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## ***On the borderline:***

*Literary analysis of 'blackness' in the narratives of Yamada Eimi*

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# Nederlandse Abstract

Deze masterscriptie beoogt de Japanse auteur Yamada Eimi 山田詠美 (1959-) te situeren in het literaire landschap. Hoewel Yamada Eimi zichzelf beschouwt als een 'zwarte auteur', blijft ze echter wel doelbewust in het Japans schrijven. Uit deze context ontwikkelen zich bijgevolg twee hoofdvragen. Ten eerste, is het mogelijk voor een Japanse auteur om 'zwarte fictie' te schrijven? Ten tweede, is het werkelijk Yamada Eimi's bedoeling om de zwarte identiteit aan te nemen, rekening houdend met het Japanse literaire publiek dat Yamada voor ogen heeft? Om deze vragen te onderzoeken en te beantwoorden werd een hermeneutische werkwijze gehanteerd.

Het eerste hoofdstuk geeft een kort overzicht van het voorkomen van zwartheid in de Japanse literatuur vóór Yamada Eimi's gebruik van literaire zwartheid. Het tweede hoofdstuk bespreekt in drie stappen wat nu eigenlijk zwarte fictie en de zwarte auteur is, en welke wending Yamada Eimi eraan geeft. Het laatste hoofdstuk analyseert op een concrete wijze de functie van Yamada's gebruik van zwartheid in haar oeuvre, uitgaande van de literaire en maatschappelijke context zoals geschetst in de eerste twee hoofdstukken.

Concluderend heeft deze masterscriptie aangetoond dat het plaatsen van Yamada's invulling van literaire zwartheid pas tot stand kan komen wanneer de Japanse maatschappelijke context in acht wordt genomen.

**Trefwoorden:** Yamada Eimi, Amy Yamada, Japanse literatuur, zwarte fictie, literaire deconstructie

## English Abstract

This dissertation aims to situate the Japanese author Yamada Eimi 山田詠美 (1959-) in the literary field. Although Yamada Eimi considers herself a 'black author', she intentionally keeps on writing in Japanese. This context has raised two main questions. First, is it possible for a Japanese author to write 'black fiction'? Second, is it truly Yamada Eimi's intention to adopt the black identity, taking into account her Japanese target audience? This dissertation has employed a hermeneutical approach in order to discuss and answer these questions.

The first chapter provides a brief outline of the emergence of blackness in the Japanese literature before Yamada's use of literary blackness. The second chapter explains in three phases the nature of black fiction and the black author, and how Yamada has dealt with it. The last chapter provides a practical analysis of the function of Yamada's use of blackness in her oeuvre, based on the literary and social context as represented in the first two chapters.

In conclusion, this dissertation has illustrated that the positioning of Yamada's handling of literary blackness can only be achieved if the Japanese social context is included.

**Keywords:** Yamada Eimi, Amy Yamada, Japanese literature, black fiction, literary deconstruction

# Introduction

My heart will always be a sister. I am the only sister in the world who can handle Japanese beautifully.<sup>1</sup>

Yamada Eimi

Yamada Eimi 山田詠美 (real name: Yamada Futaba 山田双葉), or Amy Yamada as she calls herself was born in Tokyo in 1959. However, due to her father's job, she had to move frequently. Yamada grew up in a middle-class family, which encouraged her intellectual eagerness. As such, during her childhood years she became an enthusiastic reader of Françoise Sagan (1935-2004) and James Baldwin (1924-1987). Tremendously interested in literature, she entered the Meiji University in 1978 in order to study Japanese Literature. During her time at university, she got fascinated by the Afro-American culture which she admired for its liberated form of art. However, she soon became attracted to the world of *manga*, and gave up her studies to fully dedicate herself to the writing of *manga*. During that time, Yamada worked as a bar hostess and a nude model in Roppongi. In 1985, she met an Afro-American soldier, with whom she started a relationship, and gave up working all together. However, drawing upon her experiences in Roppongi and her relationship with an Afro-American, she ventured into fiction-writing. Yamada Eimi made her debut with *Beddotaimu Aizu* ベッドタイムアイズ (Bedtime Eyes) in 1985 which was received with mixed feelings. The sexually explicit scenes, the unusual Japanese female and the appearance of her Afro-American lover caused a big fuss with literary critics. However, her talent for writing was acknowledged and she was granted the Bungei Prize for *Beddotaimu Aizu*.<sup>2</sup>

As the quote above already demonstrates Yamada Eimi is a rather unusual and extravagant author, proclaiming herself a black author and a Japanese author at the same time. Aside from her thrill-seeking characters and her boundless plots, her writing style is just as exceptional. Yamada frequently adopts the black voice in her Japanese narratives in a multifold way. She represents black speech through writing *katakana* next to *kanji* compounds, thus offering the Japanese reader the Japanese version as well as the black version. Second, her narratives are full of black literary tropes, ensuring a vivid writing style reminiscent of jazz and soul. Third, the 'literary blackness' is omnipresent in Yamada's narratives since intertextual references to black culture are legion.

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1 Yamada, Eimi. *Sōru Myūjikkū Rabāzu Onrī (Soul Music Lovers Only)*. Tokyo: Kadogawa Shoten, 1987: 216.

2 Mulhern, Chieko. *Japanese Women Writers: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*. Greenwood, 1994: 457-460.

Additionally, the stories are often set in locations all over the world, namely New York, Bali, and Japan. As such, Yamada crosses the geographical borders through her fiction-writing.

Even though Yamada herself has claimed that her real-life experiences are crucial for her narratives, her fiction doesn't consistently follow the identification between author and narrator as is frequently the case with the 'I-novel' (*shishōsetsu* 私小説). For example, her autobiographical *Hizamazuite Ashi wo Oname* ひざまずいて足をお舐め (*Kneel Down and Lick My Feet*, 1988) has described Yamada's life from her friend's perspective functioning as the narrator. Moreover, in her short story *Fiesuta* ファiesta (*Fiesta*, 2001) the narrator is the neutral embodiment of 'Lust'. Consequently, Yamada has been awarded many literary prizes and was nominated for the Akutagawa Prize, for which she has ultimately been appointed as a member of the jury.<sup>3</sup>

This dissertation aims to locate Yamada Eimi in a literary sense. As the quote at the start of this introduction already suggests: is it possible for a Japanese author to write black fiction? This proclaimed hybrid identity also raises the question why Yamada Eimi would want to be viewed as a black author, considering the fact that she is still writing in Japanese on purpose. In other words, this dissertation offers an attempt to elucidate what Yamada aims to achieve with this assumed black fiction.

In order to answer these research questions, I make use of a hermeneutical approach intending to account Yamada's literary blackness. For the occasion, I have translated two of Yamada Eimi's short stories which have up until now never been translated before. Both stories, *Me and Mrs. Jones* and *Precious Precious* are part of Yamada's short-story-collection *Sōru Myūjikkū Rabāzu Onrī* ソウル・ミュージック・ラバーズ・オンリー (*Soul Music Lovers Only*, 1987) which was awarded the Naoki Prize. Translating these short stories in an equally vivid and expressive way was somewhat of a challenge, considering Yamada's preference for a hybrid writing style. Nonetheless, it is my humble wish that my translations will once be published and open to the public as I dare say I have accomplished the translations in a successful way. Moreover, since only some of Yamada's stories have been translated to English -as well as German and French- Yamada's audience is thus mainly limited to the Japanese audience, which is a regrettable matter.

Previous investigations on Yamada Eimi's narratives can be divided into two categories. The first one consists of mainly American academics who have zoomed in on Yamada's handling of literary blackness. However accurate those investigations of the appearance of blackness might be,

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3 Ibid.

Yamada's intentions and context were mostly overlooked or misunderstood. The other category consists of a female Japanese group of scholars who have focused on Yamada's conception of gender, showering her works with praise for its realism and courage. Both groups have indeed clarified some of Yamada's literary aspects, albeit none of them have combined them in an encompassing way. This combination of various elements which has consequently led to expound on the complexity of Yamada's fiction is precisely the purpose of this dissertation. Even though this dissertation is but an introduction on the case of Yamada Eimi, it might serve as a boost to further research on this topic. Furthermore, it is deliberately written in an accessible way for all audiences, although those with a basic knowledge of Japanese literature and society have an advantage.

The first chapter of this dissertation will trace the origins of blackness in the Japanese discourse, as to contextualize the emergence of literary blackness before Yamada Eimi's handling of it. Subsequently, the second chapter addresses the function of the black appearances in Yamada's narratives through outlining the concept of the black author and black fiction. Having contextualized as such the black novel, this dissertation offers a possible framework to further investigate Yamada's texts and attempts to explain Yamada's assumed intentions in the context of the Japanese reality. Chapter 3 then zooms in even further on the very appearance of Yamada's literary blackness. The theories and perspectives of Chapter 2 will thus be put into practice by drawing upon examples of Yamada's translated fiction, namely *Bedtime Eyes* (*Beddotaimu Aizu* ベッドタイムアイズ, 1985), *The Piano Player's Fingers* (*Yubi no Tawamure* 指の戯れ, 1986), *Jesse's Spine* (*Jeshii no Sebone* ジェシーの背骨, 1986), *X-Rated Blanket* (*Seijinmuki Mōfu* 成人向き毛布, 1988), and *Trash*<sup>4</sup> (*Torasshu* トラッシュ, 1991) and my own translations of *Me and Mrs. Jones* and *Precious Precious*.<sup>5</sup>

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4 *Trash* is partially based on Yamada's earlier short story *Jesse's Spine*.

5 See Appendix for full translations.

# Chapter 1: The emergence of blackness in Japanese literature

First and foremost, it is indispensable to have a good understanding of the literary context in order to answer the key question and related subquestions of this dissertation. As Yamada Eimi is certainly not the first Japanese author to write about blackness, the emergence of blackness in Japanese literature will be discussed and contextualized in this chapter. Together with this literary contextualization, I aim to briefly home in on Yamada Eimi's first appearance and reception in the Japanese discourse as well.

As the concept of 'blackness' (*kokujin* 黒人) can be interpreted exceedingly broad, it is first necessary to properly define the kind of blackness that will be dealt with in this dissertation. Considering Yamada Eimi's narratives, apart from a few exceptions – a half-Italian half-African American male protagonist in *Pay Day!!!* (2003) and a Balinese male protagonist in *Brown Sugar of Hindu* (*Hinzū no Kurozatō* ヒンズーの黒砂糖, 1992) – the male main characters, and sometimes the female protagonists, are African American blacks. Since this thesis focuses on the narratives of Yamada Eimi, the term blackness will be narrowed down to the meaning of the blackness of African Americans, referring not only to the skin color but to their socio-cultural and literary discourse as well.

It is rather troublesome to pinpoint the exact moment at which blackness really emerged in Japanese literature as a literary style. Taking a closer look at the very manifestation of blackness in the Japanese literary discourse, it becomes clear that there exists a sharp gap between the pre-World War-II-era and the years after the war. The years before and during the Second World War research on blackness in literature and Black Studies were rather scarce.<sup>6</sup>

It turned completely the other way several years after the war. As a result of the close relationship between Japan and the United States in the years following the end of the Second World War (also called the post-war democratization period in Japan), American culture introduced itself and became very popular in Japan.<sup>7</sup> Together with the increasing popularity of black culture, a keen interest regarding black literature developed. However, it wasn't until some Japanese leftists

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6 Kiuchi, Toru, Butler Robert J., and Hakutani Yoshinobu, ed. *The Critical Response in Japan to African American Writers*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003: x-xi.

7 Ibid.

considered the black culture and its literature as a kind of ally in their endeavours for revolution that the Black Studies Association (*Kokujin Kenkyū no Kai* 黒人研究会) was founded by Nukina Yoshitaka 貫名義孝 (1911-1985) in October 1956 and began publishing the Journal of Black Studies (*Kokujin Kenkyū* 黒人研究).<sup>8</sup> By the 1960s, *The Complete Works of Black Literature* (*Kokujin Bungaku Zenshū* 黒人文学全集) was published and triggered a group of serious readers of black literature.<sup>9</sup>

One of the key figures in this search for pre-Yamada Eimian blackness and also linked to the Black Studies Association, is the famous Nobel-prize winning author<sup>10</sup> Ōe Kenzaburō 大江健三郎 (1935-). In 1963, Ōe Kenzaburō gave a speech ('Negro American Literature and Modern Japanese Literature') on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of 'the Emancipation Proclamation'<sup>11</sup> and established himself as the first Japanese author to include black literary tropes.

The Black Studies Association gradually attracted more and more people from different backgrounds, all with their shared interest. However, this growing interest was a politically coloured one. Koshiro Yukiko describes this particular interest as follows:

As the civil rights movement promoted African American people's integration into American society, some Japanese noted that a similar theme of dualistic identity emerged among them as well – modern men, yet neither white (in skin color) nor colored (in the Third World sense). Ōhashi Kenzaburō, postwar Japan's leading critic of American literature, was especially intrigued by the conflicting theme of African American effort at acculturation into (white) America and simultaneous resistance against it. Ōhashi confessed how he was mesmerized by the complexity of such historic African American endeavors. In fact, other Japanese scholars of African American studies also expressed their desire to identify the mutual sense of alienation and powerlessness facing both Japanese and African Americans in the Western-centered world. One scholar confessed that he often saw African America's destiny overlapped with that of the Japanese themselves. Another said he had been drawn to African American studies because he felt compelled to overhaul the psychology of the Japanese, the colored race committing themselves to (white) Western democracy. In other words, Japanese people in the postwar period should first examine the nature of African American struggle for freedom and equality against the background of the (white) Western notion of liberty.<sup>12</sup>

8 Koshiro, Yukiko. "Beyond an Alliance of Color: The African American Impact on Modern Japan." *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique*, vol. 11 no. 1 (2003): 198.

9 Kiuchi, x-xi.

10 Ōe Kenzaburō received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1994.

11 Kiuchi, xiv.

12 Koshiro, 200-201.

Whereas the concept of black culture and the notion of blackness itself in the 1950s and 1960s tended to be inspired by a sense of camaraderie and shared ideas, the question about 'identity' was gradually being raised.

By the 1970s, the *burakumin*, a hereditary group of socio-economic outcasts in Japan, found themselves enormously attracted to black literature and black culture as they considered black Americans to be in the same boat.<sup>13</sup> The most famous exemplary author of this new kind of notion of blackness is Nakagami Kenji 中上健次 (1946-1992).

Almost a decade later, Japanese women writers engaged themselves with black literature. The 1980s was a time when female writers gained prominence in Japan as well as in the United States. Japanese female writers – and this is where Yamada Eimi comes in – took an interest in the women's situation in the United States. As a result of this growing interest, they began to translate black-American female writers' narratives as to establish a sisterhood.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, the renewed (female) interest for African American culture and literature was closely tied with the rise of feminism, which means an emerging female voice fighting for equality and women's rights.

Yamada Eimi somehow took it to the extreme and began to write black fiction (see Chapter 2). In other words, she created narratives in which she experimented with black literary tropes and techniques. In the afterword to her *Soul Music Lovers Only* Yamada Eimi pretends to be “the only sister who can handle the Japanese language beautifully”, thus proclaiming herself a black author writing in Japanese.<sup>15</sup>

However, Yamada Eimi was praised by Japanese feminists in the eighties and nineties for her daring literary style, which strived for a Japanese female sexual liberation, and her protest against oppressive structures.<sup>16</sup> In this way, blackness was again tied together with the notion of 'identity'. However, this discovery of 'identity' was distinct in nature to the concept of camaraderie from the literary blackness of the 1960s and the *burakumin* identification with black people from the 1970s. This Yamada Eimian concept of literary blackness came to symbolize a new (new as in untouched hitherto) female identity in the 1980s.

Through her harsh descriptions of sex (mostly with African American men), her liberated female protagonists and the absence of the 'traditional' Japanese concept of 'good wife, wise

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13 Koshiro, 203.

14 Kiuchi, xxii.

15 Yamada, Eimi. *Sōru Myūjikkū Rabāzu Onrī* (*Soul Music Lovers Only*). Tokyo: Kadogawa Shoten, 1987: 216.

16 Okada, Richard. "Positioning Subjects Globally: A Reading of Yamada Eimi." *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal. English Supplement*, no. 9 (1995): 115.

mother', Yamada Eimi was and is still admired by many Japanese feminists. For instance, the Japanese feminist Hasegawa Kei praises Yamada's realism and even dedicates a chapter in her non-fiction book to her.<sup>17</sup> Considering the era in which her first novella, *Bedtime Eyes* was written, it really was an encouragement towards other Japanese women and a big middle finger to the Japanese patriarchal establishment.

The Japanese feminist Iwao Sumiko defines this transition to a new kind of Japanese woman in her work *The Japanese Woman: Traditional Image and Changing Reality* as follows:

The kimono-clad, bamboo parasol-toting, bowing female walking three paces behind her husband remains the image many Westerners hold of the typical Japanese woman. Satellite communications and high-speed travel have not dispelled the exoticism that captured Western imagination in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Westerners first began traveling to Japan in significant numbers or removed for them the mystery that surrounds the thinking and behavior of Oriental women. It is still possible to witness such a scene of traditionalism and apparent subservience on the streets of Tokyo today. But appearances can be deceiving, a fact that is all too well known among Japanese themselves. The traditional female is rapidly becoming but one of several breeds of women in a society that is growing increasingly pluralistic.<sup>18</sup>

Chucking down this outdated stereotypes in her narratives, Yamada Eimi became the figurehead of the newly liberated Japanese women in the eighties, closely followed by a flock of young Japanese female aficionados imitating her fashion style of wearing black, putting on dark sunglasses and lots of cheap-looking jewellery. This trend was also called: *Yamada Eimi o shiteiru* (going Yamada Eimi).<sup>19</sup>

Despite the many commendations by Japanese feminists for her brave narratives of female liberation, Yamada Eimi had to put up with a lot of critique as well during her debut phase. The most striking one of these critiques is called 'the yellow-cab-syndrome'. This term refers to a number of Japanese young women who travel to foreign destinations (the preferred destination being New York City) to have steamy sex with *gaijin*, foreigners. The term was derived from the 'yellow cabs' which "can be ridden anywhere, anytime" to put it in the words of the best-selling author Ieda Shōko 家田莊子 (1958-) who described these morally insane women in her non-fiction

17 Hasegawa, Kei. *Seiai no gensetsu: Beddo taimu aizu (The Discourse of Sexual Love: Bedtime Eyes)*. *Gendaa de yomu ai, sei, kazoku (Reading Love, Sex, and Family through Gender)*. Ed. Kei Hasegawa and Hiroko Iwabuchi. Tokyo: Tokyodō shuppan, 2006.

18 Iwao, Sumiko. *The Japanese Woman: Traditional Image and Changing Reality*. New York: The Free Press, 1993: 1.

19 Ma, Karen. *The Modern Madame Butterfly: Fantasy and Reality in Japanese Cross-cultural Relationships*. Charles E. Tuttle, 1996: 76-77.

book *Yellow Cab: Women who flew out of Narita (Iero kyabu: Narita o tobiatta onnatachi, 1991)*.<sup>20</sup> Later on, she would also mention another nickname for Japanese women living abroad: 'Seven-Eleven', meaning they can be picked up at any hour of the day. A year later, Ieda published another non-fiction book which describes travel-for-sex Japanese females going to Hawaii seeking sexual encounters with the local bartenders and beachboys. Although these non-fiction works were based on shady information and rumours, they caused a tremendous fuss inside Japan.<sup>21</sup> Many readers of Yamada Eimi criticized her novellas and accused them of depicting the main heroines as 'yellow cabs'.

However, the year after *Yellow Cab* was published, Yamada Eimi herself published a short story, *Brown Sugar of Hindu*, dealing with a Western woman who travels to Bali and seeks a sexual relationship with a native Balinese.<sup>22</sup> Though she was extremely criticized because of a possible connection with the yellow-cab-phenomenon, Yamada Eimi literally didn't give a damn about it, and published this resort-love-like novella as to mock the criticism away.

Regardless of these harsh critiques, Yamada Eimi's notion of literary blackness is closely tied together with self-identification with black people and the exploration of her position as a Japanese woman. The American feminist critic of Yamada Eimi, Nina Cornyetz, even goes as far as to narrow down Yamada Eimi's use and concept of literary blackness to the 'black phallus', suspecting Yamada Eimi of using this stereotypical portrait of an African American for its commodity value.<sup>23</sup> In her essay, Nina Cornyetz argues that Yamada Eimi's portrayal of the typical sex-beast-like black American is meant to get into the spotlights, thinking of the slogan 'sex sells'.

The supreme mark of difference that inverts the conventional superior-inferior binarism (which would situate Japanese men in the empowered position) is the "perfect black phallus". The black phallus remains a transcendental signifier of power, which denigrates by its perfection the phalluses of white and Japanese men. Simultaneously, Yamada's heroines are empowered by manipulating this transcendental (black) phallus.<sup>24</sup>

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20 Ibid. 61-62.

21 Hirota, Aki. "Image-Makers and Victims: The Croissant Syndrome and Yellow Cabs." *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal. English Supplement*, no. 19 (2000): 102-103.

22 Okada, 119.

23 Cornyetz, Nina. "Fetishized Blackness: Hip Hop and Racial Desire in Contemporary Japan." *Social Text*, no. 41 (1994): 128.

24 Ibid.

Although this hypothesis is partially true, there's more to Yamada Eimi's use and function of literary blackness than a black phallus. Though many of her stories depict a black man and a Japanese woman, this is not always the case. For example, all female main characters in her short story collection *Soul Music Lovers Only* are black females. Moreover, the stories scarcely make use of a 'black phallus', but are filled with black literary tropes and intertextual links. This raises the question whether Yamada Eimi can be considered as a black author, and if so, within which framework this 'Japanese' literary blackness works out. In other words, what does Yamada Eimi intend to achieve writing black fiction in Japanese? The next chapter will thus zoom in on this transracial dimension Yamada Eimi gives to her narratives.

## Chapter 2: The function of blackness in Yamada Eimi's narratives

The first chapter already showed the importance of identity in regard to the literary blackness in Japanese literature. This second chapter addresses a possible way to understand the perception of the 'black author', seen from an outside perspective. In other words, this chapter attempts to provide an answer to the question why Yamada Eimi proclaims herself a black author and what purpose this literary blackness serves. I will answer this question in three phases. First, it is essential to situate the origins and the expansion of the black novel. Second, I will continue with the definition of 'black fiction', in other words, attempting to define what it is and what it is not. This definition will help us to grasp Yamada Eimi's use of blackness and black culture in her novels. The last phase goes to the very core of the function of blackness in Yamada's narratives. This last phase deals with the question why Yamada Eimi re-invents herself as a black author and attempts to reveal the underlying argumentation for it.

### 2.1 *The 'black authority' reconsidered*

Although the traditional group of black authors and academics have argued and strived for a 'black authenticity'<sup>25</sup>, it is a rather empty term with a dubious nature. Considering the increasingly globalizing world, it is highly desirable to reconsider this assumed 'authenticity'.

Notwithstanding that African American literature has some common characteristics (the main one being its African roots), it is a discourse that has undergone a lot of changes. The collection of African American thinkers, critics, academics and authors is what we will call in this dissertation 'the black authority'.<sup>26</sup> This 'black authority' relies to the greatest extent on its own ethnic value, albeit this authority has started to budge recently – from the African American Civil Rights Movement<sup>27</sup> (1954-1968) onwards – under an increasing tendency towards multiracialism and focusing on the hybrid nature of African Americans.

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25 Bridges, William H. "Playing in The Shadows: Fictions of Race and Blackness in Postwar Japanese Literature." PhD dissertation Princeton University, 2012: 191-192.

26 Ibid. 191.

27 The African American Civil Rights Movement (1954-1968) was a social movement of African Americans in the United States, fighting for equal civil rights and citizenship and seeking to end racial segregation.

The origins of black literature trace back to the late eighteenth century and consisted around that time mainly of slave narratives.<sup>28</sup> These slave narratives depict in an early phase the pains and discomforts suffered by the African American slaves. These stories of grievance and cruelty gradually evolved into narratives of post-slavery notions of freedom, telling the story of the geographical journey of escape from the Southern slave territories to the free Northern parts.<sup>29</sup>

However, the tone of the black discourse changes remarkably after the American Civil War (1861-1865). African American thinkers such as William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963) – hereafter W. E. B. Du Bois – argued for equal rights and objected racism and discrimination.<sup>30</sup> He obtained a doctorate at the University of Harvard and he was the first African American to do so. Later on, he was a professor at Atlanta University and is famous for his publishing of his collection of essays entitled *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935). Moreover, he was one of the co-founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)<sup>31</sup>, established in 1909. He is considered to be the most influential African American thinker.<sup>32</sup>

However, until the 1920s black literature was considered a literature written by blacks for blacks. The period between the 1920s and 1940s, called the Harlem Renaissance<sup>33</sup>, marked a turning point for the literary audience. Along with this black literature gaining prominence internationally, the most influential female black author of the Harlem Renaissance, Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960), received loads of attention and was perceived as a role model for female African American writers. A couple of decades later, her stories were rediscovered by the black author Alice Walker.<sup>34</sup>

This opening up to a new audience flourished during the era of the African American Civil rights Movement (1954-1968), with the most remarkable black author of this movement – and at the same time the model for Yamada Eimi – being James Baldwin. The reason why I choose to highlight James Baldwin in this section, is not only because of his decisive role towards Yamada Eimi, but also for the nature of his narratives which caused a second turning point regarding the

28 Winston, Napier, ed. *African American Literary Theory*. New York: New York University Press, 2000: 623.

29 Kawash, Samira. *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity, and Singularity in African-American Narrative*. California: Stanford University Press, 1997: 23.

30 Winston, 2.

31 The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is an African American civil rights organization founded in 1909 by Moorfield Storey, Mary White Ovington and W. E. B. Du Bois. According to its website the central mission of the organization is "to ensure the political, educational, social and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate race-based discrimination".

32 Winston, 72.

33 The Harlem Renaissance is a socio-cultural and artistic revival of African American art and literature that took place in Harlem (New York) during the period from the 1920s to the 1940s.

34 Winston, 374.

presumed validity of the black author. As C. W. E. Bigsby put it in his essay: "There are certain individuals who contain the 'yes' and 'no' of their culture, whose personal ambivalences become paradigmatic,"<sup>35</sup> he truly catches Baldwin's impact in one phrase. Baldwin is best known for his stories that tackle a question of double identity: being black and being gay. A homosexual himself, he suffered a great deal in his generation. As a young man, he fled to Paris in order to escape the racism and discrimination he endured in the United States. Firstly, this expatriation meant a challenge for Baldwin, as his ambition was to be recognized as a dignified author beyond his career in the United States. Secondly, his experience in France resulted in an international extension of the African American literature. In this aspect, James Baldwin was one of the key figures regarding the dissemination of African American literature abroad.<sup>36</sup>

While James Baldwin is to a great extent responsible for this dispersal of black literature, we owe the divergence within the African American discourse to the female black writer Alice Walker. Although a black writer herself, she has been criticized by the 'black authority' many times. Alice Walker can be considered a feminist writer more than a African American writer because of her great efforts to fight for the rights of black women through her narratives.<sup>37</sup> This is already one of the big causes for her controversy, but the main cause is definitely her depiction of some black male characters. Alice Walker doesn't aim at exalting the black main characters – in some cases the male black characters are depicted as male chauvinist pigs – but tries to address the black woman as a creator in her narratives, being aware of black women as a muted group.<sup>38</sup> It is obvious that there are certain connections between the narratives of Alice Walker and those of Yamada Eimi as both authors embark upon the question of female and ethnic identity, albeit there hasn't been done any research about it yet. As opening up this discussion would lead us too far and would make us deviate from the key question, I won't go into detail concerning this hypothesis.

The 1970s projected a peak regarding the expansion of African American literature. The establishment of the Black Arts Movement (BAM) initiated by Amiri Baraka (later on known as LeRoi Jones) signified an engaging diversity regarding the African American literature.<sup>39</sup> Although the BAM was a catalysator for the diffusion of the African American literature, it wasn't limited to literature alone. African American music, mainly jazz and later on also hip-hop, became widely

35 Bigsby, C. W. E. "The Divided Mind of James Baldwin." *Journal of American Studies* 13, no. 3 (1979): 325.

36 Davis, Charles. "The Mixed Heritage of the Modern Black Novel." *Ralph Ellison: Modern Critical Views*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House, 1986: 281.

37 Tucker, Lindsey. "Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*: Emergent Woman, Emergent Text." *Black American Literature Forum* 22, no. 1 (1988): 81-82.

38 Ibid. 81.

39 Winston, 466, 184.

spread, propagating black culture as a unit. Another important figure concerning the expansion of black literature is the female black author Toni Morrison.<sup>40</sup> She is an international voice for the black literature and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993.

Although in a first phase, African American literature was generated to refute the existing prejudices and accusations that people of African descent were mentally not able to create literature<sup>41</sup>, later on, this origin wouldn't be sufficient to define the black literary discourse. Together with the legalization and acquisition of equal civil rights for black Americans, black literature was partly incorporated in the broader American literary discourse or mostly seen as a subgenre of American literature (however, this is still a point of discussion for many black scholars). Moreover, the expansion of black culture entailed different views on the notion of the black author from outside and caused a range of new ideas concerning the validity of the black authority from within the black community.<sup>42</sup>

The brief outline above allows us to have an ordered understanding of the black authority from the beginning up until now. In particular, the underlining above of the moving trend in African American literature will serve as a basic for the following elaborations.

## **2.2 What is black fiction?**

The black novel is not a kind of narrative that lets itself be defined easily. Although there is a general tendency in this black fiction, there are some exceptions which cannot be classified properly according to criteria for black fiction. The 'criteria' themselves are legion as well. However, a proper definition of the black novel from a practical point of view (thus without referring to the author's skin color) is indispensable for our understanding of Yamada Eimi's literary blackness.

In his book *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, Henry Louis Gates has stipulated four criteria that make it possible to identify the black novel.

A first characteristic is what Gates calls 'tropological revision'.<sup>43</sup> By this, he refers to a (black) literary trope which is the author's signature. This trope acts as an attribute in most of, if not all, the author's narratives.

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40 Ibid. 135.

41 Warren, Kenneth. *What Was African American Literature?* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011: 14.

42 Ibid. 15.

43 Gates, Henry. *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988: xxvi-xxvii.

A second feature of black novels coined by Gates is the so-called 'speakerly text'.<sup>44</sup> This criterium refers to the representation of the speaking black voice in writing. This characteristic is frequently used by Yamada Eimi, to the extent that one could even call it her literary signature. Although it is a rather difficult task to represent the speaking black voice in the Japanese language, Yamada Eimi pulls it off in an extraordinary way. The black speech is represented through *katakana* written next to a *kanji* compound or original Japanese word. For example, the Japanese word *mittomonashi* (みつともなし, Eng.: 'ugly') is represented as black speech through the *katakana* words *agurii* (アグリ) <sup>45</sup>, as such offering both a Japanese version of the black speech and a foreign version as well. Moreover, Yamada has a tendency to decorate her texts with 'black curses' written in the Latin alphabet. The representation of black speech is thus an omnipresent characteristic throughout her works.

The third sign deals with the notion of intertextuality, more specific a black form of intertextuality. This is what Gates calls 'talking texts'.<sup>46</sup> There are tons of references and allusions within a black novel towards other black novels; knowledge of the works referred to is not a must, but obviously enhances a good understanding of the content and to what it is referring. This is a characteristic used by Yamada Eimi as well. References towards jazz musicians, soul music and black culture are everywhere present in her oeuvre. An example of this intermediality, is the reference to the founder of the Black Arts Movement, Amiri Baraka, also known as LeRoi Jones. The male main character of *The Piano Player's Fingers* is named Leroy Jones, obviously alluding to this famous person. In addition, a more concrete illustration of this intertextual characteristic, is the reference to her source of inspiration, James Baldwin. She often refers to his works in a direct way, as is the case in her short novel *Bedtime Eyes*:

Spoon lay on the bed, his burnt-black body only partly covered by the sheets. He reminded me of Brother Rufus in the Baldwin novel, listening to the saxophone and crying out from deep down inside his heart: "Please, won't you give me your love?"<sup>47</sup>

Ultimately, the fourth indication of black fiction is called by Gates 'rewriting the speakerly'.<sup>48</sup> He uses this term to indicate a pastiche, as such emulating another black artist's style or blending

44 Ibid.

45 Yamada, Eimi. *Precious Precious*. In *Sōru Myūjikkū Rabāzu Onrī (Soul Music Lovers Only)*. Tokyo: Kadogawa Shoten, 1987: 106.

46 Gates, xxvi-xxvii.

47 Yamada, Eimi. *Bedtime Eyes*. Translated by Gunji Yumi and Jardine Marc. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006: 23.

48 Gates, xxvi-xxvii.

fragments of other artistic pieces with the author's own work. Perhaps the most outstanding example of her use of pastiche can be found in the short story collection *Soul Music Lovers Only*. Every short story in the collection is named after the title of a soul song. The lyrics of the songs meet the content of the short stories in the sense that the stories might be considered as a fusion of the soul songs with literature.

Having summed up the four criteria of a black novel, we see that Yamada Eimi fits in quite well. In other words, her use of black literary tropes and techniques resembles those of renowned African American authors. However, Yamada Eimi still writes in Japanese, as such having the Japanese audience in mind. Although she twists and turns the Japanese language to make it suitable for an almost natural incorporation of black speech, she puts herself on the borderline between a Japanese and a African American author. This raises the question whether she truly aims to be a black author as she proclaims herself.

### ***2.3 Literary deconstruction in Yamada Eimi's narratives***

Having discussed the linguistic criteria of black fiction and likewise illustrated those criteria with concrete examples of Yamada's texts, the way she has inserted black literary tropes in her narratives has now been made clear. However, it leaves us with the question why she would aim to write black fiction. There seems to be more to it than just fancying a mere fetish. What Yamada Eimi is doing by writing black fiction – but still in Japanese – is, simply put, deconstructing your average Japanese novel (if such a thing exists, though). The aforementioned signature technique which she uses to write black speech through the Japanese language, is already a very concrete form of deconstructing, or more precisely, deconstructing the Japanese language. Moreover, it doesn't end with that; her challenging of the notion on 'being Japanese' together with its rather radical views on race and gender is a protest she expresses through her narratives.

Furthermore, the term 'deconstruction' is reminiscent of the very term coined by Jacques Derrida. He claims that a conceptual dualism causes a 'violent hierarchy'<sup>49</sup>, meaning that one of the opposed aspects dominates or is valued more than the other one. Reversing is inefficient as the binary order is reinstated again and again. Moreover, he states that opposition is a necessity as it holds the meaning of signs.<sup>50</sup> According to Derrida, the final objective of deconstruction is then to mark the differences in between. In addition, he emphasizes the over-reliance on 'meaning', as every

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49 Zlomislic, Marko. *Jacques Derrida's Aporetic Ethics*. Lexington Books, 2007: 49-50.

50 Ibid. 93.

'meaning' is a construct itself.<sup>51</sup> Although tons of books have been published regarding Derrida's deconstruction, the explication in a nutshell and also the core of his concept of deconstruction, enables us to take a look from the postmodern perspective as this is the most suitable approach to dissect Yamada's narratives.

What Yamada Eimi is then doing through her narratives is exactly deconstructing – in a Derridean way – those very conventions. She does so in three ways. First and foremost, she challenges her 'being Japanese' along with the Japanese conception of national culture. Secondly, Yamada attempts to deconstruct the Japanese perception of race, vis-à-vis the assumed homogeneity of the Japanese society. In a third place, her narratives break down the traditional gender roles.

This threefold attempt to deconstruct is, as such, briefly contextualized in the following sections. Subsequently, the next chapter illustrates this literary deconstruction with concrete examples from Yamada's texts.

### 2.3.1 The deconstruction of 'Japaneseness'

Capturing the essence of 'Japaneseness' is something that has ruffled some feathers. After the Second World War, an increasing amount of publications in Japan stated the uniqueness and homogeneity of the Japanese society. The discourse which highlights the singularity of the Japanese, is called *Nihonjinron* (日本人論), literally translated as 'theories of Japaneseness'. Although this paradigm has provoked much criticism from all angles, it is the most coherent and persistent view on Japanese society.<sup>52</sup> This genre depicts “Japanese society as a homogeneous society with little variation and is based on the drive for *ganbari* (頑張れ) which is translated as 'endurance and perseverance' and is innate to every Japanese person, regardless of their class, gender, occupation and other stratification variables.”<sup>53</sup> Publications on *Nihonjinron* also assert that this so-called uniqueness has deep historical roots and is still applicable to every Japanese today. The *Nihonjinron* discourse is by all means a very abundant one, describing a huge amount of supposedly exclusive Japanese characteristics. According to a study performed by Manabe Kazufumi and Befu Harumi, the *Nihonjinron* can be divided into four main assertions<sup>54</sup>:

51 Sallis, John, ed. *Deconstruction and philosophy: The texts of Jacques Derrida*. University of Chicago Press, 1987: 3-8.

52 Sugimoto, Yoshio. *An Introduction to Japanese Society*. Cambridge University Press, 2014: 3.

53 Ibid.

54 Manabe, Kazufumi and Befu Harumi. “Japanese Cultural Identity: An Empirical Investigation of *Nihonjinron*.” In *Rethinking Japan: Social sciences, ideology & thought Vol. 2*, edited by Boscaro Adriana, Gatti Franco, and Raveri Massimo, 89-102. Psychology Press, 1990: 94.

1. Japanese are homogeneous and unique people, referred to as *tan'itsu minzoku* (単一民族) in Japanese.
2. The Japanese 'blood' is essential for mutual communication and understanding and for the understanding of the Japanese culture.
3. Foreigners are incapable to fully grasp the Japanese culture and are unable to master the Japanese language.
4. The sociocultural territoriality belongs to the Japanese and aims to exclude all foreigners in the areas of marriage, employment, teaching, and political and artistic leadership.

As this rigid perception is woven into the popular genre (newspapers, television, radio, magazines and popular books)<sup>55</sup>, it obliges and pressures in a covert way every Japanese person to commit to these claims, and leaves little room for other notions on ethnicity or identity or to express individuality. As a reaction to this, many Japanese people try to utter their displeasure with this pre-constructed identity through different kinds of media. A good example of this protest is the emergence of youth culture and subcultures, enabling Japanese youth to discern themselves from imposed conservative and outdated ideas about 'how to be Japanese'. This is exactly what Yamada Eimi tried to do during her debut phase (she even entailed an ensuing subculture with it). The brouhaha Yamada Eimi caused with her bold refutation to act according to the *Nihonjinron* through proclaiming herself a black author and effectively writing as such, was a big blow considering the years of her first publications (the end of the eighties). Though, she didn't completely chuck down her 'Japaneseness' and kept on writing in Japanese, derisively tearing down the uniqueness and singularity of 'Japaneseness' through adopting a hybrid identity.

Yamada Eimi is certainly not the only author to do so. Another exemplar figure of this hybrid literature is the awarded female author Tawada Yōko 多和田葉子 (1960-). Tawada writes both in Japanese and in German and denounces the delicacy and limits of language through her works, equally drawing on a hybrid identity.<sup>56</sup> Although discussing her works and her notion on Japanese identity is not part of this dissertation (and would lead us too far), it is a case worth researching as Tawada similarly deals with the issue of identity vis-à-vis the assumed 'Japaneseness' and its value towards an increasing globalization (much the same as Yamada Eimi does).

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55 Ibid.

56 Mori, Maryellen T. "The Liminal Male as Liberatory Figure in Japanese Women's Fiction." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 60, no. 2 (2000): 585.

Closely tied together with *Nihonjinron* is the 'national essence', called *kokutai* 国体. To explain all shades of *kokutai* is an impossible task as it has adopted an abundance of related-but-different meanings since its emergence in the Tokugawa period (1603-1868). Common characteristic of all notions of *kokutai* is the putting on a pedestal of the Japanese race, drawing on their uninterrupted imperial line. The term has frequently be translated as 'national polity', 'national identity' and 'national unity'.<sup>57</sup> Zooming in on the literary refutation of *kokutai*, Douglas Slaymaker argues in his non-fiction work *The Body in Postwar Japanese Fiction* that Yamada Eimi is one of many Japanese authors to counter the notion of *kokutai* 国体 ('national body') through asserting the inscribing of *nikutai* 肉体 ('physical/carnal body'). Slaymaker states that “this binary of individual and state yields imagery of liberation-through-carnality that suggests carnal hedonism as a corrective to political ideology.”<sup>58</sup>

Coming back to the *Nihonjinron* debate, another aspect of the *Nihonjinron* model also draws upon the illusion of Japanese society as consisting of one social class. Along with an altering vision towards *Nihonjinron*, the illusion of a Japanese egalitarian society changed dramatically at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The appearance of Japan as a *kakusa shakai* (格差社会), literally translated as a 'disparity society', in other words a socially divided society with sharp class differences and a flagrant inequality, gained prominence.<sup>59</sup> The main cause for this change is the economic recession of the nineties (also called 'the lost decade') and its aftermath until far in the 2000s. The outcome of this financial crisis resulted in a collapse of the labour market entailing precarious work conditions and little job guarantee.<sup>60</sup>

Be that as it may, Yamada Eimi had already attacked, in a literary sense, this Japanese illusionary singularity in a first place, and the conception of the Japanese society as a egalitarian society in a second place, even before these extreme ideas collapsed (though some have argued that they still continue). Yamada Eimi portrays her Japanese protagonists on the verge of marginality, with dubious jobs (occasional prostitutes, bar hostesses, etc.) and an according lifestyle. In other words, she shows her readers a side of Japan which had at that time not been overtly exposed. In this sense, she is deconstructing the very idea of the illusionary egalitarian Japanese society.

Moreover, the insightful reader may have noticed, but I state it here nonetheless: aside of their shared themes and motifs, Yamada Eimi and the above-mentioned Tawada Yōko share something

57 Doak, Kevin M. *A History of Nationalism in Modern Japan: Placing the People*. Brill, 2006: 87.

58 Slaymaker, Douglas. *The Body in Postwar Japanese Fiction*. Oxon: Routledge, 2004: 1-2.

59 Sugimoto, 10.

60 Ibid.

more essential, namely their generation. It is no coincidence that both authors symbolize aspects of alienation. Other Japanese writers from the same generation (although not all) might share a similar literary alienation. Authors such as the famous Murakami Haruki 村上春樹 (1949-) and the lesser known Murakami Ryū 村上龍 (1952-) automatically come to mind.<sup>61</sup> This genre goes by the name *shinjinrui* 新人類, literally translated as 'the new breed'. The term *shinjinrui* was first used in the context of the emerging consumer culture of the late seventies. This consumer culture was characterized by an increasing predominance of the sign-value of commodities over their use-value in late capitalist societies.<sup>62</sup> This tendency towards the preference of brand goods evolved in a new style which the Japanese youth of the eighties used as a way to engage in personal relationships. It was very soon picked up by the media and coined as *shinjinrui*, a neologism to describe a new generation.<sup>63</sup> This new generation became obsessed with creating its own identity and desired to express an individuality based on the personal choice of consumer goods. Although in this first instance *shinjinrui* was considered as a refinement of oneself, defined by the terms *kansei* 感性 'tastes or feelings' and *nori* 乗っ 'tune, rhythm', it ended up with a negative connotation, emphasizing its 'hopelessness'.<sup>64</sup> Often translated as 'Generation X', they experienced an easy youth in a rich and successful Japan, unaware of the post-war traumas from the generation before. This satiety resulted in an overall weariness and social alienation. As such, these themes are often present in authors of that particular generation. However, their works might show some similarities as a result of this generational ennui; their novels and fiction can differ a great deal in the way they handle this 'alienation'. In other words, the influence of the generation might have different effects on each author, partly according to their own experiences resulting in their own style of fiction-writing.

Although Yamada Eimi's works have often been labelled as *shinjinrui*, her works don't allow to be pushed into one category. Also considering the fact that the literary genre of *shinjinrui* has been constructed post factum, it might be somewhat blunt to consider all of her works as pertaining to that category. What mainly characterizes Yamada Eimi's fiction is her eclectic style, as such making it very difficult to examine her works from only one perspective (in this case the influence of the generation).

61 Sakurai, Tetsuo. "The Generation Gap in Japanese Society since the 1960s." In *Japan's Changing Generations: Are Young People Creating a New Society?* Edited by Mathews, G., and White Bruce. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004: 21-22.

62 Ishikawa, Satomi. *Seeking the Self: Individualism and Popular Culture in Japan*. Bern: Peter Lang, AG, European Academic Publishers, 2007: 118-119.

63 Ibid. 119.

64 Ibid. 123.

### 2.3.2 The deconstruction of race

Continuing the theory of deconstruction, we arrive at the 'deconstruction of race', which is one of the key themes in Yamada Eimi's narratives. The Japanese notion of race has been going hand in hand with the paradigm of *Nihonjinron* for decades. To state it more specific, it is embedded in the *Nihonjinron* discourse through the above-mentioned myth of *tan'itsu minzoku* (単一民族), frequently translated as 'monoracialism'.<sup>65</sup>

Although Japanese aesthetics have a deep inclination towards white skin, they borrowed the derogatory representation of blacks from the West, which has a long history of discrimination against black people. The first Japanese encounter with blacks goes back to the initial contacts in the seventeenth century with African and East Indian servants who accompanied Portuguese and Dutch traders to Japanese ports. Diaries kept by Japanese who were involved with the trade attested their view of the African slaves as sub-humans which they considered on the same level as their own outcasts, the *burakumin*<sup>66</sup> (hence the affiliation of the *burakumin* with the African American cannon during the latter half of the twentieth century since they both sought a way to get rid of the discriminations as discussed in Chapter 1).

Nonetheless, as John Russell states in his essay *Race and Reflexivity: The Black Other in Contemporary Japanese Mass Culture* that “this tendency to dehumanize and belittle blacks disguises another tendency, particularly the one that employs the black Other as a reflexive symbol through which Japanese attempt to deal with their own ambiguous racio-cultural status in a Eurocentric world, where such hierarchies have been largely (and literally) conceived in terms of polarizations between black and white and in which Japanese as Asians have traditionally occupied a liminal state – a gray area – 'betwixt and between' the 'Civilized White' and the 'Barbarous Black' Other,”<sup>67</sup> it is clear that the Japanese view on black people has to do with their own inferiority complex towards the western world and their superiority complex towards black people and during the twentieth century even towards other Asian countries (although this superiority complex towards other Asian countries is a rather recent phenomenon – mainly during the twentieth century – and is not included in the quote above).

As a result of this, the Japanese notion of monoracialism “has been inculcated in the populace through the myths of racial purity and the ethnic superiority which was supposed to be guaranteed

65 Russell, John. "Race and Reflexivity: The Black Other in Contemporary Japanese Mass Culture." *Cultural Anthropology* 6, no. 1 (1991): 4.

66 Ibid. 5-6.

67 Ibid. 6.

by the uninterrupted lineage of the imperial household over centuries.”<sup>68</sup> Sugimoto Yoshio further points out that “in the years of rapid economic growth since the 1960s, many observers have attributed Japan's economic success and political stability to its racial and ethnic homogeneity”.<sup>69</sup> This economic success can be perceived as the main cause for Japan's assumed supremacy towards the rest of Asia. The following paragraph from Sugimoto Yoshio's work *An Introduction to Japanese Society* hits the nail on the head:

Analysts of the social psychology of the Japanese suggest that the inferiority complex towards the Caucasian West and the superiority complex towards Asian neighbors have played a major role in Japanese perceptions of other nationalities. The leadership of modern Japan envisaged a 'ladder of civilizations' in which Euro-American societies occupied the highest rungs, Japan was somewhere in the middle, and other Asian countries were at the bottom. Also notable is the persistence of the doctrine of *wakon yōsai* (Japanese spirit and Western technology), the dichotomy which splits the world into two metaphorical hemispheres, Japan and the West, and assumes that the spiritual, moral, and cultural life of the Japanese should not be corrupted by foreign influences no matter how much Japan's material way of life may be affected by them.<sup>70</sup>

It is obvious that due to these complicated racial perceptions, there is much to deconstruct if one wanted to do so. Though Yamada Eimi's deconstruction of race is deeply tied together with the deconstruction of 'Japaneseness', I treat both separately since the appearance of blackness in Yamada's narratives is already the very sign of her dealing with the notion of race.

John Russell points out that the dismantling of Japanese notions of race and superiority was a generational tendency:

With the Vietnam War, the rise of the counterculture and the influx of black popular music and culture, disaffected Japanese youth came to see the African American as a counter to the values of the Japanese establishment, and the black Other was adopted as a symbol of defiance, forbidden fruit, and their own alienation from the Japanese mainstream.<sup>71</sup>

John Russell certainly has a point there, though it covers only a part of Yamada's literary intentions. In the same essay, Russell resented Yamada's frequent use of stereotypes to depict the

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68 Sugimoto, 196.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid. 196-197.

71 Russell, 20-21.

black male protagonists, and he is not the only one to do so. Yamada's use of stereotypes cannot be denied. However, thorough investigation of her works demonstrates two tendencies. Firstly, there isn't such a thing as 'one stereotype' to depict all her black male protagonists. Yamada uses a wide range of black males, attributing only some stereotypical traits where she sees fit to perk up their personalities. In other words, the one black protagonist of story x, isn't the same one as the black protagonist of story z. Therefore, the male black main characters aren't given a fixed form. Secondly, her 'stereotyping' – albeit this word has already a negative connotation – is often applied in a positive way. That is to say, the female (Japanese) protagonist is intrigued by the black male protagonist even to the extent that they extol every trait of the black male whereas the Japanese male is frequently pilloried.

### 2.3.3 The deconstruction of gender

Since Chapter 1 already pointed out that Yamada Eimi's narratives are often praised by Japanese feminists for their protest against the Japanese patriarchal values, it is needless to say that Yamada has tremendously attempted to deconstruct the Japanese notion of gender. Investigations of Yamada's works performed by Japanese (female) scholars are recurrently based on this protest against the Japanese patriarchal society and tend to isolate Yamada's issue of gender when discussing her works. As I already mentioned, Yamada's works are above all eclectic. Therefore I would rather propose an integrated approach to this deconstruction of gender, which means taking into account the above-mentioned arguments of 'Japaneseness' and 'race'.

The deconstruction of gender in Yamada's narratives is interjected threefoldly. Initially, she envisions the dismissal of the traditional Japanese patriarchal society, which caused a wide approval from Japanese feminist organizations during the eighties and nineties. The very emergence of feminism in Japan is defined by Ehara Yumiko in multiple lines of argument:

In contemporary society, feminism emerges from the context of sex discrimination and focuses on both societal contradictions and the inner struggles that women face. In discussing the future, feminism envisions women's liberation and ways to improve women's lives. In historical discussions, it demands that women's position in society be evaluated through women's history and the reevaluation of female artists and philisophers.<sup>72</sup>

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72 Ehara, Yumiko, Yanagida Eino, and Long Paula. "Japanese Feminism in the 1970s and 1980s." *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal. English Supplement*, no. 4 (1993): 49.

This 'liberation of women' and 'reevaluation of female artists', as Ehara has pointed out, is parallel to the understanding of the famous post-structuralist Hélène Cixous who puts forward that women must liberate themselves through the act of writing.<sup>73</sup> However, liberation of women in the Japanese context can only be achieved through a deconstruction of the female Japanese identity, which is for the biggest part inscribed in rigid (male) notions of the 'Japanese society'. As such, Kitamura Aya argues that 'the Japanese woman' is a performative identity.<sup>74</sup> With this 'performative identity' she denotes that Japanese women aren't Japanese women per se. However, "they 'do' and 'become' that identity of necessity and in accordance with the dominant prescription ascribed to their gender – be it the classic 'good wife, wise mother' model in Japan or the exoticized 'Other' stigma abroad. Therefore, individual lives, experiences, and identities of Japanese women are unavoidably contingent upon the prescribed meanings, never free of the dominant gender and racial hierarchies".<sup>75</sup> Yamada's narratives are to be situated in this context, attempting to break down that prescribed female identity, if only literary. Subsequently, taking into account her female (Japanese) audience, Yamada's stories might be seen as an attempt to influence this audience by dismantling the traditional Japanese female identity in a literary way.

Secondly, the relevance of internationalism, and more specific the female internationalism in Yamada's narratives, might be considered as a very direct way to break (literally) out of the borders. This 'internationalization', *kokusaika* (国際化), emerged during the eighties when Japan had taken on the task of changing its image in the eyes of the West. However, it could be argued that this internationalization is rather an empty term since it meant to many Japanese simply looking Westward.<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, in feminist discourse it is often presented as the ultimate way to liberate and cultivate oneself, frequently coined as *disukabā jibun* (ディスカバー 自分), 'discovering oneself'.<sup>77</sup> Nonetheless, Karen Kelsky argues that this internationalism has two sides:

What is found through Western contact is called a 'new self' (*atarashii jibun*). This new self manifests women's gendered alienation and gendered flexibility, for it represents the degree to which women can and will allow the foreign/Western to enter and remake them. While anthropologists of Japan have argued that Japanese encounters

73 Cixous, Hélène and Clément Catherine. *The Newly Born Woman*. USA: University of Minnesota Press, 1986: x.

74 Kitamura, Aya. "Subverting from Within: Images and Identities of Japanese Women." *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal*, no. 29 (2005): 41.

75 Ibid. 41-42.

76 Ma, Karen. *The Modern Madame Butterfly: Fantasy and Reality in Japanese Cross-cultural Relationships*. Charles E. Tuttle, 1996: 28-29.

77 Kelsky, Karen. "The Gender Politics of Women's Internationalism in Japan." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 10, no. 1 (1996): 37.

with the foreign reinscribe the non-porous border between Japanese and Other, these accounts attest to a desire to be remade, at least partially, in the Other's image; interactions with the Other become the opportunity to examine Japanese self and find it lacking.<sup>78</sup>

This paragraph demonstrates Yamada's desire to seek her own identity through the (black) Other, as part of her deconstruction of the Japanese identity on the one hand and the female Japanese identity at the other hand. Moreover, Kelsky concludes that:

However, foreign defections are more ambiguous and ambivalent events than the narratives of emancipation and new selfhood would suggest. Exuberant celebrations of the international and the new selves that can be found or forged there conceal other, more problematic meanings of women's embrace of the Other. On a personal level women find that bright futurist rhetoric does not make easy their path as women 'without a country,' traversing the sometimes empty space between Japan and the foreign.<sup>79</sup>

This excerpt perfectly shows the personal struggle Yamada's heroines are in, finding no place in the old-fashioned Japanese society and therefore experiencing a longing for the 'foreign'. However, this causes the heroines to experience an inner conflict.

A third aspect of Yamada's rethinking of gender issues, is the emerging female sexual awareness. Yamada Eimi's works have often been described as 'sexually explicit', yet it certainly has to do with the era in which her first works were published. The seventies and eighties in Japan marked an altering social status for women. The main cause for this emerging sexual equality is the increasing economic independence.<sup>80</sup> As Karen Ma puts it: "After decades of repression, Japanese women are finally beginning to realize that sexual enjoyment is something they are entitled to and there really is nothing wrong with being direct about sex."<sup>81</sup>

This increasing female sexual consciousness in literature is often coined as 'emancipation narratives', which means narratives that symbolize female self-discovery.<sup>82</sup> Mizuta Noriko has coined this type of narrative as *jiko katari* (自己語り)<sup>83</sup>, 'narrations of the self'. In this sense, these

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid. 38.

80 Ma, 74.

81 Ibid.

82 Mori, 537.

83 Mizuta, Noriko. "Kaku' josei to 'yomu' josei: feminizumu bungaku hihyō no kadai (feminizumu hihyō no kanōsei) (The Woman Who Writes and the Woman Who Reads: Feminist Criticism in Modern Literature (The Possibility of Criticism on Feminism))." *Japanese Literature* 36, no. 1 (1987): 48.

emancipation narratives might be considered as a type of the Bildungsroman, the novel of awakening and rebirth now functioning as a female quest-romance. However, the term 'female Bildungsroman' has been a point of disagreement within feminist literary discourse as it is a broad term used to discuss a wide range of female narratives, often in a contradictory way. Although the term has been widely used to represent the protagonist's growth as a linear and outward process, the female Bildungsroman has gained popularity as a representation of the heroine's evolution as an inward, circular and even regressive process.<sup>84</sup> Mori Maryellen defines this women's quest fiction as a fiction "that typically portrays a female rebel or misfit who experiences life in modern society as alienating or oppressive, especially because of its gender codes".<sup>85</sup> She further specifies this as follows:

The protagonist rejects the female developmental blueprint centered on romance and marriage, with its assumption of female subordination, and embarks on a search for more authentic ground of identity and an alternative way of life. Her inner journey toward expanded self-knowledge is usually paralleled by a literal withdrawal from mainstream social life, often in the form of a retreat to an isolated or a primitive setting.<sup>86</sup>

The narratives of Yamada Eimi are also to be seen from this angle. In this sense, the black male protagonist is rendered as a tool or a mere trigger to enable the heroine to seek her own identity, aside from the one that is imposed on her by convention. More concretely, the 'black Other'<sup>87</sup> is a necessity to express her resistance not only against the prescribed gender roles, but also against the whole notion of the illusionary singularity that is extolled by the Japanese establishment.

### 2.3.4 Notes on the validity of authorship

As is to be expected from Yamada's multi-sided narratives regarding her diverse themes and hybrid approach, the questioning of the validity of the authorship is also a multifold one.

If we were to consider Yamada Eimi solely as a black author, disregarding the function of her literary blackness, a postmodern perspective might be the only way to do so. However, this point of view is one from the outside perspective, which means not taking into account Yamada's real ethnic identity (Japanese) and her position towards this identity. In other words, incorporating Yamada

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84 Mori, 538.

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid.

87 Tsuruta, Kinya. *Nihon bungaku ni okeru 'tasha' (The "Other" in Japanese Literature)*. Tokyo: Shin'yōsha, 1994: 1-7.

Eimi's narratives in the black discourse means relying on the postmodern notion of the unimportance of the authorial intent. In their essay *The Intentional Fallacy*, Wimsatt and Beardsley doubt the connection between text and author, arguing that the author is secondary to its text and has no significance to it.<sup>88</sup> Although this assertion has been criticized a great deal, it allows Yamada Eimi to be seen as a black author since the identity of the author is no longer a prescription for its text. However, this point of view is only a part of the story. Yamada has indeed adopted the 'black identity' through writing black fiction, but she herself has stated that she writes with the Japanese audience in mind. This is already an indication that we might have to look beyond her adopted 'black identity'.

As such, seen from the inside perspective, which means looking at the Japanese context and Yamada's intentions for writing this black fiction, the above-mentioned postmodern notion of the validity of authorship is untenable as it makes further investigation of Yamada's narratives impossible. Moreover, Yamada's works have often been considered in regard to her 'experience', more specifically 'the black experience' which she proudly promulgates as a warrant for her authenticity. As Yamada Eimi herself already implies, her narratives rely on the very connection with the author (her experience, her own questioning of identity, etc.). Because of this 'experience' Yamada's narratives have frequently been categorized as 'I-novels' (*shishōsetsu* 私小説), a genre that draws upon the close relationship of the author and the narrator.<sup>89</sup> Even though Yamada's experience is indispensable for her fiction-writing, the narrator is not in all cases the voice of Yamada Eimi herself. Furthermore, the understanding of above-mentioned attempted literary deconstructions only make sense in regard to the author's context, thus the author might even be a necessity to fully grasp the meaning of her works.

However controversial Yamada Eimi may have been at her debut phase, she has ultimately earned her recognition as a renowned author since many awards have been bestowed on her works. Even though her sexually explicit and rash novels have ruffled some feathers, she perfectly fits in the contemporary Japanese literary world together with other controversial authors such as Murakami Haruki and Shimada Masahiko 島田雅彦 (1961-) as they all have challenged – in their own literary way – the borders of the Japanese literary world, only to conclude that there are no borders any more.

88 Wimsatt, W. K., and Beardsley M. C. "The Intentional Fallacy." *The Sewanee Review* 54, no. 3 (1946): 468-69.

89 Okada, Richard. "Positioning Subjects Globally: A Reading of Yamada Eimi." *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal. English Supplement*, no. 9 (1995): 115-116.

One could even argue that the very emergence of Yamada Eimi and the likes has entailed a new – deconstructed – notion of Japanese literature which relies on a great extent on a boundless literary world, which means there are no longer any limits to what can be written and what cannot.

## Chapter 3: The construction of deconstruction: blackness as a tool

Coming back to the Derridean theory of deconstruction, it might be concluded that everything is a construct, caught in systems and conceptual chains.<sup>90</sup> Because of the captivity of these 'constructs', the Derridean theory urges to dismantle these constructs and rethink them by offering an alternative style. Having defined these 'constructs', as Derrida has called them, which Yamada Eimi seeks to 'deconstruct' through her fiction (Chapter 2), this chapter illustrates Yamada's deconstructions with specific examples extracted from some of her works. Ultimately, the main critical arguments on Yamada's fiction (as some of them have been shortly mentioned in Chapter 1) will be briefly addressed in an encompassing way, which means taking into account the results from this dissertation.

However, before taking on this chapter, I want to make a critical note. As ironic as it may be, the reader should keep in mind that, in order to 'deconstruct', Yamada has equally set up 'constructs' (in a Derridean way) in which blackness serves as a mere tool to elaborate her constructs of deconstruction.

### ***3.1 The deconstruction of 'Japaneseness' in Yamada Eimi's narratives***

Maria kept pigs in her dressing room. There were lots of them and they were all really fat. There were always a few sprawled out on the tatami floor, their flabby, white legs spread wide, stuffing themselves with curry rice. Maria told me I shouldn't call them pigs, but the resemblance was striking.<sup>91</sup>

To avoid any uncertainties, I state it here clearly: the fat pigs Yamada Eimi is referring to, are by all means the Japanese women, working for an entertainer club. Though Yamada has put it very bluntly in her descriptions, she attempts to get rid of the well-bred and goody-goody image of the Japanese, often referred to as innate characteristics which make them pure and refined.

The heroine of Yamada's first translated novel *Bedtime Eyes*, named Kim, is a social misfit with low perspectives for the future. She works as an occasional prostitute and bar singer. Kim falls

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<sup>90</sup> Sallis, 4.

<sup>91</sup> Yamada, Eimi. *Bedtime Eyes*, 9.

in love with Spoon, an Afro-American GI who has gone AWOL and she offers him a place to stay. As a result of her insecurity about her own identity and as a consequence of her social misfitting, she gets emotionally corrupted by Spoon and tries to emulate him. The next excerpt illustrates Kim's gradual corruption:

Spoon calmed down and looked up at me. But as soon as our eyes met he burst out laughing and began rolling around on the floor again. *Shit!* He was laughing at me. And this was all his fault! In a fury I gulped down a second bourbon and screamed, "*Fuck y-o-o-o-u!!*"

I wasn't in the habit of swearing like that. Spoon suddenly stopped laughing and stood up.

"Baby, you're turnin' into my kinda woman."

"Go to hell, you motherfucker!"

"That's right, Kim. That's the way...."

Spoon inched closer and closer. I was rooted to the spot. It was like he was an animal and I was his prey. I fumbled in the sink behind me, and my hand found the sponge. I threw it at him, and it hit him in the face and fell to the floor.<sup>92</sup>

The same kind of identity fragmentation is also the case in *The Piano Player's Fingers*. A Japanese woman, Ruiko, at first an independent daring woman who's notorious for devouring men, grows attracted and later on corrupted by a black piano player. Rejecting every Japanese man who crosses her path, she gets infatuated with Leroy Jones (the black piano player) and finds herself no more able to figure out her own identity:

The sun was going down and a breeze blew in through the window, gently ruffling my hair. I had been soaked with perspiration when I walked in, but now it had dried and felt like part of my skin. I stayed where I sat behind him, staring at his back. Leroy had made the mistake of forgetting that I was there.

Suddenly he struck his head on the keyboard and kept it there, motionless. He looked absolutely desperate.

"*Why...?*" he whispered. "*Shit! Shit! SH-I-I-I-T!*"

He banged his head again and again against the keyboard, strange, mutant chords belching out from the piano, echoing around the room. The keyboard was wet with tears.

I didn't know what to say. My mind was screaming, *This is your chance! This is your chance to escape! Do it! Do it now!* I knew that if I got up, went over, and put my hand on his shoulder and held his head in my arms, I would finally be able to escape the torture. All I needed to do was to say in a gentle voice, "Are you okay?" and he would fall into my arms, sobbing quietly on my chest, kissing me.

92 Yamada, Eimi. *Bedtime Eyes*, 18.

My heart was pounding so loud I could hear it, and I found it difficult to breathe. My whole body tensed and I just sat there in the background, rooted to the spot.

"*Why can't I do it? Why? Why? Why?*"

Leroy's voice echoed in my head.

The next thing I knew, Leroy was back at the piano again. The room was getting dark and the only thing I could see was the eerie, blue-white hue of the sheet music scattered on the floor. I looked closer. Every single sheet of paper overflowed with Leroy's illegible handwriting.

He played with passion now, not just tapping at the keys with his index finger as he had before, but deftly conjuring the melody, both hands weaving across the keyboard, the piano giving voice to his new composition. I had missed my only chance to get away.<sup>93</sup>

However, Yamada's deconstruction of Japaneseness is something that is rather present in a covert way than openly expressed. The paragraphs above are a good indication of Yamada's Japanese heroines, torn between their own Japanese identity and both their affection and fascination towards the black male protagonists, which as a consequence causes the heroines a true black mania, blurring the borders and creating a fused identity.

### ***3.2 The deconstruction of race in Yamada Eimi's narratives***

The way Yamada Eimi takes on the notion of race in her narratives is a rather tricky one. When I say "Yamada Eimi", the stereotypical black male automatically comes to mind. More specifically, a stereotype which portrays the black male as an unmannered womanizer with an insatiable hunger for sex who is also an alcohol-addict with an outrageous personality and a violent side to it.

However, Yamada's black male characters are exceedingly more diversified. For example, the black male protagonist in *Me and Mrs. Jones*, named Willy, has no similarities with the description above. Willy is a seventeen-years-old black boy with no sexual experience, and falls head over heels for the notorious Mrs. Jones, an older black woman who likes to spend her time with younger boys. Consequently, Willy and Mrs. Jones "have got a thing going on, both knowing that it's wrong, but it's much too strong to let it go. They got to be extra careful that they don't build up their hopes too high, cause Mrs. Jones has her own obligations and so does Willy."<sup>94</sup> Finally, their ways split, making an end to their indulgence. Yamada Eimi portrays Willy as an adolescent boy who admires

93 Yamada, Eimi. *The Piano Player's Fingers*. In *Bedtime Eyes*. Translated by Gunji Yumi and Jardine Marc. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006: 125-126.

94 Extracted from the lyrics of the song *Me and Mrs. Jones* by Billy Paul.

Mrs. Jones in a very submissive way, contrary to outrageous black males from other narratives of Yamada, and also contrary to the general stereotype of the flagrant, crooked and immoral black male which often prevails in the Japanese discourse:

When I raised my face, it was the first time I saw Mrs. Jones' face from the front. I couldn't move. The real Mrs. Jones stood there, laughing, only one foot away from me. At that very moment, I fell in love.

"My Mrs. Jones!" cried my heart out without knowing why.  
Her body inside my mind had already lured me in.<sup>95</sup>

Furthermore, Willy is portrayed as a softy who seeks for approval from his beloved Mrs. Jones:

She was very fond of tea and sweets. My scarce pocket money took the form of pikan pies and peach cobbles I took with me to her house. She used to open the package and bestow compliments on me for these mere two chunks of sweets.<sup>96</sup>

As their relationship continues, Willy gets obsessed with Mrs. Jones and is dead-set on becoming a suitable man for Mrs. Jones, being worthy of the responsibility for whatever Mrs. Jones might need.

She answered me with a tearful voice. I felt she wanted to cry. I didn't know what to do when a woman was crying in front of me. Helplessly I stroked her legs. Maybe I should have stroked her back. However, her shivering back was too painful for me to look at. What if her shivering would be transmitted to my hands? Maybe I would end up crying too. I mean, I wouldn't be able to produce such a tremor.<sup>97</sup>

[...]

When a woman cried before his eyes, what could a man do? I wanted to do something for her. She was like a little girl seeking my protection. I lied on the bed and turned Martha's face towards mine. Her tears changed direction. She looked at me without blinking her eyes. Those were by no means sad eyes. I thought her face was a little bit funny if it weren't for the streams of tears.

"Why are you crying? I have something you'll like."

She began crying once again. I started sucking up her tears and ended up tasting her cheeks. At the same time the salty taste slowly invaded my throat, I felt a raging desire

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95 Yamada, Eimi. *Me and Mrs. Jones* (Appendix)

96 Yamada, Eimi. *Me and Mrs. Jones* (Appendix)

97 Ibid. 5.

towards her. Cute Martha. Martha who started crying when I said I had something for her. Is this what you want?

Her voice started to rise because of pleasure. I gently made love to her to comfort her heart. Her body seemed to me like an entirely naked and hurt heart. I began to understand the ways of effective love-making. In order to make a crying woman relax, I made my body useful. For the first time, I didn't sleep together for myself but for her sake. I didn't know if this was a success. After all, her body started crying more than her spirit.<sup>98</sup>

[...]

I spent much of the hot season on love. I was still working in the store, because I needed the money for the shoes and socks I wore when going to Martha's house, the tie and the handkerchief to surprise her, and then of course the presents I got her (mostly sweets). My mother was shocked by my sudden rough and spending behaviour. Although Martha could have bought all those things for herself without even working, I hated her having to spend money. I was convinced a grown-up man should use his own money for the woman he loves. So I planned on growing up very fast for her.<sup>99</sup>

The quite submissive role the black male protagonist is assigned to is even more explicit in the short novel *Precious Precious*. The black male main character, Barry, is a misfit with a gaping lack of social skills. He falls in love with a black girl, Jannie Ruu, whom he doesn't dare to address. As a result of his timidity, he takes on spying Jannie Ruu and adoring her secretly. Because Barry “is still satisfied in loving her, he will be waiting around when she gets through.”<sup>100</sup>

He knew her. She was the only one he had eyes for since starting high school. Ever since the shadow of the school building at dusk. Ever since his hiding behind the jukebox in the cafeteria. He used to trail her seducing, sweet lingering presence while playing shadow tag. There was no way he could tell her. He thought of himself, who couldn't help but pretend to be a smug man, as pathetic.<sup>101</sup>

[...]

His classmates all agreed on him being an eccentric guy. It wasn't because of his appearance, but because of his silent behaviour and his tendency to open his eyes wide. They weren't the kind of fools to judge on his appearance. They simply felt it. The shady aura of a person who they should dislike. Barry radiated it.<sup>102</sup>

Barry, equally pathetic as Willy from *Me and Mrs. Jones*, gets obsessed with Jannie Ruu, idolizing her in an almost frantic way. Things get really complicated for Barry when he finds Jannie

98 Ibid. 5-6.

99 Ibid. 6.

100 Extracted from the lyrics of the song *Precious Precious* by Jackie Moore.

101 Yamada, Eimi. *Precious Precious* (Appendix)

102 Ibid. 4.

Ruu's earring and consequently gets even more fanatic about her, assuming she doesn't have the smallest clue.

At times like this, he tightly grabbed her earring. That brand-new thing was unable to become familiar with her ear, but it absorbed the sweat on his hand and got used to his own body temperature in no time. He rubbed it against his cheek. He stuffed the warm earring in his mouth. At that time, he realized that a single earring of a woman was something that made a man feel suffocated. His cheek got wet before he knew it.<sup>103</sup>

When looking at the stories which depict the interracial relationship of an African American and a Japanese female, it's more complicated. As much as it might be stated that the black males are often portrayed in a stereotypical way, their appearance and personality are by no means stagnating ones. In *The Piano Player's Fingers*, the black male Leroy Jones is at first depicted as a rather timid guy – his level of patheticness being similar to Willy and Barry – whose personality takes a turn for the worst as he decides on taking revenge on his former Japanese lover who has played with his heart. Initially, Leroy is described as follows:

The first time I met Leroy was two years ago at a party. He was sitting behind some of my friends. They were all dressed up, but he blended into the background like part of the furniture. Compared with everyone else there – the women, who had obviously spent most of the day deciding what outfit to wear, and the gay men, determined to look their best in their sharp, well-made suits, Leroy was camouflaged – he stood out no more than the table napkins or someone's jacket casually draped over a chair.<sup>104</sup>

[...]

I was interested in Leroy because I couldn't understand how he came to be part of our scene -he didn't seem to fit in with us party animals. It wasn't so much his dark skin or his extraordinarily thick lips that set him apart from the rest of us, but the hideous clothes he was wearing- his suit was a serious "World's Worst" contender. But even more striking than that, he was unshaven and kept looking around nervously. Everything about him said *hick*. And we hated people like that -he just wasn't sophisticated enough to be one of us.<sup>105</sup>

This initial derogatory description changes dramatically when Leroy Jones has decided to teach Ruiko, the Japanese female, a lesson. His new appearance got the crowd dumbfounded, his new style surpassing every Japanese man:

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103 Ibid. 6.

104 Yamada, Eimi. *The Piano Player's Fingers*, 75.

105 Ibid. 75-76.

He had wavy hair, slicked back with gel, and a single gold earring in his left ear. It took me a few moments to recognize him, but the suave, smartly dressed lady-killer standing in front of me was Leroy. I was stunned. Then, without a word, he turned around again and continued dancing. *Dancing!* I couldn't believe it. Leroy had always had two left feet and his dancing had been even worse than his pickup lines. I couldn't imagine anything more ridiculous than seeing Leroy dance. But this guy was far from ridiculous, and with his arm wrapped around his partner's waist, his feet seemed to move on air, like he was born to dance.<sup>106</sup>

Leroy's clumsy behaviour has made place for an enchanting duende, enabling him to hook Ruiko, chucking down all artificial stigmas that had often been ascribed to African Americans.

A similar evolution can be found in *Bedtime Eyes*. Initially, the black main character Spoon is described as a black brute with little brains:

Fucking was all he knew. In his heart he must have been screaming, *What do you want me to do? How can I make you feel better? What else is there besides fucking?*<sup>107</sup>

At the start of their relationship, Kim (the female Japanese main character) even got embarrassed from being seen in public with Spoon. Kim and Spoon go out together when they run into Maria who judges Kim for her choice of a black lover:

It was Maria. I was surprised to bump into her so unexpectedly, but I didn't let it show. I just stood there, rooted to the spot, as she looked Spoon up and down. I thought I would die of embarrassment. It was humiliating to be seen with someone you love so much. Spoon, on the other hand, gave Maria a brief glance and went back to stroking Osbourne inside his jacket.

“Is this him?” she asked.

I nodded. I always counted on Maria to tell me what to do next, but I didn't want her to pass judgment on Spoon as she had my other men.

“He's a big one,” she said after a moment, then mumbled good-bye, caught a cab, and was gone.<sup>108</sup>

However, as the novel continues, the negative image of Spoon gradually changes, Kim is even mind-blown by his cleverness:

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106 Ibid. 98.

107 Yamada, Eimi. *Bedtime Eyes*, 30.

108 Ibid. 34.

The next day on FEN radio news, they said that Spoon had been arrested for trying to sell confidential military documents. There was probably a big article about it in *Stars and Stripes*, too. Actually, I was surprised to hear that Spoon had been dealing with something so important -maybe he was more clever than I had given him credit for.<sup>109</sup>

Although Yamada Eimi has sometimes portrayed her black male protagonists in a rather negative way, she surely knows how to extol them too. Mostly, the heroines are attracted to the black skin of the male protagonists, expressing their amazement for the black skin, which they compare often to chocolate candy, whereas they tend to humiliate the Japanese men.

"Your skin really is the color of ebony, isn't it?"

It was the saddest color in the world, and yet it was the most beautiful color I had ever seen. However suntanned I got, I could never come close to the color of Spoon's skin.<sup>110</sup>

I loved certain parts of Leroy. Like the Leroy I knew in bed. I loved the thought of his tough, shiny black body drowning in my pussy.<sup>111</sup>

His dick wasn't the kind of disgusting, red cock that white men have, nor was it the pathetic, infantile thing of Japanese men, the kind that doesn't do a thing for you until it's inside you. With Japanese men, anyway, I always worry that I'm going to get myself tangled up in their pubic hair because it looks so much like seaweed floating on the surface of the sea.

With Spoon, maybe it was just that his pubic hair was the same color as his skin, but I was totally in awe of his dick. It was gorgeous, like a big chocolate bar, and as I stared at it excitedly I couldn't stop my mouth from watering.<sup>112</sup>

It goes without saying that Yamada Eimi is very fond of the black phallus. Not only does she use it as an expression of her astonishment, it is also the ultimate weapon to ridicule and humiliate the Japanese man (and his dick). However, the glorification of the black skin isn't limited to black males. In *Me and Mrs. Jones*, one of Mrs. Jones' lovers describes her as follows:

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109 Ibid. 61.

110 Ibid. 23.

111 Yamada, Eimi. *The Piano Player's Fingers*, 82.

112 Yamada, Eimi. *Bedtime Eyes*, 5-6.

“Her skin is like cocoa butter, man. First, we were only eating a choco bar and drinking tea and when she got tired, she asked me for a massage and lied down on the couch. I sat down on that huge ass and started pressing her on her back. While I was doing so, she started panting and before I knew it, she was massaging me instead.”<sup>113</sup>

Nonetheless, Yamada tends to ascribe an exclusive personality to her (male) black characters, making this personality a challenge for the Japanese heroine to handle. In doing so, Yamada has portrayed the black male as a peculiarity, focusing on the odd relationship between the Japanese heroine and her black lover. As such, Yamada has brought this whimsical connection into the spotlight, emphasizing on purpose their difference and their attachment at the same time.

Koko didn't have a bit of prejudice in her, but when she saw a black man and a blond woman together she couldn't help wondering how they had become a couple. They must have all kinds of problems, she'd think. A Japanese like herself, coming from a different country, ran into fewer problems living with a black man. White people don't care how nonwhites pair off. People don't flaunt their prejudice as long as something doesn't disturb their own little community. Thus Koko could get along well with both blacks and whites. She knew instinctively if she didn't invade their territory, they wouldn't invade hers.<sup>114</sup>

[...]

Rick's younger sister, Grace, once said to Koko, "My brother is a very nice person. Chances are good that you'll be happy with him, Koko. But you gotta understand exactly where that 'niceness' is coming from. He can never say no. It's easy for him to accept anything. It's up to you to understand that and control him. Black women can get a hold of black men's feelings, but it might be pretty hard for a Japanese like you. Question of blood. White women are terrible at it; they'll say 'He's very nice' and leave it at that. They never have a good time of it."<sup>115</sup>

Coming back to the derision Yamada preserves for the Japanese man, she humiliates him in a very open way, but more covertly as well. As I discuss in the next section (deconstruction of gender), Yamada's heroines are liberated from the patriarchal Japanese men, which means they have no single bit of influence on the female characters. The Japanese male characters in Yamada's works are neglected, ridiculed and even enslaved. However, the heroines are willing to lay at the black males' feet, willing to stand anything from them. The black males have liberated the heroines sexually, but got them emotionally corrupted in the most extravagant ways. As such, this is the ultimate deconstruction of race Yamada has cited. Such passages in Yamada's narratives are legion,

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113 Yamada, Eimi. *Me and Mrs. Jones* (Appendix)

114 Yamada, Eimi. *Trash*. Translated by Johnson Sonya L. New York: Penguin Books USA, 1996: 34.

115 Ibid. 36.

occurring in almost all fictional works which deal with the interracial relationship of a Japanese female and a black male. To illustrate this, I quote an excerpt from the novel *Trash*. As Koko, the Japanese female main character, tries to get her drunken black lover Rick to bed, he starts peeing his pants. As a result, Koko – who of all people hates the most to take care of others – cleans up his mess, willing to do anything for him. The following paragraph is perhaps the most exemplary one to demonstrate this race-related submission:

Daryl went and lifted Rick's torso. Just then, the three looked at each other in shock, mouths open. Rick was comfortably peeing, right in the middle of the living room.

"Oh my God! I don't believe this!" Jesse jumped back, disgusted, and bolted out of the room. Koko could hear him in the bathroom washing his hands. She sighed deeply and started undoing Rick's belt to take off his pants.

"Koko, you're getting your robe wet."

"It doesn't matter," she muttered.

Daryl helped Koko pull at Rick's jeans.

"Thanks," Koko said, glancing up. The sympathy in Daryl's eyes made her look away. The two silently worked Rick's soaked jeans down, then his underwear.

Jesse came back with a wet towel and a couple of dry ones. Koko wiped Rick's groin and thighs with it. She couldn't stop herself from sobbing. Jesse stood watching, despondent, and Daryl, flustered, rubbed Koko's shoulders.

Don't look, she kept thinking, please, just don't look. Gripping the wet towel, Koko still wept. Can you believe there was a time when the thing that made this rag wet with piss brought me to ecstasy?

"Koko, are you OK? Don't cry."

"I'm OK." Koko nodded over and over. "Don't worry, I'm all right."

This person is part of me. I couldn't do this for anyone but Rick.<sup>116</sup>

In the short story *X-Rated Blanket*, the female main character expresses her subservience to the black male in a very direct way:

I dress myself so George may desire me at any moment. I even wash carefully between my toes so that he may, at any time, take them in his mouth. Of course I polish my toenails. I wonder if I am the only woman to go as far as perfuming her toes. I labor to make myself into a delicious treat for him. He might want to bite my neck sometime, so I take special care of it. Baked to a soft brown in the sun, prepared in advance ready to be eaten any time. I always adorn my earlobes with gold pierced earrings so that his tongue may savor them. When putting on my makeup I agonize over such details as

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116 Ibid. 78-79.

which lipstick, which blush will make me the most beautiful as I lie in George's arms. This is how I serve him.<sup>117</sup>

### 3.3 *The deconstruction of gender in Yamada Eimi's narratives*

The main reason why Yamada Eimi was received as a controversial author during her debut period, was because of her feminist-like notion of gender, fighting for the liberation of the Japanese woman, which of course met with resistance at one hand, and was praised at the other hand. Yamada is most known for her literary exaltation of black males together with the sexual liberation of the Japanese female, as such dismantling the Japanese conventionalities regarding gender (as discussed in Chapter 2).

Most of her interracial fiction depicts a Japanese female unwilling to commit herself to her 'duties', more specifically blowing up the whole thing of 'duty', and living a free life with no children or husband or anything that could threaten her freedom. Moreover, Yamada even takes it a step further in her narratives: the Japanese male is depicted as the underdog who has to take care of the Japanese female, too busy with crushing on African Americans to bother.

In the novel *Trash*, Koko is asked by the ex-woman of her black lover to baby-sit on her child. The next paragraph shows her reluctance to do so, as if it were a threat to her giddy style of life.

"It's a big deal to me. Just hearing the word 'child' makes me think of responsibility. If you tell me any different it means you have no sense of responsibility, even if you are a mother. No, you *do* have a sense of responsibility; you're just good at shifting it to someone else."<sup>118</sup>

The following excerpt from *Bedtime Eyes* illustrates the role of the Japanese man as a caretaker of the flighty Japanese female, who isn't even grateful for his dedication.

He wrapped me in a towel and guided me to the bedroom, then went to the kitchen to open a can and make hot soup for me. I wanted a cigarette but mine were too damp to light, so D.C. offered me the one he was smoking. I was grateful for his kindness.

"I love you." I smiled.

I made it a rule never to tell lies to avoid hurting someone's feelings, and it felt the same as when I pretended I wanted to fuck even though I really didn't. D.C. stared at me in surprise, pinching himself to make sure he wasn't hearing things. He didn't even

117 Yamada, Eimi. *X-Rated Blanket*. Translated by Nina Cornyetz. In *New Japanese Voices: The Best of Contemporary Fiction from Japan*, ed. Helen Mitsios. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1991, 50-51.

118 Yamada, Eimi. *Trash*, 10.

notice the soup pan boiling over. And of course, he didn't hear me apologizing silently to him in my heart.<sup>119</sup>

[...]

"You really don't give a shit about me, do you?"

Apparently D.C. has been talking about the weather and I hadn't replied. *The weather?* That was the last thing on my mind.

"Goddamn it, D.C.! Why do I have to talk about the fucking weather with you?"

"You said you loved me. But I can tell you don't."

I was too fed up for words.

"So if I listen to you go on about the weather, *that* proves I love you?"

"Yeah," said D.C., breaking down in tears.

It wasn't the first time I'd seen a man cry, so I wasn't particularly moved.<sup>120</sup>

In addition to that, the Japanese male character isn't even given a proper name. Yamada has abbreviated his name or nickname as to generalize. It could have been any Japanese man whom Ruiko is looking down on.

Moreover, the female gaze is used instead of the male gaze. The female gaze isn't something that limits itself to Yamada's interracial fictions, it is also the case in her stories *Me and Mrs. Jones* and *Precious Precious*. Willy (*Me and Mrs. Jones*) was already "lured in"<sup>121</sup> by Mrs. Jones even before their first encounter. Likewise, Barry (*Precious Precious*) was convinced he tailed Jannie Ruu secretly. However, in the end, she had already seen through his plan and had picked him even before he knew it himself. Yamada makes the female gaze even more explicit in her interracial fictional works:

The moment our eyes met, I felt as though he had read my mind, and I looked down at the floor. When I looked up again, he caught my gaze and motioned toward the door. I stood up like I was possessed, told my boyfriend I was going to the ladies' room, and left the game room. Spoon was waiting for me right outside the door, both hands thrust in his pockets now, leaning against the wall and looking like some kind of small-time gangster.<sup>122</sup>

Nina Cornyetz points out in her essay *Power and Gender in the Narratives of Yamada Eimi* that the Japanese females in Yamada's narratives adhere to some kind of archetype, namely the

119 Yamada, Eimi. *The Piano Player's Fingers*, 110.

120 Ibid.

121 Yamada, Eimi. *Me and Mrs. Jones* (Appendix)

122 Yamada, Eimi. *Bedtime Eyes*, 4.

*yamamba*.<sup>123</sup> The *yamamba* or 'woman of the mountains' as Cornyetz describes it, is an archetypal figure from Japanese myths and legends. In this *yamamba* archetype Cornyetz sees the heroines of Yamada's narratives as dangerous, lusty women frequently associated with nature and the bestial. Moreover, Cornyetz states that "other appetites (such as hunger) collude to tether Yamada's women securely to their bodies and sever them from acculturation", thus making them appear as "beasts to male humanity."<sup>124</sup>

Moreover, Yamada's heroines are tremendously open about sex and their sexual desire, which is quite unacceptable according to Japanese standards. As already mentioned in previous chapters, due to her overtly addressing of sexual issues, Yamada has been praised extremely by Japanese feminists. The French post-structuralist feminist writer Hélène Cixous has put forward in her essays and non-fiction works that the uncovering of the female sexual desire enables the creative power of the female author, resulting in *jouissance*, which means a transgressive state of gratification.<sup>125</sup> Cixous has frequently expressed her displeasure of the preference of the male narrative above the female narrative. Consequently, she has defined this with the term 'phallogocentrism', a neologism based on Jacques Derrida's neologism 'logocentrism', which means the preference of the spoken word above the written word.<sup>126</sup>

The expression of female sexual desire is omnipresent in Yamada's narratives, albeit the most explicit in her interracial fictions. The Japanese females don't mince their words when describing and expressing their sexual desire; this might even be one of the most outstanding features of Yamada's narratives, which consequently was the main trigger for her literary reception as a cause célèbre. To give an example of this sexual expression, I quote a paragraph from *X-Rated Blanket*:

When I say I want a man, I mean this man; even if it's not that man, then it just won't do for me. George. The name alone twists open a faucet inside my body. Twisted, I am wet; water floods high enough to wet my eyes. That's how I clearly recognize my own desire when I look in the mirror.<sup>127</sup>

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123 Cornyetz, Nina. "Power and Gender in the Narratives of Yamada Eimi." In *The Woman's Hand: Gender and Theory in Japanese Women's Writing*, edited by P. G. Schalow and Janet A. Walker, 425-457. California: Stanford University Press, 1996: 432.

124 Ibid.

125 Cixous, xvii.

126 Cixous, 64-65.

127 Yamada, Eimi. *X-Rated Blanket*, 1.

Also worth mentioning, is the lesbian passage in *Bedtime Eyes*. Despite lesbianism (in fact all LGBT) still being a taboo topic in Japan, it surely was a big blow when *Bedtime Eyes* was first published in 1985. Although Yamada addresses homosexuality now and then, she isn't in the habit to touch on this topic, yet she is not afraid to take the bull by the horns. The next paragraph is the famous lesbian scene from *Bedtime Eyes*. Maria and Spoon were discovered having sex and Maria consequently confesses her lesbian love for Kim:

But I had adored Maria and had even dreamed of being her lover. I didn't want to believe that an affair with her could ever be a shallow thing -I wanted it to have some deep meaning.

"You're in the middle," she repeated.

"Just lay off, will you?" I said, beginning to cry.

"Hey, baby, don't cry."

"Kim, my darling, don't cry."

Their voices overlapped.

"I love you, Kim."

I couldn't believe my ears. This woman, who I had worshiped for so long, was saying words I'd never expected to hear. But it was too late. I had already stopped loving her.

"I've always loved you. There has never been anyone else."

Now that she said it, I knew it was true. She really did love me deeply.

Far more than her hats and her rings, or her men.

"I love everything that has anything to do with you. I want to know everything there is about you. Since you've met this guy, you never come around anymore. I don't care if you leave me in a corner and forget all about me; just let me watch you. I can't bear being shut out like this. Do you know how hard it's been because I couldn't tell you how I felt?"<sup>128</sup>

### 3.4 Yamada Eimi criticized

Being the enfant terrible of her generation, Yamada Eimi has been lauded and criticized at the same time. In this section, I briefly enumerate some of the most remarkable critics addressed to Yamada Eimi's fiction.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Yamada's narratives have frequently been accused of adhering to the yellow-cab-phenomenon.<sup>129</sup> However, the going-abroad-for-sex has never been the real target Yamada aimed at. Despite the allegations regarding the yellow-cab-phenomenon, Yamada has come straight to the point breaking all kind of taboos through her narratives. This has brought her much praise, but also made her the centre of controversy in Japan during the eighties and nineties.

<sup>128</sup> Yamada, Eimi. *Bedtime Eyes*, 40.

<sup>129</sup> Hirota, 102-103.

Japanese (male) writers, such as Takeda Seiji 竹田青嗣 (1949-) and Ryū Murakami, have recognized Yamada's talent, though they make light of her work by considering her oeuvre as a mere product of her 'experiences', referring to her earlier job as a bar hostess.<sup>130</sup> The Japanese female audience sees it all from the other side, which means they consider Yamada Eimi as the embodiment of the striving for gender equality and the pursuit for sexual liberation.

Outside Japan, mainly in the United States, Yamada has often been criticized for her stereotypical portrayal of the black male.<sup>131</sup> As only part of Yamada's oeuvre has been translated to English, many American scholars take on the illusion that Yamada's black males are all the same, namely the lusty brute as Spoon in *Bedtime Eyes* and Leroy Jones in *The Piano Player's Fingers*. However, these assumptions are rather blunt, not taking into account the evolution Yamada's black males have gone through. Moreover, many of the black males differ from this brutal portrayal, as has been illustrated in the sections above. Moreover, the sometimes negative depiction of the black male has particularly stirred the critical senses of the American academics, though the black author Alice Walker is doing pretty much the same in her fictional writing. Together with the critique of the black male being a mere stereotype – even the assumption of a stereotype already presumes that there is something as a 'black male' – goes the critique of Yamada's black males being a mere fetish of her. Moreover, the sexual escapades with the black males have often caused a fuss, alleging Yamada Eimi of treating the black males as sexualized objects.<sup>132</sup> However, thorough investigation of Yamada's narratives – as in this dissertation – has demonstrated the function of those sexual interventions with black males. As has been discussed in this dissertation, Yamada aims to make a statement, which consequently involves sexual relationships with the black male protagonists (though only some parts of her oeuvre include this sexual relationship).

In addition to that, Yamada's realistic and even naturalistic depiction of the female liberation hasn't been approved by every female. American scholars – again – have doubted Yamada's literary dismantling of the patriarchal reading code, even going as far as claiming a reinforcement of the patriarchal reading code.<sup>133</sup> In other words, the liberation of the Japanese male is replaced by a new submission to the black male. In a way this might be true. However, we have to keep in mind that Yamada Eimi is not a feminist author no matter how much she may have been called as such. As

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130 Okada, 116.

131 Ibid. 114-117.

132 Cornyetz, Nina. "Power and Gender in the Narratives of Yamada Eimi.", 439-440.

133 Ibid. 434.

thorough investigation of her narratives has pointed out, Yamada has attempted to tear down the Japanese notion of gender. As a result, the black males have served as a tool to achieve this goal.

However problematic, helter-skelter and prone to misinterpretations (though Derrida wouldn't say there is even a way to misinterpret) and misunderstandings Yamada's narratives may be, the critics of Yamada Eimi should always be aware of the context and Yamada's intentions, looking beyond the surface.

## Conclusion

Having contextualized, investigated and illustrated Yamada Eimi's literary blackness, we might conclude that it is an eclectic one. In other words, it has become clear that there are several, partially overlapping, underlying factors for Yamada's self-proclaimed black authorship.

Although Yamada's notion of literary blackness in the Japanese discourse is perhaps the most outstanding one, she's not the only one and certainly not the first one to do so. When attempting to trace back the origins of blackness in the Japanese discourse, we have seen that the renowned author Ōe Kenzaburō was amongst the first ones to do so, although in a sometimes derogatory way. A decade later, in the 1970s, the *burakumin* writer Nakagami Kenji was enormously attracted to black literature as he considered the discrimination of Afro-Americans the same as the Japanese discrimination for *burakumin*. Nakagami thus became engaged with the black narratives and marked a turning point concerning blackness in the Japanese literary discourse.

In the 1980s, female Japanese authors engaged themselves with black literature, more specifically female black literature as they saw the black female as an equally oppressed woman. Moreover, Japanese youths developed a keen interest for black culture and jazz music. This is also the era in which Yamada Eimi made her debut with the controversial novel *Bedtime Eyes* (1985). Moreover, she even proclaimed herself a black author, despite firmly holding on to the Japanese language.

This double entendre has raised the question whether Yamada Eimi can be considered as a black author. An overview of the evolution of the black novel has demonstrated that, contrary to the initial unity of black authorship, the black novel has been widely expanded and dispersed, no longer demanding the black skin to be called a black author.

Though Yamada's writing style is certainly according to the black writing style, inserting black literary tropes and full of intertextual references to black culture, her self-proclaimed hybrid identity has more to it. Yamada's adherence to the Japanese audience through writing in Japanese has triggered the question of her intentions. In other words, what did she intend to achieve by writing black fiction in Japanese? It has become clear Yamada aims to propose an alternative to the Japanese reality. Invoking Jacques Derrida theory of deconstruction, this dissertation has offered a possible way to investigate Yamada's narratives. Taking into account the Japanese context, I have argued that Yamada has attempted to deconstruct the notion of 'Japaneseness', race, and gender.

However those three aspects are partially overlapping, they cannot be fully understood separately, as the combination of the three is needed to exactly locate Yamada Eimi and her fiction.

Theories on Japanese-ness, or *Nihonjinron*, have shown that the perception of the Japanese as a singular and pure race is deeply rooted in the Japanese discourse. Together with this illusion of the singularity of the Japanese race goes another myth, namely one that states the Japanese society as consisting of only one class, a middle class. Yamada has clearly shown the other side of the coin through her fiction. The heroines are fed up with their Japanese identities and subsequently become fascinated by Afro-Americans, emulating their black style. Yamada deals with the myth of the one-class-society in an equally bold way. The female Japanese protagonists are depicted as rather marginal figures with dubious kind of jobs.

This goes hand in hand with the Japanese notion of race. The illusion of superiority over black people is one that has been incorporated in the Japanese discourse through Western racist ideas. Nonetheless, this idea of assumed superiority is deeply encrusted in the Japanese discourse. No matter how much some academics have argued that Yamada has portrayed the black male in a derogatory way, the appearances of black males are never stagnating. Moreover, it is mostly the case that at the end of the story the Japanese female has surrendered to the black male. Even though Yamada's depictions of black males might at times be harsh, they are mostly exalted by the female protagonists, thus highlighting the dominance of the black male over the Japanese female.

Together with Yamada's questioning of the Japanese identity and her dismantling of race, she has expressed a protest against the patriarchal Japanese ideas of gender. The heroines break with the traditional image of the good housewife and mother, adopting a giddy lifestyle full of indulgence and extravagance. Ultimately, Yamada has fought for the sexual liberation of the Japanese female through her fiction, depicting the heroines as fully sexual liberated women encouraging the female readers to reconsider their own female identity.

The question whether Yamada Eimi has achieved her goal, namely challenging the Japanese establishment and literary world remains a subjective question. However, the commotion she caused in the eighties and nineties might be a good indicator that she has at least drawn the attention. Moreover, Yamada has been granted many awards and nominations and ultimately a seat in the jury of the Akutagawa committee, which proves her literary recognition and her profile of a literary icon.

Nevertheless, we have seen that Yamada Eimi crosses not one, but many lines, making it very hard to categorize Yamada Eimi or determine her literary position. Above all, as the author has situated herself, it may be best to locate her on the borderline.

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# Appendix

In this appendix, I have included my translation of two of Yamada Eimi's short stories, which were cited in this dissertation.

## *Precious Precious*

At that moment, Barry's ears were overflowing with happiness. The next moment, his entire body was engulfed by shyness. His body, trembling with joy, broke out in cold sweat because of shame. Wiping his forehead, he opened and closed his mouth, trying to give her an answer. However, no matter how hard he tried, he knew the lips spitting out the voice answering her question weren't attractive. He got desperate. A strange excitement sprouted in his heart. Lingering despair is something that makes people cheery. So this cheerfulness caused his talent as an actor to flourish.

It wasn't until that afternoon in the hot summer just before graduating from high school that he received a phone call from her. Barry couldn't control his regrets about his high school life during which he hadn't done anything (at least when it came to girls) and twisted the cork of his beer bottle with his fingers. The ringing of the telephone, unable to escape through the hot, stagnant air, just kept on going. Barry didn't pay it any heed. After all, it had to be another one of the male friends of his little sister in heat. Recently, she was coming home late almost every day with dark red bruises below her swinging earrings. Barry knew that the lips of a boy had created them, but he had never believed those things could actually appear on your skin for real.

He pressed his arm against his mouth and tried sucking it. However, he couldn't recreate the same forms as on the nape of his sister Risa's neck. His skin was too black. When he parted his lips from his arm, only a large imprint of his own mouth was left on that spot. He found it disgusting. Swiftly, he wiped it clean with his thumb. For a long time, he despised his finger because of that repugnant feeling.

The telephone stopped ringing. Barry was once again left behind in lonely silence. There's no way it's her at a time like this. Feeling depressed, he took a sip of beer. It tasted bitter. This characterized his high school life.

That's when the telephone rang a second time. Barry got up slowly. He walked to the telephone in the living room. He was going to pick up and say: "Hey, man. The woman you wanna speak

already left with another guy today.” But he had already realized he wouldn’t be able to say it. It had always been like that. “Notice me! I’m right here!” He’s been wanting to scream that for eighteen years now, but he hadn’t made it any further than a force smile. He was a naïve and introvert kind of guy, and therefore unattractive.

He picked up the receiver. Surprisingly, the person on the other side of the line said "Hello? Can I speak to Barry?"

It took him several seconds to register she was asking for him.

"I'm Barry," he said, making an effort.

"In the pocket of the clothes I'm wearing today, there was a scrap of paper with your phone number and name on it. I think you wrote it. I'm sorry, but I can't remember you at all. It's been a while since I've worn this outfit. I was worried, so I called. Hey, where did we meet?"

"Now this is strange. I can't seem to remember it either," he said with a big sigh.

This was the beginning of his performance.

"I surely wouldn't have forgotten a girl with such a sweet voice."

"Weird, right? But, if it isn't your handwriting, whose is it?"

"Yeah, that’s indeed strange. Anyway, this allows me to speak to a fantastic lady. Since he slipped this phone number into your pocket, I guess the guy must have noticed it too: the fact that you’re a charming woman. "

Barry felt a little bit embarrassed by his own sweet-talking, but this kind of tone wouldn't displease a young woman at all.

The voice of the girl turned a bit moist from the expectations of the man on the other side of the line.

"Hey, what kind of man are you?"

"Can't you guess from my voice?"

"A *sexy* man?"

"Heehh, I don't get it. That's what every woman says."

"Do you always wear a neck tie?"

"I'm always *dressed up*, you know."

"Oh why can't I remember you? So weird. Yet it’s because I talked to you that I have your phone number."

"Maybe our encounter was such a shock you lost your memory at once."

"When can we meet?"

"Well..."

"Will you go to the prom?"

"Of course."

"Then let's meet each other there."

"By the way, what's your name?"

"Do you want to know?"

"No, never mind. I can imagine a fitting face when hearing such an attractive voice. I'll ask your name after we'd meet. I'll keep the pleasure for that moment."

"Hehehe, at a party you'll have to raise your voice ten times louder or I'll keep chatting with my friends. Barry, look forward to my voice until then."

"*Yes I am.* You too, look forward to my voice."

"I'll do."

She put down the telephone. Barry sighed. His lips closed, just like the curtains of his stage. He couldn't believe the way he had pulled it off. Still with the receiver in his hand, he cried out.

Good heavens! She really dialled my number with her beautiful fingers. And she wanted to meet me! Oh god! This was really crazy!

He was amazed he had managed to have a perfect conversation with her.

Why did he tell lies like: 'What's your name?' and 'I can't remember you'? A shocking encounter!? Always *dressed up!*? BULL SHIT!!

Barry was confused. The delight caused by her long-anticipated phone call and the understanding that it couldn't work out in any possible way made him stand motionless, unable to hang up the phone.

He knew her. She was the only one he had eyes for since starting high school. Ever since the shadow of the school building at dusk. Ever since his hiding behind the jukebox in the cafeteria. He used to trail her seducing, sweet lingering presence while playing shadow tag. There was no way he could tell her. He thought of himself, who couldn't help but pretend to be a smug man, as pathetic.

Barry had first met her at a party before New Year's Eve. Every year, this was the most magnificent party held at his high school. On New Year's Eve there were always different kind of people doing various activities. Some spent the night with their lovers, while others went to church with their family. On this day before, everyone who wanted to bring out a toast on the last moments of the old year gathered, dressed up. Those who were accompanied by their girlfriends got loads of

envious stares, and those who weren't kept their hopes up while looking at the girls who had come in groups. It was that one precious day of the year on which everyone let their eyes sparkle like a glittering diamond. This was called: the pre-New Year's Eve party. When the first half of November had passed, this was the hottest topic in class. The exciting atmosphere in the class affected the teachers as well; since it seemed a touch of immorality was allowed, the students were rather open-minded. In those days, they got their taste of the girl they fell in love with for the first time and wounds caused by now long-forgotten friendships.

This time was the first winter since Barry attended high school. During lunchtime, he observed the seniors getting worked up over the party (problems like 'What am I going to wear?' and 'Should I ask that chick to escort me?') and he got a strange feeling. He hadn't yet bet on that one day and hadn't yet tasted the pleasures of life.

Barry's classmates acted as though they were entranced. They really thought they'd gotten pretty high on the grown-up's ladder whilst they had gone to school. After they'd turned fifteen, most families allowed them to do a part-time job and to keep the money for themselves. Their self-earned money obtained through their own efforts. The same language like grown-ups. Their rapidly evolving physique. Women were about the one thing there wasn't enough of.

If you could manage to befriend a girl at the party, maybe you'd be able to spend the lonely and boring New Year together. In order to grow up, they felt everyone had their own mission to fill that part they were missing.

Leaning against the wall of the class room, Barry put his hand in his pocket and stared at their appearance. No way he could participate in their conversation. Because he used to be ridiculed by his mother and his sister about his hair as fluffy as feathers and his wide nose, he had lost all self-confidence. Ever since he was a little kid, he used to be reserved. His heart was filled with expressions like an angry scream or an exclamation of surprise, extremely prominent and noisy, but he couldn't exactly figure out how to let out these cries. Back in the days, when he'd searched for a solution, he would get desperate. When he finally let some words slip out after intense concentration, because it took him way too long, it always provoked the laughter of his friends. Eventually, he got fed up with it and gave up. In order to get his compressed thoughts out of his heart, he thought there was no other way than to wait until somebody pierced the swelling with a needle.

His classmates all agreed on him being an eccentric guy. It wasn't because of his appearance, but because of his silent behaviour and his tendency to open his eyes wide. They weren't the kind of

fools to judge on his appearance. They simply felt it. The shady aura of a person who they should dislike. Barry radiated it.

Barry hesitated whether or not to go to the party. If he didn't go and stayed at home, his family would certainly ask him about it. He had a strange kind of pride. He had no friends at school and he felt gloomy and pessimistic every day, but he didn't want his mother and sister to know it. He challenged his sister and talked to her in a rude way. That was the only way for him to make himself clear. And thus he became more and more hated.

Let's go and check it out, he thought. Personally, he wasn't satisfied with his way of life. By not doing anything, he felt as though he were an ill person with a heart that was about to explode because of impatience. It was incomprehensible to others, as though he was suffering from a toothache. The word 'party', most unsuitable for him, had passed the tip of his tongue. Maybe something was going to change. Such a frivolous word could give even the types like him a magical power that made him actually believe in it.

That day, the gymnasium was filled with boasting, dressed up teenagers. The proud classmates of Barry, who was pierced in one earlobe, had put on a neckties and were making great efforts to show their hair to the girls clinging onto their arms. At the entrance, an employee was checking hastily everyone's invitations. Without paying much attention to them, the employee stood amidst of the students. Barry showed his invitation with a disappointed look. The employee glanced at his face. Barry felt a little uncomfortable because he was only wearing an ordinary coat.

After a formal prayer, a badly prepared diner was served. As soon as the bread was divided, the party took off. When a clumsy student band began to play, everyone broke into a dance. Although everyone already knew the taste of alcohol, no alcohol was being sold. Because everyone would probably drink afterwards, nobody complained. To them there was no relation between alcohol, love and girls.

In the middle of the foolish tumult, Barry looked around with a perfectly cool head. He felt he didn't fit in the circle. If anyone would have said a word to him, maybe the dike would break and flood him with joy. However, his classmates were already used to his image and nobody made an effort to greet him.

"She won't come," he muttered and took a seat on a chair. That moment, he noticed a squirming shadow at his feet. A red dress spread across the floor and a bent-over girl seemed to search her lost earring. The scales of the dress brushed against his nose and he hallucinated they could engulf him any moment.

"You still haven't found it, Jannie Ruu?" The girl raised her head hearing the words of her friends rushing to her. Jannie Ruu! Barry's eardrum immediately absorbed the name.

"Yeah, I've been looking for it quite some time now without any luck. I just bought it. Awful."

"You just bought it and you've already lost it? Maybe it wasn't in the mood to befriend your ear."

He noticed a small shiny thing at his feet. He hesitated for a second, but in order to make her come back he stepped on it softly with his foot. It allowed him some time. He was torn between giving it back or stealing it. Steal it?! He didn't understand why he'd think that way. If he stole it, what purpose would it serve in the first place? He didn't know yet what kind of effect a girl's earring could have on a man's heart.

Jannie Ruu had been bending over for some time now. Her long waving hair touched his knee. Barry wasn't affected at all. However, why had he fallen under the spell of her glance and actions? He thought this was a strange feeling. Until now he had turned away his face on purpose when a girl spread her sweet fragrance in his direction. However it may be, he couldn't bring himself to stand such a shameless body odour. In an utmost calm way, he contemplated the obvious reactions on Jannie Ruu's worried face. "Sorry," with this one word she excused herself crawling at his feet. Although her posture looked like she'd been expecting a man, and her name hinted the same thing, she somehow made some boyish movements.

"Still nothing. I give up." Jannie Ruu got up. I have to tell her, he thought, but swallowed that thought on purpose. He was astonished by the wickedness of a grown-up man, which he didn't know he carried inside. The girl left the place together with her friends. Barry didn't say a word, of course.

He had met her like this. He wasn't really impressed by her attractive hair or her expressive, deep-black, flashing eyelashes. However, *something* had shaken his body to the core, that's for sure.

As soon as the girls were gone out of sight, he slightly lifted his feet and looked at the booty. The golden earring sparkled incessantly on the dirty floor in the tumult of the gymnasium. He looked around, picked it up and held it tight. "Jannie Ruu," he mumbled. This was the first time he remembered the name of a girl who wasn't a relative.

From that moment on, he followed her every day. He had never noticed her up until now. However, having carved her appearance and her name into his heart, to his surprise, he found her everywhere.

She was always surrounded by her friends, laughing. When the flock passed, he turned his face towards them as though he were a sunflower turning its head to the sun. He could hardly remember anything about the other girls. However, he took notice of Jannie Ruu's cheerful voice and gestures and stored them within his heart.

Alone in his room, Barry often replayed the image of Jannie Ruu in his heart, savouring them. Depending on the purpose, he could move the images slowly or stop them, just like a video movie. That turned out to be the best possible way to spend time when he was alone in his room. As was the case for boys who fell in love after meeting a girl for the first time, he didn't let his heart get overexcited. After all, there was no need for him to fret over her answer. This was because he knew from the beginning that he would be ignored by her. However, with each passing day, the traces of Jannie Ruu evaporated drop by drop into his heart, sometimes it got so bad it made him choke.

At times like this, he tightly grabbed her earring. That brand-new thing was unable to become familiar with her ear, but it absorbed the sweat on his hand and got used to his own body temperature in no time. He rubbed it against his cheek. He stuffed the warm earring in his mouth. At that time, he realized that a single earring of a woman was something that made a man feel suffocated. His cheek got wet before he knew it.

Not long after that, he got promoted. No matter what classmates he ran across, he didn't open his heart to anyone. However, he had actively attended high school events. By doing that as often as possible, he had been able to look at Jannie Ruu's figure and he'd been able to save up traces of her one by one in his secret treasure box.

Although he always showed up on their gatherings, but he still didn't say anything, his classmates found it amazing. He always just looked around with his arms folded, and remained silent. To those who made a big thing out of nothing, he looked like a thoughtful philosopher. Actually, he was only thinking about Jannie Ruu. Since it was in no way possible to clear up that misunderstanding, he just ignored them, but that only made him even more mysterious. "That guy is really grown-up. Rumour has it he goes out with girls from the neighbourhood. They say he's always drinking whiskey at a bar." That's how they made a legend out of Barry. Compared to one year ago, when he had been surrounded by an air of suspiciousness (although the kids secretly found it attractive), his body and smell had grown up.

Barry didn't go to a bar or the like, but he just enjoyed being in his room drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes. At the same time he had been savouring the traces of Jannie Ruu in his heart,

but it was no longer enough to satisfy him. The Jannie Ruu of his heart. He felt he had to do something with all the stuff he had carefully saved up in his heart. His hands started fidgeting naturally between his legs. For the first time he understood that the desire for women had been passing from his heart to down below. Until now, the pile of memories of Jannie Ruu had been streaming without limits to his groin. The flashing of her black pupils and the shine of the fuzzy hairs on her earlobe, no matter how trivial, were sufficient to set his groin on fire. At that moment, he felt Jannie Ruu all the way in his heart. He savoured his memories of her with his heart and body until he was exhausted. In the end, Barry realized this was called 'love'.

Before he knew it, he learned several things. For instance, he was shocked when his face reflected in the window glass. He saw his face, disfigured by worries. Why had the sweet whispers of the traces of Jannie Ruu he had so carefully saved changed into something this ugly only by passing through his legs? He hated himself when for doing such a thing next to the window. However, he couldn't forget the taste of pleasure now. He felt the tingling of his body and shut his eyes at once.

It was also around this time he'd secretly call her 'baby'. While making himself excited, he couldn't manage to say her name, so he called her 'baby' as though he were singing a song. His tenderness for her came seeping out of that word. He sang the word until he got tired of it and understood he could use that word for any woman.

*Oh, Jannie Ruu, baby.* Barry unzipped his trousers. Baby, it's fine if you'd only be here and sit next to me. She was well-suited to the name Barry had given her; she tied up her hair and crossed her legs. However, she didn't look at Barry at all. In fact, she hadn't noticed him even once. Isn't it terrible, he thought in tears.

That's what he was thinking about every day. The Jannie Ruu who always passed him by. And he, the only one who looked. What would happen if our eyes met? What would happen if I grabbed a strand of hair and forced her to look at me? He shook his head, as though he wanted to say he'd been thinking about foolish things. It was no use. He couldn't keep on living his life masturbating and thinking about a woman. He was confused. Suddenly he got the idea to slip a scrap of paper with his name and phone number into her breast pocket and wait for her reaction.

After a lot of failed attempts, he finally managed to write a simple note. The desire for Jannie Ruu made him, who had given up everything until now, do it. While thinking this, he felt he reached the height of love. In fact, only thinking about one woman with his heart and body had made him

grow up too much. The instinct inherent to every man made him hunger after any kind of contact with Jannie Ruu.

The action was successful and a few months later he received a phone call from Jannie Ruu. After he'd settled the phone conversation perfectly, the prom was the next thing to worry about. It was the first time since he was born that he'd been looking forward so much to that day. His outfit was the first thing he'd worry about. There were only two weeks left until the prom. What should he do? He could even decide not to turn up and just stay at home. But then, what should he do if she thought he was a liar?! How in the world could he even explain his feelings of two and a half high schools years?

He walked slowly out of his room and asked his mother who was peeling potatoes in the kitchen how to knot a necktie. His mother dropped the knife on the ground from sheer astonishment and jumped up. He could no longer stand the humiliation. However, she, who'd always called him ugly, reacted different from what he had expected. Happily, she embraced him. "What is it? You finally got a girlfriend?" While he felt the chin of his ecstatic mother on his shoulder, a look of annoyance appeared on his face.

"You know, it's because I'm going to the prom. I've been thinking to wear a suit. When wearing a suit, it's appropriate to put on a neck tie too."

"Oh my!" His mother looked as if she would burst into tears every moment.

"My, you don't need to discuss those things with your mother. I was just worried you were such a strange kid. Barry, my baby. You ugly!"

Barry smiled faintly and rubbed his face. The dimple between his tight eyebrows kept on getting looser.

His sister Risa came home. She was taken aback when she saw the strange scene with her mother and her brother. Her mother excitedly explained the situation. Risa climbed the stairs without saying a word. "Come to my room later. I'll make you look like my boyfriend."

Now it was Barry's turn to have his jaw drop in amazement.

The day of the prom had come. With the graduation ceremony coming up soon, everyone was desperate for the moment that signals the end of childhood and the anticipation of what follows after that.

His classmates nodded in agreement seeing Barry in a suit. He looked exactly like a dude who picked up girls from the street and leaned with his chest against the counter of a bar. His suit fitted perfectly. As usual, he was silent and asocial; his sand-coloured suit matched his behaviour perfectly. He felt cramped because of the shirt he wasn't used to wear and fiddled with the pin of his collar. The way he raised his chin caused the others to whisper. He was so cool. That's what the others were thinking. Barry got the impression they were ridiculing him and looked away while he drank a cold but gentle wine. Because of the occasion, they were allowed to drink a small amount of wine.

Barry was determined. Of course he'd been looking for Jannie Ruu. Leaning against the counter, his eyes were scanning the place looking for her. Like a possessed man, he gave off an aura that he would accept no other person. That's how it should be. Today, he was standing in this spot only for the sake of finding and catching Jannie Ruu. Suddenly, he was overcome by a feeling that something he craved for was approaching, and he looked at the entrance. Sure enough, Jannie Ruu appeared.

Although she was busy chatting away with her friends, she seemed to be looking for something. Barry realised he was the one she was searching for. His guts made a noise as though there heavy stream of boiling blood was passing throughout his whole body. I have to approach her! He tried to convince his throat. However, no matter how hard he tried, his feelings couldn't motivate his vocal cords and his tongue got stiff. Say it, just one word. What's up, Jannie Ruu? Only that.

She passed Barry. She didn't seem to pay attention to him. He wiped the cold sweat off his forehead. He'd lost the chance to approach her for once and for all. How could he even beckon her now if she'd already walked past him without noticing? His high school life had slipped away too fast, he thought. The back of her figure he'd been thinking about every single day hadn't changed the least. I know your glance too well, but you don't know the glance directed at you.

“Shit!”

A curse of self-pity came gushing out his mouth without him realising it. The air stopped moving. If he had only kept his damn mouth shut tight! Now it was too late. Or better, had he been just in time? He felt Jannie Ruu's presence behind him.

“Barry?”

He turned around in surprise.

“Barry. I'm sure you remember my voice. So it was you, huh. I've known all this time it was you after all.”

Barry looked at her over his shoulder. It was the first time he'd looked into the eyes of a girl. Her glance penetrated Barry's pupils and made him shiver all over.

“How did you find out?”

“It wasn't that hard to figure out, you know. Why did you think I didn't realize it? I knew it was you right away when I entered.”

“Why?”

Jannie Ruu frowned.

“A woman can feel when a man's gaze is pointed at her.”

“But you said you knew it all this time.”

“You see, it's because you're always looking at me. I thought you had a crush on me.”

“So, you even knew I'm not always dressed up like I told you?”

“I thought you meant after school time. I heard some rumours about you, you know.”

Barry was confused. He excused himself and went to the bathroom to refresh. Why did he look at the mirror when washing his hands? For the first in a long time he stared at his own face. With an expression like he wanted to cry and laugh at the same time, he mumbled: “Goddamn!” Before he even realised it, Barry's face in the mirror changed into a face that wasn't that bad after all.

## ***Me and Mrs. Jones***

In our group, Mrs. Jones was famous for her frivolous lifestyle. Taking advantage of the fact that her husband who had joined the army only paid her a visit once a year, she spent her days savouring the company of young men.

The sentence 'Hey, you, did you sleep with Mrs. Jones?' became like a password among us. Whoever could answer 'yes' to that question, was guaranteed the position of hero of the group for a few days. These heroes revealed all sorts of details about her body and her breathing while the others listened, collecting the excess saliva with their tongue as if imagining a candy bar they had never seen before.

Actually, hungering after a candy bar would make a laughingstock of someone our age. After class, we used to hang out in an alley uncorking cans of beer and lighting up cigarettes, trying to behave like adults. In fact, we looked more like a bunch of old women who had reached the age at which they didn't feel the need to wonder if smearing honey exuberantly on a pancake wouldn't ruin the taste. Everyone knows that period in one's life of false courage. Well, rinsing our mouth with beer, we were in the middle of it. At that time, I had just turned seventeen.

Because of his boasting about his date with Mrs. Jones last night, Jeffrey had conquered the hero's throne for this week. While I was spinning a basketball on the palm of my hand, he informed me about it, talking in an excited way. Two months ago it had been David, if I remember correctly. Ever since he got his older brother's used car as a birthday present and he used to offer the young ladies of our school a ride, he found himself overwhelmed with joy. Before we knew it, he got pulled out of our group.

"Mrs. Jones was not my first woman," boasted Jeffrey before telling me about her body.

'Her skin is like cocoa butter, man. First, we were only eating a choco bar and drinking tea and when she got tired, she asked me for a massage and lied down on the couch. I sat down on that huge ass and started pressing her on her back. While I was doing so, she started panting and before I knew it, she was massaging me instead.'

After this, Jeffrey would further continue to give specific explanations about her body. Thanks to that, images of a naked Mrs. Jones whom I had never met increasingly kept popping up in my head. At the same time, I despised Jeffrey because he could only talk about her in such a coarse language. Whenever they were talking about her, I would shut my mouth and listen to them from a corner. To me, their stories were about a world I didn't know yet, although I could already sense the pleasure, but wasn't it no more than lying on top of a female body?

I knew the feeling to be in love with a girl. The happiness that seemed to come out of nowhere and the bitter feeling when she let you down, I knew it a little. However, I couldn't imagine what it would be if that thing called pleasure would be combined with love. Love and pleasure had always been living separately in my mind.

'I love you, I want to have sex with you,' whenever I saw this kind of transition in a movie I got a strange feeling. Why would loving each other lead to sex? When I asked my friends who had already experienced such a thing, none of them could give me an explanation. I tried asking several times but I couldn't figure it out. After all, I was the only one from our group who didn't know a woman's body and it was a humiliation for me to be mocked about it. Nevertheless I listened to their stories. And so there was one woman's body that came to mind when I returned alone to my room. That woman was Mrs. Jones. I could see the looks of Mrs. Jones very precisely just like a conditioned reflex when I was alone in my bed, and they would soak the sheets. Maybe it was time to get to know a woman. It made me feel gloomy.

I used to work after school two or three times a week at a store. I had to bring the cart with stuff bought at the store to the car of the customer and store it away in the trunk. For a high school student it was an ordinary, boring side job. The pay wasn't very high, but the tips the customers gave combined to a decent amount by the end of the day, serving me well when hanging around with my friends, so I continued my job while trying to resist a yawn.

One day, my heart started making a sound. My pulse became heavier and I felt a kind of surprise as I noticed something happening.

When I was putting the goods that had passed the register in the cart, I heard Mrs. Jones say "Please."

My heart fluttered. "Okay," was all I could say. She exited the store searching her car key in her bag without really paying attention to me. I followed behind, pushing the cart and moving my feet very slowly, contrary to the heavy throbbing of my heart. Without knowing my feelings, the cart full with canned goods and packets of vegetables, faster than me, urged me to hurry.

Examining Mrs. Jones from behind. I thought she looked more like a secretary than a housewife, with a golden chain sparkling between her stockings and clinging to her ankle. While I was wondering if she would undo the chain when taking a shower, I stored the groceries in the trunk. I faced the ground, looking at the slender heels of her shoes piercing the asphalt of the

parking lot. Although I felt compelled to stare at it forever, I couldn't do it any longer than the time needed to store the goods away.

"I finished."

When I raised my face, it was the first time I saw Mrs. Jones' face from the front. I couldn't move. The real Mrs. Jones stood there, laughing, only one foot away from me. At that very moment, I fell in love.

"My Mrs. Jones!" cried my heart out without knowing why.

Her body inside my mind had already lured me in.

She smiled and thanked me, searching for a one-dollar bill in her purse. Because there was only a one-hundred-dollar bill or some dimes, she looked troubled.

"I'm sorry, I'll go change some money," she said and went back to the store.

"It's all right!" I shouted promptly.

Mrs. Jones turned her head strangely.

"Don't bother with the tip. Leaving that aside, please treat me to some tea." The spontaneous behaviour of a man in love surprised me. I thought that this was something I couldn't be taught by anyone, but something I could only learn by doing. Of course, this was the first time I asked a woman a favour.

For a moment, Mrs. Jones was perplexed. Her expression changed from a girlish look to something cunning.

"Are you perhaps a friend of Jeff's?"

I was flustered as she hit the nail on the head. I felt uneasy by my own foolishness that had immediately unveiled my plans. As expected, it was impossible for a kid to invite a woman like a real man. Embarrassed, I looked down. I caught sight of Mrs. Jones' heels for a second time. I wondered how much pleasure it would give me to be kicked and killed by her heels. However, she lifted my chin and said with a sweet voice, "Get in. I'll pay the rest."

I panicked. I had to go to the shop manager to tell him there was some urgent matter and I had to leave earlier. Since I didn't want the shop manager to suspect that my urgent business was to sleep with a woman, I had to stretch and tighten the muscle of my jaw with my finger many times in order to mask the grin on my face.

From that day on, I had become Mrs. Jones' lover. I went to her house every day. However, I didn't think announcing my relationship would make me the hero of the group. It was too sweet a

secret to share with others, so I kept the pleasure to myself. It was not that the childish opinions of the rest of the group mattered so much to her, but as the days passed by, I understood.

She was very fond of tea and sweets. My scarce pocket money took the form of pikan pies and peach cobbles I took with me to her house. She used to open the package and bestow compliments on me for these mere two chunks of sweets.

"Oh, Willy, life is great!" she said while stuffing her cheeks as usual. I smiled faintly. To be honest, I couldn't think of pies and cakes as something that makes life great. When I got home, my mother would nag to me about doing my homework, and my sisters would make a fuss over a Puerto Rican idol group. My father would nag to me asking questions about my plans after leaving high school. More than that, I thought of Mrs. Jones as making life great for me now.

"Call me Martha," she always reprimanded me. Like this was the sign, we embraced each other's bodies.

A whiff of the pie was still left on her lips and it tasted sweet. She taught me how to kiss in a different way from the ones you give when greeting someone. Those kind of kisses were always linked to sexual desire and made me push her down onto the bed.

Her body was surely not a thin one, but when I pushed her onto the bed, it changed its form freely like the flaky feathers in a pillow. I laid her onto the bed and savoured her. Even the first time, I pulled it off like a pro. "I can't stand clumsy men, Willy. I know that you have the talent." These words made me ecstatic and I thought of them over and over again.

A while ago, I read an article in a magazine that stated women get sexually aroused by clenching their finger nails into a man's back. However, she didn't really want to hurt my back. Her beautifully trimmed nails slowly stroked across my spinal column and made me raise my voice. That moment, I was overcome with a pleasure that clogged all my pores at once.

She liked to chat in bed. When I gave her pleasure and worked on her body, she would praise me with a husky voice. When that voice gradually disappeared, her forehead would be covered in sweat. She sighed and the pauses between her sighs became my name. Her long eyelashes were down. The setting sun came in through a gap in the curtains, showing a glimpse of her wet teeth from between her half-open lips. The desire from her lips calling me. The smell of the warm teeth that came from her spontaneously kissed lips hanging in the air. It made me think of the sunny odour I smelled when I rubbed the cheeks of my younger sister together back in the day.

"Oh, Martha!" How much I loved the thickly-grown tufts of hair of her arm pits. How much I stared with a suffocating feeling at the beginning wrinkles in her neck. I felt the urge to drink up the sweat piled up between her wrinkles like water from a river.

Before I knew her, why had I thought of love and pleasure as two separate things? Both the inside and outside my body wanted her. Whenever I could do nothing but think about her, I pulled the zipper of my pants, and whenever I thought I wanted her, my heart cried out. I was convinced I loved her. That's because after making love, I desired her. Afterwards, I hated the animal inside me for losing its life. I had always been able to handle that animal freely, and it wanted to make her scream without stopping.

After our affairs in bed, she took a seat on the wisteria chair and smoked a cigarette. After having sex, I felt a little lonely (although not to the extent that one could notice), I laid my head in her lap and had to confess. "Hey, Martha, am I bad in bed?"

Without saying anything, she smiled and put my half of the pie, still on the table, in her mouth. Then her usual, easy-going look returned. My childish sperm seeped out in a single line from between her legs, hidden under her dressing gown, soaking her ankle.

Love made me a fool. My mates had always mocked my absent-mindedness. I didn't care. Such trivial things began to mould my heart like an unperturbed fossil.

At school, my body had always been a weak one. The battery of my body was always used up. Only when Martha twined her arms around me, my heart recharged.

When I was not at her side, would she also think about me and feel miserable? Would her nipples become stiff when she was thinking about me?

I got on friendly terms with the lady of the candy shop. She got curious why I bought cakes and pies on a daily basis.

"It's for your younger sister, right? Why does a boy buy so many sweets every day?"

"It's to make someone feel great."

The lady gazed dumbfounded at me when I snatched the package of sweets from her hands and ran off, carrying it under my arm.

That day there was no response when I knocked on Martha's door. The door wasn't locked. I pushed it slightly and let myself in. Martha was lying on the bed, her face upside-down, crying. The telephone was pushed under the bed. It was obvious someone had called her and made her cry.

"Martha."

She lifted her face hearing my voice. I stroke her cheeks wet from tears. It was a non-dense, beautiful liquid. My dry nails softly turned moist, but it didn't penetrate my nails themselves in any way.

"Martha," I called her name once more.

She answered me with a tearful voice. I felt she wanted to cry. I didn't know what to do when a woman was crying in front of me. Helplessly I stroked her legs. Maybe I should have stroked her back. However, her shivering back was too painful for me to look at. What if her shivering would be transmitted to my hands? Maybe I would end up crying too. I mean, I wouldn't be able to produce such a tremor.

I noticed her legs were far more slender than mine. Even now, the passion with which I pushed her down onto the bed and the details of her body can't be described. For the first time, she reflected as a frail women in my eyes. She was not that natural-talented, frivolous, irresistibly attractive Mrs. Jones.

When a woman cried before his eyes, what could a man do? I wanted to do something for her. She was like a little girl seeking my protection. I lied on the bed and turned Martha's face towards mine. Her tears changed direction. She looked at me without blinking her eyes. Those were by no means sad eyes. I thought her face was a little bit funny if it weren't for the streams of tears.

"Why are you crying? I have something you'll like."

She began crying once again. I started sucking up her tears and ended up tasting her cheeks. At the same time the salty taste slowly invaded my throat, I felt a raging desire towards her. Cute Martha. Martha who started crying when I said I had something for her. Is this what you want?

Her voice started to rise because of pleasure. I gently made love to her to comfort her heart. Her body seemed to me like an entirely naked and hurt heart. I began to understand the ways of effective love-making. In order to make a crying woman relax, I made my body useful. For the first time, I didn't sleep together for myself but for her sake. I didn't know if this was a success. After all, her body started crying more than her spirit. At that time, I finally touched her spine and I was able to stroke it. That was because I was confident her shivering now was my doing. Controlling my pleasure, I watched how her body reacted to my tongue or fingers. I was able to handle her body freely. When I at last remembered my own pleasure, I screamed at her face, no longer being able to restrain my joy, "My girl!"

The window was open. The May wind swept away our collected sweat. She wasn't crying any longer.

"Baby," I said while I untangled Martha's hair. I wasn't her baby any longer. She had become my baby.

"I love you, Willy."

I was moved to tears by happiness. I didn't know it yet, though. The good feeling of those words, and how convenient they were when betraying a person.

I spent much of the hot season on love. I was still working in the store, because I needed the money for the shoes and socks I wore when going to Martha's house, the tie and the handkerchief to surprise her, and then of course the presents I got her (mostly sweets). My mother was shocked by my sudden rough and spending behaviour. Although Martha could have bought all those things for herself without even working, I hated her having to spend money. I was convinced a grown-up man should use his own money for the woman he loves. So I planned on growing up very fast for her.

She didn't talk about her husband in the army. Unless she would have said something, I couldn't ask her about it. He was laughing in a picture frame on the table, but I didn't care that much. I didn't even feel a vague hint of compassion. At that time, I felt like I had become the winner of love. He could smile all he wanted, but I was the one by Martha's side who could love her mind and body. I didn't know what kind of place the army was, but I surely didn't want to enter a place where one could see his wife only once a year. Only the one who stayed beside his beloved girl could become the winner. Surely, he was getting drunk on his own victory with some port city bitches by his side who were holding his arms.

She didn't seem to worry too much about her husband, and she put the sweets I brought in her mouth every time, thinking only about those. She didn't get fat, though. She always coiled her elastic body around mine. Because we worried about the rumours from people of ill will, we always spend our time in the room.

She came to the store to buy fresh cream put in a pot like insecticide. It was a product which one had to shake, press it and then whipped cream came squeezing out. It was the first time she came to buy something to decorate her self-made cake. It had come to her as a pleasant, impulsive idea.

She called me while I was wandering aimlessly in the room, a towel around my back after showering. When I arrived, thinking she had already finished the cake decorations, she suddenly snatched off my towel and pressed the nozzle of the can. I was surprised when I felt the cold, sticky substance. While she couldn't stop laughing, she sprayed my whole body with the fresh cream. A few minutes later, my body had been decorated magnificently.

"You're all white!" While Martha crouched on the floor, laughing, I hastened to the bathroom to look into the mirror. My whole body was covered in cream. I was like Marshmallow Man from the movie. I was startled by my own figure, but what surprised me even more, was Martha subsequently entering the bathroom. She chuckled, watching my figure in the mirror, and eventually stuck out her tongue and began licking the cream from my body. First, I twisted my body around because of the tickling, but then, I proactively offered the parts I wanted her to lick with her tongue.

There hung a sweet smell in the bathroom. Innocently, she just continued to lick the cream. It looked like she was carelessly bringing sweets to her mouth. I was covered in a pungent vanilla scent, and I vaguely felt like I had turned into her sweets. I thought it would be all right if she started eating me after she finished licking. School, my parents, my friends, everything except her seemed to be bothersome. Was there anything in this world more important than loving her? Would there exist anything sweeter in this world than the feeling of being warmed up to the very core of your body? And how would you explain it? For me, that equalled loving her body.

I thought that loving her was the most important thing to me. However, I began to understand I couldn't just throw away everything else. I was a bit negligent. I could love her body, but I couldn't keep up with the way I proved my feelings. I couldn't wait until I grew older. I wanted to make her gulp down every part of me. I thought if she felt the same about me, she would now want to eat my whole body.

I was impatient. I thought her tongue didn't move over my body quick enough. If she only dug her teeth in! Then I'd know that her wide-spread sweet thoughts, which she was anxious to let escape, were perfectly the same as mine.

However, she was pursuing her pleasure at a slow pace, only licking me like candy.

I always had that feeling it was too slow-going. In order to shake off that feeling, I increased my pace when walking to Martha's house. That day too, although I had run to her house, the pies in the box, making sounds, protested to me.

Martha was sprawled out on the bed as always, and when I came in, she stood up and began to make tea. Although everything was repeated as usual, I had the feeling something was off in the atmosphere of the room. The sweet smell that always drifted in the air when I opened the door wasn't there today.

The telephone was placed under the bed. I looked at her face to see if she'd been crying again. There was no trace of tears.

We sat on a chair, drinking tea. I noticed the hot tea was more delicious than ever and I knew it was the end of summer. Martha sipped her tea in silence. She didn't eat my pie. There was something wrong! I got anxious and broke out in cold sweat.

The first thing she said confirmed my premonition.

"Willy, I don't want you to come anymore."

Blood rose to my head, and I pressed her for an explanation. She said ordinary things as if she had learned them by heart like: "You have classes, your parents are worried because you love a married woman, and the neighbourhood is watching you."

I was completely shocked. While I had understood those ordinary reasons from the very beginning, couldn't we just continue our relationship? I asked her promptly if her husband was coming home. She said that wasn't the case. Why then!?

"Because I think you shouldn't come anymore," she said exasperated. I threw the pies I had brought with me against the door. To my surprise, they scattered to pieces.

Martha didn't change her expression. "What a waste!" she said while she started to pick up the scattered pieces from the ground. When I saw her bottom sticking out, my rage surpassed its limits and I dragged her along to the bed.

She didn't resist. I stripped off her clothes, and I began making love to her the way we always did. Did she get fed up with this?! Didn't I love her so much before? While I was crying, I made her remember that. My flavour I had made her appreciate so far.

Like before, she cried out in a sweet way. Liar! She was only making me feel more messed up. I thought she was tricking me like a little girl.

The telephone rang. I thought she didn't hear the bell ringing. Whenever she was in ecstasy because of the pleasure, she always forgot everything. Like a boiling kettle, a filling bathtub or the oil in the sauce pan.

However, she slowly reached out her arm and picked up the receiver. Surprisingly, she began speaking with her usual voice, even though I hung over her.

I began raping her violently. That was no longer love. I moved my body so that she would run out of breath. However, like she had forgotten even those nostalgic long sighs, she continued speaking with a calm voice. Like her lips were a completely different creature.

Only my body was sweating. I wanted to let the human being on the other side of the telephone know of my existence. If her voice would only tremble a little bit, he would realize she was in the middle of pleasure. However, it was only me who was in the middle of pleasure. Whenever she

didn't hold the receiver with her hand and attached it to her mouth, just like the time when she was picking up the pie, a sweetness spread out like the sticky sugar.

I wanted to make her remember my flavour, but after all, it was only me who had been made to remember her flavour. I remembered it. The way she absent-mindedly put sweets in her mouth and her behaviour of crying like a child after the phone call. Strangely, it wasn't the soft flesh of her legs or the sexy girl with the hot tongue I remembered. Although the way I made love to her had always been with sexual feelings. The memories welled up one after another. As if I helplessly wanted to discard them, I ejaculated into her.

At the same time, she put down the receiver. "I love you, my dear," her voice lingered. Poor husband. Poor me. I was lying on the bed without even wiping my wet body dry.

"Get up, Willy." Martha's voice was entirely calm, as if to console me. She gently stroke my back. That was something I used to do to her before.

"It was sufficient to request a man's body for the first half of the year. Now I want a heart."

Why was I no good? In my heart I refuted Martha's words. Why couldn't she request my heart? I wanted her body as well as her heart.

"Do you think I only wanted your body? Are you really fed up with my love-making?"

She shook her head. "I loved it," she whispered. While she was stroking my back, she was thinking what she could say to me.

"The body, you know, is like candy. The heart is like bread, you know. Baby!"

As soon as I heard these words, I raised my voice and began to cry. How could I understand those things from the first woman I loved? I was a boy who had just turned seventeen. However, she was a grown-up who continued eating sweets.

I wasn't angry with Martha. However, I couldn't forgive her, and cried. For the first time since I was with Martha, I felt like a child. I was surely a child from which his sweets were taken away.

After crying for a while, Martha helped me putting on my clothes. If she would only wipe away my tears. The kiss I got at last left a sweet flavour like it did before, tormenting me as I searched frantically for parting words. Goodbye, Mrs. Jones.

The moment I opened the door, I stepped on a lingering lump of pie. Together with the good feeling of the sound, my 'great life' was smashed to pieces.