PHALLIC POWER OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN:
A STUDY IN JAPANESE LITERATURE
(1930-PRESENT)

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Master of Arts in the
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By

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* * * * *

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The aim of this study is to explore the representations of African Americans in modern Japanese literature. By investigating prewar and contemporary Japanese texts, one can paint a picture of the language, images, and symbols used to introduce and illustrate African Americans to Japanese society. In this respect, this thesis examines the works of three authors, namely, Abe Tomoji (1903-1973), Yamada Eimi (b. 1959) and Murakami Ryū (b. 1952). Specifically, Abe's "Shinema no kokujin" ("A Negro in Cinema," 1930), Yamada's Beddotaimu aizu (Bedtime Eyes, 1985), Hizamazuite ashi o oname (Kneel Down and Lick my Feet, 1988), "Otoko ga onna o aisuru toki" ("When a Man Loves a Woman," 1987), "Seijin muki mōfu" ("X-Rated Blanket," 1988), Torashu (Trash, 1996), and Murakami's Kagiri naku tōmei ni chikai burū (Almost Transparent Blue, 1976).

Each of these authors have similarities in the fact that they were inspired to write about African Americans due to their specific experience(s) with them. Abe's infatuation with American cinema inspired him to construct a portrait of an African American
filmstar, Stepin Fetchit (1892-1985). Yamada's principal involvement with African American servicemen stationed in Japan motivated her to write a collection of works illuminating certain aspects of African American men. Murakami's living arrangements with African American GIs was influential in his writing a novel about that period in his life.

A common thread mirrored in these authors' works is the sexuality of African American men. This research is organized in a manner to demonstrate the various levels in which sexuality is presented in modern Japanese literature. Chapter two depicts the more subtle ways in which the sexual attraction of African American men was suggested in the 1930s. Chapter three portrays explicit love obtained with African American men in the 1980s. Chapter four illustrates the extreme perverse sexuality of African American men in the mid-1970s.

Finally, the appendix of this thesis presents three translations, namely, Abe's "Shinema no kokujin," and Yamada's Hizamazuite ashi o oname [excerpt] and "Koi no daichōsasen" ("The Biggest Search Party for Love," 1988). The last translation is a comic strip and it will not be discussed in the body of the text, however, it provides a provocative insight into the way in which Yamada has been perceived by the public due to her intimate relations with African American men.
Dedicated to my “heroic” mother

and

In loving memory of
Onoe Atsushi
(1972-1999)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to give an honor to God for being my ultimate shepherd and source of inspiration.

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Lastly, I owe my deepest gratitude to my caring mother, Eunice Taylor Hobbs, whose love and tremendous emotional support over the years offered me the most precious of all resources. Therefore, it is her, the greatest person in the world, who I dedicate this thesis.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The representation of foreigners as Other in modern Japanese literature almost always has little to do with an intention to realistically depict the internal life of a foreign character or to provide a “living portrait” of an individual; rather foreigners are deployed in modern Japanese literature in order to speak to or highlight characteristics of Japanese society and individuals. It is thus unavoidable that foreigners are almost without exception dealt with in stereotypical terms. If the literary and popular representations of Asians in the United States tell us a great deal about the United States and little or nothing about Asians, so too do the representations of foreigners living in Japan tell us little or nothing about foreigners but a great deal about Japan. This study examines literary and popular representations of a particular group of foreigners, African Americans, to glean what these have to teach about modern Japan.

The first images of African Americans to reach Japan were obtained through Caucasian males’ projections of “black” Americans. These images were interpreted as embodying the quintessential characteristics of the threatening American male, but more so. For example, in Nosaka Akiyuki’s 1967 “Amerika hikiji,” Mr. Higgins, an elderly Caucasian man, and American males in general are portrayed as hairy and beast-like, physically very strong, smelly, inordinately interested in sex, uncultivated, inarticulate, and insensitive. It will be shown that the anthropologist John Russell’s eight stereotypes typically used to describe “black” characters: 1) infantilism, 2) primitivism,
3) hypersexuality, 4) mental inferiority, 5) natural athletic prowess, 6) mental inferiority, 
7) psychological weakness, and 8) emotional volatility are themselves derived from 
Japanese stereotypes of foreign males in general and from the racially loaded images of 
African Americans that Japanese writers and intellectuals took over from the dominant 
Caucasian culture in the United States.¹

Historical and political factors in the postwar period worked to provide the portrayal 
of African Americans in Japanese literature with more complex dimensions. Since the end 
of World War II, but particularly during the international protests against America’s war in 
Vietnam, the Japanese have posited either political identification with the third world and 
people of color, or have regarded themselves, as part of the first world, as Caucasians. 
Clearly among the countercultural and protest movements in Japan against the sterility, 
homogeneity, and alienation that are seen as the products of advanced capitalism, African 
Americans and African American culture have been received with great admiration by 
some. This perspective is revealed in Ariyoshi Sawako’s *Hisoku (Not Because of Color*, 
1963) and Ishikawa Jun’s *Ōgon densetsu (Legends of Gold, 1946).*²

In what might be termed the postmodern period, admiration for African American 
culture has remained but has been stripped of its political significance in terms of the prior 
debate between the desirability of third world or first world affiliation. As Russell has 
written, “recent trends in Japanese literary representations of the black Other tend to portray 
blacks as sexual objects, studs, fashion accessories and quintessential performers, images

that imported American media reinforce daily." I will attempt to show that in contemporary Japanese culture, the meaning of African American characters in works by contemporary authors have been far more diverse. On the one hand, as Nina Cornyetz has written, Yamada Eimi uses African Americans to help her tame her Japanese male counterparts: Her “toppling of Japanese (and white) men from any position as bearers of phallic power...depends upon the incorporation of existing, stereotypical images of black men...” On the other hand, Yamada portrays African Americans as an oppressed minority, especially in the U.S. military, a minority inherently more sensitive and receptive than the white ruling class that oppresses.

In chapter two, I will discuss the short story written by Abe Tomoji, “Shinema no kokujin” (1930). In particular, Abe’s treatment of one of the most famous African American entertainers in the 1930s, Stepin Fetchit, demonstrates the type of attractions that motivate Japanese authors to write about African Americans. Chapter three will focus on Yamada Eimi and her works. She has been criticized for sensationalizing her involvement with African American men. I will argue that Yamada shows a true sensitivity to the African American male as a whole human being. Chapter four will introduce Murakami Ryū and his work concerning African Americans, Kagiri naku tömei ni chikai burū (1976). From our personal interview and analysis of his book, I hope to show that his representations of African American men are no more extreme than his representations of Japanese men in his later works.

In essence, the treatment of African Americans in modern Japanese literature is still quite limited. For instance, there is the obvious lack of professionals, such as teachers, doctors and lawyers. However, a 1991 survey conducted by the Joint Center for Political

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3 Russell, p. 19.
and Economic Studies for the Advancement of the Colored Race concluded that African Americans are “relatively optimistic about the prospects of improved Japanese racial attitudes with increased education and contact and are eager to learn more about the Japanese.” Indeed there appears to be every reason to think that the Japanese will continue to attempt to understand and sympathize with African Americans and their culture.

CHAPTER 2
BLACK ENTERTAINERS AND PREWAR MODERNISM

During the prewar era, the Japanese were able to capture a glimpse—although often a distorted image—of “black” culture, particularly African culture, through a number of mediums: a) in advertisements; b) in popular songs; c) comic strips; d) in a few works of literature; and e) in motion pictures.

First, the can of the Calpsis soft drink was adorned with the controversial trademark commonly referred to as “Calpsis kuronbō” which was designed by a German artist named Otto Dünkelsbühler in 1923. This logo had similar features to that of a “minstrel-looking darkie;” but due to strong protest from Americans and the Japanese, the beverage company acquiesced to the protesters’ wishes and in 1989 discontinued their popular trademark of over seventy years.\(^5\) When compared to kokujin (black person), kuronbō is a more derogatory term for African Americans. However, the translation of the term kuronbō into English has to depend on context. In Abe Tomoji’s work, in which

\(^5\) John Russell, “Race and Reflexivity: The Black Other in Contemporary Japanese Mass Culture,” in Cultural Anthropology, v. 6 (1991), no. 2 (Feb.), p. 10. Picture available. It is interesting to note that the Calpsis trademark has undergone many transformations. For example, in 1924, a kuronbō trademark
the relatively respectful term for African American is *Niguro* (Negro), *kuronbō* might be said to correspond to “darkie” or “nigger,” whereas in present contexts it reveals a more conspicuous insensitivity. In the case of Japanese children’s literature prior to the 1980s, the use of *kuronbō* might be seen as emphasizing the “difference” and “exoticism” of African and African American characters. More recently, in the case of Yamada Eimi, *kuronbō* seems to represent an African American male in a “lovable” aspect. From henceforth, the most applicable translation, depending on context will be provided here with the original Japanese term in parenthesis.

Second, one popular song that most Japanese of a generation ago sang in school was “The Chief’s Daughter,” from the 1920s:

My lover is the Chief’s Daughter  
Though her color is black  
She is a beauty in the South Seas...  
Let us dance, dance under the palm trees  
Those who don’t dance, no girl will care to marry...⁶

Third, the immensely popular comic strip, *Bōken Dankichi* (The Adventures of Dankichi) written by Shimada Keizō which was serialized from July 1933 to February 1939 in *Shônen Kurabu*, went about falsely identifying skin color with Africanness. In this cartoon story, a Japanese boy named Dankichi drifted off to sleep while fishing. He later ended up on an island in the South Pacific where he outwits the black natives and becomes their king. The perceptions projected in popular songs and cartoons are good examples of was advertised on a billboard poster, and in 1919, a Grecian Venus was illustrated on a Calpiss bottle, see: 20 Seiki zenkiroku: chronik 1900-1986, Tokyo: Kodasha, 1987. Picture available.
how the Japanese were socialized about the identity of “black people,” as pointed out by Wagatsuma and Yoneyama:

This fantasy cartoon blended ideas about South Pacific islanders and primitive tribes in Africa. Originally cannibalistic and warlike, these people could become loyal though somewhat simple-minded subjects when tamed and educated. It is worth noting that this was the kind of image of “black people” to which most Japanese children of the prewar period were exposed. “The Chief’s Daughter” created an image of carefree South Sea islanders with black skin who danced away their lives under the swaying palm trees.7

Fourth, the citations from literature of the period do not do much to clear up stereotypes and misconceptions. A 1930 short story written by Dazai Osamu (1909-1948) entitled, Kuronbō (Nigger), depicts a nameless “black” woman as part of a circus act who performs tricks when released from her cage. The story is filtered through the eyes of a young Japanese boy, who attempts to befriend her and is not afraid of her like the other villagers. His attitude towards her also differs from that of the “black” woman’s trainer who carries a gun for his protection against the woman. The fact that Dazai locks the black woman in a cage and makes her dangerous suggests the animalistic qualities and tendencies that Russell outlines as familiar stereotypes representing the “black” Other in Japanese literature.8 Another example is from the poem “Angels,” written in 1928 by Hori Tatsuo (1904-1953).9 It also includes the derogatory term, kuronbō:

The angels
come on their bicycles
to bring me for breakfast
a baguette, pottage, and
flowers

I then pluck
the petals
sprinkle them on the soup

7 Ibid.
8 Russell, p. 6.
9 This poem, “Angels” was first published in the ninth edition of Roba on Mar. 10, 1928. It can be found in “Shi,” Hori Tatsuo senshū, Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, pp. 322-326. Translated by Jeffery Angles, Ph.D. candidate at The Ohio State University.
dip the bread
and eat a modest meal

* * *

Wherever I go in this town
a wonderful smell is in the air
as if I wore a fresh rose
in my lapel --
Is this the reason that wherever I go in this town
a dog is waiting there?

* * *

The Westerner stands even taller than the sunflowers.

* * *

The hotel is a cockatoo --
From the cockatoo’s ear, Juliet sticks out her head
but Romeo is not there
He is probably playing tennis --
When the cockatoo opens its mouth
a naked nigger
comes into view.

In Donald Keene’s explication of “Angels,” he commented that “it is amusing, but is less
for its intrinsic merits than for what it tells us about Hori in Karuizawa that summer
of [1923...]. The poem is dotted with the names of foreign things (bread, soup, roses,
parrots, tennis, etc.), lending a piquant dash of exoticism to this evocation of the
atmosphere in Karuizawa.”¹⁰ Hori is concerned with the exotic above all else, and the
word “nigger,” is contributing to that exotic pleasure. Furthermore, the nakedness of the
term “nigger,” may reflect the kind of primitivism or uncivilized characteristics referred to
by Russell.

In any case, in Japanese literature, representations of African Americans were not
common. In fact, it is difficult, almost impossible, to find literary novels from Japan
concerning this subject matter. The reason may be that Japanese authors had few occasions
to learn about the culture and traditions experienced by African Americans in the United States. So the image of African Americans in the Japanese eyes during prewar Japan was primarily shaped by the importation of American fables and games, such as reading in translation the all-time classic, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) by Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896), and singing the popular American tune, “Old Black Joe” (1860) by Stephen Foster (1826-1864).

Starting in the 1920s, the opportunity for Japanese people to hear and see African Americans in talking pictures, or what was known then as the “talkies,” broadened their perceptions of African Americans. More and more African Americans were able to find work in the film industry because the talkies emphasized their distinct voices. Talkies were a way to create a multi-dimensional voice for African Americans; and Hollywood was able to capitalize and popularize their unique way of singing and talking in a dialect which was distinguishable from Caucasians. Early on in the film industry, African Americans’ images were not a reflection of cultural contexts, but rather a frequent reflection and illumination of cultural myths and fantasies.\(^\text{11}\) For instance, racial stereotyping is reflected in images known to Americans as “Mammy,” “Sambo,” “Uncle Tom” and so forth.\(^\text{12}\) Such “derogatory” images are crystallized in the most popular prewar movies: D.W. Griffith’s classic, *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939). It is evident that the images of African Americans presented in America and Japan during the prewar era were unbalanced because the complexity of African American history and community life was neglected.

At the movies is where at least one Japanese author, Abe Tomoji, was introduced to a popular African American filmstar in the late 1920s and early 1930s named Stepin Fetchit


In fact, Abe Tomoji was so fascinated with Stepin Fetchit, that he wrote a short story centered around his life as a Hollywood actor entitled, “Shinema no kokujin” ("A Negro in Cinema," 1930). Perhaps Abe Tomoji was struck by his portrayal of “Gummy” in *Hearts in Dixie* (1929) and/or “Christopher Lee” in *The Ghost Talks* (1929) since both of these films are mentioned in “Shinema no kokujin.” Although our concern here is to understand the meaning behind the storyline, it is a difficult one to unravel. On first reading, the story seems to reinforce and perpetuate the stereotypical “arch coon”

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13 Abe Yoshio’s personal interview with Ayanna Hobbs on May 20, 1998. Abe Yoshio (b. 1932), the eldest son of Abe Tomoji, suggested that his father was impressed with the dress and style of Stepin Fetchit in the movies, and that perhaps led him to write a short story later.
14 For translation, see Appendix A.
Figure 2. Stepin Fetchit as "Gunny" in *Hearts in Dixie* (1929)
(Top) Fetchit with Clarence Muse
(Bottom) Fetchit with Bernice Pilot
*Source: Black Hollywood*
images that Stepin Fetchit is known for delivering on screen; however, after a closer examination of the literary techniques used by Abe, it can be argued that as a social critic, he is attempting to objectively illustrate the attitudinal race relations prevalent between African Americans and Caucasians in the United States. After all, “the problem of the Twentieth Century” was as once proclaimed by W.E.B. DuBois, “the problem of the colorline.” According to Abe Yoshio, Abe Tomoji’s son, his father was “conscious of racism” in America.\textsuperscript{15}

Abe Tomoji, the critic, scholar, and translator was born June 26, 1903 in Okayama Prefecture and passed away on April 23, 1973. From 1928-1968, Abe was a scholar of English literature and taught at a number of institutions, the most prestigious being Meiji University and Waseda University; as well as receiving an invitation to teach at St. John’s College in Shanghai. Abe was intellectually curious about the world, as is reflected in his life history. He was able to introduce famous American and English writers to the Japanese public by translating works by Byron, Shakespeare, Melville, Brontës, Austen, Shelley, and Stevenson. Furthermore, Abe was able to experience other cultures as he visited places such as Java in 1941, Europe during wartime, and mainland China in 1954 as part of a cultural delegation.\textsuperscript{16} However, according to my personal interview with Abe Yoshio, Abe Tomoji never had the opportunity to visit America or Africa and Abe Tomoji did not have any American friends before 1945.

Abe was ideologically opposed to the dominant writings of his day. Instead, Abe aspired for the Japanese novel to go further than what proletarian and naturalist literature could offer at the time, so he went in search of new methods involving literary expression. He settled for active experimentation to add another dimension to his works, that new dimension being “international;” in other words, the inclusion of foreign characters and countries in his works became crucial. In addition, Abe was interested in telling stories

\textsuperscript{15} Abe Yoshio’s telephone interview with Ayanna Hobbs on February 20, 1999.
with a narrative flair, but not like the so-called “I-novels” which dominated the 1930s. Instead, he wanted to create stories with more analysis, exploration and objectivity that actually probed social realities, so he thought it best for authors to distance narration—or detach—theirselfs from their literary works in order to avoid having the work become a concentrated expression of self.\footnote{Jay Gluck, ed., \textit{Ukiyo: Stories of “The Floating World” of Postwar Japan}, New York: Universal Library, 1964, p. 246.}

Abe, like other Japanese authors, had his philosophical understanding of literature shaped by European writers. For Abe, it was the English poet Edmund Blunden (1876-1974), who taught him at Tokyo University the basic doctrine of literature, “imaginative sympathy.” Abe explains the doctrine as a “humanistic noble mind, the willingness to understand others with the compassion by which one can share others’ suffering and joy.”\footnote{Abe Tomoji, “Sakka to sakuhin no kyōri,” \textit{Shinbunshakaku kenkyū}, no. 3 (1931) pp. 9-12. See this article for an in-depth description on the mechanics of narration. Matsumura Misako has also stated that Abe’s understanding of narration is in some ways influenced by his reading of \textit{A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man} (1916) by James Joyce since Abe did assist with the Japanese annotated translation that appeared in 1935, four years after his article on this subject was published.} With the idea of “imaginative sympathy” in mind at the time of writing, it is then possible to tell the story of different traditions and social institutions far removed from one’s own environment. Abe was strongly convinced of this philosophy of writing, and it is reflected in works early on in his career such as, “Nichi-Doku taikō kyōgi” (“The Japan-Germany Athletic Games,” 1930) in which he describes German athletes, and the previously mentioned short story, “Shinemina no kokujin.”

The idea of a Japanese author having the ability to probe and penetrate into the depths of racial problems in America may appear too difficult to believe. Abe adopts a partially successful strategy by displaying characteristics of a modern novel in the narrative technique he uses to depict a contemporary figure of the day. Because of the story’s

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have translated it in an appendix to this study. This story takes place in California when America was in the process of advancing the film industry with talking motion pictures. The character Henry Brooks, a poet, is originally from St. Louis, but goes to California to get relief from his bronchitis. During his visit, he fraternizes with his alumni chum, a Los Angeles newspaper reporter named John Burlington. These two characters analyze, describe, and tell stories centered on the lifestyle of Fetchit. Abe’s highlighting the conflict and confrontation between the two races brought the reality of the intense relations between African Americans and Caucasians forth. These antagonistic forces are the elements, which Matsumura points out as the formation of the “dualistic structure” that is the “notion of simultaneous affirmation and negation of two like or unlike elements,” characteristic of Abe’s other works as well.\(^{19}\) Indeed, if the aforementioned representations of distant lands and people are an indication of Abe’s works, then “Shinema no kokujin” follows this pattern as well.

The story seems to illustrate stereotypes of African American men since it presents a picture of Fetchit as irresponsible, a criminal, and sexually alluring. Fetchit is depicted as irresponsible because in his early days, he was consistently late for rehearsal at Fox Studios, and he is described as a spendthrift. This story also highlights the lawlessness of Fetchit, relating that his thievery caused him on one occasion to be beaten by a police officer, which resulted in Fetchit losing a tooth. Finally, the work touched upon what might be considered “taboo,” that is, the relationship between an African American man and a Caucasian woman. However, there seems to be a conflict between the Caucasian poet Brooks and the African American filmstar Fetchit: both seem to be attracted to the same person. In the end, Fetchit becomes the romantic hero and receives the prize: Mizz Crawford. Abe writes, “William Fox’s Negro filmstar, Stepin Fetchit is engaged to be married to Mizz Ann Crawford of L.A....The couple have announced plans to have a high Catholic wedding” (Abe, “Shinema no kokujin,” p. 108). The documentary material Abe

\(^{19}\) Matsumura, pp. 6-7.
presents seems to be somewhat accurate since Fetchit did attend a Catholic college in the South. Thus, the author makes a reasonable assumption about the kind of wedding, which could have taken place. Nevertheless, Fetchit’s first wife, whom he married in 1929, was a seventeen year old young woman named Dorothy Stevenson, and they had one son (some reports say the child was named Jemajo). However, sources claimed that a few years later Stevenson died, and there are other reports that said the two divorced. In any case, in 1935, Fetchit married the singer, Winifred Jackson. Once again, a son was born to him, and his marriage dissolved. Still another report claimed he was married a third time, and it too was unsuccessful. These contradictory reports add to the complexity of understanding Fetchit’s life. Nevertheless, Abe appears to use informed sources as well as guess work to surmise that an affair between an interracial couple would bring particular consequences. His assumption seems to be based on his understanding of the tension between the two races.

The aforementioned characterizations depict Fetchit as brash and temperamental. However, it does not seem to be the intention of the author himself to treat Fetchit in an unflattering light or use him as a prototype to represent all African American men, but as the epilogue to the story suggests:

This is a fictionalized story centered around the filmstar of Fox Studios, Stepin Fetchit. Information about Stepin, himself, was obtained with the assistance of Kitagawa Fuyuhiko of Eiga-Ohraisha, and is based on two or three magazine articles. My intention here has been to do nothing that will bring discredit to Stepin Fetchit. As for the news about his wedding, it is information that I received word about from a Fox Studios branch office. (Abe, “Shinema no kokujin,” p. 109)

What was his real intention in having included this epilogue? Abe seems to have been introducing to the Japanese public, as in his other works, an international figure. Therefore, he was emphasizing that Stepin Fetchit was a real Hollywood movie star. He

proved his point by revealing how he researched the history behind Fetchit, and at the same time, expressed gratitude to his friend Kitagawa Fuyuhiko, a poet and film critic. It is ironic, however, that Abe’s leading biographer, Takematsu Yoshiaki, believed Stepin Fetchit to be a fictitious character, invented by Abe. In any case, let us look at how realistic the portrayal by Abe is about the lifestyle of Fetchit.

Fetchit, the son of a Jamaican cigar-maker, was born Lincoln Theodore Monroe Andrew Skeeter Perry (named after four American Presidents) in Key West, Florida on May 30, 1892. As a small boy, he moved to Alabama with his family. He attended a Catholic college in Montgomery, Alabama. In 1914, Fetchit left home and pursued a life in show business. Before making a name for himself in Hollywood, Fetchit joined the Royal American Shows Plantation Revues, worked in medicine shows, minstrel shows, and vaudeville. Fetchit performed in vaudeville circuits with his partner, Ed Lee, under the stage name “Step’n Fetchit: Two Dancing Fools from Dixie.” Fetchit said that the name came from a Baltimore racehorse who inspired him to write a song for his comedy routine with his partner: “The Stepin Fetchit, Stepin Fetchit Turn Around, Stop and Catch It, Chicken Scratch It to the Ground Rag.” But after the duo went their separate ways,

22 Abe Yoshio’s telephone interview with Ayanna Hobbs on February 20, 1999. He stated that the company, Eiga-Ohraisha, is no longer in business.
23 Takematsu Yoshiaki, “Abe Tomoji ron,” Aoyama gobun, v. 15 (1985), p. 84. Also, Abe Yoshio suggested that no one would be aware of this fact unless they were American cinema fans, like Abe Tomoji and Kitagawa Fuyuhiko (telephone interview).
24 James Vinson, ed., International Dictionary of Films and Filmmakers, Chicago: St. James Press, p. 227. This is a comprehensive resource on African Americans in film, so the date cited probably is the most accurate, although some historians date his birth in 1889 and 1902. Vinson also reported that Fetchit worked in vaudeville under names such as “Rastus the Buck dancer,” “Jolly Pards,” “Skeeter Perry,” and “The World’s Greatest Colored Star.”
25 Bogle, p. 388. Also see: Daniel J. Leab, From Sambo to Superspade: The Black Experience in Motion Pictures, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975, p. 89, reported that the name of the group was “Step and Fetch It.”
26 Eileen Landay, Black Film Stars, New York: Drake Publishers, Inc., 1973, p. 42. Also, Annual Obituary, p. 574, described an interesting account on how Lincoln Perry acquired his showbusiness name: “on one fateful visit to an Oklahoma race-track, in a state of accustomed destitution, Perry wagered his clothes against $30 on a horse called...Stepin Fetchit. The beast obliged him with a victory, thus lining his pocket and preventing his exposure. In gratitude, he changed his name to that of the horse and wrote a song of thanksgiving describing the affair.” In another article by Barbara Thomas, “Moms Mabley, Stepin Fetchit Kid Around in Atlanta,” Atlanta Journal, July 31, 1974, (reprinted in Biography News, Sept. 16
Fetchit kept the name for himself. Abe mentions the origin of the name in his story about Fetchit (Abe, “Shinema no kokujin,” p. 106).

Fetchit became so popular on the Southern vaudeville circuit that he was encouraged to go to Hollywood. When he arrived in Hollywood in 1927, Fetchit was first employed as a “porter on a movie lot [and this is] when he was discovered.”

Fetchit, later became an almost immediate sensation on the silver screen, beginning with a silent movie entitled, *In Old Kentucky* (1927) for his role as a stable boy named Highpockets. *Variety* praised Fetchit in its film review:

> Much stuff, but the MGM finish, and a colored comedian hold picture. He’s just a lazy, no good roustabout, wheedling money out of colored help but he’s no mean pantomimist. Later, *Variety* singled him out again for his work in the 1929 *Salute*: Picture has good comic values, through the presence of the priceless Stepin Fetchit, most amusing of Negro character clowns.

Yet, his most dramatic breakthrough in the movie industry came when he performed in his first feature role, *Hearts in Dixie* (1929). He was hailed by movie critic, Robert Benchley as the most intriguing:

> Of course, entirely outside the main story (what there is of it) is the amazing personality of Stepin Fetchit. I see no reason for even hesitating in saying that he is the best actor that the talking movies produced. His voice, his manner, his timing, everything that he does, is as near to perfection as one could hope to get in an essentially phoney medium such as this...When Stepin Fetchit speaks, you are there beside him, one of the great comedians of the screen.

This kind of unprecedented media attention for an African American supporting actor made Fetchit famous. The mass media kept a close eye on Fetchit and their almost daily reports of him assisted in making him into a Hollywood legend. Newspaper headlines of the

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1974, p. 1048), there is another account: “It was while he was on the show circuit, then called the Death Trail, that Lincoln Perry got the name Stepin Fetchit. He had a partner, Step, who was prone to not showing up for performances. One day Lincoln pulled into town and saw their names on a marquee ‘Step and Fetchit, Two Dancing Fools from Dixie.’ His partner was nowhere to be found so he got the theater operator to make one name of Stepin Fetchit.”


28 Bogle, p. 388.
1930s publicized his car accidents, his alleged brawls, his brushes with the law, and his elaborate spending sprees. In this respect, Fetchit, broke new ground, turning himself into a living legend in his day. Abe’s story is an attempt to get beyond the stereotypes of African Americans by examining the “truth” of Fetchit behind the image presented on screen. Abe was able to obtain information regarding Fetchit due to the availability of news and magazine articles depicting his off-screen high life. The following contrasts passages from the story that portray the lifestyle of Fetchit with documentary records Abe may have had occasion to consult. It appears that Abe is creating a sympathetic portrait of Fetchit by presenting the information about him through the narration of an unsympathetic character, Burlington, who delivers this speech:

Ah, yes. Our Stepin Fetchit. The luckiest of the very lucky few who managed to ride out the wave of unemployment that ended careers of tens of thousands of musicians and actors when the talkies swept Hollywood! You mean to tell me, my friend, that you don’t know who he is?!? He probably pulls in five hundred bucks a week. Who knows how many Cadillacs he owns? He lives in grand style at a hotel on Hollywood’s Central Avenue. Originally he was on payroll with Metro Goldwyn Mayer and not Fox, and he had been working as a vaudeville actor. Or I should say, half-actor and half-cook. Who knows how many times he was in and out of jail. Did you see that gold tooth when he gave me a big smile a minute ago? They say he once hid a stolen diamond in his mouth and the police beat him so bad that he had to replace it with solid gold. I interviewed him once. I’d really like to get the low-down on his darkest secrets...” (Abe, “Shinema no kokujin,” p. 91)

Gary Null records that during this era—which included the Great Depression—a handful of African American filmstars were living well. Perhaps what makes Fetchit the “luckiest,” or distinguishes him from his peers such as Bert Williams, Clarence Muse, Bessie Smith, and Hattie McDaniel (the first African American recipient of an Oscar) is that he was said to have been the first African American moviestar to become a millionaire. However, Fetchit asserted that “in those days blacks couldn’t get but 10 percent of what others made. I broke into a world that represented millionaires and Hollywood had to pretend they paid me a lot of money to keep up the image of the Hollywood stardom.”

For example, it has been reported that Fetchit started out earning $75 a day, but his weekly

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29 Patterson, p. 95.
salary was increased to $1500 at Fox Studios for his performance in *Hearts in Dixie*.

However, in those days the average African American actor would be paid between $25 and $50 per day and for extras a mere $5.00 a day.\textsuperscript{31} Fetchit’s high salary reflected his box-office appeal. Yet, his roles in movies were attacked by fellow African Americans, journalists, and especially the NAACP, for what they “regarded as his highly lucrative betrayal of his race.” He responded to their accusations with the remark that he was “just trying to make a living.”\textsuperscript{32} And Hattie McDaniel concurred with the attitude held by Fetchit when she said, “it was better to play a maid for $7,000 a week, than be one for $7.00,” after she was criticized for playing what civil rights groups deemed derogatory stereotypes of African Americans.\textsuperscript{33}

And how many Cadillacs did Fetchit own? In the early stages of Fetchit’s career he was reported to have:

bought the biggest house on Central Avenue and three cars, including one pink Rolls Royce with his name in neon lights on the back, employed one liveried chauffeur for each ear, owned fifty suits-some which were celebrity hand-me-downs bought from Rudolph Valentino’s tailor after Rudolph’s death-bought tickets to boxing matches by the bunch because he liked to sit in the center of a block of friends, and employed fourteen Chinese servants and one liveried footman-who wore a coat of many colors as he served him.”\textsuperscript{34}

In this story, Abe makes use of Fetchit’s real life luxuries, as a number of similarities are compared: his reportedly twelve Rolls Royces are traded in for one Cadillac with neon lights employing the name STEPIN FETCHIT-WILLIAM FOX STAR; boxing tickets are sold for race-track passes; the unidentified chauffeur is typecast as a Filipino, Fetchit had fourteen (some sources claimed sixteen) Chinese servants;\textsuperscript{35} and his grand house on Central Avenue has been changed to living in a first class hotel on Central Avenue.

\textsuperscript{30} *Biography News*, p. 1048.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 16.
\textsuperscript{33} Patterson, p. xiii (Introduction).
\textsuperscript{34} Landay, pp. 42-43.
\textsuperscript{35} *Annual Obituary*, p. 574. This article claims that Fetchit had sixteen Chinese servants.
Stories circulated about Fetchit were in some cases true to life, and only increased his allure. Furthermore, Fox took a gamble and promoted Step In Fetchit as their first African American film star. Fetchit signed an exclusive contract with Fox, and from 1929 to 1935, he starred in 26 films, often times appearing in as many as four movies at a time. However, Fox fired Fetchit after The Prodigal (1931) because they grew weary of his tardiness, insistence on directing his own scenes, and walking off the movie lot(s). In 1934, the headlines wrote a different story, this time, Fox wanted to take back Fetchit but not unconditionally. One source read:

Fox has re-signed Step In Fetchit. The colored performer who had such a promising movie career will be given another chance. They hesitated about signing Fetchit again. According to Helen Gwynn, they first called him in and told him that they were going to let him make a short. He was told that if he behaved during the making of the short he would be given features. He was reminded that he was Hollywood’s bad boy.

“You don’t have to worry about me any more,” said Fetchit. “You’re not taking any chances at all. I’ve been reading history, and I’ve noticed that they all became big guys after they were 32. Napoleon, Washington, Abe Lincoln. You don’t have to worry about me any more. I’m 32 today.”

Indeed, the signing, firing, and re-signing of an African American film star in the 1930s was unprecedented treatment by a studio for any of its employees. Once again, Fetchit became a favorite icon for moviegoers while appearing in nine more films, including featured billing with legendaries such as Shirley Temple (b. 1928) and Will Rogers (1879-1935). In fact, Will Rogers and Fetchit made five movies together, and they were known in Hollywood as the most prominent “master-servant team of the thirties.”

In the late thirties, Fetchit’s fame in cinema was coming to an end. He appeared in fewer and fewer pictures in the 1940s and civil rights groups began to loudly criticize and protest his stock roles as the most ‘dim-witted, shuffling, stammering Negro’ in cinema. Afterward he drifted into obscurity, and in 1947 he filed for bankruptcy. Once again he began performing in vaudeville circuits, as well as in a few independent all black movies.

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36 Landay, p. 43.
38 Landay, p. 43.
such as *Miracle in Harlem* (1947), *Bend in the River* (1952), *Amazing Grace* (1974), and his final big screen appearance in *Won Ton Ton The Wonder Dog Who Saved Hollywood* (1976). However, these films did nothing to revitalize his career; in fact, he was hardly recognized any longer.

It was not until the 1960s, when he joined the Nation of Islam and emerged as a member of the entourage of Muhammad Ali, that he resurfaced in the public's eye. His fame was heightened even more in the 1970s when he was bestowed two prestigious honors, namely the Special Image Award from the NAACP in 1976, and was elected to the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame in 1978, for his contributions made for over 50 years in the business. He also drew attention to himself when he unsuccessfully sued CBS for $3 million dollars due to defamation of character in the TV documentary, "Black History: Lost, Stolen, or Strayed," which aired in 1968. Fetchit was described by Bill Cosby as the "lazy, stupid, crap-shooting, chicken-stealing idiot."Fetchit resented being labelled "the symbol of the white man's Negro" and in a 1971 interview in *Film Quarterly*, he defended himself by saying:

> People don't understand any more what I was doing then, least of all the young generation of Negroes. Maybe because they don't really know what it was like then. Hollywood was more segregated than Georgia...Humor is my only alibi for being here. Show business is a mission for me...I was 100% black accomplishment.

In fact, many people do not understand, as one film historian in support of Fetchit claims, that "Fetchit was not a discredit to his race, he is simply a product of his time, and his performances in so many films paved the way for other black actors on-screen." Moreover, Fetchit did not have a choice but to play stock characterizations in the 20s and 30s, if he wanted to remain in that profession. The controversy over Fetchit's acting style

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39 *Annual Obituary*, p. 574.
40 Ibid.
41 Vinson, p. 227.
42 *Film Quarterly*, summer 1971.
43 Vinson, p. 227.
lingers on: whether he was a talented man who desperately wanted to make it into show business or a man of no creative resources who desperately wanted to make it rich quick or make a name. He died on November 19, 1985 in Woodland Hills, California.

Fetchit's declaration, "one day I'll be known all over the world" proved to be true, since he was even known in Japan.44 Perhaps it was his timing and body language which attracted Abe Tomoji to write a short story about Fetchit. Abe's story depicts not only the life of a Negro in the American film industry, but a life portrait of a "colored man" in American society. In this respect, I believe the English translation of this story should be entitled, "A Negro in Cinema," rather than, "The Negro in Cinema." As argued by Frantz Fannon, "the Negro experience is not a whole, for there is not merely one Negro, there are Negroes."45 This last section is based on the premise that Abe was intending to feature explicit examples of blacks and whites living together in America during critical national political debates. Abe could be offering a politically progressive empathy for African Americans, who are minorities struggling to overcome social injustices and discriminatory practices. This attitude puts forward a position pointed out by Dower, who reports that there were strong attempts to forge a "Japanese-Negro alliance" from the 1930s on.46

Abe's "documentary fiction," that is fiction built around current news, events, or newsmakers, differs greatly from the works by some of his contemporaries, such as Dazai and Hori, who exemplified the Other in terms of exoticism.47 Abe's account presents a more abstract, yet fuller vision of prewar social realities in America by altering/switching modes of narration, a technique common to Japanese modernist literature: 1) through third-

person omniscient narrative voice; 2) in a dialogistic sense by which we perceive different views of Stepin Fetchit from conversations between the poet Henry Brooks, and the journalist John Burlington; and 3) by employing a sophisticated treatment of “internal monologue,” which is the representation of a character’s inner thoughts or emotional experiences, in this case, Stepin Fetchit’s own reflections.48

In the dialogues between Brooks and Burlington, both at some point state their opinion about Fetchit and the system in which they live. The two seem to be agitated by the accomplishments achieved by Fetchit, thereby downplaying any of his artistic success. This point is taken up when Burlington conveys to Brooks that he cannot understand the reason Fetchit’s performances are admired and imitated by the white entertainer, Morris Shively. For instance, Burlington asks, “Why does Shively want to learn how to dance and sing like that nigger, Step!--- Our Morris! How can he do such a thing. Can you tell me why Negroes are being idolized this way?” And Brooks answers Burlington’s question in the following manner:

My opinion is this, said Brooks launching into a long speech --- I think the civilization of us white people has gotten too far advanced. It has gotten overripe and has become nearly decadent. Take any of them--what is serious, or what is highclass--they’ve all become something comic and boring. It seems like we whites can no longer respond emotionally anymore to the most serious of dramas or the most delicate of dances. It appears that the barbarism of the Negroes gives a sense of joy in life. However...However...Let me also say this, I truly believe that we whites have not gone down to total defeat yet. Why, there’s Shively. He was the one so madly intoxicated with Josephine Baker, and it was Shively who taught her how to get the Parisian decadents to understand the fascination of white music, and white clothes, and the white man’s straw hat. Yes, he’s our CRUSADER. The white race is not going mad as long as we the public continue our love affair with Shively. Before he knew it, Brooks had allowed himself to get quite excited about his topic. (Abe, “Shinema no kokujin,” pp. 100-101)

Abe seems to be playing on the name, Morris Shively, perhaps a reference to Maurice Chevalier (1888-1972), a popular musical-comedy star who was known for

48 Ibid., p. 111.
wearing straw hats in the 1930s. In addition, Brooks and Burlington not only refer to Fetchit by using the derogatory term, kuronbō, but there are other instances where they regard him as a “prince.” This occurs when the two discuss the sexual appeal Fetchit has for women. A good example is when Fetchit enters a speakeasy and all eyes are fixed on him, even the female singer is “struck with awe, admiration, bashfulness, and coquettishness” (Abe, “Shinema no kokujin,” p. 96). As Fetchit walked toward the back of the bar he enters a private room, but not alone, a mysterious woman, someone who appears to be Mizz Crawford, follows him into the room. Upon seeing this, Brooks commented: “Why be surprised. He’s a prince after all. Even white girls get conquered. That’s the way it’s been ever since the days of Arabian Nights. Why that nigger is…” (Abe, “Shinema no kokujin,” p. 97).

In telling this story, Abe establishes a broader concept of discovering humanity, in that, a deeper, richer, more complex view of human relationships is presented to the reader. Abe seems to be including some of the kinds of opinions about Fetchit’s performance during his heyday. In this respect, NAACP’s view that Fetchit plays an “arch-coon” is suggested in a conversation between Burlington and Brooks. On one level, Burlington seems to think that Fetchit is engaging in comic maneuvering in order to entertain his way out of bad times:

Do you mean to show sympathy for the Negro, the oppressed race throughout the United States. ---But, you know, that might all be a ploy on Step’s part. He knows full well what he is doing. And he is using it as a strategy to make himself popular. (Abe, “Shinema no kokujin,” p. 102)
At another level, Brooks seems to push Fetchit’s role to the extreme as he equates Fetchit’s performances to those of two famous Hollywood animals:

Brooks, on the other hand, felt something that bordered on rage inside him. “He may be a star, but he’s no saint. After all, he’s not much different from one of those dogs or horses that have been trained to act like ‘Rin Tin Tin’ or ‘Tom Mix’s Tony the Wonder Horse.’ They are nothing but tools--something that the studios use. (Abe, “Shinema no kokujin,” p. 102)

Rin Tin Tin, was a famous German shepherd dog who made his film debut in an adventure picture, Where the North Begins (1923), later in Tracked By the Police (1927), The Man Hunter (1930), and a host of other movie billings; in addition to his own television drama entitled, The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin (1954-1959). Tony the Wonder Horse, was a famous mount who played alongside the daredevil cowboy, Tom

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Mix, in a number of films depicting the Old West in the mid 1920s.\textsuperscript{50} Again, this shows that Abe was an avid moviegoer and he seems to have been familiar with American cinema. Another example is when Abe mentions Oscar, an African American actor who worked for Paramount Studios. In Abe’s description, Oscar is depicted as a person who is meek and has saved a modest fortune (Abe’s “Shinema no kokujin,” p. 94). Actually, this character is the antithesis of Fetchit because Fetchit is not a conservative spender. In any case, Abe’s account of Oscar is accurate because there was a real actor named Oscar Williams, who received an exclusive contract with Paramount Studios, and worked in over two hundred pictures. In addition, Williams was reported to have owned the “bootblack stand at [Paramount] studios.”\textsuperscript{51}

Abe’s use of modernistic technique works to show Fetchit as a marginalized character. The reader rarely hears his voice, except for a few insertions of internal monologue. He seems even more marginalized when his background is portrayed from the standpoint of someone who seems to be annoyed with Fetchit and vice versa. For instance, when Abe provides a platform from which Fetchit speaks, Fetchit emphatically reveals his opinion of Burlington through his usage of a racial epithet, “honkie” (shironbō), because he feels threatened by Burlington’s presence, someone he defines as a scandalmonger attempting to “undermine his movie career” (Abe, “Shinema no kokujin, p. 92).

Furthermore, through Fetchit’s stream of conscious intervals, the reader sees a different viewpoint of the state of America told or at least as remembered from an African American perspective. There seem to be two examples which explore the ramifications of the racism under which Fetchit lived: 1) the lynching of Negroes; and 2) rejection because of color.

How did Abe come to know the experience of African Americans without ever visiting America and without ever having any African American friends? First, according to the historian, Reginald Kearney, “Japanese newspapers often ran items protesting

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., p. 228.
\textsuperscript{51} Patterson, p. 119.
American racial conditions and the lynching of blacks. For example, the *Asian Review* which was published in Tokyo, ran an editorial in the summer of 1921 condemning a lynching in Arkansas. The story was based on information supplied to the foreign press by the New York office of the NAACP.

Consider the following passage where Fetchit suggests through internal monologue his fear of physical violence after gawking at the body of a beautiful Caucasian woman:

But all of a sudden there flashed before his eyes the vivid sight of an incident he had seen, an incident in which whites had taken the law into their own hands and a Negro man was lynched for attacking a white woman. Out of all of the many days and years that he had spent roaming and wandering as a vagabond, it was the one image that had stayed with him. It was a terrible sight, and it had taken place on the outskirts of a small town in the Mid-West. He felt there was something unlucky at suddenly having remembered it now, and shaking his shoulder as though tossing off a bad memory, he dove into the back seat of the car.

(Abe, "Shinema no kokujin," pp. 94-95)

Second, Fetchit recalls his first experience with racism after being accused of lustfully gazing at the body of his virgin-like Caucasian secretary, who rejects his sexual advances and walks out of the room:

Step was conscious of the reproach implied by his servant’s look. He knew what it meant. Whites and Blacks. He recalled his first time he encountered such scorn. It was back in his old hometown in Florida. He must have been three or four. He was playing with his white friend and when he was about to go inside the house the boy’s father came to the door and kicked him out onto the lawn. Just like that. Although it was a hot, sunny day in Florida, he felt as though he had been drenched in ice cold water. “I don’t know what it is, but there’s something different between me and them.” It was still something vague and undefined, when the thought first came to him. He was only a boy, but it tore at his childlike heart. It was as clear as the sun rising over the horizon --- when an awareness of different races suddenly dawned on him. It was oh-so-black, oh-so-dark. "Oh God. Please God." (Abe, "Shinema no kokujin," p. 107)

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32 Reginald Kearney, “Afro-American Views of the Japanese, 1900-1945,” Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University, 1991, p. 103. Kearney indicates that this story was first reported in the *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 16,1921. Also see: 20 *Seiki zenkirokku*, which reported riots in Washington, D.C. and Chicago where some Caucasians had attacked some African Americans in 1919.
Abe Tomoji’s writing style is so cinematic as to make scenes appear before the reader’s eyes. According to one source, this story is distinguished by Abe’s ultra-modernistic (for the time) switching of perspectives in a “jazz-like” manner.\(^{53}\) Abe, in his conviction that writing fiction was an act of “imaginative sympathy,” attempted to imagine the experience of an African American based on the knowledge he had acquired. His undertaking of this act of sympathy extends to all aspects of his treatments of Stepin Fetchit in the following respects: 1) there is an attempt to remain faithful to the facts as received through the filter of the dominant American culture; 2) within this framework, there is the author’s obvious effort to imagine the internal life of this African American character, Fetchit, which is inspired by the modernist technique of the “internal monologue”; 3) and in the case of Abe, the literary movement of modernism, with which he was aligned in opposition to literary Marxism, led him to be attracted to the latest “international” things, such as American jazz, the cinema, and “fashionable” African Americans. In summation, Abe’s description of Fetchit illustrates a limited number of examples of racism in American society. However, it is interesting to note that Abe had no encounter with living African Americans of his day.\(^{54}\) It is not as though meeting either African Americans in an intellectual or in a personal way was impossible. It was reported that African American leaders such as W.E.B. DuBois and Marcus Garvey had visited prewar Japan to rally support for their cause in America, and they left Japan having developed admiration for the Japanese.\(^{55}\) Kearney goes on to say that DuBois had the support of many Japanese people as he travelled throughout Japan and, “for more than thirty years, [he] helped project an image of Japan as an ally in the struggle for racial equality.”\(^{56}\) There were other African

\(^{53}\) “Shinema no kokujin,” Shinchô Bungei Geppô, Apr. 4, 1930.

\(^{54}\) Abe Yoshihisa’s personal interview with Ayanna Hobbs on May 20, 1998.


Americans who petitioned the Japanese to act as intermediaries in the cause of ending racial discrimination. For instance, a group which consisted of Madame C.J. Walker, the millionaire cosmetics entrepreneur, A. Phillip Randolph, co-editor of the *Messenger* magazine, Ida Barnett Wells, and Monroe Trotter, editor of *Boston Guardian* newspaper, made an appeal to the Japanese delegation at the Waldorf Astoria in New York prior to the opening of the Paris Peace Conference.\(^{57}\)

In any case, encountering real African Americans seems to have been secondary to Abe’s desire to treat America as a whole, from the vantage point of an abstraction, the abstraction of “America’s most prominent Negro,” illustrating the defects in that abstraction: the evils of racism, materialism, lawlessness, and a brash frontier mentality. So what is sympathetic about Fetchit is also a condemnation of racism in American culture, and his defects as well are a critique of American culture.\(^{58}\) In the years to come, Japanese authors would take up other aspects of African American life and would continue in the tradition of Abe’s “imaginative sympathy,” though Abe probably would not have been able to himself imagine the narrative forms that sympathy would take after Japan’s defeat in World War Two.

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\(^{57}\) Kearney, p. 87. He quoted from: Chicago *Broad Ax*, Jan. 4, 1919; Philadelphia Tribune, Jan. 18, 1919 and Apr. 26, 1919.

\(^{58}\) Abe Yoshio’s telephone interview with Ayanna Hobbs on February 20, 1999. He stated that other critiques of this story do not point out the issue of racism, so this project has an original point of view. Moreover, he stated that one reason critics overlooked the issue of race was because his father was not considered to be a political writer, so his father’s early works were viewed as mere entertainment.
CHAPTER 3

BLACK OTHER EROTICISM AND YAMADA EIMI

The mass media in Japan portrays one kind of subculture in contemporary Japan that boldly expresses the desire to be penetrated by the “phallic power” of an African American man. For a few highly visible, young Japanese women, African American males create this sensation of the Other which is presented in novels -- award winning novels -- which are read by the young and made into movies.¹ These mass media images are illustrations of how a male penis should appear in performance and size. The African American man is symbolized as an exotic figure: not as a ‘freak’ characterized in “Shiiku” (“Prize Stock,” 1958) by the Nobel laureate Ōe Kenzaburō (b. 1935); rather as ‘the gratifier’ of ultimate eroticism. In some fashion magazines and television programs, this “made in the USA” commodity is portrayed as an ultra-cool (chō-kakkō-iî) stylish and hip accessory which stimulates better than a hand-held vibrator or, for that matter, his Japanese male counterpart.²

¹ For example, see Yamada Eimi’s movie adapted version of her books: Beddotaimu aizu (1987) and Boku wa benkyō ga dekinai (1996).
² For example, “Kokujin-teki,” Studio Voice, Oct. 1991. On the cover of this Japanese magazine stands a muscle-bound African American male who conceals his nakedness with his bare hands.
Aesthetic tastes among one sub-group of Japanese women perhaps have valued sexual liaison with African American men. In recent years, African American men have become a commodity for a few Japanese women, who went shopping at military bases, especially the Yokota Air Base in Tokyo, peering through the gates and targeting foreigners generally but African American men in particular. In her book, *The Myth of the Madame Butterfly*, Ma reports that these Japanese women have been nicknamed the “gate girls.” Ma, further explains, that the “gate girls” interested in African American servicemen would dress in a similar fashion familiar to Yamada Eimi’s style of dress: black mini-skirt, tank tops, and heavy make-up. In any case, this risqué lifestyle of a few is generalized by the mass media as a subculture of the young which defies the traditional cultural norms in that women are the aggressors instead of the passive targets of seduction.

Beginning in the mid-80s, the image of African Americans in Japan has undergone a broad re-definition in that it has become fashionable among a spectrum of young Japanese people to associate directly with African American culture and more importantly, with individuals. Perhaps a major impetus to this development was the work and lifestyle of Yamada Eimi (sometimes written as Yamada Amy), at least this is the way it has been portrayed in the mass media. For instance, in a *Tokyo Journal* interview with Yamada Eimi, the interviewee stated that after the release of her debut novel and subsequent works, “there was a big increase in the number of girls who started hanging around the

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3 Karen Ma, *The Modern Butterfly: Fantasy & Reality in Japanese Cross-cultural Relationships*, Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc., 1996, pp. 78-80. Ma also discusses her interview with three “gate girls” at the U.S. Navy base at Yokosuka. In addition, Ma states that the fashion trend of the “gate girls” was known as ‘going Yamada Amy’ (*Yamada Eimei o shite iru*), however, in my interview with Yamada Eimi, she claims that she has never heard of this phrase and thinks that it is a strange statement.

4 Yamada Eimi was born Yamada Futaba. However, in her early twenties, her American friends began calling her after a famous African American rock singer named Amy, so she changed her given name to imitate the foreign word. However, she did not use the Japanese orthography, *katakana*, which is normally how the Japanese treat foreign words, instead she choose *kanji*, Chinese characters, thereby adding flavor and meaning to her name: *ei* symbolizes singing or composing a poem, and *mi* evokes beauty or loveliness.
bases." In any case, Yamada is one of the most popular young female writers in contemporary Japan as is Yoshimoto Banana (b. 1964). Yamada is the voice of the individualistic, Japanese youth culture (wakamono bunka) attempting to buck the system. This kind of independence is clear in her novels, which permit Japanese women to freely choose their lifestyle, partners, and identity.⁶

Yamada is a creator, a creator in unleashing -- conscious or unconscious -- her most intimate, romantic, and unfiltered perceptions. Writings penned by Yamada about the explicit, love relationships in which young Japanese women are embraced, cuddled, and fondled by African American men are popular. Even though Yamada has written nearly 30 novels, not all of her novels treat interracial relationships between Japanese and African American couples. In an interview with Cross Section, Yamada commented that, "I wrote about African Americans in four or five books. For some reason people want to talk about that all the time. But anyway (laughs)... When I wake up in the morning, I see an African American guy's face. So it's natural for me to write about African Americans."⁷ Yet, due to her bold depiction of such affairs, she has been sought after by the media to determine if her fictionalized stories shadow her private affairs. Yamada

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defends herself by saying that she can only write from personal experience, so let us take a look at how her participation in Japan’s subculture developed. It will be the argument here that her personal experience has informed her writing, and that experience has led her, contrary to the image projected by the mass media, to write highly personal and sympathetic stories of loving relationships that resist the “easy stereotypes” fostered by the mass media.

8 Who’s Who of Japanese Women, Nichigai Associates, Inc., 1996, p. 667. In this article, Yamada is quoted as saying that her writings are personal because “nothing had much meaning to me unless I could see, feel, and hear it.” Furthermore, in one of our interviews, Yamada said that “life” itself inspires her to write. Asked how she comes up with topics for her writing, she explained that “deadlines take them.”
YAMADA'S LIFE

Yamada Eimi was born Yamada Futaba on February 8, 1959, the oldest of three daughters to the union of Takayasu and Fumiko Yamada in Fussa, Tokyo.9 Yamada has two younger sisters, Yoko and Yukiko. Yoko is a housewife and Yukiko works at a restaurant. In understanding the life of Yamada, one thread that is easy to follow chronologically is her educational background. As a young girl, her family moved frequently due to her father's position at a Japanese company, and subsequently she transferred to many different elementary schools. Her family finally settled in Utsunomiya, her mother's hometown, and Yamada remembered living in a “typical Japanese house.” Here, in Utsunomiya, is where she was able to secure her high school diploma at Tochigi Prefectural Shikanuma High School. During her high school days, she was introduced to African American music and literature. At age 15, her boyfriend's appreciation for jazz led her to listen to African American music. And at age 17, she became acquainted with her first James Baldwin (1924-1987) novel, Another Country (1962), introduced to her by her Japanese boyfriend at that time. What impressed her the most in this book was the idea of “humanity beyond sexism and racism.”10 Baldwin is by far her favorite African American writer and her favorite Baldwin novel is Giovanni's Room (1956). Other African Americans writers who she admires are Charles Johnson (b. 1948) and Maya Angelou (b. 1928). Her readings sparked an interest in her understanding more about African American culture and people. Moreover she enjoys African American television shows such as “The Oprah Show,” “The Cosby Show,” and “In Living Color.”11 Yamada also stated in our interview, that she dated her first African American lover at the

9 Yamada Eimi’s interview by fax to Ayanna Hobbs on June 1, 1998.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid. As for Japanese writers, she stated that her favorite writer is Murakami Ryū (b. 1952) because he calls her 'sis.' In one of our telephone conversations, Yamada stated that each time the two meet, they
age of 21. She said that they had lots of fun together such as “lunch → dinner →
breakfast.” Furthermore, she told me that her other friends were involved with African
American men. At the age of 24, Yamada traveled to America for the first time, where she
vacationed in Hawaii.

In 1977, she left her countryside home in Utsunomiya and rented an apartment in
Kichijō-ji, a young and trendy part of Tokyo. This was on the occasion of her entrance to
the Japanese Literature Department of Meiji University. Yamada decided to enter Meiji
University because as she put it, “I didn’t have a choice” after not passing the entrance
exam to Waseda University. Her decision to major in Japanese literature, as opposed to
African American literature, was due to her belief that she was “not good at English.” As a
student at Meiji University, she joined the Cartoon Study Club as part of her extra-
curricular activity.\(^\text{12}\) She says that she participated in the club with the intention of
becoming a cartoonist one day. Two years later she withdrew from school in order to
pursue a career as a cartoonist for Girls’ Comics (Shōjo Manga). However, she claims that
her comics were not written to espouse any ideology or political statement; they were “just
graffiti.” As always, Yamada kept up with the latest trends set by the wakamono bunka, so
she became a part of the “amateur manga movement,” and in 1981, she produced “A Sugar
Bar” (“Shuga Bā”), her first professional comic strip under her given name, Yamada
Futaba.\(^\text{13}\) With so many successful accomplishments, one would think that she would

\(^{12}\) During my research in Japan, I visited the Cartoon Study Club at Meiji University. I came across one of
Yamada’s comics entitled, “Jashūmon hikyoku” (The Secret Music of Jashūmon) published under her given
name, Yamada Futaba, in the club’s comic strip entitled, “MORE,” v. 3 (1979), pp. 61-64. The theme of
this comic strip is sexually explicit. Yamada graphically illustrates a non-Japanese woman kneeled down
between the legs of a non-Japanese man performing oral sex. And her appreciation for American music is
also captured, as the word ‘jazz’ is written in capital letters in English.

\(^{13}\) Sharon Kinsella, “Japanese Subculture in the 1990’s: Otaku and the Amateur Manga Movement” in
Journal of Japanese Studies, v. 24 (1998), no. 2, pp. 289-315. This is a fine discussion on how this
movement became a major mass medium primarily organized by young Japanese teenage girls as an act of
continue in the world of *manga* since it couples her dual appreciation of painting/drawing and writing. One source claimed that Yamada was “frustrated with the low status” she was relegated to as a manga artist in popular literature, so she opted to embark on writing fiction.\(^{14}\) However, the author disclosed to me that drawing was not her forte, so she decided to bypass this kind of creative medium altogether.\(^{15}\)

After her stint as a cartoonist, Yamada did not suddenly pick up a pen and begin to write fiction; instead she explored a variety of possibilities until she finally found her niche as a novelist. Steering clear of the traditional OL (Office Ladies) occupational path, Yamada explored the gamut of Tokyo’s water-trade (*mizu shōbai*) industries during the early 1980s. Her résumé includes work as a Ginza hostess, a nude model, a songwriter, and an SM Dominatrix/Queen for a couple of months. She quit after receiving an award for new writers.\(^{16}\) Such a flamboyant lifestyle provided enough creative leverage for her to use these experiences to buttress her storylines, especially her heyday as an SM Queen which turned into the novel, *Kneel Down and Lick My Feet* (*Hizamazuite ashi o oname*, 1988). As a reader, one may question the truthfulness of this story since it depicts bizarre acts of sexual fantasies, but she defends her work in an interview conducted by *Cross Section:*

> I used to work in a sex club before I became a writer. It was a lot of fun. I wanted to be a writer—it was my dream, right. So when I was working there I kept thinking, I must write about this. Then I got the chance to publish the story. The editor-in-chief told me the story would be too controversial (shocking). I told them I’d write about it anyway. I saw a lot of cases, so really it’s the truth.\(^{17}\)


\(^{15}\) In a comic strip entitled, “Koi no daichōsasen” (“The Biggest Party in Search of Love”), Yamada confesses her inability to draw when she writes *moo sukkari e kakenai*. This comic strip also depicts her affairs with African American men. For translation, see Appendix C.

\(^{16}\) Samuel’s article states that Yamada was once a songwriter. But Yamada expressed in one of our many telephone conversations that she did not remember the name of the song, nor for which individual or group.

\(^{17}\) Dowling, p. 25.
Although this interview questioned the validity of the story, other interviews, magazines, and journalistic endeavors drew a comparison of Yamada’s sexual experiences with African American and Japanese men, a subject dealt with only peripherally in the novel, *Kneel Down and Lick my Feet*. This kind of journalistic hysteria began with Yamada’s debut story, *Bedtime Eyes*. Yamada, herself admits, that “After the appearance of the book, the interviewers would always begin by asking me, ‘How are black men?’ Everything had a sexual connotation.”¹⁸ In another interview with the famous American talento (entertainer) in Japan, David Spector, he begins their discussion by inquiring about sexual differences among different “races” of men.¹⁹

For a brief time she was a nude model. She was photographed with African American men while engaging in acts of fellatio, using a hand-held vibrator on the couch, and in nude shower scenes, all of which play a thematic and pornographic role in her novels.²⁰ Yamada ventured into such a profession for the sole purpose of making money, and she seems not to have been ashamed, since she was, in fact, experiencing life in the raw, peeling away hang-ups, prejudices, and anti-feminist images.

And if her career choices were not enough in rebelling against social norms, in 1984 she moved in with her African American soldier lover, Calvin Wilson, a divorced father of an adolescent boy, whom she met at a nightclub at the Yokota Air Base. During their co-habitation, she began to craft what would make her a household name -- she penned her prize winning debut novel, *Bedtime Eyes*. Yamada and Wilson were inseparable lovers; she took care of his son, and he accompanied her to interviews as well as posing for pictures with her for magazine layouts.

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Yet, their ren'ai kankei (love affair) would come to a tragic end after Wilson was accused of assaulting a neighborhood housewife and sentenced to Japanese prison in 1987. Once again, Yamada became the subject of tabloid journalism and ridicule about her unconventional lifestyle as a young thrill-seeker making questionable choices in life. In fact, Yamada, herself confided that "it was the saddest time in my life...[Wilson] really hurt me."21 But bolstered by the support of her publishers, fans, and friends, Yamada pressed on as a teflon wakamono. Yamada continued to frequent the Yokota Air Base for dating and pleasure. So when Wilson contacted her after being released from jail and asked her for some money, she was startled and unnerved. Yamada was in the midst of a serious ren'ai kankei with her husband to-be, Craig R. Douglas, and in order to prevent their love from unraveling, she handled the Wilson problem immediately and quietly. She had a friend secretly deliver money to Wilson without Douglas ever suspecting.22

As a prolific writer her successes mounted and she did not feel any conflict between career and marriage. In 1990 in New York city, she married her long-time African American soldier lover, Craig R. Douglas, whom she had met at the nightclub on the Yokota Air Base.23 The couple later had an intimate reception in Japan, and currently resides at Lions Mansion Haijime in Akishima, Tokyo. Even though international marriages are considered a fashionable trend among the younger generation, marrying an African American male may not be as common. One source indicates that, "although parents generally frown upon cross-cultural marriages, they are generally more willing to bend the rules if their prospective son-in-law or even daughter-in-law is Caucasian."24

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21 Yamada Eimi's dinner interview with Ayanna Hobbs on February 20, 1998.
22 Ibid.
24 Ma, p. 34.
Yamada's parents seem to be liberal and open-minded because they accepted diversity in their family with the inclusion of Douglas as their son-in-law.

Yamada may seem to be quite the rebel based on her educational background, work experiences, and intimacy with foreign men. Yet, there is at least one lifecycle path that Yamada did not deviate from: she followed the custom of marriage by the age of 31.25 Yamada married her soulmate or "best friend" as she likes to call Douglas. She travels at least once a year to visit her in-laws in New York, and there seems to be a close relationship. During our personal interview she began recalling a story that occurred between her in-laws and herself. She began telling the story by using the phrase, "my family and I...," but never did she say "my in-laws and I" or "my husband's side of the family and I." In fact, she never referred to nor addressed African Americans as kokujin (an inclusive word which is generally used to indicate blacks in America and other dark-skinned Asians); instead she used the term, Afurika kei Amerikajin, which more closely represents the meaning of African Americans. This indicates, I think, insight into the peculiar position of African Americans, in that African Americans are usually described as kokujin in the media and Japanese society. This suggests that she has affection for African Americans and basic knowledge about their culture.

Yamada is now forty years old (at the time of this writing, 1999), and she does not have any children. She is not contemplating the idea of having children as revealed in our interview, although she is fond of her niece. Her dream at this moment is to complete a masterpiece within a five-year period involving her cultural experiences from places around the globe, such as New York, Bali, Paris, Italy, and so-forth.26

25 Ibid, p. 50. Ma asserts, "...these days women are opting to hold out until New Year's Eve (omisoka), or by 31; albeit, as recently as ten years ago, women were still abiding by an unwritten rule to marry by the age of twenty-five lest they be labeled Christmas Cake—too old for the market on the twenty-sixth."
26 Yamada Eimi's dinner interview with Ayanna Hobbs on February 20, 1998.
Yamada is anything but a timid, shy, and dependent female. Instead, she lives on the cutting edge, takes risks and dares anyone to mold her into the so-called typical good wife, wise mother (ryosai kenbō). But one must not be too quick to overlook her motherly qualities. Yamada has the power and opportunity to mentor young girls when she provides advice on traveling, movie picks, music, and of course sex and men in popular magazines targeted for young girls, magazines such as An An or Non No. Her stories help to fill in the gaps that sometimes girls may not learn from their own mothers who are trying to be both: a career mama and kyōiku mama (education mother) at the same time. Therefore, Yamada has become a surrogate mother for young girls. Her reflection on life as a “postwar kid” inevitably influences her literary works.

YAMADA’S LITERARY TREATMENT OF THE OTHER

Yamada has received strong criticism for her characterizations of African American men. Some have even gone so far as to accuse her writings of invoking racist overtones. Perhaps the outpouring of such scrutiny can be ascribed to her accusers’ mode of thinking, one that sees individuals as abstractions of racial categories: How can a Japanese write about the emotions, struggles and psyche of an African American man? Toni Morrison answers this question as follows: “Writers are among the most sensitive, the most intellectually anarchic, most representative, most probing of artists. The ability of writers to imagine what is not the self, to familiarize the strange and mystify the familiar, is the test of their power.”\(^{27}\) How does Yamada imagine what is not herself as she tries to depict African American men and their cultural traits in her novels?

Yamada’s literary themes are unique and break barriers in regard to the idealized role of a typical Japanese woman. In some of her stories, the heroines love African American men; are aggressive; and believe in sexual freewill. Let us review how these images are manifested in her more famous works: Bedtime Eyes (Beddotaimu aizu, 1985), which received the 22nd Bungei Award, “When a Man Loves a Woman” (“Otoko ga onna o aisuru toki,” 1987; tr. 1991), in the anthology, Soul Music Lover’s Only (Sōru muziku rabāzu onri, 1987), which received the 97th Naoki Award, Trash (Torashu, 1991; tr. 1996), which received the Joryū Award or Women’s Literature Award, “X-Rated Blanket” (“Seijin muki mōfu,” 1988; tr. 1991), in the anthology, I am Beat (Boku wa biito, 1988), and Kneel Down and Lick my Feet (Hizamazuite ashi o oname, 1988; tr. 1991), hereafter referred to as Kneel Down. A brief summary of each work is provided below.

Bedtime Eyes depicts a ren'ai kankei between Kim, a Japanese songstress and an African American serviceman nicknamed Spoon. In a Japanese nightclub catering to American soldiers the couple make immediate eye contact with each other and engage in a scandalous sexual escapade in the boiler room of the club’s basement. The illicit language and sexual scenes are heightened when Kim moves in with Spoon. The climax unfolds when Spoon is arrested for attempting to sell classified military documents. Often readers (and movie viewers) mistakenly identify the character of Kim, as the real-life Yamada because the story seems to bear resemblance to Yamada’s personal life. However, Yamada stated in our interview that this story is based on an incident experienced by her friend.

In 1985, Bedtime Eyes won the first prize for the Kanebō amateur literary contest and subsequently in the same year, it went on to receive the 22nd Bungei Award. Critics placed a great deal of emphasis on her expression and her dealing with issues affecting the

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Additional accolades include: Classroom Burial (Fuso no kyōshitsu, 1989) receiving the Hirabayashi Taiko Award, and Animal Logic (Animaru logiku, 1996), receiving the Izumi Kyoka Award.
younger generation. One member of the Bungei selection committee praised Yamada's work for her “precise self-depiction of a girl, who using her own language, zooms in at zero distance on life and her black GI.”29 Another enthusiast of her work, exclaimed that *Bedtimes Eyes* was similar to the *Invisible Man* (1952) since the African American soldier is manifested in Ellison’s terms. One critic raved about the strength of Yamada’s heroine:

Here is a ‘colored man’ taken under the wing of a young Japanese girl, without anything ‘trendy’ intended. Here is something truly new, the birth of a fresh reality that neither their realism of past eras nor the modes of expression relying on sensibility and intellect alone could have captured. Here is someone who looks at life straight on, without expecting favors. The avant garde appears to be moving in this direction, and therein lies the strength of this prize-winning work. It may be the start of a literary revolution.30

The work was acclaimed as the start of a literary revolution begun by and for Yamada. Yet Yamada also encountered unflattering comments about her writing. One critic not as impressed with Yamada’s African American male centered subject commented that: “As literature, this is not a particularly outstanding work. To describe it in terms of a ‘new sensibility’ is also inappropriate. The attention that it has received reflects nothing more than media hype centering on the fact that the author is living with a black American. This novel is but another unfortunate sign of the times.”31 In fact, the media did sensationalize Yamada’s affair with her live-in African American lover, and her publisher anticipated the success of this kind of book, so they reduced the printing time from three months to a little over a month.32 When the book hit the stores, it sold over 260,000 hard-cover copies, its primary readership being young Japanese women in their twenties.33 It inevitably became a bestseller and finally in 1987, it made its way to a movie adapted version (Video in English and Japanese) and later hit the Japanese television airwaves. The movie did not

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30 Ibid. Emphasis added.
32 Ibid.
fare as well as the book, and even Yamada found the film, “a bit boring.”

As she wrote the book to challenge Japanese ideas about interracial love, she claims, “that was my first novel, and I was so surprised by the reaction. I thought I'd just written a pure love story, like Last Tango in Paris. I wanted to write that kind of story, so when people started to say I was breaking taboos, I was kind of surprised.”

“X-Rated Blanket” is a soliloquy of a woman describing the art of lovemaking with her capable lover, George. Although George’s ethnicity is not identified, it can be inferred based on the clues provided in the text. One major clue is that George “has a voice described ‘like a southern melody’ (54). In Yamada’s works, however, that which clearly identifies a male character as a black is his excellence as a lover.”

For Trash, Yamada spent nearly three years thinking about the plot of this novel and then an additional two years transcribing her thoughts on paper. This story presents the most fully balanced images of African American men because she writes about gay men, college-educated men, and men who are alcoholics. The setting is in New York, and the first half of the story centers around a love-hate relationship between a Japanese woman, Koko, and her African American lover, Rick. The couple met at a bar and that same night Koko accompanied Rick to his house for what she thought would be a one night stand. However, due to Rick's incredible lovemaking talent Koko moves in with Rick and his son for about two years. Even though Koko tries desperately to resolve their differences, she finds herself being defeated by Rick's alcoholism. Koko finally decides to leave, but not on her own accord. She departs only after she has the security of another lover named Randy, and their love story forms the second half of the novel. Randy is the

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33 Ma, p. 77.
34 Yamada Eimi’s telephone conversation with Ayanna Hobbs in 1997.
35 Dowling, p. 25.
antithesis to Rick because he is younger, a college-bound student, and because he possesses the ability to be extremely sensitive to her emotional and physical needs. However, what most sets Randy apart from Rick is the fact that he can communicate with Koko openly and honestly, whereas Rick shuts Koko emotionally out of his life. Another interesting part of this novel that makes for a well-developed plot is that we see Koko acting as a surrogate mother to Rick’s teenage son. After his father is killed, he wants to remain friends with Koko, despite the serious problems that they had undergone during the time Koko lived with them. The English translation of *Trash* includes Yamada’s earlier novel, *Jesse’s Backbone* (*Jeshii no sebone*, 1986) which was nominated for the Akutagawa Prize.

As she stated in our personal interview, *Trash* is by far Yamada’s favorite novel. She claims that a family member was just as impressed with the novel: “My brother-in-law was the first American reader of *Trash* and he said he loved it because it’s the truth. He and his friends aren’t always talking about heavy problems. He’s in his early 20s, and the most important things are girls or the clothes to wear on a date. So *Trash* is like real life for him.”

On the flip side, she is the least pleased with *Harlem World* (*Haremu wārudo*, 1990), because as she explains, “I did not write down everything I wanted to say” since she was hard-pressed by the publishers. In any case, according to Kodansha, the translation of *Trash* into English did not fare as well as the Japanese language original. It was reported that the translation in nearly two years of being in the bookstores sold approximately 3,800 copies in Japan, 380 copies in America, and a mere 30 copies in Great Britain. According to Noma Chikako, an executive at Kodansha, the translated work did not sell many copies because Yamada declined to participate in the public engagements

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39 These figures were given to me by Stephen Shaw, an editor at Kodansha’s headquarters in Tokyo.
scheduled for her throughout the United States. Kodansha was even willing to hire a publicity coach and have an interpreter on hand, if needed.\textsuperscript{40}

\textit{Kneel Down} probes the world of an SM club set in the heart of Tokyo. The reader witnesses the SM Queens’ personal lives and how the SM atmosphere affects their daily job performance. The reader is also informed about specific techniques a Queen uses on her customers. This schooling is done through the eyes of the protagonist Chika, who is being taught the ropes of the SM world from her friend, Shinobu, an expert in the world of sadomasochism. The name Shinobu usually refers to any experienced Dominatrix.\textsuperscript{41} Chika gets involved with this kind of work in order to buy her African American lover a birthday present. In the final pages of the opening chapter, which are crucial to an understanding of the novel and which have thus been translated in an appendix here, the reader learns that Chika, is, in fact, playing the role of Yamada because Chika reveals that she has won an award for new writers, which is in reference to the Bungei Prize for Yamada’s debut novel, \textit{Bedtime Eyes}.\textsuperscript{42} The twist to the plot is that the good news about winning the award is overshadowed by her fear of reporters discovering her present line of work. As Chika explains to Shinobu, she cannot help but shudder at the phone calls she has been receiving from a number of tabloid magazines that want to interview her. These magazines have learned that she works in a sex club, and in their next issue they plan to expose nude pictures of her taken by an informant under false pretenses. Yamada elaborates more on how this incident occurred in her article entitled, “The Reason I Love Writing and Blacks.” She explains that a Japanese guy came to her club posing as a customer, and begged her to show him safe SM techniques so that he can teach them to his wife, who enjoys playing

\textsuperscript{40} Noma Chikako’s personal interview with Ayanna Hobbs in June 1998 at Kodansha’s branch office in New York. Stephen Shaw confirmed this account as well, and it is through him that I met Noma Chikako (the granddaughter of the founder of Kodansha).


\textsuperscript{42} For translation, see Appendix B.
SM games. Unfortunately, she is so dangerous that he was almost strangled to death. Yamada sympathized with his circumstances and decided to pose for the pictures under the condition that her face not be shown in any photos. Nevertheless, the informant did take some pictures that showed her face and those are the pictures that were included in the tabloid magazines, such as Friday, she mentions in Kneel Down.

“When a Man Loves a Woman” depicts a nameless female artist, who meets Willy Roy, an African American, at a Miami Beach resort. She casually gives him the address to her place in New York. Weeks later Willy Roy shows up unannounced and invites himself to stay for a few days. She relents and allows Willy Roy to stay since she views the situation as harmless on two accounts: 1) she has no interest in sleeping with Willy Roy; and 2) she has a boyfriend. Unexpectedly, Willy Roy creates a mood with soul music and begins to seduce her. This one joyful night of sex has left an indelible and an unforgettable mark of passion throughout her body: she claims that she has never experienced such intimacy before. Even though Willy Roy made the initial contact, she tries to entice him to more sexual play. At one point she even begs Willy Roy to fulfill her erotic desires. However, he never again submits to her during their brief co-habitation.

CRITICS OF YAMADA EIMI AND HER RESPONSES

Any representation of “racial difference” or the “Other” can be categorized as “racist” by its nature, as the recent post-colonial debates have illustrated. Yamada Eimi’s works are no exception. In conclusion to this chapter, I will introduce some critics who have accused Yamada of exploiting her relationships with African American men. I will

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then cite her defense of her work both in her own words and in my interpretation of her implicit intent.

The Myth of the African American’s Male Phallus Size

One critique of her work is that she portrays black sexual prowess in physical terms. Cornyetz argues that Yamada’s style of narrative “pays homage to the phallus as the ultimate symbol of power...for her symbol of the ultimate bearer of phallic power is repeatedly an African American male.” Therefore, phallic power eradicates Japanese men. In some of her works, Yamada may seem to rank the phallus according to “race.” This can be seen in Kneel Down, where the sizes of the Japanese men’s penises are portrayed as “pitiful little cocks” (187), “filthy things” (190), “sorry little pricks” (190), and a “bunch of wriggly vegetables out of some cartoon” (191). In stark contrast, foreign men, especially African American men’s phalluses are not seen with such revulsion.

Yamada herself refutes the notion that penis size is important. A clear example of this point is seen in “When a Man Loves a Woman.” Willy Roy questions the female artist’s boyfriend, Mike, about the size of his phallus, and in response Mike confidently asserts, “Pretty damn big” (119); however, Willy Roy challenges him by saying, “Mine, too. You want me to pull it out and show you right here” (119). As expected, Mike does not refute Willy Roy’s provocation, instead, a “cold sweat broke out on Mike’s forehead” and he walked away from the competition. Even the female artist “burst out laughing” (119) at the end of the ridiculous contest. In this scene, Yamada is demonstrating to the reader through the artist that the penis competition is an immature and petty insecurity among men that makes women laugh. In fact, Yamada believes the “theory that blacks all

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44 Cornyetz, p. 439.
Language as the Source of Sexual Attraction

Yamada has been criticized for writing explicitly graphic pornographic tales. However, Yamada herself defines language rather than the physical sexual act as the ultimate source of erotic pleasures. The writer, then, is the ultimate lover. Since language is the most important part of sex, Yamada’s novels display her criticism of Japanese men for not being as talented as foreign men with oratory. In Kneel Down, especially, Yamada’s heroine, Shinobu, expresses the common sentiment shared by some of her other protagonists regarding this topic:

If there were a man who could talk to a woman in bed the way I talk, women would come just listening to him. But there aren’t many men like that, men who can say enough of the right things in bed. Relatively speaking, foreigners are better at it. Men who can speak in a way that is both obscene and refined, crude and sincere. Most Japanese men don’t have it in them (195).

For example, the way in which an African American male foreigner can speak is disclosed in “X-Rated Blanket,” the heroine asserts, “it is his words, even more than his penis that turn into a naughty toy which makes me wild, makes me salivate. This is loving...George’s whispers make me crazy” (53). In Kneel Down, the heroine asserts, “Technique takes a secondary role. That’s why lots of clients say they are completely satisfied with purely verbal play” (194). On top of that, in “When a Man Loves a Woman,” the power of the African American’s language is the source of erotic attraction: “Never once did he stop talking to me, on and on in that sweet voice of his. What he was

saying wasn’t anything like those marvelous little lies men usually tell women they are making love to...He kept talking, and whenever he stopped I would urge him to go on” (114). The comfort that a woman feels when a man is able to say the right words is made known after the couple makes love, the female artist exclaims: “His talk had completely healed my sick and aching heart” (115). In essence, the joy of sex is not the act itself, but the way the lover is able to make the heroine feel through his choice of words:

What makes a woman the happiest in bed?...Is it my tongue or sex toys?” I answered his childish questions with one word, “Language.” After that he enumerated all sorts of dirty words and asked, “Is this the kind of language you mean?” I answered him like this, “No. You’ve got it all wrong. It’s the language of love.”

**African American Men are Not the Only Ones who Desire Love**

Some of the women in Yamada’s narratives think of nothing else but living, breeding, and engaging in sex. Some critics would seem to assert that African American men are the only lustful, sexual creatures in Yamada’s works, but in truth, in her fiction, all human beings are sexual creatures: men, women, Japanese men and women, African American men and women, and Caucasians as well. Yamada’s women “deviate from the traditional female sex role which emphasizes passivity and virginity.”

In fact, her women are quite aggressive and play an active role in their involvement with their African American lovers. This portrayal of women is not to be looked down upon but applauded because the author has captured a very human side of some women’s sexual drives. It is a necessary inclusion because it shows that men, especially African American men, are not the only ones who have an active libido. Indeed, given the fact that men and women of all “races” and nationalities can be obsessed with sexual love, the desires Yamada portrays

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48 Kuwahara, p. 109.
would seem to mitigate against the accusations that her portrayal of African American desire is casting African Americans in stereotypical roles.

Some women try desperately to seduce their mates into having sex, as the vivid account in “When a Man Loves a Woman” demonstrates. The female artist confesses her yearning desire as she recounts: “I snatched the book away from him and flung it across the room. Pouncing on him, I began undoing the buttons of his shirt...and started stroking his bare chest...” (117). Other women may not be quite as forceful, but the heroine in “X-Rated Blanket” candidly glorifies her sexual marathon: “All we do is make love. We can’t help it. We have to make love. Why do we have to make love? Because I love you” (52).

Even in Trash, Koko declares her passion to spend endless nights with her lover:

[Koko] wanted to stay locked away forever in this room with him, just the two of them. In this sacred place, money, jewelry, materials would have had no meaning. Koko thought. They would have known that most primitive state of being: two naked human beings possessing nothing but intangible love to save them (220).

Furthermore, these women do not shy away when it comes to drinking and partying. The heroines usually meet their male companions at a bar, the popular pick-up place in the late 80s and early 90s. For example, in Trash, Koko meets Rick in a nightclub in America; in Bedtime Eyes, Kim meets Spoon in a night club in Japan; and in “When a Man Loves a Woman,” the artist meets Willy Roy at the bar of a tropical beach resort. The majority of Yamada’s other works revolve around the night scene, perhaps because Yamada is comfortable with this kind of environment, since she met some of her African American lovers, including her current husband, at the nightclub on the Yokota Air Base.

Confronting African American Stereotypes

Perhaps it is true, as Cometyz points out, that Yamada’s novels can be construed to be immersed in stereotypical traits of African American men, all of which seem to reflect an
unbalanced or uneven view. Yet if we take a step back and take an honest account of these unflattering characteristics, then we realize that they are also aspects of the heroic in many literary characters common to all peoples. Heroes and villains fit the profile of Yamada’s characters. Her literary heroes and villains just happen to be Japanese and African American because those are the people who make up her bicultural world. She admits, “When I wake up in the morning, I see an African American guy’s face. So it’s natural for me to write about African Americans.” It is too easy to dismiss Yamada’s writings as racially insensitive, thereby simplifying her position in dealing with the most difficult and frustrating issue we face in our society, that is racism. In response to accusations that her books invite racial misconceptions, Yamada says:

I’m a bit afraid of being called a racist and that kind of thing. I’ve always liked James Baldwin, so I’ve always thought that if he could write the way he did, then I can write the way I do. I sometimes feel that he is accepted because he’s black, but I’m not. My beliefs start from the idea that differences of races and nationalities are not that important. But not all people read my books with that kind of cool judgment.

Name Calling

In our interview, Yamada told me that she was criticized for using the term, “nigger” in one of her earlier works, Jeshii no sebone. Perhaps one can say in short, that those on intimate terms with African Americans are able to use this word in a non-derogatory way. The word “nigger” has an ambiguous meaning since it is sometimes redefined by African Americans. It can be understood that within some contexts, the term

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49 See Cornetzy for a discussion of the many “stereotypical” images occurring and re-occurring in Yamada’s works.
50 Dowling, p. 26. Furthermore, in one of our interviews, asked if her characters in her novels are about African American men she knows personally or imaginative figures, she stated, “Both.”
52 Yamada Eimi’s dinner interview with Ayanna Hobbs on February 20, 1998. Yamada also stated that she was annoyed by the comments made by the critic because that person failed to realize that on occasion some African Americans use the term “nigger.” Yamada Eimi, Beddotaimu aizu. Yubi no tawamure, Jeshii no sebone, in Shinchô Bunko series, Tokyo: Shinchô, 1996, p. 283.
“nigger” does not always evoke a sense of degradation, rather one which strikes an affectionate chord between both the speaker and the listener. For example, two African Americans who are friends may greet each other with this kind of expression: “What’s up nigger?” If translated into standard English, it simply means, “Hello. How are you?” Even when referring to a close friend in admiration one might say, “Hey, that’s my nigger!” Which means, “Hey, that’s my good friend” in standard English. The use of the word “nigger” between African Americans in general, and occasionally between others in his/her “in-group” is sometimes acceptable because it can evoke a special meaning such as “dear,” “sweetie,” or “darling.”

In the end, this is a standard criticism of a non-black, like an Asian woman, who calls her former African American husband, the term “nigger” (kuronbo). But in this situation, the novel demonstrates a non-derogatory expression since the couple are within the same “in-group.” Therefore, Yamada appears to be familiar with the different ways in which the word may be used among some African Americans.

Not only have Yamada’s works come under attack, she, herself, has been defamed and ostracized by her critics and the media for her private love affairs with African American men. In the mid-80s she had to defend herself from being called a burasagari-zoku, and in the early 90s she had to counter the insult that she was a yellow cab. These accounts serve as examples of how Yamada’s image has been stereotyped.

According to the Encyclopedia of Japanese Pop Culture, zoku (subculture or tribe) as referred to by the local media in Japan, consist of perceived common preferences for a certain style, attitude, or behavior, in order to mark the zoku as different from the general Japanese population. The term burasagari-zoku can literally be translated as “arm-

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hangers,” a term which portrays Japanese women hanging onto the arms of their African American lovers. In the summer of 1985, Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS) aired a show about this subculture in Japan, and the lead-in defined the group in the following manner:

Cozying up to gaijin males, especially blacks, is all the rage. These girls who wrap themselves up in the arms of blacks are called burasagari-zoku, girls so kind that they look after their lover’s every need, from food to housing. There are not a few blacks who save up their money to jet to Japan all the way from the American mainland just to receive such favors. They call them katamichi kippu Joni (one-way-ticket Johnnies). For Japanese men, this is truly an alarming sight. These days, thirty years after [Japan’s surrender] it rouses deep emotions.54

In her article, “The Reason I Love Writing and Blacks,” Yamada for the first time protests against journalists, such as the one described in her article, who are filled with prejudice against “blacks” based on sensationalism and not always fact. She explains that when she tuned in to watch a television program aimed at housewives, a reporter was attempting to define burasagari-zoku, and then he characterized Yamada as a premiere example. She argues, however, that the media always seems to categorize young people in derogatory ways. For instance, in 1948 there were the ShayÔ-zoku (Setting Sun Tribe), in 1959 the Kaminari-zoku (Thunder Tribe) emerged, in 1964 there were the Miyuki-zoku (Miyuki Tribe), in the mid-70s they came up with the name BÔso-zoku (Wild Speed Tribe) and in the early 80s, there were the Takenoko-zoku (Bamboo Shoot Tribe). But what she finds remarkably different from the aforementioned zoku when compared to burasagari-zoku is that the latter “illustrates the prejudice of the Japanese people, in particular the prejudice of Japanese men...because it illuminates their deep-seated inferiority complex.”55

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Russell has compared Yamada’s works to that of the writer Ieda Shōko (b. 1968), since both writers are “chronicling sexual relations between black men and Japanese women, the black male body, and its legendary powers to pleasure and transform.”

Even Okada states that “Yamada enacts her own version of the Yellow Cab discourse around the color of men — her preferred male protagonist /object of desire — with whom she populates her stories.” It cannot be denied that the notion of high sexual prowess by African Americans is pervasive in the books of both authors when they focus on relations between Japanese women and African American men. However, these two writers are quite different. For instance, Ieda is a “nonfiction” author, and Yamada is not. Yamada does not promote or produce work under the guise of ethnographic interviews or journalistic endeavors as in the case of Ieda.

Take for example, Ieda’s best-seller, *Yellow Cab* (*Iero Kyabu*, 1991), in which she interviewed Japanese women living in New York and Los Angeles who have sexual relations with men, African American men being clearly overrepresented. In her book, Ieda suggests that the “nickname for [Japanese woman, yellow cabs...was originally used by African American men referring to Japanese women they had numerous sexual encounters with.” In her article, “Is it a Monkey? Or is it a Human Being?” Yamada explains how she got into a brawl with a Japanese man who referred to her as a yellow cab. Late one night Yamada went out drinking with her friend, and a man whom she was slightly acquainted with began laughing and taunting, so she boldly confronted him, and his response was, “What you two are doing is something

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that Ieda Shōko calls yellow cab. It’s something worse than a monkey.”

This led to a physical altercation. In this essay, Yamada brings up a case of seemingly inverse discrimination. The invention of the demeaning racial term yellow cab used in reference to young Japanese women has been attributed to African American men, but Yamada seems to think that it is a purely Japanese invention used to stigmatize young women who are associated with foreigners. In her works, Yamada does not attempt to label or affix strict codes of identification on her subjects.

Ieda’s books define a group of people in stereotypical ways based on statistical research. However, Ieda’s methodological strategy was questioned by a New York based group calling themselves the Iero Kyabu o Kangeru Kai (Association to Think Over the Yellow Cab Issue). This group consisting of Japanese and non-Japanese members, conducted a “survey in Manhattan in 1993 to see how widely known the term was, and not surprisingly found that none of the two-hundred Americans picked at random from the white pages had ever heard the phrase used in reference to anything other than a taxi.”

Furthermore, the investigation was skewed in favor of Japanese women who had encountered sexual violence by African Americans. Moreover, Ieda admitted in an interview conducted by Japan Times that her informants were “less than ten percent” of the Japanese women in New York. Despite Ieda’s questionable findings about this phenomenon, the Japanese mass media sought to play it up as a trend among young Japanese women. From this journalistic hysteria grew a television documentary entitled,

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60 Yamada Eimi, “'Ozaru-san ka ningen-sama ka' (Is it a Monkey? Or is it a Human Being?),” in Chūō Kōron, (bungei tokushû), 1993, p. 89.
61 Ma, p. 62-63.
"Yellow Cab," in which lifestyles of Japanese women dating African American men in New York were examined.63

Why are Yamada's representations of African American men important in Japan? Russell argues that Yamada's work perpetuates racial stereotyping of African Americans in Japan:

Unlike Baldwin, however, whose work attacked the distorted caricature of blacks prevalent in American popular culture and acknowledged the diversity of the black experience, thereby humanizing the black other, Yamada has chosen to trivialize the black experience, to exotize, eroticize, and exploit it, at all the time appropriating the style but not the substance of alienated humanity. Unlike Ariyoshi Sawako's Hishoku (Not Because of Color, 1963), which dealt unglamorously with the realities of racism and class in the United States, Yamada's black fictions remain little more than sensational entertainment that present a synecdochical view of blacks and manipulate the popular iconography about them all so pervasive in Japanese mass media and popular culture.64

Judging from Yamada's own opinions about her writings, however, nothing could have been further from her intention since the creation of stereotypes is contradictory to her purpose. True, the African American experience she projects is limited. However, it was never her goal to represent the totality of the African American experience in the United States. Rather, the value of her representation lies in the fact that she writes from her personal experience. Yamada argues that she does not use African Americans to create a sensation, "but because African Americans are very much a part of my life." She is telling her side of the story, and it captures only a part of the cultural habits and traditions of African-Americans. Critics and readers alike must remember that Yamada's exposure to African Americans is generally limited to military men stationed in Japan. Their lifestyle represents just a fraction of the whole, and it is impossible to categorize or define the entire African American race based on a minute population because as she states, "human beings

63 "Kinyobi Terebi no Hoshi," Iero Kyabu (Yellow Cab) Aohai Terebi (TV Asahi), Jan. 29, 1992. In addition, before Ieda's reports were called into question, she had appeared regularly on Japanese television.
are complex creatures." At times that personal experience seems to transcend categories of "racial difference," perhaps in sexual moments or moments of verbal communication. If these moments seem racist, perhaps it is the problem of the reader and not the author. The next author we take a look at is Yamada’s favorite Japanese writer.  

66 Yamada Eimi’s telephone conversation with Ayanna Hobbs in 1998. When I told Yamada that my interview with Murakami Ryū was confirmed, she said that I would have a wonderful time because he is so kind.
CHAPTER 4

MISSIONARY POSITION AND BEYOND BLACK EROTOMANIA

I am in effect setting up moral codes and standards which include drugs, orgy, music, and primitive magic as worship rituals -- educational tools which are supposedly contrary to our cultural mores.
Allen Ginsberg, San Francisco Oracle, 1967

Perhaps the most effective argument presenting the case for racist imagery in Japanese literature can be found in a critique of the writings of Murakami Ryū (full name Ryūnosuke). However, it is often the case that Japanese writers accused of racism have not been able to defend themselves in an English-language publication. After providing a brief biography and introduction as to how I came to know Murakami, I will afford him the opportunity to present his opinions about African Americans in his work Almost Transparent Blue (Kagiri naku tōmei ni chikai burū, 1976; tr. 1977) through an interview I conducted with him. Thereafter, I will conclude with a discussion on the representations of African Americans in this book.¹

Murakami was born on February 19, 1952, in Sasebo, Nagasaki, which is on the west coast of Kyūshū, dominated by a U.S. Navy base. Influenced by his father, who
was an art teacher, he enrolled in the Department of Basic Design at Musashino College of Art in Tokyo for his undergraduate studies. He is an international traveler. His adventures include journeys to America, Cuba, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. However, his most extensive travels are throughout Africa. For his honeymoon, he visited Kenya and Tanzania because he is fond of animals. Since then, he has toured the northern and western parts of Africa, countries such as Morocco, Nigeria, and Senegal. Even though he has explored many wonders of the world, he finds traveling to be a hassle and hectic, especially since his wife did not accompany him on his business trips after their child was born. Usually family excursions include places such as Hawaii and Tokyo Disneyland when time permits.\(^2\)

Murakami is a man of many talents and creative visions. In addition to being a prolific and preeminent novelist, he has engaged in a number of projects in the entertainment industry. For a short span in the 1980s, Murakami hosted his own television program entitled, “Ryū’s Bar,” as well as his own radio show. He has a love for music and owns a record label, “Mura-kami’s.” Moreover, he has a strong appreciation for foreign music, particularly Cuban music, and he has used his influences promoting the fourteen member Cuban group, “NG la Band” in Osaka and Tokyo. Murakami has also translated American rock-and-roll music, such as three songs by The Doors: “People are Strangers,” “The Crystal Ship,” and “Moonlight Drive.”\(^3\) He is a movie director and writer -- although his films are usually independent, low budget productions -- in 1983,

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2 Murakami Ryū’s personal interview with Ayanna Hobbs on May 27, 1998.
3 *Suiso no tobira no mukoe: rokku orijinaru yakushishu*, Tokyo: Shichōsha, 1989. This book contains selected English and German popular rock music translated into Japanese, and Murakami is one of the five contributing translators.
"Daijobu, Mai Furendo" (All Right, My Friend), starring Peter Fonda, did earn him recognition in the international film industry.

During Murakami’s undergraduate days he wrote *Almost Transparent Blue*, the most sensational piece of Japanese literature created in 1976. The novel earned him two awards, namely, the 19th Gunzō Prize for New Talent and the 75th Akutagawa Prize. And like Yamada’s debut novel which was an instant success, Murakami’s book sold over 1,200,000 copies in the first six months after publication. 4 Perhaps the high degree of interest for this book is attributable to the fact that Murakami presents a new perspective on Japanese literature. As pointed out by literary critic, Akiyama Shun:

> The mainstream of postwar literature, in which hypersensitivity to an atmosphere of constant social unrest or to the frustrations of everyday life was prominent feature, has become stagnant. This is a state that is both annoying and frustrating for the literary public, readers, and critics alike. People have begun to crave new literature reflecting the social movements that are going on before our eyes. They want to read about the waves of change that we are actually experiencing from day to day. 5

Unlike the prevailing literary current, Murakami’s work boldly captures and exposes a subculture of Japanese youth living near U.S. military bases in the 70s. It is evident that Murakami’s novel did not receive the coveted Akutagawa Prize because of any noteworthy advances in literary style or techniques, but because of its engaging and impressive feat of introducing the emergence of a new, alternative lifestyle or counterculture: what Shun calls Japanese hippie culture. 6 As one of the judges for the prestigious Akutagawa Award said,

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5 Ibid.
“There’s no doubt but that this is the first work to present a vivid, three-dimensional perspective of ‘the age of rock and fuck.”’

*Almost Transparent Blue* presents a progressive approach to depicting the contemporary (sexual) issues of young Japanese people. Shun’s observation is true in that the characters in the book provide a paradigm of how the infiltration of American hippiedom influenced a small percentage of the younger generation in Japan, and we see similarities in the activities and values of both groups. In the 60s and 70s, America witnessed the “sex, drugs, and rock ‘n roll” movement, a movement that influenced Japan as well. In many ways, Murakami is advocating and celebrating the (American) hippie credo -- if it feels good, then do it -- which meant the participants should be sexually liberated, chemically stimulated, and musically uplifted.

In his story, foreign influences are pervasive in the depiction of the counterculture he so vividly describes. First, drugs were utterly intrinsic to the American underground lifestyle. In this novel, Murakami describes the effects of the many different kinds of drugs (or in American hippie culture, “dope”) used by the characters in a daily routine; for instance, they exercise license over a wide range of substances such as, *hallucinogens*: acid, hash, marijuana, mescaline; *narcotics*: morphine; *stimulants*: Philopon (Benedrine); and *other drugs*: Hyminal and Nibrole. Second, Murakami illustrates his familiarity with rock music, which plays an integral role in this kind of alternative lifestyle, by his frequent name-dropping of American music created by The Doors, James Brown, Jimi Hendrix, Mick Jagger, Pink Floyd, Rolling Stones, and Sly and the Family Stone. Drugs and music were employed only as the backdrop; they were treated as a stimulus for erotic exhilaration or as a sedative for numbing the pain and suffering caused after sexual encounters,

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7 Shun.
especially hard-core intercourse. Finally, as indicated by Timothy Miller, an expert on American hippiedom, the predominant inclination among the counterculture was toward sex and sexual freedom on the grounds of pleasure and individual free choice. Miller goes on to say that “most [American] hippies did not condemn orgies, but neither were they attracted to organized sex, since the hip spirit of liberated sex was one of spontaneity, not sex with as many partners as possible...organized sex conduct was utterly inferior to the caring relationships, or at least honest pleasure, the counterculture advocated.” Here lies the distinction between American and Japanese underground culture, or at least as depicted in Almost Transparent Blue, because unlike their American counterparts, Japanese hippies celebrated and glorified organized sex parties.

In the novel, sexual experiences take on many explicit, unrestrained forms and shapes. Sex is heterosexual and bisexual, interracial and monoracial, bimorphemic and polymorphemic, and finally violent and torturous. Moreover, Murakami’s, like Yamada’s tales of sexual eroticism, have been criticized and looked down upon for their intense pornographic episodes. However, perhaps due to gender differences their approach to and attitude about the way in which sex is performed is contradictory, in that, Murakami’s Almost Transparent Blue has an alarming tendency to defile and degrade women during sexual intercourse. And it is blatantly obvious that at the forefront of the infliction of harm to the Japanese women are African American GIs, who ironically, play only a marginal role in the entire novel.

This is unlike Yamada’s portrayal of African American men, who are usually central characters and have the ability to leave an impressionable, long-lasting, sweet tasting wholesome effect upon the female conquered. In her essay, “The Reason I Love Literature and Blacks,” Yamada explains that “Americans make a distinction between

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9 Ibid., p. 62.
“FUCK” and “MAKE LOVE;” and of these two phrases, the one which makes a woman feel good is to make love.”11 Clearly, in Murakami’s work, “making love” takes a back seat to “fucking” because the African American GIs are portrayed as having a “hard heart” attached to a “hard penis;” and are not the slightest bit interested in pleasing or acquiescing to the wishes of their partner. The notion of forced-entry sex is not new to Japanese entertainment. Japanese manga, for instance, are inundated with stories of women with their legs sprawled open while crying and screaming for the abuse to stop. However, this kind of sexual intercourse is usually depicted as an act of pleasure, and the women are viewed as willing participants. Murakami paints a similar picture, but with a different twist: the victims are Japanese women, and their abusers are no longer Japanese men, but foreigners, specifically African American men taking an extreme and an improper advantage of the situation.

**CONTACTING MURAKAMI RYÛ**

I decided that I wanted to meet the man who wrote about African American men and women drugged up and engaged in pornographic sexual episodes. I wanted to determine if this novelist created sensational stories about the Other in order to sell books. I felt that it was unlikely for him to have had direct relationships with African Americans, and especially on such a distorted level.

I went to the library at the International Christian University (ICU) in Tokyo, where I was an exchange student (1997-1998), and searched for his contact information. That same day, on a Saturday afternoon I telephoned his home. I briefly rehearsed my lines in Japanese, and then I picked up the phone and called his number. Someone, perhaps his

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10 Ibid., pp. 66-67.
wife, answered the phone, I introduced myself and asked to speak with Murakami. The very gracious voice said to me in an apologetic tone that her husband was not there, but she encouraged me to call back the next day after 2:00 p.m. because that is when Murakami was scheduled to return home. I followed her advice and I tried back a day later, but this time, the person who answered the phone was Murakami, himself. Once again, I introduced myself and explained my aspiration to interview him for my master’s thesis. I told him that I had already met with Yamada Eimi about a similar subject, which was the treatment of African Americans in Japanese literature. To my delight, he granted my request and said, “Yes, but I’m not sure of my schedule so please call my literary agent at Gentōsha, Mr. Ishihara, to arrange a date and time.” I expressed my gratitude and then I started skipping with joy along the Meiji avenue near Waseda University, the place I was to meet my friends for a late afternoon of Thai food.

The following day I contacted Ishihara to set up an interview appointment with Murakami. After Ishihara asked a few questions, concerning when I wanted the interview and how long it would take, he said that he would call me back with concrete details later. The following weekend, I decided to visit Murakami’s home because I had not heard anything from his literary agent. So an ICU colleague and myself went to Yokohama. As we stood in front of his house taking pictures, she asked me, “Aren’t you going in?” I was surprised at her suggestion because I had not visited his house to call upon him unannounced but to investigate what kind of place he lived in. Furthermore, I did not want to ruin my chances of actually meeting him because I felt as though Murakami’s agent would be calling any day. But she encouraged me to utilize this opportunity to its fullest. And I agreed. As I was reaching for the intercom, a black car approached and stopped in front of me. The lady in the car asked me what was the nature of my call. I explained that

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11 Yamada Eimi, “Watashi ga bungaku to kokujin o aisuru wake” (“The Reason I Love Literature and
I wanted to contact Murakami, and then she said that she remembered my previous phone call. She informed me that Murakami was away in Korea and would be back tomorrow; however he would be flying to France a week later, so I had better remind Ishihara about my request.

The next day, I was going to contact Ishihara just as Murakami’s wife suggested, but when I returned home late Monday night, I received a message from Ishihara which said to meet Murakami on Friday at 4:00 p.m. I was elated after reading the memo and I did not sleep that night. On Tuesday afternoon, I returned his call for confirmation, and I asked him where the interview would take place. When he said that the interview was scheduled at the Century Hyatt in Shinjuku I immediately became alarmed because I thought a place such as a hotel was a bizarre and inappropriate place to meet. I was uncomfortable with the suggestion so I suddenly asked if a friend could accompany me; and his response was surprising, “How many would you like to bring?” (I subsequently learned that it was customary for famous writers to meet interviewers at hotels). After our conversation, I began to prepare a list of questions in Japanese with the assistance of my classmate, Kudo Masaru. This collaboration was later essential because my friend informed me that when authors are being interviewed they are usually addressed as sensei (teacher). In addition, my classmate served as a stand-in for Murakami, and I rehearsed the questions with him over and over again. Furthermore, John Russell, an anthropologist, suggested some questions to ask at the meeting. And for the final preparation, two of my Japanese language instructors reviewed my introductory statement and interview questions.

On May 27, 1998, accompanied by two classmates from ICU, I went to Century Hyatt, but before going to the hotel I stopped in my preferred florist shop and purchased a gratitude bouquet of fresh flowers. After arriving, I did exactly what I was instructed to do

by Ishihara. I went to the hotel house phone and asked the operator to connect me with Murakami’s suite in order to let him know that I was on my way up to his room. After carrying out the details, I was finally there, face to face with the man of the hour. I handed him his flowers, and in turn, he gave me one of his favorite Cuban CD’s entitled, “Hey, You, Loca!” by David Calzado & La Charanga Habanera. With his permission, our interview was tape-recorded and lasted an hour. The contents of our discussion had a three-fold purpose: 1) to gain knowledge of Murakami’s family background; 2) to learn more about his experience near American military bases in Nagasaki and Tokyo; and 3) to understand how his involvement, if any, with African Americans influenced the writing of his award-winning novel, Almost Transparent Blue.

INTERVIEW WITH MURAKAMI RYÛ 12

Ayanna: Where did you meet your wife?
Ryû: I met my wife during my junior year in college. You see, she is older than me, and she was working as a piano teacher at Musashino Music University, and I was still a student.

Was she your first love?
No, because I was already around twenty-something and it’s more common for one to experience their first love while still in middle school.

Do you have any siblings?
Yes, there are two of us, my younger sister and I. Right now she is married and lives in Hokkaido with her family.

Speaking of family, how many children do you have?
I have one child. A seventeen year old son who is now in high school. He is studying English, although his favorite subject is chemistry.

You're a native of Sasebo, Nagasaki. What was it like growing up in that part of Kyōshū?
Perhaps the main attraction of Sasebo was the American Marine base with all those sailors parading around town.

During your childhood days, what did you find the most exciting? Playing with my friends was the most exciting. But because it was so many years ago, we could only play baseball, catchball, soccer since there weren't any video games or television sets back then. Although that was during grade school, things changed once I entered high school.
What did you do differently in high school?
At that time I participated in more school related activities like getting involved in the newspaper club. But it was not so simple. I was the editor and a reporter, but due to the school regulating political issues--which was right around the time of the Vietnam War--students were banned from writing about the American student movement against the war. Even more so because the military base was in close proximity and the Marines were keeping a close watch.

Since you lived near an American military base did you have an opportunity to meet and/or see many foreigners?
Yes, but they were all Marines. Now, though, that's not the case so Japanese people don't get a chance to meet as many foreigners as before. But during my childhood days, Japanese people thought African Americans were scary because they didn't really know them.

You did, in fact, see African Americans growing up?
Yes. I often saw African Americans and white sailors playing baseball inside the Marine base that was around my neighborhood. And what stood out the most, was the fact that the African Americans were swift on their feet and talented in baseball. I also liked their music and stuff... you see, I just liked them.

Did you ever have any African American friends?
Yes, I played with half-African Americans.

What do you mean by “half”?
I am referring to the children of Japanese people who are married to African Americans. Of course, we played baseball together since there was nothing else for us to do in those days, but we sure had fun.

What books, if any, did you read involving African Americans while in school?
As a child, I read the usual thing, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

What was your opinion of the book?
If many African Americans are on base, then the Japanese will get used to them and they will not be afraid of African Americans. For example, when I read the book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, I learned that African Americans were slaves many years ago, and I thought that was an extremely harsh situation. I felt sorry for them, but in no way do I look at them in a “special” way. Let me see, how shall I put it. African Americans were forever discriminated against and that kind of racism is still prevalent in today’s society. I read that book thoroughly, but I can’t agree with those terrible conditions, maybe because I uphold the principle of democracy.
Have you ever read the book, ChibikuroSambo?
Yes. It was an interesting fairy tale.

What do you remember about the book?
It was a cute story. The most delightful part is when the tiger just goes around and around in circles and turns into butter. Oh! That was the most unique part because I kept wondering why the tiger melted into butter.

Why did you move from beautiful Kyūshū to come to Tokyo?
Needless to say, young people like the city. Not necessarily for the purpose of only playing around, but because the countryside can be rather boring.

Were you a popular guy during your college days in Tokyo?
Yeah, I had a lot of friends. As I said before, I grew up on the fringes of an American military base, so living near the Air Force base in Tokyo was quite comfortable, I felt right at home. It was only a 15 minute walk from my apartment to the base. Besides, I liked the many American GIs who were around. And during that time, I was a hippie. Do you know what that is?

A hippie? Yes, I do. Do you have any pictures?
[Laughs] No, no way. I must have been around seventeen or eighteen years old, right around the time the hippie movement was popular. I wore my hair long and I dressed similar to David Bowie, the way he dressed when he first hit the scene. His style of dress was a hot trend in those days. And it’s interesting because that period resembles today’s fashion, in fact, it’s exactly the same. Anyhow, hippies weren’t exactly welcomed. For me to find a house or room to rent in Tokyo was almost impossible since the landlords frowned upon hippies. But there was this one owner who really understood different people, so he rented to anyone. What a really good man! When it came time for me to move into the place, I then discovered that all the other renters were African American GIs.

So did you make a lot of African American friends?
Yes, together, we would often listen to music, but not so much Japanese music. Instead, we listened to a lot of jazz and soul music...They [African Americans] had lots of soul music. But, now I don’t much care for jazz and blues because the melody is not so wonderful. I also don’t like to listen to white people’s music like country songs. Actually, I’m rather fond of Cuban music.

You mention in Almost Transparent Blue, African American singers like Jimi Hendrix and James Brown. Do you like soul music?
My favorite solo artist is the great Jimi Hendrix, and I think Sly and the Family Stone are a great music group. But back then, there were so many African American artists that we listened to, like Earth, Wind and Fire, Jazz Crusaders, and Tyrannosaurs Rex.
Yamada Eimi now lives in Fussa. Did you live in the same place as her? Perhaps, but I don’t think so. You see, the apartment I once lived in has now been demolished...you know that was 25 years ago. Since then, Fussa has been transformed. Back then there was a lot of GIs housing facilities, but now they no longer exist.

What language did you use when your were talking to the African American GIs?
English. But the African American GIs knew a little Japanese. Actually, I really spoke in “broken English.” I suppose that I could manage in an English-speaking environment like going on trips and so forth. However, business English is a little difficult for me, but I have on occasion been interviewed in English.

Do you still keep in contact with those African Americans you made friends with while in Fussa?
No. But, there is this one person I saw when I was on location filming Almost Transparent Blue. It had been six years since we last saw each other, because I had moved away from living near the base. Anyhow, he yelled out my name, “Ryū,” I looked around to find August from Louisiana. We were really good friends in those days.

You must have fond memories of your time in living in Fussa?
No, not really. Today when I look back on the past I feel like I was living in HELL. When you are young, you try anything and everything, like for me, I tried drugs. After all, it was during Vietnam War.

What kind of drugs did you experiment with?
Extremely strange kind of drugs. But, you know when it comes to drugs, the tastes of African Americans and white people differs. Take for example, white people like the psychological drugs such as LSD and so forth, but African American don’t. Instead, they like natural drugs -- no chemicals -- like cocaine, heroin and marijuana.

Did you experiment with drugs before going to Fussa city?
Yeah. I grew up in Sasebo where there were a lot of Marines. Once I was arrested for possession of marijuana when I was twenty years old, and that’s when my parents found out. I liked using drugs at that time because it gave me mental and psychological freedom...besides it was the cool thing to do. You know, I received a kind of education while doing drugs. All artists used drugs...it was just that kind of era.

When did you enter Almost Transparent Blue in the Gunzō literary contest?
It was published when I was twenty-four years old. Although I wrote it at the age of twenty-three, while still in my senior year of college. But I later dropped out of school.

Why didn’t you finish your college education?
[laughs] I didn’t go to school so I knew I wouldn’t be able to graduate. Besides, there was no way I could adjust to the life of being a salaryman or employee of a company.
How did you come up with ideas for this masterpiece?
It’s a semi-autobiography.

Which parts are true?

And did you engage in orgies?
[Laughs] NO COMMENT.

How long did the writing process take?
I wrote it in my apartment and the actual writing time took about a week, but I had been jotting memos down here and there. I was trying to submit it before the deadline so I wrote it quickly, and even today I can write fast...although writing fast is nothing to boast about.

How did you feel when you won the Akutagawa Prize?
I felt FREEDOM. I needed the money to survive since I wasn’t going to be able to graduate and I didn’t have a part time job during college. My parents sent me 50,000 yen per month, which was about the average monthly allowance in those days, but, still that wasn’t a lot of money. And what’s more, I strongly believed that I did not want to become your traditional salaryman, like other college students who went to work in a company after graduation. I could do whatever I wanted without any restraints from my parents. I was extremely satisfied!

Why do you think Almost Transparent Blue won the Akutagawa Prize? For example, what specifically set your book apart from others at that time?
I did not understand it at the time I won the award, but now I know the reason. When considering Japan or any Southeast Asian country experiencing the emergence of modernization, the literature of that country also echoes the consciousness of modernism. About twenty or thirty years ago, the market was reflecting the will of Nixon’s economic measures and the American dollar was approximately worth 360 Japanese yen. However, the Japanese monetary system of floating rates is one in which rates fluctuate, so the dollar began to depreciate, and at the time of my debut book, one dollar was worth about 198 Japanese yen. On the macroeconomics level, Japanese modernization had ran its course, so did Japanese modern literature. As I see it, my debut novel, was right on the tail end of the modern era.

Why did you decide to include African Americans in this book?
Because it is about my friends in real life. What I really want to say is that not only do I like African Americans, but all blacks from all over like Caribbean, Cuba, and South America. I like them better than whites.

What is the difference between the two races?
Black people and I just FIT...maybe because of the discrimination against them. Black people are kind and considerate to others who have encountered discriminatory practices. I enjoy their music and style of dancing. And they are also generally good at playing sports.
How did you come up with the names for the African American characters in your book?
I used the names of my African American friends.

Have any Western or African American authors influenced your writing?
Take, for example, Yamada Eimi, she likes the writings of James Baldwin. As far as African American writing, I have not read much. Anyhow, I don’t read many novels, except for Yamada’s books and French literature in translation. Although I can’t speak French, I can speak a little Spanish, and of course Kyūshū dialect.

Since this book has been translated into English, what do you think African Americans feel about the contents in this book? Specifically, their portrayal as being smelly, drug sellers, and violent?
It wasn’t my intention for readers to come away with the idea that all African Americans like orgies or drugs. I just wanted to write about African Americans’ power to survive in contrast to Japanese people.

What about the parts in your novel where African American men, like Jackson, rape Japanese women?
Not only African Americans, but all GIs were frustrated because of the Vietnam War. Even though there were many ethnic groups on the military base, everyone felt a sense of discrimination and, in turn, they became irritated. I had lots of African American friends and when we were hanging out drinking or doing drugs together, a lot of things just happened. But that was a special case. The African American characters in the novel are not typical of all people in their race. Anyhow there was no rape in my book!

Do you have any African American friends now?
I have one in New York. But not in Japan because I don’t have a chance to meet them on the account of my busy schedule. Wait a minute, I take that back, I do have one African American friend who manages the English version of my web page on Internet.

If you heard the word, “African American,” what would come to mind?
I don’t think of them in any special way. On the other hand, a chance to meet them would be fun.
If you heard the word, “Japanese,” what would come to mind?

What about “white” people?
There are many kinds of white people like Latinos and WASP, but I prefer the Latinos. I don’t like WASP because we don’t get along with each other. But when I’m shooting a movie there are many races involved and I’m not conscious of whether they are white, Latino, or African American because they are all humans...people are people.
Do you have any African Americans whom you admire?
Michael Jordan because he is an incredible player. The height he reaches when he dunks...that's amazing. One day I would like to meet him. I also like Dennis Rodman because he's a lot of fun. I think it's extremely interesting to have a variety of people in the world; but those people who dye their hair, pierce their bodies, and decorate themselves with tattoos are lonely people. More than likely they were once underprivileged kids who are now looking for attention in their adult life.

What about people other than sports figures? For example, writers, educators, and so forth.
Denzel Washington, but I guess he's still an entertainer.

What did you think of the late 80s and early 90s so-called "kokujin-boom" in Japan?
It doesn't mean anything...It has no merit. To say the word "boom" is the same as saying "FASHION." Like the example, I gave earlier, it's no different than a Japanese guy walking around Shibuya looking like an African American rapper, but can't speak a lick of English.

What is the attraction of U.S. military bases for Japanese people?¹³
That's a tough one because it's an incredibly big problem. I just can't give you a simple explanation.

How have things changed, if at all, since the 70s?
American military bases throughout Japan, except in Okinawa, have been reduced. It's difficult to explain, but there are two kinds of Japanese people: those who adore America and those who don't. In fact, it's too complex to ascertain these differences because the Japanese are good at hiding their feelings. In the past there were some troubled times due to the war, but economic relations with both countries were accommodating and viable. In recent years, however, communication has deteriorated, in part, because the Japanese younger generation has shown great apathy in foreign affairs. You see years ago, if there was someone who appreciated jazz, then that person would go abroad to study jazz in America. Direct contact with foreigners and foreign nations has become less frequent on the part of the young Japanese. The result of this kind of attitude is realized when, for example, you see a cool-looking Japanese guy dressed like a rapper, but he can't speak any English nor is he interested in learning more about America. On the other hand, I remember when I was young, I was so anxious to understand all the lyrics to the Beatles songs that I looked up every single word in the dictionary.

¹³ When I asked Yamada the same question, she stated, "The Japanese girls realize that it's a cheap trip to meet and be with foreigners."
What do you make of all those reports from the mid-80s early 90s about Japanese women who flock to American bases?\textsuperscript{14} That's also a tough one.

Do you think that Yamada Eimi's debut novel was a catalyst to this phenomenon? I don't think her book bears any relation because that was going on before her book was published. Needless to say, some Japanese girls are simply attracted to African American men. It's a difficult issue for the Japanese, but it's hard for them to say "I'm Japanese" with pride. The "physical" aspect that African American men are viewed as "great sexual lovers," is not the issue, but rather it's more "symbolic." For example, suppose you have one group of Japanese girls who are extremely adventurous and date African American soldiers, and suppose you have another group of Japanese girls who are conservative. On a deeper level, all these girls are similar, although one group seems to be more open in expressing their desires. Both groups have the same roots because they are attracted to non-Japanese things, they want to break free from the Japanese Garden and plant seeds in another country's garden.

The film you directed based on Almost Transparent Blue was relatively tame compared to the book, particularly the interracial sex scenes.\textsuperscript{15} Was there any government censorship? That movie came out in 1978. I'm not sure if it was popular, but it didn't make a profit. It was my first movie and I didn't have much experience in the film industry. The producer wanted to appoint an "adult" to be the director because he felt that a kid, like myself, could not do a successful job. But eventually I turned out to be the person in charge. And now, the movie is on Internet. Although, at first, I had a plan to use a server in America and make it a porn website in order to receive a lot of money. However, I later gave up on the idea because there was a chance I could have been arrested. So I opted to put it on an adult site, and not a porn one.

What is your latest project about? My next movie project will be an independent production filmed in New York entitled, "AIDS Eve." This is a symbolic title, meaning the days before AIDS. The plot is about a famous Japanese prostitute who has an Hispanic pimp and together they engage in criminal activity throughout the city of New York in the mid-70s. My other movie will be filmed in Japan and it is based on one of my most recent books. However, these film projects will be produced after I finish writing my latest story entitled, Exodus in a Hopeful Country.

\textsuperscript{14} When I asked Yamada, she said, "Well, I'm not interested in other people, but if they can get on the base, then they should go for it!"

\textsuperscript{15} John Russell, "Race and Reflexivity: The Black Other in Contemporary Japanese Mass Culture," in Cultural Anthropology, v. 6 (1991), no. 1 (Feb.) p. 23. In this article, Russell explains that the "film version, directed by Murakami, soft-peddles the novel's explicit interracial sex scenes and is tame even by the censor-sensitive standards of Japanese visual pornography. Only one orgy scene survives; the partially clad black actors engage in stylized writhing atop their Japanese partners, yet never so much as even kiss them, as if the director believed such intimate contact contaminating."
This is a futuristic novel, set in Japan 2001 and is about a riot among junior high school boys. It should be available in bookstores by next year.\footnote{Murakami Ryū’s telephone interview with Ayanna Hobbs on February 20, 1999. The information presented here is from a follow-up interview with Murakami.}

**AFRICAN AMERICANS AS “FORBIDDEN PLEASURES”**

The interview resulted in a concrete understanding that Murakami based some of the images of African Americans in the novel on his African American friends in real life. Since his involvement with African Americans was confined to military men, it is apparent that his perspective of African Americans was limited. Furthermore, since Murakami left his living environment with African American GIs, the content and focus of his later works, consisting of nearly 45 books, rarely include African American figures. However, in his novel, *Kyoko*, there is an African American limousine driver named Ralph, who becomes a friend to the protagonist, Kyoko, a Japanese dancer in search of her former dance teacher.\footnote{Also see Murakami’s movie adapted version of *Kyoko*: *Kyoko* (1995) Directed and written by Murakami, produced by Dela Corporation, distributed by Nikkatsu. The African American limousine driver is played by Scott Whitehurst.}

Even though Murakami claims that he had many African American friends during the time he spent in Tokyo, his treatment of African Americans in *Almost Transparent Blue* is not a balanced one. One reason for this unevenness is the fact that the African Americans in his novel do not play major roles but are peripheral. This kind of representation raises the question of whether Murakami’s friendship with African Americans was more of a shallow, superficial relationship and less of a deep, profound one.\footnote{From the novel, African American GIs are only drawn to center stage when they are featured in two orgy scenes replete with drugs and music. Murakami presents African}

\footnote{From the novel, African American GIs are only drawn to center stage when they are featured in two orgy scenes replete with drugs and music. Murakami presents African}
Americans in familiar stereotypical roles, such as exotic sexual studs, drug addicts, and persons having pungent body odors.

Among the reviews of *Almost Transparent Blue*, an in-depth analysis and focus on the representations of race is not available. There are, however, a few critics, John Russell, Glynne Walley, Michael Molasky and Yamashita Sayako, who briefly touch on the treatment of African American servicemen in this novel. The Other, as Russell argues, is constructed in terms of sexual prowess:

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. This change in attitude is suggested in Murakami Ryū's Akutagawa Prize winning *Kagiri naku tōmei ni chikai burū*, an explicit tale of decadence that graphically depicts the sexual exploits of a group of dissatisfied Japanese youths involved with black GIs stationed at Yokota Air Base. Drug use, orgies, and human debasement dominate this novel of sexual excess in which stereotypes of black sexuality abound.19

What kind of sexual images can be visualized by the reader? When any fiction endeavors to examine the issue of race, particularly written by a non-African American novelist, it usually is subjected to suspicion and attempts at censorship because opponents assume the characters to be caricatures or stereotypes.20 Take, for instance, the controversial *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) by Mark Twain or *The Story of Little Black Sambo* (1899) by Helen Bannerman: the latter was banned in both Japan and the United States.21 In the case of *Almost Transparent Blue*, what familiar conventions of

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18 Murakami Ryū’s telephone interview with Ayanna Hobbs on February 20, 1999. In our conversation, Murakami once again stated, “I really like African American people.”
21 In Japan, *The Story of Little Black Sambo*, “was the all-time best-seller in the juvenile section, selling more than 1.2 million copies since its first publication in 1953.” Quoted from: “Attacked for Racism, Publisher Shelves its Best-Selling Children’s Book,” in *Japan Times*, Jan. 20, 1989. For other news articles related to the banning of *The Story of Little Black Sambo*, see: Gary Mukai, “The Media in U.S.-
African Americans are at the crux of Russell’s argument? Upon review of the book, there seems to be a few prominent stereotypical themes.

Sander L. Gilman commented that in German literature the case of “black” sexuality is tied to their genitalia. In fact, this phenomenon is also evident in Japanese literary works. As in Yamada’s novels, Murakami engages in the exercise of comparing the size of the African Americans’ penises to those of other “races.” For example, in Yamada’s Bedtime Eyes narrated by the protagonist Kim, there is a description of how her African American lover’s penis is more satisfying than that of a Japanese: “[Spoon’s] dick was completely different from the ugly reddish cocks of white men and different again from the pitiable juvenile things of Japanese men, cocks that could only stand up straight and hard inside a pussy.” With Almost Transparent Blue, the Japanese girl, Kei initiates a “penis competition” by searching for the most prominent phallus during an orgy party. Yet Kei does not just compare the Japanese to the non-Japanese; but African American men are measured with other African Americans, who are, sometimes, part Japanese.

Bob’s huge cock was stuffed all the way in Kei’s mouth. Ah’m jes gonna see who’s got the biggest. She crawled around the rug like a dog and did the same for everyone. Discovering that the largest belonged to a half-Japanese named Saburo, she took a cosmos flower from an empty vermouth bottle and stuck it in as a trophy. Hey Ryū, his is twice the size of the one ya got (37).

This scene substantiates the familiar myth that African American men possess exceptionally large penises. For instance, in the original Japanese version the penis is not described as ooki (big), but instead, with adjectives of exaggerated dimensions such as kyodai (huge, enormous) and saidai (maximum, greatest).

Black or blackness as signifying sexual perversion and rape is a mainstay in the portrayal of African American characters. In the 1950s, Ōe Kenzaburō’s “Prize Stock” likened the sexual release of the African American pilot, who is held hostage in a remote village in Japan, to that of other animals; thus the pilot engages in intercourse with a billy goat. By the time Murakami began to write *Almost Transparent Blue*, then, the idea of black sexuality as pathological was already internalized in Japan. However, the difference rests in the fact that in Murakami’s tale, African Americans copulate with human beings to release their sexual urges. For instance, the narrator Ryū, coordinates elaborate organized sex parties and brings Japanese men and women to African Americans, just as the village children in “Prize Stock” bring a goat to the African American in order to view his intercourse for their entertainment.

Both Ōe and Murakami exoticize the sexuality of African Americans in their works. Thus, the focus here is to identify the specific ways in which African Americans are depicted in Murakami’s piece for the purpose of determining whether racist overtones or prejudiced attitudes are lurking in the novel. This evaluation can be carried out by examining the orgy scenes that depict the unbridled passions of African American servicemen and an African American woman (although a Caucasian woman is involved, her role is extremely marginal).

This kind of portrayal of African Americans as an oversexed race -- innately animalistic -- to the point of committing acts of sexual violence is implicit in the “pornographic” orgy scenes graphically portrayed in *Almost Transparent Blue*. Although

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24 Russell, “Race and Reflexivity,” p. 23. Russell quoted from Ian Buruma: “The image of the black GIs as rapists has become something of a staple of Japanese pornography and films about the Occupation.”
Murakami insisted in our interview that there is no depiction of rape in his book, the following passage makes it difficult not to assume misogynistic tendencies:

Saburo easily picked her up. He pulled her legs open, just as if he were helping a little girl to piss, and lifted her onto his belly. His huge left hand gripping her head and his right pinning her ankles together, he held her so that all her weight hung on his cock. Reiko yelled, That hurts, and stuck out her hands, trying to pull away, but she couldn’t grab on to anything.

Her face was getting pale.

Saburo, moving and spreading his legs to get more friction on his cock, leaned back against the sofa until he was lying almost flat and began to rotate Reiko’s body, using her butt as a pivot. On first turn her entire body convulsed and she panicked. Her eyes bulging and her hands over her ears, she began to shriek like a heroine of a horror movie (38).

Afterwards Reiko goes to the bathroom crying and the end of the chapter closes with Reiko still “howling” about the pain (42). Not only has Reiko been violently abused, but her friend Moko has also been inflicted with injury: “Moko wiped her butt, her face twitching. There were traces of blood on her paper. She showed them to Jackson and muttered, That’s awful (41).” These two citations mark extreme instances of African Americans’ maddening appetite for sex. And in his analysis of the book, Walley equates the sexual violence committed by African American men as a reinforcement of Japanese generalizations of the “black” Other:

The participants are a motley assortment of prostitutes and addicts, male and female, and four or five black American servicemen (playing off lingering Japanese prejudice against blacks). The servicemen think only of their own pleasure, regardless of the effect on others. The line between consensual sex and rape is blurred. The Japanese are willing participants in these parties, but often end up hurt and bleeding. Violence is ever present, and the emphasis is on the absolute power the American possess, and the inability or unwillingness of the Japanese to resist. Obviously, these scenes are meant as metaphors for the effect the American military presence has on Japan as a whole. 25

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Cornyetz supports Walley’s position, writing, “Black American soldiers appear in postwar prose, as do white Americans, as part of a conquering force that occupied Japan at the end of the Pacific War. Narratives and films often portrayed male servicemen (white and black) as conquerors, and Japanese women as prostitutes.”

David Goldberg argues that racial demarcating is based on a matrix of hierarchical ordering of differences, which can be defined “hygienically, in terms, for instance, of body odor.” Gilman also contends that, “olfactory qualities had long been used to label the Other as different.” This kind of characteristic marking of African American men is pointed out in Russell’s critique of Bedtime Eyes, and it can also be observed in Almost Transparent Blue. In her novel, Yamada demonstrates and unveils African Americans’ difference through the Japanese olfactory sense about the Other. When Kim embraces Spoon for the first time, for example, she makes a startling discovery:

I kissed him with full force on his lips and pulling at his chest hair, I savored his body’s musk. It reminded me of something that I’d smelled long ago. The sweet pungent scent of cocoa butter. His arm pits gave off a mysterious odor. Close to rotting, but definitely not disagreeable. That’s to say it was disagreeable, but its dirtiness which assaulted me made me feel pure. It was a smell, his smell, that gave me a sense of superiority.

Though Spoon’s smell seems to be celebrated and credited as evoking in Kim a sense of power; in Murakami’s work the notion of strong body odor from the Other was articulated as offensive and resulted in a sickening effect. The following passage, from the narrator Ryū’s perspective, signifies the pathological ramifications of sexual encounters with a nymphomaniac African American woman who is by no means a lily of the valley:

28 Gilman, p. 114.
At the smell of the black woman, clinging to me with her seat, I almost fell. The smell was fierce, as if she were fermenting inside. She was taller than I, her hips jutted out, her arms and legs were very slender. Her teeth looked disturbingly white as she laughed and stripped. Lighter colored, pointed breasts didn’t bounce much even when she shook her body. She seized my face between her hands and thrust her tongue into my mouth. She rubbed my hips, undid the hooks of the negligee, and ran her sweaty hands over my belly. Her rough tongue licked around my gums. Her smell completely enveloped me; I felt nauseated...Her whole body glistening with sweat, the black woman licked my body. Gazing into my eyes, she sucked up the flesh of my thighs with her bacon-smelling tongue. Red, moist eyes. Her big mouth kept laughing and laughing (53).

The African American woman’s unpleasant odor is associated with perverse sexuality and this association is strengthened when Jackson, an African American, engages in sex so extreme as to hover on the verge of Ōe’s bestiality. Here is, perhaps, the best illustration of Ryū’s manic and bisexual images of African Americans’ lack of sexual restraint:

Without slackening the speed of her hips, she leaned forward and bit my nipples until blood came. Singing a song, Jackson straddled my face. Hey baby, he said, lightly swatting my cheek. I thought his swollen asshole was like a strawberry. Sweat from his thick chest dripped onto my face, the smell strengthened the stimulus from the black woman’s hips. Hey Ryū, you’re just a doll, you’re just our little yellow doll, we could stop winding you up and finish you off, y’know, Jackson crooned, and the black woman laughed so loudly I wanted to cover my ears. Her loud voice might have been a broken radio. She laughed without stopping the movement of her hips, and her dying fish, my cock jumped inside her. My body seemed powder dry from her heat. Jackson thrust his hot prick into my dry mouth, a hot stone burning my tongue. As he rubbed it around my tongue, he and the black woman chanted something like a spell. It wasn’t English, I couldn’t understand it. It was like a sutra with a congo rhythm. When my cock twitched and I was almost ready to come, the black woman raised her hips, thrust her hand under my buttocks, pinched me, and jabbed a finger hard into my asshole. When she noticed the tears filling my eyes, she forced her finger in even deeper and twisted it around. There was a whitish tattoo on each of her thighs, a crude picture of a grinning Christ (54-55).

Sometimes it can be difficult to untangle the difference between the author, Ryū, in real life, and the narrator of the story who is also named Ryū. Both seem to resemble each other in their respective understandings of African Americans. For instance, both have many African American (and half-African American) friends; both have a strong
interest in African American music; and both seem to think African Americans are
interesting. As expressed in our interview, the writer, Ryū, believes African Americans are
exciting, and this same sentiment is emphasized by the narrator, Ryū, who comments,
“When there’re blacks around it’s cool, because they are really something else” (77).
During our interview, I was impressed with his gesture of refraining from calling African
Americans kokujin. Similarly, as Yamada did in my interview with her, Murakami
referred to African Americans as Afroika kei Americajin. This indicates that Murakami
understands the importance of referring to ethnic groups with respect.

Murakami’s sensitivity to this matter is displayed in the novel when his Japanese
friend, Moko, insists on calling African Americans by the word “nigger,” and he rebukes
her by saying, “Listen, Moko, you’ve got to stop saying nigger (kuronbō), they’ll kill you,
they can understand that much Japanese” (25). He continues by threatening not to invite
Moko to the sex party with the African American military men if she does not immediately
stop with the insults. However, the forcefulness of his words is not felt by Moko, who
does attempt but fails to retract her statement in her next line, “Aww, don’t get mad, I was
just kidding. She hugged me. I’ll go, didn’t we already decide that? Those niggers are
strong and they’ll give us some hash, right?” (25). In Moko’s speech what is unique is
that Murakami writes the word kuronbō (nigger) in katakana, instead of kanji as
employed by Abe in “Shinenia no kokujin.”

As seen from the interview, the tendency for Murakami to portray African
American males is clearly derived from the fact that he was attracted to and involved in a
counterculture movement that was sweeping the world, a movement seen as revolutionary
during the time his novel was published. Murakami admires African American culture in
terms of music and sports, and while these may constitute negative stereotypes in American
contexts, in Japanese contexts they do not necessarily have a demeaning sense, for
instance, an American’s sarcastic statement to the effect that ‘blacks are good at sports’ or ‘blacks are good dancers.’ However, in a manner similar to his misogynist treatment of women, Murakami’s representations of African Americans are offensive and vile because he describes people only in terms of perverse sexual functions. African Americans are in a subset of foreigners who rape Japanese women, but African Americans are portrayed in a more exotic manner and thus have a propensity toward extremely exaggerated conduct. However, Murakami’s later novels rarely depict African American men and women as sexually perverted people. Instead, he shifts to the portrayal of Japanese men and women in acting out their “sadomasochistic” tendencies.30

In this licentious tale, Murakami shows us the decadent reality of his contemporary life, and this is validated in the subculture or underground deviant spirit that lurks in the trenches of Japan. Perhaps no writer has had the temerity to so frankly portray the promise of freedom held out by sexual license for a youth culture. The role of African Americans in this sexual liberation from the societal norm probably seemed revolutionary for Murakami and his generation, but it had unintended consequences for the representations of African Americans in Japan. Murakami’s treatment of African American men reflects a more traditional mythology about the sexuality of African American men than any of the other works discussed here. However, as revealed in his interview with me, Murakami honestly portrayed his experience and the “African Americans in the novel are not typical of people in their race.”

30 For an in-depth understanding on how he treats his Japanese counterparts, review the following books: Ibis (Ibisa, 1995), and Piasshingu (Piercing, 1994). Topazu (Topaz, 1991). Moreover, see Murakami’s movie adapted version of Topazu: Tokyo Decadence (1993).
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

From the 1930s to the present, the images of African Americans in Japan have been complex and resistant to a single value judgement. In prewar Japan, although it does not seem to have been important for the Japanese to make a clear distinction between Africans and African Americans, there were avenues in mass communications, such as the movie and music industries, where African Americans were clearly delineated according to certain stereotypes. In postwar Japan, due to the American Occupation and Vietnam War, the Japanese had more of an opportunity to view African Americans as real persons, since they were stationed at American military bases from as far away as Okinawa to centrally located Tokyo. However, acquaintance with African Americans was conditioned in part by the racism in American society, played out in microcosm on U.S. military bases in Japan.¹ In present day Japan, despite the unflattering remarks by Japanese political leaders, African Americans have become increasingly popular among the younger generation of the Japanese who have been labelled, kokujin ni nari tai wakamono (black wannabes).² Their interests rest in hip-hop, reggae or rap music, baggy clothes, gold chains and T-shirts illustrating Malcolm X, tightly curled hairstyles called niguro pama (tightly curled

permanents that imitate the texture of black hair) and dreadlocks; as well as tanned skin. On the other end of the spectrum, Yamashita Sayoko explains that there are other images of African Americans current in Japanese society. African Americans are portrayed as, “likely to be involved in drug-dealing or gang-related criminal activity, and possessing ‘potent sexual ability.’ Although these images all may have some basis in reality, they have been exaggerated through media overkill.”

Some studies on the issue of Japanese attitudes toward African Americans have concluded that Japanese views of African Americans are negative and tolerant at best. However, in the 1994 survey I conducted in Japan, I concluded that the Japanese held a multitude of feelings and thoughts about African Americans depending on, for example, age, gender, social class, and a host of other variables. For instance, when asked the open-ended question of what comes to mind when you hear the word “black,” answers ranged from Africa to Sanko (an entertainer in Japan from Africa who was once an ambassador to Japan); Bushman to Malcolm X; apartheid to LA riots; violence to Dr. King; poverty-stricken to blue collar workers; broad-minded to dynamic; wonderful bodies to big n’ tough; from books such as Chibikuro Sambo to Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Finally one respondent said, “My seventeen year old sister longs for a black man” while another stated, “When I was a child, I thought they [blacks] were Indians and cannibals.”

In addition, my 1996 study reporting Japanese college students’ views toward African Americans registered a range of emotions, especially in regards to Chibikuro

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6 As a research fellow at Yamanashi Women’s Junior College in the winter of 1994, I sent out random questionnaires written in Japanese throughout the Yamanashi region with assistance from the Yamanashi prefectural government office in order to investigate Japanese attitudes toward African Americans, Caucasians and Koreans. My findings were reported in Ashai Shinbun (Asahi Daily News).
Sambo. The interviewees generally thought the book was a beautiful, cute and cuddly bedtime fantasy which brought just as much joy to them reading it as it did to the author, Murakami. In fact, most of the Japanese people I spoke to could not understand the meaning behind the banning of the book, because they did not understand that the Sambo image denoted African Americans. As one person said, “I heard African Americans were upset and they thought that we were laughing at them, but the story has nothing to do with African Americans at all.” Still another interviewee had this to say:

There are two images of African Americans in Japan. One is a good image because of Chibikuro Sambo, he’s cute, small...It’s a cartoon image. The book says Chibikuro Sambo – not African Americans, but maybe the small Sambo is representative of the real one. I learned in my multicultural class that the word Sambo in America became very controversial in the 60s and 70s because Sambo was depicted as a servant, funny, and no matter what happened he was always cheerful with big lips...The second image is that all African Americans are dangerous and this comes from the movies, like those war-related films.

Another respondent commented,

In junior high or elementary school I had a nice fancy book, and I threw it away when I came back from America in 1991...I heard that African Americans were upset with the title and Japanese people learned that the word ‘chibikuro’ is offensive. Actually, when I was small I was called chibi (little or small) by my father, so chibi can be used to show affection. The word kuro is offensive, but we never meant to hurt blacks, we didn’t know it was insulting.

In this study, I have tried to reflect an unexpected complexity I found in the attitudes of Japanese people toward African Americans. This view may be surprising because I, perhaps like others who have wrestled with this issue, expected an unfavorable view of African Americans in the eyes and hearts of the Japanese, due to the media propaganda depicting pervasive Japanese racist ideology toward darker-skinned peoples. Despite the occasional disparaging remarks from high Japanese political leaders, the Japanese general perceptions of African Americans that I have canvassed are not

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7 For my Japanese anthropology class project in the autumn of 1996 at The Ohio State University, I conducted an ethnographic interview entitled, “Japanese attitudes toward African Americans.” Ten of my Japanese college friends participated in a tape-recorded interview ranging from one to three hours. Unpublished manuscript.
necessarily negative or unfavorable.⁹ This is, in part, due to those Japanese people who stand on principles of “integration” and “internationalism” and do not rally around “nationalistic” endeavors.

A case in point are the literary texts embodied in this research. These works do not constitute racist literature. They are an important part of the phenomena of “minority discourse,” which should be appreciated, counted and read for what it is and what it presents to the reader, rather than for what it is not and does not offer the reader.¹⁰ It is not a glorifying testament of a jovial picturesque scene from the popular television sitcom, “The Cosby Show.” It is not a representation of politically advantaged heroes such as Colin Powell; nor is it a beautifully illustrative soliloquy about the plight of single-parent African American women who are also career oriented. These works do constitute small-scale realistic (almost documentary accounts) which provide readers with an understanding that in some small (and perhaps not so noble) way Japanese authors have been exhilarated, inspired, and touched by individuals who are African Americans. What are the contexts, historical or social, in which the Japanese authors of this study have become aware of and exposed to African Americans? A number of constraints seem to play a role in their way of comprehending in a substantial way the “Other.”

Abe Tomoji’s primary knowledge of African Americans is defined by the popular 1920s and 1930s expositions of jazz and movies imported from America to Japan; both Yamada Eimi’s and Murakami Ryū’s associations with African Americans are confined to the servicemen stationed at the Yokota and Yokosuka American military bases in Tokyo. Yamada has maintained a more personal and intimate contact with African Americans than

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the other two novelists, especially since she is married to an African American. According to Karen Ma, Yamada is quoted as saying “her attraction to black men has a lot to do with her having felt like an ‘outsider’ in Japanese society...Although initially drawn [to military bases] because she was a ‘black music freak,’ she soon found the bases to be the closest thing to a foreign land available in Japan, where she could be herself and behave freely.”

In the case of Abe, he read about Stepin Fetchit and experienced vicariously his struggles and triumphs in American society. Murakami, on the other hand, has had first-hand experience with African Americans because he lived in the same apartment complex with African Americans near the Yokota Air Base. However, as he stated in our interview, his direct contact and association with African Americans ceased after he wrote *Almost Transparent Blue*.

Although, the Japanese authors have been introduced to African American culture and people, one must consider that they interacted with African Americans outside of their cultural homeland. Therefore they have not obtained a profound understanding of African Americans. In fact, as much as the authors try to demonstrate their cosmopolitan attitude, their window on African American experience in the United States is constricted. Yet, their imaginations should not be discredited or too simply dismissed. As Toni Morrison has argued in her book, *Playing in the Dark*, it is important that writers attempt to go beyond themselves and envision another culture and people.

Finally, this study is a “flicker of light” which suggests the need for further illumination concerning Japanese attitudes and artistic works about African Americans. There is more to be studied and considered. For instance, left to be explored are poems and odes written about great jazz legends such as Josephine Baker in the 1920s, manuscripts written on Sojourner Truth, Toni Morrison, and the American civil rights

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movement, critical studies investigating the roles African American women play in Japanese historical and literary texts, and educational programs and workshops conducted and designed in Japanese which provide information on the culture and history of African Americans. A very important field of inquiry is the way African Americans have been projected in Japanese movies and television. Only through further studies of Japanese cultural representations of African Americans can a more objective and balanced view of Japanese encounters with foreignness be formulated. I hope in some small way that this study has enriched and expanded a part of this minority discourse.

12 Yanaka, p. 373. Yanaka explains how some students, after taking her American history course taught at Kyōitsu Women's University, decide to focus on African Americans and African American culture for their thesis topic.

13 February 1994 in Yamanashi, I conducted a bilingual history symposium with 150 participants entitled, "African American Celebration" in commemoration of Black History Month in America. The event was publicized in the following newspapers: Asahi Shinbun (Asahi Daily News), Mainichi Shinbun (Mainichi Daily News), Shimotsuke, and The Japan Times.

APPENDIX A

A NEGRO IN CINEMA

1

The young poet Henry Brooks, who came from St. Louis in the Mid-West of the United States, was walking down Hollywood Boulevard. It all seemed so strange and new to him. Even though it was February, the sky shone with a violet light that made even the smooth surface of the asphalt street shine a slick, bright blue. The trees were battling with each other as if it were already the beginning of summer. Behind him came three girls who were carrying fencing equipment for school. It was such a lovely, warm day that the heat rising off the street and the fragrance of the flowers in the air seemed to dance about the hems of the girls’ very short skirts.

"Hey, Harry...Oh no, pardon me, I mean Henry. Hey Mister HENRY Brooks!

Suddenly someone shoved Henry from the rear. When he turned around and looked, who was there but John Burlington, his fellow alum from the University of Missouri. In the course of three years, the look on the face of his once clever-looking classmate had changed. Now there was something sharp, if not shrewd and cunning, about the way his old friend looked. Henry had heard that Burlington was working as a reporter for an L.A. newspaper, but their sudden encounter had taken him by surprise.

“What a surprise to see you, Burlington.”

“Well, well. What’s my old friend, the poet laureate and assistant professor of ole Missouri U, doing here in Hollywood? I was pretty sure it had to be you from the back, but I couldn’t help wondering for a second or two,” said Brooks.

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“I’ve let myself get run down a bit, so I decided to take a break and visit a warmer climate. On top of that, I have business to take care at UCLA.”

“Look at how well off you are! You must be rich compared to me.”

As a matter of fact, Burlington looked every bit the poor cub reporter.

“So, you’re still big on being a poet, huh?” He added, quickly changing the subject.

“I’m not much of a poet, but...”

Before Henry could get over looking shy and embarrassed, a cool-looking Cadillac grazed past him and Burlington. Inside was a nigger dressed like a jockey in a horse race. He was puffing on a cigar, but he stopped and smiled when he saw John Burlington. The school girls broke into exaggerated peals of “o-o-o-h! “o-o-o-h!”

“Hey, John, who was that? He looks like the heir to the throne of some black kingdom or other. A real prince....”

Burlington fell silent and merely pointed to the rear Cadillac. As the car drove off, the words--STEPIN FETCHIT WILLIAM FOX STAR--mounted on the rear spare tire quickly grew smaller and smaller. Finally, Burlington broke into an oratorical tone of voice and began to deliver a little speech....

“Ah, yes. Our Stepin Fetchit. The luckiest of the very lucky few who managed to ride out the wave of unemployment that ended careers of tens of thousands of musicians and actors when the talkies swept Hollywood! You mean to tell me, my friend, that you don’t know who he is!?! He probably pulls in five hundred bucks a week. Who knows how many Cadillacs he owns? He lives in grand style at a hotel on Hollywood’s Central Avenue. Originally he was on the payroll with Metro Golden Mayer, and not Fox, and he had been working as a vaudeville actor. Or I should say, half-actor and half-crook. Who knows how many times he was in and out of jail. Did you see that gold tooth when he gave me a big smile a minute ago? They say he once hid a stolen diamond in his mouth and the police beat him so bad that he had to replace it with solid gold. I interviewed him once. I’d really like to get the low-down on his darkest secrets...”

John and Henry turned at the streetcorner and were about to go their separate ways.
“Hey, Henry, what’s the name of the hotel where you are staying? I’ll stop by and say hello.”

“Actually, I’m staying with my aunt from L.A. Hopkins is the name.”

“Mrs. Hopkins! Have you met her friend, the Crawford lady yet?” There was a smirk on Burlington’s face.

“No, I don’t think so. I may have, but I don’t recall the name. Why do ask?”

“She’s quite a beauty, you know. But be careful not to fall head over heels…and by the way, if you want to know more about that nigger Stepin we just saw, well, you just ask MIZZ Crawford. She’ll know.”

There it was again, that curious smirk on Burlington’s face. But with that he hopped aboard a streetcar and was gone.

“Hey, Gonzalez, step on it, will you.” Stepin Fetchit was pushing his Filipino chauffeur to drive faster. “We’re off to buy a race horse today. It’s a famous horse, and I don’t want anybody else getting it before we get there.”

Gonzalez gave the car gas and let the speedometer climb. It was a beautiful avenue that ran through the suburban hills of Hollywood.

“Hrumph. As for that honkie we saw a minute ago, I can’t put my finger on it, but there’s something about him I just don’t like.” Stepin was thinking to himself as the sight of Burlington standing on the street happened to flash through his mind. A wrinkle formed across his brow. To be sure, Burlington was out to steal the secrets of his past and undermine his position as a movie star. Yes, Burlington was just the sort of scandalmonger of a reporter who liked to hang around film stars and ruin their careers. Ever since he had agreed to the initial interview Stepin could not escape feeling that the man was a devil who hovered around him and was waiting for him in the shadows.”

“Gonzalez, step on the gas. Step on it, will you.”
The production, "The Hearts in Dixie," a black film starring Stepin was winding down at Fox Studios. The film director, Paul Sloane was fretting and fuming as he talked with Howard Johnson, the conductor of the musical score.

"That Stepin is slacking off again. Aren't the others all waiting?"

"What time is it now?"

"It is twenty minutes past--NINE-THIRTY--our scheduled shooting time! I told him before I wanted him here at 8:00 a.m. What's more..."

"EIGHT A.M.? Well, if that's the case, you know Stepin. Eight o'clock means he won't show up till noon."

"Shall I have somebody go get him."

"Are you serious? Not even God knows where he lives. As a matter of fact, there is no one whose life is more enveloped in mystery that Stepin. Why, even now he just might be out..."

"...stealing? He's gotten rich, but he still can't seem to break that habit, huh?"

What the studio had planned to shoot today is the scene where Stepin, now dressed as the drunk and lazy character "Gummy," sings and dances without the least concern for his younger brother's illness. Bernice Pilot, who plays the black wife of "Gummy" and Clarence Muse as the old coot "Nappus" are already in make-up and worn out from waiting for Stepin to appear on the set.

It was 10:30 a.m. when Stepin rolled into the studio, grinning and smiling as usual.

How many times until late in the afternoon did that famous voice of his ring out and cut the hot, stuffy air of the sound stage equipped with facilities for recording the human voice and producing the "talkies." Yes, that voice! That strangely high-pitched, "here kitty, kitty, nice kitty" voice that has charmed the heart of every woman in America.
And, until the day was done and the last shot taken, Sloane continued to rand and rave. He was going to let Stepin know just how unhappy he was about this morning. There was not a sign of complaint from Stepin as he sweetly apologized again and again. He would open that mouth of his—the one that had once hidden a diamond—and letting his gold cap shine, flash Sloane a big smile.

“Please Lawd, help me to be on time. I ain’t gointuh be late no more!”

Even Sloane could not help feeling moved to pity Stepin whose face looked so solemn it was almost comical.

“Say Stepin, you’ve really got to do something about the way in which you’re living.”

Sloane began to chide Stepin about the ridiculously childish way that Stepin went about lavishly spending his money. He should do this and that, he said. He told Stepin about Oscar, a Negro who behaved very quietly. Oscar worked at the Paramount Studios, and he had saved his pennies to build a modest fortune.

“But Mista Sloane, Oscar’s a... I don’t need no life insurance. What a joke! You know Sir, if I happen to die, I’m tellin’ you now jes’ throw me out in the streets or something.”

And off the stage went Stepin, the black man who lived only for a moment’s pleasure—that was his philosophy—and he strode into the golden sunset smiling a big smile, and he was as full of life as ever.

From off of another set came one of the white girls from the studio chorus line. Her beautiful white body was all aglow as she brushed up against Stepin.

“Stepin Darling! Tomorrow, lend me one of your Cadillacs. How about it, sugar?”

“Sure thing, babe,” said Stepin as he lifted a languorous eye and set a long sidelong glance dancing over her body. “Given all the power I got now, that sweet young honkie is all mine for the pickin’,” said Stepin to himself.

But all of a sudden there flashed before his eyes the vivid sight of an incident he had seen, an incident in which whites had took the law into their own hands and a Negro man was lynched for attacking a white woman. Out of all of the many days and years that he had spent roaming and wandering as a vagabond, it was the one image that has
stayed with him. It was a terrible sight, and it had took place on the outskirts of a small town in the Mid-West. He felt there was something unlucky at suddenly having remembered it now, and shaking his shoulder as though tossing off a bad memory, he dove into the backrest of the car.

“Gonzalez! Get me to Santa Barbara! Be quick about it!”

Stepin is off to meet Mizz Crawford. He thought about how, given her age, she must have been married at least once in the past. Nonetheless, of all the white women he had met—be it the pig of a widow or a string of prostitutes—by far and away Mizz Crawford was the most beautiful and the most fit of any of them. She had yet to accept his love, but one day she would for sure! He knew it would happen.

“Gonzalez! Step on it!”
It was nearly midnight in Hollywood at a speakeasy in the basement. In the company of Burlington, Brooks had gone to this strange bar run by Negroes. He sat in a corner and let his eyes roll as he surveyed the room. In the midst of a steamy brew of smoke and bad liquor, a crowd of libertines, movie types and prostitutes had gathered and their eyes had the look of madmen. A jazz band crooned. A Negro waiter weaved from one table to the next as though lost in a nightmare. There was a Japanese, the yellow of his skin shining brightly as the sun. A nigger girl squeezed a high C note out of a chest so flat it had to be tuberculosis.

“What did you think? Wasn’t it something else? It’s a sight you wouldn’t get to see were it not for your crooked friend here.”

“Can you handle that much cheap booze? You’ll make yourself sick.”

“Ha! Ha! Ha! It’s nothing but moonshine.”

Suddenly, the eyes of the black folks seemed to glow as they fixed their eyes on the door. Stepin strutted in his evening dreads. The young girl stopped singing in midstream and she looked up at him struck with a whirl of emotions—awe, admiration, bashfulness, and coquetishness. Smiles were in every direction as our black hero headed for a private reserved room for him.

“That nigger...he’s a prince.”

“Sure is. But I don’t know about our prince. He’s more Yankee-like than any damn real Yankee boy.”

A woman, her face buried in the collar of her over coat, entered the room. She kept her eyes averted from the crowd, as she followed him into the private room.

“Hey Burlington. Look at that will you. What was that?”
“Why be surprised. He’s a prince after all. Even white girls get conquered. That’s the way it’s been ever since the days of The Arabian Nights. Why that nigger is organ...”

“What in the dickens!”

“Ha! Ha! Ha! But don’t tell me you’re going to say she isn’t that Mizz Crawford that you know? She sure as hell looks like her.”

“Asshole! Stop talking like a fool.”

“You know, I find this rather amusing. You do hold that Crawford woman in high regard. You put her on some kind of a pedestal or other. Ha! Ha! Ha! And now you are neck and neck with Stepin! Our young American poet! I’ll drink to that!”

“You stupid idiot! Let’s get out of here.”

“In any case, I reckon they didn’t even notice us. It’s a good thing for them that they didn’t.”

Brooks had come to this strange country—the strange land of Hollywood—and the longer he stayed, the less he understood. It was filled with imponderables. He stepped outside. The stars that shone in the southern, winter sky over Beverly Hills, the foothills of Hollywood, were so bright that they twinkled.
Brooks met Ann Crawford for the first time as they sat face to face in his aunt’s parlor. It was a glorious, sunny afternoon. Although previously married, Mizz Crawford, had about her an air of calm composure, and she was exceedingly beautiful. Still an indefinable weariness or fatigue hovered over her face, and again and again he found himself being careful not to let his eyes meet hers.

(Yes. Am I feeling something for her?...Oh! What nonsense. At any rate, I can’t believe this fine lady is an acquaintance of Stepin. She just has to be different from that woman back at the bar?)

“What’s weighing on your mind?” she asked solicitously.

“Oh nothing! No, nothing at all. Really...” once again he avoided her eyes.

“Say, did you visit UCLA?”

“Why, yes I did. Not the branch here in Los Angeles, but the main campus in Berkeley. I paid a visit to Professor C.... I went to see his research and his private collection of Elizabethan literature... he’s the authority, you know.”

“What a surprise! I went to Berkeley too.”

“I must say that Berkeley has an extremely rare collection of documents from the Elizabethan era. Especially on the persecution of Catholics.

“What a surprise. You say Catholic. I even attend the Catholic mass from time to time.”

Suddenly she fell silent. It wasn’t clear why, but she said not a word more. A spell fell over the room. Finally, Brooks spoke.”

“I was thinking of going into Hollywood tonight to see a film preview of...”

He waited for her reaction. He was about to add the words, “a preview of Stepin’s latest film,” but it stuck in his throat, and he did not continue.

There was no change in her expression. “Maybe I’ll go too.”
February 24, 1929. At a theater in Hollywood, Fox Studios presents the preview of “Hearts in Dixie” and “The Ghost Talks.” It was a big sensation created, of course, by the fact that the black singer, Stepin Fetchit, stars in both movies.

Waves of cars... millionaires, writers, producers, and movie stars dressed in fine gowns and tuxedos were embraced by a swarm of on-lookers and the bright lights from flashing cameras.

Inside, in a corner on the second floor, Henry Brooks sat next to John Burlington curiously taking notice of the crowd of elite’s resplendent jewelry and clothes. Everywhere he looked there were famous producers, actresses, and businessmen. Each time a celebrity arrived, the name was announced in a loud, regal voice. And the spotlights highlighted their faces in such a way that they seemed to float over the crowd. It made them look all the more dramatic and triumphant. In fact, they were more haughty than in their on-screen performances.

“MR. HALE ROCHE!”

“MISS MARGARET LIVINGSTON!”

“MR. RUPERT HUGHES!”

“....................”

“....................”

Each time a name was called, quite a stir passed through the crowd.

“Isn’t it exciting?”

“Yes, indeed--”

“Hey - - - Look! said Henry Brooks getting the attention of John Burlington. Mizz Crawford is over there. She’s standing next to her elder brother, who is a businessman in L.A. Say, how about going over and saying hello?”
"I’m not the least bit interested."

"Boy, our Step sure seems happy. Oh dear! Will you be upset if I say that? Anyhow, it doesn’t look like Step, our star and main attraction is going to show. Doesn’t that strike you as strange. Why, his name hasn’t even been called. I can’t understand why on earth that our ole pal isn’t here? Step certainly is an unusual chap. Is there such an actor who won’t come to his own preview."

"I’ll never understand Hollywood. The strangest things happen here."

"Hey Henry, don’t get yourself all worked up. The truth of the matter is that Stepin hasn’t won the heart of Mizz Crawford yet. There’s no doubt about it. You’ve still got a chance, ole pal!"

"About what? What do you mean, ‘still got a chance?’ First, let’s get something straight, I do not have any feelings for Mizz Crawford. As I said before, there is no place stranger than Hollywood. The reason I came here was to cure my bronchitis, but instead, I ended up not with clean lungs but an empty head. I’m planning to go home in a couple of days."

"Yah, this is a place that kind of drive you nuts, too. ---You’ve fessed up to it--- admit it. But it would be a pity for you to leave after having lost in love."

"That’s nonsense..."

("MR. MORRIS SHIVELY!")

Everybody was moved and excited. A great wave of emotion surged through the crowd. The name Shively. Shively was whispered from one ear to the next.

All eyes were focused next on the beloved Parisian who stepped into the limelight. He was as bright and debonair as ever.

"Why does Shively want to learn how to dance and sing like that nigger, Step!--- Our Morris! How can he do such a thing. Can you tell me why Negroes are being idolized this way? Believe me, it’s no joke, we are talking about a serious problem here. It just doesn’t make any sense when you think about it seriously."

My opinion is this, said Brooks launching into a long speech --- I think the civilization of us white people has gotten too far advanced. It has gotten overripe and has
become nearly decadent. Take any of them—what is serious, or what is high-class—they’ve all become something comic and boring. It seems like we whites can no longer respond emotionally anymore to the most serious of dramas or the most delicate of dances. It appears that the barbarism of the Negroes gives a sense of joy in life. However... However... Let me also say this, I truly believe that we whites have not gone down to total defeat yet. Why, there’s Shively. He was the one so madly intoxicated with Josephine Baker, and it was Shively who taught her how to get the Parisian decadence to understand the fascination of white music, and white clothes, and the white man’s straw hat. Yes, he’s our CRUSADER. The white race is not going mad as long as we the public continue our love affair with Shively. Before he knew it, Brooks had allowed himself to get quite excited about his topic.

Burlington didn’t respond with his usual cynical comment. “Mmmm. Finally, the showing is about to start and our boy, Step still hasn’t made it. He certainly is a strange animal.”

As a matter of fact, everyone was whispering to each other about how mysterious it was that Stepin Fetchit hadn’t shown up for the screening of his movies.

The two black talkies had been a big success. The talkies had now insured Step’s status around the world. They had made it possible for him to use his strangely nice-kitty-kitty voice. To make the public’s eyelids grow heavy and entice them into a pleasantly drowsy state.

Outside the theater there was a row of limos waiting for the performance to be over. In the midst of a whole slew of cars, Burlington spotted Step’s Cadillac by chance. “Hey, where have you been all this time?” Brooks is addressing Step. Brooks went running toward Step, who had already been spotted by those with a sharp eye and who was standing in the midst of the crowd accepting its praise and congratulations.

“C’mon, tell us Mister Step, where were you all this time?” Asked someone in the crowd.

“I--I was watchin’ exactly where I was suppose to. I was where all of us Negroes are told to look at movies... in the balcony.”

Burlington whispered to Brooks, “He’s a very practical type. He’s a real clever fellow.”
Brooks, on the other hand, felt something that bordered on rage inside him. "He may be a star, but he's no saint. After all, he's not much different from one of those dogs or horses that have been trained to act like 'Rin Tin Tin' or 'Tom Mix's Tony the Wonder Horse.' They are nothing but tools--something that the studio use."

"Do you mean to show sympathy for the Negro, the oppressed race throughout the United States. ---But, you know, that might all be a ploy on Step's part. He knows full well what he is doing. And he is using it as a strategy to make himself popular."

"Come now, that's a terrible way to look at things."

"You're a poet laureate, so you ought to know. The fact that a black poet was a friend of Charlie Chaplin's."

"Oh that's right. Now, let me see, what is his name. He's the one who writes the defiant poems."

"But as far as our friend, Step, here is concerned he doesn't give a damn about those kind of issues. He is a practical man through and through."
In Hollywood there is no sadder sight than the lives of those who have gathered from all parts of the world in hopes of becoming an actor. And you can’t possibly compare them to those who want to become novelists gathered in Paris’ Quartier Latin or London’s Club Street to those who aspire to become Hollywood actors. Why? Because Hollywood is the lowest of the low -- a bottomless pit. How so? Among those who long to be artists there are those who stop believing in their own talent and leave. And even if they don’t leave, they still attempt to find some other paradise. Still, in the film industry it doesn’t matter if you are aware of how ugly you are, or how terrible your voice is, or how old you’ve become. In spite of it all, there remains in your heart the dream of waiting for one’s big chance. ---That just maybe the film industry will use you for your ugly face, for your bad voice, for your aging body in a marvelous way, and just you might become a star who captures the love and attention of the whole world. The police report that the staggering theft of milk bottles that are delivered each morning through the residential districts of Hollywood is the work of starving artists who are still waiting for their big break.

Even in sunny Southern California, it’s cold during the winter season where there’s no heat --- even in small rooms. Jim and his little sister Nancy sat side by side on their bed shivering. Outside the dirty window of their apartment, the stars had started to come out in the sky. The two only had one shirt each, they wrapped themselves in a thin wool blanket. In case they are called to be an extra, they don’t dare wear their best clothes inside. As for the one set of clothes that each owned, they never wore it at home. They never knew when they would be called in as extras. They did not dare spoil its outward appearance by wearing it at home. And sometimes Nancy coughs.

“Should we return to the home we once ran away from?” At times one or the other would raise the question. And the other would invariably reply, “But that’ll be the day when one of the directors assigned to produce a special film will think that he needs one of us to fit his special role.” Until they die, neither one will forsake his dream of getting into film. They cannot extract themselves from the morass in which they have gambled their very lives in order to succeed in Hollywood.

“Hello,” said Bob in an energetic voice. He lives next door, and like them aspires to become an actor. He has just come in.
“Hey Jim, Hey Nancy, wait till you hear my good news. I was wandering around Beverly Hills today with nothing to do. I was just wandering around there thinking, you know, Bobby boy, one of these days you will be living here too. Just think of that. When suddenly I had the greatest stroke of luck. Today, for the whole day, Universal Studios put me to work as an extra. It was really a role that was almost too good for just an extra. I just happened to walk onto the location where they were shooting. Sheer coincidence. I just know that any day now the good times are going to start rolling in. What’s the glum look on your face? it’s not just me who is going to have a good day.. Hey Nancy, how about grabbing a hot meal to eat? Jim, you can come too. Say, maybe afterwards we can take in a movie together.”

Jim and Nancy couldn’t be as enthusiastic as Bob. But thanks to Bob’s money they had their fill of food. Later, then Bob dragged them through the crowds at an amusement park.

“Hey Nancy, what do you say if you and I ride the merry-go-round first?”

But suddenly the expression on his face blanched white. “What! Empty! There’s nothing left in my pockets. I was for sure that I still had lots of money left over. Damn it! Shit!”

Bob, Nancy, and Jim were on the point of tears and didn’t notice the tall black man running as fast as lightening towards the exit gate of the amusement park.

* * *

The talkie, “Ghost Talks,” starring Stepin Fetchit was playing at one of the local theaters. Stepin was attracting a crowd by the marquee acting like an excited child.

“Hey ladies and gents, look at that! That’s my name right over there, S-T-E-P-I-N--F-E-T-C-H-I-T. Ain’t the words printed in great big, bold pretty letters? Hey, it’s me . . . .”

Someone tapped Fetchit on his shoulder.

“Mister Step, you’re certainly in high spirits.”

He turned around and saw Burlington with a smirk on his face.
“Say, Mister Step, what a fine performance you pulled off at the amusement park earlier today. I see that you’re still up to your old ways. You must be still missing your old jail cell at Key West. I came to talk to you about giving back to those people. And there’s God to think of too. You know the one you believe in.

Step pulled a wad of bills from his pocket and flung it at Burlington.

Just then the car that had come to pick him up appeared. He leapt inside.

“So long, Mister Reporter.”

“Gonzalez! Step on it! Hrumph. Somethin’ tells me that honkie is trouble.”

Step sat in his car agonizing. “Oh Lawd. My God. Please save me from this habit of mine.” The pale face of the girl in the group of three at the amusement park floated before his eyes. It was as though he were back in the park again. Right at that moment, he suddenly thought of the orphan girl whom he had loved like a father when he was leading the life of a vagabond working the vaudeville circuit. In an effort to keep her life from being ruined by all the others he had stepped in to protect her from others. But at the same time, he was using her as his cat’s paw in robbing and stealing. Then one day something happened and they went their separate ways. When he thought about the girl back in the amusement park and how pale she looked, he wondered what had happened to that orphan girl. Maybe she had died, looking just as pale and wan.

He was reduced to tears as he cried out, “Oh God, Oh God.”
Step lived in a suite of rooms in a first class hotel on Central Avenue in Hollywood.

When he returned home his secretary would hand him contracts from the studios and a bundle of letters. He would sit down on a luxurious sofa and while reading each letter one by one he would perfume his kinky hair.

Step was by no means illiterate. As a child, he had even learned Latin from a dentist in Florida.

He was shocked when he picked up one of the letters. It was from a prison. The signature read, "Fetchit."

Actually, the name "Stepin Fetchit" did not belong to him and him alone. He was known as "Step" when he travelled the vaudeville circuit out West with his old buddy, "Fetchit." They had been caught stealing and jailed many times, and had escaped just as many times. But right now "Fetchit" was locked up in prison and not likely to get out. When Step became a film star he decided on his own to combine both names to form "Stepin Fetchit."

Fetchit wanted money. Step's hands trembled as he read the letter. Oh, no, not again. Am I going to be called back to that hell hole again --- from such a nice place as this hotel suite? Oh, the terrible habit?! He felt a cold chill run down his spine. He rang a bell to summon his secretary in the next room.

"What may I do for you, Sir?"

"Run my bath water."

At lonely times like these, everybody looks at the person they are talking to for a ray of hope. Step let his eyes settle on his female secretary's well-proportioned and virgin-like body. Perhaps she took the burning look in his eyes as a sign lustful desire --- her nose twitched nervously as she exited the room without a word.
Step was conscious of the reproach implied by his servant’s look. He knew what it meant. Whites and Blacks. He recalled his first time he encountered such scorn. It was back in his old hometown in Florida. He must have been three or four. He was playing with his white friend and when he was about to go inside the house is when the boy’s father came to the door and kicked him out onto the lawn. Just like that. Although it was a hot, sunny day in Florida, he felt as though he had been drenched in ice cold water. “I don’t know what it is, but there’s something different between me and them.” It was still something vague and undefined, when the thought first came to him. He was only a boy, but it tore at his childlike heart. It was as clear as the sun rising over the horizon --- when an awareness of different races suddenly dawned on him. It was oh-so-black, oh-so-dark. “Oh God. Please God.”

It was only minutes later that Step, happy as a lark, sat in his tub splashing about in the heavily perfumed bath. Oh the beauty of his black, mature flesh. It glowed like black lacquer. Oh the muscles on the svelte body of a famous dancer. They rippled like a snake. What’s more the beautiful and wealthy Mizz Crawford was in love with him. Yes, that gorgeous white lady. Step became overjoyed as he added more and more of the soft, sweet-smelling water to the tub. “Ha! Ha! Ha!” He laughed to himself.
The Autumn of 1929. The young poet Henry Brooks is puffing on a cigar while stretching out on a divan in the lounge at a private men's club in St. Louis. He has received a contract from Boston and London bookstores who will publish his poetry. He has regained his lost health. He has gotten engaged. What a felicitous Autumn evening! He reaches for a popular magazine next to him -- he reads it only half-consciously when... Suddenly, there it was!

William Fox's Negro film star, Stepin Fetchit is engaged to be married to Mizz Crawford of L.A.

The article continues...

The couple have announced plans to have a high Catholic wedding. When asked about his views on religion, Step replied, "What I aspired to become most in the world was to become a pastor. I still feel the same way, even today. However, I know too much of this world to become a pastor. I'm just too much of a scoundrel. Be it that as it may, however, there's too many people who will come to church for the sake of worshipping God only on the account of me. They wouldn't get a chance to hear the powerful sermons preached by the pastors if it weren't for the fact that they go to church with me. See, actually, me and the toughest folks in Hollywood go to mass together. The more I become famous the more religion gets famous. You asked me about my views on women? Well, if you're in love with someone, then you must strictly observe your marriage vows. If you only keep that person just as a lover, then you just better HURRY BACK....

Brooks whispered to himself, "What a prince! That's our Stepin Fetchit for you."

There before his eyes, there arose an image of Step in his tuxedo and Mizz Crawford in her bridal gown as they drove off in his Cadillac with the words -- STEPIN -- mounted to the spare tire and wrapped in a spray of flowers. As the car drove away, the words grew smaller and smaller until they faded into the distance and vanished completely.
NOTE:

This is a fictionalized story centered around the filmstar of Fox Studios, Stepin Fetchit. Information about Fetchit, himself, was obtained with the assistance of Kitagawa Fuyuhiko of Eiga-Ohraisha, and is based on two or three magazine articles. My intention here has been to do nothing that will bring discredit to Stepin Fetchit. As for the news about his wedding, it is information that I received word about from a Fox Studios branch office.
APPENDIX B

KNEEL DOWN AND LICK MY FEET

Months went by, and it was around the time I was beginning to think that Chika would always be here with me. I was so surprised when she called me late one night.

“Sis, I might have to quit the club,” Chika said.

“Oh! What do you mean? Is it because your man found out?”

“No, you got it all wrong. Look, I’ll explain later. Can I come over?”

By taxi she came over to my place. I figured it would be a long night so I kicked out the man who was sleeping at my place and made him go home.

“Shit! When it comes to Chika, you wanna go and kick me out. Just don’t mess around and have sex with her.”

I burst into laughter at the ridiculous comment he made as he left. “Sorry, but there are just those times when your “hoomies” are more important than men. I’m not some woman who make my lover a priority -- no matter what. And that’s even more reason for a man to like me. See, I refuse to be one of those wives who sit around all evening waiting for their husbands to return home.”

CHIKA WAS TERRIBLY FLUSTERED, so I calmed her down and went off to make us some drinks. In one slurp Chika gulped it all down.

“Next Friday, my fate will end up changing. Sis, what shoulda I do?”

Having no idea what the heck was going on, I blurted, “C’mon what are you talking about?”

“Next week I will appear in magazines like Focus, Friday, and Weekly Hōseki.”

“What! You’re about to become a celebrity!?!?”

“No, silly. Girl -- no way! You see, these magazines, especially Friday, have photos of me in hot action. And just right before leaving the crib, they called me for my comments. Oh boy! I’m in trouble! Whatchya think I should do? My boyfriend is going to find out! My parents are going to shit bricks!”

“Well, what is it? Some kind of special issue on the sex trade industry? Never mind that. Were you taking photos, right there, at the club?”

“No. You’ve got it all wrong. Let me explain. I only meant for him to take pictures without revealing my face. See, this man told me that he needed to teach his wife how to tie him up with ropes. But, in order to do that, he needed me to teach him “the ropes.” Even though his wife gets off on this SM crap, she is still a bit of an amateur. You know he has even had some close encounters with being choked to death because of her clumsiness. I felt kinda of bad for him, so I wanted to show him how to do it. Even though I carefully checked all the photos to make sure my face was not captured, I am sure, somehow he hid a few photos which included my face. Fuck! That Dirty Damn Dog! Sis, whatchya think about all this crap?”

With Chika -- it’s nonstop -- when she talks. As she talked about the terrible jam she was in, Chika went into my refrigerator and started to munch and nibble on ham and some other junk food. Even when she’s freaking out, she is somewhat peculiar. She says that she still misses her ex, but at the same time she invites other men to her quarters. Because she is such a loose girl, I can’t possibly sympathize with her. I absent-mindedly gazed upon her, and then realized that I neglected to ask about an important detail.

“What’s the big deal about being in this magazine anyway?”

As Chika stuffed a piece of ham in her mouth she began moving her eyes around in a frantic state.

“Is it that you come from a prestigious family?”

“Ummm.”

“Well, did you sleep with some superstar?”
“Umm.”

“Hey, I just don’t get it! What’s the deal?”

After finally chomping her food, she burst out saying, “the novel that I wrote won an award for new writers.”

“A novel? What on earth! You mean the thing that have words sorta linked together and is a pain in the b - u - t - t.”

“Girl, just calm down,” said Chika, as she shoved a piece of ham in my mouth. “Yeah, that’s right. And I might just become a novelist.”

I could barely muster any sympathy for her as she chomped on that takuan, wondering in such a carefree spirit, “What am I gonna do?”
APPENDIX C

THE BIGGEST SEARCH PARTY FOR LOVE

1. These two Japanese stars are quite famous for imitating the style of African-Americans, especially with their suntanned faces.

2. Yamada has worn somewhat of a "dreaded" look in the late 80s.

3. This is a children's song entitled, "Hotaru." However, the interesting point is that Yamada changed the text around slightly. The original version is as follows:

   Hey, the water over there is bitter!
   Hey, the water over here is sweet!

4. This comment makes reference to Yamada's former part-time job as a Dominatrix at an SM club in the mid-80s.

5. a. This statement refers to Yamada wearing heavy "pink" lipstick on her lips. A good picture of her looking like this can be found in the magazine, Asahi Gurafu (Asahi Graph, July 31, 1987), the time she received the Naoki Award.

   b. Rumor has it that this is a doll that Japanese men used to comfort themselves when going to the South Pole on long expedition trips. It is a doll that is shaped like a woman with her mouth hanging open, and can be used to engage in sexual intercourse. I think it is similar to the so-called "Dutch Wife" doll.

6. This song is entitled, "Ryokō no yokakazu," performed in 1963 by Kirishima Noboru. The original version of the song and a picture of the singer can be found in the magazine, Shōwa no ryūkōkashū (Popular Singers from the Showa Era).

---

YAMADA AMY

IS...

Hey!

Right

SCHOOL BAY ME!

Black

1.

Hibino

Kupota Toshinobu

That's just my sick obsession

DREADS

Hey Bro!

Why did you do that crap to me?
Thanks to you Japanese men don't LOVE me!

2.

The water on the other side tastes much sweeter

NOTHING

Black Curry

Yellow Curry

Black curry tastes better than yellow curry

I can't draw -- not worth a darn!
SCENE 1
I lose interest in my wedding

SO WHAT...
people are people!

SCENE 3
I fight all over the place

This is the essence of Amy Yamada

His blackness covers me as I hide in his shadow

The ZOMBIES who want my manuscript

Can you believe it...
I once was a cartoonist
THE END!

SCENE 4
I gotta get away

The acupuncture machine always gets it

Tired, old-ass ADIDAS

Next stop, SOUTH BRONX!!

Don't you get dirty looks often

Who cares! Don't concern yourself with my man

THE END

Excuse me, Can you tell me what you think of Ms. Amy Yamada?

She's selfish because she takes all the black chocolate for herself!

Well, you know I kinda wanna be cracked with a whip, too

Oh! You mean that black girl!

She's fine man! So don't ax me such a God-damn stupid fucking question man!

Yo man! Take yo ass home man. You know she's baeeed man.

Yo Man!

The lady with the whips, right?

Ah, you mean that traitor, right?

She puts pink donuts on her lips

Why are you here...? What are you doing here...

Don't you get dirty looks often

Who cares! Don't concern yourself with my man

THE END

Yo Man!

Black don't say "ask", but "or"
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