

Constructions of Gender Identity in Kurahashi Yumiko's *Seishōjo*

Ami Tanahashi

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Davinder Bhowmik

Justin Jesty

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Ami Tanahashi

University of Washington

Abstract

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Ami Tanahashi

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
Davinder Bhowmik
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Kurahashi Yumiko's use of transgressive themes and her experimentalism in content and form throughout her works have been points of both controversy and scholarly interest. In *Seishōjo* (1965), Kurahashi takes the taboo theme of incest and places it at the center of the novel. In terms of form, she also experiments with a layered, multi-vocal narrative. The novel moves back and forth through the eyes and voices of two narrators, "I" and Miki. While the incests of "I" and Miki and the unique narrative style of the novel have been the subjects of academic discourse, there has been little attention dedicated to discussing the relationship between the two narrators and the construction of their gender identities.

In my paper, I will use Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to analyze the ways in which Kurahashi parodies pre-existing gender identities to construct her hero and her heroine. By

imitating two popular genres of Japanese literature—the I-novel and *shōjo* literature—Kurahashi caricaturizes the gender identities of the rational, smart, elite male writer and the flowery, beautiful, innocent *shōjo*. This caricaturization reveals the arbitrary nature of attributes like “masculine” or “girly,” thereby destabilizing the long held ideas that serious male writers write highbrow literature and that girlhood is a time of innocence, soft beauty, and friendship.

Introduction

Kurahashi Yumiko (1935-2005) rejected imposed norms of Japanese modern literature that privilege mimetic representation and originality. Her works are often difficult to categorize because they often do not fit into one genre. Her experimentalism and unique approach to writing has sparked several controversies. One of the defining moments of Kurahashi's career occurred in the first few years of her emergence as a literary figure, when she had a long debate with the critic Etō Jun over her first full-length novel, *Kurai tabi* (暗い旅 “Dark Journey”) (Sakaki 36).

Kurahashi was born in Kōchi prefecture. Her father was a dentist, and after coming of age, she had initially followed in her father's footsteps, working towards becoming a dentist herself (Sakaki 1). In 1956, she made the choice to abandon her father's wishes for her to work in dentistry, and she began her studies at Meiji University, majoring in French literature. As a student, she entered the literary scene in 1959, gaining fame and popularity with her first work of publication, a novella titled *Parutai* (パルタイ “The Party”) in 1960. As she mentions in her essays and as can be seen in many of her works of fiction, Kurahashi was deeply influenced by European literature, and she particularly refers back to Franz Kafka, Albert Camus, and Jean-Paul Sartre throughout her body of works.

Critics like Etō were concerned with the possibility of plagiarism and with her abstract representations of real-world places and events, scholars of Kurahashi focus on the themes that run through the writer's works, including incest and emptiness. Scholarly discourse on Kurahashi also often concentrates on the writer's unique narrative style. She often experiments with different styles and intentionally strays from creating a straightforward plot. For example, *Kurai tabi* is a second-person narrative in which the main characters lack names. In *Seishōjo* (聖少女

“Divine Maiden”), Kurahashi creates a multilayered story, with smaller narratives embedded within a larger one. In her debut piece, *Parutai*, the story is written as a first-person narrative, but her lover is referred to in the second-person as “You.”

Despite the richness and depth of Kurahashi’s works, until the last decade, there has not been a serious breakthrough in English-language literary criticism on Kurahashi. Furthermore, much of the literary criticism that does exist focuses on her later works that re-imagine European and Japanese stories, fairytales, and myths. Before the more recent interest in Kurahashi Yumiko, in North America, the leading scholar of Kurahashi’s earlier works was Atsuko Sakaki, whose most extensive and exhaustive dive into Kurahashi’s literary world is her PhD dissertation, titled *The Intertextual Novel and the Interrelational Self: Kurahashi Yumiko, A Japanese Postmodernist*. Since the completion of her dissertation, Sakaki has published several shorter scholarly papers on Kurahashi in both English and Japanese.

Sakaki has helped popularize research on the works of Kurahashi within English-language academia, and the scope of her research has been far and wide. Her interpretations mainly explore the self/other binary central to many of the writer’s works, as well as the intertextuality between the short stories and novels of the first decade of Kurahashi’s career. Sakaki also writes about Kurahashi’s fixation with certain themes, such as incest and womanhood as performance. Furthermore, she is especially interested in Kurahashi’s unique style of incorporating others’ works into her own.

Sakaki also writes about Kurahashi’s “antiworld,” (反世界 *hansekai*), a term Kurahashi uses to describe the world of fiction. In “(Re)Canonizing Kurahashi Yumiko,” Sakaki explains that “the relationship between the antiworld and the ‘real’ world is clarified. The former is not a

faithful representation of the latter; it is a deformed version of the latter” (159). Sakaki then goes on to link Kurahashi’s concept of the antiworld to the author’s understanding of women’s position within the real world. Quoting Kurahashi, Sakaki writes, “Women are shut in the world of the negative [minus] sign, or the antiworld in the [actual] world, so to speak. In short, this [actual] world belongs to men. In it, women are regarded as nothing but those who have the other sex of female”¹ (159).

Sakaki dedicates a fair amount of her Kurahashi scholarship to the antiworld, but her work largely focuses on Kurahashi’s identity as a postmodernist writer who subverts the norms writers were subject to at the time. In “(Re)Canonizing Kurahashi Yumiko” and “Kurahashi Yumiko’s Negotiations with the Father,” Sakaki discusses the author’s view on gender, as well as the ways in which Kurahashi’s position and experience as a woman have influenced her writing. Because of Kurahashi’s own preoccupation with the male/female binary in both her nonfiction and fiction, as a Kurahashi scholar, it is impossible to ignore gender completely. However, Kurahashi-focused scholarship on gender has continuously referred back to the author’s own gender ideology. It is difficult to find literary criticism and interpretations of Kurahashi’s earlier works that do not limit themselves to the writer’s idea that women cannot have a self because they will always be “other” to men. Kurahashi’s conception of gender relies on a binary system of male/female, self/other.

For Kurahashi, the body—the feminine body in particular—is a crucial aspect in her construction of the gender binary. Katano Tomoko discusses the relation between Kurahashi’s

¹ Kurahashi was highly influenced by the writings of Simone de Beauvoir. One of her essays is titled “My ‘Third Sex’” (わたしの「第三の性」 *Watashi no dai san no sei*), alluding to Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*.

works and the feminine body in her work, “‘Onna no kamen’ wo kaburu toki” (〈女の仮面〉を被るとき “When They Put on the ‘Mask of a Woman’”). Katano refers to the feminine body as the “body that births” (妊む身体 *umu karada*) throughout the entirety of the work (50).

Stringing together examples from various earlier works of Kurahashi, Katano argues that Kurahashi continuously portrays the lack of autonomy and freedom afforded to women because of their menstruating, fertile bodies. For both Kurahashi and Katano, the sex of a body is intrinsically linked to gender identity. In other words, in the world of Kurahashi, sex and gender correspond to one another. What makes a woman a woman is, in part, her body.

Kurahashi’s gender ideology is not surprising, given that she was writing in the 60’s. In fact, the writer’s decision to write detailed accounts of traumatic, feminine experiences, such as the start of menstruation, father-daughter issues, and relationship struggles, must have been a challenging, yet innovative one. However, with more than sixty years since the debut of Kurahashi, ideas of sex and gender have continuously shifted. While many Kurahashi scholars continue to use the writer’s ideas of sex and gender as the backbone to their literary interpretations, what’s notably missing is the application of newer ideas about gender. In this paper, I will use Judith Butler’s idea of gender performativity in my analysis of Kurahashi’s 1965 novel, *Seishōjo*. First, I will summarize the novel and then introduce Butler’s gender performativity.

Kurahashi’s early fiction is defined by its intertextuality. Her narratives constantly speak to and refer back to one another. In particular, Kurahashi embeds her earlier work, *Kurai tabi*, into *Seishōjo*. The subplot involving one of the characters, Writer, perfectly mirrors the plot of *Kurai tabi*. Like “You” in Kurahashi’s earlier novel, Writer in *Seishōjo* searches for her missing lover,

“Him.” Similarly, the novel features the pair K and L, two characters who often appear in many of Kurahashi’s short stories and novels. They’re often portrayed as twins, K a man and L a woman.

Seishōjo certainly revisits plots and characters from Kurahashi’s past works, but it is also a novel that pushes the boundaries in terms of its content. There had been many controversies surrounding Kurahashi’s work pre-*Seishōjo*, but as mentioned before, they often had to do with claims of plagiarism and unoriginality. However, *Seishōjo* garnered attention specifically due to the presence of two incestuous relationships, a brother-sister pair and a father-daughter one, placed at the heart of the narrative.

Seishōjo was published in 1965. The novel builds off of a short story published one year prior titled “*Watashi no kokoro wa papa no mono*” (わたしの心はパパのもの “My heart Belongs to Daddy”) (Guarini 343). As the title suggests, the short story focuses on the heroine’s incestuous relationship with a man whom she calls “Daddy.”

To summarize the novel, “I” begins his diary with a recount of the first time he met Miki when they were high school students. At the time “I” is writing, he is already in his early 20s. The reader and “I” learn Miki has recently been in a terrible car accident. The accident has led to the death of her mother and has left Miki an amnesiac. Although “I” and Miki never had a particularly intimate relationship before her accident, he regularly visits her in the hospital and the two grow close. Miki confides in “I,” and tells him that she has found a diary of the “old” Miki—the Miki before the accident. She is confused by the content of the diary, and wishes for “I” to read it and decode it. From here, “I” spirals into the fictional world of Miki’s diaries, trying to discern between lies and truth, all the while recording everything in his own diary.

The diary that amnesiac Miki asks “I” to decode contains details of a sexual relationship Miki has with an older man. Miki begins writing her diary at the age of sixteen, after meeting a middle-aged dentist whom she calls “Daddy” (*J\A\ papa*). Miki knows that this man is a former ex-lover of her mother, and she suspects that he may be her biological father. In the diary, Miki seems to be obsessed with the idea that Daddy truly is her father, and she wishes to share this information with Daddy while they engage in sex.

Meanwhile, “I” confesses to both the readers of his diary and to the amnesiac Miki that he also has an incestuous past. While still teenagers, his sister, L, catches “I” masturbating in their shared bedroom. He writes in his diary he was masturbating to the image of his sister. Upon realizing he has been caught in the act, he grabs L and pushes himself onto her, raping her. After telling his sister that he loves her, he says that L has disappeared and he does not know her whereabouts.

While the story largely focuses on these twin acts of incest, *Seishōjo* is ultimately a piece of writing about both the act of writing and the act of reading. The two main narrators, “I” and Miki, are not simply verbally telling their story. Kurahashi makes clear that the narrators are writing. Furthermore, “I” not only writes himself, but he also reads Miki’s writing. In Miki’s third diary, she reveals that the catalyst for her diaries and her incestuous relationships was her reading of her father’s diary. In essence, the characters within the novel themselves are both readers and writers.

The characters’ dual position as reader and writer, paired with the multilayered structure of *Seishōjo* makes it a difficult work to follow for the reader. Throughout the novel, Kurahashi weaves back and forth between the diaries of the two narrators. “I”’s narrative serves as the

foundation of the work. Within his narrative, Kurahashi places three separate diaries of Miki. While Miki's diaries are more or less temporally coherent, "I" adopts a stream-of-consciousness approach to writing, temporally transporting himself and the reader to whatever memory he is trying to uncover and recall. Kurahashi further complicates the reading experience by adding full paragraphs written entirely in *katakana* throughout the novel. The bifurcated narrative, the temporal jumps, and the *katakana* all make the reader aware of the fact that they are reading a work of fiction. Kurahashi challenges the reader, asking them to put in the work of deciphering her novel.

My interpretation of the novel will still consider Kurahashi's intentional and explicit ways in which she challenges the reader, but it will primarily focus on the ways in which the acts of reading and writing done by "I" and Miki separate and define their gender identities. In my analysis of Kurahashi's gender construction of both narrators, I turn to Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) for a theoretical framework in analyzing *Seishōjo* from the perspective of gender.²

Butler coins the term "gender performativity" in *Gender Trouble*. In the first chapter of the book, Butler questions the existence of a "subject" of feminism. They write, "The very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms... There is very little agreement after all on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women" (1). What Butler

² In Sakaki's work, "(Re)Canonizing Kurahashi Yumiko," she dedicates a section of her essay to discuss the performative self found in many of Kurahashi's works. However, Sakaki interprets gender performativity in Kurahashi's works to mean that Kurahashi's female subjects "embody internal nothingness" (168). She asserts that the women are empty because they lack a gender core. In her reading, Sakaki applies the concept of gender performativity and the lack of a gender core to women specifically.

then proposes is to change our shared perception of gender. Instead of thinking of terms such as “man” or “woman” as unchanging truths, Butler sees gender as a constant act of “doing,” where “the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence” (24). They continue, “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (25). Rather than thinking of gender as a natural expression of identity, Butler posits that all gender expressions are constructed—none are inherent to one’s identity.

In Katano’s “‘Onna no kamen’ wo kaburu toki,” the scholar begins with a rough summary of Butler’s idea of gender performativity. She argues against Butler, asserting that not all gender expression can be considered performative, because women are the only sex capable of reproducing. Katano believes in a “mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex” (Butler 6). However, for Butler, sex and gender are both cultural constructions. They write, “Perhaps [sex] was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all” (7). In other words, the idea that it is a woman who menstruates and reproduces itself is a construction.

An important point of Butler’s gender performativity is the acknowledgement that the idea of gender performativity does not necessarily mean gender is not “real.” They explain, “To claim that gender is constructed is not to assert its illusoriness or artificiality, where those terms are understood to reside within a binary that counterposes the ‘real’ and the ‘authentic’ as oppositional” (32). Butler also emphasizes the fact that the performance of gender is not a conscious act performed by an individual. The subjects, or the “doers,” are not aware of the fact that they are “doing” gender (25). Despite the performative nature of gender, the lack of agency

makes it impossible to make a conscious decision to transgress gender norms and free oneself from the restrictive cultural rules of gender expression.

Butler's concept of gender performativity destabilizes the idea of a coherent gendered self. In the third chapter of *Gender Trouble*, they write, "Acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body... Such acts, gestures... are *performative* in the sense that the essence of identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured..." (136). This means that the ways in which one acts or expresses themselves does not speak to the core gender identity of a person, precisely because no such core exists. Butler then turns to the performance of drag as a parodic performance that "mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" (137). They continue, "*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency*" (137). The scholar looks to drag and other forms of parodic gender expressions as an opportunity to break through current reified gender norms. By repeating imitative gender performance continuously, Butler claims that it could then "*displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself" (148).

The characters of Kurahashi's novel may not be performing drag, but there is a highly parodic element to the gender expressions of the two main narrators, "I" and Miki. I argue that through parody, Kurahashi uncovers the performative nature of gender. For the hero of the story, Kurahashi creates a caricature of the canonical authors of modern Japanese literature by constructing a parody of the I-novel. The heroine, Miki, constructs her own version of a *shōjo* (少女 "young girl") identity, taking elements of girls' literature and manga and poking fun at them through parody and play. By imitating two popular genres of Japanese literature—the I-

novel and *shōjo* literature—Kurahashi caricaturizes the gendered identities of the rational, smart, elite male writer and the flowery, beautiful, innocent *shōjo*. This caricaturization reveals the arbitrary nature of attributes like “masculine” or “girly,” thereby destabilizing long held ideas that serious male writers write highbrow literature and that girlhood is a time of innocence, soft beauty, and friendship.

The first section of my analysis will examine the construction of a *shōjo* identity by the heroine. I will begin with a brief history and definition of *shōjo* literature, as well as an introduction to the scholarship connecting *shōjo* literature with the works of Kurahashi Yumiko. Then, I will consider how Kurahashi plays with and alters *shōjo* tropes, revealing the performative nature of the *shōjo* found in girls’ literature. I examine three different ways in which the *shōjo* is parodied. First, I look at the father-daughter incest outlined in Miki’s first and third diaries. Second, I turn to the “S relationship” between Miki and her female friend, M. Finally, I explore Kurahashi’s depiction of the feminine body and Miki’s fixation on menstrual/vaginal blood.

In the second section, I argue that Kurahashi constructs an imitation of an I-novel only to deconstruct the genre, exposing again the arbitrary nature of attributing elements of the I-novel to the personalities and ideologies of elite male writers. Different scholars have different definitions of what constitutes as an I-novel, but I will briefly explain and define the I-novel, pulling from Edward Fowler and Sakaki Atsuko.

Miki’s *Shōjo* Identity

The genre of *shōjo shōsetsu* (少女小説), or girls’ literature, has had a history of over one hundred years and has undergone several shifts and transitions since its inception. I will begin

with a brief history of the genre and introduce key writers, works, and scholars who study it.

Many scholars cite the Taishō period writer Yoshiya Nobuko as the pioneer of the genre, but Kume Yoriko posits an earlier origin in the Meiji period. Kume traces the beginnings of the genre to the magazine, *Shōnen sekai* (少年世界 Boy's world), and the writer Wakamatsu Shizuko (25). Through the stories of Wakamatsu Shizuko, the word *shōjo shōsetsu* first begins to be used to describe tragic stories featuring young heroines. Kume links the *shōjo* stories featured in *Shōnen sekai* to the government's new system of the "good wife, wise mother," whereby Japan was deliberately attempting to shape women into becoming useful tools for their individual husbands and to the nation-state as a whole (26). Kume pinpoints the birth of the genre to be around the end of the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), near the turn of the century.

However, Kume explains that it was not just stories written from the point-of-view of young women that were considered under the banner of *shōjo shōsetsu*. In "*Shōjo shōsetsu*" *no seisei* (「少女小説」の生成 "The Formation of 'Shōjo Shōsetsu'") Kume writes, "The name of "*shōjo shōsetsu*" was even used for stories that featured a *shōjo* but were marketed towards adult men"³ (22). As young girls began to attend school, they became exposed to the public eye while they commuted to school. In "Commuting Gazes," Alisa Freedman explains that, through the gazes of men on the trains, "Female students became both idealized as model modern women and eroticized as sexual objects" (30). A collective image of the *shōjo* as an object of sexual desire is born.

While men could gaze upon and sexualize the *shōjo*, the actual girls themselves were not allowed to fall in love and choose the person to marry because of strict patriarchal standards.

³ All translations my own, unless otherwise stated.

From the end of the Meiji era and the beginning of the Taishō era, writers circumvent this problem by writing about girls' friendship as a substitute for romantic plots (Kume 28). Yoshiya Nobuko is arguably the most well-known writer of friendship stories. This is also the period when girls' literature truly begins to take off, thanks in large part to the magazine industry and the birth of several magazines marketed towards young girls (Dollase 727).

In the postwar period, girls' magazines transition from a focus on literary works to more visual entertainment. Shamoan writes that during the 1950s and 60s, "teen films were the locus of *shōjo bunka* (少女文化 "girls' culture")" (85). However, *shōjo* manga also began gaining traction during the two decades before becoming the center of *shōjo* cultural production in the 1970s. This means that Kurahashi had grown up and was writing during a transitional period of girls' culture, a time when the culture was redefining its borders and developing a distinct flavor and shape. In *Seishōjo* and other works, Kurahashi seems to pull her image of the *shōjo* from several different time periods, most likely influenced by the transformations *shōjo* culture was going through during Kurahashi's lifetime.

Despite the twists and turns *shōjo* culture has taken, from its inception, the genre has never had a stable, static definition. However, one aspect that Kume makes clear in her outline of the history of the *shōjo shōsetsu* is the emphasis on the "aesthetic value of the girl—as something to be 'looked at'" (21). Regardless of the intended audience of the genre—young girls or adult men —, the characters portrayed "had to learn not to 'love' but to 'be loved,' to 'be chosen.' Girls' magazines thus taught girls how to be an object of love" (Kume 21). The trend of viewing young women as objects of affection and desire, as opposed to agents or subjects of it continues throughout *shōjo shōsetsu* and even into common tropes found in postwar *shōjo manga*.

Different scholars may have differing definitions of *shōjo* culture,⁴ but the idea that the girl is an object of love, not the subject, is generally agreed upon. *Shōjo* experts often describe girlhood, or the period of *shōjo*, as a stage of transition. Honda Masuko, in “The Genealogy of *Hirahira*,” writes, “‘Girlhood’ is often likened to the sleep of a pupa awaiting transformation into a butterfly, a time spent in a closed world” (20). Another scholar, Fujimoto Yukari, in “Transgender: Female Hermaphrodites and Male Androgynes,” asserts that girls are “genderless” before they become “loved by a man” (79). In the definitions of Fujimoto and Honda, there is a sense that the world of *shōjo* is a protective sphere that shields the girls from the outside world.

Yet, the sphere of girlhood cannot completely protect the girls within. Honda explains, “The girl may try to avoid contact with the outside world when in her self-contained, inwardly converging state; nevertheless, her constant swaying and fluttering provokes and attracts the gazes of others” (20). Honda echoes the words of Kume, hinting at the sexualization of *shōjo*. Fujimoto, too, writes that once a man falls in love with the girl, she must shed her “genderless” state and graduate into womanhood. The girls within the protective sphere are not able to completely hide themselves from men, and are then forced to shed their girlhood and transform into women.

The literary elements found across many works of *shōjo* fiction are what defines the genre for Honda. She argues that there are “signs” recognizable by all girls that populate the world of *shōjo* fiction. She says, “The common factors in the realm of girls’ culture are undoubtedly the ‘colors, fragrances, and sounds’ that resonate uniquely with the aesthetics of the girl” (27). The

⁴ The words *shōjo bunka*, or *shōjo* culture, are often used to describe both the literature and manga.

most notable and prominent of the signs is ribbons and frills. The reason ribbons and frills are found recurrently in *shōjo* culture is because of the “fluttering movement” Honda refers to as “*hirahira*” (33).

Honda defines the *shōjo* by looking at common signifiers found throughout postwar girls’ literature. Moreover, she is particularly concerned with the readers of the literature. For Honda, the signifiers of the *shōjo* must be recognizable to all young girls in Japan. Fujimoto’s research has led her to find that since the birth of *shōjo* manga in the 1950s, gender switching and gender fluidity was a common trope found in various popular manga. However, Fujimoto makes clear that young girls lose their flexibility in gender identity “when the girl is promised a fortunate sexuality [and] she removes the men’s clothing and accedes to adulthood” (79).

In Honda’s definition, there is an assumption that the signs of girls’ literature will resonate with all young girl-readers. That is to say, *hirahira* speaks to all girls universally. For Fujimoto as well, the gender fluidity represented in the world of *shōjo* only occurs during the period of girlhood, and once the girls grow up, they outgrow their unstable gender identity. Honda defines the *shōjo* with the assumption that there is something natural within girls and women that make them girls and women. Fujimoto makes the point that “sex/gender is not something that is physical or external, rather, it is something determined psychologically,” but concedes that in the majority of *shōjo* manga, the girls naturally grow into womanhood—they get married (77). Both Honda and Fujimoto point to the idea that, as members of society, girls are expected to graduate from their girlhood and enter the world of womanhood. Growing up forces them to leave behind the private world of the *shōjo*.

For this analysis of *Seishōjo*, I combine the definitions of *shōjo* culture put forth by Honda

and Fujimoto, whilst taking into consideration the history of *shōjo* literature being used as a tool to promote the system of “good wife, wise mother.” I define *shōjo* culture as expressions of girlhood as a time of transition. The literature and *manga* that make up the genre emphasize extreme femininity by dressing up the girls in frills, lace, and ribbons, always considering the gazes of men. Yet, there is also an element of gender fluidity that allows young girls to experiment and play before reaching womanhood, where they become more limited by what society expects out of them.

In this section, I argue that Kurahashi exposes the fact that the portrayal of the *shōjo* experience in girls’ literature and popular culture creates the existence of girlhood itself. In other words, Kurahashi’s parody of *shōjo* identity shows that this type of identity only exists because it has been perpetuated and repeated in literature and media. As evidence, I identify three “signs” of the *shōjo* Kurahashi parodies: the father-daughter relationship, the S relationship, and the feminine body.

“*My Heart Belongs to Daddy*”

Other scholars have voiced their own interpretations of Miki’s incestuous relationship with Daddy. Katano Tomoko, in “A Study of Kurahashi’s *Seishōjo*: The Masochist’s Contract,” (倉橋由美子「聖少女」論：契約するマゾヒスト *Kurahashi Yumiko “Seishōjo” ron: Keiyaku suru mazohisuto*) first explains the father-daughter plot found in *Seishōjo* using Freud’s Oedipus complex. In Freud’s lecture on femininity, he claims that boys and girls at first develop while following the same path—there is not much difference between the two groups. In Freud’s words, “the little girl is a little man” (118). After reaching a particular age, however, the two sexes split. While the object of attention for boys remains their mothers, for girls, they exchange

their mothers for their fathers instead. Freud explains that this is the formation of the Oedipus complex for women, and that this change in love-object from mother to father comes from the young girl's envy of the penis, or "castration complex" (124). He further says, at first, "the girl regards her castration as an individual misfortune, and only gradually extends it to other females and finally to her mother as well... With the discovery that her mother is castrated it becomes possible to drop her as an object" (127). In other words, after the girl discovers that other women also do not have a penis, she begins to value women less. This results in a hatred towards the mother not only for failing to provide the daughter with a penis, but also for the mother not having a penis herself. A girl's desire for her father comes from her desire for a penis, but her new attraction to her father also results in an "intensified" hatred towards the mother because the mother has now become a rival, "who receives from her father everything that she desires from him" (129).

As Katano explains in her work, Miki does feel both hatred and jealousy towards her mother. Miki looks at her own unripe body and compares it to her mother's full, mature one. She also often compares her mother to a goddess, a being above humans (Katano, 70). In the end, Miki is able to overcome her Oedipus complex—Freud explains that the idea of father as love-object eventually disappears and they find a replacement-father when the girl grows older—by substituting Daddy for a new type of father-figure: "I."

Indeed, Freud's Oedipus complex seems to describe Kurahashi's heroine. However, Katano argues that, concealed underneath the guise of a desire for the father's love, there exists a masochistic desire for pain that complicates the Oedipus complex. She writes, "Rather than for love, [Miki] provokes the sadistic nature [of her father] in order to obtain her fill of

pain=ecstasy” (72). That is, her father is not a love-object of Miki’s, and furthermore, Miki derives sexual pleasure from both mental and physical pain. As such, Katano explains that the masochistic Miki is actually the one seducing Daddy to “play the role of the sadist” (72). Miki’s desire for pain=ecstasy complicates the application of the Oedipus complex to the situation of Miki and Daddy, because there is no real triangulation between mother, father, and child. Katano’s argument is that Miki only yearns for pleasure, and the object that gives her that pleasure is a secondary priority.

Takahara Eiri analyzes the novel in a similar manner to Katano, writing, “The most arrogant and incredulous element [of the novel] is Miki’s commitment towards the impossible—the daughter’s attempt to rein in the father in any form, when originally, the father controls the daughter” (225). For Takahara, this is what she calls the “*shōjo*-type consciousness” (少女型意識 *shōjogata ishiki*), a consciousness specific to contemporary writers whose works depict a longing for freedom (自由 *jiyū*) and arrogance (高慢 *kōman*) (17). Miki’s persistence in fighting over control of her sexual and romantic partners (“I” and “daddy”), Takahara writes, is “the most honest desire of the young girls of postwar Japan, or the bearers of a *shōjo*-type consciousness” (226).

Katano and Takahara look at how Miki inverts roles by becoming the dominant party in her relationship with Daddy, a man who embodies the patriarchal system. Their interpretations show that Miki protests against the patriarchy by dominating a figure who serves as both her lover and her father. At the heart of the argument of each scholar is the idea that a *shōjo* is always in a position of weakness and because of their lack of power, they often lack agency. The patriarchy makes decisions for them. Miki counters this by showing strength despite her *shōjo* identity.

Essentially, their arguments explain why Miki is a special or unusual *shōjo*, and that her relationship with her father is what makes her unique. However, my point is that Miki marks herself as a *shōjo* by constructing this love story surrounding herself and her father. Rather than a protest against patriarchy, I read Miki's diary as a construction of her gender identity. The father-daughter plot is essential to this construction.

In her final diary written to "I," Miki confesses she created this fictional story based on her real incestuous relationship with her father in order to "sanctify" (聖化 *seika*) their relationship.⁵ She writes, "Through my novel, I tried to sanctify the impossible love that I held for my impossible lover, Daddy" (230). Earlier in the novel, Writer explains to "I" the very same thing. She tells him, "By using written language, she created an imaginary love—an impossible love beyond expectations...A romance between lovers worthy enough to sanctify the incest between father and daughter" (197). Both Miki and Writer stress the role of writing in the process of sanctification. Sakaki, citing the words of Kurahashi herself, explains that sanctification is "not about incest in society, but about a peculiar injunction in which eros rises out of incest through the process of fiction" (98). Sakaki doesn't further explain what she means in the above quote, but I interpret Kurahashi's words as meaning the world of the novel can distort or conceal what the real world considers "crimes," like the crime of incest. The fictional world is a distortion or upside-down world of reality.

Miki's third diary confesses that she did actually have a sexual relationship with her biological father, but her first diary keeps the reader in the dark. She creates a fictional character, although he is heavily inspired by her real, biological father. In the world of the diary, incest

⁵ Translation is originally Sakaki's from her dissertation (98).

remains concealed because the reader never truly finds out if Daddy is based on a real person. Not only does Miki attempt to distort and conceal the real relationship she has with her father, but it also serves as an exploration for the author, Miki, to experiment between the boundaries of the transgressive and the natural. On the one hand, the common trope of “daddy’s little girl” naturalizes father-daughter kinship and it normalizes having a close relationship between a father figure and a daughter. On the other hand, incest is considered taboo, a transgression that should never be committed. Inside of the world of Miki’s novel, the heroine crosses the line that separates “daddy’s little girl” from the incest taboo. By doing so, Miki uncovers the fact that there is little that separates the accepted trope from the transgressive taboo.

It is important to note that the father-daughter relationship was not a common “sign” of the *shōjo*. However, I argue that Miki’s construction of a relationship with daddy signals a *shōjo* identity for two reasons. First, *shōjo* literature comes together as a genre largely by form rather than content. That is to say, it is not the plots themselves that map out and create the genre, but instead, the way in which works are written. Miki employs the type of flowery, metaphor-heavy language found in many prewar works of *shōjo* literature. Furthermore, the short story “*Watashi no kokoro wa papa no mono*” uses old *kana* orthography. Kurahashi chooses to switch to regular *kana* usage in *Seishōjo*, but the fact that the original short story is written in old *kana* suggests that Kurahashi wants her readers to make the connection to *shōjo* literature, which was often written in old *kana* orthography or *bibun* (美文 “beautiful prose”). While the content—the father-daughter plot—may not be common in *shōjo* literature, Miki mimics the form.

Second, although the trope of “daddy’s little girl” was not a part of *shōjo bunka*, it was indeed part of the cultural image of girls. The 1950s and 1960s brought a wave of American

popular culture, particularly movies and jazz. As Shamoan argues, *shōjo* literature had seen a dip in popularity during this time period because of the influence of films and star actresses who swayed the larger populace of young Japanese girls (113). In *Seishōjo*, Miki and her friend meet in a movie theater to view a Hollywood film. Many of Kurahashi's heroines are also fans of jazz. It is clear that imported popular culture helped shape the new postwar *shōjo*.

Similar to the title of the original short story, the words, "I belong to Daddy," written in English, appear twice in *Seishōjo*. The first time she utters the phrase, Miki also says, "Wasn't there a song like that?" (114). The second time, the daughter is on vacation with her mother when she tells her mother she wrote "I belong to daddy" on a postcard sent to her father. As Miki describes to M, the song, "My Heart Belongs to Daddy," first written by Cole Porter in 1938 for a Broadway musical, tells a simple story of a young woman flirting with other boys her age, but never committing to them because she has a "daddy" she adores. The song is reused for a Marilyn Monroe film, *Let's Make Love* (1960). In this version, Monroe adds extra lyrics to the intro of the song. She says the words, "My name is Lolita and uh...I'm not supposed to play... with boys!" (Monroe, 0:44). In both versions, the song does not address directly if the "daddy" is a biological father or a sugar daddy, but regardless, the song "My Heart Belongs to Daddy" infantilizes the singer ("lolita") and insinuates the presence of a sexual relationship with someone whom she refers to as "daddy." Inspired by the contents of the song, Kurahashi reimagines the normalization and romanticization of close father-daughter kinship in *Seishōjo*.

While "My Heart Belongs to Daddy" may allude to a sexual relationship with a "daddy," it stops short of directly articulating such a relationship. Moreover, the idea that a young child is "daddy's little princess" or "daddy's little girl" is widely accepted, but once the young girl grows

up, there is an expectation for both father and daughter to distance themselves from one another. Even in *Seishōjo*, when Miki turns twelve and reaches menarche, her father laughs and says, “Now I can’t take baths with you anymore, Miki” (232), implying that now that Miki has begun to grow into a female body, it would be improper for the pair to see each other’s naked bodies.

In her third diary, Miki confesses that the sexual relationship with her father began after she discovered his old diary.⁶ He writes, “This child will become even more beautiful than her mother, and she will come to love me, as a lover” (232). Through this diary, she discovers that her father had anticipated incest with Miki since the day she was born. It was also he who had given her the name “Miki.” He continues, “In any case, Miki is the enemy I myself created” (232). Her father gives her the identity of “Miki” by gifting her the name, but he also asserts ownership over Miki’s body by claiming to have “created” her. In her father’s diary, there is no masking or concealing the fact that he desires Miki as a future sexual object because of their biological kinship—he “created” her and therefore seeks to possess her both as a father and lover. In the song “My Heart Belongs to Daddy,” the speaker is a woman. The woman willfully chooses to seek out and spend time with her “daddy.” Unlike the song “My Heart Belongs to Daddy,” Miki’s desire to commit incest is triggered by the writing of her father. Her father’s diary plants the seed of incest within Miki’s developing mind.

In her own diary, Miki chooses to create a fictional story based off of the real-life events of her father and herself. Rather than directly writing her biological father as Daddy, Miki

⁶ Kurahashi is a writer who wants her readers to challenge the notion that people write to express the truth. This is why the reader cannot trust if what Miki has written is real or fiction. However, given the nature of the third diary, I am operating under the assumption that Miki is indeed telling the truth here.

purposely keeps the identity of her lover ambiguous. She creates a fictional character who is both similar to and very different from her real-life father. In this way, she mimics the effect of “My Heart Belongs to Daddy”—Daddy may not be a biological father, but rather, he is a father-figure whom the subject sees as both a lover and someone in a position of power.

In order to exaggerate the power of Daddy, Miki characterizes him as a “god” (99). She engages in a peculiar back-and-forth conversation with Daddy, during which she asks him what he is hiding inside his chest, as it sounds like objects are rolling around inside. He tells her, “When I break up with a woman, I take one of her bones. The bones are a substitute for a gravestone” (98). Her repeated use of the word “god” to describe Daddy elevates his position to a status of that above other men. Although Miki describes him as a god, the above image of his chest being filled with the bones of past women suggests a grim reaper rather than a god. Regardless, Miki communicates to the reader that Daddy is no common man—he is a higher being. Their conversation about the bones, as well as her description of her lover as “a terrifying god” also conjures up the image of a higher being who is not afraid to take the lives of women. This image of a grim-reaping lover also hints at Daddy’s mistreatment of women. In return for his time and his love, he feels entitled to a piece of the woman’s body. The collecting of bones, then, can be read as a metaphor of Daddy’s belief that women owe him something in a relationship. The diary entry where he expects Miki to fall in love with him because he helped create her suggests the same.

In a different passage, Miki writes, “Father plus Man equals God. That’s why Daddy is my god...” (107). For Miki, Daddy is only a god if he happens to be her biological father. She does not provide concrete evidence that shows Daddy is biologically related to Miki. She only knows

he was once her mother's lover, and her current step-father entered their family after she was born. But in the mind of Miki, she believes Daddy is both her father and her lover, and thus, a god. The question of Daddy's identity remains a mystery but this passage reveals Miki's wish for Daddy to be her biological father. Just before she writes out her formula of "Father plus Man equals God," Miki imagines having sex and, while he is inside of her, asking Daddy if he knows that she is actually her daughter. She writes, "If the answer is 'yes,' out of happiness, I will wrap myself around him like a snake and I will really start to love Daddy" (107). This affirms the idea that Miki wants her lover and her father to be one and the same. Furthermore, she wants Daddy to desire her as a daughter and a woman.

Similar to the "lolita" of Marilyn Monroe's "My Heart Belongs to Daddy," Miki describes herself as a "saintess" (聖女 *seijo*) who is devoted to her god. Marilyn Monroe's lolita ignores the other boys out of loyalty to her sugar daddy, and Miki the saintess gives her body as sacrifice out of devotion to her god. In her diary, Miki writes that their relationship is a "contract that is smeared with [my] blood full of suffering and sacrifice" (97). She repeatedly says she is "bleeding for Daddy," a phrase that illustrates the masochism Katano describes, but also points to a blind devotion to Daddy. Miki is willing to shed blood for her god.

After spending a night in bed with Daddy, she tells him, "I want to quickly become someone capable of fully loving you, Daddy. I want to become a flower that's able to melt sweet honey onto your pillar...I love you, Daddy" (100). Miki sounds as if she is a woman devoted to her religion, only alive to be of use to her god. It also shows the extent to which Miki is willing to use her body in order to sexually satisfy her lover. She believes that if she succeeds in aiding her Daddy to reach sexual ecstasy, she will also succeed in becoming a fitting sexual partner.

Despite her self-designation as a maiden who lives for her god, she also confesses to deceiving her Daddy. Miki turns her words to the reader, and confesses that “everything was a lie” (100). She doesn’t truly love this man. One side of her attempts to gain favor, hailing the man as a god. But her other half is interested in toppling over the god. This sentiment is mirrored in another part of the text, where Miki wakes up, looks in the mirror and sees “half her face is that of a beast and the other half a saintess” (101). The saintess worships her god, while the beast is the masochist who only wishes for the ecstasy of pain. The vacillation between saintess and beast also parallels Miki’s movement between the world of father-daughter love and the world of father-daughter incest.

The two faces can also be read as Miki transitioning from one self to another. Her face is split in half because she is currently in the process of fully turning into a beast from a saintess. She writes, “Apparently, this face is just like that of the woman who makes love to a man for the first time” (101). She implies that the haggard features of the beast-half of her face are a result of engaging in sexual intercourse with a man. Miki’s two faces represent her leaving the world of the *shōjo* and entering the world of womanhood because of the loss of her virginity.

Miki’s two faces also represents the mask she wears as a *shōjo* and the hidden self behind the *shōjo* identity. She appears in front of others as a young, high school girl interested in popular culture, jazz, and movie stars. Yet, privately, she goes against the allowed norms of *shōjo* identity by having a sexual relationship with an older man. Miki’s appropriation of the lyrics of “My Heart Belongs to Daddy” also highlights the difficult position of the *shōjo*. During the 1950s and ’60s, much of their culture derived from Hollywood films that featured romance and mischief. Yet, within society, upper-class *shōjo* are asked to continue to be docile, obedient, and proper.

This is so with her mother when Miki recounts a conversation they shared. The mother is concerned about her daughter attending university because then Miki won't have the time to learn the cultured arts such as flower arrangement, tea ceremony, and cooking (120). This is the type of pressure placed onto Miki. The heroine may have written her diary as an outlet—she is unable to emulate the movie stars she looks up to, thus she creates a private world where she can mimic what she sees on the big screen without the prying eyes of others.

S Relationship

Friendship between girls that mirrored expressions of heterosexual love was a common theme found in prewar girls' culture. In "Prewar Girls' Culture (*Shōjo Bunka*), 1910-1937," Deborah Shamoan writes that the "passionate friendship" between two girls was referred to as "S," taking the first letter from the English word "sister" (35). The S relationship was a special type of friendship that occurred exclusively between two girls, often with one older-sister figure (お姉様 *onēsama*) and one younger girl (37). In describing the S relationship, Shamoan writes, "[S relationship] was a coupling not merely with someone of the same sex, but with one who exhibited the same modes of dress, speech, and behavior as oneself... The ideal of S relationships encouraged sameness and loving one who looks just like the self, or rather, a better idealized self" (37). Although S relationships mimicked the model of heterosexual love, the love between two girls was rooted in their shared feminine identity.

Another aspect of the S relationship Shamoan raises is its emphasis on chastity and purity. Because the love between the two girls was always framed as pure and innocent, it meant it was also safe (Shamoan 44). In contrast, in works depicting S relationships, any type of correspondence between girls and boys was marked as impure. Citing the scholar Inagaki

Kyōko, Shamoan writes, “Girls’ love letters to boys operate on a discourse of shame not only because of the inherent scandal involved, but to keep the girl from seeming like the aggressor in the relationship” (44). Without the same social rules and limitations, S relationships allowed the girls to express themselves in a way otherwise impossible in a heterosexual relationship.

Kurahashi includes a plot point in *Seishōjo* that alludes to the prewar S relationships. Miki’s first diary mainly focuses on her sexual relationship with Daddy, but she also talks at length about two other people in her life: her mother and her friend, M. Interestingly—and no doubt intentionally—both her mother and M share the same name, Misao. In this section, I argue that Kurahashi’s parody of the S relationship destabilizes the idea that S relationships were inherently pure or innocent.

Miki first meets M at the movie theater. Miki is on her period, and she writes that it often makes her sensitive to the smells of others. She notices M wincing in pain, and realizes that a specific scent is also permeating from the girl’s body. When M runs to the bathroom, Miki follows and hands her medicine to help with her menstrual cramps. The heroine cites this incident as the beginning of their friendship.

M immediately warms up to Miki because of this encounter. Miki’s looks and way of speaking signal to M that Miki is also a high school girl. M feels camaraderie in the fact that Miki too is struggling with menstrual pains. Because M sees herself reflected in her perception of Miki, she promptly links arms with Miki and sees her as a friend. Although the reader never gets to hear the story of their meeting from M’s point of view, Miki’s depiction of M’s body language suggests that Miki’s identity as a schoolgirl is what attracted M to Miki.

The heroine also uses language that stresses M’s aesthetic beauty, as well as her immaturity

and innocence. When introducing M to her readers, she describes her as “the beautiful M wrapped in long hair and soft flesh,” emphasizing M’s physical features (117). When recounting her first meeting with her friend, Miki describes her body in this way:

She was a girl that reminds one of the beautiful women of the Heian period. Her straight hair reached her lower spine. There was a beautiful dimple on her hand which looked as if it would redden immediately when in contact with water. She was a bit shorter than me, but her bust, hips, and legs were sufficiently plump. Her innocent fullness reminded one of Renoir’s girls. (118)

What’s interesting about Miki’s description of M’s physical appearance is the narrator’s attention to the feminine details of her friend’s body. The way Miki moves from the hair at the top of M’s body all the way down to her legs brings to mind a man assessing the physical appearance of a woman. The heroine’s gaze towards the movement of M’s hands, and the detail of noticing a dimple also suggests that Miki is evaluating M’s looks. Her comment regarding frequently sexualized parts of the feminine body again makes the reader forget that the speaker is also a young woman. Finally, Miki qualifies the “fullness” of M’s body with the adjective “innocent” (*junshin*).

She repeatedly describes M as “innocent” and refers to her as “Little Miss Virtue” (美德ちゃん *bitokuchan*). Miki wants her readers to identify M as the model *shōjo*, pure and innocent, yet aesthetically beautiful and lovely. Miki’s desire to paint M as the innocent but beautiful *shōjo* becomes even more clear in the following passage:

M is the innocent type of beauty. The word “innocence” is as if it was created for M. Pure white granulated sugar makes up M’s flesh, her nervous system is the branches of naivety,

her bloodstream is red milk, and her unknowing hair, endlessly long and black, covers her shoulders to her back. (124)

Using elaborate metaphors, Miki directly links M's physical beauty to her naivety and innocence, as if innocence personified constructed Miki's physical form. Miki's use of language--the beautiful metaphors, the colors, and the foreign words—also mimics the language of *shōjo* literature. The writer uses flowery language to transport the reader, making them believe that M is a being from a different world—the world of *shōjo*.

Kurahashi directly alludes to the S relationships of prewar *shōjo* literature when she writes, “I expected to be called *onēsama* at any moment” (118). After the incident at the movie theater, Miki also gifts M with an expensive opal ring. In return, M gives her friend a homemade ring (123). The exchange of rings solidifies their friendship and symbolizes their special relationship with one another. The fact that Miki's ring is much more expensive than M's also serves to affirm that Miki is the *onēsama* in their S relationship.

The section directly preceding the account of her first meeting with M describes a conversation between the two friends about Miki's Daddy. She confesses to M that she is seeing a man whom she calls Daddy, and that she has a sexual relationship with the older man. The heroine seems to enjoy shocking and disturbing M. Her friend asks Miki to stop telling her about this man, yet Miki refuses and continues to push M. In the end, Miki forces herself onto M, planting a kiss on her cheek and then on her lips (115). Before parodying the S relationship in the succeeding section, Kurahashi marks Miki as a subversive character—the reader is aware that Miki is not an innocent or pure *shōjo*. However, the conversation between Miki and M paints M as a victim of her friend's sadism. The reader comes to believe that M is too innocent to

understand such sexually explicit topics, but Miki forces them onto her.

While the friendship of Miki and M takes the relative shape of an S relationship, the parody is neither complete nor faithful in its imitation of the S relationships of prewar *shōjo* literature. But the similarities shared reveal some of the problematic elements of the S relationship and by extension, *shōjo* identity. Kurahashi portrays Miki, the *onēsama* figure in the relationship, as sadistic and aggressive towards M. She directly depicts a clear power imbalance between the two young women. The younger sister idolizes the *onēsama*, who is older and wiser. The *onēsama* harnesses the power to sway and influence the younger sister. Kurahashi reveals that the power imbalances seen in heterosexual relationships exist in S relationships, too.

However, the biggest twist in the portrayal of their relationship is the reveal of M's true nature. Miki invites M to a sleepover. She plans on sexually corrupting her friend. But to Miki's surprise, when she slips her hands around M's slender neck, pretending to choke her, M says, "Choke me harder. Do it stronger, harder. You can kill me if you want" (126). Miki, shocked by her friend's words, writes, "In reality, it was me who was being seduced. For a while, I wasn't able to stop the trembling of my body" (126). Miki had thought that she was the *onēsama* in the relationship, that she was the one in control. M surprises the heroine by turning the tables and revealing her own masochistic tendencies.

In public, M presents herself as a model schoolgirl. Like Miki, M performs *shōjo* identity by maintaining a feminine, youthful physical appearance and by playing innocent, avoiding topics deemed to be indecent. Shamoons' description of the S relationship makes it seem as if, because the relationship is between two women, it was impossible at the time for S relationships to be seen as sexual or impure. Kurahashi's portrayal of the friendship between Miki and M resists this

claim. Both Miki and M perform the role of the schoolgirl when in the presence of others, yet in private spaces, they engage in sex.

Regarding the world of *shōjo* literature, Hiromi Tsuchiya Dollase writes, “Girls indulge in their fantasy world and create a pseudo-reality by performing a reconstructed identity, that of Shōjo” (732). She stresses that the world of the *shōjo* is a fictional space, where girls can be their idealized, perfect selves. However, the same world can also be a place that fuels anxiety because in reality, living girls are not as they appear in girls’ culture. Miki’s sadism and M’s masochism break the idea that the world of the *shōjo* can only be inhabited by perfectly pure girls.

Feminine Body

Because the *shōjo* continues to be an object of desire for men, *shōjo* identity heavily relies on the visual, physical appearance of the schoolgirls. The feminine bodies of the schoolgirls are a significant signifier of *shōjo* identity. Since the late Meiji era, when young women became more visible to the public eye, the *shōjo* has been sexualized in literature. For example, in Tayama Katai’s “Girl Watcher,” the gaze of the man focuses on the physical appearance and the fashion of the young women he watches.

At the station, when seeing a girl with whom he often takes the train, the narrator describes her fashion. He says, “She wore a bright, striped top and a maroon *hakama*. She carried a slender parasol, striped top and a bundle wrapped in purple cloth in her left. He noticed straight away that her ribbon today was white, different from her usual one” (169). Sugita, the main character, then fantasizes about watching her on the train. The narrator describes Sugita’s fantasies and says, “He would just sit opposite her, thinking about what a plump girl she was, how fleshy her cheeks were, how big her breasts were, and what a wonderful girl she was” (170). First, Sugita

notices the fashion of the *shōjo*. The ribbon and the trendy-colored *hakama* communicate to others that she is a schoolgirl. Then, Sugita observes her body carefully, imagining how it must look underneath her clothing.

Even from the *shōjo* perspective, physical beauty is an essential component. In “Na mo naki hana” (名も無き花 “The flower without name”), in Yoshiya Nobuko’s *Hana monogatari* (花物語 “Flower Tales”), two sisters find a bedridden girl near their villa, and are stunned by her breathtaking beauty. Despite being unable to completely see the young beauty because of the window curtains, they remark, “Just how beautiful, noble, and even saintly and solitary a figure” (85). Amazed by her beauty, they come to visit her at her window the following day. In the *shōjo* world of Yoshiya Nobuko, descriptions of purity and innocence are paired with physical beauty.

The popular prewar artist, Nakahara Jun’ichi, also emphasized the same attributes in his portraits of girls. Shamoan writes, “Nakahara’s girls are all slender and arranged at angles to indicate weakness. The faces are oval with pointed chins, small but very full lips, straight hair, and hugely exaggerated eyes with very full lashes and many highlights...The emphasis is on purity and innocence, tinged slightly with longing” (68). His style of drawing girls would continue in popularity into the postwar period during the rise of *shōjo manga*. Nakahara and Yoshiya Nobuko do not depict girls as sexual objects in the way Katai does, but they underscore the heavy focus on the bodies and faces of the *shōjo*.

The gazes of men and women alike emphasize the importance of a beautiful body, a beautiful face. However, the world of the *shōjo*, by solely focusing on the aesthetic value of the body, simplifies the feminine body. It seems as if the only purpose of the body is to be gazed upon. What’s missing from the bodies found in the world of *shōjo* is a realistic account of how the

body operates. For women especially, despite *shōjo* overlapping as the time of adolescence, discussions of female fecundity and menstruation are often displaced from the narrative. In this section, I will focus on Kurahashi Yumiko's portrayal of the fecund body. She includes several passages that detail the fashion and the physical attributes of the heroine and other female characters, but Kurahashi does not stray from portraying the often hidden parts of the feminine body.

The world of *shōjo* most likely hides the body's menstruating and reproductive capabilities because of society's perception of it. In the opening chapter of *Managing the Monstrous Feminine*, Jane Ussher argues that women in society and in culture are "positioned as monstrous feminine" (6). She lists several examples of movies and books where men's fear of being violently devoured by a woman's vagina come to life. Ussher argues that people believe women to be "monstrous" because "female fecundity" is "a sign of abjection" (6). In "Approaching Abjection," Julia Kristeva defines abjection as an "ambiguity" that cannot be defined as subject or object. The abject is "something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object" (4). When a subject reacts to something they deem "abject," they are constantly attempting to separate from it and rid themselves of the abjection. Ussher argues in her book that the fecund female body has been positioned as abject. She writes, "The apparently uncontained fecund body, with its creases and curves, secretions and seepages... signifies association with the animal world...and stands as the antithesis of the clean, contained, proper body, which 'must bear no trace of its debt to nature'" (7). Ussher asserts that the positioning of the female body as abject has led to religious regulation and "purification" of female bodies. It has also contributed to the persistent falsehood that women have a biological

propensity for madness and hysteria.

While Ussher discusses the ways in which societies and communities reject the female body and attempt to cleanse it, she also looks at how individual women reject their own fecund bodies. Because the world around women positions their bodies as “impure and corrupt, a source of moral and physical contamination,” women end up internalizing this idea, believing their bodies are abject (Ussher 1). In the fictional world of Kurahashi Yumiko, this is the case for many of her main heroines.

Feelings of disgust and shame surrounding the menstruating body have been a recurring theme in the works of Kurahashi Yumiko. In *Kurai tabi*, the main character, “You,” reaches menarche and soon after is sexually assaulted by a group of adolescent boys at the beach. When describing her first period, “You” says, “It is your mark of shame that flows from the wound you received when the world raped you” (109). In just the way Ussher describes woman’s relationship to their body, “You” clearly views her newly fecund body as a “mark of shame.” This leads “You” to reject her identity as a woman, and she tells her lover, “He,” that she is not actually a woman, but a thing that wears the mask of a woman. Kurahashi echoes this same idea in her nonfiction essay, “Yōjo de aru koto” (妖女であること “I am a witch”), where she writes that women writers are all women who are “not really women,” but humans who “live by taking advantage of the fact that they have the shape and body of a woman” (252). Kurahashi herself and her fictional heroines attempt to separate from their abject bodies by positioning themselves as not really women, but beings that wear the mask of one.

In another work, “Inside the Shell” (1960), “I” moves into the girl’s dormitory and she is immediately nauseated by the stench coming off of the other girls and their belongings. She

describes her roommates as similar to a “a herd of four-legged beasts” (116). With time, “I” realizes, “It seems that the menstrual cycles that affected each of us in turn were another reason why the <shell> was constantly pervaded by the stench of blood and animal skins” (120). In this work too, the heroine experiences a similar reaction of disgust and shame. But, rather than rejecting her own body, “I” is disgusted and ashamed of the female bodies of her roommates. Nevertheless, in both cases, the two heroines show a visceral repulsion for the uncleanness of the menstruating body.

In *Seishōjo*, Miki displays a similar reaction to “You” and “I” when faced with the menstruating body, but she also embraces the abject in a way very different from Kurahashi’s other heroines. In this section, I examine Miki’s conflicting views on the abject female body found in her first diary, focusing on the blood that comes from both menstruation and from physical trauma from sex. I argue that through writing, Miki attempts to work through her feelings of shame and disgust over her own body. Miki, rather than wear the mask of a woman, openly accepts all facets of her womanhood, including her menstruating body.

Similar to the heroine of “Inside the Shell,” Miki shows repulsion towards the menstruating bodies of other women. When Miki meets M in the movie theater, both girls are currently menstruating. Miki, knowing that M has just come back from the bathroom, is instantly repelled by M’s physical proximity, and must consciously make the choice not to fling her arm and push away M. In her diary, she says:

Isn’t it rude of her to touch me with her soiled body? The soft flesh hanging from my arm, shedding dirty blood from the crack [between her legs], releasing the stench of death, takes the form of a young madam running about with her excessively bright voice. Something

about her makes me feel uneasy for a reason I can't explain. (118)

What causes this reaction in Miki is the juxtaposition of M's vibrant, feminine outer appearance with the "stench of death" that is coming from the blood dripping out of M's body. Like in "Inside the Shell," Kurahashi describes the uncleanliness of menstruation through the sense of smell. In "Inside the Shell," the visual messiness of the dorm room bothers "I," but more than anything, "I" is disturbed by the vile stench that seems to permeate from her roommates. In the same way, Miki is sensitive to the smell of the menstrual blood coming from M.

Within the world of *shōjo*, depictions of the body are often visual. Especially in the postwar period, with the rise of films and *shōjo manga*, this becomes even more so. M's visual appearance is that of the common *shōjo* figure, yet Miki exposes the scent of M, which seems almost opposite what one would expect from an aesthetically beautiful young girl. By focusing on the scent of blood, Kurahashi is able to maintain the beautiful, canonical image of the *shōjo*, yet simultaneously introduce the abject feminine body.

Kurahashi also hints at the idea that abjection is something contagious. Her heroines fear proximity to other abject bodies. In "Inside the Shell," "I" is particularly bothered by the stench of others, and believes that she only starts smelling bad after being contaminated by the others. "I" attempts to separate herself from the abject bodies of the other girls. In *Seishōjo*, the reason Miki can sense that M is bleeding is because she herself is in the middle of menstruating. She explains, "During this time [of menstruation], my sense of smell becomes sharpened, and I am constantly irritated by certain smells, like the smell of my own blood, the smell of other people's mouths, and the smell of leather" (117).

When describing her first encounter with M, Miki doesn't seem to differ much from

Kurahashi's other heroines. She goes to the movie theater in order to clear her mind and to stop thinking about her menstruating body. It is only during moments with Daddy that Miki seems to enjoy her feminine body. In the passages that recount her relationship with Daddy, the blood that flows out of the vagina is a key element to her sexual connection with her older lover.

Miki starts her first diary with the line, "Daddy, I'm in the middle of bleeding" (97). She purposely keeps it vague without clearly articulating the source of the blood—is she menstruating? Or she bleeding from the physical trauma of sex? Her words after the first line point to the latter, and this seemingly conforms with the lie Miki gives her mother when she asks why Miki has come home earlier than expected. The daughter responds, "A customer came to visit, so I came home at eleven last night"⁷ (101). It was not her period that prevented her from staying out late, but rather, Miki was spending time with Daddy.

However, as Odaira Maiko points out in "Kurahashi Yumiko *Seishōjo ron*" (倉橋由美子「聖少女」論 "A Study of Kurahashi Yumiko's *Seishōjo*"), it is difficult to discern the veracity of Miki's claims here. Odaira writes that, earlier in the diary, Miki recalls her "first time" being disappointing and a betrayal of her expectations because of the lack of blood (97). As such, Odaira writes, "Rather than blood from penetration, the "customer" Miki uses as an excuse to deceive her mother regarding her whereabouts of the previous night may be the real [source of the blood]" (33). In other words, the lie Miki tells to her mother about beginning menstruation may not have been a lie at all—she may have really come home early due to period cramps. Because of conflicting information, the reader does not know when Miki first has sex with Daddy and does not know if the sexual encounter outlined in the diary caused bleeding.

⁷ Meaning, she began menstruating last night.

Again, while it is likely that “bleeding for Daddy” means blood from the trauma of penetrative sex, the lack of precise language is most likely a conscious choice made by Kurahashi. This is especially so since Miki reveals in her third diary that the arrival of menarche and the beginning of her sexual relationship with her father happened around the same time. For both Kurahashi and the speaker, Miki, there doesn’t seem to be much of a distinction between what actually causes the blood. Rather, both writer and character are more interested in the presence of the blood, as well as the location from where it flows.

Miki’s description of her body strays from the image of abjection when she asserts in her first and third diary that by engaging in sex with her Daddy and gushing forth blood, she aims to become a saintess. Kurahashi calls this process “purification”.⁸ In Sakaki’s dissertation chapter, “A Narcissistic Narrative: *Divine Maiden*,” she notes that the word for purification, *seika*, does not “carry any Christian overtones,” and thus, Sakaki does not examine the process of purification from a religious angle in her analysis of *Seishōjo* (98). I agree with Sakaki that even within *Seishōjo* there is no direct link to Christianity specifically, but there are several thematic choices made by Kurahashi that point to a religion-based employment of the word.

Ussher gives examples of the purification of the abject feminine body. Specifically she looks to the laws of *niddah* found in traditional Jewish practice. For those who practice Orthodox Judaism, Ussher writes that women must follow clear guidelines that instruct them on what to do when they find a stain of menstrual blood in order to “purify” their bodies (10). Some aspects of the laws of *niddah* include physically separating from the husband, inspecting the vagina with a

⁸ In an earlier section, I used Sakaki’s translation of *seika* as “sanctification” to minimize confusion. In this section, I believe “purification” is a more accurate translation given the context of my own argument here.

clean white cloth after the bleeding stops, and inserting a white cloth deep inside” (11).

Regarding this “ritual of purity,” Ussher writes, “The rule of separation most clearly positions the fecund body as contaminated and despoiled, needing to be physically separated from man, for fear of pollution” (11).

For Miki, she does not separate from man; she actively pollutes man as a form of purification. Miki describes her ideal “first time” in this way: “The beginning of that ritual must be the dirtying of Daddy’s face with a gush of bright red as powerful as when water pipes burst” (97). Miki fixates on the presence of blood during sex. In this passage and similar passages, Miki equates the act of bleeding with a show of love and affection. In other words, the “gush” of blood akin to water pipes bursting is a display of Miki’s love and desire for her partner, Daddy.

However, as I explain in the first section, Miki has two faces. She vacillates between loving Daddy and wanting to deceive him. The gush of blood represents Miki’s love for Daddy, while the desire to release it on her lover’s face represents the “beast” side of Miki, where she takes pleasure in deceiving her god. She wants her ideal loss of virginity to represent both sides of her identity.

In the same passage, she continues, “This ritual of my circumcision, a ritual where the foreskin of the good is torn off and the bad becomes bare for all to see—this is the kind of ritual fit for someone like me” (97). Although the language is grotesque and aggressive, what Miki essentially says through the metaphor of circumcision is that losing her virginity is something she believes to be significant and special. Miki becomes disappointed with the lack of blood because she anticipated her first time to be a point of transition, where she can quit pretending to be “good” (善 *zen*) and fully be “bad” (悪 *aku*). Her image of circumcision can also be read as a

metaphor for graduating into womanhood. She sheds her *shōjo* self and fully becomes a woman.

Miki's depiction of the feminine body focuses on the vagina and the blood that comes from it. Because of the "pure," virginal image of the *shōjo*, the genre has strayed away from graphic or realistic images of the feminine body. However, by focusing on the menstruating body, Kurahashi is sending the message that the feminine beauty that exudes from the *shōjo* only exists because of the way in which the body operates and maintains itself. In other words, Kurahashi says that the *shōjo* cannot exist without the menstruating body—they are one and the same. Her other heroines have tried to run away and cast off their abject bodies. Miki is the only heroine that attempts to accept her body. Through a process of purification, she no longer sees it as an abjection.

Miki and the Signs of the Shōjo

In this section, I have attempted to show the constructed nature of *shōjo* identity by looking at three signs of girlhood Kurahashi utilizes in *Seishōjo*. Kurahashi's use of the father-daughter plot, the S relationship, and depictions of the feminine body do two things simultaneously: Kurahashi reconstructs common tropes and influences that have helped define *shōjo* identity, and she disrupts said tropes by introducing transgressive, taboo details. By recreating the visual elements of the *shōjo*, but then replacing the content with transgressions, Kurahashi reveals how far apart the *shōjo* ideals are from the reality of living young girls. Moreover, Kurahashi's twisted portrayal of a *shōjo* breaks away from the accepted tropes of *shōjo* culture, thereby calling attention to the problems of the genre.

"I"'s Masculine Identity

There are far fewer conversations surrounding masculine identity when compared to

feminine identity because masculinity is often thought to be the default. In Atsuko Sakaki's "Negotiations with the Father," she writes, "What males call reality is in fact a male construction of what is real and is thus gender specific" (305). On the same page, she goes on to say, "For most of the history of modern Japanese literature, female writers have needed to define their styles in comparison with those of male writers...For male writers, the question of whether they should write as 'essentially male' or 'disguised as women' was largely irrelevant" (306). In a similar vein, in *Girls*, Catherine Driscoll discusses why girls' studies is so new and why girlhood or feminine adolescence has long been ignored in academic circles. She writes, "The Birmingham School talked about new youth and new youth cultures, under which rubric they almost exclusively discussed boys or young men...Youth as a struggle with hegemonic tendencies has seemed to be more easily identified in the cultural activities of young men" (11). In modern Japanese literature and in youth studies, there has been a tendency to focus on men and young men, despite the undeniable presence of women and girls in the two fields.

In *Seishōjo*, the main protagonist, "I," goes through many different selves throughout the course of his life. In high school, he allegedly committed several robberies with his friends, and even lured and gang-raped high school girls. In college, he joins the *Anpo* protests, fighting against ratification of the United States-Japan Security Treaty. Finally, in the narrative present, "I" has shed his communist self and is getting ready to study abroad to California for graduate studies. The present-day "I" is also a writer who uses his diary as a way to understand and possess his love interest, Miki.

Unlike the heroine, who commits to a *shōjo* identity, "I" has the luxury of being able to transform into a different self throughout various phases of his life. While his past and present

selves seem widely diverging, the fact is that all of the above are masculine identities. That is to say, “I”’s position as a man allows him to play the roles of a delinquent high school student, a communist, and a writer. Not only is he able to perform such different roles, but he is able to clearly and explicitly write about his past transgressions and mistakes without worrying about any repercussions. While Miki writes her diary encoded within a fictional space, “I” simply recounts different details and events from his life. In this section, I make the claim that Kurahashi parodies masculine identity by giving “I” the persona of a young I-novel writer. She constructs an imitation that successfully emulates the I-novel, yet also reveals the gendered nature—often at the expense of women and other marginalized groups—of the form. Kurahashi’s construction also asks the question, how much of one’s personal life should be shared for the sake of literature? Should modern Japanese literature be so accepting of a literary form that encourages writers to confess the darkest parts of themselves?

I will begin this section with a definition of the I-novel. Similar to the task of defining the *shōjo*, many scholars have various diverging definitions of what they consider an I-novel. To define the I-novel, I will be drawing from Sakaki Atsuko’s definition of the modern Japanese novel from her essay, “‘Watashi’ to ‘kare’ no aida” (「わたし」と「かれ」のあいだ “The Space between ‘Me’ and ‘You’”) as well as Edward Fowler’s definition from his 1988 book, *Rhetoric of Confession*. I choose to incorporate Sakaki Atsuko because her definition is informed specifically by her knowledge of Kurahashi’s works. I also use Edward Fowler’s definition because it supplements Sakaki’s definition with historical context.

In her essay, Sakaki writes, “First, the first-person narrator or the author hidden behind the stage ‘objectively’ observes and records the ‘other.’ Then, they (the narrator/author) make an

effort to explain the “existing ‘other’ in front of them to the reader” (343). She continues, “From the backdrop of attempting to understand the modern novel, through the idea of the fixed state of the ‘self’ and the ‘other,’ is an understanding that each human is equipped with a consistent personality and can be thought of as an independent existence” (343). To summarize her definition, the modern novel must include a narrator that observes and records the movements of their target, the Other (*tasha*). It must also explain the Other to the readers, and finally, it must have a fixed idea of both the Self and the Other—in other words, the Self is a separate entity from the Other.

What’s missing from Sakaki’s definition of the modern novel is the inclusion of the gendered aspect of the Self/Other binary, with the Self embodying all that is masculine, and the Other ruling the space of the feminine. In Huyssen’s chapter, “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other,” the gendered language that describes modernism as masculine and mass culture as feminine causes one to draw parallels between the two dichotomies. In Japan and the West, modernism became “somehow associated with women while real, authentic culture remains the prerogative of men” (47). The I-novel, too, often conjures the image of a male narrator observing a woman he desires. Therefore, Kurahashi’s choice to create a male narrator for *Seishōjo* is intentional.

Sakaki Atsuko’s definition focuses on the relationship between the narrator, text, and the Other, but Edward Fowler looks at the I-novel from its historical context. In the chapter, “The ‘Transparent’ Text,” Fowler describes the view of literature during the Edo period. He writes, “Literature came to be regarded, officially at least, solely as a vehicle for propagating the dominant sociopolitical ethos. Indeed, literature was understood to be useful only insofar as it

contributed to the Confucian worldview or ‘Way’” (22). However, Fowler notes that this did not mean that the Edo period had a lack of fiction—fiction was simply not considered literature and these works were mostly marketed towards commoners. This divide between literature that reflected Confucian values and non-serious works of fiction for the commoners continued into the Meiji period (23).

Another major element of the I-novel, according to Fowler, is the Japanese view of human relationships as immediate reality, as opposed to mediated reality. Fowler introduces an argument made by Maruyama Masao in 1969 that explains the Japanese aversion to fiction. Fowler writes, “Like medieval European society, Maruyama argues, Japanese society sees interpersonal relationships as static and irrevocable. It naturally follows that the social environment... assumes for the Japanese the same kind of reality (‘immediate’ rather than ‘mediated’) as the natural world” (11). Fiction, which “thrives on fluidity in human relations” contradicts how the Japanese view the world around them, causing an ideological collision (12). The I-novel rectifies this, by only focusing on the writer’s immediate reality, with the assumption that social relationships are static and unmoving.

The I-novel, then, became a vehicle that allowed at least one form of fiction to become literature. The disdain for fiction came from the concern about telling lies, which went against Confucian ideals. If writers instead wrote about their own lives and experiences, and nothing else, then the vulgarity of telling lies would disappear. The novel could then be elevated to the area of high, refined literature. In order to avoid “fabrication,” a writer must “draw solely from his own life” (26). Differing from Sakaki’s focus, Fowler’s definition of the I-novel concentrates on the idea that authors are telling only the truth when writing.

If the I-novel must be an account of the Other, and simultaneously a truthful account of one's lived experiences, Kurahashi Yumiko's novels would fall outside of the realm of the I-novel. Kurahashi explicitly opposed pouring her own life experiences into her writing, and actively took a less common approach. In the introductory chapter of her dissertation, Sakaki, writes, "[Kurahashi] is opposed to Romantic poetics which appreciated the author's self-projection into his/her works, and to 19th-century realism which values mimetic representations of 'reality' in the actual world" (5). In essence, Kurahashi directly rejected the core elements of the I-novel at a time when, although lessening in power, the I-novel had a strong hold on literary critics and writers.

In a short essay published in 1965 in *Mainichi Shinbun*, titled "Watashi no shōsetsu sahō" (わたしの小説作法 "The Way I Write Novels") Kurahashi criticizes the approach to writing novels Fowler is referring to in *Rhetoric of Confession*. Novels are not meant to tell the truth. Kurahashi says her "novels are dreams and nothing more" (49). She continues, "In particular, I want to get rid of the assumption that the words of the 'novel' are merely a means to convey information to another person" (49). In retrospect, Kurahashi's words don't seem very revolutionary, but at the time, this new approach to writing was not only heavily criticized and condemned, but was part of a bigger move towards a different view of looking at the novel that was causing a major cultural shift.

Considering her unique writing philosophy, Kurahashi indeed can be thought of as one of the postmodern writers of Japan during the 60s. The I-novel brought the status of the novel into the realm of high art, but Kurahashi's style of writing seems to question and undermine the privileged position of the novel itself. As Huyssen writes in his introduction to *After the Great*

Divide, the term “postmodernism” “indicates what is at stake is a constant, even obsessive negotiation with the terms of the modern itself” (x). Kurahashi’s desire to “thoroughly destroy” the modern novel seems to fit Huyssen’s description of postmodernism as a direct reaction to high modernism (Kurahashi 49).

In the introduction to *Rhetoric of Confession*, Fowler argues that while Western writers often create works that are narrative or plot-driven, the Japanese writer is not concerned with enveloping the reader into a fictional world. Instead the Japanese author “sought to transcribe the world as he had experienced it, with little concern for overall narrative design. . . . He therefore limited the scope of his authority to his personal realm, the depiction of which was dictated by lived experience” (xxiii). This description of the Japanese I-novel writer can be applied to “I” as well. The main narrative present in *Seishōjo* has no real plot. There are temporal jumps, flashbacks, and dream-like sequences that make it difficult for the reader to create a stable fictional world in which they can immerse themselves. To give an example, Miki mentions her acquaintance with Writer, and this prompts “I” to recount a meeting he had a month earlier with Writer, whom he ran into at a bookstore in Shinjuku. This then leads him to remember another encounter with her from earlier in the year during spring, and he dedicates several pages to disclosing the intimate relationship he had with Writer. “I” isn’t concerned with a steady narrative that is easy to follow; instead, he follows his thoughts and faithfully puts them into writing, just like the authors described in Fowler’s introduction.

“I”’s Other: Miki

In *Seishōjo*, the Other who counters “I”’s Self is the heroine, Miki. He spends the entirety of the novel obsessed with observing and decoding the behavior and writing of Miki. Katano

Tomoko divides “I”’s narratives into four separate stages. In the first stage, “I” expresses his desire to hide Miki’s physical body from the eyes of others. He wants Miki to be an object of observation for him alone. In the second stage, “I” jumps from Miki’s physical body to a desire to “understand” (認識 *ninshiki*) Miki. Katano writes, “Through the process of looking for the truth about Miki’s past, he begins to desire Miki as a ‘target of understanding,’ and thinks he wants to ‘possess’ her whole existence” (66). In the third stage, “I” becomes aware that Miki is observing him as he observes her, and to avoid her watchful eyes, attempts to write as much as he can about Miki. Finally, in the fourth stage, “I” is unable to write anymore about his object of desire. I will return to the third and fourth stage later in my argument.

“I”’s observations of Miki in the first and second stage mirror Sakaki’s definition of the modern Japanese novel. “I” is a first-person narrator that describes the Other in front of him to the reader. However, it is worth noting that “I” seems reluctant to share his knowledge of Miki with the reader during the first stage of his writing. He writes, “Miki doesn’t need to be seen, I just need to believe that she is there” (93). In this first stage, “I” and Miki barely have a relationship, and have only met a handful of times. The allure of Miki comes from the sense of mystery that she emits. “I” remarks that Miki wore all white on the day they first met, but he imagined she wore black underwear underneath. He enjoys the mystique of Miki—he finds pleasure in not knowing, but imagining the hidden parts of her. It is only until after the accident that causes Miki to become an amnesiac that “I” begins to want to uncover the mysteries and understand them for himself.

After Miki’s accident and amnesia, there are two major shifts in “I”’s relationship to Miki. First, the pair begin to spend more time together. “I” visits Miki almost daily while she is at the

hospital, and once she is well enough to go home, “I” begins visiting her home regularly. It is unclear what motivates “I” to visit Miki so often, but “I” mentions that he is getting ready to leave for California to study abroad soon. He may be visiting Miki to kill time before his visa is ready. When the amnesiac Miki first calls “I,” letting him know that there is a journal she wants him to read, “I” is afraid of the contents of the journal. He writes, “I wondered, did the past Miki express a certain will (意志 *ishi*) towards me [within that notebook]—following my own delusions, I call this will ‘love.’ And at the same time, I also thought that reading this notebook would undoubtedly beat my delusions to death” (96). The violent language “I” chooses to use (“beat to death”) shows how important it is for “I” to keep his delusions (妄想 *mōsō*) open to possibility. By keeping certain aspects of Miki hidden, “I” has been able to enjoy his own imaginings of Miki. The contents of the journal scare “I” because they may uncover the mysteries of Miki he has intentionally kept hidden. However, “I” finds that Miki’s writings have actually added to the secrets, leading to the second shift in their relationship.

“I” reads the diary, which contains details of her relationship with Daddy. Asked to decode the diary by the amnesiac Miki, “I” sets out to find the answers to the following questions: Are the contents of her diary fact or fiction? Does Daddy from her diary truly exist?

As “I” looks for the answers to these questions, he finds himself not satisfied with simply observing Miki. Instead, he begins to believe that understanding Miki will lead to the possession of his object of desire. As he watches her swim at the pool, “I” has an internal monologue regarding his target of possession:

Miki became my target in a way that tickled and pulled at my insides. Rather than my interest being pulled for the purpose of sexual gratification, [Miki] challenged me as a

target of understanding (認識の対象 *ninshiki no taishō*). I wanted to become the eye of a large fish and devour Miki. But when I give off signs of awareness (Should I call this awareness admiration?) and attempt to capture the core that is Miki, she quickly swims away and escapes, like a shape-shifting goddess. What can I do to succeed in owning this woman? (153)

The desire for possession (所有 *shoyū*) only appears *after* “I” has read the contents of Miki’s first diary. Rather than keep her hidden inside of his imagination any longer, “I” seeks to bring light to all the mysteries of Miki. Again, “I” uses intense, violent metaphors when the topic turns to his target. He feels such an intense pull towards his object of desire that it feels like his innards are being “tickled and pulled.” Furthermore, he confesses a desire to “devour” (食べてしまう *tabete shimau*) Miki. To decode this strange metaphor of eyes devouring Miki, Sakaki explains, “This synaesthetic expression, in which the organ the primary function of which is to observe (an eye) also purports to eat, synthesizes the two acts of perceiving and eating” (122). In other words, “I” compares the experience of perceiving, or observing, Miki to devouring her.

Unfortunately for “I,” Miki hides herself away from his eyes, and although he tries, “I” is unable to fully observe Miki. In the same scene as the quote above, “I” rushes towards Miki who has just gone into the pool, but when he raises his head above the water, “I” finds that Miki has already swam to the other side of the pool. Just as the physical body of “I” attempts to “capture” (捕獲 *hokaku*) Miki in the pool, through writing, “I” attempts to capture the core of Miki.

Within “I”’s faithful reproduction of his immediate reality, however, are the embedded narratives constructed by Miki. There are a few differences between Miki’s three diaries and “I”’s novel that highlight “I”’s strict adherence to the conditions of the I-novel, while Miki has a

more flexible, experimental position towards writing.

“I” has a singular voice when writing his novel, but Miki has no unified voice within herself. Looking at her three diaries, each of them seems like they could be written by a different person. Contrasting the first diary with the second, the first diary primarily focuses on Daddy, although there are a few sections dedicated to her mother and M, her friend. The second diary reads like a daily log of what Miki’s everyday routine since becoming an amnesiac. “I” often dedicates pages to parsing through his thoughts and feelings of anxiety. Miki, on the other hand, shares none of her inner most thoughts. Her first diary in particular lacks the interiority found in “I”’s diary. As Writer remarks later in the novel, “[Miki] could have written [it] for the sake of hiding something” (194). To the pre-amnesiac Miki, writing is not for the sake of sharing one’s inner thoughts. It is to hide those thoughts and desires. The second diary is written by Miki during her amnesia, and she attempts to write a new diary in order to help bring her memories back. The main difference between the two diaries is the lack of Daddy’s presence and the change in style of language in the second diary.

As Atsuko Sakaki notes in her dissertation chapter, “A Narcissistic Narrative: *Divine Maiden*,” Miki engages in a “flexible and performative use of words,” which is notably absent in Miki’s second diary. In her first diary, Miki compares her breasts to yet unripe fruits, and believes her plant-like features are what keeps Daddy from seeing her as a woman. She says, “I was lacking in things like the strong scent of a female animal and the kind of concentrated charm that provokes others. That’s why Daddy doesn’t sniff out the most woman-like parts of me the way that dogs do. Like a well-mannered hunter, he must have let me escape” (109). Daddy sees Miki as “plant-like” (植物的 *shokubutsuteki*) and Miki believes this is because she is still young

and has not fully ripened. But, her metaphor shifts from plants and fruits to animals when talking about what Miki lacks as a woman. It also implies that once Miki ripens into a full-fledged woman, she will transform from a plant into an animal. Miki in her plant form seems incompatible with the carnivorous type of animal that she describes her lover as being. She awaits her transformation into an animal in order to be devoured by her beloved. This is one example of the many metaphors Miki uses to describe her body, sexual intercourse between her and Daddy, as well as the physical features of her older lover. She may not engage directly with her interior self, but decorative use of unique metaphors offers a glimpse into the mind of Miki.

In contrast, Miki's second diary does not play with language in the same way. The types of novels opposed by Kurahashi herself are the ones that simply convey a message through language without any embellishments or decorative language. Miki's second diary is precisely that. To give an example, a short while after amnesiac Miki leaves the hospital, she and M are in a taxi when they narrowly escape a car accident. She describes the scene, "At that time I saw something get pulled from between the wheels of the truck. It looked like a human. I was hit with an intense migraine. It happens every time I get flashes of that moment [the accident] inside my head" (144). Despite the many emotions that may have rushed over Miki, only an account of what occurred is present in her diary. While pre-amnesiac Miki does not explicitly write out her thoughts the way "I" does, she expresses her feelings through distinct metaphors. Amnesiac Miki neither writes how she is feeling nor does she use metaphors to express something beyond the words. Writing simply conveys an accurate description of the world around her.

Returning to the contrast between "I" and Miki, what is most different between Miki and "I" may be the difference in their writing ideologies. Writer mentions to "I" that Miki's motive for

writing is her desire to hide (隠す *kakusu*) something. In her final diary, Miki explains to “I”:

The words I secreted melted away reality and held a spell-like nature that was built to trap me inside a flickering haze at the border of reality and un-reality. Now that I think about it, through that novel, I was trying to purify the impossible love that I held for my impossible lover, daddy. (230)

Miki writes in order to create a space that will “purify” her relationship with her father. This also reflects Miki’s belief in the power of words; she “secreted” words that “melt” the reality around her, as though her words are like poison that keeps her safe from reality. What’s interesting here is that, although Miki has a desire to hide herself away from reality, she hangs on the border between the real and the un-real, rather than pulling completely away into a fictional world. For Miki, novels are a secret hideaway that shields her from reality, and yet, they are not a complete departure from the real. Miki's novel allows her to create a story that is neither completely fiction nor completely real.

Contrastingly, “I” has a different relationship with writing. Miki “secreted” the words out of her body, whereas “I” likens writing a novel to raising a monster. He says, “In other words, in the remaining time I have to live, I will raise this monster, and in the end, I myself will transform into a novel” (179). He fears that the act of writing will cause he himself to become a novel. The words Miki writes are a part of her being, but “I”’s words are a separate entity that may devour him. Sakaki offers an explanation for “I”’s comparison of his novel to a monster, or “dinosaur.” She says, “The faster ‘I’ writes, the more of the time in which ‘I’ lives the novel (a dinosaur) consumes, and the sooner it will catch up with the narrating instance” (125). I-novel writers only write a truthful account of their immediate reality. But by writing about the events of one’s own

life in real time, it becomes difficult to separate reality from the novel. This is why “I” feels like he is caught in a race between himself and the novel he is producing, between his true reality and the representation of that reality.

The fear of being consumed by his own writing also stems from “I”’s unsuccessful attempts to understand and possess Miki. “I” is unable to see Miki as a fully separate human being because the amnesiac Miki and the Miki of the diary seem like two different people. He cannot see Miki in her entirety. This means that the Other, who is supposed to reflect the Self and assure the Self that they are whole and complete, is only a silhouette of a person. Miki’s lack of wholeness creates the fear that “I” himself is not a whole person, and that he too lacks selfhood.

“I” as the Observed

I’ve mainly discussed the ways in which “I”’s narrative mimics an I-novel. Now, I will examine how Kurahashi inverts the roles of the Self and the Other of “I” and Miki towards the end of the novel, thereby deconstructing the I-novel. This inversion of roles between the two leading narrators has been studied by many Kurahashi scholars, in particular Katano and Sakaki. Returning to Katano’s four stages, the third stage is the change in “I”’s position from the observer to the observed. She writes, “The position of ‘I’ begins to fall from that of a doctor to a patient, and from the observer to the observed” (66). Katano refers to the scene where “I” shares the stories of the crimes committed as a high school student, as well as the truth of his incest with L, his sister, with the amnesiac Miki. At this point, while the roles are not completely flipped, “I” begins to become suspicious of Miki, and wonders if she has started to regain her memories. In Katano’s third stage, the roles are not yet inverted, but this scene sets the stage for the fourth and final phase. In this phase, “I” has lost his will to write, and, “I”’s privilege of being the

observing subject is completely destroyed” (66).

For Sakaki, the novel’s switching of roles between “I” and Miki had been foreshadowed by prior relationships outlined by “I” earlier in his narrative. “I” begins having a sexual relationship with L *after* she watches “I” masturbate, and Writer composes a story about “him” (かれ *kare*) that “I” suspects to be about himself (352). In this way, the women whom he has been otherizing have also been observing and recording him as the Other.

On a hot summer day in July, amnesiac Miki tells “I” she knows where L is. Her knowledge of L’s current location causes both the reader and “I” to be suspicious of how much Miki remembers of her past. Even “I” remarks, “Suddenly, I had a feeling that Miki was beginning to remember little by little what happened before the accident” (180). But, it isn’t until “I” receives the final diary in the mail that both “I” and the reader discover the truth about Miki. Through reading Miki’s third diary, “I” completes the inversion of roles, and the reality that he has been the observed all along comes to light. Miki confesses:

The reason you directed your interest in me—an interest that looked similar to love—was above all because of that strange notebook. There was no doubt that it was because I wrote [that diary], and now I was a patient that had lost her memory. In order to have you continue providing treatment, I knew I could not undo the bandages of lies. (226)

In the first diary, Miki only uses elaborate metaphors when the topic was in relation to Daddy. This third diary serves as a confessional letter directed towards “I,” and Miki uses her playful language to appeal to him. She paints herself as the “patient” (病人 *byōnin*) in need of treatment from her doctor, “I.” In reference to this scene, Sakaki writes, “‘I’ had thought he had voluntarily assumed the task of a doctor to ‘nurse’ Miki, or that of a ‘psychiatrist.’ What has appeared to be

‘I’'s free choice is in fact under the control of Miki’s will” (121).

Not only does “I” become the observed, but he also loses his sense of self by the end of the novel. “I” can only think of himself in relation to Miki: “I think I love you. That’s why, no matter where you escape, I will always follow you and understand you...I exist because I think of you” (239). By this point, there’s a desperation in “I” that did not exist until this phone call with Miki. After reading Miki's final diary, “I” assumed that he understood Miki and because of this, if he offered marriage to Miki, she would readily accept. During this time, he explicitly says, “It’s not that I love Miki” (235). Yet, he suddenly tells her he “thinks” he loves her a few minutes later when they are on the phone together. He does this because he realizes he has not captured Miki and he has yet to truly understand her. His obsession with possession is not over until he achieves his mission of completely understanding his target. Regarding this passage, in “A Study of *Seishōjo*,” Kamio writes, “At this time, K has ‘offered his freedom’ to Miki, to the point that K cannot maintain his own existence without ‘understanding’ Miki” (48). It becomes clear that “I” has no independent selfhood—his sense of self is tightly linked to his bond with her. Without the ability to understand Miki, “I” feels lost within himself. This is why he willingly gives up on his freedom—the freedom of leaving Japan behind and escaping to America—to stay by Miki’s side.

In the final scene of the novel, Miki and “I” sleep together for the first time. In a previous metaphor found in Miki’s third diary, she compares herself to a dog with poisonous fangs that has bitten into “I.” At this point, “I” becomes aware of Miki’s will to ensnare “I,” and she can no longer be perceived as an object of observation with no will of her own. By choosing to marry Miki and sleep with her, “I” gives in to the “poison” (毒 *doku*) of Miki willingly. He writes, “I slowly slipped into death. I melted away inside of Miki, as if I had contracted gangrene” (242).

After “sliding” into Miki, the poison enters “I,” and “I” “melts” inside of Miki, just like the way Miki “secretes” poisonous words that “melt” away the reality around her. The comparison to gangrene (壊疽 *eso*) offers an image of “I” unable to move due to the disintegration of his body. While grotesque, this final image of “I” melting into Miki binds the two together physically. By the very end of the novel, the roles of the Self and the Other disappear, and the reader is left with the physical and mental fusion of Miki and “I.”

The union of Miki and “I” in the final scene acts as a message that conveys the idea that there are flaws in perceiving human relationships as one’s immediate reality. In *Seishōjo*, Miki is a “shape-shifting goddess” that refuses to remain in place. Thus, no matter how much “I” tries to write about her in order to understand her, he fails. By the end of the novel, “I” has lost the will to keep writing because he has finally come to the realization that he will never possess Miki through such means.

“I”’s decision to quit writing also reflects the transitions in the field of literature occurring at the time Kurahashi is writing. As mentioned in my introduction, Kurahashi was embroiled in several controversies during the first several years of her career. Conservative critics had a difficult time coming to terms with her experimental, boundary-pushing form and content. In *Japan at the Crossroads*, Nick Kapur discusses the influence of the *Anpo* protests in transforming and renegotiating literature and the arts. He cites several controversies that occurred in the early 1960s and includes a quote by the critic Isoda Kōichi who likens the 1960s to the “Middle Ages” (217). That is, it was a time of transition with new types of literature and arts emerging. Thus, the death of “I”’s selfhood at the very end of *Seishōjo* can be read as the death of the I-novel writer, making way for more innovative writing.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to apply Butler's concept of gender performativity to Kurahashi Yumiko's *Seishōjo*. It has been more than thirty years since Butler published *Gender Trouble*, and I acknowledge that there have been criticisms and debates taken place since its publication. In *Judith Butler*, Sara Salih summarizes the key questions raised regarding the performativity of gender. She writes, "[People] continue to worry over the meaning of 'performativity,' whether it enables or forecloses agency, and whether Butler does indeed sound the death knell of the subject" (68). Salih also cites the words of Seyla Benhabib, who criticizes Butler's idea of lack of selfhood and points to how this can be a damaging narrative for women in particular (68).

I agree that Butler's gender performativity is not a perfect theory. In my own reading of *Gender Trouble*, I question Butler's claim that there is no distinction between sex and gender—both are constructions. While there is a need to think outside of man/woman, sex/gender binaries, a conversation that acknowledges the physical differences between masculine and feminine bodies, and in particular, acknowledges the fecundity of the feminine body can exist outside of a sex/gender frame of thought.

I apply gender performativity to this novel in the hopes that discourse surrounding Kurahashi will have more diverse readings of her works when examining gender. Although Kurahashi was and is still considered to be an innovative experimentalist, she held a gender ideology that did not allow for gender identity outside of the man/woman binary. Following in her footsteps, many Kurahashi scholars also interpreted her works in this way, using her gender ideology as the basis for their literary criticism.

Even within her extensive collection of stories, *Seishōjo* stands out for its unique narrative style and its attention to girlhood. Kurahashi has always kept gender at the forefront of her works, but as an adult, many of her stories navigate the difficulties of womanhood, such as romantic relationships with men and marriage. *Seishōjo* is important because it follows the diary of a teenage girl who looks and acts like a *shōjo*. Kurahashi's perception of *shōjo* identity disrupts how past scholars have looked at girlhood in the context of Japanese literature and media. Although I utilize the definitions of Honda and Fujimoto for the purpose of this project, I also recognize that their definitions of the *shōjo* rest on outdated notions of girlhood. Their definitions ignore the fact that girlhood is constantly being reproduced by real girls and the media that portrays them. Even in the case of *Seishōjo*, Miki and M are highly influenced by each other and by jazz and movies. Observing one another and emulating popular culture creates the illusion that girlhood is static and definable because attributes of the *shōjo* seem to appear wherever they go. Injecting new ideas on gender identity in *shōjo* culture discourse can lead to a fuller understanding of the ways in which the *shōjo* aesthetic and identity is constructed through media and living *shōjo*.

The question of womanhood has always been at the center of Kurahashi's works, and scholars have also dedicated their work to focusing on womanhood. However, the spotlight on Kurahashi's female characters has left a gap in looking at the construction of her male characters, despite K/"I" being a staple figure in several works. The erasure of Kurahashi's male characters in Kurahashi scholarship gives fuel to the idea that gender is a woman's issue—men do not need to be a part of discussions about gender. "I"'s many selves, his anxiety about writing, and his loss of self to Miki all indicate that masculine identity can be just as confusing yet valuable as *shōjo*

identity and girlhood.

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