

特別寄稿論文

Our Bodies, Myself

Uchida Shungiku's *Sex For Girls*

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Uchida Shungiku is one of Japan's most prolific, as well as provocative, female writers and performers. Her 1993 fictionalized autobiography, *Fazaa Fakkaa*, which was nominated for the Naoki Prize, drew upon her own experience of sexual abuse at the hands of her stepfather, and offered a stinging indictment of her mother's failure to protect her. Since then, Uchida has enjoyed a busy and varied literary career, authoring numerous *manga*, essays, and fictional works, while at the same time expanding her repertoire to include appearances as a singer, actor, and television personality. In 2007 alone, she was responsible for a number of graphic novels, "how-to" books on knitting, sewing, and cooking, and a collection of essays about her children (*Kyoiku shite imasu?*) Over the decades, however, Uchida has continued to nurture her public persona as a transgressive woman, taking the traditional feminine roles of daughter, wife and mother and turning them on their head.¹ This image is epitomized by her ongoing *manga* series *Watashitachi wa hanshoku shite iru* (or *Watahan* for short) [We are reproducing], which chronicles her pregnancies as well as the births and childhoods of her four children, all the while frankly acknowledging—and even celebrating—the many relationships (marital and extramarital) which produced them.

In 2007, Uchida published *S4G—Sex for Girls—Josei no tame no sei no ohanashi*, a self-described guide to sex and reproduction for pre-pubescent women.² Written in episodic, four-frame *manga* form, the manual is narrated by Uchida's alter-ego Gigi, the protagonist of the

¹ On Uchida's "transgressive" public persona, see Setsu Shigematsu, "Feminism and Media in the Late Twentieth Century: Reading the Limits of a Politics of Transgression," in *Gendering Modern Japanese Literature*, (ed.) Barbara Moloney and Kathleen Uno (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 573.

² Uchida Shungiku, *S4G—Sex for Girls—Onna no ko no tame no sei no ohanashi*, (Tokyo: Asuka Shinsha, 2007). All references *passim* will be given parenthetically in the text.

Watahan series, with Gigi's children serving as fictional interlocutors. On the surface, the book seems to be the kind of transgressive, taboo-breaking challenge to social norms for which Uchida has become famous: the title is a takeoff on an erotic *manga* (*Sex for Ladies*), while the cover art features Gigi, in fuschia silhouette, kissing a cherry, against a pale blue background in which intaglio-relief images of sperm swim towards her face. This titillating and sexualized wrapping, however, has little to do with what lies inside—namely, a surprisingly prosaic synthesis, organized in loosely thematic fashion, of information on female sexual biology, the experience of pregnancy, and Uchida's own life history.

S4G, then, is not the sex manual that its cover seems to advertise. Indeed, despite her use of the katakana loan-word *sekkusu* in the title, Uchida provides no descriptions of sexual intercourse; her exhaustive discussion of the fertilization of the egg, for instance, never mentions how the sperm who swim gaily up the uterus into the fallopian tubes actually get there. "Sex" here, rather, seems to be a reference to biology, "female-ness", rather than the procreative act. In this respect, *S4G* is in keeping with the stringent regulations on primary school sex education (normally offered to Japanese third and fourth graders) which were adopted by the Tokyo Board of Education in 2004. These regulations, issued in response to parental complaints about the inclusion of what some considered to be "graphic" imagery and accounts of sexual intercourse, ban any discussion of the sexual act itself, and discourage the use of clinical terms such as "penis" and "vagina" for the reproductive organs (recommending instead their "baby-talk" counterparts *chin-chin* and *man-man*).³

In broader terms, however, *S4G* represents a view of sex and sex education diametrically opposed to the approach advocated by the Board of Education. In the latter, fertilization and pregnancy are treated as biological processes with no apparent cause, leaving students uninformed about the nature and consequences of sex at the same time as teenage sexual activity and pregnancy are on the rise.⁴ Uchida's manual, in contrast, is a manifesto about the need for honest, accurate, and straightforward education about the female body and its reproductive functions, one prompted and narratively anchored by Uchida's recollections about her own childhood in 1960s Nagasaki and

³ Shigeko Segawa, "Information Overload: To Teach or Not to Teach," *Asahi Shinbun*, 1 January 2005 (on-line edition):

www.asahi.com/english/lifestyle/TKY200501150158.htm. Accessed 22 January 2008.

⁴ *Ibid.*, which cites surveys indicating that nearly half of all high school girls in Japan have been sexually active by the age of seventeen.

the faulty views which she was allowed to form of her own body and sexuality. Along the way, Uchida also attempts to debunk some of the stereotypes about women and women's bodies perpetuated by men.

This pedagogical agenda distinguishes *S4G* from Uchida's earlier *oeuvre*, particularly her writings on pregnancy and motherhood. In the past, Uchida has insisted that her writings are not meant to offer advice on raising children.⁵ Instead, as the jacket description to her book *Watashitachi wa hanshoku shite iru Yellow* puts it, they describe her own experience, and rip away the veil from what she feels are the secrets about pregnancy and childbirth that no one tells women until they themselves become pregnant. Many readers have been drawn to Uchida's irreverent perspective, one that differs radically from the calm, authoritative, and often blandly cheerful approach adopted by the pregnancy manuals which crowd bookstore shelves. Speaking through her alter-ego, Gigi, allows her to offer her own views on childrearing in a markedly un-didactic way, and her children, whose identities she has taken great care to protect by giving them numbers, serve as foils for her riffs and comic interludes. In many ways, then, Uchida's *manga* offer a kind of risqué, episodically-structured "situation comedy" approach to the plight of motherhood, focused upon discrete stories rather than character development.

In *S4G*, however, Uchida has a specific lesson that she wants to teach—a lesson, moreover, intimately bound up with her own life story. This autobiographical element is by no means unique; Uchida's artistic endeavors, from her *manga* to her modeling work, have always been emphatically self-reflexive in character and content. This reflexivity, however, has tended to be employed in the service of Uchida's larger project of transgressive performance and titillation, focusing upon her own sexual history in order to shock and also amuse her readers. In *S4G*, however, Uchida's past becomes a teaching resource, a collection of lessons learned—a fact is emphasized by the book's narrative structure, in which Uchida's protagonist and alter-ego, Gigi, speaks to a younger, less experienced person, usually a woman (although sometimes her oldest son is the interlocutor).

While found throughout *S4G*, this simultaneously didactic and dialogic approach is exemplified by the book's discussion of ectopic pregnancy. The autobiographical event which Uchida uses to frame her narrative here is a familiar one to her readers, described at length in the "pink" volume of her *Watahan* series: Uchida/Gigi developed a tubal

⁵ Uchida Shungiku, *Watashitachi wa hanshoku shite iru (yellow)* (Tokyo: Kadokawa bunko, 1994), 50.

pregnancy, the complications from which required emergency surgery.⁶ Here, however, the story serves distinctly pedagogical ends: the emphasis is not upon the pain of the event, or its effect upon Gigi's psyche, but upon the fact that it was caused by a chlamydia infection contracted after being raped in an elevator (a fact which Gigi has not divulged in past iterations of this story). As Gigi goes on to explain, the statistical likelihood of tubal pregnancies (around 10%) becomes far higher in women suffering from pelvic inflammatory disease. Uchida's life story, in other words, has been reframed in the guise of edifying example, rather than explicit exposé. This agenda is furthered by Uchida's recasting of the narrative context: rather than being addressed directly and graphically to the reader's gaze, Gigi's tale now is told by Gigi herself to an interlocutor within the representative frame. Unlike elsewhere in *S4G*, Gigi's discussion here takes place with another young woman rather than daughters, whom Uchida clearly feels would not be an appropriate audience for this troubling tale.⁷ Nevertheless, the author's juxtaposition of youth and maturity, innocence and experience emphasizes here (as elsewhere) the fundamental importance of intergenerational communication within Uchida's overall project.

S4G, however, is more than just a guide for girls or a confessional advice manual. It also is a reflection upon motherhood—its responsibilities, its potentials, as well as its pitfalls. While the episodic arrangement of *S4G* seems at first glance to be haphazard, abruptly leading the reader from practical discussions of ovulation, fertilization and menstruation to autobiographical exposé (including the story of Uchida's childhood abuse), Uchida's storytelling is organized around a central theme—namely, the critical role which mothers play in the education and upbringing of their daughters. Announcing her age (48) at the outset of the book, Gigi highlights the gap in life experience between herself and her third-grade daughter, marking their relationship in quite traditional terms as that between elder and novice, teacher and student. At the heart of this pedagogical dynamic, Uchida makes clear, should be the female body: a mother must teach her daughters how their bodies work, and give them a positive body image, in order for them to realize their full emotional and sexual potential as women.

This lesson is driven home with stories taken from Uchida's own life, which demonstrate how her lack of bodily knowledge and outdated sense of how women ought to behave damaged her emotional and sexual

⁶ Uchida Shungiku, *Watashitachi wa hanshoku shite iru pinku* (pink), (Tokyo: Kadokawa bunko, 1996), 249-288.

⁷ A sensibility indicated by her marginal comment on page 71: "This character looks like a child, but she can ask good adult questions."

development. As Gigi/Uchida was growing up in Nagasaki, she received contradictory messages about a woman's sexuality from her mother, whose traditional (or perhaps old-fashioned) notions about female behavior stood in seeming contradiction to her work within the *mizu shobai* as a bar hostess. From the time she was a little girl, Gigi talked about sex in an open and candid way—a habit likely learned from her mother, who “used to tell me funny erotic stories from her work,” but whose cramped sense of social propriety led her to treat sex as something which was best left undiscussed, and who went so far as to punish Gigi for showing guests her parent's bed (she was proud of the coverlet that her mother had knitted) (88). As Gigi recalls, “My mother said things like ‘I am a good mother, but this daughter of mine is a problem child who makes lewd [*ecchi*] remarks” (89), criticisms which the young girl found contradictory and confusing.

Another example of such mixed messages occurred when Gigi was a third grader, sitting sprawled out in the summer heat on the veranda of her row apartment and proudly wearing a short set that her mother had made for her. Upon seeing her, her mother screeched, “What are you doing? What would happen if a pervert came along?” Gigi's sensible reply—“I'm wearing shorts”—is rebuffed by her mother, who frets, “It doesn't matter that you're not wearing a skirt--they can still see your underpants” (93). Such anxiety- and shame-ridden attitudes towards the female body female sexuality only became more acute as Gigi entered puberty; when she first had her period, her mother simply showed her where the sanitary napkins were kept without any further explanation, while her teachers discussed menstruation in only vague and embarrassed terms: “I was told that the menstrual blood was there to nourish the baby . . . There was no mention of eggs, sperm or fertilization” (19). As a result, she wryly notes, “I had the unpleasant image of a blood-drinking baby in my head” throughout her adolescence, despite the sex education that she subsequently received in school (20).

It is this kind of misleading “education” which leads Uchida to discuss the fertilization of the egg and its implantation in the uterus in such detail elsewhere in *S4G*. More generally, Uchida's two brief forays into the topic of sexual intercourse clearly are meant to demonstrate not only the essential link between sex and procreation, but also the need to treat sex as a matter not for shame and silence, but as a topic to be acknowledged by mothers with their children. In the first of these episodes, sex is depicted as the point of origin for the process of fertilization, as Gigi narrates the ejaculate's progress through the vagina and eventually into contact with the egg. In the second, Gigi reflects on a story that she read in a *manga* about a twenty-year-old man who

walked in on his parents making love. The son's mother, we are told, got up and ran away, and the next day told her son, "I didn't want to, but your father forced me [*muriyari*]" (84). Gigi wonders, "if she was being forced, then why was she on top?" (85)

Thinking about what would happen if her own son (at age twenty) walked on in her and her partner, she concludes that his first reaction would be one of apology rather than shock, and that neither she nor her partner would be overly perturbed by the interruption. Nevertheless, when she realizes that she always keeps the door to her room open except during lovemaking, she makes sure to warn her children accordingly: "When the door is closed, it's because we're making love [*rabu-rabu*], so don't open it suddenly" (87). In reply to her younger sister's question, "is making love a bad thing?" Uchida's oldest daughter replies, "No! If they don't do it, then they can't have a baby." As Uchida remarks in the margins, "these two want another brother or sister," highlighting not only the procreative function of sex, but also its proper role as a topic of honest and gentle discussion between mother and daughter.

The failure to embrace this kind of honesty by her own family, and the silence and shame with which the adult world treated her maturing body, is associated by Uchida with a far more sinister outcome--namely, her abuse at the hands of her own stepfather, "the biggest pervert of all" (93). This traumatic period, previously chronicled in Uchida's controversial novella *Father Fucker (Fazaa Fakkaa)*,⁸ is summarized again in *S4G*, this time in a way that emphasizes the barely pubescent Gigi's innocence and lack of knowledge. Fondled by her stepfather and told that he would "snatch your virginity and make you my wife" (94), Gigi has to look up the meaning of "virginity" in the dictionary. We are not shown the horrific abuse described in Uchida's novella; instead, we are confronted with a faceless male figure and the language with which he dominates his stepdaughter, until the beaten face of young Gigi appears in the next-to-last frame.

While Gigi's tale of abuse is horrific, its role here is not simply to shock, but to serve Uchida's larger goal of demonstrating the critical role of mothers in educating, and thus protecting, their daughters when they are young. The story's emotional climax in *S4G*, therefore, occurs *after* its actual narration. As her oldest son weeps at his mother's treatment,

⁸ The barest details should suffice. After Shizuko, the Uchida figure in *Fazaa Fakkaa*, becomes pregnant and has a late term abortion, her stepfather attempts to sew her vagina shut so that she will never get pregnant again. While preparing to do this, he decides to rape her instead, and then continues to rape and beat her until she runs away. For more see, Uchida Shungiku, *Fazaa Fakkaa* (Tokyo: Bunshun bunko, 1996).

Gigi explains that there is a greater lesson to be learned—namely, the pernicious effects of “the kind of thinking that says that ‘the woman asked for it’ in cases of rape” (96). Her own mother said the same kind of thing to her, and made her feel like she was responsible for the abuse she received. These attitudes, moreover, were not simply a matter of her mother’s misplaced loyalty to her husband. When Gigi was groped by a man in a local record store, she felt powerless to do anything about it, for despite her shame and anger at the attack she realized that her mother and younger sister would hold her responsible for it. The adult Gigi, looking back at her younger self in the previous frame, concludes that “I wasn’t bad—I was pitiable,” before grabbing her own two daughters tightly and declaring, “I won’t let you feel that way!” (99)

Uchida’s portrayal of her mother in this affair as a black outline, spewing abuse outside of the traditional discursive space of the word-balloon, is a clear iconographic analogue to the way in which she depicts her stepfather earlier; as such, it further emphasizes in negative terms the importance of mothers for their daughters’ healthy development. Without an engaged, informed, and informing mother, girls like Uchida/Gigi are rendered susceptible to men who want to take advantage of them or to make them feel worthless. Such mistreatment, Uchida points out, does not have to take the extreme form that Gigi’s first rape does; instead, it can stem from something as simple as insulting comments on their physical appearance by fathers, boyfriends, and even husbands, or disinterest in their physiology beyond the basics needed for sexual gratification. Gigi’s first husband, whom she married at twenty, serves as a signal example of this phenomenon, insisting that she buy larger tampons on account of his own inflated sense of his penis size (61), and ignorantly asking why she is taking her basal temperature orally, rather than vaginally (67). A similar if less dire message, however, also seems to underlie the reaction of Gigi’s young son to the sight of her labia, when he mistakenly assumes that she’s defecating on the bath stool (10-11). As often happens in Uchida’s works, this vignette is allowed to pass without explicit commentary; nevertheless, her response to herself upon hearing her son (“Am I really that dark?”) suggests not only the differences between mother-daughter and mother-son interactions, but the potentially disruptive effect which the male gaze and male words can have upon women’s self-esteem and self-image.

Gigi’s uncomfortable exchange with her son highlights the importance of the Japanese bath (*ofuro*) within *S4G*. The bath long has been a symbolically-charged locus within Japanese culture, where the cleansing of the body is associated with a cleansing of the whole person. Gigi’s reflections upon her own childhood, however, and the role of

bathing within it, reveal a dark side to the *ofuro*, in which the relationship between pollution and purification is a highly gendered one. The bath at Gigi's Nagasaki home, located behind the apartment complex, is depicted as a place fundamentally at odds with the values traditionally associated with the *ofuro*—cleanliness, coziness, and privacy. Shielded from the elements only by tarps and umbrellas, the bath is chilled by rainwater, visited by the neighborhood's stray cats, and subject to constant invasion by enormous flying cockroaches (43); moreover, it is a place inextricably linked with Gigi's own abusive past, since the bath enclosure was one of her stepfather's favorite places to imprison her when she had "misbehaved".

As Gigi's subsequent narrative reveals, however, the significance of "filth" (*yogore*) is far more complex. As we discover, the condition of the bath, while less than ideal, was not a huge burden for the young Gigi, who simply accepted it as a fact of life. This changed when she began to menstruate, and was told by her parents to keep away from the *ofuro*. At first, she assumed that they were concerned about her menstrual blood dirtying the bath water. As she soon realized, however, this was not the issue; instead, it was an extension of the traditional Japanese practice in which the man of the house is allowed to bathe before any of the women. As Gigi angrily tells her partner, "My stepfather used to say, 'it's filthy after women get in the bath,' and so he got to get in the bath first . . . The fact is, he wasn't concerned that 'my bath water will get dirty' because a menstruating woman got in it. . . he thought that when women get in the bath, the bath *itself* gets dirty . . . What kind of parents would say something like this to their daughter?" (46)

Gigi's anger, in other words, is not simply a reaction to the misguided notion that menstruating women should avoid the *ofuro*—she understands how one might worry about the need to drain dirty bath water and then refill and reheat the tub. Rather, she is particularly upset by the traditional message that women themselves are inherently dirty, and therefore need to bathe after men so that they do not pollute them—a message which she was taught from her earliest days not simply by men, but by her mother as well. As she realizes, this association of women's bodies, and in particular their sexually active bodies, with "filth" and pollution is not only part of a larger complex of beliefs and attitudes which render women inferior to men, but also a potent source of negative attitudes about female sexuality.

In order to combat these destructive associations, Uchida reclaims the bath itself as a site friendly to women, their bodies, and their sexuality. She directly refutes the connection between menstruation and pollution by depicting Gigi in the bath during her

period, simply using tampons to keep the water clean (in one amusing scene, her daughter notices the string and pulls on it). When Gigi was young, people had treated tampons as a sign of decadence and immorality, describing the women who used them as *hasuppa* (a word, as Gigi discovers in the dictionary, that denotes “words or attitudes which are frivolous or low-class, as well as women of this sort” (63)). It is significant, therefore, that Gigi’s discussions with her daughters about tampons as well as the “DivaCup” (a small silicon cup that catches menstrual flow) take place in the bath, simultaneously refuting her mother’s misguided attitudes as well as the spatial taboos which went along with them.

In a similar fashion, the bath is the setting for Gigi’s most intimate discussions with her daughters about the female sexual anatomy. To be sure, this association is a familiar one in Uchida’s work; as one of the few places within the Japanese home in which nakedness is customary as well as comfortable, the bath is often used as a site for the frank depiction and discussion of the female body, while Uchida’s *Watahan* series, with its frequent images of Gigi nursing her babies in the warm confines of her bathtub, clearly foreshadow the bath’s connection to motherhood. In *S4G*, however, the focus is upon honesty about one’s body, knowledge of it, and a positive sense of its worth.

These values are emphasized in the book’s opening scene, where we see Gigi and her daughters bathing together—a scenario frequently employed by Uchida in order to present the naked female body in a non-eroticized context. Gigi realizes that she must teach her daughters how to wash their vaginas, both because they have been doing it improperly and because her partner, Yûya, had taught her son how to clean himself when he was a little boy. As she demonstrates how to clean the folds of the labia, her older daughter is struck by the difference in color between her own genitalia and those of her mother, exclaiming, “Wow, they’re so dark!” (8) This observation leads Gigi to explain why her body looks the way it does: “Look, when the mucous membranes get stronger, they get darker . . . So when you become an adult, they turn black” (9). Her daughter thinks about this and asks, “Is it OK for children’s to be skin-colored?” Gigi responds that it is, and she and her two daughters snuggle in the bath together.

This scene of parental intimacy, and Gigi’s positive reaction to the interaction—“Given that I’ve never heard a positive explanation of a woman’s genitals turning dark, I’m glad that I was able to talk about it so well”—illustrate Uchida’s contention that mothers must give their daughters positive messages about their body in a direct and understanding way. When bathing with their children, mothers should

be sure to clean the latter's genitals in a matter-of-fact fashion, using plain language rather than euphemisms in order to make them comfortable and confident about their own sexual organs. As Uchida notes in an aside, "When you parents take a negative attitude towards washing your child's genitals, or do it unhappily as if the genitals are something "dirty", you leave your child with negative feelings about sex" (48). Instead, she suggests, the parent should say, "Let's make your important parts clean," reinforcing her point by suggesting that mothers ought to be at least as serious as they are when telling their children to be gentle with the household pet. Failing to do so, Uchida argues, leads into unpleasant territory: the mother, for example, who still bathes her fourth-grade son and tells him, "Your penis is so nice. Mama wants one too" (50). As the narrator bluntly points out, "People who don't see the problem here need only imagine a father washing his third- or fourth-grade daughter's genitals" (50).

In many ways, then, Uchida's *S4G* stretches the parameters of what a sexual education instruction manual should be or do. As we have seen, very little of it would be much help to a girl who wanted to know more about the nuts-and-bolts of sexual intercourse and birth control. It is possible, of course, that this characteristic simply stems from an attempt to follow government content guidelines, imposed upon the author by her editor and/or publisher. I would argue, however, that the peculiar form and content of *S4G* is motivated instead by Uchida's sense of a crisis of sexual self-image among Japanese girls and women in the twenty-first century. Much of this concern is rooted in, and expressed in terms of, Uchida's own upbringing and experiences as a Japanese woman. These experiences, however, are now understood as object lessons (both positive and negative) for Uchida's own offspring, whom she wishes to spare from abuse and degradation—not only the explicit and personal mistreatment she endured, but the relentless objectification and diminution of women's sexuality that pervades Japanese society in general, and makes life-histories like her own possible.

In turn, *S4G*, although it addresses the same issues as her earlier works, represents a significant change for Uchida. As before, she still writes in a uniquely personal and even confessional style, freely sharing her loves, her fears, her enthusiasms, and her pet peeves. Yet after a career spent defining herself as a "transgressive woman", fearlessly challenging the social taboos surrounding sex and violence and redefining the traditional roles of daughter, mother, and wife, Uchida Shungiku here begins to focus her energies and talents upon something beyond, if still close to, herself--namely, her daughters. Talking about

the past becomes more than an act of self-definition and self-promotion; it is a labor of love, an attempt to explain what was in order to teach her daughters what they should and can become. *S4G* thus is “sex education”, but in a fuller and more complex sense, combining biology and biography to teach what it might mean to positively understand oneself as a young woman, a woman who by knowing her body knows her worth, and by knowing her worth can participate freely and confidently in the world around her.

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