

# Y A O I

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The Analysis Issue

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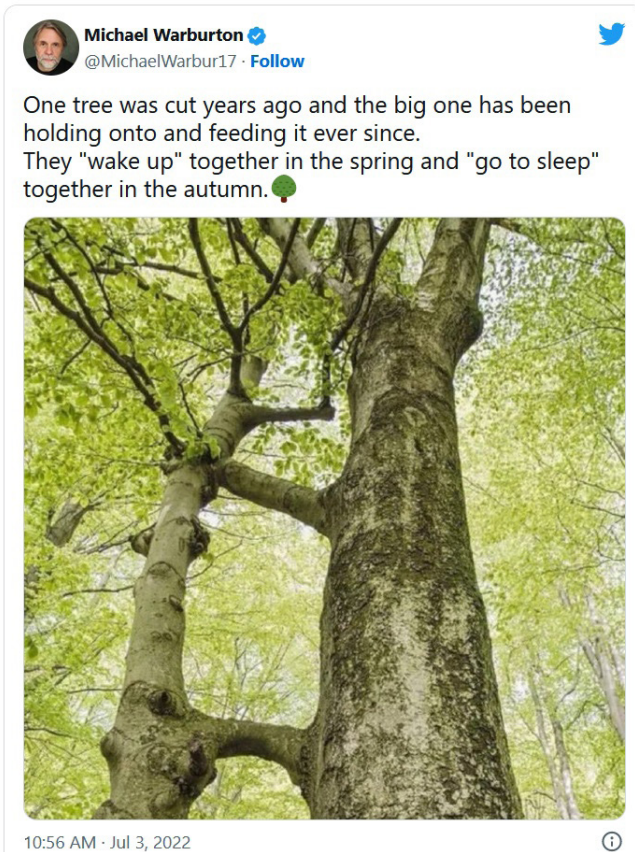
# PERSONAL ESSAYS

## Yaoi is for people who bit their peers in childhood

By tama

In 2018 light novel author Iori Miyazawa set out a theory of yuri in an interview at a science fiction convention titled by its translator “Yuri made me human”. Many of Miyazawa’s thoughtful statements have become memes, divorced from the context in which he initially proposed them and spread on social media by the kind of person who has never interacted with any kind of GL media by choice, let alone the kinds of GL speculative fiction genre works Miyazawa was advocating for in this event.

That’s why people can look at this photograph of trees and say, confidently, “this too is yuri”.



*I did look for the specific quote retweet which said “This too is yuri” but I couldn’t find it and trying to use twitter in 2023 is like hitting your toes with*

*hammers, so I gave up.*

These people are wrong.

Miyazawa argues that yuri is a relationship between a woman and a woman, characterised by intense and undefinable emotions that does not necessarily have to include love. The emotional core of the yuri is so strong that yuri can be felt even when the women who are connected by those emotions are not present. This has helpfully been misconstrued by non yuri fans as *'yuri can be anything as long as it isn't two girls'*.

Look at the trees again.

The larger tree holds the smaller tree up, suspending it far above the soil that would have sustained its life and yet the smaller tree lives on, having become a partner and a feature of the larger tree's life. The larger tree is aggressive, dominating, all powerful in the relationship but also nurturing, caring, protective. In lifting up the smaller weaker tree - which would have died without its support - both have flourished.

*How can this be yuri? It's **yaoi** !!*

Allow a simplistic and false dichotomy: if yuri is absence, then yaoi is presence. If yuri is overflowing emotion, then yaoi is thoughtless action. Yaoi is about immediacy, violence, gripping a cute boy by the scruff of his neck and shaking him until he whimpers. The emotions between two women create yuri; the actions and physicality between two men create yaoi.

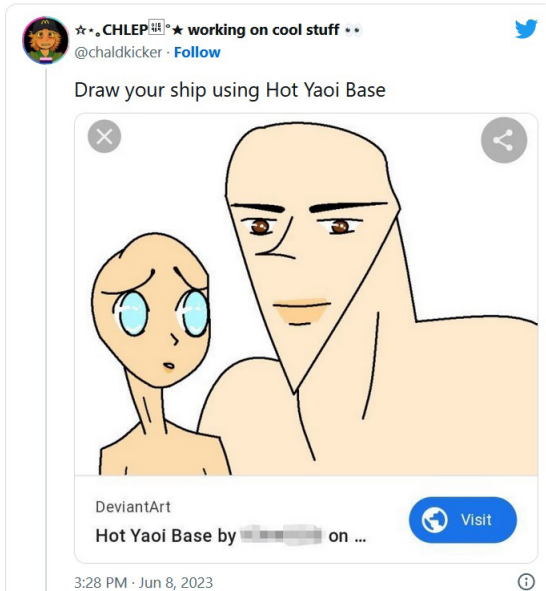


Of course, yaoi and yuri are both more than that. Yaoi was my queer awakening, giving form to my confusing teenage impulses that couldn't separate attraction from revulsion, intimacy from violence. Yaoi offered explosive action with semes and ukes driven by physical urges they couldn't rationalise or ignore. It was about domination, possession, acting first and thinking later. Consider Gravitation, an inarguable giant in the world of online anglophone BL discussions of the early 2000s. Does Gravitation present the love story between Shuichi and Yuki as healthy? Was the context of the humour and tongue in cheek self-referential irreverence of Gravitation lost on English speaking teenagers for whom it was baby's first yaoi? Or was Gravitation just numbers-filed-off bandom RPF all along??? I don't know. Like a lot of the yaoi that shaped me, Gravitation has been resigned to an unfortunate product of its time, and I've heard that the various spin-offs and sequels have not aged well at all.

But even though I knew yaoi was contentious and was increasingly aware of the slash fandom scene, fandom juggernauts like Stargate Atlantis and Smallville held none of the appeal for me that yaoi did. The interplay between depictions of male friendship on TV and the shibboleths of their fandom was as confusing and foreign to me as the Japanese manga I devoured and, as I saw it, at least in yaoi I would get to see people biting each other. Just like me, yaoi protagonists were confused by the ways their bodies reacted to people. Just like me, affection and aggression were unerringly intertwined. Did the specifics of the romance make much of an impression? Not really. The idea that feelings could be this all-consuming and destructive was enough.

Yaoi might not be for everyone and I acknowledge that. The reputation of BL as an entire romantic category was (and kind of still is?) tainted by association with yaoi, by mere proximity to this heady world of over-exaggerated physical features and frequently dubious consent. Yaoi remains a punchline, the perceived domain of tragically unselfaware MLM fetishising fujoshi, *rotten girls*, the unwelcome and immature sisters of self-serious grown up fandom, the children peeing in the pool of queer representation in media and ruining it for everyone else.





*Here's the artist's comment on the original piece from 2013: "For all your hawt yaoi pictures. lol I don't post any art except this and my watchers must hate me now"*

*I guess because this is on deviantArt people thought it was sincere. It's clearly poking fun at yaoi just as much as the ironic ship redraws circulating on twitter.*

I am the person that I am today because of yaoi. I can't change that. I will always be someone who missed that a girl was trying to find out if I was attracted to her during a sleepover I'd only agreed to in order to read her print copies of FAKE. (sorry Cait) I will never not know the intricacies of the customary yaoi groupings of KH2 era Kingdom Hearts fanfic, of the incredible in retrospect fandom consensus about who belonged to the blond yaoi family and who was a brunette. Conversations about yaoi's role in perceptions of LGBT people were my stepping stone into my political awakening, my reason to care about equality and injustice long before I understood the role I played in white supremacist global hegemony.

Perhaps we're overdue a theorist of Miyazawa's calibre who can redefine yaoi for our new age. Perhaps we'll never get one, and any conversations about our complicated histories with yaoi will remain whispered into

DMs with sympathetic parties, ready at any moment to cover the evidence with our hands should the adults walk by. If you live in your truth as a yaoi fan instead of taking the road of least resistance as I do and sheltering under the broader umbrellas of BL and fandom, I have nothing but respect for you. Yaoi is in the world all around us. We just need to take the time to look for it.



*To clarify I didn't bite people nearly as much as I wanted to because as much as I craved violence I was a teacher's pet with anxiety who hated being in trouble.  
And I had yaoi.*

BL recommendation: Junketsu Drop by Watarumi Naho. The most annoying high school senior in the world finds himself falling into a complicated and strange D/S-esque relationship with the school's star athlete and decides the only course of action is to keep pretending he knows what's going on. I think it's a spin-off from one of the mangaka's other series but it's really solid on its own. I love Kusakabe and Misato, they're both a lot of fun and very stupid and although I wish it wasn't a school-based story they do seem like realistically thoughtless teenagers.

It's good! I love to see an irritating airhead winning.

# **Kroger Shoppers and Butch4Butch: Failures of Categorization, Failures of Desire** by Julian shipyrds

## I. Survey Fatigue

The year after graduating college, I spent about six months filling out online surveys. In between sending out job applications, I trawled r/beer-money and r/workonline for survey clearinghouse websites, where I could (ostensibly) earn money by giving various nebulous corporations a large amount of information about my preferences on everything from TV to deodorant.

Unfortunately for the me of 2016, survey clearinghouses are not actually a great way to make very much money. Most surveys with low barriers to entry don't pay very well, unless you happen to stumble on a well-funded academic researcher. The ecosystem of survey-based consumer demographics collection is deeply exploitative, with most surveys on public clearinghouses that aggregate many different companies together paying well below minimum wage for the amount of time they take to fill out. (We're talking, like, \$1 for 20 minutes.) Which makes sense, as their ideal candidate is middle-aged, upper middle-class or higher, owns a home and at least one car, has multiple kids, is considering upgrading every category of possession imaginable, and is taking this survey in her free time because she feels deeply passionate about shaping the products of the future. (Many surveys are aimed at women, because, you know. Women be shopping.)

What survey clearinghouses *are*, instead, is a fantastic way to spend a lot of time thinking about how others might categorize your identity. Marketing research focuses on particular demographic categories, and survey clearinghouse sites overwhelmingly use screeners to make sure that only people who fit that category take the survey. If you're a marketer interested in the grocery habits of northeastern women with multiple kids, you don't want some single guy in California's data. But if you're a single guy in California, or (just as an example) a nonbinary recent college grad in Georgia, trying to make some extra cash, and you know you won't get paid for the time you spent taking the screener, it's in your interest to try to figure out exactly what the marketers want from you, and adapt your profile accordingly. And this is the internet, so every survey clearinghouse has its own subreddit full of advice for newbies.

(Bear with me; I promise we will get to the yaoi.)

Of course, the posts assure you, you don't want to outright lie. If you say you're a retired white midwesterner with two grandkids on one survey, and on another you tell them you live in Seattle in an apartment making tech money, eventually the survey clearinghouse is going to figure it out, and they will ban you. But, the posts continue, it is in your interest to stretch the truth. After all, aren't the survey companies exploiting us? Shouldn't we get to, just a little bit, exploit them back?<sup>1</sup>

So I put down the total household income of everyone I was living with, even though we paid bills separately; my kid siblings, who lived multiple hours away, suddenly became residents of this same household, as did my parents' newly acquired dog; and I became interested in every possible purchasing category imaginable. Sure, I was planning to purchase a vacuum cleaner in the next six months. Yes, I considered myself a power beverage drinker. Yes, that one hookah session did mean that I smoked tobacco regularly, and also I drank a lot, and I was planning to buy a car soon, and a toaster oven, and I made business decisions at my place of employment (my bedroom), and also, also, also, I was a woman.

Back in 2016, very few marketing surveys allowed you to select any category except male or female on the gender question, which was usually the first question asked. I'm not sure if this has changed, but even when surveys did offer nonbinary as an option, I usually selected female.

As of 2021, 1.2 million adults in the US identify as nonbinary. This is a big number; it is also vanishingly small from a marketing perspective, especially when you begin further population segmentation, and especially because 68% of those 1.2 million adults report not having enough money to make ends meet. The majority of us aren't exactly splashing out on vacation homes. Which means that very few surveys target us, which means, as a nonbinary person trying to make ends meet, I said "oh yes I'm a woman! please let me into your survey" all the time.

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1 Some of these posts also advised fudging your race, as survey slots for more common (read: white) demographic categories tended to fill up faster, or at least the posters seemed to think they did. This was a line I was not willing to cross, but the prevalence and comfort with which some of these posters talked about racefaking for pretty minimal amounts of money could be an essay of its own.

I could make an argument that this is an inherently transgender thing to do, that my choice to create a survey identity who crossed as many categories as I could feasibly claim was an act of transcendent self-creation and boundary-blurring. My drag persona, Kroger shopper [oldname] Shipyrds, created for a world that did not have a category for me. If I was writing this essay for Vox or something, maybe I would make this argument, and the essay could end here, on a vaguely triumphant note about the ways trans people manage to exist under capitalism.

But I don't find the closet liberatory. Mostly, it felt kind of depressing, and also pretty futile, because—much like actually being a woman—I wasn't very good at it. To make surveys into a successful career—well, first, I'm not sure it's actually possible, unless you get hired by one of these firms to do blind shopping or focus groups, and even that's pretty precarious. And second, you have to do it all the time, and you have to install a whole host of scripts and add-ons written by other members of the community to help you grab surveys quicker, to auto-input your pre-loaded information, to tell you which firms are reputable and which ones will trap you in endless screeners before kicking you out without pay after you've already given them the info they want. There was a kind of arms race happening between the marketers and the survey takers, because of course the marketers don't want people who are doing this full time taking their surveys, because we're not a normal representation of American society, and also because we lie. And I wasn't particularly good at lying, and I didn't want to put in the unpaid time to install all of these add-ons and tweak them to my exact specifications, and so as soon as I found other work that paid better, I laid Kroger shopper [oldname] Shipyrds to rest.

## II. Lesbian Male Homosexual Sex

Now on to the yaoi. A few months ago, a quote floated across my dash, from Gayle Rubin's "Of Catamites and Kings: Reflections on Butch, Gender, and Boundaries," an article in the 2006 collection *The Transgender Studies Reader*.

"Although [butch-butth eroticism] is not uncommon, lesbian culture contains few models for it. Many butches who lust after other butches have looked to gay male literature and behavior as sources of imagery and language. The erotic dynamics of butch-butth sex sometimes resemble those of gay men... Many butch-butth couples

think of themselves as women doing male homosexual sex with one another.”

As you may imagine, I found this delightful. And I think it is also applicable to the eternal question of why lesbians read yaoi. There’s been a tremendous amount of writing and handwringing on this elsewhere, both on social media and academically. Are lesbians who read yaoi fetishizing gay men? Are we betraying our lesbian identities by not reading yuri instead? (As we all know you can only read one kind of content.) Lesbians who read Kirk/Spock slash fiction popped up in 1980s-era writing during the pornography wars; Akiko Mizoguchi has been writing on lesbians who read yaoi (in the specific, not the generic) since 2003.

Lesbians who read yaoi is a thorny question from the outside, but from a butch perspective it seems very simple. A number of the arguments imply that lesbians read yaoi because we want to be men, which for a lot of (I would even go so far as to say most) lesbians is so untrue as to be offensive. The other side of the argument is equally bad: Joanna Russ’s 1985 Kirk/Spock essay has a lot of loving descriptions of the inherent tender and nurturing nature of K/S slash fic, which for anyone who has ever read pon farr fic is. Kind of laughable. The fic is nurturing, she argues, because K/S fans are writing Kirk and Spock as women, and thus the porn is actually fine to read, because it’s two women having beautiful life-affirming sex, in a way where everyone’s boundaries are respected and no one ever gets hurt. (As we all know lesbians never fuck nasty.)<sup>2</sup>

The argument about the morality of pornography aside— that’s another essay— I don’t think either of these arguments are actually true, or at least, they’re not true for me, which after all is the only perspective I can give without doing some survey design of my own. I read yaoi because I enjoy it, because of the tropes and the angst and the stupid bullshit plot machinations, and yes, also because I’m not a woman, and I’m not a man, but I am a dyke and also a twink and when I have sex it’s gay and lesbian at the same time, and so sometimes I want to read (and write!) about gay male

2 The entirety of Russ’s essay is pretty interesting, not just for the Gender of it all, but also because towards the end she almost gets there: “Until recently I assumed, along with many other feminists, that ‘art’ is better than ‘pornography’ just as ‘erotica’ is one thing and ‘pornography’ another; and just as ‘erotica’ surpasses ‘pornography,’ so ‘art’ surpasses ‘erotica.’ I think we ought to be very suspicious of these distinctions insofar as they are put forward as moral distinctions.”

sex. (One of the joys of being trans is that you get to feel like the meme about the School of Athens just by moving through the world.)

### III. Yaoi and Categorization

These are two different essays, sort of, but they are also the same essay, because ultimately both the entire field of market research and the question of lesbian yaoi readers are failures both of categorization and of desire.

Marketing research, much like gender identity, is an attempt to fit the vastness of human experience into a series of small boxes that can be easily quantified. This is by necessity: if your job requires you to analyze data, your data must be manipulable, comparable across categories, vaguely replicable. But you are also asking people questions about what they want. How much do they want a bottle of iced tea over a can of Coke? Does adding a leaf to the label change the intensity of that feeling? How do you put numbers on desire? How do you put labels on it, so that it can be compared to other types of wanting?

Desire in the world of marketing research is a deeply beige, wan emotion, limited to the constraints of the capitalist imagination. But it is the only emotion in that world, and marketers want nothing more than to make it stronger. They want you to feel the same kind of overwhelming lust when you see an ad for chicken wings that you feel when you see someone you want to fuck. They want your desire to be very strong, and they want it to be about consumption and possession, and they want you to feel it all the time. And also, they'd like you to answer some questions about it, please, and in exchange they'll enter you into a drawing for a \$25 Amazon gift card.

This desire is impossible. There is nothing less sexy than a survey; even surveys about things like alcohol or makeup place their product designs on white backgrounds, devoid of all of the surrounding drivers of want—the hot butch at the bar drinking the green-bottled beer, the person wearing the maybe it's Maybelline lipstick. We live in a society! Desire doesn't exist in a vacuum!

And for that reason, the more ungovernable and uncategorizable my desire, the better it feels. There is no place on the survey for butch dykes having male homosexual sex; there is a place in the research for it, but

always as a sort of curiosity, a quandary that requires explanation, because this type of desire exists outside of the researcher's imagination.

And increasingly, I am unsure that I want a place in either locale. There is an argument to be made that by allowing ourselves to be studied, we normalize and cement our place in the world. To some degree, this is true. It is hard to accept something you do not believe exists. But also, I don't believe that the answer to the unfulfilling and exploitative hunger of the marketing survey is to spend our energy advocating for more categories so I can be more accurately sold toothpaste. I feel more and more resistant to the idea (ironic though it may seem several thousand words into this essay) that I should categorize my desire at all. In the end, the best way to articulate my desire— to myself and to others— is to live it. And also, to go read some yaoi.

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# SEMEUke.com

The Seme/Uke Quiz was posted in 2008, at least according to archive dot org<sup>1</sup> and the recreation I found and took while writing this.<sup>2</sup> I was 14 in the year 2011, so the quiz was already five years old, but I was just beginning to take charge of my own romantic life. I decided it was time for me to start dating that summer, instead of pretending to have “crushes” on conveniently unattainable boys.

Looking back, this resolution makes me sound confident, but it was born of insecurity. I was fresh off the experience of being rejected by all my childhood friends. I felt like a baby bird touched by human hands, who smelled wrong. My ex-friends had sensed my queerness and my fatness, and made it clear I didn't fit. That summer, feeling at a deficit of what I thought was normal, I decided I was going to catch up on normalcy. I was going to date someone, and kiss them.

I ended up dating this girl who I met at a friend's birthday party. We both liked Doctor Who and the music of Doctor Who fan band Chameleon Circuit, so it seemed like a no-brainer.<sup>3</sup> However, I had picked her by default, the first person who had ever seemed interested in me, so when I went to high school in the fall and met X,<sup>4</sup> I lost interest almost immediately. X and I were best friends. We also spent a lot of time “stage kissing.” We were never on a stage. X had a boyfriend. It was all... a whole thing.

In my memory, it was X who showed me the quiz. I had been in fandom since around age 10, reading Warrior Cats and Maximum Ride fanfiction, but I hadn't quite found my way to anime or manga until X and our

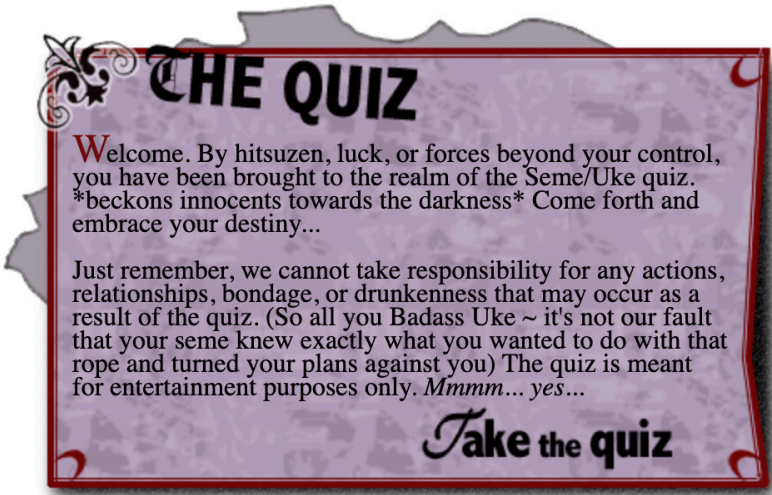
1 <http://web.archive.org/web/20080531083450/http://www.semeuke.com/>

2 <https://uquiz.com/quiz/duZjJ6/semuke-com-quiz-emulator>

3 Both a prominent member of Chameleon Circuit and the person I was dating ended up coming out as trans women later in life, so maybe that means something.

4 X isn't their real name, for anonymity, but they're the type of nonbinary person who might pick “X.”

other friends introduced me. Once again immersed in a group of friends, I no longer felt the need to be “normal” as strongly. I wanted to belong to these weirdos instead. They would have never showed me this kind of quiz.



These are the questions on the seme/uke quiz:

1. Do you enjoy licking things?
2. Have you ever bought hair dye for yourself?
3. Have you ever tied someone up?
4. Have you ever been tied up?
5. What kind of shoes do you wear?
6. Would you feel guilty for taking advantage of someone?
7. Your weapon of choice?
8. Do you have any piercings?
9. Alcohol?
10. What kind of vehicle do you drive?
11. How do you eat your ice cream?
12. What gift would you give your partner?
13. What's your ideal pet?
14. How do you order at a restaurant?
15. The server brings you the wrong food. What do you do?
16. You catch someone checking out your partner. You: (followed by multiple choice answers.)
17. Your dream occupation: (also multiple choice).
18. What's your favorite accessory?

19. What costume would you wear to a masquerade?
20. What kind of music do you listen to?
21. Do you usually find yourself on top or bottom?

I didn't really know how to answer these questions. I was 14: I had never gotten drunk, never driven, never even gone to a restaurant without my parents. Still, the answer felt important to me. The world implied by these questions seemed thrilling. Sure, maybe half my answers were conjecture, but my result could tell me something about myself. Was I a seme or a uke?

I don't remember exactly what specific archetype I received,<sup>5</sup> but I definitely remember the answer to that central question: uke, for sure.

What did this mean? Did I want to be tied up? Did I want a seme to dominate me? Did I want to be a uke, and by extension a boy?

...yes? Maybe?

Yes, if the seme was X.

Yes: they had gotten seme as their result. This was an incredibly flirty and exciting development.

But no. Because none of that felt exactly right. I wasn't a boy and neither was X. I didn't even really like the idea of dating most boys.



I dumped my Doctor Who girlfriend at a Wild Willy's.<sup>6</sup> It was amicable, but I was filling up with longing for someone who wouldn't tell me I was "missing the mouth" when I tried to kiss her on the neck. She was not letting me find out if I liked licking things.

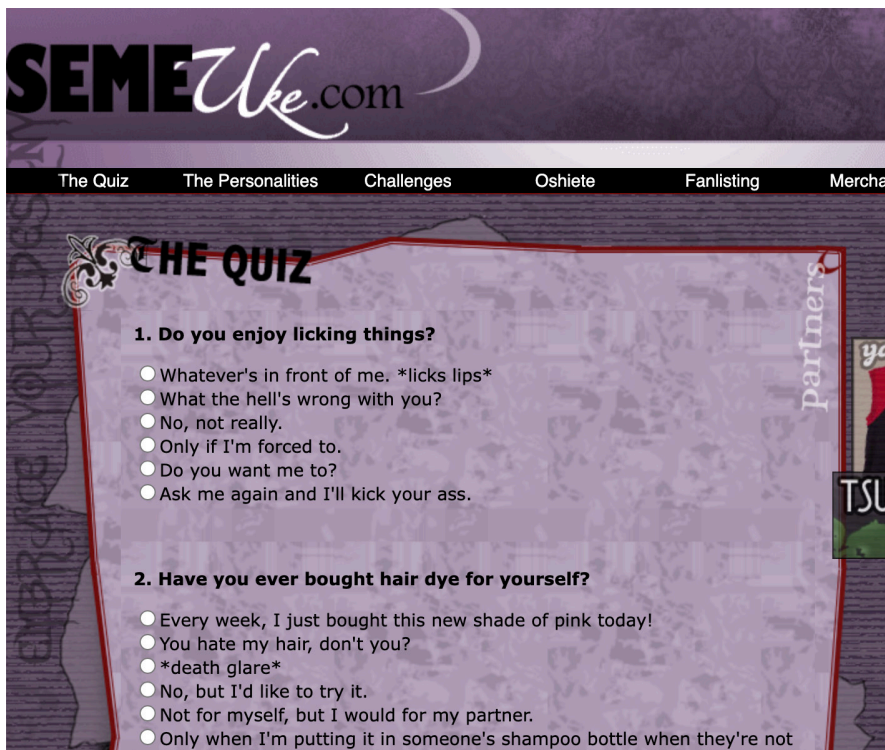
I started dating X the next year, and we stumbled through a relationship.<sup>7</sup>

5 There are ten, five seme types and five uke types.

6 A local New England burger chain. My mom drove me there.

7 We were also dating another girl. By that time the friend group was a complicated, polyamorous mess that only got more transgender by

We took more quizzes, on kink and polyamory. We made out in the stairwell of their apartment building, since their mother would not let them close the door to their bedroom.



X showed me Ouran High School Host Club, and we both related to Haruhi. I started going out to restaurants with my friends. I started buying my own clothes. I tried to learn how to play Magic the Gathering. I bought hair dye for myself. I lurked outside kink panels at conventions. I wore two different-colored Converse sneakers. I read actual yaoi. I did like to be tied up. I did usually find myself on the bottom.

Slowly, I was coming up with real answers to the questions. I think I still hoped that checking off the boxes of teenage experience would lead me to my true self. The promise of the seme/uke quiz--that it would show me who I was--resonated with me. It was the same urge that had driven me to date someone (anyone) in the first place.

Seme or uke?

---

the day.

It still somehow took me until about a year after I dumped X (in my freshman year of college; we had dated for over a year between my two freshman years, though not all in a row) to realize I was trans. Nearly our whole former friend group is trans now, I hear.<sup>8</sup> A queer theory class in college shook me out of my queerness-has-rules 2010s-Tumblr mindset, and I was free.

Until then, I'd always felt a little guilty for enjoying yaoi, and/or m/m. The late 2010s were the era of "if you are not an MLM yourself, you must be careful not to fetishize them." I even got called out for shipping a non-canon m/m pair in Adventure Zone fandom.<sup>9</sup> But then I realized I could do whatever I wanted forever.

In a way, the answer of uke turned out to be right. I am not a girl. I don't want a straight man. I want to be dominated. I feel alienation from heterosexuality and girlhood and womanhood, have ever since I had been cast out in middle school. The uke's effeminate masculinity is in me.

Yaoi showed me a world where the protagonists were never in my situation, never trapped as a straight girl who felt like she was failing every aspect of that identity. Yet neither yaoi nor yuri rings entirely true to my experience. I've never strongly preferred monogamy,<sup>10</sup> for example. Even if I were the uke, I don't really want a hyper-masculine, hyper-violent seme.

The obvious conclusion is that, of course, I'm nonbinary. I'm bisexual. I'm queer but I don't fit entirely into lesbian or gay scenes. Also, I'm a real human being. I don't have a weapon of choice because I work in data entry. I wear shoes with insoles, because I have plantar fasciitis. I am queer without rules.

Yaoi was valuable to me as an adolescent because I could cherry-pick aspects of it to build myself an identity. It was different than the chaste,

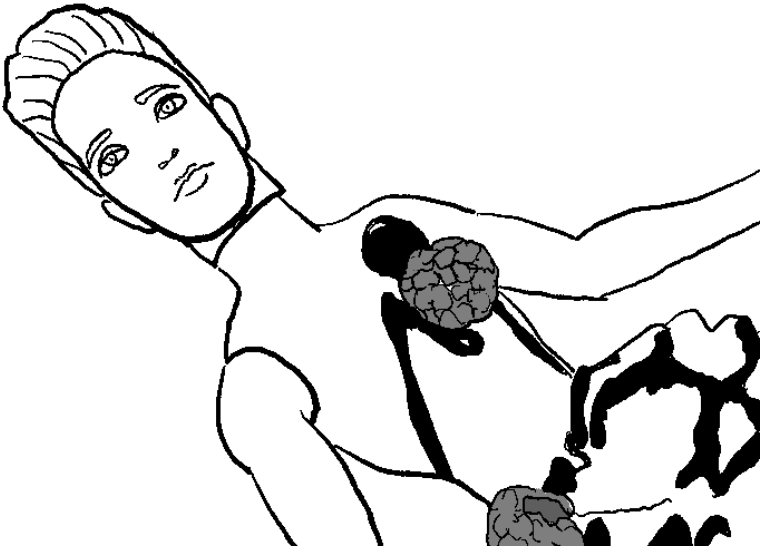
8 The only conclusion I can draw is that playing Magic the Gathering makes you trans.

9 Which was a whole thing and maybe would be a good entry for yaoi zine #3?

10 An answer to question number 16 on the quiz, about someone else checking out your partner: "Grin because I was waiting for the chance to kill someone today."

straight, vanilla world I would have been offered otherwise. In it I found possibilities of sex, kink, and love. It was not an instruction manual or a mirror or a prophecy. It was simply one piece in my coming of age as a queer person.

But you know, when I took the quiz just now, I did get uke again.



## ## ON YAOI AND AUTHENTICITY (by roland)

One could say that I came into maturity during the golden age of yaoi. SasuNaru AMVs were a genre unto themselves on early YouTube. Lawlight icons were inescapable in LiveJournal comment sections. As a middle schooler who liked manga and spent most of my time online, yaoi was a spectre looming over my consciousness that proved impossible to exorcise.

I lived in fear that someone would accuse me of being a fujoshi. I hid the covers of the manga I checked out from the school library, even though I mostly read shoujo and shounen titles that weren't predominantly associated with slash fandoms, like \*Fruits Basket\* and \*Rurouni Kenshin\*. I found the mere idea of yaoi fangirls petrifyingly embarrassing, and I was convinced that if I ever gained a reputation as one at school, I would achieve permanent social death.

Yes, I had previously spent six years as a Christian homeschooler. However, my understanding of queerness was more complex than a homophobia flat rate, as it were.

I was cognizant that I found women attractive. When I was 11 I told my younger sister that women were “objectively better looking” than men and this is why they were more often depicted as muses in Western art (LMFAO.) Even so, I resolutely refused to conceive of this attraction as romantic or sexual. If MOGAI tumblr had existed at the time, I would probably have clung to the idea that I had purely Aesthetic Attraction to women, but it didn't, so I just came up with it on my own. I had very few friends at school, and the environment in which I socially thrived was Evangelical youth group. I experienced more cognitive dissonance about the constant misogyny than the blistering homophobia—I felt strongly that sexism was wrong, and, weirdly, felt like transness (in the abstract) was a completely separate thing from homosexuality and not sinful at all, but it was harder for me to come up with mental arguments against religious homophobia, specifically because I \*did\* find the idea of two men having sex scary and weird. (I had a hard time conceiving of two women having sex as existentially wrong the same way, even if it took a few more years to accept that I was sexually attracted to them, and I never sat comfortably with the label of “lesbian” despite feeling nauseated by the idea of dating men as a woman)

In my online life, I was adjacent to slash spaces. I had written fanfiction since I was a single digit age, though I didn't post it anywhere; my first fic was OC-centric Harry Potter stuff. I didn't actually read much other fanfiction, though, because I knew that fanfiction involved SEX (scary) and especially GAY SEX (really scary!!!!), so I rotated the subjects of my passions by reading a lot of analysis—meta posts on LJ or fansites, mostly, or TV Tropes. This felt much more dignified. I was partaking in discussions around the agora. Deepening my media literacy. Uncovering textual truths. I was getting at what the authors \*really\* meant, which was the opposite of being a yaoi fangirl, because being a yaoi fangirl was about making up a bunch of fake shit for prurient reasons and then insisting that it was real.

But my highly cultivated sense of shame could not stave off the tide of yaoi forever. My downfall came when I arrived at something that appealed to my literary sensibilities: something that felt, in some way, real.

Unfortunately, that means Harry Potter again. There's a famous Remus/Sirius fanfiction called \*The Shoebox Project\*. The fic depicts a year in the life of the Marauders (Harry's dad's friend group) through ephemera kept in a shoebox. It incorporates multimedia elements, including visual art, and cemented a lot of bad fanon characterization. The concept was intriguing enough that I couldn't resist reading it—out of literary interest, of course. (It helped that there was no explicit sex.)

But yaoi is like Pringles. You can't stop with just one.

The moment before I knowingly clicked on the first explicit slash fanfic I ever read was one of the top 10 most terrifying experiences in my teenage years. The devil's breath had never been so hot against my cheek, but I was reading about Remus and Sirius sucking and fucking and there was no turning back.

It was really sexy even though it freaked me out. I reacted by doubling down in my mind palace on the "realness" of it all—not just the ostensible canon compliance of the ship (at least in the precanon era), but those multimedia elements that made it feel more anchored in the real world to me, instead of the horny wish fulfillment of a bunch of sweaty nerd girls. The first fanfic I ever actually \*published\* was Remus/Sirius songfic to "I'm On Fire" by Bruce Springsteen, which is the most horny song ever recorded. But it was period accurate to the time I was setting my fic, so I



could not be held responsible. I was just being authentic.

So my yaoi era was here—in theory. I spent the following decade quitting church, becoming radicalized, and reading gay erotica. I wrote my share, but I gravitated to creating my own fanworks about female characters (probably because they are Objectively More Attractive, or something.) I did, still, on some level, judge people who were primarily into yaoi, except this time it was because if they were more feminist they would care about the interiority of Women instead, instead of because butt sex icky/evil.

2009 was the year of my first yaoi reckoning, and 2019 the second. I was at a personal nadir, and my emotional lifeline became an overwhelming obsession with the manga \*Golden Kamuy\*. GK is a painstakingly-researched work of historical fiction about war and colonialism and trauma. It's also one of the most lovingly horny celebrations of the male form I have ever encountered.

For the first time in my life, I was churning out voluminous quantities of my own bespoke yaoi. It wasn't cringe though, because I was doing a ton of extracurricular reading about male/male homoeroticism in the late Meiji period and writing the kind of fanfic that came with a bibliography. Part of this was, genuinely, because I love history and enjoy that kind of thing. But I can't help but think that part of it was self-justification, like I needed to prove that I wasn't just becoming a full-time yaoi content creator because I \*wanted\* to—I basically had no choice. Both Satoru Noda and the annals of history were holding guns to my head.

To keep a short story short, the year I spent writing 100k of GK fic was also the year I came to terms with a) being attracted to men as well as women, and b) the fact I wanted (needed!) to masculinize via medical transition.

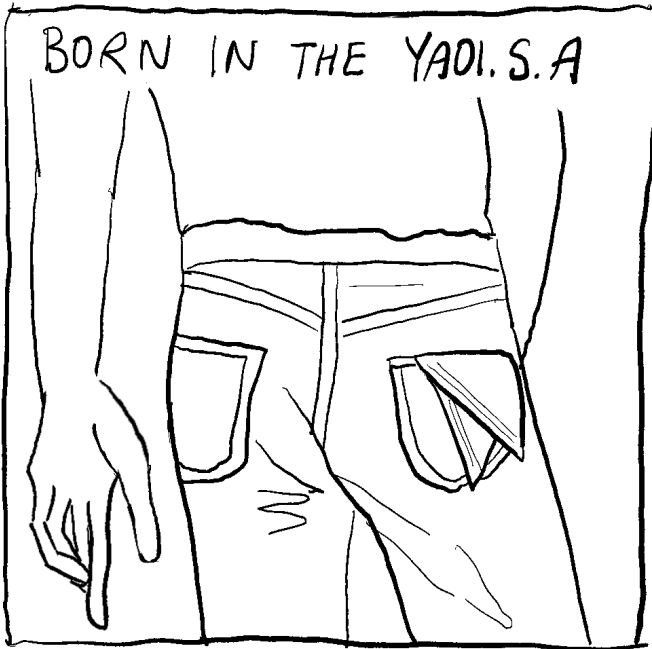
The latter was an agonizing thing to admit. There was nothing more embarrassing than making up a bunch of fake shit and pretending it was real, and that was what it would be if I decided I was going to be a guy now (or something in the ballpark of a guy.) (Not for other people though! Just for me.)

Anyway. I think this is why a lot of young trans guys online get super weird about yaoi and the people who love it. When you don't feel real enough for your own identity, it can help to draw lines around “your turf”

and start yelling at the people who are even bigger fakey fakers than you are. I'm just so glad I wasn't exposed to those specific lines of discourse when I was 15, because even though it might have been good to come to terms with being trans early on, IDK if it would be worth coming at the cost of becoming an anti-fujo crusader, and I can see that timeline through a glass darkly.

These days, my fanworks are still predominantly about women, and I don't think it's coming from self-hatred or anything; I just love women a lot and find them interesting to write about. But I love yaoi too, and I won't apologize!

I think we should all love and respect each other, whatever it is that brings us to yaoi. There's no wrong reason. Yaoi is spacious. Its hole is big enough for us all.



## **The Bottom of the Line** by Romane izanyas

On a bright day of January, 2010, a fresh-faced and innocent teenage Ro met the uke to change all ukes, the pinnacle of bottomhood, the embodiment of pathos in its most antiquated meaning; Ro pressed play on episode 2 of *Durarara!!*, the animated adaptation of the eponymous light novel series by Ryohgo Narita.

DRRR!! at the time was on every mid-tier otaku's mind: a little too fine-tuned for the casual anime consumer but sprinkled with delicious content for the connoisseur. A mid-twenties male could therefore be served with several female characters quickly designed with his demographic in mind—an incestuous older sister obsessed with her younger brother, a stalker girl ready to change her entire face with cosmetic surgery to be the object of her victim's love, a timid high-school girl with secret badass powers and a considerable rack... and, to top all of it off, a headless female grim reaper in skin-tight leather, equally well-endowed in the tits area. That's like 3 different fetishes in one.

Each lady with her own obsession with a (pathetic, normie) man or on the receiving end of a (pathetic, normie) man's obsession. As I said, the mid-tier otaku's kingdom.

What Narita may not have predicted (or at least, not quite as much) with the widening of DRRR!!'s audience was to reach into the hearts of another, very different, demographic: the fujoshi... and specifically, the kind of fujoshi that I was at the tender age of fifteen. The kind to imprint and obsess for the following thirteen years over a male character so pathetic in his homosexuality that he puts outspoken pink nationalists to shame.

Let us take a second to give context to this. The story of *Durarara!!* begins with the arrival of country bumpkin Mikado Ryuugamine to the bustling entertainment district of Ikebukuro, Tokyo. He is rejoining his childhood friend Kida Masaomi as they prepare to enter a whole new era of their life: high school! And through the eyes and ears of Mikado, we are made aware of the urban legends, the scary gangs, the extravaganza of Ikebukuro itself. What follows is a mess of substories and gnarly, knotted-up relationships, with as many side characters as there are words in this essay, and only one golden line valiantly holding the whole together: Cely, the headless grim reaper atop her horse-turned-bike, looking ceaselessly for her head, stolen from her ten years prior.

And, for me: Izaya.

Izaya Orihara is properly introduced in episode 2, where he proceeds to con and terrify a teenage girl by becoming her friend online and agreeing to be her partner in a double-suicide; before kidnapping her, lecturing her on her own insignificance, and generally making a complete creep of himself for kicks. At twenty-three years old, Izaya is an information broker in cahoots with local yakuza as well as literally anyone else who asks. Never quite an antagonist, never even close to a protagonist, he seems for the first part of the story to be floating over the plot and delighting in pushing things here and there in directions he finds entertaining. Voiced by Hiroshi Kamiya, adorning silly smiles and giving long-winded crazed monologues, giving off the kind of fujo-friendly effeminate vibe that could make a gaydar break from the other side of the ocean, there was only one thing missing to make a proper uke out of Izaya—the seme.

In episode 3, Izaya is engaged in a violent, albeit short, fight with Shizuo Heiwajima: blond, tall, has hated Izaya's guts since they were classmates, voiced by Daisuke Ono, Kamiya's very own best friend, who has famously played with him in BL audio dramas. Yes, explicit ones.

Has there ever been a more straightforward recipe for yaoi?

There is no doubt in my mind that Narita knew Izaya and Shizuo would make BL headlines the second "Izaya-kun" left Ono's mouth and "Shizuchan" left Kamiya's, but to this extent? Perhaps not. Within about a second and a half, my heart was filled with glee, my neurons were fried, I was a whole new person. Shizaya was my reason for living, and I was far from alone. Fanfiction flew down from the skies, fanart sprouted out of the earth, blogs and forums were given life. And it endured. Shizaya still has dedicated authors and artists today, is still considered a classic of yaoi for that entire generation, and God fucking knows what would have happened if today's discourses had been alive back then. Deferring to size difference and Shizuo's inhuman strength and, once again, a perceived lack of virility, Izaya became the uke in about 99% of fanworks. I think, to this day, that Shizaya wins the uke-seme distribution contest by a fair margin. Izuo was considered a whole different ship, a bona fide rarepair, for years.

But we are not here to talk about Shizaya, or Izaya's preference for taking dick, or all the ways that Izaya twisted the minds of my generation of

fujoshis. We are here to talk about Izaya's homosexuality.

Izaya's backstory was a mystery to international fans for a long time: it took 6 years, I believe, for a season 2 to be aired, and the light-novels were only sparingly translated by fans, excerpt by excerpt. Shizaya had taken root into the flesh of transformative works and become immovable. And although I had known some tidbits of information about his backstory, although I was an undefeated shipper of my One True Yaoi and a convinced Bottom Izaya Truther, that backstory made my neurons explode (again!) and changed the course of my life.

Because Izaya was gay, for realsies, in a much more complex and pathetic way than I could ever have dreamed of; and the one he was gay for wasn't even Shizuo.

There is no tragedy in Izaya's past that could be used for woobification (not that it stopped any of us from inventing some for him). His parents were distant but nice to him, his little sisters are estranged from him because he was terrible to them. He was a normal kid with good grades and no social circle until middle school.

Until he met Shinra.

Shinra Kishitani, Shizuo's childhood friend, the headless Celty's love interest, is the one Izaya has been gay for all along. Holy shit, thought Ro, not-so-young anymore, in the midst of a 6-month stay in a psychiatric clinic after attempting suicide. Holy shit! I had a new reason to live, I had a new One True Yaoi. My obsession with Izaya was renewed. My heart was full and beating.

Shinra was the one who came to Izaya and invited him into his own empty social circle. He was the first to become his friend, to hug him, to spend time with him. Shinra is insane in ways Izaya can only hope to emulate, Shinra feels no attachment to normality, to humanity, and yet Shinra chose Izaya. Shinra got stabbed to protect Izaya. And Izaya fashioned a whole new self out of this, out of feeling this special to someone—and he did it for Shinra.

Shinra only loves Celty, only loves monsters; well, Izaya will love all of humanity and viciously hate monsters. Shinra likes Shizuo and his inhuman strength; Izaya hates Shizuo with a vengeance, the boy who shares

Shinra's friendship and whose name graces Shinra's lips in the same way Izaya's does. Izaya spends the rest of his life making himself into Shinra's complementary person, into someone Shinra will find special and love in a way not even Celty or Shizuo can be loved. Izaya isn't close to anyone because he doesn't need anyone as long as he has Shinra—and, in fact, he doesn't even need Shinra, as long as he is still the one who complements Shinra the best. And as the years go by and Izaya and Shinra become distant, Izaya burrows into this self-made loneliness. The people he manipulates for fun grow tired of him. The people he still has a modicum of acquaintance with move on and make their own relationships. Izaya loses his status as a character in this story about love, because no one can give enough of a damn about him to create stories with him.

When Izaya is stabbed in the middle of the street and the incident makes the news, we see the other characters walk by and talk over TV channels relating the event without even noticing. Izaya sits in his hospital room and eagerly waits for someone to come—will it be an assassin? will it be a client? will it be Shinra? But no one comes, and when Izaya calls Shinra himself to tell him the news and finally get the reaction he craves, Shinra succinctly hangs up—he is on a date with Celty, after all. He has a life. He has moved on.

When they were children, Shinra gave Izaya the gift of a prophecy; you and Shizuo will end up killing each other, he tells him, and actually—Shizuo will be the one to kill you.

At the end of the story, as Izaya has vanished even from the mind of Shizuo, his worst enemy and rival, the one who would start uprooting trees at the sound of his name alone, he tries to make that prophecy true. He confronts Shizuo one last time. He turns the cogs of his own suicide at Shizuo's hands, becoming little more than one of those teenage girls he so likes to manipulate and mock, and hopes for his death at least to create something special in Shinra that will stay there forever.

His plan fails, of course. Izaya Orihara is carried off into the sunset to general indifference. No one is scared of him anymore. No one has loved him for a very long time. Even Shizuo left him behind without a second glance after breaking his body, as if he couldn't be bothered to even finish the job, after over a decade of threatening to kill him. Izaya is irrelevant to the characters and irrelevant to the story. Izaya's homosexuality, which could have become love, which could have made him into a person worth

telling stories about, withered him down to nothingness because he missed the most important memo: that relationships have to be nurtured, and that one can't simply wait and expect for people to be obsessed right back.

Shinra himself had to put in a lot of work to manipulate Celty into a relationship, after all.

And so here I am, 13 years later, still as obsessed with Izaya Orihara as I was at fifteen. The difference now is that what I feel for him is full of pity as well as delight and fondness. To this day, I wonder how in hell an author as cheap as Narita managed to write such a delicious subtextual depiction of homosexuality. He probably meant none of it. It's fine; as far as Izaya is concerned, my voice carries the Word of God. If I say he's gay, then he is. And if I say he bottoms, then he does, and fuck everyone else's opinion.



WHEN YOU REALIZE NO  
ONE CARES ABOUT YOU.JPG

## Accepting Yaoi Is, Itself, a Form of Yaoi by Leo @ hellspawnmotel

Yaoi and I have been on an interesting journey. It's something that's followed me since I took my first steps into the internet world, and we've had our ups and downs, our arguments, our denials of feelings for each other, the classic story of repression and acceptance. And that story isn't over yet, by a long shot.

For whatever reason, as a kid gay women always felt more acceptable than gay men. I was a deeply homophobic little tween. To me, and the people around me, gay men were gross and sick, and any girl who was into two guys together was a delusional pervert. I think I mentally justified that as "why would any boy want to be with a boy when he could be with a girl" which I would be able to explain as buried angry lesbianism if it weren't for the fact that I'm bisexual. There's probably some psychological/cultural reason for this, one that I still see reflected in attitudes about yaoi and yuri today, albeit more subtly. I might touch on that later.

All that said, even as I was decrying the very notion of yaoi, I still looked for it. Not overtly, in a way that I could deny it was what I wanted to see. I would search for fanart of things like Kingdom Hearts and Death Note, media I had never engaged with, and well, if I just happened to come across drawings of two boys holding each other tenderly, or a comic of one glomping another, was it really my fault for seeing it accidentally? Or for clicking on it out of what was clearly morbid curiosity? And after lighting a tiny fire in my heart, I would turn around and make fun of it with my friends. A little cleansing ritual.

The next step was the ever-present "joke yaoi". *Gay or European* and *If You Were Gay* were the backbone of my YouTube recommendations. It was safe as long as it was to be mocked, with the plausible deniability that maybe you were just laughing at the notion of boys kissing and touching each other and not getting lost in the fantasy yourself.





Eventually, as I grew older and moved onto new fandoms, I did get steadily more comfortable with the idea of gay men, not just in fiction but in reality as well. By the age of 14 I was meeting more people on the internet, actual gay people, and I was starting to realize that maybe I was gay too?? It was actually a shockingly smooth transition considering all the hate and shame I'd held onto previously. But- that didn't mean I was completely free of my complicated feelings towards yaoi. After all, I'd spent my first years in fandom spaces being told that yaoi was something that only silly, stupid, vapid girls took part in, and I was NOT like other girls.

So, in my mind, yaoi became another taboo- but luckily for me I loved taboos. I had already spent a lot of time drawing and writing shocking things for fun, so shuffling yaoi away into the vast network of "messed up things you find on the internet, which I am now grown up enough to gleefully participate in" was the perfect way to deal with any embarrassment I still felt. This was the beginning of my "wild west" days, which lasted for most of my teenage years. Incest, unhealthy age gaps, abuse, dubcon, and yaoi- they were all on the same level for me, and if you mixed two or more together, that just made it even more exciting.

# THE RAVENOUS YAOI-BEAST

THEY TRIED TO  
HOLD HER BACK...  
AND NOW SHE'S  
DANGEROUS!!



However, there was still one major barrier left to break through on my journey to accepting yaoi. I'd come to terms with the fact that I *liked* yaoi, but it was much harder to admit that I *cared* about yaoi, emotionally. I didn't just want smut and horny jokes, I wanted a romance. I wanted to see boys kissing not just because they wanted to fuck each other, but because they truly loved each other. Something about that felt much more vulnerable and dangerous, for whatever reason, than just flat-out porn, and much less attainable. But I was about to get a little help from someplace I never expected.

At this point, I wouldn't be true to myself if I didn't give a hearty shout-out to the yaoi that changed my life, since I didn't get to participate

in the first yaoi zine. Unfortunately, that means we need to talk about Homestuck. I was in Homestuck fandom from 2011-2013, for most of the time I was in high school, and it shouldn't be a surprise when I say that it *defined* the "anything goes" mentality when it comes to shipping. So many characters with easy-to-digest personalities and simple designs, just waiting to be shoved together like lego blocks, morality and taboos be damned. It was heaven for a horny teenager stretching her artistic wings. What I did or didn't get up to in the fandom aside though, the event that changed everything actually came from the comic itself. You see, on page 2625, Karkat Vantas sees John Egbert for the first time. And while watching the boy grow up through his computer screen, the grouchy troll is overcome by an all-consuming hatred for the whimsical human- one that manifests in his alien culture as *attraction*. Karkat has a crush on John, canonically. Disregarding the fact that it's one-sided, the feelings are never really acted on and eventually fade out, and one of the participants may or may not have actually been a trans girl named June all along, this was a revolution for me. It was the first time I had ever seen a boy being attracted to another boy in a story that wasn't just porn, in the canon and not just fanwork, and not played as a big joke that's quickly moved on from. Suddenly, yaoi wasn't just a fantasy anymore. Yaoi was real.

As you might be able to guess, Johnkat fandom was BIG. It was a perfect formula, a tale as old as time- the grumpy one and the silly one, the alien and the human, at odds with each other but more alike than they realize. Art and fic sprouted like plentiful fruit, and provided me with just what I had been craving so badly. Not just eye candy, but real connection, real love, real feelings. So many people were creating what I had been afraid to, and I was eager to join them. And best of all, it was (sort of) supported by the canon we were working from.



I want to make sure, at this point, that any younger readers understand that this was long, loooooong before the discourse of “yaoi is problematic and fetishizes actual gay men” entered the picture. Most of the scrutiny surrounding it was more along the lines of “it’s unrealistic to have gay people in fiction” / “women who express sexual desires are freaks” at the time. It was much easier to defend yaoi on principle, but the shame was still there. So despite the immense validation the yaoification of Homestuck brought me, I was still pretty embarrassed to indulge in it. In my HS career, I drew dirty jokes, underage girls with their boobs out, and romantically-involved siblings, but the thing that still made my face flush the hardest was just clean, innocent yaoi. I did draw Johnkat fanart, not as

often as I really wanted to, but I still felt ashamed and afraid that others would see this and judge me as a crazy fangirl. Looking back I wonder if some of my enthusiasm for straight or lesbian crackships and rarepairs was trying to cover up how much I cared about boys kissing, by convincing people that I just loved shipping in general and would draw anything for any reason. Honestly I don't even remember that many people being vocally anti-yaoi, except for one very loud and angry dude who was mostly known for writing the infamous "hurricane dick" fic and who everyone made fun of. It was more of a ghost holding me back than anything, the shadow of friends I'd had, artists I'd admired, and general public opinion of just a few years ago who insisted that it was okay to be gay, but they just don't want to see or hear about it. So in the back of my mind yaoi was still something you were supposed to hide, and that feeling was hard to overcome.

I wish I could say I experienced another revelatory event that suddenly opened my eyes again, but in reality things just steadily changed, as the world often does. More and more people were coming out as gay or trans, representation became part of the conversation as opposed to just indulgences, and people who opposed those facts were quickly booted out of the room (in the online spaces where I made my home, anyway). I mellowed out over time considerably along with everyone else, and by the time I left highschool I really had no problem posting a drawing of two boys cuddling or kissing, though as it became less "exciting" it took a backseat to a fully-realized obsession with girls. I think 2013 was a very special year, it was in the sweet spot where yaoi was accepted in online leftist spaces but it hadn't yet become problematic to take part in again. And just in general, I could defend my love of complex and unhealthy relationships without being called an abuser, which is another aspect of yaoi to me.

You all know what happened next, I don't think I need to get too into it. The great social justice takeover of 2014-2017. Now it wasn't about whether or not you were cringe, it was about whether or not you were a "good person". So if you weren't a gay guy and could therefore justify your interest in it, yaoi was on the frontlines again. Basically everything was, but this is about yaoi. Never yuri though, yuri was pure and chaste, even when it wasn't. And while I wasn't really part of the conversation at that point, still too focused on girls, even at my lowest I never fully agreed with that. Like, I know yaoi has kind of a rough history in places, and was usually just aimed at women and not gay men, but isn't that true for most

kinds of romance fiction? I don't know, I haven't really researched the yaoi timeline, or whatever problems it might have caused for people, but that line of thinking always just reminded me of myself as a kid. Convinced that all yaoi was created for nefarious purposes, and anyone who participated must be a girl-pervert that you didn't want to associate with. Just another flavor of the same attitude. Yuri and Yaoi are not enemies, they do not represent Good and Evil. I finally started to question why one was considered okay while the other wasn't to the culture I was in, why one was wholesome and one was harmful. I wasn't going to say that out loud, of course, the threat of a callout was far too scary. But I'm proud of myself that despite all the crazy things I was convinced of back then, and no matter what I said to save face, yaoi was never able to be pushed out of my heart.

Just like before though I think we've steadily loosened up, at least among the slightly older folks, because if you restrict people for long enough they start to fight it. I've gotten braver too, and smarter. I'm almost 28 now, arguing about that sort of thing seems so pointless, and I've learned that simply shutting the fuck up and expressing yourself how you want anyway can be more effective and rewarding than trying to convince everyone that your opinions are better than theirs. I don't give a shit whether or not some TikTok fifteen year olds discover Junjou Romantica and decide we need to reinstate the Hays Code. I'm steadily understanding how to balance my indulgences and my morals, my beliefs and my image, and I think everyone else I grew up with is too. At this point, I believe yaoi can only strengthen us.

But..... sometimes I do wonder about myself. I look at myself and I think, why does yaoi still make my heart race in a way that yuri never has? What's so different about it? I think that deep down, I still associate yaoi with a sense of danger, of the forbidden, of being a "bad girl". Yuri has always felt safe and comfortable, but yaoi has a zing to it that I can't find anywhere else. So what does that say about me? Does it mean that in a way I'm still holding onto my childhood prejudices? Am I part of the "problem"? Is there any way to get over the feeling that yaoi is a tasty little treat to enjoy in secret, and more importantly, do I even want to get rid of that feeling? After all, that's what makes it so special, so indulgent. If I lose that, then I lose a part of my own history. But maybe it's selfish of me to want to hold onto that. If the idea that yaoi is more perverse than yuri fades away, the world will probably be a better, more accepting place.

More recently though, I've been asking myself, what IS yaoi to me anyway? It's no longer as simple as a boy kissing another boy. I've learned that there can be girl yaoi, or straight yaoi, or even boy yuri. So I think, to me, the essence of yaoi is.... Something that lights your brain on fire. Yaoi is a pair of rivals with swords to each other's throats. Yaoi is "let's meet again in the next life." Yaoi is always almost there, but never quite fulfilled. Yaoi makes you feel a little devious. Yaoi is staring into the light of your phone late at night and giggling to yourself. Yaoi is at least a little at odds with whatever's acceptable at the time. Yaoi is the prince with a thousand enemies. Yaoi is I Can't Decide by Scissor Sisters. Yaoi is buying clothes at the soup store. Yaoi is something ancient, and raw, and unapologetic. Yaoi is a secret in a lockbox in your heart. Yaoi is stepping outside of yourself and opening yourself to something you've always been afraid of. I yaoi, she yaoi, we yaoi. For as long as curious people are willing to push the boundaries of their creativity a little further, yaoi will always exist in some form. LONG LIVE YAOI.





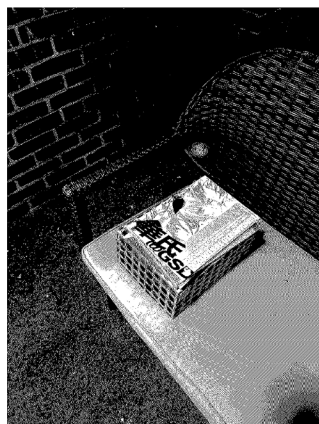
# INHERITING MY FRIEND'S HIGH SCHOOL YAOI COLLECTION

by kirbystarflower  
written 7/15/2023  
cw for dated language ?

So almost exactly a year ago, a friend texts me to ask if I'd like to take (specifically quoted) "the yaoi from my youth" off of their hands. This friend is older than me and someone I met outside of my artistic circles, a person who would not come off as having been a fujo growing up. She asked me not to judge her taste and I responded empathically that I would *never!!!*

To give some context to my excitement at being the inheritor of such a collection, I guess I identify as transmasc by default, or maybe I don't identify as anything at all anymore. Every label falls short now, feels like a trap and a measure against how well others perform gendered sexuality, ablebodiedness, and I'm always failing. Oops, already starting to stray, the point being I didn't realize my queerness until I was an adult, despite all the markers and signs. I always feel like the internet has this idea that gay FTM weebies discover their gender through yaoi, that fujos are sexually freed by BL, and occasionally in transfemme circles will the topic come up that in reverse, nerdy MTFs often discover their gender and lesbianity through yuri/GL (though I notice that it truly is within their circles since TERF gold-star-bi-separatism plagues the wider "lesbian discourse") SO. not to play the "I'm special" card but I am a rare transmasc that did not engage with yaoi much at all growing up, though I did with yuri. I was aware of its presence and I did enjoy homoeroticism in my media, the Sasunarus of it all, but also I was a heavily closeted, repressed Christian... so I closetedly assumed that "as a girl" I would have to repressedly "read" scanlations of cartoon girls fucking instead.

This is all to say, I know plenty of "nonbinaries" that relate to growing up feeling attracted and gender envious of both other girls and boys, that any touch from a girl or boy was a homoerotic one, that any girl or boy who seemed cool became a confusing cocktail of attraction and admiration. So what about yaoi? Oh right, back to the reason why I'm writing this haha...



The shoe box of BL. "Just dropped it off on your porch.  
Hope it's the right house lol!"





I finished reading all of my friends cringe yaoi and I'm here to say: cringe yaoi is good

5:24 PM · 7/5/22 from Earth

View Tweet activity

7 Likes



My dear friend's yaoi collection is earnestly a treasure trove. When I read it, I wasn't necessarily imagining the teen that he was, nor the teen that I could have been. Really, I wasn't thinking about reality at all. I dove straight into the worlds of these "men" with no fear or shame (which is amazing to me when I remember how much of youth is defined by shame for most people). After taking in all the stories, I looked through the 3 Japanese-language books I couldn't read to take in the art. This collection has an incredibly expansive range of cartooning styles, much of which is so appealing to me. My friend even said there was an artist they still liked, which I could guess instantly was Natsume Ono on the cover illustration of one of the original JP language books, OPERA, an anthology with 9 different artists.

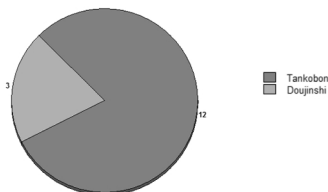
*I'm also of the opinion that even the most "trashy" "uwu" etc manga styles is loads more fun than the majority of realism-touting styles. The point of cartooning is not realism! Comics with realistic people are (not always) (but usually to me) boring now! Yaoi hands are the peak of artistic style!*



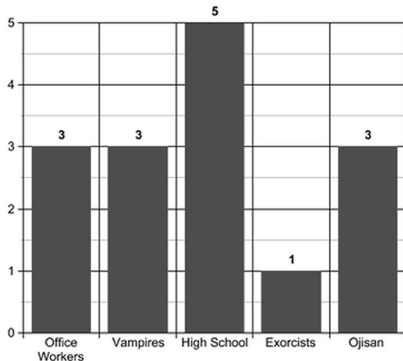
^ Comic by Natsume Ono in the OPERA anthology.

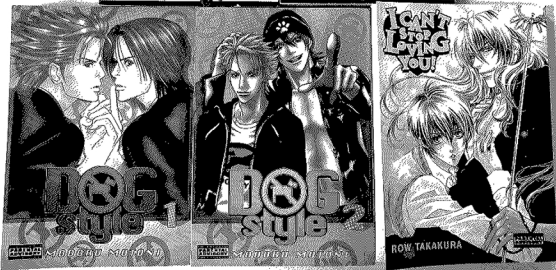
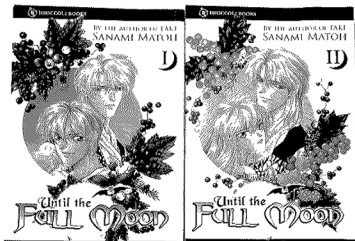
Anyway, AGAIN, back to the point. I don't want to take up too many pages so I already decided I wouldn't do any actual reviews of any of the books in this stack, though I would like to. Instead I'll share some pictures and make some charts that create an overview of this collection, because I like silly & useless statistics. :-)

Print format



Topics/Characters (Some overlap)





Misc stats/notes

Publishers represented: 5, the one with most titles is "Juné" (they're still going!)  
 Only one series has genderbending (Until The Full Moon)  
 Only one series has delinquents (Dog Style)  
 Only one book has a long-haired top (I Can't Stop Loving You!)(this makes me sad because I like men with long hair...)  
 The doujinshi were for Gundam and One Piece (I gave the One Piece one to another friend who likes Zosan lol)

Okay that's all ! If people enjoyed this maybe I'll do some actual book reviews for the next issue... Ciao!



^ Amazing y2k artifact, I love stuffed bears.

# POETRY/SHORTS

## messages i've received from samson

Here's the premise:

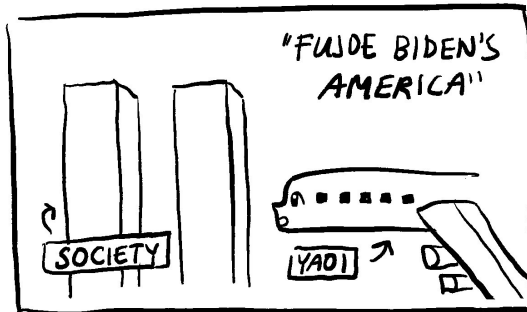
Normal guy transmigrated into the body of a teen mom omega whos got a weird relationship with the dad/love interest. The protagonist is like a cis man originally (the ML rationalizes it as like he was an alpha) so he struggles with being an omega. He breaks gender roles whatever and gets the mark ML gave him removed because he doesn't want his mark clouding like their feelings. Then suddenly like less than half of the way through the novel he moves into MLs house because the og bodies biodad keeps asking to see his kid in a weird way. There's a whole conflict that the ML doesn't believe the protagonists kid is his bc he gave birth in 5 months and the DNA isn't a match but it's explained away as the kid absorbed his twin in the womb

What's ACTUALLY happening is the biodad of the protagonists body has been doing genetic experiments in the og body and combined omega with small herbivores (the protag body has rabbit DNA) beta with small carnivores and large herbivores, and alphas with large carnivores. The dad ignored MC bc he didn't show any signs of being effected, excluding the fact he has a double womb (surprise the absorbed twin was in a second womb and has been hanging out there for uhhh 14 months.) but his son HAS and he has like. A tail. The dad wants this baby back **DESPERATELY**

There's like video footage and documents showing these genetic experiments out and about being like hunted and killed. Also MCs only friend was in the dad's payroll and he's like a sad wet bag and is marked by the successor, who is engaged to MCs half brother. Like. A bunch of stuff happens and also nothing happens. The entire time we get snippets of the dad in Africa in various underground bunkers Turning his dad into a human dog and also he has like a weird serial killer torture basement. He's doing experiments. Corpses of poor people who've been mutated keep showing up in different countries. Eventually he makes a ploy for the kid but gets double crossed by his other son (MCs half brother) and gets stuck in the city. MCs father in law is military so they shut the city down. Then I guess, the antagonist dad does a 9-11 and orders a plane to be flown into a big tower in new years eve. And a bunch of people die. And then he's like getting ready to leave but oops! He gets caught

I'll answer any questions you have to the best of my ability but 30 chapters have been translated so I'm reading the world's worst mtl ever

Oh also the MC gives birth on New years day. He's been secret pregnant for like over a year and like real pregnant for like 5ish months.



## THE HOLE

is deep even under the beam of sun & I  
crouch down & think about putting my hand  
in. Would I get it back? Or would I keep  
going, skin first, disappearing under the  
seam of the world? Maybe. You always tell  
me to stop thinking so much & so I think of  
you instead, sliding through liquid to pull at  
me. I want to dissolve into velvet blackness  
like sugar & I want you to make it happen.  
Could you pull me in, please? Offer your  
hand. A welcome from you could split the  
sky, turn the deep into water. I'll wade in.



Label the yaoi creatures by theo

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
4. \_\_\_\_\_  
5. \_\_\_\_\_  
6. \_\_\_\_\_  
7. \_\_\_\_\_  
8. \_\_\_\_\_  
9. \_\_\_\_\_



- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. \_\_\_\_\_
- 7. \_\_\_\_\_
- 8. \_\_\_\_\_
- 9. \_\_\_\_\_
- 10. \_\_\_\_\_



## **The Divine Cells**

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**“I am the grapevine, and you are the  
branches.”**

**“Apart from me, you can do nothing.”**

## **The Instinct To Spread**

BL game Cell of Empire is about two things:

propagation, yaoi, and the results of their incompatibility.

(For more regarding propagation and yaoi, please refer to previous notes.)

## **A note on propagation**

Reproduction begins at the cellular level. Similar, if not identical cells are born when the "parent" cell duplicates and divides its contents.

Plants reproduce through multiple means. A popular human intervention into plant reproduction through a cutting from the parent material.

These cells create identical copies of the parent. This process can be repeated indefinitely. However, mutations may still occur, and create something entirely different.

Humans propagate themselves through two means:

Most actively seek out a partner, and in a union sanctioned under God, create a child.

Other humans turn to preaching.

## A Mathematical Proposal on the Mpreg Factor

$$(Y) + (P^2) + (p \cdot 0.5) = MP$$

["0"] Nothing. No relation, even tangential.

["1"] If you squint, it could be something. No hints that it is. But it could be.

["2"] The medium value. There's never much to say about medium values.

["3"] The high value. Anyone in this category did their best but fell short of divinity.

[Special ranking "Empyrean"] The highest level. Inescapable. Infinite. At this time, spreadsheet technology cannot handle the divine infinity. So "4" it is.

(To see each subject's results, please contact 4546775-6)

## The Mpreg Factors

Let me elaborate on the variables in my mpreg formula.

["P"] Parenthood. Or propagation quotient. Multiplier: 2.

["p"] Everyone is the product of propagation. This variable, too, is dependent on the parent. Multiplier: 0.5

["Y"] No multiplier. For more on yaoi, please refer to "A note on yaoi".

### **A note on yaoi**

Why did he begin to preach?

It was the only way to receive God's favour.

Why did he play along?

He had something he wanted enough to sacrifice his own happiness for.

Why did he take that flowerpot tag?

*[The rest of the note has been torn out.]*

**MORE ESSAYS**

## **GIRL YAOI, by tshirt with chris.**

What do we mean when we say a work of art is girl yaoi? I think girl yaoi is a concept that a non-zero number of people intuitively understand but struggle to articulate. Our project for this essay is to develop a yaoi grammar such that future conversations on girl yaoi may have a tentative framework.

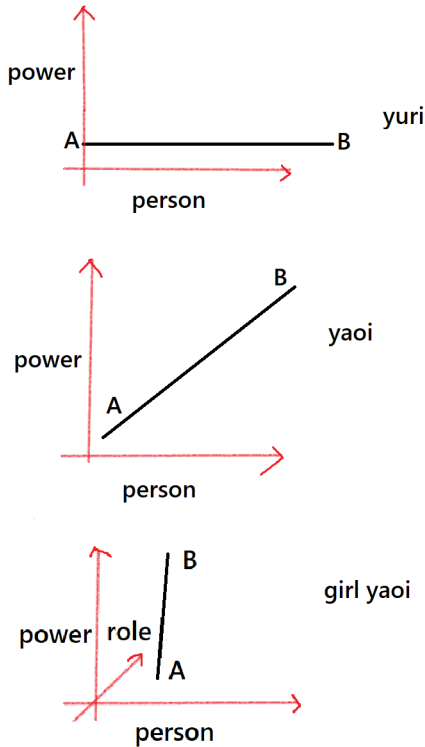
Let us start with a statement that is fairly uncontroversial: girl yaoi is not yuri. It is a separate genre. This is, perhaps more controversially, because yaoi is about power. Most things are about power, granted, but yaoi is about power in a way few things truly explicitly are. Yuri, conversely, embraces ambiguity and tends to less strongly emphasize power differentials between the two characters. It is because of this tendency that we find it more productive to call the F/F media that does emphasize power differentials “girl yaoi” and analyze it as yaoi rather than as yuri with all other F/F media.

These are our own beliefs. While others may have independently come to similar conclusions as us, this is still an experimental field to talk about. After all, yaoi and yuri refer technically to the historical continuity of, respectively, M/M and F/F content produced by Japanese artists. And in common parlance, they are used to refer to any M/M and F/F respectively, without regard for the context the work was made in or the tropes and genre conventions it employs. Our alternate definitions are meant to capture instead certain subjectivities that have become associated with those continuities in a transnational context. We are trying to map out a new taxonomy of genre, informed by our positionality of being queer and very online.

Yaoi presents a complication to the presumed lateral world of male homosociality by introducing an explicit hierarchy—its 1s and 0s, domination and subordination, and so on. Classic yaoi tropes involve relationships mediated by disparities in age, wealth, gender performance, and other such power-inflected qualities. In many ways, we can read yaoi as having undergone a “heterosexualizing” matrix. This is not to say that yaoi is about F/M, but that it is informed and structured by the outside “straight” world. Girl yaoi contains hierarchy, which is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for its identification, but is more preoccupied with the social-sexual rules that govern girlhood, and deliberately defamiliarizes and perverts them.

We can represent this with the metaphor of vectors on a coordinate plane. This is meant to be visual example, not to imply any stance about yuri being a “purer” form of yaoi, nor yaoi being an “evolved” form of yuri. It is simply just trying to represent these abstract relations spatially, via yaoi dimensions. Yaoi dimensions are useful because they allow us to understand and visually represent gendered hierarchical modalities as they mediate interpersonal relationships. We can classify relationships as yuri, yaoi, or girl yaoi based on their yaoi dimensionality.

The first dimension supposes equal hierarchical and social roles, or at least treats them as such. Its x axis simply indicates personhood. The second dimension introduces oppositional hierarchical roles. Its y axis indicates power. The third dimension adds the social roles that tend to preoccupy girls. These roles are not necessarily “real” but they are treated as such by girls. Girl yaoi treats this z axis as the most important source of difference.



The y axis is also important, but the z axis disparity is what makes it girl



yaoi. F/F can be yaoi without being girl yaoi if it lacks this dimension. Girl yaoi must be about femininity in some important way. Because it prioritizes difference along the z and y axes rather than the x axis, from the two dimensional point of view they can collapse into the same person (in two social classes). Much girl yaoi plays with the identity of the women it follows, and this is our visualization as to how.

None of this talk about yuri being in the first dimension is to say that yuri is simpler than yaoi, by the way. Yuri includes such outstanding examples as Portrait of a Lady on Fire (2019) and the rare male yuri example Moonlight (2016). It is composed of many complex elements; they are simply not the focus of this essay.

At any rate, if this seems too abstract, or too specific (or even both), to make sense, we turn to three case studies. Our cases are three Korean films that we consider girl yaoi: The Housemaid (1960), The Handmaiden (2016), and Memento Mori (1999). We choose this genealogy for no particular reason, other than that they are all strikingly girl yaoi movies that we like, due in no small part to the outsize influence of The Housemaid on Korean cinema. The following analysis contains spoilers for all three movies.

### *The Housemaid:*

The premise of the movie is as follows: Mr. Kim plays piano for a factory's choir group, which is made up of women, many of whom are attracted to him. Mr. Kim wants to make more money because he's recently moved into a new home and his wife is pregnant. So he takes on a student, Miss Cho who, unbeknownst to him, is attracted to him. He asks her for a maid recommendation, as his wife is over-exerted. She introduces him to a cleaner from the factory. This new maid unsettles the household balance, which ultimately culminates in violence. Here's a link to watch the movie on Youtube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-J\\_](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-J_)



*Sex:*

The plot hinges on four separate women being desperately attracted to Mr. Kim. Two of them die over him; two of them commit murder over him. But why does everyone want to sleep with him so badly? Is he simply that attractive and good at sex? Our answer is that sex with him is a source of authority vis-a-vis the other women. Sex in general is very much about other women in the film. For instance, Mrs. Kim, towards the middle of the movie, reprimands her husband for cheating on her with the maid, crying "How could you come to my bed with a filthy body? I feel so dirty!" The maid's body contaminates Mr. Kim's body. Sex facilitates transference. The maid is dirty, so Mr. Kim is dirty, so Mrs. Kim is dirty. The maid has feelings for Mr. Kim for Mrs. Kim. And so on.

Lust is a contaminating force. The student, Miss Cho, infects her friend Miss Kwak. She presses Miss Kwak into writing a love letter to Mr. Kim, which gets Miss Kwak fired from the factory, which causes Miss Kwak's suicide. Miss Cho also infects the maid, Myung-sook, introducing her to Mr. Kim. It's Miss Cho's confession to Mr. Kim, which Myung-sook spies on, that precipitates Myung-sook's adulterous encounter with him. Her passion overflows into them; each becomes possessed by her insatiability.

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This phenomenon is common. Here are some examples of the other woman being the whole point. These, too, are girl yaoi:

"Super Freaky Girl" - Nicki Minaj

I don't let bitches get to me, I fuck they man if they try  
I got a princess face, a killer body, samurai mind

"Girls in the Hood" - Megan Thee Stallion

Bitch, you better hope I never run across your man, uh  
In the mall with him, I'ma have a ball with him

"Take Yo'Man" - City Girls

See this bitch ain't like me and I don't know why  
But I'ma give her a reason when I take her guy

"Bartier Cardi" - Cardi B

Cardi took your man, you upset, uh  
Cardi got rich, they upset, yeah

“In the Party” - Flo Milli

(La, la, la, la, la, la) Yeah, bitch, I got your man

(La, la, la, la, la, la) Since you bad, ho, come catch him if you can

“Misery Business” - Paramore

Woah, it was never my intention to brag

To steal it all away from you now

But God, does it feel so good

‘Cause I got him where I want him now

---

*Power:*

The film explicitly discusses who possesses power in the household. It begins and ends with a frame narrative of Mr. Kim reading a story—the plot of the movie—from a newspaper to his wife.

MRS. KIM: Men are such fools. Taking interest in a maid!

MR. KIM: I disagree. Look at us. We’re almost totally dependent on our maid. She cooks and washes for us, and is the first person to greet me when I come home from work. She is entirely at our service.

There’s a tension between Mr. Kim’s two statements “We’re... dependent on our maid” and “She is entirely at our service.” In the first, the maid seems to hold power over her employers. But in the second, it’s the employers who seem to hold absolute power over the maid’s life. So which is it? That’s the root of the problem in the movie. This is remarked upon in the ending scene of the film.

MRS. KIM: Having a young girl around the house was like offering raw meat to a tiger.

MR. KIM: Or a wolf in a sheepfold. Isn’t that right?

MR. KIM: [turning directly to camera] Listen to me. As men get older, they spend more time thinking about young women. That’s how they become attracted to women, who could lead to their downfall. This is true for all men, even those of you who are shaking your heads!

Again, tension in this message. A girl is meat; a girl is a wolf. Men should watch out, because it’s them who can prevent girls from being girls.

But what do the contents of the movie actually say about any of that? We see the absolute power over the maid exercised only once, when Mrs. Kim convinces Myung-sook to abort Mr. Kim's child. But it's Myung-sook who is the instigator for most things. She has sex with Mr. Kim; she causes the death of one of the children; she threatens the family afterward.

After Chang-soon—the son of the family—dies, Mr. Kim wants to go to the police. But it's Mrs. Kim who intervenes: "It's better to save those who are still living. If the factory learns about this, you'll lose your job. Then, we can't afford to make a living." So Mrs. Kim offers Myung-sook anything she wants. And Myung-sook chooses Mr. Kim living as her husband as her bribe. There's an economy here. Myung-sook has sex, which she pays for with the death of her fetus. But it's that life and death which gives her access to the economic power over the Kims, which she uses to gain sexual power again.

Myung-sook acquires power over the household through that transaction, which transforms the equation. Where once we could dramatize the household as the standard Oedipal triangle, where Myung-sook was in competition with the mother for the father, by having sex with the father, she obtained the phallus [power over the household]. This identification of Myung-sook with the father changes the equation to make her an Oedipal *boy*—and she goes on to kill the father. Yet having sex with the mother is elided. There's this gaping missing gay sex hole at the center of the movie.

*Identity:*

Family roles are in flux in the movie in general. The characters repeatedly identify each other with new roles. When Mrs. Kim is convincing Myung-soo to abort her child, she tells her "You're like a little sister to me." When Myung-soo is demanding water afterward, she cries out deliriously "Water! Help me. Help. Oh, mother! Give me water!" And who should answer her call, but Mrs. Kim. We see at play the identity blending that is so central to girl yaoi, in which girls conflate their identification in relation to/with other women.

You may ask: how is this girl yaoi? None of these women are in a relationship with each other. I've instead spoken abstractly about sex, power, and identity. Here, we turn to Eve Sedgwick. In *Between Men*, Sedgwick explains:

“To cuckold” is by definition a sexual act, performed on a man, by another man. Its central position means that the play emphasizes heterosexual love chiefly as a strategy of homosocial desire.

The plot hinging on one woman making another the cuckold allows us to cross-apply this analysis. Myung-soo is performing sexual acts on the other women of the movie, acts which are merely trafficked through Mr. Kim. Moreover, the knowledge asymmetry that characterizes cuckoldry is supremely yaoi. As Sedgwick writes:

Thus, cuckoldry inscribes and institutionalizes what is only contingently a feature of male homosexual bonds—an impoverishment of horizontal or mutual ties in favor of an asymmetrical relation of cognitive transcendence.

What’s more yaoi than that? The exercise of power over the other women in the movie animates the plot. It’s easy to place in sexual terms when their reactions are so visceral. Their faces screw up, lips parted, panting, moaning, in ecstatic fits of violence. Sedgwick similarly details that women enjoy a more natural continuum between homosociality and homosexuality.

it seems at this moment to make an obvious kind of sense to say that women in our society who love women, women who teach, study, nurture, suckle, write about, march for, vote for, give jobs to, or otherwise promote the interests of other women, are pursuing congruent and closely related activities.

The Housemaid blends these roles together. It conflates women who nurse, who employ, who stab, who cuck—who hold power over each other in social-sexual ways. This is the yaoi continuum that *The Housemaid* sets up. One can easily imagine torrid anal sex as the endpoint of all this.

### ***The Handmaiden:***

The premise of the movie is as follows: In colonial era Korea, Sook-hee is hired as a maid for the wealthy heiress Lady Hideko, who is under the care of her uncle. Sook-hee’s employment is arranged for by the fake Count Fujiwara, who is attempting to engage himself to Lady Hideko so that he can commit her to an asylum and seize her wealth. Sook-hee is supposed to assist him with this, but quickly becomes entangled with

Hideko herself. If you have not seen that movie, stop reading this essay here. I am begging you, go to [1337x.to](http://1337x.to) and torrent that goddamn movie. It's also on Amazon Prime video, if you're more the streaming sort. Anyway.

*Mother:*

The conflation of roles in this movie is much more dramatic than in *The Housemaid* due to what I will phrase delicately as Sook-hee's "mommy kink." She regularly attempts to mother Hideko in both romantic and sexual situations. This is a core part of her character. Upon her second introduction, where she reveals she is a thief not a maid, she immediately also tells us that she wishes she had breast milk so she could breastfeed all the infants that her criminal organization trafficks. This desire to perform care labor bleeds into her interactions with Hideko. As she bathes Hideko, she explains:

SOOK-HEE: When my aunt heard a guest was coming, she dropped everything and bathed her Baby Miss. Nothing made her happier than when guests praised the baby's scent. You are my Baby Miss.

And she continues to think of Hideko in these possessive tones, at one point wondering, "Of all the things I've washed and dressed, has anything been this pretty?" This culminates during a sex scene. Sook-hee tells Hideko, "I wish I had breastmilk to feed you," repeating her earlier wish. Mothering is how she wants to treat the good things in her life.

Hideko expresses this is a love she is deficient in. Sook-hee's efforts reach her because of it. As she tells the viewer, "My late aunt and Mrs. Sasaki tried very hard to teach me of a mother's love. But not really." The two failed her in a multitude of ways and collaborated in grooming her, leaving her bereft of the maternal presence she craves. She feels guilty for it too, stating that because her mother died in childbirth "it's as if I strangled her myself." But Sook-hee voices her mother. She repeats what her Auntie once told her about Sook-hee's own mother, that she "Said she was lucky to have you before dying and that she had no regrets." Sook-hee roleplays as both of their mothers simultaneously in order to fulfill Hideko. What a delightful psychosexual mess.

*Father:*

Imagine, if you will, the Oedipal triangle once more. Who is the father?

The obvious answer, I think, is that the Count Fujiwara is the father, Hideko as his mother-collaborator, and Sook-hee the child who comes to love the mother and help kill the father. Even before the two women work together, both Hideko and Sook-hee vie for their plan with him to work out; they are in competition for him. As Sook-hee phrases it, “Everyone’s performing their roles so damn well.”

But I think it’s a little more complicated than that. If Sook-hee is the child, why is she so motherly? If Fujiwara is the father, why does he lack any real power? And as Hideko phrases it, “I was going crazy so I wanted everyone else to go crazy too.” The roles in this movie are awfully mixed up.

Let’s try again. What if Hideko becomes the father? She truly has the power, being the character who is set to legally inherit all the wealth. She’s the one person who’s actually Japanese, instead of Korean collaborator attempting to leverage colonial power. And the third act twist comes down to her decision to choose Sook-hee over the Count—were she to do nothing, Sook-hee would have been committed to the asylum and that would be that. Moreover, if we, to use Gayle Rubin’s formation, think of the phallus as the right to have a woman, as a token that can be exchanged for a woman, she certainly comes to possess that. Now, her crossdressing at the end of the film seems intelligible.

The rest of the triangle becomes mixed up too. Sook-hee roleplays as a man too—namely, the Count. For it’s the Count who has the right to have a woman early on. So the first sex scene takes place under the flimsy pretense that Sook-hee is fucking Hideko the way the Count would. “Keep doing what the Count will,” indeed. The layer of roleplay is immediately preceded by Hideko identifying with the Count as well. After dressing Sook-hee up, she comments that she “[knows] what the Count means” when he said “Every night in bed, I think of your face.” Again, delightful.

### *Infant:*

Not only do Sook-hee and Hideko identify with mothers and fathers with respect to each other, they identify themselves with the other person. Hideko comments, “We look alike. Don’t you think?” And Sook-hee was chosen by the Count for some physical resemblance to Hideko, as Sook-hee is meant to be committed to an asylum under Hideko’s name. This resemblance is heightened in certain scenes, such as the one in which

Hideko dresses Sook-hee. The two women standing in line have an eerie visual similarity. The final sex scene similarly pursues a symmetry that verges on uncanny.

The mirror stage, which begins at the age of 6 months old, is the stage at which the infant, upon looking into a mirror, can recognize their reflection as themselves. Lacan vests this recognition with great significance for the development of the “I.” When you see yourself in a mirror, you see your actions mirrored—shown in reverse—and recognition that reversal as you nonetheless “symbolizes the I’s mental permanence, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination.” This produces both your sense of self and a feeling of alienation. After all, you are “[finding] its unity in the image of the other,” recognizing yourself as if you were a different person. The infant becomes infatuated with its own idealized (unified) image. And Lacan is clear that any number of things can function as a mirror; it only requires this identification with the other.

Anyway, *The Handmaiden*. Sook-hee and Hideko make the other into their ideal “I,” seeing themselves as another person. They come to be themselves through this identification. Lacan is also clear that the infatuation with one’s own image is a misrecognition. There is no ideal “I”; there are only fragmentary bits of identity that we imagine cohere into a unified self. This misrecognition is necessary for the ego to survive though. But these contradictory identities Hideko and Sook-hee take on with relation to each other draw our attention to the fiction of *méconnaissance*.

This is yet another reason that girl yaoi has a privileged relationship to psychoanalysis. Girl yaoi, rather than eluding the phallus, has an askew relation to it, and psychoanalysis is especially well equipped to handle these questions of psychic power and social relations. This lens is especially important with relation to *The Handmaiden* because of the centrality of incestuous grooming to the plot. Under it, the question of who has power in the family and the subject of girlhood are both placed in terms of initiation into a sexual world that endangers as much as it thrills.

This is what Freud becomes a theorist of, through failing to account for women. Much like yaoi is a theory of fiction without women, Freud’s work is centered around an assumed male child. When we adapt both, strange things happen. Girl yaoi is about living in a world that didn’t account for you, and about the shapes you inhabit in the process of becoming. You can be her father, her mother, her sister, her lover, and so on. And



playing those roles only reveals their contingent and fictitious nature. The phenomenal @shrimpchipsss brought up the closing lines of *Bound* (1996)—Gina Gershon as Corky asks “You know what the difference is between you and me, Violet?” “No.” “Me neither.” And just the year before, in *Showgirls* (1995), Gina Gershon as Cristal Connors stated to Nomi Malone, “You and me, we’re exactly alike.” Girl yaoi always draws attention to the plasticity of being. There is no “I,” it says. Only “us.”

### *Memento Mori:*

The premise of the movie is as follows: Min-ah is an ordinary student at an all-girl’s school, until she finds a diary that belongs to two of the students, Shi-eun and Hyo-shin. They kept the diary together as a record of their relationship. After Hyo-shin dies by suicide, her ghost attempts to get revenge on those who wronged her life, all while Min-ah becomes increasingly obsessed with the diary.

### *Death:*

*Memento Mori* is a movie about haunting. This is true quite textually. The title of the movie appears in the diary as an incantation to protect oneself. It’s translated as “remember the dead.” There’s something interesting, though: *memento mori* more technically means “remember that you will die.” And the conflation of the two suggests an interesting possibility.

“Remember the dead” makes sense as a message from Hyo-shin. It serves as her confession, as she takes her revenge on those who wronged her in life. It may as well be rephrased “Remember what you did to the dead.” Only penitence will satisfy her. But “remember that you will die” as a talisman as against her is less straightforward. It suggests that the dead and you are not so different. Maybe this one should be rephrased “remember you are like me.”

As the poem Hyo-shin wrote goes, “Anyone is me. I am anyone. Everybody is me. I am everybody. The truth becomes a lie.” And what is Hyo-shin? A lesbian. Anyone is lesbian. Lesbians are anyone. Everybody is lesbian. Lesbians are everybody. The truth—the irrepressibility of queerness—becomes a lie—through its overstatement. But this is why Min-ah is so powerfully fixated on the diary, and why her haunting takes place in sexual terms, the ghost’s hands on her body. Its incantation indicts her.

### *The Uncanny:*

Freud theorized the concept of the uncanny in his 1919 work “The Uncanny.” He explains that the uncanny “is that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar.” It is something that was once repressed, but now emerges from the repression. It confirms the beliefs we thought we put behind us, sending us into self-doubt. Hauntings are uncanny. They are something returned. So if the uncanny is about repression, it has a powerful relation to our “memento fricare” thesis.

What does haunting say about the lesbian body? Michel Serres comments on the orthodoxy that health is “only the silence of the medical sciences, all astir from speaking of pathology. The normal does not say much.” It is the shadows—illness—of which we speak, and which themselves speak. Shi-eun and Hyo-shin bond over their shadows. Shi-eun is hard of hearing, while Hyo-shin hears too much from her hallucinations. Together, they are silent—there is no excess. They are also silent, because they can communicate telepathically. Telepathy is uncanny, Freud writes. It is the:

transferring [of] mental processes from the one person to the other... so that the one possesses knowledge, feeling and experience in common with the other, identifies himself with another person, so that his self becomes confounded, or the foreign self is substituted for his own—in other words, by doubling, dividing and interchanging the self.

Telepathy makes textual the pair of doubling the self/unifying two bodies that is a central preoccupation of girl yaoi. This relation of the double and the self is rich theoretical territory. Freud describes how the uncanny figure of the double is a projection of the ego, making something about us which is strange foreign to us as an act of self-protection. He speculates that the strangeness is in part derived from childhood, when the “ego was not yet sharply differentiated from the external world.” Whatever the case, the double is us haunting our own self, and telepathy once more breaks down the barrier between us and that externalized self. It returns us to our once permeable body. Telepathy confirms that unlike Min-ah who repressed her identification with Hyo-shin, what’s different about Shi-eun and Hyo-shin is that they do not repress their identification with each other.

This is how Min-ah can also later join in the telepathy, to Shi-eun’s sur-

prise. Three becomes two becomes one. She becomes the living haunting a conversation that had stopped. Of course, she is merely animated by the dead. Or maybe that's just an excuse for her own desires. As Bladee tweets, "Yoo chill im just a vessel ! didnt mean to flex on u bro Im just a vessel ," We are a vessel for our own uncanny. We project our strange desires onto the other. We haunt our own selves in girl yaoi.

***In conclusion:***

"[F]or women it is of particular importance that we find a language which allows us to recognise our part in intolerable structures—but in a way which renders us neither the pure victims nor the sole agents of our distress..."

—Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*

So what do we mean when we say girl yaoi? We seem to be talking in large part about what it's like to live in a society. We are talking about a worldview in which we must see ourselves constantly implicated in these structures around us. We are not imagining a better world, or a worse one, but simply a version of the one we live in, with women in its central roles. I said once, facetiously, that yuri attempts to escape the phallus, while girl yaoi is about bludgeoning each other with it. And there's a grain of truth in that. Girl yaoi suggests that we and the intolerable world around us are not as different as we might hope, that we might find ourselves in others, for the better or for the worse.

What we mean when we say girl yaoi: SOCIETY. BOTTOM TEXT.

A/N: thank you shrimpchipsss for bound reference, verity for latin help, elliott for letting me use his thesis as reference, and most of all chris for marathoning these movies with me and being the source of all the best ideas in here!

WE LIVE IN A GIRL SOCIETY...



## girl yaoi 2: 2 girl 2 yaoi by chris

before diving into my girl yaoi piece, i would first like to acknowledge t-shirt for their brilliant case studies of and analysis on the many facets of our girl yaoi cinematic universe. in illustrating and identifying the tropes and symbols of girl yaoi, the case studies have broadened our understanding of how the genre may manifest. similar to how a horror movie may have ghosts, but also may have zombies, girl yaoi might have mommy issues, but also might have insane proxyfucking.

regardless of how it may manifest, the core of girl yaoi is still a perverse sort of identification between the yaoiful women in question, and it is perverse because, to return to the introduction, “girl yaoi contains hierarchy.” identification across these imbalanced, hierarchical social dynamics implies their dissolution, which in turn implies a weakening or inherent falsehood in the social structures that defined these women as different in the first place.

my particular interest in the field of girl yaoi studies is this collapse of differential power dynamics, as well as what it might imply, and so this supplementary analysis aims to continue to explore our proposed definition of girl yaoi through an examination of this process of personal identification, interpersonal integration, and social disintegration exhibited in *the housemaid*, *memento mori*, and *the handmaiden*.

### IDENTIFICATION

the three films all open with their leading ladies appearing to be unthinkably different. how can a handmaiden and her mistress have anything in common? a chain smoking factory girl and an elegantly composed wife could never seem more different. what would an average school girl and a disturbed social pariah share?

in terms of either class or conformity, there is a deeply uneven distribution of power between the women of each film. in both *the handmaiden* and *the housemaid*, the film title foregrounds the role class plays within the narrative; the titles also allude to how gender and womanhood play into it. and while class differences represent one of the easiest avenues of presenting how social roles and status impact womanhood and the ways women can relate to and identify with each other, they aren't strictly necessary. in *memento mori*, which takes place in an all-girls high school,

uniformity and conformity are highly desirable; conformity grants you power and safety in numbers, while failing to adhere to the oft-impentable social codes of mean teenage girls relegates you to disempowered, outcast status.

a desire to identify with the other is what crosses this first hurdle of difference in power, and this desire recurs throughout all three films.

in *the housemaid*, the titular housemaid, myung-sook, longs to inhabit the role of her employer, mrs. kim, and expresses this desire through lust for mrs. kim's husband, through whom myung-sook can access the role of middle-class wife and mother. or fantasize about it, at any rate. her lust for mr. kim becomes code for her lust for (the relative wealth, status, and stability) her social superior, mrs. kim(, enjoys).

for *memento mori*, mapping this mix of envy and yearning is a little trickier, because it doesn't actually happen between the established couple of shi-eun and hyo-shin. rather, it occurs between min-ah, a classmate who chances upon the couple's shared diary, and the relationship itself. min-ah's initial intrusion triggers an obsession with the relationship that ultimately leads to her being possessed by the diary and hyo-shin herself. she wanted to be a lesbian so bad, she became one (or, as some may interpret, one became her).

however, nowhere is this desire better exemplified — or made mutual — than through the relationship between sook-hee and hideko in *the handmaiden*. the two only meet due to their desire to escape into the other's life: sook-hee longs for the luxury and leisure of hideko's station, while hideko aims to take on sook-hee's identity to escape her abusive uncle. as the only pair of women that actually end up sucking and fucking, one could say that they're the epitome of the classic lesbianic dilemma of: do i want to be you, or do i want to kiss you?

## INTEGRATION:

whether this desire is unidirectional or bidirectional, these women want to be each other. funnily enough, the narratives make it quite clear that underneath the trappings of social roles, power, and status, they're already the same — just, maybe not quite in the way they want to be.

this is demonstrated in how cleanly myung-sook and mrs. kim inhabit

the role of the other. myung-sook blackmails the kim family by threatening mr. kim's job at the factory where she once worked. in exchange for her silence, she demands that mr. kim sleep in her bed ("darling, come to my room and sleep tonight," she says), and that mrs. kim bring her breakfast the next morning. intercut with a fade-to-black sex scene between myung-sook and mr. kim are shots of mrs. kim laboring at her sewing machine in an effort to supplement the family's income.

within seconds, myung-sook forces a complete reversal of roles as she claims the comforts enjoyed by mrs. kim and forces her position of servitude upon her once-superior. the ease with which myung-sook inhabits the role of her employer is emphasized in the next scene, when mrs. kim attempts to poison myung-sook's breakfast.

when mrs. kim brings the food up to myung-sook's room, the vast difference between the two women's body language is telling: the wife moves with a tense subservience, while the maid watches her with a relaxed, prideful ease. based on body language alone, viewers could easily assume myung-sook to be the true lady of the house. mrs. kim is even reduced to eavesdropping outside the door as myung-sook and her husband eat, which, throughout much of the film, is *the housemaid's* m.o.



*the housemaid: myung-sook fusses with her hair while mrs. kim serves breakfast, her head bowed and eyes downcast.*

some innate similarity must be at play here, for the housemaid to so convincingly play the part of her master, and for the master to be reduced

to such subservience, no? any outward differentiation clearly stems from social circumstance, which the psychological twists and turns of the housemaid have unraveled, allowing the identities of these women to be interchanged with a surprising fluidity.

*memento mori* is a touch less dramatic with its reversals and mergings of identity. threaded throughout the film are signs that min-ah's possession by shi-eun and hyo-shin's shared diary has led her to become one with, or even replace, hyo-shin entirely.

a note: hyo-shin's relationship to the journal is of particular importance here; though the diary chronicles the relationship of both shi-eun and hyo-shin, it is the latter's handiness with arts and crafts that show through most in its pages. if anyone is about to haunt that diary and use it as a means of possession, it's going to be her. because she's crazy like that. and also because she actually did die and become a ghost.

the film establishes early on that shi-eun and hyo-shin have some kind of telepathic connection. as min-ah's obsession with the diary grows, she exhibits this telepathic ability in communicating with shi-eun. her reading of the diary has changed her in some fundamental way, connecting her mind and soul explicitly with shi-eun's, and blurring them with hyo-shin's, whose role she has begun to take on. or, whose role has begun to consume her.

the closing scenes of the film emphasize this confluence of identity. after terrorizing the student body and teachers who abused her in life, hyo-shin's ghost seems to retreat, and her diary vanishes. min-ah apologizes to shi-eun for this loss, to which the latter responds, "it's okay, we can always write a new one." (this exchange happens telepathically, by the way.)

it's ambiguous whether this open promise represents the continuation of a toxic cycle or a fresh start, but one thing is clear: in all the ways that matter, diary or not, possessed or not, min-ah has come to replace hyo-shin, their identities interchangeable and equal. because she's crazy like that.

hyo-shin was viciously bullied and ostracized by her peers, and so the fact that it is min-ah, her social superior, who is unidirectionally fascinated by hyo-shin and shi-eun, is particularly interesting. unlike *the housemaid*, it's impossible to excuse her obsession as being rooted in conventional desires



for, say, wealth or male attention, and so on. the explicit queerness in the film doesn't help. min-ah's ultimate identification and merging with hyo-shin is transgressive in multiple ways, perverse in terms of the individual self and in terms of socially acceptable priorities. or, girl yaoi trumps society, but cannot exist without it, especially when the things you want or want to be are not what you are meant to want.

*the handmaiden* alludes to the interchangeability of its two female leads within its title. interestingly, in korean, the film is titled *agassi*, which translates to 'lady.' in korean, the film refers to *hideko*, and in english, *sook-hee*.

the two of them continuously flirt with role and power reversals as a game: in one of the most erotic and also most comedic scenes of the film, *hideko* dresses *sook-hee* up in her fine clothes, all while *sook-hee* marvels at how *hideko* is like a doll to her, one that she can button up and undress as she pleases. her lack of self-awareness is parallel to none.

this game comes into play later on in the film, when *hideko* (and *sook-hee*, as we later discover) trick an asylum into committing *sook-hee* under *hideko's* name. for a moment, *sook-hee* is the japanese noblewoman, and *hideko* her korean handmaiden. the movie makes it clear: either one of them could be the handmaiden and either one of them could be her mistress. this interchangeability adds flux and complexity to a once-straightforward dynamic of power and servitude, and, much like the housemaid, alludes to a core 'sameness' between the two.

## HORROR (DISINTEGRATION)

many of the scenes mentioned in the previous section are rather tense, and intended to generate some sense of horror or unsettlement. which makes sense, since both *the housemaid* and *memento mori* are categorized as horror, and *the handmaiden* as a thriller. and the genre line between thriller and horror is already quite thin, especially if you're like me and have a delicate constitution. (sources: wikipedia, my delicate constitution)

in a straightforward sense, this horror seems to be generated by the intoxicating girl-on-girl violence of poisoning and possession, the scenes of which encode the blurring of two individuals into one, either through a literal merging or through the reveal of an underlying similarity.

but in truth, the intimate horror of such identity-play comes from its implications, which dismantle the rigid social spheres of the domestic household and classroom dynamics that enforce a status quo and staticity on women and girls. remember: key to girl yaoi are differential power dynamics, and even more key to girl yaoi are the subversion and disintegration of them

like regular boyxboy yaoi, the tropes and dynamics of which are informed by heterosexual structures of power, girl yaoi cannot exist without the outside world. this is especially palpable for girl yaoi because of how girlhood and womanhood are defined in relation to men, as any internet poisoned or wittig-reading lesbian must surely be familiar with by now. any perversion of female social roles must implicitly or explicitly discuss the patriarchy, because that is what has constrained the women of these girl yaoi films to their particular social roles, and defined their ambitions, desires, and relationships with other women in terms of them.

*the housemaid* is extremely on-the-nose about it, with the central conflict in the film surrounding the husband and his attentions, despite him being the least interesting part of the movie. the wife and the housemaid are defined in terms of their service to him, even as the movie completely upends this dynamic by stripping him of any agency and power, reducing him to an object to be fought over.

*memento mori*, despite taking place in an all-girls high school, is far from exempt: despite the predominantly female environment, the presence of the patriarchy is heavy in the authoritarian demands of male teachers and insidious in the body standards for weight and curves and chastity that the girls have internalized unto themselves, and externalized unto their peers.

the twisting and collapse of these dynamics of housemaid/wife and girl best classmates into something other indicates a disintegration of the patriarchal element that mediated and defined their initial relationships. curiously, this, rather than the trauma these women endure as a consequence of patriarchal strictures, becomes the source of horror.

to no one's surprise, the structured, domestic household and the regimented schoolroom inflict immense trauma upon our female leads. as a working class woman, *the housemaid's* myung-sook sees her health and safety heavily deprioritized in favor of preserving the kim family's illusion

of domestic stability, and demands “do you think my body is just a toy?” as for *memento mori*, shi-eun and hyo-shin, especially, endure ostracization and bullying due to their queer relationship.

however, while those scenes of verbal and physical harassment are tense, it is the disruption of the school environment through hyo-shin’s post-mortem hauntings that generate the most overtly ‘scary’ moments of the film. (i identify these ‘scary’ moments by how many people on-screen are screaming and crying). hyo-shin’s life evokes pity, disgust, and sadness, while her afterlife inflicts terror, pain, and fear. we, the audience, experience this fear alongside the perpetrators of her suffering; thus, we are implicit in their crimes, and fearful for what her retribution and obsessions may wreak upon them/us.

which raises the question: is the horror in the movie that she suffered, or is it that, when given the power, she sought vengeance? both myung-sook and hyo-shin are viciously abused by those around them, which leads them to take on an antagonistic role that terrorizes their abusers (and us, the audience). this antagonism disrupts the environment that so defined their roles and identities, lending their warping of established identities and power an inherent horror. girl yaoi cannot exist without horror, because girl yaoi, as it breaks down the individual identities and barriers of its girl semes and ukes, threatens to break down society — which is scary, isn’t it?

you might notice that i haven’t mentioned *the handmaiden* in a while, and that’s because it doesn’t really follow this pattern.

in both *the housemaid* and *memento mori*, the implications of sameness and/or convergence of their female leads generate horror. but in *the handmaiden*, this sameness, this interchangeability, becomes a strength that allows hideko and sook-hee to escape that which binds them under male violence and control. and how do they do that?

through gay sex.

## GAY SEX

*the handmaiden* visualizes these themes of symmetry through its oft-devastating mise-en-scene. visual symmetry often carries an eerie quality due to its highly-structured and unnatural nature, and the film leans heavily

into this, particularly in scenes set at hideko's uncle's estate.

that this estate is the site of significant trauma and abuse for hideko is not an accident. one of the most striking symmetrical frames is from the scene introducing her uncle. in the frame, he and hideko are across from each other in the library in almost perfect alignment, save for the fact that he is seated at the table, and she is kneeling on the ground, alluding to the power dynamic between the two.



*the handmaiden: hideko and her uncle sit in his library.*

this shot ties symmetry to abuse to her uncle with clean efficiency, but symmetry later becomes the key to escaping her uncle. the likeness between hideko and sook-hee is evoked when they effectively switch places, leading to sook-hee being trapped in the asylum under hideko's name. the symmetries between them are reinforced by an earlier exchange of dialogue when the two reveal that they have each been scheming against the other.

“sook-hee, are you worried about me? i'm worried about you.”

“you think you're tricking me? you're the one being tricked. you're the one bound for the madhouse. i am going to lock you up in there under my name, then i'd become you.”

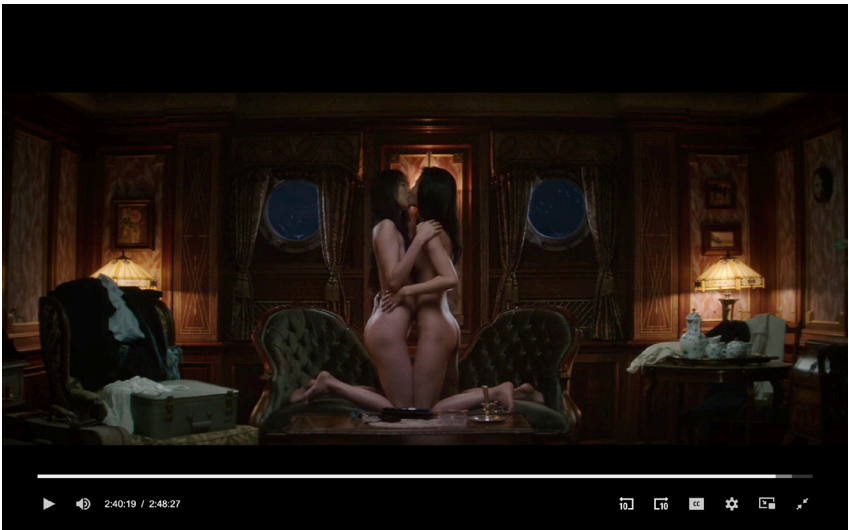
this dual confession effectively saves the two of them. honesty and open

acknowledgement of their symmetries allows them to collaborate and take hold of hideko's fortune, escaping the control of her uncle and the manipulations of count fujiwara.

*the handmaiden* strips back the layers of narrative lies in order to reveal symmetry and interchangeability across social strata and individual identities as a strength. it converts horror into joy — both within the narrative scope, and in broader terms regarding the identity horror we see in films such as *memento mori*.

nowhere is this more concisely captured than in the final sex scene, and final scene of the film. previous sex scenes between the two laid groundwork in referencing and perverting gendered social hierarchies by allowing sook-hee and hideko to escape the structured relationship of handmaiden and lady under the premise of sexual fantasy. the encounter is initiated by sook-hee roleplaying as count fujiwara. the physical mirroring of their bodies through sex positions like scissoring and sixty-nine equalize them, while sexual fantasies such as sook-hee's blatant mommy and lactation kink re-introduce and deconstruct the hierarchies of the external world in a deliberately perverse manner.

the final sex scene is the culmination of both threads — the subversion of symmetry as a source of horror, and the equalization of disparate bodies through pleasure.



*the handmaiden: hideko and sook-hee have gay sex.*

during this scene, sook-hee and hideko are at last sailing towards a shared freedom, and are celebrating with gratuitous lesbian sex. the composition of these final shots are striking, with hideko and sook-hee nakedly facing each other in profile, their bodies twinned across both halves of the frame. kneeling, they push silver bells into each other's... holes. not only is this symmetrical frame composition a callback to hideko's uncle's mansion, but so are the bells.

as a child, her uncle would have her hold bells in her mouth to silence her before beating her, linking their metallic tinkling to physical punishment. to see them repurposed for pleasure and to see symmetry utilized in such an overtly joyous scene reinvests the set pieces and aesthetics of hideko's uncle's mansion with new meaning in a very literal way. it emphasizes symmetry as liberatory rather than horrifying, and the narrative as a whole is sympathetic to both hideko and sook-hee, both of whom are never framed as antagonistic due to their trauma. in this way, the handmaiden pushes the boundaries of girl yaoi by transmuting the implicit horrors of prescriptive female social roles and their dissolution into joy and extremely sweaty lesbian porn.

## GIRL YAOI

to be frank, i don't know how much this will illuminate in terms of girl yaoi. this entire essay has been spent rewording a few brief paragraphs of the introduction in increasingly elaborate ways, and so, in some ways, the best conclusion i can offer is to re-read that.

but, all in all, girl yaoi is about many things. girl yaoi is horrific, until it's not. girl yaoi is about pain, whether its the pain women inflict upon each other, or the pain women suffer just by being. girl yaoi is also about the union of disparate bodies. girl yaoi is about unraveling and ripping at the social circumstances that bind women together, yet hold them apart. and, in the end, girl yaoi is about society, always.

## Plausible Deniability Yaoi: A Webnovel Listicle by simkjrs

It is already widely accepted to us yaoi scholars that yaoi, as a genre, is romance concerned with introducing and exploring difference and power dynamics in relationships that would otherwise be homogenous.<sup>1</sup> This broad definition allows us to expand our understanding of yaoi past traditional M/M dynamics to conceptualize such things as girl yaoi, which is different from yuri.<sup>2</sup> This, in turn, opens up a number of other possibilities as well, such as straight yaoi (yaoi featuring a F/M pairing), straight yaoi 2 (yaoi for straight people), girl yaoi 2 (yaoi for girls), girl yaoi 3 (yaoi that contains at least one girl but not necessarily two), and more.

This essay isn't about that. This essay is about webnovels that try to use gender as an excuse for why they couldn't possibly be yaoi.

That's right. It's the gender fake-out problem. And yet, like the mimicry camouflage of eyespot-sporting butterflies, the efforts to use gender to diminish or dodge the yaoi implications only enhances the inherent yaoiful delight of these stories.<sup>3</sup>

Without further ado, let's dive in.

### 1. Fake Saint of the Year

Fudou Niito is a hardcore fan of the Saint Eterna, the main heroine of *The Eternal Scattering Flowers: Fiore Caduto Eterna*. Unfortunately, it's a "rocks fall, everyone dies" sort of game. How can he accept such a terrible bad end for his favorite character!

Then he reincarnates as the fake Saint Elrise who was almost single-handedly responsible for Eterna's heartbreaking fate. What's a guy to do? Of course, it's to throw his entire detached, callous, and black-hearted nature into becoming a Saint great enough to pave the way for Eterna's future.

Consequently, Eterna and Elrise toe the line of lesbian ecchi quite a few times. But more relevantly to this zine, the main hero, Vernell, falls in

1 Source: My beautiful mind

2 For more information, check out renowned yaoi scholar t-shirt's essay, girl yaoi.

3 Source: Just trust me

love with Elrise and devotes himself to a life of celibate training so he can dedicate himself silently to her from the sidelines for the rest of forever. A side effect of this is that he is one of the few people who visits Elrise regularly in the cottage in the forest that she has retired to.

Wait! You might be saying. Fudou Niito has reincarnated as a girl, though, and Vernell thinks that Fudou Niito is definitely a girl! How could this possibly be yaoi?

To which I can only say: My friend, you've fallen for the trap! Take a look at this:

*The reason he worked so hard was because of me, but...it was unfortunate, but I didn't think I would ever be able to answer his feelings.*

*That's why I kept trying to convince him to give up on me and find happiness with another woman, but... he replied with a totally embarrassing line then.*

*"I'm happy to be a man who could protect you."*

*What's with this killer phrase. If my heart was really that of a woman's, I probably would've swooned over him.*

[...]

*...My inner self was still that of a man's... right? I was actually starting to doubt myself on this.*

*If it was before, then the idea of falling for a man and truly becoming a woman had been completely impossible for me. Because the formation of my identity had already been completed during my last life; regardless of how many decades passed, I wouldn't end up considering such a thing... or so I had declared. However, because of that last battle, I was a little... really, it was just a little, but my thoughts did change, and I was scared that one day I would get influenced by such feelings.*

Of course, there are many possible readings of this; for example, the idea that perhaps Fudou Niito has — after living as the “opposite” gender for nearly two decades — finally touched upon the inscrutable and wonderful frontiers of gender...



But that won't stop this situation from being gay. Is there anything more gay than being afraid of falling in love with the guy who thinks you're a girl? I don't think so. The fact that Fudou Niito is nominally a girl, and perceived as a girl by others, is simply a smokescreen from the narrative to trick the anti-yaoi defenses of the unenlightened reader.

## 2. If You Touch My Brother, You're All Dead

Rosalite, the protagonist of this shoujo story, transmigrates as the older sister of Asterion, the main character of the BL novel, *Asterion of the Starry Night*. To her immense frustration, every time Asterion dies, she regresses back in time to when she is 16. In order to live a fulfilling life and gain the right to die in peace, Rosalite must embark on a very important mission: fulfill Asterion's wish and make him happy!

Since she has transmigrated into the wonderful world of BL, however, Rosalite must remain on alert for all the trash MLs who might aim for her younger brother and screw up her plan. The problem? Well... She's got a beautifully toxic friendship with almost all of them. The author has set her up perfectly to unwittingly swoop in and steal Asterion's harem of garbage love interests. Indeed, already, many of the MLs have already exhibited signs that they are turning "straight" for her...!

But does that change the fact that Rosalite is living in BL world? I say NAY. Rather, her presence in the story has simply changed the story from yaoi into straight yaoi. "What could you possibly mean by this?" You might be asking. Well, it's simple. Rosalite has become a BL seme. Let's take a look at her relationships to others:

- **Glen:** After killing his half-brother and forcing him to beg for his life, Rosalite coaxed him into a mutually beneficial contract marriage and has now set him up as her wife-for-life. She's a human hurricane, a force of nature, sweeping Glen up easily in her pace as she takes and takes as she pleases... And yet, just when she's on the verge of driving Glen crazy, she catches him off guard with her earnest, thoughtful, and dependable side! What could she be thinking? Will he really be able to resist her charms for long?!
- **Theodore:** As the oldest daughter to a powerful duke who keeps suppressing the throne, Rosalite has more political power than Crown Prince Theodore. Nonetheless, she uses this privilege exclusively to be an annoying meddling pest in Theodore's life, a feeling which Theo-

dore reciprocates completely and yet is frustrated he can do nothing about. And yet, in times of trouble, Theodore feels that Rosalite is the most trustworthy person he can rely on...! What will happen in this love-hate relationship?!

- **Luke:** A commoner bastard who ascended to become one of the nation's most notable merchants, this black-hearted and scheming man has his eyes set on Rosalite's monetary sponsorship. Too bad she so often spins things so that she has the upper hand...

If these relationships make it sound like Rosalite is the ML of these men's yaoi stories it's because she is. Once again, the gender excuse is only there to let down the guards of those who are afraid to venture into the wonderful world of yaoi. But you and I, enlightened readers that we are, will surely perceive the truth.

### 3. What Happens When the Second Male Lead Powers Up

Jung Eunseo, easy-tempered older brother to a shoujo-obsessed younger sister, finds himself transmigrated into his sister's most recent favorite romance series as the second male lead, Prince Jesse. As a political hostage to one of the most powerful empires in the series, he'd like to simply keep his head down and avoid getting involved with the male and female lead's romance. Oh, and maybe it'd be nice to watch their developing romance from the side...

To no one's surprise but Jesse's,<sup>4</sup> the male and female lead have both fixed their eyes on Jesse instead.

For a romantic comedy, this story has proved quite capable of confusing all of its readers. With two years' worth of steady translations, a thriving 3P fanbase, and over 100 chapters of ambiguously romantic dynamics between Jesse and the male and female leads, this story has yet to acquire any romance-related tags on the famous webnovel-categorizing site, NovelUpdates. That's right. It doesn't even have the "Romance" tag.

Why? Because for every person who believes in the very obvious bisexual throuple forming in the story, there's another person who can argue that Cedric and Christelle only want Jesse to become their shared partner for life because of the culturally practiced priest-knight partnerships, and yet another person who can argue that while obviously Christelle is interest-

4 If he's even noticed, which he hasn't

ed in Jesse, the only reason Cedric is fighting with Christelle for Jesse's time, attention, and admiration is only because Cedric is attracted to Jesse's exceptionally pure and abundant mana.<sup>5</sup> The author clearly does not give a shit about clarifying this situation and continues to write whatever they want.<sup>6</sup>

The author really needs to be admired for all the layers of deniability they've put here. For the person purely determined to read a gen-fic, or perhaps a straight romance, there are many ways they can choose to blinker their eyes. However, it has to be said... There simply is no straight explanation for some of the things that Cedric and Christelle do.<sup>7</sup>

#### **4. The Villainess, Cecilia Silvy, Doesn't Want to Die, so She Decided to Crossdress**

A shoujo reincarnation story that is basically exactly what it says on the tin.<sup>8</sup> And yet, this premise is exactly what makes this story so yaoiful. Cecilia, while crossdressing as a guy, and being perceived and treated as a guy, attends an academy and forms a lot of male-male friendships with guys who can't help but be drawn to her irresistibly despite the fact that they think she is a guy. Or perhaps because they think she is a guy. The uncritical reader will take it at face value that this story is surely still straight because, despite what everyone thinks, Cecilia is actually a girl...! They are wrong though.<sup>9</sup>

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*"No, no, no. It can't be. I'm just surprised! He's a man and I'm a man*

5 Not that this would ever be a metaphor for anything.

6 Oh no, Prince Cedric is going to be late for his coronation ceremony. Prince Jesse, you have no choice but to use the divine relic to obtain an angel wing and carry Cedric in your arms to take Cedric to his once-in-a-lifetime important ceremony in public view of everyone in the nation and also the gossip rags are going to write about it forever.

7 Christelle x Jesse is a classic example of girl yaoi 3 (yaoi that contains a girl), hence her inclusion in Jesse's yaoiful delights. However, due to the gender deniability in the story, her presence has morphed their three-way tension into a delicious flavor of bisexual yaoi.

8 Although how exactly crossdressing is supposed to save her life is unclear.

9 Just ask the in-universe fujoshis who are writing doujinshi about Cecil(ia) and her love interests. (As we all know, fujoshis are never wrong (but they are often wrong about how they are right).)

too!” Oscar firmly reassured himself.

Actually, he understood what this feeling was. But if he consciously acknowledged it, he would never recover from this discovery.

“I have Cecilia!”

Deep in his heart, he thought of his first love.

The girl in his memories, exactly like the boy in front of him, made Oscar’s chest fill up with warmth.

Oscar laid down on the bed again, sticking to the wall, trying to keep the maximum possible distance away from Cecil.

“This is terrible. I shouldn’t have invited you here so willingly...”

He regretfully whispered after clearing out his mind.

— Straight things to say about your boy best friend who you just invited to sleep in your bed together with.

Usually, authors who write about crossdressing protagonists prefer to go a more subtle route: the male leads don’t fall in love with the female lead until after it’s revealed that she’s “actually a girl.” The claim in these kinds of stories is basically, “if that guy was a girl he would have fallen in love with her ages ago” (which is still a really gay claim to make, but that’s beside the point). However, this author has stretched the gender excuse to the very brink of its limits until only the most stubborn and hard-headed deniers can read the story and still say that it’s not gay.

The yaoi is so self-evident I have nothing more to say about it, so enjoy this small collection of comments about this story.



T/N: Does this seem kinda gay to you?



**Dragon Commander** 

2 years ago

LOL the BL vibes intensify...



**Yogur Lapiz** 

3 years ago

Yaoi. XD



**Kawaii Panda** 

3 years ago

When he thinks he's starting to bend gahaha



**J-more** 

2 years ago

if she was a he, that would be BL

Hold on a second. I mean he at this time shouldn't know that Cecil is Cecilia or in other words he still believe that Cecilia is a guy right? omg if only this is bl lol

## 5. The Misfit of Demon King Academy

Demon King Arnos, growing bored of the war tearing apart the four realms, allows the hero to kill him and chooses to reincarnate 2000 years later to see how things change. And boy, have things changed! Somehow, standards have changed so much that the Demon King Academy can't even recognize the great power that he holds anymore. As he investigates the secret conspiracies and new political structures that have unfolded since his last life, Arnos inevitably draws the curiosity and attention of

those around him... especially since he sees no need to hide who he is.<sup>10</sup>



**Fig. 1** Why the hell did you say that  
The Misfit of Demon King Academy is a harem novel. Arnos is surrounded by interesting girls who are capable and beautiful but who, for some reason, need him to come and save the day. It is exactly what you

would expect from your typical ecchi novel, full of power fantasies and just as many fantasies of desirability.

There's just one little hitch, though... Arnos has way more chemistry with the few male characters introduced than with any of his alleged love interests.<sup>11</sup>

This story is a classic case of the oldest yaoi deniability trick in the book: the male characters involved couldn't possibly be in a yaoi relationship because they are surrounded by so many beautiful girls who love him. And yet, it is undeniable that Arnos has a weirdly charged relationship with the hero he entrusted with killing him, as well as his right-hand man who chose to reincarnate with him in hopes they would meet again in the next life.

Although Arnos, as an ecchi protagonist, is already prone to doing some ambiguous things, he says some seriously insane things to his male colleagues.



**Fig. 2** The yaoi levels are off the charts

To the average reader, Arnos couldn't possibly be in a yaoi dynamic with anyone, because there are so many girls who like him romantically. Eventually one is bound to stick. However, fearless fujoshi warriors will know

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11 A common problem in stories written by misogynists.

in their hearts that Arnos x Ray will never lose.

## **Honorable Mention: Worlds' Apocalypse Online**

Gu Qing Shan, after killing the Demon King, somehow regresses back in time with the mysterious War God UI. This time, he vows to change the course of the Apocalypse... only to find out that the Apocalypse is a destructive conspiracy that has been going for much longer than he thought, and has much higher stakes than he could have ever imagined.

We've all heard of yuri of absence. Now get ready for yaoi of absence. Quite literally: Gu Qing Shan's friend Shroud, a reality-bending and jawdroppingly powerful ancient lifeform from nearly the beginning of his universe's time, used one of his reality-bending powers to leave a "gap" in his personal history so that if some day he met someone very important to him, he could make them retroactively always have existed as part of his life as his very best friend. This gap persisted for millions of years until Shroud met Gu Qing Shan.

However, less literally, Gu Qing Shan's yaoi of absence can be seen in the narrative structure. You see, this story is a harem novel. Gu Qing Shan has an abundance of interesting and intriguing relationships with female characters. However, all this chemistry promptly withers and dies as soon as the author makes them into harem candidates with feelings for him, which is why, as soon as they confess to Gu Qing Shan, the author never lets them have more than one chapter of screen time with Gu Qing Shan ever again. The only time we see an alternate universe Gu Qing Shan get together with any of the girls, he is absolutely miserable. Amusingly, the only evidence that Gu Qing Shan is "straight" — the fact that there is a harem — is pretty much proof of the opposite. The gender fake-out failed to establish his sexuality.

This is why he doesn't make the list. But he gets a participation award from me anyways.

## **Conclusion**

Sometimes, straight things are gay.



## Adam Sandler Yaoi

By Elliott Queerapika

elliottasher.substack.com

We begin and end *Uncut Gems* by penetrating Adam Sandler.

Following a prologue set in the Welo opal mines in Ethiopia back in 2010, the bulk of the film begins with a seamless montage where we move from the facets of a black opal into galaxies unfurling across the universe, upon which point the scene transmutes into Howard Ratner's colon in 2012 as we literally go up his ass.

It's a hint of the scatological humor we tend to associate with Sandler's comedy, sure, as well as a clear indication of his character's narcissism—the montage implicitly compares his guts to the entirety of the universe. There's also more than a smack of yaoi to it.

Of course, there are as many ways to catalog and define yaoi as there are types of yaoi. For my purposes, I'm interested in building a contextual definition that takes shape as the inverse of José Esteban Muñoz's foundational point in *Cruising Utopia* that “queerness is not yet here.” If queerness is a horizon one can gesture towards but never touch, one that frames the insufficiency of the present, can we understand yaoi, in contrast, as a kind of immediacy? What might become available to us if we think about yaoi as something that's already here?

I was hoping to braid the autotheoretical narrative of my own investments into this essay with a bit more panache and skill, but I don't actually know how to do that. So, hi. I'm a trans man, a bi transfig to be specific, and I can't actually talk about yaoi as immediacy without talking about why it feels important to me in particular. In the Yaoi vs Reality roundtable elsewhere in this issue, I gesture towards a kind of personal transsexual genealogy through fanfiction, arguing that reading slash (as it was largely known in the last few decades) enabled me to *feel* like a man without my making an embodied or hormonal commitment in that direction. For years, I experienced my gender and sexuality as inextricably and largely passive. In the roundtable, tshirt suggests that a kind of passivity underwrites fantasy in the psychoanalytic tradition, which can be encapsulated in Freud's formulation “a child is being beaten.” Note the passive voice, here. In yaoi, we can look to the figure of the uke as being exemplary of this kind of passivity.

In their dialogue “I’m So Into Avoiding You” in *The New Inquiry*, Grace Lavery and Charlie Markbreiter claim avoidance as a trans affect. I read this piece when it came out in 2020, a period of gender uncertainty and nascent trans identity for many of us. Lavery mentions the fantasy of being able to get out of desiring anything at all, which Markbreiter follows with “For most of my life, I remember being asked low-stakes questions like, “What do you want for dinner?” ... And just feeling totally helpless, like, literally nothing I answer will feel like “me” ... So why doesn’t somebody else just decide?” I was going back and forth about starting t the entirety of 2020 and upon reading this my flaky ass went, *uh oh*.

The passivity that Lavery and Markbreiter invoke here doesn’t seem to translate, for them, into a sexual passivity—Markbreiter articulates the fantasy of flitting back and forth between different options in a manner that will feel familiar to anyone who’s ever wanted to try hormones without them necessarily being permanent, but he’s careful to differentiate this fantasy from wanting a “Decision Top—for Daddy to just swoop in and *make the decisions for you*.” For my part, at least, I’m not sure these were truly ever different or divergent fantasies. The passivity that shaped my own eroticism was not, is not separable from my identification as a bottom (or, for that matter, from my daddy kink).

But, back to Howie Ratner’s colonoscopy. This opening, bookended as it is with a more deadly kind of entrypoint at the film’s end, symbolically frames Sandler’s character as someone who is penetrable. In our homophobic and misogynistic society, this is not something men are supposed to want to become—and, indeed, throughout the film Howie strives to assert his agency and sovereignty as an impenetrable being. *Uncut Gems*, however, is not a film that rewards this kind of striving.

But *does* yaoi really function under the rubric of immediacy in *Uncut Gems*? One could feasibly argue the opposite; could follow the path set forth by Muñoz to argue that yaoi is a horizon that never quite grants itself expression in the text of the film. While this could be understood as true, I’m arguing something slightly different—what might happen if we conceptualize yaoi as actually produced in the friction between what is present in the film, and its own deferrals?

One thing that happens is that we can begin to conceptualize these constant deferments, disavowals, and delays that make up the narrative, the visuals, and the writing as its own kind of status quo. While the film

constantly gestures to something beyond its borders, to an untimeliness that exists outside of its confines, what is left is the film itself.

Let's take a look at two parallel scenes. In the first, Howie is hiding in his apartment closet, waiting for his mistress to get home so he can surprise her. He has just told her on the phone that he is on his way home. When Julia (Julia Fox) arrives, she starts undressing to get ready for him, having no idea that he's watching her. From his vantage point in the closet, Howie texts to ask what she's wearing. Julia texts that if she told him, he'd start jacking off in the cab. He texts "Already am," followed by "are u wet?" A different film might have had Julia lie, but she answers him in the affirmative here and she's actually telling the truth—she starts touching herself on the couch. He leaps out, startling her—and what seems like delayed/deferred sex resolves on screen into a sex scene...only it doesn't, not really. The camera pans out the window, and we see Julia straddling Howie on the couch, but we understand that the most vital part of the scene is what we've already witnessed, that is, the sexting. While the phone serves as a kind of mediating object or fetish, Howie is already on the scene, and there's no technical need for it.

The second scene follows Howie running from a pair of hired goons who have shown up at his daughter's school play performance. He's captured and dragged into a van where he's verbally accosted by the mysterious Arno (Eric Bogosian), an Armenian to whom he owes a great sum of money (he also happens to be Howie's brother-in-law, but you don't learn that till much later). Howie repeatedly tries to reason with Arno, calling him by name, to which Arno takes offense ("Stop saying my fucking name, you don't know me.") Then, in an interesting rejoinder to the prior sex scene, Arno commands his men to strip Howie. Right as Howie's about to be stuffed into his own trunk, Arno says "I want the underwear." Howie's final shout before he's locked in the trunk is "Arno, you cock-sucker!"

In this scene, the specter of Howie's underwear becomes its own kind of fetish or mediating object focusing and then displacing the eroticism between Howie and Arno. Like the phone in the prior scene with Julia, it's something external, something separate from the two of them, and yet it's being used in the scene as a channel for desire (and, for Arno, humiliation, though one could certainly argue there's more than an undercurrent of desire here). What appears to function in these scenes as delays, deferrals, and displacements are actually fundamental sequences undergirding

the logic of the film itself.

Linda Williams' essay "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, Excess," in which she articulates the temporality of pornography as "right on time," in contrast to that of horror (too early) and melodrama (too late). I don't want to necessarily equate yaoi with pornography—not all yaoi is porn and not all porn is yaoi, certainly—but I would argue that yaoi and pornography are inextricably linked in the public imagination. While the temporality of events in *Uncut Gems* operates in a different sphere, often simultaneously too early and too late, the yaoi itself—the tension between these events and the film's own gesturing outside of them, and our enjoyment of that friction—is right on time.

Along with this timeliness comes the film's orientation towards the polarity of "winning" and "losing." Back when this film came out in 2019, it was accompanied by fervent whispers of "but is it good for the Jews?" In other words, are we winning, son? In an early, infinitely memeable moment in the film, Howie looks right into the camera and says, "This is how I win." At the film's end, Boston Celtic's basketball player Kevin Garnett tells the courtside camera, "When you win, that's all that matters," as the camera pans to Howie's shop, where his body lies near Arno's as the latter's men loot the place. If "winning" is about timeliness (right on time!), it has a privileged relationship to yaoi and immediacy here. But Howie's victory is pyrrhic; his immense gambling winnings will not bring him back to life.

I've been puttering around for hours trying to figure out the best way to wrap this up but honestly I don't think I can draw any profound conclusions here and this essay is already way overdue. It's called "Adam Sandler Yaoi" but really it was kind of an excuse to talk about Eric Bogosian about whom I made the below edit. Sorry I didn't get to talk about *Interview With a Vampire* as well. Bogosian if you're reading this i am free on thursday night and would like to hang out. Please respond to this and then hang out with me on thursday night when i am free.



**mothercain**

Dec 19, 2022

maybe if men touched each other gently more often like women do, they wouldn't be so grouchy all the time

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**roycecooldge**

Fuck gentle touch, I wanna get my faggot cunt mauled by a dominant alpha armenian top!!!

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**mothercain**

Dec 19, 2022

whoa



## **Realist yaoi, escapist yaoi, and reparative reading of fanfiction as queer praxis** by shrimpchipsss

My parents finally believed me the third time I came out to them in a frankly hilarious and homophobic misuse of materialist analysis (it took me having a girlfriend, which, sure, that is a difference in material conditions but come ON). In the years leading up to and since the dawn of this horrific time of my life, I processed my parents' homophobia by reading tons and tons of fanfiction. As one does.

This has included phases of seeking out queernorm or otherwise un-homophobic, romance-focused escapist gay fanfiction, an obvious space of refuge that focuses on the interpersonal dynamics between characters.

It has also included phases of seeking out realist gay fanfiction, necessarily set in heteronormative worlds and full of all the attendant drama, including, at times, fraught family dynamics and homophobia. While this subtype of fanfiction sounds more obviously stressful to read, I found myself gravitating to it as much as I did escapist gay fanfiction in a textbook case of reparative reading.

Reparative reading is Eve Sedgwick's answer to paranoid reading, an approach which seeks out knowledge of worst case scenarios at a cerebral and distant arm's length out of fear of experiencing surprise. Reparative reading, on the other hand, surrenders to emotional affect and the possibility of surprise, knowing that it can come in the form of horror but also of hope (Sedgwick, *Paranoid Reading*, 146).

Both approaches operate as a sort of narrative-driven exposure therapy and can resemble each other in their repetition and knowledge seeking, but paranoid reading has a tendency to hopelessness and dread, while reparative reading is more invested in drawing out meaning from or even transforming texts into something new and sustaining (Laing, 9). Fanfiction (and all fanwork) can be itself a reparative reading—a transformation of a text—as can be a fan's approach to reading a text and its fanfiction.

In this essay, I explore escapist gay fanfiction (from here on, escapist yaoi) and realist gay fanfiction (realist yaoi), two subtypes of yaoi narratives which proliferate in different and interesting ways in fanfiction depending on the structure of the canon source material, and the way both subtypes of fanmade yaoi can have a reparative function to the queer reader.

## But first, a quick rundown of structuralism and a disclaimer.

### FANDOM STRUCTURALISM

<i>Superstructures</i>	FANWORK (fanart, fanfiction, meta, AMVs, memes) IDEOLOGY (discourse) THE “LEGAL SYSTEM” (campaigns, harassment, cancellation) SOCIAL SUPERSTRUCTURES (moderated forums, curate your own space, dni)
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<i>Base or infrastructure</i>	THE ECONOMIC, OR MODE OF PRODUCTION	RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION (fandom as gift economy, networks of mutuals or followers, forums, grouchats) FORCES OF PRODUCTION (original canon text, software and creative tools, the ecology and population of the fandom subgroup)
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Behold my fandom structuralism chart. It is a blatant rip off of the chart in my copy of *The Political Unconscious* by Fredric Jameson. To understand it, all you need to know is that the base or infrastructure informs and produces the superstructures. The base is material reality, and superstructures are like allegories for material reality. Or the base is an original text and the superstructures are fanwork. Like derivatives and integrals in calculus. And there's a word for fanwork: derivative.

If we consider this structural model of fandom with regards to fanmade yaoi, we can consider not just aspects of the original canon text, but also things like sociopolitical moments and public attitudes about queer people at the time of the writing of the yaoi as part of the base which will affect the superstructure (for example, the yaoi being set in a heteronormative world, or homophobia being a plot point; the quantity and quality of such instances).

At risk of stating the obvious, you'll see examples of both escapist yaoi and realist yaoi derived from all sorts of canon sources, be they themselves yaoi or not. I have chosen my examples of media and their respective fandoms to point out that some stories have structural elements that facilitate the proliferation of certain kinds of fic, whether or not they are a queer canonical text.

### Haikyuu!! and escapist yaoi

A fandom that I was surprised to see was made up of a staggering major-

ity of escapist yaoi is that of the sports animanga *Haikyuu*. The fanfiction scene is roughly this: mostly yaoi, a minority of gen fic and hetero romances, and the odd yuri.

You may ask yourself how the hell a completely romanceless story about playing high school volleyball engendered so much yaoi, but this is fandom we're talking about, and the lack of romance plots in *Haikyuu* may have actually contributed. Before I get into that, though, let's set the scene.

*Haikyuu* is set in our world, mostly in a town in Sendai, Japan and then in Tokyo (with interludes in Rio de Janeiro and California), and is even situated in our timeline, spanning the years 2012–2013 in the main story (with time skips spanning 2016, 2020, and 2021). The geography and temporality of *Haikyuu* are not concerned with particular social or political moments but are primarily about regional and national competitions and major sporting events like the Japanese V.League games and the Olympics.

While a few characters of the mostly male ensemble cast have crushes or talk about the traits they like in girls, romance is not a central theme to the story. Tanaka goes through an arc concerning the maturing of his feelings for Shimizu from a bundle of shounen tropes to something more serious, and then there's MikaShou (a rare het canon couple where the girl's name comes first, at least in English-speaking fandom) but that's. Really it.

The characters and their development are not wound up in romance, nor in the particularities of heteronormativity. In fact, *Haikyuu* is basically completely about male homosocial relationships between teammates, mentors, rivals, and partners, without any trace of the homophobia that, if present, would disrupt the continuum between homosocial and homosexual (Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 1). Despite *Haikyuu* taking place in present-day cisheteronormative Japanese society, the absence of homophobia in the narrative and minor importance of romantic plot points allows for relationships that are not bound by a friend-lover binary (consider, instead, a new axis of rivals and partners) or encumbered by social attitudes on queer people. It is an easy slide into yaoi that is uncomplicated by the rules of heteronormativity.

To add onto that, *Haikyuu* is itself generally escapist. It takes place in



the well-trodden setting of high school with the familiar beats of coming of age and getting better at a beloved sport. There are stakes but all within the realm of the sport (after all, people don't usually die playing volleyball). For many fans it is a zone of psychological safety; instances of hurtful behavior or toxic masculinity are always addressed in the narrative which prizes the values of sportsmanship, healthy competition, and care and communication between teammates. For that reason, the ensuing yaoi tends to lean escapist as well.

There is also something about Haikyuu being a shounen animanga aimed at and about high schoolers and tending to have a younger fanbase that may contribute to escapist fic being popular. A quick search through any of the popular pairings will reveal a world full of fluffy fic in well-loved formats: soulmate aus, coffee shop aus, college aus, and so on.

This isn't to say that such fic formats cannot be realist if a writer opts to take things in that direction. And there are of course incredible examples of realist Haikyuu fic, but there is a tendency in the fandom to focus on the interpersonal dynamics of a ship, sans the effects of heteronormativity. And with a story that is so rich in homosocial bonds and unencumbered by the shackles of homophobia, why not take the chance to write an escapist fic that feels like a natural extension of the canon in its escapism and fly?

### **MDZS and realist yaoi**

A fandom that stands out to me as having a lot of examples of realist yaoi is Mo Dao Zu Shi/The Untamed.

Before I get into it, allow me to try to heed Jameson's call to always historicize, if personal histories also count. MDZS stands out to me in part because it's the first fandom in which I encountered yaoi that was not just queer by virtue of being yaoi but also about being queer (and this from someone who started reading fanfiction circa 2008). I do wonder whether this was a coincidence of most of the fandoms I've been in being animanga fandoms whose demographics skew younger, my extremely repressed bisexuality, or the swing of the pendulum of fandom being tired of having to contend with homophobia vs. wanting characters to engage with heteronormativity based on sociopolitical as well as fandom moments.

A study comparing Kirk/Spock fic written in the 80s and the late 2000s/early 2010s found that instances of homophobia and heteronormativity

decreased in fic between the two time frames (Callis). But while instances of homophobia and heteronormativity have decreased in fic since the 80s, the nature of their inclusion in fic may have undergone a qualitative shift that is not consistently documented across fandom history (rip LiveJournal).

But to go back to MDZS, this is a fandom that has some really great examples of realist yaoi and this, too, is structural.

MDZS takes place in fantasy historical China and its world is cisheteronormative. Cut-sleeves (gay people) appear to not be in danger of being attacked or expelled from society over it (Mo Xuanyu's exile is attributed to the incest, not to the incest being gay), but the term tends to be used derogatorily. While queer marriages appear to exist in-universe they are not the norm.

In addition, MDZS is about sects organized around gentry families and is thus full of inter- and intra-family drama. Our protagonist Wei Wuxian is an orphan and the ward of the main family of the Jiang sect which complicates everything. Throughout the story, he faces situations such as the conditional acceptance of his foster family being battered into him all his life (particularly by Yu Ziyuan), the threat of judgment and exile from society for his demonic cultivation method, estrangement from his brother and sect, prioritizing the material needs of the Wen refugees above all else, and caring for a child that is not his by birth.

From this I am sure you can pick out themes like adoption, belonging, chosen family, estrangement, conditional acceptance, repression, and importantly, social stakes for being able to act on your feelings, all common themes in MDZS yaoi and themes which, if explored in certain ways, are easily realist.

Take for example, the threat of expulsion from society for heretical practices as an allegory for homophobia. In talking about the performance of gender, Judith Butler defines the abject as the way in which the reinforcing of bodily norms produces a domain of abjected bodies which fail to qualify as fully human (Butler, 540). In this case, the reinforcing of norms around accepted forms of cultivation produces the heretical, which in turn reinforces the acceptable norm. Ironically, it is when Wei Wuxian is cast down into the Burial Mounds (a haunted old battleground, and doesn't that sound like a domain of abjected bodies?) that he develops

demonic cultivation for survival in the first place.

This is not to say that the same themes cannot be central to escapist yaoi, but while escapist yaoi may explore the same themes within the bounds of the relationship between the main couple, realist yaoi explores the themes and the way they societally impact, or even threaten, the relationship between the main couple or the characters' queerness.

And there is a lot to work with with regards to MDZS characters' queerness. Wei Wuxian is popularly depicted as bisexual because he flirts openly with women (though you can be gay and still do this as x\_loos points out in her meta on Wei Wuxian's orientation). Wei Wuxian spends most of the story in fraught denial over his feelings for Lan Wangji and plays heartbreaking, brilliant mind games with himself to evade this admission up to the last moment.

However you interpret the specifics of his sexual orientation, Wei Wuxian is a classic case of queer repression with material familial and social consequences for being able to act on his feelings throughout most of the story. It gives writers a lot to work with to create realist yaoi in which the characters' relationships and even their queerness exist in the fabric of a heteronormative society.

### **SVSSS and realist yaoi and escapist yaoi**

And now. The one and only. A story that begets escapist yaoi and realist yaoi that overlap with each other in fascinating ways is Scum Villain's Self-Saving System, which takes place in a queernorm (big caveat to come) world but has a transmigrated protagonist, Shen Qingqiu. A guy who has. So much weird internalized shit about sexuality and gender.

Since Shen Qingqiu has transmigrated, his parents and the society he grew up in (very online in China, the year of his transmigration is 2014) aren't in the picture. The world of Proud Immortal Demon Way (another fantasy historical China) which he wakes up in does not have concepts like "straight" or "bent," but it's a while before Shen Qingqiu knows this. Because here's the caveat: PIDW was a male power fantasy stallion (harem) novel. How was Shen Qingqiu supposed to know that the rules of homophobia and heteronormativity would not apply?

In Scum Villain yaoi set in the modern world, his fears about homophobia may materialize, but in yaoi set in the world of PIDW he faces no

threat of exile, rejection, or expulsion for being queer. Thus, Shen Qingqiu's mind games can oddly be a weird fun space of psychological safety for people who are familiar with the very difficult deconstructing he is doing. For all that the mind dungeon of internalized homophobia is real, he can contend with the psychic damage of it in the safety of a world that will not punish him with it.

I've talked a lot in this essay about how realist yaoi is necessarily set in heteronormative settings, often signified via vectors of homophobia, repression, and avoidance. But I think yaoi can also be defined as realist via how it engages with gender and gender anxieties. And Shen Qingqiu is full of gender anxiety because he is so preoccupied with propriety, role-playing, and what people ought to do (tshirt, 61).

As tshirt points out, "because the possibility of gay life does not even occur to Shen Qingqiu, he instead immediately is determined to fit himself inside a heterosexual paradigm, and as the woman." (tshirt, 64). This leads to all sorts of fun gender adventures in Scum Villain yaoi, including feminization of male characters and interesting gender swaps in every combination imaginable, covering the full gamut of trans and cis varieties (and you can see tshirt's girl yaoi manifesto for more on whether this might still qualify as yaoi).

In a critique of genderswap wlw in the MDZS fandom, x\_lo points out the way some genderswaps fall into the trap of Any Two Guys (see post comments). This is a term of critique of slash fiction where the characterization is so weak and general that you could swap in a different cast of characters and not affect the story. This critique can also be extended to characterization of gender in yaoi.

This isn't to say that escapist yaoi is necessarily "bad" characterization if it does not engage with a character's gender or gender issues; engaging with it may simply not be the project of the escapist fic. But I do think there is something to realist yaoi tending to engage with gender in interesting ways. After all, weird gender shit is only weird because of heteronormativity.

So there it is. Scum Villain begets a lot of fic that contain elements of both realist yaoi and escapist yaoi due to its delightfully fucked up mix of queernorm materiality and internalized homophobia.

One last thing before I leave Scum Villain behind. In the opening of this essay I talked about reparative reading as fans reading fanfiction and taking meaning from it, and also the way that fanfiction is a reparative reading, a transformation, of an original text. Scum Villain is a case in which the reparative reading permutation goes a level deeper: Scum Villain's Self-Saving System is itself a reparative reading of Proud Immortal Demon Way.

Just when you thought that it couldn't get more meta.

### **Escapist yaoi and realist yaoi: different but important parts of reparative reading**

Let's revisit our points. There are realist and escapist fanmade yaoi that are derived from various yaoi and non-yaoi original texts. A reader can seek out both types of yaoi with a reparative approach, doing the same exposure therapy kind of thing that a paranoid reading approach has, except that it is open to the possibility of hopeful outcomes as much as it is prepared to encounter pain.

Realist yaoi is by definition grounded in the structures of the real world (or the fictional world that a fic is referencing), even in various AU forms. Contending with these structures is one way that realist yaoi provides readers with a mirror to reality, which a reader can choose to engage with reparatively and draw out knowledge, affect, and meaning.

Escapist yaoi is less concerned with the particularities of survival in a heteronormative world but is no less substantive, affective, or interesting. It is an example of a magical or romance narrative, as Jameson puts it—a fantasy which aims at the transfiguration of the real world, to restore its conditions to how things should be (Jameson, 110). Heteronormativity and homophobia are not able to be resolved in escapist yaoi, but their very absence calls attention to the conflict in our real world. In studying Philippine popular literature, Soledad Reyes points out the way the romance mode is rooted in the structural features of people's actual conditions and serves to highlight the contrast between real life and what people would like to happen (Reyes, 176). The same goes for escapist yaoi. It can be read reparatively as a vision of the world to come.

And in a sense we already have more of the world to come. The mere existence and commonness of escapist yaoi is a triumph, compared to the fic landscape in the late 2000s when I joined the internet and when

slash fic was still considered deviant. Consider cases of authors against slash fiction, such as Robin Hobb in 2005, or anecdotes of writers feeling that they couldn't write their slash couple getting together the way they wanted, worrying that they would be censored in forums (Thomas). That writers do not feel the need to censor themselves and can choose whether or not they want to engage with heteronormativity in their yaoi is something to be celebrated.

## Closing

Now that I've laid out all these points, allow me to poke some holes in them. Escapist yaoi and realist yaoi aren't necessarily mutually exclusive; elements of both can be contained in a single text. And this may not be a useful framework with which to understand every example of yaoi out there.

I don't think I need to state that everyone seeks out fic for different reasons and I don't have any presumptions about the things I got out of reading fic being at all related to the reasons why a writer would write one. Fandom is a gift economy, not one of supply and demand. To have so much fantastic fic out there, with all the work and love it took to write it? We are the lucky ones.

I haven't been quoting fic in this essay but I do want to leave you with an example that I think thematically goes along with a lot of what I've written here.

One of my favorite fraught-family-themed examples of yaoi is *Way Home* by ao3 user yamabato which is about the OsaAka pairing from *Haikyuu*. This is a fantastic example of a story that works as an allegory for parental acceptance of a queer child without the character ever being at risk of exile due to being queer specifically (thus, escapist yaoi or realist yaoi? I say it's a realist allegory but strange how a text can be both). I wrote a short Dreamwidth post a while back about how a bunch of mutuals and mutuals-in-law lost our minds over the theme of the failed son (**THE QUEER FAILED SON!!!**) and that I think the story resonated so well with people in part because it could be about your life without being about the thing itself.

Sounds like reparative reading to me!



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# Scum Villain's Self-Saving System and Homosocial Triangles. by shrimpchipsss

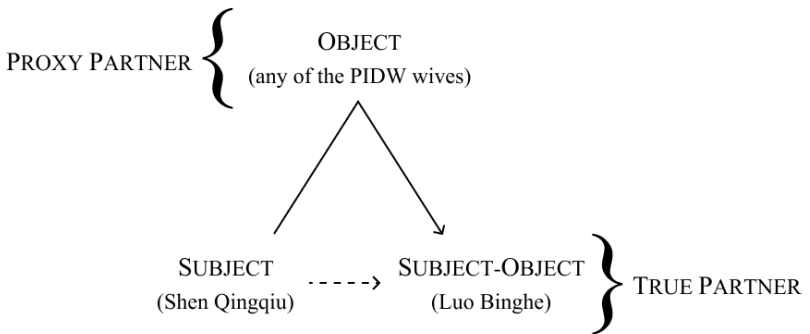
This essay exists in a pocket universe off of the previous one because I started analyzing Shen Qingqiu and got carried away from my main point. I just really need to tell you about homosocial triangles.

We leave off with this: how was Shen Qingqiu supposed to know that the rules of homophobia and heteronormativity would not apply in the world of PIDW? Well, because PIDW was a male power fantasy stallion novel.

In his new transmigrated life, Shen Qingqiu spends years “shipping” Luo Binghe with the wives Luo Binghe would have had in PIDW, sublimating his care for Luo Binghe into encouraging him to pursue the women, notably Liu Mingyan (best girl). Shen Qingqiu’s heteronormativity-poisoned and blinded-by-hubris-about-genre-savviness brain can only comprehend male-male desire within a structure of institutionalized social relations that are carried out via women—in this case, via marriage and matchmaking (Sedgwick, 35).

By positioning himself as a matchmaker, Shen Qingqiu unknowingly slots himself and Luo Binghe into a homosocial triangle, a structure in which a woman is a symbolic conduit by which men seek to cement their bonds, and in which the true partner is a man (Sedgwick, 26).

Here is a chart. The dotted line is Shen Qingqiu’s care and affection for Luo Binghe, and the filled-in line is that care and affection sublimated into matchmaking.



This is all subconscious of course. Shen Qingqiu’s feelings for Luo Bing-

he when he is under his care are of mingled fear over Binghe's future potential for revenge, favor towards his once-favorite-character, and the genuine care of a mentor. If anything, Binghe might be the one resenting that he cannot pursue his feelings for Shen Qingqiu due to continually being triangulated (arguably worse than being simply friend-zoned) into a structure of social relations that Shen Qingqiu sees as legitimate, and which is appropriate for their ages and master-disciple relationship at the time.

Of course, Shen Qingqiu's mind games get even worse the moment he realizes that Binghe has feelings for him (and that people in this world can be gay at all) and his internalized homophobia kicks into higher gear. He is completely thrown off, flustered and hesitant now that the homosocial continuum turns out to continue on to homosexuality and that all of his actions up until that point can be interpreted through an erotic lens (Sedgwick, 1). He is no longer living in a stallion novel; his love and care have transformed the genre of his world into a BL.

Hilariously, while Shen Qingqiu is under the assumption that he is living in a stallion novel, he is extremely homosocial, no holds barred, an advocate for the brotherly bond between sect siblings, unknowingly charming men around him with his simple kindness and mental rules for the way physical touch is fine and even welcomed ("please go ahead"??) between men because none of it is gay.

But even before his paradigm-shifting revelation, you can tell that Shen Qingqiu has been anxious about the gender and desire stuff all along. He does all of his homosocial triangulation and unknowingly winning at gay chicken with everyone around him while referring to both Binghe and himself in turns with female roles, casting himself as the woman (wife, female lead) pre-revelation of Binghe's feelings and Binghe as the woman (maiden, schoolgirl) after (tshirt, 66). Such a funny guy.

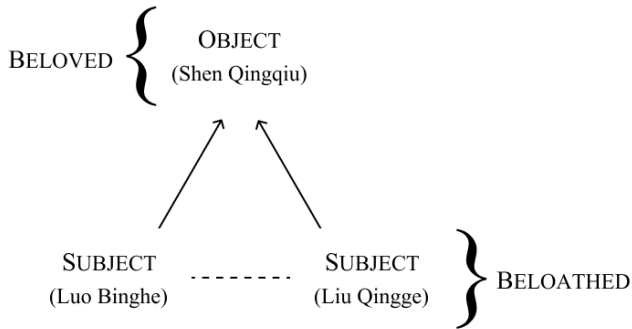
Enough about that though. I can't talk about homosocial triangles in Scum Villain and not talk about BingLiuShen.

Liu Qingge, one of Shen Qingqiu's fellow peak lords and friends doesn't quite qualify as a tsundere, though he is often misinterpreted as one. Shen Qingqiu saves his life and they spend years engaged in one-sided banter on Shen Qingqiu's part, doing biweekly meridian cleansing sessions, going on missions together, and playing a likely unintentional game

of fetch with Shen Qingqiu's fans which he leaves all over the place and which Liu Qingge returns to him.

When Shen Qingqiu dies to save Luo Binghe from a qi deviation and Binghe hoards his corpse to try to bring him back to life, Liu Qingge fights Luo Binghe every day for five years to bring the corpse back to Cang Qiong mountain and give Shen Qingqiu a proper burial.

Over the course of those five years, Luo Binghe beats Liu Qingge in every battle, dragging Liu Qingge's body and reputation for never losing a fight through the dirt. They are locked in a bitter, daily, bereavement flavored fight. What an intricate ritual you have going on there. And would you look at that: it takes the shape of a triangle.



The entire time this fight is ongoing, the object of desire, Shen Qingqiu, is dead and not there. Or he's there, as a corpse. Do you see where I'm going? Shen Qingqiu is the object of desire but he is also quite literally the object. Can you believe it? They are fighting over his body.

Once again, a homosocial triangle is not quite a typical love triangle. Liu Qingge's feelings for Shen Qingqiu are a bit more ambiguous than Binghe's, and it isn't like they're fighting for him to accept their feelings since he is dead and thus cannot accept them. There are other potential filial or psychosexual or chivalrous or other miasmatic intentions at play. But the desire and the grieving and the resentment, maybe even the identification with the other, are all mingled there.

Here are some excerpts from Sedgwick's *Between Men* on this permutation of the homosocial triangle:

In any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: ... the bonds of “rivalry” and “love,” differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent (Sedgwick, 21).

Also:

The bond between rivals in an erotic triangle [is] even stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices, than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved (Sedgwick, 21).

We see this in our own example. With Shen Qingqiu in the most “object” state a person can be, Liu Qingge and Luo Binghe only have each other by which to determine their actions and choices.

Every now and again I’ll see a comment where people muse that Liu Qingge probably kept Luo Binghe alive during the five years that Shen Qingqiu was dead. Consider the way the rivalry may have fueled Luo Binghe and Liu Qingge in the absence of love and their beloved. It’s a compelling thought.

This triangle is diluted somewhat when Shen Qingqiu returns to the land of the living and joins Luo Binghe, but it continues on in a new form. Liu Qingge gets upset that Shen Qingqiu asks for Luo Binghe when he wakes up after the debacle at Maigu Ridge and declares that Luo Binghe is dead (he isn’t). And Binghe continues to balk at calling Liu Qingge by the appropriate title of martial uncle and dreams openly of fucking Shen Qingqiu on the Bai Zhan training grounds (Liu Qingge’s home if he ever deigned to spend time there). Aren’t they so much?

In conclusion, homosocial triangles fucking rock as a concept. I showed two examples of how they can be applied but they’re quite a flexible and load-bearing framework that can accommodate oh so many scenarios. If you can’t get enough of this please read Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Between Men*. I hope I spread the agenda and that you found my charts as funny as I did.

## Notes

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## **Die with Honor** by Zarinthel (contains Umineko Episode 5 spoilers)

One of Rokkenjima's most fundamental mysteries comes from attempting to "see through" a phantom. Attempting to understand the undeniable red truth that underpins their existence. It is the most tempting lure of the witch that you have to believe that there is something right there. Even if it's not exactly what you are seeing.

But that is the fundamental error.

"Magic," Teller, of the famous Penn and Teller Vegas Magician Act, states. "Is a form of theatre that depicts impossible events as though they were really happening... In a typical theatre, an actor holds up a prop, and you make believe that it is a sword. In magic, the sword has to seem 100 percent real, even though it's 100 percent fake. It has to draw blood."

"Magic is the unwilling suspension of disbelief."

In other words, if you had believed in magic from the beginning, there's nothing to see at a magician's show. Because magic is only special when you are attempting to see through it. When you check the Magician's sleeves. When you try and watch their hands as they toss the cards back and forth.

By attempting to see through the witch's illusion, you grant it the power to thrill. By questioning magic, you become enthralled at how real it seems. And yet, should you ever decide to believe in magic, a magician's tricks would not be at all impressive. After all--

A witch can do anything.

A trick grows more impressive, not less, when the audience understands how difficult it is. How even directly in front of their eyes, they have still become unable to see.

This is why Battler likes Erika, even though she's like that.

But this is the yaoi essay. The essay about holes.

So this essay is about Natsuhi, and Natsuhi's role as the witch.

Episode 5, End of the Golden Witch, is the first of the ‘answer’ episodes, and adds in Erika into the main cast, a new “human” on the island. Now whether Erika is actually human is both debatable and ultimately not at all important, so we’ll skip that entirely to turn our eyes on Natushi, who is the core human actor of the piece, and incredibly importantly, also the witch.

Natushi has two episodes to shine in: episode one and episode five. This is, naturally, not a coincidence, but a loop.

So, a large portion of the illusion of episode five revolves around Kinzo’s death. Kinzo’s death is one of the rules that underpins the “Illusion of the Witch”, but Kinzo’s existence comes from Natsuhi. She is the one who decided that he should resurrect, and she is the one that conducts the illusion that keeps him alive-- an illusion that she never once backs down on.

She can only do this because she is human, and cannot hear nor speak red truths.

So let us speak the red truths where she can’t hear them.

[ Urushimiya Kinzo is dead. He died two years before the Rokkenjima Incident. In his life, he never once spoke kindly to Natsuhi, nor appreciated her as a part of his family, nor respected her as a human being. ]

How cruel. But that is not the Kinzo that she brought back from the dead.

Sorry. The Kinzo that Beatrice brought back from the dead.

Because Natsuhi is incapable of magic, she isn’t a witch-- she’s merely the master of the witch. Sorry. She can’t be the master of the witch because she isn’t the Ushiroimiya successor. She’s merely acting in her husband’s stead, being a proper wife.

She would not have had to resurrect Kinzo had her husband been a more capable man. However, isn’t she Ushiroimiya Natsuhi? It’s her fault for not realizing she needed to also do his job as well as her own.

Sorry. It’s her fault for not having enough faith in her husband to believe

that he'll be able to turn it around and everything will be fine. Sorry. It's her fault for not being capable enough to preserve the illusion for the eternity her husband needs to make everything turn out well with his investors.

So you see, it's simple.

The Phantom Kinzo returned from the dead respects her, even though she's not a witch. He respects her for the qualities that Natsuhi cannot find in her husband: her decisiveness. Her practicality. Her willingness to commit to something once she's started it. Her judgment when it comes to other people.

He promises her that though she, in the world that Eva sees, is ranked lower than any blood member of the family, and furthermore ranked below his favored servant, she is actually worthy. Not only is she worthy; let me quote the phantom himself.

“How vexing... if only this person had been my son.”

[ Except he did not say this. Natsuhi said this to herself. ]

If she had been Kinzo's son, then she would be the successor. Her birthright would have been Krauss's birthright. So, let us quote a few more things Kinzo has said about Krauss.

“Why are my children so incompetent!? Krauss is lacking in dignity.”

This is Eva's recollection within the third episode. A childhood memory of when Eva was in high school.

“Krauss is a fool who squanders money like water, who throws away two gold coins to obtain one. And then he has the gall to claim he's earned money!!”

This is what he said to Genji in episode one.

Context says that this is likely something he said to Genji, paraphrased if not word for word, when he was alive. Likely very soon before his death; thus, two years ago.



Within the story, we are allowed only one flashback of Kinzo and Natsuhi interacting with one another.

Kinzo has been informed that the baby that he gave into her care has fallen from a cliff and died. Learning of this information, instead of flying into a rage, he instead bursts into laughter, cursing at Beatrice for escaping his grasp once again.

He does not blame Natsuhi: Instead, this phenomenon has been laid at the feet of Beatrice.

And Beatrice does claim credit for it: She offers Natsuhi a kind illusion.

Beatrice is Natsuhi's only companion in the world, after all. The witch that speaks to Natsuhi about foreign teas is her only friend. They console each other.

But see.

[ Natsuhi was unkind to the servants. ]

Beatrice wrote the first two episodes, and Beatrice would know, wouldn't she? Natsuhi was prone to taking her agonies out on the only people she could lash out at. Despite being the lady of the house, she had almost no control over who was working there. She could not fire Genji. She could not fire Shanon. She could not fire Kanon. She could not fire Kumasawa.

We are told that this is because Kinzo does not want them fired.

But see.

[ Ushiromiya Kinzo is dead. ]

Shanon and Kanon cannot be fired because they know that Kinzo is dead. Kumasawa cannot be fired because she knows that Kinzo is dead. Genji cannot be fired because firing him would be the same as confirming that Kinzo is dead.

Natsuhi cannot maintain the illusion of life without the servants. But neither can she outwardly act as their master: in many ways this is the most direct possible allusion to the true nature of Beatrice-- the servants

who serve the Golden Witch keep the illusion alive. Beatrice is both servant and ruler. Natshuhi rules over the Golden Witch.

All of this is not delusion, but truth. Or rather, the delusion is the truth.

However, the pitiful illusion is not this, but the tea party that Natshuhi did not have with Beatrice. The departure from reality is that she and Beatrice are not friends.

How could she be friends with Beatrice?

That is Kinzo's mistress. That is Krauss's competitor for successor. That is the child she murdered.

[ Natshuhi is alone. ]

The Man from 19 Years ago knows her favorite season, an idle thing that she only ever told Shanon.

Now I must stop for a second. As evidence, this is inconsequential. The man from 19 years ago doesn't actually need to have known her favorite season: he could have hidden cards bearing the name of all four seasons in various spots around her room, and, once she told him which one it was, he simply had to direct her to find that one.

But things needn't be so convoluted, and I am not solving this mystery.

Natshuhi told Shanon what her favorite season was because she was lonely. She is a character defined by being trapped on Rokkenjima. She will never be able to leave Rokkenjima.

Kinzo has trapped her on Rokkenjima. Humiliated her and given her as a prize to his eldest son.

She does love Krauss. It would be truly unbearable to not love him.

She is too dignified to not love her husband. It is an unprovable, impermeable statement. Natshuhi cannot speak red truths. But it would be cruel to say otherwise.

So I will say otherwise. Perhaps her love for her husband was just as

illusory as Kinzo's phantom-- but nevertheless, it was a secret that she prioritized above an active serial killer and above her own life. There is no version of Rokkenjima where Natsuhi admits that Kinzo is alive. She refuses, because 'killing' him is the same as killing Krauss's business dealings, which is the same as losing the house, which is the same as calling her entire existence as a wife a failure.

There's no need to worry, though! Eva is willing to call her a failure even without any of that cascade of disaster.

Eva has to take a heavy load in the complaining department, because she has to be a better wife than Natsuhi and a better successor than Krauss and a better parent than both of them. It's not enough to find fault with Natsuhi's servants who Natsuhi cannot fire because they are in actuality Kinzo's servants who Genji hired.

It's not enough to find fault with Natsuhi's daughter for her mannerisms, her grades, her cheerful air. It has to be Natsuhi's fault for not teaching her properly.

Eva hates Natsuhi so fiercely and so bitterly that a gun pointed in her face isn't enough to make her cool down.

And that hatred comes from a deep, deep place. Eva wanted to be the one chained down with ugly responsibility. Eva spent her whole life begging her father to want her enough to put her in a cage where he kept all the stuff he really wanted.

She wanted to be the person who took responsibility for their father when he went into a rage and started hitting them, not the one who was protected from the blows. She wanted great expectations placed upon her.

She could not meet Kinzo's expectations, because he had none for her.

So the fact that Natsuhi lives in Kinzo's house and cleans Kinzo's room and deals with Kinzo's ungodly temper tantrums and screaming matches and complaints--

Is something to be envious of.

If Eva were in Natsuhi's place she would simply do a better job.

*Do a better job of what?*

She would do a better job of being Natsuhi. If she were in Natsuhi's shoes, she would not need to reanimate her father, because she would not be dealing with Krauss's terrible business decisions. Because she would simply not have a husband who made bad choices.

If she were in Natushi's place she would kill the husband that she loved because the idea that someone that wasn't her had become the Successor would be unbearable. No phantom could soothe her agony. That despair would change her from a human into a witch. She would have a daughter and she would hate her daughter too, for having what was denied her handed to her without question.

Because Natsuhi is human, she is capable of not hearing red truths. This is her strength.

If Eva had been born male, she would have married Natsuhi and not hated her at all, except for looking down on her for not being able to have a child, and insulting her for not understanding the world of business, and telling her that she should keep only to women's work, and not mind what Eva was up to.

And she would not tell Natsuhi that the gold was real, and Natsuhi would become hysterical and weep all the same, for the Ushiromiya's did not trust her with anything, and did not consider her anything but an outsider, and still she would go to the grave with their secrets.

That is the dignity that Krauss lacked.

It is not a very kind thing, dignity.

Virgilia refers to love and honor as basically the same thing.

Without love, you cannot see it.

I said before that Natsuhi's pragmatism denies her the role of witch. She's unable to believe that she can perform miracles. The agony that grants other girls power grants her nothing.

Natsuhi deals not in the 'love' that defines witchdom, but honor.

If it is not honorable, it does not exist.

This is, perhaps, her most 'masculine' characteristic. Her view of the world is one of the Ushiromiya successor. If it is not honorable, it does not exist. Reputation overrides kindness: it does not matter if someone's intentions were good, only if their actions were dignified.

Since Kinzo having a mistress would be dishonorable, it did not happen. Whether he loved Beatrice is irrelevant. Similarly, Natsuhi looks down on Eva because she is undignified. Looking at Eva like Krauss looks at Eva, she sees someone who grasps beyond womanhood, beyond her station.

Her disdain is masculine, and thus stings Eva more than any insult to her parenting skills ever could.

Natsuhi has access to Kinzo's room, which Eva does not have. Natsuhi has access to more parts of the Illusion of the Witch than Eva has--

In fact, it's Natsuhi's flashback that reveals the key hint as to the true location of Kinzo's beloved hometown.

So Eva hates her. So Eva embarrasses her. So Eva reminds Natsuhi that she is ranked below her in the bloodline. That she sits below her at the table.

But Natsuhi lives on Rokkenjima and Eva does not. But Natsuhi counts herself as more honorable than Eva. Because she is the hostess, and Eva is the guest.

If Natsuhi were Kinzo's son, then Eva would hate her more than anything in the world. She would hate her, and she would hate her wife, a young innocent maiden from a rich house, humbled before Natsuhi and whose only crime in the world had been being born to a family more well reputed than the Ushiromiya.

Because that is Natsuhi's only crime. The crime of being born.

Until she kills a child, of course.

The crime of being born seems to be a generational affair.

But nevertheless, honor binds Natsuhi to the island just as fiercely as love binds Beatrice. They cannot leave. And Eva cannot enter.

That's the magic trick. Something that you know is impossible is shown as possible, but you know that it is all an illusion. The honor and love that Natsuhi and Beatrice see does not exist on Rokkenjima. But still they see it, and because Natsuhi is not a witch, she watches for wires. And it is that thrill of her looking for the wires and for one dazzling moment, not seeing them. That allows her to duel the witch.

Beatrice kills Natsuhi in a duel because Natsuhi sees honor, but not love.

There will be no other such duels in Rokkenjima. None for Eva.

Thus does honor render Natsuhi chained to the board.

In the time of 1998, Eva is the Ushiromiya head. And still, she hates Natsuhi.

If only Eva had been chained to Rokkenjima, then she would not have survived what killed her husband and son.

If only she had been able to see!

If only she were not a girl, to whom the witches told in red the truth of all things.

If she could be a boy like Natsuhi was a boy, who could not hear the red truth, then she would not be so unbearably sad.

But she can still hear this red truth.

**Natsuhi was alone. And your hatred was a part of her death.**

If only Eva had been masculine enough, honorable enough to not insult her sister in law, even if she could not love her.

But not even Krauss could be considered honorable enough to manage that.



## **Juxtaposition of Holes: Examining Emptiness** by Ryan

Contains spoilers for Gintama and Revolutionary Girl Utena.

### **The Background.**

This essay is meant to stand and be comprehensible on its own, but it is informed by the extant literature. In *Penis Analogous*, T-shirt takes another look at castration and the phallus using the paradigm presented by Kile in her essay to end (and begin) all essays, where she presents the framework of head, hole, and head-hole, or Ouroboros. T-shirt considers head, and in this essay, I hope to immerse myself in hole.

Where Kile and T-shirt inform their essays through an alchemical and psychoanalytical frameworks, my nonfiction background is in microbiology, and while it would be topical to compare the denizens of Kabuki-cho to the bacteria in your colon, and Gintama even had a whole journey-to-the-center-of-the-stomach arc, that metaphor will only take us so far. So instead, for this contribution to yaoi-zine, I'll put Gintama's portrayal of hole in dialogue with another show concerned with the hole in the middle of a cycle (or Ouroboros)- Revolutionary Girl Utena.

### **Hole.**

First: what is a hole?

Kile answers this: it's the mouth of the serpent. It's a lack, an emptiness, a void. It's also a receptacle. The mouth that eats the tail, the scabbard that holds the sword. A quote from T-shirt's essay, *Eat Shit and Die*, puts this squarely into Gintama's context: "the anus [hole]—the dirty human things—is the home for the phallus—the ideals we hold, the source of our power." The hole is there to be filled.

In Gintama's world of mirrors and not-quite dualities, the not-quite duality of hole is par for the course. Outside of Gintama's world, it's reminiscent of another movie's not-quite duality. Rather, from my perspective, as someone who obsessed over Gintama for years before this movie came out, *Everything Everywhere All At Once* has a juxtaposition that reminds me of Gintama. The everything bagel of despair, and the googly eye of spirit. *Everything Everywhere All At Once* addresses generational trauma, another cycle, and included in that cycle is hole.



So far, I've said that hole is a mouth, a void, a scabbard, a googly eye, and an everything bagel. I've used T-shirt's words to claim the most obvious use of hole: the anus. In *Eat Shit and Die*, T-shirt approaches the hole as the anus from an angle of Freudian analysis. In *My Orochi stood up*, Kile approaches with the notion that hole is hole and uses it interchangeably with other holes. Aside from the theme of ANALysis, my own motivation for discussing the anus here as opposed to any other hole is this: while the Ouroboros is a cycle of self fertilization, I must pay my respects to the anus. Your digestive tract is a continuous tube, one long hole, as opposed to the reproductive cycle, which iterates on itself. My anatomy/physiology professor memorably dubbed us all 'the human donut' out of acknowledgment that what goes in goes through a continuous journey before coming out again. Coming out as what? Well, shit. There's my nonfiction tie in for you all.

Which gets us to eating, or putting something inside of that long, continuous hole called the digestive tract. In *My Orochi Stood Up*, Kile also takes care to establish the difference between devouring yourself versus emptying yourself. In the world of the Ouroboros, where the tail is in the mouth of the snake, how can you tell? Those who devour themselves digest themselves, and change themselves into the shit that colors other characters. Those who empty themselves try to starve, while their tail is still stuck in their mouth.

Is that image gross? Yeah, probably. This is what the censor bars are for, so you don't have to imagine that too hard.

Let's turn to the villains. While contrasting "head sided" and "hole sided," Kile mentions that most of the villains in *Gintama* are hole-sided. Kamui, Takasugi, Utsuro- his name even means "Empty." But the mouth devours, and a hole is filled. By continuously emptying themselves, they become larger holes with more room to be filled. (The first rule of holes: if you find yourself in a hole (as a hole) stop digging.) Even with their determination to starve, their success at refusing to digest themselves is debatable. Takasugi stains the Kihetai, implying he filled and was filled in turn, at least a little bit. Kamui leaves his own marks, on the Harusame, on Abuto, no matter how singleminded he is in his goal of usurping his (head sided) father. We can even consider Douman, from the *onmyouji* arc, who, on top of filling the lives of Ketsuno Christel and Seimei and being filled in turn, also has hemorrhoids and all of the anal insertions that accompany that in the world of *Gintama*. An aside- I keep coming

back to the hemorrhoids in hole theory, but I think they're beyond my scope. Sasaki Isaburo is so empty after the death of his wife and child that he fills that void with the child assassin who presumably killed them. Housen gets the maybe the closest to truly emptying himself, but in the end he still desperately longs to see the sun. Jiraya, Tsukuyo's master, seeks not only to empty himself of every shred of feeling including his identity, but in his loneliness, he also tries to pull her with him into his void. It goes on and on and on- desperate hands thrown out to anyone who will grab them as each villain tumbles into their own void. They are the everything bagel, all the small things cease to have meaning in the face of their all consuming black hole.

So, what is hole, for these hole-sided villains? A lack of purpose. A lack of identity. In Gintoki's speech to hole-sided Kamui, he says: "I lost everything. And knowing the fear of loss, I lived on, empty. I lived on without meaning or name."

## **Not What You Should Be**

What creates that hole? A loss.

Both Gintama and Revolutionary Girl Utena take place after the protagonist, some time ago, suffered through the death of their parent(s). Gintoki becomes empty, and Utena crawls into her coffin to die. "This coffin was made for me." She says. I was meant to die with my family, she says. But Gintoki fills his emptiness physically with the manju offered at Tatsugoro's grave, and metaphorically, when he finds an old lady to protect. And Utena- Utena leaves her coffin and follows Dios to Anthy.

The black hole- the center of the everything bagel that becomes the googly eye- that Gintama is pulled inexorably towards is the hole in Gintoki himself, the hole born of his failure to save Shoyou. The mouth that the tail of Utena's narrative dives into is the loss of Utena's parents, an emptiness that she fills with the ideal of becoming a prince.

So far, so good. Utena, like Gintoki, seeks to fill her hole- coffin becoming a scabbard- with a sword- an ideal, the desire to fight for someone other than herself.

Both Revolutionary Girl Utena and Gintama address a failure to fulfill an archetypal role. Gintoki lost the war, Shinpachi is a protege who will

never have a training arc, and Kagura can't be the beloved, adored little sister who keeps her family together after her mother is gone. While you can look at any character in Utena see how they fail to measure up to the standards of Prince or Princess, we'll focus on our two main characters and say that Utena is a princess who decides to become a prince, and Anthy is the rose bride- who failed at being a princess so bad that she invented becoming a witch. And for all of these characters, their holes in some way relate to how they fall short of their archetype. Gintoki- again- couldn't save Shoyou, Shinpachi lost his father and his means to study the sword and leave his adolescence, and Kagura could stop Umibouzu from killing Kamui, but couldn't stop either of them from leaving. Utena's coffin is built when her parents die and she can no longer be a normal girl from a normal family, and Anthy is hurtled into her coffin as she seeks to save Dios and becomes a witch.

Holes all around. Lets sum it up: our characters are human, so they're human donuts. They've all got holes.

### **It's pretty dark in that hole.**

The Black Rose arc of Utena has some of the most potent coffin visuals in the entire series, and therefore, some of the most potent hole symbolism as well. Everyone in the Black Rose arc is a hole- let's introduce a new paradigm. They're shadows.

Mikage is Utena's shadow, fighting in the duels for Mamiya's eternity and Tokiko's approval, much like Utena fighting for Anthy's freedom and her prince's- Akio's- ideal. In the conversation on the rooftop, Utena apologizes to Anthy for her selfishness, for playing the prince with no understanding of Anthy's truth. Mikage gives us a retrospective view on Utena's mindset. The eternity that Mikage seeks for Mamiya is actually Mikage's eternity, a world where he will never have to face Mamiya's death, and never have to face the disruption of the life he's found with Mamiya and Tokiko. Utena seeks to become a prince who can protect Anthy, and to hold onto her life with Anthy, and with Akio, the new family that is finally filling the hole her parents left. Their drive is born from their loneliness. Mikage is so obsessed with saving Mamiya and preserving his eternity that he no longer remembers who Mamiya IS. Anthy, in her emptiness, her own capacity as a shadow, has taken Mamiya's place. They are completely exchangeable in their damselhood.

But it's not only Mamiya that Mikage disregards in his singleminded pursuit of eternity. The boys that died in the fire are defined by one picture, rumors, and their coffins, coffins that Mikage feeds to the flames so that he can use other shadows- Shiori, Kanae, Wakaba, Kozue- in the pursuit of his goals. Like Mikage, holding onto his distorted view of Mamiya, the rest of the Black Rose duelists latch onto their student council counterparts to fight the encroaching loneliness that the journey through adolescence brings.

Isolation. Being left behind. The hole in your life that love leaves. While I've come to grasp more about the Black Rose arc, I'm still not quite sure if Utena's victory is an ideological triumph, or simply putting a ghost to rest. While Utena has the capacity to love Anthy for Anthy and not as her prince, she's not finished her growth yet. Maybe it's simply taking a stand against Mikage, or not letting Wakaba fall.

Of course, in *Gintama*, where the protagonist is consistently compared to an unsteady silver light (the glint of light off of a sword), shadows are prominent as well.

Before the Shogun Assassination arc, there's a hole in Gintoki's history. The shadow that Shoyou casts is too dense, too dark for the audience to pierce, and Gintoki's steady silver glow simply isn't concerned with illuminating it. The bonfire that Takasugi is making of his life, however, is more than bright enough to throw their shared past into sharp relief. We see the beheading, the break in the Ouroboros that starts a new, unconventional cycle. But also we see a break. Shoyou has died, and taken Gintoki with him, and Utsuro- emptiness- is born again. Takasugi lives his life in the shadow of this event.

## **To Eternity (And Beyond)**

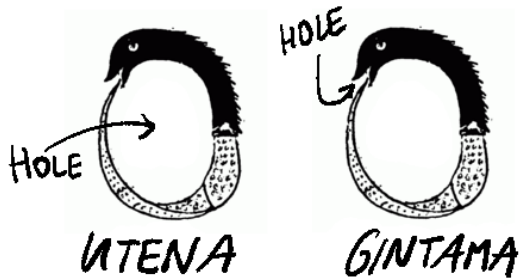
To consider how hole theory diverges, we have to consider the Ouroboros in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* versus *Gintama*.

First: both series want us to consider eternity. We have Utsuro and Anthy. Both immortal, eternal, perpetually dying. Both of them bear the burden of the world's hatred, and it turns them into fairy tale villains, the dragon and the witch. Utsuro is "Empty". Anthy is an empty school uniform. An empty dress. If her dress is empty, where is she?

She's in her coffin.

Let's take a step back there: Utsuro is the hole, but Anthy is in one, whether that's one of her uniforms, or her coffin.

Holes in Revolutionary Girl Utena take on an additional dimension to the holes in Gintama, but we'll put them in dialogue with each other. Both shows are full of holes and failures, but in Revolutionary Girl Utena, there's a hole other than the one inside of them. It's the locked room at the top of the tower, it's the passenger seat of a speeding car, it's the inside of an egg with a shell that they must break in order to be born. In short- hole in Revolutionary Girl Utena is the coffin.



The fairy tale is also an Ouroboros. The same characters play the same parts. Once upon a time, middle, they lived happily ever after, the end. If the fairy tale is an Ouroboros, we can say that the tail is the sword, and the mouth is the witch that it pierces. And so we come to the sword of Dios, and (if we're being generous, or maybe obtuse) it's keeper, Anthy. The sword and the scabbard are similarly the head and the hole in Revolutionary Girl Utena. They even keep their sexual connotations, but in Revolutionary Girl Utena, that's not symbolic of how the dirty things are part of life; Revolutionary Girl Utena wants you to think about patriarchal power imbalances. In Revolutionary Girl Utena, it urges you to consider the plight of the scabbard, endlessly impaled. In this way, the whole of the Ouroboros is a destructive cycle- infinite death. But there is still room for duality. In the framework laid out in My Orochi Stood Up, the tail of the dragon is the phallus, and the mouth the hole that accepts it. But the whole snake/dragon/orochi is also a phallus, or a sword, and Revolutionary Girl Utena urges us to reject the sword as a whole. And if the whole snake eating its tail is the phallus, well, where's the hole? That's an easy answer. It's in the middle. Revolutionary Girl Utena rejects the mouth and concerns itself with is the hole that the Ouroboros forms through its act of self destruction. The hole in the middle of the Ouroboros. And this void, outside of the cycle, is something that Utena and Anthy disappear into, leaving the cycle behind entirely.

## How was the Cycle? Was the Cycle Fun?

Here's another way to conceptualize the difference between holes in Gintama versus RGU; you can think of the relationship between the protagonist and the void. Shoyou/Utsuro and Gintoki are abnormal parent and child. Parent child parent, even, as Gintoki raises Shoyou from a baby after the timeskip. Here, we can bring back the self fertilization motif of the Ouroboros. The reproductive cycle iterates on itself, repeating, but different. However, in RGU, the relation of our protagonist to our void-Utena to Anthy- is lovers, not parent and child. It's not an iteration on itself.

In Gintama, the cycle is bad. Like Utsuro. Unless it's good, like Gintoki waking up and eating breakfast. Well. Gintama wants you to know that life is like taking a shit. It's bad when you have to take one, but pretty nice after you have.

Gintama wants to convince you that nothing ever changes. The yorozuya is still the yorozuya. Stupid people are still stupid. Shoyo is still dead. The holes in the characters are always being filled by the cast off dirt and shit produced by the people around them, and they digest all that, and fill other people, and they fill Tama, their memory receptacle, where their narrative is immortalized. In Revolutionary Girl Utena, Utena and Anthy leave the cycle. Disappearing from Ohtori, they're the socks that get eaten by the dryer. Utena and Anthy leave the narrative, and their coffins stand empty.

In Gintama, they'll play pranks on the narrative, but they would never actually leave it. The fairy tale is an Ouroboros and sheathing the sword is a trap, but Gintama says that you shouldn't shake off your bonds, because they fill your emptiness and connect you to the people around you. Revolutionary Girl Utena says that your bonds can pull you out of your hole, and take you out of the narrative entirely.

Here, we'll let Revolutionary Girl Utena and Gintama converge again. We'll return to the mouth, to the act of consuming. Anthy and Utena will be drinking tea together in ten years. Gintoki is fighting not for the manju that will be offered at his grave, but for the breakfast that he'll eat with Kagura and Shinpachi tomorrow.

## The Orochi Revisited: A Close Application of the Neo-Jungian Draconic Framework in Gintama by kilelele

The following paper is a commentary on and tribute to *My Orochi Stood Up: A Draconic Response to “eat shit and die”* (1948)<sup>1</sup>, in celebration of its 75th anniversary. Though much has changed in the anal-ytic landscape since *Orochi* was first published, much is still the same. As the pioneer of ouroboros theory, a now interdisciplinary framework that has made many valuable contributions to the study of literature both anally inclined and not, *My Orochi Stood Up* is a foundational work that has remained relevant and resonant across years and disciplines. However, in this text I will be focusing on *Orochi’s* roots first and foremost as a piece of Gintamaology.

To begin, we must acknowledge that it is impossible to discuss *My Orochi Stood Up* without also accounting for the work it was written in response to, T. S. Hirt’s *eat shit and die* (1938)<sup>2</sup>, or the original unnamed poem where most of its ideas first took shape (1944).<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, providing a commentary of the former would be beyond the scope of this paper. Readers interested in anality are strongly encouraged to familiarize themselves with this watershed text in Gintama escatology, as it lays the groundwork for everything that follows. As for the poem, it is referenced at length in *My Orochi Stood Up*, but I have decided to omit mention of it—among many other things—owing to this journal’s physical constraints. While I regret the necessity of this, there is simply too much to say on the subject of “the pole and the hole” in Gintama—particularly the pole, which Gintama explores with endless fascination. The sword, the pillar, the Terminal, the gravestone, the tree—with its fondness for substitution as well as its love of dirty things, Gintama’s collection of treasured motifs has no shortage of things that stand erect.

Both pole and hole are equally important to the cycle of self-fertilization first described by *My Orochi Stood Up* almost a century ago. Yet *Orochi* was, understandably, primarily preoccupied with explaining its ouroboros thesis, leaving it with limited room to discuss in-story logistics beyond the conceptual framework and Gintama’s broad thematics. As you may

1 <https://www.tumblr.com/yamameta-inc/712259877459886080/my-orochi-stood-up-a-draconic-response-to-eat>

2 <https://www.tumblr.com/tshirt3000/707992163126034432/eat-shit-and-die-a-scatological-reading-of>

3 <https://www.tumblr.com/yamameta-inc/707187232472252416>





the wrong side of the divide “hole-sided.” Their lack is caused not by their injury, but by their own response to it, by their failure, for a time, to live up to their own humanity. This is the position occupied by the antagonists (and, intermittently and continuously, yet somehow always away from the reader’s eyes, our protagonist Gintoki), those who have failed to fill the lack in their souls like responsible adults.

That which Gintama prescribes to fill these naturally and unnaturally occurring holes in humans is dirt: the debris accrued from a lifetime of living, brushing shoulders with other people, becoming stained by them, becoming dirty and worn as you mature, subjecting yourself to the deeply humiliating and humbling experience of being alive. Of course, as both *eat shit and die* and *My Orochi Stood Up* illuminate, in Gintama “dirt” is also a synonym and euphemism for “shit.” We are thus not talking about just any dirt-filled hole, but specifically about the anus. The vulgarity of Gintama’s framing of bonds—as shitting onto and into each other—and its use of shit as a humanizing trait is highly characteristic of both the series’s general sense of humour and the ways in which it mixes gags and serious delivery of narrative to create a densely layered non-linear experience in which absurdity and tragedy are forcibly, jarringly concomitant.

As T. S. Hirt wrote in 1948, “the anus—the dirty human things—is the home for the phallus—the ideals we hold, the source of our power.” Indeed, were Gintama not so irreverent about its most valued symbol, the sword, due to its fondness for wordplay and for low-hanging fruit, perhaps the nationalistic bent of the series would be more questionable. But as *My Orochi Stood Up* argued, Gintama’s emphasis on wordplay and its fearless decision to call itself the equivalent of “Ligma” are integral to a thematic understanding of the series, and are key to the ouroboros thesis in particular.

But perhaps the singularly most important example is the *-tama* in Gintama, with its plethora of potential meanings, each of them just silly and dirty enough that you have to take it seriously. Beyond the obvious joke on *kintama* (balls) and the “silver soul” direct meaning, we’ve seen that *tama* is also easily conflated with *atama* (head), and even with *tamago* (egg). This is clearly demonstrated with the series’ fixation on beheading leading to the salvation of the soul and the bodyswap arc hinging on the pun between soul and egg. [...] The fact that the characters end up turning into giant turds, likening the soul-egg-balls to an asshole, only drives the point in further. (*My*

*Orochi Stood Up*, 1948)

To return to the unfortunate hole-sided, these are the characters who lack dirt, who could not withstand the mortifying ordeal of being alive. The natural assumption to make here would be that Gintama then juxtaposes opposing forces, setting “desiring-pairs” of head and hole, sword and scabbard in conflict with each other. Indeed, Gintoki is stabbed again and again, with all kinds of blades—but the villains do not want to stab him as much as they want him to stab them, with his much more meaningful sword. Yet those who are hole-sided do not seek to be filled.

[...] But this is a different process than emptying yourself, which is what the antagonists are doing. All Gintama villains are hole-sided, desperately trying to destroy themselves while pretending, as hard as they can, that they don't know that you can't destroy a hole—only make it bigger. (*My Orochi Stood Up*, 1948)

Takasugi desires Gintoki, not because he believes Gintoki can make him whole again, but rather because he knows he cannot ever be whole again, and that is because of his love for Gintoki. Moreover, the series' consistent use of language such as “broken” versus “unbroken” swords implies that those who cannot be filled are also those who cannot fill others. Just as the serpent cannot swallow its tail without filling its own mouth, its mouth cannot be filled without having a tail to swallow. As *My Orochi Stands Up* makes clear, the process of self-creation and other-creation are effectively one and the same in Gintama.

All Gintama antagonists are in parallel with each other and in mirror with their counterparts, who in turn contain echoes of our protagonist, Gintoki. In this way, the entire story can be folded in on itself, side over side, into the shape of Gintoki, the microcosm, like a piece of carefully designed origami. One of the most popular endings of the anime, ending 25, “Glorious Days,” demonstrates one half of this as Gintoki stands unmoving and unchanged as the anime's large roster of antagonists replace each other before him in quick succession, different times and places flashing past without emphasis. “Nothing has changed,” Gintama constantly claims, while simultaneously showing us how the world has entered a different era, a different century, a different genre, in the span of ten years.

In the ending, Takasugi and Gintoki haunt each other's footsteps. Taka-

sugi's feet in Gintoki's reflection in the water lag one step behind, unable to keep up with him but unable to stop chasing after him, while Gintoki's ghost is not even visible in Takasugi's reflection; instead, Gintoki's presence is indicated by Takasugi's own reflection stopping and looking back.

Gintoki and Takasugi are the most important pair of mirror selves in Gintama, and inarguably the most yaoistic. Rather than homoeroticism, however, what they have could perhaps be termed a sort of homothematism. Whereas Gintoki has filled himself with dirt and debris from the series' overflowing, enormous cast, learning and re-learning how to be human, Takasugi is caught in an incandescent storm of rage and grief, a serpent futilely trying to swallowing itself in the literal sense. But he can never succeed, because he has nothing to fill his belly with other than himself; there is nothing he values in the self he is trying to destroy; thus, he can never satisfy his desire to hurt himself.

Takasugi's immortality is of the same kind as Utsuro's, which is to say, hole-sided. It is not that they cannot be killed, only that they cannot die. Takasugi therefore turns to the same drastic final resort as Utsuro: destroying the world in order to destroy themselves. Again we can observe Gintoki's role as the microcosm in comparison to Shouyou and Utsuro's exaggerated, macrocosmic style. *My Orochi Stood Up* details how Utsuro as well as the eponymous Orochi's identities blur into that of their respective planets, likening them to world snakes. Tied to the Earth itself, Utsuro's existence cannot end independently of it; his only recourse is to destroy Earth, and perhaps take the entire universe with it.

To Takasugi, however, the world is synonymous with Gintoki.

Takasugi's doomed love for Gintoki affords him an interesting position in the narrative, where his conflation between Gintoki's sword and the pillar of the world aligns with the story's folded structure centered around Gintoki. Takasugi is Gintoki's shadow, Gintoki's "other self", as Gintama terms it, but weak, diminished, unable to carry the burden of living or live up to Shouyou's teachings. Gintama's villains—and its weaklings—are those who will recklessly hurt others in order to harm themselves; its heroes are those who will fight themselves in order to become better versions of themselves. Conveniently, in this cast the villains are the heroes are the villains—and so in defeating the villains, the heroes overcome their own shadows, while the villains knowingly throw themselves into this process out of desperate hope that this will finally end their miserable roles in

this story.

Takasugi, then, tries to destroy Gintoki because it is the only way he can destroy himself. On one level, part of him possesses the same general meta-awareness that all Gintama characters have about their allotted roles, and knows that if they were to clash, Gintoki would be the one to successfully devour him. But for the most part, Takasugi's motivations are painfully earnest and straightforward: harming Gintoki simply hurts more than harming himself can ever hope to accomplish, and if Gintoki were to die, so too would Takasugi's world crumble to nothing.

What is interesting is Gintoki's response to these violent advances. Gintoki, of course, understands full well what kind of story he is in at all times. "Too bad," he tells Takasugi, scraping himself back up from the ground. "I won't fall. Until you stop, I'll keep standing back up." Here Gintoki himself is positioned as one of those things that stand erect. The Gintoki in Takasugi's memory that is invoked is "a figure that stands before Takasugi"—or, put another way, Gintoki understands his duty in their relationship as that to keep standing, for as long as Takasugi needs something erect to throw himself against.

Thus, when Takasugi says that the world will not end as long as Gintoki's sword remains unbroken, while Gintoki says that the only way to stop Takasugi is to stop his breathing, Gintoki becomes the immovable object and Takasugi the (un)stoppable force. However, in a fascinating inversion of the usual connotations, here the object is presented as something the force has chased after all its life, something unattainable and unreachable and yet no less immovable. Meanwhile, the force traps itself in a circular, looping motion, its unstoppable momentum doing nothing to help it escape its labyrinth. But in their battle, Takasugi and Gintoki do manage to reach each other; not because of Takasugi's desperate violence, but because Gintoki's interiority is as vast as the story they are in, and he is able to take Takasugi into himself.

*My Orochi Stood Up's* ouroboros thesis is famously anchored in western alchemical and philosophical concepts. It frames Gintama's mission of human-becoming as the enacting of the Great Work, viewing Gintama's parallelism through the lens of the individuation process. On the ouroboros as a symbol of two becoming one, it quotes Carl Jung:

In the age-old image of the Ouroboros lies the thought of devour-

ing oneself and turning oneself into a circulatory process, for it was clear to the more astute alchemists that the prima materia of the art was man himself. The Ouroboros is a dramatic symbol for the integration and assimilation of the opposite, i.e. of the shadow. This 'feedback' process is at the same time a symbol of immortality since it is said of the Ouroboros that he slays himself and brings himself to life, fertilizes himself, and gives birth to himself. He symbolizes the One, who proceeds from the clash of opposites, and he, therefore, constitutes the secret of the prima materia which ... unquestionably stems from man's unconscious. (*The Collected Works of Carl Jung, Volume 14: Mysterium Coniunctionis*, 1977)

Gintoki's assimilation of his shadow, of his other self, is best represented by the moment where he finally visibly attains "a human's sword" at the end of the series. Takasugi's reflection in Gintoki's blade bequeaths upon him the honour of being the face of Gintoki's "human's sword." This is a similar use of the reflection as in Ending 25. What is made clear by comparing these two moments is the same obvious truth that Gintama has impressed upon its readers all along: Gintoki is capable of containing Takasugi within him, but Takasugi is not capable of the reverse.

Or, more accurately, Takasugi is chiefly defined by the fact that he carries Gintoki's ghost within him—and was driven insane by it. Gintoki was able to quietly shoulder the knowledge that his actions caused Takasugi's descent into madness, but Takasugi was never able to inure himself to the sight of Gintoki's tears. Takasugi is hole-sided primarily because he hollowed himself out in a vain attempt to scrape the image out. But dirt, as *My Orochi Stood Up* states, is what remains.

Takasugi's crushed left eye has ever been his most obvious hole. Indeed, confronting Gintoki again made him aware that the image of Gintoki's face that he had been carrying around in his eye like a grain of sand was in fact a speck of "dirt." And of course, Takasugi was never empty: though the Kiheitai are sparse characters, they serve quite clearly to illustrate that Takasugi had never stopped being surrounded by people who trusted and depended on him, people who could participate in Gintama's dirty gags and absurd comedy in the ways he could not, and people who, on multiple occasions, physically emulated Takasugi in order to inject his likeness into the series' gags even when he was not present. People who, in short, supplied him with dirt.

The linkages between the gross and vulgar nature of Gintama's preferred jokes and the double entendre in the meaning of "dirt" are an intrinsic part of both Gintama's vision of life and the ouroboros framework. As T. S. Hirt explained, "the persistence of those dirty things marks the permanence of one's relationships. something clean would never stick so." Gintama posits that living is mortifying, humiliating, and while not *shameful*, certainly full of shame and debasement. To be a character that clings to dignity—or to whom dignity clings to—in Gintama is to accept an unfavourable life expectancy. Takasugi, while participating in a few gags, was never thoroughly embarrassed by them. His friends' actions thus helped to tether him to the world of the living, even at his most ghostly.

Holes do not need to be completely empty to be deemed holes. Such a proposition would be absurd. Holes are identifiable even when filled partway with soil—even, perhaps, when brilled to the brim. No one is truly empty. *My Orochi Stood Up* makes clear early on that "head vs hole" is not a false dichotomy, but a misleading one:

You can reduce everything in Gintama to essentially two things. Shouyou and Utsuro. Gintoki and Takasugi. Humans and monsters. [...] Those who take in and those who are taken in. Those who keep struggling and those who don't. And then you can also always reduce these two things to one thing: Shouyou/Utsuro are, after all, the same being [...]. You can't pick yourself back up if you never lost in the first place. We know that Gintoki has managed to become "a splendid human" by the end of the series—so what was he before that? Was he really a monster? At what exact point in the series did he become human? Was it while he was on-screen, while we were looking, but without us noticing? Was it off-screen, while we were flipping the page, or in the space between the panels? The answer, of course, is that he was learning to be human every day of his life [...]. And so "which one is the head and which one is the hole?" is the wrong question. Even if you assigned one to each half and managed not to be wrong, since they're collapsible into one anyway, they'll always be both. (*My Orochi Stood Up*, 1948)

To be hole-sided is not to be the hole. It is to be stagnant, to be trapped in a state of needing to be filled without being able to carry out the process of self-constitution with the dirt that is received. In the end, Gintoki, the "reluctant hole" as T. S. Hirt iconically termed, is the one who takes Takasugi into himself. *My Orochi Stood Up* quotes philosopher Bernard

Stiegler: “The *I* is essentially a process, not a state, and this process is an in-dividuation [...]. It is the tendency to *become one*, that is, to become indivisible.” This is, I argue, the climax of their homothematic relationship. Not coincidentally, it is also the climax of Gintoki’s personal quest to become human, the individuation that Jung and Stiegler speak of. *My Orochi Stood Up* capitalizes on the ouroboros’ nature as a symbol of fertility to liken dirt not only to shit but to seed, and the hole to the womb where the *tama* (egg/soul) is fertilized. It is an intentionally paradoxical and anachronistic framework, where one must have an unbroken sword to be able to be fertilized by the dirt of others, yet it is only through that fertilization that one’s sword can be forged. This is simply another iteration of the classic chicken-or-egg dilemma, as befits the motif of the ouroboros. But for the characters of Gintama, this paradox reflects their continuous responsibility: the task of becoming human is a Sisyphean one that will span their lifetimes and beyond.

In other words, as Takasugi was folded into Gintoki, he found that he was already there; that his lack was filled by Gintoki because he was filling Gintoki; and that being a ghost did not preclude anyone from being human.

I have spoken at length about holes and serpents up until this point without mentioning the eponymous dragon, Utsuro. This is partially because this essay was focused on Takasugi and Gintoki’s relationship, and partially because practically all insights regarding Utsuro are contained within the framework of the ouroboros thesis itself. As the world snake, his body and bones were used to construct the theory we have been discussing, his lack identical in essence to the other hole-sided. It is worth noting, however, that for Gintoki, Utsuro represented the unreachable object. Gintoki’s deepest anxiety was over his blade not reaching Utsuro, because he had been told that he could only reach him with a human’s sword. In the end, as we have seen, he does indeed manage to reach him, with Takasugi’s soul in his hands.

Takasugi, too, manages to reach Gintoki in the end. Cradled in Gintoki’s arms, he is brave enough—and selfish enough—to ask for a fleeting smile.<sup>4</sup> *My Orochi Stood Up* argues that the moment Gintoki’s tragedy was revealed to us through Takasugi’s eye was the one that broke Gintama’s own narrative cyclicity. This was, of course, the original bit of dirt flung

4        As those familiar with Gintama doubtless know, a smile can sometimes shatter eternity.

into Takasugi's hole that he could not cope with, that halted his process of individuation. As previously mentioned, the ten years that separate the end of the Joui war from the present day span an entire age. At the very end, this eternity spent wandering, too, ruptures, and Takasugi finally finds his way out of the labyrinth, only to look back and see a clear and straight path through the trees.

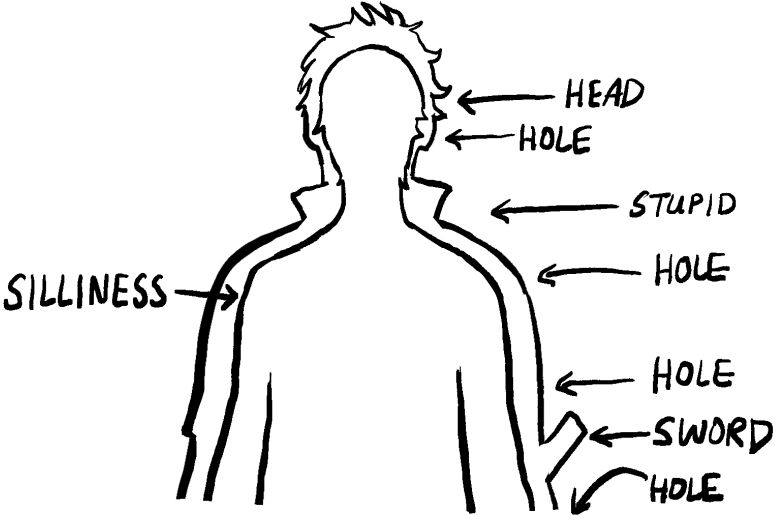
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This essay has been a brief exploration of Takasugi and Gintoki's relationship in the context of *My Orochi Stood Up's* innovative ouroboros framework. In the seventy-five years since it was first published, it has been transformed in diverse and exciting ways. However, I thought it only fitting that for this major anniversary, the focus be brought back to the Gintama characters that first inspired it. Rather than the iconic dragon, Shouyou/Utsuro, this piece has chosen to focus instead on his two most intertwined disciples. While not necessarily treading any new ground, I hope to have presented an interesting snapshot of this relationship known for being simultaneously transparent and opaque.

As we have seen, this relationship is one made possible by the intense parallel structure it embodies. Just as Takasugi serves as Gintoki's shadow, their journey and the cannibalistic nature of their duality echo the conflict represented by their teacher, and in many respects parallel the shape of the narrative itself. In this way, the position they occupy in relation to these other draconic structures—micro- or macrocosm—is perhaps a reversible one.

In short, though Gintama “cannot resist the phallus,” as T. S. Hirt said, it is also singularly concerned with holes: how they are filled, what results from them, what constitutes them. The only question it does not ask is what creates them. It is instead implicit that human beings naturally possess holes, that they are a natural part of the anatomy of both our bodies and souls. And thus, it is natural both to fill them and to fail to fill them; the fertile infinity of the ouroboros guarantees that should one fail, there will always be tomorrow.





## What are we Doing to our Beautiful Ukes?: Disciplined Yaoi Bodies

By AI (@actualhamlet)

An artist's interpretation of the body is both prescriptive and descriptive. By this, I mean that in one way the visual representation of form depicts reality, and in another way it depicts the desired reality of the artist, or rather, society as whole. When we create depictions of bodies through art, in some sense we are creating our version of the way a body should look and behave. When we perceive the body depicted in art, it is the artist, whether intentionally or not, telling us something about how they think bodies should look and behave. This is motivated both by their own thoughts on the body as well as how they think the viewer will respond to this body. Ultimately, it is a cyclical process of discourses between the artist, the viewer, and the art where the body depicted represents a certain norm or norms while simultaneously telling the viewer how their body should fit these norms. The body, both artistic and physical, is disciplined through these subconscious acts.

So, the question is, why the fuck do bodies in yaoi look like that? (and to be clear here, I'll be using any comic/manga/manhwa/etc depicting gay guys as my definition of yaoi here, as limiting as that is) There could be easy answers, like bad art style or fetish or whatever, but I think there is something more fun and more Judith Butler-esque at play here.

Yaoi art is infamous for its exaggerated style, 'yaoi hands' being one of the first things people think about, but there are other characteristics. Typically, the seme is depicted as a brick shit-house, with little to no difference between him and a 6x3 cube of cement (sement? kinda a double entendre there). His fingers are usually like half the body size of the uke. The uke is delicate and fragile like a baby deer, stick-thin with big eyes.

So how exactly did this style get popularized? I don't know the exact specifics of the history of yaoi art. However, I do know that these depictions of semes and ukes have stayed fairly consistent over time. Of course, there are tons of yaoi where the main characters just look like Normal Guys, but even in those, you can see the subtle exaggeration of their bodies in order to signify who is the top/bottom, and therein lies one of the main reasons behind the style.

The yaoi man's body signifies his yaoi-ness. It tells the viewer if the character is a seme or uke, or more broadly, that they are gay/Yaoi at

a glance. The yaoi body is a language that a fujoshi learns in order to quickly understand the story and roles being presented to them. The yaoi artist, similarly, knows this language, understands the conventions of yaoi. These conventions are replicated over time to various effects in order for the viewer to easily pick up on the message of the artist. The yaoi body is a conduit for messages between the artist and the viewer. That is why, I think, we sometimes get severely exaggerated forms. The artist may not trust the viewer to understand subtle signals of seme and uke or they want to get the message across as quickly as possible, so the bodies become extremely distorted.

The wild exaggeration of the body in both the seme and uke is reminiscent of the mannerist style of 16th century Europe. The mannerist style came from a desire to break away from the rigidity of the Renaissance, a growing uncertainty of one's place in the world, and wanting to depict emotion in a way the natural body could not depict. The unnaturalness of the bodies could be saying something more, such as the unnatural love between two men should be depicted unnaturally. However, yaoi bodies, like mannerism, depict the emotion of yaoi. Gay love between two men is simply too powerful and emotional to be depicted using a natural depiction of the body.

Yaoi is a place where the queerness of bodies, love, and sexuality can be explored. Throughout life, we internalize depictions of bodies and discipline ourselves and others in order to conform and perform these depictions. In yaoi, bodies perform gender in abnormal ways. By depicting and viewing bodies in odd and unnatural ways, participants in yaoi subvert the gender and sexuality expected of them. Yaoi makes the unnatural natural and the viewer internalizes this, empowering them to explore gender and sexuality outside of the norm. Yaoi makes you gay and trans! We learn to recognize the yaoi bodies on page, and then we learn to recognize the yaoi body within us.



OG GIRL YAOI



HIMEMOTO  
ANIMAY

- 
- ☰ ☐ this is my friend anthy. shes simultansouly 14 and milleniums years old. shes from the 1997 anime revolutionary girl utena, where she is the deuteragonist and love interest to the protagonist utena.
  - ☰ ☐ hav u seen RGU? well uh. to put it very very briefly rgu is a surrealist fairy tale and magical girl genre deconstruction as well as a coming of age story, that analyses patriarchal power, gender, sexuality, cycles of abuse and how they all intercept. im sure im probably missing something because rgu is a LOT of things really but thats the gist ....
  - ☰ ☐ anyway its about a 14 yr old girl utena tenjou who transfers to this new school and she accidentally gets herself entangled with the mysterious student council that like hav like the student government power equal to NATO (which is to say, none really besides being flashy) where they hav a secret magical sword fighting club where they ritualistically duel for the hand of the so called "rose bride", which isssss HIMEMIYA ANTHY ! the

reason why she is so sought after is because she is said to "hold the power of revolution" that her intended spouse/prince would be able to harness to bring about the revolutionization of the world. whatever that means. WAIT I ALMOST FORGOT THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF UTENA CHARACTER its integral to mention that utena is a GIRL PRINCE her character motivation and aspiration is to be a prince herself one day ! supposedly, she was saved by a prince when she was younger and she was so

- ☼  impressed by him that she wants to become a prince who saves princesses too one day too
  - ☼  so RGU explores power gender & sexuality through multiple venues within the patriarchy. it divides gender into 3 categories, prince, princess, and witch. a witch is a girl who has failed to become a princess. so a girl who does not meet the feminine ideal.
  - ☼  the thesis of RGU is the patriarchy, the gender binary, hurts everybody. and to truly be free from these roles we have been assigned and trapped/confined by
-

---

is that u must abandon them all together !



with utenas character, it interrogates the ideology of eradicating systemic oppression from the inside and by the systems rules, by placing a minority into a position of power. so like the girlboss's tools can never dismantle the CEOs house. or something. that it ultimately does nothing to actually benefit the group of oppressed peoples that the systems existence is dependant on's oppression in the first place ! this patriarchal world we live in, can only truly be "revolutionized" by destroying it and starting over instead of trying to change existing aspects



utena and anthy are foils in which utena is on the surface, the "progressive" entity in the patriarchy. a girl prince. a woman with a mans power. a female who is equal to a male. anthy on the other hand is the embodiment of the feminine ideal. she is the perfect princess, woman, wife, bride, yeah



RGU makes it a point to say that for utena to be a prince there

---



must be a princess to save. a princess is a role that must be rendered powerless and helpless to all external powers including the prince. utena wants to save the princess, but never thinks farther as to why the princess needs to be saved or even if the princess wants to be saved. the conditions in which utena is able to have power is also the very same that oppresses anthy. utena even apologizes to anthy at the end for trying to be a prince



anthy is the embodiment of the ideal woman. which means she is also the receptacle of all feminine envy and resentment towards women. and because of that she is also conversely the manifestation of all female suffering. but the thing is anthy is a real person. shes still just a girl. so even she who is presumably the ideal woman does not meet impossible standards she is also a witch ! to put it simply. she is THE girl of all time



WAIT BUT ANYWAY ... i was explaining all this exposition to get to what i really wanted to talk about --- lately iv been thinking

---

about transgender anthy  
(transthy) interpretations

☐

☐

☐

☐

ok its 11pm and this is a different day i cant do this anymore in an interview with ikuhara with mari kotani in 2000 ikuhara described the dynamic between utenanthy to be yaoi because of the importanace of power in their relationship. in his words [not in the same interview] a prince is someone who owns and and a princess is someone who is owned. i just think its fun to think of all the different transgender interpretations of anthy and utena with how they adhere to their roles in the show.

☐

theyr yuri theyr straight theyr yaoi theyr girl yaoi

☐

if utena was transmasc leaning hard into masculinity dependant on female subjugation or butch transbian utena to explore a different route of queer womens

complex relationship with femininity or transmasc anthy who has completely surrendered to their assigned role or transfem anthy who performs her role perfectly but is undeniably suffering despite being the 'ideal'



anthy frees herself from patriarchys roles in the end as well as her abuse and i think itd be really fun to trans that too. utena got stabbed by a billion swords begging anthy to come out of that girl box and what if she transmascs after leaving the tomb of ohtori ? what if transfem anthy finds a more fluid femininity in the outside world ? idk. transthy. watch revolutionary girl utena. if u havnt. even if i spoiled it for u ur welcome. and if u hav watched it watch it again. goodnight



**sweet.lad** Today at 11:27 PM  
btw do you have a title



**babytown** Today at 11:28 PM  
this is my friend anthy  
or "og girl yaoi" idk whichever one u think is better



**sweet.lad** Today at 11:29 PM  
this is my friend anthy is fine



**babytown** Today at 11:30 PM  
wait here. girl yaoi ANALysis: in the end all girls are the  
rose bride. and in the end we all hav holes. maybe we are  
all girl holes in the end



**sweet.lad** Today at 11:30 PM  
is that your title?



**babytown** Today at 11:31 PM  
wait how about og girl yaoi: this is my friend anthy: girl  
yaoi ANALysis: in the end all girls are holes and we are  
all holes that swords come out of  
maybe the phallus was in us all along



**sweet.lad** Today at 11:31 PM  
is THAT your title????



**babytown** Today at 11:31 PM  
can my title be a screenshot of this conversation  
actually



**sweet.lad** Today at 11:32 PM  
okay



# Hi everypony welcome to my

Ship flowchart that makes sense only to me. But I will try to make it make sense for you too. Good luck!

## *Note from 2023:*

*I made this originally for tshirts graduation party in 2021 and presented it as a powerpoint presentation.*

*And now ive adapted it for tshirts yaoi zine TWO!!!!*

*I did a lot of qc-ing to make sure the flow still worked, but didn't edit the paths, or add in any new endings. Other than adding some more text to some endings, everything has been left p much intact.*

*There are a lot of ships missing from this... for example my scum villains or nu carnival ships... but I hope everyone enjoys my 2021 opinions :^)*

# The way this works



## DISCLAIMERS?!!



1. Start with a ship in your head
  2. Answer questions and turn to the listed pages
  3. And theoretically, where you end up is the correct ship designation.
- My tastes are always changing, and I made this in 2021 (rn it is 2023)
  - Doesn't apply to all ships ever, and is based on my personal interpretations of various ships. It's all very ymmv.

How dearly do they want  
the other guy buried 6  
feet under? ♥♥♥

---

Uhh... they  
spar/fight often but  
it's not that serious?

go to page 9!

Kind of.  
A little bit.

go to page 7!

NOT AT ALL!?



go to page 11

Damn this shit is tom and jerry!

Or coyote and roadrunner!

go to page 4

# HYPOTHETICALLY,

IF THEY HAD TO CUDDLE FOR WARMTH IN A CAVE, HOW WOULD THAT CHANGE THEIR RELATIONSHIP? 🤔 🤔

---

They are **NOT** dating now! They still hate each other!! Nothing has changed!! why would you even ask this!!

Go to page 5!

They are dating now :^ ) come hell or high water!

Go to page 21!



Woah!

Okay  
sorry  
that  
didn't  
work for  
them!  
yeesh!

Hmm. Is  
one of them  
*clearly* the  
bad guy?

Yes!

Go to page 21!

No!

Go to page 6!



OKAY! MORALLY AMBIGUOUS GUYS!  
LOVE IT!

HOW MUCH BETRAYAL IS INVOLVED?



YES.

Go to page 19!

Between all the chasing and yelling? Not much. Person A just dearly wants to understand/be understood by person B. ah jeez!

Go to page 22!

Love the  
ambiguity!

Tell me how  
eminent the  
threat is.

Does person  
A ever follow  
through and  
kill person  
B?

Who knows!  
It might one  
day. :^)

Go to page 23!

Haha yeah



Go to page 8!

OKAY, UNDER WHAT SPECIFIC  
CIRCUMSTANCES DOES THE  
KILLING OCCUR? 🤔 🤔

---

**It was the  
final straw.  
They have  
gone too  
far. Person  
A is person  
B's  
executioner.**

Go to page 19!

They literally  
planned this  
out. Mutually  
consensual  
murder.  
Romantically  
charged self  
destruction.

<3

Go to page 20!

**Congrats.  
They are  
rivals!**

Let's talk  
about their  
first  
impressions.

**What  
are their  
meet  
uglies  
like?**

*They disagree a lot and  
get into a ton of  
arguments.*

*Over who is better at  
arm wrestling, who is  
better at navigating.  
Everyone around them  
is annoyed!*

Go to page 17!

One of them makes a fool of  
themselves in front of the  
other. Just an absolute  
cringey first impression.  
Oh jeez, how can they possibly  
get back from this?

Go to page 18!

**Congrats.**

**Friends to  
lovers!**

Tell me, how  
clear does  
person B  
make their  
feelings for  
person A?  
:thinking:

**Pretty early on!  
Person B is a  
little annoying  
about it tbh  
:rolling eyes:**

Go to page 13!

**They take their  
secret to the grave.  
Or pretty close to it.**

Go to page 14!

Wahoo! Let's talk about how far they would go for each other.

---

Uhh... They  
would never be put  
in this position...  
they are literally  
just chilling  
:sweat:  
But I guess if  
they were put in  
this situation,  
they would.

Go to page 10!

One or both  
would level  
countries for  
the other.  
Without a  
doubt. There  
are concrete  
examples I  
can pull up for  
you.

Go to page 12!

HOW  
DOES  
PERSON  
A FEEL  
ABOUT  
PERSON  
B'S WAR  
CRIMES?



They're  
accomplices! Person  
A is absolutely  
complicit.

Go to page 15!

What war crimes? It's  
not even within the  
realm of possibility  
that Person B would  
ever do such a thing.

Go to page 16!

There is a possibility,  
but Person A would  
kill them before they  
could follow through

Go to page 23!



I'm in love with the most annoying guy I know?!

---

- Bonus points if person b is like.. Otherworldly in some way.
- Ends up quite sweet in the end!
- Examples: cecilos, reigisa, kawoshin

# Long suffering best friend

---

- Pining is king here!  
typically childhood best friends. usually person a is more in touch with their sexuality/feelings than the person b. person b may even be staunchly “straight” ?!
- Examples: johndave, makoharu,

# My little meow meow

---

**• Well yeah. This is a pretty new category for me and theres only like. 2 ships I can think of that ME PERSONALLY I like that fit here**

**[note from the future: omg. This is the xiyao slide. It took me forever to realize this]**

# King and lionheart (classic flavor)

---

- **Ignoc. Madohomu.**
- **We all know this one.**
- **Okay this is the one where person a has a goal and person b is dedicated heart soul and mind to: 1. person a themselves but also equally or possibly more importantly 2. person a's goal. person a and their goal are inextricable from each other**
- **Usually a power dynamic? One guy is the other one's liege. You know.**

# CLASSIC RIVALMANCE

---

- Commonly I will refer to this as davekat
- Catty towards each other, but no actual malice. Unless there is :flushed:
- A more lighthearted ship. Memefied to hell
- Examples: klance, zukka,



## CRINGE TO....LOVERS?

Lol. This can be as bad as person a peeing themselves in front of person b. or killing a bunch of person b's brethren and then passing out stone cold. Or person a is just the village fool.

Whatever it is, it's a bad first impression! Either one or both don't think much of the other at all. but once they have a bonding experience... it turns out they actually might understand each other the most. they are actually... equals?!

*Bonus points for similar/shared trauma*

# VRISREZI

- I have a lot of feefeels (feelings) for these two guys. Theyre kind of everything to me.
- they are a lot but abridged version for this zine, I consider something to be a vrisrezi when there is an element of betrayal involved (due to ideological / morality differences). The betrayer regrets their decision, and just wants them back :^ (.
- Whether or not they get back together depends on the ship.

• Unsatisfied with this result?  
Return to page 5

# Suzalulu

---

- these guys are proving the myth of consensual murder



# CLASSIC ENEMIES TO LOVERS!

Or as I like to call it: drarry.

---

- This is the classic enemies to lovers ship. It just is!
- Notably, what separates it from the other category is that the conflict between them is rather simple. One guy is **CLEARLY** in the wrong, and the other guy isn't.
- May include a redemption arc.

# NARUSASU

Friends to rivals to enemies to lovers  
to friends to lovers to single dads to  
... idk I haven't read boruto.



tweets for yanderes only @GAINAX · Sep 8, 2021



can love bloom between an antifa and a neoliberal **centrist** with nationalist leanings... this is the question that narusasu dares to ask

14

204

433



• Unsatisfied with this result?  
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# Sword of Damocles (romantic)

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Like a ticking time bomb around your neck, only sexier. Person a keeps person b in line, and is specially positioned :smirk: to know when the killswitch should be flipped. I don't have many ships like this but its vetvimes from discworld.

## Yaoi Round Table: Yaoi vs Reality

*tshirt:* Hi everyone. Welcome to the Yaoi vs Reality round table discussion. Today we're gathered here to talk about to what degree you believe yaoi does, can, or should reflect reality, and perhaps more importantly, what is produced when it does not. We want to generate a conversation about the permeable relationship yaoi can have with the external world, and problematize what those terms may even signify.

*elliott queerapika:* So, I'm coming at the question of Yaoi vs Reality from the standpoint of a white ashkenazi jewish queer trans guy who really first came into eroticism through fic, particularly m/m or what used to, in the 2000s and early 2010s, predominantly cohere under the rubric of "slash." While I thought of myself as female or nonbinary during this period, I strongly identified with the male characters I was reading about in a way that felt easy to rationalize—maybe I just didn't see myself reflected in narratives about female characters due to my own trauma, or possibly just bad writing. But no matter my own identification at that point, what yaoi gave me was a way to feel like a man before knowing for sure that I wanted to experience that in Real Life™.

I guess that's where I see the connection, for me at least. It wasn't so much the desire to recreate yaoi 1:1 in my own life; indeed, I was happy for it to remain a fantasy for, um. Like 15 years or so. But to add one more dimension to this thought, I've been ruminating a lot lately (because of this zine) on how to conceptualize yaoi in relation to queerness, and I've found theory to be a helpful interlocutor in that regard—I've been drawing on José Esteban Muñoz's formulation that "queerness is not yet here," that it is a horizon, to postulate that yaoi, in contrast, is always already a kind of immediacy. This also heavily draws from Linda Williams' writing on the temporality of pornography as being "right on time." But if yaoi is something that is irrevocably here, for me it was also, up until I was in my late twenties, the kind of timeliness that can only exist in fantasy, which serves as an interesting contrast to the delayed-time of transition. What is created through the collision of these two time-frames? How can we understand the intersections between yaoi and reality through something like fantasy? If I were more heavily schooled in psychoanalysis, I'd probably have more to say about that, but I'm gonna leave it there for now.

I'm working on expanding on this into a more robust (auto)theorization

in my essay, so if this is at all interesting to you, check that out somewhere else in this issue, I guess. Assuming I haven't written something totally different by the time you read this!

*tsbirt*: I heard psychoanalysis so I popped in. For me, psychoanalysis and fantasy always comes down to Freud's classic formulation "A child is being beaten." For those unfamiliar with the essay, Freud notes a surprisingly common fantasy among his hysteria patients, in which "A child is being beaten." He would ask them to clarify-- "Who was the child that was being beaten... Who was it that was beating the child?" But the reply was always "I know nothing more about it: a child is being beaten."

The English-language scholarship on the connection between "A child is being beaten" and yaoi is written primarily by Kazumi Nagaike and her thesis "Japanese women writers watch a boy being beaten by his father: male homosexual fantasies, female sexuality, and desire." Her thesis argues that scopophilic desire creates both identification and dissociation with yaoi characters, and is subconsciously motivated by the "[desire] to access the bisexual (simultaneously masculine and feminine) body."

While Nagaike assumes her subjects are cis, I think it's telling that she arrived at this gender ambivalent conclusion. And I would hesitate to call the authors whose texts she works with, or the readers who enjoy those texts in the way she describes, or even Freud's patients, transgender. Rather, I return to that passive voice: A transgender desire is evoked. This connection in passivity between yaoi and transgender identity evokes another passive identity: the uke. Another formulation: An uke is being penetrated.

Now, we begin to equate these. An uke is being beaten. A transgender desire is being penetrated. A child is being transitioned. Yaoi in many ways feels to work in this transgender mode, this uke mode. I like that doubling.

*sully glowtoads*: tbh the place that yaoi takes in my life is always reflective of the tools I need(ed) to communicate. like many, I was first introduced to yaoi as a teenager, but I went to a girls' school and had little exposure to boys — the only other gender that I knew (that I didn't know). at that point I was really struggling with defining a/my gender identity in isolation: all I knew was that I liked girls, but how could I do that AS a girl? I didn't like myself; but I still liked people who looked and acted

and existed like me? it felt big and vacuous and like it would swallow me whole if I looked at it too closely, but I had to examine it at some point.

so yaoi was my language, in the most structuralist sense — it gave me signifiers that were external, pointing outward rather than inside me, and that was safe to think about. and yet the signifiers were of tangible effect upon myself, because yaoi is always about connection and relations in some way, and in connecting with yaoi as a framework I was, in fact, being yaoi. I know now that it's Derrida's concept of *différance*, of being different and of deferring meaning, that meant yaoi was shaping how I thought about myself — even looking out, even deliberately looking at things that I felt were different to me, I was still looking at myself, talking about myself. I wouldn't say I was consciously mapping yaoi onto my own life; still, inhabiting a different world with different signs meant that I didn't have to look at mine, and in doing so I think I gave myself that sounding board I so desperately needed. again, I went to a girls' school — the boys I knew were either my relatives, who I didn't really want to be, or the yobs at my mosque, who I was navigating comp-het feelings towards as well. yaoi took me away from the mess of my life at 13/14/15, and gave me language to do so. it was both real and unreal, and the relief provided by both of those dichotomous states is integral to my understanding of yaoi.

but I did not have the clarity on yaoi that I have now! at the time I just needed emotion, and yaoi was emotion. I use the metaphor of language to explain what yaoi was to me, but it really just stayed with me as pictures, images, feelings. it fascinates me to see people talk so eloquently about an experience that has always been nebulous and ubiquitous to me. I could never talk about yaoi; it just was. so I feel very privileged to be in a space where I'm encouraged to give meaning to a formative experience by verbalising it. the true yaoi, in the end, was the friends we made along the way.

*zarinthel*: It's a bit weird to put it like this but to me I enjoyed (and still do enjoy) yaoi because of its separation from the self. Like my Platonic Ideal of love is something that exists but doesn't have anything to do with me, so naturally when I encountered yaoi I was like well this is the ideal-- love that cannot include me. My other biggest preference being for harem protagonists that were consistently portrayed as disliking being touched/ hit on, obviously for the sake of stretching the harem plot but to me that 'obviously' simply didn't exist. The state of being imposed on was

something I found relatable, and thus managed to relate to a character that otherwise had nothing to do with me.

But it was also much uglier than just watching yaoi because there's an inevitability about watching harem that tells you that this state of being-- that rejecting all comers is not natural, that it will end. That it will not be respected. So even as something I liked to read I can't say that it was nearly as good of a time as reading yaoi because the implication became very ugly to me. But it also leads to different complaints about yaoi that I used to voice a lot-- aka, lack of 'top' pov. Reading about love as the person who is pursued was simply not as interesting to me as reading from the perspective of the pursuer-- a distinction that completely flips when I read het.

But anyway, this unites in me specifically enjoying things the farther and farther they get from reality. I've never cared when something-- either a sex position or a bizarre plot device or a weird proportion on the body-- exists, because I like the disconnect and in fact prefer it that way. There is no issue with suspension of disbelief because believing romance itself exists is an act of very happy faith for me-- there's no way for me to know, but it's a fantasy that I do have to believe in, because it would be truly sad if it weren't there.

*crossy*: The separation from the self is really how I feel about it... As an aromantic/asexual/agender person I have had a very fraught relationship with, well, relationships. Romance has the sensation of "this is a girl's media, so it appeals to you, a girl", which evolves into "as a girl, you must be interested in romance", which evolves into "a girl in love must be heterosexual". I had so much anxiety over it, I was having chronic intrusive thoughts about sexual encounters with every boy I looked at, which was disorienting because it had all the identifiers of "daydreaming about boys", but uh, they were intrusive thoughts. I was constantly anxious and disgusted with myself without being able to understand why.

So there was a lot of appeal in yaoi as a complete part and parceled Other. Zar puts it best with "love that cannot include me". There was also no expectation of involvement from the reader. I think I'd describe it as a sort of reduction to men as a default, and the yaoi as expression of appeal. Fetishization as literally turning men into a fetish object, a source of disproportionate commitment, divorced from being like, people. They are "Men [Oh, You Know]". I think this is why Yuri is considered a different

species, because women can never be the default, and in the act of not being the default, exert weight through their mere presence. Men as the default is also my reasoning for why, when dreaming up throwaway romance concepts, it will always be a stupid yaoi. It's a thoughtless tendency to be beholden to the Fetishization Of The Male Status.

And so like, this character appeal, generic signifiers and all that, is also why I always felt uncomfortable reading gay comics. Because what is depicted in gay comics is "attraction", rather than appeal. Like, the men they're drawing aren't charming concepts acting out sexy ideals, they are in of themselves sexy. They're not men as the Default, they are men as the Focus, a decision to draw men because they are uniquely attractive AS men. I avoid these visuals the same way I avoid hetero romance; it is expecting an Understanding of me that does not exist. I have the instinct to prioritize men, but I DON'T find real men attractive.

*tsbirt*: I'm hearing a lot about yaoi as being something that helps voice something deeply felt--or deeply not felt as the case may be--a something that is a reality that precedes yaoi. I'm curious if any of you have experienced the opposite: yaoi preceding reality. Elliott alluded to this in his discussion of yaoi and trans timelines, which I took in the direction of yaoi voicing an unconscious fantasy, but I'd like to pick up on the idea Sully mentioned, that yaoi was a "[signifier]... of tangible effect upon myself."

Feel free to consider any of the following: How might yaoi be a verb? How might yaoi produce reality? Is yaoi a form of a priori knowledge?

*kilelele*: In terms of personal experience or meaning, I have absolutely nothing of interest to contribute, or anything that I find personally interesting at any rate. But I think crossy's point about "appeal" rather than attraction is an interesting one. And I find zar's phrase of "love that cannot include me" particularly resonant. But at the same time, almost paradoxically, I think that the presence of "appeal" makes the yaoi relationship one that inherently involves you--to the point where you can cut out the other half of the yaoi couple if you so wish. I think we've all seen content of single male characters without suggestion of any other presence that made us think, "this is yaoi." And that yaoi dwells in the presentation, intent, and palpable feelings the artist has towards the character--not in the character itself, or in the act of drawing or writing a specific thing or in a specific way. I think yaoi can most certainly "precede" "reality" in this way,



though not in a way that creates a meaningful answer to that question.

*shrimpchipsss*: It's so nice to meet some of my yaoi scholar contemporaries!

I think all the time about this quote from the manga *I Want to Be a Wall* which is about the lavender marriage between an asexual fujoshi and a gay man who is in love with his best friend. When pondering what she likes about yaoi, Yuriko thinks, "it's a whole other world, a place that has nothing to do with me. I can pretend like I don't feel out of place. It's another 'safe space' for me."

Personally, I think yaoi has nothing to do with me since I am a somewhat aroace bisexual woman and not a mlm but also that it has everything to do with me because of the frameworks and tangible effect it can have like Sully points out.

Yaoi as a priori knowledge probably definitely happened to me during the period when I was only really out to a handful of (mostly cishet) friends. I was reading some fic in which the characters talked frankly and fondly among themselves about their queerness and the safety and solidarity they had with each other eviscerated me because I knew that if I carried on as I was, mostly closeted, I would never have that kind of connection or community with anyone. The breakdowns I had over this were a turning point for me! It isn't that yaoi showed me that these worlds existed—I knew they did—but what it did was reveal how deeply I longed for them.

I talk more about reparative reading and the way yaoi enjoyers might read yaoi as a way to imagine the realities they hope for in my essay. Reading yaoi produces reality if you let it affect you that way. That's queer praxis!

BONUS:

“i think it’s gay to fight people in mechs. you’re externalizing your symbolic body to touch that of another man?”

The literary influence of mobile suit gundam is unparalleled.”

- chemiosmotic





## WHAT IS ANALYSIS? A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

hi everyone. that's right. we made it to the second volume, the analysis issue. i'm so happy you're here with me.

i wrote once, "i think we should reclaim the term dark academia from people who like plaid skirts and cambridge and it should be only for people who post yaoi freud essays on tumblr." and i actually was serious. to me, dark academia means creating your most vibrant, fulfilling, and expressive work outside of school, rather than in it. it means saying no to norms of rigor and exclusivity and saying yes to yaoi and fun.

so that was the idea. hopefully we've managed to feature analytic content with a fun and perverse edge, and maybe even placed the anal in analysis. as to what that even means:

i was really inspired by leo bersani's iconic quote about hiv summoning up the "seductive and intolerable image of a grown man, legs high in the air, unable to refuse the suicidal ecstasy of being a woman." what a way to capture our cultural baggage and its glamour, its violence, and its contradictions. so i asked my friends to create works about all the dark, dirty, and sexy things that are deeply yaoi analytic objects.

this zine is the result of that call. i hope you enjoyed our reclaimed dark academia.

xoxo tshirt