

FINDING THE POWER OF THE EROTIC IN JAPANESE YURI MANGA

by

Sarah Thea Arruda Wellington

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Abstract

Yuri is the genre of Japanese manga and anime that focuses on romantic and sexual relationships between girls and women. Although what is perceived to be its counterpart, yaoi or BL, has received a great amount of scholarly attention in the past years, yuri, however, is still a nascent topic in academic discourse. Upon briefly delineating Japanese prewar girls' culture and its influence on the romantic and erotic spaces found in female-authored manga made for a female audience, several female-authored narratives from the erotic yuri manga anthology *Yuri hime wildrose* are analyzed in regards to their depiction of relationship dynamics, the female body, and the space in which both are explored. These yuri narratives are considered in relation to Audre Lorde's ideas of the erotic to show that despite their lack of explicit lesbian identity and social realism, they manage to carve out a positive erotic space that is ultimately empowering for female readers.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Sarah Wellington.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Preface	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Notes	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Origins and Development of Yuri Manga	7
1.1 Prewar Girls' Culture in Meiji and Taishō	9
1.2 Space and Homogendered Relations	14
1.3 1970s Revolution of Shōjo Manga and Beyond	18
1.4 Female Sexuality and the Female Body.....	21
Chapter 2: Erotic Yuri Manga and the Creation of a Female-centered Space	27
2.1 <i>Yuri hime wildrose</i> and the Framing of the Erotic	28
2.2 Relationships, Gender, and Power Dynamics.....	33
2.3 Representation of the Female Body and Sexual Desire.....	42
2.4 Establishing a Safe Space for the Erotic	48
Conclusion	54
Works Cited	57

Notes

Japanese names are written in Japanese order with surname first, except in the case of people who publish work in the English language and use the English name order. Titles of Japanese works are written in a transliteration of Japanese followed by their translation in parentheses. In the cases when there is a commercially available English language translation of the work, the translation will appear italicized. The titles of the short manga stories that constitute the thesis' primary sources are often in English in the anthology examined here. Those written in the Roman alphabet will be written as is, including in lowercase or uppercase, just as presented in the anthology. If the title consists of English words written in *katakana*, the works will be transliterated first and provided with the corresponding title in English in parentheses.

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Introduction

Yuri (百合) refers to the genre of Japanese manga and anime that focuses on the depiction of romantic and sexual relationships between girls and women. The term *yuri*, translated as lily in English, became associated with female-female desire after the term *yurizoku* (lily tribe) was used to refer to women-loving female readers of *Barazoku*, a magazine targeted at homosexual men, in the 1970s (Welker “Flower Tribes” 215). Since women who loved women did not have a forum of their own, in 1976 the editor of the magazine, Itō Bungaku, created the term *yurizoku* as a female equivalent of *barazoku* (rose tribe) and included within the magazine a column section titled *Yurizoku no heya* (lily tribe room). It was thus Itō who helped to popularize the term, even if he was not the first to use it (Welker “Flower Tribes” 218-9). As we shall see, the issue of space is crucial to the argument of this thesis, and it is noteworthy that Itō provided his lesbian readers a “room of their own” in his magazine.

The theme of “love between girls” became a frequent element of *shōjo* manga (manga for girls) in the 1970s, at about the same time that *shōnen-ai* (boys’ love, a genre focusing on romantic and/or erotic relationships between young men) also became common (Fujimoto “Yuri no kishikata” 101). Even though what are now considered the first *yuri* manga were published as long ago as the 1970s, the usage of the term *yuri* to describe materials dealing with female-female love only truly became solidified when the specialty magazine, *Yuri shimai* (Yuri/lily sisters), came into being in 2003. The first magazine of its kind dedicated to this type of manga, *Yuri shimai*’s debut seems to have reinforced the idea of *yuri* as a distinct genre of manga. Although *Yuri shimai* ceased publication in 2005, it was picked up by the publisher Ichijinsha in the same year, and reborn under the name of *Comic yuri hime*. As the most popular manga magazine dedicated to *yuri*, it has continued to concretize the idea of *yuri* as its own genre.

Fan-scholar Erica Friedman is a lover of yuri and self-identified lesbian who is well known among English-language yuri fans for her pioneering efforts in bringing attention and exposure to yuri in North America. She defines yuri in the following way:

Yuri can describe any anime or manga series (or other derivative media, i.e., fan fiction, film, etc.) that shows intense emotional connection, romantic love or physical desire between women. Yuri is not a genre confined by the gender or age of the audience, but by the *perception* of the audience. (Yuricon “What is Yuri?”)

The diversity that Friedman is pointing to is reflected in the reader demographic of *Comic yuri hime*. According to a mail survey, 73 percent of *Comic yuri hime* readers are female, while 27 percent are male (Fujimoto “Yuri no kishikata” 108). Furthermore, readers vary in age and sexual orientation (Nagaike “The Sexual and Textual Politics”). However, the diversity does not end at readership. One feature of yuri manga is the range of authors, who are male as well as female, and have varying sexual orientations. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that commercial publications such as *Comic yuri hime* feature a majority of women authors writing with a female audience in mind, as is suggested by the readership demographics.¹ The stories featured in *Comic yuri hime* often depict very strong emotional relationships, for the most part romantic, but not necessarily erotic.² As Kazumi Nagaike points out, even though sexual desire is not absent from *Comic yuri hime*, the depictions of sex are usually limited to kissing and the touching of breasts, thus emphasizing the importance placed upon the “spiritual female-female bond” (“The Sexual

¹ Ichijinsha also published between 2007 and 2010 a side magazine to *Comic yuri hime* named *Comic yuri hime S*, which was explicitly targeted at a male audience. This further suggests that *Comic yuri hime* is primarily seen as “for women.”

² Here erotic is meant as that which pertains to the depiction and the arousal of sexual desire, which means that it will often contain explicitly sexual material. This concept will be defined in more detail in Chapter 2.

and Textual Politics”).³ Starting in 2007, Ichijinsha began the publication of an erotic yuri anthology titled *Yuri hime wildrose*, which includes a variety of short stories, most of which do feature explicitly erotic scenes. The anthology is a series with multiple volumes, and of on-going publication.

Critics writing about the yuri genre have commented that explicit sex is largely absent from most stories.⁴ Narratives from the erotic yuri anthology *Yuri hime wildrose*, therefore, seemingly fill a gap in the normal yuri genre by providing the depiction of sex scenes. Erica Friedman, however, has criticized *Yuri hime wildrose* for its narratives. She argues that besides having shallow plot and character development, they are also disappointing for their lack of “lesbian identification” (Friedman “Yuri hime wildrose 1”). Thus the stories in *Yuri hime wildrose* have been dismissed for their lack of political engagement and lack of concern for the social reality of female-female love, as well as, in some cases, a low level of plot and character development, focusing more heavily on sex. In this study, however, I argue for an alternative way of reading such narratives, to show how they can be empowering to female readers, regardless of sexual identity/preference, age and other aspects of individual identity. By opening up a safe “space” for erotically charged fantasy, explicit yuri manga allow women to access an anti-patriarchal, powerfully female-centric imaginative world.

In this thesis I analyze six narratives from *Yuri hime wildrose*, delineating some of their prominent features in order to characterize the kind of erotic space they establish. (My definition of “erotic” comes from Audre Lorde, and will be discussed in detail below.) I believe that most of the narratives in *Yuri hime wildrose* provide a safe space for the exploration of female sexuality outside the bounds of the patriarchal, heteronormative framework that both censors

³ Spiritual love is used in contrast with sexual love.

⁴ Kazumi Nagaike (“The Sexual and Textual Politics of Japanese Lesbian Comics”) and Tamaki Sana (“Ironna yuri ga sakeba ii”) are examples.

female eroticism and pleasure, and enforces what Adrienne Rich terms “compulsory heterosexuality” (645). This space is one that allows for girls and women to feel empowered, due to its specific characteristics. By employing the ideas of scholars such as Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, and Fujimoto Yukari, I will provide an alternative way of reading the manga stories, one that can highlight the ways in which such erotic narratives can help readers to “fly free” of the constraints of their everyday lives (Vincent 64).⁵

Manga written by and for females that feature romantic and sexual relationships between *boys and men*—referred to as boys’ love (BL), *shōnen-ai*, or *yaoi*—have received increased scholarly attention in the past few decades. For some reason, however, yuri manga have rarely been the subject of rigorous academic research, in either English or Japanese. Very recently, the Japanese literary magazine *Yuriika* (Eureka) dedicated its December 2014 issue to the theme of “yuri,” which the editors present as a groundbreaking foray into the study of the genre that shows a deepening interest in the analysis of yuri manga and the social phenomena surrounding it. The *Yuriika* volume certainly represents a broadening and focusing of the discussion of yuri, both in public and academic discourse.

However, there is still much untapped potential within yuri studies, given the relative scarcity of the scholarship on the subject. In recent years, some work has been dedicated to the topic. In the English language, Kazumi Nagaike has written an article on yuri that focuses heavily on the magazine *Comic yuri hime* (“The Sexual and Textual Politics of Japanese Lesbian Comics,” 2010). Fan-scholar Erica Friedman, who runs the “oldest and most comprehensive blog on yuri” has written countless posts and articles on a variety of yuri-related topics. Scholars such as James Welker (“Beautiful, Borrowed, and Bent,” 2006; “Flower Tribes and Female Desire,”

⁵ Although Vincent is referring to BL when he talks about manga providing a space for readers’ imaginations to “fly free,” this is also applicable to the reading of yuri narratives.

2011), Mark McLelland (“The Love Between ‘Beautiful Boys’,” 2000), and Akiko Mizoguchi (“Male-Male Romance,” 2003) have touched upon related issues, although focused primarily on shōnen-ai, yaoi, and BL.⁶ Scholars such as Jennifer Robertson (*Takarazuka*, 1998), Michiko Suzuki (*Becoming Modern Women*, 2010), and Deborah Shamoon (*Passionate Friendship*, 2012) have done extensive work on the history of women’s self-expression, gender, and shōjo culture in prewar Japan. In Japanese, Fujimoto Yukari has analyzed shōjo manga in a number of articles and books, some of which address the issue of female same-sex depictions (*Watashi no ibasho*, 1998; “Yuri no kishikata,” 2014). This thesis will build on the work of all of these scholars to add new information and analysis to the growing body of yuri scholarship.

The first chapter presents an overview of the historical background surrounding the origin of and influences on the yuri genre, its development up to the present date, and how such background can inform our understanding of the primary sources under analysis in the second chapter. This overview starts with prewar girls’ culture (*shōjo bunka*), moving on to the developments that took place in manga in the 1970s, and some of the major works from the 1990s that deal with same-sex relationships between girls or women and are considered important early examples of the yuri genre, as well as the yuri magazines that solidified the genre in the first decade of this century.

The second chapter begins with a discussion of the terms “erotic” and “lesbian,” taking inspiration from the writings of Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich. Then it introduces additional information concerning the anthology *Yuri hime wildrose* from which the primary sources under analysis come. It then proceeds to the analysis of selected erotic yuri narratives according to different themes, bearing in mind the issues of eroticism’s relationship to female empowerment

⁶ According to Akiko Mizoguchi, the term boys’ love (BL) was adopted in the 1990s by publishers of content featuring same-sex relationships between men aimed at a female demographic (50-1).

(Lorde), the complexity of female sexuality (Rich), and the importance of a free fantasy space for women (Fujimoto).

In the conclusion I revisit the ideas presented in the previous two chapters. Returning to the discussion of space and fantasy, I discuss the tools that can lead us to recognize what the erotic narratives in *Yuri hime wildrose* can do for girls and women (of whatever sexual identity, including lesbians). I argue that the texts in *Yuri hime wildrose*, although seemingly shallow in terms of plot, character development, and issues of lesbian identity, have tremendous potential in carving out a positive erotic feminine space that serves as a vehicle for the safe exploration of female sexuality, sexual desire, and sexual fantasy. While necessarily limited in scope, I believe that this thesis will shed light on aspects of Japanese popular culture and visual erotic narrative in general, particularly possibilities for the creation of an erotic literary and visual space for women in the contemporary period.

Chapter 1: The Origins and Development of Yuri Manga

“Let the girl stay in her world of dreams, her gentle spirit sleeping for as long as possible.”

Yoshiya Nobuko, 1925 (qtd in Suzuki 42)

Akuta Rinko’s “Promise” (2010) is a short yuri narrative that focuses on Chihiro and Ayaka, two feminine high school girls at an all-girls’ school. As the student council president, Chihiro is popular with fellow students, which is demonstrated at the beginning of the story when she is accosted in the hallway by two students who give her cookies made in home economics class (*Yuri hime wildrose* 5, 101-3). Upon reaching her destination, the student council room, Chihiro finds the door unlocked, and is surprised to find her lover Ayaka sleeping inside. As the reader comes to know later, Ayaka had stolen the key to the room. As they begin interacting, it is revealed that Chihiro and Ayaka have matching rings as a symbol of their love and commitment to each other. However, instead of wearing it on her finger, Chihiro keeps hers hidden by wearing it as a necklace, because she believes that as student council president she needs to set a good example (106-109). Ayaka is jealous due to Chihiro’s popularity with other girls. Despite the conflict, they make up and end up having sex, after which Ayaka makes Chihiro promise that she will at least wear the ring on her finger outside school (112-6).

Although sexually explicit (as is appropriate to its inclusion in the erotic yuri anthology *Yuri hime wildrose*), the story includes a number of narrative and visual characteristics as well as thematic motifs that arose in what is known as the prewar girls’ culture (*shōjo bunka*) that emerged in Japan in the first two decades of the twentieth century: a homogender relationship, an enclosed homosocial space, schoolgirl identity, and sentimental emotionality.⁷ Because

⁷ The element of “sentimental emotion” constitutes, in Dollase’s view, a cultural/social code that establishes “Shōjo’s imaginary community.” (731).

contemporary yuri manga derive from shōjo bunka, it is necessary to begin with an overview of that phenomenon.

In fact, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, Japan saw the emergence of a recognizable girls' culture, which would have a pivotal influence on the development of shōjo manga (manga for girls) in the second half of the century. Yuri manga arose out of the tradition of the shōjo manga genre, as what are now considered the first yuri manga were created in the 1970s by women with a young female audience in mind (Fujimoto "Yuri no kishikata" 101). Given the fact that yuri derives from the shōjo manga tradition, the origins of the yuri genre can be traced back as far as the early twentieth century. One aspect that ties yuri very closely with the girls' culture of prewar Japan (that is, prior to the beginning of the Pacific War in 1941), is the abundant depiction of female-female romantic relationships, which mirrored real-world romantic relationships between adolescent girls within the context of a school environment (Shamoon "Situating the Shōjo" 139-140). There was at the time a combination of socio-cultural conditions that allowed for the development of such relationships.

Thanks to the myriad of developments brought about by the modernization of Japan and the influx of Western culture and ideology into the nation starting in the Meiji period (1868-1912), in the early twentieth century Japanese girls gained a world of their own: a world of flowers and dreams. Characterized by sentimentality and romanticism, this was a private universe that only girls belonged to, one that was closed off to society as a whole. One of the most important venues for disseminating this world of flowers and dreams was the shōjo magazine, several examples of which were available by the 1930s. Despite the economic disparity of the girl readers, and their widespread physical locations in different parts of Japan, these magazines created an imagined community that linked them all within the context of shōjo

culture. Within these magazines girls and young women could find many stories of passionate, sometimes erotic friendships between fictional girls inhabiting girls-only spaces.

Relationships between girls permeated both the visual and narrative aesthetic of shōjo cultural products (magazines and artwork), and are characterized by what Deborah Shamoan calls an “aesthetic of sameness.” Today this girls’ culture is seen as having heavily influenced not only the genre of manga known as shōjo, but also the genre known as yuri, which arises from the same tradition. In the remainder of this chapter I will provide a brief introduction to some of its most important and significant socio-cultural aspects.

1.1 Prewar Girls’ Culture in Meiji and Taishō

The Meiji Period (1868-1912) saw the emergence of new ideologies concerning women’s education and place in society. As such, one of the ideologies expounded in regards to women’s social/national function was that of “good wife, wise mother” (*ryōsai kenbo*). The influx of ideas from Western nations in education, politics and psychology alerted lawmakers to the necessity of educating women so that they could be wise mothers who would raise their children well (Dollase 725). As Sarah Frederick explains, “the school was seen as the best location to do this well, replacing superstition with scientific and nationally unified standards of behavior for girls and women” (68). This is why in 1899 lawmakers passed the Higher Girls’ School Act (*kōtō jogakkō rei*) to expand education for girls. This Act allowed for a proliferation in the establishment of schools for secondary education dedicated to girls, with significant increases in the number of schools in the late 1910s and early 1920s (Suzuki 23).

The proliferation of higher girls’ schools facilitated the creation of a new female identity, that of the schoolgirl (*jogakusei*). As Suzuki points out, schoolgirls “captured the cultural imagination as potential partners in romantic (heterosexual) love” as can be observed in the high

literature of the time (23). Yet, schoolgirls spent their time in a sex-segregated environment and outside of it were discouraged from engaging in socialization with the opposite sex (23). Thus, the school environment, inherently homosocial, was a space of its own that lent itself to the development of female-female romance. In many ways, this school environment facilitated the development of these relationships and yet it is important to understand that the school was still a space that would be a “source of her potential goodness” in later becoming a good wife (Frederick 68).

The concept of the schoolgirl became intrinsically connected with the concept of the *shōjo*. Although it is translated as “girl” in English, in Japanese the concept “*shōjo*” has subtle shades. The term, which was coined in the Meiji period to describe unmarried girls and women (Robertson 64-5), has the connotation of an adolescent girl in the liminal space between childhood and adulthood (Shamoon 2). Jennifer Robertson brings to the fore the fact that the term means a “‘not-quite-female’ female”⁸ pointing to the transitional nature and liminality of the *shōjo* (65). Not only that, Robertson also indicates that one of the connotations associated with the term was the idea of someone of “heterosexual inexperience and homosexual experience” (Robertson 65). Frederick also describes the *shōjo* in nuanced terms:

... [t]he *shōjo* always seems larger than life, representing a conflicting set of ideas and anxieties about gender, sexuality, consumption, education, and Japanese culture. As such, she has always had a complicated connection to the “bad” and the “good.” Paradoxically, even though the *shōjo* embodies a hyper-feminine ideal, she also poses an ominous threat to the feminine sphere. (Frederick 67)

⁸ Reflected by the way the word is written: 少女.

Frederick goes on to relate that “the early image of the *shōjo* was threatening because she was outside the family system; she inhabited a liminal space between the close supervision of her parents and that of a husband after marriage” (Frederick 67). This period coincided with a girl’s attendance at a higher girls’ school, which also shows how the two identities—*shōjo* and *jogakusei*—became connected.

In 1911 a tragic incident concerning the double suicide (*shinjū*) of two higher girls’ school graduates who loved each other necessarily put the topic of female-female love in the forum of public discourse, forcing educators and the public at large to assess whether such relationships were something dangerous or not (Suzuki 24). The reaction to the incident reflects the anxieties caused by the new female identity of the schoolgirl, and her existence within a closed homosocial space beyond parental supervision. As expected, there were people on both sides of the debate, which incorporated some of the sexology discourses that had been imported from abroad beginning in the late Meiji period. One important notion that emerged from the attempt to understand and analyze these female-female relationships contended that there were two kinds: one that was “normal” and “harmless” and “pure”—*dōseiai*—no more than a passionate friendship, between two feminine girls; and, on the other hand, one that was unacceptable, the *ome*, in which one of the girls had an “inverted” gender and displayed masculine tendencies, exerting a negative influence, it was believed, on the typically younger, more feminine girl (Suzuki 24-5).

Thus, the *ome* relationship became associated with pathology. As Jennifer Robertson points out, the former type of relationship, referred to as *dōseiai*, is homogender while the latter, *ome*, is heterogender (69). This distinction is extremely important not only due to the fact that it showcases the heavy policing of women’s sexuality, but also because the different types of

relationship and their reception are reflected subsequently in influential realms of popular culture production such as shōjo manga and the popular all-female theatre group, the Takarazuka Revue.

First established in 1913, the Takarazuka Revue was founded in the hot spring resort of Takarazuka by Kobayashi Ichizō (1873-1957) as a solution to his “financial woes” after he had failed to maintain a successful spa in that location (Robertson 4). In the Takarazuka Revue, girls are divided into those who play exclusively male roles, the *otokoyaku*, and those who play female roles, the *musumeyaku*. Upon successful acceptance into the Takarazuka Music Academy, the student actors are assigned their “secondary” gender based primarily on physical and “sociopsychological” criteria and then spend two years training hard to learn how to correctly perform Takarazuka-style “masculinity” and “femininity” (Robertson 10-3). Thus, even though all the parts were and are still played by women, the main relationships being showcased are essentially heterogender, just as in what was designated the ome relationship. Robertson relates that the Takarazuka Revue was subject to some criticism in the media, including one pertinent example of a newspaper article from 1930 claiming that the ome relationship could find its genesis in women playing men’s roles (Robertson 69).

Kobayashi strongly defended the Takarazuka Revue against critics who said that the *otokoyaku* and their adoring female fans were deviant, claiming that its strict training helped to prepare its members—both *musumeyaku* and *otokoyaku* alike—to be proper wives in proper heterosexual households (Robertson 70). Nonetheless, Robertson presents a myriad of examples that show that Takarazuka was never a simple and straightforward training ground for properly socialized wives, but was, on the contrary, subversive in its own ways. The popularity and prevalence of the Takarazuka Revue certainly helped to further the imaginary space of girls’ culture as a “closed, homosocial space” (Shamoon 138). Robertson also emphasizes that it was

significant that otokoyaku were perceived as and referred to as *chūsei*, one of the terms for androgyny coined at the beginning of the twentieth century, meaning “neutral” or “in-between” (50).

However, it was primarily the type of relationships referred to as *dōseiai* (same-sex love between similarly gendered girls and young women) that became a cornerstone of *shōjo bunka*, with an influence that has lasted into the contemporary period. This pairing or type of relationship was known under different names: one of the most common being “S” (*esu kankei*) or “S Class” (*esu kurasu*). Robertson suggests that the “S” probably stands for “sister” (Robertson 68).

It is undeniable that same-sex/same-gender love (*dōseiai*) between girls became the most prominent fictional motif of prewar girls’ culture, but besides being depicted in girls’ fiction and art, this type of relationship also existed between real girls. Despite the fact that some educators tried to prevent such relationships between girls, it is also the case that “girls having romances and crushes among themselves were seen by some as a positive training ground for future kindnesses to husband and children” (Frederick 68).

These relationships were in great part normalized by girls’ magazines (magazines targeting the then relatively new demographic of *shōjo*), without which the creation of a distinctive girls’ culture and its propagation would very likely not have been possible. Deborah Shamoon points out the importance of these magazines in the solidification of a unified and recognizable girls’ culture. The aesthetic created by the stories and illustrations found in prewar girls’ magazines helped to establish and normalize *dōseiai* through depictions of same-sex (and importantly same-gender) romance between girls, which featured an “aesthetic of sameness” (Shamoon “Situating the *Shōjo*” 137). Shamoon points out that it was a recognizable aesthetic,

frequently found in the works of illustrators such as Takehisa Yumeji, Takabatake Kashō, and Nakahara Junichi (Shamoon 58). However, this aesthetic was not merely expressed in visual art. In literature, too, shōjo culture and its aesthetic of sameness was pervasive in the Taishō (1912–1926) and early Shōwa (1926–1989) periods. Girls’ fiction had the power to provide adolescent girls with a feminine space of their own in which they could fantasize about their sexuality, through the depiction of homogender romantic and erotic relationships.

1.2 Space and Homogender Relations

The aforementioned ideologies and discourses emerging in the Meiji and Taishō periods, especially the ones involving state policies and regulations, were necessarily male-authored, with little or no input from women themselves. However, the emerging space of girl’s culture allowed girls and young women to have “an [imagined] independent community for girls, free from intrusion by male educational codes or standards” (Dollase 727). We find the same “independent shōjo community” in fiction by female authors such as Yoshiya Nobuko (1896-1973). Yoshiya was one of the most important figures in establishing the legitimacy of romance between girls as well as one of the most prominent Japanese writers of the 20th century, although for a long time her work was dismissed by academics due to the nature of her fiction and the scholarly prejudice against popular literature (Shamoon 71). The genre of girls’ fiction first arose in Japan in 1897, but it was initially comprised mostly of didactic tales that taught girls to be virtuous (Suzuki 35). Yoshiya Nobuko’s work can be credited with invigorating the genre, through her depiction of romantic relationships between girls and by linking them with girls’ development and modern love ideology (Suzuki 34-5). She is especially known for her contribution to the genre of fiction for girls (that is, not women), her most famous work being the collection of short stories *Hana*

monogatari (Flower Tales), most of which were first serialized in the girls' magazine *Shōjo Gahō* (Girls' Graphic) starting in 1916 (Suzuki 35).

Most stories in *Hana monogatari* are not sexually explicit, but they often do deal with the romantic affection between girls, frequently implying sensual relations (Dollase 742-3). One narrative found in *Hana monogatari* is "Kibara" (*Yellow Rose*, 1923, recently translated into English by Sarah Frederick). "Kibara" tells the story of Miss Katsuragi, a recently graduated teacher who falls in love with a student named Reiko in the school at which she has just started teaching. Even though they have made plans to go live together in Tokyo and then to go study in America, the plans are destroyed when Reiko is forced by her family into an arranged marriage. The story ends with Miss Katsuragi wandering from one place to another in her life in the United States, sad and depressed due to having lost the one person she truly loved. While this particular story does not end in the death of one of the romantic partners, it still sets a pessimistic, hopeless tone for narratives of same-sex love, which was picked up again in the 1970s in many of the female-authored manga that depict relationships between girls/young women.⁹

One story from *Hana monogatari* that distinctly addresses the romantic and sensual relationship of two girls is "Hikage no hana" (Flowers in Shade), whose protagonists are Tamaki and Masu. In the absence of Tamaki's father, the two girls meet in the dark where through Yoshiya's idiosyncratic coded language it is conveyed to the reader that they engage in sensuous acts. As Dollase points out, Tamaki's attraction to Masu seems to be connected with Masu's resemblance to Tamaki's dead mother's portrait, which hangs in her house. As Dollase infers, this means that it is highly likely that there is some resemblance between the two girls (742). In fact, Dollase claims that "in *Hanamonogatari*, sexuality and eroticism are exchanged

⁹ An example of one of Yoshiya Nobuko's stories that touch upon same-sex love and in which one of the characters dies is her 1925 story "Aru orokashiki mono no hanashi" (A tale of a certain foolish person).

narcissistically among girls” (742). As Shamooin points out, given that S relationships took place and were often depicted in the context of the school environment, it is inevitable that there was a certain aesthetic sameness, deriving from the fact that the girls’ uniforms made them quite similar to one another (37). Again we see here the “aesthetic of sameness” that characterizes shōjo culture and the fiction written about it.

One characteristic of Yoshiya Nobuko’s writing is her distinct style which has been called “ornate” (*bibun*), and which Dollase interprets as an *écriture féminine* (748). She makes unusual and abundant use of punctuation marks and ellipses, creating a visual impact in the form of dashes and dots. As Frederick points out, this idiosyncratic punctuation is extremely meaningful to the “pace and tension, sexual and otherwise, which pervades the text” (Frederick Introduction to *Yellow Rose*). Suzuki interprets this as Yoshiya’s encoding of a sort of stuttering language or stuttering narrative (Suzuki 41). Frederick on the other hand refers to them as epistemological gaps that open up Yoshiya’s texts to be read as extending beyond the platonic and spiritual into the erotic, since often the reader does not necessarily know what is omitted with the ellipses, and may well infer that they stand for sexual or erotic actions (Frederick Introduction *Yellow Rose*, n.p.). Regardless of the exact interpretation, it is clear that Yoshiya is doing something interesting with language. As Dollase states in reference to another story in *Hana monogatari*, “Kuchinashi no hana” (Gardenia), “[the s]hōjo’s eroticism is expressed without borrowing male expressions or heterosexual expressions” (741).

Robertson brings up the idea of a “dream world” (*yume no sekai*), associated with the usage of the neutral gender term *chūsei* (androgyny) to describe the roles played by the otokoyaku in the Takarazuka Revue. The dream world is described as a space that is “free from the constraints of fixed, dichotomous, and hierarchical gender roles” (Robertson 71). We can link

this with Yoshiya Nobuko's fiction itself, which critics argue produces a space of freedom for girls. Both Michiko Suzuki and Sarah Frederick discuss the significance of "space" in their respective analyses of Yoshiya's 1920 novel *Yaneura no nishojo* (Two Virgins in the Attic).

The novel, which Michiko Suzuki identifies as a *Bildungsroman*, deals with a young and somewhat immature girl named Akiko, who despite her age and being trained to be a teacher is very girl-like. Akiko ends up falling in love with the beautiful Miss Akitsu who lives in the attic room next to hers. Once they begin a relationship, they decide to tear down the wall between the rooms and to live together in the now larger attic room. Sarah Frederick points out the importance of the space that the girls inhabit in the story – the attic: "The attic lies outside of the Japanese family structure or other institutions (school, dormitory administration, church) and is even not quite Japanese; this is what will permit Akiko to explore different options for living as a young woman in the world" (Frederick 71). Thus, the physical space also becomes an important aspect of the wider conceptual space crafted by Yoshiya Nobuko.

One thing that makes this novel different from the kinds of stories found in *Hana monogatari* is that it gives hope that the kind of love shared by women, and the "purity" attached to it, does not have to be confined to the realm of girl-hood but that perhaps it can be carried over into adulthood. This is evidenced by the fact that at the end of the story, Akiko and Miss Akitsu consciously decide to leave the attic and go live together somewhere else. From our perspective, *Yaneura no nishojo* might seem like a much more empowering story than most narratives in *Hana monogatari*, but both works provide important imaginative possibilities for girls. Overall, it is significant that Yoshiya Nobuko managed to create these spaces through which girl readers could come to terms with themselves and their growth, as well as their romantic and erotic feelings through homosexual, homogender relationships.

Hana monogatari remained a best-selling book throughout the prewar period (Suzuki 35). As Michiko Suzuki notes, even though Yoshiya would later mostly stop depicting same-sex love, moving on to content for women that was instead heavily focused on *friendship* between women, her legacy is a great one (Suzuki 60-2). After all, she not only helped to legitimize the importance and significance of same-sex love in the development of a girl's life, she also helped to create a space in her fiction in which the shōjo could access a “female-centered eroticism”¹⁰ in a space of her own, away from the male gaze. The influence of her fiction lasted long beyond the prewar period, as we shall see. And the fact that a one-volume manga adaptation of some of the stories in *Hana monogatari* was released in 2014 confirms the idea that there is a heightened level of contemporary interest in her work (Frederick Intro).

1.3 1970s Revolution and Beyond

Deborah Shamoon sees shōjo manga as the primary medium through which the girls' culture that developed in the beginning of the twentieth century is continued today. The genre's wide, mainstream popularity and availability in Japan makes it so, but even beyond that, it is “an important site of cultural production” (Shamoon 101). As she points out, in the period following the war, the 1950s and 1960s, shōjo manga emerged as comics for children in works such as *Ribon no kishi* (*Princess Knight*, 1952-53) by Japan's most influential (male) *manga-ka* (manga artist), Tezuka Osamu. However, it was really in the 1970s that shōjo manga went through a period of new experimentation that culminated in the establishment of many of the tropes that are even today associated with the genre (Shamoon 102). Naturally, as the children who were growing up in the 1950s and 1960s became older, the demand for more mature manga topics that were more relevant to their experience also increased, leading to several of them becoming

¹⁰ Shamoon's term.

manga-ka. The great changes in the shōjo genre can be credited in large part to the work of a group of young women known as the Year 24 Group.

The Year 24 Group (*hana no nijūyonengumi*, also known in English as The Fabulous 49ers) derives its name from the fact that many of its members were born in 1949, or year 24 of the Shōwa period. They were a group of women manga artists who became known for creating psychologically complex stories for older teenagers that often broached the topics of politics and sexuality (Shamoon 102). Some prominent members include Takemiya Keiko, Ikeda Riyoko, Hagio Moto, and Yamagishi Ryoko. Takeuchi Osamu points out that it was then, in the 1970s, that shōjo manga turned from entertainment to a vehicle of self-expression (qtd. in Shamoon 102). Shamoon argues that one particular characteristic that shōjo manga inherited from prewar girls' magazines was "a narrative style that emphasized emotional interiority" (Situating the Shōjo 144).¹¹

The relatively free and creative atmosphere of the 1970s (simultaneous with the sexual revolution, the women's liberation movement, etc.), in some ways afforded manga artists more freedom in their depiction of heterosexual relationships than authors previously had. However, there were still social conventions (such as well entrenched gender roles) that stood in the way of a truly revolutionary way of depicting women in empowering positions, especially within the context of a heterosexual relationship. According to Shamoon, Ikeda Riyoko's *Berusaiyu no bara* (*The Rose of Versailles*, 1972-3) distinguishes itself from other shōjo manga from the same time period owing to its depiction of "adult heterosexual romance between equals" (120). A classic manga that has remained very popular throughout the decades, *The Rose of Versailles* was influential and revolutionary when it debuted in the 1970s. Despite its status and

¹¹ She cites Yoshiya Nobuko as one of the authors most responsible for creating a unique and recognizable prose style that influenced shōjo manga.

significance, the manga also shows how difficult it was to portray alternative heterosexual relationships in which both partners have equal standing (Shamoon 136).

The story initially focuses on the life of the young Marie Antoinette, but then shifts its focus to Oscar, the commander of the royal guard, a woman who dresses as a man and engages in a masculine gender performance in 18th century France. Oscar can be considered a very powerful female character, but it is worthwhile to note that her status and agency is clearly derived from her masculine gender performance, and the fact that she was raised as a boy rather than a girl, affording her much greater opportunity. This narrative tactic allowed Ikeda to produce a subtle but incisive critique of gender inequality. As Shamoon indicates, the fact that the manga includes heavy political undertones, namely Oscar going from the commander of the royal guard to a commoner sympathizer who ends up joining the cause of the French Revolution, is empowering in a story aimed at girls/women (121-23).

Beyond the social critiques enabled by Oscar's masculine gender, Ikeda also plays with the possibility of non-normative sexualities. Although everyone in the story knows that Oscar is "really" female, women are as attracted to her as men. In several scenes Ikeda toys with the idea of homosexual but heterogendered relationships between masculine Oscar and beautiful women at court, but, ultimately, Ikeda favored the relationship with Oscar's family servant and long-time friend André, which although heterosexual, is homogender (Shamoon 123-5). As Shamoon points out, in the end, even though the story seems to be very heteronormative due to the plot resulting in Oscar being in love with her male friend André, the relationship is queered by the fact that André loves her for her masculine traits as well as the rest of the package, and this is clearly a homogender romance (Shamoon 127). Unlike the homogender romances of early *shōjo*

bunka, however, which focused on pairings of *feminine* young women, here we have a homogender relationship between two *masculine* characters.¹²

The next great milestone in the thread of postwar manga took place in the 1990s, which saw the rise of shōjo manga that incorporated heterogender same-sex relationships. This is found, for example, in *Bishōjo Senshi Sērā Mūn* (1991, Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon), henceforth referred to as *Sailor Moon*. In *Sailor Moon*, two of the characters, Haruka and Michiru, respectively Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune, are lovers. In addition to that, three of the characters, the Sailor Stars, change from male/masculine to female/feminine between their everyday lives as music idols, to their real identity as warriors for righteousness, which adds a distinctly queer element to the story.¹³ It is highly significant that a franchise that was so very popular in both domestic and international markets included homosexual and queer characters.¹⁴ It is possible to say that it was partly due to its popularity and influence that later shōjo manga experimented even further with queering the norms of sex, gender, and sexuality, continuing on in the lineage of *The Rose of Versailles*.

1.4 Female Sexuality and the Female Body

In the 1970s, the depiction of *male* homosexual romance became a common subject in shōjo manga, in great part due to the challenges in depicting heterosexual relationships that were truly freeing and empowering:

¹² It is clear that within the context of the world within the story Oscar and André both conform to masculine norms, but it is undeniable that with their long flowing hair and beautiful faces both characters provide a visual image to the reader that has strong feminine aspects.

¹³ Sailor Moon was revolutionary in portraying a set of female protagonists who can fight evil without being masculine. They do not need to act like men to be extremely powerful warriors, and in fact find their power while being and acting strikingly feminine. This makes an interesting and empowering contrast to Oscar in *Rose of Versailles*.

¹⁴ Another influential manga and anime series is *Shōjo Kakumei Utena* (1996, *Revolutionary Girl Utena*), which features a homosexual heterogender pairing between the female protagonist Utena and her classmate Anthy.

The shōjo manga discourse on love and sex, however, is limited by the genre from which it developed. Shōjo manga in the 1970s developed as a safe place for girls to fantasize about their own sexuality and sexual and social agency through the use of same-sex romance, but that same rhetorical device made the portrayal of heterosexual, adult sexuality difficult. (Shamoon 136)

As Shamoon indicates, the theme of *male* same-sex romance would end up becoming an especially beneficial space for girls and women due to the freedom that it allowed for the exploration of female sexuality. James Welker analyzes Hagio Moto's *Toma no shinzō* (The Heart of Thomas, 1974), and Takemiya Keiko's *Kaze to ki no uta* (The Song of the Wind and the Tree, 1976), to show how in the early development of this genre the "visual and cultural borrowing" of Western aesthetics allowed for the exploration of alternative forms of identity and sexuality, outside the usual framework of heteronormativity ("Beautiful, Borrowed, and Bent" 841-2).

Similarly, in his attempt to explain why women's comics so commonly feature same-sex relationships between men, Mark McLelland draws attention to what Jennifer Robertson called the "dream world" (*yume no sekai*) in reference to the space of Takarazuka (19). Together with Welker's argument, this resonates with ideas previously discussed in relation to Yoshiya Nobuko's *Yaneura no nishojo*, whose interpretations by both Sarah Frederick and Michiko Suzuki indicate that by borrowing words and concepts that are not traditionally Japanese, the main characters that inhabit her story seem to be given freedom to explore their relationship in an alternative form of life choice that is outside the bounds of traditional female behavior.

Another aspect that seems to have facilitated the acceptance and increased popularity of shōnen-ai and BL narratives is the fact that when reading them girls (and women) are not forced

to deal with representations of the female body, which, according to Fujimoto Yukari, is a factor of great importance (“Where is My Place” 25). Although this applies heavily to female heterosexual readers, for whom the representation of the female body coupled with a male body would perhaps be too realistic or limiting (for reasons ranging from restrictive gender roles to physical aspects such as the possibility of becoming pregnant), this also seems to be the case for female readers who are not heterosexual. James Welker notes the influence of boys’ love comics on several members of the Japanese lesbian community and lesbians readings of the relationships depicted in such manga (“Beautiful, Borrowed, and Bent” 843).¹⁵

Furthermore, the comments of well-known manga-ka who have authored popular male-male manga for a female readership, also indicate a general feeling of discomfort that girls (and women) feel in relationship to their body, which hinders the depiction of the female body in manga. Fujimoto Yukari comments:

After all, doesn’t Hagio Moto say that when she was writing “Jūichigatsu no gimunajiumu” (1971, November gymnasium)— which was the model for her masterpiece *The Heart of Thomas* (1974, Tōma no shinzō), that set shōnen’ ai in motion— doesn’t she say that at the draft phase, she tried writing both a female and a male version, and she gave up the female version because it was too raw and fleshy? Girl readers do not want to embrace female bodies; they want to create a distance between themselves and sexual love. (*Mechademia* vol. 9, 25)

This issue of the female body is thus also presented as one of the reasons why the depiction of male homosexual love in shōjo manga was more readily popular than the depiction of female homosexual love.

¹⁵ For another example, yaoi/BL scholar Akiko Mizoguchi, writes that reading shōnen-ai manga as a young woman helped her to discover her own lesbian identity (49).

However, there are also other reasons inherent in the kind of space created by early manga narratives that depict female-female love, which can show why they might not have been as effective in creating the kind of space that lent itself to the free exploration of female sexuality. Yamagishi Ryōko's 1971 one-shot manga *Shiroi Heya no Futari* (The Two of the White Room) is usually considered to be the first "yuri" manga. The story is centered on two characters, Resine and Simone, who are placed together in one room of a boarding school. Seemingly not a very good match at first, the two girls end up falling in love after playing Juliet and Romeo in a school play. When a classmate finds them kissing in secret after the play, she uses the opportunity to spread malicious gossip about the two girls. Unlike Simone, Resine is unable to cope with the gossip and tries to repress her feelings by dating a boy. After a heated argument between Simone and Resine, the latter runs away to her aunt's house and becomes sick. Struck with grief by her inability to be with Resine, Simone is drinking at a bar, where she ends up purposely inciting one of her (former) male lovers to kill her. Upon recovering from her sickness, Resine hears the news of Simone's death and is heartbroken, although she vows to keep on living.

Thus, one of the characteristics of the erotic space found in such narratives is oppressiveness. The romantic and erotic desire between the characters is a matter of "forbidden desire" that must be kept secret at all costs, due to the risk of social disparagement. Here we see again the influence, conscious or not, of the kinds of female-female desire depicted in the work of Yoshiya Nobuko, which often ended in sadness or tragedy. It may also be significant that the title of the work, *Shiroi heya no futari*, literally means "the pair in the white room," suggesting again an enclosed and special space in which female-female love and eroticism can thrive, and outside of which it may be doomed—another echo of Yoshiya's work.

In these early “yuri” narratives (depicting same-sex relationships between women from the mid to late 1970s and early 1980s), Fujimoto Yukari identifies two dominant character/protagonist types: the “Crimson Rose” (*shinku no bara*) and the “Candy Girl” (*satōgashi*) (Fujimoto *Watashi no ibasho* 252-3; *Mechademia* vol. 9). The terms seem to depict an aesthetic similar to the Takarazuka Revue’s, featuring a heterogender relationship in which one protagonist is tall, cool, and masculine, while the other is very girly and ingenuous. As pointed out by Fujimoto, in such narratives the Crimson Rose is almost always destined to die, just as in *Shiroi Heya no Futari*. In Fujimoto’s description of this era we see many narratives that resemble those of Yoshiya’s fiction, in which passionate friendships and homogendered romantic relationships between girls are curtailed due to graduation, the pressure of marriage, or death.

Together with the anxieties concerning the female body, the depressing, pessimistic tone, and claustrophobic, oppressive space created by these female-female narratives might have made *shōnen-ai* and eventually BL narratives more appealing to female readers. After all, it was precisely for this reason that Takashima Rica, known for her yuri manga *Rica tte Kanji*, identified the need to create a work that was positive and cheerful, while dealing realistically with some of the issues faced by women who love women and same-sex couples (“Yuri no saibai” 118). The narratives found in the erotic anthology *Yuri hime wildrose* integrate some of the optimism found in Takashima’s work. However, while Takashima is concerned with bringing not only hopefulness but also *realism* to the depiction of lesbian romance and sex, the stories in *Yuri hime wildrose* provide free-floating fantasies that resonate more closely with the characteristics of prewar girls’ culture.

Overall, the prewar girls’ culture that flourished between the late Meiji and early Shōwa Periods has had a lasting influence on the genesis and development of shōjo manga, and

consequently, the yuri genre as well. Developments in girls' fiction, such as Yoshiya Nobuko's *Hana monogatari*, brought to the table a feminine sphere dedicated specifically to girls, characterized by a space that is enclosed and inherently homosocial and homogendered. As we have seen, at the same time a parallel female homoeroticism—characterized by less enclosure and a more generally bright and hopeful tone—was created by the Takarazuka Revue and later popular culture products such as *Sailor Moon*. While both strands of female homoeroticism influenced later yuri production, as we shall see, the former generally had the stronger influence on the imaginative space of yuri, perhaps because of the media pathologization of the kinds of same relationships common in the latter strand.

Yuri has developed a fair amount since the early shōjo manga narratives of the 1970s that dealt with female-female love. As mentioned in the introduction, this has been facilitated by the publication of specialty magazines such as *Comic yuri hime*, which have helped to further define yuri as its own genre. This has allowed for the establishment of yuri's own specific tropes and thematic motifs. The interest in yuri in the past few decades has grown, making yuri an object of study and debate both in and outside Japan. The *Yuriiika* volume dedicate to the current state of yuri culture (*yuri bunka*) certainly presents a groundbreaking widening of the discourse on yuri that will kindle dialogue in various parts of the world and surely continue to grow in times to come.

Chapter 2: Erotic Yuri Manga and the Creation of a Female-centered Space

“There are many kinds of power, used and unused, acknowledged or otherwise. The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling.”

—Audre Lorde (“Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power”)

The previous chapter traced the origins and development of yuri, situating it within the tradition of shōjo manga and, more recently, BL. It was shown that shōjo manga, which was largely influenced by prewar girls’ culture, experienced a revolution in the 1970s that established the genre as a vehicle for self-expression. The emergence of shōnen-ai manga in the 1970s was necessitated by the fact that, as pointed out by scholars Fujimoto, Welker, and McLelland, it allowed for the creation of a space in which women of different sexual orientations could safely explore their sexuality without the constraints of the representation of the female body. Welker shows how the placement of the shōnen-ai narratives far outside the familiar realms of Japanese society allowed space for the expression of erotic female sexuality, similar to the kind of space constructed in Yoshiya Nobuko’s novel *Yaneura no nishojo* (“Beautiful, Borrowed, and Bent” 841-2).

This chapter focuses on the analysis of several narratives from the erotic yuri anthology *Yuri hime wildrose*. It makes use of Audre Lorde’s idea of the erotic and Adrienne Rich’s idea of the lesbian continuum to show that, while these narratives might be easy to dismiss for their lack of politics and inattention to the social realities of female-female love, as well as for their thinly developed plot and character development, they are also positive because of the way in which they create a space that lends itself to females, of any sexuality, exploring the sexual aspects of Audre Lorde’s erotic.

2.1 *Yuri hime wildrose* and the Framing of the Erotic

Yuri hime wildrose is an anthology series published by Ichijinsha, the same publisher currently responsible for the most well known yuri magazine on the Japanese market, *Comic yuri hime*. It is a multi-volume anthology of short erotic yuri works, of ongoing publication, often featuring stories by authors who also have their work published in *Comic yuri hime*.¹⁶ It is worth pointing out that contributors include male as well as female manga-ka, although the majority typically skews female. These stories are compiled in this anthology precisely because they are erotic and sexually explicit, thus filling a gap for yuri readers, given that most stories in *Comic yuri hime* are very mild in terms of their sexual content (Nagaike “The Sexual and Textual Politics”). The cover of each volume indicates this clearly by claiming that the anthology offers “*onna no ko dōshi no jūshī rabu komikku*” (juicy girls’ same sex love comics). Similarly, the spine of the cover of volume 8 presents the content as “*ōru shinsaku gāruzu rabu ansorojī*” (girls’ love anthology of all new works), which establishes a connection with the term “girls’ love” (GL), a *wasei-eigo* term¹⁷ created in response to the widely used term “boys’ love” (BL).

Yuri hime wildrose is an interesting concept, because, similarly to *Comic yuri hime*, it manages to incorporate in each volume a breadth of voices. Each volume features at least seven different authors, female and male, each of whom gives their story a unique flavor derived from their own perspective and artistic style. In a sense this complicates the analysis of the anthology as a whole; however, by analyzing both the differences and similarities between stories, it is possible to establish some characteristics concerning what authors tend to do in depicting an erotic space where girls and young women explore their sexuality. The fact that the manga-ka often use pen-names and choose to keep a certain amount of discretion concerning their personal

¹⁶ The first volume was published in 2007. The latest volume (volume eight) was published in 2014.

¹⁷ An English language term that originates in Japan.

lives—as seen through blogs and Twitter accounts, which are the most common vehicles for self-promotion and interaction with fans—means that it is at times difficult to discern with confidence the sex of authors. In what follows, therefore, I do not attempt to analyze stories by male and female manga-ka separately, and do not try to characterize stories by the sex of the author. While this would be an interesting factor to consider, it is not necessary in this preliminary study of the characteristics of contemporary erotic yuri manga. On the other hand, I have chosen stories that I *believe* to have been written by female manga-ka.

Erica Friedman has written a series of reviews on the different volumes of *Yuri hime wildrose* on her blog Okazu. In the reviews, she provides not only an informative description of each volume, but also her personal opinion on different narratives found in each tome. Although it varies on a case-by-case basis, Friedman’s assessment of the anthology is overwhelmingly negative. She gives the stories in *Yuri hime wildrose* the label she typically gives yuri, that of “lesbian content without lesbian identity” (Friedman, “Volume 8”). She claims that most yuri characters do not identify as lesbian, or if they do, they are not out, which she finds disappointing. Some of the narratives in *Yuri hime wildrose*, like the ones in *Comic yuri hime*, might break the norm by introducing issues of identity, but it is telling that most stories refrain from such issues, as it is a crucial aspect in defining the qualities of the erotic space carved by these narratives, as we shall see.

Furthermore, Friedman criticizes the stories for their shallow plot, as implied by the label that she attributes to most stories: “‘plot, what plot’ style’” (“Volume 8”). In her review of the latest volume, she states that the stories are “constructed with minimal character development and maximum sexual activity,” an opinion that seemingly echoes her thoughts regarding most stories in previous volumes (“Volume 8”). Her criticism of many of the narratives, which is

implied by her additional label of “plot, what plot?” style, is not without grounds. In fact, the stories found in *Yuri hime wildrose* focus heavily on love making scenes, without providing extensive plot or character development. Given the relative brevity of the stories in the anthology (usually between five and twenty pages, with most of them averaging at about eight pages) it is understandable that such aspects of the narratives will fall short.

Overall, Friedman views these issues, namely the focus on sex to the detriment of other aspects of the narrative as well as the general failure to address the politics of female-female love (such as lesbian identification and social realities surrounding that), as problematic. Yet, is this reading of the narratives the only possible one? Friedman’s perspective from the standpoint of yuri connoisseur, yuri lover, and self-identified lesbian, is valuable and incisive on its own terms, but its value far exceeds its own scope, forming a platform from which to begin analyzing these narratives from other points of view. In many ways, to fail to go beyond Friedman’s initial reading of the narratives would be a failure to explore their potential as a vehicle for the exploration of other sorts of female sexuality beyond the realistic depiction of lesbian life that Friedman calls for. As erotic works authored (in most cases) by women, which actually focus upon females (as opposed to BL, for example), the narratives in *Yuri hime wildrose* present themselves as a potential vehicle for the direct exploration of the fundamental feminine erotic dimension. Reading the narratives through a different lens can give us the perspective necessary to show how they can also be read as creating a safe and empowering space for women readers to explore issues pertaining to female sexuality.

Audrey Lorde’s essay, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power,” originally presented as a talk in 1978, discusses “the erotic” as a form of power and a tool for female empowerment, one that should be explored and claimed by women, given that it is within a sexist and patriarchal

social framework that women have been encouraged to *not* give way to their “deepest and nonrational knowledge” out of which the sense of eroticism arises (569). Lorde takes special care to distinguish the erotic from the pornographic, which she believes are opposites, even claiming that “pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic” (570). From this, a question arises: whether the stories found in *Yuri hime wildrose* are erotic or pornographic. When Lorde uses the term “pornography” she is focusing on sexual materials generally made for heterosexual *men*, which often are the antithesis of allowing women the space to get in touch with the erotic, instead subjugated them to a patriarchal and heteronormative model of sexual relationships in which they are stripped of power. On the contrary, eroticism for Lorde is that which allows women to tap into their deepest selves, finding there sources of power and joy. While the brief narratives of *Yuri hime wildrose* may not provide an extensive pathway to Lorde’s deep eroticism, I would argue that (most of) the stories in *Yuri hime wildrose* should be considered expressions of “erotic,” rather than “pornography,” because of their anti-heteronormative, non-power-driven nature. Moreover, because of the safe space they provide for the exploration of a female-centered eroticism, they are again linked to Lorde’s idea of the erotic.

Although the manga shorts in this anthology can be criticized for their exclusive focus on sex to the detriment of the plot and character development, as well as their failure to address directly the politics of female-female desire, they can equally be praised for that same reason if considered from an alternative perspective: as an expression of deep and non-rational female eroticism. Operating within a patriarchal framework, the existence of a vehicle or space in which girls and women can safely explore issues of sexuality and erotic desire can be read as empowering. The exposition and sharing of fictional erotic experiences between females, can serve as a great source of empowerment, one that ultimately extends itself beyond the bounds of

sexuality, moving into other areas of women's lives, regardless of age.

In her 1980 article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," Adrienne Rich explains that the use of the term lesbian within a patriarchal framework has resulted in a drastic limiting of its definition. She offers instead the idea of a "lesbian continuum" that includes all women, regardless of whether they identify as lesbian or not. She writes:

As the term "lesbian" has been held to limiting, clinical associations in its patriarchal definition, female friendship and comradeship have been set apart from the erotic, thus limiting the erotic itself. But as we deepen and broaden the range of what we define as lesbian existence, as we delineate a lesbian continuum, we begin to discover the erotic in female terms: as that which is unconfined to any single part of the body or solely to the body itself, as an energy not only diffuse but, as Audre Lorde has described it, omnipresent in "the sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, [or] psychic..." (*Signs* Vol. 5 No. 4, 560)

Rich's idea of "discovering the erotic *in female terms*" is especially relevant as a point to consider in the reading and analysis of *Yuri hime wildrose* narratives.¹⁸ Rich also calls for the widening of our conceptions of lesbianism and the erotic, beyond the purely sexual. As we shall see, although the stories in *Yuri hime wildrose* focus heavily on sexual interactions (the physical/sexual aspect of the erotic), there is also always great attention to the emotional exchange between the characters, the feelings that two girls/women share in a safe space.

Why does it make sense to read these theories together? Because if there is a lesbian continuum that all women can take part in, then even stories that do not directly engage the realities of lesbian life can be considered legitimate and politically relevant. The erotic is

¹⁸ This is an idea that evokes Yoshiya Nobuko's depiction of a feminine eroticism that does not borrow male expressions, as mentioned in Chapter 1.

something all these stories have in common. They need not directly deal in gender issues or address political dimensions because they are harnessing the raw, unconscious power of the erotic. We should also keep in mind Fujimoto Yukari's point that too strong a focus on lesbian identity inserts an element of reality that female readers (of whatever sexuality) do not necessarily want to deal with in their fantasy life.

In the analysis that follows I put more of a focus on those stories that seem to be written by women, in order to consider how female manga-ka construct female eroticism. The stories will be analyzed individually, for the unique voice they bring to the table of (erotic) yuri, but also together within the context of the anthology in order to see what they are doing.

2.2 Relationships, Gender, and Power Dynamics

In her discussion of depictions of explicit female sexual desire (or the lack thereof) in *Comic yuri hime*, Kazumi Nagaike brings up the *seme-uke* binary found in BL manga:

As we have seen, the female lesbian characters in *Yurihime* rarely manifest a butch–femme dichotomy. In this regard, the stylized depiction of the characters in BL manga also requires discussion, due to the significant influence which this genre has had on conventions of depiction generally. These conventions consistently reinforce the binary opposition between penetrating *seme* (literally, to attack, connoting the male sexual role) characters and penetrated *uke* (literally to receive, connoting the female sexual role) characters, in ways that parallel the heterosexual orientation. While the *seme* characters in BL are depicted as tall, handsome and masculine, *uke* characters generally resemble *kawaii shōjo*, both physically and psychologically. (“The Sexual and Textual Politics”)

Embedded in Nagaike's point are two important aspects: one is the dynamic of the conventional

relationship depicted in BL through the narrative, which in itself creates the idea of the binary; the other is the *visual depiction* of the conventions, which feeds into the former, and thus helps to further crystalize the binary. In this case, the establishment of such a binary can be seen as not particularly subversive of a patriarchal and heteronormative framework, as it mimics that which is normative. A cursory glance at the narratives found in *Yuri hime wildrose* might indicate that, similarly to the BL narratives employing these specific conventions, many of the narratives focus on the dichotomy between active and passive characters in one pairing.

The strong dichotomy does not seem that distant from the *seme-uke* binary that Nagaike discusses, and thus could be read as reinforcing a binary view of gender and sexuality, not at all dissimilar from that of heterosexual relationships. This analogy can be further drawn out by considering one particular type of imagery found in the depiction of sexual acts, in which a more active partner will be the one who “fingers” the other, establishing perhaps a visual intertextuality with a heterosexual mode of intercourse, in which one partner acts as the penetrator while the other is penetrated. However, narratives from *Yuri hime wildrose* will be analyzed to show that even though they might seem to reinforce binaries that belong to such a framework, such narratives can also subvert typical roles, thus potentially empowering female readers.

Morishima Akiko’s “Koi no iinari” (Slave to Love) is one narrative that exemplifies the subversion of typical roles and relationship dynamics. In this story, the reader accesses the inner landscape of Midori, one of two schoolgirl lovers—a *senpai* and a *kōhai*—who seems to be the partner who is more passive (and even submissive), as reflected by the way in which she states right at the beginning that she always ends up becoming her senpai’s *inari* (person who does as

s/he is told).¹⁹ This is seen in the first page of the story, as Midori is depicted being the target of sexual advances by her senpai inside the music room at school (*Yuri hime wildrose* 5, 65). This establishes Midori, the character who serves as the narrator, as the kōhai, who is in this case also identifiable as the “bottom”²⁰ in the relationship.²¹ Cute and gentle, always abiding by her lover’s every request and sexual advance, Midori expresses to her senpai that she is tired of being naughty at school, so the senpai suggests meeting at home, where the story features the intimate physical connection between the two.

Since at the beginning of the story it is established that Midori’s senpai is the one who is always active during sex, Midori surprises her partner (and the reader) by suddenly performing oral sex on her, while her partner is on top of her (*Yuri hime wildrose* 5, 69-70). As she does so, she repeatedly tells senpai that she loves her, relating the active participation in sex to her deep, burning feelings of love for her senpai (70-1). The standard roles of expression of sexual desire (*seiyoku*) as well as the standard roles during sex are reversed. However, the dynamics of their relationship are not only established by the textual elements and flow of the narrative, but also visually.

At the beginning of the story, the reader first encounters Midori underneath her senpai, as she is being the target of sensual advances. Even on the walk home, the senpai takes up a large

¹⁹ The *senpai-kōhai* relationship is a prominent type of Japanese status relationship based on seniority. The senpai is the senior (in high school, the upperclassman) while the kōhai is the junior. This relationship extends across different areas of Japanese life, including school, work, as well as other aspects of social life (organizations and clubs).

²⁰ The senpai, being older and higher on the social hierarchy, is often associated with the role of the partner who is more active and takes initiative. This is also the case in yaoi narratives, and is probably why there is a specific genre of yaoi narrative that focuses on reversal, in which the younger partner penetrates the older, as mentioned by Kazumi Nagaike in her chapter “Perverse Sexualities, Perverse Desires”.

²¹ As mentioned subsequently, in the scene in which Midori and her senpai have sex, Midori is the on the bottom. However, it is also her position below her senpai that allows Midori to suddenly take an active role in the love making process by performing oral sex on her lover.

part of the central frame, emphasizing her height and confidence (*Yuri hime wildrose* 5, 66). This is further reinforced when Midori is being lightly caressed by her senpai: in contrast to Midori's body, senpai's body looks disproportionately larger (68). Thus, there is a visual pattern according to which Midori is depicted as smaller than her senpai, and shown beneath her in some way. This is why it seems especially significant that after Midori takes control of the sexual activity and expresses the depth of her feelings through both words and actions to her senpai, on the last page the central panel focuses on both their faces on an equal level. In this scene Midori apologizes in a cute manner for dominating her partner, but the fact that their heads are positioned at the same level suggests the equal standing of the characters in the relationship. Furthermore, the last panel shows Midori naked on top of her senpai, as they both laugh, and as senpai states: "Fine... do what you will [with me] today" (*Yuri hime wildrose* 5, 72). Thus, both characters have their chance to be on top and to express their love and desire through physical action.

Ōsawa Yayoi's story "stay green?" is another narrative that features the switching of roles and dynamics in a relationship, although in this case the reader has access to the interiority of the senpai in the relationship, who is also the more active partner. The protagonist, whose thoughts the reader has access to and who is known to the reader only as senpai relates how her girlfriend, Hiromi, is very much like a herbivore type²² (*sōshokukei-poi*) (*Yuri hime wildrose* 8, 39). The protagonist is frustrated that Hiromi never shows any passion and does not seem to care about sex, and she expresses her intense frustration to Hiromi. Shaken by senpai's emotional outburst, Hiromi explains to senpai that she feared the loss of senpai's affection that might result from being aggressive in initiating sexual activity (45).

After this honest confrontation of their feelings, Hiromi takes the lead, and even without

²² This is a term that is often used to refer to a contemporary *male* phenomenon in Japan. A "herbivore man" (*sōshoku danshi*) is seen as a somewhat passive person who does not show interest or actively pursue sex (the meat, *niku*).

taking her clothes off, initiates sexual advances upon her *senpai*. The depiction of sexual intercourse is omitted, but it is implied in the transition between the romantic climax in which they kiss passionately, shown by a rectangular blank panel featuring only the written text corresponding to the *senpai*'s thoughts/feelings, to the following morning when they are both shown in bed. The story ends in comedic fashion: just as the *senpai* remarks to herself as Hiromi is sleeping peacefully that "after all, this is the Hiromi that I like...", as Hiromi wakes up she grabs for her *senpai*'s buttocks, saying "senpai, one more time...", much to *senpai*'s surprise (48). As also happens in Morishima Akiko's "Koi no iinari," it is emphasized through the establishment of one partner always being active, and with the passive one being given the opportunity to express her feelings of love and sexual desire, that both partners have now an equal chance to be active, and are able to experience joy through the sharing of erotic experience of a sexual nature.

Even though the *senpai* might seem to retract her feelings at the end with the statement that "after all, this is the Hiromi that I like," implying that she might like the side of Hiromi that is very much like a herbivore, it is undeniable that at the climax of the story they are both happy due to the equal participation in sexual activity. After all, Hiromi was just as passionate as her *senpai*, but had been holding back thinking that that was what her *senpai* wanted. On *senpai*'s side this is reinforced by the visual gap between the kiss and the morning after they have sex. The white panel features on the right side a speech bubble stating "senpai...", indicating that it is Hiromi speaking; the left side of the panel has floating text indicating *senpai*'s inner monologue: "[I never knew that] being able to come together in mutual desire felt this good" (*Yuri hime wildrose* 5, 47). The expression of the feelings is undeniably positive, but is also visually reinforced by the contrast between the negative space and the dark words across the panel.

The relationship between the two female characters as seen in narratives such as Ōsawa Yayoi's "stay green?" as well as Morishima Akiko's "Koi no iinari" amongst others, indicates for the most part a dichotomy between active and passive that can also be conceived of as the top-bottom pattern, and this is established visually in many of the narratives. It is possible to read the active versus passive identification of partners in a relationship as being in alignment with the stereotypical heterosexual pattern, in which the male partner as the penetrator is seen taking on an active role, with the female partner being the one who, as the penetrated, carries out a passive role.²³ The fact that there is a strong underlying categorization (in Yayoi's story reflected by the word "herbivore" and in Morishima's story reflected by the word *inari*) that needs to be overcome (passive to active) could be read as reinforcing these very same categories. From this perspective, one could criticize the stories in *Yuri hime wildrose* for being filled with relationships that enforce gender binaries. After all, if manga-ka depicted characters who could easily transition between sexual roles without friction it would have the effect of challenging stereotypical binary norms.

This idea seems especially significant concerning the creation of yuri narratives, as reflected in the comment by popular female yaoi and yuri author duo Zaoh Taishi and Eiki Eiki that reflects the desire and special care to depict relationships beyond the confines of patriarchal and heteronormative situations in which men are seen as the initiators of action:

In fact, our goal [in creating yuri manga] is to denounce a society in which men always take the (sexual) initiative over women. We also wish to show our dissatisfaction toward men who don't understand women's natural sexual desires.

²³ This is a stereotypical pattern, although one that is not necessarily always in line with even the reality of heterosexual modes of sexual relationships. But it is undeniable that pornographic materials that present heterosexual sex, such as *ero* or *H* manga, and even ladies' comics, continue to perpetuate this simplistic image/pattern, which establishes it as an often inflexible dichotomy.

(*Yurihime* Vol. 1: 127) (qtd. in Nagaike “The Sexual and Textual Politics”)

Zaoh Taishi and Eiki Eiki’s comments reflect special care in the messages they want their stories to express. However, we are reminded that such stories as “stay green?” also build the story on the roles being reversed, and on the revelation that the partner who seems passive most of the time is underneath very passionate, burning with desire, and is shown, upon exposing that side, taking initiative and performing the role of the one who pleasures. Thus, by the end of such stories it is possible to interpret the situation as one in which both partners are, at some point, capable of expressing their sexual desire, engaging fully and passionately in sex without any reservations. By having all such stories include the motif of overcoming an imbalance in sexual roles, it ensures that there is never one partner that has complete and absolute control in always being active or even dominating.

One point to consider is that in BL, even if there are seemingly rigid patterns centered around the categorization into *seme* or *uke*, the roles are often shifted, changing the power dynamics between partners. Deborah Shamoan notes that with boys’ love the female reader can project themselves onto either of the characters, or sometimes even both, which could potentially be empowering (Shamoan 113). This brings up the issue of focalization and reader identification. If it is true that having two partners of the same sex allows for more flexible reader identification, then we should be able to see this in the narratives. One might expect this to be confirmed by the way the narrative is set up in order to allow for flexible reader identification with either character.

In “stay green?” the reader has access to senpai’s innermost thoughts. The reader is not given the name of the protagonist in “stay green?” who is known only as senpai. This might allow for the reader to better project herself as that character, or someone who is in a similar

situation who might desire for a similar outcome in their relationship. In “Koi no iinari” the reader is invited to identify with Midori, the protagonist who is usually more passive yet has a desire to express her love through physical action. Thus, different experiences are tackled in different narratives. If in “Koi no iinari” the reader might be called primarily (if not necessarily exclusively) to identify with the more passive partner, in “stay green?” the reader might be called to identify primarily with the more active partner, giving a chance for girls and women who usually play one particular role to experience a different situation, or to see reflected in the narratives situations that mirror their own. In addition, although in each narrative the reader will have access to the inner monologue of only one of the characters, this seems more like a narrative device to provide background information for the sake of the plot. On a visual level, there do not appear to be particular signs that push the reader to identify with one character more than another, leaving it up to the reader to make the choice. Visually, both narratives show a seamless transition from one character to another across panels, often with both characters shown simultaneously from a third-person perspective.

As noted above, Kazumi Nagaike points out that a butch-femme dichotomy is not commonly observable in *Comic yuri hime* (“The Sexual and Textual Politics”). While there are probably several reasons as to why that might be the case, one such reason might be the continuing influence of prewar girls’ culture (the culture of sameness) and the homogendered nature of that culture. Within the framework of girls’ culture, the types of relationship that were depicted in girls’ fiction and girls’ magazines were homogendered ones, with heterogender relationships being marginalized and even pathologized. Another reason might be the prominent focus on spiritual love rather than the depiction and exploration of explicit sexual relationships in *Comic yuri hime*. This raises the question of whether Nagaike’s findings would apply equally to

Yuri hime wildrose, given that its stories are all focused on relationships that feature heavy physical intimacy rather than shōjo-type dreamy, spiritual emotion.

One might consider that she is essentially establishing that in BL there is a connection between the type of relationship (heterogender, based on relationship dynamics, psychological disposition, and visual markers) and the role of active/passive found in the seme-uke binary. Although this might be the case in Morishima Akiko's "Koi no iinari," most of the narratives in *Yuri hime wildrose* seem to feature homogender relationships. For example, this is reflected in Ōsawa Yayoi's "stay green?" Gender categories can sometimes be difficult to pin down because, for the most part, there is little discussion of how the characters feel in terms of their gender *identity* within the stories. However, there are abundant gender markers such as clothes and hairstyles that often provide the clue that the relationships are homogender. In the case of "stay green?", both the senpai and Hiromi are stereotypically beautiful young women with long hair. The senpai might initially seem more feminine and nurturing in the way in which she interacts with Hiromi, displayed through asking her if she's done with her work yet and in the way she tried to seduce Hiromi by rubbing her chest against Hiromi's back, but Hiromi is not correspondingly masculine.

In her book *Emerging Lesbian Voices From Japan*, Sharon Chalmers dedicates a fair amount of space to the differentiation between the categorization of "butch" and "femme" in Japan. Chalmers points out the influence of the Takarazuka Revue and the way different gender roles performed by the women of the troupe have influenced Japanese (lesbian) culture, but also the persistence of the binary system of categorization phrased as "tachi" and "neko" in the Japanese lesbian scene (27-9). This categorization bears resemblance to the terms used similarly in the yaoi fandom, *seme* and *uke*. Even though such categories are usually not referred to

explicitly in the erotic narratives, it is interesting to see how the dynamics are depicted in the stories in a way that creates that polarization.

Overall, one can interpret the power dynamics and the homogender relationships as subversive and as defying a broader range of ideas than simply action versus passivity. In this sense, we can see how it would be refreshing to women of various sexual orientations to experience a space that is free of those pressures. The pressure associated with being active versus passive or the initiator versus initiate, a construct based on patriarchal and heteronormative ideals in the first place, is blasted through the climax of the story which shows both partners as being able to express themselves, in a sense even canceling out further need for the hard distinctions to be made within the relationship.

2.3 Representation of the Female Body and Female Sexual Desire

Writer Tamaki Sana states that one of the things she would like to see in yuri is the increased depiction of the body (*shintai*), as well as the depiction of sexual desire (*seiyoku*), and the depiction of menstruation (*seiri*) (159-60). In fact, Tamaki invites us to consider whether besides spirit (*seishin*²⁴) it would not also be positive to have works that deal with the depiction of the female body, given that the stories depict female same-sex love (160). Tamaki is addressing yuri as a genre, which seemingly points to the necessity of a publication such as *Yuri hime wildrose*, which serves as an attempt to fill this gap in yuri. Simultaneously, this raises the issue regarding the manner in which the female body is depicted in the narratives found in *Yuri hime wildrose*, and how might it deal (or not) with the seeming discomfort felt by women regarding their own sexed body being represented. As part of the erotic experience, the depiction of the female body could serve as a point of empowerment for women, through the experience of

²⁴ I believe that she's referring to the heavy focus on spiritual love found in mainstream yuri publications such as *Comic yuri hime*.

seeing their own types of bodies represented, serving as a balance to the male sexed body found in the BL genre.

Women's relationship to the female body is one that has been continuously explored in the realm of Japanese literary production. As several scholars point out, the difficulty of this relationship is also shown in manga, particularly within the genre of shōjo manga. This was noted in the previous chapter, in which Shmoon's analysis of the rise of BL manga in the 1970s shows that this particular kind of manga presents a way of exploring sexuality in a safe way, an idea that mirrors and has been echoed in the scholarly research undertaken by Fujimoto Yukari and James Welker. Shmoon's comparison of early shōnen-ai works with *The Rose of Versailles* further shows the relative inadequacy in effectively doing such a narrative exploration through heterosexual couplings (136). In addition, as Fujimoto Yukari states, "shōjo manga that deal with male-male homosexual relationships are not necessarily attempting to depict male homosexuality, but rather it is a vehicle through which women can explore their own sexuality (*Mechademia* vol. 9, 33).

Referring back to Fujimoto Yukari's points about the representation of the female body mentioned in the previous chapter, we should consider the fact that Hagio Moto claimed to have given up her female version of "Jūichigatsu no gimunajiumu" (1971, November gymnasium) because it was too "raw and fleshy," which is reflective of the anxiety inherent in the relationship of Japanese women with the representation of the female body ("Where is My Place in the World" 25). Furthermore, as Fujimoto explains why narratives that depict male-male love are much more abundant in shōjo manga than those that depict female-female love, she also centers a great part of her discussion on the desire for dissociation with the female body (25). The fact that a great deal of yuri focuses on spiritual love and platonic relationships, as pointed out by

both Tamaki Sana and Takashima Rica, while often leaving out erotic and sexual love, also seems to have some relation with this point.

Some erotic yuri narratives also seem to address, although not in depth, anxiety regarding the female body, especially during and after sex. Katakura Ako's "Rabu sain" (Love Sign) deals with two young women of unclear age. The narrative is set up through Chigusa's thoughts, in which she explains that her lover Isumi is very reserved; she always ends up doing as she is told, and does not express sexual desire for Chigusa. The story is based again on the premise of a seemingly passive partner who does not show as much longing to give the narrator a "love sign" that confirms her desire. In fact, the climax and main theme of the story revolves around a confrontation and subsequent confession of feelings, which leads to Isumi being able to express herself and be active as the initiator of sex, which is reminiscent of previous narratives. However, before this climactic event, as Chigusa is initiating sex with Isumi, Isumi tells Chigusa not to look at her. Surprised, Chigusa asks: "Where?" Isumi: "Anywhere...All of it" Chigusa: "Why? It's fine wherever" (*Yuri hime wildrose* 8, 123-4). Although this particular point is not addressed again within the narrative, it is clearly an aspect that is consciously depicted by the author, and can be read as being part of the reality of having sex.

This particular aspect of Katakura Ako's story is similar to Zaoh Taishi and Eiki Eiki's non-*Yuri hime wildrose* story "First Kiss," which features two adult women named Reiko and Ayano. The two are longtime friends who shared their first kiss in the same high school that they currently work in, but have caved in to the pressures of society and have found themselves in relationships with men, only to later find within the course of the narrative that they actually belong to each other. After the two have had sex, Ayano asks Reiko to turn off the lights (103). The following dialogue ensues: Reiko: "They're pretty much all off already. What's bothering

you?” Ayano: “Because I... My body has become lewd” (*iyarashii*) (103). Although the reason why Ayano makes this comment is not absolutely clear, it is striking that Ayano does not want her body seen and that there is a feeling of shame associated with it.

These narratives suggest and reflect the tension felt concerning women’s relationship with the female body itself and its representation. Despite portraying seemingly different age groups, the inclusion of these particular details in the depiction of explicit sexual relationships between women indicates that this is one possible aspect of the experience for one or both partners. Although in the end both stories end on a positive note for both sets of characters, the fact that there is an indication of shame regarding the female body, especially during and after sex, can be read as an aspect of the honest depiction of how many Japanese women may experience sexual activity. Such representations may seem less than positive because they fail to celebrate the body, but, on the other hand, they may truly capture a common aspect of the female experience. These moments depict, even if only briefly, the ways social expectations and pressures continue to impact women’s self-image. And it could be argued that this is a kind of political engagement through the realistic depiction of an experience common to women of whatever sexuality.

However, there are also other narratives in which the depiction of the sex more positively embraces the body. This latter type of story is more accepting of female desire, and features the very open depiction of the female body. Amano Shuninta’s short manga “milky” is one such narrative. It begins in medias res, with the two female characters engaged in sexual activity on a bed (*Yuri hime wildrose* 8, 71). A dark-haired female sucks on the breasts of a light-haired character, simultaneously engaged in dialogue, addressing her partner as her stepmother and indicating that she/her breasts are delicious (71). As the story progresses, the characters are

shown engaged in different sexual activities, with the stepmother being the one pleased, with several kisses in between. The plot twist at the end seems to be that, after talking about the role-play situation they were just engaged in, making the reader think that the naughty things being said are part of a sexual fantasy, the characters make it clear in the last page that the two women are in fact mother and daughter (77-8).

One salient aspect of this particular narrative is the depiction of the female body as the sexual activity between the two women takes place. This is reflected in the great visual detail of bodily fluids that is seen throughout the story. At the beginning of the story, which sees the characters already fully engaged in sexual acts, there is already the depiction of sweat represented by sweat drops on both characters' bodies (71). Throughout the story, this is also the case, until the last page when they are no longer engaged. In the second page, which continues to focus on the daughter kissing and sucking on her mother's breast, one of the four panels is dedicated to a close-up shot of the daughter's face, who is shown blushing with her tongue sticking out, and saliva dripping from her mouth and falling off her chin (72). Finally, there is the depiction of vaginal fluids on the daughter's hand, which she wipes off with a tissue after the mother has an orgasm, the literal and metaphorical climax of the story (75).

The climax of the story is of special interest because it combines the three types of bodily fluids mentioned above in a scene of heightened intensity (74). It does not seem random that there are splattered white spots visually depicted across the panel, and that even the lettered sound effects are depicted in a manner that visually resembles the consistency of a fluid. Together with the open depiction of the naked bodies, the precise depiction of bodily fluids establishes an image of normality pertaining to the physiological function of the female body. In

this sense, the narrative can be interpreted as embracing the female body and reinforcing the normality of its functions in the course of sex between two women.

However, Amano Shuninta's story does not stop at the acceptance of the female body and its associated characteristics. We are reminded that the story features a taboo subject by depicting the sexual relationship between a mother and daughter, even though there is no great facial resemblance between the two. In addition, one of the central aspects of the story is the element of role-play. It is conveyed through dialogue that role-play is one form of sexual play in which the couple often engages. The combination of a relationship that is considered taboo in most socio-cultural environments with the open engagement in sexual role-play further helps to establish the space of the narrative as one in which desire and fantasy can be explored side by side. Unhindered by censorship, this space is one in which women can fantasize about their sexuality, thus resulting in a situation that can be empowering for female readers.

Further evidence of this potential for empowerment is found in the special focus placed upon the pleasure experienced by the mother during the course of the sexual activities. In fact, throughout the whole story there are close-up shots of the mother's face in what seems to be ecstatic bliss as she is pleased through different sexual acts. By privileging female pleasure and the fulfillment of female sexual desire through sexual fantasy, "milky" seems to stand as a story that provides a full acknowledgment of the erotic, as expressed sexually. As Lorde points out, "in order to be utilized, our erotic feelings must be recognized" (574). Thus, reading this narrative while bearing Lorde's ideas of the erotic in mind, it is easy to understand that, by giving the erotic full expression, this kind of narrative ultimately benefits females.

Through the observation of different erotic yuri narratives, it is possible to state that even within erotic yuri, as with yuri in general, there is a range, from the least explicit, in which the

sex might be implied but not visually depicted, to the most explicit, featuring detailed depictions of the female body, and even bodily fluids, and intense physical activity. This range creates a spectrum that is helpful for girls and women to find the type of depiction that they feel most comfortable with. However, within this range, different kinds of narratives can be empowering, whether they address the female body and female desire with an element of realism by depicting scenes in which female characters might express shame or discomfort concerning their female body (“Rabun sain”), or scenes in which they can engage in sex with complete openness and lack of reservations (“milky”). Ultimately, both allow female readers to project themselves into a scenario that places special emphasis on female pleasure and the sharing of joy through physical intimacy. In both cases, this is facilitated by the specific kind of safe space created by such narratives, which allows for the expression and inquiry into the erotic, to develop.²⁵

2.4 Establishing a Safe Space for the Erotic

When considered together, many of the narratives in *Yuri hime wildrose* can be seen to create a safe conceptual and imaginary space for the exploration of female sexuality. It is within this space that attention can be given to the depiction of relationships that subvert typical sexual roles and typical depictions of the female body. However, this space is in itself one of the aspects that make the narratives so empowering. As Friedman points out, most yuri narratives do not address lesbian identity by including characters who are self-described lesbians or characters who are “out” in regards to their sexual orientation. Deeply tied with identity is the (often harsh)

²⁵ Although the depiction of the female body in and of itself is empowering, there are also limits to empowerment that should be considered, especially in future research. The visual representation of the female body focuses on what seem like very idealized bodies that might or might not be in line with the reality of most girls and women. Although there is some variety in breast size depending on the author, for the most part, characters are thin, often with little sign of a heavier weight or bigger body frames. Although this might be a feature of the fantastical nature of the space created in the narratives, which is somewhat idealized in nature, it is still important to consider how it might exclude plus-size females and the ramifications of such an absence.

social reality of being a female who loves other females, which is usually absent in *Yuri hime wildrose*. However, the very aspects that can be criticized are perhaps also some of yuri's greatest strengths, as they allow for the creation of a safe space where authors and readers can share in the exploration of the erotic.

When examining whether or not the overall lack of explicit lesbian identity and social reality is detrimental to the stories, one can easily come to the realization that the narratives are serving females in alternative ways. As Sarah Frederick points out, there are elements to Yoshiya Nobuko's fiction, common to shōjo culture as a whole, that make her work seem escapist in nature (69). It is the sheltered nature of the girls' world and the fact that the romantic relationships do not graduate into adulthood in Yoshiya's *Hana monogatari* that are probably most responsible for leading to the perception of escapism. *Yuri hime wildrose* narratives can be seen to share this common aspect with Yoshiya Nobuko's work as they often feature highly sheltered environments, almost always devoid of any male presence and devoid of any explicit social disparagement pertaining to the nature of the same-sex relationships.

In addition, as Kazumi Nagaike notes, many of the stories still seem to focus greatly on the shōjo, avoiding for the most part the depiction of relationships between older adult women ("The Sexual and Textual Politics"). She points out that a large percentage of the stories featured in *Comic yuri hime* are set in (high) schools, thus placing the age range of the typical characters at that of teenagers. The same happens in *Yuri hime wildrose*, in which the majority of narratives feature high school girls as the main characters. The lack of older women and the high prevalence of stories set in a school can suggest the idea that, similar to the world of Yoshiya Nobuko's *Hana monogatari*, a relationship between women does not and cannot extend beyond adolescence, rather than providing a positive portrayal with positive role models for real girls

and women who love the same sex. This perception is reflected in Zaoh Taishi and Eiki Eiki's comment regarding their story "First Kiss":

What we wanted to say in this work is 'don't mystify the term yuri by defining it exclusively as a phenomenon of adolescence.' We don't want people to view yuri merely as a form of fantasy confined to adolescent years. High school students are pretty young and live in an enclosed space, like being protected by a comfortable cocoon. However, things change when they become adults, as they are shackled to various kinds of obligations, norms, socially required vanity, and so forth (Vol. 1: 128) (qtd in Nagaike, n.p.)

Zaoh Taishi and Eiki Eiki's point is certainly valid, and helpful in considering the limits of empowerment caused by the fact that the stories overwhelmingly focus on schoolgirls. Zaoh Taishi and Eiki Eiki's argument is also, as pointed out by Nagaike, reflective of author awareness of formulaic tropes in yuri ("The Sexual and Textual Politics"). In this case, the setting of narratives in girls' schools in which the main characters are *shōjo* is a major trope that is also found in *Yuri hime wildrose*. This is reflected in Akuta Rinko's "Promise," which shows a sheltered environment within a girls' school and that is therefore homosocial.

Despite these concerns, just as Yoshiya Nobuko's *Hana monogatari* stories had something valuable to offer, so do the stories in *Yuri hime wildrose*. Yamada Toriko's eight-page story "Osoroi" (Matching), features two high school girls who meet up in public at what seems like a diner (*Yuri hime wildrose* 5, 25). After some conversation that involves a slight confrontation of feelings, they have sex in a stall of the ladies' bathroom. In the last scene, they are seen walking after the sexual encounter, with one of the protagonists noting that they are wearing matching panties, hence the title of the story.

As is common in shōjo manga and also many stories in *Yuri hime wildrose*, there is great emphasis on the interiority of one of the protagonists, which serves as an anchor for the short story, in this case the one whose surname is Sonoyama. As the two protagonists begin to have sex, Sonoyama is thinking of all the boys she has “hooked up” with. In an internal monologue she states that “...even if the names of 100 boys come to mind, they are no match [to this girl]” (*Yuri hime wildrose* vol. 5, 31). Sonoyama’s inner monologue further reveals that what she finds scary, and even more so what she finds mortifying (*kuyashii*), is that her partner, the other girl, seems not in the slightest afraid. As they hold hands and walk together into the distance, Sonoyama does not remember that they were wearing matching panties, so her partner laughs and says “then shall we check again at home?” which provides a more cheerful conclusion by introducing the comedic aspect that makes reference to their passionate activities in the bathroom stall, and the possibility of another love making session.

Although Sonoyama states that all the boys she has been with are no match for this girl, the continued flow of boys in Sonoyama’s life would indicate that she could be in some sense sexually attracted to them. Added to her relations with her sexual partner within the narrative, this could implicitly paint her as someone whose sexuality is fluid. Sonoyama’s relatively young age, which places her in the category of shōjo, also adds to the idea of being in a liminal state in which one’s sexuality does not need to be set in stone. In addition, while it is not specified clearly, there is the idea that she is afraid or that there is something that is scary in her intimate relationship with her lover. Although left to the interpretation of the reader, that which is scary to Sonoyama could be interpreted as being the realization that she likes females more than males (non-normative behavior) and that her female partner does not seem to be worried, but rather, is

nonchalant about expressing her love for another girl, not caring about ramifications. The fear that Sonoyama mentions can be interpreted as an element that adds realism to the narrative.

“Osoroi” shows that even if the narratives in *Yuri hime wildrose* do not do what Erica Friedman would like regarding the realistic depiction of lesbianism they are engaged and realistic in other ways that may include lesbians. Furthermore, Friedman views the lack of lesbian identity and identification in the stories found in *Yuri hime wildrose* a problematic aspect, but we could also argue that it merely allows for a shift in focus that also provides valuable insights and space for fantasy. Returning to the idea of “lesbianism,” Fujimoto Yukari has also stated that in trying to formulate an answer to why it is that there are so few lesbian shōjo manga, especially when compared to the high number of shōjo manga that feature male-male relationships, the explanation is that “lesbianism introduces reality into the work” (“Where is My Place” 25). Fujimoto’s idea is one that seems applicable to the stories in *Yuri hime wildrose*. Although she uses this concept to explain how earlier works of shōjo manga that focused on lesbian relationships created sad narratives with often tragic endings, it might also be true that introducing aspects of lesbian identity into the works in *Yuri hime wildrose* could potentially add another and unwelcome dimension of reality.

On a more general level, we can also see that the narratives in *Yuri hime wildrose* can be considered positive when considering Rich’s ideas. In her article, Rich discusses the extent to which “heterosexual preference” has been imposed upon women over the centuries (648). If this is the case, and assuming that Rich is correct when she sees it as a tool of a patriarchal system keen on maintaining itself, then the fact that girls and women can read narratives in *Yuri hime wildrose* through a lens that focuses on the expression of erotic desire and sexual touch/play without attaching a specific sexual orientation could be deemed positive, for it would allow

women of any sexual orientation a space to explore same-sex desire without feeling encumbered or with the sort of limits that would accompany realistic depictions of lesbian life. This argument posits that “fantasy” identifications of this sort are useful expressions of Rich’s lesbian continuum, with girls/women of any sexuality able to participate.

Conclusion

Erica Friedman finds it disappointing that the vast majority of the narratives in *Yuri hime wildrose* do not have characters that identify as lesbian or who are “out” concerning their identity and sexual orientation. Indeed, the stories will often deal with couples who are already together and are engaging sexually in an enclosed space of their own, so the hardships of being a girl who loves girls, a woman who loves women, or a same-sex couple, seem mostly absent. One has to consider equally that the short nature of the stories, which are made for compilation, might not allow for the deepest exploration of the social and psychic landscape that the characters are navigating in their own life. That is not to say that Friedman does not bring up good points, especially if we are to consider the limits of empowerment that might be found in these narratives. The increase in the creation of manga that depict the realities of out lesbian life is certainly one that is welcomed and is to be encouraged for the future of yuri. Although it is not possible to speak of *Yuri hime wildrose* as a monolithic entity, given the wide variety found in the narratives that make up the different volumes, it is possible to state that there are many interesting narratives and they are doing something significant that is worth attention.

As mentioned before, two of the things that writer Tamaki Sana wants to see in yuri among the three she lists are the increased depiction of the body (*shintai*) and the depiction of sexual desire (*seiyoku*) (with the third being the honest depiction of menstruation, *seiri*) (159-60). A number of stories in *Yuri hime wildrose* seem to fulfill the desire for at least one if not two of such depictions, at least on a surface level. Thus, the idea that there is a space dedicated to the representation of themes that are not usually addressed within presumably a vast majority of yuri works, seems to indicate that there is value in the existence of *Yuri hime wildrose*. Furthermore, the ideas of individuals such as Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, and especially Fujimoto Yukari

give us the tools to recognize their potential, showing us that such narratives need not be so quickly dismissed.

Tamaki Sana also comments on the ways in which different people might perceive the need for yuri to address serious topics, including struggle, jealousy, conflict, etc (159). She argues that the belief that yuri has to address “heavy” topics or “light” topics is actually a big misconception (159). Thus, one can contextualize the perceived lack of politics and social reality in the narratives in *Yuri hime wildrose* reflected in Friedman’s comments, not as a lack, but rather as an emphasis on the erotic dimension of same-sex relationships, which are ultimately empowering. The fact that yuri manga exists at a different section of the lesbian continuum can be counted as positive, as it allows many more women to tap into the erotic power of female-female love and sex, helping to free them from the patriarchal and heteronormative pressures that limit their everyday lives.

There are certainly limitations to a study of this kind, which allows for future options for research in the topic to arise. One such limitation lies in the fact that narratives were chosen deliberately and taken from the anthology. While not necessarily impacting the individual understanding of the narratives, it would be interesting to analyze what would happen when one is reading the stories in the context of the anthology, reading them in the sequential order arranged by the editors. This would facilitate, in addition, an understanding of how they work together to create the space of the anthology, what kind of space it is, and what it might impart to readers. Another point to consider in future research would be the style of each manga-ka and whether or not, visually speaking, a given style is more apt to portray a certain kind of topic, to convey a certain kind of message, to help further the narrative, or to allow for better empowerment.

In conclusion, the short narratives in *Yuri hime wildrose* can be seen as valuable in terms of representation, for depicting girls and women in situations in which they can enjoy sex with each other, pleasure, and on a more basic level, the honest expression of erotic and sexual desire. This is the sharing of joy that Lorde places great emphasis on. The fact that many of the narratives feature emotional exchange and sharing of feelings shows that the sex, besides being an important aspect of the relationship, is also a way in which lovers can come together to deal with their own desires and needs honestly. Together with Audre Lorde's idea of eroticism, one can state that these works manage to "harness" the power of the erotic through the depiction of erotic scenarios that place the focus on intimate sexual relations between two girls or women. The idea that any given story that is built around sex more than other elements, somehow fails for doing so, seems to perpetuate the idea that eroticism is lower and undeserving. One could claim that even today there is a system in place that keeps the erotic in a position of less privilege and status. Lorde discusses the idea of getting in touch with and harnessing the power of the erotic as well as extending it beyond the cloistered confines of the bedroom to other areas of women's lives. In this case, the creative depiction of erotic encounters could be classified as empowering for women.

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