

yuri
zine



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too yaoi
to live,
too yuri
to die

by bell @lowlybellbird

Before I knew I was a girl, I didn't know why yuri spoke to me. I didn't know I was allowed to listen.

I didn't know much about gay people as a preteen. I was only vaguely aware of them, and of my interest in them, and possibly of some burgeoning queerness in myself. My intermediate-school girlfriend opened the door into a new world for me, between MSN OC roleplay sessions, by introducing me to fanfiction. She also introduced me to the terms yaoi and yuri, slash and femslash: boy/boy and girl/girl stories. I was fascinated: the first fanfic I remember reading was Final Fantasy 8 Squall/Seifer postcanon slow-burn. But most of what I read, after that, was NaruHina. I read what is in hindsight a staggering amount of straight Naruto fanfiction because I was obsessed with Hinata. It was only natural, I thought, since she was in love with Naruto, and what boy my age wouldn't want to be Naruto? Of course, that wasn't what I wanted. My insatiable appetite for fic was a hunger for romance.

It was a hunger for self-discovery.

This fixation continued after my girlfriend and I parted ways to go to different high schools. I became infatuated with a girl a year older than me. I thought it was a crush at the time. Really, it was two things about her — gleaned from her Bebo, where we were friends — which drew me in: she also liked Naruto, and she liked yaoi and yuri. These two pieces of knowledge were important to me for two reasons. We went to a Catholic high school which required me to suppress any and all homosexual tendencies. I had also lost contact with my girlfriend and web friends from intermediate. I was alone in the world. And yaoi and yuri, somehow, represented something I desperately wanted and needed to be connected to, though I didn't understand why.

I wanted her to like me so badly, and at the time the only language available to me was Naruto. I thought this shared knowledge, this secret we were both in on, would be enough to make a connection. I thought that because she was older than me, and she was a girl, and she had the forbidden knowledge of yaoi and yuri, that she could tell me something about myself that I didn't know. I wanted to ask her what favourite ships were, what she thought of yaoi and yuri in specifics, and why I felt the way I felt. Essentially, I was a young maiden looking for an older sister to whom I could brokenheartedly weep for comfort and encouragement.

But I didn't know where to start. Fanfiction.net was a yuri desert and I was dying of thirst. I had seen maybe two SakuIno stories, and a total of zero yuri pairings involving Hinata. There was a lot of NaruSasu of

course, but boys didn't interest me in the same way girls did. I didn't even consider at the time she might've been reading 'real' yaoi and yuri, and not just online fan stories. In the end, it didn't matter anyway. I couldn't get past my own anxiety, we talked maybe twice in three years, and never became more than friends-of-friends.

So really it was just me and Naruto. I read so many fics, romantic and sexual, about Naruto and Hinata declaring their love for each other, getting married, having children even. I thought of Naruto being as devoted to Hinata as she was to him, though he must've gone over 100 chapters or more after her love confession without coming back to it. I constructed elaborate scenarios in my head about the ways Naruto would confess his love for Hinata back. That he would see the way she loved him. That he would love her the way she loved him: with a desperation, a yearning, a feeling bigger than herself. That he would love her, a girl, the way that I loved girls. I did this for a few years, only giving up on Naruto when life meant I had to move. I went to live with my dad, moving to a different city, and with it, different fandoms.

The largest exposure to actual yuri content in my life came a few years later in the form of watching YuruYuri with my guy friends, back when I still thought I was a guy too. (YuruYuri is a slice of life anime about school girls in a school club getting up to nonsense while having crushes on each other.) One of my friends — the Sasuke to my Naruto, perhaps — was a typical channer anime teen. He wore an honest-to-god trilby, was exactly as into lolicon as the hat would suggest, and showed us YuruYuri because he was titillated by it and wanted to share. I enjoyed it, but not for the reasons he did/thought I should. Lighthearted fun about teenage girls not much younger than me, having crushes on each other that went nowhere but went unpunished. Nothing romantic or sexual — and more importantly, no judgement. If I'd had the words or understanding at the time, I'd have said I watched YuruYuri and saw myself reflected back. In an ideal world, I was them and they were me.

It was with these same friends that I gently started exploring the edges of my sexuality. (Not in a yaoi way, unfortunately.) One of them was bi, which allowed me to let go of my attachment to being straight. Suddenly it was ok to be gay, or a furry, or a gay furry homestuck, even if no one knew what that meant. I could be 'not straight' and still have friends. I would still be safe, and arguably happier than if I kept pretending. But those feelings spiralled out of control once I went to university and came

back questioning my gender. We had planned a weekend of drinking and watching movies and I, drunk as I was, started kissing my friends on the cheek. We all had a good laugh about it, I played it up, and they got in on the joke too. Late in the evening, I turned to kiss my Sasuke right as he turned to kiss me and, NaruSasu-style, I stole his first kiss. I burned with shame, though he just laughed it off. That night, I confided in another friend that I was questioning my gender. He didn't mention it when he drove me home the next day.

I had laid myself bare with them — too bare. I had to withdraw from the young men who now knew too much about this version of me, someone so different from their friend. I punished myself for my wrongdoings with self-harm.

I thought of the girls in YuruYuri. I wanted to be more like them.

*I wanted a simpler way to express a desire for closeness,
romantic or otherwise.*

I wanted to be close with my friends in meaningful ways. I wanted to feel allowed to want that. I never spoke to any of those friends again — not when I uninvited myself from their hangouts, not when I went uninvited, and not a year later when I publicly came out as a trans woman. We didn't have anything that the other wanted.

In a sense, that self-punishment was the most yuri, or most female, aspect of my desire. Harming myself for wanting something, for taking what I wanted. Torturing myself for taking any initiative at all. I had accepted the apparent maleness of wanting something in the first place, and saw my desire as intrusive — as violent. Despite that, I had always been a receptacle for the desires and expectations of others: a friend, a jokester, a son. And I had failed at even that. I was struggling to find my rightful place as a woman, yet struggling against what that meant for my desire: if I should feel desire at all, it should be passive and servile. My desire existed and demanded action from me, and so it was male. It transgressed the bounds of acceptable female longing by refusing to be passive. And yet, wanting to be a woman was the least passive thing I'd done in my life. Nothing about my wanting fit with what (I thought) I knew about gender. I was an outcast. I didn't belong to the gender I came from, nor the gender I was going to.

Part of this was a realisation of the romantic— a desire for connection in a way I now understood, as someone finally reckoning with her latent lesbianism, that I couldn't get from men. Other parts were about meaningful friendship in general — the team 7 of *Naruto*, the Yuru of *YuruYuri*, so to speak. I made an active effort to exist in queer spaces and meet other queer people. I changed majors from computer science to sociology. I hung out with other dykes who got their tits out for summer and cheered when I sang along to folk punk anthems. One of those dykes would later become my wife.

These were things I had to grow into to understand: through age, through transition, and through meeting more people who couldn't give me these things. I dropped out of proper fandom for a few years after the Tumblr porn ban. I watched JJBA but never got involved in its fandom. It wasn't until I had found lesbian love, gotten married and done some intense years of therapy that I returned to fannish ways. And I came back because I saw someone writing about trans women — women like me — being desired and hot and loved.

I had never seen that before. I had never seen myself in print, much less written as a whole sexual being with that kind of generosity, and it blew me away. I had learned to accept that I was a lesbian woman. I stumbled over the threshold back into fandom as that adult woman, suddenly able to recognise the way I yearn for connection of all sorts — romantic, sexual, and platonic. Those early fics about trans women held up a mirror I didn't know I was able to want or believe I deserved. Fandom became a lifeline again. This time, I reached out to the artists and fans I admire. I participated fully in fandom. And now I don't want to leave.

Yuri has gained a reputation of being everything but lesbian desire. The joke has gone too far.

Similarly and perhaps unfortunately, it took me getting through everything that wasn't my yuri to arrive at my yuri — happily, unapologetically married to a lesbian, writing my truth through transgender lesbians fucking each other up. Yuri to me was *NaruHina*, and being a not-boy kissing boys, and unpicking the gender of active and passive desire. Yuri became seeing girls like me having uncomplicated desires with low stakes. Yuri is me, and people whose longing looks like mine. And maybe the people who find that uncomfortable, the people who consider it “the male gaze”,

will step into their full inheritance of this unabashed desire and tenderness in their own time. And maybe, like me, they just need a little more yuri in their lives to get them there.



Can you see yourself as clear?

by kirbystarflower
@kirbystarflower on twitter

Before we had words to talk about gender, we had opportunities to enact gender and images to process the feelings around those experiences. In my column for Yaoi Zine 2, I alluded briefly to this in mentioning that I did not grow up consuming yaoi much at all, but yuri was something I did, in private. In discovering scanslations at around thirteen years old, I was not only keeping up with the latest chapter of Fullmetal Alchemist, I was also consuming heaps of shoujo manga and yuri. Yes, even explicit and substanceless yuri. To be thirteen at that time meant using the family computer when no one else was looking. To be alone, blending memories imagined and real, with the images of a limitless world, that was the internet back then.

In the public hell of middle school, I had a girl friend *A* who loved to flirt with me and my other girl friend *B* (the only out lesbian I knew growing up). She was so conventionally attractive and we were not, and we would not get attention from the boys and popular girls, but she did. And still, *A* gave us her endless attention and affection, and as much as we craved it, it was sometimes frustratingly obtuse. Besides that though, she really was the same as us: a weird, freaky weeb who loved cartoon girls. We shared that which she couldn't with others... *yuri*... yet in my repressed, Christian shame at the time, I did not tell *B* I was reading actual yuri too. I eventually did come out to her later when we were in college. She talked to me for hours about the girl she had dated and missed so badly, living



across the sea in Japan.

I think when I check up on *A* as an adult now, she is pretty comfortably out living as bisexual, but back then we never discussed anything related to gender and sexuality. Not even with *B*, it was always indirectly through Tumblr diary posts. We lived it, reflected on it messily, as kids do. I spent a lot of my youth in segregated gender spaces, the only “girl” in my groups of guy friends, and then “one of the girls” at sleepover parties that *A* hosted. So naturally the first queer label I adopted as an 18-20 something year old at art school was “gender fluid” (shout out also to the formative Ranma ½ trans-fans out there <3). I thought for so long that I didn’t have a core personality, nothing that made me unique, and all I could do was mirror the performances of gender around me. If a girl wanted to hug me and lean on my shoulder, I’d lean my head back on hers. If a guy wanted to punch me, I’d punch back harder (often I even punched first). I cut my hair boy-short when I started dating my first boyfriend. What is gender if not socialized? We are monkeys desperately making meaning of our erratic emotions and actions.

I had a lot of thoughts I wanted to expand on related to topics brought up in Yaoi Zine 2, and Iori Miyazawa’s “Yuri made me human” interview, or even “Are Lesbians Women?” by Jacob Hale (please find the PDF and read this one) but instead I find myself rambling as always on the actual thing on my mind... which is *yearning*. I joked the other day that they need to make a pill for this, an anti-yearning medication.

Here is my proposal: regardless of gender, it is gay to yearn.

Even if you’re a woman “yearning for a man,” or “man for woman,” you are gay. In fact, you are also a lesbian. You are imagining this person and you are not only imagining being with the person, but you are likely also imagining being the person. What is it like to move through the world as they? What is it like to feel the sun in their body, to go to school or work and be seen in that body, to wake up and look at a reflection of yourself in that body? Maybe if they’re taken, you’re imagining the person that person is with. Your feelings are muddled in thinking that what you desire is to replace them, but that makes you relate even more deeply now to the companion of the person you yearn for. Now you share a yearning.

This comes up a lot in josei manga, the adult-serving genre of shoujo. These “straight” women are constantly jealous of each other’s femininities,

but also find a solidarity with each other in their attractions to immature, foolish men. It makes you feel foolish too, so aren't we the same? It evolves into palpable yuri once the author realizes that there is something so gay in wanting the same thing (let's kiss about it). It's so homoerotic to yearn. Even when I imagine myself different, separate, from a subject of my desire, I am always somehow queering them as I make myself stranger, estranged. I come to the conclusion that I don't even need to be perceived by them anymore, though some small part of me still wishes for it of course. In youth, I would have taken a lack of reciprocation as a judgment on my self-worth, but now I choose to relish in the yearning itself. A friend said, your body is telling you something and it's worth listening.

On one mix, I come across a song by Bob Dylan that I'd never heard before, "Mama You Been On My Mind." Coincidentally, around the same time a friend put Joan Baez on another, and I stumble across Baez' version on her album "Farewell, Angelina" where she flips the gender to "Daddy." I start to read on their relationship, but pull away, choosing for now to focus on the simple clarity found in the yearning here, that I was already steeped in. In private, before harsh reality, now public as I share with you.

*When you wake up in the morning, baby, look inside your mirror
You know I won't be next to you, you know I won't be near
I'd just be curious to know if you can see yourself as clear
As someone who has had you on his/her mind*

What solidarity there is in yuri. We struggle together. We seek a clarity in yearning, together. It seems that one would think yearning is a solitary act, but

if someone is in your mind, are you really as alone as you feel?

Can you see yourself as clear as someone who has had you on their mind?

“then they toyed and embraced and kissed”

by Soph. @sophia_sol on
dreamwidth

from the tale of
kamar al-zaman. a
summary:

Budur's husband Kamar al-Zaman disappears one night, so she dresses in his clothing to disguise herself as him and then sets out to find him. As she travels, she comes across a city ruled by a king Armanus, who has a daughter Hayyat al-Nufus. Budur, in her husband's guise, so impresses King Armanus that he offers his daughter in marriage to her. Budur has no choice but to accept.

On their wedding night, the newlyweds find each other beautiful. Budur kisses Hayyat, and the two fall asleep to a lullaby Budur sings. The next morning, the king and queen are shocked when they talk to their daughter and learn the marriage was

I'm dreaming of the most yuri of traditional folk songs and folk tales that we don't get to read or hear or tell today because Certain People (I'm looking at u, 19th century white male colonialist folklorists) have prevented us from ever accessing them.

the scraps that survived are delicious and I am here for every one of them, even the ones that I know are out there but don't have ANY reasonable english translation cough cough looking directly at certain stories from the thousand and one nights.

how can I recommend you read “the tale of kamar al-zaman” when half the english collections of the nights don't even include it, and of the ones that do, the translations are variously horrifyingly orientalist or bowdlerized or both. and yet! budur/hayat is yuri that demands attention. I have been on my bullshit about them since 2011 and I'm not going to stop ever. look at the title of this piece, it's about them, they have a great wedding night together I'm just saying. and hayat seems so thrilled that her husband is a woman! even if, at least in the translations I can read, budur and hayat's sexuality seems to be on display for the titillation of the assumed male reader; even if, in the end, they

not consummated. So the next night, Hayyat tells Budur that her parents asked whether her husband undressed her. So Budur undresses Hayyat, and kisses her all over, and the two go to sleep. The next morning, the king and queen ask whether she lost any blood and are ashamed to learn that the marriage is still unconsummated.

That night, Hayyat explains to Budur that the king demands they consummate the marriage. Budur confesses to Hayyat that she is a woman, and explains her story thus far. Hayyat agrees to become Kamar al-Zaman's second wife. Budur then teaches the sheltered Hayyat about the pleasures of her body. They use a fowl's blood to simulate the virgin blood, and the king and queen are pleased.

The story continues on, but that is how Budur and Hayyat met.

--tshirt

end up as sister-wives to a man, the titular kamar.

but at least I get to know that one exists, because the centuries-old arabic manuscripts it survives in cannot be ignored.

other yuri in folk traditions made it to today because it is subtle enough to be missable, or because it's framed as a joke.

but what about the oral songs and tales that didn't get written down by anyone? or had their records destroyed, or were altered beyond recognition?

modern retellings that read yuri into traditional stories where it wasn't previously present have their place, and I devour these whenever I come across them. but there's also value in seeing the yuri that came before us. and I long for it.

queer people have always existed.

women have loved women for as long as there have been women to love, and I am entirely certain people told stories about them, made jokes, sang songs. what stories don't I get to hear? what glimpses into the narrative priorities of unlistened-to voices am I kept from? I reach back through time and space and can only trail my fingers through the wake left behind in their passing

Serendipity

by 白雪花

on october 6, 2016, an anime that would change my life forever premiered, called *yuri!!! on ice*.

i have never watched *yuri on ice*, nor will i ever for reasons that are ultimately very sillypetty at this point. this essay isn't really *abt yuri on ice* (although that would have been a very funny way to interpret this volume's yuri theme), but it *is* still abt an anime that first aired on october 6, 2016 and subsequently changed my life! kind of. sort of. you'll see!!!!

flip flappers is a niche magical girl anime that i saw when i was a teenager and still didn't really know what gay people were. well okay i knew what gay people were by that point since i existed on tumblr, knew i was ace, and gay marriage had been legalized for like a year by that point, but i had zero idea how queerness expressed itself and therefore thought, and indeed *publicly insisted* on the whole-ass flip flappers blog that i ran, that the two main leads could be interpreted as Not Gay.

only tangentially related, but *flip flappers* is actually where I picked up the habit of saying "i love love LOVE [insert whatever here]" bc the way papika, the love interest, would say "i love love LOVE you!!" to cocona, the protagonist, every so often just kind of branded itself into my brain.

flip flappers was, to my teenaged self, abt whimsical, nearly nonsensical adventures through the fantasy land of pure illusion, during which cocona learned to loosen up and openly reach out for her desires. meanwhile, her partner papika learned to pay attention to and consider the needs of others without sacrificing her fun-loving and quirky personality. they spent every episode in a different anime genre looking for these "amorphous shards", which allegedly would grant wishes but just seemed like macguffins to me. idk i was actually most obsessed w/cocona's pet rabbit, uexküll, bc he was GREEN and SQUISHY.

having just rewatched the anime for the sake of this essay, i can now say with certainty that i was a Very Sheltered teenager, bc the whole show is *exactly* as gay as i remember it being, but for basically just uninformed

casually homophobic teenager reasons, it just never occurred to me that hey! this is some *Gay-Ass Shit!* i also wrote down a boatload of thoughts as i went through the show this time that i probably won't be sharing with everyone today bc simply put, this is more of a retrospective on *flip flappers's* place in my life through the years.

flip flappers marked the first time i ever felt like i Belonged to a fandom community. like yeah it wasn't my first fandom or anything, but it was the first time i felt like other fans saw me. it was the first time i received asks on tumblr requesting my thoughts on some part of the show. it was the first time my fanfiction ended up on a relict. it was the first time i had people ask me if i was back when i'd post again after a long pause.

funny story abt that relict thing. although i'm pretty sure i made it clear on my blog that i didn't really ship any of the characters in the show, i still wrote a little bit of shipfic anyway, one of which made it onto that list. i was touched by the gesture, even though i knew as i'd been writing it that i was, like, *~pandering to the yuris~*

...or something. i don't actually know what i was thinking back then anymore. but it was still my first time writing anything that focused on the romance between two girls! and for someone who grew up in a deeply christian and homophobic household (whose repercussions i'm still unpacking to this day!!), that's pretty wild!! i'd reread it so that i could talk abt it more for this essay, but i'd rather not take psychic dmg from reading my teenaged self's deeply 2016 writing style, so im just going to lie to all of you and say that i deleted it and lost the files. whoops!

still, that sense of community was important to me. a fun fact abt me is that through my years on ao3, i have never once removed *flip flappers* from my favorite tags list, even though i'd never check on it for years. something abt that sense of belonging and participation and identification within the community, combined with its niche status due to everyone else's *yuri!!! on ice* fever, has cemented its place in my heart as something to look back on every so often and bring up at every given chance.

i'd like to think that *flip flappers* was an important stepping stone in my years-long process of dismantling my own internalized homophobia. after all, even if i didn't actually ship cocona n papika when i wrote that fic, something abt writing it anyway must've paid something towards my eventual comfort with queerness in the spotlight.

i think that to say, "*i've always been more comfortable with the idea of yuri than yaoi in my media diet,*" wouldn't be that much of a lie, if a lie at all.

i've always needed someone or something familiar at my side before i can approach something i've never done, tried, or thought about before. considering the fact that there *was* a very long period in my life when i *did* consider myself a cishet girl—something i don't Regret or Resent in the slightest—it makes sense that *flip flappers* ended up being such a critical stepping stone in my acceptance of queerness *bc* it was abt two girls. at the time, i *thought* i was a girl, so the step into the unfamiliar—two girls who loved one another—was not too painful.

of course, growing up, it has been grappling with the fact that i Exist in this world and might perhaps be Perceived as something i do not feel reflects the *Me* that i've built myself to be that made me realize that, hey..... *maybe im not a girl.*

suddenly, i was one step closer to a queerness within myself i had *never* noticed or considered before, and i think in general, i just have an awful time looking Straight At things, especially at parts of myself that seem too ugly or painful to accept and untangle. the idea that **incomprehensibly mumbling abt Being transgender and the dimension that brings to one's queerness** was (maybe even still is) A Bit Much to look at all at once, so i just didn't look at it.

obviously, being nonbinary gives me a complicated relationship to both masculinity and femininity. but something i still found very odd when i first started looking at my own transgenderism is that i felt more understood and comforted by portrayals of transfemininity than transmasculinity.

like, i think that yaoi and yuri are kind of genders unto themselves. where yaoi is overbearing presence, yuri is subtle absence. where yaoi is the text, yuri is what is read between the lines. and where sometimes, looking at my own self is as painful as staring directly into the sun, my solution has typically been to study its reflection in the moon.

(yes yes, "*nice dichotomy, asshole. now what lies outside of it?*" i'm getting there!!!)

something i've known deep down since my egg cracked is that my sense

of gender is tied very, very closely to my sex-repulsed asexuality in a way that i imagine is similar to how some trans lesbians say their gender is closer to “lesbian” than “woman”.

episode 7 of *flip flappers*, “pure component”, sees cocona start developing her sense of self-identity from the ground-up as she engages with several different components of papika, who has been split into several different love interest archetypes for the episode, in order to determine both what exactly she wants her relationship with papika to *be* and what sorts of tastes and preferences she has in a partner.

probably the most important of episode’s parade of papikas is the last one, wherein a devilishly mature-looking papika dressed in an adult nightgown asks cocona, “*is change really so bad? no matter how much you change, i’ll always love you. what about you?*” in the ensuing conversation, cocona finally comes to pinpoint the fact that papika being *the papika she knows* is something that is important to her (although she still cannot yet articulate *why*)— something that, to *me*, indicates the first germ of her acceptance towards having desires.

my current otp is currently old man yuri that i use to explore the Deeply Christian Upbringing® and the *guilt* of having desire— though if i were to get into THAT, we’d be here all day lol— so obviously change i have through the years! but if i hadn’t had *flip flappers* to hold my hand as a baby queer, to look back on time and time again as a young adult able to discern more and more of its deeper themes, i don’t know how else i would have started to untangle the absolute *gordian knot* that has been my gender’s relationship to my sex repulsion *whilst also* maintaining a sense of self-identity such that i didn’t, like, shatter into pieces so fast everyone gets hit by the shrapnel as i collapsed underneath the stress of it all lol.

and maybe this, too, is yuri!! this chasing of tangled-up desires from one to another, only to loop back around into itself, yet remaining distant from its original premise in some meaningful way...!!!!!!

and i think that’s beautiful.

WH4TS 4 YUR1 >:O -
i promise i don't kin
terezi

Don't h8 me if I get any

Homestuck f8cts wrong!!!!!!!!!!

by xtine

i broke up with my first girlfriend when i was 19.

it was my first relationship, much less my first lesbian one. It's funny, i actually outwardly ided as a lesbian before i felt i was one; i wld often call myself as a lesbian while at work or school to fend myself off from male admirers. All i knew was i felt deeply repulsed by male romantic attention, and so i wore the lesbian label to protect myself. What i actually id'ed as was some split attraction microidentity that was popular on tumblr in those days. i kind of fell backwards into lesbianism, basically.

the relationship itself was picture perfect. fanfiction perfect even. we met on twitter, and had a lot of mutual friends. we were crushing on each other for a year, we wrote a callout post for her ex together, and when we became a couple the tl was in riotous celebration. it could have been pulled out from a cheesy socmed au. The relationship was long distance, but it worked for us. We called everyday too. this was when i was working a night time job, and after i got off work at 3am my time, since they were 3 timezones over, they'd still be awake and we'd spent hours or so just talking. we'd make trips to see each other. she'd buy me gifts; i still have the pack of swedish fish she mailed me from hawaii. I hope they still have my two door cinema club sweater.

she was the one to first suggest going to a school near me. thats when i started panicking—it just felt too much! i wasnt good enough for her to change the entire trajectory of her life for me. she was going to come

here and be disappointed in... something. i'd have to make sure she fit in with my friends. i didn't have money to support her. She didn't bring it up again, and we continued the cadence of our calls, but for weeks i agonized and fretted secretly, until i came to this conclusion--we had to break up.

i told them i wanted to video call (unusual for us), and they were super excited. Later i realized it was near our one year anniversary, oops. i broke up with them, and they left the call in tears. i felt immediate relief though, and hit the bar to celebrate that night. And yet... for three years after, the decision would torment me. but why?? EYE was the one who made the decision. it was the perfect relationship, but somehow that wasn't enough for me. what would be enough for me? i missed her. we weren't really friends anymore. i broke something.

homestuck is a webcomic that began in 2008 and ended in 2016 (the length of the obama presidency). i started reading it in 2010 and have been a lifelong fan of it since, i'm still up to date on the more recent stuff with james roach's team. i won't try to summarize the overarching plot, because i realized very recently that a rule i held to be true for the story was actually an instance of unreliable narrator, and now im terrified of what other basic facts i might get wrong about it l o l. whats important for this essay though is that vriska and terezi are the most important characters of the plot. im only exaggerating a little bit!

terezi is the libra troll who likes eating chalk and is obsessed with law and order. Her main joie de vivre is to bring wrongdoers to justice. vriska is the problematic one who did nothing wrong. shes strong headed and hurt and hard to get along with.

Vriska and terezi start out as partners in larping, which occasionally involves killing and maiming no-good-doers on alternia. Just regular teen stuff. until vriska does Something Problematic and that kicks off their revenge cycle, which starts with vriska blinding terezi and terezi exploding vriska's left side, and bleeds past their own universe and into the human one. Terezi's blindness becomes a core part of her character, as does vriska's robot arm and eyepatch. In the next universe, terezi tricks john into killing himself, so vriska takes him under her wing. Terezi latches onto dave in an attempt to position him as a rival to john. every slight vriska and terezi make against each other, every act of pettiness have far reaching consequences to the plot. They are, as hussie themself states, the axis that the comic revolves around.

the revenge cycle culminates on a rooftop, on an abandoned building in an abandoned meteor in an abandoned universe. Terezi directs one last accusation at vriska, she denies it, and turns away. terezi stabs vriska, killing her.

Before making her decision, Terezi uses her mind powers to see the possibilities that would result from her actions. She watches a timeline where she lets vriska go. vriska goes onto fight the big bad and wins, but returns to find all their friends dead. A pyrrhic victory. choosing their friends, terezi [S] M4K3S H3R P4Y for the final time.

After the act, terezi hugs karkat, relieved in the moment. so now their friends are spared from that big bad, and vriska is dead. but vriska did all that bad stuff right? it was the just thing to kill her. look even this plot relevant clock says it was a just death. This is what JUST1C3 looks like.

when my ex first told me she was thinking of moving across the country for me, i actually brought up this anecdote from homestuck. Oh yeah, she actually read all of homestuck in order to get closer to me?? But anyway, i was trying to frame it as like... no matter what decision you make, you'll win some and you'll lose some. One decision may lead to winning the game but all your friends die, and the other may lead to all your friends staying alive (for now), but killing your best friend. All decisions in real life have consequences like this. Kind of exactly like vriska and terezi, here are two timelines, one where you live with me and one where you dont. it'll be okay no matter what decision you make. We'll be okay.

afterwards, our terezi tries to enter a relationship with karkat. fails. tries to enter a relationship with dave. fails. she enters into a relationship with gamzee. its unhealthy and abusive. terezi becomes an alcoholic (a metaphor for it) and her spiral culminates with her healing her blindness.

Months after i broke up with her, it would take me 3 years to get over her. every time id get a little too drunk, my friends wld have to babysit me as i had a little maudlin sob sesh. I would dream about the other reality where i didn't break up with her, and she did come to live with me. At night time too. It became one of my obsessions, this other possibility. i just didnt understand why past me had broken up with her--the relationship was perfect!! she was going to move across the country for me!! Make the other decision, don't 8r8k it!!!! Why did I 8alk. Why did I kill it. WHY W4SNT SH3 3NOUGH FOR M3.

ive always had a hard time recognizing my attraction to women, and even when i “get the girl”, i fumble it. Like, i did go on dates w other ppl after my first ex. i even had other relationships with other ppl. but for the most part, i was the one to break it off. it frustrated me how i didnt seem to click with anyone, or meet someone i wanted to commit to. i already figured out i like women, im going on dates with them too, why isnt it working, wh8ts wrong with me?????????

this isnt news to anybody who knows me but: i am a self professed fu-joshi. i frequently get asked why i gravitate towards m/m if im a lesbian. Here are the easy answers:

- yaoi comes in these bite sized pieces that is easy for me to chomp through
- theres a lot of it, so i never run out of material.
- it can be hilarious, and sex comedy is one of my fave slants of comedy.
- i just like schlocky romance with a porny bend to it!

the harder answer is that sometimes yuri is too hard for me to look in the eye. In fiction, when women get together easily... when the path from recognizing attraction (recognizing that attraction at all) to getting together to staying together to happily ever after is all a straight line... that's unfamiliar to me. It really challenges my theory of mind. And actually, it fills me with such envy to read about women getting their happily ever after with another woman. i want that to be me!!!!!!!

the thesis ive been coming to. is that bc my attraction to women has been so difficult to parse + ive made the wrong choices related to that, that means that the f/f i enjoy has to reflect that. if i suffer and struggle in my lesbianism then my yuri has to as well. so... women turning down a chance at a happy life with a woman they love, who they might not even realize they love, and spend the rest of her life missing her... thats something i recognize. to me that is MY yuri. my YUR1 OF R3GR3T.

I know this all sounds depressing as hell, but im actually okay though. im better at communicating than i used to be, and also i have a they/them therapist. When i get too drunk i don't cry about my first ex anymore. Im thinking about throwing away those swedish fish. And i have a girlfriend right now! we like each other a lot. Wahoo! vrisrezi are doing okay too. our terezi retcons the rooftop-vriska-trolley-problem out of the plot and in the new canon, vriska is alive again. And in 2023 they each have sep-

arately acknowledged the possibility of romantic feelings for each other.
So exciting!!!!!!!

anyway, what better way to prove that all couples are on good terms than
with this 3P1C S4L4RYM4N VR1SR3Z1 YUR1 that my girlfriend
drew for me. teehee!

ATTORNEY 1



**CLIENT
PRIVILEGE**

Bury Your Gays in Ep. 1

by Allula

I am guilty of being a consumer of trashy isekai. It's taken over anime. It seems like every fantasy story or anything with magic is now an isekai. The previously orphan/poor/otherwise tragic protagonist now seems to just be the ordinary citizen put into an extraordinary world. While some have earned my respect, others I know in my heart to be hot garbage. It's just the light novel trend, which has become the anime trend. As this genre has expended its focus toward women, the sub genre of isekai, villainess manga and anime, has begun to become popular, typically as romantic comedies or dramas. This phenomena has had its own essays written on it; it's already old news. While some isekai have genderbent protagonists, they always tend to lead to an ambiguous form of queer content, which I still enjoy and have for many years, but they tend to play this aspect of the story off for laughs, rarely thinking about this further than jokes and ship-bait. However, we now have yuri isekai anime with female leads professing their love for women. Sometimes even evil women. 'I'm in love with the villainess' has yet another classic exactly what it's about isekai anime title, but fails to inform the reader that our protagonist is a lesbian who isn't afraid to describe herself as a gay woman. When I was in middle school, I would have gone rabid over this sort of series.

I wasn't initially a enjoyer of isekai stories. I found a lot of them to be incredibly obnoxious, in part because sometimes there was a sliver of something that sounded appealing surrounded by parts I hated. I took issue with a lot of the 'earlier' isekai series such as Sword Art Online, but also began to understand the appeal of being a hater. With many shows, it was frustration with how female characters were treated, or how the main character never really ended up distinguishing themselves as a unique character. As the genre took over anime through the 2010s, it became harder to avoid, but the premises were also changing in order to distinguish themselves. In my drive to find more isekai, I ended up eventually stumbling into the MXTX novels through 'Scum Villain' which specifically caught my interest as it played off of a lot of common tropes within light novels and other isekai stories, while telling a gay love story. And it also didn't bore me to tears, or have pro slavery protagonists, or military propaganda. But really I was mostly interested in the gay love story, and

the antagonist-love interest aspect as well. The drama of it all while still managing to pull off the comedy kept it in my heart for much longer than a lot of other series I had watched. Romance in fiction, and even fanfiction, isn't necessarily a primary interest of mine for many reasons. In the shounen genre in particular, the straight male protagonist is often focused on & developed as a character, while the female characters feel like 2-D cardboard cutouts with maybe 1 personality trait, or 2 if they're lucky. I never really connected 'isekai' and 'interesting romance' in my brain for several years despite villainess isekai already being prominent at this point. I'm not sure why. But, like many other lesbians, I can easily be recommended a piece of media by saying 'by the way, there are lesbians in it'.

That doesn't mean I won't be picky.

I watched the first season of a different anime, 'My Next Life as a Villainess' a few years ago, after being told that it had some yuri-ful moments, which it did, but I found myself unhappy with it. This show is a reverse harem, and like many in the genre, tantalizes the watchers with potential relationships, while rarely ever ending up with satisfactory romance for all of its ship-teasing. And in only one season, you can imagine how this went. Additionally, with our protagonist transmigrating into the primary antagonist, the desire for an evil women is also left wanting. The existing woman, and her potential is erased and substituted for a different, 'better' woman who can do everything right. To contrast, 'I'm in love with the villainess' has the setup for a one on one slow burn romance. While being based on an otome game premise, just like my next life, our female protagonist blatantly has no interest in her predetermined male love interests and only has eyes for her horrible mean girl crush who treats her like trash. Our main men are fine for driving the plot forward but they aren't truly love interests. I feel my interest in this relates to a lot of other gay people who have hoped not just for a story about being gay and the challenges it presents, but a gay story where everyone can shoot fire from their hands, or have a space laser gun or something sick like that.

Between this light novel receiving a well received anime adaption, among a few other girls love isekai, and the popularity of the non-isekai science fiction anime 'Witch From Mercury' yuri anime is going exciting places.



second generation himejoshi

by verity

yuri goggles (n):

what you will wear 24/7 after being raised in a household where your allegedly straight mom is obsessed with *Xena: Warrior Princess*

~

Arguably, my formal introduction to yuri was via clicking on an explicit Daria/Jane fanfic on Outpost Daria. It was 1999: no tags, no ratings, just vibes. “Wow, that’s too adult for me,” thought I, and clicked away. I wasn’t aware that I was gay. I was just obsessed with Daria Morgendorffer and Jane Lane, an extremely normal passion for a proto-goth twelve-year-old. Later, I would be obsessed with Allison Argent and Lydia Martin in a similar way. To be a werewolf hunter is its own kind of goth.

Despite being a femslash enthusiast since my early fandom days, I’ve often felt embarrassed about the fandoms I’ve been drawn to. Some of us didn’t connect with *The Devil Wears Prada!* I have never been interested in who killed Jenny on *The L Word* and I’m not going to google it now! No one online made me feel this pressure (certainly, I am more interested in eating pussy than broccoli). The emotion is the one that rotisseries my brain when I hear gay news via my mom’s recaps of Rachel Maddow, like: shouldn’t I be better at being homosexual than you?

During my Sterek years, I called home one time and my mom said, “I’m sorry, honey... but my girls are on.” She was watching *Once Upon a Time*. Never have I felt more humbled.

My mom herself is largely unaware of the shadow she casts over my media consumption: yuri wholesomeness so weaponized I can barely generate a PG-13 thought about a show I know my mom would go crazy for. Sometimes I send her Xena/Gabrielle fanart where they’re holding hands. Out there on the efiction archives of 2003 there is some horny shit, but I have to Look Away.

I am often Looking Away at the collected works of 74243.

74243, numbers-jie to their fans, is a prolific and genre-defining author of r63 Wangxian in which Lan Zhan is a mean top and Wei Ying loves to both playfully provoke and be tormented. Sometimes they are cis women; sometimes Lan Zhan is an alpha dyke with a dick and Wei Ying is an omega who's getting wet in the stairway of her apartment building about it. Lan Zhan generally has a mullet. I want her to run me over with her motorcycle.

Thus follows the hotly debated (by people who care about the answer) question: is r63 yuri?

Well, it's all yuri to me.

Like Luke Skywalker plunging into the swamps of Dagobah, I had to wade through millions of words of dripping omega bussy to claim my birthright: women fucking nasty. Somehow, this is what's serving *Macho Sluts*. I'm not saying all genderswap fic feels like an authentically queer experience (you can smell the yaoi coding on every fic that is blatantly just big titty/small titty), but it feels gay to me. Maybe it's just more accessible for some of us to experience yuri through a mirror, genderly. Rachel Maddow will probably not report on the appeal of being stepped on by alpha dyke Lan Zhan.

I'm sure I would hear about that, though, like when Jimmy Fallon taught my mom about hashtags. For a long time, I thought our fannish interests could never converge, until we watched *Word of Honor* together and she fell in love with Gu Xiang and "A-Xu." My mom was delighted when I showed her the front cover of my fem Wenzhou collab zine with Moose, and she accepted that all she was going to get to see. The secret of the filthy period sex that lay inside was safe with me and every single person who's ever visited my AO3.

Recently, she sent me a *Daria* mug. I continue to bear the cross of having a cool mom.

Getting Bent.

by Alexis TheSwordWizard

I get the urge to preface this essay with a setting of expectations. When I saw the yaoi zine 3 announcement, I was already planning on writing something that I would later include in my next Butchverse zine. As much I was as excited at the announcement that this edition was going to be yuri specific, I had been anticipating on writing using a yaoi framework. I can do yaoi in my sleep. The bar for yaoi is in hell, half the fun is reshaping the bounds of what that means. But yuri felt like suddenly I had to deliver a certain kind of product. I had to preserve the sanctity and emotional earnestness of yuri. Yuri was serious. Even though the whole premise of what I was writing/drawing was lesbian, I was uncertain if I should stick with it, even after getting the go-ahead. It struck me as odd that I would suddenly get stage fright on writing about Daredevil being a lesbian after selling so many zines about it. It was worth examining, if only to root out the source of the cognitive dissonance.

I follow several himejoshis and respect them immensely, but the pretty, clean, lithe, anime girls roll off my brain like water. I could never picture myself as a cute girl liking another cute girl; they were completely unrelatable. My main “girl” book series I was into as a child was Tamora Pierce’s historical fantasy books. They were the most important books I read as a kid, and The Protector of the Small series was a decent replacement for therapy and walking back the wrong lessons I took from the Ender’s Game series. It was also, notably, the first female protagonist I could relate to. Keladry was described as stocky, but she was strong. While practical and interested in the more martial arts, she still admired other women as much as she struggled to relate to their levels of femininity. She was sensible, disciplined, and focused. She wanted to become a knight, and knew she was as capable as many of the other boys who would easily be accepted, where she was only allowed as an experiment and probate. Her being female was an issue for everyone else around her to struggle with, and she handled everything that came with being surrounded by obnoxious men with a dignified, almost elegant, stoicism. She was SO cool.

Still, she was not a lesbian. When she eventually became interested in

some of the men in her life, suddenly her relationship to being female was of great concern. It never overshadowed anything else she was doing, and she always placed her work first, but still. Pierce was clearly working to give something to the tomboy girls who still liked guys, and give more avenues of alternate forms of femininity, instead of represent female masculinity. Keladry occasionally dress femininely not as a path of least resistance or to make a point, but because she still wanted to present as female, and desired for men she liked to still see her as feminine (just in addition to a knight). What a let down for young me.

How could the only avenue of being attractive as a women be tied to being seen as a woman?

Even the levels of female friendships in most girl media didn't relate. The first time I considered sexuality as something applied seriously to myself was when a friend in middle school told me her mom didn't want me coming over because I was a lesbian. Which was news to me. I had known since elementary school that people sometimes talked about me behind my back, mostly because I was incredibly effective at counter-bullying from being raised in a psychological thunderdome, but it was only at particular moments was I faced with the emotional distance between myself and most other kids. My friends in school were made from convenience or shared prioritization of our schoolwork, and in high school my closest friend was a strategically closeted gay guy in rural South Carolina, who was willing to drive 30 minutes to pick me up from my house so we could walk around the woods and identify plants.

This was in part why I was always suspicious of the framing of "female" and "male" socialization as something inherent. I don't really feel "female-socialized." Growing up I had respectably long hair (before I buzzed it for good I would cut my own hair by putting it in a ponytail and then leave just enough I could still keep it up) and participated in girl scouts in elementary school, but I also did martial arts until I moved in high school. I wore pants because they were practical and comfortable. I was raised by a mildly conservative, retired military, "do-it-yourself" stay-at-home father and a career-focused mom who got her first degree in mechanical engineering, with a younger and older brother. My dad had raised two (cheerleader) daughters before and was kind of over it, and just brought me along for whatever would normally be regulated as "boy stuff." My room was only painted pink by the people who owned our

house before us, until it was repainted white for resale value. I had some barbies because there were always a ton at a nearby thrift store, but I also had legos (my dad once found several huge mixed boxes at an estate sale). I would say my presentation was less attached to any real concept of gender, and more to what was cheap and efficient.

I felt like a girl because everyone else saw me as one, and I didn't really have anything better to counter with. I thought both of my brothers and a lot of boys my age were kind of lame, so I felt like being a different gender than them was apt. In hindsight I felt like even pretty young I understood gender as something that was projected onto me. It was a category for convenience and primarily the convenience of others. Now, I'm still not stressed over it. I use any pronouns, I care more about tone. He/him pronouns, or otherwise masculine terminology, can be used in insult as much as she/hers can. Either can be a pushing of boundaries, a pointed reminder, or a backhanded compliment depending on what the person thinks you're "supposed" to be, and what gender markers they think you are or aren't hitting. Even a little cis girl on the playground could become furious at a little boy taunting "you're a giiiiirl!" She technically agrees that yes, she is a girl, but she knows that what she considers in herself a girl is different than why that boy said it as mockery. Which is where we get into gender semiotics.

For those who aren't familiar, semiotics is the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation. Basically how things like words, images, sounds, or other "physical" forms get used to indicate a larger concept. One of the classic examples is that of an apple. The overall sign of "apple" is made up of its signifier and the signified. The signifier is the "physical" existence that our brain is processing at that moment, whether it be a physical apple in your hand, a picture of an apple, the sound of someone saying the word aloud, or the word apple as written here way too many times already. This invokes the signified, what your brain associates with those things, such as the concept of fruit in general, a healthy snack, the brand, anything. You can use specific codes to narrow down possible context. For example, if you were using the code of talking about technology, your signifieds would stick to what you associate with the tech brand, and your signifiers would stick to things like logos, or the computers themselves. There are many concrete queer-specific semiotic codes, such as the hanky code which uses different colors and placements to advertise different dynamics. Queer cultures build robust codes that allow us to exist and form meaning in the margins of dominant heterosexual cultures.

The idea of “codes” also come into play in popular culture when we talk about queer coding. Subtle dynamics and details that might have been intentioned to mean one thing (or nothing at all) in a narrative set firmly in a heteropatriarchal structure can mean something completely different when read in a different code —a queer one. For example, in the Amazing Heroes Swimsuit Special #1 (I don’t even have time to get into it) from 1990 there’s a page with Frank Castle holding two uzis and looking huge and imposing as usual, while wearing what could only be referred to as a micro-kini (with a little skull on it, of course). Obviously it is never intentioned to be considered anything but a hahaha big angry guns guy manly-man has small dick (is less powerfully masculine, less sexually desirable as a man) joke. But if taken from a queer perspective, could be easily read as trans/butch coding, and in which case I think I have covid. The mainstream comic industry might be playing checkers, but I’m playing air hockey. And I’m slamming all these pucks right off the table.

People reading into narratives with these alternative codes are not necessarily arguing that there were real queer intentions, or that their reading is some objectively correct truth, but that that there is a compelling, and often completely coherent sub-narrative that can be read through these codes. I never try to say that any writer ever in the history of Marvel comics definitely meant for Daredevil or the Punisher to be read as butches, but oh my god wouldn’t it be fucking awesome. Would it not still cohere? I am both completely dead serious as much as I know that it’s objectively funny that I even bother. Andrea Chu in her memoir *Females* says about comedy in general, that

a bit may be fantastical, but the seriousness required to commit to it is always real. This is the humorlessness that vegetates at the core of all humor. That’s what makes the bit funny; the fact that, for the comic, it isn’t.

In preparation for this essay I read her book because it that argues a thesis that is very convenient for me: that Everyone Is Female. Specifically, Chu argues that “femaleness is a universal sex defined by self-negation, against which all politics, even feminist politics, rebel. [...] Everyone is female, and everyone hates it.” Gender is political because (in my opinion) it is less about sexual organs than it is about signals we use for others. We want to be treated a certain way, seen a certain way, so we apply for different sets of signs and signifiers. Heteropatriarchy controls gender as a class structure using “birth sex” as a foundation that is easy to point to and delineate for the masses. Of course, this two-party system falls

apart when considering intersex and nonbinary individuals, which is why they tend to get railroaded into being treated as one or the other anyways.

It requires "either" gender to swear fealty and put effort into signaling their commitment to their gender class.

It promotes internal policing of each class, and in times where the system is threatened that policing is heightened to the point of hysteria. Like nosy middle-class suburbanites suspecting their neighbors of being communists, delusionally insecure cis women transvestigate celebrities on Facebook.

Females uses Valerie Solanas's SCUM Manifesto (and her play "Up Your Ass") as a jumping-off point, with Solanas's main thesis that men ruin the world and that they should be eliminated. Chu doesn't necessarily accept it at face value, nor does she frame it as a practical political position. But it does speak to the emotional validity of her work, as one could (and Chu does) claim that transfemininity can be one of the most similarly radical forms of both figuratively and literally deconstructing heteropatriarchy we have. Particularly the way that Solanas's work almost requires a sense of humor to engage with directly, even as seriously as Solanas takes it herself. To approach it solely at face value would be like reading *A Modest Proposal* as a genuine. As Chu says herself: "Valerie would make statements not because they were accurate or provable, but simply because she wanted to. Readers would be confronted by desire, not truth." It's not about what she's saying, but how she feels saying it. It's about provocative optics. It's about charisma. It's about swagger. Which is about a quarter of what makes up gender perception anyway.

But I cannot escape the phrase "desire, not truth," when I think about gender. What could the "truth" of gender even be other than desire? You present yourself how you want others to perceive you, whether it's what your birth assignment was or not. How could you argue that someone's desire to look a certain way, to be seen a certain way, to be treated a certain way. isn't honest? I think that when it comes to concept and practice of genderbending in media, there are contradictions in desire and presumed truth. A big, physically powerful man suddenly becomes a deflated everywhere except for the T&A, when ethnic features got melted into a button nose and European features, the only way a "real" woman can look. What is valuable (or neutral) in a man has to become what is valuable in

a woman. They don't care about the gender, not really. And they definitely don't care about bending anything.

Why bother playing with gender if not to think about gender? If not to interrogate how it shapes our worlds? It's such a disappointment when it feels like gender roles and heteropatriarchal structures just get replayed and bought into, simply because they're familiar. At the same time I do own a bootleg of the Michael Myers Bishoujo series statue, where it's basically just a hot girl dressed up in his costume. The duality of man. Shunya Yamashita if you are reading this please design a new Elektra statue that doesn't look terrible, thank you. But seriously, gender is so interesting! Our cultures are so heavily built on making presumptions on how we think we're supposed to interact with other people, reading into something that can be so quickly radicalized creates such a rich playing field.

Every story is about gender, even if it's mainly how someone avoids seriously thinking about it.

It's why there are so many queer readings about so many stories, like there are so many Marxist readings. The political inherently shapes our whole world, but can also be equally invisible if we don't know the codes.

Because these codes are not always concrete, or well known, it can be difficult to explain without a lot of set-up. You can't talk about gender without using Gender Words, which are some of the most culturally loaded words we have (the two characters I've been writing about in Butchverse are white, so it is easier to skate over the other category of loaded identifiers, as much as race and gender are inescapably intertwined in cultures of subjugation and control). It was easier also writing about butchness, and presumed AFAB butchness, as it's hip to aggressively deconstruct masculinity (as well as the fact that that's how I categorize myself). The structural power of the label of being a man can (and should, and must, tbh) be knocked loose, but most feminists have to deal with at least the instinct to be a bit more protective over concepts of femininity, even traditional ones. Women are an oppressed class in heteropatriarchy, and womanhood (and anything deemed feminine) is generally under attack as an inherent weakness.

I feel silly even bothering to say that even some traditional ideas femi-

ninity have inherent value and strength (because, duh) but it's important that I don't come across in a way I don't intend too. Masculinity is not the neutral state of humanity, and treating it as such is just basic sexism. But defending and representing womanhood cannot be done in a way that ends up limiting it. So much transmisogyny, especially from cis women—and cis women who consider themselves feminists—ends up trying to treat womanhood as something that is so weak it has to be defended by retreating to more traditional (and harmful) values and concepts. Which is how you get these kinds of women arguing in the mainstream that women are so inherently weak that trans women would have unfair “biological advantages” in every sport up to and including the notoriously testosterone-boosted game of... chess.

As much as they want to believe that they are defending some concept of womanhood that they find important in themselves, what they are really only doing is defending heteropatriarchy. They are stuck in that mindset, even as they try to gain benefits to their personal brand of living as a woman. Womanhood is such a burden in this culture that their main way of coping is to see it as a noble one that they must see through. Transitioning to a man is betraying other woman and cheating, and transitioning to a woman is suspect. “How could someone who is supposed to be the lucky half, the powerful half, switch sides? They could never understand what it is to really be a woman.” Yet little do they acknowledge that dismissive and demeaning treatment of trans women is really just giving them the ultimate treatment as Female, showing that they don't really see them as men. Their worldview sees femininity as something so fragile that it must be sacrosanct, unless it's a form of womanhood that they don't relate to, in which it is as garbage as misogynistic men see their own womanhood.

This also occurs in otherwise queer spaces, to a degree. We are all familiar with “women and nonbinary” spaces that end up treating “nonbinary” as “women-lite.” Womanhood is seen as stifling, so it's expected for more people to not want to associate with it. Manhood is a position of power, so those that would identify as nonbinary are far more suspect. This gets amplified when race is a factor, with how the further from whiteness one is, the less attainable femininity or any form of neutrality is. Perceived gender continues to be a way to quickly categorize others for personal convenience.

To create spaces for radical forms of gender we have to commit to the bit, so to speak.

Queer and similar spaces often use “girls, gays, and theys” type language in the hopes of a group that will in one way or another be more likely to reject heteropatriarchal structures, and be a safer space within. Of course this is not always the case, and often emblematic in the demonization of trans women (partnered with the infantilization of trans men). By rejecting heteropatriarchy, by rejecting gender binary, one would hope that gender essentialism would be rejected as part and parcel. The reliance on AGAB terminology as identification is counter-intuitive to... just about everything, in my opinion.

Putting femaleness on a pedestal holds us back in every regard. We get female characters that must fit into stereotypical boxes of “girl character” or else someone is trying to say that the typical (and frankly, stereotypical) image of womanhood isn’t good enough. Anything that shifts from stereotypical femininity is an inherent shift towards masculinity. It’s admitting defeat. But this really just limits womanhood. Writing women, writing yuri, cannot be seen as something more limiting than writing men, and writing yaoi. We need to have room for play, for experimentation, and for alternate forms of femininity, for female masculinity as we do for masculinity, and for masculine femininity.

Comics is an easy place to start from, as the concept of “canon” is already so flexible. Characters that are now almost mainline in their popularity originally started as one-offs or alternate versions of existing ones. What gets considered more “canon” in the long run is based more off of demand and collective conscious than much else. Entire comic runs get dismissed as irrelevant when enough people dislike them. Side characters get their own runs out of enough interest. There is a rich precedent of different parallel worlds, writers, and artists that can coexist even within an obnoxious overarching IP. With so many stories spanning over so long, with so many spin offs and variants and crossovers, you can’t count on the average reader to remember everything as it happened. What remains, and is the most important in the long run, is how we feel reading it, and specifically having finished reading an arc.

With so much variation (and frankly, inconsistency) in writing, readers have to decide as individuals what feels true about a character. Which

of course, will always in part be based on desire—what people want to see in a character. And that will eventually loop back in influencing later writers who cannot remember every detail about the character they're writing, but are faced every day with what people say and how they feel about them. Did you know that for a majority of Daredevil's run he was more lapsed Catholic than anything? How quickly the times change. What I'm saying is that I'm running important long-term psychological operations. When the solar flare happens that takes out all computers and a super-locust that only eats trade paper back paper wipes out all other instances of these characters, all that will be left and canon is Butchverse. You're welcome.

Going back to Chu, she defines "as female any psychic operation in which the self is sacrificed to make room for the desires of another." In this case, by feminizing these male characters I am doing doubly so, and shedding female-ness from myself. I no longer am the one responsible for crossing the gap of gender difference between us to relate to them.

I sacrifice their cisgendered maleness to project and grow myself into as an extension of what is a woman.

I highly recommend reading her book, it's a quick read and better expresses her full framework better than I could quickly explain here. It's such a challenge trying to be succinct (not that I was successful in that either) while fully communicating something so personal and full anecdotal—but also oddly and forcedly universal, as so many people have to share the limited terms we have—through writing over time and space. I want to connect with you so badly without insulting any version of who you might be, without lying about who I am. We are sort of doing yuri right now, you and I. I have a girlfriend, though.

CARD CAPTOR
SALVORA
HAD AN
IRON GRIP
ON 90'S
GAYS



me @
the library
@ 8 years
old, upset
Salvora ends
up with
 Syaoran instead
of Tomoyo

ATSU
2013

TRUE SEEKERS MIGHT BE DAMNED

(an annotated Madohomu fanmix)

by Roland

In the interest of brevity, I've not provided much overview of the subject matter, because *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* is a touchstone of 2010s yuri culture. Wikipedia will provide you all that's needed to follow along if you're unfamiliar. The crucial bit is here:

an extremely powerful witch known as Walpurgisnacht approaches the city. Homura attempts to stop it but is defeated. She begins to lose hope and is on the verge of becoming a witch when Madoka arrives. With the past month's events in mind, Madoka decides to become a magical girl, despite Homura's efforts to stop her. She makes a wish to stop the creation of all witches in the past, present, and future. The paradoxical nature of her wish causes her to transcend into a psychopomp form, called the "Law of Cycles" which is a new rule of the universe where magical girls are purified and disappear into a higher plane instead of becoming witches. A new reality is formed in which Homura is the only one who remembers Madoka. Homura vows to continue fighting in honor of Madoka and the world she cherished.

Unsurpassed.

This is an annotated version of a pair of linked fanmixes — one focusing on Homura as a solo character piece, and one on Madohomu as a ship—I made almost a decade ago. Homura is my meow meow of all time, and I wanted to ample room to delve into Madohomu as the relationship at the

centre of Homura's life, while also giving space to explore her character on its own—especially since, in many ways, the relationship to Madoka is a relationship to absence, to projection, to what Madoka represents in Homura's world. Madohomu represents a real quintessence of yuri, and by extension Homura encapsulates a quintessence of yuri, or at least some of what yuri is to *me*.

There was a darker edge to this project, however. Original *PMMM* is a twelve-episode series that was later adapted into two feature-length recap movies before the release of a third, original animated film, *Puella Magi Madoka Magica: Rebellion*, in 2013. *Rebellion* earned eternal loathing from me; I have never in my life hated a movie so vehemently. At the same time, I never created any *PMMM* fanworks until after it came out; I felt quite satisfied with the series as a closed narrative and didn't feel a need to add to it. I was thereafter tasked with the holy mission of raging online about bad Homura characterization, even if it was coming from the ““canon”” ““creators,”” and the following fanmix is one of the artifacts of my crusade.

Every piece of *PMMM* fan content I've ever made is an attempt to reckon with *Rebellion* without looking it straight in the face, as though I'm going to get frozen into stone by its Gorgon gaze. This annotation/revival/re-examination of my fanmixes continues that trend, except I actually suffered myself to look Medusa in the eye—by which I mean revisit the film for the first time since I saw it in theatres and had an existential crisis looking at myself in the Cineplex bathroom mirror afterwards as I tried to process just how fucking bad it was.

When 8tracks started to go downhill, I backed the playlists up to spotify as best I could; a non-negligible number of songs are either unplayable in my country or not on Spotify at all, and have been cut and replaced by others, and merged into one playlist. ♡ = a track was featured on the original two mixes from back in the day; the rest of the tracks are new to this rebooted edition, mostly because they did not exist in 2014 (or my brain wasn't big enough back then to include them.)

Anyway, on to the playlist:



(or old-fashioned style: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/6YP68rI69w-Jug39BxQR9SH>)

WALKING ON A WIRE – THE CASKET GIRLS ♡

This song is so weary, but with this chilling sense of... inevitability carried along by the unexpectedly heavy baseline. There's no self-pity; the speaker just seems somewhat resigned or bemused by the point we get to the line, repeated four times: "*maybe we weren't meant for these times...*"

On an intertextual note, I can't help but suspect the Beach Boys' "I Just Wasn't Made For These Times" is being invoked, and by association, the other *Pet Sounds* classic "God Only Knows" comes to my mind: "*If you should ever leave me / Well, life would still go on, believe me / [but] what good would living do me?*". That question is one which the end of *PMMM* proper answers in a particularly satisfying way—Homura living, even with Madoka ascended to another plane of existence, does all the good in the world—and *Rebellion* does... not.

To explain why *Rebellion* sent me off the deep end, I'm going to pull a choice paragraph from the Wikipedia synopsis:

Before Madoka can cleanse Homura, Homura suddenly grabs her, trapping her. Homura separates Madoka into two forms, severing Madoka's humanity from her ultimate magical girl form. Homura reveals that **what corrupted her Soul Gem was not a curse of despair, but rather a curse of love**. She unleashes this power across the universe and rewrites the cosmos into a reality where her beloved Madoka—and Madoka and Homura's friends—will forget what has happened and return to the lives they led before the events of the series, while Homura herself will assume control over the design of their universe. **Homura then transcends her own mortal existence and announces herself as a "demon", a winged figure dressed in black**. She gloats to Kyubey that this new reality will force the Incubators to bear the weight of the collective curses of

the world. Homura revels in her creation, but she accepts that she may become Madoka's enemy if the latter should regain her memories and magical girl powers and oppose what Homura has done.

Now, you might be like, "this sounds extremely yuri." And it is. But it's cynical and evil yuri. It's yuri that has nothing worthwhile to say about life or the experience of being human besides that love, specifically love between women, is a corrupting force (!) that will make you into a sexually predatory yandere with a vampy cleavage dress (!). I think I would be less crazy about this if some people weren't like "this rules because now Homura is even more explicitly gay!" which is just. Like. Yes. She is. In the service of narrative homophobia. This is literally homophobic. And not in the memey way. Can we not demand more from our yuri?????

But we have a lot of tracks to get through.

QUEENS – YAMANTAKA // SONIC TITAN ♡

I titled a PMMM fic after the line in this song, "*wolf's breath in my hair,*" which is followed by "*my weariness cuts my feet to the bone...*"

I also wanted something metal-adjacent on here, for the flavour, even though this track is mostly prog. "*So say the waves / screaming in time / all out of joint...*"

AN HOUR – FOREST SWORDS ♡

I really appreciate a well-chosen instrumental track on a fanmix, both as transitional material, as tone-setting (choosing purely based on what the music itself evokes for you [as well as, possibly, the title] rather than having to also factor in the lyrics), and to invite the listener to use their imagination a little bit. Why do *you* think I included this song? You can't rely on Genius.com to tell you! Let your brain play a little eyelid movie and see what happens!

On a specific note, this is our first foray into electronic music proper, which recurs throughout the rest of this playlist because of the prom-

innence of rhythm/beats/dance/tempo in the landscape of the music. Homura has time powers. I am very clever.

LAST GASP – HOLLY HERNDON

“shifting forward without age / are we really here, alive? [...] the last gasp of a dying man / time’s on my side.”

I have a hard time imagining that Homura thinks of herself as a “girl” anymore, despite the magical girl <-> witch continuum of exploitable adolescent feminine hope/desire/rage/despair. She is the opposite pole to Kyubey: ageless, genderless sojourner of a very long entropic hallway. She is a thing that loves Madoka and fights for her, The End.

That chunky, queasy, plodding bassline, too!

BUTTERFLY NET – CAROLINE POLACHEK

“here you were, with your mirror / shining the world all over me / there I was, with my butterfly net / trying to catch your light [...] you stayed unwavering through every false goodbye / unsubiding, pining / for now and for never”

The way emotion is expressed in this song really steers it away from cringe-unrequited-love-self-pity territory while keeping it wrenching and sincere, which I find fitting.

It’s not that Homura was never kind of creepy and obsessive in the original series, because the potential was always there. But it’s in the service of intensity of feeling that reaches its apotheosis in devotion not simply to a person, but to that person’s values, that person’s vision for the world—and those values being ones of hope and possibility and agency! And, significantly, there’s a reversal within that arc; we’re introduced to Homura as the near-omnipotent (due to the accumulation of time loop knowledge) Bearer Of The Curse, but in the final analysis, Madoka becomes the all-seeing one on an elevated plane of existence, while Homura remains as stubbornly human as she ever was, deep down. Mutual love and care, not one-sided obsession, is what made her and saves her.

ECSTASY OF ST. TERESA – OBJECT BLUE

Sainthood as a state of yuri being is clearly set up by the imagery of the source material.

BACHELORETTE (FAMILY TREE VERSION) – BJORK

“I’m a fountain of blood / in the shape of a girl” !!!

HOURGLASS SANDS – AMBROSE ♡

“sifting through my hands, the hourglass sands, on a distant beach / I thought my grip was firm, that I held it in my palm, but I woke and the dream was gone [...] no one knows the secrets that you keep / tucked away under the pillow where you sleep”

It’s about the perceived futility of going through The Horrors for the sake of someone who barely knows you exist (at least in any given bad timeline)..... Sometimes that’s what having a crush is like!!!!

LOCUS LACED – SLEIGH BELLS

Sleigh Bells have always channeled petulant teen-girl god-or-fallen-angel-complex vibes better than anyone. Homura is one of those blorbos who are very tragique but also kind of a power fantasy of competence and stoic suffering, and that’s what I was gesturing at here. It’s very charming to me when she’s an arrogant asshole. And it’s been too long on this playlist without heavy guitars.

ENDLESS – HAPPY HOLLOWES ♡

This track is delivered from being too unbearable an example of radio-friendly 2010s indie pop by Sarah Negahdari’s uncanny, keening, banshee wail of a voice.

What I’ve been gesturing at throughout this not-essay is that a quintessence of yuri, one that is spoken to by this story (*REBELLION DO*

NOT INTERACT), is The Crush—the experience of longing as well as the object of that longing herself—elevated to the point of the Sublime, in the aesthetic sense: greatness, power, immensity beyond comprehension or expressibility.

DANCE – REBECCA & FIONA ♡

One takeaway from this playlist is that I believe Akemi Homura listens to EDM. Or, more accurately (since I don't usually make diegetic fanmixes), EDM is a fitting expression of her internal world. She's made saves-cumming into a lifestyle.

The original title of the Homura solo mix was “then, rewind,” based on a mistaken parsing of the lyric “envy chances to rewind” from this song, which also fits thematically, but is less catchy and evocative as a title.

JEANETTE (HAIDER REMIX) – KELLY LEE OWENS

I warned you about the EDM. This is music to set explosion-filled AMVs to, and Homura loves to blow stuff up. When I first heard this remix (which is very different from the original track, which I also love), my first thought was “too bad it's impossibly cringe to make a THIRD Homura/Madohomu fanmix in 2022 because this is really taking me there.” Ha ha.

What little thematic relevance this has to the overall subject is the name Jeanette being a diminutive of Jean, as in Jean d'Arc, which, martyred gender-y girl-saints → we're in Homura town baby.

CHAMPION (HAAI REMIX) – WARPAINT

I promise something that isn't EDM will come on soon.

“I'm a million years old...” See earlier notes on Homura's arrogance and maniacal pragmatism as a quality that really endears me, and one that reductive “oh no I have a crush on my classmate D: what do” understandings of yuri obviously don't accommodate. Even though this is yuri about having a crush on your classmate. It's about having a crush on your

classmate as the impetus to become a demigod and collect assault rifles and neg your magical girl colleagues. Which I think is really important.

Warpaint are, famously, an all-female four-piece rock band, and HAAi is a female producer—I really tried to go for a majority of female artists on these playlists in their original incarnations, and I've done my best to keep that up. Because of my commitment to yuri.

GIRLKIND – SINEAD O'BRIEN

I waffled about including this track. “6.5min of lyrically dense spoken word” is a hard sell even for intrepid listeners. But the bass and percussion are so churning, and there's a real sense of chaos and control held in tandem, which makes it feel very on-brand.

Also, “eternity is so much less than I had thought / a long withstanding single moment, an unacknowledged act / a leg caught on the trap / and would the ankle snap / to free the snare from the fawn / or the thought from the clock...”

CHANGELINGS (JOHN FOXX AND THE MATHS REMIX) – GAZELLE TWIN ♡

“disappear before the next star rises” was the title of the Madohomu half of this playlist. This song is a pair, to me, with the Young Galaxy track at the end; our electronic stylings begin to wind down and get significantly more subdued and melancholy, without being overly bleak, which feels fitting for the way things resolve.

ELEMENTAL – WILLOW BEATS ♡

This is one of the tracks that feels like it was written for this playlist... burbling 2010s EDM about being gay with a goddess for your beloved? You shouldn't have!

TRUE SEEKERS – SLEIGH BELLS

I typically don't love Sleigh Bells' more... “motion picture credits se-

quence”-esq downtempo tracks, but “true seekers might be damned” is a lyric that works for me in this context, much as it might seem more in line with the beloathed turned-into-a-demon-by-gay-infatuation ending. In the context of the rest of the song (*“I remain forever loyal / I’ll find my way out of the grave”*), it speaks to being exiled from the mundane concerns of the straight world in favour of living a life of conviction and of unrepentant queerness. Like, it might exile you! But it might be worth it!

FALL FOR YOU (GHOSTING SEASON REMIX) – YOUNG GALAXY ♡

[as if from an out-of-sight rave down a gloomy yet ethereal sewer tunnel:] *“I work the mines til the break of dawn / just me in the dark with a lonely heart [...] When you need a guide I’ll light your way...”*

THE PRINCESS AND HER HANDMAIDEN



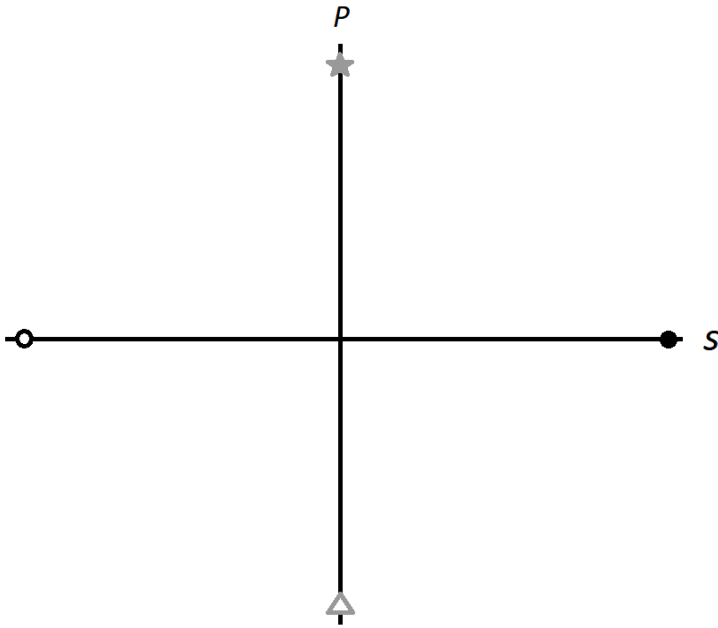
ATTEND A ROYAL BANQUET

Beginner's Chart Starter Kit

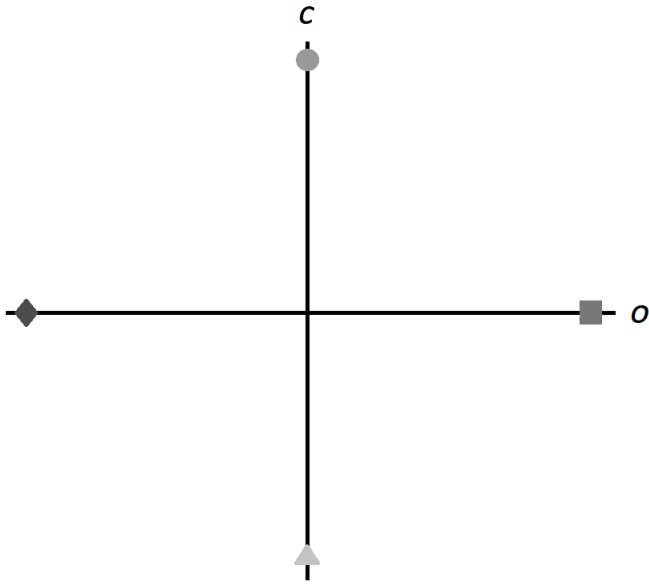
by KJile

Calculate the slope (m) of your relationship!

$$y = mx + b$$

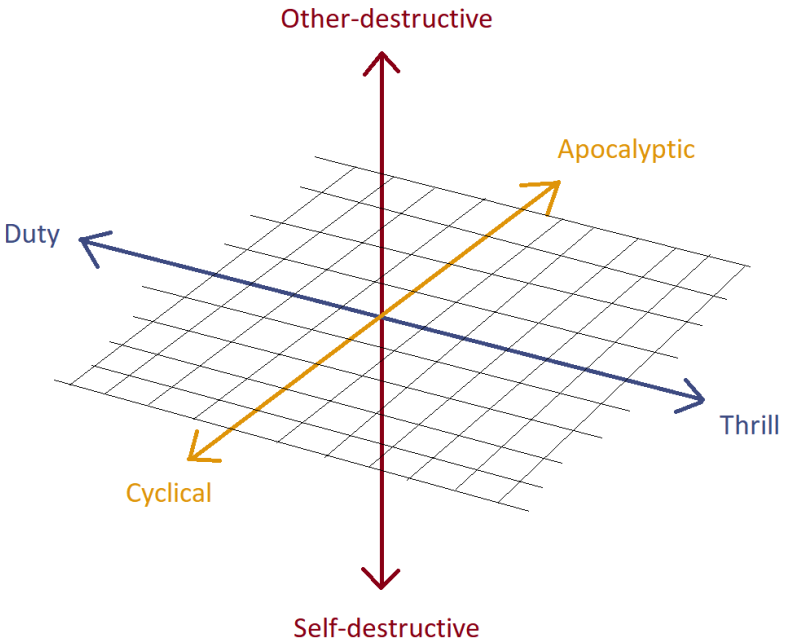


- Why doesn't Sisyphus just stop pushing the boulder? Is he stupid?
- Why doesn't Sisyphus just push the boulder? Is he stupid?
- ★ **Prodigy** /prɒd'ə-jē/: noun. 1. A person with exceptional talents or powers. 2. An act or event so extraordinary or rare as to inspire wonder. 3. A portentous sign or event; an omen.
- △ **Plebeian**: as in *common*, as in *ordinary*, as in *uninteresting*, as in *dull*, as in *dismal*, as in *bleak*, as in, as in *barren*, as in *unable to support growth*, as in *unprofitable*



- My birth was a curse - unto myself
- ▲ My birth was a curse - unto everyone around me
- ◆ Weapon
- Handler

which quadrant best fits the concept of a "monster"?



LOVE

<p>The cat is still alive. I can't leave the cave and leave it all alone.</p>	<p>The cat is definitely still alive. I'll leave the cave to find a way to save it.</p>
<p>The cat is already dead. What reason is there to leave the cave anymore?</p>	<p>The cat is dead. There's no point staying in this cave. No one else understands this.</p>

Which one is more romantic? Can you name the axes?

Can your pairing walk out into the sunshine together?
Do they want to?



“Tell me about you and Mother and how she enslaved you and you lost her and found her and laid your fortune at her feet so you could wear a maid’s uniform every day and she had me, and you both decided to bring me up without any of the flaws that were present in your early education and—”



Victorian yuri

and its descendants. by tshirt



“Little devil, indeed, you shall beg my pardon for that too, you insulting young lady, how dare you express yourself so to your governess, your bottom must be cut to pieces if I can’t subdue such a proud spirit. There— there— there!” cutting away, each stroke going in on the tender parts of her inner thighs. “Will you be rude again? Will you insult me again, eh? I hope I don’t hurt you too much, pray tell me if I do. Ha! Ha!! Ha!!! you don’t seem quite to approve of it by the motions of your impudent bottom,” cutting away all the while I was speaking, each stroke with deliberation on some unexpected place, till her bum was rosy all over, and marked with a profusion of deep red weals.



What she writes that the definition of the child in the nineteenth century came to be dominated by sexuality.” As he explains, “Innocence was filed down to mean little more than virginity coupled with ignorance; the child was before, that which was innocent. . . . The irony is not hard to miss when something entirely as a negation brings irresistibly before us that the we’re trying to banish.” It also, as Kincaid points out, inevitably was this ideal of the innocent (sexually ignorant) child into “the literary Gothic.”⁵¹

Such a scene, as well as the scene of the bride, as well as the scene of the girl who had to endure; her cheeks were pinched with tears and her hands were pushed up nearly to her eyes. As much as possible, she had to kneel with her clothes still pinned up behind.



This is what James Kincaid describes when he writes that the definition of the child in the nineteenth century came to be dominated by sexuality.” As he explains, “Innocence was filed down to mean little more than virginity coupled with ignorance; the child was before, that which was innocent. . . . The irony is not hard to miss when something entirely as a negation brings irresistibly before us that the we’re trying to banish.” It also, as Kincaid points out, inevitably was this ideal of the innocent (sexually ignorant) child into “the literary Gothic.”⁵¹

Yuri sources

- Goodbye, My Rose Garden*
- The Finishing School (Macho Sluts)*
- Marie and Alex*
- Getting to Know Grace*
- Miss Coote’s Confession, or the Voluptuous Experiences of an Old Maid*
- Ghosts of Greywoods*
- Madchen in Uniform*

• First interaction with yuri by zarinthe1

So when I was younger I made up a girl who had long
brown hair
And dark blue wings
And she knew everything in the world, and in fact she
knew everything in all worlds

Her power was 'preexistence'
Once she knew you she had always known you, and in fact
You had always known her

So by knowing everyone, everyone thus knew her
And would say
Ah, my friend [-----]

My friend who knows everyone and knows everything
Yet is constantly learning something new everyday

I feel that I will go my whole life
Slowly learning more of her.

Thankfully, every time I learn more of her,
I get to re-meet my friend.

on the road

by lili

She has dreams.

They sleep under unfamiliar ceilings, far on the way to Jun's home, in between a forest and meadow, and the air is cool, humid, approaching the sea.

The castle's heart smells like saltwater, fountains all running to the center with no source. It never speaks to her. She kisses Jun, already dead, she kisses them alive and then wakes with a start and a horror.

Jun murmurs at her in the middle of the night, sadly and softly.

Goodnight, and go back to sleep, and I love you.

She takes the mix of words and repeats them back.

In her dream, Jun lies in the Celestial's tower. They have been hidden in the room behind the dais, and their blood is still painted across the floor out front. Feathers line the floor below the operating table from ritual killings. It smells like gore and antiseptic.

Angeliese, fearing the worst, forced them to sleep for several days after, and then slept herself, a restless, anxious rest of a few-hour intervals broken by making sure Jun hadn't died. She undoes the anesthetic spell carefully with Ren's help and then asks Ren to leave. The amount of magic in the room has started to make even her sick.

Jun wakes with the setting of the sun, golden light filtering through the thin windows at the top of the walls. Angeliese rushes to their side, and they blink at her in confusion.

She tries to say something like *don't try to speak just yet* or *i'm here it's ok* but the recognition registers in Jun's eyes first and catches her off guard.

"Angeliese," they gasp, lacking any form of address.

Then, before she can react, they roll off of the bed and drag her to the floor.

Angeliese opens her eyes and looks at the panels of wood in the ceiling. The room has one sliding window that opens to a short deck, overlooking the dry patch of grass outside of the house. They're in a stranger's guest room, someone once important to the throne but a generation ahead of Angeliese's memory. It's a silvery night and the

light of the moon illuminates everything under it.

She sits up and pushes away her side of the covers. She walks to the window and the wood is cold below her feet. When she opens it the crisp night air hits her face and she steps to the edge of the deck, looking out into the dark.

She stands alone until Jun comes up beside her silently, touching her on the shoulder to let her know that they are there and then leaning on the railing with her. She turns to them and they move an arm to hold her under the night.

Sorry I woke you.

No, it's okay.

You hurt me. In my dream, I mean.

I'm sorry.

I'm just telling you. I'm not upset with you.

I know. But I'm still sorry.

When Jun grabs hold of her they scratch her with their nails, one long length down her arm, and it's sheer surprise that keeps her down.

She doesn't know what they mean to do, but she sees the hatred in their expression up close, and they could have not touched her and it would have gutted her still. But they press her into the floor and she chokes on their fingers around her throat. When she fumbles for purchase to push them away she avoids touching her own magic, still, foolishly, she avoids hurting them. *No, no*, she thinks, without being able to speak, feeling the static of a spell they're trying to do against her skin, *this will undo you again*, but Jun doesn't know and they are slow to flinch when their shoulder comes unraveling.

She whines and drinks their blood, trying to hold onto the threads as Jun's grip weakens and they curl into themselves, on top of her, she says *I'm sorry*, gasping for breath

—but in the dream their weight does not give. She loses her grasp and this time it's everything that comes apart, all of it on top of her, until she can see their heart. Sick, she closes her eyes, and when she opens them again it's dark and Jun looks back at her with the eyes of the castle.

She is overjoyed by their reincarnation. She throws herself at them, sobbing into their chest, clutching at their shirt. They do not push her away, but step backwards.

"Jun," she says.

"No," replies the castle.

—in the dream it throws her into the fountain and she cannot swim. Under the water, she looks at it, wearing Jun's face.

Please, she begs. It says something, but Angeliese can not hear it, or read its lips. Miserable, she drowns.

Maybe she cries in her sleep. She doesn't know, but sometimes when she wakes Jun is already looking at her, eyes bright in the dark. The color of their irises are a bloody plum, the castle's leftovers in their expression. They are not the castle, but sometimes they are confused.

Like when Angeliese says:

The castle didn't speak to me. I don't know why...

And Jun replies:

It was for you. I loved you.

Their words slant differently, and then she cries, awake.

The castle never let me dream, Angeliese says to Jun. It took away all of my nightmares.

That's nice, Jun replies softly, but then, how did you know what you were afraid of?

I'm just not used to it. Even the good dreams hurt.

I'm sorry. You will get used to it.

I keep dreaming about...

Angeliese trails off and Jun looks at her. Nevermind. Let's go back to bed.

Okay.

Jun follows her lead, and they climb back under the covers. They face each other again, and Jun kisses her atop the forehead. Angeliese closes her eyes and she cannot truly kiss them back, the gesture withheld not by any curse but her own memory and the fear of it, but Jun accepts her facsimile through held hands.

It's weird, Jun says suddenly, in the dark. I don't think I dream anymore. At least, I can't remember them.

Oh, says Angeliese.

Goodnight, Jun says, after a silence, sweetly. See you in the morning.

Angeliese closes her eyes. She thinks briefly about the castle, and Jun. Then she sleeps quietly until the day.

prom date
by 

My prom date and I met in the woods when I found her eating a dead deer.

I hadn't meant to lose my way in the woods, but the energy of my rage-hike had led me off-path, not registering where I was going, and I ended up in the same clearing where she had stopped to feast on her most recent kill.

Once our eyes met she raised her lips like hackles, the spit and stringing meat still trailing down. Even hunched over she had a powerful look about her, with wide shoulders and a blunt nose. Her nails were buried still into the hide of the freshly felled animal, sharp and gleaming with wet blood. She was wearing an oversized Grateful Dead t-shirt, smock-like and covered with dirt smears. The polite thing would've been to back away, apologize for interrupting, and depart, feeling anxious and embarrassed at my social faux-pas. I stood still, aware of every spot where my bare skin touched the warm summer afternoon air, each a little white flag.

She made the first move. Low to the ground she lurched forward a step, maybe just to make me flinch. It worked, and I felt the frisson of atmosphere as I took a step back. When I found my voice, all I could manage was feeble "Oh, woah, hold on—"

Her eyes were hard to focus on, so yellow and tight, that I kept darting between her and the carnage on the ground, too anxious to rest my eyes. I held up my hands defensively.

"Sorry to barge in, I didn't know..."

By now she had abandoned her lunch and was slinking around, still low to the ground and on all fours, And I felt myself shifting as well. We kept slow pace with each other's circling, her matching my stumbling paces with lithe movements. I had never had such a straightforward meeting with anyone from up the mountain before, and I was still feeling contrarian towards my own common sense.

I tried to casually pause my movement and lean on a tree, giving myself something solid. I wish I had worn something nicer that day, not one of those windbreakers that moms wear when they walk the dogs before bed. She soundlessly kept the distance between us equal. I felt like I was trying to tempt an alley cat. I stuck out my hand. Was it for her to smell? To shake? To bite? I didn't know, but I stayed there, feeling stupid.

“Hi. My name's Irene. Sorry for interrupting.”

She moved into a low crouch, then lifted up to her full standing height. She was shorter than I was, but most girls were. There was something easier about this pose, something I could understand, and I didn't flinch again when she stepped forward and clasped my hand. Her long fingernails (claws?) scratched against my wrist, and I could feel the soft short fur on the back of her hand and the stickiness of her fingertips. I was brave enough to let our eyes fully connect this time, and noticed that her pupils were so much larger than mine. I forgot what I had planned to say next. She pulled back, looking away, and crouched down over her lunch once more. She kept eating, loudly and messily, seemingly no longer worried about my presence there. I tried conversation again.

“So... did you catch that?”

After a gulp, she nodded.

“Do you come around here often... to hunt?”

Nod.

“You live in these woods?” She shook her head and pointed a bloody finger west and upward, to the mountain we were at the foot of.

“Cool.”

It passed my mind briefly that I was definitely going to miss track practice. Well, I had been looking for an excuse to quit. I never liked those girls and I was going to graduate in a few months anyways.

“So, do you... Like The Grateful Dead?”

She looked at me with a furrowed brow. It was unexpectedly

human. She shook her head.

“Oh, guess not then. It’s a cool shirt though.”

She shrugged distractedly, breaking one of the ribs and sucking on the marrow.

“I guess you don’t get too much music up there on the mountain...” I realized this might be another misstep, and tried to backtrack “Or, maybe you guys have your own music, I don’t really know-”

She popped the bone out her mouth, and growled, her voice unexpectedly high and expectedly monotone “Library.”

“Oh! Yeah, that’s right, you can listen to albums at the library. What kind of music do you like?”

Another shrug. “Loud. Old.”

“Then you would love the Grateful Dead!” My voice was a little loud, so I cleared my throat. She didn’t seem to notice. “Are you sure that you’ve never heard them before?”

She shook her head again, but gently. I felt annoying, but for some reason I couldn’t shut up. She didn’t seem to mind.

“Play them? On your-” she waggled her thumbs in front of her, miming a touchscreen. “While I wash,”

I nearly dropped my phone in my rush to get it out as she started licking long, purposeful swipes across her bloody hands.

Scrolling past all the missed messages, I found one of my favorite songs by them. I tried not to watch her too closely as the song played. She seemed not bothered one way or the other. When the song ended, she stood up again. She pointed at what was left of the deer.

“I have to bury, to save.”

“Oh, sure. Are you going then?”

“Yes. Thank you for the music.”

“Will you be around here again? Maybe we could hang out?”

She thought for a moment. “Don’t hunt around here for many weeks.”

“That’s- That’s fine. I understand.”

“But... the library tomorrow. You come?”

“Yeah, definitely! What time?”

She shrugged. She pointed one of her claws to a spot in the sky
“When sun there?”

“Uh, yeah, sure, I’ll make it work.”

She started to drag the carcass away, and I remembered something else.

“Oh! What’s your name?”

She paused, and barked out a sound, something that sounded like “Huawr-AGAthragh.” I tried to repeat it back, and she shook her head, biting her lip in what almost looked like a chuckle at my horrible pronunciation.

“You call me Aggie.”

“Aggie. Aggie, that’s a great name. I’m Irene, by the way.”

“Yes, you said before.”

“Oh, duh. Well, It was great meeting you, Aggie.”

She nodded, then dragged her deer away, disappearing through the trees.

We weren’t seeing each other for too long before I asked her

to prom. I'm not even sure if it was "seeing" each other, but after a few library visits spent mostly listening to music together in silence I built up the courage to invite her over to my house. She liked to perch on the top of my sofa as I played video games. She would silently watch me as I wove my way through dungeons, tensing up whenever I got in a fight. I think she was enjoying herself. I offered to let her play, but she shook her head. She'd hang around for a few hours, then usually ask me to give her a ride back to the woods.

Every drive back at the end of the night I fantasized moving my hand off the wheel and to rest onto hers. I still remembered that first handshake, how warm and interesting her hand had felt. One evening she turned to me before she left the car. Her hair was pushed back in one of my headbands, and it struck me how beautiful her face looked in the soft twilight, framed by the soft tufts of fur that grew on the top of her edges of her cheeks and eyes so much larger than mine.

"I like you."

My heart almost burst out of my chest.

"Really?"

"Yes. You're strange, and you can't hunt very well, but I still think you are good."

"Doyouwannagotopromwithme?"

It had been on my mind, even though I hadn't planned on how I should ask her. There was something about the sentimentality of taking this girl I liked so much to prom that had gripped my whole chest in a vice. She shrugged.

"I'm not sure what prom is, but yeah."

She closed the door behind her and bounded away into the trees on all fours.

Our time together after that was focused on explaining different parts of prom to Aggie. I told her about limos, going out for dinner

beforehand, and those pictures where everyone lifts a leg for some reason. One sunny afternoon we stood in a field, and I pressed a clump of wildflowers on her wrist and explained what a corsage was.

One weekend, while looking through my closet (I was going to let her borrow one of my old dresses to wear) Aggie asked:

“So, what happens during?”

“Hmm? During what?”

“During the prom. What do you do.”

“I guess you talk to friends, and you dance. Maybe they have a photo booth...”

“How do you dance?”

I stopped comparing different shrugs and had to think about this question. I was definitely not the one to ask, but well, I guess I knew more than her.

“There’s two main kinds of dancing, at least for the ones at prom. There’s the one that you do to fast music where you kind of move your hips, maybe jump around a bit if the music is really good, and you can dance near other people or by yourself if you want. The other is the slow dance. You need someone else for that one, and you kind of face each other and... sway...”

My voice trailed off, and I could feel myself getting pink in the face. I had daydreams of the two of us at prom, silhouetted by lights in the middle of a foggy dance floor, my hands around her waist, her head on my shoulder, rocking back in forth. Aggie seemed not to notice my hesitation. She just said “Oh, okay then.” and walked into my closet to try on another dress.

I picked her up by the woods, at our usual spot, around 6:30 pm. I had lent her a satin lilac dress and wrap to match, her fur was brushed back, and her hair was gathered up in a bun with a mother-of-pearl patterned wire headband. It was the first time I had seen her with the whole

ensemble together, and I tried not to stumble over my compliments as I jumped around the car to let her in. She nodded and scratched the tight spaghetti strap on her shoulder. I was wearing a velvet blazer with a patterned collared shirt and some pants I'd stolen from my brother. I drove us straight to the restaurant, trying not to babble. I wasn't really sure what to do, or how to talk. Even though we had hung out dozens of times before this, and they could be considered dates, this seemed different, like we had taken a huge bite of something that we had been slowly nibbling through.

Once we got to the restaurant I introduced her to my friends, who were all excited to meet my date. Cindy, who had organized everything, had already talked with the waiter about Aggie's dietary restrictions, and as we sat down she started plucking her freshly killed chicken. The rest of us looked over our menus.

I was hyper-aware of how many of us there were, and the different conversations weaving across me. Cindy turned and started questioning Aggie about how we met, and what her life was like on the mountain. "So, do you guys have your own school?"

"Yes, but different. Mostly we learn hunting and survival from our old. No college, more like... how do you say... apprenticeships. A lot depends on who you pick to be in the pack."

"What are you interested in doing?"

"I'm not sure. I like music, and strategy, and hunting. I don't know what I want to do yet. It's hard."

This sparked a chorus of agreement, as everyone started mourning the fact that all their college applications were asking them what major they wanted to go into, as if they should already know. Aggie looked across at me.

"What will you pick? Do you know?"

"Oh, for a major? Well, I got into my top school, so I guess I'll go there and just keep an open mind."

"It's far away?"

”Uh, yeah. It’s... It’s in Canada.”

I felt awkward having this conversation here. Between learning more about each other’s worlds, Aggie and I hadn’t talked much about graduation or me leaving for college. Everyone around us had moved on to another subject, but we sat in our own little bubble, me pushing a meatball around my plate aimlessly as she picked a feather out of her fur. I grasped around for a new topic.

“Hey, with me graduating soon, I’ll have a lot more free time. Maybe you can take me along on a hunt? I know you’ve been wanting to do that for a while.”

Aggie nodded, eyes still distracted. The bill came and we all had to busy ourselves with coordinating checks and pulling out money, and the topic of our future slid away from us.

Prom was being hosted in an old theater, right in the center of town. I drove the two of us and a couple of extra friends piled in as well. My friend’s date had brought a flask and the passengers were all cycling it between themselves. Aggie took a huge swig, and everyone cheered. I knew this wasn’t her first time drinking (apparently the parties in the woods with her fellow packmates could get really wild) but I still felt a little uneasy.

We filed through the lobby and into the auditorium set up with half tables, half dancefloor. My friends and I all quickly claimed a table, and huddled in the blaring music and smokey air. Aggie wasn’t saying much, and I made sure to sit next to her. I hadn’t drunk anything, but the fizzy feeling in my stomach was filling my whole body.

Within minutes people started getting antsy to get out onto the dance floor. Cindy was rallying troops, and when the song switched to a nostalgic favorite of ours she pulled me out of my seat. Laughing, I turned around at Aggie.

“Do you want to come join? Or would you rather watch?”

I could see her clutch her cup of punch tightly, and the fur on her arms was fluffier than usual. I called out as I was dragged away: “Don’t worry about it! Stay there as long as you like!” and I left her sitting there

as I plunged into the mass of writhing classmates.

I was dancing hard to try to get all of my nerves out. After each song I would look over to Aggie, making sure she was still alright, still sitting there, and I would wave. On the fifth song she came down to join us and I cheered, elated. She started watching me and mirroring the moves I was doing. For a while we danced in a circle, one of us leading the others in a series of moves that grew goofier as our small inventory of dance knowledge quickly depleted.

This was exactly how I had wanted this night to go. Everything was perfect. Then, like he had read my mind, the DJ our student council had dug out of some abandoned Party City switched tracks, putting on a soft, synth-y 80s hit. My friends all looked for their dates, and I turned to Aggie.

“It’s the slow dance song.”

She nodded woodenly, arms held stiff to her sides. I moved to face her, and her eyes darted away from me. Maybe I needed to take the lead. I wrapped my arm around her waist and took hold of her hand with mine, stretching out our arms. For a few moments I felt our bodies lock together, and without thinking I gripped tight and pulled her close.

I heard a low growl come from the back of her throat, and before I could shift my body she had her foot planted between mine, turning her body and stretching my arm forward, my balance lost. In the same movement she turned her shoulders and struck, opening her mouth wide and plunging gleaming canines deep into my arm. The sound of the fabric screaming as it ripped reached me first, then the dull pressure of Aggie’s powerful jaw. She was wrenching herself out of my grip before the blood managed to well up. Shoving and growling, she barrelled off of the dance floor and out of the auditorium.

I stood there, sleeve and arm ripped, dripping. The world around me was submerged in a tank of water, the burning pain from my arm barely creeping in. Cindy was trying to talk to me, asking if I was okay. There were hands, raised voices, soft and unsure touching, trying to lead me to a chair. I ripped myself away from all of these and set off, chasing after Aggie.

I burst out into the now-empty lobby, and saw a side door swinging open, hidden and maybe just meant for staff use. It led me down gray concrete steps into the tunnels backstage. I went down one hallway, then another. I wish I could track things like she could. All I could smell was the musty concrete, and hear drips and mechanical movements of archaic pipe systems. I wanted to smell her, soft tree rot in summer, warm pond shores, pollen caught in fur.

Finally, by the entryway of the boiler room, I saw her. She was crouching on the floor, crying and snarling into her balled up fists. Nearly slipping on the blood still dripping from my arm, I jogged over to her. I bent down on my knees onto the floor.

“Aggie... Aggie I’m sorry, I’m sorry I made you upset... tell me what I can do to make this right l-”

She looked at me with a glare that wasn’t human. We were on opposite sides of the predator and prey scale, but I didn’t know who was who. She lunged forward and scrambled up onto me, her clawed hands pinning me down to the gritty cold floor by my neck. Her hot breath heaved onto my face, her hair, completely undone from its bun, brushed against my cheeks. Her entire body was on top of mine pushing me down, as if I was some bubbling geyser that she was trying to plug.

“Why? Why do you like me so much? Why are you so nice with me? I don’t know anything about this world... I don’t belong here!”

Her voice was almost more snarls than words. “You’re so much softer than I can be! I’m hard, and I will hunt you down and hurt you! So why... Why did you talk to me that day in the woods?”

I could feel tears welling in my eyes. I didn’t know what to say, I felt like an orange peel ripped open from my weakest point.

“That day I, I felt like everything in my life was just... Disappearing because it had never been there in the first place. Like everything was bullshit, and it’s dumb, but you were real, and you looked so... I wanted to get to know you.”

I felt a tremble loosen the hands at my neck and they slid away. The weight on my body rolled to the side as Aggie’s hip hit the ground,

and the face that had been snarling into mine seemed to fold in on itself. Aggie slumped into me, pushing her head into the hollow between my neck and collarbone. I felt her breathing raggedly into my neck and whispering “I’m sorry” over and over again. My arm was lifted and cradled, and between apologies she gave me stinging licks, cleaning the blood and threads from the punctures. I watched my own blood smear across her nose and lips, and it felt intimate in a way I didn’t know existed. I felt the soft satin of the shrug I had lent her wrapped tightly around the wound. My other arm was around her, stroking her hair.

I wanted to speak to her assuredly, I wanted to pull a thought, a conclusion, an opinion of who we now were to each other. But more than that, I didn’t want her to stop. I wanted to live forever in this place, and feel the shockwaves of the moment bring her closer and closer to me.

are those two,
you know,
passionate friends?

yuri, isolation, and growing up

by zoe @miss_coverly

POV: you're me, traipsing through a university library in search of fun little books about shoujo manga, queer theory, or any combination of the above—and a book on shoujo manga called *passionate friendship* catches your eye. as any self-proclaimed yuri enjoyer would, i thought, okay this title is DEFINITELY a euphemism. “historians would call them close friends,” that sort of thing. maybe it's about GL! lovely! my cup of tea.

but no.

see, in *passionate friendship: the aesthetics of girls' culture in japan*, deborah shamoon discusses close female relationships through the lens of early shoujo manga—but she really does mean as friends. female friendships that sure do function exactly like romantic relationships, but they aren't. they're just like, really passionate friendships. no homo, if you will.

as someone who wanted to read about yuri undertones or even just some positive commentary on homoeroticism in shoujo, this trip to the library was pretty insane.

passionate no homo

the part of the book that really piqued my lesbian brain was its discussion of *S kankei* or Class S, “a close but temporary bonds between two girls” in early shoujo manga (shamoon 11). the author asserts that, while japanese girls' close bonds in the early 20th century could resembles romantic lesbian relationships, don't get it confused—these girls were NOT lesbians.

definitely no uhhhh interesting biases to the book, none at all. /s

while this was the first i'd heard of the term itself, as i learned more, it's an easily recognizable yuri dynamic: a romantic friendship or relationship, potentially one that's explicitly romantic or sexual, between two female classmates (either the same year or a senpai and kouhai relationship). it's also not as decidedly Not Gay as shamoon might lead readers to believe.

@/piosplayhouse' [tumblr post on yaoi/yuri history](#) does an excellent job of breaking down S relationships through a queer-friendly lens, explaining yuri manga's basis in S genre literature and these homosocial female relationships. piosplayhouse writes:

“Homosociality like this among women has historically been and to this day remains somewhat under the radar and perceived as a “phase” or an amateur attempt at romance before a woman eventually marries a man.”

thus, S relationships or romantic friendships between girls were seen as a normal adolescent phase that “trained girls in the interpersonal skills needed for [heterosexual] marriage” (shamoon 37). think of it as a very intense homoerotic girl best friend who you practice with until you become a straight adult.

but what about the girls who don't grow out of it?

who don't graduate from high school and immediately lose the love they feel for other girls?

early shoujo manga didn't account for deviation from the pure, spiritual love between girls found in S relationships, and modern yuri manga has expanded to depict a wide variety of stories, not just Class S narratives that end with graduation.

however, exploring this facet of yuri sheds light on the isolation that lesbians face as they go from girlhood to adulthood—and what it even means to grow up.

before we dive in, i do want to say: i don't want to label this book as outright homophobic or malicious in its intent—and it *was* published in 2012, so i don't know what i was expecting. however, the book is not particularly welcome to and does read as overtly dismissive of reading

potential queerness into non-western works that aren't explicitly about lesbian identity—and in some cases, works that actually are.

the author's quickness to denounce any possible queerness in early shoujo manga makes me roll my eyes, but isn't surprising. however, the insistence that it is "deeply problematic" to, for example, study nobuko yoshiya's work—a [widely acknowledged lesbian writer](#)—"for hints of incipient feminism, lesbianism, or subversion of the heterosexual patriarchal family structure" or call her a lesbian author (70) is a little uhhhhh.....

no, i feel pretty reasonable calling this book homophobic. even in 2011! it's important to approach transnational discussions of queer identity with a lot of nuance, an understanding that queerness is not identical cross-culturally. however, the over-correction ends up sounding a lot like:



fun fact, while we're on the topic of nobuko yoshiya, her novels were actually some of the earliest Class S narratives and therefore part of the birth of yuri. :) so much for passionate friendships being no homo!!

all that to say, i'm not here to harp too much on how straight *passionate friendship* is. rather, i'd like to talk about how this book did fascinate me as a yuri enjoyer, in a roundabout way, for how it brought up (and never really challenged, unfortunately) the idea of growing out of lesbianism. that was an integral facet of Class S narratives, and it's interesting how that internalized belief impacts lesbian (or lesbian-coded) characters in yuri manga and non-yuri manga alike.

additionally, i want to look at three different series—*kakeochi girl*, *nana*, and *skip and loafer*—that broach this idea of passionate friendships/S relationships, either intentionally or merely invoke it through narrative implications or queer subtext.

i'd like to start by looking at *kakeochi girl* (run away with me, girl), a josei yuri manga that follows two women from a youthful S relationship into a complicated adulthood, and then explore how relevant themes crop up in narratives that *aren't* explicitly yuri or Class S.

we're grownups now!

the above line comes from the opening scene of *kakeochi girl*—a celebratory proclamation following two girls' high school graduation, with a tragic twist.

the central relationship of the manga is between maki and midori, two girls who dated while attending an all girls high school. their romance aligns cleanly with S relationships as we've established them thus far, although the manga does acknowledge it as a romantic relationship rather than just a passionate friendship. maki narrates that they exchanged love notes, held hands, "and kissed. a lot." she reflects, "i thought we would love each other all our lives," but her expectations are shattered.

following their graduation ceremony, midori excitedly says they should see which one of them can get a boyfriend first. when maki reacts in confusion, midori says,

"two girls together? hah! we can't keep dreaming forever, right? we're grownups now!"

this keeps them right on schedule with the timeline of an S relationship,

then. while the two girls express their romantic feelings for each other throughout high school, it's ultimately something they have to grow out of. midori even leaves behind two bright red hair ties after graduation that she complained "made her look like a baby." it cements the idea of their relationship being something real but ultimately only for young girls, not something they can take into adulthood.

while midori seems easily able to accept this fact, maki doesn't exactly stop being gay just because she graduated high school. the narrative shifts to ten years later, settling in on maki who is now 28 years old and—shockingly—still a lesbian.

the expectation that lesbian sexuality was only a youthful phase has led to an adulthood of dysfunction—for both maki AND midori.

maki is constantly asked by her parents when she's going to find a man to be with, given that she's never shown an interest in one. she's a grad student without a large IRL social circle, and like many queer people, her best friend is actually her twitter mutual, komari. despite being a high school student, komari and maki frequently voice call and are able to connect with each other due to their shared experiences as queer women. aside from this friendship, maki experiences isolation in her broader life due to this inability to leave her feelings for midori behind her and "grow up."

midori has graduated into adulthood more than maki has, by heteronormative standards: she's engaged to be married, and it's later revealed that she's pregnant. however, as the story goes on we see more that her adult life is by no means perfect. her fiancé is abusive, and the more she talks to maki, she realizes that she didn't grow out of her romantic feelings for her and grapples with her compulsory heterosexuality. but she doesn't see any escape from her engagement, a way for herself to live authentically or love who she wants to or even be happy within the rigid role she exists in. despite her adherence to what women are supposed to do, she's isolated in her own way, just like maki.

while the nature of S relationships implies their expiration date, what's truly rewarding about kakeochi girl is its depiction of lesbianism that doesn't disappear upon graduation. maki and midori are both able to

escape dissatisfying lives, governed by compmet and isolation, through rediscovering their enduring love for each other.

they're given the narrative space to explore their sexualities as adults, beyond what is expected of them as adult women.

maki and midori prove that their passionate friendship doesn't have to remain as just that—and ten years after graduation, they're able to run away from past hurts and the oppressive effects of compmet.

this doesn't mean they cease to live In A Society. after they get together, homophobia still plays a role in their lives, just as it led them to break up at graduation. but now, they're able to grow into their relationship and identities as lesbians, not grow out of it.

and they were (passionate) roommates

it may seem like a sharp left turn, but now having touched on an actual yuri manga depicting an S relationship, let's look at *nana*, the popular and tragically unfinished shoujo manga. despite the fact that the story revolves around two women and their heterosexual relationships, it sure does read like yuri and thus becomes relevant here.

a necessary disclaimer: *nana* does not fit the bill as a Class S narrative. nana osaki and nana komatsu (nicknamed “hachi”), two 20 year old women, become roommates and best friends upon moving to tokyo. they're not high school students, nor are they shown to have any S relationships prior to adulthood. thus, as adult women, they are past the age of passionate friendships and practicing romance with other girls. and given both of their romantic experiences with men during high school and after, they've already “graduated” to a heterosexual adulthood.

in theory. because, while *nana* exists in contrast to a youthful, high school yuri narrative,

it nevertheless showcases the dysfunction that queer women experience when they continue to display traits of queerness into adulthood.

because the thing is, despite not technically being an S relationship, the relationship between nana and hachi DOES read a lot like one. it's a passionate friendship between two women, straddling an ambiguous line between platonic and romantic. their relationship shares a lot of qualities and intimacy that you'd find in a heterosexual romantic relationship, and both characters (as well as outside perspectives) try and fail to understand the nature of their bond through heteronormative language.

hachi laments that if nana was a boy, they'd have a perfect love. nana likens her feelings for hachi to a teenage boy falling in love.

what delegitimizes the recognition of this relationship as romantic, though, is the fact that nana and hachi are both women—and furthermore, that they're both *adult* women, not teenage girls who will eventually grow out of a “phase.”

i point all of this out not to argue that nana and hachi have a literal S relationship. what this actually further highlights is how, as adult women, their “passionate friendship”/yuri tendencies are largely incompatible with the heteronormative existence they must conform to. their relationship shows the reality of when S relationships don't end with graduation, when women continue to be queer as they grow up.

with hachi in particular, this idea aligns nicely with her canonical fears about needing to be more mature or grow up. if we come back to the idea of growing up = becoming heterosexual, hachi is a prime example of how this belief plays out.

hachi's pursuit of adulthood and maturation is achieved through heteronormative goalposts: heterosexual love, marriage, and becoming a housewife. just as within a Class S narrative, these signs that a woman has “grown up” don't leave space for hachi's intense and arguably romantic feelings for nana.

even taking off the yuri goggles, a huge aspect of *nana* is examining the rigid, gendered expectations that nana and hachi both face.

even as hachi conforms to these expectations and nana runs

from them, the bottom line is the same: queerness isn't an option for them within these boxes.

while maki and midori were able to rekindle their love as adults, the love between nana and hachi is doomed in a world that can't make sense of it. the connection between adulthood and heterosexual love—and thus, between immaturity and love between women—is the tragedy implicit to passionate friendships.

skip to yuri

lastly, in this analysis of passionate friendships, their history and their aftershocks, i'd like to look at another example outside the yuri genre that nevertheless i'm more hopeful about than most: the relationship between yuzuki and makoto in the seinen manga *skip and loafer*.

skip and loafer is a pretty straightforward high school manga focusing on friendships, coming of age, and navigating adolescence. while the core friend group of four girls is a highlight of the story overall, the friendship between yuzuki and makoto has a uniquely queer-coded feel to it, due to each character's individual experiences with gender expression and discomfort within heterosexual romance plot lines.

combine this with the intensely close bond that the two share, and their friendship starts to read the same as an S relationship, too, teetering on the homoerotic edge of platonic and romantic.

interestingly enough, the connection between yuzumako and S relationships occurred to me once i read *kakeochi girl* and noticed how similar their relationship is to maki and midori's visually—along with sharing some general physical characteristics, like maki and makoto's dark hair and glasses, they also exhibit some of the same behaviors and intimacies. yuzuki braids makoto's hair in class, just as maki and midori did as a couple, and yuzuki displays a touchiness with her female friends, including makoto, just as maki and midori spent their high school years holding hands. these factors don't automatically prove a romantic intention, but are neat all the same.

top it off with *white lilies being yuzuki's flower motif*. like, *the yuri flower*—no, it's too obvious at this point, but i digress.

aside from these more coincidental points, yuzumako reads as an S relationship in an almost subversive, though not accidental, way. the reason for this is how

yuzuki and makoto's experiences with boys are always followed by an equally intimate and yet more fulfilling experience with each other.

after a disappointing date with her senpai that ultimately leaves makoto feeling uncomfortable and insecure, yuzuki calls and asks to meet her at a restaurant. as they share a meal and yuzuki shows makoto pictures of her dog, makoto reflects, “even if i leave high school boyfriendless and as plain as the day i entered, i’ll still have someone like you to come cheer me up when i’m down.” a scene like this displays yuzumako prioritizing their relationship—in the way you might prioritize a romantic one—over their potential relationships with men. it also calls to mind *nana*, which we’ve already discussed, where hachi declares that she doesn’t want to have a boyfriend ever again—“and besides,” she already has nana.

in a later scene, yuzuki thinks she’s going out to see a movie with a group of friends, only to realize that she’s *actually* been set up to go on a solo date with a boy in her class who likes her. yuzuki goes off on the guy for trying to trick her and storms off. she’s deeply uncomfortable with the set-up; it’s a situation that she’s been forced into since junior high, feeling like guys wouldn’t leave her alone until she gave in and agreed to date them, despite her lack of interest.

however, when she’s so upset over the situation that she skips school the next day, makoto is the one who shows up outside her house that night. displaying true dream shoujo boyfriend traits, makoto brings yuzuki snacks and expresses that she hopes yuzuki feels like she can confide in her, despite their different life experiences.

in both of these scenes, the closeness that yuzuki and makoto feel for each other surpasses any connection they feel to men, even in romantic contexts. what’s more, with the way the narrative ebb and flow is structured (every bad het romance scene is followed by a godtier yuzumako scene), the relationship between yuzuki and makoto appears to be the *antidote to every failed attempt at heterosexuality*. while still ambiguous, their friendship is paired with and *contrasted* with other romances so

often—you can't help but read it as a passionate one, a friendship that's veered into yuri territory.

here, we see the same idea of homosociality being at the center of early shoujo manga—a prioritization on girls' relationships with other girls over heterosexual love—and its subsequent foundation for yuri manga.

the intimacy and deeply treasured bond between them is simply too easy to find the yuri in!

as *skip and loafer* is an in-progress manga, it's too early to really say if yuzumako will have a more explicitly romantic relationship. it's possible theirs will be limited to ambiguity and only exist while they're in high school, but i'm hopeful that that's not the case, as *skip and loafer* already has a canon trans main character and handles queer themes with a lot of care. it's my hope that yuzuki and makoto are able to embrace the queerness embedded in their arcs—to see a passionate friendship expanded to a genuine lesbian relationship would feel so natural, not to mention rewarding.

in conclusion

i wrote this essay for a few reasons. at first, i honestly just wanted to rant about *passionate friendship* because i took brain damage from reading that uhhhhh vaguely homophobic book. but the more i learned about the history of Class S narratives and their ties to yuri manga, i was fascinated by the topic and how i could recognize it even in unconventional, non-yuri places.

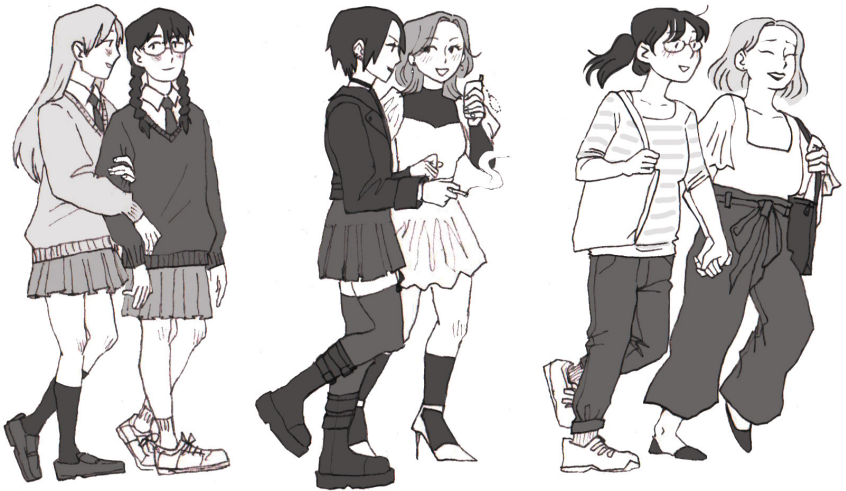
kakeochi girl, *nana*, and *skip and loafer* all belong to different demographics, and only the first one is explicitly a yuri manga (so far! there's still hope). however, in their own way, each of these series highlights the pervasive and often no homo'd concept of passionate friendships between women. they showcase the harm and discomfort that comes from this idea—the belief that lesbianism is fine, sure, just make sure you stop once you're an adult.

even more, they shed light on what can come from *not* growing out of it. how queerness and S relationships don't have to just be practice for heterosexual marriage. it's something that doesn't have to go away. you can

grow with it your entire life, just as your identity flourishes, and you live how you were always meant to.

seeing these stories depicted in yuri and non-yuri manga alike is crucial—so that we can see not just love that exists until graduation, but where it can lead.

that there are girls who love girls, and there are women who love women, too.



passionate friendships

shrimpchipsss

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yuri theory: a workbook

by tshirt

so in the 80s, lesbian feminists threw around a lot the idea of the lesbian continuum, the idea that women who love women and women who advance the interests of women—

(as sedgwick puts it, “who teach, study, nurture, suckle, write about, march for, vote for, give jobs to...”)

— exist on the same continuum. and of course no one would ever say that voting for a man for president is on the same continuum with male homosexuality, this was a lesbian specific theory.



regardless of whether you buy this in real life, i see a connection to yuri here, in that people generally agree yuri to have its roots in the class s genre, which i'd struggle to describe as straightforwardly romantic.

rather, it focused on nebulous strong emotional bonds between girls, as structured in a junior-senior school relationship. so historically yuri exists on a continuum with shojo, but similarly to my above example, no one would say that yaoi exists on a direct historical continuum with shonen.

in many ways, yuri and yuri-coding has appeared throughout the four major genres of manga (see erica friedman's "by your side: the first 100 years of yuri anime and manga"). and also in friedman's book, we learn, much yuri elides lesbian identity, and even romance. and writers like iori miyazawa have been memeified with things like "this too is yuri." so somewhat facetiously:

everything is yuri.

but what are the implications of that?

if yuri desire is encrypted everywhere, what is the brightline between yuri and other genres?

how can we stake out theoretical territory for it?

is gatekeeping what we want, anyway?

so i want to join other theorists who talk about yuri in its own terms. to collectively develop a grammar of yuri, that's different from just "manga with women and their relationships with each other."

i. what is the "id" of yuri?

people speculate a lot on what people "get" out of yaoi. what the wish fulfillment fantasy is. i want to investigate what the yuri counterpart to that is. i look to psychoanalysis here, specifically freud's "a child is being beaten," the essay i jokingly call the fujo essay.

basically a lot of hysteric patients came to him with this fantasy, that a child was being beaten, that they derived a lot of pleasure from. the child was usually male (being beaten by "the father", implicitly), and freud comes to the conclusion that it's not a sadistic fantasy, and it wasn't quite a masochistic fantasy either.

it's not *i'm* beating the child;
it's not i'm the child *being beaten*.

rather: the passive voice. a child is being beaten. it is a scopophilic fantasy, where the pleasure is in looking.

so if the prototypical fantasy as articulated by freud's patients is a yaoi fantasy, what does a yuri fantasy look like? i left some room for you:



i jokingly asserted that it would be a child being beaten by the mother instead. is yuri the project of making the mother visible in this scenario? to look aside from masculine assumptions, into a world where relationships between women *take priority over* everything else?

i agree

i disagree

and it's easy enough to know you're not the child. but the mother is the prototypical other, the first being you know of that is different from yourself as an infant. so how do you know you are not the mother, but instead a different kind of other, an other who only looks, not beats?

i know

i do not know

is yuri about how you differentiate yourself from other women, then? or to taking a step back, is watching women differentiating themselves how you yourself differentiate yourself?

i am different from other women

i am the same

here's where we come to miyazawa once more. he references this spectatorship, explaining:

I guess this notion first appeared in BL, where you don't self-insert into one of the characters, but rather prefer to see yourself as a wall or a decorative plant watching over the couple.

but in the follow up to the interview, he goes even further.

*But I never wish for anything like that.
[Interviewer]: Why is that?
I.M.: Huh? Because I'm unnecessary, of course.
[Interviewer]: You don't want to exist even as a wall?
I.M.: Yes. I don't want to be an observer.*

he explains this statement, saying "I wouldn't want to affect anything with my observation...."

I want to become nothing."

what i think is fascinating about this is that it denies pleasure in observation, that scopophilic impulse freud thought he observed in his patients' fantasies.

now, this may be for political reasons. i mean this in the sense that it seems a bit prurient, societally speaking, for a man to be that interested in lesbians. the writer floatingcatacombs on tumblr explains:

But I guess what I'm trying to get at is that due to a confluence of factors, writing a lot about lesbians as a guy puts you under extra scrutiny these days. People want to know why!

The way I see it: there are four potential outcomes if you start to question this yourself:

- 1. Get some gender splashed on you.*
- 2. Figure out the exact reason why your writing focuses around lesbians and not any other romantic configuration.*
- 3. Abstract yourself and your personal views out of the writing as much as possible.*
- 4. Lean into the idea of being a creep.*

this one!

so maybe it's fig leaf. but i take him at his word, if only because 1) it's polite and 2) it's interesting.

so we see in miyazawa's yuri theories a tension between the simultaneously dehumanizing and humanizing processes that yuri acts upon him.

**it is dehumanizing because i the *observer* am less than human;
it is humanizing because i the *writer* become human.**

as he states:

But to write yuri you have to focus on the feelings and emotions of the characters, so in the end I had to face humans.

[Interviewer]: You first faced humans to write yuri.

I.M.: You could say that "yuri made me human".

so we see the figure of the non-human human in his statements. now, we could easily connect this to the idea of a lesbian as a "de-womaned" or "un-personed" object subject under cisheteropatriarchy. and we see a

strong connection to yuri theory on that level:

“Basically, the extremes of both ‘Strong Yuri’ and ‘Weak Yuri’ **places real beings and fictional beings on the same ontological level,**” states gengen kusano, another yuri author who joined miyazawa for the second part of the interview. he later elaborates that “We’re living inside an imaginary world... The border between fiction and reality loses any meaning.”

sidebar: strong yuri and weak yuri are his idiosyncratic parallel to hard and soft scifi. yurimother explains them like this: “Strong Yuri is Yuri that focuses on realism through feelings and emotions. Kusano describes it as fiction[al] characters having real emotions... In Weak Yuri, one uses their theory of mind to observe facts and deduce the existence of a Yuri relationship, even if one is not present.”

is the fantasy of yuri about
finding a way to become a
person, when you don't feel
like one?

or is the fantasy of yuri the fantasy of a euphoric nonexistence outside of lesbianism (that is, existing only within it)? or both—or neither?

CIRCLE ONE:

do you feel human?

YES

SOMETIMES

NO

when, if at all, do you feel most human?

WRITING

READING

LOVING

LOOKING

anyway. this all to say: yuri simultaneously creating and disavowing the human observer in a contradictory process is one way to deal with the problem of the yuri gaze.

ii. what is the “gaze” of yuri?

laura mulvey argues that the gaze of the camera simultaneously objectifies its images (of women) and identifies the viewer with its images (of men). well, it’s a bit more complicated than that, but that’s good enough for our purposes. but in yuri, where the images are primarily of women, that contradictory process of objectification-identification is unified.

mulvey talks about how female spectators are masculinized through the process of looking, through identification with active desire. and her language (“restless in its transvestite clothes”) suggests that that masculinization is simultaneously unnatural and uncomfortable for the spectator.

so the first theory, miyazawa’s answer to the yuri gaze, is one way of dealing with the masculinization: by un-personing the observer.

but is a reading that takes pleasure in looking possible?

can we imagine a woman who looks at other woman? who simultaneously objectifies and identifies? (so this gaze is twofold: a present gendered observer, with identification/attraction to the gendered object)

now, this is basically the oft-repeated “do i want her or want to be her?” that people throw around a lot. or, rephrased in blakey vermeule’s words, “how do i ‘do’ her?” is this identity play what yuri can come down to?

i don’t want to reduce the question of whether a yuri gaze exists down to simply whether a lesbian gaze exists, though. i think maybe the question i’m really trying to ask here is, as my friend daffy phrased it:

how do lesbians fit into yuri?

- A. looking
- B. participating
- C. objectifying
- D. absenting themselves
- E. all of the above

and obviously, yeah, there's no one answer to that. but we do have answers. so hopefully this essay has contended with the problem that if everything is yuri, then nothing is yuri. i've tried to describe the pleasures of yuri, the functions of yuri, the queerness of yuri in a way that allows for multiple theories to bloom and coexist.

and maybe that's yuri too.

Jealousy and the Dream of Innocence

by simkjrs

“Male fantasies, male fantasies, is everything run by male fantasies? Up on a pedestal or down on your knees, it’s all a male fantasy: that you’re strong enough to take what they dish out, or else too weak to do anything about it. Even pretending you aren’t catering to male fantasies is a male fantasy: pretending you’re unseen, pretending you have a life of your own, that you can wash your feet and comb your hair unconscious of the ever-present watcher peering through the keyhole, peering through the keyhole in your own head, if nowhere else. You are a woman with a man inside watching a woman. You are your own voyeur.”

– Margaret Atwood, *The Robber Bride*

The life of a woman who loves women is alienated from the life of women on the screen. Cinema, which shapes so much of cultural thought, rarely furnishes the woman with an inner life as rich and loved as a man. She exists as an object of fascination, most often for her mystery or her beauty, but all in service of her desirability to the male gaze. Alison Bechdel famously coined the informal Bechdel test to express this deep sense of alienation from the woman on the screen: are there two female characters, who speak with each other, about something other than a man? And therein lies the problem. Even if there is no man present in the scene, he still makes himself known. His absence is itself a presence.

Yuri authors deal with this in different ways. Some stories exclude the man from any possibility of romantic entanglement by making him a family member; others bring him into the fold by making him a gay man with no interest in women; yet others deliberately cut men out from the story altogether. Each of these is a conscious choice made in opposition to the dominant ways of storytelling under a male-centric society. This essay isn’t about any of these patterns, though. This essay is about jealousy.

Let’s start with a simple statement. Under the patriarchy, women are

pressured to meet male expectations and desires through various covert and overt means. This means that, among other things, beauty and female sexuality as fantasized by men are social capital. A woman is valuable because men see her as valuable.

But as a woman who likes women, of course you would appreciate her beauty, her sexuality. So what does it mean to look at and desire those things?

For a young girl just starting to understand herself, perhaps she borrows the patriarchal dominant modes of thinking. She evaluates the beauty and sexuality of the girl she likes through that lens, and recognizes these things as social capital. If this young girl doesn't have that social capital, then she envies her object of affection for having what she can't; and if she does have it, then the object of her affection cannot only be just that — she is a threat as well. There may not be a boyfriend or shared crush or anything like that between them just yet, but the imagined third presence of a man there has already twisted attraction into jealousy and competitiveness. If she doesn't wise up, this jealousy will poison the well.

That's what happened to the titular Jennifer from the cult classic, *Jennifer's Body*.

Jennifer and her best friend Needy were undeniably attracted to each other. They were best friends; they could have been more than that, too. But Jennifer's insecurity and jealousy ruled her relationship with Needy more than anything else. Being turned into a man-eating monster by men fulfilling their power fantasies only made literal what Jennifer already lived by — that she had to be beautiful to be loved, and that she had to be desired to be beautiful. That's why no matter how much she liked Needy, she could never allow Needy to be cuter — therefore more desirable — than her; and she could never let Needy spend more time with someone else, because then that would mean that Needy loved someone else more than she loved her. Is it any wonder that Needy found someone else when Jennifer couldn't meet her emotional needs — and is it any wonder that Jennifer killed him for getting between her and Needy?

Jennifer and Needy's relationship is thus completely destroyed by Jennifer's jealousy, symbolically shown by Needy snapping Jennifer's matching "Best Friends Forever" necklace the moment she kills her.

The tragedy, of course, is that it didn't have to be this way. Needy was always trying to reach out to Jennifer. After the fire at the bar, when Jennifer was in shock and the handsome band members preyed on her vulnerable state to lure her away, Needy tried to stop Jennifer and warn her that something bad was going to happen. As toxic and contentious as their relationship could be, Needy still wanted the best for her.

But Jennifer could only analyze this action through that internalized male gaze. If Needy was trying to stop her, then Needy must have just been jealous, the same way Jennifer was always jealous of her. Needy must have been cutting her down and undermining her social capital — her desirability, her beauty — because she wanted to be better than Jennifer.

So Jennifer falls into the trap of the patriarchy: that it is men's opinions she must cater to, and in doing so, other women — even her best friend — must be her enemies. To the astute viewer, Jennifer died the moment she pushed Needy's helping hand away. Everything after that was just... a ghost.

It's easy to blame Jennifer for her choices. However, the sexual violence that shaped her is an ever-present spectre. The metaphors are quite clear. Jennifer is a woman made into a literal monster by the appetites of men who only see her for body. Her ritual murder stands in place of outright sexual assault, but the penetrative imagery remains. The movie demands the viewer to examine the culpability of a society that permitted this to happen at all.



Such is the case in *Mulholland Drive*. In the “nightmare” half of the movie, Diane's relationship with Carmilla cannot escape the sexually exploitative context they are in. As an aspiring actress who can't quite

make the cut on her own, Diane is thankful for acting star Carmilla's help with her career but at the same time envious of Carmilla having what she cannot. Yet the reason why Carmilla has these things — and can give Diane “charity” roles in acting — is because she exploits, and is exploited by, the “casting couch,” ultimately breaking up with Diane and entering a relationship with the film director Adam in order to further her career. Diane is jealous of Adam for having Carmilla and jealous of Carmilla for her success; yet these things are only possible to have because of the sexual abuse and exploitation of women that takes place behind closed doors. So what does it mean, for Diane to be jealous of these things? In this nightmare, Diane is so jealous she orders a hit on Carmilla, and then commits suicide from the guilt. Jealousy offers no way out, only death.

It is against this backdrop that Lynch explores the desire for innocence: to be innocent of knowledge and the patriarchal structures that oppress. In the “dream” half of *Mulholland Drive*, Diane — now Betty — imagines a world where they are strangers, Carmilla loses her memory, and she meets Betty in the aftermath. In this perfect world, neither of them have ever hurt each other before; there is no man between them; and even if Carmilla has sold her body for her career before, it doesn't matter. She doesn't remember and she isn't going back. She is a slate wiped clean, unblemished and unmarred by the pressures of a male gaze. When she has sex with Betty, it is innocent — wonderful — fantastical — so much so, perhaps, that Lynch couldn't imagine a way to portray it on screen. Here is the ultimate antidote to Betty's jealousy: If you are going to be shaped by someone's desires, let it be by mine.



The impulse to dye someone else in your own colors takes a much darker turn in Lynch's *Fire Walk with Me*. Donna, a quiet and well-behaved girl, has a happy and ordinary life that is a far cry from what her best friend,

Laura, lives. Although she is only in high school, Laura regularly indulges in sex and drugs to a self-destructive degree and has already become part of her town's sex work scene. But Donna cares about Laura; she admires her, wants to be like her. A rather innocent form of jealousy and longing. When she sees Laura dressed up to go to what she believes is a party, and Laura shuts her out, Donna follows her in secret. She crashes Laura's deal to sell her services at the brothel and drinks from the cup prepared for Laura. A challenge: she wants to be part of Laura's world.

It's unclear how much Donna knew about what she was getting into. Perhaps she thought this was just a bar and a crazy sex proposition at a crazier party. Either way, Laura accepts the unspoken challenge. She kisses one of the men buying her services. Donna imitates her with the other man, as if to show that she can do what Laura can, too. Despite the fact that their sexual acts are performed at and for men, their incredibly charged eye contact with each other makes it clear who this is really about. It is a textbook perfect conflation of sexuality, jealousy, and longing. Donna wants to be part of Laura's world, and Laura is finally bringing her in. Showing her how it's done.

But the framework by which she does so is so horrifying.

The realization of what she's done only seems to set in for Laura when she sees Donna drugged and topless being pushed down by a man. Laura sits up straight in shock. She screams. She runs to Donna and pushes the man away, trying to cover Donna up.

"Get off her!" she shouts. And when Donna sits up, confused, she screams at her, too: "Don't ever wear my stuff! Don't ever wear my stuff! Never!"

When Donna has a clearer mind the next day, she can't comprehend it. Why would Laura be so angry about her wearing her clothes? She apologizes the only way she can, when she doesn't understand. "I do love you, Laura."

Laura's response?

"I love you, Donna. But I don't want you to be like me."

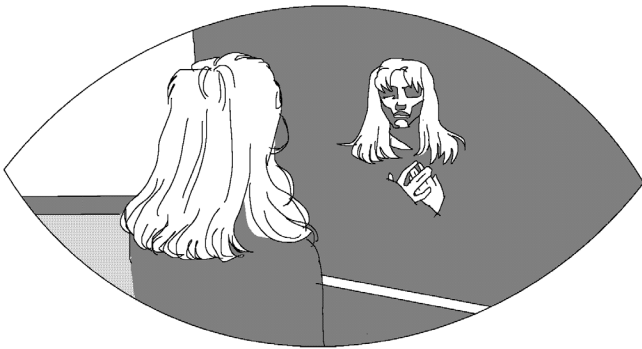
Donna still doesn't understand. She loves Laura; why wouldn't she want to be like her? So she asks Laura again. If it's such a bad thing, why does

Laura do what she does?

And Laura's father, the man who has been sexually abusing her for her whole life, walks into the room.

There it is. That's the answer; that's all you needed to know. At this point in the story, Laura still is unaware that her father is the one brutalizing her; she has repressed it into a "fantasy" she can live with, in which her assaulter is a terrible stranger and not someone she should have been able to trust. But even without that knowledge, the damage persisted nonetheless.

This is the truly insidious thing: how sexual violence and the patriarchy can distort even the purest and most innocent desire between women. In that framework, Needy's efforts to protect Jennifer and Laura's sudden need to protect Donna are painted into "jealousy." Jennifer's attraction to Needy and Diane's for Carmilla are poisoned by that jealousy as well. It isn't enough for two women to love each other; they must do so while fighting against external pressures that could easily tear any budding relationship apart.

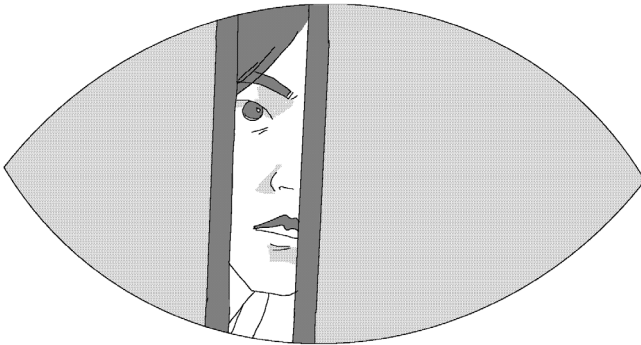


The central couple in *The Handmaidens* are nearly torn apart by this very trap. Hideko and Sook-hee have much higher stakes and many more reasons to tear each other down than Jennifer and Needy. Hideko wants to find a poor fool to suffer in her place so she can be free of the patriarchal, sexually abusive environment she is trapped in; Sook-hee wants to con a poor fool so that she can escape her life of poverty and crime. Both of their desires have been used to pull them into a man's scheme to obtain Hideko's inheritance from her uncle. And at first, it seems that their budding attraction to each other is doomed to fold under the pressures of

society. Hideko envies Sook-hee's freedom and Sook-hee envies Hideko's materialistic life; with the two of them looking so alike, wouldn't it be natural to think, "What she has could be mine"?

But against all odds, Hideko and Sook-hee do not fall for the trap of a zero-sum game. The men in their lives would pit them against each other. However, Hideko and Sook-hee end up caring for each other more than they envy each other. Their mutual choice to choose each other over their respective schemes and self-benefits is what frees them where Jennifer doomed herself and Needy. Instead of remaining enemies, they become each other's refuge and salvation, and it is by this bond that they are able to subvert the mens' plots that surround them and escape to a happier life together. The movie culminates in a truly awesome sex scene wherein Sook-hee accompanies Hideko to reclaim her sexuality from the abuses of male power. Together, they reenact a sex act previously performed for male sexual gratification, this time in the privacy of their own home, according to their own desires and their own joy. Though the male gaze has brutalized Hideko and shaped her relationship with sex and sensuality, in her deliberate reclamation, she finds resistance and freedom in her private and innermost lives.

What is interesting about this movie is that it does not imagine a female sexuality that is innocent of the male gaze, only one that is aware of and actively resists it. The optimistic reading is that women can find a way to free themselves of it. For Hideko and Sook-hee, reducing the very real abuses in their lives to nothing more than a specter is a victory. But the pessimistic reading is that the specter of male domination haunts even the most earnest sexual relationship between women.

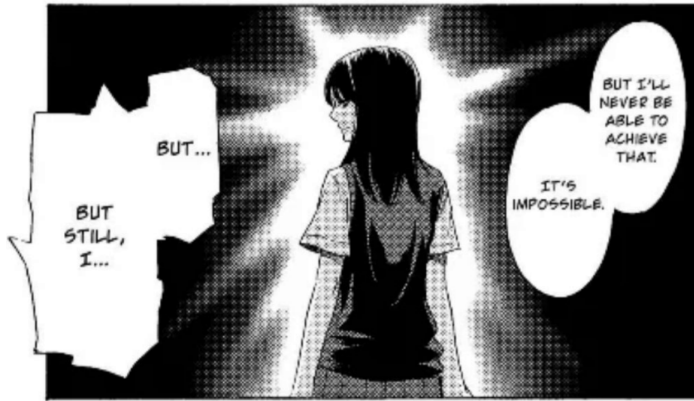


Even for those who weather that pressure and remain steadfast in their

love, their sexual relationship with each other is informed by the gendered sexual abuse that has victimized so many. How do we see each other past the projections of male fantasy? How do we desire each other, not as men would, but as women? What does it mean to love each other as women, when the way we love each other is so often informed by media and cinema that centers the male gaze first?

Or, in the words of Shūzō Oshimi, creator of *Inside Mari* and *Welcome Back*:





So when the chance to have sex with a woman actually came, I forgot all about it (or pretended to forget it), and my mind was filled with the vanity of “as a man, as a male specimen, I must carry through sex impressively.” My mind and body were in pieces. I didn’t want to make the other person feel good, nor did I want to feel good myself. I only kept repeating the words “I have to do it right” in my frightened blank mind. I could not do it properly, as I should have. Before the penetration happened, my body’d become totally unexcited and I could not get an erection. Strangely, I had forgotten about the birthmark that had worried me so much.

No matter how many times I tried, it didn’t work. But eventually, little by little, I started to “get it right.” The trick I found was to erase my girl self only while I was doing it. To be one machine in a boat of manhood. I am a machine. I am a machine, a sex machine. By telling myself this and pushing my body to the limit, I was finally able to have sex.

But every time, the girl in me is wounded, bloodied, and torn to pieces. And then, before I know it, she becomes dim and begins to fade. It’s as if she was never there, as if I was always the sex machine, like, “all men are nervous when they have their first time, often they can’t get an erection, that’s how we all grow up, you shouldn’t have sex like in porn...”

But I couldn’t forget the girl covered in blood inside me. How can I help her? I always feel some sort of tearing pain when feminism attacks men’s unconscious misogyny – because I am exposed for the sin of trying to be a male specimen; I am forcibly confronted with the guilt of hurting the girl inside me. I cannot stop being a man. But I can’t be a girl, I can’t be a woman. How can I quit being a man?

I dream of what sex would be like after I stop being a guy. Sex where no one spills blood. I want to get out. Out of manhood, out of the boat, out of this reality. But if that’s possible. or where it is – that. I don’t know.

(source: <https://x.com/mysteryurifag/status/1696299928853606573>)

We may fantasize about being innocent of knowledge of patriarchal ways of seeing. But it's too late. It is impossible to obtain innocence again once it is lost; Pandora's Box has been opened, forever altering the way we understand the world. If we want to love each other free of the internal distortions of patriarchal manhood and the "male gaze," we can only find another way.

What is that "hope" that still waits for us at the bottom of the box?

This exercise in imagination is left to the reader to take forward into their life.

Author's Note



Anonymous said to simkjrs:



Anonymous asked:

you would write essays about two tree logs as long as theyre boys



This essay is dedicated to the anon who sent me this message while I was working on it. I love you

Art for this essay was created by shrimpchipsss.

Wlw genderswaps and the elusive promised land of toxic yuri

by @shrimpchipsss

A few of you may be familiar with an earlier version of this essay posted on my dreamwidth which puts forth a critique of wlw genderswaps that are derived from mlm media. It uses Lesbingqiu from Scum Villain's Self-Saving System as the main example of the mysterious detoxification that happens to what has the potential to be a phenomenal toxic yuri ship during the genderswapping process.

In this version of this essay, in an effort to not trap us in a cycle of only critiquing, I'll summarize what wlw genderswaps derived from mlm media reveal about depictions of wlws, especially in fanwork, and provide some examples of toxic yuri that may guide us to richer yuri pastures.

The sad defanged lesbian, a rehash

Despite the toxic yuri zeitgeist of spring/summer 2023, the toxic (think broadly: jealousy and possessiveness, not just abuse or manipulation) aspect of toxic yuri is something that is comparatively hard to come by in wlw fanwork as opposed to in mlm fanwork, particularly in wlw genderswaps that are derived from mlm media.

X_loos wrote a critique on the state of wlw genderswaps in MDZS fandom circa September 2020 that I think really gets at the odd loss of athleticism and physical capability as part of the alchemical genderswapping, and the tendency for cis wlw genderswaps to be domestic, mundane, and soft when the couple that the genderswap is derived from is blatantly not. It's the kind of genre or tonal shift that isn't a Thing on its own but is a notable trend across entire fandoms—the cozy-fying of athletic, martial ships when they are portrayed as women—and therefore worth examining.

Not only is there a loss of physical capability in femswaps, but there is also a loss of aggression and confrontation present in many of the original m/m ships, which start out as warriors and combatants often locked in melodramatic confrontation with each other, and are transformed into unathletic, nonphysical, non confrontational non-beings—a sad tradition of cottagecore lesbians. There is a real and valid escapist reason for this domestication process which I explore in an essay in Yaoi Zine 2. However, the fact that you do not see the same domestication happen to such a degree across non-genderswapped fic for those same ships is for the simple reason that “men are culturally permitted to be violent while women are not” (pallas_rose).

This leads to a conundrum in fandom because people are uncomfortable with women displaying overt aggression on the one hand, but can't seem to come up with good ways of portraying alternate aggression on the other, when it is not that women cannot be violent or aggressive, but just that it can manifest in different ways.

The book *Odd Girl Out* by Rachel Simmons describes how aggression and anger among girls is suppressed from a young age, which makes girl aggression covert and indirect. Girls are also socialized as caretakers who are valued for their relationships with others, which makes girl aggression relational and social. Instead of fighting with physical aggression, girls fight through social capital, secrets, threatened withdrawals of friendship or sabotaging other relationships, body language, and more.

This is great news for toxic yuri enjoyers who want the full gamut of overt and covert displays of aggression. Toxic yuri can contain physical acts like choking and stabbing and grappling on the floor, but it can also be full of subterfuge and emotional manipulation and other fun forms of psychological warfare (Zoe).

Genderswaps, toxic yuri, and girl yaoi

Consider tshirt and chris' theory of girl yaoi which distinguishes girl yaoi from both traditional yuri, which embraces ambiguity and is less about power differences between characters, and (boy) yaoi, which is about hierarchy and power differences (55, tshirt w chris). Girl yaoi, like traditional yaoi, is concerned with differences in power, but more importantly, with femininity and the various social roles of women (56, tshirt w chris).

Theoretically, genderswaps should be especially well-primed to be about

these things, given that the project of a genderswap is to consider the core of a character and how their disposition and personality would manifest in the same or different ways if they occupied a different social role due to their gender.

For example, Shen Qingqiu from *Scum Villain* is affectionate and indulgent towards his student and eventual lover Luo Binghe. How does this dynamic change if one or both of them are women? If they are cis or trans/nb? What displays of favoritism or affection towards a beloved student are more or less permissible from a mistress instead of a master? When Luo Binghe is angry at Shen Qingqiu how does the anger manifest? Does Binghe still chase Shen Qingqiu through a city and choke her against a wall? And whether or not they grapple in an alleyway, does their dialogue change? There is much to consider!

Yet, in fandom, we tend to get femswaps that exist in fluffy, cozy, mundane domesticity. It is not that mundane domesticity is inherently less interesting than a brawl or a fight. The issue is that people tend to portray that domesticity or mundanity in such a way that is entirely about aesthetics and set dressing and has little to do with the characters and their social roles as the women they are supposed to be now. If you could swap out the names of the characters in the fic for any other two women, what's the point (x_lo)? You may have painted a picture of a beautiful scene but you have not told me anything substantive about the characters or their dynamic.

Moreover, this fluffy, cozy mundanity tends to comprise the majority of fic even for ships that are well-primed to be toxic and vicious and insane. It's a travesty for toxic yuri and nontoxic yuri enjoyers alike—a manifestation of what is socially acceptable for women in real life and in fiction.

As in my first essay, I will point out that my critique is mostly about cis w/lw genderswaps, as genderswaps with even one trans/nb partner tend to have something interesting to say about gender and social roles. And I'll caveat that point with the hopefully obvious and redundant statement that trans/nb writers don't owe their audience something interesting to say about gender and social roles. But to go back to the yuri,

The promised land of substantive yuri

Recall that girl yaoi is concerned with the social roles of women, and moreover, the way a conflict between characters in a ship plays out be-

cause of their different social roles. This makes girl yaoi an incredibly useful tool for toxic yuri purposes. Though some toxic yuri will have conflict along different lines like “pure interpersonal aggression,” some are deeply and utterly about femininity and navigating the world and relationships as a woman (tshirt).

I would like to give some examples of girl yaoi that also happens to be toxic yuri and that may provide some inspiration to those seeking to develop their toxic yuri palate. They are Nana and Black Sails. Both examples are about women’s social roles and both illustrate that the home is not just a site for fluffy, cozy, domesticity, but also a prime setting for conflict.

Hey, Nana,

Nana is an animanga about two 20-year-old girls named Nana who on the surface couldn’t be more different, who meet on the train to Tokyo and become roommates and good friends. It is about personal style and expression, the prison of cishet amatonormativity, and the slow creep of being influenced by somebody else.

But first, a toxic yuri disclaimer: I really read most of Osaki Nana (Nana O) and Komatsu Nana(Hachiko)’s actions as not being malicious. Any possessiveness or self destructive behavior stems, for the both of them, from the fear of loss of connection between them, but a lack of malicious intent doesn’t mean that a relationship isn’t dysfunctional or doesn’t have toxic elements.

In terms of social roles, Nana O, described by multiple characters as “handsome,” is dry and sharp with an intimidating presence. She is a singer in a punk band and comes off mature and independent. Nana (Hachiko), who gets her nickname for acting like a cute, loyal dog*, is traditionally feminine, soft, bubbly, and can come off vapid and childish. Nana O wears skirts and corsets but is extremely gender nonconforming and takes on the role of what in high school I used to call, “the boyfriend friend,” while Hachi conforms to a traditionally feminine social role (Zoe).

They are roommates and share a western-style apartment which is often the setting for their social circle. This should be the definition of mundane and domestic and yet the way they navigate comphet society and a culture of amatonormativity and their intense relationship with each

other is electric.

Throughout the course of their friendship, both women display a frankly awe inspiring possessiveness of each other. Hachi becomes jealous when other girls become close to Nana O and lashes out when Nana O tries to have Misato, a fan and familiar face from her hometown, stay over. Nana O, on the other hand encourages Hachi to date her bandmate Nobu so that Hachi will stay in her immediate social circle instead of in their rival band's (now THIS is a homosocial triangle).

Hachi is full of self-destructive behavior. She catastrophizes and obsesses over what Nana O thinks of her, which makes her hide things from Nana O and push her away for fear of rejection or judgment, in the next breath wondering what it would be like if they were lovers. Nana O also longs for Hachi to see her positively and fears the intensity of her possessiveness over Hachi and so holds Hachi at a distance, while telling her boyfriend how moved she feels by Hachi, as if she were a teenage boy falling in love for the first time.

Though these acts of possessiveness and withdrawal and secretiveness may not be meant to hurt the other, they play out in the realm of girl aggression: relationally and socially.

The Nanas' social roles are incredibly different as a traditionally feminine woman and a gender nonconforming punk. As the lead singer of an up-and-coming band and as the "pet" or groupie of the band, they also have differences in social status. They also have vastly different personalities and perceptions of each other. Hachi sees Nana O as independent and unaffected while Nana O sees Hachi as sincere and pure, both thinking that the other is above the kinds of selfish acts they do, yet both driven by the same desire to be close to each other, and for the other not to think badly of them. They continue to mirror and identify with each other in sentimental admissions throughout the story.

And after all, their names are literally the same!! As the girl yaoi manifesto says, "Girl yaoi always draws attention to the plasticity of being. There is no 'I,' it says. Only 'us'" (65, tshirt w chris). Through the way Nana and Nana grapple in secrecy and fear, and as their desire to be close to each other forces them apart, they show how a conflict-filled example of girl yaoi is a perfect fulfillment of toxic yuri.

You need to watch Black Sails

The pirate show *Black Sails* is set on New Providence Island in the early 18th century during the Golden Age of Piracy, and it is a story about empire, revenge, power, stories, race, and patriarchal violence. It also has an insanely good example of toxic yuri in Eleanor Guthrie and Max, whose power and social roles could not be more different.

I'll keep this one more brief and focus on themes and season 1 events so as to not do a retelling of the entire plot of *Black Sails*.

Eleanor Guthrie is the daughter of a black market merchant who deals with the pirates. Her father wanted a son so she made her family's slave, Mr. Scott, teach her how to take over her father's business, and she dreams of a free and independent Nassau. Max is a prostitute who works at the brothel, the child of a slave woman and the slave owner. She is cunning and strategic and has a knack for discerning people's underlying motives, and she, too, dreams of a better life.

Eleanor and Max's relationship has the feeling of lesbian retreat from patriarchal masculinity, a house where there is joy, is love, is peace, until it isn't, due to Eleanor being the fictional white woman of all time (two-guysonebeartrap).

Consider Eleanor Guthrie's precarious hold on power in Nassau as a woman merchant dealing with pirates in a patriarchal society. It is precarious but the power is oh, so close. Consider, then, Max's utter precarity in comparison as a prostitute to those pirates.

The women have vastly different social roles and also a vast power differential. Sure, they are lovers who talk of dreams of a better world, but Max is Eleanor's prostitute. Sure, they speak as though they are peers and equals, but Max was born into slavery and Eleanor, though not a son, has the chance to take over her father's business. Sure, Eleanor doesn't lay a hand on Max, but the moment their interests diverge, their "same"ness ends, and Eleanor abandons Max to a terrible fate.

Before everything goes to shit though, Max and Eleanor have retreated into a refuge from the patriarchal violence of the empire. Neither character had the safety of domesticity growing up, due to Eleanor's family being uprooted in her youth and Max's birth into slavery. The brothel itself is still a site of exploitation and violence but in their room in the

brothel is comfort and wound tending and safety from the world; it is an escape for them both (Chris roxast). This is another example of mundane domesticity turned electric because it is mundane domesticity as resistance, carved out in the world in the face of violence and overwhelming threat. Though domestic settings are often written as fluff for the sake of escapism, it is also possible to write a domestic setting with conflict or in the face of conflict (Zoe).

As the story goes on, the two scheme and bargain against each other and deal in secrets and intimacy and social alliances. It is the social and relational realm that they are allowed to operate in, unlike the male pirates (Anne Bonny aside) who fight and pillage and plunder.

To wrap this up, I want to point to chris' follow up to the girl yaoi manifesto which brings up how "identification across these imbalanced, hierarchical social dynamics implies their dissolution, which in turn implies a weakening or inherent falsehood in the social structures that defined these women as different in the first place" (69 (nice), chris).

Eleanor's identification with Max as a woman and as an equal stops at the point that she betrays Max. But later on, the identification returns in a charged interaction where Max thanks Eleanor for teaching her to "never let anyone stand in between you and your ambitions."

In conclusion

Hopefully my examples illustrate the ways in which girl yaoi is extremely conducive to toxic yuri. Though girl yaoi is not the only way to do toxic yuri, because girl yaoi is necessarily concerned with the social roles of women and femininity, and to stretch that a bit, what women are permitted to do, girl yaoi provides compelling examples of how insane women can be and so fits itself very neatly under the toxic yuri umbrella.

For genderswap writers who are turning physically capable, melodramatic m/m ships into w/lws and want to retain the melodrama, or for people who love toxic yuri and want tips on how to get there, there is a framework for us!

This goes for toxic and nontoxic yuri alike. We don't live in a world where the only choices are physical aggression and violence and soft, mundane domesticity where nothing happens. There is a rich world of femininity

and women's social roles, the aesthetics of which are easy to get right, but the substance of which is harder to get to. Though curiously, starting with the aesthetics of womanhood and adding something insane to it is one possible way of going about creating a toxic yuri scenario.

For example, consider a Lesbingqiu where they go shopping and Shen Qingqiu buys a new lipstick and Binghe remarks about her choice of clothes. I have learned nothing about the characters other than the set dressing and aesthetics of femininity.

Now, consider a Lesbingqiu where they go shopping and Shen Qingqiu buys a new lipstick because Binghe stole her other one because Shen Qingqiu is her image of what a good and perfect woman should be and Binghe is trying to be worthy of her, is doing everything she can to be seen as socially acceptable and legitimate (and maybe Binghe stole the lipstick for the indirect kiss, or maybe she ate it in a crying fit, something about femininity and consumption), and Binghe remarks about Shen Qingqiu's choice of clothes because she is trying to draw attention to the way she chose an outfit that compliments Shen Qingqiu's, because she has her closet memorized so that they'll always look subtly matching so that she can signal to everyone else that they're a pair. Maybe Binghe subtly glares at people or angles her body so that they'll be left alone while they shop, the same way she does at group hangouts with their friends, while Shen Qingqiu is none the wiser.

Put together it's very alarming behavior, but it's so hidden, isn't it? So indirect and covert. So about their social roles as a paragon of femininity and someone trying and grasping with all her might to live up to that. Consider.

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Failing At Love As a High School Sapphic: On Reading SQ in Your Twenties and Going Nuts

by @ahaybale and dre

On starting in the middle, or being in the midst

I'd like to know if this resonates with you: trying to think about why [SQ](#) fucks me up so bad has me feeling unmoored.

Why the brainfuck? It would be easy to blame this on the fact that SQ is a WIP, and historically, I've avoided WIPs because I'm a slut for narrative resolution. When I read BL, I'm always racing towards the climax. I need the CP to declare their unabiding love for each other, or at least to fuck about it. SQ's status as an eternal WIP—vaguely shadowbanned, destined to an afterlife of occasional fluff extras, in the realm of many other yuri works—offers me little in the way of closure. I could take the evasive approach, and say that my feelings for SQ are destined to be incomplete, because I am waiting for Sunjing and Qitong to get together and they never will.

But then I remember what you said about watching *blue* (2002) recently: that the relationship between Kayako and Endo remains suspended (unresolved, anticipatory) at the end of the film. Not over, precisely, if only because the love between them never becomes a reality. This is the case for so many yuri works—I'm reminded here of Homura and Madoka from *Madoka Magica*, whose narrative fate lies in being captured within an endless time loop of death. The ending of a work of yuri offers no promises to the realisation of a relationship; if anything, it often forecloses the possibility altogether. Perhaps it's better that SQ remains unfinished, allowed to drift towards a vanishing point of hope, not resignation.

No chance of finding answers in an ending, then. And what of the beginning of SQ? It's an odd opener, too—SQ starts in the midst, Sunjing already in full simp mode for Qitong. We are in the thick of Sunjing's Immense Pining; compelled to empathise with her desire to get closer to Qitong, with her desire to become someone deserving of love and radically transformed by it. This emotional drive is what characterises every encounter that follows—and is where the work remains in every encounter that follows, as Sunjing and Qitong get to know each other better and the possibility of them falling in love becomes ever more viable—without quite realising itself. Maybe this is what fucks me up about SQ—that it begins, continues, and drifts off in the thick of feeling; in the midst of an emotional situation. I'm unmoored because there are no clear narrative points to cling onto; no moments of clarity that elucidate what Sunjing and Qitong mean to each other. Are they in a state of stagnation? Do they move and change each other in ways that are not recognisable by existing conceptualisations of narrative—can these conceptualisations found elsewhere—should we be looking to frame them at all?

The closest point of reference I have for SQ are my own gay feelings. Sunjing's moon-sized crush reminds me how I have sought out closeness with the girls I have pined for, the ways my memories of the days spent doing nothing together are sun-soaked and dreamy, the romantic implications of these moments only clear in hindsight, when I am so deep in it that I have lost to the feelings, having relegated them to a possibility that has passed. To read a text this way—not as a detached observer or through theory, but as refracted through my own memories—is uncomfortable. It makes me at once protective and critical of Sunjing and Qitong and what they fail to do, by sketching out a version of my relationship to queerness that are unflattering: fraught, unclear, often avoidant even as it tries to find alternatives to the tired modes of Relation in heterosexuality.

on the yuri-ness of yuri

I want to stay here with thinking through what SQ makes us feel, as well as this attempt to map out our relation with and through the text. For us both, I definitely think there's an immediate urge to self-identification, and for me it even happens to an extent where my memory of the plot details are distorted by how much I've projected myself into the characters when I was reading it. This is something I've noticed more as we write about our experience reading SQ—in many ways it feels like I was using it as a proxy to bask in sterilized memories of good times I

had with girls I loved, stakes-free. But at the same time, in the back of my mind I continue to recognize that I'm enacting a purposeful suspension—I'm bracketing the memory within the context of reading a fictional work; I'm allowing the stagnancy of their relationship development conveniently erase the unsavory bits and edges that were part of my less-than-ideal experiences. It's this act of mental gymnastics that produces the feeling of "fucked-up-ness" for me—feelings of regret, missed opportunities, unresolved desire. At the same time that I recognized there were things I could have done to change things between me and those people, I continued to ignore them as opportunities consistently passed me by—in the same way that I choose to escape into yuri instead of confronting the reality of what I would need to do to ensure that that doesn't continue to be the case. Perhaps it's also the way that after Sunjing's initial confession, the author doesn't force the two characters to come to terms with the nature of their relationship at all—as long as they keep their mouths shut, biding their time, letting their actions speak for themselves, the author rewards them with a kind of pseudo-relationship where we are privy to only the Greatest Hits of Exciting Flirting & Intimacy, and comfortably lets me enjoy the delusion that I could have that, if I just did the same.

Maybe it's this willful ignorance I'm participating in that makes me not want Sunjing and Qitong to actually get together. There's definitely a level of angst felt towards their perpetual situationship, but maybe I'm also enjoying it, in a delulu way—a hopeful kind of nonresolution like you mentioned above. My attachment to SQ feels so big and so devastating specifically because they don't get together and that you could probably infer that they won't. Another reason why I think this feeling of almost-not wanting them to have a satisfactory resolution is part of a desire to want to be in the trenches together, of specifically that these experiences often haven't resolved for me so it's comforting to know that at least someone else is going through the shit too. To borrow your words, I don't want it because if Sunjing was given a happy ending, I would no longer be able to resonate with her, and SQ would no longer be an indulgent fantasy, but just a huge slap in the face to being what—a gay loser who can't express their feelings, instead of an Advanced Queer Sapphic Subject.

Which brings me to Sunjing's Immense Pining and how it comes across, which is all of the sudden/right in the feels/huge/overwhelming/yet also not oriented toward a trajectory at all. It happens quite early on that Sun-

jing confesses her love to Qitong, with Qitong rejecting-but-not-completely her confession, which suspends Sunjing in a kind of limbo: while Qitong says that she can't return her feelings, she doesn't say that she won't ever, which relegates Sunjing to the position of waiting-for-her-to-turn-gay. I wonder if it's specifically this space, a hopeless optimism, a walking in the same place over and over again while expecting a different result that causes the intense affective power of this dynamic, and that these feelings don't feel codified as genre or sayable in the ways that romance genre media often feel. And it's created by the unknowability of each others' feelings by virtue of the fact that in many cases these characters don't have the (literary, social) cues by which to identify whether their crush really is one or not.

But when I'm crying for Sunjing and Qitong, I'm not really crying about any specific situation but rather for the me who didn't realize what she was feeling, for the me that wasn't able to articulate what felt off about trying to fit my feelings into the boxes of heteronormative dating culture. We talk about our interest in theorizing yaoi now as some kind of redemptive action for the preteen feral us who were reading smut and feeling intense shame about it, and autotheorizing yuri also feels kind of like that—like I'm always experiencing it after having passed it, of a delayed realization once I'm already in the thick of it. You speak of the delayed moment of realization, of realization occurring only when one feels or has been lost—and I think there is some sense of the lack of iterability of the feelings we have that renders this realization always too late. Even to define the “realization” as some kind of breakthrough moment—like what kinds of definitions are we trying to categorize our feelings by? At least for me, it often feels like trying to put words to my feelings is one of my compensatory mechanisms, that being able to derive a narrative with a clear timeline of “meeting to crush to love” to summarize the absolute mess of my gay feelings is somehow doing myself dirty, and just another way to postpone my problems to an even later date. Basically, I just want to highlight that what if this feeling of in the middleness is an effect of the inarticulability of the feelings felt, and how would we begin to celebrate or harness that feeling to more productive ends?

From the text to feeling and back again

You make a key point in drawing attention to what articulation/in-articulation has to do with our fucked up, possibly self-identificatory feelings about SQ. And so I'm wondering what claims SQ actually makes about articulation/in-articulation, and whether that allows us to map our queer

feelings onto the text towards, as you say, productive ends.

To read ourselves as Sunjing: certainly SQ, as told from her POV, encourages it. I always feel like I am the Sunjing of my own life—caught up in my overwhelming feelings for someone wonderful and mysterious, a little hard to reach in a way that makes me clumsy. Told from her perspective, SQ certainly encourages us to identify with her. But she doesn't fail to articulate at all—when Qitong gives her an out after the confession with the lukewarm response of “I like you too! What could you possibly mean?,” Sunjing makes her romantic intentions clear. This poses a big problem for a genuine attempt at self-identification: can I say that I've risked a friendship in the way that she has, that I've come out with my gay-ass feelings? No. And even if I did (I have never done this), could I take the non-rejection-rejection as generously as she does? Not likely.

So maybe we're Qitong. That would be more on par with the in-articulability of feeling you've discussed. It's clear that she is drawn to Sunjing; that she's not so stupid to think that things are platonic as they move further and further into what resembles a domestic partnership. You get the sense that she is seeing and choosing not to recognise and name what is happening. But that doesn't feel right either—a reading premised on identifying wholly with Qitong brings out a troubling element to SQ that I don't really find either in my own experience of the work.

Perhaps this is where the fantasy element of SQ as a work of yuri comes back into play. Not precisely in the fact that we can map out our own experiences with Sunjing or Qitong's, but in the fantastical nature of their situation. That we could remain unhurt and hopeful if we came out and articulated our feelings, even if they cannot be returned; or, on the other hand, that you can recognise a romantic undercurrent to your relationships and still remain peacefully unchanged. This is a fantasy in the sense that there are no stakes to articulation/in-articulation, that whether or not you can say and commit to your feelings outright, they are somehow understood and accepted and can be held in suspension.

For me, it's a bitter fantasy to take part in. It offers a nice way to charactersise all my past experiences in which I let my feelings pass me by, and to say that my codependent friendship-relationships were ones in which we both understood the situation and articulation wasn't necessary. Thinking about these experiences through the lens of SQ makes me wonder: but what if we had spoken seriously about what was happening

between us? What would it have meant for me to treat articulation seriously—as an act, and not the gesturing towards hypotheticals I have been patterned towards—and to allow these ambiguous feelings to turn into something else? I am comforted by Sunjing being in the pits with me, but I also want better for her, and I want better for Qitong, because I don't want to live in a fantasy where there are no consequences for articulation. I want them to get it fucking together (however that might play out), because in doing so it offers an orientation of queer girlhood that is not simply about hopeless optimism.

Where does the fantasy element of SQ lie for you, and what is its nature? Is there something else to be made of the operations of fantasy in yuri—despite and in contrast to my gloomy assessment so far? I'd love to know your thoughts.

broaching it with love

The fantasy is definitely felt as bitter over here as well, and to head towards some semblance of a conclusion, I'd like to review the points we've covered so far. We started by asking, what does SQ make us feel? We're operating from a place that recognizes the agency that a text can have over us. Our second question asks why SQ is able to make us feel that way, and we attempted to find a way through our feelings by tunneling along certain affective points. We've located that the unmoored, overwhelmed feeling that comes to us through the text might be a cause of the mode in which we're reading—at times escapist, at times self-identificatory, overall engaging in fantasy. But in doing so, we found that this type of reading is merely enacting a cycle of repetition in which we chase a desired object hopelessly, trying to find a strand of intimacy where we have failed in our real lives. Here I'd like to suggest—perhaps the way out to all this lies in exactly the work we've been doing throughout this piece?

Where we've landed right now in relation to what we think the text is saying, in addition to our engagement with it, is that our attachment to SQ comes via the way that it functions as a space for fantasy. I've spoken to you on this in other conversations about how yaoi might function simultaneously as a holding space in two ways—that it would be some kind of incubator for a repetitive process, of not being ready for something but attempting to get there, and at the same time, the utopia place of the deferred desire itself, where you might never get there because you're purposefully shying away from it. The same might be said of SQ as a space for fantasy, in which we are projecting our own insecurities into

the text, and the friction between Sunjing and Qitong gives rise to a reconsideration of the things we've done before.

So I guess one of the things I want to explore here is to begin to think through how recuperative spaces like SQ, viewed for their "repetitive stuckness," can employ the stuckness itself to instead be generative and/or interruptive/disruptive. We're reading yuri (comparatively with yaoi) as less of an escape and more of a confrontation/identification, but how do we arrive at a mode that doesn't fall into the typical pitfalls associated with those two modes of reading?

I want to come back to our point on articulation, and how our relationship to articulation is refracted through Sunjing and Qitong's articulation, or lack thereof, throughout the series. You say that Sunjing does articulate, and clearly—she reiterates more than once that her feelings are romantic when Qitong gives her a way out. And Qitong, she's being a bit too inarticulate—it slides into the area of willful ignorance and mixed signals that we really don't like. So in this case, it does feel like ok—Sunjing, she's made her case, she's articulated, she's knowable. And she's made herself knowable, which is to say that she's made herself open and vulnerable to rejection. On the contrary, Qitong hasn't, and that creates a power differential that makes us queasy, and contributes to the feeling that things have to be articulated to be clear and good and only when things are clear and good can the relationship progress to the next stage for growth and discovery. For me at least, seeing the fantasy of inarticulation play out to these somewhat bittersweet ends in SQ reinforces the disadvantageousness of pushing for either or, that a better way of relating might lie elsewhere.

To this point, I want to borrow from [Trisha Low citing Snack Syndicate's thoughts](#) on touch via fandom, where touching (through fan production, consumption, and circulation) doesn't equate "identifying, identifying with seeing, seeing with knowing, and knowing with possessing." The impulse to articulation is often an attempt to identify, possess, and control—drawing neat little lines around what someone is to you, and what you are to them—often forgetting about who you both are as a result of each other. Their intervention is to suggest a being-with "where the shared outlines blur but we can still belong to ourselves," to not be "an entity deciphered and slotted into place, but rather situated in the ongoing process of being known, in a nebulous, reciprocal way of being shaped by others." Could there be a way in which we saw not only our relationships,

but our relationships with fan texts, as a shared subjectivity? What if we tried to meet the text not as an escape, or identification, but as a kind of touching?

I bring in a quote from [Ronjaunee Chatterjee on analytic love](#):

“love broaches the comfortable conjunction of desire with its unreachable object (a sustained fantasy) that structures enjoyment at the heart of repetition.”

Perhaps the bitterness, and at the same time, enjoyment, of the fantasy of SQ is that it replays the repetitions we are attached to, whether it's the unbreakable patience of Sunjing or the uncertain optimism of Qitong, but are unable to step out of by virtue of the conditions that structure this fantasy. Recognizing the affective force of cycles like this to suck us in and keep us stuck, Chatterjee doesn't ask us to mend it—rather, she wants us to broach, infiltrate, interrogate it—that way, we can force a space from which to locate the structures of our desire. I'm going to propose something that seems farfetched: this dialogue feels like a broaching. Reading yuri, really *reading* it, has allowed me to meet the text at a point where I don't feel engulfed by its power, that we're sharing and generating something that wasn't attributed to either the reader or text prior to encountering each other.

So when I think about our original question, “what is it about SQ that fucks us up so bad,” I want to think about its affective power to fuck us up as the catalyst for allowing subversion of the same repetitive cycles it enacts. The ambiguity of Sunjing and Qitong's relationship is a scenario that presents the possibility for alternative solutions we want to lean into, because it flirts with the possibility that we could not only be knowable, or know, as a way of possessing, but that we could be “situated in the ongoing process of being known together, as a reciprocal way of being shaped by others.” So I agree that as much I don't want Sunjing and Qitong to be together, maybe it's because they haven't behaved in the way that I think warrants a resolution, that they only mirror possible realities that I don't want to be a part of anymore. Their actions are problematic (and attractive) in that way, but they don't have to be—it's an unfinished work, after all. And just as the experiences we're reflecting into the text are similarly unfinished, SQ suggests that despite wanting to fall into the cycles of repetition that structure desire for an unreachable object, we might be able to broach that with love—not by being able to articulate something about our feelings in particular, but of opening ourselves up to the possibility of knowing together. Using our relationship with yuri texts

and fan materials as a model, what if we (and they) were able to relate in a way where they weren't trying to demand reciprocation, to regard each reading as an event that has the capacity to expose a truth about our own desire, to allow their stories to resonate through us and feel our difference and yet still meet each other somewhere, producing something new out of our specific encountering, giving each other something that we individually do not have to give? I think we are attuned to the ethics of not articulating, but also aware of the dangers of making articulation a prerequisite. We seek a way to meet the text and our life with love—to put a space between us and our repetitions to intervene and possibly create something different out of it, to meet the text in a way to allow something different or shed light on the structures of our desire and hopefully be able to confound, not consolidate, the affective attachments we have to these texts, and to relationships that prevent our flourishing.



1 1996

BLACK CANARY ORACLE

Birds of GAY

Julian shipyrd

SOME SITUATIONS REQUIRE...

...A WOMAN'S TOUCH!



I. This Too Is Yuri¹

Birds of Prey (1995-2009) is a comic about power, control, physicality, the internet, and convincing your girlfriend to set aside her moral principles. Well, not quite.

Some quick background for people who haven't spent the last year in DC hell: Birds of Prey is one of the more famous female team comics, mostly starring Barbara Gordon and Dinah Lance, though there's a rotating cast of other women who come and go (Helena Bertinelli joins the team later in the run.) The comic started off with a handful of one-shots, continuing to be a top seller for a decade. (There was also a brief and very doomed TV series, which apparently featured t.A.t.u.'s "All The Things She Said" during a deeply homoerotic fight scene.)²

Barbara Gordon, formerly Batgirl, is the daughter of Gotham police chief Jim Gordon. At the beginning of Birds of Prey, she's acting as Oracle, a sort of technosuper-genius capable of hacking everything from Army satellites to banks.³ She's forged this role for herself after the Joker shot her in the spine; in Birds of Prey, she's paralyzed from the waist down and uses a wheelchair.

Dinah Lance is the Black Canary, one of the most talented martial artists in the world. She fights crime in fishnets, the costume her mother (the first Black Canary) wore.⁴ At the beginning of Birds of Prey, she's reeling from the death of her longterm ex, Oliver Queen/Green Arrow, and also

1 I struggled with how to frame this essay almost as much as I struggled to research it. Birds of Prey debuted during the days of the "old internet," making it fairly challenging to find contemporary fan responses (more on this later.) So there was a great temptation to say this, the archival gap, too is yuri. But while I love to talk about research methods I think an essay about my attempts to get into comics DC++ servers is not actually that interesting, and also oh my god I want to talk about Dinah Lance and Barbara Gordon and their nightmare relationship.

2 "But We're Out of Time: Queer(ed) Nostalgia and WB's The Birds of Prey" by Nicholas Miller (*The Middle Space*, 2020) covers the show; it's also a great read about queering memory. Very funny to read this blog after scrolling through a lot of forum posts deeply upset about the show when it first aired.

3 DC Comics has a lot of ideas about what a library degree prepares you for. Clearly I missed the hacking classes.

4 This is one of the more normal ways to react to a superhero parent I've seen in comics, actually.

the loss of her powers, a sort of superhuman shriek that can blast through walls or knock out opponents.

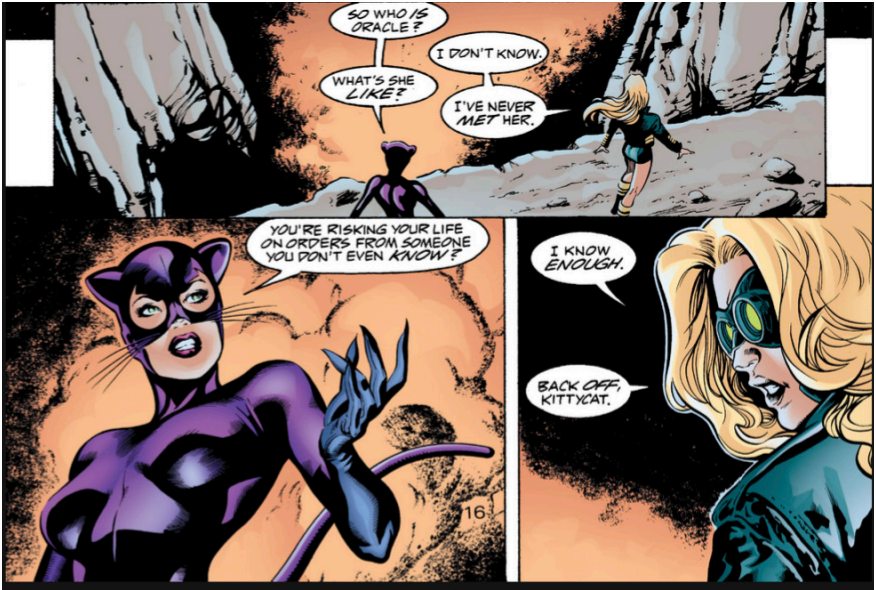
Cue the yuri. In *Birds of Prey*, Barbara (Babs) acts as Dinah's handler, sending her on missions that range from comic-book normal to absolutely wild (Dinah fights a dinosaur at least twice.) Babs books her travel, orders her food, buys her clothes, and acts like a jealous girlfriend any time Dinah works with another woman without Babs orchestrating it.



1. *Black Canary/Oracle: Birds of Prey* (1995), Chuck Dixon and Dick Giordano, p. 16
2. *Birds of Prey: Manhunt #1* (1996), Chuck Dixon and Matt Haley, p. 14

The intimacy only goes one way, though. Despite her exhaustive knowledge of Dinah, Babs remains a voice in Dinah's ear for the first 21 issues of the run. Dinah doesn't know the name of the woman who sends her into danger every other week.

Critically, Barbara keeps her identity-- not just her superhero and civilian identities, but also her identity as a disabled woman-- secret. She has nearly unlimited access to information about Dinah, as well as the rest of the world; and she will not allow herself to be known. Her anonymity and her remove are her power and control. This makes the little worms in my brain do a sort of unhinged samba. If yuri is about absence, as the tumblr memes go, about reaching out and trying to grasp something you can never quite have, well!





3. Birds of Prey #13 (1999), Chuck Dixon and Greg Land, p. 16

4. Birds of Prey #19 (2000), Chuck Dixon and Butch Guice, p. 14

5. Birds of Prey #3 (1999), Chuck Dixon and Greg Land, p. 11

Identity, both in its revelation and its concealment, is a key feature of any superhero comic. Who has a secret identity? Who is allowed to know it? Identity in comics is about who you are, of course, but it is also about safety, about masking and unmasking, about intimacy and trust, about having a place to go when you hang up the spandex. As the Black Canary, Dinah doesn't wear a mask; her identity is something of an open secret, and it's only her relative obscurity among civilians that keeps her safe in her day-to-day life.

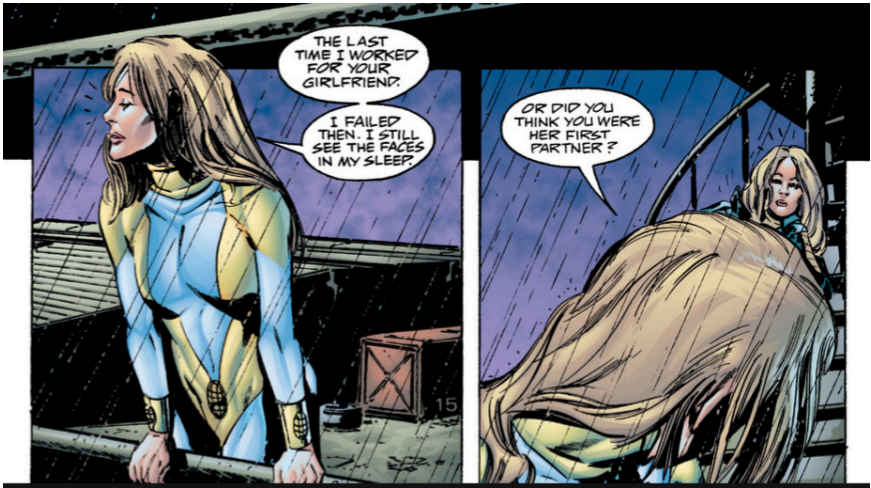
Oracle, on the other hand, is so much of a cipher that most of the villains trying to target her don't even know that she's a woman, a fact she regularly plays to her own advantage. After all, who would suspect a poor disabled girl of being the ruthless cyberwarrior who's been blackmailing them for months? Barbara's weaponization of societal ableism and sexism leads to some very girl power rah-rah moments. But Barbara isn't just someone who (depending on the writer) either overcomes or reclaims her disability; she's also kind of a hot mess.

II. More Girlboss War Criminals

Throughout the comic's 127 issues, Babs is consistently portrayed as both deeply caring and also manipulative, secretive, and frankly, a little unhinged.³ Even after she and Dinah meet in person for the first time in issue 21, she keeps key mission and personal info from her friends, who she regularly refuses to admit are actually her friends; she emotionally manipulates both Dinah and, later, other members of the team; she goes to incredible lengths to maintain her independence. Her past history with Power Girl is hinted at so darkly that every time Power Girl appears on screen I hear "No Children" start to play. I love this for Babs, in part because it positions her as Birds of Prey's Batman, despite how often she

butts heads with him, and in part because it creates a nightmare codependency between her and Dinah that is just catnip for my little brain.

Where Babs is a practical master manipulator, Dinah is idealistic, stubborn, hot-headed, and reckless; she believes (often correctly) that she can either sweet-talk or punch her way out of any situation. In the early issues of the comic, she flings herself into danger so much that she comes across as having some sort of death wish.



6. Birds of Prey #17 (2000), Chuck Dixon and Butch Guice, p. 15

Unfortunately, as delightful as this dynamic is, because the first 46 issues of the run were written by Chuck “Got My Start Writing the Punisher” Dixon, this means that Babs is operating as a sort of one-woman CIA and manipulating Dinah into destabilizing foreign governments because that’s what she believes is right.⁵ This isn’t unique to Birds of Prey, of course, but it is particularly notable here because Babs is so powerful and operates so independently. There is no Justice League to reign her in. The only person to reign her in is Dinah, who achieves only middling success because Babs constantly keeps her in the dark. Doubly unfortunately, Chuck Dixon’s era of Birds of Prey, and not Gail Simone’s later and arguably more influential run on the title, is the one that gives me the most brainworms.

5 This is usually happening in vaguely Middle Eastern countries, of which DC has a whole stable of fake ones so they can continue the long comics tradition of using the Middle East as a setpiece without contending with any actual political realities. Sometimes they branch out and we’re in Africa or southeast Asia instead. That’s a separate essay but one I would like to read.

III. It's Time to Talk About Chuck Dixon

Birds of Prey was created by Chuck Dixon, who after a series of successful one-shots went on to write the first 46 issues of the series. Dixon is one of the most famous writers in comics; his runs on Detective Comics and Robin in the 90s defined those characters for decades. He's also a profoundly reactionary homophobe; his most recent comics star a hero who is literally reskinned QAnon. Normal man with normal views! Somehow, he ended up writing a comic where the two female leads come across as deeply, deeply in love with each other, to the point that other characters comment on it. Lampshading it does not make it seem less gay, Chuck!⁶

7. Birds of Prey: Wolves #1 (1997), Chuck Dixon and Dick Giordano, p. 21

I don't have a lot of interest in trying to psychoanalyze Dixon. I don't really care about why he wrote Babs and Dinah the way he did; in general, I think trying to psychoanalyze comics writers is a great way to make yourself deeply unhappy. But it does make me feel vaguely hysterical that the moment when Babs and Dinah finally meet in person, where Dixon called out shippers *in the comic script*, ends up being one of the gayest panels I've ever seen.

Dixon's script, which he's so proud of that it's still up on his website:

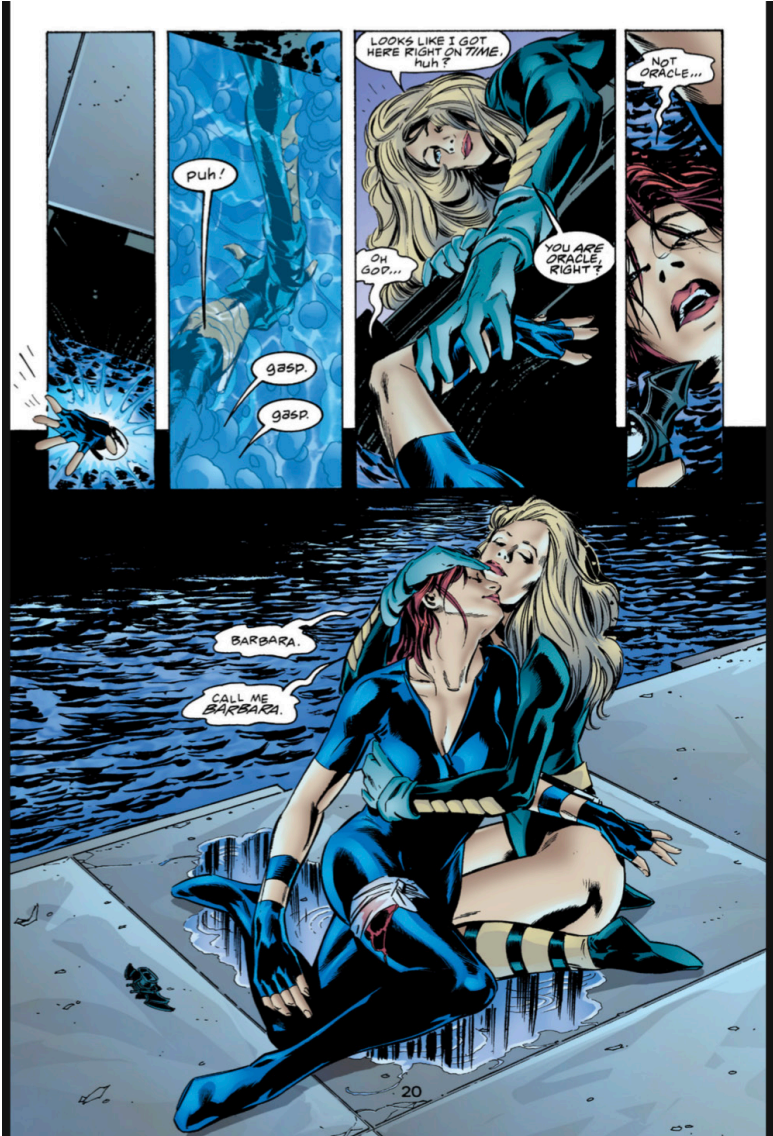
PANEL FOUR

Canary crouches and holds Oracle to her. Oracle is curled in a fetal position and dripping wet. The more drama you can squeeze from this the better. We're going for The Pieta as opposed to anything that HINTS of the sexual. This scene is apparently RIPE for misinterpretation (or



⁶ This is not the only time Dixon has done this; he has a habit of being so afraid to write sex in comics that all of his characters come across as gay. Tim Drake/Robin and Connor Hawke/Green Arrow's characterization in Dixon's arcs laid the foundation for them to later be canonized as bi and ace, respectively.

OVERinterpretation.) by some of our readers.
BARBARA: (WEAK) not Oracle...
BARBARA: (WEAK) BARBARA.
BARBARA: (WEAK) CALL ME BARBARA



8. Birds of Prey #21 (2000), Chuck Dixon and Butch Guice, p. 20

You know, the Pieta, when you're both dripping wet, and your hand is on your platonic girlbestie's boob.

IV. This 2 Is Yuri

This is the part where I would love to talk about the fan reaction to Dinah and Babs. There were clearly enough shippers that Dixon was both aware of and bothered by them (although I think Dixon would probably have been bothered if there was one person who thought his characters were gay, so that's not a sure-fire barometer.) Unfortunately, *Birds of Prey* came out in the late 90s and early 2000s, and digital decay has not been kind to fan writing. The Wayback Machine's coverage of forums tends to be spotty.⁷ The letters pages, where DC published fan letters and which often serve as a barometer for fan response, aren't collected in the trade paperbacks that (unless I want to spend \$300 on a full issue collection on eBay) are all I have access to.⁸ I can find fans looking back on *Birds of Prey*, but for contemporary reactions I'm left to fill in the gaps by reading forum post titles and clicking around defunct Geocities archives.

This digital absence is oddly ironic for a comic that relies so much on the internet for its plot. But it also makes sense. Queer readings, like queer fans, vanish from the archives. We find our own spaces, and those spaces are spottily recorded; when we do make it into the record, as in the case of an extremely touching letter in *Green Arrow* (1988), it has to be sought out and resurfaced.

But comics themselves aren't intended to last. As objects, individual issues are fragile, usually printed on cheap paper and referred to as "floppies." The way they make us feel isn't meant to last either; the industry is notorious for the way it churns through storylines, characters, and creators. That was last month's issue. On to the next! And yet comics fans are often as obsessive as we are opinionated, cataloging every appearance of characters across 70 years of comics history, writing exhaustive wiki pages for one-off villains, reading a thousand pages of comics for a character

7 "Any fellow gay DC fans?" thread on the official DC forums from 2000 and "frokeback femmeslash thread" from 2006, you are my white whales. Also huge thank you to Max @zeiat for digging up some unofficial fan forums, especially *Words of Prey*, which were a treat to dig through even if I couldn't see the posts!

8 The inaccessibility of fan letters is deeply depressing to me, and I think it's unfortunate to erase that for a lot of comics history comics was intentionally positioned as a dialogue between fans and creators. There are a lot of memes about the fan poll that led to Jason Todd, the second Robin, 's in-comics death, and it *is* very funny, but it was part of a larger medium-wide understanding that fans did have some input into the narrative.

who appears in maybe 30% of that runtime.⁹

So where do I go from here? I'm not meant to be fixated on iterations of these characters that are nearly 30 years old. Since *Birds of Prey* volume 1 ended, the DC Universe has been rebooted twice. Barbara got magically healed and is back to being Batgirl, an identity DC seems unwilling to let her transcend.¹⁰ In current comics she's written much younger and regularly relegated to being Dick Grayson's supportive girlfriend—a far cry from the secretive, deeply jaded woman who forges her own identity because she has to. Dinah has fared a little better— DC is at least willing to let her be an adult.

There is a new *Birds of Prey* series coming out; the reviews are glowing, both from comics press and fans whose opinions I trust. But I haven't read it yet. I will probably enjoy it when I do, but part of me will still be waiting for Babs to wheel onscreen.

That's the lot of a comics fan: you wind up longing for deeply flawed versions of characters who haven't existed in 15 years. And if longing for the impossible is yuri, well!

9 You *can* read the entirety of *Knightfall* for Tim Drake's Robin, but you shouldn't.

10 There's been a ton of academic and fan writing on Barbara's disability and its retcons. I'd recommend in particular José Alaniz's "Standing Orders: Oracle, Disability, and Retconning" in *Disability in Comic Books and Graphic Narrative*, Chris Foss, Jonathan Gray, and Zach Whalen, eds., as well as Marit Hanson's "Mistress of Cyberspace: Oracle, Disability, and the Cyborg" in *Uncanny Bodies: Superhero Comics and Disability*, Scott Smith and José Alaniz, eds., and Carolyn Cocca's "Re-booting Barbara Gordon: Oracle, Batgirl, and Feminist Disability Theories" in *ImageText* 7(4).
<https://imagetextjournal.com/re-booting-barbara-gordon-oracle-batgirl-and-feminist-disability-theories/>

embodiment: the transfeminine yuri of Shiki Misaki

by Daffy damientiamat

Fandom: The World Ends With You
(Warnings: death, violence against women, and body dysphoria.
TWEWY spoilers, primarily for Week 1)

[Enter SHIKI]

The very first chapter of the 2007 DS video game ‘The World Ends With You’ introduces you to Shiki Misaki. She is the classic popular girl(TM)! Her boots are high, her skirt is mini, her top is crop. She’s cute, absurdly skinny, fashion-forward, with a habit of staring at her phone in awkward situations... Friendly, social, bubbly, but also kind of naive. She’s also the protagonist’s partner in a competitive elimination game to come back to life!

Haha, I just lied to you right there. Shiki Misaki is very few of those things. But the protagonist, Neku Sakuraba, certainly thinks she is. And many new players may also think this for the majority of her screentime, because this is who she tries to convince you she is.

The truth is, the body of the girl you see on screen for the entirety of the game[1] is not Shiki Misaki’s body. It’s her best friend and partner in fashion, Eri. The personality that Shiki presents is also not Shiki Misaki’s personality. It’s her best attempt at the personality of her best friend, Eri. We as players only get to meet Eri herself once - briefly and in passing, for a few lines of dialogue to another side character. And yet, it still feels like we know Eri. At least, we know who Shiki thought she was.

[Enter SHIKI AS ERI]

The death game that drives the central structure of TWEWY requires an entry fee: whatever the contestant values most. There are no practical boundaries to how this fee is collected. The protagonist conveniently loses his memories; another character loses his relationship with his sibling. Shiki's fee is her identity. The intent of collecting this fee is to force the contestant to understand whether those things are truly so crucial and how it influences their outlook on life. To Shiki, her entry fee didn't make very much sense at first.

Shiki died immediately after a fight with Eri, and by her own admission, she was thrilled to wake up in her best friend's body.[2] Finally, she had the opportunity to be cute, sexy, confident, charming... All the things that Eri had and she didn't. Here we find the translesbianisms-- the sense of resentful inferiority to the most beautiful girl you know, the deep preoccupation with your best friend's body and how you want it so badly that you want to BE it. But somehow this was supposed to be a sacrifice?

As the death game continues, and Shiki gets closer and closer to coming back to life, her bubbly persona starts to flag. She's going to lose this, this opportunity to BE Eri. How can she come back to life and face that? The reality where she is what she actually is? She is self-obsessed; she is self-loathing. She becomes listless and vacant, resigned to death, constantly staring at the photo of herself and Eri on her phone.

[Enter ERI]

It's at this point that we finally meet Eri herself. Eri, it should be specified, never meets us. She is still alive, while Shiki and Neku are not-- another point in her favor. The living cannot see or interact with the dead[3], but the dead can see and hear the living. Eri is ignorant both of her audience, and her superiority. We only get this one moment with her, and in it she is not the bubbly girl that Shiki has shown us.

She is a grieving highschooler who misses her best friend, and wishes she'd had the chance to make amends before losing her forever. Perhaps most importantly, we see hints of her own jealousy-- jealousy of Shiki's compassion, her attention to detail, her technical talent. To her, Shiki was the one who had it all, and without Shiki by her side, Eri is considering

giving up on fashion entirely.

This scene is the pivotal moment for Shiki's self perception. In the 2021 animated adaptation, Shiki steps forward to futilely wipe away Eri's tears. Seeing her own identity as Eri perceives it, Shiki overcomes her jealousy and realizes she does value herself and her own skills. She also realizes that she wants to be back by Eri's side, making fashion again. Is it in Eri's expressions of mourning that Shiki finds the resolve to win the death game and return to Eri.[4]

[Exit SHIKI AS SHIKI]

Eri was correct in her assessment of Shiki's character. Shiki Misaki and Neku Sakuraba successfully rally to win the death game, and the compassion she has shown are Neku's driving force for the entire remainder of the narrative.

Now, I'm afraid I've misled you once again. The death game and the narrative are not equivalent. TWEWY actually covers a total of three death games, all of which Neku participates in-- while I won't bore you with all the gritty details, it's important to understand that Shiki's is the first. Neku is at his freshest-- scared, amnesiac and aggressively antisocial. Did I tell you he actually tries to kill Shiki on the second day, when told that doing so would buy his freedom? Yeah. However, Shiki is the first person to put a dent in Neku's antisocial shell and show him that human connection is worthwhile.[5] To his credit, he picks up on the notion pretty quickly for a traumatized emo teen.

When they successfully reach the end as a team, Shiki wins- and only Shiki. Neku is offered the chance to play again, leading directly into the second death game. Even though she's no longer present, Shiki's influence is felt over the course of all three death games. Neku's willingness to trust, help, and work with strangers-- the trait that Eri named, that Shiki embodied-- are the key pieces that shape the remainder of the narrative.

[1]With the exception of two partially-obscured images, both notably censoring the eyes

[2]Heheh. Yeah.

[3]Yes yes I know there are specific exceptions but Reaper Creeper and meme imprinting are NOT relevant to the scope of this essay, alright??

As funny and unethical as it would be to imprint memes on Eri. Damn I wish that had happened in game now

[4]Neku also helps I guess, as protagonists must, but it's really not about him.

[5]Not to put all the emotional labor and domestic abuse onto women... Sorry, women. If it makes you feel better, Neku gets his own emotional labor and domestic abuse in the form of Joshua Kiryu



BONUS: THE MYTHICAL TWEWY YURI SEQUELS THAT I HAVEN'T WRITTEN BUT SOMEONE ELSE SHOULD

- uzuki yashiro and mitsuki konishi starring in: toxic evil girlboss femmes
- rhyme's incredible baby transmasc swagger
- shiki, eri, ai, mina: twewy's preoccupation with the class s relationship

something lingers

by anonymous

You are beautiful, stylish,
and I thought kind beyond measure
where I am nothing special,
only steady hands and a keen eye to my inferior talents.
Well, perhaps not quite;
it might be that my petty jealousy
is well above average.
You are everything that I'm not,
everything I have always quietly wanted to become,
so I look in the mirror and imagine your face,
your hair, your smile, the shape of your body
in place of mine.

Through a sweltering August we indulge
in the dream we share.
You come to me with pages of figures in
draped fabric and watch as I
measure and cut cloth,
wet the thread with my mouth
to slip it through the needle's eye.
It is steady in my hand, under your gaze,
and I feel as if you are me and I am
your means.
You are moving my hands.

I want to move my hands. I want to
be you, to move your hands,
to fill pages with figures in
draped fabric.
Summer is ending when
you tell me that is something I
can never do.

I die with the summer
but something lingers.
Something with your face.

In death, I wear your flesh.
Reflected on the glossy windows of
our favorite storefronts in Shibuya
is not my plain face.

Your eyes are my eyes, your smile is
my smile. Your hands are my hands.
I become you in death. I speak
as you would speak,
and dress as you would dress,
but it is ill fitting.

As I wear you like a borrowed gown,
I play a game. If I win, I might live in your skin
forever; if I lose, my death will be twofold,
my name, my face, removed from human memory,
from your memory.

When I think of this I
pass you by.
I am a mirror to you,
but you look foreign to me,
worn and thin as if you are the
ghost.

I hear you tell a girl that
you killed your best friend,
that she was everything you are not,
that she had beautiful hands and
shared in your dreams.
You said
your dreams would never come true now,
because you killed the only girl you
wanted to dream with.

You walk through me with
the rest of the crowd and
for a moment I am inside you,
and you are inside of me,
and I think perhaps that had been what I
wanted all along.
You are everything I
am not and I am everything
you are not. What I wanted was
to be one person, after all,
to have your hands be my hands and

my hands be yours.

In death I play a game and
if I win, I will cut myself apart;
I will take the thickest of my scissors
and cut a piece of me away and
with the steady hands you called beautiful I
will sew it into you and
if you say yes,
I will take a piece of you in turn.

He Will Never Emotionally Fulfill You

by dan @godtiering

On December 16, 2010, Season 1 Episode 9 of *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* aired on television. This episode, titled “The Dinner Party from Hell” contains one of the most iconic scenes of all of reality television, and I would argue one of the most iconic scenes of any narrative ever written or produced.

So, like you really don't need to know much at all about this show for me to explain this scene, especially since it was the first season of this regional iteration of the *Real Housewives* franchise. Basically, it centers around Camille Grammer, the (now ex) wife of actor Kelsey Grammer (yeah, the guy from *Frasier*) and her beef with Kyle Richards, the aunt of Paris Hilton, and the child star who played the little girl being babysat in the original *Halloween*. The conflict is.... nothing. I won't bother to explain it, it's not relevant to my thesis about MILF Yuri. Also present at this dinner along with the cast members of Season 1 of *RHOBH* was a friend of Camille's, a woman named Alison Dubois who claimed to be a psychic medium. Bear with me here.

Kyle Richards is the only woman who has been in every single season of *RHOBH* as a cast member. She has also been married to her husband Mauricio Umansky for 27 years. Season 13 of *RHOBH* is currently airing, and the main overarching plot of the season is Kyle and Mauricio's separation. A major part of this narrative is Kyle's new relationship with country musician Morgan Wade. At this point in your reading, I'd really love for you to put the zine down and go to Morgan's YouTube channel to watch the music video for the song “Fall in Love With Me” and the behind the scenes interview about the music video.

Okay I assume you went and did that and so now you see how it is. The show itself foreshadows Morgan's first scene with an earlier scene between Kyle and Mauricio. Kyle is talking to Mauricio about her tattoos, and he only knew about one out of her current five. She tells him “Well,

maybe you should pay attention to my body more.” He also tries to tell her that she’s not allowed to get more tattoos and she stares at him in the absolute disbelief of a 54-year-old mother of four when she says, “it’s not up to you”. Later in the episode, we see her together with Morgan for the first time. The contrast between their dynamic and her dynamic with her husband is incredibly stark and they have clear chemistry. Morgan is also covered in tattoos and Kyle has been getting tattoos with her. If you want to watch the scene for yourself search “How Did Kyle Richards Befriend Country Musician Morgan Wade” and watch that video on the Bravo channel. Their scene starts about halfway through.

Now let’s talk about The Dinner Party from Hell. We’re back in 2010 now, okay? Are you with me? I’m sorry I keep pulling you back and forth across the timeline like this I just need to frame this perfectly. But okay. So. Camille Grammer’s psychic medium friend Alison Dubois. She gets extremely drunk and starts smoking at the table. The guests at the dinner party start asking her to do a psychic reading for them. She then begins to antagonize Kyle, because Camille has a bad relationship with Kyle due to an imaginary slight. This culminates in her talking about Kyle’s marriage and saying, and I quote, “He will never emotionally fulfill you. Ever. Know that.”

Know That. Like how can you not scream. The delivery. The intonation. The martini glass in one hand and cigarette in the other.

She’s not done talking. “He will never emotionally fulfill you, but you will stay with him and he will take care of you, and as soon as the kids are bigger you’ll have nothing in common,” she concludes smugly.

When the show engages with Kyle and Mauricio’s current marital problems very early on in Season 13, they pull... that scene. In what other show could you ever get a narrative like that, a slow burn that has come to fruit 13 years later. The Chekhov’s gun took over a decade to fire. In Season 1 of RHOBH Kyle’s youngest daughter was 2 years old. In Season 13 we see her 15th birthday dinner. A few episodes later, we watch Kyle tattoo the initial “K” on Morgan’s arm.

My point isn’t even about Kyle and Morgan, who as of writing this have not publicly confirmed they are in a relationship. Kyle and Mauricio haven’t even announced a divorce yet. That doesn’t matter. What matters is the narrative this tells and what it means for bored rich MILFS all across

America.

Why do women choose to be on this show in the first place? It's an important philosophical consideration with regards to the Yuri thesis. Fame, of course, is a major motivating factor, but consider what fame entails. To a housewife who frequently relies on the income of a wealthy husband, becoming a part of this ensemble cast can be personal freedom both financially and socially. When you become a public figure in your own right, you gain agency. Maybe even enough agency that you can dump your man and still be able to afford the lifestyle to which you have become accustomed.

The Real Housewives is a highly homosocial franchise. The whole point of each regional iteration is to put together a group of women and watch their dynamic with each other, the fights, the theatrics, the friendship, the drunkenly sharing a bed after a night out on a girl's trip in Turks and Caicos. Men appear on the show, as husbands, friends, staff... but they are only there in relation to the cast members and not as characters of their own.

The franchise has obviously witnessed countless breakups and divorces. This is also by far from the first time that some genuine dyke shit has occurred on it either. Specifically, on RHOBH in one season two cast members were openly bisexual and hooked up. The reason why what Kyle has going on is such a compelling example is because of her role as a legacy cast member combined with the longevity of her marriage and the way it has consistently been framed in such a positive light. Beyond the singular Alison Dubois, their relationship has never been shown to have notable conflict in the way that so many other marriages on the show have. It's been a pillar of the show in its consistency and solidity. This twist comes as a genuine upset to the continuity and larger world of the franchise. It feels like the other shoe finally dropping.

There's so much more I could say about this, but I should write my own zine rather than taking up more page space. My point is that The Real Housewives demonstrates consistently that women find far more fulfillment in relationships with other women. When another cast member, Dorit, finds out that Kyle tattooed her initial on Morgan's arm, she scoffs jealously that despite being best friends, Kyle has never tattooed her initials on *her* arm. Well, Dorit, have you ever tried asking?

He Will Never Emotionally Fulfill You. Ever. Know That.

I Can Fix Her: Yuri as Character Development in Fire Emblem: Three Houses' Holy Kingdom of Faerghus

By Gnats (@eye_gnats)

There is no homophobia in the world of Fire Emblem: Three Houses. The game features five same-gender romance options for women: one of which is the dragon-shifting, wide-hipped, de facto Pope of the continent. As such, it can be inferred the religion of this world does not hold any ill will towards yuri in the canon text. Several girl/girl “endcards” (the epilogue texts for different paired characters in the game) are explicitly romantic, with several more being implicitly romantic.

This is a world where yuri can blossom—or it should be. No, the threat to yuri does not stem from a religion borrowing a copious amount of catholic aestheticisms or deliberate anti-queer game mechanics. The real threat to yuri is instead a vicious, ceaseless heteronormativity blanketing the continent of Fodlan. White supremacy drips from Fodlan's three, pale, isolationist countries. Eugenics flourishes in keeping monarchal bloodlines pure and noble women induced with the next generation. Men and women wed for medieval politics over love. Paths for girls in The Holy Kingdom of Faerghus in particular are grim and set: courting, marriage, childbirth, death. Conflict with this path drives the stories of Faerghus' three playable female characters, the varied yet equally bound Annette, Mercedes, and Ingrid. Subversion from this path is the only way to break these women from its hold and from its carnage. In a canon of heteronormative violence, shipping yuri is radically transformative. True freedom can only be gained by girls kissing girls.

ANNETTE

Annette Dominic is a twenty-three year old woman chained by her relationship to men in the way so many twenty-three year old women have been before her. From the moment you meet her at a sensitive sixteen and under five foot tall, you discover the long list of males who have come to define her: Her father, a knight so obsessed with protecting the young prince of their country that his parental negligence, in some ways, occurred long before his literal and actual abandonment of her. Her uncle, who spares no time in overstepping her missing father in shaping her as an inevitable, wealth-bringing bride. Her eldest male cousin, a free spirit and heir to her family estate who carouses around with half Annette's skill and a quarter of her determination. And her king, Dimitri, the protagonist of the game itself who seems to outstrip her in notability from the men around her at every innocent turn. Annette is haunted by the men who she perceives as either better than her or of whom know better for her. She vies for attention from her father, she strives to prove herself to her uncle as carrying worth beyond the womb in her body—she works hard, harder, than most of the cast in some desperate attempt to prove herself to a dismissive world. She feels she has no natural talent for anything. Everything she has, she carves by hand from bone.

Annette is the comparative equivalent to middle class in the world of Fire Emblem: Three Houses. In many ways, this is the worst of both worlds. Her noble lineage and “crest,” a subtle magic lacing in her blood that gives her a minuscule advantage in battle, is highly prized among suitors to pass to their offspring. Her family owns an unnotable amount of land near the capital. They already have a crested, male heir. She is a spare, referred to as a mere “knight's daughter,” by her own uncle, and in the original Japanese text, he warns her that if she does not find worth beyond her crest she will be outright “bought” by a fellow noble. She is the ideal candidate to be pawned off to a suitor. Her father, the only one who could have halted her fate, is absent. Everything is terrible for her, and yet she works, and smiles, and creates fire, and sings. Her personal ability is aptly titled Perseverance; a skill which permanently offers her to rally an ally for +4 strength. She persists, and encourages others to do the same with her indomitable spirit.

Annette, as the daughter of the eldest crested son of the prior generation, is the rightful Heir to Dominic. However she will never see the spoils of her own family chest. In order for her to survive she will need to make

her own way in the world. And make her way she does. In her personal endcard, Annette becomes a notable professor of sorcery. Annette transfers her love of academics into a lifelong endeavor and frees herself from the chains of social captivity. However, in many more endcards, Annette takes the backseat to a more powerful husband. She finds love, but not freedom. A kind, intelligent queen to King Dimitri. A lovable denmother to Adrestia's troops with Caspar. A long-suffering Fraldarius duchess in a long line of long-suffering Fraldarius duchesses. Brave, knightly Ashe's clumsy wife. Many of Annette's endcards see her the supportive sidecar to a man's personal arc, watching the seedlings of his character motivations blossom under her careful, capable hands. There's a practical game design reason for this: Annette is, after all, a spare heir, and has the flexibility to move in with her partner where her partner might be stuck with an immovable noble title, land, and goals. There is, however, a more insidious undercurrent to Faerghus' brightest star being dulled down to a simple partner. There is a great shame in two becoming one in the eyes of the endcard's voice as a historical account. For a woman whose story should end in independence from those who have placed their destructive expectations upon her, seeing her end up a mere supportive element in a man's story is insultingly reductive.

Perhaps that's why I find her wlw ending so damn refreshing. Annette holds a single endcard in common with another woman, Mercedes von Martritz. It is simple, and it is sweet.

After the war, Annette and Mercedes lived separate lives: the former as a teacher at the school of sorcery in Fbirdiad, the latter as a cleric at Garreg Mach. Though they lived apart, they exchanged letters so frequently and shared their lives with one another in such detail that it was as though they were side by side. After many decades, they resigned their respective positions and reunited at Garreg Mach. In their final years, they relocated to a modest house in the Fortress City. It is said that they were happy together to the very end.

They do end up together, but only after a years long old woman yuri professor x nun long distance situationship. You know, that classic thing. The endcard is, however, clear in its intentions. These are two women who have freed themselves from their respective traumas, fought for their futures, and now, now that all has been accomplished, do they settle down with one another.

It's no mistake that in their endcard, Annette achieves the end to her personal character arc before she makes room for Mercedes. The path to yuri is paved with self-actualization. In an early support conversation, Annette expresses anxiety over getting to stay with Mercedes. "Since our time in the capital, so much has happened," she says. "We've had to make new lives for ourselves, and we've seen at least as many hard times as good. If things keep changing like this, I wonder if we'll be able to stay the same people we are now..." She doesn't explicitly refer to the fact that their crests will pull them to inevitable marriages to distant men, but she certainly implies it. Here, in their endcard, an end is placed to her proposed fear. They have changed, they have been pulled in different directions, but they have done so of their own agency and drive. Annette sees her character to its happy end and then, and only then, does she make room for a wife.

MERCEDES

Mercedes von Martritz is one of the five explicit queer woman romance options in the game, but the sheen of a nonconformist glints off of her long before the discerning female player has the chance to propose to her. Mercedes carries the kind of knowing, serene grace that can only be forged in the worst of traumas. Like Annette, her adoptive father plans to wed her to a noble for his own personal gain. Unlike Annette, this father is another in a long series of paternal misfortunes for Mercedes. Her birth father died the year she was born, dissolving the Martritz noble house and casting her into commonhood. Her mother remarried into the crest-obsessed Bartels House—a nightmare for both of them so extreme that they were forced to escape into the night and leave behind Mercedes' young half-brother. We later learn that Mercedes' new father intended on marrying her once her mother was beyond child bearing age, all for the sake of producing more crest-bearing children. Mercedes eventually found her way to a church that took her in, and later, into the arms of her unscrupulous adoptive father.

Mercedes is older than her two compatriots and it shows in the way she handles herself in the aftermath of these tragedies. She does not vie for recognition from men. She does not tolerate unwanted advances from her male classmates. She does not hesitate to cut herself off from her adoptive father in the wake of his mandates for marriage. She is, in many ways, already near the end of her character arc when we meet her. She is, in many ways, a model for what Annette and Ingrid could be with

enough strength, pride, and denial of guilt. She loves who she loves, and removes herself from what she dislikes. She has been through so much already, and for better and for worse she does not allow herself to be that vulnerable again.

Mercedes' is a story of continuous patriarchal violence. It's fitting, then, that her story ends so often with her trimmed in the aesthetics of nunnery. It's fitting that she break a cycle of gendered brutality and bear no children (except for the Sylvain endcard, though that is its own cycle broken). It's fitting that she be shipped with women; that she herself be one of the player character's queer romanceable options. She is impregnable in her queerness and in her determination. She tells the player character, Byleth, upon her (gay) marriage proposal: "I may be quite demanding at times as I'm intent on pursuing my dreams. I want to help those in need, wherever they may be. And I won't give up on that." Mercedes needs yuri to obtain her own agency the least of the three Faerghan women, in part because she is already explicitly and unapologetically sapphic, but that does not stop her female endcards being among the best and numerous in the game. Most importantly, Mercedes can date women because she is so certain of herself. The foundation she has built is strong despite her many wounds. Her yuri potential is only possible through her own actualization, a challenge she passes with poise, empathy, and love.

INGRID

Oh jeez. Ingrid. Where to start with Ingrid. Where Mercedes understands herself, Ingrid Galatea is messy, confused, and violent. Where Annette turns her felt inadequacy inward, Ingrid lashes out. Ingrid shares the core character conflict with the two other girls: her father is determined to see her married to the highest bidder, at any cost to her well-being. Her county is poor, you see. Her family is starving. The stakes for her marriage are the highest of the three. An entire territory is counting on her securing a rich husband, lest the entire place collapse. However, she fails to navigate the situation with either complacency or defiance. She flounders in the center of pleasing her father and striking her own path. She chooses instead to continuously kick the can down the road. She scrambles for more time for herself before she is consumed by the monster of a patriarchal marriage—and she knows the clock is ticking, and the marriage is inevitable.

Like Mercedes, the existence of her crest manifests in sexual violence.

Ingrid is kidnapped by a suitor her father arranged for her to meet in her paralogue mission—forcing you, the player, to rescue her amidst a game map that's sole objective is to maneuver her to an escape tile. Ingrid is sixteen at the time of the paralogue. The event does not deter her father from arranging more suitors for her. If anything, he grows more desperate for her to find a match she can tolerate.

Ingrid's attempts to secure a path outside of forced marriage manifest a violent, nationalist undercurrent. She sees only two paths ahead of her: that of a man's role, and that of a woman's. Shirking the feminine at every opportunity, Ingrid leans wholly into life that is a pantomime of the masculine. She becomes obsessed with becoming a noble knight of Faerghus. She seeks respect in the form of a man's path since she cannot glean it from a woman's, searches for justification for her life beyond childbirth. This leads her down a path of nationalistic, xenophobic fervor for her country. She desires a noble death—a quick end, without bringing disgrace to her family. She desires glory for Faerghus at the ideal cost of her entire existence. This leads to her death on all routes where she is not a playable character. If the player character does not interfere, Ingrid will gladly spear herself on the first blade that offers itself up to her.

Respect is, of course, denied to her. She is still a woman in the eyes of the men of Faerghus. There is no real honor in death, though I respect that her flaws are so drastic that they lead her there. (Female characters are too often denied the hand of their own demise.) Ingrid finds the emptiness at the heart of rejecting her own womanhood and the emptiness at the heart of desiring respect from men who see her only as an object to further their own ends. She has nothing. This emptiness is capitalized on, seemingly intentionally, in her endcards. Half of them show her as a knight, devoid of romance and abandoning of her home territory. The other half see her wed to a noble man, her county saved but her dream of knighthood long forgotten. There is no ending where she procures both her knighthood and the security of a home. She is always sacrificing something, always giving up a little piece of herself in pursuit of the other half.

Ingrid is unique in that she has no endcards with any women, a trait she shares with only one other character in the game. A tragedy, considering a hypothetical wlw romance might be just the thing to strike a balance between an ending of love and an ending where she secures her dream. Ingrid is deserving of love. Ingrid is deserving of a fate where she might

at last be at peace. Ingrid is deserving of her dream, and an assurance that she does not have to be alone or die to obtain it. Ingrid deserves yuri.

It is not that yuri will solve Ingrid's problems. It's that, in order to commit a yuri, Ingrid must come to terms with herself, her dreams, and what she must excise to secure them. There is no universe where Ingrid marries a woman that does not also involve rejecting her father's over-reaching path. There is no universe where Ingrid marries a woman and then still feels the need to seek out a quick and noble death. There is no universe where Ingrid marries a woman and then gives up entirely on her home territory of Galatea. Yuri is not the cure—it's the symptom of a well-rounded, agency-gripping woman. A world where Ingrid marries a woman is by default a world where Ingrid has become the best version of herself.

ALL TOGETHER NOW

The Holy Kingdom of Faerghus is unique among the three countries of Fire Emblem: Three Houses in that all three of its playable characters share a common issue: that of the eugenics and misogyny of their world. Each responds to this conflict in their own turn—doubling down on another path, cutting off those that would harm them, or making the most of their ill fate—but ultimately this conflict is what draws them together. They reach out to one another. They find common ground. They escape their forced marriages and, maybe, find true love.

Yuri does have a place in this world, and that's to draw these women together. In canon, Ingrid handily rejects Mercedes' attempted hand of comradery. In canon, Annette's conversation supports where she talks about herself and her problems are miniscule. In canon, Mercedes got to safety and security entirely alone. But in fanon, none of these women have to be alone. In fanon, one can trace the threads of their similarities and cinch them closed. In fanon, all things are possible through yuri.

Here Comes the Airplane

Honkai Star Rail Jarilo-VI spoilers.

by Crossy

The videogame company Hoyoverse has a favourite child, and it's their Anime Action RPG Honkai Impact 3rd.

I don't know much about this game, but to be brief, it contains Good Yuri. As a Chinese company, there's a lot of tiptoeing around the lesbians they want to write, but HI3 has some honest to god canonical lesbians who kiss. And these lesbians are Bronya and Seele.

Hoyoverse likes to make AUs of their own works. Characters reappear in other games with different designs and personalities, like actors in different roles. In Honkai: Star Rail, these two appear in the second chapter of the game, presented like star-crossed lovers across spacetime who will always find one another.

But listen dude. You have to understand. This yuri sucks.

Do they believe that Bronya/Seele truthers will simply see their favourite lesbians from the favourite child videogame and go "I know them!", and thus become invested in their true love on the spot? Surely they must, for such a shocking failure. Let me break it down.

Bronya is the noble and stalwart daughter and heir of Cocolia, the leader of Belobog, the final stronghold in an ice age apocalypse. She believes in her city and her glorious purpose, but her conviction is shaken by the fact her mother has cut off the Underworld – the underground villages that surround the mining operations keeping Belobog warm – and is pushing soldiers to sacrifice their lives to fight an onslaught of cosmic monsters.

Seele is a hotblooded member of Wildfire, a resistance force fighting in a civil war against Belobog's military for the right to see the sun once more. When Bronya chases the protagonists down to the Underworld, Seele treats her with hostility, bitterness, and wariness. She does not trust Bronya's values.

It's your basic opposites attract Enemies to Lovers. As by the numbers as it gets. Which is kind of the issue.

I would consider the power of Yuri to be fueled by its conventions; in yuri, the good Enemies to Lovers food is comprised of absence, feminine closeness, parallel beliefs, the sense of a rift even as they fight to come together.

The problem with Bronya/Seele in Star Rail is that it reads as if they are trying to escape the fundamentals of Yuri (and even basic romantic storytelling) at every opportunity.

They are enemies on either side of a civil war, but they get over it almost instantly, and develop grudging respect after a conversation or two. They do not share in feminine closeness, there is no intimacy between them to threaten, hope for, or cast away. Their relationship is clinical and professional. As the story goes on, they actually lose their parallel roles, and fail to construct new ones – Bronya is made leader, while conversely Seele is still a member of Wildfire in a nebulous representative role, not in leadership, not separated from Bronya, not expressing any loyalties. Deep coworker energy. And worst of all, they end up plenty in common, which is never used to develop their relationship or bring them closer together.

Seele and Bronya soften into “proper girl” and “brash girl” archetypes, without any chemistry or individuality. They are reduced to bland tropes surrounded by infinitely more fascinating supporting characters. Bronya's unyielding noble soul is poured into another character, Gepard, who does a lot of good interpersonal drama with it, leaving her feel even more superfluous and empty. What are you for, girl? They gave your character development to a man!

This is your anime action RPG peak yuri??

It feels like I'm being talked down to. It feels like Hoyoverse is telling me 'here comes the airplane!' as the spoon full of slop comes closer and I'm batting it away like a squalling toddler.

Luckily for me, this chapter also has some of the best yuri in the game anyway!

With Bronya's mom.

In the Belobog storyline, Bronya's mom Cocolia is an evil brainwashed dictator, from a long line of evil brainwashed leaders (dictatorship unclear). The meteor of divine calamity that started the apocalypse can talk, and it's in her head telling her Belobog will be wiped out by this 600-year ice age. It says she must commit genocide so that her people may be reborn as undying wraiths in the God of Destruction's war. It says she has to blow up the city. Uh oh!

But it took time for it to get that far. Cocolia was once someone of noble ideals who loved her city dearly, and would do anything to save it. The meteor had to exploit that love to break her.

...And on the other side stands Serval.

Serval is the city mechanic and midriff-rocking rockstar pushing 40 with ageless glamour. She's cheerful and satisfied with her life, but it's been rough. She broke off from her abusive aristocratic family to follow her own path. After graduating with her college roommate Cocolia (oh god), she became her Royal Scientist and close confidante (OH GOD). But then she learned that Belobog's leaders have been storing the very thing keeping their planet frozen for generations (OH GODDDD). After being confronted about this, Cocolia stripped of Serval rank and cast her out to keep her away from exposing the dark truth.

Serval took her disgrace in stride, but a part of her has always been frustrated at the loss of both her friend and power to make a change for her city. When the protagonists arrive, she's finally willing to tear down the Belebog government to do what's right, and even confronts the brother she used to protect, dares him to strike her down – she's going to stop Cocolia, even if she has to give her life to do so.

Serval's personality – daring, desperately loving, and unrelenting – brought Cocolia to her. But it also doomed their relationship, because even as Cocolia changed, Serval's values were unshakable.

Can we go through yuri tropes again? Let's go through the yuri tropes again.

The absence after Cocolia cast her out – Serval lingers on it, even keeping the guitar she once gifted Cocolia in their college days. The feminine closeness of **THEY WERE ROOMMATES**, and mired in their parallel

beliefs, Serval immovable in her love while Cocolia crushed by grief and defeatism. Cocolia solemnly succumbing to the role assigned to her and allowing herself to be destroyed, Serval who dyked it up and followed her passions, lived life to her fullest, and achieved self-actualization.

After Cocolia dies, her spirit lives on as a wraith. Serval seeks this spirit out, even though she's scared at what she'll find. She feels like Cocolia is long behind her, something she got over years ago, yet some part of her heart still craves closure. Serval has come to understand Cocolia is behind her because she's always been running from her shadow.

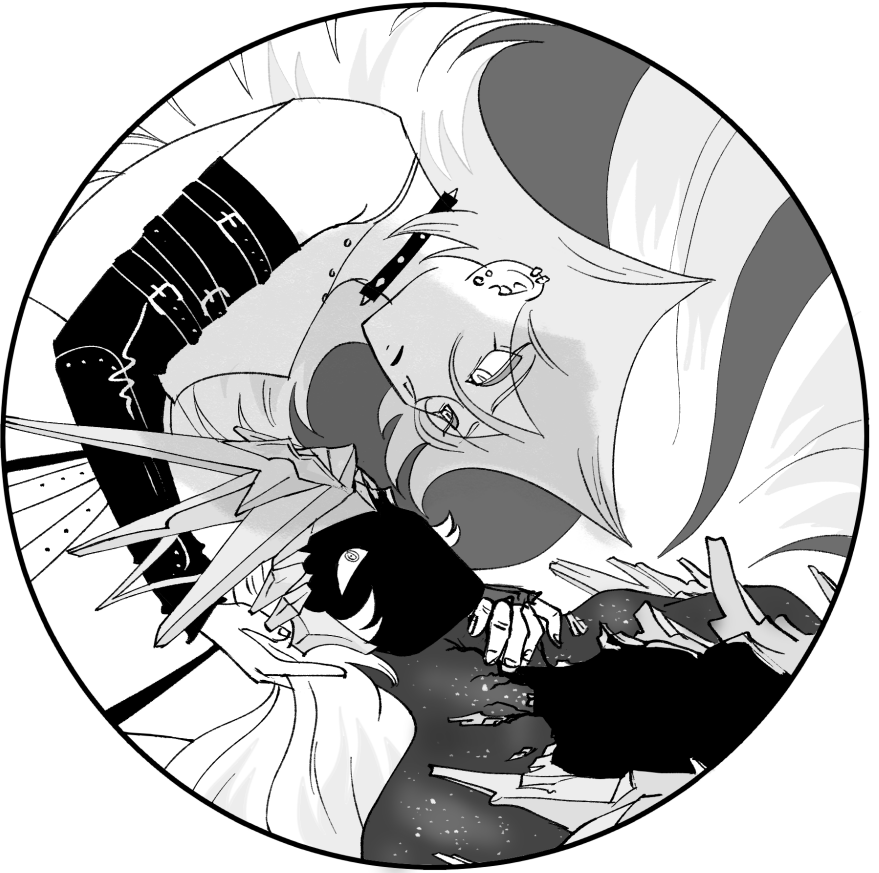
Cocolia's dying words to Serval are something only the protagonist can hear, and you have the choice to tell her:

- **A lie:** that Cocolia came to understand Serval and thanked her for allowing her to finally let go.
- **The truth:** To the very end, Cocolia saw Serval as an obstacle getting in her way. Her doom was written in stone. Nothing could have saved her. Her last words were cursing Serval for living well.

This is my yuri!! THIS IS MY YURI!!!!!!!

Serval and Cocolia aren't canon, aren't even all that ship-baited, yet everything that frustrated me about Bronya and Serval is executed to perfection with them. Brashness and propriety, two different worlds, the heat of conflict and yearning between one another. You could say it gives Bronya/Seele some wobbling legs to stand on; the generational doom that hung over Bronya's head could be escaped through the power of reaching out to others and taking Seele's hand, something her mother could never do.

But let's be real. It's only halfway decent because of the tragedy that came before it.



by simkjrs

MY REVIEW OF INTIMATE CONFESSIONS OF A CHINESE COURTESAN (1972)

by sully glowloads

Everything I like about *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan* can be summed up in the opening sequences, which starts as many wuxia (of the time and today) do: blood and snow, ringing silence, a murder. A police officer asks the routine questions about the dead man, slowly being buried by snow, and his steward answers. No, he has no enemies. Yes, his wife wasn't home. Yes, he was alone last night. Wait, no. AINU was there.

This is immediately followed by a Disney princess introduction for AINU, who turns out to be a hugely successful courtesan. She is seen through hazy silks and pretty frames, dressed lavishly by attentive servants, and seems blissfully happy. It is so obvious that she has killed this man, and that she has enjoyed it, and as the film takes us back to the past where AINU's horrific backstory is revealed, we understand why she has done it.

And then the opening scene is repeated! The film loops right back and we get that scene again with full context, and full colour and sound to match. This kind of repetition is common in rape-revenge stories, which often reuse images and motifs under new contexts for the purposes of irony and foreshadowing, or to hint at unreliable narration or subjectivity. I think *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan* does this mostly as an act of reflection. What has changed for us as the audience? Now we can say with our chests that yeah, this guy deserved to die. But we kind of already knew that AINU was Our Girl from the beginning – now we just have the timestamps to prove it.

The thing is, though, no other character agrees with us. That police officer still pursues AINU (surprise surprise), trying to keep her from further re-

venge that is equally deserved. AINU's owners, those who run the brothel, either don't feel threatened by AINU's new pattern of murder, or feel that they can control her. One of the cops in this film, when asked about why AINU might have turned to murder, says this: "Whores have no background. They are either forced or they volunteered." That tautology defines AINU, and I think the film is complicating that impossibility. Its highly ordered structure shows us that AINU has no subjectivity, especially in the eyes of other characters.

Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan is essentially an exploitation story: it uses, abuses, and exposes a vulnerable character to suffering in order to exploit the audience's expectations of how films in this genre go. Our main character, AINU, is kidnapped and sold into sex slavery. She is beaten and raped into submission, both by lusty old men from the community and the brothel owner herself. AINU takes note of each abuse and enacts revenge – violently so, re-enacting the same mechanics of abuse when murdering those who harmed her and thus forming a narrative mirror. She has the worst time ever, which is unfortunately a standard worst time ever for women in wuxia. The difference is that AINU is the main character, and gets to take the revenge herself.

That's a pretty big difference! I'm not one to enthrone authorial intentions, but it's significant that this film sits amongst a codified genre of cinema that ignores or trivialises women, even from the same studio. There's a contemporaneous film by the Shaw Brothers called *Golden Swallow* (a sequel to *Come Drink With Me*) and the aforementioned Golden Swallow is a female character within the film, is in fact the main character (!!) of the first film. In this sequel, however, despite it being named for her, Golden Swallow is sidelined for the two male heroes around her; this is now a film about machismo, masculine warrior strength, and male rivalry. It's very homoerotic. It is also, in many ways, emblematic of how wuxia of the time was being framed through the presentation of women as ornamental and illustrative of/for men.

In contrast, *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan* seems very much to attack institutional prostitution as a background setting for male-dominated wuxia. Any texture given to the men is to make AINU's subsequent revenge more exciting, or to expose the pretence in their patriarchal abuse of AINU. It means something for us as the audience to think that AINU is being failed by the society that endorses her abuse – it means something for this to not be a problem of individual lechery, but a wider, entrenched

issue.

I think *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan*, which is undeniably an exploitation film, is also consciously and deliberately *about* exploitation. It takes the classic rape-revenge story and pumps it full of iron. Ainu's every hurt is justified because of her status as a courtesan, and so we get to complicate the idea of a sympathetic victim. How does Ainu "earn" agency when it's already been established that people sold to brothels can be freely hurt?



Lady Chun is the film's answer to this. I mentioned earlier that reflection is key in *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan*, and this is done most successfully with the relationship between Ainu and Lady Chun: which is balls to the walls insane, and easily my favourite element of the film. Lady Chun, who owns the brothel that Ainu is sold to, is the first person to rape her. There's this scene where Lady Chun watches Ainu get whipped, and then licks the wounds

on her back, and unlike other scenes of abuse and rape that Ainu faces, this we get in full detail – Lady Chun's tongue, her hands teasing at the jagged edges of her torn clothing, perfectly framed and lingered upon.

Cooler people than me have talked about the history and significance of the predatory lesbian in horror (see: Carmen Maria Machado) but it's clear that this is the role that Lady Chun is meant to play. There's a lot bound up in this – eroticism, disgust, shock. In every sense, Lady Chun is written as a threat. Ainu has to get clever about how she protects herself from Lady Chun. After her failed escape attempt, Ainu agrees to enter a sexual relationship with Lady Chun, which raises her status in the brothel and brings her closer to her enemy. Lady Chun teaches her kungfu and swordfighting, and ends up falling so in love with Ainu that she is totally taken off guard when Ainu finally fights back.



Usually in rape-revenge stories, the abundance of repetition-as-reflection actually robs the revenge-taker of real agency and turns them into a message instead. I think the film does risk that with Ainu, but counter-balances it with Ainu's changing relationship with Lady Chun. We know that Ainu will succeed with her other revenges, but there's this real fear that she's gonna balk when it comes to Lady Chun: not because she can't do it, but because she decides not to. Ainu scrapes herself raw to lower Lady Chun's guard, and it changes her irrevocably. What is Ainu reflecting in Lady Chun? All of her worst emotions, her cruelty and selfishness – but also her loneliness. It's a long walk to the final revenge on Lady

Chun, whom AINU saves for last, and every moment before it is another lost opportunity to look at herself. Is AINU going to be able to come to terms with how cold she's become? What is there for AINU after she kills the woman she's been sleeping next to for two years? I'm more invested in how AINU deals with Lady Chun than anyone else who has hurt her, and I think the film is too – it's with Lady Chun's murder that AINU feels anything more than pure rage and satisfaction. Not to spoil the ending, but she feels grief and guilt as well.

AINU is seen through mirrors, or frames, or through long shots that emphasise her opposing movement to everyone else. It gets across the sense of a closed-off world, a tight claustrophobic surveillance and suffering, and AINU's growing control – or at least, an understanding of how to use her face for her ends. People *know* that she's going to kill them, and for various reasons, they let her into their bedrooms anyway. On numerous occasions, Lady Chun is warned that AINU is "hiding her true face". AINU even tells her directly that she's killing everyone who hurt her. And Lady Chun loves her more for it?! I don't think AINU exactly reverses the predatory lesbian trope in her calculated manipulation of Lady Chun, but she does become a predator in the literal sense, stalking and waiting her prey out – and she uses Lady Chun's lesbian sexuality to do so. AINU ruins that woman!

The final third of the film is a rolling fight scene, with AINU slipping into different conflicts, escaping one fight by leaping into another, then escaping that one by colliding the scenes and manipulating everyone into fighting each other. It's really well-presented, with brutal and stylistic choreography that pulls together everything in the film before. *Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan* is just gorgeous to look at, and the intense pacing of this film means that the ending, when it comes, lands like a sucker punch. Every minute of this film is doing something, and I don't often see such sophisticated storytelling in, let's face it, a film designed to show as many boobs as they could get away with.

Intimate Confessions of a Chinese Courtesan is everything I've been asking for, and it's been in the world since 1972. It's punchy, and bloody, and it's also got the world's worst lesbian. The intense tragedy between Lady Chun and AINU could so easily be schlocky; instead it's really thoughtful and challenging, and I found it just as rewarding to revisit it as I did seeing it the first time. I feel like I could watch this film forever, and never get bored.

i dont consume f/f

B I N G O

"you people are so entitled"	>"woman characters have no personality" > Fixates on male characters w/no screentime	"f/f is too political and preachy"	"all f/f is sweet and soft uwu fluff"	"Fictional women just aren't relatable"
"fandom isn't activism but also fandom is inherently queer and radical"	"caring about woman characters is too much wooooork"	"telling ppl to care about f/f is terf rhetoric"	"actually the REAL misogyny is pointing out that misogyny exists"	"i deal with misogyny irl too much to enjoy reading about women"
>"women written by men suck" >exclusively consumes content written by men	"no good woman characters exist"	Free!  it is misogyny	"m/m is more queer or authentic"	"fandom is about fixing problems in media unless it's women"
"i would consume f/f if something existed that describes thing that very much exists"	"maybe if u ppl were NICER, I'd give your little books a chance but now i never will"	"f/f content isn't horny enough"	"f/f content is too horny"	"woman characters are too bitchy/petty"
"f/f is misogynist and caters to the male gaze"	"make it yourself instead of whining"	"all f/f is too angsty"	"woman characters are too perfect"	*cissexist comment/ thinly veiled transphobia*

use that bingo to
fight online with
people who don't
consume f/f. and
use the following
recommendations
to be better than
them.

START HERE ↓

DO YOU WANT TOXIC YURI?

YES

DO YOU WANT HUMAN YURI?

YES

HOW TOXIC?

HIGH SCHOOL
BLACKMAIL

DESTROY IT
ALL AND LOVE
ME IN HELL

NO

ON A LEASH

SEXY SCALY
BAD BOSS

HOW TOXIC?

CANNIBAL
MERMAID

A MONSTER
WANTS TO EAT
ME

LATERAL
WORKPLACE
VIOLENCE

BLACK &
WHITE

RAISING
A GIRL
TO KILL YOU

KILL ME
NOW

NO → OK, BUT DOES IT HAVE TO BE HAPPY?

YES

NO

WHICH APPEALS TO YOU MOST?

OLD WOMAN YURI
↓
HANAMONOGATARI

GAY FAMILY → LOVE MY LIFE

TRANS FRIENDSHIP → DOUBLE HOUSE

VIBE?

SUICIDAL SPORTS MANGA

GOLONDRINA

SEXY VICTORIAN SPANKING

MARIE & ALEX

ESCAPIST EXES TO LOVERS

RUN AWAY WITH ME GIRL

content warnings not exhaustive. they're what popped into my head from my memory of the series.

on a leash (aji)

- a charged relationship between a dog girl and her snake woman superior heats up against the backdrop of an anthro shapeshifter war.

a monster wants to eat me (naekawa sai)

- grieving from her family's death years ago, a high school girl encounters a mysterious mermaid who wants her to live, if only for one reason (see title).

destroy it all and love me in hell (kuwabara tamotsu)

- a seemingly perfect high school girl's facade cracks, leading a classmate to begin blackmailing her--but to what end?

black & white (sal jiang)

- two rival women coworkers at a bank become entangled in a violent and sexual relationship.



kill me now (cosmos)

- a hitwoman kills a man in front of his daughter, and raises the girl with the aim of the girl killing her in return. but when the now adult girl chooses another way to get back at her, sparks fly. cw rape



hanamonogatari (schwinn)

- after the death of her husband, an older woman takes a chance on love and herself again.

love my life (yamaji ebine)

- slice of life manga about a girl who comes out as lesbian to her father, only to learn that both her parents are gay too.

double house (haruno nanae)

- short slice of life manga from 1998 focusing on a trans woman and the rich girl she saves, and the connection that blooms between them. cw casual transmisogyny.

golondrina (est em)

- after her lover cheats on her, a girl decides to become a matador and die facing a bull.

marie and alex (jeong shira, jo sangdeok)

- something is awoken in a delinquent young noble lady when her maid is beaten in her stead

run away with me girl (battan)

- a woman encounters her high school ex, who is soon to be married. they pick up where they left off anyway. cw domestic violence.



CONSIDER: LOSS IS THE LOCUS OF YURI

*Or: letterboxd user @horrors introduces a lonesome
lesbian cinema watchlist*

It is a long-withstanding finding that there is a preoccupation with loss in the formation of yuri. Yuri utilizes the language of aching women. The genre does not create it, rather it serves as the conduit of the aching woman's despair or sorrow, which are not to be mistaken for each other. To feel despair is to cast away all confidence, while to feel sorrow is to endure the transient presence of distrust and uncertainty. Loss is the definite experience of being without what was previously there, or having less of what you trusted was there in full. Loss constructs the lonesome lesbian character within stories, and the lonesome lesbian author of stories, and the lonesome lesbian audience of stories. Loss is the locus of yuri: the aching woman's despair or sorrow, indicating the unfulfilled desire explored in its stories.

Investigating that statement, we ask: Why is it so dazzling when women ache for women, and loss ensues? Investigating loss as the locus of yuri, we watch:

1. Chinatsu and Kyoko in *Love/Juice*, 2000 dir. Kaze Shindo
2. Mitsu and Natsuko in *Afternoon Breezes*, 1980 dir. Hitoshi Yazaki
3. Ai and Miyuki in *Unlock Your Heart*, 2021 dir. Rin Shuto
4. Jayoung in *Our Body*, 2018 dir. Han Karam
5. Mary and Suri in *Mary is Happy, Mary is Happy*; 2013 dir. Nawapol Thamrongrattanarit
6. Sachi in *Haruhara-san's Recorder*, 2021 dir. Kyoshi Sugita
7. Mei-li Chen and Mei-li Ling in *Murmur of Youth*, 1997 dir. Lin Cheng-sheng

Movies that are Yuri to Me

by 

When I think about what makes a female relationship “Yuri” to me, I feel like a person who’s half-remembering their Susan Sontag trying to describe camp. Outside of its literal definition, there’s a strange, amorphous angle to what I enjoy when it comes to yuri. Instead of fully defining it, I thought of a way to try illustrating around it by pulling on one of my favorite wells of lesbianism: semi-obscurer movies.

This list is more of a charcuterie plate than a definitive list, but I did try to stay true to two core selection methods:

1. I can’t have seen any of these on a more basic list of “best lesbian/gay movies”
2. You have to be at least a little bit insane to enjoy them

I won’t sort these by quality, but rather, from least to most “setting my brain on fire”.

Anything with intense themes is given a *, and I personally recommend searching the website “does the dog die” to get the full list of content warnings for most of these.

The Children’s Hour (1961)*

If our last pick is something that is all consuming to me, then the first on this list is the movie where I am most aware of the meta around it. The Children’s Hour tells the story of two best friend school mistresses, who are accused (by a truly evil little child) of -gasp- having a secret love affair. The movie appears to be a lesson in the pitfalls of gossip showing how one bad intentioned rumor can destroy these women’s entire lives and careers. The movie seems to be turning to you and bemoaning “how horrible is it, to be accused of being a lesbian!”, until it hits you with the final “Unless...” in the form of a beautifully sincere and tortured confession from one of the women to the other. The Hayes Code was still kicking by the time this came out, and the movie ends predictably tragically (there is a literal rule that any confirmed homosexual character has to die by suicide- yeesh!) but that doesn’t keep me from adoring the story under the surface of this movie, and the pretend ending that I’ve built flawlessly

in my brain, one where they run away and get on that train together.

The Case of Hana and Alice (2015)

An anime prequel to a live action film I never saw, it tells the story of a girl moving to a new town and becoming friends with her shut-in neighbor. The writing in this story really shines in a way you don't see in many movies, tossing in so many bright and funny side characters. The people that made this movie think it's heterosexual (there's a whole plot that's centered around trying to find a boy that one of them has a crush on) but let me tell you, no straight stuff in this movie comes even close to the gentle intimacy of two girls sharing secrets as they huddle under a car in a parking lot. It's just so odd and charming, with such a creative way around "cheap" animation, that in general more people should just watch this, and join my yuri delusions.

Muriel's Wedding (1994)*

Maybe part of the lesbian tragedy is craving for a heterosexual dream you will never have! The egotistical delusion that once you are validated the way society tells you that you will be, nothing else matters. This movie is so next level in its criticisms of straightness, but it also has one of the most overwhelmingly perfect female relationships in the middle that... I don't even know if I can call it not gay! Like they are in love! When they are apart I am in hell and when they are together, life feels like an ABBA song! I'm not alone, I'm with Muriel!

The Novice (2021)*

Okay, like no one saw this movie when it came out, and I can't have that, cause I need more people to talk to about it. The lesbian relationship in this is hilariously the most boring and perfunctory part of the movie, but I don't care. The lesbianism lies, for me, in the total rejection of reality in order to compete against the image of the delusion of success. The fire burning of competition simply for the sake of chasing, the hunt, the pursuit of a new reality where only you and she exist. There is something so incredibly yuri about destroying yourself to remake yourself in the obsession of another. Ultimate "women should be worse" movie.

Je Tu Il Elle (1974)*

I almost put three Ackerman's on this list, and I won't apologize for that. Chantal Ackerman, icon of depressed jewish lesbians, has such a power-

ful aura that everything she touches becomes homo-fied. However, I had to spotlight this movie above all others. With its poetic and frustratingly long sequences, this is about a main character (played by the 24-year-old director) dealing with a break-up by going absolutely crazy in a little room (mostly while nude), rearranging furniture, writing endless unsent letters, and eating sugar from a bag. She finally emerges, catching a ride with a creepy truck driver that she hooks up with, and finally goes crawling back to the apartment of her love, whom she still so desperately craves, and having a truly incredible unsimulated onscreen sex scene with her for like, 20 unbroken minutes. It's so awesome dude. Chantal I love you.

Showgirls (1995)*

Hidden within this absolute mess of a movie is the greatest toxic love story ever told. The way I feel when Nomi and Crystal are on screen together should put me on an interpol watch list. I don't think that Verhoven knows what sex is and instead he just defaulted to lesbianism. Go into this film with a sage guide (and for god's sake, please skip That One Scene with Mary near the climax of the movie) and experience the closest we will ever get to finding all of the worst ways to be horny.

Mulholland Drive (2001)*

Sorry. If you know me (though why should you) this is so predictable for me. It's hard to even figure out how to go about describing this movie, but all I can say is, go watch it, it's the best movie ever made, and if you don't "get it", then watch it again. As a rough guide, there are two parts of this movie. Only when you reach part B do you realize how it paints the fantasy of the first part. However, only by seeing the idealized joy of the first part do you see the pessimism and total despair of the second part. You can literalize as much as you want, or you can let the whole thing exist in metaphor. I've seen it so many times and each time it's a new movie, and I have delved into almost every piece of this film. The only movie about hollywood. The holy text of pathetic lesbians. This is my favorite movie.

The Devil Wears Prada (2006)

Okay I'm sure everyone has seen this movie, and you're all saying "Hey! That movie isn't lesbian!" Oh really??? Are you telling me that my deep desire to have a gorgeous fashion mommy eviscerate me with two words is straight??? Are you telling me that the way Andy does anything for

Miranda is straight? Are you trying to tell me that these moments of adoration, fear, and control is heterosexual??? Get out of my list. I never want to see you again.

Duke of Burgundy (2014)

Girl!!!!!!! This movie is RIPE with it! I was hooting, I was hollering, and I was praying to god my roommates wouldn't walk in on me watching this! The story of this movie is slowly told, but also beautifully shown in so many tiny details that you need to stay glued to the screen like you're studying the horniest textbook ever. Two women in a long-term BDSM relationship play out their parts, and we see the gentle dance of reality and fantasy, and the frustrating borders between the two. Perfect movie for anyone who wants to see a story of what lies beyond in these kinds of relationships, but also how these games of dress-up and make believe can slowly make other subtle issues in a relationship vulnerable. Also had me howling like a tex avery wolf, sorry to say.

The Living Dead Girl (1982)*

Catherine and Helen are childhood sweethearts, stealing away with each other and confessing their love, swearing to be bound in life, giving oaths over blood pacts. Then, Catherine dies, and many years pass until she is resurrected as a helpless and vicious undead woman who must feed on the flesh of the living. What does Helen do when she learns of this? Burns rubber to get to Catherine, Immediately cleans up her murders, and gently and lovingly washes the blood from her naked body? Hell yeah she does! A B-movie with some insanely beautiful acting and writing hidden away inside of it, there is also a good feast for the enjoyers of some absolute shit production budget, and some of the most hilariously convoluted and useless side characters ever. At the center of it, though, Helen is maybe the craziest Renfield-type to ever do it. This lesbian relationship charts the path of one melancholy monster slowly realizing the evil that she is, while the love-struck human goes "Sure, but I'm keeping you alive no matter what." Sigh, so romantic. You are my death.

WHAT IS YURI? A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

what do we mean when we say yuri? do we refer to the historical continuity, the collection of tropes, any media that's f/f, a specific subjectivity, or something else entirely? this zine was an attempt at celebrating that yuri has enough room for all those things. yuri is romance, yuri is friendship, yuri is loving women, yuri is genderqueer, yuri is abstract theory, yuri is nasty onscreen sex, yuri is about seeing yourself in a canon that never spared you a single thought, yuri is about lifting up and supporting lgbt creatives, yuri is the relationship between you and me, yuri is the relationship between me and these words.

it's a lot of things. i wanted this zine to approach yuri in the same way we approach yaoi: in a simultaneous spirit of irreverent play and utmost seriousness. we are deeply committed to our silly things here. i think too often with yuri we fall into the trap of seriousness alone. we hold our yuri to a higher standard than our yaoi. it must be beautiful, it must be true, and it must do right by women. yaoi is often none of the above with respect to masculinity. and yet it is dear to us. i'm not suggesting that we need to make yuri that is ugly, lying, and detrimental to women per se, but i am saying that this volume is about being unafraid that our yuri is any of those things. yuri is expansive enough for us all.

xoxo tshirt