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Beautiful and Innocent : Female Same-Sex Intimacy in the Japanese Yuri Genre

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HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN

Beautiful and Innocent
Female Same-Sex Intimacy in the Japanese *Yuri* Genre

Verena Maser

Dissertation aus dem Fachbereich II: Sprach-, Literatur- und Medienwissenschaften der
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In memory of my grandfather

Gottlob Maser

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Note on Language

Japanese names appear with the family name first with the exception of Japanese scholars who have published in English and who are cited with their family name last.

The spelling of Japanese words follows the revised Hepburn system, but macrons are omitted from words common in English, such as Tokyo.

I give the English title of fictional works, if available, with the Japanese title given in brackets at the first mention. I however usually cite from the Japanese version.

All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Since manga and *shōsetsu* do not always contain punctuation in direct speech, I have added it as I thought best.

Introduction. A Lily Is a Lily Is… No Lily?

"I think, therefore *yuri* is." (Kurata 2011, 30) This is the credo of Keisuke, the male main character of Kurata Uso's manga *Yuri danshi* (Yuri males). Keisuke is a fan of the so-called *yuri* ("lily") genre in Japanese popular culture. It comprises texts[1] about female same-sex intimacy and is the topic of this study. I begin with this credo because it alludes to three important topics of this study: It is a reference to its basic theory that genres are not inherent qualities of texts, but are rather the products of a discourse. It further shows that fans play an important role for the *yuri* genre since it is their imagination that mostly forms it. Finally, on a meta-level the credo is also an example for the importance of manga editors since it was originally made up by Nakamura Seitarō, the editor in charge of *Yuri danshi* (161–62).

When I first came to Japan in 2005, I was eager to find manga about love between girls. Manga about love between boys (a genre variously known as boys' love/BL, *shōnen ai* [boy love] or *yaoi*)[2] had experienced a boom on the German manga market, so I was convinced that there should also be a corresponding genre about girls. It took me almost six months to find the *yuri* genre which back then was not yet fully established on the Japanese market. The situation has changed tremendously ever since. When I came back to Japan to conduct research for this study in 2011/12, I was no longer able to buy every *yuri* text I came across—my office shelf was just not big enough. Scholarly research has not yet caught up with this trend. While they boys' love genre is a vibrant field of research (e.g. Levi, McHarry, and Pagliassotti 2008; McLelland et al. 2015),[3] neither narratives about female-same sex intimacy or "female homosexuality" nor the *yuri* genre (or even their audiences or producers) have received much scholarly attention.

The few studies that do exist have mostly been devoted to the texts' content, often from a feminist point of view. An example for this is Fujimoto Yukari ([1998] 2008), the first to address the fictional portrayal of female same-sex intimacy in Japanese popular culture. She argues that the stereotypical depiction of failing intimate relationships between females in *shōjo* (girls') manga from the 1970s to the 1990s is based on the assumption that females can find positive reassurance only through a male, and never through another female (243–305).[4] James Welker (2006, 2010a, 2011) expands on Fujimoto's argument with concepts of feminist theories and finds that only science-fiction allows for gender disruptions. A different approach is taken by Deborah Shamoon (2008, 2012) who writes on Japanese girls' culture and homosociality in early twentieth century fiction for girls. By incorporating the texts'

content, their production and reception, she argues that these early narratives serve as a framework for understanding later portrayals of homosocial relationships in manga.

Studies that explicitly discuss the *yuri* genre are still rare. Kumata Kazuo (2005) focuses on Japanese male fans of the genre and compares them with Japanese female fans of the boys' love genre. He argues that both groups are torn between traditional gender role models and the wish for more equal relationships (71–97). Kazumi Nagaike's (2010) article on the *yuri* manga magazine *Komikku yuri hime* (Comic lily princess) places it in the context of "lesbianism", although, as we will see, this disregards how the *yuri* genre is usually positioned in Japanese discourse. Most recently, the special issue on *yuri* of the Japanese magazine for art criticism *Eureka* (2014/12) included several (scholarly) articles on the genre's genesis, its content and fans (e.g. Fujimoto 2014b; Tamaki 2014). It sold out on Amazon Japan within a day, testifying to the great interest in the *yuri* genre in Japan.

Sex, Gender and Intimacy

Some readers might wonder why I am using the expression "female same-sex intimacy" instead of "lesbianism" to describe the *yuri* genre. This usage is rooted in my discomfort with the way we talk about "sexual identities" in English today. I agree with Judith Butler (1992) that terms like "lesbian" and "homosexual" (or "heterosexual," "bisexual" etc.) are not neutral descriptions of something that exists a priori. "Identity categories are never merely descriptive, but always normative, and as such, exclusionary." (15–16) Such categories merely make something material understandable and also controllable (17; see also Butler 1993, 308)—"there is nothing intrinsic about the categor[ies]" themselves (Mittell 2004, 7). Furthermore, these categories are also not stable. As Michel Foucault (1978) has demonstrated, the category of "homosexuality" is an invention of the late nineteenth century: the act itself had been known before, but instead of constituting an identity, it was considered pathology (42–44). This is also true for Japan (e.g. Pflugfelder 2005, 140–50). To draw attention to the unnaturalness of these categories, I will put terms like "lesbian," "homosexuality," and "heterosexuality" in quotation marks "to denaturalize the terms, to designate these signs as sites of political debate." (Butler 1992, 19)

As cultural categories, terms like "lesbian" and "homosexuality" do not do justice to a genre as broad and as varied as *yuri*. Characters in *yuri* texts can be portrayed as lovers, friends or even rivals. As I argue throughout this study, it is often not the original depiction of a relationship but rather the fans' interpretation of it that makes a text a *yuri* text. Terms like

"love," "friendship" or "romance" are thus too limited to describe the relationships found in the *yuri* genre. Instead, I will use the broad term "intimacy."[5] I understand it as referring to a "feeling of connectedness, closeness, and comfort that is performed and negotiated while sharing space, communication, and activity." (Galbraith 2011, 211n1)

So if the nature of the relationships is so broad in scope, what about the gender of the characters involved? At least at the time of researching and writing this study, I would argue that the sex and gender of the characters in *yuri* texts are depicted to be identical, namely "female." Importantly, three phenomena of Japanese popular culture where this is not the case are usually separated from the *yuri* genre: *otoko no ko* (男の娘; approximately "girl boy"—a word play on the Japanese term for boy with the character for "child" replaced with the character for "daughter"), the all-female Takarazuka Revue, and *futanari* (hermaphrodites). *Otoko no ko* look and behave like girls, but are actually boys.[6] In fictional texts about them, female characters regularly fall in love with them. Only on the surface is this a female-female romance: as the audience is always aware of the "girl boy's" male sex, it remains a male-female one. Similarly, the all-female Takarazuka Revue[7] performs plays about romances between men and women with both being played by women. However, scholars have argued that the performers of the male roles (*otoko-yaku*) have to be understood as gender neutral (*chūsei*; Shamoon 2012, 47) and that the audience does not see them as "actual men" (Stickland 2008, 7, 111). Thus the romance on the Takarazuka stage is neither female-female nor male-female. Finally, *futanari* have both female and male reproductive organs, but are mostly featured in pornographic manga and anime (Nagayama 2006, 221–28). Neither "girl boys," nor the Takarazuka Revue, nor *futanari* are mentioned in Japanese articles on the *yuri* genre. Fan works about them are not sold at *yuri* fan work events. The fandoms do not even overlap on the Japanese social networking site Mixi—there are people who like them, but they do not appear to be the majority of *yuri* fans. So if all of this is "not *yuri*," then what then "is *yuri*"?

Yuri*: What It Means and Where to Find It*

Yuri means "lily," but although the genus of lilies (*Lilium*) comprises flowers in a wide variety of colors, the *yuri* genre is typically associated with the white lily. Before the Meiji period (1868–1912), the white lily had only seldom been depicted in Japanese art and literature (Watanabe 2009, 203–8). In Japanese romanticism, from the late 1880s and 1890s onwards, the white lily came to be associated with the ideal woman, symbolizing (spiritual)

beauty and (sexual) purity (195–96).[8] From the turn of the century, the white lily was further associated with the previously unknown idea of *ai* or "spiritual/platonic love" of a man for an ideal woman (200–201, 217, 224).[9]

In the early 1910s, the symbol of the white lily was adopted by Japanese girls' magazines (*shōjo zasshi*), but now it connoted only female sexual purity (Watanabe 2009, 263, 303). An example is the following excerpt from the short story "Shirayuri" (White lily) from Yoshiya Nobuko's *Hana monogatari* (Flower tales, see also chapter 2). Music teacher Ms. Hayama bids farewell to two female students who adore her:

> But don't you ever forget this thing, these my feelings, please swear to me that you will guard [your] "purity," the purity of the eternally unchanging soul, the purity of conduct. You two, this is your most excellent repayment of my kindness, yes, do not forget it, purity! Throughout our lifetime, let us all guard our "purity," symbolized by the flower of my dearly beloved [*daisuki*] white lily! (Yoshiya 2003b, 212–13)

As I will show in part I of this study, the *yuri* genre is still closely associated with this general image of beauty and purity. Nevertheless, how the lily came to be associated with female same-sex intimacy has not yet been completely elucidated. The most common explanation is that *yuri* was an antonym for *bara* or "rose," which in the 1970s had become associated with male "homosexuality" (Ishida 2010, 270; see chapter 1 for details).[10] As the name of a genre in popular culture, *yuri* has been in use since approximately the mid-2000s.[11] At least among consumers of manga, anime etc. the term *yuri* has come to refer more to the genre than to the flower.[12] *Yuri* today even crosses the boundaries of fiction: the term is now also used for live action movies (Japanese and non-Japanese, e.g. Sugino 2008, 118–21) or for pop idol groups like AKB48 (Nishinaka 2011).

As a cross-media phenomenon, *yuri* can be found in forms as diverse as manga, anime, *shōsetsu* (narrative fiction) [13], light novels[14] and fan works (*dōjin sakuhin*). Both males and females are involved in their production, whether as artists or behind the scenes.[15] The different forms are often connected through media franchises, but since they have different production contexts, they cannot readily be compared to each other.[16] Manga are for example primarily determined by the manga magazines in which they are serialized before being bound into paperbacks (*tankōbon*) (Prough 2011, 13).[17] The same is true for some light novels. These two forms are usually the work of a single artist, although we will see that they are often heavily influenced by their respective editor. In contrast, anime usually come in the form of television series or OVA (original video animation). Whereas the series is first broadcast and then made available on DVD/Blu-ray (BD), OVA are produced to be directly

sold on DVD and/or BD without prior broadcasting. The production of anime involves an array of people ranging from animators to directors and screenwriters (in detail see Condry 2013).

As I will show in this study, the fans and their interpretations of the texts they like are one of the most important aspects for understanding the *yuri* genre. The most readily accessible materializations of these interpretations are fan works. Broadly speaking, there are two categories: *parodi* or *paro* (from the English "parody," although not all of these works are of a humorous nature), i.e. texts based on a (commercially produced[18]) manga, anime, light novel etc., and *orijinaru* (original), the much smaller category of texts not based on any already existing text or personality. Fan works come in many forms, ranging from manga and *shōsetsu* (also known as *dōjinshi*, "magazine by/for the same people") to anime and video games, or even merchandising like stickers or buttons. Producers of fan works form *sākuru* (circles) consisting of one or more persons. Some publish their works for free on the Internet, but the majority of Japanese fan works are physical products that are sold, usually at fan works events (*dōjinshi sokubaikai*, "*dōjinshi* sales exhibition"). Hundreds of these take place all over Japan every year, the largest one being Comic Market (also known as Comike, Komike or Comiket), the world's largest event for selling and buying fan works (Lam 2010, 232). It takes place twice a year in Tokyo and over three days draws around 35,000 *sākuru* and around 520,000 visitors (numbers for Comic Market 85; Fujita 2014) (see also chapters 9 and 10).

Given the diversity of the *yuri* genre, it seems inappropriate to solely focus on for example manga. And as Berndt (2008) has noted, when studying Japanese popular culture it is not enough to focus solely on content. Hence, like some previous studies of Japanese popular culture (e.g. Shamoon 2012; Thomas 2012), my approach to the *yuri* genre is concerned with the interdependencies of its content, production and reception. By examining the genre's key texts and by incorporating first-hand accounts from manga magazine editors and fans, I will explore the *yuri* genre's various facets and the mechanisms of its construction. On the basis of contemporary genre theory, I argue that the *yuri* genre is discursively produced: rather than producers assigning texts to the genre, in this process it is the audience's imagination that is critical.

Chapter Outline

To discuss the cultural construction of the *yuri* genre via the interdependencies of its content, production and reception, I base this study on an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates theories and methods of sociology, media and cultural studies. In chapter 1, I first discuss the Japanese usage of the term "genre," before explaining the theoretical approach of contemporary genre theory. It argues that genres should not be understood as inherent qualities of texts, but as discursively produced categories. I then explore the Japanese discourse on the *yuri* genre in more detail to give the reader a better idea about what to expect from the genre's content. Using a variety of sources, I consider four areas of the discourse: the *yuri* genre's name, its definition, its characteristics and its canon. I show that the *yuri* genre is mainly associated with the adjectives "beautiful," "pure," "cute" and "heartrending," and that the boundaries between *yuri* and pornography and between *yuri* and "homosexuality" are ambiguous.

Part I focuses on the content of the *yuri* genre. In chapters 2 to 6, I discuss ten exemplary *yuri* texts from the 1910s to 2010s in more detail. I chose them because in the Japanese discourse on the *yuri* genre, they are considered to be the milestones of the *yuri* genre's historical development. In each chapter, I consider the texts in their historical contexts and discuss how they represent female same-sex intimacy. I show how each of these texts corresponds to the discursively established image of the *yuri* genre and how these texts are retroactively assigned to the genre.

Part II is concerned with the production of *yuri* manga in particular and specifically with the role of manga magazine editors. In chapters 7 and 8, I discuss the state of the Japanese manga market in general and through which stages the *yuri* genre became a fixture on it. Through a discussion of my interviews with ten Japanese manga editors, I show that they consider the *yuri* genre a niche that is (still) too small. While they appreciate the readers' positive reactions to it, they have no major strategy for the future development of the *yuri* genre. Their ultimate concern is to sell as many books as possible.

Finally, part III is about the reception of the *yuri* genre in Japan, specifically its fans. In chapters 9 and 10, I show that it is possible to call those who like the *yuri* genre "fans" since they exhibit the four main characteristics of fans identified in previous research: investment (of time, money and emotions), discrimination, productivity and community. I further discuss the results of the online survey I conducted among fans of the *yuri* genre in Japan with 1,352 respondents. I show that they are not one single homogeneous entity, but rather a very

heterogeneous group, made up of various subgroups. Every single fan brings various motivations and expectations to the *yuri* genre's content, resulting in a struggle between the subgroups.

I argue that the *yuri* genre is for the most part constructed not through assignment on part of its producers but through interpretation on part of its fans. The texts that are considered to be milestones of the genre exhibit various ways of depicting female same-sex intimacy, but each of them conforms to the *yuri* genre's discursively established image of beauty and innocence.

Notes

1. In this study, I understand "texts" as "frames of realizable meanings that span across single or multiple communicative acts, including visual, sound-based, and written communication." (Sandvoss 2007, 22)

2. *Yaoi*—an acronym of the expression *yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi* (no climax, no point, no meaning)—was created by female fan works artists to (jokingly) describe their erotic works. The terms boys' love, *shōnen ai* and *yaoi* have different histories and are often used to describe different texts (in detail see Welker 2015). For the sake of simplicity, I will use the term boys' love throughout this study.

3. There are parallels between the boys' love and the *yuri* genre, like the importance of fans' interpretations, which I will point out throughout this study. However, this is not the main concern of this study.

4. For a translation of parts of this discussion see Fujimoto 2014a.

5. I would like to thank Mary Redfern for suggesting this term to me during the EAJS PhD workshop.

6. Male characters wearing "female" clothes have been present in Japanese popular culture since the early 1980s, starting with the manga *Stop!! Hibari-kun!* by Eguchi Hisashi (1981–83) (Nagayama 2006, 222). Yet "girl boys" only started to appear from the late 2000s (for details see Mizuno 2011).

7. For details see for example Kawasaki (2004), Robertson (1998), and Stickland (2008).

8. The romanticists, having Christians and people with experience abroad amongst them, were inspired by Christian symbolism: the white lily is the attribute of the Virgin Mary (Watanabe 2009, 195).

9. For details on the import of this Western concept see Shamoon (2012, 15–18) and Suzuki (2010, 7–14).

10. *Bara* has come out of use as a referrer to "homosexuality." *Yuri* as well is rarely used in reference to real-life female "homosexuality." Instead, in standard Japanese, the two most common terms are *dōseiaisha* ("homosexual" of either gender) or *rezubian* ("lesbian"). The abbreviation *rezu* is usually considered offensive due to its "pornographic nuances" (Welker 2010b, 369), although in colloquial Japanese, this is often lost. Some "homosexual" females also use the term *bian*, the second syllable of *rezubian* (370).

11. According to one of the Japanese manga editors I interviewed, in the 1990s the term *kudamono* (fruits) was used among artists of fan works about female same-sex intimacy. Back then, people who did not want to accidentally reveal their interest in *yaoi* or male same-sex intimacy fan works changed the term's second syllable and said *yasai* (vegetables). The term *kudamono* was then used as an antonym (interview with E2, February 13, 2012).

12. Among the Japanese general public, it is still rather the other way around. As the name of a specific genre, *yuri* is not listed in any Japanese language dictionary. In the *Gendai yōgo no kiso chishiki* (Encyclopedia of contemporary words), to date (2014 edition) the *yuri* genre has been referenced solely in the 2007 edition: the term *yurippuru* (from *yuri* and *kappuringu* or "coupling") is defined as "two females flirting with each other" (*Gendai yōgo no kiso* 2007, 1247).

13. The term *shōsetsu* is usually translated as "novel." It was originally introduced in Japan in the Meiji period as a translation for European terms like the English "novel" and the German *roman* (Hijiya-Kirschnereit 1996, 8n2). The term *shōsetsu* designates narrative prose of various lengths and is thus a more general and broader term than "novel" (Meyer 2000, 23). I therefore use the term *shōsetsu* when referring to this particular literary form.

14. Light novels (*raito noberu*)—entertainment novels targeted at adolescents—first appeared in the late 1980s, but the term itself came to be used only from around 1990. Rather than sharing specific modes of presentation, light novels are defined by their outward appearance: the books are published in the small A6

format and their covers are adorned with illustrations in the style of anime and manga ("Tokushū raito noberu kenkyū" 2005, 4–6). They are "light" in that they have to be easy to read and easy to be picked up, rather than their content being "light" (10). For details see Ichiyanagi and Kume (2013).

15. Actual numbers are hard to establish since it is not always clear whether artists with for example female names are actually female. Some artists also use gender neutral pen names.

16. For a discussion of stylistic differences between manga and anime and their interpretation see Thomas (2012, 45–50, 52–55).

17. Japanese manga editors and publishers call these paperbacks *komikkusu* (comics). In order to avoid confusion with the English term "comics," I refer to them as paperbacks.

18. There are also fan works based on non-commercial texts like *Tōhō Project* (Eastern project) which started in 1996 as an amateur video game (see also Lam 2010, 242–43).

Chapter 1. The *Yuri* Genre as Site of a Discursive Struggle

My aim is to understand the *yuri* genre in the broader context of its production and reception. To this end, contemporary genre theory offers a useful approach that considers the relationship between content, production and reception and how genres are produced in the interaction between these three areas. This chapter introduces the approach of Rick Altman, later expanded by Jason Mittell. Both argue that genres have to be understood as discursively produced rather than inherent qualities of texts. I show that this is also true for the *yuri* genre by mapping out the parties vital to its discursive production and the main areas of the discourse on the *yuri* genre. The discursively established characteristics of the *yuri* genre are present in all texts that I will discuss in part I.

Japanese Genre Practices

Genres are important because they provide a framework for communicating about (popular) texts. If you say "*Doctor Who* is a science fiction show," most people will probably know what you are talking about or at least get some general idea about *Doctor Who*—although not everyone might have the same image in their mind or might even agree to this categorization. Genres also serve producers for advertising their texts, and stores for categorizing the texts on their shelves.

In Japanese, "genre" is usually expressed with the romanized term *janru*. The term *mono* (thing) is also common. For example, *gakuen mono* or "school piece" could designate a manga about life at school. Similar to English, Japanese does not distinguish between the form of presentation and the presented content. Hence *gakuen mono* could also refer to a television drama. Due to this non-distinction, Japanese books on *janru* often present an unordered mixture of articles about specific forms (e.g. narrative prose) and specific types of content (e.g. tragedies). None of these books provide any further definition of the term *janru* (e.g. *Bungaku no janru* 1941; *Bungaku no janru* 1951; Koshikawa 1976). In Japanese dictionaries, the definition of *janru* is based on the same mixture, i.e. genre is described as a classification that can be based on form and/or content (e.g. Fukuda and Muramatsu 1987, 124; Shōgakukan kokugo jiten henshūbu 2001, 1185).

The utilization of genre in practice is equally complicated. Manga for example are, at the most fundamental level, distinguished by the targeted audience: there are for example *shōnen* manga (manga for boys), *shōjo* manga (manga for girls) and *seinen* manga (manga for

adult, often male readers). These are mainly marketing categories, but they also have different formal characteristics (think for example of the infamous "saucer eyes" of *shōjo* manga) (Itō 2007, 13). Their various contents could be referred to as for example "science fiction," "adventure," boys' love, or *yuri*. Yet if you go to a Japanese book store, you will find that manga are usually not arranged by content-related genre, but rather by their publishing label—which usually indicates the target group.[1] In contrast, for the marketing of anime genre terms such as "science fiction" or "adventure" are often adopted. Yet another principle can be found in the world of fan works where "genre" (*janru*) refers to the source text that a work is based on (Welker 2015, 57).

Genres, and especially their construction, have rarely been discussed by Japanese scholars (Hijiya-Kirschnereit 1996, 5, 165–68)[2]. In Japanese literary theory, the terms *janru* and *yōshiki* (style) are used interchangeably (165), mirroring colloquial usage. Non-Japanese scholars also rarely discuss the concept of "genre" in Japan. In her study on *shishōsetsu* (autobiographical *shōsetsu*), Irmela Hijiya-Kirschnereit refers to these as "genre," but calls this usage a "heuristic device" (123) that is preliminary until there is a clear definition of the term *shishōsetsu*. Harald Meyer (2000) in his research on *rekishi shōsetsu* (historical narratives) aims at defining this genre and its modes of representation, and categorizes the analyzed texts on a continuum of characteristics. The volume on Japanese cinema by Arthur Noletti Jr. and David Desser (1992) offers various studies of particular genres, but none of them considers the notion of "genre" in more depth or discusses how genres are constructed and used in Japanese cinema.

As far as manga and anime are concerned, there are studies of manga or anime from specific genres, but these are mostly concerned with the texts' contents and rarely consider the perspective of their consumers or even producers.[3] Those approaches that consider genre in manga on a more general level as well remain unsatisfying. Itō Gō (2007) for example uses the term *janru* interchangeably for both the form manga itself and for its various categories like *shōnen* and *shōjo* manga (e.g. 12–13). Implicitly, he recognizes that the assignment to these categories is the result of a discourse rather than an objective judgment (14–15). Still, he argues that "when a new work is published, it is automatically included into a genre[, b]ecause genre is just another name for a set of works." (72) He does not further discuss who assigns the texts to a genre and on what grounds. The edited volume *Manga janru sutadīzu* (Manga genre studies; Ibaragi 2013) is mostly concerned with formal genres like cartoons and manga and only few contributors discuss the construction of these. Hence, my own approach draws on Non-Japanese genre theory.

Rick Altman's and Jason Mittell's Approach to Genre Theory

In his seminal book *Film/Genre*, Rick Altman (2004) analyzes genres in film and argues for a new understanding of genre. To him, genres are not derived from texts' inherent qualities, but are discursively produced by producers and audiences. He argues that genres have to be seen as a site of discursive struggles between different users with diverging interests (99), and that "generic terminology … is primarily retrospective in nature" (48). Producers might position their films in certain generic contexts, but there is no guarantee that this assignment will persist forever. For example, the studio might decide to change the genre affiliation or the affiliation changes through interaction with various audiences (30–48).

This process can also be seen in case of the *yuri* genre: As I will discuss, before the 1990s and early 2000s, the term *yuri* (referring to texts about female same-sex intimacy) circulated only among fans and was not recognized by publishers. Only after the creation of the unified genre *yuri* various manga and anime were retrospectively assigned to it. This history of the *yuri* genre—one that is similar to the one of boys' love genre (see Welker 2015)—in part explains why even today fans continue to assign previously unassociated texts to it. Taking their clues from the commercial products, the fans then go on to produce and consume their own fan works, and to assign the whole original text to the *yuri* genre. This continues to be a vital factor for the genre's sustainability.

Altman urges for a discursive understanding of genres. According to Michel Foucault (1972), discourses are not simply "groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but … practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak." (49) The discourse has the power to define subjects (and objects) by describing them (49). Hence, things and beings are not something, but are culturally constructed to be something (Mittell 2004, 12), and this is especially true for genres: The prime motivation for producers is to make money and if this can be achieved by (re-)assigning their products to certain genres, they will most certainly do that. But producers are just one of the many actors in the discursive production of genres. Altman (2004) argues that genres cannot exist without audiences who can make connections between different movies: "the very notion of genre depends on the existence of audience activity (prior knowledge of similar texts, intertextual comparisons, specific cognitive tendencies and predictable schema-processing practices)" (84). Yet audiences also somewhat depend on the producers, because they obtain at least part of their genre knowledge from them: "A genre abandoned by producers tends to disappear from viewers' active vocabulary, while continued production serves as the most common

institutional reinforcement of an existing genre." (91) Audiences are also influenced by the press (e.g. specialized magazines), reference books (e.g. movie guides), and stores (display and advertising) (93).

Altman (2004) concludes that "genres [are] not … a quality of texts, but … a by-product of discursive activity" (120). Nevertheless, they are not "a transparent vessel of communication between sender and receiver," but "a site of struggle among users," a discursive struggle with "competing meanings, engineered misunderstanding and a desire for domination rather than communication." (99) This struggle is often hidden, since all parties are using the same term, pretending to talk about the same thing (101–2). This applies not only to US American movies, but also to the boys' love (e.g. Welker 2015) and the *yuri* genre. As I will show, the *yuri* genre's producers and consumers have various and often conflicting ideas about and motivations for producing and consuming it. These motivations are as diverse as making money in an increasingly difficult market, free imagining in a world of fixed commodities, dealing with differing "sexual identities," or political activism for the recognition of "homosexual" individuals. The struggle for the "correct" definition of the *yuri* genre is recognized as such: on the Japanese Internet there is an unspoken agreement not to discuss definitions for fear of heated disputes (Tamaki 2014, 157).

Altman's theory shows parallels with contemporary media studies that also note the struggles between various producers and audiences. Simple "stimulus-response-models" for explaining audience reactions to particular media content have long been abandoned in favor of more complicated theories of interaction between media and audiences. One example for a model that incorporates audiences' opinions and actions is the one proposed by Stuart Hall (1992). He argues that producers encode their messages and that audiences decode them, but that the codes used by each may not be identical—a point I will come back to when discussing the relationship between the *yuri* genre's producers and audience.

Altman's theory was later expanded by Jason Mittell (2004). Writing on US American television genres, he argues that an analysis of genres has to acknowledge the specific medium's context and practices instead of just adapting theories from other fields (xiii, 23–24). Rather than as textual categories, he sees genres first and foremost as cultural categories working in various aspects of television (xi). For Mittell, genre is "a process of categorization that is not found within media texts, but operates across the cultural realms of media industries, audiences, policy, critics, and historical contexts." (xii) Hence, researchers should analyze how genres work in their broader cultural context, by taking into account various sources in lieu of studying specific texts (12–13).

That genres should be understood as a process of categorization can also be demonstrated for the *yuri* genre. Let us for example consider the form of manga. Commonly, in manga magazines statements in the margins of the first and often also last page of a manga give the readers hints on what to expect from the story and/or how to interpret it. This can take the form of a clear generic positioning (e.g. "a science fiction manga"), but it can also be a short comment or description of the content. This text is usually written by the manga's editor and is not reproduced in the paperback editions. In fact, the paperback editions often omit genre categories altogether or only indicate them on the promotional *obi* (cover flap) (usually thrown away by the readers). The paperbacks themselves only carry the name of the specific publishing label. So when Eban Fumi's manga *Burū furendo* (Blue friend; 2010/11) was serialized in Shūeisha's *shōjo* manga magazine *Ribon* (Ribbon), it was referred to as "girl meets girl youth white paper" (*Ribon* 2010/6, 267). When it was published in paperback format, the *obi* called it a *yuri* manga, but the paperback itself only carried the name of the publishing label *Ribon Mascot Comics*.

To say that genres are discursively produced does not mean that every text can be assigned to every genre (and vice versa). As Mittell (2004) argues, "genres work as *discursive clusters*, with certain definitions, interpretations, and evaluations coming together at any given time to suggest a coherent and clear genre." (17; emphasis in original) Through the discourse, a general idea about the nature of a specific genre is developed. This general idea includes the genre's key characteristics as well as its canon, i.e. the texts that together form the genre's corpus. It serves producers and audiences as guideline for assigning other texts to the genre in question, but is not a strict and stable rule, and may be discursively changed. In the following discussion of the discourse on the *yuri* genre, I show how the *yuri* genre is defined, what characteristics and what canon are regularly associated with it.

Sources of the Discourse on the Yuri *Genre*

When I refer to the Japanese discourse on the *yuri* genre, I rely on written/transcribed discursive statements in Japanese. On the producers' side, there are three parties of the discourse: (1) Manga magazine editors who are or have been in charge of *yuri* manga: As I will discuss in chapter 8, editors at Japanese manga magazines can almost be considered co-creators of manga. Their opinion matters most when it comes to deciding about new serializations and their assessment of certain genres plays an important role in this regard, also influencing how they position the manga they supervise on the market. Here, I rely on my

interviews with ten manga editors. (2) The content and design of *yuri* manga magazines and anthologies: The existence of manga magazines specializing in a certain genre is usually judged to be the proof for the genre being established on the Japanese manga market. Journalistic articles on the *yuri* genre usually refer to at least one *yuri* manga magazine or anthology, often including an interview with an editor. Hence *yuri* manga magazines (or rather, their editorial staff) play a decisive role for disseminating a specific image of the *yuri* genre. This is even true when we ignore the actual fictional content, since the design alone sends a certain message. I rely on a convenience sample of seventeen *yuri* manga magazines: all five issues of *Yuri shimai* (Lily sisters), nine issues of *Komikku yuri hime* (Comic lily princess), three issues of *Komikku yuri hime S* (Comic lily princess S) and eighteen volumes of various *yuri* manga anthologies. (3) The guidebook *Yuri sakuhin fairu* (File of *yuri* works) (Sugino 2008): Especially for people unacquainted with a given genre, guidebooks play an important role (Altman 2004, 93). They aim to provide historical overviews and guide their readers through the diversity of a genre to help them gain a better understanding of it, thus giving a very concise image of the genre. For the *yuri* genre, the (to date) only guidebook *Yuri sakuhin fairu* is part of the producers' side of the discourse: it was written by the editorial staff of the *yuri* manga magazines *Komikku yuri hime* and *Komikku yuri hime S* and therefore reiterates many ideas previously voiced in these two magazines.

With respect to the audience, I focus on three subgroups that have three different angles on the *yuri* genre: an entertainment, a commercial and an academic one. These can result into different opinions. These three parties of the Japanese discourse on the *yuri* genre are: (1) Fans of the *yuri* genre in Japan: As I will discuss in detail in Part III, fans are probably the audience's most important subgroup. Henry Jenkins (1992b) argues that fans evaluate single episodes of a longer series on the basis of how well they conform to their idealized image of the series as a whole (97). For example, if a series is seen as crime drama, an episode about two characters' romance might not be highly regarded. I would argue that the same is true for the *yuri* genre: fans evaluate every new text on the basis of how well it fits their idealized image of the whole genre. The better a text fits, the more popular it will become. To assess the opinions of the *yuri* genre's fans in Japan, I rely on the almost 500 comments on my online survey, many of which describe the particular characteristics individual fans like about the *yuri* genre. (2) Journalists writing for Japanese anime and general interest magazines: Articles on the *yuri* genre often aim to give their audiences a basic understanding of the genre, but in the way they report about it, they also shape the image the readers get of it. This process is also known as "agenda-setting": media bring certain topics to the public agenda, but they also

structure these topics thereby influencing the public's perception of them (see McCombs 2014 for details). For my analysis, I rely on articles about the *yuri* genre in general, published between 2005 and 2012, a total of fifteen sources. The magazine *Megami Magazine Lily* (Goddess magazine lily; Satō 2011) and the *yuri* special of the art magazine *Kikan S* (S quarterly) were each counted as one source. (3) Japanese scholars writing on the *yuri* genre, whose accounts are influenced by their theoretical background. Here I rely on the works published until 2012: Kumata Kazuo's (2005) study of Japanese male fans of the *yuri* genre and Akaeda Kanako's (2010) general overview of the *yuri* genre.

I now trace the five main topics of these six parties of the Japanese discourse on the *yuri* genre: (1) the origin of the genre name *yuri* and possible alternative names; (2) the relationship between *yuri* and pornography, and between *yuri* and "homosexuality"/ "lesbians"; (3) the definition of the *yuri* genre; (4) the main characteristics of the *yuri* genre; (5) the *yuri* genre's canon. This is the groundwork for Part I, where I further discuss how those texts that in the discourse are identified as milestones of the *yuri* genre's historic development fit the discursively established key characteristics of the *yuri* genre.

Discourse on the Yuri *Genre's Name*

As discussed, the term *yuri* originally refers to the flower "lily." The further proposed genealogy of the genre name *yuri* (or at least parts of it) can be found in the *Yuri sakuhin fairu* (Sugino 2008, 77–79, 107), in chronological tables in *yuri* manga magazines (NOV 2010b; "Yuri history rewind" 2012; "Yuri no hana saku" 2003), in journalistic articles (Endō 2009, 87; "Hajimete no GL" 2009, 197; "Kinkyū kikaku" 2006, 58; "Rezubian & baisekushuaru kara mita" 2009, 57; Yamada 2005), in scholarly writing (Akaeda 2010, 277–78; Kumata 2005, 74–76) and also on various websites. It was also mentioned by some of the manga editors I interviewed. The consensus is as follows:

The usage of *yuri* in relation to female same-sex intimacy originated in the 1970s in Japan's first magazine for "homosexual" men, *Barazoku* (Rose tribe). In this magazine, a regular column for "lesbian" readers was called *Yurizoku no heya* (Room of the lily tribe). *Barazoku*'s editor-in-chief Itō Bungaku chose the flower *yuri* as an antonym to the magazine's eponymous flower *bara* (rose). In the 1980s, film company Nikkatsu used the term *yuri* for its series of *roman poruno* ("romantic porno"—pornographic movies produced by Nikkatsu between 1971 and 1988)[4] with two female actresses, *Sērā fuku yurizoku* (Lily tribe in school uniforms). Among fans of manga and anime, the term *yuri* proliferated in the

late 1990s and early 2000s with the boom of the series *Maria-sama ga miteru* (en. *Maria Watches Over Us*). As genre name, *yuri* only started being broadly recognized from the mid-2000s after the introduction of the specialized *yuri* manga magazines *Yuri shimai* and later *Komikku yuri hime*.

As clear and simple as this narrative sounds, it is neither complete nor without contradictions.[5] As Akaeda Kanako (2010, 280–82) and James Welker (2011, 219–21) demonstrate, *Yurizoku no heya* was not a column exclusively for "lesbian" readers of *Barazoku*. While some of the letters came from women who felt attracted to other women, others for example came from "heterosexual" females who wanted to understand or even marry "homosexual" men. Only for Itō Bungaku himself the term *yuri* seemed to be identical with "lesbian" (Akaeda 2010, 280), although it remains unclear why he chose the flower *yuri*. In *Barazoku* the shorthand equation "*yurizoku* = 'lesbians'" did not take root until the 1980s (281–82).

Akaeda (2010) and Welker (2011) further emphasize the importance of the 1980s magazine *Allan* which contained manga and articles about male same-sex intimacy, particularly its personal ad column *Yuri tsūshin* (Lily messages). In it, the female advertisers sought intimate contacts with other female readers. The column was advertised as "for lesbiens (*sic*) only." Yet rather than using the terms *rezubian* or *rezu* in their ads, Akaeda (2010) points out, the advertisers used the term *yuri* (283). She therefore sees *Allan* as the origin of today's usage of the term *yuri* (284). However, as Welker (2011) elaborates, not even *yuri* seemed to have meant the same for every advertiser (219; see also Welker 2008). Hence, although there was at least some kind of connection between female same-sex intimacy and the term *yuri* in these magazines, it was an unstable one.

The flower lily and "lesbians" were also visually connected in another manga magazine, the short lived *Lady's Comic misuto* (Lady's comic mist; 1996–99). It featured almost exclusively pornographic manga with two adult female characters and heavily employed symbolic lily flowers. The magazine also contained articles on the topic "coming out" and Tokyo's "gay district" Shinjuku Ni-chōme. In the column *Saffō no yakata* (Sappho's hall), it printed pen friend requests of female readers aimed at other female readers, although not all of them used the term *rezubian*. From around 1997, the column's pages were adorned with illustrations by manga artist CHI-RAN who later drew manga for *Yuri shimai* and *Komikku yuri hime*.

In the anime magazine *Animage* we see the term *yuri* undergoing a change of meaning, getting disconnected from "lesbian," and instead being connected with the playful

interpretation of anime. In the December 1993 issue, manga artist Shibata Ami recounts an invitation from her friend "M-ko": "'You know, the person I want you to meet is *yuri*, *yu – ri* ♥' 'What?' 'A lesbian [*rezubian*].'" (Shibata 1993, 112) The term *yuri* is here written in *katakana* (Japanese syllabary usually reserved for foreign words) and used to refer to "homosexuality." Three years later, in the May 1996 issue of *Animage*, "*yuri*" is written with Chinese characters and now refers to female same-sex intimacy in a fictional context: An article on the television anime *Shinpi no sekai Eru Hazādo* (en. *El Hazard: The Wanderers*; 1995–96; dir. Akiyama Katsuhito) presents several frames from the series, each showing two of its female characters, and asks its readers which two characters would make the best couple. The article's headline reads "How many couplings? *El Hazard*: the *yuri* world?" (Takahashi 1996, 59) Here we see an early example of the idea that fans can re-interpret existing material and this is also an early hint on the significance of this practice for the *yuri* genre: "Coupling" refers to the practice of fans taking two characters from a source text and imagining them as a romantically involved couple, especially in fan works (Galbraith 2011, 221). Those characters can be a couple in the original text, but do not have to. The *Animage* article invites readers to form couples with the female characters of *Shinpi no sekai Eru Hazādo* although originally, the anime had no female-female couples.[6]

As disputed as the history of the term "*yuri*" for the genre about female same-sex intimacy is, today it is the term that is most commonly used. The term girls' love (*gāruzu rabu* or *ravu*) and its abbreviation GL, probably coined as an antonym of the term boys' love, remain less widely used and debated. Most manga editors I interviewed saw girls' love simply as an antonym of the term boys' love. E7 for example thought that *yuri* and girls' love meant the same thing, but that girls' love was used less often.[7] In practice, *yuri* and girls' love are more or less equivalent. The guidebook on the genre is called *Yuri sakuhin fairu*, but its cover sports the slogan "Best of GIRL'S (*sic*) LOVE!!" (Sugino 2008) The manga anthology *Tsubomi* (Flower bud) was advertised as "*yuri* anthology," but was published as part of the "Manga Time KR Comics GL series." Likewise, the respondents of my fan survey often used the terms *yuri* and GL interchangeably, but none of them discussed whether there were any differences between the two terms.[8] The fan works event GirlsLoveFestival defines its scope as "only works [with] girl love [*shōjo ren'ai*] (*yuri*/GL), [and] couplings of two girls" (Gāruzu rabu fesutibaru jimusho 2011). For Kumata (2005) as well, *yuri* and girls' love are identical (73). An exception is the literature magazine *Da Vinci* which uses the term GL but adds that the genre is "also sometimes called *yuri*" ("Hajimete no GL" 2009, 196). A differentiation between *yuri* as "innocent" and girls' love as "erotic" could have been

established in 2011, when publisher Ichijinsha issued the short-lived anthology *Girls Love* (*sic*) which specialized in slightly erotic *yuri* manga. To date, this has however not taken root—a situation similar to the one of boys' love and *yaoi* (Welker 2015, 66).

Outside Japan and also in some non-Japanese articles (e.g. Darlington and Cooper 2010, 165; Pagliassotti 2008a, 60), another term can be found as denoting texts about female same-sex intimacy: *shōjo ai* (literally "girl love"). It may have been coined by non-Japanese fans who were inspired by the term *shōnen ai* which had gained recognition via specialized magazines and websites.[9] Yet in Japan, the expression *shōjo ai* refers not to female same-sex intimacy but to the love of adults *for* girls—pedophilia, in other words. Kurata Yōko (2008) defines *shōjo ai* as "affection of an older person aimed at girls." She emphasizes that the term remains "somehow obscure and immoral" (157).[10] Japanese dictionaries have no entry for *shōjo ai*, but the term can be found in two other publications. One of them is a short story by Moroi Kaoru (1998): "Shōjo ai," published in 1997 in the magazine *Mondai shōsetsu* (Problem narratives), is the story of two men who are attracted to teenage girls. The second publication is the book *Shōjo ai* by Miyajima Kagami (2005) which explores the phenomenon of *lolicon*[11] (short for "Lolita complex"), which he defines as love of adults for (real) young girls. The book is of dubious nature since Miyajima demands public acceptance of this "love" which he distinguishes from pedophilia for not being sexual. Thus when talking about female same-sex intimacy in Japanese popular culture, the term *shōjo ai* should best be avoided.

Discourse on the Definition of the Yuri *Genre*

The discursive struggle concerning the *yuri* genre is not limited to the definitional scope of its name. Trying to define a certain genre is an important part of the cultural practices surrounding it (Mittell 2004, 14–16). The Japanese discourse on the *yuri* genre's definition is directly connected to the question of the term's relationship with pornography[12] and "homosexuality"/"lesbians."

The line between *yuri* and pornography is somewhat blurry, depending on the source one considers. The guidebook *Yuri sakuhin fairu* for example appears to slightly differentiate between *yuri* and pornography: Only one reviewed text is explicitly marked as pornographic, but is at the same time declared to be exceptional due to its art style: *Shōjo sekuto* (Girls sect) by Kurogane Ken (Sugino 2008, 34). Apart from this manga, the anthology *Komikku yuri hime Wildrose* (Comic lily princess Wildrose) is briefly mentioned and described as "anthology for adults about love [and] valuing body contact" (79).

Japanese journalistic accounts present a somewhat complicated picture of connecting and at the same time disconnecting *yuri* and pornography. Let us for example consider *Cyzo*, a magazine targeting especially male readers with a plethora of topics ranging from politics to technology. *Cyzo* draws a mixed picture of *yuri* which is at the same time both not erotic and placed in connection with pornographic content: In the October 2007 issue, adult video actress and director Myū "reviews" the *yuri* manga *Aoi hana* (en. *Sweet Blue Flowers*; Shimura Takako), but her article is more about pornographic videos than about the manga. Myū notes that more and more newly scouted adult video actresses are not opposed to appearing in *rezu mono* ("lesbian porn," i.e. pornographic films with two female actresses). On top of this, the short text advertises a pornographic movie where a "real lesbian" is raped by men. In contrast, *Aoi hana* is only described in small letters next to the main text (Cyzo 2007, 61). One year later, the picture changes and an article notes that many male readers of the *yuri* manga magazine *Komikku yuri hime* greatly dislike erotic depictions in *yuri* texts (Yasuda 2008, 38). Yet another year later, an interview features *Komikku yuri hime* editor-in-chief Nakamura Seitarō and *Komikku yuri hime mangaka* Eiki Eiki (*sic*) alongside Arikawa Chiri, a pin-up girl whose cup size is explicitly mentioned several times. Nevertheless, in the interview Nakamura emphasizes that not all readers of *Komikku yuri hime* are interested in representations of sexual activity between female characters (Endō 2009, 86). In an interview in the April 2011 issue of *Cyzo*, Nakamura further explains *Komikku yuri hime*'s editorial policy: sexual activity should be depicted without sex toys. The readers do not need them because they are "a replacement for males." *Yuri* is supposed to be "completely fantasy" (Yasuda 2011, 61).

Similarly complicated is the picture presented in the male-oriented magazine *Weekly Playboy* (not connected to the US American magazine *Playboy*). In the same issue, it features an article on *yuri* (Nishinaka 2011) and a large number of pin-up photos and interviews with female adult video actresses. The connection between *yuri* and pornography is also implicitly drawn in *Comp H's*, a "visual magazine with only beautiful girls." It does not explicitly mention pornography in its article on *yuri* ("Kinkyū kikaku" 2006), yet contains numerous pin-up posters of scantily dressed female anime characters.

In the comments I received on my online survey among fans of the *yuri* genre in Japan, only a few respondents addressed the relationship between *yuri* and pornography. A twenty-eight-year-old male wrote "I think that *yuri* has value simply because it's depicting the spirit rather than the body." Like the editor-in-chief of *Komikku yuri hime*, some of the editors I interviewed thought that the *yuri* genre did not have any erotic content and reasoned that the

readers would not want that. Kumata (2005) discusses a definition of the *yuri* genre according to which it is neither pornographic nor written from a "lesbian" point of view. It sees distinguishing between *yuri* and pornography as a matter of convenience because it is necessary to differentiate *yuri* from texts with two females aimed at males. It would be nonsense to draw a strict line between pornographic and non-pornographic material since there is a considerable amount of *yuri*-like texts in pornography. This definition further emphasizes that "not from a 'lesbian' point of view" does not mean "not 'lesbian.'" Rather, it excludes fiction written by "lesbians" as "lesbians" (73–74). This introduces the second point of reference in the Japanese discourse on the *yuri* genre's definition, the relationship between *yuri* and "homosexuality"/"lesbians."

As discussed, the term *yuri* was in the past directly linked to "lesbians," but today, this link has weakened considerably. On the producers' side, the guidebook *Yuri sakuhin fairu* does not particularly differentiate between *yuri* and "lesbian." It mentions the manga *Love my life* by Yamaji Ebine, the story of two "lesbian" Japanese women (Sugino 2008, 74), as well as non-Japanese live action movies that in the United States and Europe are usually counted as "lesbian movies" (e.g. *Kissing Jessica Stein*; 119) and the two (discontinued) Japanese "lesbian" magazines (*bian-kei kurasu magajin*) *anise* and *carmilla* (78).

Journalistic accounts rather disconnect *yuri* and "lesbians." An article in the anime magazine *Megami Magazine* asserts that "even though *yuri* and lesbian [*rezubian*] overlap in certain areas, they are not completely identical." ("Kinkyū kikaku" 2006, 56) Similarly, the article in *Weekly Playboy* wonders whether *yuri* was not jargon for "lesbian." In the same article, *Komikku yuri hime* editor-in-chief Nakamura states that "in general, [*yuri* is] not [about] lesbians [*rezubian*] with a carnal relationship" (Nishinaka 2011, 58). An article in the youth culture magazine *QuickJapan* notes that "queer" and "lesbian" magazines in the 1990s were opposed to the term *yuri*, presumably because of its prior connection to pornography (Yamada 2005, 29). Still today, Japanese "lesbians" often take a critical stance on *yuri*, as I will discuss in chapter 10.

In the comments on my online survey, a number of respondents addressed the relationship between *yuri* and "lesbian." All of them were male, and mostly only interested in females as partners in a relationship. Their accounts are markedly similar: *yuri* is not sexual, but "lesbian" is. A twenty-two-year-old thought that "lesbian" (*rezubian*) and *yuri* were different things. A thirty-nine-year-old wrote "Personally, I accept and understand that '*yuri*' isn't limited to mere homosexuality or … [homosexual] actions, but also includes spiritual bonds …[,] connections, trust, and relationships that are more than friendship but less than

love." A twenty-three-year-old claimed that "in Japan, the nuances of the meanings of the term '*yuri*' and the term 'lesbian' [*rezu*] are subtly different. Both signify love between girls, but there's the nuance is that '*yuri*' [continues] until the depiction of 'love' [*suki*], whereas 'lesbian' includes the depiction of sexual acts (but I think there aren't that many people who clearly understand that difference)." A thirty-two-year-old gave the following definition: "*Yuri*: the medium is 2D. Stresses spiritual bonds. Aesthetic. Lesbian [*rezubian*]: the medium is 3D. Stresses carnal bonds. Realistic." Similarly, a twenty-one-year-old wrote "Concerning the definition of *yuri*/GL, I think that they indicate relationships [ranging] from friends to lovers (not including sexual meddling) (in case it includes sexual meddling, it's lesbian [*rezu*])." Similar opinions were also voiced by some of the editors I interviewed.

Thus the line between *yuri* and "lesbian"/"homosexuality" is at least as blurry as the one between *yuri* and pornography. One problem of this discourse is that the term *rezubian* is used in many instances, but that it is almost never made clear what exactly it is referring to. It could be texts, fictional characters, actual persons or a specific "sexual identity." In contrast, *yuri* always refers to fictional texts and/or characters which could suggest that *yuri* is at least partly disconnected from the discourse about sexual minorities.

As mentioned, the *yuri* genre's definition is by now considered a minefield, and this already started in the genre's early days. The only *yuri* manga magazine in my sample to give a definition is the first volume of the first ever *yuri* manga magazine, *Yuri shimai*. It already acknowledges that there are various definitions of the *yuri* genre: "Depending on the person, it [i.e. *yuri*] means once and for all the very thing 'lesbian' [*rezubian*] female, or also sex between two females in adult comics aimed at males. We negate none of these [definitions]." Nevertheless, here *yuri* is defined as "the overdone affection between two girls peculiar to girls in puberty," adding that it is "a limited-time pseudo love" ("Yuri no hana saku" 2003, 56). The manga in *Yuri shimai* reflect this insofar as they rarely feature adult characters. In the aforementioned interview with *Weekly Playboy*, *Yuri shimai* and *Komikku yuri hime* editor-in-chief Nakamura later defines the *yuri* genre in a different way: "In general, not lesbians [*rezubian*] with carnal relationships, but spiritual connections close to love that go one step further than friendship and which are for example temporarily held by high school girls, are called '*yuri*'" (Nishinaka 2011, 58). This definition echoes the already discussed differentiation between *yuri* and "lesbian." It furthermore refers to an important set of descriptive attributes: the opposition between "spiritual" and "carnal" relationships. The *yuri* genre is regularly associated with precisely the kind of spiritual bonds described here.

Similarly, many of the editors I interviewed noted that *yuri* manga usually did not contain any sex scenes and that readers did not want them to.

"Exact" definitions of the *yuri* genre are much more common in Japanese journalistic articles. One of the earliest examples can be found in *QuickJapan* where *yuri* is defined as a "genre that depicts 'love between girls'" (Yamada 2005, 29). A similar description can be found in the *yuri* special of the manga information magazine *Pafu* which states that *yuri* manga anthologies collect "works depicting love and [other] relationships between girls" (Yamamoto 2010, 26). In *Cyzo*, the description of the *yuri* genre reads: "'*Yuri*'…… These are fascinating *shōsetsu* and manga works where the state of love or strong friendships woven by two beautiful females (mostly adolescent beautiful girls) are depicted." (Endō 2009, 84; ellipsis in original) A 2011 article in the same magazine says that *yuri* is the "genre of works whose topic is love between females or friendships that resemble it" (Yasuda 2011, 60). In the women's fashion magazine *anan*, a 2012 special about female bonding develops a coordinate system to categorize various kinds of relationships between females. The *yuri* genre is positioned between the coordinates "cute" and "love and hate," and is described with the expressions "more than friends but less than lovers" and "heart-throbbing atmosphere" (Kawano 2012, 55).

Japanese scholars as well give clear definitions of the *yuri* genre. As discussed, Kumata (2005) cites from a longer definition according to which the *yuri* genre encompasses "stories about female homosexuality (or resembling it)" (73). Akaeda (2010) gives a different definition, writing that *yuri* depicts "intimate relationships between females, especially 'girls'" (277).

Unlike all these straightforward definitions, fans of the *yuri* genre are very cautious about giving a definition of the genre, possibly because they are aware that almost everyone has their own—something that was noted by three male participants of my online survey (ages: nineteen, twenty-four and twenty-eight). This discomfort with fixed definitions might be reflected by the shift that occurred in the discourse on the *yuri* genre in the early 2010s: instead of asking "What is *yuri*?" the aspect "In which ways can you enjoy *yuri*?" came to the fore (Tamago 2011, 80). This is also further evidence that interpreting texts is more important for the *yuri* genre than considerations of its (supposed) "true nature."

But actual definitions might not even matter that much. Foucault (1972, 49) postulates that descriptions are more powerful than definitions. Hence it is necessary to consider which characteristics of the *yuri* genre are emphasized in the Japanese discourse on the genre. These descriptions convey a certain image of the content of the genre even to those who are not familiar with the actual texts.

On a meta-level, this image of the *yuri* genre can readily be seen in some of the taglines of *yuri* manga magazines and anthologies where the *yuri* genre is associated with pure love and the exclusion of males: "Prohibited to males!! A secret love tied with a ribbon" (*Yuri shimai*); "Prohibited to males!! Comics about the secret pure love between girl and girl" (*Komikku yuri hime* until 2010); "Prohibited to males!? A cute and lovely comic magazine that snipes at your heart" (*Komikku yuri hime S*); "A comic anthology about a maiden loving a maiden" (*es: etānaru shisutāzu* [eternal sisters], vol. 2); "Manga about the juicy love between girls" (*Komikku yuri hime Wildrose*); "The sweet and gentle *yuri* anthology" (*Tsubomi*); "The pure *yuri* anthology" (*Hirari* [Lightly]).

A similar image is conveyed by Japanese journalistic articles on the *yuri* genre and by the respondents of my survey among fans of the *yuri* genre in Japan. In the discursive statements in my sample, four adjectives were used particularly often for describing the characters in a certain *yuri* text, their relationship, and the text in general: "beautiful," "cute," "pure" and "heartrending." In the Japanese discourse on the *yuri* genre, the generally conveyed image it that of a genre about girls living in a beautiful, dream-like world with a hint of sadness as the protagonists' youth draws to a close. The characters have intense feelings for each other, but they stay innocent and pure ("maidens" even). The world they inhabit is mysterious and inaccessible, especially for males. In the end, *yuri* is therefore especially one thing: "a fantasy world detached from reality" (Nakamura S. 2008, 80).

As described, the flower lily was formerly associated with beauty and purity and this image is still prevalent in the genre named after it. The notions of "innocence" and "purity" are echoed in the already mentioned description of the *yuri* genre as being about "spiritual" rather than "carnal" bonds. This idea is evoked in many journalistic articles. For example, in the magazine *Comp H's* the author claims that the *yuri* genre places its emphasis on "spiritual connections," and concludes that texts which feature only a "connection between hearts" can be called *yuri*, but texts which feature only a "connection between bodies" cannot. *Yuri* should thus be defined as focusing on "relationships with spiritually special bonds" ("Kinkyū

kikaku" 2006, 56). In an article for *Cyzo*, *Komikku yuri hime* editor-in-chief Nakamura Seitarō (2008) characterizes the *yuri* genre as being about "a spiritual fusion that transcends the flesh." He argues that the readers of *yuri* manga want to read about exactly these kinds of relationships (80). This might be his personal opinion, but it is shared by others, for example the editor of the manga *Burū furendo*. He as well reasons that one of the appeals of *yuri* manga is "the depth of the emotional depiction" (Yasuda 2011, 61). In a way, this description of relationships in the *yuri* genre mirrors how in early twentieth century Japan female same-sex intimacy was described as "spiritual," contrasting it with the supposedly "carnal" same-sex relationships between men (Pflugfelder 2005, 157). This idea was still present in erotic magazines of the 1950s and early 1960s (McLelland 2005, 86–88).

The overall notion of "beauty" and "innocence" is further emphasized through the exclusion of males from the world of *yuri*. Until 2010, every *yuri* manga magazine carried the tagline "prohibited to males." This expression can also be found in journalistic articles. For example, the *yuri* genre is described as a "beautiful world prohibited to males," even as a taboo since it depicts a supposedly "forbidden love" (*kindan no ai*) ("Kinkyū kikaku" 2006, 52). In the magazine *Cyzo*, the *yuri* genre is even asserted to be a "taboo" topic for *shōjo* manga magazines (Yasuda 2011, 60). This notion of "taboo" and "prohibition" is an artificial one as intimate relationships between females are usually cherished and lauded.[13] "Prohibiting" the *yuri* genre to male readers was rather a marketing stunt, probably meant to create curiosity and attention. Yet while there are no laws in Japan that would prohibit intimate relationships between females (or males), some editors I interviewed noted that actual female-female couples had to face many difficulties in contemporary Japan, like social stigmatization (for details see McLelland, Suganuma and Welker 2007), and reasoned that precisely this complicated situation made *yuri* manga special. The artificial concept of female same-sex intimacy being forbidden and mysterious is reinforced by the frequent usage of the term "secret" to describe the kind of relationship depicted in *yuri* manga, and by calling all girls' schools the standard location of its texts (e.g. "Danshi kinsei" 2006, 108; Endō 2009, 84, 87). Since only students (and teachers) can enter the grounds of all girls' schools, they are considered a closed and therefore secret space. The first volume of *Yuri shimai* even carried a special on all girls' schools and what kind of life prospective students could expect there ("Joshikō e ikō" 2003).

The prevalence of "cuteness" in relation to the *yuri* genre is certainly connected to the fact that this is a valued attribute of females in today's Japanese society (Yomota 2006) and is especially emphasized in the design of characters in manga and anime (see also Galbraith

2009a). Where *yuri* is concerned, a sociologist even speculates that females like the genre precisely because it depicts cute girls (Kawano 2012, 59). The idea of cuteness is not only present in textual descriptions of the *yuri* genre, but also in its general art style and design. For example, until 2011, the covers of the *yuri* manga magazines *Yuri shimai* and *Komikku yuri hime* were kept in pastel colors (often pink, red or light blue) adorned with cute characters with large eyes. Most manga and anime associated with the *yuri* genre as well depict such cute characters.

As described, the *yuri* genre encompasses a broad variety of relationships. In the Japanese discourse on the genre, these are described with a variety of expressions, ranging from "love" (*ren'ai*, *ai* or *koi*), "friendship," "adoration" and "affection" to "emotional ties." While "love" has to involve romantic feelings on at least one side, a term like "affection" can also be used for characters that are depicted as being "just" good friends. However, the terms most often used to describe the relationships depicted in *yuri* texts are the ambiguous expressions *suki* and *daisuki*. *Suki* can mean anything from "to like" to "to love." In everyday Japanese, "food I like" and "a person I love" are both expressed using *suki* (see also Welker 2006, 179n21). The usage of such ambiguous expressions facilitates the assignment of new texts to the *yuri* genre: the various participants in the discourse might not agree on the degree of *suki* depicted in a particular text, but they might agree that the notion of *suki* is there.

Discourse on the Canon of the Yuri *Genre*

Together with the characteristics of the *yuri* genre, the different parties of the Japanese discourse also mention texts that each of them consider good examples of the genre. Some journalistic articles explicitly state that by introducing these texts they wish to help unacquainted readers to get to know the *yuri* genre. The special on the *yuri* genre in *Da Vinci* is for example called "First-time GL" and promises interested readers a careful selection of *yuri* texts for beginners ("Hajimete no GL" 2009, 202).

It can be expected that the introduced texts to a certain degree epitomize the characteristics of the *yuri* genre discussed previously. By presenting the history and present situation of the *yuri* genre, the parties of the discourse actively (re-)produce the *yuri* genre's canon which can in turn be adopted by others to form their own opinions and attitudes towards it. Mittell (2004) argues that "listing texts is a vital way in which critics [as well as producers and audiences] constitute genres for their further analysis. … The common practice of creating 'greatest' or 'best' lists of any given category operates as a specific moment in

which genre is manifested through defining and evaluative practices." (87) And yet, no canonical list of any genre can ever be complete and/or correct. If genres are understood as discursive practices, any list of texts is primarily an expression of this practice—"all lists … are inherently skewed and limited, as well as certainly being driven by particular tastes and contexts." (88) They express a particular selective definition of the genre, authored by a specific participant in the discourse on the genre (89).

Looking at the *yuri* genre, we find that indeed, Japanese producers, fans, journalists and scholars frequently list texts that should be considered forming the canon of the genre. Yet in contrast to those genres that Mittell discusses in his book, most parties in the discourse on the *yuri* genre agree that there is no one, clear definition of the genre—it is the interpretation that makes a specific text a *yuri* text. The aspect of imagination is even emphasized on the pages of *yuri* manga magazines, despite the fact that they offer manga content that is clearly labeled as "*yuri*". Volume two of *Yuri shimai* for example contains a special on *shōnen* and *seinen* manga that can be interpreted as being *yuri* manga. The manga introduced are evaluated according to how many *yuri* scenes (e.g. kisses between female characters) they contain and how many couplings readers can form ("Kono shōnen manga ga" 2003, 60). The topic of imagination remains important. In the May 2012 issue of *Komikku yuri hime* for example, an article encourages its readers to write their own fan fiction based on the text *Yuru yuri* (en. *Yuruyuri: Happy Go Lily*) ("SS o kakō!!" 2012). In various interviews, editor-in-chief Nakamura further actively propagates the idea of the *yuri* genre relying on interpretation. For example, in *Megami Magazine* he gives advice on how to enjoy various texts as *yuri* texts ("Danshi kinsei" 2006). The *yuri* special in *Da Vinci* as well tells its readers that "for the most part, it's up to the feelings of the recipient" ("Hajimete no GL" 2009, 200) whether a certain text is read as *yuri* text or not. And the motto of *Megami Magazine Lily* is "We fantasize about secret relationships between girls." Here we see a parallel with the boys' love genre where interpretations are equally important for its fans (e.g. Galbraith 2011).

The fans' interpretations are the driving force behind the popularity of the *yuri* genre. The fans do not merely read/watch *yuri* texts but are actively forming their own couples with the female characters they encounter in them. To speak with the terms of Stuart Hall (1992), "decoding" is much more important for this genre than any "encoded" content. "Decoding" often takes the form of fan works. In my survey of *yuri* fans living in Japan, an overwhelming majority of more than 80% of respondents consumed such texts. The importance of interpretation is also reflected by the *yuri* genre's canon presented by the parties of the

Japanese discourse on the genre: it is not important whether the various listed texts are "really" *yuri* texts, but whether they are interpreted to be part of the genre.[14]

A quantitative analysis of my sample of discursive statements resulted in a list of 411 different texts as canon of the *yuri* genre, and the majority of these were not outright marketed as *yuri* texts. The *yuri* manga magazines *Yuri shimai*, *Komikku yuri hime* and *Komikku yuri hime S* list the largest number of canonical *yuri* texts of all sources considered. On the whole, I counted 272 different texts (manga serialized in the specific magazines were not counted).[15] *Komikku yuri hime S* seemed to be the least concerned with discussing the *yuri* genre's generic canon as it featured fewer articles on texts than its sister magazines. The three *yuri* manga magazines develop a historical canon of the *yuri* genre. The magazines in my sample were published between 2003 and 2012, but the ten texts mentioned most often all appeared before 2003: *Sakura no sono* (The cherry orchard; Yoshida Akimi; 1985/86) and *Ichigo mashimaro* (en. *Strawberry Marshmallow*; Barasui; since 2001) with six mentions each; *Maria-sama ga miteru* with five mentions; and *Apurōzu—kassai* (Applause, applause; Ariyoshi Kyōko; 1981–82, 1985, 1991, 1997–99), *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* (en. *Sailor Moon*; Takeuchi Naoko; 1992–96), *Kādo Kyaputā Sakura* (en. *Cardcaptor Sakura*; CLAMP; 1996–2000), *Loveless* (Kōga Yun; since 2001) and *Shōjo kakumei Utena* (en. *Revolutionary Girl Utena*; 1997, 1999) with four mentions each. The perceived importance of forming a historical canon is all the more obvious given that three issues in my sample contain a section on the "history of the *yuri* genre" in the form of a chronological table (NOV 2010b; "Yuri history rewind" 2012; "Yuri no hana saku" 2003). Anime do not play a big role in this list which rather focuses on manga and light novels. We also see the importance of interpretation: none of the top ten texts was outright marketed as *yuri* text—they were all retroactively assigned to the genre.

My sample of journalistic articles on the *yuri* genre mentions a total of 134 different *yuri* texts. This list as well centers on texts that were not initially positioned as *yuri* texts by their producers. The top five text were: *Maria-sama ga miteru* with seven mentions; *Aoi hana*, *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon*, *Hana monogatari* and *Sasameki koto* (en. *Whispered Words*; Ikeda Takashi; 2007–11) with five mentions each. Some of these texts were popular at the time the articles were written, which is not surprising given that journalists usually report on novelties. However, this further emphasizes the perceived importance of the texts published before that time: *Maria-sama ga miteru*, *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* and *Hana monogatari*. Similar to *yuri* manga magazines, the main canon of the *yuri* genre in journalistic articles consists exclusively of manga, *shōsetsu* and light novels. One reason might be that anime

DVDs/BDs are relatively expensive compared to printed texts. People unacquainted with the *yuri* genre would probably rather spend a little bit of money on a book than a lot of money on a DVD/BD—especially if they were not sure whether they liked the genre.

What is written about the *yuri* genre does not necessarily reflect what is popular among its fans. In my online survey among *yuri* fans in Japan, I asked the respondents (N = 1,352) to give up to five favorite *yuri* works and thus obtained a list of 466 (identifiable) different texts. They ran the gamut from *shōjo* and *shōnen* manga to anime, video games and even live action movies and artists such as the Japanese music idol group AKB48. Some respondents even gave the titles of specific fan works, emphasizing their importance for the *yuri* genre. 1.3% of respondents did not give any specific title, and 34.5% of respondents gave five titles. The five most popular titles were: *Maria-sama ga miteru* (26.6%), *Yuru yuri* (23.2%), *Aoi hana* (15.9%), *Strawberry Panic* (dir. Sakoi Masayuki; 2006) (13.5%) and *Shōjo sekuto* (11.2%). As I will discuss in detail in chapter 10, the popularity of each text varies tremendously by gender and "sexual identity," but what we already see here is that like *yuri* manga magazines and Japanese journalistic articles, the fans mostly list texts that were not officially marketed as *yuri* texts. The only exception is *Yuru yuri*, the first successful anime to be positioned as *yuri* anime from the beginning. Since its first season aired during my survey, it is probably not surprising that it was named by so many respondents as their favorite title.[16] There are further parallels between the five titles: all of them are set at all girls' schools, all of them have a media franchise of at least a manga and an anime version, and all of them (with the exception of the long running hit series *Maria-sama ga miteru*) debuted in or after 2003.

Fans actively create the *yuri* genre's canon also beyond surveys. On Japanese online platforms such as 2channeru and Mixi, they write long lists of texts that every fan of the genre should know. There are also websites completely or partly devoted to listing every *yuri* text ever made. Some of these sites also involve an evaluation of these texts, for example based on whether main or side characters are depicted as having an intimate relationship. These lists as well are based on interpretations, as they do not only list texts officially marketed as *yuri* texts. Such canon formation was also visible at the *yuri* fan works event GirlsLoveFestival. Its organizers gave the participants paper forms on which they could recommend a *yuri* text. This form explicitly asked whether the recommended text was officially produced as a *yuri* title or whether the participant's imagination made it a *yuri* text.

Since there is no consensus which texts are part of the *yuri* genre's canon, whichever ones I choose for further analysis, I will not do justice to all parties in the discourse. Hence I decided to focus on the discursively established history of the *yuri* genre and on those texts

that in the discourse are considered milestones in this development. I do this because the *yuri* genre's history was frequently mentioned by fans and editors I spoke to, and is explicitly discussed in eight sources in my sample (Akaeda 2010; Endō 2009; "Hajimete no GL" 2009; Kumata 2005; NOV 2010b; Sugino 2008; "Yuri history rewind" 2012; "Yuri no hana saku" 2003). By following this basic consensus, I avoid discussing simply what was popular during the time of my research.[17] The history that is discursively developed is as follows:

The *yuri* genre's roots lie in the *shōjo shōsetsu* of the 1910s to 1930s, most importantly *Hana monogatari* by Yoshiya Nobuko (seven mentions) and *Otome no minato* (The maidens' harbor) by Kawabata Yasunari (one mention). The next important step occurred in the early 1970s which saw the publication of two *shōjo* manga: Yashiro Masako's *Shīkuretto rabu* (Secret love; four mentions) and Yamagishi Ryōko's *Shiroi heya no futari* (The two girls in the white room; five mentions). In the 1990s, a new boom was sparked by the series *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* (seven mentions). The *yuri* genre finally took root in the early 2000s with the success of the series *Maria-sama ga miteru* (eight mentions).

Obviously, this history is not without gaps. This does not mean that no texts were produced during those years, but rather that in the Japanese discourse on the *yuri* genre, these are not considered to be important for understanding the genre's development. In following this supposedly straight history, I am not suggesting that it really occurred that way. Rather, it carries meaning for the parties involved in the discourse and must be discussed as such. None of the texts in this "history" was explicitly positioned as *yuri* text, they were all discursively assigned to it. In the following five chapters, I discuss in more detail how these six texts represent female same-sex intimacy and how they fit the discursively established image of the *yuri* genre. Additionally, I will shed light on some more recent developments with four texts that are I perceive as important for understanding today's *yuri* genre: *Shōjo sekuto*, *Aoi hana*, *Yuru yuri* and *Yuri danshi*. The main questions of the following chapters are how these texts that for the most part were not produced as *yuri* texts came to be associated with a genre that most of them even predate, how they construct female same-sex intimacy, and how they fit with the discursively developed image of the *yuri* genre.

Notes

1. Mio Bryce's and Jason Davis' (2010) account of genres in manga mixes the aspects of form and content. For example, they provide a subsection on fantasy manga, including the *shōjo* manga *Mājinaru* (Marginal) by Hagio Moto, but then continue with *shōjo* manga in general.

2. The situation does not seem to have changed since the mid-1990s (Harald Meyer, pers. comm.).

3. See for example Hori (2009) on erotic/pornographic manga or Bolton, Csicsery-Ronay, and Tatsumi (2007) on science fiction in Japanese popular culture.

4. With thanks to Doris Lang.

5. In the glossary of the boys' love volume edited by Levi, McHarry and Pagliassotti (2008), it is speculated that "'yuri' derives from many characters depicted [in] the genre being named Yuriko" ("Glossary" 2008, 262). However, during my research, I did not come across any *yuri* text in which a character was named Yuriko (or even Yuri).

6. One of the minor female characters is shown as adoring other female characters, usually for comic relief. The series' OVA version has an actual female-female couple.

7. Interview with editor E7 (male), February 27, 2012

8. The reason might be that I used the expression "*yuri*/GL" in the questionnaire, suggesting that I saw the terms as equivalent.

9. In stark contrast to the usage of the term *yuri* in Japan, outside Japan, the term *yuri* often signifies sexual content whereas the term *shōjo ai* signifies non-sexual content.

10. Some fans outside Japan are well aware of the problematic nature of the term *shōjo ai* and are urging for abandoning it, so far with limited success.

11. Patrick Galbraith (2009b, 205) claims that in the 1980s, the terms *shōjo ai* and *lolicon* were used interchangeably in Japan. I could not find any sources to back this up.

12. I understand pornography as texts depicting secondary sexual organs and sexual activities in order to sexually arouse the audience (Hori 2009, 13).

13. See for example the special on female bonding in *anan* (Kawano 2012).

14. Such interpretations can change over time. Here, I present the status quo in mid-2012.

15. As mentioned, mine is a limited sample. The number of texts mentioned in all issues of the magazines should be even larger.

16. Lists by fans always reflect what is popular at the time. Compare for example this list to the ones in the *Yuri sakuhin fairu* (Sugino 2009, 140–41).

17. This is not to say that I did not consider any other texts. Over the years of researching and writing this study, I have read approximately 250 volumes of *yuri* manga and more than forty volumes of *yuri shōsetsu* and light novels, and have watched more than 400 hours of *yuri* anime. Without this in-depth knowledge, I would not have gotten into such close contact with fans and editors as I was able to.

Part I. Content of the *Yuri* Genre

Chapter 2. "Sisterhood" before World War II: *Hana monogatari* and *Otome no minato*

Although most *yuri* texts today come in the form of manga and anime, the Japanese discourse on the genre locates its historical roots in early twentieth century narrative prose for girls, or *shōjo shōsetsu*.[1] Like manga today, these were serialized in popular girls' magazines between the late Meiji (1868–1912) and the early Shōwa (1926–89) period. Following the discourse on the *yuri* genre, I examine two exceptionally popular texts: Yoshiya Nobuko's *Hana monogatari* and Kawabata Yasunari's/Nakazato Tsuneko's *Otome no minato*. In these two *shōjo shōsetsu*, the notions of "beauty" and "innocence" are especially highlighted. Female same-sex intimacy is constructed as passionate, but at the same time innocent and limited to a certain period of time. Male characters are excluded from this world, yet the intimate relationship is not depicted as something that is "secret" or "forbidden." Although neither *Hana monogatari* nor *Otome no minato* were officially positioned as texts about female same-sex intimacy, these overall characteristics make it possible to interpret them as *yuri* texts today.

Japanese Modernization and Female Education

Shōjo shōsetsu have to be considered in their historical context. With the beginning of the Meiji period in 1868, Japan entered a period of modernization after more than 200 years of almost complete isolation. Japanese politicians were eager to close the gap on the United States and Europe and from the start, education was judged as important in this regard—particularly that both males and females should obtain at least primary education (Marshall 1994, 26, 33). In 1872, elementary school became mandatory for boys and girls (37).[2] Higher education at public institutions at first remained reserved for boys, so female higher education was provided by private schools that were often run by Christian missionaries (45) and were hence commonly referred to as "mission schools."[3]

Eventually, the 1899 *Kōtō jogakkō rei* (Edict on higher girls' schools) mandated that public higher girls' schools had to be established in all prefectures (article 2), so that girls from age twelve could obtain the "absolutely necessary higher normal education" (article 1). In general, higher girls' school should last for four years, but three or five years were also permissible (article 9). In addition to the edict, the state legally recognized some of the previously established private institutions (Marshall 1994, 74).

Yet even if public and private institutions are taken together, the total number of higher girls' schools was so small that attending one was a privilege that only few girls enjoyed. In 1901, about 17,500 girls attended seventy higher girls' schools, and by 1941 the numbers had risen to around 617,000 students at 1,126 schools (Pflugfelder 2005, 180n14). In 1945, about 800,000 students were attending higher girls' schools (Marshall 1994, 140). In relation to the total number of girls in Japan, this means that in 1905 about 4% attended higher girls' schools, in 1920 it was 12% and in 1930 a mere 16% (94). By 1945, about 25% of all girls attended higher girls' schools (Inagaki 2007, 6).

There were two main factors for these (by today's standards) low numbers. Firstly, it was a question of money: the higher girls' schools charged monthly tuition (Uchida and Yayoi bijutsukan 2005, 19) and attending often necessitated moving to a larger city which entailed added costs for living in a boarding house or dormitory (Marshall 1994, 66). Secondly, not all parents were willing to let their daughters study. Even among society's higher strata, not all families found higher education for girls necessary (Uchida and Yayoi bijutsukan 2005, 19).

At the schools, the girls were educated to become *ryōsai kenbo*—"good wives and wise mothers."[4] It was believed that only educated women were able to educate their children and thus foster the growth of the Japanese state (Marshall 1994, 44–45). However, as Shizuko Koyama (2013) notes, "while proclaiming themselves devoted to producing *ryōsai kenbo* they [the higher girls' schools] were not, in fact, very thorough in teaching subjects related to housekeeping and childrearing," (44) as can be seen from the hours allotted to the individual subjects (43).[5] Nevertheless, at the schools ever more girls learnt how to read and write. Coupled with the public recognition of girlhood as a distinct period in the life of a woman (Kan and Fujimoto 2008, 6), industrialization and the expansion of industrial mass production, girls became an important economic target group. Most prominent among the countless new products for them were the monthly girls' magazines.

Girls' Magazines

In Japan, magazines aimed at young readers appeared from 1888 onwards when the first issue of *Shōnen en* (Young people's place) was published.[6] Especially important for the later development of *shōjo shōsetsu* was the magazine *Shōnen sekai* (Young people's world), published from 1895.[7] It was the first magazine to include a separate column with stories for girls (Kan and Fujimoto 2008, 7). Seven years later, in 1902, the inaugural issue of the first

magazine aimed solely at girls, *Shōjo kai* (Girls' world),[8] was published, cementing the division between magazines aimed at boys and magazines aimed at girls. The girls' magazines of the pre-World War II era were targeting a "mainstream, popular audience" (Suzuki 2010, 32). Three of them are considered to have been particularly influential:[9]

- *Shōjo no tomo* (Girls' friend; 1908–55; Jitsugyō no Nihonsha) had a print run of more than 80,000 copies and targeted[10] girls from upper elementary school age onward. It was especially read by girls of the new middle class and was famous for the illustrations by male artist Nakahara Jun'ichi.
- *Shōjo gahō* (Girls' illustrated; 1912–42; Tōkyōsha[11]) began as a sister publication of *Fujin gahō* (Women's illustrated) which was aimed at adult women. *Shōjo gahō* focused on the entertainment world as well as on the life of school girls. Particularly famous were the illustrations by male artist Takabatake Kashō.
- *Shōjo kurabu* (Girls' club; 1923–62; Dai-Nippon yūbenkai kōdansha[12]) had the biggest print run of all girls' magazines with almost 500,000 copies in the late 1930s. It targeted girls from the upper years of elementary school to the lower years of high school. Unlike its biggest competitor *Shōjo no tomo*, it was also read by girls in the countryside. *Shōjo kurabu* was famous for its supplements as well as for its long *shōsetsu*.

All girls' magazines were of A5 size (ca. 15 x 22 cm), with a colored cover (later also back) usually showing an illustration with one or two girls. In the early years, the magazines were rather thin and of low paper quality, but during their heydays in the 1930s, they had between 300 and 400 pages, some of them even colored. The price was around fifty sen (0.5 yen) per issue which was fairly expensive given that *soba* noodles cost around ten sen and pork cutlet around twenty-five sen (Uchida and Yayoi bijutsukan 2005, 8).[13]

The girls' magazines were highly visual, beginning with the illustrated cover. The main part of the magazines was usually headed by standalone (often colored) illustrations, some of which could also be folded (and cut) out. The most popular illustrators of girls' magazines were all male, for example Takehisa Yumeji (1884–1934), Takabatake Kashō (1888–1966) and Nakahara Jun'ichi (1913–83) (Uchida and Yayoi bijutsukan 2005, 65–73).[14] Their illustrations are also known as *jojōga* or "lyrical pictures." Aimed at girls, they were a standard feature of girls' magazines. In contrast to classical *ukiyoe* and *nihon-ga*, *jojōga* were highly romantic (65), depicting girls with exaggerated eyes and willowy limbs (Shamoon 2012, 57) and "evok[ing] a quiet, sentimental, sometimes mournful mood." Their "chic modern look" (61) was influenced by (amongst others) European Art Nouveau (63).

The magazines further contained articles illustrated with photographs, for example about the life of girls or reports on the magazine's authors and illustrators, and often came with supplements like small books, card games or paper dolls. Yet their main selling point were the serialized, illustrated *shōsetsu*.[15] In all magazines, readers were encouraged to submit letters as well as their own stories and illustrations to readers' columns (Uchida and Yayoi bijutsukan 2005, 8–10).[16] On the pictures as well as in the texts, "one of the features of prewar girls' magazines … [was] the depiction of close friendships and even romance between girls" (Shamoon 2008, 137). There were various terms to designate such female same-sex intimacy, but from around the 1920s on, *esu* became the dominant one (Pflugfelder 2005, 136).[17]

Esu *between Reality and Fiction*

The term *esu* was coined by Japanese higher girls' school students and is derived from the Japanese pronunciation of the letter "s" as an acronym of the English term "sister." *Esu* usually denoted an intimate relationship between an older and a younger student, but sometimes also between a young teacher and a student.[18] The general idea was that "one partner … [was] the protector and … [became] the *o-nē-sama* [older sister[19]] [and] the other partner … [was] the protected *imōto* [younger sister]" (Uchida and Yayoi bijutsukan 2005, 14). Gregory Pflugfelder (2005) notes that due to the age difference between the two girls, *esu* was not an equal relationship, but that it nevertheless carried notions of "emotional intensity and warm trust" (139).

To twenty-first century readers, *esu* might seem like just another term for "lesbian." However, I would agree with Shamoon (2012) that we cannot simply apply contemporary concepts of "sexual identity" to a time when those concepts were not yet known. "These bonds … were normative within girls' culture in the 1920s and 1930s, and helped to develop the dominant aesthetics of girls' culture: purity, elegance, innocence, and chastity." (30) They were modeled on the concept of spiritual love (*ren'ai*; 29, 37–38).

Esu relationships were mostly deemed socially acceptable, "a positive training ground for future kindnesses to husbands and children," "a natural stage in life, innocent and commonplace. Many thought them to be non-physical platonic relationships and thus unthreatening." Nevertheless, the girls were expected to get married to a man after graduation (Frederick 2005, 68). Hence, *esu* relationships ended as soon as the *o-nē-sama* graduated. The previously younger partner was then free to look for her own younger partner. Limited to a short time in the girls' lives, *esu* relationships were ultimately seen as innocent, involving the

exchange of many letters[20] between the partners (Uchida and Yayoi bijutsukan 2005, 38). "Such female ties were considered an expected outcome of a sexually segregated society; in other words, the girls were seen as simply expressing their affectionate, emotive natures and budding sexuality (unperceived by themselves) within a same-sex environment." (Suzuki 2010, 26)[21]

Since the readership of Japanese girls' magazines was largely made up of higher girls' school students, *esu* relationships were often addressed in the magazines' advice columns where they were usually regarded as something positive (Uchida and Yayoi bijutsukan 2005, 94–96).[22] In the 1930s, most *shōjo shōsestsu* in *Shōjo no tomo* were about *esu* (Imada 2011, 1). *Shōjo shōsetsu*, written with girls as assumed readers in mind (Kan and Fujimoto 2008, 6), "typically focused on the inner feelings of their young girl heroines, who personified desirable feminine virtues and expressed those feelings in a flowery, emotional prose style." (Takahashi 2008, 115) The morals of the time demanded that girls be kept away from the other sex, so boys were often excluded from fictional stories as well. But since girls' magazines should educate their readers on how to love, they published stories about friendship between two girls (Kume 2003, 9). The stories in the girls' magazines influenced the reader submissions, so the readers' pages were full of declarations of affection for other girls (10), although it is unclear how many of these submissions were actually based on reality (Yokokawa 2001, 5–6).

Although *esu* and *yuri* obviously share some characteristics, like the perceived innocence, the connection has so far not received much scholarly attention. It is briefly mentioned by Nagaike (2010, under "Origins of *Yurihime*"), Kumata (2005, 75) and Shamoon (2012, 146n5), but not further discussed. More detailed discussions can be found in the *yuri* special issue of *Eureka* (2014/12).

In the Japanese discourse on the *yuri* genre, the connection with *esu* is firmly established. Only Takemoto Novala (2003)[23] argues that *esu* is different from *yuri* because *esu* relationships are purely spiritual while *yuri* does involve a carnal aspect (43)—an (implicit) definition of the *yuri* genre that strongly diverges from the usual idea of *yuri* being "innocent." In most other instances, *esu* is seen as the predecessor of *yuri*, if not as an identical concept. An article in the anime magazine *Comp H's* for example states that *esu* had been in use before the term *yuri* took root ("Kinkyū kikaku" 2006, 58).

Esu is often described with expressions similar to those used for the *yuri* genre. In an article about *Otome no minato* for the online edition of *Asahi shinbun* for example, *esu* is referred to as a "secret flower garden" (Hamada 2010). Sister-like relationships and all girls'

schools continue to be important tropes of the *yuri* genre. For example, *Yuri shimai*'s all girls' schools report was subtitled "Mission: get an *o-nē-sama*" ("Joshikō e ikō" 2003, 89). The *yuri* genre's fans as well see the *esu* relationships in early *shōjo shōsetsu* are the "ancestors" of today's *yuri* genre. Fans I met in person as well as some respondents of my online survey for example explicitly referenced *esu*.

"Hana monogatari"

Yoshiya Nobuko (1896–1973) is considered one of the most popular Japanese female authors before 1970 and one of the founding mothers of *shōjo shōsetsu*.[24] Her career would not have been possible without girls' magazines. As early as 1908 (aged twelve) she regularly had her submitted short stories published in *Shōjo kai* and *Shōjo no tomo* (Frederick 2005, 66; Robertson 2004, 156–57, 159). According to Kume (2003, 9), *shōjo shōsetsu* about friendship between girls were an important source of inspiration.

Yoshiya's fame and success began with the story "Suzuran" (Lily of the valley), submitted to *Shōjo gahō*. It impressed its editor-in-chief Wada and he decided to print it—if Yoshiya would also write several sequels ("Ichiryū no joryū sakka" 1949, 28). Thus began *Hana monogatari* in the July 1916 issue of *Shōjo gahō*. Originally, it was planned to end serialization after seven stories. Yet the readers' response was so overwhelmingly positive that Yoshiya continued to write short stories named after various flowers until 1924 (Kan and Fujimoto 2008, 9–10). The first paperback edition was published as early as 1920 (Uchida and Yayoi bijutsukan 2005, 11). When publisher Kōran shuppan needed more material to fill the pages of a planned *Hana monogatari* book edition, serialization restarted on the pages of *Shōjo kurabu* in 1925, ending in 1926 (Watanabe 2011, 38). *Hana monogatari* remains popular today. Between 2012 and 2014, a manga version by Ozawa Mari was serialized in Shūeisha's manga magazine *Cocohana* which is aimed at an adult female audience.

In recent years, Yoshiya and *Hana monogatari* have been (re-)discovered by researchers in Japan and overseas (e.g. Frederick 2005; Inagaki 2007, 68–74; Kume 2003; Robertson 2004; Suzuki 2010, 35–42; Watanabe 2008; Yokokawa 2001). While textual analyses dominate, many of these articles see Yoshiya as an early example of a Japanese "lesbian" writer, since she lived in a relationship with her partner Monma Chiyo from 1926 (Robertson 2004, 162). As Frederick notes in the introduction to her translation of *Kibara* (en. "Yellow Rose"), Yoshiya's writing certainly offers possibilities for queer readings (Yoshiya 2014).

More recently, the connection between Yoshiya and *yuri* has been discussed in *Eureka* (2014/12).

Although girls' magazines used a wide variety of categories for narrative prose—*Shōjo no tomo* for example had "long *shōjo shōsetsu*," "children's stories" or "girl detective stories"—*Hana monogatari* was not assigned to any particular genre in *Shōjo gahō* (Takahashi 2007, 26). Nevertheless, today, the parties of the Japanese discourse on the *yuri* genre assign it to certain categories, for example by calling it "the pioneer of *shōjo shōsetsu*" (e.g. "Hajimete no GL" 2009, 197; Yamamoto 2010, 41). Akaeda (2010) claims that you could call it the pioneer of *yuri* and *esu* (285). *Hana monogatari* is further described as the "bible" of *shōjo shōsetsu* (Sugino 2008, 100), school girls (Yamamoto 2010, 41), *esu* ("Yuri no hana saku" 2003, 56), and the *yuri* genre (NOV 2010b, 200). It is also called a "monumental work" of *shōjo shōsetsu* (Takemoto 2003, 42) and the *yuri* genre (Kurata 2012, 23).

Usually, fifty-two stories are understood to form the corpus of *Hana monogatari*.[25] All of them have female main characters, ranging from pre-school girl to adult woman. Male characters appear only seldom and are usually not further developed. A number of stories in the collection are set in higher girls' (boarding) schools and/or dormitories, but only a few of those explicitly describe *esu* (or similarly intimate) relationships. Still, in the majority of the stories, the most important relationship is one between females (Yokokawa 2001, 6) and many of them are constructed like *esu* relationships, for example through the pairing of an older and a younger partner. As Yokokawa Sumiko notes, *Hana monogatari* should not be interpreted as one unified work, since it was written over a long period of time in Yoshiya's life (2). For my analysis, I have chosen six exemplary stories that particularly revolve around intimate relationships between female characters.

In "Hinageshi" (Red poppy), fourth-year student[26] Shima becomes the *o-nē-sama* of motherless first-year student Yukiko. After the summer holidays, Yukiko leaves the school and becomes a dancer in Tokyo's entertainment district Asakusa. Shima searches after her, but when she discovers her on board of a ship to the north, she can only wave her farewell (Yoshiya 2003b, 181–98). The two main characters of "Tsuyukusa" (Asiatic dayflower), Miss Akitsu and orphaned second-year student Ryōko love each other. When Ryōko's family loses money, Miss Akitsu's family pays her tuition. Ryōko cannot bear this and returns home, leaving the school and Miss Akitsu behind (325–43). In "Moyuru hana" (Burning flower), Midori attends to the wealthy and already married Masuko who wants to stay in school against her family's wish. In the end, both commit suicide in a fire (Yoshiya 2003a, 31–81).

The main character of "Hama nadeshiko" (*Dianthus japonicus*), third-year student Masumi, has a crush on Sakiko, also a third-year student. When Masumi goes home during the summer holidays, her parents decide to keep her there in order to arrange her marriage. Masumi sends Sakiko a box of pink shells she collected and then drowns herself. Sakiko uses the shells to play the *koto* (a Japanese string instrument) and then suddenly sees Masumi's ghost (213–49). In "Nemu no hana" (Flower of *Albizia julibrissin*), sickish Junko has a crush on the older Michiko. Junko becomes ill and her illness aggravates when she reads about Michiko's marriage in the newspaper. Junko dies of sadness and her friends show Michiko her grave (289–322). In *Kibara*, Miss Katsuragi flees an impending marriage and becomes a higher girls' school teacher. She develops an intimate relationship with her student Reiko and they vow to stay together forever. When Reiko is married away by her family, Miss Katsuragi goes to the United States (Yoshiya 2014).[27]

In these stories, intimate relationships between girls are depicted as beautiful but ultimately sad. Innocent, spiritual feelings are highlighted over carnal desires through an emphasis on the emotional attachment of the characters. They live for their emotions, always aware that their time of happiness is a limited one. Financial problems, illnesses, marriage or graduation put a sudden end to their relationships. These overall characteristics strongly resemble those of the *yuri* genre identified previously.

The adjectives "beautiful" and "cute" are certainly apt for the characters found in these stories. Yukiko of "Hinageshi" for example has "round, cute eyes, like … a female dove" (Yoshiya 2003b, 182). Even Junko, who lies in bed sick, is described as "beautiful" (Yoshiya 2003a, 295). In *Kibara*, Miss Katsuragi contemplates the beauty of sedated Reiko: "The end of her ponytail stretched down below the pillow, and a wisp of stray hair lay on her white forehead; her cool eyes were both gently closed and just her lips moved with her breath like a flower——in the stillness of noon perhaps her closed eyes were seeing a dream……ah, how lovely!" (Yoshiya 2014; ellipses and dashes in original)

This general sense of beauty is emphasized by Yoshiya's particular writing style, also known as *bibun* (beautiful writing), a "distinctive narrative style with its gentle tone of nostalgia, lyrical descriptions of beauty, and polite, feminine diction" (Shamoon 2008, 144). *Bibun* is a decorative style marked by long, convoluted sentences conveying a very emotional and sentimental tone. It mixes Japanese with plain English in Latin alphabet or foreign words written in *katakana* and uses sentence end particles that express ambiguity (Saga 2011, 105; Suzuki 2010, 39–42).[28]

Further contributing to the beauty of *Hana monogatari* are the illustrations. When the stories were first serialized in *Shōjo gahō*, these were done by Fukiya Kōji (Watanabe 2008, 104). The reprint in *Shōjo no tomo* was illustrated by Nakahara Jun'ichi, and the most popular book editions adopted these illustrations with Nakahara's famous slender girls with large eyes dressed in beautiful clothes. Most of them do not look at the reader, conveying an image of unearthly beauty.

The characters of *Hana monogatari* are further portrayed as innocent. Female same-sex intimacy is described in an elusive, low-key fashion that leaves it up to the reader to interpret the feelings of the girl protagonists, aided by the Yoshiya's frequent usage of six-dot ellipses and dashes (see also Sarah Frederick's Introduction in Yoshiya 2014). One notable exception is *Kibara*, where the characters' feelings are rather obvious, although not explicitly stated. At the beach at night, Miss Katsuragi relates to Reiko the story of Greek poet Sappho who loved her servant Melitta but committed suicide when she was betrayed by her. Katsuragi admits that she loves Sappho (Yoshiya 2014):

> Miss Katsuragi's [eyes] expressed a dark passion and shone with tears……
> "……Teacher!……" Reiko's voice, faint and timorous, barely managed to let escape that one word from her crimson lips, which trembled like flower petals.
> At that moment, the trailing echoing of the bell reached them——embraced by the sound of the bell their shadows overlapped—— (Yoshiya 2014; ellipses and dashes in original)

This is followed by a short poem about a silent kiss, so most readers would probably interpret the scene as the description of the first kiss between Miss Katsuragi and Reiko. This makes the references to Sappho all the more significant. The ancient Greek poet is well known for having composed love poems addressed to girls and the term "lesbian" is derived from the name of her home island Lesbos. As Sarah Frederick notes in her introduction to her translation of *Kibara*, translated poems of her and others were popular among girl readers of the time (the story was first serialized in 1923; Yoshiya 2014). Yet even if her readers were unfamiliar with Sappho, they could still have read the story about her and Melitta as a fictional sad unfulfilled romance which sets the tone for the rest of the story, as the two lovers will soon have to part.[29]

As the description of Miss Katsuragi's and Reiko's kiss indicates, in *Hana monogatari*, rather than actual physical contact, the emotional connections between the characters are emphasized by describing the feelings the characters have for each other. In "Nemu no hana," Junko secretly calls Michiko "*akogare no kimi*" because she does not know her name (Yoshiya 2003a, 301). "*Akogare no kimi*" could be roughly translated as "my adored" and

designated the partner in an *esu* relationship (Imada 2011, 6). Junko's adoration is thus marked as an intense one, but also an unrealizable one. A similarly unequal relationship is depicted in "Tsuyukusa": "Miss Akitsu [Akitsu-*san*] loved [*ai suru*] Ryōko, like a real younger sister, [and] Ryōko loved dearly [*shitau*] Miss Akitsu, like a mother, and like an *o-nē-sama*." (Yoshiya 2003b, 329) While the terms *ai suru* and *shitau* suggest an equal passion on both sides, the roles ascribed to Miss Akitsu and Ryōko are by no means equal. The same can be said about Midori and Masuko in "Moyuru hana," where Midori tells Masuko: "You are a beautiful queen. I will be your chamber maid and serve you." (Yoshiya 2003a, 46)

But despite being beautiful and innocent, all of the relationships portrayed in these exemplary stories have a heartrending ending. Instead of living happily ever after, the characters have to bid farewell and some even die. Especially marriage is connoted with tragedy as it implies the separation of a girl from higher girls' school, i.e. her friends and (relative) freedom. Still, Yoshiya conveys even tragedy with beautiful words, as can be seen in the following excerpt from "Hama nadeshiko." A sad atmosphere is invoked through the intense description of Masumi's surroundings, climaxing in her disappearance/implied suicide:

> Masumi climbed up the dune, there the light pink *hama nadeshiko* blossomed, [and] she sat down on the dune.
>
> The tide of the ocean rumbled. In the sky, the pale evening moon faintly shone.
>
> On the beach were no human figures at all.
>
> Masumi took a harmonica from her kimono sleeve, put it to her lips, [and] an intermittent, very sad sound resounded, mixing with the sound of the waves.
>
> Soon, this sound stopped as well.
>
> Masumi lay face-down on the light pink small flowers blossoming on top of the dune, [and] cried sobbingly.
>
> ……Sakiko [Sakiko-*san*]……
>
> She called the name of the person she missed [*natsukashii*]……
>
> The night wore on, [and] the moon shone clearly. Lit by the light of the moon, there was only a small harmonica left without owner, shining silvery on the top of that dune where the flowers blossom——Masumi was nowhere to be seen.
>
> In the dark, the sea was from time to time silently turning over white waves. (Yoshiya 2003a, 245–46; ellipses and dashes in original)

In sum, *Hana monogatari* displays the same characteristics that are ascribed to the *yuri* genre. In the Japanese discourse on the *yuri* genre, the text is also often described with descriptions similar to those used for the genre. Especially the beauty of female same-sex intimacy is emphasized: "*Hana monogatari* is a collection of short stories which modestly depict the state of the heart of teenage girls living in girls' schools and boarding houses, and the main topic are deep friendships that two lonely teenage girls rear away from their parents' home." (Endō 2009, 87) Or: "It's a beautiful and tranquil work … full of pure affection"

(Sugino 2008, 100). *Hana monogatari* is attributed with a lasting influence: "Over generations, the numerous stories that recount girls' delicate sentiments captivate girls (people who have the mind of a girl, irrespective of their gender)." (Yamamoto 2010, 41) Or: "The influence that her works, which delicately and frankly depicted love [*ai*] between two teenage girls, had on following generations is inestimable." (NOV 2010b, 200) While *Hana monogatari* is seldom directly called a *yuri* text, all sources in my sample acknowledge the depiction of intimacy between female characters. In my online survey of fans, eleven respondents gave *Hana monogatari* as one of their top five *yuri* works and three of the manga magazine editors I interviewed mentioned Yoshiya Nobuko as a prime example of early fictional portrayals of female same-sex intimacy

"Otome no minato"

Otome no minato was serialized between 1937 and 1938 in *Shōjo no tomo*. It was long assumed that 1968 Nobel Laureate in Literature Kawabata Yasunari (1899–1972) was its sole author. But in 1989, the newspaper *Asahi shinbun* revealed that the manuscript had originally been written by Nakazato Tsuneko (1909–87), proven by a manuscript written by her that was found in her estate ("Kawabata Yasunari no 'Otome no minato' wa" 1989, 17). An unknown housewife in 1937, she was in 1938 the first woman to win the Akutagawa Prize for her "debut" *shōsetsu Noriai basha* (Stagecoach).

Even though the fact of Nakazato's (co-)authorship of *Otome no minato* is known today, she is still not officially credited as the author or co-author in the book editions.[30] It seems to be assumed that the main author of *Otome no minato* remains Kawabata himself although Nakashima Nobuko (2010) shows that the groundwork for *Otome no minato* came from Nakazato, whereas Kawabata made suggestions on changes in letters to Nakazato and also made changes to the final manuscript. Hence I believe that it would be unjust to attribute *Otome no minato* solely to Kawabata. Unless it is a citation, I write "Kawabata/Nakazato" when referencing this work.

Otome no minato was extremely popular when it was first serialized in *Shōjo no tomo*, in part certainly due to the illustrations by Nakahara Jun'ichi. The first paperback edition was reprinted more than forty times in four years (Uchida 2009, 332) and various editions appeared also after World War II. Still today, *Otome no minato* continues to attract attention, even from young Japanese. By popular demand publisher Jitsugyō no Nihonsha issued a special edition in 2009 with reproductions of the original illustrations. Its editors received

letters not only from former readers of *Shōjo no tomo*, but also from young women in their twenties (Hamada 2010). Nevertheless, there is still little research on this text (e.g. Imada 2007, 122–25, 198–201; Nakashima 2010; Shamoon 2012, 38–45; Shimojō 2009), thus the connection between it and the *yuri* genre has not yet been discussed.

When *Otome no minato* was first announced in the May 1937 issue of *Shōjo no tomo*, it was simply called a "long *shōsetsu*" (Kawabata 2009, 340). During its serialization, no particular genre was assigned to it. Today, it is called a "legendary *shōjo shōsetsu*" (promotional cover flap of the 2009 re-edition), but has also been assigned to the *yuri* genre. For example, in an article for the online edition of *Asahi shinbun*, the 2009 re-edition's editor speculates that the unexpected success of the reprint was due to today's readers seeing the text as an extension of the *yuri* genre (Hamada 2010). In the *yuri* special of the magazine *Pafu*, the recommendation of *Otome no minato* notes that "people who are captivated by girls' love should certainly also reach out for the world of literature" (Yamamoto 2010, 41). There is even a fan works manga based on the text, sold at the *yuri* fan works event GirlsLoveFestival in 2012. As a sequel to the original *shōsetsu*, it recounts how Michiko and Katsuko become friends after Yōko's graduation (Ai-iro akane-iro 2012). Authors Ai and Akane comment that they decided to create the manga because they were fascinated by the beauty of the words and the story.

Otome no minato revolves around Michiko, a first-year student at an all girls' Roman Catholic mission school in Yokohama. Shortly after joining the school, she receives two letters: one from fifth-year student Yōko, and one from fourth-year student Katsuko who both want to form an *esu* relationship with Michiko. Michiko chooses Yōko, but Katsuko still tries to be close to her, especially when she meets her during the summer holidays. At the school's sports festival in autumn, Katsuko has an accident. Yōko attends to her and Katsuko changes her mind. She apologizes to Michiko and Yōko and the three of them become friends shortly before Yōko graduates. Like *Hana monogatari*, *Otome no minato* emphasizes the innocence and beauty of female same-sex intimacy. Emotions are valued more than action in this dialog-heavy story. The same characteristics that are used to describe today's *yuri* genre could also be used for *Otome no minato*: it is beautiful, cute, innocent and heartrending.

Like the female characters of *Hana monogatari*, Michiko, Yōko and Katsuko are presented as beautiful and cute. Although they are not described in detail by the text, illustrator Nakahara draws all of them in a beautiful and distinctly "feminine" way: They wear their hair at shoulder-length (or shorter), have large eyes and slender bodies. Their clothing includes fashionable kimonos and a sailor suit school uniform. Most striking are the many

variations of Western clothing, especially dresses and hats, worn by Michiko and Katsuko. Given that in the late 1930s, such clothes could not yet be bought in normal stores (Uchida and Yayoi bijutsukan 2005, 44) Nakahara's illustrations undoubtedly appealed to the girl audience of *Shōjo no tomo*. In the text itself, the characters use speech patterns coded as "female," especially the sentence end particles *no* and *wa*—Shimojō Masazumi (2009) speculates that this writing style was influenced by Nakazato's own experience as a student at a Roman Catholic higher girls' school (41–42). While Kawabata/Nakazato does not use the same *bibun* writing style as Yoshiya, he/she still evokes a dream-like atmosphere. As in Yoshiya's texts, plain English (in Latin alphabet with added *katakana* for pronunciation) is mixed with Japanese text (e.g. Kawabata 2009, 20–23). The punctuation (e.g. the usage of six-dot ellipses) and the overall atmosphere are also markedly similar to *Hana monogatari*, as can be seen in the following scene of Michiko meeting with Yōko:

> Oh, *o-nē-sama*! Do such beautiful people as well live in this world? I am still hers.
>
> If Katsuko is an earthly flower, Yōko is a celestial flower——.
>
> "You know, recently I have gained a completely new attitude. Of the things I had until now, none was precious."
>
> Yōko said, but in her heart she thought as if praying
>
> "But Michiko [Michiko-*san*], only you……. are precious. I don't want to let you go——. What shall I do if even you, together with all the things I had until now, would be lost to me?" (Kawabata 2009, 190; ellipses and dashes in original)

This scene also highlights the girls' intense feelings for each other. As it is to be expected from the story's title, they remain *otome*—innocent maidens. Like the relationships described in *Hana monogatari*, the one between Michiko and Yōko remains of a purely spiritual nature. Even if body contact between them is described, it remains innocent, for example when Yōko places her hand on Michiko's shoulder (Kawabata 2009, 190). As Shamoon (2012) notes, Michiko and Yōko "are lovers … in the idealized sense of spiritual love." (42) The emphasis lies on the purity of their relationship (44), further highlighted by the Christian elements in the story (30–31). Yōko in particular is depicted as a strong believer (esp. chapter 10; Kawabata 2009, 256–85).

Unlike in the previously discussed stories of *Hana monogatari*, in *Otome no minato* the relationship is explicitly referred to as "*esu*." At the beginning of the story, Michiko is clueless about what to do with the letters she gets. She has heard that the relationships between older and younger students at mission schools are at the same time more tender and more intense than at public schools (Kawabata 2009, 17). Michiko's friend, who has attended the school since kindergarten (16), explains the concept of *esu* to her: "You know, *esu*, that

means sister [*shisutā*], it's an abbreviation for sisterhood [*shimai*]. … When an older student and a younger student become good friends, they are called like this and there is much ado [about them]." (17; my ellipse) Echoing the reality of *esu*, the story presents such relationships as being socially acceptable, even outside school (e.g. 98–100), and as regulating female same-sex intimacy: It is acceptable for Yōko to have an *esu* relationship with Michiko, but once this relationship is established, it is no longer acceptable for Katsuko to try to get close to Michiko (202–8).

Much like real *esu* relationships, the one between Michiko and Yōko is continuously referenced to as one that will soon end due to Yōko's graduation. This further emphasizes the relationship's innocence and at the same time adds a heartrending aspect to the story. When Yōko explains to Michiko that she will look after her diseased mother after graduation, Michiko feels sad:

> But when her *o-nē-sama* graduated, how boring would Michiko['s life at] school become from next spring [when school starts back].
>
> If only her *o-nē-sama* would do her the favor of remaining at school as well until Michiko's graduation…….
>
> Michiko became sad only by thinking about it (Kawabata 2009, 90–91; ellipse in original)

Yōko's feelings are not different from Michiko's, although she is aware of the ultimately limited time of their *esu* relationship:

> "When you, *o-nē-sama*, graduate next spring, school will become unpleasant for me," Michiko said again.
>
> "But as you know, we cannot stay like this our whole life."
>
> Michiko said with dissatisfaction:
>
> "If you you want to, you can."
>
> "Right. I wish I could think like that, but……"
>
> said Yōko and covered her eyes. (Kawabata 2009, 95–96; ellipse in original)

Although we see that *Otome no minato* displays the same characteristics that are discursively established as those of the *yuri* genre, interest in the text only surged with the 2009 re-edition. For example, in the January 2011 issue of the *yuri* manga magazine *Komikku yuri hime*, *Otome no minato* is described as depicting love (*ren'ai*) between girls and as a *shōjo shōsetsu* about *esu* ("O-takara yuri sakuhin" 2011, 350). In *anan*, *Otome no minato* is assigned to the (invented) category "we, the sensitive ones" which comprises texts about vulnerable yet beautiful girls and their relationships with each other (Kawano 2012, 55). *Otome no minato* is described as a text about "romantic love" (*ren'ai*), depicting a form of love (*koi moyō*), and author Miura Shion comments that she found *Otome no minato* "heart-wrenching" (59). In my online survey among fans of the *yuri* genre in Japan, *Otome no minato* was given by two respondents as one of their top five titles.

The Legacy of Esu *and* Shōjo Shōsetsu

With the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 came the demise of *esu* relationships in *shōjo shōsetsu*. Censorship regulated what could be published in magazines and intimate relationships between girls were no longer deemed appropriate (Shamoon 2012, 56; for details see Yuhara 2005, 53). In 1940, Nakahara Jun'ichi was forbidden to illustrate *Shōjo no tomo*—the girls he drew were judged to be morbid (Uchida and Yayoi bijutsukan 2005, 68).[31] Paper was rationed and thus girls' magazines had to merge (like *Shōjo gahō* with *Shōjo no tomo* in 1942) or stop publication altogether (Horie 2003, 114). *Shōjo no tomo*'s last war issue had only around sixteen black-and-white pages with more text than pictures and was not even bound. After the end of World War II, most prewar girls' magazines were revived, but *shōjo* manga gradually replaced *shōjo shōsetsu* (Shamoon 2012, 82). In 1962, *Shōjo kurabu* was renamed *Shūkan shōjo furendo* (Weekly girls' friend) and became an important *shōjo* manga magazine.

Already in the late 1920s and 1930s, Yoshiya Nobuko shifted the focus of her writing from intimate relationships between girls to fiction for women's magazines (Suzuki 2010, 60). Nevertheless, her "narrative style that emphasized emotional interiority" (Shamoon 2008, 144) was inherited by *shōjo* manga. Yoshiya also inspired many later authors of *shōjo shōsetsu*, for example Himuro Saeko in the 1980s (Kan and Fujimoto 2008, 21). Artist Nakahara Jun'ichi as well is credited with having inspired later *shōjo* manga with his illustrations of girls with large eyes, thin bodies and fashionable clothes (Shamoon 2012, 89–90).

Although homosociality between girls remained an important topic in postwar *shōjo* manga (Shamoon 2012, 83), the sister-like *esu* relationships were gradually replaced by male-female romances. Imada Erika (2011) argues that the main reason for this shift was the change in the educational system from same-sex to coeducational schools, introduced under US American Occupation in 1947 (1).[32] She notes that the change in content was promoted by the magazines' editors and authors, but was also requested by the readers who had to adjust to their new environment. *Esu* was now regarded as sentimental and as having less value than male-female relationships (7-8).

A notable example for a postwar *esu*-like relationship can be found in *Sakura namiki* (The avenue of cherry trees) by male artist Takahashi Macoto.[33] Originally, this manga was published in 1957 as a *kashihon* (rental book) manga.[34] It tells the story of first-year student Yukiko and second-year student Ayako. Both are members of the ping-pong club and fight

for the love (*ai*; Takahashi 2006, 22) of third-year student Chikage. Chikage in the end chooses Yukiko who refers to her as *o-nē-sama* (e.g. 23), echoing the *esu* relationships presented in prewar *shōjo shōsetsu*. Takahashi explained to me that he had been an avid reader of Nakahara's postwar magazines *Himawari* (Sunflower) and *Junia soreiyu* (Junior soleil) and with *Sakura namiki* wanted to transplant their style into manga.[35] Takahashi's visual style is credited with having been groundbreaking and an important influence for later *shōjo* manga (Fujimoto 2009, 36; Fujimoto 2012; Shamoon 2012, 93).

Notes

1. Since I regard *shōjo shōsetsu* as a category of its own, I do not translate the term. The same applies to *shōjo* manga. In all other instances, *shōjo* is rendered as "girl."

2. In 1907, the number of compulsory years was expanded from four to six (Marshall 1994, 96). In 1947, under the US American Occupation, elementary as well as middle school attendance became mandatory, the number of compulsory years thus rising to nine (162).

3. For details see Inagaki (2007, 159–204) and Satō (2006).

4. For details see Koyama (2013).

5. Nevertheless, higher girls' schools "were inferior to middle schools [for boys] in content and level." (Koyama 2013, 44) For example, mathematics was taught with fewer hours and subjects such as law and economics were not offered at all (43).

6. Today, *shōnen* is understood as "boy," but here it means "young person." The magazine was read by both boys and girls (Kan and Fujimoto 2008, 7).

7. For details see Kume (1997).

8. The magazine ceased publication in the early Taishō (1912–26) period, probably in 1913 (Kume 2003, 14n10).

9. The following descriptions are based on: Horie (2003, 112–14), Imada (2007, 12–15; 2011, 3), Kan and Fujimoto (2008, 14–15), Uchida and Yayoi bijutsukan (2005, 6–7), and Yuhara (2005, 52, 96).

10. Target groups merely indicate to which age group the content was tailored. The real readership might have deviated considerably from this "ideal readership." *Shōjo kurabu* for example was also read by females who had long graduated from high school (Yuhara 2005, 96).

11. In 1931, the magazine changed to publisher Shinsensha. The last issues in 1942 were published by Shōjōgahōsha.

12. Today: Kōdansha

13. Today, these prewar girls' magazines remain sought-after collector's items and can cost several ten thousand yen if in mint condition.

14. For a detailed discussion of these see Shamoon (2012, 58–70).

15. For an account of the development of early *shōjo shōsetsu* see Kume (1997, 2003).

16. For a discussion of the participative culture fostered in girls' magazines see Shamoon (2012, 49–57).

17. For other terms see Akaeda (2004) and Pflugfelder (2005, 134–35).

18. The same phenomenon for boys was called *bī* from the letter "b" in "boy." *Bī* was however not often addressed in popular culture such as *shōsetsu* or illustrations (Takemoto 2005, 117–18).

19. I use *o-nē-sama* throughout this study because the English translation "older sister" has a different notion and would not convey the idea of her having a higher status than her younger partner as indicated by the honorific *-sama*.

20. In detail, see Inagaki (2007, 82–118).

21. For reactions to *esu* from sexologists, the press and the women's movement see Pflugfelder (2005).

22. In contrast, for example kisses with boys were regarded as unhygienic and a bad influence from foreigners in movies (Uchida and Yayoi bijutsukan 2005, 97).

23. Takemoto is the author of *shōsetsu* such as *Shimozuma monogatari* (en. *Kamikaze Girls*; 2002). He also edited the Yoshiya Nobuko collection of publisher Kokusho kankō-kai.

24. For a biography see Robertson (2004) and Tanabe (1999a, 1999b).

25. Two stories published in 1926 in *Shōjo kurabu*, "Karatachi no hana" (Flower of the trifoliate orange) and "Azami no hana" (Thistle) have not yet been included in any book version of *Hana monogatari* (Watanabe 2011, 38) and are thus not counted among those fifty-two. For an analysis of "Karatachi no hana" see Watanabe (2011). On the problem of sourcing *Hana monogatari* see Watanabe (2011, 38–39) and Yokokawa (2001, 2).

26. In this chapter, "student" always refers to students at higher girls' schools.

27. I cite from Sarah Frederick's translation, but have also consulted the Japanese original (Yoshiya 2003a, 251–87).

28. Yoshiya "inherited" this style from her time as reader/submitter to *Shōjo sekai* (Girls' world). On the pages of this magazine, *bibun* was cultivated through reader submissions. These were heavily influenced by the magazine's male editors who thought that girls should not only look beautiful, but also write beautifully (Saga 2011, 108).

29. Curiously, Watanabe Shūko (2008) puts the name Sappho in quotation marks as if to indicate that she was a fictional character invented by Yoshiya (104, 106).

30. The 2009 reprint acknowledges her work in two commentaries at the end of the volume.

31. This measure was met with protest on part of the readers and some 7,000 of them actually stopped buying *Shōjo no tomo* (Kan 2008, 168–69).

32. Nevertheless, some all girls' and all boys' schools continue to exist.

33. For details on *Sakura namiki* see Shamoon (2012, 92–96; she renders Chikage as "Chiaki" and Ayako as "Ayumi"). For details on Takahashi Macoto see Fujimoto (2012) and Yonezawa (2007, 78–82).

34. *Kashihon*, popular until the mid-1960s, could be borrowed for a fee from rental book stores and manga made up a considerable portion of the books available (Nakano 2004, 57–62; Shamoon 2012, 85; Takahashi 1991a, 110–17; Yonezawa 2007, 67–75).

35. Interview with Takahashi Macoto, August 20, 2011

Chapter 3. From *Esu* to Distress: *Shīkuretto rabu* and *Shiroi heya no futari*

If we follow the *yuri* genre's history as proposed by the Japanese discourse on the genre, a gap occurs between the *shōjo shōsetsu* of the pre-World War II period and the next milestone of 1970s *shōjo* manga. This is not to say that female same-sex intimacy was not a topic in Japanese popular culture between 1938 and 1971, as the example of *Sakura namiki* shows. Yet in the discourse, these instances are not judged to be important. Thus we now enter a new historical period and a new artistic form, *shōjo* manga. I discuss the two (probably) earliest examples dealing with female same-sex intimacy, *Shīkuretto rabu* and *Shiroi heya no futari*. Like *Hana monogatari* and *Otome no minato*, they present beautiful and innocent but ultimately tragic stories. But unlike their predecessors, they portray female same-sex intimacy as something that is forbidden and has to stay secret and are thus indicative of a changed social environment.

The 1970s "Golden Age" of Shōjo *Manga*

Manga had already been published in prewar girls' magazines, as rather simple so-called *koma* (panel) manga. In most of them, every panel had the same size and shape, and the stories were of a humorous nature. After World War II, longer, usually serialized *sutōrī* (story) manga became the main content of girls' (and boys') magazines which were now of B5 size (ca. 18 x 25 cm). In the 1950s, most manga, even those for girls, were drawn by men. When female artists started drawing for female readers from the mid-1960s on, *shōjo* manga underwent dramatic changes (Fujimoto 2009, 35–37).[1] What we mean with "*shōjo* manga" today was formed in this process: "The artists are mostly women close in age to the readers. Essentially, the topic 'love' is indispensable and the pictures are gorgeous. The works are published in '*shōjo* manga magazines.'" (37)

As a turning point in the history of *shōjo* manga, the 1970s are also referred to as its "golden age" (Fujimoto 2009, 37). They owe this title mostly to a group of female manga artists known as the "Year 24 group" (*nijūyo-nen gumi*). These artists were all born in or around the year Shōwa 24 (1949) and are credited with having created the particular style that is today commonly associated with *shōjo* manga. The exact makeup of this group is under debate, but commonly included artists are Ikeda Riyoko, Hagio Moto, Ōshima Yumiko, Takemiya Keiko and Yamagishi Ryōko (Takahashi 2008, 130). In their works, these artists

particularly focused on the emotions of their characters (Fujimoto 2009, 38) and expressed them in pictures rather than in words (Shamoon 2012, 97). This new aesthetic style was marked by "interior monologue[s], open frames, layering, symbolic imagery, and emotive backgrounds" (114). With their introduction of thematic complexity and seriousness (121)—including dramatic stories about love between boys—into *shōjo* manga, its target group started to shift from children to a teenage audience (101).

Of the two manga I discuss here, only *Shiroi heya no futari* was drawn by an artist who is regularly assigned to the "Year 24 group," Yamagishi Ryōko. Still, I decided to include *Shīkuretto rabu*, because in the Japanese discourse on the *yuri* genre, it is cited as the earliest example of a *shōjo* manga addressing female same-sex intimacy. Its artist, Yashiro Masako, is however mostly forgotten today. In the 1970s, the *yuri* genre was not yet known and neither *Shīkuretto rabu* nor *Shiroi heya no futari* were originally advertised as love stories. Rather, they were positioned as *shōjo* manga for an older target group. But since both manga comply with the discursively established image of the *yuri* genre as being beautiful, cute, innocent and heartrending, they are today discursively assigned to the genre.

"Shīkuretto rabu"

Yashiro Masako (real name: Yamamoto Masako; born 1947) debuted as manga artist in 1963 with "Chīsana himitsu" (A small secret) in *Sumire* (Violet), a *kashihon* collection of short *shōjo* manga (MANGAseek and Nichigai Associates 2003, 389; Takahashi 1991a, 116, 126).[2] *Shīkuretto rabu* was first published in November 1970 in Shūeisha's *shōjo* manga magazine *Derakkusu Māgaretto* (Deluxe Margaret). In 1978, it was included in a paperback omnibus volume.[3] To my knowledge, no prior research has addressed *Shīkuretto rabu*. It is however mentioned in at least two encyclopedias of manga artists in the respective entry on Yashiro (*Gendai manga hakubutsukan* 2006, 70; MANGAseek and Nichigai Associates 2006, 389). The encyclopedia issued by MANGAseek and Nichigai Associates even says that *Shīkuretto rabu* was talked about, but this is not further explained. Yonezawa Yoshihiro (2007) likewise calls it a "controversial work" (194), but does not further comment on that. In contrast, Fujimoto (2014b, 101) argues that it was not that influential.

The original publication context of *Shīkuretto rabu* is one key to understanding its content. *Derakkusu Māgaretto* was a quarterly *shōjo* manga magazine targeting female high school and university students. Its tagline was "A magazine for lovely young ladies" and it featured only self-contained manga. A "refined taste" was its biggest selling point and

Yashiro was one of its top artists (Takahashi 1991b, 72). On the last page of the winter 1970 issue, which contains *Shīkuretto rabu*, one of the magazine's editors even comments that the issue contains "nothing but tours de force" (*Derakkusu Māgaretto* winter 1970, 258). The stories in *Derakkusu Māgaretto* were mainly tragic romances about a girl and a boy who fall in love but ultimately cannot get together. Since *Shīkuretto rabu* has a similarly tragic ending, the manga could be said to have simply provided a twist on an established pattern.

Yet in *Derakkusu Māgaretto*, *Shīkuretto rabu* was not framed as a love story. On the issue's cover, it is simply referred to as "long manga," like many manga in the magazine before and after. The left margin on the manga's first page reads: "Do you know your own heart? Maybe looking at your true self is very frightening." (*Derakkusu Māgaretto* winter 1970, 87) The margin on the final page of the manga says: "The true heart that [you[4]] are not able to tell anyone about… It was a memory of anything and everything being over." (115; ellipse in original) None of these descriptions refers to love or female same-sex intimacy, but rather to emotions and feelings. *Shīkuretto rabu* could thus also be seen as a story about self-discovery.

Shīkuretto rabu bears some similarities to earlier *shōjo shōsetsu* like *Hana monogatari*: it is the story of an innocent adoration from afar, one with an ultimately sad ending. Unlike Yoshiya before the war, Yashiro emphasizes the secrecy of the main female character's feelings and strategically uses the presence of a male character. As *esu* relationships were no longer common in the 1970s, a girl having intimate feelings for another girl is now judged as "not normal." Describing the beauty of one's best friend has become "amusing" (Yashiro 1978, 6) and the feelings have to be explained through hatred for males.

Shīkuretto rabu is the story of the love triangle between two girls (Atsushi and Fuyuko) and one boy (Makio). In its twenty-nine pages, the main protagonist Atsushi recounts her first love (*koi*) for her classmate Fuyuko. They have been friends since elementary school, but recently, Atsushi has come to love (*suki*) Fuyuko. Fuyuko however has a crush on her cousin Makio who in turn has a crush on Atsushi. Fuyuko becomes desperate when she finds out about Makio's feelings for Atsushi. In an accident[5] at school involving her and Atsushi, Atsushi almost dies. A week later, Fuyuko tries to kill herself by jumping into the ocean. Makio saves her, but Atsushi runs away to another town.

Like most early *shōjo* manga (examples see Takahashi 1991b), Yashiro's drawing style is rather simple compared to the gorgeous characters of later *shōjo* manga. Nevertheless, especially Fuyuko is characterized as a beautiful girl, particularly by Atushi:

> Why is Fuyuko's hair so fine, straight and beautiful? When light suffuses it strand by strand, it shines golden. Fuyuko's eyes are deeep (*sic*) brown, like a foreigner's, you know. Her eyebrows are jumping up with all their strength. And her cheeks, they're smooth and sleek; it's lovely when they're sometimes dyed in the color of a cherry blossom. (Yashiro 1978, 6)

This description of Fuyuko lasts for three panels all showing her from different angles, the first panel even picturing her surrounded by sparkling stars. Fuyuko's beauty and cuteness are further emphasized by the panel immediately following this description. In it, she is shown laughing while holding her hands to her cheeks (Yashiro 1978, 6). When Atsushi paints her, Fuyuko is equally surrounded by sparkling stars and flowers that emphasize her beauty (11) as it is common in *shōjo* manga, despite the simple style.

As Fujimoto (2014b) argues, in 1970s *shōjo* manga about female same-sex intimacy, the two main female characters are depicted as a pair of opposites—"crimson rose and sugar" (101). Although she does not count *Shīkuretto rabu* among these, the manga follows this pattern: Atsushi has short dark hair and sometimes even wears pants (e.g. Yashiro 1978, 14), while Fuyuko has long red[6] hair and is always wearing dresses or skirts. In character as well, they are different: while Fuyuko is constructed as very emotional, Atsushi mostly keeps her feelings to herself. And even though both girls use the first person pronoun *atashi* for saying "I," which is understood as a marker of femininity, their names mark them as "male" and "female": "Atsushi" is usually used as a male name, while "Fuyuko" is marked as female through the final syllable "-ko."

The feelings depicted in *Shīkuretto rabu* are innocent ones as the characters adore each other from afar. Physical contact that would suggest intimacy does not occur at all. Two terms are used interchangeably for expressing intimacy: *suki* (to like/love) and *koi* (love). In the introduction, Atsushi states that Fuyuko was the first person she ever loved (*koi shita*; Yashiro 1978, 5), but throughout the story, she struggles to name her feelings for Fuyuko. In an interior monologue, Atsushi addresses the ambivalence of the term *suki*: "Fuyuko, whose eyes and voice are remarkably impressive and tender when she laughs. I liked [*suki*] Fuyuko from then on. But I liked her more than just 'liking.'" (6) In *Shīkuretto rabu*, *suki* is the term of choice when referring to feelings that exceed friendship: Fuyuko calls her feelings for Makio *suki* (21) and Atsushi as well calls Makio's feelings for her *suki* (23).

Yet even this ambiguous feeling of liking troubles Atsushi. When she indirectly describes to Makio how she feels about Fuyuko by using a string of questions like "When she closes her eyes, folds her fingers, tilts her head …Aren't you involuntarily charmed by such gestures? Don't you think that they're extremely beautiful, cute and lovely?" (ellipse in

original), he calls these feelings the "first symptoms of the disease of love [*koi*]" (Yashiro 1978, 18). This response troubles Atsushi as indicated by the following panel, showing her staring into the sky with a concerned expression on her face, a faint image of Fuyuko floating behind her (19).

Love for a person of the same sex is not possible in *Shīkuretto rabu* and Atsushi continues to refer to her relationship with Fuyuko as friendship (e.g. Yashiro 1978, 21). This only changes when she sees how Makio jumps into the ocean to save Fuyuko from drowning. Atsushi then finally starts calling her feelings "love." She reasons that none of this would have happened "if I hadn't loved [*koi shita*] Fuyuko, if I hadn't even kept on hiding that love." The corresponding panel shows a close-up of her face focused on her eyes. They are wide in shock as wind and spume hit her face. The feeling of shock is further emphasized by the form of the speech bubbles that look like they are exploding. As Makio emerges from the ocean carrying the unconscious Fuyuko, Atsushi realizes that she was unable to tell her about her feelings: "It was a love that I had to keep a complete secret" (32). Atsushi recognizes her feelings for what they are, but on the next page already, she decides that she has to leave Fuyuko.

Since the framwork of *esu* is no longer available in *Shīkuretto rabu*, female same-sex intimacy becomes a source of distress and Atsushi's feelings have to be explained by her hatred for men. In the epilogue, Atsushi tries to find a reason for everything that had happened: "An anecdote created to reverse a pathologically fastidious girl's sentiment of detesting the other sex—maybe that was my first love [*koi*]." (Yashiro 1978, 33) Earlier, she had told Fuyuko: "A boyfriend is absolutely no good. You cannot associate with them!" (11) Yet as it was the case before the war, girls are still expected to get married and the manga implies that such feelings of unpleasantness towards the other sex are a temporary condition: every girl will become happy as soon as she finds "Mister Right."

As Fujimoto (2014b, 102) notes, in early *shōjo* manga about male same-sex intimacy, those relationships were regarded as pure fantasy. This is not the case in *Shīkuretto rabu*: having feelings for a person of the same sex leads to troubles in one's social environment. At Fuyuko's birthday party, Atsushi blushes when she sees Fuyuko with her new shawl. The same panel shows Fuyuko's other guests jetting suspicious looks at Atsushi. Undulating lines in the background create an atmosphere of anxiety suggesting that the others do not approve of Atsushi's feelings. A girl with ponytails tries to explain Atsushi's reaction by the fact that Fuyuko and Atsushi have been friends since elementary school. But a girl with bobbed hair relates to her that Atsushi interfered when in elementary school it looked like Fuyuko might

get herself a boyfriend (Yashiro 1978, 9). She concludes "That kid [Atsushi] is not normal" (10) and Atsushi hears this. At the end of the scene, Atsushi is depicted alone in an almost completely black panel visually emphasizing her isolation.

"That kid is not normal" is a harsh judgment and Atsushi recalls it twice in the further course of the story (Yashiro 1978, 11, 19). Yet the reactions of the girl with ponytails to this judgment are rather ambivalent: "I see" (9) and "Oh…" (10). Both times, she raises her eyebrows, but this does not suggest that she is completely convinced. It could also be interpreted as simple surprise. That the actual readers of the manga might react differently is suggested by introductory monologue on the first page of *Shīkuretto rabu* in which Atsushi directly addresses the readers:

> Please listen to the story of my first love. But when you've finished listening to it, don't bend your healthy cheeks with laughter of contempt.
>
> The person I first loved [*koi shita*], that was a charmingly smiling beautiful girl. (Yashiro 1978, 5)

Atsushi is drawn here with a sad, absentminded look on her face, hinting at the story's tragic ending. In the end, the girl can only be saved by the boy and not by the other girl. As Fujimoto (2014b, 102) notes, being female was considered a deficit. Hence, many early *shōjo* manga about female same-sex intimacy are tragedies (101). Nevertheless, it should be noted that Makio is an exceptional male character for an early *shōjo* manga about female same-sex intimacy: He does not realize Atsushi's feelings for Fuyuko and it is not his fault that the story does not have a happy ending—he saves Fuyuko, but it is Atsushi's decision to leave town. Still, Makio is not presented as a completely likeable character, as he is desperate to get a photo of Atsushi even though she does not want that (Yashiro 1978, 10, 13–14).

Although it is probably the first *shōjo* manga ever to address female same-sex intimacy, *Shīkuretto rabu* is not mentioned in any journalistic article on the *yuri* genre. The editorial staff of *Komikku yuri hime* as well usually lists it as "also-ran"—partly because the year of the paperback edition, 1978, is misinterpreted as the year of the initial serialization (e.g. Sugino 2008, 77; "Yuri no hana saku" 2003, 56). Only in 2012 is *Shīkuretto rabu* called one of the representatives of *shōjo* manga which showed "love [*ren'ai*] between girls directly." The manga is seen as part of a process in which more and more *shōjo* manga depicted "secrets" ("Yuri history rewind" 2012, 13).

"Shiroi heya no futari"

Yamagishi Ryōko (born 1947) debuted as manga artist in 1969 in Shūeisha's *shōjo* manga magazine *Ribon komikku* (Ribbon comic)[7] with the short story "Refuto ando raito" (Left and right). In 1983, Yamagishi earned the seventh Kōdansha Manga Award for *Hi izuru tokoro no tenshi* (Emperor of the land of the rising sun). Her works address a broad variety of topics, like legends, ballet and horror (*Gendai manga hakubutsukan* 2006, 71; MANGAseek and Nichigai Associates 2006, 395).[8]

Yamagishi's *Shiroi heya no futari* was first published in the February 1971 issue of *Ribon komikku* and has been reprinted in three different paperback omnibus volumes.[9] There is very little research on this manga. Yonezawa (2004) sees it as an heir to Yoshiya Nobuko's *shōjo shōsetsu*, but one that is rather different from Yamagishi's later works (103). For Fujimoto Yukari ([1998] 2008), it is a "story about lesbians [*rezubian*]" (247) that follows the same tragic pattern as all *shōjo* manga about "lesbians" in the 1970s (253–55). James Welker (2006, 165–66) as well draws attention to the characters' struggles with their sexual identity.

Shiroi heya no futari is considered to be typical of *Ribon komikku*, judged to have been a rather radical manga magazine. It featured almost exclusively self-contained manga from (then) unknown manga artist and many of these presented social problems (Takahashi 1991b, 60–61; Yonezawa 2007, 201–5),[10] targeting mainly girls from the age of sixteen upwards. *Ribon komikku* can be seen as one of the starting points for the changes in *shōjo* manga in the 1970s and Yamagishi was one of its most important artists (Yonezawa 2007, 201). Her style and stories are said to have changed through the influence she received from drawing for *Ribon komikku* (Takahashi 1991b, 86).

On the cover of *Ribon komikku*, *Shiroi heya no futari* was advertised as part of a series of very long stories. The manga starts with a full-color page, underscoring its special status. Compared to today, in the 1970s the number of full-colored pages in *shōjo* manga magazines was small and color often limited to the additional use of orange. For example, the original second page of *Shiroi heya no futari* was colored in orange, purple and white (*Ribon komikku* 1971/2, 272). On the title page, the manga is described as follows: "Is it love [*ai*]… or friendship…. Yamagishi Ryōko beautifully draws a unique long problem story!!" (*Ribon komikku* 1971/2, 271; ellipses in original) The dust jacket of the Hakusensha paperback edition explains that *Shiroi heya no futari* "earned a favorable reputation for drawing the sensitive mentality trembling between two girls." In the Japanese discourse on the *yuri* genre, *Shiroi heya no futari* is for example seen as a "good quality *shōjo* manga containing a

portrayal of *yuri*," although this journalistic article adds that these early *yuri* manga were not widely acknowledged (Endō 2009, 87). *Yuri shimai* and *Komikku yuri hime* similarly judge favorably and describe the manga as a story about "girls loving [*ai*] each other from the heart," containing "elements of serious *yuri*" ("Yuri history rewind" 2012, 13). It is a "tragedy" and "could also be called a monument of *esu* manga" ("Yuri no hana saku" 2003, 56).

Much like the earlier *Shīkuretto rabu*, *Shiroi heya no futari* depicts a girl's search for her own heart. Like Atsushi, the main character Resine ultimately cannot obtain happiness. Once again, love between girls has to stay a secret and is judged unfavorably by the social environment. Yamagishi openly draws kisses, i.e. physical contact between two females, yet nothing suggests that the relationship goes any further. Like the *shōjo shōsetsu* of the early twentieth century, female same-sex intimacy in this manga remains beautiful and innocent, epitomized by the usage of the term *ai* or "spiritual love."

The eighty-page manga *Shiroi heya no futari* is set in France and recounts the tragic love of the two girls Resine[11] and Simone. After the death of her parents, Resine enters a Christian girls' boarding school and becomes the roommate of Simone who she at first does not like. After a fight with her mother, Simone kisses Resine in the school park. The two girls are then chosen to play the parts of *Romeo and Juliet* in a school play and kiss again on stage. Resine's friend Louise sees her having a fight with Simone and starts spreading the rumor that they are more than just roommates. Hearing this by chance, Resine is heartbroken and Simone introduces her to a group of young men she had befriended. Resine thus starts dating a young man named Renault. Simone is jealous and confesses her love (*ai*) to Resine who is shocked and runs away to her aunt's home. She moves to a school in Marseille where she receives a letter telling her that Simone had been killed. Resine is shocked and goes to see Renault who relates that Simone had been drunk and had provoked her friend Marcel to kill her. Renault gives Resine a letter to her from Simone. Reading it, Resine becomes aware that she loves Simone. She interprets her pain as punishment for running away and realizes that she will never be able to love again.

Unlike Yashiro's rather simple style, Yamagishi draws beautiful characters with long flowing hair, large eyes and fashionable clothes. She clearly adheres to the new style of *shōjo* manga with its reliance on symbolism and overflowing decor. Yet despite this difference in style, Yamagishi like Yashiro depicts the main female characters of *Shiroi heya no futari* as pair of opposites. This is already apparent on the colored title page: Resine, in the foreground, looks pure, innocent and vulnerable with her white curly hair and the translucent veil. Simone

right behind her looks sad, the pitch-black hair resembling a shadow enveloping her. This basic juxtaposition between white and black continues throughout the manga. Resine is the "good girl" who does as told and believes in God (*kami-sama*)[12], whereas Simone is the "bad girl" who does not care about rules or the Christian religion. Despite their contrasting character traits, both protagonists use speech patterns coded as "female": Resine as well as Simone frequently employ the sentence end particle *wa*. Simone additionally uses the first person pronoun *atashi*.

As in *Shīkuretto rabu*, the difference between friendship and love is the main source of distress for the main character Resine, particularly the two terms *suki* (to like/love) and *ai* (love). At first, Resine uses the ambiguous *suki* to describe her feelings. Lying in her bed alone at night and crying, she thinks "I really loved/liked [*suki*] Simone…" (Yamagishi 1976, 67; ellipse in original) She later uses the ambiguous nature of *suki* to explain her feelings to Simone: "Simone, I like [*suki*] you, but…… as a friend!" (68; ellipse in original) In contrast, Simone throughout the story refers to her feelings for Resine as *ai*. She confesses these feelings for the first time after the staging of *Romeo and Juliet*. Standing behind Resine, she puts her arms around her and holds her hands. Simone has her eyes closed and tells Resine "I love you [*ai shiteite*]" (55). The corresponding panel background is completely black and Simone is almost completely white. The darkness draws attention and emphasizes Resine's reaction: her eyes are wide in shock. When Resine starts dating Renault, Simone asks her whether she loves (*ai shiteru*) him. Resine affirms "Yes, I love him!" (68), but the panel shows her feet instead of her face. The reader is thus lead to agree with Simone that Resine is lying. Even after Resine has left, Simone's feelings for her are unchanged and before Marcel kills her, she tells him "Because I loved her, I can never love anyone else again." (77)

Fittingly for a tragedy, it is only when Simone dies and Resine receives her letter with a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke[13] that she realizes her actual feelings. She sees that she is now eternally connected with Simone and that the pain she feels is love (*ai*). Resine thinks that she is punished with suffering for having risked (and lost) this love. This is visually represented on one whole page consisting of one panel. It shows Resine kneeling on the ground in agony before a close-up of Simone's head and shoulders. Simone jets a sad last look back at the world (Yamagishi 1976, 83). In the third to last panel of the manga, Resine calls Simone her "beloved" (*ai suru hito*) (84), admitting that her and Simone's feelings had been the same.

As suggested by the usage of the term *ai* (which is a staple in Japanese fiction, but rarely used in real life), Simone's feelings for Resine are more than just superficial. Nevertheless, their relationship does not go beyond innocent kisses. To my knowledge, *Shiroi*

heya no futari was the first *shōjo* manga to depict two female characters kissing. The first kiss occurs after Simone's fight with her mother. Simone sits in the school park at a water fountain and Resine wants to console her. The panel with the kiss covers the entire lower half of the page. It is an upside-down mirror image of their first kiss, as if it was seen in the water of the fountain. Simone as well as Resine had been crying before and neither of them is presented as smiling during this kiss (Yamagishi 1976, 46). The dark color and the unusual perspective emphasize that this is not a moment of happiness for them. It is also a secret kiss: the reader is positioned as an intruder, not allowed to directly glimpse the characters kissing.

The second (and last) kiss occurs on stage in the *Romeo and Juliet* theater play. It is not a happy one either, but decidedly one that is permissible and even greeted—as part of a theatrical performance. As Fujimoto (2014, 101) notes, theater plays can be found in many early *shōjo* manga about female same-sex intimacy, possibly to draw a parallel between the tragedy of the play and the tragedy of the manga. [14] When their (male) teacher urges Resine and Simone to kiss during rehearsals, a student comments laughingly that he is "indecent." He responds "They are two girls. There's nothing to be ashamed of." Another student then laughingly tells Resine "Because of that [i.e., you two being girls], [you're] all the more [ashamed.] Right, Resine?" (Yamagishi 1976, 50) The actual kiss on stage is shown as a close-up of Simone and Resine with both of them looking concentrated rather than happy (52). The students are shown to be excited about the rehearsal kiss (50) as well as the kiss on stage (53). For them, Resine and Simone are the "supreme couple" (49). Resine's aunt similarly comments how lovely she found the play (54).

But outside the world of theater, female same-sex intimacy is not permissible in *Shiroi heya no futari*. The negative reactions of her social environment drive Resine away from Simone. In the library, Resine overhears a conversation between two students. One of them is gossiping that someone saw Resine and Simone embracing each other. The other student's reaction to this is a loud "Gee, lesbians [*wā rezu*]!?" Resine is shocked when she hears this. The following panel shows her upside down, grasping her head with her hands and screaming "*Rezu*?!" (Yamagishi 1976, 57) The rope pattern in the panel background further emphasizes her shock. While *rezu* is still a rather harsh word today, it must have been even harsher for readers in the early 1970s when "lesbians" were mostly invisible in Japanese society (see McLelland, Suganuma and Welker 2007).

The negatively connoted term *rezu* haunts Resine for the rest of her time at the school. When she tells Simone about the overheard conversation and that they are seen as "lesbians [*resubian*; *sic*]," she is still trembling with shock and fear, almost spilling her tea. The

following panel shows a close-up of Simone's face before a dark background. She does not look shocked but rather as if she had anticipated this. A crying Resine asks her whether she is not shocked and Simone answers "I hate telling lies." (Yamagishi 1976, 59) This could be interpreted as Simone admitting that she is a "lesbian." But this scene is not necessarily about the issue of "sexual identity." Simone could also mean "I don't want to lie about what kind of feelings I have for you"—that she feels love rather than friendship for Resine, irrespective of her "sexual identity", thus re-invoking the juxtaposition between *suki* and *ai* discussed above.

Resine clearly refuses the term *rezu* for herself: At night, she is crying and thinking "I'm no *rezu*" (Yamagishi 1976, 60). Simone tries to help her by introducing her to a group of young men, but Resine realizes that they make her jealous. Back in their room, she falls crying into Simone's arms and asks her to never forget her. Simone answers that she never will (65–66). In a large panel covering the lower half of the page, Resine and Simone embrace. The background depicts a churning sea (66) that emphasizes the intensity of their emotions but at the same time foreshadows the sad ending of their relationship. At night in her bed, Resine realizes that she likes (*suki*) Simone. But then she remembers the "Gee lesbians!?" reaction and in agony calls for God (67).

This suggests that Resine is not only troubled by the reactions of her social environment. In part, she also seems to be fighting with her Christian beliefs. Earlier in the story, when she cries for her mother on a tree, she sees the image of Simone and runs away crying "No no God forgive me!" (Yamagishi 1976, 40) During her last fight with Simone, the panel design suggests that Resine's Christian beliefs separate her from Simone: The upper half of the double page is covered by two panels that can be read as one. The right page shows a close-up of Simone's head on an almost white background. On the left page we see a close-up of Resine's head before a black background. The difference between black and white already suggests the separation of the characters. Positioned between the two is a collapsing white statue of the Virgin Mary as a symbol of Resine's Christian beliefs (70–71). Simone reproaches Resine: "I don't want to entrust my heart to a statue made of stone like you do!!" (70) She accuses Resine of being unwilling to diverge from the rails of society (69). Resine runs away crying and screaming "I cannot become like you" (71)—either independent from what others are thinking or unbelieving in God. From a European or US American point of view, the connection between Christianity and the condemnation of female same-sex intimacy seems obvious, but this has never been a major topic in other Japanese stories about female (or male) same-sex intimacy, presumably because Christianity does not play a major role in Japan.

Like *Shīkuretto rabu*, *Shiroi heya no futari* tries to explain the close relationship between its female protagonists. This time, the reason is not hatred of men, but the characters' problematic family circumstances. Resine feels lonely because her parents died and her aunt wants only Resine's money (Yamagishi 1976, 8–9). When she cries for her mother on a tree, she sees the image of Simone appear on the bark (39). It could therefore be argued that she finds the emotional warmth of a mother in Simone. In contrast, Simone does not hold her mother in high esteem. When she hears Resine crying for her mother at night, she comments: "Good grief, what's so great about a mum?" (18) Simone is upset about her own mother, who has fallen for a much younger man, and even suspects that she does not know who exactly her father is (40–41). Simone and Resine kiss for the first time after the fight with her mother (46), suggesting that Simone realizes her feelings for Resine through her sadness about her own mother.

Whereas in *Shīkuretto rabu*, the male character Makio was depicted as somewhat sympathetic, the male characters in *Shiroi heya no futari* are more problematic. While Renault does not harm Resine, he is one of the reasons for Resine's and Simone's breakup. And Marcel, who appears in only two short scenes, cannot accept that Simone does not love him (Yamagishi 1976, 77–78) and in the end kills her. Implicitly, this means that girls can only become happy with each other if men cannot interfere, emphasizing the need for secrecy.

Yuri *and 1970s* Shōjo *Manga*

Despite the differences in artistic style, we see quite a few similarities between *Shīkuretto rabu* and *Shiroi heya no futari*: the main "couple" is portrayed as a pair of opposites, the texts offer an explanation for the attraction to a person of the same sex, and male characters interfere in the relationship's development. Together with the tragic ending, these motives can be found in many later *shōjo* manga about female same-sex intimacy well into the 1990s, e.g. Fukuhara Hiroko's *Kurenai ni moyu* (Burning in crimson; 1979), Ariyoshi Kyōko's *Apurōzu—kassai* or Fujimura Mari's *Futte mo harete mo* (Come rain or come shine; 1993–95) (see also Fujimoto 2008 [1998], 243–83). And although both female and male same-sex intimacy were topics of 1970s *shōjo* manga, only the boys' love genre was quickly established on the market (Welker 2015).

Both *Shīkuretto rabu* and *Shiroi heya no futari* display the same characteristics that have discursively been established for the *yuri* genre, i.e. the atmosphere of beauty, cuteness, innocence, tragedy and secrecy. The characters are portrayed as beautiful and cute

(emphasized by the *shōjo* manga style), the relationships are innocent and the stories are heartrending. The framework of *esu* relationships as acceptable form of female same-sex intimacy no longer exists in the 1970s, and these *shōjo* manga reflect this: what was once permissible is now a source of distress for the characters. Feelings have to be kept secret and are prohibited by the social environment. In this regard, these manga reflect their time the same way *shōjo shōsetsu* did before the war. But the portrayal of female same-sex intimacy also follows a broader pattern of *shōjo* manga from the 1950s to the early 1970s. These often portrayed tragic stories with sad endings, a tendency inherited from prewar *shōjo shōsetsu* (Yonezawa 2004, 34–37, 47–49, 99–103).

The tragic aspect of manga like *Shīkuretto rabu* and *Shiroi heya no futari* is also a major point for the editorial staff of *Yuri shimai* and *Komikku yuri hime*. In *Yuri shimai*, a text about female same-sex intimacy in 1970s *shōjo* manga is titled "Secret love [*ren'ai*] and suffering," saying that "if the element of prohibition is added to a fairy tale world, this will accompany the distress of isolation from the outside world." ("Yuri no hana saku" 2003, 56) A similar description can be found in the *Yuri sakuhin fairu* guidebook. It adds that these manga focus on "secrets between only two" and that in them love (*ai*) burns stronger because of the obstacles involved (Sugino 2008, 77). In *Komikku yuri hime* as well, the fact that society cannot accept the characters' love and the ensuing problems are emphasized (NOV 2010b, 200; "Yuri history rewind" 2012, 13).

Most fans I spoke to made rather general references to the 1970s as "time when *yuri* manga started." The exact titles were not known and/or not considered important. This can also be seen in my online survey among fans of the *yuri* genre in Japan: no respondent gave *Shīkuretto rabu* as one of their top five *yuri* works and only one gave *Shiroi heya no futari*. Of the manga editors I interviewed, two mentioned early *shōjo* manga as early examples of *yuri* manga, but none of them gave any specific titles. I suspect that this lack of knowledge is partly due to the limited availability of these two manga: all paperback editions have been out of print since at least the 1980s and second hand bookstores sell them for 2,000 yen and more. The limited accessibility would also explain why these two manga are not often mentioned in journalistic articles which tend to list texts that are still widely available for purchase.

Notes

1. For a detailed history of early *shōjo* manga see Takahashi (1991a, 1991b) and Yonezawa (2007).
2. For more on Yashiro's works see Takahashi (1991a, 126) and Yonezawa (2007, 128–32).

3. The other manga in this volume do not address female same-sex intimacy.

4. The verb "cannot tell" could refer to the readers or the main character Atsushi.

5. The depiction suggests that Fuyuko accidentally lets a glass of sulfuric acid slip from her sweating hands (Yashiro 1978, 27). In a letter to Atsushi, Fuyuko later writes that she let the glass fall down on purpose (29–30).

6. Fuyuko's hair is pictured in white, but Atsushi says that it is red (Yashiro 1978, 9).

7. Not to be mistaken for Shūeisha's other *shōjo* manga magazine *Ribon*, which is still being published today. *Ribon komikku* was first published in 1969, but after its March 1971 issue was merged with *Ribon* (Takahashi 1991b, 41; Yonezawa 2007, 205).

8. For more on Yamagishi see Hashimoto (1988, 171–222) and Takahashi (1991b, 86–87).

9. The other works in those volumes do not address female same-sex intimacy.

10. Examples include a girl with an artificial leg or a story about incest and double suicide (Yonezawa 2007, 201–5).

11. To avoid confusion, I give the French spelling of characters' names rather than the *katakana* version. Resine's name is the only one which is also given in Latin alphabet in the manga (Yamagishi 1976, 81). The transcription of all other names is my interpretation.

12. *Kami-sama* does not necessarily refer to the Christian God, but since Resine is supposed to be French, it is highly unlikely that she would call for any other deity.

13. Titled "Kanojo-tachi o shitta kara ni wa shinaneba naranu" (You have to die because you know them; ger. "Man muss sterben, weil man sie kennt"), it is originally about men being unable to bear women's beauty. Yamagishi changed the Japanese translation from *kanojo-tachi* (them, i.e. women) to *kanojo* (her, i.e. Resine). In the manga, Simone first recites this poem in class (Yamagishi 1976, 30–31).

14. Yamagishi consciously changed the script of *Romeo and Juliet*. Resine speaks lines from the famous "balcony scene" (specifically 2.2.113–15 and 2.2.129–30) after which Yamagishi (1976) added "Let us kiss once more." (52)

Chapter 4. Fans' Imagination Galore: *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon*

In the discursively established history of the *yuri* genre, another gap occurs between the *shōjo* manga of the 1970s and the milestone of the series *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* in the 1990s. Again, the texts that appeared in the years between are not considered influential. An article in the first issue of *Yuri shimai* even wonders whether the 1980s should be referred to as an "era of darkness" ("Yuri no hana saku" 2003, 57) for the *yuri* genre. However, Fujimoto (2014b) notes a turn in these years from the tragedies of the 1970s to happier stories about female same-sex intimacy, like Yoshida Akimi's *Sakura no sono*, and attributes this in part to the 1985 Equal Employment Opportunity Law which implemented gender equality in the workplace: it is now no longer important to be "chosen" by a man (103; see also Welker 2010a). In *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon*, we see a positive portrayal of female same-sex intimacy. The series is also a prime example for the importance of fans' interpretations in this regard.

The 1990s: A New Era for Manga and Anime

Fujimoto (2009) argues that in 1990s *shōjo* manga the former big topic of romantic love (*ren'ai*) became less important, the focus shifting towards the self and its environment: the main character was now seeking self-fulfillment (40). Part of that development is the appearance of the motif of the "fighting girl" (*tatakau shōjo*), embodied by *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon*.[1]

The series is further emblematic of four major changes that occurred in the 1990s in manga and anime in general. Firstly, even a cursory glance at 1990s issues of anime magazines like *Animage* and *Newtype* reveals that the looks of anime began to change during these years: grim male heroes were slowly replaced (or at least backed) by cute female characters. *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* was part of that trend: over the course of five seasons, its anime version featured a total of ten female characters in its core group, but only one male character. Its female characters were also much more popular than any of its male ones.[2]

Secondly, manga magazine sales started to drop after peaking in the mid-1990s. Partly as a result of this development, media franchise strategies became ever more important: popular stories and their characters had to be marketed in various forms, including manga, anime, video games, merchandising etc. (Nakano 2004, 152–80) Although *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* boosted the sales of its "home" *shōjo* manga magazine *Nakayoshi* (Pals)

(MANGAseek and Nichigai Associates 2003, 229), it is also a prime example of a media franchise.

Thirdly, the 1990s witnessed the growing visibility of the former underground culture of fan works. They had become popular in the mid-1970s, but when printing and copying technologies became cheaper, more and more amateurs became able to produce and distribute their own works at low cost. From the 1980s on, fan works saw a boom (Lam 2010, 236–38) and *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* is considered one of the texts that had a major impact on the scene (Fujimoto [1998] 2008, 298).

Finally, it was in the 1990s that manga and especially anime spread to the United States and Europe on a large scale. *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* was sold to dozens of countries and is credited as having been one of the series that helped spark the manga and anime boom in the United States and many European countries (Maser 2012, 277). Due to its success, previously largely unknown *shōjo* manga gained a foothold in these countries.

Despite its popularity and impact, scholarly research on *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* is still limited. The articles that are available were mostly written before the completion of the series and/or make no distinction between its manga and its anime version. With few exceptions (e.g. Allison 2000), English language research takes a critical stance towards *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* (e.g. Allison 2006, 128–62; Grigsby 1998). In contrast, Japanese researchers mostly see the series in a favorable light (e.g. Kumata 2005, 50–63; Saitō 2010, 140–51; Yomota 2006, 123–27). In both languages, the fans and their activities are rarely considered. Female same-sex intimacy in *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* as well is seldom discussed.

Due to restrictions of space, I focus on the two female characters that in the Japanese discourse on the *yuri* genre are considered to have been decisive: Haruka/Sailor Uranus and Michiru/Sailor Neptune. My discussion centers on the original manga and the original animated television series.[3] In both versions, Haruka and Michiru appear as an ambiguous pair that could be either friends or lovers. It was the fans who imagined them as romantically involved and produced fan works about them. Based on this interpretation, *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* was later assigned to the *yuri* genre.

The Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon *Media Franchise and Story*

Exactly how *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* was "born" is somewhat of a mystery. One version of the story says that Irie Yoshio, editor at Kōdansha's *shōjo* manga magazine

Nakayoshi, came up with the idea and then looked for a manga artist to draw it (Prough 2011, 159n10). Another version starts in 1991 with manga artist Takeuchi Naoko[4] and her editor Osano Fumio gathering ideas for a short manga to be featured in the summer edition of the *shōjo* manga magazine *Run run* (Euphoric).[5] Takeuchi wanted to draw a manga about "a champion of justice" and Osano suggested that this character should wear a sailor suit ("Takeuchi Naoko-san ga hajimete" 1992, 34). The manga, *Kōdonēmu wa Sērā V* (en. *Codename: Sailor V*), first appeared in the August 1991 issue of *Run run*. It was so successful that it continued serialization in self-contained segments until November 1997 and was later issued in paperback format.

After the publication of the first chapter of *Codename: Sailor V*, the anime production company Tōei approached Takeuchi and Osano to make an anime version of the manga. In the end it was decided to create a completely new series with a longer story (Mori 1998, 63–64). Thus in its February 1992 issue,[6] *Nakayoshi* began serializing a manga with the same setting of a super heroine sporting a sailor suit: *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon*. On the colored title spread, the advertising text read: "Extremely dynamic sailor suit action. Finally, the greatest of 1992's much-discussed works appears!!" (*Nakayoshi* 1992/2, 16–17) The manga was serialized until the March 1997 issue in a total of fifty-two chapters, and was also published in eighteen paperback volumes which by mid-1995 (publication of volume ten) had already sold more than ten million copies (*Run run* 1995/7, 109). In 1993, *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* earned Takeuchi the seventeenth Kōdansha manga award (Takeuchi 2004g, 299).

The cover of *Nakayoshi*'s March 1992 issue boasted the "exploding popularity" of *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* and inside the anime television series was announced (*Nakayoshi* 1992/3, 153, 186). It was broadcast once a week on the Saturday 7:00 p.m. slot on the TV Asahi network. An instant success, it lasted until 1997 for five seasons with a total of 200 episodes. In addition, three animated feature films were produced. Manga and anime were accompanied by a myriad of merchandising. Over ten thousand different products are said to have been available when season three aired (Mori 1998, 68) and licensing sales alone amounted to 300 billion yen (64). To this day, *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* remains widely popular: since 2014, the remake anime series *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon Crystal* airs online to celebrate the original's twentieth birthday.

Compared to the breadth and depth of the media franchise, the story[7] of *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* is rather simple: Ordinary middle school student Usagi one day meets the talking cat Luna who tells her that she is actually the *senshi*[8] for justice, Sailor Moon. She obtains a brooch to transform and the duty to fight the numerous enemies trying to rule/destroy the

earth. Usagi soon gains friends, also sailor *senshi*: Ami (Sailor Mercury), Rei (Sailor Mars), Makoto (Sailor Jupiter) and Minako (Sailor Venus, the former Sailor V). Usagi's boyfriend Mamoru fights as Takishīdo kamen ("tuxedo mask"). In the past, he had been Usagi's lover when she had been Serenity, Princess of the Moon, and he Endymion, Prince of the Earth. As the story progresses and enemies are vanquished, numerous other allies join the fight, among them Haruka and Michiru.

Originally, *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* was positioned as a series about beautiful fighting girls targeting a young female audience. However, the series was also popular with adults of both genders (MANGAseek and Nichigai Associates 2003, 229). The friendships between the series' female characters spurred the imagination of many of these readers. At the height of *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon*'s popularity, the term *yuri* as a name for a genre about female same-sex intimacy did not yet exist. Yet even without a name, the topic was present in fans' interpretations of the series. Already before the appearance of Haruka and Michiru, there were fan works about female same-sex intimacy involving Usagi and her friends. Yet the most popular pairing was (and remains) Haruka and Michiru, and their relationship is one of the main factors for *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* today being discursively positioned as a milestone in the history of the *yuri* genre. *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* is seen as a "masterpiece that represents *yuri*" and as a "monument" of the genre ("Yuri-shimai Book Center" 2004, 61). For *Komikku yuri hime*'s editor-in-chief Nakamura, *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* is a must *yuri* text (Endō 2009, 87). Kumata (2005) equally refers to it as a prime representative of the *yuri* genre (74).

Haruka and Michiru appear in the manga volumes six to twelve (Act 27–38 and Act 44–60)[9] and in the anime seasons three (1994/95; episodes 90–127) and five (1996/97; episodes 167–200). Manga artist Takeuchi later noted the difference between her own manga version and the anime version of Haruka and Michiru: "To be honest, since in the anime those two [i.e. Haruka and Michiru] were almost different persons than in the original, I was extremely shocked. It wasn't meant that way![, I thought]. But since really a lot of you fans came to like the two… I was rescued ♥" (Takeuchi 1996, 67; ellipses in original). Since the story as well develops differently in the two forms, manga and anime have to be considered separately. They portray two radically different versions of Haruka: in the manga, the character has an ambivalent gender, whereas in the anime the character is thoroughly "female." In both versions, Haruka's relationship with Michiru remains open to interpretation, an openness later used in fan works.

The Manga Version of Haruka and Michiru

The *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* manga focuses on the numerous fights with the main villains and the maturation of the central character Usagi/Sailor Moon. As a result, the other characters and their interpersonal relationships remain relatively undeveloped. This is also true for Haruka and Michiru whose most relevant scenes can be found in the earlier chapters.

Like the characters of earlier works about female same-sex intimacy, Haruka and Michiru are portrayed as beautiful and cute, but at the same time as a pair of opposites in terms of looks and character. They are introduced as boyfriend and girlfriend: male Haruka is a famous racer, Michiru a famous violinist, and both have a large number of male and female fans (Takeuchi 2004a, 27–28). The first time Sailor Moon sees their alter egos Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune, Uranus wears the same (male) attire as Sailor Moon's long-time ally Takishīdo kamen (82–83). Takeuchi draws Haruka the same way she draws all of her other male characters: tall, with short hair and usually wearing "male" clothes (e.g. pants or a suit; 27, 168). Haruka's speech pattern is equally coded as "male" through the usage of the first person pronoun *ore* (101) and the second person pronoun *omae* (107). Until the end of Act 28, readers would therefore have assumed that Haruka was male.

Yet Haruka's gender is not as stable as it seems. In a cliffhanger at the end of Act 28, the reader sees the female version of Sailor Uranus for the first time, even though she remains nameless at this point. Uranus here wears the same uniform with a pleated skirt as all other *senshi* (Takeuchi 2004a, 127). At the beginning of the next chapter, Usagi is lead to believe that this female *senshi* is in fact Haruka (129). She becomes confused about Haruka: "—— It's strange. This person…… looks male as well as female……" (143; dashes and ellipses in original) A few scenes later, she sees Haruka wearing a blouse and skirt, and using the female first person pronoun *atashi* (161–63). Later, Usagi mistakes Haruka for her boyfriend Mamoru (199–200) and voices her confusion by asking Haruka whether he/she is male or female. Haruka evades a clear answer and wants to know whether that is really so important (202). When they meet again, Haruka is dressed "female" with a top and a skirt (Takeuchi 2004b, 43). Usagi's/Sailor Moon's confusion only ends two chapters later, when Sailor Neptune explains to her "—— Uranus is male as well as female" and that he/she is a *senshi* with the strength of both genders (74; dash in original).

Even afterwards, Haruka's gender remains highly unstable. He/she is never shown again in his/her "male" school uniform, instead now wearing dresses and skirts (Takeuchi 2004b, 94, 166). In a later chapter however, Haruka again wears pants and is referred to as Michiru's

boyfriend (Takeuchi 2004c, 207). Once again, the people around him/her are confused about his/her gender (204–5). In the final arc of the manga, Haruka and Michiru are no longer referred to as lovers. Instead, Haruka is now depicted as (almost) thoroughly female. He/she wears a school uniform for girls (e.g. Takeuchi 2004e, 17–18), dresses or blouse and pants (42, 163). The speech pattern as well changes: only in a few instances he/she uses gendered particles such as the "female" *wa* (80). For the most part, the speech style is now gender neutral.

Notably, apart from her first appearance, Haruka's alter ego Sailor Uranus is always coded as nothing other than "female." As described, her uniform has the same style as those of the other *senshi*. Uranus further uses speech patterns that are coded as "female," with pronouns such as *atashi* (Takeuchi 2004a, 133) and *anata* (Takeuchi 2004b, 74). Like the other *senshi*, she is later referred to as "princess" (Takeuchi 2004d, 181) and transforms into wearing a dress (183). I suspect that Takeuchi preferred Haruka's female version. In an interview with the German manga and anime magazine *AnimaniA*, she for example admitted that she prefers drawing females (Holzer 1999, 52). In a 1998 question and answer session at San Diego Comic Con International, she stated that Haruka was female and always would be (McCarter 1998).

In contrast to Haruka, Michiru/Sailor Neptune is always depicted as "female": She has long, curly hair, wears dresses and skirts as well as a school uniform for girls (e.g. Takeuchi 2004a, 28). Michiru/Sailor Neptune uses speech patterns coded as "female," such as the pronouns *anata* (34) and *watashi* (Takeuchi 2004b, 71).

Only a few scenes in the manga are devoted to the relationship between Haruka and Michiru. They portray an innocent one somewhere between friendship and love. For example, in one scene before Haruka's gender is questioned, Haruka and Michiru are worried that they might already be too late to save the world. With her typical fine lines, Takeuchi depicts Haruka as "male," wearing pants and a shirt that does not suggest that he/she has breasts. Standing behind Michiru, Haruka embraces her, eyes closed as if to suggest that he/she is kissing her hair (Takeuchi 2004a, 101). On the following page, the bottom half is made up of one single panel. It shows a close-up of Haruka's and Michiru's face in lateral view, looking at each other and Haruka holding Michiru's hand (102). This is the closest that Takeuchi ever gets to suggest a kiss between the two. Although they are (at this point) supposed to be boy- and girlfriend, their relationship remains a purely platonic one. In contrast, the main couple Usagi and Mamoru is frequently shown kissing throughout the entire manga (e.g. 21). Uranus is also shown kissing Sailor Moon (134) and Usagi even dreams that Haruka kisses her (138).

In the manga, the relationship between Haruka and Michiru is much closer to "(close) friendship" than to "love." Physical contact is limited to embraces (Takeuchi 2004c, 225) or a linking of arms (Takeuchi 2004f, 260). Takeuchi's color illustrations as well at best remain ambiguous. On the illustration for Act forty-seven, Haruka is the only one who wears pants and he/she is depicted holding the hands of Michiru and Usagi who both appear to be sleeping (Takeuchi 2004d, 100–101). The illustration for Act fifty-three shows both Haruka and Michiru wearing dresses. Haruka lies in Michiru's lap and Michiru's right hand touches Haruka's breast (Takeuchi 2004e, 144–45). Scenes that could suggest a love relationship are scarce and rely on readers' interpretation. For example, Michiru sits behind Haruka on the bicycle when they are riding to school (17–18), like a typical fictional love couple of Japanese popular culture. In another scene, Haruka is depicted as being jealous of one of Michiru's male fans (Takeuchi 2004c, 206–7).

The ambiguity of the relationship between Haruka and Michiru in the manga is somewhat explained by how they were conceived. Initially, Takeuchi (2004b) had planned for both Haruka and Michiru to be "female," and for them to be connected by a "strong emotional tie" (85). She intended them to be like a Takarazuka Revue pairing, with Haruka being the *otoko-yaku* (Takeuchi 1999, 50–51). It could thus be argued that Haruka was meant to be adored and to remain ambiguous and unattainable.

Judged solely on the basis of the manga, it is hard to understand why *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* is today often considered a *yuri* text. Haruka/Sailor Uranus has an ambiguous gender and the relationship between him/her and Michiru/Sailor Neptune is closer to "friendship" than to "love." Yet as it has been noted previously, the anime version was far more influential than the manga (Kumata 2005, 74). In the anime, Haruka and Michiru have an equally ambiguous relationship, but one that is closer to "love" than to "friendship." Furthermore, Haruka is clearly gendered as "female."

The Anime Version of Haruka and Michiru

Although the anime version is significantly different from the manga, here as well Haruka and Michiru are depicted as beautiful and as a pair of opposites. This starts with their introduction in episode ninety-two: Usagi and Minako are hanging out at their usual game center and meet Haruka who wears a "male" school uniform (pants, tie and a blazer). Usagi and Minako think that Haruka is a "beautiful boy" and "good-looking"—their eyes turn into hearts and a large heart pops up behind them. Haruka is depicted in shining light, (imaginary)

rose petals flow around her and music from a choir and bells accompany her appearance. The same music plays a few minutes later when Michiru makes her debut, dressed in a "female" school uniform (blouse with a ribbon and a skirt). Usagi and Minako think that she is "beautiful." They suspect that Haruka and Michiru are "lovers" (*koibito*), but Michiru negates this. Minako's crush on Haruka abruptly ends at the close of the episode when her friends notice that Haruka is actually female.

In contrast to the manga version, in the anime Haruka's gender is definite. She is presented as a girl, albeit one with short light brown hair and comparatively small eyes, which makes her look like the other male characters of the series. She is never once shown in specifically "female" attire like dresses or skirts, but rather wears suits or jeans and t-shirt. Even her occasional kimonos are coded as "male": their color scheme is blue and gray and the *obi* sash is the small "male" version (ep. 103, 104). Haruka's speech style as well is marked as "male" through the usage of the first person pronoun *boku*, the second person pronoun *kimi* and sentence end particles such as *ze* and *zo*. Her alter ego Sailor Uranus as well uses a speech style that is coded as "male," such as the first person pronoun *ware* and the second person pronoun *omae*. Despite wearing makeup, a skirt, high heels and an earring, Uranus does not act "female" at all. Her attack move "World shaking" appears to be much more powerful than the attack of any other *senshi*—its blast rips open the earth. Her secondary weapon is a sword, equally coded as "male."

Unlike Haruka, Michiru is not much different from her manga version, albeit still being constructed as an opposite to Haruka. She appears as thoroughly "female" through her attire and speech style. Michiru has long wavy dark green hair, wears skirts or dresses, and her occasional kimonos are brightly patterned (ep. 103, 104). Michiru uses a speech style that is coded as "female," such as the first person pronoun *atashi* and the sentence end particle *wa*. As Sailor Neptune, she remains "female," albeit with a dedication to her mission that could be read as "male."

As in the manga, Haruka's and Michiru's relationship remains ambiguous and innocent, but with a number of innuendos that give the possibility to see more if one wishes to—as did the creators of fan works. When asked directly, Haruka as well as Michiru avoid any clear terms. As described, Michiru negates the question of whether they are lovers (ep. 92), and in a later episode, Haruka introduces Michiru as her "classmate" (ep. 96). Their relationship remains "pure" in the sense that physical contact is limited to the touching of hands. One prominent scene occurs in episode 110: Haruka, wearing her school uniform, sits at Michiru's window. Michiru, clad in a bathing suit and still soaked in water from her swimming pool,

sits down opposite her. The focus lies on their intertwined hands as they talk about their upcoming fight. Haruka is worried that her hands might not be strong enough to defeat the enemy, but Michiru ensures her (with a loving look): "It's okay, Haruka. I like [*suki*] your hands."

This is of course also a prime example for a comment that could be interpreted in a different, i.e. sexual way. Haruka's reaction to Michiru's statement remains somewhat ambiguous: her eyes widen and she seems to be confused about what exactly Michiru is trying to tell her. This is just one of the many innuendos in the anime that hint at Haruka and Michiru being lovers. In episode ninety-five for example, they enter a "love" [*ren'ai do*] contest. The participants face a number of challenges to determine whose love for each other is the greatest. When the host asks Haruka for the name of her "lover," she refuses to give an answer, suggesting that she does not see Michiru that way. The audience is left to speculate, as expressed by Ami's comment: "I wonder whether those two really have such a [i.e. love] relationship."

A number of other episodes contain ambiguous dialogues between Haruka and Michiru that hint at the possibility of them being lovers. For example, in episode 107 Michiru is presented with a bouquet of red roses by her student Masanori, a boy at least seven years her junior. When Haruka sees the flowers in Michiru's room the following dialogue ensues:

> MICHIRU. Are you bothered [by the roses]?
> HARUKA. A little bit. (*Michiru laughs*) Of course this is a present from your lover.
> MICHIRU. (*smirks*) Naturally.
> HARUKA. Oh. There's an overweening man who courts you.
> MICHIRU. It's rare that you're jealous.
> HARUKA. I'm not jealous. I just don't approve of you paying attention to someone other than me.
> MICHIRU. Haruka, that's what you call jealousy.

Both speak in a teasing tone that sounds more appropriate for lovers than for simple friends—or at least it can be interpreted that way.

Haruka's and Michiru's relationship does not seem to particularly bother any of the other characters, except for those episodes where one or several characters are shown having a crush on or being jealous of either Michiru or (mostly) Haruka. For example, like Minako, Makoto develops a short-lived crush on Haruka (ep. 96), but later states that she simply wants to become as beautiful a women as Haruka. In another episode, Yūichirō, who has a crush on Rei, thinks that Haruka is flirting with her. He later witnesses Haruka meeting Michiru in the park at night and accuses Haruka of cheating on Rei (ep. 99). Unlike in for example *Shiroi heya no futari*, the characters in the *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* anime do not judge the

possibility of Haruka and Michiru being more than friends. Terms like *rezu*(*bian*) are not uttered once.

The anime openly acknowledges the ambiguity of Haruka's and Michiru's relationship, but at the same time dismisses over-interpretation. In the introduction of episode 106, Usagi shortly narrates what will happen in this episode that deals with Haruka's and Michiru's past. At the end, she wonders "I thought they were more than lovers…," but quickly adds with her signature phrase "Oh, hey, hey, you [*kimi*] who is imagining weird things, on behalf of the moon, I will punish you!" It is possible that this was meant as a message to (male, as indicated by the pronoun *kimi*) viewers who were creating fan works that drew on ambiguous comments such as "more than lovers." In that case, the expression "weird things" should probably be thought of as referring to sexual acts, reinforcing the idea that the relationship is purely innocent.

The anime version of *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* adds a heartrending aspect to the relationship between Haruka and Michiru. Over the course of the story, they die three times (although they are resurrected afterwards). Especially their last "death" in episode 198 is also an example for the ambiguity of their relationship. Defeated by the enemy, they lie next to each other, their bodies slowly dissolving. The following dialog develops:

> HARUKA/URANUS. Michiru, are you afraid?
> MICHIRU/NEPTUNE. Haruka…
> HARUKA/URANUS. What?
> MICHIRU/NEPTUNE. Haruka, I want… to touch you

They reach for each other's hand and as they intertwine, they both "die." Although primarily a shocking turn of events in the series' grand finale, this is also an emotionally touching scene with its underlying romantic idea of lovers being united in death—something that was not possible for Resine and Simone in the 1970s.

It is unclear who in the anime production team was responsible for the ambiguous nature of Haruka's and Michiru's relationship as the persons involved give different statements in interviews. Series director/producer Satō Jun'ichi for example says that they had no hidden intention to create *yuri*-like content (Satō 2011, 52). A 1994 interview with Haruka's voice actress Ogata Megumi and Michiru's voice actress Katsuki Masako indicates the opposite:

> OGATA. Of course, since they [i.e. Haruka and Michiru] are two girls, I first thought they had a normal friendship relationship. Then I was told by Ikuhara [Kunihiko, the director of season three] "They are two females, but please think of them as husband and wife."
> KATSUKI. Yes, yes. Me too, I spontaneously thought "What!?" and was surprised.
> OGATA. And when I then asked Ikuhara "Is that to say that m-, maybe they're homosexuals?" (*laughs*), I was told "No, that's not the case. In any case, they're husband and wife."……. ("Futari wa fūfu na" 1994, 32; ellipse in original)

Ishida Minori (2014, 187) argues that Ikuhara had a decisive role in creating the anime version of Haruka and her ambiguous relationship with Michiru, although in a later interview Ikuhara repealed his "husband and wife" comment. Instead, he now said that Haruka and Michiru "share a common destiny" and that "they can see the purity of each other's heart" ("Futatsu no Moon Light" 1995, 12).

Imagine—How Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon *Became a* Yuri *Text*

Haruka and Michiru were very popular among the audiences of both the *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* manga and anime. In the 1995 *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* character popularity poll in *Nakayoshi*, Sailor Uranus placed sixth, Sailor Neptune seventh, Michiru ninth and Haruka tenth (*Nakayoshi* 1995/2, 152–53). In the 1996 poll, Sailor Uranus came in tenth, Haruka twelfth, Michiru sixteenth and Sailor Neptune twenty-second (*Nakayoshi* 1996/4, 60–61). For the entire *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* anime series, ratings peaked during season three (Mori 1998, 63), the first one to feature Haruka and Michiru. Especially Haruka was very popular among the fans. Readers of the anime magazine *Animage* frequently voted her into the monthly top ten of anime characters and even best female character of the year 1995 ("17th Anime Grand Prix" 1995, 38). A breakdown of the numbers suggests that Haruka especially appealed to *Animage*'s female readers ("Akemashite besuto 100" 1995, 11).

Haruka and Michiru became popular subjects of fan works about female same-sex intimacy. Here, the anime version was far more influential than the manga version: Haruka is usually portrayed as a female, and only occasionally as a hermaphrodite. Kumata (2005) calls the boom of works about Haruka and Michiru a "battering ram" that opened a new era of the *yuri* genre (74). A number of manga artist that are today known for drawing *yuri* manga started their career with *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* fan works, for example Hayashiya Shizuru (Nakamura S. 2008, 80). Yonezawa Yoshihiro, the late managing director of Comic Market, speculates that *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* was a perfect match for the tendency among young men in the 1990s to draw soft rather than frank erotic fan works. Therefore, he argues, girls could join. He also notes that with the advent of *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon*,

girls drew a lot of "lesbian [*rezu-teki*] stories" (Komikku māketto junbikai 2005, 184). This is also emphasized by Fujimoto Yukari ([1998] 2008) who argues that it was especially the relationship between Haruka and Michiru that stimulated the "lesbian [*rezubian*] taste" of the series' audience. For her, *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* was epoch-making for fan works since prior to its appearance, the fan works scene had been dominated by works about male-male romances (298). In the magazine *Cyzo* it is explained that especially female fan works artists coupled various characters of *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon*, the same way they had previously coupled male characters from *shōnen* manga (Endō 2009, 84). The article further emphasizes the importance of Haruka and Michiru and "their ominous relationship that did not insinuate homosexuality," especially for female fans (85).

In *Komikku yuri hime*, it is argued that the 1990s mark the "fan works *yuri* movement," and that the lead in this boom was taken by female artists who were inspired by the light love (*ren'ai*) relationships of the female characters in texts like *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon*. Those artists laid the foundation for today's *yuri* genre and created a *yuri* boom among fans of manga and anime. In this article, Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune are seen as direct personifications of the *yuri* genre (NOV 2010b, 201). *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* was also mentioned by a number of Japanese *yuri* fans I spoke to. They emphasized the importance of its anime over its manga version, and the role of Haruka and Michiru in the series. In my online survey, thirty-eight respondents gave *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* as one of their favorite *yuri* works. The series was also mentioned by two of the manga editors I interviewed who equally emphasized the importance of fans' interpretations of the series.

Manga artist Takeuchi Naoko's opinion on the fans' interpretation does not seem to be fixed.[10] At San Diego Comic Con International 1998, she for example said that Uranus and Neptune were lovers "because they fit together" (McCarter 1998). In an interview one year later, she slightly retracted:

> INTERVIEWER. Some readers asked us what would happen if Haruka and Michiru would get married…
> TAKEUCHI. (*laughs*) Maybe you should carefully teach them that all sailor *senshi* are women. Let's say, for genetic reasons. Even if the two would get married, there would certainly be no "second generation" of sailor *senshi*… (Holzer 1999, 52; ellipses in original)

In these comments, Haruka and Michiru appear more like an idealized *esu* couple, but both are still expected to marry and have children. But this is not Takeuchi's final word on the matter. The fourth volume of the manga's 2003 re-edition contains a number of newly drawn humorous *yonkoma* (four panel) manga and in one of them, Takeuchi muses about Haruka

and Michiru. In the last panel, which in this manga format equals the punch line, she writes: "Uranus and Neptune—I can tell you now, I was/we were aiming for a lesbian-like [*rezuppoi*] impression. I was/we were extremely happy that the fans and all of the anime's staff were totally into it."[11] This text is given in normal print font. In her own (smaller) handwriting, Takeuchi adds "But I absolutely can't remember why I/we made them lesbian-like." Seemingly as a nod to the *yuri* genre, this last panel is decorated with two lilies in the lower two corners (Takeuchi 2003, 244). So in the end, maybe it was all just a marketing stunt to stir attention and to boost the audience.

No matter the reason for the inclusion of Haruka and Michiru and their ambiguous relationship in *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon*, the fact remains that this was the first time that female same-sex intimacy became a big topic among Japanese fans of manga and anime. For those who produced the manga and the anime, the audience's interpretations mostly came as a surprise. Like all texts about female same-sex intimacy that came before it, the assignment of *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* to the *yuri* genre relies on the fans' interpretation. However, the series displays the same discursively established characteristics as the *yuri* genre: it is beautiful, cute, innocent and heartrending.

Notes

1. For more on the motif of the "fighting girl" in anime see Saitō (2010). In the Japanese discourse on the *yuri* genre, many texts about fighting girls after *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* are considered to be *yuri* texts, largely due to fans' interpretations of the relationships between their female characters. Examples include the media franchise series *Kādokyaputa Sakura* and *shōjo kakumei Utena* (in detail see Ishida 2014).

2. For example, Ami/Sailor Mercury regularly topped the *Animage* reader polls from late 1992 to mid-1995.

3. I exclude the anime movies as well as the manga and anime specials.

4. Takeuchi (born 1967) debuted in 1986 with *LOVE CALL* in *Nakayoshi derakkusu* (Pals deluxe) after winning the second Nakayoshi newcomer manga award (MANGAseek and Nichigai Associates 2003, 228–29).

5. *Run run* was at first a regular special edition (*zōkan*) of *Nakayoshi*, then its independent bi-monthly sister magazine from April 1993 to January 1998, when it stopped publication.

6. As it is often the case for manga magazines, the issue date and the sale date of *Nakayoshi* are not identical. The February 1992 issue was published in December 1991 (Takeuchi 2004g, 298).

7. The stories of the manga and the anime version are slightly different, but the overall plot is identical. For a more detailed account see Maser (2012).

8. There have been various translations for this term. The official Japanese version used "soldier," but later replaced it with "guardian." Some English sources use "champion" or "scout." I keep the original Japanese term *senshi* which can be translated as "warrior" or "fighter"

9. The numbers refer to the 2003/04 re-edition. In the original paperback version, the respective volumes are seven to ten (1994/95; Act 24–33) and fourteen to eighteen (1996/97; Act 39–52).

10. Takeuchi is not opposed to fan works per se. In 1998, she participated in Comic Market, selling a self-published manga she had made with her husband (Holzer 1999, 53).

11. Since Takeuchi collaborated closely with her editor, I chose "I/we" as translation.

Chapter 5. The Monumental Text: *Maria-sama ga miteru*

The trend of fan works about female same-sex intimacy could have faded quickly after the end of *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon*, but it took hold with the text that is discursively positioned as the epitome of the *yuri* genre: *Maria-sama ga miteru*. In its wake, the *yuri* genre was established on the Japanese market. Like *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon*, the series succeeded at appealing not only to its original target group of young girls, but also to adult females and (especially) males. Intimate relationships between female characters are the core of *Maria-sama ga miteru*. They are portrayed as innocent and normative, reminiscent of the *esu* relationships of the early twentieth century.

The Maria-sama ga miteru *Media Franchise, Setting and Story*

Maria-sama ga miteru is originally a light novel series by female author Konno Oyuki[1]. The first short story was published in Shūeisha's light novel magazine *Cobalt* in 1997, followed by thirty-nine paperback volumes under the label *Cobalt bunko* (Cobalt library)[2] from 1998 to 2012, illustrated by female artist Hibiki Reine. The text was a huge hit: until August 2011, 5.4 million copies of the light novel series had been sold (Web kobaruto 2011). The success led to an extensive media franchise: The manga version of the first eight volumes by female manga artist Nagasawa Satoru was published in Shūeisha's *shōjo* manga magazines *Margaret* and *Za Māgaretto* (The Margaret)[3] from 2003 to 2007, and later in paperback and A6 format. Between 2004 and 2009, an anime version (three television series and one OVA) was produced. 2010 saw the Japanese cinema release of a live action movie adaptation of the light novel's first volume (dir. Terauchi Kōtarō). To further promote it, manga artist Nagasawa drew a manga version of the light novel's ninth volume which ran in *Za Māgaretto* in 2010 and was later published in one paperback.

Despite its popularity, not much scholarly research has addressed *Maria-sama ga miteru*. The series is mentioned in various books and articles (e.g. Akaeda 2010, 285; Kan and Fujimoto 2008, 22; Ōizumi 2005, 45–46; Satō 2006, 4–6, 204–9; Yonemitsu 2002, 31–35), but research focusing solely on it is scarce and mostly centered on the light novel version. Some researchers argue that *Maria-sama ga miteru* is so successful because it incorporates current problems that especially resonate with its male readers (e.g. Akimoto 2006, 207–9; Kumata 2005, 35–39, 91–92), while others see it as a story "about self-discovery and self-acceptance" (Hairston 2006, 179).

In terms of genre, *Maria-sama ga miteru* started out as an ordinary *shōjo shōsetsu* in *Cobalt*, a magazine for girls in middle and high school with a print run of about 70,000 copies ("'Maria-sama ga miteru'" 2003, 36, 38). It was advertised as a "school comedy" (*Cobalt* 1997/2, 303) and later also as the "immortal work of *shōjo shōsetsu*" (Web kobaruto 2011). The manga version, equally published in manga magazines for a female readership, was not assigned to any particular genre. Rather, its advertising relied on the popularity of the light novel: the manga was the "talked about new serialization …; the first manga version of the highly popular *shōsetsu*" (cover of *Margaret* 2003/21) or "the series receiving much attention" (*Za Māgaretto* 2006/11, 844). The anime version as well at least officially targeted girls around middle school age ("'Maria-sama ga miteru'" 2003, 39), despite being broadcast at one in the morning on the TV Tokyo Network.

When *Maria-sama ga miteru* began being published, the *yuri* genre was not yet established on the Japanese market. Nevertheless, it did not take long for the series to be assigned to the *yuri* genre by its audience—to the point of it being referred to as the "monumental work of *yuri shōsetsu*" ("Hime Topi" 2011, 341). Already in the afterword of the second light novel volume, Konno (2003c) notes that on a certain Internet page her series had been described as "soft but completely *yuri*." She sees this as a "supreme compliment" although it made her laugh (212). In a later afterword, she elaborates further on the issue of assigning a genre to her work:

> "Maria-sama ga miteru" is fantasy. ——it seems.
>
> In addition, it's variously called "school comedy," "soft *yuri shōsetsu*," "mystery" etc.
>
> Well, I think it's great that the genre division for *shōsetsu* exists because it's useful when you organize large amounts of books or when you want to recommend [a book] to someone, but it's not something that you can state definitively and without hesitation. Since the label "This is such a *shōsetsu*" is attached depending on the impression the person had after reading, you may interpret it however you want unless it is greatly off the mark. (Konno 2008, 190; dash in original)

Thus Konno embraced the assignment of her light novel to the *yuri* genre (and still does, see Konno and Aoyagi 2014, 39). The website she refers to is probably that of the manga specialist shop Mangaoh in Hachiōji (Tokyo) which is said to have been the first to assign *Maria-sama ga miteru* to the *yuri* genre. From at least April 2001, it had a special section on the series where its male salesclerks described it as depicting a "soft *yuri* world" (Mangaoh kurabu 2001).

Strong bonds between females are indeed the main topic of *Maria-sama ga miteru*. The series is set at the (fictitious) Christian private Lillian Girls' Academy in present-day Tokyo. One of the school's particular traits is the so-called *sœur* system (French for "sister"): an older

student chooses a younger student as her *sœur* to mentor her.[4] As a symbol of sisterhood, the older student gives a rosary to the younger one. From then on, the *petite sœurs* (little sisters) call their respective "older sister" *o-nē-sama*.[5] The *sœur* system also forms the basis for the structure of the high school's student council Yamayurikai, on which the story centers (see fig. 1).

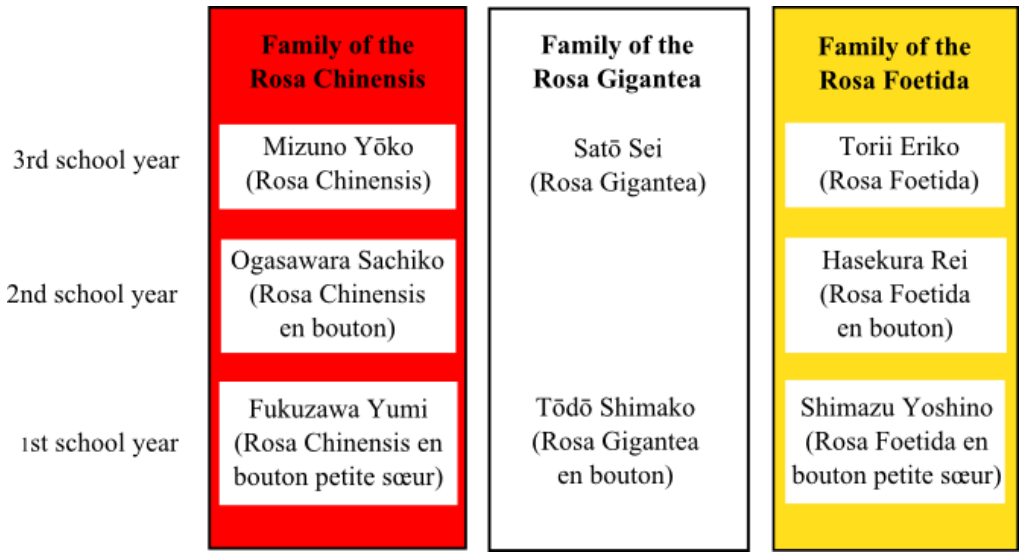


Figure 1. Structure of the Yamayurikai (compiled by the author)

The Yamayurikai is lead by three third-year students:[6] the red Rosa Chinensis,[7] the white Rosa Gigantea and the yellow Rosa Foetida. Each of these girls has a *sœur* from the second year, the respective Rosa en bouton (French for "bud"). These three girls in turn each have a *sœur* from the first year, the so-called Rosa en bouton petite sœur. In theory, the Yamayurikai thus consists of nine persons, but when Yumi joins the council at the end of volume one, the family of the white rose consists of only two students (Konno 2004a, 60–61).

As Akaeda Kanako (2010, 285) notes, *Maria-sama ga miteru* alludes to the *yuri* genre symbolically with the names "Lillian Girls' Academy" and "Yamayurikai." The school's name is presumably derived from the lily as a symbol of the Virgin Mary (especially *Lilium candidum*, also known as Madonna Lily; Watanabe 2009, 195) who is the school's guardian (Konno 2004c, 9). "Yamayurikai" literally means "Association of the mountain lily." The name is derived from the Japanese name *yamayuri* for the lily species *Lilium auratum* (Konno 2004a, 31). In the Japanese song of praise for the Virgin Mary, *Maria-sama no kokoro* (The heart of the Virgin Mary; text and melody Sakuma Takeshi), her heart is equated with this lily (Tenrei shikyō iinkai tenrei seika henshūbu 1980, 490). The hymn is mentioned multiple

times in *Maria-sama ga miteru* (e.g. Konno 2004a, 248). The names might have given fans further reason to assign the series to the *yuri* genre.

Akaeda (2010) adds that the portrayal of the *sœur* relationships is faithful to the *esu* relationships of the early twentieth century (285). Indeed, they are presented with romantic imagery and dialogues, but stay innocent in that there is almost no physical contact between the *sœurs*. Like *esu* relationships, *sœur* relationships are exclusively between two girls. At the Lillian Girls' Academy, they are acceptable (if not normative), but much like *esu* relationships, these *sœur* bonds will end as soon as the older student graduates. One might add that the usage of the outdated[8] greeting formula *gokigen'yō* ("I pray for your wellbeing"), which has almost become a trademark of the series[9], adds another layer of antiquity to the story.

Despite the parallels, at least officially, the *sœur* system was not modeled on *esu* relationships. Rather, the invention of *Maria-sama ga miteru* was a reaction to the boom of boys' love texts in the late 1990s. As Konno recounts in an interview (Konno and Aoyagi 2014), she and her friends found stories that had only boys rather dull and tried to come up with a story with a lot of girl characters (35). Konno knew the term *yuri* as an antonym of *bara*, but did not start *Maria-sama ga miteru* thinking that she wanted to create a *yuri* text. She read *Hana monogatari* and informed herself about *esu* only after she had started writing the series (40).

My analysis of the representation of female same-sex intimacy in *Maria-sama ga miteru* incorporates the light novel, the manga and the anime version.[10] I limit my discussion to the first high school year of the main character Yumi, the only part of the story[11] that is covered in its entirety in all forms. The rather episodic narrative follows Yumi as she and the members of the Yamayurikai experience different events during the course of the school year: the school festival and Yumi's admittance to the Yamayurikai through her sisterhood with Sachiko (volume one), Yoshino's heart surgery and the crisis of her sisterhood with Rei (volume two), rumors about Sei's alleged autobiography and a retrospection on her former relationship with Shiori (volume three), the election of the new leaders of the Yamayurikai and a retrospection on the New Year's holidays (volume four), Valentine's Day (volume five), the first date of Yumi and Sachiko and a retrospection on Sachiko's childhood (volume six), Eriko's relationship with the adult Mr. Yamanobe and the preparations for the graduation ceremony (volume seven) and finally the graduation ceremony and a retrospection on the beginning of Sei's and Shimako's sisterhood (volume eight).

Due to restrictions of space, I focus on two contrasting relationships: the one between the two main characters Yumi and Sachiko is a *sœur* relationship, while the short-lived romance between Sei and Shiori is not. The former is depicted as a normative one, at least within the gates of the school: nobody is particularly worried about this level of intimacy. In stark contrast stands the relationship between Sei and Shiori which is depicted as occurring outside the confines of the *sœur* relationship and thus potentially disruptive.

The Normative Sœurs*: Yumi and Sachiko*

Yumi's relationship with Sachiko is the one that kicks off the story of *Maria-sama ga miteru*. Like many other girls at the school, Yumi adores Sachiko, the Rosa Chinensis en bouton. One day before school, Sachiko stops Yumi and fixes the tie of her sailor collar, and Yumi's friend Tsutako secretly photographs this. In order to obtain a print, Yumi has to get Sachiko's permission to display the photograph during the school festival. When Yumi visits the Yamayurikai, Sachiko bumps into her and to everyone's astonishment declares Yumi her *petite sœur*. It turns out that Sachiko only wanted to escape her lead role in the theater play *Cinderella* for the school festival[12] and Yumi subsequently refuses her sisterhood. At the end of volume one (light novel and manga) and episode 1.3 (anime), Sachiko and Yumi have reconciled: Yumi formally becomes Sachiko's *petite sœur*, thereby entering the Yamayurikai.

Like all the main postwar characters discussed previously, Yumi and Sachiko are portrayed as beautiful and cute, but as a pair of opposites in terms of looks and character. They are only similar in that they both look distinctively "feminine" with long hair and large eyes, and that they both use speech patterns marked as "female," like the sentence end particle *wa*. By definition, a *sœur* relationship involves an older and a younger student, so the difference in age is one of the things that sets them apart. It also results in a difference in speech patterns: Although Yumi's and Sachiko's relationship becomes more equal as the story progresses, Yumi continuously uses the polite *desu masu* style and Sachiko in turn uses the plain *da dearu* style, as it is common for senior-junior-relationships in Japan.

There are other differences between the characters as well. Like most students of the Lillian Girls' Academy, Yumi comes from an upper middle class background, her father owning an architectural firm (Konno 2004a, 31).[13] Far from being stuck up, she is characterized as an "ordinary daughter of a high-class family" (e.g. 7). In the light novel and the manga version, Yumi even has issues with her looks, especially her "frizzy hair" (35), and her marks as well are average (59). Sometimes, she even appears rather childish, for example

when she asks for the light not being put out completely during the night—although she denies that she is afraid of the dark (Konno 2004c, 236–38).[14] In contrast, Sachiko is portrayed as a very mature person, a beautiful young woman with a stately voice and long straight black hair that is as silky as that of an advertising model (Konno 2004a, 8, 10, 40). She is compared to the archangel Michael (28) and the Virgin Mary for being "pure, righteous [and] beautiful" (110). She is the star of the school and the object of everyone's adoration (11, 13). Sachiko comes from a rich family that owns department stores and amusement parks, and her mother comes from a former noble family (32). She was raised accordingly and has learned things like ballroom dancing and playing the piano (117), but has never eaten at a fast food restaurant until she goes to one with Yumi (Konno 2003d, 83).

As noted, *sœur* relationships are similar to *esu* relationships in that they are normative. The framework allows for open and accepted female same-sex intimacy. Since *sœur* relationships are a long established tradition at the Lillian Girls' Academy, Yumi and Sachiko do not have to face any particularly negative reactions from their social environment. At most, Yumi in the beginning feels like she is garnering jealous looks from other students for being so close to the Yamayurikai members (Konno 2004a, 122).[15] Although jealousy is sometimes an issue (e.g. Konno 2000, 151–75), in general the relationship between Yumi and Sachiko is supported by the students, teachers and their families.

Sœur relationships are also innocent, platonic ones, another parallel to the prewar *esu* relationships. In the beginning, Yumi's feelings for Sachiko are characterized as adoration (Konno 2004a, 24). Yumi calls herself Sachiko's fan and devotee (75, 77), and even feels that she is too ordinary and thus unsuitable to become Sachiko's *sœur* and a member of the Yamayurikai (67).[16] Yumi's feelings for Sachiko are mostly described by referring to her blushing or her heart beating fast. For example, in the first volume Yumi and Sachiko play the piano together: "[Yumi's] feeling of excitement lasted just for a brief moment. Instantly, she became aware of Sachiko [Sachiko-*sama*] being there and the excitement changed to throbbing." (106) In the manga version of this scene, Yumi is shown blushing in several large panels. The sound of her quickly beating heart "*doki doki*" is expressed with small font that would probably go unnoticed during quick reading (Nagasawa and Konno 2004a, 53). Blushing is a frequently used stylistic device in *shōjo* manga and it can be found in several instances in the *Maria-sama ga miteru* manga version. In the anime as well, Yumi's feelings are mostly made visible through her blushing, although the shade is not always as intense as in the manga version. She for example blushes when she sees Sachiko playing the organ (ep.

1.2) and when she accepts Sachiko's rosary (ep. 1.3). As the anime mostly omits interior monologues, this was probably the easiest way to convey Yumi's feelings.

Blushing is also a highly ambiguous reaction. In *shōjo* manga, it often hints to romantic feelings, which would thus imply that Yumi sees Sachiko as far more than her *o-nē-sama*. Hence, just like the relationship between Haruka and Michiru in *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon*, the one between Yumi and Sachiko can be interpreted in various ways. In the text itself, they are simply *sœurs*, but numerous ambiguous scenes and dialogues suggest that they could be more than that. An example are the terms used to describe Yumi's feelings for Sachiko. In the light novel, the two expressions used the most often are *suki* and *daisuki* (e.g. Konno 2000, 125; Konno 2004b, 31). As both terms are also used to describe Yumi's feelings for other characters, they should not be understood as "liking" or "loving," but as "caring for someone." An example is the following passage from volume one in which Yumi's classmates enquire about her relationship with Sachiko:

> Yumi cared for [*suki*] Sachiko [Sachiko-*sama*].
> She still cared for her. Precisely because she cared for Sachiko [Sachiko-*sama*], she had rejected her with her last pride. (Konno 2004a, 129)

Yet Yumi would never tell Sachiko about her feelings, as we learn from the following exchange between Yumi and Yoshino:

> "Let's always be close friends." […]
> "W… What are you talking about, Yumi [Yumi-*san*]." […]
> "No need to blush."
> "I'm not blushing." […]
> "Then why aren't you answering? Since I care for you, Yoshino, I someday want to be such good friends with you as the Roses are. …… Or, do you dislike me?" […]
> "…… I don't dislike you."
> "So, you care for me?"
> "Hey Yumi, why can you say such things without blushing?"
> "If it was in front of Sachiko [Sachiko-*sama*], I couldn't say it." (Konno 2003d, 27–28)

This scene also shows that *suki* is not a term that is used exclusively for *sœur* relationships, but rather encompasses a broad scope of people the characters care for. This is also true for the term *daisuki*, as Yumi refers to her friends and the Yamayurikai as "all those I deeply care for [*daisuki*]" (Konno 2003b, 201). In contrast, in the manga version *suki* and *daisuki* tend to be reserved for Yumi's feelings for Sachiko. Artist Nagasawa comments that she found the level of flirting between Sachiko and Yumi in her version too low (Nagasawa and Konno 2005b, 4), and at the end of volume two for example added Yumi's thoughts "This

Sachiko [Sachiko-*sama*] is the Sachiko [Sachiko-*sama*] I deeply care for" (Nagasawa and Konno 2004b, 173), accompanied by a close-up of Sachiko's face that fills the whole page. Crystal shapes made with screen tone evoke a romantic or dream-like atmosphere. It could even be said that in the manga version, *suki* has a more romantic notion than in the original *light novel*. For example, when Sei asks Yumi "Do you *suki* Sachiko…?" (Nagasawa and Konno 2004a, 130; ellipse in original), the blushing Yumi nods in reply while looking to the ground. As mentioned, blushing in *shōjo* manga is usually a sign for romantic feelings. Yet such an interpretation is refuted in the same scene as Sei goes on to state that the whole Yamayurikai does *daisuki* Sachiko. In the anime version, forthright statements of Yumi's feelings for Sachiko occur much less frequently. In the scene with Sei for example, Yumi looks to the ground but does not give a definitive answer to Sei's question (ep. 1.3). There are only a handful of scenes that show Yumi thinking that she does *suki* or *daisuki* Sachiko (e.g. ep. 1.2; 1.7; 1.13).

The relationship between Yumi and Sachiko is open to interpretation, and many fans imagine them as a romantic couple, for example in fan works. This opinion can even be found among the staff of the *Maria-sama ga miteru* anime version: its head writer Yoshida Reiko for example said in an interview "I think it might be a love story" (Kanou 2004, 52) since Yumi's emotions depended on what Sachiko does or says. It could be argued that the anime made use of the ambiguity to further spur fans' imagination. In all versions, physical contact between Yumi and Sachiko occurs quite frequently as they for example touch each other's shoulders and hands (e.g. Konno 2004c, 28) or walk home from school holding hands (e.g. Konno 2000, 80).

Within the text, these scenes mainly emphasize the growing intimacy between Yumi and Sachiko. But especially the anime version contains a number of scenes in which Yumi and Sachiko look as if they are about to kiss. These scenes are not part of the story itself but instead occur in the animations for the closing credits. The first season's ending credits for example close on an illustration of Sachiko leaning towards Yumi with her hand on her neck. Their eyes are half closed, as if they were about to kiss. The second season's end credits as well close with an ambiguous image of Sachiko holding Yumi's chin as if to imply that they might kiss. The same image was used for one of the anime's eyecatch illustrations (inserts before and after the commercial break).[17] Those audience members who are looking for "proof" that Yumi and Sachiko are a romantic couple, can rely on these illustrations, while for the rest of the audience the two continue to be just *sœurs*.

The Disruptive Couple: Sei and Shiori

There are few intimate relationships in *Maria-sama ga miteru* that occur outside the framework of the *sœur* relationship. The most important one is the one between Sei and Shiori, limited to the single chapter "Shiroki hanabira" (White petals) in the light novel's third volume, and set during Sei's second year at the school (one year prior to the main story). Sei befriends the orphaned Shiori, but when their relationship grows more intense Sei refuses to make Shiori her *petite sœur*. Both develop intense feelings for each other, but when Sei wants them to run away together, Shiori decides to stick to her original plan to become a nun and leaves Sei.

Although their relationship is markedly different from the other ones in *Maria-sama ga miteru*, Sei and Shiori are still depicted as beautiful girls, and as a pair of opposites in terms of looks and character. Sei sports a very "feminine" look with long hair (Konno 2003a, 210) and uses a speech pattern coded as "female," for example the sentence end particle *wa* (e.g. 225). However, she is also described as a "rebellious person" (210) who is fed up with herself and the world around her:

> "It's stupid," I mutter.
> (What?)
> The words that come closest to an answer are "everything" and "me."
> Like the students of this school who draw an innocent face and smile as if they had no complaints about the world.
> Like the troubled parents who don't yet have a shred of doubt about their own parenting.
> Like the school that for now does you the favor of not labeling you a failure because you keep the top grades.
> Like myself who is fed up with just about everything, but still keeps on living her daily life. (Konno 2003a, 210)

Sei does not feel like she belongs in the Lillian Girls' Academy, the "meadow of angels" (Konno 2003a, 211). Ever since kindergarten, she has been known as a "problem child" (Konno 2004b, 90). Since one of her ancestors was a non-Mongoloid person (136), she stands out through her "exotic looks" (Konno 2004a, 45).[18] Orphaned Shiori is shown with the same "female" appearance as Sei with long floating hair and she equally uses a style of speech marked as "female." But in stark contrast to Sei who does not believe in Christianity (Konno 2003a, 213), Shiori is portrayed as a pious Christian (225). Sei's first impression is that Shiori is "divine" (214) and "mature" (216). To Sei's eyes, she is "white" (225), which could be interpreted as "completely innocent."

Much like the relationship between Yumi and Sachiko, the one between Sei and Shiori is open to interpretation. But although it is never described with the term "love," it is positioned as a relationship that is much more than friendship or sisterhood. Sei as well as Shiori refer to their sentiment for each other as *suki* (Konno 2003a, 249). Yet much like the protagonists of *Shīkuretto rabu* or *Shiroi heya no futari*, Sei struggles with the boundaries of this feeling:

> I recognized myself that the relationship between me and Shiori was a special one. We didn't have a relationship like the one between Yōko and Sachiko [who are *sœurs*] and it was also different from the one between me and my *o-nē-sama*.
>
> It's difficult to explain, but I think that maybe both of our hands, with which we had been born, were holding the same partner. As a result, we completely excluded everything else. (Konno 2003a, 230)

Sei feels "captivated by" (Konno 2003a, 227) and "drawn into" Shiori (229), but she differentiates these feelings from "love":

> I couldn't make sure how the feeling inside me differed from love [*ren'ai*] between man and woman.
>
> I loved [*ai suru*] Shiori's spirit. I had to find value in her flesh as its vessel, as its accessory so to speak. (Konno 2003a, 239–40)

Clearly, Sei's feelings are positioned in the familiar framework of the spiritual rather than carnal bond between females, emphasizing their pure and innocent nature. They are also disconnected from any kind of "sexual identity": Sei is described as reading *shōsetsu* about "homosexuality" in order to understand her feelings, but she does not find the answer she was looking for in them. She also reads biology books that make her wonder why she and Shiori feel so drawn to each other when they cannot produce children together. Sei does not want to stop being female, but she wonders why there are two sexes and feels jealous of hermaphroditic earthworms (Konno 2003a, 240–41). This sequence is missing from the manga version and was replaced by Sei wondering whether her feelings are a divine punishment (Nagasawa and Konno 2005a, 167)—a clear deviation from the novel where Sei does not believe in Christianity. Sei's struggles with her feelings were also omitted from the anime version. She states that she wants to be with Shiori (ep. 1.11), but her feelings are not further explored, not even as a possible divine punishment.

The issue of Christianity plays an important role in the relationship between Sei and Shiori, and shows parallels to the events in *Shiroi heya no futari*. In Sei's opinion, Shiori's piety is separating them, although it is exactly this purity that she finds so "precious" about Shiori (Konno 2003a, 248). Sei tries to talk Shiori out of becoming a nun and tries to kiss her,

but Shiori refuses her saying "Because the Virgin Mary is watching!" (252) and then slapping her in the face.[19] They split up for the fall holidays, but in the end Shiori comes back to Sei, confessing:

> The school's headmaster sympathizes with us and therefore she's really worried. She even talked fervently with me so that I don't deviate from my path [of becoming a nun]. I felt great sympathy for what she was saying and I thought that I really couldn't be together with you. I even promised her that I wouldn't meet you again. But it was useless. (Konno 2003a, 260–61)

Not only does Shiori deviate from her calling, but her relationship with Sei now also deviates from the established *sœur* pattern. A few lines earlier, we find the only scene of two female characters willingly kissing each other on the mouth in the whole *Maria-sama ga miteru* series:

> Somehow suppressing the mixed feeling of surprise, joy and confusion, I lead Shiori to the backend of the [school's] church where people only seldom went by.
>
> There we exchanged a kiss [*kuchizuke*] of which it was unclear who initiated it. It was as if in that way, we threw the complicated feelings we couldn't explain with words at our partner. (Konno 2003a, 260)

Since the chapter "Shiroki hanabira" is devoid of illustrations, manga artist Nagasawa had to rely on her own imagination when drawing this scene. In her version of the kiss, only the cheeks and chins of Sei and Shiori are depicted. Their eyes and lips remain invisible to the reader (Nagasawa and Konno 2005a, 193).[20] That this is a loving kiss can be taken from the used effect lines: circles with outlines created with a dotted screen tone emphasize the romantic atmosphere. In addition, the usage of large panels on this page slows down the reading speed and intensifies the emotional impact of the scene. Yet the panel with the kiss scene is not the largest panel on the page and it is also not placed in the center of the page where it would get the most attention. The kiss thus does not appear to be important for the story or the relationship between Sei and Shiori, but rather happens at random. Similarly, in the anime version, the kiss is only implied: as they move close to each other and are about to kiss, the focus of the camera pans down and thus the kiss occurs off screen (ep. 1.11). These portrayals can also be interpreted as emphasizing the spiritual over the carnal side of Sei's and Shiori's relationship, keeping it innocent. Apart from the kiss, physical contact between them is limited to embraces (e.g. Konno 2003a, 232).

The relationship between Sei and Shiori brings the heartrending aspect of female same-sex intimacy into the otherwise accepting atmosphere of *Maria-sama ga miteru*. Much like the characters of 1970s *shōjo* manga, they cannot become a happy couple. However, the text

attributes this outcome not to hatred of men or family issues, but simply to the different personalities of Sei and Shiori. Towards the end of her third school year, Sei muses why their relationship did not turn out all right, especially in comparison to the one with her later *petite sœur* Shimako:

> There are a number of common features [between Shiori and Shimako]. They are pious Catholics, have long hair and are tidy beauties. But that wasn't what attracted me.
>
> I desired everything of Shiori and likewise I hoped to give myself to her. When I realized that this was a wish that wouldn't come true, you could say that our relationship ended. Shiori was the first to notice it. Therefore, we had to accept separation in order to live on.
>
> If I think about it now, for me Shiori was an angel. By nature, it was impossible that a human being like me fastened her to the ground.
>
> In this regard, Shimako was a human being. (Konno 2004b, 197)

The only possibility for female same-sex intimacy in *Maria-sama ga miteru* that goes unsanctioned is the *sœur* relationship. Since the relationship between Sei and Shiori is positioned outside the framework of "sisterhood," it allows for much more intimate contact (e.g. a kiss) than for example the *sœur* relationship of Yumi and Sachiko. But as the relationship is unapproved, it is at the same time bound for failure. Although we do not find terms like *rezu*(*bian*) in the text, the relationship between Sei and Shiori is met with negative responses from all sides. In the Yamayurikai, Yōko calls Sei's relationship with Shiori a "problem" (Konno 2003a, 230) and urges Sei to make Shiori her *petite sœur* and to formally introduce her to the Yamayurikai (231). But Sei does not want to comply with her wish:

> Although I said that I would think about it, I had no intention whatsoever to make Shiori my *sœur*. For we had always been equal. Giving and receiving the rosary only to now earn everyone's approval was too ridiculous. In my heart, I laughed sardonically that the *sœur* ritual [of giving and receiving the rosary] was something that people did who couldn't find peace of mind without a symbol. (Konno 2003a, 231–32)

The relationship between Sei and Shiori is not necessarily deemed morally wrong, but rather a distraction from studying. Sei's mother for example is enraged about Shiori and insults her in front of Sei (Konno 2003a, 258), implicitly because she considers Shiori a bad influence on Sei, worsening her daughter's grades and her class attendance (255). The school's headmaster[21] is worried about Sei becoming absorbed in her relationship with Shiori: "In life at school, learning isn't everything, but isn't it sad to fall for just one thing and to lose sight of your surroundings?" Sei thinks that the headmaster is the only one to understand her real feelings for Shiori (257). This is noteworthy, as the same volume had earlier revealed the headmaster's past: as a student, she had been in a love relationship with another female student and even tried to commit suicide with her (168–84, 201–2). As noted, the headmaster

does not want Shiori to stray from her path of becoming a nun—the same path she had chosen herself after the end of her romance.

The relationship between Sei and Shiori is not portrayed as impossible per se, forbidden or morally wrong, but rather as a tragic romance. In the afterword of the light novel's fourth volume, Konno calls the story of Sei and Shiori one about "tragic love" (Konno 2004a, 251), although in a 2014 interview she wonders whether the feelings between Sei and Shiori should be called "love" (Konno and Aoyagi 2014, 37). In any case, their portrayal in *Maria-sama ga miteru* is markedly different from the one of male-female or male-male intimacy, which is frowned upon, ridiculed or marked as threatening.[22] And while the story of Sei and Shiori was one of those that got the most (and one can assume positive) response from the readers (37), many did not want to see any male characters in the series. However, for Konno herself it is natural for a woman to love a man. Adoring other girls is something you do in high school (39).

Boon and Bane of the Yuri *Genre*

Maria-sama ga miteru fits very well with the discursively defined characteristics of the *yuri* genre: The characters and their relationships are portrayed as beautiful, cute, innocent and sometimes also heartrending. Their world is more or less devoid of male characters—and despite or maybe even because of this, the series has a large male fanbase. Already on the Mangaoh website it was noted that the series was not only popular with its original target group of teen girls but also with adult males (Mangaoh kurabu 2001). The monthly report on publications from The All Japan Magazine and Book Publisher's and Editor's Association as well states that more than 80% of the series' readers are male ("Tokushū raito noberu kenkyū" 2005, 8). Almost every journalistic article that mentions *Maria-sama ga miteru* draws attention to this fact (e.g. "Hajimete no GL" 2009, 197; Yasuda 2008, 38). Konno notes in an interview that while most fan letters come from females, most attendants of autograph sessions are male (Konno and Aoyagi 2014, 38). I witnessed this myself at an autograph session of Konno and Hibiki in April 2012: most attendants were males between the age of about twenty and thirty, whereas there were only few girls or women.

But what made *Maria-sama ga miteru* so successful? In *QuickJapan* it is argued that one of the factors is that the series is not pornographic and not limited to a "lesbian" (*rezubian*) audience (Yamada 2005, 29). While this might be true, one major factor certainly was the fans' imagination. In the magazine *Cyzo* for example, the series' success is attributed

to female fans who "intensely fantasized about the relationships between '*o-nē-sama* and younger sister'" (Endō 2009, 84). In *Komikku yuri hime*, the "ardent support" from male fans of fan works is emphasized, noting that in the beginning of the twenty-first century, the formerly female-centered fan works scene started to include more males (NOV 2010b, 202). *Maria-sama ga miteru* is certainly an ideal series for creating *yuri* fan works. It features a large number of female characters so that every reader can imagine his/her favorite couple and produce fan works about it (Sugino 2008, 107). As we have seen with the example of Yumi and Sachiko, the *sœur* relationships are ambiguous enough to allow various interpretations—although these are rarely pornographic: at Winter Comic Market 2004, most *Maria-sama ga miteru* fan works were not erotic (Ōizumi 2005, 23) and the fan works I bought in 2011/12 as well were rarely of the adult persuasion.

Fan works and the vivid communication about *Maria-sama ga miteru* on the Internet appear to have been major factors in popularizing the name and content of the *yuri* genre. In *Komikku yuri hime*, it is argued that due to the success of the series, the *yuri* genre reached the new stage of "permeation" and "establishment" (NOV 2010b, 203). The boom of *Maria-sama ga miteru* lead to the foundation of the first commercial *yuri* manga magazine, *Yuri shimai* (NOV 2010b, 202; Yamada 2005, 29). Its editor-in-chief and current editor-in-chief of *Komikku yuri hime* Nakamura tried to profit from the series' success: its illustrator Hibiki Reine drew the covers of both *Yuri shimai* and the early issues of *Komikku yuri hime*. Furthermore, the plots of many stories in both magazines followed the lead of the hit series (Satō 2011, 32). This policy only changed years later: in an attempt to free *Komikku yuri hime* from *Maria-sama ga miteru*, from the June 2007 issue on, the cover illustrations were drawn by the magazine's own manga artists (NOV 2010b, 203). By then, the manga's content had also diversified.

This indicates that *Maria-sama ga miteru* is at once boon and bane for the *yuri* genre: on the plus side, the series brought it the attention it needed to become entrenched on the Japanese market. It became so firmly associated with the genre that Akaeda (2010) calls it "the bible of *yuri*" (285). One of the manga editors I interviewed learned about the *yuri* genre via *Maria-sama ga miteru* and referred to it as a "template" that solidified the genre's image.[23] In the series' wake, in many commercial manga and anime the *yuri* elements were highlighted (NOV 2010b, 202). An example is the media franchise *Strawberry Panic* which is equally set at a Christian all-girls' school and revolves around the various interpersonal relationships of its students.

But in this way, *Maria-sama ga miteru* also became the silver bullet for creating content for the *yuri* genre. The term *o-nē-sama* can now almost be considered a stereotype of the genre (e.g. Endō 2009, 84; Miyakichi 2010, 40). *Komikku yuri hime* editor Pine (pen name) thinks that the series defined a standard format for the *yuri* genre, the "beautiful miniature garden," but that the genre diversified when more and more readers and manga artists learned of it through other avenues than *Maria-sama ga miteru*. Her colleague Nora (pen name) equally notes that until the early 2010s, many submissions to *Komikku yuri hime* from prospective manga artists were oriented on the patterns of *Maria-sama ga miteru*. Yet if you did not want to bore readers, she argues, you would have to add some extra spice ("Yuri hime henshūbu zadankai" 2012, 303).

Whether *Maria-sama ga miteru* is considered positive or negative for the *yuri* genre, the fact remains that it is extremely popular among the genre's fans. In 2006, the readers of *Komikku yuri hime* elected it second best *yuri* work of the year (Sugino 2008, 141). And even though the popularity has waned, the series still appears to hold the top spot in the mind of many fans. In my online survey, 359 participants (26.55%) named *Maria-sama ga miteru* as one of their five favorite *yuri* titles, making it the most popular text. Fan works as well continue to be made and sold at large events like Comic Market and well-attended specialized fan works events continued to be held well until 2015.

Notes

1. Konno (born 1965) won the 1993 Cobalt Novel Award for her work *Yume no miya: taki no mita yume* (The palace of dreams: The dream in which I saw a waterfall). *Maria-sama ga miteru* is her third light novel series published under the *Cobalt bunko* label (Konno 2008, 195).

2. The label, founded in 1976, is the oldest paperback label aimed at girls and the one with the highest output of books (Yonemitsu 2002, 25–27).

3. The chapters of the paperback volumes one to five were published in *Margaret* (2003–05), the later ones in *Za Māgaretto* (2006/07). The target group of *Margaret* is slightly younger than the one of *Za Māgaretto* (Shūeisha 2012, 3–4).

4. This is not an obligation, but the "tradition" is observed by most students.

5. If the series would completely follow the pattern of giving everything a French term, *o-nē-sama* should be read as *grande sœur*, but there are only a few instances in the light novel which give this term as ruby (e.g. Konno 2004a, 43).

6. In Japan, high school lasts three years.

7. These are the readings of the ruby characters written next to the Chinese characters expressing the meaning of the name. The Chinese characters for "Rosa Chinensis" would for example normally be read *beni bara-sama*, "Miss red rose."

8. Apparently, it is still used at some real all-girls' schools in Japan (e.g. in Kamakura).

9. For example, the series' official internet domain name was www.gokigenyou.com. Manga artist Nagasawa as well uses the formula to greet the readers of her manga version (e.g. Nagasawa and Konno 2004b, 15). Light novel author Konno uses the standard greeting *konnichiwa* (hello) in the afterword of her books (e.g. Konno 2004a, 250), but at an autograph session in April 2012, she greeted every fan with *gokigen'yō*. Fans of the series likewise greet each other this way on- and offline.

10. I omit the live action movie as it sticks closely to the first volume of the light novel. I usually cite only from the light novel, but will point out deviations in the manga and the anime.

11. The following description is based on the light novel version. The manga and the anime version sometimes deviate strongly from it. In general, one light novel volume equals one manga volume and two anime episodes.

12. Sachiko's *o-nē-sama* Yōko had promised that Sachiko would not have to play Cinderella if she could present her *petite sœur*. Sachiko declares the first girl she meets after this promise to be her *petite sœur*. By chance, this is Yumi.

13. This is not mentioned in either the manga or the anime version. Yet since both show Yumi living in a house (e.g. Nagasawa and Konno 2006, 24; ep. 2.3), the audience would probably have assumed that she comes from such a background.

14. This scene was omitted from the anime version.

15. This is not shown in the manga and the anime versions.

16. In the manga and the anime version, Yumi at first declines Sachiko's rosary because she is her fan (Nagasawa and Konno 2004a, 36–37; ep. 1.1) and thus it is only implied that Yumi sees herself as "unsuitable."

17. The end credits animation of the third season, not discussed here, shows Sachiko flying towards Yumi as if they were about to kiss, but the image fades out.

18. Sei's hair color is inconsistent on the light novel's color illustrations. The manga and the anime version depict her with light brown or golden hair.

19. In the anime version, Shiori pushes Sei away (ep. 1.11).

20. Volume two of the manga's A6 edition opens with a color illustration of Sei and Shiori who are about to kiss. This picture shows a close-up of their faces, their eyes are closed and Shiori is blushing (Nagasawa and Konno 2010, color insert).

21. Her identity remains unclear in the manga and the anime version.

22. Unfortunately, there is not enough space to discuss this, so examples have to suffice. Yumi for example thinks that Sachiko would "lose her chastity" (Konno 2004a, 222) if she was kissed by her cousin/fiancé Kashiwagi. Kashiwagi, who loves only boys (228), is shown as constantly flirting with Yumi's younger brother Yūki to the extent that Yūki at first refuses to sleep in the same room with him (Konno 2004c, 183–247). In the manga version, Kashiwagi further makes sexually ambiguous comments directed at Yūki (Nagasawa and Konno 2005b, 44, 58). The relationship between Kashiwagi and Yūki is further explored in Konno's spin-off light novel series *O-shaka-sama mo miteru* (Buddha is watching as well; 2008–13; 10 volumes).

23. Interview with editor E5 (female), February 29, 2012

Chapter 6. Developments in the *Yuri* Genre after 2003

Although *Maria-sama ga miteru* has now ended, the *yuri* genre remains on the market. As new texts are released, new tropes emerge and the genre's content and target group diversify. There are many texts that would merit a further discussion. For this chapter, I have chosen four that I see as representing important trends in the development of the *yuri* genre after 2003. The selection is based on my own observations as well as comments made by fans and editors I spoke to. Rather than their portrayal of female same-sex intimacy, I discuss the trends they embody and how they are positioned by the Japanese discourse on the *yuri* genre. These trends are: the inclusion of a few pornographic texts into the *yuri* genre's discursively constructed canon, especially *Shōjo sekuto*; the further broadening of the target audience to include adult readers, for example by *Aoi hana*; the first successful anime produced as *yuri* anime, *Yuru yuri*; and the meta-level discussion of the *yuri* genre and particularly its male fans in *Yuri danshi*. Especially the latter two texts, both serialized in the *yuri* manga magazine *Komikku yuri hime*, further emphasize the importance of fans' interpretations for the fans themselves and for the *yuri* genre as a whole.

Shōjo sekuto *by Kurogane Ken (2003–05)*

As discussed, in Japanese discourse, the *yuri* genre is commonly associated with "innocence" and "spiritual bonds," and these characteristics can be found in virtually all texts that are (retrospectively) assigned to the genre. Nevertheless, especially outside Japan the idea persists that *yuri* is a pornographic genre. Representations of sexual activity between female characters are certainly anything but new to manga.[1] The earliest example I could find was in *I.L* by Tezuka Osamu, the doyen of manga. The scene is part of its seventh chapter, first published in 1969 in Shōgakukan's *Biggu komikku* (Big comic), a manga magazine targeting men. On a whole page, Tezuka shows two adult female characters having sex, although this hardly qualifies as pornography, since no genitalia are shown (Tezuka 1977, 137). Almost thirty years later, a few manga magazines for adult women featured manga with sexual activity between female characters, for example *Lady's Comic Misuto* (1996–99) and *Lady's Comic scandal I* (esp. 1999–2000). As of early 2015, there is no commercial manga magazine for an adult audience that contains only pornographic manga about sexual activities between female characters. In the realm of manga anthologies, only publisher Ōkusu is regularly issuing a series (first *Ayayuri*, now *L Ladies & Girls Love*) for an adult audience containing

exclusively stories about sexual activity between female characters. Some of the manga are also published as manga paperbacks. On the publisher's website, all of these publications are called "*yuri*." The anthology *Ayayuri* was even published under the label "OKS comix *yuri shirīzu*" (OKS comics *yuri* series), thereby firmly associating pornographic content with the *yuri* genre.

Nagayama Kaoru (2006) notes that there are surprisingly few manga that show sexual activities between female characters, despite the popularity of *Maria-sama ga miteru* among male readers (230). His implicit assumption seems to be that these males were somehow sexually aroused by the way *Maria-sama ga miteru* portrayed female same-sex intimacy, but as the analysis of my fan survey will show, this might be a misinterpretation of their motivations: sexual arousal was rarely given as motive for consuming *yuri* texts. Asked for their top five *yuri* works, merely 19.1% of respondents gave one or more erotic/pornographic texts. Of the total 466 titles given by all respondents, only twenty-nine (6%) could be classified as erotic/pornographic material. These titles were given a total of 276 times, the majority of which (151) were allotted to *Shōjo sekuto*, the most important erotic/pornographic manga that is discursively assigned to the *yuri* genre.

Shōjo sekuto by male manga artist Kurogane Ken[2] was first serialized between 2003 and 2005 in the manga magazine *Comic Megastore* from publisher Core Magazine. Later bound in two paperback volumes, it enjoyed a lasting popularity and in 2008 was made into a three-episode anime OVA (dir. Aozaki Ryūsei). Set at an all girls' school, the manga tells the story of two girls, Momoko and Shinobu. The first volume is mostly about random events in their life at school and the sexual encounters of their classmates. At the end of the volume, Shinobu tells Momoko "I like/love [*suki*] you" (Kurogane 2008, 174). The second volume recounts the development of their relationship until they become a love couple and move in together. This time, the sex scenes focus on Momoko and Shinobu.

Unlike what is probably usually associated with a pornographic text, *Shōjo sekuto* is basically a love story. It is further striking that the manga is beautifully drawn and does not overly exaggerate any character's breasts or vulva. When I interviewed editor E5, she thought that it was this beauty that set the manga apart from other erotic/pornographic titles, since other manga artists could not simply imitate it.[3] The style is all the more remarkable given the magazine in which *Shōjo sekuto* was serialized: *Comic Megastore* targeted adult men and mostly featured manga about sexual activities between male and female characters. In general, the female characters had hugely exaggerated breasts and/or vulvas. In stark contrast

to these and other erotic/pornographic manga, *Shōjo sekuto* features absolutely no male characters and shows only a low amount of bodily fluids on the pages.

The special status of *Shōjo sekuto* is also visible in the way the manga is advertised on the paperback volumes' promotional *obi*. The one for volume one reads: "Beginning in the world prohibited to males, an eternal girls-only 'Girly's (*sic*) Festival!!'" And the one for volume two: "Continuing forever, eternal Girl's (*sic*) Love Stories…" By employing the familiar expression "prohibited to males," especially the first volume is positioned within the framework of the *yuri* genre. This idea was readily accepted and *Shōjo sekuto* was discursively assigned to the genre although it had never been officially advertised as such. In the *Yuri sakuhin fairu* guidebook, the special status of the text is emphasized by calling it "a noticeable work that you could also call a revolutionary for the *yuri* comic world." It is reasoned that the paperback cover illustrations with two beautiful girls being intertwined drew attention at the point of sale—after all, the covers of most pornographic manga are illustrated with just one girl, and illustrations that show two or more characters usually show them being engaged in sexual activity. The guidebook further describes *Shōjo sekuto* as drawing love with elegant and careful lines, and as being innovative because no males appear at all and because the main topic is sexual activity between girls (Sugino 2008, 34).

Shōjo sekuto is marked as being a truly special erotic/pornographic manga since it can even be enjoyed by females who were not its intended audience. In *Komikku yuri hime*, it is declared "*yuri* for adults." It is further explained that "the magazine in which it was serialized addresses men, but since the pictures are delicate, we also recommend it to you who wants to read a just slightly explicit *yuri* manga." ("Ichijin shinbun" 2006, 226) Here, the readers of *Komikkuri yuri hime* are addressed with the expression *anata* ("you") written with the Chinese character for "female," suggesting that most readers of the magazine were (then) assumed to be female, as supported by the official numbers (see chapter 7).

Komikku yuri hime's recommendation is remarkable considering that representations of sexual activity between females are rarely found in its pages. As discussed, in general its editorial staff considers its readers not being interested in sexually explicit content. Its predecessor *Yuri shimai* had a similar policy, but nevertheless introduced its readers to a number of erotic/pornographic texts with two (or more) female characters. Issue one for example presented video games for an adult audience ("Sei PC jogakuin" 2003, 138–40) and manga considered to be "slightly erotic" ("Yuri no hana saku" 2003, 59). Issue three and five each featured a special on erotic/pornographic texts. In issue three, readers who did not want

to see it could glue the pages together ("Ura yuri shimai" 2004a). In issue five, readers had to cut open the pages if they wanted to read the special ("Ura yuri shimai" 2004b).

These precautionary measures indicate that the readers of *Yuri shimai* as well were not considered to be interested in sexually explicit content. Indeed, the readers' reaction to the first one of these specials is telling. In issue four, it was revealed that 31% of *Yuri shimai*'s readers found it "unnecessary," but that while male readers were against it, "many females, especially teens, declared their support." ("Yūkan yuri" 2004, 159) In a 2009 interview, Nakamura Seitarō, the editor-in-chief of both *Yuri shimai* and *Komikku yuri hime*, noted that in essence, the situation had not changed since then: It was still the female readers who asked for manga in *Komikku yuri hime* to depict sexual activity between female characters. In contrast, the male readers were content if the manga stopped at showing a kiss. In his opinion the male readers wanted the characters to have "pure relationships" (Endō 2009, 86)—echoing the idea that "innocence" is one of the *yuri* genre's main characteristics. As discussed, my survey indicates that his assumption is at least to a certain degree correct.

Aoi hana *by Shimura Takako (2004–13)*

In the early 2000s, female same-sex intimacy also made stronger inroads into non-erotic/pornographic manga for an adult audience. There were a few earlier examples, like Tsukumo Mutsumi's *Moonlight Flowers*/*Midnight Flowers* (1989/90) in *Shūeisha*'s magazine *Office YOU*, which targets an adult female audience (Fujimoto [1998] 2008, 271–74). Yet they did not attain as much popularity as a manga that in Japanese discourse is regularly assigned to the *yuri* genre: *Aoi hana* by female manga artist Shimura Takako[4]. From 2004 to 2013, it was serialized in Ōta shuppan's bimonthly manga magazine *Manga Erotics F* which targeted adult men and women. *Aoi hana* is set in Kamakura and tells the story of the female childhood friends Fumi and Akira. Fumi had changed schools ten years earlier but returns to Kamakura with her family to go to high school there. She meets Akira again and even though they attend two different all girls' schools, they soon return to being close friends. Fumi starts dating her classmate Yasuko, but the relationship does not last long. Instead, Fumi realizes that she has a crush on Akira. They start dating, but face difficulties because especially Akira does not know how to deal with the situation. In 2009, *Aoi hana* was made into an eleven-episode anime television series (dir. Kasai Ken'ichi), broadcast on Fuji TV at two in the morning.

The tagline of *Manga Erotics F* was "Fantastic, Sweet and Erotic Comic Stories" (in English) and it was dominated by the rather realistic drawing styles of manga artists like Yamamoto Naoki and Furuya Usamaru. The style of *Aoi hana* is similar in that Shimura uses precise lines and clear-cut panel arrangements that are typical for manga targeting an adult audience, but was rare in manga about female same-sex intimacy. In line with the artistic style, the story of *Aoi hana* is rather realistic in tone. It explores relationships between female characters, but also between males and females. Unlike the all girls' school in for example *Maria-sama ga miteru* which allowed for or even demanded female same-sex intimacy, in *Aoi hana* strong bonds between girls and especially love between females are not normative. Oftentimes, the female couples have to deal with the negative reactions of their families, but also with their own anxieties and insecurities about their relationship. Shimura also draws sexual activities (between females as well as between males and females), but does so in a very low key fashion: the sexual act is implied rather than shown (e.g. Shimura 2006, 65).

Aoi hana is one of the few prominent manga assigned to the *yuri* genre that makes explicit reference to "sexual identities" and hints at actual problems of female same-sex couples in contemporary Japan. For example, Yasuko introduces Fumi to her family as the person she is currently dating and who might even become her lover (Shimura 2009, 110–11). Yasuko is asked by her sisters whether she is a "lesbian" (Shimura 2009, 111) or a "bisexual" (112), but does not answer them. Fumi as well does not give a definitive answer (113), but she later tells her friends that she "is swinging the other way" (Shimura 2011, 129).

Shimura not only addresses these issues in her manga, but also in public interviews. In *Komikku yuri hime*, she for example says: "I'm often told things like 'It's unnatural if all girl characters fall mutually in love.' Personally, I don't really care if there are many girl couples. However, if you specialize only in the *yuri* world view, love between girls becomes entirely a fantasy. Since I dislike that [idea], I also include love between man and woman into 'Aoi hana.'" ("Shimura Takako" 2010, 6) Implicitly, she thus criticizes the mainstream of the *yuri* genre which excludes male characters and is thus closer to fantasy than to reality. In another interview, Shimura says "I feel that the attitude 'Two people of the same sex look fishy…' denies relationships between girls and I dislike that." ("Aoi hana" 2009, 25; ellipse in original) She may not be campaigning for the rights of sexual minorities, but she is nevertheless trying to raise awareness for the reality of (female) same-sex couples in Japan.

Shimura's opinions were not reflected in the way *Aoi hana* was advertised in *Manga Erotics F*. In the magazine, the manga was described as a "heart-wringing 'girl meets girl' story" (e.g. *Manga Erotics F* 2008/7, 59). And despite her slight criticism of the *yuri* genre,

Shimura acknowledges that *Aoi hana* can be called a *yuri* manga. As noted, she also gave an interview to the *yuri* manga magazine *Komikku yuri hime* where she lauds the magazine's existence for allowing manga artists to draw all kinds of different stories about female same-sex intimacy ("Shimura Takako" 2010, 7). Shimura also admitted that drawing a *yuri* manga was a challenge. In one interview she said that she does not know the definition of the *yuri* genre and speculates that it is different for every person ("Aoi hana" 2009, 25), something that we have seen to be true. Shimura saw it as a challenge to draw a love story between Fumi and Akira that pleases both those readers who want to see them having sex and those who do not ("Shimura Takako" 2010, 7), thus showing awareness of one of the major issues in the Japanese discourse on the *yuri* genre.

The *Aoi hana* manga itself contains a number of references that can be interpreted as subtle nods to the *yuri* genre. For example, in volume one, Akira is asked by her brother whether at her school they actually use the greeting *gokigen'yō* (Shimura 2006, 27)—the quasi trademark of *Maria-sama ga miteru*. At least implicitly, the manga is also connected to Japan's prewar *shōjo shōsetsu* and the *esu* relationships described in them, although the relationships are portrayed in a different way. In the afterword manga of the first volume, Shimura draws her visit to Kamakura. One panel shows how she and her editor prayed in front of the Yoshiya Nobuko memorial hall that *Aoi hana* would become a hit (190). The first chapter of *Aoi hana* is titled *Hana monogatari* (6), a deliberate reference to Yoshiya (Shimura and Fujigaya jogakuin shinbunbu 2009, 149).

The parties of the Japanese discourse on the *yuri* genre praise *Aoi hana* for various reasons. Although the relationship between Fumi and Akira does not remain completely "innocent," the sensitive dealing with it allows for the manga to be assigned to the *yuri* genre. *Komikku yuri hime* editor-in-chief Nakamura for example comments: "For the *yuri* genre which depicts pure and beautiful stories, 'sexual love' is an element you want to avoid, but this work, while depicting sex, doesn't lose its *yuri* atmosphere at all." (Nishinaka 2011, 60) The manga is also lauded for portraying various kinds of relationships: "In addition to the trembling love between females, it also depicts the delicate feeling of distance special to female friends, and love with men." (Kawano 2012, 59) In my interview with editor E2, she thought that the *yuri* genre had become even more popular due to the success of *Aoi hana*, especially its anime version.[5]

In my online survey, *Aoi hana* was one of the most popular *yuri* works, being named by 215 participants (15.9%). However, it has been argued that while the series had a strong support in its original manga version,[6] its anime version did not: "Since it seems like [it] did

not contain anything that impressed users who were not interested in *yuri*, sales-wise it left a lot to be desired." Accordingly, it was not renewed for a second season. In *Komikku yuri hime* it was speculated that it was hard to be commercially successful with "serious *yuri*" ("Yuri history rewind" 2012, 11), meaning that it would rather be necessary to produce an anime that appealed to a mixed audience of both *yuri* fans and non-fans. Such a series would likely invite the audience to use their imagination instead of delivering actual scenes of intimacy between female characters. Fans would then go on to create *yuri* fan works based on the series. *Aoi hana* did not do this and this could explain why there are only few fan works based on it.[7] This line of reasoning is supported by the success story of the *yuri* anime *Yuru yuri*.

Yuru yuri *by Namori (since 2008)*

In a 2008 interview with the magazine *Cyzo*, *Komikku yuri hime* editor-in-chief Nakamura said that the occurrence of a *yuri* boom depended on whether there would be a hit series like *Maria-sama ga miteru* (Yasuda 2008, 38). About three years later, his prediction came true when the animated version of *Yuru yuri* drew renewed attention to the *yuri* genre and broadened its fanbase. *Yuru yuri* is a humorous manga by female manga artist Namori that started serialization in 2008 in the *yuri* manga magazine *Komikku yuri hime S*. When the magazine was discontinued in 2010, *Yuru yuri* moved to its sister publication *Komikku yuri hime*. As of early 2015, thirteen paperback volumes have been published, and since 2012 there is also a spinoff manga called *Ōmuroke*. Since 2011, the anime version of *Yuru yuri* has seen four installments (three television series and one OVA), proving its popularity. The series marks not only the first time that a manga serialized in a *yuri* manga magazine was made into an anime, but also the first time that an anime officially advertised as *yuri* enjoys widespread and lasting popularity.[8]

Yuru yuri is a humorous text about the everyday life of a group of girls at an all girls' middle school. Since there is no ongoing plot, the text can be assigned to the popular category of the slice-of-life (*kūki-kei*) manga and anime which are characterized by the so-called *moe* aesthetics. Derived from the verb *moeru* "to burn," but written with the Chinese character for the verb *moeru* "to bud," *moe* denotes "a euphoric response to fantasy characters" (Galbraith 2011, 215).[9] Slice-of-life texts favor charming *moe* characters over plot (see also Galbraith 2009a, under "The female approach to *moe*"). Thus despite being advertised as a *yuri* text, *Yuru yuri* features only few scenes of female same-sex intimacy.[10] Instead, what matters most it the imagination of the audience—the survey postcards in the manga's paperback editions

even ask the readers to give their favorite couplings of the series' characters, and indicate that the answers are used by author Namori and her editor Nakamura for future projects.

Imagination is also a major part of the *Yuru yuri* text itself. For example, the sisters Chitose and Chizuru both enjoy imagining female same-sex intimacy: Chitose fantasizes about her classmates Ayano and Kyōko while the younger Chizuru fantasizes about Ayano and Chitose. Fan activities are also acknowledged in other ways. Kyōko is shown producing *yuri* fan works about the (fictitious) manga character Mirakurun, a girl with magical powers like Sailor Moon (e.g. Namori 2012, 20–30).[11] The anime (ep. 1.5, 2.6) shows Kyōko participating in a large-scale fan works event called Komuke—a play on "Komike," the commonly used abbreviation for Comic Market. One of the fan works Kyōko sells in the anime was later actually sold by Ichijinsha at their Comic Market booth. Episode 1.5 and the respective DVD cover illustration (season one vol. 3) further show the characters of *Yuru yuri* dressed as characters from the Mirakurun series. This is a reference to the fan practice of cosplay, i.e. fans dressing up as a beloved character from their favorite text. All of these references probably did not happen by accident since Namori herself is originally a fan works artist. As she recalls in an interview, *Komikku yuri hime S* editor-in-chief Nakamura liked her manga and she thus started working for the magazine (Jungūji 2011, 102).

In the same interview, Namori states that she deliberately added the element of imagination to her work. Her aim was to create a text that could even be enjoyed by audiences who had no prior interest in the *yuri* genre. She tries to not permanently pair characters so that the audience members can imagine their own couplings (Jungūji 2011, 102). The importance of the element of imagination is also acknowledged by the television anime's director Ōta Masahiko. In an interview, he speculates that parts of the audience reject clingy *yuri* relationships. Nevertheless, you have to give those parts of the audience that like such relationships the possibility to use their imagination on the relationships portrayed in the series. In the production process, they were not that conscious about the fact that they were producing a *yuri* anime (Satō 2011, 24). This view is also shared by the anime's head writer Aoshima Takashi: "If all the audience members watch the girls with their own filters, it should appear as *yuri*." (Jungūji 2011, 111) Thus both acknowledge that the audience's actions are much more important than the producers' intentions.

Director Ōta admits that prior to working on *Yuru yuri*, his own image of the *yuri* genre had not been very positive. He describes it as *doro doro* (literally "muddled"), a gloomy state with relationships that are dominated by hatred and jealousy—reminiscent of the way female same-sex intimacy was portrayed in for example *Shiroi heya no futari*. Ōta thinks that this

image of the *yuri* genre was also prevalent among many viewers of the *Yuru yuri* anime (Jungūji 2011, 106). When Ōta first heard that they were about to animate a *yuri* manga, he feared that it would be about two girls sticking together, but was relieved to find that this was mostly not the case. Since the *yuri* scenes were like spice (i.e. not the main ingredient) he became convinced that it would be possible to broadcast the series (Satō 2011, 24). Head writer Aoshima similarly thinks that *Yuru yuri* is a "*yuri* [text] that everyone can read" (Jungūji 2011, 110).

The series' success seems to confirm this view. Many viewers appear to have learned about the existence of the *yuri* genre from *Yuru yuri*. As was the case with *Maria-sama ga miteru*, it was once again word-of-mouth communication on the Internet that helped boost the series' popularity, although it was partly planned by the producers: Namori contributed one hundred manga pages to the last issue of *Komikku yuri hime S* in November 2010 and personally signed 10,000 copies of a special edition of the fourth volume of *Yuru yuri*. These two projects made the series a hot topic on the Internet. If we are to believe *Komikku yuri hime* editor-in-chief Nakamura, this was all part of a larger strategy: he had long planned to have a *Komikku yuri hime* manga made into an anime. Otherwise, he argues, the *yuri* market would have dried out (Satō 2011, 30). For Nakamura, *Yuru yuri*'s role is to enlighten the audience about enjoying something as *yuri*. His plan seems to have worked out: he feels that the number of people who call a particular text a *yuri* text and enjoy it that way has risen (32). Imagination is now more important than ever.

The strategy also seems to have paid off for *Komikku yuri hime*. Director Ōta recounts that he had at first been puzzled about what kind of people would like the series (Satō 2011, 27). According to Nakamura, it is mostly men—the number of male readers of *Komikku yuri hime* rose while the number of female readers remained stable (32). Nakamura seems to have been surprised by this development. In a discussion with Namori in *Komikku yuri hime*, he admits that he had not expected that those who came to the magazine through *Yuru yuri* would enjoy the magazine's other content. He also indicates that the magazine's circulation had risen due to the popularity of *Yuru yuri* ("hime cafe" 2012, 195). Likewise, the *Yuru yuri* paperbacks sold exceptionally well. Nakamura recalls that from episode two of the anime's first season on the number of sold copies rose immediately, and that they continued to sell well even after the season had ended, which was rare (Satō 2011, 31).

This popularity is also visible in my online survey where 313 participants (23.2%) named *Yuru yuri* as one of their top five *yuri* works. From 2011, the series also became a staple at fan works events, both small-scale specialized *yuri* events and large-scale general

ones like Comic Market, and a number of smaller events dedicated solely to *Yuru yuri* started being held from 2012. If *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* marks the point where fans started imagining about female same-sex intimacy, *Yuru yuri* marks the point where imagination became inseparable from the *yuri* genre. Insofar, the year 2011 was a turning point for the *yuri* genre, the year the genre finally became entrenched on the Japanese market (Tamago 2011, 80–81). 2011 was also the year that saw the beginning of the publication of the meta-manga *Yuri danshi*. As with *Yuru yuri*, its acknowledgment and stimulation of fan activities can be considered key factors for its success.

Yuri danshi *by Kurata Uso (since 2011)*

Given that the very core of the *yuri* genre is *female* same-sex intimacy, the appearance of a manga about "*yuri* males" should indeed be seen as a milestone for the genre. *Yuri danshi* by male manga artist Kurata Uso[12] began serialization in *Komikku yuri hime* in 2011. Its first part is comprised in five paperbacks and the second part is planned. This text is a humorous manga about the male high school student and ardent *yuri* fan Keisuke. It centers on Keisuke's (inner) conflict about being male but at the same time liking the *yuri* genre. Or as he expresses it: "I think, therefore yuri is. ……But there, I'm not needed." (Kurata 2011, 30; ellipse in original) Throughout the manga, Keisuke encounters male and female *yuri* fans, makes friends with them and learns about the individual views of the *yuri* genre and its appeal.

Even though *Yuri danshi* is mostly a comical manga, the episodes are rooted in the reality of the *yuri* genre in Japan. Like the genre's real fans, Keisuke and his friends enjoy imagining various intimate relationships between female characters of fictional texts (and also the "real" females around them). *Yuri danshi* mentions or alludes to a number of texts that are considered to be part of the *yuri* genre's canon, ranging from the works of Yoshiya Nobuko to *Maria-sama ga miteru* and current hits like *Yuru yuri* (e.g. Kurata 2012, 23, 104, 117). *Yuri danshi* is also partly a parody. Under the dust jacket, the paperback design parodies the book design of the light novel version of *Maria-sama ga miteru*: Instead of the "Cobalt-Series," the manga is part of the "Yurihime-Series" and the label "Kobaruto bunko" becomes "Yuri hime bunko." The logo of the Cobalt series, a white silhouette of a girl riding a horse, is replaced by a silhouette of one of the *Yuri danshi* characters. The fonts used likewise allude to the ones on the *Maria-sama ga miteru* light novels.

Fan activities are a major aspect of the manga's story. Chapter four recounts Keisuke's first visit to a *yuri* fan works event. He expects to see predominantly female artists and buyers

(Kurata 2011, 118), but instead encounters mostly female artists and mostly male buyers: "In this alley-like space, there are men! Men! Men!" (110) The Chinese character for *otoko* (men) gets bigger every time Keisuke thinks it. Each mention is accompanied by a panel showing a male character reading a *yuri* fan work, for example based on *Maria-sama ga miteru*. If Keisuke were a real person, he would likely make the same experience: at the *yuri* fan works events I attended, most artists were female and most buyers were male. In my survey as well, more female respondents than male ones said that they had produced a fan work (see chapter 10).

Yuri danshi re-stages the actual discourse on the *yuri* genre on a small scale. At the event in the manga, Keisuke meets a group of four male *yuri* fans that he joins for food afterwards. Their discussions about the *yuri* genre and their own predilections mirror how real fans of the *yuri* genre do not agree on what *yuri* is or should be: Yutaka favors *Aoi hana* and manga for adult women, Hiroyuki is a fan of *Maria-sama ga miteru* and *shōjo* manga, Kenji favors the slice-of-life text *K-On!* and Seijirō is a fan of *Shōjo sekuto* and other erotic/pornographic texts (Kurata 2011, 116). A lively (and almost violent) dispute erupts among the group about whether manga by male artists should be considered *yuri* manga, whether sex scenes should be included in *yuri* manga and whether *yuri* is actually meant for a male readership (118–21). In later volumes as well, the manga's characters for example discuss how the *yuri* genre has changed since the advent of *Maria-sama ga miteru* or why *yuri* works are lauded on the Internet but still do not sell well (Kurata 2013, 48, 114). As *Komikku yuri hime* editor-in-chief Nakamura sees it, *Yuri danshi* is like a manual for understanding how to enjoy the *yuri* genre (Nishinaka 2011, 60).

Like *Yuru yuri*, *Yuri danshi* is an example for a manga on which the artist and the editor closely collaborated in order to broaden the appeal of the *yuri* genre (Tamago 2011, 80). In an interview, Nakamura recalls that he was partly "inspired" by the *yuri* genre having many male fans who had different ways of reading its content. He compares *Yuri danshi* to an autobiographical narrative since it is based on his and manga artist Kurata's own experiences as male *yuri* fans (Satō 2011, 33). If we are to believe the afterword of the first paperback, the concept of *Yuri danshi* began with Kurata hitting a slump after having finished his first two *yuri* manga for *Komikku yuri hime*. He lamented to Nakamura about his struggle with his own fandom of the *yuri* genre. Nakamura liked this idea and made him create *Yuri danshi*, making the manga more or less a co-production (Kurata 2011, 157–58, 160–61).

However, it proved difficult to include a manga with primarily male characters into *Komikku yuri hime* which until its re-launch in 2011 had mostly excluded males, whether as

characters or as readers. Nakamura openly admits that the magazine's editorial department was divided on the topic: for some staff members, *Yuri danshi* was not a *yuri* manga (Satō 2011, 33). As was to be expected, *Yuri danshi* sparked discussions on the Internet from the day it was first announced (Kurata 2011, 160). Nakamura notes that the responses from readers were divided between those who were in favor of the manga and those who criticized it (Satō 2011, 33). However, given that the serialization did not end after the first chapter, it is safe to assume that the manga is actually quite popular.

Yuri danshi will likely not become the most popular *yuri* text of all times (in my online survey, it was given by sixteen participants or 1.2%), but it is nevertheless an important meta-text for understanding the *yuri* genre: it recognizes the genre's male fans and their various ways of enjoying it—not limited to, but also not excluding the enjoyment of erotic/pornographic material. It further reflects the changes the *yuri* genre was undergoing, from a rising visibility in stores to a larger number of people becoming interested in the genre. Last but not least, it is possible that fans of the *yuri* genre will in the future refer to themselves as *yuri danshi* (for male fans) or *yuri joshi* (for female fans).

Notes

1. Unfortunately, what little there is in research on erotic/pornographic manga (e.g. Hori 2009; Yonezawa 2010) has so far not discussed it.

2. Kurogane also draws non-erotic/pornographic texts, usually about female same-sex intimacy. He has worked for *yuri* publications like *Tusbomi* and *Komikku yuri hime S* and is also actively producing fan works.

3. Interview with editor E5, February 29, 2012

4. Shimura has been active since the late 1990s. She draws a variety of manga, most of which are about relationships between male and female characters.

5. Interview with editor E2, February 13, 2012

6. In my interview with editor E6, he attributed the success of *Aoi hana* to the popularity of its artist Shimura (interview with E6, February 16, 2012).

7. Other possible reasons are the original adult target group of *Manga Erotics F* and the fact that manga artist Shimura was then not active in the fan works scene.

8. The anime *Simoun* which aired in 2006 (26 episodes; dir. Nishimura Junji) was advertised as a *yuri* anime, but was not popular enough to be renewed for a second season.

9. For details see Galbraith (2009a).

10. In my interview with editor E6, he remarked that the series would still be funny if it were about female-male couples (interview with E6, February 16, 2012).

11. Mirakurun is originally a character from the light novel series *Pui pui!* by Natsu Midori. Namori drew its illustrations and its manga version and was allowed to "borrow" Mirakurun for *Yuru yuri*.

12. Kurata debuted as professional manga artist in *Komikku yuri hime* and drew two other works for it before starting *Yuri danshi*.

Part II. Producing *Yuri* Manga

Chapter 7. The *Yuri* Manga Market in Japan

In order for texts to be discursively assigned to the *yuri* genre, they have to provide the space to be read as such. As we have seen, this space is sometimes—but by no means always—consciously provided by their producers. In this part of my study, I delve deeper into the role of the *yuri* genre's producers. Since most *yuri* texts so far have been issued in the form of manga and since this was also the form most popular among the fans I surveyed, I focus on manga editors (*henshūsha*). They are among the most important figures in manga production and have a greater influence than for example their US American counterparts (see Prough 2011, 93–96).

First and foremost, editors have to be thought of as business people who need to make money with the manga they put on the market. Thus it is necessary to have an understanding of the market in which they are operating. In this chapter, I provide a more thorough look at the situation of the Japanese manga market in the early 2010s and at the specific situation of the *yuri* genre in it. While the market in general was in crisis because sales were continuously shrinking, the market for *yuri* manga saw ups and downs. At the beginning of the 2010s, the outlook for the *yuri* genre was rather positive, but the future bore some big question marks.

The Japanese Manga Market in the Early 2010s

Ever since the early 1970s, manga production means issuing thick manga magazines with serialized manga for a specific target group. The single chapters are later collected and published in paperback format.[1] This system worked well until the mid-1990s. But ever since 1995, the Japanese manga market is in crisis. Especially manga magazines are selling less and less copies. In 2011, the manga market in total made estimated sales of 390.3 billion yen (minus 4.6% compared to 2010), of which manga paperbacks accounted for 225.3 billion yen (minus 2.7%) and manga magazines for 165 billion yen (minus 7.1%).[2] Even in this crisis, it still held true that profits could only be made with paperback editions of manga previously serialized in manga magazines: In 2011, 516.03 million copies of manga magazines (minus 7.7% compared to 2010) were sold, but they made less money than the 452.16 million copies of manga paperbacks (minus 3.5% compared to 2010) sold in the same time span ("Komikku shijō saizensen" 2012, 4). Within the overall Japanese market for publications, manga magazines and paperbacks combined made up 21.6% of sales (minus 0.2% compared to 2010) and 35.8% of copies (no change compared to 2010; 6).

The reasons for the decline in sales are manifold. As Nakano Haruyuki (2004) points out, the problem is not so much that customers for example prefer buying used manga over new ones (11). Rather, the manga publishers' business model itself is problematic: Firstly, children are one of the most important target groups, especially for manga magazines, but due to the demographic change in Japan less and less children are born. Secondly, manga are now competing with new entertainment devices like mobile phones and video games. Finally, Nakano argues that a large variety of texts are offered to meet the needs of a large variety of readers, but that this variety has become too large and thus no one knows what kind of content will sell (43). As my interviews will show, especially the last factor is also an issue for the *yuri* genre.

One way out of this plight are said to be digital publications. Manga for mobile phones are being offered since the early 2000s (Nagayama 2011, 68), but 2010 is said to mark the "first year of digital publications," mostly due to the introduction of the iPad in January of that year (Nagaoka 2011, 46). Digital manga (*denshi komikku* [electronic comics] or *dejitaru komikku* [digital comics]) used to have the largest share in digital publications. In 2011, the market for digital manga had a volume of 51.4 billion yen, a slight minus of 1.9% compared to 2010 (Impress R&D 2012).[3] Digital publishing more or less relied on the principle of "trial and error" (Nagaoka 2011, 46) and each publisher had its own strategy for tapping the market: some publishers offered free digital manga on their websites while others were selling digital versions of their most popular series to mobile phone users. Conversely, some manga issued independently on the Internet were picked up by commercial publishers and issued in regular paperbacks.

Development of the Yuri *Manga Market*

Researchers and editors I spoke to generally agreed that the best way to make a new genre visible was founding a manga magazine specializing in this particular genre. Such a magazine signals the existence of a large readership and therefore contributes to the recognition of the genre by other publishers. Essential is the regular publication schedule ensuring that new content regularly captures readers' attention.

Alternatives to actual magazines are manga anthologies and so-called *mook*. Anthologies are usually published in A5 format with a dust jacket, resembling (large) manga paperbacks. They mostly have irregular publication cycles, but can be reprinted if necessary. In stores, they are sold alongside regular manga paperbacks instead of manga magazines. Like

manga magazines, anthologies contain several short manga (or chapters of longer stories), but unlike magazines no advertisements or editorial sections. In contrast, *mook*—a neologism derived from the terms "magazine" and "book"—are edited like specialized magazines, but are published irregularly. Since *mook* are handled as books, they are kept in book stores for a longer time and can also be reprinted (Hashimoto 2000, 8–9). Manga *mook* can contain advertisements and editorial sections.

In the case of the *yuri* genre, it needed several attempts with several publishing formats until the genre became a fixture on the market. In the mid-1990s, the first[4] endeavor was publisher Movic's anthology *EG*, "The book about secret love stories of girls!!," with seven short manga on about 160 pages. The artists were probably originally producing fan works, as indicated by an illustration of Sailor Moon in the afterword (*EG* 1994, 162) and the fact that the drawing style of all stories is reminiscent of texts that were popular at the time. A comment from one of the editors shows that the anthology was intended for female readers (163). The manga were of a humorous nature. All had at least one male character that played an important role in the story, and only three showed a visible kiss of two female characters. The content was thus quite different from what can be found in today's *yuri* anthologies which by and large exclude male characters. The *yuri* guidebook *Yuri sakuhin fairu* notes on *EG*: "If times had been better, publication might have continued periodically afterwards." De facto, only one issue of this "premature hero" was published (Sugino 2008, 78).

It took almost ten years until another specialized publication focusing on female same-sex intimacy appeared. The *mook* called *Yuri shimai* is now commonly referred to as the first specialized *yuri* manga magazine (e.g. Sugino 2008, 78). Its (male) editor-in-chief Nakamura Seitarō later recalled in an interview that the boys' love genre drew his attention to the topic "love (*ren'ai*) between persons of the same sex." Inspired by the boom of *Maria-sama ga miteru*, he founded *Yuri shimai* (Yamada 2005, 29). The first issue of *Yuri shimai* was published in summer 2003 by Magazine Magazine (*sic*)—a publisher that also issued the boys' love manga magazines *JUNE*—but the magazine already ceased publication after five irregularly published issues in fall 2004. Every issue cost 880 yen and contained about seven manga, an illustrated short story, and a number of articles on around 200 black-and-white pages and a few glossy color pages. As mentioned, the covers were drawn by *Maria-sama ga miteru* illustrator Hibiki Reine. The overall design of *Yuri shimai* used a pastel color scheme and especially the color pink. The few advertisements on its pages were all for boys' love magazines and games, the consumers of which are thought to be predominantly female.

Since *Yuri shimai* was designed to mostly appeal to females, males made up only around 30% of its readership. Nakamura later commented that the magazine was especially read by female teenagers and women in their thirties who liked *shōjo* manga and/or the boys' love genre (Yamada 2005, 29). According to Nakamura, sales of *Yuri shimai* were more or less identical with those of its successor magazine *Komikku yuri hime* (Yasuda 2008, 38) which has a print run[5] of around 75,000 units (Media risāchi sentā 2010, 330). While Nakamura says that *Yuri shimai* ceased publication because it did not reach the sales numbers requested by the standards of its publisher Magazine Magazine ("Yuri hime henshūbu zadankai" 2012, 304), Fujimoto (2014b, 107) reasons that the publisher was not interested enough in the magazine.

After the failure of *Yuri shimai*, Nakamura switched publishers and joined Ichijinsha. In summer 2005, the first issue of *Komikku yuri hime* was issued as special issue of Ichijinsha's established female-oriented manga magazine *Comic Zero Sum*. Most artists that had been active for *Yuri shimai* changed with Nakamura and continued to work for *Komikku yuri hime*. The new magazine was published regularly four times a year and was priced at 880 yen.

The first issue of *Komikku yuri hime* consisted of about 280 black-and-white pages and a few glossy color pages, thus was slightly thicker than *Yuri shimai*. The number of pages rose over the years and the last issue of *Komikku yuri hime* before its re-launch featured roughly 370 pages. The main focus of the magazine remained on manga with each issue containing around fourteen different manga, often serialized ones, and (especially in the earlier issues) illustrated short stories. The remaining pages were filled with articles, readers' pages and two columns by the authors Miura Shion and Mori Natusko. Miura introduced readers to various older *yuri* texts and Mori answered letters from readers who asked for her advice, usually about love problems. Compared to *Yuri shimai*, the color scheme remained largely unchanged with most issues using pastel pink, red or violet. Nakamura did not want *Komikku yuri hime* to stand out: it was designed so that it would not look strange if placed alongside *shōjo* manga magazines (NOV 2010a, 205). Since at this point *yuri* was still a minor genre, he considered *Komikku yuri hime* to be closer to a "fanzine" than to an actual "magazine" (206).

In the index of Japanese periodicals, *Komikku yuri hime* is described as a magazine for a female audience about "pure love between girl and girl" and catering "to the needs of readers who insist on quality" (Media risāchi sentā 2010, 330). According to the guidebook *Yuri sakuhin fairu*, in 2008 73% of all readers of *Komikku yuri hime* were female, but Nakamura cautioned that these numbers were biased since they were based on the responses to the

readers' survey. Readers could win presents for answering it and since the presents of *Komikku yuri hime* appealed to females, males might have refrained from answering (Sugino 2008, 141).[6]

Komikku yuri hime proved so popular that in 2007, its sister magazine *Komikku yuri hime S* was launched as a special edition. Nakamura thus became the editor-in-chief of two magazines. They were published alternately, each with four issues per year costing 880 yen each. In 2010, *Komikku yuri hime* had a print run of 75,000 copies, and *Komikku yuri hime S* had one of 80,000 copies (Media risāchi sentā 2010, 330)—relatively high numbers compared to those of specialized boys' love manga magazines. Both magazines contained almost no advertisements. Content-wise, *Komikku yuri hime* and *Komikku yuri hime S* differed markedly. On about 300 to 400 pages, *Komikku yuri hime S* contained around fifteen different manga, some of them serialized. In contrast to its sister magazine, articles were rare and often focused on *yuri* video games. The magazine had no illustrated short stories, no readers' pages or any other regular column. The manga were usually of a humorous nature with cute characters, as exemplified by *Yuru yuri*. In contrast, *Komikku yuri hime* had also rather serious dramatic manga. *Komikku yuri hime S* clearly had a different target group, also expressed by its use of saturated colors, especially green.

According to Nakamura, he intended *Komikku yuri hime S* to be a magazine solely for male readers (Satō 2011, 32). In the index of Japanese periodicals, it is described as being about "pure love between girl and girl, focusing on the needs of male readers." (Media risāchi sentā 2010, 330) However, according to the *Yuri sakuhin fairu*, in 2008, just 62% of all readers of *Komikku yuri hime S* were male (Sugino 2008, 141). Nakamura later explained that founding *Komikku yuri hime S* had also been a way of creating a rival for *Komikku yuri hime* so that its manga artists and its editorial staff would not become lazy (NOV 2010a, 304). In 2007, there were not yet any rivaling magazines from other publishers.

It took three years until *Komikku yuri hime* became cost effective, and thus, in early 2008 (vol. 11), independent from *Comic Zero Sum*. This can also be seen as a sign that the *yuri* genre had become a fixture on the manga market (Yasuda 2008, 38). From then on, even more *yuri*-related content was added to the portfolio of Ichijinsha, for example manga anthologies and *shōsetsu*. From 2009 on, several other publishers also started issuing *yuri* manga anthologies. Of the dozens that were launched, only a handful saw more than two volumes, and not all that survived were published continuously. Although the *yuri* genre has gained more and more readers over the years, new contenders still need tenacity to survive on this market where not even popularity with readers can ensure survival: the two most popular

yuri anthologies, *Tsubomi* and *Pyua yuri ansorojī Hirari,* (*sic*), have now both ceased publication.

Tsubomi (2009–12, 21 vols.) and *Hirari* (2010–14, 14 vols.) each contained *yuri* manga in about 330 pages and cost roughly 1,000 yen. Later, paperback versions of some of the manga published in them were also available, signaling the popularity of the anthologies. Often called the "big three" alongside *Komikku yuri hime*, together they shaped the image of the *yuri* genre, its style and content (Tamago 2011, 81–82). It thus came as a surprise when their discontinuation was announced. While the actual reasons are unclear, it is possible that they sold too few copies for their publishers' standards. Although the actual print runs remain unclear, my research suggests the most *yuri* manga anthologies have five-digit print runs. This might not be enough on the highly contested manga market of the mid-2010s.

With the appearance of *Tsubomi* and *Hirari* in the early 2010s, the *yuri* manga market changed: once dominated by one and then two manga magazines from one single publisher, it now became more diverse. For *Komikku yuri hime* editor-in-chief Nakamura, this was a rather risky situation. Those readers who were not satisfied with the content of *Komikku yuri hime* or *Komikku yuri hime S* could now easily buy other publications. Nakamura felt that he had to act before the print run of his magazines started to decrease. Thus in *Komikku yuri hime* issue twenty-one it was announced that the magazine would be merged with *Komikku yuri hime S* so that they could "fight together" (NOV 2010a, 204). Since January 2011, the re-launched *Komikku yuri hime* is published every two months at the old price of 880 yen (890 yen after the sales tax increase),[7] and reportedly the old print run of 75,000 copies (Media risāchi sentā 2011, 326).

The "new" *Komikku yuri hime* contains around 500 pages. Most of these are black-and-white, but there are also a number of glossy color pages. The magazine contains around twenty different manga, some of them serialized, two illustrated serialized *shōsetsu*, and a number of articles. Advertisements are completely missing. With the re-launch came a number of design changes: the new color scheme relies on saturated colors and the covers are illustrated by the magazine's own manga artists. The tagline as well was changed from "prohibited to males" to "Justice for girls." (in English)

This reflects a change in the editorial policy. According to Nakamura, there was a second reason to unite *Komikku yuri hime* and *Komikku yuri hime S*. As described, the magazines were originally intended for separate target groups: females and males. But over time the readership of *yuri* manga had crossed gender lines and thus Nakamura wanted to create a new, general *yuri* manga magazine for all readers (Satō 2011, 32). Especially male

readers who had started reading *Komikku yuri hime S* slowly picked up *Komikku yuri hime* as well. In the end, the differences in taste between the two sexes became largely invisible (NOV 2010a, 204). In 2011, *Komikku yuri hime*'s core readership consisted of males from their late twenties to early thirties and of females in their early twenties and mid thirties (Satō 2011, 32).

Intrinsic to the new concept of *Komikku yuri hime* was the desire to create attention. To a certain extent, *yuri* had become ordinary in the world of manga and anime, so the magazine had to be special (NOV 2010a, 205). Nakamura describes it as a general magazine with a broad scope, but a design that at first makes it a little bit hard to pick up (Satō 2011, 32). Editor Pine (pen name) adds that the editorial department wants to disturb people's feelings even if it means that they dislike the new magazine. It restricts possibilities if you think of it as a magazine "for readers who like *yuri*" ("Yuri hime henshūbu zadankai" 2012, 304). In essence, *Komikku yuri hime* is intended as a magazine that people buy even when it comes without supplements and none of its manga are made into an anime (NOV 2010a, 206).

Like the rest of the manga market, *yuri* manga cannot survive as paper-only publications. Nakamura argues that young Japanese no longer know what a magazine is and that it therefore makes no sense to target them. Rather, such a strategy drives older readers away (NOV 2010a, 204–5). Editor Nora (pen name) notes that the number of people who buy magazines by habit is decreasing. In order to make people buy your magazine, you have to surprise them every month. For editor Pine, the new challenge is how to get readers to engage with the magazine when you cannot offer things such as web videos, so she and Nakamura would like to produce an iPad version of *Komikku yuri hime* ("Yuri hime henshūbu zadankai" 2012, 303).[8] For now, the website Niconico Seiga offers an online-only version of the magazine called *Niconico yuri hime* (since 2013). Some of its manga are now also available in paperback, like the *Yuru yuri* spin-off *Ōmuroke*. A number of *Komikku yuri hime* manga are further available as mobile manga via Ichijinsha's mobile website.

To a certain extent, *Komikku yuri hime*'s editorial staff has a mission. As Nakamura puts it, as the pioneer *yuri* manga magazine, they feel that "if our magazine collapses, then the *yuri* business also collapses" (NOV 2010a, 204). Hence one of the primary concerns of *Komikku yuri hime* is to make the *yuri* genre known to the general public (205). In this regard, the first issue of the re-launched *Komikku yuri hime* contains something like a manifesto. In it, Nakamura (2011) writes that the magazine wants to increase the "*yuri* population." But this, he adds, does not necessarily mean increasing the number of readers of *Komikku yuri hime* (506). Rather, those readers who do not like the content of *Komikku yuri hime* should pick up publications from other publishers. Nakamura admits that it might be strange to recommend

rival publications, but since the *yuri* business is small, those publications are to him "nothing more than a barometer for the diversity of the market; they are not rivals." (507)

Although introduced in a time of crisis, by the early 2010s the *yuri* genre had become a fixture on the Japanese manga market—albeit still on a comparatively small scale. Nakamura for example assumed the *yuri* manga market's size to be about one-tenth of the boys' love manga market, based on the number of specialized manga magazines and the number of *sākuru* at the fan works event Comic Market.[9] He further argued that although the number of people who liked the *yuri* genre had risen, not all of these bought commercial magazines, a phenomenon also known for boys' love manga (Yasuda 2011, 61): fans often valued fan works more than commercial publications (NOV 2010a, 205). Such issues have to be taken into account when marketing *yuri* manga.

Notes

1. For a history of manga publishing see Nakano (2004, 20–180) and Prough (2011, 27–41).

2. I present here the status quo at the time of my interviews, but there is no indication that the situation has improved ever since. The numbers do not include the large market for used books.

3. The market has grown even more ever since.

4. The anthology *Girl Beans*, which also appears to have contained manga about female same-sex intimacy, was published in 1991. Its tagline, "A secret love that I give to you." positions it in the familiar framework of the *yuri* genre. Unfortunately, I have been unable to access a copy to check its content. Many thanks to James Welker for alerting me to its existence.

5. The publicly available print runs of manga magazines should be read with caution. Typically, around one-third of the copies of every issue are returned unsold to the publisher. About 8% of the copies of every issue are pulped (Holmberg 2011).

6. In volume eleven, readers could for example win Anna Sui perfume and a hair dryer (*Komikku yuri hime* 2008/11, 8–9). In later issues, the presents consisted solely of manga and related merchandising.

7. Compared to specialized magazines for boys' love manga, the price ranges in the middle.

8. The specific regulations of Apple's iBook store could prevent such an endeavor. There are numerous reported cases of the store refusing books and comics on the grounds that they contained "materials that may be considered obscene, pornographic, or defamatory" (Striphas 2011, xvii–xviii). Since this included comics with scenes of mild nudity, it is possible that *Komikku yuri hime* could also be rejected.

9. In 2011, there were sixteen different boys' love manga magazines ("Komikku shijō saizensen" 2012, 11). Another indicator for the size of the *yuri* manga market is that whereas many bookstores devote whole shelves to the boys' love genre, only a few (specialized) bookstores have (small) bookshelves devoted solely to the *yuri* genre.

Chapter 8. Interviews with Japanese Manga Magazine Editors

Some readers might wonder whether it would not be more insightful to interview the actual *yuri* manga artists rather than their editors. However, many existing interviews with artists show that they often cannot explain why they draw certain content or were even outright asked to do so by their respective editor (see for example the interviews in *Eureka* 2014/12). As we have already seen in part I, manga production is essentially a cooperative effort and the editor's role is often just as crucial as the one of the actual artist.

If we look at the case of Nakamura Seitarō, we also see that the editors play an important role in shaping the public's knowledge and image of the *yuri* genre. For this, not even their names have to be known. Taglines and descriptions used for advertising a manga in a particular manga magazine (or anthology) help shape the image of any genre, and these are usually phrased by the respective manga's editor, making him/her responsible for the initial generic assignment of the manga. Hence manga editors are at a unique intersection in genre production: they can influence the manga's content and they are responsible for the marketing, and can thus help shape the image of any genre.

The opinions of a manga magazine's editor are furthermore crucial when it comes to deciding which texts will be published in the magazine because he/she assesses the manuscripts of aspiring manga artists (Nakano 2004, 52). Manga editors act as a kind of gatekeeper, much like journalists who decide what they will report on and what they will ignore, thereby shaping the public's knowledge (Manning White 1950). But the manga editor's job does not end once a manga is accepted for publication: he/she remains closely involved in the creative process by giving and rejecting ideas to the extent that he/she could almost be called a co-creator (Natsume 2009, 141; Prough 2011, 13). One of the reasons for this system is that at many manga magazines, the editors are responsible for the success of the (usually several) manga they supervise. If a manga does not sell, the editor will be blamed and might even lose his/her job (Nakano 2004, 98, 135).

Research on manga editors remains sparse. Their particular role in the manga business has been noted early on by researchers (e.g. Kinsella 2000, 50–69). But like the books written by former editors of manga magazines (e.g. Konagai 2011; Nishimura 1999), these accounts describe the state of the manga business at a time when sales were still high and stable. Jennifer Prough (2011) notes that times have changed and with it the work of manga editors (14).

In order to assess manga editors' opinions on the *yuri* genre and their decision making processes, I conducted expert interviews with ten of them between February and March 2012. I gained access to my interviewees by contacting the editorial staff of those manga magazines that were serializing or had serialized at least one *yuri* manga between 2007 and 2011. I further contacted all *yuri* manga magazines and anthologies that were being published at the time of my fieldwork. It is possible that my special status as foreigner gave me access to the editors.[1] I conducted all interviews face-to-face in Japanese, with interviews lasting between about thirty minutes and one and a half hours. Since my interviewees were involved in many concealed processes and had access to sensitive data, I granted them complete anonymity and will refer to them with abbreviations: A1 to A9 = the respective manga **A**rtist, E1 to E9 = the respective **E**ditor, M1 to M9 = the respective **M**anga, P1 to P9 = the respective **P**ublisher, Z1 to Z9 = the respective manga maga**Z**ine.

The three main tasks of Japanese manga editors are (1) deciding which manga to run in the manga magazine they work for, (2) being involved in the creation of the manga they are in charge of, and (3) marketing the manga they are in charge of. For the editors of *yuri* manga described in this study, all of these tasks are influenced by their image of the *yuri* genre: since the manga has to be sold to the readers, the editor needs to know what these people expect from the manga's content. My interviewees had various incoherent ideas about the *yuri* genre and its readers, who they mostly assumed to be male. They often relied on their own personal taste when deciding about future publications and thus in most cases it was the manga artist who initially proposed drawing a *yuri* manga. This often meant that the respective editor did not influence the manga's content that much. Rather, his/her influence was strongest in his/her marketing efforts to sell the manga to as many readers as possible.

The results of my interviews should be seen as snapshots reflecting the status quo at the time when they were conducted. Since the editors gave their personal opinions, I discuss here not an "objective" truth, but what is assumed to be true by my interviewees[2] which in turn influences what they do and how they assess the *yuri* genre. I will not judge these opinions, but will give context for their answers where necessary. For most of my interviewees, *yuri* was a niche genre, one that was nice to have, but not the main focus of their attention. Nevertheless, the term *yuri* itself was seen as having a lot of appeal on the market and my interviewees greeted fans assigning otherwise unrelated manga to the genre. However, they found it difficult to assess the genre's audience and seemed to lack an overall strategy for tapping it.

Editors' Image of the Yuri *Genre and Its Readers*

On average, my interviewees had five years of job experience in manga editing. All of them were interested in *yuri* manga, but only three of them called themselves fans of the genre. One of these had even been creating *yuri* fan works in her youth. Knowledge about the *yuri* genre thus varied greatly. The *yuri* manga magazine *Komikku yuri hime* was known to almost all of my interviewees, but only a few were able to give the names of other popular *yuri* manga. Hence their image of the *yuri* genre varied, specifically of its content and its readers.

My interviewees exhibited two different definitions of the *yuri* genre: one group defined *yuri* as a genre about "love between girls," while a second (smaller) group defined it as a genre about "two flirting girls." Some were also quick to point out what in their opinion was not *yuri*. E2[3] for example thought that *yuri* was different from "lesbians" (*rezu*) and hermaphrodites (*futanari*). She considered the quantity of sex scenes in the respective manga to be essential for drawing the line: "I think that the core of *yuri* users [*yūzā*] are like 'If they do it, it's lesbian [*rezu*].' … Therefore, essentially, if there are sex scenes [in the manga], the core of *yuri* users probably wouldn't want you to use the term *yuri*."

Similarly, E6[4] thought that *yuri* and "lesbian" (*rezubian*) were different: "I don't know whether I should decide this, but I think 'lesbian' is really about complete homosexuals and most stories also contain a sexual aspect. *Yuri* manga, this could be a Japanese thing, but they're about [girls] who, during their student days, yearn for their same-sex senior or like [*suki*] their senior, but who aren't particularly homosexuals." Implicitly, E2 as well as E6 thus emphasize the innocence of *yuri* texts, markedly similar to the discursively established image of the *yuri* genre.

In fact, many of my interviewees considered it important how many sex scenes were shown in *yuri* manga. As described, E2 thought that the core of *yuri* fans would not use the term *yuri* if a manga contained one or more sex scenes. Concerning the content of M7, E7[5] thought "that in other *yuri* manga … often the physical and carnal aspects [of a relationship] are drawn. Maybe we're different from them in that we completely eliminated that aspect and consistently drew it [i.e. the relationship] as an extension of friendship." Thus the content of M7 was in part a direct response to E7's image of the *yuri* genre, which deviates from what is usually thought to be characteristic of *yuri* manga. E3a[6] thought that erotic scenes were only necessary in those manga in which the characters were troubled by love between two women—something he felt was not the case for M3. E1[7] however admitted being troubled by

those *yuri* fans who thought that the relationships depicted in *yuri* manga had to be completely platonic ones.

For the majority of my interviewees, the most important aspect of the *yuri* genre was the nature of the portrayed relationship. They provided descriptions that contained the same stereotypical images of femininity and female same-sex relationships that are apparent in the overall discourse on the *yuri* genre. The main idea was that relationships between two female were somehow "special." As E9[8] put it: "In the end, the story somehow or other draws the relationship between two human beings. Therefore you can depict something you cannot draw in the case of relationships between males and females. … And I think that's what artists and readers can feel very well." But what is this "something" that makes relationships between two female characters so special? According to E4,[9] it is the fact that these relationships are not seen as "normal" by society: "It's difficult because they're of the same sex. … With people of the same sex, the public is more relentless [than with male-female couples]. In that sense, there are *yuri* manga … with very good characters and you're drawn into the development [of the story], but it's rather difficult to empathize with them." E7 added:

> I think there are aspects you can draw precisely because the characters are two girls. When it's love between man and woman … you are free to say, "How about we go out?" "Should we go one step further?", that's no particular problem. But here [with two female characters], it's rather socially complicated, even when the feelings are mutual. Here it becomes rather dramatic and I think that also makes it entertaining [*omoshiroi*].

In manga, as in movies or novels, happiness and unproblematic lives do not make a good story. As movie director Alfred Hitchcock once said "Drama is life with the dull bits cut out." Still, my interviewees partly attributed the problematic relationships in *yuri* manga to the demand of the genre's fans—despite the fact that they did not seem to have much actual contact with them. E3a was the only one who mentioned having talked to *yuri* fans, albeit limited to men he had met in Akihabara, Tokyo's mecca for fans of manga and anime. My other interviewees seemed more or less clueless about the *yuri* genre's actual consumers. Consequently, their answers in part also reflected popular ideas about the psychology of Japanese manga fans that should not be taken at face value.

Even when it came to the readers of the *yuri* manga they supervised, most of the editors I spoke to were unable to say who exactly read them. M1, M6 and M9 seemed to have about the same number of male and female readers, whereas M3 and M8 seemed to have more male readers. Age as well varied greatly, but most of the manga in question seemed to be read by people in their 20s and 30s. However, this information was usually based on the results of the

reader surveys in the manga magazines and paperbacks, which, as discussed, are often biased.[10] My interviewees further based their estimations on the audience present at the manga artist's autograph sessions and on responses on the Internet (e.g. Twitter), neither of which is a neutral indicator.

Despite this lack of reliable data, most of my interviewees imagined the fans of the *yuri* genre to be predominantly male—a view that is at odds with for example the numbers on the readership of *Komikku yuri hime*. The line of reasoning was mostly the one of E6: "Aren't *yuri* manga the female version of the Japanese boys' love genre? And since boys' love is practically read only by women, I thought [that *yuri*] would be read by males." E1 further elaborated:

> I thought that females would hardly be interested in love between girls because … it's about themselves. Love between persons of the same sex is rather close to life … and I thought that they wouldn't really want to read it. And I thought that at the same time, there are men who are interested in love between females, but that they would decrease because for men, they themselves are the standard and therefore they would only be interested in male-female [relationships].

Obviously, E1 was amazed that anyone would be interested in reading *yuri* manga. E8[11] added that "for quite some time now, there have been a lot of women who especially like that boys' love genre. But it's been rather recently that the number of males liking *yuri* has risen." These arguments are highly problematic in their assumption that certain content is necessarily associated with readers of a certain gender. As recent scholarship has elaborated, not even boys' love manga are read (or even produced) only by women (e.g. Nagaike 2015).

Since my interviewees thought that the majority of *yuri* fans were male, they explained the content of contemporary *yuri* manga with the demand of exactly those fans. E6 for example said that "among men who like *yuri* manga, there are many who want to see two girls simply having fun and [the story] not progressing into one about lesbians [*rezubian*]." E2 thought that males had a particular motivation for reading *yuri* manga: "If we talk about the core users of *yuri* …, my image is that there are many men. There are also women who read *yuri* with a *shōjo*-manga-like drawing style, but I feel that among those who haven't got a favorable opinion about themselves … there are many men. They are searching for something pretty [*kirei*], for a beautiful [*utsukushii*] world." She added that women were used to the world not being beautiful since they saw that in television dramas. Men, she reasoned, did not want to see that "unbeautiful" side of life—which is kitchen sink psychology at best. For E8, reading *yuri* manga was a redirection activity of its male fans:

> Maybe when males read slightly erotic manga about male and female characters, they take the point of view of the male character and watch the cute girls. But with boys' love or *yuri* manga, … it's like readers don't really want to enter that world and watch it from the outside, like watching two kittens playing with each other. … The boys' love genre has been popular for a long time, and maybe *yuri* became as popular as it is because men are no longer active about love. Like, they read it because it heals them spiritually [*iyasu*]. Like the *sōshoku danshi* ["herbivore male"]. … They are passive about their own love or timid. … They have given up on their own love … or aren't really interested in it … They entrust those two beautiful cute characters … with their own wishes and desires.

E8 here refers to a popular stereotype of the Japanese media of the 2010s, the "herbivore male." "Young men given this label … are said to be interested in fashion and domesticity, with many of the same interests as their female friends … [and are] criticized in some media as uninterested in sexual relationships." (Glasspool 2012, 118) E8's explanation for why these men supposedly like the *yuri* genre might sound farfetched, but at least the aspect of "spiritual healing" (*iyashi*) was actually present among the (male) fans in my online survey (see chapter 10). The idea that *yuri* fans of any gender did not want to be part of the fictional world they consumed was also voiced by E5:[12]

> Regardless of whether it sells or not, the image I really have is that of a box, a small one, like a little garden. You peer into this little space from above, from a remote place and grin. It's really that image of a box you don't enter yourself or project yourself into. … In the case of *yuri* manga the distance between the reader and the characters is rather great. Maybe in that sense there are people who find it a little bit hard to read and others who like it a great deal.

Yet another theory about the readers' psychology came from E9. He argued that there were people of both genders

> who aren't satisfied with or have doubts about that uncomplicated "There's a man and a woman and they have some kind of relationship." … I think that [they] feel sympathy or find something genuine [in boys' love and *yuri*] … Whether it's male or female readers, they don't find it appealing if there's an uncomplicated [story about] a man and a woman, and they get together, get married and have kids. Maybe they feel it's contrived.

In sum, most of my interviewees had very specific ideas about the readers of *yuri* manga and the aspects of *yuri* manga these enjoyed, but there was a distinct lack of understanding for it. E6 for example wondered why there were male readers who were interested in love stories. E8 said that most readers liked flirting scenes and exclusive relationships, something he wanted to change with M8. In contrast, E2 and E5, who both worked for *yuri* manga anthologies, said that most fans of *yuri* were against sex scenes in *yuri* manga and did not like male characters being involved in the story: "Readers of *yuri* want to read about love between girl and girl and therefore pay money to buy Z5." (E5)

In general, my interviewees thought that the number of people interested in *yuri* was rather small. E6 for example estimated a maximum of about 100,000 to 200,000 readers of *yuri*, based on the number of paperback copies sold by the most successful *yuri* manga. This assessment was important when it came to deciding about editing and marketing *yuri* manga.

Deciding to Serialize Yuri *Manga*

Manga editors act as "gatekeepers" since they ultimately decide what is (not) published in the manga magazines they work for. The first hurdle for the creator of a *yuri* manga is to find an editor who is interested in his/her work. My interviewees' decision making processes had different standards, but the basic principle was "bait the hook to suit the fish, not the fisherman": prospective new manga had to match the manga magazine, not the other way around. At P5 for example, I observed how editors examined manuscripts while the prospective new manga artists were reading the manga magazines they were hoping to get published in.[13] E7 added that as an editor, you had to think for the core target group of your manga magazine, not for those additional readers who might buy the manga's paperback edition. Even though ultimately most editors wanted to sell "their" manga to as many people as possible, at this first step, they were bound to the (narrow) confines of the manga magazines they worked for.

What a new manga needed in order to be considered for publication varied greatly. E3b for example decided on a "case-by-case" basis: sometimes she was offered media franchise texts, sometimes she considered how much a manga artist had sold before and sometimes she responded to requests from the manga artist—"We're rather lax," as she put it. Ultimately, she argued, the editor needed a vision of who the manga could be sold to. The editors know about their key role, as can also be seen in a statement made by E1 who said that one important aspect was "that I definitely want to make [*tsukuru*] a work of that person … I try to choose persons who [in their style] don't resemble other people, who have some kind of originality." But most important was that she found the manga *omoshiroi*.

This term was in fact the one most often used by my interviewees when describing what they were looking for. *Omoshiroi* is often translated as "interesting" (e.g. Prough 2011, 94), but in this context is closer to "entertaining." E7 for example described that he usually first got a storyboard from a prospective new manga artist which was then discussed by Z7's editorial staff. The two main criteria in this discussion were whether the manga was suitable for Z7's readers and whether its content was entertaining for them. E2 as well commented that

"in the end, even if a story is proposed by the manga artist, if I read it and don't find it entertaining, it's no good." Such a situation can also prompt the editor to influence the content of a manga, as was described by E6: "[I ask,] 'So, what do you want to draw?' and if it's entertaining, we do it that way. If I think it's not entertaining, I discuss it [with the manga artist] and sometimes it happens that I say, 'How about if you did this and that?'"

What made a manga "entertaining" depended on the respective manga magazine. E3b and E6 for example thought that the drawing style was the most important factor. They reasoned that in the end it was the drawings that let readers pick up new magazines: "At first, [the readers] really skim through the pages and if they don't find drawings they like, they don't read [the magazine]." (E3b) "Of course there are also [manga] that you read and find entertaining. But when you put it on the market and nobody likes the drawing style, no matter how entertaining the content is, if the manga is not picked up [it's a failure]" (E6). E6 also thought that the drawing style said something about the manga artist's working style – sloppy pictures were not signs of an earnest worker. This can be problematic in the manga business with its fast pace and tight deadlines.

In contrast, E5 thought that a good manga artist was one who was good at creating characters, something she considered harder than being good at drawing, especially now that many artists use computer programs: "It should be a text that's so strong that you remember the characters' names after having read it. Not a text where you say, 'It's a good story' but one where you say, 'So-and-so-*chan* is cute'" E1 had a more comprehensive approach: "It's really a complex job (*laughs*). It's really like with the four wheels of a car, [there are] the drawings, the characters, the story and the setting [*settei*]. If one of them is missing, it doesn't run smoothly, you know." E1 personally preferred manga with a balance between those four elements over those manga that were extremely strong in just one of the four areas. As we will see in chapter 10, these elements are also important for the fans of the *yuri* genre.

The requests of the manga magazines' readers were rarely considered when it came to choosing new manga for serialization. E1 for example explained that Z1's survey postcards asked the readers which manga artists they would like to see working for the magazine, but although these requests were taken into consideration, what mattered most in the end was the editor's personal opinion. E7 as well explained that fan letters were keeping up the morale, but did not reveal what readers actually wanted. These opinions differ markedly from Prough's (2011) descriptions of *shōjo* manga production in the early 2000s where readers' responses to the magazines' surveys could directly influence the content of their manga (71, 74–75). It is possible that magazines with a young target group pay more attention to their

readers' voices than those for an adult audience. I was for example told that adult readers usually gave less feedback than young ones.[14]

With regards to the prospects of *yuri* manga, the most important question seemed to be whether the editor considered the specific manga magazine's target group to be interested in manga about female same-sex intimacy. E4 for example thought that the readers of Z4 could not relate to *yuri* itself. Rather, some kind of drama needed to unfold around the female characters so that readers could sympathize with them. A similar opinion was voiced by E3b:

> [We would serialize such a manga] if it was an unfolding drama in which as just one element [*yuri*] was introduced, but apart from that it could be enjoyed as usual [as every other manga]. … Another possibility would be a story that doesn't develop into one about love, but still has only female characters, like *K-On!* … It's not that we absolutely and unconditionally say "No [*iya da*]," but rather "If it's entertaining, why not?" … I think if the readers read it and find it entertaining, then why not?

If a manga is entertaining, the genre is no longer that important. Or as E7 put it: "In the end, you shouldn't do it because it's *yuri*. … The order shouldn't [start with] *yuri* material, but with an entertaining manga and in it there's *yuri*." For my interviewees, the manga artist had to take the initiative and propose *yuri* content. This was further explained by E9: "It depends on the magazine, but in our case, we don't plan projects as in 'Let's make that kind of manga'—'I want a *yuri* manga'—'Okay, let's look for an artist.' … it starts with some artist and [questions like] 'What would be the topic best suited for this person?', 'What would be the most entertaining thing this person could draw?'" If an artist of Z9 would like to draw a *yuri* manga, then it would probably be serialized, he said. He thought that forcefully looking for a manga artist to draw a certain kind of story would not yield good results and that it was best to let the manga artist come up with a topic. Yet E6 cautioned that "if people don't draw *yuri* manga because they find them entertaining, but … because *yuri* is popular, that would certainly fail. … There's really a difference in terms of level between a *yuri* manga by an artist who draws all kinds of stories and a person who says, 'I want to draw only *yuri* manga.' (*laughs*)." It is possible that his opinion would have been different in the early 1990s. In today's manga market, you cannot afford producing a manga that nobody reads because its quality is perceived as inferior.

Most *yuri* manga that my interviewees supervised had originally been proposed by the respective manga artist. One of the few exceptions was M7: "I had long been of the opinion that the drawings of this artist A7, the atmosphere was suited for *yuri* manga. So I said, 'There's a genre called *yuri*, wouldn't you want to try that?' … At that time, *yuri* manga were extremely popular and I thought it would become a huge topic if we did that in Z7." (E7) In

this case, the process of co-creating manga started with the original idea. In fact, all of my interviewees referred to their own work as *tsukuru* or "creating" manga rather than for example "editing." They thought of themselves as (co-)creators rather than as administrators of creativity.

Creating Yuri *Manga*

Some readers might find it strange that manga editors in general have a great deal of influence on the content that is published in the manga magazines they work for, given that we usually see a manga solely as the product of an artist's mind. But much like the editors interviewed by Prough (2011, 90), my interviewees saw their input as necessary if a manga was to succeed on the market. E3b for example felt that manga artists had a hard time distancing themselves from their own work and thus needed input from an outsider. E9 likewise saw himself as the judge of a manga's content, one who had to be frank about his opinion, even with famous manga artists. The manga's readers would judge it anyway, but unlike an editor, they would not pay as much attention during reading and would nevertheless be frank with the manga artist.

Editors are deeply involved in the creative process of manga production—even outside their working hours. E1 for example recounted that she often met with Z1's manga artists in her spare time to talk in a relaxed atmosphere and that this often generated new ideas. E2 supplied Z2's manga artists with stories inspired by current anime hits, but also accepted story proposals by the manga artists themselves. She admitted that her own taste influenced the content of the manga she was supervising: "Everybody really likes pretty stories. … [But] I got tired of reading pretty stories when I was young. The stories I do [*tsukuru*] should be a little bit more sexually explicit."

The content of a manga can be influenced long before the first page is drawn. E9 for example explained:

> It's the same with every manga, but basically at first there's a discussion "What kind of story will you draw next?" and I get the contents … and the storyboard. Then [I tell the artist] what I noticed about it, for example "Staging-wise, this would be effective" or "This presentation is hard to understand" etc. and in those cases I have these points revised. When we finally both agree, I have the manga drawn.

Indeed, making a manga easy to understand for its readers is an important part of the editors' work. "Easy to understand" does not necessarily mean that the story has to be simple, but rather that for example the reading order of the panels is clear. I once inadvertently

witnessed how an editor at P7 rejected a manga because (among other things) the reading order was unclear. E3b also explained that since Z3 was not a magazine for manga fans, the manga serialized in it had to be easy to understand, and that she gave the manga artists advice on how to finish a manga so it would be read.

The degree to which my interviewees influenced the actual content of the *yuri* manga they supervised varied a great deal. E9 for example related:

> I think in the case of M9, apart from slightly "unsteady" scenes I corrected almost nothing. … The editor's ideas are not in there, it's drawn at the pace of the artist. It depends on the work, there are also serializations where the editor even steps in with the further development of the story during discussions. I also do [*yaru*] these kinds of works, but in the case of this work [i.e. M9], … this almost doesn't happen.

E1 only stepped in when she felt that A1 was concentrating too much on subplots: "When [the story] gets too focused on minor points I really say, 'How about you return to the main story?' … But I very much trust A1." E8's major point of concern was that M8 did not get too sexually explicit. There had to be a balance between the depiction of female characters having fun and them being involved in slightly sexually explicit scenes. "There are times when I [make suggestions], but it also happens that A8 says, 'I want to draw this.' And if A8 is going into a direction that is too sexually explicit, I have to curb that a little bit; I often have to curb it (*laughs*)." E4 discussed with A4 how the story would proceed and how the characters would develop. In the case of M7 as well, A7 and E7 worked together in planning the story: "A7 developed the general framework and the characters and at that point … I gave a little bit of advice on the development of the story. … We had a common understanding of things like 'We want to go in this or that direction.'"

Some of my interviewees acknowledged that the content of the *yuri* manga they (had) supervised had been influenced by their image of the *yuri* genre. E1 for example thought that most *yuri* manga contained only girl characters and were thus completely unrealistic. In M1, they wanted to show the grey zones of human love: "We thought, 'Let's draw love between girls in a precise way.'" E6 similarly thought that most *yuri* manga were about girls flirting with each other and that readers imagined them to be lovers. With M6, the aim was to create a story that was closer to the reality of love between girls. E8 likewise recounted:

> Originally we didn't really intend a *yuri* [manga]. … In the beginning our aim were the real connections between girls and I think this stress cannot be found that often in other *yuri* manga. … What we pay attention to is that … the affection itself doesn't get too vivid; by all means, we try to make it a completely artificial world … [The reason that] M8 gradually became rather *yuri*-like was probably that A8 rather enjoyed drawing *yuri* manga. I think I should have curbed that a little bit more often, but since it became popular that way, these days I'm not curbing it so much.

As described, the demands of a manga's readers were rarely taken into consideration. Some of my interviewees felt that what readers wanted most was that the characters became happy: "Most importantly, we pay attention not to make the characters unhappy by all means, because I think that maybe everyone hopes that they become happy. … In *yuri* manga, my image is that at first there are many obstacles and barriers for the relationship [between the female characters], but in the end they become happy" (E8). Nevertheless, E3a thought that responding to readers' wishes for characters' happiness could ultimately lead to a manga ending after one or two paperback volumes. Happiness does not make a good story and is best left to readers' imagination. But while the possibility to use their imagination is one of the things the fans enjoy most about the *yuri* genre, only one of my interviewees thought that this was important in the creation of *yuri* manga: "I feel that it's good to leave the readers some space for their imagination." (E8) As Japanese manga editors are first and foremost concerned with selling manga (Prough 2011, 87, 94, 96), anything that helps in this process is appreciated. New target groups can be tapped with the right marketing strategies.

Marketing Yuri *Manga*

As described in chapter 7, the state of the Japanese manga business in the early 2010s was anything but good. When I mentioned this to my interviewees, most agreed that times were tough, but they were slightly optimistic about the future. In these hard times, marketing was ever more important. In fact, the marketing strategies were even mentioned to be part of the overall creation process. E3b for example said that she and the manga artist consulted together to decide how the respective manga should best be sold.

As discussed, the marketing of any manga does not start when the paperbacks are put on the shelves, but when the manga is serialized in the respective manga magazine. It is the editor who decides about the taglines that are used to describe a specific manga. Of my interviewees, almost none had advertised the manga I interviewed them about as *yuri* manga. Rather, it had been the audience who had assigned the manga to that genre. On the editors' side, this was in general seen positively. E1 for example said that she was not surprised that M1 was called a *yuri* manga, even though it had not been her decision: "[Rather than] us saying, 'Let's go into the *yuri* direction,' [people] started thinking, 'It's a *yuri* manga.'" She saw this as an honor and was happy about the recognition, even if the space has not been consciously provided.

In contrast, E3a was not sure whether M3 should be referred to as *yuri* manga. It was marketed as a manga about pure love and was assigned to the *yuri* genre by the audience: "There are not that many customers who come when you say, 'It's *yuri*.' Rather, there are more people who come when you say, 'It's about pure love' or 'It's about school.'" Ultimately, he considered the market for *yuri* manga to be (too) small. E3b added that M3 could be read "like a normal love story." E6 attributed his non-usage of the label *yuri* for M6 in part to the nature of Z6. Since the magazine was not specialized in *yuri* manga, no manga could be advertised by saying, "This is a *yuri* manga." He however added that the magazine's readers would not have a problem with a manga having a *yuri*-like story. For E7 as well, the way *yuri* manga were advertised in part depended on the manga magazine they were serialized in. If the editor judged the term "*yuri*" to be unknown to the magazine's readership, usage of the term "girls' love" would be better. He added that just because a manga was thought to be or advertised as *yuri* manga, it would not automatically sell. E8 had a similar stance:

> Originally we didn't really intend a *yuri* [manga]. … A8 has originally been popular with *yuri* manga and in the end it was almost natural [that M8 was called a *yuri* manga] … Personally, I put on the brakes while working … so [M8] doesn't become too much [like *yuri*]. … At first I thought that the readers of Z8 wouldn't really know this technical term *yuri* and thus I didn't use it much …, but then I got the feeling that it would be okay and inserted it rather at my own convenience.

E9 shared E7's opinion that it was not the label that sold the manga: "M9 is not a manga that is bought just 'because it's a *yuri* manga.' The reaction is 'This manga is entertaining,' irrespective of whether it's a *yuri* manga or whether you're interested in that." To put it another way, he sees M9 as a manga that is not only for "core" but also for "light users," a differentiation that was particularly emphasized by E5. She thought that the future of the *yuri* genre in part depended on those "light users": "Since I feel that [the market for] *yuri* manga is still very small, I want as many people as possible to read them, irrespective of whether they're male or female (*laughs*). [The group] that is easiest to exploit are really the various light users, the girls and boys who buy at specialized book stores."

In times when overall sales of manga were declining, the readership had to be expanded beyond the narrow scope of the manga magazines' original target groups. This expansion became possible by marketing the manga paperback to a broader scope of readers. Previous research on manga noted that only the successful (i.e. popular) manga of any manga magazine were published in paperback format at all (Kinsella 2000, 43; Prough 2011, 10). But in the early 2010s, the situation appeared to have changed: all of my interviewees assured me that

they published at least one paperback volume of every manga serialized in the manga magazines they worked for. The success of the manga was assessed through the paperback sales—unsuccessful manga were those that had only one or two paperback volumes.

How many volumes of a manga needed to be sold in order for the manga to be considered successful varied by publisher size: the larger the publisher, the more copies needed to be sold. E3a thought that a minimum of 30,000 copies should be sold. He mentioned that large publishers had a minimum of 100,000 copies which he considered really tough. E7 and E9 thought that a manga should sell more than 50,000 copies to be profitable, even though both considered 100,000 copies to be desirable. E3b added that such numbers should not be seen as cruelty on part of the publishers, but as a measure to secure the livelihood of the manga artist who depended on the royalties. Continuing an unpopular manga for a long time was just not in their best interest, she argued.

Not all of my interviewees wanted to disclose whether the *yuri* manga they had supervised had sold more than 50,000 copies. E9 for example only said that M9 had sold tens of thousands of copies. Others were more forthcoming. M6 for example had sold between 30,000 and 40,000 copies and M7 had sold 40,000 to 50,000 copies. By the standards mentioned above, these manga would thus not be termed huge hits, but both were very popular among the fans of the *yuri* genre. An exception was M1 which had sold up to 100,000 copies. "Up to" because it had more than one volume and it is common knowledge in the entertainment business everywhere that the first volume of any series usually sells more than any of the following volumes.

My interviewees tended to differentiate between the manga as serialized in the respective manga magazine and the manga as published in paperback format. Since paperbacks had to appeal to a broader audience, they were particularly suitable for the usage of genre labels such as *yuri*. E7 for example thought that adults would buy a manga paperback because it was advertised as a *yuri* manga. He judged the term *yuri* to have a large impact on the market. E5 even argued that design-wise the label "girls' love" looked better, but that paperbacks would rather sell with the label *yuri*.

Prough (2011, 96) argues that making manga is not about artistic values, but about making money. As E7 put it, if the artist was not particularly famous, any manga needed promotion. For him, this started with the design of the paperback's cover and promotional *obi*. The manga's content was important, but no manga sold just because the content was good: "There's no point if you don't get [the readers] to take [the manga] into their hands. Thus if

[the marketing strategy] gets them interested, it fulfills its role." He however added that such strategies often received mixed reviews from the readers.

The goal of such strategies was to make the manga a hot topic among (potential) customers. As I was told numerous times, conventional advertising on trains or billboards was just too expensive for most manga magazines. Instead, most of my interviewees relied on the readers' word-of-mouth communication, especially on the Internet. Nevertheless, at the time of my interviews active usage of social media was still rather rare. If my interviewees used social media, it was usually Twitter, but only a minority had an official account for the manga magazine they worked for.[15] Those without one did however often use Twitter passively in order to assess the responses from their readers. As we will see in part III, social media plays an important role for fans of the *yuri* genre in Japan.

Those interviewees who used Twitter—whether actively or passively—generally considered it and other social media platforms important. E1 for example saw them as particularly suitable for spreading information to (prospective) buyers. Likewise, E7 thought that social media helped fans garner information and express their support for a particular manga. E9 said that Twitter was "extremely important for word-of-mouth communication. … There are many people on it who like manga or have a strong affinity to manga and they give us feedback so we know 'Oh, that's their reaction' or 'That's what they want.'" In his opinion, on the survey postcards found in manga magazines and paperbacks, readers tended to express their official stance (*tatemae*), but Twitter helped understand what was really good and bad about a manga.

However, according to E9 not all publishers encouraged the usage of Twitter by their editors. This was not the only reason why not all of the manga magazines and/or editors had an official account. Some of my interviewees for example argued that the target group of the manga magazine they worked for was not using social media. Even more importantly, many had reservations about the Internet and social media in general. E7 for example thought that Twitter brought the risk of leaking secret information, although he admitted that he would like to use it if he could do so skillfully. E6 argued that social media in general were biased towards articulate fans and thus he did not pay much attention to it. He also thought that people on social media were only giving positive feedback and that some people would get undue attention simply because they wrote a lot.

But even those who had a favorable opinion on social media admitted them to have their dark side. E9 for example said that Twitter was good for getting feedback, whereas on anonymous message boards like 2channeru, people would write with ill will. E3a thought that

in general, "where they write anonymously, there are really a lot of kids [with an attitude] like 'Basically, we're raining on your parade.'" E3b added that she would prefer manga artists not to read 2channeru because it was full of comments from people who had not even read their manga. E5 said the same thing about Twitter. E2 even told me about Internet users who did not like Z2 and harassed other users who had a different opinion. Such harsh reactions were not limited to 2channeru: "The reviews on Amazon are scorching criticism. But among us editors, we say that if [a manga] was complete rubbish, they wouldn't even comment on it (*laughs*). We say that even if the content is terrible, if there are more than ten reviews, it's still [okay]." Experiences such as these might also contribute to the already mentioned lack of consideration of readers' voices in the production process.

Apart from social media, my interviewees saw especially one website as important for their marketing efforts, due to the wealth of information available on it: Comic Natalie, a news hub about manga, manga magazines, events and also anime. Comic Natalie was frequently reporting on *yuri* manga, something that could not be said about "traditional" news outlets such as general magazines. E3a thought that those did not really get into *yuri*, their journalists being either interested in *yuri* manga that were already a hot topic or in those they thought were not really *yuri* manga. E5 and E7 as well had the impression that general magazines were not interested in the *yuri* genre. Indeed, as my sample of journalistic articles on the *yuri* genre shows, most of these were published in niche or special interest magazines.

Some of my interviewees further noted the importance of specialty store chains for their marketing efforts. The shelves of book stores were increasingly becoming an important advertising space, especially in terms of book design. In the past, many stores had allowed their customers to browse through new manga magazines and paperbacks, a practice known as *tachiyomi* (reading while standing). Today, in most stores magazines and paperbacks are wrapped in plastic, so customers have to make their buying decision based on the cover design. E6 further explained that book stores' sales clerks differed in how much they liked the *yuri* genre and thus the stores' respective marketing efforts also differed. E7 recounted that the sales clerks of some stores in Tokyo had liked the design of M7's paperback and had thus ordered a large number of copies.

The Possible Future(s) of Yuri *Manga*

When I asked them about the future development of the *yuri* genre, my interviewees were undecided. Their assessment often relied on a comparison to the market for boys' love

manga. For E6, the category of *yuri* had already taken root on the Japanese market, whereas E1 compared the *yuri* genre to the boys' love genre and concluded that *yuri* was not yet a fixture on the market. Nevertheless, she thought that *yuri* might develop similarly to the boys' love genre. E5 as well argued that there was still a lot of potential for the *yuri* genre since the number of *yuri* manga was still comparatively small. E4 also compared the *yuri* genre to the boys' love genre and concluded that *yuri* had much less readers and that those readers also had less choices in terms of offered content. E2 considered *yuri* a niche genre with a market smaller than the one of the boys' love genre, but also a potential for future expansion. Regarding the rising number of *yuri* publications, she added that it was unclear how long these would last. As the cases of *Tsubomi* and *Hirari* demonstrate, this caution was appropriate.

As it turns out, the success of previously published *yuri* manga could be a major hurdle for future *yuri* manga. E1, E6 and E7 all described to me that future *yuri* manga in the manga magazines they worked for would have to compete with M1, M6 and M7 in terms of sales and content. Future *yuri* manga should not be an imitation of these earlier ones but should nevertheless sell a similar amount of copies. A similar opinion came from E8:

> I think that today among manga artists there are quite a few people who want to draw *yuri*. Of course, … when I ask, "What do you want to draw?" and the artist then says, "I absolutely want to draw *yuri*" then he/she will probably draw it. … It's not that it would be absolutely impossible to have two *yuri* manga [in Z8]. But on the editors' side I think we don't really transmit that. As Z8 we think that it suffices to have to the utmost one.

Digital manga could help expand the market for *yuri* manga, but at the time of my interviews, they were rather seen as a challenge of their own. E6 for example explained that manga for mobile phones were still selling, but that manga for smartphones and computers were not (yet) selling well. He thought that part of the reason was that in Japan paper manga were still rather inexpensive[16] so the digital version (which was sold at the same price) had no (monetary) advantage for the readers. E2 added that those manga that sold well digitally did not necessarily sell well when printed on paper (and vice versa). Readers tended to see digital manga as *yomisute*—you read them and then immediately threw them away, partly because mobile phones did not offer enough storage space.

Prough (2011, 106) notes that the big challenge is to keep the old readers while also appealing to new customers. As E5 puts it, "I think the challenge of the future will be how we can win over the readers who are slightly interested [in *yuri* manga]." E6 thought that the future growth of the *yuri* genre depended on whether the number of female *yuri* fans would

rise since there were not many more males to be gained. It appears that *Yuru yuri* is an example for mastering this challenge: it appealed to "light users" and got especially male readers interested in the *yuri* genre.

If we look at *yuri* manga anthologies, these face particular challenges and need special strategies. As E3a said at the end of our interview, there is a difference between specialized and general manga magazines—it would be difficult for a manga magazine like *Komikku yuri hime* to publish a *yuri* manga that every manga reader would enjoy. For *yuri* manga anthologies, the biggest challenge was the expansion of their readership. Much like the paperback editions of every other manga, they needed to target a larger group than the die-hard fans of the *yuri* genre. As mentioned, E5 referred to this group as the "core users," while she tried to also get the "light users" to read Z5. It took her some time to realize this: "At first we had this image … to make [*tsukuru*] *yuri* manga of superior quality … But when we started, [we realized that] this alone was useless." This strategy made it rather complicated for new readers to get into the manga in Z5, so they changed their tactics: "[Thus we thought] it would really be good if we would make [*tsukuru*] manga that went well with and were easy to understand for light users other than *yuri* readers. The works we start now are a little bit simplified and not that specialized in *yuri*." She even went so far as to state that some of the manga in Z5 would probably not qualify as *yuri* manga, although it seems to me like its readers would disagree. Ultimately, E5's aim was a mixture between full-scale *yuri* manga and those manga where readers had to imagine. Whether readers actually wanted this was not that important to her.

During my interviews, I noticed that the editors I talked to were all more or less working on their own. Only a minority seemed to be in contact with manga editors working for other manga magazines or even publishers. Efforts for co-operation or even a joint strategy were at least not made public. The *yuri* genre remained largely a niche that was not the main focus of most of my interviewees. But although they certainly did not praise the genre to the skies, they also did not criticize it. They tried to take a neutral stance, which makes sense given that their prime objective was to make money and hence the content had to be judged in terms of whether it satisfied that objective or not (see also Prough 2011, 129). My interviewees' ultimate goal was not to publish as many *yuri* manga as possible in order to please a group of readers they considered to be (too) small. Rather, their concern was to publish manga that appealed to as many people as possible. Manga that focused on female same-sex intimacy were not considered to be capable of that. In fact, this may be one of the reasons why the fans of the *yuri* genre still have to rely on their imagination: Manga with

implied female same-sex intimacy can be sold to more people. Those who want to read a "normal" story can do just that and the fans of the *yuri* genre can imagine their own story with the same characters.

Notes

1. Prough (2011) had similar experiences in the early 2000s (5). It appears that her interviewees were even more interested in the US American comic market than mine were in the German comic market.

2. It could be argued that they wanted me to believe these things and/or did not want to tell me the (whole) truth. Yet most of them were very open about for example print runs and other insider information—although most interviews took place in rooms that were open to eavesdropping. I would thus assume that for the most part my interviewees were not consciously withholding information.

3. Interview with E2 (female), February 13, 2012

4. Interview with E6 (male), February 16, 2012

5. Interview with E7 (male), February 27, 2012

6. Interview with E3a (male) and E3b (female), February 8, 2012. When E3a was transferred within P3, E3b had become in charge of M3. Since E3b brought E3a along with her, I conducted the interview with both of them simultaneously.

7. Interview with E1 (female), February 1, 2012

8. Interview with E9 (male), March 28, 2012

9. Interview with E4 (female), February 23, 2012

10. E3b readily admitted to this problem, especially in regard to manga magazines. Those often come with supplements adorned with the characters of one of the magazine's manga. In recent years, readers have come to buy the manga magazines mainly because they want a particular supplement. In the magazine's survey, those readers vote for the manga of which the characters were shown on the supplement.

11. Interview with E8 (male), March 29, 2012

12. Interview with E5 (female), February 29, 2012

13. This method differs markedly from Prough's (2011, 57–88) description of *shōjo* manga magazines which seek new talents from among their readers with regular contests.

14. Ian Condry's (2013) study of the anime industry suggests that to producers of anime, audience response does not matter much, either (51).

15. Twitter was attractive because it was used by many manga artists (who could register with their pen name) and also many fans. Japanese social networking sites like Mixi did not offer company pages or accounts, and Facebook had the image of being mostly used by businessmen (E3b).

16. Regular new paperbacks usually cost between 500 and 1,000 yen. At used book stores, they are available for half the price and especially older ones are even sold for just one hundred yen.

Part III. Reception of the *Yuri* Genre

Chapter 9. Characteristics of the *Yuri* Genre's Fandom in Japan

The manga editors I interviewed often found it hard (if not impossible) to say who actually bought (and read) "their" manga magazine or paperback. A German manga editor I once spoke to colorfully referred to "voodoo" when I asked him how he knew who bought certain manga. No matter how well defined its target group is, the mere sales figures say nothing about the gender or age of its readers and for what reasons they bought it. Hence even though we know that some *yuri* manga sell up to 100,000 copies per volume, that does not tell us who the buyers are.

When it comes to the *yuri* genre's Japanese audience, even researchers often make bold assertions, like "*yuri* is not very popular among females in Japan … and many *yuri* fans appear to be heterosexual males" (Tan 2008, 146), or—in stark contrast in the same volume—*yuri* being a "major theme in manga and anime for male and female readers" ("Glossary" 2008, 262). Others emphasize the particular appeal that *yuri* supposedly has for males (e.g. Galbraith 2009a, nxxxvi; Galbraith 2011, 213n6). These statements stand in stark contrast to the available data on the *yuri* manga magazines *Yuri shimai*, *Komikku yuri hime* and *Komikku yuri hime S* which, as discussed, are/were read by males as well as females (albeit with different percentages).

In order to find out more about the audience of the *yuri* genre, I focus on the highly visible group of its Japanese fans and how they make sense of the genre.[1] As we have seen, the fans and their interpretive activities play an important role in that they assign previously unrelated texts to the *yuri* genre, often disregarding the text's original positioning. Before going into detail on who these fans are, I first discuss why it is apt to refer to them as "fans." Using the findings of research on fans outside Japan, I show that the four main characteristics of fans, investment, discrimination, productivity and community, also apply to the Japanese fans of the *yuri* genre.

General Findings on "Fans"

There is no clear boundary between the "fans" and the "normal" audience (Jenkins 1992b, 54) since "the fan is an 'excessive reader' who differs from the 'ordinary' one in degree rather than kind" (Fiske 1992, 46). Popular culture fandom[2] is a thriving field of research, especially in the United States.[3] One of the most important findings of fan studies is that "fans" are not a unified whole since "fan culture is a complex, multidimensional

phenomenon, inviting many forms of participation and levels of engagement" (Jenkins 1992b, 2). Neither is fandom stable, nor are fans uncritical of their object of adoration or agree on everything: "Fandom is characterized by a contradictory and often highly fluid series of attitudes towards the primary text" (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995, 263). Most people could be said to be a fan of something, but affiliations can shift and/or multiply, for example when someone becomes a fan of several television series.

Fans in Japan have until recently been a minor field of research. Although studies on them rarely discuss the findings of fan research outside Japan, they often come to similar conclusions. With few exceptions (e.g. Hayashi 2005; Kelly 2004; Yano 1997) the focus has been on fans of manga and anime, often referred to as "otaku." The term literally means "your house" or, in a more formal sense, "you," but is today generally understood as meaning "excessive fan" (e.g. Galbraith 2009a, 2009b; Kaneda 2007; Kinsella 2000, 102–38; Saito 2011). Yet as new research in a volume edited by Galbraith, Kam and Kamm (forthcoming) argues, "otaku" is in many cases just a label that is applied to various groups and practices. "Otaku" are thought to exist although those who write about them often do not even agree on the definition of the term "otaku" itself. As I share these concerns, I do not use the term and rather refer to "fans" more broadly.

Scholarly research on the *yuri* genre's fans is limited to the findings of Kumata Kazuo (2005).[4] He is particularly interested in the male fans of the genre who he assumes to be "heterosexual" (97n13). Kumata posits that they long for an equal relationship while accepting "traditional" gender roles. The fantasy of the *yuri* genre is a way out of this conflict (80). The male fans identify with the female characters of the *yuri* genre (82–83). Although his methods are not well documented, Kumata's study is important in that it does not support the usual assumption of males being attracted to the *yuri* genre for sexual reasons.

When I speak of "fans," I rely on the following definition: fans are "persons who for longer periods have a passionate relationship with an … external, public, either personal, collective, objective or abstract fan object and who invest time and/or money into the emotional relationship to this object." (Roose, Schäfer, and Schmidt-Lux 2010, 12) To this we can add that "fandom is characterized by two main activities: discrimination and productivity" (Fiske 1990, 147) as well as the observation that fans form a complex and multifaceted community (Jenkins 1992b, 277).[5]

Investment, discrimination, productivity and community are not four discrete characteristics. While the aspect of "investment" can be understood on its own, it is for example almost impossible to talk about productivity without also talking about the

community that consumes the fan-produced texts. Nevertheless, not all fans will exhibit every characteristic to the same degree (Fiske 1992, 34). For various reasons, people might not be able or willing to for example invest much time or money in a particular object, despite considering themselves its fans. Others might spend money and time on a particular object, but might not be interested in the larger community of fans. Nevertheless, the four characteristics help us make sense of the fandom of the *yuri* genre in Japan. My findings are mostly based on my fieldwork in 2011/12, when I became to a certain degree part of this community.[6] I participated in twelve fan works events of various sizes and talked to many different fans I met there. I became friends with quite a few and discussed many aspects of the *yuri* genre with them. Additionally, I participated in online discussions about the *yuri* genre on various social networking sites.

Investment

Roose, Schäfer, and Schmidt-Lux (2010) elaborate that fandom is based on emotions although the intensity of these may vary over time. This emotional bond has to be a long-term one, differentiating fans from casual consumers of the same object. The exact length of the emotional attachment is not that important. The object of fandom can take on many shapes. Markedly, the fan is not part of the object (for example the adored music group) and in general everyone can become the object's fan. Fandom involves doing something for or with the object (13). Often, a "sense of ownership" (Pustz 1999, 71) of the object of adoration evolves from these investments: fans get angry at the producers for doing something to the object that they deem "wrong," e.g. killing a beloved character (Johnson 2007, 291–94; Pustz 1999, 71).

It was only in the early 2000s that the *yuri* genre was established as a specific genre in Japanese popular culture. Yet I would argue that this new visibility was in part due to the fans' long-term investments into it. If they had not for example continuously created fan works about female same-sex intimacy, it is doubtful that manga editors or anime producers would have noticed the market potential at all. As we have seen, fandom of characters such as Haruka and Michiru from *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon* endures long after the end of the original series. Today, the *yuri* genre is sustained by its fans investing a lot of time, energy and especially money into their fandom by buying manga, anime, light novels etc. Depending on a series' popularity, merchandising can cost anywhere from 500 to 10,000 yen and more.

Often, these items are not even used, but are bought solely to enlarge one's collection (see also Yano 1997, 341).

Discrimination

Fans differentiate strongly between objects of which they are a fan and objects of which they are not. This strategy also serves the building of a community by drawing boundaries between the fans and "the rest of the world" (Fiske 1990, 147). By demonstrating their fandom to others (e.g. by wearing a special outfit), fans can draw a line between themselves and those who are not fans or fans of something else (Gebhardt 2010, 183–87). Yet even among fans of a single text, further distinctions are possible, for example along the lines of "favored characters, actors, periods in a series, films in a franchise, or according to differences in fans' interpretive strategies" (Hills 2002, 62). Other ways of discrimination involve the formation of canons (Fiske 1992, 36), the "accumulation of knowledge" (42) about the object of fandom, the collection of things related to the object (42–44) or the usage of a specific lexicon (Harris 1998, 8). Discrimination can lead to ongoing and often harsh struggles when the different subgroups of a fandom disagree (e.g. Johnson 2007).

My research suggests that the Japanese fans of the *yuri* genre as well draw clear lines between the texts they like and the texts they do not. As mentioned, especially on the Internet fans can even be harassed for liking a particular text. Depending on the context, one's fandom of the *yuri* genre may be demonstrated to the outside, for example by using bags with illustration of one's favorite character.

Discrimination *among* the fans of the *yuri* genre is less easy to discern. There are certainly differences in how long people have been fans of the genre, how much they know about it or how much merchandising they own. Yet in my experience, that does not necessarily mean that those with a lot of knowledge and/or a large collection consider themselves an "elite." Although these fans might be admired by others, it seemed to me that knowledge was often happily passed on—think for example of the way fans cooperate to form "complete" lists of *yuri* texts. Merchandising was sometimes virtually passed on in the form of photographs and descriptions on blogs and other websites. Thus to a certain degree, even those fans who did not have the money to buy a certain limited edition could vicariously experience the item. This attitude of sharing does not mean that all fans see themselves as equal, but rather that the perceived differences are usually not addressed.[7] Nevertheless, there are differences and differing expectations of the *yuri* genre. Like other fandoms, the fans of

the *yuri* genre are not a homogeneous group, either. I will discuss this further in chapter 10, especially concerning the opposition between "lesbian" fans and "heterosexual" male fans.

Productivity

Fans are "active producers and manipulators of meanings" (Jenkins 1992b, 23), often by creating new texts. "Texts" here denotes not only tangible texts, but also for example gossiping about one's favorite television series or particular ways of dressing (Fiske 1990, 147). As Henry Jenkins (1992a) argues, "fans are drawing on materials from the dominant media and [are] employing them in ways that serve their own interests and facilitate their own pleasures." (214) We can also apply Stuart Hall's (1992) theory of "en- and decoding": fans use specific decoding strategies to make meaning of the texts they consume, but their codes are not necessarily identical to those used by the producers. Fans' productions are not faulty interpretations of the original text, but appropriations of it (Jenkins 1992b, 33). The most researched result of production is certainly fan fiction—texts about popular fictional characters, created by their fans (e.g. Hellekson and Busse 2006; Jenkins 1992b; Jenkins 2006, 131–205; Tulloch and Jenkins 1995, 196–212). Japanese fan works, especially those about male-male relationships, are equally well-discussed (e.g. Kaneda 2007; Lam 2010; Orbaugh 2010; Saito 2011), although a deeper analysis of their actual content is still largely missing (Noppe 2010, 120).

As we have seen, the production and consumption of fan works is a vital aspect of the *yuri* fandom in Japan. The aspect of production is strongly connected with the aspect of investment, since fan works are usually sold at fan works events. In a survey by the organizers of Comic Market among 5,393 visitors of Comic Market 78 (summer 2010), 65.3% of respondents said that during the event, they had spent up to 29,999 yen on fan works (Komikku māketto junbikai and Kontentsu kenkyū chīmu 2011, 1329)—although *sākuru* seldom make a profit. Fan works are also connected to the characteristic of discrimination. As Kaneda Junko (2007) points out, there are different kinds of *sākuru* based on their size and popularity (181–83). At Comic Market, we for example find the so-called *kabe sākuru* or "wall circles": these are the popular ones and their tables are positioned at the halls' walls so that more people can queue up for their works.

Such distinctions can also be seen at the specialized and general fan works events wehre *yuri* fan works are sold. The largest specialized event is GirlsLoveFestival (one day, twice a year, Kantō area) with around 230 participating *sākuru* (all numbers here as of spring 2015).

In comparison, the second specialized event Maiden's Garden (one day, twice a year, Kansai area) is rather small with about 60 *sākuru*, partly because it is part of a larger event. In 2012, the *yuri* subsection at the *orijinaru*-only event Comitia 100 (one day, four times a year, Tokyo) consisted of about 90 *sākuru* and the one at the general event Super Comic City (two days, once a year, Tokyo) of about 20 *sākuru*.[8] At the largest fan work event Comic Market, I saw (in 2011/12) only few *sākuru* devoted solely to *yuri*, but a large number offered fan works about female same-sex intimacy with characters from various primary texts without labeling them "*yuri*" or "girls' love." All of these events are well visited, as attested by the fact that many *sākuru* sell out. As Kaneda Junko (2007, 181) notes, fan works are produced because their creators are emotionally attached to the original text. Hence there are also numerous fan works events that focus only on one specific text. Such events reflect the texts' popularity among the fans and therefore only take place as long as there are enough participating *sākuru* and buyers. In 2011/12, events were held for (among others) *Bishōjo senshi Sailor Moon*, *Maria-sama ga miteru* and *Yuru yuri*, and attracted fans of the *yuri* genre as well as fans of the particular text who were not necessarily fans of *yuri*.

The production of fan works itself can be a collaborative effort (e.g. Orbaugh 2010, 175) and fan works events as well publicly display the community aspect of *yuri* fandom, although only for a short period of time. A permanent manifestation can be found on the Internet, for example on the specialized social networking site Pixiv where (primarily Japanese) creators upload their fan works. Some fans also publish their creations on the *yuri* communities on Mixi or on the pages of the specialized social networking site Yuri Komyu! (Yuri community!).

Community

The circulation of texts among fans helps define a fan community (Fiske 1992, 30). For Jenkins, "fandom is a cultural community, one which shares a common mode of reception, a common set of critical categories and practices, a tradition of aesthetic production and a set of social norms and expectations." (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995, 144) By meeting fellow fans and discussing favorite texts, the texts' pleasures are heightened (Jenkins 1992b, 45). Mutual fandom thus makes it easier to communicate with others—whether on- or offline (Jenkins 1992a, 213). This community—even if it is visible "only" on the Internet or at special events— is for many people also one of the motivating factors to be a fan (e.g. Kaneda 2007, 179). Yet fan communities are also connected to the characteristic of discrimination: Kaneda

Junko (2007) for example argues that Japanese producers of fan works about male-male intimacy constitute an interpretive community (a concept originally developed by Stanley Fish), but that it consists of many different subgroups based on preferred couplings (170–74). As we will see in chapter 10, similar differences can also be found among the fans of the *yuri* genre.

With the proliferation of the Internet, the community of fans has become more visible than ever before (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007, 7). As the example of the website Pixiv demonstrates, this is also true for Japan. Fans can meet and interact with other fans on social networking sites such as Mixi or Twitter, and on blogs and message boards (see also Lam 2010, 243). In a survey by Impress R&D (2011) for the period of 2010/11, over 70% of the respondents used the Internet in general to look for information on their hobbies (184). About half of the respondents used social media, especially blogs and social networking sites (179), and almost 40% of those used them to get information on their hobbies (194). Social networking sites provide a direct (but mostly safe) way of interacting with each other.[9] For example, on Mixi, users can found and join groups (called *komyuniti* [community]) based on shared interests. Thus it becomes easy to find like-minded fans and connect with them. Although the users of the different websites might as a whole not feel like a community, their communication about shared interests openly displays the social aspect of fandom.

The fans of the *yuri* genre as well are active on social networking sites. Since 2011, there is even a specialized one for Japanese fans of the *yuri* genre called Yuri Komyu! On Mixi as well, we can find several groups for fans of the *yuri* genre and for fans of specific texts. As mentioned, Twitter as well is used by many *yuri* fans, and also by the producers of *yuri* texts. Japan's largest online message board 2channeru has a specialized board for discussing the *yuri* genre called "Rezu/yuri moe ita," described as being for men and women who want to discuss *rezu* and *yuri* (although the exact difference between these two terms remains unclear), but cautioning: "While we do not actually exclude lesbians [*bian na kata*], this is also not a board aimed at lesbians [*rezubian*]." Since the board belongs to an external 2channeru subsection for erotic/pornographic content, both *rezu* and *yuri* are here connected to pornography.[10]

Clearly, it is apt to speak of "fans" of the *yuri* genre in Japan. They invest time, energy and/or money, they sometimes discriminate, they are productive, and they form a community. Yet the question most people seem to be interested in is still unanswered: are these fans primarily male or primarily female? Or to be precise: are they "heterosexual" males or "lesbian" females? To answer this question, the fans themselves had to be asked.

Notes

1. Some studies distinguish between different kinds of fans, for example "followers" and "fans" (Tulloch and Jenkins 1995) or "fans" and "cult fans" (Hills 2002). I will not make such distinctions since they would not reflect the reality of *yuri* fandom in Japan.

2. Since *yuri* fandom is a particular kind of popular culture fandom I will mostly refer to findings on popular culture fandom and exclude findings on for example soccer fans.

3 . For a history of fan studies see Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington 2007. For examples of fan studies see e.g. Hellekson and Busse 2006; Jenkins 1992b; Pustz 1999; Tulloch and Jenkins 1995.

4. Research on fans of the *yuri* genre outside Japan is equally scarce. See Brenner and Wildsmith (2011) for a short discussion.

5. I understand the term "community" not in terms of an "organized community" but rather as a "social phenomenon." Fans can be fans without the community, but for most people experiencing it heightens the pleasure their fandom gives them.

6. In order to enter fandom and develop adequate theories on it, researchers have to be fans themselves (Harris 1998, 46). I am aware that my unique position as a Japanese-speaking foreigner gave me a kind of access others would not have been able to get.

7. As usual, exceptions prove the rule. The self-proclaimed "king of the otaku" Okada Toshio has for example written a whole book about his disappointment with the younger generation of fans of manga and anime (Galbraith 2009a, under "*Otaku* discussions of *moe*").

8. For all events it is unclear how many *sākuru* applied but were not admitted.

9. Mixi is only in Japanese and remains tightly locked: those who do not have an account cannot access any of its content (not even by searching on Google). In order to sign up, potential users need a Japanese contract mobile phone to receive an authentication email. This essentially excludes Japanese without a contract mobile phone and foreigners. Therefore (and due to language barriers), Mixi has almost no foreign users. Nevertheless, most users do not sign up under their real name.

10. At least officially, usage of the "Rezu/yuri moe ita" is thus forbidden for users under the age of eighteen.

Chapter 10. Online Survey among the Fans of the *Yuri* Genre in Japan

Since the fans of the *yuri* genre are very active on the Internet, I conducted an explorative online survey. Although other researchers have noted the necessity of qualitative and/or quantitative surveys among Japanese fans in general (e.g. Kumata 2005, 88), online surveys have so far only been conducted among manga and anime fans in the United States and Europe (e.g. Bouissou et al. 2010; Brenner and Wildsmith 2011; Pagliassotti 2008a, 2008b).[1] My survey covered the fans' demographic characteristics and their reasons for liking the *yuri* genre. The results indicate that the fans of the *yuri* genre should not be seen as one homogeneous group. Rather, there are various subgroups with differing motivations and ways of using *yuri* texts. The fans are able and willing to think critically about their fandom and the texts they like, and to share these thoughts with those who are interested.

I recruited the participants of the survey by posting the link in the five largest groups on *yuri* in general on Mixi[2] and—after a notification from a Mixi user—to the specialized *yuri* community Yuri Komyu! Especially the call on Yuri Komyu! had a high impact: Solely on the day I posted it, 2,120 persons clicked on it. This resulted in 994 completed questionnaires, the highest number during the whole survey. A search on the Japanese version of Tweetbuzz[3] further showed that the link to the call on Yuri komyu! had been tweeted 1,217 times. Thus most respondents came to the survey via Yuri komyu! (see table 1).

Table 1. Websites from which Respondents Originated (N = 1,352)

Website	Respondents (%)
Yuri Komyu!	84.8
Mixi	6.4
Twitter	3.6
Various blogs	.4
The Interviews[a]	.1
Facebook	.1
Unclear	4.7
Total	100.1[b]

a. Members of this site can anonymously ask other people questions and can answer questions asked of themselves.

b. Due to rounding, sometimes the percentages do not add up to a total of 100%.

Since Yuri Komyu! is an open community, registration was not necessary to access my call. Hence, even those who accessed the survey via Yuri Komyu! were not necessarily

members of the site.[4] Table 1 indicates that Mixi is not necessarily useful for recruiting participants for online surveys. As the survey by Impress R&D (2011) found, about 40% of those who used social networking sites used them to read discussions in groups, compared to over 60% who used it to read notes by other people (179). Only around 20% of users stated that they contributed to groups (194). This phenomenon is not unique to Mixi and is probably related to the so called "1% rule," a "rule of thumb that suggests that if you get a group of 100 people online then one will create content, 10 will 'interact' with it (commenting or offering improvements) and the other 89 will just view it." (Arthur 2006)

My survey was online from September 16 to October 16, 2011. In total, I received 2,848 Japanese responses. For several reasons, adjustments had to be made (see table 2), which resulted in 1,352 valid responses that I could use for analysis.

Table 2. Valid Responses

Total number of responses	2,848
Incomplete responses	− 1,471
Respondents aged thirteen years or younger[a]	− 4
New assignment from English version[b]	+ 4
Country other than Japan[c]	− 23
Wrong fandom[d]	− 2
Valid number of responses	= 1,352
% of total responses	47.5%

a. Due to research ethics, all persons aged thirteen years and younger at the time of the survey (here: born in 1998 or later) were discarded ("n/a" answers were kept).

b. Originally, the survey was also available in English and German. Respondents who answered the questionnaire in English but gave Japan as their country of residence, were assigned to the group of *yuri* fans in Japan.

c. Respondents who answered the questionnaire in Japanese, but did not give "Japan" as their country of residence.

d. One respondent stated a preference for boys' love rather than *yuri* and also gave no favorite *yuri* series to "prove" that he/she liked *yuri* at all. The other respondent gave only boys' love titles as favorite titles, so fandom of *yuri* could not be assumed.

Before I delve into a deeper analysis, I have to give a slight statistical caveat. Since this survey is not based on a random sample, its findings cannot be generalized for the population of all fans of the *yuri* genre in Japan. It is necessarily biased towards fans with Internet access, and to those who (regularly) used the sites where I posted the link. Hence, it should be seen as explorative research meant to encourage and inspire further quantitative and qualitative studies of Japanese fans. The results are a snapshot of the status quo in the fall of 2011 and only of those who participated. Despite this caveat, the results offer valuable insights into the fans' attitudes towards the *yuri* genre.

Participants' Demographics

When I told fellow scholars that I was doing research on "female same-sex intimacy in Japanese popular culture," those who were unacquainted with the *yuri* genre usually made one of two statements. Either (a) *Yuri* must be like pornography with two women, so the fans are heterosexual men. Or (b) *Yuri* must be about lesbian characters, so the fans are lesbian females.

Those who made these statements assumed that the fans of the *yuri* genre were a homogeneous group and that the genre's supposed content motivated them to consume it. Yet the data on the readership of magazines such as *Komikku yuri hime* already shows that this is a very simplistic assumption since these magazines are read by both males and females. My online survey as well had a fairly even distribution between male and female respondents: females accounted for 52.4% of the respondents, while males accounted for 46.1%. To account for different gender identities, the possibility of "other" was given as well, but was chosen by only 1.6%.[5] These numbers do not support the idea that the fans of the *yuri* genre are primarily male or primarily female.

Most readers are probably interested in the fans' "sexual identity." For surveys, this is considered a rather sensitive topic. Furthermore, as I have discussed in the Introduction, identity categories are neither neutral nor stable. Consequentially, rather than offering a list of labels in the questionnaire, I let the participants complete the following sentence by choosing one or several answers: "As lover [*koibito*], I prefer …." I then re-coded the answers to this question. Respondents who expressed a preference solely for people of the other gender were coded as "heterosexual." Respondents who expressed any other kind of preference were coded as "non-heterosexual." Respondents who had given their gender as "other" were assigned to the "sexual identity" "other." Those participants who stated that they did not know their partner preference were categorized as "don't know," and those participants who did not want to give their partner preference were assigned to the category "n/a." This resulted in the following numbers: "non-heterosexual" females accounted for 30.0% of respondents, "heterosexual" females for 15.2%, "non-heterosexual" males for 4.7%, "heterosexual" males for 39.5%, and "other" for 1.2% (don't know: 8.1%; n/a: 1.3%).[6]

I deliberately put all labels for "sexual identities" in quotation marks since they do not necessarily reflect the "sexual identity" of any of my participants. It could very well be the case that *yuri* content is enjoyed by females who are less interested in the political aspects of their "sexual identity" (namely the LGBT movement) and see sexual activities as something

they do (or could do), but which do not define them. As Welker (2010b) notes, what connects "lesbian" Japanese women is their deviation from social expectations rather than a shared identity (361). Furthermore, as discussed, I find supposedly fixed categories such as "homosexuality" highly problematic. My usage here is a matter of convenience as it permits me to analyze my data in a meaningful way. The blanket term "non-heterosexual" is intended as a neutral way of describing all kinds of (fluid) "sexual identities." I agree that it is not a perfect choice (Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan 2001, vii), but it seems like the English language is still short of a better alternative.

The percentages suggest that *both* stereotypes of the Japanese *yuri* fans might to some degree be true: "non-heterosexual" females *and* "heterosexual" males are large groups among my respondents. Further analysis shows that among the "non-heterosexual" females, most respondents could be assigned to the category "bisexual" (i.e. female respondents who gave both females and males as partner preference; 70.4%) rather than the category "lesbian" (i.e. female respondents who gave only females as partner preference; 22.2%). The remainder of the respondents' demographic characteristics was much less exceptional. Table 3 shows the respondents' age at the time of answering the survey, calculated via their year of birth.

Table 3. Respondents' Age (N = 1,352)

Age class	% of total
14 to 15	2.4
16 to 20	29.4
21 to 25	39.6
26 to 30	13.1
31 to 35	5.0
36 to 40	2.7
41 to 45	1.3
46 to 50	.2
51 and older	.1
n/a	6.1
Total	98.6

My respondents gave their age as ranging from fourteen[7] to fifty-one years, which resulted in a median age of twenty-two years, reflecting the fact that 69% were between sixteen and twenty-five years old. These numbers correspond with the audience I observed at various fan works events and the readership of *yuri* manga described in journalistic articles (e.g. Yamada 2005, 29). The age distribution explains why most respondents stated that their

highest educational level was either a senior high school degree (34.9%) or a university degree (33.6%).

What the Fans Like about the Yuri *Genre*

The main part of my survey was split into two sections: one on *yuri* in general answered by all respondents, and one on either *yuri* manga, *yuri* anime or *yuri* video games, depending on which form the respondent had chosen as liking the most. 69.1% of respondents preferred *yuri* manga, 26.0% *yuri* anime and 5.0% *yuri* video games. This reflects that there are far more *yuri* manga than *yuri* anime or *yuri* video games—especially due to the (formerly) high output of the *yuri* manga magazine *Komikku yuri hime* and the *yuri* manga anthology *Tsubomi*. I first present the results of the questions answered by all respondents before analyzing in more detail the answers of those who preferred *yuri* manga and *yuri* anime. Since only sixty-seven participants answered that they preferred *yuri* video games, a detailed statistical analysis cannot be conducted for this group, but the few numbers I have suggest that it is not fundamentally different from the fans of *yuri* manga or *yuri* anime.

As we have seen, using one's imagination is an important aspect of the fandom of the *yuri* genre. My survey covered this aspect by asking about consumption of *yuri* fan works: 58.6% of respondents used[8] both parodies (*parodī*) and originals (*orijinaru*), 16.0% used only parodies, 6.7% used only originals, and 18.8% used no fan works at all. Hence a majority of 81.2% of respondents consumed some kind of fan work. 74.6% of respondents consumed (exclusively) parody fan works, further indicating the importance of interpretations for the *yuri* genre and its fans.

Yet enjoying what others did and doing it yourself are two different things, as the results for the question about fan work production show: 13.9% of respondents had produced both parodies and originals, 16.9% only parodies, 8.5% only originals, and 60.7% had produced no fan works at all. Here we see that the fans of the *yuri* genre exhibit various ways of engaging with their favorite text(s): far more respondents consumed fan works (81.2%) than produced them (39.3%). Only 17.2% of all respondents neither consumed nor produced *yuri* fan works, a result that attests to the importance of this aspect of fandom. Further analysis shows that while 49.3% of female respondents answered that they had produced some kind of *yuri* fan work, only 27% of male respondents said this (***$p<.001$),[9] a finding consistent with prior research on Japanese fan works (e.g. Orbaugh 2010, 177).

The various subgroups among the respondents also differ when it comes to their favorite *yuri* texts, as becomes apparent when we cross-tabulate the titles given by the respondents with their "sexual identity" (see table 4).

Table 4. Respondent's Top Five *Yuri* Titles by "Sexual Identity"[a]

	"Non-heterosexual" female (*n* = 405)	"Heterosexual" female (*n* = 206)	"Heterosexual" male (*n* = 534)
Text (% of total)	*Maria-sama ga miteru* (25.9)	*Maria-sama ga miteru* (24.3)	*Yuru yuri* (31.3)
	Yuru yuri (17.3)	*Yuru yuri* (18.9)	*Maria-sama ga miteru* (30.2)
	Aoi hana (15.6)	*Aoi hana* (16.0)	*Shōjo sekuto* (15.2)
	Strawberry Panic! (14.1)	*Strawberry Panic!* (11.7)	*Aoi hana* (15.0)
	Shōjo sekuto (9.1)	*Puella Magi Madoka Magica* (9.7)	*Strawberry Panic!* (14.8)

a. An analysis for "non-heterosexual" males was not possible due to the small number of sixty-four respondents.

We see that the erotic/pornographic text *Shōjo sekuto* is liked by both "non-heterosexual" females and "heterosexual" males (albeit to varying degrees). In fact, the top five lists of these two groups contain the same titles. However, the textual preferences of "non-heterosexual" females seem to vary more: whereas about 26% of them agreed on the top title *Maria-sama ga miteru*, among "heterosexual" males about 31% agreed on the top title *Yuru yuri*. The textual preferences of "heterosexual" females as well varied enormously. That 9.7% of them gave the television anime series *Mahō shōjo Madoka magika* (en. *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*; 12 episodes; dir. Shinbō Akiyuki) as one of their five favorite titles might be due to it being one of the most popular series of 2011. The results indicate that even though the "sexual identity" is an important factor, favorite texts cannot necessarily be inferred from it: The "non-heterosexual" females in my survey did not name only texts that contained stories about "lesbian" or "bisexual" females. Likewise, "heterosexual" males did not name only texts that can be classified as "pornography with two females." In this regard, the two stereotypes of the *yuri* fans are incorrect.

As discussed, the manga editors I interviewed often compared the *yuri* genre to the boys' love genre, suggesting that they were similar, at least in their focus on same-sex intimacy. Nakamura Seitarō, the editor-in-chief of *Komikku yuri hime*, thinks that the readers of boys' love and *yuri* overlap (Yamada 2005, 29) and as we have seen, in *Yuri shimai* the advertisements targeted fans of the boys' love genre. Similarly, the index of Japanese

periodicals notes that *Komikku yuri hime* "is valued highly not only among those who like 'yuri,' but also among females who like boys' love" (Media risāchi sentā 2011, 326). My survey covered this topic by asking participants whether they were interested in the boys' love genre: 55.8% of respondents said they were interested, 34.2% said they were not, and 10.0% were not sure. This result supports the idea that the fandoms overlap. A further breakdown by "sexual identity" shows that it was mostly female and (to a lesser degree) "non-heterosexual" male respondents who liked both *yuri* and boys' love: 75.3% of "non-heterosexual" females and 83.0% of "heterosexual" females, as well as 57.8% of "non-heterosexual" males answered this question with "Yes"—but only 27.2% of "heterosexual" males did (***p<.001). This is probably not surprising given that the majority of boys' love fans are female.

As described, when forced to decide, most respondents favored *yuri* manga, but the results suggest that this group was not fundamentally different from those who preferred *yuri* anime. In general, my respondents had been interested in manga/anime for an average of fourteen years (median), i.e. since the year 1998, and had on average first read/watched a *yuri* manga/anime seven years ago, i.e. in 2004 (median).[10] There were some differences in how the respondents first encountered *yuri* manga/anime (see table 5).

Table 5. How Respondents Came into Contact with *Yuri* Manga/Anime

How did you first come into contact with *yuri*/GL manga/anime?	% of total manga (*n* = 934)	% of total anime (*n* = 351)
A manga/anime I liked contained *yuri*/GL.	31.6	51.0
I stumbled upon it on the Internet.	24.3	23.9
I stumbled upon it at a store.	16.2	4.8
It was recommended to me by friends.	10.0	4.3
I specifically searched for it at a store.	3.9	0.0
I specifically searched for it on the Internet.	2.9	3.4
Other	9.0	10.5
n/a	2.2	2.0
Total	100.1	99.9

As we can see, rather than specifically searching for content that suited their taste, most respondents encountered it by chance. These results further indicate that the reasoning behind the two stereotypes of the *yuri* fans is not completely accurate: Arguing that "lesbian" fans are consuming certain texts because their content corresponds to their "sexual identity" would be misleading. Only nine comments by female participants indicated that they came across the

yuri genre when they became aware that they preferred girls over boys. In comparison, ten respondents said they came across *yuri* because one of their relatives was a fan of the genre.

The respondents further exhibited varying degrees of fandom, as indicated by the frequency with which they read/watched *yuri* manga/anime (see table 6).

Table 6. How Often Respondents Read/Watched *Yuri* Manga/Anime

How often do you read/watch *yuri*/GL manga/anime?	% of total manga (*n* = 934)	% of total anime (*n* = 351)
Daily	11.1	4.6
Several times a week	30.7	39.5
Several times a month	40.4	35.3
Less frequently	13.7	14.7
Don't know	4.9	5.4
Total	100.8	99.5

The results indicate that the frequency with which one consumes certain content is not related to whether one sees oneself as a "fan." Those who read *yuri* manga several times a month might be termed "light users" (to use E5's term), although it is possible that they also consumed for example *yuri* anime or *yuri* light novels when they did not read *yuri* manga. The high number of "light users" might also be explained by the fact that new *yuri* manga magazines and anthologies were not published every month. In order to read *yuri* manga every day, fans would have had to re-read older manga. In the case of anime, the rather low frequency might in part be due to the fact that anime are broadcast on a weekly basis. Daily consumption is therefore only possible if you buy/borrow DVDs/BDs or record the series.

So if it is not their "sexual identity," what reasons do the fans of the *yuri* genre have for liking it? In my survey, I gave a list of reasons from which respondents could choose all that applied to them. Due to limitations of space, I list here only those reasons that were given by at least 50% of the respondents. For respondents who preferred *yuri* manga (*n* = 934), those were: "Because I like their setting (*settei/sekai-kan*)." (69.8%), "Because I like their story." (69.6%), "Because I feel better (*iyasareru*) when reading these manga." (64.7%), "Because I like their characters." (59.7%) and "Because I like their drawing style." (54.8%). Respondents who preferred *yuri* anime (*n* = 351) placed a greater importance on the characters and a lesser importance on the drawing style: "Because I like their characters." (74.4%), "Because I like their setting (*settei/sekai-kan*)." (69.5%), "Because I feel better (*iyasareru*) when watching these anime." (64.7%) and "Because I like their story." (62.7%).

Some prior research has emphasized the importance of *settei* and *sekai-kan* in the production of anime (Condry 2009, 141), yet the importance of these two as *reasons* for consuming manga and anime was (at least for me) unexpected. Ian Condry translates *settei* as "premises" and *sekai-kan* as "world-settings" (141, 152, 160n1). *Settei* link the various characters to each other and *sekai-kan* "define the world in which the characters interact" (141). Condry points out that *settei* and *sekai-kan* are important for producing the media franchise of a specific text since they link the various adaptations to each other (155).

Thus an example for *settei* would be the "*sœur* system" in *Maria-sama ga miteru*: it defines how the various characters are linked to each other. In my survey, 77.1% of those who gave *Maria-sama ga miteru* as one of their favorite texts also gave *settei* and *sekai-kan* as one of their reasons for consuming *yuri* manga (**p<.01, $n = 245$). Condry (2009) argues that fan works playfully free characters from their original *settei* and *sekai-kan* (143). Yet in most *Maria-sama ga miteru* fan works that I know, much the opposite is true: the characters are firmly bound to their specific relationships, Yumi for example always being the *petite sœur* of Sachiko. Creators of other fan works as well are careful to stay true to the original text's characterizations (Orbaugh 2010, 183). I would thus argue that *settei* and (to a lesser degree) *sekai-kan* at least partly facilitate interpreting a given text as a *yuri* text. To remain with the example of *Maria-sama ga miteru*, the "*sœur* system" leads to in a strong emotional bond between two girls that in turn makes it possible to interpret them as a romantically involved couple.

The other reason that deserves some explanation is "I feel better" or, to use a closer translation of the Japanese term *iyasareru*, "I feel emotionally healed." Since the turn of the twenty-first century, Japan has seen an "*iyashi* (emotional healing) boom" (Matsui 2013, 14). Japanese dictionaries define things that provide *iyashi* as those which "let you feel relaxed" (6). As early as 1999, the Japanese anime magazine *Animage* ran an article about *iyashi* characters in anime that argued that anime characters provided emotional care for their audience members ("'Tennen'-kei ga iyashi no" 1999, 29). *Iyashi* has also been identified as one of the reasons why Japanese women of middle and old age liked the Korean television drama *Fuyu no sonata* (Winter sonata). Hayashi Kaori (2005) argues that this love drama had a therapeutic function as it gave these women the emotional care that was missing in their everyday life (87–92).[11]

A further analysis of the responses to my survey indicates that *iyashi* was especially important for fans of specific texts. For example, 79.5% of those who gave the pornographic text *Shōjo sekuto* as one of their favorite titles also gave *iyashi* as one of their reasons for

liking *yuri* manga (***p<.001, *n* = 132). In the case of those who preferred *yuri* anime, *iyashi* was especially important for the fans of the series *Yuru yuri*. 81.4% of those who gave *Yuru yuri* as one of their favorite *yuri* titles also gave *iyashi* as one of their reasons for liking *yuri* anime (***p<.001, *n* = 113).

The respondents' "sexual identity" was another important factor for quoting the reason *iyashi*: 82.9% of "non-heterosexual" male respondents as well as 73.4% of "heterosexual" male respondents gave *iyashi* as one of their reasons for liking *yuri* manga. The same reason was also quoted by 60.7% of "non-heterosexual" female respondents, but only by 45.2% of "heterosexual" female respondents (***p<.001).[12] In the case of *yuri* anime as well, *iyashi* was given especially by male respondents. It was quoted by 76.5% of "non-heterosexual" males and 74.0% of "heterosexual" males, compared to 55.0% of "heterosexual" females and 54.0% of "non-heterosexual" females (*p<.05).[13] These results would correspond with the suggestion that men feel emotionally healed by the cute characters of *moe* anime (Galbraith 2009a, under "Japanese critical discourse").

It appears that *iyashi* encompasses far more than mere relaxation and/or escapism. Respondents could choose the reasons "Reading these manga relaxes me." and "Reading these manga helps me to flee from my day to day life.," but only 36.5% and 23.7% did so, respectively. For those who preferred *yuri* anime, the respective numbers were equally low with 39.6% and 29.1%. It is possible that *iyashi* was seen as a more acceptable answer than "escape." Yet *iyashi* as a reason for consuming *yuri* texts did also surface in a qualitative analysis of comments about *yuri* on Mixi that I conducted in 2008 and the term *iyashi* can also frequently be found in blog posts on various *yuri* texts. It is further quoted in some of the personal essays in the *Eureka* special issue on *yuri* (e.g. Takashima 2014, 118). I would therefore argue that at least some fans see *iyashi* as a genuine reason for liking *yuri* manga/anime and/or the *yuri* genre in general.

The two stereotypes of the fans of the *yuri* genre reason that the fans like the *yuri* genre either "because it arouses them sexually" or "because they are 'lesbian.'" I tested these assumptions by adding the reasons "Because I also love [*suki*] girls/women." and "Reading/Watching these manga/anime arouses me sexually." to the list of reasons in my questionnaire. The reason "Because I also love girls/women." was given by 47.8% of those who preferred *yuri* manga. Further analysis shows that the answers corresponded with the respondents' "sexual identity": 71.8% of "non-heterosexual" females gave this reason, but it was quoted by only 38.4% of "heterosexual" males and 29.3% of "non-heterosexual" males (***p<.001).[14] The reason was also given by 43.6% of respondents who preferred *yuri* anime

and it again correlated with the respondents' "sexual identity": while 78.2% of "non-heterosexual" females gave this reason, it was quoted by 52.9% of "non-heterosexual" males and 31.8% of "heterosexual" males (***p<.001).[15] These results would support the idea that "non-heterosexual" females like the *yuri* genre because it corresponds to their own sexual preferences—although as we have seen that does not necessarily mean that they prefer texts that openly address "sexual identities."

In contrast, the reason "Reading these manga arouses me sexually." was given less often, namely by 24.8% of respondents. Although it was an anonymous survey, respondents might have felt too ashamed to actually give this reason—although as we have seen, most top five titles given in the survey for example did not have any sexual content. Whether respondents gave "sexual arousal" as a reason for liking *yuri* manga corresponded with their "sexual identity": the reason was quoted by 34.1% of "non-heterosexual" males, 28.2% of "non-heterosexual" females and 28.0% of "heterosexual" males, but it was given by only 8.9% of "heterosexual" females (***p<.001). Even of those who gave *Shōjo sekuto* as one of their favorite texts, only 31.8% also quoted the reason "sexual arousal." In contrast, 79.5% of those who gave *Shōjo sekuto* as one of their favorite texts quoted *iyashi* as one of their reasons for consuming *yuri* manga. This might be an example for a "creative interpretation" of the term *iyashi*, but it also indicates that the apparent content of a text does not automatically explain why it is consumed.

By those who preferred *yuri* anime, the reason "Watching these anime arouses me sexually." was given even less often, namely by 24.5% of respondents. This might be due to the respondents not wanting to give this reason, yet it should be noted that the list of top five titles for those who preferred *yuri* anime did not contain any erotic/pornographic texts. Again, the respondents' "sexual identity" correlated with whether they gave "sexual arousal" as a reason for liking *yuri* anime. It was quoted by 27.6% of "non-heterosexual" females, 29.4% of "non-heterosexual" males and 31.8% of "heterosexual" males, but was given by only 6.7% of "heterosexual" females (**p<.01).

Comments from Participants

Surveys do not always cover every aspect of a topic that is deemed important by the respondents. At the end of my survey, I therefore gave the opportunity to leave a comment and 496 respondents made use of it. Many participants wrote longer texts that addressed for example the state of *yuri* genre in general, their own fan activities, the *yuri* fandom or the

boys' love genre. Three issues came up in several comments: the importance of imagination, opinions on "homosexuality," and the issue of "sexual arousal." I will also briefly reflect on the label "otaku" as used in the comments. I will not judge any of these comments as I consider them illustrations of the various discourses that exist(ed) among the fans of the *yuri* genre. I will however provide more context where necessary.

The comments show that the fans of the *yuri* genre do reflect on their actions and motivations. They are able to distinguish between fantasy and reality and can think critically about the object of their fandom. This would confirm that there is no simple "stimulus-response-effect" of media content, but that audiences use a variety of "decoding" strategies. These can also lead to conflicts among and between the various subgroups. The stereotypes of the supposed "nature" of the Japanese *yuri* fans do not do them justice, because these simple explanations ignore that these fans are not one single homogeneous entity, but rather a very heterogeneous group, made up of various subgroups. Every single fan brings various motivations and expectations to the *yuri* genre's content.

The first topic, addressed by a total of twenty-five comments, was "imagination." They further underscore the importance of fan works for the *yuri* fandom. For example, a twenty-three-year old "heterosexual" male enjoyed using his imagination on the series *K-On!* although he was aware that the series does not depict any love stories between female characters. For him, this was one way of enjoying anime. A thirty-five-year old "homosexual" female called the process of imagination a "*yuri* filter," an idea that has previously been described for female fans of the boys' love genre (Galbraith 2011, 221). Other participants emphasized the role fan works played for imagination. For example, an eighteen-year old "heterosexual" female wrote: "Since I imagine love [*ren'ai*] between two female characters in works that are not *yuri* and like reading fan works manga about them, I have not really watched that many *yuri* anime etc." A nineteen-year old "heterosexual" male stated that imagining was much freer than consuming a text that was created as *yuri*. This would indicate that Nakamura Seitarō is right in his assumption that not all fans of the *yuri* genre are interested in commercially produced *yuri* texts.

With imagination, even mainstream *shōnen* manga can become *yuri*, as a comment from a twenty-three-year old "bisexual" female illustrates: "There are also cases where I like [fan works] in which two characters who were male in the original both switch sexes. For example, I completely fell for [the *shōnen* manga] *One Piece* because the original had depictions where you could switch sexes with very little effort." A twenty-two-year old "bisexual" female further noted that in the past it had been normal for *yuri* fans to simply imagine relationships

between female characters. She asserted that popular *yuri* texts were those that demanded that fans used their imagination. As the low popularity of the anime version of *Aoi hana* indicates, this might be true. These fans can be seen as an example for Stuart Hall's theory of en- and decoding since they use decoding strategies that were not intended by the texts' original producers.

For some respondents, imagination did not stop with the production and consumption of fan works. A seventeen-year old "bisexual" female commented that she even looked at her own environment using her imagination—presumably in the same way as a twenty-four-year old "heterosexual" male who wrote: "I also like watching people in reality who look like *yuri* couples (two girls walking hand in hand etc.) lol." These comments suggest that the portrayal of male *yuri* fans in the meta-manga *Yuri danshi* is not too far from reality. However, not all of my participants were comfortable with this situation. One twenty-one-year old "bisexual" female complained about fans who "arbitrarily decide about *yuri* at their own convenience," making originally non-*yuri* texts a part of the canon and thereby complicating a definition of the genre. This would support the observation that the *yuri* genre's definition is an object of heated debate.

The second important issue that came up in the comments was "homosexuality." A number of comments specifically addressed the relationship between *yuri* and "real lesbians"—a problematic one, as I will discuss in more detail at the end of this chapter. Two respondents complained that the *yuri* genre did not help "real lesbians" in Japan and that the acceptance of fantasy did not equal acceptance in reality. A twenty-six-year old "bisexual" female wrote:

> Japan is a country with a large population of people who feel *moe* for GL and BL, but to the utmost it's a country where in GL and BL "heterosexuality rules."
>
> To be precise, even among women who like BL, there are many who say "I don't like gays." There are also many who say "It's great because same-sex love is a love with which you cannot become happy." In the end, there are many BL [stories] which start with a negation of gays like "I'm [*ore*, i.e. a man] not gay, but I like [*suki*] you (a man)."
>
> In GL as well, most works are about "girls in girlhood flirting" and they have a tendency to pretend to respect lesbians [*rezubian*] while in fact staying distant from them.

Although painted with very broad strokes, this picture is not completely wrong when it comes to boys' love texts (Saito 2011, 182–83). And as we have seen, "sexual identity" is not a big topic in *yuri* texts either. A similar point was made by a twenty-one-year old self-identified "transgender lesbian" in the following long comment:

> I think that in Japan, many *yuri* [texts] are about tragic love. Furthermore, there are also those created by males fantasizing about *yuri*.
>
> I always think that I would like to read *yuri* created by LGBT women [*tōjisha*[16] *josei*]. In society, many negative things are murmured about homosexuality, for example "They can't be saved," "They can't have children" or "Two females can't live together." Or the negation is said out loud. If that's true, then I don't understand why such works are valued.
>
> Perhaps they see "unhappiness" as "something beautiful"? If that's the case, it would be cruel to LGBT persons. Because even among those who enjoy reading *yuri*, there's no small number of people who say "*Yuri* in reality is 'lesbian' [*rezu*]. No way!" That means in many cases they tolerate *yuri* but negate lesbians [*rezubian*]. Someone who deviates from society is made into "a thing that can be enjoyed as fantasy."
>
> Extremely often Japan's sexual minorities are consumed as "entertainment" in this way.
>
> … There are only a few people I can trust. The reason is that I don't want to be made into "entertainment." I'm always wishing for a few very sincere and positive works about homosexuality. I'm constantly thinking that it would be good if the sentiment of homosexuality (not "lesbian" [*rezu*] as used in the world of porn) soaked into general [texts]. I cannot understand people who say "It's a good work" about tragic stories. … Same-sex love is "love" [*ren'ai*] just like heterosexual love. … I wish that there were happy and sad stories in *yuri* just the way they exist about normal love. Homosexuality is absolutely not special. I want it to be much more equal, that we don't color a completely normal thing to show that it's "not normal."

She has a point in that there are almost no (*yuri*) manga artists who have publicly come out as "lesbian" (or any other "non-heterosexual" identity), like Takashima Rica. We have also seen that "heartrending" is regarded as one of the key characteristics of the *yuri* genre and that many *yuri* manga editors think that the readers want to read about couples who face social obstacles. As if to confirm these complaints, a male twenty-two-year old "heterosexual" male respondent wrote: "I love [*aikō*] two-dimensional love between girls [*shōjo ren'ai*] (*yuri*), but I'm against legalizing same-sex marriages in real society or even lesbian persons [*rezubian no kata*] voicing their political opinions. In other words, I belong to the moderates." In contrast, a twenty-three-year old female wished for Japan to become a society where same-sex couples as well could raise children. A thirty-eight-year old "heterosexual" female thought that the barrier between "heterosexual" and "queer" (both written in English) was created by society. Clearly, there are various subgroups with different expectations of the content of the *yuri* genre and also of Japanese society. It further becomes apparent that the fans of the *yuri* genre discriminate between texts and between each other, although this discrimination usually does not happen openly, for example at fan works events. I as a foreign researcher was usually assured that no one had a problem with "real lesbians."

The stereotype that *yuri* is consumed by "heterosexual" males for sexual arousal was also addressed by the survey's respondents, albeit in less detail. A twenty-two-year old "heterosexual" male for example wrote: "For me as a man, *yuri* is a sexual object, but above all it's an ideal. I have a strong feeling of self-hatred, including my sex and in this sense *yuri* is an ideal world where I don't exist." Another nineteen-year old "heterosexual" male wrote: "I prefer those [*yuri* texts] which are not sexual. I also like the sexual ones, but I have a

feeling that I enjoy them in a different way." Some respondents explicitly mentioned that *iyashi* was more important to them than "sexual arousal." For example, a seventeen-year old "heterosexual" male wrote: "I'm not sexually aroused by *yuri*. I watch it and it's charming and I'm emotionally healed [*iyasareru*]." These comments would thus support the results of my survey.

Finally, a brief comment on the question of how to call the fans of the *yuri* genre. As far as my survey is concerned, only a few respondents used a distinct term for "fan." Most often, it was the term *fan* written in *katakana*. In one instance, the word *aikōsha* or "devotee" was used. The term "otaku" came up in only two comments. One twenty-six-year old male wrote about how *Yuru yuri* appealed to "light otaku," but he himself did not give *Yuru yuri* as one of his top five titles. The other comment came from an eighteen-year old "heterosexual" female who warned me that "Japan's otaku culture is dangerous. There are people with various sexual dispositions." In both cases, "otaku" refers to somebody "other" than the commentators. I would therefore argue that the usage of the label "otaku" for all fans of the *yuri* genre would be misleading.[17]

Different Subgroups, Different Problems

The high number of "non-heterosexual" females among my respondents was surprising for me. Among all respondents, "lesbian" females account for 6.7% and "bisexual" females for 21.1%, even though I did not post the link to the survey on any sites specifically catering to "lesbian" and/or "bisexual" females. The numbers are especially remarkable given that the *yuri* genre receives quite a bit of criticism from self-identified "lesbian" females in Japan, similar to the way that the boys' love genre is criticized by actual Japanese "gay" men (Nagaike and Aoyama 2015, 123–26). One example would be the above mentioned comments from my survey. Another one is the "lesbian" *mini-komi* (self-published magazine) *Pe=Po* in which the author of a *yuri* manga review quotes her "lesbian" friends with "*Yuriiiiiii* (*sic*)? Basically, that's that thing with [girls shouting] '*O-nē-sama*!' in all girls' schools, right?" and "That are those primitive stories for straights [*nonke*] who are happy when you say [the words] taboo or immorality, right?" (Miyakichi 2010, 40) Even those comments refer to concepts that frequently come up in the discourse on the *yuri* genre. Manga artist Takeuchi Sachiko, a self-identified "lesbian," has a somewhat ambiguous stance towards the *yuri* genre. In her autobiographical essay manga, a friend asks for her opinion on *yuri*. Takeuchi answers "I don't feel *m-moe*… Maybe it's my female heart that won't let me feel that much *moe* for

real things?" (Takeuchi 2009, 10) Yet the book's subtitle "Sachiko, who is *yuri* and likes boys' love" seems to indicate that the term *yuri* is some kind of identity marker for her. This is further supported by the cover illustration which shows Takeuchi and her friends surrounded by numerous lily flowers.

A third example is an interview with Tosaki Miwa and Hagiwara Mami who in the 1990s and early 2000s had worked for the "lesbian" magazines *anise* and *Phryne*. Even though their "sexual identity" is not made clear, they are positioned as representatives of Japan's "lesbians" and "bisexuals," so their opinions are to be read as speaking for the community. Tosaki notes that "it's ambivalent whether they [i.e. the characters in *yuri* manga] have any self-awareness as 'I'm a lesbian [*rezubian*]'—that's not depicted." ("Rezubian & baisekushuaru kara mita" 2009, 56–57) Hagiwara adds that "from the point of view of LGBT persons, I think that opinions are divided on whether that part is depicted realistically, as 'the real thing.'" (57) Both criticize that manga artists try to depict relationships between females as something special even though they are the same as relationships between men and women (58), a complaint similar to the comments on my survey. However, this is not a critique of the form of manga itself—Japanese magazines for "lesbians" have featured a variety of manga (59).

Despite such rather harsh criticism, there are also "non-heterosexual" females who enjoy *yuri*, as described in a personal essay by self-identified "lesbian" Makimura Asako (2014). This shows that even this subgroup of *yuri* fans is by no means homogeneous. Other "lesbians" do not feel accepted in the *yuri* fan community—especially by the other large subgroup, "heterosexual" males. When I talked to *yuri* fans, I was usually assured that although nobody had a problem with "lesbians," *yuri* was not a "lesbian" genre. Some "lesbians" might feel that this denies their existence, that they are excluded from the genre. Two other incidents would support such an interpretation: After volume ten (2007), an advice column in *Komikku yuri hime* on love problems which had received many letters from "lesbian" readers was discontinued, which could indicate that the magazine's editorial staff was trying to move away from a close association with sexual minorities. Secondly, in some *yuri* groups on Mixi, threads pertaining to LGBT topics (e.g. the self-identified "lesbian" politician Otsuji Kanako or events for LGBT women) were deleted by the groups' administrators without comment. However, as I pointed out earlier, it is also possible that the label "lesbian" used in this chapter is just that—a label, rather than an identity marker. Females who prefer female partners but do not define themselves as "lesbian" might not feel excluded from the community of *yuri* fans and can thus continue to enjoy the genre.

The situation of male fans is different from that of "non-heterosexual" female ones. As a twenty-three-year old "heterosexual" male commented: "Usually you'd think that it's odd that there are males who like *yuri*."—echoing the sentiment portrayed in *Yuri danshi*. While I had expected a relatively large number of "heterosexual" male respondents—especially due to my experiences at various fan works events which were mostly frequented by male visitors—the reasons they gave for liking the *yuri* genre were surprising, for example the great importance of *iyashi*. My findings seem to be consistent with Kumata's (2005) argument that male fans of *yuri* tend to identify with the female characters and are therefore not looking for sexual arousal (82–83). For the participants of my survey as well, the aspect of *iyashi* was much more important than "sexual arousal." Similar findings have also been reported for the male fans of the boys' love genre (Nagaike 2015, 195)

In Japan, the "*iyashi* boom" occurred together with the "boom of pure love [*jun'ai*]" (Hayashi 2005, 94) in fictional texts. *Iyashi* has been argued to be a central aspect of the stories about "pure love," a love that is thought to have more value than any physical commodity (94–95). Purity and innocence are considered to be essential characteristics of the *yuri* genre, and it would seem like these are also important factors for the feeling of *iyashi* enjoyed by many of its fans. Still, it remains unclear what exactly the fans are "healed" of: is it frustration with the demands of contemporary Japanese society or is it more about personal problems? Does *iyashi* even mean the same for everyone? A deeper investigation of this issue would be needed.[18]

The four characteristics of fans can also be glimpsed from the results of my survey. The respondents' comments seem to suggest that the fans, while (emotionally) invested in the *yuri* genre, are aware of the various subgroups, especially "non-heterosexual" females and "heterosexual" males. To a certain degree, they are also trying to distinguish themselves from subgroups they do not consider themselves to be a part of, for example by using the label "otaku" for these "others." Nevertheless, there also seems to be a sense of community, since *yuri* is still perceived as a minor genre and its fans think that they have to "stick together." Creativity is a vital point for the surveyed fans. Not only do most of them consume fan works, but some even say that using their imagination is much more important to them than having a ready-made *yuri* text at their disposal. In this regard, the tagline of *Yuri danshi*—"I think, therefore *yuri* is"—is certainly true for the fans of the *yuri* genre.

The fans' imagination and productivity could even be considered one of the most important reasons for the growth of the *yuri* genre as a whole. Without fans imagining intimate relationships between female characters in otherwise "non-*yuri*" texts, the genre

might not have become as big as it is today. The importance of such creative ways of decoding further emphasizes that the content of specific texts does not always indicate *why* and *how* it is consumed. Much like genres, motivations are not inherent qualities of texts. Clearly, the fans play an important role in the discursive construction of the *yuri* genre. They bring a variety of expectations, motivations and desires to it and construct it in unique ways. Some of these might conform to the intentions of the texts' creators. But more often than not, fans resort to creating their own stories and fantasies, thereby shaping the *yuri* genre in much different ways.

Notes

1. My questionnaire drew on these surveys. I would like to thank Bernd Dolle-Weinkauff for kindly providing me with the questionnaire used by Bouissou et al. (2010). Additional sources of reference were the studies conducted by Susan Napier (2001, 2007) and Janice Radway (1984) as well as the findings of my 2008 M.A. research.

2. Yuri ota chotto kinasai yo (Hey *yuri* otaku, come here), 5,852 members; Yuri shimai (Lily sisters), 1,756 members; Gāruzu rabu (Girls' love), 1,409 members; Yappari yuri desho! (In the end it's gonna be *yuri*!), 1,187 members; Yuri moe-tai! (*Yuri moe* troupe!), 630 members (members as of September 16, 2011)

3. Tweetbuzz extracts those tweets from Twitter that contain links and displays them in the order of popularity.

4. The number of its registered users rose only slightly during my survey: on the day of posting, it was given as 440, and on the day after the end of the survey as 464.

5. Respondents had to choose one of the three categories.

6. Due to the small number of respondents in them, I exclude the categories "other," "Don't know" and "n/a" from this analysis.

7. As indicated in table 2, I discarded all respondents younger than fourteen years.

8. I chose the term "use" (*shiyō*) as a broad term to encompass all possible forms of fan works (which could be "read," "watched," "played" etc.). After posting the survey online, it was however pointed out to me that this verb could also be interpreted as "For what purpose do you use *yuri*/*GL* fan works?," as if I was asking for masturbation or other sexual practices. Judging from the numbers though, I would assume that most respondents got my intention right.

9. Since this survey is not based on random sampling, the significance levels are given solely to illustrate differences.

10. Range for *yuri* manga: zero years (in 2011) to thirty-eight years ago (in 1973). Range for *yuri* anime: zero years (in 2011) to twenty-five years ago (in 1986)

11. A similar argument has been made by Radway (1984) about why women read romance novels (83–85, 100).

12. "Non-heterosexual" females: $n = 298$; "heterosexual" females: $n = 135$; "non-heterosexual" males: $n = 41$; "heterosexual" males: $n = 357$ (for those who preferred *yuri* manga)

13. "Non-heterosexual" females: $n = 87$; "heterosexual" females: $n = 60$: "non-heterosexual" males: $n = 17$; "heterosexual" males: $n = 154$ (for those who preferred *yuri* anime)

14. It was also given by 22.2% of (supposedly) "heterosexual" female respondents, indicating that my categories are not as clear-cut as they appear.

15. It was also given by 20.0% of (supposedly) "heterosexual" female respondents.

16. *Tōjisha* or "person concerned" is an expression often used in the Japanese LGBT community to refer to those who belong to sexual minorities (McLelland 2005, 182).

17. This is despite the fact that one of the Mixi groups on which I posted the link to my survey, Yuri ota chotto kinasai yo, explicitly targeted "*yuri* otaku" (or "ota" in short).

18. In a small survey by Jolyon Thomas (2012), "more than half … of the … respondents said that they had had inspiring, fulfilling, or transcendent experiences reading manga or watching anime" (60). It is possible that these persons felt some kind of *iyashi*.

Conclusion. *Yuri* at the Crossroads

On March 1, 2013, the wedding ceremony of the former Takarazuka Revue *otoko-yaku* Higashi Koyuki took place in Tokyo Disneyland. This would not have been noteworthy, had she not gotten "married" to her girlfriend—the first time that a same-sex wedding ceremony was performed at Tokyo Disneyland. The *New York Times* notes that although the wedding was not legally recognized by the Japanese state, the news got a lot of positive response from Japanese social media (Tabuchi 2013). When a month later the Japanese newspaper *Asahi shinbun* posted a photo of Higashi and her partner on its Facebook page, most users commented that the two women were "beautiful."

We might infer that they were associating actual Japanese "lesbians" with the same characteristics as fictional female same-sex intimacy in the *yuri* genre. However, the fans of the *yuri* genre do not appear to be allies in advancing the cause of sexual minorities in Japan. Higashi's "wedding" was not discussed in the *yuri* fans' groups on Mixi or on the specialized social network Yuri komyu! Not even the essay manga about Higashi's and her partner's life (Higashi, Masuhara and Sugiyama 2014) caused any visible reaction. For the boys' love genre, it has been argued that its fans are interested in "pleasure, not politics—fantasy, not reality" (Galbraith 2011, 215), and the same appears to be true for the fans of the *yuri* genre. This is supported by the results of my online survey, comments by *Komikku yuri hime* editor-in-chief Nakamura Seitarō (2008), and even the meta-manga *Yuri danshi* (Kurata 2014, 124–27).

Saito (2011, 183) argues that a manga about two "lesbian" females would not be enjoyable as a romance for (female) readers because its characters would have to deal with social obstacles. E9 also said that depicting an actual love relationship between two female characters in a manga would mean that you had to deal with actual social discord and the various problems the characters faced. It can be inferred that he did not think that such stories would sell with a mainstream audience, but at a time when manga sales were shrinking it was exactly this mainstream audience that had to be targeted. Thus in essence, the demands of (at least parts of) the audience for fantasy and the needs of the producers for mainstream appeal complement one another, resulting into the kind of ambiguous relationships that we find in so many *yuri* texts.

Interpretation is key for the *yuri* genre, for both producers and consumers. The fans' interpretations feed off of the ambiguity of the original text, whether or not it is consciously

provided by its producers. By producing fan works, the fans can assign the texts to the *yuri* genre, which in turn can generate renewed attention for the text from a group of fans who might originally not have been interested in it. This means a larger audience and thus benefits the producers without costing them a single yen—a mechanism that has also been observed for the boys' love genre (Saito 2011, 188). This is also the reason why it is rarely heard that Japanese publishers or artists sue fans for copyright infringements, although fan works are technically just that. This is in stark contrast to cases in other countries like the United States where for example Warner Bros. sued creators of fan fiction based on the *Harry Potter* franchise (Jenkins 2006, 185–205).

Yet the situation in Japan could change quickly. As the *Asahi shinbun* notes, the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement between (among others) the United States and Japan poses a threat to Japanese fan culture. Under current Japanese law, if the copyright holders do not sue, investigative authorities cannot prosecute copyright infringements. The TPP's (proposed) chapter on intellectual property rights wants to change this law, so that copyright infringements could be prosecuted even without a formal complaint by the rights' holder. Fans and creators like manga artist Akamatsu Ken consider this a threat to Japanese fan works and cosplay activities (Fujita 2014).

But this is not the only question mark looming over the *yuri* genre's future. Constructed through the interaction between content, production and reception, the *yuri* genre, like any other genre, is a "site of struggle among users." (Altman 2004, 99) In Japan, the *yuri* genre became popular via the grassroots of fan activities, a popularity upon which producers could then build their commercial enterprises. But *yuri* fans do not necessarily need the texts that are from the start produced as *yuri* texts: they derive much of their pleasure from interpretation, so commercially produced *yuri* texts are not the sine qua non of *yuri* fandom. Fans can always use their imagination to read female same-sex intimacy into any other text they like. In fact, the space for interpretation maybe even needed in order to make a text successful. A case in point would be the anime version of *Aoi hana*. Its main (if not only) selling point was obvious female same-sex intimacy, but apparently that was not enough to ensure its success. In comparison, the extremely popular series *Yuru yuri* is labeled a *yuri* anime by its producers, but mostly relies on the audience's interpretation of the characters' relationships.

Broadening the appeal of the *yuri* genre was a major concern of the manga editors I spoke to because profits could only be made with texts that appealed to a large audience. But producing texts for a diverse audience that includes both "hardcore fans" and "light users"

poses yet another challenge. In a 2011 interview, *Komikku yuri hime* editor-in-chief Nakamura described two groups of *yuri* fans and identified "a difference in degree of enthusiasm" (Satō 2011, 33) between them: On the one side were the fans of *yuri* manga who supported the genre precisely because it was a minor one. These fans were not interested in *yuri* anime. On the other side were those fans who had discovered the *yuri* genre via the anime version of *Yuru yuri*. For Nakamura, the next challenge was to produce something that pleased both of these groups (32–33). Just like the results of my online survey indicate, the fans of the *yuri* genre are not one unified homogeneous group. This needs to be recognized on the producers' side and will necessitate several strategies to tap the various subgroups of the *yuri* genre's audience.

However, these strategic considerations are also the source of discontent and concern on the producers' as well as the audience's side. Anime writer Ayana Yuniko for example says that she is irritated by the "'soft *yuri*' world" that is currently popular among the *yuri* genre's fans. While recognizing that selling different content is hard, she would like to see stories that are "not just cute and gentle" (Ayana and Kitsukawa 2014, 174). Tamaki Sana (2014) attributes this development to the success of *Yuru yuri*. She fears that this series has limited the *yuri* genre's scope and describes how readers who liked it were unsatisfied with the rest of *Komikku yuri hime*'s content (157). For Tamaki, "a genre that does not allow for diversity is … easily destroyed" (158). She argues that the future lies not in interpretation, but in texts that feature "heavy" topics like jealousy and hatred (159). Yet if such texts (allegedly) do not sell, it is doubtful that her wishes will come true in the (near) future.

It is possible that the (over-)reliance on ambiguous relationships could also alienate the *yuri* genre's foreign audience. Erica Friedman for example told me that US American fans were invested in the couples present in the text, wanting to read about them being happy. If future *yuri* texts contain happiness without presenting any actual couples because they rely on fans' interpretations, this might disappoint these readers. It might also fuel local production of comics (manga-inspired or otherwise) about female same-sex intimacy, as they can already be found in the United States, Germany, and even the Philippines.

"I think, therefore *yuri* is." says Keisuke in *Yuri danshi*. But what if he stops thinking, whether of his own free will or because he has to? In the mid-2010s, the *yuri* genre has come to a crossroads in its development. The example of *Yuru yuri* has shown that *yuri* anime can be successful with a larger audience, albeit at the possible expense of the *yuri* genre's hardcore fans. At the same time, the publication stop of the major *yuri* manga anthologies *Tsubomi* and *Hirari* marks a change in the *yuri* manga market which once again threatens to

shrink. We now witness a struggle between making money and making meaning. It still remains to be seen whether *yuri* can do what boys' love did—building a stable commercial market on the fans' interpretive activities.

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