

# YURI JAPANESE ANIMATION: QUEER IDENTITY AND ECOFEMINIST THINKING

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Yuri or Shōjo-ai, a sub-genre of Japanese Animation and Manga, can be defined as women-loving-women narratives that explore the relationships between women. Although the sub-genre has only been recently introduced to the West, it has been in existence in Japan for nearly a century and has been used as a means to resist stereotypical perceptions of both queer and heterosexual women. With the aid of perspectives found within queer, ecofeminist, and cyberfeminist theory, four contemporary animations are analyzed to challenge the various myths about queer and heterosexual women. The animations *Kashimashi: Girl Meets Girl* and *Sweet Blue Flowers* defy stereotypes of queer sexuality and identity by demystifying myths about the queer body and mind and the nature of the “closet.” The animations *ICE* and *Kurau Phantom Memory* deconstruct the woman/nature myth and other fabrications produced within it, such as the goddess myth and the queer against nature myth, through the tales of two queer female warriors who must save humanity.



YURI ANIMATION: QUEER IDENTITY AND ECOFEMINIST THINKING

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## **DEDICATIONS**

I would like to dedicate my thesis to the strong women who have inspired me countless of times throughout my life—my mother, Willie Kaye Thompson; my sister, Kathryn Lilley Rollins; and my partner, Nicole Elizabeth Allen. It is their voices and their narratives that have instilled in me a passion to document the voices of women.

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## PREFACE

I was first exposed to Japanese animation and manga (comics) as a teenager. After watching a two-hour long feature, whose title I have not yet been able to recall, at a friend's home, I surmised that Japanese animation was an “avante-garde” derivative of Western cartoons. My supposition was predominantly based upon my inability to “read” the text. I found the narratives to be perplexing and the illustrations to be intangible. Thus, I made a mental note to myself never to watch Japanese animation again because of its ability to create boredom—a “disease” most heinous and vile to a teenager.

I carried that mental note with me until I met my partner, who is an avid Japanese manga and animation fan. After many attempts by her to persuade me to watch Japanese animation, I ultimately relented and began to watch certain animations that she personally had collected over the years. Unlike my first horrible encounter, I was able to comprehend, with her aid of course, concepts and tropes found within the narrative; yet, I still was unable to empathize with the characters and ultimately unable to empathize with other viewers, such as my partner, who are devotees of Japanese media.

However, my attitude towards Japanese animation radically changed when she introduced me to *Yuri* Japanese animation and manga during my graduate career. Yuri, meaning “lily” in Japanese, can be classified as a sub-genre of Japanese animation and manga that can be found across all demographics, such as *shōnen* (a young male) and *shōjo* (a young female), and across all literary styles, such as science fiction, fantasy, and comedy, with the explicit purpose of exploring the diverse relationships found between women. In addition, some of these narratives explore the relationships within scenarios that too often happen in the lives of women, such as rape, drug addiction, sickness, and incest. The outcome of such scenarios ensures that an

alternative perspective will be heard that counters the one that is most commonly heard in society: a hegemonic perspective laced with patriarchal concepts. Thus, as I will argue in this study, these women-loving-women narratives are not simply produced to titillate minds for erotic pleasure as some might perceive; rather, they incessantly explore, resist, and subvert traditional notions of gender in Japan and in the West.

These women-loving-women narratives have not always been referred to as *Yuri*. Although the sub-genre has been in existence since the early twentieth century, and the term *Yuri* was quite often used to describe women-loving-women readers of gay magazines in the 1970s, the sub-genre was not coined *Yuri* until the 1990s when the animation began to cross over to the West. Thus, it has predominately been Western societies who have referred to the sub-genre as *Yuri*, and it has only been as of late that Japanese fans have also begun to refer to the narratives as *Yuri*. Unfortunately, it is unclear if the sub-genre possessed any other name before the christening in the 1990s since there is no documentation that suggests otherwise. As a result, animation and manga fans generally refer to all women-loving-women animations and mangas, regardless of when they were produced, as *Yuri*.

In addition, the term *Yuri* is sometimes substituted in the West with the Japanese construction *shōjo-ai* (girls love) when a particular women-loving-women animation and manga lacks explicit sexual encounters between the characters. However, such a distinction is rarely used within the anime fan community. More often than not, the term *Yuri* is used to designate any animation and manga, regardless of explicit sexual encounters, containing a women-loving-women narrative. Therefore, like the advocates of *Yuri* animation and manga, I will also refer to any women-loving-women narrative in animation and manga as *Yuri*.

To my surprise, very little academic research had been done on Yuri animations. While several studies about Yuri's male counterpart, Yaoi (*shōnen-ai*), have been published, such as the works by James Welker and Mark McLelland, not a single scholarly article has been devoted to the Yuri sub-genre. In fact, I have only been able to find one article that has referenced the sub-genre in passing: Masami Toku's article "Shojo Manga! Girls' Comics! A Mirror of Girls' Dreams." While some might find the lack of information on the sub-genre as a lucrative academic opportunity, I was quite forlorn by the sub-genre's invisibility, because if the women-loving-women sub-genre was invisible, it signified that I, a woman-loving woman, was invisible, and it signified that others were also invisible: the women who love women or the viewer who appreciates women who love women. Indeed, no one can deny the imposed invisibility of a queer identified individual and what it produces—anger and anguish. Therefore, this study is an attempt to render the invisible visible and it is an attempt to provoke a dialogue about the Yuri sub-genre in the academic community.

Yet, such a study of this size is quite challenging because it does not lend itself to the methodologies of a single discipline. Although my thesis is predominately one that offers literary interpretations of the media, offering literary interpretations without some form of a historical context would cripple any intellectual capacity to truly understand the literary analysis. Therefore, Chapter One synthesizes current scholarship in order to explore the possible origins of the sub-genre and to demonstrate how the sub-genre has changed over time. However, most importantly, Chapter One illustrates how the sub-genre can be considered a multi cultural narrative. Japanese and Western culture are inextricably linked by sub-genre through the constant integration of concepts found within the two cultures.

In addition to the challenges of methodology, this particular type of study is also challenging in that the perspectives that are being used to interpret the animations are ones that are primarily Western, such as queer theory, eco-feminist theory, and cyberfeminist theory. As of late, the general perception of the application of Western theory to non-Western cultures has been one of hesitancy. Scholars have become uncertain if it is possible at all to apply Western-based theories to non-Western cultures, and this uncertainty comes mostly from previous attempts in the past that have been biased and have produced negative consequences. Furthermore, it is known that sometimes a Western lens can make aspects of a culture undetectable, thus limiting, if not skewing, the results of any given study (Nakamura 269).

What further adds to the complication is that certain theories, in particular queer theory, are not nearly as explored in Japan as they are in the West. According to Karen Nakamura in her review essay “The Chrysanthemum and the Queer: Ethnographic and Historical Perspectives on Sexuality in Japan,” there is very little queer “discourse” being produced in Japan on a “grand scale—no Minnie Bruce Pratt, no Randy Shilts, no Judith Butlers, no *Out* magazines” (271). Moreover, even if there are some findings being published in Japan on the theories mentioned, it does not necessarily mean that they will be translated and published in Western outlets.

However, it is still necessary to use caution when analyzing texts from another culture. Indeed, that is my main purpose for utilizing the term *queer* instead of any other taxonomy in defining the literary analysis. In opposition to the current literature being produced about gender bending animations, Chapter Two posits that the characters of Yuri animations can be read as *queer*. It is clear through the analysis of *Kashimashi: Girl Meets Girl* that the characters in Yuri animations represent multiple possibilities of gender and sexuality, and it is through the exploration of these multiple possibilities that the characters have the potential to subvert or

resist regulatory norms. As for the case of the characters in *Kashimashi: Girl Meets Girl*, the characters' gender identity, gender performance, and sexual orientation are often in conflict with one another. Thus, the characters' dissonant characteristics threaten the regulatory norms found within Western society and possibly Japanese society.

In addition to exploring alternatives in regards to gender and sexuality through the performances of the characters, Yuri animations can also be read as queer texts due to the narratives' exploration of what Eve Sedgwick calls the "epistemology of the closet." Indeed, in the animation *Aoi Hana (Sweet Blue Flowers)*, the main focus of the narrative is to document the characters coming out as queer identified individuals. Yet the animation does not simply document one "coming out" experience; rather, the animation documents two of the characters' struggle to "come out" from multiple closets and to accept and reconcile with the traumatic memories associated with being in the "closet." Thus, the animation clearly implicates the "closet" in shaping the identity of the queer individual.

Yet, Yuri animations are also concerned about contesting other myths that reside within the heteronormative sphere, such as the myth that women possess an affinity to nature. Thus, Chapter Three analyzes two Yuri animations, *ICE* and *Kurau Phantom Memory*, both of which explore, deconstruct, and re-conceptualize the woman/nature myth and the other fabrications created from the myth, such as the queer being against nature and the dualism of the cyborg and the goddess. In the animation *ICE*, the queer women of Japan of 2012, must decide if they should take on the arduous mission of saving humankind from extinction, and in *Kurau Phantom Memory*, the queer alien energies Kurau and Christmas are also confronted with the potential extinction of the human species.

A final reason for using the term *queer* to classify the characters of women-loving-women narratives is the audience. Like the characters of Yuri animations and mangas, the spectators who view these animations also represent multiple genders and sexualities. While originally Yuri animation and manga, as I illustrate in Chapter One, were aimed towards a Japanese queer female audience, one can now find females and males of various forms of genders and sexualities in both Japanese and Western cultures viewing the beautiful, handsome women in Yuri animations. In addition, while most Yuri animation is still written with the Japanese queer female audience in mind, some recent Yuri animations are speculated by Yuri advocates to be aimed towards a male audience. Thus, it seems only logical to choose a taxonomy that is representative of not only the desire of the characters, but also the possible desire of the audience.

Thus, I hope that my critique reaches those who are willing to take note of this phenomenal and radical genre of women-loving-women narratives and film. Although as of late there has been a shift to attempt to document women-loving-women literary and visual art in the collegiate community, literature pertaining to women-loving-women is still highly inconsistent in comparison to other literatures documenting queer communities. Linda Garber in her article “Where in the World are the Lesbians?” notes such asymmetry in the literature of the LBGTQ community and states, “Left out of histories of homosexuality because of lack of evidence, excluded from cultural constructions of sexual agency because of gender stereotypes, unnamed because of scholarly prohibitions against imposing anachronistic or culturally inappropriate terms, women who love women face an uphill battle for scholarly recognition, which in turn leads to their underrepresentation in queer studies curriculum” (50). Indeed, scholars who concentrate on documenting women-loving women across the globe and fans who attempt to

advocate women-loving women narratives in popular culture material are battling a fight against hegemonic forces that have been successful for the most part in being able to quell and mitigate resistance. However, as many Yuri animations have articulated through their narratives, through continued determination and perseverance one can finally break free from the “closet”—a closet imposed by the dominant forces to imprison and silence the voices that reside in women-loving-women narratives.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE SECRET BEHIND THE VEIL:

#### THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF YURI ANIMATION

They were wearing a beautiful pink veil called “secret.” People say that this secret veil was knitted with rays of midnight moon light by the hands of beautiful witches. The two girls protect and nurture this small and tasteful round world. Only these two girls know this secret world behind the veil.

- Yoshiya Nobuko’s story “Hikage no Hana” (“Shaded Flower”) found in *Hanamonogatari (Flower Tales)* (qtd. in Dollase 742)

According to *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online*, *secret* is defined as “something kept hidden or unexplained, something kept from the knowledge of others or shared confidentially with a few.” If one applied the definition of secret to Nobuko’s story “Hikage no Hana,” one could theorize that the two girls’ desire for one another is hidden. It must be kept from others either for fear of their love being tainted by the reality that is outside of their sphere or for fear that their love will be misunderstood at best. Nobuko’s use of the term “secret” in relation to the girls’ love affair also reflects a common stereotype, often applied by heterosexual men, to women-loving-women relationships: they are powerful, mysterious, provocative, and erotic. An additional component to the myth implies that such relationships are not meant for women themselves; rather, they are created in order to titillate the heterosexual male mind.

Nobuko's description is also applicable in describing the present lack of awareness and knowledge of the Yuri phenomenon in the academic community. One could speculate that the absence of academic research on the phenomenon is simply stems from a lack of awareness of the genre. Yet, with the proliferation of anime literature in the 1990s and 2000s, it seems more appropriate to suggest that the current trend of academic scholarship in this field follows the trends of mainstream society. Favoritism, regardless of intention, too easily creates a lens that obscures any other types of expressions. In other words, overlooking certain texts, especially texts produced from marginalized communities, perpetuates invisibility. Therefore, this chapter attempts to recover and reveal the secret—a secret containing a multi-cultural narrative that has existed since the early twentieth century.

What has come to be called the Yuri movement of Japan originated during the Meiji Period (1863-1912), when imperial rule was restored to the country. Prior to the Meiji Period, Japan's Shogunate system terminated political and economic ties to other countries due to suspicion. When imperial rule was finally reinstated, the government restored its political relations with other countries. As a result, the Meiji period became a time of mass industrialization and modernization.

One particular aspect of Japanese culture that changed as a result of modernization was the education system. The newly revised educational curriculum, influenced by the Victorian era of Western Europe, began to indoctrinate girls on how to perfect their ability to be "good wives, wise mothers" (*ryosai kenbo*) (Dollase 725). Later, during the Taisho and Showa period, boys' education was also modified to instruct them on how to become good soldiers, while the "good wife and wise mother" concept for girls still remained (Robertson, "Theatrical Resistance" 166).

As a means to instill the “good wife and wise mother” concept into young girls, Western Young Adult narratives, such as *A Little Princess* and *Little Women*, were translated and published in Japan (Dollase 725-26). While these stories were meant to introduce a new view of domesticity, the free-spirited tomboy Jo in *Little Women* proved otherwise for young girls, who had yet found an outlet to escape oppressive reality (Dollase 727). Individuals looking to make a profit or individuals inspired by the revolutionary Western fiction saw the gain in creating magazines such as *Shōjo Kai (Girls’ World)* in 1902 and *Shōjo Gaho (Girls’ Illustrated)* in 1912. Void from the infringement of male authority, the newly created girls’ magazines helped young girls envision a better world for themselves and allowed a space to explore alternatives in contrast to the ones that were encouraged and enforced (Dollase 727). Thus, the concept of Shōjo fiction and the Shōjo was born.

While the contemporary term “Shōjo” refers to a young girl approximately between the ages of five and fourteen, “Shōjo” during the Meiji and possibly up until the Showa period meant literally a “not-quite-female” female (Robertson, “Politics” 426). This expression was reserved for anatomical women who had yet to be married either because they were still adolescents or because they had chosen not to marry. The term also insinuated that one lacked heterosexual sexual experiences and instead had engaged in homosexual sexual experiences (Robertson, “Politics” 426). Indeed, the most influential writer of not only the early Shōjo movement but also of the present Shōjo movement, Yoshiya Nobuko, had a same-sex lifelong partner, Monma Chiyo (Frederick 65).

Yoshiya Nobuko (1896-1973), a writer, and Nakahara Jun’ichi, illustrator of most of Nobuko’s work, are identified by some as the founding mothers of the Shōjo narrative and the Shōjo visual image. Nobuko serialized most of her works in newspapers and women’s magazines

between the years of 1910 to 1970, with most of these magazines selling approximately one million copies (Frederick 65-66). Indeed, Sarah Frederick, in her article, “Not That Innocent: Yoshiya Nobuko’s Good Girls,” affirms Nobuko’s popularity:

In a 1946 survey by Mainichi Shimbunsha titled, “Who is your favorite writer?” Yoshiya was the highest ranked woman writer, coming fifth right after Natsume Sōseki. It is hard to find a woman who read fiction before the 1970s who has not read one of her works. Tanabe [Seiko] recounts how the current empress of Japan, when asked what she had read in the early postwar, lit up with glee and listed off several Yoshiya novels. (66)

Although Yoshiya was an acclaimed writer in Japan, she has received very little attention in the West. Sarah Frederick states, “Yoshiya Nobuko has rarely been translated into English and has only recently become the subject of literary criticism in Japan or elsewhere. This is primarily because of her status as a popular writer, which placed her fiction outside the circle of critically acclaimed writers, while ignoring her influence on an entire generation of readers” (65). In addition, the lack of esteem and regard from her male counterparts during the time period certainly did not help, as expressed in Hiromi Dollase’s article “Early Twentieth Century Japanese Girls’ Magazine Stories: Examining Shōjo Voice in *Hananmonogatari* (Flower Tales)”:

Despite the rich imaginations and unique voices, girls’ culture and narratives are trivialized both by accomplished male and female writers. For instance, the authoritative critic Kobayashi Hideo once denounced Yoshiya Nobuko, saying that her writings, ‘as if manipulating and playing with an immature audience, make me feel disgusted.’ From the male point of view, Yoshiya’s writings, which

do not submit to the male language, are immature. Yoshiya's feminine writings are hard to accept for men and they are somehow "disgusted." (735)

Yet, it was Nobuko's use of the hyper-feminine that not only enticed young girls' minds but also constructed "alternative gender expectations" (Frederick 65). Nobuko created hyper-emotional and hyper-romantic narratives for young girls to be taken to a dimension free from the normative gender roles of the time (Dollase 729). Nakahara Jun'ichi, illustrator of the *Hanamonogatari*, mirrored Nobuko's narrative of challenging traditional female gender roles by illustrating girls with large, soulful eyes and slim, elongated limbs (Dollase 733). Dollase states:

Big and unrealistic eyes look only at dreams. A slim body is not made for reproduction. A small mouth is not for consuming food. The girl's bodies do not need to have realistic functions: Shōjo are created only to be admired and gazed at by girls. They are so unrealistic that their nationality is blurred; they exist just as Shōjo. (733)

Thus, Yoshiya Nobuko's and Nakahara Jun'ichi's visualization of the Shōjo body set the precedent not only for Shōjo animation and manga but also other Japanese animation and manga sub-genres.

In addition to the extreme emotionalism and romanticism, Nobuko also exoticizes the West. For example, in her earliest work *Hanamonogatari* (*Flower Tales*), the stories include such Western elements as ribbons, attics, pianos, and churches (Dollase 730). Dollase speculates that these narrative decorations "subvert the power of the west" and likewise "estranges girls from reality and the masculine Japanese world" (Dollase 730). Currently, Western tropes can be found in most Japanese animation and manga genres and sub-genres; however, they are still predominantly used in mangas and animations marketed towards girls or women.

Yet, perhaps what is the most pertinent in Nobuko's work that connects her to the Yuri sub-genre is her use of eroticism and homosexual love in her stories.<sup>1</sup> Once again, Nobuko subverts the heteronormative notion of eroticism: girls are only erotic when allowed by heterosexual men or girls are only erotic when defined by an anatomical male gaze. In Nobuko's novel *Yaneura no Nishojo (Two Virgins in the Attic)*, the main character, Takimoto Akiko, develops a relationship with her dorm mate Miss Akitsu. Once the two make their dorm room attics into one, the two are finally able to share their sexual desires for one another:

In this cramped, blue, triangular room that one bed of such rare beauty was enough. And so that one beautiful place to sleep was all the two used night after night. . . . Miss Akitsu's linen pajamas have the soft scent of magnolias . . . . . and unnoticed that scent of the magnolia flower was transferred to the flannel sleeves of Akiko's own sleepwear . . . . . so like a magnolia to slip its fragrance into the bedroom during the night . . . . . their arms were resting as if entwined . . . . . the hearts in each of their breasts softly ticking . . . . . as if their two souls had disappeared into a tender dream without beginning and without end . . . . . a soft, pliant kiss . . . . . a kiss like trembling and melting into a damp, red petal . . . . . softly, tenderly flowing, sinking and surfacing, disappearing and melting into the replete then ebbing undulation . . . . . (qtd. in Frederick 74)<sup>2</sup>

While some might suggest that this particular love scene is innocent and pure, Nobuko's love scene subverts the traditional notion of purity in that her young feminine girl characters engage

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<sup>1</sup> Nobuko is not the first to write stories incorporating eroticism in Japan. Other writers, such as Ihara Saikaku, also wrote stories incorporating homosexuality and homoeroticism. However, these works were aimed towards a heterosexual/homosexual male audience and were not intended for a heterosexual/homosexual female audience.

<sup>2</sup> All ellipses in the quotation are as written in Frederick's article.

in erotic pleasures. (Frederick 75). Purity is traditionally thought of as a lack of sexual experience and erotic desire and is commonly associated with youth and femininity. Nobuko does not deny her young feminine characters' erotic pleasures or sexual experiences; rather, she denies the masculine gaze upon a woman's body that so easily imposes the traditional perception of purity and femininity on a woman's physique.

In addition to Nobuko's same-sex romantic literature, Japanese society saw the proliferation of the Class "S" (*kurasu esu*) relationship among adolescent girls. While the "S" was usually considered an abbreviation of the English kinship term sister, the "S" possibly also stood for *shōjo*, sex, or all three (Robertson, "Politics" 427). The "S" relationship was also known in Japanese culture as *dōseiai* (same-sex love), and it was defined, according to Jennifer Robertson, as a "passionate but supposedly platonic friendship. The *dōseiai* relationship was regarded as typical among girls and women from all walks of life, but especially among girls' school students and graduates, female educators, female civil servants, and thespians" (Robertson, "Politics" 427). Western missionary schools were rumored to be the grounds where many of these relationships flourished (Dollase 744). These schools saw these relationships as a way to train young girls for their prospective husbands (Frederick 68). Not surprisingly, one can find this form of relationship with the same academic setting in many of the modern Yuri animations and mangas, such as *Maria-sama Ga Miteru* (*Maria Watches Over Us*), *Simoun*, and *Blue Drop*.

In contrast to the *dōseiai* relationship that was encouraged, the *ome* relationship, consisting of a "butch" and "femme" couple, was highly discouraged, as it was considered psychologically abnormal and the ill product of westernization. Robertson elaborates upon the negative stigma associated with the *ome* relationship:

*Ome* (“butch-femme”) relationships, however, seemed to stymie the sexologists and worry the social critics of the day, since unmarried women (that is, *shōjo*) in particular were stereotypically regarded as blissfully unaware of sexual desire and since females in general were certainly not supposed to play an active role in sex. ‘Moral depravity’ fostered by modernization (westernization) seemed to be the only viable “explanation” for *ome* relationships among urban women, at least until the appearance of the Takarazuka *otokoyaku* prompted critics to come up with new ideas to account for the increasingly visible masculinized female (428).

Although the *ome* relationship was considered an abnormality at best, like the *dōseiai*, the *ome* relationship also served as a model for modern Yuri animation and manga, such as *Strawberry Panic* and *Ice*.

Undeniably, the Takarazuka Revue (an all-female theater troupe) also gave further incentive for young girls to explore their sexuality with other young girls. The Takarazuka Revue was established by Kobayashi Ichizō (1873-1957) in 1914 in order to ease his financial burdens (Robertson, *Takarazuka* 4). Currently, the Revue owns two theaters in Japan, one in Takarazuka and one in Tokyo, and tours regionally and internationally (Robertson, “Theatrical Resistance” 167). The actors of the Revue are referred to as Takarasiennes (*Takarajiennu*) similar to the Parisiennes of the French revue. The actors are further categorized by which sex they perform on stage—*otokoyaku* (actors specializing in men’s roles) and *musumeyaku* (actors specializing in women’s roles) (Robertson, *Takarazuka* 5). The actors, according to Jennifer Robertson in her article “The Politics of Androgyny in Japan: Sexuality and Subversion in the Theater and Beyond,” are designated by their specialization once they have been accepted by the Takarazuka Music Academy:

Upon their successful application to the Takarazuka Music Academy, founded in 1919 as a part of the Revue complex, the student actors are assigned (what I call) their “secondary” genders. Unlike “primary” gender, which is assigned at birth on the basis of an infant’s genitalia, secondary gender is based on both physical (but not genital) and sociopsychological criteria: height, physique, facial shape, voice, personality, and, to a certain extent, person preference. Secondary gender attributes or markers are premised on contrastive gender stereotypes themselves; for example, men are supposed to be taller than women; to have a more rectangular face, thicker eyebrows, a higher-bridged nose, darker skin, straighter shoulders, narrower hips, and a lower voice than women; and to exude charisma (*kosei*), which is disparaged in women. (422)

Once the actors have been assigned a specialization, the actors are then trained to “model” themselves in accordance to the gender, defined by stereotypical perceptions of gender, to which they have been assigned. As a result, as Robertson concludes, the “*musmeyaku* and *otokoyaku* are the products of a masculinist imagination in their official stage roles” (“Politics” 423).

While the explicit purpose of the Takarazuka Revue was to further perpetuate and maintain heteronormativity, women who gazed upon the elegant *otokoyaku* and *musmeyaku* interpreted the Revue quite differently. The *otokoyaku* and *musmeyaku* were representatives of the *ome* relationship—the same sex relationship that was abhorred by those upholding the heterosexual norm. In addition, the *otokoyaku* and *musmeyaku* became symbols of a hidden lesbian subculture within Japan not only on stage, but off-stage (Robertson, “Theatrical Resistance” 169). Many of the revue actors began to have relationships, which were often publicized in newspapers and magazines (Robertson, “Theatrical Resistance” 172). Thus, the

Takarazuka Revue became a site of resistance, subverting “conventional and oppressive gender roles” (Robertson, “Theatrical Resistance” 171).

Although the Takarazuka has been able to maintain its theatrical performances quite successfully throughout the twentieth century, Nobuko’s concept of the original shōjo did not. Because the creation of manga was an occupation normally reserved for men, the shōjo genre soon switched hands from women writers to men writers in the 1930s and 1940s (Toku 22-23). Although the shōjo remained hyper-feminine in form and content, the shōjo ceased to explore same-sex romances. Nevertheless, without male manga artists, such as Tezuka Osamu, Chiba Tetsuya, Ishinomori Shōtarō, and Matsumoto Leiji, the concept of the shōjo might have ceased, hence never inspiring its readers to dream of writing their own shōjo manga (Toku 22). When women finally became the majority in the realm of creating shōjo manga, the concept of the shōjo was once again revolutionized to explore sexuality not only through the bodies of women, but also of men.

Called the Golden Era of Shōjo Manga, the 1970s was not only an era of sexual revolution in the West, but also in Japan (Toku 25). The theme of sexuality resurfaced in the writings of manga artists. Although the original concept of the shōjo produced by writers like Yoshiya Nobuko in the early twentieth century explicitly explored the theme of sexuality, it only explored the theme within an adolescent body which had yet experienced marriage and which had yet experienced adulthood (Ogi, “Blending” 244). In other words, shōjo manga did not explore adult themes or heterosexual themes in the narrative. Thus, three sub-genres of Shōjo appeared: Ladies’ manga (comics meant to represent the lived experiences of adult women), Boys’ Love or Yaoi (*shōnen-ai*) manga (comics meant to explore heterosexual/homosexual experiences within the men-loving-men sphere), and finally, Girls’ Love or Yuri (*shōjo-ai*)

manga (comics meant to explore homosexual experiences within the women-loving-women sphere).

The Ladies Comics' genre is predominantly based upon demographics rather than a particular trope. Ladies Comics' are typically aimed for an adult heterosexual female audience. The majority of these narratives explore mature themes, such as domestic violence and prostitution, in order to provide the audience with a more realistic perspective on the lives of women (Ito 116; Ogi, "Female Subjectivity" 787). However, it is important to note, that one might find Yuri narratives aimed for a ladies' manga and Yaoi narratives aimed for a ladies' manga. In such a case, one might see a same-sex relationship narrative, such as the manga *Pietá*. Yuri and/or Yaoi mangas found in this demographic clearly illustrate that the sub-genres are not as concrete as one might speculate. Their borders tend to blur with one another in particular mangas and animations. For example, certain earlier works, such as *The Rose of Versailles*, are exalted as being influential to the Yuri movement and Yaoi movement.

Although Ladies' Comics are indeed significant in regards to shōjo culture and have been influential in the proliferation of the Yuri narrative, it is apparent that this merging of the two did not start until much later in the mid-1980s. Therefore, the remainder of the chapter will focus on the importance of the Boys' Love movement in regards to the Yuri movement.

Boys' Love, as defined by James Welker in his article "Beautiful, Borrowed, and Bent: 'Boys' Love' as Girls' Love in Shōjo Manga," is a "subgenre of *shōjo* manga (girls' comics)" that depicts "androgynous beautiful boys who love other beautiful boys rather than girl characters. Early boys' love narratives are generally set beyond Japan, in the borrowed psychic space of romanticized Europe of the past, thus visually and narratively transporting shōjo readers to a world they can only fantasize about inhabiting" (841-42). The sub-genre later influenced another

sub-genre YAOI (*Yama Nashi*, *Ochinashi*, and *Iminashi*--without climax, without ending, and without meaning) and the two are sometimes equated as one and the same (Ogi, “Beyond Shoujo” 246). However, in the article, “Underage Sex and Romance in Japanese Homoerotic Manga and Anime,” Aleardo Zanghellini discusses the distinction between the two:

“Yaoi” and “BL” are sometimes used interchangeably by western audiences to designate a single genre, but a distinction can be drawn, among other things, on the basis that the former tends to be more sexually explicit. Take together, yaoi and BL cover not only man-man, but also boy-boy, and man-boy love. (160)

Nevertheless, both are synonymous in regards to their target audience and purpose—to function as a channel for heterosexual girls to explore heterosexuality. However, some scholars have argued that Yaoi also allows exploration of other sexualities and genders besides the traditional concept of gender and sexuality. Fusami Ogi states that Yaoi “provides *shoujo* with a tool to see their own sexuality” due to the narrative’s possessing “multiple views of gender” that “makes it possible to present social and political issues in relation to gender” (246). James Welker concurs with Ogi’s assertion:

Regardless of whether boys’ love manga were created merely to offer heterosexual readers a temporary respite from patriarchal restrictions on their desire, some readers found in identifying with the beautiful boy a way through the looking glass to a world outside of patriarchy. And regardless of whether he is read as a boy or a girl, the beautiful boy can be read as a lesbian. Like the lesbian, the beautiful boy is a “narrative outlaw” . . . inviting, indeed seducing, readers to violate patriarchal law with regard to love, gender, sex, and sexuality. For readers, whose experience of sexuality and gender contravenes heteronormativity, works

like *Song* and *Thomas* offer narrative safe havens where they can experiment with identity, find affirmation, and develop the strength necessary to find others like themselves and a sense of belonging. (865-66)

Indeed, there seems to be some evidence to suggest that girls did and do utilize boy love narratives to explore and liberate their own homosexual desires (Welker, “Telling” 130). However, regardless of whether the beautiful boy can be read as a boy or girl, the beautiful boy is anatomically male. Although some spectators were able to fulfill their need to explore alternatives to the heteronormative paradigm through viewing boys’ love manga, others could not find the association. Nevertheless, the creation of boys’ love manga was critical to the Yuri movement in that it restored the original intent of the shōjo—to explore sexuality. In addition, it also served as a guide, because in fact, some of the manga artists who created boys’ love manga also created girls’ love manga during this period, one being Riyoko Yamagishi. Indeed, Nobuko’s shōjo re-emerged in Riyoko Yamagishi’s *Shiroi Heya no Futari (Our White Room)* and Riyoko Ikeda’s *Berusaiyu no Bara (The Rose of Versailles)*. Consequently, the conceptualization of the modern Yuri shōjo-ai girl commenced.

Although Yamagishi’s manga *Our White Room* was the first to illustrate romantic love affairs between women, *Our White Room* has received very little acclaim or attention in the academic circle or in the anime community. Yamagishi is usually discussed in terms of her influence in creating boys’ love manga, while her re-introduction of same sex exploration between young girls is overlooked at best. Such an oversight on the parts of academic scholars is one that produces some negative consequences in that it further perpetuates the marginalization of the voices found within the Yuri sub-genre. Indeed, Yamagishi’s manga is extremely important because her manga set the precedent for the Yuri mangas and animations. Therefore,

since one cannot be all too sure if *Our White Room* will ever be explored in depth, a brief literary analysis seems appropriate in hopes of piquing further interest.

Created in 1971, *Our White Room* explores the love affair between two girls, Simone and Resine, in an all-girl boarding school. As with the case of most of Nobuko's work and Yuri manga later in the 1980's and 1990's, the setting introduces a western motif. The school is governed by the Roman Catholic church. The students' daily routine consists of an Etiquette class and a Physical Education class that normally consists of playing tennis. When the students finally have time to relax in their dorm rooms, they lounge on European furniture.

Although the two characters are of the same-sex, the characters' personalities are radically different. Resine De Poisson, a girl who lost her mother in a car crash, has decided to attend the same boarding school her deceased mother did in order to escape the custody of her aunt, who seems to cherish her only as a domestic servant. Aesthetically, Resine's hair (light in color) cascades to her shoulders and she is always clad in Victorian garments. Simone refers to Resine as "princess" on numerous occasions in the story, and Simone suggests that Resine is the "type that won't do things that'll make" her "look bad" (Yamagishi 22).

In contrast, Simone embodies "the bad girl," or what Judith Halberstam in her book *Female Masculinities* would call the "masculine" woman (186). Simone repeatedly skips class, smokes cigarettes, and sneaks out on risqué adventures, such as dating men and/or acting in a troupe (one can only guess a female acting troupe). Other students at the school refer to her as a "player" (Yamagishi 33). Not surprisingly, Simone's hair is dark, without Resine's waves or volume, and Simone is constantly featured wearing modern slacks and a button-up shirt or sweater. James Welker has speculated that the disparity between the physical characteristics of the protagonist and antagonist in many BL mangas is to illustrate a connection, or lack thereof,

with reality. Welker states that the characters “can be broadly cast in black and white” with “black being the more masculine black-haired boy who is grounded in reality” and white being the more “feminine boy who is separated from reality” (Welker, “Beautiful” 852-853). Although Welker is specifically discussing the black/white dynamic in terms of the beautiful boys in BL mangas, one can also apply Welker’s interpretation to Simone and Resine; yet, one could argue that Simone is not as grounded as Welker’s interpretation suggests. Simone possesses demons of her own, such as her resentment towards her own mother for her lack of concern about her behavior and her promiscuity with all sexes.

The reality, however, lies in Simone’s devotion to Resine. When the students spot Resine and Simone kissing by the fountain and begin to gossip about the passionate kiss, Simone ignores her own feelings and offers to help Resine find a boyfriend in order to save her from humiliation (Yamagishi 61). When the traumatized Resine informs a disaffected Simone of the whirling gossip, Resine stresses to Simone that their relationship is “not like that” (Yamagishi 59). Simone responds to Resine’s comment by stating, “I do not like to tell lies” (Yamagishi 60). Clearly, Simone has accepted the stigmatization of being called a lesbian or at least she is willing to accept it so long as Resine is by her side.

Ultimately, the story ends on a sad note. When Resine decides that “she cannot become like” Simone (Yamagishi 71), Simone decides to drown her sorrow in a local bar. There, her current male lover realizes that Simone is in love with another; however, he is unaware that her love is for Resine. Out of rage and anger, her male courtier stabs her in the heart and kills her (Yamagishi 75-80). Curiously enough, Simone wrote a love poem to Resine as though she foresaw her tragic end, which was forwarded to Resine: “Once I have known her I/must die/ For

that shining smile/that is so difficult to/describe, I must die/For these light, delicate/ hands, I must die/ For her I must. . .” (Yamagishi 81).

Clearly Simone’s character and her final words illustrate the “tomboy” motif, the precursor, according to Judith Halberstam, of the “butch” character roles in film. In the book, *Female Masculinities*, Judith Halberstam defines the “tomboy” as an “extended childhood period of female masculinity” that “tends to be associated with a ‘natural’ desire for the greater freedoms and mobilities enjoyed by boys” (5-6). However, the “tomboy” is punished “when it threatens to extend beyond childhood and into adolescence” (6). For Simone, the consequence of her decision to love a woman and to adopt masculine characteristics—commonly acknowledged as the most threatening to heteronormativity—was death. Thus, while *Our White Room* does portray positive characteristics of the women-loving-women relationship, it is still situated within a border regularly policed by heteronormativity.

Like Simone in *Our White Room*, Oscar in *Berusaiyu no Bara (The Rose of Versailles)* suffered the same fate. Written by Ikeda Riyoko in 1972 for publication in the shōjo magazine *Margaret* and later published as a ten-volume manga series, *The Rose of Versailles* is most notably known for the gender bending Oscar, an anatomical female woman living his life as a man. In the article “Androgyny and Otherness: Exploring the West Through the Japanese Performative Body,” Erica Abbit eloquently summarizes the narrative:

*The Rose of Versailles*, set in eighteenth-century France, centers on a dashing palace guard named Oscar who is actually a young woman. Disguising her femaleness in an Ariake-type uniform with a voluminous cape, Oscar, guards the relentlessly foolish Marie Antoinette, falls in love with a peasant comrade-in-

arms, goes over to the revolutionary side, and sacrifices her life at the storming of the Bastille. (251)

The *Rose of Versailles* manga was further adapted as a film and television series and numerous websites are devoted to the narrative in several different languages other than Japanese and English, such as Italian, German, and Chinese. *The Rose of Versailles* has been studied, albeit restrictively, in relation to Shōjo manga, Boys' Love manga, and most notably in relation to the Takarazuka Revue (adapted for the Revue in the 1970s) (Robertson, "Politics" 430). It is also important to note that *The Rose of Versailles*, besides the Takarazuka, was the first manga to illustrate the "*dansō no reijin*"—a beautiful person (female) in masculine dress. Coined from the short story "Dansō no reijin," written by Muramatsu Shōfu, the androgynous beauty of the *dansō no reijin* has become synonymous with many of the modern Yuri mangas and animations, such as *Strawberry Panic* and *Aoi Hana (Sweet Blue Flowers)*. In addition, Riyoko Ikeda continued to develop the gender-bending "*dansō no reijin*" in other mangas, such as *Oniisama e... (Brother, Dear Brother)*.

In addition to *Our White Room* and *The Rose of Versailles*, the 1976 publication of the gay magazine *Barazoku (Rose Tribe)* not only signifies the presence of a community of lesbian readers, but also signifies where, according to James Welker in his article "Beautiful, Borrowed, and Bent: 'Boys' Love' as Girls' Love in Shōjo Manga," the term *Yuri* (Lily) came to be a marker of women who loved women:

At what point the transgressive meanings of roses and the lily were broadly available across the community of boys' love fans remains obscure, but their use in both narratives cannot but be intentional. To be sure, the rose's symbolic value was reinforced with the 1971 publication of the gay magazine *Barazoku*. "Lily

Tribe's Room" (*Yurizoku no heya*), a column of *Barazoku* beginning in 1976 that printed correspondence from women readers, attests to the presence of a female readership of the magazine and to the magazine's role in popularizing the lily as a symbol for the female-desiring-female. (864)

In addition, not only has the term *Yuri* become the label to classify animation and manga that explore the desires between women, but the lily itself has also become a marker and is now being illustrated within certain visual frames of the manga or animation. For Yaoi manga and/or animation it is the rose that is so aptly used to express love and desire.

After the 1970s, a proliferation of Japanese animation and manga began to be published. However, since the writers of Japanese animations and mangas did not explicitly mark the animation to stress its same-sex romanticism—the term *Yuri* was not applied until the 1990s—it is difficult to locate mangas and animations with a women-loving-women theme. Furthermore, *hentai* (pornography) *dōjinshi* (self-published or amateur) artists started to exploit these same-sex love affairs to titillate a male dominated audience (Freidman, "Email Interview" 2008). Even currently, one can find these works for sale at Japanese animation and manga conventions, such as the Animazement Convention in Raleigh, North Carolina, where one could find a stand selling a manga further exploring the relationships of the characters in the visual novel and animation *Yami to Bōshi to Hon no Tabibito*. As a result, *Yuri* animation and manga have been naively typified, in the past and in the present, as *hentai* pornographic material. Nevertheless, with the advent of the internet, the West's craving for Japanese animation and manga has steadily increased and by the 1990s the *Yuri* phenomena had officially crossed over to the West.

Western audiences were not novices in Japanese animation and manga before the 1980s. During the 1960s, animations such as *Speed Racer* and *Astro Boy* were aired on U.S. television

screens (Price 160). However, these animations, like many others, were appropriated for a Western audience. Culture-specific terminology such as names and food items were substituted with Western names and Western food products. Similarly, religious/mythological terms and/or expressions were erased through clever dubbing or subtitling techniques (Price 161). Out of curiosity, viewers began to realize that the previous animations had become the product of Western exploitation. As a result, fans began to search other avenues to find the original Japanese media. In the book *From Impressionism to Anime*, Susan Napier describes the attempts made by first wave anime enthusiasts to locate such animations:

By this point (in the late 1970s), private individuals were beginning to use VCRs. Anime began to establish a limited beachhead at science-fiction conventions, the usual scenario being that some would put a sign up on the notice board announcing “Japanese cartoons” in their hotel rooms. The cartoons would often have been recorded on a third or fourth generation videotape and usually would not provide much in the way of translation. If the viewers were lucky, there might be someone there who had learned a bit of Japanese, perhaps in the army, or who had received some basic plot description from a Japanese pen pal. Undoubtedly, however, part of the fun was in the incomplete understanding and the enjoyment of the pure visual pleasure of the anime. (134)

In addition, groups actively copied and exchanged tapes, usually for the cost of blank tape, at conventions and conferences (Napier 135). Later, a second wave of enthusiasts, “foreign exchange students and military personnel,” began to bring other animations back to the West (Price 161-162).

However, it was not until the 1990s that the West saw rapid growth in the manga and animation market and, ultimately, the awareness of Yuri animations. This can primarily be attributed to the expanding World Wide Web and to the birth of Cable and DSL in the mid 90s. In the article, “Cartoons from Another Planet,” Shinobu Price discusses how the Internet aided in exposing the West to anime. She notes that “thousands of websites are currently devoted to anything from video distributor catalogs to cute short-lived anime characters” (161). Consequently, rare animations became easily accessible via the Internet. In fact, according to Price, the art form “basically owes much of its popularity in the U.S. to ‘illegal’ transactions such as bootlegging, pirating, and unauthorized distribution” (161).

Currently, one can easily download episodes through Peer-to-Peer or Torrent networks, and most suppliers of these episodes are members of fan sub groups. These communities consist of fans that are relatively fluent in Japanese, who spend most of their spare moments translating recently televised animations from Japan (Price 163). However, fan sub translations are not without fault. Since most fan subs are comprised of novice or intermediate Japanese speakers, translation errors occur regularly—most noticeably grammatical and punctuation errors. Yet, perhaps the most problematic issue with fan sub translations, according to Laurie Cubbison in her article “Anime Fans, DVDs, and the Authentic Text,” is its violation of copyright laws:

In the early days fan subbers worked with materials that were unlikely to see commercial distribution outside of Japan. As the audience increased, so did the commercial viability of anime. Fan subs came to be seen not only as violations of intellectual property laws but also as depriving Japanese producers of the money needed to support continued production. Thus, the fan sub came to be seen as a form of the work that threatened the continued viability of anime texts. (48)

In order to prevent fan subs from distributing material, many Japanese distributors and producers are including a marquee at the bottom of the animation urging individuals not to distribute the material on the internet. Out of protest, many fan subs are now including a marquee of their own suggesting that until the animation has been released to the U.S., communities will continue to translate animations and release them for download.

In addition to fan sub groups, other fan communities, such as Yuricon's forum on Yahoo Groups and Shoujoai.org, were established to promote and support Yuri media. Members of these groups are highly diverse: representing all continents on the globe, representing multiple genders, and representing multiple sexualities. Although earlier Yuri writings were predominantly aimed towards a female audience and generally still are, one can currently find Yuri narratives crossing into other demographics besides *shōjo*, such as *shōnen* (a young male) and *seinen* (a young adult male). It is still in debate, especially in forums, about whether the characteristics of Yuri narratives change when crossing into different demographics. Some have suggested that Yuri narratives aimed towards a *shōnen* or *seinen* demographic are highly sensationalized in plots and characters. However, one could argue that regardless of demographic, all Yuri narratives are sensationalized in one way or another. In addition, demographic categories are not clear indexes to the general makeup of who watches or reads the animations or mangas. Although there is no statistical information available on the proportion of women and men watching Yuri animation in Japan, it can be said that the Yuri animations and mangas marketed for a male demographic has not stopped Western women from watching or reading them.

Therefore, in most online forums, such as Yuricon's Yahoo Group forum, one can find men and women conversing, theorizing, and debating about the latest Yuri animation. While

some may feel that male gazers negate the purpose of Yuri animations and manga—to resist heteronormativity—one should also be reminded that men are also constrained by traditional gender roles and also search for an outlet to explore sexuality beyond what is considered socially “acceptable.”

Another avenue that introduced anime fans to Yuri animation and manga was television. The pivotal shōjo animation *Bishōjo Senshi Sērā Mū (Sailor Moon)*, which contained a same-sex love affair between Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune, was aired on U.S. television in the mid 1990s. Last, but not least, the manga and animation *Shōjo Kakumei Utena (Revolutionary Girl Utena)*, inspired by *The Rose of Versailles*, was later released in the late 1990s to the U.S.

A final possible avenue where anime fans might have learned about the genre was through Erica Freidman and her organization, Yuricon. Erica Freidman, a Yuri advocate, founded the Yuricon organization near the turn of the millennium. The organization not only offers historical background about the sub-genre and lists of Yuri animations, but also publishes Yuri short stories originating from Japanese and Western manga artists and displays at various anime conventions in the U.S. Erica Freidman is also an avid literary and cinema critic who evaluates recently released and/or published Yuri media on her blog, *Okazu*.

To capitalize on the recent popularity of Yuri manga and animation, distributors have now started to release Yuri animation and manga to the U.S. However, besides the animation *Sailor Moon* and *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, Yuri animations with an intense queer narrative have yet to be aired on U.S. television, perhaps because of controversial imagery and narrative. Nevertheless, while Yuri animation and manga can now easily be purchased through websites, such as Amazon, the market for Yuri is still small in comparison to Yuri’s male counterpart, Yaoi animation.

With the continued expansion of mass communication across the globe, Yuri animation and manga will continue to entice its viewers to learn the “secret” behind the veil. One could offer an alternative definition of “secret” that seems more fitting to Nobuko’s “Hikage no Hana.” Secret, as defined by *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online*, aside from being “something kept hidden or unexplained, something kept from the knowledge of others or shared confidentially with a few,” can also be interpreted as “something taken to be a specific key to a desired end.” Perhaps it is not necessarily something unknowable to others that Nobuko articulates in her story in *Hananmonogatari*; rather, it is the aspiration for the world to finally liberate itself from the oppressive gender roles that have marginalized love in so many different contexts.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE QUEERING OF YURI JAPANESE ANIMATION:

#### *KASHIMASHI: GIRL MEETS GIRL AND SWEET BLUE FLOWERS*

Your feelings aren't something you can just turn off at will.

- Akira Okudaira, also known as Achan, in *Sweet Blue Flowers*

Eve Sedgwick, in her book *Tendencies* (1993), defines the term “queer” as “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t be* made) to signify monolithically” (8). Sedgwick’s definition articulates and illustrates the complex and complicated nature of gender and sexuality. In opposition to the traditional notions of gender and sexuality, Sedgwick’s notion asserts that gender and sexuality are rarely fixed and uniform. They can vary throughout one’s life, and they do not necessarily complement one another.

Looking at the “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances, resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning” in two recent Yuri animations, *Kashimashi: Girl Meets Girl* and *Sweet Blue Flowers (Aoi Hana)*, this chapter identifies queer characters in them and discusses how such “gaps and overlaps” allow the characters to perform diverse gender possibilities, which, as Judith Butler consistently argues in many of her works, “subvert dominant gender norms in the hope of destabilizing and displacing these regimes” (Jagger 34).

The animation *Kashimashi: Girl Meets Girl*, directed by Nobuaki Nakanishi, explores the perceptions and experiences of the characters in regards to gender identity (which gender one identifies with), gender performance (which gender one performs), and sexual orientation (which

gender one may be attracted to). Originating from the manga by Satoru Akahori, the anime aired on Japanese television in 2006. The series ended with 12 episodes; however, an OVA (original video animation) was later released to the public and is considered the 13<sup>th</sup> episode. Later, Seven Seas Entertainment released the series in 2007 to the United States and ultimately released a box set in 2008. Although all of the characters have their own personal experiences in regards to the “dissonances and resonances” of gender and gender performance, this chapter focuses on the “resonances and dissonances” of identity and performance in the main character, Hazumu, and three secondary characters, Asuta, Tomari, and Yasuna.

Hazumu, a teenage boy, is perceived by many to be effeminate. He is slender in girth and short in height and his red hair always casually drapes below his eyes. His passion in life is gardening, and other hobbies, such as viewing pornographic magazines like his friend Asuta, do not interest him. He speaks softly with a high pitched voice and is highly bashful. As a result, his classmates taunt him. His closest friends repeatedly remind him of his lack of manliness and indeed, define the boundary of manliness by making such comments as: “Stop whining, Hazumu! You’re a man right? Be confident!” Despite his friends’ demeaning opinions of his manners, Hazumu makes no attempt to conform. When Yasuna remarks to him that he looks like a girl, Hazumu responds, “People usually say the same thing. They say I look like a girl. So don’t worry about it.” While one may perceive Hazumu’s comment as defeat or apathy, Hazumu regrets his performance only when Yasuna rejects his proposal to be his girlfriend.

Aesthetically, Hazumu presents himself as male. Besides wearing the typical school uniform, Hazumu dresses in men’s clothing. However, his clothing is always in the color of neutral green, beige, or brown and undoubtedly reflecting the duality of his character. The length

of his hair also reflects the duality of his character as a result of the spectators being unable to glimpse his eyes. Hazumu denies the spectator access to view his soul or inner self.

Hazumu's character illustrates the conflict that can arise when one is not following the heterosexual norms of society. Yet, what is it exactly that creates conflict for Hazumu? Utilizing Judith Butler's three contingencies of significant corporeality as discussed in her book *Gender Trouble*, one can see that the discord originates from the dissonance of sex, gender, and performance:

The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance. (187)

Anatomically, Hazuma is a man and identifies as male. He does not signify to the spectator that he identifies as female since he does not express any desire to be one. However, his gestures, his actions, and his mannerisms allude to femininity, and it is these articulations or his gender performance that creates the dissonance. As a result, Hazumu is constantly in a state of a drag performance and is constantly in a state of mocking "both the expressive modal of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" (Butler 186). Although his friends attempt to empathize with him, Hazumu's attempt to subvert heteronormativity is perceived as an explicit threat: a threat that their heterosexual realm will be fatally displaced.

Indeed, his friends' heterosexual realms rapidly shift into uncharted territories when Hazumu radically transforms into a woman. While hiking the local Kashima Mountain, Hazuma is accidentally struck by an extra-terrestrial ship that appears in the sky. Although the extra-terrestrial saves Hazumu, Hazumu loses his Y chromosome and transforms into a woman. When Hazumu descends from the ship, two women, Tomari and Yasuna, catch him when he falls. Both are in love with Hazumu and the narrative ultimately focuses on the love triangle between the three characters.

As with many individuals who transition from one anatomical sex to the other, Hazumu's transition includes learning how to "perform" the female gender. Ironically, her sole instructor is no other than the masculine Tomari. Tomari candidly instructs and reprimands Hazumu when an error is made. Most notably, Tomari's instructions come in the form of bluntly yelling comments in Hazumu's face: "Girls don't do things like that!" Although Hazumu's adjustment reminds one of a rigorous boot-camp, Tomari's caustic instructions are unable to sway Hazumu's perception of herself. She says to Tomari, "I'm still me, even though I look different." Ayuki, another friend of Hazumu's, also notices the same perception and says to the confused and frustrated Tomari, "But Hazumu doesn't seem to mind at all whether he is a boy or a girl." For spectators who are transitioning from man to woman or from woman to man, and for individuals who do not fit in the heteronormative model, this moment of the narrative is an empowering one because it offers a different perspective of the transgender body and mind—maybe the individuals who dwell in the "in-between" prefer to dwell in the "in-between." In the book *Female Masculinities*, Judith Halberstam discusses this alternative perspective and space:

It is true that many transsexuals do transition to go somewhere, to be somewhere, and to leave geographies of ambiguity behind. However, many post-op MTFS

[Male to Female] are inbetween because they cannot pass as women; many FTMS [Female to Male] who pass fully clothed have bodies that are totally ambiguous; some transsexuals cannot afford all the surgeries necessary to full sex reassignment (if there is such a thing), and these people make their home where they are; some transsexual folks do not define their transsexuality in relation to a strong desire for penises or vaginas, and they may experience the desire to be trans or queer more strongly than the desire to be male or female. (163-164)

As Hazumu's transformation is broadcast on television and documented in newspapers, everyone is aware of Hazumu's transition, and ultimately Hazumu will never be able to truly pass as a woman. As Foucault would suggest, Hazumu's body has become "inscribed" with the "events" (qtd. in Butler 176), and Hazumu will be forever reminded through her own body and through documentation of the transformation that her body will never be able to conform to the traditional notions of gender. In other words, Hazumu will have to "live with the inherent instability of identity" (Halberstam 164).

Yet it seems that Hazumu has no desire to be identified based upon the traditional notions of gender. Hazumu's and Ayuki's comments suggest that Hazumu has no qualms in residing in the "in-between." Rather, Hazumu would like to be viewed as an individual who has hopes, dreams, and desires like any other person even though the individual may violate traditional gender roles. Hazumu affirms to those residing in ambiguous territory that it is perfectly acceptable to reside and to thrive in such spaces.

In addition to articulating a different perspective in regards to ambiguous spaces, Hazumu's character also suggests another alternative perspective: sexual orientation is distinct from anatomical sex and gender. Although Hazumu transforms from an anatomical man to an

anatomical woman, Hazumu's desire for the feminine Yasuna and the masculine Tomari remains the same. Hazumu confesses her love for both of the women and passionately kisses them. Thus, Hazumu's unchanging sexual orientation illustrates that anatomical sex, gender, and gender performance are not always determining factors of one's sexual orientation.

Nevertheless, Hazumu's friends remain vigilant in interrogating her sexual orientation. Some of Hazumu's friends, such as his friend Asuta, assume Hazumu's sexual orientation will soon change and wait for the change to occur. For Asuta, Hazumu's transformation might provide the chance to finally have a female companion. Initially he finds his best friend's transformation confusing. However, he soon rationalizes his confusing interactions with Hazumu and begins to imagine the possibility of their friendship blossoming into a love affair. In one such instance of extreme rationalization, Asuta mistakes Hazumu's asking about his current romantic interests as a sign that Hazumu romantically likes him: "Wait, think calmly! If he's asking me if I like someone right now then that probably means what I think it is. What should I do? I shouldn't be getting confused! So cute with a nice body . . . this is my chance!" Such an assumption clearly marks a need and desire among Hazumu's friends to find a way to make Hazumu fit into the heteronormative structure in more ways than one.

Like Asuta, Tomari also struggles with Hazumu's transformation, but not because Hazumu does not necessarily fit into the heteronormative system. Rather, Tomari struggles because now she does not fit into the heteronormative system. Tomari secretly admired Hazumu when Hazumu was an anatomical man. Once Hazumu transforms, Tomari immediately finds the transformation conflicting with her notions of sexuality. During several scenes, Tomari reflects upon this discord and in one such instance says to herself, "He just looks different. . . Like a woman. . ." Likewise, when her daydreams affirm that Hazumu will start to become attracted to

men, she fearfully screams. Although she was quite aware of Hazumu's subversive acts as a man, Hazumu's transformation implicates her love for Hazumu as deviant. Her feelings for Hazumu as an anatomical man fit the protocol of heterosexuality even if his performance suggested otherwise. Now, her feelings deviate from heterosexual norms, and it is the deviation and the fear of retribution that makes her uncomfortable with Hazumu's transformation.

Ultimately, Tomari resolves her feelings when she reflects upon her past memories of Hazumu and why she loves Hazumu. She realizes that it does not matter whether Hazumu is man or woman; rather, it is other characteristics, such as intelligence, charisma, compassion, etc., that defines why she loves her. This leads her to compete for Hazumu's love with Yasuna and leads her to accepting the fact that she might also become a part of the ridicule and hate resulting from their challenge of the heteronormative paradigm.

Nevertheless, the forthright and boisterous Tomari does not perform her gender right either. Like Simone in *Our White Room*, Tomari also reflects the "tomboy" motif that Judith Halberstam explores. Tomari always wears her hair in pigtails as though it is simply an annoying and aggravating anomaly. She excels in activities that require physical strength and dexterity, such as sprinting and fighting. Her attitude is characteristic of what a man should be like, in accordance to norms, and she even states to Hazumu, "I always act like a guy anyway!" Therefore, like Hazumu, Tomari is also always in a state of performing drag as well and ultimately resisting the heteronormative system.

Perhaps the character who does "perform her gender right" is Yasuna. Yasuna, the other prominent woman in Hazumu's life, embodies characteristics most typically ascribed to the female gender, such as being soft-spoken and being passive and modest when in a group or

confronted by a group. She excels in fine arts subjects, such as playing the flute and drawing, and also has advanced culinary skills.

In addition to such characteristics, Yasuna's character also embodies the stereotypical characteristic that women-loving-women are mentally or physically deficit. Yasuna possesses a health condition (or to others a defect): she cannot see men! Yasuna can only make out the silhouette of anatomical men and thus finds conversing with anatomical men challenging and distressing. Since Yasuna refuses to reveal her condition to others, she ultimately decides to live alone and to avoid contact with individuals as much as possible.

Fortunately for Yasuna, she is able to see more than just a shadow of one particular anatomical man—Hazumu. While Yasuna is not able to completely cognitively process all the nuances of Hazumu, she is able to see Hazumu more clearly than any other anatomical man. Yasuna states to Hazumu that the first moment she realized she was able to see Hazumu, it was “revolutionary” and that it signified that her “whole world was about to change.” Nonetheless, as a result of past experiences with anatomical men, Yasuna rejects Hazumu's offer to date. When questioned by Hazumu, Yasuna states that she was “afraid” that Hazumu would “eventually become invisible,” like her father. However, once Hazumu transforms into an anatomical woman, Yasuna immediately begins to pursue Hazumu because Hazumu is now a “girl who will never disappear” from her “sight.”

Although the medical community today has renounced views that articulate alternative sexualities as abnormal, the notion is still quite prevalent. While cures have varied throughout time, today the cure for such “deviant” behavior requires the procurement of the “right man.” It is safe to assume that the man cannot be just any “man,” but a “masculine man.” Indeed, Yasuna finds the right anatomical man. However, what made the anatomical man visible in Yasuna's

eyes is not masculine characteristics, but feminine characteristics. It was the differences among the three contingencies of Hazumu that makes Yasuna aware of Hazumu. Furthermore, by engaging in sexual activities with the transformed Hazumu, such as kissing, Yasuna transforms as well. By the end of the animation, Yasuna finds independence and empowerment. In other words, queering revolutionizes Yasuna.

Yasuna's character illustrates the complicated nature of portrayals of the queer community in cinema. Characters like Yasuna are sometimes perceived as "negative images" due to their negative portrayals of the queer community. Such characters are normally based upon stereotypes of the queer community that have the potential to demean, demoralize, and marginalize. Thus, there has been a shift in the West to incorporate "positive images" of the queer community in Western films (Halberstam 179). These "positive images" can be defined as portrayals of the queer community that are queer sensitive in that they attempt not to stereotype the queer community (Halberstam 184). However, Halberstam argues that positive images are just as much premised upon stereotypes as negative ones: "Positive images, we may note, too often depend on thoroughly ideological conceptions of positive (white, middle-class, clean, law-abiding, monogamous, coupled, etc.), and the emphasis on positivity actually keeps at bay the 'bad cinema' that might productively be reclaimed as queer" (185). Although Halberstam discusses the image debate in regards to queer film situated in Western society, one can still apply the same concept to Yasuna's character. A Yasuna portraying a sensitive image of queer identity might be unable to reflect how engaging in queer activities can be revolutionary. Thus, her transformation would be rendered invisible to spectators.

*Sweet Blue Flowers*, a queer coming-of-age animation, also subverts the traditional notions of gender and sexuality. The writer and illustrator of the work, Takako Shimura mostly

creates literature with the LGBT audience in mind—a rarity in the manga/animation cosmos. Originally produced in manga format, the narrative was later adapted as an animation that aired on Japanese television in 2009. The animation was also streamed online through various websites, such as Crunchyroll.com and Afterellen.com. Although *Sweet Blue Flowers* is not the first animation to be streamed simultaneous to its release in Japan, it was perhaps the first time a Yuri animation with the central theme of exploring alternative sexualities was streamed. Clearly, the desire for the animation to be released immediately not only illustrates the growing popularity of Yuri animations, but also suggests that the narrative of *Sweet Blue Flowers* is perhaps like no other.

Indeed, the narrative of adolescent growth in *Sweet Blue Flowers* is only a supplementary theme used to situate the main theme of exploring what is inside the “closet.” In the book *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Sedgwick describes the closet as being a “weighty and occupied and consequential” space that forever contains influence among the queer community (68, 76). Yet, very rarely does one think that other lives outside of the queer community reside within the closet and, perhaps most importantly, that one can be confined to a “closet” for multiple reasons or reside within multiple “closets.”

*Sweet Blue Flowers* documents the dwelling in multiple “closets” and what such dwelling entails for two of the protagonists, Yasuko Sugimoto and Fumi Manjōme. Not only are they coming to terms with “coming out” as queer individuals, but they are also coming to terms with “coming out” as survivors of trauma caused by events that many find taboo. For the handsome protagonist Yasuko Sugimoto, her trauma comes from her experience as a young adolescent of unrequited love. However, her immense desire was not for one of her own age; rather, it was for an adult man who was her teacher as well as soon-to-be brother-in-law. As for the second

protagonist, Fumi Manjōme, her trauma stems from an incestuous love affair between her and her cousin Chizo Hanashiro who is soon to be married.

Both are radically transformed due to such experiences, and it seems that both are haunted by their recollections of the experiences. Yet it becomes clear in the animation that the flashbacks of both protagonists enable them to heal and ultimately to find empowerment within a queer body and then to move forward as queer individuals. Thus, *Sweet Blue Flowers* illustrates how memory and trauma pertaining to the “closet” influences queer identity.

Yasuko Sugimoto, a senior at the Matsuoka Girls’ High School, is affectionately admired by the other students at the school because of her androgynous appearance. Although Yasuko must wear a school uniform consisting of feminine garments, such as a skirt, she sports short, dark hair and is quite slender and tall. She is known for her excellence in sports, such as basketball, and in the performing arts. Yasuko is always asked by the drama club to play the main male roles in certain dramatic features. This year the drama club has asked Yasuko to play Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*.

Although one is unaware if all of the students of the Matsuoka Girls’ High School are aware of Yasuko’s queer sexuality, the students who do know do not seem to be surprised that Yasuko is dating Fumi Manjōme. However, it is clear that Yasuko has not “come out” of the “closet” openly to her family and friends outside of the school. In fact, it is only when Fumi confesses to her friend Achan about her romantic relationship with Yasuko that Yasuko finds the inspiration to openly confess her sexuality and her romantic relationship with Fumi to her family. Yasuko finds Fumi’s disclosure to Achan admirable and states to Fumi, “That’s amazing, Fumi. . . It’s amazing that you came out of the closet. . . You’re something special, Fumi. You’re strong. You’re embarking on a path of thorns.”

Clearly, the two are all too aware of the negative repercussions of the “closet.” While Fumi is rescued from the damage accrued when one is on the “path of thorns” with Achan’s acceptance of her sexuality and ultimately offering support, Yasuko is not so lucky. When she finally decides to tell her parents and her three sisters of her sexuality and her relationship with Fumi, her family berates and patronizes Yasuko in her decision. Kuri Sugimoto, one of Yasuko’s older sisters, is perhaps the most vocal in criticizing Yasuko: “Do you really love her? . . . *Right now* you do, right? . . . You’re saying that, at this moment, you love that girl sitting right there, yes? Then I guess that would make you bisexual.”

Such dialogue when one attempts to exit the “closet” is not unique, although the lexical properties used are quite diverse and are dependent upon the speakers’ inclinations. Sedgwick observes that such dialogue clearly illustrates the overall resistance to being queer or possessing a queer identity:

In the processes of gay self-disclosure, by contrast, in a twentieth-century context, questions of authority and evidence can be the first to arise. “How do you know you’re really gay? Why be in such a hurry to jump to conclusions? After all, what you’re saying is only based on a few feelings, not real actions [*or alternatively*: on a few actions, not necessarily your real feelings]; hadn’t you better talk to a therapist and find out?” Such responses—and their occurrence in the people come out to can seem a belated echo of their occurrence in the person coming out—reveal how problematical at present is the very concept of gay identity, as well as how intensely it is resisted and how far authority over its definition has been distanced from the gay subject her- or himself. (79)

It is as if the only individual who can truly know whether one is queer is someone heterosexual. Even if one has recognized one's queer identity and lives one's life as a queer identified individual, the power still lies within the heterosexual speaker to determine whether one is queer or not. In essence, it is not up to the queer whether one is queer; it is up to the heterosexual to deem if one is queer.

Such questioning from the listener of the coming out experience can be quite damaging to the one exiting the "closet," so much so that in some cases one may re-enter the "closet" in order to be free of the subjugating examination. Yasuko is no exception. Out of anger, resentment, shame, and embarrassment, Yasuko abruptly ends her relationship with Fumi after her attempt to come out and says to Fumi, "Listen. I wasn't being fair to you before. I'm sorry. I can't control my emotions and blamed you for it. As I am right now, I can't be your girlfriend." Fumi, distraught and embarrassed, leaves Yasuko's house. Although Yasuko by the end of series attempts to rekindle her romantic love affair with Fumi, Fumi will take no part in such a relationship and states, "I've . . . given up on you. I'm done with you. Please grow up."

As Fumi suggests, Yasuko is in a process of growth in the animation. Yasuko is not only growing in regards to becoming more aware of her sexuality, but also in regards to becoming more aware of another "closet" that she resides in: her unrequited love for Masanori, a teacher at the legendary all-girl secondary school Fujigaya Girls' Academy. With the exception of various flashbacks, triggered by certain objects or events, Yasuko only consciously speaks of the act through the art of storytelling. The first in the animation to hear of the story, so aptly coined "The Master of the Library," is Fumi: "There's a 'Master of the Library' at Fujigaya. . . Some teacher was messing around and called a girl who loves books that, and the name stuck." However, it soon becomes apparent that Fumi is not the only one who is aware of the story when

Fumi overhears two students from Fujigaya discussing the story and speculating about the “forbidden relationship” between the Master of the Library and the teacher.

While it might seem to the audience that Yasuko’s attempt at a confession of her once divisive desire for her teacher is half-hearted at best, or at worst the romantic whims of a teenage adolescent girl, Yasuko’s storytelling illustrates the process of healing. In the book *An Archive of Feelings*, Ann Cvetkovich discusses the power of storytelling in healing one’s self from trauma. Focusing on the storytelling in Margaret Randall’s book *This Is about Incest* and Dorothy Allison’s book *Bastard out of Carolina*, Cvetkovich notes how the books articulate the empowerment of orating traumatic events through fiction:

Although both Randall and Allison are passionate about the value of truth telling for both personal healing and public intervention, their work is deceptive in its allegiance to this principle, for it demonstrates how imaginative work that may bear an oblique relation to the actual event of sexual abuse can ultimately be more “healing” than an explicit rendering of the event. (94)

Although Cvetkovich discusses the empowerment of storytelling in relation to two American authors’ personal experiences with sexual abuse, one can still apply the same theoretical perspective to Yasuko’s story and surmise that Yasuko’s story fosters healing.

Instead of simply stating the actual events of the experience, which would probably result in negative consequences and which would also disturb the plot’s purpose of delivering Yasuko’s memories as fragmented pieces along the narrative, Yasuko creates a story that is meant to heal through disconnection. Unfortunately, the terms *disconnect* and *disassociate* have become bearers of negative connotations by the medical community. As a result, many

individuals perceive one who disconnects or disassociates as mentally unhealthy or mentally abnormal.

Yet Yasuko is not mentally abnormal. If anything Yasuko can only be faulted for the simply mental instabilities that everyone suffers from time to time. Her disassociation is not one of totality where one cannot function or where one cannot locate one's self within a particular event. Nor is it a disassociation that results in negative consequences. By separating herself from the story, being the creator of the story and the ultimate orator of the story, Yasuko gains control over a situation that she originally did not have control over. In other words, by being the storyteller, as the editors of the book *Narrative, Memory, and Identity* might suggest, Yasuko is able to "redefine history and culture and to legitimize personal and collective memory" (Singh, Skerrett, and Hogan 18). Yasuko uses narration as a tool/resource to reconstruct "her"-story, in opposition to "his"-story, and to finally validate "her"-story in a society that much prefers "his"-story. Yasuko's narrative would possibly fall on deaf ears, because she lacks power and agency in the current educational structure and lacks power and agency as a woman. In contrast, Masanori possesses power in the educational system due to being an educator and being a man. Thus, Masanori's narrative would possibly be considered to be the most authentic.

In addition to attempting to re-define and re-construct history, Yasuko's story resists the focus that is placed on most traumatic events—the actual event itself. Too often in traumatic scenarios the focus is placed on the details of the event rather than on the emotional or physical well-being of the victim. Yasuko's story denies the audience access to the actual event, because the story is not meant to relay the actual event. Rather, Yasuko's story is meant to redirect attention to the culmination of emotions produced in traumatic events. For Yasuko, the traumatic event produced anger and melancholy.

It is unknown whether anything transpired physically between Masanori and Yasuko. However, it is clear that Masanori is not an innocent party. When Yasuko decides to dress in a man's suit instead of a dress to wear to her sister and Masanori's wedding, Masanori states to Yasuko, "Well, sorry for being dull. Are you going dressed like that? . . . No. I mean it looks great on you. It's cool, but you look good in cute, girly clothes, too." Although Masanori states this information to Yasuko after he realizes her desire for him and after she has left the school of Fujigaya Girls' Academy in order to avoid him, Masanori certainly has no qualms in making advances towards Yasuko during his wedding day. Even Yasuko states to him that he thinks like a "creepy old guy." While one cannot hold Masanori accountable for Yasuko's immense desire for him, his actions make it difficult to exonerate him and one begins to question if Masanori abused his powers as an instructor and manipulated Yasuko's desire for him to his advantage.

Undeniably, Yasuko's traumatic event with Masanori shaped her queer identity. As soon as Yasuko realized her desire for Masanori, Yasuko transformed from a feminine adolescent to a masculine adolescent. When realizing that her older sister, who was about to be married, possessed masculine mannerisms, such as in the way she sat in a chair, Yasuko attempted to replicate her older sister's masculinity in an attempt to grab Masanori's attention. Yasuko narrates:

When I first met him, they were already dating a long time. What was I thinking? I hacked my hair off. My sister conceals it well, but she has a strong personality. Even just superficially, I wanted to resemble her. People quickly picked up on my boyish image, and I suddenly became popular. "Girls sure are simple." I felt like I could be whatever I wanted to be, by sheer force of will. In retrospect, I think I

was pretty snobbish. Though, of course, I had the ability to hide that part of my being as well.

However, Yasuko's emulation of her sister was not simply due to respect and admiration for her; rather, it was a transformation to access power. Yasuko felt powerless in the tenuous triangle between Masanori, her sister, and herself. She had very few characteristics within her that made her a worthy opponent of her sister. Thus, Yasuko transformed herself hoping that it would make her a worthy adversary.

Yet, Yasuko took her transformation to the extreme. She stopped engaging in activities that her sister also participated in, such as painting and drawing, and started to participate in more masculine type activities, such as basketball. Yasuko also starts to wear androgynous or masculine clothing, such as a men's suit at her sister's wedding. Most importantly, Yasuko begins to participate in queer sexual activities.

The culmination of such an extreme transformation suggests Yasuko's resistance towards her sister and what her sister stands for—the double standard placed upon women. Yasuko's sister walks the fine line of the double standard. She is neither too “feminine” nor too “masculine.” She is praised for her strong personality; yet, is also praised for her femininity. In other words, Yasuko's older sister is the “pinnacle” woman that every man wishes for or desires.

However, if Yasuko's sister ever exceeded the limits of masculinity or femininity, Yasuko knows the consequences her sister would have to endure. Her sister would not only lose the affection of Masanori and perhaps other men but also would be scorned by society.

Yasuko sees the heteronormative system of oppression and marginalization placed upon her sister and decides not to participate by transforming to the extreme. By being a masculine woman who engages in erotic desires with women and enjoys it, Yasuko is subverting and

inverting the system. Although Yasuko knows that her queer identity laced with masculinity will always be distressing to most individuals, by the end of the series Yasuko has no qualms in making one distressed since it is the result of challenging heteronormativity. A prime example of Yasuko's desire to subvert and invert can be found in her conversation with Achan's brother about her relationship with Fumi: "I guess you would be surprised by this, huh? I think that's normal. I'd be shocked if I was in your shoes too." To even suggest placing herself and imagining herself within a system that adamantly refuses to acknowledge her, if not incessantly vilifies her, threatens to rupture the heteronormative system. No, the viewer cannot imagine placing Yasuko within the system because she does not fit, and the reason she does not fit is because her very existence violates the regulations that people assume are truth. Consequently, if one attempts to situate Yasuko within the system, Yasuko's being not only has the power to illustrate the fabrication of the gender system, but also has the power to implode it.

Just like the editors surmise in the book *Memory, Narrative, and Identity* that "memory interrupts linear, conventional narratives in order to make for multiple voices and perspectives" (Singh, Skerrett, and Hogan 18), the multiple queer memories found within *Sweet Blue Flowers* explore multiple voices within the animation. Besides Yasuko Sugimoto, Fumi Manjōme, the other protagonist in the animation, is another voice that conveys existence within multiple "closets." Fumi Manjōme's queer performance is less explicit than Yasuko's. Fumi, also tall and slender, is highly bashful and tends to be somewhat passive when it comes to engaging in conversations with others. Fumi is also notorious for letting experiences and emotions overwhelm her. Under such circumstances, Fumi becomes quite mournful and usually has to be comforted by a friend, such as Achan.

However, unlike Yasuko, Fumi tends to follow through with her decisions. As already stated, Fumi is the first in the animation to attempt to exit the “closet.” Unable to endure the immense anxiety of being in the “closet,” Fumi confesses her desire for Yasuko to her friend Achan at their usual retreat, the local tea house. After admitting her romantic relationship with Yasuko, Fumi, in fear and sadness, cries, “Please don’t hate me. Don’t think it’s gross!” Fumi is highly conscious of the repercussions of coming out and its potential to damage not only the listener, but also the speaker. She fears that Achan will despise her for her alternative sexual desires or, worse, find her repulsive. Sedgwick explores the apocalyptic breach of coming out and concludes that the confession implicates the listener’s erotic identity:

The double-edged potential for injury in the scene of gay coming out, by contrast, results partly from the fact that the erotic identity of the person who receives the disclosure is apt also to be implicated in, hence perturbed by it. This is true first and generally because erotic identity, of all things, is never to be circumscribed simply as itself, can never not be relational, is never to be perceived or known by anyone outside of a structure of transference and countertransference. (81)

Achan’s acceptance of Fumi’s queer identity immediately implicates her as being one who perpetuates an identity that does not subscribe to heteronormativity, and Achan realizes the implication when she states to herself after the confession, “I guess she must feel uncomfortable after confessing such a thing. I don't see anything wrong with a girl liking girls. Maybe I'm just too simpleminded. Still . . . I didn't think it was gross.” Although Achan does not regret her supportive attitude towards Fumi’s sexual orientation, Achan still questions her motives in being supportive. Thus, Achan interrogates her identity to ascertain if she too is queer in desire or queer in mind.

Like Yasuko, Fumi is also imprisoned within another closet and one that is perhaps more controversial than Yasuko's—incest. Before dating Yasuko, Fumi was involved in a sexual love affair with her cousin Chizu. Although it seems that Fumi loved her cousin and was possibly in love with her cousin, it is still questionable whether Fumi truly wanted to engage in sexual acts with her cousin due to the hesitancy within her voice during their first sexual encounter. When Chizu asks Fumi if she is “no good” and if her desire scares her, Fumi replies with, “I don't know.” Later, Fumi states, “It's not that I didn't know. It was just a little scary.” The viewer only witnesses the relationship of Chizu and Fumi through flashbacks triggered by Chizu's betrothal. Fumi, distraught and heartbroken, feels abandoned and abused. When Fumi finally confesses of her past love affair with Chizu to Yasuko, she states, “I loved her, but she was probably just fooling around.”

What is most uncomfortable to some of the viewers of the animation is not necessarily the incestuous act itself; rather, it is the link of incest to the queer identity. Cvetkovich discusses the taboo effect of the linkage between incest and queer identity and surmises many articles and books, such as self-help articles and books, reject a connection or, worse, pathologize queer identity if it is a result of sexual abuse (90). In response to such notions, Cvetkovich states:

But why can't that “sexual abuse causes homosexuality” just as easily be based on the assumption that there's something right, rather than wrong, with being lesbian or gay? As someone who would go so far as to claim lesbianism as one of the *welcome* effects of sexual abuse, I am happy to contemplate the therapeutic process by which sexual abuse turns girls queer. (90)

Although one cannot be certain if the incestuous act Fumi experienced resulted in her queer identity, it is clear that being queer became a therapeutic process that aided Fumi in overcoming

the emotions produced by the traumatic event. By having a romantic relationship with Yasuko and further establishing her bond with Achan, Fumi finally becomes comfortable again in mind and body. In fact, Fumi becomes so comfortable that she soon realizes that the first person she fell in love with was not Chizu, but Achan. Fumi's revelation is an empowering one because it takes away the power and authority that Chizu held over Fumi. However, most importantly, the narrative of Chizu and Fumi concurs with Cvetokovich in that regardless if sexual abuse results in one becoming queer, being queer can be just as rewarding as being heterosexual. A queer life, just like a heterosexual one, can be enriched with adventure, friendship, and most importantly, love.

*Kashimashi: Girl Meets Girl* and *Sweet Blue Flowers* clearly illustrate the importance of utilizing queer perspectives in order to interpret the narratives of Yuri Japanese animation and manga. By reading the characters as queer and utilizing queer perspectives, one sees narratives articulating desire and it is through this desire that the characters challenge the norms that are harassing to the queer community. Without the aid of queer perspectives, such as those of Judith Butler, Judith Halberstam, Eve Sedgwick, and Ann Cvetokovich, one might not recognize desire as a way to challenge heteronormativity. As for some of the viewers, the animations certainly have the power to create a catalyst in reflecting upon the traditional notions of gender, sexuality, and being queer. Last, for other viewers who do not feel that they correspond with the heteronormative paradigm, seeing characters resembling their own situations can become both empowering and liberating.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**THE QUEER CYBORG AND QUEER APOCALYPSE:**  
**CONTESTING AND REINVENTING MYTHS AND THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT**

Farewell, you who shares my name...

- Hitomi Aida in the animation *ICE*

Japanese culture has long been viewed by Westerners as possessing an affinity to nature perhaps stemming from its emphasis on spiritualities such as Buddhism and Shintoism which mandate a reverence, or at least respect, for nature. One particular outlet Westerners use to affirm such a perception is through Japanese animations and mangas. Many Japanese works incorporate themes pertaining to the environment and even some make such themes the focal point of the narrative. An example of such a work can be found in Hayao Miyazaki's animations in which the majority of the protagonists are adolescent girls challenging the notions of nature and technology. Yet very few mainstream works resemble Miyazaki's. The majority of works entering the Western market only perpetuate debilitating myths that marginalize and oppress women. In these instances the women characters are depicted as having a special bond to nature and are also typically represented as objects with the sole purpose to appease the wills of men.

While Yuri animations are no exception in regards to exploring environmental themes in the narrative, Yuri works are unique in that they explore and contest marginalizing myths that attach women to nature. Indeed, the majority of Yuri animations containing environmental themes use these themes to subvert and invert the predominant myth normally used to oppress women, the woman/nature myth. The woman/nature myth can be defined as an ethic produced

by patriarchal forces that conceptualize land as being “woman” and is used to justify conquering the environment and oppressing women (Legler 228). Not surprisingly, other oppressive fabrications are produced within the nature/woman myth, such as the queer against nature myth and the goddess myth, to firmly keep control of groups that are perceived as threatening. Normally, these myths in Yuri animations are explored in an apocalyptic setting where nature and technology are opposed to each other and where human beings are struggling to find a harmonious balance between the two. Once again, the apocalyptic scenario is not unique to the Yuri genre. Many other Japanese genres also use the apocalyptic setting to explore similar themes and tropes. Yet, in apocalyptic scenarios in non-Yuri Japanese animations, the voices of women are often silenced. Very rarely does one hear the echo of the female voice, much less a queer female voice, upon the day of reckoning.

Therefore, this chapter examines the long forgotten and long forsaken voice of the queer female in the Yuri animations *ICE* and *Kurau Phantom Memory*. The queer female voice found within both animations is one of power and agency. The characters are not passive participants of the armageddon but are active agents of change and transformation—an active agent that saves the world from total annihilation through subverting and re-conceptualizing the woman/nature, queer/nature, and goddess myths that have been used as an excuse to conquer at the expense of the world.

The Yuri animation *ICE*, written by Yasushi Akimoto and Makota Kobayashi, challenges the woman and nature myth in an apocalyptic scenario set in Japan in the year of 2012. The animation was released in 2007 as a DVD in Japan and has also been screened at several international film festivals, such as Sao Paolo and Chicago. Unfortunately, the animation has yet to be officially released to the Western market. Although it is unknown as to why it has

not been released, one can speculate popularity and profit is the likely cause. It is clear while watching the film that creating a women-loving-women film was not the main intention. The women-loving-women theme is illustrated and written as an undercurrent of immense desire, a strong but subtle desire that only reaches the surface in the intimate setting of death. Thus, the animation lacks the romantic spectacle and suspense that most individuals are attracted to and would be a risky venture to take for most animation publishers. As a result, viewers are only able to obtain the animation via the internet through Peer-to-Peer and Torrent networks.

The animation originally begins in the year of 1986. The viewer is introduced to the character Hitomi Aida, an attractive brunette who keeps the neighborhood awake all night due to a possible sexual escapade. Hitomi becomes the vehicle that leads the viewers to the desolate Japan of 2012 when she is accidentally struck by a truck. Before submitting to unconsciousness, Hitomi sees Yuki, a character from Japan of 2012, in the distance; and suddenly Hitomi Aida enters the mind of Hitomi Landsknecht, a commander and guardswoman of the militant party of Japan of 2012

It is unknown how Hitomi Aida becomes one with Hitomi Landsknecht. However, Hitomi Landsknecht and the other characters do offer clues to suggest that Hitomi Landsknecht is a medium or clairvoyant. Hitomi Landsknecht is known by other guardswomen as possessing a remarkably accurate sense of intuition, and she herself states that she has the ability to interact with spirits. These “strange people,” according to Hitomi Landsknecht, “take turns entering” her mind, causing her mind to become “noisy.” As a result, Hitomi Landsknecht has not slept for three years, and one of the “ghosts” that is causing the insomnia is Hitomi Aida. Repeatedly, Hitomi Landsknecht tells Hitomi Aida to go back to where she came from, but Hitomi Aida is unable to. Because of her inability to enter back into her own body, Hitomi’s character initiates

the continuation of the narrative: one that could possibly be the final chapter of the human species.

A man-made catastrophe caused by the obsession of biological warfare and genetic engineering has led to the annihilation of the majority of the human species. All males have been eradicated, and only small groups of women have survived. One of these remaining groups lives in Tokyo where two factions are in control of the city. These two factions oppose each other in regards to their belief about humanity. Although the first faction does not have a particular title, it is a militant party controlled by Julia, who is one of the last few remaining soldiers to have lived through the “old era.” This group believes that measures should be taken to continue the human race; however, they believe the continuation should be monitored in order to prevent a renewal of patriarchy. In contrast, the Kisaragi party is rooted within mysticism. Controlled by Kisaragi, a hybrid who is half-human and half-jellyfish, she believes that the human species should allow the law of nature to take control and accept the demise of humanity. This particular group is despised by the militant party due to their excessive sexual escapades and excessive drug use.

However, what both factions agree upon is that men are to blame for this catastrophe due to their arrogance and greed in regards to controlling nature. The excessive manipulation of the eco-system on Earth has led to such radical modifications of the environment that the women are forced to subsist on the last remnants of convenience stores and grocery stores of the time before. If the women even attempt to drink or eat anything in the current ecosystem, they will be poisoned. In addition, the ecological system has very little resemblance to the ecological system of the past. Birds can now be as small as butterflies or as large as dinosaurs, and plants are not the only living things that can create flowers. Birds can form into plant-like spheres and

create flowers. Birds are also now able to reproduce through the creation of such flowers. As a result of such extreme changes to the environment, many women have opted out of the equation in the form of suicide. In one visual frame, a woman ends her life by her son's graveside. In another visual frame, a group of women have ended their lives together in a similar fashion to the 1997 mass suicide of the U.S. cult Heaven's Gate.

Although it seems on the surface that the animation supports the woman/nature myth in that the only human beings left to contend with the environment are women, this notion is deconstructed when the leader of the militant party, Julia, delivers a speech at the ball:

Welcome ladies! Please give me a moment of your time. As you all know, the male-ruled society that we call the "old era" met its end due to environmental damage and the men's own self-destruction. In the end, much of the Earth was ruined, and we women were dragged into the conflict.

The women of *ICE* do not suggest or claim to possess an innate mystical relationship to nature nor do they suggest that they have an innate desire to protect nature. Rather, they have become the involuntary bearers that must rectify the oversights of men, because not doing so means the extinction of the human species.

In addition, Julia's speech also implies that the women of *ICE* had no influence in regards to the decisions made prior to the destruction of the environment. Clearly, the woman/nature myth influenced the sociopolitical system beforehand. Thus, the Japan of 2012 is the outcome of using the woman/nature myth as a means to conquer. If the myth had not been used to conquer and control the environment and to conquer and control minority groups, the Japan of 2012 would not have happened.

Most importantly, the woman/nature dualism is deconstructed in *ICE* when the women utilize science and technology. The women of *ICE* have no qualms about using technology, once relegated to the male sphere, to protect and save the species. However, they avoid using science and technology in certain circumstances when it is used as a means to oppress an individual. Mint, a guardswoman, eloquently speaks of such avoidance when she is instructing new recruits of the militant party about why one should avoid using guns:

This is a Walther 99. It holds eleven bullets. Nine millimeter parabellum rounds. It's an easy to use gun. But we, the Crimson Guard, don't use this. What do we use, you ask? This. A revolver sword. It's a bit hard to use, but it's the perfect weapon for elegant Guardians like us. It's a lethal weapon, but depending on how it's used, it's possible to neutralize opponents without killing them. That's what's important about it. Listen, ladies! Those cursed men who used guns destroyed themselves. And then we women also used guns in battle, until that curse killed all but a handful of us. That's why we refuse to hurt our companions . . . People who lack that love and respect continue to kill. We have to stop that, no matter what. Therefore, we carry the ultimate weapon. However, if at all possible, we want to avoid killing.

To the women of *ICE*, the ultimate signifier of patriarchal domination is the gun. Perhaps the weapon most revolutionized through science and technology, the gun is the choice of weapon of the “master” in order to conquer and colonize. Therefore, anyone who must carry a revolver or rifle is forever perceived as cursed with its intent. For Hitomi Landsknecht, her curse is much more extreme for she has to carry a nuclear machine-like weapon. Ironically named Escaliver, the nuclear machine-like weapon is a burden of collective sin and like Jesus of Nazareth, Hitomi

Landsknecht is the “son” who has to bear it for the sake of humanity. During times when Hitomi Landskecht must use Escaliver, she supplicates to a higher being asking forgiveness for using such a destructive weapon: “Oh God, please forgive me, for I shall now employ the violent tools left behind by wicked man, for the sake of our future.” Clearly, the similarities of the name of Hitomi’s nuclear machine-like weapon to the sword Excalibur found in Arthurian lore foreshadows that Hitomi is the one who must save humankind.

Nevertheless, the avoidance of such weapons illustrates how the women of *ICE* are redefining and reconstructing science and technology in “less oppositional and hierarchical ways” to nature and to women through a mode of awareness that Val Plumwood calls the “mutual self” in her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (4). To Plumwood, redefining and reconstructing dualisms is achieved through changing one’s ethic from a mastery model of self to a “mutual ethic” self. She defines the mastery model of self as one that erases the “other” from the ethical sphere. The mastery of model of self is only concerned about its own interests and desires. Thus, such a self views the “other” as either a barrier to obtaining resources or as a resource itself for obtaining resources (Plumwood 145). Clearly, Mint’s statement of men’s “lack of love and respect” for others and persistence in killing mirrors Plumwood’s model of the mastery model of self. The women of *ICE* have seen far too much devastation caused by such cognizance and have chosen to follow the contrasting path of the “mutual self.”

The “mutual self” is a mode of thinking that recognizes the connection/relationship between all living beings where “each transforms and limits the other” (Plumwood 156). This mode of self is acutely aware that one’s relationship between other individuals and things is mutual. One has the potential to affect “others,” and the “others” also have the potential to affect the self (Plumwood 156). Mint’s instruction to the new recruits echoes such a self. Through the

experience of apocalyptic destruction on Earth, the women of *ICE* are all too aware of the rippling effect of past actions. Especially when humanity is at the brink of extinction, absolute care must be taken to preserve what is left and to recognize that one is responsible for the lives of others.

In addition to Mint's conversation with the recruits, Julia's speech at the ball also carries the same tone:

Now our country numbers only these 20,000 here in Shinjuku! Because of the war, other nations have been all but annihilated. Even now, we can't confirm any survivors. However, this situation was not brought about by science itself! The hunger for profit and the devaluing of human life! It was the old society's mind that turned science into a destructive trap!

To the women of *ICE*, men's mastery mode of self utilized science was a disguise to justify the exploitation and oppression of the "other"—women and the environment. According to Julia, if one rejects a mastery mode of self for a mutual one, science and technology can be used for good. Indeed, at the end of the monologue Julia proclaims that "science" will become the "savior," and the "savior" that she is referring to is genetic engineering.

Before men were ultimately eradicated, several projects, one so aptly called "The Seed of Christ," were developed to attempt to find a way where women could procreate without the use of men. Unfortunately, the projects seemed unsuccessful, but only unsuccessful in the terms that the projects were not predictable or stable. In some cases, offspring were produced, but it was at a high cost—the death of the mother. Once a woman was fertilized, a casing called *ICE* forever encapsulated her. If the casing was ever disturbed, the woman turned into a monster that destroyed anything in sight.

Unbeknownst to the women of *ICE*, Julia attempted to modify the methods used in these projects in order to find a way where such an atrocity did not occur. However, she was unsuccessful, not because she could not find a way to change the genetic process; rather, she became unsuccessful because she lost her “mutual self.” She became like the men the women of *ICE* despised who only thought of themselves. She became obsessed with the project due to her desire to be the ultimate leader of Japan of 2012. She wanted to reap the rewards of conquering the women of Japan of 2012, and she became a conqueror at all costs. Julia ordered the militant faction to kill every member of the Kisaragi party out of fear that the party would ruin her plans to dominate. Julia was finally stopped when Hitomi Landsknecht killed her, but unfortunately, Julia’s greed to control the world created another problem for the women of Japan of 2012 that would cost the lives of countless of women, including Hitomi Landsknecht and the other protagonist Yuki.

The land of *ICE* and the women that inhabit it is a “queer” one. On the one hand, using the traditional definition of the term queer as something being strange, one could say that the topography is filled with anomalous creatures and other life forms juxtaposed with anomalous environments that fluctuate from the decaying urban sprawl to the toxic rural wasteland. Likewise, the women have also become quite anomalous beings. Kisaragi, the leader of the spiritual party, is a victim of genetic engineering from the past, resulting in a hybrid body of half-woman and half-coelenterate. In addition, the new recruits of the militant party seemed to be almost like replications in that each one resembles one another in physical characteristics.

Yet, what is perhaps the most problematic to some of the spectators viewing the film is that the landscape and the women seem to have transgressed the boundary that patriarchal domination has attempted to repress: eroticism. Indeed, the women of *ICE* are highly erotic

beings. Julia, captain of the militant party, engages in erotic orgies with her maids, and Kisaragi, leader of the spiritual party, greets the people she loves by licking their eye. Such erotic behaviors are feared by patriarchal forces to such an extent that sexuality has been reduced to only being expressed in certain contexts controlled predominantly by legal and religious conventions and being expressed in those contexts in one position (Gaard 118). In addition, what is usually most condemned and controlled by these sanctions is the sexuality of women. Thus, since men have been completely eradicated from the picture in *ICE*, the women are able to engage in erotic affairs without the disciplining eye of masculine society. Women have erotic affairs whenever and wherever they want. Thus, *ICE* might invoke the fear of women's emancipation from patriarchal society in some of the audience members.

Yet, it is the very same eroticism that releases the subversive forces and deconstructs the notion of the queer against nature. As Legler points out, the woman/nature myth is not used solely to oppress anatomical women, but is also used to oppress "others" by ranking them "closer to nature" or by declaring their practices "natural" or "unnatural" (228). One minority group that tends to be oppressed through this assessment is the queer community. According to Gaard, "opponents of queer sexualities have frequently argued that alternative sexualities go against nature; yet, these same opponents are using such characteristics as animalization and eroticization—qualities often used to depict the connection between women and nature—to incriminate queer sexualities" (119). Women's "animalistic" and "erotic" dispositions connect them to nature while queers' "animalistic" and "erotic" dispositions separate them from nature. To Gaard, the contradiction between the two is of no surprise since the contestation is indicative of the oppressive nature of myths originating from patriarchal forces (119).

A prime example of eroticism as a deconstructive force against the queer/nature myth can be found in Hitomi Landsknecht's budding love affair with Yuki, the other protagonist in the film and the adopted daughter of Kisaragi. The matchmaker of the two is no other than an *ICE* monster who holds Yuki captive in its grip. Hitomi Landsknecht, in the process of trying to vanquish the monster, sees Yuki's captivity and saves her from the foe. After being saved, Yuki offers herself physically to Hitomi, but Hitomi declines. When Yuki asks why Hitomi refuses to solidify a "flesh" bond, Hitomi states:

Listen, Yuki. It's true that since the men are gone, many people pledge themselves to one another in that way. I have heard that even among the Guardians there are those who would have intercourse with a Kisaragi like you. But I'm different. It must be because I'm mad. To me, a bond between two people is signified by something more than just a pledge between bare bodies.

What is important about this dialogue is the use of the word "intercourse" to illustrate the erotic relationships of women. Typically, it is thought that same-sex love affairs, especially between women, cannot acquire such a state due to the absence of male genitalia. Women-loving-women, according to a heterosexism code, can never consummate their love, and as a result, such relationships are not perceived as valid. Yet, the women of *ICE* do not perceive their relationships as such. These relationships, regardless of the absence of male genitalia and regardless of penetration, are bona fide love affairs to the women of *ICE*.

Due to Hitomi's refusal, Yuki must establish a connection with Hitomi Landsknecht in a different way. Her solution is to woo Hitomi Landsknecht by taking her to a secluded and intimate section of the city, an abandoned amusement park, where the birds turn into beautiful flowers that cover the entire surroundings. This scene is quite poignant because the two connect

on a soulful level through mourning and illumination. They begin to lament the loss of a harmonious environment, and both realize that the “queer” environment they are in is a simulacrum of men’s desires. Hitomi Landsknecht asks the rhetorical question, “A copy of nature created by humans, huh?” Thus, it is the oppression and domination of patriarchy that “queers” the environment of *ICE*. Patriarchal forces were so concerned to quell what it sees in nature as “queer,” that patriarchy did what it intended not to do: to make a “queer” world. Patriarchy has exterminated and sterilized the environment of such characteristics as sexuality, femininity, and animalism, which it deemed destructive to culture/reason and in turn has created a world that is poisoned. This male simulacrum of nature—a “queer” nature—in juxtaposition to the queer female couple (femme/butch) is the dagger that deconstructs the queer/nature myth: the only natural object within the male simulated “queer” environment is the queer female couple—a queer female couple consisting of a feminine female and masculine female, which is so often labeled as being a simulacrum of its own and a misperception of queer female (femme/butch) relationships. Such a perception articulates that a queer relationship consisting of a feminine woman and a masculine woman is an imitation of a heterosexual relationship.

In the end, humanity is saved, but not by a male warrior; rather, humanity is saved through the unwavering love of a masculine female warrior for her partner. Unfortunately, Julia’s greed and obsession to conquer the world caused her to make a grave error. Julia thought that the “Twin Towers,” a terraforming system, and “The Seed of Christ” were one and the same. The “Twin Towers” was the final product left by man for the intended purpose to return Earth back to a state before life developed, and Julia was unaware of its purpose. While Julia’s finger was not the one that ultimately unlocked the “Twin Towers,” Julia’s greed was the catalyst to the terraforming system being unlocked. Thus, it then becomes Hitomi Landknecht’s job to save the

last remaining women and creatures from being vaporized by the time bomb. Unfortunately, Hitomi Landsknecht does not survive her final attempt to save Yuki from an untimely death. To show that their love for each other was not in vain, Yuki takes the final remnants of what is left of the genetic engineering project and turns into ICE. The result of such unconditional love creates a male child that will give the women of *ICE* one last shot to save the world.

Hitomi Landsknecht is not the only masculine female warrior that saves humanity. The main protagonist Kurau in the animation *Kurau Phantom Memory* also saves the planet in a technological apocalyptic setting and, perhaps most importantly, deconstructs the original goddess myth and reconceptualizes the myth within a queer extra-terrestrial infused cyborg body. First explored through the writings of Donna Haraway, the current conception of the cyborg perceives the cyborg as having the “capacity to embody a challenge to conventional categories of race, gender, nature, and humanity. By virtue of their hybrid status, cyborgs call into question the impermeability of the categories by which humanity has traditionally differentiated itself from its non-human ‘others’” (Graham 308). In other words, the cyborg has the ability to transgress dynamic dualisms, such as male/female, human/nature, which have so far been the founding premise of oppression. Another component of the cyborg perspective is the notion of the goddess as the polar opposite. Proponents of the cyborg perspective, such as Donna Haraway, see the goddess as an icon that only perpetuates and reinforces dualisms that are used by patriarchy in justifying the marginalization of groups, especially women.

Yet by creating a polarization between the female cyborg and the goddess, one is simply following the status quo. Proponents of the cyborg perspective, who laud the potential of the cyborg to challenge dualisms and who criticize the goddess for reinforcing dualisms, are creating what they detest—a binary that can be used by patriarchal forces to oppress the “other.” The

goddess/cyborg binary uncomfortably parallels the binary of nature/technology which further mimics the binary of woman/man. The female cyborg, although a hybrid of organic and biotic, can still trace the origin of its biotic self to the realm of science which typically excludes women from taking part (Graham 309). Similarly, the organic features of the female cyborg are relegated to the sphere of nature which has been perceived by patriarchy as space that should be conquered through science. While the merging of the two has the potential to confound dualisms, such as woman/man, nature/technology, situating the female cyborg and the goddess as opposites only reinstates those oppressive dualisms and ultimately mitigates any type of potential the female cyborg does have in challenging hierarchical binaries.

In addition, when one looks at the female cyborg and the goddess, it becomes evident that the two are not as dissimilar as Haraway and other advocates might suggest. Both are imbued with gifts and talents that go far beyond the gifts and talents of average human beings, and both, either through appearance or skill, exude empowerment. As a result, the average human citizen extols the goddess and the female cyborg for their feats; yet the average human citizen also fears them due to the power that they possess.

Furthermore, one only has to look through the historical record to find goddesses, such as the Greek goddess Athena, that also challenge and confound dualisms that are oppressive and it would not be a surprise if some such goddesses were the inspiration for the creation of the female cyborg in literature. Yet, perhaps what is most overlooked with the relationship of the female cyborg and the goddess is that they may be one and the same. As technology and science continue to advance and become the dominant feature upon the landscape, certain aspects of spirituality are merging with technology. As a result, certain individuals or certain texts might merge science and spirituality into one, and the culmination of such a merging might create the

female cyborg as the new goddess. It is clear that such a merging is possible since the main character Kurau in the animation *Kurau Phantom Memory* can be interpreted as encompassing not only a cyborg body, but also encompassing the divine.

Directed by Yasuhiro Irie, *Kurau Phantom Memory* aired on Japanese television in 2004 and was later released to the U.S. in 2007 through Funimation Entertainment. *Kurau Phantom Memory* is not typically categorized as being Yuri because of the lack of explicit sexual contact between the two main protagonists, Kurau and Christmas. Yet, it is evident that the relationship between Kurau and Christmas is more than just a platonic/sisterly friendship. In fact, the two characters consider each other their other half or soulmate and frequently refer to each other as their “pair.” Indeed, the connection between the two is so powerful that one cannot live without the other.

Nonetheless, the connection between the two protagonists contains a twist: Kurau and Christmas are extra-terrestrial beings that reside in the body of Kurau Amami. In their natural form, these extra-terrestrial beings, called Rynax, exist as otherworldly energies in space. In addition, each Rynax possesses a pair and in contrast to the typical perception of soulmates—consisting of an anatomical male and an anatomical female—these pairs are not premised upon the Earthly notions of gender and sexuality.

Normally, these energies do not interfere with livelihoods of human beings. However, when they are called upon or are unleashed, these beings have the capacity to enter and possess the body of human beings. Kurau is the first to be possessed by such extra-terrestrial beings. During an unfortunate accident caused by her father’s experimenting with the energies in order to find a sustainable energy resource, Kurau, as a child, is infused with the energy. It is insinuated much later in the series that Kurau called upon these energies unconsciously during

the experiment due to the absence of her mother, who had fallen ill and passed away when she was younger. Nevertheless, once she is possessed with such energy, Kurau saves the energy of her pair by infusing her pair within her. When the father begs the Rynax energy to leave the body of his daughter, the Rynax energy of Kurau states, “Are you telling me to leave this body? I do not know how to do that. Besides, my Pair lies dormant in this body. . . My Pair is weakened. It needs rest. This body is necessary for that reason, also.” Thus, the body of Kurau for the next ten years consists of three living beings: her former consciousness and the pair of extra-terrestrial energies.

Although Kurau does not possess the typical characteristics that embody most cyborgs, such as mechanical features, Kurau is a cyborg due to her character’s blurring the boundaries of subjectivity. In the article, “Sex and the Single Cyborg,” Sharalyn Orbaugh explores the blurring of subjectivity within the cyborg and concludes that one can find a similar experience with the perception and experience of conjoined twins:

Conjoined twins challenge the notion of the individual, autonomous identity housed in a singular body; they demonstrate the possibility of separate personalities and consciousnesses—separate subjectivities—in a single physical unit. Moreover, although conjoined twins have separate consciousnesses, Grosz quotes first-person accounts that underscore the fact that the “usual hard and fast distinction between the boundaries of one subject or another are continually blurred” to a degree unimaginable to morphologically singular human beings, even including identical twins. (176)

Thus, conjoined twins, intersexed individuals, and ultimately, cyborgs follow what Luce Irigaray and Sharalyn Orbaugh discuss as the “not two”—they cannot be considered one, but they also

cannot be considered as two (Orbaugh 175-76). Clearly Kurau's subjectivity also cannot be divided or added to fit neatly into one integer. While it is clear that three distinct consciousnesses reside in the body of Kurau, it is also evident that the three influence one another sometimes unknowingly. As for the case of the Rynax energy of Kurau, she is sometimes influenced by the memories of the original Kurau and it is implied that Christmas has the ability to visit the Rynax energy of Kurau in dreams. For the original Kurau, she is the gentle voice that Christmas remembers saying, "I'm here." Hence, both Rynax energies and the original Kurau are acutely aware of one another and influence one another.

In addition, such a setup in the animation immediately conjures up an oppositional trilogy to the Christian masculine trilogy of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Likened to the infusion of the Holy Spirit, Kurau is infused with the energy of the Rynax. As a result, Kurau not only possesses extraordinary powers that far surpass the abilities of average human beings, but she is also able to fill a void created by the loss of her mother. It is through the merging of Kurau and the Rynax energy that Kurau is finally able to realize by the end of the series that the spirit of her mother dwells within her. This particular affirmation is remarkably similar to the view of some religions/spiritualities that a higher being resides within one's self. However, the distinction between Kurau's higher being and that of the higher being of most other religions/spiritualities is that her higher being is an anatomical woman. Although Kurau is specifically longing for the mother who was lost at an early age, her longing also mimics the longing or absence of the goddess within the current livelihood of human beings. The supreme Mother has long been forsaken in most religions/spiritualities and has been replaced by the Father.

Most importantly, it is the merging of the Rynax energy with Kurau that saves the world from complete annihilation. Therefore, it is not the masculine trilogy of Christianity that saves

humanity; rather, it is the feminine trilogy of the goddess—the Mother (Goddess), Daughter (Woman), and the queer Rynax energy of Kurau and Christmas (the spirit of the Divine). Similar to many prophets of many religions, Kurau sacrifices herself for the sake of humanity. When the Rynax energy immediately becomes uncontrollable, the only individual who can absorb them back into the world from which they came is the Rynax energy of Kurau. Like the Star of David, the Rynax energy of Kurau radiates immensely while absorbing the hazardous energy. Not surprisingly, her sacrificial act does not take place on Earth but on the moon, where colonies have been established to research the Rynax energy. Besides planet Earth, the moon has also long been associated with goddesses.

For the Rynax of Kurau, such an existence without one's pair is a lonely one. During times when alone, the Rynax energy of Kurau speaks to the pair, begging and coaxing the other half to come out: "Hey . . . Are you here? If you are, please answer me. I've been waiting a good ten years. Please . . . wake up. I'm alone in this world, without my Pair." Ultimately, the once exhausted pair is finally restored to health, and through a process of self-replication leaves the body of Kurau and dwells within a body of her own. Since the body is a cloned one, the pair mirrors the body of Kurau with the exception of possessing longer hair. The Rynax of Kurau proudly names the pair "Christmas." Although the viewer is unaware of the reason behind the christening of the name, it is later revealed that the Rynax energy of Kurau named the pair Christmas due to the original Kurau's memory of the last Christmas she spent with her mother. It is also implied within the animation that Kurau's mother died soon after, possibly the day after Christmas.

Once again, the context of the naming contests Christianity. It is not that the Rynax of Kurau named her pair due to birth of Jesus Christ; rather, it is the last memory that the original

Kurau can remember of her mother, and it is possibly the last time she saw her mother alive.

Thus, the focal point is not upon Christianity's messiah; it is upon Kurau's mother, who can be interpreted as a supreme Mother, a supreme Mother who bears a daughter that bestows the Rynax energy to Earth and a daughter that saves Earth.

Unfortunately, the two are unable to live peacefully with one another. The communist driven government GPO wants to use Kurau for experimentation in the hopes of creating hybrid Rynax and Human (Ryna sapien) soldiers who are better equipped to control society and to maintain order within society. Once the GPO is finished with their experimentation, they plan on killing the two due to their being considered "dangerous" to society. As so put by Ayaka Steiger, an investigator and GPO officer, "they [Kurau and Christmas] are monsters." Indeed, both male and female cyborgs and gods/goddesses alike are perceived by many to be fiends, but it is the female cyborgs and goddesses that are most often vilified. In the article, "Alien Spaces and Alien Bodies in Japanese Women's Science Fiction," Mari Kotani offers one possible explanation. She surmises that women characters who challenge patriarchal forces are viewed as being "monsters"; thus, the "monster" motif in Japanese science fiction literature can sometimes be used as a tool, especially for women writers, to rebel against patriarchy, to express their "cry of reform" and to express "their grief that they often have no other choice but to turn into monsters" (57). Therefore, Kurau and Christmas are "monstrous" beings, not because they are "monsters," but because they have the potential to "implode the world surrounding them" (Kotani 57), or in lay people's terms challenge/subvert the dominant forces in the world of 2100.

In addition to Kotani's explanation, Sharlyn Orbaugh suggests another reason why female cyborgs, in particular Japanese female cyborgs, are considered heinous. She notes that in many Japanese narratives, the cyborg is often female and argues that the re-occurrence of the

female cyborg in literature is a literary motif to illustrate the feminization of Japan by the West (177). This feminization found within Japanese literature is to signify the loss of power since Westernization.

However, the feminization of Japan does not necessarily result in the Japanese female cyborg lacking agency. On the contrary, a Japanese female cyborg is perhaps the most threatening to Western patriarchy due to her challenging patriarchal forces on two fronts: gender and culture. Not only is the Japanese female cyborg challenging the marginalization of her gender, but she is also challenging the marginalization of her culture.

At least the female cyborg can take comfort in knowing that she is not the only female character that is vilified in texts. Goddesses, too, are vilified in various texts. An example of such a goddess is the Hindu goddess Kali. Although Kali is typically portrayed in modern times as a mother goddess, she has also been portrayed as being monstrous due to her connection to death. In addition, the goddess Athena can sometimes be perceived as a threat due to her participation in aspects that are normally reserved for men.

As for Kurau and Christmas, their plight consists of an additional front: sexuality. The two are engaging in a queer relationship that is highly threatening to patriarchy, especially when the relationship is not used as an enhancement for a heterosexual relationship. The Rynax of Kurau is highly aware of such a threat and refers to Christmas as her “sister” when the two are at places where stating the truth might provoke malevolent emotions within the listener. When Christmas asks the Rynax of Kurau why she uses the term “sister” instead of “pair” when referring to her, Kurau states, “We’ll just keep it that way, in this world.” Although it might seem that Kurau’s statement to Christmas suggests that the two will refrain from being “pairs,” on the contrary, Kurau’s statement suggests that the two must avoid using the term “pair” in certain

scenarios. In fact, when the Rynax of Kurau feels safe in other scenarios, she speaks about her relationship freely with others and usually with sincere affection and desire. Even their friend Doug, an agent who helps them escape from the GPO, states to his son, “There's only one person who can give Christmas back her smile.”

While the Rynax of Kurau possesses extraordinary talents, such as flying and being able to withstand space radiation without the use of space equipment, perhaps the most important ability the Rynax of Kurau has that convincingly affirms her potential as the new goddess is her ability to heal. Like many prophets and shamans, Kurau has the capabilities to heal others injured by the Rynax energy. She learns that she possesses such capabilities when she accidentally reabsorbs Rynax energy that was once in the body of an enemy, but it is not until her father takes her to a sanitarium reserved for individuals who are dying due to over-exposure that she learns about her true potential. One by one she begins to heal the dying patients; however, such miracles come at a cost. In each instance that she must reabsorb the energy, she becomes deathly ill. Nevertheless, Kurau ignores her own pain and suffering for others and continues to heal and sacrifices her own self to heal the planet.

Indeed, it is her final sacrifice that is the most moving and most revealing of the Rynax energy of Kurau's divinity. Due to a promise that the Rynax of Kurau gave to the father, the Rynax of Kurau uses her very last bit of energy to save the original Kurau. The original Kurau discusses this last moment of sacrifice with her father: “She used the last ounce of her energy to save my body. She said she must return it to you, Dad. She said she promised you . . . She was starting to disappear . . . She barely had any strength left in her, yet, she protected my body.”

As a result of such sacrifice, the Rynax of Kurau must lie dormant, like Christmas, in order to replenish her strength. The bearer of the Rynax energy of Kurau is no other than

Christmas. Thus, like the Rynax of Kurau who had to wait for Christmas, Christmas now must wait ten years alone without her partner. Ultimately, though, Kurau does return. Before she exits Christmas's body, Kurau states:

Look, Christmas. The Rynax have found a wide world. Somewhere that's not here . . . A wide world where the Rynax can go out into. I want to see that world too. A new, bigger world. But, Christmas. I'll stay right by your side. I'll be with you!

Although the Rynax of Kurau's comment may seem directed towards Christmas, the Rynax of Kurau is also directing the comment towards the audience. It is a comment that reassures the spectators that they too possess a Kurau, a goddess. Thus, Kurau encourages and invites the spectators to find their inner goddesses. According to Luce Irigaray and Elaine Graham, such an invitation is the pinnacle act of the reconfiguration of the goddess myth—to imagine that one possesses divinity within one's self. The new goddess is not like the God created by the masculine sphere that makes one all too aware of one's imperfections and the new goddess is not like the God created by the masculine sphere to project the ultimate desires and interests that one strives for and places on a transcendental kingdom; rather, the new goddess acts like a beacon that urges individuals to recognize one's own strengths and talents and urges individuals to strive for one's desires and dreams in this realm (Graham 317). In imagining a divinity with one's self and in the selves of others, one will soon find that many cyborgs/goddesses walk among us: individuals who are hybrids consisting of half humanity and half goddess; cyborgs who have the power to deconstruct the dualisms of patriarchy; and goddesses who have the power to deconstruct the dualisms of patriarchy.

It is clear that *ICE* and *Kurau Phantom Memory* beckon the audience to reflect, deconstruct, and/or re-construct the nature/woman myth and the fabrications within it. In

addition, they also beckon the audience to search out other social myths and deconstruct them and to explore other possibilities outside the sphere of Western patriarchal forces to find solutions and to find enlightenment before it is too late. Last but not least, the animations encourage the audience members to reflect upon the current master story that is being heard most often and to decide if such a story reflects their own way of life. If not, like the characters of most Yuri animations, one has the power to resist and change the master story.

## CONCLUSION

Although the main purpose of Yuri manga and animation is to entertain the masses, Yuri narratives should not be taken lightly. Yuri manga and animation are not “cartoons” intended for the imaginative minds of young children; rather, they are narratives intended for readers and viewers to explore what is beyond the boundaries of hegemonic order through a queer female subject. From its early origination in the early twentieth century to the present, the queer female subject of Yuri narratives has defied and challenged the rules and regulations found within hegemony. These narratives can be thought of as ground zero where myths about female gender and sexuality created by hegemonic rule explode. Such stereotypical beliefs about women are challenged by the characters explicitly or implicitly, who, most often than not, invert such beliefs to reveal their oppressive natures.

Some stereotypical beliefs about women that Yuri narratives explore pertain to the queer female community. These narratives offer a glimpse into a community that often gets overlooked in literature and film and often gets categorized based upon only few taxonomies. As such, individuals ignore the diversity found within the queer female community and only view such diversity as exceptions to the rule. In actuality, diversity is the majority, not the minority, in the queer female community, and such narratives bring awareness to the range of possibilities that can be found in the queer female community.

Similarly, individuals also ignore the diverse paths that have led women to understand their particular personal genders and sexualities. Hegemony has created a monochromatic perception of the queer female community, where only certain paths validate one’s sexuality. Even such a perception can be found in the queer community. Rather than disregarding women-

loving-women narratives that do not fit the status quo, we should cherish and revere such narratives for their representations of the numerous and diverse ground zero sites that can be found on a journey of self-discovery.

Yet the beautiful, handsome women of Yuri narratives are not only concerned about misperceptions pertaining to women loving women. Other myths, such as myths connecting women to nature, are also explored by Yuri narratives. Yuri narratives make clear that the woman/nature myth and the other fabrications produced within it is a foolhardy excuse to justify the continued subjugation of women. The myth is an illusion at best, and if humanity continues to use such an illusion to conquer and control, total annihilation of the planet or other spheres will be the result. If the time comes, one should not be surprised that the savior of humanity will come in the form of a queer female divine shōjo, who is a cyborg warrior ready to sacrifice herself willingly for the sake of humankind.

In addition to such amazing narratives, Yuri has played a central role in the development of other sub-genres, such as Shōjo, Yaoi, and Ladies' Comics. Yoshiya Nobuko and Nakahara Jui'ichi created and developed the concept of the shōjo, which can be found not only in the Shōjo sub-genre, but also in all genres of Japanese animation and manga. Riyoko Yamagishi's "tomboy" narratives and Ikeda Riyoko's "gender bending" narratives brought back Nobuko's concept of the shōjo, who preferred to explore eroticism with other shōjos. The adaptation of Ikeda Riyoko's *The Rose of Versailles* for the provocative Takarazuka Revue attests to the immense popularity and influence of the sub-genre in Japanese culture. Even today, the sub-genre's popularity continues to grow. The Yuri narrative *Maria-sama Ga Miteru* (*Maria Watches Over Us*) has been adapted as a live-action film, and is expected to make its debut in the Fall of 2010.

In light of such narratives, the academic community needs to reassess its current historical and literary findings of Japanese animation and manga. Excluding Yuri animation and manga from the historical and literary record perpetuates the suppression of women's voices. By employing such Western theories as queer theory, eco-feminism, and cyberfeminism, my thesis offers alternative interpretations that point to the subversive influence of Yuri animations and manga. After all, it is through narratives, lived or imaginary, that one can find not only solace but also courage and strength to face challenges, small and large, in one's life.

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