



Boys' Love, Otome culture, and gender

JR Brown



- 
- Position Boys' Love media in otome culture
 - Role of Boys' Love media in otome culture's explorations of gender and sexuality
- 

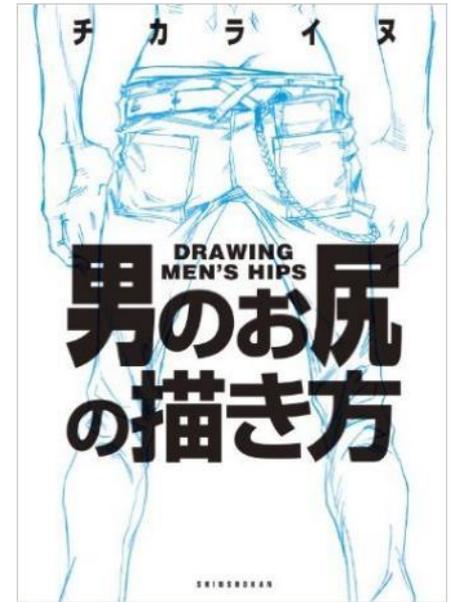
“Made in Japan English”

Loanwords: often with change in meaning

Hippu (hip) = butt

Jūsu (juice) = soft drinks, soda

Feminisuto (feminist) = gallant, chivalrous



Wasei-eigo: Japanese made with English parts

Does **not** mean what it would literally mean in English

Boys' Love / Girls' Love / Teens' Love / Men's Love: no age cutoffs

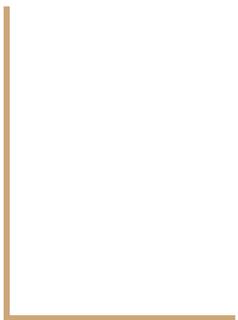
Otome Culture:

Japanese pop culture for girls and women (otome = maiden)

- Shoujo manga
- Josei manga
- Female-targeted anime
- Female-targeted light novels
- Otome games
- Female-oriented dramas / film
- Fan activity (doujinshi, etc)
- *Etc.*

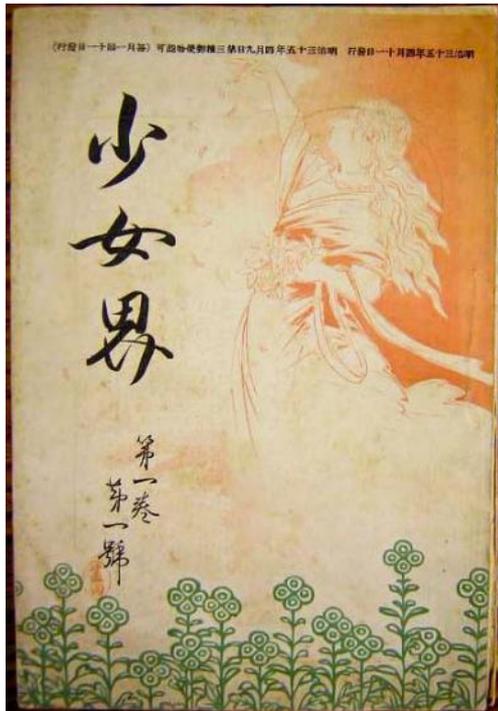


Condensed history of shoujo manga

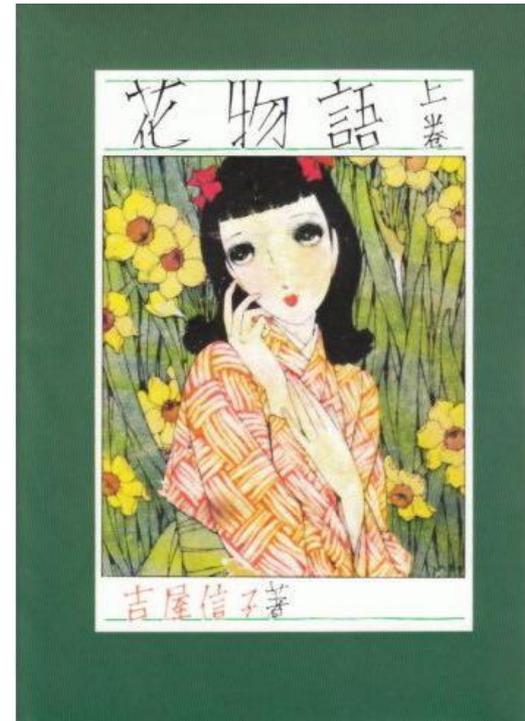


The birth of girls' media

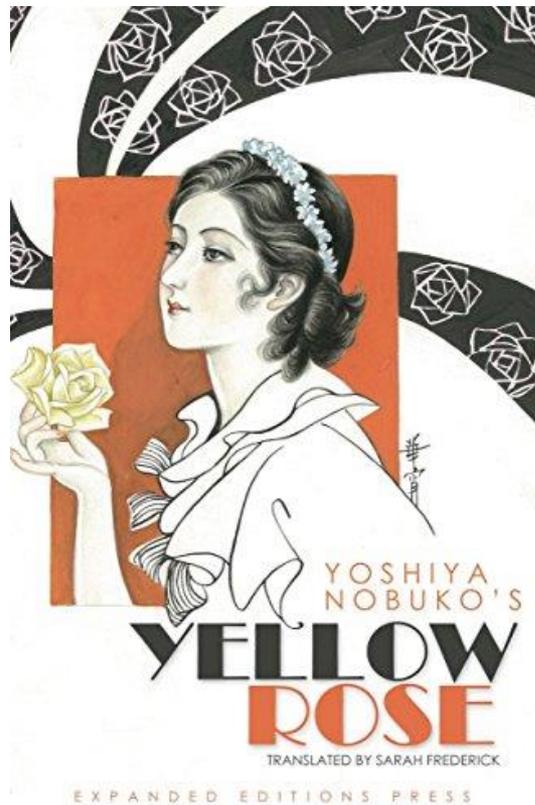
First girls' magazine: *Shoujo Kai*
(girls' world), 1902-1912



Girls' stories: *Hana Monogatari*
(Flower Stories) by Yoshiya
Nobuko, originally published 1916–
1924) (cover: Jun'ichi Nakahara)



The Yellow Rose (digital: Kindle): One of the stories from *Hana Monogatari*, nice introduction by Sarah Frederick, cover by Takabatake Kashō



Visual style

Takabatake Kashō (cover image for *Shōjo Gaho*, 1928)



Fukiya Kōji (cover for *Shōjo Gaho*, c. 1930)

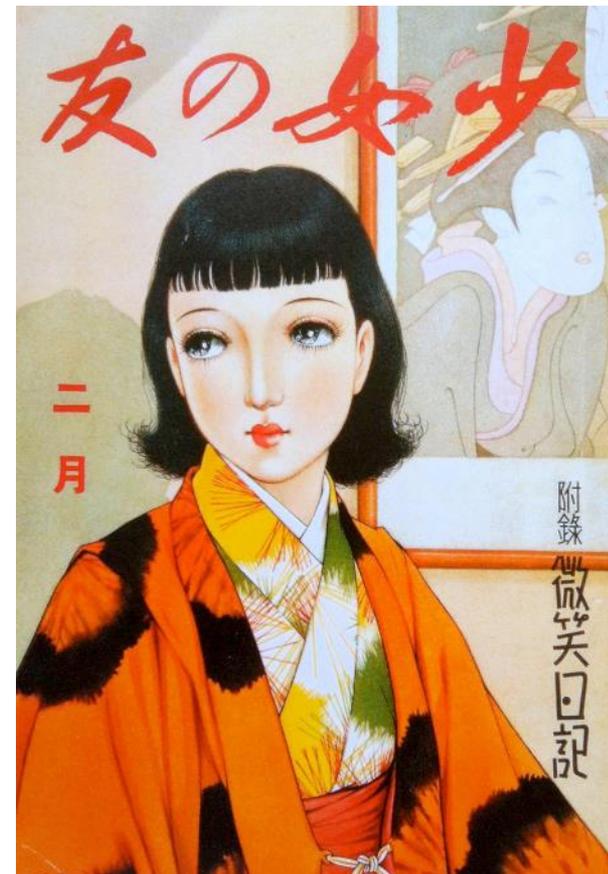


Visual style

Matsumoto Katsuji (illustration c. early 1930's)



Nakahara Jun'ichi (cover for *Shōjo no Tomo* c. 1930)



The birth of shoujo manga

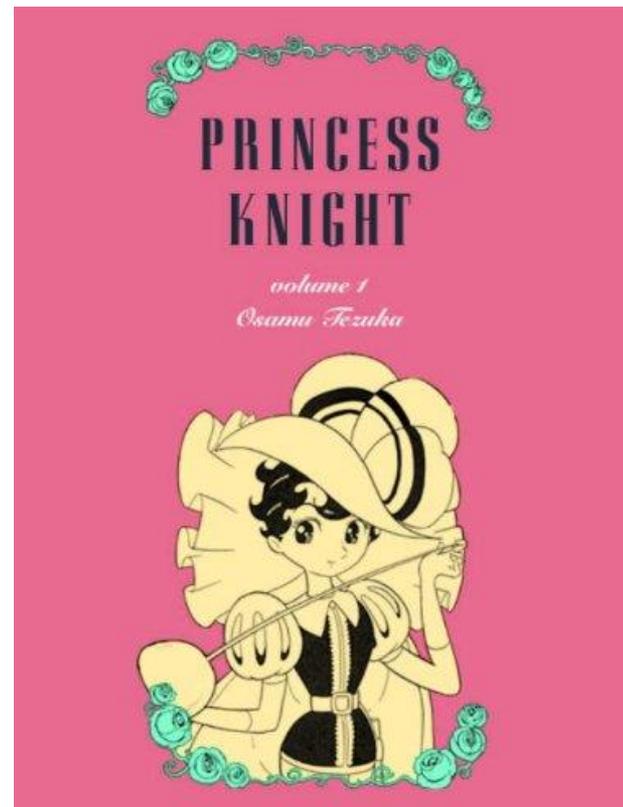
Early shoujo comic insert: *Nazo no kurobaa* (The Mysterious Clover),
Matsumoto Katsuji, 1934



Princess Knight

Ribon no kishi (Princess Knight),
Osamu Tezuka, 1953+

Available from Vertical, 2 omnibus
volumes



Dedicated shoujo manga magazines

Longest-running: *Nakayoshi* (good friends), 1954+



One of the runners-up: *Ribon* ("ribbon"), 1955+



Women write manga!

“*Showa 24-nen Gumi*”: Showa year 24 group

AKA “the Fabulous 49-ers”

A group of young women, many born in/around 1949, who started writing shoujo manga in the mid-60s

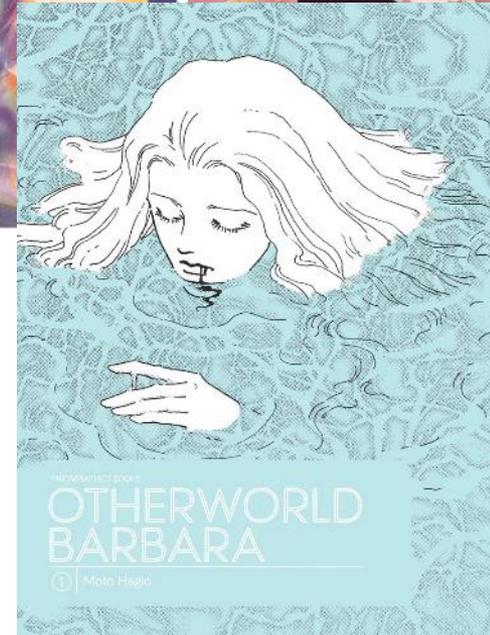
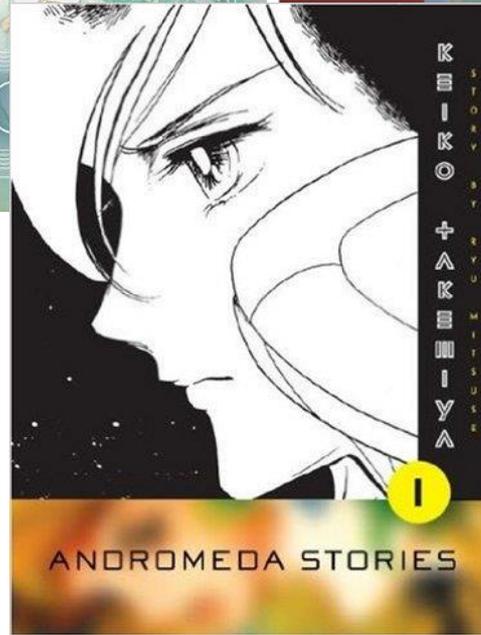
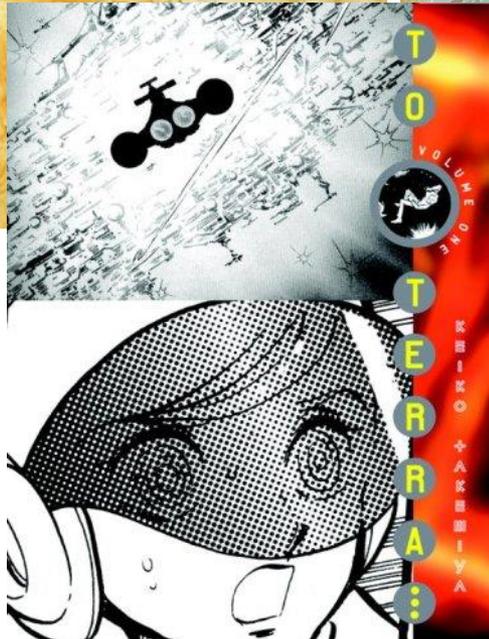
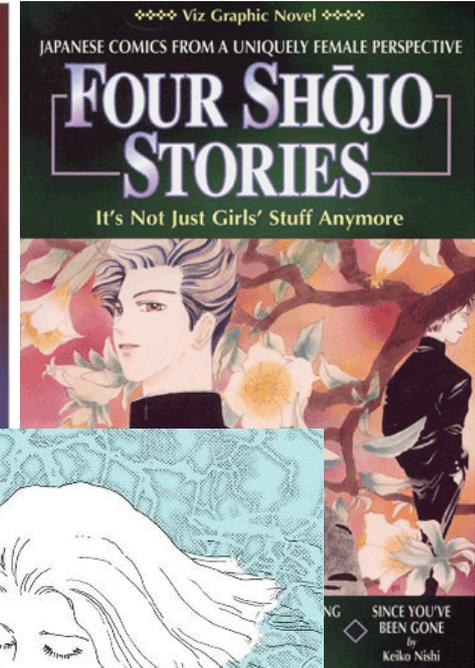
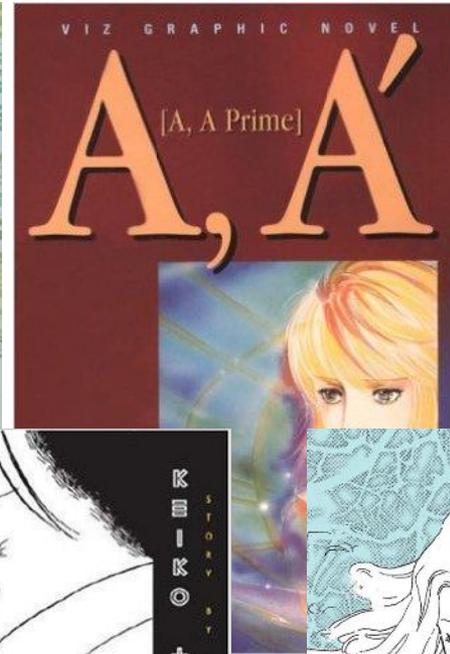
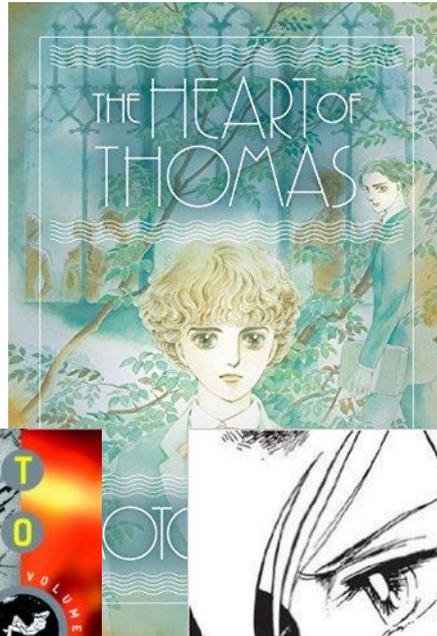
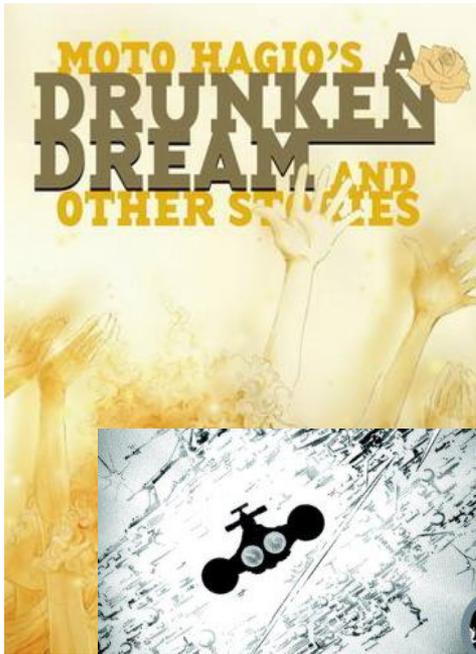
Yasuko Aoike, **Moto Hagio**, Riyoko Ikeda, Yumiko Ōshima, **Keiko Takemiya**, Toshie Kihara, Ryoko Yamagishi, Minori Kimura, Nanae Sasaya, Mineko Yamada, and others

“Founding mothers of shoujo”

Not the first women to write shoujo manga, BUT:

- Changed shoujo to a female-created category
- And an artistically and culturally important one

Painfully little in English...



Announced for this year....

Riyoko Ikeda, *Rose of Versailles*, Udon



Women writers brought new themes to shoujo

Sexuality

First sex scene in a shoujo manga: *Fire!*, Hideko Mizuno, 1969

Gender problems

Social issues

Abortion, sexual abuse, sexism, AIDS

One of the first fictional treatments of AIDS in any Japanese media:
TOMOI, Akisato Wakuni, 1987 (BL)

Cute boys

First male protagonist in a shoujo manga: *Fire!*, Hideko Mizuno, 1969

Gay dudes (and girls)

Money talks

Publishers were initially resistant to stories with these topics....

... but girls bought them

... and more mature themes attracted older (i.e., teenage) readers = more sales

The shoujo market took off, and publishers became more hands-off

“The editor's job is to guide the artist to making something the audience will like”

Eventually adult women became a significant readership

First josei manga magazines appear in the 1980's

The “Girl ghetto”

Women and girls consume media made for boys and men

Men and boys do not consume media made for girls and women

- Female-targeted media has less visibility and cultural importance than male-targeted media

OTOH: This can enable it to “fly under the radar”

The Japanese girl ghetto: “Genregraphics”

The American market treats manga as a single unit

- Typically shelved alpha by title
- Demographic target invisible and often misinterpreted

Japan treats manga as separate “demographic” categories

- Typically shelved by age/gender category
(although some by genre/type - BL, 4-koma, etc.)
- Demographic target is salient
- Shoujo/josei/BL typically clustered

You cannot “accidentally” buy a girl book

Most other pop culture products are similarly segregated (light novels, games, etc.)

Shuesha readership breakdowns, 2015 (based on returned survey cards):

Shounen / Seinen:

Weekly Shonen Jump: - not telling, estimated 80% male

Jump Square: 67% male, 33% female

V Jump: 92% male, 8% female

Young Jump: 90% male, 10% female

Ultra Jump: 95% male, 5% female

Shoujo / Josei:

Ribon: 100% female

Cookie: 100% female

Margaret: 99.9% female, 0.1% male

Betsuma: 99% female, 1% male

The Margaret: 98% female, 2% male

You: 100% female

Office You: 100% female

Cocohana: 100% female

Cobalt (light novels): 100% female



Condensed history of BL



Wakashū

Age category for boys between childhood and adulthood (originally restricted to upper classes)

Distinctive hair and dress compared to adult men

In prints, can be hard to distinguish from women

The peak moment of male beauty

➤ Prototype of the bishounen



Beauty is unisex

Torikaebaya Monogatari (The Changelings), late Heian period (794 to 1185)

Chigo Imamairi (The New Lady in Waiting is a Chigo)

- Beautiful crossdressing boys



Traditional categories of (male) sexual desire:

- Joshoku (female color) – male desire for women
- Nanshoku (male color) – male desire for wakashū

Not mutually exclusive or necessarily oppositional

(Waka)shūdo:

The do (way) of wakashū

Boy-banging considered as a fine art



Masanobu Okumura, New Years gathering within a brothel, c. 1739

The onnagata

Kabuki female-role actors

Typically wakashū

“More womanly than woman”

Fashionable, beautiful, erotically desirable

Typically also prostitutes



Early 20th century literary *shounen-ai*

Edogawa Ranpo

Ero guro nansensu - surrealism, eroticism and decadence

Taruho Inagaki - promoted "heightened emotional and artistic receptivity as a key tenet of *modanizumu* [Japanese modernist literature]"

Tambi-ha (aesthetic school) - early modernist fiction emphasizing "aestheticism, decadence, hedonism, and a general *fin de siecle* sentiment"



Taruho Inagaki,
Shōnen'ai no Bigaku,
1968

The “gei boi”

English loanword “gei” nativizes in Japan in the late 1940’s (before it became generally known in the US)

Homophone of gei (芸), “artistic accomplishment” - as in geisha

Associated with beautiful androgynous male entertainers and “gei ba”



A “gei boy” of the 1950s (Tomita Eizo, *Gei*, 1958)

Mari Mori's “aesthetic” novellas

Koibito tachi no mori (A Lovers' Forest), 1961

Nichiyōbi ni boku wa ikanai (I Don't Go on Sundays), 1961

Kareha no nedoko (The Bed of Dead Leaves) (1962)

Female-targeted stories of beautiful teenage boys in melodramatic relationships with older men

Three women go to a movie...



The birth of BL

Keiko Takemiya, *Sunroom Nite* (In the Sunroom), Bessatsu Shōjo Komikku 1970



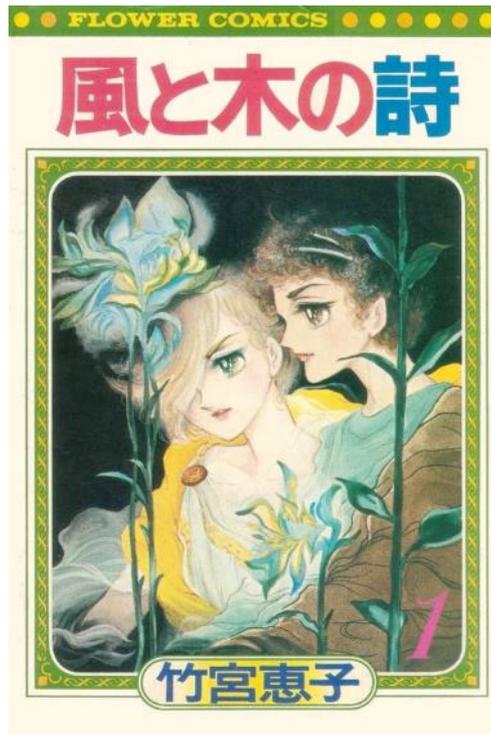
Moto Hagio, *11-gatsu no Gymnasium* (The November Gymnasium), 1971





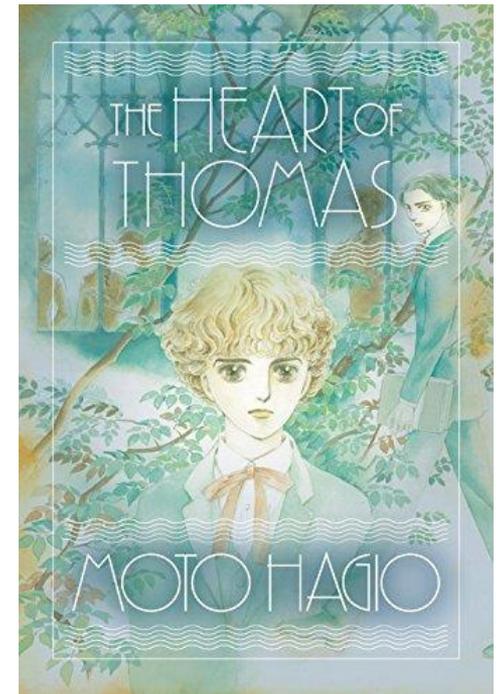
The birth of BL, full volume edition

Keiko Takemiya, *Kaze to Ki no Uta*
(The Poem of the Wind and the
Trees), Shojo Comic (1976 to
1984)



Moto Hagio, *Thomas no Shinzō*
(The Heart of Thomas), Shojo
Comic (1974-1975)

English edition Fantagraphics



June magazine, 1978-2012

Named after Jean Genet

From Magazine Magazine, porn publisher,
also did the gay men's magazine *Sabu*

Editor was a huge fan of Keiko Takamiya

A “slightly pornographic” magazine for girls

Amateur- and semi-pro driven

Primary competitor was *Allan* (1980-1984)



1990's: "Boys' Love" emerges

BL hit a boom in early 90's, magazines exploded

Kid's, 1989

Gust, 1990

b-Boy, 1991

Image, 1992

About 30 others over the decade (most didn't last)

Other publishers didn't want "June" to be the category name: *wasei-eigo* to the rescue!

BL breaks off as an identifiable category – but also becomes ghettoized

Representing gender



Gender is cultural



Pink satin and lace is...?

Pink satin and lace is... a status marker

Daniël Mijtens, Portrait of a Young Nobleman, c. 1630



Cultural encoding:

Japan: Sweet food is feminine



America: Sweet food is universal



Cultural encoding:

America: Body hair is masculine

1999 women's poll: things women find undesirable in a man's body

- 1.Chest hair
- 2.Body hair
- 3.Leg hair
- 4.Beards
- 5.Fat

Japan: Body hair is slovenly

2000 women's poll: grooming problems you wish the men in your life would fix

- 1.Body hair
- 2.Beards
- 3.Pimples

Conventionalized representations

How to Draw Shoujo Manga (Hakusensha)

Now compare the drawings in B, C and D. B and C are similar t-shirts, but the horizontal creases in B make it look fitted. The character's well-built physique is also accented. On the other hand, with the looser fitting t-shirt in C, the creases are vertical. You can also show the character's delicate body type. Shirts like D usually fit loosely, so the creases should also have a softer feel.



Conventionalized representations

Voltage Inc. mobile otome games



Voltage USA re-skins (same games)



Otome fantasies of gender

Recuperation of femininity

Mainstream culture devalues femininity: traditionally positioned as weak, dependent, etc.

"joshi-ryoku" vs "josei pawa": "accomplished femininity" vs "powerful femininity"

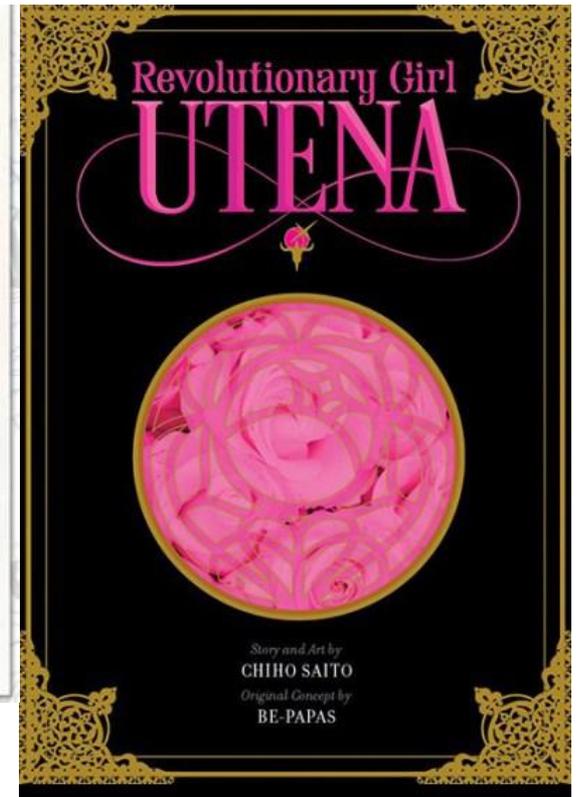
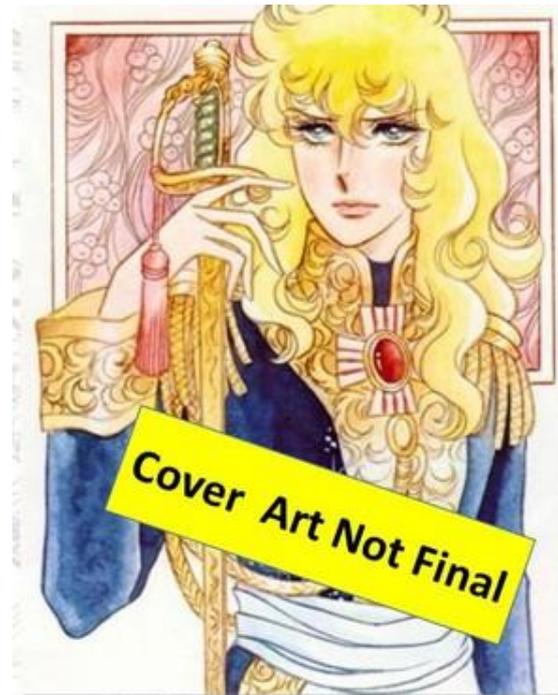
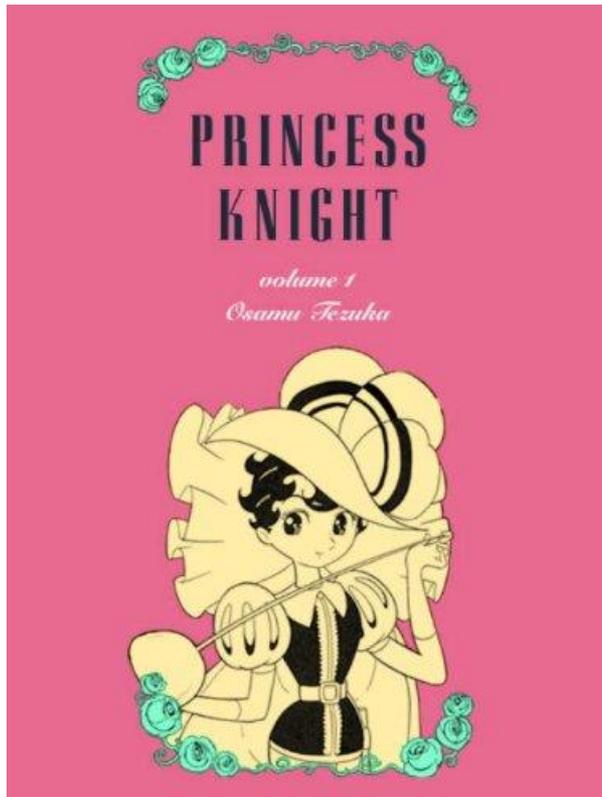
“Weaponized femininity”: magical girls, “power of nice”

Otome media provides alternate gender conceptions

Female access to desirable masculine traits

Recuperation of femininity in men: male access to desirable feminine traits

The Girl Prince



Stock character type

Monthly Girls' Nozaki-kun, Izumi Tsubaki

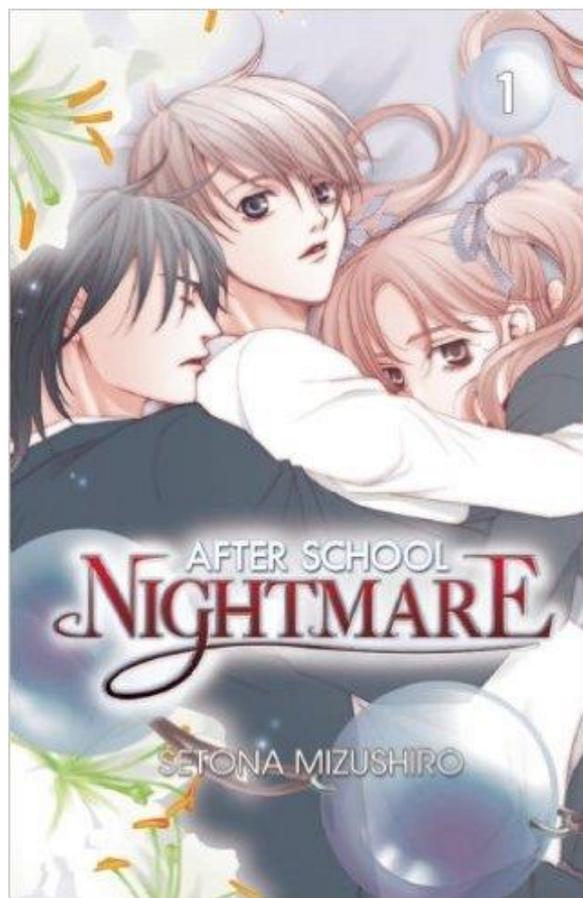
“Technically Not Shoujo”



Kashima <3

Gender trauma

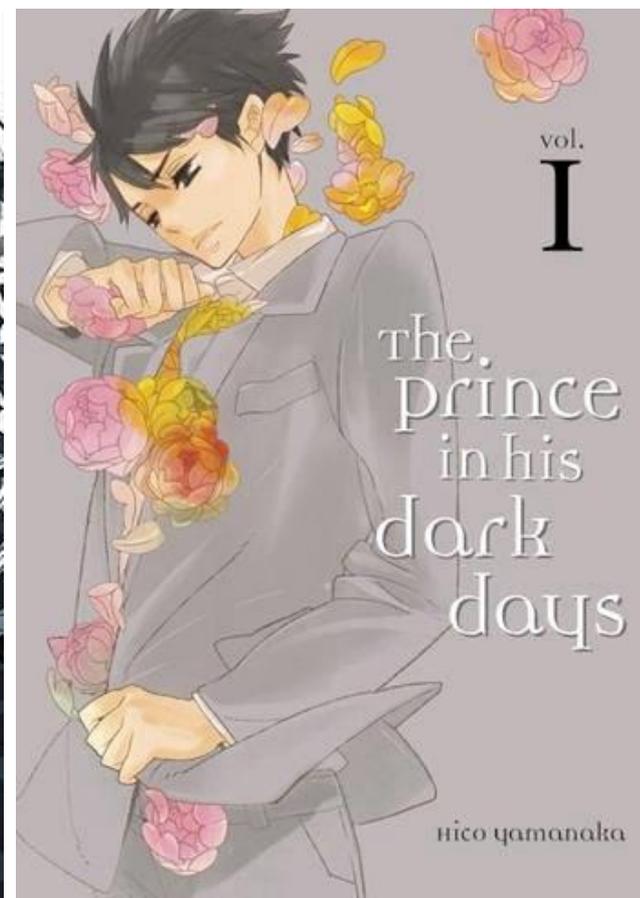
Setona Mizushiro, *After School Nightmare*



Aya Kanno, *Requiem of the Rose King*

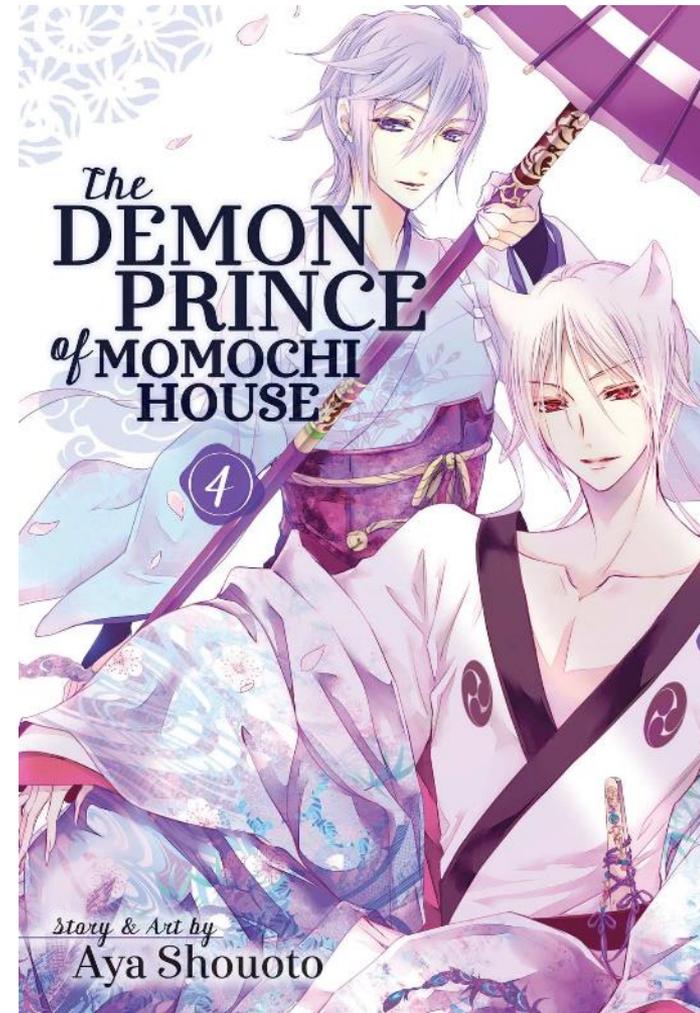


Hico Yamanaka, *The Prince in his Dark Days*



Androgynous beauty

Bishounen are forever

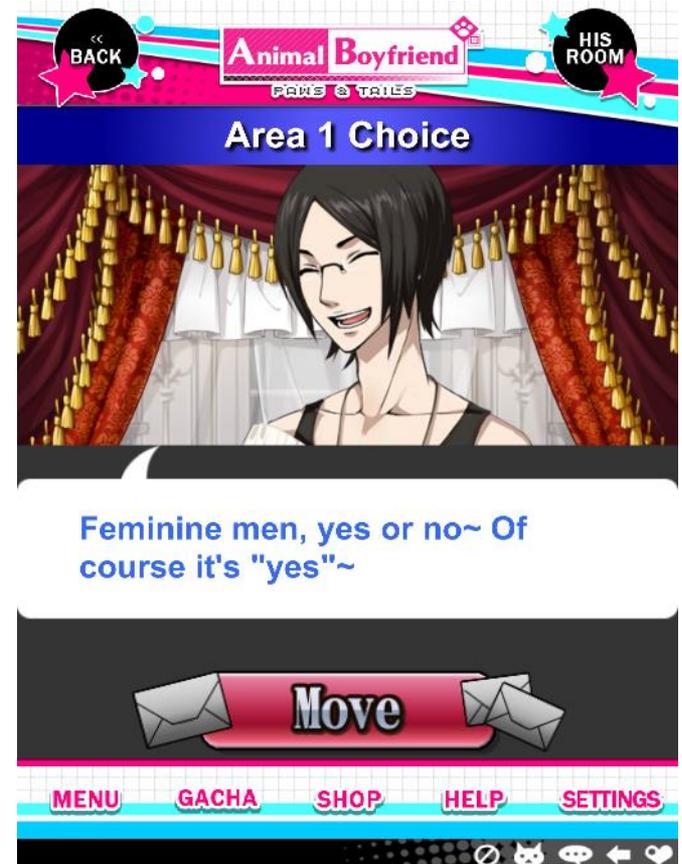


Overtly feminine men

Mr. Osomatsu (lost episode 1)



Animal Boyfriend mobile game

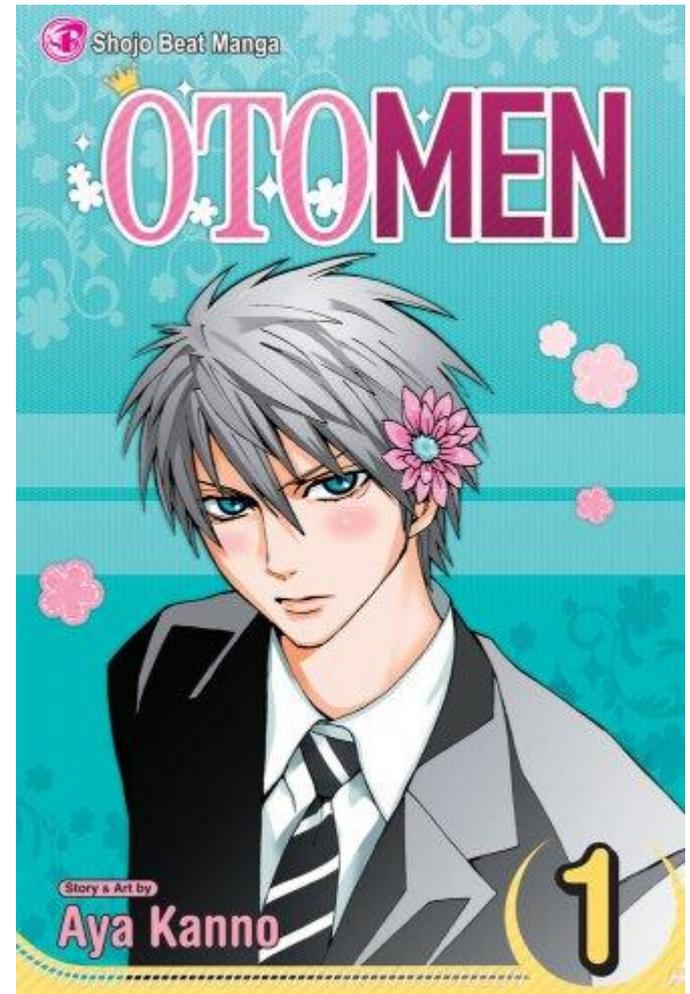


Otomen

Aya Kanno (*Bessatsu Hana to Yume*)

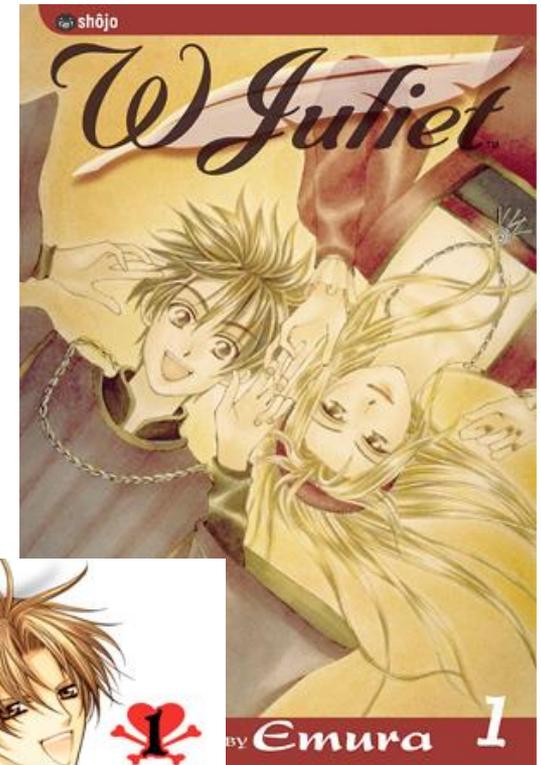
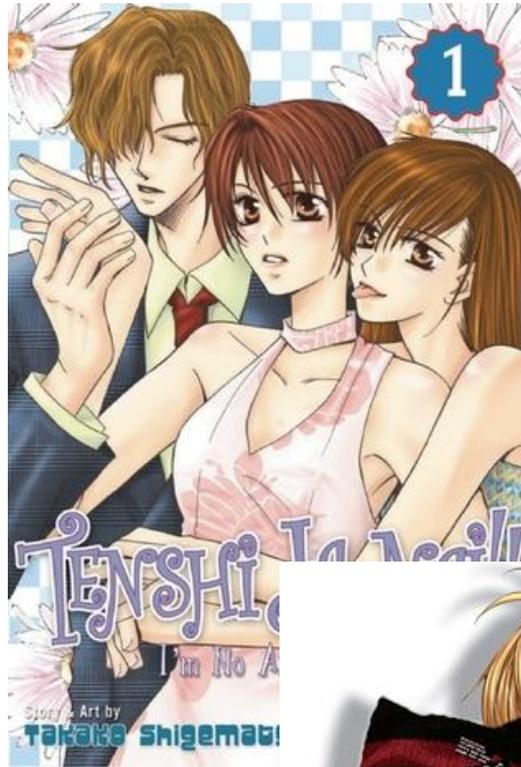
All men have feminine aspects

Coined a word: self-identified otomen



Crossdressers

Josou danshi wa ikaga desu ka? Promo book (ShoComi)



Usotsuki Lily

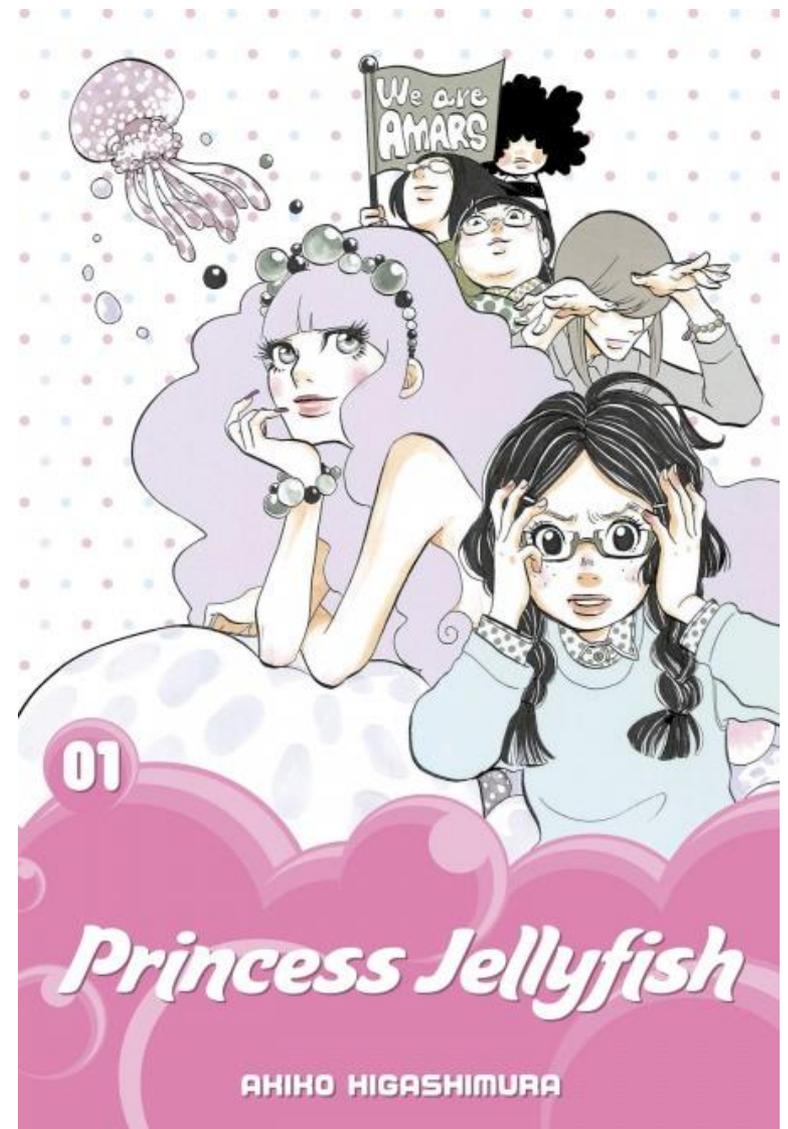
Ayumi Komura (Available as *Lily la Mentreuse* in French)



Josei crossdressers

Princess Jellyfish, Akiko Higashimura (*Kiss*)

Helps female characters access accomplished femininity



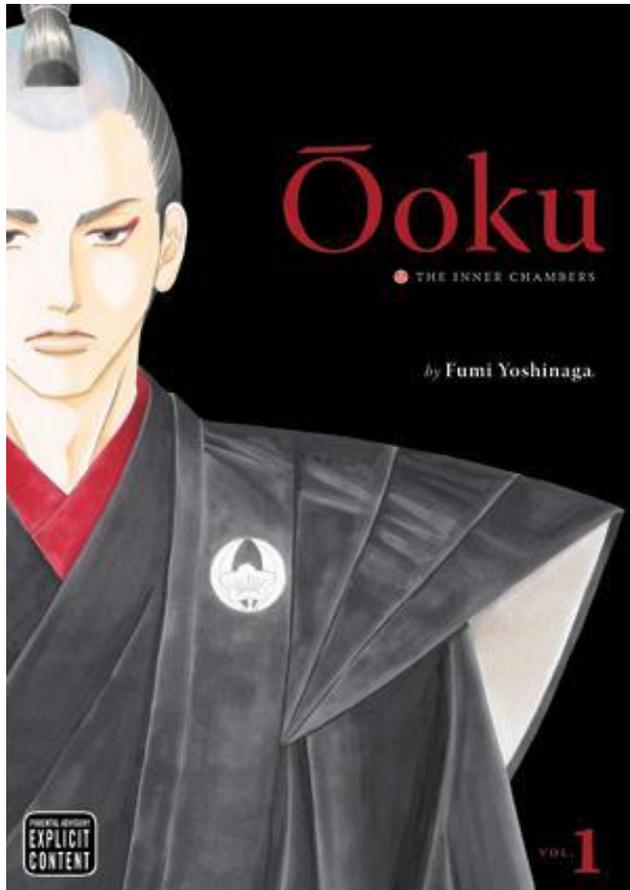
Crossdress Paradise reality TV

Segment of a daytime TV show oriented to women (search Youtube)

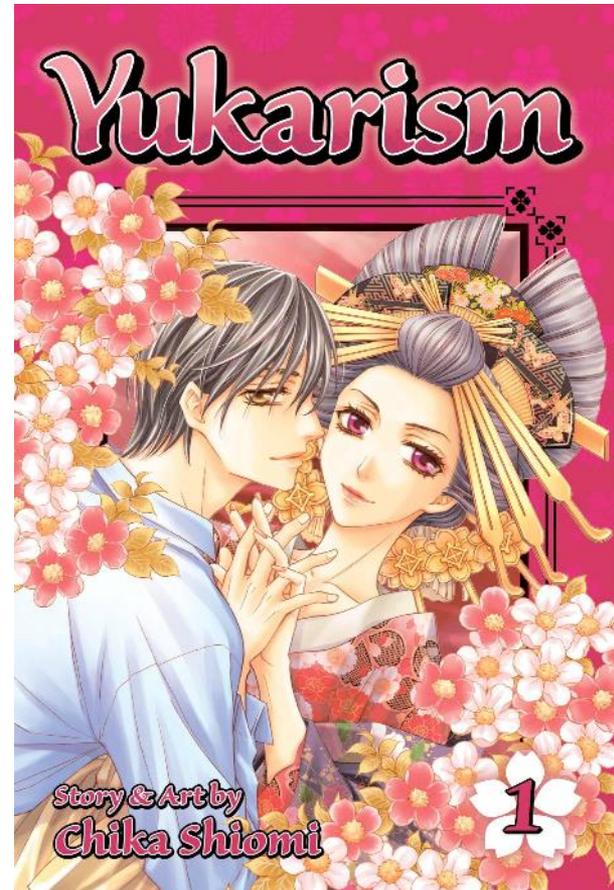


Generalized gender mashing

Ooku, Fumi Yoshinaga

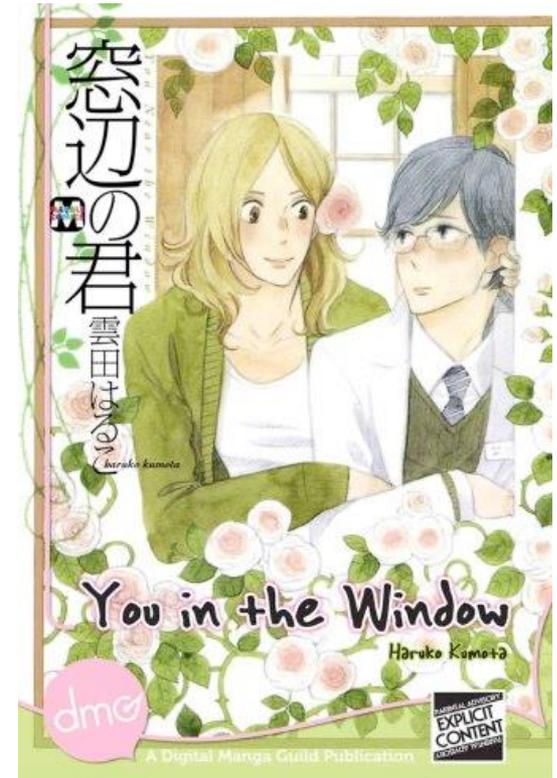
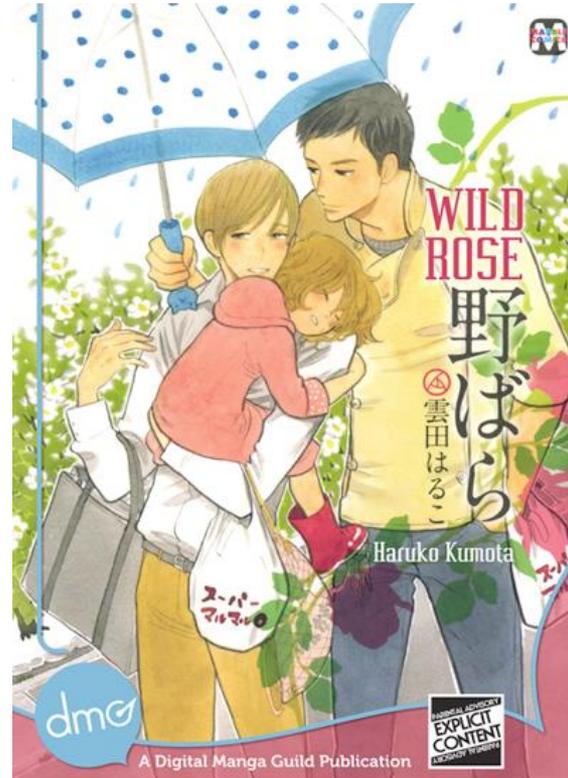
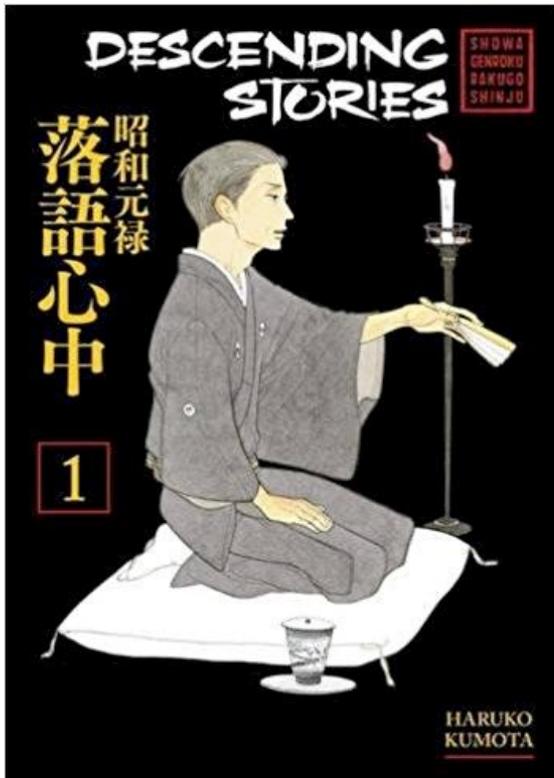


Yukarism, Chika Shiomi



BL subtext in mainstream josei

Descending Stories: Showa
Genroku Rakugo Shinju, Haruko
Kumota (ITAN)

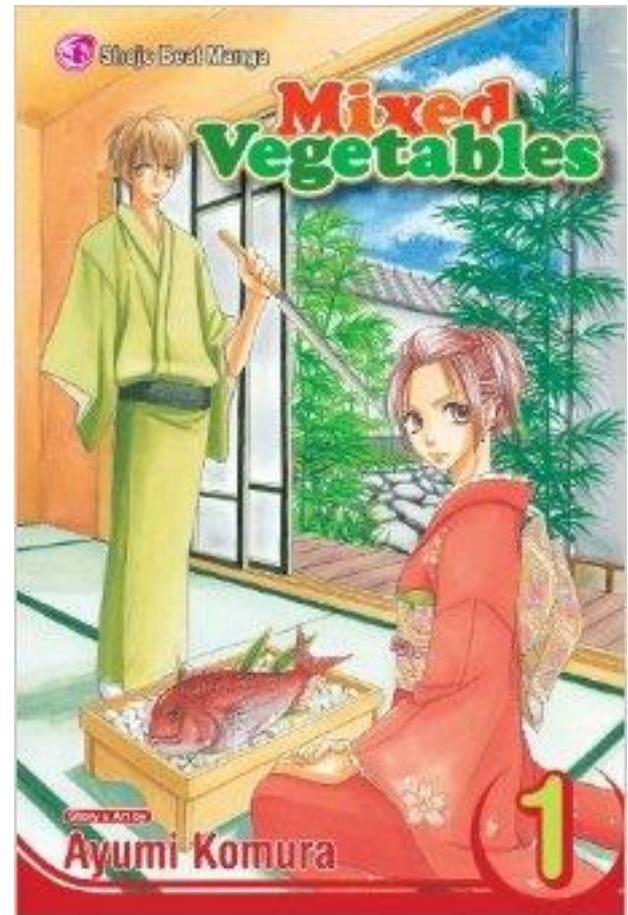


Men take on feminine roles

Cooking

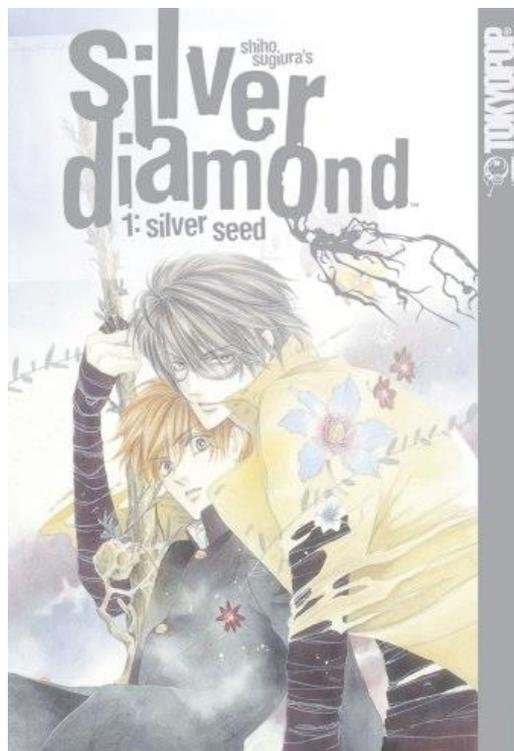
Parenting

Professions (e.g. pastry chef)

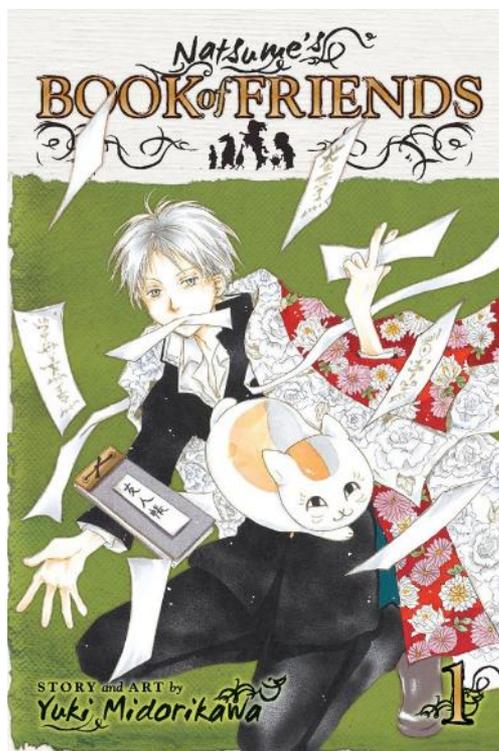


“The Power of Nice”

Silver Diamond, Shiho Sugiura



Natsume's Book of Friends, Yuki Midorikawa

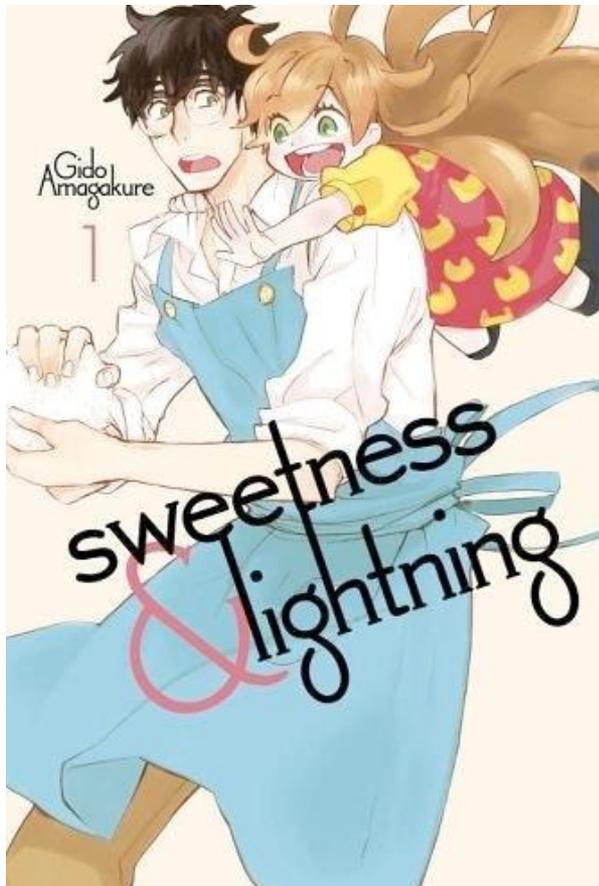


The Morose Mononokean, Kiri Wazawa



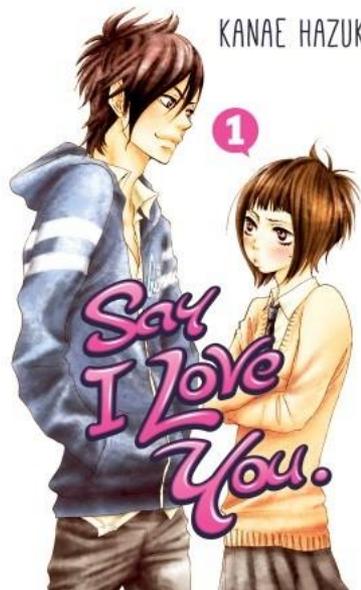
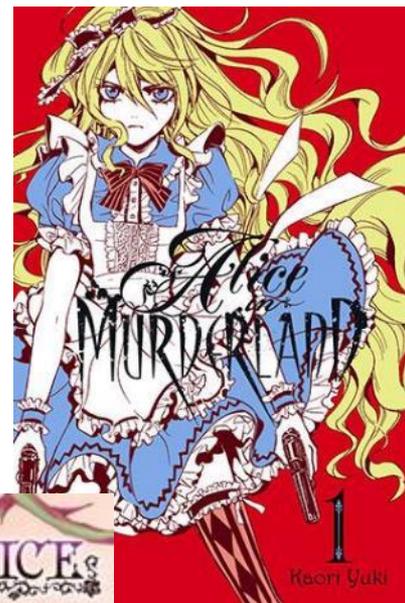
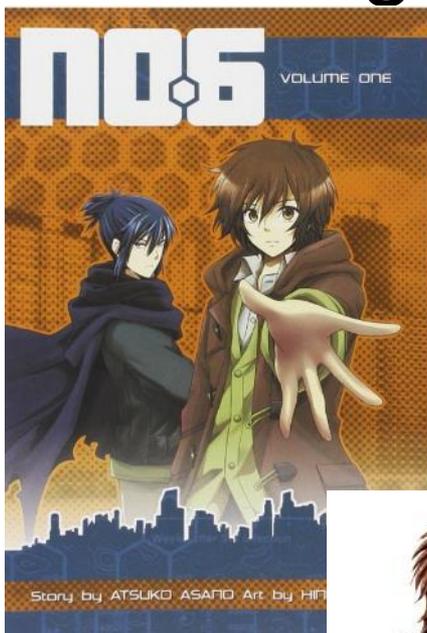
Female-friendly seinen and domesticity

Sweetness and Lightning, Gido Amagakure (*Good! Afternoon*)



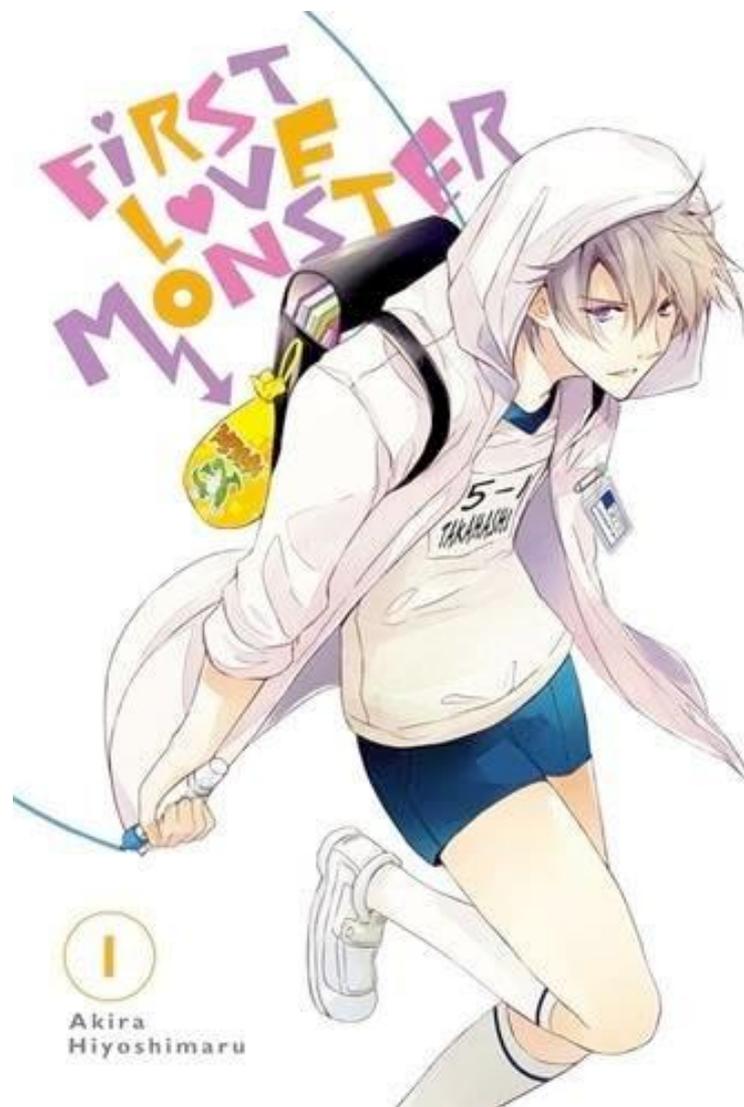
Otome sexuality

Older-targeted shoujo



Things girls like:

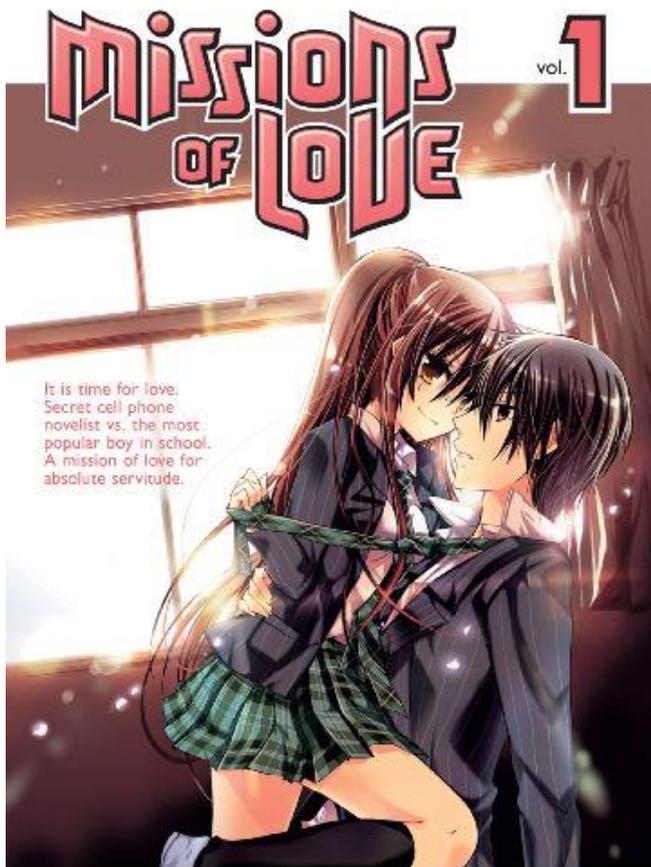
- Guys who are inappropriately old for them
- Guys who are inappropriately young for them
- Incest
- Body-swapping
- Vampires
- Boys kissing
- Girls kissing
- Gratuitous crossdressing
- Angst-ridden bisexual love triangles
- Disturbing sexual power dynamics
- Kittens



First Love Monster, Hico Yamanaka

Smut for everyone

For tweens – ran in *Nakayoshi*



EMA TOYAMA

For adults – “Teens Love” manga

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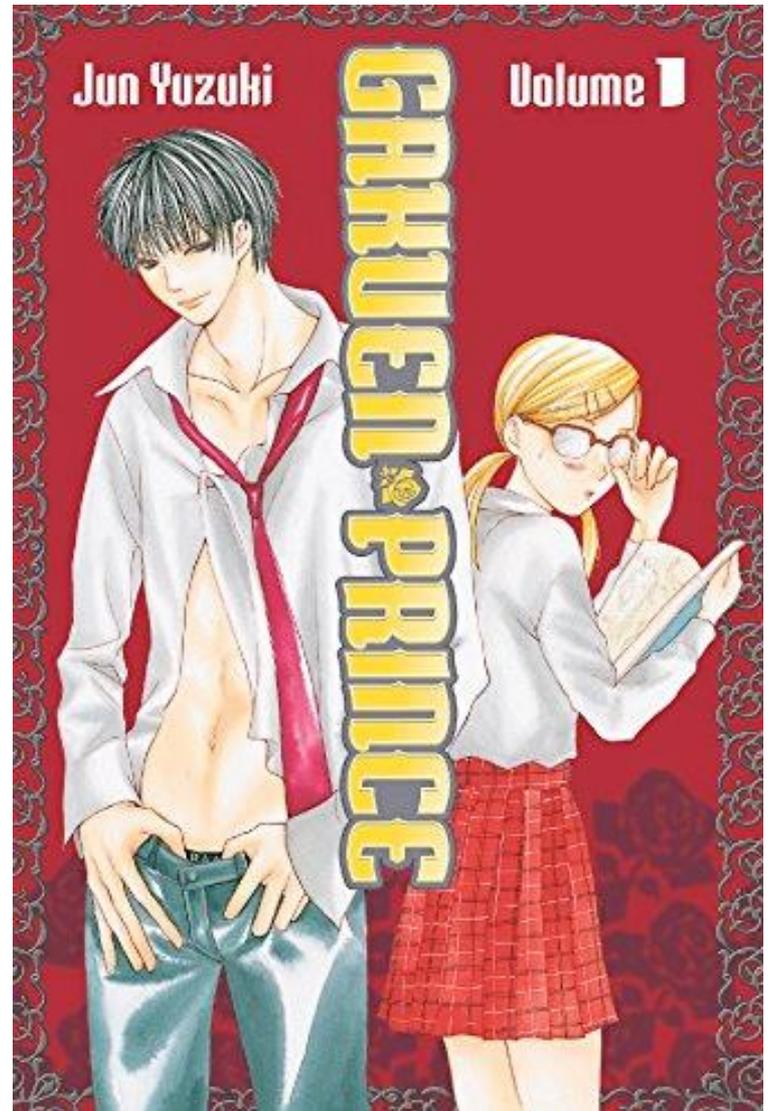
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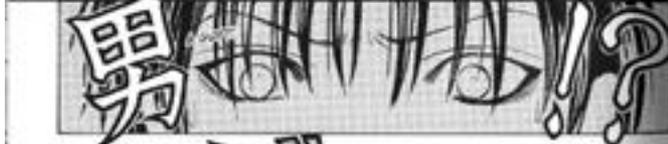
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Gakuen Prince

Jun Yuzuki

Recently-integrated girls' school full of sex-mad predatory girls



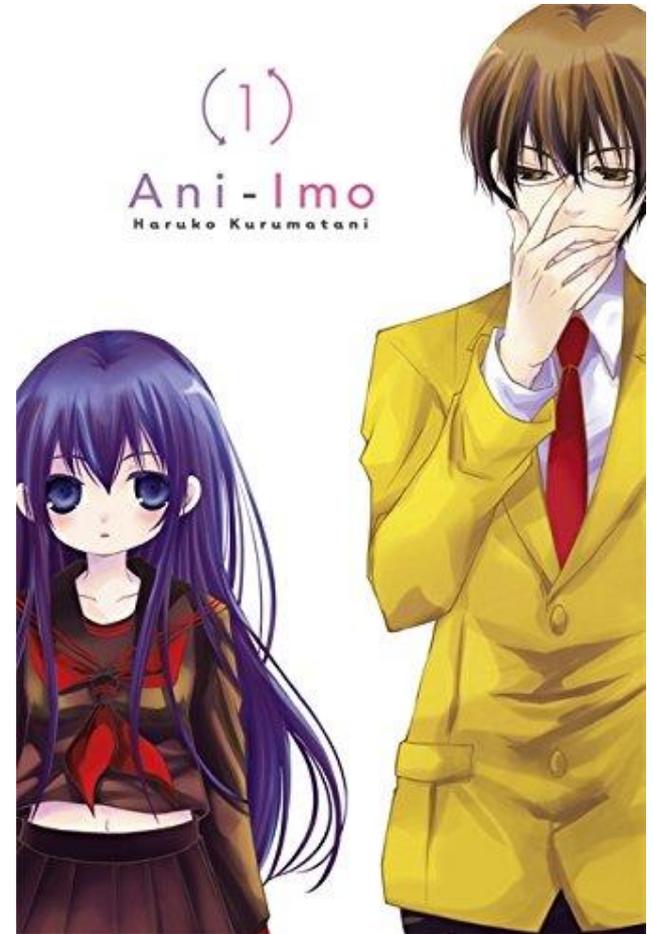


Ani-Imo

Haruko Kurumatani (*Aria*, targets high school and college girls)

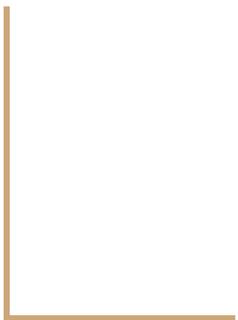
Smutty bodyswap incest romance

Very overt about social constraints on female sexuality





Boys' Love



What is and is not BL / Gei comi

Boys' Love:

Required:

- For a female audience
- About relationships between men

Not required:

- By women

Gei comi:

Required:

- For a gay male audience

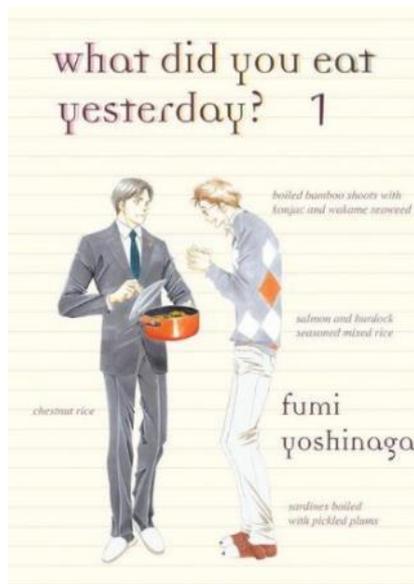
Not required:

- By gay men

What is and is not BL / Gei comi

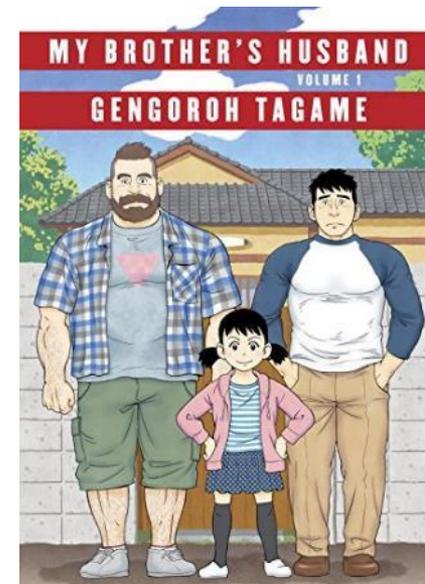
What Did You Eat Yesterday?, Fumi Yoshinaga

- By a well-established BL author
- About a gay couple (and food)
- Ran in a seinen magazine (*Morning*)
- Not BL



My Brother's Husband, Gengoroh Tagame

- By a well-established gei comi author
- About a gay man (among others)
- Ran in a seinen magazine (*Monthly Action*)
- Not gei comi



BL gender fantasies

Alternative visions of men

Heterosexuality is highly constrained

Possible ways to remove constraint:

- Reading against the grain (identify with the male character)
- Fantastic setting (e.g., *Ooku*)
- High suspension of disbelief
- Present explicitly as a kink

Alternative visions of men

Removing female character disrupts heterosexual gender dynamic, allows male characters to violate masculinity / access femininity

- Narrative roles: ingenue, seductress, tragic heroine
- Domesticity: cohabitation, cooking/cleaning, marriage, parenting
- Gender play: crossdressing, performative gender
- Relational and sexual roles: uke / seme coding

Alternative visions of (wo)men

Removing female character disrupts heterosexual reader/story dynamic, allows female readers to violate femininity / access masculinity

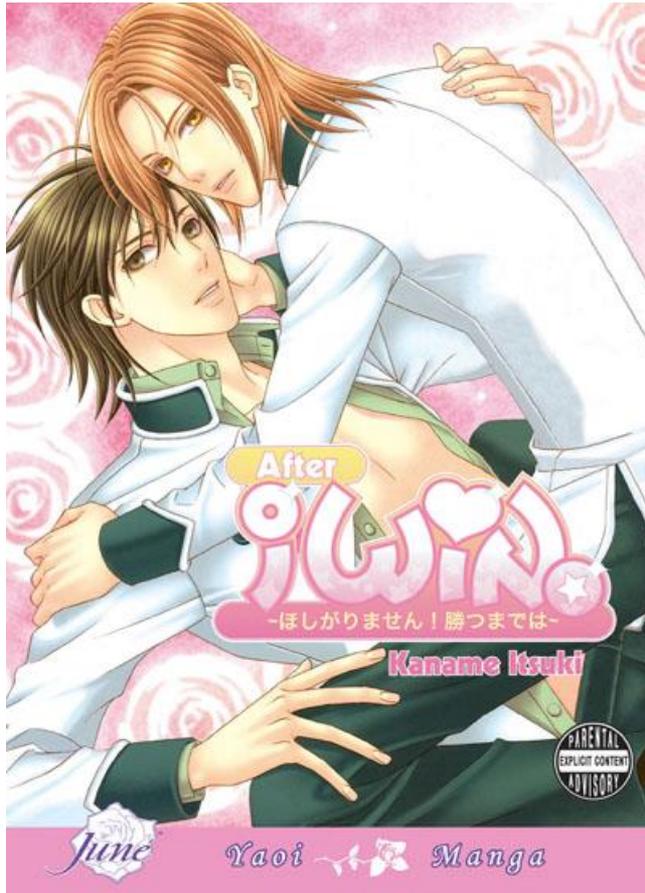
- Particularly in the context of relational and sexual roles
- Uke / Seme coding: You have a choice of who you identify with and who you desire

Uke / Seme semiotics

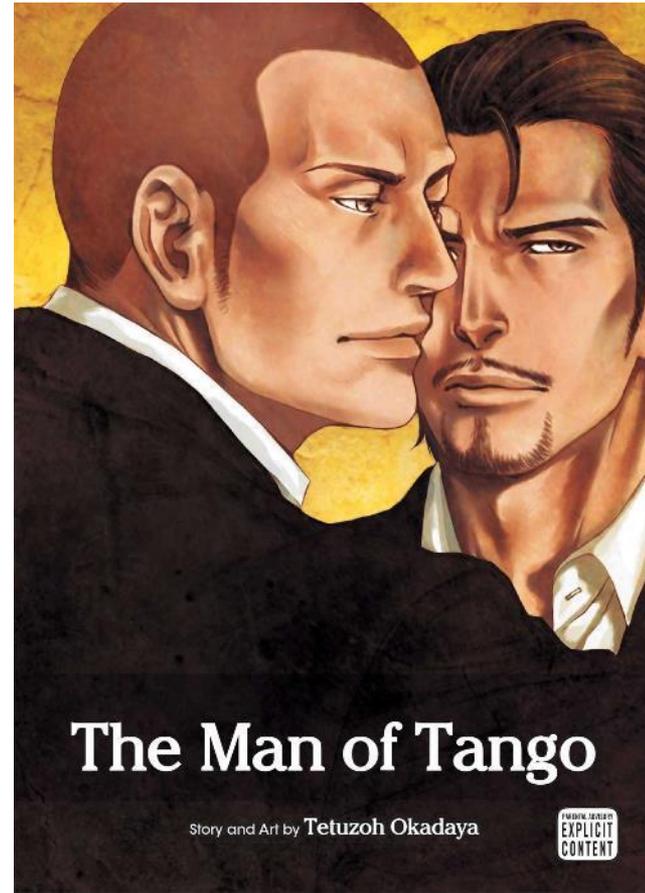
The uke / seme coding is determined by the relationship between the characters, not their absolute qualities

Uke / Seme semiotics

After I Win, Kaname Itsuki



The Man of Tango, Tetuzoh Okadaya



Uke/ Seme semiotics

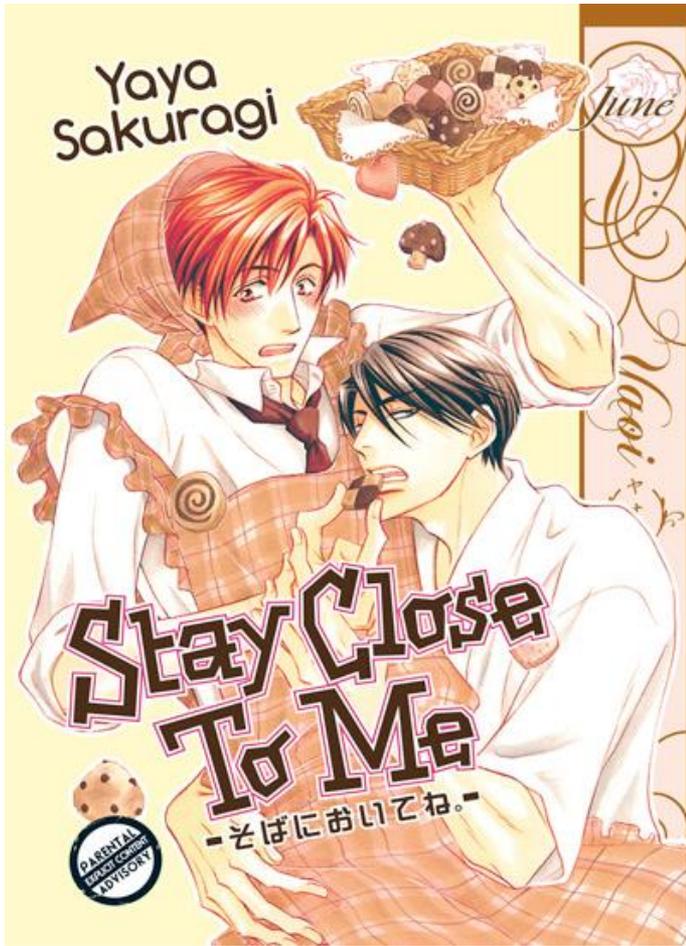
Ukeness is transitive

“Reversible” character

How to Control a Sidecar,
Makoto Tateno

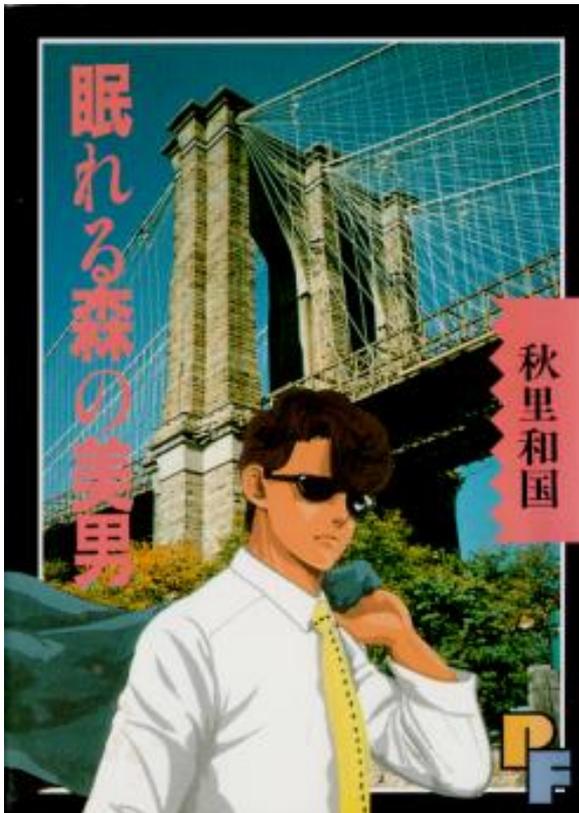


Gender play: *Stay Close To Me*

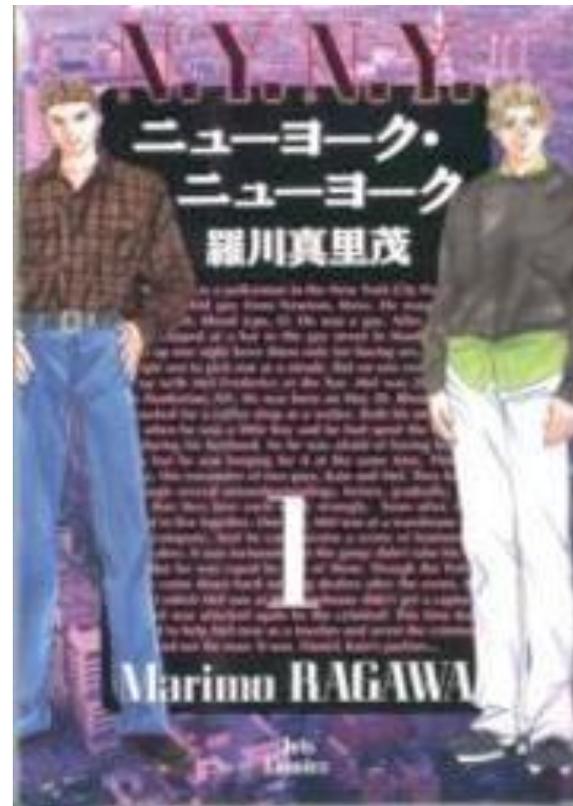


Domesticity: Gay marriage

Nemureru Mori no Binan (the male sleeping beauty in the woods), Wakuni Akisato (1986)

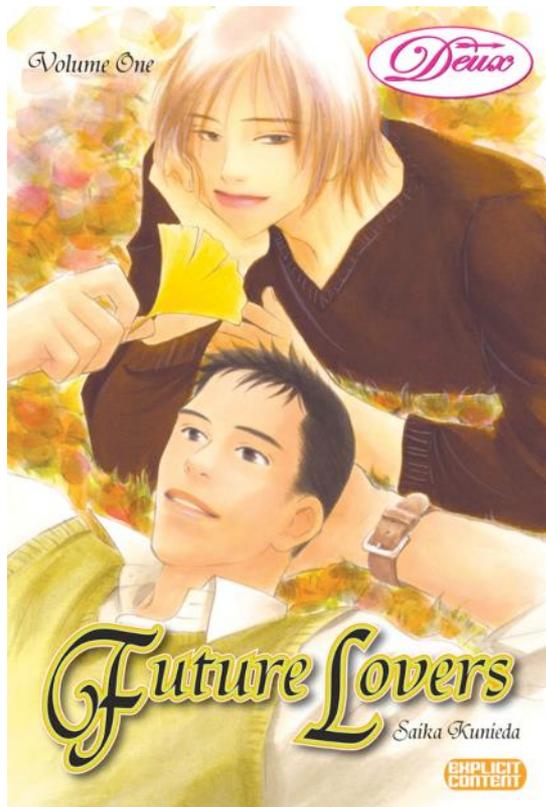


New York New York, Marimo Ragawa (1995)

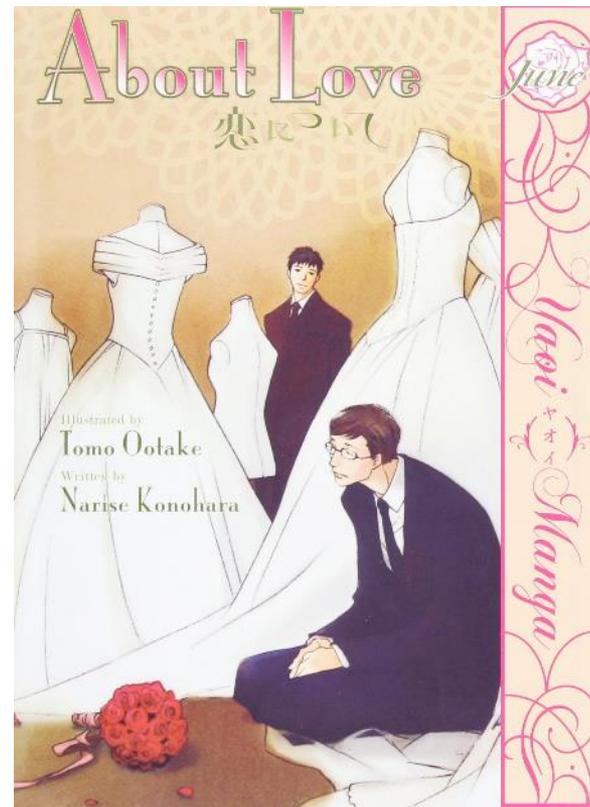


Domesticity: Gay marriage

Future Lovers, Saika Kunieda
(2002-2004)



About Love, Narise Konohara
(novel) and Tomo Ootake (manga
adaptation) (2009)

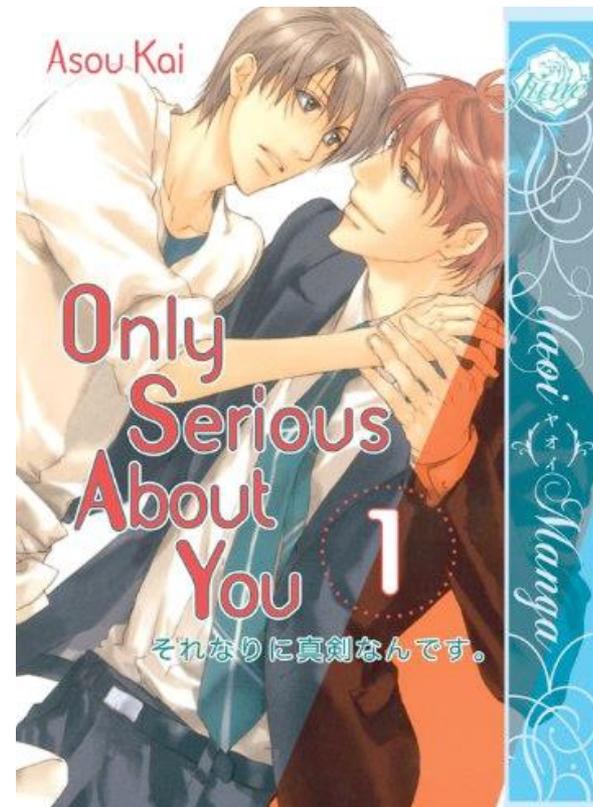


Domesticity: Parenting

Wild Rose, Haruko Kumota



Only Serious About You, Kai Asou



Emotions

Positive and negative: degree of affect rather than type of affect

- Fluff & rom-com
- Romance & squishy feelings

But also

- Horror is a traditional shoujo genre
- Tragedy is a perennial
- Angst-ridden relationship melodrama is too

Do we abuse male characters more?

- No, IMO
- The shoujo / josei we get in translation is highly filtered

Tragedy: *A Cruel God Reigns*

Moto Hagio (Petit Flower, 1993-2001)

Rip your heart out and stomp on it
melodrama





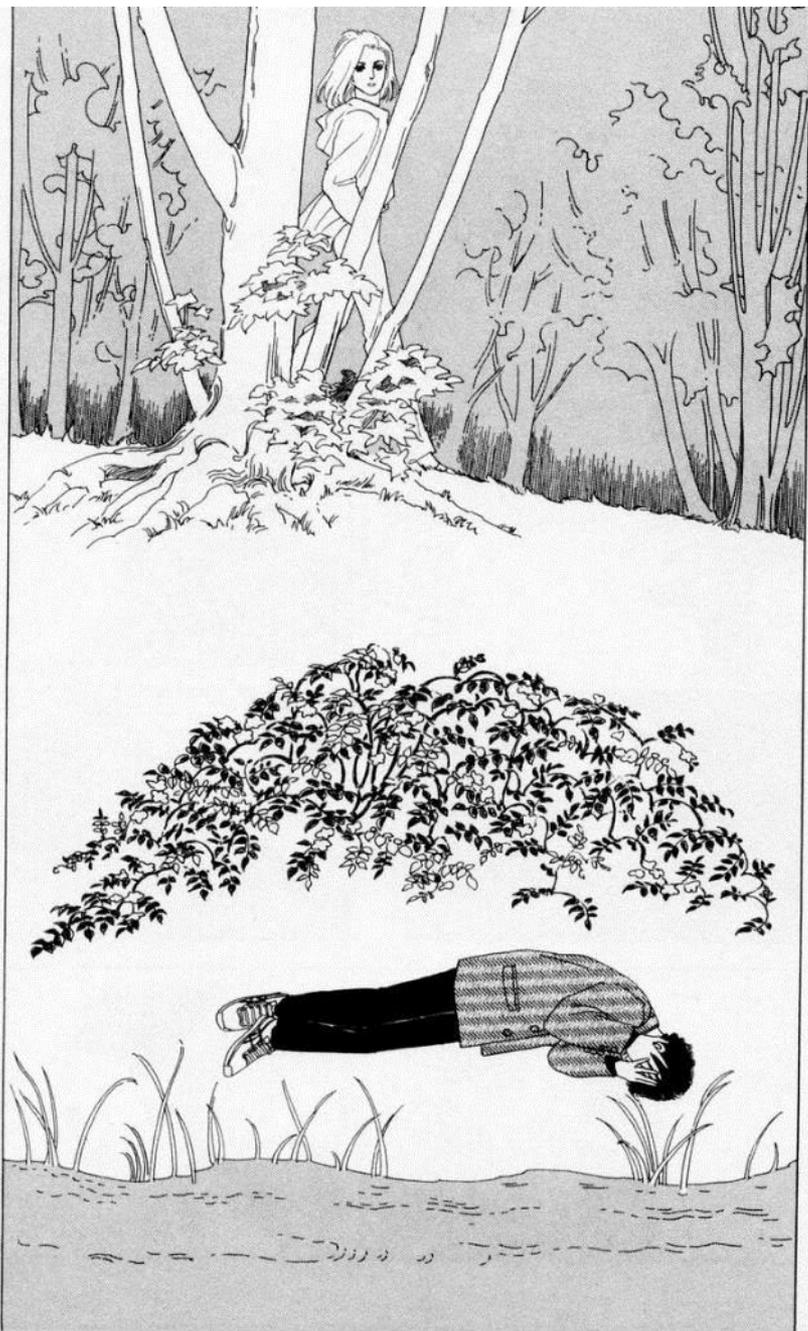
ほくが
感じたのは
苦痛ではない

ほくは
泣いてたが
涙ではない

悲鳴ではない
あえぎではない

口を
ふさがれていた
ほくの
毛穴のすべてから
しみ出たものは
汗ではない
悲しみではない

それは
深く
底のない
絶望だ



Gay male response

Social issues aren't always obvious across cultures

Everywhere: homophobia, discrimination, gay marriage, etc.

Japan specifically: pressure to marry and have children, workplace discrimination against unmarried (especially men)

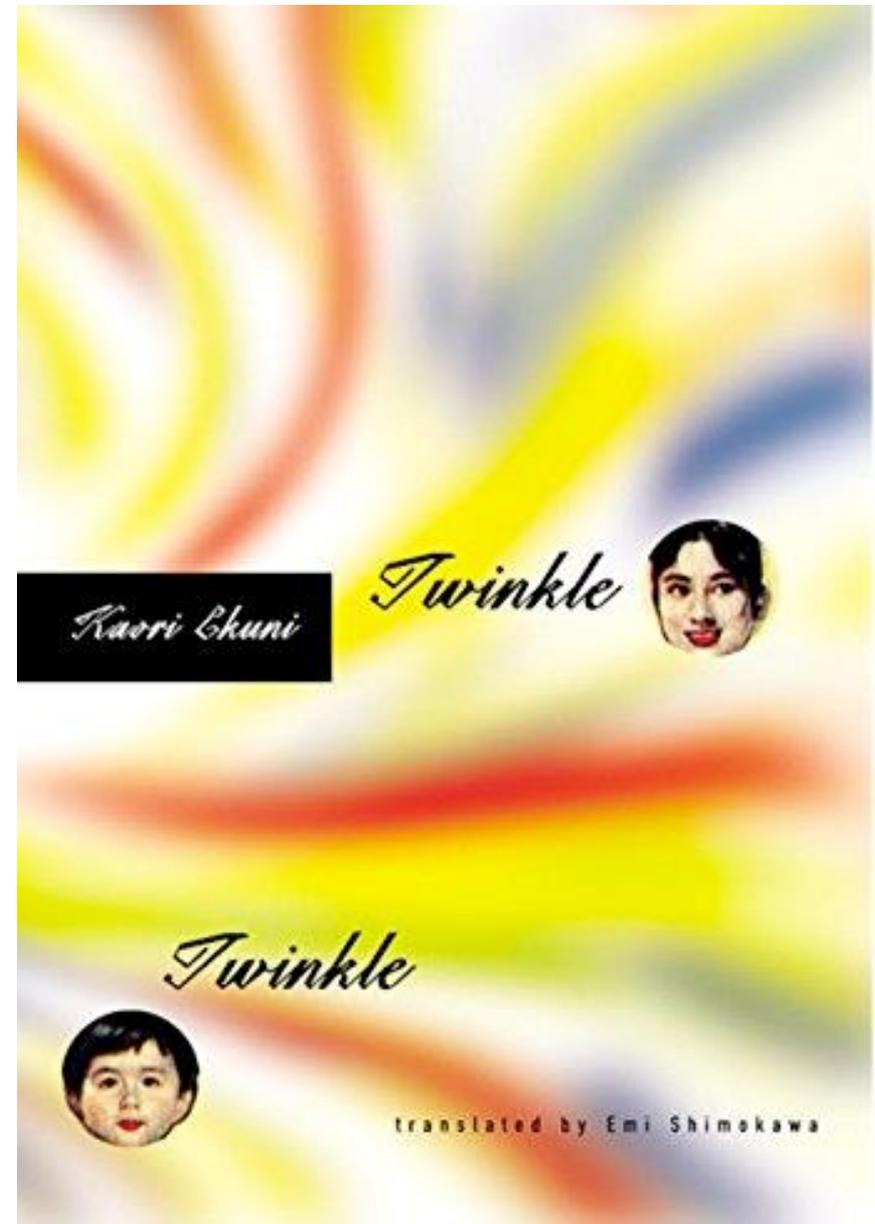
Gay male response

Examples: gay male attitudes in the 90's towards common 90's plots:

- Throwing over politically beneficial fiancée for male lover
- Adopting children / step-children

Twinkle Twinkle

Kaori Ekuni (1991) (Movie
adaptation 1992)





Resistance or accommodation?



Social attitudes towards otome media

How much cultural power does otome culture have?

Politicians criticizing shoujo

Anti BL efforts: ““inappropriate” and “incorrect” sex and gender roles that are likely to cause misidentification and confusion among their youthful readers”

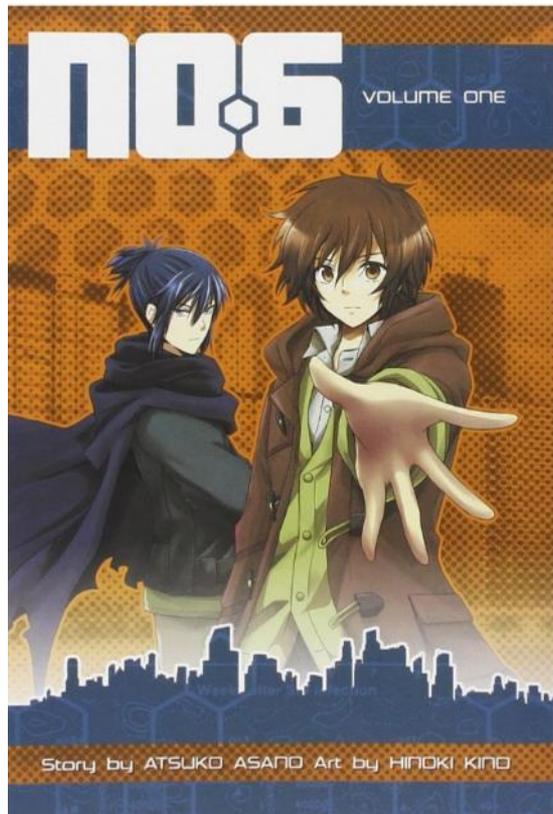
Tolerated because it's not meaningful

“Feeling empowered and being empowered are two very different things”

“Technically not BL”

Attracts fangirls but not in the ghetto = bigger audience

➤ Profitable = gets resources = can be more ambitious

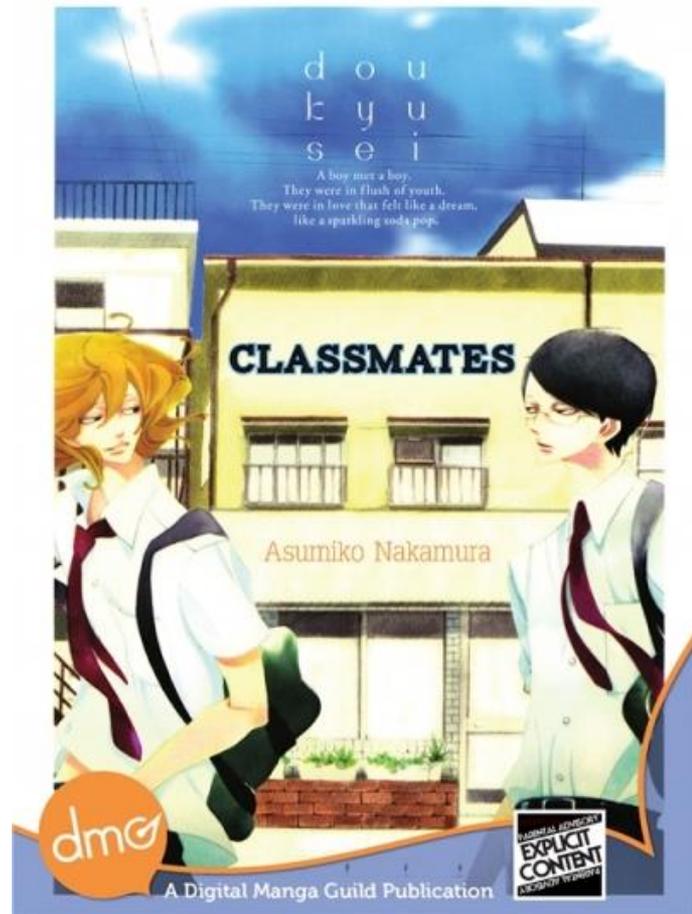


Classmates (*Doukyuusei*)

Anime 2015



Manga, Asumiko Nakamura
(*Opera*), 2006



Otaku media



Creepy campy (gay) dude



Gatchaman CROWDS

Three views of male femininity coexisting in the same show

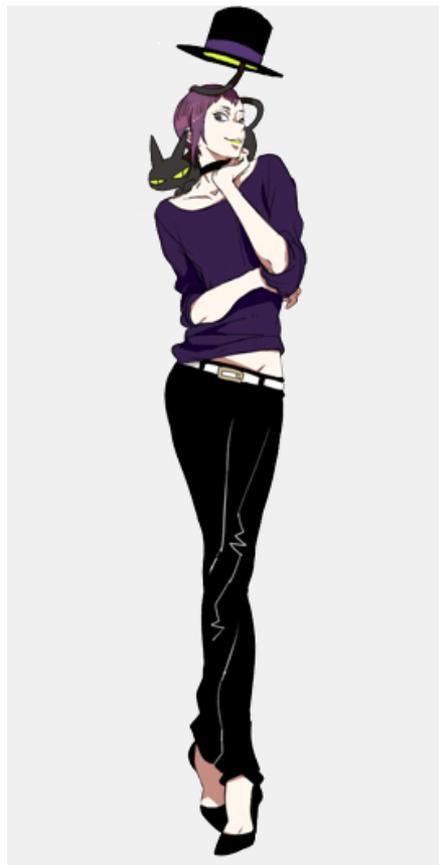


Gatchaman CROWDS

Berg-Katze: creepy
evil femininity



O.D.: campy comedy
femininity



Rui: cute appealing
femininity



Otokonoko

otokonoko (男の子) = boy (literally “male child”)

otokonoko (男の娘) = cute crossdresser (literally “male girl”)

The term is new (c. 2008) but the idea is old:

Stop!! Hibari-kun!, Hisashi Eguchi, 1983

(Weekly Shonen Jump)



Genre covers a wide range of content

Otomegokoro (?)
Jiyukei (Maidenly
(?) feelings
freestyle), Akiduki
Wataru



Amahara-kun+,
Hinahime



Shounen Princess
(Boy princess),
Seishirou Matsuri



Onnanoko
Tokidoki
Otokonoko (Girl
sometimes boy),
Hinemosu Notari

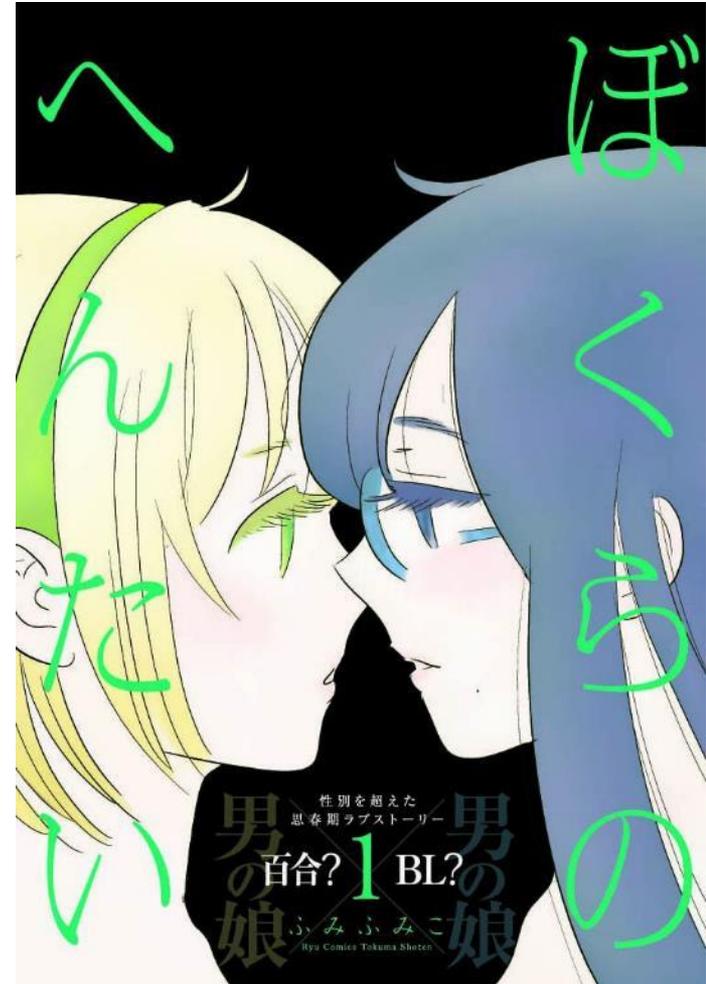


Bokura no hentai (our metamorphosis)

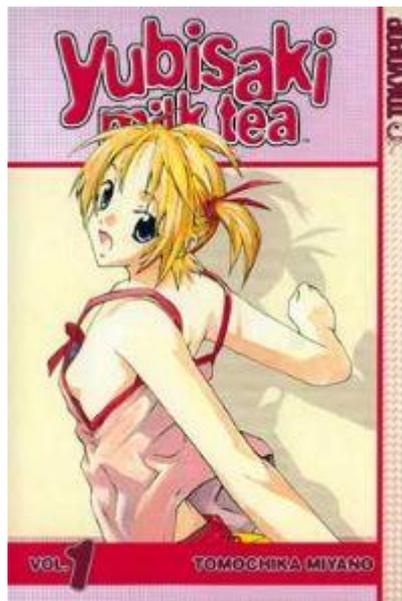
Fumiko Fumi, 10 vol (2012-2016)

Bokura No Hentai

1st Girls meet Boys



M/F otokonoko in English



(plus lots of porn)

Himegoto

4-koma manga, Norio Tsukudani, from *Waa!*

2014 anime (4 min. shorts) - Crunchyroll



Otokonoko in real life

Crossdressing men, coming out of otaku culture, generally straight cis guys

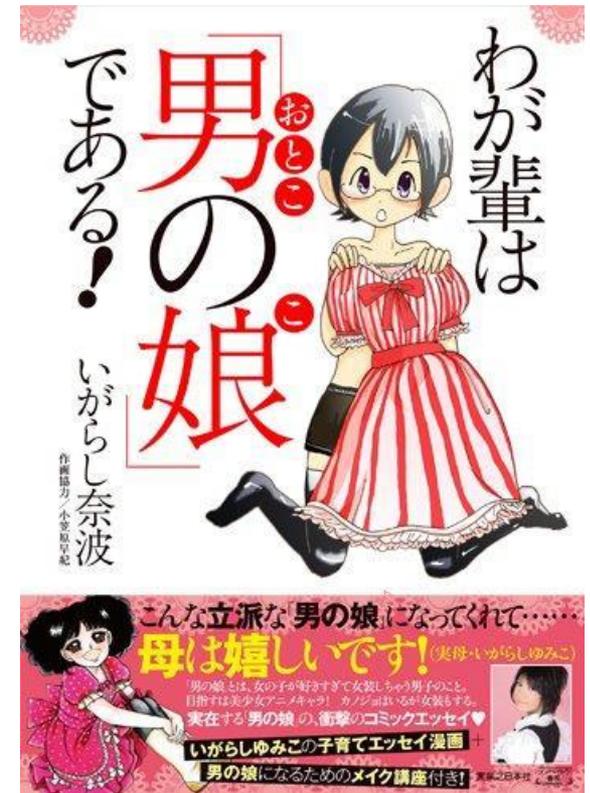
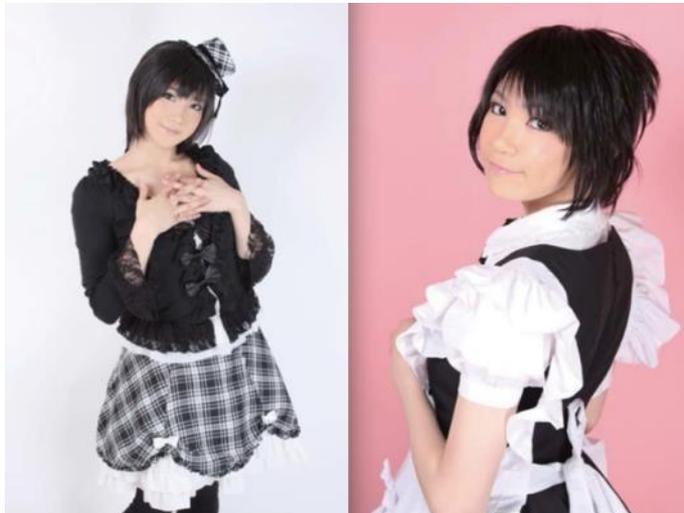
“Looking cute”

Wagahai wa otokonoko de aru

(I am an otokonoko), Nanami Igarashi (né Keichi Igarashi), 2010

Son of shoujo manga-ka Yumiko Igarashi (Candy Candy) and voice actor/former Johnny's member Kazuhiko Inoue

Got into crossdressing through crossplay



Yuri Danshi photobook

Photographer: Naoko Tachibana

Runs a crossdressing studio

A bit of an activist for cross-play

Models: from the crossdressing cafe
New Type in Akihabara

“wanting to show people the
attractiveness of otoko no ko” and
“wanting to push away the world’s
negative impression of crossdressers”



ゆりだんし

Yuri-Danshi

Photographed by Naoko Tachibana

myway mook

Yuri Danshi photobook

“The world has decided that “men should be *this way*” which is just disrespectful and off-base. You should be able to do by whatever you personally like. Having realized that, I love and cherish those who pursue such a life. Don’t judge these otoko no ko from the viewpoint a woman or a man is expected to have, but by what naturally moves your heart. Then you’ll see it a different way.”



Hato-chan (-kun)

(Genshiken Second Season)

- access to femininity, feminine interests, female sociality
- access to non-normative sexuality

Relation to real otokonoko...?



Rampo Kitan: Game of Laplace (2015)

2 forms of m/m tease:

Hashiba x Kobayashi: otokonoko coded

Akechi x Namikoshi: BL coded



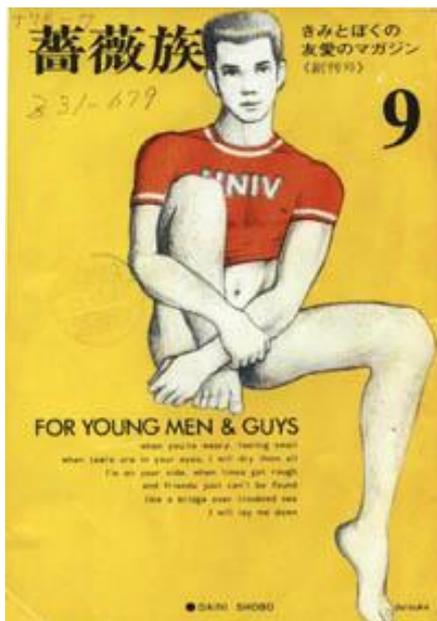
Gender in *gei comi*

Gay men's magazines and manga

Barazoku (rose tribe), 1971-2008

First widely-available gay magazine

Ran some manga, briefly tried a spinoff manga magazine

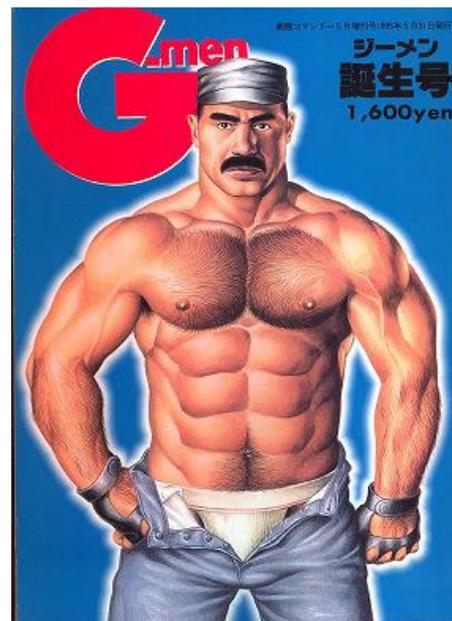


G-men, 1994+

Targeted to “macho type” men (and their admirers)

Strongly associated with artist / manga-ka Gengoroh Tagame

Influential in gay manga

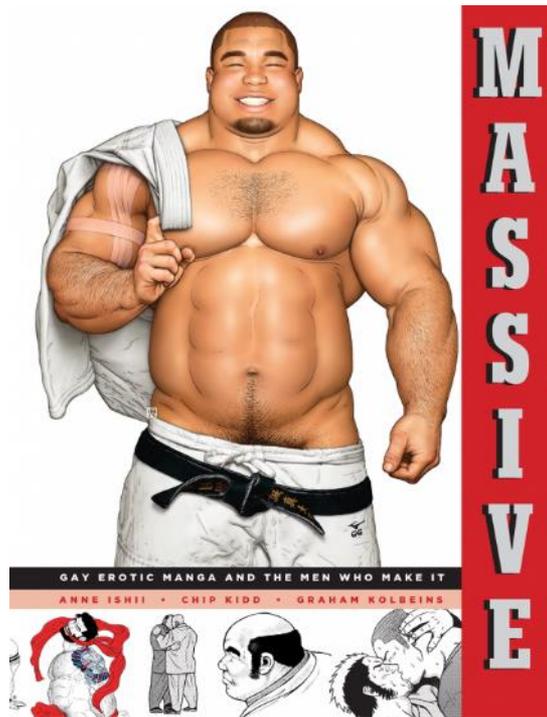


Gei comi in English (warning: porn!)

Massive (Fantagraphics)

Interviews and sample manga from
9 artists

Good intro to the genre

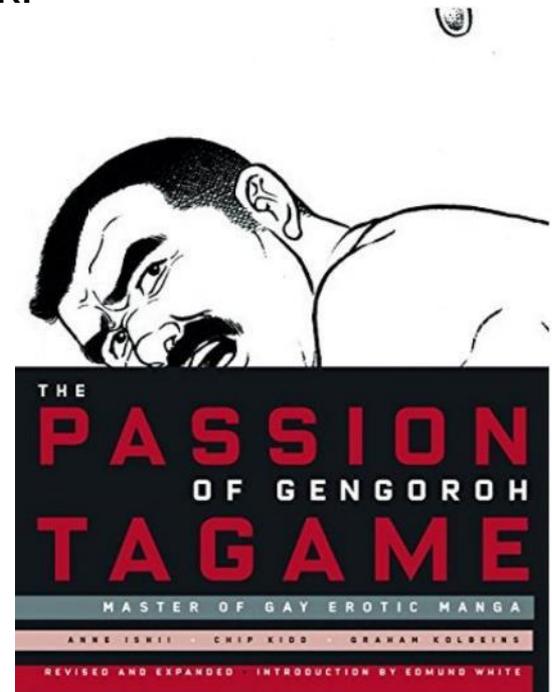


Gengoroh Tagame:

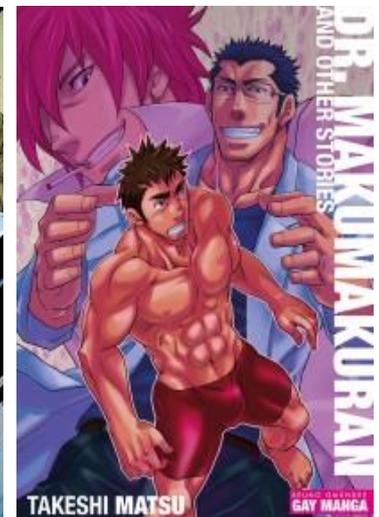
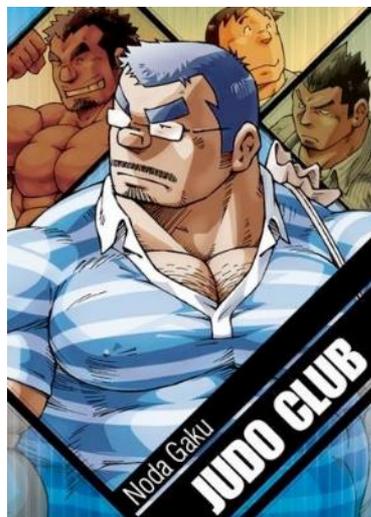
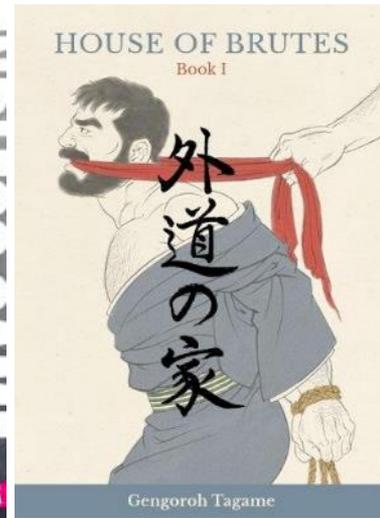
Most popular, most famous, most
influential gei comi manga-ka

Most famous for *brutal disturbing*
BDSM

Sampler pack:



Gei comi in English (all NC-17!)



Why all porn?

Economics

Gei comi gender fantasies

Assimilation into conventional masculinity

Pushing against femininity

Valorization of traditional masculinity - blue collar, Japanese not Western (but also Occidentalism)

Fetishization of hypermasculinity

➤ fundamentally different concept of gender compared to BL

Stereotypes of *gei comi* vs BL

BL:

Gender nonconformity

Thin pretty guys

Romance, relationships, emotions

More story

Gei comi

Hypermasculinity

Large bodies

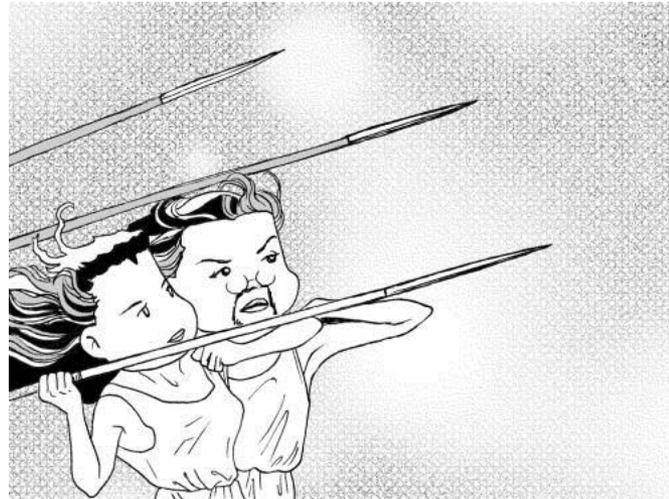
Explicit sex and lots of it

Gengoroh Tagame:

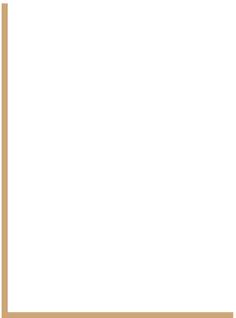
“When I write for gay men’s magazines, it’s primarily about the hero’s initiative and interiority. When I know that women are also going to be reading it... they’re more interested in seeing actual relationships and coupling. So that’s a big difference when I go for writing for one or the other.”

Gei comi does play around with gender sometimes....

Kumada Poohsuke



Mainstream



Haruchika

Mystery novel series (not light novels)

Adapted to anime (2016) (got moefied)

Haruta (male deuteragonist) is canonically gay

➤ Author does not like writing romances



Novel V1 original cover



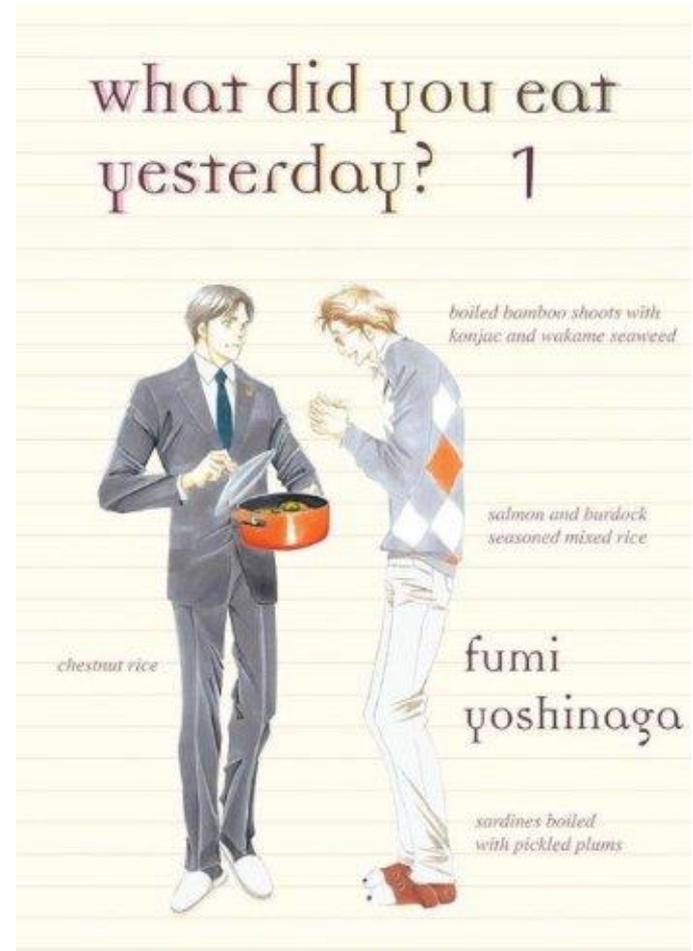
What Did You Eat Yesterday?

Fumi Yoshinaga (*Weekly Morning*), 2007-ongoing

Foodie manga that *just so happens* to star a gay couple

Sneaks in social issues, including gay issues

English edition Vertical



Otouto no Otto (my brother's husband)

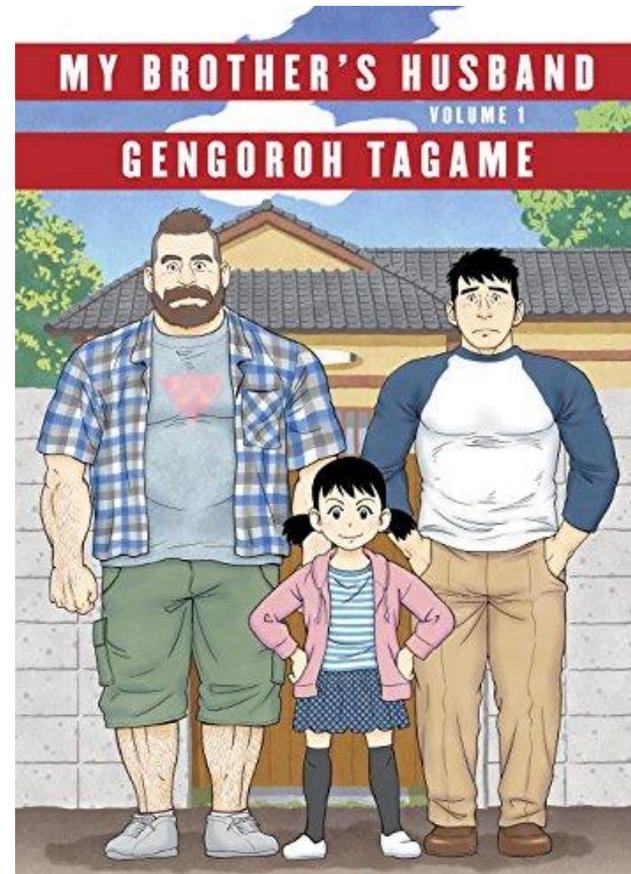
Gengoroh Tagame (*Gekkan Action*), 2015-16

Mainstream seinen magazine, not *gei comi*

Single father is visited by his dead twin brother's Canadian widower

Lots of gay issues

Coming in May from Pantheon





Thanks!

