

# Memoirs of a Fujoshi

**Pearl Moeko, translated by Edmond “Edo” Ernest dit Alban**

“*True love can only happen between two men.*” Fed up with the extreme boredom of society’s obsession with “real” love, marriage and work, these are the words muttered by *Fujoshi* after reading Boy’s Love (BL) manga, novels, *dōjins* or films and anime with a certain BL taste. This is indeed a “two dish-course” ending with an ironic grin; a good part of it is humoristic but it also leaves a self-deprecative aftertaste.<sup>1</sup>

I was born in 1973 and as I just turned 46, I recently realized that I have more than 30 years of experience as a *fujoshi*. Not so long ago, I recall telling one of my friends after reading Azumiko Nakamura’s *Dōkyūsei* (2006–2007) something very hyperbolic and passionate like “*True love can only exist between men.*” I however obviously do not misinterpret my passion for homosexual romances as something more beautiful than heterosexual love, neither I do idealize homosexual romances as *something that has to be beautiful*. I must however say that I previously had this misconception. I was 13 when I read a fanzine parody of a certain famous football manga (with sexual representation in between male characters) for the first time. If I could meet my (fanatic) self then, I would probably say something along the lines of, “*There is nothing more special about homosexual and lesbian love: just like heterosexual love, it is equally ungraceful and full of hardships, beauty and delight. Don’t forget that BL is a fantasy.*” I guess that my 13 years-old self would respond “*Sorry I was not really thinking that deep. I don’t know why but I need BL.*” Why was BL important to me as a teen? Why am I still reading BL?<sup>2</sup>

I have been always surrounded by manga and books. My father was a journalist, and literary enthusiast, so our house was filled with a large range of old and new, fictional or non-fictional books from all over the world. Since he was one of the little boys who read Tezuka Osamu’s *New Treasure Island* (1947) in real time, he was also very tolerant towards manga. He would buy my brothers and I all the books we wished for. With a familial environment like this, I obviously became a bookworm girl and an *otaku*.

I was an avid reader, but I had a certain aversion for those manga “for girls” with a lot of romance elements, you know, the ones that you exchange with your friend in your early teens in the last years of elementary school. It’s not like I hated girl’s manga; I liked some but could not bear reading most of them. I can count on one hand the tiny number of pieces I like when I was exchanging approximately four manga magazines with my school friends. Good boys lacked sexiness; I saw the violence in the bad boys appearing in girl’s manga, I felt their unkind, mysterious and thoughtful personality and I rejected the “nice bad boy” trope of girl’s manga. If I may add, I always wondered why heroines were even attracted to these male characters in the first place. I don’t get why heroines become the object of other characters’ love: they are clumsy and can’t be sincere. I had the same issue in novels: I also read romance novel and became obsessed with the

innocent love in between boys and girls as in George Sand's *La petite Fadette* (1848) although I never was responding to the "usual girl's manga" parts of it.

It is difficult to fully analyze how I felt back then. I nevertheless discussed a lot with other *fujoshi* friends as an adult. As though about my personality and opinions, I hate to have to play the role of "the nice girl" (the "healthy" one that cooks homemade food for her crush, the one who accepts bully with a smile...) and I even despise the role of "the one who forgives her violent lover when he (eventually) manifests some kindness." I now know that it is a representation of the clumsiness and immaturity of first love experiences, but it was too crude for me back then and even felt old fashioned. As a result, I could not read stories with characters that represented these tropes. We are now in the 21st century and *shōjo* manga's main characters evolved with our times: they don't have to marry anyone, they can do what they want and most of them can fall in love "just as they are." Male characters are also probably better than they used to be. But when I was actively reading girls' manga magazines in the mid-80s, I feel like it was not the case.

I then made a discovery that changed my life. When I was twelve, a friend was buying *bessatsu shōjo komikkusu* (1965–) (from Shogakukan, now Kodansha) and she was lending it to me every month. It was the time when Akimi Yoshida's *Banana Fish* (1985–1994) and Wakuni Akisato's *Dead End* (1985) were currently in publication. I tremendously enjoyed *Banana Fish* for the charm of its characters and the inventive story. There were homosexual representations in *Banana Fish* but I didn't fully realize it. No. It was much more present in *Dead End*. *Dead End* was a love story, well sort of. I was astonished by the bad end of twin brothers (and American football players) Marc and Lucas developed through the eye of Maybelline but also understood that it was not a mere tragedy. Reading manga was a corporeal experience from beginning to end; like puking from being too excited.

That's when I made another decisive encounter. As I entered junior high school at 13, I made a friend in my softball club who was into manga. She lived in my neighborhood and was like a big sister to me. One day she loaned me a tonne of books...that happened to be all the volumes of Takemiya Keiko's *The Poem of the Wind and the Trees* (1976–1984), and Hagio Moto's *Poe's Clan* (1972–1976).

*The Poem of the Wind and the Trees* is the now famous love story between Gilbert—the archetype of the evil beautiful boy—and Serge, the embodiment of a solar successor of a viscount family with gypsy blood. *Poe's Clan* is the fantastic story of a vampire's clan with Edgard and his recruit Allan passing through the ages together. My words might lack of elegance, but I read *The poem of the wind and the trees* as "a desperately violent passion" and was in a daze for a while after reading it. I think this is the ancestor of the current BL industry. As I felt my soul trembling in *Poe's clan* and was transported by its' lore and structure, I also discovered the true calling of *fujoshis*: *kankeisei moe*.<sup>3</sup> I am sorry for Edgard and Allan but boys too proud to lie together in bed are a *fujoshi's* favorites.

I was then introduced by my big sister from the softball club to fanzines (*aniparo*) about a certain football manga and thought about going to conventions; I became very quickly a well-rounded *fujoshi*. Well, I had potential, so it was an obvious outcome. At that time, I was living in the countryside. Fanzine events were organized only twice a year, but I was able to find multiple anime magazines selling fanzine through mail orders. I ordered unpolished and soapy fanzines one after the other. Most of the fanzines I was able to gather had homosexual romance in it but there was restriction at the time and even a middle schooler could buy them. Since I am talking about a moment in history when sexual education was summary, and I even had not much of an idea of how heterosexual sex worked, I was puzzled by the meaning of most revealing scenes and forgot my interrogations with a strong passion for "how they desired each other."

At 14 we had to move because of my father's job. I found two new *fujoshi* friends. A few years later, at 16, we applied for the *comiket*, the *dōjinshi* fair in Tokyo. I briefly switched from only reading to writing my own boy's love stories. Some might say that it was a lot of work without the internet, but I was able to gather basic information about the production of fanzines and how to participate to conventions from the free corner of fanzines, the pamphlets form conventions, and my friends. Although I was rarely participating in group *fujoshi* activities, we were able to understand each other. My social world progressively expended

within the intricate interpersonal networks.

For *fujoshi* back then Hermann Karl Hesse's *Demian* (1919) and *Narziss und Goldmund* (1930) were must haves. In cinema it was *Another Country* (1984) with Colin Firth. For Japanese literature, Natsume Sôseki's *Kokoro* (1958), Atsushi Nakajima's *Sangetsuki* (1942), Mari Mori's *Koyô no nedoko* (1962). Since my motives were not pure at all I could not ask my father and had to search for them in libraries and old bookstores to feed my sporadic need for readings. I read all *chef d'oeuvres* through my *fujoshi* lenses.

In sum, far from even imagining a day when anyone can access BL manga, novels and *dôjins* in one click on the internet, I had to put so much work and passion into homosexual romances that I was absorbed by it. I was moved by my strong believe in homosexual love as true love. At least this is how I interpret it now that I have the capacity to express myself. I wanted to feel a world where true love is possible. The idea that love could occur *because of who I am* and not because of my coiffed hair, not because I bravely waited for him, not because I am clumsy but also smile gracefully, and certainly not because I am a cute girl, was extremely attractive. It was usual in the 1990s for BL industry as well as in fanzine production to represent homosexual romances as taboo. After the 2000s you would probably get cancelled for saying this, but it was a very well-established canon at the time. But that's why I want to emphasis on the *because of who I am* component of these fantasies.

I identify as a woman and was born with a female body. When I discovered BL in my pre-teens my body started to change, I got my periods, I had t start wearing a bra, I was preoccupied with hair growing on me. I was forced to acknowledge myself as a woman, even if I was not comfortable with this notion. In top of that, it was *that* moment when I started to get sexually objectified by men while being called a booger by boys at schools. From what I know in Japan there are not many women who live that transition well. But with homosexual love stories, I didn't have to picture myself. For girls, love stories in between boys do not represent "oneself": the abnormal one that does not abide by the stereotype of the nice girl, the one that is confused by her growing body, the one that feels uneasy being gazed upon as a sexual object. It was easy to enjoy a love that drags *the real you* because it starts with the simple reason that *you are lovable because of who you are*. Sexual representation had *Uke* and *Seme*, bottom and top, and although I felt like it was probably based on heterosexual stereotypes, I felt that "he can be accepted as he (by another boy) is although he is a boy" to a point that I used to think that BL told me everything I know about love (my 46 years old self would like to object though).

This is a bit of a side note but, BL is completely different from gay fanzine written by gay men. I have helped my gay *otaku* friends many times in conventions and borrowed a lot of media from them. With this experience I can say that gay *oeuvres* ask a lot of personal projection into characters. It is often said that when *fujoshis* read BL they enjoy a reading strategy that "makes you part of the walls, watching others." For me the magic of BL is that I do not have to project myself in the story so my passion for gay manga and BL are not working on the same levels. Even when gay manga and fanzine have a thrilling story, I read them as if I was reading a normal girls' manga. It has no moe. This is another side note but you might have heard of a certain trend in hardcore pornographic mangas for straight males that transforms women's nipples into penises. Boobs and dicks are different, but their function is similar? There is a certain love for crude descriptions of bodies in pornography does not reflect my taste. Maybe this explains my attraction to BL.

Things became different after I graduated from university. The real world took precedence over fantasy worlds. I developed? multiple love stories. I expanded my personal network and became friends with people who had real life experiences in same sex relationships. I also lived through some tremors in my sexuality during my 30s. In other words, life made me an adult capable to question my childhood notion that "True love can only exist between men."

Despite all of that, I am still a BL loving *fujoshi*. But why? I am not the naïve girl I used to be during my pre-teens. I have a husband and a cat. I do not live a passionate romance every day, but I am grateful for this gentle love. I also think that people who love you unconditionally *because of who you are* might be hopeless. All that said, my heart still jumps when I find a good representation of the "I love you for who you

are” trope. This is probably the core of a *fujiohi*’s fandom. The appeal of the fictional world of “I love you for who you are” is strong. If your love interest was unemployed or a *yakuza* in real life you would probably dump him. But in the “I love you for who you are” world, partners are chosen against any normative rational with instinctive and emotional reasons. Love is not a compromise with society but a defiance. There is no common sense nor morality. These are perfectly sweet relationships! Is BL the entertainment of love that one can almost safely experience in a safe space? I probably need to acknowledge it. But for the little girl that I was the world of BL’s “I love you for who you are” was the brilliant extreme opposite of my world of “women should behave this way.” Its shiny aura has not declined in thirty years.

Even if it features homosexual love, BL is a fiction different from homosexuality. Yet, if I had not encountered BL during my childhood years, my life would certainly have been more painful. BL gave me a dream as a young girl and still pleases me as an older woman. I will probably never stop reading BL. Well, you know, girls want to feel that sparkle of love, and BL always delivers.

### Notes

1. Translated from the original Japanese: もちろん冗談の要素が大半で残りは自嘲なので、苦笑で終わるまでがワンセットとなる。
2. I am aware that boy’s love did not exist as such in the 1980s. I use the term in this piece as a shortcut.
3. Translator’s note: *Kankeisei moe* is a term mostly used by fans to discuss how they enjoy relationships between characters. This is similar to the meaning of “ships” or “shipping”— short for relationships, in fan fiction.

### Editor’s Note

While including a piece about Japanese slash romances, written by a straight woman, in a special issue about Queering Movements might seem questionable to some critical observers, Pearl Moeko’s recollections resonate with the other works in this collection. Moeko’s writing discusses one crucial aspect of queer moving images—social movements. Her personal, even autobiographical, perspective on Japanese slash illustrates with an intimate insight the often-discussed impact of homosexual romances on young female fandoms (here referred to as *fujiohi*). If some readers accustomed to the subject might not understand the “novelty” of this piece, we invite them to look at the details expending on the animation of queer images: the story of a media environment around schools, the media history linking novels, cinema and manga. Too little work is looking at how animation techniques specific to queer representations and production is actually spread across media. Moeko’s experience as a journalist, free-writer, and critic for *Kono BL ga sugoi* and active allyship with LGBT fanzines and grassroots publishers in Tokyo blurs many of the presupposed gaps thought to exist between slash fandoms and queer communities.