

# Eureka Discovers Culture Girls, Fujoshi, and BL: Essay Review of Three Issues of the Japanese Literary magazine, Yuriika (Eureka)[1]

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*Bunka-kei joshi katarogu* (Culture Girls' catalogue, November 2005)  
ISBN: 4-7917-0140-2



*Fujoshi manga taikei* (Fujoshi manga compendium, June 2007 supplementary issue)  
ISBN: 978-4-7917-0163-6



*BL (Bōizu rabu) sutadiizu* (BL [Boys Love] studies, December 2007 supplementary issue)  
ISBN: 978-4-7917-0172-8

1. *Eureka* (or *Yuriika*) is a mainstream Japanese literary magazine specialising in poetry and criticism. Established by Date Tokuo (1920–61) in 1956, the magazine has played a very important role for decades, introducing cutting edge Western art and literary theories and recognising new texts and talents as well as rediscovering the old. With a few exceptions such as a 1981 issue on girls' comics,[2] however, the magazine has rarely dealt with women writers and artists—until relatively recently. Given this general background, the November 2005 *Culture Girls* issue has a special historical significance.
2. The issue quickly sold out and the term *bunka-kei joshi* (used broadly for young(ish) women culture vultures, intellectuals, writers, artists, and fans)[3] gained some currency in popular media. From this issue onwards *Eureka* has paid much more attention than before to a wide range of 'Culture Girls' favourite topics, artists, and genres. The January 2006 *Forefront of Manga Criticism* issue, for example, included slightly more input from women commentators than the August 2005 supplementary issue *Otaku vs Sub-Cul[ture]*. [4] Other topics featured in 2006 included singer Madonna (March), female manga artist Saibara Rieko (July), and women film directors (December). The trend was further heightened in 2007 (see Table 1), with the regular December issue dedicated to woman writer Mori Mari, who is regarded today as the pioneer of male homosexual fantasy stories for women, as well as the *Fujoshi manga* and *BL Studies* issues that are also reviewed in this essay.

Month	Eureka 2007	Eureka 2006	Eureka 2005	Eureka 1988
1	Matsumoto Taiyō (manga)	Manga criticism	Translation technique	Agatha Christie
2	Postwar Japanese jazz	NEET	Comic manga	Antonin Artaud
3	Leonardo da Vinci	Madonna	Post noise	Birth of photography
4	Yonezawa Honobu (mystery)	Kikuchi Naruyoshi (jazz)	How to blog	Hiraga Gennai
5	Le Corbusier (architect)	Fujita Tsuguharu	Love for dolls	Tsutsui Yasutaka
6	Uehashi Nahoko (fantasy)	Nintendo	Moonriders (rock band)	Michael Ende
7	Ishii Momoko children's lit	Saibara Rieko (manga)	Minor theatres	Ishikawa Jun
8	Yasuhiko Yoshikazu (anime)	Furukawa Hideo	Golden age of magazines	García Márquez
9	Scandinavian mythology	Ideal textbooks	Mizuki Shigeru (manga)	Colin Wilson

10	Dostoevsky	Yoshida Ken'ichi	<i>Kōkaku kidōtai</i> Manga/anime	Fukazawa Shichirō
11	Araki Hirohiko (manga)	Ōtake Shinrō (artist)	Culture girls' catalogue	American non-fiction
12	Mori Mari	Women film directors	Nosaka Akiyuki	Scott Fitzgerald
sup	(6) Fujoshi manga	(8) Ursula le Guin	(8) Otaku vs sub-cul	
	(7) Ōtomo Yoshihide (new jazz)	(9) Inagaki Taruho		
	(12) BL Studies	(11) Miyazawa Akio (playwright)		

**Table 1.** Topics covered in *Eureka*, 1988, 2005–07 (yellow indicates women/girls)

- The visible change can certainly be regarded as a belated recognition of the significance of young (and not so young) women readers, writers, scholars, and artists by the traditionally male-centred literary and cultural criticism that *Eureka* represented. A more cynical view, however, would be that *Eureka* and other media and culture distributors/producers have realised the need to appeal to the 'culture girls' market. However, there are clear differences among the three issues under review, not only in the scope of their contents and the genres discussed but also regarding the manner in which they treat the media's interests in girls' (sub-)culture and culture girls.
- The contributors to the *Culture Girls* issue vary immensely—certainly more widely than contributors to the other two issues. The issue is divided into several sections: literature, visual art, music, 'Otaku-kei' (manga, *yaoi*, BL, anime, digital games and gadgets etc.), and fandoms (pop music and comedians). The issue also includes a roundtable discussion with four 'culture girls,' the responses of twenty men (critics, writers, and artists) to the questionnaire about their 'favourite culture girls' and a culture girls' chronology. As is clear from Takada Rieko's opening essay, some of the contributors are more familiar with the conventional *danshi-kei bunka* (men's culture), such as German literary studies (Takada's own field), than the genres associated with *bunka-kei joshi*. In Takada's view women academics, who have been working within the male-centred humanities, 'do not deserve to be included in the *Culture Girls' Catalogue*, which presumably expresses the creativity, intelligence, and misery of women who are *free* from the institutional restrictions and the shadow of men.'<sup>[5]</sup> And yet, as she also claims, it is worth noting that the decline of 'men's culture' based on Western cultural hegemony has released 'culture girls' from the spell of their often turbulent personal relationships with the *bunka-kei danshi*.<sup>[6]</sup>
- The significance of 'freedom' and 'relationships' is mentioned in many other contributions. Issues of gender segregation are also recurrent. Ozawa Eimi, Kimura Kana, Kodai Nariko, and several others deal with the dilemma of women academics, literary girls, and artists. Horikoshi Hidemi, who chaired the roundtable and compiled the culture girl chronology, notes that only after graduation did she realise that years of reading books written solely by male authors had suppressed her interests in girl culture.<sup>[7]</sup> Kanemaki Tomoko begins her essay 'Joshi ota 30-nen sensō' (30-Year War of Female Otaku) with a discussion of the absence of women's views and voices in debates and studies about *otaku*. This is despite the fact that 71.2 per cent of the exhibitors and 56.9 per cent of general participants at the 30th Anniversary Comic Market<sup>[8]</sup> were women.<sup>[9]</sup> Sociologist Shibuya Tomomi, too, points out that women have traditionally been excluded from top class comedy shows both as performers and as a connoisseur audience. According to Shibuya, 90 per cent of comic entertainers are men, while 90 per cent of the audience are women,<sup>[10]</sup> and yet there is a strong and persistent view that 'women are not suitable for comedy,' which is what the popular comedian Matsumoto Hitoshi wrote in his book that sold 2.4 million copies.<sup>[11]</sup>
- Freedom from social and artistic restrictions and conventions is a strong motif throughout all three issues under review. This does not necessarily take a confessional or denunciatory mode; often it is expressed in strategically comic, sarcastic, and playful language. Singer Mieko<sup>[12]</sup> explores verbose girls' colloquial style that challenges generic and syntactic conventions. The title of her creative piece 'Sentan de, sasu wa sasareru wa sora ee wa' (With the tip, piercing and being pierced, that's nice,)<sup>[13]</sup> suggests gender and sexual ambivalence. The Kansai (Osaka) dialect<sup>[14]</sup> 'ee' for 'ii' (good) makes the final particle 'wa' which is normally regarded as a feminine marker gender- and age-ambiguous (i.e. a middle-aged man, for example, can use this kind of 'wa' in Kansai dialect). We may also note that this title in 5/8/5 syllables is a variation of the traditional 5/7/5 meta, symbolically mixing the pleasant and familiar rhythm with innovation.
- Gender-conscious playfulness abounds in *yaoi*, games, and other sub-cultures as well as in the discussions of these genres. The playful language may enhance subversiveness and creativity; at the same time endless jargon and neologisms could create comprehension problems, especially to outsiders, including sympathetic ones. Of course much of this also applies to the language of *otaku* practitioners and researchers. Furthermore, inaccessible jargon in other fields of academic writing has often been teased and criticised. Huizinga's theory in *Homo ludens* (originally published in 1938) seems to be useful in understanding 'playfulness': play, according to the Dutch historian, is 'a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious," but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly.'<sup>[15]</sup> The superfluous and leisurely nature of 'play,' its temporal and spatial boundaries, and the promotion of 'the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common

world by disguise or other means'[16] also seem applicable, even though Huizinga's point about the lack of material interest may not necessarily apply, as playful language, for example, is constantly used for marketing purposes.

8. In any case, it would not be easy to keep up with the pace of change and new terms unless one was inside the 'play' group. Hayami Tō, who is introduced as a *yaoi* specialist, gives a brief definition of some of the terms to *Eureka* readers:

Boys Love (BL) denotes mainly original fiction as fantasy dealing with male homosexual love. JUNE, coming from the title of the pioneering magazine specialising in this genre, is now used for original fantasy about male homosexuality with aesthetic (*tanbiteki*) tendency. [...]やおい Yaoi is used for various types of fantasy (including secondary fiction) on male homosexuality, at times including BL. Some believe that when it is written in *katakana* as ヤオイ, it specifically indicates homosexual fiction by Kurimoto Kaoru. The term may also be paraphrased as *yasai* やさい [homophone of vegetable] or written '801' [pronounced *yaoi*]. *Fujoshi* 腐女子 was at first used for women interested in BL, JUNE, and *yaoi*, but recently it is also used for women who like heterosexual parodic fiction or for *otaku* women generally. Some use *fujoshi* as a derogatory term for women. It is wrong to assume that women who are *yaoi* fans are all *otaku*, for there are certainly more less committed readers who, for example, read only a few BL novels a month.[17]

9. As is clear from the above, there are ambiguities and variations even among 'insiders.' In fact, even the definitions above are subject to debate. Hayami's summary does not go into the etymology of *yaoi* or *fu* 腐 (decay, rot). Moreover, in many cases, especially in interviews and roundtable discussions, no explanation of the terms and names is provided. As already mentioned, this creates difficulty for readers unfamiliar with the subjects discussed, while at the same time it strengthens the playful bonding within the circles. Socio-linguistically, the interviews and roundtable discussions are full of interesting material. Speakers are fully aware of social conventions and can switch from one code or register to another instantly, even when speaking to the same person in the same session, to indicate subtle nuances of distance, closeness, respect, solidarity and so on. In this sense, too, relationship is important in the *fujoshi* discourses.
10. Compared with the broad, ambiguous, and somewhat hesitant tone that permeates *Culture Girls Catalogue*, the two later issues are much more clearly focussed and less reserved. *Fujoshi manga taikei* opens with a dialogue between the Naoki Prize winning popular novelist Miura Shion and sociologist Kaneda Junko. Titled "'Seme x uke' no mekurumeku sekai: danseishintai no miryoku o motomete' (The dazzling world of 'seme x uke': in pursuit of the charm of male body), the two women discuss thematic and technical freedom, innovation and diversity in BL manga. Their topics range from the significance of depicting *uke* men's nipples and body fluids to the much wider types of protagonists, including the 'fat, bald, and old.'[18] Terms such as *seme* (lit. attacker), *uke* (lit. receiver), and *riba* (reverse/reversible) are used without gloss. One of the important points raised in this dialogue is the homophobic (e.g. 'I'm not gay but I love you.') and misogynistic expressions ('Stop treating me like a woman!') that used to be commonly found in BL works.[19] These are much less common now, however, as BL has become more and more diversified and includes critiques of gender stereotypes and discrimination. While the dialogue thus emphasises the positive aspects and specific innovations of BL, it also mentions the negative view that was dominant until the mid-1990s and is still present.[20]
11. As mentioned above, gender asymmetry and segregation are the central issues in the *Culture Girls' Catalogue*. Many contributors to *Fujoshi manga taikei* also discuss these. Ueno Chizuko, for example, emphasises in her essay 'Fujoshi to wa dare ka?' (Who Is Fujoshi?)[21]:

despite the post-war Americanisation and permeation of heterosexism [*dēto eiji* 'date age'], Japanese gender segregation culture has been reproduced. 'Couple culture' has failed to establish itself in Japan...Sub-culture media are filled with couples; however, the imagined sex differs immensely between male and female cultures. It rather amazes me that real sexual intercourse is possible at all between men and women who have separately developed such gender-asymmetrical sexual fantasies.[22]

12. In psychologist Kayama Rika's view, *fujoshi* have two contradictory traits, namely, the *otaku*-like (i.e. erased or blurred) 'self' and feminine orientation for relational narrative.[23] Kayama also notes that 'while more women are released from relationship-based illnesses, at the same time the number of women who suffer more deeply has increased.'[24]
13. Sociologist Ishida Hitoshi discusses the gap between the 'real gay' and gays as represented in *yaoi*/BL and the lack of dialogue between the *fujoshi* and the 'real gays.' In *BL Studies* Ishida further examines the 'autonomy' and 'appropriation' in BL representations.[25] Mizoguchi Akiko offers another angle: she argues that while the majority of *yaoi* artists and their audience are heterosexual women, 'nevertheless its discursive space is highly lesbian.[26] Like Miura and Kaneda, Mizoguchi confirms the increase of non-homophobic and more diversified representations including, for example, gay human rights issues. Diversity is also evident in other essays including Mori Naoko's discussion of 'hard' (sexually explicit) BL and Yoshimoto Taimatsu's analysis of male BL fans (*fukei* 腐兄[27] and *fudanshi* 腐男子). Yoshimoto also deals with the BL subgenre called *shota*, which involves pre-adolescent boy protagonists. The topic of *shota* appears in many other essays and interviews but with the unspoken understanding that this has nothing to do with 'real' paedophilia, child pornography, and censorship. As Mark McLelland and others have pointed out, this presents a great contrast to the sensitiveness of these issues in the West.[28]

14. *BL Studies* includes further updates and useful theoretical and bibliographical overviews. Kotani Mari proposes the notion of C (in contrast to the famous A, P, and V in Inagaki Taruho's *Shōnen'ai no bigaku* (The Aesthetics of Love for Boys, originally published in 1968)[29] to analyse the sexuality of *homme fatal(e)* protagonists. Kotani argues that *homme fatal* narratives should be understood as stories of C, that is the symbol for service for women's autonomous and personal pleasure without oppression or invasion.[30]
15. Referring to her own pioneering monograph on girls' comics, *Watashi no ibasho wa doko ni aru no?* (Where is My Place? 1998),[31] Fujimoto Yukari summarises two main points:
1. First *shōnen ai* [the earlier genre that dealt with male homoeroticism] was created to flee from various gender restrictions and sexuality taboos;
  2. Once the mechanism is established, however, it has enabled girls to 'play sexuality' and opened up a possibility for them to change their viewpoint from passive to active.[32]

Then she discusses a number of issues and misunderstandings with updated data and references such as Nagakubo Yōko's *Yaoi shōsetsu ron* (On *yaoi* novels, 2005).[33]

16. Kaneda Junko's overview of theories on *yaoi* is equally useful. She argues that there are two general inquiries. First of these is the psychological approach that concerns 'Why do you like *yaoi*?',[34] which implicitly assumes that there are some problems to be solved. The other is a gender studies approach that asks 'What does *yaoi* signify to women and to society?'.[35] Kaneda cites Kotani, Nagakubo, Mizoguchi, Ishida and many other studies in regard to this latter inquiry. While this issue includes Shiina Yukari's essay on the popularity of BL manga in America,[36] generally the discussions in all three volumes are limited to Japanese-language publications, audiences, artists, and scholars.
17. The focus on the more recent and specific is apparent in *BL Studies*. The opening roundtable discussion looks at the major themes, changes, and topics in BL manga in 2007. The three most popular themes were '[male] pleasure quarters, Arab, and [male] brides',[37] while there was also the first BL fiction to deal with tuna fishermen (a major industry supplying Japan's sushi trade). Several different kinds of *seme* are mentioned. Recent publications on *yaoi*, BL, and *fujoshi*, including those written from male viewpoints and/or for a male audience, are also discussed. While *Fujoshi manga taikai* includes interviews with two artists: Nobi Nobita and Kyūshū Danji,[38] *BL Studies* features seven interviews. These are highly interesting, as they go into specific details and examples, which often correspond to the points raised in the essays. Each issue also includes an illustrated guide to major BL artists and texts. Perhaps these and the cover illustrations (by Hajimekku, Kusama Sakae, and Tojitsuki Hajime) best illustrate the freedom and diversity discussed above.
18. These three volumes are essential readings for anyone interested in BL, *yaoi*, and girl culture in contemporary Japan. They are also very useful and interesting for students and researchers of broader gender studies and Japanese popular culture and many other fields even though readers unfamiliar with the terms, genres and broader socio-cultural context may have some difficulties. As outlined above, each volume has its own aims, significance and emphasis. *Culture Girl Catalogue* marks an important turning point for *Eureka* from its traditional focus on male-dominant, and Euro-American oriented elite culture to a wider range of both elite and popular cultures produced and received by women. *Fujoshi manga taikai* and *BL Studies* more specifically deal with both technical and thematic innovation and diversification in the relevant genres. Earlier negative images and discourses surrounding *fujoshi* have been replaced by positive recognition of their creativity. The discursive centre has shifted from 'liberation from' and 'alternative to' to 'freedom for.' Needless to say, there are still many issues and areas unexplored or underrepresented in these volumes. Transnational fandoms and non-Japanese language studies of BL and other genres, for example, are hardly discussed.[39] Given that *Eureka* is not an academic journal but a literary magazine, it is not surprising that relatively few articles go into theoretical discussions. There is no doubt, however, that these volumes will stimulate both popular and scholarly interests that lead to further publications.

## Endnotes

[1] The three issues are: *Bunka-kei joshi katarogu* (Culture Girls' catalogue, November 2005) ISBN4-7917-0140-2; *Fujoshi manga taikai* (Fujoshi manga compendium, June 2007 supplementary issue) ISBN978-4-7917-0163-6; and *BL (Bōizu rabu) sutadiizu* (BL [Boys Love] studies, December 2007 supplementary issue) ISBN978-4-7917-0172-8. (N.B. No apostrophe is used in the English title of this issue and hence I follow this form in this review.)

[2] July 1981 supplementary issue. For more information about this editor, see his collection of essays and memoirs, Date Tokuo, *Shijin-tachi: Yuriika shō* (The Poets: Notes on *Eureka*), first published in 1971, Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2005.

[3] For a more detailed explanation, see '[bunka-kei joshi](http://d.hatena.ne.jp/keyword/%CA%B8%B2%BD%B7%CF%BD%F7%BB%D2)' on *Hatena Keyword*, 200-2009 ongoing, online: <http://d.hatena.ne.jp/keyword/%CA%B8%B2%BD%B7%CF%BD%F7%BB%D2>, accessed 3 January 2009.

[4] *Otaku* is a somewhat derogatory term for maniacal fans of popular culture, something like the English term 'nerd'; 'geek,' in North America. The term was originally coined by Nakamori Akio in 1983 for people with obsessive interests in sub-cultures such as manga, anime, and video games.

[5] Takada Rieko, 'Korerakin-teki kōsatsu: Danshi-kei bunka no suijaku to bunka-kei joshi no taitō' (An examination from a cholera bacteria's viewpoint: the collapse of men's culture and the rise of culture girls), in *Culture Girls*, p. 43, emphasis added.

[6] Citing the cases of three celebrated intellectual couples, Yagawa Sumiko and Shibusawa Tatsuhiko; Meiō Masako and Karatani Kōjin; and Takahashi Takako and Takahashi Kazumi, Takada argues that 'To "culture girls," "culture" used to materialise in the living man (preferably a beautiful one).' (*Culture Girls*, p. 50)

[7] *Culture Girls*, p. 115.

[8] Comic market or *komike(tto)* is a biannual (August and December) gathering of manga artists and aficionados.

[9] *Culture Girls*, p. 146.

[10] *Culture Girls*, p. 178.

[11] *Culture Girls*, p. 179.

[12] This is Kawakami Mieko, the winner of the 138th Akutagawa Prize (2007). In this 2005 *Eureka* piece she signed only as singer Mieko rather than novelist Kawakami Mieko.

[13] *Culture Girls*, pp. 132–38.

[14] Dialects are often used for carnivalesque effects (i.e. subversion of the centre/periphery hierarchy). Ogino Anna, for example, also used Osaka dialect in her pre-Akutagawa Award piece 'Uchi no okan ga ocha o nomu' (1989), the title which also takes the 7/5 syllable pattern. This is a good reminder that neither 'culture girl' nor women's playful language is new.

[15] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, New York: J. & J. Harper Edition, 1970, p. 32.

[16] Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, pp. 26–32.

[17] *Culture Girls*, p. 173.

[18] *Fujoshi manga compendium*, pp. 25–27. In interviewing BL manga artist Kusama Sakae for the *BL Studies* issue, Kaneda discusses Kusama's choice of protagonists whose physical features are outside the stereotypical 'beautiful boy' or *bishōnen*. See *BL Studies*, pp. 111–12).

[19] *Fujoshi manga compendium*, pp. 17–18.

[20] *Fujoshi manga compendium*, pp. 13–14. Both Kaneda and Miura talk about the strong negative impact they received from Nakajima Azusa's book *Komyunikēshon fuzen shōkōgun* (Communication Failure Syndrome, 1991) as young women.

[21] *Fujoshi manga compendium*, pp. 30–36.

[22] *Fujoshi manga compendium*, p. 33.

[23] *Fujoshi manga compendium*, p. 39.

[24] *Fujoshi manga compendium*, p. 40.

[25] *BL Studies*, pp. 114–123.

[26] *Fujoshi manga compendium*, p. 56.

[27] Just as *fujoshi* 腐女子 was coined by combining the sound and meaning of 婦女子 (women and children) with the subversive and self-deprecating character 腐 (decay), 腐兄 (lit. rotten big brother) is a pun on 父兄 (lit. fathers and older brothers, but usually used for parents in educational institutions) .

[28] Mark McLelland and Seunghyun Yoo, 'The International Yaoi Boys' Love Fandom and the Regulation of Virtual Child Pornography: The Implications of Current Legislation,' in *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2007), pp. 93–104. Science fiction writer Noa Azusa briefly mentions this problem. See *BL Studies*, p. 74. Shiina Yukari's essay on BL in America also discusses the concerns and some practical solutions about sexually explicit material involving underage characters and homosexuality. See *BL Studies*, p. 184.

[29] In Taruho's unique essays on aesthetic eroticism (and erotic aestheticism) A[nus], which is directly connected to

O[ra], is regarded as the most important and essential of all erotic organs/sites including V[agina], P[enis] and K[litoris]. He considers A to be the paragon of the comic, primitive, innocent, and beautiful. See Inagaki Taruho, *Shōnen ai no bigaku*, Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1999. As an American literature scholar with a particular interest in feminist criticism and science fiction, Kotani chooses C[litoris] rather than the German K which Taruho used.

[30] *BL Studies*, p. 32.

[31] Fujimoto Yukari, *Watashi no ibasho wa doko ni aru no?: Shōjo manga ga utsusu kokoro no katachi*, Tokyo: Gakuyō Shobō, 1998.

[32] *BL Studies*, p. 38.

[33] Nagakubo Yōko, *Yaoi shōsetsu ron*, Tokyo: Senshū Daigaku Shuppankai, 2005.

[34] *BL Studies*, p. 49.

[35] *BL Studies*, p. 53.

[36] *BL Studies*, pp. 180–89.

[37] *BL Studies*, p. 9.

[38] Nobi Nobita, based on the name of the often whimpering boy protagonist of the classic manga/anime *Doraemon*, is the pen name of Enomoto Nariko. Kyūshū Danji (Macho Man from Kyushu) is the name Matsuyama Hanako uses for her BL work.

[39] If mentioned at all (see note 28 above), it is usually about the North American situation.

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*Intersections* acknowledges the assistance of the Gender Relations Centre, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University in the hosting of this site.

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Last modified: 4 March 2009 0912

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