

# Japan Week 2021 Presents: Yoshiya Nobuko and Reading Like a Girl with Sarah Frederick

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Slide 1: “Japan Week Presents: Yoshiya Nobuko and Reading Like a Girl, Sarah Frederick, Boston University.”

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## Samuel Perry:

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Hello, everyone, and welcome to the Department of East Asian Studies at Brown University. My name is Samuel Perry, and I teach in the Department of Comparative Literature and East Asian Studies here at Brown. This is Japan Week at Brown, and tomorrow we will be holding our annual Japanese speech contest featuring our first and second year students, which I hope some of you will be able to tune into again tomorrow. But today it is my great pleasure to host the fifth annual Japan Week lecture, and to begin by introducing to you all our speaker, Professor Sarah Frederick.

Professor Frederick is now Associate Professor of Modern Languages and Comparative Literature in the Department of World Languages and Literatures at Boston University. Professor Frederick has a PhD from the University of Chicago and has been the recipient of several coveted fellowships, including the Fulbright, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Hakuho Foundation.

Her first book, called *Turning Pages: Reading and Writing Women's Magazines in Interwar Japan*, was one of the first books in English to take up this very important topic of women's journals. In recent years she has published on the writer Natsume Sōseki, the Japanese feminist Yamakawa Kikue, she's published on Isabella Bird's travels through Kyoto, as well as on cosmopolitanism and the Japanese kimono.

In recent years she's been working on a new book project about the popular writer Yoshiya Nobuko, whose work featuring intimacy among girls propelled her to stardom in the early twentieth century. Professor Frederick has translated a selection from Yoshiya's, perhaps her most famous work, *Hana monogatari* or *Flower Tales*, in a piece called “The Yellow Rose,” which I know many of our students at Brown have enjoyed so much. And today we are delighted to have her share

some of her newest work on Yoshiya Nobuko.

Professor Frederick will speak for about forty, forty-five minutes, after which we'll have a Q and A period, where I hope many of our undergraduates in particular will get a chance to pose some questions to our speaker. And so with no further ado, let me turn over the screen to Professor Frederick.

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Slide 2: "Yoshiya Nobuko and Writing Like a Girl, Sarah Frederick, sfred@bu.edu, Associate Professor, Boston University, translator of 'Yellow Rose.'" Image: The cover of the "Yellow Rose" ebook.

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### **Sarah Frederick:**

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Thank you so much, Sam Perry, and thank you to all the other faculty, students, and staff who have supported Japan Week, and for inviting me to it. I know that Jessica Cho and Hiroshi Tajima have been helping with arrangements, and I'm sure there are many other people who have been involved along the way.

This talk was originally scheduled for March 11, 2020, and cancelled right before due to the expanding pandemic, and I think we had really no idea at that point what we were in for. I was really disappointed, of course, but I'm really glad it didn't turn into the Brown superspreader *shōjo* sushi event or something like this, and making the headlines. I really wish we could hold it in person this year and eat something together, but I'm really glad it was possible.

And I guess one of the benefits is that I can see from the participant list as it rolled in that we really have this other added bonus, different bonus of having people from all over the world. We have super distinguished scholars joining us for this presentation, and I hope they'll join in the discussion. I'll still direct my remarks to the Japan Week audience at Brown, but I hope everyone will participate after that.

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Slide 3: "Yoshiya Nobuko 吉屋 信子 (1896-1973)." Left image: Photograph of Yoshiya wearing a hat. Right image: Photograph of Yoshiya sitting at her desk at home.

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So my talk today is about Yoshiya Nobuko, who might be said to be the parent or sort of progenitor of Japanese girls' culture, and is and was incredibly influential continuing to this day. Her influence continues, often in ways that can no longer be fully traced or even quantified, but are palpable at every turn.

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Slide 4: “With partner, Monma Chiyo 門馬千代.” Left image: Photograph of Yoshiya and Monma. Center image: Photograph of Yoshiya and Monma with a third woman. Right image: Photograph of Yoshiya and Monma with two men (one a soldier).

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On the basis of her biography, of having a same-sex partner with whom she lived for almost fifty years, and for whom she professed her deep love, and legally adopted, I would certainly place her as one of the important twentieth century lesbian writers in world literature. This designation can also apply to her fiction as well, based on many things, not limited to but including her frequent use of images of Sappho, her, even the use of the letter “L” for “lesbian” in at least one of her novels, not to mention many steamy scenes in her work that depict desire of one woman for another.

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Slide 5: “1929-1930 World Tour.” Upper-left image: Sketch of Yoshiya. Left image: Photograph of Yoshiya in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris. Right image: Photograph of Yoshiya at her send-off party, with Yosano Akiko and other women.

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Yoshiya was also one of the most popular writers of the twentieth century, and at various points extremely highly paid—to the resentment of some others. In 1929 to 1930 she was able to take an around the world tour with her partner, using funds from serialized fiction and some of the first of her many movie rights royalties.

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Slide 6: “Richest Girls in Nippon, (Pix, Australian magazine, July 2, 1938).” Image: Photograph of Yoshiya and two other women.

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I just picked—I guess I’ll hold it up because I’m here—I just picked up the original of this press photo off of eBay—but this was sent around the world as a press photo and printed as “the richest women of Nippon.”

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Slide 7: “Made 3 million yen, more than her friend, Tanaka Kinuyo.” Image: Newspaper article “Japan’s Newly Rich,” from the Herald (Melbourne, Victoria), March 14, 1950, page 4.

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This was in 1938, but a similar news story from 1950 has her in a similar position as one of the highest paid writers and highest paid people and women, certainly women, in Japan.

I learned—it’s tax month—I learned recently that she was even audited

in the 1930s for excessive expense deductions, including her trip to the Philippines to research the novel *A Husband's Chastity*. And apparently this sort of audit wasn't really that unusual for authors at the time.

In any case, she was incredibly prolific and successful from the late nineteen-teens until close to her death in 1973. So obviously today I'll just be picking up a few snippets from this long life and huge corpus of writings.

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Slide 8. Text (quoting Yoshiya): "... my older brothers had a subscription to a magazine called *Boys' World*, which I would have to surreptitiously read whenever they left it sitting on their desks. I remember being so happy when I could finally read the new magazine for girls and have it all to myself. Whenever *Girls' World* was delivered, I would spread it out in my hands and savor every corner. Taking great care not to dirty the pages, I would add each magazine to the neat pile on my desk and enjoy the way the stack grew higher and higher. The frontispieces were drawn by illustrators such as Ikeda Shōen, bearing charming titles like *A Doll's Banquet*, and graced with flower images appropriate for each month. ...one monthly issue of a cheap girls' magazine inspired the passion of this girl and gave her such immense pleasure. (from essay 投書時代)"

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So my book project is pretty biographical and I won't go too deeply into biography today, although I just did a little bit, but I think it's very important that her life—again, born in 1896—really coincides with so much of the emergence of youth magazines and specifically girls' magazines, as well as new laws and programs pushing women's education.

So they really, the beginnings of these things coincided with her toddlerhood, the first *shōjo* column in one of the all-genders youth magazines was, came out when she was a toddler, I think she was two that year. So she's sort of, she's not just the progenitor of girls' culture but also sort of lived alongside it throughout her life.

She was born in Niigata and then moved to Tochigi when she was six. She was the daughter of a government official with several older brothers, and she was in a position to attend good schooling as it was emerging over the course of her life.

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Slide 9: "*Girls' World* 少女界 founded 1902, when Yoshiya was age 6." Left image: Cover of an issue of *Girls' World*, showing a young girl outside with flowers in the background. Right image: Cover of an issue of *Girls' World*, showing a young girl smelling a flower.

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A lot of these magazines that she enjoyed reading had the word *shōjo*,

girl, in the title. And this conception of a girl, the *shōjo*, as Barbara Hartley and Tomoko Aoyama point out in their great introduction to *Girl Reading Girl [in Japan]*, they point out that it was different from, say *musume* or daughter, which highlighted a kinship relationship and a place within the patriarchal family.

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Slide 10: “Reader Fan Gathering, Tokyo, 1918.” Image: Two-page spread of a magazine with photographs showing a theater full of girls.

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One of the major qualities of these magazines was their reader contributor communities. They would sometimes get together in cities around Japan, forming a strong sense of girl networks in person. Many of these were of course organized by the publishers for their own interests, but there were also casual networks as well, that were more sort of homegrown or grassroots.

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Slide 11: “Girls’ magazine contest pages, letters from all over Japan, also from China.” Image: Two-page spread of a magazine showing letters from readers.

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But they were probably drawn together, the girl readers were drawn together most strongly in the pages of the magazines themselves—the sort of social network of the day—sometimes interacting with a girl in their very same class, but sending notes through this national publication, through means of this national publication, but also interacting with the larger world, whether it’s all of Japan or also Japanese readers and colonial spaces and emigre spaces, such as the US, Canada, and Brazil.

This one has a kind of racist remark by a somewhat Japanese girl in China about the awful Chinese there. I didn’t realize that until I was preparing this talk. I just had kind of chosen it originally because of the China, but it’s indicative of most of these pages that you would see, readers from all over the world. And about half of these magazines would be made up of reader contributions.

And Yoshiya did this kind of reader contribution from the age of twelve, and by nineteen to begins to be paid for this, this work, beyond the prizes, like a silver watch or medal or something, but to actually be paid royalties. And she starts her breakout hit *Flower Stories* at age twenty in 1916.

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Slide 12. Left image: Cover of the book *Routledge Handbook of Japanese Media*. Center image: Cover of the book *Girl Reading Girl in Japan*. Right image: Cover of the book *Age of Shōjo*.

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Just to introduce them, these are some of the many books that provide a good context for these magazines where she wrote. They're in my biblio—, I have a bibliography slide at the end to include them. But I have a chapter in this *Media, Rutledge Handbook of Japanese Media*, that's all about these magazines if you want to know more. And these other books are also great resources.

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Slide 13: “Embrace of passionate friendships.” Text (quoting a reader): “I wonder if it is a dream! ... The ‘girl romance’ story I submitted was selected, and my parents were so happy for me.” (Typical reader letter in 1923, *Girls' Pictorial*.)

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Often, as all of the people writing about these magazines point out, the imagery of girl friendships was prevalent and intimacies were all in all welcomed, including even by parents of girls, same-sex intimacies were often, were welcomed in these publications.

Often featured, often these featured places represented as all-female spaces, such as schools or dormitories. And as Jennifer Robertson famously pointed out, there came to be a sort of an assumption that the girl, the *shōjo*, had a quote heterosexual inexperience and homosexual experience unquote, again making use of these kind of girls' spaces that we're seeing as also being protected from men.

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Slide 14. Left image: Drawing of two stylish adult women, one wearing kimono and the other a dress. Right: A similar drawing of two stylish adult women with fingers intertwined, again with one wearing kimono and the other a dress.

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These are images that are really from later, and maybe will appear in my talk later, but these kind of images come to be associated with these publications and kind of girl culture, even though as you see they're actually older women in these pictures.

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Slide 15: “*Flower Stories* 花物語, 54 stories, 1916-1924.” Images: Covers of various Japanese editions of *Flower Stories*, and the cover of the English translation of ‘Yellow Rose.’”

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So I know some of you have read or even translated her work in Professor Perry's class, or, I don't know if those people are here, but I know some students have done so, so I hope I won't just repeat things you already know. And I hope in discussion you'll feel free to bring in your own knowledge about her work, or things that you know from

our contemporary culture that you see to be influenced by it.

I'm not going to talk solely today about writing specifically aimed at or representing adolescent girls, but also more broadly about Yoshiya's argument for the value of girlhood as a resource and a way of reading the world.

For her, girlhood was something that, if valued and fostered, could throughout life be called upon as a source of solace, space, and imagination, she said. It's a source of flexibility, openness, and hope that might be able to survive other oppressive structures of, such as patriarchal kinship, arranged marriage, or even certain state institutions—she sometimes calls out the *Monbu-shō*, the Ministry of Education, for criticism. It might also allow escape or comfort in the face of individually difficult emotional situations, of loss or unfulfilled desires.

I argue that she tried to use this girlish stance to make space in her audience and herself for diverse emotions and sexual feelings. Sometimes this was a stance insufficiently critical of her contemporary politics at various moments, maybe particularly during the war, but I want to argue that this was not because of its somehow inherent political immaturity or frivolity.

I also want to be insistent that our task should not to be, should not be to somehow determine whether the relationships between girls that she depicted were like just friendships, or if they were really sexual, or what the right way to read them necessarily is.

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Slide 16, “Akaeda 2005, Kanno 2011.” Left image: Title page of article by Akaeda Kanako. Center image: Title page of article by Yuko Kanno. Text:

- Akaeda Kanno, “Onna dōshi no shinmitsuteiki na kankei ni miru ‘romantiku rabu’ no jisho: *Onna no yūjo* no rekishi shakaigaku ni mukete,” *Shakaigakuron* 56(1):2005:129–146.
- Kanno, Yuka. “Love and Friendship: The Queer Imagination of Japan’s Early Girl Culture.” In *Mediated Girlhoods: New Explorations of Girls’ Media Culture*, edited by Mary Celese Kearney, 17–34. New York: Peter Lang, 2011.

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Here my thinking on her writing aligns with that of Akaeda Kanako and Yuka Kanno, and I put those references here. The Akaeda is written in Japanese and Kanno’s article here is in English.

There are so many great works on Yoshiya and *shōjo* that are out there, but I went to call out these two at this moment because I think they provide really important additional interventions in the writings on, as, or, same-sex girl culture that are not as well known to some and, two,

who are particularly engaged in the project. I also try to support keeping the queer readings of Yoshiya alive, and actively engaging in anti-homophobic reading practices and analyzing her work.

So the “reading,” the “reading” of my “reading like a girl,” of the title of my talk, refers simultaneously to multiple things: Yoshiya Nobuko’s girlish readings of the world as found in her writings, reading by readers of Yoshiya in her time, to the extent that we could know them or try to think about them, and finally, also to readings and analysis of her now. I want to argue for the most capacious and flexible readings as girlish readings, but also to argue that such flexibility not be used, as I think it sometimes is, to avoid or deny completely obvious political or erotic potential of this writing.

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Slide 17: “Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick on the queer reader.” Text is as quoted in the talk. Source: Sedgwick, E. Kosofsky (1997), “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction Is about You,” in *Novel Gazing*, Durham NC, In37. (p.1).

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The title of my talk also has very much in mind this quote from Eve Sedgwick in the introduction to *Novel Gazing*. I don’t usually like to read off my slides, but I think I’ll read off here a bit. She talks about the absorption of the queer reader, “the child or adolescent whose sense of personal queerness may or may not (yet?) have resolved into a sexual specificity of proscribed object choice, aim, site, or identification.”

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Slide 18. Text is as quoted in the talk. Source: Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading.”

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“Such a child—if she reads at all—is reading for important news about herself, without knowing what form that news will take; with only the patchiest familiarity with its codes; without, even, more than hungrily hypothesising to what questions this news may proffer an answer....”

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Slide 19. Text is as quoted in the talk. Source: Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading.”

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“This state is a speculative, superstitious, and methodologically adventurous state where recognitions, pleasures, and discoveries seep in only from the most stretched and ragged edges of one’s competence.”

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Slide 20: “Girl reader as being in a: ‘speculative, superstitious, and methodologically adventurous state.’” Image: Yoshiya reading a magazine.

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I think Yoshiya’s writing style itself, in addition to her nonfiction arguments about the value of girlhood, all contain many of these same elements. Many of her fictional writings have a certain sort of vague atmospheric quality: often sentences aren’t finished, elliptical, full of lists of adjectives, maybe missing the predicate of a sentence, or taking forever to get to it.

I just heard a snippet from a discussion about Ernest Hemingway and reminded, reminding me that he hated adjectives. And Yoshiya’s sort of like the total opposite of that. And you need a huge vocabulary of adjectives to translate her.

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Slide 21: “Girlhood: Past and future.” Text: “*Flower Stories* (1916–1924).” Images: Covers of Japanese editions of *Flower Stories*.

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The early works, *Flower Stories*, usually set up a simple situation and set up relationships and images, without resolving into a plot or developing the characters very much. Some criticized this writing style then, and many did not—and many did later. It is likely one reason her fiction was neglected for some time.

But such writing also kept open a door, I think, for a girl reader to explore these girls and settings from many angles: identifying with them, thinking of them as targets of affection, or as being like their own objects of affection, being like sisters, or not identifying with them all—at all perhaps.

Some have a vague cultural location: an Italian girl living in Japan, a Japanese girl infused with Christian culture from her schooling, and so on. Some are wildly emotional, some frail and hard to delve into, and it’s hard to delve into their consciousness or subjectivity from the reader’s perspective. Some communications are in fragments—a letter, a flower pressed in a book, a poem copied—but for young readers exploring nascent feelings and myriad sensations, this vagueness is and was not a flaw but a virtue. And I would argue this was one of Yoshiya’s gifts to her queer reader, queer readers and all readers.

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Slide 22. Adds the following quote to the previous slide: “Girlhood days that won’t return, flowers that blossomed in dreams, I send each and every one to you lovely girls.”

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OK, so I want to move to some specific examples of these texts and

how Yoshiya thought about the girl, just starting with this preface that just appeared in the orange square of my previous slide. This is a super famous, and if you've seen anything about *Flower Stories* you will have seen it already. But I want to point out the ways this nostalgic preface is highly aware of the way this girlhood is, the nature of girlhood, in two ways.

First it's fleeting and short lived, and that's sort of obvious. She was already twenty when she publishes the first one to, second, repeatable through storytelling—maybe this is less obvious—she repeats this preface actually in republications of *Flower Stories* as it's repeated again and again over the years.

So, for example, you see the green cover with, at the top. This one with the red kimono, this is from the republication, hardcover republication of *Hana monogatari*, of *Flower Stories*, and it uses a reprint preface from 1939 that is—

[Recording interrupted briefly due to audio issues.]

OK, so I'll just go back slightly. So she reprints, the preface that appears in the reprint of a contemporary publication of *Flower Stories*. It's taken from the 1939 version and refers to the China, it being at the time of the China-Japan war or the *Shinajihen*, it says in the preface. And she talks about these stories again as being from the dawn, the *akebono* of her writing career and being like another tear building up behind her eyelid, as she calls the stories *omae-tachi* and says “you who know my heart so well”—you the stories—“you know my heart so well, go out to still younger girls and tell your stories anew.”

So even here she's attempted to leave space for herself, to kind of re-enter girlhood, re-enter the stories, attaching again to their emotional potential in a different time, but also thinking about girls who are not from her own world. There's this kind of stretching out of the timeline that these stories can address.

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Slide 23: “From *Two Virgins in the Attic*.” Text (from *Yaneura no nishajo*, page 52): “Even before reaching the concept itself, the very syllables ‘yaneura,’ were so attractive, conveying an ingenious beauty with their sound. And the word even included within itself symbolic references, evoking meanings of beauty and desire. For example, (rose)–(coral)–(first love)–.....(.....).....”

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This quote is taken from Yoshiya's *Yaneura no nishajo*, *Two Virgins in the Attic*, from 1920, published when she was twenty-four years old, also probably very familiar if you've read about Yoshiya and the novel. But it's a really good example of the unsaid, the unsaid, and I include it in my argument about ellipses and her writing. This quote sort of is “reading like a girl,” providing a metacommentary on the very word

“attic.” Here “attic” appears as *yaneura*, the Japanese word, but it also appears in alphabet, in [English] elsewhere in the novel.

It’s linguistic, it explores its linguistic qualities and images it conjures up. This image is kind of patchy, but it also becomes clearer and more suggestive the less is specified. The story is two girls living in an attic room together, and their relationship. And so this very kind of sketchy, even blank, representation contains so much within it. Even as the information becomes less clear it’s all the more obvious that something interesting is going on here, and certainly that the girlish reader can explore some options for what that might be. Yoshiya’s writing in a way that works for that girl.

I think while looking at this quote I also want to mention one other thing, that Yoshiya had a strong interest in going to films. She gets kicked out of her dorm because she doesn’t make curfew while going to movies in Asakusa, and she used to write, and she would write in the morning and then go to movies in the afternoon. She is heavily immersed in movie culture, and although a lot of her novels have this kind of linear plot quality, I think that some of her writing like this shows this kind of montage style, piling up of images to build kind of a subconscious meaningful message and atmosphere.

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Slide 24: “*Revolutionary Girl Utena*, based on Yoshiya story *Two Virgins in the Attic*.” Image: Drawing of Utena and Anthy kissing.

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Just, by the way this novel is hugely influential on *Utena*—sorry if my anime references are a bit old, because maybe I’m a bit old—but these two in the attic kind of bust out of the attic like these two characters do in the *Utena* movie, if you’re familiar with it.

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Slide 25. Text (from *Two Virgins in the Attic*): “... If a mermaid were to lament by a rock on the shore, desiring the moonlight she would look like this.... Akitsu placed on her palm a small glass bottle filled with amber liquid, and squeezed the rubber globe at the [sic] to release a mist in the moonlight, the mist of perfume took on faint colors of the rainbow and disappeared behind the two maidens’ hair...”

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A lot of these kinds of quotes bring together, pile up these images that, as in this case, this is not sexual in the sense of some kind of commonly discussed sex act, but absolutely sensual, suggestive, totally open to erotic reading, in my mind and I think many readers’ minds. These sort of quotes have a strong, strong bodily element that builds a sensation—colors, elicited by flowers or jewels, scents, fabric, textures—and the absences only builds, build that sense further.

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Slide 26. Text (from *Two Virgins in the Attic*): “.....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.....” Image: Cover of a Japanese edition of *Two Virgins in the Attic*.

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Another really famous quote is this one. It’s less vague and it builds on these elements even as it uses more ellipses—all of these ellipses are in the original quotation. Here this elision is pretty, however much elision you have it’s pretty clear that something is going on here, and most of what is going on here is pretty clear.

So this kind of openness to obvious reading is something that I want to think of as “reading like a girl,” “writing like a girl” and also “reading like a girl”: being willing to say that this is an erotic passage, to enjoy it from multiple perspectives, whether that’s sort of a younger teenager reading it from a more innocent, or I think rather different perspective, to a contemporary reader reading it now—open for us to have these queer readings.

And it’s so obvious that I think it’s a good example of how it can be problematic to think of this as just a temporary kind of relationship, or just some kind of vague kind of text. It’s vague but completely obvious.

And this is similar to some of the ways that Eve Sedgwick talks about some of the writings that she is exploring in terms of homosociality and the ways that people kind of rejected her attempt to talk about the works in those terms, even when they are completely obvious, obviously referring to some kind of same-sex relationships.

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Slide 27. “Katsuragi first seeks Reiko.” Text (from “Yellow Rose”): “Perhaps because she had been running so fast her little chest beat wildly, sending the profusion of flowers in that single hand all a-tremble, and this quivering of the yellow rose bouquet moved in unison with the fluttering of the girl’s sleeves——it was a beautiful scene——”

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This is from my translation of “Yellow Rose.” It’s just one of a few in that story that sort of sets the scene and allows the reader to imagine—and this is one of the *Flower Stories*, is one of the few in that story that sort of sets the scene—and allows the reader to imagine the breadth of

the character and to visualize the scene where one young woman first sees another on a train platform. She has no idea who this girl carrying the roses is. It turns out the girl is actually a senior at the same school where she's starting her job as a teacher.

And this has a more taboo element. And if you read it in a class, probably you talked about some of the issues that raises. But Yoshiya introduces the two in a place outside the school and before the teacher is working in the school, so that the girl reader can view the characters in full isolation from that complex dynamic before bringing them into the more complex and ultimately tragic love story.

The reader, the girl reader, can then really wonder what this scene's information is implying, what will happen, what will be, but we know, but the reader who is familiar with the codes of the *Flower Stories* knows that this girl carrying flowers is going to be an important character and someone that maybe she is being encouraged to have a crush on.

So these are just a few of the really obvious examples of passages that can be read as queer longings and part of same-sex relationships. These are all quoted a lot now because they're pretty obvious as such. Many more in her writings are somewhat less so.

One response to that could be to say that these are finding what news you already are looking for, and that they're, therefore they might not be typical of the more friendship-like scenes in Yoshiya's girl fiction, even places where the girls could seem to many readers as just friends.

I'm trying to use these quotation marks on Zoom but I don't know if it works—but my point is just that if someone is looking for this, they actually will find it all over the place in her writing. And then that is fine as a reading practice—why wouldn't it be? Again, a frothy quality or vagueness doesn't mean we shouldn't call it lesbian, lesbian or sexy or hot. It's all of these things, it can be.

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Slide 28. Text (from Yoshiya's "Loving One Another," 1921): "Same-sex friendship-love ... can be extremely advantageous from an educational perspective, and almost immeasurably so ... through it the *shōjo* develops a beautiful ethical, social, and unselfish character."

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So those are some examples of what Yoshiya Nobuko provides as reading material for girls. What was her vision of the girl as written about in non-fiction? We can learn a lot from her writings on the topic. What are, what are sometimes called "S" or "sister" relationships, "s for sister" relationships, around the time of Yoshiya's youth were increasingly under scrutiny for seeming to be a threat to traditional marriage, even as they were omnipresent. They were prevalent throughout these publications as I mentioned before, largely embraced

by many people.

But there were some well-publicized double suicides by well-to-do girls—something discussed in articles by Jennifer Robertson and Michiko Suzuki—and this did cause a certain amount of panic in some circles. Within that, into that environment, Yoshiya now in her mid-twenties writes a piece for a mainstream literary magazine making a strong argument for the ethical possibilities of having same-sex relationships in adolescence or in high school as a learning experience for women.

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Slide 29: “Loving one another 2.” Text (quoting Yoshiya): “Their sensibility grows like a beautiful flowering grass, nurtured in those soft embraces while showered with spring rains. It grows day by day in the heart of a young *shōjo*, and, just like the ocean tide receding from the shoreline, the longer all of that sentiment overflows and is cherished, the more sublimely powerful the generosity that takes form in its wake. ...That powerful friendship-love that emerges from the very first time during her *shōjo* years must have an effect that permeates her entire life.”

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Actually some other people did make this kind of argument, but she is less than others focused on any expectation that this friendship in high school would have to be rechanneled into heterosexual love to be meaningful or valuable, or as some, also, others argue that it could save her virginity.

Her sense was that whatever her future—her, the girl’s future, and this is wide open—this kindness towards other girls older or younger would be useful in creating, useful in creating an ethical compassionate adult. And we can see that this flowery writing style’s also maintained here to express this idea.

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Slide 30: “From Yoshiya, ‘Loving One Another’ (1921).” Text (quoting Yoshiya): “In [Edward] Carpenter’s (*Love’s Coming of Age*, 1896), he points to friendship-love. ...it can be extremely advantageous from an educational perspective, and almost immeasurably so. When this happens, the younger *shōjo*’s feelings towards the older does not stop at taking her as a love object; she worships her as a sort of hero for her own spirit and imitates her. Meanwhile, the older girl is touched by the dearness of that younger *shōjo* ... and she develops a beautiful ethical, social, and unselfish character (性情).”

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We can see—this is just a longer version of the first quote I gave—but here she also called on Edward Carpenter. I don’t have time to talk about it here in depth, but along with Sappho references this is another

reason to think it would be problematic to claim that Yoshiya is somehow not in conversation with international queer culture at the time.

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Slide 31: “Edward Carpenter (w/ partner George Merrill), queer sexologist, socialist.” Text: “*The Intermediate Sex*, used by Japanese feminists to explore how social institutions form gender and sexuality (and make it changeable), translated by Yamakawa Kikue.” Top image: Photograph of Edward Carpenter (left) with George Merrill. Bottom image: Photograph of Yamakawa Kikue (left) with two other women.

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He’s certainly a really interesting figure, if you haven’t studied about him, and very influential in Japan, and was translated by Yamakawa Kikue— one of the more Marxist feminists—who I’m sure Professor Perry is also very close to his work as well, in proletarian literature.

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Slide 32: “‘Yellow Rose,’ from original serialization of ‘Yellow Rose,’ installment titled: ‘A Vow to Sappho.’” Image: Drawing of Katsuragi Misao standing next to her student Urakami Reiko, both with their heads bowed.

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These kind of codes were also supported by the illustrators, who also added their own kind of readings, and added to the potentially powerful experience for girls and all readers. And so just as I think Yoshiya, although she already had, as I said, within her environment of this kind of emerging *shōjo* culture where same-sex relationships were condoned in some ways, this doesn’t mean that she didn’t seek different ways to articulate her identity through world resources and the kind of authority of other philosophies and sets of images.

And of course there were still tremendous pressures on her, and on her community, to marry when they grew up or to pursue more kind of socially accepted life course. So it makes sense that they reach out to these images, they reach out to these images and ideas, and illustrators supported this in many ways. And have their own, of course they had their own interests as well.

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Slide 33: “Modern Global Visual Culture and Queer Culture, Aubrey Beardsley illustration, Oscar Wilde’s *Salome*.” Left image: Drawing of Salome holding the head of Jokanaan (John the Baptist). Right image: Photograph of Oscar Wilde.

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There’s an interesting argument about the ways that the illustrations for “Yellow Rose” are calling on from the original publication, are in

conversation with these illustrations from Oscar Wilde's *Salome*.

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Slide 34: “Yellow Rose,’ original illustrations Fukiya Kōji, based on Wilde illustrations.” Left image: Drawing of Salome from the previous slide. Right image: Drawing from “Yellow Rose” as published in an early Japanese edition of *Hana monogatari*.

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I think you can see some of the similarities, particularly in this scene. This argument's developed by Watanabe Shūko in her article in Japanese. I find it quite convincing.

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Slide 35: “*Shōjo no tomo*, *Little Women* film-based insert. Text by Yoshiya Nobuko; Nakahara Jun'ichi illustrator; still from film *Little Women*, 1934.” Upper-left image: Drawing of Katharine Hepburn as Jo from *Little Women*. Upper-right image: Drawing of a character from *Little Women*. Lower-left image: Film still from *Little Women*, featuring Katharine Hepburn as Jo. Lower-right image: Text from magazine insert.

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And Yoshiya was always very engaged in visual culture, international visual culture, as well as film culture and girls' stories from other places. And this is from a booklet that she helped produce about *Little*, based on *Little Women*, which had photos from, stills from the Katharine Hepburn film, and explanations of the characters, like Jo and so on. So this is another place that Yoshiya is sort of calling on the world of girls' culture, including some of the gender ambiguous elements that, Jo is *otoko no yō ni* to me, she's like a boy.

And I think is another place that she pulled in resources from different places to support her girl readings. But also her own lifestyle, her own life choices—I don't want to say “lifestyle”—but her own sexual feelings, her choice to live with Monma, as well as similar desires that she saw in her readers.

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Slide 36: “Takabatake Kashō, illustr. Yoshiya Nobuko, ‘Stormy Roses,’ 嵐の薔薇 1929.” Image: Drawing of two girls holding hands, one holding a pink rose.

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Takabatake is someone who, great work by Barbara, Barbara Hartley, also Leslie Winston, talk about the ways that this illustrator, who often illustrated Yoshiya's works, including these pairs of, sort of, two shots of girls, were also part of a broader set of iconography where he also depicted gender-ambiguous figures, boys and girls. I'll show you one later.

And again, even as a child Yoshiya enjoyed being interpolated by these images, and she continues to call on them as part of girls' culture. At the same time she is also critical of magazines for trying to commodify the girl and to move girls' perspectives into heterosexuality through pressure.

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Slide 37: "Seeking a form for a long-term relationship, letter to Chiyo, December 11, 1924." Text (quoting Yoshiya): "Why [sic] would be wrong with the two of us living together? Why shouldn't the two of us who love each other not have already disclosed that love to others and brought that close bond into our everyday lives? There should be no greater obstacle for two people of the same sex (同性) than there is for a man and a woman."

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This is also just around the time when she's worried about not being able to live with her partner Monma, and the pressures on her personally. And we have some of her letter, this letter to Monma presenting some of these feelings. She's defiant and determined that they can live together, but you see some of her doubts and her awareness of criticism of their relationship.

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Slide 38: "Independent 'girl' magazine *Black Rose*, 1924, (self published)." Image: Cover of issue number 1 of *Black Rose*.

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So it's in that context that she starts this magazine *Black Rose*, which is independent, it's not self published, she has a publisher who does the, they're going to make money off of it. But they are giving her complete editorial choice, and she will be the only person writing it, writing in it. And here's an actual copy of the first edition that I have.

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Slide 39: "*Black Rose*: Flower petals as weapons! (also asks Chiyo to be the editor)" Text (quoting Yoshiya): "The girls' magazines are so terrible lately that I just sigh every time I read them.... They seem to endorse obscenity, pushing on girls the idea that they should be flirting with men. Sometimes I really wonder whether those artists and writers who publish there are really human? Even thought [sic] it is true that anyone having a pure spirit who is simply given the opportunity to polish it can enjoy her solitude, these people are a dirty lot, taking their filthy hands and cover [sic] girls' eyes, propping them up as so many clay dolls that can only think about getting married.... With *Black Rose* I raise a protest banner against that trend; Nobuko will write, throwing flower petal after petal against it."

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And this petal, this petal quote, which was in one of my book chapters,

was briefly viral on Twitter, so I want to share it for that reason, apart —I think it's also really wonderful to share the ways that this kind of image of the flower can be used in a political way, being weaponized in her, in Yoshiya's mind. But also some of the ways that some elements of girl culture were to her, even to her whose career was made by them, exploitative and not just spaces of solace, and all that that I talked about at the beginning of my talk.

She could not just kind of float in this frothy space of the girl's world, but she also experienced discrimination, and she saw that she had to be a kind of active imaginative activist in a sense. So it's not so kind of passive as this image of, as many people kind of think of this image of the flower as a kind of narcissistic self-absorbed, a pretty and nonpolitical kind of image.

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Slide 40: “‘The Spirit of Youth on Leaving the Nest,’ 1924, 若き魂巣 立ち, throughout ‘girlhood’ is おとぬ furigana on 少女.” Text (quoting Yoshiya): “Girlhood: when she is moving from that bright, cloudless world of childhood where she may frolic without a care, toward another one that may cast subtle shadows across her emotional landscape. When girls’ hearts and bodies are growing as fast as young grass in the spring rain, their bodies still long and yearn for that former world that had been their home.”

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This is one of the pieces that Yoshiya published in that magazine, and it goes, she's very honest about adolescent relationships among girls, especially. It's kind of similar to the “Loving One Another” argument, this idea that allowing girls to have time to mature without the interven —, mature or explore themselves and be young without the intervention of others is important.

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Slide 41: “‘The Spirit of Youth on Leaving the Nest,’ 1924, 若き魂巣 立ち, throughout ‘girlhood’ is おとぬ furigana on 少女.” Text (quoting Yoshiya): “Given that indescribably and pure realm the girl, I think that *adults should not try to encroach on it with their rough hearts and rigid hands lest they destroy it.* They should wait for as long as they can and let the girl's gentle spirit slumber in that dream for awhile, letting her spirit develop as much as it can inside that world. Like a butterfly weaving its own cocoon, she will emerge from that world beautiful. The girl who resides in that special place of yearning and kindness is without parallel. I don't think men should trespass into those gentle youthful dreams with their menacing presence.”

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So I'm going to just push with this a little bit, this idea that “adults should not try to encroach on it with their rough hearts and rigid hands lest they destroy it.” So here too she feels this kind of pressure

on the girl's space. And I think the main pressure is pressure to marry or enter a kind of certain, sort of socially accepted kinship relationship, and she feels the need to kind of write against that. And I want to argue that this is part of this political kind of "reading like a girl" and allowing girls, giving girls skills to read against these pressures if they need to.

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Slide 42. Image: Illustration of two young women, one in kimono and one in Western dress, standing under a cherry tree holding hands.

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So now, of course Yoshiya didn't write only girls' fiction throughout her life, and she was not always a girl. In fact, as I said, she wrote *Flower Stories* when she was already twenty, and then her friends around her were following many different trajectories: marriages that were good and bad, bohemian world travel, crazy affairs with different men, and so on. And she was inspired to write about all sorts of experiences.

Of course, most girl readers of Yoshiya, and many of her girl characters, did not have the freedom to live out the life path that she did. They were not the "richest women of Nippon" like she was. They also in, for, had various family pressures to marry, and sometimes particular people that they really didn't want to marry. And she starts writing, she was writing at this point not as a girl, but writing for those girls, or former girls, and many of those—

She continues to write girls' fiction as well, but she writes more and more novels like this. And this could be, and I think sometimes the scholarship implies this, that this is about the girl readers growing up. In terms of marketing this might be true, her girl readers then read *Housewife's Friend*, so they really want Yoshiya publishing in these adult women's magazines, because it pulls her readers along.

But in terms of Yoshiya herself, I like to push this a bit more to make it less of a narrative of, a kind of capitulation of sexual identity. Rather she maintains this girlish stance of flexible and more open sexuality throughout her life.

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Slide 43: "Takabatake Kashō, illustr. Yoshiya Nobuko, 'Stormy Roses,' 嵐の薔薇 1929." Image: Drawing of two girls holding hands, one holding a pink rose.

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Akaeda Kanako, who I mentioned before, makes the point that the compulsion to decide whether the relationships in Yoshiya's work, and schoolgirl relationships in general, are a form of friendship or homosexuality is tied up with a simplistic dichotomy between the two.

She shows the usefulness of untangling these complexities in the face of other factors, especially reproductive and nonreproductive sexuality

and notions of public and private. Particularly because of the potential for reproduction, there was a stigma placed on women whose intimate partner is of the same sex, and the sense that this would prevent her from moving from teenage relationships that might be marked as pure and moral in adolescence, but deviant if lasting into the reproductive years.

And as ideals of arranged marriage were falling away towards a sort of love marriage idea, people came to see the consensually-formed heterosexual family as a private space with private feelings of love, with extramarital sexuality such as affairs with other women and engagement with prostitutes and nonreproductive sexuality as deviant.

So people saw this heterosexual family as the place a woman should go as an adult, and its romantic love able to replace the intimacy of friendship that was permitted within the more public school space of the school, among girls. Even though having a similar feeling in school is common, by labeling that as friendship and never romantic love, it could be seen as normal and positive. This friendship could be seen as positive in the high school, even while demonizing older women with this feeling, or who simply fail to marry and reproduce, known as “old maid” or “old miss” in Japan.

That’s kind of a complex argument, but I think it’s really helpful for thinking about some of the things that Yoshiya was trying to overcome as she started to write about adult characters in their marriages from different angles.

And novels like this one that’s illustrated here, *Stormy Rose*, deal with the edges of that when a woman in a tough marriage situation flees to her friend’s house in Hokkaido, only to have both the husband and the girls’ school friend hit on her in a way that is not desired by her at that time. These are the kind of situations that she starts to set up, and explore the lives of women from different angles.

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Slide 44. Left image: A Japanese edition of Yoshiya’s *Haha no kyoku* 母の曲 (*A Mother’s Song*) and an English edition of Olive Higgins Prouty’s novel *Stella Dallas* on which it was based. Right image: The title page of the novel *Stella Dallas*, with a photograph of Belle Bennett portraying Stella in the 1925 silent film adaptation.

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Just a very couple quick examples of these adult works that keep this in play. She rewrote the story of *Stella Dallas*, an American novel and movie, with an eye toward making a film ...

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Slide 45. Text (quoting from Yoshiya): “...behind her father, there was a beautiful woman, pure like a white lily and wearing stylish western clothing. Keiko: ‘Oh, yes, I like her so much. If she were a teacher at my

girls' school everyone would be all worked up and have crushes on her —' Junji laughed happily. Indeed it made him happy to see his love, Kaoru, reflected so fondly in the eyes of an innocent girl. (37)" Upper image: Irie Takako as Kaoru in the 1937 film adaptation of *Haha no kyoku*. Lower image: Hara Setsuko as Keiko in *Haha no kyoku*.

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... which was made with [Irie Takako] and Hara Setsuko. And this really highlights the schoolgirl. This supposed to be a mother film, mother-daughter film, but it really highlights the schoolgirl crush dynamic of the daughter and foster mother, stepmother, as well as the warm relationship between, with Stella in the American film, here Ine, and Helen, a piano teacher.

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Slide 46. Left image: Hanabusa Yuriko as Ine and Irie Takako as Kaoru in *Haha no kyoku*. Right image: Takabatake Kashō drawing of two girls holding hands, one holding a pink rose.

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The film picks up on this. So it's adapted to a novel and then that's made instantly into a film, and the filmmaker picks up on this using this kind of two shot pairings that we see in magazine illustrations, as well, too, ...

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Slide 47. Upper-left image: Irie Takako as Kaoru in *Haha no kyoku*. Lower-left image: Irie Takako as Kaoru and Hanabusa Yuriko as Ine in *Haha no Kyoku*. Upper-right images: Barbara O'Neil as Helen Morrison in the 1937 film *Stella Dallas*, and Alice Joyce as the same character in the 1925 silent version. Lower-right image: Barbara Stanwyck as Stella and Barbara O'Neil as Helen Morrison in *Stella Dallas*.

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... which also kind of prefigures some of the American lesbian criticism of the film *Stella Dallas*, which picks up on these much later, like in the 90s: the kind of sexual tension between the two mothers and between the mother and stepmother—, the daughter, stepdaughter.

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Slide 48: "Silent film from one of the *Flower Stories* 福寿草 *Pheasant Eyes*. Image: Still from the 1935 Japanese film *Pheasant Eyes* (*Fukujusō*), showing two women next to a cross marking a grave.

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And you see this kind of dynamic in even this earlier silent film based on one of the *Flower Stories*. And this film is often available on YouTube if anyone wants to find it. I can help you find it.

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Slide 49: “Women’s Classroom, 1939–.” Left image: An advertisement for the film *Women’s Classroom* 女の教室 (*Onna no kyōshitsu*). Upper-right image: Another advertisement for *Women’s Classroom*.

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Another technique in works aimed at adults for leaving that space, for “reading like a girl,” and I think the more common one, is to spin off huge numbers of characters. And Yoshiya was just brilliant at producing three sisters from different angles, or four classmates, or here seven classmates, all in the same medical school. And she would just, she said she would just see people on the street when she was taking a taxi in Ginza or something and just spin out a whole story about them and their friends.

And in a film like this she has all of these different characters, and this is the, two of the film adaptations, that allows this tremendous variety of experience: you have this Christian Chinese woman, a poor student, a wealthy bourgeois student, and then a tomboyish one who, who is in love with one of the other classmates. And this allows for exploration of a huge number of different trajectories for life.

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Slide 50. Image: Article with character biographies for *Women’s Classroom*.

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Dr. Perry’s and my friend Miho Matsugu writes about this story, about this novel, and particularly the question of why the lesbian character has to die. And this may be because it is a wartime work, and maybe we can talk about that later. It’s too much to handle in this class.

But before that, I think it does allow for exploration of one kind of trajectory. And that character’s able to not marry someone because she’s taking care of her handicapped brother, which allows her a social, sort of, passport, to be able to live in that particular, live without marrying someone at that time.

And I decided not to present them because they’re sort of triggering, but there are also some really important representations that Yoshiya makes of unwanted sexuality within arranged marriage, even going back to the *Black Rose* private publication, where she could kind of say whatever she wants. She doesn’t have a utopian ending at all, but the novel published there ends with apparent rape and murder of the girl love interest of the protagonist.

So while not at all hitting the iconic image of frivolity and cuteness of *shōjo* culture, I want to suggest that these are also forms of this “reading like a girl” in Yoshiya’s sense, of experience of many possible futures. And I think she wants the reader to experience the shock of such an outcome from the perspective of a girl who is rightly shocked by sexual violence, and her care and empathy is still maybe intact.

And this really differs from some of Yoshiya's adult kind of pushy mother characters—not the, she has virtuous mother characters but not those—those who push the patriarchal kinship system on their daughters without attention to the difficult horribly painful experiences that they cause for their daughters. This for me is another way of kind of “reading like a girl” for Yoshiya, finding these situations offensive and troubling.

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Slide 51. Text (quoting from Yoshiya's 1940 novel *Flowers* 花): “The young dentist's tall body was accentuated by the crisp, freshly laundered white scrubs, and, although his well-formed nose and shapely mouth were hidden behind the pure white gauze mask, the masculine elegance of his dark, shapely brows and large eyes still full of boyish innocence alone were enough to qualify him as a ‘beautiful man’ type (美男型).”

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Less disturbing, I sort of put this in for the pandemic because we need some descriptions of men, people with masks. She often uses the image of a beautiful boy and plays with different gender representations. These also can pull in many different kinds of readers: they might be the girl who is interested in a young handsome man, or they might also be of interest to desiring male readers. And she herself seems to enjoy these characters and often brings them up.

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Slide 52: “Takabatake Kashō beautiful men and boys.” Left image: A drawing of a boy in traditional dress playing a flute. Right image: A painting of a young man wearing a black shirt and a tam o'shanter-style cap.

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And these as I mentioned earlier are also found in her illustrators' work as well.

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Slide 53. Image: Two-page magazine photographic spread of Yoshiya standing in front of a plane.

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I will not talk about it, just kind of a teaser in case you want to ask about later, in Yoshiya's wartime writings when she travels to Asia to report on the war, she actually uses these beautiful boy characters, characteristics, to describe some military people she meets as well as Japanese colonialists, men who are in Asia—bringing up some other issues and possible problems. I've been writing about that lately, but don't have time to talk about that also today, but I think it's important.

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Slide 54: “With Zhang Xueliang (Peter Chang), Manchuria, Oct. 1928.”  
Left image: Photograph of Zhang Xueliang, the ruler of Manchuria in northeast China in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Right image: Photograph of Yoshiya and Monma with Zhang and others.

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She also describes Zhang Xueliang in these terms as well, as this beautiful boy. This is pretty interesting.

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Slide 55: “If I Were a Man (1935).” Text (quoting from Yoshiya): “As a husband, I would take care of and clean my own space in our home and my own things so as not to burden my wife too much. And, for my wife who has my deepest love, I would want her to read lots of books, think deeply about things, and express her own opinions. Because I believe if there is true love in a marriage there will be no problems that come from that. By and by, one little girl will be born, and she will be like a jewel, like a flower, like a little angel. (And one will be *more* than enough as far as kids go, thank you very much!)”

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And just as my last example, Yoshiya also explores gender identity differences, and she has this cute essay “If I Were a Man.” If you want to, I have translated the whole thing if anyone ever wants it, it’s very fun. And at the end of the essay, at the end of the description of what she would be like if she were a man, Monma kind of comes in and questions her, questions her plan for being a man. So that’s just kind of playfulness in that essay.

So again, as Akaeda points out, in this period any questions of sexuality or non-feminine gender identity were supposed to sort of disappear into the private. So the issues over intimacy and denial of women’s sexuality and just the daily life of adult women as softening their ideals remain for all readers. But for various reasons the lesbian reader often has more at stake in this.

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Slide 56. Left image: Animation still of Yumi and Sachiko, from the anime *Maria Watches Over Us*. Center image: Photograph of Monma and Yoshiya. Right image: Magazine illustration of two girls.

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As Yuka Kanno points out, modern historiographers, who try to claim that adolescent friendships are not sexual or only friendships, are not only different, are not really that different from sexologists from the 1920s who tried to draw a line between sexual relationships that they saw as healthy, pure girl friendship—between sexual relationships, heterosexual relationships, and then what they saw as healthy pure girl friendships.

And we also, we should think about what might be at stake in trying to deny their sexual quality. And the danger of, as Kanno puts it, evacuating same-sex desire and lesbian subjectivities unquote. It also has the danger of denying a huge range of desires that do not fit such a narrow view of accepted sexuality.

I think one important way of doing this is to embrace this “reading like a girl” in the present, in the sense of being open to different readings and not drawing lines in the sand, and hist—sands of history. Indeed there has been an expansion of interest in Yoshiya Nobuko, largely because of LGBTQ identities being more openly expressed in scholarly and fan communities.

And just making that happen, making republications happen, and starting to make translations happen, is not the focus of today’s talk or my research. But obviously Yoshiya has been continuously influential in *shōjo* anime and manga and especially yuri genres that depict same-sex relationships, and maybe even in BL genres as well, probably not maybe, probably definitely. Perhaps someone here listening can speak to that in our question and answer.

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Slide 57: “*Fatal Frame (Gekijō ban zero)*. (Excellent recent) analysis by Lindsay Rebecca Nelson-Santos, Meiji Univ.)” Image: Film still from *Fatal Frame* showing two schoolgirls.

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I recently heard a great talk at the Association for Asian Studies about this horror film that’s very influenced by Yoshiya’s work as well.

So there are many other genres to consider. In general this has led to a lot more access and attention to Yoshiya’s work, blogging, social media, including internationally.

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Slide 58. Image: Screenshot of the *Okazu* blog <https://okazu.yuricon.com>, with a photograph of Erica Friedman.

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An early leader is Erica Friedman, who I think is here today, and she’s publishing a book on a hundred years of yuri, coming out next year. And she’s also published an important article in Japanese on yuri for *Eureka* magazine, which I mention, because I think like Yoshiya Nobuko herself, there, she’s part of the international queer network that continues surrounding her work and the things influenced by it.

So my role in writing this book, I think, is to bring a lot of knowledge of historical context and biographical information that I’ve been collecting. But today I wanted to focus on the ways that this is not meant to cement any particular reading or perspective on her work, but provide materials for more, and for supporting lesbian and anti-

homophobic readings of her, as best I can from the research that I have.

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Slide 59: “Some Recommended Readings on Yoshiya Nobuko in English.” Text:

- Aoyama, Tomoko, and Barbara Hartley eds. *Girl Reading Girl in Japan*. London, New York: Routledge, 2010.
  - Bergstrom, Brian. “Girliness Next to Godliness: Lolita Fandom as Sacred Criminality in the Novels of Takemoto Novala.” *Mechademia: An Annual Forum for Anime, Manga, and the Fan Arts* 6 (2011): 21–37.
  - Dollase, Hiromi Tsuchiya. *Age of Shōjo*. SUNY University Press, 2019.
  - Kanno, Yuka. “Love and Friendship: The Queer Imagination of Japan’s Early Girl Culture.” In *Mediated Girlhoods: New Explorations of Girls’ Media Culture*, edited by Mary Celese Kearney, 17–34. New York: Peter Lang, 2011.
  - Pflugfelder, Gregory. “S is for Sister: Schoolgirl Intimacy and Same-Sex Love in Early Twentieth-Century Japan.” In *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, edited by Barbara Maloney and Kathleen Uno, 133–190. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005.
  - Robertson, Jennifer. “Dying to Tell: Sexuality and Suicide in Imperial Japan.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 25, no. 1 (1999): 1–35.
  - ———. “Yoshiya Nobuko: Out and Outspoken in Practice and Prose.” In *Same-Sex Cultures and Sexualities: An Anthropological Reader*, edited by Jennifer Robertson, 196–211. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
  - Shamoan, Deborah. *Passionate Friendship: The Aesthetics of Girls’ Culture in Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2012.
  - Suzuki, Michiko. *Becoming Modern Women: Love and Female Identity in Prewar Japanese Literature and Culture*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010.
  - ———. “Writing Same-Sex Love: Sexology and Literary Representation in Yoshiya Nobuko’s Early Fiction.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 65, no. 3 (August, 2006), 575–599.
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So I’m going to just put up, I promised some bibliographical things, you can do screenshots or something, so I just will put that up there for those watching in a recording or those doing screenshots, just let people think about or start to raise some questions. And I hope that people will have some questions, comments, criticisms, additions to my talk for today.

**Samuel Perry:**

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Sarah, thank you so much. I'm so excited to hear about this project and looking forward to seeing the book that eventually will come out.

I know that we have many, many guests today who are very anxious to have some contact with you and ask you some questions. There are, I guess there are two different ways that folks can ask questions: there should be a little box at the bottom of your screen called "Q and A." So if anyone has any questions there I would be happy to read them to Sarah, and I think that's probably the best way to do it. There's also a "raise hand" function, and we might be able to get a few people to ask direct questions as well. So I want to welcome all the participants to please ask some questions.

In the meantime, perhaps Sarah, you mentioned that one of your, one of the pieces that you had mentioned had gone viral on Twitter. And I'm wondering maybe if you could just very quickly speak about the ways in which maybe a much more younger generation has embraced Yoshiya Nobuko in the twenty-first century, or if you know anything about how the youngest, a younger generation is maybe reading her today.

### **Sarah Frederick:**

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Yeah, so that was exciting, and that was definitely a kind of English-speaking readership, so it was taking the quote, that I had translated. I worried that it was not a good translation because I did it long ago, but I think it was good. And so I think that there is a familiarity with her work from the Internet, from, even from Wikipedia, and sort of there are certain pieces of information that repeat and are recycled among those who are only reading in English.

And they're pretty accurate things, but they're definitely focused, I think they're primarily focused on her sexuality and her biography, and on her, and, and on those people's interest in *shōjo* culture, particularly manga [and] anime.

I'm sure that other people here have other thoughts on that. But I think that's where it's coming from. And so I mean this kind of strange thing about, I talk as if I'm like trying to make sure that everyone knows that there really is like sexual content here, and same-sex sexual content, and it's almost like a strawman thing.

But what I see in some of the Japanese scholarship, but also some of the scholarship in English, is a kind of going to a certain point and then kind of historicizing, and leaving it over there and saying, "well, that was common in Japan at that time, it's not, now Japan's not tolerant, but it was at that time." This kind of lines being drawn, there are different lines each time.

And so I want to push against that. And I think, I can't talk too much about like the estate and the process of doing the translation probably

on video. But, but I do, I think this is known by various people who have been involved in choosing what might be translated or republished in Japan, is I think the estate wants her not to be kind of minoritized into, as a lesbian writer, but to show the broad range of things that she wrote.

Which in a way is great, but, but it's not really acknowledging or realizing the extent to which the resurgence of interest in Yoshiya is coming from that, both in Japan and internationally. So without that the republications would not be selling so well.

### **Samuel Perry:**

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So well, all right, look we have a few questions coming in, if you don't mind. Someone has asked if the presentation will be recorded, and it will be. Later on it will be posted on the East Asian Studies website at Brown University.

We have one question: "You mentioned that Yoshiya was interested in Hollywood movies, the majority of which are also heteronormative. I'm curious to learn if she ever commented on those kinds of films in her work, which are very different"—the question writer says—"from work such as *Little Women*." The Hollywood—

### **Sarah Frederick:**

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Yeah, that's a great question. And I'll probably forget some of the people, but she does some, she watched a lot of films. Apparently she literally would write in the morning—sounds fun—write all day and then go to the movies that night. And so you see things coming back to her stories. And, yeah, absolutely she would have watched so many heteronormative Japanese and Hollywood films.

She, in some interviews, like *Eiga jidai* and these kind of film magazines, she occasionally is asked what her favorite actresses are, actors, and she tends to pick people with, around whom like queer rumors circulate. You can contact me if you want to check with me, because I feel like I'm not going to remember the right people that she talks about.

But when I looked into that, I'm going to write, I think I'm, I think it's becoming a chapter, like her film stuff, but it might just be—anyway, I had, when I was researching that, that's what I found as a pattern. So she is doing, not that, she doesn't really, she tends not to comment negatively about heteronormativity, but she just tends to comment positively about gender ambiguity and queer sexualities of various sorts.

### **Samuel Perry:**

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Thank you, Sarah. I have a question from a Brown student. Elizabeth

Ahn McGrane, who is taking my translation class right now, has a question about translation and the real—we took a stab at, I think one of the stories in *Hana monogatari* that talks about a Japanese girl who spent some time in Beijing, and her sort of experience walking through the Forbidden City or something, and these ghostly figures appearing of girls, of women from the past. And Ahn writes that it was really difficult capturing the kind of subtleties of Yoshiya's writing when we were trying to translate this.

And she'd like to know a little bit about your experience translating Yoshiya, and how you think translation might be able to highlight or diminish queer themes in Yoshiya's work, when they're sometimes so intentionally vague, and so grammatically vague, even.

### **Sarah Frederick:**

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Yeah, that's a great question, and so important.

And I teach "The Yellow Rose" in my gender and sexuality class. It's not really particularly [?], and I talk about that there. And, yeah, and this is one of the things that's criticized in her writing by some other authors, as being vague and bad writing. But it's so important, and it's very easy to not—this is a place where I think being active in supporting those readings is really important to me politically. And I can, it's easy to fail at it, it also, one could over-read, I guess. But I tend to move in that direction.

So like in "Yellow Rose" there's a subtitle in the translation of "queer" or something. That's not in the original publication. There are no subtitles, not in the original serialization, but in—and I put this in a footnote like I'm a good girl, I put it in the footnote—the republication has this phrase.

And of course the meaning, just as in English at the time, "queer" doesn't mean necessarily anything about sexuality, it's lots of things are "queer" and "strange." But I chose to put that as a subtitle because I kind of like the subtitles, anyway. And I think it, I push my reading, which is totally there, it's not like I made up the reading. So there's that. And I also, as someone who doesn't identify as a lesbian or as queer in my life, I also reach out to other scholars and translators for their opinions.

So, I think Keith Vincent is here. There's an important part of "Yellow Rose" that I worked on with him. I wanted to be sure to get it right, I don't [mean] "right," but get, have a good translation. The part where she's, where the older girl is convincing the younger girl to get married, she decides she has to convince her to just go ahead and get married, because the mother wants that. And that was, I think, that's important work to do, as well, work with people.

And I did that in terms of the introduction to my story as well, that I

did have to change a bit to please the estate, so I was like working a fine line of avoiding. So I talked to people about how to keep what I wanted and not introduce a, introduce because of that process, a kind of homophobic reading that had been done in the past. So definitely [?].

Those aren't very specific about language but that's kind of a politics of translation. But I think also keeping the richness out, less is more most of the time in translation, but there are times when it can be easy to get rid of too much of the excess in her writing, or fill in the gaps too much. So I think, I'm really thinking about what kind of reading experience developed, emerges from what you produce, is important. That's a great question.

### **Samuel Perry:**

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Let's see, we have from Erica Friedman, asks, "Going back to your comment about Edward Carpenter and Yoshiya, could you comment on how Yoshiya adapted Carpenter's ideas, which were focused on male and male, male to male friendships, into female relationships in her own work."

### **Sarah Frederick:**

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Yeah, that's also a really important question. Michiko Suzuki actually has an article about, both of us have, we seem to be interested in the same topics all the time. But she wrote an article about, I wrote an article about translation of Edward Carpenter and Yamakawa Kikue's role. But Michiko Suzuki wrote about this topic in particular, the ways that Yoshiya adapted the ideas.

But, yeah. And I did a lot of work, kind of digging up what the original version, what translation she was working from, and so on, and how much was Yoshiya doing and how much was the translator. And I think it was actually Yamakawa, no, Yamada Waka, another feminist who was first paraphrasing this, she took it from that.

So, a lot of these feminists were interested in Edward Carpenter, and they kind of, they just kind of made it gender neutral or even just turned it into girls. Which I think there's a question of to what degree that was because at that time that was more acceptable in Japan, the girl-girl relationships. And it was also part of their agenda.

They also kind of, I think she also kind of highlights *chūsei*, this kind of middle or unclear gender, middle gender aspect. But, yeah, I would definitely recommend Michiko Suzuki, it's in a book about translation rather than in Japanese studies, so easily overlooked, and good to see.

### **Samuel Perry:**

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Sarah, we have a question, if you could, people were wondering if you could share your Twitter account. Perhaps they can contact you later if

you don't feel comfortable mentioning it here.

### **Sarah Frederick:**

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OK, yeah, I don't even remember, I don't always know about this—

### **Samuel Perry:**

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I think one of your colleagues at BU, Petrus Liu, has a question: "Thank you for the wonderful talk. Towards the end of your talk you reiterated the importance of lesbian anti-homophobic readings of her work. And do you think pieces like "If I Were a Man" also make it possible for transgender and gender-[non]conforming interpretations of her work? And, if so, how would you relate these undercurrents from her legacy to today's Japan."

### **Sarah Frederick:**

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Yeah, that's a great question too. And I was thinking, I mean that's why I put that in there, just really thinking about that piece and whether, and other things.

But does it provide good material for thinking about transgender issues? It seems at the very end of it that backs off, like when her partner, or someone in the voice of her partner, says, "Oh that's ridiculous, like you wouldn't be anything like this person." Like, she claims that if "I were a man I would be this great, I would clean up around the house," and she's like, "You don't, you're a woman and you don't clean up around the house, why do you think that if you were a man you'd be so nice?" And she says, "Well, if I were born, if I were born a man, I would be, I would have to be a different person than I am now. I mean if it were just me as I am now, and just happened to be a man and still a novelist, that's really boring."

And, so, this kind of, is this playfulness just completely undercutting the message, or something else? But it's kind of thought-provoking, right, what is it? What changes if you change your gender identity? I mean this [?] being born, but what other, how do you think about that? And all of these things that she talks about are so socially embedded as well: what university she would go to, what kind of career, what kind of research she would do, and what kind of daily domestic life would take place.

So I think it is thought provoking for that purpose. Do, I mean, one of the things that I've been trying to do in my research is, today I talked about "reading like a girl," but I've actually found a lot of these references to beautiful men. And there's a story where she talks about a character is thirty, is it forty? sixty? or thirty-seven? anyway, forty per cent man, sixty per cent woman, something like this.

So I think there's a lot of potential in a story like that. So it's something

I'm trying to highlight more in her work, that's always seen as so much about girls and women only, but it has these elements.

Today's Japan, I think it could be very productive for that, but I don't know if there's any influence or if there's a readership. I think there probably is, though. I mean you also would want to think about something like boys love manga and the ways that there's a lot of sort of cross-gender identification, reading practices in Japanese popular culture, which is, she could sort of be a part of that network, potentially. It's something I should look on social media and see if I can find something there—it's a great, great idea.

### **Samuel Perry:**

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Sarah, I have several students in a class I'm teaching on empire this semester. And you've engaged with, maybe, Yoshiya's relationship to gender politics, and I was thinking about that opening comment about racism from the girls' magazines you mentioned at the very beginning of the talk. And I know that, I've translated some works from the 1930s about Japanese women in Korea, shooting the rebels, and using pistols, and really brought into a wartime rhetoric. And I was wondering if Yoshiya had a position on the war and colonialism, and the ways in which gender was actively appropriated for those, sort of, more nefarious mechanisms of nationalism, et cetera.

### **Sarah Frederick:**

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Yeah, it's a huge, huge topic. But she, but it's also one of the difficult things to talk about with her. and difficult things in the scholarship, people don't know what to do with. Because she was, she was sent by *Housewife's Friend* and then by the government to report around Asia. She was in, she was in Shanghai during the Battle of Shanghai, doing a roundtable at a military hospital. And then she was sent to Indonesia just as Japan is seeking resources for the empire. And then she's sent to Vietnam, to French Indochina, and she's there on Pearl Harbor day as the Japanese occupation is finishing there, so.

And then she writes, she writes a lot of nonfiction about this and for, and then she also writes a novel called *The Man From the Moon* about a Japanese man who has a baby with a Vietnamese woman. And of course she dies, and then his old friend from Kyo—, girlfriend, girl, woman friend and he are going to raise this baby as a child of Asia. It's very disturbing, right?

And, but the stuff she writes during this time is really interesting. So I think, what I've been taking as an approach is to sort of just describe a lot of what she writes, and show the texture of it. Absolutely she was helping to promote the idea of the Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere in so many of these writings. And so, and it can use the dynamic of the girl to girl bonds and helping women in these places, helping cast off white imperialism through, and then we, me and my Chinese sisters or these

beautiful women of Vietnam or this half Japanese, half Dutch woman who looks like Hara Setsuko in Indonesia—she pulls in all these people, and they sort of become part of this network.

And, so it's very easy to criticize. And I've even been sent her writings on the Tongzhou massacre by the right wing group, the Moteki people, who send us emails, they translated one of her things.

So, yeah, so absolutely she helps support the war effort, not just personally, but even more so, I think than personally in terms of the popularity that she had. But she also is always thinking about gender and compassion and ethics and so on. And there are spaces in those writings that are different than are expected.

And I think what I'm trying most to avoid is some things that I'm talking about today, that you also see in that scholarship, where there's a sense that these kind of bonds, these icky bonds between women that she produces earlier in her career, are what set up for this co-prosperity sphere ideology. And there's this kind of vague homophobic, almost homo-fascism type argument that emerges there that I'm really trying to make sure to push against, mostly by providing more of the material that she wrote and just talking about it in more detail and giving it texture.

But absolutely, and she never, and she doesn't mention Korea at all during that period, I think that's kind of typical. But earlier Korea might be a space for a problem, like someone who gets pregnant out of wedlock, or something, to go to, or that piano teacher in the *Stella Dallas*-type thing, she's been in, teaching piano in Korea and then she sort of comes back.

### **Samuel Perry:**

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Which is really interesting because by the late 1930s Yoshiya is one of the most popular writers among all girls in Korea at the time, as women's magazines there have documented.

Let me see if I can get one or two more questions out here. Erica Friedman—a different Erica Friedman—writes, "I'm curious whether the sense of overwhelming nostalgia in the beginning of *Hana monogatari* is related to the importance of girlhood in her writing. Is it in part her desire to return to girlhood, or is this meant as a part of, I guess, part of a larger context?"—I'm not sure exactly what that means there, but on this kind of sense of nostalgia and her own experience of girlhood.

### **Sarah Frederick:**

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Yeah, I mean that's so important. I think, I was kind of talking more at the beginning today about looking forward and different possible futures, but always there's also this nostalgia for a different, for past,

for the past. And I think for her that that nostalgia is a resource, it's something that might be something of comfort—I mean, it's also, it's a sad thing.

But it's this emotional resource or savings account that these, maybe these women who have awful experiences in adulthood can look back to, to sort of get them through. And often those, if you have this kind of domestic squabble, the alcoholic husband or whatever, who, in those moments you have, that girl will write a letter to that friend and feel really nostalgic about their friendship, and the kind of conversation, substantive conversations they used to have, and the warmth that they had, and the comfort of their friendship.

So it's a criticism of that institution in the present, often, and a source of comfort. Those are some of the things—usually nostalgia's often criticized politically. It's not forward looking, and it probably could be criticized politically, it's just not a revolutionary—

### **Samuel Perry:**

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But it is really interesting how the very beginning of *Hana monogatari*, some of the early stories like “Primrose,” they really set up these multiple levels of a kind of intergenerational sort of subjectivity, that's being set up through these kind of memories of the past: “This was a story my friend told me, that her mother told me,” and it's this kind of sense of inheriting these stories as well, and creating a sense of community around nostalgia. It's quite profound in the early, in the early stories as well. It's quite compelling,

### **Sarah Frederick:**

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Yeah. And really that's the stronger element than the erotic one, but maybe that, there's an eros of nostalgia, maybe, too.

### **Samuel Perry:**

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Well, let's see, I have one more quick question, let's see. Viviana Wei asks, “How you think Nobuko's work continues to inform modern-day LGBT spaces today?”

And before you answer, I'll just say that several other people have written in, thanking you for a fascinating, informative talk and is probably going to be the last question since we only have a few more minutes, but maybe you could, maybe you could address that question of contemporary activism and and modern-day LGBT spaces.

### **Sarah Frederick:**

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Yeah, I think that's so important. And I think they're, in, this is in Japan—I think internationally there's, it's a tremendous resource to have kind of a space or a situation where there was kind of a norm, where

such relationships were almost normative. We don't want to over-romanticize that, but I think that's incredibly powerful and has been a resource for people internationally.

Within Japan, I think it's, there are times when it could be like almost a double edged sword, or that—I taught, I had students at Doshisa Women's University read "Yellow Rose" with me and they thought, they were just like, this is just like any other girls' thing, they didn't see any, for better or worse, they didn't see anything politically challenging in it, or—it was just typical girls' stuff. So I think they felt like it was just the thing you can grow out of.

### **Samuel Perry:**

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Sarah, I think I'm going to, I think I'm going to leave it there and take this opportunity to thank you again for coming to Brown. Thank all our participants for sticking through to the end, and [I'm] encouraging more, many of you to come back tomorrow for a Japanese speech contest as well, I want to get that little plug in there.

So, thank you all so much. And the talk will be recorded and put again on the East Asian Studies website at Brown within, hopefully within the next day or two, so if those of you who had missed any parts of it or want to go back to it, can do that as well. We might be able to get Sarah's Twitter feed by then as well.

### **Sarah Frederick:**

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OK, yeah, thank you so much. Feel free to contact me. I think my email's in the very beginning of the end of the recording, so feel free to contact me there, and I can give you my Twitter feed as well.

### **Samuel Perry:**

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Sarah, thank you so much, and farewell to you all.

[End of transcript]