COMMUNICATING EMOTIONS:

How Commercial Manga for Women Approaches 3.11

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Abstract

Hagio Moto's manga series *Nanohana* was one of the first attempts in female-oriented mainstream manga to depict the 3.11 tragedy and its aftermath. However, it appears to lack in overt social critique, providing instead a highly emotional story about overcoming hardship and maturing. Via a close-reading of *Nanohana* this article analyzes the modus operandi of social critique in popular manga highlighting the visual conventions of female manga genres and thereby going beyond the plotlines, which have been at the center of critical attention so far. The article contrasts the initial one-shot "Nanohana," which directly addresses 3.11, with the subsequent three one-shots that anthropomorphize nuclear elements. Leaning on Thomas LaMarre's theory of plastic and structural lines, *Nanohana* is analyzed in regard to signification and affect by correlating the manga's varying line work with issues of gender, especially the dynamics of the gaze, as theoretically developed by Oshiyama, Nagaike, Ōgi and Ishida. Respectively, the visualization of popular gender stereotypes in *shōjo* and *josei* manga comes to the fore. Special attention is paid to how visual gender constructs help the reader to differentiate between "self" and "other" on the levels of signification and affect, and how the resulting identification and dissociation aid in approaching the traumatic nuclear accident.

About the Author

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INTRODUCTION

Hagio Moto's 24-page story "Nanohana" (Canola Flowers) was one of the first attempts in female-oriented mainstream manga to depict the 3.11 tragedy and its aftermath. The initial one-shot appeared on June 28, 2011, in the monthly *Flowers*, a manga magazine aimed at an adult female audience. It was followed by three other one-shots: "Lady Pluto," "Rainy Evening," and "Salome 20xx". Whereas the first episode gravitates towards *shōjo* (girls) manga and features the coming-of-age story of Naho, a girl in Fukushima City, the latter three episodes explore the problem of nuclear power by anthropomorphizing nuclear elements, adopting a more mature *josei* (women's) manga style. For the sake of brevity, I will use the term "Nuclear Trilogy" when referring to these three titles. In March 2012, all four one-shots were assembled into a *tankōbon* hardcover edition under the title of *Nanohana*, with the addition of another final episode again featuring Naho from Fukushima.

The series presents fragments of factual information related to Fukushima and nuclear power while stylistically fluctuating between two related manga genres: *shōjo* and *josei*. Fans and critics have scrutinized this hybridity, with mixed results. Initial fan reviews on the magazine's webpage praised Hagio Moto for addressing the topic as such. However, negative reader reviews appeared later on the Amazon.com product page for the *tankōbon* edition, highlighting an "overly hasty" treatment of the topic. From my point of view, the *Nanohana* series triggers controversy precisely because it raises different expectations concurrently: expectations of dedicated manga readers toward a new work by Hagio Moto, the critically acclaimed auteur; expectations associated with *shōjo* manga conventions; and expectations regarding the representation of nuclear power after 3.11. The *Nanohana* series employs fragments of each, and as a result, the narrative appears to refrain from any overt critical stance; it seems to pose rhetorical questions instead. As such, the *Nanohana* series presents a perfect example for examining the critical potential in commercial manga. This paper attempts a close reading of *Nanohana*, not to evaluate, but rather to investigate this particular manga as an example of commercial media that addresses an acute social issue.

The author of *Nanohana*, Hagio Moto, is one of the leading *shōjo* manga artists. She has maintained a creative career since the 1970s, tackling complex psychological issues and producing award-winning works. Thus, *Nanohana* may invite discussion as a critical[1] manga by an auteur. However, *Nanohana* is also a commercially successful work by an exemplary manga artist who negotiates complex topics in the framework of female-oriented genres. Such duality stems from manga's inherent potential to evoke several readings simultaneously, inciting re-contextualization and multiple uses of the same text. Agency in the creation

of meaning is left to the reader, rather than assumed by the author (Berndt 365). Azuma Hiroki elaborates on this in his seminal work *Otaku: Japan's Database Animal* (2001). Azuma suggests that in the case of the post-modern text, the reader assembles and reassembles the elements of the narrative, while recognizing and (re)contextualizing media and genre conventions. Accordingly, the text in itself is constructed to encourage these mechanisms of consumption.

It must be noted that multiple readings stem not only from signification, but also from a less explored facet of manga—affect. Correspondingly, special attention will be given in this paper to the immediate visceral impact of the visual conventions particular to female manga genres. Looking at the specific example of *Nanohana* and focusing on the construction of multiple readings, *Nanohana* can be taken as both *shōjo* manga and part of a larger discourse related to media representation of 3.11. Related to these two readings, I will suggest that *Nanohana* is undermining a strictly critical stance towards the events of 3.11 through narrative and visual techniques found in *shōjo* manga, but in the process, ultimately raises awareness of the 3.11 event in a socially productive manner.

1. SHŌJO MANGA AS CONTEXT

Female-oriented manga is known for melodramatic and affect-oriented narratives. In the *Nanohana* series, two types of distinct narrative conventions are present. The initial "Nanohana" one-shot features a sentimental narrative that centers on the protagonist's coming-of-age drama, evocative of classic *shōjo* manga. Adult protagonists and more mature sexual scenarios present in the Nuclear Trilogy tend toward conventions of *josei* manga. However, it must be noted that both genres share multiple stylistic devices, as they both developed when the initial *shōjo* genre was compartmentalized. Both types of narrative also include the same topical subjects of nuclear power and 3.11, fragmenting them and mixing these fragments with female manga tropes.

Approaching sensitive subject matter this way is the legacy of 1970s *shōjo* manga, of which Hagio Moto is representative. At that time the foundations of contemporary *shōjo* manga, its themes, tropes, and conventions were laid. Much of the credit for this is popularly given to The Magnificent 49ers, a group of innovative *shōjo* manga authors who introduced controversial themes of gender-related discrimination, homosexuality, rape, and violence into the then-marginalized *shōjo* genre. These themes were incorporated through diversifying character types alongside girl protagonists who acted as identification anchors. Male characters and villainous characters served as protagonists and even invited empathy by being

depicted via the same narrative and visual conventions as girl protagonists (Ōgi 546–548). At the same time, their underlying "otherness" (as manifesting itself in male bodies) provided dissociative potential for the intended readership (Nagaike 117–118). Critical themes were raised, but they remained fragments woven into the entertaining narratives, often utilized as emotional catalysts or decorative elements without further development (Ishida 193). For example, a character's dark skin could reference racial discrimination, but also function as a device of visual distinction from other characters.

While actual narratives might have remained ambiguous, another forum for raising awareness of critical themes related to gender and sexuality was the paratextual commentary in the magazines. Alongside the serialized work, authors indicated their inspirations, such as novels by Hermann Hesse and Jean Cocteau or films by Luchino Visconti and Federico Fellini (Ishida 76).

Despite such commentary having educational intent, in the 1970s, younger manga artists implied their role as older sisters to the reader rather than mentors. Broadcasting their voices served as a virtual forum for simulating the imagined peer-relationship with the reader (Ōgi 549). To facilitate this, the industry emphasized direct contact with the authors and downplayed the roles of editors and scriptwriters. Consequently, due to the ambiguous depiction of complex topics, communities have sprouted around specific readings and usages of manga. The author's commentary and the inclusion of critical topics raised awareness of controversial issues, but refrained from taking a political stance or providing a concrete solution. Similarly, in the hardcover *tankōbon* edition (2012), Hagio Moto's afterword expresses her concerns, her need to address the issue, and her goal to communicate the feeling of hope to the people touched by this tragedy.

Drawing a conclusion from these practices, I would suggest that reading *shōjo* manga requires negotiations of meaning rather than a search for an authoritative message. Readers can ignore critical elements or emphasize them at their own convenience by focusing on separate fragments as points of reference.

With respect to the critical potential of commercial texts, audience response studies prevail, especially in the case of female-oriented genres. For example, the critic Mizoguchi Akiko suggests that the practice of the artist-reader peer-relationship currently continues, and she links engaged interpretative communities to the development of certain critical themes into social practices (158–162). This paper, however, focuses on the mechanics of the multiple meaning constructions within *shōjo* manga through textual analysis, without privileging specific meaning.

2. IDENTIFICATION IN THE "NANOHANA" ONE-SHOT

Hagio Moto's one-shot "Nanohana" fragments and reiterates information about 3.11. These facts are arranged around 12-year old Naho, the likable protagonist of the one-shot, which employs the visual style, setting, and overall coming-of-age narrative structure characteristic of *shōjo* manga. It is precisely Naho as a *shōjo* manga protagonist that mediates the fragmented representation of 3.11.

Within the narrative, Naho is an elementary school student in a post-3.11 Fukushima City whose residents are filled with anxiety about radiation. However, more than the radiation, Naho is concerned with an immediate tragedy: the loss of her grandmother to the tsunami. These distressing events prompt the awakening of Naho's supernatural power—she begins to have clairvoyant dreams, which help her mature and take an active stance towards a hopeful resolution of the 3.11 crisis.

Naho's dreams introduce another historic event—the Chernobyl disaster. In a series of nightmares, Naho encounters a girl from Chernobyl. She finds out that her late grandmother was indirectly supporting sick Chernobyl children and that this girl was one of them. After learning about the efforts to salvage the Chernobyl region and finding encouragement through her dreams, Naho decides to stay in Fukushima to purify the soil by planting canola flowers, which appear to extract the radioactive particles from the contaminated soil.

This coming-of-age narrative typical of *shōjo* manga is further structured through reiteration of specific visual manga conventions. Mangaesque visual cues suggest Naho's safety and imply a hopeful message, influencing readers' identification. I will focus on two facets of visual representation, character design and panel layout, and trace their role in identification and dissociation, examining both the level of signification and the level of affective response to visual stimuli. Through analysis of these elements, I will further explore the role manga conventions play in mediating the events of 3.11.

Visually, the "Nanohana" one-shot triggers identification with the protagonist on several levels. "Nanohana" has an overall geometrical panel layout that implies objectivity and a certain degree of realism. Only in dream sequences or internal monologues do we see slanted panels or dotted panel frames. However, the realistic panel flow is repeatedly interrupted with close-ups of Naho's eyes. The one-shot opens with such a panel, focalizing the whole narrative from Naho's point of view.

Furthermore, the recognizable Japaneseness of Naho's character design enhances her familiarity. She has black eyes with de-emphasized eyelashes and short black hair. Overall, she is drawn with rounded lines, and her silhouette is further softened with shapeless clothes full of patterns and solid blacks. Naho's clothes conceal her femininity, while her movements communicate her childlike purity. Naho possesses proactive agency; she is an empowering character who personifies hope. In this manga, both images and lines communicate Naho's immortality beyond the comprehension of the plot.

Critics like Natsume Fusanosuke and Itō Gō note additional levels of signification that the line-work appears to possess, while Thomas LaMarre goes a step further and differentiates between signification and figural force of the line in his article "Manga Bomb: Between the Lines of Barefoot Gen" (2010). LaMarre categorizes the line as either "plastic" or "structural". The plastic line, which he also refers to as the "cartoon line," is a self-sufficient figure, generating meaning and producing affective impact that precedes recognition of the contents, even when taken out of its context:

> […] the plasticity of the cartoon line tends to keep open the play between different levels of synthesis, such that we see and feel its dynamics across levels. The structural line is subjugated to signification and conveys the contents as directly as possible, without drawing attention to the line itself: the structural line encourages a subordination of lines to forms, and forms to structures (icon to signification, and time to space)." ("Manga Bomb" 276)

The plastic line can be traced to plasticity as used by Sergei Eisenstein in his analysis of Disney's animated animals. Plasticity signifies the ability of characters to visualize life-force by transcending their own physical barriers as well as the physical barriers of others; when struck, the characters bounce back, unharmed by violence. Using the example of *shōnen* manga, LaMarre emphasizes life-force as the physical immortality of the character throughout the duration of the narrative or in a concrete situation ("Manga Bomb" 280–282).

In contrast, the structural line is evident in geometrical panel layout, or in realistically shaded rectilinear architectural backgrounds, as well as in designs of aggressive adult characters. The definite line-work employed in these depictions constricts their form to signification. Especially in the case of the panel layout, the structural line mediates the reading sequence. The lack of elasticity of figural force renders structural lines fragile, devoid of transformative potential and therefore indicating mortality ("Manga Bomb" 280–282).

Naho's design appears to borrow from the plasticity of *shōnen* (boys) manga. Her physical body is emphasized as immortal by her bouncy movements and rounded looks, complete with her oversized clothes. However, the soft features and accentuated innocence also relate to the *shōjo* manga conventions of a tomboy protagonist. LaMarre focuses his exploration of plasticity on male genres, but it also deserves attention how plastic lines operate in *shōjo* manga. When the outlines of the character's body merge with the lines of the background, the decorative elements, and the panel layout, they affectively communicate the immediate emotions or physical reactions of the character, but they also imply the overall psychological makeup and drama of these characters. Plastic lines prompt empathy toward complex psychological states on a visceral level, through a combination of affect and signification.

In other words, plasticity reveals the interiority of the character, bringing characters closer to the reader and drawing empathy. This interiority relates to another type of immortality. Plastic depictions negate not only the mortality of the body, but the finality of death itself. For example, if a sympathetic character rendered in plastic lines dies, she/he is almost always transferred into a new form of existence—a memory, a ghost, an inspiration. Some titles, like *The Heart of Thomas* by Hagio Moto (1995 [1974–75]), begin with a character's death, which is not to say that this character does not participate in the narrative as a visible being.

In the *Nanohana* series these two types of immortality interrelate with two types of general conventions, those of (generically) female manga and male manga. The combination communicates safety as *self* and danger as *other* dialectically. By comparing *self* with *other*, *self* is defined. Accordingly, the *other* is perceived as impossible to identify with (Evans 135). In a literal sense, the "Nanohana" one-shot presents us with the character of Naho, from whose point of view the narrative unfolds, and with another female character, who has no distinct personality or agency and is visually contrasted to the protagonist: the Chernobyl Girl from Naho's dreams, who has already died from radiation exposure as we learn later.

The Chernobyl Girl is drawn with thin, wispy and sometimes unfinished lines, suggesting ghostly transparency. Her form is left mostly blank, devoid of patterns or gradients. Naho's Japanese visual representation is contrasted with the Chernobyl Girl's blonde Caucasian look. Moreover, she is wearing a skirt, juxtaposing her femininity with Naho's boyishness. Her lines appear much more *shōjo* manga-like. She does not speak, but she still conveys support for Naho and acts as a medium between Naho and her grandmother. Her implied tragic death and ethereal kindness elicit empathy, though from a distance. While Naho personifies grounded stability and physicality that can actively influence the environment around her, the Chernobyl Girl channels Naho's life-force. Through contrast presented visually

and in terms of demeanor and actions, the reader is led to believe that Naho's fate is also opposite to that of the Girl. Consequently, Naho's immortality is established. In spite of these two differently "immortal" girl protagonists emerging against the backdrop of 3.11, almost no actual visual landmarks of Fukushima City are emphasized. Instead, locality is established through fragments: the necessity of wearing masks, information about radiation, the word Fukushima in a speech balloon as well as the quasi-local dialect. It appears that the 3.11 disaster is generally represented via the repetition of abstract, prevalently textual elements, which arguably do not have the affective impact of visuals. For example, the tsunami is not depicted but implied through the loss of Naho's grandmother. Compared to Fukushima throughout the narrative, the visual icon of the dilapidated Chernobyl plant appears in Naho's dream sequences. However, additional information suggests that Chernobyl is on its way to recovery, despite that accident having been worse than the Fukushima disaster *(Nanohana* 4–5). Realism is mostly suggested by the use of a structural panel layout. Thus, Naho's physical plasticity is framed by a geometrical panel layout reminiscent of *seinen* manga. But these fragments of information are constantly interspersed with reiterated *shōjo* manga conventions, dissociating the reader from the topic and re-contextualizing 3.11 as a catalyst for the protagonist's maturation.

Fig. 1. Hagio Moto, *Nanohana* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2012) 24–25. Print.

When the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant appears in the climax of the narrative, it is also within a dream sequence. The respective double spread stands out from the overall structural panel layout. Being the only double spread in this manga, it brings the narrative to a visual halt and multiplies the meanings (see fig.

1). Narratively, it suggests Naho's separation from the world of the dead; however, at the same time, it disturbs the impression of the character's alleged safety.

Fig. 2. Hagio Moto, *Nanohana* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2012) 3. Print.

In the double spread, the perspective changes to that of an omniscient observer. Against the background of the dilapidated Fukushima Nuclear Plant we see the two girls. Yet, in this instance the visual "otherness" of the Chernobyl Girl is muted. Both girls' outlines are similarly strong and their positions mirror each other. This mirroring reiterates the cover of the story that depicts the girls standing as if reflecting each other, separated by a door, which the Chernobyl Girl opens (see fig. 2). The contrast between Naho and the other world disappears, and the scene gains momentum with the ambiguous text: "You are me in Chernobyl; I am you in Fukushima..." The severity of the nuclear disaster is impressively displayed through its fluid connection to the Chernobyl tragedy.

But on the lower tier of panels, a generic convention is reinstated with a shot of Naho that shows her with tears in her eyes, smiling as she fades. A reverse shot depicts the smiling Chernobyl Girl and Naho's grandmother who appear farther

and farther away. At the same time, the image of a melancholic Naho, and the gentle smiles of the Chernobyl Girl and grandmother lull the reader back into security. The last single page depicts Naho's resolve and aspiration to save Fukushima, ending on a hopeful, even positive note *(Nanohana* 26). However, loaded with information, the final page lacks the show-stopping impact that the double spread possesses.

To summarize, the "Nanohana" one-shot introduces the 3.11 disaster as the story of one girl's maturation. Loss and hope are vicariously represented through the character of Naho, whom the reader can safely identify with. In contrast, the worst possible outcome of a nuclear disaster is personified by the Chernobyl Girl as "other." Compared to Naho's physical safety, which is placed in steady panel layout, the ghostly appearance of the Chernobyl Girl makes her seem alien. She lacks agency, except for the double spread where she offers the sowing machine to Naho. Catalyzing the reactions and actions of Naho, the Chernobyl Girl is mostly shown as a surface without personality. Her objectified position invites references to Laura Mulvey's analysis of the movie camera's Cartesian perspective. But in the manga the text under scrutiny here is not only the object, but also the subject is a girl, and it is this girl's appearance, ghostly outline, and lack of agency, that dissociate the reader, rather than her gender.

The contrast between the feisty tomboy Naho and the victimized feminine Chernobyl Girl introduces a visually distinguishable hierarchy between implied *self* and potential *other*. The identification anchor Naho is represented as subject, while the *other* does not have a voice in the story. Consequently, the *self* appears safe, while the dangers of radiation are explored through the example of the *other*, the Chernobyl Girl. This results in the topic of radiation being introduced, but as an abstract possibility that does not affect the reader immediately. Meanwhile the narrative is interspersed with fragmented information about 3.11. Although graphic depictions of the disaster are omitted, the single occurrence of the double spread featuring the Fukushima Daiichi plant interrupts the reiteration of *shōjo* manga conventions and exerts an affective impact that overrides the protagonist's and the reader's impression of "safety."

3. DISSOCIATION IN THE NUCLEAR TRILOGY

The second, third and fourth one-shots of the *Nanohana* series anthropomorphize nuclear elements and thereby address broader issues of nuclear power. At first glance, the trilogy appears more critical in its representation of nuclear power as it discusses personal responsibilities and steps an individual must take to achieve a future safe from repetitions of nuclear disasters. Yet at the same time, it provides

numerous entertaining aspects derived from the *josei* and *shōjo* manga genres. Moreover, how each one-shot and the series in general is structured tends to mask the immediacy of the nuclear problem in favor of affording affective distance.

In the previous example, I have emphasized the tropes in character design that facilitate identification. In my further analysis I will inquire into the representation of unresolved issues of nuclear energy through *shōjo* manga conventions of dissociation. Following the analysis in the first part of the article, I will look into the character setting and the specific representation of the dangers of nuclear power.

Nanohana as a series refrains from visceral shock by omitting representations of the effects of radiation on the human body. Instead, the series focuses on more abstract visualizations of the critical topic through sci-fi and fantasy scenarios.

The trilogy's plot, characters, and designs are largely repetitive. For example, in "Lady Pluto," the female anthropomorphite representing plutonium behaves like a prostitute and offers her power exclusively to male scientists from various epochs in a sexually alluring way. Every character who touches her dies. In "Rainy Evening," the foreign *bishōnen*[2] Count Uranus (a personification of uranium) seduces a whole family who has invited him. The character Ann involves him in a discussion of the advantages and dangers of nuclear power. When Uranus's life is threatened, Ann spontaneously confesses her love for him. But as soon as the danger passes, she is again reluctant. "Salome 20XX"[3] is about a strip-dancer who is put in jail by her lover due to charges of being plutonium, the dangerous nuclear element. In her prison, Salome dances once again and causes a nuclear blast. The year in the title grimly suggests that the next disaster might strike within this century.

Fig. 3. Hagio Moto, *Nanohana* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2012) 120–121. Print.

The looks of the anthropomorphites, their sexualized behavior, and the climax of the narrative are reiterated multiple times, showing a pattern of human involvement with nuclear power as seduction. However, the anthropomorphites harm only the minor characters, those who symbolize greedy industries. Such harm is depicted in a metaphoric way: bodies turned to dust, one nose-bleed, as well as more general representations of lifeless wastelands (see fig. 3), skulls or black suns in the sky, and the mushroom cloud (see fig. 4). As "Salome 20xx"[4] has the most dynamic plotline, I shall privilege it in the analysis below.
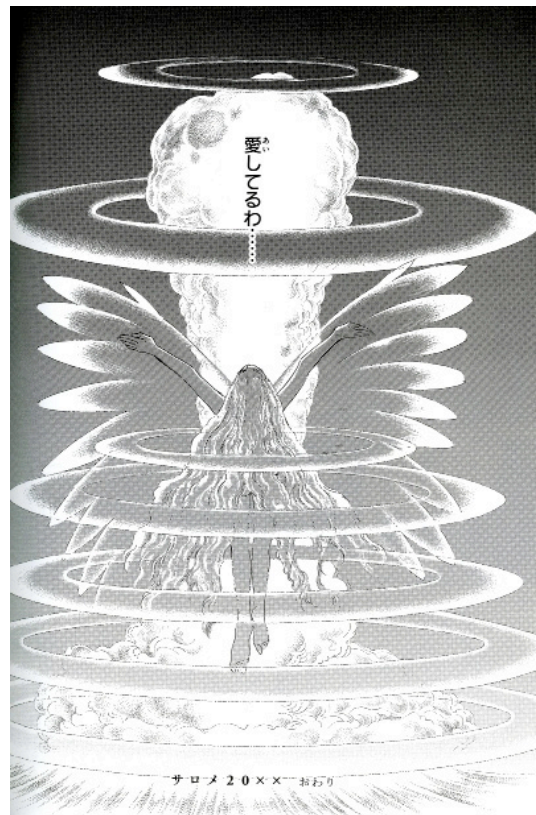

Fig. 4. Hagio Moto, *Nanohana* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2012) 128. Print.

The anthropomorphites are rendered with plastic lines and positioned in elaborate panel layouts. They wear extravagant clothes that billow in beautiful lines around their sexualized bodies. Their hair is white, long, and flowing, but they do not behave like sympathetic characters. They are depicted through manga conventions that connote beautiful yet evil, aggressive, or devious characters. They feature slanted eyes, longer faces, and mature sexualized bodies that are contrasted to the innocent girl in the initial "Nanohana" one-shot. A female-genre manga

reader would recognize these traits as suggesting a certain distance and limiting identification potential.

Nagaike Kazumi discusses the complex interrelation of identification and dissociation in manga with the example of male characters in Boys Love narratives, whereas Ōgi Fusami stresses the familiarity of male protagonists, who were created to look and act like girl protagonists in *shōjo* manga of the 1970s. Takemiya Keiko, Ishida Minori, and Nagaike Kazumi point out how these characters introduced critical themes of social discrimination, gender, or traumatic aspects of sexuality precisely through the dissociative potential of the male body. For example, Hagio Moto's *The Heart of Thomas* and Takemiya Keiko's *The Song of the Wind and the Trees* (1976–84) both use male protagonists to address topics of rape and power inequality. Ambiguous characters (such as Auguste in the latter or Umayado no Ōji in Yamagishi Ryōko's *The Prince of the Land of the Rising Sun* [1980–84]) take center stage in narratives of unrequited, violent love. In these stories male characters and villains play leading roles, and they are rendered in plastic lines that visualize their emotions in a way identical to girl protagonists. Visualized interiority makes them anchors for empathy. However, the possibility of identification remains fluid due to the fact that these are male bodies being harmed. Another aspect that may *other* these characters is their positioning as objects of the female gaze. As a result, they fluctuate between functioning as anchors for empathy, mediators of traumatic themes, and objects of the female reader's desire.

In the Lacanian sense, "woman" is always the *other*, even to the biological female. In this case, "woman" is the opposite of the norm, "man," who defines himself as the constant by referencing differences with the *other*. *Other* cannot be identified with but can only be juxtaposed with, in the precarious and fluid dialectic power position of subject and object. Likewise, objectification of the character through sexual innuendo (frequently seen in the Nuclear Trilogy) posits these characters as *others* to the *self* (either the reader or the character set as anchor for identification), initiating a complex dialectic dependency while also affecting identification strategies. These relationships are fluid. However, in the Nuclear Trilogy the distance is made continual by cementing anthropomorphites in the positions of *others*, that is, by denoting them as object, resulting in the mediation of the nuclear problem from a distance.

Within the diegesis, the anthropomorphites are represented as another species or race that does not differ from humans externally but is inherently harmful and needs to be controlled. The nuclear elements are depicted as sexualized objects of desire by fragmenting their bodies for the reader's gaze, making her focus on erotic zones in close-ups and shots from the position of those characters who objectify them.

In order to achieve dissociation, "Salome 20XX" establishes a hierarchy between the characters themselves as well as in their relation to the reader, through the exchange of gazes. Throughout her seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey theorizes that in film noir, female characters are constructed as *other* and are deprived of agency through the masculine perspective of the camera, adding that the objectified position of female bodies makes certain types of female protagonists ill-suited as anchors of identification. Mulvey emphasizes the connection between objectification and the fragmented representation of the female body; this fragmentation is realized through the lens of the camera, which she equates to the masculinity of Cartesian perspective. She concludes that both the intra-diegetic gaze hierarchy and the way in which visual perspective is structured for the spectator facilitate the masculine subject. Criticism of her seminal essay emphasizes that Mulvey does not address the possibility of male bodies as objects of the gaze, and did not touch upon the possibility of a dialectic power structure of the gaze.

Ishida Minori divorces the subject/object relationship from the male/female dichotomy in her analysis of *shōjo* manga and *shōnen'ai* (Boys' Love) manga. Reminiscent of Lacanian dialectics of the gaze, Ishida notes that a character who is constructed as an alleged object of the gaze through panel layout and shot/reverse shot sequences may obtain diegetic agency by manipulating and conditioning the gaze of other characters and the reader. She uses Gilbert from Takemiya Keiko's *The Song of the Wind and the Trees* as an example. Gilbert is an ultimate object of gaze and desire, within the narrative and also for the reader. He is constantly presented as a decorative spectacle splayed naked over "plastically" rendered panels, adorned in elaborate clothes, flowers and patterns. Yet he is shown to manipulate the gaze and desire of the onlookers, causing people to succumb to his demands, sexual and otherwise, precisely through this exposure (93–95). He executes agency through acknowledgement, manipulation and a re-turning of the gaze.

In the Nuclear Trilogy, both male and female anthropomorphites are depicted with a compromised subjectivity as objects of desire, yet find (temporary) agency through manipulation of the gaze. In the beginning, their "danger" is visualized as wanton sexuality and excessive beauty, traits that also serve as the metaphor for radioactivity. However, when the nuclear elements exert their agency, they are restricted by at least one character who is immune to their manipulations. Moreover, one may argue that they are also subjugated to the agency of the reader, who knows their "true nature" and is thus invited to judge both their radioactivity and their extreme sexuality. Closest to shōjo manga conventions, "Salome 20XX" illustrates this dichotomy of agency and objectification especially well.

"Salome 20XX" both captures the reader's identification with close-ups of the eyes and uses eyes to indicate the dynamics of the gaze. In this way empathy and dissociation are balanced and provide easy access to the theme of nuclear power. The opening panel introduces a sexualized full-body shot of Salome, the strip dancer, from a perspective that roughly corresponds to the viewpoint of the patrons of the dance club *(Nanohana* 98). Yet the next panel shows a close up of Salome's round mangaesque eyes that imply Salome's cheerful personality and gradually establish her interiority (see fig. 5). These "innocent" eyes, unlike those of Lady Pluto and Count Uranus, suggest that she is truly unaware of her danger. Her monologues express her longing for the male protagonist Yohanan[5]. Salome's line-work is flamboyant with an emphasis on the flowing lace costumes she wears and takes off layer by layer. The panel layout fluctuates between showcasing the objectified fragmented body of Salome and highlighting her emotional monologues with close-ups of her eyes. In following the Freudian definition of female sexuality as masochistic, in this scene Salome defines herself through being seen by the man she loves.
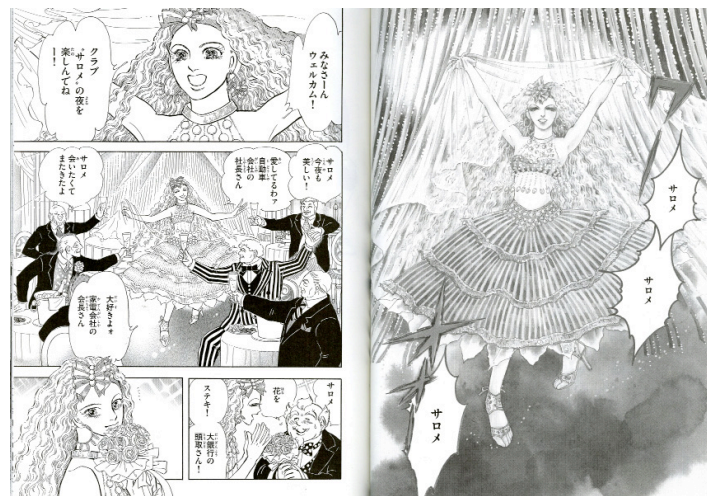

Fig. 5. Hagio Moto, *Nanohana* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2012) 98–99. Print.

In the narrative, Yohanan is the character who gazes upon Salome and objectifies her. Moreover, he also prosecutes Salome for her crimes. Yohanan's design is a straightforward representation of his agency, which rests on masculine lines, among other things. In *shōjo* manga, the lines are covertly gendered. In her analysis of Ikeda Riyoko's *The Rose of Versailles* (1972–73), Oshiyama Michiko divides elements of character design into feminine and masculine (165–170), and she asserts that big round eyes, wispy hair, and flowing dresses are gendered as

feminine. Using LaMarre's terminology, plasticity might thus appear feminine. By contrast, masculinity seems to be indicated by straighter and more angular—or structural—lines.

Visually, Yohanan is depicted as tall and handsome with narrow slanted eyes and a long face, emphasizing his masculinity and a possible deviousness. He is wearing an elaborate hussar uniform, which is aesthetically appealing yet conveys authority. His line-work is contrasted to Salome's luminosity. As she performs the Dance of the Seven Veils, intent on seducing Yohanan, her soft lines appear powerless to transcend his black silhouette. Salome's wispy, delicately contoured clothes and fragmented sexualized body extends beyond panel frames to surround the man. Nonetheless, her plasticity cannot penetrate his solid contours or merge with him. He appears "structural" against the white backdrop of the panels and the "plastic" whiteness of Salome *(Nanohana* 105–108).

When Salome is thrown into prison, Yohanan announces her sentence *(Nanohana* 118–122). At this point in the narrative he is drawn in recognizably plastic lines; his clothes, hair and body transcend the limitations of the panel layout, and he appears to expand into the dark space of the panel background. Multiple close-ups of Salome's eyes and shot/reverse shots show Yohanan from her perspective. He is depicted from a lower angle as a towering figure, as if the crouching Salome is looking up at him in fear. Salome's gaze does not weaken him, but makes him even more potent and threatening. Furthermore, the narrative states explicitly that Yohanan's actions curb the potential danger of Salome's radioactivity. Thus, Salome's feminine weakness and Yohanan's masculine agency are represented as a favorable relationship coinciding with a patriarchal power structure. However, despite his evident agency, there is no monologue or any other indication of Yohanan's motivation. Rather, his subjectivity is established dialectically through the subjugated position of Salome. Consequently, both protagonists are distanced from the reader, even if one character seems pitiful and the other one omnipotent. This distance draws the reader's attention to the discourse on nuclear power.

The actual problem of nuclear power is reiterated by citing a variety of scientific data. While the personified nuclear elements can be seen participating in a melodramatic plot, this scientific information appears mostly as verbal text; characters discuss it in dialogues or ponder it in monologues. And even if accompanied with illustrations, the nuclear power-related issues are abstracted from realist representation—the dilapidated nuclear plant in "Rainy Evening," the allegorical wastelands in "Lady Pluto" and "Salome 20XX," and the mushroom cloud at the end of "Salome 20XX". There are no depictions of radioactivity affecting the human body or the environment. Specific issues are introduced through iconic imagery. "Salome 20XX" features three types of nuclear power representation. The

first is symbolic, the Dance of the Seven Veils; the second is the scientific speech by Yohanan, accusing Salome of her crimes as plutonium (see fig. 3); and the third is the mushroom cloud on the last page of the one-shot (see fig. 4).

The pinnacle of Salome's dangerous *otherness* manifests itself in the highly sexual Dance of the Seven Veils *(Nanohana* 105–108), which is also the climax of the manga plot-line. Salome performs a strip dance, and the more she disrobes the more dangerous she becomes. Throughout the dance sequence, which stretches over four pages, Salome's body is fragmented into close-ups across an elaborate panel layout. The spectacle is focalized from the perspective of the viewers present in the panels; their gazes slide over her body and stop at erotic zones, which are emphasized through her dance moves. Salome's body and her frilly costume are depicted in plastic outlines, and at times she appears almost luminescent. She extends beyond the panels and overlaps with other characters. This sexualized spectacle is supplemented by an inner monologue expressing how she yearns for her beloved. Precisely at this point, the underlying issue of nuclear disaster appears to dissipate into the spectacle of elaborate clothes and plastic lines evoking sexual titillation.

Salome's costume originally protects surrounding characters from her radiation; her disrobing synchronizes with the escalation of her sexual appeal and symbolizes the escalating danger. Yet the radioactive nature of Salome is not addressed until the end of the dance. The dance and Salome's body beneath the costume are revealed as a metaphor for radiation only in retrospect, when men, wearing realistic protective gear drawn in precise structural lines and mechanical hatching, proclaim the room contaminated *(Nanohana* 113–114). But despite their structural appearance, they are situated within the dramatic plastic panel layout which is characteristic of "Salome 20XX" as a whole *(Nanohana* 109–113). Moreover, none present seem to be in any way affected by the radiation.

Yohanan comes to accuse Salome after she is imprisoned, but she seems oblivious to her "crimes." This is the first time in the narrative that Salome is introduced as a specific nuclear element, plutonium. Information on nuclear power only appears in Yohanan's speech. This is supplemented with the aforementioned abstracted images of a wasteland, a skull in the sky, and Salome as Angel of Death (see fig. 3). Yohanan's speech is high-flown and full of metaphors, but it lacks any specific facts related to the dangers of radiation. The accusation culminates in a kiss that is stretched over four slow-motion panels *(Nanohana* 123). As the kiss metaphorically seals Salome's fate, the visualization appears to be skewed at this point too in favor of reading "Salome 20XX" as *shōjo* manga.

Locked in her solitary cell, Salome is shown aging, deteriorating and recollecting her glorious dancing youth *(Nanohana* 126–127). The striking last panel depicts her naked and youthful again in the center of a mushroom cloud. Salome's transparent silhouette merges with the dotted lines of the mushroom cloud, and her hair is shown as wispy fumes. The caption reads, "I love humanity!" Although the mushroom cloud is one of the least romantic images, it serves here as a conventional *shōjo*-manga metaphor that extends a character's plastically visualized interiority and indicates her relationship to the specific diegetic event.

Through metaphor, the last page reveals Salome's potential danger and justifies her subjugation. But the mushroom cloud, a familiar abject icon of nuclear cataclysm, tends to elicit a strong affective response to the signification. Thus, the last page reorients the narrative from *shōjo* manga to a discussion of nuclear power, bringing the nuclear danger affectively closer to the reader through the iconized memory of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Despite its omission from Yohanan's speech, the mushroom cloud prompts the fact that plutonium is used for atomic bombs. In this manner "Salome 20XX" fluctuates between the necessity of introducing the topic of nuclear power and the necessity of appealing to an audience that is seeking the affirmation of their own safety, demonstrating the potentials of dissociation in *shōjo* manga.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have looked into the potential of generic female manga for addressing socio-critical topics. I have argued against relating topical representation in *shōjo* manga directly to critique, suggesting an alternative approach to the formal specificities of complex themes in manga. In the *Nanohana* series, conventions of female manga genres shape the topic into an accessible form at the expense of realism and overt critique. However, this approach results in bringing the tragedy of 3.11 and the discussion of nuclear power to a human scale, making it approachable.

Such ambiguity leans on the fragmented nature of manga. A combination of elements, such as generic conventions, an entertaining plot, and factual information related to the critical topic are reiterated and juxtaposed in order to present a variety of reading possibilities. The gaps in the reiterations allow the reader to pull the narrative apart and reconstruct the elements in the necessary order. Like any other possible meaning, the critical meaning is constructed by re-contextualizing inconsistent elements within a specific context. Consequently, the reader addresses the constructedness of the text itself, dismantling elements

that can be rearranged and re-contextualized to suit specific uses such as direct reading, derivative creation, cosplay, community-building, and so on. This fluidity both constricts the possibilities for directly critical representations and allows involvement of a diverse public. The ambiguity of the narrative invites various readers, those who are interested in the critical topic as well as those who are interested in *shōjo* manga, initiating a variety of meanings and uses for the same text. In this way, one and the same manga text can become a bridge between different audiences, bringing about communities that may in turn become critical.

The aforementioned two readings of *Nanohana* —as *shōjo* manga and as representation of 3.11—do not conflict with each other; rather they fluctuate through the involvement of the reader. Reiterated elements of generically female manga, both as narrative tropes and as visual tropes (such as a coming-of-age narrative, protagonist setting, character design, panel layout, etc.), imply that the *Nanohana* series is a female-oriented, entertaining manga title. Yet, it is difficult to read *Nanohana* as merely another *shōjo* narrative, just as it is also problematic to focus exclusively on the context of 3.11. The *Nanohana* series should rather be regarded as a meta-manga that demonstrates a number of tropes utilized in manga with a critical topical orientation.

Hagio Moto's early works drew literary critics' attention to the marginalized *shōjo* genre, triggering a plethora of new readings. Contemporary genres increasingly include female-genre conventions as well, in response to the growing recognition of female readership in male genres. As a result, female manga becomes more accessible to a male readership, which is now accustomed to *shōjo*-manga conventions. The *Nanohana* book attests to the accessibility of female manga: the high-quality hardcover edition, printed on premium paper, is marketed as a manga about the Fukushima event composed by a famous artist, and addressed not only a female but a cross-genre readership. As such, *Nanohana* is an example for book, or even hardcover editions to lead to the formation of new cross-genre interpretative communities.

Notes

1. The term "critical" in this paper is used to mean initiating a change of perspective in the reader, raising awareness of one's position in society.
2. *Beautiful boy*: character type associated with shōjo manga
3. All three one-shots of the Nuclear Trilogy allude to classic literature or the Bible.
4. "Salome 20XX" references the Biblical legend of Salome as well as quotes from Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations of Oscar Wilde's Salome.
5. The romanization of the Hebrew name of John, implying John the Baptist.

Figures

1. Fig. 1: Hagio Moto, *Nanohana* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2012) 24–25. Print.
2. Fig. 2: Hagio Moto, *Nanohana* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2012) 3. Print.
3. Fig. 3: Hagio Moto, *Nanohana* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2012) 120–121. Print.
4. Fig. 4: Hagio Moto, *Nanohana* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2012) 128. Print.
5. Fig. 5: Hagio Moto, *Nanohana* (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 2012) 98–99. Print.

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