10. Creating Happy Endings

Yaoi Fanworks as Audience Response to Kaworu and Shinji's Relationship

Jessica Bauwens-Sugimoto

Shinji Ikari is the undisputed protagonist of the *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (*EVA*) franchise, and Kaworu Nagisa has a short but pivotal role in Shinji's story. But many fans were left unsatisfied with the ending of the series, including *fujoshi*.

Fujoshi, or 'rotten girls,' is a self-depreciating term for mostly female fans who interpret and rewrite relationships between male characters as romantic and sexual, within a fan-created genre called yaoi (the analogous commercial genre with original stories is called BL, short for boys love) (Galbraith 2011: 212). This type of fan stories is what Henry Jenkins calls "textual poaching" (1992): Fans will pilfer the elements they like from their favorite stories, and combine and rewrite them to their own satisfaction, not just as a solitary pastime, but often as a way to connect to other fans and find a community of like-minded people (see Bauwens-Sugimoto 2014). Jenkins and others active in English-language scholarship like Joanna Russ (1985) and Constance Penley (1997) discussed the equivalent and mostly English-language genre of slash, where fans recombine relationships between male characters, particularly characters poached from Science Fiction works like Kirk/Spock (K/S) from the TV series *Star Trek*, one of the earliest popular pairings. The term slash, derived from the "/" sign placed between capital letters, is the English-language equivalent of yaoi.

Inside and outside of Japan, for more than a decade now, a large amount of research on yaoi and BL has been conducted. Many academic inquiries focus on these genres as a whole, and as the field grows, so

do subgenres like BL featuring Arab princes (see Nagaike 2009). Some researchers investigate the activities of yaoi fans in particular locations, such as the Philippines (see Fermin 2013), but few yet have analyzed yaoi fanworks based on just one canon series, or one franchise, usually a work of popular fiction used as a source text for characters to form romantic and sexual connections in the fanwork. Yet, by doing so, it is possible to illuminate how one particular subset of fans, which is mostly female, resolve their issues with the ending of *EVA*. This chapter foregrounds the relationship between the *EVA* characters Kaworu and Shinji, called *Kawoshin*. The contraction Kawoshin is used as both shorthand for the couple in speech and a tag by many yaoi fans within their works, but also in discourse about the pairing on and offline. Kaworu's name is listed before Shinji's because most fujoshi see him as the more dominant character in their relationship, as will be detailed later.

Kawoshin fans devotedly explore the characters' relationship through their fanworks and create an endless variety of 'What if?' stories, whether in peer-produced *dōjinshi*, the prevalent type of fanwork in Japan and mostly available in printed form, traded between fans at specialized amateur markets, or online fanfiction, which is the most common type of fanwork globally (especially in English). Left wanting after Shinji killed Kaworu (in episode 24), Japanese and foreign yaoi fans have created vast amounts of Kawoshin stories and art for more than two decades. At present, the Kawoshin pairing is regarded as a classic, or *ōdō* (lit. way of the king) where *EVA* is concerned. The fan stories build on the relationship of the two characters within the 'canon,' that is to say, the texts they reference stretch from the initial TV anime series and the subsequent films, and to interviews with the director Hideaki Anno and his collaborators about the series, as well as about their interpersonal relationships. Within Anno's original series, the relationship is unstable and hazily defined, but it already transcends homosociality because of Kaworu's transgression of normative male (and human) boundaries, and precisely this tension, or the resolution of it, is a starting point for many fan stories.

As several chapters in this volume demonstrate, *EVA* is of endless fascination to fans, critics, scholars and those active in the anime industry because of its openness to interpretation and speculation. This chapter uses a digital ethnographic approach tailored to specific websites where fans are active (based on Herring 2004). It delves into the large amount of Kawoshin fan narratives currently available online, both novels and manga, to find out if and how yaoi fans engage with the issues that have been prevalent in general fan criticism as well as academic discourse on *EVA*, such as the deconstruction of the mecha genre or posthumanism.

The first part of this chapter looks at the way in which the characters interact in the initial TV, or canon, series and how fans' interpretation of these interactions vary wildly. The second part is a first and somewhat rough attempt at analyzing the most common tropes in popular Japanese and English language yaoi fan stories focusing on Kawoshin, as well as the related online discourse. The third part summarizes the methodological hurdles encountered along the way, which are caused by the fact that each fan site and community has its own culture and characteristics.

Looking for Kawoshin in Text and Subtext

Yaoi fans extract 'proof' of a relationship between two male characters from within the narrative of the original or source work and between its lines. Yet, depending on perspective and desire to believe, this proof can be obvious or completely fabricated.

Many yaoi fanworks rewrite male characters who have been present in popular series from the initial episodes as a romantic couple. These include Naruto and Sasuke from *NARUTO*, Erin and Levi from *Attack on Titan*, Sebastian and Ciel from *Black Butler*, and Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson to name a non-anime example with a much longer history. Kawoshin is an exceptional pairing for yaoi standards since Kaworu appears very late in the series, in episode 24 of 26. The

time he spends with Shinji is a turning point in Shinji's life, eventually ending with Kaworu's demise, when he magnanimously sacrifices his immortality so that humanity may live, and dies by Shinji's hand, or the hand of the Eva unit operated by Shinji. There is an alternative ending in the Q theatrical release (*Evangelion: 3.0 You Can (Not) Redo*, 2012), in which Kaworu dies in a different way, but again self-sacrificially.

Whether before Kaworu's death he and Shinji were ever in a romantic and sexual relationship is like most things in *EVA* open to interpretation. The series itself, and in particular some works in the rest of the franchise, do suggest that there is more to the Kawoshin relationship than mere admiration, friendship, platonic love and finally betrayal and enmity. And this is what activates fannish imagination. But there are hurdles to the pairing of the two characters. One would be that Shinji is only 14, mid-puberty, which poses a risk for some fans, as in a number of jurisdictions it would be illegal to depict him in homosexual and/or graphically sexual situations. Thus, pictorial depictions are often off limits, and in some cases even written ones. Another is that Kaworu is the 17th Angel, immortal yet not indestructible. It is never clear if his notions of love, whether platonic or romantic, align with what humans consider to be love. As a character who has the power to destroy all of humanity but chooses to desist, his power is that of a god, and what he felt for Shinji may have been deeper than something a human can feel, yet still not necessarily sexual or romantic in nature. It is this openness to interpretation, the leaving open of many possibilities, that invites fans' imaginations to expand on Anno's story, allowing fans to make it their own stories too.

Many *EVA* fanworks are not yaoi. They feature other couples, most notably heterosexual romance between Shinji and Rei or Asuka, a potential love triangle which is supplied right from the start. In the series, Shinji and Kaworu get close extremely fast due to Kaworu's attitude, which differs fundamentally from those of the female characters in whom Shinji expresses sexual interest: Kaworu reads Shinji

like an open book and without hesitation discloses his insights into all of Shinji's insecurities, which embarrasses and confuses Shinji. Kaworu's lack of conventional physical boundaries only furthers Shinji's bewilderment, indicated by his blushing in many of his interactions with Kaworu.

When fans write Kawoshin, many interpret Shinji as more feminine relative to Kaworu, as is customary in yaoi as well as BL stories, where one character is usually coded as more masculine and called the *seme* (lit. attacker, top), while his paramour is the *uke* (lit. receiver, bottom). In *Seibo Evangelion* (*Holy Mother Evangelion*), an entire volume analyzing *EVA* and one of the earliest to do so, author and feminist SF critic Mari Kotani, also considered an expert on fandom, yaoi, feminism and the techno-gothic, discussed Kaworu as a queer (or *hentai*, i.e., 'perverse') character with both male and female characteristics, and remarks that Kaworu is a character purposefully made for "a special subset of fans from all over the country" (my translation, 1997: 90). She clarifies that she is talking about yaoi fans, of which there are now many more not just all over the country, but all over the world, and goes on to give a brief history of the yaoi genre (ibid.: 91) and how it relates to feminist critique, citing her 1994 book *Joseijō muishiki (*technogynosis*): Josei SF ron josetsu* (Unconscious Femininity, Technogynosis: An Introduction to Women's SF). For this book, she won the 15th *Nihon SF Taishō* (Japan SF Grand Prize), and she was one of the first critics to discuss yaoi from a feminist perspective.

Kaworu himself describes Adam as the mother of all Angels, which, as the first and last of his kind, makes him his own mother. What further feminizes Kaworu is that he is non-human, a dangerous creature akin to a monster, a "female who can wreck the infinite" (Kristeva 1982: 157), and therefore abject. In one of the most confusing scenes in the series, Kaworu calls the crucified Lilith, mother of all humans, Adam, causing more gender blurring.

Some fans new to Kawoshin yaoi do wonder why Shinji is always drawn as an uke, and one fan on a scanlation site offers this

explanation in the English comment section of an originally Japanese-language dōjin work, scanlated into English:

> It's because Shinji throughout canon is almost always the passive/dependent party. He lives for the approval of others, and rarely ever initiates things on his own . . . With Shinji as the bottom, you get to fill him up with the love, care and support he so desperately wants. (Squinut 2017)

Another fan responded to the comment, calling it insightful enough to want to frame it and put it on their wall, and others expressed agreement with the idea of filling Shinji up with love, which is what they want to see in fanworks as they were denied this by the source work.

Fans have been justifying their yaoi reading of Kawoshin by reference to authorial intention, but director Anno did not set out to explicitly depict the two characters as a romantic couple. This distinction is important in view of the controversy surrounding the new English subtitles of the 2019 Netflix adaptation. Anno supervised the translation and had the translator work as closely to the Japanese original as possible. Controversy arose when the Japanese word *suki*, used by Kaworu and directed at Shinji in episode 24, was translated as "like" rather than "love," the way it had been in earlier localizations. The ADV film 2003 localization (for DVD) translated the line *suki-tte koto sa* as "It means I love you"; however, the 1998 VHS ADV also translated it as "It means I like you."

Some fans heavily invested in the Kawoshin relationship insisted that anything less than explicit representation within the source work equals the erasure of real sexual minorities, and they launched a vicious and unwarranted attack on official translator Daniel M. Kanemitsu on social media. The word *suki* is in general translated as "like," whereas it takes a *daisuki* (lit. big like) to be translated as "love." The distinction can be murky and vague. Even when the distinction between "love" and "like" is clearly based on context, the characters' earlier interactions in the text, the depiction of their inner thoughts, their background and more, *suki* and *daisuki* can still be

"like" or "love" without carrying the nuance of romantic or sexual attraction. Given that Shinji and Kaworu have only three episodes to become close (episodes 24–26), and Kaworu comes on strong by very directly communicating his thoughts to Shinji, a like can still be interpreted as romantic: he may indeed mean love, but this is never clear, a common trait of interpersonal issues between the characters in *EVA*.

Among fans, not confined to yaoi, Shinji is widely regarded as an avatar for Anno since he voiced as much himself in a short essay included in the first volume of the 1995 *EVA* manga series, and while Kaworu does not necessarily have or need an avatar in the flesh, some fan and business insider sources (GAINAX 2008: 54–55) point out that part of Kaworu's character design, whether good looks or personality, is based on anime director Kunihiko Ikuhara, known for several seasons of *Sailor Moon* (1992–96) and *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (1997), and one of the people within the same industry whom Anno looks up to. When Ikuhara was interviewed in an article for the GAINAX volume *All about Nagisa Kaworu a Child of The EVANGELION*, subtitled "The magic of 'You are fine just the way you are'" (2008: 54–55), he said that one of Kaworu's other pivotal lines directed at Shinji, the famous "You are deserving of good-will"[1] (translated as "You are deserving of love" in the 2003 ADV DVD), is something that he once may have said to Anno. In turn, Anno has stated that Ikuhara is someone whom he admires, and someone who encouraged his work as an anime creator.

Apart from Ikuhara being projected onto Kaworu, Shinji is habitually discussed within fandom as a stand-in for Anno, an avatar to work through his own psychological issues, which include depression. In this regard, fans refer to the fact that character designer Yoshiyuki Sadamoto had convinced Anno to use a male instead of a female protagonist (1999: n.p.), and that he sketched Shinji like the titular character of *Nadia—The Secret of Blue Water* (1990–93), only with short hair.

1. Original Japanese: *kōi ni atai suru yo*.

Putting staff relations aside, Anno himself was clearly aware of yaoi fandom when he voiced that Kaworu is an idealized version of Shinji, in other words, everything Shinji aspires to, which meant for fans that their relationship could easily be rewritten as Shinji being in love with Kaworu. Anno made his comment in an interview in the first issue of *Bessatsu JUNE* (vol. 1, September 1996, n.p.), a companion publication to the oldest specialized magazine for *shōnen'ai* (lit. boys love, in disuse for contemporary BL stories) and *tanbi* (narratives focusing on male beauty, often but not always adolescent), *JUN/JUNE* (1978–2012). *JUNE* magazine was a precursor of commercial BL and an offshoot from general girls' manga magazines, which were the first to publish shōnen'ai narratives. The magazine editors' motivation to interview Anno, who was not a BL anime director, rested on the knowledge that, at the time, Kawoshin was the hottest new pairing among Japanese fujoshi.

Kawoshin Fanworks, an Analysis

Kawoshin fans read and write stories about the couple not necessarily because they wish the source work would be different, but because through watching *EVA* they developed love for the characters, and this love translates into a desire for the characters to meet fates other than death—many and varied fates, often light-hearted, but sometimes as dark or darker than the source material itself. Looking at what fans do with Kaworu and Shinji in these stories and how they interpret and rewrite the source material, I aim to give some insight into a part of *EVA* and SF anime fandom that is skewed heavily toward the female.

Researching Fan Sites with Varying Amounts of Legality and Regulation

The main method used for this chapter is similar to the one used by my co-author and I in 2012 (published in 2013) when analyzing long fan narratives (up to half a million words) based on the anime

and manga hit series *NARUTO*, written in English by male fans (Bauwens-Sugimoto & Renka 2013). Since it was impossible to analyze all stories on fanfiction.net—where I also examine Kawoshin stories this time around—and we were interested in not just the content of the stories, but also the interaction between fan authors and their readers, we narrowed our sample by looking at fan author/reader engagement, and limited our analysis to the top 10 stories, where author/reader engagement was highest (based on the number of comments per chapter). Because of its flexibility, we then used CMDA (Computer Mediated Discourse Analysis) as an approach to research online comments and interaction, or computer-mediated communication (based on Herring 2004) and to look for the most common tropes in the fanworks (the text), and the most common themes apparent in author/reader interaction (the metatext), which I also use this time. On a limited scale such as for this chapter, CDMA requires no specialized software (both times Google documents and spreadsheets were used) and similar to grounded theory, the findings emerge from the data, with tentative hypotheses starting to form from there. For this chapter, I looked at three different websites (ifanfiction.net, Pixiv and one unnamed site with pirated translations of dōjinshi) where fan-created content is posted and readers can comment. On the scanlation site, I examined the comments where there was a clear disconnect between the text, that is, the scanlated dōjinshi, and the metatext, that is, the comments by fans who often directly addressed the artists of these dōjinshi, but who never got a response as the artists had not authorized the uploading of their works on the website. All data for this chapter were gathered between 30 May and 13 July 2019. The considered fanworks and creator/reader interaction were all posted publicly online, though some of them without authorization by the fan author, in which case I will not name the site.

   Given time and space restraints, the scope of this chapter is limited to works that are (also) known outside of Japan, and it is further

limited to the major languages the Japanese Kawoshin fan narratives known overseas have been translated into. Where the work discussed is originally Japanese, I will mention which languages are readily available in scanlation, to capture the borderless nature of the fan discussion about the work in question.

A study should be verifiable and data gathered easy to interpret, but research into fanworks has to cope with very limited verifiable quantitative data and with materials that are published, traded and sold within a shadow economy in a legal gray zone (see McLelland 2018). Dōjinshi sold in Japan have a limited amount of copies, and fanworks published online may disappear suddenly, at the whim of the author or an administrator of the website.

Kawoshin Fanworks on fanfiction.net and Pixiv

Fanfiction.net, established in 1998, is the largest, and oldest, multi-lingual all-genre fansite on the Internet (mostly English, but boasting a total of over 40 language options) and also the one we used in 2013 when sourcing *NARUTO* fan narratives (Bauwens-Sugimoto & Renka 2013). Pixiv is an online fanwork archive that went live in 2007. Originally geared toward Japanese users, it hosts mostly drawn content (illustration and manga), as well as some written works, mainly fan novellas and novels. As its popularity outside of Japan grew, so did the diversity of its artists; to date, it has over 20 million users. I am looking at these two sites together and separate from the scanlation site discussed below because fanfiction.net is based in the United States, and given the 'fair use' doctrine in US copyright legislation, its content is legal. The fan content on Pixiv is not technically legal in accordance with Japanese law, but in a legal gray zone usually left undisturbed by copyright holders. Both sites have a certain amount of regulations to which submissions need to adhere and contributors upload only content they created. Scanlation sites, on the other hand, feature mostly pirated content uploaded without permission.

Fanfiction.net's terms of service forbid the uploading of stories that are extremely sexual or violent in nature, which limits the extent to which fans can depict sexual encounters in their stories. By virtue of being written and not (porno)graphic in nature, Kawoshin stories on fanfiction.net are tamer than the illustrations, manga and fan novels posted on Pixiv and much tamer than the explicit dōjinshi hosted on scanlation sites.

Fanfiction.net has multiple sections divided by the media format of the original work on which fan stories are based, like books, TV, films, video games, musicals and more, and in its large Anime/Manga section, *EVA* to date has 8,500 stories, a modest amount compared to juggernauts in the same section like *NARUTO* (418,000) and *Inuyasha* (119,000), but still making the top 40 within its category. Fanfiction.net has a more user- and researcher-friendly interface than Pixiv, and allows the use of filters when searching for stories. With the genre filter 'romance' and the character A and character B filters for Kaworu N. and Shinji I., the site brings up 167 stories. A small margin of error is expected as some fan authors may use a tag mistakenly. Further narrowing it down, of these, 129 are written in English, of which nine are over 20,000 words long, with two longer than 100,000 words, all published between 2012 and 2017. The limited time span during which fans wrote such long stories is puzzling since *EVA* was distributed overseas more than a decade earlier, and the earliest *EVA* fanwork in English was published on the site in 1999. None of the stories created before 2012 that has a focus on the Kawoshin pairing is longer than a short story.

Given space constraints, I limited my analysis to the three longest stories as they demonstrate a more than casual dedication to the Kawoshin pairing by the author and the readers following them and giving feedback. All three deal with many of the complex issues present in the original work and may be inaccessible to those who haven't watched *EVA*. They were all written by the same author, Laryna6,

between July 2012 and October 2014. Other long Kawoshin stories by different authors all have under 10 reviews, which shows a lack of engagement by the Kawoshin fans on the site with the stories, as well as the fan authors and their readers, and this limits insights to be gained from examining them. Laryna6's oldest story, *Book of Revels*, is an impressive 226,304 words long, divided into 46 chapters (93 reviews); the next, *This Alien Shore*, 132,118 words (52 reviews) is somewhat less popular with readers, and the newest, *Babylon*, 89,048 words (119 reviews) is not set in the *EVA* universe, but uses all the same characters. The stories' interpretation of the Kawoshin relationship, the reader reviews and the author's response to them form the basis for my analysis.

The first thing the author does in *Book of Revels* is to tell readers the story is a slashfic. The term slash (see above) is still used for written fanworks featuring romance between male characters, while some fans use slash and yaoi interchangeably or will stick to yaoi for fanwork based on Japanese productions and slash for others.

The author Laryna6 engages with comments on the story by writing short author's notes at the start or end of each chapter. She is well-versed in obscure *EVA* details from all versions. She sets her story in an alternative universe where Kaworu is initially called by his Angel name Tabris. He takes control of SEELE and turns it into an organization that defends the Lilim, which takes caring about Shinji to another level. When Shinji and Kaworu first sleep together, their physical union is described as a merging rather than intercourse, and until the very last chapter, merging is how they make love, distinguishing the author's interpretation significantly from the other works examined for this chapter. There is a comical note about the way the author sees Kawoshin in chapter 24, and her use of the word uke here means she is aware of yaoi, making the designation of her story as slash intentional:

> There's a joke about "What happens when you put two ukes in a boat? They fix the boat." Or in this case work together to fix the planet.

The comments on the story are universally praising. The author's next story, *This Alien Shore*, takes inspiration from the various *EVA* manga series; it is a complicated, nuanced story where Kaworu comes over as needier than Shinji, and many readers comment that the story was so good it made them cry. The last story, *Babylon*, is set in an alternative universe in Victorian times, where Gendō and almost the entire cast of *EVA* participate in Satanic rites. Kaworu, again called Tabris, is a demon that keeps Shinji, who has cat ears, as a sex slave. In spite of the outlandish setting that does have some similarities with the dōjinshi examined in the next section (cat ears are a common trope and characteristic of uke characters), the story has a serious tone. The author explains controversial aspects of the story, like Shinji's age (chapter 4), as follows:

> Note that in this time period in England, it was legal for a boy to marry . . . at fourteen, which is why Tabris set that as the minimum age at which someone could sell their soul . . .

I would have liked to examine a larger variety of Kawoshin stories on fanfiction.net, but surprisingly the longest ones with the most author/reader engagement all have the same author. Also surprising is that she did not follow the yaoi convention of designating one character as uke and the other as seme, and apart from her story *Babylon*, Kaworu was not written as more dominant than Shinji. Given the high amount of reader engagement with her stories, my tentative conclusion is that the audience on fanfiction.net does not necessarily require this yaoi convention to enjoy Kawoshin stories. Now that *EVA* is going through a renaissance thanks to the recent Netflix adaptation, the number of stories fans share on this site will hopefully increase.

Coming then to Pixiv, on 13 July 2019, the site hosted 7,998 illustrations and manga (746 of those rated adult) and 2,530 novellas and novels (overwhelmingly in Japanese) with the tag 'kawoshin.' The site allows users to sort both categories by new/old, and is limited to the illustration and manga category, general or rated adult (R-18). Premium users who pay a monthly fee of 450 Japanese yen can further

sort by popularity, but for the purpose of this study, I will only discuss those that are public, similar to Noppe (2013), and visible to all non-paying users.

The oldest Kawoshin fanworks were uploaded in 2007, soon after the site went live, while the newest is from 11 July 2019 at the time of this writing. Users who are signed in can like and bookmark artist submissions, and get updates on serialized stories, manga as well as novels.

The level of skill of the artists in the illustration and manga categories varies, but most artists take great care to present their works as professionally as possible, with clean lines, often adding color and visual effects. Some are mere sketches, and many show both Kaworu and Shinji in romantic and sometimes sexual settings. A common theme is redrawing scenes from the first TV series in a way that focuses on the Kawoshin pairing, like replacing Rei with Kaworu in the famous scene where Shinji and Rei merge into each other, an alternative way of intercourse also described in one of the popular stories on fanfiction.net.

There are numerous stories in the illustration and manga as well as the novel categories that resurrect Kaworu or put the characters in alternative settings without Eva units or Angels, for example, turning them into normal high-school students. This is a common way for fans to rewrite favorite characters from SF, fantasy or action stories in which the characters' lives are in peril. Mundane settings are a manifestation of fans' desire for beloved characters to be safe and happy. There are numerous fan artists who focus exclusively on the Kawoshin pairing and who have gained thousands of likes on their works and a following of hundreds of users.

In some illustrations, Shinji is wearing women's apparel (sun dresses, ball gowns, bikinis, lingerie, bloomers, maid costumes and cat ears) or is depicted as a girl with short hair. A small minority of stories features him as being pregnant with Kaworu's child. This does not come as a surprise in a fandom context, and the same is true for the manga dōjin works on the scanlation site discussed below.

In contrast to English-language fanwork archives, written stories on the Japanese-language site Pixiv are a minority, but not rare. The length of them varies, with some having only around a thousand characters, and many others tens of thousands of characters, the same length or longer as commercially available novels. Instead of leaving comments, fans can click a heart button, which functions like a like button on the SNS Facebook.

Kawoshin Fanworks on Dōjinshi Scanlation Sites

Scanlations are fan-made translations of manga and dōjinshi (subtitles on pirated anime episodes are called fansubs, fan-made voiceovers are fandubs). Many of these works are manga that have not been officially localized in many countries, and a number of scanlation sites employ an honor code: translators vow to take down their scanlation once a work is licensed in the language featured on the site.

Fan-made parody dōjinshi,[2] however, have a very low chance of ever being localized, as they are neither legal nor official from inception, and in Japan, too, their creators operate in what is regarded as a gray zone, but again, technically illegal. Many publishers turn a blind eye on the trade in fanworks as a lively fan culture supports the manga industry at large, and because they can scout for new talent at dōjinshi direct sales events. Dōjinshi artists are understandably worried about losing control of the distribution of their works and never agreed to having them uploaded online publicly. Because of this, studying and especially quoting these works and the websites that uploaded them presents a moral dilemma for the researcher. But these works are important for the impact they have on the global Kawoshin fandom and cannot not be ignored when examining the proliferation of common tropes for the pairing, like Kaworu taking care of Shinji like a parent and a lover rolled into one, or Shinji's personal weaknesses being rewritten as feminine, often in a positive rather than derogative way. Foreign fans are grateful to these scanlation sites for

2. In Japanese usage, the word parody does not refer to a funny, mocking reinterpretation of an original work, but merely means not original; the fanwork can be parody in the English-usage meaning of the word, but isn't necessarily.

providing access to works otherwise only available in Japanese and on the Japanese fan market. In addition to not naming the site to which these works are uploaded, I will not mention artist or circle names and obfuscate the titles by renaming the works, somehow similar to but different from the original. The commenters on these sites all use pseudonyms, which I will keep as these are also public and submitted voluntarily.

As mentioned above, stories available here rely entirely on the whim of fan translators as well as the dōjinshi to which they have access. Technically a pirate site, the artists whose content is uploaded do not have the legal clout required to protest and have their works taken down. The works discussed tend to be of the same generation as those on Pixiv and fanfiction.net, mainly from the 2000s to the late 2010s. I use the number of translation languages, as well as the number of comments each dōjinshi has, as a very rough measure of their popularity, and then discuss the most common tropes in these popular works in more detail.

On the most popular global, but mainly English, site I searched for Kawoshin works tagged as "Kaworu Nagisa x Shinji Ikari." There are 109 works to the date of writing, not all of them different, as some works are available in the original Japanese,[3] English, Korean, Chinese, Spanish and Russian. A total of 78 results are in English, 14 in Japanese, 10 in Korean, three in Chinese, two in Spanish and one in Russian. The site has yaoi dōjinshi in more languages, but not for the Kawoshin pairing.

Among these 109 works, it is difficult to gauge for popularity as the site doesn't have any filters that allow sorting for this purpose. It does have a comment section, and checking the amount of comments as well as what readers say gives some idea of the popularity. I read all 78 works and looked at how lively the reader interaction in the comments was, when picking the examples discussed here.

The first dōjinshi scanlation I chose is *Fooling around in the Bath* (title altered), which was uploaded to the site in 2017 (date of creation

3. These scans are called 'raws' and are meant for fans who don't want to wait for a translation.

unknown) in three languages. The site has a page with the original Japanese raws (not translated, this page has seven comments in English by fans who enjoyed the pictorial content of the scans without fully understanding the story) and the English (14 comments in English) and Korean scanlations (12 comments in Korean). Bath stories form a small but fairly popular subgenre among Kawoshin stories on both the scanlation site and Pixiv, which is to be expected as Kaworu and Shinji get closer in the first TV anime series while having a bath together in a communal bath house, or *sentō*, complete with a picture of Mount Fuji on the wall. This is a scene in which Shinji tells Kaworu he has to go to bed, to which Kaworu immediately responds, "With me?" Shinji reacts flustered, and they do not end up in the same bed, but many fans like to imagine they did and create their own stories accordingly. On the scanned cover of *Fooling around in the Bath*, Shinji is featured alone in contrast to the vast majority of Kawoshin dōjinshi that have a cover with both characters. Shinji is covered in foam and has a yellow rubber duck bath toy between his legs. From the first page, Kaworu and Shinji are not in a sentō, but the average Japanese bathtub in an apartment, with Shinji sitting in front of Kaworu, leaning into his chest. They engage in frottage and anal sex, with graphic depictions of both, and there is no mention of any of the life-and-death situations or philosophical issues otherwise so prevalent in *EVA*.

In the comments, readers interpret Shinji being the receptive partner during anal sex as getting "filled with love," and contrast the original story, expressing their delight that nobody dies. On the cover of another dōjinshi entitled *Bath Lovey-Dovey Time*, rated R-18, Kaworu and Shinji are both featured, with a rubber duck, and in the same position as they are in *Fooling around in the Bath*. This scanlation is only available in English, with 15 comments; it was also uploaded to the site in 2017, but originally published in 2014 (date printed on the back cover). In contrast to the first where there is only the bath scene, this one features other young *EVA* characters, albeit

in a light-hearted fashion and without scenes or dialogue referring to battle, violence and potential death.

As mentioned previously, many fans enjoy the idea of Shinji getting his needs fulfilled and filling him with love. In most dōjinshi, the shape of 'love' used to fill Shinji up is Kaworu's penis and sperm. One popular story, with 31 comments in English, gives Shinji three Kaworus in a foursome where only Shinji is the uke, filled by the Kaworu from the first TV series, the Q version (2012) and Sadamoto's manga series (1995–2014). To readers unfamiliar with yaoi and BL, the equation of love with sex might seem unrealistic, naïve, dangerous and even comical, but yaoi, and to a somewhat lesser extent its commercial cousin BL, hardly ever presents realistic scenarios, and its fans rarely assume that it does. What is depicted is an ideal, a fantasy of perfect intimacy, where romantic love and sexual intercourse are synonymous.

There are more bath scenes in stories that don't feature a bath or a rubber duck prominently on the cover. In *Hubris*, published in 2013 and uploaded to the site in 2014 (in English and Korean), Shinji is self-conscious about what he said to Kaworu, and while he battles inner turmoil, he ends up fainting in the bath. There are 20 comments on the English version (22 on the Korean), including many requests for a sequel as there is a masturbation scene in the story, but no full intercourse, no metaphorically getting filled with love and thus no closure. Another story uploaded in 2014 and with several bath scenes is *My Secret Hole Condition*, which does depict full intercourse and wins wild praise from fans in the comments for a dash of comedy in the panel where Kaworu calls his penis his Lance of Longinus, which he fully intends to insert into Shinji's "central dogma." Comedy through parody plays an important role in these fanworks to defuse the gravity of the conclusion of the original series. In some stories, Shinji displays confusion about his sexual orientation and is still attracted to Rei and Asuka, but since only Kaworu enthusiastically likes him back, he invariably surrenders to his attraction to Kaworu. Another common

trope is that, as a non-human (tagged as *jin-gai*, other than human, lit. outside of human, a tag also used on Pixiv), Kaworu displays an unabashed attitude toward physical pleasure, frequently encouraging Shinji to engage in it too, by calling it natural for humans, the children of the Lilim. Using persuasive lines like "This is just a part of human physiology, it can easily be dealt with" would sound like a predator grooming a younger boy in a more realistic genre, but among the 109 Kawoshin scanlations on the site, there wasn't a single one which drew the dynamic as clearly abusive.

While variations can be found in many Kawoshin works, the above-cited line is from the dōjinshi *Take Me Up to the Moon* (2015). This story also includes a bath scene and an inside joke where "thermal expansion" is used as a metaphor for an erection. Like the fanworks on Pixiv, some dōjinshi completely divorce the characters from the series' setting, placing them in mundane or school settings with no mention of the *EVA* universe at all, but about nine in ten do not, which allows for canon references. There are some works with allusions to the bad end the couple have in the series, but these tend to be vague. To quote one example, Kaworu tries to persuade Shinji to sleep over after they have already had intercourse, and Shinji declines, saying, "There's always tomorrow." Kaworu smiles, and Shinji reconsiders, staying over after all. This can be read as Shinji merely being unable to resist Kaworu's charm, but it adds a layer of pathos for fans of the series, aware that in the series Kawoshin have no future and will not have a happily-ever-after (*No Title*, R-18, 2010, English scanlation uploaded to the site in 2016).

Among the works on the site, there was just one that ends according to canon, *Overbeam* (2013, uploaded to the site in 2015). After Kaworu and Shinji have intercourse, Shinji is called to his Eva unit, and Kaworu is identified as the humanoid Angel he has to, and does, destroy. The dōjinshi contains three fully black pages after Kaworu is gone, depicting Shinji's emotional state, as well as expressing the fan

artist's reaction to *EVA*'s devastating end. The artist is also active on Pixiv, where the work has only two wordless comments, yet 1,841 people to date have liked it, and over 78,000 have viewed it. In contrast, on the scanlation site, there are 34 comments in English, many of which express admiration and gratitude to the artist, although she may never see these comments. The scanlation site has no view number, but as with all sites, most readers and viewers will read without ever leaving a comment, and the amount of people who have read the manga on the scanlation site is without a doubt by several digits higher than the amount of comments.

Discussion

This chapter is an attempt to analyze the many ways in which Kawoshin fans rewrite the characters, and the way in which readers of these fanworks react to them. The amount of engagement within *EVA* fan communities concerning these fanworks can tell us much about to what extent and in what ways fans are invested in the source text, the characters within the source narrative and the characters themselves, taken out of their narrative setting even if not completely divorced from it. Unsurprisingly, most fans prefer fanworks in which both Shinji and Kaworu are alive, as well as works in which they are relatively healthy and happy. Many works have a light-hearted tone and can be categorized as 'slice of life' stories, where the terrifying occurrences of the original work are glossed over or omitted.

   During my analysis, I found that I could not easily apply the exact same method to all three websites equally and had to adapt parameters accordingly. Like Nele Noppe, who examined the websites DeviantART and Pixiv for her work on transcultural fannish interactions, I found Pixiv the least accessible. As Noppe points out, getting reliable data from Pixiv as a researcher is a challenging endeavor (2013: 150), and among the three sites I looked at I found it the

least useful to draw any kind of conclusion about tropes and trends in the way fans create and consume Kawoshin stories. There is no option to filter fanworks by popularity. Many stories have little to no comments and see very few reader interactions, posing a problem because these interactions form the brunt of my useable, collected data. Noppe noticed the same, while also pointing out that the comments on Pixiv don't necessarily say anything about the popularity of a work. While Pixiv is unfortunately resistant to effective data gathering and thus challenging when undertaking fandom research, the site does feel welcoming to fan creators and their audiences. The site also features its own fandom dictionary, with a treasure trove of details on popular characters and pairings, and has more features that make it attractive for the average user.

Another method considered but abandoned was going through all the catalogues of the annual Comic Market since the airing of *EVA*. Yukari Fujimoto employed this method when looking at *NARUTO* yaoi fandom (2013: 173, 181–187). The Comic Market is held twice a year in Tokyo, and it is the largest dōjinshi direct sales event in the world. Its catalogue would yield clues to how many fan clubs, or 'circles,' have sold Kawoshin dōjinshi, but it would be incomplete and inconclusive given that certain circles are cryptic about the kinds of works they will sell, and not all dōjinshi are sold at the Comic Market. Morever, it would yield only quantitative data and virtually nothing qualitative, little about the content of the stories and nothing about buyers'/readers' reactions and interaction with the fan artist/author and each other.

Given the limited scope of the websites researched, as well as the difficulties when trying to gather data on Pixiv and to a lesser extent on fanfiction.net, further research is required. A follow-up study of the most prevalent tropes that is statistically valid can be conducted within a generous time frame at the Yoshihiro Yonezawa Memorial Library in Tokyo, with access to all the Kawoshin dōjinshi in their

collection. But such a follow-up study can only illuminate how fan artists and authors redraw and rewrite the pairing, and it would not include reactions from fans to these stories and thus be qualitatively different from this chapter.

Fan creators often use their stories as attempts to create a happy ending for Kawoshin, and popular dōjinshi show that, barring exceptions, Kaworu, as the more dominant character in the pairing, is also the more nurturing, guiding and supporting, meeting the emotional needs of Shinji, who at age 14 still needs his parents, but who has a cold father in Gendō and a mother who is long dead.

It is possible to interpret Kaworu's feelings for Shinji, including his eventual self-sacrifice, as motherly. And yet, this does not form any obstacle for writing Kawoshin in a romantic and sexual way, not realistically, but as idealized romance. The tenderness and care with which Kaworu approaches Shinji, bolstering his lacking self-esteem, and the two then falling in love, especially within a narrative created by mostly female artists for a mostly female audience, is in line with what Radway discussed first in 1983: that female romance readers look for nurturing qualities in the fantasy object of the male hero, qualities that are very much like those of a mother, but packaged as a good looking man, which fits yaoi as a subgenre of romance fiction for a mainly female audience. Shinji is usually the uke in fan narratives, and as the main character, easy for fans to identify with or project onto. Shiori Shimomura's yaoi survey showed that more than three times as many readers identify with the uke than with the seme (2006: 164), and the Hanamura Henshūbu guidebook on how to write successful BL stories recommends making the point-of-view character the uke (2004: 104). However, as mentioned above when discussing works on fanfiction. net, readers there don't require the yaoi conventions of seme and uke to enjoy Kawoshin stories. Kaworu can be nurturing as a lover without necessarily being dominant.

On the scanlation site, where the fans cannot directly interact with the author and don't know the identity of the site's contributors of pirated content, fans engage with one another and have conversations in the comments, most of them full of praise for the Kawoshin work on the same page. These conversations are what Patrick Galbraith (2015) called "moe chat." He conducted fieldwork between 2006 and 2007 in Japan, with Japanese fans, and the moe talk on which he focuses is fans discussing yaoi face to face, which he distinguished from moe chat, that is, online talk on websites (2015: 157–158). Moe means to burn (with passion), which in the case of yaoi fans, signifies affective behavior toward an imagined male/male couple (ibid.: 156). Galbraith observed fans shrieking and clapping and expressing their excitement in other ways during moe talk (ibid.: 159). In my study, something similar was apparent in the comments section of the technically illegal scanlation site, where fans expressed their affection not just in text conversation like on the more regulated fanfiction.net, but with images or animated gifs of fiery flames and nosebleeds, the latter being a manga and anime convention signifying acute arousal. Below are some examples of comments that function as moe chat, expressing readers' love for the pairing and the way in which fan artists and authors rewrite and redraw their relationship, but often also the original work:

> oh god I feel like crying, I did not come here for the feels man, all I wanted was some good fornication ;A; (Usagina, 2014)

> OH MY FREAKIGN (sic) GOSH, FULL COLOR R-18 KAWOSHIN DJ. WHAT A TIME TO BE ALIVE (suomynonA, 2014)

> Son of a bitch, how could you. The first Kaworu/Shinji I've read in how many years and this depressing shit of a doujinshi made all the depressing shitty feelings that come with reading/watching the depressing shit of a masterpiece that is Evangelion come rushing back like a motherfucker. Fuck my life. Ugh, brilliant. (minisoysquares, 2015)

> Aw I thought they were gonna fuck on the piano (catmerchant, 2016)
>
> Reply from Maria (2016): It happened in another DJ and that was a wonderful thing XD
>
> My heart . . . So much moe! (Moe Mami, 2017)

It is very rare for a comment on any of the sites to be negative. Fans focus on their common likes, using sexually tinted language they may not be able to frequently use offline, and expressions people outside of the Kawoshin fandom may not understand.

This chapter shows that, by and large, yaoi fan creators as well as fan audiences tend to avoid a head-on engagement with the life-or-death situations in which the *EVA* canon places their favorite characters, but some artists do go there, writing long romantic Kawoshin narratives in which they, and the readers, still have to brace for the worst in spite of being in their more comfortable, escapist fandom space. For as difficult to understand as *EVA* is, part of its legacy is giving the global fujoshi fandom a pairing that has brought female fans together and allowed them to turn Kawoshin into something that within their world has become a pairing many are familiar with, love and will continue to write stories about with the encouragement and support of likeminded fans.

Lastly, anime fandom and in particular SF anime fandom is still regarded as a nerdy, mostly masculine, pursuit, and from my own experience working in academic circles the field of Anime and Animation Studies is also male-dominated and does not reflect the diversity of the audience nor what moves audiences. Works that are now considered mainstream and classics in the genre, like *EVA*, have a demonstrably large number of female fans who engage passionately with the source material. Anime Studies from a feminist perspective is as yet an insufficiently explored area of research, and this chapter is a small contribution to a body of research that will hopefully continue to grow.

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