

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: "DESTROY ME!": THE RAPE FANTASY AS TRANSFORMATION IN A JAPANESE MALE-MALE PORNOGRAPHIC VIDEO GAME SERIES

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The thesis explores the use of the rape fantasy in Japanese male-male pornography through an analysis of Nitro+CHiRAL's *DRAMAtical Murder* and *DRAMAtical Murder: re:connect* as case studies of the larger genre and cultural history. The thesis puts Western and Japanese scholars in conversation with one another to encourage more academic attention to the emerging fields of Boys Love (BL) and pornographic video gaming. The methodology relies on intersections between gaming, sexuality, and trauma studies to deconstruct the *DRAMAtical Murder* series' embodiments of rape with critical consideration to both the victim and the perpetrator.

“DESTROY ME!”: THE RAPE FANTASY AS TRANSFORMATION IN A
JAPANESE MALE-MALE PORNOGRAPHIC VIDEO GAME SERIES

by

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Note on Japanese Names and Terminology

For the thesis, I have reproduced Japanese names with the family name appearing first (when known), followed by the personal or pen name. Citations of Western-language sources and Japanese scholars who publish in English are presented in the traditional order of the personal or pen name followed by the family name. Japanese terms are italicized with the long vowels indicated by macrons unless they are proper nouns (e.g., names of people, places, organizations, companies), have been assimilated into English language (e.g., samurai, manga, anime), or are commonplace names (e.g., Tokyo, Kyoto). Since Japanese text does not use capitalization, I have reserved the use of capitalization to Japanese personal and place names and publication titles. The Japanese to English translations for *DRAMAtical Murder* and *DRAMAtical Murder: re:connect* were created by the fan community Aarinfantasy.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

While critical studies of pornography as a genre tackle questions on its construction of the autoerotic reader, the thesis shifts gears by drawing more academic consideration to its connection with sexuality as testimony. The Japanese pornographic video game *DRAMAtical Murder* and its direct sequel *DRAMAtical Murder: re:connect* are approached as individual case studies to stimulate further analysis of sexual and masculine anxiety in the emerging Japanese genre of Boys Love (BL).¹ Japanese literary scholar Susan J. Napier defines Japanese pornography through its invocation of “obvious questions of gender construction and interaction.” According to Napier, the Japanese pornographer calls the reader’s attention to “the relation of gender, power, and control to technology, tradition, and transition” (Napier 64). The *DRAMAtical Murder* series speaks to the complications within socially constructed power dynamics and expectations of sexuality and gender by identifying the body as a site of visualizing and vocalizing individual testimony outside the larger scope of the collective and community trauma narrative. The title of the thesis— *“Destroy Me!”: The Rape Fantasy as Transformation in a Japanese Male-Male Pornographic Video Game Series*—puts under review the normalization of sexual violence in the Japanese imagination of male-male romance and sexuality. The paper extends literary and media criticism of BL’s gendered representation of sexual violence by exploring the subversion of the rape fantasy and dissecting both the victim and perpetrator’s physical and emotional responses to the act of rape.

¹The aesthetic typographic characteristics used in the titles of Nitro+CHiRAL’s visual novel series *DRAMAtical Murder* and *DRAMAtical Murder re:connect* have been retained.

The propinquity of the terms “destroy me,” “rape fantasy,” and “transformation” in the title of the thesis unites seemingly conflicting physical behaviors and psychological emotions and responses to address the placement of sexual violence at the foreground of these visual novels. Rape is a central trope in many BL narratives, reliant on concepts of the pornographic rape myth and phantasma and the visual aesthetic of two-dimensional flatness. The definition of these expressions are mindful of their socio-cultural influences. Here, rape fantasy refers to the erotic desire of involuntary, forcible sexual activity initiated by a beautiful male character driven by passion for his equally handsome partner. In this abstract imaging, the rape myth is internalized with the conflation of violence and love, the provocation of pleasure instead of trauma, and the transmutation of resistance to willful submission. The virtual scripting of sexual participants as male within the liminal space of a video game while the player’s gender remains unrepresented problematizes the gender-specific identification of both the victim and perpetrator of the assault and opens a possibility for a reparative reading of the crime.

Fetishization of rape unifies decades of overlapping genres and mediums of Japanese male-male erotica into a cohesive literary and artistic history. The contemporary genealogy of Japanese male-male pornography starts with the 1970s publication of the magazine *JUNE* and spans up to the 1990s genre of BL. The texts produce and promote graphic displays of fictional non-consensual oral and anal intercourse to its implied reader to present sexual violence as the touchstone for their assumption of male-male relationships. For brevity and to avoid the appearance of sexuality or gender bias, “they,” “their,” and “them” are used as third-person singular pronouns when the sex of the referent is unknown, indeterminate, or irrelevant. The predominately female creators of

this form of pornography signify its implied reader as female; a majority of Japanese men would not identify with the aesthetics or language expressed in these manga, anime, and video games. The thesis discusses the player of both *DRAMAtical Murder* games within the context of this subculture of women who consume fictional accounts of male-male sexuality and romance while largely remaining divorced from the reality of such relationships.

The terms “homosexual” and “homosocial” and their derivations are consciously omitted from the analysis to respect the cultural influences embedded in these video games as products of Japanese history and social construction of sexuality and gender as separate from a fixed identity as perceived by the West. The adjective “male-male” refers to narratives where two or more male characters engage in romantic or sexual relationships with one another. The term does not cross over to indicate the gender or sexual orientation of the texts’ primarily female creators or readers. The adjectives male and female are simply descriptive and employed to represent biological categories. They are not meant to characterize a social or cultural construction of gender or sexuality, nor is the term male-male used pejoratively to impute a moral value or ethical weight when applied to sexual partners or the act of rape.

The *DRAMAtical Murder* series rejects the gendering of sexual violence as between a male assailant and a female victim through its narrative about a rape involving two men. The (un)gendering of rape as conducted through the images of Aoba and Mink’s bodies realizes Judith Butler’s theories of gender performativity. Butler defines the performative as visible markers “on the surface of the body” (328), with assumptions of gender being a “fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies” (329). The

changes shown in Aoba and Mink's bodies during and following each instance of rape displace the player's expectation for a stable, gendered body and identity. Rather than relying on archetypes of masculinity or femininity, the games signify the two characters outside the construct of male and female performance to encourage the audience to read and interpret the sequences on their own terms. Similar to Butler's examination of drag and cross-dressing, Nitro+CHiRAL's examination of the men's physical bodies as well as their unconsciousness blurs the division between the "inner and outer psychic space" to an effect that disrupts "the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" (329). Neither Mink nor Aoba comfortably fit into rigid gender models for male or female given the player's penetrative gaze on the surface of their bodies and in the spaces of their psychic apparatuses. Instead, Nitro+CHiRAL pushes the player to recognize rape and its impact as separate from a collective narrative. Partially through the disturbance of the normalized model of gender, the games compel the player to engage more deeply with their understanding and responses to rape.

Originating with Takemiya Keiko's romantic adaptation of rape in her manga *The Song of the Wind and Trees* (*Kaze to ki no uta*, 1976—1984), Japanese male-male pornography realizes the violation of the body as the ideal for sexual and romantic interactions between men. Pornographic manga rationalizes to the reader the perception that male-male desire is always a power struggle with one man inevitably falling into submission as the sexual bottom (*uke*) to the dominance of the sexual top (*seme*). The Japanese slang words assigned to male-male sexual roles derive from violent language to maintain the signification of male-male desire with practices of violation. The term *seme* was adapted from the verb *semeru* (to attack) and *uke* was adapted from *ukeru* (to receive,

to suffer, or to blame). The secondary meaning of *ukeru* implies its slang variant is standardizing the suffering of the male body as routine for male-male desire through its repeated use in conversations and published works. The alternate reading of *ukeru* as “to blame” alludes to the genre’s adversarial dynamic between victim and perpetrator, one where causality and controllability are attributed to the responsible party.

These terms began and remain exclusive to the BL subculture realm and have not transitioned into Japanese popular culture nor do they accurately position the reality of intimate same-sex relationships. The importance of this genre lays in its transgressive potential and the freedom of expression in a space of fantasy—where women feel safe to criticize and resist the hetero-normative gender and sexual roles that hegemonic cultural scripts demand. This includes the perception that women are submissive, passive, and rapeable. These games become a strategic site of resistance to the dominant traditional patriarchal narrative and provide women with a site to create alternative, disruptive libidinal fantasies that counterbalance and challenge these scripts. However, in affixing and codifying the *seme/uke* dynamic, are the women reproducing or renegotiating social and sexual roles?

The standardization of the two sexual roles, and the accompanying development of the male-male rape fantasy, is deeply rooted in the first publications of male-male erotica created by and for a female audience. *Yaoi* and BL, two of the primary genres of contemporary Japanese male-male pornography, originated and existed separately from the pre-World War II artistic and literary histories. Rather than preserving the traditional models of male-male desire embodied by the samurai or kabuki actor, these forms of Japanese male-male erotica derived from a movement of *shōjo* manga (little girl manga),

which is a seminal foundational genre intended for a female readership. *Yaoi* turns rape into a marketing tool to entice consumers and associate violence as eliciting an erotic response between two men and the text and the reader. The first headline of *JUNE*, one of the first commercial male-male erotica magazines running from the 1970s to the 1990s, captures a reader's attention by defining its content with the following appeal: "now, opening our eyes to dangerous love" (Welker65).

Starting in the 1980s, *yaoi* popularized the narrative of male-male romance and sexuality to its readers through the mediums of manga, anime, audio drama, and video gaming. The West incorrectly classifies all Japanese erotica featuring two men as *yaoi* despite the genre signifying only one phase in the evolution of pornography. *Yaoi* can be read as an acronym and expanded as follows: *yaru, okasu, ikaseru* or "do (him), rape (him), make (him) cum" (Welker56). The authoritative tone behind the word signals the projection of its pornographic texts into a space of fantasy in which the concepts of rape and consent are distanced from its referents in reality. Despite explicit language and images of violence and violation framing a majority of its characters' relationships, *yaoi* encourages readers to reinterpret rape as an uncontrollable release of emotion for a partner through physical contact. Identifying a text as erotic fantasy denotes the writer's attention to the safety and enjoyment of the implied reader when stepping inside the text. The *yaoi* writer authorizes an autoerotic response to the fictional accounts of rape, allowing the reader to translate the constructions of sexual identity into their understanding of men in real life.

Manga artist Yoshida Akimi correlates the identification of violent desire as inherent between men through the normalization of rape as "a means to express

affirmation of one's commitment to a partner" and "a measure of passion." Yoshida's belief that "[h]omosexuality does not produce anything, and so great power is poured into it" grounds the connection between rape and the romantic and sexual male-male narrative as a cultural preconception of the overwhelming power attributed to this form of desire (qtd. in Suzuki 257). *Yaoi* forms as a community for its female creators through their adherence to a set of tropes to discuss gender and sexuality. Manga critic Fujimoto Yukari argues the ability to write or draw male-male pornography enables the women with "a mechanism offering an escape from the social realities of gender suppression and the avoidance of sex(uality)" allowing for a "play with sex(uality)" (Fujimoto 79). Playing with sexuality empowers a contemporary generation of female Japanese creators and consumers even as they move away from the conventional male-male erotic text passed down through *yaoi*. The contemporary genre of BL permits women to realize their own individual expression of the male sexual body in isolation from past foundational manga or anime.

Coined in the 1990s, the term Boys Love refers to the commercial publication of male-male erotica as opposed to the distribution of *yaoi* through self-published works (*dōjinshi*). BL's experimentation with the form and content of erotica "open[s] up new spaces for the exploration of masculinity and femininity for men and women alike" (Welker and McLelland 19). In her 2003 manga *Under Grand Hotel (Andāguraundo Hōteru)*, Sadahiro Mika refuses to separate the narrative from fantasy by asserting the rapes of its main character as acts of brutality instead of models for eroticism. Sadahiro's decision to set the rapes in a prison resists the romantic readings of rape while also dissecting the characters' motivations beyond sexual desire and the assignment of the

seme and *uke* titles. The manga forces the reader to confront their expectations for a *seme* and a *uke* to perform the rape fantasy for the erotic gaze. The reader's discomfort when reading Sadahiro's work sets up a new precedent for BL narratives to engage with the testimony of rape as a larger social critique of fiction and reality.

Nitro+CHiRAL's erotic video game *DRAMAtical Murder* and its direct sequel *DRAMAtical Murder: re:connect* represent the culmination of the representations of sexual violence over the history of *yaoi* and BL. Through witnessing the romance between Seragaki Aoba and Mink as told by reoccurrences of rape, the player incorporates the testimonial voices of both characters into their mindset on sexuality and the world. Nitro+CHiRAL elevates pushes the genre of the pornographic text beyond the assumed intention of sexual arousal and release for the reader to provide an intervention to Japan's normalization of the rape fantasy as the singular image of male-male desire. Its use of the more interactive medium of video gaming distinguishes the text from the previous communities centered on manga or print publications. The games shine a constant, harsh light on rape to make the reader experience a visceral reaction beyond the sexual pleasure expected of pornography. The player of *DRAMAtical Murder* is forced to watch each act of abuse, follow Aoba's shame and disgust, and uncover the reasons for Mink's violent actions. The games do not comfort the audience and instead compel them to address and question their own preconceptions about rape. The transformations of Aoba and Mink's bodies and mind during and following each individual instance of rape externalize the shifts in the player's understanding of male-male sexuality.

Before contextualizing the definition of rape assumed for the thesis, the mechanisms of the game are broken apart below for an unfamiliar reader.

DRAMAticalMurder and *DRAMAtical Murder: re:connectare* visual novels; a visual novel performs like the children's book series *Choose Your Own Adventure*, relying on branching path stories in which "the player will be presented with a choice, with the story branching accordingly depending on [their] decision" (Lebowitz and Klug 194). The choices typically appear in the form of deciding the protagonist's response or reaction to an action or conversation. Wrong or immoral decisions lead to a bad ending in which the protagonist either dies or is caught in a form of sexual slavery. Unlike the *Choose Your Own Adventure* format, visual novels take into account each decision the player makes with "some decision points [being] hidden...[or] the game automatically selecting a branch based on the player's past decisions" (194). These two games render the separation in narrative routes as Aoba's decision to accompany and later date one of the five available male characters (Mink, Clear, Koujaku, Noiz, and Ren). The inner workings of video game genres are further clarified in the Methodology chapter of the thesis.

Section 1: Structure of the Thesis

As a whole, the thesis engages with the following two terms: "rape" and "transformation" through four distinct chapters: Introduction, Methodology, Analysis, and Conclusion. The rest of the Introduction provides a definition of rape in order to ground the analysis of the two video games. The Methodology chapter engages with questions of three genres. It begins with differentiating the three video game genres (the visual novel, the dating simulator, and the Japanese pornography video game or *ero*ge) as the *DRAMAtical Murder* games pertain to each term. While discussing critical theory on sexuality, a union of theories by Japanese (Mishima Yukio and Otomo Rio) and Western

scholars (Angela Carter and Michel Foucault) unearths a more complete model of an approach of pornography and its transformative capability with its subjects and reader. The final section engages the theories of Western scholars (Roland Barthes, Georges Didi-Huberman, and Akira Lippit) and a Japanese scholar (Kawai Hayao) to provide an overview of image as genre and its potential to convey trauma and cut through the interiority and exteriority of the body.

The Analysis chapter applies the theories and definitions from the prior two sections in a close reading of select sequences from *DRAMAtical Murder* and *DRAMAtical Murder: re:connect*. These sections tie together scholars with the primary analysis and incorporate images to better illustrate the analysis to a reader unfamiliar with the games. The Conclusion chapter opens the study to future work on BL and the treatment of rape in Japanese male-male erotica. The removal of the rape sequences and male-male sexual and romantic narrative complicates any assumption on the potential future direction for the genre and its representation of rape.

Section 2: Context—Defining Rape

The analysis of Mink's repeated rapes of Aoba pulls extensively from Angela Carter's definition of the act as discussed in her critical reading of Marquis de Sade: *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography: An Exercise in Cultural History* (1979). Carter's theories on pornography as a transformative genre locate the argument that the change in Aoba and Mink's bodies in response to trauma serves to communicate a larger message on rape outside the erotic or fantasy space. The following quote by Carter serves as the basis for analyzing the rape narrative in the *DRAMAtical Murder* series. Expanding on the language Carter uses in her definition of the fear of rape, the

thesis identifies Nitro+CHiRAL as extending the representation of sexual violence beyond the physical act as inflicted on the victim to include its psychological repercussions and the inclusion of the perpetrator's voice:

[S]omewhere in the fear of rape, is a more than merely physical terror of hurt and humiliation—a fear of psychic disintegration, of an essential dismemberment, a fear of a loss or disruption of the self which is not confined to the victim alone (Carter 6).

The separation of Aoba's consciousness according to Sigmund Freud's structural model of the psychic apparatus (id, ego, superego) implies Nitro+CHiRAL's knowledge of psychoanalytic theory. The game's decision to represent Aoba's shame rather than follow *yaoi*'s erasure of negative emotion aligns the characters as capable of acknowledging the same fears signified by Carter. Carter's definition not only encompasses Aoba's shame, but touches on Mink's culpability and his assumption of responsibility for his entire culture.

Carter foregrounds her commentary on pornography with a deconstruction of "the archetypal male and female," a move that can be translated in the essentialization of every male-male narrative in the *seme* and *uke* binary (6). She pinpoints pornography as dealing in "false universals" of the myth, which can inform *yaoi*'s strict and limiting representation of its male characters (7). But, *DRAMAtical Murder* and the contemporary genre of BL reject this schema for a communication on the trauma of rape and more open discourse on the affected characters' responses. Carter's clarification that rape traumatizes the perpetrator as well as the victim connects with Nitro+CHiRAL's more sympathetic and inclusive depiction of Mink in the rape narrative without relying on

excuses or avoidances of the damage caused by rape. Her reminder "sexuality, in short, is never expressed in a vacuum" encourages readers to examine sexual images outside the space of fantasy and realize its multiplicity of meaning in reality (11). The interactivity between the player and the avatar character Aoba as afforded through the medium of video game generates hyperawareness to the separation of sexuality in fiction and reality.

Neither Aoba nor Mink can fully occupy the role of the perpetrator or the victim or that of the *seme* and the *uke*. When witnessing the rapes in isolation, a player could easily connect Aoba with the role of the victim and *uke*. His more feminine body is portrayed as forced into a submissive position in oral and anal intercourse by Mink's hypermasculine body. However, consideration of Aoba's ability to control people and violate their consciousness through his voice offsets the dynamic of power and reader expectation. A voiced and speaking body has subjective power and is not the passive voiceless victim of most *yaoi* or BL narratives. Aoba is able to exercise this power, entering people's minds and controlling their movements/thoughts. Both his words and body provide testimony, bear witness, render visible interior violence that may have otherwise been obscured. Nitro+CHiRAL reserves information about Aoba's powers to present his vulnerable body as a façade to the other characters and player. Aoba was actually conceived from a biological experiment that was attempting to create an instrument to control people and enter into and influence their minds. Aoba's powers to control people manifested as a sadistic and masochistic entity (Scrap) inhabiting his consciousness. Aoba is unaware of the Scrap aspect of his personality until later in the game and attempts to repress any signs of Scrap taking over his body (which he misidentified as headaches) through herbal medication. Scrap challenges the strict

identification of Aoba as the victim or *uke* and the effectiveness of language to fully encapsulate a person in their entirety. The game engages the player with questions of identity and illustrates the changes in Aoba and Mink's bodies and minds to represent how an individual does not occupy a single role for the entirety of their existence. Just as Aoba's body and self-identification fluctuates in response to trauma and violence, Mink undergoes significant changes that may garner him more sympathy from the player than expected given his reliance on rape and brutality.

Before the start of the game, Mink's identity was tied to his position as the keeper of his tribe's knowledge of scent and herbal medicine. The massacre of his people and his subsequent imprisonment and torture perverts his previous identity with the desire for revenge at any costs, even through violent and dehumanizing means. Mink's reclusion from his emotions and culture others his body and voice as imposing and aggressive. The player initially perceives Mink as the archetypal *seme* that refuses to disclose his emotions and dominates his partner physically and emotionally. Following the development of his empathy toward Aoba, Mink's body and mind visibly transform to accommodate for unfamiliar feelings of compassion. The game presents Mink's new desire to protect Aoba as a reparative reading on his previous acts of rape while also openly addressing the sexual violence in the dialogue in both the main game and the sequel. Aoba and Mink's changing bodies dispel the rape fantasy by pushing the player in close proximity to the acts, which removes what Carter defines as the "safety valve" (19). The motif of transformation contextualizes the game's focus on subverting traditional readings of rape and its perpetrator and victim and addresses the larger scope of the imagination of male-male desire.

Below, a brief description of the game and its characters in the following sectionserves as an aid for readers unfamiliar with the *DRAMAtical Murder* series. The summary is included in the Introduction chapter to immediately immerse readers into the world and characters of the games. The games function on a similar level to the children's books *Choose Your Own Adventure* as the player can choose which character Aoba will be romantically involved with over the second half of the story. For that reason, the summary only covers the branching paths dealing with Aoba's romantic and sexual interactions with Mink. The Analysis chapter is constructed around specific sequences that are further illustrated with screenshots take from the game.

Section 3: Summary of *DRAMAtical Murder* and *DRAMAtical Murder: re:connect*

BL video game developer Nitro+CHiRAL's *DRAMAtical Murder* occurs on the fictional Japanese island of Midorijima in an unspecified time in the future. Japanese conglomerate Tōue Corporation privatized and divided Midorijima into two regional zones—the resort Platinum Jail and the Old Residents' District. Tōue Corporation reserves Platinum Jail for invited members of the element and confined all of the island's original residents to the Old Residents' District. The protagonist Aoba Seragaki is introduced as a sales clerk for the Junk Shop Heibon who is only interested in maintaining a peaceful, uneventful life. The game states that Aoba is a twenty-three years old Japanese man, making him older than typical protagonists of *yaoi* and BL. Mink is identified as a Native American from an unnamed tribe in North America. The game opens with Aoba's confusion about the customers' attraction to his voice, establishing to the player that he has some unknown power.

The story begins to escalate when the mysterious gang Morphine kidnaps Aoba's grandmother Tae Seragaki. Mink and his gang of former prisoners later kidnap Aoba and almost gang rape him. Mink offers a deal in which he will help to locate Tae as long as Aoba agrees to help him in the future and obey any command given to him. Aoba accepts the deal and Tae is found with the help of the resources provided by Mink and the other eligible male characters. During the rescue operation, Aoba discovers that Morphine is composed entirely of mind-controlled individuals who previously were reported as missing and finds his close friend Mizuki holding Tae at knifepoint. Aoba unintentionally initiates Scrap and enters Mizuki's inner consciousness and destroys his mind, leaving him in a comatose state. Later, Tae informs the player and characters of Aoba's true origins as a biological experiment conducted by Tōue Corporation that possesses the power of Scrap. With Scrap, Aoba can control people and enter their inner consciousness through his voice. Tae identifies Scrap as a dangerous part of Aoba's personality that can take over his body and mind. Aoba vows to never use Scrap after accidentally mentally incapacitating Mizuki.

Tae informs the player and Aoba that Tatsuo Tōue, the leader of Tōue Corporation, intends to sponsor an event allowing all Midorijima residents to enter Platinum Jail as a cover for his plan to use his mind control research on a large scale. Aoba and the rest of the group decide to sneak into Platinum Jail to stop Tōue. At this point in the game, the narrative branches off depending on which character Aoba has the most affection for. The affection level is determined by Aoba's choices in previous conversations and encounters. The rest of the game focuses on Aoba working with the

specified character as he discovers more about his potential romantic partner and stops Tōue. The rest of the summary below conveys the content of Mink's narrative path.

Mink reminds Aoba of the previous deal and reveals that he always knew about the power in Aoba's voice after first hearing the unnatural movements of his vocal cords. Despite Aoba's persistence, Mink refuses to disclose any part of his agenda or background. Aoba repeats his promise to never use Scrap again, but Mink disputes that simply having a power and not using it makes him useless. Mink vows to have Scrap be used to achieve his goals regardless of Aoba's hesitance. When inside Platinum Jail, Aoba and Mink go to the district Night Valley known as an industrial underground designed for the darker and more violent desires of the residents. Much of the action for the rest of the story takes place in a European-style inn that Aoba and Mink both are assigned via an invitation.

Mink takes Aoba to a nightclub and watches him become high from the strobe lights that simulate the effects of drugs. The Scrap personality emerges and takes control of Aoba's body and personality while he is under the influence of the lights. Mink questions if this is Aoba's true identity. Scrap then seduces Mink to have rough anal intercourse in one of the club's hallways. The game emphasizes the violence in the sexual encounter through Scrap's demands for more pain and Mink's lack of consideration for Aoba's comfort or pleasure. After both fulfill sexual climax, Aoba regains control of his body and personality with a full awareness of Scrap's prior actions. Since Aoba is still too delirious from the lights, Mink carries him back to the inn. Aoba suspects Mink intentionally led him to the club to test out Scrap.

Later, Mink orders Aoba to accept Scrap fully rather than suppress it. He tells Aoba that fate gave him Scrap and he was not the only one forced to deal with fate. Mink rapes Aoba to forcibly draw out Scrap and fully understand its power and its potential as a tool in his plans. Aoba faints from the traumatic experience of the rape and Mink carries him upstairs to his room.

Aoba feels shame and guilt following the rape and attempts to run away from the inn to escape Mink and stop Tōue on his own. Mink captures Aoba and brings him back to the inn. He rapes Aoba in a more violent manner than the past sequences. Scrap takes control of Aoba in a more absolute way than earlier appearances in the game. Scrap tells Mink that he can control and use all of Aoba, but he will insure that it leads to their mutual destruction to insure maximum sexual pleasure for themselves. Aoba resumes control and passes out, leaving Mink confused and afraid of Scrap's sadistic language. Aoba wakes up and feels Mink tenderly touching his hair and hears him reciting a prayer.

Aoba and Mink infiltrate the Oval Tower, the headquarters of Tōue Corporation, and are confronted by Tōue, who revealed that he has been observing them since the beginning. Tōue apologizes to Mink for the massacre of his people to steal their knowledge of scent for his own research. Tōue confesses to using blood samples from both Mink and the massacred people to further understand how the herbs affect the body and mind. Aoba uses Scrap to enter Mink's mind so he can find out more about his past and help him deal with his trauma. At this point in the game, the narrative splits off into a good ending and a bad ending. For this game, the good ending is identified as romantic and sexual fulfillment for both couple and the bad ending is identified by the characters' inability to handle their traumatic pasts and mentally break down under stress.

The following summary covers the good ending, which includes content from *DRAMAtical Murder: re:connect*. Upon entering Mink's mental landscape, Aoba witnesses the memories of the massacre of his village and his imprisonment and torture by Tōue. He discovers Mink's true desire was death and his original view of Aoba as an instrument for his revenge has changed to be more compassionate. He finds out that Mink intended to commit suicide after getting rid of Tōue and Tōue Corporation. Tōue reveals that he developed and implanted a weaker version of Scrap within himself and uses it in an attempt to thwart Mink's plans to kill him. Mink reveals Aoba's Scrap to protect him is more powerful than Tōue's. Aoba's powers made Mink realize that he was still alive and there was hope for him in the future. Out of desperation, Tōue stabs Mink and the tower begins to crumble around them. Mink prays to the spirits of his family and tribe and his homeland as he accepts his fate.

After the fall of Tōue Corporation, Mink disappears. Aoba refuses to believe Mink is dead and attempts to find him by travelling to America. After their reunion, Mink orders Aoba to go back home. He deflects any signs of affection from Aoba and leaves him for long periods of time for unspecified reasons. The distance between them goes on for a month. When Mink is gone for over a day, Aoba goes out in the middle of the night to search for him and becomes very sick. After finding Aoba and carrying him back to the cabin, Mink reveals his affection for Aoba. He admits that he deeply cares about Aoba, but felt guilty over his past actions toward him and did not view any relationship between them as appropriate or stable. Aoba expresses his romantic feelings for Mink and forgives him for the rapes. Mink and Aoba have sex, which the game portrays as being motivated by love and affection and in direct opposition to their past sexual

interactions The games end with Mink's decision to create a new community with Aoba by dressing him in the traditional attire of his tribe.

The bad ending exclusively focuses on Aoba and Mink in the mental reconstruction of the massacre. If the player decides to help any of the people from the past, Aoba will be trapped inside Mink's inner consciousness. Aoba realizes that he uses Scrap incorrectly by changing the past and is confronted by Mink. Mink embraces Aoba and tells him the most sacred part of the body is the head as it houses the soul. Aoba's guilt from preventing Mink's heart and soul from moving forward results in Scrap commandeering his body and mind. Mink vows to protect Aoba's soul, but Scrap forces his masochistic sexual desires on Mink. The physical altercation between the two turns sexual with graphic images of rough penetration and bloody beatings. The sound of gunfire and the screams of Mink's people blare in the background during the entirety of the sexual encounter. Mink prays for Aoba before decapitating Scrap and holding his head close to him.

Chapter 2: Methodology

By intersecting video game, sexuality, and trauma studies, the deconstruction of rape in the *DRAMAtical Murder* games is articulated through the analysis of three genres. Each section engages with several questions: What kind of sexuality is present and either privileged or inhibited and what are the in-game characters' responses? What bodies are allowed to be represented and for what purpose in the context of reader response? Why does the game allow the player to witness and interact with certain images and leave others as predetermined or unseen? What norms are being violated? This line of inquiry shapes the proposal that Nitro+CHiRAL purposefully subverts *yaoi*'s standardization of the rape fantasy through the replacement of a more "realistic" depiction of the act. The contextualization of three types of video games into a single critical discourse provides a better understanding of the developer's adherence and challenge to player expectation. Placing Angela Carter and Mishima Yukio into conversation on the sexual gaze contributes to an examination of the interventions of transformation and reality in pornographic texts. Finally, an application of Roland Barthes and Georges Didi-Huberman's theories outside of their original contexts carries over a discourse on the traumatic and testimonial potential of the image into the analysis of the two primary sources.

As emergent forms of media, video games are subject to constant change from technological updates to changes in public expectation and demand. Platform availability further encroaches on the accessibility of primary material for critical analysis. The subjects of the thesis are confined to a specific genre movement and cultural history in Japan and cannot be treated as representative of an analysis of rape in every video game.

Given Nitro+CHiRAL's decision to exclusively release the games for Microsoft Windows, the study is restricted to this gaming platform. The thesis does not speculate on the potential differences across Microsoft Windows, Mac, and console and handheld systems due to the focus on the narrative and characters over a statement on the game's materiality. Nitro+CHiRAL's choice to limit the release of the games to Japan implies the rape storyline is produced and promoted to an audience familiar with *yaoi* and BL. The analysis relies on the English subtitles provided by the fan community Aarinfantasy, but the original Japanese audio proves useful to inform the social and linguistic dimensions of each scene. The interdisciplinary discourse, in the following three sections, constructs a working model to approach the subversion of the rape fantasy in the *DRAMAtical Murder* games and potentially other BL narratives.

Section 1: Video Games as Genre

The thesis provides evidence that Nitro+CHiRAL is consciously producing material that draw the player's attention to a more "realistic" idea of rape by moving outside the space of the erotic fantasy. A background on video games is necessary to reach a deeper understanding of how the genre can exhibit the same capability to shape the reader's worldview as poetry, literature, or film. Kenneth S. McAllister, a professor who specializes in the rhetorics of computer gaming, views games as accumulating what he terms a "force" that "manifest[s] in culture" (McAllister 10). McAllister's correlations between video gaming and culture align with cultural scholar Richard Ohmann's definition of "mass culture" as a medium "intended 'for millions across the nation to share'" (Ohmann 12-13). Ohmann's observation that "[m]ass culture comes at us from a distance, produced by strangers" frames the interactivity between a larger game

developer and its text to the individual gamer (12). McAllister's appeal for scholars to consider "the human agents behind the software" provides the language to address game developer's intentions and manipulation of player response (McAllister 12). The inquiry into the possible connections between the creator and player through the medium of the game does not digress into the popular debate linking violent behavior with the act of playing a video game. The inclusion of Mink's testimony on rape and the game's sympathetic characterization of him, which extends beyond the stigma of the perpetrator, neither justifies nor advocates for sexual violence. Instead, the thesis replaces the dominant language and images of the archetypical rape narrative with the beginnings of more authentic and poignant voices. Aoba and Mink's experiences complete an account of rape that attempts to capture the complicated and raw nature of the experience in reality.

While a majority of the critical discourse on *yaoi* and BL tracks the progression of *manga* (comics) and *anime* (animation), these theorists are fundamental in pioneering more academic attention to the territory of video gaming. Susan J. Napier locates *anime* as occupying a liminal space between local and global identities. Since "the world of anime itself occupies its own space that is not necessarily coincident with that of Japan," anime has been referred to as stateless (*mukokuseki*) (Napier 24). Napier's understanding of anime as an intersection between Japanese and Western cultures and the perfect candidate for consumption by any reader regardless of nationality applies to video gaming as well. Her identification of anime as a "nexus point for global culture" can be extended to the portability of video gaming across national boundaries (Napier 24). *DRAMAtical Murder* and *DRAMAtical Murder: re:connect* not only occupy a liminal

space between cultures, but they also experiment with three forms of video gaming: the visual novel, the dating simulator, and the pornographic video game (*eroge*).

The closest counterpart to the visual novel in Western literature and media is the children's book series *Choose Your Own Adventure*. While the children's series is bound to a book form, the visual novel relies on a series of static images and minor animation to convey the various branching paths in the narrative. A standard visual novel imbues the player with the ability to assume the identity of the protagonist and determine their own choices. The inclusion of voice acting and an original soundtrack aids in the construction of the game's world. The visual novel is a contentious topic among gamers as the minimum amount of direct gameplay causes debate on whether it should be categorized as a true video game or an example of interactive fiction. The thesis unravels the player's feelings of responsibility and guilt when choosing the narrative path resulting in the repeated sexual violations of the protagonist Aoba. The fluctuations between providing the player with the freedom to determine a character's dialogue or action and restricting control and leaving them to witness the rapes from the powerless space of the voyeur builds a deeper awareness to each individual action. Nitro+CHiRAL frustrates or confuses the player to simulate the fragmented nature of testimony rather than establishing a clear timeline of events from the beginning.

The dating simulator is a subgenre of the visual novel, which modifies the format of the branching narratives with the inclusion of potential romantic partners. It introduces the player to the available suitors and reconfigures the decision points as either improving or reducing the attraction or affection between the player character and the potential partner. The game then shifts from a general introduction to the characters' backgrounds

and personalities in order to place a spotlight on an individual romance plot between the protagonist and suitor with the highest affection. Through the good ending, the player witnesses a successful romantic and sexual relationship while the severity of a bad ending depends on the game, ranging from separation, the protagonist being caught in an unhealthy or abusive relationship, or death of one or more characters. The *DRAMAtical Murder* series differentiates itself from convention dating simulators by tasking the player to identify the suitor's trauma and aid Aoba in addressing it. The games include the standard quest for a successful romance or scene of sexual intercourse, but the character's developments beyond the act of romance or sex occupy a space of equal importance.

Eroge, derived from the Japanese term for erotic game (*erochikku gēmu*), directs the player to guide the avatar character through explicit sexual encounters to reach sexual and romantic fulfillment. While the genre is not confined to a singular gameplay mechanic, a majority of *eroge* adapts the forms of the visual novel and dating simulator. With the branching paths in this genre, the player's choices either led to the good ending of romantic sexual intercourse or the bad ending in which sexual intercourse is denied or perverted through fetish, violence, or death. Perverse sexual desires or acts or sexual fetishes (encapsulated in the Japanese term *hentai*) characterizes *eroge* to the point where it is also referred to as *hentai* games or H-games. The contemporary use of the term *hentai* as abnormality or perversion developed from its original meaning of "transformation" or "metamorphosis." By starting with the more abstract genre of the visual novel and ending with the specialized form of *eroge*, a continuum can be established to place each development in video gaming in accordance with one another. The relationship between the developer, the player, and the game is expanded to

understandings of genre leads into questions on the study of pornography, specifically the gaze on the vulnerable body as the site of erotic desire. An interrogation on the expected response to erotic fantasy as opposed to a realistic portrayal of sexuality deconstructs the slippage between arousal and discomfort.

Section 2: Pornography as Genre

During the Edo period (1603-1868), pornographic woodblock prints and paintings (*shunga*) were widely consumed by men and women. Considered an “integral if private aspect of Edo period society,” *shunga* were easily obtained either through rental libraries, (Hayakawa 18) or were received as gifts (3). Popular across age groups and social classes, (18) the designs of the prints and the paintings were intended for solitary and group viewings in order to immerse the audience in fantasy (19). After its victory during the Russo-Japanese War and identification as a "civilized country" by the West, Japan actively sought to modernize its culture. The shift away from tradition resulted in the suppression of *shunga*, with the fantasy associated with the images being deemed "shameful" (Ishigami 52). Western scholars and critics have adapted the Japanese word *hentai* to denote contemporary pornographic anime, manga, and video gaming originating from Japan. A shortening of the phrase for "sexual perversion" (*hentai seiyoku*), *hentai* is more accurately interpreted as abnormality or transformation and lacks strict connotations with sexuality or pornography. The Japanese translation of Richard von Krafft-Ebing's work *Psychopathia Sexualis* and the rising fascination with psychology lead to the construction of *hentai* as a term for perverse sexual desires or acts and their depictions in fiction. The interest in exploring and representing sexual perversion resulted in several aesthetic and literary movements involving pornography, such as *ero guro* and

pink films. According to Japanese scholar Mark McLelland, *hentai* in the post-war period became a genre that “was characterized by the tendency to seek out relations between a wide range of non-normative sexual fantasies and desires” (McLelland).

The perversity read into *hentai* as a contemporary construct extends into the reader's gaze and response to erotic images. In his introduction to Kawabata Yasunari's 1961 novella *House of the Sleeping Beauties*, Japanese author Mishima Yukio defines pornography as characterized by the gaze. Mishima specifies the lust present in and evoked by eroticism as "inevitably attach[ing] itself to fragments" (Mishima 8). He interprets the "violent feelings of the one who loves" as most powerful with the fragmentation of the human body or the gaze on the corpse, which "sends forth the strongest radiance of life" (8). His conception of the erotic text as predisposed to death and the "impossibility of attainment" calls into question the connection between the autoerotic reader and the text's subjects (9). Mishima's observation on the fragmenting gaze in eroticism parallels Western feminist Angela Carter's representation of pornography as "an abstraction of human intercourse in which the self is reduced to its formal elements[:]" "the probe and the hole" (Carter 4). Mishima's views cannot be transposed to Japan as a whole. He embodies the image of an outlier of Japanese culture, both during his lifetime and after his death, through wielding his literature and ideology to upset cultural ideas of sexuality and modern and traditional Japanese aesthetics. He perfectly suits an analysis of subversive works like the *DRAMAtical Murder* series as they both occupy space outside the dominant mindset of Japan and intentionally discomfort the reader by diverging from the expected through shocking and explicit means.

The following quote by Carter locates the potential for pornography to step out of "its quality of existential solitude" and "the kitsch area of timeless, placeless fantasy" to produce images of sexuality as performed in the real world:

[T]he more pornographic writing acquires the techniques of real literature, of real art the more deeply subversive it is likely to be in that the more likely it is to affect the reader's perceptions of the world. The text that had heretofore opened up creamily to [them], in a dream, will gather itself together and harshly expel [them] into the anguish of actuality (19).

Although the *yaoi* community revels in the opportunity to play with sexuality in the safe space of fantasy, the decision of individual BL writers and illustrators to imitate real life embodies the subversive attitude put forth by Carter. The abandonment of the once passionate and erotic response expected in the image of the *seme*'s rape of the *uke* puts the reader in a state of unease and complicates their relationship to the pornographic text. Nitro+CHiRAL sets up the introduction of *DRAMAtical Murder* as adhering to the qualities of *yaoi*'s rape fantasy, thus allowing an expectation for the fantasy "open[ing] up creamily" to the player with the narrative escalating into Mink's route as a harsh expulsion into the reality of rape and its' impact on both parties (19). Carter's imagination of the solitary, autoerotic reader extends into the critical discourse on the reader in *yaoi* and BL.

The tendency of eroticism or pornography to stylize the body, as raised by Mishima and Carter, informs the contextualization of the performances of rape in *yaoi* and its subversion in BL. Rape as the romantic ideal of male-male relationships can only be achieved by adhering to a stylized space in which the rough sexual violation of the

body accumulates erotic appeal at the expense of removing any signifiers of permanent trauma from these fragments. The emphasis on the cultural reality in which sexuality becomes an agent breaking down the body returns to a basis in sadism. As identified in Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* (1964), sadism is "one of the greatest conversions of Western imagination: unreason transformed into the delirium of the heart, madness of desire, the insane dialogue of love and death in the limitless presumption of appetite" (Foucault 210). Foucault may attach the practice of sadism to a strictly Western context, but his commentary on the ritualized sexual acts of power and desire carry over into discussion of the reliance on the *seme* and *uke* archetypes in Japanese male-male erotica.

Japanese literary scholar Otomo Rio replaces the assumption only women, who are judged with the pejorative term "rotten girls" (*fujoshi*), participate in the creation and consumption of *yaoi* and BL. Otomo opens up the impact of these genres by acknowledging that "[r]eaders and writers are in fact spread widely across the social stratum and sexual orientations" (Otomo 144). Otomo's negotiation of the consumption of erotic texts enriches Carter's image of the solitary autoerotic reader. Her concept of "th[e] acting of reading [as] an expression of my personal sexual fantasy, and I perform it in my own private space" fits the player's experience when entering the world of the *DRAMAtical Murder* series (144). The autoerotic reader engages in a liminal space between private performance of desire and public consumption. Otomo's recognition of the reader as "a public performer" provides the framework in which the actions of playing the games and examining preconceptions on rape and masculinity can be interpreted as a communal event (145). One of the primary appeals of BL for a reader is membership to a

subculture. Even during a solitary experience with game, the player participates in a larger attempt to reclaim the genre of male-male erotica for individual expression and social critique, not just the instant sexual gratification of pornography.

Section 3: Image as Genre

Since *DRAMAtical Murder* and *DRAMAtical Murder: re:connectare* constructed from a series of static images and minor animations, questions of the image as genre are vital to analyzing the games' representations of rape. The emphasis in the games' artwork on the transformations in Aoba and Mink's bodies and the various, stylized takes on the individual rape sequences taps into the image's ability to transfer testimony while simultaneously exposing the subjects' interiority and exteriority to the viewer. Roland Barthes' 1980 book *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* puts language to the photograph's relationship with the spectator by the creation of the term punctum, or "that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)." Derived from its original meaning "sting, speck, cut, [or] little hole," the punctum references the attraction and distress Barthes ascribes to the small detail or partial object that transforms into the touchstone for the image (Barthes 27). Barthes' incorporation of his personal experiences into his choice of the punctum in an image implies each individual brings his own background into the identification of the object of focus. Aoba and Mink's bodies serve as the punctums of the rape sequences to guide the player into a deeper consideration of the embodiment of trauma.

In his 2008 book *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, Georges Didi-Huberman discusses the use of an image to convey testimony for trauma initially deemed "unspeakable" or "unimaginable." While Didi-Huberman uses the

context of photography from Auschwitz, his appeal to the spectator to face the discomfort of looking at images of trauma can be connected with the games' sequences of rape:

Let us not shelter ourselves by saying that we cannot, that we could not by any means, imagine it to the very end. *We are obliged* to that oppressive imaginable. It is a response that we must offer, as a debt to the words and images (Didi-Huberman 3).

Didi-Huberman's statement that "[the viewer] must contemplate [the images], take them on, and try to comprehend them" can be extended outside its original analysis of Holocaust images to be applied to the player's unease with images of rape (3). Using this view, the importance of the differing perspective of perpetrator and victim along with the fact that each rape is a singular episode, an experience that is different and irreducible, attaches more fluidity to the player's act of looking. In reality, like the Holocaust photos, one never knows exactly what was thought at the time, but when extended out a community can look at the images together, share an unstable space that is distanced from the trauma, and engage with the atrocity depicted. While Nitro+CHiRAL confronts the audience with traumatic images, the game also withholds visuals to force them to fill in the gaps. In Didi-Huberman's analysis, he pays close attention to the "mass of black" obscuring four Holocaust photographs and how the spectator must make sense of it; in a similar way, the player must reconcile the absence of images with Mink and Aoba's testimonies and bodies (35).

The emphasis that a singular image can never be all-encompassing representation of the past raises questions on the proper method of viewing and interpreting the fictional images' role as testimony in film and media. Why are scenes and actions deliberately

hidden from the viewer? How does the removal of the spectator complicate their performance as the voyeur and draw attention to the trauma of the characters? Can testimony be more powerful or evocative by withholding information following an assault of unsettling images? As with Didi-Huberman's analysis of the four photographs from Auschwitz, the study intends to dismantle the meaning behind the gaps left in Aoba and Mink's testimony to assemble the games' subversion of the rape fantasy in favor of a communication of trauma.

Placing the theories of Western scholars Barthes and Didi-Huberman in conversation with Japan's cultural perception of space allows for a more unified approach to research responses of traumatic images in different cultural contexts. For the purposes of the thesis, the body becomes signified as becomes an uneasy site of opening and penetration to voice the fears and threats of traumatic testimony. In his 2005 book *Atomic Light: (Shadow Optics)*, Akira Lippit writes that Japan's definition of the body was reconfigured by the atomic bombs. Lippit identifies the deaths and disease caused by the bomb's radiation as being imagined as "an excess visuality that threatened the material and conceptual dimensions of human interiority and exteriority." He proposes Japan experimented with the representation of the human body in various aesthetic and literary mediums since the radiation or visual intensity "annihilat[es] the limits that established human existence" and its light "penetrate[s] the human figure at its limit" (Lippit 4). Japan recodes the body as the punctum as its pre-World War II visual order is eradicated by the bombings. The theoretical readings of the trauma inflicted on the national body of Japan through atomic bombing can be transposed to an analysis of the rape narrative. As the atomic radiation ripped open bodies in a transformative act, Nitro+CHiRAL forces

the player to witness the exposure of the body through the violation of rape. The conflict between Aoba and Scrap and Mink and his true emotions and pain become realized in both excess of visuality and the absence of visuality. The ability to read the body as a text forms the foundation to represent *DRAMAtical Murder* and *DRAMAtical Murder: re:connect* as a reconstruction of a new understanding of male-male desire and rape outside the preconception of passionate violence.

Kawai Hayao, the first Jungian analyst in Japan, defines “the absence of a clear distinction between exterior and interior world” as representative of “the Japanese ego” (Kawai 103). According to Kawai, Japan's combination of the exterior and interior originated in the belief from the Huayan school of Buddhism that “nothing in the world exists independently of others” and the universe acts as “a tightly structured nexus of multifariously and manifoldly interrelated ontological events” (33). The line of philosophical thought experiments developed by the Huayan school asserts the ability for the interior and exterior to exist in the same space. This highly abstract concept can be made more concrete when understanding the body as having an exteriority (the physicality) and an interiority (the mental or psychological identity). The transformations of Aoba and Mink make both of these ideas visible to the player in order to better represent the sheer impact trauma and testimony places on the body.

Section 4: Methodology Conclusion

The paper is an innovative approach to rape, one that analyzes the impact of sexual violence on both the perpetrator and the victim and introduces a little-known Japanese popular cultural medium to a Western audience. The case study approach reinforces the focus of the thesis on the individual experience of rape rather than one that

is collective and gendered. In highlighting the interactive nature of dating simulation gameplay, the rape-as-love narrative path is confronted as both an encoded trope and player selection. The explicit sexual nature and commercial success of Japanese *eroge* games encourages investigation into the use of pornography as both parody and criticism of a patriarchal society and offers a socio-cultural glimpse into its history. A deconstruction of the characterization of male bodies and depiction of sexual activity broadens an inquiry into the use of the image as an instrument of communication subject to social interpretation. The centrality of male-male sexual violence within *DRAMAtical Murder* and *DRAMAtical Murder: re:connect* invites a closer examination of the use and depiction of male erotica in BL. The Analysis chapter focuses attention on the sexual body, the wounds of rape, and as Japanese literary scholar James Welker would say, “its cumulative effect in transforming images of masculinity in Japanese popular culture” (Welker and McLelland 15).

Chapter 3: Analysis

Both installments of the *DRAMAtical Murder* are protagonist-centered, in which the player assumes the space of the central character Aoba. *DRAMAtical Murder* is initially oriented around Aoba's perspective, inducing the player to feel an emotional attachment and responsibility when making decisions for their life. The choice of narrative pathways and the flexibility with romantic and sexual partner broadens the player's control over the game's sexual content, and accommodates multiple fetishes or fantasies. Nitro+CHiRAL act out the performative identity set out by Angela Carter's construct of a moral pornographer through engaging with a discourse with the player about the deeper implications in sexual fetishization of certain acts. The company's dissection of the rape narrative, a convention closely followed by *yaoi* creators, as the means to further understand the traumatic nature of sexual assault between two men places the games in a more complicated relationship with preconceptions of pornography as a genre.

The bodies of Seragaki Aoba and Mink in their pain and in their rebirth confronts the player with a more philosophical experience than expected for the type of work. In the first and second installments, sexuality is segmented into three separate concepts (expectation, testimony, and transformation) to identify rape as a process composed of distinct emotions and images. These three definitions overlap with the ritualized movements of seduction and sexual intercourse, pulling the viewer back from a comfortable viewing of sex in the games. Rather than featuring only foreplay between the two characters, the narrative piques the player's curiosity about the meaning of the actions occurring on the screen. Aoba and Mink's testimonies, during and after each

instance of rape, prevents the audience from seeking refuge as autoerotic readers and provokes a critical gaze on the acceptance of rape fantasy by the *yaoi* community and by themselves. The piercing look into Aoba and Mink's identities, beyond the terminology of perpetrator and victim or *seme* and *uke*, usurps the space of the postcoital experience with a period of reflection on the use of sexuality in the games' narrative and *yaoi* as a whole.

The fixation on the two male bodies, initially fulfilling and later subverting the erotic gaze of *yaoi*'s rape fantasy, alters the player's perception of the embodiments of trauma and sexuality, or as Carter would say, deals in "the total demystification of the flesh and the subsequence revelation...of the real relations of man and his kind" (Carter 19). Borrowing a phrase from Susan Napier's analysis of Japanese pornography, Aoba and Mink's visceral responses to each act of rape represent a "frenzy of metamorphosis" occurring throughout their bodies and minds (Napier 75). Nitro+CHiRAL presents a jarring shift away from the traditional understanding of the body in pornography as a site of sexual arousal and fantasy separate from real-world equivalents by interweaving a commentary on rape and the body "not only in terms of sexuality but also in relation to aesthetics, gender, and social identity" (64). The development of Aoba and Mink as complete characters outside the desire or expression of sexuality pushes the player to recognize the problematic nature of romanticizing and eroticizing sexual violence.

The detailed backgrounds and storylines involving Aoba and Mink exemplify Napier's formula of Japanese pornography as integrating "a hardcore sexual framework" within a "dense narrative that [is] usually related to the fantastic, the occult, or science fiction" (64). While Nitro+CHiRAL adheres to the basic tenants expected in

pornography, the gaming company does not allow a player familiar with *yaoi* to fully enter into a fantasy where a rape between a *seme* and a *uke* is privileged as an erotic and romantic experience. Rather, the two games perform the movement in which BL writers and artists imagine male-male desire in their own individual lens by replacing the archetypal dominant and submissive of *yaoi* with fully realized characters and voices. The images of Aoba and Mink shake the acceptance of the male body in pain or vulnerable positions as inherently erotic and acceptable through the recognition of the characters' shame and guilt, which is normally concealed in *yaoi*. By occupying a liminal space between reality and fantasy, the player can recognize the allusions and subversions of *yaoi* motifs and the outward movements to consider trauma and testimony in order to interrogate the necessity of configure rape as an act of romance and passion.

Before analyzing the three distinct forms of sexuality explored in the series, it is vital to deconstruct the artwork representing Aoba and Mink throughout the narrative to not only familiarize a reader unfamiliar with the artistic stylizations, but also pinpoint the visual cues that shape player response. DRAMAtical Murder's illustrator—Onitsuka Seiji, who professionally publishes under the name Honyarara—intentionally gives significance to each aspect of Aoba and Mink with consideration of their roles in the rape narrative. Onitsuka only created the artwork for the first game, but her influence on the characters' designs can be seen in the direct sequel. The evolutions in the two men's physical appearance are fixed on outbursts of transformation or metamorphosis. Reflecting Japan's growing acceptance of "gay and androgynous masculinity" and recognition of fluidity in gender and sexuality identity, Aoba and Mink exemplify the increasing representation and discussion on masculine performance and anxiety (Napier

121). These two characters could only exist in this particular moment in Japanese history, where gender and sexuality can be openly questioned and explored through the form of fiction.

Section 1: Visual Analysis of Aoba

The dialogue and narration of Aoba's perceived femininity resonates with the player's expectations for the *bishōnen* (beautiful boy) archetype, which exhibits androgynous or feminine characteristics to toy with the boundaries of sexual orientation and gender. Drawn with "beautiful faces similar to the girl characters in *shōjo* [young girl] manga," the *bishōnen* represents a turn in aesthetics away from the compulsory heteronormativity brought over from the West (Kazumi 197). Onitsuka recognizes the potential for individual expression in the *bishōnen* model by attaching unique markers to Aoba's body specific to the games' narrative and setting (figure 1). Aoba's hair, with each strand containing bundles of delicate nerves, abstracts his body as an exposed wound constantly pushing the boundaries. The representation of Aoba's unnatural birth and his attempt to suppress Scrap are placed at odds with his trademark white and blue Brain Nuts jacket and oversized, pink headphones that mask him with a youthful and innocent appearance reminiscent of a typical protagonist in a *yaoi* narrative.



Figure 1: Aoba's body, image from Headroom, *DRAMAtical Murder Re:connect Official Visual Fan Book*. Tokyo: Ohzora, 2015. 24. Print. Cool-B Collection.

Despite being older than a majority of *yaoi's uke* characters, Aoba's choice of a playful sense of fashion as indicated by the repetitions of bright colors carry assumptions of a childlike naivety into the player's first impression of the character. This superficial analysis of Aoba's clothing contrasts with his name's literal translation as "blue leaves" in Japanese. According to color theory, the cooler shades of blue attached to him, as enforced by the color of his hair and the leaves on the kimono of his childhood friend Koujaku, directs the player to expect a calm or passive character. Onitsuka consciously fulfills the player's desire for an *uke* character and drives the speculation of the romantic interests and future sexual encounters, serving to make the later overturning of erotic fantasy into the territory of realism and testimony even more unsettling and unexpected.

The visual transformation of Aoba's identity into that of his split personality Scrap derives from the established tropes of the female body in Japanese pornography. Scrap's intrusion and control over erotic scenarios and the powers of his voice enact Napier's

overview of Japan eroticizing the female as "being in touch with intense, even magical forces capable of over-whelming male-dominated reality." The metamorphosis of the female body as an act of eroticism expanding outside the "simple fantasies of male dominance and female submission" provides the backbone for Onitsuka's approach to drawing Aoba and Scrap " (Napier 71). The attention to the female body is not exclusive to pornographic texts and exists in literature and images from high culture and folklore. The images of Aoba immediately after birth tap into the dangerous sexuality passed down in Japanese folklore and pornographic tales. The shot of Aoba wearing blood-soaked Shinto robes as the sign of his complete possession by Scrap invokes cultural and social connotations primarily meant for a Japanese player. With consideration to the intertwining of such deeply rooted power within Aoba, Onitsuka limits the player's access to images of Aoba's birth and Scrap to control the misrecognition and confusion on the character's true identity. The player can only encounter certain visuals and pieces of dialogue during certain narrative routes; the shots of Aoba and Scrap's unnatural white bodies are not shown during Mink's storylines for instance. By leading the player to categorize Aoba as the *uke* or the submissive early in the game, the later intrusion of Scrap and Aoba's past and powers dissolves the assumed power dynamic from *yaoi* to represent individual characters rather than archetypes.

In her representation of Scrap, Onitsuka invokes the connotations of the gothic and the occult as the female space or identity passed down in Japanese traditions and literature. The player's view of Scrap as the naked body of Aoba suspended in complete darkness deep inside Aoba's consciousness elicits the same suspense or fear as the demonic woman in Japanese folklore and pornography. Adhering to the cultural

resonance of dangerous sexuality with "dark interior spaces and fluid, engulfing entities," the positioning of Scrap as repressed into the depths of Aoba's mind addresses the player as a voyeur of a deeply erotic scene (Napier68). Scrap's nudity perverts the passivity and vulnerability in *Taisho* and early *Showa* era artist Kashō Takabatake's iconic illustrations of nude boys and young men by asserting the body as the vehicle to express the sexual urge to be destroyed and to destroy the partner. Onitsuka pictures Scrap with his arms outstretched towards the viewer in a nonverbal threat that he could trespass into the exteriority of reality by overtaking Aoba's physical body. Scrap's exposed muscles combined with his menacing facial expression pushes back against the player rather than Kashō's invitation for the viewer to actively rescue the nude man.

By vocalizing Scrap through a digital distortion that darkens and deepens Aoba's voice, the games not only encourage the player to identify the two figures as completely separate, but also to imagine a constant competition for control between the two consciousnesses. The player is only allowed access to image of Scrap during Aoba's frequent headaches. When representing Aoba's headaches, the player assumes the character's point of view and blood vessels and red marks on the sides of the screen simulate the panic and pain marked with Scrap's appearance. Accompanied by a loud heartbeat, the single shots blur the interior personality with Aoba's body and pivot the player's actions in the game's world while in control of Aoba as transgressive. In the same way that supernatural transformations use "women's frightening potential to change" as a platform to address women's growing financial and social independence in 1980s and 1990s Japan, the struggle between Aoba and Scrap taps into an anxiety on male-male sexuality in *yaoi* and BL (Napier 76). The range of meanings and visuals in

the representations of Aoba's complete identity replace the static images of the male body to introduce a more dynamic vision that comments on the changes in contemporary Japan. Aoba's physical transformation into Scrap figures prominently in the analysis of the second rape sequence in the hotel and the bad ending.

Section 2: Visual Analysis of Mink

Mink's initial appearance embodies the hypermasculinity of the demon archetype while his later character development is rooted in the cultural construct of the honorable samurai. During her research on Japanese pornography, Napier categorizes the male characters as either "humorously childlike" or "grotesquely demonic." Introduced as the "giant man," (Aarinfantasy, *DRAMAtical*) Mink's body matches Napier's description of the demonic body as "preternaturally huge, covered with rippling muscles, and inevitably equipped with an enormous penis" (79). Onitsuka depicts Mink's body (figure 2) to overturn the *bishōnen* aesthetic and invoke images of physical strength and dominance to the player, establishing an expectation for the character to fulfill the role of *theseme*. Mink fits into the aesthetic traditions of the "nonhuman" body of the Other, which is always "demonic, made of steel, [and] bulging with tentacles" in the constant pursuit of sexual satisfaction. Even though Mink is clearly portrayed as human and lacks the nonhuman markers of the "demonic phalluses or phalluslike tentacles," Onitsuka initially depicts the characters as capable of the same dangerous or destructive sexuality (Napier 79). Similar to the player's initial inability to access images of Scrap and Aoba's consciousness, the first half of the game only allows a gaze of Mink's exterior without any chance to pierce through and acquire an interior gaze of his mind or personality.



Figure 2: Mink's body, author's screenshot from Nitro+CHiRAL's *DRAMAtical Murder*, 2012. PC.

Onitsuka covers Mink's body with items that actively disturb or reject a prolonged gaze from the player and the in-game characters. Mink's military style coat and combat boots, whose soles Aoba abstracts into claws, cover his body and deflect the gaze of his exposed body. The only part of Mink's body left exposed, his muscular right arm, is meant to intimidate the viewer with an overt display of strength and implicit threat of violence. By retaining the shackles around his wrists and a large lock around his neck from imprisonment, Mink flaunts his identity as an escaped prisoner to instill respect and authority from his gang and arouse fear in others. Mink breaks free of his physical imprisonment while remaining mentally fettered and bound to his past. Unable to reach his ideal for liberation until exacting vengeance for the genocide of his people, he preserves the manacles around his neck and arms as a metaphoric encumbrance for the weight that the obligation to his people hold over him.

Mink embodies a constant struggle between powerlessness and empowerment. He visibly presents a mask of strength and masculinity while emotionally shrinking away from feelings of emasculation for being unable to protect his people. Retribution becomes the driving mechanism of the narrative pathway and forces behind Mink's sexual predation. Nitro+CHiRAL's choice to represent Mink with a baritone voice without any inflections of emotion or empathy implies the character's conscious rejection of his emotions and identity beyond the role of the leader, or as Napier would phrase it, the "demon." An audience familiar with *yaoi*, BL, or even Japanese pornography in general would identify Mink with other *seme* or aggressor characters from past narratives and recognize him as the most sexually perverse option out of all the eligible characters. Through misleading the player into restricting Mink into their expectations of the hypermasculine body, Nitro+CHiRAL contrasts the character's initial appearance with the emergence of his later testimony and trauma. The dynamic development of Mink from the grotesque demon to a more sympathetic figure provides a model for players to reflect on their understanding of archetypes.

Mink's cultural identity as a Native American and responsibility to his tribe humanizes him to the player rather than degrading him as the "savage" Other. The alignment of a Native American male character with the violent identities of a rapist and a *seme* uncomfortably rubs against the heavy racial and cultural stereotypes, but Nitro+CHiRAL uses Aoba and the player's recognition and exploration of Mink's heritage as a growing experience rather than an act of shame or pity. Even in the first half of the game, details in Mink's clothing and accessories imply the character's dislocation from his culture to the player. Overlooked by a first-time player, these references accrue

more meaning upon playing the game a second time in order to perceive the progression of Mink's trauma and testimony as a coherent and aesthetic movement running throughout the narrative. The beads and pink feather braided into Mink's dreadlocks motion towards a stock characterization of the Native American, but the fact he created both objects with his tribe's practices presents him as an individual rather than an abstract representation of his entire culture. From seeing Mink's darker skin complexion, the player recognizes he belongs to a distinct ethnic category than the predominantly Japanese characters. The choice to represent his AllMate (a word for the robotic partners in the games' futuristic context) as a cockatoo, an animal not native to Japan and by extension the game's pseudo-Japanese setting, further clarifies Mink as uprooted from his community.

These early indications of Mink's personality behind the hypermasculine performance expose his longing to avenge his people and achieve a sense of closure. Mink's cultural obligation to his people at the expense of his own morality or individual identity parallels him with what Japanese literary scholar Jim Reichert calls "the cult of hard (*kō*) masculinity." Personified by the mythic image of the samurai, Reichert's phrase *kō* masculinity refers to the choice to embrace a "stern moral code and for[sake] material pleasure and sensuous experience" for the benefit of the collective (Reichert 3). Mink does not perfectly embody the samurai, but the recognizable structure of honor and responsibility fuels his actions in the later rape sequences to support such a comparison. The characterization of Mink as a Japanese warrior is reflected in his attire, attitude, and demeanor. The internal ethical dilemma he faces is relayed externally by the conceptual weight of the talismans he wears.

Onitsuka and the artwork from the sequel visually define Mink's ability to reconcile his past trauma with progression into the future through reimagining his body. The removal of the heavy clothing and chains reflect Mink's internalization of Aoba's reminder he was still alive in the present and had a future and was not massacred along with his people in the past. The change in the representation of Mink's body symbolizes the reconstruction of his mental image of himself in connection to his tribe and Aoba. He replaces his military-inspired clothing to adopt a look more reflective of his origins in an unidentified part of the American West. The image of Mink wearing cowboy boots and a ranch-style jacket and shirt represents his forward motion beyond his past identities as a survivor, a prisoner, and a rapist. The replacement of the shackles with jewelry, charms, and feathers, crafted by Mink in the same traditions passed down from his tribe, externalizes his momentum in preserving his cultural heritage while reconstructing a new identity for himself. This visual transformation complicates a straightforward identification of Mink's story as that of the perpetrator by expanding the gaze outside of fully developing his character and voice beyond that one-word identification.

Section 3: Sexuality as Expectation

In the first instances involving rape, Nitro+CHiRAL fulfills the player's expectation for the *DRAMAtical Murder* series to be pure erotic fantasy by permitting an autoerotic gaze of the characters. Through her images of the attempted gang rape and the sexual intercourse at the nightclub, DRAMAtical Murder's illustrator Onitsuka Seiji preserves the separation between fantasy and reality. The sequences encourage the player to revel in the erotic potential of the acts without consideration to its real world counterparts. A player experiencing the game for the first time would view its storylines

and characters as safe spaces to explore and act out various forms of sexuality, making the later subversions of rape as an acceptable expression of desire more impactful and unsettling. The player approaches the games with a fixed idea of either *yaoi* or the larger genre of *hentai*, or as Carter phrases it, encounters the text with the belief that "the function in a pornographic narrative is always the same" (Carter 12). Their engagement with the games' characters is initially rooted in the assumption that plot in pornography or erotica exists solely to "provid[e] as many opportunities for the sexual act to take place" and elicit sexual arousal from the viewer (12-13). The framework of a conventional pornographic or erotic work does not leave room for "tension or the unexpected" as a reader physically picks up or watches it in order to achieve sexual stimulation and fulfillment without the intrusion of deeper, more critical thoughts (13). Aoba occupies the same space of female characters in media by serving as the "erotic [object] for the characters within the screen story" and "for the spectator within the auditorium" or behind the computer screen. The images of Aoba's vulnerable and undressed body assume a "strong visual and erotic impact" or "to-be-looked-at-ness" by halting the narrative to transfix the player's attention on a pornographic punctum (Mulvey 236).

Game developer Nitro+CHiRAL demonstrates an awareness of the player's intention when purchasing and first playing a BL game by providing a false sense of security to the act of witnessing extreme sexual violence. The imagery of Aoba being overpowered and violated by Mink's gang members and later Mink himself aligns with Japan's cultural and aesthetic attitudes towards male-male sexuality. Aoba adopts the same role as the "young men liminalized by their confrontation with a threat to life and limb" featured throughout Kashō Takabatake's artwork of the male body by also being

signified as a site for sexual desire (Hartley 27). The two scenes of the attempted gang rape and sexual intercourse at a nightclub fulfill the reader's expectation for explicit foreplay and intercourse. The two sequences rely on the player's desire to view sexuality for his own pleasure. The close positioning of the camera to Aoba's body presents the tools for the player to be a participant, by "watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other" (Mulvey 234).

The attempted gang rape occurs before the player chooses a specific partner and his respective narrative path. The introduction of Mink in a scene of graphic sexual violence sets up the expectation for his route to contain violent and nonconsensual sexual fantasy. The player is left to watch Aoba being kidnapped from his home by Mink's gang while being Mink's face is covered in shadows. Onitsuka pays close attention with allowing the player to immerse himself in the scene at select moments, while keeping them distanced during others. The attempted gang rape is coded as a traumatic, criminal act prior to the act itself. Even with the set-up of Aoba's kidnapping from the safety of his home, the player can grapple to a separation between the *yaoi*/BL fantasy and the scene's real-world connotations. The scenes play with a performative concept developed by Japanese literary scholar Rio Otomo known as the "autoerotic reader." Otomo creates this title for the reader to not only acknowledge the physical act of reading and the body's reaction to the text, but also to ground it in a distinctly pornographic context. Through the use of first-person pronouns, Otomo images the reader of pornography as actively engaged in the "expression of [their] personal sexual fantasy" taking place in "[their] own private space" (Otomo 144). The games provide materials for the player to shelter themselves in a space of fetish or desire, in particular those invested in bondage,

domination, sadism, and masochism (BDSM). The clear division between the fictional world of the *DRAMAtical Murder* series and the player's role as the "auto-erotic reader" elicits a level of comfort despite the violence shown on the screen. Through Aoba's perspective, the player first sees Mink's entire body via a slow pan up from the floor. The position of Aoba and the pulling of the camera upward instills the roles of Mink as the dominant and Aoba as the submissive. The restriction to Aoba's upward gaze of Mink places the emphasis on Mink's muscular body shrouded by chains. The restriction of Mink's voice to relaying threats to Aoba and demands to his gang builds suspense for his upcoming treatment of Aoba, and associates him with the hypermasculine aggressor. The glimpse of Mink's base of operations in a derelict warehouse surrounds the characters with visible signs of deviance and decay, reminiscent of the equation of male-male sexuality as "dangerous."

The sequence occurs in "[t]he hopeless Old Resident District," where its affiliations with gangs are made readily apparent through the crumbling squalor of the environment. The player is encouraged to engage with and exoticize the dangerous repercussions of poverty—inequity, violence, and despair—which result in the objectification of the marginalized and powerless, specifically Aoba. Their emotional response is targeted through sound and image editing, selecting spatial and temporal features to not only frame the scene of the sexual assault but locate it as a site of voyeuristic pleasure. "[A]ny given silence," observes Susan Sontag, "has its identity as a stretch of time being perforated by sound" (Sontag, "Aesthetics" 187). Here, the spatial and temporal shift is marked by the non-diegetic sound of slowly dipping water heard as Aoba sluggishly opens his eyes, bringing the room

into focus. Water reflects not only the passage of time but the change of Aoba's circumstances and contributes to feelings of anxiety and anticipation in both the character and gamer. The steady dull plop of water into a puddle on the concrete floor is an associational insert specifically chosen for its emotive impact in game culture. According to Ken S. McAllister, game developers rely on sound as "[c]onditionally functioning rhetoric," an aural trope "drawn from culture, embedded in artifacts that culture supports, and re-presented back to the culture that then reconsumes them" (McAllister 88). The destructive properties of this element are heightened by the introduction of the background image—a dilapidated room containing a couch, bed, refuse, and debris. Water-logged asbestos ceiling tiles have fallen onto a moldy rug, a flaking iron bedframe hosts a sodden and stained mattress, and corroded pitted industrial barrels are strategically placed in front of the only visible exit.

Nitro+CHiRAL orchestrates sound with image to provide the viewer with cultural touchstones associated with Godzilla and the Second World War, industrial pollution and the vulnerable body, before the scene unfolds. The selection of images is deliberate and instrumental to player stimulation, engagement, and immersion. Aoba centers his line of sight on the closed, handleless metal door and delimits the bed, offering the player a keyhole view of the room. A small portion of the bed remains in the frame. By obscuring its view, Onitsuka Seiji transmits the character's fear to the player and transforms the soiled mattress into an object of interest. Film Scholar Aga Skrodzka reads the mattress through Roland Barthe's notion of the punctum, seeing it as a "source of discursive violence" that interrupts the narration

of the image (Skrodzka 246). It is simultaneously traumatizing and titillating, eliciting an anticipation of both pain and pleasure.

In the sequence of the attempted gang rape, the game invites the player to act as voyeur and participant. The player is allowed to project themselves safely into the scene as the autoerotic reader in order to interpret the upcoming actions as pure erotic spectacle. Nitro+CHiRAL removes the player from Aoba's perspective to prevent the sexual violence from being directed at the camera. The positioning of the player in direct confrontation with danger rather than vicariously through Aoba would deconstruct the erotic capability of the scene. The movement of the camera to an unobstructed view of the scene simulates Mink's oversight of the action, and etches a comfortable place for the autoerotic player to experience a sensation of scopophilia. Anthropologist Anne Allison defines scopophilia as a common trope in Japanese pornography projecting the reader as "masterful viewers but passive and consuming actors" (Allison 32-33). The player's embodiment as either Mink or one of the gang members exemplifies Napier's argument that Japanese pornography "emphasize[s] voyeurism as much as intercourse" (Napier 77). Aoba's anxiety contrasted against Mink's calm observation of his assault introduces the fear that Mink views rape as "an attraction of sorts" (Aarinfantasy, DRAMAtical). This line authorizes the player's intake of the violation of Aoba's body as a spectacle for his own erotic impulses rather than witnessing it as the scene of a trauma. Falling in line with the *seme*'s control over the *uke*, the detachment of the player into the construct of the voyeur or the participant connects the interpretation of Aoba's body as solely an object of pleasure for consumption.

The abstraction of the gang members into generic facial features and highly developed bodies provides yet another space for an autoerotic player to inhabit in their perception of the scene as erotic fantasy. The gang members inscribe Aoba with qualities normally associated with femininity, with one saying “Even if he’s a guy, I don’t really give a shit” and another responding “But this guy, he has fair skin and long hair too. Don’t he look like a chick anyway?” (Aarinfantasy, *DRAMAtical*). This call and response fetishizes Aoba’s body as a female space, traditionally regarded as more susceptible to sexual violence in rape narratives, and makes him vulnerable to outside interpretation and misuse from the game’s characters and the player. The animation of Aoba’s body, from his gagging to the exposure of his lower body, pulls the scene deeper into the territory of spectacle. The soundtrack’s throbbing and sharp electronic beats and distorted melodies builds feelings of anxiety and expectation in the player for the penetration and intercourse. The instrumental capitalizes on the potential reading of gang rape as sexual fantasy by completing the erotic imagination of such a violation.

The first-time player is the intended audience for Nitro+CHiRAL’s construction of sexuality as expectation, as a more experienced one would perceive the game’s subtle dissection of the rape as traumatic rather than erotic. By ending the scenario before penetration, Nitro+CHiRAL permits the player to occupy the bodies of Aoba or a gang member, or act as voyeur to act out dominance or submission and imagine the rest of the scene without guilt or fear. The emphasis on the game’s visuals allows the autoerotic, first-time player to be engrossed by the images of Aoba’s vulnerable body or the gang members’ control over him. The experienced player, however, would read the dialogue and understand the access into Aoba’s thoughts and pain initiates the character

development for Mink's route. Aoba's feelings of "disgust cour[sing] through [his] entire body" and threatening to drive him into insanity soils the autoerotic reader's projection into the rape as fantasy, but informs an experienced player's understanding of Mink's route as a whole (Aarinfantasy, *DRAMAtical*). His revulsion at the scene contradicts the consumption of rape for sexual arousal, and marks the origin of the character's self-hatred and shame as expressed to the player. The gaze of Aoba's exterior body and interior thoughts unnerves the recognition of the space as purely fantasy or eroticism. Aoba's stream of consciousness calls into question the ethics of expecting the erotic from images of others in pain. The desperation in Aoba's pleas for Mink to end the rape and confusion on why he was chosen to be violated breaks down the fourth wall to address the player's intentions when watching the sequence and experiencing the game as a whole. The theatricalization of sexual assault as a spectacle and the consumption of violence as entertainment function to facilitate the effacement of rape victims as gendered, sexualized beings. The choreographed enactment of male rape in this digital subgenre is rooted in the historical legacy of women's manga as an activist medium of parody, where male bodies act as reflexive substitutes for the female form. As a traditional and recognizable format to critique and counter hegemonic patriarchal attitudes, manga, anime, and digital media can be appropriated to examine the erasure of male-male rape from dominant patriarchal discourses and a cultural construction of a gendered rape victim.

The ending of the attempted gang rape foretells the transformative capabilities of Aoba's body separating him from the archetypes of the powerless *uke* or the passive *bishōnen*. Scrap's claiming of Aoba's body back from the control of Mink and his gang

taps into the supernatural and transgressive powers Napier classifies with the dangerous female body in Japanese pornography. Scrap disrupts the gang rape by commanding the men to disappear. The disruption of the images of Aoba's body with a black screen restricts the player's ability to witness and interact with Scrap beyond the medium of sound. This distance builds tension and mystery in their understanding of the split personality, as he is not provided the comfort of a clear answer or gaze on Aoba's transformation into Scrap. Scrap takes back the power dynamic by reversing the gaze back on to the player. The word "disappear" is repeatedly vocalized quietly until Scrap expresses it with a tone of finality to push the player out of the fantasy world previously constructed and upheld by Onitsuka's artwork. Nitro+CHiRAL's decision to confine this moment to a few seconds leaves the player with questions and an expectation to understand and learn about Aoba's body outside the context of sexual intercourse.

Mink's representation in the scene following the attempted gang rape allows him to act beyond the expectations dictated by the motif of the demonic or nonhuman male body in Japanese pornography. Through Aoba's blurred vision and scattered narration, the player witnesses Mink standing over a light and speaking to himself. The lack of a visual denies the player access into this moment of Mink's vulnerability or humanity and leaves his actions ambiguous. Only through knowledge of Mink's cultural background and spiritual beliefs would the player connect this moment as a solitary and introspective act of prayer. The narrative later explores how Mink relies on prayer to reconcile his violent behavior to his obligation to avenge his people's massacre and temporarily commune with his ancestors. The recognition of Mink expressing emotions outside the spectrum of sexual arousal or perversion challenges the expectation for fantasy purely

defined by eroticism. The reoccurring references to Mink praying throughout the game resists the inclination to define him solely as a rapist or an instigator of sexual violence. The indications of the transformations in Aoba and Mink's bodies and identities beyond player expectation opens the space for a more complete testimony on experiences of rape and trauma. However, the lack of clear visuals and focus on these moments permit the player's continued reading of Mink and Aoba to the *seme* and the *uke* until their decision to pursue Mink's narrative route.

The game extends the definition of sexuality as expectation and authorizes an autoerotic reading even after the split in narrative paths partially through the erotic implications of the setting. During each individual narrative route, Aoba and the chosen partner separate from the rest of the characters and are located into a district of Platinum Jail that best personifies the character's personality and sexual kink. Nitro+CHiRAL situates Aoba's relationship with Mink in Night Valley, a district frequented by "people with an adult-like mindset" and closely associated with perverse activity and drugs (Aarinfantasy, *DRAMAtical*). Onitsuka's representation of the area as an industrial underworld with the primary color palette being restricted to gray and black further connects Mink's sexuality with his persona as the criminal or demon. Nitro+CHiRAL and Onitsuka portray Night Valley as disconnected from the player's reality in order to appeal to an autoerotic reading. The generic settings of warehouses and nightclubs align the game with "the kitsch area of timeless, placeless fantasy," allowing the game to inhabit a "quality of existential solitude," so the player approaches the world as divorced from those in reality or real literature and real art (Carter 19). Aoba's commentary on the

otherworldly and futuristic nature of Platinum Jail and Night Valley addresses the player's dislocation into fantasy.

By staging Mink's first direct act of rape on Aoba in a nightclub, Nitro+CHiRAL showcases the environment's interaction and transformation of the two men's bodies as performers of an erotic spectacle solely for the player's enjoyment. The game introduces the nightclub as infamous for its use of strobe lights simulating the euphoria and other side effects of drugs. Aoba's low tolerance for the lights parallels his body with the vulnerability imagined in the *uke* archetype, and more importantly, pulls his repressed personality and emotions to the foreground. Mink's resistance to the drug supports the reading of his high physical and mental strength, two traits idealized in the *seme* archetype. The player initially assumes Aoba's perspective to witness the intensity of Mink's gaze on his weakened body and mind. Aoba narrates his paranoia that Mink's gaze was reaching into his body by "send[ing] shivers down [his] spine" and "pierc[ing] [him] like needles" to further articulate the rise of Aoba's interiority to the surface (Aarinfantasy, *DRAMAtical*). The framing of Mink's eyes in the style of a film negative visualizes a reversal of interior and exterior spaces on the body. Aoba's repetition of the word "deeper" in increasing panic signifies Mink and the player's look inside his body without his consent (Aarinfantasy, *DRAMAtical*). The brief interaction, which only spans the course of several seconds, immerses the environment of the nightclub with the connotations of voyeurism and exhibitions of power. The flashes of Scrap accompanied by the diegetic sounds of Aoba's heartbeat solidify the force in which the setting is defiling Aoba's body and identity. The trespassing of Scrap's physical presence and voice into the gaze between Aoba and Mink complicates the power dynamic beyond a

traditional showdown between the *seme* and the *uke* and the simplicity of the sexually driven couple in traditional pornography.

The rape in the nightclub perverts the borderlines between consent and violation and pleasure and pain to adapt the dialogue and interactions leading into the act with the same structure of foreplay. The game heightens the player's anticipation and desire for an explicit sex scene primarily through the inclusion of Scrap. Mink does rape Aoba in the scene, but he brings Aoba to the club to test the effects of the drugs on his powers rather than engineering a scenario to enact his sexual intentions. Instead, the sexual tension is initiated by Scrap while controlling Aoba's body. The explicit representation of Scrap's seduction of Mink shatters the power dynamic imagined with the *seme* overpowering and demanding intercourse with the *uke*. The image of Scrap embracing Mink and pulling him close to his chest during the dialogue during Scrap's pleas for masochistic and sadomasochistic acts of sexuality serves as a continuation and deconstruction of *yaoi*'s reliance on destructive language and traumatic imagery to stage male-male sexual intercourse. Mink's initial resistance to Scrap's demands as shown in his attempt to drag Aoba's body towards the exit resists the expectation for the demonic or nonhuman character to be the one in constant pursuit of intercourse.

Despite the discomfort in watching Scrap's possession of Aoba and excitement for sexual violence, the game orchestrates the scene on the dance floor of the nightclub to preserve an autoerotic reading. Borrowing from pornography's rendition of foreplay, Nitro+CHiRAL places Scrap and Mink in a recognizable location existing outside the time and space of the player. The lights and music acts as intrusion on the two men's bodies so the player can have a clear view of them. The following words spoken by

Scrap, which is used in the title of the thesis and separated as a block quote for emphasis, represents the culmination of his desire to be violated in a more physical and violent manner experienced through the club's atmosphere in his sexual proposition to Mink. Scrap's request carries key ideas locating sexuality as transformation through mutual destruction: "Destroy me. I want you to wreck me. In pieces, recklessly, sloppily" (Aarinfantasy, Nitro+CHiRAL). Scrap's interpretation of sexuality as accomplished through the breakdown of the self and the rupture of walls between the id, ego, and super-ego both follows and upsets a reader's expectation for pornographic narrative to be driven by a constant flow of sexual intercourse. Onitsuka does not represent Aoba's possession by Scrap on the visible surface of his body, opting for the alterations in voice and behavior as the sole means to signify the change in personality. Due to this, an autoerotic reader can configure Scrap's statement to his own personal sexual preference or curiosity for the rape fantasy or violent sexuality.

For the autoerotic reader, Scrap's desire to be destroyed does not accrue any meaning in terms of critiquing or reflecting the interweaving of sex and death outside of the space of erotic fantasy and with consideration of reality. Alternatively, the development of Aoba and Mink as nuanced characters participating in a larger narrative that runs outside of a flimsy excuse to string together as many sexual encounters as possible pushes against the frame of the erotic fantasy. A conventional *yaoi* text diminishes story and character development as tools to identify a *seme* and *uke* and engages them in intercourse in as many various situations approved by the writers and illustrator. The flirtation between Scrap and Mink removes the archetypes and expected narrative structure to raise questions on the purpose for the two men having sex in the

nightclub and its contributions to their individual progressions of identity. Mink's initial refusal and confusion on Scrap's intentions would not occur in *yaoi* as it slows the movement into intercourse. The small pieces of dialogue, which are easily overlooked by a first-time player, suggest a subtle jab to the player to recognize the sexual sequences as serving a greater purpose than as a space for autoerotic enjoyment. Scrap's version of foreplay leaves room for the autoerotic and critical reader to either define sexuality as expectation or subversion. This safety net of ambiguity disappears in the later depictions of rape.

Onitsuka's artwork of Scrap and Mink having sex arouses the erotic gaze on vulnerable or abused male body as idealized by the past community of *yaoi* creators and consumers. The representation of their sexual intercourse invites an autoerotic player to participate as voyeur. While the dialogue and images emphasize the sexuality as violent and painful to Aoba, the player's association of male-male sexuality to a power struggle or awareness of the rape fantasy arms the sequence as an erotic spectacle tailored specifically for the viewer's satisfaction. Onitsuka sets the sexual encounter in a hallway plastered with flyers resembling "scales from a monster" to located the violence into the realm of fantasy (*Aarinfantasy, DRAMAtical*). Sharpened by the erotic appeal commonly attached to public displays of sexuality, Onitsuka shows Aoba and Mink's bodies on a single screen to allow full access to both their bodies and the act of penetration. The explicit dialogue and descriptions of oral and anal intercourse along with the images of Mink and Aoba's genitalia and Mink's penetration of Aoba's body allows the player to occupy the role of either man or watch as a passive participant. The confirmation of Mink as playing the dominant role in both oral and anal sex and Aoba's body as craving sexual

attention and satisfaction fits into the player's expectation for the inclusion of the *seme* and *uke* dynamic and conflation of rape and violent sex with passion and love. Scrap and Mink's excitement, as vocalized through their moans and groans, authorizes the player to achieve a similar response without feelings of shame or guilt.

Attention to the dialogue and diegetic soundtrack complicates the player's erotic imagination of the sequence and entry point through either the characters or voyeuristic gaze by emphasizing intercourse as an act of violation. The instrumental soundtrack, first heard in the attempted gang rape, returns to reinstate a disconcerting atmosphere over the player's fetishization of the two men. Aoba's panic at feeling "the low bass chopping [his] body apart with [its] unstable melody" reconfigures the erotic appeal of watching the penetration and subsequent intercourse into witnessing an act of sexual abuse. His feeling that "both [his] mind and [his] body...are being raped" includes the word rape to shift the punctum away from the genitalia to Aoba's pain and the fact the player's previous choices are forcing him into a compromising (*Aarinfantasy*, *DRAMAtical*). Aoba's stream of consciousness pressures the player into a state of guilt for choosing to follow Mink's narrative path despite the warning signs in the form of the attempted gang rape and deriving pleasure from images of others in pain. The language used to describe Mink forcing himself into Aoba "without any protection" and pounding him mercilessly scripts the interaction as a battle instead of a demonstration of consensual and pleasurable sexuality (*Aarinfantasy*, *DRAMAtical*). The autoerotic reader can easily overlook these excerpts of dialogue to stay true to their expectations for sexuality, but Nitro+CHiRAL eliminates this space for a quick and comfortable retreat into a safe and consumable piece of eroticism.

Following the nightclub scene, the game provides the player access to Aoba's recovery and self-reflection in order to represent a more complete narrative on rape. Aoba's flashbacks to the rape, portrayed as a succession of fragmented images, forces the player to relive the moments through the character's point of view. While *yaoi* genre immediately reconfigures rape as the beginning of a romantic and sexual relationship between the *seme* and *uke*, the intimacy between the player and Aoba's inner voice and thoughts introduces the concept of testimony. The past become verbally impossible for Aoba and Mink to articulate and they cannot render their emotions into words for the audience. The player understands the rape as leaving a weight on their perceived sense of identity. Aoba's emotional turmoil articulated as "a wave of regret and self-hatred" expands beyond the individual character to tap into the player's epiphany that Mink's narrative route and sexuality are based in a fixation on the traumatic rather than a release into the erotic (Aarinfantasy, *DRAMAtical*). The collapsing of the player with Aoba challenges the desire for erotic pleasure with an invitation to critically and deeply engage in both the perpetrator and victim's or the *seme* and *uke*'s voices and bodies in their rape narrative. Through shifting the punctum from images of naked bodies and penetration to the men's dialogue and thoughts, the player enters into a strand of discussion on rape that sets the stage for the two more overtly traumatic and subversive representations of sexuality.

Section 4: Sexuality as Testimony

Through the two rape sequences at the hotel, the game redefines sexuality as a physical manifestation of testimony, and casts the player as the witness and participant in each act. The player's gaze into Aoba's fragmented memories through the trauma

inflicted on their bodies represents Sigmund Freud's expansion of the word trauma from its original Greek origins as a bodily injury (Caruth 3). The acts of rape bind Mink and Aoba's testimony irrevocably together to draw the player's attention to their respective traumas. Borrowing a phrase from Cathy Caruth's analysis of the film *Hiroshima mon amour*, Aoba and Mink perform "the story of two people bonded in and around their respective catastrophic experiences" and sexual violence becomes the method of representation and change (4-5). The player is denied the "decided air of homoeroticism" associated with the violated male body as the game strips back the autoerotic gaze on the men by expressing their interior trauma on their exterior surface (Hartley 25). The game uses the player's discomfort to motion to a reparative reading of the rape fantasy as one grounded in reality.

The player occupies two distinct gazes in the two following sequences of rape: one in which images are suppressed and another in which the images are magnified to a state of hyperawareness. These two contrasting stances change the player's identification as witness and uproot the safety associated with watching erotic fantasy. The placement of the gaze is reminiscent of the interactive nature in Yoko Ono's performative art piece *Cut Piece*. During her performance, Ono invites members of the audience to cut away her clothing from her body. Ono forces the viewer out of a passive voyeuristic position to challenge the neutrality of the gaze on the body, and raise the idea that "viewing without responsibility has the potential to harm or even destroy the object of perception" ("Yoko Ono"). The *DRAMAtical Murder* series enacts the same slippage between reality and art and passivity and responsibility present in Ono's performance. By making the narrative route involving rape a choice, the game pulls the player on to the stage to implicate them

in the acts represented through the images and dialogue. The audience is confronted by an understanding of graphic images of men's bodies in pain outside the genre of erotic fantasy or art. They are prevented from retreating into the space of the passive, autoerotic reader.

Through this inversion of cultural norms and reader expectations, Nitro+CHiRAL acts as what Angela Carter terms "moral pornographer." The games wield the rape sequence as "a critique of current relations between the sexes" (Carter 19). They question and explore Carter's definitions of sexuality as "nothing but pure cruelty" (141) that is only achievable through the "annihilation of the partner" (142) and "triumph of the ego" as the ideology to deconstruct the fixation on male-male sexuality as erotic violence (142-143). The Sadeian orgasm, defined by Carter as "[t]he annihilation of the self and the resurrection of the body," fits into the game's inspection of rape as visualized by the transformative bodies of Aoba and Mink in response to trauma (150). In the second sequence, the encroachment of Scrap on Aoba's primary identity overturns his previous identification as the submissive *uke*, while Mink's duty to his fallen people humanizes and individualizes him beyond the frame of the demonic *seme*. This eradication of genre archetypes provides the space for a reparative reading of the characters as more fully developed individuals. In the following two sequences, the turn to reparation and individuality through extreme discomfort is the key point in which the *DRAMAtical Murder* series shatters the rape fantasy.

The location of the rape as erupting from the character's philosophical debate on whether identity and individual actions are predetermined by destiny or a higher power unsettles the player's expectation for sexual foreplay or tension on the same level of the

nightclub scene. The metaphysical topic revokes any attempt to soften the subsequent rape as a safe fantasy by pushing outside the acceptable design of pornographic narratives. Aoba's guilt and self-hatred at his inability to control Scrap and Mink's emotional withdrawal convey deeper emotions than the unrelenting desire and presence of sexuality expected in pornography. Aoba and Mink exist outside of representations of sexual intercourse, leading the player to recognize them as characters rather than instruments for their own sexual fulfillment. The breach in the boundaries between erotic fantasy and a real literary and aesthetic work alters the player's methods of reading and interacting with the text. Even during the rape, the characters become abstracted as enactments of the dislocations of their trauma outside of a larger sense of purpose or narrative.

Mink's dialogue with Aoba prior and during the rape disconnects from his intentions from the pursuit of sexual pleasure or power to image him as a perversion of the samurai archetype. His relationship with Aoba taps into two key characteristics of the samurai: the bond with the pupil and the privileging of cultural responsibility above personal and emotional ties. Jim Reichert defines the sexual and mentoring relationship between an adult samurai and his younger apprentice, identified through the term *wakashū*, as frequently praised for its "inspirational and moral function" by Heian-period (794-1160), female poets (Reichert 21). This aesthetic tradition showcasing a relationship between two men is passed down and adapted from one community of female writers to another, with the genre of BL harnessing this history to appeal to its contemporary female audience. Mink's threats that "[he] do[esn't] have time for that shit" and for Aoba to "soak in [his] self-importance" and "run away this late in the game" by repressing

Scrapout of fear emulates an experienced samurai's words to his student. The following statement, "If you have no self-awareness, I will drag it out. It's more convenient that way[.]" contaminates this idealistic reader by twisting the potential for support with aggression and violation. Aoba's rejection of Mink through the short yet clear response "I don't want this" explicitly sets up the sexuality as non-consensual, directly rejecting an autoerotic player's escape into alternative readings (*Aarinfantasy, DRAMAtical*).

In this particular rape sequence, the player gains access into Mink's interiority rather than being restricted to relying on assumptions based on his body. Vague references in Mink's dialogue are the first direct clues given to the player about the character's traumatic past. Mink's insistence to Aoba that "[y]ou get what burden you were given, that's the reality" sparks speculation on his history and binds the two characters as experiencing similar repressions of memory and emotion (*Aarinfantasy, DRAMAtical*). The implications of Mink's history fulfill Japanese scholar Paul Gordon Schalow's image of the samurai as bound to "the vendetta, a formally sanctioned procedure that allowed a samurai to avenge the unjust death of a superior" (Schalow 31). The game repeatedly establishes that Mink rapes Aoba for the sole purposes for forcing him to recognize and use Scrap and his powers. The absence of sexual desire and focus on Mink objectifying Aoba as a tool for his revenge plot refuses an entry point for the autoerotic reader. Instead, the similarities between Mink's agenda and the samurai's mission to "locate the man responsible for the unjust death of the person being avenged" at any cost moves the attention to the character's testimony over an erotic reading of his body (31).

Unlike the attempted gang rape and rape at nightclub, the game subverts the player's gaze away from any images of Aoba and Mink's bodies. In the previous two instances, the renderings of the character's genitalia and facial expressions during orgasm as well as the act of penetration allow room for an autoerotic reader. For this moment, the game distinguishes itself from the possible reading of *yaoi* as an acronym for "no climax, no point, no meaning" (*yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi*) by negotiating the boundaries of visibility and signifying the characters' sexuality as expressions of testimony expanding beyond desire (McLelland and Welker 55). The player can hear Aoba and Mink's conversation and thoughts during the rape while the screen lingers on separate, unoccupied areas of the hotel. The images of the empty sets of the game present an uncomfortable reminder that the scene is staged by the player's choice of narrative paths. Instead of assuming the role of the participant or instigator, the player is personified as a voyeur left unable to interact with the characters or yell cut and stop the rape. By providing a moment for the audience to reflect on their choice of romantic partner, the game heightens a sense of responsibility and guilt for prioritizing the autoerotic gaze over any other reading. George Didi-Huberman's analysis of four photographs from Auschwitz informs the intentions of the images present and absent in this rape sequence. Didi-Huberman repeatedly refers to the Auschwitz photographs as "images in spite of all" as they were snatched "from a world bent on their impossibility" to prevent the invoking of trauma as unimaginable and separate from the reader (Didi-Huberman 3). He addresses the negative space in the photographs, which he terms "zone of shadow" or "the visual mass," as informing the viewer of the urgency and danger in taking and preserving the images for display (36). Carrying over the ideas of the image captured in spite of all with

traces of the zone of shadow, the view of empty spaces instead Mink and Aoba during the rape pulls the player toward a hyperawareness of the trauma and testimony behind the act. The same level of urgency and discomfort from the Auschwitz images is present in the rape as the player is left to imagine the actions and its effects of Mink and Aoba.

Due to the restraint in visual representation of the rapes, the punctum resonates as Mink's dialogue and Aoba's pain. Mink's command for Aoba to "throw everything away...[a]nything that conceals your true self" defines rape as a transformative act, pushing both sides towards an uncomfortable proximity to their images of self. His narration that he will "engrave the sensation [of pain] into every inch of you" to the point "every time you see me, you'll remember" not only marks sexuality as transgressive to the body and mind, but also raises attention to the actions of archiving and consulting trauma in the form of memory (*Aarinfantasy, DRAMAtical*). The continued use of rape changes both characters' identifies in their own testimonies through the introduction of terms like rapist, perpetrator, and victim that gravitate towards a more universal reading of archetypes rather than a recognition of individual narrative separate from a collective memory. Mink's actions and words rip apart Aoba's body to expose his exteriority and interiority for an outside gaze and control. The emphasis on Aoba's pain and confusion in response to the dialogue allows room for the player to follow both men's voices. By reconfiguring the body and mind as the sites of trauma simultaneously during the rape, Nitro+CHiRAL prevents any attempt to eroticize or romanticize the sexual violence in the sequence.

Pulling from Didi-Huberman's rejection of separating trauma into the category of the "unimaginable," Nitro+CHiRAL forces the player to bear witness to the rape and

construct their own interpretation from Mink's dialogue and Aoba's thoughts. The static images of empty spaces accompanied by the diegetic sounds from the rape tackles writer Susan Sontag's exploration of the photograph's potential to be seen as "objects of contemplation to deepen one's sense of reality." While Sontag doubts a traumatic image can truly occupy "a sacred or meditative space in which to look at them" and engage in desire for deeper understanding, the presentation of the rape as occurring off-screen abandons the player to their imagination of the act (Sontag, *Pain* 119). The absence of the image perverts the expectation of eroticism from violence and leaves the player to question the purpose behind the continuous reliance on rape and the *seme* and *uke* archetypes to uphold a fantasy of male-male sexuality. This discomfort provides an avenue for self-reflection without the risk of exploitation or misinterpretation.

Aoba's examination of his body following the rape voices the character's testimony directly to the player. The explicit expressions of Aoba's shame present a separate way of viewing the post-rape body as a replacement to *yaoi*'s representation of the *uke* immediately falling in love or lust for the *seme* and demanding more sex. Through the ability to hear and read Aoba's thoughts, the audience can diagnosis the rape as desecrating the character's body and mental formation of their identity. Aoba's descriptions of himself as "an empty husk" and his pain as throbbing inside his body like a burn enacts Freud's concept of the double wound inflicted on the body's interior and exterior spaces (Aarinfantasy, *DRAMAtical*). Aoba's desire to disconnect from his body and forget everything opposes the preconception of rape as a necessary or natural part of male-male sexuality and romance. Aoba's shower in attempt to cleanse his body and mind further presents the inverse of expectations from *yaoi*. Onitsuka does not depict

Aoba's naked body in the shower to avoid a misreading of nudity as fan service and keep the attention on the character's thoughts. Aoba's disgust at Mink's semen inside him and running down his legs represents how his view of himself is permanently changed even when physical traces of the rape is removed. Aoba's separation from the player reappropriates the shower as a private space and implies the characters exist independent of the player's gaze.

The set-up of the second rape at the hotel as instigated by Aoba's unsuccessful attempt to run away from Mink relies on fragmented images and stream of consciousness to fully develop the character's emotional response to his previous abuse. By fixing Aoba's thoughts on his doubts on controlling his own body, the game's telling of its rape narrative consistently returns to anxiety rather than eroticism. The audience act as both the witness and interlocutor with Aoba's testimony as they are situated in the character's point of view and must piece together their experiences. Through the dislocated, first-person shots of the hotel's interior accompanied by the diegetic noises of creaking floorboards and strained breathing, the player experiences the tension of the escape alongside the character. The immersion of the player in Aoba's stream of consciousness strengthens the empathy towards the character and responsibility for choosing Mink's narrative branch despite the warnings of sexual violence. The cut to Mink inevitably tracking Aoba down and ordering him to "Come. I'm going to beat you" forces the player to realize their limitations in controlling the narrative. Aoba's identification of a "small stimulus r[unning] through [his] body like electricity" emerging "from a much deeper place" inside of him signifies the anxiety of the exterior body and interior mental construction of self being threatened and exposed to Mink and the player (Aarinfantasy,

DRAMAtical). Aoba's emotional and visceral reactions to Mink present a more unfiltered testimony, triggering the player to reexamine male-male sexuality outside the archetypes of *yaoi* fantasy.

Onitsuka's representation of Aoba and Mink's bodies confronts the player with explicit images of rape. The emphasis on Aoba being choked by Mink (figure 3) serves as an extension of Sontag's inquiry on the spectator's response to still image of trauma. Sontag identifies the photograph as mimicking memory by "provid[ing] a quick way of apprehending something and a compact form for memorizing it." Sontag's comparison of a photo to a "quotation, or a maxim or proverb" unpacks the capability of an image to convey a lasting impression that varies between spectators and context (Sontag, *Pain* 22). Sontag's argument that representation of mutilated bodies "arouse a prurient interest" and those displaying violence to an attraction body attract an erotic interpretation (95). While the conventional *yaoi* narrative consistently returns to the autoerotic gaze on the violated body of the attractive *uke*, the player's familiarity with the characters causes discomfort and guilt rather than sensual desire. Conflating the player's gaze with that of Mink, the camera towers over Aoba to lay out a hyperawareness to the violence. The fragmented view of only Aoba's upper body guides the player to direct their punctum at the markers of pain rather than misdirecting it at the attractiveness of Aoba or Mink's bodies. Onitsuka intensifies the player's discomfort at looking at Aoba's body by depicting blood in the corner of his mouth, his painful grimace, and implied attempts to escape Mink's grasp in the center of the frame.



Figure 3: Mink choking Aoba, author's screenshot from *Dramatical*

Murder.Nitro+CHiRAL, 2012. PC.

The placement of the player in the space of the rapist presents the scene as more shocking and unsettling, raising questions of responsibility for choosing and playing this specific narrative route. Mink's hands wrapped around Aoba's neck symbolize the restraining of his voice and by extension his testimony. The extension of Mink's arms the bottom of the frame also implicates the players as performing the action, continually keeping ideas of ethics in the forefront. The emphasis on Mink's muscles limits his identity to the *seme* or aggressor. The absence of a clear image of penetration and full view of either man's bodies further divorces the sequence from erotic fantasy in favor of paralleling photography of suffering bodies. Mink's demand for Aoba to look at him during the rape heightens the uneasy exchange of glances between the player and character. While this image adheres to the standard power dynamic of the *seme* and *uke*, the sequence quickly overturns this assumption and questions the fluidity of the two roles through the physical and mental transformation of Aoba's body into Scrap.

Aoba's transformation into Scrap and Mink's response rejects the essentialization of all instances of male-male rape in the framework of the erotic or pornographic. Both

men dissemble the reliance on titles, such as perpetrator or victim and *seme* or *uke*, to distinguish each character's testimony as individual from a collective memory or narrative. Scrap's emergence confuses the player's preconceptions of Aoba as the submissive *uke* and Mink as the demonic or nonhuman *seme* by reversing the power dynamic. Aoba's assumption of agency through Scrap and Mink's fear and guilt personify Carter's definition of the sexual pleasure in Sadeian pornography as "entirely inward experiences" in which "[r]oles may be changed about and women become men, men women" (Carter 144). This inability in identity politics appears prominently in the dialogue. The rape begins with an excess of voices, with Mink delivering his nihilistic views on life and destiny and Aoba surrounding his identity on a physical and mental level. The construction of Mink's spoken words and Aoba's thoughts into a conversation blend their voices together into a single testimony by blurring the lines between interiority and exteriority. This discord, as exemplified by Aoba's identification of "[his] body and heart hav[ing] been bent beyond recognition" being followed by Mink's order to "throw away your useless pride" and "fall into my arms," introduces a singular rape narrative composed by both parties rather than a fragmented one (Aarinfantasy, *DRAMAtical*). Described as a switch turning in Aoba's mind, the transition is characterized as abrupt and devoid of visual extravagance. The description of Mink's penetration as inflicting a "pain attack[ing] every inch of [Aoba's] body" to the point where his organs are imagined as "torn apart" locates the rape as dragging Scrap into both an interior and exterior (Aarinfantasy, *DRAMAtical*).



Figure 4: SCRAP’s emergence during the rape, author’s screenshot from *Dramatical Murder*. Nitro+CHiRAL, 2012. PC.

Onitsuka portrays Aoba as adopting the personas of both the supernatural female and the monstrous and inhuman male of Japanese pornography through Scrap's body language and dialogue with Mink. In opposition to the previous image of Aoba being choked, Onitsuka portrays Scrap as taking possession of Mink as his object of pleasure (figure 4). Scrap's threat—"I'll churn your brain into little tiny pieces"—reconceives Aoba's body as capable of more agency and violence than its previous reading as a site of violation and trauma (Aarinfantasy, *DRAMAtical*). His desire to eviscerate Mink's body and mind along with his own directs the rape narrative toward a sadomasochistic fantasy of mutual destruction. This change in command from Mink to Scrap also takes away control over sexuality from the autoerotic reader and shapes the narrative to best suit Mink's trauma and history. Scrap's smirk, which emphasizes the blood still flowing from his mouth, and stare directly into Mink's eyes competes with and dislocates the autoerotic reader by implying a self-awareness not found in pornographic fantasy. During the transformation of Aoba's body, Mink realizes that Scrap and its powers is separate from Aoba and refuses to proceed with sexual intercourse. Mink stops penetrating Aoba's

body, but Scrap takes control to complete the rape with sexual climax of both characters. Mink's inability to comprehend Scrap fully exposes vulnerability in his body and voice for the first time to the player. His refusal to actively penetrate Aoba's body and his anxiety over Scrap articulates the rape as representative of his own inability to reconcile his cultural obligation to pursue revenge with his body and mental construction of self.

The intimate gaze of Mink's body following the rape and the development of his compassion for Aoba delves deeper into his character beyond his hypermasculine impression. The game pauses on a quiet moment in which Mink prays while watching over Aoba in order to convey the rape narrative and the characters outside of the contexts of sexual desire or the intentions of arousing an audience. Carter identifies that a conventional erotic text presents sexuality as the characters' "their raison d'être" or "their life work" while Nitro+CHiRAL treats the sequences of sexual intercourse as a part of a larger commentary existing outside of the page (Carter 13). The image of a more vulnerable Mink lets the player see him outside the context of sexual violence and understand he is struggling with a similar disconnect between his body and mind and his repressed emotions and the trauma of his past as Aoba. The game emphasizes Mink as existing and having motivations outside of sex. Rather than flattening Mink as the villain of Aoba's narrative, the attention places his development over the course of each rape supports the compilation of both sides of sexual violence into a singular testimony. Aoba identifies Mink's body as transformed by the act of prayer to the point where he is unrecognizable from "his normal, unpredictable self" (Aarinfantasy, *DRAMAtical*).

The awareness of Mink's religious identity configures the previously unseen and undefined image of his actions following the attempted gang rape and implies spirituality

as his method of working through his moral conflict of using rape as a tool to get revenge for his tribe and honor their memories. While the words of Mink's prayer are never vocalized or represented on-screen, the act of having Aoba and the player see his body during this action creates a voyeuristic and reparative reading of his testimony. The close attention to the moment Mink touches Aoba's hair signifies an intimate moment that clashes with the previous rape sequences. This brief interaction between the two men represents the start of Mink reconciling with his emotions by developing empathy for Aoba as a person rather than an inanimate tool. By reserving Mink's epiphany to nonverbal communication, the game stresses the importance of the body's response to trauma and connects Aoba and Mink's physical transformations together in a cohesive narrative.

Section 5: Sexuality as Transformation

In the good and bad endings to Mink's narrative route, the focus on Mink's voice and character development defines sexuality as a transformative act. Depending on the ending, sexuality either paralyzes Mink in his past memories or encourages him to form a new community to proceed into the future. Both sequences draw attention to Mink's identity as the witness of his tribe's massacre and status as the last of his people. As the sole witness who "bear[s] the solitude of a responsibility" and "the responsibility, precisely, of that solitude," Mink embodies sexuality as either a destructive or constructive force. Mink's cultural identity and obligations not only establishes his testimony as a "vehicle of an occurrence, a reality, stance or a dimension beyond himself," but also elevates sexuality into a higher purpose outside of appeasing the autoerotic gaze (Felman and Laub 3). Through providing extended versions of the good

and bad endings in *DRAMAtical Murder*'s sequel, Nitro+CHiRAL fully explores Mink's character and Aoba's romantic relationship with him without rewriting the rapes as romantic or necessary. The player's identification as the voyeur to Mink's testimony forces them to "partially experience trauma" through the act of listening and usurps any potential for erotic interpretation (57). The final sequences occupy opposing representations of nature, with the good ending visualizing the life left in Mink's homeland and the bad one remaining trapped in the memories of his burning village. The juxtaposition represents the core nature of Aoba and Mink's views of sexuality. The good ending showcases sexuality and romance as pushing forward to a reformed community or future while the bad one connects these two concepts as inherently steeped in violence and death. The return to natural settings rather than the cityscapes of Midorijima is interrogated and analyzed during the examination of the final sequences of sexual intercourse.

The bad ending stages Scrap's seduction and intercourse with Mink inside the memories of the massacre to embody sexuality with an act of defiling both characters' identities beyond a breaking point. Aoba enters Mink's inner consciousness to locate the source of his trauma, leaving the ending up to the player's success or failure in guiding Aoba to Mink's true self. The player's choice to rescue anyone from the massacre initiates the bad ending as the alterations to Mink's memories traps both men in a temporal and spatial dislocation. The diegetic sounds of the massacre—screaming, gunshots, and crackling fire—serve as physical projections of the destruction of Aoba and Mink's bodies and minds as they are both unable to reconcile their past trauma into their lives. After Aoba abandons control of his body, Scrap overturns the power dynamic of *seme*

and *uke* by forcing Mink into the submissive role. Scrap's identification that Aoba's previous sexual encounters with Mink "couldn't really be considered sex" and instead "was just violence" represents the characters as performing mutual destruction (Aarinfantasy, *re:connect*). The scenes of Scrap assaulting Mink and Aoba's body being penetrated and beaten by Mink merge with the encroaching voices and images of the burning village to abstract the experiences into the state of collective memory or consciousness. The tactile language of Scrap's "delusional sensation that [his] body is being filled with muddled, clotted blood" defines transformation in response to sexuality as violence on interiority. Scrap's taunts that Mink is "defiling [his] past" by having sex in his memories further connect the exteriority of intercourse ejecting the interior spaces of the mind (Aarinfantasy, *re:connect*). Pushing trauma to a graphic extreme, the environment allows the player to witness Mink in a vulnerable state and attain a gaze of his entire exteriority and interiority.



Figure 5: Mink holding Aoba's decapitated head, author's screenshot from *Dramatical Murder: re:connect*. Nitro+CHiRAL, 2012. PC.

By representing the outward expression of Mink's love for Aoba in the form of decapitation (figure 5), Onitsuka conveys the physical and mental anxieties associated

with rape and sexuality as a whole. Recognizing Scrap's possession of Aoba's body, Mink plans to cut off Aoba's head to save his soul from damnation. Scrap's agreement to provide the head under the condition they first engage in violent sexual intercourse dismantles the power paradigm expected in a rape narrative. While Mink occupies the dominant role in intercourse by penetrating Aoba's body, Scrap is represented as wielding the most authority by taking control over Aoba and pushing Mink into a sexual encounter. The image about Aoba's head addresses Mink's spirituality and crisis of faith, allowing the character to voice his testimony outside the assumptions placed into the title of rapist or perpetrator. Mink's desire to protect Aoba's soul at all cost, even through another act of rape, recalls Carter's definition of rape as the "fear of a loss or disruption of the self" and projects this anxiety into the visible space of the artwork (Carter 6). Mink's narration about the head being "the most sacred part of a person's body" entangles his spiritual understanding of the body in the sexual encounter (Aarinfantasy, *re:connect*). Since the stomach holds the most importance in a Japanese assessment of the body, his speech enacts his reconnection with his past cultural identity through quoting the Western, Christian ideology of his colonized people. The significance of the soul residing in the head and Mink's vow that "the devil cannot take your soul away so long as one protects the head" showcase the physical body and mental image of self as undergoing constant struggles for control (Aarinfantasy, *re:connect*). Mink's removal of Aoba presents a literal enactment of the approach to rape as "an essential dismemberment" leaving both parties irrevocably changed by the repetitions of violence (Carter 6).

Mink's prayers directed to Aoba's decapitated head provides the player access to a personal moment in which the character takes responsibility and reflects on his identity in

the rape narrative. Scrap's taunts that the blood and semen from the rape invoke a "purification ritual" for them mocks Mink's attempts to use his cultural and spiritual beliefs to understand his narrative (Aarinfantasy, *re:connect*). While the sequence does occur in the public spectacle of the memory of a collective trauma, Mink's prayer invokes a private space to take ownership of his testimony. His action of holding Aoba's head close to his own represents his psychological transformation throughout the narrative as he is directly confronted with the evidence of his mistreatment of Aoba. Despite this recognition, the bad ending does not allow Mink or Aoba's bodies or minds to transform beyond their respective traumas, leaving a bleak diagnosis of trauma as an insurmountable obstacle in the storytelling of ones' life.



Figure 6: Mink's "true" self, author's screenshot from *Dramatical Murder: re:connect*. Nitro+CHiRAL, 2012. PC.

Through the good ending, imagery of Mink's "true" identity articulated by Aoba's response showcases the physical embodiments of both men's psychological transformations when confronted with past trauma. The player's resistance to save anyone from the massacre signals the more positive ending through the recognition of the events

as they occurred rather than denying them through an act of intervention. As Aoba progresses further into Mink's mind, his suspicion that the space is rejecting his intrusion and the voice warning him not to proceed further symbolizes the boundaries placed on memory and trauma. The image of the "true" Mink (figure 6) as confined to an iron chair with thick, metal chains tightly bound around his body not only juxtaposes against the authority and strength attached to Mink's exterior body, but also reminds the player of the character's unspoken and previously unseen trauma in prison. The game never fully discloses what happened during Mink's imprisonment, but leaves the image of his body to make his trauma tangible and visible. This depiction is reminiscent of the four images recalls Didi-Huberman's discussion on the images snatched from Auschwitz as they represent an act of resistance against the silencing of individual voices into the category of the unspeakable or unimaginable. Aoba recognizes the "true" form of Mink as unable to move beyond his past memories of the massacre and his imprisonment and the belief he can never have a present or future. Mink's resistance to Aoba's intervention, as personified as a "numbing spark" when Aoba attempts to remove the chains, expands into the fear or inability to reconcile and place trauma into the context of testimony. This exposure to Mink's "true" physical body and emotions prefigures his later change in outward appearance.

Aoba's response to save Mink's "true" identity draws attention to his own body and mental configuration of self. While attempting to remove the chains from Mink's bodies, Aoba's arms become coated with rust from the metal and shatter like glass. Onitsuka does not provide any visual representation of this literal dismemberment, but Aoba's screams and moans forces the player to witness his suffering. Aoba's

determination to protect Mink at all costs, even as more and more chains move to both of their bodies, symbolizes his mental and emotional strength gathered over the course of the game. The depiction of Aoba's physical body eroding into nothingness is contrasted with the growth in his own self-understanding. Aoba's reminder that Mink was still alive and promise that "I won't let you be destroyed" opens a space for Mink to see him and recognize their shared trauma (Aarinfantasy, *re:connect*). This instance of mutual witnessing, emphasized in gaze between the two characters, unifies the trauma carried from their pasts and the previous instances of rape into a single testimony. Both characters achieve an understanding of each other's histories and "true" identities.

In the sequel, Mink's open discussion about rape and his careful treatment of Aoba's body during sex allows for a reparative reading of the rape narrative. The game portrays Mink as initially angry at Aoba for leaving Midorijima to track him down and hesitant to talk to him about anything. Mink's attempt to push Aoba away illustrates his belief that his repeated rapes of Aoba are unforgivable. By emphasizing the romantic relationship between Aoba and Mink as developing over the span of several months, the game avoids *yaoi*'s instant reconfiguration of rape as love or passion. In fact, the markers of intimacy and romance present in the dialogue and visual cut deeper than those employed by a conventional *yaoi* to present the possibility for sexuality to be imagined as positive and healthy behavior even after sexual trauma. While admitting to his original intentions to "use [Aoba] as a tool and throw [him] away" afterwards, Mink comforts Aoba by taking full responsibility for the rapes implies the beginning of a new narrative that moves beyond their shared traumatic past (Aarinfantasy, *re:connect*). An erotic sequence after the repeated rapes may appear inappropriate following the discussion of

the repeated rapes. However, the emphasis placed on consent and care between the two characters represents the possibility of a positive image of sexuality.

Mink's questions and attention to Aoba's consent—asking him “Are you going to take responsibility for those words?” and “Are you sure this isn't your body talking?”—mark a shift in his perception of Aoba's body as an object to that of a person (Aarinfantasy, *re:connect*). The repetition in dialogue about consent serves to distinguish this sexual interaction in opposition to the rape sequences for the player. The representation of Mink's nude body during intercourse further visualizes his vulnerability and willingness to concede a level of control. Mink's use of one of his tribe's fragrances to relax Aoba during anal intercourse with his approval symbolizes the sexuality as an equal exchange between the two men. Mink's intentions to create a pleasurable and safe sexual experience for Aoba by preparing his body for penetration replaces the images of Mink forcing himself inside him without any signal. While problematic in terms of the previous rapes, the sexual sequences imagine Aoba and Mink's bodies and self-images as repaired and expand them as hopeful examples of reparation and testimony.

Through the good ending's final sequence, sexuality is reconceived as an instrument capable of forming community in opposition to its previous representation as the trauma of rape. The game pivots Mink and Aoba's first intimate and consensual sexual experience as an epiphany enabling them to conceive their bodies and identities outside of trauma. In the last image, Aoba embraces Mink and wears the clothing and ornaments of his tribe. By attaching his tribe's symbols to Aoba and explaining each object's importance, Mink projects his new community on to Aoba's body. The unseen process of Mink creating each ornament specifically for Aoba and braiding them into his

hair acts as a constructive method of reconciling past trauma in the present narrative. The act of creation and progression is juxtaposed against the bad ending's fixation with destruction and immobility. Mink's sexual and romantic reunion with Aoba acted as support for his decision to visit his ancestor's graves "to return their artifacts and tell them my story." His visceral reaction, defined as "my body almost mov[ing] on its own to their graces" strengthens the connection between the body and the mental picture of self and trauma (Aarinfantasy, *re:connect*).



Figure 7: Aoba and Mink forming a new community together, author's screenshot from *Dramatical Murder: re:connect*. Nitro+CHiRAL, 2012. PC.

The language of Mink's reawakening as his soul's release from his first "death" for "the start of the second journey to 'death'" ties together a transformation of the body and narrative in reconciliation with trauma (Aarinfantasy, *re:connect*). Contrasted against their initial appearances, the final images of Aoba and Mink (figure 7) represent their ability to incorporate their past into their physical and mental constructions of self. This change is not limited to Mink, as Aoba positively responds to his new attire, emphasizing that he finally feels "appropriate to be on this land." The merging of both characters' narratives and traumas into "our new journey together [that will] become something

irreplaceable to us" resists the common practice of splitting of roles into the *seme* and *uke* and the perpetrator and victim (Aarinfantasy, *re:connect*).

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Queer theorist Adrienne Shaw poses the following question on the representation of LGBTQ sexuality in video gaming: "Why then, when video games have been a popular medium since the 1970s, are questions about the representation of diverse sexualities and gendered identities only now being discussed?" (Shaw 230). As Shaw emphasizes in her inquiry, critical academic discourse has largely ignored the representation of queer bodies and identities in video gaming. While Shaw primarily deals with American video games and video game developers, her work in addressing the medium's questions of queer sexuality carries across cultural borders and remains applicable to Japan. Her question can be reformatted to the following: "Why then, when *yaoi* and BL have been popular genres since 1980s and 1990s respectively, are questions about their association of rape with male-male sexuality only now being discussed, especially by Western scholars?" Japanese BL video games, like the *DRAMAtical Murder* series, reference and subvert the long history of aesthetic and literary approaches to sexual identity and the male body.

Fulfilling Angela Carter's concept of the moral pornographer, Nitro+CHiRAL uses the transformative body as the framework to subvert the fantasy of the autoerotic reader and interrogate two topics: the cultural and aesthetic association of rape with male-male sexuality and the silencing of the male voice in the rape narrative. The contemporary state and future direction of BL as a genre and a movement of independent writers and illustrators create a momentum in attempts to more accurately portray complete images of sexuality and gender in all of its form. Through Aoba and Mink's testimony and changes in response to trauma, Nitro+CHiRAL offers a reparative reading

of the rape fantasy upheld by the *yaoi* community and Japanese pornography in general. However, these two games do not operate in a vacuum and are neither the first nor the last reconfiguration of the violated, male body and the hypermasculine, aggressive one.

Section 1: A Study of Genres

The *DRAMAtical Murder* series is a single example of a larger shift in genre and aesthetics to accommodate for creators and consumers to advocate their individual opinions and ideas on sexual roles and gendered identities rather than continuing the legacy of archetypes. Artist Yoshinaga Fumi defines BL as an unrestrained form of expression on queer identity and views the writer, illustrator, and reader as having their own preference in character, pairing, and narrative. Yoshinaga's belief "the pressure points for women differ from person to person" reflects a text's potential for a reader's personal preference to conflict with the writer's (qtd. in Fujimoto 88). Yoshinaga's gendering of the implied reader of BL as female raises important questions and concerns on its representations of the queer male body and identity. Mink and Aoba's storyline in the *DRAMAtical Murder* series creates both characters in opposition to stereotypes or archetypes, but its intentions to be played by a female audience must be considered when addressing its depictions of masculinity.

By focusing on three overlapping genres (sexuality, video gaming, and image), the structure of the thesis supports the serious consideration of BL texts for academic consideration. The theoretical models from the Methodology and Analysis chapters act as a response to Shaw's question. The means to provide language to queer representation in video gaming already exists and can be applied to virtually any primary source, even those outside the culture or specialization of the scholar. The research culminates on an

intersection of psychoanalytic, trauma, and sexuality studies with resources from foundational scholars and critics, such as Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag, and more obscure or contemporary ones, such as Angela Carter and Rio Otomo, to showcase the means of analyzing video games as already existing. By dealing directly with theorists from these three genres, the thesis reconfigures their language to argue how the *DRAMAtical Murder* series and BL as an extension intentionally occupies a space outside these generalizing terms.

Carter's definition of rape on a psychoanalytic level serves as the driving force behind the thesis. Her validation of the testimony from the perpetrator and victim allows for an investigation of rape as a complete narrative rather than a fragmented approach. Her controversial statements about the trauma of rape not being restricted to the victim provides the means to discuss BL's representation of its male characters outside of the models of dangerous sexuality and the *seme* and *uke* dynamic. The attention to detail when citing these scholars for the analysis of the *DRAMAtical Murder* games acts to undermine previous assumptions of BL as "a ready-made genre" that exists solely to meet the reader's autoerotic desires (Kazuko 112). The intersections that the analysis creates between Japanese and Sadeian genealogies of the erotic gaze of the body and its violation and pain showcases Nitro+CHiRAL as putting forth a new model to envision the role of rape in identity politics and male-male desire. The final images of Mink holding Aoba's decapitated head or the pair embracing and forming their own communities are strong statements on the queer body as indicative of more than just fan service. The games' alterations between oversaturation and restraint of sexual explicit and traumatic images challenge and transform the player's understanding of rape just as much as the characters.

Section 2: Looking to the Future

The *DRAMAtical Murder* series is a subversive and disruptive work, pushing against the history of *yaoi* narratives and dissecting the rape fantasy and anxieties of power and gender common in Japanese pornography. This thesis is a case study of this particular video game series and cannot be taken out of its context for a general application to Japanese pornography, *yaoi*, BL, or sexual identity in Japan. The games should not essentialize the diverse intentions of their creators and responses of their readers. The future development of BL is still uncertain as articulated by Japanese literary scholars' anxieties over the continuation of subversive configurations of past literary and artistic representations of male-male sexuality and romance. Rio Otomo ends her research with an open question to critics and consumers on "whether it is possible for BL narratives to present new, more liberal relationships in the place of the formalized, clichéd patterns they have used as a more effective love machine" (Otomo 150).

James Welker acknowledges the continued success of BL, citing it as a \$24.5-million-dollar market in Japan alone and a growing business abroad, but raises concerns on the fact a majority of the actual content either stays with *yaoi* conventions or avoids sensitive topics like rape altogether (Welker67). It is impossible to predict whether more or less works of BL will replace the rigid image of male-male sexuality and romance in the *yaoi* community with a more inclusive understanding of a relationship between two men. The *DRAMAtical Murder* series does show a positive trend towards making the queer body and sexual trauma and testimony more visible and concrete in interlocutors in interactive media, but the silencing of Aoba and Mink's testimony in the anime adaptation does validate the concerns raised by Otomo and Welker.

In 2014, the *DRAMAtical Murder* series was adapted as an anime series by the Japanese animation studio Naz, which is unconnected to Nitro+CHiRAL or its parent company Nitroplus. The anime's director removed all instances of rape from the series and inserted scenes of physical, nonsexual abuse in their place. The exclusion of a majority of the scenes of male-male romance or sexuality, with the exception of a kiss, casts further doubt on changes in the images of sexuality and gender. The silencing of the rape testimonies and sexual identities raises questions on if future BL texts will adopt a similar experimental approach or conform to the separation of reality and erotic fantasy. The anime calls attention to the fact that creators and consumers of BL account for a smaller community in Japan. Anime acts as the primary medium of entertainment in Japan and Miura may have removed the more graphic material in the transition of the narrative being constructed for a larger audience rather than the subculture of *yaoi* and BL. This absence of the queer body on the more visible scale of anime places doubts on the effectiveness of subversive BL texts to change the representations of queer sexuality and erotic fantasies of rape.

The absence of the queer body and the rape narrative in the anime adaptation fits into a larger history of movements of significant social change or agitation inciting resistance and silencing. Nitro+CHiRAL performs the basic definition of agitation as the "persistent long-term advocacy for social change" by continuing the discussion on rape and its impact on Aoba and Mink's bodies and identities across both games (Bowers, Donovan, Ochs, Schulz 3). The Japanese video gaming developer has a history of invoking and rupturing *yaoi's* image of male-male sexuality as inherently violent or dangerous through its previous releases, such as the post-apocalyptic and prison setting in

the 2005 visual novel *Togainu no Chi* (Blood of the Reprimanded Dog). The identification of the anime as an act of resistance against the game in the name of increasing the potential audience and monetary gain serves as an indicator for the reception of the game and other BL works by academics. While the increase in interest in *yaoi* and BL studies in Japanese academia suggests more attention paid to material like *DRAMAtical Murder*, it is impossible to determine if they will remain marginalized to its specific fan community or erase the boundaries to invite other readers into the discourse. While the increase in interest in *yaoi* and BL studies in Japanese academia suggests more attention paid to material like *DRAMAtical Murder*, it is impossible to determine if they will remain marginalized to its specific fan community or erase the boundaries to invite other readers into the discourse.

Building from the questions on the future of BL as a genre, the *DRAMAtical Murder* games have proven the possibility for an increased range of queer, male characters and roles for readers beyond the autoerotic impulse. The characters mark a significant change away from the normalization of the *seme* as inherently living for perverse and aggressive sexuality and the *uke* as vulnerable and attracted to sexual violence and violation. The series challenges whether or not the terms *seme* and *uke* will be applicable to future BL works or if more inclusive titles will be developed to replace them. This analysis opens up a space in Western academic studies for a critical consideration of a more contemporary genre that aids in the deeper inquiry of queer identity, the body and testimony, and gaming and can improve current approaches to sexuality and gender.

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