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## The Journal of the Lincoln Heights Literary Society Miscellanea and Ephemeron

### 07/01/2007 Entry: "Satoru Kannagi Interview"



*I was lucky enough to get to interview my favorite Boys Love novelist, Satoru Kannagi at the Digital Manga headquarters on June 28, 2007. Ms. Kannagi is in town as Digital Manga's guest at Anime Expo, this year being held at the Long Beach Convention Center. We were ably assisted in this interview by translator Shinobu Kadokura.*

**Ginger Mayerson:** How did you become a Boys Love (BL) writer?

**Satoru Kannagi:** I used to help my friends make doujinshi by providing the stories but some publishers saw these manga and asked me to write novels.

**GM:** That's amazing. What's your motivation for and enjoyment of writing BL?

**SK:** Are you familiar with the term moeh?

**GM:** Sort of.

**SK:** When I write, I'm always thinking of what my readers will like in the characters and story.

**GM:** What's your definition of moeh?

**SK:** That's a difficult question. My idea of moeh is that when I write about a character, I want to appeal to the readers imagination of this character. I also like my characters and try to make them more... more...

**GM:** Is it an emotional connection with the character?

**SK:** Yes, wanting them to be happy.

**GM:** Um... Is moeh a peaceful emotional state or a violent emotional state?

**SK:** Peaceful. If you have moeh you can be happy anywhere.

**GM:** Have you ever written male/female romances or is it always BL?

**SK:** Mainly it's just BL, but some of my work includes boys and girls love as a side story. Sometimes my readers are not happy to have a boy/girl romance even as a side story in a BL story.

**GM:** What do you think the appeal to BL is to your readers?

**SK:** In BL the girls can read about the gay relationship and not feel jealous of anyone because there's no girls in it. And BL is a total fantasy world, and girl readers like that. This is also the reason why gays don't like BL because it's so unreal, that this is not how things go. But for girls, they like the fantasy.

**GM:** How many novels have you published?

**SK:** Fifty to sixty.

**GM:** Novels? Does that include manga, too?

**SK:** I've only got three manga, so the rest are novels.

**GM:** Your mangas are "Rin!," "Only the Ring Finger Knows," and?

**SK:** It's coming out soon, it's called "Sometimes the World is Beautiful."

**GM:** Who's the artist?

**SK:** Haruka Momozuki. Her style is very cute.

**GM:** What was your first title?

**SK:** "Piece of Clear Sky." That publisher is gone now. But the publisher of "Rin!" liked this book so much, they asked me to write the script for "Rin!"

**GM:** When was "Piece of Clear Sky" published?

**SK:** 1994.

**GM:** Is this the first one she wrote or the first one she published?

**SK:** It's the first novel I published because before "Piece of Clear Sky" I was writing like eight-page stories for manga.

**GM:** When did you start writing?

**SK:** I started writing when I was fourteen or fifteen, but just writing in a notebook and only showing it to my friends. I started writing as a doujinshi after I was twenty.

**GM:** Did you study writing at school?

**SK:** No, I haven't studied formally, but my parents always gave me a lot of books to read. So I was always writing on my own. After I debuted as a novelist, editors would give me advice, so I learned from that, too.

**GM:** What was the plot of your first story, "Piece of Clear Sky"?

**SK:** Well, two boys meet in High School and one is a shy boy and the other is playboy who is unfriendly, but they fall in love. Then they learn that years before the shy boy's father ran over the playboy and injured him so he can't walk perfectly. So when they find this out, they break up. They go to different universities, like Tokyo and Kyoto, which are pretty far away from each other, but they can't forget each other, so they get back together.

**GM:** What of your titles other than the next volume of "Only the Ring Finger Knows" (OTRFK) would you like to see published in English?

**SK:** All of them. I'd like to have my fans be able to read them in English.

**GM:** Has OTRFK volume 4 finished being serialized in a magazine?

**SK:** Volume 4 was never serialized, but it was just published a few weeks ago as a book. Only volumes 1-3 were serialized.

**GM:** What are working on right now?

**SK:** I'm working on a magazine serial called "The World is For Us," it's part of a bigger serial called "Sometimes the World is Beautiful." But I'm only providing the dialogue for the manga.

**GM:** Do you like writing manga dialogue?

**SK:** I love it!

**GM:** More than writing novels?

**SK:** About the same.

**GM:** Have you always been a writer?

**SK:** I used to be an announcer, or a host for the audience at events.

**GM:** Like a Master of Ceremonies?

**SK:** Yes.

**GM:** What kind of events?

**SK:** Various kinds of events because I used to work for an agency that sent hosts to all kinds of events.

**GM:** That must have been difficult.

**SK:** I used to talk in public and to people all the time, but now I just stay home alone and write all the time. My life is so different.

**GM:** The writer's life. What other kinds of writing have you done? Non-fiction? Poetry? Journalism?

**SK:** I used to interview people.

**GM:** Like I do?

**SK:** Yes! I like writing BL, but I'm open to writing other things if I get the offers. I love the horror genre, so I've written stories for doujinshi horror manga.

**GM:** Ah. What are you reading these days?

**SK:** I prefer reading non-fiction because I write fiction and I don't want to be distracted by someone else's fiction. Write now I'm writing a story about gay prostitutes in the Meiji era, so I'm reading histories of that era for background research.

**GM:** What authors do you admire?

**SK:** BL authors?

**GM:** Anyone.

**SK:** I like Steven King very much. And of Japanese writers, I like Souseki Natsume, he's a great writer.

**GM:** Is there anyone in the BL genre you read?

**SK:** I have a lot of friends in this genre, so I read a lot of them, but other than my friend's stories, I try not to read it so I don't get distracted. I'd rather read BL manga.

**GM:** What manga do you like?

**SK:** I like Yugi Yamada's manga very much.

**GM:** I like Yugi Yamada a lot, too.

**SK:** So I read whatever she has out. I've recently finished "Love Control, volume 2," which is not by Yugi Yamada, but I enjoyed it very much.

**GM:** What makes a story enjoyable for you as a reader?

**SK:** I like unexpected story events.

**GM:** Plot twists?

**SK:** Yes! I also like a book that I want to tell everyone about when I've finished it.

**GM:** When you're writing a book, what makes the writing enjoyable for you?

**SK:** I love to write dialogue that really fits the characters. Sometimes my editors ask me to make changes that I hadn't thought of, but still fit the characters. For example, originally in OTRFK, the older brother, Shoehi was supportive of Wataru and Yuichi's relationship, but my editor didn't think that worked very well.

**GM:** Not enough conflict?

**SK:** Yes, so they asked me to change it so he's against them, but his character is still strong and attractive.

**GM:** Shoehi is perfect.

**SK:** Expect to see him in volume 4.

**GM:** I always expect Shoehi.

**SK:** There's another person who's going to be involved in the love triangle.

**GM:** Asaka?

**SK:** Yes, Asaka. But a lot of fans don't want Asaka to break up Wataru and Yuchi up, so they suggest that Asaka and Shohei could get together.

**GM:** I thought Shohei was going to fall in love with Wataru.

**SK:** Really? Why?

**GM:** Because everyone falls in love with Wataru.

**SK:** (laughs) Well, not everyone. In volume 2, Asaka was just supportive of Wataru and Yuichi's relationship, but then he falls in love. I want to write more from Asaka's point of view about why he feels this way about Wataru.

**GM:** Was "Rin!" ever a novel or only a manga?

**SK:** Only ever a manga. I'm very happy with the way the collaboration with Ms. Honami turned out, so I wouldn't want the story to be a stand alone story.

**GM:** You and Honami are my manga dream team.

**SK:** I've very happy to hear that, because I'm a big fan of Honami, too. For OTRFK, it was already a novel, so Ms. Odagari came to it after it was done. With "Rin!" the publisher knew that Honami was going to be the artist before I was asked to write the script, so I wrote my script with Honami's art style in mind. Both Odagari and Honami changed my writing a little, but I like what they changed.

**GM:** Did the publisher tell you it was about archery or was that your idea?

**SK:** Mostly they were asking me to write about a character that grows up and falls in love along the way. At first they wanted it to be a story about playing the violin, but at the same publisher they had a story about the violin, so it was going to be too similar, so they wanted to do something new. So I decided to make the story about archery because I love archery. I took some archery classes.

**GM:** How much research did you have to do for the archery parts?

**SK:** Because it takes place in a High School I interviewed a High School archery club teacher.

**GM:** Why did you choose the pen name SatoruKannagi?

**SK:** It was the first thing that came into my mind. I wanted a unisex name.

**GM:** Are there women named Saturo?

**SK:** A few.

**GM:** For a long time I thought you were a man because in the second to the last paragraph of Ms. Odagiri's free talk at the end of the English version of OTRFK, she refers to you as Mr. Kannagi.

**SK:** I was glad when the English version of the manga was published because suddenly I had English speaking fans asking me when the novels would be published in English.

**GM:** That's because we all wanted to read about Yuichi and Wataru having sex.

**SK:** Oh. I never thought the sex in OTRFK was that important or necessary for the story.

**GM:** Well, there's only one sex scene per novel.

**SK:** Do you think it should be more?

**GM:** No, but there has to be at least one per novel after they get together.

**SK:** I hear that a lot from fans. It depends on the novel, but sometimes I do write more sex scenes, but in OTRFK I have fewer sex scenes.

**GM:** Do you have any advice for people who want to write BL in English?

**SK:** Welcome to the new BL world. Once you get into that world, you can never get out.

**GM:** This a Japanese question, about the concept to iki-

**SK:** The drink?

**GM:** Ah, no, the concept, we don't really have it here, it's kind of like elegance or cool, but not really.

**SK:** Oh. That iki.

**GM:** What role does the concept of iki play in your writing? Does it have an influence in your writing?

**SK:** Most of my characters, even though they fall in love, they don't go crazy. They don't go over the line or get violent with each other. There's a restraint in my writing. There are no rapes, or violence, in my stories and that's iki.

**GM:** I don't understand the rape thing in BL, do you?

**SK:** If the rape is in the story as a crime, I can understand that, but if one boy rapes another because he loves him, I don't understand that. I don't have a problem with violence in context. I like horror manga and have written for horror mangas.

**GM:** Have you had an horror manga published?

**SK:** Only doujinshi.

**GM:** This is the last question. What are your plans for the future?

**SK:** I've had a pretty long career so far and sometimes readers get tired of writers with long careers, so I'm looking for way to keep my writing fresh. I'd like to keep writing BL, but basically I'd just like to produce as many good books as possible.

**GM:** What about a BL Horror fusion?

**SK:** I'd love to do that, but BL fans really don't like Horror, so editors usually say no to that kind of book. I'd like to write about it, but a publisher would have to say yes to it.

**GM:** That would be great. Congratulations on the publication of volume 4 of OTRFK in Japan.

**SK:** Thank you. I have a question for you.

**GM:** Okay.

**SK:** Why did you choose to read OTRFK?

**GM:** The publisher sent it to me, it was my first manga. I didn't quite know what to do with it. I even opened it the wrong way, so I knew that beautiful ending smooch first.

**SK:** What do you think of BL?

**GM:** When I first read OTRFK, I wasn't sure I liked it because it was such a fantasy, but then I really did like it because the characters are so sweet. However, I'm not sure why I became obsessed with it and the ensuing novels. It became way too important to me to be able to read the novels in English and I'm still not sure why. Usually I'm cooler than that.

**SK:** I hear that a lot of fans became obsessed with this book.

**GM:** I think it was the characters.

**SK:** I think it's DNA.

**GM:** (laughs) Yeah, maybe. But getting the novels published in English became a kind of cause celebre where the fans signed a petition and emailed Digital Manga and eventually Digital Manga arranged to publish the novels in English. And we were all so glad.

**SK:** Do the images in the manga match up to the novel?

**GM:** Well, I read the manga first, and the illustrations really fit the action, so when I read the novels, those characters are who I see in my head. So yes, they matched up well, I can't separate them anymore. However, I liked the novel better than the manga.

**SK:** Why?

**GM:** There was a little more depth to the characters in the novel, which is probably normal. The manga was a great introduction to BL, but the novel was more enjoyable for me.

**SK:** Are there any other mangakas you like?

**GM:** I'm very into Sakuragi Yaya and especially "Koi Cha no Osahu," I love that book right now. So much so, I bought the last two volumes in Japanese, which I can't read, just to see if I could figure out what happens.

**SK:** I worked with Sakuragi Yaya for novels.

**GM:** What were they called?

**SK:** Two series. "Our Secrets" and "Our News."

**GM:** Who was it published by?

**SK:** Frontier Books.

**GM:** As much as I like Wataru and Yuichi, Hasune and Tokomaru are giving them a run for their money.

**SK:** I'm glad to hear that because some fans like them a little too much.

**GM:** Is that possible?

**SK:** Well, when they put "sama" (lord) on Yuichi's name, like he's a prince figure, that's a little intense. Some people have very strong feelings about Shohei, positive and negative.

**GM:** I don't completely understand Shohei's motivation for being against Wataru and Yuichi as a couple.

**SK:** Shohei really cares for his brother because in Japan the gay lifestyle is really not accepted and he doesn't want his brother to suffer.

**GM:** I thought the gay lifestyle and community was accepted, loved, powerful even in Japan.

**SK:** The gay community is more accepted compared to ten or twenty years ago, but there are still things you don't talk about in Japan. But Shohei isn't against gay people, he just doesn't want his brother to be one.

**GM:** Isn't gay marriage or domestic partnership legal in Japan?

**SK:** No, neither of those are in Japan.

**GM:** There's an almost stark difference between the open and supported gay relationship in "Rin!" versus the closeted relationship in OTRFK.

**SK:** That's because "Rin!" is about how Katsura grows up and falls in love, so there didn't need to be any obstacles to falling in love and being with Sou. OTRFK was more of a pure romance where conflict and obstacles add spice to the story.

**GM:** Well, the relationship in OTRFK is the struggle. I, ah, think that's it for me. Thank you for a lovely interview.

**SK:** You're welcome.

**GM:** Is this your first visit to Los Angeles?

**SK:** Yes.

**GM:** First trip to the United States?

**SK:** Yes, I've been in Europe before but ever the United States.

**GM:** Is there anything in particular you'd like to do while you're here?

**SK:** I want to meet my fans.

**GM:** Well, they'll come find you at Anime Expo. Especially at your panel on Sunday afternoon.

**SK:** I hope so.

**GM:** I'll be there. Thank you again for the interview.

**SK:** Thank you.

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