Prince Charming by Day, Superheroine by Night?

Subversive Sexualities and Gender Fluidity

in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* and *Sailor Moon*

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In the third major story arc of Naoko Takeuchi's groundbreaking graphic narrative series, *Bishōjo Senshi Sērā Mūn* (or *Sailor Moon*, to English-speaking audiences), the protagonist finds herself questioning the sex of the person she has recently kissed. Judging from the cropped hair, male school uniform, and other characters' repeated use of the masculine pronoun in reference to this individual, Usagi might safely assume it is a man. However, she has also seen Haruka on the battlefield—in a costume clearly revealing a female body. As her alluring acquaintance leans in for a second kiss, Usagi hesitantly asks, "Are you a guy… or a girl?" Haruka simply responds, "Guy or girl… is that so important?"[1] The question echoes thematically throughout the rest of the series, prompting readers to examine their own preconceptions.

As it turns out, Haruka is biologically female, but her gender identity is less clear. She wears both traditionally male and female clothes in her civilian life, and does not "correct" people when they assume she is a man. Though Takeuchi insists that Haruka was always intended to be a woman, dismissing fan theories that she had been a man in a past life (reincarnation is part of the series' mythos),[2] part of what makes Haruka so

compelling to audiences is her defiance of the reductive male/female binary.[3]

In her analysis of North American mainstream media heroines, Jennifer K. Stuller advocates a break from gender delineations and a democratisation of the idea of heroism. "There is no one way to be heroic," she writes, "and there shouldn't be limited or conformative representations of a 'hero.' What we need are heroes and heroisms: Black, White, Asian, Hispanic, Aboriginal, Middle Eastern, gay, straight, male, female, transgender, fat, skinny, somewhere-in-the-middle, athletic, disabled."[4] A number of comics creators share Stuller's concerns and have developed alternatives to the stereotypical white, young, male hero figure, DC Comics' new Jewish, lesbian Batwoman not being the least among them. However, representations of heroism that reflect non-heterosexual experience and unfixed gender have been relatively scarce. And of course, there is an ongoing problem regarding the absence of strong female characters in general: a report from the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film found that a mere 11% of protagonists in the top grossing 100 films of 2011 were female,[5] and Marvel's Joe Quesada recently voiced his doubt that a female hero could carry a blockbuster movie alone.[6]

The aim of this article is to examine two iconic *manga* (comics) and *anime* (animation) series geared toward young adults—*Sailor Moon* and *Revolutionary Girl Utena*—and the roles they play in the contemporary discourse surrounding the normalisation and validation of homosexuality and gender fluidity. I am invested in analysing these texts in particular because they feature prominent female characters who are either bisexual or lesbian and who also experience gender as a spectrum rather than a hard and fast box to be checked. Though neither narrative is flawless in its depiction of these homosexual and gender-fluid individuals, both disrupt the disturbing trend of queer female negation and invisibility that has long permeated the superhero genre by portraying such characters as admirable, courageous, and relatable.

Queering the Hero(ine)'s Journey

Both *Sailor Moon* and *Utena* centre on characters who progress from adolescence to adulthood, implicating them in the *Bildungsroman* (coming-of-age story) tradition; both also feature protagonists who participate, to some extent, in the narrative trajectory of the Hero's Journey as articulated by mythologists Joseph Campbell and Northrop Frye.[7] These literary traditions overlap in many ways, and each has served as the foundation for countless epic tales, both historically and contemporarily. Many stories

geared towards young adults combine the two, tracing a character's growth both in terms of age and heroic development. This follows, since at its heart, the Hero's Journey is in itself a sort of Bildungsroman—a tale of the growth of a hero.

Certainly, stories emerging out of these traditions can be richly entertaining and inspirational. However, they can also pose some problems if the hero in question is female, and even more if she is inclined toward homosexuality or variable gender presentation. With regard to the *Bildungsroman*, Annis Pratt asserts that females' stories differ from males' in that they offer a model for "growing down" instead of "growing up,"[8] as is evidenced by many nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels.[9] The Hero's Journey presents some unique challenges too, due to the fact that the very definition of the hero carries some assumptions about gender. Though Campbell repeatedly states that the Hero could be of any sex, some of the stages of the Journey are described in noticeably gendered terms. The "Meeting with the Goddess"[10] and the resistance of the "Woman as Temptress,"[11] for example, may be symbolic events adaptable to multiple interpretations, but such phraseology assumes a heterosexual, male point of view. Delving into this dilemma, Stuller inquires, "What happens to our social consciousness if the presence of our mythic heroes is—and has always been—overwhelmingly male?"[12] Where is the developing female hero left, much less the lesbian hero or the hero with a variable gender identity, if the narrative traditions out of which her story emerges are almost inextricably androcentric and heteronormative?

Citing traditional European fairy tales such as Cinderella, Snow White, and Briar Rose, Marilyn Farwell demonstrates the extent to which *Bildungsromane* include "the same seemingly natural elements—problem, complication, resolution—that define all narratives and at the same time [trap] the female in a fatalistic apparatus."[13] Any adventure story dealing with the seemingly innocuous migration from girlhood to adulthood potentially "demands that woman be muted, silenced, and violated when she enters the time-line that forces her into the sexual story."[14] By portraying the female's adherence to traditional sexual and gendered conduct as proper and correct, such stories funnel women into one of two endings: heterosexual marriage, or death. Radical feminist Andrea Dworkin concludes that in western fairy tales, "There are two definitions of woman. … The good woman must be possessed. The bad woman must be killed, or punished. Both must be nullified."[15] Obedient women who succumb to the "natural" progression from bashful virgin to sexual object to doting wife and selfless mother are rewarded, while those who disrupt the "order" of these events are met with contempt and disgust. Women who resist

dominant social scripts, being labelled sexual or gender "outlaws," are thus often symbolically represented in adventure stories as monsters, vampires, and other threatening figures of the grotesque.[16] A more socially just narrative formula, then, would eliminate the conflict between a character's status as a "nontraditional" woman and her status as a hero, which both *Sailor Moon* and *Utena* do.

Another essential component of progressive literature, in terms of lesbian and queer criticism, is the portrayal of sustained homosexual relationships as tenable and possible rather than fleeting and impossible. Citing examples such as Rosalind's story in Shakespeare's *As You Like It,* Farwell demonstrates the problematic ways in which the narrative of compulsory heterosexuality[17] relentlessly devours any flicker of alternative love or eroticism that does exist within a text.[18] In Rosalind's case, a brief escape into the Forest of Arden allows temporary relief from the strict confines of feminine performativity and enforced heterosexuality; a lesbian affair almost erupts between "Ganymede" (the cross-dressed Rosalind) and Phoebe, and there are simultaneous allusions to male homosexuality in the flirtatious relationship between Ganymede and Orlando. The setting of this narrative is therefore seemingly marked as a space in which gender binaries can blur, and sexual orientations along with them. However, due to the fact that *As You Like It* follows the trajectory of a conventional fairy tale, prescribing the appropriate ending for a lady of quality, Rosalind must ultimately abandon the forest, re-establish herself as wholly feminine in both behaviour and appearance, and wed her male suitor. The only alternative, theorists argue, would have been death.

Farwell also references Anne Sexton, who explores the theme of negated homosexuality in her poem "Rapunzel." In it, the lesbian relationship between the characters Rapunzel and Gothel disintegrates immediately upon the arrival of the prince, who "dazzled [Rapunzel] with his dancing stick."[19] Gothel's heart shrinks "to the size of a pin / never again to say: Hold me my young dear," as she realises that "a rose must have its stem" and that Rapunzel has "outgrown" her lesbian attraction "just as a tricycle."[20] Drawing a parallel between the fairy tale couple and a contemporary, non-fantastical one (a student and mentor in a realistic setting), the poem insinuates that present-day lesbian love is still equally subject to condescension and attempted erasure. Farwell writes that "Sexton gestures toward a lesbian relationship as an alternative story, but cannot follow through. She treats the lesbian story as a nonstory," adding that therefore, for feminists, "the broken sequence becomes the answer to disturbing an ideological monster: the master plot."[21] To help combat the myth of heterosexual primacy, then, heroic narratives should promote the

possibility of sustainable, long-term love between female characters, with neither heterosexual marriage nor death being framed as the only logical, inevitable occasion for an ending.

Though the examples cited by these theorists all stem from western culture, Mark McLelland's detailed examination of the history of queer populations in Japan reveals some similar attitudes toward lesbianism and gender fluidity.[22] McLelland reports that female homosexuality has often been dismissed as a "preliminary kind of love, one that [would] soon be replaced by a more mature attraction to men," and that in mid-twentieth-century literature, its representations were mainly designed to titillate heterosexual male readers.[23] Cross-dressers and female-to-male transgendered individuals were also marginalised by patriarchal systems of privilege. In the 1960s and 1970s, several nightclubs devoted to the celebration and self-expression of female-to-male transgendered individuals closed down due to their target audience's finite free time and lack of disposable income.[24] Even the Takarazuka Revue, a famous all-female performance troupe, has received criticism for its bold representations of *otoko yaku,* women who play male roles.[25] Moreover, in each of these cases, female experimentation with gender presentation was still relegated to the realm of the theatrical, the entertaining, and the ephemeral, not unlike Shakespeare's Forest of Arden.

In summary, life outside the boundaries imposed by norms of gender and sexuality is infrequently positioned as a lasting option for female protagonists within the narrative structures that guide literature and social relations alike. However, *Utena* and *Sailor Moon* attempt to confront and rewrite these cultural prejudices, portraying alternative trajectories as feasible, valid, and even heroic.

Revolutionary Girls

Revolutionary Girl Utena (*Shōjo Kakumei Utena,* in Japanese) was conceived by an artists' collective known as Be-Papas. The original manga was illustrated by Chiho Saito and released in 1996, while the 39-episode anime series was directed by Kunihiko Ikuhara and aired in 1997. For the purposes of this article, only the anime will be discussed, but both iterations tell the same basic story: after losing her parents at an early age, Utena has a fateful encounter with a prince who encourages her to "never lose [her] strength and nobility" and gives her a ring, promising that they will meet again.[26] It occurs to Utena that the ring may be meant to signify engagement, but she is far more interested in *emulating* the handsome prince than growing up to marry him. When, in high school, Utena is swept

up in a cult-like series of duels, she gets her chance to "be the prince" by defending her timid classmate Anthy against competitors who seek to claim her mysterious powers for their own twisted uses. Regardless of their gender, the current champion of the duels is said to be "engaged" to Anthy, and as Utena battles to liberate her friend, the two become increasingly close. Though she becomes briefly involved with men, Utena's deepest and most passionate relationship is her homosexual one. Other gay and lesbian pairings occur throughout the series, and whether they are purely sexual or emotionally intimate, all are treated as perfectly legitimate and normal. Sexual orientation is never a major topic of conversation, and the fact that several main characters are drawn to people of various sexes without incident or anxiety adds to *Utena*'s positive representations of flexible rather than fixed sexuality.

The series' treatment of gender also illustrates the extent to which categorical definitions of masculinity and femininity are limiting and unnecessary. From the very start, Utena is introduced as a character who subverts commonly-held cultural assumptions about her sex. Utena "should" jump at the chance of marrying the noble prince, yet instead of falling in love with him, as we have been culturally conditioned to expect her to do, she looks up to him as a role model. As a high school student, she rebelliously wears a derivative of the male uniform and competes alongside exclusively male peers in a variety of athletic activities.[27] She is generally regarded as a tomboy, and another character even affectionately refers to Utena as her "boyfriend."[28] Most importantly, in the spirit of becoming more "princely" and traditionally heroic, Utena prides herself on looking after the underdogs of the school and frequently intervening on their behalf.

Yet it is important to clarify that Utena does not want to "become" a prince in the literal sense of the word. She does not want to relinquish her female body, she is not trying to "pass" as a man, and she resents it when people imply that she is somehow less of a woman simply because of her more performatively masculine behaviours. When she says she wants to become a prince, Utena is referring to her desire to exhibit the qualities her hero reflected: courage, compassion, strength. The "prince" becomes, then, a body of ideas, connoting a heroic agency that is unfixed from gender. Utena contrasts this to the idea of the "princess"—a passive, helpless, and objectified entity. While her use of this gendered language is admittedly problematic, I suggest that she is seeking to rewrite the cultural scripts that dominate her environment by appropriating the label of the "prince" to refer to her own identity, which incorporates a unique mix of both traditionally masculine and feminine attributes and visual markers.

That said, in her superheroic exploits, Utena does indeed draw nearer to her goal of "becoming the prince" literally as well as metaphorically. Before each duel, her appearance becomes noticeably more masculine.[29] During the stock animation preceding each battle, Anthy endows her with additions to her school uniform that cause her to more closely resemble the mysterious prince from her childhood. Utena becomes further conflated with the prince when his ghostlike figure inexplicably appears to aid her during each fight.[30] In these moments, their bodies literally meld, temporarily collapsing their identities. Additionally, Utena's role as a duellist is fraught with phallic symbolism. One of Anthy's powers is to call forth a legendary sword, which Utena wields during duels and which is coded as a symbol of masculine sexual virility in various ways throughout the series. To name only a few, there is a scene in which the president of the student council demonstrates a hidden power of the blade, the activation of which requires Anthy to literally fall to her knees and touch her mouth to its tip.[31] The scene shows the president gazing down at the totally submissive Anthy in a manner that can only be read as suggestive. Also, there is the method of winning the duels, which involves cutting a single rose from the lapel of one's opponent. Roses are linked to female sexuality in medieval literature and psychoanalytic discourse, and *Utena* draws from these traditions, positioning the flower as an icon of femininity. This adds supplemental implications, therefore, to the "deflowering" of the defeated duellist, associating the victor with themes of male-coded dominance.

Interestingly, however, there is some slippage in the symbolism invoked by these motifs as the series goes on. In the final story arc of the anime, the stock animation depicting Utena's ascent to the duelling arena and the enhancement of her costume serves to emphasise the intensifying relationship between her and Anthy, incorporating homosexually-charged imagery.[32] Anthy runs her hands down Utena's face and body, caressing her as she adorns the costume. Moreover, the subtext of Utena's weapon changes: instead of Anthy conjuring the legendary sword alone, the two women summon it together, further alluding to their emotional unification. In these ways, Utena successfully appropriates the allegedly masculine icons of the prince costume and phallic sword, re-inscribing them with gynocentric meaning. This also signals the generativity of the relationship between the two women—a relationship that proves to be the strongest and most intimate out of the entire series.

Over the course of her adventures, Utena's principles of heroism and nobility are challenged. Particularly, she encounters forces that seek to pressure her into conforming to traditional feminine performativity, to compulsory heterosexuality, and to a fixed, rigid gender identity. Utena's

cross-dressing, for instance, is met with a variety of responses. While her peers, both male and female, admire her for her rebellious appearance, she has an outspoken opponent in her guidance counsellor. However, the extent to which audiences are meant to take this backlash seriously is debatable. The guidance counsellor is ultimately nothing but a shrewish, ranting woman who is easily dismissed as comic relief.[33] The only real opposition comes from Akio, the archetypal embodiment of patriarchy within the text. Akio calculatingly seeks to break Utena's spirit, and he goes about it in an extremely gendered way. He pointedly aims to socialise her into a prim and proper woman, infantilising her while simultaneously sexualising her. He sabotages her relationship with Anthy by seducing her and even goes so far as to forcibly dress her as a princess and confiscate her sword, undermining her dream of becoming a prince.[34] By defying Akio, rejecting the role of the passive princess, and struggling to free Anthy from her objectified role in the duels, Utena emerges as a subject of multilateral narratological disruption. She subverts the narratives assigned to her gender, refusing heterosexual primacy and tirelessly fighting for what can only be called feminist ends. Yet she can also be read as a hero according to queer theory, exploding gender binaries and rewriting the meanings of "masculine" and "feminine" terms, symbols, and ideas. By "becoming the prince," Utena does not suggest that women must act like men in order to keep their "strength and nobility," but rather that gender categories are overly restrictive. Her identity as a hero transcends her biological body and the nature of her attractions, honouring both without dwelling on either. In these ways, she is an answer to Stuller's call for diverse "heroisms."

Pretty Soldiers

In Takeuchi's original manga *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon*, which ran from 1992 to 1997, sexual orientation and gender identity are similarly portrayed as but one component of significant characters' lives. The anime stays true to Takeuchi's plot and tone in several major ways, though it takes some liberties, as will be explained.

In its most basic sense, *Sailor Moon* tells the story of several young girls who transform into superheroes known as Sailor Soldiers to protect the earth from evil forces. While the heterosexual relationship between Sailor Moon and her lover is certainly a focal point of the manga, two lesbian characters are introduced approximately halfway through the series, and their relationship is treated with respect by the other members of the team. Haruka and Michiru, who are secretly Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune, are a happy couple who cohabitate and eventually even end up

raising a child together.[35] None of their comrades judge them on the basis of their relationship; in fact, in the manga, it nearly goes unnoticed. The issue of the couple's "lesbianism" is never brought up in conversation.[36] Haruka and Michiru's relationship is treated like any other and is portrayed as long-term, loving, and sustainable.

There is, however, some anxiety expressed over the ambiguity of Haruka's gender. Haruka participates in athletic activities, competes in professional car races, and is very outspoken about her opinions—all traditionally "masculine" characteristics. Like Utena, she wears the male version of her school's official uniform. However, unlike Utena, she is often mistaken for a boy, which she does not seem to mind.[37] Uli Meyer suggests that Haruka could be read as a female-to-male transgendered individual,[38] which is a plausible interpretation. However, due to the fact that Haruka does not articulate a specific desire to claim a male identity, she may also serve to illustrate the superfluous nature of gender categories by being who she is and letting people assume what they will, encouraging them to examine the roots of their own need for labels. An example of this comes in the manga when several of the main characters, including Usagi, are appalled when Haruka flips over a girl in a martial arts competition. Their horror stems from the fact that they believe Haruka to be a man. Immediately, Haruka comments directly on the problematic double standards that saturate the construction of gender. "Gender doesn't make a difference," she says. "Do you think just because you're a girl you're always going to lose to a guy? If you think that, you can't protect the ones you love."[39] Takeuchi's dialogue is usually devoid of such direct social commentary, so the passage stands out.

In terms of her superheroic gender performativity, Haruka becomes visually more feminised when she transforms into Sailor Uranus. Aside from differences in colour, the costumes of the Sailor Soldiers are all primarily the same, so she acquires the standard short skirt, tiara, and form-fitting suit.[40] Interestingly, though, Haruka's superpowers and weaponry are coded as traditionally masculine when compared with those of her partner, Sailor Neptune. The women are nearly inseparable in battle, and in the anime, the stock animations of their respective powers usually occur within seconds of each other, offering opportunities to contrast their gendered subtext.[41] Whereas Michiru carries a magic mirror, Haruka bears a sword, and while Michiru's spells are replete with smooth, curvilinear imagery and cool tones, Haruka's are noticeably more physically aggressive, jagged, and tonally warm. Overall, Haruka is seen as the more active and dynamic of the two, stressing her role as the more "masculine" member of the relationship. Takeuchi's artwork includes similar motifs: A

well-known pair of facing drawings depicts Michiru serenely playing a cello, while Haruka leans on a Ferrari and clutches a sword, smiling confidently.[42]

Thus, when Haruka kisses Usagi while wearing her Sailor Soldier uniform, Usagi is far less concerned about the potential homosexuality of the kiss than discerning Haruka's "true" gender. While the manga version of *Sailor Moon* delivers positive representations of lesbianism, therefore, the treatment of gender fluidity is less clear. Haruka challenges readers' ideas about the importance of labels, but Usagi has been the central character up to this point in the narrative, and fans may be inclined to identify with her discomfort. Nevertheless, Usagi's interest in her new friend overcomes her impulse to categorise her, and she ultimately sets her questions aside, accepting Haruka on the basis of who she is.

The anime, contrastingly, treats gender ambiguity and homosexuality as more sensational, scandalous issues. As in the manga, several of the main female characters develop attractions to Haruka because they believe she is a man. When her biological sex is revealed, however, these attractions instantly dissolve, and the girls exhibit hyperbolic disgust over their former feelings.[43] The event becomes entirely comedic, and Haruka is afforded no thoughtful reflections on the exaggerated importance of gender. When Makoto/Sailor Jupiter shows signs of romantic interest in Haruka even after learning she is a woman, the rest of her teammates react with shock.[44] While again, their comments are teasing rather than hateful, they are nevertheless homophobic. The lesbianism between Haruka and Michiru is accepted by the younger Sailor Soldiers, but in a distant, abstract way. The thought of one of their own close friends questioning her sexuality is cause for giggles that problematically cast homosexuality as something deviant, strange and undesirable.

The North American translation of the anime is even more troubling, as it attempts to elide the issue of Haruka and Michiru's lesbianism altogether.[45] Worried that viewers would take umbrage at the inclusion of a lesbian couple in a show targeted at young adults, the North American licensors altered considerable portions of dialogue to portray Haruka and Michiru as cousins.[46] This contrivance was fundamentally flawed, and translators occasionally had to resort to flagrant narratological contradictions as they scrambled to cover up the plot holes they had thrown open.[47] Many English-speaking fan responses to this alteration showed considerable outrage, indicating both a genuine investment in the text and a riled sense of injustice over the licensors' homophobic revisions.[48]

The fifth season of the anime deviates from the manga in an interesting and noteworthy way. In the manga's final story arc, three new female warriors called the Sailor Starlights are introduced. By day, they

disguise themselves as males and pose as the Three Lights, a boy band adored by fans the world over. In scenes reminiscent of Haruka's introduction, the Three Lights are constantly pursued by female adorers, including some of the younger Sailor Soldiers.[49] Upon learning their true identities, however, the girls seem undisturbed.[50] Only one comment about their cross-dressing is made—notably, by a villain—who says that she "wouldn't trust girls who pretend to be guys."[51] The antagonist's attempt at bullying is immediately dismissed by two members of the Three Lights who overhear her, and she is shortly thereafter fought and defeated.

The anime departs radically from this scenario, portraying the characters as physically male in civilian form and physically female when transformed. Additionally, it amps up the romantic tension between Usagi and Seiya, the leader of the Starlights, which continues even after Usagi learns of Seiya's gendered secret. Some of the other younger Soldiers develop crushes on the other two Starlights, as well.[52] Significantly, when the superheroic identities of the Three Lights are revealed—along with their unstable sexes—the girls do not react with the mock horror or embarrassment that emerged after learning of Haruka's sex.[53] Perhaps this is on account of the significantly deeper relationships that develop between the characters in between the time that they meet and the time when their secrets are revealed.

Though the topics of homosexuality and gender ambiguity were broached with some discomfort earlier in the anime series, the Sailor Starlights are treated with dignity and respect. The anxiety that emerges following the revelation of their identities occurs on account of Usagi and company's uncertainty about how to negotiate between their civilian friendships with the Three Lights and their tense superheroic relationships with the Starlights. As in many other superhero stories where the revelation of a secret identity causes complications for the civilian hero's loved ones, the collapse of the Lights' dual identities has more to do with social roles than sexual or gender identity. The fact that their secret is not met with disgust, disdain, or any other negative judgment indicates that *Sailor Moon* may have the potential to help normalise and un-sensationalise the presence of transgender and transsexual individuals. Though I hesitate to call the Starlights transgender or transsexual due to the fact that none of them express a preference for one gender or sex over the other, I find it significant that the series encourages viewers to look past the characters' physical bodies and to contemplate the fact that they are the same individuals regardless of the bodies that they occupy. In the end, the Starlights enjoy a happy ending, demonstrating the ability of their unique heroism to thrive.

The fifth season of *Sailor Moon* was never televised in English-speaking countries. The countries that did translate and air it dealt with the presence of the sex-alternating heroes in various, sometimes perplexing ways. In Italy, for example, the Starlights were contrived to be the twin sisters of the consistently male Three Lights, allegedly due in part to the warnings of psychologist Vera Slepoj that representations of gender fluidity might cause homosexuality in young children.[54] As we can see from the noticeable lack of gender-fluid, transgender and transsexual characters in mainstream media, these types of representations are still contested today.[55]

The Continuing Demand for New Models of Heroism

Though *Sailor Moon* and *Revolutionary Girl Utena* ended their runs in the late 1990s, they are currently experiencing a miniature renaissance. Digitally remastered DVD box sets of *Utena* were released in late 2011, new translations of the *Sailor Moon* manga are hitting North American markets one volume at a time, and a reboot of the anime series is scheduled to launch in Japan during the summer of 2013. The re-emergence of these texts is timely, given their complex portrayals of female superheroes who represent a range of sexualities and gender presentations. Activists and concerned academics alike are interested in the portrayal of fictional female-bodied individuals who challenge the norms of feminine gender performance and compulsory heterosexuality in part because they realise the influence of such representations on the societal acceptance of these individuals. The treatments of such characters in these two series are far from perfect, but they offer imaginative alternatives to the heteronormative scripts that saturate so much of contemporary media geared towards adolescents. Based on their ongoing popularity, it seems that these stories continue to resonate with audiences, and that the celebration of the female heroes embedded in their narratives may be able to help, if only in some small way, to normalise and honour the existence of women who deviate from heterosexual and conventional gender scripts within the cultural landscape of the twenty-first century.

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NOTES

1 Naoko Takeuchi, *Sailor Moon Comic #24,* trans. Anita Sangupta (New York: Kodansha/Mixx Entertainment Inc., 2000), 31, accessed July 31, 2011, http://nas.homeunix.com/onlinereading/?image=Sailormoon%20complete/Sailorm oon%20c031/SM_comic_24_28.jpg&server=nas.html.

2 Mark Vallen, "The creator of Bishoujo Senshi Sailormoon speaks at the 1998 San Diego International Comics Convention," *The Black Moon,* accessed September 3, 2012, http://www.theblackmoon.com/Naoko/take.html.

3 See Kazumi Nagaike, "The Sexual and Textual Politics of Japanese Lesbian Comics: Reading Romantic and Erotic Yuri Narratives," *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies* 10, no. 3 (2010), accessed September 4, 2012, http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/articles/2010/Nagaike.html. Also consider the following comments, taken from fan sites: "Haruka especially appeals to me as she is the androgynous half of a subtle (yet exposed) lesbian relationship. I identify with her disinterest in clearly-defined gender labels" ("Application [Sailor Moon RP]," accessed November 20, 2011, http://toyotatenoh.tumblr.com/); "I identify with/relate to Haruka pretty strongly. There's some gender ambiguity & butchness" ("The Character You Relate to the Most," accessed November 20, 2011, http://galaxycauldron.forumotion.com/t585-the-character-you-relate-to-the-most).

4 Jennifer K. Stuller, *Ink-Stained Amazons and Cinematic Warriors: Superwomen in Modern Mythology* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 162.

5 Martha M. Lauzen, "It's a Man's (Celluloid) World: On-Screen Representations of Female Characters in the Top 100 Films of 2011," *Center for the Study of Women in Television & Film,* accessed September 10, 2012, http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/2011_Its_a_Mans_World_Exec_Summ.pdf.

6 Adrian Hieatt, "Cool News," accessed September 9, 2012, http://dcwomenkickingass.tumblr.com/post/23415131312/joe-quesada-on-female-led-marvel-movies.

7 See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), and Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

8 Annis Pratt, *Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 14.

9 Carol Lazzaro-Weis, "The Female 'Bildungsroman': Calling It into Question," *NWSA Journal* 2.1 (1990): 17.

10 Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 109.

11 Ibid., 120.

12 Stuller, *Ink-Stained Amazons*, 1.

13 Marilyn Farwell, *Heterosexual Plots & Lesbian Narratives* (New York: NYU Press, 1996), 27.

14 Ibid., 27.

[15] Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc, 1974), 48.

[16] Marilyn Farwell, *Heterosexual Plots* 33.

[17] See Adrienne Rich, "Compulsive Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in Blood, Bread, and Poetry (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986), 23–75.

[18] Farwell, *Heterosexual Plots*, 48.

[19] Sexton, *Transformations*, 41.

[20] Ibid., 42.

[21] Farwell, *Heterosexual Plots* 46–7.

[22] Mark McLelland, *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 86–7.

[23] Ibid., 87.

[24] Ibid., 120-1.

[25] Ibid., 117. Interestingly, the Takarazuka Revue served as an inspiration for *Utena.*

[26] "The Rose Bride," 1997 episode of *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (TV Tokyo, 1996–1997; Central Park Media/Software Sculptors, 1999 DVD).

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] "For Whom the Rose Smiles," 1997 episode of *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (TV Tokyo, 1996–1997; Central Park Media/Software Sculptors, 1999 DVD). This sequence first appears in this episode, and is repeated before every subsequent duel up until episode 25, when the stock animation changes.

[30] "The Rose Bride," *Revolutionary Girl Utena.* Again, this is a recurring motif, both thematically and visually.

[31] "For Friendship, Perhaps," 1997 episode of *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (TV Tokyo, 1996–1997; Central Park Media/Software Sculptors, 2000 DVD).

[32] "Their Eternal Apocalypse," 1997 episode of *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (TV Tokyo, 1996–1997; Central Park Media/Software Sculptors, 2003 DVD). The aforementioned pre-duel stock animation changes in this episode and continues to be used throughout the rest of the series.

[33] "The Rose Bride," *Revolutionary Girl Utena.*

[34] "The End of the World," *Revolutionary Girl Utena.*

[35] Naoko Takeuchi, *Sailor Moon Comic #32,* trans. Anita Sangupta (New York: Kodansha/Mixx Entertainment Inc., 2001), 35, accessed July 15, 2011, http://nas.homeunix.com/onlinereading/?image=Sailormoon%20complete/Sailorm oon%20c039/SM_comic_32_29.jpg&server=nas.html.

[36] Judging from other *shōjo*, or young women's stories, such as *Cardcaptor Sakura* and *Fruits Basket*, this seems to be a common convention of the genre. Relationships are often left unlabelled, and even unmentioned.

[37] Naoko Takeuchi, *Sailor Moon Comic #21,* trans. Anita Sangupta (New York: Kodansha/Mixx Entertainment Inc., 2000), accessed July 15, 2011,

http://nas.homeunix.com/onlinereading/?image=Sailormoon%20complete/Sailorm oon%20c028/SM_comic_21_00-cover.jpg&server=nas.html.

[38] Uli Meyer, "Hidden in Straight Sight: Trans*gressing Gender and Sexuality via BL," in Dru Pagliassotti, Antonia Levi, and Mark McHarry, *Boys' Love Manga: Essays on the Sexual Ambiguity and Cross-Cultural Fandom of the Genre* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2010), 238.

[39] Naoko Takeuchi, *Sailor Moon Comic #22,* trans. Anita Sangupta (New York: Kodansha/Mixx Entertainment Inc., 2000) 46–7, accessed July 15, 2011, http://nas.homeunix.com/onlinereading/?image=Sailormoon%20complete/Sailorm oon%20c029/SM_comic_22_42.jpg&server=nas.html   and http://nas.homeunix.com/onlinereading/?image=Sailormoon%20complete/Sailorm oon%20c029/SM_comic_22_43.jpg&server=nas.html.

[40] The tension between the positive narratological representations of these strong female heroes and their sexualised visual representations is a complex and worthy topic in itself, but it falls outside the scope of this particular article.

[41] "A Pretty Boy? The Secret of Tenou Haruka," 1994 episode of *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon (Bishōjo Senshi Sērā Mūn)* (TV Asahi, 1992–1997). Episodes' titles and dates of distribution refer to the original Japanese releases unless otherwise noted. The animation sequences first appear in this episode, and are repeated throughout the remainder of the series.

[42] Naoko Takeuchi, *Pretty Soldier Sailormoon III: The Original Picture Collection* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1996), 2–3.

[43] "A Pretty Boy? The Secret of Tenou Haruka," *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon.*

[44] "Cruel Uranus? Makoto's Pinch," 1994 episode of *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon (Bishōjo Senshi Sērā Mūn)* (TV Asahi, 1992–1997).

[45] For an extensive and spirited exploration of the differences between the original Japanese and North American releases, see Robert Wheeler, Dan Berdnaski, and Tiffany Gould, "Sailor Moon Uncensored," accessed August 5, 2011, http://smuncensored.com/.

[46] "Blinded by Love's Light," 2000 episode of *Sailor Moon* (Cloverway Inc, 2000). This citation refers to the English release.

[47] For example, "Lita Borrows Trouble," "Related by Destiny," and "Friendly Foes," 2000 episodes of *Sailor Moon* (Cloverway Inc., 2000). These citations refer to the English release. In "Lita Borrows Trouble," a reference is made to the fact that Haruka and Michiru grew up together since they were cousins, in spite of the fact that a later dubbed episode, "Related by Destiny," blatantly contradicts this fact. The latter centres on a flashback of the Soldiers' first meeting, which occurred when they were young adults. This discrepancy was never resolved within the rewritten narrative. Equally confusingly, in "Friendly Foes," a female villain refers to Sailor Neptune as Sailor Uranus' cousin, although she does not know their civilian identities. Narratologically, the reference made no sense.

[48] For example, one fan writes that the translators "had no respect for this…art" (Robert Wheeler et. al., "Sailor Moon Uncensored: Episode 96," accessed November 22, 2011, http://smuncensored.com/comparison.php?episodeid=96).

[49] Naoko Takeuchi, "Sailor Moon SuperS," trans. Mika Onishi, *Smile: Cool Comix for Girls* 3.1 (December 2000): 22–3, accessed November 4, 2012, http://nas.homeunix.com/onlinereading/?image=Sailormoon%20complete/Sailorm oon%20c056/Smile_3-01_020__Sailor_Moon_.jpg&server=nas.html and http://nas.homeunix.com/onlinereading/?image=Sailormoon%20complete/Sailorm oon%20c056/Smile_3-01_021__Sailor_Moon_.jpg&server=nas.html.

[50] Naoko Takeuchi, "Sailor Moon StarS," trans. Mika Onishi, *Smile: Cool Comix for Girls* 3.2 (January 2001), accessed November 4, 2012, http://nas.homeunix.com/onlinereading/?image=Sailormoon%20complete/Sailorm oon%20c057/Smile_3-02_000-cover.jpg&server=nas.html. See, for example, pages 38–41, in which Sailor Venus and Sailor Mars discover that the "male" Three Lights are the actually the female Sailor Starlights, but do not comment on this revelation. They stay focused on the mission and their role as soldiers.

[51] Naoko Takeuchi, "Sailor Moon StarS," trans. Mika Onishi, *Smile: Cool Comix for Girls* 3.3 (February 2001): 24–5, accessed November 4, 2012, http://nas.homeunix.com/onlinereading/?image=Sailormoon%20complete/Sailorm oon%20c058/Smile_3-03_021__Sailor_Moon_.jpg&server=nas.html and http://nas.homeunix.com/onlinereading/?image=Sailormoon%20complete/Sailorm oon%20c058/Smile_3-03_022__Sailor_Moon_.jpg&server=nas.html.

[52] "A Farewell and a Meeting! The Flow of the Stars of Destiny," 1996 episode of *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon: Sailor Stars (Bishōjo Senshi Sērā Mūn Sērā Sutāzu)* (TV Asahi, 1992–1997).

[53] "Invitation to Terror! Usagi's Night Flight" and "Torn Between Duty and Friendship! Confrontation Between the Sailor Soldiers," 1996 episodes of *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon: Sailor Stars (Bishōjo Senshi Sērā Mūn Sērā Sutāzu)* (TV Asahi, 1992–1997).

[54] Marco Pellitteri, *The Dragon and the Dazzle: Models, Strategies, and Identities of Japanese Imagination; A European Perspective* (Latina, Italy: Tunué, 2010), 275.

[55] One interesting recent development in this area is the introduction of Wade Adams/Unique to the mainstream American television show *Glee*. Wade/Unique presents as both conventionally masculine and feminine and identifies as female. This is particularly notable because *Glee* is largely targeted at young adult audiences.