

**Make-Up!: The Mythic Narrative and Transformation as a Mechanism for
Personal and Spiritual Growth in Magical Girl (*Mahō Shōjo*) Anime**

by

N'Donna Rashi Russell
B.A. (Hons.), University of Victoria, 2015

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT

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The *mahō shōjo* or “magical girl”, genre of Japanese animation and manga has maintained a steady, prolific presence for nearly fifty years. Magical Girl series for the most part feature a female protagonist who is between the ages of nine and fourteen - not a little girl but not yet a woman. She is either born with or bestowed upon the ability to transform into a magical alter-ego and must save the world from a clear and present enemy. The magical girl must work to balance her “normal life” – domestic obligations, educational obligations, and interpersonal relationships – with her duty to protect the world.

I will argue that the “transformation” of an ordinary girl into a magical girl heroine is a mechanism of personal and spiritual growth within a liminal space that provides the heroine and the female fans who read these series with the tools needed to grow in a supportive community. I will build a framework using Joseph Campbell’s mythic narrative and Vladimir Propp’s folktale morphology to illustrate how the narrative pushes the heroine to grow and mature in a way that honors her individual self. Furthermore, I will illustrate how female fans disseminate these works as consumers, creators, and producers. Magical girl series, particularly ones marketed to school girl audiences, are published in manga magazines that encourage engagement between the readers and artists while initiating young readers into the world of manga.

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Dedication

To every girl
Who held a wand in her hands
And believed she could be magical

To every girl
Who held a brooch to her heart
And declared herself the hero

To every boy
Who saw the heroine standing tall
And promised to support her always

And to every person
Who took their own brand of magic
into their hands and ran with it!

Author's Note

All Japanese names are written in Japanese order – that is last name – first name. However, if the author intentionally has their name written in Western order (first name then last name), then I will use that. Throughout this thesis, I have used the original Japanese names of various manga series and they are transliterated into the Hepburn form of Romanization. The first time I refer to a title, I will first use its transliterated Japanese name in italics, then its English translation in parentheses. For Japanese word or phrase translation, I will state the English translation first, then the original Japanese phrase italicized in parentheses.

Except for *Sailor Moon*, I have primarily used the English translations of each manga where available. However, to ensure that my textual analysis is complete, I also have the Japanese versions of each manga (except for *Ribon no Kishi*) as reference to ensure that nothing is “lost in translation”. Finally, all original illustrations were done by Amber McGowan for use in this thesis.

CHAPTER ONE:

What's Up? An Introduction to Magical Girl Anime

I will promise too. I will... always protect. And I will always protect our precious friends. Even someday when we disappear...and new Sailor Senshi are born...

Sailor Moon, you will always be invincible. The most beautiful shining star.

– Mamoru Chiba, Sailor Moon, Volume Twelve (Mixx/Tokyopop Translation)

The City of Chicago – September 1995. In a modest one bedroom apartment located on the North Side of Chicago, two blocks east of Amundsen High School, the modest life of a meek second year student was about to change.

I had just transferred from a posh all-girls Catholic High School to my neighborhood catchment high school and I clearly remember not being happy about it. Never mind that the idealistic dreams I once had toward attending such a school were long shattered – uniforms were work to keep clean, the stereotype of the strict nun existed for a reason, and tuition is expensive – I'd managed to get into all the classes I really wanted and now, as then, I had to give them up. While I didn't transfer blind – that is, there were elementary school friends in attendance who looked forward to me joining their ranks – to say that I was ready to start a new chapter of my high school life was a bit of a stretch.

As I returned home from a day filled with grammar rules, math equations, and musical notes, I expected it to be like any other day – mundane. I planned to plop down on my mother's old and weathered couch, turn on the television, and zone out to weekday afternoon cartoons. In other words, I planned to do what other children and adolescents usually did.

Little did I know that fate had other plans for me.

The first change was the television station – the independent television station WCIU, a previously Spanish-language channel that switched to English program two years before. I don't know what possessed me to switch to it that day; if this were a more mainstream, narrative piece I'd offer a long-winded explanation as how my desire to watch something other than the usual was all fate. Instead, I will stick to the facts while indirectly insisting that such a change, in the end, was indeed “fate”.

One guitar riff and eight peppy notes later, she graced my television screen. My eyes widened in amazed wonder as a blonde girl with big blue eyes and two neatly wrapped meatballs on the top of her head lifted her hands up in the air, swearing that in the name of the moon, she would right wrongs and punish evil.

Fighting evil by the moonlight

Winning love by daylight

Never running from a real fight

She is the one named Sailor Moon.

I didn't stand a chance. I was already hooked, even though I had no idea what I was watching. Japanese animation was still under the radar in 1995 – only those in the know knew about it. Blockbuster Video, still in business at the time, had a modest selection of titles for those aware of their existence, but it would be five more years before the introduction of Toriyama Akira's *Dragon Ball* and *Pokemon* would push anime to the forefront. Furthermore, while shows such as *Speed Racer* (“Mahha GoGoGo”), *Robotech* (“Chōjīkū Yōsai Makurosu”), and *Voltron: Defenders of the Universe* (“Hyaku Jūō Goraion”) were previously introduced to the masses, they amassed more of a cult following than a mass audience. But *Sailor Moon* was

about to change all of that, even if the initial run of English-dubbed episodes would ultimately lead to cancellation due to scheduling and licensing issues.

Despite this, the show only needed five minutes to make a long-lasting impression upon me. The series was eye catching in various ways – slender heroines with big, expressive eyes and long legs kicking butt, detailed and colour backgrounds featuring various Tokyo neighborhoods, Tokyo Tower glittering in the background, and of course, the flashy and rhythmic transformation sequences. It was nothing like anything I'd seen on American television before. Don't get me wrong – little girls had their heroines, such as Wonder Woman, She-Ra, and the stylish animated pop group Jem and the Holograms. But they were all grown women who could do whatever they wanted and live their lives however they wanted. The most I could do, as both a little girl and a teenager, was aspire to be like them when I became an adult.

Sailor Moon was different. She was a super hero *and* a teenager. Not only did she have to save the world, but she also had to do her homework and appease her parents and her teachers. When she and her friends were dealing with the monster-of-the-week, they were doing the same things I did with my friends. That is, they were hanging out, playing video games at the Crown Center arcade, enjoying lunch at a café, or just enjoying time with one another. Unlike the stoic Wonder Woman, steely in the face of her enemies, Sailor Moon wasn't afraid to wear her emotions on her sleeve. I got to watch how fighting a relentless enemy affected her. I got to watch her cry and show frustration, even if she was determined to protect the people close to her heart.

Sailor Moon was a mirror into my own life. Though I didn't have the power to change into a super-powered, stylish heroine, watching the show was therapeutic for me. In seeing the heroine go through her struggles, I found comfort when dealing with my own. I had a heroine I

could relate to, in spite of her extraordinary adventures in an ordinary world. I wasn't the only one enchanted by her, either. My best friend Katherine, who was more aware of anime than I was at the time, was just as hooked as I was. As the internet exploded with communities devoted to Sailor Moon – it helped me to find out more about the episodes not shown in North America as well as the differences between the original Japanese broadcast and the English dub – it became apparent to me that *Sailor Moon* had captured the hearts of people all around the world. And though I am no longer a teenager, *Sailor Moon* has stayed with me and continues to influence my personal life as well as my academic pursuits.

As Sailor Moon celebrates the twenty-fifth anniversary of its initial anime broadcast with various limited-edition merchandise, countless collaborations with other companies dedicated to offering cute goods such as cell phone charms, stationary, and handbags, there remains a questionable gaze over how a narrative, created for Japanese readers, became a global phenomenon. Even now, as anime has gained a considerable presence within the mainstream consciousness due to legal-streaming websites, bookstores offering English-translated manga, and annual conventions centered around anime, manga, and Japanese popular culture, there are still those who stare at this medium with a suspicious gaze. In America, comics are often associated with young boys, who are thought to be the primary consumers. Furthermore, there is still pushback against recognizing manga, and graphic novels in general, as narrative media. For example, the cancellation of the graphic novel and manga-best sellers lists by the New York Times was seen by some as an affront to the storytelling medium, making it more difficult for educators and consumers alike to discover new works.¹

¹ “Authors react to The New York Times canceling its graphic novel best-sellers list”, The Verge, accessed June 9, 2017, <https://www.theverge.com/2017/2/2/14484456/nyt-best-seller-list-graphic-novels-manga-canceled-scott-mccloud-brian-lee-omalley-image-comics>.

On the other hand, manga reading is a wide-spread pastime in Japan; there are several demographics that correspond to different groups of readers. If comics are associated with young boys in America, then it's almost unheard of to consider that there is a separate category of comics for young girls within Japan. Recently, stories in this category feature a heroine, drawn with very feminine features, experiencing love for the first time.² However, since the 1950s, there have been stories published that feature a heroine gifted with abilities that could be described as "extraordinary" fighting for justice in a seemingly ordinary world. This heroine, known as the *mahō shōjo* ("magical girl"), has become a popular figure within the anime world and a visual representative of "girl-power" since her introduction in 1960s Japan. Rather than feature a heroine that could be perceived as passive, these heroines actively fight for their passions while navigating the challenges they face through extraordinary battles and in their ordinary lives.

Though this narrative sounds exciting in nature, the question remains of how such a narrative managed to achieved popularity with fans outside of its initial marketing demographic. This thesis will seek to answer this question through its analysis of various magical girl narratives, specifically looking at the elements of the narrative that may appeal to readers, how these narratives tie into girls' culture (*shōjo bunka*) within Japan, and which elements of the narrative resonate with readers outside of Japan. I will demonstrate how magical girl narratives use the transformation of the heroine into her magical avatar is a mechanism for personal and spiritual growth; this process is one that readers around the globe can relate to despite cultural differences. In exploring the text, I will explore the structures that come together to create this

² Shamoan, Deborah, *Passionate Friendship: The Aesthetics of Girl Culture in Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 2012), 1

type of narrative, and how the narrative ultimately promotes individual acceptance as well as acceptance by an understanding community.

The Shōjo and the Mahō Shōjo

It is important to define important terms regarding magical narratives before pouring into existing literature dedicated to the subject. The word *shōjo* itself can simply be translated as “girl”; however, *shōjo* is not simply a term but also a cultural phenomenon within that has existed within modern Japanese culture since the Meiji era. It refers to girls between the ages of nine and sixteen and at the time of its cultural creation, referred to the middle-to-upper class young girls who were now allowed to pursue advanced education due to educational reforms that occurred during this time.³ While these reforms allowed for women to delay marriage, the *shōjo* was still expected to “grow up”. Furthermore, schoolgirls were instructed and expected to follow the tenets of *ryōsai kenbo* – that is, they were expected to become “good wives, wise mothers” upon adulthood.

As Japan hurtled toward modernity at a breakneck pace to prove its mettle to the western world, the role of women within modern Japan became a subject of intense scrutiny. The Meiji Schoolgirl became a mystical figure from the late-Meiji period into the Taisho era and became the focus of mainstream media and a subject of discourse within literary circles. In addition to educational policies that championed *ryōsai kenbo*, male authors wrote serialized novels that warned against straying from the culturally accepted path to adulthood and the consequences that would befall a woman if she did. The *shōjo* was to be virginal and pure of heart as she was to be

³ Shamoan, *Passionate Friendship*, 2, 15-17

the path to salvation for a male who wish to engage in a spiritual relationship (*ren'ai*).⁴ On the other hand, a woman who engaged in her own pleasures would ultimately be denied such salvation. This type of literature mirrored the anxiety and subjective male gaze regarding the female during this period.

The *mahō shōjo*, one aspect of girls' culture born in 1960s Japan, seems to be the opposite of the ideals espoused during the Meiji and Taisho eras. Commonly translated as “magical girl”, the *mahō shōjo*, on the surface, is simply defined as a girl that uses magic. However, the traits of the magical girl set her apart from her Meiji-era counterpart. Though she may possess the visual traits associated with the *shōjo* aesthetic – wide and expressive eyes, willowy features, and a slender form, the *mahō shōjo* often embraces character traits that are not considered to be feminine – clumsiness, mischievousness, and lack of academic ability. Though initially created by male artists, the *mahō shōjo* character would come to embody themes of female empowerment, growth, and maturity. Furthermore, if the *shōjo* of the Meiji and Taisho eras embodied traditional Japanese ideas of femininity, then the *mahō shōjo* subverts them.

Sugawa-Shimada credits the Disney film *Mary Poppins* – featuring the eponymous magical nanny – and the American 1960s sitcom *Bewitched* – featuring actress Elizabeth Montgomery as a middle class housewife who is also a 900 year old witch – with kickstarting the *mahō shōjo* genre within Japan.⁵ *Mahōtsukai Sarī* (“Sally the Witch”) is credited with being the first magical girl anime; according to Sugawa-Shimada (2011), the show captured the attention

⁴ Shamoan, *Passionate Friendship*, 19

⁵ Sugawa, Akiko, “Children of Sailor Moon: The Evolution of Magical Girls in Japanese Anime”, Nippon Communications, accessed June 10, 2017, <http://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/a03904/>

of the young female viewers it was marketed to and was an instant success.⁶ The mischievous Sally, a young girl from the magical world who comes to the human world to make friends with children her age, would pave the way for further narratives featuring young girls with magical powers doing extraordinary things. As stories of little witches (*majokko*) undergoing a rite of passage evolved into magical warriors fighting for justice and to protect the ones they love, magical girl series continue to feature young girls using their unique source of power to navigate idealized forms of femininity while at the same time questioning what it means to be feminine.

The differences between these literary portrayals of the *shōjo* is at the heart of my research inquiry. What began as a dare between friends – “say, wouldn’t it be cool to conduct research on magical girls because I’m totally obsessed with them?” – has morphed into a three-year academic labor of love. What started as a fan’s curiosity about cute outfits and superpowers transformed – for lack of a better term – into a desire to textually analyze the series that have captured the imaginations of myself, my friends, and countless friends worldwide. Though magical girl series were initially created for a young female Japanese audience, series such as *Sailor Moon* have managed to gain a worldwide following. As fans celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the series that features a klutz crybaby heroine who is also the guardian of love and justice, I wanted to discover what it is about these narratives that resonate with the hearts of so many fans. Furthermore, I wanted to perform an in-depth analysis of these narratives to discover the parts that make the whole of a narrative that is called “empowering” by ardent fans of the series.

⁶ Sugawa-Shimada, Akiko, “Representations of Girls in Japanese Magical Girl TV Animation Programmes from 1966 to 2003 and Japanese Female Audiences’ Understanding of Them” (Ph.D Diss. University of Warwick 2011).

This is not to say that everyone, especially with regard to the academic community, is charmed by *Sailor Moon* and other magical girl series. Many question whether these narratives are indeed empowering. In the article “Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis: Magical Girl Anime and the Challenges of Changing Gender Identities in Japanese Society”, Kumiko Saito (2015) argues that magical girl series broadcast conflicting messages about gender roles by marketing these types of programs to both young girls and older men, upholding traditional ideas of gender and heteronormativity within Japanese society.⁷ Furthermore, anthropologist Anne Allison emphasizes that Sailor Moon’s transformation into her magical avatar features her going from cute school girl to sexy warrior, wearing a uniform that features ample amounts of “fierce flesh”.⁸ Allison goes on to state that while other warriors armor up when transforming into hero form, magical girls such as Sailor Moon strip down with battle uniforms showing off skin. Because of this, Allison states that such outfits, due to their skimpy nature, could be interpreted as sexual.

Magical girl series have caught the attention of the male *otaku*, who are attracted to the cute character designs.⁹ These male fans go on to herald these characters in a space beyond reality; the suggestion is that male *otaku* would rather concern themselves with the fantasy of these two-dimensional cute girls rather than to interact with actual women. The term *otaku* is

⁷ Saito, “Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis: Magical Girl Anime and the Challenges of Changing Gender Identities in Japanese Society”, in *The Journal of Asian Studies* 73 (2015), 147.

⁸ Allison, Anne. “Fierce Flesh: Sexy Schoolgirls in the Action Fantasy of *Sailor Moon*”, in *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*. (Berkeley: University of California Press), 129.

⁹ Mary Grigsby, “‘Sailormoon: Manga (Comics) and Anime (Cartoon)’ Superheroine Meets Barbie: Global Entertainment Commodity Comes to the United States”, *Journal of Popular Culture* 32 (1998): 59-80.

generally translated as “fan”, but evokes different meanings depending on who you ask.¹⁰

Nakamori Akio is credited with coining the term; he wrote a series chronicling his encounters in his magazine *Manga Burikko*, entitled “*Otaku Research*” (*Otaku no Kenkyū*) in 1983.¹¹ In his articles, Nakamori characterizes the *otaku* as mostly male, skinny, and unattractive who lack masculinity and appear to be more interested in fulfilling their erotic desires with imaginary characters.¹² He goes on to state that *otaku* lack social skills, have no friends, and are unable to connect with women. In his articles, Nakamori takes a derisive tone with young men he identifies with being *otaku*. Despite pushback from *otaku* readers who did not appreciate Nakamori’s analysis, the word *otaku* nonetheless became a discriminatory term.

The crimes of Miyazaki Tsutomu, an introverted shut-in who was a known child molester and a fan of anime, further enhanced negative connotation associated with the word “*otaku*”. In 1989, Miyazaki admitted to and was arrested for the kidnapping and mutilation of four young girls; he described committing the crimes in a dream-like state, motivated by the pressures from his family to marry.¹³ When it was discovered that Miyazaki was a fan of anime and therefore an *otaku*, the media fashioned him as a cautionary tale, the mark of a failed society plagued by

¹⁰ Traditionally, *otaku* (お宅, オタク) is a formal way of saying “you” in Japanese. However, the word has a detached and impersonal tone.

¹¹ Tsutsui, William M., “Nerd Nation Otaku and the Youth Subcultures in Contemporary Japan”, *Education About Asia* 13 (2008), 14.

¹² Yamanaka, Tomomi, “Birth of ‘Otaku’: Centring Discourse Dynamics in Manga Burikko”, in *Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan: Historical Perspectives and New Horizons*, ed. Patrick W. Galbraith et. Al. Kindle Edition.

¹³ Treat, John Whittier, “Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home: *Shōjo* Culture and the Nostalgic Subject”, *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 19 (1993), 354-5.

mass consumption. Rather than taking a socially accepted role in the real world, Miyazaki created his own through the consumption of electronic goods and animated media. As a result, the word *otaku* is associated with individuals who are so devoted to a series or character that they choose to spend their time outside the bounds of reality instead of in the real world.¹⁴

More recently, the *otaku* is also associated with technological fluency and content creation. Akihabara is considered to be the Otaku Playground of Tokyo; maid cafes, electronic stores, cute idols, and cosplay stores allow for individuals to partake of *otaku* culture in a socially accepted public place.¹⁵ The *otaku* have been integrated into the “Cool Japan” project, an initiative by the Japanese government to cultivate global influence through its soft power properties, such as anime, manga, pop music, and video games.¹⁶ Despite the negative connotations associated, a survey conducted by the MyNavi website notes that 62% percent of teenagers, over 55% of respondents in their twenties, and 46% in their thirties identified themselves as “otaku”.¹⁷ Finally, the Comic Market (or *Comiket*) is twice-annual event (August and December), which features various artist circles offering *dōjinshi* (fan-published comics) to

¹⁴ Mizuki Ito, introduction to *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World*, ed. Mizuki Ito et, all (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), xi.

¹⁵ Galbraith, Patrick W., “Akihabara: Conditioning a “Public” Otaku Image”, *Mechademia* 5 (2010), 211.

¹⁶ Gray, Douglas, “Japan’s Gross National Cool”, *Foreign Policy*, accessed July 8, 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/11/japans-gross-national-cool/>

¹⁷ “*Jibun no Koto wo [otaku] to ninjikishiteru hito jyūdai wa 62%, nanajyūdai wa 23%*” [Sixty-two percent of teens and 23% of seventy-year-olds identify with being an *otaku*], *MyNavi*, accessed July 8, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130706214820/http://news.mynavi.jp:80/news/2013/04/27/076/>.

attendees. When the event began in 1976, it attracted 600 attendees; now the event attracts over 500,000 visitors per event.¹⁸

The method in which the otaku consumes these characters can occur one of two ways. On one hand, the *otaku*, attached to the universal narrative and the emotional discourse that surround these characters, will go on to produce their own fan-made narratives. On the other hand, the otaku may only be concerned with trivial facts associated with these works and will mine a series for ephemera about the characters (such as body dimensions and age); the otaku will then cross-reference this information with other characters of similar stature.¹⁹ Though the motivations differ, in both cases these designs conjure up desire and eroticism within these consumers who are detached from reality, encouraging negative and degrading attitudes toward young women.²⁰

Grigsby further mentions how male fans of the series consume both official merchandise and unofficial *Sailor Moon* pornography videos.²¹ One fan describes his consumption of *Sailor Moon* pornography as a way to satiate his dark curious impulses, while another fan laments his inability to quell his love of *Sailor Moon*, despite his own fear that it can be seen as “immature”. In any case, these narratives may be created for female audiences, yet academic literature in a similar vein to the *junbungaku* of the late-Meiji and Taisho eras, center upon the male subjective

¹⁸ Brent Wilson and Masami Toku, “‘Boys’ Love’, Yaoi, and Art Education: Issues of Power and Pedagogy,” *Visual Culture Research in Art and Education*, accessed July 7, 2017, http://www.csuchico.edu/~mtoku/vc/Articles/toku/Wil_Toku_BoysLove.html.

¹⁹ Hemmann, Kathryn, “Short Skirts and Superpowers: The Evolution of the Beautiful Fighting Girl”, in *U.S. – Japan Womens’ Journal* 47 (2014), 50.

²⁰ Hemmann, “Short Skirts and Superpowers”, 46.

²¹ Grigsby, Mary, “Sailormoon”, 73.

gaze as well as anxieties associated with women and modernization. The fans that these series are primarily created for continue to be left out of the equation.

Indeed, most academic literature concerning fan consumption of magical girl series appear to be male-centered. My frustration with these texts is that in situating these series within the context of gender and sexuality in Japanese culture, they fail to consider how female fans consume these works and why they continue to relate to them long after they have reached adulthood. While previous academic studies of magical girl texts take a sample analysis of the narratives, none have elected to undertake an in-depth textual analysis of these series, save for the works of Kathryn Hemmann and Akiko Sugawa-Shimada. This is where I hope to add more to the conversation. I wish to examine the arguments magical girl narratives put forth while taking into consideration the motivations of the author and how fans have consumed these arguments.

Conceptualizing the Idea of Space and Place within Shōjo Manga and Shōjo Bunka

In his book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, geographer Yi-Fu Tuan defines the word “space” as “an abstract term for a complex set of ideas”.²² He goes on to say it is left for people to determine how aspects of their world are divided up as well as the values assigned to these places according to his intimate awareness with his physical form. As a result, space is created with specific biological as well as social needs in mind. An individual determines his or her relation to the world via the use of language as well as his or her proximity to other people, places, and things. To have space implies that the individual has freedom to

²² Tuan, Yi-Fu, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press 1977), 34.

make individual choices. On the other hand, to have the freedom of space implies that one is also vulnerable to outside attacks which threatens individual freedom. Therefore, Tuan argues that humans require space *and* place. Place offers individuals a “calm center of established values”; together with space, that individual achieves a happy medium of both constraint and freedom.

If we are to transfer these ideas with regard to *shōjo* manga, then *shōjo bunka* (“girl’s culture”) is the “space” that gave way to the creation of magical girl narratives while *Shōjo manga* is the “place” where readers can safely enjoy it. It is coded in a language that only the readers understand and therefore may not easily be translated or understood by individuals outside of this space. Most, if not all sub-genres of *shōjo* manga include themes related to Japanese girlhood. Furthermore, if we were to further visualize this space, the *mahō shōjo* occupies one specific room young female readers can retire to. Magical girl narratives are the most fantastical of the subgenre – after all, the transformation into a magical being and mentorship by talking animal are hallmarks – but are also grounded in reality. While transformation into a magical avatar may be out of reach, the ways in which the heroine navigates situations the readers may be faced with are indeed helpful to the reader.

How then does this space work? If space is defined as a complex set of abstract ideas, then the space of *shōjo* manga is defined by a complex set of abstract ideas that answer the question of “what girls want”. Indeed, *shōjo* manga magazine, an enduring symbol of *shōjo bunka* (“girls’ culture”), are purported to offer exactly that. Each issue offers an assortment of series that cater to this desire, the majority featuring plots motivated by interpersonal relationships, including friendships and romances. In the case of series such as *Sailor Moon* and *Ribon no Kishi*, however, *shōjo* manga also offers readers the opportunity to vicariously live

through characters who do not fit within traditional ideas of femininity, which in turn helps with their own identity creation; I will be describing this in detail further below.

Publishers are motivated by sales and as a result have created the affective communities in order to sell manga magazines. This is further complicated by a stark division of labour within the publishing companies: most manga artists within the *shōjo* demographic are female while editors and those in upper management are male. Despite this, historically, there has always been a concerted effort for publishing companies to connect with their young, female readers. According to Shamoan, pre-war *shōjo* literary magazines, such as *Shōjo no Tomo* (“Girls’ Friend”), were the epicentres of girls’ culture during their heyday. Stories featuring “S-relationships” – passionate friendships between two girls, one senior and one junior – reflected the realities within the private world of single-sex boarding institutions and homosocial relationships between female students.²³ Furthermore, magazines offered esteemed members of the magazine’s fan club the opportunity to meet with writers and illustrators annually. Readers could connect with other readers via mailbag sections using the coded language of schoolgirls, which, according to Shamoan, fostered a deeper sense of community. When the war effort during the late 1930s forced publishers to push readers to do their part for the good of the nations, readers responded negatively. To be told that their stories were frivolous and unnecessary was viewed as a betrayal. As a result, readership plunged and many literary magazines ceased operations shortly after the end of the second World War.²⁴

²³ Shamoan, *Passionate Friendship*, 29-57.

²⁴ It should be noted that paper shortages at the end of the Second World War exacerbated publishing issues.

Now, in the present day, editors must still be conscious of what appeals to female readers if they wish to ensure that issues continue to sell while working in tandem with the artist.²⁵ The magazines have taken measures to ensure that they receive reader feedback to answer this question. For example, question-and-answer sections allow readers to interact with their favourite manga artists as well as each other.²⁶ Occasionally, students are given the opportunity to meet with artists and to ask questions about their craft. Reader surveys give insight to the insert items offered with each issue, which in turn encourages readers to purchase their own copies rather than sharing with friends. Finally, publishers recruit future artists through their manga school submissions; the best artists are paired with an editor, win a cash prize, and have their work published within the magazine.²⁷

Publishing companies may have created an affective community between the publisher, the artists, and the readers to sell *shōjo* magazines, but they have also created a system which cannot carry on and continue to be profitable without the actual *shōjo*. If they are to stay in business, then they must be able to provide “what girls want”. As for the exact question of “what girls want”, the simple answer is to be in the spotlight. In a society that traditionally is patriarchal, *shōjo* magazines, and *shōjo bunka* offers girls the ability to take the lead in a space that shields them from demands of the outside world, at least temporarily. Furthermore, publishers offer readers stories that feature otherwise ordinary heroines doing extraordinary

²⁵ Prough, *Straight from the Heart*, 89-109

²⁶ Prough, *Straight from the Heart*, 57-88

²⁷ Prough uses the word *debut* to describe the process in which the artist is published within the magazine. It should be noted that many manga artists get their start this way.

things. It means producing stories that give the reader permission to assert the self and explore facets of their personality through consumption of these series.²⁸

Magical Girl Narratives, as an extension of the *shōjo* demographic, continue to promote female agency and empowerment.²⁹ In this case, female readers desire strong-yet-beautiful characters that are empowered by belief in themselves and by the teammates who support their mission. The heroine may not readily accept her new role in the beginning, but she rises to the occasion through the course of the narrative. Romance is accepted but is not the centre of the narrative. They can be tested and grow as individuals, and be changed for the better from their experiences. Furthermore, they are also allowed to grow up strengthened by their experiences as a magical girl.

This thesis seeks to illustrate the major themes of magical girl anime, particularly the ideas of “magic” and “transformation” as mechanisms leading to the personal and spiritual growth of the heroine, focusing upon how the heroine manages to overcome the obstacles placed before her as both a normal girl and as a magical girl, and how it changes her as an individual from start to finish. I will be careful to highlight the ways in which magical girl texts embrace but critically examine traditional ideas of femininity, offer a supportive community that allows for safe exploration of these alternative ideas, and emphasize how these texts subvert traditional portrayals of heterosexual romance, offering visual portrayals of relationships that feature men and women as equals, sidestepping the power imbalance associated with male-female relationships.

²⁸ Sugawa-Shimada, “Representations of Girls in Japanese Magical Girl TV Animation Programmes”, 214.

²⁹ Hemmann, “Short Skirts and Superpowers”, 58

The second chapter, “Make Up!”, will analyze the magical girl narrative from a structuralist framework. I will apply Joseph Campbell’s Mythic Narrative to examine the elements that create a magical girl narrative. I will look at the prevalent themes featured in stories of the *shōjo* demographic, including emotionally-driven narratives, expressive characterizations of *shōjo* characters, and a focus on interpersonal relationships. I will address the masculine connotations associated with Campbell’s mythic narrative and the word *hero*, exploring what it means to be a magical girl *heroine*, how a *heroine* experiences her own form of the mythic journey, and how that applies to the magical girl narrative. To bolster this analysis, I will refer to several magical girl series produced as both anime and as well as manga series.

The third chapter, “Rise Up”, will apply Joseph Campbell’s mythic narrative as well as Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale* to three magical girl series, spanning the mid-1950s to the mid-2000s. The first series is *Ribon no Kishi* (“Princess Knight”) by the “Godfather of Manga” Tezuka Osamu, considered by many to be the first narrative *shōjo* manga and the blueprint for the magical girl narrative. The second series is *Bishōjo Senshi Sera Mun* (“Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon”) by Takeuchi Naoko. The third series is *Sugar Sugar Rune* by Anno Moyoco, an artist known more for her mature *josei* manga series.³⁰ Using Propp’s work as a model, I will create my own magical girl narrative morphology, then I will apply this morphology to the text. By doing this, I can emphasize how the narrative is created specific to encourage the growth and maturation of the heroine and how interpersonal and romantic relationships assist with this growth.

³⁰ *Josei* manga refers to a works created to caters to a demographic consisting of older high school students and college-aged women. These stories feature more mature themes and may feature sexual situations. Series may also feature romantic relationships; however, these relationships are considered to be more realistic, unlike *shōjō* manga, which features idealistic relationships.

Finally, the fourth chapter, “Stand Up”, seeks to understand why these narratives work and how they resonate with fans around the globe. The chapter will look at how works of the *shōjo* demographic have traditionally offered a safe space that allows for the exploration of gender and sexuality and allows for critique and subversion of these ideas. To do this, I will also look at how fans, particularly female ones, have consumed these works, including the act of cosplaying characters from the series, internet communities devoted to various series, fan art and fan fiction, and through *dōjinshi* – that is, fan comics of existing series. By doing this, I will show that there are significant differences between how academics, male fans, and how female fans consume the series, using my previous textual analysis to illustrate how important the narrative is to female fans of the series.

By undertaking this research methodology, it is my wish to illustrate, as both magical girl fan and as an ardent academic, the reasons why such series are dear to the hearts of many female fans despite concerns of character hypersexuality and the upholding of heteronormativity within Japanese culture. Instead, this thesis focuses on the figure of the magical girl who tows the line between femininity and post-femininity, presented as ultra-feminine yet characterized as anything but. Though there may be validity to the concerns presented by existing research – there is a subgenre of magical girl anime created for predominately male audiences – this thesis seeks to offer understanding as to why the magical girl is heralded by fans across the globe as a symbol of female empowerment.



Figure 1 Sailor Moon Fan Art by Kelsen Jace Tkachuk

CHAPTER TWO

Make-Up! – A Structural Analysis of the Magical Girl Narrative

Magical Girl series are classified as one subgenre of *shōjo anime* and manga (though many other series have been released to wider audiences). The Magical Girl herself is as varied and specialized as her narrative requires. Most people's familiarity with Magical Girl series lies with *Sailor Moon*; however, the magical girl heroine isn't always a klutzy crybaby, doesn't always transform into a magical warrior, and doesn't always fight an ancient foe determined to destroy the world. Even so, the ending always seems to be the same – the magical girl standing triumphant in her power and living happily ever after – the roads to such a point are varied in their twists, turns, and distance. This chapter will attempt to address these various journeys by examining the structures that come together to make up the magical girl narrative. Furthermore, this form of textual analysis will be applied to three different magical girl narratives to illustrate the variations that can be found in the genre.

Magical Girl Series: A Structuralist Perspective

Because magical girl series have proliferated since the late 1960s, it is a genre that cannot be simply classified under any one demographic. However, for the purposes of this thesis, textual analysis will be focused upon series published within the *shōjo* demographic – that is, manga and anime marketed to young girls ranging from elementary to high school students. Magical girl narratives published in the *shōnen* (young boys) and *seinen* (teenaged boys to adult men) demographics share a similar narrative structure with *shōjo* narratives; however, they tend to be more action-oriented, places less emphasis on the emotional interiority of the characters,

and features mature subject matter, such as violence and nudity.³¹ As my thesis focuses on the visual narrative of personal growth for the heroine, it makes sense to focus my study upon narratives that try to illustrate both the emotional and physical aspects of that journey. Also, because *shōjo* manga readers are attracted to narratives that are action-packed and emotionally visceral, I can further discuss how young female readers find empowerment through these narratives.

Shōjo manga narratives are driven in part by the emotional interiority of the protagonist. Visually, this expressed through the big, starry eyes of the young female protagonist, which reflects the innocence and purity long associated with the Japanese *shōjo*. Furthermore, the *shōjo* narratives not only focus on the important events as they occur, but also upon how the young protagonist *responds* to these events. Emotive backgrounds employing florals, bubbles, or hearts help to communicate the protagonist's inner emotions. The trials and tribulations the protagonist must face are also based in emotions. Much of *shōjo* narratives centre on romantic relationships – usually, the protagonist meets her first love and the couple must endure several trials in order to be together. However, there are also narratives that feature strong friendships between young school girls as well as narratives that are adventurous in nature, such as magical girl series.

³¹ This is not to say that these types of magical girl narratives are not without emotional weight. Popular *seinen* series *Mahō Shōjo Madoka Magica* (“Puella Magi Madoka Magica”), feature scenes in which the characters are under emotional duress. The difference between *seinen* and *shōjo* narratives is that emotional reactions, while shown, are not as intrinsic to the plot as they are in *shōjo* narratives. A character will react during an event, but there will be no effort to show the audience of how the character internally comes to terms with the event.



Figure 2: A Sample Panel from *Bishōjo Senshi Sailor Moon*

Unlike other manga series, which employ a rigid form of storytelling in the form of linear panel layouts, *shōjo* manga artists employ a tabular layout or what Fujimoto refers to as the “three-row overlaid picture style”.³² If static linear panel layout features arranged panels spaced apart with gutters, the three-row overlaid picture style feature images laid over panels; usually employing a vertical image of a figure, the style uses images not necessarily related to the immediate plot to both communicate the emotional depth of a particular scene and to evoke and inspire emotion in the reader. Furthermore, use of this panel allows the author to achieve emotional intimacy with the reader via bold, full body images of the featured character.

Though comics of other demographics have adopted similar narrative styles, *shōjo* manga have consistently presented series using this form of narrative since the golden age of manga in the 1970s. Improving upon the stylistic changes introduced by male artist Macoto Takahashi³³ in

³² Fujimoto, Yukari, “Takahashi Macoto: The Origin of *Shōjo* Manga Style”, Matt Thorn, trans., *Mechademia* 7 (2012): 24-55.

³³ Though the name “Makoto” (まこと) is traditionally romanized with a “k”, the artist chooses to write the name with a “C”.

the late 1950s, a group of female artists known as the Golden Twenty-Four used a combination of panel techniques inspired by the cinematic narrative as well as tabular three-row overlaid picture style to revolutionize the demographic.³⁴ Furthermore, stories began to feature complex, emotional characters that were counter to traditional ideas of Japanese femininity. In fact, these characters straddled the line between masculinity and femininity just as they stood at the crossroads between childhood and adulthood. Willowy and strong, beautiful and brave, these characters offered an adventurous type of lead formerly associated with boys' comics in a way that would appeal to young female readers.

It is important to note that while *shōjo* manga is classified as a genre of graphic novels in the United States and Canada, it signifies a demographic in Japan. As a result, series of various genres can fall under the *Shōjo* demographic umbrella, including romance (whether fantasy, historical, school, etc.), slice-of-life series, sports, sci-fi, and fantasy. For the next section of this chapter, I will now focus on the narrative structure of the *majō shōjo* genre, which is popular for its marriage of ordinary life with extraordinary abilities. Furthermore, I will explain how Japanese culture has influenced the narrative of this genre, especially its emphasis on the heroine as a magical, powerful individual and the importance of interpersonal relationships among the heroine and other young girls.

The Heroine's Journey in the Magical Girl Narrative

Despite the masculine connotations associated with the word “hero”, the narrative structure of magical girl series can be likened to the structure of the mythic narrative according

³⁴ Prough, Jennifer, *Straight from the Heart: Gender, Intimacy, and The Cultural Production of Shōjo Manga* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press), 47-50.

to Joseph Campbell.³⁵ Campbell's basic structure for the mythic narrative is still important, as it is a structure that is broad enough to be applicable to the magical girl narrative. In brief, Campbell states that there are three acts to the mythic narrative – the separation, the initiation, and the return. Throughout the course of these three acts, the hero travels into a liminal space separate from the ordinary world that is filled with supernatural forces, helpful and harmful. Should the hero venture forth and conquer the challenges associated with this space, he can return to his ordinary life with the spoils of adventure, experiencing elevation to a heralded, almost divine figure.

In more detailed terms, the hero, usually an individual whose ordinary traits that somehow stand out within the home community, is called to leave his ordinary world for a world filled with magic and danger. He must decide if he wishes to answer the call or refuse it, though refusal may not always be possible. Whether by choice or by force, supernatural forces gift the hero with much needed assistance that will be needed to successfully complete the quest. Once the hero has crossed over from the ordinary to the extraordinary, he faces *initiation*. The hero must quickly navigate the rules of the new world, taking care to assess his surroundings; he must also determine who his allies and enemies are.

The hero then must endure trials to test the worthiness of his title, and if he can do so, he is rewarded with his fated meeting with a divine goddess, who bestows upon him the spoils promised for successful completion of his journey. He is elevated from the ordinary to the extraordinary through his experiences; in other words, the journey has elevated him from a simple man to a divine hero. The hero hesitates to return to the ordinary world; he wonders if the

³⁵ Campbell, Joseph, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1949), 30

boon he has received can be properly translated into the world of his birth. Nevertheless, the hero then *returns* to the ordinary world, fighting all enemies who wish to stop him along the way. Just when the situation seems dire, the hero finds the strength within him to conquer his foes once and for all. Finally, the hero, on return to the ordinary world and his community, experiences blessed renewal due to his efforts. The hero may not retain the powers he possessed in the extraordinary world, but he is nonetheless permanently transformed by his experiences.

Though Campbell's "monomyth" can be applied to magical girl narratives, there are issues that must be addressed before doing so. One issue is the term "hero" itself, which carries masculine connotations. Indeed, throughout "The Hero with a Thousand Faces", the various Campbell references in the book share one common device – the protagonist, the "hero", is always male. While recent magical girl series have featured young school boys as magical, series within the *shōjo* predominantly feature female protagonists. Furthermore, David Emerson explains that the male heroes of these myths exhibit traits that are considered masculine in nature, such as courage, strength, and independence.³⁶ While women have been featured in narratives that mirror the monomyth, Emerson notes that it would be easy to swap these characters for male ones, since they exhibit traits that are strongly associated with the masculine "hero".

On the other hand, *shōjo* narratives are emotional and personal in nature. That is, the narrative is carried by the emotional interiority of the characters, especially the protagonist. The author gives just as much prominence to the event – in this case, the heroine's feats of bravery – as she does the heroine's reactions to these feats. Therefore, if Campbell's monomyth consists

³⁶ Emerson, David, "Innocence and a Superpower: Little Girls' on the Hero's Journey", *Mythlore* 28: 132

of the brave feats of the hero and the battles he must face to gain salvation, then it stands to reason that the female heroine uses traits that are considered feminine in nature to rise above adversity.³⁷ Because of the emotional nature of the *shōjo* narrative, that's exactly what the magical heroine does in the most visual way possible. Rather than subdue an enemy through force, she may try to reason with the enemy, offering kindness and sympathy.

This is featured prominently in the series *Cardcaptor Sakura*, where magical girl protagonist Kinomoto Sakura must collect the enchanted Clow Reed Cards that she accidentally released into the world³⁸. While at times she must use her sealing wand to capture wayward cards that are hostile in nature, at other times it her kind disposition that allows her to gain the power of the card. The cards can appear at any time, and when they do, it happens at the most inconvenient times. For example, she is tasked with sealing the Flower Card, which has inundated her school's athletic field with flowers during the sports festival. The card is not a hostile one; when Sakura engages it, it wishes to dance with her. It is Sakura's duty to seal the card, but she understands that the card means no harm to her or her fellow students. She manages to seal it without any further trouble.³⁹

³⁷ Emerson, "Innocence as a Superpower", 132-3

³⁸ The Clow Cards were created by magician Clow Reed. Inspired by Tarot Cards, the Clow Cards are a marriage of Eastern and Western magic and represent the various elements of nature (air, water, fire, earth, light, and dark). Each is classified as a sun card or a moon card. Because this new magic was so powerful, Reed sealed them into the Clow Cards. Only a person who the cards consider to be their owner can use their magic. So, when Sakura seals the cards with the Sealing Wand, she becomes the card's owner. (Cardcaptor Sakura Wiki)

³⁹ CLAMP, *CardCaptor Sakura Volume One*, trans. Miki Onishi and Anita Sengupta (Milwaukie: Dark Horse Comics, 2010). Kindle Edition.

This is not to say that the magical girl heroine is exempt from physical combat. She fights as hard as any hero, and many magical girl series feature intense fight scenes with the enemy. In the 2004 series *Futari wa PuriKyua* (“We are Pretty Cure!”), dual magical girl heroines Cure White and Cure Black get physical with the enemy, often using their super strength to pummel their enemies. The difference lies in motivation; if the hero accepts the call to adventure due to a higher sense of duty that is nationalistic in nature, then the magical girl heroine accepts the call due to her interpersonal relationships.⁴⁰ For example, upon transforming into Sailor Moon for the first time, Usagi can’t believe what is happening. However, through her glasses, she can hear her friend Naru crying out for help as a dangerous monster approaches her. Unwilling to see her friend harmed, Usagi accepts her change for the moment and rushes to Naru’s rescue.⁴¹

Despite the differences in motivations, the result is the same – the magical girl heroine, once she has conquered her foe, experiences spiritual rebirth and gains the power to protect her loved ones. Interpersonal relationships are strengthened, and the young heroine is forever changed by her ordeals. Through friendships and romance, the heroine confronts her inner demons as well as the outer ones and experiences emotional healing. By the time she prepares to do battle with the enemy one final time, she is stronger both inside and out. She is ready to end the struggle once and for all.

Just as the hero may not retain his powers at the end of his journey, the magical girl heroine relinquishes her power at the end of her journey. However, this is not to say that the

⁴⁰ Allison, Anne, “Fierce Flesh”, 138.

⁴¹ Takeuchi, Naoko, *Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon Perfect Edition Volume One* (Bishōjo Senshi Sera Mun Kanzenban) (Tokyo: Kodansha 2014).

heroine is no longer “magical”. The heroine rarely remains the same throughout her journey, and for her, becoming a magical girl means becoming whole. That is, she becomes the person she desires to be, not for the sake of others, but for the benefit of herself. This can mean shedding traits that are undesirable or marrying those traits with more beneficial ones. Whatever the change may be, the heroine experiences significant personal growth.

In the next chapter, I will examine three magical narratives in further detail, taking care to apply Campbell’s narrative to various magical girl series, analyzing the monomyth of each one while charting the mechanisms that lead the heroine to her personal apotheosis. Each series will be explored using the *separation-initiation-return* structure, and will chart the personal growth of the main heroine from start to finish. In the meantime, we must explore the Japanese cultural phenomenon known as *shōjo*, and how the space between childhood and adulthood plays a crucial role in the magical girl narrative.

Coding Girls Culture: The Power of the Shōjo

The magical girl protagonist is usually between the ages of 8 and 15 (or older, depending on the series). In other words, the heroine is a female who is no longer a small child but not yet a young woman. During this period, the *shōjo* has the freedom to experience life before she is ensnared by the obligations of adulthood, including marriage and motherhood. This freedom is prominently displayed in the manga itself; the protagonist spends extensive time with her friends, both leisurely activities as well as fighting the enemy that threatens their way of life. For example, in the first volume of *Sailor Moon*, protagonist Usagi can transform herself into the eponymous heroine, rescue her best friend Naru and Naru’s mother, and destroy a minion of the Dark Kingdom without arousing the suspicion of her parents.

Another example can be found in Moyoco Anno's *Sugar Sugar Rune*.⁴² Young witches Chocola and Vanilla travel to the Human World to compete to become Queen of the Magic. Whoever collects the most human hearts is declared the winner. Rockin' Robin, a powerful wizard, has agreed to be their guardian but his profession as a rock star keeps him away from the girls for extensive periods of time. Even so, Chocola and Vanilla go on about their lives as usual, attending school and hanging out with their human friends. This is not to say that Robin is unaware of any troubles the girls may encounter; unless the problem requires his attention, he allows them the space to solve these issues on their own.

Suffice it to say, the freedom associated with girlhood in Japan allows the magical girl the space in which to use her abilities and experience her personal journey without any outside interference. In these series, there is little to no interference from parental figures, save for demands to do well in school and to respect the family name. Otherwise, the heroine is free to do whatever she wishes, including visiting her friends, and in the case of the magical girl, fighting off any threat she may happen to encounter. Furthermore, the heroine never tells her parents and/or guardian about her other life nor do the parents inquire about it.

The heroine reflects the Japanese cultural preoccupation with the *shōjo* as the paragon of beauty, innocence, and chastity.⁴³ The artistic aesthetic found in *shōjo* manga reflects this idea; characters are usually drawn with tall, slender bodies and large, expressive eyes.⁴⁴ Emotive backgrounds consisting of bubbles, hearts, or stars help to illustrate her emotions. In *Magica*

⁴² Moyoco Anno, *Sugar Sugar Rune Volume 1*, trans. Yayoi Hine (New York: Del Ray Manga Books, 2006).

⁴³ Shamoan, *Passionate Friendship*, 15-28

⁴⁴ Shamoan, *Passionate Friendship*, 90-100 .

Quartet's *Mahō Shōjo Madoka Magica* (released in the west as "Puella Magi Madoka Magica"), magical girls are described as emotional individuals who defy the concrete laws of existence.⁴⁵ In other words, magical girls can and do the impossible on a regular basis. But in addition to embodying the ideals of innocence and purity, the *shōjo* presents a fascinating and frightening power that stirs anxiety within the collective male gaze. On one hand, she has the power to lead a man to his eternal salvation through the power of his adoration for her. On the other hand, the *shōjo* instigates male anxiety as an object of sexual desire and fetishization.⁴⁶

In the case of the heroine, to be a magical girl is to live in a liminal space that allows for the heroine to call upon her own personal power in times of peril; if the heroine remains in this space, she can continue to call upon these powers should the need arise. Furthermore, if the magical girl wishes to remain that way, she must continue to be a *shōjo*. If she chooses to become an adult, she is required to leave this liminal space and relinquish her powers. Therefore, so long as the heroine remains a magical girl, she can sidestep the traditional expectations of adulthood in favour of cultivating her own personal power. While, many magical girl heroines do eventually relinquish their powers in some way, the consequence of such experiences allows them to remain "magical", even if the narrative implies a transition into adulthood. Therefore, many narratives end while the characters are still considered to be *shōjo*. And though *Sailor Moon* ends with Usagi getting married to her boyfriend Chiba Mamoru, the narrative comments that she will always be the soldier of Love and Justice, Sailor Moon.

⁴⁵ Magica Quartet and Hanokage, *Puella Magica Madoka Magica Volume 3*, trans. William Flanigan (New York: Yen Press, 2012), 19.

⁴⁶ Shamoan, *Passionate Friendship*, 28.

Several magical girl series provide commentary on what it means to be an ideal *shōjo* in modern Japan. Thus, many heroines featured in these types of narratives are often considered to be, at first glance, an unideal type of *shōjo*. Indeed, the *shōjo* herself has been caught in the middle of two extremes since her birth during the Meiji Era, both as a patron saint of virtuous chastity and the lustful symbol of male anxieties toward the trend of rapid modernization.⁴⁷ This trend has continued in recent times with male Japanese scholars criticizing the *shōjo* for her perceived selfishness. Female-centered fashion subcultures, such as Meiji schoolgirls, the Moga (modern girl) of the 1920s, and the *kogyaru* of the 1990s were both revered and reviled for their lifestyle choices, which married western individualism and independence and sexual desire, especially from the male subjective gaze. Rather than working for the common good of the people, a product of Japan's group culture, the *shōjo*, scholars argued, appeared to only have her self-interest at heart.

As for the magical girl series themselves, the heroine in her own way is mixture of the revered and the reviled. These heroines are often characterized as *otenba* – translated as “tomboy” from Japanese. They are a mixture of both feminine and masculine traits. Scenes feature their loved ones – parents especially – chastising them for not being feminine enough. If the character is not academically inclined, they tend to excel at more physical activities. Compared to female characters that are implied to be more feminine (usually characters of this nature are from well-to-do, “good” families), the character is ditzy, forward-speaking, mischievous, and ungraceful instead. However, they still retain the feminine virtues of nurturing, empathy, and kindness, and use these traits to their advantage both on and off the battlefield.

⁴⁷ Shamoan, *Passionate Friendship*, 14-28.

The narratives themselves illustrate these traits in detail. In *Sailor Moon*, Usagi is often chided for her so-called unladylike behavior. Thematically, her foil is her best friend Naru, the daughter of a wealthy jeweler. Unlike Naru, who is considered pretty and academically superior, Usagi's academic performance leaves much to be desired. Furthermore, Usagi, who enjoys food to a high degree, admits to being a klutz and a crybaby. However, she is cute but she is also admired for her abundant friendliness, and her she is protective of the ones she loves, especially her teammates and protectors, the Sailor Senshi.⁴⁸

Tezuka Osamu's *Princess Knight*, considered to be a blueprint for future magical girl series, is the story of Princess Sapphire, who must pretend to be a boy despite being born female. Though she desires to be a princess, she is educated in all forms of princely decorum, becoming an excellent fencer and equestrian. The kingdom is none the wiser, as she completely presents herself as male rather than female. When she meets Tink, the angel tasked with capturing an important item she carries with her, even he is fooled by her use of masculine speech. However, upon meeting Prince Franz Charming of the neighboring Gold Kingdom, her desire to be a true princess grows even stronger. This does not stop her from using her princely training to protect her kingdom from Duke Duralumin, who desires the throne for himself. As such she must continue to present herself as male to fulfill her mission, even though to do so means leaving her true desires unfulfilled.⁴⁹

Regardless of these perceived negatives, the magical girl heroine, both visually and throughout the course of the narrative, represents an enduring hope in the face of oncoming

⁴⁸ Takeuchi, Naoko, *Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon Perfect Edition Volume One* (Bishōjo Senshi Sera Mun Kanzenban) (Tokyo: Kodansha 2014).

⁴⁹ Tezuka, Osamu, *Princess Knight Volume One*, trans. Maya Rosewood (New York: Vertical 2011), Kindle Edition.

despair. Though the heroine faces an enemy that is older, mature, and sinister, she is nonetheless determined to beat the odds and protect her loved ones and the world they live in. This is not to say that the entire narrative is bright and hopeful; because the *shōjo* narrative is emotionally visceral as a rule, the despair of the protagonist is illustrated in painstaking detail. Nevertheless, her wide, innocent eyes filled with youthful determination often carry her and her allies through all trials and tribulations.

Others may consider the *shōjo* to be immature because of her wish to fulfill her desires, it is that same desire that makes her the perfect candidate to become a magical heroine who will protect the hopes and dreams of her loved ones, and by extension, the reader. Bestowed with an otherworldly magic that is without limits, the magical *shōjo* pursues the journey that leads to personal apotheosis. But how exactly does this magic work? How does the power of transformation differ from the implied feats of force within the basic monomyth? In the next section, I will explore how magical girls use both magic and feminine wiles and their “magical agents” – in this case the items given to the heroine to become their magical avatar – to overcome problems that arise.

A Magical Compact: Coding Physical Transformation in the Magical Girl Narrative

Upon her first meeting with the supernatural entity fated to guide her to the extraordinary world – usually an animal-like creature with human speech – the magical girl heroine is given a magical item, the symbol of her power. After meeting the heroine by chance, the entity insists that she is the only who can save the world from individuals who are determined to destroy it. Upon shouting a magical incantation, the item gives the heroine the ability to transform into her magical girl form, or if the heroine is already magic-born (i.e. in the case of a little witch born in

an outside world who travels to the human realm), gives a boost to her abilities while helping her to control them.

This magical item, henceforth known as the “*henshin* item”, is what Russian scholar Vladimir Propp refers to as a “magical agent”.⁵⁰ The magical girl heroine, determined by the supernatural entity to be the chosen one, gives her the *henshin* item, usually before the first encounter with the enemy. The *henshin* item, a concrete symbol of the heroine’s powers, is usually directly transferred to her, though, contrary to Propp’s assessment, the transfer occurs out of necessity rather than as a reward. Once the heroine receives the item, the transfer is met with initial suspicion or obliviousness; that is, the heroine either disbelieves the warnings of the entity or is simply too in awe of the item to take the entity seriously. However, the heroine never goes as far as to refuse the *henshin* item; once the enemy appears before her, the heroine chooses to believe in the power of the item, eschewing any further reluctance and suspicion temporarily to ensure her own survival.

In 1969, Akatsuka Fujio introduced the concept of the *henshin* item in the series *Himitsu no Akko-Chan* (“Akko’s Secret”), one of the very first magical girl animated series produced in Japan.⁵¹ The eponymous heroine, Kagami Akko, is rewarded with a magical mirror after giving her beloved compact mirror a proper burial. Using the proper magical words, the compact gives her the ability to transform into anything and anyone she wants. Since then, a majority of magical girls series have used *henshin* items as a means to transform from the ordinary to the extraordinary. Shouting out a magical phrase, the heroine initiates a colorful transformation

⁵⁰ Propp, Vladimir, *The Morphology of the Folktale*, Trans. Laurence Scott (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), Kindle Edition.

⁵¹ “*Himitsu no Akko-Chan (Akko’s Secret)*”, Fujio Productions, accessed September 27, 2016, <http://www.fujio-pro.co.jp/english/character/index.html>.

sequence, complete with colorful visuals and stirring background music. At the end, she is fully dressed in her battle uniform, ready to engage the enemy.

The *henshin* item represents the intersection between traditional ideas of femininity and the questioning of traditional gender items in relation to Japanese culture. The *henshin* item is usually one associated with the feminine and traditional femininity; brooches, compact mirrors, ornately decorated transformation sticks disguised as pens are just a few examples. However, as stated before, the heroine herself may not be considered an ideal kind of woman due to her exhibition of traits usually classified as “masculine”. By using the *henshin* item to transform into her magical girl avatar, the heroine adopts an identity that allows her to be “glamorous”. In this case, glamour, stated by Rachel Moseley quoting Beverly Skeggs, is a “performance of femininity with strength” that allows the heroine that can differ from traditional ideals of womanhood while maintaining the innocent dignity associated with the *shōjo*.⁵²

Shōjo vs Majō: Coding the Struggle Between the Heroine and her Foe

Recall that the supernatural entity gives the heroine her *henshin* item once the enemy has made their presence known, usually before the first encounter. While not all magical girl series feature a physical enemy, most series created during the 1990s and after do; because the series this thesis will be analyzing feature a physical enemy, we are more concerned with these types of narratives.⁵³ However, it should be noted that once the heroine has initially transformed into her

⁵² Moseley, Rachel, “Glamorous witchcraft: gender and magic in teen film and television” *Screen 43* (2002): 404-5.

⁵³ Most magical series circa 1990 and after feature enemies that use force, magical powers or weapons imbued with magic in order push their agenda. While Go Nagai’s sci-fi series *Cutey Honey* is the first to feature this type of enemy, *Sailor Moon*, influenced by the *Super Sentai*

magical girl avatar, her first encounter with the enemy is not only immediate, but also inevitable. In some cases, it is the encounter itself that leads to the transformation for the very first time.

It is unlikely that the heroine will directly encounter her true foe during the first battle. Instead, she is more likely to encounter a servant of the enemy, such as grunts or creatures created specifically to cause trouble for the heroine. Furthermore, once the heroine has defeated this particular foe and returned to her ordinary life, another one will be sent in its place, calling for her to transform again.⁵⁴ Each battle escalates, with each new servant stronger than the previous one, testing the powers of the magical heroine, who in turn becomes more and more accepting of her new abilities and her situation. Once the heroine has defeated enough servants, she is given the opportunity to face the enemy directly.

The True Enemy of the magical girl can be one of two individuals – the seductive *majō* (“witch”) or the master manipulator. The seductive *majō* is traditionally an older female, while the master manipulator is usually male or a supernatural entity that uses male pronouns. On the surface, it appears that both types of villains share a common goal – they both wish to take over the world and destroy all forces that would hamper that goal, namely the magical girl heroine. However, the difference lies in the way these villains go about achieving this lofty goal. While the seductive *majō* uses the powers of an even stronger entity to further her goals, then the master manipulator uses the magical girl herself to further his.

If the magical girl visually expresses innocent girlhood, then the seductive *majō* is her stark opposite; she is usually an older female with a curvy body and ample bosom who is

genre, cemented this trend. Even series that feature an “ordinary” type of enemy, such as bully, may eventually reveal that this person is anything but ordinary.

⁵⁴ Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*.

visually representative of lust and desire. Saito describes her as being career-driven to the point of obsession, due to her failure to become a wife and/or mother upon reaching adulthood.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the *majō* does not have a positive view toward love due to previously being scorned by a previous lover or due to experiencing unrequited love. Overwhelmed with negative emotions, including envy and jealousy, the seductive *majō* is determined to achieve her goal of world domination, and is especially determined to extinguish all good things that the magical girl symbolizes. As such, she turns to a dark higher power to achieve her goals, extinguishing her humanity for the promise of vengeance.

The most iconic example of the seductive *majō* is *Sailor Moon*'s primary antagonist of the Dark Kingdom Arc, Queen Beryl.⁵⁶ Beryl was once a human who fell in love with Prince Endymion of the Earth Kingdom. However, once she discovered that he was in a forbidden relationship with Princess Serenity of the Moon Kingdom, she became sick with spite and jealousy. This allowed Queen Metallia, a formless ancient evil entity, to take over her heart, transforming her into Queen Beryl. Beryl is Sailor Moon's complete opposite – while her love for Tuxedo Kamen (Endymion's reincarnation) is pure and precious, then Beryl's love for him is driven by lust. She even goes as far as to use her powers to control Tuxedo Kamen to keep him by her side.

While Queen Beryl appears to be more of the most persistent images of villainy within the genre, many of the true villains found in magical girl narratives are master manipulators. While the master manipulator can be any gender, in many works (including the ones that will be

⁵⁵ Saito, Kumiko, "Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis: Magical Girl Anime and the Challenges of Changing Gender Identities in Japanese Society", *The Journal of Asian Studies* 73 (1: 2014), 146.

⁵⁶ Takuechi, *Sailor Moon Volume 1*.

analysed in the next chapter), the master manipulator is male. If the primary motivation of the seductive *majō* is that of desire to rule the world, then the primary motivation of the master manipulator is to crush the personal hopes and dreams of unsuspecting individuals. In the case of the magical girl, he wishes to strip her of everything that makes her a *shōjo* – her hopes and dreams especially. This can mean interacting with the magical girl, sometimes in a disguised form, to manipulate her directly, or attacking the dreams of innocent individuals, including her loved ones. Furthermore, although the magical girl and the master manipulator may engage in physical combat, the latter will eventually attack her emotions, especially where her heart is concerned.

Kishu, one of the alien enemies of the series *Tokyo Mew Mew* is an example of the master manipulator.⁵⁷ Though it is his duty to destroy the Tokyo Mew Mews, a group of five girls imbued with the DNA of five endangered animals, he nonetheless desires group leader Ichigo. Upon their first encounter, he steals a kiss from Ichigo, distressing her. From that point on, he oscillates between flirtation and violence, desiring her love while calling her his “interesting toy”. When she doesn't return his feelings, Kishu goes as far as to strangle Ichigo, nearly killing her because she rejected him.

Whether a seductive *majō* or a master manipulator, it is the ultimate goal of the true enemy to control the world by attacking the dreams of people directly. This can occur through direct force or by possessing the individual so that they act in a way that is contrary to their personal beliefs and/or motivations. Scholars argue that the differences between the magical girl and her true enemy illustrates a shallow character binary; Hemmann, quoting Susan Napier,

⁵⁷ Yoshida, Reiko and Mia Ikuni. *Tokyo Mew Mew 1*, trans. Elina Ishikawa (New York: Kodansha 2011). Kindle Edition.

states that magical girl characterizations are devoid of complex personalities, while those characters who are emotional in nature tend to be labeled as villains.⁵⁸ However, readers nonetheless connect to the magical girl's desire to protect the dreams and agency of others, young and old. For the magical girl, to attack someone's personal motivations is unforgivable and it is up to her to provide justice for such an egregious act. As such, in this way, magical girl series not only engages directly with traditional ideas of gender identity in modern Japanese culture, but also critiques them.⁵⁹ Furthermore, magical girl narratives, artists are able to question if there is only one way to be a girl and give female readers an insulated space to embrace their individuality as they live day-to-day in a culture that places prides itself on group conformity.⁶⁰

Becoming the Goddess: The Heroine as the Goddess and Male Partner as Ardent Follower

Romantic sub-plots in magical girl series are common, but for fans, it is not the priority. Instead, friendship – especially the relationship the heroine has with her teammates – takes priority. In addition to coming together to fight the extraordinary enemy, the heroine and her teammates are also featured in more mundane situations, such as spending time at school together and participating in leisurely activities. This is not to say, however, that romantic relationships are ignored. Many series, including the ones I will analyze in the next chapter, feature romantic relationships equalized by the male lead's devotion to the heroine. If the hero

⁵⁸ Hemmann, "Short Skirts and Superpowers", 56

⁵⁹ Hemmann, "Short Skirts and Superpowers", 46-7.

⁶⁰ Sugawa-Shimada, "'Representations of Girls in Japanese Magical Girl TV Animation Programmes", 245-7.

in Campbell's mythic narrative is destined to meet the goddess who will give him the power to triumph over the enemy, then the heroine in magical girl series *is the goddess herself* and the male lead is destined to be her most ardent follower.

At the beginning of their relationship there is a push-pull dynamic between these characters. The heroine and her romantic partner may not even like each other initially; this is further exacerbated if the male lead directly challenges the protagonist's role and insists that she cannot fulfill her role as heroine. He may even go as far as to become aggressive if she refuses to heed his demands. However, this does not last. Just as the heroine's encounters with her romantic lead help her to grow as individual, the male lead experiences character progression when he finally recognizes her abilities as a magical girl heroine and does nothing to interfere with her duties. He may fight alongside her, but otherwise trusts her to do what needs to be done – he backs her up. The heroine is strengthened by her relationship with the hero, just as she is strengthened by the support she receives from her friends/teammates. Furthermore, the narrative places its focus more on how that strength allows her to overcome adversity rather than upon the intimate details of the relationship.

The relationship between Prince Charming and Princess Sapphire illustrates this idea in *Ribon no Kishi*. At first, the two share a friendly rivalry as princes of neighboring kingdoms. Charming is unaware that Sapphire was born a girl. Nevertheless, they fall in love when Sapphire, disguised as a blonde-haired maiden, runs into him. However, the relationship is not without angst, as Sapphire must keep the secret of her birth to lay claim to her kingdom in the future. The relationship further sours when Charming is framed for the murder of Sapphire's father due to the machinations of Duke Duralumin. Charming is eventually released when he is

found innocent but he is already consumed with hatred for “Prince” Sapphire for his imprisonment.

The relationship between Charming and Sapphire is tenuous. As the blonde-haired maiden, Sapphire gains Charming’s affections, but she cannot allow herself to fall for him due to her deceit. However, as Prince Sapphire, she is burdened by her duty to save her kingdom; because she cannot tell him the truth, she must endure his anger toward the “prince”. However, that changes when he discovers that the blonde-haired maiden and Sapphire are one in the same. He apologizes for his misplaced anger and asks to tend to her needs. He pledges his loyalty to Sapphire and takes his place as her ardent follow her when Duke Duralumin challenges the relationship. However, Charming cannot be swayed; he announces that his trust is in Sapphire. From that point on, Charming is bound by his love for Sapphire. In return, when the forces of evil capture Charming at various points of the narrative, Sapphire is the one who rushes forth to rescue him.

Tuxedo Kamen of *Sailor Moon* is another example idea. When he initially meets Usagi (Sailor Moon) in his civilian persona Chiba Mamoru, the relationship is frosty. He chides her for being a lazy, unmotivated student and she tells him to mind his own business. Still, the two find themselves drawn to one another and fall in love. As Tuxedo Kamen, Mamoru offers support and words of encouragement to Sailor Moon. Beyond his rose dart, which signals his presence, he rarely intervenes in a fight. Instead, he recognizes that Sailor Moon is the one who must defeat the enemy. However, if the foe is especially powerful, Mamoru becomes more hands-on, lending his energy to Sailor Moon. Still, there are several times when, despite his best efforts he is captured by enemy forces, such as by Queen Beryl in the Dark Kingdom act. It is Sailor Moon, with the help of the other Sailor Senshi, who forges ahead and rescues him.

As the ardent follower of the magical girl goddess, the male romantic partner may not readily accept his role at first; instead, he poses a challenge which may mentally stress the heroine. However, this does not last. Once the male romantic partner and the heroine fall in love, he pledges his allegiance to her. But rather than being the hero that helps the goddess when she is in trouble, the goddess is the one who saves him. His love allows her to grow further empowered and in return, she protects him and in some cases, rescues him from all real threats to their relationship. This subversion of the heroic narrative – the *shōjo* as the warrior AND the divine goddess – cements the magical girl as the heroine of the story and her male partner as a supporting character.

The Journey, Not the Destination: Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have applied a structuralist perspective to the magical girl narrative, applying Joseph Campbell's mythic narrative structure. Because the mythic narrative is so broad, the magical girl narrative shares similarities with Campbell's creation. The magical girl is a young girl, no longer a child but not yet a woman, who is either born into magic or is chosen to receive extraordinary powers. Mentored by an enchanted mentor, the magical girl heroine ventures forth to engage an enemy that threatens those she holds dear and is rewarded with discovering her true self. On the other hand, in many ways, the magical girl narrative subverts Campbell's mythic narrative. Though she may physical engage with the enemy, she is beyond the masculine connotations associated with the word "hero". She shows compassion and kindness to those who support her mission. Furthermore, she is her own goddess. Once she has come to terms with her true self, the heroine gains power to save the world and her loved ones from harm. Protected by an ardent male follower who once challenged her position of power, the

magical girl heroine is empowered by his love and her determination, using her divine power to save the world.

The magical girl narrative is coded in the cultural significance of the *shōjo* in Japanese culture. The heroine is characterized as visually feminine but in terms of personality, is outside the bounds of socially-accepted femininity. This may include a lack of academic ability, a strong affinity for sports or other physical activity, or negative traits such as clumsiness, being hot-headed, or overly emotional. As a result, the heroine is chastised by others for lacking feminine traits. The heroine nonetheless endures. Though she is tested by the schemes of the master manipulator and the wiles of the wicked *majō*, she somehow endures. Surrounded by a supportive group of teammates with complimentary traits, the heroine pushes forth even when hope is dim. Her status as a *shōjo* allows her the space to grow, to fight, and to be herself.

In the end, the narrative provides a space in which the female reader can consume a young and empowered heroine in relative safety, a recent innovation for both Japanese and North American audiences. In this space, the narrative allows for a young girl to be the hero, which in turn encourages the female audience to explore their individual personalities. For Japanese female audiences, it allows for the exploration of individuality in a culture that prides itself on a group dynamic. For North American audiences, the introduction of a new style of animation and a young girl as a superhero paved the way toward an engaging, continuous storyline and characters that were emotional and flawed.⁶¹ For both audiences, in engaging with the growth of the heroine throughout the course of the story, the female audience resonate with the narrative through their own experiences.

⁶¹ Allison, "Fierce Flesh" 154-8.

CHAPTER THREE

Rise Up! – Textual Analysis of Magical Girl Narratives

Recall in the previous chapter that magical girl series published within the *shōjo* demographic follows a structure that emphasizes the personal and spiritual growth of the heroine through her magical transformation. Their journey itself can be classified into three phases – separation, initiation, and return. If Campbell’s monomyth structure is translated into magical girl terms, the result would be, in its basic form, as follows:

The magical girl heroine, who is chosen to wield fantastic powers from an otherworldly entity, has her ordinary life shaken up by an extraordinary enemy who wishes to disrupt life as she knows it (separation). After an initial battle which sees the heroine victorious after accepting her powers (but not necessarily her fate), the heroine is thrust into a liminal space which sees her balancing her ordinary life with her extraordinary duties (initiation). Once the heroine has willingly accepted her fate, she returns to her role as a magical avatar, her life constantly threatened by death until she succeeds in defeating her foes once and for all (return).

It is important to note that there is validity to this basic narrative structure and I will illustrate how several series tend to follow this structure later in the chapter. However, it is also important to note that Campbell’s monomyth takes on a masculine tone – a consequence attributed to the use of the word “hero”.⁶² As a result, the structure focuses on the feats of the hero – how he crushes his foes, how he toils to overcome obstacles, and how he manages to gain the spoils to elevate himself above others. Magical girl series (at the very least the ones I have selected for analysis) are a product created in the space known as “girls’ country” – they were created by women for elementary-aged girls in Japan. Because magical girl series exist within

⁶² Emerson, “Innocence as a Super-Power”, 132.

the *shōjo* demographic, plots are driven by the emotional interiority and personal struggles of the heroine. This is not to say, however, that magical girl series are devoid of action sequences.

If the narrative structure of magical girl series is to be properly analysed, then the morphology of the series, based on Propp's morphology of Russian folktales, must also be considered. Just as Propp considers various deviations that occur within Russian folktale narratives, we must take into consideration the various deviations and variations of the narrative structure as well as how the structure has changed over time. Magical Girl series may be similar in structure; each series does have its own variations and/or deviations. Each magical girl series, including ones I intend to analyse in this chapter, places an emphasis on the growth of the heroine and the actions taken for and against her to encourage growth, and visually plots these changes from beginning to end.

The Morphology of Magical Girl Series

Going back to Propp's method of morphology, he states that while the cast various fairy tales (the *dramatis personae*) changes, their actions do not. Propp refers to these actions as *functions*; he goes on to specifically define a function as an act of a character that is a constant component of a tale, no matter who performs them; they are significant as they are actions that bear importance to the story's plot.⁶³ These functions are numerous according to Propp, and frequently repeated throughout several different stories. Because the person carrying out of a specific action can change, there are variables as to how an action takes place but not the action itself. Therefore, the structure of a story, according to Propp, is a sequence of actions taking

⁶³ Propp, Vladimir, *Morphology of the Folktale*.

place in a certain order with a limited amount of functions used; though variations may be present depending on who performs the action, the structure appears to remain unchanged, no matter the story being told.

Since the variations found within the narrative structure stem from the person who is performing the action, it stands to reason that the characters involved in the story bear significance as well. Just as their actions move the plot, an individual character's purpose and how it relates to the framework of the story is what Propp considers to be an "important morphological element". The situation these characters find themselves in influences any function they perform, which goes on to influence the narrative. Therefore, with these elements in mind, we can create a basic morphology of magical girl narratives. While Propp's original morphology uses thirty-one distinct functions found in Russian fairytales, the length of this thesis cannot support such a detailed analysis. As a result, I will only use the functions needed to illustrate the morphology of magical girl narratives, offering detailed explanations when necessary.

The Morphology of Magical Girl Narratives: A Sequence of Actions

If we apply Propp's morphological structure while considering the elements of Joseph Campbell's mythic narrative to the magical girl narrative, the basic, overarching structure of magical girl series would look something like this:

Part One - Separation

a. The Ordinary and the Extraordinary (The Ordinary World)

- i. A girl of an extraordinary world comes to the ordinary (human) world for a change of scenery OR
 - ii. An ordinary girl⁶⁴ is given a special power from an extraordinary world.
- b. *You are Chosen – Now Get Going! (The Call to Adventure)*
- i. A resident of an extraordinary world comes to the ordinary (human) world to complete a trial or pass a test – and the trial starts immediately.
 - ii. An ordinary girl must use extraordinary powers to defeat a foe who desires to take over the world – starting with a friend or family member.
- c. *You Want Me to Do What?! (Reluctance or Refusal of the Call)*
- i. If the Heroine is an Ordinary girl, she expresses disbelief at her extraordinary abilities.
 - ii. Extraordinary girl expresses disgust at the ordinariness of the human world.
 - iii. While an adjustment period is necessary, both girls nonetheless use their powers continuously.
- d. *You can Talk?! (Meeting with the Human Mentor/Magical Companion)*
- i. The Heroine is introduced to a human mentor/animal-like familiar who insists that only the heroine can complete the task ahead.
 - ii. The Heroine is briefed on the seriousness of the situation and the heroine must act right away

⁶⁴ I will discuss this further when I provide a textual analysis of each series, but the Ordinary girl, is not considered to be an “ideal” kind of girl. She usually possesses traits that are considered “unladylike” and may be referred to as an *otenba*, or “tomboy”. I refer to her as “ordinary” because, unlike the Extraordinary Girl, she is not born with magical abilities.

- iii. Will help the heroine by training heroine to complete task (in theory)

Part Two: Initiation

e. Crossing the Threshold

- i. The Heroine invokes power for the first time with the help of her otherworldly companion OR with
- ii. The Heroine agrees to begin the trial in the human world
- iii. The Heroine may still express reluctance toward her new duties but otherwise accepts role as chosen one
- iv. This and the four other stages occur very rapidly, usually within the first few chapters of the narrative

f. Are You Friend or Foe? (Tests, Allies, and Enemies)

- i. The Heroine, with choice made, must contend with the issues that arrive from being chosen.
- ii. The Heroine begins to test the extent of her powers while supervised by her otherworldly companion.
- iii. As time passes, the Heroine learns more about the enemy she must face/the reasoning and motivations behind the trial.
- iv. **The Rival**⁶⁵ May Appear – The rival believes they are the chosen one and can do a better job than the Heroine

⁶⁵ A rival is defined as a character, male or female, who is in direct competition with the heroine. They are not necessarily an antagonist, and usually have something to prove – what that is depends on the plot.

- v. **The Teammate**⁶⁶ May Appear – The teammate has her own personality and abilities and pledges to use them to help the Heroine defeat the main foe
- vi. The Heroine may encounter “foot soldiers” (smaller enemies) before first encountering **the Dark Enchantress/Magician**, a very powerful enemy who is only second to the **Big Bad**⁶⁷, the main enemy of the series.

g. *I Can Do This (The Approach)*

- i. The first Major Battle between the Heroine, her teammates, and the Enemy occurs – not a direct confrontation with the Big Bad, but possible with **the Dark Enchantress/Magician** and an army of minions
- ii. The Heroine may also battle **the Rival**. However, the battles are not on as grand a scale.
- iii. The Heroine may be defeated in this battle and must retreat temporarily to regroup.
- iv. The Heroine discovers that there is more to the story than a “trial” and/or her true relationship to the **Big Bad**

h. *A Test of One’s Worth (The Ordeal)*

⁶⁶ A teammate is an ally who helps the heroine to achieve her goals. The teammate may be a former ally who decides to partner with the heroine. The teammate may also have the power to transform into a magical girl ally; however, this is not always the case.

⁶⁷ Because of the nature of magical girl narratives, it’s very rare for the heroine to encounter the Big Bad at the beginning of the story. Many series introduce a fake Big Bad who seems powerful but is a smokescreen for the real enemy. This is why I have named the other significant antagonist roles “the Dark Enchantress” or “Magician”. These roles are stronger than minion roles but they are not the main antagonist. Only one series featured the Heroine encountering the Big Bad in the first episode – *Hokugo no Pleiades* (“Wish Upon a Pleiades”), but both the Heroine and the eventual Big Bad were both unaware of his true role.

- i. The Heroine may discover startling information that shifts her perspective on the situation and/or may help her to defeat the **Big Bad**
- ii. The Heroine discovers that her powers are much stronger than she realized. If she is to defeat the **Big Bad**, she must invoke the goddess within to awaken her true power in this time of crisis.
- iii. The Heroine goes through a period of emotional and mental introspection; she strengthens her interpersonal relationships and becomes more grounded in who she really is.
- iv. **The Big Bad** may also be gaining power, preparing for the Final Battle

Part Three: The Return

i. I Have the Power (The Reward)

- i. As a reward for introspection, the Heroine may unlock new powers or be fully tapped into her true powers.
- ii. The Heroine gains a further sense of self and becomes a more confident individual.
- iii. The Heroine gains power to overcome the trial or to defeat **Dark Enchantress/Magician** and eventually the **Big Bad**.
- iv. If there is a **Rival**, the Heroine may face him or her one last time to assert confidence and cement her full powers – defeated, the rival may become an ally (or in the case of a male romantic prospect, a follower of the goddess⁶⁸) or leave the narrative.

⁶⁸ I will discuss this further in the next chapter, but a common trope of magical girl anime is a role reversal – if the rival is a male and potential love interest, the Heroine usually rescues him

j. *The Final Battle (The Road Back)*

- i. The Heroine strives to complete the final trial, which tests her on everything she has learned.
- ii. Heroine vs Dark Enchantress/Magician and/or Big Bad – the enemies have sensed the upgrade in heroine’s power and are more determined to destroy her before she destroys them.

k. *Victory (Resurrection)*

- i. The Heroine is brought to the brink of death in final battle (may experience a sort of “death”); other lives may be lost as well
- ii. The Big Bad is at the height of its power but is ultimately defeated
- iii. Heroine is ultimately changed from her experiences; the Heroine’s victory leads to resurrection of lives and restoration of her surroundings.

l. *Return with the Elixer*

- i. The Ordinary Heroine returns to her ordinary life – she is stronger, more powerful, and more apt to take on the challenges ahead of her OR
- ii. The Extraordinary Heroine returns to the extraordinary world after completing the trial. She experiences promotion and is celebrated, says farewell to the ordinary world, and grows up (end of story)
- iii. Heroine forms stronger friendships and any romantic relationships are further cemented

from danger or helps him overcome inner turmoil. If this male, as a Rival, challenges the Heroine’s power and loses, he converts to her most ardent protector and supporter. He does *not* necessarily fight alongside her in battle.

- iv. Heroine and **the Rival** may continue to engage in battle or may forge ahead with a friendship
- v. The cycle may begin again with an even stronger **Dark**

Enchantress/Magician or Big Bad

The basic narrative structure focuses on the actions taken by the heroine and the actions taken by those around her, allies and enemies. First, the narrative establishes the heroine as a “diamond in the rough”. She has potential to become something greater so, all actions taken, both positive and negative, are done to apply “pressure”. It matters not who takes the actions, so long as the action is taken; the character who performs the action may add variations to the style of the narrative but the end result is always the same. By the end of narrative, the pressure does its job and the heroine shines like a diamond and she is strengthened and emboldened by this transformative, magical experience.

Now that the basic structure and morphology are established, I will apply it to three magical girl series, published within the *shōjo* demographic. The three series I have selected are as follows: *Ribon no Kishi* (“Princess Knight”), first published in 1953 by Tezuka Osamu, *Bishōjo Senshi Sera Mun* (“Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon), first serialized in 1992 by Takeuchi Naoko, and *Sugar Sugar Rune*, first serialized in 2004 by Moyoco Anno. These three series cover the spectrum of *shōjo* magical girl series published since 1950s post-war Japan, featuring shifts in thematic content, character portrayals and portrayals of interpersonal relationships, and variations in narrative. As a result, a magical girl series written in more recent times may retain much of the basic narrative structure of its 1950s counterparts, but may contain deviations that reflect the period of its publication.

The Blueprint for Transformation – Tezuka’s Ribon no Kishi

Tezuka Osamu’s *Ribon no Kishi* is widely considered by scholars and fans alike to be the blueprint for the magical girl genre.⁶⁹ Published during a time when young female readers craved stories involving exotic (read: European) locales and luxurious settings, *Ribon no Kishi* fanned the flames with its European medieval setting complete with grand castles, royal intrigues, and the marriage of mythical magic with Christian influences.⁷⁰ Note that *shōjo* manga published up until the 1970s were primarily written by men; however, this did not stop Tezuka from infusing his “understanding” of the female experience within his narrative. Such understanding, which would come in the form of gender shifting and ambiguities. In addition, the idea of “transforming” from an ordinary into an extraordinary being would become a central hallmark of the *shōjo* manga narrative.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Gravett, Paul, *Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics* (London: Laurence King Publishing 2004), 77.

⁷⁰ Tezuka, Osamu, *Princess Knight Volume One*, trans. Maya Rosewood (New York: Vertical 2011), Kindle Edition.

⁷¹ Hikari, Hori, “Tezuka, *Shōjo* Manga, and Hagio Moto”, *Mechademia* 8 (2013), 299-311.



Figure 3 Vintage Ribon no Kishi Cover from classicshoujo.tumblr.com

The Separation: A Princess with Two Hearts

The heroine of the story – Princess Sapphire – is marked as an extraordinary individual even before her birth. The mischievous angel Tink, looking to have some fun, feeds a baby a boy heart as it waits in line to be born. This proves to be a disaster, as the baby was meant to be born a girl; furthermore, the head angel gives her a girl heart before he discovers Tink's sabotage. The narrative makes clear that there are to be no ambiguities; girls are born with girl hearts and boys are born with boy hearts. Tink committed a grave error by upsetting the order and for that he is banished to earth, where he will remain unless he can retrieve the boy heart.

In the meantime, the narrative continues to emphasize the ordinary but extraordinary heroine. The baby with two hearts is born as Princess Sapphire of the Silver Kingdom. Due to a miscommunication, the kingdom believes that a Prince was born rather than a Princess. The King does not correct them; only a male heir can inherit the kingdom and if the truth were revealed the Silver Kingdom would fall into the hands of Duke Duralumin, an unscrupulous royal. As a result, they raise Sapphire as a Prince rather than a Princess. She is already no

ordinary girl because she was born into royalty; now, she is no ordinary princess due to being masqueraded as a boy and due to her two hearts.

As Sapphire grows older, she becomes more aware and emotionally troubled by her situation. In the public eye, she is a gallant prince who is a skilled swordsman who is beloved by many, especially young ladies. She plays her role so well that when she rides through town wearing heeled shoes, the act does not arouse mass suspicion. But in private, Sapphire longs to be a girl and embrace her femininity. This longing is exacerbated when she meets the Prince Franz Charming, prince of the Gold Kingdom, while disguised at Carnival. Her feelings for Charming are at the crux of the narrative; she is torn between her desire for happiness and being herself and her duty to her family and the Silver Kingdom. Her parents are sympathetic to her plight, especially her mother who is privy to her daughter's inner turmoil. Though she assists Sapphire by supplying her with a wig so that she may attend Carnival in disguise, she cannot do much else. Even so, the narrative makes it clear that she is destined for more than just romance and royal duty.



Figure 4 Prince Charming and the disguised Sapphire. From anime.es

However, this is not to say that Sapphire takes issue with her “masculinity”. She may have been destined to be born a female, yet she nonetheless uses her boy heart when she requires it, and her freedom as a royal *shōjo* allows her the space to do that. When she speaks, she speaks with a forceful, confident tone; in other words, she uses Japanese pronouns and particles associated with male speech instead of female speech. In the moments where she loses her boy heart, she loses her source of strength as well as her ability to defend herself. She is a visual representation of Japanese girlhood – she is neither a little girl nor a grown woman nor is she completely of the masculine or of the feminine. Indeed, she truly is the “Princess Knight”.

Sapphire answers the call to adventure when her father is murdered by a poison arrow during a jousting event, leading to her being outed as a girl by her own mother during her coronation. It is not an intentional act, however; Sir Nylon laced the queen’s goblet with a truth serum moments before. Nevertheless, Sapphire and her mother are cast out of the kingdom as traitors by Duralumin and are rejected by her people. But this is only the beginning of Sapphire’s adventure. However, as both ordinary and extraordinary forces stake their claim to Sapphire’s two hearts (and eventually Franz’s sole heart), the story shifts as she crosses the threshold into the world outside the Silver Kingdom.

Initiation: The Rise of the Princess Knight

Sapphire, with help from her mother and a sympathetic guard, escapes prison to find a way to regain the Silver Kingdom’s throne. The angel Tink, once determined to retrieve her second heart, becomes her ally when an attempt goes awry and nearly costs the princess her life. He still intends to make Sapphire a “proper girl” (a plot point that will be discussed further below), but intends to protect her from those that would do her harm. Indeed, the odds are

stacked against Sapphire, but she nonetheless stands her ground. Her longing for the love and attention of Prince Charming never interferes with her desire to save her kingdom, angst notwithstanding. This is important, as her quest to regain her kingdom escalates into war of all sides for Sapphire's two hearts, physically and emotionally.



Figure 5 Sapphire as the Masked Knight. Courtesy of tezukainenglish.com

There is no one Big Bad in *Ribon no Kishi*, but there are three main antagonists; Duke Duralumin and Sir Nylon throughout most the story, Madame Hell throughout the second third of the story, and the Goddess Venus in the latter half. Duralumin is only interested in gaining the Silver Kingdom for the benefit of his son Plastic; he exposes Sapphire's true gender so that he

may ascend to the throne. Indeed, Duralumin and Sir Nylon attack the princess on a physical level. The series is filled with several action sequences; Tezuka uses action-to-action panel transitions to simulate furious sword battles between Sapphire and her various opponents.

Madame Hell and Venus, on the other hand, are villains that wish to challenge Sapphire on a personal level. Madame Hell wants Sapphire's girl heart in hopes of making her own daughter, Hecate, more "feminine". She desires to marry off Hecate to a royal family and believes that Prince Franz Charming suits her needs. Furthermore, if Sapphire is without her girl heart, she will truly become a he, making her ineligible for Franz's affections.

Rebellious attitudes and being proactive in changing one's fate are the driving forces of the first leg of Sapphire's journey.⁷² As the story further unfolds, the traditional attitudes of adults and the progressive attitudes of the young become more evident. Sapphire's parents mean well and love their daughter, yet they nonetheless raise her as boy rather than attempt to change the laws that insist that only a male heir can rule the kingdom. Duke Duralumin exacerbates this; he is determined to out Sapphire as female so that he may rule the kingdom. The villains of *Ribon no Kishi* also appear to adhere to tradition. Madame Hell is the powerful matriarch of the underworld, but even she insists that her daughter Hecate be more ladylike so that she may marry into a royal family.

On the other hand, Prince Franz Charming appears to be blessed with the freedom associated with being a prince. However, he desires the freedom to make his own decisions rather than bend to the will of his uncle, who has raised him since his mother's passing. Charming resists the influence of his uncle, who insists that Charming owes him for taking him

⁷² Tezuka, Osamu, *Princess Knight Volume Two*, trans. Maya Rosewood (New York: Vertical 2011), Kindle Edition.

in after the passing of his parents. Hecate is the daughter of the Underworld and is mischievous but she is also good-natured. As she helps Franz to escape from her mother, he comments on how kind and helpful she is. Finally, Plastic is an eighteen-year-old trapped in a toddler's visage. Duralumin desires to give him the throne, but he is only interested in making mischief. However, upon gaining Sapphire's boy heart, he becomes a confident and competent leader who desires to change the laws forbidding women from rule so Sapphire can take back the throne.

Princess Sapphire, of course, is the main example; she desires to regain her family's kingdom, but also desires to live as both a girl and a boy – as a *shōjo*. She desires to embrace her feminine side but does not want to give up her masculine side either. Tezuka draws her with wide, starry eyes but also with a long, slender body as well as an androgynous appearance – the classic *shōjo* aesthetic. Throughout the course of the story, she uses both sides to achieve her goals, and hesitates to define herself. Even when she loses her boy heart to Plastic, she continues to oscillate between the masculine and the feminine. She can still fight and does fight for herself, but she also embraces her feminine traits. From beginning to end, each victory she experiences affirms that her strength draws not from either a girl's heart or a boy's heart, but from her status as a *shōjo*.

The Return: Happily Ever After – The Acceptance of Self

If the final part of the magical girl narrative – the return – involves returning to fight an enemy that once defeated her, then Sapphire's journey involves a return to her core self. By this time in the narrative, two major foes – Duke Duralumin and Madame Hell – have been defeated; however, Sapphire has lost her memory, and as a result, has no idea of who she really is. As the jealous goddess of love Venus plots to keep Franz from locating his true love, Sapphire is given

time to discover who she truly is, apart from her duty to her family and her love for Prince Charming. A bout of amnesia helps this along – she knows that she is a girl but doesn't understand why she is dressed as a prince. She struggles to regain her memories, even as Sir Nylon tries to have her killed and the Swordswoman Friebe, who is described to be manly despite being female, wishes to marry her. As she struggles to regain her memory, she also struggles to ensure her survival.

If we are to analyze Sapphire's actions regarding her quest to regain her identity, then we must look at the actions of Prince Charming, who takes the lead during the final act. He is indirectly responsible for Sapphire's amnesia; while the life flower he retrieved from the garden of the Goddess Venus revived her, it also caused her amnesia. Even so, his devotion to her never wavers, even in the face of a persistent goddess. He is clear in his intentions to bring her back home and marry her. Furthermore, he is aware that she is a princess raised as a boy but this does not change his feelings. His desire to rescue her and bring her back unharmed has implications for Sapphire's own desire to make sense of her situation.

When Sapphire and Prince Charming finally reunite, it signals the definitive triumph of good over evil. Nylon has been arrested for his attempts to kill Sapphire and Venus has been punished for her attempts to interfere with their relationship. Sapphire states that she will wear a gown and marry the Prince as a woman, yet she is still dressed in men's clothing. As Tink ascends back to heaven, the story gives no indication that Sapphire will take on a more feminine personality. Prince Charming makes no request for her to become more feminine. Furthermore, while Sapphire wants to marry him as a woman, the ambiguity associated with the *shōjo* remains. Indeed, in *Futago no Kishi* ("The Twin Knights"), she retains her androgynous features

despite her role as Queen of the Silver Kingdom.⁷³ Both Sapphire and Prince Charming refer to her being raised as a boy. Furthermore, when she trains her daughter Violetta to be a skilled fencer, she introduces herself as “the Princess Knight”.

It should be noted that the narrative aspects of *Ribon no Kishi* make it difficult to analyze in the modern framework of *shōjo* manga. While the narrative features some of the hallmarks of *shōjo* manga, including occasional use of tabular layouts featuring certain character features as well as the starry-eyed heroine aesthetic, the series mainly employs linear layouts to tell the story; there is more emphasis on actions rather than emotion. Furthermore, in the final third of the story, Sapphire’s amnesia stifles any effort for her to determine who she is really. That may have been intentional on Tezuka’s part, as Prince Charming chooses her despite her being raised as a boy. Nevertheless, *Ribon no Kishi* features the transformation of Princess Sapphire into a stronger individual. Though she loses her boy heart, she gains the strength to overcome obstacles and for her efforts is rewarded with a mate who accepts her for who she is, fighting alongside her. These elements will continue to be seen within the magical girl narrative, even as *shōjo* demographic – and by extension the *shōjo* herself, experiences numerous periods of retooling and upheaval.



Figure 6 Sapphire and Tink, the angel. From tvtropes.com

⁷³ Tezuka, Osamu, *The Twin Knights*, trans. Maya Rosewood (New York: Vertical 2013), Kindle Edition.

Part Two: Fighting for Love and Justice – Takeuchi’s *Bishōjo Senshi Sērā Mūn*

When Toei Animation recently announced a fourth season of the animated series *Sailor Moon Crystal*, the response was immediate⁷⁴. Despite animation issues with the first three seasons, fans were nonetheless pleased with the news – fitting, since 2017 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the series. The announcement was just one of many ways to mark the occasion; Japanese fans have been treated to pop-up stores featuring Sailor Moon-centered fashion merchandise, pop-up cafes, and a museum exhibition in Roppongi Hills featuring physical renditions of the various props featured in the manga and animated series⁷⁵. Though the most zealous Western fan will need to use a deputy service to get their hands on some of these special goods, there are local options. Western stores, notably Hot Topic, now offer fan merchandise for English-speaking fans, such as Sailor Moon t-shirts, dress, hosiery, jewelry, and merchandise from Japanese toymaker Bandai’s “Proplica” line, which features realistic toy replicas of the various items featured on the show.⁷⁶ As a fan of the series, even I cannot resist “wearing my fandom,” as they say. My beloved Moon Stick necklace, which I wear whenever I am presenting about Sailor Moon or magical girls in general, was purchased at a nearby video game store.

It could be argued that *Sailor Moon* is the series that pops up in most people’s mind when it comes to magical girl series. The series, a collaboration with Bandai and *shōjo* artist Takeuchi

⁷⁴ “NEWS: Sailor Moon Crystal Anime Gets Sequel”. Anime News Network, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2017-01-25/sailor-moon-crystal-anime-gets-sequel/.111437>.

⁷⁵ “Tokyo Trip: A look at the Sailor Moon exhibit in Roppongi Hills”. Kodansha Advanced Media, accessed March 16, 2017, <http://kodanshacomics.com/2016/04/16/inside-sailor-moon-exhibit/>.

⁷⁶ “Sailor Moon Brand Merchandise”. Hot Topic, Inc., accessed March 16, 2017, <http://www.hottopic.com/pop-culture/shop-by-license/sailor-moon/>.

Naoko, is one of the first series to achieve popularity both within and outside of Japan. It is a deviation from the usual romance-centered stories featured in *shōjo* manga magazines; Takeuchi, influenced by the on-going *Super Sentai tokusatsu* series⁷⁷ (better known as *Power Rangers* in the West), wanted to create a series which featured a team of color-coded young girls who transform into their battle forms to fight their enemies.⁷⁸ In an interview with ROLa magazine, Takeuchi describes the series as a reflection of her independent life at the time of its initial serialization. She goes on to state that she faced initial reluctance from the management (who she describes as “old men” [*oyaji*]), as they were not convinced that the series could feature five beautiful fighting girls successfully without resorting to character tropes.

Takeuchi believed otherwise, and worked hard to give each character an air of beauty and elegance despite their overall personality. Takeuchi’s hard work paid off; the series became an instant success. The series, featuring fourteen-year-old Tsukino Usagi, a self-professed crybaby who is also the soldier of love and justice, Sailor Moon, became popular with a wider audience that expanded beyond the young girls it was marketed to. The work itself is a marriage of

⁷⁷ The *Super Sentai* series, which has aired in Japan since 1975, is an ongoing Superhero series which features a team of teenagers transforming into armored heroes to protect the world from a revolving door of alien antagonists. It is of the *tokusatsu* genre of shows, which means it heavily employs special effects. In the 1990s, Saban Entertainment created a westernized version of the show called *Mighty Morphin’ Power Rangers*, using Japanese footage of the original show (*Kyōryū Sentai Zyuranger*) along with new story sequences featuring American actors. Both series continue to air to this day.

⁷⁸ “Interview Translations: ROLa Magazine and God of Backstage Show”. Miss Dream: A Sailor Moon Translation Project, accessed March 16, 2017, <https://missdream.org/interview-translations-rola-magazine-and-god-of-backstage-show/>.

Takeuchi's various interests – science fiction, Greek and Roman Mythology, the cute *shōjo* visual aesthetic, and works that featured darker narrative themes.⁷⁹

Unlike *Ribon no Kishi*, which sees Sapphire transforming figuratively, *Sailor Moon* features Usagi transforming into Sailor Moon as well as “transforming” from a klutzy crybaby into a mature young woman. Due to the brevity of this thesis, however, I will focus solely on the first two volumes of the “Kanzenban” edition of *Sailor Moon*, the Dark Kingdom arc. Once again, I will apply the magical girl morphology to the Dark Kingdom arc, taking care to emphasize Usagi's physical transformation into a magical girl as well as her personal transformation into a stronger, more confident individual.



Figure 7 Usagi and Sailor Moon. From prettysoldierproject.com.

Separation: The Crybaby with Odangos in Her Hair

Just as in *Ribon no Kishi*, heroine Usagi is presented as an “extraordinary” heroine in an ordinary world.⁸⁰ The two buns atop her head that resemble dango desserts is the most visual

⁷⁹ “Naoko Takeuchi Interview in ROLA Magazine November 2013”. Miss Dream: A Sailor Moon Translation Project, accessed March 16, 2017, <https://missdream.org/naoko-takeuchi-interview-rola-magazine-november-2013/>.

⁸⁰ Takeuchi, *Bishōjo Senshi Sera Mun Kanzenban 1*.

clue to her extraordinary status – so much so that when she first meets Chiba Mamoru, her future love interest, he teases her with the name “*odango atama*” (translated in the English version as “meatball head”). However, according to the other characters, “extraordinary” is not a word used to describe Usagi. According to her mother, Usagi is nowhere near the level of Sailor V, a crime fighter in a sailor suit who thwarts criminals.⁸¹ Her English teacher, Sakurada Haruna, is frustrated with her low test marks and voracious appetite. Her best friend Naru wonders why she cannot be more “ladylike”. By her own admission, Usagi describes herself to be a “crybaby” (*nakimushi*). If the word “extraordinary” is to be used regarding the opinions of family and friends, then Usagi is an “extraordinary” in that she appears to fail at being a proper lady and a proper person.

It is upon her meeting with Luna, a black cat with a crescent shaped bald spot on her forehead that the reader discovers there is a little more to Usagi than bad grades and tears. Luna informs Usagi that there are evil forces afoot in Tokyo and Usagi is the only one who can defeat them. Fulfilling her role as the Magical Companion, Luna provides the brooch that allows Usagi to transform into Sailor Moon for the very first time. She is rewarded with incredulity and disbelief for her efforts; Usagi would rather take a nap in her bedroom than deal with this nonsense. After all, it appears that she is comfortable with being an underperforming, klutzy crybaby. But at the same time, this makes her ripe for personal growth. Furthermore, for all her negative qualities, Usagi is loyal to her friends and will help those in trouble. When she sees and hears her friend Naru’s cries for help, Usagi (as Sailor Moon) rushes to her aid.

⁸¹ This is a reference to Takeuchi’s previous work *Codenamu wa Sera V* (“Codename Sailor V”), a series that featured middle schooler Aino Minako as the titular heroine and inspired *Sailor Moon*. Aino would eventually be incorporated into *Sailor Moon* as Sailor Venus.



Figure 8 Usagi's First Transformation into Sailor Moon. From sailormoon.wikia.com

Initiation: The Champion of Love and Justice in a Sailor Suit

Usagi's transition from a regular schoolgirl to the Soldier of Love and Justice Sailor Moon is fraught with bumps and bruises. Now that she has become Sailor Moon, Usagi's encounters with evil entities is continuous. Luna is there for every battle, and while the cat does her best to train Usagi, Takeuchi visually expresses her frustration with wide, expressive eyes marked with anger. Usagi struggles to find the balance between her new duties and her everyday life. Luna wants to brief her about the enemy and what they plan to do with Tokyo; in addition to that, they must find her other teammates as well as the "princess" who must be protected at all costs.⁸² But Usagi just wants to play video games at the Crown Game Centre to be near cute

⁸² It is implied that the "Princess" is the one who has the Silver Millennium Crystal (*Maboroshi no Ginzuishou*), which holds great power. Queen Metallia, who empowers Queen Beryl, wants the crystal for herself in order to take form and rule the world. In the meantime, she orders Beryl and her Generals to gain energy through various schemes. For example, in the first

worker Motoko. Eventually, they come to a happy medium – Luna uses the arcade to teach Usagi to be a better warrior with occasional skill upgrades, and Usagi grows more settled in her new role.

The pacing of the manga, in terms of Usagi’s journey – is relentless. Each chapter within the first volume of the perfect edition sees her fighting the enemy in the climax. The Dark Kingdom, led by Queen Beryl and empowered by Queen Metallia, are desperate to find the Silver Millennium Crystal; Sailor Moon’s presence threatens that goal. While this gives Usagi ample opportunities to become a better warrior, she still experiences fright and reluctance when engaging the enemy. However, with each battle, she grows more confident with every battle. Eventually, Luna does not need to demand that Usagi transform – she chooses to do so herself.

Usagi is not alone on her journey. The Sailor Senshi, her color-coded protectors who are destined to fight alongside her, awaken to their abilities shortly after she does. Each *senshi* shares similar qualities in their appearance, including slender bodies, wide and expressive eyes, and features considered “beautiful” and “attractive”. However, their personalities are different and are meant to appeal to a wider audience. Mizuno Ami, or Sailor Mercury, is a blue-haired girl with reserved personality and a genius-level intellect. Hino Rei, or Sailor Mars, is a shrine priestess (*miko*) with a strong personality and psychic abilities. Kino Makoto, or Sailor Jupiter, is intimidating at first due to her tall stature, strength, and tough expression, but is actually a sweet girl who has a talent for cooking. Finally, Aino Minako, or Sailor Venus, who is the most mature and the most experienced senshi; if you consider her own journey from *Kōdonēmu wa Sailor V* to *Bishōjo Senshi Sērā Mūn*, she hints at what will become of Usagi by the completion

chapter, a monster who is a doppelganger of Naru’s mother sells jewelry which sucks the wearer of their energy.

of the series. In the meantime, as Usagi battles the Dark Kingdom, she also forges meaningful relationships with the Sailor Senshi, which strengthens the dynamic of the entire group inside and outside of battle.

If Usagi's transformation into Sailor Moon and relationship with her teammates provides two significant mechanisms for personal growth, then her relationship with rival Tuxedo Kamen is the last one of importance. On the surface, the relationship is the clash of opposites; Usagi is not enthused with Mamoru's smug attitude and tells him so. Mamoru is quick to point out Usagi's negative traits and is the one who blesses her with the "odango atama" moniker. On the battlefield, they are rivals; they are both in search of the Silver Millennium Crystal, albeit for different reasons. This, however, does not stop the two from falling in love with one another. In fact, it is that love that sets the stage for the Usagi, her teammates, and Mamoru himself to reclaim their true identities and discover the truth about their enemy, the Dark Kingdom.

As the arc reaches its climax, Sailor Moon and the Sailor Senshi engage with Dark Kingdom General Kunzite, the strongest of Queen Beryl's generals. The battle does not end well for Usagi, as Mamoru/Tuxedo Kamen is dealt a critical blow. However, the resulting grief and confusion awakens everyone to the truth; Usagi is the princess she's been looking for and the owner of the Silver Millennium Crystal. Her grief over Mamoru's injury awakens her true form and gives her access to an even stronger power. But this also means she's back to square one. Her team, beaten and bruised, must retreat, and Mamoru, still unconscious, is kidnapped by Kunzite and Queen Beryl.



Figure 9 Tuxedo Kamen Protects Sailor Moon. From mangareader.net

The Return: In the Name of the Moon

It should be noted that while a story featuring romantic relationships is the hallmark of *shōjo* manga narratives, *Sailor Moon* finds balance between Usagi's relationship with the Sailor Senshi and her relationship with Tuxedo Kamen. All characters, both the senshi and Tuxedo Kamen, are linked to Usagi. Though she is portrayed as a klutzy crybaby, she is also a friendly individual who manages to connect with individuals who are considered by others to be difficult to connect to. For example, Usagi easily befriends Ami (Sailor Mercury) when other students are intimidated and put off by the latter's genius intellect: Usagi even gets Ami to play video games. Also, she has no qualms befriending tall-and-imposing Makoto (Sailor Jupiter) who is falsely rumoured to have been kicked out of her previous school for fighting. The power of friendship is one of the prevalent themes of the series; the characters are there to support each other, especially during difficult battles with the Dark Kingdom. Furthermore, while the

narrative visually expresses Usagi's romantic relationship with Mamoru, it also shows him being supportive of her mission. As Tuxedo Mask, he may assist her with her battles but he never rescues her. Instead, he offers words of encouragement and only physically intervenes when necessary.

Mamoru's loss signals a period of grief and introspection for Usagi. She is dealing with two very powerful events: that Mamoru is in the clutches of her enemy and that she is Serenity, Princess of the fallen Moon Kingdom and owner of the Silver Millennium Crystal. The effect on her is profound and expressed both visually and emotionally; after shutting herself off from the world in her room, her friends come to discover that her hair has grown to an exorbitant length. Usagi is consumed with grief and unsure of what to do. What is certain, however, is her awareness of her mission; now, it's become *personal*. It isn't enough that the Dark Kingdom has attacked innocent people – they have also kidnapped the man she loves. That is enough for Usagi to act.

The final battle between Usagi and Queen Beryl is a battle of opposites; it's more than just Usagi being the good *shōjo* and Beryl the evil adult. Beryl is visually striking as a Dark Enchantress – she is the embodiment of corruption and sexuality, with her long, sharp nails, hourglass figure, ample bosom, and wicked eyes. Furthermore, she is empowered by Queen Metallia's energy. Though several academics raise the issue of the purity-lust binary represented in these characters, according to the narrative, they aren't much different. Usagi, empowered by Luna, is empowered to become Sailor Moon. Beryl, upon locating the power of Queen Metallia as a human, also accepts her fate. It is their motivations that ultimately make the difference.

With the help of the Sailor Senshi, Usagi engages Queen Beryl and Metallia in a final battle. Despite her determination, she is bested by the enemy at first. Mamoru, under Queen

Metallia's influence, is used as a weapon against Usagi while Metallia consumes the power of the Silver Millennium Crystal. The fight results in the loss of her life; after stabbing Mamoru in the heart, she kills herself. However, death is only temporary, as the crystal brings the two of them back to life. With the support of the Sailor Senshi as well as Mamoru, Sailor Moon reaches her full potential. Determined to protect her love and her friends, she finally triumphs over Beryl and Metallia, sealing the evil away for good.



Figure 10 Usagi claiming her identities as Sailor Moon and Princess Serenity. From prettysoldierproject.com

It should be noted that peace is only temporary; the entire series is twelve volumes and there are four more arcs in the series. Nonetheless, Usagi has been “transformed” by her experiences. She is still bit of a crybaby and still klutzy, but, as Sailor Moon, she is also the strong and capable leader of the Sailor Senshi. Her relationships with the other senshi as well as with Mamoru have also been strengthened by these experiences. As the arcs continue, she will continue to be tested as a warrior and as individual, with each test growing higher in difficulty. But, with the help of her friends and Mamoru, the magical girl narrative will repeat itself, always in Usagi's favor.



Figure 11 The Sailor Senshi celebrate their victory. From prettysoldierproject.com

Part Three – The Battle for Love and Hearts: *Sugar Sugar Rune*

Sugar Sugar Rune is a magical girl manga series written by Anno Moyoco and published in the manga magazine *Nakayoshi* from 2004 to 2007. Unlike Takeuchi Naoko, who published a few other short series before *Sailor Moon*, Anno is better known for her works in the *josei* demographic.⁸³ Though the series has not achieved the same massive popularity as *Sailor Moon*, it still has a healthy, devoted following. Furthermore, the series won the Kodansha Manga Award in the children’s category in 2005.⁸⁴ In 2015, in honour of its eighth anniversary, a special

⁸³ The *josei* demographic is marketed to high school girls and young adults, such as female college students and OL (office ladies). Stories within this demographic do feature romance, like the *shōjo* demographic, but romances are more realistic, whereas *shōjo* romances are idealized. The stories are thematically mature, and may also feature sexual situations.

⁸⁴ “Kodansha Manga Awards”, Comic Books Awards Almanac, accessed March 23, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20070816031310/http://www.hahnlibrary.net/comics/awards/kodansha.shtml>

website was launched to celebrate the occasion; the site features various illustrations of the series protagonist as well as the entire manga series in full colour.⁸⁵

Like Takeuchi, Anno's works reflect her personality and experiences.⁸⁶ Stories feature strong yet vulnerable characters navigating relationships and career issues. One example of this is the *josei* series *Hataraki Man*, which features an older protagonist devoted to her career despite increasing societal expectations toward marriage and motherhood due to her age. *Sugar Sugar Rune* reflects the *shōjo* manga she consumed during her childhood; rather than being focused on romance, stories covered a variety of themes that evoked, in the eyes of Anno, a magical feeling.⁸⁷ Furthermore, in an interview with MTV News, Anno expressed her desire to write as an adult to a younger audience without the use of sexual situations or the mature subject matter reserved for her *josei* works.

If *Sailor Moon* featured an ordinary heroine who receives extraordinary powers, then *Sugar Sugar Rune* is the opposite. Protagonists Chocolat and Vanilla are selected to travel to the Human World to determine which one will be the future queen of the Magic World. Despite this reversal, it still follows the basic magical girl narrative structure. Just like *Sailor Moon* and *Ribon no Kishi*, it emphasizes the personal growth of the heroine as she navigates her extraordinary circumstances. The series is not without romance, but the friendship between

⁸⁵ "Moyoco Anno's 'Sugar Sugar Rune' Revived After Eight Years; Entire Series Available In Full Color", Tokyo Otaku Mode, accessed March 23, 2017, <https://otakumode.com/news/5626198f1179852539fd823a/Moyoco-Anno%E2%80%99s-%E2%80%9CSugar-Sugar-Rune%E2%80%9D-Revived-After-Eight-Years-Entire-Series-Available-in-Full-Color>

⁸⁶ "Manga Interview: Moyoco Anno", Music Television, accessed March 23, 2017, <http://www.mtv.com/news/2627010/manga-interview-moyoco-anno/>.

⁸⁷ Manga Interview: Moyoco Anno.

Chocolat and Vanilla, and how the competition to become queen changes them for the worse and for the better, takes centre stage.



Figure 12 The Witches Chocolat and Vanilla. From *girly.today*

Separation: Of Hellfire and Bubbly Soda, the Battle for Hearts

The beginning of *Sugar Sugar Rune* puts the reader right into the centre of the action: witches Chocolat and Vanilla jump in feet first into the human world – literally. Chocolat rises to the occasion but Vanilla is hesitant and fearful. Already, the narrative illustrates how these girls are extraordinary, as they are the two selected candidates for the Queen competition – a competition their mothers participated in years before. Though Vanilla’s mother won that competition, Vanilla is unsure of her own ability to win, due to her timid nature. Chocolat on the other hand, is very confident in her abilities to collect the most hearts⁸⁸ and become Queen,

⁸⁸ There are different coloured hearts in *Sugar Sugar Rune* and each one represents an emotion with an assigned point value. These points can be used to buy spells or add upgrades to a magic wand. Yellow (or “piss” hearts) are the lowest value and represent fear or surprise. Green hearts represent friendship. Orange hearts represent infatuation. Pink hearts represent sweet love (pure and innocent), while Ruby Red Hearts represent passionate love. Purple hearts

something her mother could not do. Even Vanilla believes that Chocolat will become Queen, given her popularity in the Magic World. In any case Rockin' Robin, a popular figure of both worlds and their guardian during the competition, gives them a stern warning; they are encouraged to collect as many hearts as they wish, so long as they do not lose their own heart.

On the surface, the challenge seems simple. To collect a heart, Chocolat and Vanilla use their magic on an unsuspecting human as they experience an intense emotion. The heart is then assigned a point value. The more intense the emotion, the higher the point value. Each heart is also assigned a colour that indicates the emotion of the heart. For example, orange hearts represent infatuation, while pink hearts represent pure love. Once a witch extracts the heart from the human, however, the human loses his or her memories of the encounter. The witch can continue to gain hearts from the same human, however, if the human continues to experience the same emotion in her presence.

The Human World is very different from the Magic World and Chocolat is the one to get the brunt of this lesson. Chocolat's confidence intimidates her male classmates, making her tasks difficult. Vanilla's meek nature, on the other hand, attracts all the boys of her class. If we are to look at the differences between Chocolat and Vanilla in terms of behavior, then Vanilla embodies the ideal traits associated with femininity. Chocolat, on the other hand is more of an *otenba* – she may be female, but her traits are considered unladylike. As a result, there is a role reversal, with Vanilla being more popular than Chocolat. This does not deter Chocolat from her

represent forbidden love. Noir (black) hearts represent negative emotions such as envy and jealousy, though they can be purified with a white heart. Female witches may "lose" their red heart to male witches, but never to humans. If a female witch loses her ruby red heart to a human, she will be banished from the Magic World.

goal of becoming Queen, but it does give her pause. In that pause, she discovers that there is more to matters of the heart than the competition lets on.

Chocolat possesses the spunk, confidence, and vulnerabilities associated with Anno's heroines. She is not reluctant to fulfill her mission – she dives right into it. She truly believes that she has what it takes to become Queen and that nothing will get in the way of that. However, that all changes when she introduces herself to her human classmates. When she displays her aggression toward the boys in her class, the consequences are immediate. She does not understand why the boys fear her, especially since that type of behavior was rewarded in the Magic World. Her resolve is shaken as Vanilla collects more and more hearts, which helps her to strengthen her magical abilities.

These setbacks allow Chocolat the time to understand the inner workings of human relationships, especially with her male classmates. As she begins to gain hearts of her own, Chocolat realizes that there is more to human love and affection than fleeting crushes. This is not to say, however, that Chocolat tries to be more like Vanilla. She retains her spunk and confidence while being more sensitive to the emotions of her classmates. Furthermore, she understands that her mission to collect hearts; however, she refuses to allow her mission to supersede her desire to be a good to her friends, especially the ogre-influenced Vanilla.

The real journey begins when she encounters Pierre, the most popular boy at Chocolat's school due to his good looks and mysterious aura. She cannot help but be drawn to him, but she refuses to fall in love with him. Instead, she is determined to make him fall in love with her so that she may collect his heart. That all changes when it's discovered that Pierre is an Ogre – an evil clan that can kill a witch should they take his or her heart. Chocolat soon discovers that

Pierre has implanted many black hearts among the female students on-campus, girls who have in turn become his most ardent followers; this makes her more determined to take his heart.

Furthermore, the friendship between Chocolat and Vanilla begins to deteriorate. Chocolat is jealous of Vanilla's ability to gain hearts from their male classmates. Vanilla is annoyed with Chocolat's assumptions. The two become further aware of their social positioning – Chocolat may be the daughter of a great witch, but Vanilla's mother is the current Queen. Vanilla is clandestine in her envy of Chocolat's brash and sassy personality. Chocolat, on the other hand, is beginning to realize that she could be a better friend to Vanilla. The rift is enough for Pierre to take the initiative in tearing the two friends apart, paving the way for the truth about the Magic World, its connection to ogres, and the truth about Chocolat's mother Cinnamon to be revealed.



Figure 13 Chocolat and Vanilla as the Princess of Ogres. From Mangareader.net

Initiation: Princess of the Ogres

Pierre's emotional manipulation of Vanilla is the turning point of the narrative. Pierre manages to convince Vanilla that she is the daughter of an Ogre and that the Queen's real daughter was swapped at birth. At the same time, Chocolat discovers the truth about the

previous Queen contest; Cinnamon allowed Candy to become Queen while she worked behind the scenes to end the war between the Witches and the Ogres. Vanilla, consumed with jealousy and envy, moves in with Pierre; together, they vow to make Vanilla the Queen of the Magic World.

Vanilla's loss has a profound effect on Chocolat. However, it also gives her the space to be more appreciative of her connections with her human classmates, especially the male ones. As they offer comfort for the loss of her friendship, Chocolat takes comfort in that loss. Though she must still collect hearts for the competition, these interactions offer a broader understanding of human emotions. She has lost Vanilla, but she has gained the ability to feel more at ease in the human world. As a result, she also becomes more comfortable in her abilities.

The Spring Exam, the first real test on their magical abilities, highlights the role reversal that has occurred between the two candidates. Vanilla, consumed with negative emotions, is forceful in her approach. Chocolat, on the other hand, uses a more instinctual and emotional approach. This increased empathy allows Chocolat to successfully complete the exam and gain one level of power. But as she gains confidence, Vanilla loses hers own. She further allies herself with Pierre, who is determined to lead the Ogres toward Rebellion. However, Chocolat is determined to help her friend, even if they are rivals.

The battle lines have been drawn in the Queen Competition. As Chocolat collects pink hearts to gain power, Vanilla collects Noir hearts to cement her place in the Ogre Clan. Chocolat is more comfortable being around her human friends and is genuinely touched when she can see the friendship hearts they carry for her. For her, it's not simply about becoming Queen. As her classmates express how much they care for her, Chocolat grows more comfortable in being friendly with them. On the other hand, Vanilla begins to fully embrace her Noir heart, and

believes that she can gain the affections of her classmates better than Chocolat. Chocolat can appreciate both the heart *and* the person it belongs to; Vanilla is only concerned with gaining Noir hearts to gain power. Though these scenes aren't as action oriented as *Sailor Moon* and *Ribon no Kishi*, they nonetheless express Chocolat embracing her power on the road to becoming Queen.

The turning point in Chocolat and Vanilla's rivalry occurs during a trip to the beach with friends. Vanilla uses the power of her Noir heart to create a beautiful beach in hopes of attracting fellow classmate Ian. Chocolat is suspicious at first but when discovers how beautiful the beach is, she is relieved. The beach gives her hope that Vanilla will return to her former temperament. In spite of their involuntary rivalry, their friendship remains a priority to Chocolat.

Unfortunately, like Vanilla's illusion, Chocolat's relief does not last. To impress Ian, Vanilla swims too far into the ocean and nearly drowns. Chocolat dives into save her, but because of the magical nature of the water, she is dragged underneath the waves. Pierre dives in to save her and they both vanish. Vanilla is horrified that her creation may have cost Chocolat her life; she comes to realize that she truly did not wish to harm her only friend. However, her revelation is short-lived as she slips into a deep slumber. Her magical beach vanishes, and her classmates find themselves back at Chocolat and Vanilla's house, bewildered.



Figure 14 Chocolat drowns and Vanilla falls asleep. From Mangareader.net

However, what appears to be a dire setback is actually Chocolat's awakening. As she makes her way back to the Human World to avoid being disqualified from the Queen Competition, she is given the space to grow even further. With the witch, she is taught the true value of the Human Heart, which is the centerpiece of the human experience. This allows her to feel even closer to her human classmates and be more conscious of their hearts. Furthermore, she is given the space to come to terms with her true power – a witch that has the power to purify Noir hearts. With this new information, she seeks to regain her footing in the Queen competition. Unfortunately, she soon discovers that becoming queen is the least of her concerns.

Return: To Become a Queen or Gain Something Better.

Chocolat returns to the Human World with more questions than answers. Her time away has given her perspective not only with human relationships, but also with Pierre. Their time together in the Forgotten Path helped them to realize how much they care for each other, despite their differences. But once back in the Human World, they return to being enemies. This doesn't stop Chocolat from wanting to save her friend Vanilla, but it does make her question her

feelings for Pierre. Chocolat is like *Sailor Moon's* Usagi and *Ribon no Kishi's* Sapphire – though their romantic interests, once rivals, have become their most ardent followers, they hesitate to cement their relationship. Instead, their quest to cement their personal power and be true to themselves takes priority. For Chocolat, that means saving Vanilla. Risking her life by sneaking into Pierre's castle, she rescues Vanilla from her demons by purifying her Noir heart. The two witches are reunited as Queen candidates, but mainly as close friends.

With Vanilla's purified heart, Chocolat restores her frog familiar, Duke, to his human form. Duke is Poivre, Chocolat's uncle, who reveals the truth about her parentage – she is the daughter of the witch Cinnamon and Glace, the Grand Duke of Darkness. Because of her parentage, Chocolat is the only one who can break Glace's seal, who in the meantime has used Pierre to collect Noir hearts to increase his power. Chocolat eventually releases him, swayed by his emotional plea for her help. But her increased empathy leads to an egregious lapse of judgment, leading to the final battle between Ogres and Witches.

The final battle against Glace is as much a psychological battle as it is a physical one. As a master of Noir heart energy, Glace appears to have the upper hand against his daughter. Her determination wavers. However, since Chocolat is the only one who can purify Noir hearts, she makes the decision to face Glace no matter what, even though Pierre makes it a point to stay by her side. Her role as a Filter allows her to purify Pierre's Noir Heart, cementing his place as her ardent follower. Furthermore, her friends lend her additional power through the kindness of their hearts. Emboldened, Chocolat gains the power to purify Glace's heart along with the entire magic world. However, for their efforts, they vanish once more. In the end, both Vanilla and Chocolat find happiness within themselves. Vanilla, after working hard to unite the people of

the Magic World, strengthens her inner resolve and becomes queen. Chocolat chooses to be with Pierre, which she considers to be “something better”.



Figure 15 Chocolat and Vanilla reunite as best friends. From Mangareader.net

Concluding Remarks

Magical girl narratives follow a basic structure that emphasizes the growth of a heroine through various ordeals. At the beginning, she may be unwilling to take on the responsibilities of becoming a magical girl, but eventually she accepts her fate. She faces many tests to become stronger and may suffer an initial defeat as a result. However, she never faces her journey alone; a magical companion is there to train her and she may have teammates fighting beside her so that she may achieve her goals. With every victory and defeat, the heroine’s inner resolve grows. Eventually, she finds the strength to defeat her foes once and for all, which rewards her with love, friendship, and a stronger power.

The three magical girl series that I have analyzed in this chapter share a common narrative, though each one has its own variations associated with the time it was published in. Stylistically, they differ in terms of visual presentation. Tezuka at times employs abstract, tabular layouts to get an emotional reaction from the reader but for the most part uses linear panel layouts to tell the story of *Ribon no Kishi*. On the other hand, Takeuchi and Anno use

tabular, three-row overlaid style to add emotional weight throughout the course of the narrative. Furthermore, while *Sailor Moon* and *Ribon no Kishi* feature intense action sequences, *Sugar Rune* is a more emotion-driven narrative that focuses on interpersonal relationships, especially friendships (Chocola and Vanilla) and romantic relationships (Chocola and Pierre).

Despite stylistic differences, these three series are similar in that the transformation of the heroine into a magical girl leads to personal maturation and understanding. Princess Sapphire is raised as a boy but was born as a girl. As she struggles save her kingdom and her family from nefarious forces, she oscillates between masculine heroics and feminine emotional introspection and in the end, finds a happy medium between the two. Tsukino Usagi as Sailor Moon is an action-oriented heroine that is both beautiful and a brave fighter and is inspired by the ongoing Super Sentai armored superhero series. She begins her journey as an admitted klutz and crybaby and ends as soldier of Love and Justice. Finally, in *Sugar Sugar Rune*, Chocolat discovers the beauty of all interpersonal relationships, including her friendships with her male classmates, her romance with Pierre, and her best friend Vanilla. For Chocolat, love is the greatest motivator, as noble an honor as becoming queen. Each heroine would not have come to such conclusions about themselves had they not made the decision to transform into a magical girl.



Figure 16 Chocolat looking for hearts by Amber McGowan

CHAPTER FOUR

Stand Up! A Case for the Magical Girl Narrative

The details of how I encountered noted shōjo manga scholar Matt Thorn, an associate professor in the faculty of Manga at Kyoto Seika University are hazy at best. I do remember making it a point to follow her on Twitter, so I might have asked a question or ten regarding my general interest in shōjo manga. It might have also been a very happy coincidence that led to our meeting. In any case, it was only a matter of time before magical girl series, especially *Sailor Moon*, would come up in conversation – a conversation limited to 140 characters at a time, but a conversation nonetheless.

Thorn was already making a life for herself in Japan when *Sailor Moon* anime was first released and thus experienced first-hand how it affected its audience – in this case, preschool girls. Up until then, the only female heroes found in age-appropriate media were the Pink and Yellow Rangers featured in *Super Sentai* series; but it was usually just that one character and there was no guarantee that each series would have one. Of course, that all changed when the color-coded Sailor Senshi burst onto the scene.

“Preschooler girls finally had something of their own,” she told me.⁸⁹ “It was a revolution. Suddenly, the girls were all like ‘we have Sailor Moon. We don’t need boys to tell (us) what we can’t do.’”

My introduction to *Sailor Moon* was much the same way. Granted, I was a teenager when DiC released the English-dubbed series in 1995, but the feelings I felt were no different from the preschool girls in Japan. Growing up, I looked up to female heroes such as Storm from the X-Men comics, Wonder Woman, and She-Ra; even if they had their super hero moments of

⁸⁹ Matt Thorn, Twitter message to the author, March 6, 2017.

glory, they were all adults who could make their own decisions. I could look up to them, but I couldn't really relate to them. *Sailor Moon* changed all that. Not only was the eponymous heroine punishing the bad guys in the name of the moon, but she also had to study for tests and labour through homework. She had friends that she hung out with all the time and they did more than just fight evil together. They went to the arcade and played video games or had lunch together. That is a powerful image for an impressionable teenaged girl to take in, and save for the saving the world part, I'd finally found a heroine I could see myself in.

Fast forward to last October, to the Magical Girl panel taking place at GeekGirlCon, a growing annual convention that celebrates the contributions of women in literature, science, animation, comics, gaming and game developments, and the arts.⁹⁰ I was asked to moderate the panel because of my continued research of the magical girl narrative (and if I may be so bold as to say, I still do not know how the organizers managed to find me to this day). This was the first time a panel of this nature was presented and this convention and I would soon discover that it was long overdue.

I knew that I was not the only person affected by *Sailor Moon*, but in that moment, I got to *experience* that realization for myself.

Thirty minutes before the panel began, there were already two lines of attendees waiting to take their seats. Fifteen minutes after that, the room volunteer informed us that the panel was at capacity – in other words, all 95 seats in the room were slated to be filled. And five minutes after that, five of those seats were filled by a group of local cosplayers dressed as the Inner Senshi – Sailor Moon, Sailor Mercury, Sailor Mars, Sailor Jupiter, and Sailor Venus. It was as if

⁹⁰ "About Us: Mission and Values", GeekGirlCon, accessed April 5, 2017, <https://geekgirlcon.com/about-us/mission-values/>.

they stepped out of a nineties' Nakayoshi *furoku*⁹¹ poster and into the panel discussion room. If cosplay is the most visual way of professing one's love for a fandom⁹², then it was clear to me and everyone else that these five ladies were five of the biggest *Sailor Moon* fans in the entire room.

As unexpected as this turn of events was (GeekGirlCon's focus isn't solely on anime, manga, and Japanese popular culture), at the end of the day, I wasn't completely surprised. With *Sailor Moon* paving the way back when it was first broadcast in United States in 1995, magical girl series have enjoyed massive global popularity. During the panel, many in attendance stated that they were drawn to these types of series because it featured themes of female empowerment, strong friendships between other women, and most succinctly, how it showcases "girl power". In a world where superhero narratives are frequently male-centered, it was refreshing to see young girls not only fighting for justice, but dealing with the same everyday issues they dealt with, such as homework, family, and romantic relationships.

Not all assessments regarding magical girl series are positive. Some attendees questioned the romantic relationships featured in these narratives, wondering if the heroines were truly in a healthy, balanced relationship. Others wondered if the heroines were sexualized since their magical avatar outfits may be considered revealing. These critiques echoed the issues raised in academic literature devoted to magical girl series. Some even go as far as to wonder if these

⁹¹ *Furoku* are small gifts inserted in girls' manga magazine – they are added to encourage sales of the product. Gifts include small tote pages, clear files, stickers, posters etc. Readers are given the chance to determine what kind of gifts they'd like to see offered.

⁹² The Oxford Dictionary defines the word fandom as "the state or condition of being a fan of something or someone". The second definition states fandom as "the fans of a particular person, team, fictional series, etc. regarded collectively as a community or subculture". This definition is more accurate to the scenario I am describing here.

series, in their own way, uphold traditional Japanese notions of gender, specifically the idea that young girls must grow up to be dutiful wives and loving mothers.

However, in analyzing magical girl series as a text, a different message appears to emerge. The ways in which current academic literature and fans of these series disseminate these series are completely different. While attendee feedback during my panel presentations may include some criticism, feedback toward these series is not only overwhelmingly positive, but fans insist that magical girl series such as *Sailor Moon* are empowering. For young Japanese readers of the series, magical girl series are read in a space that is safe from the expectations of Japanese society. Furthermore, these series offer narratives that feature romantic relationships between equals, the heroine solving problems that resemble what the reader might be going through, and characters who are active in fighting for what is important to them.

If I am to successfully argue for the positive aspects of magical girl series, then it stands to reason that I must somehow recreate the space in which fans read and resonate with them. Because of the nature of this thesis, which relies upon textual analysis in addition to historical and cultural conjectures, going an ethnographic route would not be feasible; this is not to say that it would be difficult to locate fans who are willing to express their connection to magical girl series. Instead, rather than rebutting existing arguments through “telling” (that is, through fan testimonials), I would rather “show”⁹³ my work by contextualizing the space that creates the idea of the magical girl narrative as “positive” and “empowering” through textual analysis as well as historical and cultural anecdotes.

⁹³ While I considered using an ethnographic angle for my thesis – I thought that interviewing fans of the various series would offer an interesting perspective on these narratives – I ultimately decided against it due to time constraints. However, other studies refer to interviews with fans of such series, and I may refer to these interviews throughout the course of the chapter.

The Critical Shōjo: Engagement with English-Language Criticism of Magical Girl Narratives

Existing English-language literature regarding magical girl narratives takes issue with the idea of series such as *Sailor Moon* and *Sugar Sugar Rune* being empowering to women, despite fan popularity and praise of the work. This is not to say these academics do not recognize fan response to these narratives; Anne Allison reported positive praise from both male and female respondents after conducting a survey to see why fans liked *Sailor Moon*⁹⁴. Still, there are three core issues that academics take issue with – the subjective gaze of the male *otaku*, the hypersexuality of the female protagonist, and the ways in which magical girls series reinforce prevailing ideas regarding femininity and gender roles within Japanese culture.

The subjective gaze of the male *otaku* is the issue that academics appear to be most concerned with. The male *otaku*, according to Azuma Hiroki, is more concerned with statistics and data mined within narratives rather than with the narrative itself. Rather than attaching themselves to the emotional weight of the narrative, the male *otaku* chooses to detach a character from the narrative. This is further made problematic due to the “real” desire of male fans for these imaginary characters. First, because these characters appeal to people outside of the target market demographic – in this case, male fans – creators have considered that these series may be viewed by a diverse audience.⁹⁵ Furthermore, Hemmann, quoting Tamaki Saito, states that male fans have the ability to toe the line between two separate but equal types of reality – the real world (*genjitsu*) and the reality (*rariti*) which allows them to live out their sexual desire toward these types of characters in a way that is psychological sound and does not interfere with the real

⁹⁴ Allison, Anne, “Fierce Flesh”, 156

⁹⁵ Saito, “Mahō Shōjo and Metamorphosis”, 144

world.⁹⁶ This is troublesome to critics, as they believe this form of attachment makes it easy for male otaku to look at “real women” in a way that Hemmann describes as “degrading and psychologically unhealthy”.⁹⁷

Mary Grigsby’s study of this subject in the article “Sailormoon Manga (Comics) and Anime (Cartoons) – Superheroine Meets Barbie: Global Commodity Comes to the United States” seems to correlate with these ideas.⁹⁸ On one hand, male fans consider Sailor Moon to be a “unisex beauty” due to being both cute and powerful. Furthermore, they like the Sailor Senshi because they are nothing like young girls of the real world due to their cheerfulness. On the other hand, there are the male fans who harbour sexual desires toward the Sailor Senshi. One fan described his sexual desire toward the senshi of Love and Beauty, Sailor Venus, as a sadistic impulse. He even goes to admit being enamoured with *Sailor Moon* pornography as he “likes Venus so much, I want to see her hurt”.

This leads to the second issue English-language literature has with magical girl narratives – the hypersexuality of the heroine. Magical girl heroines are visualized as both innocent and feminine. They possess wide, emotive eyes which is representative of the idea that women are emotional, imaginative, and idealistic.⁹⁹ Heroines such as Sailor Moon or Princess Sapphire of *Ribon no Kishi* are drawn with slender bodies; feminine features are further emphasized when in uniform, such as short waist, the outlines of the breasts, and the curves of the body.¹⁰⁰ Kumiko

⁹⁶ Hemmann, Kathryn, “Short Skirts and Superpowers”, 52-3

⁹⁷ Hemmann, Kathryn, “Short Skirts and Superpowers”, 46

⁹⁸ Grigsby, Mary, “Superheroine Meets Barbie”, 73.

⁹⁹ Grigsby, “Superheroine Meets Barbie”, 69

¹⁰⁰ Hikari, “Tezuka, *Shōjo* Manga, and Hagio Moto”, 301

Saito, quoting Susan Napier, states that such characterizations, which attract both young female fans and older male fans, sends mixed messages to viewers.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, because these characters are so attractive, Saito questions whether these characters are truly empowering.

These criticisms are in line with continued trend of male, patriarchal anxiety toward the female within Japanese culture. This has been in a continued theme present since the Meiji Restoration, starting with the middle-to-upper class schoolgirls who benefited from educational reforms that allowed for advanced education, effectively establishing the concept of girlhood during this period of rapid modernization. But as these schoolgirls began to adopt fashions, mannerisms, and a language considered out of line with traditional ideas of femininity, society responded in kind with resistance; single-sex institutions were created to separate boys and girls, with the latter being taught the value of *ryōsai kenbo* – that is, the value of becoming “good wives, wise mothers”.

The anxiety toward women stepping outside the bounds of acceptable femininity and the patriarchal morphs into different instances going forward over the last 100 years of Modern Japan. The “modern gals” (*modan gāru*) of the 1920s dressed in western fashions were accused of being sexually promiscuous and corrupted by western influences.¹⁰² More recently, the *kogyāru* (“high school gal”) of the 1990s were both revered and reviled in the media.¹⁰³ On one hand, they were heralded for their burgeoning roles as trendsetters in Japanese culture; marketers

¹⁰¹ Saito, “Mahō Shōjo and Metamorphosis”, 145

¹⁰² Harden, Jacalyn D, “The Enterprise of Empire: Race, Class, Gender, and Japanese National Identity”, in *The Gender/sexuality Reader: Cultural, History, and Political Economy*, ed. Roger N. Lancaster and Michaela Di Leonardo (New York: Routledge, 1997), 493-4.

¹⁰³ Prough, *Straight from the Heart*, 117-8.

began to court the *kogyāru* in an effort cash in on the “cute and sexy” brand these young girls created for themselves. On the other hand, the sexuality of *kogyāru* raised considerable alarm within Japanese society. Sensational headlines describing the phenomenon of *enjo kōsai*, or compensated dating, gripped the country; just the same as their modern girl counterparts, the *kogyāru* were accused of being selfish due to their consumption habits. Furthermore, they were considered to be the signifier of Japan’s collapse – economic and social – as the country moved further into a deep recession.

It is not the intention of this thesis to deny the ways in which male *otaku* consume magical girl series. However, the issue with these criticisms is that it fails to consider that these works were created initially for female audiences. The word *shōjo* itself is problematic, as it is a societal construct. The ideal *shōjo*, as constructed by educational policies and male-written novels of the period, was to be pure, innocent, refined, and elegant. However, in the hands of the female artists who now produce *shōjo* narratives, the *shōjo* may still appear to be elegant and beautiful, but she also adopts mannerisms that are outside the bounds of traditional femininity.

Publishers call these magazines *shōjo*; however, the young readers who consume them do not refer to themselves by this term.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, the ways that male fans consume these works differ from the ways in which female fans consume these works. By centring criticism on the how the male *otaku* consumes these works, the idea emerges that magical girl narratives are shallow, problematic, and sexist. In fact, by placing the lens on how men consume the narratives, it takes the female-centered focus of these narratives out of the equation entirely.

¹⁰⁴ Sugawa-Shimada, “Representations of Girls in Japanese Magical Girl TV Animation Programmes”, 6

The *mahō shōjo* genre was initially created to appeal to young female viewers. Every aspect of the series, from character designs to storylines are created with this demographic in mind. This is especially true for the manga versions of these series, as they are published in manga magazines specifically marketed to young female readers. Female artists, once manga readers themselves, create the narratives they feel their readers will enjoy and will evoke the same feelings they had when reading manga for the first time.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, magical girl narratives offer stories that feature characters who are aware of their autonomy and offer alternate ideas of heteronormative roles within Japanese society.

Arms Held High: Magical Girls, Empowered Readers, and Creative Producers

Recall that current academic research involving magical girl narratives are framed within the male subjective gaze; research specifically takes issue with the hypersexualized appearance of the magical girl heroine and how it has attracted an older male audience. Anne Allison argues that magical girls are a sub-category of the female superheroes (*bishōjo hīro*) characterized by their revealing outfits that “show off flesh”; furthermore, Allison states that, unlike armored superheroes, such as the Power Rangers, who suit up completely when transformed, magical girls dress down.¹⁰⁶ On the other hand Keith Malliard, a creative writing professor at the University of British Columbia postulates that what male fans see as “sexy” and “desirable”, young female fans see as “cute” and “adorable”.¹⁰⁷ If Professor Thorn’s anecdote is any

¹⁰⁵ “Manga Interview: Moyoco Anno.

¹⁰⁶ Allison, “Fierce Flesh”, 129.

¹⁰⁷ Malliard, Keith, “Hibiki the Real” (paper presented at the symposium “Queer Transfigurations in Postwar Japanese Popular Culture: Manga and Anime”, Vancouver, British Columbia, March 29, 2016).

indication, Sailor Moon and her teammates, in the eyes of Japanese preschooler girls, were superheroes they could call their own.

It should be noted that up until the early 1960s, *shōjo* manga were written by male artists. This includes the first magical girl manga (*Himitsu no Akko-Chan* by Akatsuka Fujio)¹⁰⁸ and the first magical girl anime (*Mahōtsukai Sarī* by Yokohama Mitsuteru).¹⁰⁹ However, many of the magical girl narrative discussed in previous academic articles as well as these were written by female artists. Even Tezuka's *Ribon no Kishi*, written by male Tezuka, credited the Takarazuka Revue, Japan's famous theatre troupe that features women in both male and female roles, as inspiration for the series. Because of his love for the theatre, which features young women in both female and male roles as well as ornate and elaborate productions full of European flair and romance that touch the hearts of female fans, Hikari suggests that Tezuka's love of the Takarazuka Revue hints that the cartoonist believed he understood the inner workings of girls' culture.¹¹⁰

As a result, these arguments do not consider the response of female fans to these works, nor do they consider the motivations of the artists when creating these series. They do not consider these narratives feature a heroine who has the freedom to choose and live out her own

¹⁰⁸ This title is commonly translated as "Akko-chan's Secret" or "The Secret of Akko-Chan".

¹⁰⁹ This title is commonly translated as "Sally the Witch". If I may note something of interest, the word *mahōtsukai* (魔法使い) literally translates to "magic user", however in the English translation, the word "witch" is used. There is an actual word for which in Japanese – *majo* (魔女, literally "magic woman"), but there is a negative connotation to this word. It is also usually indicative of an older woman rather than a young girl.

¹¹⁰ Hikari, Hori, "Tezuka, *Shōjo* Manga, and Hagio Moto", 299-300

adventure and how young female fans positively receive these narratives.¹¹¹ This is quite significant, as heroic narratives are usually reserved for boys' (*shōnen*) manga. Furthermore, if Professor Thorn's anecdote is any indication, series such as *Sailor Moon* have had a positive effect on female fans in the way they perceive these characters, and the way these characters help fans achieve a positive image of themselves.



Figure 17 - Attendees of the Magical Panel at Emerald City Comic Con

The Shōjo Who Heeds the Call to Adventure

The previous two chapters of this thesis provided a detailed analysis of the magical girl narrative. At the heart of this analysis is the magical girl heroine, who is both assertive when engaging the enemy but also exhibits understanding and mercy rather than violent aggression. Though many recent series feature heroines with feminine features, they still exhibit the traits of an *otenba* – translated as “tomboy”, it refers to a strong-willed and spirited young girl. For example, in *Sugar Sugar Rune*, heroine Chocolat has the features of a typical heroine, including

¹¹¹ Prough, *Straight from the Heart*,

wide and expressive green eyes, long brown hair, and pursed lips. When she speaks, she uses feminine pronouns, and she cares very much for the well-being of her best friend and rival, Vanilla. What separates her from the typical heroine, however, is her fanged smile. Chocolat is very mischievous, aggressive, and outspoken. She toes the line between the masculine and the feminine, but she never ventures fully into either territory. This sort of portrayal has not been without pushback.

Rather than discussing structure in detail as I did in the previous two chapters, this time I am more interested in exploring how female readers respond to magical girl narratives. Upon its initial release, *Mahōtsukai Sarī* became very popular with a young female audience; viewers were bewitched by protagonist Sally Yumeno, princess of the Land who comes to the human world to make friends. *Mahōtsukai Sarī* represented a shift in animated programs of the 1960s; a young female character, previously relegated to a supportive or a subordinate role, was now the lead character of an entire series in an animated market dominated by male heroes.¹¹² It responded to a long-held desire for a female lead with strong potential by young girl viewers.

A character's popularity with the masses does not equate to a desire to become just like the character. Just as male fans make the distinction between *genjitsu* (the real world) and *riariti* (the world that allows for their spiritual and sexual connection to imaginary characters), the appeal with these series lies in the ability to resonate with the personalities and ideals of the characters without desiring to be just like them. In her thesis, Sugawa-Shimada interviews several individuals who grew up watching shows such as *Mahōtsukai Sarī* and *Himitsu no Akko-chan*. The author argues that these shows “serve to facilitate the construction, self-assertion, and

¹¹² Sugawa-Shimada, Akiko, “Representations of Girls in Japanese Magical Girl TV Animation Programmes from 1966 to 2003 and Japanese Female Audiences' Understanding of Them” (Ph.D Diss. University of Warwick 2011).

awareness of femininity”. Furthermore, because of these programs, female viewers wished to express their unique individuality despite considering themselves to be normal for the most part. The western influences within these series (European-style locales, the heroine as an outsider, and how the heroine-with-tomboy-tendencies breaks ranks with her patriarchal father) also influenced female viewers to be more aware of their individual selves. Finally, Sugawa-Shimada states that respondents connected more to the ideals of the character yet there was no desire to *become* the character. Just the idea of looking just like the main character of these television programs was considered by most to be odd and unreasonable.¹¹³

Takeuchi’s *Sailor Moon* is credited with achieving massive global popularity, especially once the anime made its debut in North America in 1995. Just as Japanese female fans were enchanted by the western influences found in magical girl series, North American fans were being introduced to Japanese animation. Due to cultural differences, anime programs, including *Sailor Moon*, had to be localized – names were changed and episodes were edited to fit local programming standards.¹¹⁴ This did not deter growing interest in these series, however, as fans were nonetheless attracted to these new programs. By the turn of the century, English-translated anime and manga became more widely available with publishers putting more effort toward producing content true to the original Japanese release.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ I will discuss this further into the chapter, but at first glance, this appears to be in direct contrast with the act of “cosplaying” a certain character. However, the act of cosplay is not a permanent experience. It’s a temporary act and performed in socially-acceptable spaces.

¹¹⁴ Lacrue, Jon, *Sailor Moon and Post-Bubble Japan* (Self-Published, 2015). Kindle Edition.

¹¹⁵ Lacrue, Jon, *Sailor Moon and Post-Bubble Japan*.

One only need visit an Anime convention in the USA or Canada to gain insight into the the popularity of *Sailor Moon* and other magical girl series that been made available in English. Anime conventions are annual celebrations of anime, manga, and Japanese popular culture. These events occur around the same time every year; for example, Victoria's local convention, Tsukino-Con, is usually scheduled during the third weekend of February. Anime North, a larger convention based in Toronto, occurs the weekend after Victoria Day. Attendance at these conventions is dependent on the area it takes place in; conventions occurring in larger cities have larger attendance than conventions located in smaller cities and towns. Tsukino-Con had an attendance of nearly 2200 in 2015¹¹⁶, while Anime North had over 32,000 in 2017¹¹⁷. The largest convention in North America is Anime Expo, based in Los Angeles; over 107,000 people attended this year's show.¹¹⁸

Panel discussions about various subjects, including ones about magical girl series, are a reoccurring fixture at conventions. At Anime North 2017, an annual convention in Toronto, Ontario, there was already a line of fans waiting to attend the panel about the magical girl narrative thirty minutes prior to its scheduled start. The International Sailor Moon Day meetup at Anime Revolution 2016 attracted a large group of cosplays dressed up as their favorite characters from the series. When the Silvercity Victoria movie cinema aired the English dubbed

¹¹⁶ "Tsukino-Con", Manga Wiki, accessed July 12, 2017, <http://manga.wikia.com/wiki/Tsukino-Con>.

¹¹⁷ "Information on Anime North," Anime Cons, accessed July 12, 2017, http://animecons.ca/events/info.shtml/7612/Anime_North_2017.

¹¹⁸ "Information on Anime Expo", Anime Cons, accessed July 12, 2017, http://animecons.com/events/info.shtml/7489/Anime_Expo_2017.

version of the *Sailor Moon R* movie in March of this year, the movie theatre was nearly filled with fans of the series, young and old.

This mass popularity is quite stunning, considering how the initial release of *Sailor Moon* in North America in 1995 resulted in failure due to low ratings; this contrasted with Europe and other Asian countries where *Sailor Moon* achieved massive popularity. That the program shifted between afternoon and early morning airings and experienced continued reruns due to delays between new episodes is credited to its failure.¹¹⁹ However, the series had enough clout with viewers that it saw revivals on other networks. The series gained a second run on the USA Network due to the efforts of the “Save our Sailors” write-in campaign before finding its stride via Cartoon Network in 1998.¹²⁰ This is due to the efforts of outspoken North American fans of the series who were captivated by protagonist Tsukino Usagi, renamed as “Serena” in the English dub. If the success of the campaign is any indication, fans were unwilling to give *Sailor Moon* up without a fight.

Just as Sally Yumeno offered young Japanese girls their very own super-powered heroine in the late 1960s, *Sailor Moon* and eventually other magical girl series offered North American girls a magical female superhero in an environment filled with shows that predominately featured male protagonists. The ordinary/extraordinary motif that appealed to Japanese fans also appealed to North American ones. Rather than a heroine that was no different than her male counterparts, heroines such as Usagi/Serena were flawed yet they were not damsels in distress. Magical girls could be both powerful and determined yet they could also be vulnerable and

¹¹⁹ Savage, Steven and Bonnie Walling, *Her Eternal Moonlight: Sailor Moon's Female Fans in North America (an Unauthorized Examination)* (2016). Kindle Edition.

¹²⁰ Allison, Anne, “Fierce Flesh”, 154.

emotional – and they didn't always triumph over the enemy right away. Furthermore, the narrative employed an extended continuity rather than an “adventure of the week” type of structure. This is a marked change from the standard superhero narratives, which featured male superheroes who used reason and force to save the day.

The Shōjo Who Consumes Hope and Strength

In an interview with Shōnen Aya of ROLa magazine, Takeuchi Naoko describes how fans continue to be influenced by the series more than twenty years after its initial serialization in *Nakayoshi* (“Good Friend”), a *shōjo* manga magazine marketed to elementary school students.¹²¹ The interviewer goes on to describe the intense, positive emotional response of fans regarding series merchandise as well as the Sailor Moon musicals, which were revived in 2013 after a popular run from 1993-2005.¹²² North American fans were treated to a similar experience when Anime Matsuri, an annual anime convention that takes place in Houston, put on a special performance by the current Sailor Moon musical cast, the first one to ever take place in the region.¹²³ Fans took to social media to express their euphoria as many believe that such an event

¹²¹ “Naoko Takeuchi Interview in ROLa Magazine January 2014” accessed June 18, 2017, <https://missdream.org/sailor-moon-interviews-and-articles/naoko-takeuchi-interview-rola-magazine-january-2014/>.

¹²² The Sailor Moon musicals, nicknamed *Sērāmyū* by fans, are theatre productions based on Takeuchi's Sailor Moon manga. The musicals are one aspect of *Sailor Moon's* “media mix”, that is, as Hemmann (2015) describes as a “multimedia marketing strategies for entertainment franchises”. In the case of *Sailor Moon*, the original manga was serialized in *Nakayoshi*, followed by the anime series a few months later, then the musicals in 1993. Fan merchandise is also a big part of the media mix.

¹²³ “Sailor Moon Musical Heads to Houston's Anime Matsuri in April” accessed June 18, 2017, <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2017-01-25/sailor-moon-musical-heads-to-houston-anime-matsuri-in-april/.111438>.

would never be possible. Finally, when Tokyo Otaku Mode, a website offering fan merchandise from Japan, announced that overseas fans would finally be able join the official Sailor Moon fan club, the website was inundated with so many purchase requests that it temporarily shut down.¹²⁴

Previous research, much by males, into magical girls takes issue with what appears to be indulgent consumption of these properties by young female fans. This brings us the final point of contention associated with the *shōjo* – the connection between the *shōjo* and the infantilization of Japanese culture. In the 1980s, schoolgirls were interested in all things *kawaii* (“cute”); Sharon Kinsella states that rise of the *kogyāru* gave way to an alternative form of femininity that came into direct opposition of longstanding, social accepted norms. In her book, Shamoons quotes anthropologist and writer Ōtsuka Eiji, who takes issue with girls’ culture; he fears that the cultural fascination with the *shōjo* could be the undoing of the Japanese – particularly Japanese men.¹²⁵ Ōtsuka’s critique is in line with the fascination and anxiety toward the schoolgirl during the Meiji Period. Furthermore, by consuming these fan goods, even into adulthood, female fans are, in a sense, refusing to grow up. Ōtsuka fears that Japanese culture may be “*shōjo*-ized” – and therefore may never grow up – which may lead to the downfall of Japan and Japanese culture.

Of course, *shōjo* has a different point-of-view. Sharon Kinsella argues that young women use consumption to rebel against ideas of traditional Japanese femininity and prevailing social norms.¹²⁶ Adulthood may be inevitable – indeed, most magical girl series end just as the heroine

¹²⁴ Tokyo Otaku Mode, message to the author, September 23, 2016.

¹²⁵ Shamoons, *Passionate Friendship*, 4

¹²⁶ Kinsella, Sharon, “Cuties in Japan”, in *Women, Media, and Consumption in Japan*, ed. Lise Skov and Brian Moeran (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press 2005), 242-3

reaches adulthood – but it is not positively received. Instead, according to Kinsella, it is perceived as the loss of hope and freedom due to being tied down by the responsibilities associated with formally becoming a part of Japanese society. By consuming the various forms of media attached to these series, fans continue to express to others their personal attachment to these series long after they have reached adulthood. By purchasing items, seen as symbols of the strength and vitality associated with these characters, the fans continue to hold some of that power within themselves.

Because the scope of my thesis focuses more of textual analysis coupled with cultural context, there was no attempt to provide an ethnographic angle for this thesis. Even so, my own experiences travelling to various anime and fan conventions to present my research appear to validate the idea that fans draw strength from fan merchandise. When I recently moderated a panel about magical girl series at Emerald City Comic Con in Seattle, two panelists wore dresses that featured the symbols of the Sailor Senshi – Moon, Mercury, Mars, Jupiter, and Venus. One panelist cosplayed as Sailor Venus herself – wig styled and battle *fuku*¹²⁷ complete with a stylized sailor suit with a large blue bow, pleated orange skirt, a large red bow on the back of golden tresses, and orange high heels. She sparkled with a proud shimmer, she looked like she jumped off the pages of Takeuchi’s famous manga.

As for myself I was certainly guilty of “wearing my fandom”¹²⁸. In addition to wearing a Moon Stick necklace (featured in the first season of the series and used for the “Moon Healing

¹²⁷ The battle *fuku* is a stylized version of the sailor suit, a type of uniform worn by schoolgirls in Japan. Each Sailor Senshi wears one that corresponds to her assigned color.

¹²⁸ To “wear your fandom” means to wear clothing that indicates your love of a television series, movie, band, etc. Though cosplayers are the most visual aspect of anime and fandom conventions, it is not uncommon to see fans wearing a shirt from a series they like. Also, for

Escalation” attack that defeated foes and provided healing to innocent victims), I wore a shirt featuring a punk version of Usagi wearing denim vest with the phrase “fight like a girl”.

Furthermore, whenever a fan of the series caught sight of my necklace, the response was usually positive, followed by an inquiry as to where they could purchase one just like it.



Figure 18: Magical Girl Panel at Emerald City Comic Con

The henshin item, that is the item the heroine uses to transform into her magical girl avatar, is what Propp defines as a “magical agent” and is the visual symbol of the heroine’s power. In the context of fandom, the power of the magical agent works in a similar fashion. For female fans of the series, fan merchandise (whether an actual replica of a henshin item, toy figurines, or any other media related to a magical girl series) somehow connects them to the magical girl and the ideals she represents. For fans of these series, it isn’t just a matter of buying the item to fulfill a desire. Indeed, the item allows the fan to visually express their love and

those who do not feel that cosplay is an option, clothing such as a series t-shirt or a cap is a better option.

devotion toward the series while being empowered by the ideals the item represents. Just as the henshin item “transforms” the magical girl into her magically empowered avatar to defeat all enemies, the act of consuming fan merchandise “transforms” the fan into a stronger individual that is further “empowered” to tackle problems they may be facing in their own life. At the end of her interview with Takeuchi, Shōnen explains this practice:

Unfortunately, social pressures on girls are still pretty tight. Women everywhere are still desperately fighting society for their freedoms, and they have to have a tough skin to get by. I think that’s why, universally, the sailor soldiers are such an inspiration. At the theater where the musical was held, you could almost feel the tension in the air – that’s why there was such a flood of orders for the transformation compacts, it’s because of the enthusiasm we still have for those ideals.¹²⁹

Textually, the magical girl narrative provides a similar argument. If the sexual desire of the male *otaku* freezes the *shōjo* into an eternal existence between youth and adulthood, then magical girl narratives allow for the heroine to grow up. In fact, the heroine does not retain her powers forever. By the end of the narrative, the heroine willingly gives up her powers once the final enemy is put to rest and her world is finally safe from harm. Furthermore, the heroine may appear to confirm to heteronormative practices; in *Ribon no Kishi*, Sapphire marries Franz Charming and becomes his queen, Usagi marries Mamoru in *Sailor Moon*, and Chocolat chooses to be with Pierre rather than become Queen of the Magic World in *Sugar Sugar Rune*.

However, though heroines may grow up, but they are not required to stop being who they are. In fact, the opposite occurs – the heroine is no longer in need of her powers, but she is stronger, more knowledgeable, and more mature. In other words, she is her true self. Adulthood may bring about marriage and motherhood, but the heroine does not lose the vivacious determination she possessed as a *shōjo*. She carries on, hopeful and in love, supported by those

¹²⁹ “Naoko Takeuchi Interview”.

around her. Her romantic partner and her teammates do not force her to change, either. They accept the heroine for who she is. The ending of Sailor Moon illustrates this idea. As Usagi and Mamoru enjoy their wedding day, he sees her as both is wife and the soldier of Love and Justice, Sailor Moon. Both figures are holding their hands out to him, a wedding band in on both fingers. Mamoru’s final soliloquy pays homage to both sides of his new bride. “Even someday when we disappear...and new Sailor Senshi are born...Sailor Moon, you will always be invincible,” he says. “The most beautiful shining star.”



Figure 19 The Final Scene of the Sailor Moon Manga. Courtesy of missdream.org

The Shōjo’s Call to Battle – Weaponized Femininity

Historically, *shōjo* manga, and by extension magical girl series, have featured heroines blurring the lines between the masculine and the feminine – heroines are drawn with big, expressive eyes and slender, feminine bodies, yet they have the freedom to partake of the excitement and adventure usually afforded to boys. This is especially true for *mahō shōjo* narratives; the heroine is free to fight against the forces that stand against her without

interference from her parents or the responsibilities of her normal life. Just as these narratives give female readers the space to explore themselves through engagement with the narrative, the artists engage with the readers through subversion of the *shōjo* narrative as well as through veiled critiques of femininity and gender within traditional Japanese culture.¹³⁰

Takeuchi's own personal freedom – she was single when *Sailor Moon* was initially published in 1991 – had a great influence on the series.¹³¹ The concept of a group of beautiful, strong young girls fighting evil and free from male restriction reflects her own youth and independence. The narrative is more concerned with the relationships between the women of the story and how their bonds strengthen as they fight together against a common enemy. Heroine Usagi is the only character in a romantic relationship. However, as stated previously, her relationship with Mamoru is a relationship of equals, and he is as much a part of her team as the Sailor Senshi are. Furthermore, their relationship is a subversion of the damsel-in-distress trope. Often, Sailor Moon must rescue her beloved from her enemies instead of the other way around.

Existing criticism of *Sailor Moon* takes issue with the physical appearance of the characters. At the heart of the criticism is the uniform of the Sailor Senshi – the sailor *fuku* – is a symbol of the sexual desire and anxiety men have historically shown toward the *shōjo*. But once again, these arguments do not consider how female fans consume and understand these images. In actuality, female fans are attracted to Takeuchi's character designs because they visually celebrate an empowered femininity that does not require the adoption of masculine traits to gain power. According to Allison, fans would not be so receptive to the narrative if the characters

¹³⁰ Hemmann, "Short Skirts and Super Powers", 58-9.

¹³¹ "ROLa Magazine and God of Backstage Show".

were not attractive.¹³² Takeuchi's own experiences with *Sailor Moon* appear to confirm this. In fact, Takeuchi faced such criticism when creating *Sailor Moon*; upper management didn't believe that there could be a story about young girls who could be beautiful and adept warriors without resorting to character tropes, such as, as Takeuchi put it, a "comically obese character".¹³³

The transformation into a magical girl is not a makeover but a weaponized transition for the express intent on subduing the enemy. In *Sugar Sugar Rune*, the accessories Chocolat and Vanilla can add to their magical wands help them to cast powerful spells despite their very cute appearance. *Sailor Moon* is the most popular example of weaponized femininity. Sailor Moon's henshin phrase – "Moon Prism Power, Make Up!" – signals her transformation from a klutzy, crybaby middle schooler to the soldier of Love and Justice. It is true that the Sailor Senshi (and by extension other magical girls of the *shōjo* demographic) are drawn in a style that can be described as ultra-feminine; however, their beauty it is not for the benefit of others nor to attract the attention of men. When Sailor Moon and her teammates doll-up upon transforming into their magical girl counterparts, their beauty is devoted to righting wrongs and triumphing over evil.

It is important to know that despite being male (and the only male artist this thesis has discussed in depth) Tezuka offers a strong heroine in Princess Sapphire in his manga *Ribon no Kishi*. Despite being raised as a boy, Sapphire never explicitly states that she wishes to be one. Instead, throughout the course of the story, she oscillates between warrior and princess, duty and desire. Though she is dressed up as a boy, her feminine features still bleed through in the form of her wide, expressive eyes and slender body. However, the moment Sapphire dresses in boys'

¹³² Allison, "Fierce Flesh" 156.

¹³³ "ROLa Magazine and God of Backstage Show".

clothing (modest in comparison to Takeuchi's Sailor Senshi) and dons her zorro-type mask, she is no longer a princess. Instead, she is a warrior determined to restore her family's honour.

Sapphire straddles two extremes. She loves Prince Charming but she also wants to protect her kingdom from the machinations of Duke Duralumin. Above all, she sees the value of both her hearts. With her boy heart, she can fight for her kingdom and the people she loves. However, her girl heart provides her with emotional intelligence, kindness, and self-awareness. Sapphire may not transform into a magical girl, but she is nonetheless the initial bearer of the weaponized femininity that other magical girls would come to inherit.

In their own way, female *shōjo* artists (and Tezuka) offer “what girls want” through narratives that take personal experiences into consideration. In these narratives, magical girl heroines are empowered by the freedom their creators possess themselves. Because of this, the artist offers female readers characters that do not fit into pre-existing ideas of gender and femininity. Instead, the artists argue that yes, these characters may be attractive, but their femininity is weaponized. As a result, these warriors – and by extension, the reader – can be beautiful for the express purpose of fighting the good fight and for their own empowerment.

The Shōjo Who Reproduces Transformative Magic

The attachment that female fans have toward magical girl series is not limited to the consumption of the narrative. The Internet has afforded fans of these series to connect with other local fans as well fans in other parts of the world. Internet mailing lists have given way to social media groups, where fans gather to discuss different series with other fans.¹³⁴ Furthermore,

¹³⁴ In the late 1990s, opt-in mailing lists were the way to keep up with fans. An individual would send an e-mail message to the group; the administrator in turn would add their email to the list. Members could choose to receive each message as it came in or get messages in a daily

annual anime conventions give fans the opportunity to gather with other fans. One of the most visual aspects of anime conventions are the attendees who come dressed as their favorite characters. Artists are given the opportunity to sell anime and manga-inspired artwork. Finally, attendees can attend panel discussions and in some cases, meet various cast members of their favourite series, going as far as to have a special item signed by their favourite cast member.

Young women are notable in this instance due to their presence as leaders of certain fan communities. They do more than just “consume” the narrative. They also disseminate and then produce works that are inspired by the magical girl series they resonate with. By creating these works, fans express which ideals and beliefs they identify with, particularly with other fans of the same series. Through fan communities, readers can negotiate the ways in which they consume and understand the series as well as determine what practices are to be used to portray that understanding.¹³⁵

The most visual aspect of the fan community are cosplayers – individuals, usually female, who dress up as their favorite character from a television series, an anime or manga, or a novel. The word cosplay (コスプレ, *kosupure*) itself is a portmanteau of the words “costume” and “play”. Traditionally, cosplayers create their own costumes, though there are several websites where full costumes can be purchased; commissioning a costume from a skilled seamstress is another option. That being said, the community, though inclusive, places a higher

digest email. Mailing lists still exists, but social media has taken over this aspect. Fans can choose to join social media communities on Facebook (I run a general magical girl community group), or choose to follow certain communities on Instagram (image-heavy) and Twitter (images, video, and text).

¹³⁵ Okabe, Daisuke, “Cosplay, Learning, and Cultural Practice”, trans. Elissa Sato and Mizuki Ito, in *Fandom Unbound: Otaku Culture in a Connected World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2012), 225-7.

respect on individuals who create a full, accurate costume from an otherwise two-dimensional character from scratch. There are various online communities devoted to linking cosplayers with other cosplayers who wish to trade information regarding costume creation, including sewing techniques, creating a life-like set of armour using non-metal materials, troubleshooting, and replica prop making.¹³⁶



Figure 20 A Group of Sailor Moon Cosplayers at Anime Evolution 2015. Taken by the Author.

Cosplay is a visual social activity as well as a visual subculture; women make up most cosplayers. Costumes may be constructed by an individual's own efforts; however, a cosplayer will rarely attend a convention by themselves.¹³⁷ Instead, they will attend with friends who also dressed in cosplay or they participate in a cosplay group. In the latter case, each member of the group is dress as a character from a particular series they chose to portray. Cosplayers in a group

¹³⁶ I say "non-metal materials" because many anime and fandom conventions ban attendees from welding actual weapons or wearing actual armor to events. To circumvent this, cosplayers use materials such as EVA form (a flexible material that can be molded and warped) and Worbla, a non-toxic thermoplastic material used because it warps when heat is applied. It can then be shaped and painted to create replica armor and props.

¹³⁷ Okabe, "Cosplay, Learning, and Cultural Practice", 243

may even go as far as to help each other construct their costumes in an act of visual solidarity. In both cases, cosplaying for an event is a way to connect with those who share the same ideals, beliefs, emotions, and practices shared by those who enjoy dressing up and with those who resonate with the series and characters they are portraying.

This is not to say that there are no individual motivations when it comes to cosplay. There is one main motivation - the desire to “become the character”.¹³⁸ To become the character is not to merely resemble the character physically, but also to adopt the character’s signature poses, mimic the character’s traits, and speak the character’s signature phrases. In return, others see the cosplayer not as someone in costume, but as the actual character. Other may even go as far as to call the individual in costume by the character’s name. This is because the act of wearing the costume allows the cosplayer to summon the character through their body, presenting their ordinary self in an extraordinary manner via the character’s traits, mannerisms, and appearance.¹³⁹ Through this summoning ritual, the cosplayer can embody the traits of the character they admire, at least temporarily.

The act of cosplay, along with the consumption of fan merchandise, are both forms of performative play.¹⁴⁰ This works due to the differing personalities of characters featured in the series. For example, the color-coded Sailor Senshi of *Sailor Moon* are all attractive, but they all feature distinct personalities that consist of various traits female readers can identify with. Furthermore, the dynamic between the headstrong and hot-blooded Chocolat and the meek and

¹³⁸ *In the Name of the Moon*, directed by Anthony Jacowy and Tiffany Lewis (2014; Baltimore, MD: @productions). Film.

¹³⁹ Russell, N’Donna, “The Ghosts of Cosplay: Haunted Memory and Repetition in Cosplay Performance” (Research Paper, University of Victoria, 2015).

¹⁴⁰ Allison, “Fierce Flesh”, 155.

prudish Vanilla drives the plot of *Sugar Sugar Rune*. As Vanilla descends into the dark emotions of insecurity and jealousy toward her best friend, Chocolat's connections with her human classmates allow her to be much more considering of Vanilla.

By cosplaying a character embodies desired traits, the cosplayers can then try on those traits as they pretend to be the character. For example, someone who wishes to be brave may cosplay as Princess Sapphire, while someone who wishes to be mischievous and hot-blooded, at least temporarily, will cosplay Chocolat. This too is an act of transformation. Anne Peirson-Smith describes the process as an act that allows the cosplayer to present their ordinary self in an extraordinary fashion.¹⁴¹ The cosplayer also communicates to others their alignment with a certain character and distinguishes herself from other cosplayers. The costume acts in the same manner as the henshin item – it allows the cosplayer to access another self to acknowledge certain parts of themselves. Furthermore, by cosplaying, the individual can express her alignment with the ideologies associated with a particular series; because cosplaying is a visual media, cosplay also allows the individual to signal this alignment to others.

Concluding Remarks

In the existing academic literature in English centered upon magical girl narratives, critics take issue with the hypersexuality of the female protagonists as well as how male anime fans consume them.¹⁴² However, these critiques fail to consider how female fans of the series consume, understand, and disseminate these works. Magical girl narratives of the *shōjo*

¹⁴¹ Peirson-Smith, Anne, "Fashioning the Fantastical Self: An Examination of the Cosplay Dress-up Phenomenon in Southeast Asia" in *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Body and Dress* 17 (2013), 79-80.

¹⁴² Hemmann, "Short Skirts and Superpowers", 56-8.

demographic create a space where young female readers could have superheroes of their own. What critics see as sexually suggestive, fans see as “cute” and “empowered”. The visual beauty of these characters is not for gaining the attention of men or for a romantic relationship. Instead, femininity is used as a weapon to ensure that justice is served and to protect the ones the heroine holds dear. As a result, the female artists who create these series, emboldened by their own personal experiences, offer female readers an alternative to existing ideas of femininity.

Consumption in the eyes of female fans is not merely consumption but a way to connect physically to a series that has affected them emotionally. Toy replicas of henshin items from the series act as magical agents that connect fans to their favorite series and allow them to be connected their individual selves and empowered by the series they are attached to. For fans that have transitioned into adulthood, these items allow them to remain connected to their favorite magical girl series. Male academics argue that by engaging in this practice, the *shōjo* refuses to “grow up” into her designated role as both wife and mother. However, female fans feel different. They may no longer be *shōjo*, but through the items they remain connected to the hopefulness that is associated with being a *shōjo*.

Female fans do not simply consume; they also produce works that are derivative of these series and illustrate their attachment to the narrative and their endorsement the beliefs and ideals associated with it. The official Japanese Sailor Moon page on Twitter has over 224,000 followers.¹⁴³ The Official North American Twitter page for the Sailor Moon anime has over 21,000 followers.¹⁴⁴ On Facebook, the largest Sailor Moon community is the Spanish-language

¹⁴³ “Sērā Mūn 25 kōshiki” (Official Sailor Moon 25th anniversary twitter), accessed July 12, 2017, https://twitter.com/sailormoon_25th.

¹⁴⁴ “Sailor Moon” accessed July 12, 2017, https://twitter.com/Sailor_Moon_NA.

“Sailor Moon Comunidad”, and has nearly 233,000 likes¹⁴⁵. Other global fan communities of note are the Taiwanese Sailor Moon fan page (93,000 likes)¹⁴⁶, the Polish “Bishoujo Senshi Sailor Moon” fan page (over 12,000 likes)¹⁴⁷, the Vietnam-based “Sailor Moon FC in Vietnam” page (over 29,000 likes) and the Italian “Semplicemente Sailor Moon” fan page (nearly 10,000 likes).¹⁴⁸

The magical girl genre has been long established in Japan, but there is a growing amount of magical girl series created by western artists. *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, created by Lauren Faust could arguably be the most popular of these western series, as it has achieved popularity with young girls, and teenaged-to-adult men.¹⁴⁹ It is the story of Twilight Sparkle, a unicorn who is tasked with learning about the finer parts of friends through her relationships with five other ponies. Together, they travel across Ponyville to help others while learning more about themselves. Another series of note is *Zodiac Starforce*, published by Dark Horse Books, is a comic that features a group of five teenagers who, in the face of a growing threat, must come

¹⁴⁵ “Sailor Moon Comunidad”, accessed July 12, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/SMComunidad/>. Spanish.

¹⁴⁶ “Bishōjo Senshi Sērā Mūn (Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon”, accessed July 12, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/SailorMoon.Taiwan/>. Mandarin Chinese.

¹⁴⁷ “Bishoujo Senshi Sailor Moon ヽ”, accessed July 12, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/sailor.moon.fan.poland/>. Polish.

¹⁴⁸ “Semplicemente SAILOR MOON” accessed July 12, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/Semplicemente-SAILOR-MOON-114588505286829/>. Italian.

¹⁴⁹ These male fans call themselves “Bronies” to signify their connection to the series. *Friendship is Magic* has dealt with the same issues as other magical girl series, namely its popularity with older male viewers. Critics take issue with how unsafe it is for young girls to look up images related to the series because of “Bronies”, due to fan art that is considered “pornographic” in nature and that males have co-opted a space created for women (DeCarlo 2014). But that’s for another research project.

together as a team after being estranged for two years.¹⁵⁰ Finally, other series of note include *Miraculous* (France/South Korea co-production), *Star and the Forces of Evil*, *W.I.T.C.H* (Italy), and *The Winx Club*.¹⁵¹

Online fan communities and annual events give fans the opportunity to connect with others who share the same interests, beliefs, and ideals toward a particular series. The most visual way a fan can announce her attachment to a series is through cosplay. By wearing a costume (usually constructed from scratch), an individual can summon their favourite character through the body, adopting the mannerisms and signature poses, therefore presenting both desired and appreciated aspects of their own personality through performative play. Fan comics, or *dōjinshi*, allow fans to explore different aspects of certain characters unexplored in the manga, explore romantic pairings that deviate from the official series, or create comical parodies of their favorite series. In the end, both the consumption of these narratives and the production of derivative fan works allow for the *shōjo* – still a girl and now a woman – to connect with her individual, empowered self.



Figure 21 Super Sailor Moon by Amber McGowan

¹⁵⁰ “Zodiac Starforce”, accessed July 12, 2017, <http://zodiacstarforce.com/>.

¹⁵¹ I wanted to emphasize that the creation of Western works isn’t limited to American creators. *The Winx Club* and *W.I.T.C.H.* are from Italy yet gained a following around the world after being translated into English.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Road Up Ahead: Conclusion

He came up to me at the end of the magical panel discussion at Emerald City Comic Con 2017. One of my fellow panelists mentioned that he was a friend of theirs but I didn't catch his name, nor did I think to ask for it. After speaking about a certain topic for one hour, hedging my opinions with the opinions of four other individuals from different walks of life, my mind tends to be a bit muddled. And yet, what he said next is still fresh in my mind four months later.

"I really enjoyed your panel," he said to me as he shook my hand. "I really learned a lot about magical girls today. And to think, before the panel, they all seemed so shallow to me!"

I smiled and laughed nervously, thanking him for his comments. Once he was out of sight, I proceeded to give him the side-eye for having the gall to call magical girls "shallow" in my presence.

Opinionated glances aside, his comments made me consider the magical girl genre as it stands today. Since the debut *Mahōtsukai Sarī* in 1968, the Magical Girl series have morphed into their own sub-genre of anime. After the smash success of *Sailor Moon* in the 1990s, other magical girl series were produced to cash on its success. Furthermore, they followed the same formula as Takeuchi's successful series – a group of magically-enchanted warriors, led by a comically flawed heroine with a heart of gold, work together to fight clear and present evil to save the world. Most these series were created for young female audiences yet gained popularity with adult male viewers. Series such as *Cutey Honey* and *Mamono Hunter Yohko* were created

for male audience due to their intense action sequences and sexual content, but many magical girl series were created for female audiences.¹⁵²

Magical girl series began to be produced en masse specifically for older male audiences after 2003.¹⁵³ The difference between magical girl series made for female audiences and magical girl series made for male audiences is that the latter is less centered on emotion and more concerned with action, fighting, and visual stimulation. Stimulation can occur in two forms; sexual and adorably cute. The former features visually attractive female heroines (*bishōjo*, “beautiful girls”) who may be in various stages of undress. The latter features youthful, pure and innocent characters that elicit an affectionate response from fans.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, these series may deal with subject matter that is considered more serious and darker than its female-marketed counterparts. For example, the recently released series *Mahō Shōjo Ikusei Keikaku* (“Magical Girl Raising Project”) actively pondered the question what it truly meant to be a “magical girl” as several cast members tried to kill one another in an effort to gain enough

¹⁵² *Fan Service* is the term that is aptly associated with these works. Fan Service is defined as the actions an animated series takes in order to please the audience. This could be anything from addressing the audience directly (also known as “breaking the fourth wall”), or fluid and intensive fighting sequences in an action anime. In the case of *Cutey Honey* and *Mamono Hunter Yohko*, it’s brief nudity, sexual titillation, and panty shots. When Honey Kisaragi transforms into her warrior form, Cutey Honey, she goes completely nude in between states. In *Mamono Hunter Yohko*, the titular heroine also goes completely nude when transforming but she is also seduced by the demons she’s tasked with hunting.

¹⁵³ “Ask John: Is Magical Girl Anime for Male Viewers a New Trend?”, *AnimeNation Anime News Blog*, accessed July 10, 2017, <http://www.animenation.net/ask-john-is-magical-girl-anime-for-male-viewers-a-new-trend/>.

¹⁵⁴ These characters are better known as *moe* characters. The term stems from the Japanese verb “moeru” (萌える), which means “to bud” or to “spout”. They are called *moe* (萌え) because, according to *The Moe Manifesto* by Patrick W. Galbraith (2014), the designs trigger a passionate but affection response from fans.

magical candies to retain their powers. In addition, the series *Yūki Yūna wa Yūsha de Aru* (“Yūki Yūna is a Hero”), the heroes, the heroine and her teammates must give up an essential bodily function to use her ultimate power. In the case of Yūki Yūna, she loses her sense of taste and ultimately falls into a coma.

With this proliferation of magical girl series, most of which cater to male audiences, future research going forward may be difficult. English-language research into magical girl series, such as Mary Grigsby’s “Sailormoon: Manga (Comics) and Anime (Cartoon)’ Superheroine Meets Barbie: Global Entertainment Commodity Comes to the United States” and Anne Allison’s “Fierce Flesh: Sexy Schoolgirls in the Action Fantasy of *Sailor Moon*” devote much of their findings of how adult males consume these words. Considering that current male-marketed magical girl series offer visual stimulation to viewers in the form of brief-to-full nudity, this only fuels the idea that men are the consumers, while women are consumed. However, this binary does not take into consideration that just as adult males became fans of magical girl series within the *shōjo* demographic, there are also female fans of these male-oriented series.

As for female-marketed series, it is my hope to see more research based in in-depth textual analysis. Other English-language articles, such as Kumiko Saito’s “Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis: Magical Girl Anime and the Challenges of Changing Gender Identities in Japanese Society” ground their study within the context of feminist movements as well as traditional notions of femininity and gender within modern Japanese culture. It is true that most magical girl narratives have strong connections to reality. In the most notable case, many of *Sailor Moon*’s settings can be found in Tokyo, including the Azabu Ward where Usagi’s family lives in the iconic Tokyo Tower where many battles take place. Mundane practices are also

featured in magical girl narratives, such as school life, family life, and moments of leisure with friends. However, these arguments do not consider how readers interpret and consume these depictions despite these connections to reality. Therefore, the question then becomes how readers find empowerment in these narratives despite the reality they are situated in, especially given the idealistic and hopeful ideas present in *shōjo* manga.

My use of Joseph Campbell's mythic narrative structure as well as Propp's folktale morphology offers one possibility of studying the text as it is written. Despite my best efforts to analyze the text in a broad sense, it is not lost on me that this narrative was created by Japanese artists. Then again, magical girl series are a Japanese creation, they are also example of syncretism. In other words, magical girl series are an amalgamation of storytelling and western settings, style, and ideas. Historically, *shōjo* narratives have employed western-influenced settings to tell stories that do not abide by traditional Japanese social norms. Magical girl narratives are no different; characters are either from another world or have visual markers that make them otherworldly, such as Sailor Moon's odango hairstyle. Perhaps this is why western audiences take to these series; they see a bit of themselves in an otherwise Japanese creation. Even so, there may be western influences in several of these works, but if I were to research these narratives further, I would be more mindful of any Japanese cultural influences that may be present in these works.

One final limitation to my research is my own personal feelings toward magical girl narratives. I have been a fan on the genre since I was fifteen years old. Twenty-seven years later, I'm still a fan of the genre but adulthood has all but erased the idealistic shine from my eyes. There were times when creating the framework of this thesis was difficult at best and impossible at its very worst. Such is the crux of an academic who is also a passionate fan. As I

wrote this thesis, I had to be careful not to allow my excitement to get the better of me. It is one thing to speak with other fans about magical girl series and another to discuss the subject in an academic context. If I were writing this to other fans, my word would be my bond. However, since this is an academic thesis, I had to ensure that my language was not too opinionated and that I provided enough textual evidence to support my claims. I do feel that my allegiance to my fandom pierces through at times. Even so, I've made it a point to look at this subject in an academic manner, fandom aside.

Final Thoughts

In this thesis, I have tried to illustrate that the act of transforming into a magical girl is a mechanism for personal and spiritual growth. This is due to the narrative, which is structured in a way that pushes the heroine through situations which test her physically and emotionally to achieve optimal identity creation. In this liminal space, she is free to be herself and more importantly, grow up and become a better, stronger, and more mature form of herself.

Focalization is key; the narrative focuses on the interpersonal relationships between the heroine and those who support her with her mission. In the end, the magical girl heroine grows up and relinquishes her powers, but she never gives up being herself. As a result, she carries her *shōjo* experiences with her into adulthood and is never pressured to give them up.

The goal of this thesis was to combine textual analysis, historical conjecture, and cultural anecdotes to explore the journey of the magical girl heroine and why such a narrative is popular globally. The answer lies in how the narrative allows for the heroine to be herself without interference. That is, rather than the heroine ascribing to prevailing ideas of femininity, the magical girl heroine is not only allowed to be her own type of femininity, but as a magical girl,

she is able to weaponize it to protect her loved ones from those who wish to do them harm. She is her own hero that toes the line between the ordinary and extraordinary and when the time comes, becomes the goddess that gives her the power to defeat her enemies once and for all.



Figure 22 Sapphire the Princess Knight by Amber McGowan

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