Short Skirts and Superpowers:
The Evolution of the Beautiful Fighting Girl

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Shōjo manga are filled with rivalries between innocent and naive young girls and evil older women. Antagonism between pure-hearted young women and villainous older women has been communicated to *shōjo* manga from *bishōjo* manga written by and for men through the process of narrative consumption and reproduction. To understand why this is so, this essay examines the work of three Japanese cultural theorists on the topic of the *bishōjo*, or beautiful girl, character type. The ultimate goal of this essay, however, is to argue that female manga artists are fully aware of the cycle of narrative consumption and reproduction, and are thus able to intervene in and disrupt the process and offer new interpretations of female character types that are empowering to female readers.

On February 9, 2011, the *New York Times* published an article entitled "In Tokyo, a Crackdown on Sexual Images of Minors."[1] Although the "sexual images" in question come from a variety of media, such as adult films and role-playing video games, the Tokyo Metropolitan Ordinance Regarding the Healthy Development of Minors (Tōkyō-to Seishōnen no Kenzen Naikusei ni Kan Suru Jōrei), or the "Tokyo Youth Ordinance Act," passed by the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly on December 15, 2010, specifically targets manga featuring young female characters in what are deemed to be sexually compromising poses or situations.[2] The journalist who penned the article, Hiroko Tabuchi, quotes Tokyo governor Ishihara Shintarō as saying of the manga in question that "these are for abnormal people, for perverts." The article sensationalizes the media that Ishihara hopes to censor as child pornography by emphasizing the young ages and sexual exploitation of its models

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without differentiating between young women who exist in the real world and those who exist solely on paper. It is only in the last line of the article that a seventeen-year-old male manga reader is quoted as saying, "I don't even think about how old these girls are. It's a completely imaginary world, separate from real life."

The style of illustration targeted by the Tokyo Youth Ordinance Act is known as *bishōjo-kei*, or "*bishōjo* style." A *bishōjo* is a female character in a manga, anime, video game, or light novel that belongs to a genre generally regarded as targeted at a male audience, such as science fiction or adventure fantasy. Examples of such characters are Nausicaä from *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984, *Kaze no Tani no Naushika*), Nadia from *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water* (1990–91, *Fushigi no Umi no Nadia*), and Ayanami Rei from *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995–96, *Shin seiki Evangerion*). *Bishōjo* are rooted firmly in fantasy, whether that fantasy is a post-apocalyptic wasteland or a halcyon year of high school. These characters need not be connected to an actual narrative, however, and can be depicted in original stand-alone artistic compositions, such as those printed on the postcards and pin-up posters enclosed in monthly manga magazines. These illustrated girls are often characterized as not only strong and competent but also somewhat naive and innocent; they are magical beings enmeshed in their respective fantasy worlds, and there is an Alice-in-Wonderland quality about them capable of evoking fantasies about childhood and, more specifically, girlhood.[3]

Nevertheless, the fundamental idea behind the manga censorship law is that adult men are looking at young women in a way that is degrading and psychologically unhealthy. A pornographic gaze is encouraged and exploited in many aspects of popular and commercial art, but one could also posit the existence of a "fantasy gaze" that is less concerned with the image itself than with the story behind the image. Moreover, the sizable percentage of women creating and consuming *bishōjo* images and narratives complicates the idea of an all-powerful male gaze. One might argue that the women who enjoy media supposedly targeted at men have adopted a hermaphroditic gaze internalizing the male gaze, and therefore identify with male characters and viewers when they look at sexualized images of women.[4] As a counterargument against this interpretation, I would like to raise the possibility of a female gaze implicit in women portraying and looking at other women. By creating and appreciating sexualized images of teenage girls, for example, women can embrace and celebrate a sexuality that lies outside of virgin/mother/whore stereotypes. For women, then, the appeal of *bishōjo* is not merely the asexual appeal of the fantasy world they represent but also the self-reflexive appeal of being young, beautiful, magical, and sexually aware.

The fictional *bishōjo* can also serve as an empowering role model for readers, especially when the character type is used by female artists as a site of contention concerning discourse on female agency and sexuality. In this essay I apply this concept of the female gaze to Takeuchi Naoko's *Sailor Moon* (1991–97, *Bishōjo senshi Sērā Mūn*) and CLAMP's *Magic Knight Rayearth* (1993–95, *Majikku naito Reiāsu*). I argue that both of these manga recontextualize and reinterpret *bishōjo* character tropes common to illustrated and animated narratives of the 1990s, and thus disrupt the cycle of narrative consumption and reproduction that drives mainstream media. This female gaze allows female readers to see celebrations of empowered female homosociality in works that would otherwise be dismissed as misogynistic, while also serving as a critical tool for female creators such as Takeuchi Naoko and CLAMP, who overturn clichéd tropes and narrative patterns as a means of telling stories that will appeal to an audience of women and as a means of feminist critique.

Consuming *Bishōjo*, Consuming Narrative

To understand why the acknowledgment of a female gaze in female-authored manga and female fandom cultures is so important, it is first necessary to examine the ways in which leading Japanese cultural theorists have understood the narrative patterns and trends in fannish consumption of entertainment media such as anime, video games, and light novels from the 1980s onward. Although awareness of female fans, particularly fans of the homoerotic BL ("boys' love," also known as *yaoi*) genre, has become more widespread since the mid-2000s, many scholars and critics have tended to focus exclusively on male fans, whom they refer to as "otaku."[5] Manga and related media such as anime adaptations are typically targeted at a specific demographic based on gender and age. While many *bishōjo* characters appear in media aimed at adolescent and adult males, *shōjo* manga as a broad genre focuses on heteronormative romance aimed at elementary school girls and young women in their teens. Despite the reinforcement of such demographic categories by publisher imprints and bookstore layouts, there is a great deal of slippage between genres both in content and in readership, especially with more popular titles and franchises. It is therefore limiting to consider the audience of all media properties with a substantial fanbase, from *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* to *Sailor Moon*, to be a uniform group whose members all share the same gender and sexual orientation. In fact, the female gaze employed by manga artists and readers directly challenges the hegemony of the male otaku fan as a model of narrative production and consumption in contemporary Japan.

In 1989, Japanese pop culture ethnographer Ōtsuka Eiji wrote a monograph entitled *Monogatari shōhiron: Bikkuriman no shinwagaku* (On narrative consumption: The mythology of Bikkuriman), based on a shorter essay that was translated in 2010 by Marc Steinberg as "World and Variation: The Reproduction and Consumption of Narrative." Ōtsuka's essay takes as an illustrative example Bikkuriman Chocolates, or, more specifically, the trading cards packaged with the chocolates. It was because of the trading cards that the chocolates were such a phenomenal hit with children around the time that Ōtsuka was writing, even though the superhero character "Bikkuriman" had no television or manga tie-in products. According to Ōtsuka, the secret to Bikkuriman's success was that, on the back of each trading card, there was a short paragraph of information about the character depicted on the front. If a child collected enough cards, he or she would gradually be able to piece together a larger story and gain a broader perspective on the Bikkuriman universe. Out of many small narratives, children were able to create a grand narrative. The point of Ōtsuka's discussion of Bikkuriman Chocolates is that "child consumers were attracted by this grand narrative, and tried to gain further access to it through the continued purchase of chocolates."[6] In other words, "what is consumed first and foremost, and that which first gives these individual commodities their very value, is the grand narrative or order that they hold in partial form and as their background."[7] Ōtsuka conjectures that, although the children who bought Bikkuriman Chocolates were invested in the collection of physical cards, they were perhaps not as concerned with individual cards as they were with the larger story, the mythology, and the worldview of the Bikkuriman universe—what Ōtsuka calls the grand narrative.

Ōtsuka argues that the consumption of anime functions in much the same way. Each episode of the anime series *Mobile Suit Gundam* (1979–80, *Kidō senshi Gandamu*), for example, is a small narrative. The story of each individual protagonist that plays out across the episodes is a small narrative as well. The diagrams and mechanical data included with the toy models of the robots can also be considered small narratives. As these small narratives are accumulated, however, they begin to form the contours of an entire world. Ōtsuka argues that it is this grand narrative that makes long-running series such as *Gundam* so popular and marketable.

According to Ōtsuka's model of narrative consumption, small narratives, while pleasing in and of themselves, also function as puzzle pieces that can be put together to form a larger narrative. Ōtsuka argues that, while the general viewing audience will only follow one or two strands of small narratives, what distinguishes male otaku is their

interest in the grand narrative. Otaku are characterized by their interest in gathering bits of information hidden in the background, putting these bits of information together, and creating their own small narratives based on their understanding of the grand narrative. Such a model of narrative consumption goes a long way toward explaining fan-made narrative products such as fan fiction and *dōjinshi* (self-published fan manga), since "if, at the end of the accumulated consumption of small narratives, consumers get their hands on the grand narrative . . . they will then be able to freely produce their own small narratives with their own hands."[8] Therefore, fans of any given work may become "otaku" if they become invested in narrative consumption and reproduction at the level of the grand narrative.

In *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* (2001), Azuma Hiroki proposes a different model of narrative consumption. The Japanese title of Azuma's cultural study, *Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan: Otaku kara mita Nihon shakai* (The animalizing postmodern: Looking at Japanese society through otaku), is revealing. The first word of this title refers to the concept of "animalization" proposed by Alexandre Kojève in *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (1980). This animalization involves the degradation of humans, or independent subjects capable of reasoning, directed action, and compassion, into animals, or mindless consumers who act on instinctual impulses such as hunger and the drive for greater comfort. It is Azuma's thesis that otaku and, by extension, the society that has spawned them are becoming increasingly animalized. Azuma describes the narrative and cultural consciousness characteristic of otaku through what he calls the database model of narrative consumption. This database model stands in direct contrast to the model proposed by Ōtsuka in his 1989 *Monogatari shōhiron* (On narrative consumption), which in turn deals with concepts relating to grand narratives and their postmodern decline as expressed in Jean Baudrillard's *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976). According to Ōtsuka, each small narrative in a particular work functions as a gateway granting access to the grand narrative of that work, with a grand narrative being synonymous with the work's setting and worldview. The character Ayanami Rei of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is an example of how Ōtsuka's model interprets otaku "narrative consumption." Ayanami is adored by otaku because, for them, she represents the tragedy, epic scale, and political allusiveness of the entire television series. Ayanami Rei is not just a girl in a battle uniform; she is *Neon Genesis Evangelion* itself. To "consume" her is to emotionally insert oneself into the apocalyptic, man-versus-god atmosphere of the larger narrative—which only heightens the visual and sexual pleasure she offers the male viewer.[9]

Azuma directly contradicts this model of understanding symbols and narrative with his database theory. Whereas Ōtsuka argues that the grand narratives of shows like *Evangelion* are given weight by their relevance to nonfictional grand narratives such the Pacific War and the postwar history of Japan, Azuma believes that otaku narratives are almost completely removed from those of the real world. In the opening chapter of *Otaku*, he states, "In otaku culture ruled by narrative consumption, products have no independent value; they are judged by the quality of the database in the background."[10] Thus, although an otaku might be familiar with Ayanami Rei's age and bust size, and be able to quote her dialogue and expound on the quality of various plastic models made in her likeness, he is not invested any larger worldview or grand narratives that may be encompassed by *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Instead, the otaku mines each episode of the television series for information to plug into a mental database that also contains information on similar shows. Because of the absence of the emotional pull of grand narratives, the otaku can substitute one element of his database for another; thus, for instance, the light-blue hair of a young female character such as Hoshino Ruri from the anime *Martian Successor Nadesico* (1996–97, *Kidō senkan Nadeshiko*) or Tsukishima Ruriko from the visual novel *Shizuku* (1996, Droplet) instantly calls up references to the light-blue hair of Ayanami Rei. Furthermore, any sexual attraction and personal attachment the viewer might have felt for Ayanami Rei is seamlessly transferred to the new character, thus allowing shortcuts in characterization. For otaku, the appeal of any given character lies in the database of associations connected to the character, not in the story that contains the character, and grand narratives are nothing compared to the "animalistic" appeal of a character's defining physical characteristics. Tropes can therefore be transferred from one story and character to another, along with an otaku's emotional investment.

Azuma claims that, "Compared with the 1980s otaku [on whom Ōtsuka bases his model of the grand narrative], those of the 1990s generally adhered to the data and facts of the fictional worlds and were altogether unconcerned with a meaning and message that might have been communicated."[11] According to Azuma's generalizing conjecture, male otaku of the 1990s thus consumed only fragments, or small narratives. These fragments, which fit comfortably within the small square boxes of a database, could then be easily cross-referenced with other fragments. Because of the ease of referencing these fragments, distinctions between an original and its copies (either through officially licensed spinoff works or fan works) disintegrated. According to Azuma, there was no longer any need to connect these fragments back to the grand narratives of either the original work or

the real world. An otaku could float unanchored through the database he created via his consumption of undifferentiated narratives. For this generation of otaku, the larger narratives that attracted Ōtsuka's earlier generation of otaku don't matter; they care only for the excavation and reproduction of details concerning cute female characters.

Azuma therefore views the otaku fascination with animated girls as being deeply pathological. Otaku have cut the cord tethering them to reality, thus severing the portion of the narrative feedback loop that connects fictional stories back to the real world. If, for example, the themes of war and masculine infantilization in a series such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion* are not associated with the historical and emotional weight of conflicts such as the Pacific War, then they become nothing more than a backdrop for the sexual titillation provided by provocatively clad female characters. For Azuma, desire for fictional characters cannot exist on the same psychological plane as an historically grounded awareness of the real world, and the otaku's preference for historically and politically disembodied *bishōjo* has caused him to withdraw into his own world of erotic fantasy and the pointless acquisition of useless trivia.

Both Ōtsuka and Azuma stress the appeal of the acquisition of narrative trivia and the intense emotional investment in fictional narratives on the part of otaku. Ōtsuka argues that otaku collect the various paraphernalia related to their favorite media properties while reading and rereading the original texts in order to gain a better understanding of the fictional world in which the story takes place. Once in possession of an adequate level of comprehension of this worldview, otaku will then create their own spinoff stories, whether privately in their heads or semi-publicly through online message boards and self-published *dōjinshi* fan comics. Fictional grand narratives thus render a media franchise more marketable, collectible, and ultimately more profitable. Azuma, in contrast, denies the existence of grand narratives, fictional or otherwise, in the minds of otaku. For otaku, he argues, data collection is not about delving deeper into grand narratives; instead, it revolves around the base animalistic pleasure of acquisition, which is rendered all the more pleasurable when combined with the polymorphously perverse element of fictional women, who serve as sources of sexual gratification for the otherwise unfocused libidinal drives of antisocial male viewers and consumers.[12] According to both Azuma and Ōtsuka's theories of narrative consumption, the otaku is not capable of independent action; he can only reproduce the narratives he consumes. Even if he is capable of selecting specific elements from his own personal database to combine into new stories, the sum narrative total is still the same.

In this way, narrative tropes that have long since become stereotypes are not only accepted by an otaku audience but welcomed and celebrated. As a result, otaku communities have developed a collective fetish for the *bishōjo*, a recurring character trope in anime and manga since at least the 1970s.[13] In his groundbreaking 2000 study *Sentō bishōjo no seishin bunseki* (Psychoanalysis of beautiful fighting girl), translated in 2011 by J. Keith Vincent and Dawn Lawson as *Beautiful Fighting Girl*, psychologist and cultural theorist Saitō Tamaki analyzes the figure of the animated and illustrated *bishōjo* in order to shed light on otaku sexuality. In his preface to this book, Saitō brings up arguments concerning "the Japanese and their so-called Lolita complex"[14] and then quickly dismisses such arguments as intellectual laziness along the lines of "the miserable business of repetitive theorizing about the uniqueness of the Japanese."[15] Saitō later lists several common assumptions about otaku, such as the misconception that "otaku are immature human beings who have grown up without being able to let go of infantile transitional objects such as anime and monsters."[16] Rejecting such notions of immaturity and arrested psychological development, Saitō argues that otaku do not privilege fiction over reality but rather possess a unique capacity to accept fictional worlds as a separate but equal form of reality. Otaku, states Saitō, "are uninterested in setting fiction and reality up against each other. If anything they are able to find reality (*riariti*) equally in both fiction and reality (*genjitsu*)."[17] Saitō thus differentiates between the reality of the phenomenal world and the perceived reality of the fictional narrative by referring to the former by the Japanese word for reality, *genjitsu*, and to the latter by the English word, *riariti* ("reality"). For the otaku who lives in both *genjitsu* and *riariti*, "real (*riaru*) fictions do not necessarily require the security of reality (*genjitsu*). There is absolutely no need in this space for fiction to imitate reality. Fiction is able to clear a space around itself for its own reality (*riariti kūkan*)."[18]

The key to making a fictional world "real" is desire. "For the world to be real (*riaru*)," Saitō explains, "it must be sufficiently electrified by desire. A world not given depth by desire, no matter how exactly it is drawn, will always be flat and impersonal, like a backdrop in the theater. But once that world takes on a sexual charge, it will attain a level of reality (*riariti*) no matter how shoddily it is drawn."[19] Because the stylization of anime and manga is so adept at creating shared codes of imagery, elements of polymorphous perversity are easily introduced into the two mediums. According to Saitō, such sexual objects began to explode across illustrated and animated narratives beginning in the 1980s. The goal of the otaku creators and consumers was "an autonomous object of desire" that did not belong to any reality outside of anime and manga.[20] Therefore, anime

characters were never supposed to stand in for real women—for otaku, their appeal is their very fictionality. Saitō's ultimate argument is that the attachment of an adult male to the figure of the beautiful fighting girl is in no way psychologically unhealthy, and that an immersion in the fictional *riatriti* of *bishōjo* narratives is not an escape from the real world, but rather a supplement and alternative to conventional sexual expression that can easily exist alongside *genjitsu*.

The primary weakness of Saitō's argument is that it fails to take real women into account. Although many *bishōjo* are drawn and animated by men and situated in stories marketed to appeal to a primarily male audience, they undoubtedly have female fans as well. Moreover, men are not the only people who draw *bishōjo* characters, and manga for boys and men are not the only narratives in which such characters appear. In fact, the most famous and high-profile *bishōjo* of the past two decades was created by a woman for an audience of teenage girls. This *bishōjo* is Sailor Moon, and she is the star of her own manga, *Sentō bishōjo* ("Fighting *bishōjo*") *Sailor Moon*. Despite Saitō's insistence that *bishōjo* exist in their own reality and have nothing to do with real flesh-and-blood women, female fans of the *bishōjo* heroines of *Sailor Moon* have claimed that these characters have had an overwhelmingly beneficial influence on their perceptions of other female characters and of themselves as young women.

Fighting for Love and Justice: The Female Fans of *Sailor Moon*

When Kodansha Comics USA announced the rerelease of the original *Sailor Moon* manga in an English translation, many fan blogs celebrated the news. For example, a Tumblr-hosted blog by the name of "Fighting Evil By Moonlight,"[21] which specializes in commentary on magical girl (*mahō shōjo*) anime, began its tribute to the work with these comments on its international reception:

> *Sailor Moon* is not only the magical girl genre's most seminal work; its influence reaches to the remotest genres and trends in anime fandom. Anyone involved with anime—hentai-hoarding otaku, overseas translators/marketers, shoujo artists, seinen artists, everyone—has *Sailor Moon* to thank for the medium being what it is today. It is hard to overstate the way that this one series revolutionized anime and manga.[22]

Although artist Takeuchi Naoko did not create the "magical girl" genre, the *Sailor Moon* series—originally collected in eighteen volumes over the course of the six-year span between 1991 and 1997, and adapted into five seasons of a television series that ran

from 1992 to 1997—was certainly influential ever since it first appeared in print in the proliferation of animated magical girl stories, from *Cardcaptor Sakura* (1998–2000, *Kādokyaputā Sakura*) and *Pretty Cure* (*Purikyua*, first aired in 2004 and ongoing as of 2014) to *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* (2011, *Mahō shōjo Madoka magika*). This is in part due to the efforts of its editors at *Nakayoshi* magazine, a publication aimed at preteen girls, who were the intended primary targets of a multimedia marketing campaign for *Sailor Moon* that incorporated an animated series and numerous items of accompanying merchandise.[23]

The true secret to the success of *Sailor Moon*, however, lay in the strength of its appealing and engaging character designs. As anthropologist Anne Allison has noted,[24] the five "Sailor Scouts" (*sērā senshi*) were designed according to the conventions of the "super fighting squad" (*sūpā sentai*) genre of live-action children's television programming, which generally features a five-person team of color-coded warriors, each with his or her own special power and guardian spirit. Each of the five core Sailor Scouts is similarly associated with her own color and celestial body. Sailor Mars, for example, is clothed in a uniform with red and purple accents and is able to attack using her fire-based magical powers. The personalities of the five girls are similarly encoded. Sailor Mars has a fiery temper to match her pyroclastic fighting style; and, given the association of fire with ritual purification in Japan, she also acts as a *miko* priestess at the Shinto shrine managed by her family when she's not attending classes or fighting evil.

Because the personalities of the Sailor Scouts were designed to be as easily identifiable as their color-coded uniforms, they tend to fall into predictable patterns. Sailor Mars, for example, though fiery, is a "well brought-up young lady" (*ojōsan*), who is slender, elegant, articulate, and used to getting her way. Sailor Mercury is "the girl with glasses" (*meganekko*), whose defining characteristics are her gentle speech, intelligence, and propensity to respond to situations with slightly off-kilter remarks. Tall, athletic, and earnest, Sailor Jupiter could be the heroine of any number of sports manga for girls, while Sailor Moon herself is the archetypal heroine of the genre of *shōjo* romance that fills the pages of *Nakayoshi* and its spinoff magazines.[25] Although her heart is in the right place, Sailor Moon is scatterbrained and ditzy, often running late to school and forgetting her homework. She would rather play video games than study, and her primary concerns seem to be romance and eating dessert with her friends. Once she transforms into her Sailor Scout alter ego, however, Sailor Moon ceases to be the stereotypical lovelorn heroine of a *shōjo* romance and instead becomes an iconic embodiment of the *bishōjo*. Despite being young and naive, she is physically strong, emotionally competent, and a compelling

leader. She sacrifices herself for her team and always achieves strategic insight into the motivations of her enemies. Her magical power and her ability to win every battle stem from her innocent spirit and her purity of heart, which make her heir to the long line of *bishōjo* characters appearing in narratives targeted at a male audience, such as the eponymous heroine of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*.[26]

Many North American readers[27] of the *Sailor Moon* manga have found the work to contain themes of female empowerment expressed through its cast of mainly female characters, its sympathetic male hero who acknowledges the strength of the female warriors, and its narrative focus on the bonds between women. For example, a blogger on Livejournal who writes feminist commentary on popular culture under the name "Comic Book Girl" has expressed her admiration of *Sailor Moon* by stating that not only did the series serve as her induction into the world of manga and comic book fandom, but it also convinced her that, even though she was playing in a cultural realm dominated by men, it was okay to be a girl:

> [*Sailor Moon*] is a world where femininity is not something to be ashamed of, it's the source of POWER. The girls don't use their pretty clothes and jewels and compacts as playthings to impress men—these things are all weapons against evil, and powerful ones. They declare themSELVES pretty, needing approval from no one. Our hero possesses all the typical "chick" attributes—emotional, tearful, forgiving, loving, nurturing—and she uses these attributes to triumph and kick ass. She burns monsters alive with the purity of her love, sends out supersonic waves that shake the villains down when she bursts into tears, and her friendship and forgiveness is [*sic*] the most effective superpower one could ask for. The "girly" emotions and affectations are not something to be ashamed of or suppressed, but the source of the power these girls wield. They don't have to imitate guy heroes at all or act "masculine" to be taken seriously—girliness is just as powerful.[28]

For a young female reader in the 1990s, Sailor Moon and her fellow Sailor Scouts were positive feminist role models. In a landscape of Disney princesses concerned primarily about the men in their lives, the *Sailor Moon* manga and anime series were a rare oasis of female characters not defined by their attachment to men or involvement in romance.[29] Even after the television series was taken off the air and the out-of-print manga volumes became almost impossible to find, knowledge of the series passed from fan to fan. As the internet became freely accessible to high school and college students, unlicensed fansubs and scanlations[30] proliferated, and *Sailor Moon* achieved an almost mythical quality in the annals of North American and European anime fandom.

Although the fandom reception of *Sailor Moon* was generally laudatory,[31] North American academic critics found the franchise troubling. Susan Napier, for instance, has observed that the Sailor Scouts are somewhat "lacking in psychological depth," and claims that, "to an adult reader/viewer the girls' lack of appreciation for their marvelous powers can be frustrating," which suggests "a loss of interior complexity" on the part of female characters who are otherwise more active and dynamic.[32] Napier points out that young female characters representing "wish fulfilling fantasies of empowerment," such as the female protagonists of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and *Vampire Princess Miyu* (1988–89, *Vanpaia Miyu*), either "lack any dark side which might make [their] personalities more interesting to older readers" or are caught in a double bind in which their powers are dangerous to both themselves and others.[33] In fact, she finds that female characters who are too powerful or who do possess psychological complexity are often cast as the evil villains whom the *shōjo* heroines must battle and defeat. Since the magical powers of the *bishōjo* stem from her innocence, purity, and unwillingness to use her abilities for personal gain, she is thus prevented from entering the realm of adult maturity if she wishes to remain one of the good guys. Based on the anime series she examines, Napier argues that, even if a girl is omnipotent, she must still know her place and behave accordingly.

Even in manga and genre fiction written by women and featuring a wider range of female characters, feminist media critic Kotani Mari argues that there is still a limiting dichotomy between the roles offered to younger *bishōjo* and those available to older women. Kotani thus understands the concept of the *bishōjo* as belonging to "'the female culture' imagined by patriarchal society."[34] In her essay "Alien Spaces and Alien Bodies in Japanese Women's Science Fiction," she argues that it is difficult to identify feminist ideological agendas in contemporary Japanese science fiction. Male writers often characterize the feminine sphere as an abject "other" by rendering it as either subhuman or uncannily superhuman, while female writers "tend to focus on vivid mother-daughter conflicts," with the mother being as monstrous as anything appearing in male-authored narratives of combat and violence.[35] Although the work of popular female writers such as Hikawa Reiko and Matsuo Yumi[36] reflects an expanded range of social roles for women, Kotani still sees an emphasis on the role of woman as mother in the science fiction of female writers in the 1970s and 1980s. For these writers, motherhood provides possibilities for the exploration of shared homosocial experience; but Kotani contends that, as empowering as female homosociality can be, the focus on motherhood still confines an understanding of femininity within the limits of patriarchal expectations.

By the 1990s, *shōjo*-hood had joined motherhood as a discursive space for exploring female identity, but Kotani finds the *shōjo* culture represented by female writers and artists such as Arai Mokoto and Hagio Moto as confining as the literary culture of motherhood.[37] Further, Kotani reasons that the very concept of *shōjo* is defined through patriarchal constructs such as female virginity and the inevitability of heterosexual marriage. As a result of these patriarchal origins, the concept of *shōjo* is often linked, even in the work of female writers, to the trope of the monstrous feminine that is common in male-authored science fiction. In manga especially, Kotani argues, the recurring conflict between older and younger women often renders the older woman, who is sexually experienced but not sexually available, as monstrous. Meanwhile, the younger woman, who is sexually inexperienced, matures from an innocent *shōjo* who needs to be protected by a father figure into a more mature *bishōjo* on the cusp of sexual availability. If a *bishōjo* grows too powerful, however, or if her magical or psychic powers are too obviously "a conduit for anger and oppressed female sexuality," then "she is hunted" as a monstrous abnormality.[38] Even in the most radical of science fiction narratives in literature and manga, then, the two most dominant roles, the mother and the *shōjo*, are still governed by their relation to male sexuality.

Figure 1. The costumes of the teenage Sailor Scouts are decorated with bows and jewelry, and the uniform-themed outfit comes equipped with an extremely short skirt.

Anne Allison views the *bishōjo* of *Sailor Moon* as conforming to patriarchal expressions on a visual level as well. Unlike the super *sentai* teams on which they are based, "who don similar unisex uniforms when morphed [into superheroes, the Sailor Scouts] tend to strip down in the course of empowerment, becoming more, rather than less, identified by their flesh."[39] Allison also references the long legs and miniskirts of the transformed warriors when she mentions that, among certain circles of fandom,

Sailor Moon "is also read as a sex symbol—one that feeds and is fed by a general trend in Japan toward the infantilization of sex objects."[40] As Allison suggests, the sailor costumes of the original manga (Figure 1) have indeed been transmogrified into fetish fuel for male fans, who have portrayed the Sailor Scouts in every sexual situation imaginable in *dōjinshi* fan comics and on online image boards such as Futaba Channel.[41]

Shallow characterization and short skirts alone, however, do not make a work inherently sexist. As demonstrated by Comic Book Girl's passionate defense of the *Sailor Moon* manga, female fans of the series have found the costumes of its heroines an appealing and empowering symbol of youthful femininity.[42] Furthermore, as both the manga and the anime series progress past the first plot arc, Sailor Moon and her four friends are allowed to develop their individual talents, personalities, and bonds with one another. An openly lesbian couple joins the team in the form of Sailor Neptune and Sailor Uranus, and a transgender trio of celestial warriors, known as the Sailor Starlights, aid Sailor Moon during the final battles of the series. Non-normative sexual identities abound in *Sailor Moon*, as demonstrated by the loving and affectionate gay couple who serve as generals in an alien army that initially opposes Sailor Moon and her comrades, as well as supporting characters who fall in love across species boundaries. Both the anime and the manga versions of *Sailor Moon* treat these relationships and the characters involved in them in a natural manner. By devoting ample narrative attention to her diverse cast, Takeuchi Naoko manages to subvert the conventions of the *shōjo* manga that typically runs in *Nakayoshi*, which primarily features heteronormative romance, even as she overturns the conventions of male-oriented *bishōjo* fantasy stories, which tend to focus on a single female character with no strong relationships to other women.

Sailor Moon, in its ability to promote female fan identification with positive and dynamic representations of relationships between women, thus challenges Azuma's database model of narrative consumption while severely problematizing Saitō's understanding of the appeal of *bishōjo* characters. Although fans of the series continue to create transformative fanworks and to collect all manner of merchandise, *Sailor Moon* conforms to the conventions of genre only to later turn them upside down, and neither the manga nor the anime allows fans to become comfortable in a cocoon spun of recycled narrative and character tropes, as the manga in particular constantly challenges its readers with conflicts that have no easy resolution. Also, although various fanworks have demonstrated that male fans (and more than a few female fans) have been sexually titillated by the long legs and short skirts of the Sailor Scouts, fans of both sexes have engaged with the work and transformed its

characters from simple objects of polymorphous perversion on Saitō's plane of *riariti* into role models. As Brigid Alverson, a professional editor of Japanese and American graphic novels, writes on the cultural and artistic influence of the series, "Today, there are more female comics creators, working in more different styles, than ever before, and many of those creators got their start reading manga—and drawing their own. Sailor Moon not only saved the world, it seems, she created a new one."[43]

For many Japanese creators, however, the anxiety of influence generated by *Sailor Moon* was a heavy burden to bear. Although *Sailor Moon* overturned the tropes of *shōjo* romance and *bishōjo* fantasy, it popularized the tropes of the *mahō shōjo* genre.[44] In the wake of *Sailor Moon*, the effects of Azuma's database model went into overdrive as artists, editors, and anime studio executives started mixing and matching the elements of *Sailor Moon* and the various magical girl titles that had preceded it. Derivative manga, such as Yazawa Nao's *Wedding Peach* (1994–96, *Ai tenshi densetsu wedingu piichi*) and Tanemura Arina's *Kamikaze Kaito Jeanne* (1998–2000, *Kamikaze kaitō Jannu*), sprang up immediately, while popular anime franchises such as *Tenchi Muyō!* quickly developed magical girl spinoff series, such as *Magical Girl Pretty Sammy* (1995–97, *Mahō shōjo Puriti Samī*). Many of these new magical girl series merely recycled the more easily digestible elements of the *Sailor Moon* manga and anime in an endlessly looping cycle of character tropes and plot devices. However, *Magic Knight Rayearth*, one of the very few magical girl series from the 1990s to survive without ever going out of print in Japan or North America, effectively broke the cycle of narrative consumption and reproduction, both for its creators and for its audience. Building on the challenge *Sailor Moon* issued to patriarchal constructions of both *shōjo* and *bishōjo* characters and fandom cultures, the creators of *Magic Knight Rayearth* employed a female gaze not only to empower its characters and readers but also to critique the misogynistic tropes common to many science fiction and fantasy narratives centered on *shōjo*.

It Can't End Like This: Breaking the *Bishōjo* Mold in *Magic Knight Rayearth*
The serialized fantasy manga *Magic Knight Rayearth* ran in *Nakakyoshi* from November 1993 to February 1995. To capitalize on the success of the magical girl series *Sailor Moon*, the magazine's editors hired the all-woman fledgling creative team CLAMP, whose debut series *RG Veda* was enjoying a successful run in a monthly Shinshokan publication called *Wings* that also targeted an audience of teenage girls.[45] Like *Sailor Moon*, *Magic Knight Rayearth* is a *shōjo* manga featuring many conventions of the magical girl genre. Its three

heroines are garbed in fantastic school uniforms that undergo a series of transformations as the girls become more powerful. Also, like Sailor Moon and her friends, the heroines of *Magic Knight Rayearth* are able to attack their enemies and heal their own injuries with flashy elemental magic spells. The work exhibits clear influences from other genres as well, such as *mecha* (giant robot) action and fantasy adventure. Over the course of their adventures in the fantasy world of Cephiro, the three girls must revive three giant robots called *mashin*, which will aid them in their final battle against their enemies. The sword-and-sorcery elements of the title seem to be borrowed directly from adventure stories such as the manga *Saint Seiya* (1986–91, *Seinto Seiya*) and the *The Slayers* (1989–2000, *Sureiyāzu*) series of young adult novels. The manner in which the weapons, armor, and magic of the three heroines "level up" (in power) through the accumulation of battle experience is drawn from role-playing video game franchises such as Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest. Although *Magic Knight Rayearth* seems to have been shaped from a combination of elements drawn from genres targeted at boys,[46] its ornate artistic style and narrative focus on the friendship of three adolescent girls place the work firmly in the realm of *shōjo* manga.

The character tropes represented by the three heroines of the series also resonate with the traditions of *shōjo* manga. Hikaru, the leader of the team of fourteen-year-old warriors, is characterized as pure-hearted and innocent. She never hesitates to help her friends despite the danger to herself, and she trusts others implicitly. No matter how perilous the circumstances the girls encounter, Hikaru's hope, trust, and naiveté are unflinchingly portrayed in a positive light, just as similar qualities are in *Sailor Moon*. Umi, a long-haired beauty, is an *ojōsan*, or well-bred young lady, from a wealthy family. As such, she is used to getting her way and more willing to question her circumstances and the motivations of others than is the girlish Hikaru. Instead of being portrayed as experienced and savvy, however, Umi's skepticism comes off as foolish and bratty as she occasionally endangers her two friends and must be gently pulled back into line by Hikaru's emotional generosity. Fū is the *meganekko*, or "girl with glasses," of the group. As such, she is demure in her interactions with other characters and speaks in an unusually formal and polite manner. Fū is enrolled in a prestigious middle school in Tokyo, and the other characters comment on how intelligent she is. Although Fū manages to solve many of the riddles the three girls encounter in Cephiro, her deductive acumen is no match for the pure heart and magical intuition of Hikaru. Like *Sailor Moon*, *Magic Knight Rayearth* valorizes girlish innocence, trust, and emotional openness. All obstacles can be overcome by the strength

of the friendship between a small team of teenage warriors, whose battle prowess derives not from training or innate skill but from the purity of their hearts.

Hikari, Umi, and Fū are summoned from Tokyo to the fantasy world of Cephiro by a fellow *shōjo*, Princess Emeraude. The opening page of the manga presents the reader with a single glowing flower suspended in space. At the heart of this flower is a young girl with long, flowing robes and hair. The following page reveals that she is crying. "Save us" (*tasukete*) are her first words, and as she summons the Magic Knights, a beam of light emerges from an enormous glowing jewel that ornaments the circlet she wears. In a dramatic two-page spread (Figure 2), the girl looks directly at the reader, still entreating someone to "save us." This girl is Princess Emeraude, the "Pillar" (*hashira*) of Cephiro who supports the world with the strength and purity of her prayers. In Cephiro, one is able to magically transform the world according to the pow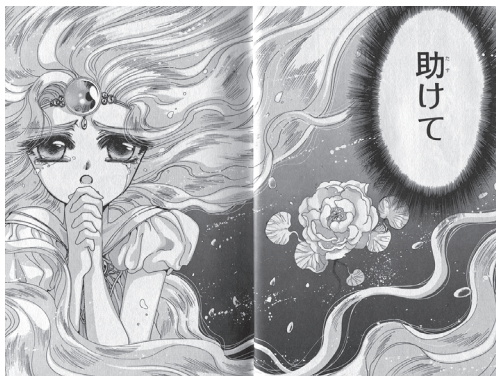er of one's will. Emeraude, who possesses the strongest will in Cephiro, maintains peace and stability through a daily ritual of virtuous prayers for the continued prosperity of the land. Unfortunately, since she has apparently become the captive of her high priest, an imposing man in black armor named Zagato, Emeraude is no longer able act as the Pillar of Cephiro, and the world is crumbling. She thus summons the three Magic Knights to save her and, by extension, Cephiro.

Figure 2. Princess Emeraude in the opening pages of *Magic Knight Rayearth*.

Princess Emeraude is a quintessential *shōjo*. She is delicate, fragile, and beautiful, just like the flower in which she is imprisoned. She is gentle and kind, yet possesses a great strength of will. Her undulating robes and hair associate her with water, and it is suggested that she is imprisoned beneath the sea. Like water (which is often associated with femininity in anime and manga), Emeraude appears outwardly weak in terms of stature and musculature and exerts her will through nonviolent methods. Her wide eyes, which often brim with tears, reflect the open and unguarded state of her interior world, and she innocently trusts the Magic Knights while still attempting to see the goodness within the man who has supposedly imprisoned her. Princess Emeraude is similar in both appearance and disposition to *Sailor Moon*'s Princess Serenity (Figure 3), who also embodies the *shōjo* ideals of loving kindness and gentle compassion.
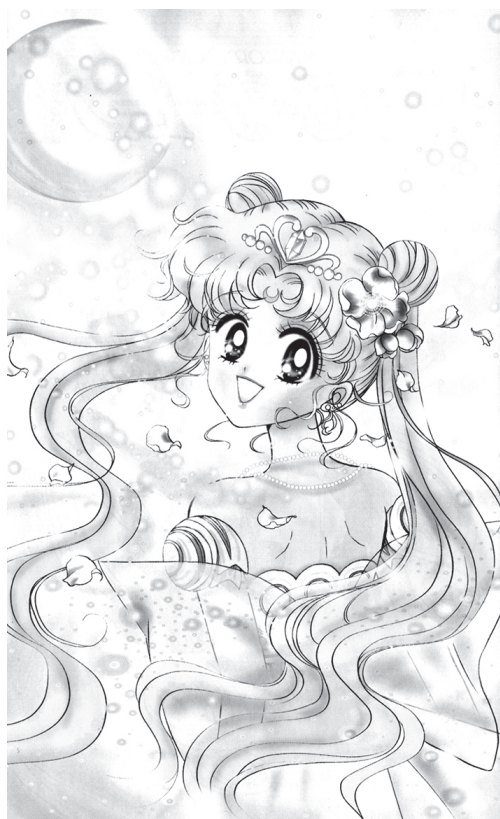
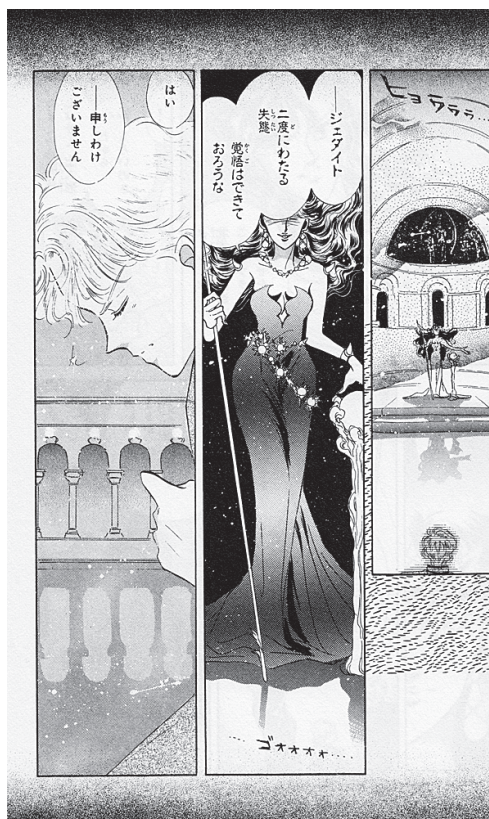Figure 3. The angelic and pure-hearted *shōjo* Princess Serenity.

Figure 4. Queen Beryl prepares to punish one of her generals for his failure to defeat the Sailor Scouts. Telling him that he has failed twice, she informs him that he must "face the consequences."

In *Sailor Moon*, at the opposite end of the *shōjo* spectrum from the childlike Princess Serenity is her arch-nemesis, Queen Beryl. While Princess Serenity rules passively, inspiring her subjects with her friendliness and generosity, Queen Beryl is hungry for power and has seized control over Princess Serenity's Moon Kingdom through political machinations, deceit, and powerful magic. By the opening of *Sailor Moon*, Beryl has focused her attentions on the neighboring planet of Earth, where she sends her generals to subdue the populace and gather energy that she will use to awake an even greater source of magical power. The first time the reader sees Queen Beryl in the second chapter of the *Sailor Moon* manga (Figure 4), she is in her audience chamber disciplining the general who had previously been defeated by Sailor Moon. Unlike Sailor Moon, who is later revealed to be a reincarnation of Princess Serenity, Queen Beryl is in no way girlish. She is a mature woman, and her full-bodied figure is wrapped in a seductively alluring dress.

In either hand she wields a phallic symbol of power, and her male general bows before her. In direct contrast to the enormous eyes of Sailor Moon and her teammates, Queen Beryl's eyes are narrow and shaded. It is Queen Beryl's lack of innocence that marks her as evil, just as much as her adult sexuality and aggressive wielding of political and military power. The value systems represented by Queen Beryl and Sailor Moon cannot exist in the same universe; and, in the *shōjo* fantasy of *Sailor Moon*, the universe belongs to the woman with unguarded eyes and a pure heart. This portrayal of the female villain as dangerous because of her mature sexuality is intensely problematic from a feminist perspective and recalls the common sci-fi dichotomy between the pure virgin and evil mother alluded to by feminist critics such as Susan Napier and Kotani Mari.

In the last chapter of *Beautiful Fighting Girl*, Saitō Tamaki explains that "subcultural forms . . . seduce and bewitch us with their uncompromising superficiality. They may not be able to portray 'complex personalities,' but they certainly do produce 'fascinating types.' The beautiful fighting girl, of course, is none other than one of those types."[47] Another primary type is the demonic older woman, the dark shadow cast by the unrelenting purity of the *bishōjo*. As a psychoanalyst, Saitō identifies this character type as the phallic mother, an expression "used to describe a woman who behaves authoritatively. The phallic mother symbolizes a kind of omnipotence and perfection."[48] Words like "omnipotence" and "perfection" just as easily describe *bishōjo* characters such as Sailor Moon, but in the realm of *shōjo* manga, these qualities become signifiers of danger and villainy when applied to adult women. The concept of "phallic" is of course threatening, but so, too, is the concept of "mother." In her discussion of *shōjo* horror manga, Hiromi Tsuchiya Dollase notes a clear trend concerning the abjection of the mother, especially through the narrative eyes of daughters, who "have seen the struggle of their mothers and the tragedy that they endured in patriarchal domesticity."[49] For a teenage female audience, an adult woman is both a frightening and pathetic creature. Her adult body is useless in the heterosexual economy of desire, her anger and frustration can change nothing, and any power she wields is unreliable and often misdirected. For such a woman, who has lost both her innocence and emotional clarity, "phallic" power is a dangerous thing that dooms her to the almost certain status of villainhood.[50]

The three heroines of *Magic Knight Rayearth* must fight two such women in order to save Cephiro. The first of these women, Alcyone (Figure 5), is a twisted perversion of Princess Emeraude. Like Emeraude, Alcyone is associated with water, and the reader first sees her emerging from under a waterfall. Her long hair and cape cascade around her body
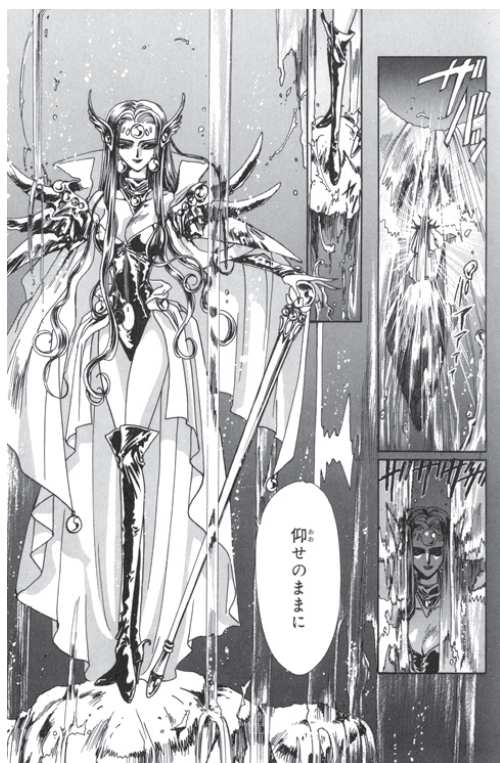
Figure 5. The sorceress Alcyone responds to Zagato's command to hunt down the Magic Knights with a self-assured "As you wish."
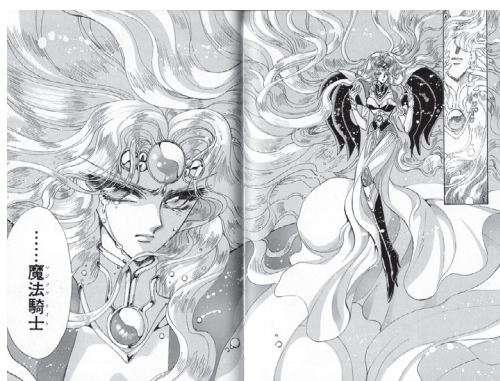

Figure 6. Princess Emeraude in the closing pages of *Magic Knight Rayearth*.

as Emeraude's do. Alcyone also has a large circular jewel ornamenting her forehead as Emeraude does and, like Emeraude, she possesses a strong will and is skilled in the use of magic. Unlike Emeraude, however, Alcyone is evil and must be defeated by the Magic Knights. The primary difference between Alcyone and Emeraude is that, whereas Emeraude is portrayed as an innocent child, Alcyone radiates adult sexuality, which is apparent in her revealing costume and condescending flirtation. Alcyone attacks the Magic Knights on the orders of Zagato, and after the Magic Knights vanquish her, they learn that she has done everything from developing her power to aiding the downfall of Cephiro because she is in love with him.

Alcyone, a sexually and emotionally mature woman, is thus characterized as evil simply because she is in love with a man despite the fact that she is no longer an innocent and virginal *shōjo*. The long, jewel-tipped staff that Alcyone carries and the ornamentation on her armor mark the character as a phallic mother, or a powerful woman who is ultimately rendered pathetic because of her inability to successfully wield her power and attract the attention of the man she desires.

Second, in the final pages of *Magic Knight Rayearth*, Hikau, Umi, and Fū must fight Emeraude herself, for Emeraude is also in love with Zagato. Because she has fallen in love, Emeraude's purity of heart and strength of will are compromised, and she can no longer act as the Pillar of Cephiro. Since no one in Cephiro can kill her, and since she

cannot kill herself, she has imprisoned herself and summoned the Magic Knights so that they can save Cephiro by destroying her and thereby releasing her from her responsibilities, for it is only with her death that a new Pillar can support Cephiro.

By falling into a sexualized love with a man, Emeraude has renounced her sexually untainted *shōjo* status. When the Magic Knights finally find her, the princess no longer appears as a child but instead displays the body of an adult woman (Figure 6). Emeraude's adult body represents both her personal selfishness—as expressed by her wish to devote herself just as much to her personal desires as to the welfare of the wider world—and her willingness to use her immense power to achieve her individual and "selfish" goals. The two-page spread in which the reader first encounters Emeraude as an adult mirrors the scene in which Emeraude first appears as a child. Emeraude still floats in a watery space, and she completes her first phrase, "Please save us" with the target of her plea, "Magic Knights." Instead of appearing metaphorically as a flower, however, Emeraude's full body is displayed, and her white robes are encased in black armor. Emeraude has thus been transformed into a phallic mother like Queen Beryl and Alcyone, and the tears in her eyes represent her anger, an impure emotion that is ineffectual against the combined powers of the Magic Knights, who are, it turns out, doomed to succeed in carrying out their mission.

The demonic phallic mother is thus defeated by the pure-hearted *bishōjo*, an outcome that would never be in doubt to a genre-savvy reader. In *Magic Knight Rayearth*, however, a happy ending is not forthcoming. Hikaru, Umi, and Fū are shocked by what they have done, and the manga ends abruptly with their realization that they are murderers. In the closing pages of the story, Princess Emeraude dissolves into light, and the three Magic Knight are suddenly back in Tokyo, crying in each other's arms. The manga closes with Hikaru
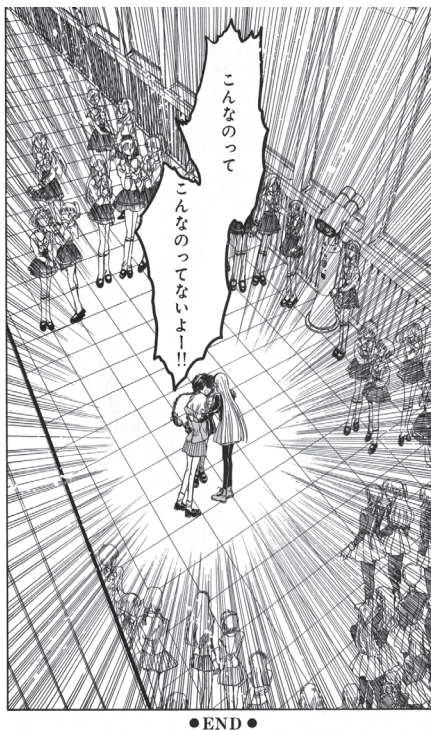

Figure 7. The final page of *Magic Knight Rayearth*. After finding herself and her friends back in Tokyo after defeating Princess Emeraude, Hikaru screams, "It can't end like this!"

screaming, "It can't end like this!" (Figure 7), and yet it does end like this. Youth and innocence have defeated maturity and adult sexuality, as the conventions of *shōjo* romance and *bishōjo* fantasy dictate, but no one is happy. In fact, this outcome is quite traumatic both for the victors and for the reader who has witnessed their victory.

By upsetting the reader, CLAMP also upsets the narrative cycle in which character tropes and story patterns are endlessly recycled. In its antagonistic and confrontational dynamic between virginal *shōjo* and sexually mature women, *Magic Knight Rayearth* mimics the narrative patterns that have preceded it in series such as *Sailor Moon*. However, by representing this character dynamic as tragic, CLAMP critiques the misogynistic tendency in anime and manga to villainize older women who possess both sexual maturity and political power. Although the older woman must still die, the emotional pain caused by the manga's refusal to allow closure to the characters or the readers demonstrates the damage caused by this trope from the perspective of a female gaze that sees women as subjects capable of growth and change rather than as mere objects to be discarded once they are past their sexual prime.

The final volumes of the *Sailor Moon* manga involve a similar conflict. At a moment of great crisis, Sailor Moon travels back in time from several centuries in the future to ask her teenage self to abandon a fight whose outcome will have devastating repercussions for the rest of her life. In addition to overcoming the enemy laying siege to the solar system, the teenage Sailor Moon must thus struggle to overcome the despair of her adult self, namely, a woman who has assumed the roles of both mother and political ruler. Sailor Moon does not fight her adult self but rather resolves the conflict by renouncing her innocent and self-sacrificing *shōjo* status and making the deliberately selfish choice of privileging her own personal desires over the fate of the entirety of the known universe.[51]

Just as female fans of *Sailor Moon* are able to find messages of feminist empowerment in the series instead of polymorphously perverse possibilities for sexual titillation, so female creators such as those who make up CLAMP are able to stage feminist critiques of real-world sexual economies of desire within their application of gendered narrative tropes. Therefore, when cultural theorists such as Ōtsuka, Azuma, and Saitō discuss otaku immersing themselves in fantasies that have nothing to do with the real world, they acknowledge *bishōjo* series such as *Sailor Moon* and *Magic Knight Rayearth* but fail to take into account the female viewers, readers, and creators for whom fictional female characters are not removed from social and political realities. Such theorists take the male gaze for granted, and their readings of anime, manga, video games, and

light novels, as well as their opinions concerning the communities of fans that consume them, are therefore phallocentric. The ideology supporting the passage of the Tokyo Youth Ordinance Bill discussed at the beginning of this essay also suffers from the same paradigm of "men as consumers, women as consumed" that severely limits the narrative theories of media scholars concerned only with the minds and reactions of male readers and viewers.

Within the communities of women who consume and produce popular narratives, however, the female gaze is alive and well. This female gaze not only allows female readers to see celebrations of empowered female homosociality in works that would otherwise be dismissed as misogynistic, but it also serves as a critical tool for female creators such as Takeuchi Naoko and CLAMP, who seek to overturn clichéd tropes and narrative patterns both as a means of telling stories that will appeal to an audience of women and as a means of feminist critique. *Sailor Moon* and *Magic Knight Rayearth* demonstrate how female creators are able to reinscribe gendered tropes in a manner that overturns sexist notions of femininity while still appealing to a broad and diverse audience. Gender tropes can therefore serve as much more than narrative architecture, and readers of all genders can find a great deal of appeal in stories that offer a pointed critique of the narrative refusal to see female characters as nothing more than the objects of male discourse and desire.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. Hiroko Tabuchi, "In Tokyo, a Crackdown on Sexual Images of Minors," *The New York Times* (February 9, 2011), http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/10/business/global/10manga.html (accessed August 30, 2014). Tabuchi, a graduate of London School of Economics and Political Science, has worked as a foreign correspondent covering social issues in Japan for *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*. She a member of the NYT team awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 2013 for reporting on Apple's manufacturing practices in China, and her work focuses on social and economic issues in Asia.

2. The Tokyo Youth Ordinance Act cannot be invoked to ban any manga that falls under its jurisdiction. Rather, a manga deemed "obscene" by the law would be removed from general circulation and display and placed into the adult-oriented section of a bookstore or other retail outlet.

3. Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* is not without sexual connotations and has been read as an exploration of adolescent sexuality replete with Freudian symbolism. As an exemplar of the literary nonsense genre, however, the work is emblematic of an equation between young women and fantasy worlds that has been capitalized on by many storytellers, such as the directors of Disney Animation Productions.

4. The argument that women have internalized the male gaze has been made by Laura Mulvey herself in Roberta Sassatelli, "Interview with Laura Mulvey: Gender, Gaze and Technology in Film Culture," *Theory, Culture & Society* 28, no. 5 (2011): 127. In an oft-quoted essay on the *Salon* website titled "The Female Gaze," comedian Eileen Kelly describes the process by which women evaluate the appearance of other women, exercising the conventions of a borrowed male gaze to gauge the physical, mental, and emotional health of their friends and acquaintances (January 30, 2003), http://www.salon.com/2003/01/30/gaze_3/ (accessed December 20, 2014). With the release of the Hollywood films based on Stephanie Meyers's *Twilight* series of young adult paranormal romance novels, film critics began to acknowledge a female gaze that sexualizes male bodies. A representative essay is Owen Gleiberman's "'Eclipse': Shrewdly retro or just backward? You decide!," *Entertainment Weekly* (July 2, 2010), http://insidemovies.ew.com/2010/07/02/eclipse-retro-or-just-backward/ (accessed December 20, 2014).

5. In common Japanese usage, an otaku is understood to be male. A female fan of male-oriented media may be referred to as an *otaku joshi*, or "girl otaku," while BL fans self-identify as *fujoshi*, or "rotten girls." In overseas usage, "otaku" is a more general term that can apply to a male or female, as evidenced by the title of the bi-monthly American periodical *Otaku USA*. Even in Japan, however, there are variations in how the otaku label is applied. See Patrick W. Galbraith and Androniki Christodoulou, *Otaku Spaces* (Seattle: Chin Music Press, 2012).

6. Ōtsuka Eiji, "World and Variation: The Reproduction and Consumption of Narrative," translated by Marc Steinberg, in Frenchy Lunning, ed., *Mechademia 5: Fanthropologies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 106.

7. Ibid., 107.

8. Ibid., 109.

9. In *Anime from "Akira" to "Howl's Moving Castle": Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), Susan Napier makes an original and compelling argument that male viewers identify with *bishōjo* characters, specifically with the freedom from social constraints and adult responsibilities they represent. Each of the theorists discussed acknowledges that the consumption of young female characters by heterosexual male viewers is multi-faceted and not purely a matter of prurient interest.

10. Azuma Hiroki, *Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan: Otaku kara mita Nihon shakai* (Tokyo: Kōdansha Gendai Shinsho, 2001), translated by Jonathan E. Abel and Shion Kono as *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 33.

11. Azuma, *Otaku*, trans. Abel and Kono, 36.

12. A major element of polymorphous perversity, especially in its Freudian application, is its association with immature sexuality and antisocial behavior. Otaku have been accused of both by cultural theorists and society at large, especially after the infamous "otaku murders" perpetuated

by Miyazaki Tsutomu in 1995. See Murakami Takashi, ed., *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005).

13. The character Mori Yuki, the only female member of the cast of the 1974 animated series *Space Battleship Yamato* (*Uchū senkan Yamato*), is often cited by Japanese media historians and theorists such as Azuma and Saitō as one of the most popular *bishōjo* characters, although American manga critics such as Frederick Schodt and Jason Thompson generally consider the prototype of the *bishōjo* to be the heroine of Tezuka Osamu's *Princess Knight* (*Ribon no kishi*) manga, which completed its original run in 1956.

14. The "so-called Lolita complex" to which Saitō refers is the accusation, often from foreign observers, that Japanese men are unduly attracted to prepubescent girls, as evidenced by the stylized representations common to many pornographic and semi-pornographic manga, anime, video games, visual novels, and related media.

15. Tamaki Saitō, *Beautiful Fighting Girl*, foreword by Hiroki Azuma, trans. J. Keith Vincent and Dawn Lawson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 6, 7.

16. Ibid., 9.

17. Ibid., 24.

18. Ibid., 156.

19. Ibid., 162.

20. Ibid., 151.

21. The blog title "Fighting Evil By Moonlight" is taken from the opening line of the English-language theme song of the North American release of the first season of the *Sailor Moon* animated series.

22. Henshins, "I Don't Write Much about Sailor Moon," *Fighting Evil By Moonlight* (September 13, 2011), http://henshins.tumblr.com/post/10180196614/i-dont-write-much-about-sailor-moon-1991-for (accessed May 25, 2014).

23. Anne Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 131.

24. Ibid., 128.

25. An example of these spinoff magazines is *Run-Run*, in which Takeuchi Naoko serialized the manga that would become the prequel to *Sailor Moon*, namely, *Codename Sailor V* (1991–97, *Kōdo nēmu wa Sērā V*). Such spinoff magazines are used by their parent company, Kōdansha, to develop new talent while diversifying and saturating the market for *shōjo* manga.

26. Saitō lists a number of examples of such *bishōjo*, including Sailor Moon and Nausicaä, in the fifth chapter of his *Beautiful Fighting Girl*, titled "A Genealogy of the Beautiful Fighting Girl."

27. As is often the case with online communities, it is impossible to accurately identify the nationality of participants. Although the writers quoted in this essay self-identify as American or Canadian, the English-speaking *Sailor Moon* fandom is diverse and is spread out across a countless number of personal websites, blogs, fan fiction and fan art hosting sites, message boards, and social media profile pages. Although many manga artists acknowledge their debt to *Sailor Moon* in interviews, on their personal blogs, and on Twitter, Japanese websites are much more ephemeral than the majority of English-language websites, and the fan response to *Sailor Moon*

can be more clearly appreciated within the *dōjinshi* fan comics that have continued to appear since the manga first began serialization. A reading of these texts falls outside the scope of this essay, but many *josei-muke* (drawn by women for an ostensibly female readership) *dōjinshi* based on the *Sailor Moon* manga and anime series have emphasized the friendship and potential romantic and sexual relationships between the female characters.

28. Comic Book Girl, "Gushing about the *Sailor Moon* manga rerelease and feminism," *Adventures of Comic Book Girl* (March 22, 2011), http://nevermore999.livejournal.com/132687.html (accessed May 25, 2014).

29. In her *Cinderella Ate My Daughter: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the New Girlie-Girl Culture* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), Peggy Orenstein details the sociological implications of the Disney Princess movies and marketing campaigns, which extend far beyond the properties of the Disney Corporation and the play of preteen girls.

30. A fansub is a pirated Japanese-language video subtitled by a non-professional volunteer team of translators. Fansubs are distributed through unsearchable online torrenting sites whose addresses are passed from fan to fan at events such as local or university anime club meetings. A scanlation is a scan of a Japanese manga which is translated, edited, and lettered by a group of fans. Before digital manga became widely available on e-readers such as the iPad and the Kindle, scanlations were hosted by publicly searchable sites such as One Manga and Manga Fox.

31. However, Saitō, in the chapter of his *Beautiful Fighting Girl* detailing responses to his email surveys of Western anime fandom, cites male anime fans as ridiculing *Sailor Moon* for being childish, formulaic, and boring.

32. Susan Napier, "Vampires, Psychic Girls, Flying Women and Sailor Scouts: Four Faces of the Young Female in Japanese Popular Culture," in Dolores P. Martinez, ed., *The Worlds of Japanese Popular Culture: Gender, Shifting Boundaries and Global Cultures* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 103, 104.

33. Ibid., 99.

34. Kotani Mari, "Alien Spaces and Alien Bodies in Japanese Women's Science Fiction," trans. Miri Nakamura, in Christopher Bolton et al., eds., *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams: Japanese Science Fiction from Origins to Anime* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 54.

35. Ibid., 48.

36. Hikawa Reiko (b. 1958) made her debut in 1988 and is known for her sword-and-sorcery fantasy series, and Matsuo Yumi (b. 1960) is the author of the short story "Murder in Balloon Town" (1992, *Barūn Taun no satsujin*), which is representative of her fascination with the exploration of off-kilter social experiments and the psyches of quirky characters who defy mainstream social expectations.

37. Arai Mokoto (b. 1960) is an author of science fiction young adult novels who made her debut in 1978, and Hagio Moto (b. 1949) is a celebrated creator of *shōjo* manga known especially for her work in the subgenre of *shōnen-ai* (homoerotic stories of young men).

38. Kotani, "Alien Spaces and Alien Bodies," 58.

39. Allison, *Millennial Monsters*, 129.

40. Ibid., 133.

41. Futaba Channel (http://www.2chan.net/), an offshoot of the anonymous message board 2channel (http://2ch.net/), is a website hosting several boards to which users can post images and responses anonymously. Like 2channel, Futaba Channel is home to many otaku subcultures; and, due to its nature as a host for image boards, the website is known for its illustrated pornographic content.

42. Not only female fans but more than a few male fans have done so as well. Veteran *shōjo* manga translator Matt Thorn calls the *Sailor Moon* series a "miraculous asset" to the development of a manga readership in North America in his blog post "The TokyoPop Effect," *Matt Thorn's Blog* (April 22, 2011), http://matt-thorn.com/wordpress/?p=495 (accessed May 12, 2014).

43. Brigid Alverson, "Sailor Moon 101: Pretty, Powerful, And Pure Of Heart," *MTV Geek!* (May 27, 2011), http://geek-news.mtv.com/2011/05/27/sailor-moon-101-pretty-powerful-and-pure-of-heart/ (accessed May 12, 2014).

44. The *mahō shōjo*, or "magical girl," genre was popular long before *Sailor Moon*, as demonstrated by animated television shows for young girls such as *Mahōtsukai Sarī* (1966–68, *Sally the Witch*), *Himitsu no Akko-chan* (1969–70, *The Secrets of Akko*), *Majokko Megu-chan* (1974–75, *Meg the Little Witch Girl*), and so on. For more information about the development of the *mahō shōjo* in Japanese media and its relation to changing notions of femininity and female social roles, see Sugawa Akiko, *Shōjo to mahō: Gāru hiirō wa ika ni juyō sareta no ka* (Girls and magic: Representations of magical girls and Japanese female viewership), (Tokyo: NTT shuppan, 2013).

45. For information on CLAMP's debut, see *All About CLAMP* (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 2009), 205, 219. Dark Horse Comics editor Carl Horn has written about how CLAMP was scouted by Kōdansha editor Irie Yoshio, who also brought Takeuchi Naoko into the pages of *Nakayoshi*. See Carl Horn, "Swords and Sorcery—Shojo Style!" *Dark Horse Blog* (June 23, 2011), http://www.darkhorse.com/Blog/465/swords-and-sorceryshojo-style-carl-horn (accessed May 12, 2014). See also Jennifer S. Prough, *Straight from the Heart: Gender, Intimacy, and the Cultural Production of Shōjo Manga* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010).

46. Such genres tended to be targeted at boys and young men before the mid-1990s. Due to the widespread popularity of *shōjo* titles such as *Sailor Moon* and *Magic Knight Rayearth* among a young female audience, however, these genres came to be marketed to girls as well. This shift in demographic targeting can be seen in the pervasiveness of the screen-tone heavy and large-eyed *shōjo* art style, the proliferation of attractive male *bishōnen* characters, and the increase in prominent female characters in the anime, manga, video games, and light novels of the late 1990s.

47. Saitō, *Beautiful Fighting Girl*, 146.

48. Ibid., 159.

49. Hiromi Tsuchiya Dollase, "*Shōjo* Spirits in Horror Manga," *U.S.–Japan Women's Journal* 38 (2010): 65.

50. An alternate explanation for this narrative tendency is that, as in *shōnen* series in which the young and inexperienced male heroes must continually face off against older, battle-hardened, and politically astute male opponents, the opponents of action-oriented *shōjo* series must be older women with more worldly experience. In other words, if the perfect rival for a male *shōnen* hero is an older man, then it only stands to reason that the perfect rival for a female *shōjo* hero is an

older woman. From this point of view, younger women fighting older women is not a sexist narrative trope but in fact feminist in its assertion that female characters can fill the narrative roles of both hero and villain. Such an argument is complicated by the obvious sexuality of older female villains, which is common not merely in *mahō shōjo* stories but also in *shōnen* action manga and *shōjo* romance. In fact, Kanako Shiokawa has written that manga readers "know that upon seeing very tall and beautiful women dripping in adult sexuality, one should run like hell because these characters are invariably deadly and evil." See Shiokawa, "Cute But Deadly: Women and Violence in Japanese Comics," in John A. Lent, ed., *Themes and Issues in Asian Cartooning: Cute, Cheap, Mad, and Sexy* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Press, 1999), 119.

51. Since the *Sailor Moon* manga concluded two years after the immensely popular *Magic Knight Rayearth* manga, it is possible that the ending of *Sailor Moon* was conceived as a reaction to the ending of *Magic Knight Rayearth* or to its much darker sequel, which was serialized in *Nakayoshi* from March 1995 to April 1996.