

GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN SHOUJO MANGA: UNDOING HETERONORMATIVE
EXPECTATIONS IN UTENA, PET SHOP OF HORRORS, AND ANGEL SANCTUARY

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines how gender and sexuality operate within English-language translations of shoujo manga, the genre of Japanese comic books that are marketed for young female audiences. This study uses the theoretical work of Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, and Judith Halberstam to do an explicitly queer, feminist close reading of *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, *Pet Shop of Horrors*, and *Angel Sanctuary*, three manga titles whose protagonists perform their own genders and sexualities in ways that run counter to or subvert heterosexual expectations. It argues that dislocating shoujo manga titles from their Japanese context, which constructs gender and sexuality in ways that are different from how gender and sexuality are constructed within the United States, provides a space in which heteronormative constructions of gender and sexuality are challenged or questioned, and suggests that English translations of Japanese manga titles provides rich grounds for rethinking gender and sexuality.

For Mom and Dad, who always knew I could do it—
even if they weren't entirely sure what "it" was.

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INTRODUCTION

When I was very young, I was devoted to the cartoon series that was broadcast in the United States as *Voltron*—or so my parents tell me. *Voltron* was a series that focused on a team of heroes who piloted a set of robots that could combine into a single larger robot. Using this giant robot, which was armed with a blazing sword, they fought a set of villains bent on (what else?) conquering the world. My parents tell me that I never missed an episode if I could help it. They also assure me that I was very emphatic about the phrase “braising sword” (“blazing sword” as rendered by a toddler) as well as “And I’ll form the head” (the phrase which the leader of the heroes used whenever the individual robots joined together to form the larger robot). I have to take their word for it, as I am sad to say that I don’t remember much from this age other than the general sense of awe I experienced while sitting, rapt, before the television.

This early passion of mine—one that many children of the eighties shared—may have seemed unremarkable at the time, but it set the stage for an interest that I returned to later in my life. The series that U. S. audiences knew as *Voltron* was actually adapted from two *anime* (Japanese animation) series that were edited for content and dubbed into English. It was also my first exposure to Japanese animation. We could make the argument (whimsically, of course) that this early exposure to Japanese animation is what shaped my taste in the years to come. Although I had left *Voltron* behind by the time I reached kindergarten, in high school I became a fan of the English dub of *Sailor Moon*, another anime series. Later, when I started college and gained access to the campus’s high-speed internet, I soon discovered that there was an even wider array of anime to be had than was currently being broadcast in the U. S. And I, as they say, never looked back.

Anime and Manga for the Nonfan

U. S. audiences who are unfamiliar with anime and its counterpart *manga* (Japanese comics or

graphic novels) often do not understand the appeal that anime and manga hold for their fans. This confusion is fairly natural, especially since many people remain unfamiliar with the traits that set anime and manga apart from Western-style cartoons. U. S. audiences are generally familiar with two types of cartoons, those that are geared for young audiences and those that are aimed at mature audiences. Cartoons that are meant for children may be gag- or humor-oriented (e.g. *SpongeBob Squarepants*) or educational (*Dora the Explorer*). Although they generally feature a set cast of characters, there is very little (if any) plot continuity from episode to episode. Cartoons aimed at adult or mature audiences, such as *The Simpsons* or *South Park*, tend to feature satirical, topical, or scatological humor. Like the cartoons aimed at the child demographic, there is very little continuity or character development from episode to episode of these adult-oriented cartoons. Bart Simpson remains the same bratty, troublemaking pre-adolescent now that he was when the series premiered in 1989, and the primary purpose of cartoons in U. S. popular culture is humorous.

Susan J. Napier's book, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle*, notes that one of the key differences that set anime apart from Western animation is that "anime works include everything that Western audiences are accustomed to seeing in live-action films—romance, comedy, adventure, even psychological probing of a kind seldom attempted in recent mass-culture Western film or television" (6-7). Thus, one of the first main differences in anime is its subject matter: some anime series follow the romantic adventures or misadventures of its protagonists; others may focus on political drama. Still other series adhere to the conventions of science fiction, fantasy, or horror—and, of course, there is even a thriving subgenre of pornographic (*hentai* or *ecchi*) anime. The variety of subject matter and genre present in anime makes it more akin to U. S. live action television shows, which is one reason many people are

attracted to anime. Indeed, rather than compare anime to U. S. cartoons, many anime series are more akin to cable series like *The Wire* or *The Sopranos*, which have definite plot arcs and dynamic characters, or with network television's *Lost*, which has a team of writers with a definite vision and ultimate goal for the series. Most anime series have an overarching plot for each season that airs, and many possess plots that are intricate and thoroughly developed. Anime series often contain discrete story arcs that trace the development and growth of the characters. A given season of an anime will also likely end with a climactic resolution rather than a cliffhanger. This forethought makes the stories attractive to audiences who may be bored with U. S.-style television shows that are renewed season after season (as long as the ratings stay high), as well as audiences who are interested in stories that are told well and characters who are multi-faceted and dynamic.

Manga shares many of the qualities of anime; indeed, many of the most successful anime series are adaptations of popular manga series. Manga is akin to Western-style comic books; manga titles are generally published weekly or monthly in serialized form, and later collected in larger edited volumes (*tankoubon*), much as many Western titles are. The main difference between manga and Western comics is mostly a matter of who reads them. In the U. S., most comics and graphic novels remain a niche market, aside from a few titles that manage to go (relatively) mainstream, like *Watchmen* or *Sandman*. Titles like *Maus* or *Persepolis* are often identified as being literary *in spite of* their format, rather than because of it. Many U. S. comics are enjoying a renaissance in popular culture, thanks to Hollywood's adaptations of popular series like *Spiderman*, *Batman*, and *The X-Men*. However, the audiences who flock to see Tobey Maguire as Spiderman or Hugh Jackman as Wolverine aren't necessarily going to follow through by picking up the comic books that inspired the movies. One of the barriers to entering Western

comics fandom stems from the decades of back issues and conflicting or contradictory storylines that new fans must find a way of negotiating, not to mention the cost involved that can be incurred in doing so. In addition to this, many of the fans who enjoyed the movie *Spiderman* and the subsequent adaptations that followed it are female, and U. S. comics fandom is an environment that, for a multitude of reasons, is not always precisely welcoming to female readers.

Manga, on the other hand, has its place within a culture that is more visually-oriented than the U. S. is, and is therefore more friendly to stories told in the form of graphic novels. In her excellent essay “Manga in Japanese History,” Kinko Ito traces the historical development of manga from its roots in early caricatures to its present-day form, and notes that one out of every three books published in Japan is a manga title (46). In Japan, all sorts of audiences—male and female, young and old—read manga, rather than a smaller, self-selecting portion of the population. The popularity of manga and anime in Japan allows for a diverse range of titles, which are classified and marketed by audience type and thematic focus. The broadest categories may be the most obvious; most manga is targeted at either a male or female audience. This male/female division can be further subdivided by age, with the result that most titles can be categorized as *shounen* (for boys), *seinen* (for men), *shoujo* (for girls), or *jousei* (for women). This is a fairly simplistic set of marketing categories, and there is certainly an overlap in the audiences. Thematically, shounen and seinen titles can be said to “focus on action and adventure narratives” while shoujo and jousei titles “typically present more romantically oriented stories” (Wood 394). Wood’s formulation here is fairly reductive; Masami Toku provides a more nuanced definition: “Regardless of the subject depicted in the story, the main theme of boys’ manga is how the heroes become men by protecting women, family, country, or the earth from

enemies. The theme of girls' manga is how love triumphs by overcoming obstacles" (19). As Ito's history notes, the seinen and jousei categories developed when manga publishers recognized the popularity of the manga younger readers were consuming and saw the potential for an increased market (39-43). Thus, manga takes a much broader role in Japanese popular culture than comic books do in the U. S.

Anime and Manga in the U. S.

Anime and manga consumption in the U. S. have come a long way since the days of *Voltron*.

Today, a wide array of anime and manga titles have been licensed for English-language releases and are readily available for consumers. The cable channel Cartoon Network offers dubbed anime in the afternoons and late at night; the titles they offer are much more sophisticated than the early days of *Dragonball Z* and *Sailor Moon*. Many publishing companies offer English translations of manga, most of which are printed to be read right-to-left, just like the Japanese originals. These English-language releases are widely available in most of the U. S.'s major book chains; the manga section of a Barnes & Noble or Borders often takes up a full aisle and generally dwarfs the selection of domestic comics. The films of Hayao Miyazaki, such as *Princess Mononoke* and *Howl's Moving Castle*, enjoy domestic theater releases and increasing popularity among audiences who may not even recognize that they originated in Japan.

Furthermore, an increasing number of manga and anime titles are licensed for English-language release before they have completed their runs in Japan. Anime/manga fan conventions such as Otakon in Baltimore enjoy a lively, brisk business, with several thousand fans flocking together to discuss their favorite series, screen up-and-coming new titles, and purchase merchandise.

A large part of this explosion of anime and manga enthusiasm is due to the availability of high-speed internet. The internet provides the perfect medium for fans to make contact with each

other. Communities that are devoted to a particular *mangaka* (manga artist), series, *seiyuu* (voice actor), or genre of anime/manga thrive on mailing lists, bulletin boards, and social networking sites like LiveJournal. While many of these communities conduct their affairs in English, it is by no means the only language used in anime/manga fandom outside of Japan—there are thriving fan communities in Chinese, French, German, and more. These communities share information with each other about the release dates of new installments of their favorite titles, compare notes about Japanese cultural practices, and create and share fan works such as fan fiction and fan art (stories or artwork produced by fans that use the characters of a given media property, generally without much regard for matters of copyright).

These online communities also facilitate one of the other proofs of how popular anime and manga have become outside of Japan: the underground culture of fansubs and scanlations. The domestic release of most manga is limited to (and by) what is economically viable for the company licensing that manga, which often means that each new volume of a series comes out on a bimonthly or quarterly basis. Most English releases have roughly two hundred pages, and generally cost between nine and twelve dollars (U. S.). Likewise, the DVD release of dubbed or subtitled anime is equally slow; one DVD containing three to six episodes may come out once every month or two. Despite the low number of episodes per disk, and the general absence of special or bonus features, many anime releases cost around thirty dollars per disk (U. S.). Since some anime series have hundreds of episodes, and many popular manga titles comprise dozens of volumes, viewing or reading an entire series in English can be an excruciatingly slow process, and prohibitively expensive.

In addition to this, the translation quality of many English-language releases can be uneven; U. S. companies often edit out the materials they suspect will be offensive or simply

incomprehensible to U. S. audiences. Thus violence and sexual innuendo are suppressed or skipped over, and, in some instances, linguistic subtleties are lost as well. One of the most infamous examples of such a bowdlerization occurred in the DIC dub of *Sailor Moon*. In the Japanese original, two of the first-season antagonists were depicted in a same-sex relationship. The English dub turned the younger of the two into a woman, so that the relationship appeared to conform to heterosexual norms. A similar adjustment was made to the third season: two female protagonists who were in a lesbian relationship in the Japanese original were turned into “cousins” in the English dub. This had an unexpectedly creepy result; instead of appearing to have a fairly straightforward same-sex relationship with each other, the two characters appeared to be engaging in a vaguely *incestuous* same-sex relationship with each other.

Many internet-savvy U. S. anime and manga fans reject such outright adulterations of the source material, some of them quite vigorously. Other fans simply cannot, or will not, afford to pay the price of the domestic release, but still wish to consume anime and manga. Whatever their motivations, many fans seek out fan-translated versions of their preferred anime and manga titles. These “fansubs” (fan-subtitled anime episodes) and “scanlations” (scanned pages from manga which have been edited so that a translation has replaced the original Japanese text) have an active circulation through relatively obscure internet channels. Fansubs enjoy a lively circulation on peer-to-peer file-sharing services, while scanlations are often hosted on more stable forums and websites. Especially popular titles are often available within a day or two—or sometimes even within *hours*—of their original release in Japan, but older titles often receive the same attention. The fans who provide fansubs and scanlations are often very passionate about the service they provide, as well. Providing a fansub or scanlation is a time-consuming process that is done for free; often the only compensation requested is a simple acknowledgement that the

work has been done. Additionally, some fansub and scanlating groups conduct extensive research to provide contextual notes for the cultural practices in the source text, and most tend to retain the linguistic subtleties such as honorific-usage and name/nickname usage that many licensed translations eliminate.

Fansubs and scanlations are undeniably flagrant violations of copyright; most releases contain notes that the fansub or scanlation should not be resold or redistributed. Many also include admonishments to purchase the licensed version when and if it becomes available. Most conscientious fansub groups take the subtitled episodes down from their hosting sites whenever news that the title has been licensed reaches them. However, this tends to have the result of simply driving the fansubbing operations of other groups further underground, especially since many fansubs are traded through peer-to-peer services rather than direct download. Scanlation groups tend to ignore issues of licensing altogether. This may be due to the fact that there is a tangible difference in viewing scanned images of a manga title on one's computer screen and reading a physical copy of that same manga. In addition to this difference, most manga titles are released in twenty-to-thirty-page chapters that are later collected into larger volumes, which are more satisfying to collect. Fansubs, on the other hand, are generally very similar to licensed releases, and depending on the talent of the fansubbers, sometimes superior. It is no wonder that fansubs form a more active threat to the Western licensors of anime and manga.

Gender and Sexuality, East vs. West

What is it about anime and manga that make them worth studying? What does the popularity of anime and manga outside of Japan mean in the context of the increasing globalization of media and culture? The small-but-growing body of academic work on anime and manga strives to answer these questions and others. In his introduction to the volume *Japanese Visual Culture*,

Mark W. MacWilliams provides two key reasons for studying anime and manga. Not only are anime and manga at the heart of Japanese mass visual culture, but they are also assuming a greater prominence in what MacWilliams calls “the global mediascape of electronic and print media” that shapes the “collective imaginations, experiences, and feelings of people throughout the world” (5). Susan J. Napier notes that anime is important because it is “a cultural form whose themes and modes reach across arbitrary aesthetic boundaries to strike significant artistic and psychological chords [in its audiences]” (14). While it’s very true that anime and manga have the capacity to strike these chords, Anne Allison’s essay “The Japan Fad in Global Youth Culture” suggests that Japanese cultural exports such as anime are appealing because of the “utter sense of difference” that anime and manga carry with them. Thus, for Allison, U. S. fans see Japan as “mythic: a place whose meaning fluctuates between the phantasmal and real, the foreign and familiar, the strange and everyday” (16-17). This sense of difference, then, attracts audiences who desire something different, even if that difference is one that is difficult to articulate.

As I note above, there body of academic work regarding anime and manga is small, but growing steadily. Studying anime and manga presents certain challenges to the scholar: much of the critical work done regarding manga and anime is done in Japanese, and few translations of these works exist in English. This obstacle is part of the larger language barrier facing would-be anime and manga scholars. Another issue stems from cultural differences; there are certain conceptual divides separating the Japanese and U. S. perspective that can lead to interpretation issues and conflicts. One of the cultural differences that I find most compelling stems from the issue of same-sex relationships and the discourses that surround and construct these relationships. While it is possible to trace some similarities in how these discourses work in both cultures, the tradition of same-sex relationships (especially male same-sex relationships) has a

much different history in Japan than in most Western cultures, and plays a much different role in the construction of Japanese society.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault theorizes a history of the role sexuality has played within Western societies. Although we conceive of sexuality as something that is kept secret, for private consumption only, Foucault notes that “What is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it *ad infinitum*, while exploiting it as *the secret*” (35, emphasis original). What defines Western sexuality are the endless discourses that seek to define sexuality as something secret, even as they continually attempt to demarcate the borders of sexuality—what is permissible sexuality, what isn’t, who may do sexuality with whom, and who may not. For Foucault, the endless discourses that surround topics of sex and sexuality are part of the subtle operations of power that define modern sexuality. Without these modes of discourse that circulate around it, the modern Western subject would not know what sex and sexuality are. This is most clearly shown in Foucault’s example of how the modern homosexual was created through discourse:

As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and

body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature. (43)

Prior to Krafft-Ebing and Ellis, Foucault argues, there was no such thing as a homosexual—there were merely acts between occurring between same-sex bodies that did not attach an identity to those bodies. With the work of the early sexologists, that shifted: homosexual acts were no longer discrete indiscretions, but came to produce complete identities for those who committed them. An instance of sexual intercourse between two men was no longer an independent act, but instead marked both of those men as a new creature, the homosexual.

As Mark J. McLelland notes, however, same-sex desires and acts have been conceptualized much differently in Japan, both historically and in present times:

It is apparent that there has been a continuous, well-attested history of genital same-sex interactions taking place between Japanese men from the Tokugawa period until today. However, the frames in which these interactions have been placed and understood differ markedly, making it difficult to speak of a unitary history of “homosexuality.” . . . [T]here are no contemporary terms which can be said to translate the modern understanding of the “homosexual,” defined as a man congenitally incapable of making love to women. (41)

Historically, erotic desire and interaction between Japanese men was looked upon much differently than in the West; prior to the nineteenth-century Meiji push towards Westernization, same-sex encounters were not stigmatized in the same fashion as they were in the West. The push towards Westernization in the nineteenth century brought with it Western ideas about sexuality. This resulted in what McLelland terms a “brief criminalization of the act of sodomy” that was nevertheless more concerned with the proliferation of “youthful sexuality” rather than

male same-sex acts; even during this period of criminalization, homosexuality was “still conceptualized as a masculine and even masculinizing practice” (26-27).

McLelland suggests that it makes more sense to consider same-sex interactions in Japan through an understanding that people possess not only a sexual identity (determined by their erotic and emotional preferences), but a gender identity as well. Here he draws upon the work of Judith Butler, who frames gender in terms that draw on speech act and discursive theory. In *Gender Trouble*, she argues that we may consider gender “*a corporeal style*, an ‘act,’ as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where ‘*performative*’ suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (177, emphasis original). In this sense, “performative” should not necessarily be construed in the sense of a volitional performance or theatricality but in the sense of something that constructs and defines in the act of being done. For Butler, gender is performative in the sense that the act of doing femininity or masculinity both defines what masculinity and femininity mean as it defines the doer as feminine or masculine:

[T]he various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions—and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them; the construction “compels” our belief in its necessity and naturalness. (178).

This construction of gender, then, “requires a performance that is *repeated*,” which becomes both “the reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established” as well as the “mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation” (178, emphasis original). For Butler, gender is an ongoing process that continually reestablishes its own meaning while it

simultaneously legitimates that meaning. In effect, the process of doing gender becomes a double bind: one is done by one's gender just as much as, if not more so than, one does gender. The process of doing gender is a discursive one that enmeshes the gendered subject from the very point that the subject's ostensible biological sex becomes apparent. This task, formerly a matter of the attendants to the birth announcing, "It's a boy," is now a task given to the ultrasound technician who states, "It's a girl!"

McLelland argues that we should apply this understanding of gender to Japanese sexuality by noting how gender performance becomes a site of anxiety within Japanese culture. If one's gender is something that one both does and is done by, gender roles take on a key significance in a culture (such as Japan's) where gender roles and sexuality are arranged in very hierarchical modes. The masculine partner or the male gender role are constructed as the active or dominant position, while the feminine partner or female gender role are constructed to be passive or receptive. McLelland notes that,

[I]t is the sexuality of Japanese *women* which has traditionally been a site of anxiety for men. . . Male sexuality is very much tied in with male gender role [sic] and is represented as dominating and controlling female responses in much the same way that men dominate and control women in the public sphere. (6-7)

With this, it becomes easy to see how homosexuality in Japan can be understood as something distinctly different from Western notions of homosexuality. Same-sex interactions in Japan tend not to be understood as identity-making acts, much like Foucault's discussion of the Western model of same-sex interactions before the construction of homosexuality as a category of being. Rather, emphasis is given to the roles that are assumed during these same-sex encounters. In a sense, it matters more who is penetrated (taking a passive role) and who does the penetrating

(taking the active role) than what the genital configuration of the interacting partners might be. Thus there are fewer significant ramifications for a man's masculine identity if he takes the active role in penetrating a male partner, and fewer ramifications for a woman if she takes the receptive or passive role with a female lover. In either case, one's bedroom activities do not necessarily carry over into one's daily life, and may not signify a "gay" or "lesbian" identity as they are understood in the U. S., although this seems to be changing with a wider popular understand of gay and lesbian lifestyles. However, these popular understandings ascribe what the queer U. S. community might consider extremely caricaturizing roles to gay Japanese men and women by understanding gay men to be extremely effete or feminine, and lesbian women to be stereotypically butch or masculine. This understanding of sexuality affects gendered behavior accordingly; acts that would seem astonishingly homosocial within a U. S. context (e.g. close, intimate male friendships; schoolgirls who hold hands and are physically demonstrative with each other) are not read as necessarily homosocial within the Japanese context. Since sexual activity is something that generally occurs behind closed doors and is not generally performed in public ways, the result is a certain latitude for behaviors that do not read as heterosexual from a Western perspective. This different cultural perspective on sexuality is reflected within Japan's cultural products. When these products, such as anime and manga, are exported to a Western context, they sometimes offer narratives that seem to run counter to Western ideas about normative sexuality in startling, even potentially subversive, ways.

Gender and Sexuality in Shoujo Manga

As I noted above, there are several categories used to market manga in Japan. Of these, one of the most fascinating is shoujo manga—the stories directed at girls and young women. As a category, shoujo manga is often given shorter shrift than manga aimed at male audiences, both

by aficionados of manga and critically as well. As Masami Toku notes, “[T]he world of shojo manga was a place for young male *mangaka*, but not for female *mangaka*, to develop their careers before going into boys’ manga” (23). However, shoujo manga offers many fascinating insights into matters of gender and sexuality: Toku further notes, “Shojo manga is said to be a mirror of Japanese girls’ and women’s desires and expectations. In its subjects and expressions, manga reflects female aesthetics and fulfills female dreams” (30). Since shoujo is intended for consumption by an audience (girls) who are developing their own ideas of what roles men and women should take, it invites a close, critical, and feminist examination of its tropes.

One particularly fascinating aspect of shoujo is its depictions of both male and female same-sex relationships. One type of same-sex relationship shoujo depicts may be labeled *dōseiai* (same-sex love). In her article “Revolutionary Romance: *The Rose of Versailles* and the Transformation of Shojo Manga,” Deborah Shamoan says, “*Dōseiai* relationships were premised on sameness (*dō*). It was a coupling not merely with someone of the same sex but with one who exhibited the same modes of dress, speech, and behavior. . . . The ideal of *dōseiai* encouraged sameness, loving the one who looks just like the self” (5). *Dōseiai* relationships may be depicted as simply very intense friendships, or may extend into erotic relationships, but are primarily expected to be transitory—something an adolescent will eventually outgrow. The other sort of same-sex relationship that is common within shoujo manga is the subgenre known variously as *yaoi* (an acronym for the phrase *yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi*—“no climax, no punchline, no point,” *shounen ai* (boy love), or simply boy’s-love (BL). *Yaoi* and *shounen ai* manga focus specifically on male-male romance, often in extremely idealized forms, and is marketed specifically for (heterosexual) women. The relationships portrayed in these stories often bear no relation to real-life gay male relationships—indeed, as McLelland notes, “[T]he genre is

characterised by its anti-realism” (71). Many yaoi titles are not concerned with the realities of living a gay or closeted lifestyle in Japan, and are not interested in male same-sex love unless it occurs between fairly young, generally beautiful or androgynous young men. Criticizing yaoi for this failure may be beside the point: as fantasy material marketed towards women, focusing on “realistic” gay male relationships might detract from the pleasure that many of the women who read yaoi find in the genre.

Both *dōseiai* and yaoi are Japanese-specific formulations of same-sex desire, and as such, it is useful to read them with a grounding in Japanese culture and history. However, the rising popularity of translated manga in the U. S. means that many of these texts are being read in isolation, divorced from their context, by audiences who may or may not be interested in the wider social framework of their reading material. While some audiences for anime and manga may become very invested in the “authentic” text, as Laurie Cubbison notes, others may be casual audiences who lack the time, motivation, or resources to delve into the subtleties of the original text. For this reason, I suggest that it is important for scholars working with anime and manga to consider how these enormously popular texts may be received and reinterpreted by U. S. audiences. U. S. feminist and queer scholars often refer to Western ideas about heterosexuality and heterosexual gender relationships and norms as “heteronormativity.” Heteronormativity is the idea that the normal course of a human life is to grow up secure in one’s gender identity (male or female, with few or no behaviors that blur the line between “masculine” and “feminine”) and to embrace a heterosexual identity whenever one reaches sexual maturity. Heteronormativity also implies an adherence to certain norms in constructing families. Heterosexual partners are expected to be monogamous and faithful to each other, generally within the confines of a committed relationship or marriage, and are generally expected to have

children whom they will raise to follow the same general set of expectations. Heteronormativity, therefore, is something often challenged by feminist and queer scholarship as too binary and restrictive of human sexuality and gender identity. Many feminist and queer scholars seek ways of challenging heteronormativity in an effort to undo its most restrictive requirements and to create broader, more livable spaces for those individuals who do not fit into heteronormative modes of being. It is in the context that I would like to consider how the gender and sexual norms present in Japanese manga can present a challenge to Western ideas about heteronormativity when they are read by audiences outside of Japan.

I should note, at this point, that we must not be carried away by assuming that all shoujo titles hold equal potential for subversive readings. Shoujo manga is a genre that is heavily dominated by the normative practices of heterosexual romance and stodgy masculine/feminine gender roles. Many shoujo titles are strictly interested in the relationship troubles of their protagonists, and often resolve in cloyingly sweet endings that reinforce patriarchal notions about the proper roles of men and women. Furthermore, I do not wish to suggest that all manga is inherently superior and ideal for a U. S. reading audience by virtue of the fact that it is manga—that is, from elsewhere. To make that suggestion is to be appropriative and dismissive of Japanese cultural products, and reeks of an orientalism that assumes that the exotic must be better.

However, as shoujo titles do emerge from a culture that has a different perspective on issues of gender and sexuality, and are often translated without the contextual notes that would aid Western readers in placing the actions of their protagonists within that perspective, it is worth considering what potentially subversive readings Western audiences might take away from selected titles.

When shoujo titles are translated into English, what is lost? What is gained? Do shoujo titles that feature *dōseiai* and *yaoi* elements offer subversive models of gender and desire for

their U. S. audiences? Are these potentially-subversive models trumped by the heteronormative elements common to shoujo titles, or are they strong enough to offer a site of resistance to heteronormativity? To answer these questions, I will be examining three shoujo manga series that have been translated and released in English-language versions: Chiho Saitou's *Revolutionary Girl Utena: Adolescence of Utena* (*Shoujo Kakumei Utena: Adolescence Mokushiroku*), Matsuri Akino's *Pet Shop of Horrors* (*Petshoppu obu Horāzu*), and Kaori Yuki's *Angel Sanctuary* (*Tenshi Kinryouku*). All three titles were originally published in the mid-nineties, and published in English from 2003 to 2007. Both *Adolescence* and *Angel Sanctuary* were published by Viz Media, while *Pet Shop* was published by Tokyopop. All three titles have enjoyed wide popularity in both Japan and the U. S. While all three manga series have been animated, I will limit my analysis to the manga versions of the titles, since the manga is somewhat more readily available to a wide audience than the DVD versions of the anime (if for no other reason than it is a relatively simple matter to spend an hour or two at one's local chain bookstore, browsing through the latest manga releases, than it is to watch a DVD without purchasing it). These titles were chosen for the range of content and genre that they represent, from *Adolescence*'s dense, allusive quality to *Pet Shop*'s episodic, loosely-connected stories to *Angel Sanctuary*'s sprawling, epic story. Each of these titles contains elements that we may understand to be non-heteronormative, if not explicitly queer, to Western eyes. I will focus my analysis on a close reading of these elements in order to tease out an answer to the questions above: what do English translations of Japanese manga have to teach us about gender and sexuality?

CHAPTER I.

FRACTURED FAIRY TALES:

UNRAVELING GENDER IN REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA

The story begins like this: Once upon a time, there was a girl who was drowning, but she was saved in the nick of time by a prince. He was handsome and strong, and she decided that when she grew up, she would become... a prince, just like him.

Is that how it goes? Perhaps we should start again:

TOUGA: [lying in a bed, naked except for the sheet draped across his hips] It all began long ago when the *Rose Prince* walked the earth, turning every girl he met into a *princess*! [leaning on an elbow, framed by elaborate draperies] The prince's life was both bitter and sweet. [Touga's face in profile; his expression is distant; the silhouette of a girl can be seen through a drape; she appears to be nude] For he knew that he was but a predetermined equation in a predetermined world...

GIRL: [half-turns, over her shoulder] Aww! I want to be a princess too, you know! Where is the Rose Prince now?

TOUGA: [Touga's face; he is smiling, secretive] Nobody knows. Sad, isn't it? You see, his *sister* locked him away in the castle tower... And no one has seen or heard from him *since*! (*Adolescence*, 8-9; emphasis original)

That doesn't seem quite right, either. The prince is locked away in the castle tower? The rescued girl wants to become a prince? Isn't that the opposite of how the roles ought to be?

Unraveling Utena's Plot

The story of *Revolutionary Girl Utena* is a complicated one that operates recursively; it has been

told, and retold, several times and in multiple formats, forming an intricate, self-referential complex of stories. The two manga versions of *Utena*—the initial five-volume release in 1996, and the later single-volume release of 1999—bookend the majority of these retellings. Taken together, one can trace the changes and refinements that Chiho Saito and the Be-Papas made to the story as they reworked it for the thirty-nine-episode anime series, and then for the feature-length animated film known as *Adolescence of Utena*. These several versions of what is essentially the same story are riddled with references to each other: minor jokes that appear in the first version of the manga are expanded to full-blown episodes within the anime, and are then compressed again to brief visual puns within the movie. Some characters that only appear in a single brief side-story contained in *To Blossom*, the fifth volume of the original manga, have a much-expanded role within the anime, and are then touched on again only lightly in the *Adolescence* versions of the story. This complicated format makes it somewhat difficult to discuss any discrete version of *Utena* without referring to its other versions. Working with the two manga versions of the story is one of the simplest ways of reducing that challenge, since, when taken together, these two versions of the story comprise all of the most crucial elements that make *Utena* so compelling to its audiences.

Utena Tenjou, the eponymous protagonist of the story, is a fourteen-year-old girl who attends the prestigious Ohtori Academy. She eschews the school uniforms worn by her female peers in favor of a distinctly masculine uniform, much to the consternation of the authority figures whose sole role in the story is to raise a fuss over her tomboyish clothing (and then disappear). Utena has come to Ohtori Academy for a reason: she is seeking her prince. In the initial version of the story, Utena's prince is a mysterious figure who saved her from drowning when she was a small child; impressed with his strength and nobility, Utena vows to grow up to

be a prince, just like him. In *Adolescence*, Utena's prince is her ex-boyfriend, who left her for reasons she does not understand. In a fit of resentment—or perhaps pique—she dons masculine clothing and declares that she will be her own prince. Once at Ohtori Academy, Utena becomes extremely popular with her female classmates, due to her friendly nature and her athleticism. In the initial version of the manga, her classmates are well aware of the fact that she is female, and develop crushes on her anyway, in spite of, or perhaps because of, that fact. *Adolescence* is much less clear regarding Utena's gender presentation; it seems possible that her classmates may not be aware of Utena's femininity.

When Utena happens upon an upperclassman, Kyoichi Saionji, abusing one of her year-mates, Anthy Himemiya, she intervenes. This act embroils Utena in the complicated plots of the school's student council: Saionji interprets Utena's intervention as the latest installment in the series of duels being conducted by a small group of the school's most elite students, and responds accordingly. Utena, initially failing to understand what he means by challenging her to a duel, accepts his challenge anyway, for Anthy's sake. Though hopelessly outclassed by Saionji, who is a member of the school's kendo team, Utena manages to win the fencing match anyway, when a mysterious power—identified as “Dios”—descends upon her and grants her miraculous skills. Upon winning the match, Utena discovers that she has won possession of the Rose Bride—Anthy Himemiya—as well.

Utena quickly discovers that possessing, or rather, “being engaged to,” the Rose Bride is the immediate object of all the duelists. The individual who ultimately wins all of the duels, which are being orchestrated by a mysterious figure known only as “World's End,” will gain access to the power to revolutionize the world. What that power might consist of, or what that revolution might look like, is something that none of the duelists actually knows. All they do

know is that they wish to possess it for themselves. Utena finds herself embroiled in these duels, somewhat against her will, due to her own unwillingness to see Anthy as a prize to be handed from winner to winner. The plot is further complicated by the fact that in the original version of the manga, Utena suspects that one of the other duelists might be her prince, and then, when that proves impossible, that Anthy's older brother Akio is her prince. In *Adolescence*, Utena is puzzled by the presence of her ex-boyfriend, Touga Kiryuu, who seems to have become embroiled in the dueling game as well.

Ultimately, Utena discovers that the mysterious World's End is none other than Akio, who has set the scheme of the duels in motion so that he can access the mysterious power of Dios for himself. The original five volumes of *Utena* figure Akio, Dios, and Anthy herself as supernatural figures: Dios and Akio are the two halves (light and dark) of the same godlike figure. Their roles have become unbalanced due to Dios's inability to refuse to answer the ever-increasing demands of humanity for a prince. Akio's attempt to preserve himself from Dios's self-destructive selflessness is what pushes the two out of balance. Anthy's attempts to save Dios from complete destruction is what curses her to become the Rose Bride, and renders her a pawn in Akio's attempt to gain all of Dios's power for himself. Utena's presence is what resolves the conflict between Dios and Akio. By inserting herself into the struggle and becoming a prince, and refusing the role of princess, she is able to restore the balance between Akio and Dios, and to allow Anthy to step outside her role as the Rose Bride, and eventually even the constricted world of the Ohtori Academy.

The *Adolescence* version of this story is considerably darker and more psychological, turning on the injuries that both Utena and Anthy have suffered. As the story progresses, Utena seeks to form a friendship with the disturbingly pliant Anthy. As she does, it becomes clear that

Anthy's beloved older brother—the one Anthy styles a prince—is no prince at all. Anthy has suffered sexual abuse at Akio's hands; when he realizes that she has been aware that he has been raping her all along, he kills himself. Anthy's world, however, demands a prince around which it can orient itself; thus, Akio's absence triggers the cycle of duels. When Utena realizes this, after having defeated the phantom of Akio, she refuses to become Anthy's prince, and urges Anthy to leave Ohtori Academy to go to the outside world. While the original manga ends with Utena taking the place of the prince in order to replace Dios' failings and Akio's corruption, *Adolescence* ends with Utena and Anthy rejecting the roles of prince and princess altogether in order to pursue something else—something that we may call “revolution.”

Female Masculinity and Gender Performativity in *Utena*

As noted in the introduction above, it is possible to theorize gender as a thing that is done, rather than a thing that simply *is*. In this sense, gender attaches itself to the trappings of femininity and masculinity, rather than the biological signifiers of sex. In *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam draws on this understanding of the performative nature of gender to suggest that there is no single form of masculinity. Rather, she argues that there are multiple versions of masculinity, and that contemporary society “ratif[ies] and support[s] the versions of masculinity” that it prefers through the “subordination of alternative masculinities” (1). Making this claim allows her to examine various forms of female masculinity, which she argues are used, culturally, in order to bolster the effects of male masculinity.

Halberstam examines several versions of female masculinity in the course of the book; of these, one of the most pertinent to our discussion of *Utena* is the figure of the tomboy.

Halberstam defines the tomboy as “an extended childhood period of female masculinity” and goes on to note that it “tends to be associated with a ‘natural’ desire for the greater freedoms and

mobilities enjoyed by boys” (5-6). Tomboyism is generally tolerated until a girl reaches her adolescence; upon reaching puberty, she is pressured to conform to the traditional trappings of femininity. Halberstam argues, “Female adolescence represents the crisis of coming of age as a girl in a male-dominated society. . . . [F]or girls, adolescence is a lesson in restraint, punishment, and repression” (6).

How one performs one’s gender, as well as what one can do with a girl who, like Utena, resists the trappings of traditional femininity, is one of the vital questions at the heart of *Utena*. Chiho Saito, one of the members of the five-person team that created *Utena*, notes at the end of *To Blossom* that

“Utena” got underway as a version of the classic “prince rescues the girl” story.

As a concept for entertainment, it was easy to understand. And it should have been acceptable to both the “girls” in the audience and to society at large. But the work, that suddenly took up the lives of everyone connected with it, became a complete reversal of the original concept. (162)

As Leslee Farish Kuykendal and Brian W. Sturm point out, “Fairy tales define women as beautiful objects, powerless to alter the events in their lives, while fairy tale men are powerful agents of their own destiny. There are characters within these tales who defy these descriptions; however, their defiance comes with a price” (39). *Utena* inverts these tropes, quite deliberately, and achieves something remarkable as a result. Rather than a fairy tale with godlike figures, *Adolescence* is a deeply psychological tale that uses fairy tale tropes to show how girls navigate the rocky path of adolescence and sexuality. What was a struggle between gods in the original manga and anime become a much darker tale of incest and grief; Anthy’s witchlike powers can be read as a manifestation of the fear society invests in the sexuality of teenaged girls and young

women. The power of *Utena* lies in the way it offers its readers an alternative to classic stories that normalize the heterosexual relationship between the (passive) princess and the (active) prince and reify power relationships between men and women. Utena's refusal to perform femininity—or a version of female masculinity, at the end of *Adolescence*—offers a site of potential resistance to heteronormative forms of doing gender.

The most overt way in which *Utena* plays with gender is in Utena's dress and behavior. Utena spends the majority of her time wearing a modified boy's school uniform that bears a remarkable resemblance to a military uniform (epaulets, braiding, brass buttons). Although she makes a concession to femininity by wearing shorts rather than trousers with the uniform, and the jacket itself flares out at the waist, her uniform is in marked contrast to the sailor-style dresses that most of the other female students wear. We must also note that Juri Arisagawa, the other female duelist, also wears a vaguely-military-style uniform, although her outfit includes trousers. In Juri's case, this may be due to the fact that she is a member of the student council, all of whom dress in similar outfits. Utena also adheres to a consistently chivalrous code of behavior, especially in the first manga collection. She intervenes in defense of her fellow students, many of whom admire her courage and daring. While this could be seen simply as a gregarious, outgoing girl's good spirits, we must remember that Utena herself codes her behavior as specifically prince-like: she is determined to be and act as a prince in all situations.

Gender Conformity in *Adolescence of Utena*

The narrative of *Adolescence* is recursive: it doubles back on itself, coming back to the same place it began, but in a different register. The anonymous girl conversing with Touga in the first few pages becomes Utena herself in a recapitulation of the scene. This repeated, changed conversation takes place after two key revelations: the first is that Touga himself is dead, kept

alive within the confines of Ohtori Academy only by the strength of Utena's memories and love for him. So long as Utena remembers him and longs for him, and stays at Ohtori Academy, he will remain with her forever (126-27). The other revelation is that everyone at Ohtori Academy bears deep wounds:

TOUGA: [against a collage: a younger Touga, upper-right, clearly naked and being held down by a dark hand, crying out as if in pain; adult Touga's face, upper-left, distant; younger Touga, center, standing, holding his arm, naked and vulnerable; younger Touga's face, also center, hair streaming back as if he is running] My life was utter misery, day after day... and there was no one I could turn to for help. All I wanted was to grow up as fast as I could... to be free, in charge of my own life! [Utena: crying, covering her mouth; Touga's eyes, half-lidded and measuring; text-only panel] The rest of the student council is the same... all dueling for the power to heal the scars left deep in their lives. (131, ellipses original)

The power of Dios, so the student council duelists believe, will allow them to achieve whatever it is that each one wants most, although they're not entirely sure how this will happen. However, as we find out from Touga, even World's End, the one orchestrating these duels, "...is *himself* a prince, deeply wounded by his own life" (132). In this fractured fairy tale, not even the princes are whole, and hoping to be saved in this fashion is ultimately fruitless.

The discussion of these wounds is made concretely clear by the wound that Anthy herself bears. After Akio realizes that Anthy was conscious while he raped her, he stabs her just above her breast, leaving her with a scar—the very scar from which the sword of Dios emerges (147-48, 150). Scars, whether visible or metaphorical, are what bind the students of Ohtori Academy

together. Utena's scar is her grief for Touga, who died saving her from drowning (147-48).

Rather than face up to the pain of losing Touga, Utena represses her memories of him: he didn't die, she tells herself; they "broke up" (118). Anthy's pain comes from her brother's betrayal of her own ideals, as Touga explains:

TOUGA: [his face, expression serious] Her magic could make anyone a prince—
anyone she *loved*. [text-only panel] But her brother was no prince *at all*—far
from it. That's why she needed to *hide* him... from everyone. (139, emphasis
original)

What Anthy must hide from everyone—even Akio himself—is that he has been molesting her. Pretending to be unconscious as she is molested allows Akio to pretend that he's not harming his sister, because she never has to know that he's raping her. Her attempt to turn him into a prince by doing so fails when he discovers the truth—that she has been aware all along of what he's doing, and that he really *is* "that kind of" person (145). According to Touga, it fails because Akio is not worthy of being a prince. However, *Adolescence* explicitly critiques the very idea of princes—perhaps raising any individual to the status of a prince is doomed to failure, as we shall see.

Ohtori Academy and Akio's (World's End's) game of duels stems entirely from Anthy's need for a prince:

AKIO: [face, three-quarter profile, on the left; right, a full-body shot of Anthy as
the Rose Bride, from above] This is *Anthy's* kingdom—created with her love!
Here, a prince must *always* exist... for without a *center*, this world would fall!
[backdrop: the castle in the sky] A real live prince was the *only* thing still
missing! It was to fill this void that the rings were sent, the duels created. All
to regain the prince she lost. (154, emphasis and ellipses original).

In Anthy's world—which is an extension of her psychic life, in a very real sense—the heart must organize itself around a prince. This need for a prince is so strong that Anthy turns her sexually-abusive brother into her prince. But where does the need for a prince come from? Where does the power to turn one's rapist into a prince come from? In *Adolescence*, the power to turn someone into a prince stems from Anthy's enormous capacity to love. Anthy loves wildly, without holding back, and sets the object of her love up as her prince, who will be the governing force of her life. Thus, after Akio's suicide, she allows the winners of the duels to do as they like with the Rose Bride. They are, after all, her princes, for however long as they manage to keep winning the duels. This wild, unrestrained love is what makes Anthy such an unsettling, fey figure: she embodies all of the dangers of excess passion that must be restrained lest they turn destructive.

Anthy offers Utena the sword of Dios (itself an extremely phallic signifier of power; the act of offering it to Utena forces Anthy to go limp, arching her back as the sword emerges from the scar on her chest), and says, “You are now the prince of this world! Take the sword. It's *yours*. And with it you can have any miracle you desire! Any eternity you desire! Any eternity can be yours... as long as you stay here... with *me!*” (156-57, emphasis and ellipses original)

Utena has the opportunity here to conform to the classic model; she can have anything she desires, from Touga to Anthy to anything else besides—as long as she remains in Ohtori Academy with Anthy (a choice which echoes a host of literary temptations, all the way back to the Garden of Eden). All Utena needs to do is assume the role of the prince—the very role that she said she wished to take, at the very start of *Adolescence* (19-20). Taking this role of the prince, which on the surface would seem subversive—who ever heard of a female prince?—is much less of a radical act than it initially appears. Taking the role of the prince will only start the cycle over again; instead of Akio, Utena will take the position of Anthy's master. Utena

recognizes this, and refuses the offer entirely, asking whether she can't simply be Anthony's *friend* instead (158).

Given Utena's original desire to become a prince, and her assumption of that role in the original manga and anime, why does she refuse the offer in *Adolescence*? It can't be because of gender roles: the texts of the *Utena* complex all acknowledge her suitability for the role of a prince. She is good-looking, popular, and athletic; she has the purity of heart and the courage that Akio himself lacks, and the integrity that Touga struggles to find. Given Utena's own initial desire to become a prince and determine her own fate, it's unlikely that she refuses the role out of any sense of doubt on her own part. Further, aside from a few qualms exhibited by the handful of adult figures, no one questions the right of a girl to be a prince. The text implicitly endorses Utena's attempt to step outside the role of the princess that is typically given to girls within most Western fairy tales. This move echoes the work of Western authors who seek to either rewrite old fairy tales so that the female characters have their own agency and activity, such as the work Robin McKinley has done with many of her novels, or to write new fairy tales featuring the princess as an active agent in her own right, as Patrice C. Wrede has done. Utena's original desire to become a prince herself seems to fit in with the feminist or pro-feminist impetus to give female characters more to do than sit around and wait to be rescued. The message of *Utena* is clear, even without Utena's ultimate rejection of the role of the prince in *Adolescence*: girls can be just as strong as boys, if not stronger, and can rescue themselves, if it comes to that.

However, *Adolescence* takes the project of rewriting the fairy tale a step farther than simply giving Utena her own agency to rescue herself and Anthony. Utena rejects the role of the eternal prince because she has come to realize that it is wrong (157). After her recollection of the true reason for Touga's absence (his death), and their reunion, consummated by coitus, Utena

crosses a threshold from girlhood into what is, in one sense, fully-inaugurated womanhood. She has navigated her adolescence and found a new maturity; it is this maturity that allows her to recognize the wrongness of the role Anthy is offering her:

UTENA: [crying] I *know* how you feel... [takes Anthy's hands, looking at her]
 ...But do you *truly* want to live for all time the way you are *now*? [Anthy's face, eyes wide, staring] To keep turning that scar into the sword of Dios as you nurse the same old wound... for all *eternity*? [Akio, glaring, clearly angry] (159, emphasis and ellipses original)

Utena's newfound maturity has allowed her to recognize what Anthy cannot: that holding onto the old griefs and hurts in the way that the students of Ohtori Academy do has locked them all into a pattern that can't be changed. In order for any of them to be happy, they must let go of their old injuries and move forward. Holding on to the notion that there are people who take the role of the prince and people who take the role of the princess offers no way forward: as long as there are people who wait to be rescued, and people who do the rescuing, there is no way for those individuals to grow as human beings. In a larger sense, this offers a critique of the heteronormative binary itself, and the idea that male or masculine activity is preferable to female or feminine passivity. If Utena had chosen to become a prince after all, this would have underlined the assumption that to be a prince is preferable to being a princess. What Utena seeks to do instead is step outside the system that values princes over princesses altogether, and to create something new. The text leaves the exact nature of Utena's revolution undefined—as most such texts do, as it is very difficult to imagine what a world defined by something other than heteronormative structures of gender, sexuality, and power would look like when one is always already enmeshed in these structures—but Utena's revolution holds the promise of being

something more egalitarian than the model that she rejects. It is no coincidence, then, that one of the foundations of Utena's revolution is her relationship with Anthy.

Same-sex Relationships in *Utena* as Revolution

Adolescence, like the rest of the *Utena* complex, is also valuable for the way it presents strong female friendships. In an explicitly feminist move, Anthy and Utena do not compete with each other for the attentions of a man; even when Anthy deliberately flirts with Touga in front of Utena, Utena continues to insist on building and maintaining a friendship with Anthy. Rather than castigate Anthy for behaving as her position as the Rose Bride demands, Utena challenges *Touga* to a duel (80-83). In other words, Utena recognizes that the social construction of women as catty creatures always in competition with each other is one designed to keep women divided. She chooses instead to attack the representation of these social constructions, confronting them headlong and proving what is truly important by her actions. *Adolescence* thus implies that it is not (necessarily) romance which changes the world, but strong female friendship.

This friendship, of course, is also coded ambiguously. Utena and Anthy, in their positions as duelist/prince and Rose Bride, share several kisses. The subtext strongly implies that Anthy, as the Rose Bride, is willing to have sex with Utena. Although Utena rejects this overture, it does not seem to be out of any unwillingness to engage in lesbian behavior on her own part. Rather, Utena rejects Anthy's offer because she suspects Anthy of making it out of a sense of obligation, rather than from any real desire of her own. One gets the sense that, had Anthy been able to approach Utena of her own free will, without being constrained by her identity as the Rose Bride, Utena would have accepted her offer. Later in the volume, it even seems a given that Anthy and Utena may be developing a romantic attachment to each other, given the lengths that they go to in order to give care to each other, and to rescue each other from the machinations of the duels and World's

End. It is never stated explicitly within the manga that Utena and Anthy become lovers, although the subtext is very suggestive. Furthermore, since *Adolescence* is part of the *Utena* complex, which is intricate and self-informing, we can make some inferences from the way the movie version of *Adolescence* closes with a final image of Anthy and Utena sharing a nude embrace and a lingering kiss. Knowing this, we may draw our own conclusions from the final pages of the manga. Utena and Anthy sit together in the planetarium, Utena with her arm around Anthy's shoulder, holding hands, and they leave the planetarium hand-in-hand (182-84). This, taken in conjunction with the romantic tension built up in all the other iterations of the *Utena* narrative complex, certainly points to an interpretation of Utena and Anthy's relationship as a romantic one.

This interpretation allows us to look at *Adolescence* as a deliberate queering of the heterosexual romances that form a key part of the socialization patterns of children in the U. S.—girls especially. *Adolescence* suggests that strong female relationships, especially potentially lesbian relationships, form a place from which to challenge heteronormativity. Lesbian relationships, occurring as they do between individuals who are constructed as the other against which masculinity defines itself, can be the site of potentially egalitarian partnerships. In *Adolescence*, this means that neither Anthy nor Utena takes the role of the prince, and Anthy lets go of her role as the princess/Rose Bride who is need of rescuing in order to stand on her own, with her own identity, desires, and wants. This is a powerful message to send to the adolescent female audiences to whom *Utena* is marketed, one that suggests that gender itself is something fluid, and that it is okay to play with the boundaries between “male” and “female” and to step outside the gender roles prescribed by heteronormativity. This queer potential is something that will become even more marked if we turn our attention to another manga title, *Pet Shop of Horrors*, which goes beyond issues of gender identity to explore (and question) the boundaries of what it means to be human.

CHAPTER II.
UNDOING GENDER (AND SPECIES) IN THE QUEER SPACES
OF *PET SHOP OF HORRORS*

In her ten-volume work *Pet Shop of Horrors*, Matsuri Akino depicts human nature, with all its faults and foibles and occasional moments of supreme grace, through a loosely-connected set of stories about the mysterious Count D, who is in the business of selling dreams—and perhaps more. D runs a pet shop that sells mundane pets, like cats, dogs, birds, and so forth. He also sells pets that are much less ordinary and come with special instructions for their care—such as rabbits which must not be fed improperly, lest they breed too rapidly and destroy their owners (Akino 1). D himself is a deeply ambiguous figure, who is something other than human, and perhaps something other than male; one of the most common interactions he has with the people he encounters is demands for a clarification of his gender and identity. D’s pet shop, which is located in the Chinatown of an unnamed U. S. city, and his dealings with his hapless customers represent the risks and the possibilities inherent when straight temporalities and spaces encounter what Judith Halberstam calls a queer time and place.

Halberstam identifies the “queer way of life” as something that

...encompass[es] subcultural practices, alternative methods of alliance, forms of transgender embodiment, and those forms of representation dedicated to capturing these willfully eccentric modes of being. [...] [P]art of what has made queerness compelling as a form of self-description in the past decade or so has to do with the way it has the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space. (*Queer* 1-2)

Queerness, then, is less an issue of sexual attraction, the choice of sexual partners, or even

gender or sexual identity—although that tends to be a significant portion of queerness as it is generally understood. Instead, queerness stands for modes of being that run counter to, and subvert, the heteronormative narrative—stable gender identities and sexualities that lead to monogamous, heterosexual partnerships—that most people expect their lives to follow.

Queerness is an attempt to break away from binaries such as male/female or black/white, and to introduce the possibility of multiple perspectives and destabilized centers and hierarchies. As such, it has the possibility to mesh well with feminist anti-sexist work and anti-racist (anti-classist, anti-ableist, anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist...) work. Queerness in this sense must also be understood as something distinct from what we may call “homonormativity”—that is, LGBT lifestyles which replicate the norms of heterosexual lifestyles and their associated gender roles.

Depictions of queerness, therefore, are important because they call into question the narratives of normativity, as we have already seen in our discussion of *Utena*. In this sense, *Pet Shop of Horrors* is also valuable for the various ways in which it disrupts normativity. D’s ambiguous gender presentation—although relatively traditional, given his ethnic identity—runs distinctly counter to Western understandings of masculinity, while the location of his pet shop in a Chinatown places the reader and the characters who encounter D outside what they understand as “normal.” For those characters who encounter the more peculiar pets that D offers for sale, the progression deeper into D’s shop, which is larger on the inside than it appears outside, represents a progression even further from heterosexual space into a queer space and time. Their experiences with their unusual pets further disrupts ideas of normalcy and requires them to adapt themselves to non-normative—non-human, in fact—experiences. The tragedy and the horror of the series rest in the fact that most of these encounters end with the death or deaths of the humans who encounter D, and sometimes the deaths of the pets who are unlucky enough to be

sold to careless or malicious humans. However, these grim encounters are softened with hope: for every three or four tales that end badly for the humans, Akino includes a more optimistic encounter wherein the human adapts to his or her pet, or the pet adapts to the humans, and a new mode of being emerges from the mutual change. D and his pet shop, then, represent the conflict between modern, industrialized lifestyles that use (and abuse) the environment and the harsh fact that this mode of life is intrinsically destructive. *Pet Shop of Horrors* suggests that this lifestyle can be modified in order to preserve what is left of the natural world. For Akino, change happens through challenging the binary distinctions between human and animal, and noting that humans are, in fact, animals themselves. This queering of our definition of the human, in conjunction with *Pet Shop of Horrors*' challenges to Western understandings of masculinity and desire, point to a queer mode of being that is more fluid and flexible than the heteronormative one, as well as the positive possibilities in the queer way of life.

Queerness in *Pet Shop of Horrors*

The action of *Pet Shop of Horrors* takes place in a large, anonymous U. S. city that seems to be an amalgamation of New York City and Los Angeles. The ten volumes of the series contain three or four chapters apiece. Most of the stories, save for those in the final volume, stand independently of each other, and are only loosely connected by D's presence and his interactions with the police detective Leon Orcot. Orcot begins the series convinced that D is smuggling illegal animals into the country, and perhaps illegal drugs as well, and believes that D is responsible for the mysterious deaths of his customers. As the series progresses, Orcot becomes aware that there are, perhaps, more things in heaven and earth than his philosophy can quite account for. He becomes D's occasional ally or dupe in D's encounters with strange and rare animals, which leads to the formation of a strange sort of friendship between them.

Orcot is represented as what we might consider to be the epitome of Western masculinity. Akino depicts him as broad-shouldered and light-haired, and his actions are nearly always brash and generally not as well-thought-out as they should be. The English translation of the series highlights his brashness still further by playing up his casual and often vulgar language and emphasizing his blundering approach to the things in D's world that he cannot grasp. Orcot's heteronormative masculinity is highlighted most thoroughly on the cover of volume seven of the English translation. The cover depicts Orcot standing at the center of the cover with his feet spread wide. He is aiming a gun at the viewer as he winks, apparently quite confident in his position as a heterosexual white man. He wears a t-shirt and jeans, and his pose (with several scantily-clad cat women surrounding him) recalls the standard pulp fiction cover, with the hero surrounded by beautiful women who clearly desire him. All told, the cover is an interesting depiction of how non-Westerners might view Western masculinity, and highlights the aggression implicit in such constructions. Orcot confronts the viewer with his power and dominance (cocky grin, gun, fawning women) and does not seem to question his power in the slightest. Orcot's presentation on this cover is in clear contrast to how D is depicted on other covers. The cover of volume one provides an excellent illustration of this contrast. Like Orcot, D is shown facing the reader straight on, but rather than grinning at the reader, D's expression is quite neutral. His hair is flowing loosely, as in a breeze, and rather than being surrounded by cat women, he holds the figure of a mermaid, one of his particularly exotic pets. She is facing him, head tucked against his shoulder. Compared to the explicitly erotic poses and outfits of the cat women who surround Orcot on the cover of volume seven, the figure of the mermaid is not figured as erotic at all. D's arm curves around her, protectively. His pose and expression seem to be challenging the reader, perhaps to question his protective stance or our understanding of who (and what) is worth being

protected or valued. This is not heteronormative masculinity: rather than aggression or sexual desire/dominance, D offers protection, possibly even nurturing, to the female figure he holds. Nor does he confront the reader with any immediate, obvious symbols of his power (as Orcot does with his gun). The initial reader may, in fact, conclude that D's presentation here something other than heteronormatively masculine—something that is more akin to the traits that are commonly associated with Western femininity, perhaps, or something that transcends masculinity and femininity altogether.

Orcot is generally the character through whose eyes we see the action of the manga. We are encouraged to view D as he does, and D constantly challenges what it is to be masculine, both through his dress and his behavior. As noted above, Akino depicts D as being ethnically Chinese, and runs his shop in Chinatown. His appearance is quite different from Orcot's short, spiky blond hair and masculine attire. D's hair is long and is dark, and generally flows dramatically, even in the absence of a breeze (which is a fairly common trope for shoujo manga, and significant for the contrast it provides to Orcot's character design and for the way it runs counter to Western ideas of what a male protagonist *ought* to look like). D's features are drawn quite delicately, especially compared to Orcot's, and his lips are generally red and feminine. His nails are quite long and sharp, and could be read as feminine—or they could be read as claw-like. Some of Akino's artwork even depicts D with coloring that could be interpreted as eye makeup, and sometimes his nails are colored. In addition to the delicately drawn nature of D's physical appearance, he generally wears very traditional, old-fashioned Chinese clothing—the flowing *cheongsam*—in rich cloths that are often heavily ornate. While the cheongsam is a unisex garment, to Orcot and many of the other Western characters D encounters, as well as the Western eyes of *Pet Shop of Horrors*' readers, it appears to be a decidedly feminine garment.

One of D's hallmarks is his fondness for sweets and pastries, which is a trait that Orcot takes advantage of on a regular basis by showing up with sweets in hand whenever he wishes to interview D.

ORCOT: Oh, and I brought something else, too. [looking aside, pulling something from behind his back] It's not much but... [recalling a piece of advice: "Count D just looooves sweets, don't ya know..."] [offers a box of pastries] Here, this is for you.

D: [shocked and surprised] Oh my God, that aroma! This is incredible!! To get these you have to line up before the store opens because they only sell 30 pieces a day!

ORCOT: ...

D: [large eyes, dramatic tears of joy] You're a lot nicer than I gave you credit for, officer. [subtext] Yes, yes, I will tell you anything!

ORCOT: [subtext] What the--?! What's with this guy? (Akino 1: 61)

This fondness for sweets and pastries underlines D's often-effeminate behavior, and is a constant motif in the series. D's effeminacy is further emphasized by the lush surroundings of his shop where Orcot and D often have tea and speak. D's pet shop is depicted as heavily Chinese, decorated with flowers and ornate paintings and furnishings. It is easy to understand this difference—this otherness—as a form of orientalism that objectifies and others D's dissimilarity from the apparently Western context in which he lives and works. Indeed, that some of the exoticism Akino highlights is to titillate the audience is obvious, especially when D's pets lounge around in their pseudo-human forms. Akino is especially fond of drawing the female cats as they appear on the cover of volume seven, wearing scanty outfits that reveal more than they conceal.

D's pet shop is effeminate and mysterious, as D himself is, in clear contrast to Orcot's Western, highly masculine apartment (generally messy, with several gratuitous cheesecake posters for decoration).

This tendency to exoticize D certainly plays into tendencies to feminize and stereotype the other, especially when the other is an Asian male living within a Western setting. However, while this tendency is definitely at play in Akino's work, D is repeatedly shown to be more than simply the mysterious, effeminate Asian man commonly seen in many orientalist works. D is powerful, despite his apparently feminine appearance and his flowing clothes. His nails, though long, are pointed and sharp, and are occasionally used as weapons to good effect. D comes out best in his encounters with Orcot time and time again, despite his fondness for sweets and his willingness to demonstrate the emotional extremes (joy, sadness, anger) that Western masculinity might attempt to keep concealed. Furthermore, he calls Orcot's own masculinity into question at several points in the series, forcing Orcot to second-guess his own assumptions and prejudices, and sometimes even his own desires. Generally, when Orcot rushes into a situation, he tends to trip over himself and make egregious mistakes—which is, perhaps, Akino's sly commentary on the behavior of U. S. citizens in general—while D's more careful approaches generally net much better results. D does not always leave his encounters successfully, but he is foiled far less often than Orcot is. As the series progresses, Orcot becomes more self-aware, and somewhat more thoughtful in his approach to the unknown—an example of how D's influence is moderating his behavior.

Sexual Tension and Desire in *Pet Shop of Horrors*

One of the most interesting encounters occurs between D and Tetsu in chapter three of the third volume, "Dessert." Tetsu, who is disguised as the human chef Mr. Wong, is actually one of D's

rare creatures, a *totetsu*: "...[A] rare animal that [has] the face of a human, horns of a sheep, and a tiger's fangs..." (Akino 3: 190). Orcot assumes that the powerful attraction that D and Mr. Wong exhibit for each other is sexual in nature. The illustrations seem to bear his assumptions out, as D and Wong stare at each other intently, and Wong kisses D on page 129. However, Orcot (and through him, the audience) has misinterpreted the situation. D desires Wong because he is a rare creature, and Wong is the serial killer whom Orcot has been hunting. Wong's "kiss" is actually a method of tasting D, whom he wishes to devour. When Orcot realizes the truth, he is appalled, but D is nonchalant: "In order to obtain him," he muses, "I would have given up an arm or two without hesitation" (3: 135). D's priorities are with the creatures he collects, and what appears to be a potentially homosexual situation (according to Orcot's very human perceptions) is upended into a different kind of desire altogether, one whose cannibalistic overtones transgress far greater taboos than male same-sex attraction does.

However, it is worth considering the homoerotic overtones of *Pet Shop of Horrors* in more detail. Although it is not officially classed as such, *Pet Shop* indulges in several of the trappings of the shounen ai genre. Shounen ai, and its more explicit sibling, yaoi, focuses its attention on the emotional, romantic attachments between male characters, most of whom are drawn to be very beautiful and somewhat androgynous—a description that suits D very well. The focus of *Pet Shop of Horrors* is, in part, on the development of Orcot's character; this development is largely facilitated by his friendship with D. Although there are a handful of recurring female characters, they play a minor role within the action of the story itself. Furthermore, though D's pet shop is fully of scantily-clad anthropomorphized animals, Orcot himself is unable to see their human forms. All he sees are their animal forms, so their charms as potential partners are lost on him. Even though *Pet Shop* is not explicitly about a romance

between D and Orcot, it is certainly possible to say that the subtext of the manga could support such an interpretation: D and Orcot's relationship is one in which Orcot's obsession with D leads him to fixate on D in ways that flirt with desire. The reader may ask whether Orcot is really interested in proving that D is actually responsible for the deaths that surround his business, or if he instead uses this as a pretext for spending more time with D. D's behavior, on the other hand, is indulgent towards Orcot, whom he treats with exasperated amusement (generally) and whose horizons he continually attempts to broaden. D remains tolerant of Orcot even when Orcot's behavior causes him problems. Given the generally shounen-ai-like trappings of the series, it is not difficult to use these traits of their relationship and extrapolate desire from the subtext of the manga.

Pet Shop of Horrors often subverts human desire; the creatures that inhabit D's shop and which he sells are often shown in human-like forms and are generally clad in diaphanous clothes. They are quite conventionally attractive, as long as one is willing to overlook the sharp fangs and claws, the occasional set of horns, the non-human ears, and the tails, that is—and that's not to mention the peculiar eyes or the incidences of fur and scales. D's hapless customers are often deceived by these appearances into thinking that the pets they are purchasing are, in fact, human. Several stories circle around the customer's desire to replace a lost loved one with one of D's pets. In this, Akino does a masterful depiction of the human willingness to delude the self, and how harmful this tendency can be. The stories in which the customer tries to treat the pet as fully human—by feeding it human food against D's explicit instructions to the contrary, as happens in “Daughter” in the first volume—tend to end in disaster, as the animal nature of the creature asserts itself. Anthropomorphizing D's creatures usually ends in destruction. However, when the human customers treat their acquisitions with love and kindness, without attempting to change

the nature of their pets, things generally work out for the best. This seems to be a fairly moralistic approach, one that reduces the series into a set of tales about following the rules and being rewarded accordingly. It would not be worth noting, if D were what he appeared to be—the somewhat eccentric, but fully human, owner of a pet shop dealing in the strange and wonderful.

Going Beyond the Human

D, however, is not human, which the events of the tenth volume reveal, after a long series of hints leading up to the final story arc. D, and his father and grandfather, are not human:

D'S GRANDFATHER: Our ancestors lived in a remote area of ancient China that is now known as the Kunlun mountains. We were able to understand the speech of animals and began to know them as friends. We would convey to the local villagers the prophecies told to us by the sacred beasts. And soon the emperor invited us to his palace as his royal fortune tellers. We were called priests and priestesses, hermits and sorcerers. We inspired awe, respect, envy and jealousy. And we soon learned that love and hatred walk hand in hand. Then one day, the emperor's son, a strong warrior of great renown, asked a priestess of our race for her hand in marriage. She politely refused the offer and the young warrior was heartbroken. [...]

WARRIOR: She isn't human! They're not human. They're devils! Monsters!! Kill them! Let not a single one live! [...]

D'S GRANDFATHER: Only a single man, our distant ancestor, survived the genocide. Exhausted and beaten, he lay down upon the earth, and readied his soul for death. [...]

ANCESTOR: [surrounded by the spirits of many animals/gods] Our suffering, our anger... our sorrow... I bequeath it all to the afterlife. Our destruction must be avenged. The humans shall feel our wrath! (10: 164-167)

D's lineage is something other than human—they are godlike figures, which is a concept more easily understood outside the framework of Western thought, but is still fairly accessible for Western readers. D and his families are not gods in the sense of beings that are venerated or worshipped, but in the sense that they are protectors of animals, and possess a kind of magic or power that allows them to do things which ordinary mortals cannot. D and his family are mortal, however, and can be killed—as happens to D's father at the end of volume ten, when he is shot. D's family is further set apart from humanity by being a series of clones. Each father creates a son, who is physically and genetically identical to him and the distant ancestor who survived his clan's destruction. The personality of the clones differs, depending on their experiences with humanity; D himself is relatively benignant towards humanity, as is his grandfather. D's father, however, is actively malicious, and seeks to destroy humanity completely in revenge for the animal species that the humans have destroyed, as well as for the destruction of his clan.

The culmination of *Pet Shop of Horrors* could have become a grim one; however, D and Orcot foil the attempt to kill humanity off completely, even though D himself shows a deep ambivalence towards doing so, and the act ends in his father's death. Though it seems like D and his menagerie must remain at odds with humanity (as represented by Orcot), the tension of the scene is resolved by the revelation that D's father has chosen to be reborn as a human. Though D must be haunted by both his father's attempts to destroy humanity and the fact that his father died at the hands of a human, this scene reveals the possibilities inherent in the contact between the D clan and humanity—that it is possible for humans to become more than they are, and to

learn to live in harmony with the environment, rather than destroying it. This message is underscored by D's final conversation with Orcot:

ORCOT: Well, Count, where are we going?

D: Anywhere. [looking away from him, down at the earth over which they are flying] We are able to move freely, without regard for the borders humans have drawn. [turns to Orcot, hands resting on his chest] But your journey ends here.

ORCOT: What?

D: [smiling, untouchable] Humans have not earned the right to board this ship. Not yet. [pushes him overboard] (Akino 10: 193-194)

Although humanity is clearly not ready for, or capable of, living in harmony with the other inhabitants of the planet—and D is clearly willing to consider humanity's extermination with a certain amount of equanimity—he is nonetheless willing to examine the possibility of their changing. It may be possible for humanity to learn how to live and let live, hence the “not yet” which closes his speech to Leon. This ambivalence is a moment of irony: humanity demarcates itself from the rest of the planet by insisting that it is more than merely animal, and uses the resources of the planet freely, without consideration for its other inhabitants. D's rejection of Orcot in this scene indicates that by doing so, humanity has set itself further apart than it thinks that it has. Until humans recognize that they are animals, too, and are connected to the rest of the planet in ways that cannot be ignored, they cannot be integrated into that web. It may be possible for individual humans to transcend the borders they have drawn between themselves and the natural world—as happens in the more cheerful episodes of *Pet Shop*—but the species as a whole does not seem ready to make this leap yet, given the preponderance of stories that end in disaster.

However, the series ends on an upbeat note: though D's father attempts to destroy humanity, when he is killed, his reincarnation takes the form of a human child, the very creature he tried to repudiate altogether. This seems to indicate that humanity still has the potential to overcome its limitations. This possibility is further heightened by the final two pages of volume ten, which shows D's son and Orcot's younger brother, Chris, interacting in a way that recapitulates D and Orcot's relationship. Chris has become a detective, like his brother, and D's son is now running the pet shop. Chris shows up with sweets in hand to speak with D's son, and to inquire whether his brother ever managed to find D himself, after D's disappearance.

This ending—Orcot's pursuit of D, even after D's disappearance—is an ambiguous one. We do not discover whether Leon Orcot has changed enough through his encounters with D to become an acceptable human being in D's eyes. Indeed, the younger generation seems like they might be set up to repeat the same steps that Orcot and D did. On the other hand, it seems that Orcot never returned from his journey to find D. We could assume, pessimistically, that he may have died in the attempt to find D. Or, if we choose to be optimistic, perhaps he found D and had been transformed enough by the quest to be accepted by D. At the close of the series, it is impossible to say what has happened between Orcot and D. Akino *is* continuing to write about D's adventures in her *Pet Shop of Horrors: Tokyo*. Due to that series' ongoing status—the fourth volume has only just been released in English—it is impossible to comment on Orcot's continuing development as a character. We *can* hope that the fact that Akino has included a handful of side stories about his quest to find D again is a positive sign.

Thus, the closing of the series leaves us in an unstable place, much as the space of D's pet shop itself is unstable and full of risks—and full of possibility. Confronting queer possibilities and spaces within *Pet Shop of Horrors* highlights the constrictions inherent in the normativity of

Western constructions of gender and what it means to be human. Queer spaces, as we see here, require flexibility on the parts of those who encounter them; when they are met with rigidity or a refusal to change, they destroy what they encounter. This confrontation between the queer space of D's shop and D's own ambiguous identity—more than human, confusingly masculine—demands that readers reconsider their preconceptions of what it means to be human. This question and this demand that the reader rethink their understandings of heteronormativity are traits that we will continue to consider in the next chapter, with Yuki Kaori's *Angel Sanctuary*, which takes a different approach in confronting readers with its subversive moments and ideas.

CHAPTER III.

THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT:

CHALLENGING GENDER IN *ANGEL SANCTUARY*

Kaori Yuki's *Angel Sanctuary* first appeared in 1995, and belongs to that class of stories from the 1990s that were preoccupied with the approaching end of the millennium. Like other stories of its ilk, such as CLAMP's *X/1999*, *Angel Sanctuary* posits that the end of the world was scheduled for the year 1999. Yuki's twenty-volume epic focuses its attention on the travails of a teenaged boy, Setsuna Mudo, who suffers from a host of misfortunes: he lives in Tokyo at the end of the twentieth century, with no clue that the "Assiah Destruction Program" is due to begin there. In addition to that, he happens to be the current reincarnation of the Organic Angel Alexiel, who has been sentenced to be continuously reincarnated as a human—and to suffer and die early in each of those reincarnations. Both of those difficulties, however, pale before his primary preoccupation, for Setsuna is hopelessly, helplessly in love with his younger sister, Sara. As if all that wasn't quite enough for one young man to deal with, before Setsuna quite knows what is happening (and whether he wants to go along with it or not), he finds himself being approached by a pair of demons who claim that Alexiel was their former ally, and who want to free her from her cycle of punitive reincarnations—even if doing so means killing Alexiel's current incarnation. When compared to the other hand, though, that doesn't seem quite so bad, because Alexiel's twin brother, the Inorganic Angel Rosiel, has been released from the seal that had kept him locked away—and Rosiel is sociopathically obsessed with possessing Alexiel for his own, and doesn't care who he has to kill or maim in order to get her.

All of the foregoing complications—and then some—occur within the first two volumes of *Angel Sanctuary*. The series is, perhaps, the epitome of shoujo manga: its pages are full of

lush art and too-beautiful-to-be-true characters, all of whom are besieged by improbable, impossible problems. Indeed, these characteristics are what draw many people to shoujo manga; the compelling characters can make even the most melodramatic, Byzantine plots worth reading. Shoujo's unrelenting focus on the redemptive, transcendent power of love is an additional enticement. Indeed, despite the many problems that beset him, Setsuna's primary focus remains his love for Sara, which provides the driving force behind much of *Angel Sanctuary's* plot. *Angel Sanctuary's* willingness to dive headlong into its enormously-complicated plot is one of its strongest assets. In the course of its twenty volumes, the series provides a minute examination of what it means to love, what it means to desire, what it means to transgress, and what freedom and power mean, both in their own right and in relation to each other. This examination occurs within the bounds of apparently heteronormative, heterosexual relationships: the enormously complicated plot ultimately resolves into the simple formulation, "Boy loves girl. Boy loses girl. Boy goes through hell to get girl back." However, Yuki plays with gender and sibling relationships freely as *Angel Sanctuary* follows those plot points; the way she uses gender identity and sibling relationships complicate the heterosexual romance narrative. Rather than using same-sex relationships the way that *Utena* does to critique binary ideas of gender and sexuality, or queer our ideas of what masculinity and humanity mean as *Pet Shop of Horrors* does, *Angel Sanctuary* subverts heteronormative romances by situating them between siblings and by layering multiple gender identities onto the same individual. This forces the reader to question what aspects of those identities belong to which identity, and where the places of overlap are. The result of Yuki's play is a critique of heteronormative sex and gender relations that is all the more scathing for the fact that it comes from within an ostensibly heteronormative romance narrative. Like *Utena* and *Pet Shop of Horrors*, *Angel Sanctuary* demands that we

rethink the boundaries that delineate identity and sexuality, and open these boundaries to a wider range of identities and loves.

***Angel Sanctuary*: A (Relatively) Brief Overview**

A summary of the action of *Angel Sanctuary* cannot do the story any sort of justice, but some idea of the overarching scheme of Kaori Yuki's world and plot are useful for understanding the significance of her thematic choices. Yuki's world of angels, demons, and the humans who are poised between them borrows heavily from the mythic and religious elements of the western Judeo-Christian tradition; a full study of the choices Yuki made when adapting her sources would make a fascinating study in its own right. Yuki arranges the world of *Angel Sanctuary* in such a way that the human world ("Assiah") is placed between the layers of the seven heavens and the seven hells. As one might expect, the heavens are ranged above Assiah, and are the dwelling place of the angels who work there. The seven hells descend below the Assiah; the topmost layer, Gehenna, is the home of a race of demons who have abandoned Lucifer's rebellion in order to form their own kingdom. Gehenna forms a mirror to the human world and is afflicted with many of the problems that the humans have caused in their own world (such as pollution). The residents of Gehenna have formed their own religion, one that is nature-based; they had attempted to live peacefully, but were attacked by the armies of heaven.

The layers of the heavens and the hells that are closest to Assiah bear the most resemblance to it; the lower levels of heaven contain cities and slums that are very like human cities. The farther one goes from Assiah in either direction, the less like Assiah the terrain becomes. However, barring a few exceptions, the angels and demons resemble humans in most respects—not just physically, but culturally and socially as well. Yuki shows angels and demons who are prone to anger, violence, xenophobia, bigotry, outright cruelty, lust, ambition, and

greed, just as any human can be. The only real difference between the angels and the demons of *Angel Sanctuary* is that the demons are honest about being all of those things, while the angels seek to profess their own sanctity at every turn. It is a delicious irony, especially when read in the context of U. S. conservative Christianity, and the many scandals that have plagued its leaders.

Angel Sanctuary begins with political upheaval in both the ranks of heaven and hell, as various factions jockey to use an impending astrological event to further their own ends. In heaven, God is absent—supposedly in retreat, but actually missing altogether. In hell, Lucifer is also an absent presence, as most of his powers are bound up in keeping the realm of the hells stable. The highest council of angels, led by the figure of Sevohtarte, conceals God's disappearance, while Sevohtarte works to bring about the destruction of Assiah and its sinful human inhabitants, as well as anyone he deems "impure." He is countered by Rosiel, who had been sealed away by Alexiel; unfortunately for those who hope that Rosiel will bring stability back to the heavens, Rosiel's imprisonment has driven him mad. The other major figures come from the hells: Kurai, who rules what is left of Gehenna, seeks to release Alexiel, hoping that she will gain a badly-needed ally for the remains of her people. In the lower levels of hell, the demon lord known as Mad Hatter seeks a way to render the hells stable, since the bindings that Lucifer used to stabilize the planes tend to come undone without a steady influx of power to maintain them. The crux of all of these power struggles is the figure of Setsuna, who houses the reincarnated soul of Alexiel.

These factions all have a use for Setsuna, primarily due to the power sleeping within him. Rosiel wants to possess Alexiel; Kurai wants to ally with her. Mad Hatter would like to see Alexiel, one of the heavens' strongest warriors, brought under the control of the hells, and Sevohtarte wants to use Setsuna's position as the Messiah in order to trigger the Assiah

Destruction Program. Of these motives, only Sevothtarte's comes closest to being achieved. When Sara is killed, Setsuna goes berserk in his grief; when his powers rage out of control, they trigger the Assiah Destruction Program. Only the direct intervention of the mysterious figure of the Holy Hermit Adam Kadamon, the dual-gendered figure who is also called Seraphita, is able to calm Setsuna—and that only when Adam Kadamon promises Setsuna that there is a way to retrieve Sara's soul so that the two can be reunited. This intervention comes at a price: Adam Kadamon has been imprisoned within God's tower, and can only stave off the destruction of Assiah for a limited period of time. The price of Adam Kadamon's assistance is Setsuna's willingness to help free it.

What follows from that point is Setsuna's journey to rescue Sara. During this quest, he encounters an astonishing array of angelic and demonic factions. His motives, which were originally purely selfish and personal (rescuing his sister), gradually transform over the course of these encounters. As Setsuna is forced to confront the hypocrisy and the corruption hidden behind the beautiful façades of the heavens, as well as the suffering among the (relatively-innocent) ranks of the lower-class angels and the ordinary demons living in Gehenna, his senses of compassion and justice are awakened. Ultimately, his quest becomes as much about fighting the corrupt powers of the heavens as it is about rescuing Sara. This pits him against Rosiel, who has resumed his powerful place as one of God's favorite creations, despite Rosiel's increasing madness and degeneration. Ultimately, Setsuna and his friends must come into direct conflict with God himself, the one whose creation schemes have brought about much of the suffering Setsuna has witnessed.

The journey that Setsuna undertakes and the very brief outline of the political intrigues he must deal with that I have outlined above is not atypical of most shoujo manga. What sets *Angel*

Sanctuary apart and requires attention from a careful reader is Yuki's attention to issues of power and how gender identity plays into the operations of power. Although *Angel Sanctuary*'s driving force is Setsuna's love for Sara, and his quest to rescue her, Yuki never loses sight of the fact that he is doing so in a world where power adheres to masculinity much differently than it does femininity. Gender identity colors and affects all of Setsuna's interactions with the other major figures highlighted above, and how gender and power are imbricated with each other forms one of the major themes of *Angel Sanctuary*.

Things Left Unspoken: Discourses of Gender and Power

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault addresses the task of

locat[ing] the focus of power, the channels it takes, and the discourses it permeates in order to reach the most tenuous and individual modes of behavior, the paths that give it access to the rare or scarcely perceivable forms of desire, how it penetrates and controls everyday pleasure—all this entailing effects that may be those of refusal, blockage, and invalidation, but also incitements and intensification: in short, the “polymorphous techniques of power.” (11)

Foucault takes issue here with what he calls the repressive hypothesis: the notion that power functions in a purely repressive, proscriptive manner—that is, from the top down, by some figure of authority forbidding certain behaviors and permitting others. Foucault argues instead that power operates at every level, both consciously and unconsciously, and that we participate in the construction of the regulatory proscriptions by which we live. Discourse, which is the propagation of language and knowledge (both that which is said as well as that which is left unsaid), constructs our understanding and knowledge of everything, and therefore power must also be produced discursively. For Foucault, power is a function of discourse, something that is

created and circulated through the discursive processes that tell us what is and is not permitted, and who is and is not allowed to speak. In return, power affects the functioning of discourse itself. For Foucault, the discourses which surround sex and sexuality are instigated by the operations of power: by continually confessing our sexuality as we discuss and analyze it, we re-enact the operations of power that, ostensibly, our continual discussions are supposed to be appeasing, because power, as a function of discourse, is always already part of everything we do. In other words, our recurrent conversations about sexuality reinforce the dictates that say we must continually discuss our sexuality, even when these recursive conversations seek alternative understandings of sexuality. In this fashion, discourses about sexuality serve to legitimize some forms of sexuality (those which are spoken aloud), while it delegitimizes or disavows others.

In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler suggests that one of the disavowed sexualities is a function of the incest taboo. She says,

[T]he law that would secure the incest taboo as the foundation of symbolic family structures states the universality of the incest taboo as well as its necessary symbolic consequences. One of the symbolic consequences of the law as formulated is precisely the derealization of lesbian and gay forms of parenting, single-mother households, blended family arrangements in which there may be more than one mother or father, where the symbolic position is itself dispersed and rearticulated in new social formations. If one holds to the enduring symbolic efficacy of this law, then it seems to me that it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of incestuous practice taking place. . . . Whether it is a challenge to the universality of exogamic heterosexuality from within (through incest) or from rival social organizations of sexuality (lesbian, gay, bisexual, as

well as nonmonogamous), each of these departures from the norm becomes difficult to acknowledge within the scheme that claims that the efficacious incest taboo determines the field of sexual intelligibility. In a sense, incest is disavowed by the law on incest, and the forms of sexuality that emerge at a distance from the norm become unintelligible . . . (158)

What Butler suggests here is that the discourse surrounding the very idea of an incest taboo enacts a double-bind. First, it assumes a universal prohibition on cross-gender, cross-generational incest, which by its nature precludes same-gender/cross-generational, as well as same-gender/same-generational and cross-gender/same-generational versions of incest. It also assumes a heteronormative household, which further erases any household that does not adhere to such a model. Second, the law's assumption of its own enduring, unimpeachable presence would seem to indicate (with all real-world evidence to the contrary) that incestuous incidents never occur; underneath such a law, things such as incest, as well as other non-normative sexual practices, become impossible for us to understand or even conceive of. Because of this double-bind, Butler argues that it is necessary for us to refrain from declaring any form of sexuality foreclosed in advance of an examination of it: "For if we say that, by definition, certain forms of sexuality are not intelligible or that they could not have existed, we risk duplicating in the very theoretical language we use the kinds of disavowals that it is the task of psychoanalysis to bring to light" (159). For both Foucault and Butler, then, it becomes vital to consider what things we leave unspoken, and, if necessary, to speak these things aloud. Speaking the things that have been allowed to go unchallenged or assumed can be a potentially disruptive act; at the very least, it forces us to acknowledge the forms of sexuality that we may have been more comfortable ignoring, and forces us to question our assumptions.

Discourses of Gender and Sexuality in *Angel Sanctuary*

The text of *Angel Sanctuary* acknowledges disavowed, delegitimized forms of gender and sexuality at every turn. In an author's note in the first volume, Kaori Yuki notes, "[*Angel Sanctuary* is] still 'about forbidden love,' but it's a theme I like, so I want to do it right. I don't have a brother, so I can write about it. I doubt any female mangaka who had a brother could write this kind of story!" (57) The forbidden love to which Yuki is referring is, of course, sibling incest, and it is a recurring theme throughout the series. However, Setsuna and Sara's relationship is very unlike Akio and Anthy's relationship within *Utena*, because it is enthusiastically consented to and enjoyed by *both* parties. Where Anthy submits to her brother's coercion because she sees no way to resist him, Setsuna is the one who continually resists his attraction to Sara. It is Sara who pursues their relationship, and tries repeatedly to persuade that Setsuna that she is willing to engage in a taboo relationship with him, before Setsuna finally agrees to consummate their relationship. Furthermore, while the reactions to Akio's rape of Anthy are uniformly negative, the protagonists of *Angel Sanctuary* generally endorse Sara and Setsuna's relationship, doting on them rather fondly. This is not to say that Sara and Setsuna's relationship is widely approved; it is condemned at several turns by various antagonists, and it is clear from the context of these condemnations that the two will continue to face societal disapproval. However, in the eyes of Sara and Setsuna's friends, the nature of their relationship is one that is generally ignored.

Thus, from the very first volume of the series, Yuki requires us to confront non-normative sexuality, and to reconsider our ideas of what an allowable relationship can be. If the participants of an act are both informed and mutually-consenting, she asks as she shows us Sara and Setsuna's love for each other, does it really matter that they're siblings? Yuki emphasizes

this question with other sibling pairs and the way desire operates on their relationships. Rosiel and Alexiel are one such set of siblings; though he desires Alexiel above everything, she does not reciprocate his desire. His repeated attempts to possess her regardless of her own desires is one of the things that makes him one of the major antagonists of the series. Another sibling set are the twins Michael and Lucifer; the other characters tread carefully around Michael, and avoid mentioning his older twin brother for fear that it will set off Michael's notoriously bad temper. However, the apparent hatred Michael harbors for his brother is, in fact, Michael's way of concealing his own sense of betrayal and his sense of inadequacy compared to Lucifer's superior strength and position. Since their relationship is embedded in a story about siblings who love each other in non-normative ways, it's not impossible that Michael's respect for his brother also comprises a certain amount of desire for him as well. This frustrated desire and Michael's subsequent rage make him a fascinating figure, especially when read against Rosiel's frustrated desire for Alexiel. Where Rosiel's desires drive him mad, Michael's desire stunts his growth; until he recognizes the truth of his emotions, he is quite literally unable to grow any more than he already has.

Sibling relationships are certainly not the only site of non-normative sexuality and desire located within the story; nor is it the only place in which Yuki challenges the conventions of heteronormativity. Yuki is fascinated with the play of gender. Her protagonist, Setsuna, is male, but he contains the reincarnated soul of the (female) Organic Angel Alexiel. The disruption this causes him to experience in his own cognition is interesting, especially during the moments when Setsuna's own consciousness must become submerged to Alexiel's. He experiences the world through an outside-but-inside perspective at these moments. If this were not already disorienting enough, he also spends a length of time inhabiting Alexiel's female body, during

which time he must cope with an alien set of experiences and challenges (such as the strain having a large bust can place on one's back, for instance). Through Setsuna's experience of a layered set of gender identities—sometimes he is himself, in a male body; sometimes he is himself, in a female body; sometimes he is Alexiel in a male body; and sometimes he is Alexiel in a female body—the reader must confront what it means to be male or female. How much of Setsuna's personality and nature are due to possessing a masculine gender identity, and how much of his personality are independent of that gender identity? This, of course, is a thorny debate in itself, and Yuki doesn't provide many clear answers. However, framing the question in terms of a shoujo protagonist places it before audiences who may not have considered it at all, which is one way of opening up the discourses that construct gender identity.

This play between male experience and female embodiment, and vice versa, is not only limited to Setsuna. One of the figures introduced early in the series, the demon Arachne, is male-bodied but dresses exclusively as a woman. Arachne does not deny being male, and does not seem interested in actually becoming a woman, but revels in dressing beautifully nonetheless. As Arachne's encounter with Kira in the second volume demonstrates, Arachne has a clear appreciation for handsome men as well. On the other end of the spectrum, in marked contrast to Arachne's cheerful acknowledgement of male embodiment under feminine trappings, is the figure of Sevothtarte. Sevothtarte presents as male for much of the series, but is ultimately revealed to be a female angel named Lailah. Sevothtarte's reasons for disclaiming the identity of Lailah are complex, and tied to the prevailing attitudes about women within the heavens:

MALE ANGEL: A woman making think tank candidate ahead of us?!

MALE ANGEL: She probably seduced her superiors.

MALE ANGEL: Women have it so easy!

KIRIE: [thinking] Romantic love is the greatest of all taboos in heaven... so the few women there are persecuted, accused of arousing desire and causing corruption. I'm sure there were corrupt female angels who used their wiles to their advantage... but all I ever did was work as hard as I could.

ROSIEL: [offering his hand to Kirie] It's because you are attractive. Men avoid you because they are afraid to succumb to your beauty. (Yuki 3: 129-130)

Female angels are regarded with suspicion and revulsion, always suspected of using their own sexuality to ensnare male angels; Lailah is one of the victims of this revulsion. Although she is a brilliant scientist and successful because of her own talents, her male peers become jealous of her. To punish her for her success (and their own failures, which they perceive to be her fault), they rape Lailah viciously. Lailah's reaction to being raped is to dissociate herself from her own identity completely. She becomes Sevothtarte, who is aggressively masculine, and equally as concerned with what he perceives as the "filth" surrounding him; Sevothtarte's goal is to purify the heavens and to turn them into a pure white world of his own design.

Finding a way to unify male and female is one of God's ongoing projects; to that end, he experiments constantly on the bodies of his angels, often with horrific results. One of these becomes the demon lord Astaroth, who is actually a set of twins who have been merged into one body. The female twin, Astarte, explains:

ASTARTE: Did you know that God likes experiments? He mixed many types of DNA to create various angels. But what God was particularly interested in was creating the legendary Holy Hermit Adam Kadamon, who was both sexes and could control both the powers of light and dark... but the only success was Seraphita. The experiment never worked again... It only served to create

creatures that had unique bodies and minds. Yet the experiments continued. That's how my brother and I became... Astaroth. . . . Nobody can stop God's madness. We were originally born as twins. And my consciousness was inserted into his body. But of course this was a failure. Two consciousnesses cannot exist in the same body. (Yuki 10: 90-91)

Astarte and her twin, Astoreth, were supposed to form a being like Adam Kadamon, who is twin-gendered and extremely powerful. Instead, they are left as a being with a single body and divided minds, both of which are driven mad by the experience. When they join Lucifer's rebellion against God, Lucifer curses them so that they can trade off on use of the body. Depending on which consciousness is dominant, Astaroth's body is either male or female, and switches between genders seemingly without effort. This switching between male- and female-embodiment only serves to highlight the similarities between the twins, and further challenges what it means to be male or female.

Kaori Yuki goes beyond challenging heteronormative gender identity; she also takes on gender identity itself by examining the nature of cisgendered identity. "Cisgendered" is another way of identifying someone whose gender identity conforms to his or her sexual identity from birth. This is opposed to someone who is transgendered, whose gender identity does not match his or her sexual identity. The character that is the most interesting example of how Kaori Yuki challenges heteronormative, cisgendered assumptions about gender identity is that of Mad Hatter, or Belial. Belial is one of the seven demon lords, and spends most of *Angel Sanctuary* scheming new ways to serve Lucifer, to whom Belial is fanatically loyal. Belial, like the other demon lords, was formerly an angel. Unlike the other characters, Belial's character design changes with every new appearance on the page. Belial's amorphous presentation is quite

deliberate: although the English translation of the text uses the pronoun “he” to refer to Belial, Belial is actually intersexed—that is, physically neither male nor female. As an angel, Belial refused to take the drugs that would have transformed Belial into a woman, and remained in an interstitial gender space between a masculine gender identity and a feminine gender identity. Belial rejects the veiled hypocrisy of heaven; prior to Lucifer’s rebellion, Belial made a habit of seducing and destroying other angels, proving over and over (through the medium of sex and blood) how corrupt angelic society really is. Belial’s loyalty to Lucifer stems from Lucifer’s own chilly form of integrity: Lucifer sees exactly what it is Belial is doing when Belial seduces the other angels, and his honest disgust gives Belial the truth that s/he has been seeking. The character of Belial, like Setsuna and Astaroth, requires us to rethink what is essential about gender identity, since Belial refuses to conform to a singular identity.

The character of Belial echoes the figure of Adam Kadamon as well; as noted above, Adam Kadamon is the one successful dual-gendered figure, and possesses an incredible amount of power. It is implied that Adam Kadamon’s power stems from the fact that s/he possesses both masculinity and femininity within the same embodiment; this power is generative and is set in contrast to the destructive (and emphatically masculine and patriarchal) bent of God’s power. Here is one of Yuki’s most subversive moments: when Alexiel finally embraces Rosiel, absorbing him into herself in a gesture that is reminiscent of coitus and pregnancy at the same time, she absorbs his masculine powers as well, and becomes a figure like Adam Kadamon. As this dual-gendered figure, Alexiel defeats and destroys God, and then Adam Kadamon (at the latter’s request) in order to set humanity, the angels, and the demons free of God’s twisted experiments. Thus the transformative moment comes when singular identities become multiple; when Alexiel steps beyond being purely female, it becomes possible to wrench destiny into a

new path—one that isn't defined by the rules imposed by heaven, but is dictated by choice and love.

Sources of Transgression

The real taboo in the realm of the heavens is love, which is the most transgressive act an angel can commit. During Sara's trial (orchestrated by Sevothtarte, so that he will be able to gain access to the power of Sara's own angelic counterpart, the archangel Gabriel), she is charged with having had incestuous sexual relations to Setsuna. While this causes outrage among the court, the real outrage seems to stem more from the fact that there was a sexual relationship at all—and the (fake) accusation that Sara was pregnant with Setsuna's child upon her human body's death. Genuine love and desire between angels is something that God has forbidden.

Individuals such as Sevothtarte seem to believe that it is because women are inherently degraded (and degrading to any man who touches them). However, it seems as though love between angels is forbidden because it is a procreative act, one that exists outside of God's direct control. Angels are created by God, through complex mechanical means and the abuse of Adam Kadamon's dual-gendered body as a means of sustenance. Angels who have sex with each other produce children who are unpredictable in appearance and power: some of these "I-Children" are physically marked as other to the ranks of blond-haired, blue-eyed angels. Others, like the character Raziel, are born with powers that are different from the other angels.

Beyond the trial at which Sara is accused of having a relationship with her brother, and the frantic attempts of Sara and Setsuna's mother to keep the two from sinning, there is very little stigmatization of the incestuous nature of Sara and Setsuna's love for each other. Setsuna's friends and companions take his adoration of his little sister as a matter of course, something that is completely unremarkable. Indeed, the text ends on a romantic high note: after the deaths of

both God and Adam Kadamon (which will force the society of the heavens to change, or risk extinction), Sara and Setsuna return to their human lives. They will live a human lifespan together before returning to their lives as Alexiel and Gabriel, and this is presented as something completely normal.

As Adam Kadamon absorbs the final corrupted form of God, an act that will destroy both of them, it plays a final message. This lengthy speech narrates the final pages of volume twenty, as the disrupted worlds of heaven and hell start to form a new equilibrium, and all the surviving characters begin slipping into their new lives:

Can you hear me... hear my voice? [. . .] Perhaps there was no answer right from the start. Humans lose sight of this... they fear the truth that they cannot comprehend.

There are no true boundaries between good and evil in this world. Heaven and hell do not really exist. The real truth is something you must discover for yourselves, as you stumble through suffering and confusion. There's only one thing I can do. I can pray that you all never have to be sad. I hope you meet the people that you love.

Find the truth. Be happy. Never forget that you were born out of great love. [. . .]

For the happiness of my beloved children... the ones who send out the eternally unchanging prayer [. . .] the winged ones flying in the heavens, flapping the wings of happiness, full of love. Someday there will be a chance meeting. This is not the end. It's a premonition that's almost like certainty. We're sure to be drawn to each other. Beloved ones gather by fate. Neither god nor human. The ones born wrapped in a dazzling love. They are called angels. (Yuki 10: 186-201)

Thus, the final commandment of *Angel Sanctuary*'s highest power is to form connections and find love with each other, and to stop drawing false distinctions between good and evil. Angels

and demons are, as Adam Kadamon points out, constructs—they are every bit as human as the actual human characters are. The notion of pure good and pure evil is equally constructed. As the text points out, over and over, labeling an action “good” if it is in service of heaven’s goals does not actually make it an ethically sound act (such as the murder of I-Children who do not conform to the physical standards of the angels, or the slaughter of Kurai’s people, merely because they are *technically* demons, albeit peace-loving ones). The answers are not that easy, and the process of finding the truth is a difficult one. However, as Adam Kadamon implies, the place to begin seeking this truth lies in loving other people.

While it is deeply unlikely that Kaori Yuki is advocating better living through loving one’s siblings in more than a merely fraternal way, the implications of *Angel Sanctuary*’s depiction of gender and sexuality are nonetheless quite provocative. Like Chiho Saito and Matsuri Akino, Yuki’s project of showing forms of gender and sexuality that do not adhere to strictly heteronormative models forces us to question those models, and whether there might be better models available to us. As all three series show, questioning these assumptions can be a deeply transgressive, subversive act, one that offers the possibility of legitimizing of a broader range of gender and sexual discourses that we can understand as intelligible—even when the titles that broach these topics emerge from a genre that is, itself, largely heteronormative.

CONCLUSION

As this study has shown, the range of shoujo manga available to U. S. audiences contains a staggering potential for subversive readings of gender and sexuality. Selected titles like *Revolutionary Girl Utena* may open up ideas about female same-sex friendships and desires that the young women reading them may not have previously considered. *Utena* must also be valued for providing a relatively mainstream model of lesbian sexuality, something that remains altogether too rare in the literature of young adults (and adults, for that matter). This is especially important since the same-sex relationship between Utena and Anthy is not presented strictly for the titillation of the audience, but is instead a key component to the revolution promised by the story's title. Titles like *Pet Shop of Horrors*, though aimed at an audience primarily interested in beautiful male characters who have ambiguous sexual tension with each other, provide a valuable commentary on the need for queer spaces, as well as a cogent ecological criticism of the modern urban-industrial complex and its increasingly negative effect on the environment. *Angel Sanctuary* and other titles like it offer a further commentary on the restrictive nature of heteronormative, cisgendered practices; by displaying alternative models of sexuality and gender, *Angel Sanctuary* creates spaces within our discourses of modern sexuality that operate to create legitimacy for a broader range of sexual practices and gender identities. All three of these titles taken together point to a larger trend within the shoujo titles published in English, which is a challenging vision of gender and sexuality as sites of greater fluidity and flexibility than are accounted for in heteronormative constructions of gender and sexuality. The audiences who consume shoujo titles are, therefore, consuming nuanced theoretical constructions of gender and sexuality that subvert some of the very tropes that are used within the titles themselves.

Studying manga and anime within their transplanted contexts is thus an area containing a great deal of potential, and is a somewhat-neglected area of scholarship within the body of current anime and manga scholarship. It is a practice that is not without its risks. Studying the English-language versions of manga titles forces us to assume that the translation of the original is relatively accurate, and to accept that publishing companies often make editorial decisions that affect how we will understand and read the characters. Such studies are best undertaken by scholars who have a good working knowledge of Japanese cultural practices, and can ground themselves in an understanding of how these compare to Western practices. Such a perspective allows a scholar to see where the disjunctions between these practices occur within a text, and allow him or her to explore them as fully as possible.

In this sense, it is more productive to suggest that shoujo manga—and manga in general—offers a potential site for the subversion of heteronormative, heterosexist models of understanding gender and sexuality. The cultural model from which manga emerges is sufficiently different enough from the U. S. model—different, not necessarily better or worse—that the portrayals of love, romance, and sexuality within manga can be dislocated just enough from the Western frame of reference that they cause a frisson of uncertainty in the minds of the audience. This frisson has the possibility of requiring U. S. manga fans to rethink their assumptions about sex and gender, and as such, makes manga a fruitful area of study. Shoujo manga, given its thematic focus on romantic and sexual matters, is particularly interesting in this respect. Titles whose writers have a focus that extends beyond the immediate relationship of their protagonists, like Saito, Akino, and Yuki, often create works that are stunningly complex depictions of sexuality and gender. The play of gender politics within these titles thus bears out complex notions of sexuality and gender embraced by feminist and queer theorists, and suggests

that the experience of reading shoujo manga can be a transformative one. The increasing popularity of manga among U. S. audiences suggests that studying these titles is important as well. As the titles examined in this study suggests, shoujo manga can contain some deeply complicated and deeply disturbing material within packages that seem deceptively innocent. It is also important not to assume that all shoujo manga approaches these subjects with a perspective that is subversive. While the titles that are examined here are ones that take a progressive, feminist- and queer-friendly approach to their subject matter, other titles are much less progressive. Here one thinks of Natsuki Takaya's *Fruits Basket*, which is a series whose beginnings suggested complicated, nuanced same-sex relationships, as well as several ambiguous relationship triangles that seemed distinctly polyamorous in their subtexts. However, all of the queer possibilities present in *Fruits Basket* were completely foreclosed by the end of the series, which saw every single character paired off in highly heteronormative romances, whether those romances made sense or not. A critical approach to these titles is necessary, in order to avoid essentializing shoujo manga as a uniformly-progressive genre.

It is equally important to emphasize that not all readers of shoujo manga are particularly interested in the nuanced aspects of the genders and sexualities depicted by some titles. Many mangaka approach their topics from a fairly uncritical perspective, and many manga fans exhibit an equivalent disinterest in examining their stories for disavowed or subversive gender issues. An additional subset of fans who consume these stories do read for subtext, especially male-male subtext, for the purposes of writing fan fiction that dwells on the romantic relationships between their favorite male characters. However, simply writing male-male relationships is not necessarily a subversive act, as many of the fan writers who do so reproduce the conventions of heteronormative romance when they do. While a study of how the Western readers of shoujo

manga approach the sexuality and gender issues of the titles they read is beyond the scope of this project, it is a project that suggests fruitful ground for future scholarship. It would also be an excellent annex to that body of scholarship that is already examining Western media fandom's fascination with slash (male-male romances written for domestic media projects, such as fan fiction written about Kirk and Spock of *Star Trek*, who are perhaps the best-known faces of the slash movement).

There are interesting possibilities for the study of gender and sexuality in other genres of manga as well, though they were not included in this project. Shounen titles often feature nearly-exclusively-male casts, and might provide fertile ground for analyses of masculinity and masculinizing practices, the nature of competition and sportsmanship, or perhaps homosocial male practices, as well as possible re-readings of heterosexual romances from a masculine perspective. Other genres of manga—the post-apocalyptic or the historical—suggest studies that might be historiographic in nature. It hardly needs to be mentioned that the hentai or ecchi subgenres offer a vast—if somewhat disturbing—array of potential topics, from studies of the trans-human sexuality of tentacle porn to the ways in which masculine misogyny plays out in the rape fantasies of the more violent forms of hentai. As and the popularity of manga titles among U. S. readers grows, and the array of titles which have been translated into English with it, such cultural scholarship will become increasingly necessary and important.

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