Love and Beauty on the Battlefield: Transcultural Influence and Transformation from Naoko Takeuchi's *Sailor Moon* to Anglophone Young Adult Fantasy

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ABSTRACT

Despite the considerable popularity of the 1990s animated television series *Sailor Moon* around the world, English-language research has largely neglected the original manga. Naoko Takeuchi's major success with the girls' manga series, *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon* (1991-1997), launched her into the spotlight in Japan and, to this day, its eponymous 14-year-old protagonist remains the quintessential 'magical girl' character. To understand the success of the series and, in particular, how Takeuchi's innovations with the adolescent female heroine and her narrative journey resonated with young female readers globally, a comparison can be made between *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon* and Takeuchi's lesser-known companion work, *Codename:*

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Sailor V (1991-1997). This often-forgotten series was initially written as a one-chapter short story, whose success inspired *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon*, and was later developed into a prequel for the more successful work. In the extended version of *Codename: Sailor V*, Takeuchi's original heroine undergoes a unique process of reversal, being progressively undermined until she is appropriate to serve as a secondary character in *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon*. Examining the two texts with a particular eye to each protagonist's personal characteristics, supernatural abilities, social connections, and narrative arcs provides insight into the attributes of the heroine's journey that Takeuchi considered essential for a true 'chosen one'. These features persist in present-day magical girl stories, as well as related works produced around the world, including popular Anglophone YA fiction, and examining their origins can provide a richer understanding of the transnational connections between stories for girls around the world.

INTRODUCTION

The Japanese girls' manga series *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon* (1991-1997) (henceforth *Sailor Moon*)[1] and its subsequent multimedia adaptations have had a lasting impact on popular culture at a global level, but the original story is underexamined in Anglophone scholarship. While each adaptation, ranging from anime to a live-action TV show, provides its own spin on the story, the core narrative always follows 14-year-old Usagi Tsukino, who meets a black female cat called Luna, and gains the power to transform into her superheroine alter-ego, Sailor Moon. The series draws on the established conventions of the girls' (or shōjo) manga genre that it sits within, and specifically the archetype of the 'magical girl', while also taking influence from popular action stories promoted to boys to create a more adventure-driven plot. The series had immediate success in Japan when it was first released (Fujimoto 35), and the first English translation went on to sell "at least a million copies in North America" (Garcia 125). More than 30 years since the publication of the first chapter, the series is regularly celebrated in Japan through live events such as concerts and fan gatherings organised by the publisher, and its most recent movie adaptation was released in 2023, indicating its continued relevance (Loveridge). The English-language localisation of the manga series, and its companion anime TV show, has also seen its influence spread and inspire new creators around the world: it has been cited as a creative influence by creators ranging from YA fiction author Marissa Meyer to *Steven Universe* showrunner, Rebecca Sugar (Reierson; Sugar).

To understand the legacy that *Sailor Moon* has today, it is essential to explore how the creator, Naoko Takeuchi, revolutionised the shōjo genre by crafting a unique heroine's journey that resonates with girls worldwide. Unlike other research which seeks to find feminist or queer attributes to justify *Sailor Moon*'s success and value (see, for example, Yatron), in this article I instead wish to situate the series in the history of girls' manga and girls' culture to

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[1] See *Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon* in references. While the series is originally known as *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon*, the new editions in 2014 featured the changed title of *Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon*.

focus on how Takeuchi's work continues established literary conventions whilst contributing innovative transcultural elements, such as bodily transformation. As Deborah Shamoon notes, girls' culture and texts are "less a direct rebuke to the patriarchal discourse than an alternate vision of girlhood", and like Shamoon, my study is similarly "not concerned with […] locating subversive or radical ideology" in Takeuchi's work (13). Such approaches have led to a body of Anglophone scholarship that has "overestimated" the presence and significance of these elements in shōjo manga, thereby "overshadowing the majority of *shōjo manga* works" (Fraser and Monden 545) and misrepresenting the genre as a whole. Rather, I argue that distinguishing what makes *Sailor Moon* so unique is possible through comparison with Takeuchi's often-overlooked prior publication, as well as consideration of earlier stories about magical girls in the girls' manga genre.

Takeuchi's *Codename: Sailor V* (1991-1997) shares a similar premise to *Sailor Moon*. The story opens when 13-year-old Minako Aino encounters a white male cat called Artemis, who recruits her to fight crime under the alias of Sailor V. However, Takeuchi originally intended Minako's story to be a standalone, single-chapter publication – it was only when publishers approached her to redesign the series for a longer serialisation that she developed *Sailor Moon* (Allison 131). While working on *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon*, Takeuchi periodically returned to *Codename: Sailor V*, transforming it from a short story more closely aligned with the tropes of earlier magical girl works, such as *Sally the Witch* (1966-1967), into a prequel for her more successful series. As a result, while *Sailor Moon* carves out a new definition for what it is to be a heroine in girls' manga, *Codename: Sailor V* depicts a heroine who loses her status as the 'chosen one', mirroring the decline of that earlier magical-girl archetype. A comparison of key moments of the heroines' journeys and how 'chosen one' status is conferred upon the protagonists in the two works illuminates the attributes essential to the new magical-girl archetype that has so widely influenced popular culture around the world.[2] Scholarship on the Japanese genre of shōjo media (and more broadly, girls' culture), as well as on Western Anglophone narratives of the girl hero in fantasy fiction and film, provide insight into the shared and distinct features of a heroine's journey in different cultural contexts, which is relevant due to the considerable role of transcultural influences on the development of shōjo manga and culture.

To contextualise Takeuchi's works within the girls' manga genre, I first provide an overview of the history of the shōjo as a concept and girls' culture and manga, drawing out key elements such as the transcultural aesthetics, beauty and femininity, and transformation of the body. I then examine how the trope of bodily transformation distinguishes the heroine's journey from her male hero counterpart, at the same time revealing how Takeuchi creates two fundamentally different female adolescent protagonists even within the same genre and conventions of girl's manga. I also consider the role of romantic love within Takeuchi's plots as a device for elevating a girls' manga heroine to chosen-one status – or actively relegating

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[2] I use the term 'heroine' to foreground the gendered difference between a female and male protagonist's journey, and the term 'chosen one' to identify the character burdened with the duty of saving the world.

her to the background – and connect this to the notion of destined love in *Sailor Moon*-inspired YA fiction. These transcultural elements of the heroine's journey present in Takeuchi's work are particularly relevant, given the series' positive reception by female fans in different language markets and its retransmission back to Anglophone texts in a new manner through *Sailor Moon*.

The *Sailor Moon* volumes referenced in this article are the editions from the 2011 re-launch of the series into the Anglophone market after six years of being out of print. The original translation by *Mixx/Tokyopop* is widely viewed negatively by Anglophone fans today. This is due to its excessive localisation of the text which strips it of its Japanese cultural context, arbitrary changes to character names, as well as manipulations of the images so that a volume is read from left-to-right instead of the right-to-left direction intended by the creator (Sleeper and Iskos). In contrast, the 2011 editions, released by the American arm of Takeuchi's own publisher in Japan, Kodansha, retain the character names, cultural context (with translator's notes provided in every edition), and correct reading direction (Sleeper and Iskos; Kodansha USA Publishing). While studying a translated text is different from studying it in its original language, the volumes used here are therefore the preferable choice because of their accuracy and their accessibility to those who do not read Japanese.

WHO IS THE SHŌJO OF SHŌJO MANGA?

Girls' manga developed from the girls' culture that had come about by the early 1900s in Japan, due in part to the introduction of more education for teenage girls at single-sex schools (Dollase xii). This in turn produced a new social identity known as the shōjo, spanning those years after childhood but before adulthood and the expected duties of motherhood (Dollase xii). The emergence of this identity is somewhat comparable to the concept of the adolescent, which emerged around this time in the United States (Fasteland 7). However, what it meant to be a shōjo does not have the same conceptual foundation as what it is to be an adolescent. The shōjo was defined by what she did as a female who was post-childhood and pre-adulthood (pre-motherhood), rather than the adolescent being defined by the onset of the biological process of puberty, which has obvious physical indicators. This makes the shōjo less of a real entity and more of an imagined girl who embodies traits seen to symbolise girlhood; indeed, the word shōjo is not used to refer to real Japanese girls today, who are far more diverse and complex (Berndt 1). Nevertheless, the shōjo is a powerful concept that has had material implications for real girls, leading to some tension about the shōjo's 'true nature'. More shallow criticisms, such as that by Victoria Anne Newsom, include condemnation for the shōjo's inherent "hyperfemininity and youth", which are at times reductively viewed as conforming to patriarchal standards (58). However, Lucy Fraser and Masafumi Moden accurately identify such scholarly approaches as sexist, pointing out that to "lament from an adult, feminist perspective" about the girly nature of shōjo manga is to "ultimately replicate the wider trend in which many cultural forms that are considered 'feminine' or 'girlish' have been deemed less

important and less worthy of examination" (545). While a decontextualised approach that does not consider the full history of the shōjo inevitably begets a singular, negative view, an understanding of the history provides insight into how different actors in Japan have conceptualised girlhood, including girls themselves.

Scholars agree that the shōjo had come to the fore in Japanese society by the early 1900s, but modern interpretations of her social meaning at the time differ. Hiromi Tsuchiya Dollase argues that the shōjo originated as an institutionally endorsed form of girlhood, emphasising the frequent use of the word "shōjo" in government policy documents pertaining to female education at the time (81). From these documents, we can see that the shōjo, as articulated by the government of the time, was a diligent schoolgirl in training for her pre-determined future as a "Good Wife, Wise Mother" who would serve national needs by bearing children (Czarnecki 50). Her close association with the family unit and education during her girlhood years was understood to prepare her to "contribute positively towards the state" (Nolte and Hastings 152), the ultimate beneficiary of her education and labour. This concept of the shōjo embodies nationalist ideals as well as restrictive gender norms. Despite no longer explicitly being part of state policy today, these values have influenced real children through the late-twentieth century, with girls expected to contribute to the housework and support their brothers in addition to managing their own studies, while boys are typically spared household burdens (White 60-63). Connections can be observed in the literature between the features of contemporary gender norms that affect real teenage girls, and the attributes of shōjo as imagined by the nation.

Conversely, it is widely agreed the shōjo ideal created by real girls during the early 1900s was a means to escape societal and national duties, through the creation of girls-only spaces that functioned as separate from the wider world. Such spaces included the communities that thrived in girls' schools and girls' magazines in the early-twentieth century (Shamoon 30-32; 50-51). Magazines,[3] in particular, were a crucial space where girls could actively construct a meaning for this new phase in their lives through submitting writing and art contributions for publication (Aoyama and Hartley 2-3). Some of these young girls went on to become established authors in their own right, with the most famous example being Nobuko Yoshiya, who often wrote stories about girls retreating from the world of adult duty (and motherhood) (Frederick 72-73). As Shamoon has observed, liminal, homosocial spaces are a consistent feature of girls' culture in reality and fiction, and the shōjo that emerged in girls' culture spaces like these magazine communities was one "who sought to subvert and resist the structural marginalization attempted by both the adult male and the women who acted on his behalf" (Aoyama and Hartley 2) by refusing to grow up and embrace national duties. This shōjo, created by real girls, was a celebration and romanticisation of the transient nature of their extended youth and freedom afforded by the longer period of education.

The evidence for both interpretations of the shōjo – as a figure of passivity and an icon of rebellion against gendered norms – demonstrates that multiple visions of girlhood emerged in different contexts, through different actors, at this point in history when real girls' lives

[3] For detailed studies of girls' magazines at that time, see Shamoon (2012) and Dollase (2019).

underwent change. The shōjo's "nebulous and complex" nature is not purely due to her literary existence, as one of the "imaginings of girls and girlhood in text and image" (Fraser and Monden 544). The form she takes is dependent on who is doing the imagining and writing. Therefore, while some may see this figure as limited or limiting, for others – including the girls who made her – she is a figure of liberation. Although a shōjo is only an imagined girl, this "does not rule out the possibility that [real] girls apply" the concept of shōjo identity to their own lives, nor that it may be applied to them by others (Berndt 1). As Nobuko Anan has argued, by engaging with shōjo community spaces even today, and finding "support from other girls in their imaginary realm, girls survive their everyday reality" (54). The shōjo, then, is not just an escapist fantasy at best, but a potential source of communal resilience with which real girls face the patriarchal world. *This* is the shōjo we find in shōjo manga: one made by and for real girls.

THE AESTHETICS OF GIRLS' CULTURE AND MANGA

The shōjo as she was imagined by real girls through writing into magazines in the 1900s in Japan led to the development of a particular set of aesthetics, that in turn gave rise to girls' manga as it is today. Indulgence in beauty is a characteristic inherent to girls' culture which first emerged on the pages of magazines like *Shōjo no Tomo* (*The Girl's Friend*) (Shamoon 29) in the early 1900s. A prominent aspect of these aesthetics that distinguishes girls' culture texts from others is the prevalence of items of adornment that suggest luxury and pleasure, such as ribbons, frills, bows, sweets, and flowers, and indeed, girls speaking in flowery language itself (see, for example, Monden, "A Dream Dress for Girls"; Shamoon; Frederick). Alongside the works of fiction and illustrations where these symbols appeared were advertisements targeted towards the girl reader, which converted the "desire for beauty" as presented in fiction into tangible objects that she could use in her daily life (Shamoon 60). The depictions and descriptions of these objects in girls' culture texts should not be dismissed as simply materialism. Rather, the interest in these unnecessary but pleasurable objects is best understood with the context of the state's expectation of girls at the time, and the values of "self-abnegation, thrift, and productivity" (Nolte and Hastings 152) to which all females were supposed to aspire. When the government later began censoring this same aesthetic from these magazines in the 1930s-1940s to promote anti-Western, and nationalist pro-war efforts, which included changing the visual depiction of girls to more "realistic bodies" without "Western dress", devastated letters from girls flooded in to editors expressing despair at the loss (Dollase 68-69). In this light, the presence of items of adornment such as those mentioned above show that girls used such artefacts not for vanity, but to reject the social expectation that they devote themselves to labour and reproduction at the expense of their own selfhood. Indeed, as Tomoko Aoyama and Barbara Hartley observe:

> Accusations of narcissism and self-indulgence that are sometimes aimed at
> the girl have surely been triggered in part by her refusal to allow masculine

structures to suppress her sensuous self-expression and by her willingness
to create ways of fulfilling her desires that humiliate normative masculinity
by rendering this superfluous. (7)

Girls' aesthetics exist to nourish girl readers. In doing so, they frustrate and render patriarchal forces "bewildered" through their flouting of male expectations (Aoyama and Hartley 7).

A comparison can be made here with what Dawn Sardella-Ayres and Ashley N. Reese define as "girls' literature", meaning Anglophone stories published for and about girls. The corpus on which they establish their definition is comprised of works by "female authors who resided in the United States or Canada, and were published from 1850 to 1939" (Sardella-Ayres and Reese 34). While their criteria for authorship somewhat differs from the texts published in early shōjo magazines, their timespan roughly overlaps with the period in which the shōjo genre also emerged and developed many of its fundamental traits. However, the nature of these works is in every way opposed. Whereas "[t]he socialization of the heroine into the roles of wife and mother remains central to girls' literature" (Sardella-Ayres and Reese 34) in the Anglophone context, shōjo stories vehemently oppose this forced and gendered subjugation. In the highly influential stories by the aforementioned Nobuko Yoshiya, who would eventually rise from a steady contributor to shōjo magazines from age 12 to become an esteemed writer, the onset of womanhood and the loss of shōjo status is synonymous with death (Dollase 36). Younger protagonists weep with despair at the news of older girls marrying, and in several, the girl protagonists commit suicide rather than depart the world of shōjo to become mothers and wives; a decision presented not as tragedy, but as beautiful and necessary to remain a shōjo forever (Dollase 37, 41). Thus, while Sardella-Ayres and Reese note that Anglophone "girls' bildungsromane stories are about community integration" (39), shōjo stories are about refusing to be integrated and rejecting the labour that patriarchal and nationalistic forces demand of their bodies.

The aesthetics of girls' culture and how they have historically manifested in prose and manga are fundamentally transnational. Translated textual representations of girlhood were crucial to the formation of girls' culture in Japan and, by extension, the girls' culture shōjo archetype that emerged. Akiko Uchiyama notes that the world of L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) presented a "safe matriarchal haven" (99) that was embraced among female readers of the 1900s, while Monden emphasises that Lewis Carroll's famed Alice of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) is "an embodiment of the Japanese concept of shōjo" (*Japanese Fashion Cultures* 86). Nobuko Yoshiya, the author who would become the "embodiment" of sentimentality and girls' culture aesthetics, aspired to be an author due to her admiration of Louisa May Alcott (Dollase 31), while Jo March of *Little Women* (1868) became another "shōjo prototype of Japanese girls' fiction" when the novel was first translated in 1906 (Dollase xv). The romanticisation of European cultural elements is another factor of this cultural fusion, which extends beyond clothing and food to include architecture and national settings (Fraser and Monden 554). The context of the reader is also crucial here, as while some of these books have nationalist themes relating to America or Canada (Sardella-Ayres and Reese 37), when read by Japanese girls, they become escapist fantasies of exotic, far-away locations and cultures, thus working against the Japanese nationalism of the time. Since the emergence of

manga as a distinct artform in the 1950s (Shamoon 82), the genre of shōjo manga has embraced this aesthetic from the earlier girls' culture, leading to the distinctive, decorative, and transcultural style of girls' manga illustrations.

Collectively, the girlish opulence in shōjo texts forms the basis of acclaimed girls' culture studies scholar Masuko Honda's notion of "*hirahira*" or "fluttering" (25-27). This "fluttering" symbolises the beautiful and liminal female existence of the shōjo, as one who is not yet weighed down by her adult body and its reproductive duties. To develop her theory about the distinctive features of girls' culture texts, Honda analysed the shōjo (and shōnen, or boys') manga protagonists' characteristics and goals, the narrative structure, the texts' values, and the nature of the endings (25-27). She found that girls' texts have great diversity in the nature of their protagonists and narrative structures, which often feature bittersweet or ambiguous endings (25-27.). Nevertheless, shōjo manga share a unifying value of "love" as "an abstract goal sought internally", as well as the use of lush language and key visual aesthetics that she terms "the signs of the girl" (Honda 25-27). These signs, such as those items of adornment discussed above, which repeatedly occur across girls' media and culture and do not appear in boys' media, aid in distinguishing girls' culture texts from those targeted towards other readers (Honda 27). Through the lens of this foundational theory, the beautifully adorned and impassioned shōjo is seen as a kind of role model who encourages the real girl to pursue her desires and speak her mind freely, instead of being beholden to male expectations.

The extent to which these signs, motifs, or patterns recur in girls' culture texts signals that they are not passing trends, but meaningful artistic elements. A recent analysis of the language used in best-selling twenty-first-century shōjo and shōnen manga found that the two genres "offer a qualitatively different reading experience" (Unser-Schutz 74). Giancarla Unser-Schutz observed that shōjo manga is distinctly "empathetic and character-oriented", through the characters' use of language and the ideas in the texts (74). This difference in the elements required to craft girls' manga and stories is recognised by producers, too. Indeed, as Jennifer S. Prough found in her 2011 study of the shōjo manga industry, twenty-first-century editors and artists described the essence of their work as "what girls like", indicating their deference to the preferences of their readers (3). Engagement with girls' culture texts can be understood as an active means by which girls (including today) may claim their dreams, even in a broader culture that still condemns their desires as being mindless consumption (Kinsella 248-249). These distinctive features in the artform indicate that while shōjo manga can be understood as a marketing demographic to some extent, it is *also* a distinct artistic genre with persisting norms. Understanding these features and their histories as elements of the genre is essential for interpreting *Sailor Moon* and *Codename: Sailor V* within the tradition of shōjo manga. However, as part of the magical girl subgenre of shōjo manga, we must also consider the development of the additional gendered supernatural elements of these works, the most notable of which are the importance of beauty and the heroine's elaborate body transformation.

Although girls' manga is heavily defined by its idealised notions of girlhood and romanticised settings, the magical girl subgenre has received less scholarly attention than general shōjo manga to date. Akiko Sugawa-Shimada has contributed a valuable overview of the history of this subgenre, noting the importance of femininity and power to the magical girl heroine (182). However, her story did not always involve a kind of transformation, and furthermore, magical girls were originally not tasked with world-saving quests. The concerns of early magical girls were related to daily troubles or interpersonal issues (Saito 148-149). Nevertheless, the seed of beauty and physical transformation as an extension of the classic shōjo manga interest in feminine aesthetics was planted early on. *Princess Knight*, a 1950s work by Osamu Tezuka, often identified as a kind of proto magical-girl story, introduced Princess Sapphire as an example of a heroine whose abilities were tied to her appearance. Born in a world resembling a European fairy-tale setting, having received the "hearts" of both a girl and a boy from a mischievous angel, she has attributes that were considered to be masculine at the time, like a strong will and desire to go on adventures (Shamoon 89). When fulfilling her duties for the kingdom, she wears pants, but she returns to her usual clothes and activities, like picking flowers, in the rare time she has to be herself (Yamanashi 144-146). As Sapphire eventually marries a neighbouring prince and becomes queen of the two kingdoms, allowing her to embrace her femininity full-time, this early example highlights the importance of a physical change of appearance as the marker of a youthful heroine who can save the day (Yamanashi 144-146).

The first true magical girl is often said to be Sally of *Sally the Witch* (1966-1967) by Mitsuteru Yokoyama, who is today remembered for his girls' and boys' manga series. *Sally the Witch* draws its inspiration from Western television series including *Bewitched* (1964-1972) and *I Dream of Jeannie* (1964-1970), and features a young witch princess who accidentally teleports from her magical homeland to earth (Saito 147-148). The emphasis on magical powers co-existing with femininity and beauty in the American sitcoms was one of the elements adopted in *Sally the Witch* (Saito 148; Sugawa-Shimada 184). However, crucially, Sally is a young girl rather than an adult and (presumably) sexually-active woman. Her age preserves the shōjo aesthetic of girlhood as a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood, and as one that is free from the constraints and expectations of both. Through this appropriation and repurposing of a feminine magical aesthetic from America, Sally's girly style created a stark contrast to Princess Sapphire's tomboyish, pants-wearing nature. As a result of this development, power no longer had to be represented through masculinity and thus proximity to men. This influence from the American shows also continued the trend of Western art and aesthetics shaping the shōjo genre, leading to further artistic innovation.

An even greater emphasis on beauty is made in the series *Secret Akkochan* (1962-1965).[4] Like other magical-girl series of the time, *Secret Akkochan* was written by a male author but published in a girls' culture magazine for young female readers. In an innovation that builds on the shōjo manga emphasis on feminine treasures and trinkets, Akkochan receives a magical compact that is used for activating her powers (Saito 149). Indeed, this story can be identified as the introduction of magical girl narratives featuring "mirrors, cosmetic compacts and transforming" that are "closely associated with magical powers to represent femininity as power" (Sugawa-Shimada 187). Although Akkochan, like other heroines of the time, mainly assisted with problems that could occur in one's daily life and provided help and care for others, she could transform into anything using her magic mirror. Furthermore, through her nature as an unremarkable girl who unintentionally acquired magic, she brought the idea of the magical girl closer to home (Saito 150). The idea of the transforming, ordinary girl persisted, and even spread into other genres, but magical girls as a whole declined during the 1980s, not to be revived until Takeuchi's work in the 1990s (Saito 152). Series after *Sailor Moon* continued these themes, with obvious influence from Takeuchi's work. For example, the popular magical girl in *Cardcaptor Sakura* (1996-2000) saw the integration of transformation through the protagonist's best friend hand-making her clothing the day before "an epic magical battle" (King 235). Although this is only a brief overview of some of the most notable magical-girl characters, their shared themes point to significance of the magical girl's bodily transformation, and the importance of her social relationships and desire to help others as signs of her power and potential to affect change in the world – both elements that have been further foregrounded in the genre since the release of *Sailor Moon*.

Analysis of female body transformation, as it is depicted in Western Anglophone science fiction and fantasy media, provides additional insight into the significance of this theme with magical-girl heroines. Barbara Creed's germinal work on science-fiction and horror film distinguishes between "the phallic woman", a female character substituted into the role of a male character with little change to the story, and what she terms the "monstrous-feminine", a female character whose monstrosity and power is inextricably intertwined with her possession of a female body and its capacity for change through menstruation and reproduction (155-158). This capacity to change or transform, as a unique feature of the "monstrous-feminine", enables these female characters to be more resonant and empowering for a female audience, while clearly distinguishing them from "the phallic woman", who still serves male fantasies. Similarly, Leah Phillips' research into adolescent fantasy fiction has argued that there are differences between girl characters merely acting in the role of the male hero and true girl heroes. These "sheroes" reject the patriarchal norm of the dominance of the mind over the body, and instead embrace their bodily potential for transformation "by incorporating liminality into, and onto, their bodies", such as through menstruation or shapeshifting (Phillips, "Impossible Journey" 8). While the texts examined to underpin these

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[4] Although this series predates *Sally the Witch* in manga form, the much wider-reaching television anime for *Secret Akkochan* was not released until 1969, and so its bigger cultural impact came after *Sally the Witch*.

analyses do not fall into the category of shōjo media, they do often feature young female protagonists; and, both identify the liminal female body as a distinguishing feature of the heroine in stories that aim to appeal to a female audience, which is markedly similar to Honda's notion of the shōjo protagonist's unstable, "fluttering" bodily existence (25-27). Furthermore, it is clear that the transformative nature of the female fantasy protagonist's body is important to the heroine's journey across cultures and genres. This speaks to the popularity of Takeuchi's work with girls globally, as an extension of the already transnational nature of shōjo manga.

BECOMING A HEROINE: TAKEUCHI'S USE OF FEMALE BODILY TRANSFORMATION

Takeuchi invokes the female body's transformative potential to identify Minako and Usagi as magical heroines, and their differing levels of knowledge about these changes shape their journey. In *Codename: Sailor V,* Minako receives a detailed explanation about her abilities during her first meeting with Artemis (Takeuchi, *Codename: Sailor V! Volume 1* 24). He draws her into a vision in which she learns about her past life and sees an image of herself, transformed into Sailor V (22). The next morning, Minako assumes it was a dream, but soon encounters a monster in the guise of a boy attacking girls from her school (30). He attacks and paralyses her mind and body (32), rendering her vulnerable through the imposition of a patriarchal mind-body division (Phillips, "Impossible Journey" 8). At this moment, Artemis provides the phrase to activate Minako's transformation (Takeuchi, *Codename: Sailor V! Volume 1* 32.). Overleaf, a narrow vertical panel shows Minako's arm outstretched as she commands her powers to activate; a visual cleaving of her life into *before* and *after* she has the experience of transformation (33).

Takeuchi uses the shōjo manga technique of depicting her protagonist's "internal voice" through "poetic monologue" during Minako's transformation to emphasise the profound nature of this moment (Masuda 28). In the top left panel, Minako embraces her bare body as light surrounds her, accompanied by the thoughts "Ah...What is...this...?! I feel liberated! I'm overflowing with power!!" (Takeuchi, *Codename: Sailor V! Volume 1* 33). The panel below emphasises the connectedness of this power with her divine purpose: "I'm struck with the urge to *act!*" (33). The final two panels in this quartet depict the shocked monster exclaiming, "Who are you?!", to which Minako immediately replies with her signature phrase and self-introduction, "Codename: Sailor V!!" (33). These panels illustrate the embodied nature of Minako's powerful unification of the self, which she is capable of articulating due to her prior understanding of her body's transformative potential gained from her vision. As a heroine, she is empowered not just in the supernatural sense, but as one who is aware of her body's potential from the outset. In addition to the transformation marking her as a heroine, Takeuchi writes Minako as unwavering in her resolve and skilled in combat, positioning her as an ideal chosen one.

In contrast, Takeuchi presents Usagi's capacity to be a heroine – let alone a chosen one – as dubious. She is unwilling to listen to Luna's explanation of her powers and duty and tries to take a nap. Upon receipt of her transformation brooch, she simply admires herself in the mirror (Takeuchi, *Sailor Moon Volume 1* 28). Luna responds by shocking Usagi into awareness by tricking her into activating her transformation, uninformed (28-29). On the next page is a triptych: first, a detailed illustration of Usagi's new brooch, where her attention lingers (29). In the next panel, there is a close-up of Usagi's hands, cupping an empty space at her breast that readers know to be occupied by the brooch – an absence gives the impression that the brooch could have melted into her body, its magic now a part of her (29). Lastly, there is a full-body image of Usagi in her school uniform sketched in faint lines as though it is dissolving, while a glowing light embraces her (29). She has not changed physically in these panels; rather, the triptych traces the fusion of power with her body. On the next page, Usagi is fully transformed, adorned in her Sailor Moon garments (30). This is the first instance in the manga in which her body has occupied the full length of a page, emphasising the shock of her physical change to the reader.

Crucially, Usagi's transformation has no accompanying internal monologue. This silence communicates Usagi's experience of profound but terrifying change, for while she is gaining power, her ignorance means her body, and indeed her sense of self, has been made foreign to her. This is reinforced during Usagi's first encounter with a monster, who demands to know her identity (Takeuchi, *Sailor Moon Volume 1* 33). Usagi stutters insecurely, unable to answer, her understanding of her new self being limited (33). It is only through Luna's gesture to the moon, depicted shining brightly behind Usagi for the first time in the series, that her superheroine identity comes to her: "The Pretty Guardian in A Sailor Suit! Guardian of Love and Justice! Sailor Moon!" (33-34). This sequence of silent transformation and fumbled self-identification is a direct subversion of Minako's articulate and confident experience, suggesting a deliberate re-evaluation of the traits necessary for a chosen one at the start of her journey by Takeuchi. From the beginning, Usagi is therefore established as an unlikely heroine who breaks the mould of typical shōjo protagonists of the time (Fujimoto 37), and who is far from the ideal chosen one meant to save the world.

As both *Codename: Sailor V* and *Sailor Moon* progress, their heroines continue to transform through personal and social growth. Usagi makes new friends as she meets the other guardians and becomes increasingly committed to her duty. She also becomes more comfortable with her body and its potential, and able to capably wield the powers her transformation grants her access to, as reflected throughout the series by her subsequent transformation upgrades into more powerful versions of Sailor Moon. Her confidence and capability in battle increase, surpassing Minako's initial skill and resolve, and she is even revealed to be the reincarnated Moon Princess, Serenity. However, while Usagi experiences considerable growth in the role of the heroine, Minako's life deteriorates under the strain as Takeuchi converts her story into a prequel. Increasingly, Minako is shown to feel torn between her duty and personal dreams (Takeuchi, *Codename: Sailor V! Volume 2* 242). Her diminished mental health and physical abilities fracture her formerly unified self and leave her vulnerable

to villains, with this downward spiral ultimately leading to her final realisation in the last chapter that she is not the world's true saviour after all: "No. The princess isn't me" (273). These character arcs suggest that an ideal shōjo heroine *earns* the power and knowledge that grant her a true, holistic sense of self through perseverance, hardship, and connection with others. Thus, while bodily transformation marks a heroine who has the power to save others, the capacity for personal growth and connection with people around her distinguishes her as a chosen one.

THE POWER OF LOVE

Love is the central theme of shōjo manga. As scholars of shōjo media note, although characters' social connections are formed through love of different kinds, the most visible is romantic love (Honda 25-27; Prough 2; Shamoon 104; Toku 12; Unser-Schutz 74). The shōjo notion of love is as a theme that enhances the literary nature of a text due to its emphasis on sincere human connection, as well as being a source of interest for girl readers (Unser-Schutz 74). However, in evaluating Western YA literature for adolescent girls, some have framed romance through a deficit lens. Girl readers' engagement with and valuing of romance over other themes present in a book has been described as "an inability to transcend stereotypical gendered values" (DeBlase 630) – a personal failure by the real girl reader. Furthermore, female chosen ones who choose sacrifice and loss are sometimes claimed to be more 'progressive' than those who choose romance, with one common example being Katniss in Suzanne Collins' bestselling series, *The Hunger Games* (2008-2010) (Fierce 92). Both such views take the unusual stance that love is somehow in conflict with strength or selflessness. And as Phillips notes, Katniss only gains her temporary strength by taking on "the (toxic) traits of heroic masculinity", until she herself marries, joining the status quo less for love then out of resignation (*Female Heroes* 16-17). However, in the context of shōjo media, participation in romantic love is considered a mark of the heroine's strength through social bonds. Furthermore, this is not the dutiful pairing of an adult woman with someone to father children, but a personal, indulgent, and youthful desire – what one might consider an emotional adornment. Thus, it stands in direct opposition to the dutiful wifedom discussed earlier and is instead part of the fantasy for the girl reader. Rather than a personal shortcoming, the heroine's capacity to choose love over all sets her apart from cold, cruel villains who are often marked by their inability to feel love or be connected to the wider world. Whether or not it ends happily, for a shōjo manga heroine, commitment to romance is a sign that a heroine has a special destiny and possesses the power needed to accomplish it.

The romantic plotlines of *Codename: Sailor V* and *Sailor Moon* clearly illustrate Usagi's growth and Minako's downfall in the role of the chosen one. Minako is a hopeless romantic, and as Sailor V, is directly associated with the Roman goddess of love and beauty, Venus, by her cat Artemis (Takeuchi, *Codename: Sailor V! Volume 1* 18). Throughout the series, Minako pursues and loses several potential boyfriends, the most significant of which is the celebrated

idol, Ace Saijyo (Takeuchi, *Codename: Sailor V! Volume 2* 55). He is initially her ally in battle as the mysterious Phantom Ace, but towards the conclusion of the series, is finally revealed to be an enemy with the true name, Danburite (Takeuchi, *Codename: Sailor V! Volume 2* 279). In the pair's final confrontation, Danburite hangs from the side of a building as Minako clutches his wrist; his sole anchor to safety (281). Danburite reveals he existed during her past life: "an unimportant landless warrior" whom she never noticed, prompting his desire for revenge in this life (276). Shocked by his betrayal and malicious aims, Minako refuses to comply with his wishes. In return, Danburite curses Minako for rejecting him, stating "[y]our love… …will never be granted for all eternity" (281-282). Minako chooses duty over love and kills Danburite, effectively fulfilling the curse. Abandoning her hopes of romance, Minako then affirms that she will keep fighting alone until she meets her true allies (284). As the final sequence in the chapter that leads into *Sailor Moon*, Minako's loss of destined love and resignation to solitude seals her fate as a dethroned 'chosen one', unable to possess the ultimate promise of shōjo manga.

In contrast, Usagi encounters her soulmate in the first chapter of *Sailor Moon* and never weakens in her affections. Mamoru Chiba, alias Tuxedo Mask, appears at the moment when Usagi's resolve is weakest (Takeuchi, *Sailor Moon Volume 1* 38). Unlike Danburite, who had engaged in battle alongside Minako, thus undermining her status as saviour, Mamoru as Tuxedo Mask does not fight on Usagi's behalf, but simply encourages *her* to keep fighting, strengthening her sense of self and purpose (Takeuchi, *Sailor Moon Volume 1* 38). The pair have frequent encounters in battle and, unknowingly, in their daily lives, until finally their past lives are revealed during a major enemy confrontation. The pair are attacked and plummet from Tokyo Tower, and the shock restores their memories. This restoration halts their fall, and they float, suspended in the night sky (Takeuchi, *Sailor Moon Volume 2* 97). Takeuchi expands the moment of the revelation to 14 pages, using the tension of the immediate threat to their lives to heighten the emotional stakes of the scene: it is unclear how the pair will land safely, but in this moment, they can finally truly know themselves and each other (97-111). From this point on, Usagi's romance with Mamoru is a constant source of strength to her as a superheroine and as a teenage girl. Usagi's heroine's journey, and indeed her status as the chosen one, are therefore intrinsically tied to her destined love.

The parallels between these two romance plots are striking for what they reveal about romance and the role of the chosen one. Both heroines meet a masked boy with whom they fall in love, but Minako suffers a deep betrayal while Usagi finds her soulmate. Additionally, at the moment Usagi and Mamoru are saved from plummeting to their deaths by their restored knowledge of their past lives and love, Minako is depicted gazing up at them from the ground, alone; a scene that spatially and thematically parallels her final moments with Danburite before she let him fall to his death (Takeuchi, *Sailor Moon Volume 2* 104). Minako is therefore firmly positioned as a witness to true love in *Sailor Moon*, not as a lover herself. While she indulges in frivolous crushes throughout this series as a supporting character, she reaffirms her commitment to reject romantic love in favour of duty and friendship in the final chapters (Takeuchi, *Sailor Moon Volume 10* 132). Minako's daydreams of love are a stark contrast to the

emotionally healthy and sexually active relationship Usagi enjoys with Mamoru (Takeuchi, *Sailor Moon Volume 3* 106-107); indeed, the series ends with the destined lovers naked in bed together before an elaborate fairy-tale wedding (Takeuchi, *Sailor Moon Volume 12* 264-265). As Usagi and Minako's journeys reveal, only a chosen one can truly commit herself to a fated love, and through this source of strength, protect others.

BEYOND THE SAILOR SOLDIERS: "MAGICAL GIRLS" IN WESTERN ANIMATION AND YA FICTION

Much of what makes Takeuchi's *Sailor Moon* so significant is its legacy. Domestically, she revived interest in the magical girl while revolutionising the archetype by crafting her as a figure of empowerment for young girls. This impact is seen in subsequent series like the popular *Cardcaptor Sakura* (mentioned above), as well as what is arguably the most popular and successful magical girl franchise today, *Precure*. Through numerous television series, manga, movies, and other forms, its success in Japan speaks to its ability to resonate with young girls. Its marketing around toys such as replicas of the protagonists' magical items, while perceived cynically by some, can also be understood as an extension of the norms of girls' culture, through the valuing of trinkets and other feminine adornments (Sugawa-Shimada 192-193). Additionally, the ordinary, transforming, loving magical girl has escaped the shōjo manga genre: boys' media has co-opted this heroine archetype, albeit with notable changes that do undermine its potential for female empowerment. Displaced from her home genre, magical girls in shōnen media no longer protect a world that is inherently worth saving despite its imperfections; instead, they discover terrible truths about the world which they attempt to change, often at a horrifying cost. The adult-male-targeted television show and manga, *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* (2011), is one such example that eschews the core theme of love and the aesthetic "symbols of the girl" including the visual style used in shōjo media, in order to depict a bleak, gruesome action series that is made all the more shocking through the violence it subjects its young heroines to; heroines which are also depicted in hypersexualized merchandise marketed to the male audience (Sugawa-Shimada 197; Butler). *Sailor Moon*'s influence has also reached Western animation, just as American sitcoms influenced the magical girl. Due to showrunner Rebecca Sugar's love of *Sailor Moon*, the children's cartoon *Steven Universe* (2013-2019) incorporates magical transformation elements and motifs from girls' aesthetics like roses and gemstones, while making the protagonist a young boy (Sugar). Similarly, although Natasha Allegri preserves more of the core aesthetics of the genre in her comic and animated TV show, *Bee and Puppycat* (2014-2016), she makes the protagonist a young woman in her early twenties who is routinely fired from her job (that is, one who is 'failing' at being a grown woman) until she is recruited as a kind of magical girl (Allegri). Nevertheless, series such as this signal that the magical girl is a powerful creative archetype that can be transplanted into different genres and cultural contexts for new story experiences.

In the realm of contemporary Anglophone YA fiction, Marissa Meyer and Sarah J. Maas are particularly notable authors who cite *Sailor Moon* as inspiration behind their stories and their writing, and as they are writers whose books are especially popular with adolescent girls, it is worth examining this influence briefly (Reierson; Maas, "Q: Didn't you used to write…"). *The Lunar Chronicles* (2012-2015) by Meyer and the *Throne of Glass* series (2014-2018) by Maas showcase this creative influence clearly, while featuring different approaches to genre: Meyer's work emphasises more science fiction elements, while Maas' work is high fantasy. Both authors make their protagonist a lost princess of a fallen kingdom who is living under an alternative identity. For Meyer, this is Cinder (true name Selene), a lost princess of a kingdom on the moon, living on a futuristic earth as a mechanic (Meyer, *Cinder* 379); and for Maas, this is Celaena (true name Aelin), a Fae princess and the last surviving member of her royal bloodline in a fantasy world, living as an assassin (Maas, *Crown of Midnight* 418). It is notable that each protagonist has a name similar to that of Usagi's true name as a princess, Serenity. Cinder and Celaena also have liminal bodies capable of transformation. Cinder, being a cyborg, is able to replace damaged parts of her mechanical body for new ones as needed (Meyer, *Cinder* 3) and Celaena is able to shift into an alternate physical form due to her Fae heritage, which grants her special abilities (Maas, *Heir of Fire* 170). Although they inherit unique powers and abilities as a result of their birthright, both are required to train and develop these abilities considerably in order to use them to their full extent over the course of the series, much like Sailor Moon's own development across the manga.

In addition to the potential for bodily transformation and the protagonist's backstory, both series also take influence from *Sailor Moon* in the development of the social dynamics of their respective worlds. Both Cinder and Celaena each establish strong bonds of friendship with other uniquely special or powerful girls, who are integral to the defeat of the final villains and enabling the heroine to triumph. Cinder has the android Iko (Meyer, *Cinder*), the pilot Scarlet (Meyer, *Scarlet*), the hacker Cress (Meyer, *Cress*), and another moon princess, Winter (Meyer, *Winter*). Celaena has the witch queen Manon (Maas, *Heir of Fire*), the courtesan Lysandra (Maas, *Queen of Shadows*), former servant Elide (Maas, *Queen of Shadows*), and the healer Yrene (Maas, *Tower of Dawn*). More importantly, despite periods of tension that can exist between Cinder and Celaena and their respective friends, these are always overcome in their pursuit to combine their strength to defeat evil. In only through "a network of relationships founded on care" for each other, and for the disempowered people around them who motivate their cause, that they are able to achieve their goals (Newcomb 107). As in *Sailor Moon*, love and connection with others is both a sign of the heroine, as well as her means to protecting the world around her.

Lastly, Cinder and Celaena both have a true love that is in some manner predestined. Cinder coincidentally falls in love with the prince her mother had planned for her to marry (Meyer, *Fairest* 131), and Celaena finds her "mate" in a powerful Fae Prince (Maas, *Empire of Storms* 655). Ironically, with regard to Maas' work in particular, it is the rendering of this love featuring the inclusion of sex scenes that has provoked the most criticism from both scholars and censorship groups alike. Censorship groups oppose the books merely because they

contain sex scenes (Schaub). However, scholars similarly criticise the sexual content, but for the reason that it is apparently not progressive *enough*, describing depictions of sexual encounters as "poisonous for teens" because they "present [sexual] expectations which cannot be fulfilled" (Murphey 94). Such a condemnation, indistinguishable from that of a censorship group, commits the usual sin of classifying girl readers who enjoy romance as impressionable failures who cannot "transcend stereotypical gendered values" (DeBlase 630). It also overlooks the significance of fantasy in these works, both in terms of genre and in the sense of personal fantasy. Indeed, Maas describes her motivation to write the *Throne of Glass* series as a desire to "escape to a place where a young woman was so empowered she could save the world", and where heroines could have both strength and femininity (Walden). Just as shōjo stories must field "lament[s] from an adult, feminist perspective" (Fraser and Monden 545) about their girly nature, it appears that creators like Maas who embrace this creative tradition face similarly dry accusations. Nevertheless, that Maas' depictions of fated love can draw such attention is, in itself, a sign of the power of such narratives. Although Meyer and Maas have no-doubt created distinct worlds and characters, the influence of *Sailor Moon* is evident through a range of narrative elements, and in particular the magical-girl chosen one's attributes of bodily transformation and destined true love. The creative legacy of Takeuchi's work, and the modern magical girl epitomised by Usagi in particular, has therefore continued shōjo manga's legacies of transnational exchange while inspiring new generations of female creators to tell their own stories.

CONCLUSION

An examination of the themes of female bodily transformation and romance in *Sailor Moon* and *Codename: Sailor V* reveal that knowledge of power, along with destined love, are key features of a chosen one's heroine's journey in shōjo manga. Crucially, these attributes must be earned through hardship and perseverance, and connection with others. Minako's possession of each of these qualities in her debut chapter initially marked her as special, but ultimately rendered her unsustainable for a typical heroine's journey in the role of the chosen one, as she had no space for personal growth or potential true love. Usagi, created with the intention of carrying a longer narrative, was deliberately immature and incapable to provide maximum opportunities for personal refinement. Therefore, to incorporate Minako into Usagi's universe, Takeuchi gradually stripped Minako of everything that had marked her as a chosen one, to make her vulnerable enough that she could be emotionally 'saved' by Usagi's friendship. As the term itself indicates, there can only be *one* 'chosen one'. Nonetheless, even today, *Codename: Sailor V* is unique in its commitment of dethroning its protagonist, and it provides valuable insights into shōjo manga by illuminating the attributes of a heroine's journey.

Through comparing these heroines' journeys that appear similar on the surface, distinct differences emerge. Usagi's heroine's journey is one of growth and transformation of

the body and mind as a single entity; a journey from ordinariness and chaos toward a more holistic experience of the self and of the love that all shōjo heroines strive towards. As arguably the most famous magical girl, Usagi's legacy has influenced many heroines that came after her. This impact has seen the continuation of many traditions of shōjo culture and the genre, including its privileging of feminine power and aesthetics, and the transnational exchange of creative influences. Furthermore, although Takeuchi is no-longer actively publishing manga, her legacy lives on through new generations of creators, including those working within and beyond the shōjo genre. With her inherent power of transformation, the possibilities of the magical girl are limitless.

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