

PEELING BACK THE CANDY-COLORED WRAPPER

An Examination of Feminization, Queer Relationships,
and Localization in *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*,
Cardcaptor Sakura, and *Sailor Moon*

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ABSTRACT

This project examines three examples of Japanese magical girl (or “mahou shoujo”) fiction—*Puella Magi Madoka Magica*, *Cardcaptor Sakura*, and *Sailor Moon*—with the intent of exploring their relationships with feminization and queer and non-binary representation, and how those relationships intersect with the process of localization between cultural audiences. Sources examined include primary source material (magical girl anime and manga, both in Japanese and in localized English) as well as broader explorations of the history and mechanics of manga and anime, the history of shoujo as a genre, examinations of the genre’s relationship to female empowerment, etc. through academic journals, dissertations, articles, etc. Though this project initially began as an exploration of feminist themes within the magical girl genre, feminist analyses have been a staple of countless other critical discussions of magical girl fiction, and so I have attempted to move beyond those questions into a new area of debate. These three examples of magical girl fiction have an immensely complex relationship with these topics—often, simultaneously projecting both progressive and regressive themes—but all have proven themselves to be thoroughly worthy of critical study.

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CHAPTER I

An Introduction to Manga and Anime, the Shoujo Genre, and Magical Girls

I would like to open this thesis with a small personal interjection: in both my academic and personal life, I do my best to act as an advocate for pop culture entertainment and so-called “low-brow” media, because I believe that a work being more easily accessible to a wider group of people should not and does not disqualify it from evaluation, discussion, and debate. Over the course of my studies in the past year, I have only grown more certain in this belief. I decided to take the opportunity I was given to work on this honors thesis and further explore some areas of pop culture that I have loved for years and that I believe deserve closer examination. Thus, I chose to focus my thesis on the (perhaps rather unconventional) topic of magical girl stories because, as a long-time fan of the magical girl genre and manga and anime in general, I feel that this particular area of entertainment deserves more coverage in academic circles. The magical girl genre, despite its “candy-colored wrapper” (Solomon 1), presents numerous fascinating topics for debate that have thus far not received enough attention, including the representation of queer and non-binary characters and how they, as well as feminization are often altered during the localization process. As a woman, a feminist, and member of the LGBTQ+ community, issues of female, queer, and non-binary representation have always been close to my heart, and so I have constructed this thesis to engage closely with questions related to feminist and queer identities.

In this introductory chapter, I will provide a working definition and brief history of manga and anime, alongside some of their common illustrative and narrative conventions. Much of my discussion of manga and anime centers on the topic of localization, so by overviewing a

few staples of the manga and anime tradition I hope to clarify how these forms of media fundamentally differentiate themselves from their Western counterparts (i.e., comics and cartoons), despite how they are presented in English to a North American audience. I will then move into a general discussion of the shoujo, or “girl,” manga genre, providing a description as well as an overview of some of its hallmarks, with particular attention paid to its representation of women and girls throughout its history. Lastly, I will provide an introduction to the magical girl sub-genre, listing some of its common conventions and why I believe it is worthy of further academic study before I conclude this chapter with a brief summary of what the rest of my thesis will attempt to accomplish.

Shoujo Manga and Anime: A Brief Crash Course

The words “manga” and “anime” are commonly defined as the Japanese words for comics and animation, respectively, but they represent much more than their simple definitions. These words embody a colossal entertainment industry that is a massive part of Japan’s cultural landscape. Manga of innumerable genres are created by manga artists (or “mangaka”) of all ages, for demographics encompassing all walks of life. This is in part because mangaka are more or less unhindered by the rigorous editing, re-editing, and publishing-by-committee process that Western publications often are subject to. Individual artists may work alone or with assistants, but they maintain direct creative control and the legal rights to their work (Schodt 31). Manga magazines, often issued weekly, usually sell for the equivalent of about three or four US dollars, and often contain about 400 pages of serialized stories designed to be portable, light entertainment for Japanese people on the go—but sometimes can be up to 1000 pages long (Schodt 23).

Manga differentiates itself from its Western counterpart through an array of unique illustrative and narrative techniques, which Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* (1993)

attributes in part to Japan's location on the other side of the globe. Being so separated from the American and European comics scene, manga gradually evolved into a totally unique form of storytelling, some of the hallmarks of which I plan to go over in subsequent paragraphs (McCloud 210). These days, manga and Western comics are beginning to borrow more and more narrative and illustrative techniques from one another, McCloud writes, thanks to the power of a more global comics community. As an example, the principle of "subjective motion" (which operates on the assumption that if *observing* a moving object can be involving, *being* that object should be more so," and puts readers in the driver's seat during action sequences—for example, instead of just observing a car chase, the reader might find themselves looking from the point of view of the speeding vehicle) was originally only seen in manga, before Western comic artists began to adapt it to their own work in the 1980's (114). By the early 90's, subjective motion had become fairly common in both Western comics and manga, and presumably it has become even more common at my time of writing, over 20 years after *Understanding Comics* was first published. Despite its recent boost of popularity, however, this type of motion still feels distinctly manga-esque, and it presents itself many times in the localized works that I am examining in this thesis.

One of the most notable among the illustrative and narrative traits that make manga unique is what McCloud calls the masking effect, in which the character on the page is drawn much more "cartoony" and stylized than the background, allowing the reader to more closely identify with (or "mask" themselves within) the character. In more recent years, McCloud claims, mangaka have begun to toy with other uses of this trick to induce other effects in their readers. Characters who are rendered more realistically than their more simply-drawn counterparts can emphasize their "otherness" and cause the reader to objectify them, or a cartoony prop suddenly rendered very realistically might give it a substantial weight and importance as an item within the text. This trick came into vogue in Japanese comics thanks in part to Osamu Tezuka, a widely influential mangaka whose innovations within the medium earned him the informal title "The

Father of Manga” (McCloud 42-4). Tezuka’s influence can be traced throughout the ever-shifting landscape of modern day manga, and his name will pop up several times throughout this chapter.

I would like to shift away from this discussion of general style to a more specific discussion of techniques for marking time and space, since these techniques, though often subtle, are able to give manga an entirely distinctive tone as compared to its Western counterpart. Any comic, manga or not, uses the blank space between panels, called the “gutter,” to imply passage of time or transition between locations (McCloud 66), but manga often uses a specific kind of transition that is used much less often in the Western tradition. Aspect-to-aspect transitions, as McCloud calls them, jump from one aspect of a scene to another, repeatedly, to establish a mood or sense of place (72). For example, instead of simply inserting a character sitting beside a pool on what looks like a warm day, a mangaka might draw a panel depicting the blinding sun, a close-up of the water in a swimming pool, perhaps a slowly melting ice cream cone in a character’s hand, etc. This way, the reader assembles the moment themselves, instead of simply being told what is happening. This type of transition gives scenes a slower, quieter feel, and can help establish exactly what kind of mood the artist has in mind (78).

Many of the aforementioned illustrative and narrative techniques make themselves known in the anime world as well, thanks in part to the fact that manga is often adapted into anime for televised release, sometimes while the manga is still being published in serial. Mitsuteru Yokoyama’s *Little Witch Sally*, released in 1966, paved the way for countless other simultaneous televisions down the road, which helped to guarantee the booming cross-platform success of franchises such as *Pokémon* and *Sailor Moon* (Gravett 78). *Little Witch Sally*, alongside Yokoyama’s *Princess Comet* from 1967 and Fujio Akatsuka’s *Secret Akko-chan* from 1962, represents an early example of the “magical girl” sub-genre of shoujo manga, upon which this thesis will focus. First, however, a definition of shoujo manga must be established.

The Japanese word “shoujo,” literally translated as “girl,” is used in Japan as a broader term referring to a very specific demographic at which works of fiction can be aimed: in this case, girls and young women. Other demographical terms in Japan include “shounen,” for boys, “seinen,” for men, and “josei,” for older women (Gough 20). In the 1960’s and 1970’s, thanks in part to a burst of female mangaka who entered the manga industry at around the same time, shoujo manga conventions really began to solidify into those we know today. To name a few: irregularly shaped panels based on the mood of a scene; panels that bled off the edge of the page, lacked borders, or dissolved; characters who were no longer confined to remain within panels, sometimes shown full-length, standing in front of them to show off their clothing or body language; a massively expanded library of symbols used to express emotions; backgrounds decorated with abstract, expressionistic patterns based on the mood of the scene; panels left without artwork at all to direct the audience’s attention to speech bubbles; and many more (78-9). All of these stylistic choices are present within the works that I am examining in this thesis.

With regards to representation of women and girls, the shoujo manga genre has not always been progressive. In the early to mid-1900s, shoujo manga was created and published by primarily male artists and promoted traditional ideals of how girls should aspire to be—often, refined, beautiful, and happily married with children (Gravett 76)—but thankfully, as the genre aged, so too did its gender politics. The classic shoujo art staple of depicting characters with huge, expressive eyes began to appear in Japanese art after the arrival of Commodore Perry in 1853. Researchers theorize that the opening of Japan’s borders resulted in an adoption of Western art and aesthetics, and with them, a subtle adoption of Western beauty standards. The “ideal” person depicted in Japanese art began to shift toward more of a classic Greek model, often drawn with large, exaggerated eyes (Schodt 60). Schodt further theorizes that Japan’s defeat in World War II led to a national loss in confidence, which directly resulted in a widespread push for not just characters with huge eyes, but long legs, blonde hair and blue eyes, and “Western” features.

Osamu Tezuka's art in particular can be thanked for boosting this trend in girl's manga, since he discovered how popular this look was among young readers of his work—certainly a racially problematic part of manga and anime's history, perhaps, but one that has become a present day hallmark of the art style (61). Female mangaka finally began to come onto the scene in the 1960's and 70's, thanks in part to the work of Osamu Tezuka that many of them grew up reading (Gravett 78). These days, most Japanese manga fans know that despite how "Western" their favorite manga characters may look, they are still "supposed to be" Japanese—even within shoujo manga, where characters are often depicted with clearly non-Japanese hair and eye colors (61). This can lead to some confusion on the part of international readers of manga, particularly Western readers, in situations where a character in a black and white manga is naturally understood by the Japanese audience to have dark hair, despite their hair's light coloring on the page. Also, it is common for fans of localized Japanese content to not even realize that the characters they are watching or reading about are supposed to be Japanese (as an aside, I remember being quite confused about this point when I was a young reader of manga).

In addition to these mechanical changes, the "heart" of shoujo manga has shifted quite dramatically over the years. Mangaka began toying with traditional gender boundaries to explore stories about forbidden love, questions of identity and self-acceptance, the intricacies of family and friendships, and even questions of mortality and aging (81). Despite its "girly" appearance, the shoujo manga genre has proven itself to be a place for posing serious questions about identity and one's place in the world. As Gravett puts it in *Manga: 60 Years of Japanese Comics*:

What [shoujo manga stories] frequently have in common is their enlightening fictions about the pressures and pleasures of individuals living life in their own way and, for better or worse, not always as society expects. The search for love is still a pervasive theme, but many women mangaka have transcended simple-minded romanticism and boy-meets-girl conformity. (81)

As an anonymous shoujo manga fan said, quoted in Gravett's chapter on shoujo manga: "Shoujo manga showed me people who were brave enough not to follow the same path everyone else does, people not fitting into the system. For me, their stories were lessons that you can think of your life in another way" (81). These days, shoujo manga embodies many different sub-genres, all still targeted toward young girls and teenagers.

The Magical Girl Phenomenon

The magical girl genre is a high profile example of a shoujo manga sub-genre, and is perhaps one of the most recognizably "Japanese" types of manga, if only because it seems to lack a true American counterpart. I plan to use the next section of this chapter to introduce the magical girl genre more specifically, with particular attention paid to the genre's history, some of its common conventions and tropes, and popular academic debates that I discovered during my research. The magical girl (or "mahou shoujo" in Japanese) genre of Japanese fiction can be broadly defined as a genre "feature[ing] women who are simultaneously powerful and traditionally feminine" (Newitz 4). The genre got its start in the 1960s, thanks to the aforementioned work by Yokoyama and Akatsuka, and today is a highly recognizable sub-genre of shoujo fiction. Magical girls, as their title implies, come to possess some sort of magical ability which they use to combat the forces of evil while also leading an everyday life. Simon Gough puts forth that common conventions of the magical girl genre include, but are not limited to: the use of a totem to access their magical abilities; the transformation between ordinary girl and magical girl; the girls acting as ultimately triumphant warriors in battle; the presence of a magical animal companion; the maturation of power to epic scales; and the power of love in their relationships and in battle (36). To explain the items on this list more specifically, I will use general examples from the three magical girl franchises that my thesis covers: *Sailor Moon*, *Cardcaptor Sakura*, and *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*. I will elaborate with more details on each of these works in subsequent chapters as needed.

1. Firstly, the main characters of magical girl stories often possess some sort of magical item through which they channel their powers. For example, in *Sailor Moon*, Usagi uses a magical brooch to transform into her superhero alter-ego, and the titular Sakura from *Cardcaptor Sakura* wields the mystical Clow Cards to call upon otherworldly powers.
2. Magical girl stories often involve the girls undergoing a literal transformation into their magical girl form and back. Anyone who has seen an episode or two of *Sailor Moon*'s anime adaptation will certainly remember the jaunty song that plays during Usagi's transformations, in which she hovers in midair as her *Sailor Moon* costume envelops her glowing form. Similarly, in *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*, the girls' school uniforms transform into stylish battle clothing, often complete with frills, bows, gloves, and capes.
3. Most magical girl stories follow a certain formula one might be used to seeing in Saturday-morning cartoons: to paraphrase, the villain makes their appearance, wielding evil magic, causing chaos, and interrupting the main characters' daily lives; the heroes join forces to fight the villain; the evil is defeated, and order is restored (at least until the next episode). Of course, each magical girl story puts its own spin on this formula—some stories, like *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*, ignore it entirely, while others, like *Sailor Moon*, start out using this formula but begin to implement larger story arcs over time.
4. Magical girls often first receive their powers through education and companionship from a small animal companion, usually a small furry creature with magical abilities. An iconic example is *Sailor Moon*'s Luna, who looks just like a normal black cat but has a small crescent moon shaped mark on her forehead. Luna teaches Usagi about her new role as a Sailor Scout and helps her learn how to properly use her abilities, while also seeking out intelligence and relevant information for the mission at hand. Kero from *Cardcaptor Sakura* performs a similar role. In fact, the “magical animal companion” is such a common trope as to lead to parody and subversion within the genre. The cat-like Kyuubey from *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*, for example, seems at first to only be a

stereotypical cute animal companion, but is gradually revealed to be a much more menacing, omnipotent figure.

5. The average magical girl story follows the protagonist's progression from a total beginner to a master of her powers. This is represented quite literally in *Cardcaptor Sakura* as her collection of Clow Cards grows over time. *Sailor Moon*, too, shows its heroes gaining more power and responsibilities as they come into their own as Sailor Scouts.
6. Finally, love, friendship, and romance are a vital component to any magical girl story. Magical girls may draw upon the thought of their friends or love interests to give them strength in battle, and most are a part of a tightly-knit group of companions, whether those companions are also magical or not.

As would be expected from any genre of fiction, the magical girl genre has seen incredible amounts of variation over the years, sometimes staying within the aforementioned conventions and sometimes altering, subverting, or defying them entirely. However, it can be safely estimated that if a shoujo manga exhibits most or all of these tropes, it is likely drawing from the magical girl tradition.

In the research I have conducted for this thesis, the question of whether or not a work within the magical girl (or simply the shoujo) genre is progressive, empowering, feminist “enough,” etc. towers over any other discourse that might be worthy of discussion. Answers to this question vary based upon the researcher at hand. Newitz writes that the genre is a subgenre of a romantic comedy characterized by “mishaps involved in the magical girl's efforts to hide her powers so that she may appear demure... sexy but innocent, and realistic but fantastical”—clearly not a very empowering message (4). Charles Solomon, talking specifically about *Sailor Moon*, says that the series “presents a message of female empowerment in a candy-colored wrapper... [with] seemingly frail young girls drawing on hidden reserves of power,” and then goes on to describe Sailor Moon herself as “Supergirl meets Heidi Klum, with a stripper's version of Shirley Temple fashions” (1). The discourse here is quite clearly concerned with the magical girl as an

undeniably desirable, perhaps even fetishistic figure for a heterosexual male protagonist (and heterosexual male audience), focusing on the “male gaze” and placing the magical girls’ capability as heroes as secondary to their inherent femininity. Here, the fact that Usagi and other magical girls are so feminized makes the fact that they actually have the strength to battle evil unexpected.

On the other hand, we also see arguments wherein the femininity of magical girls is presented as their greatest strength, and that magical girls are in fact reclaiming these feminine spaces for their own, not just existing within them. Joanne writes in “The Heroine's Reclamation of the Girlish and the Portrayal of Girl-Power in *Sailor Moon*” that the uber-feminized, sexualized magical girls are in fact given agency through their feminization, rather than being representative of regressive, perhaps even post-feminist ideals—placing her in direct opposition to the arguments stated by Solomon and Newitz (Joanne). Of course, there are middle grounds to be claimed here as well, which I found in Browning’s argument that *Sailor Moon* “finds both empowering, revolutionary and traditional, pacifying messages at work simultaneously” (Browning 108).

Despite these riveting readings of *Sailor Moon*’s gender politics, the discussion that these works promote has not transcended the question of whether or not magical girls present an empowering, progressive representation of women to their target audience, or if they are just presented as fodder for the heterosexual male gaze. The question of “Is this feminist?” is practically inescapable when it comes to academic discourse surrounding this genre, and frankly, despite the variety of voices expressing opinions on the subject, it quickly grows uninteresting. I would like to take this thesis as an opportunity to transcend that question and instead examine other, less-explored topics regarding not just female representation, but feminization in general, as well as the representation of non-binary genders and queer relationships within the magical girl genre.

Any discussion of feminization and queer and non-binary identities in manga and anime would be lacking without some attention paid to the localization process itself, since representation of feminized and marginalized identities is often likely to change based upon the intent of (and creative liberties taken by) the work's localization team. I found a large body of work discussing the history of anime and manga localization, particularly a something I've taken to calling "editorial localization"—that is, when a work's adaptation for another cultural audience consists of not just simple translation of the script, but also a drastic tonal and/or structural change. I will go into more detail about common trends within the phenomenon of localization in my chapter on *Cardcaptor Sakura*, but I have chosen to examine it in this thesis because I believe that the issue of how magical girl stories are adapted for North American audiences becomes especially interesting when considered through the lens of feminization and female representation (and, admittedly, also because long fascination with the Japanese language). Similarly, while sexuality and queer relationships within manga and anime are a commonly discussed topic, the academic discourse thus far has not considered how those topics interact specifically with the magical girl genre. Further, the interaction between queer relationships, non-binary genders, and the process localization to a North American audience is a relatively unexplored topic.

Peeling Back the "Candy-Colored Wrapper"

My next chapter is an examination of *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* and its relationship with queer representation in the magical girl genre; particularly, what its subversive and unconventional approach to a magical girl storyline says about romantic relationships between girls. In the following chapter, I turn to the anime adaptations of *Cardcaptor Sakura* (1996): the Japanese adaptation of the same name (1998) and the North American version, *Cardcaptors* (2001). These two versions of the same show could not be more different from one another, and I plan to discuss how *Cardcaptor Sakura*'s localization illustrates a bias against the feminization of localized anime heroines, and a belief that the removal of feminization might as well be akin to

gender-neutrality, when in fact it closer resembles masculinization. Lastly, I turn to the famous *Sailor Moon* (1991) to discuss its portrayal of queer and non-binary characters, and how those characters underwent censorship during its localization process. I believe there is untapped material here for an entirely new conversation, and while I do not expect to make any world-shaking revelations within this project, I am grateful that I have this opportunity to put a lens to this more or less unexplored side of the story.

CHAPTER II

Queer Subtext, Shoujo Tradition, and *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*

Love, both romantic and platonic, is always a powerful motivator and source of strength in magical girl stories, and the anime and manga series *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* (hereafter abbreviated as *Madoka Magica*) is no exception. Thanks to a heaping helping of subtext and the “romance and girlish interplay” that so often saturates the shoujo manga genre (Considine), the affection between female friends that is found in stories like *Madoka Magica* often teeters on the edge of becoming romantic, and fan communities are quick to pick up on this subtext—for instance, the fan-curated *Madoka Magica* wiki’s page on perceived romantic subtext between female characters is almost comically large, and the sub-section dedicated to writing on romantic subtext between Madoka and Homura weighs in at a staggering +7800 words long (“Yuri undertones”). However, academic culture has not taken the time to examine much of this particular aspect of *Madoka Magica*, tending instead to focus on its subversion of typical magical girl genre tropes and its use of classic horror devices. Two of the works that I studied for this thesis—Simon Gough’s “Remember Madoka” and Daniel Rachovitsky’s “Tracing the Japanese Gothic in *Madoka Magica*”—though certainly fantastic resources, dedicated all of their analysis to *Madoka Magica*’s diversion from classic magical girl genre staples, and turned none of their attention to the romantic interplay and subtext between *Madoka Magica*’s characters. *Madoka Magica*’s portrayal of queer relationships between girls opens the way for a conversation about its both stereotypical and simultaneously progressive portrayals of queer relationships and romantic attraction between girls, and also the broader tradition of lesbian relationships and queer romance within the shoujo manga genre.

While *Madoka Magica* has been lauded in both academic and fan communities alike for its remarkable experimentations with and departure from genre conventions, it in many ways continues to repeat generic representations of lesbian relationships, painting them as one-dimensional comedic fodder or as doomed, tragic romance. To say that *Madoka Magica* totally adheres to this tradition is not entirely truthful, however, as demonstrated in the character of Mami and in the relationship between Homura and Madoka, both of which are examples of significant departures from tradition—but ultimately, at least in the case of queer relationships, *Madoka Magica* proves itself to be more generic than innovative, in that none of its representations of queer relationships show a relationship that lasts.

The Tragic (and Comedic) Shoujo Tradition: Mami, Sayaka, and Kyouko

Romantic subtext and queer relationships between girls in magical girl stories is often included primarily as a source of comedy, and *Madoka Magica* adheres to this tradition as well. The first third of *Madoka Magica*, being much lighter in tone than the rest of the story, takes a light approach to the topic of female sexuality and romance. An example in the first volume of the manga depicts Sayaka teasing Madoka about her new hair ribbons. She squeezes her and cheerfully proclaims “Changin’ your image so you can lure in the guys like [Madoka and Sayaka’s friend] Hitomi does, huh? Now that sounds like a girl I’m gonna marry!” (*Magica Quartet* 1:10). Madoka protests, embarrassed, and the scene moves on. Again, later in this same volume, Sayaka teases Madoka for her fascination with the mysterious transfer student, Homura. A tiny stylized Sayaka pops up in the foreground and proclaims, “You two are, you know, two whom fate has bound together in a previous life... A mystery of the universe!” (21). A blushing Madoka accompanies her, and in the background, a full-sized Homura and Madoka stand gazing into each other’s eyes, clasping hands. With these two scenes, we are presented with two depictions of romance between girls, both of which are chalked up to punchlines. The idea that Madoka could perhaps be romantically attracted to Homura, or that Sayaka wants to marry a girl

like Madoka someday, is afforded no attention beyond Madoka's flustered protests, which are included for laughs. The readers get their chuckle at Madoka's embarrassment and Sayaka's forwardness, and the scene moves on—and the prospect of a serious romantic interaction between the girls is thus entirely dismissed.

Perhaps the most interesting example of this dismissal of queer romance comes later in this volume, in a classic romantic-comedy scenario. This example alludes to a much larger tradition of queer relationships in shoujo manga stories: namely, that romantic relationships between girls are never “meant to be” and must always be either written off as punchline material or presented as a doomed, tragic romance. In volume one of the manga, Sayaka and Madoka's friend, Hitomi, misinterprets the time that the other two girls have spent together as some sort of romantic tryst. Flushed and grinning, her hands fly to her face as she excitedly speculates “You mean this is... Forbidden love!?” (49). Hitomi's statement, though meant as a joke, speaks to a much larger truth that is reflected throughout the subtext of *Madoka Magica*. This particular joke was presumably inserted by the writers as a riff on classic shoujo manga tropes usually found in stories about lesbian romance from the 1970's and 80's, which Fujimoto writes about in the article “Where Is My Place in the World? Early Shoujo Manga Portrayals of Lesbianism”. Fujimoto writes that for the larger part of two decades, lesbian romances in manga dealt almost exclusively in tragic endings (Fujimoto 30). Conflicts within these stories were based upon troubled family life, public harassment, rape, or “Romeo and Juliet”-style suicides, which were invariably brought upon the two lovers specifically because of their sexual orientation (33). Shoujo lesbian romances invariably ended in tragedy until about the 1990's, at which point lesbian romances in shoujo manga (thankfully) began to take a turn for the positive (37). It can be argued, then, that *Madoka Magica*'s systematic squelching of any potential romantic subtext between its female characters—often in violent, heartbreaking ways—is in fact recalling a tradition that is far older than *Madoka Magica* itself.

We can find an even clearer example of this tradition in the third chapter of the first volume, when *Madoka Magica*'s storyline makes an extremely dark tonal shift. Mami and Madoka, who have been bonding as they work their way through a witch's labyrinth, find themselves in a highly emotional conversation. Madoka promises to stay by Mami's side and save her from struggling to fight the witches alone, as she has done for many years. Mami, crushingly lonely and delighted to have the chance to create a real friendship with another magical girl, tearfully accepts. The anime's framing of this scene is particularly telling. Gentle music plays in the background as the two girls face one another in profile to the viewer, clasping hands, while they tearfully pledge to stay together and work as a team once they escape. Subtext though it may be, the romantic implications of this declaration are clear: the tearful, blushing gazes, the hand-clasping, the gentle music, and Mami and Madoka's pledge to stay together no matter what are obviously romantically tinged (see Figure 1). However, three pages later Mami is dead, Madoka and Sayaka are terrified for their lives, and any hope a first-time reader may have had of a cute and happy magical girl story is utterly crushed. Mami and Madoka's relationship is cut off before it has a chance to blossom into a closer friendship or possibly something more. The subtextual romantic attraction between Mami and Madoka is doomed to end in horrifying calamity, just like the grand tradition of lesbian shoujo manga.

This tragic pattern reoccurs even more dramatically in the relationship between Madoka's best friend Sayaka and her magical girl rival, Kyouko, whose subtextual romantic attraction is about as close to official "text" as anything in *Madoka Magica* (at least, according to this *Madoka Magica* fan). Sayaka and Kyouko first meet in the second volume of *Madoka Magica*'s manga, and from the moment they set eyes on one another their relationship is strained. Kyouko's unemotional pragmatism runs in direct contrast to Sayaka's noble idealism, and whenever the two run into each other, things are guaranteed to get tense. However, Kyouko, originally prickly and utterly lacking in empathy, soon finds a kindred spirit in Sayaka. As Sayaka sinks further and

further into despair, Kyouko comes to care more about her, doing her best to pull her back from the brink. In the end, Sayaka's despair gets the better of her and she meets a horrifying end, painfully transforming into a witch—a fate from which there is no way to return. In a last-ditch effort, Kyouko goes against her very nature and makes the ultimate sacrifice to stay by Sayaka's side:

I may leave everybody else behind, but not you! I know how rotten it can be to be lonely.

...So it's okay. I'll stay right here with you. (Magica Quartet 3:34-5)

Kyouko hurls herself headlong into death, totally defying her instincts of self-preservation, in an effort to bring Sayaka some measure of comfort, even though she knows that it won't do anything to bring her back. Kyouko shows in her actions a kind of devotion and determination that is usually only found in epic romantic tragedies, totally going against her original character and transforming herself into a heroic figure that is willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for a girl she barely knows—but is certainly (romantically?) attached to.

Episode nine of the anime locks down the theme of Sayaka and Kyouko as tragic, Romeo and Juliet-style doomed lovers when it concludes with a different ending song than usual. The track, titled “and I'm home”, plays alongside artwork of Kyouko and Sayaka suspended underwater in what seems to be a romantic embrace (see Figure 2). “and I'm home” is a duet between Sayaka and Kyouko and is performed by their voice actresses:

I want to keep holding your hand

I call your name as many times as I must

The future is uncertain, but my heart still aches

When I think of the one I can't let go

I'm right here. I'm right here.

And this is the place you can come home to, you know? (“I’d Never Allow That To Happen”)

Sayaka and Kyouko are portrayed here as star-crossed lovers who “can’t let go” of one another, despite their perilous fates. Even in spite of their differences, their immensely strong bond ensures that they always have a place to “come home” to—and it is not difficult to interpret this statement in a romantic fashion. Sayaka and Kyouko’s fall from grace is the kind of lovers’ sacrifice that any Shakespearian tragedy would be incomplete without. The two undoubtedly clash, but as they reach the end of their character arcs they begin to exist more like two complementary halves of a whole. Even their color schemes speak to this: Kyouko’s clothes are red and Sayaka wears blue. Framing the two as total opposites, even in their color schemes, further adds drama and romance to their sacrifice, and their differences lend their eventual bond—and their romance—even more significance. This, of course, means that when their relationship is forced to end in disaster, it has an immensely powerful emotional impact.

Sayaka and Kyouko’s relationship is defined entirely by tragedy, in fact. One could speculate that thanks to the two’s significant differences in personality, ideals, and overall demeanor, without the extreme circumstances that brought them together, they would likely never have even come close to achieving such a bond. With this in mind, *Madoka Magica*’s portrayal of Sayaka and Kyouko seems to imply that romantic interactions between girls should only be allowed significance if they enable some nightmarish disaster to take place—certainly never a happy ending.

Homura and Madoka: A Tragic(?) Contradiction

Any discussion of romantic subtext in *Madoka Magica* would be incomplete without the relationship that drives the entire plot: the relationship between Homura and Madoka, which, despite the similarities it bears to Sayaka and Kyouko’s tragic romance, manages to also subvert

expectations by introducing a bittersweet silver lining—making it both an adherence to and departure from classic shoujo tradition. The other magical girls (Mami, Sayaka, and Kyouko) have been just as present in each of the story’s timelines as Madoka has, but Homura is so fixated on Madoka’s well-being only that she has traveled back in time over and over again, bending the laws of the universe in a desperate bid to keep Madoka alive. Her devotion to Madoka is so powerful that even the other girls have picked up on the fact that Madoka is “the one thing that means most to [Homura]”, and that she intends to “protect [Madoka] to the end” (“I’d Never Allow That To Happen”). Clearly, Homura’s bond with Madoka is incredibly powerful, and it is not hard to construe romantic implications here: certainly, not many people would subject themselves to several eternities’ worth of torment to help someone they were not extremely close to. This bond, however, proves to be their undoing. Kyubey deduces in volume three that Homura’s dedication to Madoka has not only destroyed her own life by trapping her in a *Groundhog Day*-esque time travel loop, but it has also guaranteed the immense destructive power of Madoka’s witch form, thus dooming both countless innocents and the future magical girls who would have to do battle with her. However, it is precisely because of this immensely powerful bond between Homura and Madoka that at the end of the story Madoka is able to make her incredibly powerful wish and “[rewrite] the universe” to save the lives of every magical girl who has ever lived (Magica Quartet 3:131). Despite the horrifying tragedy that Homura’s devotion has perpetuated time and time again, it also gives Madoka the power to fix everything. There is a strange paradox to be found in the fact that Madoka and Homura’s intense bond has both brought them immense suffering and also given them immeasurable strength. This dynamic adds a fresh new twist to the tragic lesbian romance tropes that have thus far permeated the shoujo genre—though, since Homura and Madoka do not end up happily together at the end of the story, it is not exactly a total departure from tradition.

Further, until this point, Madoka has spent the entire story totally powerless, both literally and metaphorically, until Homura unwittingly grants her enough power (via her universe-bending magic) to become the most powerful force in existence, to transcend her human form and become an entity that can enact “a total reversal of the laws of cause and effect” (119), not just “one who grants the hopes of others, [but something that] will be hope itself” (124). To use a cliché, Madoka is literally able to channel the power of love to save the universe thanks to Homura’s sacrifice. However, as Madoka takes on her ultimate form she must also make a huge sacrifice: allowing herself to be utterly wiped from existence on the mortal plane, erased both physically and in the minds of all who knew her. The termination of Madoka and Homura’s relationship is the “cost” of Madoka’s wish, so to speak—Madoka’s other friends and family do not remember her and live on, unaware that they are missing anything in the first place, but Homura and Madoka are tragically kept apart for the rest of their existence. Thus, it is directly at the expense of her relationship with Homura that Madoka gains this immense power, and Homura and Madoka’s relationship, like so many other lesbian shoujo romances before it, is made a harbinger of tragedy—but also, strangely, a bringer of bittersweet resolution.

The dynamic between Homura and Madoka presents a paradox quite unlike what so often appears in lesbian romances within the shoujo genre. Unlike the previous examples within *Madoka Magica*, where romantic subtext between girls has only presented opportunities for goofy comedy and grandiose tragedy, we see in Homura and Madoka’s story that neither comedy nor tragedy are fully embraced, and instead *Madoka Magica* chooses to toe the line between a happy ending and a sad one. The traditional shoujo manga conventions that have been followed to the letter up until this point are both upheld and challenged by the text—while Madoka and Homura are no longer able to be together by the end of the story, like all of those tragic lesbian stories from the 70’s and 80’s, it is thanks to the strength of their undeniably strong and subtextually romantic bond that they are able to bend the universe to their will.

Homura and Madoka's relationship presents an opportunity to segue from a discussion of subtextual romance between girls into a broader discussion of feminization and sexualization in *Madoka Magica*. For the greater portion of *Madoka Magica*'s plot, Kyubey and Homura's machinations have kept Madoka in the dark, and she remains a totally powerless and helpless child until the last possible moment. Once she makes her contract at the end of the story, however, she moves from a helpless victimized child into an all-powerful, almost maternal entity that has devoted her entire existence to helping to ease the fears and save the lives of others: "I refuse to allow all of their wishes to end in despair. I will take all of these burdens onto myself... You needn't do this anymore. I will take all of that pain from you" (*Magica Quartet 3*:128-30). As Madoka transcends her human form, she takes on a role that is utterly protective, utterly selfless, and utterly maternal in nature. She is able to take the burdens of everyone—literally, everyone—onto her own shoulders, empathizing deeply with all of them and pledging her entire existence to ending their suffering. We see Madoka travel from one extreme to the other: an utterly helpless young girl and the most powerful (and maternal) entity in the universe. She has no agency, until she suddenly has all of it. Again, it is entirely thanks to her relationship with Homura that she is able to reach this extreme. Thus, despite the tragedies that queer relationships seem to induce in *Madoka Magica*, they also grant Madoka the power to become an ultimate force for good—and an extremely femininely coded one, at that. While *Madoka Magica* continues to uphold the shoujo tradition of doomed female romance, it also seems to state that through these strong romantic bonds between girls, great (motherly) power and agency can be achieved. *Madoka Magica*'s message about queer relationships thus becomes even more complex.

Mami and the Tradition of Heterosexualization

All of my discussion thus far has focused almost entirely on romantic subtext between girls, with sexual gazes left unmentioned. There is a good reason for this: in *Madoka Magica*, the

only instance in which any kind of sexual gaze is represented is in earlier episodes of the anime, specifically in scenes focusing on Mami while she is in battle. I would like to turn my discussion to this instance now, however, because I believe that the sexual gaze focused on Mami nicely showcases how *Madoka Magica* encourages a heterosexual gaze and heteronormative attraction during its more traditionally magical girl-esque first third, but then wholly and utterly rejects it. Mami exemplifies the classic magical girl: she is powerful, dependable, bombastic in battle but still mature, and a valued ally and guardian to Madoka and Sayaka. She speaks formally, but with confidence; her movements are graceful and elegant; she excels at grandiose finishing attacks; and she always celebrates her victory in combat by summoning a teacup out of thin air and taking a sip. Mami practically oozes confidence and classic magical girl appeal. As such, while Mami is in her magical girl form, the camera lingers on her breasts and legs. The representation of the male gaze here continues the tradition of sexual appeal that often lingers in the magical girl genre: the kinds of girls who appeal to the male gaze by appearing “sexy but innocent, and realistic but fantastical” (Newitz 4). Her sexualization does not stop here, though: in a classically absurd magical girl move, Mami arms herself by summoning countless guns out of thin air, and in the anime, we see her pull them from her clothing, including out from under her skirt. Mami also uses magical ribbons as weapons, sometimes pulling them from her clothing (see Figure 3). The imagery of a powerful girl pulling weaponry from her clothing and literally undressing herself to gain the upper hand in battle is not exactly subtle. Mami’s entire character is furthering the magical girl tradition of enforcing feminized power while also appealing to the heterosexual male gaze.

After Mami dies in chapter three, however, these tropes more or less disappear. For one thing, none of the other magical girls receive this sexualizing treatment from the show’s camera. The only scenes in which this sexualizing gaze can even be observed is in the magical girl transformations, which—no matter their subject—invariably include shots of the girls’ legs and

chests. However, these shots usually only happen once or twice per character over the course of the anime, and seem to be included mainly as a holdover from the magical girl genre. The girls' battles are now treacherous, not awe-inspiring; their combat styles are furious, terrified, and desperate, certainly not proud; no one shouts grandiose names for their finishing blows anymore; and Mami's ridiculous tea gimmick is a thing of the past. Battles are drawn with heavy, chaotic strokes, huge onomatopoeic effects, and lots of dark shading, unlike Mami's earlier battles which focused almost entirely on her cool poses, drawn with clean lines (see Figure 4).

What Does *Madoka Magica* Say?

The magical girl genre's long tradition of feminized empowerment "does not necessarily mean that they reflect feminist concerns," as Browning puts it ("Pretty Little Girl Warriors"), and while I am not eager to launch into a discussion of whether or not *Madoka Magica* or the magical girl genre "is feminist," I do wish to highlight that the queer relationships in *Madoka Magica* do not exactly have an easy time of it. The girls' struggles in the post-Mami chapters can be read as not only a battle to keep themselves alive, but, I believe, a struggle to assert their queer agency in a heteronormative environment, which adds a fascinating dimension to *Madoka Magica*'s immensely complex relationship with queer relationships. What, then, does *Madoka Magica* ultimately say about queer relationships between girls?

Madoka Magica manages the remarkable feat of simultaneously adhering to traditional heterosexist norms and rejecting them entirely in favor of queer, romantic attraction. It paints queer relationships as merely vehicles for comedy (e.g. Sayaka's and Hitomi's throwaway jokes) and tragic plotlines (e.g. Mami and Madoka's relationship, Sayaka and Kyouko's relationship), but also purports that they enable great power and queer agency (e.g. Homura and Madoka's relationship). *Madoka Magica*'s first third revels in the history of heterosexually portraying magical girls as subjects of sexual attraction, but this only lasts until Mami's death, when

tradition is tossed out the window. Queer relationships between the girls (when taken seriously) are never sexualized according to heterosexual norms. The near-overwhelming quantity of queer romantic subtexts that can be found in even a casual reading of *Madoka Magica* illustrate that queer relationships can contain great strength, as we see in the final chapters of *Madoka Magica*—Homura and Madoka’s immense bond allots them indescribably vast power. But this immense power is only achievable when the girls pay the price demanded by immense tragedy, and it is uncommon that any queer relationship even reaches this point: Mami, Sayaka, and Kyouko are all proof that queer relationships in *Madoka Magica* are almost always fated for misfortune. Nowhere do we see a healthy, fulfilling romantic relationship between girls that actually lasts.



Figure 1: Mami and Madoka's (romantic) confession. "I'm Not Afraid Of Anything Anymore." *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*. MBS, 21 Jan. 2011. *Crunchyroll*. Web. 13 Feb. 2016.



Figure 2: "and I'm home" image. "I'd Never Allow That To Happen." *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*. MBS, 4 Mar. 2011. Television.



Figure 3: Mami's sexualization. "I'm Not Afraid Of Anything Anymore." *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*. MBS, 21 Jan. 2011. Television.



Figure 4: Chaotic and dark battles (with bonus Sayaka/Kyouko subtext). Magica Quartet. *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*. Vol. 3. Art by Hanokage. Trans. William Flanagan. Lettering by Alexis Eckerman. Tokyo: HOUBUNSHA CO., LTD, 2011. Print.

CHAPTER III

Cardcaptor Sakura, Cardcaptors, and Localized “Girl Power”

Anime and manga-focused academic circles have expended countless hours examining the phenomenon of localization; understandably so, considering how complicated the issue of translation can be. In the earlier days of manga and anime localization in the United States, many works were subjected to drastic editorial localization in an attempt to better adapt them to a totally different cultural audience. These changes were often met with mixed reviews, and drastic editorial localizations have grown increasingly scarce as the anime and manga industry have continued to grow. Much of my research on manga and anime was dedicated to articles about the localization process, and while there was plenty of material to sort through, I noticed an interesting gap in the existing scholarship about the localization of a specific anime program in the U.S. The work I will be discussing in this chapter is *Cardcaptor Sakura*, or as its original localization is known in North America, *Cardcaptors*. *Cardcaptors* presents a fascinating opportunity to discuss not only how localization can result in two totally different end products, but also how representations of gender and femininity are perceived, prioritized, and altered through the localization process.

A Brief History of Editorial Localization

Before tackling *Cardcaptor Sakura* specifically, I would like to examine a few examples of localization that demonstrate how anime is often localized for a North American audience, and how that editorial localization can completely alter the tone, plot, and structure of a work, and even, in extreme circumstances, turn it into a brand new, completely different product. The cases of *Kiki’s Delivery Service*, *Warriors of the Wind*, *Voltron*, and *Robotech*—which I will elaborate on subsequently—speak to the power that the localization and translation of anime wields. Screen adaptations are often subject to extreme alterations when adapted to North American audiences,

as Alexandra Roedder's essay analyzing the adaptation of the Studio Ghibli film *Kiki's Delivery Service* demonstrates. Aside from the obvious addition of English-speaking voice actors, the North American version of *Kiki* heavily edits the score of the film. The "long, sweeping melodies" of Joe Hisaishi's original score are replaced with what Roedder refers to as "mickey-mousing" (258): a phenomenon in which a character's physical movements are mimicked by the sound of the score, and a common staple of North American cartoons. Roedder theorizes that these changes were made in part thanks to North American audiences' liking for animated films that were also musicals (261). Characters' dialogue, too, is edited. All of these changes, though seemingly subtle on their own, come together to present an entirely different cinematic experience. Roedder describes it as follows:

The initial English-language version of *Kiki* that U.S. audiences experienced on VHS was a very different film from the one experienced by Japanese audiences in 1989 in theaters. Instead of a quiet coming-of-age story about a young witch discovering the importance of believing in herself, Disney's localized *Kiki's Delivery Service* was a series of comic misadventures returning to the status quo—with a boyfriend in tow—at the end. (254)

In short, *Kiki's* narrative was able to morph from its original "quiet coming-of-age story" format into a typical North American animated film plot thanks entirely to edits to dialogue and to the score (254). The case of *Kiki* illustrates that even when editorial localization is used subtly, it still holds the power to drastically (yet relatively inconspicuously) change its final product.

Many anime localizations were not nearly as understated as *Kiki's*, however, as Brian Ruh's "Localization and Longevity" describes. Ruh goes into detail on common practices used in the localization of anime for US broadcasts in the 1980s, and how well—or how poorly—these adaptations went over with their North American audiences. In particular, Ruh cites *Warriors of the Wind* (the North American adaptation of the Japanese film *Nausicaa of the Valley of the*

Wind), whose localization was widely regarded as a massive failure (32), while exploring the conflict between audience's desires for "transparent" localizations and the perceived need to make alterations for the sake of clarification or acceptability (33). Ruh also discusses the adaptations of the shows *Voltron* and *Robotech*, which were sci-fi anime series from the 80's. *Voltron* and *Robotech* were Frankensteinian amalgamations of multiple Japanese shows (35), edited together to produce a totally original product for release in English-speaking countries. Strangely, some shows that went under the knife like *Voltron* and *Robotech* were not widely criticized for the severe edits they went under (36), while others were decried by fans as a "butchery" of the original material (37). Ruh theorizes that *Warriors of the Wind* was perceived as such a failure primarily because of the eager fan culture surrounding it (44), and that *Voltron* and *Robotech* were more successful thanks to the care with which they were written and the audience they were marketed for—not niche fans, but more casual cartoon watchers.

Cardcaptor Sakura and Localization

Drastic changes during localization are a fairly common occurrence, particularly in instances of localization from the 80's and 90's—the aforementioned *Kiki's Delivery Service*, *Warriors of the Wind*, *Voltron*, and *Robotech* all demonstrate this phenomenon. *Cardcaptor Sakura*, however, is especially notable when placed among these works for the massive tonal and structural overhaul that its North American release received when it was released in 2001. Charles Solomon's article "Is art lost in translation?" turns to *Cardcaptor Sakura* to discuss the numerous controversies surrounding the differences between the Japanese and North American version of the show. The Japanese version, 70 episodes long, barely even resembles the North American version, *Cardcaptors*, which was shortened to 39 episodes and heavily altered. According to Solomon, fan complaints surrounding *Cardcaptors* include the allegation that "WB altered the characters' personalities and shifted the focus of the series to make it more appealing to boys... [and] the North American series stops abruptly at the beginning of the second major

story arc” (1). Solomon quotes industry representatives who commented on the adaptation of *Cardcaptors*, including John Hardman, senior VP for Kids WB programming, whose statement on editorial changes to the series went as follows:

We asked them to take the female hero's name out of the title and turn it into a more gender-neutral title that wouldn't turn away our core boy audience... [regarding the edits in the individual episodes], it was just broadcast standards and practices concerns and cuts for time. Most Japanese shows come in at around 26 minutes per episode, and we have 21-minute time periods. We did ask them to pull back a little on some of the romantic relationships. (1)

The localization of *Cardcaptor Sakura* also Westernizes characters' names (as an example, Sakura's best friend Tomoyo becomes Madison, and her brother Toya is now Tori), while also vastly changing the sound of characters' voices, as compared to their Japanese counterparts.

Solomon quotes Jake Forbes, editor at TokyoPop publishing house (which released *Cardcaptor Sakura*'s manga version in North America) speaking on the differences between Sakura's Japanese and North American voice. Her “high-pitched, innocent, and very sincere” voice in the Japanese version “just isn't heard on North American television” (2). The Japanese Sakura's high-pitched, childlike, extremely feminized voice is exchanged for a much lower American voice—still young and undoubtedly feminized, but clearly either belonging to an older actress, or intending to evoke a slightly more mature feel, and clearly altered to appeal to a different, North American crowd. John Hardman, quoted again in “Is art lost in translation?”, comments:

[The North American version of] Sakura is feistier; she's an empowered female, not only to attract girls but to make sure boys realize she's someone they should aspire to befriend.

We looked for an actress with an older voice to make sure we appealed to the upper end of our demographics. (2)

Hardman clearly implies that the highly feminized Japanese version of Sakura was perceived to be not feisty enough, not empowered enough, not likeable by boys, and to put it bluntly, not appealing. This statement speaks volumes as to where *Cardcaptors'* localization team's priorities fell, and frankly it says something rather unsettling about their (admittedly, only perceived) valuing of femininity in general—bluntly, that they did not seem to value it much at all, in comparison to an allegedly superior, more “gender-neutral” version that will more strongly appeal to boys. Also, we see here how localization can have such sweeping effects on not only how a show flows from start to finish, but how it is received by its audiences—or at the very least, how those with the power to decide believe that it will be perceived.

The last of the articles that I researched for this chapter, J.D. Considine's “Making Anime A Little Safer For Americans,” focuses specifically on how *Cardcaptor Sakura* was altered in its localization and makes the argument that the rebranding of the show as less feminized was likely regarded as a necessary measure to keep the show on the air, since “in America, a girl's cartoon is considered sissy stuff, and faces a difficult fight for broadcast or distribution” (1). To that end, Considine mentions that “Cardcaptors had its cuteness content drastically reduced... the romance and girlish interplay that dominated the original [show] has been written out almost entirely” (1). Further, the relationship between Sakura and her best friend Tomoyo was greatly stripped down because, as Considine writes: “[Tomoyo's] intense devotion to Sakura... verges on the creepy [to a North American audience]” (1). Also, despite the common shoujo manga staple of young girls falling for older boys, Considine argues that Sakura's crush on Yukito (a high school junior) would have caused quite a controversy to a North American audience. “In the world of shoujo manga, such plot twists are seen as little more than girlish wish fulfilment—a harmless fantasy. But... no one [in America] wants to assume innocence in a cartoon subplot... It's better to play

down the romance and turn up the action” (1). In other words, it is better to “turn up the action” in a show like *Cardcaptor Sakura* because romantic subplots and “girlish interplay” are not welcome in a show that is being marketed to a North American audience, particularly in an environment that only tends to readily accept animated TV shows that are “gender-neutral”. The feminized elements of the original are not necessarily boons in a market that does not value feminized material, and *Cardcaptor Sakura*’s overt feminization is a red flag for anyone that might be interested in marketing the show for an audience made up of young boys as well as girls. After all, it is a well-known stereotype that boys never like “girly” things, and girls tend to watch cartoons less than boys, making the preservation of girlishness and feminization in localization a low priority.

Defeminization and *Cardcaptors*

Though the overhaul of *Cardcaptor Sakura* has proved itself worthy of academic discussion, I would like to examine more closely how the drastic changes that the North American version of *Cardcaptor Sakura* underwent make a statement about the series’ relationship to femininity. While Solomon, Considine, and others have produced a great body of work on the changes that *Cardcaptor Sakura* has undergone during its localization and plenty of observations about its portrayals of gender and femininity, these observations are, in my opinion, missing some crucial elements. I argue that the North American version of *Cardcaptor Sakura* does not just de-feminize the original work, as Considine and Solomon have pointed out, but actually gets rid of its femininity altogether for the sake of a more “gender-neutral” show. The North American and Japanese versions of *Cardcaptor Sakura* present to the audience two entirely different representations of “girl power”: a highly feminized (Japanese) magical girl, and a (North American) girl who is more or less playing the role of a male cartoon hero. This issue is nicely encapsulated by the first episodes of *Cardcaptor Sakura* and *Cardcaptors*, which are so astoundingly different that watching them back to back produces an incredibly surreal experience.

As the first opening credits sequence of *Cardcaptor Sakura* begins, the camera pans up, revealing a bright red shoe. The rest of Sakura (clad in her bright red magical girl outfit) slides into frame, accompanied by the opening phrases of the show's theme song, "Catch You Catch Me"—an upbeat, cutesy, and incredibly 90's tune with a female vocalist. Immediately following a few quick shots of Sakura striking cute poses, the show's title, written in bright pink, is emblazoned across a blue sky with puffy white clouds and sakura petals floating by in the background. These shots only take up about eight seconds, but already there is a clear emphasis on feminized, cute imagery. As the opening continues, Sakura and her friends and family pop up on stylized, abstract backgrounds, and Sakura skips across the blue sky in a shower of pink sakura petals. The lyrics to the theme song, nicely synchronized with the action of the opening, sing about unrequited love and the joy of the romantic chase:

I want to see you, but I can't see you, all I have is this lonely feeling
I can't tell you, but I want to tell you, I just keep missing my chance
But still! But still! I want to spread my wings with you
Run across the skies with you, share our dreams in unison
Now I catch you, catch you, catch me, catch me, wait now!
Look my way and tell me you love me
Yeah, nice to meet you, good to see you, for sure!
Let all the feelings I have for you fly, fly, fly into your heart!
I am so in love! ("Sakura and the Strange Magical Book")

The last shot of the opening depicts Sakura running toward the camera, meeting up with her friend Tomoyo, and walking onward to school as a tiny pink sakura petal whizzes past the camera, accompanied by a fade to black. The inclusion of the small, cute petal drives home how the opening of *Cardcaptor Sakura* is steeped in feminized imagery and themes of friendship, romance, and happiness (see Figure 5).

The American *Cardcaptors* opening, however, could not be more different. The sequence opens with a spiraling camera shot, zooming into a (now slightly dated) CGI rendering of the Clow Book, which flips open to reveal the glowing Clow Cards. The music during this scene is a driving, dramatic tune that is extremely reminiscent of action-packed American cartoons from the 90's. The song opens with an intense, almost aggressive chanting vocal line which is immediately followed by the verse, sung by a female vocalist—who incidentally sings in a much lower register than the Japanese singer of “Catch You Catch Me”:

The secrets of the Clow were all a mystery
But when this mighty book was opened, the powers were set free
(Cardcaptors) A mystic adventure
(Cardcaptors) A quest for all time
Each card possesses a power all its own
We've got to find them to bring the power home! (“One Fateful Day”)

Clearly, the lyrics now contain absolutely no trace of any romance; instead, they promise action and adventure, awe-inspiring magical powers, and a dramatic quest to restore balance to the world. The rewritten lyrics and thoroughly revamped opening song blend together into a blood-pumping opening sequence that was no doubt designed to get any young boys that might be in the audience perched on the edge of their seats. The opening theme is accompanied by rapid-fire action shots of Sakura and her friends mid-battle, mysterious magical symbols, blasts of energy, and mystical beasts. Not once is the cutesy feel of the Japanese opening even so much as referenced; even the color palette is now almost exclusively dark shades, as opposed to the Japanese opening's bright pinks, blues, and pastels. Also notable here is the fact that Sakura is not the focus of this opening. The camera focuses on Sakura's friends, her animal companion Kero, and the various magical beasts they do battle with far more often than it turns to Sakura herself. Even the omission of Sakura's name from the title of the show itself—*Cardcaptor Sakura* now

becomes simply *Cardcaptors*, with a new title card in dark blues and red to boot—is telling (see Figure 6). Sakura’s feminization has been thoroughly scrubbed off the face of this opening. She now plays the role of any male character that one might find in a standard cartoon aimed toward young boys, with the only difference in this situation being that a girl plays what is usually a boy’s role. While the Japanese show embraces the feminized nature of its heroine and her daily life, the North American show instead accepts the masculinized experience as the default—a universal experience that all of its audience will be able to relate to. Feminization, on the other hand, is deemed unnecessary and cast aside.

I decided to take these comparisons further and examine the first episodes of both *Cardcaptor Sakura* and *Cardcaptors* to assess their differences, and remarkably, the defeminization trend continues here, making itself known in nearly every aspect of the show. Immediately I spotted a difference in the titles of each episode: *Cardcaptor Sakura*’s first episode is titled “Sakura and the Strange Magical Book,” while *Cardcaptors*’ first episode is called simply “One Fateful Day”. I hypothesize that Sakura’s name was scrubbed from the name of the episode, as it was from the show’s title, because the localization team was attempting to shift the focus of this episode away from Sakura and her daily life. Instead, the magic powers that she gains from the Clow Book and the promise of action-packed adventures that will inevitably follow become the show’s new selling point, so to speak, and Sakura and her feminized daily life are delegated to second fiddle.

Similar to *Kiki’s Delivery Service*, *Cardcaptors*’ musical score underwent a dramatic change in tone during its localization. Instead of whimsical, Joe Hisaishi-esque orchestral pieces and the particular style of glimmering, disco-esque Japanese pop that is so evocative of magical girl shows of the 80’s and 90’s, *Cardcaptors*’ score is filled with very American funky instrumental beats and synthesizer and electric guitar-filled dance pop tracks. Though these changes could have been based upon necessary edits for time, I believe that the score was altered

entirely for demographical reasons. The youth of North America in the 90's would have no doubt expected to hear music like what they listened to at home and at school, and *Cardcaptor Sakura*'s delicate, cute score may not have appealed as strongly to the audience of young boys *Cardcaptors*' team of localizers were so eager to woo.

Lastly, it is important to mention how the actual content of each episode was altered. Certain scenes in *Cardcaptors* now contain Americanized dialogue, for one thing (a particularly amusing example: in the first two minutes of the show, Sakura's father, carrying a tray of clearly Japanese breakfast foods, cheerfully offers "Pancakes, anyone?"). However, more significant are the scenes that are now entirely missing from the North American show, or the numerous conversations that now cover completely different topics. For instance, as described in "Making Anime A Little Safer For Americans," Sakura's crush on Yukito is a significant plot point in *Cardcaptor Sakura*. *Cardcaptors*, however, removes much of it. Similarly, Sakura and Tomoyo's relationship is entirely changed; though in *Cardcaptor Sakura* Tomoyo is a devoted, even slightly starstruck friend (for the sake of comedy, of course), in the first episode of *Cardcaptors* their dynamic is far more sedated and much less intimate. These omissions betray the *Cardcaptors* localization team's attitude toward traditionally feminized aspects of entertainment media—in this case, friendship between girls and girlish romantic attraction. Though in the Japanese version of the show these elements are gladly and enthusiastically included, the North American show chose to shy away from these representations of feminization. I will go into detail about the events of these scenes below:

In the Japanese show, Sakura has arrived at school, while her brother Toya and Yukito bike on ahead to their high school down the street. As they leave, Yukito tosses Sakura a small piece of candy, at which she is completely lovestruck. While she clutches the candy to her chest, however, Tomoyo startles her by popping up next to her and making a comment about Yukito's "smooth move". In the next scene, as Sakura and Tomoyo prepare for the day at their shoe

lockers, Tomoyo gushes “You were so cute back there, Sakura. The way you gripped that candy, with a dreamy look on your face... I wish I could have recorded that moment on film!” Sakura is visibly embarrassed and a little uncomfortable as Tomoyo excitedly asks if she can obtain more footage of Sakura with her brand new camcorder. Sakura is hesitant but agrees, adding “Maybe you should film something a little more interesting than... me.” Tomoyo immediately rebuffs her remark, hands flying to her face as she blushingly proclaims “There *isn't* anything more interesting than you! Or more adorable...” Sakura falls over in shock, and the scene ends as Tomoyo walks off to class and Sakura narrates “I hate to say it, but Tomoyo is a little... different” (“Sakura and the Strange Magical Book”). The North American show, however, completely removes Yukito’s candy toss and changes Sakura and Tomoyo’s conversation to instead be about choosing topics for an independent study project. As Considine puts it in her article, the “romance and girlish interplay” of this scene is totally gone (1). By removing these details, *Cardcaptors* says to its audience that the romantic attraction Sakura exhibits for Yukito and the girlish interactions between Sakura and Tomoyo should not be important to the audience. The feminized elements of these scenes are stripped away in favor of more “gender-neutral” fare, chosen to appease a more “gender-neutral” crowd. In this case, however, a neutral crowd is not neutral at all, and rejects feminized elements in favor of more masculinized ones.

The localization team further attempted to strip feminizing elements from *Cardcaptor Sakura* by not only removing feminized aspects of her relationships, but by also removing references to Sakura’s personality and aspects of her daily life. Considering how Japanese magical girl stories put such a large emphasis on the everyday girlishness of their heroines, presumably, these decisions were made to attempt to shift the focus of the show away and reimagine Sakura as an action hero first and a girl second.

To this end, Sakura's introductory scene is completely altered in *Cardcaptors*. In the Japanese show, as Sakura gets dressed for school, she explains a little bit about herself through narration:

I'm Sakura Kinomoto! I'm a fourth grader at Tomoeda Elementary. My favorite classes are P.E. and music. My least favorite class is math! If I had to name one thing I'm really good at, it's being cheerful! ("Sakura and the Strange Magical Book")

In addition to being a common staple of Japanese anime and manga, this self-introduction does an excellent job of introducing to the audience not just to Sakura, but to what is important to her. She is introduced to the audience not as a hero, but as an ordinary girl with likes, dislikes, and a personality. *Cardcaptors*, however, changes her dialogue entirely:

This was the day that changed my life... the day that I discovered the Clow Book! It started out like any other morning, and as usual, I was already late... ("One Fateful Day")

Unlike in the Japanese version, the only thing the audience learns about Sakura here is that her life is about to be changed by some magical power. Nothing else about her is established, except perhaps the fact that she is often late for school. As the localization team scrubbed away Sakura's name from the title of the show, so too did they scrub away the details that would have allowed the audience to learn about who she is as a person. We can see signs of how the concept of Sakura the girl becomes less significant than the Sakura *Cardcaptors* creates: Sakura, the vessel through which the "gender-neutral" audience will experience the plot.

What Does *Cardcaptors* Say?

In the Japanese show, Sakura's girliness is central to the story and tone of the show. Her daily life and the unapologetically feminized aesthetic of the show's atmosphere are foregrounded. *Cardcaptors*, on the other hand, offers its audience an Americanized version of her

“girl power”. Sakura is localized not as a Japanese magical girl, but as a female action hero in a traditionally masculine role. Her part is played in this case by a girl instead of a boy, but apart from that, this show is virtually identical to other Saturday morning cartoon fare. Given how *Cardcaptors* entirely rejects the feminization of the original and strives to embrace the stereotypically masculine, a word such as “defeminized” seems far more appropriate than calling the North American show “gender-neutral”. I want to discuss the broader implications of *Cardcaptor Sakura*’s defeminization: namely, that in the case of *Cardcaptor Sakura*, Hardman and many other writers and critics choose to associate masculinity with “neutrality” and femininity with an optional “excess” or “lack”. Masculinity becomes the default experience; femininity, an abnormal exception.

When Solomon writes in his article “Four Mothers of Manga” that “Sakura is a good-natured but never saccharine girl who learns and grows” and clearly contrasts her from his description of Usagi (of the immensely popular magical girl series, *Sailor Moon*) as “the ditsy teenager,” his words betray an implication that a “saccharine,” “ditsy” girl is an inferior heroic specimen to a girl like *Cardcaptors*’ Sakura (“Four Mothers of Manga” 1). Usagi, with her unmistakable girliness, love of sweets and arcade games, fondness for naps, and hatred of schoolwork, is too “girly” and imperfect to be a respectable hero. Sakura, on the other hand, has had her feminization, personality, and quirks buried underneath a veneer of Saturday morning cartoon-style action-adventure plot. As Sakura and her feminization are removed from the top billing, so to speak, the importance of her presence in the show as a feminine force wavers. *Cardcaptors* undoubtedly places Sakura in a heroic role, but in comparison to the Japanese Sakura, this version of Sakura is practically female in name only. Pronouns aside, Sakura’s role in the story is entirely masculinized—or as others have put it, “gender-neutral”. Her role is stripped of its feminization, becoming simply that of a masculinized female hero; but the critics I have cited in this chapter put forth that her role is “empowering,” “feisty,” and something to be

celebrated (“Is art lost in translation?” 2). I would argue, in fact, that to describe *Cardcaptors* as a gender-neutral experience with an “empowering” heroine is to disregard the fact that *Cardcaptors* accepts masculinization as the norm.

Obviously, it is impossible to make any accurate sweeping generalities about North America and Japan’s cultural attitudes toward femininity (and extremely ill-advised to attempt as such). However, the case of *Cardcaptor Sakura* illustrates the tendency that critics and viewers (such as Hardman, Solomon, Considine, Forbes, and others) sometimes have to assume that masculinization is the same thing as gender-neutrality. This assumption, I think, is steeped in the idea that though masculinity and masculinization are more or less universally acceptable, feminization is not, and must be used sparingly if one seeks to create an appealing final product. The assumption that the localization team needed to so drastically alter *Cardcaptor Sakura* for the sake of making her “feisty” and “empowered”—read: no longer feminized—and thereby safe for boys to like is, frankly, absolutely absurd.



Figure 5. *Cardcaptor Sakura* opening. “Sakura and the Strange Magical Book.” *Cardcaptor Sakura*. NHK BS2. 7 Apr. 1998. *Crunchyroll*. Web. 6 Mar. 2016.



Figure 6. *Cardcaptors* opening. “One Fateful Day.” *Cardcaptors*. Kids WB. 23 June 2001. *YouTube*. Web. 6 Mar. 2016.

CHAPTER IV

Invisible Queerness and *Sailor Moon*

Naoko Takeuchi's *Sailor Moon* is perhaps the best known (and best loved) magical girl story to be produced, adapted, and re-adapted in the last 20 years. Being very fond of the *Sailor Moon* series myself, I was thrilled to discover the surprisingly robust body of academic work that the series has inspired. I am far from the first individual to focus on *Sailor Moon* for the purposes of thesis work, and plenty of other writers have written dozens and dozens of pages on its presence in popular culture (to mention a few, the writings of Annalee Newitz, Quenby Joannette, Sheila Browning, Charles Solomon, and Catherine Bailey are all quoted in this chapter; but the overwhelming majority of the works I found that mentioned the magical girl genre at least name-dropped *Sailor Moon*). Certainly, the question of "is this feminist?" has made its fair share of appearances in *Sailor Moon*-related academic discourse, and several of the works I will be quoting in this chapter have devoted hundreds of pages to cracking this question; however, much of the existing scholarship on *Sailor Moon* chooses to pursue the feminist question instead of analyzing the representation of queer relationships and non-binary gender representation, which have not been given much analysis. In *Sailor Moon*'s original North American localization, queer and non-binary people are given little to no representation at all, in direct contrast to the far more inclusive and diverse original show. By devoting this chapter to this aspect of *Sailor Moon*, I hope to shed some light on how *Sailor Moon*'s original North American adaptation utterly rejected non-heteronormative and non-cisgender representation.

Sailor Moon's Academic History and Female Empowerment

Firstly, I would like to briefly examine some of the work that I discovered during my research that focuses more broadly on *Sailor Moon's* relationship with female representation and empowerment, and in doing so, illustrate how its representation of girls has provoked such an incredibly huge response from the academic world—not to mention from the world of pop culture as a whole. Notably, the debate around magical girl manga and feminism I outlined in my introduction is grounded in and developed with reference to *Sailor Moon*. The definition that Newitz puts forth in “Magical Girls and Atomic Bomb Sperm: Japanese Animation in America” (which I quoted in my first chapter) represents the genre as little more than a romantic-comedy callback to sexist and outdated gender roles. Newitz further claims that “Americans consume magical girl anime as a form of nostalgia for the kind of social situations made possible by traditional gender roles... [and] for male domination” (5). These statements make it clear that this is an issue of objectification—and sexual objectification at that—and that the magical girl genre is decidedly not a place of female empowerment. Though she is not speaking about *Sailor Moon* specifically, her representation of the genre is a scathing indictment of the genre that *Sailor Moon* exemplifies, and by extension, *Sailor Moon* itself.

In contrast, I would also like to examine the argument made by Joannette in “The Heroine's Reclamation of the Girlish and the Portrayal of Girl-Power in *Sailor Moon*.” As a full-length thesis, Joannette's writing contains ample material for discussion, but I was particularly interested in the argument Joannette constructed in her abstract:

How *Sailor Moon* and her friends use their bodies, play with gender constructions, bond with each other, and privilege their female-only space demonstrates the value of [girl-power, feminist] texts within the scope of other American girl-power narratives... The reclamation of the girlish [in *Sailor Moon*] seeks to claim the feminine as valuable in

itself... By rearticulating a site of oppression for girls, normative femininity can claim value and power the way the masculine realm has. The Sailor Scout body reflects the power of gender performance and fluidity, and the Scouts' feminine performances do far more than simply reinforce the male-gaze. Sailor Moon and her friends act and react within a patriarchal world where they are not the exception to the rule of female power. (Joanette)

Joanette goes on to argue that the Sailor Scouts wholeheartedly embrace femininity in both how they function as heroes and in interpersonal relationships, and this is what makes them autonomous, valuable, and powerful; in other words, their feminization directly enables their heroism (21). This statement runs in direct opposition to the statement that Newitz makes regarding female empowerment in the magical girl genre, claiming instead that the overt feminization of the girls of *Sailor Moon* is actually what gives them their strength and, in fact, their value as heroic figures and role models.

Browning's "Pretty Little Girl Warriors: A Study of Images of Femininity in Japanese Sailor Moon Comics" straddles the line between Newitz and Joanette's arguments, making points about *Sailor Moon*'s empowering message, while also acknowledging its potentially problematic elements—in this case, its embrace of subtle erotic elements for the sake of wider audience appeal:

[The sailor suit] is both the standard uniform style worn by [high school girls] and also the outfit used by marketers in the sex industry to sell a nymphette effect... [This] satisfies two desires: the desire on the part of young or teenage girls to identify with the Sailor Scouts, and the desire, exhibited primarily by older males, to eroticize the Scouts... The nature of shojo comics as a medium largely by and for females does not

necessarily mean that they reflect feminist concerns... A girl's desire to be desirable... is not exactly dismantled in *Sailor Moon*. (23-4)

Usagi and friends' outfits, evoking "Supergirl meets Heidi Klum, with a stripper's version of Shirley Temple fashions" (many thanks to Solomon's "Sailor Moon's 20 Years of Cute Girl Power," which I quoted in my first chapter, for that unique description), are indeed difficult to defend from a feminist standpoint (1). That being said, Browning also points out the strength of the narrative of empowerment that ties *Sailor Moon* together: in her words, "Women and girls have the power to dominate or save the world. There are multiple models of girlhood, all equally acceptable and good. Girls can even be imperfect, and still be a heroine. Girls can be stronger than boys, in every respect" (Browning 121). Ultimately, Browning's argument concedes that *Sailor Moon* manages to both promote empowering messages while simultaneously promoting traditional, less progressive themes.

The Case of Haruka Tenou

Though the aforementioned discussions on *Sailor Moon*'s relationship with feminism mark academic response to the magical girl genre, these particular questions have flooded the market, so to speak, and totally drowned out discussion of *Sailor Moon*'s relationship to queer relationships and non-binary genders—a facet of *Sailor Moon* that is in sore need of attention. As in the case of *Cardcaptor Sakura*, *Sailor Moon* has been subject to significant editorial localization, but where *Cardcaptor Sakura*'s changes were ostensibly made for the sake of TV ratings, both the anime and manga versions of *Sailor Moon* released in North America have undergone blatant censorship. Queer relationships between characters have been altered or made into punchlines, and important scenes discussing gender identity are either totally removed or edited so as to have no real significance. Many of the works that I researched offered very little reflection on this particular facet of *Sailor Moon*'s history, and instead focused on *Sailor Moon*'s

representation of feminized empowerment (or lack thereof, arguably). Though the authors I cited in previous paragraphs have presented undoubtedly fascinating analyses of *Sailor Moon*'s relationship with feminism, I would like to turn my gaze to the changes that *Sailor Moon* underwent during its North American localization, and examine the unfortunate implications of the localized *Sailor Moon*'s treatment of non-heteronormative relationships and non-cisgender identities.

As was discussed in my introductory chapter, as the shoujo manga genre has expanded over the years, readers have seen an increase in stories about “a range of different narratives and representations of sexuality” (Kotani 167), and tales that “make a mockery of conventional gender roles and narratives... [and make] fun of the heroic heterosexuality and monogamy of traditional fairy tales” are far more common than they used to be (165). This is thanks in part to the ever-increasing presence of women mangaka in the shoujo manga world, as Gravett described in *Manga: 60 Years of Japanese Comics*:

What [shoujo manga stories] frequently have in common is their enlightening fictions about the pressures and pleasures of individuals living life in their own way and, for better or worse, not always as society expects. The search for love is still a pervasive theme, but many women mangaka have transcended simple-minded romanticism and boy-meets-girl conformity. (81)

We see representations of this nonconformity in *Sailor Moon* as well, most notably through the character Haruka Tenou (also known as Sailor Uranus), and her partner, Michiru Kaiou (Sailor Neptune). These two Sailor Scouts and their romance are legendary among communities of queer anime and manga fans, and Haruka is particularly notable for how she refuses to adhere to the gender binary. For the sake of clarity, I will continue to use female pronouns for Haruka, since that is what is most commonly used for her; however, Haruka herself never states a preference for

any particular gender identity, and she is commonly assumed within the fan community to be non-binary or genderfluid (but as a disclaimer, I believe that it is important to mention that I am not personally qualified to speak about the perspective of a non-binary individual, and externally assigning a gender to anyone is a dangerous path to tread). However, Haruka's gender identity and her relationship with Michiru are altered in the original North American localization—sometimes clumsily censored, sometimes totally removed. This censorship denies *Sailor Moon*'s audience access to a character that could provide important positive representation to a group of people who have historically been denied it, as well as denying Haruka herself an extra dimension that adds realism and humanity to her character. I would like to use this chapter to further examine how she was localized and what the changes that were made to her imply about the localization's highly negative attitude toward queer and non-binary people in general.

The version of *Sailor Moon* that I am choosing to examine is widely recognized as one of *Sailor Moon*'s first adaptations for a North American manga-reading audience. This particular version was released in serial in North American magazines in the late 1990s, and was later gathered for publication in 2000 a series of novels, marketed as the “pocket edition” of the original story. Manga localizations from this time period would often “flip” a story's artwork during editing in order to make the stories read from left to right instead of right to left and to minimize confusion for North American readers. Similarly, since Japanese text in manga is typically read in vertical lines, from the top of the page to the bottom, the original shapes of speech bubbles and text orientation are often altered as well (Sell 103-4). These are telltale signs of a localization from the 90's-early 2000's, since nowadays it is much more common for localizers to attempt to preserve the basic format of manga as much as is possible for readers, and attempting to find new manga with the artwork “flipped” is nearly unheard of by modern manga readers. *Sailor Moon*'s localization also “Americanized” many character's names, changing Usagi to Serena or “Bunny” (in Japanese, “usagi” means rabbit), Usagi's friends Ami and Rei to

Amy and Raye, respectively, and Usagi's love interest Mamoru to Darien. As was already discussed within the context of *Cardcaptor Sakura*, this change may have been intended to make names easier to remember for North American audiences, as well as to keep the manga consistent with the already dubbed and localized *Sailor Moon* anime. In sum, the localized version of *Sailor Moon* was already quite different from the original, if only in terms of format—but of course, the localization team did not stop there.

Though the changes mentioned above were rather significant, they pale in comparison to the changes that characters' genders and sexualities were subject to during the localization process. Haruka in particular was altered drastically, and the changes she underwent clearly show how uncomfortable localizers were giving her gender identity and relationship time in the spotlight. Localizers seem to have scrambled to mold her into a format that would be more palatable for a North American audience (or so they believed), changing dialogue and plotlines where they could, and removing whole scenes that were too difficult to alter coherently. The resulting product comes across as unclear and inconsistent at best, and offensively non-representative and heteronormative at worst.

Act 30 of the Japanese manga contains a scene that brings Haruka's refusal to adhere to the gender binary to the forefront while also smoothly incorporating an instance of queer sexual attraction in a format that is brimming with shoujo manga style—so of course, the North American localization did not allow it to stay in the final product. In this scene, Usagi finally plucks up the courage to ask Haruka about her gender (something that has been a source of confusion for Usagi for several acts thus far). Upon being asked “Are you a man... or a woman?”, Haruka moves in close, sweeps Usagi into her arms, and touches their foreheads together in a romantic embrace. She then replies “Man or woman... Is it really that important?” while holding Usagi just inches from her lips. Usagi, who is clearly attracted to Haruka, is quite beside herself (see Figure 7). These panels, in addition to subtly teaching young readers about

non-binary gender identities, quietly prove an important point to their readership about how biological sex and gender identity are not necessarily one and the same, and that someone's gender identity is not always determinable from the outside—nor is it always appropriate to guess. This scene adds dimension to Haruka's character and educates its readers at the same time, making it extremely valuable to the text. However, in the English version, the panels in which Usagi questions Haruka's gender are totally missing, reducing this scene from four pages to three and strangely altering the flow of its characters' movements (now, Haruka inexplicably seems to teleport right next to Usagi). The exclusion of these panels can be easy to miss if one was unaware that they were there in the first place, but when noticed, this exclusion becomes a gaping hole that is nearly impossible to miss—and even harder to justify (see Figure 8).

The inclusion of the “Is it really that important?” scene in the original manga proved a salient point to its readers about gender politics that the North American localization is poorer without. The localization's refusal to acknowledge Haruka's gender identity merely introduces confusion in a scene that could have instead been a thrillingly inclusive acknowledgement of queer identities. Further, the fact that the value of this scene is stripped away under the pretense of changes made in the name of “Americanization” feels like a low blow—non-binary characters and non-heterosexual attraction are apparently just as un-American to the localization team as reading from right to left.

Haruka's relationship with her girlfriend, Michiru, receives just as much censorship, if not more, than her gender identity does, and this only further emphasizes how the North American localization chose to give *Sailor Moon's* queer and non-binary characters the short end of the stick. Catherine Bailey's article, “Prince Charming By Day, Superheroine By Night? Subversive Sexualities And Gender Fluidity In *Revolutionary Girl Utena* And *Sailor Moon*,” examines the depiction of queer relationships and non-binary genders within two salient examples of the magical girl genre, and her observations about the nature of Haruka and Michiru's

relationship fit right in this chapter. Bailey mentions that queer relationships (lesbian relationships, in this context) are often portrayed within shoujo manga as fleeting, impossible, or even flat-out deadly as opposed to stable and safe heterosexual ones—this is a direct callback to Fujimoto’s argument in “Where Is My Place in the World?”, which I referenced in my chapter on *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*. However, Haruka and Michiru are a delightful exception to this rule. Their relationship as portrayed in the original Japanese story is realistic, loving, and perhaps most significantly, never shoehorned in for drama, conflict, or tragedy as in the cases of the unfortunate heroines of “Where Is My Place in the World?”:

[Haruka and Michiru] are a happy couple who cohabitate and eventually even end up raising a child together. None of their comrades judge them on the basis of their relationship; in fact, in the [Japanese] manga, it nearly goes unnoticed. The issue of the couple’s “lesbianism” is never brought up in conversation. Haruka and Michiru’s relationship is treated like any other and is portrayed as long-term, loving, and sustainable. (Bailey 214-5)

Haruka and Michiru’s relationship was not totally free from censorship in the North American version, however. Once the localization team got their hands on it, Haruka and Michiru’s relationship underwent a huge shift that is borderline comical in hindsight. Any child who grew up watching the North American version of *Sailor Moon* would no doubt remember Haruka and Michiru (or “Amara” and “Michelle” in the English dub)’s status as very close “cousins.” Since the localization team did not have the ability to reanimate parts of the show and could only either re-dub dialogue or edit around scenes, much of Haruka and Michiru’s romantic body language is still included, adding strangely incestuous implications to what was already a clumsily written cover-up (see Figure 9).

Again, we see that the North American localization of *Sailor Moon* prioritizes censorship above clarity of narrative, and certainly far above the desire any non-heterosexual reader might have had to see some part of themselves represented in a heroic role. Further, as Bailey writes:

[In the anime,] several of the main female characters develop attractions to Haruka because they believe she is a man. When her biological sex is revealed, however, these attractions instantly dissolve, and the girls exhibit hyperbolic disgust over their former feeling. The event becomes entirely comedic... When Makoto/Sailor Jupiter shows signs of romantic interest in Haruka even after learning she is a woman, the rest of her teammates react with shock. While again, their comments are teasing rather than hateful, they are nevertheless homophobic... The thought of one of their own close friends questioning her sexuality is cause for giggles that problematically casts homosexuality as something deviant, strange and undesirable. (216)

In fairness to the North American localization, much of the subtly homophobic subtext that Bailey mentions is, unfortunately, a holdover from the original Japanese anime. I choose to include it here because I believe that the fact that this instance is not changed in the American text is just as telling as the localization team's decision to omit examples of non-binary gender identities and queer relationships in the other instances I have mentioned. Depicting queer characters in a relatable, heroic light was presumably considered too scandalous for the Saturday morning cartoon crowd, but subtly homophobic remarks made for comedy, clearly, need no altering—or so this example seems to state.

What Does *Sailor Moon* Say?

Haruka's situation clearly demonstrates how the original North American adaptations of *Sailor Moon* went out of its way to ignore or change queer elements of the original story. In the name of "Americanization," Haruka had much of her value as a queer, non-binary heroic figure

stripped from her, leaving barely-coherent scenes and incredibly inconsistent writing in her wake. An incredibly important part of *Sailor Moon*'s North American audience was denied an invaluable opportunity for positive representation thanks to how Haruka was treated, but additionally, the localization team's decision to remove these elements also projected a highly problematic attitude to the rest of their audience. Haruka's gender identity and sexual orientation, they seem to say, is not only unimportant to a North American audience, but perhaps even some strange form of perversion—certainly nothing American parents should want their children exposed to. Thankfully, as the *Sailor Moon* franchise has aged and only grown more popular over the years, its adaptations have become more and more concerned with preserving elements of the source material, particularly those that were not in the original localizations. Haruka and Michiru are happily (and unquestionably) together in the most recent adaptations of the series, Haruka's gender identity is never hidden, and the “Is it really that important?” scene is left whole, in all its glory, in the most recent manga adaptation. Despite what Haruka says, in this case, it really *is* that important.



Figure 7. "Is it really that important?" in Japanese (read from right to left). Takeuchi Naoko. *Bishoujo Senshi Sailor Moon*. Vol. 8. Tokyo: Kodansha Comics, 1994. Print.



Figure 8. "Is it really that important?" in English. Takeuchi, Naoko. *Sailor Moon*. Vol. 8. Los Angeles: Mixx Entertainment, 2000. Print.



Figure 9. Haruka and Michiru: Kissing “Cousins”. “The Death of Uranus And Neptune: The Talisman Appears.” *Sailor Moon*. TV Asahi, 15 Oct. 1994. *hulu*. Web. 14 Apr. 2016.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In this thesis, I have attempted to prove through my examination of *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*, *Cardcaptor Sakura*, and *Sailor Moon*—not to mention the numerous works that I have cited throughout this project—that the magical girl genre is not only worthy of academic debate, but also yields plenty of material for analysis in areas not often discussed: in my case, feminization, queer and non-binary identities, and their intersection with the phenomenon of localization. In my first chapter, I offered a basic introduction to manga and anime, the shoujo genre as a whole, magical girl stories, and asserted that the genre has been thus far lacking in discussion on how my particular areas of interest overlap. My chapter on *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* discussed the series' queer subtext and its simultaneously progressive and regressive portrayals of classic shoujo lesbian romance; through my examination of *Cardcaptor Sakura* and *Cardcaptors*, I explored what the show's strange relationship with the localization process implies about a wider attitude toward the presence of femininity in North American pop culture; and, in my *Sailor Moon* chapter, I examined the case of Haruka and Michiru to explore how queer relationships and non-binary gender identities within the magical girl genre clash with the localization process. Of course, I do not intend to delude myself into thinking that the research that I have conducted over the course of this project has accomplished anything particularly groundbreaking, but I am grateful that I have had the opportunity to turn a more critical eye to one of my favorite genres of fiction, and I can only hope that magical girl stories will continue to inspire me in the future.

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