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Mechademia, Volume 4, 2009, pp. 241-256 (Article)

Published by University of Minnesota Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mec.0.0085>



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From Jusuheru to Jannu: Girl Knights and Christian Witches in the Work of Miuchi Suzue

In the vast and diverse world of manga, war is traditionally considered to be the domain of *shōnen* manga, or boys' comics, while *shōjo* manga, or manga for girls, are perceived as primarily concerned with romance. As Kotani Mari and Saitō Tamaki note, love and war merge in the *sentō bishōjo* or “battling beauty” motif, in which these traditionally separate themes are combined, allowing identification on the part of different readers and making it a particularly popular and increasingly visible figure in contemporary Japanese popular culture.¹ The *sentō bishōjo* is a productive trope that spans different genres and appears in boys' and girls' manga alike, as well as in their animated versions and related merchandising.

In this article, I want to look at the uses and implications of another figure that, by contrast, appears almost exclusively in *shōjo* works: the “girl knight.” While battling beauties and girl knights share a number of traits, including their challenge to traditional notions of femininity, they differ in some significant aspects, most importantly, as I will try to demonstrate, in their epistemological approach to, and use of, war/time. I therefore propose to study the peculiar combination of themes of war, time, and cultural and

gender identity in the girl knight trope as a means to reflect more broadly on the uses of history in *shōjo* manga.

In the first part of the article, I will look at the development of the girl knight figure in modern girls' manga and analyze the way it combines history, parody, and fantasy to subvert conventional notions of reality. In the second part, I will analyze one specific case of subversion of Western history and war/time through the use of the girl-knight figure, specifically Miuchi Suzue's creative misreading of the legend of Joan of Arc. A canonical author of girls' manga and very popular among fans in Japan, Miuchi is seldom studied in the West.² Looking at her works will thus allow me to look at the treatment of history and gender in mainstream *shōjo* manga, a topic that is generally overlooked by critics on both sides of the Pacific, who tend to focus on more radical and experimental (and, undoubtedly, more pleasant-to-read) authors.

POWER LEOTARDS AND KNIGHTS WITH RIBBONS

If in boys' manga from the late 1950s to the early 1970s casting children in the role of pilots of fighter planes and giant robots functions as a form of empowerment for young readers, girls in these stories generally maintain a passive role, in line with the conventional representation of women and children as symbolic civilian victims of war. From the torments of an adolescent woman hit by atomic radiation in Shirato Sanpei's *Kieyuku shōjo* (1957, *The vanishing girl*) to the death by starvation of little Setsuko in Takahata Isao's *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988, *Hotaru no haka*), in Japanese popular culture, and particularly in boys' manga, girls are almost invariably portrayed as victims rather than agents of war.

With the evolution from robot manga to the so-called "power suit" stories, where, rather than piloting a giant machine, characters don robot armor that gives them various kinds of powers, the encroachment of technology on the body, among other things, begins to undermine gender differences, and female characters increasingly gain access to active warrior roles. Interestingly, however, compared to their sturdy, armor-like male counterparts, girls' power suits tend to be tight-fitting, flimsy garments that appear designed to reveal the body rather than shield it, as epitomized by the power leotards worn by the Knight Sabers in *Bubblegum Crisis* (1987, *Baburugamu kuraishisu*). As Kotani notes, while being a warrior-like figure, "aggressive as any boy," a battling girl must also be "a beauty, which configures her in relation to boys'

desires.”³ Accordingly, empowered girls usually have either hyperfeminine, Wonder Woman-like bodies or *lolikon*-oriented schoolgirl looks. In either case, the subversion of gender roles is accompanied by a high degree of sexualization of the characters according to traditional stereotypes of femininity, adult or adolescent. In both *shōnen* and *shōjo* manga, battling girls are constructed according to male standards and objectified through a male gaze.

Very different in this respect is another recurring battling female of manga, the “princess knight.” Launched by Tezuka Osamu’s *Ribon no kishi* (1953, *The knight with the ribbon*; also known in English as *The Princess Knight*) and consolidated in Ikeda Riyoko’s *Berusaïyu no bara* (1972, *The Rose of Versailles*), this trope does not involve physical transformations but relies instead on a combination of cross-dressing and historical settings. The two are fused in an aestheticization of European war tales that focuses on fashion, in the form of exotic-looking, elegant uniforms and/or a combination of shiny armor and lace frills. The uniforms worn by Oscar and Sapphire, the respective protagonists of Ikeda’s and Tezuka’s manga, are radically different from power suits, in that they do not alter biological identity; rather, they expose its constructed and performative nature. Cross-dressing thus becomes a critique of conventional, rigid notions of gender: its initial inversion of the male/female binary ultimately leads to an undermining of the categories themselves, which are shown to be not natural and grounded in the physical body but arbitrary and acquired.

The historical settings, revisited through a fantastical filter, perform a similar function. *Berusaïyu no bara* is a good example of such strategies; the background of the French Revolution is both an occasion to display exotic landscapes and romanticizing clichés about Europe, and a way to address social and political concerns in a displaced, allegorical mode. The protagonist of the manga, Oscar François de Jarjayes, is a girl raised as a boy, who pursues a military career in prerevolutionary France and eventually becomes captain of the Royal Guard. In the course of the story Oscar becomes romantically involved both with queen Marie Antoinette and André, the son of Oscar’s housemaid and one of the few people to know her female identity, as well as with other characters from the aristocracy and from the underclass. A nobleman and an army official in the service of the aristocracy, Oscar is led by her love for André to sympathize with the cause of the people. Her inability to side with the aristocracy and to fulfill her role as protector of constituted order intertwines with her personal identity conflict; both class and gender categories are presented as obstacles to self-realization, obstacles that ultimately prove insurmountable, as shown by Oscar’s tragic death on the

barricades after failing to convince Marie Antoinette to withdraw the troops from the streets of Paris.

Such rewriting of historical battles as allegories for personal and social struggles is not new to manga; it was a common feature in the *gekiga*⁴ of the 1950s and 1960s, traditionally considered the two great seasons of political

THE CREATIVE ANACHRONISMS OF SHŌJO MANGA, LIKE THOSE OF GEKIGA, ARE A MEANS OF APPROPRIATING HISTORY AS A WEAPON.

commitment of Japanese comics. While children's comics tend to depict war through fantastic tales of adolescent pilots, from the numerous Pacific War manga of the 1960s and Nagai Gō's giant robots of the 1970s all the way to contemporary mecha anime; *gekiga*, targeted mostly at an adolescent and young adult audience, used medieval wars and samurai stories to stand for current social and political fights. Renowned examples are Shirato Sanpei's *Ninja bugeichō* (1959–62, Chronicle of a ninja's martial achievements), which symbolizes the student and worker revolts of the 1960s through the portrayal of peasant uprisings of the Edo period, and his *Kamuiden* (1964–71, The legend of *kamui*), which performs a similar operation but using the story of a *buraku* boy fighting against discrimination and oppression.

While *gekiga* relies mainly on Japanese history, *shōjo* manga displays a marked preference for foreign settings.⁵ This adds a further layer to the rewriting of history as parody, creating a romanticized and displaced version of the West that duplicates, and exposes, Western mechanisms of stereotyping the Orient, in their peculiar combination of exoticization and domestication. If in Hollywood movies all the characters speak English regardless of their nationality, here everybody speaks Japanese, and revolutionary France becomes a repertoire of exotica and stylized images, performing the same function as *geisha* and *samurai* in American and European popular fiction. While catering to their readers' taste for all things foreign, *shōjo* authors also exhibit a remarkable boldness in appropriating Western history for their own purposes, a fact that problematizes the common image of Japanese awe toward Western culture. *Shōjo* manga's rewriting of Western history is thus a particularly ambiguous and interesting operation.

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In her analysis of the evolution of manga from an "art of the people" with radical political content to an increasingly conservative medium, Sharon Kinsella sees the boom of girls' manga in the 1970s as the sign of a shift toward sentimentalism and disengagement, echoing the view of Japanese critics who describe it as "a form of petty individualism and a reactionary retreat from more important political and social issues."⁶ In this essay, I would like to

attempt a reassessment of mainstream *shōjo* manga, suggesting that, while it remains a form of mass culture that often serves to convey conservative messages and contain dissent, in rewriting Western history it introduces elements of social and political critique that prompt, or at least permit, reflection on the part of the readers.

Through a blend of historical faithfulness and fantastical fiction, and a juxtaposition of modern and premodern elements, “girl knight” stories produce creative misreadings of history that allow the authors, the characters, and the readers to reflect critically on the conventions of culture and society, while making them aware of the pervasiveness of such conventions. The creative anachronisms of *shōjo* manga, like those of *gekiga*, are a means of appropriating history as a weapon.

In this article, I want to explore one case of imaginative reinterpretation of history: Miuchi Suzue’s rewriting of the legend of Joan of Arc as a “girl knight” story, which also becomes a reinterpretation of the Hundred Years’ War as a conflict between the Christian god and devil, both represented through a fantastical framework as exotic supernatural creatures. Through the combination of these two elements, the girl knight trope and Christian imagery, this manga portrays war as a binary opposition of good against evil, us against them, and women against men: an opposition that is ultimately subverted, revealing the very categories it is based upon to be arbitrary and constructed.

In order to highlight the specific articulation of this mechanism, I propose my own anachronism as a critical tool to uncover the strategies at play in the work. To explain Miuchi’s use of girl knights and Christianity, I will read her story against an apparently completely unrelated, yet intriguingly similar text: the sacred book of the early Christians, *Tenchi hajimari no koto* (*The Beginning of Heaven and Earth*; hereafter *Tenchi*).⁷ The two texts, as we will see, have much more in common than we could think, and juxtaposing them will allow us to shed light on Miuchi’s rewriting of Western history.

MAYA, MARUYA, AND JUSUHERU

In many respects, Miuchi’s works read as paradigmatic *shōjo* manga, and follow all the genre’s visual and thematic conventions, including floral and art deco motifs, shining eyes and flowing hair, cute unthreatening male protagonists, fashion-conscious female characters dressed in frilly skirts or trendy pantsuits, and romantic stories often featuring a rags-to-riches dynamic.

In this sense, her works are a far cry from the experiments of the so-called *24nengumi*, and belong more to the tradition of Tezuka Osamu's mainstream comics than to the movement for the appropriation of manga by female writers of the 1970s.⁸ Miuchi's manga are rather tame both in style and in content when compared to those of some of her contemporaries such as Hagio Moto and Takemiya Keiko, and more radical authors who border on the world of *dōjinshi*.⁹

Miuchi's most famous work is *Garasu no kamen* (1976–present, The glass mask), a long series tracing the adventures of teenage Kitajima Maya in her quest to become an actress at the Tsukikage school. While the story reads as a fairly conventional *bildungsroman*, the choice of an actress as a protagonist allows Miuchi to reflect on the performative nature of identity in general, and more specifically of gender roles. Like the “glass mask” of the title, female identity is presented as something that needs to be learned, and even once acquired, is constantly in danger of shattering.

Her shorter works, too, often revolve around the struggles of female teenage protagonists in their socialization as women.¹⁰ Her protagonists are for the most part tomboys, physically fit and with a strong character. Often they are either obsessed with sports or overachievers in school, and both types attract criticism from their family and society at large for the resulting lack of femininity. In story after story, Miuchi's girls struggle with their inability to fit into gender roles. Besides coming-of-age tales, the other main register of Miuchi's stories is horror, with a specific focus on ghosts, creatures from the past that allow her to introduce history into the manga in a highly fantastical mode. Her girl knight stories are arguably the most interesting combination of these two elements, the concern with gender roles and the rewriting of history through fantasy.

The concern with the arbitrariness of gender roles and the interest in horror also provide an important background to her interpretation of Christianity. Two of the most intriguing cultural adaptations performed by early Christians are the reinterpretations of the figures of Mary and of Lucifer; both resonate with contemporary manga's revisiting of Christian legends.

Early interpretations of Christianity in Japan are in themselves a fascinating example of cultural adaptation. This adaptation is partly related to the work of cultural negotiation undertaken by the Jesuits in the sixteenth century, when the religion was first introduced to Japan. Alessandro Valignano, the main evangelizer in Japan after the departure of Xavier for China in 1551, was one of the strongest advocates of the idea of cultural adaptation in missionary work.

EARLY INTERPRETATIONS
OF CHRISTIANITY IN JAPAN
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As in China, where missionaries had rendered the word *God* as *Shang Di* (Emperor) or *Tian* (Heaven), in Japan, in an effort to make Christian doctrine comprehensible in local terms, the Jesuits translated a number of key terms into Buddhist equivalents. As a result, Christianity was initially interpreted as a form of Buddhism, yet another Buddhist sect that had been imported from China. The most controversial term was the word *God* itself, which was initially translated as *Dainichi* (*Mahavairocana*, the Buddha revered by the Shingon sect). Later on Francisco Xavier, realizing that this led the Japanese to think that they were converting to a form of Buddhism and not to Christianity, forbid the cult of *Dainichi*, declaring it “the devil’s invention,” and the Christian god was renamed *Deusu*.¹¹ This initial confusion, coupled with the myth of Lucifer as a fallen angel, resulted in a strong concern among early Japanese Christians with the ambiguity of the Devil/God binary, which is clearly reflected in their reinterpretation of the figure of Lucifer.

Interestingly, this intrinsic ambiguity of the Devil/God binary is addressed by a number of modern authors of fiction and in popular culture. I should make a caveat here: I am not trying to prove a historical continuity between these interpretations or imply that there was an uninterrupted tradition of questioning of Christianity that goes from the *Tenchi* to modern manga. Rather, my working hypothesis is that the early Christians’ misreading of religion informed popular perceptions of Christianity that are still alive today, and, more importantly, that this phenomenon shows an active appropriation of Western culture in Japan, which ultimately undermines Western categories of thought by presenting them from an estranged perspective.

A first instance of such similarities between *kirishitan* and modern interpretations of Christianity can be seen in the representation of the figure of Mary. In the *Tenchi*, the Biruzen Maruya (Virgin Mary) is portrayed as a gifted and bookish teenage girl, who becomes endowed with magical powers after her encounter with God. When read against Miuchi’s stories, Maruya appears to be the perfect *shōjo* heroine, yet another girl knight endowed with supernatural powers. Here is how she makes her first appearance in the book:

In the country of Roson [Luçon, in the Philippines] where King Sanzen Zesusu [three thousand Jesuses] reigned, a girl of humble birth by the name of Maruya also lived. Since her seventh year, she had set her heart and soul on the pursuit of learning. By age twelve she had made great strides and reflected thus: “When I consider the state of our world, I wonder how I can be

saved in the world to come now that I have been born into the world of humans.” As she thought relentlessly about this, how mysterious it was when she received this heavenly oracle: IF YOU MARUYA WILL REMAIN SINGLE FOR YOUR ENTIRE LIFE LIVING THE ASCETIC LIFE OF A BIRUZEN, I WILL QUICKLY GRANT YOU THE SALVATION YOU SEEK. Much amazed and rejoicing, the girl Maruya threw herself to the ground and worshiped.¹²

Shortly afterward, the Biruzen Maruya is asked to marry the king of Roson. The king offers her worldly goods, but she refuses, claiming that, despite her low rank in this world, she is superior because of her “secret arts.” She is depicted as a shaman or magician, summoning supernatural beings, even concentrating the force in her *hara* in the best martial arts tradition:

Without so much as a glance at the king’s treasures Maruya responded, “Your treasures are temporary and pertain to an ephemeral present. Once you have used them up, they are useless. But now I will show you my secret arts.” Turning her face to the heavens above, pressing her palms together and gathering all her force to the center of her being in prayer, the girl Maruya worshiped and invoked while these words flooded from her: “Reveal to us your mystery and power in this instant.”¹³

After summoning a table laden with food and a snowfall in the middle of summer, Maruya ascends to Heaven on a flower wagon. She then returns to Earth and receives the visit of San Gamuriya Arikanjo (The Archangel Gabriel), who asks her to “use her young and fresh body” to give birth to the Son of God. From that point on, the text focuses on the life of Jesus, but Maruya accompanies him in most of his travels and is an active participant in his adventures. No mention of a husband is made; Santa Maruya remains a powerful, shaman-like virgin mother throughout the story, a squire, more than a mother, to the Son of God.

Another departure of the *Tenchi* from the biblical tradition can be found in the portrayal of Lucifer, called Jusuheru in the text. While Jusuheru fulfills the same role of tempter that he has in the Bible, the actual dynamic of the temptation is quite different. He first appears on the scene as a rival deity, trying to convince Ewa and Adan to worship him, reenacting the Dainichi/Deusu mechanism:

One day while Deusu was away, Jusuheru seized the opportunity to deceive the anjo and said: “As I am also like Deusu, worship me from now on.”

Hearing this, the anjo worshiped him saying, “Ah, behold, behold!” Ewa and Adan then asked, “Isn’t Deusu here?” But Jusuheru replied swiftly by saying, “The Lord is in Heaven, but because I am like Deusu, tens of thousands of anjo revere me. Therefore, Ewa and Adan, you too worship me, Jusuheru.”¹⁴

Deusu promptly arrives and chases Jusuheru away, but he does not seem particularly concerned with the danger of idolatry. On the contrary, he appears to be rather accepting toward the possibility of polytheism, and only warns Ewa and Adan: “even if you should worship Jusuheru, don’t eat the fruit of the masan.”¹⁵

When Jusuheru comes back and lures Ewa into eating the fruit, he claims: “it is forbidden because whoever eats it will obtain the same rank as Deusu,”¹⁶ and when she hesitates he insists, “eat this, and obtain the same rank as I, Jusuheru.”¹⁷ He is then expelled from Paraiso shortly after Adan and Ewa and transformed into the God of Thunder.¹⁸

The focus on rank, part of the localization of religion, allows the text to present identity as intrinsically ambiguous and constantly shifting: if godliness is a rank rather than an essence, it can be gained and lost, and easily reversed. While the Lucifer of the biblical tradition is a fallen angel who loses his divine status as a result of sin, Jusuheru retains his ambiguous status (he still has the same rank as God) and thus embodies the fundamental ambivalence of the God/Devil, or Dainichi/Deusu, binary in the vision of the early *kirishitan*. This operation is strikingly similar to that performed in girl knight stories: divine nature is represented here as an accessory and arbitrary factor, just as girl knight characters’ gender identity is determined by their armor, uniforms, and military training, rather than by any biological essence.

Interestingly, in her manga *Miuchi* shows a similar fascination precisely with the ambiguity of Lucifer, which she combines with gender-bending elements to further destabilize both male/female and good/evil, God/Devil binaries. How then do we get from Jusuheru to Jannu, and who is Jannu anyway?

JANNU, JIRU, AND THE MAGIC POWER OF CULTURAL TRANSLATION

Jannu is the protagonist of *Shirayuri no kishi* (1975, *The knight of white lily*), a story based on the legend of Joan of Arc (Figure 1). The title, while focusing on Joan of Arc’s role as a warrior, is also an obvious reference to Tezuka

Osamu's *Ribon no kishi*, thus situating the story in the “princess knight” tradition of mainstream *shōjo* manga.

The story begins with a metatextual moment, portraying Jannu reading stories about Telesia, a queen who dressed as a warrior to defend her country.¹⁹ Joan of Arc's legend is thus framed as a tale of female empowerment—she is a girl who wants to be a boy and a soldier—and as a story of formation of identity through identification with literary figures. The scene is a *mise en abyme* of the text's own appropriation of Western history, hinting at the position of girls as readers, interiorizing the roles they are presented with, but also at the possibility of their appropriating this mechanism by choosing which figures to identify with, and rewriting them on their own terms.

While she ostensibly declares herself to be an instrument in God's hands, Jannu in fact uses God's call to realize her long-held dream of becoming a knight, like the protagonist of her fairy tales. Her mission to save France in God's name is most of all an occasion to gain agency, to defy social conventions and construct her identity beyond conventional gender roles.

After introducing Jannu, the manga shifts to the other main thread of the plot: the plan of a group of worshipers of Lucifer, led by a shady figure named Guillaume, to prevent Charles VII from regaining the throne.²⁰ Alerted by Lucifer to the imminent arrival of a White Knight who will hinder their plans to conquer France, they decide to bid the Black Knight, Renard Edmontes (alias William George Stempleton), an English nobleman who has come to France as a spy, to find him. Or, rather, *her*: the White Knight is, of course, none other than Jannu.

The stories of the White and the Black Knight run parallel throughout the manga; they repeatedly meet, and there is even a hint at a possible romantic involvement, which is never realized. This both pays homage to and subverts the conventions of *shōjo* manga, as the love



FIGURE 1. Cover of the 1975 edition of the first volume of *Shirayuri no kishi* (The knight of white lily), published by Hakusensha.

story is very marginal to the plot. The two are presented as mirror figures, one the negative of the other—Jannu has short hair and silver armor, William/Renard has long flowing hair and black armor, and both have crosses on their chests.

The ambivalence of this binary couple mirrors the ambiguity of the war between God and Lucifer, which in the manga is the real conflict underlying the Hundred Years' War. In the final part of the story, the mastermind behind the whole war is revealed to be Guillaume, who, with the help of one general La Treuil, fomented the hostilities in order to weaken both countries and ultimately establish the reign of Satan in Europe.

The manga thus rewrites the story of the siege of Orléans as a war between the forces of the Christian God and Devil, who are portrayed as uncanny supernatural beings, fundamentally equivalent. This is particularly evident on the visual plane. While the cult of Lucifer is performed with all the stereotypical devices of black magic, such as horns, capes, magic circles, five-pointed stars, rising smoke, and dark caves, the angel Michael, who brings Jeanne God's request to devote herself to the cause of France, appears in the middle of a thunderstorm, in a similar horror/gothic mode, and crosses and angels carry similar ominous resonances throughout the comic.

Even more ambivalent is the portrayal of the figure of Gilles de Rais, protagonist of the second half of the story. When Jannu finally manages to speak to the Dauphin and offer him her services, the King's evil counselor assigns her the impossible task of obtaining financial help from De Rais, in the conviction that she will fail and possibly be murdered. The characters of Jiru do Re and Jannu mirror each other on multiple levels, as do the respective historical figures. Like Jeanne d'Arc, de Rais was also tried and condemned for witchcraft, and like her, he later became the object of a posthumous semi-canonization (there are churches devoted to him and his effigies are said to perform miracles).²¹

In the comic book, he is portrayed as a solitary and dark figure, living alone in a castle peopled by wax dolls, which we later discover to be the embalmed cadavers of the friends and relatives who have died around him, gaining him the nickname *shinigami*, "God of death". Besides the nickname, his association with rival creation is reinforced by his activity as an alchemist, desperately trying to find a way to create gold so that he can become the richest man on earth, and by the fact that his castle is surrounded by a cemetery, which once again allows the manga to dwell on gothic imagery of crosses and tombs.

Jannu befriends Jiru and redeems him, in typical Beauty-and-the-Beast fashion, obtaining his support in the war against the English. The evil power

of de Rais is thus turned into “good magic” in the service of God and France. In his choice to put his supernatural powers at the service of good, Jiru do Re mirrors the actions of Jeanne and her ability to perform miracles, for which she will later be condemned to death as a witch. Significantly, Jannu’s power is often referred to as magic in the story.²²

Gilles de Rais’s sorcery, the schemes of the worshippers of Lucifer, and the miracles of Jannu are presented as different manifestations of occult power, facets of a Christian religion that is ultimately identified with magic. The manga ends with the death of the Black Knight among the flames, which cannot but remind the readers that Jannu, too, will soon be burned on the stake by her fellow countrymen, once again pointing to the overlap of witchcraft and religion, and at the arbitrariness of the good/evil, God/Devil binaries.

CONCLUSION

By retelling the legend of Joan of Arc as a “girl knight” story, *Shirayuri no kishi* performs two simultaneous inversions, which ultimately reinforce one another. On one hand it inverts and undermines the male/female binary, pointing at the constructed nature of gender roles; on the other, in rewriting the Hundred Years’ War as a conflict between a God and a Devil that express their power on humans through almost identical forms of witchcraft, it blurs the divine/demonic opposition and ultimately reveals it to be meaningless, thus exposing a fundamental contradiction of Christian religion and of Western culture (Figure 2). Just as gender roles are based on an arbitrary distinction, the saintly and the demonic are shown to be ultimately one and the same, and to elicit the same kind of reaction in believers. In this sense, the combination of accurately researched foreign setting and fantastic rewriting of history assumes further significance: we should not see this creative misreading as born of ignorance or lack of understanding but rather as a playful yet pointed critique, showing us that God worship is, ultimately, superstition, just as Devil worship is.²³

Through creative appropriation of this specific war/time, the manga questions conventional notions of femininity and religion, and more broadly of culture and identity. It does so through a rewriting of history that differs greatly, however, from that performed by revisionist comics that have recently become popular in adult male manga, epitomized by the works of Kobayashi Yoshinori. Crucial in this respect is its reliance on the fantastic, fairy-tale mode that is typical of *shōjo* manga.

As noted by Sharon Kinsella in her pioneering work on adult manga, neo-conservative *seinen* comics offer a supposedly objective alternative to official history relying on a realistic and objectifying narrative and visual style. The content is presented from an apparently neutral perspective, effacing the authorial function; this strategy de-individualizes the works, presenting them as reality showing itself directly, and thus makes their message pass for a neutral statement of fact, downplaying its ideological content.²⁴

In contrast, *shōjo* manga are for the most part clearly antirealistic and replete with metatextual references that make the authorial presence felt throughout. They are obviously fictions, to be perceived as such, without any pretense of objectivity. This combination of historical accuracy and thoroughgoing fantasy suggests a possible

new interpretation of the personal focus in *shōjo* manga, which contrasts with the generally accepted notion that it constitutes a retreat into interiority and a renunciation of political engagement. While this escapist element is undoubtedly present in the genre, works such as Miuchi's point to a more complex social function of girls' manga, which is acted out on the level of form. *Shōjo* manga's antirealistic and self-reflexive style can at times prove a more effective tool for social criticism than a realism that, through the use of a supposedly "transparent" visual and narrative mode, ultimately endorses existing power structures through a naturalization of the arbitrary.

In girl knight stories, employing the tension between historical content and fantastic form as a background for the female protagonists' self-realization allows the texts to address the constructed nature of identity, which is presented as something that is acquired through the performance of preconstituted roles but also as something that can be changed and rewritten. In saying this, however, I do not mean to imply that girls' manga are necessarily radical or subversive, either. This very act of rewriting is also the most ambiguous



FIGURE 2. Cover of *Jūsangatsu no higeki*, a story by Miuchi centering on the subversion of the God/Devil binary. Republished in 1996 by Hakusensha in *Miuchi Suzue's Best Works*.

feature of this genre. In fact, the stories generally focus on the socialization of the individual and on how to come to terms with imposed paradigms on a personal level, rather than looking at the formation of the system as a whole, let alone suggesting the possibility of changing it. Thus they function as an instrument of containment of the same dissent they produce. Such a blend of subversive and conservative strategies is arguably what makes girls' manga such popular items of consumption; it is also what makes them a productive subject of study, one worthy of further scholarly attention.

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Notes

1. Kotani Mari, "Metamorphosis of the Japanese Girl: The Girl, the Hyper-Girl, and the Battling Beauty," in *Mechademia 1* (2006): 167; for a discussion of the battling beauty trope, see also Saitō Tamaki, *Sentō bishōjo no seishin bunseki* (Psychoanalysis of the battling beauty) (Tokyo: Ōta Shuppan, 2001).

2. In her analysis of adult male manga, on the other hand, Sharon Kinsella writes briefly about Miuchi Suzue, whom she calls "Kakue," when discussing the growth of mainstream girls' manga in the 1970s, describing her as an example of conservative and shallow girl manga, in the "less politically controversial tradition of child-oriented, cute manga pioneered by Tezuka Osamu and his ex-assistants." Sharon Kinsella, *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Contemporary Japanese Society* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 112–13.

3. Kotani, "Metamorphosis of the Japanese Girl," 166.

4. *Gekiga*, literally "dramatic images," generally refers to manga of the postwar period, written mainly by and for working-class teenagers and young adults, mostly with radical political content and a fairly experimental, expressionist graphic style. It was revived in the 1960s, when it became connected with the *Zengakuren* (All-Japan Student Federation) and the *shinsayoku* (New Left). For a discussion of the evolution of the genre, see Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, 24–36; Frederick Schodt, *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1986), 68–79; and John Lent, "Japanese Comics," in *The Handbook of Japanese Popular Culture*, ed. Richard Gid Powers and Hidetoshi Kato, 229–30 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989).

5. There are significant exceptions to this pattern; Miuchi herself wrote about Japanese history in *Nihon rettō ichimannen* (1971, A thousand years of the Japanese archipelago), in *Niji no ikusa* (1976, The battle of the rainbow), which rewrites the life of Oda Nobunaga from the perspective of his teenage wife, Nōhime, and in her most recent series, *Amaterasu* (1986–94), devoted to the story of the Sun Goddess, mythical ancestor of the Japanese people.

6. Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, 37.

7. I will be quoting from the translation by Christal Whelan, *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth: The Sacred Book of Japan's Hidden Christians* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996).

8. *24nengumi*, or, as it is sometimes called in English, the 49 group, refers to a group

of female *mangaka* who were all born in or around the year 24 of the Shōwa era (1949 in the Western calendar). The origins of the *24nengumi* are traced to the Ōizumi, the apartment where Hagio Moto and Takemiya Keiko were living and working together, in Ōizumi Nerima-ku, in the years 1970–73. The group was thus from the beginning openly referencing Tezuka Osamu’s famous experiment with the Tokiwa-sō, the school where he trained his disciples while also giving them room and board; the *24nengumi* authors’ ostensible goal was to reappropriate the production of *shōjo* manga, which was still in their opinion dominated by male authors, while also claiming the right for women to write in different genres, e.g., *shōnen* manga and science fiction. Born in 1951, Shōwa 26, Miuchi belongs to the same generation, but was never associated with the group, which criticized her work as too conventional.

9. The term *dōjinshi* refers to amateur manga, circulated and distributed along informal channels such as the *comiket* (comic market) conventions. They are generally associated with experimental and avant-garde content and drawing style, and have a close relationship with the world of published manga: many artists begin their career by writing *dōjinshi*, and published authors occasionally draw *dōjinshi*. For a discussion of the evolution of the phenomenon and its implications for the history of manga, see Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, 102–38.

10. One of the most interesting examples is *Dainamaito miruku pai* (1982, Dynamite milk pie), where the protagonist has to undergo special training in girlishness when she is hired by the family of a rich teenager, to whom she bears an uncanny resemblance and who has recently fled from home, to play the part of their daughter in order to defer the scandal for as long as possible. While the training also involves learning everything about the girl’s past, her allergies and favorite foods, Miruku also needs to become a proper “*ojōsan*,” who can play the piano, laugh softly, and display the appropriate ladylike behavior. This gives Miuchi a chance to deride standards of femininity while at the same time stressing its performative nature.

11. For a discussion of the Early Christians of Japan, see Carlo Caldarola, *Christianity: The Japanese Way* (Leiden: Brill, 1979); George Elison, *Deus Destroyed: The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973); J. F. Moran, *The Japanese and the Jesuits: Alessandro Valignano in Sixteenth-Century Japan* (London: Routledge, 1993); and Mark Mullins, *Christianity Made in Japan: A Study of Indigenous Movements* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998).

12. Whelan, “*The Beginning of Heaven and Earth*,” 45.

13. *Ibid.*, 47.

14. *Ibid.*, 40.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, 41.

17. *Ibid.*

18. In another intriguing anachronism, at this point Ewa and Adan, realizing that their sin has been discovered, kneel down and recite the *Salve Regina*, praying for the intercession of the Virgin Mary!

19. Miuchi Suzue, *Shirayuri no kishi* [The knight of the white lily] (Tokyo: Hakusensha, 1975), 5.

20. While this element is not part of most Joan of Arc legends, it is in fact historically

accurate and refers to the diffusion of cults of Satan in medieval France, although the manga transforms it into a crucial factor in the Hundred Years' War.

21. Rais was charged with kidnapping about one hundred and fifty women and children in order to sacrifice them to Satan, and the history of his life contributed to the formation of the legend of Bluebeard. In Japan, he also appears in Endō Shūsaku's *Scandal* (1986, *Sukyandaru*); he is a minor character in the series *S & M no Sekai* (2002, *The world of S&M*) by Saitō Chiho and Be-Papas, and appears as a vampire in videogames.

22. For instance, to convince the count of Vaudricourt to give her an army of a thousand men, Jannu makes all the roses in his garden wither and all the cutlery in his kitchens fall to pieces, miraculously restoring them to their previous state once her request is granted. Vaudricourt then watches her leave and comments: "Jannu do Aruku . . . kami no tsukai ka dô ka wakaran ga . . . maru de washi made mahô ni kakerarete shimatta yô da . . . nani ka ano . . . ano shôjo ni wa fushigina chikara ga aru . . ." [Jeanne d'Arc . . . I don't know if you are a helper of God or what, but it looks as though you have bewitched me . . . that girl . . . that girl has a strange power . . .]. Miuchi, *Shirayuri no kishi*, 53.

23. This focus on the ambiguity of Christianity and its relation to Devil worship is at the center of another story, *13gatsu no higeki*, (1973, *The tragedy of the thirteenth month*). The title references one of the most famous and groundbreaking works by Hagio Moto, *11gatsu no gimunajiumu* (1971, *The gymnasium of November*). Both explore the theme of life in a foreign boarding school, but in very different ways. Hagio's work, the story of the troubled relationship between Eric and Thoma, two beautiful boys at a German collegium, is generally acknowledged to mark the birth to the genre of *shônen ai*, or boys' love manga, whose main features will be popularized by Takemiya Keiko's *Kaze to ki no uta* (1976, *A song of wind and trees*).

Miuchi's comic, on the other hand, involves no romance, homosexual or otherwise. Instead, it focuses once again on Christianity in a horror/fantasy mode. It tells the story of Marii (Mary), a young girl in a fictional European country who enters in mid-semester a religious school called Sei Barajūji (Saint Rose-Cross), founded by Christian Rosenkreutz, the leader of a seventeenth-century secret brotherhood of alchemists and sages that aspired to conquer Europe with the help of the Devil while wars of politics and religion ravaged the continent. The sisters who run the school, too, regularly conduct black masses and summon Lucifer with the ultimate goal of conquering the world, and the story constantly juxtaposes images of nuns and images of devils, magic circles, monsters, and beheaded young girls in sailor suits. At the end of the story, Mary is almost burned at the stake by the sisters, together with a male protagonist who makes a brief appearance, in yet another reversal of the witchcraft/religious fanaticism trope.

24. For a discussion of the tendency to photographic realism in neoconservative adult male manga, see Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, 70–101 and 162–201, particularly 172–78.