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Revolutionizing Girl: Oppressive Social Structures as Stymieing Adolescent Change In Revolutionary Girl Utena

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**Revolutionizing Girl: Oppressive Social Structures as Stymieing Adolescent Change In
*Revolutionary Girl Utena***

An Honors Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of East Asian Studies
Bates College

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts

by

Garrett Thomas Anderson
Lewiston Maine
March 28, 2018

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-Rett

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INTRODUCTION

The television anime series *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (*Shōjo Kakumei Utena* 1997) or SKU remains well known for its stylized action sequences, heavy use of symbolic imagery, and its approach to transgressive gender and sexual identities. *Revolutionary Girl Utena* depicts adolescent change as stymied by oppressive social forces. By analyzing the *Utena* anime, this study attempts to demonstrate how the series represents these social forces as taking on the form of naturalized notions of proper gender presentation and sexual orientation. The pressure these notions exert on several characters create the conflict, drama, and tragedy in *Utena*'s story. Despite originally airing in 1997, *Utena* enjoys continued popularity, receiving a DVD re-release in 2013, a 20th anniversary manga chapter published in *Flowers* magazine, and a BluRay remaster coming in late 2017. Three distinct texts compose what may be called the *Utena* franchise: a Manga by Saito Chiho¹ (1996-7), an anime TV series created by Be-PaPas (1997), and an animated film by the same group (1999) which each feature a stand-alone narrative, generally following the same themes. All three address themes ranging from the trials of adolescence and growing up to issues in acceptance of gender and sexual minorities. The series is often described as an inversion of fairy tale tropes, featuring both a girl and a playboy prince, not to mention the literal upside-down castle in the sky. That being the case, how does *Revolutionary Girl Utena*'s approach to adolescent identity, particularly in regard to gender and sexuality, continue to resonate with audiences, even among more and more progressive works today? This study intends to center its focus on the 39-episode 1997 anime television series, drawing parallels to the manga and film when relevant. The reasons for limiting the study as such are to keep the material as focused as possible; while the three texts contain many of the

¹ All Japanese names appear in Japanese order: Family name followed by given name.

same thematic elements and functions, the narratives themselves are rather distinct. Following only the TV anime will keep the study straightforward to readers unfamiliar with the various texts, as well as unify the arguments under the singular vision of the anime staff.

SERIES SUMMARY

Revolutionary Girl Utena begins with a small vignette, played out in a fairy tale storybook style. The cutesy narration tells the story of a young girl, who fell into a deep despair when her parents suddenly passed away. However, she was pulled out of this depression by a prince riding a white horse, who told her to hold on to her strength and nobility, giving her a rose crested ring to remember him by. “Perhaps the ring the prince gave her was an engagement ring” goes the narration, but here the story diverges from expectation. The girl admired the prince so much that she decided instead to emulate him, adopting masculine clothing, attitudes, and sense of honor. Thus begins the epic story that is *Revolutionary Girl Utena*. The series is divided into four main story arcs that are woven together to create a sense of progression to the overarching narrative.

The Student Council arc opens with the introduction of Utena, the cinematography working to present her as a popular and rebellious student, operating against the norm and receiving nearly unanimous admiration from the student body. After seeing Saionji, a green haired member of the Student council striking classmate Himemiya Anthy², Utena jumps into action, unwittingly entering an elaborate series of duels that determine Anthy’s fiancé, as well as who will receive ‘the power to revolutionize the world’ from a mysterious figure known only as

² As Kotani notes, Anthy’s name comes from *anthros* the Greek word for flower. Anthy is closely linked to roses, she tends a rose garden and enacts the role of the Rose Bride. Kotani Mari. “Metamorphosis of the Japanese Girl: The Girl, the Hyper-Girl, and the Battling Beauty,” *Mechademia* 1, no. 1 (2006): pp. 162–169.

‘The End of the World’. Utena defeats the arrogant Saionji and becomes engaged to Anthy, the two of them becoming roommates. Anthy’s extremely subservient habits, which includes addressing Utena with the *-sama* honorific suffix and only acting when granted express permission, quickly throws Utena off balance, but the two begin to grow close as Utena is challenged to duel again and again. From here, the various other members of the student council step forward to duel Utena for the power to revolutionize the world. The boyishly friendly Miki out of romantic feelings for Anthy, the stern and imposing Juri for her desire to disprove the power of miracles, and the haughty and entitled Nanami out of jealousy for her brother Tōga and Utena. Kiryū Tōga is the school’s promiscuous student council president, and he quickly falls for Utena after she dismisses his advances. Tōga tries to convince Utena that he was the prince that saved her as a child, and is able to defeat her, becoming engaged to Anthy. Utena falls into a state of confusion in regards to her identity, attending school in the standard female uniform until she comes to realize her desire to protect Anthy and continue to uphold the ideals of strength and nobility imparted on her by the prince. She defeats Tōga, reclaiming Anthy’s engagement to her as well as her own identity.

The next arc, titled the Black Rose arc, follows a slightly different pattern, shifting the focus away from Utena and instead focusing on the stories of several side characters. This arc follows an episodic structure where these minor characters from the first arc experience depressing or even traumatic events wherein they face rejection, often taking the form of a single sided romantic attraction. The antagonist of this arc, Professor Nemuro, runs what appears to be a guidance counseling clinic, offering to solve people’s problems. Instead, he manipulates these characters into a depressive, hypnotic state, reinforced through the motif of an elevator descending deep into the earth, before convincing them that they must battle Utena and kill

Anthy. His ultimate goal is revealed later on to be to replace Anthy as the Rose Bride with Mamoru, the sickly younger brother of his own beloved. Ultimately, the Black Rose arc's ending matches its overall importance to the story, with the clinic disappearing, forgotten to both the cast and the overall narrative. Despite this, the story arc sets up an important point of contrast to Utena, Nemuro an example of what she could become if she achieves the power to revolutionize the world. Additionally, this arc introduces Anthy's older brother and school Chairman Akio, and hints at the dark nature of their intimate sibling relationship.

The third arc of the series aptly named the Ōtori Akio arc focuses on the growing relationship between Akio and Utena, and the desire of various members of the student council to grow up. Akio is revealed to be the 'end of the world', the mysterious figure running the duels from the background, now tempting each of the council members with access to a sexually charged image of adulthood in exchange for dueling Utena. Akio takes various couples for rides in his car in offering this image of adulthood to them, and both Utena and Anthy take on a more cooperative style to combat these couples. Meanwhile, Akio begins to seduce Utena, slowly causing her to question her identity as a noble prince more and more. This comes to a head in episode 33, "The Prince Who runs Through the Nighttime". Following the formal conventions of the story arcs before it, the Akio arc ends in episode 33 with a recap episode that outlines the events of the arc while adding some hints as to what's to come. Breaking from convention however, the episode interjects a major plot revelation, a rape scene between Akio and Utena. Portrayed from the Akio's point of view, Utena talks aimlessly in between recap montages of the preceding episodes, before culminating in a medium close long take of Utena lying on a bed, visibly uncomfortable while releasing slight gasps and moans as she talks about preparing lunch

for the next day. A series of quick fade cuts shows the dark brown hand of Akio entwined with hers, leaving no guesses to the nature of the deed that was done.

The final arc, entitled Apocalypse, focuses on Utena's struggle with her identity in the wake of her 'loss of innocence' and the resolution of the duels for the power to revolutionize the world. Utena duels Tōga and Saionji a final time, leaving only her confrontation with the End of the World, Akio. In an act of helplessness, Anthy attempts to jump off the roof of a school building but is pulled back by Utena. Utena, sensing a need to release Anthy from her role as the Rose Bride decides that she must defeat Akio and Anthy herself. Appearing to hold the upper hand in the duel, Utena corners Akio when Anthy suddenly betrays her, stabbing Utena in the back with her own sword. In a final bid to save Anthy, Utena claws her way through the Rose Gate and pries the door open. Anthy's true self lies here fetal, and the two reach for each other, touching hands briefly. Anthy falls and Utena is stabbed by the thousands of swords that had impaled Anthy. A few months pass and Utena is forgotten among the student body, but the change she brought about remains. The series ends with Anthy, dressed in an outfit of her own choosing crossing the gated boundary of the school to search

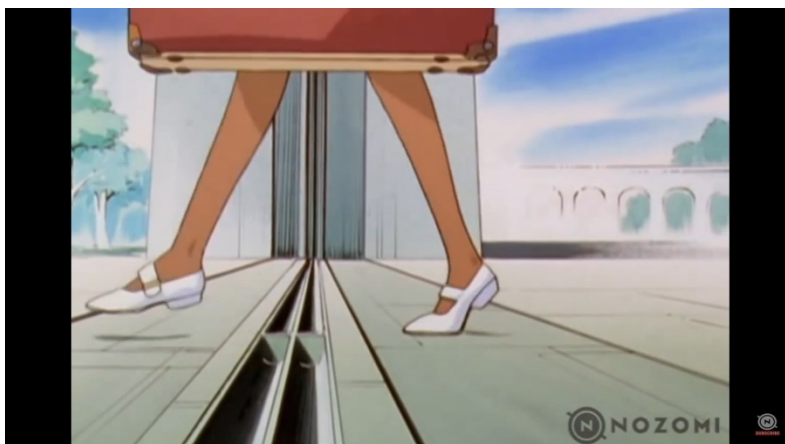


FIGURE 1: ANTHY CROSSES THE SCHOOL BOUNDARY

for Utena (Figure 1).³

THE HISTORY OF UTENA

³ Nozomient. "Revolutionary Girl Utena Episode 39 (Sub): And Someday, Together, We'll Shine" 21:02

First broadcast in 1996-1997 on TV Tokyo, *Revolutionary Girl Utena* was an original production of J.C. Staff and the artist collective Be-Papas⁴. Like much anime of the 1990s, *Revolutionary Girl Utena* sits at the precipice of a major shift in the anime industry and has stood the test of time as one of that periods landmark works along with *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995, Anno), *Ghost in the Shell* (1995, Oshii), *Sailor Moon* (1992-7, Satō, Ikuhara, Igarashi), and *Cowboy Bebop* (1998 Watanabe). While *Utena* was undoubtedly part of the surge of series addressing explicitly adult themes, it simultaneously emerged out of a longer tradition within the *Shōjo* or young girl genre and the historical climate of Japan from the time.

Utena's progressive portrayal of transgressive gender presentation and sexuality emerges from a longer tradition that could arguably be traced as far back as the 1950s with the publication of manga legend Osamu Tezuka's work *Ribbon Knight* (*Ribon no Kishi* 1952, Tezuka). *Ribbon Knight* follows the story of a princess named Sapphire who disguises herself as a male in order to fight to protect her kingdom. *Rose of Versailles* [*Berusaiyu no Bara* 1973] by Ikeda Riyoko also serves as a strong influence. The plot of the manga initially follows the flighty young Marie Antoinette in the years before the French Revolution. The story however shifts partway through towards the life of a young woman Oscar François de Jarjayes. Born to a father longing for a male heir, Oscar was raised as a man, and was trained in traditionally male skills related to the military. While *Princess Knight* and *The Rose of Versailles* both prominently feature female characters dressing and acting in the noble and militaristic fashion of a 'knight', neither attempt to engage with the transgressive nature of this role, sentimentally de-problematizing their transgressive gender presentations. This is one of the main points *Utena* attempts to address.

⁴ "Shōjo Kakumei Utena," MyAnimeList LLC.

While not directly involving young girls performing traditionally masculine roles, the influence of *Sailor Moon* on *Utena* was instrumental in the creation of *Utena*. Before working on the series, director Ikuhara Kunihiro was best known for his work as a director of *Sailor Moon*, particularly in his telling of the lesbian relationship between Sailors Uranus and Neptune and the introduction of a darker, more mature atmosphere to the show. Working within the framework of a *tokusatsu* superhero group series such as *Kamen Rider* (Ishinomori, 1971-73) and *Super Sentai* (Ishinomori, 1975-present) that emerged in the '70s, *Sailor Moon* presented high school girls as superheroes, saving the earth over and over again. Achieving international success, the *Sailor Moon* series has cemented itself as one of the first major series in the *mahou shōjo* or magical girl genre to enjoy such widespread appeal.

Revolutionary Girl Utena has been directly influential for many series following its release, ranging from the nuanced exploration of transgender identities in *Wandering Son* (*Hourou Musuko*, Aoki, 2011) to the scandalous action series *Kill la Kill* (2013-14, Imaishi) with the most notable recent example being the American cartoon *Steven Universe* (2013-present, Sugar). *Steven Universe*'s portrayal of gender and sexuality mirrors much of the pathos of *Utena*. This children's show has been praised for its portrayal of gender and sexual minorities, and the series creator Rebecca Sugar has cited *Utena* and the all-female Japanese theater troupe The Takarazuka as influences⁵, going as far as including several direct homages to *Utena*'s duels and other moments throughout the story.

REVOLUTIONARY READINGS, A LITERATURE REVIEW

⁵ Shamus Kelley, "Steven Universe was Influenced by Revolutionary Girl Utena," Den of Geek. Last updated July 25, 2017. <http://www.denofgeek.com/us/tv/steven-universe/266591/steven-universe-was-influenced-by-revolutionary-girl-utena>.

Scholars have taken a number of approaches in interpreting *Utena* itself. Catherine Bailey reads *Utena* through the narrative model of the Hero's Journey⁶, arguing that the series successfully breaks away from the theory's inherently male framework. Susan Napier takes a different approach, analyzing *Utena* through the trope of disappearing women, how young girls often disappear when they grow up,⁷ and commenting on how it shows Utena's refusal to act within male expectations and desires. Similarly, Kotani Mari claims that Utena's adoption of male attire and machismo reinforces the idea of male as active and female as passive yet categorizes Utena as a 'battling beauty' or an active girl whose beauty is still used to draw male audiences⁸. In their brief review of the series that address the manga, television series, and film, Pepper and Cornog address the nature of fate and karma in *Utena*, as well as the agency of Utena and Anthy, ultimately claiming that they are successfully able to take their fate into their own hands⁹. Catherine Kyle revisits the series in "Her Story, Too" expanding on *Utena*'s demonstration of a feminist Hero's Journey¹⁰, building on Kotani and Pepper and Cornog's categorizations of Utena as revolutionary, and breaking from what existed before to create something new. In both of Kyle's works she does not reference Susan Napier. Perhaps this could

⁶ Catherine Bailey "Prince Charming by Day, Superheroine By Night: Subversive Sexualities and Gender Fluidity in Revolutionary Girl Utena and Sailor Moon?," *Colloquy Text Theory Critique* 21, (2012): pp. 207-222,.

⁷ Susan J. Napier, "Now You See Her, Now You Don't: the Disappearing Shōjo," In *Anime From Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 169–193.

⁸ Kotani. "Metamorphosis" pp. 162–169.

⁹ Timothy Pepper, and Martha Cornog, "In the Sound of the Bells: Freedom and Revolution In *Revolutionary Girl Utena*," *Mechademia* 1, no. 1 (2006): pp. 183–186, doi:10.1353/mec.0.0098.

¹⁰Catherine B. Kyle, "Her Story, Too: *Final Fantasy X*, *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, and the Feminist Hero's Journey." *Heroines of Film and Television: Portrayals in Popular Culture*, edited by Bob Batchelor, Norma Jones, and Maja Bajac-Carter, Rowman and Littlefield, 2014, pp. 131-146.

be attributed to the different theoretical approaches the two take, Napier focusing on the shōjo identity while Kyle focuses on narratology and myth: the hero's journey.

This study will attempt to offer a somewhat broader yet distinct picture of *Utena*, spanning the entire story of the television series. Scholars have tackled the text from many different approaches but almost always at only specific turning points of the series: Utena's duels, Anthy's betrayal, and Utena's subsequent disappearance. While still addressing these seminal moments, this study aims to expand the scope of analysis of the series, while synthesizing previous research and focusing on the shōjo identity and the theme of adolescent change. Most characters in the series are middle schoolers dealing with the complicated process of creating a sense of identity, and the world of *Utena* does not attempt to draw a sentimental picture. Transgressive sexualities and gender presentation hold weight in the framing of the characters' identities, and the clash between these identities and oppressive social structures is the central focus conflict of the series. Utena herself is defined not only by her nobility, but also her innocence, and the confusing of this identity after Akio rapes her, forces her to enter an intense reflection of her own identity and values.

The first chapter of the study will work to introduce the concept of adolescence and *shōjoron* or young girl studies in the context of the series. As Wills and Bright argue, "Adolescence is a threshold state, poised between categories, discourses, and definitions. It exists primarily between other conditions: between childhood and adulthood, dependence and autonomy, inexperience and maturity"¹¹. Neither here nor there, adolescence itself is a liminal space from which boys become men and girls become women. *Utena*, however, depicts the

¹¹ Deborah Wills, and Amy Bright, "'On the Cusp': Liminality and Adolescence in Arthur Slade's *Dust*, Bill Richardson's *After Hamelin*, and Kit Pearson's *Awake and Dreaming*" *Studies in Canadian Literature*, Volume 36 No 1 (2011)

process as not nearly so straightforward, showing how normative expectations of adulthood clash with the identities of several characters. Much of the series focuses on the idea of innocence and growing up; the series only features a single adult male recurring character. Catherine Bailey's article on the Hero's Journey in Utena expands on the idea of adolescence as she argues that the model often employs maturity in conjunction to "heroic development"¹² This chapter will analyze the defining aspects of Utena's Adolescence at several key points throughout the series: her initial promise with the prince, her increasingly intimate relationship with both Anthy and Akio, and her eventual departure from the school. Through this framework the space of the school, the main setting of the series, exists as an adolescent world, discreet from reality and the troubles therein. This is only reinforced by the presentation of the world outside of the school, only shown in a few specific moments of the series. In the third arc of the series Akio begins to drive students outside of the school in his car, an increasingly recurrent symbol of adulthood as the series progresses. The world outside is almost always dark and mysterious, the road lit only by the streetlights, and low jazz beats play in the background. Akio drives students in order to convince them to duel with Utena, offering them access to adulthood, usually presented as highly sexualized.

¹² Catherine Bailey, "Prince Charming by Day," pp. 208-209.

The second chapter focuses on gender, particularly in terms of performance and presentation. In particular, it draws upon Judith Butler¹³'s work defining gender as performance, which although not directly dealing with cinema, illuminates *Utena*'s binary crossing



FIGURE 2: UTENA AND ANTHY'S CHARACTER DEISGNS

representations while also speaking to other work on anime gender studies directly relevant to *Utena*. Utena and Anthy both embody radically different forms of gender presentation (Figure 2),¹⁴ Utena donning a sleek black *gakuran* style coat with emblazoned shoulder pads and shorts, with Anthy wearing a long, bright red dress and donning a golden tiara.

This dress clearly displays the 'prince' and 'princess' roles that the two play, acting as foils for each other. Kotani's article on the "Battling Beauty"¹⁵ focuses on gender presentation slightly differently, taking on a more fan facing analysis of Utena's presentation and the introduction of the 'battling beauty' while still addressing the dynamics of agency, framed as *activity* and *passivity*. This approach can be used in conjunction with Laura Mulvey's concept of the gaze¹⁶ and further refinements of spectator studies. Tamaki Saito continues to build on this approach in his book on the beautiful fighting girl¹⁷. In one chapter, Saito argues the difference between the

¹³Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.(New York. ,Routledge,1999)

¹⁴ Nozomient. "Revolutionary Girl Utena Episode 25 (Sub): Their Eternal Apocalypse"16:42

¹⁵ Kotani Mari. "Metamorphosis of the Japanese Girl," pp. 162–169

¹⁶ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Visual and Other Pleasures*, (New York Palgrave Macmillian, 1989), 14-26. doi:10.1007/978-1-349-19798-9_3.

¹⁷ Tamaki Saito. *Beautiful Fighting Girl*. *Trans.* Keith Vincent, Dawn Larson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

phallic mother and phallic girl, claiming that the mother is defined by their experience of trauma whereas the phallic girl experiences no such trauma, citing Nausicaa from *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind* (1984 Miyazaki). Utena challenges this definition, but also takes it on as she assumes the role of duelist in the series and claiming a phallic power of her own.

The third chapter will take on sexuality as its topic of focus, making use of the methodology of psychoanalytic film theory to understand the symbolism director Ikuhara employs throughout the series. This field begins with Jacques Lacan, creating the idea of the ‘mirror stage’ which Laura Mulvey has reinterpreted into the Gaze. In his monograph *How to Read Lacan* Slavoj Žižek unpacks Lacan’s approach to psychoanalytic theory, “for him, psychoanalysis itself is a method of reading a text.”¹⁸ Known for his heavy use of symbolism, Ikuhara’s work was clearly constructed with a metaphysical framework that leans on psychoanalytic iconography. The usage this iconography, such as symbolic representations of the phallus and fetus, are also well known to have appeared in series contemporaneous to *Utena* such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (Anno 1995), *Serial Experiments Lain* (Nakamura 1998), and *Akira* (Otomo 1988). On a surface level the swordsmanship duels in which Utena participates are merely contests of strength but reading deeper reveals a sexual narrative. Using a sword (phallus) to strike an enemy’s boutonnière (labia) from their chest, the victory condition for the duels becomes elevated to an act of asserting one’s masculinity over the other. One such example happens at the end of the first arc when Tōga, one of the more misogynistic characters in the series, orders the Rose Bride to kneel down and place her lips at his sword during a duel (Figure

¹⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (London: Norton and Company, 2006),.

3),¹⁹ granting him an increase in destructive (penetrative) power. This action is framed as a wholly obscene act, Utena averting her eyes from the indecency. The show very clearly intends to equate the act with fellatio, and the scene becomes particularly revealing because of it. Not only does the scene put on display the extremes to which Anthy is willing to enact her role as the subservient Rose Bride, but also gives Utena an understanding of the dominance of the ideology under which Anthy operates. From here Utena is renewed with confidence in taking on the role of prince and defeats Tōga, operating within the system oppressing Anthy in order to protect her from it. Ikuhara's usage of this symbolic framework characterizes the series, necessitating the



FIGURE 3: ANTHY PLACES HER LIPS AT TŌGA'S SWORD

methods of psychoanalytic film theory in approaching the work.

¹⁹ Nozomient. "Revolutionary Girl Utena Episode 12 (Sub): For Friendship, Perhaps" 17:30.

CHAPTER ONE: LIMINAL ADOLESCENCE, THE SCHOOL AND THE WORLD

Revolutionary Girl Utena focuses heavily on the idea of adolescence. Given, however, the complexity of the concept of adolescence and the series' subversion and complication of the process of adolescent change, it is important to clarify the definition of adolescence operative throughout the series. Wills and Bright argue, "Adolescence is a threshold state, poised between categories, discourses, and definitions. It exists primarily between other conditions: between childhood and adulthood, dependence and autonomy, inexperience and maturity"²⁰. Adolescence is a period marked by its liminality which the series reinforces through a number of strategies from the very design of the characters to the space in which the series takes place. Naturally, the end of adolescence is synonymous with the beginning of adulthood, and thus its liminality takes the form of preparing and transforming children into adults. *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, however, attempts to draw a picture of how normative social expectations can become an obstacle for this change, despite ostensible intentions towards the opposite goal. This chapter aims to establish how *Revolutionary Girl Utena* establishes the state of adolescence, through elements from the design of the characters to the nature of the setting the series uses.

THE SHŌJO THROUGH LITERATURE

In their article "The Genealogy of Japanese Shōjo Manga Studies²¹", Takeuchi Kayo chronicles a large body of prominent Japanese language research on the *shōjo* identity (*shōjoron*) in popular culture beginning from the 1970 and ending in the late 2000s. The article meticulously

²⁰ Wills and Bright, "'On the Cusp,'"1.

²¹ Takeuchi Kayo, "The Genealogy of Japanese "Shōjo Manga" (Girls' Comics) Studies," *U.S. Japan Woman's Journal*, No. 38 (2010): 81-112.

tracks the various foci of *shōjoron* including the 24 year group of contemporaneous female *shōjo* manga authors and the shift to using psychological and eventually formal approaches to criticism, emphasizing the usage of features particular to manga itself: speech bubbles, paneling, and the like. Notably, Takeuchi finds that much of the late 1990s scholarship on *shōjo* manga focused on the idea of battling girls, examining series such as *Ribbon Knight*, *Sailor Moon*, and *Revolutionary Girl Utena* itself. John Treat approaches the *Shōjo* through his analysis of popular novelist Yoshimoto Banana's works, most notably *Kitchen* [Kitchen] and *Tsugumi*²². Treat argues that the *shōjo* in Japan are linked to postmodern conceptions of capitalism, claiming, "They effectively signify sheer consumption, and as such cannot exist as wholly "real" in an economy otherwise committed to creating value." To Treat, the *shōjo* exists not so much as actors but rather as a byproduct of Japanese postmodern tendencies. Sato Rika builds off of Treat's configuration of the *shōjo* in her book chapter "What are Girls Made of? Exploring the Symbolic Boundaries of Two Different Cultures," employing Treat's thoughts, as well as anthropologist Victor Turner, to help her establish a narrow definition of *shōjo*²³. *Shōjo* does not have an equivalent in English language, as it narrowly refers to girls in the liminal period of adolescence. She continues, arguing that *shōjo* is a feminine identity that can be 'performed' through a stylized repetition of acts²⁴, echoing Butler's thoughts of gender in general. While gender is performed, Sato argues, these performances differ along the context of other factors

²² John Treat, "Yoshimoto Banana Writes Home. *Shōjo* Culture and the Nostalgic Subject," *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (1993): pp. 353-387.

²³ Sato Rika, "What are Girls Made of? Exploring the Symbolic Boundaries of Femininity in Two Cultures." in *Millennium Girls Today's Girls Around the World*, in ed. Sherrie A. Inness (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield 1998). pp15-44.

²⁴ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" *Theater Journal* 40, No. 4 (1988): pp519-531.

such as age and class. Sato, studying a massive number of photos presenting female identifying people of varying ages in Japan, identifies the characteristics of *shōjo* as ritualized ‘childlike carelessness’ and suggests that women in Japan may be presenting in this mode so as to escape the pressure of compulsory heterosexuality and the idealized nuclear family. In her chapter, “Now You see her Now You Don’t: The Disappearing Shōjo” Susan Napier notes the trend of young girl *shōjo* characters in various anime series from the late ‘90s to disappearances from those series near their resolution. Considering the adolescent *shōjo* figure, she links these disappearances to a Japanese attitude toward *shōjo* and a reluctance to acknowledge their inherent liminality. Concluding with a discussion of Sophie from *Howl’s Moving Castle*, a girl who is cursed to become an elderly woman for most of the film, she writes, “Although Sophie does return to girlhood at the end of *Howl*, she retains her silver hair, a suggestion, perhaps, that it is time for Japanese cinema, or perhaps Japanese society to acknowledge that youth is not a permanent state and that, magical or not, all *shōjo* eventually disappear.”²⁵

CHARACTER DESIGN

At first glance, the characters of *Utena* appear to be much older than their stated age. Many viewers are surprised at the first mention of the students attending middle school. Their long, slender bodies suggest them to be somewhat older, many female characters possessing fully developed breasts, and male characters with a trapezoidal body shape seem more likely to be high school athletes. This visual incongruity between images of bodily development in real life and anime seems to resonate across much of Japanese popular culture, repetitively becoming the subject of internet memes and jokes²⁶. However, within a formal analysis, this age

²⁵ Napier, “Now You see Her” 193.

²⁶These ‘memes’ generally take the form of captured stills of two anime characters next to each other, most often a muscle bound man and a young girl. Comically, the captions of the image

presentation may itself be an expression of the ideals of adolescence that define the work. Many of the characters see themselves as adults, or rather, are blind to the differences between themselves and adults. *Utena* is told from the perspective of the students, and thus the perspective of the viewer.

To an extent this strange juxtaposition is shown in the lower school student Tsuwabuki (Figure 4)²⁷. Early on in the series, Tsuwabuki finds himself enamored with Nanami. A central feature of his character arc is how he is exploited by her. Nanami herself is a haughty *ojousama* or *mademoiselle* character, complete with her own gang of female ‘friends’ who follow her and whom she makes use of for her own gain. While Nanami also entertains popularity among male students, in this case a group of ‘nerdy’ triplets, she only sees romantic potential in her brother Kiryū Tōga. Despite this, Tsuwabuki, a lower school student, is able to gain



FIGURE 4: TSUWABUKI AND NANAMI

Nanami’s trust as a lackey, largely due to his innocent, de-sexualized nature. Compared to the rest of the cast Tsuwabuki is incredibly short, standing only as high as Nanami’s own bosom. Tsuwabuki also pursues Nanami, yet their difference in height, referencing their ages, shows the futility of this pursuit. This visible representation of the difference in age between the characters,

reveal that the man is actually only a youth, while the girl is somehow far older than they appear. While the problematic representation of underage *shōjo* and even *yōjo* (young girl) characters are warrants further research, this lies outside of the focus of this study.

²⁷ “Revolutionary Girl Utena Episode 6 (Sub): Take Care Miss Nanami!” 10:00.

while presented in part to be amusing, demonstrates by contrast the liminal nature of the adolescent phase which encompass the main cast.

While the series does not contain many adult characters, their designs are not so distinct from the middle school cast. Where Tsuwabuki and other lower school characters are very clearly of a different age from the rest of the cast, that distinction does not exist between the main cast and the adults, namely Akio, Utena, Anthy and the other characters stand at about the same height as Akio and the other adults in the series, and while there is some variance, the bodies of the characters are depicted as being developed, with male characters possessing broad shoulders and female characters with wide hips and developed breasts. This visual blurring of the line between adolescence and adulthood, reinforced by the absence of a large enough cast of adult characters to which viewers could compare them, demonstrates the ‘both yet neither’ nature of adolescence.

Before delving into how the series views adolescence, an overview of how *Utena* constructs adulthood is in order. From the outset, this presents somewhat of a problem, as the series only features two recurring adult characters. Despite the majority of the series taking place at school, hardly any instances of the school’s faculty appear, they are invisible to the viewer. These two characters are the frumpy guidance counselor met in the early moments of the series, and Ōtori Akio, chairman of the school and Anthy’s older brother.

Mysteriously, teachers and other faculty appear in the school are largely be absent from the grand halls and classrooms of Ōhtori Academy. While this may be due to budgeting constraints during the production of the series, this effect is maintained in the feature film *Adolescence of Utena* (Shōjo Kakumei Utena Aduresencu Mokushiroku, 1999 Ikuhara), suggesting that the choice was intentional. The teachers, while present, are entirely invisible to

the viewer. The teachers, as well as the normative ideology they represent, are naturalized within the school, not even important enough to show. The choice of the female guidance counselor as the only member of staff shown to the audience reinforces this idea, as she, and her ideas on appropriate modes of behavior, become representative of the school.

The first adult presented in the series is the school's guidance counselor. She is presented as stuffy, overblown caricature of an adult woman, wearing gaudy 'old lady' sunglasses, a plain white blouse with accentuated frills around the cuffs and collar, and a black pencil skirt. She wields a riding crop that she whips about threateningly to accentuate her scolding remarks. Her position of 'guidance' counselor immediately establishes her as central to the ideology of the institution of the school, her main role to 'guide' students so that they may be successful. Of course, this means that the position is essentially that of an agent of the school's ideology, 'correcting' the wrong behavior of students out of line. Despite the intimidating nature of this



FIGURE 5: UTENA DEBATES THE VALIDITY OF HER UNIFORM WITH THE GUIDANCE COUNCILOR

position, she is never presented as a real threat. On the contrary, her juxtaposition with Utena in the first episode, "The Rose Bride", presents her as powerless to actually exert influence over the students she should be 'correcting'. Rather than making good on her threats to Utena she strikes a ridiculous pose, hair out of place and clothing ruffled, reflecting the cracks in the system (Figure 5).²⁸ This lack of power

may be representative of the effectiveness of the ideology the school itself presents, or rather the

²⁸ "Episode 1 (Sub): The Rose Bride" 5:00.

lack thereof. However, her relevance in the series overall is relatively small, with only a handful of appearances in the first half of the series, and the character herself is never even named.

In contrast to the guidance counselor, Ōtori Akio is a powerful adult figure, taking on a much more central role in the overarching narrative of the series. Differentiated from the main cast mostly by his height, bright red shirt, and position as the chairman of the school, Akio is made to look like an attractive young adult, living in the prime of his vitality. As the school's chairman, Akio's personal views are linked closely to that of the academy itself, including the less widely known dueling system. As the series continues on more and more is revealed about his influence in the school, including his position as the mysterious 'End of the World' who had been running the duels from behind the scenes.

THE DIVISION OF THE WORLD

Revolutionary Girl Utena uses space to convey the division between adolescence and adulthood. The series, taking place mostly within Ōtori academy, presents the school as an adolescent space, while the outside world is presented as that of adulthood. This division serves to illustrate the influence of the institution of the school's, as controlled by Akio, as well as the intangible nature of adulthood to the adolescents of the series.

More than a typical day school, the influence of the boarding school or academy as a place of not only learning but also of residence is incredibly powerful. Michel Foucault, in his book *Discipline and Punish* establishes the idea of the Normal as a "structure of power", claiming, "The Normal is established as a principle of coercion with the introduction of a standardized education."²⁹ Foucault sees the homogenizing nature of the Normal, and the power

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish The Birth of Prison*, Translated by Alan Sheridan, (New York: Pantheon Books 1977) 184.

with that nature lends itself to. In the setting of the school, this is amplified, with the institution able to set rules and definitions of 'normal' or even 'correct' behavior at their will. In this setting, and particularly in *Utena*, the school is all that the students have access to, as much a place for learning as a prison of ideals. If students are allowed to go into a town or interact with the outside world on their own, viewers of the series are not shown this existence, left to wonder what students not involved in club life do with their time outside of class. Within the school, several locations or landmarks hold strong imagery that points towards the ideology that defines the normative expectations that pressure the characters throughout the series.

One of these locations is the garden that Anthy tends, a greenhouse located within an inner courtyard of the school. Anthy is often seen here tending to the many different roses that grow, presenting a beautiful image of youth. The exterior of the building however offers a more sinister reading, as it visually mirrors a birdcage. This design, though never directly addressed within the show, imparts to viewers the nature of Anthy's role as the Rose Bride within the school. Anthy is a beautiful bird, kept in the cage for the pleasure she provides, but kept nonetheless. What makes this revelation even more powerful is her seeming freedom to enter and leave the birdcage at her leisure, suggesting that the nature of her captivity lies in her psychology, rather than being physically placed in the position. Anthy has submitted herself to the fate of being trapped in this space, and by extension, the expectations of submissive and deferential behavior in her position as Rose Bride.

Akio also has his own space within the school that takes on its own meaning as the series continues on. The central tower of the school is revealed to be both the chairman's office and domicile part way through the series, serving as the center of his control over the institution. Mimetically, the tower mirrors a phallus, which, as will be discussed later on, serves as a symbol

of the male dominant ideology that Akio embodies. As a phallus the tower also carries a strong sexual subtext, as the location where he is suggested to be regularly engaging in sexual activity with several women, including his sister Anthy. These role of consent in these sexual interactions is dubious, as some women very clearly are consenting with Akio while others, namely Anthy and The tower is often placed in shots looking down upon the school, making it seem impossibly tall. This emphasis on the grandeur of the tower serves to reinforce the impact it has on the school, a literal monument to the structures of power within the school. In the finale of the series, the tower is revealed to actually be the location of the battlefield where all of the duels in the series had taken place, with Akio's huge (mimetically referencing the testes) planetarium projector responsible for the deception. This reveal reinforces the tower as the seat of power within the series, as the site of the ritual battle that determined the Rose Bride's fiancé, reinforcing their masculine capacity.

The school, and all of its subtle (and not so subtle) reminders of the power structures that bind Anthy cause her to eventually lose all hope and attempt to commit suicide by jumping off of the roof of a school building. Trapped by the school, Anthy sees death as the only escape. Death for her can only happen within the school, as she lacks the agency to actually leave herself. The walls of the school buildings close around her, and the buildings stretch down into the abyss. The school, presented in such oppressive imagery, is inescapable to Anthy, with her death her only means of resistance.

The main location shown outside of the school and various dorms is the open night road, where Akio brings students to offer them access to the world of adulthood. First appearing in episode 25 "Their Eternal Apocalypse" the road is shown only at night, with a slow jazz track

playing. Existing outside the realm of the school, this road is only accessible to the students through adults, or more specifically Akio, and thus reflects Akio's image of adulthood.

The space beyond the school as evocative of a space beyond adolescence is particularly evident in the ending of the series. After Utena and Akio's final confrontation, she disappears from the space of the school, leaving many of the cast to guess as whether she was expelled or left of her free will. Not shortly after, Anthy also leaves, following after Utena. The series ends with a shot of Anthy's feet, as she crosses the threshold of the school. While the dynamics of Anthy gaining the ability to leave the school will be discussed in later chapters, her act of egress demonstrates her maturation at the end of the series. Susan Napier's argument of the disappearing shōjo suggests that Utena's disappearance from the school after the series' climax implies that she had moved past the state of shōjo. This argument can be adapted to the very choice of when to end the series, with Anthy leaving the school as a signal of her leaving her adolescence behind her, or at least the normative forces of the school, as well. With the conflict of both her and Utena's adolescence against the power of the school resolved, the series also ends. This choice is especially clear in the film *Adolescence of Utena*, Utena and Anthy break past Akio's obstacles one after another until they finally land beyond the school, and beyond roads. They have reached a desolate, untouched outside world, but the two drive on in their car, embracing into a final kiss the credits begin to roll.

ON REVOLUTION AND ETERNITY

While time in the series has largely been distorted at the convenience of the narrative, the difference in age between Anthy and Akio illustrates how the normative structures to which Anthy subscribes stymies her maturation. Akio has become an adult, taking on the position of chair of the school and has puppeteered the duels over Anthy for the power to revolutionize the

world. Anthy on the other hand, has only become a middle schooler, still bound by the school system. The events that led to her becoming the Rose Bride also rendered her at the complete behest of her brother. In assuming this role Anthy has become completely submissive to the oppressive ideology advanced by Akio. As a consequence, she has been denied access to the structures of change that would allow her access to adulthood, instead she remains an idealized image of female submission³⁰.

While *Utena* is somewhat infamous for its difficult to understand nature, often being compared³¹ to *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995, Anno), one of the most elusive ideas the show presents may be its definition of *revolution*. From the beginning the ‘power to revolutionize the world’ is established as the end goal of the duels, the mysterious power to which all of the duelists aim. The idea however, is closely linked to that of adolescence and adolescent change, and thus a working definition of the term, as well as what the ‘power to revolutionize the world’ entails, is necessary for understanding some of what the narrative presents.

Revolution³², in its varying definitions, manifests within the series in several capacities, including instances of literally rotating objects. Every time Utena approaches the dueling grounds, she must ascend a fantastically large spiral staircase in order to reach her destination. Cars, appearing later on in the series, at times also revolve. During the duels in the Ōtori Akio arc cars appear in the dueling grounds, encircling the duelists as they fight, building tension. In

³⁰ Napier, “Now You See Her,” 173.

³¹ Ibid, 172.

³² The Japanese word for revolution used is *kakumei* [革命] which, similarly to the English *revolution*, can mean both dramatic change and the act of revolving. While breaking up compound kanji by component characters as a means of semantic analysis is dubious at best, the kanji that compose the word are 革[kawa/kaku] which is often used in words denoting change, and 命[inochi/mei] which means life, perhaps granting the Japanese word less of a connotation related to government, and more related to social change.

the end of the series as Utena lies on the ground she talks to the Dios, the phantasmagoric version of Akio the prince, while he rides a carousel round and round. After Akio had given up on opening the rose gate Dios dismounted the carousel to chat, before once again riding off (in circles) as Utena opens the Anthy's coffin. In this way, the series often confounds the two different meanings, with rotating objects as symbolizing both dramatic adolescent and structural change. This is in direct contrast to another recurring theme in the series, that of eternity.

Episode 34, "The Rose Crest" tells the story of Anthy and Akio's childhood, revealing the events that led to both the system of dueling seen in the series and Utena original moment of inspiration. As a young boy, Akio was by all means a prince, wielding extraordinary power that allowed him to save "all the girls of the world". Anthy, his younger sister, was able to see the immense toll this took on his body, and decided to take action. She locked him in their home, disallowing the rest of the world access, so that he would no longer have to save. This act, of a princess saving a prince, is subversive, earning her the title of witch to those around her. While she does save her brother, she takes on the fury of those from whom she is protecting him. Anthy becomes a witch to all but the viewer who is helpless to watch as she is stabbed over and over again. Thousands of swords penetrate Anthy, essentially crucifying her yet never killing her, revealing the twisted meaning of her title, "The Rose Bride". Rather than the implications of her beauty and domestic nature as related to beautiful flower that the series had presented before, Anthy's resemblance to the the rose comes instead in the form of the thorns. It is this view, described as something 'eternal' that serves as the galvanizing force that causes Utena to take up the ideal of Prince. Dios, the prince that inspired Utena to fight, had also achieved eternity, but the implications of this are far darker than suggested earlier in the series. Eternity actually means stagnation, a state

of inaction and no change. Having become eternal, Dios is unable to act, instead lying dormant in an intangible state between life and death.

The coffin is used several times in *Utena* to represent the stagnation that comes alongside eternity, with leaving the coffin as a moment of rebirth. Along the same lines, the coffin and eternity, are linked in turn with a state of death. Trapped in the coffin as the rose bride, Anthy does not age, accounting for the age gap between her and Akio in the series. As a child Utena hid in a coffin alongside her parents, claiming that she didn't deserve to live without them, but after being shown Anthy's eternity she jumps to action, ready to change. This matches with how Anthy leaves her coffin at the end of the series. As Akio lounges off to the side, the swords suddenly stop flying towards Anthy, frozen in space. Utena slides the lid off of the coffin and deep inside Anthy is revealed. She is lying in a fetal position on the ground before opening her eyes and reaching out to Utena. Utena, in pulling the lid off of the coffin for Anthy in a sense 'revolutionizes the world', pulling Anthy out of a position of eternity. Akio, unable to comprehend Utena's actions begins to panic, while Dios merely mounts a horse on the carousel again, back facing Akio. Utena's action also inspires structural change, as the swords of hatred throw themselves at Utena and the floor around her, toppling the dueling tower and the structures that held Anthy in place.

Revolutionary Girl Utena constructs adolescence in liminal terms, positioning it as a transition period between childhood and adulthood. The visual designs of the characters reinforce this reading, with the main cast visually very similar to the few adults the series does present. The cast inhabit the school, which serves as a gathering place of adolescents, but also an institution with aims to socialize these characters into adults under a specific, normative mold. Akio, as the chairman of the school further embodies this notion, as he oversees the series of

duels that Utena finds herself swept up in. Even when he takes students out of the school, offering them access to the 'adult world' he does so through his own interpretation of that: mysterious and dangerous.

Placing the forces of revolution and eternity at odds with one another, the series presents adolescent change as revolutionary. The series ends with both Utena and Anthy having left the school, suggesting their growth has allowed them to leave the grasp of the institution that oppressed them so.

CHAPTER TWO: GENDER DIVORCED FROM EXPECTATION, GOING BEYOND PERFORMATIVITY IN ADOLESCENCE

Revolutionary Girl Utena argues for an interpretation of gender divorced from all expectations of male and female behavior, presenting the character Utena as successfully escaping from a patriarchal ideological framework built up by society and preserved through the institution of adulthood.

GENDER PERFORMATIVITY

In *Doing Gender*, psychologists West and Zimmerman acknowledged that the distinction of ‘sex as physical, gender as social’ had been drawing criticism as early as the 1970s³³. Their research pointed out the hypocrisy of discussing gender in binary terms despite using case studies focusing on binary challenging subjects such as hermaphrodite and transvestites. West and Zimmerman then moved to argue that the category of gender is socially determined, that it is *done* rather than existing on its own. Judith Butler, however, introduced this idea of gender performativity into critical theory, adopting a meshing of frameworks from Lacanian psychoanalysis and Foucauldian criticism. Butler argued that gender is established through the repetitive performance of acts seen as fitting naturalized ideas of gender. These ideas of gender were considered natural along the lines of Foucault’s understanding of power. Her essay “Performative Acts of Gender Constitution”³⁴ (1988) and her monograph *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990)³⁵ established the idea of performance of gender,

³³ Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, “Doing Gender,” *Gender and Society* 1, No. 2 (1987): 125.

³⁴ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” *Theater Journal* 40, No. 4 (1988): pp519-531.

³⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York. 1999.

while *Bodies that Matter* (1993)³⁶ and later publications correcting previous misreadings of the idea of performance and more.

Before discussing how *Revolutionary Girl Utena* addresses gender in terms of transgressing normative expectations, this study needs to establish how gender is defined within the limits of this specific series. In recent years, America and Europe have seen increasing support in viewing gender in a relatively loose construction compared to previous models working upon the presumption of a binary. Gender fluid, transgender, and intersex are only a few of the gender identities now acknowledged that complicate the binary and understanding of gender has moved far beyond the demarcation of biologically or bodily determined “sex” and socially determined “gender”. *Revolutionary Girl Utena* presents sex as constructed in binary terms, and thus should be discussed along the same lines, but its presentation of gender is somewhat more nuanced. As *Utena* was first broadcast in 1996, it would be anachronistic to attempt to read *Utena* with more contemporary conceptualizations of gender; perhaps even a disservice to the lineage of progressivism within which the series is situated, paving the path for series domestic and abroad such as *Wandering Son* (*Hourou Musuko*), and *Steven Universe* to take on a wider conception of gender. As this chapter argues, while *Utena* does operate within the framework of a binary conception of gender, it does much to argue against the social construction of that binary, presenting normative expectations as limiting growth.

Utena seems to complicate the notion of gender as performance that Butler argues, as *Utena* performs what the show deems masculine modes of dress and attitude while still insisting on her female identity. This identity, which will be further broken down in this chapter, exists

³⁶Judith Butler, “The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary,” In *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, Routledge, London. 1993. pp. 57-91.

outside of the neat framework provided within the ideology of the school. It is because of this conflict with the school ideology that Utena is seen as such a transgressive character. Through her gender presentation, or rather her complication of the expected gender presentation, the show works to break down the entrenched ideology of male and female as discreet categories and instead proposes an individualistic mode of existing across these categories. This does not necessarily suggest that gender is fluid in the series, although it certainly opens up the possibility, but rather that ‘gender’ as a category constructed between the dyad of masculinity and femininity itself is invalid. The school sees gender as a result of performance, but Utena’s transgressive performance breaks down gender itself.

GENDER AS IT APPEARS IN CHARACTER DESIGN IN *UTENA*

Before discussing the performativity of gender in *Utena* it is important to understand the designs of the various characters being discussed. This study will focus mainly on characters Utena, Anthy, Juri, and Akio, but will touch on the designs of a few others. Anime is a completely constructed medium, meaning that creators have complete control of what goes into the designing of a character. Whether or not various elements are purposefully imbued with *meaning*, they are at the least *chosen*, indicating an even stronger importance of *mise-en-scene* in an animated medium than in a captured medium such as film.³⁷ Understanding the naturalized ideas behind character design will inevitably allow for a multi-layered interpretation of the

³⁷ While this largely holds true in *Utena* as an original work, several factors complicate this view when applied more generally. For example, design can often be beholden to various other factors including pressures from the original author or production company in order to make the series more marketable, offer more potential for merchandising, etc. Additionally, recent forays into creating fully CG anime such as *Knights of Sidonia* and *Land of the Lustrous* have been known to reuse the bodies of character models allowing production companies to save resources and only have to remodel the heads of characters. Interestingly enough, both of these series feature characters with decidedly ambiguous gender identities.

series, going beyond the stated arguments of the creators, and even the narrative of the series itself. In this regard, readings of *Utena*'s character design present somewhat contradictory ideas.

The general style of the character designs is in line with the typical shōjo designs of the 90s, as a successor to *Sailor Moon* and contemporaneous with the likes of prolific all female manga group CLAMP. Characters are drawn with long, thin appendages, extremely thin torsos, and highly angular features. The basic female uniform is a slightly embellished version of a *seifuku* or sailor uniform, consisting of a short green skirt and white blouse with exaggerated shoulders and a matching green tie. The male uniform is simply a green version of the *gakuran* uniform common to Japanese middle school boys. These origins of these uniforms, the *seifuku* and *gakuran*, can be traced back to British naval and French army uniforms respectively³⁸. This is particularly notable in that the uniforms of the duelists, both the members of the student council and the duelists of the Black Rose, are markedly more militaristic than those of the normal student population.

Compared to the rest of the students' at Ōtori Academy, Utena's school uniform design stands out in almost every regard. The most defining feature is her modified *gakuran* male uniform, a large black coat with red accents. Unlike a typical *gakuran*, the uniform hugs Utena's body until it splays out as it lands on her hips. While the design evokes the aesthetic of the male uniform, its shape is decidedly female, mirroring the hourglass shape created by the standard female uniform. Underneath she wears skintight red spats, contributing to her athletic appearance. These pants also serve to preserve a semblance of modesty for Utena, as her quasi-

³⁸ Sharon Kinsella, "Whats Behind the Fetishism of Japanese School Uniforms?" *Fashion Theory: The Journal Of Dress, Body & Culture* 6, no. 2 (2002): 218

skirt lands even higher on her frame than the miniskirt of the girls' uniform. As Kotani notes, this design, reminiscent to *Sailor Moon*'s, works to reinforce male desire.³⁹

This design is open to several readings. Incorporating a combination of male and female elements, it could be read as an expression of Utena's desire to not be pinned down. "Excuse me, I'm a girl!"⁴⁰ she exclaims when asked to join the boys' basketball team, emphasizing specifically that she is not attempting to 'pass' as a boy but rather that her dress and appearance is her own. Butler's construction of naturalized gender as socially determined along Foucauldian terms of power show through here, as Utena's personal repeated gender performance directly opposes the 'given' order. She is either treated as weird (by the guidance counselor) or as wanting to become more masculine. Utena's performance is so outside of the expected that the system isn't able to process her transgressive identity.

Kotani argues that Utena is what Tamaki Saito would call a 'battling beauty', claiming that "[she] does not hold out any desire for liberation."⁴¹ While the full implications of this will be discussed further below, part of that identity is an alignment with male desires.⁴² Essentially, Kotani's argument is that Utena operates within a position of liberating men, aligning with and confirming their active position. By trying to perform masculinity while being active, she reinforces the connection of masculine activity and feminine passivity. While operating as an active participant in battle, Utena is still presented as a beauty, fulfilling male viewers' desires. Kotani's argument works to problematize the supposed feminist stance of Utena, but the issue is

³⁹ Kotani Mari. "Metamorphosis of the Japanese Girl," pp. 167.

⁴⁰ Episode 1 The Rose Bride 6:07. In the Japanese, this reads as 「あのね、僕は女子！」 Utena is using the masculine *boku* pronoun even as she expresses that she is a girl, further playing with the conventions of gender.

⁴¹ Ibid. 166.

⁴² Kotani Mari. "Metamorphosis of the Japanese Girl," 166-167.

far more complicated than she presents it. While this argument lacks a wider perspective, falling into the same traps as Laura Mulvey's initial article on the male gaze,⁴³ privileging a singular form of consumption of media, Kotani's article does raise compelling points on the contradictory nature of Utena's character design. While her uniform holds the trappings of the *gakuran*, the actual shape of the uniform rather skin tight, showing a thin body with a large bust. On her hips it splays out visually mirroring a skirt. For a character so often criticized for dressing like a man, her outfit certainly accentuates her 'feminine appeal'. While this could be read as Utena's refusal to adhere to expectations of what a prince looks like, the show could have just as easily had her wear the female uniform with the same argument. Through these choices of character design, the series presents a contradictory message, employing a feminine character design while calling it masculine.

While this is true in the television anime series, the film *Adolescence of Utena* released

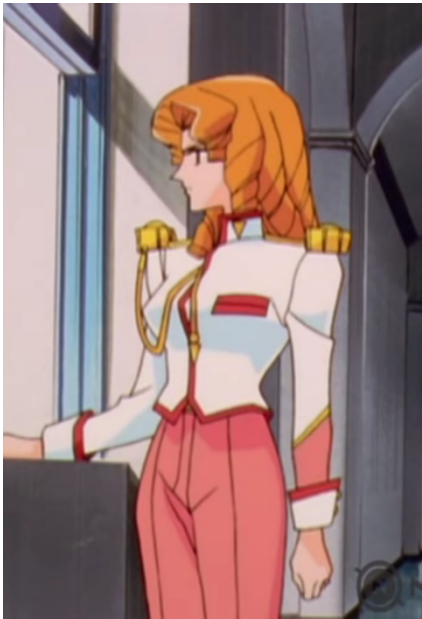


FIGURE 6: ARISUGAWA JURU'S CHARACTER DESIGN

after the conclusion of the series features a full redesign of Utena, where she wears a much more 'masculine' outfit. Yet her dueling outfit in the film is decidedly more feminine in comparison, with her hair even growing from a boyish short cut to the waist length hair seen in the television series. This suggests that Utena is trying so hard to perform masculinity through the prince ideal is constricting, and only when she fully embraces her 'true self,' unbound by expectations, can she be free. The film's well-known scene of Utena and Anthy dancing on a pool of water reflecting the night sky and their dueling outfits

⁴³ Laura Mulvey. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 1989, pp. 14-26

ends with the ‘imaginary’ vision of the duel outfits as upright, suggesting perhaps that this presentation is more natural for the two.

From the very first moments of the series, Utena’s uniform serves as a point of contention to the adults around her, her first interaction with another character has her arguing with a female guidance counselor as to whether or not her uniform should be allowed. Utena cites the student handbook as not having any rules on the matter and thus there is no problem. Here Utena’s innocence shows itself, the lack of rules on the matter signifying not the school’s lenient policy but rather the degree to which its ideology is set in stone. There are no rules about girls wearing men’s uniforms because there don’t *have* to be, the mere thought is audacious. Yet Utena is not the only female character in the series to wear masculine clothing.

Juri (Figure 6)⁴⁴ stands out in the series as a strong foil to Utena in more ways than one, and her character design is no exception. As another female duelist, Juri comes into conflict with Utena several times, and is even the final duelist she fights in the film. She harbors strong feelings for a childhood friend of hers, Shiori, another girl, further matching Utena’s somewhat ambiguous, yet nevertheless transgressive sexual orientation. Along these lines, Juri’s uniform stands out in the series also in contrast to Utena. She wears a version of the student council uniform, with some slight differences in body shape to the male members of the council. Like Utena’s, her outfit breaks with the expectations of other female students, but Juri does not particularly catch criticism from the teachers in the same way. This is seen in episode 7⁴⁵ when Utena is being scolded by an elderly female teacher, similar to the first episode, but Juri intimidates the school headmaster into resolving the issue. Compared to Utena, her design is less

⁴⁴ “Episode 7 (Sub): Unfulfilled Jury” 4:30

⁴⁵ Ibid

shapely, her jacket only coming out slightly above the hips, and rather than spats revealing her legs she wears long pants.

Overall, this outfit gives Juri more of a conservative, formal look than Utena. This formality may also point to Juri's feeling of being trapped; where Utena's outfit might represent her comfort in her body and identity, Juri's tight coat and long pants may indicate her reservations about her sexual orientation, and her resignation to keeping in in the shadows, allowing her feelings for Shiori to fester unspoken. Her defeat to Utena in episode 29⁴⁶ supports this; rather than losing at the striking of her boutonniere she surrenders after Utena strikes open her collar and lets loose the locket Juri holds of Shiori's image. This defeat may be the most physically painful in the series, emphasized by her body language and stuttered breathing, terrified of her feelings being laid bare.

As a point of contrast to Utena, Juri does not receive the same disappointed treatment as Utena from the adults of the series. While the series never explicitly states the reason for this, it does point to several different reasons. The most likely is that her uniform is not self-made, as in Utena's case, but rather *earned*. All of the members of the student council wear a white coat with pants matching the color of their hair, and Juri is no exception. How one becomes a member of the council is never mentioned in the series, but excellent academic achievement and standing in extra-curricular activities, fencing in Juri's case, are characteristics of all council members. Alternatively, rumors of Juri having a dark streak run around school, and several of the adult members of the faculty at Ōtori are shown to be intimidated by her. Either way, Juri's ability to navigate within the expectations of the adults allows her the position in the student council, which simultaneously unnerves the teachers and students.

⁴⁶ "Episode 29 (Sub): Azure Paler than the Sky" 17:38.

Additionally, as the captain of the school's fencing club, Juri is often shown with her face and hair covered, concealing other indicators of her gender. Miki, with his smaller frame, also participates as a member on the fencing team, suggesting that it is a more feminine counterpart to the *kendo* or Japanese sword fighting that Saionji and Tōga participate in.⁴⁷ While both sports traditionally involve rules about wearing helmets while fighting, these are upheld within the fencing club but not in the *kendo* dōjo. Comparing the two sports, the more feminine fencing is strictly regulated and systematically organized with regular after school practice, whereas the more 'masculine' *kendo* is more or less unorganized, with only Saionji and Tōga participating whenever they want. This difference shows some of the underlying assumptions about strength in the series, that while 'masculine' men are free to express their power freely, more feminine characters hide their forms outside of the dueling arena.

Himemiya Anthy's character design features two main appearances. The first is simply her standard issue uniform, but in the dueling arena she dons another guise: that of a long red dress that reaches the ground. The draping of the fabric on her lower half not only serves evoke a vaguely courtly appearance, but also mirrors the flower from which her title is derived: the rose. The top half is slightly more stylized, the torso is sleeveless and adorned with a pennant and shoulder frills, and her wrists wear what would be the cuff of her nonexistent sleeve. Her hair is tied tightly into a short bob, but when let loose it almost reaches the floor.

While this chapter takes on gender as its focus, it would be remiss to leave Anthy and Akio's ethnicity unaddressed. Ethnicity in anime is difficult to fully define, even series featuring entirely mundane narratives contain characters with most characters with inexplicably

⁴⁷ While the nationalist implications behind the masculine position of Japanese *kendo* versus the feminine Western fencing warrant further exploration, this research is beyond the scope of this study.

unnaturally colored hair, and most anime feature predominantly pale-skinned characters, racial diversity not even enjoying the position of an afterthought. In *Utena* however, both Anthy and her older brother Akio are presented as brown skinned, and draw on Indian iconography - most evident is the red *bindi*-like mark Anthy and, Akio, wear on their forehead, and the red clothing the siblings wear. The point of this difference in design seems to only separate the two characters visually from the rest of the cast, with seemingly little intention to actually represent characters from a specific place. Anthy and Akio's roles as the helpless Rose Bride and the hypersexualized End of The World respectively are evocative of colonial narratives of dark skinned women being oppressed by dark skinned men, with only a fair skinned savior (in this case Utena) being able change the situation. While I argue that the actual narrative of Utena's protection of Anthy is more nuanced than this, the implications of othering these two characters who are displayed in such extreme terms offers a problematic reading of the text.

Akio's character actually has three different outfit designs, all used at different times in the series. His casual wear is the most commonly seen, a simple baggy red button down shirt and black pants are all he needs. As a prince, his design is quite different, with his hair flowing down his body. He wears a white breasted coat like other student council members, but his long legs and broader chest make him stand out as more mature, particularly when he begins to strip his shirt off revealing his hard muscles underneath. Additionally, this coat features even more militaristic imagery than all of the other members of the student council.

Akio's third design, that of Dios the pure prince, appears much younger, an adolescent version of Akio himself, but he wears the same militaristic uniform as the 'prince' Akio. His hair matches Akio's casual design, sans ponytail, and he stands only slightly taller than Utena herself.

THE PRINCE, THE PRINCESS, AND THE DYNAMICS OF RESCUE

Within scholarship on the series, Utena's unique positioning of the fairy tale prince as a body of ideals rather than a conferred title denoting royal lineage has perhaps received more attention than any other aspect of the series. Both Kotani and Bailey define the position of prince as distinctly *active* in contrast to the *passive* princess⁴⁸. However, if the Prince is defined as a body of values, then the extent to which this activity takes place is limited within the body of ideals. This section aims to examine the role of prince while engaging previous literature on the matter, with the aim to both synthesize previous works and offer a new reading of the series' focus on the idea.

Bailey and Kotani's positioning of the Prince as a body of ideals detached from gender may be flawed in of itself. From the very first scene of the series, Utena's choice to emulate the prince who saved her rather than reserve herself for him is met with skepticism from within the narration, positing, "But was that really such a good idea?"⁴⁹ Princes *should* be male, otherwise Utena's actions would not be defined as transgressive, her presentation would not be met with resistance. In *Gender Trouble* Butler leans on Foucault, as well as other theorists, in developing her idea of performative acts of gender. She discusses how certain presentations of gender became the norm, "a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes existing in a binary relation to one another."⁵⁰ Butler here relies on Foucault's arguments of the power of the 'normal' suggesting that even gender is constructed along these lines, encouraging certain performances. Utena's performance of gender, the repetitive acts that establish her personage over time, are coded within the show as

⁴⁸ See Bailey, "Prince Charming" and Kotani "Metamorphosis"

⁴⁹ "Episode 1 (Sub): the Rose Bride," 1:30

⁵⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity Tenth Anniversary Edition*, (New York, Routledge 1999), 176-178.

masculine (regardless of how masculine she actually looks), reinforced again and again by characters asking about her gender. She is very much positioned as performing masculinity while maintaining her female self-identification. While the series certainly does work to show that the Prince as ideal is not exclusive to male *sex*, it is exclusively gendered as *masculine*.

However what values does the Prince actually stand for? Napier notes, “masculine power and nobility (*kedakisa*)”⁵¹, whereas Bailey argues that it “[connotes] a heroic agency that is unfixed from gender.”⁵² Both of these definitions account for parts of the ideal that Utena aspires to, but the actual definition of the prince is found in their relation to the princess. In the episode “The Rose Crest”⁵³ the full purpose of the prince is explained in two parts: a stage play and a flashback of Utena’s fateful encounter with the prince as a child. In the stage play, the prince was a character who would comically go around to save all of the princesses of the world. The prince is shown running to and fro, saving one girl from a giant monster resembling Godzilla one moment, before being called away to save another girl from spending Christmas day (a romantic holiday in Japan) by themselves. The prince is not defined by merely his ability to be *active*, but instead by his ability to ‘save’ others.

In contrast to the prince, the identity of the princess is constructed upon their helplessness and *passivity*. Per fairytale convention, all princesses need to do in life is wait to be saved by their prince, and perhaps marry him to live happily ever after. Himemiya strongly represents this idea, always acting in complete submission to the code of the duels. She always acts respectful and perfectly deferential to whomever she is engaged, her loyalty changing several times throughout the series in line with the identity of her fiancé. As the story progresses however,

⁵¹ Napier, “Now You See Her,” 172.

⁵² Bailey “ Prince Charming,” 212.

⁵³ “Episode 34 (Sub): The Rose Crest”

Utena becomes close to Anthy who becomes specifically loyal to her. However Utena becoming increasingly close to Akio causes Anthy to become increasingly cold. This comes to a head in episode 37 “The One To Revolutionize the World”. In a casual conversation about the future between Anthy and Utena over tea, Utena is asked by Anthy, “Do you know about cantarella?... Its something used by the Borgia family in Italy long ago. A poison. So, do you like those cookies? I made them myself.⁵⁴” Utena responds in kind “What a coincidence, I put poison in your tea”. The two reconcile, promising to have a date in 10 years, but the underlying troubles still linger. Immediately after this conversation the scene cuts to an image of the school at night, panning down over the one of the buildings showing Anthy trying to jump off. Anthy tries to jump off to escape the system that has taken control of her body, the structures of power inherent to the school at odds with her identity. At this point Anthy sees death is the only potential escape from those structures. Utena saves her, pulling Anthy back onto the balcony, back into the system. Here Utena sees the system of duels, the structures in place that have deprived Anthy of agency, and her fire is reignited, she must confront Akio, the actor at the center of this structure, to put an end to her friend’s suffering.

In *shōjo* manga, the term prince has been thrown around for quite a long time. While the term is generally used more often as a term of affection or praise from a large group, (e.g. a character introduced as the school prince often has a plethora of adoring fans, with the female equivalent being an idol) in most contexts it does not have anything to do with a position of royalty. Rather, the prince fulfills a character archetype, defined by their kindness, gentleness, and easygoing nature.

⁵⁴ “Episode 37: The One To Revolutionize the World,” 17:40.

Utena presents the role of the prince slightly differently, focusing on the trope from the very beginning. Utena is introduced as not only aspiring to become a prince, but also as fulfilling the *shōjo* prince archetype. When she first arrives at school she is greeted by unanimous cheering and adoration and is able to pass through a large crowd of onlookers as they part ways just to let her by. She greets her fans with reserved acknowledgement. Later on in the episode viewers are also able to enjoy a brief montage of her in another element, easily besting the basketball team at their own game, portraying her admiration as well earned. This series of montages near the beginning of the series serve to quickly and effectively give the impression that Utena is the center of the school's attention, nearly all shots of her are medium close and place her powerfully in the center of the frame. As far as the student body is concerned, she is a figure that deserves admiration.

This idea of prince however, is quickly overturned within the series, as Utena enters an elaborate series of duels with various other prince figures from throughout the school. In a way, all of the members of the student council are in one way or another presented as similar prince figures. Saionji is the first presented by the series, and is an arrogant, self-aggrandizing bully. He is introduced being the recipient of Wakaba, Utena's best friend's affection is quickly disposed, his vile treatment of Anthy during their brief engagement is what draws Utena into the duels in the first place. The shorter blue haired Miki is known well for his kind nature and intelligence, as well as skill in playing the piano. Rather than antagonizing the Utena and Anthy he quickly befriends them. Juri, introduced as the elegant captain and ace of the school's fencing club is also a prince in another fashion, known more for inspiring fear in the teachers than admiration from her classmates. And finally, there is Tōga, student council president, wealthy, and widely loved by the female students at Ōtori academy.

Here, the series draws a distinction between the ‘school prince’ and the ‘prince’ of the type that saved Utena when she was a child, that is, the Prince as an ideal. This idea of Prince as rescuer is so prevalent throughout the series that it could potentially be read as the main ideological pulse behind the entire story. Utena confronts various ‘princes’ during the the Student council arc, differentiating and solidifying her own interpretation of princely ideals that she holds to for most of the rest of the series. The black rose arc has Utena fighting characters who are specifically NOT princes, those who suffer rejection at the hands of their own princes. Here Utena gradually comes to see the troubles of not being chosen; being ignored or rejected by those they admire. This arc culminates in her duel against her best friend Wakaba, who was rejected by Saionji despite her devotion to him, The Ōtori Akio arc shows Utena backing away from her self-proclaimed identity as prince until her sexual encounter with Akio in episode 33⁵⁵, signifying an almost complete break from the ideals she aspired to. The final Apocalypse arc serves as both a return to and final departure from Utena’s prince ideal. Now an outsider to the very ideal she aspired to, Utena is able to look at what exactly the princely ideal stands for. She re-embraces the ideal in an effort to save Anthy from Akio, but this decision works against her and Anthy betrays her instead.

Napier identifies Anthy’s actions here as the result of a revelation on her part, claiming, “it may also be seen as Anthy discovering her own rage toward the notion of masculine ‘protection’ represented by both Akio and Utena... It is only when Anthy makes her own choice... that she begins to move towards a more integrated personality.”⁵⁶ Napier’s analysis here captures the essence of Anthy’s betrayal, finally sick of the system that binds her, she

⁵⁵ “Episode 33 (Sub) The Prince Who Runs Through the Night”

⁵⁶ Napier “Now You See Her” 176.

teaches Utena that she doesn't need another 'prince' coming to save her, just for her to lose her own agency again. This betrayal, as Kotani notes, transforms Utena's perspective, allowing her final actions to *help* Anthy without actually *saving* her.

In the climactic finale to the series, Akio, having stolen Utena's sword, attempts to open the Rose Gate which seals the power to revolutionize the world. A walkway appears off of the familiar dueling ground, and as Akio approaches thousands of swords, stated by Akio as representing human hatred and referencing those that had stabbed Anthy in the past, begin to rise up from far below, and the true purpose of the Rose Bride is revealed, "She takes the swords in place of the prince."⁵⁷ Akio attempts to open the gate, but the sword breaks and he gives up, completely unfazed. Utena then approaches the gate, despite discouragement of Akio, with her bare hands. Akio lounges while waiting for Utena to fail, when suddenly the swords stop, suspended midair. The gate has turned into a coffin which Utena is prying open (Figure 7)⁵⁸. Akio begins to frantically protest, but Utena persists nonetheless eventually creating a slight opening. Inside; a naked Anthy, lying in the fetal position, opens her eyes. "We finally meet" cries an elated Utena. The two reach out their hands and touch, before the structure binding Anthy falls, Utena unable to pull her out. The swords finally turn on Utena, swarming before finally, decidedly stabbing her.

⁵⁷ "Episode 39 (Sub) And Someday, Together, We'll Shine," 7:17.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 11:46.

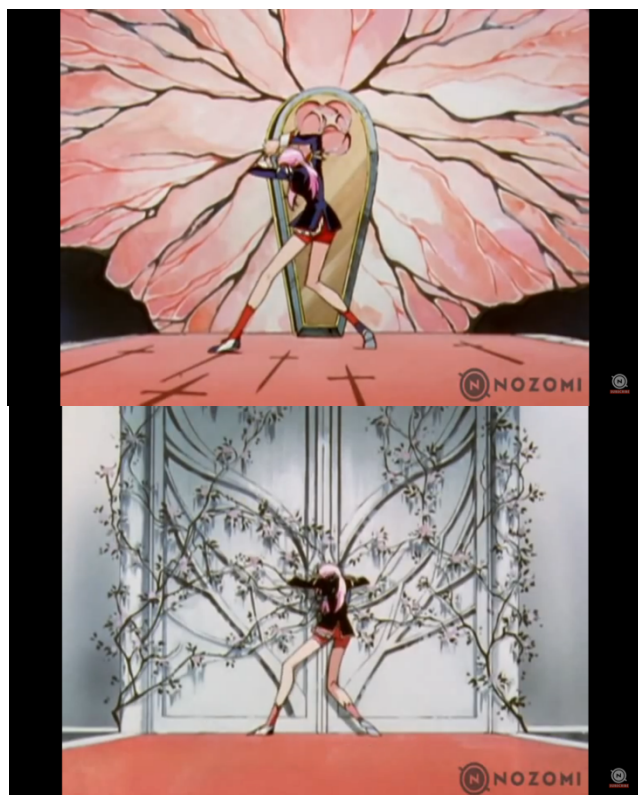


FIGURE 7: UTENA TRIES TO FORCE OPEN THE ROSE GATE BEFORE SWITCHING TO OPENING THE COFFIN WHEREIN ANTHY IS TRAPPED

Yet Utena's seeming failure, to pull Anthy out of her coffin, offers the potential for a positive reading of Utena's growth in the rejection of the prince ideal. Utena only opens the door for Anthy, and reaches out her hand. Anthy resists at first, before reaching her arm out to Utena. Their fingers touch, but the two understand that they can't go any further. "Someday, Together," Utena whispers, referencing the title of the episode "Someday, Together We'll Shine." Their outstretched arms rotate as Anthy begins to fall, and the music swells, dissonantly uplifting compared to the action on the screen. Rather than matching the failure of Utena

to save Himemiya, the song matches to Anthy's renewed agency in reaching out in the first place. Utena being stabbed by the swords shows that she was able to successfully free her from the role of the Rose Bride, inherently a princess. The scene ends, both Utena and Anthy neither prince nor princess.

The ideal of prince is limiting in the first place. If Anthy's betrayal of Utena during her fight with Akio shows her dissatisfaction with being objectified as a princess, someone to be saved, then this result may be the best possible result for Anthy. Utena does not free Anthy from her abusive relationship with Akio, but she does show her the door. Anthy's fall signifies not Utena's failure but instead the weight of Anthy's responsibility. Restoring Anthy's agency, grants her access to the potential of liberation, but only the potential. Anthy's liberation is now in

her own hands, which is shown in the last scenes of the series. Life at the school continues on unperturbed, but signs of Utena's revolution subtly manifest. Miki trains Tsuwabuki in the piano, Juri still captains the fencing club which Shiori has joined, and Tōga and Saionji practice kendo with Nanami watching on. Akio begins pulling together notes and sorting papers in the chairman's office, supposedly preparing for the next series of duels, however Anthy is changed, and meets his commands with only words of refusal. Placing her glasses on Akio's desk, Anthy says, "You really don't know what's happened, do you? It doesn't matter. By all means, stay in this cozy coffin of yours and continue to play prince. But I have to go now.... She hasn't disappeared at all. She's merely vanished from your world". Anthy proceeds to leave the office, Akio's protests falling on deaf ears. She stands before the gates of the school, "This time its my turn to go."⁵⁹

This notion, the importance of Utena actions in Anthy achieving freedom without actually 'saving' her, appears at first glance to be contradictory. Utena's actions, the opening of the coffin, appear to hold all of the trappings of rescue, but the differentiation is important. Anthy being left to her own devices to rescue herself, restoring her own agency, also appears in the film *Revolutionary Girl Utena: Adolescent Apocalypse*. In the feature film, after Utena realizes that she loves Anthy and sees that she must save herself from the systems of power under which she is confined, spontaneously literally transforms into a car in a surreal sequence. Utena has literally become a vehicle for Anthy's escape from adolescence, and while Anthy rides this car the two are separated. Anthy does not communicate with Utena again until after they burst past the obstacles holding them back and into the 'outside world'.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 20:55

In much the same way, the ending of the series mirrors this. Utena does not pull Anthy out of her bondage, but rather opens the door. Disappearing from the school immediately after the events of the finale, Utena supposedly was expelled, hospitalized or transferred out according to the rumors of the students, and time passed. Time enough has passed for the adolescents of the school to mostly forget Utena. Even Wakaba, her best friend has moved on. Anthy has remained all this time, but as Akio begins the preparations for the next round of duels Anthy, for the first time in the series, disobeys her brother and leaves the school. She stands in front of the school gate, wearing not the school uniform but her own clothes, and she thinks about meeting Utena, before crossing the threshold of the school, no longer under the structures of power binding her before.

CHAPTER THREE: EMPLOYMENT OF PSYCHOANALYTIC ICONOGRAPHY IN *REVOLUTIONARY GIRL UTENA*

Revolutionary Girl Utena makes heavy repetitive usage of psychoanalytical symbolism and iconography throughout the series, particularly evident within the duels between Utena and other characters. This psychoanalytical framework is not limited to the duels however, as it often appears hidden in plain sight. In this chapter I will begin by introducing the tropes of the duels themselves before breaking down their underlying meanings. From there I will move onto an analysis of some of the more specific story arcs presented throughout *Utena*. Utena's duels against Tōga, Juri, and Akio, as well as several scenes involving Akio offering 'adulthood' to the main cast and the usage of car symbolism. Through this analysis I plan to reveal how *Revolutionary Girl Utena* juxtaposes sexuality and adolescent change, and how normative expectations surrounding the two stymie adolescent change.

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD OF PSYCHOANALYTICAL FILM THEORY

While scholars have talked in brief about the phallic symbolism in *Utena* (Bailey, Napier) there has yet to be an in depth analysis of the duels which Napier describe as "fascinating rituals, highly suggestive of both the erotic and apocalyptic."⁶⁰ As integral, and certainly ritualistic elements of the series, understanding the symbolic framework that makes up the duels will be imperative in understanding the central meanings of the series itself, and by extension the core of its continuing popularity. A point of complication however, is that the series makes heavy use of *sexual* symbolism in that derives meaning within a *psychoanalytical* framework. While these frameworks do not strictly overlap, they may appear to do so, with tendencies to equate the male

⁶⁰ Napier, "Now You See Her," 173.

penis with the psychoanalytic *phallus* as an example. Before delving into this analysis, a brief introduction to the psychoanalytic framework used in this chapter is in store.

While psychoanalytic film theory did not begin in earnest until the spectatorship focused work of Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey in the 1970s, the history of the field begins in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with Sigmund Freud. Freud's work introduced many ideas into the world, including the various complexes of penis envy and fetishism, his research has been largely dismissed by scientists as outright wrong and by cultural critics as decidedly phallogocentric. For example, a short essay of his from 1927 titled *On Fetishism*⁶¹ discusses the horror of viewing the clitoris as part of the castration complex while also dismissing the organ as 'inferior', a notion which understandably drew much criticism.

The other scholar from which much of the field stems is the French therapist Jacques Lacan. Lacan was known for a 'return to Freud' taking on his ideas on the unconscious and transforming them. Lacan is perhaps best known for his emphasis on "the mirror stage" period in a child's development when they first look in a mirror and encounter what Lacan would call the triptych of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real⁶². Lacan saw the Imaginary as the internalized image of the ideal, whole, complete self, the Symbolic as the network of signifiers and signified; images and languages that create meaning, and the Real as that which can not be signified. Other influential ideas of Lacan include those introduced in his talk on "The

⁶¹ Sigmund Freud, "On Fetishism." In *Critical Visions in Film Theory*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2011. pp710-713

⁶² Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," *Ecrits, The First Complete Edition In English*. Translated by Bruce Fink in Collaboration with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg. New York: Norton and Company, 2002. pp. 75-81.

Signification of the Phallus”⁶³ in which he argues the phallus as an intersubjective signifier separate from that of the *penis*, and that men want to possess it while women want to become it. Naturally, this description has inspired strong response, notably from Judith Butler in her monograph *Bodies that Matter*, where she agrees with his separation of the *phallus* from the *penis* but sees his definition as insufficiently distanced from the male reproductive organ, offering her own view of the phallus⁶⁴.

Much of the result of Lacan’s return to Freud would become the basis for what is known as the first wave of psychoanalysis. This work includes that of Laura Mulvey⁶⁵ and Christian Metz⁶⁶ using the ideas of the mirror stage and the symbolic order respectively to develop theories of spectatorship in cinema. While monumental in the field of feminist film theory, Mulvey received much criticism for her arguments presenting a singular view of spectatorship, arguing the screen presented a masculine perspective.

The second wave of psychoanalysis came about with scholars such as Slavoj Žižek and Joan Copjec and their criticisms of previous psychoanalytic theories. These criticisms, while in line with previous critics of Mulvey, took on a more radical dimension claiming more fundamental errors. Joan Copjec calls out the arguments of Metz and others as having fundamental misunderstandings of the idea of Lacan’s mirror stage and the gaze. She argued that instead of Lacanian thought, these scholars were instead thinking in Foucauldian terms, due in

⁶³ Jacques Lacan, “The Signification of the Phallus” Translated by Bruce Fink in collaboration with H elo ise Fink and Russell Grigg. New York: Norton and Company, 2002. pp. 75-584.

⁶⁴ Butler, “The Lesbian Phallus,”. 57-91.

⁶⁵ Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,”14-26.

⁶⁶ Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*. Indiana University Press, Indiana. 1986.

part to his widespread influence at the time⁶⁷. Much like how Lacan began a return in interest to Freud, figures such as Copjec and Žižek were calling for a ‘return to Lacan’, emphasizing the need for an actual psychoanalytical approach to psychoanalytic theory. Current work in the theory is focused on this approach, with Slavoj Žižek achieving somewhat celebrity-like status within the field.

A SEXUAL READING OF DUELING

The system of dueling in *Utena* is introduced in the first episode and continues throughout the entire series, following the same basic rule set throughout. At their simplest, the rules of the duels are as follow: the first duelist to strike the flower from their opponent’s chest with their sword will be declared the winner of the duel, and will thus be engaged to Himemiya Anthy, the Rose Bride. Apart from this nothing further is stated about the carrying out of duels beyond the fact that Akio, under the pseudonym End of the World, takes care of their organization. Despite this simplistic ruleset and repetitive style, with over thirty duels in the 39 episodes, analyzing the duel sequences through a psychoanalytical lens offers insight into the central messages of the series. While there is obvious difference from duel to duel, each is carried out with redundant, ritualistic elements.

Within the structure of psychoanalytic discourse, the phallus as a signifier has received significant attention from the central theorists (Freud, Lacan, Butler) and has been established within a specific definition. To them, the phallus is generative, with the main evolutions of theory being in developments of its relation to demarcating sexual difference. Freud’s initial arguments did not work to distinguish the *phallus* from the *penis*, whereas Lacan saw them as

⁶⁷ Joan Copjec. “The Orthopsychic Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan” *October*, Vol. 49 1989. pp. 53-71.

separate, arguing that men want to *have* the phallus whereas women want to *be* the phallus.

Butler sees Lacan's arguments as insufficiently separating the two, arguing that his conception of the mirror stage does not sufficiently account for the phallus as symbolic. The phallus, as seen in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* works in slightly different dimensions from this framework, operating more in the realm of patriarchal power. The phallus in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* is not necessarily *generative* so much as it is *penetrative*, directly linked to patriarchy and power in sexual intercourse. While the act of *possessing* the phallus, especially as a woman, does hold some meaning, it is *using* the phallus to exert power over others within the duels that marks its significance.

These rules remain largely consistent throughout the course of the series, and thus they become a framework of signifiers that are able to color the duels on a second, metaphorical level creating deeper meaning. Most obviously, the swords are phalluses, and the skill with which a duelist is able to use largely determines their success in the duel. Bailey notes the usage of the flower in medieval literature and psychoanalytic discourse, equating the act of having the flower cut from the lapel as an emasculating, just as the winner exerts male dominance by striking⁶⁸. To delve slightly deeper, this framework operates with a specific ideology of sexual dominance, that of the male as the dominator and the female as the dominated. By striking the flower with a sword, the duelist is asserting their masculine prowess over the other, and the more masculine wins Anthy as the prize. The ideology revealed in these duels is aligned with the institution of

⁶⁸ Bailey, "Prince Charming," 213. While she does mention the linkage of flowers to femininity in medieval literature and psychoanalytic discourse, she fails to list any sort of reference to these usages. While it is beyond the scope of this study to investigate medieval literature for these usages, the central body of psychoanalytic discourse does not link the two. Freud mentions the clitoris as an "inferior phallus" in *On Fetishism* but the clitoris itself is largely absent from the psychoanalytic discourse of Lacan and others.

the academy, or to be more specific, Akio himself. The series of duels were designed with the male duelist in mind, and from the specific perspective of gender presented in chapters previous. Akio, as the creator and final contestant of the duels, represents the oppressive phallogentric, or rather, patriarchal structure of the world, and so the duels play out in this framework. This is seen in the penultimate episode, *The End of the World*, when Utena appears at the dueling arena. The two hold a brief conversation, and Akio summons a sword from Utena's bosom, matching the familiar sequence of Utena summoning the sword from within Anthy. As soon as the sword is removed from Utena, possession, her outfit transforms in a bright flash, into a bright pink dress mirroring that of Anthy's.⁶⁹ No longer possessing the phallus, the sign of her 'masculine' ability to be active, Utena has become a passive princess with Akio trying to become her prince.

Each duel is preceded by a long sequence of ascending a massive spiral staircase to the dueling arena, Utena's clothing endowed with finery that bestows a regal attitude upon her, completing the look with spaulders for the shoulders and frills. After briefly talking with that duel's opponent, the chest of both duelists is adorned with a rose by Anthy, colored differently depending on the character. Utena summons a sword, pulling it out of Anthy's chest as she shouts "Grant me the power to revolutionize the world!"⁷⁰. Part way through the duel a transparent image of the Prince from Utena's past descends from the inverted castle above and grants her the power to win the duel.

In the latter stage of the series this sequence has a few minor changes. Rather than climbing stairs to the arena Utena and Anthy ride an elevator up together. Anthy's body disappears, leaving her school uniform on the ground before she reappears in her Rose Bride

⁶⁹ "Episode 38 (Sub): End of the World," 5:20.

⁷⁰ "Episode 2 (Sub) For Whom the Rose Smiles," 17:54.

outfit. The clothing is left on the ground before a rose bush grows through it, from a bud to fully bloomed. Utena and Anthy summon the sword together now, and rather than receive help from the prince Utena relies on Anthy to help her pull through in particularly difficult matches.

Catherine Bailey notes that this change in particular “signals the generativity of the relationship between the two women—a relationship that proves to be the strongest and most intimate out of the entire series.”⁷¹ Here, Bailey’s view illustrates how *Utena* flips the notion of the phallus on its head, re-designating generative power to a lesbian relationship. As Butler argues in “The Lesbian Phallus”⁷² that phallus is not limited to male possession and female being, Utena and Anthy’s relationship demonstrates how the power of the phallus can be wielded by women.

This study will approach three representative duels from the series in order to understand its usage of this framework. Utena and Tōga’s duel at the end of the student council arc, Utena and Juri’s duel from the Akio arc, and Akio and Utena’s final duel in the Apocalypse arc.

UTENA AND TŌGA

Utena and Tōga’s second duel takes place at the end of the student council arc and serves as a turning point in Utena’s acceptance of her role as Anthy’s protector. After losing a duel previously to Tōga, Utena finds herself without direction, unable to perform her role as a ‘prince’ for Anthy. She even comes to school wearing the standard female uniform rather than her signature masculine one. After restoring her confidence, she challenges Tōga anew and they fight in the dueling arena. This duel reveals a previously unknown ability, after being dominated by Utena for the first half of the battle Tōga commands Anthy to kneel and place her lips at his sword. This bodily performance clearly mimes fellatio, revealing the extent to which male

⁷¹ Bailey, “Prince Charming” .213.

⁷² Butler, “The Lesbian Phallus” 88.

dominant ideology rules the duels. It is through Anthy's complete submission to her fiancé that the sword is empowered. Not only does the scene put on display the extremes to which Anthy is willing to enact her role as the subservient Rose Bride, but also gives Utena an understanding of the dominance of the ideology under which Anthy operates. From here Utena is renewed with confidence in taking on the role of prince and defeats Tōga, operating within the system oppressing Anthy in order to protect her from it.

This fight reveals some of the more prevalent ideas of the series. The power granted by the sword at Anthy's submission and Utena's triumph due to her resistance of expected norms in particular serve as the crux of these messages. This duel contrasts Utena and Anthy in their response to the system of expectations placed on them as women, as represented by Tōga. Presented as a popular playboy and highly ambitious, Tōga is the series' first male character presented that comfortably lives within the patriarchal power dynamics in the school. In a sense, his character is an over exaggeration of the 'school prince' popular boy romantic interest trope common to shōjo manga and comes to represent the pressure of normative expectations in the early parts of the series. Despite fulfilling a typical 'prince' archetype, the show portrays him as decidedly misogynistic; a playboy who wants to push Utena into a similar state of submission as Anthy.

Furthermore, in this duel, and throughout much of the series, Anthy is portrayed as exceedingly obedient, acting within expectations of feminine submissiveness. As the Rose Bride, her engagement changes depending upon the victor of the duels, and she follows through on these results fully. Anthy normally speaks to her fiancé using the honorific suffix *-sama* rather than the typical formal *-san*, a practice made clear upon her immediate switch in language when talking to Utena after losing the first duel against Tōga. Anthy is shown as the character most

accepting of the expectations placed on her, always acting with absolute submission to them. In the early parts of the series this submission is reinforced time and time again, she would hardly do anything without the express permission of her engaged to the point of saying she will only make more friends only if Utena wishes it. Anthy's submissiveness is taken to the extreme when she is asked by Tōga to put her lips to his sword, mirroring fellatio. This act not only reinforces Anthy's submissiveness, but also shows how within the series of duels, this female submission is looked upon favorably. Obedience, especially as shown by Anthy, empowers the duelist, allowing them a greater chance to win the fight.

Utena, on the other hand, is shown to represent the opposite end of the spectrum, her gender performance in direct opposition to normative expectations. In this duel, Utena comes to grips with herself, striving to protect Anthy and follow her own ideals of strength and nobility once again. Her determination opens Anthy's eyes, reminding her of the prince, (her brother) when he was still pure. Broken sword in hand, Utena takes advantage of an opening and defeats Tōga, resuming her place as engaged to the Rose Bride.

UTENA AND ARISUGAWA JURI

Arisugawa Juri, one of the members of the student council, serves as a foil to Utena in ways, not only in how she is dressed in the more masculine student council uniform, but also as another character suffering under the expectations of normative sexuality. In Juri's duel in the Student Council arc she is revealed to be in love with her friend Shiori, another girl.⁷³ In the Black Rose arc Shiori reveals her own complicated feelings towards Juri, admiring her strength to the point of jealousy⁷⁴. Shiori developed a complex around Juri's strength, feeling pathetic for

⁷³ "Episode 7 (Sub): Unfulfilled Jury"

⁷⁴ "Episode 17 (Sub): The Thorns of Death" 12:30

always being treated nicely by her. In her twisted logic Shiori acts to compete with Juri romantically, dating an upperclassman that she assumed Juri was in love with. During this episode however, Shiori discovers Juri's love of her, and becomes intoxicated with that power, feeling that she had finally defeated Juri saying, "But now, now she and I are equal! No, I've beaten her! I'm the one who's always been in her heart! I've beaten her in the end!"⁷⁵ Shiori's complicated feelings towards Juri demonstrate in part how the heteronormative expectations of the school do not equip adolescents to process orientations outside of that schema. Shiori reacts violently, afraid of the implications of Juri's attraction to her, and is manipulated to fight Utena.

In the Akio arc, an upperclassman named Ruka, the fencing club captain before Juri, returns to the school and duels Utena alongside Shiori.⁷⁶ Shiori thinks that she is expressing power over Juri by entering into a relationship with Ruka, but in reality, he is the deceiver, knowing of Shiori's goals from the beginning. They are defeated, but Ruka convinces Juri to fight with him in the next episode⁷⁷, and after being taken for a ride by Akio, Juri decides to accept, hoping to free Shiori from Ruka.

For the most part the duel proceeds as usual, but rather ending with Utena striking the flower from Juri's chest, it ends with Utena striking her locket, one that contains a picture of Shiori. As the locket falls, it begins to rain, and Juri gasps for air, as though Utena had struck her heart or a lung. Juri drops her flower on the ground and forfeits the duel, and Ruka tries to confront her. Ruka himself loved Juri, and was unable to properly express that to her.

Juri, as the only duelist Utena faces with explicit homosexual desires, is also the only duelist to lose by having something other than the flower on her chest struck. As mentioned

⁷⁵ Ibid, 13:00

⁷⁶ "Episode 28 (Sub) Whispers in the Dark"

⁷⁷ "Episode 29 Azure Paler than the Sky"

before, a duel is lost when the flower is struck from a duelists' chest, signifying the emasculation of the duelist through the penetration of a labial form (the flower) by a phallic one (the sword). Juri's loss when her locket is struck, however, shows that *Utena*'s symbolism can be flexible. As Juri staggers forwards after losing her locket, barely standing, it becomes clear that her motivation to fight was never to defeat Utena, but only to protect Shiori from Ruka. Juri knows and internalizes this, and having lost makes her realize that conforming to normative expectations to protect her loved one was pointless in of itself. The rain falls, emphatically emphasizing the tragedy of Juri's loss.

UTENA AND AKIO

In the final arc of the series, Utena is invited to back to the dueling arena where she meets Akio, who reveals himself both as the eponymous End of the World, as well as the prince that saved Utena as a child. She is



FIGURE 8: AKIO PULLS THE SWORD FROM UTENA'S CHEST, MAKING HER INTO A PRINCESS

given a pink dress (Figure 8)⁷⁸, closely mirroring that of Anthy's, and Akio claims that all that is left is for them to live happily ever after, a la fairy tale conventions. Anthy, however, is to continue to serve as the Rose Bride for eternity. Utena takes back the sword and begins to duel Akio, her dress dissolving away to her typical uniform, once again princely. She pushes Akio back and the inverted castle begins to crumble apart, Akio visibly unsettled. He pushes Anthy towards Utena, dodging a blow, and she moves to protect her. Anthy stabs her in the back and the episode ends⁷⁹.

⁷⁸ Episode 38 (Sub): "The End of the World" 5:30.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

The ending of *Utena*⁸⁰ has received some of the most scholarship of the entire series, and for good reason. Anthy's betrayal, and Utena's reaction to that betrayal are the two moments that the series had been working toward since the beginning, as Utena's misguided attempts to protect Anthy come to the forefront. Susan Napier argues that Utena's ending is ultimately dark and depressing, with Utena's failure serving as a galvanizing force for Anthy at best.⁸¹ Was Utena's failure really that simple? Anthy stabs Utena in frustration, in betrayal that she aspires to assume the very same masculine ideal that kept her shackled in the first place. If Utena was a prince, she was no different than Akio, assuming not only all of the responsibility but also the agency of being able to save oneself. Anthy stabs Utena in revenge, hoping to grant her some understanding of what she had gone through herself.

At this point, Utena does finally realize her misguided aspirations and crawls her way to the rose gate where the real Anthy is imprisoned. She reaches the gate and manages to open it, something Akio was never able to. As she reaches out, Anthy and her hands touch briefly before Anthy falls into the abyss below, Utena crying "Forgive me Himemiya, for pretending to be a prince". Finally, Utena takes on the swords of hatred that had previously been pointed at Anthy, and the scene cuts away, leaving the image of Utena's suffering to the viewer's imagination. After a time skip it is revealed that Utena has left the school, and Anthy, now able to assert her own agency, leaves the grounds of the school in search of Utena. Utena's efforts did succeed, by taking on the swords of hatred thrown at Anthy she not only frees herself from reinforcing the roles feminine submissiveness in exchange for masculine protection, but also frees Anthy from

⁸⁰ "Episode 39 (Sub): And Someday Together We'll Shine"

⁸¹ Napier, "Now You See Her," 174.

the role of the rose bride, allowing her the ability to leave the school. As Anthy says to Akio before leaving, “You really don’t know what has happened, do you?”.

CARS, ADULTHOOD, AND SEXUALITY

Utena also uses symbolism in expressing a depiction of adult sexuality, using the imagery of cars as a symbol of both adult freedom and mature sexuality. During the third arc of the series Akio is revealed to be the hand behind the various duels taking place throughout the series, as well as the prince that saved Utena as a young girl. In the first arc, duels took place due to characters coming into conflict with their desires, in the second duels were fought by those who were ‘not chosen’, most often expressed in one sided loves. The third arc shows duels of characters who want to become adults, showing the struggles between their aspirations and their reality. Akio sees these desires and uses them to manipulate the various characters, presenting them with a version of adulthood defined by a male dominant sexuality, one where the masculine favor of ‘saving’ engenders the feminine response of ‘submission’. In each of these duels, the repetitive sequence that leads into the duels involves Akio driving the dueling couple outside of the school grounds. Similar to the duel sequences, this process takes form in a ritualized form, with Tōga inviting the duelist to join Akio in the car.

“There, can you hear it... If your soul has not truly given up, then you can hear the sound, that races through the End of the World. Come! Come with us! To the world which you seek!”⁸²

The scene always takes place in the darkness of night, with a jazzy track in the background, evoking the unknown adult world. Characters discuss their desires in the car as Akio drives, the sound of the engine always present, with various cuts to close ups on car parts

⁸² “Episode 25 (Sub): Their Eternal Apocalypse,” 10:00

(gear shift, exhaust pipe, wheels) to constantly remind the viewer of the setting. The scene always ends with Akio letting go of the wheel, flipping over the windshield and sitting on the hood of the car, shirt open as the car drives straight on into the frame.

Using a psychoanalytic framework these scenes can be broken down into moments of Akio offering the couple access to adulthood. Constant focus on the car in particular emphasizes it as a vehicle of not only adulthood, but also sexuality. Reminiscent of *Kustom Kar Kommandos* (1970, Anger), *Utena's* portrayal of cars is distinctly sexualized, the very experience of riding being highly sensualized. Unlike *Kustom Kar Kommandos*, however, cars are coded as an icon of mature masculinity, rather than possessed, and perhaps fetishized, femininity. The car represents an extension of Akio's mature masculine body, which viewers witness in his complete control of the vehicle in every shot. The focus of the cuts away from the characters lands on phallic components of the car itself such as the gear shift. The car is also presented as a sexualized space, characters stretching their body over the reclining chair, clothing unbuttoning more and more revealing their bodies, and moans escape against the car's rough vibrations.

Cars, and in turn this male dominant sexuality, is also portrayed as reckless, each duel during the Akio arc ending with the car crashing in the arena after Utena has bested her foe. The repetitive appearance of the cars in the latter half of the series reinforces the pressure to become an adult, and to do so towards a specific ideal of adulthood. This picture of adulthood however is hyper masculine, hypersexualized, and importantly excludes women with agency, their role to only sit in the passenger seat, sexually available. This is demonstrated in the scene where Miki is convinced by his sister Kaoru to fight Utena once more. Riding in the car, Kaoru drops the necktie of her uniform which covers Miki's eyes. Here Miki is presented an imaginary scene of him driving the car, having become 'active' in relation to Anthy (who he has a crush on) laying

on her side, gazing seductively into his eyes.⁸³ This small vignette positions the car as a *vehicle* for a masculine adulthood and sexuality, with the *driver* as the active male and the *passenger* as the passive female.

Episode 33, “The Prince Who Runs Through The Night”, ends with the most direct depiction of sexual intercourse within the entire series⁸⁴ as Akio rapes Utena. The episode is



structured similarly to other recap episodes throughout the series that occur between arcs, a common tactic to extend a small production budget. This episode in particular crosscuts between two first person views, the first looking at Utena in a hotel room and the second looking at Akio driving through the

FIGURE 9: UTENA AND AKIO'S HANDS INTERLACED

night. Driving, Akio calls into a radio talk show, answering questions that lead in to edited clips of previous episodes. Utena on the other hand, is shown talking aimlessly to the unseen observer in the hotel room, uncharacteristically wearing a tight striped dress while she performs her nervous habit of stretching. This goes back and forth until a nearly 100 second close up long take of Utena lying in bed, hair splayed about. She continues to talk aimlessly, about the day, about Anthy, about making lunch, all the while nervously shifting her eyes back and forth breaking, establishing, breaking and establishing again a vacillating eye contact with the camera. Finally she looks to the camera and asks “what is eternity”, the shot fades to black, a quick cut shows the road, with the Japanese word for ‘stop’ 「止マレ」 endlessly passing by, and finally a quick

⁸³ “Episode 26 (Sub): Miki’s Nest Box” 14:14

⁸⁴ “Episode 33 (Sub): The Prince Who Runs Through The Night,” 18:03

fade to her hands interlaced with those of Akio's, tangled in the sheets of the hotel bed (Figure 9)⁸⁵. Akio is shown driving home in his car, talking on the phone to Anthy. The camera finally shows a reverse shot, revealing that Utena has been there all along. In this shot Utena's design is shown to have changed significantly, her features are much sharper, her eyes are smaller, and she wears a fashionable striped dress giving her a much more mature look. Her identity has undergone a change of some sort, throwing her into a state of confusion. This scene matches prior representations of the sexual power dynamics within the car, and Akio is positioned as the active driver, rather than a chaperone, for the first time.

HIMEMIYA AND AKIO

One of the last car scenes of the series leading up to the finale involves only Anthy and Akio, and is then presented as a violent act of intercourse, a metaphorical rape demonstrating the horrifying nature behind the siblings' relationship. Akio drives with both hands on the wheel, wearing a furious expression on his face while Anthy sits with her back arched, releasing a pained moan. "Does it hurt Anthy? Well, I'm not the one causing it. It's the world!"⁸⁶ Followed by a cut showing Anthy as stabbed by hundreds of swords as she was on the rose crest. This simultaneously references the hatred of the world that Anthy is revealed to have taken on by saving Akio. Their relationship was first called into question during in the beginning of the Black Rose arc, as Kanae, Akio's fiancé, becomes increasingly jealous of Anthy, becoming the first corrupted duelist⁸⁷. While the accusations seem unfounded during the episode, the last few moments before the end credits roll completely turn this idea on its head. Leaving the dorm,

⁸⁵ Ibid, 20:00.

⁸⁶ "Episode 37 (Sub): The One to Revolutionize the World," 16:45

⁸⁷ "Episode 14 (Sub): The Boys of the Black Rose"

Anthy tells Utena that she is going to visit her brother in his office, a habit she was revealed to do weekly earlier in the same episode. After an establishing shot of the chairman's tower in the rain, Anthy enters her brother's room. He sits alone on a sofa, legs sprawled wide, shirt collar open and tie undone. Staring intently at her across the room, Akio watches Anthy slowly move towards him, and suddenly the curtains drop, shutting out what little light the night sky provided. The planetarium turns on as the frame pans up, focusing on the stars. "It's been a week. Did you miss me?"⁸⁸ whispers Akio, and the music plays ominously as it fades to black. Here, the first hints of Akio and Anthy's sexual relationship is revealed, and while its presentation may be subtle here, it is made more and more clear as the series goes on, most notably when Nanami walks in on the two during her brief stay in the tower.

TŌGA AND SAIONJI

The buildup to the penultimate duel reveals much about Tōga's character and desires, both in regards to his love of Utena and admiration of Akio. Tōga can tell that Utena has become enamored with Akio, and with a mixture of envy and genuine concern he proposes an ultimatum, in the next duel between them if Utena wins the student council will never bother her and Anthy again, but if he wins Utena must become his woman⁸⁹. This aggressive approach to trying to date Utena proves to ultimately be off putting, however, and Utena becomes disgusted with him. The normative masculine sexuality that Tōga strives for is based on Akio's, which has been repeatedly shown to deprive women of their own agency. A scene from earlier in the episode shows Tōga bringing Utena to the arena at night, giving a straightforward confession of love and

⁸⁸ "Episode 14 (Sub): The Boys of the Black Rose" 20:55

⁸⁹ "Episode 36 (Sub): And Thus Opens the Doorway of Night," 9:00.

ultimately treating her as an equal. The scene shows how at times he is able to act genuinely, but ultimately his emulation of Akio's sexuality prevents him from getting through to Utena.

This emulation of Akio comes about in other scenes as well. Before he and Utena's final duel, Tōga drives a motorbike with Saionji riding in a passenger car, a humorous mockery of the car scenes with Akio from earlier. Tōga, in trying to distance himself from Akio in order to more directly compete for Utena's love, separates himself from the source of his perceived maturity. Until this point, he has had the backing of Akio and was able to enact his idea of sexuality, but on his own his attempts to embody that same sexuality are significantly hindered. Herein the audience is reminded, perhaps for the first time in the entire series, that Tōga too is just an adolescent, powerless here to obtain his desire through the means he was given by the normative institution. Saionji stands up dramatically, similar to how Akio acts in the car, but is told to sit down by Tōga. "Standing like that is dangerous."⁹⁰

This aspiration is mirrored in Tōga's attempts to take Utena on a date near the end of the series. In episode 35, 'The Love That Blossomed in the Wintertime', Tōga is ordered to give Utena a gift in Akio's name, "I want you to buy her a present, it doesn't matter what, I'll let you decide what to get her". Tōga rebuffs "You don't know her very well, do you? She's no pushover for gifts. I once gave her a dress. She isn't the sort of girl who's plied with presents."⁹¹ Thinking that he knows Utena better than Akio, Tōga buys the gift for her, a pair of earrings, and delivers it to her while, somewhat curiously, carrying a carrot with him. Witnessing Utena's bashful surprise in receiving the gift, Tōga becomes concerned, realizing that he was wrong about Utena. His expectation of Utena to reject the gift proven wrong, he realizes that he knows

⁹⁰ Ibid, 6:00

⁹¹ "Episode 35 (Sub): The Love That Blossomed in the Wintertime," 8:10.

less about her than he might have thought. Clutching the carrot to his face, he asks for Utena to accompany him, saying he wants to ask her a question. His posture is uncharacteristically slouched forward, his typical confidence seemingly shattered. Crosscutting of a horse in gallop and their conversation transitions to the two riding together, connecting the purpose of the carrot hinting at his purpose from the beginning. Tōga is revealed to have used the pretense of wanting to ask Utena something to take her on a date, riding a horse as an attempt towards fulfillment of Utena's obsession with the prince of her youth. However Tōga's riding is too rough; Utena falls off the horse and is saved by Akio, ruining Tōga's efforts and reinforcing Akio's princely image to Utena. Tōga's mimicking of Akio's masculinity only serve to push him away from Utena, his ideology rooted in masculine dominance. As much as Utena's activeness is incompatible with the system put forward by the school, Tōga's attraction to Utena, and the style of his attempts to woo her, are incompatible with her. It Tōga's alignment with the normative ideology of the school that allowed him to thrive with other girls that proves to be his downfall with Utena. Where Akio attempts to actively change Utena into a princess to fit into his schema of sexuality, Tōga instead tries to make her love him within the male centric ideology that he knows while not changing her at all. The two ideals clash, and Tōga is helpless.

Revolutionary Girl Utena's portrayal of sexuality through heavy usage of symbolism shows how the normative expectations of sexuality, as advanced by Akio, only stymie adolescent change. The duels system of symbolism reveals conflicts of power based in the submission of the rose bride herself and Utena's aspirations of being a prince who can protect her are revealed to be rooted in the same ideas. Akio's presentation of a hypersexualized masculinity as adulthood only causes suffering and confusion for Utena, and has Tōga and Saionji striving for an ideal that only distances them from their goals. These normative expectations, as well as others throughout

the series hold characters back, cause them undue suffering and pain, and keep them from growing up.

THE END OF THE WORLD

While *Revolutionary Girl Utena* employs heavy usage of abstract symbolism, complex narratives, and mature content, its unrelenting commitment to telling the powerful story of Utena and Anthy's struggles under and eventual escape from the normative expectations placed upon them.

The construction of the school as not only the vehicle for the very ideology that Anthy and Utena would struggle under, but also as the very space of adolescence; a garden and a birdcage, all serve to constrain and indoctrinate the cast into the mold of normative identities. Even the adult world presented to the characters is curated through the lens of Akio, the chairman of the school and primary figure of authority in the school.

Revolutionary Girl Utena's complex approach to gender simultaneously works to present traditionally masculine modes of presentation, namely the idea of becoming a Prince, as achievable by non-male identities, while subsequently criticizing those very modes of expression as lacking a holistic perspective, inherently privileging one actor over another.

Despite initially broadcasting over 20 years ago, *Revolutionary Girl Utena* still holds importance in today's world. While much progress has been made in the United States in regards to gender, sexuality, and romantic minority (GSRM) groups, the pressures of normative expressions of identity continue. Despite its binary construction of gender, despite its inaccessibility at times due to high handed symbolism and metaphor, despite its problematic representation of characters of color, the series tells a story of rebelling against forces that try to control what people feel and how they express, and understand, themselves; a story that will continue to resonate long into the future.

Regardless, much is left to be done in the space of understanding depictions of female adolescence in anime. While *Utena* as a text is revealing on its own, wider studies of modern *shōjo* series, as well as those in adjacent genres is necessary as the globalizing influence of simulcast services such as Crunchyroll and Funimation, as well as Netflix and Amazon Prime's recent forays into the anime space continue to bring the medium in new directions. Anime that represent more and more complex depictions of gender and sexuality, either directly addressing the issues such as in *Hourou Musuko* [Wandering Son] (2006) or purposely avoiding them as in *Houseki no Kuni* [Land of the Lustrous] (2017) warrant the focus of further studies. Regardless, I expect *Revolutionary Girl Utena* to remain a force to be reckoned with, as a series that was, in of itself, revolutionary.

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