Subverting Feminine Identity: Reinvention of *Sailor Moon*'s Girl Power in *Violet Evergarden*

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Abstract

During the 1990s, *Sailor Moon* and the Girl Power movement came face to face with young girls worldwide. As an anime based on the shōjo manga *Sailor Moon*, the adaptation set a precedent for heroic feminism within the male-dominant industry. In modern Japanese literature—namely light novels—we encounter other female heroines who reinvent the notion of Girl Power by challenging the weaponized femininity presented in Victoria Newsom and Joanette Quenby's work around the reclamation of the girlish and alternative gender identities. Moreover, as a new form of fiction, light novels challenge older forms of Japanese literature—mostly manga—which continue to subvert the dissemination of this Girl Power. Consequently, this article further develops the idea that the modern anime *Violet Evergarden*, based on a light novel of the same name, reinvents *Sailor Moon*'s Girl Power through the modern form of Japanese literature and the titular protagonist's otherworldly presence within a liminal space. Magical girl anime typically limits itself to the socially constructed masculine heroism that Violet reinvents through her newfound strength and subversion of the feminine.

Keywords

manga, Girl Power, anime, magical girl, shōjo, light novel

Résumé

Au cours des années 90s, les jeunes filles autour du monde ont découvert *Sailor Moon* et le mouvement « Girl Power ». Basé sur le shōjo manga *Sailor Moon*, l'adaptation filmique a fixé un précompte de l'héroïsme féministe au cadre d'une industrie à prédominance masculine. Au sein de la littérature moderne Japonaise—en particulier le *light novel*—nous rencontrons d'autres héroïnes qui réinventent la notion de « Girl Power » en stimulant la féminité militarisée selon les recherches de Victoria Newsom et de Joanette Quenby en ce qui concerne la revendication de l'identité féminine (« the girlish ») et des identités de genre alternatives. De plus, en tant que nouvelle forme littéraire, les *light novels* défient les formes plus anciennes de littérature japonaise—principalement le manga—et continuent à subvertir la diffusion du mouvement « Girl Power ». Par conséquent, cet article développe davantage l'idée que l'anime moderne *Violet Evergarden*, basé sur le *light novel* du même nom, réinvente le « Girl Power » de *Sailor Moon* à travers la forme moderne de la littérature japonaise et l'existence du protagoniste titulaire fantastique dans un espace liminal. L'anime du genre *magical girl* se limite généralement à l'héroïsme masculin socialement construit que Violet réinvente par sa force et sa subversion du féminin.

Mots-clés

manga, Girl Power, anime, magical girl, shōjo, light novel

Many girls—including me—grew up watching (or reading) magical girl anime. *Sailor Moon* by Junichi Sato from 1992, based on the manga *Sailor Moon* by Naoko Takeuchi, is one of them. We idealized the Girl Power that the titular protagonist, Usagi Tsukino (Sailor Moon), put forth through her perseverance, resilience, friendships, and love. Nowadays, we encounter remakes of other magical girl favourites, such as *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* (2018) from the 1985 original American animation *She-Ra: Princess of Power*, or *Powerpuff Girls Z* (2006), from the original 1998 *The Powerpuff Girls*.[21] In addition to these magical girl genres, we come across other powerful heroines that subvert our standard view of Girl Power in anime—namely, the 2018 anime *Violet Evergarden* by Taichi Ishidate, based on the Japanese light novel written by Kana Akatsuki and illustrated by Akiko Takase. Violet challenges our notions of heroism and Girl Power. Within Girl Power scholarship, Victoria Newsom focuses on how the concept, within *Sailor Moon*, empowers the young female body after the hero's critical transformation. Moreover, Joanette Quenby believes that Girl Power challenges gender identities within North American heteronormative society. By contrast, my approach reinvents Girl Power because I focus more broadly on a subject—Violet Evergarden—which shifts the female hero's narrative. Violet exemplifies an otherworldliness and almost god-like development beyond the Girl Power realm, or even the limitations of the young female (or girlish) body as her metamorphosis takes place after her time as a hero. While the titular heroine of *Violet Evergarden* appears to follow the narrative of Girl Power, I will argue that Violet's otherworldliness is, in reality, a reinvention of the 1990s Girl Power figure from the magical girl anime *Sailor Moon*.

[21] Other shows of the magical girl genre are *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (1997), *Tokyo Mew Mew* (2002), *Magical Girl Lyrical Nanoha* (2004), and the *PrettyCure* franchise (2004).

My paper will begin with a historical background of manga, light novels, and anime within Japanese society and culture. I will define Girl Power in the world of shōjo and magical girl anime and its importance within the *Sailor Moon* adaptation. Consequently, I will apply this reinvention of Girl Power onto *Violet Evergarden* through the different challenges to femininity, their similar yet contrasting physical appearances, their transformations into heroes in a liminal space, as well as their relationships with others and how they indicate the confines of a young girl's body.

Defining the Terms: Manga, Light Novels, and Anime

Manga, or commonly referred to as Japanese comics or comic art, has been a part of the country's history and culture for centuries. Kinko Ito states how it is closely connected to their "politics, economy, family, religion, and gender" (26). Their influence, reflecting both Japanese society's realities and fantasies, shapes what has become of their nation today. Throughout our globalized times, manga—along with Japanese light novels and their adaptations into anime—have penetrated North American media, though to a much lesser extent in Canada than in the United States. Blockbuster anime shows like *Astro Boy* (1963) and *Speed Racer* (1966) paved the way during the 1960s, but Dragon *Ball Z* (1989), *Sailor Moon* (1992), *Pokémon* (1997), *Hunter x Hunter* (1999), *Naruto* (2002)—with some shows that still run today, or have been readapted due to high demand—reign in this category. As a result, Japan and the U.S. have become the two biggest consumers of manga and anime. Beáta Pusztai states that "[w]hat makes manga so attractive in [their] eyes … is the generic and thematic diversity of products – as opposed to their American and most European counterparts, Japanese comics are targeting readers from all age groups, males and females alike" (144). These demographics are essential to define manga, such as the two main genres we encounter—shōjo and sōnen.

Shōjo manga are girls' comics. They are commercial genres marketed to female audiences and adhere to a character type that appear in entertaining graphic narratives or non-narrative games and campaigns—emulating the cute adolescent girl, according to Jaqueline Berndt et al. (1). Sōnen, originally meaning 'children,' means 'boys' today (Takahashi 115). Mizuki Takahashi further explains that shōjo "refers to a socially conservative gender role that owes its origin to the formative phase of the educational system in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (116). More specifically, this transformation, from 1887, is "[k]nown as the *chūtōgakkō rei* (the junior high school law) … [which] sacrificed girls' education in [favour] of boys'" (Takahashi 116). Consequently, as girls were expected to become domestics, wives, housekeepers, and child-bearers, they often did not possess an advanced education compared to boys. This aspect of Japanese history strongly influenced girls' representation, and even women's eventually, because they all had the same roles. Manga, anime, and, finally, light novels created a male-dominant space within this Japanese industry until *Sailor Moon* challenged the norm of male heroism. The hegemonic masculine discourse, or even the heteronormative narrative, depicts a shift in female representation, especially when introducing *mahō shōjo* (magical girls) into both the manga and anime world.

As a manga and anime, *Sailor Moon* falls into the magical girls' category because of Takeuchi's powerful female-dominant world around Usagi. Magda Erik-Soussi states that "[e]ven with a majority-male animation staff and the modification eventually made for a Western audience, *Sailor Moon* still [channelled] … women writing emotive, dramatic, unapologetically feminine fantasy works for other women" (24). However, although these works are under a socially constructed understanding of the feminine, magical girls are "often dedicated to [subverting the patriarchal system entirely], primarily associating superpowers with being or

becoming feminine" (Erik-Soussi 28). They equally disrupt their gender roles because Usagi, along with her friends and fellow Sailor Guardians, occupies traditionally male-dominant spaces like educational institutions, the job market, arcades, and the public sphere at large. Women often found themselves in private spaces, primarily the home, so their subversion of this facet of femininity already presented a challenge to society and gender performativity. *Violet Evergarden*, both through literature and character, solely continues to disrupt these spaces in a contemporary manner.

Along with Usagi challenging social norms comes the portrayal of Violet Evergarden, further altering one's outlook on girls, or shōjo, in Japanese culture, society, and even literature as we find ourselves in the newer realm of Japanese light novels. In the 1980s, according to Satomi Saito, while modern media enjoyed the "prosperity in the global market, a return to paper media has also been observed in Japan at the same time … [t]hese paper media, closely tied to anime, manga, and larger media franchises, are widely called 'light novels' (*raitonoberu* or *ranobe*)" (315). They are small narratives with occasional illustrations; however, they are not considered graphic novels. Moreover, light novels went viral "among [adolescents] [and] young adult audiences as an extension of or even a substitute for anime and manga" (315). Rósa Björk Blöndal highlights that there are also "novelizations [of] anime or manga with a few illustrations by the original *mangaka* [manga artist]" (22). Kamikita Keita, who coined the term light novels, made the "conscious decision to avoid already established terms in the publishing industry such as 'juvenile,' 'young adult,' or 'teen's novel' [which] shows his keen observation of a gradual shift in Japan's entertainment market in the 1990s" (qtd. in Saito 317). In this way, *Violet Evergarden* challenges society both within a modern subgenre of Japanese literature and her characterization. Violet's existence, in contrast to Usagi, poses a challenge to the question of

feminine life and women's agency because they put forth different narratives. While Usagi knows, with age, how her entire life will unfold and the role she performs within the feminine or somewhat subverted feminine role, Violet must define this aspect of her life because her unconventional upbringing within the army and consequent removal destabilizes her identity and her performance within society. I will later touch on the significance of their characterizations more with the Girl Power trope's reinvention from Usagi's journey onto Violet's life within their respective anime shows.

Finally, anime—forged by Osamu Tezuka approximately before World War II—refers to Japanese animation. It has quickly become one of Japan's most prominent emblems. Manuel Hernández-Pérez believes "[a]nime is defined in relation to other Japanese national branding components such as manga, J-Pop [Japanese pop music] or sushi" (4). It is most common that "[t]he stylistic characteristics that define anime, including its serial character and its visual style, find their origin in adaptations inspired by the original manga" (6) and light novels. Therefore, Takeuchi and Akatsuki's respective creations of Usagi and Violet as the titular protagonists play integral roles in defining their anime as dominant female figures within a male-dominant industry. They create a space for girls and set the precedent of their Girl Power. What truly makes anime a treasure for its viewers—often initially readers of shōjo manga and light novels—is how they adapt it from the original version. These adaptations make or break the cinematic experience. We look to the directors, namely Sato and Ishidate, and their storytelling methods to understand their works, especially in a globalized manner, for their notable depiction of Girl Power.

The adaptation process of *Violet Evergarden* in juxtaposition with *Sailor Moon* is a critical aspect of the reinvention of Girl Power as we enter from one century into the next, with

more than twenty years between these two shows. Mark W. MacWilliams posits that Japanese literature and anime "share a mixed or hybrid nature … [because] they both blend the visual and the verbal into a unified whole, manga [and light novels] via a synthesis of text and images and anime through dialogue in cinematic live action" (6). Anime's cinematography has inevitably improved, but more importantly, the new technology has emphasized and adjusted the exaggerated Westernized feminization of women and girls in these original works.

In *A Theory of Adaptation,* Linda Hutcheon considers how "contexts of creation and reception are material, public and economic as much as they are cultural, personal, and aesthetic" (28). In this way, although two Japanese women wrote both *Sailor Moon* and *Violet Evergarden,* their anime's creation matches North American cultural aesthetics more than the traditional East Asian materialization because their viewership derives from inside and outside Japan and Asia at large. They cater to larger groups beyond their own societies—all ranging from East Asian and mainly North American girls (the general shōjo demographic) as well as boys and men of all ages—with the occasional hyper-sexualization of female characters. Additionally, their overall public reception—covering some of the world's biggest consumer countries—fuels more tremendous economic success with the creation of this Westernized aesthetic. Moreover, Hutcheon wisely mentions that "we react today, for instance, when a male director adapts a woman's novel" (28). This reality is true for both *Sailor Moon* and *Violet Evergarden* due to the imposed male gazes of their respective male directors, Sato and Ishidate. Therefore, as male adapters of female literary works, their final results significantly affect the audience's engagement, which is, once again, primarily young girls worldwide, though mainly in Japan and the U.S. These fans create a community that adapters need to nurture. Hutcheon believes that the latter must realize how "young women in particular need to be able to 'appropriate cultural

material to construct personal meaning' … [they] create imaginative worlds, complete with their own history, geography, people, and rules of [behaviour], and they inhabit these imaginatively" (116). These appropriations made the Girl Power movement of the 1990s crucial for decades to come in the shōjo world. The female-dominant concept enabled girls to define their own identity and sense of agency within this newfound femininity of *Sailor Moon* and now *Violet Evergarden* beyond society's patriarchal impositions and gendered objectification.

DEFINING AND REINVENTING GIRL POWER

Girl Power is an integral aspect of magical girls' manga, and anime—primarily *Sailor Moon*—and equally manifests itself within Violet Evergarden's narrative, even if it is solely presented as a light novel. Most definitions of Girl Power are within a North American context and mainly affect their young female demographic. On the one hand, Quenby claims that *Sailor Moon,* "as a 'girl-power' text, demonstrates alternative gender identities that were largely ignored in American popular culture texts during the early 1990s" (2). On the other hand, Newsom defines Girl Power primarily through the lens of third wave feminism as they align in the 1990s movement:

> [G]irl power [is] the ability for young women to achieve personal empowerment while maintaining a distinctly "girlish" style, in a U.S. context. In this context, "girlish" refers to a style of personal expression that both promotes and reclaims traditional feminine stereotypes, co-opting them as sites of empowerment, particularly personal empowerment. The personal empowerment of the Girl Power character is an ability to find both personal pleasure and success simultaneously. (57)

This concept is a direct response to the 1970s superheroines who worked within the patriarchal system. Girl Power represents how Sailor Moon and her fellow Guardians disrupt this status quo

and, as previously mentioned, occupy all spaces—both private and public—despite the limitations put forth by society. Both Takeuchi and Sato illustrate how the feminine body is the only one that can enact this power of personal pleasure and success as Sailor Moon's character transcends all of society's associations of empowerment with the masculine. Usagi and her friends become role models in their heroic journeys. However, the manifestation of their Girl Power equally takes form "without necessarily 'becoming' male" (Newsom 59) even if they occupy male-dominant spaces and appropriate the conventionally masculine notion of heroism. This appropriation of masculine performance takes place as Usagi makes herself a feminine space within the heroic masculinity in manga and anime and within patriarchal gender binaries at large.

Sato's adaptation emulates Sailor Moon's evolution of the girlish and reappropriates masculine elements within her performance to challenge patriarchal impositions of gender binaries and empower her femininity. Judith Butler's theory of performativity establishes that "[g]ender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (179, original emphasis). This performance is crucial as Usagi's repetition of girlish acts end up becoming her most potent weapon, subverting the masculine expectation of power. Both Takeuchi and Sato present these girlish tropes in the first volume and episode of the series. Usagi's character demonstrates that "[she] [is] a bit of a crybaby" (Takeuchi 9; Sato 02:34; Appendix A) and is often ditzy, like when she trips over a cat, Luna, tardily on her way to school (Takeuchi 10; Appendix B). However, she is an equally compassionate individual as she caresses Luna to make her feel better (Sato 03:04; Appendix C). Her hypersensitivity and caring demeanour make her the best candidate for a conventionally

feminine figure, and this performance of femininity remains the same throughout the entire first volume, in addition to the *Sailor Moon* adaptation's first episode (appropriately titled "The Crybaby: Usagi's Beautiful Transformation") and, more broadly, the entire season. Sato also presents Usagi's girlish performance, as it intersects with aspects of heroic masculinity, primarily when she fights evil. In the first episode, she must help her friend, Naru, when a villain takes over her mother's jewelry business. Usagi transforms into Sailor Moon—I will analyze her symbolic transformation later in juxtaposition to Violet—and begins to cry because she does not know how to fight evil yet (Sato 19:40; Appendix D). After some help from Tuxedo Mask, her male counterpart in the series, she wins the battle with her "Moon Tiara Action" (Sato 20:45; Appendix E). Consequently, Sailor Moon's performance establishes that Girl Power indeed does use femininity—in the shape of a crown—as a weapon. This weaponization of femininity within Girl Power, however, does not look the same for everyone.

Although Violet's character still ultimately seeks personal pleasure and success in her assigned duties, she reinvents Usagi's performance of Girl Power through a modernized depiction of her strength that manifests neither within feminine nor masculine spaces. Unconventionally, Violet does not fit in either of these spaces as she is an orphaned girl who is brought to a military base and is used as a 'weapon' or "tool" (Ishidate 11:57) for their army. She possesses quick, assassin-like skills, which make her too masculine and intimidating for men and not feminine enough for women, not even for the 'girlish' empowerment of Sailor Moon. This portrayal is not the typical premise of shōjo or even magical girls. However, Violet's power stems from her implied otherworldliness that transcends gender binaries even more than Sailor Moon. In contrast to Usagi's journey, who overcomes evil with the help of intimate relationships and femininity, Violet's otherworldliness puts forth her existential challenge to find a space for

herself in society. She wishes to define her own gender and performance notions once she is no longer needed in the army. This reinvention is critical to Violet's Girl Power because she subverts the process of being girlish and adopting heroic masculinity to already being an otherworldly hero and developing an understanding of her powerful presence. Violet "spent [her] life fulfilling [her] duties" (Ishidate 17:55) as a soldier in the Leidenschaftlich Army during a fictional war, but she can now define her own identity and sense of agency. Within the light novel and anime adaptation, Akatsuki and Ishidate go on to demonstrate how Violet's otherworldly portrayal of Girl Power compares to Usagi's exuberant Girl Power. This in-depth analysis will compare Usagi and Violet's appearances and the projection of their emotion concerning the use of colour within their respective adaptations.

WESTERN FEMINIZATION

Side by side, the only glaring difference between Usagi and Violet is the quality of their adaptations (Sato 17:16; Ishidate 13:55; Appendix F). They are both blondes, with large, round, captivating blue eyes and fair skin. Fusami Ōgi et al. state that during this time in the 1990s, it had been a few decades that "the term *kawaii* (cute) became prevalent in Japanese girls' culture" (100). The *kawaii* images were predominantly of European girls who looked like princesses and used excessive amounts of pink or other hyperfeminine colours. It brought an entire aesthetic movement to Japan with the Lolita fashion found throughout anime and manga, and even more prominently in cosplay.[22] However, the argument has been made by many that Japanese literature "written by and for women, created a style erasing … Japaneseness and replaced them

[22] See Mari Kotani and Thomas LaMarre. The term cosplay is an abbreviation of "costume play," which has become a blanket term that refers to dressing up or wearing disguises. Cosplay sometimes refers more specifically to dressing up as manga or anime characters in the context of conventions and fairs, although it frequently extends far beyond those contexts into daily practices.

with feminine, beautiful Westernized images" (100). More specifically, Akatsuki's portrayal of Violet matches this theme:

> [B]londe, blue-eyed woman who possessed a beauty that seemed to have come straight out of a fairytale answered in monotone, without putting on a fake smile. The woman named Violet Evergarden was a figure as reticent and charming as an ordinary doll. Her blue irises, partially covered by golden locks, shone like the ocean, with cherry blossom pink-tinted cheeks over milky-white skin and glossy, lustrous rouge lips. (8-9)

In this way, Violet "represents a type of fantastic 'otherness'" (Newsom 65), which is emphasized by her Western appearance in relation to her heroism, or instead her reinvented Girl Power. One can say the same about Sailor Moon, but she has a fellow Guardian, Minako, who looks like her—blonde and blue-eyed—so there is no uniqueness in Sailor Moon's appearance that way. There is no one else in *Violet Evergarden* that looks like Violet, which highlights the importance of her characterization. If Violet looked like everyone else—the same way Usagi looks like Minako—her Otherness would be meaningless. Ishidate's adaptation of Violet equally comes into play when discussing how colour challenges the notion of Girl Power, feminization, and *kawaii*.

Ishidate presents Violet in a colour scheme that virtually rejects Girl Power and the girlish appearance it exudes. Although her eyes glow like in every shōjo anime, the rest of her appearance does not match this brightness. Her clothes do not possess a bright colour scheme to match Usagi either. They are lifeless (Ishidate 10:01; Appendix G), except for her shiny emerald brooch, which was a gift from her Major during the war (Ishidate 00:41; Appendix H). Violet does, however, match one aspect of *kawaii* through her clothes—the Lolita aesthetic. She traditionally wears a long, layered, predominantly white dress that exemplifies her otherworldly

appearance. Her skin is like porcelain, which, as previously mentioned, emulates a doll. According to Theresa Winge, this doll image, "through the use of *kawaii* objects, … [embodies] and visually communicate[s] much more than "cute" or "feminine/cute"; they also represent a desire for empathy … within the understood and hierarchical power structure" (59). There is a specific rejection of the infantilization in this way. While Sato uses bright yellow for Usagi's hair and cobalt blue for her eyes, these colours put forth women's infantilization to keep Girl Power only within the specific young female body. Even the colour pink is found everywhere throughout *Sailor Moon,* so the *kawaii* aesthetic powerfully penetrates this image in addition to their Western feminization. Therefore, Ishidate's adaptation of Violet Evergarden challenges this theme of shōjo and the girlish. Antonio Horno-López claims that colours are not used by chance, "and that there is an important colour relationship with a high level of connotative and symbolic meaning" (46). This element is crucial to differentiate the magical girl within *Sailor Moon,* in contrast to the neutral or even morose colour scheme of *Violet Evergarden*'s anime, which continues to reinvent Girl Power. Violet's otherworldliness, through appearance and colour, inherently creates a distance between her and the rest of the world.

Within this distance, she finds herself in a liminal space that intensifies her ethereal presence in society.[23] This liminality equally reinvents an aspect of Girl Power because it removes the duality of Usagi Tsukino/Sailor Moon's character as a regular girl/magical girl hero within shōjo. Violet's character does not hold this duality because her sole identity as Violet Evergarden does not entail a specific transformation to become powerful—she already exudes this strength, which is why she is otherworldly. Usagi's transformation into Sailor Moon is notably one of the aspects of femininity, or the girlish, which leads to the hyper-sexualization of

[23] See Gemma Irving et al. One "[enters] a liminal space of 'being betwixt and between' when they realise that their previous understandings are inadequate but before they have fully developed a new understanding" (356).

these female Guardians and their premature bodies' objectification. This element poses another challenge to Usagi's Girl Power because Ishidate desexualizes Violet's appearance from Sato's imposed male gaze. Newsom believes "the primary restrictions of Girl Power in patriarchy are the body type [favoured] within the Girl Power construct; the style of representation, including clothing styles that are appropriate for the Girl Power practitioners; and the constant stereotyping of hyperfemininity" (60). While we often find Usagi in her school uniform, her emblematic appearance takes form when she is in her magical girl hero costume. Her costume consists of a white sleeveless bodysuit with a short royal blue skirt, red knee-high boots, a tiara, and her moon prism (Sato 17:16; Appendix F)—"[t]he costume is as much a part of a Scout's character as is her flesh" (Quenby 76). Her body metamorphizes into Sailor Moon, but she must be nude before this can happen. Quenby claims that Sailor Moon "is noticeably void of female genitalia—'unsexed and sexualized' at the same time" (60). The Guardians' "breasts are void of areolas" (Quenby 60-61) as well to demonstrate their youth and degendered bodies. However, as they are subject to the male gaze, Violet demands a different regard for her presence. The woman who illustrated Violet, Takase, ensured that she would not face the same fate as the other representations of Girl Power. She solidified Ishidate's efforts—as a man and the creator of *Violet Evergarden*—to adapt Violet accurately. Therefore, her body, which is always covered, does not need to exude the necessary 'femininity' to acquire her Girl Power.

In contrast to Usagi enduring a transformation to become a hero, Violet continues to subvert the traditional Girl Power narrative when she endures a transformation after her time as a hero. While Usagi must transform to become powerful, she must also use weapons to exemplify such strength—namely her Sailor Locket and tiara (Sato 15:41; Appendix I). In this way, her weapons "materialize from within her body, reflecting the source of her power" (Quenby 76). As

she evolves throughout the series, she uses other objects such as a moon wand and a sceptre to strengthen her presence. In comparison, Violet uses virtually nothing 'magical' to materialize her ethereal strength. In the first episode, she loses both her arms during the war and eventually wakes up in the hospital with bandages around her limbs (Ishidate 01:22; Appendix J). However, this time, she has hands and arms "made of adamant silver" (Ishidate 09:58) that she covers with gloves. Although this is analogous to a soldier receiving prosthetics after battle, this metamorphosis further demonstrates Violet's otherworldliness. Her bodily transformation also changes the Girl Power narrative because her new arms hold a dual meaning. On the one hand, the addition of her silver limbs demonstrates a disempowerment because her natural, otherworldly strength is removed from her young female body. With this removal, Newsom would assume that Violet no longer possesses Girl Power as the standard feminine body is an integral aspect of her self-actualization. On the other hand, the alteration, or even the fragmentation, of Violet's young female body presents a challenge to femininity being the sole source of Girl Power. Violet's strength is still unparalleled. She uses this transformation as a learning opportunity to find a new purpose and redefine her identity without the sense of being a weapon or hero within the war. She develops agency within her newfound independence, even if she is still subject to patriarchal constructs of what it means to be a hero.

In *Sailor Moon*, Usagi grows into a powerful hero through her connection to friends, family, and new cat, Luna. As she develops these strong, intimate relationships with others, she builds her confidence and attempts to become an independent person. Newsom states that "[g]irl power suggests a means for personal empowerment and independence to the practitioner, especially in terms of personal pleasure … [h]owever, the nature of Girl Power prevents the practitioner from fully developing an independent nature" (60). This personal empowerment is

crucial to Sailor Moon's Girl Power narrative. It encourages the idea that creating these connections with others will allow her confidence and consequent independence to grow. However, the idea that Usagi needs these supportive friends to cultivate her growth demonstrates her unwavering dependence. Frequently, Usagi fantasizes about boys, manga, and even superhero games. Even in the first episode of the series, as she wakes up late for school, Usagi asks her mother, "Why didn't you wake me up sooner?" (Sato 02:17). Her mother responds, "I tried many times. And you told me to go away each time" (Sato 02:20). She is still "a growing girl" (Sato 04:16) and her lack of maturity even shows through her failing grades (Appendix K). Her teacher explicitly makes a point by giving her a 30 percent on their most recent test. Throughout the series, Usagi makes a conscious effort to improve, but ultimately her dependence and lack of maturity become a part of her identity within the Girl Power form—conforming to the limits of a young girl.

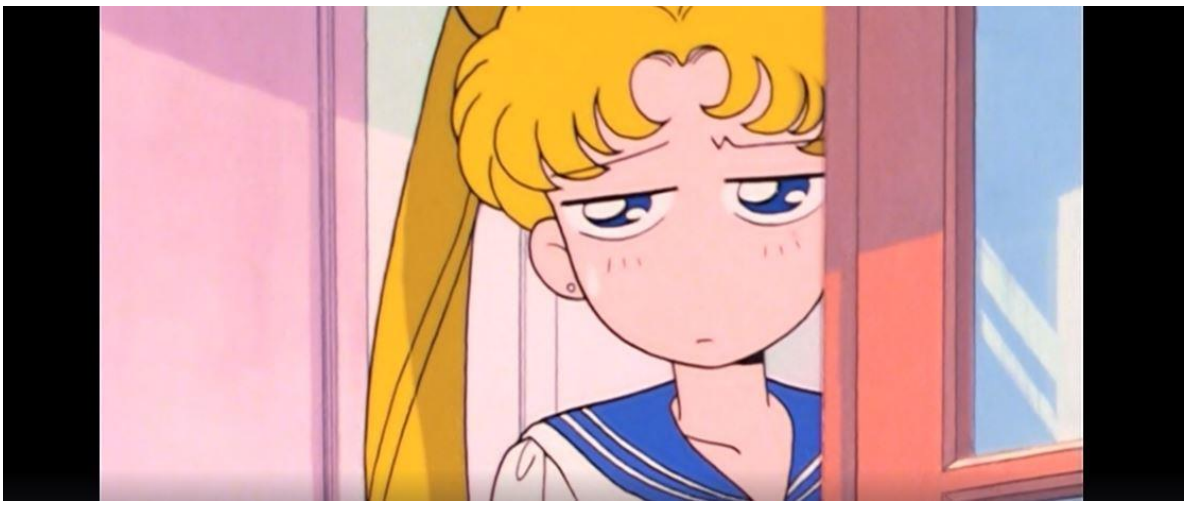
In *Violet Evergarden*, Violet also begins as a dependent person because she is placed in the care of Major Gilbert—her leader and love interest—during the war. She "had always just followed [his] orders" (Ishidate 22:39). However, even as Violet develops other relationships, namely with Mr. Hodgins, Gilbert's closest friend, she often appears distant from them. This distance, which encourages the liminal space she occupies, is unique to Violet's adaptation and, once again, subverts the typical narrative of Girl Power. While Sato's adaptation of *Sailor Moon* presents a sense of closeness to the viewer, Ishidate dismantles this theme using distance through her physical and symbolic placement. In particular, we come across a significant scene between Violet and Hodgins: Violet stands at a distance from the viewers, but equally in juxtaposition to firelight, as they discuss how "[she] [is] burning" (Ishidate 18:30). As Violet and the firelight mirror one another, Ishidate exemplifies a vulnerability and maturity in her, which offers a

deeper understanding of herself (Ishidate 18:12; Appendix L). As she begins to "realize for the first time that [she has] many burns" (Ishidate 18:47), the self-actualization of her trauma allows her to further develop a healthier independence that does not merely demand for her to remain in this liminal space, at a distance. Ishidate beautifully finalizes this scene by merging Violet and the firelight to demonstrate how she will always grow even as she is burning (Ishidate 18:51; Appendix M).

To summarize, Violet's otherworldliness within Taichi Ishidate's 2018 anime adaption of Kana Akatsuki's light novel *Violet Evergarden* reinvents *Sailor Moon*'s notion of Girl Power as she ultimately challenges the specific feminine body, appearance, and behaviour of the magical girl hero. Within the realm of magical girls' anime adaptations, Violet does not follow the typical narrative of Girl Power as her journey reinvents the notions of feminine heroism. Violet defines her sense of agency through self-actualization by "[asserting] her own will" (Ishidate 22:43). This reinvention of the 1990s movement utilizes different aspects of the modern Japanese literature form—the light novel—and adaptation to present subverted female heroism within the twenty-first century. Moreover, Ishidate's version of Violet through varying colours, physical appearance, bodily transformation, desexualization of the male gaze, and performance allows self-actualization to penetrate the sphere of shōjo and redefine its preconceived notions of femininity. Ishidate's depiction of Violet has shifted our representation in modern times of these feminine tropes. However, future changes within the genre will provide a new reality for viewers, especially through opportunities to distinguish themselves beyond societal binaries or even Sailor Moon's Girl Power.

APPENDIX A


MY NAME IS TSUKINO USAGI. I AM 14 YEARS OLD, AND IN 8TH GRADE.
WHINE
Mom, you dummy, why didn't you wake me up sooner?!
I'm leaving!
TRIP
STUMBLE
ouch! I must have stepped on something
I don't wanna hafta go to school ~
why does morning always have to come so soon? I'm still sleepy!
PANT
PANT
I AM A BIT OF A CRYBABY
sniffle
EVEN THOUGH I DON'T LIKE TO ADMIT IT
9



APPENDIX B


Ah, maybe it's only because I stepped on her.
It's a little black cat. She looks a bit shabby though.
MEOW
OWWWW
No way! I tripped over a cat?!
Sorry, I'm so sorry! Did I hurt you?!
smoooooch!
TEE-HEE, you're so cute! Forgive me! MWAAA~
POT POT
WIGGLE WIGGLE
Why the hell are you scratching me like that?!
Huh? What's that? Do you want me to take off your bandaid? Okay, okay
HEH
Giggle
SCRATCH SCRATCH SCRATCH
OW OW OW OW!!
KYAAA!!

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX D

APPENDIX E

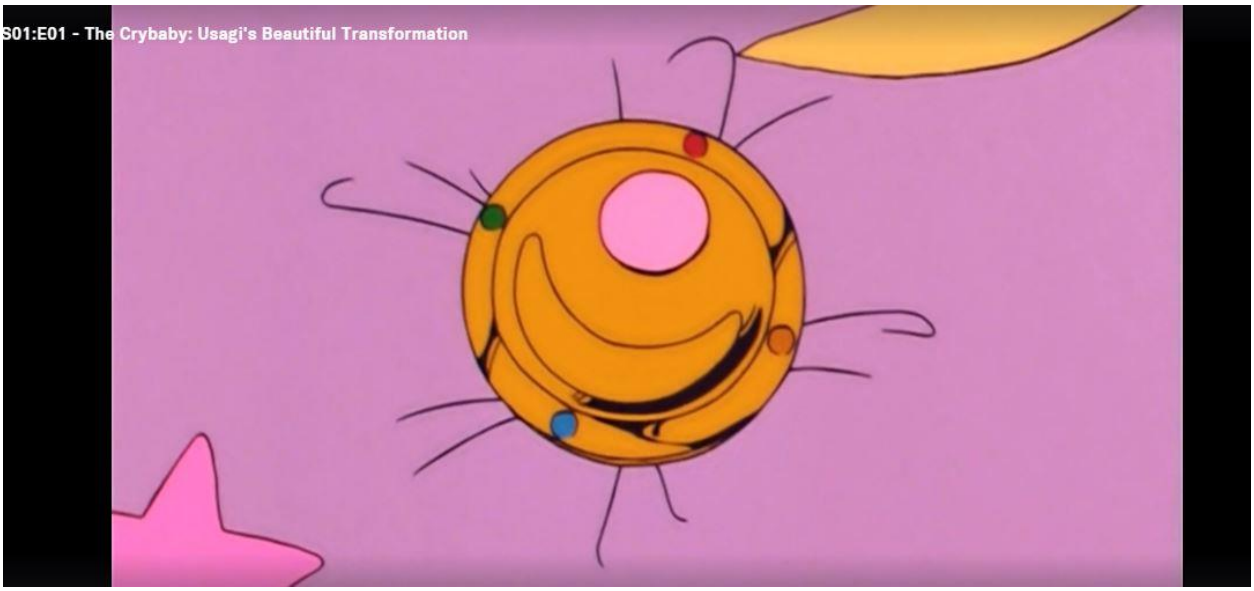
APPENDIX F

APPENDIX F (*cont.*)

APPENDIX G

APPENDIX H

APPENDIX I



APPENDIX J

APPENDIX K

APPENDIX L

APPENDIX M

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