

Envisioning the *shôjo* Aesthetic in Miyazawa Kenji's 'The Twin Stars' and 'Night of the Milky Way Railway'

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Even though Miyazawa Kenji's (1896–1933) children's tales (*dôwa*) initially operated (and were marginalised) within the confines of patriarchal Japan's Taishô Era (1912–1926), some of his narratives incorporate gently transgressive *shôjo* (girl) themes. Two such works provide the focus for this paper, 'The Twin Stars' (*Futago no hoshi*) and 'Night of the Milky Way Railway' (*Ginga tetsudô no yoru*), henceforth *Futago* and *Ginga*. *Futago* is often seen as the prototype for the now classic *Ginga* (Akieda 1989: 76). Whereas *Futago* was the author's first piece of prose fiction, initially narrated to his family in 1918, *Ginga* was his last, and remained unfinished at his death in 1933. Both works exhibit several signifiers of the early twentieth century 'girl,' and indeed the 'beautiful boy' (*bishônen*), such as androgyny, adoring friendships and melancholic yearning. These kinds of tropes in *shôjo* literature and visual culture epitomise a subversive desire for release, through the imagination, from the restrictions imposed by an enduringly patriarchal Japan. Although these now familiar motifs are present in Kenji's narratives, they are still rather implicit. Recently, however, among the many illustrators of *Futago* and *Ginga*, two award-winning artists, Makino Suzuko (b.1951) and Azuma Itsuko (b.1953), have embraced and foregrounded these aspects of the

stories.¹ Their respective visual interpretations of the narratives draw on earlier *shōjo* art, *manga* and literature conventions to bring Kenji's work into the broader community of the 'girl.'

By using Takahara Eiri's (1999) concept of 'girl consciousness' (*shōjo ishiki*) and Honda Masuko's (1988; 1992) 'fluttering' (*hirahira*) aesthetic, this paper shows how Makino's and Azuma's artistic interpretations of *Futago* and *Ginga* resonate with recurring motifs of the *shōjo*. Takahara's *The Territory of the Girl* (*Shōjo ryōiki*) demonstrates his interest in destabilising centrist, patriarchal modes of literary criticism. He proposes the notion of 'girl consciousness' (1999: 9) as being able to think like a girl in order to help decentre the dominant patriarchal way of viewing the world. Takahara maintains that having a 'consciousness of the girl' when reading *shōjo* fiction inspires a 'freedom' (*jiyū*) and 'arrogance' (*kōman*) that release a critical and creative power as an act of resistance. He cautions, however, that such 'freedom' is imagined rather than actual or political liberation, and that this 'arrogance' functions as a 'non-concrete faculty' whereby unattainable desires and wishes in the actual world can be satisfied through the subject's imaginative process (1999: 17). His 'girl conscious' reader actively seeks an imagined escape from socially imposed chains such as daughter-, wife-, mother-hood, and even boy- and man-hood. Importantly, Takahara reiterates that one does not need to be a biological female in order to have 'girl consciousness.'² Rather, any such 'girliness' is a way of being, open to both males and females who wish to reject societal norms and restrictions (1999: 10). This point is relevant to the present discussion of both *Futago* and *Ginga* in that, although neither *Futago* nor *Ginga* is written by, nor necessarily even for or about girls, both stories and their protagonists have traits that will be recognisable and appealing to 'girl conscious' readers. Through this way of reading, they can be gently subversive of their societal confines. As Aoyama and Hartley (2009: 2) suggest, the fictional construction of 'a parallel imagined fantasy world that acknowledges [the girl's] aspirations and fulfils her desires' helps deflect the negative social and cultural assessments that have been directed against the *shōjo*.

¹ These two picture books form part of Kumon Publishing's illustrated series of Kenji's works edited by Amazawa Taijirō and Hagiwara Masayoshi. Both were first published in 1993 and are still in print. *Futago* was in its 11th print run in 2010, *Ginga* in its 18th run in 2008. Kumon will continue to reprint the series due to its enduring reception (email communication, 7 January 2012).

² Another present-day male novelist, Takemoto Nobara (b. 1968), for example, demonstrates such 'girl consciousness' in his affinities with the *shōjo* in his novels and his life. His novel *Shimotsuma Monogatari* (2002) has become known internationally through its translation (in 2006) as *Kamikaze Girls* and especially through its adaption into film (in 2004).

Takahara's 'freedom and arrogance' connects with Honda's earlier (1992) notion of fluttering and lightness. Honda indicates how the aesthetic of 'fluttering' in *shôjo* literature and art offers a sense of lightness that invokes an interstitial space of imagined liberty. Decorative 'girlish' ornaments such as ribbons, frills and lace, and alliterative and assonant words and sounds that appear to waft and shimmer in the breeze symbolise an unfettered *shôjo* imagination. They provide a 'fantastic' (Takahara 1999: 19) space of floating yet resilient 'girls' hours' in which real time is suspended (Honda, 1992: 177–78). When the 'girl' is caught between the desire for and constraints of womanhood, her imaginative aspirations render the space between girlhood and adulthood as a place of liminality in which to dream freely and resist her societal confines. Honda is nevertheless aware of the paradox that while these evanescent tropes signal a kind of eternal and ageless desire, such sparkle also holds the imminent risk of fading. While dreams and fantasies offered the Taishô 'girl' a freedom that was not present in the real world, they also signalled the desire for a resistance that could not last. Such an experience of *shôjo* literature is therefore bitter-sweet in offering only a brief liberation from the more rigid concerns and constraints of everyday life. As Honda points out, however, this very impulse signifies an act of transgression that blurs boundaries, freeing the 'girl' to yearn for the faraway sky and connect to new and free things, without any urge for 'worldly benefit or sexual desire' (Honda 1992: 182).³

The gentle transgressions that play out in Kenji's *Futago* and *Ginga* narratives form part of a tradition of imagined resistance to everyday confines that had its beginnings in early twentieth century Japan. Although Kenji is not generally considered a *shôjo* writer, scholars have noted that many of his stories have an aesthetic that is reminiscent of Japanese girls' narratives, such as the 1920s *Flower Tales* (*Hanamonogatari*) of Yoshiya Nobuko (1896–1973).⁴ Yoshiya's stories presented their readers with a European exoticism and Romanticism with erotic undertones as they fashioned melancholic dreams and ideals of girls who yearned for love, often with older women (Aoyama 2009: 60).⁵ Like other art and intellectual writing of the time, including the popular Takarazuka theatre troupe of girls and women who played men's and boys' roles, these

³ As translated by Aoyama and Hartley (2009: 35).

⁴ On various *shôjo* traits in Kenji's work see, for instance: Amazawa (1988; 1998), Akieda (2005; 2006), Hirazawa (2000), Dollase (2003), Yamane (1999).

⁵ For more on a similar yearning, European flavour in *shôjo manga*, see Aoyama & Hartley (2009: 11) and Welker (2009: 162).

stories reached Kenji's rural region of Iwate (Amazawa 1988: 53). Amazawa suggests that *Ginga*, with its mastery of 'girl conversation,' is infused with the 'breath' of Yoshiya's *Flower Tales* that were introduced to Kenji by his younger sister (1998: 22).⁶ Indeed, Amazawa observes that in the first draft of *Ginga*, it was actually three sisters rather than two boys who were originally riding in the eponymous train (22), and its sensitive dialogue and gentle assonances recall all the delicacy and lightness of Honda's *hirahira* aesthetic. Kenji's work was no doubt influenced by the yearning images and emotional dreamscapes of the *shônen* and *shôjo* that were beginning to reverberate through 1920s Japanese culture and literature.

This was also a time when the 'modern girl' (*moga*) was contesting patriarchal gender and power relations (Seaman 2006:157). The *moga*, with her bobbed, masculine hair, modern clothing and ability to attain paid work outside the home, became associated with androgyny and resistance to gendered power relations. Neither was gender-bending unusual in Japan. Takahara (1999: 16–17) sees both the modern Taishô girl and today's androgynous or asexual *shôjo* as a continuation and blending of the medieval *chigo* boys who were sought by priests and samurai for their sexual favours. Elsewhere (2003: 9) he reiterates that androgynous images in the arts (including Kabuki) have a long history in Japan, and that representations of *bishônen* in early 1900s' works like Kawabata Yasunari's *Shônen* (The Youth) and Orikuchi Shinobu's *Kuchibue* (Whistle) were precursors of the *shôjo*. According to Takahara, these *bishônen* images encompassed the desire to contest gendered power relations in a similar way to today's *shôjo* (1999: 15; also see, 2006: 191). Kenji's emotional fantasies certainly display an attraction to and awareness of gender issues, and were no doubt guided by his interest in and awareness of egalitarian issues on many levels (see Hamashita 2002: 232).⁷

In turn, as Akieda Miho asserts (2006: 22), there is a new reception to Kenji's poetry and literature which has inspired and fortified the genealogy of 'girl' literature and

⁶ Amazawa Taijirô is an eminent Kenji scholar and poet. He worked on the compilation of *The Complete Works of Miyazawa Kenji* (Miyazawa Kenji zenshû) in the 1970s. He is also co-editor of the series of picture books (Miyazawa Kenji e-dôwashû) which holds Makino's and Azuma's artistic interpretations of *Futago* and *Ginga*.

⁷ As Hara (2000: 360–61) indicates, Kenji showed an interest in women's concerns through his active support of the local journal *Josei Iwate* (Women of Iwate). His 'Marivuron and the Girl' (Marivuron to shôjo) was first published in the journal in 1933. It depicts the aestheticised aspirations of a young girl who, in symbolic rejection of her role as a dutiful daughter, adores an older woman and yearns for an artistic life like hers. See Kilpatrick (2009), which also discusses Kenji's readings of the egalitarian ideologies of the Pre-Raphaelites.

manga. For example, Matsumoto Reiji's award-winning 1978 *Ginga tetsudō 999* developed a *shōjo* audience through its reference to Kenji's *Ginga* and through its themes. Akieda (2005; 2006) also points out the intertextual borrowings and quotations from Kenji's work in the *shōjo* literature of Yū Miri (b. 1968) and Nagano Mayumi (b. 1959). Further, Hirazawa Shin'ichi (2000: 6–11) draws comparisons between Yoshimoto Banana's narratives and Kenji's *Ginga* in their pursuit of other-worldly themes of death, dreams and yearning.⁸ He suggests that Yoshimoto's depictions of night and death hark back to and surpass Kenji's fourth dimensional 'theory of empty space' (2000: 9). Traits in Kenji's work that overlap with the characteristics of the girl pointed out by Honda and others include for instance: the in-between stage peculiar to adolescence; a fusion of masculine and feminine characteristics; an affinity for the space of 'death' and the border of the real world and death; a refusal to mature; and an affinity for water and water imagery (Akieda 2005: 17). Certainly, such intertextuality has brought some attention to the largely overlooked *shōjo* aesthetic in Kenji's work.

Both the *Futago* and *Ginga* narratives immediately signify the *hirahira* sparkle and lightness of unfettered dreams, the liminal realm of the 'girl,' through their luminescent skies against the dark night. Each is set in the fantastic celestial sphere, the mystical transitional space that is well recognised in *shōjo* literature, and that Kenji admired for its spirit of freedom, creativity and spirituality. Both *Futago* and *Ginga* also show a deep reverence for nature that harks back to the Romantic penchant for flora and fauna. The blend of science and religion in the narratives further reflects their 'exotic' European imagery and adds a flavour of mystical spiritualism.⁹ The works' fantastic themes, their use of *katakana* names and words, and their emotional language and scenes all exhibit a tone and sensibility that symbolise the refusal to transition smoothly from childhood to adulthood or girlhood to womanhood.

The two-part *Futago* narrative is a somewhat fatalistic story of virtue and justice, constructed around ambiguously gendered twin stars (*dōji*). (According to Nakachi Bun (1996: 135), the term *dōji* can be translated as both 'child' and 'bodhisattva' and was

⁸ Hirazawa focuses particularly on Yoshimoto's *Moonlight Shadow* (Mūnraito Shadō; 1986), *Goodbye Tsugumi* (Tsugumi; 1989) and *Kitchen* (Kicchīn; 1988).

⁹ Despite his devout Buddhism, Kenji often blended his eclectic interest in religion with Western science, for instance, Einstein's fourth dimension. He expounded on his theories about life and art in his 1926 treatise, *Outline of Agrarian Art*, which was inspired by the artistic endeavours and reformist social ideals of Pre-Raphaelites John Ruskin and William Morris (Onda 1991[3]: 264).

used by Kenji to differentiate the ‘eternal child’ from the actual child who grows up or matures. It is evidence of the centrist patriarchal viewpoint that the twins are usually taken as boys even though their non-Japanese names, Chunse *dôji* and Pôse *dôji*, give no hint as to their gender.) The stars are peripheral to the earthly world, bound by their celestial orchestral ‘duties’ to the king of the heavens. Every evening, they are required to sit on their crystalline pedestals and play their silver flutes to the ‘Song of the Circling Stars.’ In the first part, when their nightly work is done, they race off to frolic together in the misty dawn skies. As they are enjoying themselves at a heavenly fountain spring, they witness a fight between the Scorpion and Crow constellations. When it ends, they help the wounded Scorpion back home, and arrive just in time to take up their flutes for the evening star song. In the second part, the twins again show their gently rebellious streak by taking off with a trickster Comet who, when he becomes disenchanted with them, thrusts them into the depths of the sea. The two different worlds (heaven and sea) are representative of the hierarchical social relations to be transcended through their adventures. In the sea, they find themselves amongst other ‘fallen’ stars who, due to their ‘misdeeds’ as stars, have now become starfish dwelling in the mud of the ocean floor (39).¹⁰ Eventually, they are reinstated to their rightful place in heaven through the good graces of the sea king who has heard of their altruistic deeds above.

Despite the story’s obvious Buddhist references, the narrative has many ‘exotic’ elements (including Graeco-Roman astronomical references), but it is the eponymous twins’ desire for adventure and their tender bonds of affection for each other that call up the transgressive desires of the *shôjo*. Their devotion and special bonds are similar to those of the orphaned heroines in many *shôjo* novels and bring to mind the union of Honda’s collective ‘girlhood.’¹¹ The twins also gently challenge their restrictive situation by showing their desire to break free from their prescribed roles. While the twins trust in their king, they seek something more than their daily routine, signalling a subtle resistance to their imposed responsibilities (in the hierarchic patriarchy). Moreover, their togetherness, friendship and affection for each other see them through adversity in both parts of the story.

¹⁰ Page numbers for all quotations from the two narratives are from the Kumon picture books. Translations are my own.

¹¹ Honda (1992) draws on Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined community’ (1983) when discussing the wider girl collective.

In comparison, the more comprehensive *Ginga* narrative takes up and complicates the tender friendship that is introduced in *Futago*, and indeed makes intertextual references to *Futago*'s twins and the star song. In a way that recalls the melancholic aesthetic of *shōjo* literature, *Ginga* concerns itself with the profound pain of Giovanni's schoolboy yearning, sorrow and desire for a deeper bond with his classmate, Campanella.¹² Their Italian names in *katakana* script (for foreign loanwords) also enhance the 'exotic,' unrealistic or fictitious flavour reminiscent of many *shōjo* works (Dollase 2003: 732–33). Further, the friendship between the *Ginga* boys' fathers reiterates mutual affection as an important theme.

As if questioning society's patriarchal roles, the narrative shows the sensitive Giovanni providing the main support for his sick mother in his father's absence. Giovanni is kept busy running from school to work to home, taking responsibility for many domestic tasks with no time for friends or play. He and his mother's plight in the absence of the family's 'male breadwinner' suggests some disenchantment with the patriarchal system and the rigid or emotionally distant masculinity it prescribes for authority figures. The boys' tender friendship also contrasts with the callousness of their classmates who seem destined with time to become more like the cold and distant patriarchal role models more often found in their contemporaneous society. Giovanni is ostracised by his classmates who shun and tease him about his absent father as he goes about his daily chores. Sad and isolated, he escapes into an emotion-charged dream world, riding in a train across the night skies of the Milky Way with Campanella, his only sympathetic friend. He is aching for love and affection, for a close sentimental relationship. These feelings are reminiscent of the 'pure emotionalism' of the melancholic *shōjo* found in Yoshiya Nobuko's *Flower Tales*, where 'sadness is almost a performative act' (Dollase 2003: 729–30). *Ginga* resounds with the pathos of Giovanni's yearning for eternal friendship with Campanella, and the intensity of his affection also recalls the erotic undertones and the tragedies of unrequited love between same sex or androgynous figures found in *shōjo* novels like the *shōnen-ai* (boys' love, or BL) in, for example, Nagano Mayumi's *The Boy Alice* (Shōnen arisu).

¹² According to Mori Masaki, Kenji's *Ginga* was probably heavily influenced by Tommaso Campanella's 1623 novel, *The City of the Sun*, which Kenji read in translation. Besides taking Campanella as the name for one of the protagonists, *Ginga* is similar to Campanella's novel in its themes of friendship, loneliness and self-sacrifice. The Italian novel also deals with communitarian agrarian practices, labour and equal opportunities of education found in other works by Kenji (Mori 1997: 207).

Together, the two boys experience an imaginative celestial trip towards death, which is itself another well-known ‘girl’ trope.¹³ The end of the narrative makes it clear that Campanella has drowned in the river, and the boys probe the depths of life and death in discussion with each of the other-worldly characters they meet along the way. This fantastic death-ride signals the ephemeral liminality of childhood (and its earthly cessation for Campanella). The whole narrative aestheticises Campanella’s death through Giovanni’s yearning for (yet despair of) eternal union and happiness, reiterating the story as a part of the emotional arena of the *shônen* and *shôjo*. The themes of adoration, yearning and preoccupation with death echo the intense passion that signals the ‘girl conscious’ desire to break free from the difficulties imposed by the restrictive systems operating in the physical world.

Giovanni’s melancholy is played out in his constant search for ‘real happiness’ (66, *passim*) and in his bitter-sweet sighs of longing for eternal friendship with Campanella, an affection which he feels is not fully reciprocated. For example, Giovanni is so pained at Campanella’s interest in the girl Kaoru, who has joined the train with her brother after they have drowned with the Titanic, that he asks himself: ‘Why am I this unhappy? ... Isn’t there anyone who will go anywhere with me, right to the end?’ (54). In contrast to the Italian names of the two boys, Kaoru is a Japanese name. Besides this, it can also be used for both males and females. For instance, Kaoru is both the name of Prince Genji’s son in the famous eleventh century *Tale of Genji* (*Genji Monogatari*) and that of the eponymous dancer in Kawabata’s *Izu Dancer* (*Izu no odoriko*, 1926). The ambiguously gendered name thus adds another level of androgynous or *shônen-ai* (BL) intertextuality. Giovanni’s jealousy and pathetic adoration for Campanella also exemplify the sentiment of unrequited love similar to that found in *shôjo* manga from the 1970s; for example, in Andre’s love for Lady Oscar in Ikeda Riyoko’s *Rose of Versailles* (*Berusaiyu no bara*, 1972–1973).¹⁴ Giovanni’s disappointments and feelings of abandonment, particularly after Campanella’s departure, manifest in several displays of aestheticised pain and tears.

¹³ For detail on death as a common theme in *shôjo* works see, for instance, Akieda (2005) and Hirazawa (2000).

¹⁴ Other examples of this kind of unrequited love in *shôjo* manga are: the prince’s love for a young man in Yamagishi Ryôko’s *Emperor of the Land of the Rising Sun* (*Hi izuru tokoro no tenshi*, 1980–1984); or the love triangles in Ueda Miwa’s *Peach Girl* (*Pîchi gâru*, 1998–2003) and in *Honey and Clover* (*Hachimitsu to kurôbâ*, 2000–2006). The first ‘boys’ love’ or *bishônen* manga was probably Takemiya Keiko’s ‘In the Sunroom’ (*Sanrûmu nite*), first published in a *shôjo* monthly in 1970 (Aoyama 1988: 188).

Like many fictional *shôjo* figures who have to overcome different obstacles in their pursuit of affection and happiness, *Ginga*'s protagonists use impassioned language and gestures to express their yearning and/or admiration. After Kaoru and her brother have left the train, Giovanni says with a deep sigh: 'It's just the two of us again' (66). As if prescient of Campanella's inevitable death and the elusiveness of eternal happiness, Giovanni suggests: 'Let's go on together, on and on forever' (66–67). Campanella agrees, but his eyes well with 'beautiful tears' (66), for he is apparently already aware of his own death and his impending departure in a way that Giovanni is not. Giovanni's efforts to hold on to an unattainable love that silently slips away from his grasp leave an aestheticised sense of deep pathos and yearning.

Giovanni's sense of dejection and sorrow is intensified at the boys' final parting, as Campanella vanishes into the 'dim white haze' (66) into an aestheticised death. Giovanni's 'unbearable loneliness' (67) is almost palpable when he cannot see the same heavenly vision of Campanella's mother that his friend can. In an outpouring of unrestrained emotion, Giovanni bursts into tears, 'sobs filling his throat' (67) as he realises that he is alone and that Campanella has reached his mother in death. This intense sentiment draws attention to the elusiveness of eternal connectedness, and is inscribed with a touching aesthetic that helps transcend the gender parameters inferred by other parts of the text (the boys' names or schoolboy antics, for instance). Such devotion and tenderness poignantly reverberate with all the 'colours, fragrances and sounds ... that resonate uniquely with the aesthetics of the girl' (Honda 1992: 165).¹⁵ As Akieda (2006: 32) suggests Giovanni's lonely inner search for happiness is like a *shôjo* rite of passage.

The boys' reverence for their mothers adds to the intensity of melancholic emotion. Like other *bishônen* characters such as Yoshimoto Banana's vulnerable Yûichi in *Kitchen* (Kicchin) who has lost his biological mother and his biological father (who becomes his transsexual mother), the two *Ginga* boys love their mothers deeply. One poignant chapter begins with Campanella's agitated concern about receiving his mother's forgiveness. This leads both boys to profound consideration of their mothers' love, and of their concern for their mothers' happiness. Holding back his tears, Campanella says: 'I would do anything to make my mother truly happy. But I wonder

¹⁵ As translated by Aoyama and Hartley (2009: 27).

what would make her happiest?’ (25). Giovanni similarly expresses a care and concern for his sick mother that, in turn, subtly hints at the plight of women and their inherent responsibilities within a restrictive (and poverty-stricken) community. Whereas Giovanni’s devotion and practical assistance to his mother while other boys are at play draws attention to prescribed gender roles, it also emphasises his isolation and sadness. The boys’ expression of adoration for their mothers further signals the regret often felt on the verge of adulthood, at leaving the comfort and familiarity of childhood.

The *Ginga* narrative’s celebration of light and transparency—the sense of misty, feathery, fluttering space, the flora and fauna imagery—is reminiscent of the liminal space occupied by the ‘girl’ on the verge of fantastical ‘flight’ from the repressive reality of the actual patriarchal world. For instance, the textual imagery surrounding the train-ride is replete with pulsating, phosphorescent light like dazzling ‘scattered diamonds’ (19) and ‘rippling,’ ‘swaying’ silver pampas grass (21), as opposed to the physical rigour and torment of the world of school, work and home that Giovanni has to try to balance in his daily care for his mother. The luminescence also recalls the ‘rainbows and moonlight’ and ‘transparent food’ from the preface to Kenji’s 1924 book, *The Restaurant of Many Orders* (*Chūmon no ôi ryōriten*) where ‘anything is possible,’¹⁶ The narrative similarly resonates with images reminiscent of the flickering light of the alternating current lamp from his famous poem ‘The Phenomenon Called I’ (*Watakushi to iu genshō*). This poem expresses the transience of life that Giovanni’s pensiveness in turn opens up as part of the liminal space of the child on the verge of adulthood.

Ultimately, both the *Futago* and *Ginga* narratives provide examples of potentially transgressive figures who imagine and desire something other. The protagonists have gentle and sensitive temperaments and seek to break free from the chains of duties and responsibility imposed by their respective confines: the twins from their nightly duties, and Giovanni from his daily chores and ostracism. While the twins long for adventure, for escape from their nightly flute-playing duties in the heavens, Giovanni fulfils his dreams of flight from more earthly environs through a supernatural train ride. The twins’ and Giovanni’s positions as peripheral and transient are comparable to the pre-sexual or adolescent ‘girl’ who desires ‘freedom from the constraints of sexuality and

¹⁶ The beginning of this preface is included on the jacket cover of all the picture books in the Kumon series that contains the *Futago* and *Ginga* books. This thus forms part of the ideologically influential peritext that helps locate the genre and signals the authors’ (and editors’ and artists’) expectations for it.

oppressive gender roles in a patriarchal system' (Sherif 1999: 128). Both narratives thus suggest a gently 'arrogant' resistance to dominant discourses of patriarchal authority.

Makino and Azuma's artistic lineage

Artists Makino Suzuko and Azuma Itsuko overlay Kenji's *Futago* and *Ginga* narratives with lyrical, Romantic visual images that draw on well-known conventions in preceding art. Such conventions are found, for instance, in the 1920s' melancholic *shôjo* and *bishônen* images of Takabatake Kashô, and in the iconoclastic 1970–1980s' love stories of *manga* artists like Ôshima Yumiko, Hagio Moto and Takemiya Keiko. Kashô is known for his expression of human emotion against idealised bucolic settings and he famously depicted melancholic *bishônen* looking longingly into the distance.¹⁷ These kinds of intensely emotion-charged images of beautiful androgynous characters and scenes were often created with the intention of interrogating the fixed categories of gender and womanhood. Kami (2006: 108–9), for instance, sees the representation and experience of melancholic reverie (lyricism) in 1920s' Japanese art as one of the rarely available forms of resistance to the confines of the day. He attributes this lyrical melancholy to the 'darkness' (*kurasa*) underlying female and children's daily lives. Later *shôjo manga* artists built on this emotion and androgyny, continuing and elaborating them as forms of subversion. Much *shôjo manga* art incorporated a highly decorative Art Nouveau version of medievalism, with fair-skinned, often androgynous maidens with blonde flowing hair, in swirling gowns, surrounded by European castles, ruins, forests, flowers and birds. As Aoyama (1988: 188) indicates, they brought a new type of romanticism, beauty and fantasy, incorporating gender ambiguity and homosexuality as a form of resistance to patriarchal norms. She attributes *manga* artists' new interest in boys 'to the desire to explore masculinity or androgyny as opposed to the worn-out image of femininity' (1988: 194) found in earlier *manga*.

Makino and Azuma access similar visual conventions to lift Kenji's narratives out of the context of Taishô and bring the stories firmly into the sphere of the present-day *shôjo*. Known for her depictions of ethereal angels and medieval fantasy, Makino's art expresses religious and medieval symbolist imagery, while Azuma's is replete with a

¹⁷ See Hartley (2008) for some beautiful images of Takabatake's *bishônen*, and Kami for an explanation of the beginnings of Japanese lyricism and melancholy in *shôjo* pictures produced for children (2006).

mysticism and beauty that connects with the Gothic Romantic *shōjo* aesthetic.¹⁸ As Aoyama suggests: ‘Parody, allusion, quotation, adaptation, and travesty play significant roles in *shōjo shōsetsu* .. *shōjo manga*, and ... *yaoi*’ (2005: 57).¹⁹ Marni Stanley (2008: 100) further indicates the sexually empowering—as opposed to compensatory—potential of the *yaoi* genre, especially in relation to its playful mockery of mainstream truths. In contrast to other illustrated versions of *Futago* and *Ginga*,²⁰ Makino’s and Azuma’s interpretations of the protagonists can be likened to the recent convention whereby fans appropriate characters from fictional narratives and transform them in their own art into romantic love between ‘beautiful boys.’²¹ The two artists help transfigure *Futago* and *Ginga* by bringing a sense of *shōjo/shōnen* resistance into play through their depictions of the characters as androgynous beauties and through the fundamental aesthetics of their illustrations.

Makino’s *Futago*

Makino’s cover for the *Futago no hoshi* volume of four Kenji stories features two enchanting young *bishōnen* figures who immediately signal the book as a ‘girl’ collection (see figure 1).²² Makino’s beautiful, anthropomorphised stars are garbed in

¹⁸ Examples of other artwork by Makino and Azuma can be found at: <http://www.art-marmelo.com/SHOP/415494/list.html> (Makino); and <http://iamachild.wordpress.com/2011/08/24/itsuko-azuma-japanese/> (Azuma). Both artists have won numerous prizes. Besides being evident in Makino’s artwork, her preference for a cosmos where the medieval meets the near future is evident at: <http://www.art-marmelo.com/SHOP/415494/list.html> (in Japanese). (All sites accessed 28 November 2012.) See Takahara Eiri’s *Gosshiku hāto* (2004: 1), for discussion of the ‘gothic’ as an imagined space that never existed.

¹⁹ *Yaoi* is writing and/or artwork, usually created by and for women, that focuses on the relationship between males. It is an acronym for ‘Yama nashi, Ochi nashi, Imi nashi,’ often translated into English as ‘No Climax, No Resolution, No Meaning’ (Ishikawa 2008: 11). The term *yaoi* is almost interchangeable with boys’ love. Also see, Mizoguchi (2003: 49–50) and Aoyama (2005: 62, footnote 12).

²⁰ No other picture books of *Futago* or *Ginga* make any apparent visual reference to the genealogy of the girl. See, for instance, Miyazawa Kenji’s *Futago no hoshi* (Illus. Toyama Shigetoshi. 1987); *Futago no hoshi* (Illus. Akiyama Tadashi. 2005); *Futago no hoshi (1)* (Illus. Shimizu Chikako. 2010); *Ginga tetsudō no yoru* (Illus. Kobayashi Toshiya. 1984); *Ginga tetsudō no yoru* (Illus. Satō Kunio. 1996).

²¹ Fan art of Arakawa Hiromu’s *manga*, *Fullmetal Alchemist* (Hagane no renkinjutsushi), for instance, takes the two boys from the *manga* and blends in some episodes from Kenji’s *Ginga* original to create a different kind of relationship from that in either of the originals (Ishikawa 2008: 13). Ishikawa also points out that other ‘fans,’ such as Kōga Yun (b. 1965) who initially parodied Takahashi Yōichi’s *Captain Tsubasa*, have themselves gone on to become well-known *manga* artists (2008: 13).

²² This volume includes, in sequence: ‘Yamanashi’ (Wild Pear) illustrated by Yuno Seiichi; ‘Futago no hoshi’ and ‘Okinagusa’ (The Spring Anemone), both illustrated by Makino; and Yuno’s ‘Matsuri no Ban’ (The Night of the Festival). Kenji classified ‘Yamanashi’ and ‘Okinagusa’ as (girl-signifying) ‘Flower and Bird Tales’ (*kachō dōwa*), while ‘Matsuri no Ban’ was designated as a local folk tale (*Ihatōbu minwa*). Kenji designated ‘Futago’ as a Buddhist tale, but categorised the much longer ‘Ginga’ as a tale for adolescents. For more information on these classifications see ‘Nōto • Memo (Honbunhen)’ (in Miyazawa Kenji 1997: 13 [2]: 333–34). A list of tales by their categorisation is available at: <http://why.kenji.ne.jp/douwa/sinla2.html> (accessed 27 November 2012). Kenji’s other *kachō dōwa* include: ‘Mekura budō’ (Wild Grape); ‘Marivuron to shōjo’ (Marivuron and the Girl); ‘Manazuru to

flowing, diaphanous Graeco-Roman robes and set against a mystical celestial background. These heavenly, misty surroundings also convey all the exotic beauty and escapism found in the *shōjo manga* of Makino's predecessors. Complementing the elements of Graeco-Roman mythology in the original narrative, her signature medieval symbology suggests both the mystery and drama of ancient astronomical lore and an escape from the confines of the mundanities of daily life. Makino's lunar references also draw on European conventions, and call attention to the mythological origins of the narrative's zodiac creatures such as the Scorpion and the Serpent (or sea king), depicted here against the lustrous central pedestal. The play of light and transparency against the mystical surroundings is reminiscent of the luminescent beauty and liminality expressed in the *shōjo* genre.

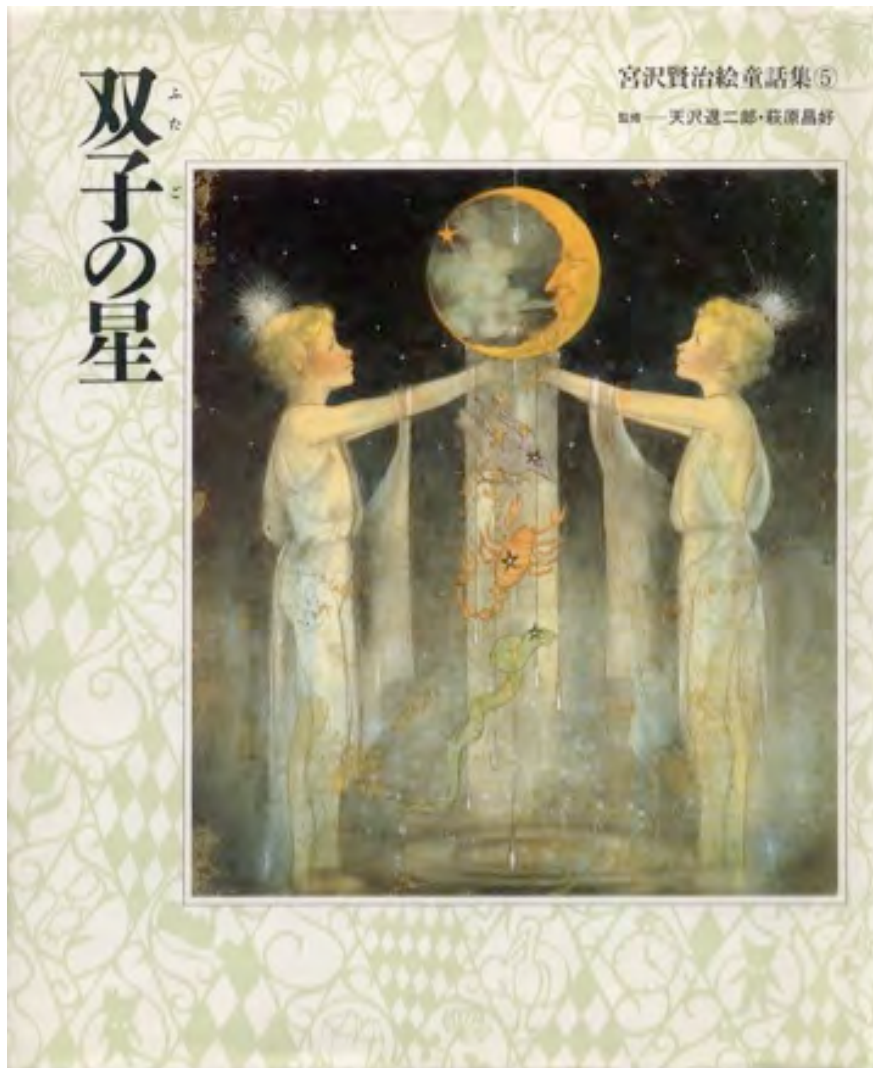


Figure 1: Illus. Makino Suzuko; jacket cover, *Futago no hoshi*; Kumon, 1993.

dariya' (The Dahlias and the Crane), and 'Yodaka no hoshi' (Nighthawk Star). See Tanaka Eiichi (1981) on the development and structure of the *kacho dôwa*.

Further, the pale skin, blonde wavy hair, wide-eyed and fey demeanour of Makino's twins reference a beauty, exoticism and androgyny reminiscent of earlier Japanese art. In the style of *shōjo manga*, readers can choose to read them as either attractive boys or girls (Welker 2006: 852). Whereas other artists have illustrated the twins as naïve, non-anthropomorphic or masculine stars,²³ Makino's signification of Chunse and Pōse as graceful ethereal beauties edging towards adolescence gestures towards what Aoyama (2005: 54) sees as the evanescent, transitional phase of neutral sexuality before adolescence. The *hirahira* lightness and transparency of Makino's flowing robes simultaneously draw attention to yet also conceal the twins' bodies in a way that emphasises femininity whilst also denying womanhood (Welker 2009: 168; Aoyama 2005). The hazy Empyrean heaven appears to flow through and around their robes and figures, obscuring their feet and lower bodies in a ghostly atmosphere like that which Honda (1992: 209) finds in Yoshiya's *Flower Tales*. The delicate transparency foregrounds their waiflike figures as mystical and eternal, yet is also symbolic of the fleeting and transitional aspects of 'girlhood' desires.

The twins' itch for risk and excitement is represented by their outstretched arms, which gesture toward the moon from either side of the central 'crystalline pedestal' (figure 1). From the outset this expression of their desire for something else inscribes them with some agency, as gently resistant to societal expectations rather than presenting them as merely 'cute' objects for a male gaze. At the same time, the anthropomorphised crescent moon within the outline of the full moon that they are reaching for is gently blowing out a plume of smoke, its promise of the unknown future again representative of the twins' desire for adventure. This smoke nevertheless remains confined within the circle of the full moon. Whereas the act of stretching towards the unattainable represents a gently resistant defiance against their containment, the suggestion of confined space simultaneously symbolises the invisible barriers that surround everyday roles. The circle imagery, too, reflects the confines and restrictions of their eternal routine, but the full moon's suggestion of complete perfection and harmony in life (Hall 1995:104) also symbolises their fulfillable desires. The twins' wilfulness within the confines of their roles in this ethereal star world ultimately signals their wistful hopes and dreams.

²³ See, for instance, Toyama Shigetoshi's (1987) abstractions, or Akiyama Tadashi's (2005) and Shimizu Chikako's (2010) more masculine twins. (See some of their images at: <http://www.amazon.co.jp>. Search for: 「双子の星」.)

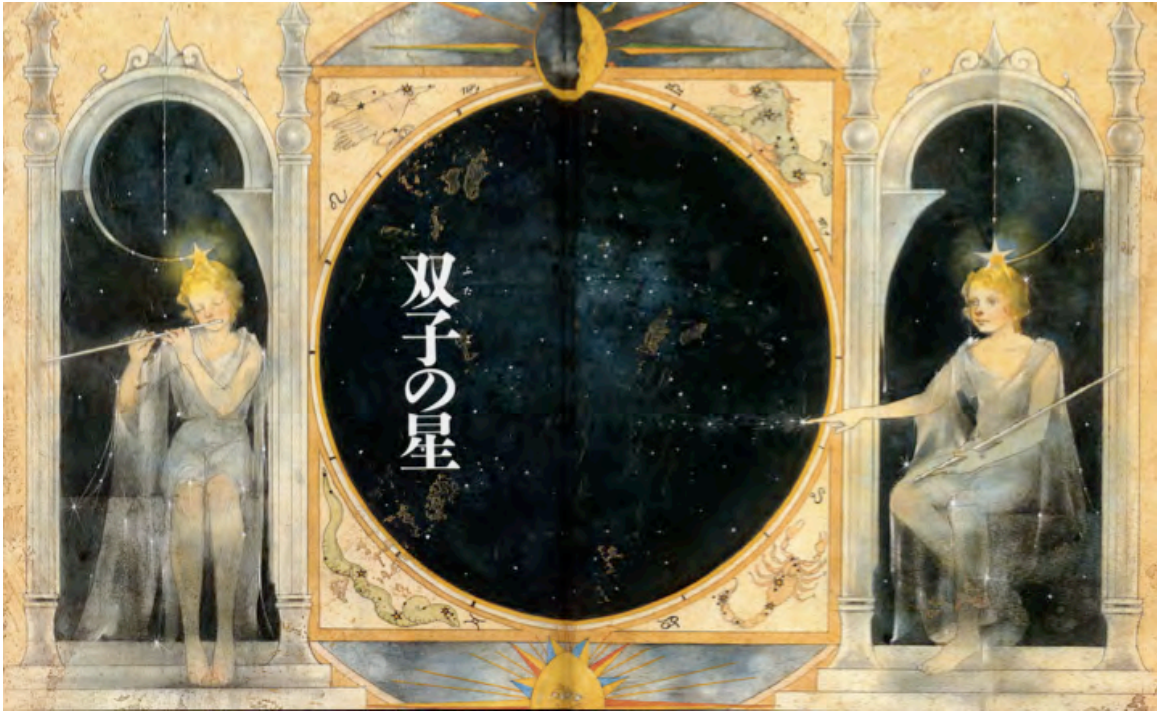


Figure 2: Illus. Makino Suzuko; pp. 16–17, *Futago no hoshi*; Kumon, 1993.

The circle and light imagery continues in Makino’s title spread (figure 2), where her twins are poised under the suggestion of the thinly enclosed lunar haloes emanating from each of their radiant star-coronae. The twin on the right looks like s/he is about to break free of the pedestal frame. The flute is lowered, showing a readiness to explore the world, to move away from the confines of the palace. This ‘arrogant’ desire to break out and seek other experiences and places not only indicates dissatisfaction with ordinary routine, but also represents an imagined resistance to imposed restrictions, the opportunity for a more inspired ‘freedom’ from the nightly routine.

Whereas the narrative signifies the twins’ exploits in Part 2 as a ‘fall from grace,’ Makino’s pink-cheeked twins dive together head first in a blur of speed through the darkness (figure 3). Their falling figures are not only luminescent against the black background, but their active plunging bodies are also propelled into a more liminal ‘fantastic’ towards a more empowered *shōjo* transcendence. Their plunging presence against the depths illuminates their potential and agency against their fall into a fateful ‘death.’

The play of light against dark also intensifies the fall as a dramatic near-death experience that can be seen as a rejection of the mundanity of their nightly orchestral duties. Their close proximity to death situates them at the periphery of a different world



Figure 3: Illus. Makino Suzuko; pp. 30–31, *Futago no hoshi*; Kumon, 1993.

of other possibilities as in-between figures of becoming. Whereas the original narrative signals the twins' lost innocence, the blurred movement and the brilliance of Makino's dual adolescent figures, together against the darkness, signal their combined resistance against all other forces. Indeed, along with their liminality and androgynous beauty, their togetherness throughout all the images invokes the defiant 'girl' collective.

Their sense of alliance and absorption into the *shōjo* imaginary is even more apparent in Makino's penultimate picture of the wraithlike twins entwined and merging with the misty waterspout at the end of Part 1 (figure 4). Even as they are being ferried back



Figure 4: Illus. Makino Suzuko; pp. 36–37, *Futago no hoshi*; Kumon, 1993.

home to their pedestals and their nightly roles, their forward movement (from right to left), their ethereality, and the outline of the moon in the foreground all signify their continuing hopes and desires.²⁴

Makino's final picture shows Chunse and Pōse at the helm of the waterspout-as-dragon-god, its/their *hirahira* ribbon-whiskers trailing behind while the cloudy tail flows out from around and behind a foregrounded, out-of-frame Gothic castle (figure 5). The dragon figure surges upwards in a wispy curlicue, as a swirling inverse 'S' or unclosed figure eight as it makes its way back to the heavens. This luminous wisp evokes the sisterhood of Honda's 'wafting' aesthetic. It further symbolises the imaginative transcendence into which the twins are heading (in the direction of reading) even as they return home, to the imaginative unknown: the 'territory of the girl.' The dragon and castle imagery evince the eternally resistant 'girl' who transcends the earthly confines of here-and-now to dream of other possibilities and roam among her undying desires.



Figure 5: Illus. Makino Suzuko; p. 45, *Futago no hoshi*; Kumon, 1993.

²⁴ Following Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) theory of reading images, in pictures read from right to left, the right-hand-side presents the given or known situation, the left, the unknown future.

Makino's sense of the fantastic and her beautiful twins thus move the story beyond the original narrative's simplistic (and fatalistic) moral. The imagery develops their mild transgressions as an imagined adventure of aestheticised resistance, re-visioning the original story as a subversive space of becoming and of fulfillable desires.

Azuma's *Ginga*

Azuma, too, accesses *Ginga*'s fantastic setting to illuminate the topos as a space of transparency and light that contrasts with the everyday physical world of Giovanni's earthly life at school, work or home. From the outset, the artist infuses the narrative's phosphorescent Milky Way with a liberal peppering of visual radiance. Her transparent apple-universe on the cover not only evokes the sweet scent of the apples given to the children on the train (48) but, together with the verbal imagery of wild roses (42), it also brings to mind the fresh fragrance of 'girlhood' (figure 6). The apple recalls the long



Figure 6: Illus. Azuma Itsuko; jacket cover, *Ginga tetsudō no yoru*; Kumon, 1993.

lineage of fruity and flowery names in various genres (of fiction and fashion magazines, for instance) for young girls (Mackie 2009: 193). Further, the glowing, crystalline apple-globe is transparent against an empty darkness, the contrast once again intensifying the mystical atmosphere and suggesting the ephemeral space which can be filled with ‘girlish’ dreams. The spiralling trail of the tiny *Ginga* (Milky Way) train weaves around and through the globe, with the misty depths of the nebula and stars shining within. This image of the train against the vastness also has multiple levels of intertextuality, fluidly reinscribing images from Matsumoto Reiji’s now classic *Ginga Tetsudō 999* back onto Kenji’s original *Ginga*.²⁵ Azuma’s cover offers an immediate image of fantastical freedom, both within and outside of the confined space of the apple-universe.

Luminescent crosses at either side of Azuma’s title double spread within the book (figure 7) also inscribe the narrative’s understated Christian imagery with an Occidental exoticism that Dollase suggests ‘estranges girls from ... reality and the masculine Japanese world’ (2003: 730). Such imagery further brings into play the *shōjo* artistic predilection for a Romanticised psychic spirituality (Ariga 2002: 195; 200).

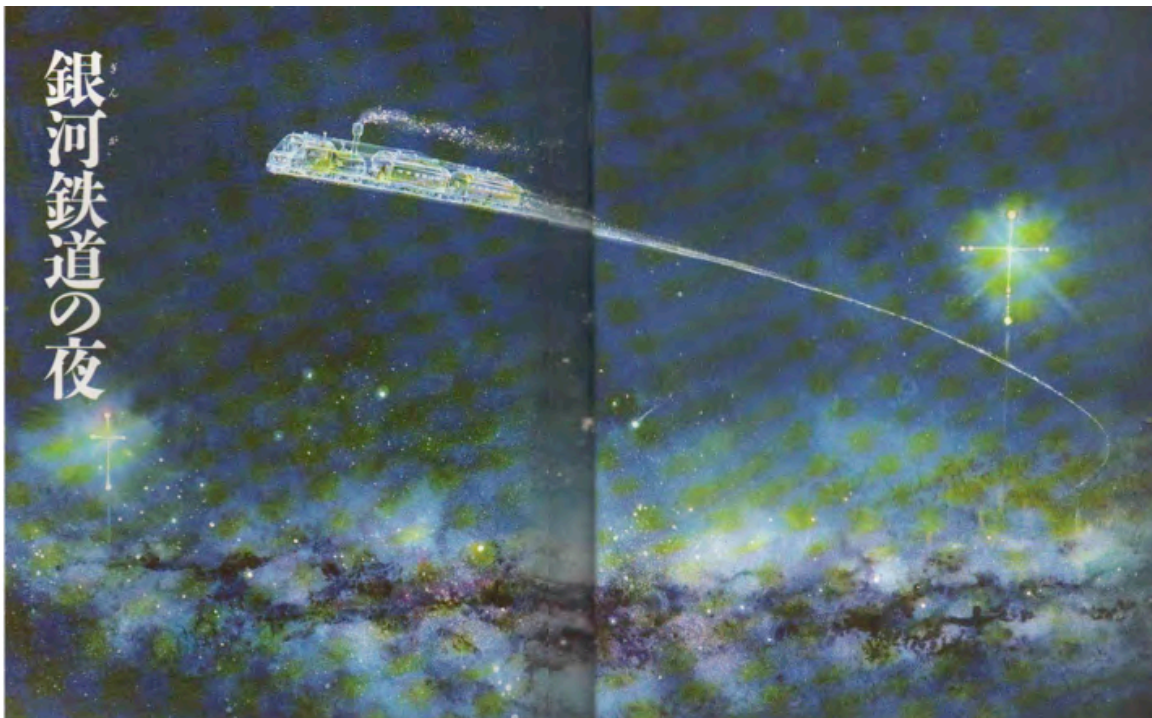


Figure 7: Illus. Azuma Itsuko; pp. 45, *Ginga tetsudō no yoru*; Kumon, 1993.

²⁵ Images of *Ginga Tetsudō 999* can be found at http://www.mangahere.com/manga/ginga_tetsudou_999/v01/c001/2.html (Last accessed 26 November 2012).

Another incandescent cross above a feathery cloud mass of floating, winged trumpet-playing angel figures in the book's penultimate spread heralds Campanella's death in a final scene of aestheticised melancholy (figure 8). Azuma's angels in this same image suggest Giovanni's inspired, Romanticised flight from the chains that bind him in his everyday world. This includes the pain of ostracism, his daily chores, and even his anticipation of the further restrictions of adulthood roles to come. Besides the 'exotic' religious symbolism, the lightness and transparency of the clouds and angels incorporate a delicacy that further recalls that of the angels and *shôjo* symbols in, for instance, Hagio Moto's *Heart of Thomas* (Tôma no shinzô).²⁶ Together with the portrayal of the departing Campanella, Kaoru and her brother, the heavenly imagery enhances the sorrow of the boys' parting, the intensity of Giovanni's admiration, yearning and ultimate loss of Campanella's eternal friendship.

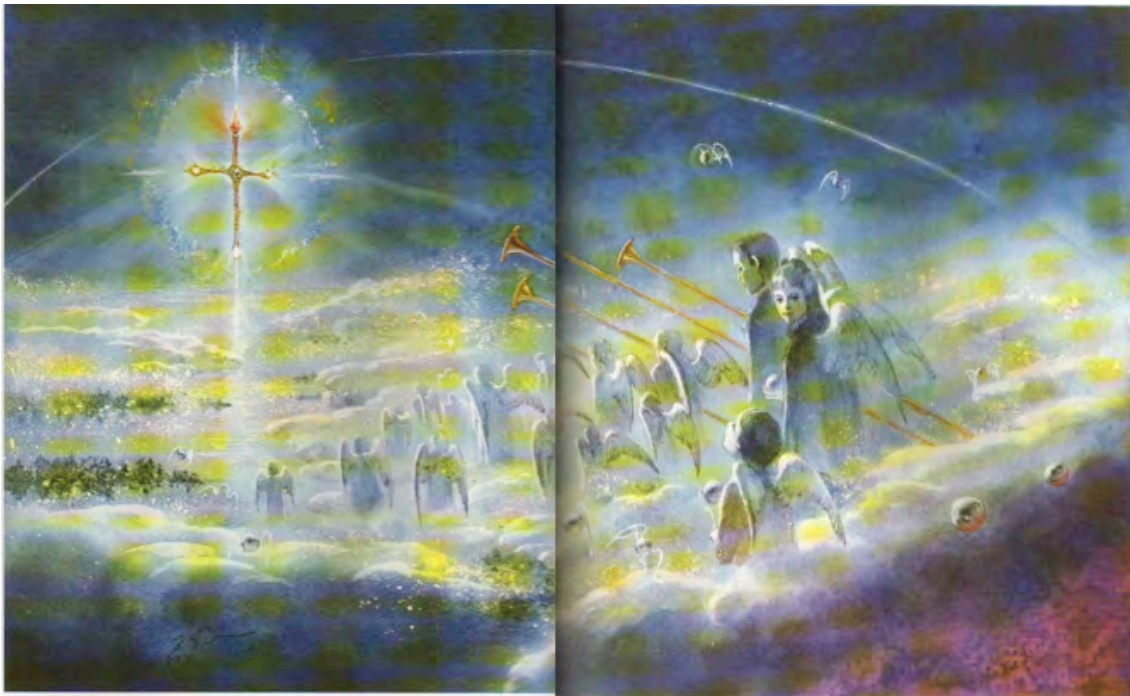


Figure 8: Illus. Azuma Itsuko; pp. 64–65, *Ginga tetsudô no yoru*; Kumon, 1993.

Azuma uniquely intensifies the relationship between the two boys in *Ginga* through her depiction of an apparently unrequited desire that is reminiscent of the elusive love and adoration between 'beautiful boy' (*bishônen*) figures from earlier *shôjo* narratives. She introduces the boys at the section when Giovanni first realises Campanella is with him

²⁶ Hagio has also mentioned her regard for Kenji's fantasies. See: <http://www.tcj.com/history/the-moto-hagio-interview-conducted-by-matt-thorn-part-two-of-four/>. Images of Hagio's covers can be found at <http://www.hagiomoto.net/> (Accessed 27 November 2012).

on the train (figure 9). The focus on the sorrow of their gazing figures harks back to Kashō's *bishōnen* figures and the BL themes of Hagio. They sit facing one another with wide-eyed, dreamy looks that exude a wistful melancholy. While their gazes are directed towards each other in an indication of mutual admiration and desire for psychological engagement, their eyes do not meet. They are simultaneously downcast, the younger-looking Giovanni's (on the right) particularly poignant with apparent expectation. The sense of silent, tragic adoration and yearning arrests ideas of heteronormativity and suggests the *shōjo*/BL arena of resistant transgression.

The sense of longing and hope in their wistful gazes signals their yearning for an alternative path beyond the real, mundane world, towards a truer 'happiness.' Both their gazes are directed towards the obsidian star chart that Campanella received at the Milky Way Station where he boarded. It is this chart that initiates Giovanni's dreams as he tries unsuccessfully to recall stopping at this station (which signifies death). In contrast to the hardship of Giovanni's everyday life, this melancholic gazing underlines Giovanni's sorrow about the elusiveness of true friendship. It brings their potential BL relationship to the fore while also signalling their future separation. By hinting at a romantic relationship that focuses on unrequited desires, the artwork inscribes all the pathos of Giovanni's longing and signals the space of subversive passion. Azuma's images thus gently challenge the social restrictions imposed upon the boys and any such unconventional relationship.

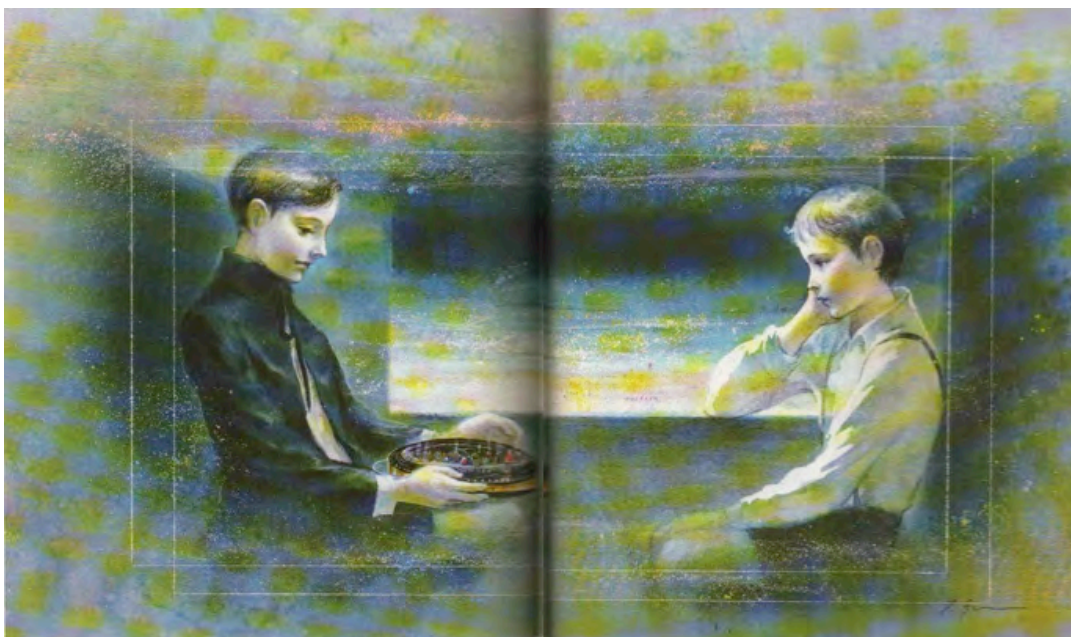


Figure 9: Illus. Azuma Itsuko; pp. 22–23, *Ginga tetsudō no yoru*; Kumon, 1993.

The framing in this picture contrasts notions of confinement with imagined freedom. Whereas Azuma's boys are merging into the train that floats in space as it moves along, they are also bordered within more rigid, yet almost subliminal rectangular lines of light that echo the outline of the window. Their confinement, however, is set against the galactic background of drifting planets in an endless space. The rainbow colours and light and transparency reinscribe the special brilliance of the celestial scenery along their dreamy travels. The scene is replete with all the mystery and wistfulness of the *shôjo/bishônen* aesthetic. Yet the *bishônen* figures are framed both within and outside the ethereal translucence of the celestial backdrop. The linearity and angularity of the framing imply notions of imposed restrictions, but are simultaneously juxtaposed against the expansive flow outside that surrounds and seeps through their semi-transparent bodies to offer the imaginative possibilities of internal transgressive desires.

Pathos and loneliness are again borne out in another framed image of a gazing Giovanni, near the point in the narrative that expresses his continuing pain and jealousy at Campanella's attention to the girl Kaoru (figure 10). Here, where narrative describes the dejected, tearful Giovanni staring out of the window, Azuma frames his yearning face within an illuminated rectangle. At the same time, he is set against the *hirahira* imagery of freely flying birds which are in turn surrounded by phosphorescent light and glittering crystalline stars. Giovanni gazes downwards, towards yet beyond the viewer,



Figure 10: Illus. Azuma Itsuko; pp. 5253, *Ginga tetsudô no yoru*; Kumon, 1993.

past all the swaying, rustling and gleaming beauty of the swiftly passing countryside. The whole image illuminates the poignancy of his pain and solitude. His disconnected gaze reinforces the vision of abandonment and retreat from difficult worldly constraints (symbolised in the linear frame) as he yearns for the unfettered ‘freedom’ that he imagines eternal love will bring and that the heavenly backdrop represents.

Amidst all the sparkle and translucency used to describe the natural world in the verbal text, the luminescence surrounding the framed Giovanni as he admires the beautiful flocks of birds aestheticises his yearning for eternal friendship as he asks himself (and the viewer): ‘Why am I this unhappy?’ (54). His ‘eyes fill with tears again’ (54–55) at the thought that Campanella is so absorbed by Kaoru. This picture thus reinscribes his teary isolation as he tries to calm himself by looking off into the dim haze in the distance after having unfairly snubbed the girl.

Giovanni’s emotional solitude is reiterated in the final spread that highlights his separation from Campanella (figure 11). Campanella has ‘escaped’ the pain of this world into death. He is high above, looking along vectors of light that lead down towards Giovanni and his teacher as they (and the viewer) reflect upon Campanella’s death. This picture again directs the separated boys’ gazes towards each other, yet they are broken by the horizon (and vertically by the book’s gutter), underlining the fact that they have not been able to fully connect, and are now even further apart. This visual



Figure 11: Illus. Azuma Itsuko; pp. 68–69, *Ginga tetsudō no yoru*; Kumon, 1993.

separation underlines Giovanni's isolation and melancholy. Azuma illuminates and reinscribes the intensity of his desire for escape into love for Campanella, signalling the space of profound longing. Her poignant illustrations highlight the *shôjo* aspects of Kenji's narrative, re-visioning dominant patriarchal readings of *Ginga* with a contemporary sense of resistance.

Ultimately, Makino and Azuma extend Kenji's concern for the oppressed and vulnerable into the sphere of the 'girl' by drawing upon the rich Japanese genealogy of *shôjo* visual imagery. Like much of the lyrical art since Taishô, both Makino and Azuma establish their protagonists as androgynous, Caucasian beauties against a fantastic sphere filled with iridescent flora and fauna. In doing so, the artists engender a radiant, liminal aesthetic that calls up the 'girl' collective. In taking up many of the earlier, iconoclastic conventions of many *shôjo manga*, they are not only reinscribing the original stories with *bishônen* imagery, but also continuing and expanding the sphere. Their art offers readers a visual taste of Honda's *hirahira* aesthetic of fulfillable desires while instantiating Takahara's 'girl conscious' world as a space of imagined resistance to restrictive roles.

By emphasising the in-between space as one of sorrowful yearning, the artists incorporate and expand the aesthetic of opposition to societal constraints imposed by ideologies operating both now and at the time when the narratives were originally produced. Their art ultimately evokes the Takahara/Honda transitional realm of 'freedom and arrogance' by creating an exotic, marginal space in which their 'girl' figures can break free—at least through the imagination—from social restrictions. Like Honda's internal resistance, this space inspires a subversive imaginative that may well live on eternally in the mind. These artistic representations provide layers of imaginative 'girlhood,' bringing into play Takahara's 'fantastic' as an incorporeal, liminal space that constitutes an intuitive 'girl conscious' rejection of life's externally prescribed limits. Makino and Azuma are thus incorporating these picture books, ostensibly produced for younger audiences, into the ever-growing *shôjo* sphere (of literature, film, anime and visual arts). That is, the illustrations for *Futago* and *Ginga* are galvanizing and reflecting a collective 'girl consciousness' that subtly confronts patriarchal hegemonies, past and current, and thus expands the abstract consciousness of the 'girl' to emerging audiences.

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