

of the postwar era writing for girls were men, but it's interesting to note that gender confusion was already on the drawing board, as Tezuka's protagonist Princess Sapphire is a creature born with both a male and female spirit. (In his waning years, he also worked on a retelling of "Faust" featuring a female Mephistopheles.)

As the girls who grew up reading comics in the fifties and sixties started writing their own in the seventies, the *shojo manga* entered what is considered its golden age. The exhibition features colorful illustrations from possibly the most aesthetically emblematic girls' comic of any era, Riyoko Ikeda's French Revolution epic "Rose of Versailles."

What sets girls' comics apart is arguably just as much a matter of visual style as narrative substance. Instead of hard bold lines and garish colors, girls' comics often use pastels and a soft glow effect. Everyone has great hair and glamorous clothes, and historical pieces get a lot of mileage out of frilly shirts, flowing gowns and flowery backdrops. They offer up a fantasy world light years away from the drab school uniforms, glass and steel monoliths, and rabbit-hutch apartment buildings that make up many kids' waking realities. Almost all characters in manga have oversized, twinkling eyes--but in *shojo manga* their eyes don't contain individual stars so much as entire galaxies. Seeing Ikeda's images as they were originally created prior to being shrunk and mass-produced, you get a sense of the painterly craft needed to make these idealized confections sparkle.

Idealization is a huge part of teenage romantic fantasy, and "Shojo Manga!" goes a long way to illustrating what young women in Japan fantasize about. For many, nothing captures the pure romantic ideal quite like stories about pretty (often blue-eyed, blond-haired) teenage boys in love with each other. "Shojo Manga!" boasts excerpts from a giant of the genre, "Thomas' Heart," a tragic love story set in a German boarding school.

"Some Japanese women no longer believe in love between men and women as superior since they see the reality after the happy ending," says Dr. Masami Toku, the exhibition's curator.

But as the exhibit gleefully demonstrates, not all girls' comics are about love or coming of age. Similarly, there's no dominant visual style on display. As the contemporary "shojo manga" world expands and fragments, girls' comics have spawned ladies' comics, romantic homoeroticism has become a genre of self-parody, and (gasp!) artists have even started drawing ugly-looking people with normal-sized eyes.

And since girls' stories were once told almost exclusively by men, it's only fitting that the venerable Osamu Tezuka's daughter-in-law, Reiko Okano, has become a highly respected *shojo manga* artist herself.

Oh yes, one other thing--she writes boys' comics on the side.

"Shojo Manga! Girl Power!" shows at the C33 Gallery, 33

East Congress, through April 26. Reception: March 24, 5-8pm, Special NAEA Convention Reception, (public is welcome to attend); March 28, 5-7pm, College-Wide Reception. Both feature lectures by Curator Masami Toku and an artist at 5:30pm.*

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