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### **End of Summer Report**

Hello, my name is Killeen Javorsky and I'm currently a rising senior at Albion College. Through the FURSCA program this summer, I was able to conduct my own research project and explore research methods that worked for me, as a history major with eclectic interests. My project was to create a detailed literature review of *manga* (Japanese comics) that focus on gender and queer themes. By reading a wide range of manga and critical works, my goal was to immerse myself in the visual world of these characters and to discern the growth over time in how these stories represent gender. For this project, I read 26 manga series that ranged in length from one to 25 volumes, and I played two novel video games estimated to take a minimum of 10 hours. I divided these pieces into categories and supplemented each theme with academic readings, including books, academic journals, and even fan reviews. After reading each piece, I wrote a brief abstract and compiled all of these recaps into a literature review that will inform my thesis, which I will begin this fall. I have included a few samples from this lit review at the end of this document for your interest.

Tackling a project of this size taught me three main things: the importance of the tiny details, the gift of brevity, and what it means to design and complete a project such as this. First, I tend to consume media at a rapid pace, but that does not always give my brain enough time to fully absorb the concepts being explored. With this project being all about mindful reading, I had to work on learning new reading techniques which resulted in me having the clearest memory of what I've read to date. For example, I was able to chart tiny details that I would normally regard as irrelevant, such as the fact that class theater performances are a recurring event in coming-of-age genderqueer stories. Going hand-in-hand with composing the literature review, these closer, more detail-oriented reading practices made relating pieces to each other way easier and, therefore, my research was a lot more fulfilling. Second, the gift of brevity does not come to me naturally; however, the FURSCA summer did not afford me the gift of endless time. Therefore, I had to learn a difficult lesson early on: be concise. I had more than two dozen series to summarize in the time that I wasn't reading, and I couldn't justify spending more than an hour writing any given literature review. Figuring out what was important for future reference and

what was frivolous detail was crucial, resulting in an overall improvement to the efficiency of my writing style. In the end I learned how to write useful reviews in under 30 minutes, which is a writing strategy that will serve me well in my future courses and as I begin working on my thesis. Finally, designing and working on a substantial project like this was radically different from the idea I had in my head as to how this would go. In the beginning I had a much bigger emphasis on the historical aspect of these manga, but drafting the proposal helped me come to the conclusion that the literary pieces were the backbone of my project at this stage. Even though it was difficult to give up a fraction of the historical aspect, I learned that there is a time and place for completing things. For my thesis, I have already completed much of the historical background in my coursework, and this literary emphasis is where I needed to focus my attention now. I also learned that there is no such thing as “disconnected research,” since in one way or another the material will become personal and may get in the way of completing your research. Although these personal challenges made it difficult to continue, they brought a plethora of discussion topics that might not have happened otherwise.

Although I was unable to finish one of the manga series on my list and struggled through the last three weeks of academic texts, I've learned about my capacity for working with both primary and secondary texts. Now, when I approach my thesis work, I will have a better sense of how to break down the workload to ensure there's a balance of readings at different lengths, and I won't overload myself with challenging theoretical works. That being said, I don't regret any of the mental hardships that came with this project in terms of my own gender exploration. In fact I'm overjoyed that I could examine the idea of representation in something as silly as a story about space-traveling-cowboy bounty hunters, and I can understand in a real and embodied way how that storytelling can bring about personal acceptance. It inspires me to understand how, if these pieces are given more visibility, someone else might be able to peacefully explore their own gender identity and perhaps reevaluate their relationship with gender norms, too.

The main problem I encountered in this project was the issue of the translator. Now, a translator is necessary because even the official English translations make egregious mistakes: for example, in the recent *Delicious in Dungeon* (2014-23), a character named Thistle is erroneously named Sissle in translation. Especially when it comes to cultural nuances with words, translators are vital, as with gender concepts the Japanese language differs greatly from what would be considered politically correct in the United States. Something I had to wrap my

head around during my reading was the fact that using a word that would be considered a slur here was a completely acceptable and, in some cases, encouraged way to describe, for instance, transgender individuals. However, with no warning, approaching these words in the text could cause a Western reader to have a rather confused, visceral reaction. In my plans for seeking a translator for some of the texts I hoped to study this summer, I made a fatal mistake in contacting the translator before I had acquired the books they would work on translating for me. Quite unluckily, my book shipment was delayed, and the time we had marked out for the translation work passed without any work being done. Unfortunately, on top of that, my translator had no other time available for me during the FURSCA period. This resulted in me having to search for another translator, resulting in me learning that there are translators who specialize rather than just being able to translate anything (e.g. people who could translate Japanese but specialized in company documents or blueprints and did not feel comfortable translating literary texts). In the future, if I employ a translator, I will make sure that I have the items to be translated before I give the translator a schedule.

The end goal for this project was to lay a foundation for my thesis writing this coming fall semester. Without this dedicated time, I would no doubt be extremely behind in my research process. Now, for the fall, I have a list of pieces I want involved in my thesis—some of which I would've never considered including beforehand—that prominently depict trending themes narrowed down from the original 28. This narrower list will allow me to give each of those an even closer focus. Furthermore, being able to have allotted time to focus on my academic work and nothing else during FURSCA this summer was something that in no other circumstance would be possible. From the beginning this project has been motivated by my desire for others to utilize this information. Through the presentation and interviews I've given, as well as simply talking to people about what I'm doing, it has opened up the floor for me to both quiz myself on my own understanding of the topic and on other viewpoints about this work that I wouldn't have considered exploring before. This has also made me realize that I love captive audiences that have to listen to me talk about my passions, and this has helped me try to figure out the most engaging way to share my information with broader audiences—while also encouraging me for my presentation at Elkin Isaac. As for how this project made a difference in my personal life, it's quite simple: without this opportunity I don't think I would've been able to have the time to do any self-reflection and examine things about myself in detail as to where I'd be able to discover

myself. This world goes by quickly, and we're not always given that chance to just sit in our thoughts, so being afforded that time to read and think and *feel* is more valuable than anything else I could imagine.

I would like to thank everyone involved in running FURSCA—Elizabeth Palmer and Renee Kreger for both being such wonderfully dedicated leaders that went above and beyond in order to make sure everyone was comfortable and having fun while still keeping everyone accountable for their work. Thank you to Elizabeth Palmer, specifically, for putting up with all my odd questions during the application process and always making sure her answers never showed any bias. Thank you to Renee Kreger, especially, for always bending over backwards to complete any request that was made of her—no matter how outrageous—with a sarcastic joke. My advisor, Krista Quesenberry, receives all my love for the fact she didn't know who I was before I walked in her door crying about how much I wanted to do this and how she took it all gracefully in stride, jumping immediately into problem solving and assuring me that this would all be figured out. Thank you again to Krista for being an amazing wealth of knowledge during the summer and a comfortable presence for more touchy subjects. Finally, thank you to the Strosa Research Fund for making this summer even possible to begin with. Without their generosity, I would've never had the opportunity to spend so much time talking, thinking, learning about, and exploring this rich and challenging topic—gender.

## Examples:

### **Princess Knight**

This manga features the character Prince(ss) Sapphire, an unconfirmed genderfluid individual. Content warnings for this manga include: violence, sexual assault, harassment, drug usage, homophobia, transphobia, bullying, and misogyny. This is such an odd piece because it reads similar to a Disney movie mixed with a children's Bible movie. It starts out with God giving every child in heaven either a "brave boy" or "graceful girl" heart, of which the troublemaker Tink (the fact that Tink is reminiscent of Disney Tinkerbell is entirely coincidence as *Princess Knight* was published first) makes it so baby Sapphire has both hearts meaning she's skilled at fighting and brave but graceful and beautiful with a compassionate demeanor. Sapphire is often shown lamenting out loud whether or not she's a man or a woman however these moments feel disjointed from the rest of the storyline as Sapphire's main goal is to be able to live as a woman freely while ruling her kingdom (due to there only being able to be kings she's forced to live as a man). There's undertones of possibly Sapphire wanting to live as a woman because she never got the chance to and, similarly, had she not been allowed to live as a man she would've had a goal to live as a man. This piece highlights the concept of the "gendered heart", at the beginning when Sapphire would have her male heart removed she immediately became a weak damsel in distress who couldn't even muster the strength to fight but towards the end when she only has the girl heart she's confidently standing up to oppressive forces—this including deities as she fights with Aphrodite. Overall, this feels like someone taking a tiny step into gender queer themes but not wanting to commit entirely because, at the end of the day, this is a love story between Prince Charming and Princess Sapphire.

### **Our Metamorphosis**

This manga features the characters Yuuta "Marika" Aoki, a confirmed transwoman, and Osamu "Parou" Tamura, a confirmed gay crossdresser. Content warnings for this manga include: transphobia, transmisogyny, homophobia, misogyny, sexism, bullying, sexual assault, assault, pedophilia, violence, and harassment. Sincerely, I think this piece is a little bit better at plot progression and demonstrating gender exploration than *Wandering Son*. Now, if you're looking for a school environment that doesn't immediately welcome a transwoman or for a narrative about transmen then this piece falls a little flat however, in contrast to *Strange Mansion*, this piece compares different reasons for gender expression but doesn't regard any of them as weird or disgusting for their situations. Marika personally explores purity culture that she attaches to her gender identity, becoming confused and disgusted with herself when she begins to have sexual thoughts as she had connected all of her feelings with her desire to be a wonderful princess that had magical stuffed animal friends. When her stuffed animal friends stopped talking to her but these feelings of dysphoria persisted, she knew she couldn't hide behind fantasies anymore and had to accept that she was growing up. Parou, on the other hand, finds herself more comfortable and confident when presenting as a woman seeing as all of the men that she's been

with in the past have insisted that she dress as a man in order for them not to be disgusted with the fact that they're in a relationship with a man. She justifies her love of sex and potential enjoyment of dressing as a woman/out of body experience while having sex dressed as a woman with a fake dream that she was a woman in her past life, trying to connect herself more with womanhood and distance herself from homosexuality. Through her discussions with Marika and the third gender exploratory friend in their trio, Parou is able to reclaim women's attire for herself and not for the comfort of other people. What is so wonderful about this piece is the fact that all of the characters are humanized in such a thoughtful and delicate way, the author admitting afterwards that she had spent a lot of time researching and interviewing LGBTQ+ people in order to get everyone's story completed in the most tasteful way possible. In the end, this wasn't just about teaching other people tolerance but rather the author learning alongside the reader, opening up to a touching love letter to the concepts of change, exploration, and love. All of these characters do bad things but all of them are fundamentally good and learn through mistakes, both comforting and informing the reader.

### **Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon**

This manga features the character Haruka "Sailor Uranus" Tenou, a confirmed intersex and unconfirmed genderfluid individual. Content warnings for this manga include: violence, sexual assault, harassment, death, bullying, homophobia, and misogyny. Haruka is an odd case as while she is stated as being more powerful than the other sailor soldiers due to being intersex and therefore having "masculine strength" inside of her, it's the way she chooses to represent her comfortability that's really fascinating. Of course, the intersex strength part as well as her desirability being higher due to her androgyny are both tried and true tropes that often surround the idea of being "the best of both worlds" but the way that Haruka herself approaches her identity is meaningful. Her girlfriend is never portrayed as being "seduced" by Haruka and is often Haruka's biggest cheerleader—if even she may be a little confused at times. Haruka, when uncomfortable such as in places like her school, dresses in a stereotypically male fashion however when she's comfortable, such as when she's confidently fighting as a sailor soldier or spending time with her girlfriend, she's dressing in a stereotypically female fashion. Always depicted as othered and disconnected from the group, slowly over time she's able to integrate into the sailor soldiers and find acceptance for herself. Overall, the depiction of clothing exploration as almost armor is poignant in Haruka as she finds her place with friends.

### **Persona 4**

This manga features the character Naoto Shirogane, a confirmed crossdresser. Content warnings for this manga include: violence, sexual assault, harassment, drug usage, homophobia, bullying, transphobia, and misogyny. To be quite frank, this character made me furious and then deeply upset before landing on a confusingly simple middle ground of resignation. Perhaps this character was intended to be a transgender man but the author was not allowed to go through with it so rather left it to the players or perhaps the character is supposed to follow a similar path

as seen in *I Wanna Be Your Girl!!*, but there's no clear answer and I think I'm alright with not getting that clear answer. Naoto dresses as a male detective in order to garner legitimacy (so the reasoning we're told) however often goes to great lengths in order to affirm their masculinity to the rest of the group. Seeing as the whole theme of *Persona 4* is the mirror being held up to you and you having to acknowledge all the nasty parts of yourself that you don't want to, there can be a very clear argument that internalized misogyny is at play here. However when the player steps into Naoto's realm you're met with a copy of Naoto that's about to undergo gender reassignment surgery who talks about how desperately they want to be a man. None of the other characters have copies of themselves that speak so emphatically about their desires but not only that, Naoto's copy seems resigned with the reality of being assigned female at birth, lamenting that they can just fix it right there and then. Of course the real Naoto decides to deny this copy's desires and asserts that they want to start living as a woman and be taken seriously in their career but the scene sticks with the viewer regardless. I think that because it's Naoto's copy that explains all of this thus begins the trend of gender non-conforming characters not being able to talk for themselves or explain their reasonings for their gender performance.

### **Danganronpa: Trigger Happy Havoc**

This manga features the character Chihiro Fujisaki, a confirmed crossdresser. Content warnings for this manga include: transphobia, transmisogyny, homophobia, ableism, racism, sexism, misogyny, bullying, graphic gore, violence, death/murder, suicide, flashing [bright] lights, mentions/depictions of abuse, physical/sexual assault, disrespect towards corpses, stalking, necrophilia, cannibalism and harassment. This is another case of a (potential) transwoman being sexually assaulted in order to "correct gender misconceptions", except this one takes place after the person is dead making it all that more eerie. However, I've already explored in another project that exact aspect of this piece, meaning I'd like to spend my time discussing another facet that I've noticed: who's telling the story. I use the word "story" deliberately as there is no confirmation as to whether or not this is the truth but I must share context first. First of all, Chihiro is part of a killing game and is titled "the ultimate programmer" who is portrayed as a meek, cowardly, and above all weak teenage girl. The main antagonist of the story is a black and white bear named Monokuma who's forcing the rest of the teenagers that are in the highschool with Chihiro to take part in a killing game—he's been known to lie and pull sneaky tricks in order to get his way, which is important. As the story progresses the player sees multiple occurrences of Chihiro becoming upset when people call them a girl or are regarded as powerless and therefore in need of protection, all leading to the night where they're murdered by their classmate, Mondo. The lengths that Mondo goes to conceal Chihiro's assigned gender at birth are denied when other classmates, Kirigiri and Sakura, decide that it's perfectly acceptable to stick their hands under the skirt of a deceased classmate. It's then revealed that Chihiro was assigned male at birth and once the trial commences Monokuma is the one to tell the rest of the classmates as to why Chihiro decided to present themselves that way. In actuality, Chihiro is only seen talking for themselves on one or two occasions about their gender identity—the rest that is

considered “canon” is all facts told by the story’s main antagonist. This choice was fascinating to me as Monokuma explains it away with Chihiro dressing as a woman in order to escape bullying but the fact that the antagonist is being believed as telling the truth is an interesting choice. It’s not Mondo, who had the conversation with Chihiro about their gender identity (of which the player never got to fully see or have explained), but rather the character who has been enforcing the killing this entire time. Honestly, I think the reason Monokuma was chosen to share this information is because we’re not meant to trust him. It may be the truth but it may not be, meaning it’s up to the player to decide whether or not they trust a murderous stuffed toy bear over their own analysis. The power of who gets to tell the story is not lost on me in this piece because although Chihiro may have died in the narrative their story is hotly debated between fans, giving me almost a peace of mind that they’ll never be forgotten.