“The Revolutionary Undoing of the Maiden Warrior in Riyoko Ikeda’s The Rose of Versailles and Jacques Demy’s Lady Oscar.”

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A dutiful daughter disguises herself as a knight and takes up the sword to protect her father’s noble reputation and her king’s realm. Whether we think of the Chinese or French iterations of maiden warrior tales, the figure is fraught with tensions. On the one hand the maiden warrior demonstrates the capacities of women to live and fight honorably. Maiden warrior tales grant the heroine ample agency, demonstrating her physical and intellectual strengths; as such, they hint at the arbitrary nature of gender norms in the societies that give rise to such tales. On the other hand the maiden warrior is only allowed to transgress the norms assigned to women for the sake of maintaining patriarchal and monarchical power. In other words, she defends a patriarchal social and political order that upholds, paradoxically, gender norms that limit women’s agency. When the heroine restores order by the end of the tale, she abandons her masculine attire to resume her position as a woman, either beside a prince or king through marriage or within the domestic space, taking up the spindle. In both cases she forever relinquishes her sword.

But what happens when the heroine refuses to set down her sword or when she turns it against father, king, and the sociopolitical order she was supposed to defend? Riyoko Ikeda’s popular shōjo manga *Berusaiyu no bara* (The Rose of Versailles, 1972–1973) and Jacques Demy’s *Lady Oscar* (1979), a film adaptation of the manga, provide us with such scenarios.\(^1\) By situating their maiden warrior tales within the context of the French Revolution, Ikeda’s and Demy’s maiden warriors end up fighting to dismantle a patriarchal and monarchical feudal order instead of defending it. In earlier maiden warrior

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tales cross-dressing marks a temporary breach in that society’s sex-gender system. However, Ikeda and Demy point to the possibility of permanent change with the reference to revolution and to Oscar’s constant identity as a masculine woman, which suggests that the sociopolitical order and the sex-gender system have been indelibly altered.

Although these modifications to traditional tales have repercussions for questions related to sexuality, which I treat elsewhere, my focus in this essay is on how Ikeda’s and Demy’s transformation of the maiden warrior tale affects constructions of gender and class. Even though Ikeda and Demy empower their respective heroines in more long-standing ways than earlier variants of such tales, their re-visionings of the maiden warrior, especially that of Demy, paradoxically point to the figure’s undoing. This undoing of the maiden warrior occurs not only because the traditional context in which she evolves—that of a patriarchal monarchy—crumbles over the course of the story but also because the class prejudices underpinning the forms of aristocratic heroism that shape the actions of the maiden warrior are undermined with the introduction of collective political action. Finally, gender trouble is not simply a parenthetical occurrence in the life of the maiden warrior; rather, gender is permanently destabilized with no fixed position to which the heroine can simply return at the end of the tale.

The Maiden Warrior Tradition

Although the use of the term maiden rather than woman may seem problematic, many maiden warrior tales concern adolescent girls transitioning into womanhood. It is perhaps because the maiden warrior finds herself in a transitional phase that her female masculinity is tolerated and even celebrated in such a culturally and historically diverse array of tales. Louise Edwards characterizes the liminal state of the maiden warrior of Chinese tradition as follows:

It is the time in a woman’s life when her sexual power has yet to be realized through pregnancy and childbirth, and her sexual knowledge is limited. Virginity as a temporary state in these young women’s lives adds the promise of sex to further titillate the reader. The temporariness of her lifestyle is therein also linked to her age. Once she has become a married woman her Amazon lifestyle must be forfeited or she pays the penalty of death. (253)

We might associate the maiden warrior with the tomboy, whose female masculinity extends through childhood, as described by Judith Halberstam. For Halberstam, however, “tomboyism is punished . . . when it appears to be the
sign of extreme male identification . . . and when it threatens to extend beyond
childhood and into adolescence” (60). In maiden warrior tales, which emerged
from medieval and early modern societies, it would seem that the tolerance
(at least in fiction) for female masculinity as manifested in this particular
figure extends well into adolescence, but such gender ambiguity must be
renounced when the heroine fully enters womanhood.

Both Dianne Dugaw and Pauline Greenhill provide insight into the shape
that the maiden warrior took in English cross-dressing ballads, whose audi-
ence was lower class. This shape conformed more or less to the following nar-
rative sequence: (1) the heroine and hero’s courtship is threatened or they are
separated; (2) the heroine disguises herself as a soldier or sailor to follow her
lover to war; (3) she endures various trials; and (4) she is finally reunited with
her beloved. 4 Although the English cross-dressing ballad represents an impor-
tant maiden warrior tradition, I focus instead on the maiden warrior in Chinese
and French folk and literary traditions, which form the classical narrative on
which Ikeda and Demy’s rewritings of the maiden warrior are based.

The basic narratives of the most notable examples from the Chinese and
French traditions are remarkably similar. Rather than follow her lover to war, the
heroine in these traditions upholds family honor by fighting in the king’s army.
Usually the story concerns a noble household with no sons, and the heroine—
usually the youngest daughter—fulfills the function of male heir by becoming a
successful knight, passing as a male, and protecting the kingdom. The king may
or may not fall in love with her, and the tale ends with the daughter returning to
her initial gender after having defended father and fatherland.

As several critics of the Chinese maiden warrior tradition have noted, the
character is ridden with contradictions. Edwards remarks: “She is threatening to
patriarchal power, with its implicit preference for meek and mild women, and
yet primarily instrumental in ensuring its continued existence because the deeds
she performs are undeniably consolidating of the existing Confucian social and
moral order” (231). Likewise, Sufen Sophia Lai maintains: “On the surface,
women warriors may appear to be unorthodox and to defy gender boundaries,
but ideologically they are still well defined within the Confucian moral codes of
filial piety and loyalty” (79). 5 In premodern Chinese lore the maiden warrior
does not fit neatly into either subversive or conformist tendencies.

The prototype par excellence of maiden warrior tales in China is “The
Ballad of Mulan” (fourth century C.E.). It opens with Mulan carrying out the
traditional domestic work of weaving, associated with women’s roles and fem-
ininity. But when the emperor calls for a soldier from every family, her father
cannot comply, for he is too old and his son too young. Mulan thus takes it
upon herself to protect the family honor and goes to different markets to buy
“a gallant horse . . . saddle and cloth . . . snaffle and reins . . . [and] a tall whip” (“Ballad” 267). She rides twelve years with the emperor’s army, after which she rejects his offer to be made counselor at his imperial court. She returns home, dons female garb, and surprises her “messmates,” who had never suspected she was a girl (“Ballad” 268). Edwards provides several other examples of warrior women in the Chinese tradition, all of whom perform as males out of filial duty, much in the tradition of Mulan.

Edwards contrasts the figure of the maiden warrior in Chinese tradition to that of Western narratives, which she characterizes in terms of the “self-indulgent realization of fantasy lifestyles or attainment of romantic desires” (238). However, she focuses primarily on studies of English ballads and does not take into account the French tradition, whose Joan of Arc, much like Mulan, takes up the sword (or at least the banner) to protect the kingdom and uphold political and moral order. Although medieval examples of maiden warriors before and after Joan of Arc exist, seventeenth-century France was particularly prolific in the production of images of Amazons and female warriors, a fashion that has been studied by such scholars as Ian Maclean, Joan DeJean, and Marlies Mueller, to name a few.

The figure of the woman warrior takes diverse forms but follows two main tendencies, as Christine Jones has shown. They either challenge political order, in the tradition of the Amazonian frondeuses, women who fought in the French rebellion against the monarchy called the Fronde (1648–1653); or they uphold it in the tradition of the femme forte, the virtuous strong woman or national heroine exemplified by Joan of Arc (Jones 25). In the late seventeenth century this fashion gave rise to several fairy tales dealing with the theme of the maiden warrior: the tales by Marie-Jeanne L’Héritier, the niece of Charles Perrault; Marie-Catherine d’Aulnoy; and Henriette Julie de Murat.

Whereas the heroine of Murat’s “Le Sauvage” (The Savage) cross-dresses as the knight Constantin to avoid an undesirable marriage, the heroines of L’Héritier’s “Marmoisan” and d’Aulnoy’s “Belle-Belle, ou le chevalier Fortuné” (Belle-Belle, or the Chevalier Fortuné) do so to uphold familial honor and political order, much in the tradition of Mulan. However, the heroines’ fidelity to patriarch and king is shaped in such a way as to criticize society under Louis XIV, and the tales themselves can be read as women writers’ responses to contemporary debates regarding women’s relation to and potential role in the public sphere.

In L’Héritier’s tale, Léonore is the fourth daughter of a nobleman and the twin sister of Marmoisan, the nobleman’s only son. When Marmoisan is killed trying to seduce a married woman, Léonore assumes her brother’s identity and replaces her brother at court and at war. Much of L’Héritier’s narrative revolves
around the anxiety of the prince, the son of the king whom Marmoisan serves. He is troubled by his attraction to Marmoisan, and after hearing a rumor that Marmoisan is in fact a woman, the prince tries to test the apparent nobleman's gender through several gender-specific tests. Marmoisan's success at outwitting the prince emphasizes her recognition of the constructedness of gender and her ability to successfully maneuver within each category. However, Marmoisan's “innocent deception” (the subtitle of the tale) is finally disclosed through the revelation of the heroine's breast after she is injured in a tournament. Despite the fact that Léonore/Marmoisan is the daughter of a count and not of royal blood, the king consents to the marriage of his son to this loyal servant of the crown because of her merit and her capability to provide solid counsel to her husband.9

As Joseph Harris notes, “The heroine Léonore's gender inversion both functions as a tool of social critique for the writer and ultimately brings about a positive reestablishment of the social order portrayed within the text” (201). Even though Léonore takes on the masculine identity of Marmoisan, she is quite critical of self-interested models of masculinity prevalent at the king's court, exemplified by the corrupt behavior of her twin brother. Although the tale concludes with Marmoisan transforming back into Léonore and her marriage to the prince, her masculine example implicitly serves as a model for ideal courtiers and she comes to play an important role as her husband's counsel. Through her heroine, L'Héritier manages to save filial honor and political order, all the while subtly carving out a place of power for the female subject.

In “Belle-Belle,” d'Aulnoy's heroine similarly and more obviously restores balance to a kingdom in decline. The tale concerns a king who has been “dispossessed” (dépouillé) of all his wealth by the neighboring emperor, Matapa. To recover his wealth and power, the king calls on noble families, each of which must provide him with a knight for the cause. As in other maiden warrior tales, Belle-Belle's father is too old to fight and he has no sons. Belle-Belle is the youngest of his three daughters, and after proving herself to a fairy, she attains the equipment and support necessary to fully transform into the accomplished knight, the Chevalier Fortuné. Over the course of the tale, several of the trials she must undergo are in fact traps set by the king's sister, who is in love with Fortuné and punishes “him” for not reciprocating. Fortuné's identity is finally revealed when, as she is about to be executed, her shirt is ripped open and her breasts are exposed. The tale concludes with Belle-Belle marrying the prince and with the restoration of the king's wealth and power.

Adrienne Zuerner reads the tale of Belle-Belle as a commentary on the waning years of Louis XIV's monarchy, which was “plagued by economic and religious crises” (205). Opening “with a scene of masculine lack,” d'Aulnoy's cross-dressed heroine restores the political and economic order of the nation.
Although the tale stages a female character who puts the monarchy at risk—the dowager queen—it is another female character, along with her merry men, who supplements the king’s lack (Zuerner 196–97). Even though the tale appears to uphold monarchy, it also, in Zuerner’s words, “constitutes an oppositional discourse because it indicates the contradictions inhering in seventeenth-century myths of monarchical absolutism” (208).

What I would like to point out in both “Marmoisan” and “Belle-Belle” is that, first, these tales challenge contemporary discourses that attributed social and political disorder to women at a time when women were playing increasingly important roles within the emerging public sphere. Through their cross-dressed heroines, L’Héritier and d’Aulnoy could prove women’s social, political, and even martial value to the state. Second, women writers consciously played on the constructedness of gender in order to open up models of both female and male subjectivity. L’Héritier and d’Aulnoy flatten the gender hierarchy by demonstrating the weaknesses and vulnerability of conventional conceptions and models of masculinity and by foregrounding the qualities of their maiden warriors that indeed prove crucial to the maintenance of the monarchy. However, like Chinese maiden warrior narratives, those by the conteuses end up supporting what ultimately is a patriarchal and monarchical regime. Although their support is conditional on the reform of such regimes—reform that includes some kind of recognition of women’s ability to contribute to public good—their maiden warrior tales are not quite revolutionary, especially in relation to the question of class.

Ikeda’s *Rose of Versailles*

Ryoko Ikeda’s shojo manga *The Rose of Versailles* (1972–1973) is a fascinating example of a maiden warrior tale in graphic novel form. Interestingly, the founding text for shojo manga, Osamu Tezuka’s *Princesse Saphir* (serialized 1953–1956), revolves around a maiden warrior figure. Saphir, who has both a female and a male heart but who is supposed to be a girl, is raised as a boy in order to inherit her father’s throne, which can only be passed down through a male heir. Like other maiden warrior tales, Saphir must identify as male for the sake of family honor as well as for the kingdom, which risks falling into the corrupt hands of Duke Duralmin. Drawing from Tezuka’s premise of a girl who is raised as a knight, Ikeda situates her story within the context of the French Revolution, which has implications for the shape her maiden warrior tale will take.

Ikeda is part of a generation of female shojo manga writers, referred to as the Year 24 Group, all of whom were influenced by Tezuka’s work. As Deborah
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Shamoon explains, the group “dealt openly with politics, sexuality, and with the psychological development and interiority of the characters” (5). First appearing in 1970, Keiko Takemiya’s Sanrāmu nite (In the Sunroom) launched the new fashion, which targeted a more mature female audience than earlier shōjo mangas. Works that followed in its wake include Ikeda’s Rose of Versailles; Moto Hagio’s Tōma no shinzō (The Heart of Thomas, 1974), a love story revolving around early-twentieth-century German schoolmates Thomas, Yuli, and Eric; and Yasuko Aoike’s Eroika yori ai wo komete (From Eroica with Love, serialized 1976–1979), which concerns English earl and art thief Dorian, modeled on Dorian Gray and Robert Plant, who becomes interested in German NATO officer Klaus. This trend in shōjo manga came to be known as “boys love” manga, also referred to as “beautiful boys.” Although questions regarding sexuality were central to the Year 24 Group, I would like to emphasize here the group’s engagement in political and gender issues through a revolutionized shōjo manga tradition, which is clearly articulated in Ikeda’s Rose of Versailles.11

In The Rose of Versailles Lady Oscar presents both continuities and discontinuities with earlier maiden warrior figures. As in the cases discussed earlier, the head of household is in need of a male heir to carry on the family’s military and political duties to the monarchy. Upon realizing that his wife has given birth to their sixth daughter, General de Jarjayes declares, “Women do not have a place in this family where, for generations, we have commanded armies and protected kings” (1: 8).12 But when he hears the boyish, hardy cry of the infant, he decides that he will raise her as a boy. In the earlier maiden warrior tales the heroine in drag conceals her female identity at all times. In the case of Oscar, however, her female identity, as Shamoon observes, “is never a secret” (9). At home as well as at court, members of the French aristocracy are aware that Oscar is a woman in men’s clothing; they appear to accept to some degree her gender ambiguity, which the narrator attributes to French mores of the period.13

Compared to her predecessors, Oscar is more thoroughly masculine, or at least masculinity is an integral and significant part of her identity. Raised as a boy in boy’s clothes with her nursemaid’s grandson André (with whom she will fall in love), Oscar continues donning male garb as she enters the service of the dauphine, Marie-Antoinette. Even when her nursemaid insists that Oscar wear a dress the first time she meets the dauphine, Oscar responds, “I cannot wear this ‘thing!’” (1: 63). Everyone knows that Oscar is female, and precisely because her masculinity is essential to her being, Oscar proves to be a more complex and ambiguously gendered character than Mulan, Marmoisian, or Belle-Belle.
Even as Oscar rebels against the sex-gender system of the Old Regime, she also rebels against its class and political structure. Whereas earlier maiden warriors sought to restore and reform (at least with respect to gender) a monarchy that privileged the upper class, Oscar instead helps to topple the monarchy and renounces her noble title. In many respects Oscar’s evolution follows that of the historical revolutionaries. Initially hoping to reform the monarchy, through her own prise de conscience, Oscar ends up leading the siege of the Bastille with the people. Deciding she no longer wants to be the doll (poupée) of the monarchy, she requests to be transferred from the queen’s guard to the French guards, an infantry unit consisting primarily of commoners assigned to the palace. Although the soldiers initially refuse to take orders from a woman, they end up developing a relationship with Oscar, who sympathizes with their miserable situation and protects them when necessary, using her political connections. When ordered to escort the members of the Third Estate out of the meeting of the Estates General, Oscar refuses, and her men are imprisoned, although they are eventually released by Marie-Antoinette out of her friendship for Oscar. Later, Oscar and her troops are ordered to back the German troops brought in by Louis XVI to protect the monarchy from protesters. Instead of protecting the monarchy, Oscar and her men fight alongside the people, and she renounces her title of countess. Oscar and André promise to marry after the battle, but André is killed just before Oscar leads the revolt against the Bastille, and then in a dramatic scene she herself is killed.

The fact that Ikeda shapes her maiden warrior as an agent who helps usher in the French Revolution is indeed significant. Whereas other maiden warrior tales concern the temporary suspension of a patriarchal political and familial order that privileges the upper classes, transgression in The Rose of Versailles is far from temporary, symbolized by the outbreak of the French Revolution. The Old Regime’s sex-gender and class structure has been permanently altered.

We must keep in mind the period in which Ikeda is writing. As Shamoon remarks in a note, “Ikeda describes the events leading to the Revolution in great detail, which in 1972 would have resonated with the student protests of the New Left [in Japan]” (16). The notion of radically transforming society—at the level of the political as well as the personal with respect to class and to gender—was an objective of student, worker, and civil rights movements in the 1960s and 1970s across the globe. Through her rewriting of the French Revolution, Ikeda addresses issues related to class and gender that were relevant to her generation.

Although Ikeda initially set out to depict the life of Marie-Antoinette in The Rose of Versailles, she ended up privileging Lady Oscar’s character over that of
the infamous queen because of the amount of fan mail she received from readers who wanted to see more of the maiden warrior (Shamoon 8–11). *The Rose of Versailles* and, in particular, the figure of Lady Oscar were so popular in Japan that the manga was staged by the Takarazuka Revue, an all-woman Japanese theater troupe, and became “the most memorable and successful postwar revue to date” (Robertson 74). Its success as a manga and as a Takarazuka production led Japanese producer Mataichiro Yamamoto to approach French director Jacques Demy, whose *Parapluies de Cherbourg* (*Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, 1964) he greatly appreciated, to transform the manga into a feature-length film.

**Demy’s Lady Oscar**

Shamoon’s study of *The Rose of Versailles* does an excellent job of situating the manga within the larger historical and cultural context of the history of girls’ magazines, same-sex romance, and the development of shōjo manga. However, her analysis of Demy’s film adaptation of *The Rose of Versailles* is limited precisely because she does not situate *Lady Oscar* within the French director’s oeuvre. She states: “In the film, Andre (Barry Stokes) is the strongest partner, and their conflict is not about Oscar’s need for independence or her fear of losing herself in a relationship but about their class differences. Andre mockingly and smugly dictates Oscar’s political awakening, but they never become social or romantic equals” (14).

Drawing from Shamoon’s analysis, one could argue that Demy’s film takes away the ways in which Ikeda’s manga empowers the ambiguously gendered character Oscar. His film could be read as reinstating a patriarchal order precisely by having André mediate Oscar’s transformation and by depicting Oscar as the weaker partner in the couple. At times, Demy seems to reproduce essentialist notions of gender. After killing Chantilly in a duel, a scene of Demy’s invention, Oscar drinks to overcome the difficulties she has in dealing with the fact that she has taken a man’s life.14 She tells André, “Answer this riddle: now that I’ve learned to walk, and talk, and fight like a man, even think, and I think like a man, why can’t I kill like a man?” André replies, “Because you’re not a man.” Such moments in the film could be read in terms of Demy disempowering Ikeda’s heroine and reinforcing conventional gender norms: no matter how much Oscar performs as a man, she will never be one.

However, the reading of *Lady Oscar* proves more complex when we situate it within Demy’s cinema. It becomes clear that his film adaptation of the manga is shaped by questions of gender and sexuality that have always preoccupied Demy and by the class issues that dominate *Une Chambre en ville* (*A Room in Town*), a film about the historic 1955 strike in Nantes. Demy was
trying to finance that film when he was approached to shoot *Lady Oscar*. *Une Chambre* eventually reached the silver screen to critical acclaim in 1982.

Ikeda’s Oscar has much more self-knowledge than Demy’s heroine, who initially is in denial about sexual and class issues. Whereas in the manga Oscar seeks out answers to the questions she is already asking herself, in the film it is the lower-class André who ponders the questions Oscar fails to ask. Through her relationship with André the aristocratic Oscar will “find herself” with respect to gender, sexuality, and class. André serves as her guide and ushers in her sexual and political “coming out.” Even though Demy’s film presents continuities with Ikeda’s manga, by granting the lower-class character André more agency and by emphasizing collective instead of individual action, Demy also challenges the model of aristocratic heroism that underpins maiden warrior tales, including *The Rose of Versailles*. As such, his film both celebrates and represents the ultimate undoing of the tradition of the maiden warrior.

Although generally faithful to *The Rose of Versailles*, in many respects Demy’s film invites us to read into Ikeda’s manga tendencies of aristocratic paternalism and noblesse oblige. Ikeda’s Oscar develops on her own an awareness of class conflict in which the lower-class André expresses little interest, despite his lower status. In the manga André follows Oscar to the French guard and plays the role, essentially, of Oscar’s sidekick. Demy reframes the relation by foregrounding the issue of class that divides them. When Oscar’s vocation changes, André responds sarcastically, “I’ve always dreamed of working in the stables.” Whereas Ikeda’s lower-class André is much more self-effacing and quickly submits to Oscar, Demy’s André constantly emphasizes the tensions inherent in a relationship defined according to the Old Regime social order. Demy’s film might be seen as taking away agency from the aristocratic heroine, only to redistribute it to characters issuing from the lower class.

In his film Demy emphasizes the class divide that separates Oscar from André. Unlike Ikeda’s manga, André never appears at court, and he wears only earthy browns, which present a contrast to the crisp royal blue, white, and gold-trimmed officer’s uniform that Oscar wears. Visually, then, the pair appear much more distinct from each other than in the manga. Moreover, in the film André always appears as Oscar’s inferior in public spaces, driving her carriage or taking care of her horses.

The only moments in the film when distinctions between them are lifted occur in the space of the stables, the site of Oscar and André’s intimacy and class transgressions. Early in the film a young Oscar and André lie together in
the hay in the Jarjayes stables. After the scene of the tavern brawl, the two again find themselves waking from a drunken stupor in a stable near the tavern, and it is at the Versailles stables where Oscar seeks André’s advice regarding her soldiers’ apparent insolence. Each of these scenes anticipates the moment toward the end of the film when Oscar and André make love in the same stables where they played as children, before the artificial class structure imposed itself on them, separating them from each other. The film comes full circle, from their union as children when class played little to no role in their relationship, to the final love scene, which occurs after Oscar renounces her family, her nobility, and the monarchy—in other words, when Oscar finally breaks through the barriers that separate her from André and from herself.

However, until the final scenes of the film, Oscar has a difficult time overcoming the complacency and expectations of her class. Oscar has no awareness of the plight of the lower classes until the poor laundress Rosalie offers to sleep with Oscar to pay her rent. As opposed to Ikeda’s rather sassy aristocrat who often challenges Marie-Antoinette and wants to learn more about the plight of the lower classes, Demy’s Oscar defends the monarchy, much like the traditional maiden warrior, until her political awakening toward the end of the film. Indeed, the tavern brawl breaks out because Oscar reproaches Robespierre for speaking ill of the crown, and then she accuses of treason another man who declared that the royal family should be “amputated.”

Oscar’s father is acutely aware of one’s place in society and of one’s duties to the crown. When preparing Oscar and André to leave for Versailles, he states, “You will each assume responsibility for your separate stations in life.” Slightly disturbed by Oscar’s defense of a commoner, he later becomes furious when he learns that Oscar refused to fire on the people, who were protesting being turned away from the Estates General. Father and daughter draw swords, and Monsieur de Jarjayes injures Oscar’s hand, at which time André steps in to protect her. Just as Oscar leaves, stating “I’ll never come home again,” Jarjayes continues his dinner routine, declaring, “Order must be maintained if the world is to stay the same!” We might view Monsieur de Jarjayes and André as representing the two tendencies that pull Oscar in different directions: a repressive status quo on the one hand and liberatory change on the other.

In the film Oscar and André are finally reunited in the modest stable, whereas Ikeda has them make love in Oscar’s bedroom at the paternal home. The space in which their love is consummated is significant in that it symbolizes the possibility of reconciliation (Ikeda) as opposed to rupture (Demy) with the family or the father. Ikeda paints a much more sympathetic picture of Monsieur de Jarjayes than Demy does, and despite political tensions that come
between father and daughter, they are reconciled before Oscar is killed while laying siege to the Bastille.

This conciliatory take on father-daughter relations extends to class relations. Ikeda constantly blurs the boundaries between commoner and aristocrat. Jeanne de la Motte is the daughter of a noble descendant of the Valois, and her half-sister Rosalie is fully noble, discovering herself to be the bastard daughter of Madame de Polignac. Oscar's family takes the apparent commoner Rosalie into their home, and Rosalie moves between commoners and aristocrats, having starved in the streets of Paris and attended a ball at Versailles.

Demy instead reinforces class divisions. In the film Jeanne de la Motte claims to be a descendant of the Valois, and it remains only a claim. Rosalie is not of noble blood either and only finds herself at the Jarjayes home when delivering a dress to Oscar for the ball, which she never attends. For his part André is confined to the stables and never wears the beautiful uniforms Ikeda's André dons. There is a clear demarcation between aristocrats and commoners in the film, and the only two characters who cross class lines are Oscar and Jeanne. In effect, the aristocracy appears less culpable in the manga than in the film.

Not unrelated to Ikeda’s and Demy’s respective representation of class is their depiction of individual heroism versus collective action. Two episodes stand out as exemplary. In Ikeda’s manga, when Oscar and her men refuse to expel the representatives of the Third Estate from the Estates General, Oscar's men are imprisoned and threatened with death, and the king plans to sanction Oscar. Whereas Oscar rallies the revolutionary Bernard to help save her men, Marie-Antoinette, out of her friendship with Oscar, releases them. In a similar scene in Demy’s film, Oscar refuses to give the order to her men to fire on the people, and then her superior orders her own men to shoot her, which they refuse. When they are all thrown in jail, it is not through Oscar’s aristocratic connections that she and her men are freed; rather, it is the people, led by Bernard and André, who release them.

Particularly notable is the way the fall of the Bastille is represented. In the manga the people lack direction in defending themselves against the Bastille’s cannons. Consequently, Oscar leads her men to take over the cannons and destroy the Bastille before she is heroically shot. Demy, however, represents the fall of the Bastille as a collective action in which most unheroic deaths occur. In the film Oscar and André walk together with the other protesters, in which members of the guard also participate, not as leaders of the people but with the people. Just as crowds begin to fill the square in front of the Bastille, royal troops begin firing at the protesters, who are armed only with pitchforks and spears. When the shooting begins, the crowd disperses and André and
Oscar get separated. Just as he is about to move away from attacking soldiers, the unarmed André is shot in the back, and stunned, he slides, bleeding, down the city walls. When the people finally rouse the forces to push back the king’s soldiers, they rush by a dying, immobile André. The Bastille is finally taken, and the crowd begins to sing and dance joyfully in the square while Oscar desperately looks for André. The film concludes with the contrasting image of collective joy and Oscar’s personal despair.

Whereas Ikeda begins to problematize the traditional paradigm of the maiden warrior by having Oscar take part in the dismantling of the monarchy rather than in its defense, Demy more generally problematizes aristocratic heroism, whatever its objective, by privileging collective action. Ikeda’s Oscar is the principal agent for change in the manga, with secondary characters such as Robespierre and Bernard hovering in the background and fueling her passion for justice. It is Oscar’s aristocratic connections and sense of aristocratic honor that allow her to protect lower-class characters such as Rosalie or the members of the French guard, and it is Oscar and her men who lead the attack on the Bastille. Basically, Ikeda’s Oscar works according to an individualistic model of heroism.

As he does in A Room in Town, Demy posits “the people” as the principal motor for political change, emphasized in the many shots of protesters physically opposing the king’s soldiers. In fact, Demy’s shooting of the protests in Lady Oscar anticipates the scene of the 1955 Nantes protest in A Room in Town. First, the fatal day is announced by red lettering (“1789 June 17th” in Lady Oscar; “Nantes 1955” in A Room in Town). Second, both films show the people pouring out of side streets into the main square, which is also the site of power: the Bastille in the Lady Oscar; the city hall and préfecture in A Room in Town. Third, Demy choreographs both confrontations by clearly and visibly opposing the people to the agents of power: Louis XVI’s soldiers and the Nantes riot police (figs. 1 and 2). In these shots Demy has the camera pull back to emphasize the collective; then it moves in to focus on Oscar and André in Lady Oscar and on François Guilbaud and his two friends in A Room in Town. This strategy has the effect of reinscribing the lives of individuals within the larger narrative of history and, in particular, the history of collective action that leads to democratic reform.

But as both of Demy’s films show, through such struggles many individuals meet a rather banal death. André is shot in the back trying to flee the soldiers as the other protesters frantically run past him, ignoring his individual fate. In A Room in Town an unarmed François dies after being clubbed in the head by a riot policeman. Demy romanticizes the death of François: his two buddies carry him away from the chaotic streets in such a way that recalls representations of the pietà. Nevertheless, both films depict the struggles of the working class as a collective effort by ordinary people who die rather
common deaths. Demy juxtaposes the joy of collective action with the troubling yet inevitable sacrifice of innocent people in order to further the cause.

Maiden warrior tales characteristic of the Chinese and French traditions have always foregrounded the constructedness of gender by staging a heroine who is as capable as any man in defending father and fatherland. Women authors
such as d’Aulnoy and L’Héritier drew from the tradition to fashion a place for women within a feudal or monarchical order. However, such tales often uphold aristocratic aspirations and a patriarchal kingly order, and as such serve largely reformist ends with respect to gender, without challenging hierarchies of class. Ikeda’s *Rose of Versailles* begins to chip away at this tradition, moving toward permanent transformation of gender roles through a maiden warrior who never ceases to be a masculine woman and through a permanent transformation of class relations through revolution. But the tradition of aristocratic heroism is not completely dismantled in Ikeda’s manga. Demy truly revolutionizes—and consequently undoes—the tradition of the maiden warrior by even further questioning gender, class, and the forms of aristocratic heroism that underpin the genre and its implicit ideology. The heroine no longer upholds father or fatherland in its monarchical and aristocratic form. As collective action is foregrounded, the maiden warrior melts into the crowd of commoners, necessarily disappearing in a moment that frees her and those around her from gender and class constraints. In Demy’s *Lady Oscar* the maiden warrior paradoxically is celebrated and dismantled in a cathartic collective revolution that permanently alters our conceptions of class and gender.

**Notes**

1. A *shōjo* manga is a graphic novel written for girls.
2. For Teresa de Lauretis, the sex-gender system is “a sociocultural construct and a semiotic apparatus, a system of representation which assigns meaning (identity, value, prestige, location in kinship, status in the social hierarchy, etc.) to individuals within the society” (5). I am drawing generally from her sense of the term here.
3. This essay is part of a longer chapter on the maiden warrior, which takes into account questions related to sexuality through the lens of queer theory, in my forthcoming book titled *Queer Enchantments: Gender, Sexuality, and Class in the Fairy-Tale Cinema of Jacques Demy*.
4. See Dugaw (92–93). Dugaw provides a sequence of five narrative elements. I condense here the distinction Dugaw makes regarding trials of valor and trials of love. See also Greenhill.
5. Lan Dong similarly states: “These female combatants’ successes on the battlefield or in the martial world are carefully characterized without either challenging or threatening the dominant male-centered rule. Instead, heroic women’s achievements are lauded with a particular emphasis on these heroines who are loyal subjects, filial daughters, wise mothers and wives, or lady knights-errant with integrity and virtue” (*Mulan’s Legend*, 13).
6. In “Writing Chinese America into Words and Images,” Lan Dong maintains that “The Ballad of Mulan” is based on a historical figure from the Xianbei, a formerly nomadic group, who eventually “established a unified regime in north China in the year 386”; Dong notes that “it was not uncommon for Xianbei women to be skillful at riding and archery” (219).
7. See, for instance, Maclean (155–232), DeJean (24–42), and Mueller.
8. For French versions of “Marmoisan,” see Velay-Vallantin (17–54); for “Belle-Belle, ou le chevalier Fortuné,” see d’Aulnoy, Contes II (215–69); and for “Le Sauvage,” see Murat (2: 1–65). For an English version of “Belle-Belle” and “The Savage,” see Zipes, Great Fairy-Tale Tradition (174–205 and 205–19, respectively).
9. The narrator relates: “The king preferred that his son give himself over to the advice of a cherished wife, whose sentiments aspired only to virtue, than to those of some ambitious favorite” (Le roi aimait mieux qu’il s’abandonnât aux conseils d’une épouse chérie, dont tous les sentiments semblaient n’aspirer qu’à la vertu, qu’à ceux de quelque favori ambitieux [Velay-Vallantin 53–54]). L’Héritier seems to be criticizing the practice of French kings marrying foreign princesses, several of whom were viewed as pursuing their own ambition; the most notable were perhaps Marie de Médicis, wife of Henri IV and mother of Louis XIII, and Anne d’Autriche, wife of Louis XIII and mother of Louis XIV, who was the target of political pamphlets during the Fronde. In his reading of the tale, Joseph Harris draws a parallel between the king’s wife in the tale and Louis XIV’s wife, the unpopular Madame de Maintenon (202).
10. See, for instance, Duggan, Salonnières (the chapter “Boileau and Perrault: The Public Sphere and Female Folly,” 121–64).
11. Again, I treat the question of sexuality more specifically in a chapter-length study of Ikeda and Demy in my forthcoming book Queer Enchantments.
12. I have used the French translation of The Rose of Versailles; there is no available English translation. All English translations are mine. The French for this passage reads: “Les femmes n’ont pas leur place dans cette famille où depuis des générations nous commandons des armées et protégeons les rois.”
13. The narrator states at one point, “In this period in high society . . . among women it was fashionable to have close female friends . . . without a homosexual connotation. Among them, some cross-dressed as men to exude an ambiguous charm” (A cette époque dans la haute société . . . parmi les dames il était de bon ton d’avoir des amies très proches . . . sans connotation homosexuelle. Parmi elles, certaines se travestissaient en homme pour dégager un charme ambigu, 1: 307). Here Ikeda alludes to the Japanese tradition of female same-sex romance.
14. In the manga Oscar is challenged to a duel by Monsieur de Guémené, but nothing comes of it when Oscar is consigned to her estate.
15. With respect to A Room in Town, Bill Marshall notes: “The space of the city moves slightly eastwards from that of Lola, to the area associated with political power, in medieval times the cathedral and the ducal castle, now the city hall and préfecture” (30).

Works Cited


