

Tracing the Japanese Gothic in *Madoka Magika with Blood*: The Estrangement, Abjection, and Sublime Erasure of the Spectralised *Mahō Shōjo* Exemplum

Daniel Elisha Rachovitsky

Dartmouth College, Cincinnati, OH, USA.

eli.racho@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This essay is an in-depth analysis of the Japanese Gothic in anime. The two anime of examination and inter-textual comparison include the 2011 critically acclaimed series Mahō Shōjo Madoka Magika (Puella Magi Madoka Magika) by Urobuchi Gen and the 2000 film Blood: The Last Vampire by Kamiyama Kenji and Oshii Mamoro. The focus is to explore the Japanese Gothic or elements of fushigi in these two anime – tracing, in particular, how Urobuchi dismantles the mahō shōjo as a genre by using the aesthetic of his predecessor Oshii. Employing a deconstructive perspective, the author attempts to weave together the series and film through discursive analysis in hopes of unveiling the dialogic momentum hidden between the two works. As a piece of scholarship, this paper attempts to catapult discussion of anime from the realm of Japanese pulp fiction into sophisticated academic inquiry.

INTRODUCTION

The Japanese Gothic & The Subversion of The *Mahō Shōjo* Typology

The Japanese Gothic - epitomised by ‘twilight [*tasogare*]’ – ‘a time of uncertain identities and indistinct forms . . . giv[ing] rise to monstrous transformations’ –materialises from ‘the specter of a chronotope’ ruled by ‘*fushigi* (the mysterious, the supernatural, the fantastic)’ (Figal 1999:5). Conjured forth from this liminal locus, this aesthetic modality of *fushigi* akin to the horrific and the unknown echoes and reverberates by transgressing and piercing the façade of order and reason, of normality and certitude, questioning the existence of the empirical world, and suggesting the possibility that what we have been taught to see as real is nothing more than an illusion –useful in staving the forces of chaos, but utterly counterfeit. Indeed, from this oneiric threshold tantamount to a state of being in-between (*chūkan*) reality/fantasy or life/death, the Japanese Gothic, I am following, aesthetically animates itself through the horrors of the uncanny (the familiar yet estranging), the grotesquerie of being hybrid qua abject, and the phantasmagoric anxiety and pathology of modernity.

Tracing these themes through the artistic medium of anime, specifically, investigating the subgenre of *mahō shōjo* (the fighting magical maiden) – characterised traditionally as the ‘romantic comedy genre featuring women who are simultaneously powerful and traditionally feminine’ (Newitz 1994:4) – this essay will examine how the film *Blood: The Last Vampire* (2000) sets the tone and the standard for the phantasmal darkness and rawness of the Gothic aesthetic that writer Urobuchi Gen in his 2011 late night, critically acclaimed series, *Mahō Shōjo Madoka Magika* (Puella Magi Madoka Magika), adopts in order to deconstruct the *mahō shōjo* genre. The inter-textually between *Blood* and *Madoka* is undeniable and although Urobuchi pays no credit to Oshii Mamoro – the mastermind behind *Blood* and *Ghost in the Shell* – he is thoroughly indebted to him, for Urobuchi uses the same narratological tactics

even mimicking the same tableaux vivants in *Blood*, which dutifully subvert the candy coated themes of the *mahō shōjo*.

Nevertheless, by copying the brilliant hermeneutics and grisly aesthetics of Oshii, Urobuchi re-inscribes the *mahō shōjo* genre with the abyssal depth and poignancy indicative of the Japanese Gothic. Even though these anime differ in character portrayal and chronotope, i.e. the singularity of Saya as original vampire set in the 1960s on the American Yokota airbase versus the troupe of collective girl power in *Madoka* set in Mitakihara City (implicitly a model of present-day Japan), the former informing the latter problematises the *mahō shōjo* archetype – unveiling the horrors of the magical girls’s paradoxical and uncanny predicament of maintaining a cohesive ‘homeostasis of self’ à la Miyadai Shinji in the face of alienation, disconnection, and abjection. Additionally, both anime as tours de force stylistically place their two-dimensional characters in an excessive, multi-textured, multi-layered, and endlessly framed three-dimensional milieu, which effects the uncanny strangeness of being estranged from one’s own fictional flatness – a spectralisation – on the meta-*techné* level.

Defining the Traditional *Mahō Shōjo*: An Estrangement unto Herself in Girl Power

Traditionally, the *mahō shōjo* genre depicts young, ordinary female characters caught between the liminality of girlhood (often placed in the setting of junior high school or *chūnibyō*), who by some twist of fate via contract with some mystical creature are made magical by ‘wish-fulfilling fantasies of empowerment,’ which become ‘intimately related with [the] young girl[s]’ normal femininity’ (Napier 1998:93). The quality of this femininity is one embodying the western trope of the “maiden” or the perpetual child. Although the word “*shōjo*” is typically translated into English simply as “young woman” – a rendering, which incorrectly ‘implies a kind of sexual maturity clearly forbidden to *shōjo*’ – Susan Napier clarifies the connotative implications of the word:

Allied with such signifiers of immaturity/innocence as stuffed animals, fluffy dresses, and an overall “cute” (*kawaii*) image, the *shōjo* seems to signify the girl who never grows up [–] the perfect non-threatening female, the idealized daughter/younger sister whose femininity is essentially sexless (Ibid.).

Thus, the imbuing of the *shōjo* figure with *mahō* displaces the slice-of-life struggles of the everyday junior high school female (i.e. searching for purpose and meaning accented by a desire to fit in with her classmates measuring successful notions of self with popularity, performing well in school, and gaining the affections of boys) in a binary opposition world, where the female protagonist – often teamed with other magical girls – must collaborate and fight against their antithetical enemies and baddies designed as ideological opponents to the magical girls’ ideals of love, friendship, justice, and peace. The elimination and thwarting of the villains, who often attempt to destroy their normal societies defines their ontological existence. Their duty as *mahō shōjo* – to use *henshin* (transformation techniques) enabled by objects such as wands, amulets, or makeup – causes their schoolgirl clad *shōjo*-selves to splice from the ordinary helpless and (helplessly cute) roles to energetic, powerful, and violent heroines.

A common motif for the *mahō shōjo* is wrestling with her fatalistic, alter ego heroine identity as it intersects with the stark normality of her junior high school existence. The magical girl’s powers although empowering and providing female agency tend to estrange and other her from her non-magical world. As *mahō shōjo* they cannot return to their normal lives and as a point of narrative intrigue their new identities must be kept secret for a variety of reasons such as for the sake of evading the enemy, embarrassment/modesty, retaining a semblance of normalcy, or maintaining the mysteriousness of their diegetic world. Indeed, what is

fascinating about this genre is how it may be examined as an artistic space for exploring the potentiality of female self ‘function[ing] as an ideological apparatus for women to be free from social obligations such as marriage’ (Ogi 2003:801).

As Napier (1998) demonstrates in her essay, ‘Vampires, Psychic Girls, Flying Women and Sailor Scouts: Four Faces of the Young Female in Japanese Popular Culture,’ the depiction of *mahō shōjo* is intricately connected to the representation of Japanese women and femininity in pulp culture stemming from a long tradition of anime from the 1980s including *Mai the Psychic Girl*, *Vampire Princess Miyu*, and *Nausicaä* –and culminating in the 1990s classic *Sailor Moon*, which features a team of astrologically signified *shōjo*, who are fatalistically tasked with fighting against the evil aliens of the Dark Kingdom led by the allegorically evil Queen Beryl.

Although *Sailor Moon* projects a femininity that seems liberated emblematising the omnipotence of collective “girl power”, this *mahō shōjo* characterisation of self is merely surface lacking interior complexity or dimension. Because the representation of women in anime may be directly correlated to societal interpretations of female roles on the extra-diegetic level of human three-dimensional reality, Napier argues *Sailor Moon* speaks to the social progression of ‘Japanese women [who] in reality are becoming increasingly outwardly active and assertive, [yet may] also suggest [] that this change is accompanied by a loss of interior complexity, a change which some might lament’ (1998:104).

Indeed, *Madoka* is an inter-textual and self-referential dismantling of the *Sailor Moon* universe that epitomises the *mahō shōjo* narrative and aesthetic as a genre both fostering liberated femininity yet characterial interior simplicity of self. Urobuchi, who, in his own right, is known for his gruesome and horrific storyboards involving complex and intricate characters and settings unhinges the *mahō shōjo* paradigm by taking the clichéd intersection of the liminality of the *shōjo*’s struggle of finding self in their schoolgirl societies and the otherworldliness of their new obligations as *mahō* to fight witches (*majo*) as one deeply rooted in pain, pathology, and paradox. In an interview with Japanese publication, *Asahi Shinbun* (2011), Urobuchi reveals his thematic approach for *Madoka*:

I received a request to write a bloody story where magical girls appear, and then drop out one by one. I paid attention to the aspects that are troubling or overlooked in the traditional magical girl genre. I’ve been thinking that magical girls who have acquired superhuman abilities will find themselves removed from the world, which would cause contradictions and reactions (“Madoka Goes Terrorist”).

It is clear that as artistic telos, Urobuchi – employing the Japanese Gothic an aesthetic he borrows from *Blood* – constructs the becoming of *mahō shōjo* of the *Sailor Moon* variety as an inevitable death sentence, in which set against the bewitched Otherworld – produces a paradoxical negative-potentiality for the 2-D *mahō shōjo*, where self-realisation becomes self-estrangement, abjection, and (in *Madoka*’s case) self-erasure.

‘Off With That Helplessly Cute Head!’: Killing The Allegory of *Mahō Shōjo*

In order to scaffold the revelation of the underside of *mahō shōjo* fictionality as it functions as reality, Urobuchi uses the first three episodes as a stylistic composition-cum-decomposition of the *mahō shōjo* genre. In a 2012 interview with Urobuchi conducted by fellow manga/anime artist Koike Kazuo, Urobuchi describes the first episode of *Madoka* as ‘inserting the viewers into the middle of an unfamiliar situation[, . .] explaining the rules of the story’s world in the second episode, [and] then creating a surprise twist in the third episode’ – a tactic, he ‘learned from anime screenwriter Kuroda Yōsuke of *Mobile Suit*

Gundam 00 and *Trigun*)’ (Ransom 2012). Indeed, the first three episodes can be described as the candy coated depictions of a typical *mahō shōjo anime*. In the first episode, the audience gets a taste of *mahō shōjo* battle—which feels akin to the *Tekken* series—between the mysterious, faux-villainous, magical girl Homura, who, in medias res, spars with the ultimate mega-boss Walpurgisnacht and ultimately gets K.O., but awakens as if it were a dream. In the second episode, we are introduced to the mystical creature-guide Kyūbey (a stock character of *mahō shōjo* fiction), who explains the wish-contract specifying the hermeneutics of the Otherworld of *mahō* as one functioning as a binary opposition pitting magical girls against witches:

If magical girls are said to be born from positive desires like wishes, then witches are born from negative desires like curses. Magical girls spread hope, where witches spread despair. And to make matters worse, they can't be seen by normal humans. Doubt and suspicion, extreme anger and hate. They bring seeds of catastrophe to this world (Kyūbey, Episode 2).

Additionally, we meet Mami, who embodies the *onēsan* (older sister) trope and acts as the quintessential example of the *mahō shōjo* character, who believes in the ontology of the Otherworld to its fullest extent. Indeed, Mami is loaded with *moë*-evocative elements: her curly blond locks of hair, her sparkling eyes, large breasts, cheerful optimism, *kawaii* post-*henshin* outfit, and her eclectic use of guns and heavy weaponry. The excess – a formative part of the surplus horror implicit in the campiness of the Gothic – of *moë* does not end there; while battling a witch, Mami deploys her special attack – a coup de grace –that is choreographed, emblazoned proudly on the screen: ‘*Tiro Finale!*’, and shortly followed by the absolutely necessary ‘*yatta!*’ (victory) dance.

For Madoka (the main character), Sayaka (her tortured best friend), and the audience, Mami represents the sheer might of the *mahō shōjo* female, who like Saya in *Blood* strikes viciously devoutly following a fanatical, female heroic code of ethics that is directly modeled after her U.S. keepers’ rules and for Mami after Kyūbey’s. In Episode 3, the implicit nature of the relationship between Madoka and Mami is one, in which the viewer expects (following the conventions of *mahō shōjo*) that Madoka as mentee and Mami as mentor will become a dynamic duo unstoppable in their female solidarity. In fact, through Madoka’s gaze, we face an overly-sentimental and somewhat faded Mami, who with tearful eyes begs and pleads for Madoka to make the contract with Kyūbey so that she will not be alone: ‘Will you really stand and fight with me from now on?’ (Episode 3).



Figure 1. Puella Magi Madoka Magika, episode 3

As she says this, however, CGI-animated three-dimensional, blue and white pill-capsules bizarrely begin to rain down, thus, invoking a thematic twist towards pathology, loneliness, and depression, thereby, revealing the subjective fragility of the paradigmatic *mahō shōjo* – hinting at the darkness and tortured spirit underlying her brutalising métier (cf. figure 1).

After this out-of-place yet heart-warming (thoroughly *yuri* (Sapphic)) moment, Mami battles the adorable, sock-puppet witch “Charlotte”, who plays dead after Mami’s “*Tiro Finale!*”; and, slyly morphing into her true form, an enormous jack-in-the-box serpent, Charlotte catching Mami off-guard—effected by the camera’s sudden shift in perspective to Charlotte’s open-jawed mouth—and before you know it—Mami’s corpse is beheld unapologetically dangling neck-down from the top of the field of view (cf. figure 2). This grim demise occurring right in front of Madoka and Sayaka, girls, who, until this moment had been sold by the *mahō shōjo* identity on account of Mami’s sheer awesomeness, leaves them scarred and unable to cope with the veritable finitude of death. Indeed, this exact same tableau is inter-texted from *Blood*, when the overtly racialised black guard—in the same manner as the overtly stereotyped Mami—is snatched up, murdered, and headlessly suspended outside the frame of view by the tree-dwelling chiropteran.



Figure 2. *Puella Magi Madoka Magika*, episode 3

Indeed, Urobuchi and company mimicking this scene from *Blood* – a doubtlessly sudden and gratuitous violence – transgress the *mahō shōjo* genre by killing the very icon of its ethos in Mami (by the third episode no less). As a stylistic meant to dismantle the genre, Urobuchi successfully raises the stakes of this fictional *mahō shōjo* world to that of ‘the real’ implying that death in this anime is ontologically certain for its 2-D characters. The death of Mami and the realisation that her body will never be found or buried – devoured in the elsewhere-space of the bewitched Otherworld called *kekka* (barriers) – has incredibly powerful psychological implications on the development of Madoka’s and Sayaka’s subjectivity as potential *mahō shōjo*. Additionally, it is important to note that the troubling nature of this slaughter extends to the notion of habeas corpus or the loss of the 2-D body never finding proper burial or funerary rites; indeed, Mami will no longer exist in her 2-D world of high school – essentially spirited away and engulfed by the three-dimensional Otherworld.

This Otherworld – a dystopia representing the witch’s realm – an anti-presence and an anti-space – designed by the animation team Gekidan INU Curry, is conceived as a labyrinth or an RPG-dungeon riddled with occultist runes and created from the distorted grotesquerie of the

amalgamated residues of 2-D, 2.5-D, and 3-D animation-styles – a macabre miscegenation of paper-puppetry, picture book collage, cel-shading, arcade-block animation, and computer-generated imagery. Figures 3 and 4 clearly exemplify this style of 2-dimensional differentiation. When inhabited by 2-D characters this 3-D placelessness – overwhelmingly excessive in its topological overload – has the palimpsestic effect of the catastrophic devolution, demotion, erasing, and crumbling away of the animated figure/subject – un-photographed, un-layered by cels over a background painting, un-painted, and barely even drawn – only leaving behind the transparent celluloid that vestigial, faded, and spectral two-dimensional trace of a once-having-been-there or a once-never-having-been.



Figure 3. Puella Magi Madoka Magika, episode 4



Figure 4. Puella Magi Madoka Magika, episode 4

With the loss of the *onēsan*, Mami to the conceivably real reality of dying as a *mahō shōjo* (a rare occurrence in the typical romantic comedic genre, only ever occurring at the end of a series), Madoka and Sayaka grieve feeling disconnected from their actual schoolgirl societies. Madoka says to Sayaka: ‘Nothing about school or Hitomi [(some friend at school, a minor character)] has changed since yesterday... Somehow it feels like I’m surrounded by strangers.’ To which Sayaka responds, ‘It’s because no one knows. No one knows about witches or Mami... It’s like we’re seeing and living in an entirely different world from them’ (Episode 4). Indeed, Madoka and Sayaka are feeling the uncanny strangeness – a return of the

repressed cloaked in the strange – occurring, as Kristeva (1991:185) notes, in our ‘initially imperative ... confrontation with *death* and its representation,’ which instantiates man’s ‘fear of death,’

which dictates an ambivalent attitude: we imagine ourselves surviving (religions promise immortality), but death just the same remains the survivor's enemy, and it accompanies him in his new existence. Apparitions and ghosts represent that ambiguity and fill with uncanny strangeness our confrontations with the image of death.

Indeed, Madoka and Sayaka have become existentially nauseated saturated by their violent exposure to the agonising, violent, and deathly world of the *mahō shōjo*, which they realise pervades their entire 2-D/human-modeled reality through the witch’s kisses or curses: an etiology from this *mahō shōjo* system that explains why murder, suicide, depression, feelings of worthlessness, and nihilism exist in their 2-D realities.

The Subway Ride That Smells of *Blood*: Saya-ka Fades to Black

In the throes of being *mahō shōjo*, the setting of school merely becomes, as Miyadai (2011a:244) notes of the *sekai-kei* (world-type trope), a ‘past reality,’ where the *shōjo* reality and *mahō* fictionality collapse into dynamic equilibrium:

As the stratified order collapsed and, in a parallel development, the order “reality” and “fiction” collapsed, the world type engaging in real-zation of fiction and the battle royale type engaging in fictionalization of reality both began to spread. In other words, “people living a game as if it were reality” and “people living reality like a game” (2011a:250-1).

The effects of this collapse are vital producing for the contracted magical girl the semblance of a choice in defining her aspirations as a magical girl: she may either fight for herself in order to preserve self, i.e. collecting Grief Seeds to cleanse her Soul Gem for solipsistic survival as Kyoko (another saucy, magical girl in love-hate with Sayaka) and Homura (seem) to do (real-ising the fiction) or fight for humanity against the threat of witches and their familiars as Mami and Sayaka do (fictionalising the real). In fact, after Sayaka makes her contract she vows to protect humanity, of which Homura had warned Madoka: ‘We don’t fight to protect people, we fight for the sake of our own wishes’ (Episode 4) – even defining the fatal flaws of a magical girl to be: ‘Unchecked kindness grows into naïveté, and brash courage often leads one to be caught off guard. Further, no matter how hard you try there is no thanks or recompense. Those who cannot comprehend that are not fit to be magical girls’ (Episode 5). Interestingly enough, Kyoko even criticises Sayaka for her naïveté and fictionalisation of the stark reality of being a *mahō shōjo*: ‘The weak must give way to the strong. The way you’re butting into this and acting like it’s a game, it kinda ticks me off’ (Ibid.).

If the “homeostasis of self” as *mahō shōjo* is not merely a game of fighting witches to collect Grief Seeds to purify one’s Soul Gem or to protect humanity from evil, then the joke is on the *mahō shōjo* genre itself in *Madoka*, where it is revealed that Kyūbey’s contract comes with the price of one’s *kokoro* (selfhood/soul/subjectivity) being dislodged from one’s 2-D *mono* (body) and focalised into the form of their Soul Gems – *koto* (an object), which in any other *mahō shōjo* anime would just instantiate the *henshin*. Therefore, the multifaceted *mahō shōjo* subjectivity in the *Madoka* universe not only estranges her from her schoolgirl reality, but it also disconnects her from the physicalism of pain as evidenced by Episode 6 when Madoka’s tossing of Sayaka’s Soul Gem causes Sayaka to collapse into a dull-eyed *moë*-less empty shell of 2-D flatness (cf. figure 5). Indeed, this heuristic of the mind-body problem of Cartesian Dualism concerning the physicality of the body *versus* the extra-corporeal

substance of the soul or mind becomes an unbearable reality for the *mahō shōjo* involved. Especially, for Sayaka, who equates this mind-body estrangement as a stunting or negative-potentiality for realising any intimacy or affect with her love-object and basis for her wish – to heal the crippled and handicapped, musical savant violinist, Kyōsuke.



Figure 5. *Puella Magi Madoka Magika*, episode 6

Therefore, being a magical girl in general, but for Sayaka in particular, i.e. dividing one's body from one's soul, thereby, anaesthetising physical pain with *mana* results in seeing the eventual futility and meaninglessness of one's wish as it negates any potential for human intimacy, which causes Sayaka to lose her humanity—defined as the ability to feel, effectively, becoming a sort of heuristic of the philosophical zombie. In Episode 7, Sayaka screams at Madoka about losing the chance to feel with Kyōsuke: “I'm dead, I'm a zombie, I can't ask him to hold me when I have a body like this! I can't ask him to kiss me!” Additionally, in the fight with the witch of Episode 7, a blood-crazed Sayaka (making up for her lack of natural, magical ability by fully detaching herself from her body) butchers that witch with an onslaught of unnecessary blows from her katana—taking a deranged sort of pleasure in her carnage—hysterical laughing as she loses touch with the psycho-corporeal reality of feeling or affect.

In the end, Sayaka's becoming as a *mahō shōjo* is her un-becoming as she hostilely scolds Madoka the tainted darkness of her Soul Gem throbs:

All I can do is kill witches, that's the only worth I have have left in this world. I'm just a walking, talking corpse pretending it's still alive. If you want to help me, you should experience what I've experienced first. I'm beyond saving! (Episode 8)

Inevitably, Sayaka—falling into the trope set forth from Mami as her *mahō shōjo* replacement, i.e. following the pretense that the magical girl's purpose is to save the world from witches as it intersects with her societal and psycho-corporeal estrangement from self—causes her to deteriorate into a state of despair. This state of despair is exacerbated and crystallised to fruition in Episode 8; recycling the tableau of *Blood's* subway scene, Urobuchi thematically attempts to un-work the feminist delusions deeply rooted in the *mahō shōjo* genre by displaying the stark misogynous discourse between two ungrateful, predatory, and abusive men. Indeed, like the opening scene of *Blood*, Sayaka – grimly shaded in black and nestled in the shadow play of a monochromatic interior of the train that seems to verge on the brink of deteriorating into the Otherworldliness of the witches – overhears this violent dialogue between two unknown, invisible, and uneducated male figures:

Women are complete morons. They get money in their hands and they blow it on stupid crap. Can't treat women like rational human beings. You gotta treat them like they're stupid dogs or something. My stupid hoe would probably be happy with that! All I gotta say is, 'I'm gonna bust up your face!' and she shuts right up! You think a shit-for-brains hostess like her will be around in ten years? That hoe's body ain't gonna last forever, y'know! (Episode 8).

The scene (cf. figure 6), as Urobuchi comments, 'smells of blood,' (perhaps, more appropriately like *Blood*) and all that we see as viewers isayaka's body being utterly consumed by the dark miasma (cf. figure 7) while muttering to herself: 'Hey . . . is this world even worth protecting?' (*Official Guidebook*; Episode 8).



Figure 6. *Puella Magi Madoka Magika*, episode 8.

Having lost everything to her wish including her capacity to feel, Sayaka's ennui reaches its critical density after overhearing the ungratefulness and the hatefulness of the male sex. Sayaka's subjectivity as the heroic *mahō shōjo* has fallen to its negative – abjection. Her last words to Kyoko before transforming into the very antithesis of her supposed ontology as *mahō shōjo* highlights the paradoxical nature of self-realisation in this anime for the magical girl as the loss of one's self, of the expulsion of self from self via unremitting bitterness and revulsion: 'For every person I've saved, in equal measure, my heart has become filled with resentment and hatred' (Episode 8). The katana-bearing Saya-ka fading to black has been unborn: witch.

The Witch That Therefore I Am: The Paradox That Kills The *Mahō Shōjo*'s "I"

The surprise of Sayaka's transformation into witch is by in large the greatest twist and Gothic dismantling of the *mahō shōjo* genre. Within this self-consistent paradox, the *mahō shōjo* as a metonym for hope, who although styled as the vanquisher of witches, in the end, must be reborn as that very enemy – a metonym for despair. This grand revelation unveils the futility of the typical *mahō shōjo* project. Sayaka becoming a magical girl and successor to Mami negotiates self by following the path of the "battle royale type", which Miyadai (2011a:247-8) characterises as

[t]he homeostasis of the self through justice . . . More abstractly, the dichotomy of "justice/injustice" is relevant to any game, whether it is real or fictional . . . The battle royale type uses 'justice' to supply the homeostasis of the self. The pursuit of justice may

seem social, but in the battle royale type, the activities of pursuing justice becomes a game for the homeostasis of self.

Indeed, the logic of justice here, i.e. fighting witches rests on the premise (like most *mahō shōjo* genres do) of ideological contraposition: because I am *mahō shōjo* – a cipher of hope – I am intrinsically destined by the laws of obligation and opposition (or rather Kyūbey) to kill my antithesis the witch – the exteriorisation of despair. The Sisyphean nature of this task and the logic of this cruel system, however, is distorted, if not completely nullified, since the witch is merely the Id to the magical girl's Ego.

Therefore, the *mahō shōjo* in *Madoka* are slated to become that abject, monstrosity. Her feelings of estrangement from society and her overwhelming sense of nihilism are implicit axioms designed as a failsafe in perpetuating the entire system – a veritable enslavement – glossed magical girlhood. If all magical girls must kill witches for the “homeostasis of self”, yet in turn must also become witches, which is the denigration of self, then becoming a magical girl and obeying her office is essentially a dualistic and counterintuitive process of κένωσις (self-emptying) evacuating one's positive-potential for self-realisation or “homeostasis of self” to the point of negative-incapacity or abjection, i.e. becoming what she despises in self—that witch. Indeed, after finding out the fate of all magical girls in Episode 10 of Timeline 3 (yes, Homura has the power to go back in time, which she does pathologically in order to save Madoka from becoming the most powerful witch in the universe), the fanatical, deontologist Mami –revived in this timeline and saved from Charlotte by Madoka, who had made the contract the moment Mami had implored her to do so – the paragon of the *mahō shōjo* archetype–knee-jerkily kills Kyoko, screaming: ‘If soul gems make us turn into witches then we have no choice but to die, do we!?’

In the end, Mami's cognitive dissonance is warranted, for her logic proves correct and immutable in every trajectory of Homura's Timelines. However, it is the utilitarian and consequentialist Kyūbey, whose true name is revealed, “Incubator”, who is reprehensible – placing the magical girls of *Madoka* in the inevitable position slating them for failure and the lapse into despair; for the purpose of harvesting the energy to fuel the universe. Despite this thorough misreading of entropy, Urobuchi has created a symbolic order or system, in which the *clinamen* or swerve from *mahō shōjo*—having Ego or *kokoro* or metaphysical presence – to witch – not-having the capacity to utter “I” is certain. As the abject or the Id, she is deprived of *logos*, for her signs are now ascribed to, inscribed in, and circumscribed by occultist runes.

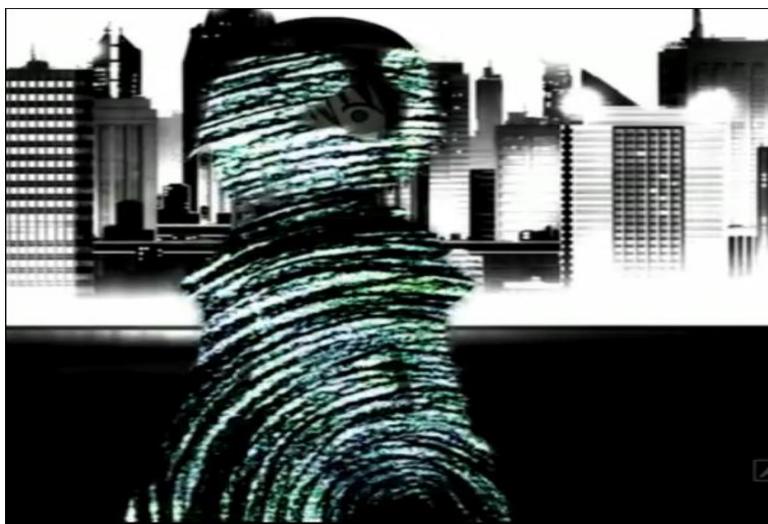


Figure 7. *Puella Magi Madoka Magika*, episode 8

Although this self-consistent paradox is outside the scope of most (if any) *mahō shōjo* anime, i.e. the *mahō shōjo*'s murderous nullification of the feminine abject is predicated on her imminent transformation from the liminal magical girl to that very same object of disgust and warring, it does literalise 'the two-edged aspect of woman's feminine identity, one which both limits and empowers; and finally the attraction/revulsion inscribed within the complex and enduring figure of the *shōjo* herself, a figure that is as "demonic" as it is "cute"' (Napier 1998:96). Kyūbey even substantiates this when he says: 'In this country, half-grown women are called "*shōjo*" right? It's appropriate that you, who will one day grow into witches, should be called "*mahō shōjo*"' (Episode 8). Implicitly, the female adult is equated with witch, and the magical girls themselves performing their office become complicit cattle in their entropic domestication.

Comparatively, a similar reading of a paradox of this nature may also be scrutinised in *Blood*. Arguably inheriting the *ero guro nansensu* (erotic-gore-nonsense) aesthetic (which lends itself to the Japanese Gothic), Saya is not simply a female sexualised schoolgirl marginalised by the erotics of *otaku* (Japanese geek/consumer culture) *ecchi* (perviness) – or a mocked, campy parody of those *mahō shōjo* I have been following – but rather she is vampire; but not simply any old stereotypical vampire, but 'the only remaining original.' She is a universal truth of vampiric consistency; she is the mold and all other vampires, mere batty false-copies. They are deprived of a full taxonomy and with no *sapiens* in sight, no subjectivity. Unlike Saya, whose body remains explicitly human in appearance, the chiropterans as eponymously defined are monstrous, creaturely, brutish, and uncivil and must inhabit, parasitically, the human form. They are crudely yet nudely put the shitters and pukers of vampiric society; they are the monster of Saya and the vampiric made manifest – the grotesque in its entire putridity.

Similar to the paradox in *Madoka*, Saya exists (or is compelled by the U.S. government, who keeps her) to annihilate and slice through these pretenders—these bastards, who offend not only the human form but also her vampiric purity of perfect exemplarity. Indeed, like Madoka, Sayaka, Mami, Homura, and Kyoka, Saya as a stereotype of the *mahō shōjo* is allowed to exist only so that she fights against that which binarily opposes her; however, the inconsistency in this narrative is that the chiropterans are kindred; they share the status of vampiric monster. One could conceive that the hybrid Saya must constantly kill the carbon copies representative of her vampiric animalism, i.e. the exteriorisation of her own monstrosity, in order, to maintain a homeostatic, categorically human, subjectivity.

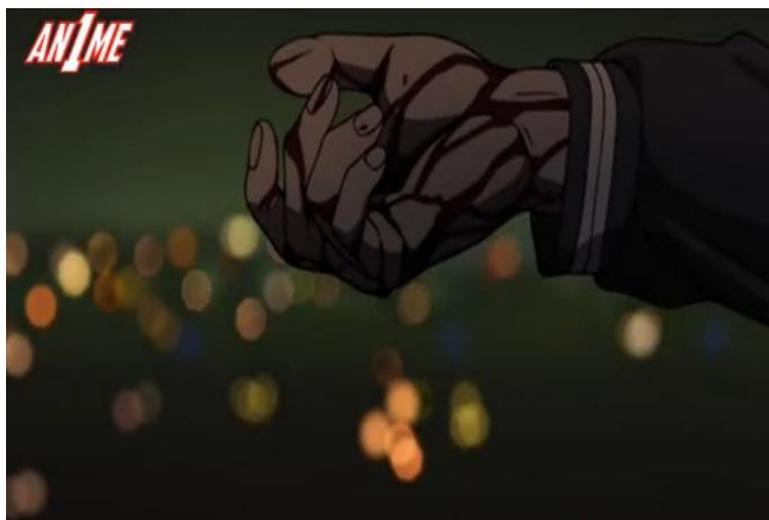


Figure 8. *Blood: The Last Vampire* (2000)

On the Other hand quite literally bleeding (cf. figure 8), exemplarity or the status of being original may not necessitate such a dialectical violent slicing of the abject, in order, to maintain a “homeostasis of self”. Perhaps, the most poignant and powerful scene in the film is when Saya gazing into the eyes of that alien-abject gracefully extends her bleeding and dripping hand over the mouth of the wounded chiropteran. This sympathetic gesture of sacrifice is met with the beast gazing back into the *moë*-evocative eyes of Saya (cf. figure 9); and that hand limply giving of her blood becomes Makiho’s hand clutching the cruciform, which in turn fades into the photorealistic lifting off of the American B-52 headed to Đồng Hới for war; perhaps, there is a mother, nun, and Valkyrie in this monster.



Figure 9. *Blood: The Last Vampire* (2000)

The Kenotic Sacrifice: The Ultimate Act of Self-Erasure & Sublime Whiteness

In *Madoka*, Urobuchi writes this world outside of its own paradoxical framework through Madoka’s wish: ‘I wish to erase all witches before they are born, all the witches in all the universes both past and future with my own hands’ (Episode 12). Conditional to her wish, ‘all traces of [Madoka’s] individual self will be lost and for all of eternity she will exist as a concept, a principle that destroys witches . . . becoming hope itself, the hope of us all’ (Ibid.). In a commentary for the publication *Spa-Weekly* 07-09, Miyadai (2011b) posits that *Madoka* is ‘a story that overcame the trap of “*sekai-kei*”, where the feeling of the self-consciousness reached a dead-end. . . . [Madoka] accepts her role,’ which ‘is not a transformation but a body flip-over’ – ‘a heroine who flips over herself and cannot un-flip back to what she was.’

For the *mahō shōjo* in this world, Madoka makes the ultimate, kenotic sacrifice of self for the purpose of maintaining the subjectivities of each magical girl in existence. Instead of falling into a fate of abjection or the denigration of self, each magical girl is freed from her fate and therefore able to retain a “homeostasis of self”. As the newly minted cosmological constant acting as the zero-function that negates all witches, Madoka’s existence flips (so to speak) from contingency, i.e. the fact of being so without having to be so, to necessity. As a necessary being, she is *necessarily* (and therefore eternally) so. Therefore, the primary consequence of resetting the un-resettable is Madoka’s self-erasure of her two-dimensional body and subjectivity: her contingent existence; however, through a metaleptical shift, i.e. a metonymy of a metonymy, as necessitated by a wish of her magnitude, Madoka becomes the ultimate, monadic expression of the *mahō shōjo* self/spirit – a singular-multiplicity of exalted hope consistently purging the stigma of female qua witch.



Figures 10. *Puella Magi Madoka Magika*, episode 12



Figures 11. *Puella Magi Madoka Magika*, episode 12



Figure 12. *Blood: The Last Vampire* (2000)

In wishing self out of self, Madoka re-configures an entirely new 2-D cosmogony, thereby, necessitating the spectralisation of the entire flattened plane to the bare minimum of drawing – fading utterly blown away into mere traces by the awesome sublimity of perfect erasure (cf. figures 10-11). Additionally, in *Blood*, a similar scene of perfect erasure by the sublime lights of the helicopter, which as an ecstatic moment for Makiho (perhaps, of the St. Theresa variety) effaces the trail of the saga with Saya and her monsters, but unlike *Madoka*, not the memory of it (cf. figure 12).

CONCLUSION

As this essay has demonstrated, there is an inextricable link between *Blood* and *Madoka*. The link becoming a chain may be followed through the Japanese Gothic aesthetic, which I have traced as 1. uncanny strangeness on the subjective, diegetic, and meta-techné level as a spectralisation; 2. the grotesquerie that is hybridity and the paradox of becoming the abject; and 3. the phantasmagoric nature of erasing animation as it intersects with subjectivity and the sublimity of perfect whiteness. All three of these threads intriguingly and playfully work to subvert or to at least scare the cliché out of the *mahō shōjo* exemplum, thereby, exposing the deeper implications of a world of magical girls that is not only inscribed in aporia, but also bespeaks to the plight of the female, who has been symbolically tethered between the dialectic of the virginal mother and the hysterical whore. From 2-D to 3-D, *Blood* and *Madoka* are two monstrosities speaking to and of each other in their infinite iterability, intertextuality, and performativity through animated figurations, which are spectralising, flattening, and solidifying – in a multitude of visual registers – thoroughly heteroptic and bustling with *fushigi*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my mentor Professor Dennis Washburn and the Comparative Literature Department at Dartmouth College for guiding me through the Japanese culture and its incomparable animated genius.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bakhtin, M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ed. and Trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press.
- [2] *Blood: The Last Vampire*. (2000). By Kamiyama Kenji. Dir. Kitakubo Hiroyuki. Prod. Mitsumoto Ryuji and Nagasaki Yukio. Planning Assistance by Mamoro Oshii *Production I.G.* Manga Entertainment.
- [3] Bolton, C. (2007). 'The Quick and the Undead: Visual and Political Dynamics in *Blood: The Last Vampire*.' *Mechademia*, 2, 125-42.
- [4] Figal, G. (1999). *Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan*. Ed. Rey Chow, H. D. Harootunian, and Masao Miyoshi. Durham: Duke UP.
- [5] Freud, S. (2003). *The Uncanny*. Trans. David McIlintock. London: Penguin.
- [6] Kristeva, J. (1991). *Strangers to Ourselves*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP.
- [7] 'Madoka Goes Terrorist.' (2011). Interview with Urobuchi Gen. *Asahi Shinbun*. Anime News Network. Trans. Username Citrus. <<http://yaranakya.wordpress.com/2011/08/31/pandoras-box-1-madoka-goes-terrorist/>>.
- [8] *Mahō Shōjo Madoka Magika* (Puella Magi Madoka Magika). By Urobuchi Gen. Dir. Akiyuki Shinbo. Prod. Atsuhiko Iwakami. Original Character Designer Aoki Ume. 12 Episodes. *SHAFT*. Aniplex of America (7 Jan. - 22 Apr. 2011).
- [9] Miyadai S. (2011a). 'Transformation Semantics in the History of Japanese Subcultures since 1992.' Trans. Kono Shion. *Mechademia* 6: 231-258.
- [10] _____. (2011b). 'No Matter If an Ordinary Girl Watches It or a Grown-up Man like Me Watches It.' *Spa-Weekly!* Trans. Username Symbv from Evageeks Forum. <http://wiki.puella-magi.net/Spa_Weekly!_2011-07-19>.
- [11] Napier, S. J. (1998). 'Vampires, Psychic Girls, Flying Women and Sailor Scouts: Four Faces of the Young Female in Japanese Popular Culture.' In *The Worlds of Japanese Popular Culture: Gender, Shifting Boundaries, and Global Cultures*. Ed. D.P. Martínez. Cambridge: Cambridge UP: 91-109.
- [12] Newitz, A. (1995). 'Magical Girls and Atomic Bomb Sperm: Japanese Animation in America.' *Film Quarterly* 49(1), 2-15.
- [13] *Official Guidebook of Puella Magi Madoka Magica 'You Are Not Alone'*. (2011). Trans. Symbv from Evageeks Forum. Site Updated 13 Oct. 2013. <http://wiki.puella-magi.net/Puella_Magi_Madoka_Magica_Official_Guidebook_%22You_Are_Not_Alone%22>.
- [14] Ogi, F. (2003). 'Female Subjectivity and Shoujo (Girls) Manga (Japanese Comics): Shoujo in Ladies' Comics and Young Ladies' Comics.' *Journal of Popular Culture* 36(4), 780-803.
- [15] Ransom, K. (2012). 'Report: Koike Kazuo and Urobuchi Gen Chat.' *Anime News Network*. <<http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/feature/2012-01-29>>.