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**Breaking Binaries:
Transgressing Sexualities in Japanese Animation**

A thesis
submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
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Abstract

As a visual medium that articulates all genres of fiction, from children's card games to extreme pornography, Japanese animation, better known simply as 'anime', is an art form that has gained international recognition among both academics and passionate devotees. The central purpose of this thesis is to closely examine representations of sexuality in mainstream adult anime – in this context, non-pornographic anime primarily aimed at teenagers and adults – and to interrogate the main themes and concepts which are used to engage in discussions of it.

Using specific anime titles as literary texts and thereby analysing the symbolism, characterisation, and key scenes being depicted, this thesis investigates the ways in which sexuality is portrayed, and how this portrayal through animation entails radically distinctive forms of representation and narrative. I also employ the current body of anime criticism to illuminate these anime titles, in conjunction with a contextualisation of these sexual representations within a Japanese cultural context.

As an aid to analysis, I utilize the aesthetic philosophy of Robin George Collingwood and the gender theories of Judith Butler, whose arguments on the topics of art as artistic expression and on gender as a performative act respectively allow for both an exploration of the aesthetics of anime, as well as a means of navigating the often distinctively complex representations of sex and gender in

anime. Both Collingwood and Butler have been chosen for their utility in opening up the highly aestheticized representations of gender and sexuality in anime – a medium well-known for its artistic sensibilities – combined with formalised and, at times, ritualised extremes. These are to be read as closely as possible in terms of the anime-ic art form itself, rather than in terms of psychoanalytic categories or abstract symbolism. The aim of this thesis is not to interpret anime through one or more specific conceptual lenses, as has been done in the past, but instead to critically examine what Collingwood calls the imaginative space, and to make observations based on Butler’s approach to gender and sexuality gender as it appears when no longer defined by biological or binary fact.

This thesis is therefore structured around a breakdown of dualistic thought, with the main sections designed to transcend boundaries of dualism, even – or especially when – this requires the viewer to step back from what is considered as being ‘normal’ or ethically acceptable. In studying a form of popular art that has been written about extensively in terms of its history, aesthetic design, and audience consumption, this thesis explores new territory in that it examines a topic which has not previously been the subject of much academic discussion from the perspective of aesthetics that predates post-modern theory and post-World War II psychoanalysis. From harems and sexbots to portrayals of homosexuality and incest, the primary interest of this thesis is to study how representations of sexuality in anime – no matter how unconventional, fantastic, or disturbing – are brought to life on screen as art.

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Introduction

Despite its current relative popularity in the West, anime is a comparatively alien form of media to much of English-speaking society. I have come to anticipate one of two assumptions that people unfamiliar with anime commonly arrive at when I attempt to explain the topic of my doctoral thesis. The first is that I watch Japanese cartoons primarily aimed at children. Examples such as *Pokémon*, *Dragonball Z*, and *Yu-Gi-Oh!* frequently punctuate the conversation. The second is that I am analysing Japanese pornography – in which case no examples are given, although it becomes evident that tiny Japanese school uniforms, characters with breasts the size of watermelons, and scenes involving tentacle rape are usually what the other party has in mind.

This is not to suggest that children's cartoons or animated pornography are unworthy of analysis. Indeed, a few of the titles that will be examined in this thesis do fall into the category of children's anime, and a small handful border on the explicitly erotic, even if not quite pornographic. However, the majority of anime titles being discussed are neither one nor the other, but fall somewhere in between – they are aimed more at the teenage and adult demographics, and are therefore mature in their ideas and themes without being extremely sexually graphic.

The central purpose of this thesis is to closely explore the key themes that are to do with nuanced representations of sexuality in largely mainstream, yet adult, anime. In one way or another, all of these themes appear to challenge normative

notions regarding societal, cultural, and even psychological and physiological models of sexuality – particularly from a classical dualistic Anglo-American viewpoint. They are transgressive, in that they are not confined to common or even conventional portrayals of sexuality, and involve topics ranging from sexual violence and incest, to female-orientated male homosexuality and man's desire towards robots.¹

As such, there are several pertinent concerns to be explored. How does the anime in question confront boundaries with regard to how sexuality is represented as a whole? Does anime present human sexuality from an entirely unique angle, or does it examine pre-existing forms of sexuality on a more microscopic level? Is there a correlation between anime and deviant sexual behaviour, or do representations of sexuality in anime remain purely in the realm of fantasy? By engaging in anime as a broad-ranging but nonetheless highly distinctive medium, these are issues which I will be providing responses to over the course of my thesis.

The anime titles I have selected for close reading are therefore based on their representation of different concepts of sexuality, and have been grouped to represent either distinct subgenres, such as *yaoi* and harem anime, or individual plot devices, such as rape and incest.² These anime have been chosen according to the main focus of these themes; for example, whilst *Bishoujo Senshi Sailor Moon*

¹ This study considers both sexuality (biological) and gender (set by roles and behaviour) when they are made problematic in anime.

² While the big names of anime such as Miyazaki Hayao, Kon Satoshi, and Oshii Mamoru may rightly be considered auteurs for analysis purposes, most animation is produced by studios whose general staff members are just as important as the director. This likely accounts for some of the repetition of tropes. It is also worth noting that production crews are predominantly male; with one or two exceptions such as CLAMP, females working in animation are rare.

explores a lesbian relationship in the form of Haruka and Michiru (Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune), this anime was not used in the chapter concerning girls love, as the relationship between these two characters is not a key focus of the series as a whole. I have also attempted to choose titles that are viewed as contemporary – although, as with any long-term study of popular culture, what may have been new and innovative at the beginning of the research inevitably becomes less so by the end of it, and with the more unconventional anime groupings such as those involving incest, the selection is naturally more limited. In the main, I am dealing with televised anime which originally came to air post-millennium, although there are some few exceptions that have been chosen for comparison's sake as in the chapter regarding censorship, or for their particular strength in relation to their relative theme within the thesis, such as the selection of *Revolutionary Girl Utena* when looking at representations of incest. Unless otherwise explicitly stated, all anime titles being quoted from according to their official English subtitles.

These titles are read in conjunction with a number of commentaries on anime, as well as with reference to notable anime practitioners and literary theorists. Much of this criticism is scholarly in nature and has been sourced from academic research by both Japanese and Western authors. However, many articles relating to specific anime titles – particularly those which have not yet received critical attention – are to be found online, and have been written by reviewers and fans.

The issue of how far the Japanese authorial dimension can be ascertained and the authorial intent/interpretation clarified is problematic, but it is a dimension that can be substantially bridged through the wealth of both scholarly and fan

commentary that is being made increasingly available in both the Japanese and English languages. This necessitates an approach where the author-text-reader literary interplay is explored, by recognising the way in which the reader perceives, understands and relates to the text as an integral and necessary dimension of commentary or discourse of the text itself. In connection to the analysis of the reception of anime, the concept of fandom plays a major role in defining what could be called anime culture – arguably, no other literary or cinematic genre or form has spawned the same levels of interactivity between the fans and the text (as represented by cosplay, for example – literally life imitating art).

To this end, the textual analysis approach has been used in tandem with what is now widely termed the ‘scholar/fan position’ originated by Henry Jenkins (*Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*, 2006, and *The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture*, 2007). Jenkins’ earlier arguments are concerned with the breakdown of boundaries between text and reader, and the effect that this has upon the growth of fan cultures in general. In particular, he points out that fan cultures ‘grew out of openings or excesses within the text that were built on and stretched ... it was not as if fans and texts were autonomous from each another; fans created their own, new texts, but elements within the originating text defined, to some degree, what they could do.’³

Matthew Hills’ *Fan Cultures* (2002), as the first text to deal with a comprehensive overview of fans, fandom, and fan theory, also outlines the ways in which fans

³ ‘Media, Education and the Marketplace’ (<http://sciencestage.com/v/1525/lec-6-mit-cms.930-media,-education-and-the-marketplace.html>), accessed 18 August 2009.

have been conceptualised within a theoretic cultural framework. Each chapter approaches fandom from the standpoint of an existing binary in fan studies, and draws on an intense theoretical background which is nonetheless written from an insider-perspective on fan culture and its relationship to mass media and consumerism. In the process, Hills takes a stand against the stereotypical portrayal of fans as being obsessed people who are simply out of touch with reality.

David Lavery (*The Essential Cult TV Reader*, 2009/2010), has taken these ideas a step further, expanding them by examining television shows which actively engage fan bases out of mainstream audiences. He explores the defining characteristics of cult television, traces its development from cult status to mainstream, 'legitimate' television, and addresses the cultural contexts that allows the development of this phenomenon. Although I do not directly refer to these three texts within the core of my thesis, they have nonetheless informed my position on analysing anime as a reader. This permits a close re-reading of key scenes, where symptomatic motifs and cues can be highlighted and explored further within the process of 'fan' reading.

Moreover, because anime introduces an extremely visual grammar of expression, this thesis identifies key elements that go beyond language, such as artistic and narrative symbolism, that are particularly apt to be adopted as part of the receptive act of (non-linguistically competent) readership. An intensive engagement and dissection of some of the narratively and aesthetically critical scenes in the anime being discussed serves as a vehicle for teasing open the points of disjuncture and

resonance for a non-Japanese audience, as well as placing a strong emphasis on the understanding of cultural idiosyncrasies.

Anime Scholarship

A large body of published scholarly work relating to the study of anime and Japanese culture already exists. In particular, there have been various publications that seek to illuminate anime codes and conventions to the uninitiated viewer, grounding the reader within the world of anime in terms of visual design. For example, Gilles Poitras' *The Anime Companion: What's Japanese in Japanese Animation?* (1999) is an excellent text for the examination of the usually very distinct aesthetics design of anime, while Patrick Drazen's *Anime Explosion: The What? Why? & Wow! Of Japanese Animation* (2003) functions as a more in-depth discussion of the same, travelling beyond a basic 'anime 101' type of reading to arrive at a close examination of anime conventions as they relate to both Japanese and American culture – many of them to do with sexuality.

Nonetheless, the 'general purpose' style of these types of publications means that critical research into the field of anime is limited to its cultural background or its aesthetics, and specific anime titles are therefore not dealt with in any critical investigation. Few published titles offer close textual analysis of anime, and the opportunity exists for expansion in this field.

Most recently, Canadian academic and Japanologist Thomas Lamarre has investigated the way in which anime succeeds in creating the feeling of movement

and depth in a 2D environment in *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (2009). Lamarre discusses how anime manages to achieve its visual illusions through detailed descriptions and generous usage of screen captures, studying the cells on which the images are drawn; the techniques of drawing and blurring lines; the individual movements of background, mid-ground, and foreground layers; and the multiplane camera as invented by Walt Disney and used by Miyazaki. For example, his chapter titled ‘Animation Stand’ makes extensive use of Miyazaki’s *Castle in the Sky* to discuss depth and movement:

As Sheeta falls from the airship toward the ground, she gets smaller and smaller... she appears to be moving away from us. At the same time, to give us the sense of Sheeta falling rather than shrinking, the sequence intersperses images of the pirates looking down from the airship above... Each time we cut back to them, they also look smaller and smaller. This setup lets us know that Sheeta is falling rapidly down and away from the airship. While this is a perfectly serviceable rendition of falling, such a sequence really doesn’t give a sensation of movement *into* depth but rather a movement away from our viewing position.⁴

Whilst this explains the mechanics behind anime – how and what anime is literally made up of – Lamarre’s explorations are restricted by the fact that he is concerned primarily with the crafting of anime above the story itself; a fact which he acknowledges in his preface:

⁴ Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 20.

Because my emphasis is on animation as such, I look at anime primarily with an eye to technical determination and technical value, rather than beginning with socioeconomic determinations and values ... The result is a book with an emphasis on “how anime thinks technology” rather than on how anime thinks Japan, or how studios make anime, or how fans interact with anime.⁵

Lamarre engages with anime on a mainly physical level, investigating methods of storytelling within anime through technology and, in later chapters, through a slew of philosophers and theorists in order to deal with the psychoanalysis of anime characters, often in regards to gender and sexuality. Although Lamarre does closely examine several anime titles, including *Castle in the Sky*, *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water*, and *Chobits*, his interest remains in the physical moving image, and not how and why gender and sexuality is narratively presented.

There are also a large number of texts that deal with Japanese sexuality and culture in an anthropological context, without using anime as a reference point. Boye Lafayette De Mente’s *Sex and the Japanese: The Sensual Side of Japan* (2006) provides a very broad look into the changing concepts of sexuality within Japan from a relatively objective standpoint. Ruth Benedict’s *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (1946) tackles similar subjects, but which are mostly to do with the contrast between the culture of Japan and that of the United States – particularly in terms of the general psychological worldview of each nation. Although somewhat dated, Ian Buruma’s *Behind the Mask: On*

⁵ Lamarre, p. xi.

Sexual Demons, Sacred Mothers, Transvestites, Gangsters, Drifters, and Other Japanese Cultural Heroes (1983) also delves into some of the prominent characteristics in the Japanese psyche as portrayed particularly in Japanese cinema, many of them to do with notions of gender and sexuality.

Other texts dealing with the sexuality of historical and modern Japan focus specifically on one particular facet of this, rather than existing as an overview of the subject as a whole. *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan: Cultural Myths and Social Realities* (2000), written by Mark J. McLelland, is one of the first texts to examine a wide range of contrasting images of the homosexual male body in Japan, and examines homosexual representations as they appear in Japanese media. Whilst there have been several influential texts revolving around the woman in both historical and modern Japan (Iwai Sumiko's 1998 *The Japanese Woman: Traditional Image and Changing Reality*, Miyako Inoue's *Vicarious Language: Gender and Linguistic Modernity in Japan*, 2006), there are comparatively very few which examine lesbian sexuality in Japan. *Emerging Lesbian Voices from Japan* (2002), by Sharon Chalmers, has been valuable in filling that gap, acting as the definitive text for the academic exploration of lesbian sexuality in contemporary Japanese society.

Perhaps surprisingly, although there have been a significant number of books and articles which discuss sexuality in anime within a pornographic framework, there have been far fewer academic texts to deal with sexuality in anime on a title-specific and non-pornographic level. Susan J. Napier's *Anime From Akira to Howl's Moving Castle* (first published as *From Akira to Princess Mononoke* in

2001), for instance, points to various anime titles of a non-pornographic nature to examine them from a sexual standpoint, such as *InuYasha*, *Princess Mononoke*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Neon Genesis Evangelion*.

However, because the most updated version of this text was written in 2005, and since so many of the anime titles being analysed by Napier date back to the 1980s and early to mid-1990s, much of the commentary is simply no longer as relevant as it once was. Moreover, Napier's tendency to make use of constructs of sexuality as seen through a hyper-sexualised, often Freudian lens, means that the anime in question is often divorced from the cultural setting from which it was actualised.

The intention of this thesis is to bridge the gap between anime and Japanese culture and society, complementing Napier's ground study by continuing to textually analyse anime that has been produced from the mid-1990s to the end of the first decade of the millennium. While making use of the research that has already been carried out by authors such as Drazen and Lamarre, as well as that of historians and anthropologists including Benedict and McLelland, the focus of my own work is on providing a well-researched yet original exploration of anime as a contemporary art form, and as it relates to constructs of sexuality as they are already overtly expressed within a selection of anime titles.

Theoretical Framework

Anime has its own distinct tropes and artistic conventions which, like any literary art form, are amenable to literary criticism. However, anime is not ‘high’ literature, and to approach anime with a heavy-handed and overly theoretical framework misses the essential point of anime – that however meaningful or complex, it is first and foremost an expressive form of entertainment. Anime does not readily lend itself to the same kind of analysis one would apply to Dostoyevsky, and to attempt to do so runs the risk of the theorist projecting interpretations upon the text that owes more to the theorist’s desire to discuss theory than to explain the text itself. The danger here is turning the text into something it is not.

‘Good’ anime evokes an emotional response from the viewer, and the critic must be sympathetic to the narrative in order to understand and explain this emotional dimension. In turn, their analysis should build on and explain that empathic process. Whilst authors like Napier and Lamarre have applied heavy critical theory in their approach to anime, such as Lacan, Žižek, Heidegger, Bakhtin, and Todorov, the theorists I have made use of in my own work – Robin George Collingwood and Judith Butler – have been chosen for their capacity to allow anime to be understood on its own terms, rather than as it might be construed based on the often prescriptive frameworks of psychoanalysis.

Although Collingwood was primarily a general philosopher and philosopher of history, his work in aesthetics – the principal work being his *The Principles of Art* (1938) – continues to be widely read today. Collingwood breaks up the principles and purposes of art into several categories: art as Craft (the ‘technical’ theory of

art), art as Representation (the feeling evoked by an artwork that resembles the same feeling evoked by the original), art as Magic (the ritualised representation of useful emotion), and art as Amusement (the way in which art purposefully stimulates an emotion by 'make believe' means).

However, what Collingwood defines as 'art proper' is none of these things in definition (although it may still incorporate them). True art, Collingwood insists, is 'fundamentally expression'. It is the expression of emotion, as well as imaginative expression, although the creator of that art 'need not be acting in order to achieve any ulterior end; he not be following a preconceived plan' to elicit that expression from viewers, because every viewer can interpret an artwork differently.⁶ Like Benedetto Croce before him, Collingwood believed in the intrinsic mental nature of art, and that art need serve no end beyond itself. In his words, 'The aesthetic experience, or artistic activity, is the experience of expressing one's emotions; and that which expresses them is the total imaginative activity called indifferently language or art.'⁷

Needless to say, anime is an artistic medium that can and does incorporate Craft, Representation, Magic, and Amusement within its stories. Miyazaki's works are applauded for his use of traditional animation as opposed to computer generated imagery, while writer and director Oshii Mamoru has stated that he regards visuals as the most important aspect to his work. Indeed, Oshii's *The Sky Crawlers* features backgrounds so skilfully rendered that they could pass for

⁶ Robin George Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (South Cotswolds, Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 129.

⁷ Collingwood, p. 275.

photo-reality in many scenes of the film.⁸ Moreover, the soundtracks that accompany anime can often be considered as brilliant works of craft in their own right, as with the music from *Ghost in the Shell* which moves from faux-Shinto chant to dynamic electronic material.

Likewise, it is easy to see where Collingwood's theory of Art as Representation can be applied to anime. Anime in Japan is not and has often never intended to be photorealistic, and is thus a representation of something deeper than simply everything it depicts. In some cases, this is a physical representation – a hair colour that does not state anything explicitly, but which says something implicit about a character's persona. An audience who knows little, or nothing, of anime codes and conventions unconsciously understands that Ayanami's icy blue hair in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* signifies her outward coldness and social withdrawal, as well as her distinct physical 'otherness.' In other cases, it is something non-physical – a piece of background music that evokes a specific feeling such as tension or sadness, as in some of the compositions in *Le Portrait de Petit Cossette* and *Angel Beats!* respectively.

Televised anime first appeared in Japan in 1963 in the form of *Mighty Atom* – well after the first publication of *The Principles of Art* in 1938. Nevertheless, anime aligns with Collingwood's description of Art Proper in that its true function is to construct possible worlds, 'some of which, later on, thought will find real, or action will make real.'⁹ Anime is not only Craft, as Lamarre focuses on, because it embodies far more than the sum of its lines and ink. Anime is not only

⁸ Jill Neldes, *Introduction to Film Studies* (New York, Routledge, 2007), pp. 228-229.

⁹ Collingwood, p. 286.

Representation because its aim is usually not to achieve realism, and it is not defined only by its planned or deliberate (i.e. non-imaginative) symbolism. Anime is not only Magic, because it does not only exist solely for the conscious provocation of practical emotion. And anime is not mere Amusement, because the potential exists for a meaning which is not limited to simple enjoyment.

Collingwood's definition of Art becomes most valuable here because it aids in clearing away unhelpful definitions of art so that we see it for what it (arguably) ought to be: an expression that unfolds out of a process of the conscious – the intellectual or technical – and the unconscious – the intuitive or emotional – inspiration. There is always an essence that is ineffable and resonant beyond the artistic artefact itself, and this is where utility of this thought in relation to anime comes into play. Anime can and sometimes does embody all of Collingwood's 'lesser' definitions of art; however, it is a medium that is often defined by an imaginative expression that connects a creator and its audience through its story. The various representations of sexuality in non-pornographic anime are made up of a series of imaginative events, and Art Proper as described by Collingwood is based on the concept of imaginative spaces: 'The work of art proper is something not seen or heard, but something imagined.'¹⁰ Ultimately, anime 'works' as art because of its potential to evoke an essence beyond its surface images.

Using Collingwood in order to approach anime as 'art' may at first glance appear problematic, since this raises questions over whether the constructs of sexuality being discussed are only acceptable because anime, both as fiction and as

¹⁰ Collingwood, p. 142.

animation, is a 'safe' mode of representation – a point which will be discussed throughout the thesis. However, such an approach also allows for a depoliticisation of the sexual transgressions being addressed here. The aim of this thesis is not to apply feminist, post-feminist, or any other kind of theoretical framework to anime, but instead to examine anime as far as possible on its own terms. By the same token, Collingwood's ideas have been chosen over theories of animation because rather than being concerned with the craft of animation, the focus of this thesis is on what anime is capable of representing, and how and why it provokes an emotional response. Anime can be defined as 'art, but it distinguishes itself from other forms of art through its often unique power of representation and the subsequently emotionally-driven responses to it.

Collingwood also wrote that 'Every utterance and each gesture that each one of us makes is a work of art.'¹¹ If, by Collingwood's definition, the principal function of language is 'an imaginative activity whose function is to express emotion', and if his explanation of expression can be most accurately viewed as emotional experience being brought to consciousness, then every sound and gesture is a work of art.¹² Those expressions that are most highly significant are those which allow the people around us to attain awareness of their own experience through emotional and imaginative engagement with that language. His theory of art, as David Davies points out, is therefore about performance as much as it is about anything else, and 'resembles Kant's account of aesthetic judgement and Dewey's

¹¹ Collingwood, p. 285.

¹² Collingwood, p. 225.

theory of ‘art as experience’ in viewing art in the standard sense as an extension of a capacity essential for our conscious engagement with the world.’¹³

The idea of art as an expressive act and as a type of performance ties in well with the ideas espoused by American post-structuralist philosopher Judith Butler. Best known for her work in the fields of feminism and queer theory, Butler has also written extensively on ethics and political philosophy. She coined the term Gender Performativity in her second book, *Gender Trouble* (1990), in which she characterises gender as the effect of reiterated acting; one which produces what we can consider to be ‘true gender’ as opposed to gender as defined by biological or binary fact. In other words, gender becomes ‘not something that one is’, but rather ‘something one does, an act ... a “doing” rather than a “being.”’¹⁴

Butler questions the belief that gendered behaviours are natural, stating that one’s learned performance of gendered behaviour – common associations concerning masculinity and femininity – is an act imposed on us by societal heterosexual norms. ‘In opposition to theatrical or phenomenological models which take the gendered self to be prior to its acts,’ she writes. ‘I will understand constituting acts not only as constituting the identity of the actor, but as constituting that identity as a compelling illusion, an object of belief.’¹⁵

¹³ David Davies, ‘Collingwood’s ‘Performance’ Theory of Art’ in *British Journal of Aesthetics* 48, 2008, p. 173. This article is concerned with British philosopher Richard Wollheim’s critique of Collingwood’s aesthetic philosophy, the response by Aaron Ridley to this Wollheimian reading of Collingwood, and the ensuing debate with John Dilworth.

¹⁴ Judith Butler, Sara Salih, *The Judith Butler Reader* (Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), p. 91. Such ideas also predate Butler, such as in Michel Foucault’s works, and parallel theories of sexuality exist in the form of modern feminist and queer theory, for example in Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto* – a clear influence on Oshii’s work.

¹⁵ Gill Jagger, *Judith Butler: Sexual Politics, Social Change and the Power of the Performative* (New York, Routledge, 2008), p. 22.

According to Butler, concepts of gender are therefore compelled by ‘social sanction and taboo’, so that our belief in ‘natural’ behaviour is really the result of societal coercion. Indeed, Butler insists that gender, as something objective and natural, does not truly exist at all, since ‘it is real only to the extent that it is performed.’¹⁶ Gender is not tied to the bodily or material, but is instead an entirely social construction that is open to movement and change, so that the body becomes its specific gender only by means of ‘a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time.’¹⁷

An obvious anime example to draw on in demonstration of this is the series *Chobits*. As a robot, Chii’s gender has been called into question by scholars including Lamarre, who concerns himself with how to sexually define her: ‘Moreover, strictly speaking, there is no woman in this relationship. The girl persocom is not human, and thus not a woman ... Is this a computer or a girl? ... Is the persocom really (that is, anatomically) like a woman?’¹⁸

Butler’s explanation of gender renders this example far less problematic. It is not that Chii’s character is designed to look feminine, and neither does it matter (in terms of gender alone) what Chii has between her legs. Instead, Chii’s gender is defined by performance. The way in which Chii willingly defines herself by how she relates to Hideki, and everything that she does for his sake – cooking, shopping for underwear, finding a job as a peep show performer – are literally what makes her who she is. A more stereotypically feminine character than Chii could scarcely be imagined.

¹⁶ Butler, Salih, p. 49.

¹⁷ Henry Bial, *The Performance Studies Reader* (New York, Routledge, 2004), p. 157.

¹⁸ Lamarre, p. 223.

Butler goes on to suggest that ‘policing gender is ... a way of securing heterosexuality’, and that normative heterosexuality demands an unyielding conformity to either one or the other gender and sexual orientation.¹⁹ She warns that ‘a gay/lesbian identity’ is constructed by way of ‘the same exclusionary means’ as any other, and recommends that allowances are made beyond the traditional binary classifications: male and female, homosexual and heterosexual, gay and lesbian.²⁰ Gender and sexuality are not, according to Butler, ‘substantive being[s]’ in themselves, but rather ‘shifting and contextual phenomenon’ that should not be forced into a duality.²¹

We can see that this type of thinking, at least in terms of how anime characters vocalise their choices and actions when it comes to sex and romance, is especially in line within the genres of *yaoi* and *yuri*, which will be later explored within this thesis. Again, however, the distinct lack of sexual duality can be seen in many anime titles regardless of genre, where a character’s sexual orientation is seen as secondary (if it is mentioned or called into question at all), to whom they are romantically attracted. In essence, engaging with Butler’s theories facilitates a reading into anime and the various constructs of sexuality represented within, but without being caught up in the confines of navigating the murky waters of gender.

The Internet is for Pr0n²²

¹⁹ Jagger, p. 28.

²⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 2nd edition (New York, Routledge, 1999), p. 174.

²¹ Butler, p. 10.

²² A deliberately inaccurate spelling of pornography, sometimes used in email discussion groups, chat rooms, and internet web pages to circumvent language and content filters.

As has been previously mentioned, a significant number of texts which analyse anime do so within a pornographic framework. This curiosity with pornographic animation is to be expected, given that it is not generally thought of as a conventional form of entertainment or erotica in Anglo-American culture, yet exists as a legitimate genre in its own right in Japan.

Because of this, usage of the word '*hentai*' (変態) is often misappropriated, and tends to be used in reference to any type of pornographic anime or manga. In reality, the term is not usually applied to ordinary pornography in Japan; the Japanese use of the word refers to activities which are considered not only unusual but also extreme or unusual even in the realm of pornography. Although both '*etchi*' or '*ecchi*' (the Japanese pronunciation of the letter H), and '*ero*' (erotic), can be used to refer specifically to manga and anime with extreme sexual content in Japan, '*hentai*' is only used to refer to the more perverse sexual situations, such as sex involving aliens or monsters, gang-rape, and other illicit sexual situations.²³

In its entirety, the scope of *hentai* encompasses an enormous range of sexual fetishes, varying from BDSM and torture to *omorashi* (also known as water-sports) and the often-cited tentacle rape. Japanese contemporary art authority G. M. Thomas has pointed out that 'Despite strict laws that no pubic hair can be shown, everything and anything else exists – if sometimes masked by pixels.'²⁴

²³ Roland Kelts, *Japanamerica: How Japanese Pop Culture Has Invaded the U.S.* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 127.

²⁴ G.M. Thomas, *Extremes: Contradictions in Contemporary Japan* (New York, Kaichan Europe, 2004), p. 127.

The reason why pornography will not be textually discussed within this thesis is not because I believe the genre is any less legitimate than mainstream anime, but rather because pornographic anime encompasses a largely separate set of codes and conventions which are more fairly dealt with in their own right. To merge pornography anime and mainstream anime together in the same group is akin to making the statement that Western pornographic films and conventional Hollywood films share the same core similarities simply because they are both live-action. Moreover, because I am more concerned with gender as a kind of performativity – one which anime enables its viewers to explore beyond the binaries of gender, and the correlating binaries of heterosexual or homosexual physical encounters – explicit hentai and pornography will be put to one side, if for no other reason than that it renders that imaginative possibilities inert by virtue of its very explicitness.

That there are some similarities between pornographic anime and mainstream anime is undeniable, especially since both often based on manga stories.²⁵ Certainly mainstream anime has the potential to be extremely sexual in nature, to the point of what the more sensitive viewer might call obscenity. 2010's *Highschool of the Dead*, a popular title both in Japan and internationally, is an excellent example of an anime that contains fanservice ranging from hundreds of panty shots to characters with breast sizes of ridiculous proportions, and yet focuses on an engaging action-based plot revolving around a zombie apocalypse. Needless to say, this does not mean that two genres of anime should be read

²⁵ Claudia Mitchell, Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, Inc NetLibrary, *Girl Culture: An Encyclopedia* (California, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008), p. 419.

identically, as the function of plot and aesthetic is typically significantly divergent.

Commonly sold in convenience stores, book stores, and magazine stores throughout Japan, pornography today is far more prolific and accessible in its home country than in the American market, largely due to a cultural tolerance of individual actions – Japan’s strict sense of *honne* (one’s individual truth or inner motive, as opposed to *tatemae*, one’s socially-tuned intention), means that people need not feel guilt for a private action that does not harm anybody else, as Japanese-American author Roland Kelts writes: ‘You need not feel guilty, for example, if you masturbate in front of your computer, or read a pornographic manga on the train ride home.’²⁶

Although mainstream anime enjoys a relatively large commercial success worldwide, the success of pornographic anime outside of Japan has not been as successful.²⁷ Because pornographic anime has a comparatively small audience, particularly outside of Japan, it is therefore often cheaply produced and very specifically targeted to the interests of its home audience.²⁸ There is certainly a huge variety of exported adult anime available within the American market both old and new, and much of which has gained some popularity. However, most of these titles have not achieved a lasting or iconic impact in the same way that many mainstream anime titles have.²⁹ Indeed, historically speaking, the only pornographic anime titles which have earned critical success and cult following

²⁶ Kelts, p. 126.

²⁷ Brenner, p. 38.

²⁸ Gilles Poitras, *Anime Essentials: Every Thing a Fan Needs to Know* (Stone Bridge Press, California, 2001), p. 50.

²⁹ Ibid.

are those which include a real and high-quality plotline and outstanding visual design.

Urotsukidoji (1986), *La Blue Girl* (1989), *Kite* (1998), and *Bible Black* (2001) are the four pornography ‘classics’ that are understood to have achieved a respected and iconic status outside of Japan, and are comparable in that they each involve enough characterization and narrative depth to stand alone without their pornographic themes (indeed, *Kite* has been released in the United States with all sex scenes removed, yet has still achieved a high success rate).³⁰ Despite the sensuality and eroticism that are the fundamental themes of each of these titles, all titles involve stories which are not only entertaining in the short term, but also interesting, complex, or engaging in some way. Human-demon hybrids banished to earth for their misdeeds, ninjas fighting sex-hungry monsters, a schoolgirl becoming an assassin after her parents are viciously murdered, and a group of high school students practicing witchcraft are all stories that have stood out from other pornographic anime titles, due in large part to character development and a comparative intricacy of plot.

John Oppliger, an employee of the anime merchandise and production distributor, AnimeNation, has noted in his Ask John column that whilst the absence of these characteristics does not necessarily doom a pornographic anime title to obscurity, it does limit the potential for international interest.³¹ The article goes on to argue that the secret to success for pornographic anime in America hinges on the

³⁰ ‘AnimeNation Anime News Blog – Blog Archive – AskJohn: Are There Any Iconic Hentai Series on the Horizon?’ (<http://www.animenation.net/blog/2007/03/29/ask-john-are-there-any-iconic-hentai-series-on-the-horizon/>), accessed 18 February 2009.

³¹ Ibid.

creation not just of simple pornography, but on the creation of an erotic narrative, and that all of America's most successful pornographic anime have been titles that are primarily erotic stories containing graphic sexuality, not the other way around.

Shape of Discussion

This thesis is divided into four main sections, all dealing with a different type of sexual duality, or binary, that is being transgressed. Each chapter begins by detailing the context of the main genre or theme that is relevant to the discussion at hand, familiarising the reader with the historical and/or cultural basis behind it. The chapters then move on to an exploration of that genre or theme by use of textual analysis, often through a close reading of several key scenes in order to interpret their possible meanings.

Section One is concerned with sexuality in the broader sense as it is represented in anime on a general scale. In the first chapter, I am concerned with the changes that are made to anime in terms of sexual censorship as it is adapted from one audience to another – in this case, as it is presented to a Japanese demographic and then to an American one. In particular, I examine the sorts of changes that are apparent between the Japanese and North American versions of *Sailor Moon* (1992), and compare these changes to those that have been made in newer titles such as *Naruto* (2002). The issue of sexuality in anime is at times not straightforward, and this section is a necessary prelude to further textual analysis in order to clarify and refine the parameters of my discussion.

The second chapter focuses on the types of imagery often seen in anime titles that may be viewed in different ways depending on the audience. What is assumed to be a representation of sexuality in some form to one can be notably non-sexual to another, and I use examples from Japanese culture, such as communal bathing, street fashion, and the wearing of the sailor school uniform to demonstrate this.

Section Two of the thesis is about the boundaries between mind and body. Chapter Three, focusing on *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995) as the primary text, is the element of mind, although, as is explored through Freudian theory (by which director Anno Hideaki was most certainly influenced), what affects the mind cannot help but affect the body – particularly because in the case of *Evangelion*, the robots that are being piloted are physically manipulated by each pilot's physiological state.

Chapter Four the element of the body, uses *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040* (1998), *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* (2002), and *Chobits* (2002) to explore sexuality as depicted between humans and machines. What their purpose is in a futuristic society, and how and why they are viewed and used by man, is the main concern of this chapter – although, as with the previous chapter, the line between body and mind often becomes blurred as human and robot begin to fuse.

Section Three of the thesis is centered on sexual continuums, particularly the ways in which anime dealing with strong themes of male and female

homosexuality portray the characters and their sexual desires. Chapter Five, a discussion on *yaoi*, or boys love, explores the many potential reasons behind the genre's popularity with a female audience, the aesthetic sensibilities of the genre, how homosexual physical and emotional desire is presented in this particular context, and the role of woman in a male-dominated universe. This is done using *Gravitation* (2000), *Loveless* (2005), and *Junjou Romantica* (2008) as the three primary titles.

In the sixth chapter, I examine similar issues from the point of view of *yuri*, or girls love anime, using *Maria-sama ga Miteru* (2004), *Strawberry Panic!* (2006), and *Kashimashi: Girl Meets Girl* (2006) to observe the relationship dynamics and gender roles between women. I also look at how symbolism plays a large part in portraying relationships that are at times made physically apparent, but are often only implied, to a relatively wide-ranging audience, and at how the genre is at once both similar to and distinct from its boys love counterpart.

The fourth and final section of the thesis is based on those boundaries which tend to be universally societal in nature, regardless of culture. Chapter Seven, on harem anime, details the ways in which a 'family' is built around one male and several female love interests (or, as in the case of the reverse harem, one female and several potential male love interests). Audio-visual cues of the harem genre, as well as character stereotypes, fanservice, and how and why most harems display a marked lack of physical sexual contact are explored, using *Tenchi Muyo!* (1992), *Ouran High School Host Club* (2006), and *Kyou Kara Maou!* (2004) as the main anime titles.

Following on from the theme of the familial, Chapter Eight focuses on incest within the anime world, with particular attention paid to how incest is viewed (as a moral or immoral act) by the characters personally involved and by the rest of society, as well as how the audience is encouraged to view it. The three chief titles used as a part of the discussion – *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (1997), *Angel Sanctuary* (2000), and *Papa to Kiss in the Dark* (2005) – are each distinctly different in terms of genre in order to give a wide scope of the themes being explored.

The final chapter deals with sexuality and violence, with a particular examination of the portrayal of rape in anime. How exactly this is made apparent in mainstream titles, to what purpose rape is used as a part of the story, and how the characters are emotionally affected by rape is the main focal point of this chapter, and once again, each text – *Perfect Blue* (1997), *Yami no Matsuei* (in English, *Descendants of Darkness*, 2000), and *Speed Grapher* (2005) – varies in genre.

In order to write a thesis on sexuality in Japanese animation, it is first necessary to discuss aspects of sexual content that differ between audiences because of cultural sensibilities and demographic changes. Using a range of examples, but focusing on three case studies in particular, I break down issues regarding editing and sexuality in my opening chapter: ‘Cultural Transference: Sexuality and Censorship’

Chapter One: Cultural Transference – Sexuality and Censorship

The censorship of children's culture in Japan has never been as strict as in America, so Japanese children grew up learning about sex and violence through anime.¹

Blinding flashes of light are conjured from nowhere in order to cover up the infamous panty shot. Ample amounts of steam during bath scenes magically waft to safely cover breasts and backside. Shadows loom from the edges of the frame and envelop anything considered too risqué with an impenetrable darkness. Objects are re-positioned, hair grows mysteriously longer, whole outfits appear or are suddenly changed, and nipples inexplicably vanish from the face of the earth.

Censorship in anime, particularly in regards to sexuality, has been prevalent since *Astro Boy* first aired on American television in 1963, exactly eight months after its release on Japanese screens, yet the topic remains one of the most debated among Western fans today. Exploring cultural miscommunication and the differences in expectations of societal propriety is at the heart of the following chapters, and one of the outcomes of this has been the way in which anime has been cut and edited to make it aesthetically and narratively ‘appropriate’ for non-Japanese juvenile audiences.² In this chapter, *Sailor Moon* (1992) and *Naruto* (2002) are closely

¹ Mark I. West, *The Japanification of Children's Popular Culture: From Godzilla to Miyazaki* (Maryland, Scarecrow Press, 2009), p. 199.

² Although anime such as *Sailor Moon* and *Naruto* are also popular amongst adult audiences, the target demographic of these titles is primarily children and young teenagers. It is also important to note that the particular focus here lies in investigating the differences between American and

explored in order to investigate what kinds of censorship have been put into place, what effects this has had in terms of gender and sexuality, and how these types of censorship have changed over time. These issues are made more complex by the fact that there are two questions to consider: are the changes between each version of a single anime title made because of cultural differences, or are they made in order to cater to an entirely separate audience demographic?

Whilst anime has been licensed by its Japanese owners for use outside of Japan since the 1960s, the practice of censorship – the alteration of content as part of the preparation for overseas distribution – became firmly established in the United States during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Shows such as *Gatchaman* and *Captain Harlock* began to be licensed by their respective Japanese companies for distribution in the American market, but were frequently accompanied by dramatic changes to the original narrative in order to cater to strict regulations surrounding children's programming.³ Whereas manga and anime as a whole in Japan often has a wide age viewership, animation from an Anglo-American perspective is sometimes seen as being inherently childish, and is repackaged accordingly. As a result, American versions of anime usually feature the most extreme examples of censorship, and because there are far more North American distributors than European, the dubbed anime broadcast in most of the English-speaking world is a product of America.

Japanese attitudes, as the vast majority of anime exported from Japan arrives via American companies, and America is the largest overseas market for producers.

³ Fred Patten, *Watching Anime, Reading Manga: 25 Years of Essays and Reviews* (California, Stone Bridge Press, 2004), p. 304.

By the early 1990s, as anime was becoming far more mainstream, several companies were beginning to experiment with licensing more adult-oriented concepts and storylines. Some of these companies, such as A.D. Vision, achieved considerable commercial success and continued on to become major players in what is now a relatively profitable industry, while others, such as AnimEigo, met with only partial success. However, many anime fans today continue to actively oppose censorship regardless of the success of these companies, believing it to be both disrespectful to the original creator's intentions, as well as a violation of free speech.⁴

The editing process put in motion after an anime is licensed for international distribution is generally applied only to those titles that are intended for broadcast on American television, since titles released directly to DVD are not subject to such heavy alterations. In the former case, editing commonly involves a number of heavy changes, including the toning down or complete removal of violence, profanity, drug use, and of course, scenes involving sexual content. Nudity, sexual innuendo, depictions of homosexuality, and other issues that are acceptable in the fictional realm in Japan, but not in the United States, are all either softened or cut out entirely during censorship; a fact that is still highly controversial among fans who feel that the act of censorship tampers with art and belittles the audience by attempting to hide or play down more sophisticated themes and images.⁵

⁴ 'Café Manga, Issue 1 – Anime Censorship: Both Sides of the Spectrum' (<http://www.cafemanga.com/issues/1/docview.php?curfeature=4>, accessed 20 December 2010).

⁵ 'Censorship in anime' (<http://anime.ifreepages.com/Censorship-in-anime.html>), accessed 20 December 2010.

Because the anime audience outside of Japan was assumed to be made up primarily of younger children, the first few anime series and films to be exported from Japan were particularly heavily censored.⁶ Sexual references of all kinds, as well as deaths of major characters, were sometimes cut out so that entire plot lines were modified as a result.⁷ However, badly controlled censorship has also resulted in more humorous outcomes, as in *Rurouni Kenshin* – an anime released on Cartoon Network in 2003 which depicts a character originally seen smoking large amount of cigarettes. The edited version uses toothpicks instead, yet in some of these scenes still shows Saito somehow exhaling smoke.

Societal Stigmas

In what might be considered a socio-historical irony, Japan adopted much of its constitutional framework from the United States after World War II, and as a result, comparatively little is considered illegal, as it is protected by an almost fanatical embrace of the First Amendment.⁸ Although Japan does have laws governing televised ‘indecentcy’, these laws are much more relaxed than those in the United States. For example, the display of full-frontal breast nudity is not only permitted but also fairly common in anime, as is full-body nudity if used in an appropriate context, such as during bathing scenes.⁹

⁶ Gil Asakawa, *Being Japanese American: A JA Sourcebook for Nikkei, Happa... & Their Friends* (California, Stone Bridge Press, 2004), pp. 70-71.

⁷ Gilles Poitras, *Anime Essentials: Every Thing a Fan Needs to Know* (California, Stone Bridge Press, 2001), p. 8.

⁸ ‘THE FIRST AMENDMENT IN CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE’ (<http://www.bsos.umd.edu/gvpt/lpbr/subpages/reviews/kroto1106.htm>), accessed 29 March 2009.

⁹ West, p. 199.

However, nudity is often more stigmatized in America, and is not permitted on American broadcast television even in context – it is therefore removed from broadcast anime, and in many series, is censored by the use of painted objects in the foreground which conceal the exposed parts of characters' bodies.¹⁰ Towels or large wisps of cloud or mist are used to conceal nudity in *Naruto*, for instance, while airbrushed bathing suits or digitally added clothing are used to hide nudity and make clothing less revealing in *Tenchi Muyo!*. In such cases, it is perhaps not so much the nudity itself that becomes the issue, but rather the potential age of the members of the audience who will be watching it.

Even implied-only nudity is commonly censored, although this seems more to do with personal sensibilities than with any actual law involving television standards. For example, all the female leads, with the exception of two characters, are airbrushed to remove the lines tracing their breasts during transformation sequences in the American release of *Sailor Moon*, despite the characters being shown only in silhouette form. Mentions of sex are likewise toned down in other shows, including scenes that portray characters on the more sexually-minded side. Master Roshi's lines in *Dragonball* and *Dragonball Z* are hence often changed in order to remove sexual references: 'If I can see your panties' is altered to 'If I can see your bellybutton' in one particular scene.¹¹

Views on sexuality and a tradition of celebrating relationships between males with a strong element of homoerotic undertones in Japan means that many anime, including those aimed at children, involve recurring characters that are suggested

¹⁰ Robin E. Brenner, *Understanding Manga and Anime* (Connecticut, Libraries Unlimited, 2007), p. 87.

¹¹ *Dragon Ball*, Episode 2, Toriyama Akira (Texas, Funimation Entertainment, 2001).

as being homosexual. However, the considerable social stigma attached to homosexuality in America, particularly where children's entertainment is concerned, has resulted in anime containing hints of homosexuality being severely censored by means of dialogue editing, plot changes, and whole scene deletion, even when there are no occurring acts of overt sexuality between these characters.

Two female characters in *Sailor Moon* are changed so that they become cousins in the American version in order to cover the fact that they are an implied romantic couple, and the relationship between two male characters in *Cardcaptor Sakura* is more or less completely removed from the edited translation. Similar forms of censorship are applied when dealing with open or suggested transgenderism and transvestitism: a key villain in *Battle of the Planets* with both a male and female alter-ego is divided into two separate characters in dub format, and an entire episode is cut from the first season of the *Pokemon* dub because it involves a bikini contest in which one of the contestants – Team Rocket's James – wears a bikini with inflatable breasts.



Figure 1

Pokemon's Jessie and James show off the size of their breasts.

Sailor Moon

In particular, one mainstream anime title that was heavily affected by editing and censorship in the 1990s – *Sailor Moon* – serves as a useful case study. Originally planned to run for only six months in Japan, *Sailor Moon* was repeatedly extended due to its extremely high viewership, and eventually became one of the most successful media franchises in Japan, reaching 1.5 billion dollars in merchandise sales during the first three years alone.¹² Internationally, the series was dubbed first in France in late 1993, and other countries including Italy, Spain and Hong Kong all followed suit before the North American version was dubbed and distributed by DiC Entertainment in 1995. Although the basic storyline of *Sailor Moon* in the North American version remained the same, a large number of alterations were made – primarily because much of the target audience was several years younger than that of the Japanese version, and producers wished to avoid a confrontation with ‘traditional American family values.’¹³

The original series, officially translated as *Pretty Soldier Sailor Moon*, first aired in Japan in 1992, and the differences between the two series led to some confusion with fans as, for many, the North American version was the first experience of anime in general.¹⁴ Numerous viewers familiar with the original series continue to express disdain for the dubbed *Sailor Moon* today, although, because so many *Sailor Moon* and anime fans worldwide would have never

¹² John A. Lent, *Themes and Issues in Asian Cartooning: Cute, Cheap, Mad, and Sexy* (Wisconsin, Popular Press, 1999), p. 187.

¹³ Claudia A. Mitchell, Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, *Girl Culture [Two Volumes]: An Encyclopedia* (Oxfordshire, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), p. 515.

¹⁴ Mitchell, p. 99.

known of the series had it not first reached North America, it is also regarded by some as a mixed blessing.¹⁵

Due to some of the changes made in the North American version, the series sometimes suffers from continuity problems where the plot has been reworked. Serena remembers a scene in episode 40 ('Day of Destiny') where she and Darien fall off a balcony but are saved when she uses an umbrella to float safely to the ground – a scene which was cut from the episode it came. An end-of-show, 'moral of the story' segment called 'Sailor Says' is tacked on in order to satisfy the requirement of educational content on American children's television shows, but on several occasions, these segments, played out as voiceovers over vaguely-related clips from each episode, still contain footage which has also been cut.¹⁶ Smaller problems regarding the removal of specifically Japanese cultural references can likewise be seen. Although the dubbed version removed references such as mock exams and other characteristics of the Japanese school system, Japanese text on most signs and publications are left untouched.

Other alterations which affect minor plot details in order to avoid any controversy are readily apparent, such as giving effeminate and implied homosexual men female voice actors, and using feminine pronouns to make any inferred relationships heterosexual ones. Characters who are more sexually aware and assertive are toned down as well, and many English-speaking *Sailor Moon* viewers are able to quote a moment in which the girls are arguing over who

¹⁵ 'Sailor Moon – girls manga' (http://www.japan-101.com/anime/sailor_moon.htm), accessed 01 January 2011.

¹⁶ John A. Lent, *Animation in Asia and the Pacific* (Hertfordshire, John Libbey Publishing, 2001), p. 37.

should play the lead role in a production of *Snow White*. In the original version, Sailor Jupiter points towards her chest and states that she should play the lead because she has the largest breasts. The dubbed dialogue has her say that she should be the lead because she has the most talent.¹⁷ The change became infamous enough that fans have since used the term ‘talented’ as a euphemism for ‘busty’.¹⁸



Figure 2

Sailor Jupiter emphasises her ‘talent’.

Unsurprisingly, the biggest changes made between the two versions of *Sailor Moon* are to do with gender and sexual orientation. The most obvious of these is undoubtedly the relationship between the two Sailor Soldiers – or Scouts, as they are better known as in the English dub – Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune. Sailor Uranus/Haruka is today one of the most famous ‘outed’ lesbian characters in anime fandom.¹⁹ She is extremely flirtatious and enjoys teasing pretty girls, who often mistake her for a male due to her tomboyish behaviour and way of dressing – including Sailor Moon/Usagi herself, as well as other members of the Inner

¹⁷ *Sailor Moon* (1995), Episode 62.

¹⁸ ‘Sailor Moon – Television Tropes & Idioms’ (<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/SailorMoon>), accessed 01 December 2008.

¹⁹ Patrick Drazen, *Anime Explosion!: The What? Why? & Wow! of Japanese Animation* (California, Stone Bridge Press, 2003), p. 80.

Senshi, who develop crushes on her prior to discovering her gender. In the manga, Haruka even goes so far as to kiss Usagi in fun. Another example of her coquettish behaviour can be seen in the *Sailor Moon SuperS Special*, where she flirts with a maid and, in doing so, provokes Sailor Uranus/Michiru, who comments sharply, ‘Aren’t you supposed to be sick?’ before slamming the door.²⁰

There are also instances of Haruka’s own jealousy, such as when she finds Seiya and Michiru alone together in a dressing room and orders Seiya out, before telling Michiru not to let him in again. Haruka’s character design began in the manga as a fairly androgynous figure who wears both feminine and masculine clothing, depicting the traditional androgynous woman in shoujo comics. *Sailor Moon* manga creator Takeuchi Naoko, originally drew the character as someone who looked physically different when cross-dressing, with a definite, more masculine figure. She refers to Haruka as being in ‘male form’ at such times, and stated that she wanted this trend to continue in the anime – which, to some extent, it did; Haruka almost always dresses as a man in the anime, and her occasional feminine appearances are downplayed.²¹ Fan rumours about Haruka secretly being a man, the reincarnation of a man, or a hermaphrodite have all been debunked. Takeuchi has explicitly stated that Haruka has ‘always been a girl. Always will be.’²²

In comparison, Michiru is portrayed as a graceful, delicate, and elegantly feminine persona. She was created as a ‘complimentary but opposite’ figure to Haruka, and Takeuchi has confirmed that the two are in a lesbian relationship in both the

²⁰ *Sailor Moon SuperS Special*, Uda Kônosuke, Igarashi Takuya (Tokyo, Toei Animation, 1995).

²¹ Takeuchi Naoko, *Bishoujo Senshi Sailor Moon Volume III Original Picture Collection* (Tokyo, Kodansha, 1996), p. 31.

²² Takeuchi Naoko, Interview, Comic Con International, San Diego, 1997.

manga and the anime series.²³ Although their relationship is not made overt until later on in the manga series, the nature of their relationship is referred to near the beginning of the season, and is generally understood by the other main characters fairly soon. Nonetheless, their relationship is never physically explicit in the anime, and is not something that is particularly alluded to by any character. Although Haruka once becomes a target of sexism in episode 98, neither she nor Michiru ever become objects of homophobia. Rather, their relationship becomes the source of good-natured humour at times, since although few of the other Sailor Senshi ever has romantic relationships of any real seriousness, the otherwise outgoing and playful Haruka finds it indecorous to talk about romantic or sexual matters in public.

Haruka and Michiru's relationship in the North American version of *Sailor Moon* has been completely redefined. The characters, whose names have been changed to Amara and Michelle respectively, are stated to be cousins in episode 95 by Sailor Mercury/Ami (in the dubbed version, Amy), who nonetheless barely knows them. They are referred to as such in subsequent episodes, although much of their sexual banter continues.²⁴ In one episode, the two claim to have known each other all their lives, yet a flashback to their first meeting is shown shortly after and is set in the very recent past. In episode 92 of the dubbed series, gentle flirting between the two is changed into banter about love at first sight, where Michelle states that she does not believe in romantic love. Two episodes later, Michelle talks about her first kiss with 'the cutest guy in school', changed again from the original

²³ Takeuchi Naoko, *Bishoujo Senshi Sailor Moon Volume 9* (Tokyo, Kodansha, 1995), Act 29; Takeuchi Naoko, Interview, San Diego International Comics Convention, San Diego, 1998.

²⁴ Referring to characters as cousins has long been a way of disguising closer relationships. For example, Petersen's *Troy* adopted the same approach to the relationship between Achilles and his 'cousin' Patroclus.

dialogue about the first kiss between Adam and Eve.²⁵ She is further redefined as firmly heterosexual when she goes on to comment dreamily, ‘My sweet Brad... I wonder where he is today.’²⁶

By the time the third season of *Sailor Moon* was released in English, the treatment of their relationship as family members was for the most part ignored, since many viewers had now become familiar with the characters and their relationship via the internet or the manga.²⁷ It has since been implied that the reason for the gap of several years between the English version of the anime’s first two and third seasons is in large part due to the difficulties in dubbing Haruka and Michiru's relationship, although this has never been confirmed.²⁸

Another significant censorship issue concerning *Sailor Moon* meant that an English dub of the final season was never produced at all. No official reason was ever given for the discontinuation, although this was in all likelihood due to the group of the Sailor Star Lights – three characters who are introduced during the final story arc from episode 173 onwards. The group is composed of Seiya, Yaten, and Taiki; respectively, they take on the roles of Sailor Star Fighter, Sailor Star Healer and Sailor Star Maker. They disguise themselves as male pop stars in order to hide their true identities, and although they are originally women who disguise themselves as men during their time on earth in the manga, they are recreated in the anime as characters who physically become men and who return to their true female forms only when transforming into Sailor Senshi – complete with

²⁵ *Sailor Moon* (2000), Episode 94.

²⁶ *Sailor Moon* (2000), Episode 93.

²⁷ West, p. 172.

²⁸ ‘The Daily Athenaeum Interactive’

(<http://www.da.wvu.edu/archives/002806/news/002806,07,01.html>), accessed 01 December 2008.

revealing leather outfits and knee-high boots. That their genders would have become something of an issue is possibly secondary to their outfits as far as North American censorship was concerned.



Figure 3

The Sailor Starlights transformed.

Their exact relationship to each other is unknown; according to the manga, they are not siblings, and are assumed by most to have the same family name simply as a part of their disguise.²⁹ More issues are raised when Seiya, the leader of the Star Lights, develops feelings for Usagi. He tells her that ‘Usually girls are happy when they see me’, and his attempts to form a bond with her becomes the primary romantic tension of the season.³⁰ He makes his interest in Usagi clear when he later says to her, ‘I like your light.’³¹ However, Seiya’s feelings are not fully

²⁹ Takeuchi Naoko, *Bishoujo Senshi Sailor Moon Volume 16* (Tokyo, Kodansha, 1996), Act 44.

³⁰ *Sailor Moon* (1996), Episode 174.

³¹ *Sailor Moon* (1996), Episode 184.

reciprocated, and he finally acknowledges the one-sided romance in episode 195 as he kisses her cheek and says, ‘I wish I had met you sooner.’³²

In total, 65 episodes of *Sailor Moon* were first dubbed into English by DiC Entertainment, with a total of 7 episodes being cut out completely. After the completion of the 65-episode package – the minimum number of episodes required for strip syndication on American television – DiC all but gave up on the series, presumably due to low popularity and bad ratings.³³ However, when Cartoon Network later bought the episodes to air on their station, the show gained a far larger following, along with an alleged 30,000 signatures during a 1996 internet petition for the return of the show.³⁴ In turn, DiC Entertainment produced additional episodes the following year, bringing the series to the end of the second season. Soon after, in breach of DiC’s contract to dub the series, Cloverway, the American representatives of Japanese animation studio Toei Douga, picked up the distribution rights and started up where DiC had left off due to high demand for further episodes.³⁵

The next two seasons of *Sailor Moon* were a step up from the DiC dubbed episodes in terms of censorship, using the original music and staying closer to the original story, although many changes still occurred. Meanwhile, because of its controversial content, the final Sailor Stars season, which still proved popular enough in Japan, is not likely to ever receive an English dub, although varying

³² *Sailor Moon* (1996), Episode 195.

³³ *Sailor Moon – Anime* (<http://www.bellaonline.com/articles/art3959.asp>), accessed 01 January 2011.

³⁴ Patten, p. 50.

³⁵ ‘*Sailor Moon Uncensored: The Series*’ (<http://www.smuncensored.com/series.php>), accessed 01 January 2011.

versions aired in Italy, Germany, Russia, Mexico, Brazil, South Korea, and Spain, among other countries.

Indeed, only a select few countries produced their own dub versions of the series that are as heavily censored as North America's. It is clear that one of DiC Entertainment's primary aims at the time was to display a show that was not only popular with young girls, but which also displayed role models who could espouse direct messages to the viewers – most obviously in the form of the 'Sailor Says' segments at the end of each show until the series was taken over by Cloverway, with simplistic adages such as 'don't daydream too much', or 'be yourself'. It was also assumed by the company that the show was intended solely for children of a younger age group, and was thus censored accordingly, when in fact the *Sailor Moon* of Japan was watched by older age groups as well.³⁶

Certainly other countries airing their own version of the series made their own changes regarding censorship. France, the first country to air a *Sailor Moon* dub, explain away Haruka and Michiru's relationship by saying that Haruka pretends to be a man in civilian form in to hide her identity, and that Michiru is 'his' pretend girlfriend. Zoisite, a very effeminate sub-main villain in the first season, is changed so that he and Kunzite, another character with whom he works closely, are brothers. In Italy, both Zoisite and Fisheye, another effeminate male villain in season four, are depicted as being female, while Haruka and Michiru are shown as being two good friends who consider each other as sisters. The fifth and final season of *Sailor Moon* originally portrays a totally nude Usagi for nearly the

³⁶ Poitras, p. 44.

entire last episode, and these images are replaced in Italy's version by either fixed images or completely different shots.

The anime was considered unfit for a young audience by some psychologists and parents associations because of its violent scenes and sexual references, and in 1997, psychologist Vera Slepov declared that the last season would seriously compromise children's sexual identity because of the sex change of the Sailor Starlights.³⁷ As a result, Italy's dub portrayed the Starlights as men who simply summoned their 'twin sisters' rather than actually transforming.

Other countries, including Germany, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, and South Korea, had far lighter forms of censorship, although they all included changes involving gender, either with Zoisite and Fisheye or the Sailor Starlights, if not both. Nonetheless, the relationship between Haruka and Michiru remained in each of these versions, albeit in somewhat toned forms.

However, both Mexico and Brazil's versions of *Sailor Moon* kept all of Usagi's nude scenes intact, and the Sailor Starlights not only continued to change gender when they transformed but also had separate voice actors for the job. Meanwhile, the Spanish dub made no effort to hide any of the characters' sexuality or gender at all, and censorship as a whole remained virtually non-existent.

Changing with the Times

³⁷ 'Sailor Moon in Italy' (http://wikimoon.org/index.php?title=Sailor_Moon_in_Italy), accessed 01 January 2011.

Censorship reversals of a kind regarding censorship have also occurred within the anime industry – although in many cases, this has not necessarily been seen as a good thing by fans and critics. ‘Fifteening’, which sometimes occurred in the earlier days of dubbed anime releases in the United States, involved stunts such as more mature language being used to achieve a higher age rating and therefore, it was hoped, a higher level of popularity amongst older audiences.³⁸ For example, an English redubbed version of Hayao Miyazaki’s *Princess Mononoke* shows the main character commenting how the soup tastes like ‘donkey piss’, while in the original version, the soup is merely ‘too watery’.

In some instances, Japanese studios have refused to allow their work to be edited as a precondition of signing an American release contract. Studio Ghibli, headed by Miyazaki himself, allowed its catalogue to be dubbed into English by Disney Studios only upon the condition that no frames were removed or airbrushed, and that no significant changes were made to the dialogue.³⁹ As a result, Disney released uncensored versions of all but two of Studio Ghibli's works, which included partial nudity and other more adult scenes and concepts. The only exception to this was when the Ghibli studio permitted a dialogue change in *Pom Poko* in order to remove a reference to testicles – a reference which was, rather humorously, replaced with the term ‘raccoon pouch.’

In 1987, a North American company called Streamline Pictures was founded primarily for the intention of distributing translated anime that would remain uncut and as faithful as possible to the original content. As demand for anime in

³⁸ Poitras, p. 85.

³⁹ Roger Ebert, *Roger Ebert's Four-Star Reviews 1967-2007* (New Jersey, Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2008), p. 617.

its original form grew more popular, most noticeably from the late 1980s, DVD releases of anime that have been edited for television audiences have also been kept in their unedited form, and almost always include the original Japanese audio version with English subtitles along with the English-dubbed audio track.

In recent years, a change in audience demographics, with more teenagers and young adults making up the anime audience, has led to a greater emphasis being placed on releasing (or re-releasing) anime with fewer changes – especially when it comes to DVD, where there are far fewer content guidelines and limitations.⁴⁰ However, as these demographics become increasingly more important, a greater number of televised anime are now being adapted without significant alterations to content, and networks such as Cartoon Network are now setting aside further time slots later in the day for uncut or only lightly adapted anime.

Western audiences have also progressively come to identify with various aspects of Japanese and Asian culture as exotic, and these references have thus become factors which attract them to a show. Japanese names, locations and cultural features have previously tended to be edited out along with the more violent and sexual content in order to appeal or make sense to a non-Japanese audience, whereas newer North American-produced animated shows such as *Hi Hi Puffy AmiYumi*, *Xiaolin Showdown*, *American Dragon: Jake Long* and *Avatar: The Last Airbender* have been consciously constructed around aspects of Asian culture due to its current popularity.

⁴⁰ Poitras, p. 16.

Naruto

There have also been significant changes in editing and censorship in anime since dubbed works like *Sailor Moon*. Ten years on from this title, the *Naruto* series is a prime example of how views on content censorship have progressed since the 1990s. Extremely popular both in and outside Japan, the first series of *Naruto* began airing in Japan in 2002 and lasted nine seasons until 2007, with the second still currently being aired. *Naruto* debuted in America on Cartoon Network in 2005, and although the dubbed version is edited for a slightly more mature audience than *Sailor Moon* due to a more varied viewership, it is still very easily accessible for children of younger ages thanks to the after-school and primetime slots it has been allotted on television. Censorship is used sparingly in comparison to the majority of earlier dubbed anime works, and tends to be used primarily in order to tone down violent content, such as the editing out of blood and the re-drawing of facial expressions. Words such as ‘destroy’ are also substituted for ‘kill’ in some of the earlier episodes.

Similarly, the use of alcoholic substances is lightly edited – the character Rock Lee’s consumption of sake is changed in the English version in order to avoid referencing a minor’s consumption of alcohol, and another character earlier on in the series, while still shown drinking, has the rosiness in his cheeks taken out to soften the effect of the scene. Smaller changes are made when it comes to altering the Japanese language for an English-speaking audience. *Naruto* originally often ends his sentences with the term ‘dattebayo’; a nonsensical word which serves as a catchphrase to complement his character, making him seem childish and

something of a brat. Because the addendum is not even a real word in Japanese, it is difficult to translate for a non-Japanese audience. It is replaced in the dubbed *Naruto* with the phrase ‘Believe it!’, mostly because it roughly matches with the character’s lip movements.⁴¹

Nonetheless, the dubbed version of *Naruto* on the whole remains comparatively unaltered. Characters continue to smoke pipes and cigarettes, the original opening and closing songs and background music are still used (the former complete with English subtitles), and the original character names are kept – often even with the correct pronunciations. However, it is in the characterisation and scenes concerning overt sexual themes where the lack of censorship is most noticeable. Sexualised fighting techniques, which *Naruto* uses numerous times, remain within the series, such as his ‘Sexy Jutsu’ and ‘Harem Jutsu’. Sexy Jutsu, the very first ninja technique developed by *Naruto* in the series, shows him transforming into a young and beautiful nude woman (whose breasts and genital area are hidden by wisps of white smoke), with the effect of knocking out any of his more perverted adversaries. His infamous Harem Jutsu combines this technique with his Shadow Clone Jutsu, and results in hundreds of nude women who can completely overwhelm any ninja with a soft spot for the ladies.

Naruto’s teacher, still referred to in the dub by his students as Kakashi-*sensei*, is depicted with a fondness for a best-selling series of novels within the *Naruto*-universe called ‘Make Out’, which deal with the author’s experiences in love. Kakashi is usually seen reading one of the books during events that do not require

⁴¹ ‘*Naruto: Series*’ (<http://www.lycos.com/info/naruto--series.html>), accessed 01 January 2011.

his complete attention, such as training sessions and early conversations with his students. When Kishimoto Masashi, the creator and illustrator of the original manga was asked about more specific plot details of the ‘Make Out’ books, he stated that *Naruto*'s target demographic was not old enough for him to disclose the details.⁴²

Another character who is introduced later on in the series, Jiraiya, is a self-proclaimed super-pervert and a frequent voyeur who has created the ‘Transparency Jutsu’; a technique which allows him to spy on naked women without being caught – a pastime which he defends as ‘research’, although he never takes pains to hide his perversion and at times seems to be rather proud of it. Naruto often calls him ‘Ero-sennin’ – literally ‘perverted hermit’, or ‘pervy sage’ in the English dub. It is later revealed that the books Kakashi is so fond of are written by Jiraiya himself.

These relatively small instances of televised censorship have been left in the DVD editions, and the series has also been officially licensed to the websites Hulu, Joost, and Crunchyroll, which air free episodes online with the original Japanese audio tracks and English subtitles. In response to some complaints by fans about what they considered to be poor voice-acting in English-language anime dubs, one viewer stated,

Rather than complaining about every little flaw in English dubs, I think fans should be happy about the increased respect and overall better

⁴² Kishimoto Masashi, *Naruto Volume 2* (San Francisco, Viz Media, 2003), p. 166.

dubbing quality that anime has been getting recently ... Viz's dub of *Naruto* is a good example of the point I'm trying to make. A few years ago, airing a show like that, even with the (relatively few) edits that Viz makes, would be totally unheard of.⁴³

Localisation versus the Wider Viewership

Viz Media, which has also dubbed other well-known mainstream anime aimed at both children and older audiences such as *Bleach* and *Zatch Bell!* is seen by many to be a less censorship-heavy version of the likes of the 4Kids production company, which has made significant changes to anime including *One Piece*, *Yu-Gi-Oh!*, and *Mew Mew Power* (formerly *Tokyo Mew Mew*). In relation to this last title, 4Kids CEO Al Kahn has been quoted as stating in an interview that 'By the time we localize the programs kids don't even know they're from Japan any more,' referring to the fact that Japanese writing, foods, and the names of characters and locations are often taken out and replaced with American alternatives for younger anime viewers.⁴⁴

⁴³ New Bleach dub+rant: "Give English VAs a break"
(<http://animeyume.com/blog/2006/10/10/new-bleach-dubrant-give-english-vas-a-break/>), accessed 01 January 2011.

⁴⁴ 'An Essay on Anime Fans and the Industry' (<http://www.whthawk.com/AniEssay.htm>), accessed 01 January 2011.



Figure 4

Two *Yu-Gi-Oh!* henchmen point their now invisible guns.

This is not to suggest that all anime aimed at children censor titles to the point of being unidentifiable as Japanese. *Duel Masters*, first airing on American television in 2004 and produced by Plastic Cow Productions, made several parody-like changes to the title but chose to retain the Japanese names of the characters, as well as some key elements (albeit terribly pronounced), of Japanese dialogue during the card duels.

Whilst some Western anime fans hold the view that censorship is something of a necessary evil that must be tolerated in order for new anime to be released, many others believe, not unjustifiably, that censored works only result in second-rate productions, and should be avoided by those who seek to support the originality, creativity, and free speech of the industry.⁴⁵ Although anime has undoubtedly made progress in terms of content censorship and target audiences, it continues in many cases to be held under the scrutiny of conservative America.

⁴⁵ 'Censorship in Anime – Actar's Reviews – The Blog' (<http://actar.wordpress.com/2008/11/01/censorship-everything-you-need-to-know/>), accessed 01 January 2011.

Because most anime titles were available only in specialty shops or by overseas purchase a decade or two ago, the emergence of United States-based distributing companies which now market to a worldwide audience has made the censorship of anime a topic of heated debate, where the question is usually not ‘will they cut?’, but rather ‘how much will they cut?’ While manga and anime continues to become more internationally mainstream, the topic of censorship will remain in the spotlight, and it is the viewers themselves who are best equipped to sum up the situation best:

The future of censorship in anime will face some of the same obstacles as high art. But anime might have a harder time defending itself because it doesn't yet enjoy the luxury of being adopted into the western canon, much less considered art. In the meantime, anime producers and distributors cut, tweak and alter titles to slip them through the cracks in America's movement against obscenity.⁴⁶

The way in which anime is censored can, in some cases, radically change the narrative or aesthetics. In exploring issues of censorship, we begin to understand the importance of differentiating between the original and dubbed version of an anime, and how this relates to representations of sexuality. This begs the question that if changes of this type are so common, then what is a more fruitful method of approaching sexuality in anime? One possible answer to this is discussed in the following chapter – ‘Sometimes a Sailor Fuku is Just a Sailor Fuku: The

⁴⁶ ‘Akadot – Article – Walking on Eggshells: Anime and Censorship – page 2’ (<http://luisarturoreyes.com/akadot/article/article-censorship2.html>), accessed 02 December 2008.

Reification of the Sexual Element in Anime’ – in which I discuss the separation of audience perception and creative intent.

Chapter Two: Sometimes a Sailor Fuku is Just a Sailor Fuku – The Reification of the Sexual Element

Tetsuko Kuroyanagi's memoir of her early schooldays recounts how the school's headmaster allowed 'clothing optional' swimming among the first-graders because 'he thought it wasn't right for boys and girls to be morbidly curious about the differences in their bodies, and he thought it was unnatural for people to take such pains to hide their bodies from each other.'¹

Tiny school uniforms, mammoth-breasted women, and constant implications of paedophilia and incest are just some of the examples of how viewers unfamiliar with anime as a form of mainstream media view the shows that appear outside of Japan. 'Why are their skirts always so short?' and 'what is that father doing bathing with his daughter?' are common questions by members of non-Japanese audiences who have seen chunks of *Sailor Moon*, *Cardcaptor Sakura*, *Bleach*, and *Naruto*, but who have little understanding of anime as a medium.

Misunderstandings revolving around concepts and practices of everyday life in Japan, either in historic or current terms, are usually at the root of these perceptions, since sailor-style uniforms and communal bathing is not the norm within Anglo-American society. Mainstream anime and manga are arguably no more sexual than any other form of media, Japanese or otherwise; it is simply that,

¹ Patrick Drazen, *Anime Explosion!: The What? Why? & Wow! of Japanese Animation* (California, Stone Bridge Press, 2003), p. 53.

as viewers who are unfamiliar with Japanese culture, it is all the easier to make assumptions that do not line up with the creative intent. By interrogating certain aspects of Japanese culture, it is possible to highlight the ambiguities and intricacies to do with sexuality in anime, and a reification of these sometimes multilayered details becomes possible.

This chapter examines some of the misconceptions that occur as a result of such assumptions. Rather than seeking to create a historical or anthropological account of Japanese versus non-Japanese perceptions of sexuality, the focus is upon representation: the aim is not to explore what ‘real’ Japanese sexual culture and society is like, but instead to make a study of how and why the distinction between ‘sexual’ and ‘non-sexual’ in anime can sometimes be understood differently by a non-Japanese audience.

In looking at the portrayal of the human form, particularly the nude form, in a variety of representative frames; the body as seen on display in the context of fashion and pop culture; and sexuality as depicted through physical contact and personal identity, a clearer idea of what constitutes intentional sexuality in anime (and what does not) can be recognised.

Nudity

Perhaps the most immediately obvious example of the de-sexualised naked human body can be observed in communal and gender-mixed bathing – a relatively common depiction within manga and anime of all genres. Nude communal

bathing for men, women, and children at local unisex public baths was a daily fact of life until the mid-1800s, when there was a marked increase of Western influence on Japan.² Men and women also traditionally bathed together at hot springs just as they did in public baths, although single-sex bathing steadily became the established custom from the Meiji period.³

Today, only children may be allowed to join a parent of the opposite sex in the public bath house, although this has its limitations as well – in Tokyo, the age limit for a child of either gender to accompany a parent of the opposite sex in any public bath house is 10.⁴ Substantiated cases of voyeurism associated with Japanese bathing traditions are unusual, but include cases such as a man who was able to see over the partition separating the men's and women's sides of a public bath house because of his height in 2001, and a male Japanese cross-dresser who entered the women's side of the bathhouse in 2003.⁵ The rarity of such instances implies that traditions centred on bathing in Japan are still very much respected today, although it is not uncommon, particularly in harem anime such as *Tenchi Muyo!*, for a 'hot springs episode' to occur where a male character will try to sneak a peek at the women over the fence.

The custom of whole families bathing together, previously in public bathhouses and now usually in the private home, is still considered by some to be an integral

² Robin E. Brenner, *Understanding Manga and Anime* (Connecticut, Libraries Unlimited, 2007), p. 87.

³ Scott Clark, *Japan, a View from the Bath* (Hawaii, University of Hawaii Press, 1994), p. 57.

⁴ Pennsylvania State Board of Health and Vital Statistics, *The Annals of Hygiene* (Michigan, University of Michigan, 1989), p. 299.

⁵ 'Sento – Japanese Communal bath house' (<http://www.japan-101.com/travel/sento.htm>), accessed 02 December 2008.

part of family bonding.⁶ Homes with smaller tubs were traditionally usually used one by one in order of seniority, but it was not uncommon – and is not unheard of today – for family members to bathe together while their children are young. Neither is it unacceptable for children to continue to bathe with their parents as they grow older, the general feeling being that the experience builds better relationships between family members.⁷

For example, *Grave of the Fireflies* depicts a 10-year old boy and his 4-year old sister bathing together companionably in a traditional round wooden tub, while another Studio Ghibli film, Miyazaki's *My Neighbor Totoro*, shows a father and his two daughters, also aged 10 and 4, washing and soaking as a family. Both films are now over two decades old and are set during World War Two and the late 1950s respectively, but more recently, an early episode of the *X/1999* series, set in modern-day Japan, portrays three adolescent girlfriends having a conversation when one of them teasingly comments, 'Oh, you're pretty mature for someone who took baths with her dad until recently.'⁸ Although potentially surprising or shocking to some viewers, this scene, taken in context, has no sexual connotations. Drazen notes that 'Many Japanese girls bathe with their dads until puberty, while boys and father may continue sharing the tub for a lifetime.'⁹

However, even outside of the bath, nudity can still be depicted as something entirely non-sexual in nature, as seen in the transformation scenes that are a staple of magical-girl manga and anime. In order to 'power up' and obtain the skills

⁶ Clark, p. 112.

⁷ Clark, p. 75.

⁸ *X TV*, Episode 1, Kawajiri Yoshiaki (Tokyo, Madhouse, 2001).

⁹ Drazen, p. 53.

necessary to defeat an enemy, the magical girl will go through a transformation sequence that typically includes a long, symbolic light show in which time itself seems suspended. At this point, she is lifted into the air and spun gracefully around while being stripped of whatever everyday clothing she has been wearing, before becoming clothed in some new sort of uniform formed from ribbons or magical energy.

Although this usually non-graphic nudity may be seen by an outside point-of-view as something akin to fanservice, it has its own genre-specific significance, in that the character is symbolically discarding her mundane, civilian identity in order to take on an empowered, magical one.¹⁰ The nudity here is emblematic of purity; it signifies the heroine becoming worthy of her powers, who must enter a magical, purified state in order to properly wield them.¹¹

The classic example of the transformation scene can be seen in *Sailor Moon*, although a variety of transformations are apparent in most magical-girl anime titles, including *Tokyo Mew Mew*, *Magical Girl Pretty Sammy*, *Nurse Witch Komugi*, and *Princess Tutu*. The fact that the majority of magical-girl shows feature pre-adolescent main characters and are aimed at a young audience demographic is further reason not to read too deeply into transformation-related nudity. This is not to say that magical-girl transformations are perceived as

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Drazen, p. 56.

definitely non-sexual by all viewers – simply that they do not need to be, and in many cases are not intended as such by the anime creators.¹²



Figure 5

Sailor Moon during one of her many transformation sequences.

Outside of the magical-girl genre, nudity is still relatively common in mainstream anime but is often used for comedic rather than erotic effect.¹³ Indeed, many, if not most, anime scenes involving uncensored nudity outside of *ecchi* and *hentai* anime can be found in the comedy genre. *Urusei Yatsura*, *Ranma ½*, and *Tenchi Muyo!*, among many other anime, tend to use nudity simply for laughs, and remain non-explicit in content.¹⁴

Crayon Shin-chan is an excellent example of an anime that is potentially hyper-sexual in implication, yet simultaneously lacking in any real eroticism. Following the antics of five-year old Shinnosuke ‘Shin’ Nohara, the anime is set in modern Japan and is largely centred on Shin-chan’s distinctly inappropriate language and

¹² By contrast, the transformation sequences in the magical-girl series *Revolutionary Girl Utena* would certainly seem to have a sexual undertone, although this is perhaps unsurprising given that this series intentionally subverts the genre.

¹³ Poitras, p. 64.

¹⁴ Drazen, p. 55.

behaviour. In essence, *Crayon Shin-chan* is about a child who is perpetually dropping his pants in order to get attention, and who wanders around asking adults rude questions such as, 'If you're a single woman, why are you so tired every morning?' Despite his age, Shin-chan is openly attracted to older girls and women, and brazenly pursues any female who happens to catch his eye – a trait he shares with his father and paternal grandfather. He frequently teases his mother about the size of her breasts, uses her lipstick for body art, and takes peeks up her skirt in public. Yet the anime, although based on a manga targeted towards males in the 18-30 year old demographic, aired at a 7.00pm time-slot when it was launched in the mid-1990s, and 68% of its viewers were under the age of 12.¹⁵

The Body on Display

Another particularly well-cited aspect of anime that is often misappropriated is the sexualisation of characters through the clothing they appear in. In particular, the stereotypical Japanese school uniform, or sailor *fuku*, has received a great deal of attention in relation to its sometimes hyper-sexual connotations.

First introduced in 1921 by Elizabeth Lee, then the principal of Fukuoka Jo Gakuin University, the traditional uniform was modelled after those used by the British Royal Navy, which Lee had experienced as an exchange student in the United Kingdom.¹⁶ School uniforms are almost universal in both Japanese private and public school systems today, required from elementary school through to the

¹⁵ 'Crayon Shin-chan anime (TV – OAV) – 11 episodes at AnimeVice' (<http://www.animevice.com/crayon-shin-chan/11-4052/>), accessed 16 February 2009.

¹⁶ Patrick Macius, Izumi Evers, *Japanese Schoolgirl Inferno: Tokyo Teen Fashion Subculture Handbook* (San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 2007), p. 46.

end of high school.¹⁷ Although the sailor-style collar and tie is not necessarily a part of every uniform, they are especially common for middle school/junior high school students (children between the ages of roughly thirteen and fifteen). In reality, although even those uniforms which do not incorporate the sailor design at all are still referred to in Japan as sailor *fuku* (*sēra-fuku*), it is to the traditional sailor-style uniforms that Westerners often refer when discussing Japanese school uniforms.

Given that so many anime and manga titles revolve around school life or school-aged children and teenagers, these uniforms are particularly prevalent, and characters in extremely popular shows such as *Sailor Moon*, *Cardcaptor Sakura*, *InuYasha*, and *Azumanga Daioh* are all depicted wearing uniforms which feed into the idealised sailor fuku image. Moreover, because Japanese societal rules dictate that school uniforms be used as student formal-wear and worn to any occasion that may have any bearing on the school itself – weddings, funerals, and sports events – anime characters are likewise often seen wearing their sailor uniform even when not in immediate context with a school setting.¹⁸ ‘Before and after school, no matter where you are, you represent our school’, state the regulations in the standard student handbook.¹⁹

The fact that school uniforms in Japan are as much a fashion statement as they are an institutional rule also helps account for their frequency in anime. The specific

¹⁷ Gilles Poitras, *Anime Essentials: Every Thing a Fan Needs to Know* (California, Stone Bridge Press, 2001), p. 51.

¹⁸ Brian J. McVeigh, *Wearing Ideology: State, Schooling and Self-Presentation in Japan* (Oxford, Berg, 2000), p. 86.

¹⁹ William J. Duiker, Jackson J. Spielvogel, *The Essential World History* (Victoria, Cengage Learning, 2006), p. 670.

colours and designs of each school's uniform are distinctive enough that people can tell who goes to which school, and girls in particular have been known to select which junior high school they attend based on its uniform.²⁰ Personalised sailor outfits also play an undeniable role in Japanese youth culture, and have done so for decades. Uniforms may be modified by students as a means of exhibiting individualism and experimenting with their image and identity – although the more upper-class or exclusive the school, the less likely these modifications are to be tolerated. The shortening, or in some cases lengthening, of the skirt, the removal of the ribbon, necktie, or bow, and the hiding of patches and badges beneath the collar are some of the more widespread changes that are made to school uniforms by their wearers.

However, like any other fashion, what is considered trendy regarding school uniforms changes with the times. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the *sukeban* style became iconic, and 'bad girls' wanting to emulate the girl gang look wore their skirts to ankle-length and their tops to bare their midriffs, completing the outfit with Converse sneakers.²¹ The *kogal* and *gyaru* styles on the other hand, which reached their peak during the mid-1990s, dictated that school skirts be worn short by rolling up the waistband, and that loose white socks be fixed below the knee with the aid of a special sock glue. Students imitating this particular style usually also tanned their skin, bleached their hair, and wore heavy make-up.²²

²⁰ Brenner, p. 117.

²¹ Brian Ashcraft, Ueda Shoko, *Japanese Schoolgirl Confidential: How Teenage Girls Made a Nation Cool* (Tokyo, Kodansha International, 2010), p. 18.

²² Ashcraft, Ueda, p. 22.

As is to be expected, these real-life styles and fashions have been immortalised in anime and manga, where examples of characters modifying and playing up their uniforms are as familiar to fans as the sailor uniform themselves. The main male protagonist of *Yu Yu Hakusho* purposefully wears the wrong seasonal colour of school uniform in order to stand out; *Fruits Basket*'s Arisa is constantly depicted sporting a dramatically lengthened school skirt in reference to her days as a former member of an all-girl gang; and cameo appearances from girls still fixated on *gyaru* fashion can be seen in *Gantz* and *Durarara!!*.

It is true that Japanese school uniforms are also a popular fetish item, both within as well as outside of Japan. Second-hand sailor outfits may be brokered through underground establishments known as *burusera* – shops which sell used clothing items, predominantly underwear – and even vending machines have been bought into this fetishised clothing business.²³ The image of a schoolgirl whose skirt is caught in the wind and lifted up to reveal her underwear, or of one intentionally bending over so that her ultra-short skirt is raised to her waist, is beyond clichéd. However, this also results in some humorous backfire of the uniform fanservice, and the way in which the sailor uniform has been repeatedly made into a sex symbol by men and women of all ages has been mocked just as repeatedly.

The *Onyanko Club* (Kitten Club), for instance, a large Japanese pop idol group of the 1980s, often set new lows for political incorrectness through their songs and appearances on evening television shows, and their musical single 'Sailor Fuku wo Nugasanaide' ('Don't Take Off My Sailor Uniform'), earned moderate infamy

²³ Iida Yumiko, *Rethinking Identity in Modern Japan: Nationalism as Aesthetics* (New York, Routledge, 2002), p. 231.

for its purposefully cheeky lyrics.²⁴ The uniform has likewise been parodied in anime such as *Tenjho Tenge* and *Samurai Girl: Real Bout High School*, where school uniforms are intentionally paired with sexually aggressive female characters who wear skirts just short enough to reveal literally hundreds of rapid-fire panty shots throughout the series.

The sailor uniform is not the only item of clothing to have been misunderstood or misinterpreted in the past. Some of Japan's contemporary street fashions are sometimes similarly seen as a statement of overt sexuality, when the model to which many Japanese women aspire to is instead to embody cuteness – the *kawaii* ideal.

Lolita sub-culture is a prime example of this, in which young women, and occasionally young men, dress in clothing primarily influenced by Victorian children's clothing and eighteenth-century French Rococo-period costumes. The look primarily consists of puffy knee-length dresses and skirts, full petticoats, knee length stockings and socks, and varying forms of headdresses. Hand-held items such as dolls and plushies are sometimes carried in order to emphasise the childlike look, and make-up is generally kept very minimal.²⁵ By adding Gothic and other more original design elements to the look, Lolita clothing has evolved into several different sub styles and has a devoted cult following in its fans – many of whom view their style of dress as a lifestyle rather than merely fashion.²⁶

²⁴ Timothy J. Craig, *Japan Pop!: Inside the World of Japanese Popular Culture* (New York, M.E. Sharpe, 2000), p. 78.

²⁵ Graham Vickers, *Chasing Lolita: How Popular Culture Corrupted Nabokov's Little Girl All Over Again* (Chicago, Chicago Review Press, 2008), p. 156.

²⁶ Frenchy Lunning, *Mechademia 5: Fanthropologies* (Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 180.

Although it is not precisely known how the lolita style of dress came to be a trend in Japan, it is attributed to have begun in the late 1970s when the formations of famous labels such as *Pink House* – then a brand which chiefly sold very feminine, country-esque clothes for housewives – began manufacturing dresses which would fit the modern standards of lolita clothing.²⁷ The style gained a larger following when *visual kei* (literally ‘visual style’) bands began coming into popularity. Japanese musical talents such as *Malice Mizer* incorporated striking make-up, unusual hair styles, and extremely elaborate and androgynous-looking costumes into their rock, metal, and punk performances, which became as equally as important as the music itself.²⁸

The Lolita movement has also gained some recognition outside of Japan, and has naturally been helped in its popularisation by its depiction in anime and manga. Chii and Freya of *Chobits* are usually seen clad in sweet lolita and gothic lolita dresses respectively in the show’s official artwork; most of the dolls in *Rozen Maiden* wear costumes influenced by sweet and gothic lolita clothing; *Death Note*’s Misa Amane is usually depicted wearing playfully cute gothic and punk lolita outfits; and Victorique of *Gosick* is a character designed in almost every way to look like a gothic lolita-themed porcelain doll. *Paradise Kiss*, *xxxHolic*, and *Tsubasa: Reservoir Chronicles* all likewise feature prevalent use of lolita-inspired fashion, in varying and dramatic forms.

²⁷ Raven Digitalis, *Goth Craft: The Magickal Side of Dark Culture* (Minnesota, Llewellyn Worldwide, 2007), p. 28.

²⁸ Tiffany Godoy, *Style Deficit Disorder: Harajuku Street Fashion – Tokyo* (San Francisco, Chronicle Books, 2007), p. 159.



Figure 6

Gosick's Victorique wearing her favourite outfit.

Although the term is in reference to Vladimir Nabokov's famous novel revolving around a character with paedophilic desires, the original followers of Lolita fashion, as well as the majority of Lolita fans across the world today, do not consider the style to be an explicitly sexual one. The concept of Lolita fashion is typically thought of as cute or exquisitely charming, but most adherents believe that neither the term nor the style has anything to do with sex.²⁹

Indeed, many of the fans of Lolita fashion attempt to combat the negative stereotypes stemming from the misunderstanding that 'lolita' refers to a sexually promiscuous female by referring to the style by other names and acronyms, such as EGL, or Elegant Gothic Lolita.³⁰ The gothic approach specifically, while often synonymous with perceptions of bondage and other sexually-related ideas in the West, tends to be just the opposite when coupled with Lolita fashion in Japan: 'Abstinence, girlishness, and virginity were prominent themes. Girls covered up

²⁹ Digitalis, p. 28.

³⁰ Ibid.

so very little skin was exposed, and wore lace and other frilly material almost to excess. They covered their legs with knee-high socks and wore Odeko shoes, characterized by a prominent rounded toe, rather than high heels.’³¹

The concept of cuteness has become a style unto itself in Japan, and *kawaii* fashion trends, which have its roots in the 1980s pop scene, came to be seen as a kind of rebellion against the more traditional fashions, which was geared towards an older generation of women and emphasised ‘womanliness and common sense’ over anything else.³² Today, being cute is not so much a fashion statement as it is a part of the Japanese national identity, and Japanese popular culture has been using aspects of cute in everyday life for decades since the birth of Hello Kitty in 1974. Food, toys, behaviour and mannerisms, and naturally, music and clothing continue to be greatly influenced by this ideal.³³

According to Japanese author Iida Yumiko, Japanese culture continues to place a high value on extremely youthful appearance and behaviour, whereas much of Western society tries to do the opposite, and advertises an explicit sexuality over cuteness in popular culture.³⁴ As such, where an obsession with all things cute might be seen as frivolous or juvenile to non-Japanese, cuteness in Japan is an aspect of life that is not restricted to children. It is used not only in the entertainment and media industries, but also in commercial airliners, government publications, public service warnings, military advertisements, and general office environments.

³¹ Godoy, pp. 135-136.

³² Godoy, p. 68.

³³ Buckley, p. 250.

³⁴ Iida, p. 180.

Sexuality and Identity

One of the biggest difficulties that many viewers face in attempting to bridge the gap between personal perceptions of gender and sexuality and Japanese representations of the them in anime is that character relationships are often treated very differently from the way in which they are treated within non-Japanese media, animated or otherwise.

In the case of relationships between characters of the same gender, it is understandable that viewers who are unfamiliar with anime codes and conventions may find themselves more than a little baffled or discomforted with them. Anglo-American popular culture is familiar with the depiction of homosexuality – as seen in characters that are either stereotypically effeminate (in the case of males), or stereotypically butch (in the case of females) – yet they may often become confused when it comes to the difference in approach within the manga and anime universe where, to the outsider's eye, it is not as immediately obvious which characters, if any at all, are intended to be viewed in a homosexual light.

Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to clearly tell the gender of a character, let alone pinpoint their sexual preference – particularly where *bishounen* (literally 'beautiful young man') are involved. Male characters with long hair and artfully arranged fringes, lean and willowy body frames with waists as narrow as any girl's, and pale, delicate-looking skin are staples of female-targeted genres and stories. To make things even harder for the Western audience, the original voices

for these characters are often extremely soft and comparatively high-pitched, so that male characters both look and sound more than slightly effeminate.

Above anything else, the stereotypical *bishounen* can be considered as ‘eye candy’ for a female audience, representative of an idealised version of the perfect male for Japanese women.³⁵ Scholars have also discussed the possibility that these types of characters may be based on a specific type of American celebrity image from the Japanese point of view, such as pop singer Boy George or boy bands like The Backstreet Boys and Westlife.³⁶ As a result, mainstream anime titles such as *Fruits Basket*, *Weiss Kruez*, *Naruto*, *Gundam Wing*, and *Fushigi Yuugi* are teeming with characters that perfectly embody the bishounen style.

This is not to imply that homosexuality in general in modern Japan is embraced. Strong exposure to Western religious thought, as well as the desire to appear ‘civilized’, have influenced the way that homosexuality is viewed by the population at large, including the Japanese government; Eastern ‘fluid perceptions of sexuality of old, which assumed that an individual was capable of enjoying a range of sexual acts, has been replaced with the ironclad Western dichotomy of heterosexual/homosexual.’³⁷

Homosexuality, cross-dressing, and transvestism are therefore not widely publicly accepted in Japan, and are viewed much of the time in a negative light. Cross-dressing, transvestism and transsexualism were considered mental diseases that

³⁵ Christopher Hart, *Manga Mania Shoujo: How to Draw the Charming and Romantic Characters of Japanese Comics* (New York, Watson-Guipill Publications, 2004), p. 60.

³⁶ Drazen, p. 91.

³⁷ Fran Martin, Peter Jackson, Audrey Yue, *AsiaPacifQueer: Rethinking Genders and Sexualities* (Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 2008), p. 236.

required medical treatment until the 1950s, and are still not openly practiced within everyday society.³⁸ Similarly, homosexuality is neither openly practiced nor well-tolerated, and those with overtly sexual desires outside of the strictly normative are a minority.³⁹ In a country where being too different or standing out from the crowd in any way is usually considered a bad thing, this should come as no surprise.⁴⁰

Conversely, anything outside the realms of the real world, from *kabuki* and opera to novels and anime, is not considered to be a reflection of society.⁴¹ Consequently, a transvestite who appears in a film is seen as a performer rather than a real individual's expression of sexuality, and a drag queen depicted on a show lives only in the land of television – a world from which most people feel detached.⁴² For example, whilst the televised portrayal of Hard Gay, as played by comedian Sumitani Masaki, depicted a man dressed in a black PVC gay fetish outfit who ran around the streets of Japan performing acts of charity for unsuspecting bystanders, the show gained national attention and popularity, and was deemed suitable to air on a Saturday evening variety show.⁴³

³⁸ Buckley, p. 94.

³⁹ McLelland, p. 232.

⁴⁰ White, p. 131.

⁴¹ Buckley, p. 94.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Explorer Publishing, *Tokyo: The Complete Residents' Guide* (Dubai, Explorer Publishing, 2008), p. 373.



Figure 7

Hard Gay poses for his 2005 book, *Razor Ramon HG*.

McLelland writes that although ‘the homosexual man who is transgender and restricts himself to the entertainment world is tolerated, even appreciated ... the homosexual man who “passes” and turns up to be your boss, your teacher, your neighbour or even your husband occasions a great deal of anxiety ... a figure to be feared and or despised.’⁴⁴ The gap, therefore, between the real world and anime and manga in particular, which often features instances of deviant sexuality, is far larger than it may appear, and what is portrayed in the former instance is rarely an expression of modern Japanese sensibilities.

However, male anime characters are not the only ones to sometimes be oversexualised. Although there is less to be confused about in terms of appearance for teenage and older female characters, who are usually drawn with obvious enough breasts that there is at least no misunderstandings in terms of gender, their

⁴⁴ McLelland, p. 55.

behaviour may not be so clear-cut. Wakaba is constantly declaring her undying love for her best friend Utena in *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, while Utena comes to the conclusion that she loves Anthy, albeit only, as she herself points out, in a ‘pure’ sense.⁴⁵ *Neon Genesis Evangelion* depicts two characters, Misato and Asuka, bathing nude together while intermittently squealing things like, ‘Don’t touch that part... no, don’t touch there, it’s ticklish!’⁴⁶ It is not particularly uncommon for female characters of all ages to sleep in the same bed, often with one character’s arm around the body of the other’s. Neither is it uncommon for female anime characters to platonically, or even suggestively, touch one another, either at home or in a public setting.

This can usually be put down to one of two possibilities. The most frequent reason is that the characters love each other, like Utena’s love for Anthy, in a ‘pure’, non-sexual but still physically intimate sense. Holding hands, hugging, and otherwise touching one another is a reflection of this, and does not often indicate anything beyond that specific kind of love.⁴⁷ The second and more obvious way in which female expressions of physical intimacy may be used is simply to tease either any male anime characters within the vicinity, or else the anime audience itself with the implication of lesbianism.

Whilst the second point certainly corresponds easily enough between the Japanese and non-Japanese audience, the first may not be as straightforward. The relationship between best friends Sakura and Tomoyo in *Cardcaptor Sakura* appears to fall, for the most part, in the ‘pure love’ category, but it is evident that,

⁴⁵ *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, Episode 37, Ikuhara Kunihiko (Tokyo, J.C. Staff, 1997).

⁴⁶ *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, Episode 10, Anno Hideaki (Tokyo, Gainax, 1995).

⁴⁷ Brenner, p. 99.

at least from a censorship point of view, the relationship was either too complicated to understand for its American viewers – that the very concept of a ‘pure love’ relationship between female characters was too unfamiliar for an American audience to inherently ‘get it’ – or that the relationship could too easily be mistaken for a sexual one.

Girls love titles, like boys love, certainly exist, and cater to both male and female audiences. Outside of these genres, however, a female-female relationship which involves somewhat more physical contact than a non-Japanese audience is used to, but otherwise crosses no real sexual boundaries, is often not intended to represent anything other than an extraordinarily close friendship. Anglo-American sexual and cultural limitations would seem to be ‘more threatened by depiction of intense same-sex friendships than does Japanese culture’, Drazen observes. ‘The reason is that American pop culture often limits its options to “sex” and “not sex.” Japanese culture makes room for a much wider range of relationships.’⁴⁸

Nonetheless, just as it is sometimes made fun of in Western society, sex and sexuality is not always taken seriously in anime and manga. As a way of poking fun not only at sexuality, but also as a means of showing that those in the industry are fully aware of their own clichés, some anime productions have been created purely in order to satirise them. The two-episode OVA *Puni Puni Poemy* is particularly aware of these codes and conventions, and transforms many popular

⁴⁸ Drazen, p. 103.

anime formulas into sexual scenes and settings for the purpose of transparent parody.⁴⁹

The title revolves around the character of Poemy, who moves in with her best friend Aasu and her six sisters. After the gratuitous group bath and an active time in bed, a massive alien mecha suddenly attacks the city, whereupon it is revealed that Aasu and her sisters are actually a covert team of super-powered heroines who are dedicated to protecting the earth from such circumstances. Unfortunately for them, they specialise only in defence, and are therefore no match for the rampaging robot. Luckily, Poemy, who was coincidentally gifted with a magical fish by a random stranger earlier that same day, uses this to transform into the magical-girl Puni Poemy. She guts the fish with a knife, which turns into a colourful wand, and initiates an extremely graphic transformation sequence. Poemy then promptly throws away her wand and engages the alien mecha in melee combat.

The sisters themselves are equally used as figures for parody: Nanaese often hints that she would like to be a transsexual; Mutsumi has a complex about the small size of her breasts; Shii has colossal breasts which she frequently rests upon whatever is handy at the time, including the family cat; Itsue is working her way through high school as a dominatrix; and Futuba physically resembles Tomoyo from *Cardcaptor Sakura*, and is consequently not-so-secretly in love with her best

⁴⁹ In December 2004, *Puni Puni Poemy* was banned in New Zealand on the grounds that it ‘tends to promote and support the exploitation of children and young persons for sexual purposes ... and the use of sexual coercion to compel persons to submit to sexual conduct.’ To date, this is the only mainstream anime in New Zealand to be so classified, making it a very interesting case. However, the series is rated as MA15+ in Australia, and has not been declared unconditionally indecent by any other country.

friend. The second episode is mainly a parody of *hentai* clichés, and includes Poemy breaking the neck of an otaku playing lewd computer games, proclaiming that ‘Playing pervy games starting in the afternoon is also evil! I mean, those are for nights!’⁵⁰ A short time later, she breaks the fourth wall after a sequence showing a video which is censored by insipid images, declaring that the footage is ‘rather satisfying just by using your imagination!’⁵¹

Excel Saga, the predecessor to *Puni Puni Poemy*, takes similar fanservice gags to poke fun at anime sexual stereotypes. The story follows Across, a secret organisation whose aim is to conquer the Japanese city of Fukuoka in their first step towards total world domination. The series draws on a lot of the problems and issues that are a common part of real Japanese everyday life, from troubles in the labour market to office relations and gender equality, and was created as a means of ‘laughing off’ the ‘depressed ... pessimistic view of life’ that these issues encouraged.⁵² Watanabe commented that his first thought on looking at the content material was, ‘Wow, there's so much here that can't be broadcast on TV!’⁵³

Indeed, the twenty-sixth episode, aptly titled ‘Going Too Far’, did not air during the show’s original run in Japan because it was intentionally designed to be too violent and obscene for public broadcast at the time.⁵⁴ The opening sequence of the finale is altered to contain pixelated nudity, and the episode itself, in addition

⁵⁰ *Puni Puni Poemy*, Episode 2, Watanabe Shinichi (Tokyo, J.C. Staff, 2001).

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² ‘Interview with Rikudou Koshi’, *Excel Saga* DVD Volume 5 (Tokyo, J.C. Staff, 2003).

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ ‘TV Underground’ (<http://tvunderground.org.ru/index.php?show=season&sid=286>), accessed 16 February 2011.

to gratuitous blood and gore, includes situations containing nudity, lesbianism, paedophilia, soaplands, and love hotels. The closing sequence depicts the translator on all fours wearing a collar and singing the Spanish Bolero, as one of the anime characters (a dog), translates into her own language. That shows like *Excel Saga* and *Puni Puni Poemy* exist and are widely understood is evidence that not only are Japanese anime creators and viewers aware of the common stereotypes, but also that they are aware of the way in which such stereotypes can be misinterpreted.

Although the clichéd images of anime with scenarios involving oversexed women and perverted male authority figures does have some basis in fact – a cliché exists for a reason, and *ecchi* and pornographic titles do not help with clearing away any misunderstandings – such things tend to be only occasional within mainstream anime. Moreover, the stereotype of ridiculously well-endowed ladies sometimes found in anime is arguably just as common in American films and comics. The fact that so many anime which are imported to the United States contain gratuitous sexuality may have something to do with the demand – or at least the perceived demand – of such content outside of Japan.⁵⁵

Having explored how some of the inherent tensions pertaining to sex and sexuality may be perceived by different audiences, how they are represented and commodified in anime, and how they can be reified, I now move on to discuss the first overarching transgressive category of this thesis – that of the mind and the body. Although there have been several anime that are concerned with

⁵⁵ ‘The New Stereotypes of Anime and Manga’ (http://www.ex.org/2.8/45-essay_stereotypes.html), accessed 04 January 2009.

psychological issues among its characters, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is one of the only titles to so closely connect psychology and sexuality. In doing so, it has pushed the boundaries of anime and sexuality to a point that has earned it a particular infamy, especially with regard to psychological dysfunction. In 'The Beast That Shouted 'Love' At the Heart of the World: Sex and Dysfunction in *Evangelion*', I examine how the title has achieved its reputation, and what impact that the mindset of the main characters has on their physical behaviour and the world around them.

Chapter Three: The Beast that Shouted ‘Love’ at the Heart of the World – Sex and Dysfunction in *Evangelion*

I tried to include everything of myself in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* – myself, a broken man who could do nothing for four years. A man who ran away for four years, one who was simply not dead ... It is a production where my only thought was to burn my feelings into film.¹

Neon Genesis Evangelion, a series that began as a relatively conventional tale about an adolescent boy piloting a giant robot in order to save Tokyo from monstrous beings called Angels, ended as a title that had broken all the rules regarding a *shounen*-style story. Its main character, who should have been a heroic young man fighting valiantly against the forces of evil and perhaps finding love along the way, is a cowardly boy virtually incapable of sustaining a healthy relationship with anyone on the most basic level, let alone a romantic one. Plot and narrative structure has been entirely overtaken by increasingly surrealistic sequences by the conclusion of the story, as the characters’ psychological dysfunctions are explored from within their own minds. By the end of the two concluding films, *Evangelion* has posed more questions than answers, and become a genre unto itself.²

¹ ‘Hideaki Anno – The NGE Fan-Geeks Project’ (http://wiki.evageeks.org/Hideaki_Anno), accessed 06 March 2010.

² Although this chapter is primarily concerned with the 1995 television series, it is worth noting that, as well as the two follow-up films in 1997, Anno has also begun his Rebuild project – four new films beginning with 2007’s *Evangelion 1.0: You Are (Not) Alone* – which acts as a retelling and reinvention of the original series.

This chapter explores *Evangelion* from the perspective of the director Anno Hideaki's utilisation of Freudian tropes to examine the main characters and their motivations, with a particular focus on how they interact with others. However, it must be remembered that the Freudian theories that are so pervasive in *Evangelion* are almost incidental when paired with the fact that above all, the series reflects Collingwood's ideas regarding art as a vehicle for expression. The Freudian concepts Anno uses are therefore a method of exploring the aesthetics of dysfunction rather than simply being a means to an end, and are a useful tool in terms of examining how these aesthetics are used to convey a story that is ultimately centered on anti-romantic, anti-*shounen* ideals.

It is in part for these very ideals that *Evangelion* has become one of the quintessential anime titles for scholars to discuss, often from a psychoanalytic viewpoint. Christopher Bolton (*Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams*), Susan J. Napier (*Anime From Akira to Howl's Moving Castle*), and Thomas Lamarre (*The Anime Machine*) have all done so to some extent. Sharalyn Orbaugh's essay in Bolton (2007) explores the relationship between Shinji and his Eva and the feminisation of his character through his machine in Bolton's text; Napier briefly discusses the 'almost classically psychoanalytic exploration of the personal identity of Shinji and his friends/colleagues' in the final episode, and the 'Lacanian fashion' in which some of these events occur; and Lamarre gives mention to the 'maternal bond' between Shinji and his Eva, before moving on to examine *Evangelion* and *otaku* theories.³

³ Susan J. Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp 101-102; Thomas Lamarre, *The*

Although these authors, among others, freely cite the influence of Lacan or Freud on *Evangelion*, there has been no detailed academic account of how this manifests itself within the series in terms of character analysis. The problem with previous interpretations of the series is not whether an Eva robot is a representation of a womb, or even whether such an analysis is a valid one, but rather that it contributes little to the Freudian basis of the characters themselves. Whilst the constructs of sexuality regarding the Eva robots has received ample conversation, this chapter extends the existing critical commentary by addressing the representations of sexuality as expressed through the characters of the series rather than their machines, and by examining these characters as different vehicles of creative expression that inhabit Anno's own imaginative space.

In most discussions of anime that use psychological models as explanatory devices of plot or symbolism, it is the commentator who, on drawing upon their own pre-existing knowledge of psychological theory, identifies and then proceeds to explain the relevant tropes in the text as some kind of hidden significance or esoteric subtext which even the creator may not be fully aware of. However, as will be outlined in the following discussion, *Evangelion* differs from most other anime titles in that the director consciously and deliberately wrote Freudian elements into the story. Examining the psychological dimension of *Evangelion* is therefore not so much eliciting Freudian meaning from the text as it is identifying the relevant elements that the director has included, and explaining their impact on and relevance to the series and its characters.

Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation (Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 216.

It is clear that Anno was heavily influenced by the Freud prior to the creation of the series. Following the success of *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water* (1990), Anno fell into a four-year depression, reportedly due to a lack of creative control with the series.⁴ He did not surface within the anime industry again until the creation of *Evangelion*, which is believed by many to be primarily an expression of his own struggle with clinical depression and the main source of his inspiration – the experiences of ‘a broken man ... A man who ran away ... one who was simply not dead.’⁵ Although the series concerns itself with a number of varying themes, including the use of Judeo-Christian and Kabbalistic symbolism, the nature of existence and reality, and the psychological strain of conflict, it is the exploration of psychological dysfunction, and in particular the exploration of sexual dysfunction, which has made *Evangelion* so infamous.

Much of the series is based upon Anno’s own experiences while undergoing psychotherapy, particularly in relation to psychoanalytic theory, and a general sense of the exploration of psychoanalysis pervades the title as a whole.⁶ The names of the background music, specific phrases used in episodes, and even the episode titles themselves frequently derive from Freudian theory, including ‘Hedgehogs Dilemma’ (an analogy of the challenges of human intimacy, suggesting that despite goodwill, human intimacy is unable occur without mutual damage); ‘Thanatos’ (a ‘death instinct’ that opposes the tendency towards

⁴ ‘Hideaki Anno – Anime Vice’ (<http://www.animevice.com/hideaki-anno/20-14737/>), accessed 06 March 2010.

⁵ ‘Doing It For The Art – Television Tropes & Idioms’ (<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/DoingItForTheArt>), accessed 06 March 2010; ‘Hideaki Anno – The NGE Fan-Geeks Project’ (http://wiki.evageeks.org/Hideaki_Anno), accessed 06 March 2010.

⁶ ‘Nighteye – Blog Archive – Neon Genesis Evangelion’ (<http://blog.juno3.com/2006/05/06/neon-genesis-evangelion/>), accessed 07 March 2010.

cohesion and unity); ‘Oral Stage’ (the first of Freud's psychosexual stages, which denotes child development during the first 21 months of life, in which an infant's pleasure centres are in the mouth); Separation Anxiety (a condition in which an individual experiences extreme anxiety due to separation from home or people to whom the individual has a firm emotional connection); and ‘Mother Is The First Other’ (a reference to the Oedipus complex).

Certainly from episode 16 onwards, *Evangelion* undergoes a sudden shift in tone, from action and adventure to psychological drama. By episode 18, *Evangelion* had become enough of a sensation during its original airing, thanks in large part to its unconventional storyline and innovative themes, that its on-screen violence was criticised as being ‘unsuitable on an anime show that is viewed by children.’⁷ *Evangelion* merchandise began to be released and sold out at a rapid pace, and when the final two episodes of the series were aired, the debate over what exactly occurred and why it became a nationwide phenomenon. With the story itself remaining unresolved, immense controversy even in mainstream publications such as the *Mainichi Times* resulted in worldwide fan and media attention.⁸

In response to backlash by fans concerning the series finale, Anno made several barbed comments during the following months directly regarding anime fans, citing a lack of self-respect and distorted sense of reality.⁹ Disgruntled fans allegedly sent Anno death threats, and Anno, not completely satisfied with the

⁷ ‘Background – Evangelion Eclipse’ (<http://afufu.net/freewill/2008/03/background/>), accessed 06 March 2010.

⁸ ‘Evangelion Special: From phenomenon to legacy’ (<http://mdn.mainichi-msn.co.jp/features/archive/news/2006/05/20060504p2g00m0fe020000c.html>), accessed 06 March 2010.

⁹ ‘Background – Evangelion Eclipse’ (<http://afufu.net/freewill/2008/03/background/>), accessed 06 March 2010.

series ending due to issues revolving around network censorship and financial troubles, eventually produced two theatrical films that were intended to either continue or replace the ending of the series, depending on the point-of-view of its audience.¹⁰ The 1997 release of both *Death & Rebirth* and *The End of Evangelion* served only to heighten the controversy, with many accusing Anno of lashing out at his audience.¹¹ *Death & Rebirth* is little more than an extended recap of the series, with the ‘Death’ section of the film consisting of series flashback scenes and the ‘Rebirth’ section acting simply as a long teaser for the second film to come. *The End of Evangelion*, intended to resolve the questions left over from the conclusion of the series, is characterised by horrific depictions of both physical and mental anguish, and multi-layered conversations of self-hatred and doubt between the characters.

An interpreted question and answer session at an anime convention in America saw Anno, in response to one fan expressing his disappointment over the films, reply in English: ‘Too bad.’¹² As one Western reviewer of the *Death & Rebirth* and *The End of Evangelion* films neatly sums up, ‘The lesson for fans: be careful what you ask for, especially when you’re asking an artist whose emotional Happy Meal is missing a few fries.’¹³ Nonetheless, since its 1995 release, *Evangelion*’s franchise as a whole has grossed over 150 billion yen, with the anime becoming one of the most celebrated projects of all time.¹⁴

¹⁰ ‘DVD Verdict Review – Neon Genesis Evangelion: Death and Rebirth/The End of Evangelion Box Set’ (<http://www.dvdverdict.com/reviews/ngeboxset.php>), accessed 06 March 2010.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² ‘Hideaki Anno’ (<http://www.evaotaku.com/omake/anno.html>), accessed 06 March 2010.

¹³ ‘DVD Verdict Review – Neon Genesis Evangelion: Death and Rebirth/The End of Evangelion Box Set’ (<http://www.dvdverdict.com/reviews/ngeboxset.php>), accessed 06 March 2010.

¹⁴ ‘Sponichi Annex’ (<http://web.archive.org/web/20070429194334/www.sponichi.co.jp/entertainment/news/2007/02/12/02.html>), accessed 06 March 2010.

One undeniable fact, and perhaps one of the main strengths of the series, is that the characters of *Evangelion* are not in any way stereotypical of an action or adventure series. The protagonist, Ikari Shinji, is a deeply withdrawn fourteen year old who is more used to running away from his emotional problems than attempting to deal with them, particularly when it comes to his abandonment issues revolving around his father and in his role as an Eva pilot. Ayanami Rei, a remote and seemingly emotionless pilot, is in fact a human created in part from the DNA of Shinji's deceased mother, and whose sole human connection at first is with Shinji's father. The egotistical and intensely angry Asuka Langley Soryu, another Eva pilot, masks deep-seated insecurities resulting from a traumatic childhood. All of the characters are in a process of breaking down, each grappling with the issues arising from individuation versus integration, with none being able to successfully find how to be an individual within society. These breakdowns become the frame upon which the narrative of *Evangelion* is constructed.

However, it is not only the teenage pilots who struggle with psychological problems. Katsuragi Misato, Shinji's (and later also Asuka's) caregiver, likewise has issues stemming from her father and early childhood, and borders on alcoholism. Akagi Ritsuko, head scientist of the Nerv organisation, is a workaholic who eases her loneliness with an obsession with cats but nevertheless seems relatively emotionally stable until it is discovered that she is having sex with Shinji's father; the same man with whom her own mother, now deceased, had an affair. Ikari Gendo himself, the commander of the Nerv organisation, is a brilliant but cold and callous man who does not hesitate to use anyone, and

discard them if necessary, in order to achieve his goals. Indeed, characters that are not severely psychologically damaged within *Evangelion* are few and far between, and the series becomes increasingly dark as it progresses. A large part of the aesthetic of the series concerns itself with the characters' internal dysfunctions being progressively externalised on the screen, until it becomes all-enveloping.

Conflicting Unconsciousness

One effect Anno's experience of the psychotherapeutic process had on the form of *Evangelion* was his utilisation of Freud's theories concerning the id, the ego, and the superego. In relation to Collingwood, these theories act as the intersection between Anno and the audience – Freud becomes the rational explanation of the symbolism which stands alone from the emotional content of art. To use a literal artistic example, *Evangelion* is the painting, while the colours used to express the emotions of that painting are the palate and shades of Freud.

According to Freud's model, the id, ego and superego are the three unconscious roles of the mind that deal with the instinctive and pleasure-seeking trends, the organised and realistic part of the psyche, and the critical and moralising function respectively. It is apparent that Asuka, Shinji, and Rei are each a representative of Anno's take on Freud's theories, to the point of visible symbolism. Matt Greenfield, the co-founder of the American entertainment company, ADV Films, points out:

Look at the way they're dressed. You have Rei in the white and Asuka in red, and if you notice, Asuka has red horns. So it's very easy to say one represents the more primal, whether you call it the Devil or call it the id, and the other is more the noble, self-sacrificing, whether you call it the Angel or the superego.¹⁵



Figure 8

Shinji, Asuka, and Rei in their plug suits.

Freud describes the id as comprising the unorganised parts of the personality that contain the basic and primal drives of human instinct. First and foremost, the id acts according to the pleasure principle; it actively seeks to avoid pain or displeasure that results from an increase in instinctual tension. Responsible for the basic drives such as food, water, and sex, the id is amoral and entirely selfish. It is not ruled by logic or caution, is infantile in terms of its emotional development, and is unable to take 'no' for an answer. Sex-wise, the id is regarded as the source of the libido and the instinctive drive to create.¹⁶ However, the id is also unconscious by definition, and therefore does not have the ability to recognise

¹⁵ 'Spoilers – Evangelion Eclipse' (<http://afufu.net/freewill/2008/03/spoilers/>), accessed 07 March 2010.

¹⁶ Pamela Thurschwell, *Sigmund Freud* (New York, Routledge, 2000), p. 82.

anything but the here and now, nor the outside world from its own desires.¹⁷ Freud has called the id

the dark, inaccessible part of our personality ... and most of this is of a negative character and can be described only as a contrast to the ego. We all approach the id with analogies: we call it a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations ... It is filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organisation, produces no collective will, but only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle.¹⁸

Asuka, who aggressively seeks out that which will satisfy her emotionally in the short-term, certainly fits into this category. Her fiery red hair and everyday wearing of her red Eva nerve hair clips are complemented by her equally fiery temper. Her character is defensive, sometimes violent, and ultimately self-destructive because she does not know her own self, especially when her main source of self-identity – her Eva – is taken away from her.

When, near the end of the series, Asuka is unable to synchronise with her Eva because of her own psychological issues, she retreats completely into herself and plays hour upon hour of video games in a kind of stupor, in an attempt to drown out her inner shame. Feeling inferior, she tells herself: ‘This junk won’t move! Oh, no, it’s me who’s junk! I’m useless. No one needs me. No one needs a pilot who

¹⁷ Thurschwell, p. 82.

¹⁸ Joseph Sandler, *Freud's Models of the Mind: An Introduction* (London, Karnac Books, 1997), p. 177.

cannot pilot Eva.¹⁹ Although Asuka, like her fellow pilots, uses her physical body to control the Eva, it is her soul, or psyche, which is responsible for her Eva's lack of response in this scene. Unable to control the Eva due to her unresolved emotional turmoil, her Eva – previously used merely as an extension of her body – is directly affected by her mental state.

Out of all three main pilots, it is only Asuka who is unable to objectively examine who she is and why, since any attempts by Shinji and especially Rei to help her in understanding her own identity are furiously rejected. When forced to relive her childhood memories, Asuka is unable to deal with the stress and pain that accompany it and has a mental breakdown, losing the will to live completely.

The ego, a mediator between the id and the superego, acts according to the reality principle in that it seeks to please the id's primal drives in ways that will be beneficial in the long-term. Comprised of the part of the personality structure that includes perceptual and intellectual-cognitive functions, the ego has some conscious awareness which works to separate what is real from what is fantasy. It organises human thought in order to make sense of both it and the world around it. The ego's main concern is with the individual's safety, and unconscious defence mechanisms – denial, displacement, intellectualisation, fantasy, projection, regression, repression, and sublimation – are all employed by the ego whenever the behaviour of the id is in conflict with reality or social and moral norms. Furthermore, because the ego is subject to the influences of the id, the superego, and the external world, it must do its best to please all three, and therefore is under

¹⁹ *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, Episode 25, Anno Hideaki (Tokyo, Gainax, 1996).

a constant feeling of conflict. The superego, which watches the ego, punishes it with feelings of guilt, anxiety, and inferiority whenever these influences are out of balance.

These points mirror Shinji's constant mental struggle – he is attracted to both Asuka and Rei for different reasons and attempts to become closer to each of them in turn. However, his advances towards Asuka result in Asuka encouraging Shinji to be more assertive and driven, while his advances towards Rei are coolly rebuffed. Shinji also recognises the conflicting forces within himself, and attempts to confront them as best as he is able, although his poor self-esteem means that he is often overwhelmed by feelings of worthlessness and self-loathing. He closes himself off from the world in order to avoid having to deal with the pain this brings him, all the while seeking to get to the root of who he truly is and the meaning for his existence.

Significantly, the Latin term 'ego' is used in English to translate Freud's German term '*Das Ich*', literally meaning 'the I'.²⁰ Confused as to how to identify himself, the final two episodes of *Evangelion* take place within Shinji's mind, where he questions his actions and motives in order to separate his own identity from the identities of Asuka and Rei: 'In order for me to find me, I have to feel many kinds of people. I have to gaze inside of me... This, and this, and this, all these are representations of me. Nothing but the things that make others recognise me. What am I? Is this me? The true me? The false me?'²¹

²⁰ Jonathan Lear, *Freud* (New York, Routledge, 2005), p. 168.

²¹ *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1996), Episode 26.

The visual cues that the audience is presented with during these episodes are a representation of the conflict that Shinji is faced with: erratically flashing words across the screen, dreamlike sequences in which he imagines a reality that could have been, and at some points only a vast blackness with moving jagged lines to symbolise sound waves as he talks himself through his own train of thought. Although *Evangelion* as a whole is rich with symbolism, this scene in particular demonstrates the representative nature of the series – as a scene that does not use traditional methods of anime/viewer communication to impart its message, it is the epitome of art as imaginative expression.

No longer even anchored in a physical representation of the real world, *Evangelion* depicts the inner workings of Shinji's mind in a language based solely on the way in which his character mentally processes the world around him – an aesthetic of breakdown that went against all conventional narrative methods of mainstream anime. Shinji finally coming to a revelation as to his individuality therefore becomes the true purpose of the series, to be prioritised above even the fate of the world. Tellingly, the series does not conclude with any resolution pertaining to the physical events taking place in Tokyo, but rather with a resolution to Shinji's crisis of identity – in the case of *Evangelion*, Collingwood's 'art proper' aspects of the series take precedence over any overarching plot.

Finally, the superego is the function that aims for true perfection. It is made up of the individual's ideals, conscience, and spiritual goals, and both criticises and prohibits whatever basic drives, fantasies, feelings, and actions that impacts on them. It works in direct opposition to the id, controlling the sense of right and

wrong and forcing the ego to attempt to reconcile the two.²² The superego punishes misbehaviour with feelings of guilt, and Freud goes on to tell us that the superego

retains the character of the father, while the more powerful the Oedipus complex was and the more rapidly it succumbed to repression (under the influence of authority, religious teaching, schooling and reading), the stricter will be the domination of the super-ego over the ego later on — in the form of conscience or perhaps of an unconscious sense of guilt.²³

In most ways, Rei stands as the polar opposite to Asuka; introverted while the other is extroverted, constantly stating that her life has little value while Asuka is typically extremely proud and boastful of her accomplishments, and sexually stagnant as opposed to Asuka's flirtatious experimentation. It is even implied in one episode that Rei does not or cannot dream, seeming confused about what Asuka is referring to when she says that the unconscious and hospitalised Shinji must be dreaming. Similarly, Asuka and Rei's character-designs are inverses of each other: Asuka has long red hair and blue eyes, whereas Rei has short ice-blue hair and red eyes – art as representation in its simplest, yet also most effective form.

Although Rei shows no sexual interest in Shinji, the brief appearance of Rei in two scenes at the very beginning of the series and ending of the second film form what is essentially a completed cycle. In both scenes, Rei is seen watching Shinji

²² Thurschwell, pp. 91-92.

²³ Sigmund Freud, Peter Gay, *The Freud Reader* (New York, W.W. Norton, 1995), p. 642.

from a distance. Sensing this, Shinji blinks and looks again, only to find that her figure has vanished. This reinforces the fact that although Rei does not appear to be concerned with Shinji's wellbeing for much of the series, she does feel inexplicably drawn to and eventually protective of him. Her final words before her individuality is destroyed – 'I can hear Ikari's heart calling out to me' – are a reflection of this pattern.²⁴

Familial Tensions

A second recurring Freudian theme that resonates profoundly within *Evangelion* is that of the aforementioned Oedipus complex. Broadly speaking, this complex is a group of largely unconscious and repressed ideas and feelings that revolve around the desire to both possess the parent of the opposite sex and eliminate the parent of the same sex.²⁵ According to classical Freudian theory, these ideas are developed within children between the ages of three and five – the phallic stage – since this is also the age where libidinal and ego development occur.²⁶ Freud asserted that it was 'the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father.'²⁷ Although this Oedipal theme has been previously referenced in relation to *Evangelion* within various academia – again by Lamarre and Bolton – Lamarre is primarily concerned with the machines in terms of masculine and feminine symbolism, while Bolton, who simply states in a footnote that 'Anno is clearly

²⁴ *The End of Evangelion*, Anno Hideaki (Tokyo, Toei Company, Ltd., 1997).

²⁵ John M. Neale, Gerald C. Davison, David A. F. Haaga, *Exploring Abnormal Psychology* (New York, Wiley Publishing, 1996), p. 35.

²⁶ Bryan Strong, Christine DeVault, Barbara J. Sayad, *Core Concepts in Human Sexuality* (California, Mayfield Pub. Co., 1996), p. 53.

²⁷ Thurschwell, p. 47.

referencing Sigmund Freud' in the final episode, focuses on patriarchy and feminism.²⁸ In contrast, the purpose of this chapter revolves around a discussion of character and narrative.

That the depression suffered by Anno found a voice through *Evangelion*'s story and characters is indisputable. Anno's interest in psychology, coupled with his depression – and by extension, the depression that each character is directly or indirectly affected by – is perhaps the ultimate basis for *Evangelion*'s notoriety. Anno himself has referred to the plot line of *Evangelion* as a metaphor of his life, and has said of Shinji that he does 'reflect my character, both the conscious and unconscious parts.'²⁹ To put it another way, Shinji is a representation of Anno, with *Evangelion* as a whole becoming the world of imaginative expression in which this representation is placed. As a result, the aesthetics of storytelling within the series are equally as depressing, portraying a darkness and an anti-romantic sentiment that the psyche of every character is influenced by and reacts to.

Therefore, another way of discussing *Evangelion* is to view Freud's Oedipal theories as the root basis for the familial dysfunction which is so prevalent throughout the series, and to view the depression and sexual dysfunction from which the characters each suffer as being the result of those very familial issues. *Evangelion* is part of the cinema of unease, as evidenced by this pervading sense

²⁸ Christopher Bolton, István Csicsery-Rónay and Tatsumi Takayuki, *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams: Japanese Science Fiction From Origins to Anime* (Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 121.

²⁹ 'Interview with Hideaki Anno, director of "Neon Genesis Evangelion"' (<http://web.archive.org/web/20070613125248/http://www.aolianime.hu/evangelion/index.php?page=interanno>), accessed 11 March 2010.

of depression throughout the series. While Collingwood's theories of art existing as shared expression – the connection between a creator and its audience through the story – explains the relationship between the viewer and that unease, Anno uses Freud in order to elicit this response. In other words, Collingwood's ideas explain the emotional reaction of the audience, while Freud acts as the framework upon which Anno draws in his viewers.

Feeling unhappy and unfulfilled, both emotionally and sexually, the characters of *Evangelion* turn to those who may not be best for them but who they sense will at least distract them from their unhappiness. The series is thus also filled with relationships that are at best shallow and unhelpful, and at worst destructive and abusive. The aesthetic of dysfunction in the story is dependent on each of the characters seeking human contact and externalising their own individual dysfunctions, projecting the breakdown of their psyche upon others in order to attempt to be understood.

As the main character, it is Shinji who becomes the poster boy of the Oedipus complex. Four years old at the time of his literal abandonment, Shinji deeply resents his father and is further upset when, at the age of fourteen, he is abruptly summoned to Tokyo and ordered by his father to pilot an Eva. The fact that his father sent for Shinji solely because he deemed his son to now be 'of use' is not overlooked by Shinji, who continues to be unable to connect with his father on any level. However, upon meeting Shinji for the first time, Misato comments, 'He's rather like his father ... neither are very sociable.'³⁰

³⁰ *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995), Episode 1.

In comparison, Shinji's relationship with Rei is far more dynamic. His instinctive physical and emotional attraction to her is understood to be a direct reference to Freud's Oedipus complex, since Rei is a partial clone of Shinji's mother, Yui. During a flashback in episode 21, Ritsuko's mother states that Rei physically resembles Yui – this despite Rei being only four years old at the time – and although Shinji is not made aware of Rei's identity until near the end of the series, he still consciously relates Rei to his mother. When they are alone during classroom duty, Shinji tells Rei, 'When you were wringing the floorcloth, you reminded me of a mother', and Rei, in a rare moment of emotional transparency, blushes in embarrassment.³¹ In summation, Shinji's attraction to Rei is first due to the fact that the physical essence of Rei is literally made up of at least a part of his mother, but also because Rei becomes a symbolic representation of the mother figure that is missing in Shinji's life.³²

The most overt method in which depression is sexually expressed within the series as a whole is the way in which no character is able to emotionally connect with another without further damaging themselves or the others around them; a profound sense of lack of communication within the universe of *Evangelion* is particularly prevalent. For example, Shinji most often chooses to physically isolate himself rather than to risk the pain of allowing himself to get close to anyone, usually by shutting himself in his room and by drowning out the rest of the world through the constant use of his music and headphones. However, this

³¹ *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1996), Episode 15.

³² Mention might also be made of the incorporation of Shinji (as well as Asuka's) mothers into their Eva's. This return to the womb is also a part of the characters' psychological problems.

defence mechanism only breeds further dysfunction, acting as a catalyst for the narrative breakdown as explored throughout the anime as a whole.

The loss of his mother, and then the abandonment by his father, has resulted in such low self esteem that Shinji is afraid of close physical contact as well as emotional contact. He is embarrassed by Misato's carefree way of expressing herself physically and sexually, and whilst he is at least subconsciously attracted to Asuka – in part for the same reason that he is embarrassed by Misato's actions – Shinji fails to understand or respond to Asuka's own sexual advances. He is at first amiable, if meekly submissive, in Asuka's presence, but does occasionally choose to confront her whenever her arrogant and abusive attitude towards him becomes too much to ignore. However, by the end of the series, Shinji has regressed in his withdrawal rather than progressed, and is all but silent when around her; something that serves only to anger Asuka further.

Conversely, Shinji has also become emotionally dependent upon Asuka, largely because he is so used to the cycle of being criticised yet also at the same time shown some affection by her. By the beginning of the second film, Shinji is simply unable to function without her strength of personality behind him, goading him onwards. Asuka has been hospitalised, unconscious, and when Shinji grows hysterical, shaking her body in a desperate attempt to wake her, he accidentally exposes her breasts and then masturbates to the sight. Horrified and disgusted with himself for doing so, he nonetheless continues to beg Asuka to regain consciousness and once again give purpose to his existence. However, his added guilt and self-loathing in the face of this new psychological weakness causes

Shinji to become so uncaring of his own existence that he does not even attempt to flee when invading soldiers later try to kill him.



Figure 9

Shinji stares hopelessly down at Asuka's unconscious form.

This lack of communication stemming from depression leads on to the perusal of unhealthy relationships. Shinji, too afraid and socially inept to have any real relationship with someone who he does not already interact with on an everyday basis, is attracted to both Asuka and Rei on different levels. However, his attraction is not based on what he feels for them romantically, but rather because he needs others to acknowledge his existence and tell him who he is as a person.

The cello becomes a recurring motif within the series as a representation of Shinji's identity – or rather, lack thereof. His musical talent is seemingly the only way in which Shinji feels comfortable enough to openly express himself, yet his extraordinary low self-confidence in who he is as a person means that even in this area, he believes himself to be untalented. When Asuka gives him what appears to be a genuine compliment about his skills, he tells her that his guardians had insisted on lessons when he turned five and that he believed he should have 'quit

immediately' as soon as he was able. However, when Asuka asks him why he still continues to play, Shinji can only answer, 'Nobody told me to stop.'³³

This particular scene, although not directly linked to Shinji's relationship with Rei or Asuka, helps to emphasises the fact that he is totally dependent on others to define him and give him purpose in life. Shinji attempts to vicariously live through both Rei and Asuka at different points within the story, understanding at least on an unconscious level that both women have a stronger sense of self than he himself does. The scene serves to emphasise the gradual decline in Shinji's sense of self-identity and self-worth, which the aesthetic of dysfunction in *Evangelion*, and by extension the narrative itself, ultimately rests upon.

When Shinji finally discovers that he cannot define himself through either of them, he retreats into himself further until a third strong-minded female forces him out of it. This occurs in the form of Misato within the second film. Under attack by the Japanese Strategic Self Defense Force, Misato saves Shinji's life but is shot while doing so. Ignoring the wound, she does whatever she can think of to pull Shinji out of the suicidally defeatist emotional state he is in, first by trying to talk to him and finally by kissing him and promising to 'finish the rest' when he gets back.³⁴ In doing so, Misato attempts to bring Shinji out of his almost catatonic state by using sexual coercion, understanding that Shinji will not be motivated to save his own life unless he perceives that he has someone through whom he can identify himself.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ *The End of Evangelion* (1997).

However, neither Asuka, Rei, or Misato can be said to be a healthy relationship for Shinji. Asuka is constantly criticising him and causing him to withdraw further, Rei remains largely unresponsive to any of Shinji's tentative advances, and Misato recognises that many of Shinji's psychological problems echo her own, making their relationship not one of mutual understanding, but rather mutual pain.

For Rei herself, it is Gendo who becomes not only a kind of father figure in her life but also the only figure of any real importance. Freud tells us that individuals who are fixated at the Oedipal level are either mother-fixated or father-fixated, and that they reveal this by choosing sexual partners who are discernible surrogates for their parents.³⁵ Whilst Rei does not physically have sexual relations with Gendo, she displays an emotional protectiveness of him that startles Shinji. Shortly prior to the series, Rei is involved in an accident which leaves her injured and locked inside the Eva capsule. In what is possibly the sole scene in which Gendo displays any worry or concern for someone's well-being, he forcibly rips open the still-searing hot entry plug to the Eva in order to rescue Rei, severely burning his hands while doing so. His pair of glasses, which are warped and cracked from the heat, are kept by Rei as a kind of souvenir – the only physical item in the world which Rei appears to hold in any importance. She slaps Shinji for remarking that he cannot trust Gendo, seemingly offended the most because Shinji, as Gendo's child, does not value his own father's work.

³⁵ Thurschwell, p. 48.



Figure 10

Rei gazes at Gendo's old pair of glasses.

Rei's loyalty to Gendo is so unshakable during the series because he has become her whole world; her physical existence is due to his creation of her and, because Rei believes that her existence as an individual is worthless, she also depends on Gendo for her emotional and spiritual existence. Gendo thus becomes not simply a symbolic father, nor even an actual father, but rather 'The' father – a god-like figure whose word is unquestionable, to the point where Rei admits that she will obey any order from Gendo, even if that order was to kill herself.

However, unlike Shinji or any other character, Rei eventually frees herself from this father-fixation. In *The End of Evangelion*, her loyalty toward Gendo has disappeared completely. She crushes his pair of glasses and betrays him, sabotaging his plan – to carry out another cataclysmic event and become God, so that he may create a better future for humanity, together with his resurrected wife – and decapitates him with her Eva.

Unsurprisingly, it is Rei who shows the least desire to communicate out of the three original Eva pilots. Whilst Shinji and Asuka both at least make some attempt

at understanding each other and those around them, Rei remains socially withdrawn and eerily apathetic to almost anything anyone does or says. When Asuka first meets Rei and decides they should become friends ‘because it would be convenient’, Rei displays a distant confusion, and replies, ‘If I am ordered to, I will do it.’³⁶ Later on in the series, Asuka loses her temper with Rei, verbally attacking her and calling her a doll. Rei simply allows Asuka to finish, and shows no animosity towards Asuka for her actions.

Unlike the other pilots, Rei lives by herself in a dingy and sparsely-furnished apartment, seemingly uncaring about her surroundings. When Shinji sees this upon visiting her apartment, he expresses his troubled disbelief at the mess of rubbish and bloody bandages he finds there: ‘This is Ayanami’s?’³⁷ The filthy and bloodied disarray is a visual representation of Rei’s individual narrative of dysfunction. Her apathy also extends to her physical form and how others view it. When Rei exits the bathroom of her apartment after showering to find Shinji there, she shows no reaction at being seen naked by him, and continues to be indifferent as his anxiety and clumsiness over this causes him to fall, landing on top of her with one hand covering her breast. Rei’s only true act of anger within the series is to slap Shinji when he insults his father – something that she does not appear to bear any kind of grudge over in later episodes.

Although Rei eventually grows closer to Shinji after she witnesses him risk his life for her, her actions when it comes to communicating with either Shinji or anybody else others does not change – she makes no attempt of her own to

³⁶ *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995), Episode 9.

³⁷ *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995), Episode 5.

become closer to anyone, very rarely speaking unless asked a direct question or otherwise spoken to by her superiors regarding her role as an Eva pilot. *Evangelion's* character designer, Sadamoto Yoshiyuki, has said of Rei that 'An emotional change causes certain muscles in the face to tense, producing an "expression". Rei is expressionless but is it that she doesn't *feel* emotion, or that she is merely unable to *express* it?'³⁸

It is apparent that Rei, whilst human in that she can feel a range of emotions, is emotionally inhibited to the point where she cannot at times recognise what she is feeling, let alone know how to express it – she is an allegorical image of someone who completely lacks the ability to emotionally express herself. Shinji's unconscious sexual advances towards her therefore remain unreturned, even when Rei finally realises that she cares about him after a classmate and fellow Eva pilot tells her so.

The relationships that Rei does have in the series are dependent upon the actions of others, since she sees no point in making any efforts at social advances, sexual or otherwise, herself. She remains almost completely indifferent to how her classmates view her, because her only worldly concern is in her performance as an Eva pilot. When Shinji first sees her at school, he questions why she is always alone. The two friends he has managed to make answer that Rei 'hasn't made any friends since she came to this school in the first grade', and that probably she just has 'a bad personality.'³⁹ Expressing surprise that Shinji himself does not know

³⁸ 'Rei Ayanami: Facts, Discussion, Forum, and Encyclopedia Article' (http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Rei_Ayanami), accessed 06 March 2010.

³⁹ *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995), Episode 5.

her at all despite the two being Eva pilots and working together on an everyday basis, Shinji admits that they hardly speak to one another even during work.

Rei's passivity stems from the fact that she believes her existence to be inherently worthless. Her understanding of her own self is that she exists solely to fill a role – that of an Eva pilot – and that any individual sense of happiness or fulfilment is pointless. Rei willingly and even happily engages in interaction with Shinji's father, Gendo, but is nonetheless aware that she cannot have any kind of normal or emotionally rewarding relationship with him, because she is ultimately nothing more than a tool for his ambitions. Rei understands that her value to him is measured in terms of how much she can be helpful to him, so that although she respects and even adores Gendo, she allows herself to be used but unloved as a person. Her amount of self-worth in her own eyes is parallel only to the worth that Gendo bestows on her – she literally lives only to fulfil whatever goals he may have, even when she is not informed of what specifically those goals are.

Asuka is another female fixated with the father-figure. Her attraction first to Misato's past lover, Kaji, and then to Shinji, result from her primal need to seek out a dominant and assertive male to be her defender, because she unconsciously understands that she herself is emotionally fragile. Disgusted at her own anxieties and weaknesses, she instinctively seeks out someone strong. Kaji, an older and very emotionally composed character, represents independency and stability. However, Kaji's own teasingly flirtatious nature towards women – other than Asuka herself – also makes him a youthful and vibrant character who Asuka can feel unashamedly attracted to. She attempts to capture his sexual attentions,

constantly initiating close physical contact and drawing attention to herself, such as by taking Kaji with her when she goes shopping for a swimsuit and purposefully picking out the more scantily-cut designs, or by leaving messages on his phone as she pretends to be molested: 'Help me, Kaji-san! What are you doing, you pervert! Ahhhh!'⁴⁰

When Asuka's repeated efforts at seduction fail, she shifts her attentions to Shinji, the only other male with whom Asuka is in constant and close contact. However, her sexual advances towards him are not because she is physically attracted to him per se, but rather because she wishes him to be as she feels a male should be: masculine and assertive. Against her will, she feels a certain connection with Shinji since they both are, at heart, emotionally delicate, but she is disgusted by him for the same reasons that she is disgusted by herself. She is not looking for a lover in Shinji, but rather for an unattainable emotional security.

On the other hand, her relationship with Rei is one of intense hatred. Rei, in some ways the all-encompassing mother-figure within the series, is reviled by Asuka because Asuka views her own mother, who committed suicide, as fundamentally weak. Although she claims not to dislike her stepmother, her stepmother admits that it is 'difficult' dealing with Asuka because she is 'quite adult in some ways, with a total rejection' that frightens her.⁴¹ At first craving her biological mother's attention and love, Asuka now fears becoming like her mother and hates her stepmother for taking her father's attention away. However, Asuka does not

⁴⁰ *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1996), Episode 15.

⁴¹ *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1996), Episode 25.

appear to despise her biological father in any way for remarrying. This, too, is in line with Freud's Oedipus complex theory:

The girl's first object of love is like that of a boy – the mother ... At some point in the pre-oedipal period, the girl, recognizing that she has been castrated, envies the male for having a penis, depreciates the mother for not having one, and also reproaches the mother for having brought her into the world inadequately equipped ... Normally the girl will then direct her affection toward the father, substituting the wish for a penis with the wish for a baby.⁴²

Despite being so dissimilar to Shinji in terms of surface personality, Asuka faces equal problems in communication that are fuelled by her simultaneous desire and disgust of other people. Although she has a strong urge to be utterly self-reliant, her own emotional vulnerabilities propel her to seek recognition in the form of praise from others, particularly from men. Like Shinji, this need has resulted from childhood trauma: when Asuka was four years old, her mother, Kyoko, participated in an Eva experiment from which she emerged mentally unstable. She believed a doll she cared for to be an infant Asuka, and referred to her actual daughter as 'that girl over there', going so far as to attempt to strangle Asuka so that the two could die together.⁴³ After being institutionalized, Kyoko committed suicide, hanging herself along with the doll and leaving Asuka to find the body; the first and most significant scene in a chain of events that is the root of Asuka's dysfunction and eventual self-destruction. Asuka's father, who had been having

⁴² Jerome Neu, *The Cambridge Companion to Freud* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 169.

⁴³ *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1996), Episode 22.

an affair with Kyoko's doctor, quickly remarried. Although Asuka loves her father and maintains a cheerful façade of a normal family when around him, she is also extremely defensive of him, and grows to hate her new stepmother.

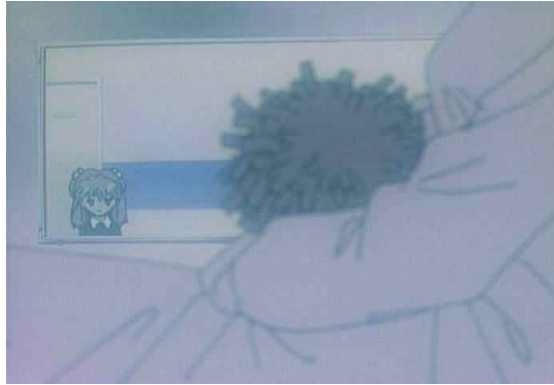


Figure 11

A young Asuka looks through the glass as her mother speaks to a doll.

All of this has had the effect of creating an especially fragile self-identity, which Asuka hides behind a brash and confident exterior. She flaunts her talents and her physical attractiveness, but is violent towards those who make sexual advances. She needs the constant presence of others around her, through which she can identify herself by being better than them, yet she is also repulsed by the idea of sharing herself with others. In a brief sequence near the end of the series, Asuka faces herself in the bathroom mirror and says:

‘How disgusting. Who wants to bathe in the same water that Misato and stupid Shinji have bathed in? Who wants to use a washing machine that Misato and stupid Shinji have washed their underwear in? Who wants to

sit on a toilet that Misato and stupid Shinji have used? Who wants to breathe the same air as Misato and stupid Shinji?’⁴⁴

Asuka repeats this sentiment of having her identity shaped or affected by other people within the final scene of the second film, when she regains consciousness to find herself in a world where she and Shinji are now literally the only two people left alive. As in the case of Asuka’s Eva refusing to move at her body’s command, Shinji’s mental state has likewise shaped the physical realm around him in this scene – a fact which Asuka is well aware of. Coming to the conclusion that he is completely alone and unwanted by anyone, Shinji decides that everyone in the world ‘can just die’, and consequently, the world as everyone knows it is finished as all of humanity dissolves back into primordial soup, their souls absorbed into a single existence that Shinji is given control of.

Shinji’s choice, shaped by his emotional condition, is responsible for the fate of the entire physical world, and Asuka is rematerialised along with Shinji when he decides that it is not possible to live a life totally divorced from human contact. The ultimate symbol of *Evangelion*’s aesthetic of dysfunction is not that the world has ended, but rather that Shinji even then needs Asuka alongside him, however spiteful and destructive she herself is. Asuka’s awareness that another human being besides herself still exists, coupled with her subconscious desire to be absolutely alone and independent of the impact of others, causes her to caress Shinji’s face and once again say, ‘How disgusting.’⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, Episode 22 Remastered, Hideaki Anno (Tokyo, Gainax, 2001).

⁴⁵ *The End of Evangelion* (1997).

In turn, the other relationships that Asuka attempts to cultivate are just as psychologically damaging as Shinji's and Rei's. Asuka sometimes reaches out to others, but she does so in ways that both alienate them and angers herself, since none of her relationships are capable of fulfilling her subconscious emotional needs. A fundamentally proud person, Asuka constantly plays up to her physical attractiveness by drawing attention to her body, but lashes out whenever anyone does something she feels is 'perverted'. She is attracted to Shinji, but is unable to be anything but abusive to him because his own lack of sense of self infuriates her. This does nothing but confuse Shinji, as Asuka's actions appear contradictory.

In an episode where they are studying alone at the pool, Asuka scoffs when she realises Shinji does not understand the theory of thermal expansion, but gives him an impromptu lesson by putting her hands over her breasts and asking, 'do you think my breasts will get bigger or smaller when they're warmed?'⁴⁶ Later on in the series, Shinji is left home while Asuka and Misato are each out on dates. Asuka arrives home early, explaining to Shinji that her date was 'no fun' so she left him waiting in line for the roller coaster without telling him.⁴⁷ Feigning boredom, she then suggests that she and Shinji kiss. Holding his nose because his breath tickles, she then proceeds to comically suffocate him. When Shinji finally stumbles back, gasping for air, Asuka rushes to the bathroom in disgust, yelling, 'I can't believe I did that just to kill time!'⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995), Episode 10.

⁴⁷ *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1996), Episode 15.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Asuka's relationship with Kaji, Misato's newly-returned ex-boyfriend, fares no better. Because Kaji is an older male, Asuka sees in him the strength and stability that is so lacking in Shinji. Kaji is self-possessed, easygoing, boyishly flirtatious, and retains his detached sense of humour throughout the series. Asuka flirts with him incessantly, but is immaturely infatuated with Kaji rather than truly in love with him. Kaji views Asuka as a younger sister and calmly deflects her overtures, but Asuka, who lacks real understanding of the reasons for her own attraction, views her rejection as a result of not being good enough. She grows only more hostile towards those around her following these events, deflecting her pain onto others – particularly the unfortunate Shinji.

In examining mother and father complexes within *Evangelion*, it becomes apparent that a further reason for its uniquely disturbing and troubling atmosphere is that virtually no character manages to fully – and sometimes not even partially – overcome the issues that have bred since their childhood years. Familial dysfunction, in part due to the apocalyptic events surrounding the series, has lead in turn to sexual dysfunction in almost every character, which is universally able to be linked to Freud's Oedipal theories. Moreover, because *Evangelion's* story revolves primarily around a group of teenagers, the series is able to focus on what is potentially the most painful and confusing period of anyone's life, when emotional expression is frustrated or stifled. Freud reminds us that

with the overcoming and rejection of these distinctly incestuous phantasies, there occurs one of the most important as well as one of the most painful psychic accomplishments of puberty; it is the breaking away

from the parental authority, through which alone is formed the opposition between the new and old generations, which is so important for cultural progress. Many persons are detained at each of the stations in the course of development through which the individual must pass; and accordingly, there are persons who never overcome the parental authority and never, or very imperfectly, withdraw their affection from their parents.⁴⁹

Role Models of Dysfunction

It is this very issue which essentially becomes the crux of *Evangelion* as far as sexuality is concerned, and may be considered to be the very point which has earned the series its reputation. Nonetheless, it is not only the teenagers of the series and their relationships that can be related to Freud's Oedipal concepts. Misato sees her lover, Kaji, as a father-figure, although because she is older and therefore more mature and experienced than Asuka, she consciously realises this fact.

However, she and Asuka do share some similar traits – like Asuka, Misato has one of the more vibrant personalities of the characters, and certainly has no issues with proudly displaying and emphasising her body and her femininity. Despite maintaining a strictly professional face while at work, Misato wears skimpy clothing around the house and when visiting Shinji at school, and enjoys the attention that this brings her. Enclosed with the official documents which were sent to Shinji when he was summoned to Tokyo is a picture of herself wearing her

⁴⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Collected Works of Sigmund Freud* (South Carolina, BiblioBazaar, 2008), p. 100.

trademark denim shorts and revealing shirt. A close-up of the photo shows that she has drawn an arrow pointing to her breasts with a caption that reads, ‘Pay attention’, or in the manga, ‘Note the cleavage.’ Shinji’s two friends and classmates, Toji and Kensuke, both harbour crushes on her.



Figure 12

Shinji looks bewilderedly down at Misato’s photograph.

Very little is said about Misato’s mother, although Misato admits that she still hates her father despite the fact that he saved her life by sacrificing his own, since he devoted his life to his work and neglected both herself and her mother in the process. Her reasons for joining Nerv, as well as her drive to fight the Angels on a more personal level, are both related to her unresolved issues with her father.

More importantly, her relationship with Kaji, both past and present, has everything to do with her father. Misato and Kaji were lovers during their college years, but had broken up after Misato ran away from the relationship. They do not see each other again in person until after the beginning of series some years later, where Kaji shamelessly flirts with her and Misato responds by insulting him,

telling Ritsuko, 'Dating him was the biggest taint of my life.'⁵⁰ Whilst at first Misato insists that she broke up with Kaji because she felt he was interested in her purely for sexual reasons, Misato later admits to 'seeking her father in Kaji's embrace.'⁵¹ After she and Kaji resume their sexual relationship, she drunkenly tells him:

I told you I had another love, but that was a lie ... I found that you had something that resembled my father. I was looking for someone like my father. When I discovered that, I was afraid. I was afraid of everything. I was afraid of being with you. I was afraid of being a woman. I was afraid of everything. Although I had hated my father, I happened to love a man who looked like my father.⁵²

As a result, Misato's renewed relationship with Kaji is in some ways as unhealthy and destructive as it is caring. Although they resume their sexual relationship with each other during the middle of the series, it is based more on a mutual need for comfort and a diversion from their problems than on love; Misato uses sex with Kaji (along with binge drinking), to distract her from her own fundamental loneliness, and Kaji, although fond of Misato and perhaps even in love with her, nonetheless uses her as a means of gaining secret information about the Nerv organisation. He once tells Shinji: '*Kanojo* ['she' or 'girlfriend' in Japanese] in Kanji means 'a woman far way'. And for us, women exist on the shore across. It

⁵⁰ *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995), Episode 9.

⁵¹ *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1996), Episode 25.

⁵² *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1996), Episode 15.

means there is a river wider and deeper than the ocean between men and women.’⁵³

Kaji is at heart a decent human being, but he puts his work at discovering the dark truth behind the Eva project as first priority, and is shot and killed by an unknown assailant before he can admit his true feelings to Misato. His last words to Misato are through a message on her home answer-phone, where he apologises for causing her trouble and finishes by saying: ‘If I can see you again, I will say the words that I could not say eight years ago.’⁵⁴ In comparison to every other character in *Evangelion*, Kaji is psychologically one of the healthiest. Tellingly, he is also the character best able to emotionally communicate, and takes on a kind of mentor role in relation to Shinji.

Ritsuko, too, is in an extremely dysfunctional relationship that came about because of Ritsuko’s own loneliness, and her affair with Gendo, not made apparent until near the series conclusion, is perhaps one of the most twisted of the series. In many ways, Ritsuko is living in the shadow of her mother, the head scientist working on the Eva project before her death, and whose work Ritsuko now continues. Ritsuko admits that she admired her mother ‘as a scientist’ but despised her ‘as a woman’; perversely, she is aware that her mother was having an affair with Gendo even as she herself chooses to sleep with him.⁵⁵

However, she does not fully realise that Gendo is using her in the same way in which he used her mother until the end of the series, and that, like her mother,

⁵³ *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1996), Episode 18.

⁵⁴ *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1996), Episode 21.

⁵⁵ *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995), Episode 13.

Gendo cares more for Rei than he does for anyone else. By this point, somewhat hysterical, Ritsuko revenges herself by destroying a significant part of the Eva project in front of Shinji and Misato and then confronting Gendo. Gendo incarcerates Ritsuko as a result. In the second movie, Ritsuko again confronts him and this time also Rei, the object of her true hatred. Held at gunpoint, Ritsuko attempts to activate a self-destruct device. However, the command to self-destruct is overridden by the part of the computer operating system that was modelled after her mother as a woman, and Gendo shoots Ritsuko after making an inaudible confession to her, to which she only responds, 'Liar.'⁵⁶

Love and Destruction

It is no coincidence that the only healthy relationships within *Evangelion* either occur between side-characters, or else are quickly destroyed before they are allowed to properly develop. Hikari, the class representative at school, has a crush on Toji, one of Shinji's friends. Hikari disguises her feelings for Toji in a very ordinary and understandable way – by bossing him around. Later on in the series, she begins bringing especially large homemade lunches to school for him as her feelings become more apparent.

Indeed, it is of particular significance to note that whilst the relationship between Toji and Hikari does appear to be a natural and successful one, it is so only because the characters involved are comparatively insignificant; their relationship is seen to work either because there is simply not enough screen time for them not

⁵⁶ *The End of Evangelion* (1997).

have any major psychological issues, or because it is so minor as to be unimportant within the grand scheme of the series. Nonetheless, this does not stop their relationship from becoming abruptly interrupted when Toji is eventually selected to be an Eva pilot himself, and is critically wounded on the battlefield. He is subsequently evacuated from the city – what happens to him or his relationship with Hikari beyond this point is unknown, and in the manga version of the series, Toji dies as a result of his injuries.

The only other relationship within *Evangelion* that can be seen as mutually caring is that between Shinji and Kaworu, the final Eva pilot. Kaworu does not appear until one of the final episodes of the series, but Shinji instantly and instinctually gravitates towards him, sensing that Kaworu's attention is not motivated by anger, sadness, loneliness, or anything else that he has become so familiar with. Unlike any other character, Kaworu makes his presence available to Shinji without asking for anything in return. He is instead entirely unselfish, seeming to see through Shinji's fear and telling him that 'The heart is easy to wound – that's why living is painful. In particular, your heart is fragile like glass', and that Shinji is 'worthy of love.'⁵⁷ Unused to such compassion, and by someone who is able to express his real feelings so completely openly, Shinji is confused but allows himself to finally feel that his existence is indeed worth something.

⁵⁷ *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1996), Episode 24.



Figure 13

Shinji and Kaworu converse in the showers.

Tragically, it is soon revealed that Kaworu is in fact an Angel, and Shinji is forced to kill him, decapitating him from within the Eva. Kaworu, realising that his death will mean that Shinji, along with the rest of humanity, will continue to be able to live, permits and even encourages Shinji to destroy him: ‘Now, please erase me, otherwise you will be erased... and you are not the one who must die. All of you need the future. Thank you. I am glad to have met you.’⁵⁸ Tearfully, Shinji tells Misato afterwards: ‘Kaworu-kun said, “I love you.” To me! For the first time, for the first time I heard those words. He looked like me. He looked like Ayanami. I loved him.’⁵⁹ In the final episode of the series, Kaworu, along with Rei, appears in Shinji’s mind and argues with him in support of individualism and free choice in regards to the case of human kind. If the narrative of *Evangelion* is expressed through aesthetic dysfunction, then Kaworu is the one figure in the series that acts as the antithesis of this pessimism, marking his death as doubly significant.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Whether or not Kaworu has any concept of human sexuality is uncertain, and the possible homosexual undertones of his interaction with Shinji have been a persistent topic of debate among the series audience since its original release.⁶⁰ However, it seems likely that, due to the nature of the series, homosexuality does not become an issue here simply because any form of sexuality displayed by the main characters almost automatically becomes an inherently dysfunctional form of love – whereas Shinji’s relationship with Kaworu, as instinctive and non-threatening to Shinji as it is, may be seen to border on the spiritual. Their relationship, therefore, can be seen as being among the most pure and truly loving of the *Evangelion* universe. Kaworu’s demise serves to highlight the fact that honest, respectful, and gentle relationships between people within *Evangelion* are either non-existent, or doomed to failure. In this post-apocalyptic world, where emotional expression is either frozen or horribly distorted, the only two possible outcomes for any given significant relationship appear to be either mutual psychological damage or death.

All fictional characters, anime or otherwise, can be said to be at least in some way a psychological projection, as they are representative of an aspect, or multiple aspects of, the creator’s inner life made manifest. Nonetheless, to find characters who consciously represent psychological archetypes is relatively rare. It may be sometimes tempting to believe that critics’ discussion of such archetypal characters says more about the critics’ projections than it does about the intent or nature of the creator or the characters themselves; however, with Anno’s well-publicised interest in and personal familiarity with psychology, it is no

⁶⁰ Patrick Drazen, *Anime Explosion!: The What? Why? & Wow! Of Japanese Animation* (California, Stone Bridge Press, 2003), p. 95.

overstatement to say that *Evangelion* deliberately uses its characters to make points concerning the nature of the human psyche as Anno experienced it – particularly the way in which their sexuality reflects this. In this aspect, *Evangelion* becomes the archetypal example of a series that is overtly concerned with art as a form of emotional communication. If ‘art proper’ is fundamentally expression, and if it concerns a communication between the artist and his or her audience, then *Evangelion* can be considered a piece of work that epitomises Collingwood’s ideas of what true art is and how it works. Collingwood’s ideas, which are focused around art as an allegorical image that becomes imaginative expression through the viewer’s interpretation of it, can be so aptly applied to *Evangelion* because of Anno’s desire to use his work as a means of emotional communion.

Certainly, there can be no doubt that each of the characters is used as a medium through which Anno attempts to connect with his audience in order to achieve a creator/viewer relationship. ‘Look outward, first of all’, Anno urged his viewers. ‘Most anime makers are basically autistic. They have to try and reach out, and truly communicate with others. I would guess that the greatest thing anime has ever achieved is the fact that we’re holding a dialogue right here and now.’⁶¹ In doing so, Anno echoed Collingwood’s ideal of art acting as a link between creator and audience, connecting two separate bodies through imaginative expression.

Evangelion has left a considerable mark on the anime industry for bringing psychology to the fore, but it is equally as important to acknowledge that, rather

⁶¹ ‘Hideaki Anno – Biography’ (<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0030417/bio>), accessed 08 March 2010.

than psychological and sexual dysfunction being the end result of the story, the story is in fact the end result of the exploration of psychological dysfunction. The psychological themes themselves, whilst pervasive in *Evangelion*, are ultimately an aid to a series which, by Anno's own admission, is a work borne out of the desire to express emotion.

I now turn to issues raised in anime that are more concerned with the physical form. 'Does Andy Dream of Electric She?: Sex, Man & Machine', the next chapter of this thesis, focuses on the role that robots and cyborgs play in terms of sexual representations, and in what way they are in turn sexually perceived by the humans that surround them.

Chapter Four: Does Andy Dream of Electric She? – Sex, Man, and Machine

The straightforward fantasy of a completely instrumental control over women – the sex machine or sexroid – becomes fraught, and the question of how men treat women becomes entwined with the question of how humans interact with machines, to the point that it is difficult to say whether sexual relations are becoming thoroughly instrumentalized ... or whether human-machine relations are becoming completely eroticized.¹

A young man of 18 moves to Tokyo from the countryside to study for university. He stares about in amazement upon his arrival, noticing the life-size humanoid computers that accompany many of those in the crowd around him, physically indistinguishable from real humans only by the mechanised ‘ears’ that protrude from their hair. Spotting a shop that sells these robots, he runs eagerly over to gape through the glass window. Although each of them differ somewhat in appearance, these ‘sleeping’ robots have one thing in common: they are all shaped like females, and clad in outfits closer to bathing suits than regular clothes. Enviously, the young man peers at them from every angle and exclaims out loud, ‘Those Persocoms are great, aren’t they? I want one too, definitely!’² The overt metaphor for the male gaze speaks for itself.

¹ Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 235.

² *Chobits*, Episode 1, Asaka Morio (Tokyo, Madhouse, 2004).

In a cartoon world where boundaries are already blurred, much of the time unfettered by concerns of conforming to the laws of real life, science-fiction stretches the imagination even further, since the genre is not one which must obey the rules even of the typical anime universe. Instead, it pushes the envelope of reality and routinely creates settings in which even the most abnormal and impossible circumstances may seem plausible, making the most of the imaginative space in which it resides. Such circumstances sometimes include settings in which a variety of forms of robots, androids, and other humanoid machines interact with humans on an everyday basis.

Moreover, they exist on a basis that is more complex than it first appears. Conventional science-fiction stories commonly depict female robots as hyper-sexualised bodies, acting as mere objects of desire, as Hideki certainly first sees them in the above scene from *Chobits*. However, just as significantly, to view the female robot exclusively through the lens of the male gaze would be to tell only half of the story. Particularly from the 1980s and onwards, a slew of science-fiction television and film lead female characters began transforming the stereotypical science-fiction female into an icon of power. *Star War*'s Princess Leia, *Terminator*'s Sarah Connor, *Dark Angel*'s Max, *The Matrix*'s Trinity, and *Resident Evil*'s Alice are all females deeply entrenched in their separate worlds of science-fiction, yet who play neither the helpless, hysterical damsel in distress of traditional early literature, nor the vapid sex kitten of the likes of *Barbarella*, nor yet the femme fatale figures of *Blade Runner*.

Like them, the protagonists of the three anime titles being analysed in this chapter – *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040* (1998), *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* (2002), and *Chobits* (2002) – are all women who blend both masculine and feminine qualities, to the point where concepts of gender and sexuality are no longer static – in some cases, no longer even definable, either in terms of biological labelling or through Butler's ideas regarding gender performativity.

These anime titles are made all the more complex when robots gain the capacity to genuinely feel and express emotion, when humans fall in love with their purely mechanical counterparts, or when the boundary between human and robot is blurred by fully cyberised yet emotionally functioning humans, rendering the 'just a body' mentality much more difficult to apply.

Given that science-fiction and cyberpunk themes have become so mainstream both in and outside an anime context, it is necessary to examine the evolution of those themes on a historical and internationally-social level – particularly because of the profound influence that cyberpunk themes have had on Japan. Because many particularly notable science-fiction anime titles also deal with the idea of androids and human cyberization as a primary concept, the real-life Japanese doll and robot industries respectively will also be explored, before moving on to the analysis of *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040*, *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*, and *Chobits*, all of which use androids as a specific sub-genre of anime work. What purpose these androids serve as a part of society; how they are viewed by their human counterparts; what this has to say about the representative gender roles; and whether or not they are capable of forming any romantic

relationships of their own by transgressing the duality of existing as a manmade body yet also being able to express true emotions, are the key themes to be discussed.

As one of the more prevalent offshoots of its science-fiction parent, and a genre that commonly employs these humanoid machines as an integral part of their story, cyberpunk anime has become particularly accepted and widespread in Japan, featuring advanced forms of information technology and cybernetics, as well as an often intense focus on ‘high tech and low life’; coupling highly developed science with an equally high degree of societal breakdown.³ Because one characteristic of cyberpunk anime and manga is a strong futuristic and international ambience, its influence is not limited to Japan:

The conceptualization involved in cyberpunk is more of forging ahead, looking at the new global culture. It is a culture that does not exist right now, so the Japanese concept of a cyberpunk future seems just as valid as a Western one, especially as Western cyberpunk often incorporates many Japanese elements.⁴

Bubblegum Crisis (1987), an 8-episode cyberpunk title set in future, post-earthquake Tokyo in 2032, holds significant importance within the anime industry, in that it was one of the few early series titles to be brought over from

³ David Ketterer, *Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy* (Indiana University Press, Indiana, 1992).

⁴ ‘Liberating Cels: Forms of the Female in Japanese Cyberpunk Animation’ (<http://www.animeresearch.com/Articles/LiberatingCels>), accessed 10 April 2010.

Japan completely unedited and English subtitled.⁵ Genom, a megacorporation with immense power and global influence, is a mass-producer of Boomers – cyborgdroids that are used primarily for manual labour and military purposes. Intended to serve mankind, Boomers also become deadly instruments when they are tampered with. The Knight Sabers, an all-female mercenary team, use their highly-advanced suits of powered armour to battle against these ‘rogue’ Boomers, attempting to preserve the safety of Tokyo behind the backs of the police force. Considered by fans to be the first true cyberpunk anime series and the ‘spiritual successor to *Blade Runner*’, *Bubblegum Crisis* epitomised the American ideal of what adult anime should be; mature, dark, and violent.⁶ A re-telling of this story, titled *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040*, was later released in 1998.

Another renowned cyberpunk title, *Ghost in the Shell*, was released as a film adaptation of its manga counterpart in 1995. A police thriller dealing with the exploits of Kusanagi Motoko, a cyborg working for the covert operations division of the Japanese National Public Safety Commission, the film is set in an intensely futuristic Japan where robots and humans with cybernetic enhancements are commonplace. Kusanagi herself has a full cybernetic body, and is not certain whether or not her ‘ghost’, or soul, retains any humanity; since only her brain and a segment of her spinal cord remain organic, she considers the possibility that she is completely synthetic, with artificially-generated memories designed to trick her into believing that she was once human.

⁵ ‘Bubblegum Crisis (1987)’ (http://animestan.7.forumer.com/a/bubblegum-crisis-1987_post2571.html), accessed 18 April 2010; mention should also be made of *Patlabor*, an anime series beginning in 1989 whose main character has a pet-like affection for her cyborg. In many ways, *Patlabor* can be seen as a precursor to the likes of *Bubblegum Crisis*.

⁶ ‘AnimeNation Anime News Blog – Blog Archive – Ask John: What Makes Bubblegum Crisis a Classic?’ (<http://www.animenation.net/blog/2003/10/31/ask-john-what-makes-bubblegum-crisis-a-classic/>), accessed 18 April 2010.

Ghost in the Shell has been recognised as one of the first anime titles to cross over to non-anime fans in North America, making an impact on several celebrated filmmakers.⁷ The Wachowski Brothers, creators of *The Matrix* and its sequels, showed *Ghost in the Shell* to producer Joel Silver, saying ‘we wanna do that for real’, and director James Cameron has dubbed it ‘the first truly adult animation film to reach a level of literary and visual excellence.’⁸ An animated series, *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*, was released in 2002 (followed by a second season in 2004), winning numerous awards for its storytelling and artwork and prompting comparisons to William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* by reviewers.⁹



Figure 14

Kusanagi in official poster artwork for *Ghost in the Shell*.

⁷ ‘AnimeNation Anime News Blog – Blog Archive – Ask John: Has Akira or GitS Made the Bigger Impact on America?’ (<http://www.animenation.net/blog/2008/08/07/ask-john-has-akira-or-gits-made-the-bigger-impact-on-america/>), accessed 18 April 2010.

⁸ Wachowski Brothers, *The Animatrix* – Interview: ‘Scrolls to Screen: A Brief History of Anime’ (Warner Home Video, America, 2003); ‘Manga.com – Ghost In The Shell’ (<http://www.manga.com/ghost/>), accessed 18 April 2010.

⁹ ‘Locus Online: Lawrence Person reviews Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex’ (http://www.locusmag.com/2006/Features/Person_GhostInTheShell.html), accessed 18 April 2010.

Following the mid-1990s, a number of complex and experimental science-fiction anime titles also involving robots and cyborgs were released, such as *Texhnolyze* and *Ergo Proxy*. Taking place in the underground city of Lux, which is treated by its citizens as a sentient force, three factions vie for control of the city in *Texhnolyze*: the Organo, a conglomerate with ties to the criminal underworld in the prosthetics business; the Union, a purist group interfering with Organo's affairs; and Racan, a violent group of Texhnolyzed youths. Ichise, a street fighter who loses his right arm and left leg when he angers one of his promoters, is left to die and is saved by 'Doc', a woman who conducts research on prosthetics and forces Ichise to accept his new robotic limbs. However, 'Shapes', or people who have been completely texhnolyzed, leaving only their heads intact and connected to organic life support pods, grow into an army which threatens to conquer Lux once and for all.

Ergo Proxy, showcasing a mix of cyberpunk, steampunk and gothic elements, focuses heavily on the psychology and mentality of its protagonists. The story begins in a doomed city called Romdeau, which was built to protect and enclose its citizens following a global ecological disaster. In this apparent utopia, humans and androids, named AutoReivs, peacefully coexist under totalitarian rule. However, a series of murders committed by AutoReivs, who have been intentionally infected with a virus that causes them to become self-aware, begins to threaten the balance of the city's social order. Re-l Mayer, the granddaughter of the city's Regent, is assigned to investigate these murders, and soon finds herself on a journey that takes her outside the city in order to expose the truth behind Romdeau and the virus.

Many anime titles dealing with science-fiction and cyberpunk themes at their core have undoubtedly been influenced by Western works which, in turn, can be traced back to the influence of Asian and in particular Japanese culture. Beginning in the early 1980s, a fascination with Japanese technology and pop culture resulted in much of the Western world viewing Japan as the embodiment of the future. From neon-flooded streets, sleek and advanced technology, and a dominating corporate culture with a mass array of skyscrapers as a constant backdrop, Japan became the home of all things ultramodern to the American eye. For example, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) is cited to have introduced the film world at large to cyberpunk ideas, particularly those involving artificial people, dystopian-urban futures, and film-noir characters.¹⁰ However, the film itself is in turn dominated by a futuristic-Asian atmosphere: Deckard is first introduced to the audience as he sits to order food at a Japanese street-side night vendor; the enigmatic LAPD officer, Gaff, uses animal origami figures as a means of commenting on Deckard's motives; the sprawling, neon-lit, skyscraper-filled environment is only made further explicit by advertisements that use women made up in Geisha-esque fashion; and even the street language is a haphazard blend of English, Spanish, Chinese and Japanese.

William Gibson's *Necromancer*, published in 1984, was very influential in popularising the cyberpunk genre in particular on a worldwide level.¹¹ The novel was partially set in Chiba, one of Japan's largest industrial areas, although at the time of writing the novel, Gibson had never visited Japan and did not know the

¹⁰ Stephen Graham, *The Cybercities Reader* (New York, Routledge, 2004), p. 389.

¹¹ Ibid.

location of Chiba. Now a frequent visitor to Japan, Gibson comments: ‘I remember my first glimpse of Shibuya, when one of the young Tokyo journalists who had taken me there, his face drenched with the light of a thousand media-suns – all that towering, animated crawl of commercial information – said, ‘You see? You see? It is *Blade Runner* town.’ And it was. It so evidently was.’¹²

A string of later 1980s and early 1990s science-fiction Western films, television series, cartoons, and comic books likewise took advantage of similar Japanese cultural representations. *Max Headroom* (1987), a short-lived but ground-breaking British-produced television series, depicts a world that is dominated by a single Japanese corporation and a setting which resonates with *Blade Runner* in its dystopian cityscape. In the second *Back to the Future* film (1989), Future-Biff works for a mysterious Japanese businessman known as Mr. Fujitsu, and it is strongly hinted that Japan dominates the economy on a world-wide scale. Marvel Comics launched its futuristic ‘2099’ titles, such as *Spider-Man 2099* (1992), in which one of the explicitly futuristic points is that Tony Stark's company – Stark Industries – has turned Japanese, and is now known as Stark-Fujikawa. *Aeon Flux* (1991) became one of America's first own anime-esque cyberpunk cartoons, first airing on MTV as an experimental six-part serial of short films. *Batman: The Animated Series* (1992) soon followed, bringing with it a partially Asian-inspired atmosphere that was far darker and more mature in tone than most previous American cartoons.

¹² William Gibson, ‘The Future Perfect: How Did Japan Become the Favored Default Setting for So Many Cyberpunk Writers?’ in *Time International*, 30 April 2001, p. 48.

When Japan's bubble economy burst dramatically in 1991, the infrastructural collapse lasted for over a decade, resulting in the 'Lost Decade' for Japan and a significant change in understanding of Japan by the West – the ideal of a futuristic economic superpower was replaced by something far less romanticised and science-fiction-inspired. However, Japanese pop culture had by this point seeped solidly into Western consciousness, and at least to some extent, most films and television series featuring subject material concerning virtual reality or cyberpunk themes continued to utilise an Asian-inspired tone. The mid-1990s saw a variety of American films such as *Demolition Man* (1993), which appears to be a blend of a futuristic dystopian Los Angeles and Tokyo in setting; *Virtuosity* (1995), in which one of its most crucial scenes takes place in a sushi bar; and more famously, *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995), which features a slew of scenes that take place in a variety of Japanese locations.

The Matrix, released in 1999, became so popular in Japan that its sequel, *The Matrix: Reloaded* (2003), outsold tickets for films such as *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and *Spirited Away*, earning a record a record \$18.8 million dollars during its opening weekend alone.¹³ However, as previously mentioned, *The Matrix* was heavily influenced by the Wachowski Brothers' interest in Japanese animation, and in particular by cyberpunk classics such as *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell*. Neo's first visit to the Oracle, as well as a scene near the end of the film where Neo's breathing appears to buckle the fabric of reality, are evocative of similar scenes in *Akira*, and the opening rooftop chase scene, along with another chase scene that takes place in a fruit market, are strikingly

¹³ 'Manga and the Matrix: Japan's cultural and linguistic influences on the Matrix Series' (http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0NTN/is_46/ai_108722582/), accessed 18 April 2010.

analogous to shots in *Ghost in the Shell*. The computer screen symbols played during the introduction of *The Matrix* films are made up primarily of reversed letters, numbers, and Japanese katakana characters; perhaps a nod by the Wachowski Brothers to their Japanese inspiration.

Also released in 2003 was *The Animatrix*; a collection of nine anime short films which, whilst overseen and approved by the Wachowski Brothers, were primarily created and directed by notable figures within the anime industry, such as Watanabe Shinichirou (*Cowboy Bebop* and *Samurai Champloo*), Kawajiri Yoshiaki (*Ninja Scroll* and *Vampire Hunter D: Bloodlust*), and Maeda Mahiro (*Final Fantasy: Unlimited* and *Gankutsuou: The Count of Monte Cristo*).

However, the popularity of the creation of science-fiction and cyberpunk in the Western world did not stop here. The American cartoon *Batman Beyond* (also known as *Batman of the Future*, 1999), visits a future-Batman in which Gotham is a film-noir inspired and kanji-covered metropolis; Steven Spielberg's *A.I.* (2001) is set in a future city that bears some resemblance to Tokyo; *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* (2002) is partly set in the ultra-shiny city of Coruscant, which has an unmistakably neo-Tokyo vibe about it; and *Aeon Flux* was adapted into its own live-action film in 2005.

It is no exaggeration to say that the Japanese have had a fascination with science-fiction and the far-flung futuristic for many years. However, perhaps one of the more specific aspects of the science-fiction focus has been with the concept of human robots. Anime such as *Bubblegum Crisis*, *Armitage III*, *Chobits*, *Ergo*

Proxy, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Appleseed* gained popularity not simply because they fit into the science-fiction genre, but because they depict a variety of ways in which society is structured as a result of the presence of robots, and also the ways in which humans and robots co-exist and interrelate. For example, *Bubblegum Crisis* gained recognition for adding ‘a new twist in the robot-mecha subgenre in that it introduces the idea of using robots for slave labor and sex. Its theme of artificial life asks the now old question: What does it mean to be human if you evolved artificially?’¹⁴

The idea of man and machine (or man and doll) relating to each other on a sexual level is not a new one, nor is it uniquely Japanese. Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* speaks of a myth in which a sculptor from Cyprus named Pygmalion created a statue from ivory, calling her Galatea. Pygmalion became so enchanted with the beauty of Galatea that he fed her, bathed her, and slept with her. In answer to his prayers, Aphrodite, the goddess of love, beauty, and fertility, brought the statue to life and united the couple in marriage.¹⁵

However, it is the Japanese today who are among the world’s elite in terms of the creation and popularity of realistic sex dolls and androids. From cheap, air-inflatable dolls which bear only a passing resemblance to humans, to dolls with bodies made of silicone that are modelled on real people and have an articulate PVC or metal skeleton, sex dolls in Japan are a small yet noteworthy part of the

¹⁴ Lois H. Gresh, Robert Weinburg, *The Science of Anime: Mecha-Noids and A.I. Robots* (New York, Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2005), p. 61.

¹⁵ This myth is referred to in *Bubblegum Crisis*, in which the all-powerful human/Boomer creation is named Galatea.

Japanese sex industry.¹⁶ Silicone dolls in particular enjoy a reasonable amount of popularity in Japan, where they are known as ‘Dutch Wives’.¹⁷ According to Yasushi Takatsuki’s *Legend of the Original Antarctic Model: From Dutch Wife to Love Doll, A Post-War History of Sex Dolls*, a rudimentary *azumagata ningyo* (literally ‘substitute-woman doll’), appeared in Ryougoku in Tokyo (then Edo) in 1926. Yasushi writes that by the 1950s, the Japanese government began using sex dolls as a means of enhancing the lives of its workers posted in such remote locations as the South Pole.¹⁸ Whether or not this is true, the string of Japanese media dealing with human-doll relationships beginning during the 1960s and 1970s, such as Matsumoto Reiji’s *Sexaroid* (1968), and Tezuka Osamu’s *Yakeppachi no Maria* (1970), meant that the average citizen could not be unaware of their presence, fictional or otherwise.

Today, the Japanese sex doll business is dominated by Orient Industry, whose 33 employees manage the process of the creation of dolls, from the beginning of the production chain at their factory in Katsushika, Tokyo, to the final sales and customisation in their Tokyo and Osaka outlets.¹⁹ Their Candy Girl series, whose dolls are made up of silicone and flexible metal skeletons, enjoy popularity enough that Vanilla Gallery – focusing on the artwork involving the erotic and the fetishist – hosted Orient’s 30th anniversary exhibition in Ginza, Tokyo, in June 2007.²⁰ Nakamura, Orient’s showroom manager in Ueno, commented: ‘That event was something of a coming out for us ... We aren’t targeting *otaku* or people with

¹⁶ ‘Silicone sex serial – Tokyo Times’ (<http://www.wordpress.tokyotimes.org/?p=739>), accessed 18 April 2010.

¹⁷ ‘Plastic fantastic: Japan’s doll industry booming – Japan Today: Japanese News and Discussion’ (<http://www.japantoday.com/category/lifestyle/view/plastic-fantastic-japans-doll-industry-booming>), accessed 18 April 2010.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

a doll fetish. That boom has come and gone. Now we are getting a lot of healthy, normal people.’²¹

Orient’s newest and most expensive doll line, Diva, is sculpted to be perfectly anatomically correct, in a way similar to Real Doll, the top American doll brand. However, the child-like and anime-inspired dolls remain Orient’s most popular choice.²² Although it is Orient’s policy not to reveal its sales figures, sources claim that the company sells at least fifty dolls priced between \$1,300 and \$6,900 each month, shipping them over Asia, Europe, and America.²³



Figure 15

Orient Industry President Tsuchiya Hideo poses with his sex dolls.

Orient is not the only business involved with the life-size doll industry. *Doru no Mori* (Doll Forest), a Tokyo-based business, rents out sex dolls and rooms to male clients.²⁴ Lala is another business that rents out private rooms complete with bath,

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ ‘Alone together – Japundit Blog’ (<http://blog.japundit.com/archives/2005/07/25/918/>), accessed 18 April 2010.

toilet, and doll. The shop currently has a staff of 17 dolls, renting them out at approximately \$130 dollars for one and a half hours.²⁵ There are also rental businesses that deliver the dolls to the customer's home, as well as a specialist love-doll magazine named *Aidroid*, which has a print-run of 10,000 copies per issue.²⁶ Each edition contains glossy photos of the newest dolls, advice columns on successful human-doll relationships, and numerous feature articles such as 'Silicone Sex Satisfaction', 'Latex Lubrication' and 'Love Doll Love.'²⁷

Along with South Korea, Japan also enjoys ownership of the most advanced technology concerning the creation of androids. Of the Japanese models, the Actroid, manufactured by Kokoro Company Ltd. (the animatronics division of Sanrio), is a pioneer example of a real machine that is not dissimilar to the imagined machines of science-fiction. First unveiled at the 2003 International Robot Exhibition in Tokyo, and then further demonstrated at an exhibition in 2005 by the director of the Intelligence Robotics Lab at Osaka University, the Actroid is a humanoid robot with strong visual human-likeness.²⁸

The Actroid is able to mimic such lifelike functions as blinking, breathing, and speaking, and whilst movement of the lower body is so far limited, some models are interactive, with the ability to recognise and process speech patterns and

²⁵ 'Silicone satisfaction – Tokyo Times' (<http://www.wordpress.tokyotimes.org/?p=626>), accessed 18 April 2010.

²⁶ 'Blow up love-doll business puts boom into boom-boom' (<http://mdn.mainichi.jp/culture/waiwai/archive/news/2007/03/20070306p2g00m0dm016000c.html>), accessed 18 April 2010.

²⁷ 'Silicone sex serial – Tokyo Times' (<http://www.wordpress.tokyotimes.org/?p=739>), accessed 18 April 2010.

²⁸ 'Robotics & Automation: Actroid Robot' (<http://robotics.youngester.com/2008/11/actroid-robot.html>), accessed 18 April 2010.

respond to them.²⁹ Artificial intelligence possessed by these androids gives them the capability to react to different types of touch, telling the difference between a poke and a pat on the arm.³⁰ It can imitate human-like behaviour such as head and eye movements, and verbal communication on a rudimentary level is also possible. In addition, the androids are able to respond in limited ways to human body language and tone of voice by changing their own facial expressions, stance, and vocal inflection.³¹ In 2010, the Actroid entered the Japanese market, being sold at select stores for approximately \$25,000 dollars.³²

Given Japan's preoccupation with both consumer electronics in the real world and mature science-fiction in the entertainment industry, it is no surprise that robots, androids, and cyborgs are all used within a variety of anime not just as background to any given story, but rather as an active part in it. Of these texts, *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040*, *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*, and *Chobits* have been chosen not simply because each of them actively involves humanoid robots, but also because these robots each play very different roles in society.

The Role of Robots in the Anime Universe

In *Bubblegum Crisis*, the robots, called Boomers, are largely ignored or looked down upon by the general public. Only when one of these robots goes 'rogue' and

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² 'Actroid Fembots to Go on Sale in Japan' (http://www.maximumpc.com/article/news/actroid_fembots_o_sale_japan_just_225000_each), accessed 18 April 2010.

transforms into a rampaging killing machine do they garner any real attention – and only then at the hands of the police force and the vigilante Knight Sabers rather than from the public, since the creators of Boomers are attempting to cover up the existence or possibility of rogue Boomers.

In *Ghost in the Shell*, set in the year 2030, cyberisation is inescapable. The world is connected by a global electronic network, and Section 9, a counter-terrorist and anti-crime intelligence unit, exists outside the public eye to solve cases relating to hacking and cyberterrorism. Major Kusanagi Motoko, herself a complete cyborg, is the squad leader of Section 9 and the main character of the series.

Chobits, a romantic comedy, takes place in a world where buying androids, or Persocoms, for use as personal computers, is commonplace. These Persocoms are expensive but versatile; they are designed in sizes ranging from miniature ‘mobile’ units to full human dimensions. Hideki, an 18-year old boy recently moved to the city in order to study and gain entrance to university, stumbles upon a Persocom lying in a pile of rubbish. Taking her home, he manages to activate her, only to find that she has no memory and is unable to perform even the most basic of everyday tasks.

Although each of these texts differs in terms of genre and storyline, the inclusion of robots and androids on a mass societal level becomes the defining link between them. However, the most striking similarity between the humanoid machines themselves lies in the way they are used and viewed – namely, as female sexual objects. Indeed, perhaps the most obvious parallel between the texts lies in the

fact that there is a distinct lack of male sex robots, and sometimes even male robots in general. For example, in *Bubblegum Crisis*, robots are employed for an array of social purposes, from cashiers and waitresses to secretaries and business supervisory roles. Although male robots (or rather, robots that verbally communicate using male voices) do exist, they do not appear to do so on a humanoid level, and instead are shaped to appear as vehicle-like forms. Moreover, the few of these that do make an appearance are used for tasks involving menial labour, such as cleaning footpaths and transporting materials.

Male-shaped Persocoms are assumed to exist in *Chobits*, but they are notable only by their absence; when Hideki first moves to Tokyo and stares enviously at the Persocoms on display in a shop window, all of them are female. Of the Persocoms accompanying their owners as they stroll by on the streets near Hideki in this scene, there is not one male form in the crowd, and no character in *Chobits* ever raises the issue, let alone gives any explanation of why this might be so. What this says about gender stereotypes in these specific instances is clear: the figure of the robot is an idealised female – one whose purpose is to serve at best the community at large, and at worst to fulfil the fantasies of their male admirers – while the male, as the creator, buyer, or onlooker of these sexualised machines, takes on the role of the superior being, at least in part because their ability to express emotion sets them above everything else.

This comes as no surprise, given that the second core similarity between each title is that they all began as *seinen* manga – that is, a subset of manga targeted primarily towards an 18 to 30-year old male demographic. On a surface level, the

existence and intense focus on the existence of female robots plays on the overt desires of the older Japanese male audience. A female robot has the potential to literally be the perfect woman: she is either personality-programmable, or physically designed to the specifications of her owner, if not or both. She does not age, get sick, or grow fat. She is entirely the person that her owner wishes her to be.

However, on a less simplistic level, *seinen* manga in relation to female robots means that sex in and of itself is no longer the primary focus – power is. In *shounen* manga, the story is tailored to reflect the issues and desires of a young male audience, hence the protagonist typically being a young male himself, who has romantic ideals but who is sexually inexperienced and must deal with the onset of puberty. *Seinen* manga can be viewed as a ‘graduation’ of sorts, from the genres more popular with younger male audiences such as harem, to titles that are more complex in story and are designed to appeal more to a more sexually mature male audience.

In turn, while it is to be expected that *seinen* stories are more likely to be sexually explicit, it is the desire for power that drives sexual activity. In essence, it is a demonstration of cause and effect, since sex becomes the consequence of a larger desire, rather than being the desire itself. In many ways, robots are the perfect tool upon which to carry out this quest for power, since they are able to be dominated in ways that humans are unable to be dominated, both on a physical and moral level.

This is demonstrated to good effect in *Bubblegum Crisis*, where robot, and therefore largely female subjugation, is commonplace. The 1987 version of the title portrays female robots that are explicitly used for sexual purposes; one particular model of Boomer, the BU-33, is designed solely for sex, and these models pay homage to the ‘pleasure model’ Replicants of *Blade Runner*.³³

Although this plays no visible part in the later version of the title, there are several key scenes in which males display their power in overt ways over their female robot underlings. In one memorable scene, two of the Knight Sabers, Linna and Nene, meet up as civilians at a diner. As the waitress Boomer is pouring Linna’s coffee, she is yanked backwards by an irate male customer, spilling the coffee over his clothing. He stands over her as she falls to the floor, and yells, ‘Don’t look away, you bitch! What are you going to do about my clothes?!’ The Boomer apologises and offers to bring a cleaner, but the customer demands that the waitress ‘show a little respect for humans’ and that she ‘clean it by licking it off.’ Still smiling calmly, the Boomer hunches over and begins to do so, wiping the coffee from his shoes with her tongue until Linna protests and calls him a pervert: ‘Do you also educate your girlfriend the same way?’³⁴

In several scenes, it is Mason, one of the antagonists working for the megacorporation in control of Boomer technology, who demonstrates his power over a female Boomer, constantly touching her in ways that are both sexual and menacing. Although Mason claims on several occasions that he despises

³³ Patrick Drazen, *Anime Explosion!: The What? Why? & Wow! of Japanese Animation* (California, Stone Bridge Press, 2003), p. 171.

³⁴ *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040*, Episode 3, Hayashi Hiroki (Tokyo, Anime International Company, 1998).

Boomers, he often kisses his personal Boomer secretary, and seems to derive immense satisfaction in ordering her to act in accordance with his wishes. 'Laugh', he once tells her as he carries out a conversation via computer with a business associate, and once he is finished, demands, 'Is something funny? ... Then don't laugh, my poor doll.'³⁵ Whether or not Mason gains true sexual gratification through these actions is ambiguous. However, that he enjoys the power he has over his Boomer, possibly to the point of sexual arousal, is apparent.

Although Mason is one of the villains of the series, the protagonists are sometimes equally as uncaring towards Boomers. Linna stands up for the Boomer waitress in the diner, yet when she is told off by her supervisor at work for being late and her dishevelled appearance, complains, 'Why do I have to take orders from a Boomer?' Earlier on in the same episode, Linna accidentally bumps into a Boomer and apologises, before her work associate tells her, 'You don't need to apologise to a Boomer even if you are a new employee.'³⁶

The leader of the Knight Sabers, Sylia, hates Boomers so much that she sees them as an abomination, and on the occasions when she fights with the other Knight Sabers against them, her combat style is savage. Although Sylia has few dealings with Boomers on a day-to-day basis, it is clear that she has no sympathy for any Boomer, regardless of whether or not they are being used or dominated over by men. Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to suggest that in this case, the figure of the robot is seen not simply as a labouring humanoid machine, but rather as a

³⁵ *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040* (1998), Episode 5.

³⁶ *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040* (1998), Episode 1.

representation of another race or species altogether; an inferior class of ‘people’ who must bow to the whims of their human overlords.

The theme of female subjugation carries over into the universe of *Ghost in the Shell*, where robots designed for sex are not only present but commonplace. In the opening episode, Section 9 is called in to resolve a hostage crisis that takes place at a geisha house staffed by androids. Examining the surveillance tapes, Kusanagi comments, ‘This next footage is of the Minister and a geisha going into the bathroom ... Apparently, he sometimes likes to swap bodies with geishas when he gets drunk.’³⁷ Presumably a sexual fetish, this is a unique demonstration of the fact that not only are men capable of possessing robots in a purely physical and sexual sense, but also in a sense that is more literal and all-encompassing than the idea of a sex robot might first suggest.

In a later episode, Section 9 is again called in to resolve a case involving mass android suicide; the obsolete product known as the GA07_JL android – dubbed the Jeri by its small but loyal fanbase – was a type of sex robot that became popular because of the ease with which they could be modified to fit their users specifications. In a small but significant detail, paper lights hanging from the wall of the sex doll shop Section 9 is investigating are decorated with kanji read as *chiku*, or ‘domesticated animals’; a slang term for what the company’s business entails. The manager of the plant responsible for the Jeri’s manufacturing half-jokingly comments that the machines have grown despondent because of their obsolete status, but Kusanagi discovers that each of the Jeri’s who have

³⁷ *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*, Episode 1, Kamiyama Kenji (Tokyo, Production I.G, 2002).

committed suicide have had a virus inserted into their mainframe. It is revealed that the user responsible for this did so because of his desire to eliminate other Jeri models, so that his alone would be unique. It is Kusanagi who points this out to her male colleague afterwards: 'He probably wanted to make his android the only one in the world, didn't he?'³⁸

In an episode in the second series, a handful of corrupt politicians are hosting a party for the purpose of showing off their sexbots. Although comedic in tone, particularly when Kusanagi herself must impersonate a sex doll to infiltrate the party (the Section 9 artificial intelligence Tachikoma units comment, 'Are these people the ones they refer to as 'perverts'?''), the party itself does not state as much sexually about the owners of the sex dolls as it does about the way in which they view the power of ownership³⁹. Each sex doll, most of them wearing lingerie, cleavage-baring dresses, or mini-skirts, is placed up on a system of display platforms for the crowd to view at their leisure as they drink champagne and socialise with one another.

The main organiser of this event, with whom Section 9 is working, openly admits to having a doll fetish, yet as Kusanagi correctly points out, he derives the most pleasure from making love to 'real' bodies like her own while they are 'empty', or devoid of mental functions. She asks him seductively, 'Have you ever tried playing with a human being in the way that you would with a puppet? ... I can lie as still as a statue for you, with all of my sense organs turned on.' His excitement at the prospect of her suggestion is so apparent that as Kusanagi renders him

³⁸ *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* (2002), Episode 3.

³⁹ *Ghost in the Shell: S.A.C. 2nd GIG*, Episode 3, Kamiyama Kenji (Tokyo, Production I.G, 2004).

unconscious, she jokes, ‘Had I let you keep going that way you would have gone into cardiac arrest.’⁴⁰ Equipped with perhaps hundreds of sex dolls of the highest quality, it is not the prospect of having sex with Kusanagi that excites the owner so much, but rather the prospect of having a non-doll surrender her body completely over to him.



Figure 16

The host of the party shows off his private collection.

Hideki's Persocom in *Chobits* can in some ways be seen as the ultimate product of man's desire to dominate. Although Hideki is clearly uncomfortable with being in a position of power over his newly-acquired robot, constantly blushing, stammering, and spouting nosebleeds over her actions, the relationship is nonetheless entirely one-sided in terms of dominance. Although Hideki has only the best of intentions, his Persocom, named Chii, is in effect little more than a pet within the introductory episodes, since she cannot speak other than the single, animal-like sound she is named after, and has no knowledge of life other than what she currently experiences. Hideki must teach her everything, from dressing herself to verbal interaction. Whether he likes it or not, Hideki is in complete

⁴⁰ Ibid.

control of Chii – her mind is a blank slate, with everything she is to become dictated, either consciously or unconsciously, by what Hideki teaches her.

Before any of this, however, he must switch her on, since, as his friend later points out, ‘Persocoms are just mannequins until you install software.’⁴¹ Reasoning that there must be some kind of a button that activates the robot, Hideki tries pressing on different places over her body, until finally he is left with only one option: between her legs.

Chii’s helplessness is further emphasised by her physical design: a short stature; loose, floor-length blonde hair; large brown eyes; and pale skin. She is artfully wrapped in nothing but bandages when Hideki finds her, and thereafter, she is often seen in clothes involving long girlish dresses and soft or pastel colours. Moreover, whilst Hideki is a genuinely kind and selfless person, he also appears to be obsessed with pornography, and when thinking of buying a Persocom, his first thoughts run to accessing internet porn sites with one. Upon finding Chii and bringing her home, he says to himself, ‘A girl barges into your life or you find one that’s really cute, has special powers, can do anything, and loves the guy she lives with. So she’ll do all sorts of things! Cooking, cleaning... even *those* kinds of things!’⁴²

Hideki is certainly not the only male in *Chobits* who harbours sexual fantasies involving robots. At one point, Hideki considers applying for a second job as he studies due to his poor financial state. Leaving the apartment without Hideki’s

⁴¹ *Chobits* (2002), Episode 2.

⁴² *Chobits* (2002), Episode 1.

knowledge, Chii is approached by a stranger who, having learned of her actions, invites her to work for him. However, the job in question turns out to be that of an internet peep-show stripper. The owner tries to direct Chi on how to put on a good show for the customers, but as Chii is unable to take off her bra, she is told to remove her underpants instead and insert her fingers into her vagina. When Chii hesitates, the owner attempts to show her how to do it himself, before Chii begins resisting and escapes just as Hideki arrives on the scene.

Surprisingly, one of the series protagonists also appears to view most Persocoms as sexual objects. Kokubunji Minoru, a wealthy child genius whose speciality lies in the knowledge and creation of Persocoms, is only 12 years old, and has a reserved and soft-spoken personality. Despite his age and his largely apathetic outlook, he nonetheless owns a harem of female Persocoms that are first seen when Hideki visits his house to ask for advice about Chii. Dressed in clothing resembling fetish maid outfits, with white aprons and purple PVC-like material – some wearing garter-belts and suspenders – a host of Persocoms greet Hideki at the door. Minoru simply tells him, ‘Don’t be having nosebleeds over Persocoms ... Well, just don’t get them dirty.’ Since Minoru is so young, and furthermore displays no sexual desire whatsoever throughout the course of the series, it can be assumed that he has dressed his household Persocoms in such provocative outfits not for his own sexual gratification, but simply because he can. Later in the same episode, he warns Hideki not to fall in love with a Persocom, commenting, ‘Something human-shaped and not human, with free will and emotions, has always been a dream ... You are her owner now.’⁴³

⁴³ *Chobits* (2002), Episode 2.

In spite of, or perhaps because of, this strong sense of male ownership and possession, the fact that the main female characters of these texts are all, in some sense, extremely powerful entities in their own right, stands out all the more. Film journalist Nick Goundry points out that until the arrival of Ridley Scott's *Alien* in 1979, science-fiction in popular film was a male-dominated genre. Ellen Ripley, as a character who is 'Calm, systematic and necessarily detached from her emotions', became 'science-fiction cinema's first alpha-female.'⁴⁴

The Knight Sabers of *Bubblegum Crisis* are not themselves robots or cyborgs, yet they regularly don high-tech powered amour 'hardsuits' in order to fight Boomers. Encased in these suits from head to toe, and with the manoeuvrability and physical strength to attack and defeat the Boomers, the Knight Sabers would appear to be just as robotic – if not more so, due to the extremely organic appearance of rogue Boomers – than the robots they defeat. Here, the binary of man and machine, body and mind is once again transgressed: the human and its mind exists, but only inside the body of another human-created robot, and one designed with the sole purpose of destroying other robots by use of advanced mechanical weapons.

As such, each hardsuit has its own individual capabilities and arsenal of weaponry, from focused grenades to retractable knife blades. However, these weapons are used only as a means of damaging a Boomer. In order to decisively

⁴⁴ 'Assessing the role of women in science-fiction cinema – by Nick Goundry' (<http://www.helium.com/items/663729-assessing-the-role-of-women-in-science-fiction-cinema>), accessed 18 May 2010.

win a battle, the Knight Sabers must kill a Boomer from the inside out, tearing through the Boomer's outer body and destroying its core.

The first time Linna does this is within a test simulation, gradually reducing the Boomer's fighting capabilities until she is able to rip into the Boomer with her fist, reaching far enough inside to find the core – a beating, pulsing heart much like any human's – and squeezing it until it bursts in her hand. Shaken up by the ordeal, not confident in her abilities to be able to destroy so invasively a machine that appears to operate like any other living creature, Linna nonetheless chooses to join up with the Knight Sabers, where she strives to be the 'top dog' of the team.⁴⁵

Neither is Linna the only member of the Knight Sabers with masculine qualities. Priscilla 'Priss' Asagiri, the first member to be recruited by Sylia, is the strongest Knight Saber of the team, specialising in heavy assault when equipped with her hardsuit. By day she lives in the slums of the town in a trailer truck. By night, when not hunting down rogue Boomers, she is the vocalist of an underground rock band, and has a passion for fast motorbikes. Uncommunicative, distrustful (particularly of men), and assertive, Priss is the stereotypical tough girl. Unlike Linna, her motives for joining the Knight Sabers were not in any way altruistic; the money, and the thrill. Even the name of the vigilante group itself is suggestive of an aggressively masculine quality, which Priss especially seems to embody.

However, this does not stop the females of *Bubblegum Crisis* from displaying strong feminine characteristics. The hardsuits, whilst completely disguising the

⁴⁵ *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040* (1998), Episode 4.

individual's identity, cover what are unmistakeably female forms. That the Knight Sabers are a team of women are doubted by no citizen that believe their existence is more than an urban legend – probably because the hardsuits are designed complete with a kind of high-heel, and so that the shape of each woman's breasts are apparent even through the flexible but thick shell of armour. Indeed, even as the Knight Sabers fight the rogue Boomers inside robots of their own, often with great viciousness, they are performatively extremely feminine. This is reflected whenever they prepare to enter into their hardsuits, first having to slide into skin-tight leotards; something that both Nene and Sylia enjoy watching Linna doing during her 'first time.'⁴⁶ However, by the end of the series the suits almost merge with the characters, who must enter them entirely naked.

Outside their hardsuits, the Knight Sabers are just as feminine. Priss, despite her lack of interest in any kind of relationship, sexual or otherwise, dresses in tight black leather pants and corset-like top with a red leather jacket. Nene's job both as a civilian and as a Knight Saber is concerned primarily with computer technology and communication, and her apartment has the appearance of an electronic junkyard. However, she is by the far the most cheerful, playful, and flirtatious female in the series. Her short blonde bob, green eyes, and high-pitched, squeaky voice all mirror her fun-loving and youthful personality.

Sylia, the founder of the Knight Sabers, is a professional and sometimes coldly capable woman who has violently emotional outbursts whenever her anger concerning Boomers gets the better of her. Nonetheless, she also lives a life of

⁴⁶ *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040* (1998), Episode 3.

luxury through the success of her numerous business ventures, most noticeably through her upscale fashion store, Silky Doll. She is constantly encouraging women who visit the store to be more sexually adventurous in their choice of clothing, and tells Priss, 'Have you finally tired of that worn-leather look? ... Oh, and look at all those split ends. You'll need a new conditioner.'⁴⁷ She seems to take pleasure in dressing in tight, skin-baring clothing herself, and is also quick to assess and compliment Linna on her physique in a way that is both bold and quasi-sexual: 'You're a pretty one, aren't you? Nice high cheekbones. Very nice indeed.'⁴⁸

The lesbian undertones that *Bubblegum Crisis* portrays, as well as the methods in which the women are sexualised, could be easily seen as merely a way to make the series more appealing to their target audience. However, what must also be taken into account is that it is through this very sexualisation that the characters are transformed into figures of strength. Priss is potentially as much a figure of female empowerment as she is a sexualised figure – ultimately, how she and the other women of the series are viewed is dependent on the viewer themselves, since she combines physical and behavioural traits that are capable of appealing to male and female audiences alike.

Ghost in the Shell's Kusanagi is no less a blend of exaggeratedly masculine and feminine qualities. She maintains her signature commanding and deeply authoritative presence throughout the series, briskly stating her orders to her team and relying very little on outside help to accomplish her goals. Unlike most of the

⁴⁷ *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040* (1998), Episode 2.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

other Section 9 members, Kusanagi is a lone wolf, and does not seek to cultivate relationships. Due to her sharp intelligence, her effectiveness as a leader, and her capabilities as a soldier, Kusanagi is usually singled out by Aramaki, the Section 9 Chief, to accompany him on both official and off-the-record business undertakings. In the second season, it is learned that Kusanagi underwent full cyberization due to severe injuries she suffered during a plane crash when she was 6 years old. Her fully cyberized body, weighing over three hundred pounds, is one of the most advanced models in existence, and Kusanagi is therefore capable of feats of strength that are unparalleled by her male colleagues⁴⁹.

These masculine qualities are more than balanced out by Kusanagi's feminine appearance. She typically wears nothing more than a strapless leotard (sans trousers), paired with a dark leather jacket and thigh-high boots in the first season. In the second, she is more often seen dressed in a form-fitting black and gray combat uniform, or low-cut blue jeans over a long sleeved leotard for casual street attire. Her already sizeable bust is also further enlarged at this time. Nonetheless, her co-workers rarely comment, even in an indirect manner, on Kusanagi's choice of clothing. This is another mark of the imaginative space in which *Ghost in the Shell* operates; despite being a rather gritty, unsentimental series that in no way depicts a fantastical universe in the idealised or romanticised sense, Kusanagi's appearance is apparently normal enough that it does not cause any raised eyebrows among her largely male colleagues.

⁴⁹ 'Ghost in the Shell Anime' (<http://motoko-kusanagi.blogspot.com/>), accessed 18 May 2010.

Although some viewers have concluded that Kusanagi's physical appearance is simply an act of fanservice, others have speculated that dressing in this way is a means by which she reminds herself that she is a woman, since she is constantly plagued with self-doubt about her own humanity.⁵⁰ This opinion gains some credence when considering several other textual details. When asked by Batou, another cyberized Section 9 agent, why Kusanagi does not 'give up trying to look feminine on the outside and switch over to a male prosthetic model', since she will 'get more power that way', she replies by challenging him to a fight, which she immediately wins by taking control of Batou's body and making him punch himself to the floor. Standing over him, she comments, 'So long as you can turn an over-amped opponent's strength against him, I'd say that there's nothing wrong with female models.'⁵¹

Kusanagi refuses to let go of her female form because it is one of the only remaining things that link her to her original humanity, and this is emphasised by the watch that she has kept since first becoming a cyborg, and has continued to wear throughout the changing of her many bodies. Given to her when she reached 'adulthood' – by eventually being transferred into a full adult body – Kusanagi uses this watch as a means of mentally anchoring her physical self.

The fact that Kusanagi is a cyborg, combined with the way in which she embodies both masculine and feminine qualities, is seen to transform her into the perfect woman, since she is not limited by the static nature of gender or biological life

⁵⁰ 'Kusanagi Motoko (Ghost in the Shell)' (<http://narutofan7st.wetpaint.com/page/Kusanagi+Motoko%28Ghost+In+The+Shell%29>), accessed 18 May 2010.

⁵¹ *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* (2002), Episode 8.

and death as other characters are: 'The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world ... The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust.'⁵² It has also been noted that, within the first *Ghost in the Shell* film, director Mamoru Oshii 'repeatedly insists ... that an android is not simply a substitute for a real girl, but that a doll itself *IS* the ideal girl. As he has said, "Dolls don't have an ugly thing called a heart [he means 'ego'] so a doll is beautiful and perfect.'"⁵³

At first glance, the feminine qualities of Chii would seem to far outweigh her masculine ones in *Chobits*. Her physique and high-pitched, soft-spoken voice lend her character a gentle and angelic feel. Moreover, the fact that she is found naked but for the bandages, and that Hideki immediately views her in a sexual light, ensures that Chii is seen as an object of male desire before anything else. When Chii awakens, one of the first acts Hideki does is to wrap Chii in a towel, since he cannot find anything else for her to wear offhand. Suffering another nosebleed at the sight of Chii now wrapped only in a towel, he remarks, 'For some reason that looks even more...'⁵⁴ He later dresses Chii in some of his own clothes, although when the apartment manager comments that the clothing looks too big on her, Hideki's mind again runs to the sexual in seeing his shirt beginning to slip from Chii's shoulders. He quickly defends himself: 'I found her last night so I haven't gotten her any clothes or anything yet...! Please don't think I'm some perverted guy!'⁵⁵

⁵² Donna Jeanne Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* (New York, Routledge, 2004), p. 9.

⁵³ Patrick Macias, Tomohiro Machiyama, *Cruising the Anime City: An Otaku Guide to Neo Tokyo* (California, Stone Bridge Press, 2004), p. 48.

⁵⁴ *Chobits* (2002), Episode 1.

⁵⁵ *Chobits* (2002), Episode 2.



Figure 17

Chii still switched off and swathed in bandages.

When Chii does eventually become more knowledgeable of the world and is able to communicate with Hideki, she immediately becomes associated with traditionally feminine ideals on top of her appearance; she goes shopping for Hideki when he is too embarrassed to buy lingerie for her himself, she attempts to cook for him when he does not have enough money to buy food, and she secures a job selling cakes for a bakery outside the shop, her appearance attracting people to sample and buy the food inside. Prior to this, knowing that Chii wants to get a job in order to help with Hideki's financial problems, the audience hears Hideki thinks to himself, 'So what Chii needs is a job that doesn't require any common sense ... does a job like that really exist?'⁵⁶

However, in another sense, Chii is innately powerful, despite the fact that she remains unconscious of this fact for much of the series. Both Chii and Hideki remain unaware that she is a unique type of Persocom that is far more

⁵⁶ *Chobits* (2002), Episode 8.

technologically advanced than regular Persocoms. She is a 'Chobi'; a being of legend that possesses true intelligence rather than relying on the execution of pre-loaded software programs for her existence. She alone has the power to release a programme that will grant every Persocom in the world the ability to feel emotion – a power that she gains control of in the final episode, gifting all Persocoms with the capacity to love as humans do.

Moreover, even though Hideki is her owner in every sense of the word and should therefore be in a position of control, he is completely emasculated by Chii. Chii is not powerful only because of what she inherently is – a uniquely powerful robot with unparalleled potential – but also because she simultaneously transforms Hideki into a babbling, nosebleeding figure of powerlessness, who is scarcely able to glance at her without becoming flustered and incoherent.

Long before Chii's robotic powers are revealed, Hideki is well aware that Chii is not like other Persocoms. When confused about her lack of ability to communicate, Hideki enlists the help of other Persocoms and their owners in order to analyse Chii's system. However, Minoru's custom-made Persocoms are unable to do so, since Chii's system is too powerful to be scanned, and the systems of his own Persocoms crash in the attempt.

Later on in the series, Chii is kidnapped by Yoshiyuki, a custom Persocom builder. When he connects all of his most powerful Persocoms into a large parallel processing network in an attempt to penetrate Chii's firewall defences, even they fail to do so: 'It's been over an hour using every Persocom in this house, yet I still

can't hack through the protection ... You are special after all.'⁵⁷ When he begins to touch her, sliding his hand up her thigh and under her skirt, Chii's higher state awakens, and Yoshiyuki is forcibly tangled in his own computer wires and slammed against the wall as she tells him, 'You are not my one special person. You are not allowed to enter!'⁵⁸

The idea of the female machine also being the perfect woman because of her balanced combination of humanity and machine is one that is explored in each of these titles. Simultaneously, the concept of a perfect male machine is also explored, if only by the fact that such a creature does not exist. In *Bubblegum Crisis*, it is the awakening of the aptly named Galatea – a female human/Boomer hybrid created by Sylia's late father – who sets this theme in motion. Mason, once in possession of the child-form of Galatea, begins spending every moment of his time with her in the hopes of observing the new world she is creating.

However, as Galatea observes, Mason's deeper wish is to become the God of the new order; something that Mason readily admits: 'Not a weak, pathetic God who simply sits back and watches, but a God who passes judgement. A God who corrects the mistakes of a million years of evolution.'⁵⁹ Mason is striving for perfection, in that he attempts to reject his humanity in favour of the Boomer core that was long since planted inside of his body. Although his humanity has been overbalanced by the Boomer core which lies dormant within him, he is unable to let go of his bitterness that he is, in essence, a failed, male version of what Galatea is.

⁵⁷ *Chobits* (2002), Episode 20.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040* (1999), Episode 20.

Understanding this, and perceiving his arrogance in believing that he can become God, Galatea grants Mason's wish by activating his embryonic Boomer core. Mason's fate is to be fused into an unholy union of human and Boomer at Galatea's will, his own Boomer core taking over his body from the inside out and pinning him to the wall with a series of living wires. Strung up high above the city, Mason can only watch the actions of Galatea as he dies, his half-corpse becoming almost unrecognisable in the process. In horror, Nene whispers, 'Boomers are one thing, but... this is something...' ⁶⁰



Figure 18

Mason's dies in a horrific human/Boomer hybrid form.

Mackey, Sylia's younger 'brother' and also a human/Boomer hybrid, is seen to be as imperfect as Mason, since, as Galatea points out, he was 'The first prototype to be created from our core', and was 'considered a failure ... too close in nature to the human beings from which we had been spawned.'⁶¹ Whilst Mackey cannot be considered to be fully human, neither is he quite machine. Entirely sentient and

⁶⁰ *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040* (1999), Episode 23.

⁶¹ *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040* (1999), Episode 25.

self-aware, he is both physically and emotionally almost indistinguishable from a human being. Because of this, he is able to cultivate relationships as any human would, and by the end of the series, is dating Nene, who labels him as human in telling him, ‘You can't kill yourself and end your problems. People can't do that ... You're human to me!’⁶²

That Mackey is able to be in a relationship with Nene is significant, as nowhere else in this series does any human/Boomer hybrid successfully do so. Although Mason appears to have no sexual inclinations towards Galatea, he attempts to control her in the same way that he would control any regular Boomer – as he does with his secretary throughout the series – and is ultimately punished for it. Mackey, already an imperfect creature, does not attempt to attain perfection or total control as Mason does, and thus is spared any retribution.

Galatea herself, a female as well as the perfect balance between human and machine, remains the perfect being in that she chooses to be assimilated into the earth's energy and become a part of the cycle of life, death, and rebirth rather than to continue to exist as a being striving to be accepted by humanity. In other words, she does not soil her perfection by attempting to reject any part of herself as Mason does, or by engaging in any kind of sexual relationship as Mackey does. Galatea is neither made up nor dictated by the confines of only mind or body, because she is not simply a robotic creature, but is also not guided by only her emotions as humans are. Her perfection is based on the fact that she is poised precisely between these two binary points: an ideal robot body and a working

⁶² *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040* (1999), Episode 15.

human mind. She threatens to assimilate the universe into her perfection, and her downfall is aided by the Boomers, who are then partly assimilated into the human race.

The trend of the perfect woman remaining untouched by either physical or emotionally intimacy with a male is continued in *Ghost in the Shell*. Although Kusanagi is said to have a boyfriend in the manga, whom she has been dating for seven months (Batou jokes that this must be a 'new record'), she remains emotionally distant both in the manga version of events as well as in the anime series, where she is not shown to have any strong emotional ties with anyone.⁶³ This includes Batou himself, the closest person to a friend that Kusanagi has. Both seasons of the anime give vague hints of a romantic tension between the two, based primarily on the fact that Kusanagi occasionally opens up to Batou and talks briefly of her past to him without any provocation on his part: 'When I was little, I couldn't manipulate my cybernetic body very well. I once cried because I crushed my favourite doll.'⁶⁴

In a later episode, Batou calls out to warn Kusanagi when he notices the laser dot of a sniper rifle aimed at her head, using her first name rather than 'Major', indicating that he may have more personal feelings for her than he lets on. Nonetheless, if either Batou or Kusanagi do have deeper feelings for the other than they admit, the series concludes with no confirmation or consummation of this fact. Kusanagi seemingly remains unaffected by this lack of companionship, and at times even appears to cultivate it with her brisk demeanour.

⁶³ 'Motoko Kusanagi: Sexuality'

(http://www.servinghistory.com/topics/Motoko_Kusanagi::sub::Sexuality), accessed 18 May 2010.

⁶⁴ *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* (2002), Episode 3.

That Kusanagi does not seem to care about her body in any physical sense is also worthy of note. She is attached to her female form in that she values it for its symbolic significance, yet she does not seem to view her body in any other way than as a means of carrying out her job. She also upholds a dim view of sexism in all its forms despite the way she presents herself, even going so far as to empathise with sex androids. She is entirely disapproving when she must investigate a sex doll party, telling Aramaki outright, 'I don't like being forced to go along with this.'⁶⁵

Critics have suggested that Kusanagi may be a lesbian, citing the manga in which she participates in an 'e-sex' lesbian splash panel that is apparently a lucrative but illegal 'side business' (in the world of *Ghost in the Shell*, engaging in e-sex involves the tying together of the users' nervous systems to allow for shared simultaneous sensations – something that has the potential for serious complications). However, given manga creator Shirow Masamune comments that he 'drew an all-girl orgy because I didn't want to draw some guy's butt', it would seem presumptuous to base Kusanagi's sexual orientation on this alone.⁶⁶

Other viewers have pointed to a specific anime episode, during which Kusanagi is seen to be relaxing on a bed in a large room with two other scantily-clad women – presumably cyberized humans like herself – in the background. However, although Kusanagi is undoubtedly friendly towards them, no physical contact

⁶⁵ *Ghost in the Shell: S.A.C. 2nd GIG* (2004), Episode 3.

⁶⁶ 'Ghost in the Shell' (http://webpace.webring.com/people/du/um_2448/gis.htm), accessed 18 May 2010.

other than the purely platonic takes place, and neither does Kusanagi say anything that establishes any physically or emotional intimacy between them.

Her lack of such with anyone in the series, combined with the way in which she views her body, suggests that if anything, Kusanagi is essentially an asexual creature who no longer has any solid ties to perceptions of either gender or sexuality. One reviewer has stated: 'She isn't a woman, she's a sexless being who plays the role of a woman.'⁶⁷ However, another way of looking at Kusanagi's character is that, rather than being neither male nor female, she is performatively both. Because she regularly and purposefully exhibits behaviours that reflect her feminine and masculine traits, sometimes concurrently, Kusanagi is not so much a sexless being as she is a complete one, incorporating both gender roles inside one fully cyberised body.

From either viewpoint, Kusanagi remains another part-robot, part-human character who in every way remains untouched by the very male gaze she appeals to – and who eventually, like Galatea, abandons her human form completely and attains true perfection as a result, since according to Oshii, 'Humans can be free only if they free themselves from their body.'⁶⁸

Although Chii retains her physical form throughout *Chobits*, she too retains her perfection by remaining physically untouched. Similar to the figures of Galatea and Kusanagi, Chii maintains a balance between human and machine since,

⁶⁷ 'Dubbing vs. Subtitles' (<http://kaedrin.com/weblog/archive/001175.html>), accessed 18 May 2010.

⁶⁸ 'Ghost in the Shell: Innocence' (<http://www.answers.com/topic/ghost-in-the-shell-2-innocence>), accessed 18 May 2010.

although she is completely man-made, she is also the missing link between them. She has the option of either denying or accepting love, not just for herself but on behalf of all Persocoms, depending on whether or not she denies or accepts her romantic feelings towards Hideki: something that she comes to terms with in the final episode when she tells him, ‘Chii is a persocom. There are things Chii cannot do but Chii wants to be with Hideki.’⁶⁹ By ‘things she cannot do’, Chii is ostensibly referring to the fact that she will not be able to engage in sexual intercourse with Hideki, since unlike other Persocoms, her power switch is located in her vagina. Should Hideki have sex with Chii, her system would be restarted, and all memories of their time together erased.

The possibility that there is a way around this is hinted at during Chii’s time at the peep show, where Chii’s ‘twin’, Freya, states, ‘regardless of what happens, until someone who truly loves you appears, never let anyone touch you here.’⁷⁰ This sentiment is repeated during the episode where Chii is kidnapped by Yoshiyuki, when Chii tells him that since he isn’t the one ‘just for her’, he is not allowed to enter. When Hideki arrives to rescue her, she says, ‘Chii wants only one person. Only one. The only one for me. I’m not allowed to touch anyone but him.’ She then grasps his hand, placing it between her legs to clearly demonstrate her meaning before continuing, ‘Only he is allowed to enter ... what’s Hideki’s most valuable thing? ... If I know that, Chii doesn’t have to be lost anymore.’⁷¹

Nonetheless, by the end of the series, Chii’s physical relationship with Hideki has not changed in any way since her awakening in the introductory episode. That

⁶⁹ *Chobits* (2002), Episode 24.

⁷⁰ *Chobits* (2002), Episode 7.

⁷¹ *Chobits* (2002), Episode 20.

Chii and Hideki continue to live with each other by the series conclusion and, realistically, would gradually become physically intimate with each other, may be assumed. However, the creators of the series chose not to consummate their relationship in any physical way, and this is telling of the nature of Chii's perfection – she is a perfect being because of the very fact that she remains pure.

Moreover, judging by the fact that Hideki also remains unable to even glance at Chii in a non-platonic way without furiously blushing or having a nose bleed, their relationship will maintain its asexual status for some time to come. That such a relationship can exist in the realms of anime is evident, as Lamarre has stated: 'The image of a sexy woman does not evoke in the man a desire that must be satisfied with a real woman. Rather, Chi and Motosuwa's relation suggest that men and woman can bypass sexual relations with one another, as long as soft porn images are allowed to manage things.'⁷² In short, Chii's body is at once both fetishized and made sacred.

In studying these anime, it is apparent that anime involving the figure of the android as a focal motif are also anime that are deeply involved with dichotomies. Whether this is the dichotomy between masculine and feminine, meekly passive and powerfully active, or sexually charged and untouchably pure, these titles are seen to at once use and subvert many of the key conventions that are designed to appeal to their audience – although they employ some conventional science-fiction and robot-themed storytelling and characterisation, the texts are not afraid of breaking expectations with their own unique take on these themes. In

⁷² 'Platonic Sex: Perversion and Shojo Anime (Part One)' (<http://anm.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/1/1/45>), accessed 18 May 2010.

continually doing so, the science-fiction and cyberpunk anime genres have continued to maintain and popularise a relatively steady exploration of original ideas that revolve around the humanoid machine.

Having discussed some of the ways in which some of the more commonly cited anime titles portray representations of sexuality concerned with the mind and body, I now go on to explore boundaries regarding sexual continuums, using titles which are not quite so mainstream. The next chapter, entitled ‘When ‘No, No!’ Means ‘Oh God, Yes!’: Boys Loving Boys’ is expressly concerned with male homosexuality in anime, and how topics explored therein are approached and conveyed.

Chapter Five: When ‘No, no!’ means ‘Oh god, yes!’ – Boys Loving Boys

How often have you seen a *seme* say something along the lines of ‘I’m at my limit,’ which translates to ‘we either need to stop or I am going to fuck you silly’? I feel like I see it or something similar once every other series or so at least.¹

If anime routinely employs art as representation and the need for imaginative expression, then boys love is perhaps the most extreme example of this, as clearly demonstrated in the following scene. Recently purchased from a real-life slave auction, Ayase stares up at his new ‘owner’ – a ruthless loan shark named Kanou – with enormous watery blue eyes. He is shoved backwards onto the bed before Kanou forcibly rips the clothing from his body and pins his wrists above his head. ‘You won’t be able to move around much anyway until the drugs wear off’, Kanou tells him. ‘You might as well enjoy this too.’² As Ayase continues to whimper and plead, Kanou rapes him, ignoring Ayase’s pained cries and leaving bruises over his entire body. This is the first of several sex scenes in *Okane ga Nai* (*No Money*), and far from being a tale about the evils of corrupt businessmen or a daring escape by an abused yet compassionate young man, the narrative is

¹ ‘January – 2008 – The Yaoi Review’ (<http://theyaoireview.wordpress.com/2008/01/>), accessed 22 June 2009. This sentence is sometimes spoken as ‘*gaman dekinai*’ – something that can no longer be endured. ‘*Gaman*’ is a term originating from Zen Buddhism, meaning to maintain self-control and passivity in the face of extreme hardship or suffering. In the instance of boys love, ‘*gaman dekinai*’ can therefore be translated as a character stating that they are unable to withstand the strain of their love (or lust) without taking action.

² *Okane ga Nai*, Episode 1, Sokuza Makoto (Tokyo, Yricc, 2007).

considered by its fans to be a sweepingly dramatic, and occasionally comedic, love story.

Boys love, also referred to as BL, *shounen-ai*, and *yaoi*, is the popular Japanese term used to describe fictional media – usually referring specifically to anime and manga – that focuses on representations of homoerotic male relationships. This chapter closely explores the boys love phenomenon, with particular reference to *Gravitation* (2000), *Loveless* (2005), and *Junjou Romantica* (2008), to understand how boys love came to be a well-known style of anime, what the hallmarks of the genre are (for example, aggressive sexuality, emotional possessiveness, and a complete lack of female characters), and why it is so appealing to its viewers.³ Boys love is a genre that is made up of representations of sexual bodies, sexual identities, and sexual fantasies, and as such, illustrates Butler's theories regarding gender performativity archetypes.

Essentially a female fantasy and therefore largely created by and for a heterosexual female audience, boys love is distinguishable from what is commonly known as *gei comi*, *bara*, or mens love, which caters to a gay male audience and tends to be created primarily by homosexual male artists.⁴ *Yaoi*, the term used predominantly by Western fans of the boys love genre, was originally used to refer to the specific type of self-published works, or *doujinshi*, which

³ It should also be pointed out that although this style of storytelling may seem unusual to a non-Japanese audience, the phenomenon of slash fiction would appear to suggest a similar interest in love affairs between males among a Western female fanbase.

⁴ Donald Symons, *Warrior Lovers: Erotic Fiction, Evolution and Female Sexuality* (London, Yale University Press, 2003), p. 73; Mark McLelland, *Male Homosexuality in Modern Japan* (New York, Routledge, 2000), p. 131.

parodied mainstream anime and manga.⁵ The term itself was an acronym created in the *doujinshi* market of the late 1970s that became popularised in the 1980s, standing for ‘*Yama nashi, Ochi nashi, Imi nashi*’: ‘no climax, no point, no meaning.’⁶ Said to refer to the tendency for boys love titles to forsake plot in favour of the depiction of sex scenes, an alternative and satirical acronym for this phrase is ‘*YAmete, Oshiri ga Itai*’: ‘Stop, my butt hurts!’⁷

Whilst the term boys love in Japan encompasses all levels of sexual content, the terms *yaoi* and *shounen-ai* are often used to differentiate between levels of sexual content within contemporary Western fandom, with *yaoi* being used to describe titles containing visually explicit scenes, and *shounen-ai* being used to describe titles that focus more on romance and do not include visually explicit sexual material.⁸ However, in Japan, the term *shounen-ai* refers to a now obsolete subgenre of manga revolving around prepubescent homoerotic relationships.⁹ Those titles that do refer to prepubescent boys within a sexual framework are now categorised in Japan as *shotacon*; a very distinct genre with only a minor association to boys love.¹⁰

⁵ Christopher Bolton, István Csicsery-Rónay, Tatsumi Takayuki, *Robot Ghosts and Wired Dreams: Japanese Science Fiction From Origins to Anime* (Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 223.

⁶ Bolton, Csicsery-Rónay, Tatsumi, p. 229.

⁷ Linda Williams, *Porn Studies* (North Carolina, Duke University Press, 2004), p. 101.

⁸ Comics Journal, Inc., *The Comics Journal* (Michigan, University of Michigan, 2008), p. 1122.

⁹ ‘Aestheticism Articles – Yaoi etc definitions’

(http://www.aestheticism.com/visitors/reference/jpnse_def/index.htm), accessed 10 June 2009.

¹⁰ Williams, p. 101.

Boys Love in the Fan Community

The earliest magazine dedicated specifically to boys love was *June*, which began publication in 1978 as a response to the success of commercially published manga by artists such as Takemiya Keiko, Hagio Moto and Oushima Yumiko, who helped revolutionise *shoujo* manga – comics targeted towards girls and young women.¹¹ The rising popularity of the depictions of beautiful young men, or *bishounen*, in the *doujinshi* market, as well as that of gender-ambiguous Western musicians such as David Bowie and Boy George, meant that *June* soon became something of a cult hit amongst its readers¹². *Shousetsu June* (*Novel June*), a sister magazine to *June*, began publication in 1982; whilst *June* was then a manga-only publication, *Shousetsu June* contained text-only stories concerning male romance, and began to be commercially mass-published during the 1990s, outselling the original magazine.¹³

The critical attention that boys love manga received ultimately resulted in translations which became commercially available outside of Japan, with the first officially translated boys love manga being sold in 2003.¹⁴ As of 2006, there were approximately 130 English-translated works formally released, with North American companies such as Digital Manga Publishing, Aurora Publishing, Tokyopop, Yaoi Generation, and Media Blasters distributing them worldwide.¹⁵

¹¹ Chris Berry, Fran Martin, Audrey Yue, *Mobile Cultures: New Media in Queer Asia* (North Carolina, Duke University Press, 2003), p. 72.

¹² Patrick Drazen, *Anime Explosion!: The What? Why? & Wow! Of Japanese Animation* (California, Stone Bridge Press, 2003), p. 91.

¹³ Frederik L. Schodt, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* (California, Stone Bridge Press, 1996), pp. 120-123.

¹⁴ The Japan Journal Ltd., *The Japan Journal* (California, University of California, 2005), p. 37.

¹⁵ Mark McLelland, 'Why are Japanese Girls' Comics full of Boys Bonking?' in *Refractory: A Journal of Entertainment Media* 10, 2006-2007 at

As boys love steadily continued to gain popularity in the United States, some American artists began creating and selling their own original English-language manga featuring beautiful male-male couples. What began as a small subculture in North America when the first known original English-language manga was published in 2002 (Daria McGrain's *Sexual Espionage #1*), has today become a much larger and still-increasing market.¹⁶

Because anime had long since become an international phenomenon, it was only a matter of time before many of the better known boys love manga titles were adapted into anime form and distributed from stores and via the internet. Today, there are stores in Japan devoted exclusively to boys love material, and *Otome Road* (Maiden Road), the nickname for a street in an area of Tokyo's bustling Ikebukuro district, is famous for its concentration of businesses that specialise in serving the boys love and *bishounen* fan community. John Opplinger has pointed out in his regular column that 'the novelty and collector mindset of the DVD revolution has encouraged fans to buy everything, and as a result pick up and view series they had never watched before, including adult anime and yaoi titles such as *Kizuna* and *Fake*.'¹⁷

Oppinger also mentions the popular notion that the Cartoon Network broadcast of *Gundam Wing*, a mecha series that introduced anime to a huge audience of female viewers that had never known of or watched anime prior, helped to further

<http://refractory.unimelb.edu.au/2006/12/04/why-are-japanese-girls%E2%80%99-comics-full-of-boys-bonking1-mark-mclelland/>, accessed 10 June 2009.

¹⁶ 'Yaoi Timeline: Spread Through U.S.' (<http://ashenwings.com/marks/2008/06/02/yaoi-timeline-spread-through-us/>), accessed 10 June 2009.

¹⁷ 'AnimeNation Anime News Blog – Blog Archive – AskJohn: Why is Yaoi so Popular Now?' (<http://www.animenation.net/blog/2001/12/19/ask-john-why-is-yaoi-so-popular-now/>), accessed 10 June 2009.

popularise boys love in the West thanks to the beautiful yet emotionally troubled teens of its cast. Although *Gundam Wing* does not depict any overtly homoerotic relationships in its story line, it is a widespread view that many of its female viewers wished to interpret the relationships between the mecha pilots as homosexual, and were subsequently encouraged to seek out similar shows.¹⁸



Figure 19

The pilots of *Gundam Wing*.

There are varying opinions among both Japanese and Western academics as to why boys love has gained such a large female, and sometimes fanatical, fanbase. Frederik L. Schodt, an American manga writer and translator, observes that depictions of male-male homosexual relationships had become popular among female readers as an extension of bisexual themes already present in *shoujo* manga.¹⁹ Feminist author and East Asian studies scholar, Sandra Buckley, has stated that *bishounen* narratives champion ‘the imagined potentialities of alternative [gender] differentiations’, whilst James Welker, author of *Queer*

¹⁸ Drazen, p. 95.

¹⁹ Frederik L. Schodt, *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics* (Tokyo, Kodansha, 1983), pp. 100-101.

Voices From Japan, adds that boys love titles liberate its readers ‘not just from patriarchy, but from gender dualism and heteronormativity.’²⁰

Several Japanese critics have seen boys love as something that allows girls to distance sex from their own bodies in order to avoid adult female sexuality, while still creating fluidity in perceptions of gender and sexuality, as well as to reject socially constructed representations of gender as an initial move towards feminism.²¹ Suzuki Kazuko, author of essays such as *Pornography or Therapy? Japanese Girls Creating the Yaoi Phenomenon*, sees the popularity of boys love as something that has surfaced from the dislike and disdain of masculine heterosexism by women.²²

The genre has also been compared to romance novels and Western fairy tales, in that it is the type of narrative that many consider to be an escapist fantasy, as reflected in the variety of historic, futuristic, and fantastic settings that boys love frequently depicts.²³ Typical boys love storylines portray couples who must overcome obstacles – often internal – to be together, and many anime and manga titles of this genre have therefore been said to foster ‘an aesthetic of purity, even when depicting hard-core sex acts.’²⁴

²⁰ James Welker, ‘Beautiful, Borrowed, and Bent: Boys love’ as Girls’ Love in Shōjo Manga’ in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31/3, 2006, p. 843.

²¹ Ueno Chizuko, ‘Jendaaresu waarudo no ai no jikken’ (‘Experimenting with love in a genderless world’) in *Kikan Toshi II (Quarterly City II)*, 1989, p. 246; Fukimoto Yukari, ‘Shoujo manga ni okeru shounen ai no imi’ (‘The Meaning of Boys love in Shoujo Manga’) in *Onna to hyougen (Women and Expression)* 2, 1991) at http://matt-thorn.com/shoujo_manga/fujimoto.php, accessed 10 June 2009; Takemiya Keiko, ‘osei wa gei ga suki!?’ (‘Women Like Gays!?’) in *Bungei shunjuu*, 1993, pp. 82-83

²² Suzuki Kazuko, ‘Pornography or Therapy? Japanese Girls Creating the Yaoi Phenomenon’ in *Millennium Girls: Today’s Girls Around the World* (London, Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), p. 246.

²³ Williams, p. 86.

²⁴ Williams, p. 97.



Figure 20

Kanou rapes Ayase in *Okane ga Nai*.

Another attraction of boys love is the constant depictions of a carefully stylised and fantastical beauty. The androgynous pretty boy is an iconic symbol able to encompass not only the physical strength of traditional masculinity, but also the grace and beauty of the stereotypically feminine. A conventional image of an attractive male in the West is muscular and assertively powerful, and evokes perceptions of authority and control. Whilst portrayals of men of this type engaged in homosexual activity are likely to come across as rough and unrefined, the image of two *bishounen* engaging in the same act is seen as something far more languid.

The artwork depicting these relationships becomes centered on the representation of the aesthetically attractive as well as or even above the need to express plot, and romantic relationships among *bishounen* are therefore idealised and romanticised by their very nature; all depict impossibly beautiful characters who express their love in ways that often seem to transcend gender. It is because of this that the men in boys love anime and manga are very rarely stated to be gay, or even necessarily bisexual. Rather, they simply happen to be in love with someone

who is also male. In this sense, boys love mirrors the ideas espoused by Butler, in that it does not conform to a simple heterosexual/homosexual paradigm. Instead, boys love romance portrays a type of love that breaks down rather than reinforces the boundaries of sex and gender, and is focused purely on the desires of the individual.

It is in large part due to these unrealistic and highly idealised characters and concepts that gay and lesbian commentators, in particular, have criticised the portrayal of gay identity within the genre. This critique occurred most notably in the ‘Yaoi Debate’ of the 1990s, at a time when boys love manga was gaining a strong foothold in the consciousness of the general fandom, and when a number of the earlier boys love anime titles were being released internationally. Japanese gay activist Satou Misaki criticised boys love fans and artists in an open letter to the feminist fanzine *Choisir* in 1992, writing that the genre not only failed to provide accurate information about gay men and ignored intolerance and inequity against gay men in society, but also endorsed a destructive image of gay men as attractive, affluent, and well-educated, co-opting homosexual males as ‘masturbation fantasies.’²⁵

Certainly homophobia, when presented as an issue at all in boys love titles, is generally used as an obvious plot device that serves to heighten the drama, or else to prove the purity of the characters’ love. It is also doubtful that any viewer could fail to notice the unrealism of boys love as a whole. From character design and interaction to plot, boys love is a genre of fancy. It does not seek to create

²⁵ Keith Vincent, ‘A Japanese Electra and Her Queer Progeny’ in *Mechademia 2: Networks of Desire* (Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2007), pp. 64-79.

reflections of real people or their actions, but rather is based purely on representative ideals. Nonetheless, an extensive debate was sparked among both the Japanese and the English-speaking fandom, from which echoes still remain. For example, manga critic and boys love researcher Mizoguchi Akiko characterises stereotypes in modern boys love as being ‘unrealistic and homophobic’ in her 2003 paper *Homophobic Homos, Rapes of Love, and Queer Lesbians in Japanese Yaoi Comics*.²⁶ However, fans of boys love argue that the genre is intended as entertainment for women rather than as education, and that the characters were never intended to be a representation of ‘real gay men.’²⁷

Sex Roles and Performativity

There are a wide variety of themes commonly explored within boys love anime and manga, all of which are unique to the genre. These include the main couple who subscribe to the stereotypical *seme* and *uke* relationship style; the depiction of rape or coercion as an act of love; the portrayal of extreme jealousy and possessiveness; dramatic internal angst; the marginalisation and sometimes demonisation of women; and the depiction of gender and homosexuality. Although not every title necessarily depicts all of these themes, it is not difficult to pick a handful of titles and clearly see the narrative threads which bind them together. *Gravitation*, *Loveless*, and *Junjou Romantica* are three of the more relatively well-known boys love titles that are explored here, all of which contain these textual thematic elements between them.

²⁶ Mizoguchi Akiko, ‘Homophobic Homos, Rapes of Love, and Queer Lesbians in Japanese Yaoi Comics’ at *Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting* Session 187, 2003.

²⁷ Vincent, pp. 64-79.

Gravitation, consisting of a two-part OVA and a 13-episode series, is largely considered by the fan community to be a classic boys love title, with the main characters being dubbed by reviewers as ‘America's favorite shonen-ai couple.’²⁸ Although it is by far the least sexually explicit of the three titles, almost half a million copies of the manga alone have been sold as of 2007.²⁹ The story revolves around aspiring singer Shindou Shuichi and his band, Bad Luck, as they strive to become Japan’s next big hit and follow in the footsteps of the legendary Nittle Grasper. As Shuichi is working on some lyrics one night, the wind causes his piece of paper to be blown from his hand. It is picked up by a seemingly cruel yet charismatic stranger who dismisses Shuichi’s work as garbage, along with Shuichi himself as having ‘zero talent.’ Shuichi’s anger and unconscious attraction leads him to track down and confront the stranger, who is revealed to be none other than Yuki Eiri, a best-selling romance novelist.

Loveless, a 12-episode fantasy series, is immediately noticeable for its character designs. Cat ears and tails are a universal trait for characters of both genders, who lose these features when they lose their virginity and become ‘adults’. Twelve-year-old amnesiac Aoyagi Ritsuka meets a mysterious older male named Soubi on his first day at a new school, who claims to have been a good friend of Ritsuka’s recently murdered older brother, Seimei. Upon discovering that an organisation named Septimal Moon was responsible for Seimei's death, Ritsuka and Soubi form a bond as Fighter and Sacrifice as they challenge Septimal Moon and engage

²⁸ ‘Gravitation OVA: Lyrics of Love – Mania.com’ (http://www.mania.com/gravitation-ova-lyrics-love_article_77356.html), accessed 10 June 2009.

²⁹ ‘Gravitation EX Gets Simultaneous Release’ (<http://www.icv2.com/articles/news/10073.html>), accessed 10 June 2009.

in spell battles against their opponents, in order to uncover the truth behind Ritsuka's amnesia and Seimei's murder.

Finally, *Junjou Romantica (Pure-Hearted Romance)*, is a 24-episode series set in modern day Japan which focuses on three male couples, the first of which is the highlight of the story. Takahashi Misaki is about to sit his University entrance examinations and wants to realise his dream of graduating from Mitsuhashi, the college his older brother, Takahiro, dropped out of in order to look after Misaki following the death of their parents. Akihiko Usami, nicknamed Usagi, is a close friend of Takahiro's and a popular author of both literature and steamy boys love novels. At Takahiro's request, he agrees to tutor Misaki for the upcoming exams. The two are living together by the end of the first episode; Usagi finds out that Takahiro, for whom he harboured an unrequited love for a number of years, has gotten engaged. Upon seeing how upset this makes Misaki on Usagi's behalf, Usagi realises that he has fallen in love with the younger boy, and the two become lovers – much to the bewilderment of Misaki, who is naïvely confused about his feelings towards the older man.

Because the appeal of boys love rests so heavily on its visual aesthetics, the most obvious trait in nearly all boys love titles is the way in which the main characters are designed and how they relate, physically as well as emotionally, to each other. 'Seme' and 'uke' – derivative of 'semeru' and 'ukeru'; literally 'attacker' and 'receiver' – originated from martial arts, and are the universally understood terms for this concept.³⁰

³⁰ This attacker and receiver model might also suggest a heterosexual modelling of gay sex, similar to the active/passive model of homosexuality in the ancient world as detected by Foucault.

Whilst both *seme* and *uke* are usually considered to be anime archetypes of beautiful males, and are consequently drawn in the highly stylised *bishounen* manner, the *seme* comes across as the more masculine of the two; he is usually older and taller, with a slightly narrower face and eyes and a deeper voice to help establish not only his physical maturity, but also his lack of innocence. In turn, his character design serves to emphasise his personality; he is physically powerful (and not afraid to demonstrate this should the appropriate situation arise), self-possessed, and often overly protective.

The *uke*, who is usually pursued by the *seme* rather than the one doing the pursuing, is far more androgynous in comparison; a shorter and slighter stature, rounder face, larger eyes, and higher-pitched voice complete a character intended to be less dominant and more feminine – occasionally to the point of being genuinely mistaken for a female even in the anime universe, as in *Princess Princess* and *Okane ga Nai*. Indeed, the performative nature of this character type renders his maleness almost incidental. Perhaps because the majority of the female audience are thought to identify more with the *uke* than with the *seme*, boys love stories are more often than not told primarily from the *uke*'s perspective.³¹

³¹ 'He loves him, she loves them – The Boston Globe' (http://www.boston.com/ae/books/articles/2005/04/25/he_loves_him_she_loves_them/), accessed 28 September 2010.



Figure 21

Maiden Rose's Klaus and Taki, a stereotypical seme/uke pairing.

It is no coincidence that all three *seme* in *Gravitation*, *Loveless* and *Junjou Romantica* have blonde hair. Reflective of their more sophisticated and worldly natures, blonde hair in this context also acts as a symbol of their abnormality or foreignness. Yuki, although Japanese-born, is stated to have naturally blonde hair, and spent several years living in New York before returning to Japan at the age of sixteen – at least in part because he was teased as a child while in Japan because of his appearance.

Soubi is considered to be an anomaly even by the standards of the *Loveless* universe, although it is not specified exactly how or why this is the case – merely that he is a 'blank slate' who, unlike all the other Fighters and Sacrifices, has no 'true name'. However, as a former student of the mysterious Septimal Moon, he is a well-trained and exceptionally skilled Fighter; so much so that Ritsu, principle of Septimal Moon and Soubi's ex-teacher, wants him to return long after he has defected from the school.

Usagi spent his first ten years in England as a child, although comparatively little is known about his past. Although his mother and father are both Japanese, Usagi has a distinct air of otherness about him for several reasons – he speaks fluent English because of his upbringing, comes from an absurdly rich family, and is the youngest ever writer to be presented with the coveted Naomori Award. In spite of, or perhaps because of his talent, Usagi is stated by his father to have been a very fragile and overly sensitive boy, and he distances himself from others because of this.

In each case, it is the exoticness of these characters which each *uke* – and by extension, the viewers – respond to. Given that the titles are all set in Japan (albeit with the possible exception of *Loveless*, which appears to be set in an alternate-world Japan), blonde hair becomes a representation of the exotic. In order to make this more apparent, each *seme* also wears glasses – Yuki and Usagi when they are writing, and Soubi nearly always – giving them a harder and more authoritative appearance. Driving home the point of the *seme* as the more masculine of a couple, Yuki, Soubi and Usagi are each compulsive smokers; Yuki and Usagi both drive expensive foreign cars; and all three have cool, aloof, and often cynical demeanours, their composure broken only by the actions of their respective *uke* – or else the threat of losing them.

In comparison, the *uke* of the each title (excluding Shuichi, whose bubblegum-pink hair is a self-expression of the world of Japanese pop in which he resides), have darker, more natural hair colours.³² Unlike the *seme*, the *uke* is not foreign or

³² It is also important to note that whilst many boys love titles do feature ukes with blonde hair, the symbolism changes from the representation of the exotic to the portrayal of intense fragility or an

alien to the rest of society, but rather symbolises the boys love version of the every-man. The female viewer is fascinated by and attracted to the *seme*, but it is to the *uke* that she can relate. As such, the *uke* is typically an ordinary high school student, university student, or even young businessman who leads a relatively unexciting or unfulfilling life up until the arrival of the Other; a world famous author as in the case of Yuki and Usagi, or a talented and enigmatic artist such as Soubi.

In keeping with their *uke* status, Shuichi, Ritsuka, and Misaki have personalities that differ markedly from their partner's. Shuichi's innocent, hyperactive, and happy-go-lucky temperament is similar to that of Misaki's naïve, energetic and stubborn persona. Shuichi is a rising pop star, but his band is only in its first stages of tentative success, and he lacks the raw talent that Nittle Grasper's Ryuichi commands. Misaki is a regular university student who understands that he has no particular talents in any area – aside from Usagi, his only real passion is reading manga. Elementary school student Ritsuka, although far moodier and more withdrawn than the stereotypical *uke*, contrasts with Soubi's comparable character traits in that he fears inadvertently hurting others and being hurt in return, while Soubi simply seems not to care enough to want to socialise.

However, not all boys love works adhere to these two base character types. Mark J. McLelland has written that many authors are concerned with 'exploring, not repudiating' the relationship between the insertive and receptive partner, and the

angelic innocence, as in *Okane ga Nai*. Nonetheless, contemporary anime titles using this frame of reference are in the minority.

possibility of reversing convention is indeed often a source of playful teasing and sexual excitement for the characters.³³

This is something that shows the creators' awareness of the performative nature of the roles within boys love, and is another reminder of how Butler's theories of gender performativity can be applied: no anime genre is more dependent on how the actions of the characters, rather than their biological bodies, define their sexuality. However, when this scenario does occur, it is generally the case that the characters are aware they are playing a role, and the dynamics of the relationship in terms of sexual dominance and submission ultimately remains the same.³⁴ As a result, the boys love community has also seen something of a backlash against this paradigm by fans that see the *semeluke* relationship as particularly repetitive, shallow, or disturbing.³⁵

However, as three of the most well-known boys love titles, the main couples of *Gravitation*, *Loveless*, and *Junjou Romantica* each adhere to these prescribed roles. Yuki, Soubi and Usagi are all overtly powerful men who, other than being considerably taller and less slender than their *uke* counterparts, are all shown at some point to demonstrate their dominance or aggressiveness by acts of force – to their respective partners as well as to other characters. In the opening episode of *Gravitation*, Yuki backs Shuichi up against an elevator wall and kisses him,

³³ Mark McLelland, 'The World of Yaoi: The Internet, Censorship and the Global Boys love Fandom' in *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 2005, p. 24.

³⁴ It is not surprising that boys love anime follows Butler's pattern, since Butler is arguing for a view of sexuality that avoids the dominance model of traditional heterosexual sex. However, if Butler is arguing for a free expression of one's sexuality (that is, a continually changing performativity), then this is complicated by the strong trend in boys love for one partner to be continually sexually dominant.

³⁵ Antonia Levi, Mark McHarry, Dru Pagliassotti, *Boys' Love Manga: Essays on the Sexual Ambiguity and Cross-Cultural Fandom of the Genre* (North Carolina, McFarland, 2010), p. 73.

demanding an explanation for Shuichi's feelings, and despite Yuki's coldly insensitive manner towards his lover, he is the first person to retaliate after a group of thugs physically and sexually assault him. He deals with the situation by lashing out in violence himself, causing the initiator of the attack to ask, 'Why did you go easy on us? You could have killed us... That look in your eyes wasn't that of a novelist... a wild animal... they were the eyes of a wild animal that wouldn't feel any pain at taking someone's life.'³⁶

On numerous occasions in *Loveless*, including their first meeting, Soubi grabs Ritsuka by the wrists or jerks him forward to hug or kiss him despite Ritsuka's protestations and, as the Fighter of the pair, defends his *uke* regularly through what is seen as necessary force. He does not kill his opponents, but only restrains himself from doing so because Ritsuka is repulsed by the idea: 'I don't kill ... I never raise my hand to hurt...'³⁷

In *Junjou Romantica*, Usagi is constantly groping (or attempting to grope) Misaki at any time the mood strikes him, and often in ways that are playfully rough, but that would certainly qualify as harassment in any realistic relationship. He is also overprotective of Misaki to the point of obsession, and barely manages to restrain himself from harming anybody whenever Misaki's own obliviousness gets him into trouble with other men. He tells Misaki, 'I don't care if you don't want me, if you hate me. I'm never letting go of you. If you ran from me, I'd probably come chasing after you and lock you away.'³⁸

³⁶ *Gravitation*, Episode 7, Shirohata Bob (Tokyo, Studio Deen, 2000).

³⁷ *Loveless*, Episode 2, Kou Yuu (Tokyo, J.C. Staff, 2005).

³⁸ *Junjou Romantica*, Episode 17, Kon Chiaki (Tokyo, Studio Deen, 2008).

Rape and Fantasy

In turn, another significant and widespread theme in boys love titles is that of rape. Although *Gravitation*, *Loveless*, and *Junjou Romantica* each contain elements of comedy – particularly *Gravitation* and *Junjou Romantica* – all also contain examples of molestation, coercion, or rape of some kind; an occurrence so common within the genre that it would not be unfair to suggest that the vast majority of all boys titles at least touch on this subject.

This is something that appears to be the case not in spite of what fans want, but rather because it is exactly what fans want. Regardless of whether a story is set in modern-day Japan or in an alternative universe, boys love is essentially a fantasy genre and, like many of the other themes within boys love, rape is also portrayed as fantasy. However, like any other fantasy, rape here bears little or no resemblance to reality. According to one study, thirty-six percent of women say that they have had a rape fantasy; yet, as scholars have pointed out, ‘these fantasy stories [in women’s manga] ... can be enjoyed by readers who do not themselves have the same kind of personal fantasies ... needless to say, even if the reader has similar fantasies, to enjoy such fantasies in the second/personal/internal dimension does not suggest that the fantasizer wants to act out these fantasies, much less justify any kind of totalizing assumption that all women really desire X, Y, Z.’³⁹

Assuming that the rapist in any given boys love title is the resident *seme*, he commits the act because he is literally unable to stop himself from expressing his

³⁹ David Knox, *Human Sexuality: The Search for Understanding* (Minnesota, West Publishing, 1984), p. 397; John A. Lent, *Themes and Issues in Asian Cartooning: Cute, Cheap, Mad, and Sexy* (Wisconsin, Popular Press, 1999), p. 143.

love in a physical manner. Only when rape is committed against the *uke* by someone other than his romantic partner does it become an act of hatred, evil, or true violence. The victim of the ‘loving’ rape therefore becomes transformed into a willing participant at some point during, or even occasionally after the activity – usually either when the physical pleasure begins to take effect, or else when the *uke* suddenly realises that he actually enjoyed, wanted, or unconsciously invited the sexual interaction.

According to Suzuki, sexual intercourse in this sense is a way of expressing commitment to a partner, and ‘apparent violence’ is turned into a ‘measure of passion.’⁴⁰ Suzuki goes on to elaborate that when a woman is raped in reality, she is stigmatised by society, but that in boys love, men who are loved by their rapists are still ‘imbued with innocence.’⁴¹ Rape has also been said to act as a means of freeing the *uke* protagonist of liability in sex, often leading to the narrative climax of the tale, when the main character is eventually able to take responsibility for his own sexuality.⁴²

As the tamest of the three titles, *Gravitation* depicts comparatively little in the way of coercion from Yuki to Shuichi. Nevertheless, there are certain scenes in which Yuki is depicted as sexually commanding, regardless of what Shuichi’s feelings are about this power dynamic. When Yuki is confronted by his older sister prior to his sexual relationship with Shuichi, he uses Shuichi’s own presence

⁴⁰ Suzuki Kazuko, ‘Pornography or Therapy? Japanese Girls Creating the Yaoi Phenomenon’ in *Millennium Girls: Today's Girls Around the World* (London, Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), pp. 257-258.

⁴¹ Suzuki, pp. 257-258.

⁴² Kristy L. Valenti, “‘Stop, My Butt Hurts!’ - The Yaoi Invasion” in *The Comics Journal* Issue 269, 2005 at http://archives.tcj.com/269/e_yaoi.html, accessed 10 June 2009.

as a means of making her leave, yanking him into a hug and murmuring into his ear: ‘He’s with me. Aren’t you? ... I think his name’s Shuichi. But it doesn’t really matter now, does it, baby? ... Now take it easy, just take it easy. You’re so stubborn, Shuichi. But that’s probably what I like the most about you... [to Shuichi] ... Play along or you’re dead.’⁴³

While purely comedic in nature, this interaction sets the background for future scenes regarding Yuki’s sexual dominance; Yuki is physically intimate with Shuichi only when it suits him to be. The more Yuki brushes Shuichi off, the more Shuichi clings to Yuki – yet it is usually always Yuki who initiates a kiss, or who cups Shuichi’s face in order to make Shuichi look up at him. Shuichi himself willingly acknowledges his own submissiveness when he abruptly turns up at Yuki’s house wanting to move in with him. When Yuki refuses, Shuichi attempts to convince Yuki that it would be worth it by exclaiming, ‘I’ll clean, do the laundry, and cook!’⁴⁴ In the original manga, this conversation is extended further: ‘I’ll clean your ears and give you shoulder rubs! And when the lights go out, we’ll play Master and Servant!’⁴⁵

In *Loveless*, Soubi wastes no time in letting the audience know which of the characters is both physically and emotionally in control of the relationship. As Ritsuka glances uncertainty upwards at Soubi’s missing cat ears, the older man calmly informs him, ‘I am an earless grownup, but it’s okay. I won’t do anything.’ He then pulls an unsuspecting Ritsuka forward and kisses him, stating, ‘We now have to form a bond stronger than any bond between two people ... I will take you

⁴³ *Gravitation* (2000), Episode 1.

⁴⁴ *Gravitation* (2000), Episode 4.

⁴⁵ Murakami Maki, *Gravitation* (California, Tokyopop, 2004), Volume 1, Chapter 10.

down.⁴⁶ In the same episode, in answer to a question from Ritsuka, Soubi tells him that he will eventually take Ritsuka's own ears – the stark symbol of any given character's virginity within the series – but only when he is 'a little more grown up.' One has to wonder whether Soubi would say the same thing were Ritsuka not only twelve years old, in comparison to Soubi's twenty.

Nevertheless, he is constantly embracing, kissing, and petting Ritsuka, whispering over and over again that he loves him. Ritsuka's reaction is typically a blushing and flustered one, while yelling at Soubi not to say such things. In one of the most implicitly sexual scenes in the series, Soubi persuades an unwilling Ritsuka to pierce Soubi's ears: 'I want you to penetrate it. Isn't it a pretty ear? I want you to drive the needle in and make me yours ... the pain will be the proof of the bond between us.'⁴⁷ Deeply flushed and breathing heavily during the act and in the moments afterwards, Ritsuka closes his eyes exhaustedly as Soubi kisses him comfortingly on the forehead. Both visually and on a psychological level, this act is essentially a sex scene without the sex.



Figure 22

Soubi convinces Ritsuka to pierce his ears.

⁴⁶ *Loveless* (2005), Episode 1.

⁴⁷ *Loveless* (2005), Episode 3.

Junjou Romantica, as by far the most explicit of the titles, features more overt and questionable sexual coercion on Usagi's behalf. Upon his first arrival to Usagi's apartment for a tutoring session, Misaki finds both Usagi's newly published book, as well a novel under another pen name, lying on a table. Curious, Misaki flicks through it to discover that it is an erotic boys love novel, in which one of the main characters is named Takahiro. Shocked and angry, Misaki rushes up to Usagi's bedroom and loudly confronts a sleeping Usagi from the doorway, causing the author to wake up in a bad mood. After listening to Misaki rant about the use of his brother's name in Usagi's novel and telling him to 'Go find some other guy! Any man'll do anyway, right?', Usagi drags Misaki into the room by the wrist, throws him onto the bed, and proceeds to molest him: 'Any man will do, right? You said it yourself.' From behind, Usagi slides a hand up Misaki's jacket and then down his pants, while using his other hand to pin Misaki down by twisting his wrist behind his back. Misaki, gasping and clutching at the sheets beneath him, is implied to have ejaculated as Usagi steps back and smirks, licking his thumb: 'That was fast.'⁴⁸

⁴⁸ *Junjou Romantica* (2008), Episode 1.



Figure 23

Usagi molests an unsuspecting Misaki.

Usagi's sexual advances only gain in momentum and enthusiasm throughout the rest of the series, and because Misaki adamantly refuses to admit that he is in love, or that he actually enjoys Usagi's physical attentions, he usually pleads for Usagi to stop or else attempts – sometimes sincerely, at other times half-heartedly – to escape from the situation. For the most part, Usagi completely ignores this behaviour. When, in the same episode, the two agree to live together so that Takahiro can move to Osaka with his fiancée, the final scene is of Misaki being assaulted on the couch, his protestations and cries for help echoing in the audience's ears. Like *Gravitation*, these types of scenes in *Junjou Romantica* are humorous in tone, or sometimes dramatically romantic. That Misaki would essentially be a victim of rape in most of them were this a real-life relationship – as symbolised by the fact that almost every time they have sex, Misaki loses all his clothing while Usagi keeps some, or most of, his own – is a fact that is both at once acknowledged and disregarded by its viewers, most of whom are expected to already have an understanding of the conventions of the genre.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ 'Junjou Romantica Episode 1 – BL bordering on Yaoi' (<http://www.thatanimeblog.com/index.php/2008/04/junjou-romantica-episode-1-%E2%80%93-bl-bordering-on-yaoi/>), accessed 08 October 2010.

The Neo-Harlequin Romance

In 1998, British authors Helen McCarthy and Jonathan Clements published *The Erotic Anime Movie Guide*. The chapter entitled 'Pretty Boys in Pain' is a critique on the boys love phenomenon that was gradually becoming more mainstream in the West at the time, and reflects their theories on 'angst-ridden stories of good looking young men locked in passionate but ultimately doomed romances.'⁵⁰ Researchers have cited the manifestation of deep-seated hatred for her male counterparts, and an expression of woman's suffering at the hands of men and a patriarchal society, as two of the possible reasons for angst being so prevalent a theme in boys love anime and manga titles.⁵¹

However, such reasoning does not seem to account for the sheer popularity of angst as a genre of a storytelling. A *bishounen* is, by his very definition, beautiful, but that beauty is made twice as compelling if he is also broken. A physically bruised and battered *uke*, or psychologically damaged *seme*, changes what is otherwise simply a pretty boy into something far more marketable: a pretty boy who is vulnerable. Pain acts as a means of breaking down barriers between two main characters, allowing them to experience the closeness of empathy through shared hurt, as well as the closeness of one character providing healing for the other. To nurture and be nurtured by an object of desire is something that boys love specialises in, to the point where the amount of angst becomes an advertisement – 'angst ridden stories of beautiful boys in love' – because, as

⁵⁰ 'Topic: Yaoi and Boys Love' (http://www.akibaangels.com/articles/06_2006/yaoiandBL.php), accessed 10 June 2009.

⁵¹ 'Drawn to It' (<http://www.nerve.com/content/drawn-to-it>), accessed 02 October 2010.

reviewers have explicitly pointed out, 'In the world of shoujo manga, the more angst you have, the better.'⁵²

This is not something unique to boys love or anime; the pages of any Mills & Boon or Brontë story paradigm are equally as filled with beautifully-scarred characters and over-the-top angst. However, where an audience might eschew a Harlequin romance for being unfeminist, they can enjoy the strikingly similar narrative pattern of a boys love manga without feeling as though they have sold out their gender. Boys love allows female viewers all the emotional satisfaction of a *Twilight* novel, but with none of the guilt: there is no shame in identifying with the main character – a weak and powerless (but lovely) figure – because that character is not a representation of the viewer's own gender.

Neither *Gravitation*, *Loveless*, nor *Junjou Romantica* is an exception to the angst-craving of boys love fans. Both main characters of *Gravitation* are physically and mentally tested to breaking point; Shuichi is beaten and raped after a rival band hires some thugs and threatens him with debasing Yuki's reputation as an author, and Yuki internally blames himself for the incident, deepening his self-loathing. Meanwhile, Yuki himself has a dark past that still haunts him. As a teenager he is depicted as having a bright and easy-going personality, much like Shuichi himself, and befriends his tutor, Kitazawa, while living in New York. When the then-sixteen year old Yuki visits him one night, a drunken Kitazawa accepts ten dollars from a pair of thugs in exchange for the use of Eiri's body. Yuki manages to snatch a gun from one of the thugs and, in a panic, shoots and kills his mentor.

⁵² Insanity Team, *Prisoner of the Immortal: A Boy's Love Graphic Novel* (Maryland, Yaoi Press, 2006), back cover; 'Hot Gimick GN 1 – Review – Anime News Network' (<http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/review/hot-gimmick-gn-1>), accessed 02 October 2010.

Only the tutor's dead body is shown in any visual sense, although when recounting the incident to Shuichi, Yuki tells him, 'I killed them all.'⁵³

Yuki's current personality is a result of the Kitazawa incident and the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder he subsequently suffered, and he resists Shuichi's advances primarily because he is afraid to be hurt a second time by someone he loves. Yuki eventually overcomes many of his mental issues and is able to find some measure of happiness with Shuichi, but it is the angst of the piece that makes *Gravitation* so popular with its fans: 'a lot of Gravi is humorous crack, but it also has its fair share of angst. This work is a genre staple for a reason. Poor Yuki.'⁵⁴

Loveless also has its fair share of angst, from abusive families to sadistic and forced relationships. Ritsuka's mother, an emotionally and mentally weak woman, has a tenuous grip on reality and suffers from hallucinations. She blames Ritsuka's personality change following Seimei's death to be the reason why Seimei 'left', and often beats her son while demanding to know what he did to her 'real Ritsuka.'⁵⁵ Ritsuka must also deal with the pain and confusion at the loss of his brother, whose corpse was found burnt and sitting in Ritsuka's classroom seat at his old school. Furthermore, although it is clear that Ritsuka deeply admired and even idolised Seimei, his brother was not the person Ritsuka believed him to be. Ritsuka claims that Seimei was a kind and gentle person who always protected

⁵³ *Gravitation* (2000), Episode 7.

⁵⁴ 'The best angsty yaoi/BL manga' (<http://www.amazon.com/best-angsty-yaoi-BL-manga/lm/RDPV6S0I1WY8P>), accessed 10 June 2009.

⁵⁵ *Loveless* (2005), Episode 3.

him, particularly against their mother's outbursts, but Soubi appears almost frightened of Seimei.

Other Fighter/Sacrifice teams believe Seimei to have been inherently cruel, claiming that Seimei refused to get close to anyone and going so far as to decline to even eat in the presence of others. Soubi's friend and roommate Kio bitterly resents Seimei for the apparently abusive manner in which he treated Soubi, and upon learning Ritsuka's last name, exclaims, 'Soubi, you're going to serve under an Aoyagi again? If you want to be tortured, I'll do it for you until you won't be able to stand up!'⁵⁶ Although Ritsuka vehemently denies that Seimei was anything other than a loving brother, he later experiences flashbacks that show a more disturbed, obsessive side of Seimei, including some behaviour towards Ritsuka that borders on the incestuous. Soubi himself battles his own inner demons; as Seimei's past Fighter half, he fought by Seimei's side for some time, while Soubi's former teacher at Septimal Moon abused him both physically and sexually, repeatedly whipping him to increase his tolerance for pain and eventually taking his ears.

Although *Junjou Romantica* does not contain instances of physically abusive relationships as in *Gravitation* and *Loveless*, the main couple still has plenty of angst with which to work through. Misaki, although often childish and brash, is revealed to be a person who simply worries about causing any kind of trouble for anyone else. He still blames himself for his parents' death, believing that they would not have sped in the rain and crashed if he had not asked them to hurry

⁵⁶ Ibid.

home. Now in love with Usagi, his worst fear is being thought of as a bother by him: ‘The fact remains that my presence will cause trouble for Usagi-san ... That is unacceptable. If people are troubled because of me, that’s completely unacceptable. Especially if it’s Usagi-san!’⁵⁷

On the other hand, Usagi goes through the pain of losing an oblivious Takahiro to marriage after nearly a decade of unrequited love, and when a sobbing Misaki confronts him about it, Usagi finally admits to the pain that he has kept hidden until now. He hugs Misaki to him and leans on his shoulder, telling the younger male, ‘I’d never let anyone else see me looking so pathetic, except for you.’⁵⁸ No Longer on speaking terms with his family, Misaki is the only person to whom Usagi will reveal his true self.

Jealousy and possessiveness is another common staple concept in many boys love titles. Seen as a way in which the *seme*, or less often the *uke*, can prove the depth of their love, this is usually a physical rather than a vocal gesture, and acts as an extension of their protectiveness. As in the case of pseudo-rape scenarios, the lengths to which some characters will go in order to make these feelings evident would be questionable at best in any true to life relationship, and their actions tend to be melodramatic in the extreme, if not bordering on violent.

Indeed, the behaviour which boys love characters exhibit as a result of jealousy over their loved ones, whether they admit to being jealous or not, can be viewed as the next logical sequence to sexual dominance. To physically possess someone

⁵⁷ *Junjou Romantica* (2008), Episode 8.

⁵⁸ *Junjou Romantica* (2008), Episode 1.

is an act of lust, but to emotionally possess them transforms the relationship into one of love over simple desire. In other words, while the rape or sexual coercion acts as the initiator of any given boys love relationship, the will for one character to seize the heart of another is what makes that coercion not only permissible but appropriate; a way in which the aggressor can show that he truly does care. In turn, a further dimensional layer is added to the character interaction – an emotional cat-and-mouse game resulting in sexual frustration, which viewers can appreciate and respond to.

For example, *Gravitation*'s Shuichi cannot seem to restrain himself from letting not only Yuki but the whole world know about his relationship with the novelist after a young woman who claims to be Yuki's fiancée appears on the scene. This prompts Shuichi to publicly display just how much he loves Yuki by screaming through the microphone in the middle of his band's first big live concert, 'Yuki is MINE!'⁵⁹ Yuki is typically abrasive and uncompromising in response to Shuichi's clingy nature, yet even he finds himself responding more honestly after realising that his resentment when Shuichi turns down his offer of collaborating on some lyrics is borne out of jealousy rather than pride: 'I want to be your main man. Don't give that position to anything or anyone else. I want to be number one on Shuichi's charts ... I understand that singing is the most important thing in your life. I thought helping you with your lyrics would make you happy ... and make me a part of your art.'⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *Gravitation* (2000), Episode 5.

⁶⁰ Murakami, Volume 11, Chapter 47; Murakami, Volume 12, Chapter 50.

Soubi often insists on waiting for Ritsuka outside of school in *Loveless*, much to the consternation of Ritsuka's class teacher, Hitomi. Soubi is later rude to her, calling her 'immature' and 'childish' (alluding to the fact that she is twenty-three and still has her ears), and seems to take a deliberately cruel pleasure in tormenting her with degrading sexual connotations the few times they meet.⁶¹ Whilst seemingly unlinked to Ritsuka directly, these interactions can be viewed as a demonstration of Soubi's own insecurities. Soubi is intensely in love with Ritsuka and wishes to both utterly possess and be possessed by him, and while Ritsuka's teacher remains a virgin, Soubi cannot give his ears to Ritsuka, which were implied to have been forcibly taken from him by his own ex-teacher.

Junjou Romantica is once again the title in which jealousy is the most obvious. When it seems as if a male classmate, Sumi Keiichi, is interested in Misaki, Usagi's possessiveness causes him to overreact even when Misaki is talking on the phone to Sumi, and he angrily yanks the phone cord from the wall. After his refusal to allow Misaki to socialise with Sumi outside of University hours culminates in a fight between the couple, Usagi admits his jealousy, and tells him as they are having sex for the first time, 'Misaki... don't let anyone else touch you. All you need to do... is choose me.'⁶²

A scant two episodes later in the series, it is Misaki who has a fit of jealousy after he is introduced to Usagi's female editor, Aikawa, and automatically assumes that the two are in a relationship. As Aikawa fixes Usagi's tie, Misaki seethes to himself: 'Stop that. You can't! Get your hands off him! Don't let her touch you!

⁶¹ *Loveless* (2005), Episode 4.

⁶² *Junjou Romantica* (2008), Episode 2.

The only one who can touch you is...'⁶³ Rather than being angry at this bout of irrational resentment upon finding out about it, Usagi seems pleased that Misaki was thinking this way. 'It's because you're in love with me', he explains, before having sex with him. Like rape, jealousy and possessiveness is another way in which love is physically manifested – even if the characters don't quite make the connection at the time.

Gender, Sexuality and Identity

The relationships that the main characters share in any given boys love title is made both more and less realistic by the fact that the worlds in which they reside seems to be lacking in female characters. In an anime universe where young women – particularly young single women – appear to be extremely scarce, it makes sense that young male characters are more easily able to be attracted to each other rather than with a member of the opposite sex, and it is to be expected that female leading characters are all but non-existent in such a genre. However, the absence of females even as background extras are sometimes so conspicuous as to be laughable; titles such as *Sukisho!* and *Gakuen Heaven*, which do not so much as reference a single person of the fairer sex by name, inhabit their own unique cosmos even when supposedly set in modern-day Japan. Boys love females are often disdained or despised by many fans because they are viewed as annoyances to the main relationships; as a result, those females that are present within boys love titles are usually either minor characters whose existence has little consequence to the plot, or else are demonised in terms of personality.

⁶³ *Junjou Romantica* (2008), Episode 4.

The only two women who receive any real screen time in *Gravitation* are Mika – Yuki’s beautiful but cold and somewhat meddling sister – and Ayaka – Yuki’s family-arranged fiancée until the latter half of the anime. Mika at first attempts to use Shuichi, telling him to convince Yuki to talk to his estranged father for her, and later states that Shuichi knows ‘far too little about Yuki Eiri.’⁶⁴ However, her character is one that can be viewed as ‘safe’ by the audience; not only she is not only Yuki’s older sister, but she is also married to Yuki’s long-time acquaintance, Tohma, and has been for three years prior to the beginning of the series. Moreover, whilst Mika is at first disapproving of her brother’s relationship with Shuichi, she is a sympathetic character because she genuinely wants the best for Yuki and understands that Shuichi brings him happiness.

For her part, Ayaka is at first jealous of Shuichi, and upon finding out that he and Yuki are in a relationship, slaps him and orders him to stay away from Yuki: ‘Your relationship has no future. If you continue to see him, you will only hurt each other ... do not ever go near him again.’⁶⁵ However, she later decides not to go ahead with the marriage, stating, ‘Eiri-san would not be happy even if he married me. I want Eiri-san to be the happiest person in the world.’⁶⁶ Following this, Ayaka appears in the anime only briefly, and only as a love interest of Shuichi’s best friend and band mate, Hiro. A third female character named Noriko – the loud-mouthed and pushy keyboardist of Nittle Grasper – is given no characterisation at all in the anime, and appears solely as a side-character whose primary interest is in performing as a part of the band. Little is known about her other than that she has a husband and a six-year old daughter.

⁶⁴ *Gravitation* (2000), Episode 6.

⁶⁵ *Gravitation* (2000), Episode 7.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Loveless might be seen as a more sophisticated boys love title, in that the ratio of male-to-female characters is far more balanced than the norm. Hitomi, Ritsuka's shy but well-meaning school teacher, is painfully aware of her own sexual innocence, and is visibly embarrassed and distressed whenever she is teased about her lack of experience. As previously mentioned, Soubi's reaction to her character can be seen to stem from jealousy, although as a young and single woman, his harsh criticism of her may also be a result of her desire to involve herself more in Ritsuka's home-life; ironically, like any female boys love fan, Soubi's instinctive response to what he sees as intrusive behaviour is extremely negative.

Yuiko, Ritsuka's classmate and only real friend other than Soubi, is another exception to the boys love rule. She is bubbly, ditzy, kind-hearted, and overtly feminine, with several characters commenting on her height and unusually large breasts. Although Yuiko quickly develops a one-sided obsession with Ritsuka, her presence is largely viewed as unthreatening; Ritsuka is eventually drawn in by her warmth, but shows no interest in pursuing any kind of sexual relationship with her. Yuiko, despite her scatterbrained nature, is aware that Ritsuka is living a life completely separate from her own, and that she is unable to be a part of it. At least on an unconscious level, she realises that all is not well with Ritsuka outside of school hours, and chooses to respect his privacy so that she can remain friends with him.

Doctor Katsuko, the psychologist whom Ritsuka has meetings with once a week, is simply referred to by Ritsuka as '*sensei*', and her first name is not known. Her

role in the anime is as a side-character only, while in the manga her appearance is limited further to the first two volumes. Katsuko's romantic interest in Ritsuka can largely be viewed as light comedic relief, such as when she snaps a pen in two after mistakenly believing that Ritsuka had kissed Yuiko while riding a Ferris wheel. These scenes are not present at all in the manga, although in both formats of the series, she makes a point of telling Ritsuka that she likes him a lot – most likely in order to reinforce in Ritsuka the idea that, despite his mother's actions, Ritsuka is fine the way he is.

The only other females who appear in the *Loveless* universe are antagonists, and do not directly threaten the relationship between Soubi and Ritsuka. Ritsuka's mother, for obvious reasons, is no sexual risk, although given her physical abuse towards Ritsuka, she is not portrayed as a likeable character. Nagisa, a young and easily angered woman who works for Septimal Moon creating Fighter/Sacrifice pairs who are unable to feel physical pain, does not play any significant role within the story. Finally, Kouya and Yamato, a Fighter/Sacrifice pair created by Nagisa, are lovers who both lose their ears to each other. In a blatant reference to the nature of their relationship, both of their Fighter/Sacrifice markings – a zero with a line through the middle – are on the same place: their right breast. The couple disappear after battling Soubi and Ritsuka, stating that they will 'die' together and be 'reborn' as themselves rather than as Nagisa's tools.⁶⁷

The only three females that make an appearance as named characters within *Junjou Romantica* are Usagi's editor, Aikawa, Usagi's cousin (and, for a very

⁶⁷ *Loveless* (2005), Episode 10.

short time, hopeful fiancée), Kaoruko, and Takahiro's wife, Manami. In contrast to her feminine and put-together appearance, Aikawa becomes extremely violent towards Usagi whenever he misses a publication deadline. A flashback from Usagi's point of view depicts her throttling him after he faints from exhaustion while working on a manuscript; while his other editors panic and tell her to call an ambulance, she grabs Usagi by the shirt and attempts to wake him up, screaming, 'Sensei, where's the next instalment? I need the next instalment of the story! Does this look like a good time to be collapsed on the floor?! Hurry up and give me that manuscript, you piece of shit!'⁶⁸ In a further comedic twist, Aikawa turns out to be a *yaoi* fangirl herself, and subtly supports Usagi's relationship with Misaki from the sidelines. Usagi eventually informs Misaki: 'All those kinky plays that 'Akihiko' does to 'Misaki' in the novels ... they're Aikawa's personal requests.'⁶⁹

Kaoruko, who only makes a brief appearance in the anime, has no real interest in Usagi at all, and demands to marry him only as a means of escaping a marriage to Usagi's older brother, Haruhiko. When Usagi blankly refuses, and after receiving encouragement from Misaki, Kaoruko returns to England to follow her dreams of becoming a pastry chef. Manami, as the third female character, acts solely as a background figure, and nothing about her personality is made clear. To all appearances, she is very happy as Takahiro's wife, and eventually begins a family with him.

Perhaps as a way of compensating for the lack of strong female characterisation in boys love, male characters are often depicted as ultra-feminine, and not merely in

⁶⁸ *Junjou Romantica* (2008), Episode 4.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

terms of their natural bodily appearance. Cross-dressing, while something that may deter an audience unfamiliar with anime and manga conventions in general, has been a reasonably common factor within the medium for decades, with both male and female characters. The theme dates back at least as far as the 1954 manga series *Ribbon no Kishi* (literally *Knight of the Ribbon*, but otherwise known as *Princess Knight*), which was adapted into an anime series in 1967: in order to inherit the throne at a time when women are ineligible to do so, Princess Sapphire must pretend to be a male prince – a deception which begins as soon as she is born. The theme of female cross-dressing has been prevalent in a number of other manga and anime titles since then, most notably in *Revolutionary Girl Utena*.

However, the number of male characters who assume female roles and identities has become markedly more common today, which has been pinned down to the gradual popularisation of the otaku subculture in Japan.⁷⁰ This has in turn resulted in trends and characteristics within anime and manga which were formerly marginal, but have today become more pronounced. Because a particular emphasis has been put on satisfying the interests of teen and young adult women otaku over recent years, manga and anime titles need no longer ‘get away’ with including a male character that looks, acts or dresses like a girl, when this element is included precisely because of the fact that they are targeted towards a female audience.

⁷⁰ ‘AnimeNation Anime News Blog – Blog Archive – AskJohn: Why Are Cross-Dressing Male Characters Becoming More Common?’ (<http://www.animenation.net/blog/2008/02/01/ask-john-why-are-cross-dressing-male-characters-becoming-more-common/>), accessed 10 June 2009.

This is doubly true for boys love titles, since effeminate male characters are already viewed as the norm; it takes only a small push for characters who were implicitly feminine to begin with to take on an unquestionably feminine role – often due to an overly-convenient excuse such as being tricked into cosplaying, or conforming to school customs, as in the likes of *Sukisho!* and *Princess Princess*. Oppliger has explored the fact that in older examples of males adopting female roles, the transformation from male into female is emasculating and done largely for comical effect, such as in *I My Me! Strawberry Eggs*, where main character Amawa Hibiki cross-dresses in order to gain a teaching job at an all-female school. However, in more recent anime examples, the transformation from male to female is presented as a liberating, fulfilling change in which the male ‘explores or unleashes his own feminine characteristics.’⁷¹ In this way, cross-dressing is no longer emasculating or even necessarily comically absurd, but instead a means of discovering and embracing one’s ‘true’ personality.

Gravitation features three instances of male cross-dressing, the initial two of which occur in the same anime episode. After coming to the conclusion that Yuki only likes women, Shuichi meets Yuki at the music production studio wearing the traditional blue and white coloured school-girl sailor fuku. When Yuki walks rapidly away in exasperation, and possibly acute embarrassment, Shuichi runs after him yelling, ‘A defenceless girl is telling you to wait, dammit! And you call yourself a man?!’⁷² Shortly after this, Shuichi and Yuki’s fiancée meet and discuss Yuki’s marriage, and Shuichi appears at the marriage ceremony in her place, this time sporting a bright orange sundress and garish makeup. Unable not

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² *Gravitation* (2000), Episode 7.

to react to the humour in the situation, Yuki relents slightly in his cold attitude and tells him, ‘The sailor uniform looked better, cosplay boy.’ The third cross-dressing occasion occurs only in the manga, when Shuichi convinces Yuki to go out on a date with him. Under the reasoning that they will be otherwise be recognised by fans, Yuki allows Shuichi to pick out ‘disguises’, and is convinced into wearing a dress and wig complete with hair ribbons.



Figure 24

Shuichi chases after Yuki dressed in a sailor uniform.

Although there are no instances of cross-dressing in either *Loveless* or *Junjou Romantica*, there are certainly scenes in which Ritsuka and Misaki are either thought of as feminine by secondary characters, or else are caught up in situations that portray them in an undeniably feminine light. A classmate in the first episode of *Loveless* observes that Ritsuka is ‘pretty, like a girl’, and Ritsuka, despite all that is going on in his life, is nonetheless seen as having a strong sense of naïveté when it comes to dating, sex, and love.⁷³

⁷³ *Loveless* (2005), Episode 3.

This is a similar fact in Misaki's case, who is innocent enough to ask himself why his feelings have changed towards Usagi after having sex for the first time: 'It is because we did... that?'⁷⁴ In one episode, he falls asleep after smelling and curling up with one of Usagi's shirts that is left lying around while Usagi is out with Aikawa on what Misaki assumes is a date. After being 'kidnapped' by Usagi's older brother in the second season, Misaki attempts to escape by climbing out of the window using a knotted white bed sheet. Although Misaki himself proudly notes that it looks 'just like an escape scene out of a manga or a movie', the scene is more reminiscent of a princess escaping from her tower in a fairy tale.⁷⁵ This comparison is made even more perceptible after the sheet rips, causing Misaki to fall and be caught by Usagi, who carries him bridal-style to a waiting car.

Conversely, despite the actions of those characters who do exhibit overtly feminine behaviour, gender boundaries as viewed by other characters are very rarely questioned. Ritsuka is not teased at school for being pretty, because he does not speak, dress, or behave in an archetypal homosexual or 'camp' manner. Misaki fits in well enough at college for similar reasons, and his relationship with Usagi is never called into play save by those characters with their own personal agendas. Indeed, despite the homoerotic relationships that exist in each anime, the only character in any of these titles to really question his love based on gender is Misaki – and then only as an excuse in order to avoid admitting his own feelings, either to himself or to Usagi.

⁷⁴ *Junjou Romantica* (2008), Episode 2.

⁷⁵ *Junjou Romantica* (2008), Episode 15.

There is no mention at all from either Soubi or Ritsuka about their gender in relation to their homoeroticism, and the only time Shuichi voices his uncertainty about the nature of his relationship with Yuki, his best friend Hiro tells him, ‘You moron! If you love someone, then what difference does it make if they're a guy or a girl? Just be happy.’⁷⁶ Thereafter, neither Shuichi nor any other main character seems to have a problem with the fact that Shuichi is dating another male, harking back to one of the fundamental rules of boys love: a male can be in love with another male, but that does not make him gay – merely attracted to an individual though the powers of fate.⁷⁷ Indeed, perhaps the ultimate argument for boys love existing purely as fantasy is that homophobia very rarely becomes an issue, and usually may as well not exist in the universe the characters inhabit. As has been previously explored, the fact that ‘real’ gay sexual identity is not represented within the genre is not cause for a loss in audience numbers, but rather adds to the fans’ enjoyment.⁷⁸

Having enjoyed select but widespread popularity across Asia, boys love is now replicating that popularity within a Western female fanbase; a fact that is unsurprising, given that boys love is, first and foremost, a form of romance – a genre which has proved to be universal in popularity and not limited to country or race. It must also not be forgotten that boys love has tapped into a pre-existing readership for slash in its Western viewers and readers; a form of fanfiction that

⁷⁶ *Gravitation* (2000), Episode 2.

⁷⁷ Unlike in many traditional Western male/male stories, where only the subordinate partner has been regarded as gay, this does not depend on who is dominant in the relationship. In fact, since it is very often the dominant partner of the couple in boys love who seems the most secure in his choice of sexual partners, an argument could perhaps even be made for the opposite in some regards.

⁷⁸ Levi, McHarry, Pagliassotti, p. 219.

was dedicated to male/male homoerotic relationships many years prior to the anime becoming a cult phenomenon within America.

In *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*, Japanese professor Iwabuchi Koichi argues that whilst some global commodities retain negative connotation with their country of origin, such as the association of McDonalds with the United States, others, while still being associated with their country of origin, are ‘culturally odourless.’⁷⁹ Boys love, essentially a genre of fantasy, is not bound to one specific culture, and can be enjoyed by both Japanese and non-Japanese alike for this very reason.

In many cases, anime and manga can be seen as a prime example of this, with boys love being one of the clearest cases in point. Depictions of gender here cannot be pinned down to any kind of true boundary, least of all a cultural one, and it is partially for this very reason that boys love continues to foster an extensive fandom, both in Japan and abroad. Evidently, the sex takes care of the rest: ‘A little of the foreplay is important too, but... am I breaching rules by saying this next sentence? I read *yaoi* to get turned on.’⁸⁰ Whether or not similar codes and conventions can be applied to female homosexuality in anime, and if they are applied in the same way, is dealt with in the next chapter of this thesis: ‘The Great Lesbian Soap Opera: Girls on Girls on Film’.

⁷⁹ Iwabuchi Koichi, *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (North Carolina, Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 27-28.

⁸⁰ ‘Drawn to It’ (<http://www.nerve.com/content/drawn-to-it>), accessed 02 October 2010.

Chapter Six: The Great Lesbian Soap Opera – Girls on Girls on Film

‘Why is yaoi so much more popular than yuri?’

‘Because there are more straight fourteen-year-old girls than lesbian fourteen-year-old girls.’¹

Two magical warriors balance maintaining their relationship with saving the world from destruction by evil forces. A dualist determined to become a prince wins a young woman’s hand in a modern-day yet surrealist sword fight. And all across Japan, a bevy of high school girls fall softly and endearingly in love with each other. Sexual interaction between two women as male fantasy has been well-documented, and like any other form of media, anime and manga gave long since catered to this fantasy by creating female-female erotica of all varieties and kinks imaginable. However, when built around an emotional intimacy first and foremost, titles primarily featuring both implicit and explicit lesbian relationships cease to function as simply erotica or even necessarily physically sexual in nature, and instead become a part of a unique genre of its own: girls love.

The focus of this chapter is on representations of that kind of emotional intimacy between women, and how it differs from character interaction within explicit lesbian-themed anime titles. Although the same element of fantasy in boys love

¹ Shoujo Arts/Yuricon *Onna!* convention, Yuri panel conducted by Erica Friedman, audience question & answer session, Tokyo, October 2005.

sometimes applies to girls love, the conflict between feminist underpinnings and male fantasies of lesbian sex in girls love ensures that the genre, while still being made up of representative ideals, does not usually take this to the same extreme level as its counterpart does. However, as with male homosexuality in boys love, it does separate lesbian representation and lesbian identity, as will be explored in depth later in the discussion. Using *Maria-sama ga Miteru* (2004), *Strawberry Panic!* (2006), and *Kashimashi: Girl Meets Girl* (2006), I investigate who the audience for girls love is, what similarities and differences are apparent between it and boys love, and how the genre uses its symbolism and narrative tropes to tell a story.

Girls Love and the Romantic Connection

Like its boys love counterpart, the terms by which female-targeted lesbian-centered anime and manga titles are referred to are numerous. The *wasei-eigo* term girls love (literally ‘Made-in-Japan English’), sometimes abbreviated as GL, is used in both Japan and in the West to denote the depiction of attraction between women within the genre, regardless of whether this attraction is romantically platonic or overtly sexual.² The word *yuri* is likewise used natively and overseas with the same meaning, although beginning in North America and now often adopted by Western fans in general, ‘*yuri*’ has come to refer to only the most explicit end of the girls love spectrum and is deemed chiefly a form of pornography.³ Following the similar pattern of the terms *shounen-ai* and *yaoi*,

² Fran Martin, Peter Jackson, Mark McLelland, Audrey Yue, *AsiaPacifQueer: Rethinking Genders and Sexualities* (Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 2008), p. 53.

³ ‘What is Yuri?, an essay by Erica Friedman’ (<http://www.yuricon.org/essays/whatisyuri.html>), accessed 23 June 2009.

international fans coined the term *shoujo-ai* in order to describe non-explicit sexual content within girls love genre.⁴

In the same way that the meaning of the term *shounen-ai* differs in understanding between Japanese and Western culture, *shoujo-ai* has also seen a separation of language usage, and in Japan, *shoujo-ai* today tends to denote paedophilia, akin to the term *lolicon* or Lolita complex in implication.⁵ Directly translating as ‘lily’, *yuri* is a relatively common feminine Japanese name, and its first documented usage outside of this context occurred in 1976, when Itou Bungaku, the editor of a magazine geared primarily towards gay men called *Barazoku* (‘Rose Tribe’), first used the term *yurizoku* (‘lily tribe’) in reference to female readers in the title of a column of letters called *Yurizoku no Heya* (‘Lilly Tribe’s Room’).⁶ Whilst not all women whose letters appeared in this short-lived column were lesbians, many certainly were, and an association with the term *yuri* gradually developed⁷. Many *doujinshi* circles also began incorporating the character name Yuri or Yuriko into lesbian-themed pornography during this time, although the meaning of the word has more or less completely detached itself from its original pornographic connotations since then, and has come to describe more of an intimate emotional connection between women.⁸

⁴ ‘Girls Love – Television Tropes & Idioms’ (<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/GirlsLove?from=Main.Yuri>), accessed 23 June 2009.

⁵ ‘Bambooweb: Shoujo-ai’ (<http://www.bambooweb.com/articles/s/h/Shoujo-ai.html>), accessed 23 June 2009.

⁶ Martin, Jackson, McLelland, Yue, p. 52.

⁷ Martin, Jackson, McLelland, Yue, pp. 52-53.

⁸ ‘Erica Friedman Interview – Interview With Yuri Manga Publisher and Founder of YuriCon’ (<http://manga.about.com/od/mangaartistswriters/a/EFriedman.htm>), accessed 23 June 2009.

In a further similarity to boys love, girls love is widely understood to exist as a genre primarily made by and for female fans. When girls love began first appearing in the manga of the 1970s, it did so within *shoujo* manga, whose target audience is, as the name suggests, predominantly young women – usually between the ages of ten and twenty.⁹ Certain codes and conventions may have changed over time, but *shoujo* manga was and continues to be a demographic with a strong focus on human interactions and emotions, as well as romantic relationships in general. Although all but a handful of *shoujo* manga artists were male up until the mid-1960s – conventional job-opportunities for females during this time did not include becoming a comics author – increasingly large audiences for manga began emerging within Japan during this period.¹⁰

Between the late 1960s and early 1970s, a flood of female manga artists began transforming the genre, and manga's two main target demographics – *shounen* manga aimed at boys and *shoujo* manga aimed at girls – were firmly solidified over this relatively short phase in the industry.¹¹ Earlier *shoujo* manga almost always featured pre-adolescent girls as the heroines in order to match the age of their readers, and, unless the setting was one of fantasy, romantic love between the heroine and any other character was therefore an unspoken taboo.¹² However, as the average age of readership rose, the interests of *shoujo* manga inevitably also changed. Since the mid-1970s, *shoujo* manga has been created almost exclusively by women, and incorporates both the genres of girls love and boys love, as well as

⁹ U.S.-Japan Women's Center, *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal: Nichi-Bei Josei Jānaru. English Supplement* (California, U.S.-Japan Women's Center, 2002), p. 5.

¹⁰ Frenchy Lunning, *Mechademia 2: Networks of Desire* (Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2007), pp. 22-23.

¹¹ 'Shojo Manga: Girl Power!' (http://www.csuchico.edu/pub/cs/spring_06/feature_03.html), accessed 23 June 2009.

¹² 'Shojo: Facts, Discussion Forum, and Encyclopedia Article' (<http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Shojo>), accessed 23 June 2009.

other major anime and manga genres such as general romance, drama, magical-girl, and some forms of science-fiction and fantasy.¹³

Nonetheless, although girls love and boys love share some similar thematic concepts, their relative popularity is very different, particularly in terms of its Western audience. It is true that there is a slowly growing body of girls love themed material available in America and other parts of the Western world. A reasonable number of manga and anime titles at least implicitly and seriously deal with one or more female characters in a homosexual romantic relationship, or who harbour strongly romantic feelings towards other females (*Sailor Moon*, *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, *Read or Die*), while a smaller but still sizable number deal with more graphically overt girls love themes (*Kannazuki no Miko*, *Strawberry Panic!*, *Simoun*). Girls love anime and manga are not a rarity in Japan, but Japan does not have stores that concentrate solely on girls love material as those that cater to boys love fans do. Neither is there an existing girls love fan community big enough to sustain a localised assembly of specialty shops, cafés, and events as in the case of the former genre; boys love has a large and extremely devoted audience of female consumers, whereas girls love appears to lack such a loyal fan following.

The main reason for this has been attributed to the fact that although countless female anime and manga fans adore the slightly taboo, and therefore all the more enticing sensuality and ‘baroque’ romanticism of boys love, the themes explored

¹³ Paul Gravett, *Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics* (London, Laurence King Publishing, 2004), p. 81.

within girls love do not necessarily share a similar singular tone.¹⁴ Oppliger has compared the title *Maria-sama ga Miteru* with *Kannazuki no Miko*, noting that the former leans towards romantic drama, while the latter employs more overtly sexual content, along with sensationalistic and exploitive themes, in order to attract more male viewers alongside its female audience.¹⁵

Although explicitly sexual boys love material still caters to the same general audience that softer or more implicit boys love material does, there are very few overtly erotic girls love titles that are directly targeted to a chiefly female audience. It would be untrue to state that some female anime and manga fans, regardless of sexual orientation, do not enjoy watching or reading the more 'hardcore' girls love titles for their own sake, just as it would be untrue to claim that some male anime fans do not take pleasure in reading or watching those girls love titles that are much softer and less obvious in tone.

However, in examining the overall audience picture, it is clear that virtually all visually sexually explicit girls love content tends to function as wish fulfilment for male viewers, and hence exhibits a depiction of lesbian sexuality that is no more realistic than that of any Western girl-on-girl works of pornography. The audience of girls love is therefore a very fractured one, since commonly explored themes within the genre do not seem to consistently appeal to either a large female audience, nor to a large male audience.¹⁶ If boys love is considered to be a

¹⁴ 'AnimeNation Anime News Blog – Blog Archive – AskJohn: Could Yuri Become More Popular Than Yaoi in America?' (<http://www.animenation.net/blog/2008/05/16/ask-john-could-yuri-become-more-popular-than-yaoi-in-america/>), accessed 23 June 2009.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ 'Erica Friedman Interview – Interview With Yuri Manga Publisher and Founder of YuriCon' (<http://manga.about.com/od/mangaartistswriters/a/EFriedman.htm>), accessed 23 June 2009.

relatively small subculture in Japan, then girls love represents only a tiny niche within the general anime and manga fandom consciousness.

Past Narratives

The absence of large-scale popularity notwithstanding, girls love is not lacking in a firm basis in Japanese history. Among the first Japanese authors to produce works regarding love between women was Yoshiya Nobuko, a feminist novelist active in the Taisho and Showa periods of Japan. As one of modern Japan's most commercially successful and openly lesbian writers, Yoshiya specialised in serialised romance novels and adolescent girl's fiction, and was a pioneer for Japanese lesbian literature.¹⁷ Much of her work portrays female-female desire in an almost narcissistic way, and many of the relationships in her writing, particularly within her earlier works, depicts longing from afar, unrequited love, and unhappy endings. Yoshiya was also to become a huge influence on the Class S stories of the early twentieth century.¹⁸

A term used to refer specifically to strong emotional bonds between schoolgirls, these Class S narratives revolved around mutual crushes between senior and junior female students – also known as *senpai* and *kohai*; an essential element of Japanese seniority-based relationships – with the letter S being a possible abbreviation for ‘sister’, ‘*shoujo*’, ‘sex’, ‘*schöne*’ (German for ‘beautiful’), and

¹⁷ Martin B. Duberman, *A Queer World: The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (New York, City University of New York, 1997), p. 51.

¹⁸ ‘Famous GLTB – Yoshiya Nobuko’ (<http://andrejkoymasky.com/liv/fam/bioy1/yoshiya01.html>), accessed 23 June 2009.

‘escape’.¹⁹ In this sense, these stories parallel the tales of English boarding schools and innocent crushes developed between younger schoolgirls and their seniors, as authored by the likes of Angela Brazil and Elsie J. Oxenham. Such stories typically depicted lesbian attachments as emotionally intense yet platonic relationships which, in the case of Class S, were ultimately fated to end upon graduation, marriage, or death.

Outside of the fictional realm, this type of romance was typically seen as transitory; more a period of growth rather than of ‘true’ homosexual behaviour.²⁰ Regarded by many as normal, and by some as bordering upon the spiritual, these types of relationships were acceptable – so long as they remained confined to adolescence.²¹ It has been proposed that eight out of ten schoolgirls had been engaged in Class S-style relationships; a number no doubt assisted by the fact that the creation of female-only schools in Japan were on the rise during this period.²² By 1913, there were two-hundred and thirteen such school throughout the country.²³ However, as co-educational school gradually became more prominent, Class S relationships became more discreet, and in 1936, Class S stories themselves were banned by the Japanese government.

It must not be forgotten that it was during this era that Japan descended into political totalitarianism; the result of the transitory collapse of capitalism and the

¹⁹ Jennifer Ellen Robertson, *Takarazuka: Sexual Politics and Popular Culture in Modern Japan* (California, University of California Press, 1998), p. 68.

²⁰ Dollase Hiromi, ‘Early Twentieth Century Japanese Girls’ Magazine Stories: Examining Shoujo Voice?’ in *Hanamonogatari (Flower Tales)* 36, 2003, pp 724-755.

²¹ Robertson, p. 68.

²² ‘Yaoi: Redrawing Male Love’ (http://www.guidemag.com/temp/yaoi/a/mcharry_yaoi.html), accessed 23 June 2009; ‘Women-loving Women in Modern Japan, by Erin Subramian’ (http://www.yuricon.org/essays/women_loving_women.html), accessed 23 June 2009.

²³ Maeda Ai, James A. Fujii, *Text and the City: Essays on Japanese Modernity* (North Carolina, Duke University Press, 2004), p. 170.

menace of communism which gave rise to an ultra-nationalist outlook.²⁴ Real life same-sex relationships that crossed the boundary from the emotional to the physical – whether between men or between women – were regarded by society as perversions; a fact reflected in the tragic outcomes of many Class S stories, and something which sparked numerous double-suicides during this time.²⁵

Class S also had strong links to the Takarazuka Revue – the all-female musical theatre established in 1913, in which women play men romancing women playing other women in lavish, Broadway-style productions. A perfect example of conscious gender performativity as outlined by Butler, it was widely believed in the popular media of the time that the Takarazuka *otokoyaku* (the woman playing the masculine role) compelled women in Class S relationships to become *ome* (butch and femme) couples.²⁶ Perhaps surprisingly, the Revue was founded by male industrialist and politician Kobayashi Ichizo, who was then also the president of then-fledgling Hankyu Railways.²⁷ Given that the city of Takarazuka was the final station of the Hankyu line from Osaka and was already a popular tourist destination for its city and famous hot springs, Kobayashi believed that it was the ideal location to present a new attraction of some kind that would boost train ticket sales and draw in further business – and, as Western song and dance shows were steadily growing more popular, an all-female theatre group was thought of as an attraction that might be well-received by the general public.²⁸

²⁴ ‘Yaoi: Redrawing Male Love’ (http://www.guidemag.com/temp/yaoi/a/mcharry_yaoi.html), accessed 23 June 2009.

²⁵ William M. Tsutsui, *A Companion to Japanese History* (New Jersey, John Wiley and Sons, 2009), p. 378.

²⁶ Jennifer Robertson, ‘The Politics of Androgyny in Japan: Sexuality and Subversion in the Theater and Beyond’ in *American Ethnologist* 19, 1992, p. 427.

²⁷ Mark Schilling, *The Encyclopedia of Japanese Pop Culture* (Massachusetts, Weatherhill, 1997), p. 250.

²⁸ Robertson, p. 115.

Kobayashi was not wrong. At a time when public kissing was frowned upon, the fact that such scenes were implied but not acted out, and that both actors were unmarried women, meant that the plays were deemed risqué but not unacceptable.²⁹ The Revue had its first performance in 1914, and a decade later had become popular enough to gain its own indoor, two-level theatre in the city, named *Dai Gekijou* (Grand Theatre).³⁰ Today, the modern Takarazuka Theater in Tokyo is an elegant showplace, where the lighting, set designs and costumes are all extravagant and dramatic spectacles.³¹ Most of their plays are either Western-style musicals, or else stories that have been adapted from folktales of China and Japan – some from *shoujo* manga, although the stories themselves are not specifically focused on lesbian themes.³² The troupe currently performs for 2.5 million people each year, with tickets selling anywhere from between approximately forty and one hundred American dollars.³³

²⁹ 'Modern Japan – Entertainment – Takarazuka' (<http://www.japan-zone.com/modern/takarazuka.shtml>), accessed 23 June 2009.

³⁰ Robertson, p. 5.

³¹ Laurence Senelick, *The Changing Room: Sex, Drag and Theatre* (New York, Routledge, 2000), p. 345.

³² Robertson, p. 115. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Takarazuka Revue was also an inspiration for *Revolutionary Girl Utena*.

³³ Schilling, p. 250; 'Takarazuka Revue – Theatre Ticket Reservation Instructions' (<http://shoujo.tripod.com/takaraticketsreserve.html>), accessed 19 October 2010.



Figure 25

A promotional image for the Takarazuka Revue's 2008 production, *Dawn Wind*.

Critics have noted that, whilst on the surface, the Revue is an institution which is primarily intended to grant Japanese women freedom from social oppression, it in fact begun as the opposite, since the production office and corporate structure that controlled it was (and continues to be) 'in keeping with the patriarchal values' of the time.³⁴ However, although Takarazuka Revue is seen to embody the idea that its actresses become the ideal 'Good Wife, Wise Mother' – as coined in 1875 by Nakamura Masanao, a Japanese educator, Confucius scholar and leader of the Meiji Enlightenment – upon leaving the company, it is simultaneously understood to be a strong demonstration of progressive feminism.³⁵ For example, it is becomingly increasingly more common for women to stay in the company well

³⁴ Laurence Senelick, *Gender in Performance: The Presentation of Difference in the Performing Arts* (New England, University Press of New England, 1992), p. 51.

³⁵ Senelick, p. 342.

into their thirties and beyond the traditional limits of marriageable age for women in Japan.³⁶

Moreover, both in historical and contemporary times, the majority of Takarazuka Revue fans were and are female; a fact which many believe can be attributed to the perceived link of freedom from the society's conventional ideas of gender and sexuality that are imposed especially upon the female population, particularly through the actors who play the male roles and are therefore perceived as 'getting away with a male performance of power and freedom.'³⁷ Scholars such as Japanese-born Takie Sugiyama Lebra regard the Revue as informing a 'lesbian subcultural style', whilst *shoujo* manga and anime titles such as *Ouran High School Host Club* have depicted the Revue, tongue-in-cheek, as a breeding-ground of rampant lesbianism.³⁸

Girls love first began to appear as a more popular and accessible medium in the *shoujo* manga of the 1970s, presenting many of the characteristics found in the lesbian literature of the early twentieth century – including, but not limited to, those of the Class S genre.³⁹ These earlier girls love depictions generally featured a slightly older-looking, sophisticated and elegant woman, paired with a younger, fresh-faced and slightly awkward admirer. Any such couple might be forced to deal with some kind of division between their respective families, and become the root of a scandal once rumours of their relationship began to spread. The outcome

³⁶ Robertson, p. 66.

³⁷ Erica Stevens Abbitt, 'Androgyny and Otherness: Exploring the West Through the Japanese Performative Body' in *Asian Theatre Journal* 18, 2006, pp 249-256.

³⁸ Takie Sugiyama Lebra, *Japanese Social Organization* (Hawaii, University of Hawaii Press, 1992), p. 184.

³⁹ Martin, Jackson, McLelland, Yue, p. 53.

was most commonly a tragic one, with the elder of the pair dying at the conclusion of the story, perhaps due to some ill-fated sickness or accident.

This type of ending was very much a reflection of the general girls love manga style of the time, where a tragic ending was seen as something unavoidable.⁴⁰ Death prevented a relationship that, for both real-life social and fictionally dramatic reasons, was unable to develop past a certain age or phase. It acted as a form of containment, while also bringing to the story the type of romanticism that its audience could appreciate.

For example, the first known officially published manga involving a lesbian relationship, Ryoko Yamagishi's 1971 *Shiroi Heya no Futari* (*Our White Room*, or *Couple of the White Room*), follows two young women attending boarding school. The pair become close despite their initial disdain for each other, and when the school puts on a production of *Romeo and Juliet*, they are chosen to play the main roles. After the play, another girl sees the couple kissing in the woods and spreads malicious gossip of the pair about the school. The couple argue and eventually split up when they find it impossible to ignore these rumours, and months later, after the younger of the two realises that her lover has died after inciting her boyfriend to kill her, swears to keep on living, forever loveless and alone.

It is also within this period that *shoujo* manga began dealing with transsexualism and transvestism, usually simply by depicting the more dominant female

⁴⁰ Frederik L. Schodt, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* (California, Stone Bridge Press, 1996), p. 123.

characters as androgynous in appearance. This was at least partially inspired by the women who played male roles in the Takarazuka Revue (although the later example of Haruka and Michiru/Sailor Uranus and Sailor Neptune in the *Sailor Moon* metaseries is a prime case in point).⁴¹ However, these formulas started to weaken during the 1990s. At a time when anime and manga was seen by many to be facing something of a decline following the ‘Golden Age’ of the industry, audiences at home were being presented with several original and ground-breaking shows, and *shoujo* stories began to drift away from the tragic endings and typecast relationship dynamics.⁴² The Japanese bubble economy had seen a sudden collapse, yet the youth of Japan discovered a new-found freedom that was mirrored in the music, street-fashion, and other alternative pop culture movements of the day.



Figure 26

Sailor Moon's Michiru and Haruka.

The changes within the girls love genre stood side-by-side with titles that were heavily influenced by the immense popularity of *Sailor Moon* – the first

⁴¹ ‘Unlikely Explorers – Gender and Sexuality in Shoujo Manga’ (http://web.archive.org/web/20080212201602/http://www.matt-thorn.com/shoujo_manga/sexual_ambiguity/index.html), accessed 23 June 2009.

⁴² ‘Something Orange’ (<http://d.hatena.ne.jp/kaiken/20060828/p1>), accessed 23 June 2009.

mainstream manga and anime title to feature a positive portrayal of an understated, but openly lesbian, couple. Many of the faces behind the series went on to create *Revolutionary Girl Utena*; a *shoujo* series in which one of the main storylines focuses on an implicit lesbian relationship between the two main characters, as well as featuring at least two other unspoken female-female relationships.⁴³

The first magazines specifically targeted towards lesbians also made an appearance around this time, and usually contained sections featuring girls love manga among their articles. Male-targeted manga and anime likewise began to deal with lesbian themes in a more 'mature manner', with stories ranging from high school crushes to lesbian love and life, featuring varying degrees of sexual content depending on the style and audience.⁴⁴ It is widely understood to be at this point that lesbian-themed works began to be considered acceptable and more mainstream.⁴⁵ The later 1990s saw the creation of Oyuki Konno's *Maria-sama ga Miteru*, which by 2004 had become a girls love bestseller.⁴⁶

The turn of the millennium also saw the launching of the first magazines dedicated specifically to girls love manga, some of which appeared in male-targeted works of this period (although usually in combination with other genres,

⁴³ 'Erica Friedman's Guide to Yuri'

(<http://origin.www.afterellen.com/Print/2007/7/ericafriedmanguidetoyuri>), accessed 23 June 2009.

⁴⁴ 'Intersections: Celebrating Lesbian Sexuality: An Interview with Inoue Meimy, Editor of Japanese Erotic Lifestyle Magazine Carmilla'

(<http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue12/welker2.html>), accessed 23 June 2009.

⁴⁵ 'Women-loving Women in Modern Japan, by Erin Subramian'

(http://www.yuricon.org/essays/women_loving_women.html), accessed 23 June 2009.

⁴⁶ 'Manganews Forum – Yuri Week: Maria-sama ga Miteru and Yuri History'

(<http://www.manganews.net/forums/showthread.php?t=3629>), accessed 23 June 2009.

such as science-fiction and mecha).⁴⁷ These stories tend to focus more on the *moe* aspects of characters – the fetishizing of certain character types and their common characteristics, and a sometimes obsessive adoration of their innocence and cuteness – and making extensive use of fanservice techniques in order to appeal to their audience. Examples of these include *Kannazuki no Miko* (2004), *Kashimashi: Girl Meets Girl* (2004), and *Blue Drop* (2005), all of which include aspects of science-fiction and/or mecha within the main storyline.

Present Fiction

As in any genre, there are a number of underlying thematic similarities that act as a link between girls love titles. Although some of these themes are at times also a major or minor part of the boys love genre, they are usually dealt with in different ways and within a separate context; despite some of their parallels, girls love and boys love are far from formulaically identical. Using *Maria-sama ga Miteru* (*The Virgin Mary is Watching*), *Strawberry Panic!*, and *Kashimashi: Girl Meets Girl*, this chapter goes on to examine several common girls love themes, including the older sister/younger sister-type relationship; the exclusion of men; gender-switching; and feminine purity, which in itself is an extremely broad thematic element that covers symbolism ranging from nudity to flowers, music, and spiritual awareness.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ ‘Intersections: Celebrating Lesbian Sexuality: An Interview with Inoue Meimy, Editor of Japanese Erotic Lifestyle Magazine Carmilla’ (<http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue12/welker2.html>), accessed 23 June 2009.

⁴⁸ *Revolutionary Girl Utena* is another extremely successful anime involving girls love as a main theme. Because this title is to be used for later discussion on representations of incest, it was not analysed here – however, it would seem remiss not to mention it in this chapter, particularly as it has recently received a major reissue.

Maria-sama ga Miteru is considered by many to be a modern-day take of the Class S-style story, and follows a group of teenage girls attending an all-girls Catholic school in Tokyo.⁴⁹ The narrative is intensely character-driven and focuses on emotional interaction over any overriding plot, and concerns itself particularly with timid first-year, Fukuzawa Yumi, and her relationship with the primly reserved second-year student, Ogasawara Sachiko.

Strawberry Panic, a more overt and melodramatic romance, likewise focuses on a group of teenage girls attending three affiliated all-girl Catholic schools. The story begins when Aoi Nagisa, a bubbly fourth-year, transfers into one of these schools and becomes immediately entranced by the elegant, mysterious and highly respected Hanazono Shizuma, who quickly develops a keen interest in Nagisa in return. Upon her first accidental meeting with Shizuma, Nagisa is instantly overcome by Shizuma's beauty, finding herself literally paralyzed by her presence. After Shizuma kisses her on the forehead, Nagisa loses consciousness and later awakens in the school's infirmary. However, Shizuma is not the only one to take notice of the new arrival; Nagisa's roommate, Suzumi Tamao, develops a crush which rapidly turns into an obsession – in some ways reminiscent of Sakura and Tomoyo's relationship in *Cardcaptor Sakura*, since Tamao is constantly calling Nagisa 'my Nagisa', tries to scare her for the sole purpose of capturing her 'cute' screams on tape, and takes full body measurements of her under the pretence of ordering a school uniform.

⁴⁹ 'Bishōjo gaippai! Wakamono ga hamaru Marimite world no himitsu' (<http://media.excite.co.jp/book/news/topics/012/p02.html>), accessed 27 October 2010.

Kashimashi: Girl Meets Girl blends romantic comedy with elements of science-fiction, and follows Osaragi Hazumu, a normal but effeminate high school boy who is killed when an alien spaceship crash lands on him. Restored to health as a girl, the incident results in a love triangle between Hazumu and her two best friends; the sweet but reticent Kamiizumi Yasuna, and the tomboyish Kurusu Tomari.

The copious use of French names and pseudo-French ideas has been a long-running trend in anime; a fact that can be attributed to a history of strong Franco-Japanese relations, and the common belief that the Japanese generally view France as being the height of cultural sophistication.⁵⁰ In particular, a respect for the modernity and elegance of French visual arts has been a notable influence upon Japanese creative works, and numerous anime and manga titles such as *Noir*, *Madlax*, *Nodame Cantabile*, *Le Chevalier D'Eon*, and *Gankutsuou: The Count of Monte Cristo*, are at least partially set in either a real or re-imagined France. Other titles, including *Azumanga Daioh*, *Ouran High School Host Club*, *One Piece*, and *Star Driver* reference the country or make use of its language even when not set in France. Both *Maria-sama* and *Strawberry Panic* is representative of settings that are intended to come across as ultra-refined, and the majority of their characters are particularly mannerly and cultured. By placing them in a Japanese setting, while liberally using the French language, the audience is made implicitly aware that the stories follow a uniquely Japanese style, while still receiving a generous treatment of the romantic and 'mythologised' refinement of French culture.⁵¹

⁵⁰ 'Japanese Opinion of Americans [Archive] - Japan Forum' (<http://www.jref.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-23818.html>), accessed 28 October 2010.

⁵¹ Philip Brophy, *100 Anime* (London, BFI Publishing, 2005), p. 127.

Because of this, the most immediately obvious link between these titles – especially in *Maria-sama* and *Strawberry Panic* – is the standard way in which the characters interact on an everyday level, both in terms of language and in a social hierarchal level. Both *Maria-sama* and *Strawberry Panic* are already strikingly similar in terms of immediate context, given that they are both set within all-female Catholic schools – something used not only for the convenience of a French-inspired all-female setting, but also for symbolic rather than theological reasons, as will be explored later in the chapter. It therefore comes as no surprise that both titles are built around elaborate school social systems, which in turn directly impact upon how relationships between students, whether platonic or romantic, are begun.

Maria-sama uses the fictional *sœur* system as its primary concept, where any second or third year student may select a younger girl to become her ‘*sœur*’ (the French term for ‘sister’). Basic etiquette demands that the *petite sœur*, or younger sister, must refer to her partner as ‘Onesama’ (‘older sister’ in Japanese). A *sœur* relationship is officially begun when the older student offers her rosary, the physical symbol of their union, to the younger. There is also an unspoken but universally understood code of behaviour between *sœurs* that characters abide by – particularly in regard to the student council, which is made up of three rose ‘families’ (Rosa Gigantea, Rosa Chinensis and Rosa Foetida). These implicit behavioural values include presenting a quiet and measured manner, demonstrating an outward display of respect towards each other, and showing deference to the deeply embedded values attached to traditional Japanese education.

Due to the high importance that the three Rose families have in the development of the student activities within the school, those who become *petite sœurs* of any of the three families receive a kind of functional inheritance through the *grande sœurs*' teachings, and, given certain circumstances, adopt their older sister's position after they graduate. However, any student can run to become a Rose, and candidates for the position are chosen through an election which lasts throughout the school year. The *petite sœur* of a Rosa is called an *en bouton* (French for 'in bud'), and is considered an unofficial part of the student council, as is the *petite sœur* of the *en bouton* if she has one. The *petite sœur* of the *en bouton* is called *en bouton petite sœur*, and performs small duties such as attending to the Roses' *en boutons*, cleaning the Rose Mansion (the meeting place of the student council), and preparing tea and snacks for the council meetings.

In *Strawberry Panic*, there are three affiliated schools that reside on one large hilltop (Astraea Hill) – Miator, Spica, and Lulim – each of which has their own student council that governs the matters of their respective schools. Students living on campus occupy a dormitory referred to as the 'Strawberry Dorms' (so named because of similarity to the cross-section of a strawberry when viewed from above), which allows for the segregation of students from each school. Students are assigned a permanent roommate in their year until graduation; if there is an odd number of students enrolled in a given year, one of the new students must live alone until a student in their year transfers into their school. The heads of each of the three student councils meet periodically in one joint council, along with the *Etoiles*.

A French word meaning ‘star’, the *Etoile* system of Astraea Hill is employed as the way in which internal politics and operations between the three schools are governed. The system is designed for two *Etoiles* to be instated at the same time in order to work as a team – although Shizuma is the sole *Etoile* in the story, given that her *Etoile* partner has passed away. Both *Etoiles* must come from the same school and, together, carry out certain specific duties including the formal and ritualised greeting of new students, acting as a mediator between disputes in student council meetings, and organising and participating in school events. To this end, they are given a private greenhouse in which to grow flowers for use during these events. The *Etoiles* are elected after going through what is known as The *Etoile* Election, which consists of a short series of public competitions, the final and most significant of these being a classical dance.

The older/younger sister form of relationship in these cases may in some respects be viewed as an alternative to the boys love style of *seme* and *uke* interaction. However, unlike a *seme* and *uke* pairing, the emphasis in girls love is not placed upon sexual dominance, but rather upon age and worldly knowledge. Although the older sister of a girls love couple is generally the more dominant of the two in terms of personality, it is because it is her moral duty to instil her knowledge and experience into her younger sister and guide her through the process of growing up – the will to overpower or possess is not typically a part of the equation. That the older sister is likely to be the more sexually assertive of the pair comes secondary to the fact that she is first and foremost something like a life guide

before being a lover – the latter of which is seen as a direct result of that mentor/student relationship.

Because there is no such school system in play in *Kashimashi* as in the first two titles, this specific type of relationship is lacking in any overt terms here. Nonetheless, there is a distinct way in which the characters interact that is quite separate to the interactions within boys love titles. For example, it is immediately obvious which of the pair takes the mentor-type role between Hazumu and Tomari, since it is Tomari who takes the lead in protecting Hazumu and teaching Hazumu how to behave like a girl, going so far as to instruct her on how to put on a bra, as well as the more mundane affairs such as how to speak and sit correctly.



Figure 27

Tomari helps Hazumu with her first bra.

However, it is Hazumu who takes an older-sister type position during her exchanges with Yasuna, since Yasuna is seen as being a far more emotionally vulnerable individual. It is just as apparent that *Maria-sama*'s main older-sister character is Sachiko, while Yumi, who has always admired Sachiko from afar, is asked to become her *petite sœur* during the first episode and slips effortlessly into

the role of the younger sister. *Strawberry Panic*'s Shizuma, already an experienced *Etoile* from the beginning of the series, takes Nagisa unexpectedly under her wing and instructs her in French and dancing, and Tomari likewise acts as older sister towards the naïvely innocent Nagisa, overseeing her introduction to the school and generally taking responsibility for Nagisa's welfare, both physically and emotionally, for the duration of the series.

As in almost any anime title, regardless of genre, it is possible to tell who of any given couple is the more dominant of the pair based on character design alone. However, whereas a genre such as boys love tends to focus more on only one main couple, it is far more common within girls love to have both multiple couples as well as love triangles; as a result, it becomes harder to make standard generalisations about character design. Nevertheless, stereotypes do exist, albeit in a little more variety given the frequently larger cast. Furthermore, there is no one commonly used term for the dominant/submissive pairing style as in boys love; *seme* and *uke*, while very occasionally used in reference to girls love, are far more rare, since this implies that the couple necessarily involves a 'catcher' and 'receiver'. Gender performativity here is more concerned with exploring multiple aspects of female sexuality, rather than relying on such firm sexual relationship roles as boys love does – at least in part because sex is simply often not the issue in girls love, even when it occurs, or is implied to have occurred.

However, despite the lack of a universal term, one such stereotype – loosely defined as the elegant/cute-type couple, or sometimes the stately/*moe*-type – is evident when examining Sachiko and Yumi in *Maria-sama*, and Shizuma and

Nagisa in *Strawberry Panic*. Both Sachiko and Shizuma have long, lustrous hair that flows freely or is loosely tied to fall down their backs. Both are also older and considerably taller in comparison to their younger companions, and give off a very distinct aura of graceful and refined sophistication. In contrast, Yumi and Nagisa have shorter, plain brown hair that is tied in more casual and youthful-looking pigtails and ponytail respectively. They have higher-pitched voices, are freer with their body movements and facial expressions, and are more openly optimistic and enthusiastic. Most importantly, they very obviously idolise their partners, viewing them as almost god-like entities prior to having any relationship with them.

The second stereotype is the tomboy/feminine couple type, which has stronger parallels with the typecasting of the boys love genre and can be seen in all three titles. *Maria-sama*'s Rei is, at least in appearance, an especially masculine figure in comparison to every other female in the cast. She has short blonde hair, narrow brown eyes, and is the captain of the school kendo club, giving her character an outwardly stoic and disciplined quality. She compulsively cares about her *petite sœur*, Yoshino, and takes it upon herself to watch over her wellbeing. Yoshino herself, while sometimes assertive in personality towards those she knows well, is the more delicate of the two in appearance, with long, darker hair styled in thin plaited pigtails, large dark eyes, and a very slight figure. Tellingly, she is also physically weak and sickly, and goes through heart surgery part-way through the first season. Well aware of its own cliché, *Maria-sama* subverts it during an episode where Rei's interests are revealed to be *shoujo* novels, cooking, and sewing, while Yoshino's are samurai stories and watching sports – much to the

confusion of the characters interviewing them for a school publication: ‘It looks like their answers are reversed ... I wonder if we should confirm their answers?’⁵²

Amane and Hikari, the secondary couple of *Strawberry Panic*, fit the tomboy/feminine stereotype so closely as to be a parody. Amane has short hair and a strong-but-silent demeanour that intimidates even those who already know her, and is a strong candidate to become the next *Etoile*. She rides a pure-white horse and is labelled a ‘prince’ by Shizuma, who at one point mistakes Amane as being a rival for Nagisa’s affections. Her other half, Hikari (‘light’ in Japanese), has very long, white-blond hair, huge blue eyes, a tiny stature, and is timid, soft-spoken, and physically fragile. She sings in the choir and is afraid of unexpected or close physical proximity with others.



Figure 28

Amane literally sweeps Hikari off her feet.

Finally, in *Kashimashi*, it is Tomari who is the clear athletic tomboy figure. She is a valued member of the track and field club, has a highly competitive nature, and generally dislikes partaking in any traditionally feminine activities such as

⁵² *Maria-sama ga Miteru*, Episode 4, Matsushita Yukihiro (Tokyo, Studio Deen, 2004).

shopping. At least two of Tomari's female friends on the track team consider her to be extremely masculine; one of them comments that if Tomari were a boy, she would have a huge crush on her, and a large group of girls discuss her character in the second episode: 'Tomari is so cool sometimes that she makes my heart skip a beat!' 'My wonderful prince.' 'Just like a guy.'⁵³ Through flashbacks, the audience is shown that when Hazumu was bullied as a child for his retiring personality, a protective Tomari would come to his rescue and fend off the attackers. Conversely, Hazumu has always been feminine even as a boy. She scares easily, is intensely sensitive to other people's feelings, and adores all things regarding floriculture.

The exceptions to these main-couple stereotypes can be found in *Strawberry Panic*'s Tamao and Nagisa, and *Kashimashi*'s Hazumu and Yasuna; neither of the pairings fit the first elegant/cute type of relationship given their equal social standing with each other, and neither do they fit the tomboy/feminine type of relationship, since all four characters are comparatively feminine and decidedly lacking in any traditionally masculine behavioural traits. Consequently, these potentially sexual relationships are ultimately never consummated. Tamao and Nagisa's relationship is doomed to platonic romance from the beginning of the series, since Nagisa is fated to be with Shizuma, who realises the depth of her love for Nagisa despite initially believing that Nagisa was 'only a cute girl ... just one of many cute girls.'⁵⁴ Nagisa remains largely oblivious to the depth of Tamao's own feelings and considers her only as a best friend throughout the story. When Nagisa and Shizuma 'elope' together during the final episode, Tamao gives

⁵³ *Kashimashi: Girl Meets Girl*, Episode 3, Nakanishi Nobuaki (Tokyo, Studio Hibari, 2006).

⁵⁴ *Strawberry Panic*, Episode 26, Sakoi Masayuki (Tokyo, Madhouse, 2006).

Nagisa her somewhat sorrowful blessing. The final scene depicts Nagisa returning to her room as she and Tamao greet each other quietly through closed doors; a symbol of the now insurmountable barrier between Tamao's love for Nagisa.

In the manga version of *Kashimashi*, Hazumu confesses her love to Tomari and thereby makes a direct decision to choose her over Yasuna. However, this ending is softened in the anime, where Hazumu confesses her love to Tomari only after first choosing, and being rejected by, an emotionally stronger Yasuna, who tells her, 'I want to walk by myself.'⁵⁵ That this says something about anime couples and character-fitting stereotypes is certain: although there are certainly some titles which challenge such relationship stereotyping (as in *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, in which most characters are far less clear-cut than they initially appear), what is seen to inherently 'work' in terms of overtly romantic pairing formula and what does not continues, on the whole, to be dictated by a careful and calculated dichotomy of social position or gender representation.

Serious and emotionally-driven girls love relationships can work on a long-term basis, but only if a clear balance is struck between junior and senior, feminine and masculine, and sometimes a combination of both. Nagisa may be upbeat and headstrong, but she is also more emotionally childish than most of the students her age and requires a quiet nurturing that Tamao, who is very alike in personality, is unable to provide. Hazumu, always expressive yet lacking in confidence, has been nursing a crush on Yasuna prior to the beginning of the series, but Yasuna has just as much difficulty in interacting with others and asserting herself as Hazumu

⁵⁵ *Kashimashi: Girl Meets Girl* (2006), Episode 13.

does, albeit for different reasons. These are relationships that are purposefully set up to fail, while their counterparts, each of which display a patently obvious equilibrium of one kind or another, are not simply the better option, but rather are destined to be.

Another obvious theme that shares a parallel with boys love is the lack of – and again, sometimes demonization of – the male sex. There is no male character within *Strawberry Panic* to make an appearance at all; nor is there any specific male character that is named or even once referred to. Indeed, the hill upon which the three schools are located is known as a sacred area, in which no men are allowed to enter.

Although *Maria-sama* is likewise set in an all-girls school, Yumi comes across Sachiko arguing with the Roses early on in the series as she protests that the council could not force her to play the role of Cinderella alongside a male in an upcoming play if she had a *petite sœur*. Rosa Gigantea offers Sachiko a bet: if she can convince Yumi to be her *petite sœur*, the role of Cinderella will go to Yumi. However, should Yumi continue to refuse the rosary, Sachiko must play the part. The reason why Sachiko so adamantly wishes to refuse the role is revealed at the dress rehearsal, where the male who is to play the prince is revealed to be none other than Sachiko's cousin and fiancé, Suguru. When Sachiko later informs Yumi of her arranged marriage, it is also divulged that although Sachiko initially cared for her cousin, he did not reciprocate her feelings. An extremely arrogant man, he is especially disliked by Rosa Gigantea, but has prestige in Hanadera

Boys Academy as president of the Student Council there. He also identifies as gay, and Sachiko recalls:

When I entered high school, what do you think Suguru-san said when he came to my high school entrance party? ‘I can see myself in you, so if we got married, it would surely turn out well. We each could live as we pleased, let's stay out of each other's hair.’ When I asked, ‘What do you mean?’, he confessed, ‘You might not like this, but for sex partners, I only like men.’ So if I want to have children, I have to take a lover from outside the marriage ... He said since they'll be more or less connected by blood, he'll still love them. What in the world is he thinking? He thinks I'm a fool.⁵⁶

During the OVA series, it is also shown that both Sachiko's father and paternal grandfather openly have mistresses, and unabashedly divide their time between their home and their women; something which has led to Sachiko's general disdain for men.

It is in *Kashimashi* that we see one of the more fascinating and original ways in which men are screened out of one female character's life. Yasuna has a unique affliction that renders her literally incapable of seeing males, and in her eyes, men appear only as a grey and hazy blur, making it extremely difficult for her to tell one male apart from another. Because of this, Yasuna has never been able to get along well with others, whether male or female, since the girls who do interact

⁵⁶ *Maria-sama ga Miteru* (2004), Episode 3.

with males are different compared to Yasuna, acting as a divide between her and the rest of the world. However, when she stumbles across Hazumu one day in her first year of high school, she is shocked to find that she can see most of him clearly, although his face is still only a blur. Nonetheless, when Hazumu confesses his love to her in their second year of high school, she rejects him, afraid that he too will one day disappear from her vision. It is therefore only after Hazumu's transformation into a girl that Yasuna openly admits her feelings. Her sexuality is depicted as being fluid – her feelings towards Hazumu do not change even though Hazumu's gender does.

Interestingly, Yasuna's affliction is changed from the manga to the anime. Within the manga series, Yasuna says that with the slight exception of Hazumu, she has never once been able to see males completely clearly. In the anime, Yasuna explains that she was at one time still able to see males, but that she suddenly could not see her father anymore after he got angry with her one day during her childhood, and that the condition escalated to encompass all males from that point onwards. Consequently, whilst in the manga Yasuna merely pays very little attention to males around her or otherwise ignores them completely even when directly spoken to, she is terrified of males in the anime, including those within her own class. Whilst it is unclear whether or not it was a conscious decision on the creator's behalf, the visual presentation of the characters was commented on by reviewers, who observed that the female cast 'provides a great contrast of

looks’, but that ‘the male characters, though easily distinguishable, stand out less.’⁵⁷

To a title that was designed to appeal to Japanese males as well as females with its comedic and science-fiction touches, the series also carries a strong feminist message thanks to Yasuna’s unique condition. When considered alongside the fact that Asuta, the only other main younger male character in the text, is treated as a pervert due to his own sexual attraction towards Hazumu, *Kashimashi* can be viewed as somewhat unusual. The feminist angle is furthered by Hazumu’s innate character quirks – he is recreated as a woman, but is still attracted to girls and never questions his sexual orientation. Moreover, given how feminine Hazumu was as a male, there is the implicit suggestion that Hazumu was never truly comfortable as self-identifying in masculine terms to begin with, and simply feels freer to express herself as a girl rather than as a boy. If considered alongside Butler’s theories, Hazumu was never a male at all, and her physical body has merely changed to fit what was always her ‘true’ form. Whilst feminist sociologist Ueno Chizuko has pointed out that ‘the number of shounen ai (boys’ love) dramas might not increase if shoujo could gain another way to present their sexuality by using their own sex’, titles such as *Kashimashi* seem, at least in some ways, to be a more feminist-friendly *shoujo* alternative.⁵⁸

Of the three texts being examined, only *Kashimashi* involves an illustration of gender-switching. Nonetheless, this is a theme which requires more than passing

⁵⁷ ‘Kashimashi GN 3 – Review – Anime News Network’ (<http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/review/kashimashi-girl-meets-girl/gn-3>), accessed 24 June 2009.

⁵⁸ Jeet Heer, Kent Worcester, *A Comics Studies Reader* (Mississippi, University Press of Mississippi, 2009), p. 245.

comment, given that several other titles not under critical discussion here, both girls love and those involving lesbianism, either involve instances of, or else revolve completely around this. For example, *Simoun* is set on an earth-like planet within a binary star system, and concerns itself with humanoid characters that are all born female and develop as girls until the age of seventeen, when they must choose a permanent sex.

Another title, *Blue Drop*, focuses on the relationship between a high-school student and his best friend, formerly a male, who has been turned into a girl by aliens that have waged war on Earth and conduct human experimentation. *Sailor Moon*'s Sailor Starlights trio disguise themselves in men's bodies while in civilian mode, but revert back to their true female forms when fighting, and the leader of the group develops strong romantic feelings for Usagi/Sailor Moon.

There are also numerous titles that combine female-female romance and cross-dressing without any bodily change. *The Rose of Versailles*'s Lady Oscar has been raised as a man all her life in order to become her father's successor as leader of the Palace Guards. The admiration that Oscar's protégée, Rosalie Lamorlière, has for her can be interpreted as either idol worship or romantic love. In *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, the title character's goal in life is to become a prince, and her relationship with Anthy, who was 'rescued' by Utena after a duel, is not a simple platonic one.

Regarding *Kashimashi*, it must be noted that whilst Hazumu is confused about the ways in which people treat her after her change in gender, she is cheerfully

resigned to living out the rest of her life as a girl. Indeed, after the initial shock has passed, not only does Hazumu not appear to mind that she has suddenly switched genders, but is possibly a happier person for it. Prior to the gender switch taking place, Hazumu seems embarrassedly pleased when Yasuna comments, ‘Osaragi-kun... you’re very feminine.’ Blushing a little, Hazumu only replies, smiling shyly, ‘People say that to me a lot. I have a very feminine face.’⁵⁹ The audience is never able to see Hazumu’s face at all before he becomes a female, even through flashbacks, as his eyes and most of his face is always obscured by his fringe. Given Hazumu’s distinct lack of male physical features prior to his change in gender, and because the gender switch occurs in the first episode, it seems doubtful that Hazumu was ever intended to be thought of in masculine terms.

When the physical change does occur, it is treated by Hazumu’s family and friends, as well as by the instigators of the sex change, as something dryly comedic rather than as anything particularly alarming. Just after the transformation has taken place, an alien voice is broadcasted all over Japan that simply states, in a manner reminiscent of a public service announcement, ‘Regarding this Earthling, a complete regeneration has been performed, except... his sex has been reversed. Our deepest apologies.’⁶⁰ Additionally, the audience sees very little alteration in terms of Hazumu’s personality despite his physical changes. Emotionally sensitive and expressive – attributes which allow her to fit in well as a traditional Japanese female – Hazumu only becomes more feminine as time goes on; a point which comes across most obviously in her mannerisms. The

⁵⁹ *Kashimashi: Girl Meets Girl* (2006), Episode 1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

one exception to this is that she never stops referring to herself using the word ‘*boku*’; a term usually used by young Japanese males.

Both Tomari and Yasuna are aware that Hazumu remains the same person inside (‘Hazumu is Hazumu!’), and the physical change is eventually pushed aside altogether in favour of the drama and emotional tension within the storyline.⁶¹ As critics have noted, *Kashimashi* ‘sounds provocative in a brief summary, but the actual anime isn’t particularly shocking or taboo breaking. The girl characters in *Kasimasi* love each other, but their feelings for each other would be the same regardless of gender.’⁶² As in or even above boys love – the line between friendship and romance being all the more difficult to pin down – titles such as *Kashimashi* put more emphasis on love rather than upon sex or gender. Consequently, perceptions of gender as a whole within girls love tend to be far more fluid and far less important to the characters than in other genres of anime.

Female purity, another major theme in girls love titles, is something which might also be referred to in terms of the Sacred Feminine. In many ways, the female characters presented here have transcended gender and sexuality altogether and become almost celestial figures in the eyes of the audience, in spite of the previously discussed conceptions of rigidly balanced relationship dynamics. As part of a convention that may at first seem peculiar to some, one of the major ways in which this is demonstrated is through the depiction of nudity. None of the three texts under discussion displays any full frontal nudity, but there are plenty of

⁶¹ *Kashimashi: Girl Meets Girl* (2006), Episode 5.

⁶² ‘AnimeNation Anime News Blog – Blog Archive – Ask John: Could *Kasimasi* Succeed in America?’ (<http://www.animenation.net/blog/2006/07/25/ask-john-could-kasimasi-succeed-in-america/>), accessed 24 June 2009.

instances – always in context with the situation, usually bathing or showering – where the characters’ nudity is emphasised.

Contrary to being a necessarily sexualised representation, the nudity in many of these instances is instead an illustration of purity or vulnerability. It is no coincidence that a common metaphor of Japanese pop art, whose creators are often largely inspired by anime and manga, is the innocence of children by use of the portrayal of nude girls, as in many of the works of Japanese pop artist Takano Aya.⁶³ As has already been explored in Chapter Two, nudity within mainstream anime does not automatically signify sexual objectivity. Even *Ghost in the Shell*’s Kusanagi, who stands naked on the ledge of a building in opening sequence of the original film, has been identified by critics as both ‘sexual... and vulnerable at the same time’ – sexual because Kusanagi is a powerfully dominant character, and vulnerable because the human form, when stripped of clothing, is also unprotected and exposed.⁶⁴

Nagisa, whose character is a far cry from Kusanagi’s assertiveness, is depicted nude more than once in *Strawberry Panic*, most notably in shower scenes where she is anxiously pondering over her interactions with Shizuma. The show makes no effort to conceal the swell of her bust, but her anxious body language and downcast facial expression indicate that Nagisa is preoccupied not by sexual tension, but rather by emotional distress. During the beginning of the opening credits in the second half of the series, Nagisa is shown nude and floating in water, arms crossed to cover her breasts and eyes closed. In particular, this kind of

⁶³ Maria Thompson, *Artist* (Arizona, Global Media, 2007), Section 16.

⁶⁴ Susan J. Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 108.

imagery is common not only in girls love but also within the magical-girl genre, where characters are all too often silhouetted and unclothed as they undergo their magical transformation.

Moreover, characters in all genres of manga and anime, usually female, are commonly shown in scenes of inexplicit nudity while they sleep, either as a means of denoting an intense focus on the unconscious mind, indicating an unnaturally long slumber (such as if a character is in a coma), or symbolising a significant internal transition or change. Similar portrayals of nudity are also commonly used in scenes involving rebirth, as in *Haibane Renmei*. The depiction of Nagisa in the opening credits evokes imagery of *Sailor Moon* characters as they become charged with supernatural and spiritual power, and is also markedly similar to Hazumu's nude descent as she floats down to earth, seemingly asleep, after being newly healed and transformed in the first episode of *Kashimashi*. Like Nagisa, scenes which show a naked Hazumu subsequent to this scene are presented to the audience only as she bathes, while reflecting upon her tumultuous feelings regarding Yasuna or Tomari.

Maria-sama is the only title of the three texts that does not include any form of nudity. As the most character-driven of the shows, and as a series whose primary focus is on the drama of the everyday, the title is neither exploitive nor subversive in its content. While it is not difficult to imagine that a show with a similar base plotline might use lesbian homosexuality within a Catholic setting purely for shock value, one of *Maria-sama*'s main hallmarks is that, far from being over-sexualised, it is instead subtle to the point of being dull – Oppliger comments that

‘Literally nothing happens in the show’s original 13 episodes. *MariMite* is a pure character study drama without even the catchy hook of sight gags and comedy ... the show may be deemed too slow or too prosaic to attract a significant consumer market in America.’⁶⁵

However, *Maria-sama*’s lack of any overt sexuality is also one of its selling points to its Japanese fanbase. Similar to what can be said of boys love, the original novel that preceded the *Maria-sama* franchise was, as one Japanese fan points out, a ‘Cobalt novel ... something like “Harlequin Romance for high school girls.” Pretty boys, love and stereotypical romance are the keywords of Cobalt. *MariMite*’s [anime] uniqueness is the fact that it avoids that mannerism.’⁶⁶

Whilst the *Maria-sama* novel was, as acknowledged in this observation, specifically targeted towards a female audience, the anime series has earned considerable popularity with viewers of both genders, since fans of the novel could continue to follow the franchise while male fans were not alienated by overly *shoujo*-style marketing techniques. To sexualise the series would be to transform the tone of the original works and create a distance between female devotees, but also to turn *Maria-sama* into simply another harem or fanservice-laden series, which many believed a male otaku audience to be fundamentally bored with.⁶⁷ The staff of the anime avoided both outcomes, and created a series

⁶⁵ ‘AnimeNation Anime News Blog – Blog Archive – Ask John: Is Maria-sama ga Miteru Too Controversial for America?’ (<http://www.animenation.net/blog/2004/04/30/ask-john-is-maria-sama-ga-miteru-too-controversial-for-america/>), accessed 24 June 2009.

⁶⁶ ‘marimite interview of fan’ (http://mariamite.free.fr/maria_article_eng.htm), accessed 31 October 2010.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

that was true to its roots, yet still inclusive of male viewers who could appreciate a more ‘elegant shoujo style.’⁶⁸

It is not only on a physical level that main characters are implied as holding an inherent purity.⁶⁹ One trend that *Maria-sama*, *Strawberry Panic*, and *Kashimashi* have in common is the use of flower and garden imagery to evoke a sense of the untainted feminine spirit. *Maria-sama*’s affiliation with flowers is made obvious from the beginning of the series, given the language and terms that are constantly being referred to. Indeed, rather than using specific names, characters often refer to each other by their ‘flower title’; Yumi always refers to Eriko, Sei, and Youko as *Rosa Foetida*, *Rosa Gigantea*, and *Rosa Chinensis* respectively, as do many of the other characters. A Valentine’s Day treasure hunt is held in one episode, in which the three *boutons* each hide a card, and those who manage to find them win a date with whichever *bouton*’s card it corresponds to. Determined to find Sachiko’s red card, Yumi immediately runs to the greenhouse and without hesitation begins digging near the roots of the *Rosa Chinensis* plant, correctly assuming that her *sœur* has hidden it there.

In *Strawberry Panic*, the school greenhouse doubles as Shizuma’s private sanctuary, and often acts as a backdrop for meetings between her and Nagisa. On at least one occasion, Nagisa helps Shizuma in planting and maintaining the flowers that are grown there; an act of some significance in their relationship,

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ The purity of female characters and relationships in girls love is similar, but not the same as, the kind demonstrated in boys love. Overcoming obstacles involving same-sex relationships for either gender is seen as pure because their love is proven against the odds, but the notion of purity in girls love seems more fundamental – at least in part because sex is usually not a significant factor in a couple’s relationship, if it is a part of the dynamic at all.

since in giving Nagisa permission to freely visit the greenhouse, she is effectively also allowing Nagisa a closeness with her that nobody else shares. Shizuma tells her seriously, ‘If you take care of them with your heart, they’ll bloom into beautiful flowers⁷⁰.’

Kashimashi’s Hazumu works with flowers on a daily basis, and after the gender transformation has taken place, Yasuna tells her that she first noticed Hazumu as the school rooftop garden gradually expanded and brightened due to Hazumu’s dedication: ‘At that time, this place only had a tiny garden that was all alone on a dreary roof ... Hazumu-kun has the power to make the world beautiful. You have the purest heart out of everyone.’⁷¹ Hazumu’s change also comes as a direct result of her affinity for flowers and plant-life; when Yasuna rejects him after he confesses his feelings towards her, Hazumu climbs the nearby mountain in order to seek comfort by surrounding himself with the plants he loves so much. It is here that the alien spacecraft crash-lands and kills him, before regenerating him in female form.

In each of these cases, flowers are used in similar ways to the same-sex love stories of the pre-war period, and become the emblem of an unswerving feminine purity and two girls’ budding relationship.⁷² Western literature, too, has constantly employed the flower as a traditionally feminine motif, and in particular has used the rosebud as representative of a youthful and virginal woman, while the fully-

⁷⁰ *Strawberry Panic* (2006), Episode 6.

⁷¹ *Kashimashi: Girl Meets Girl* (2006), Episode 4.

⁷² Suzuki Michiko, *Becoming Modern Women: Love and Female Identity in Prewar Japanese Literature and Culture* (California, Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 36.

bloomed rose becomes symbolic of sexual maturity.⁷³ It is therefore unsurprising that the focus of flowers in *Maria-sama*, *Strawberry Panic*, and *Kashimashi* is on those that are just being planted or are in the midst of being nurtured. A girls love story begins before any romantic relationship has had the chance to take place, and it is expected the characters involved are young, and therefore both emotionally and sexually inexperienced.

Another way in which femininity becomes purified in all three titles is through music. The musical choices of *Maria-sama* are generally classically inspired, and the second episode, titled ‘The Awkward Piano Duet’, depicts Yumi sitting at the school piano and recalling Sachiko playing the organ during the school welcoming ceremony, recognising that it was from this time that she began to admire Sachiko. Yumi is brought back to the present by Sachiko’s hand reaching for hers, and at Sachiko’s request, they begin playing a duet together.



Figure 29

Yumi and Sachiko play a duet.

⁷³ Mary Virginia Brackett, *Beginnings Through the 19th Century* (New York, Infobase Publishing, 2006), p. 145.

In the first *Maria-sama* OVA, Sachiko invites Yumi to her summer home for a vacation. When Sachiko's acquaintances decide to make trouble for them and invite the pair to a party celebrating the eightieth birthday of one of the acquaintance's great grandmother, they ask Yumi to play a musical instrument in front of everyone in an attempt to embarrass her. Yumi responds by saying that she is no good at playing anything, and instead chooses to sing 'Maria-sama no Kokoro' as Sachiko accompanies her on the piano. Far from inviting embarrassment, the great grandmother calls Yumi a 'cute angel', and is asked to visit again next year.⁷⁴ Translating to 'The Virgin Mary's Heart' and constantly referred to within the series, the song is a hymn taught to the students of the school within the context of the series, which references Mary's heart as being a white mountain lily that the students likewise seek to have.

However, the word '*kokoro*', while meaning 'heart', can also be interpreted as 'mind', 'mentality', and 'emotions'; a translation which is often used within the *Kashimashi* series. Yasuna tells Hazumu several times that she has 'a beautiful heart', and whilst this is not directly used in context with music in this case, it is no coincidence that Yasuna plays the flute, and that the school rooftop garden on which Yasuna first became aware of Hazumu is, as Yasuna herself points out, viewable from where she practices: 'You can see this place from the music room ... I was always watching.'⁷⁵ Like Sachiko, *Strawberry Panic*'s Shizuma is also skilled on the piano, and is seen to play constantly, sometimes in symbolically loaded duets with Nagisa as she nurtures the younger girl's talent. As with their time spent in the greenhouse, their playing the piano is symbolic of Shizuma and

⁷⁴ *Maria-sama ga Miteru*, OVA Episode 1, Matsushita Yukihiro (Studio Deen, Japan, 2006).

⁷⁵ *Kashimashi: Girl Meets Girl* (2006), Episode 4.

Nagisa's growing relationship, and is possibly also a coy reference to the pair 'making beautiful music together.'

The connection between the piano and the female sex was particularly drawn throughout the 1800s, but continued as an especially feminine symbol well into the 20th century through the works of such people as impressionist artist Gustave Caillebotte and English novelist E.M. Forster, who portrayed the instrument as an idealised outlet for repressed emotions.⁷⁶ Skill at the piano also allowed marriageable women to display themselves to the male gaze without undermining their chastity; it functioned as a 'location for her sex expression that allows her to remain innocent, her body chaste, yet her desire communicated or mediated through playing.'⁷⁷

In Japan, the piano was considered as the 'requisite symbol of modern feminine accomplishment' during the late 1800s and was, at least until recent years, still perceived by some as being one of the core 'polite feminine arts.'⁷⁸ The fact that the piano is pervasive within both *Maria-sama* and *Strawberry Panic* would suggest that at least a part of this view still remains within the Japanese consciousness, while the flute, as played by arguably the most feminine main

⁷⁶ Anne Distel, *Gustave Caillebotte, Urban Impressionist* (Paris, Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1995), p. 213; John Henry Stape, *E.M. Forster: Critical Assessments Volume 1* (New York, Routledge, 1998), p. 93.

⁷⁷ Laura Vorachek, 'The Piano as an Icon of Female Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century' in *George Eliot - George Henry Lewes Studies: Issues 38-39* (Illinois, Northern Illinois University, 2000), p. 27.

⁷⁸ Rebecca L. Copeland, *Lost Leaves: Women Writers of Meiji Japan* (Hawaii, University of Hawaii Press, 2000), p. 94; Joyce Lebra, *Women in Changing Japan* (California, Stanford University Press, 1978), p. 115.

character of *Kashimashi*, is still thought of by many today as an especially feminine instrument.⁷⁹

Although both *Maria-sama* and *Strawberry Panic* are grounded in pseudo-religious settings, it is an often overlooked fact that these titles depict very few characters as religiously-minded as one might expect. There are no public prayer gatherings, no religious rituals or ceremonies, and no mention of God within an expressly religious context at all. Although the texts contain a distinct atmosphere of spirituality that use Catholicism as a way of portraying this without seeming out of place to the situation, it is associated more with a divine femininity than with God or religion per se. However, particularly with regard to Western audiences, the image of the Virgin Mary may evoke stronger reactions of a figure at once both virgin and mother, maiden and mentor.

When the story of *Maria-sama* begins, Yumi is praying in front of the Virgin Mary statue near the school entrance when she is approached by Sachiko, who absentmindedly straightens Yumi's uniform neckerchief. This seemingly simple act of kindness stays with Yumi the rest of the day, and is effectively responsible for sparking off the relationship between the two women. The extensive use of the lily as a symbol as utilised by the Lillian Girls Academy is not only a blatant reference to the girls love genre, but also to the real-world symbolism of the white lily in relation to the Virgin Mary, and its connotations of virginity and purity.

⁷⁹ Linda K. Thompson, Mark Robin Campbell, *Issues of Identity in Music Education: Narratives and Practices* (San Francisco, IAP, 2010), p. 70.

The large Catholic church in the centre of the hill is most prominent feature of the school in *Strawberry Panic*. The church can be seen from a long distance away, and a statue of the Virgin Mary is also contained within the school grounds, which Hikari frequently prays in front of while reflecting upon her relationship with Amane. However, no other religious symbolism or discussion is alluded to in either of the two titles, giving the impression that while religion itself is not something of great significance to the texts, the love that the women share with each other is sacrosanct, and one that is somehow sanctioned by one of the most mythologically divine woman in history – a laughable thought, given that neither the figure of the Virgin Mary nor the Catholic Church could ever realistically be seen as legitimising a homosexual relationship.

Nonetheless, after *Maria-sama*'s Yumi finally accepts Sachiko's rosary, we hear her narrate, 'The night I became Rosa Chinensis *en bouton*'s *petite soeur*, only the moon and Maria-sama were watching us.'⁸⁰ The explicit religious imagery as portrayed in these girls love titles are used for symbolic reasons, and although they lend much to the spiritual tone of the texts, they are not used in order to forward any kind of religious agenda – most characters are not shown as having any specific theistic leanings.

Today, girls love is considered by many to be something of a soap opera, in which actual lesbian identity comes secondary, if at all, to intense emotional friendships and, on some occasions, physical consummation.⁸¹ Others regard the genre as more explicit, particularly when purposefully targeted towards an audience of

⁸⁰ *Maria-sama ga Miteru* (2004), Episode 3.

⁸¹ 'Star Crossed Anime Blog' (<http://psgels.blogspot.com/2009/09/10/aoi-hana-review-875100/>), accessed 01 November 2010.

both genders. In a 2008 interview with Erica Friedman, girls love scholar and publisher, she commented, ‘Recently, I’ve been thinking of Yuri as stories with lesbian content, but without lesbian identity.’⁸² Even more so than boys love, the characters of *yuri* do not tend to identify as homosexual or bisexual – to so obviously put a label on their sexuality, even if their sexual orientations are made explicit, would be to curtail the freedom of the stories. To many viewers, the beauty of these stories lies in the very fact that the characters are not pinned down by one single definition as they would be in real life, but rather simply fall in love with the person they were meant for. In the instance of girls love, it just so happens that that person is another female.

Although the genres of boys love and girls love differ on some levels, they share the same core similarity in that they both liberate themselves from the duality of sexual orientation – they exist on a scale that is not limited to either heterosexual or homosexual ‘normativity’. This thesis now goes on to explore a separate kind of sexual fluidity and transgression of binaries – that of societal boundaries. I begin in ‘Single, Desperate and Lonely: Building a Harem’, where the ways in which anime presents us with the curiously innocent concept of multiple partnerships are examined.

⁸² ‘Erica Friedman Interview – Interview With Yuri Manga Publisher and Founder of YuriCon’ (<http://manga.about.com/od/mangaartistswriters/a/EFriedman.htm>), accessed 23 June 2009.

Chapter Seven: Single, Desperate and Lonely – The Harem Genre

Awkward repressed young males ... half-naked women practically crawling on his lap at every turn carrying signs that say ‘single, desperate and lonely’... cleavage big enough to lose your remote control in, enough panty shots to fill an entire year’s worth of Victoria’s Secret magazines, a sufficient volume of nosebleeds to fill the entire Atlantic Ocean ... actually, I could have described that so much quicker by pointing to *Love Hina* and saying ‘pretty much that.’¹

A young and completely ordinary male, who has previously been unlucky or ineffectual with the opposite sex, suddenly becomes the focus of several lovely ladies – at least two of whom are fighting over who gets to take our unlikely hero to bed. hilariously destructive love battles ensue, particularly if some or all of the women happen to be super-powered. The sex never happens, although the main male character does gain a happy, if somewhat dysfunctional, family unit, and contents himself with accidental peek-shows and inadvertently crashing head-first into girls’ cleavages. This is the abbreviated version of almost every harem anime in existence, and despite attracting a good deal of negative attention over the years, harems have become such an integral part of anime that scarcely a season goes by without one or two new titles.

¹ ‘YouTube – Anime Zone: The Harem Genre’
(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASwzlrPpqSA>), accessed 23 December 2009.

In broad terms, harem anime can be defined as a specific genre that is characterised by a male protagonist who, by some twist of fate, finds himself surrounded – and usually romantically desired by – at least three members of the opposite sex.² However, because romance is rarely the main focus of a harem series, the structure of the genre is often ambiguous, and the most distinguishable trait is simply that a group of females coincidentally end up accompanying, and usually cohabitating with, a teenage male. The genre acts as a point of contrast to the previous chapters, where sexual fluidity was key to the narrative structure. There is no such fluidity in harem anime, where characters are designed as wish fulfilment material and usually cater to heteronormative stereotypes. Although there is no explicit mention of sexual orientation, there is an underlying assumption that the women, many of whom aspire to marry the male protagonist, must therefore be heterosexual – any lesbian undertones can be generally understood as a means of further pandering to male fantasies.

Although physical and emotional intimacy is to be expected, it is not a necessity of the genre. Indeed, many harem titles remain unspecific as to which one of the group the main male character is truly interested in until near the end – if a romantic decision is made at all. In such a case, a title will often conclude open-endedly, or else will imply that the protagonist has chosen to remain single in order to refrain from alienating or otherwise hurting the feelings of any of the female characters. Of course, the general rule that there are no sexual relations between the characters in many harem titles also allows for the indefinite

² Robin E. Brenner, *Understanding Manga and Anime* (Connecticut, Libraries Unlimited, 2007), p. 89.

continuation of the series – hence the length of anime such as *Urusei Yatsura*, *Ranma ½*, and *Kyou Kara Maou!*, among others.

Conversely, other harem titles may narrow the focus almost immediately down to only one member of the female cast, so that the audience is made at least implicitly aware that it is the canonical choice. Other female characters then exist simply to provide temptations, subplots, humorous obstacles, and general comical chaos. When an opposite pattern occurs, and one female protagonist is surrounded by at least three male leads, it is commonly referred to by Western audiences as a reverse-harem.

Although harem anime titles are occasionally depicted as dramatic, emotional, or even dark, the majority tend to be light-hearted and humorously self-aware affairs, usually with a healthy dose of fanservice incorporated into the mix. Using three very well-known texts in order to discuss the dynamics of both harem and reverse-harem titles, as well as single-gender harems (*Tenchi Muyo!*, *Ouran High School Host Club*, and *Kyou Kara Maou!* correspondingly), I explore the main thematic commonalities in depth, including the role of universal audio/visual cues such as glomping and nosebleeds; the respective roles of male and female leads so unlike the ambiguity of gender representation previously explored; the way in which other characters are frequently cast; the function of fanservice; and the way in which the concept of family comes into play.

The Harem in Context

Although the term ‘harem anime’ is derived from the Turkish ‘harem’, there is nothing which links the genre to the polygamous term. Certainly China, and thus to some extent Japan, does have a history of polygamy; because producing offspring has traditionally been particularly important within Chinese culture, polygamy had been legal for thousands of years, and was written in the law as recently as the end of the Qing dynasty of imperial China.³ Since a great number of men died as a result of both war and labour-related incidents within pre-mechanised and agrarian-centric China, women were for centuries far more likely than men to be either widowed or left unmarried.⁴ The practice of polygamy among the wealthy and elite ensured that such women would be cared for in these events, and also guaranteed the births of the large numbers of children that were essential to the continued existence of a nation in which early mortality rates were extremely high.⁵

Chinese literature and general influence is believed to have been introduced and assimilated by Japan sometime between 270 and 310 A.D, and with this, the introduction of writing.⁶ The Chinese written language inevitably came to be considered as the language of learning; all Japanese scholars wrote in Chinese, and books concerning history, law, science, and theology were all written in Chinese as a matter of course.⁷ This is reflected in the written language regarding polygamy, wherein the original wife of a household is referred to in both China

³ Valery Garrett, *Chinese Dress: From the Qing Dynasty to the Present* (Vermont, Tuttle Publishing, 2007), p. 34.

⁴ Deborah Davis, Stevan Harrell, *Chinese Families in the Post-Mao Era* (California, University of California Press, 1993), p. 319.

⁵ Muḥammad ‘Adnān Bakhīt, *History of Humanity Volume 4: Scientific and Cultural Development* (New York, UNESCO, 2000), p. 15.

⁶ Sir Edward James Reed, *Japan: Its History, Traditions, and Religions: With the Narrative of a Visit in 1879* (London, J. Murray, 1880, p. 125.

⁷ Annie Shepley Omori, *Diaries of Court Ladies of Old Japan* (South Carolina, BiblioBazaar, 2009), p. xiii.

and Japan (as well as Korea) as the ‘main room’, or ‘big woman’ in the slang term.⁸ The word for a second woman in both written languages literally translates as ‘she who occupies the side room.’⁹

Moreover, prior to the Meiji period in Japan, the term ‘family’ did not include only biologically related people, but rather signified a far broader concept in which workers who lived in and subsisted on their labour in any single village were regarded as one unit.¹⁰ Although this changed when the Japanese Imperial Constitution of 1889 legally defined family in a written law as formed by blood lineage, polygamy was still officially legal until the defeat of Japan in World War II.¹¹ Multiple wives, their children by one father, and their relatives were still regarded as one separate family up until this point, when a reconstruction of Japanese society occurred under the new constitution and a nationwide family registration system was established.¹² Whilst having more than one wife is quite different to owning a harem, a strong link exists between this concept and harem anime since, as will be discussed, a harem in the context of anime is far less about presenting sexual relationships than it is about exploring familial ones.

Despite this cultural inheritance, ‘harem’ in reference to the genre of anime and manga was created, as many anime-specific terms now are, by Western fans – such titles are usually still referred to in Japan simply as *lovecomi* (love

⁸ ‘Polygamy’ (<http://hi.baidu.com/dachong678/blog/item/d940232a7e047c3f5343c114.html>), accessed 23 December 2009.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ ‘Japan – Mating and Marriage, Gender Roles’ (<http://family.jrank.org/pages/994/Japan.html>), accessed 23 December 2009.

¹¹ James J. Ponzetti, *International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family* (New York, Macmillan Reference USA, 2003), p. 969.

¹² ‘Japan – Mating and Marriage, Gender Roles’ (<http://family.jrank.org/pages/994/Japan.html>), accessed 23 December 2009.

comedies).¹³ Indeed, 'harem' anime only first came into usage with the success of the *Tenchi Muyo!* series in America in the late 1990s, and has in more recent years attracted typically satirical or negative connotations.¹⁴

Nonetheless, the history of the genre itself did not begin here, but rather with *Urusei Yatsura* (*Those Obnoxious Aliens*), the anime version of which spanned six films, eleven OVAs, and one hundred and ninety five half-hour episodes. These episodes premiered in Japan on the Fuji Television network between 1981 and 1986, and were later aired across Japan again by the anime satellite television network Animax (who, in turn, have also broadcast the series across its respective networks worldwide, including much of Southeast Asia, South Asia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan). The series was also aired in Italy from 1983, in France from 1988, and finally in America from 1998.¹⁵

The story tells of a high school student, Ataru Moroboshi, whose seemingly one and only talent is chasing after girls. When a group of aliens invade Earth, they decide to play a game to determine Earth's fate: if a randomly selected earthling is able to defeat their chosen champion in a game of tag within ten days, they will call off the invasion. Naturally, this random earthling turns out to be Ataru, and his opponent, the beautiful, bikini-clad princess Lum. After nine days, Ataru has failed to even get near her, and Shinobu, Ataru's childhood friend, promises to marry Ataru should he succeed at the game. With a newfound motivation, Ataru

¹³ 'Baka-Updates Manga' (<http://www.mangaupdates.com/showtopic.php?tid=1744&page=1#post34852>), accessed 23 December 2009.

¹⁴ 'Defining anime: The harem genre' (<http://www.helium.com/items/152955-defining-anime-the-harem-genre>), accessed 23 December 2009.

¹⁵ 'Urusei Yatsura: Facts, Discussion Forum, and Encyclopedia Article' (http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Urusei_Yatsura), accessed 23 December 2009.

steals Lum's top, tricking her into flying at him to get it back and then catching her. In his moment of triumph, he yells 'Now I can finally marry her!' Misunderstanding this as a marriage proposal, Lum accepts on the spot and immediately moves in with him.¹⁶ From this point on, the tale follows Ataru and Lum as legions of attractive aliens attempt to steal Ataru from Lum or vice versa, along with the appearance of creatures from every corner of space. *Urusei Yatsura* is one of the most popular titles in anime history, and was the first to inspire fan-written translations – it is not simply a rather strange love comedy, but rather a series responsible for helping establish harem gender stereotypes, and the model to which nearly every love comedy owes a debt.¹⁷



Figure 30

Lum dressed in her famed tiger-striped bikini and knee-high go-go boots.

¹⁶ *Urusei Yatsura*, Episode 1, Oshii Mamoru (Tokyo, Studio Pierrot and Studio Deen, 1981).

¹⁷ Fred Patten, *Watching Anime, Reading Manga: 25 Years of Essays and Reviews* (California, Stone Bridge Press, 2004), p. 47.

The enormous success of *Urusei Yatsura* paved the way for many more similarly structured love comedies to come, and in the early 1990s, the modern *bishoujo* game came into being. These games are a uniquely Japanese phenomenon, having virtually no equivalent in the Western video game industry. Nevertheless, they form a sizeable part of the Japanese entertainment market, and make up the majority of offline PC games in Japan.¹⁸

Perhaps the most notable subgenre of these games are *ren'ai* games, better known outside of Japan as dating sims, in which a male character is placed in a game with the overt goal of having sex with as many female characters as possible (although, paradoxically, the ultimate goal is the selection of a single female character and the orchestration of a happily-ever-after ending). Such erotic video games often serve as the basis for plots of harem anime titles today – indeed, relatively popular anime titles such as *Sakura Wars*, *Shuffle!*, and *Rumbling Hearts* are based on them – and influenced the creation of the next landmark in harem anime history: *Tenchi Muyo!*.

The *Tenchi* OVA debuted in 1992 and, like the *bishoujo* games of the time, was clearly intended for a young male audience who enjoyed, and were by now quite used to, the concept of a single male character surrounded by a bevy of attractive young women. If *Urusei Yatsura* introduced the original framework for this plot-type, it was *Tenchi* which reinforced popularised it to such an extent that the idea of one male being stuck in a house with a group of gender-stereotyped girls turned

¹⁸ 'Bishojo Games and Adult Content' (<http://www.buzzle.com/editorials/6-21-2006-99966.asp>), accessed 23 December 2009.

into a genre cliché ‘virtually overnight.’¹⁹ Arguably, *Tenchi* was the single title that marked the change from the action/adventure-orientated anime of the 1980s, to the domestic comedies and magical-girl anime of the 1990s – the years leading up to the premiere of *Tenchi* are characterised by such titles as *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water* (1990), *Record of Lodoss War* (1990), *Future GPX Cyber Formula* (1991), and *Yu Yu Hakusho* (1992), while the years following *Tenchi* saw the emergence of shows including *Sailor Moon* (1992), *Oh! My Goddess* (1993), *Magic Knight Rayearth* (1994), and *New Cutie Honey* (1994).

The popularity of the *Tenchi* franchise also allowed for the eventual successes of similar shows from the same company. In particular, *Tenchi* creator Kajishima Masaki returned to the harem concept in working with later projects such as *Saber Marionette* (1995), *Martian Successor Nadesico* (1996), *Hand Maid May* (2000), *Steel Angel Kurumi* (2000), *Love Hina* (2000), and *Kanon* (2002). By this time, the American audience had also been prepared for these types of shows, some of which gained mainstream attention. *Oh! My Goddess* and *Love Hina* especially became hit shows overseas.

However, the overall reception of harem anime outside of Japan is not a particularly favourable one. The genre is often heavily criticised for its pandering to male fans with heavy use of fanservice, and in the United States especially, such prominent themes are often shunned by female viewers who find them to be sexist misrepresentations.²⁰ Whilst not every harem series is reduced to using

¹⁹ ‘AnimeNation Anime News Blog – Blog Archive – Ask John: What Started the “One Guy Many Girls” Trend?’ (<http://www.animenation.net/blog/2002/05/06/ask-john-what-started-the-one-guy-many-girls-trend/>), accessed 23 December 2009.

²⁰ Brenner, p. 89.

fanservice as its main selling point, there are some titles which would seem to be genuinely offensive not only to feminists, but to the female population in general – for example, *DearS* (2004), the story of which centres around a temperamental and discriminating young man named Takeya Ikuhara, who comes across a mysterious girl (later nicknamed Ren) on his way home from school. When Takeya expresses concern at her state of undress and apparent homelessness, Ren abruptly kneels in front of him, kisses his hand, and professes herself to be his slave.

As Takeya's self-proclaimed slave, Ren not only sees herself as inferior to her 'master', but is also an inherently emotionally dependant young woman. The essential role of her character, as one of the DearS aliens, is solely to be 'useful and liked' to and by whomever she serves. The same can be said of any other DearS; should they fail in this, they look upon themselves as fundamentally worthless. Each DearS wears a collar as a part of their character design. Reminiscent of dog collars, they also have a leash attached to them in the opening sequence, in which the musical refrain is 'I'm your slave.'

Takeya himself, whilst being loudly against DearS exploitation, makes a living by peddling pornography to his classmates. Miu, another female DearS and Ren's rival, regularly devises competitions revolving around cooking and house chores, while Takeya's class teacher frequently dresses in lingerie and lounges on her desk during class for no apparent reason. Every female character, whether DearS or human, has sizeable breasts, and non-graphic nudity is a common occurrence. As one reviewer points out, 'the show itself is fairly fan service-laden... On the

other hand, there isn't much in the way of violence (outside of someone bleeding to death in the 8th episode.) And then, I remember the whole 'slave' angle, and the word 'appropriateness' flies straight out the window.'²¹

However, *DearS* is by no means a representation of the harem genre as a whole. That most harem titles lack any main male characters or male relationships outside of the lead may be explained by the creator's wish to control the size of a typically already-large cast, or that they have no desire to design another male character in whom a predominantly male audience will not have an interest. Meanwhile, a large female cast acts as wish fulfilment for the heteronormative masculine ideal, and maximises the chance of every male audience member finding at least one character they like, both in terms of personality and physical design. In the case of those harem titles which quickly make apparent the main couple, any strong sexual interest is concentrated on one particular female rather than viewing the entire female group as a kind of sexual prey.

A further important counterpoint is that because reverse-harems and many *shoujo* titles have the equivalent to a harem in their cast, certain criticisms are rendered hypocritical from those who perceive *shounen* and *seinen*-targeted works as intrinsically more sexualised than those of a *shoujo*-based audience. Within those harem titles that do employ fanservice, the level of this can be a very distinguishing trademark, as has been summarised by viewers: 'There's the

²¹ 'THEM Anime Reviews 4.0 – DearS' (<http://www.themanime.org/viewreview.php?id=764>), accessed 23 December 2009.

extreme of nakkid-except-for-a-bonnet triplets of *Hanaukyo* to the more conservative “OMFG did Belldandy just flash a shoulder?”²²

Finally, there is also the common assumption that all harem titles are comedies, and are therefore inferior to titles of a more serious or complex nature. Opinions regarding what makes an anime superior or inferior aside, it would be incorrect to say that a harem anime must necessarily also be a comedy. Relatively serious harem titles which draw on drama, sincere romance, and even occasionally dark thematic elements, while rare in comparison to their comedic counterparts, can and do demonstrate that the genre does not revert solely to fanservice and slapstick humour in order to tell a story.

Titles such as *Oh! My Goddess*, *Ai Yori Aoshi*, *Elfen Lied*, *Kanon*, and *Clannad* are all strong examples of this. Oppliger has commented that ‘The fact that typical harem anime are exploitative, superficial, and redundant doesn’t mean that all of them are, nor does it mean that harem anime are automatically bad. There shouldn’t be any reason to feel shame about describing *Ah! My Goddess* as a harem title.’²³ Such shows may involve little or no fanservice, and comedy, when a component of the show at all, is not the main attraction.

The same can likewise be said of some reverse-harem shows, including *Fushigi Yuugi*, *Boys Over Flowers*, and *Saiunkoku Monogatari*, all of which focus on drama and romance over any other element. Of course, the fact that harem titles

²² ‘harem genre primer (featuring mahoraba)’ (<http://blogsuki.com/archives/2005/06/12/358/5/>), accessed 23 December 2009.

²³ ‘AnimeNation Anime News Blog – Blog Archive – Ask John: What Distinguishes Harem Anime?’ (<http://www.animenation.net/blog/2009/04/17/ask-john-what-distinguishes-harem-anime/>), accessed 23 December 2009.

commonly include at least some form of comedy is not necessarily a drawback – that many viewers, particularly females, often seem to prefer alternative modes of storytelling is a matter of personal taste. In response to harem anime backlash, some anime fans have urged others to ‘think of it [harem anime] as a light fruit dessert after a heavy three-course meal; it’s sometimes refreshing to watch a minor show about a jacked-up guy trying to score after you’ve just watched something like, say, *Evangelion*, which makes me want to slit my wrists and listen to Marilyn Manson.’²⁴

Comedy and Visual Decoding

It is possibly due to such assumptions that there is comparatively very little written on harem anime, either academically or fan-based. The genre does not usually take itself too seriously, which perhaps means that few have seen the need to write about it. It is also a possibility that the genre is frequently either overlooked or viewed in a negative light due to the fact that there is no equivalent in any form of Western media. One cannot compare the typical harem series with an American comic book or television programme – particularly with the rise of game shows such as *The Bachelor* or *I Love New York*, where men or women are decreased in number by being voted off week by week. The closest that Western television shows come to compare to harem anime are American sitcoms where, like most harem titles, romantic comedy and slapstick stunts are the usual fare.

²⁴ ‘YouTube – Anime Zone: The Harem Genre’ (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASwzlrPpqsA>), accessed 23 December 2009.

However, simply because little appears to have been written on the subject does not signify that the genre is lacking in varying themes and concepts which can be explored. Like any anime genre, harem titles have their own unique sets of codes and conventions, both spoken and unspoken. Some of these, such as audio and visual cues, while obvious to those who are familiar with the genre, are also often unique or distinctive to harem titles for the very reason that people often eschew them; they are largely comedic in nature, and are therefore not limited by rules of realism or normalcy. From physical displays of affection, bleeding noses, and unusual arrays of hair colours, the harem genre is largely responsible for many of the more memorable audio-visual cues that anime in general has become known for. In no other genre of anime is Collingwood's idea of art as representation so strongly apparant.

A well-known example of this is what is commonly referred to within the Western fan community as glomping. Named for the imaginary sucking sound this sudden vacuum-like grasp creates, glomping is understood to be the act of a character suddenly and violently (but affectionately) hugging other characters, often knocking them to the ground via a running or flying start.²⁵ Whilst the act of glomping itself is not tied to any real cultural gesture, it may share links with the Japanese (and South Korean) concept of *skinship* – a word used to describe the concept of physical closeness that is reflective of emotional intimacy.²⁶ According to scholars, the term is derived from the blending of 'skin' and the last syllable of

²⁵ 'The Glomp – Television Tropes & Idioms' (<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/TheGlomp>), accessed 23 December 2009.

²⁶ Scott Clark, *Japan, a View from the Bath* (Hawaii, University of Hawaii Press, 1994), p. 73.

‘friendship’, although it may also have its roots from the play on the similarity of ‘kinship’.²⁷

The term originally referred solely to the closeness that is developed between a mother and child, specifically through the touch of bare skin during breast feeding. However, it has since developed into a much more general term which is used to refer to bonding through broader methods of familial or friendly physical contact: holding hands, patting the head, putting an arm around shoulder or waist, sharing a bath, and of course, hugging.²⁸

The term is cited as having been in use as early as 1971 in the *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten* (a 14-volume dictionary similar in scope to that of the Oxford English Dictionary), which states, ‘When a child receives an abundance of skinship, the child is better able to handle stressful situations and will mature into an emotionally stable adult.’²⁹ Kawabata Yasunari, a Japanese short story writer and novelist who also worked as a reporter, commented in a similar vein, ‘Some children on school trips to Tokyo who come here even enter the bath with their pants on, because they've never taken a communal bath and are embarrassed... Young people don't have a chance to learn the social manners to be gained from bathing together.’³⁰

²⁷ Clark, p. 73.

²⁸ Patrick Drazen, *Anime Explosion!: The What? Why? & Wow! of Japanese Animation* (California, Stone Bridge Press, 2003), p. 54.

²⁹ ‘Word Spy – skinship’ (<http://www.wordspy.com/words/skinship.asp>), accessed 23 December 2009.

³⁰ ‘Public baths: Centuries-old Japanese tradition may be ending’, *Boca Raton News* (17 September 1982, p. 12A), pp 259-260.

It must also be understood that, to Japanese children at least, the sudden hugging of a friend is not necessarily perceived as an invasion of personal space, but rather as an act of natural instinct that is ‘akin to petting with a cute kitten or playing with an excited puppy.’³¹ Anime, like many other forms of media, exaggerates realistic situations for the sake of stylistic or dramatic effect, and glomping has become such a well-known phenomenon that it is not an uncommon occurrence at conventions.

In particular, glomping is a frequent occurrence within harem titles, where flamboyant displays of affection – and indeed, overstated demonstrations of almost every emotion – are commonplace. *Urusei Yatsura*’s Ataru attempts to glomp virtually every female he encounters other than Lum, who instead glomps him; *Girls Bravo* regularly features glomping to and from almost every main character; *Love Hina*’s Koalla Su repeatedly glomps a number of characters in the form of a leaping tackle; *Ai Yori Aoshi*’s Mayu glomps Kaoru in just about every episode; and Tenchi is the constant recipient of glomping, usually by Ryoko, in every incarnation of the *Tenchi* meta-series.

Incidences of nosebleeds are another example of a visual convention that is especially common to harem titles and, unlikely as it may seem to first-time viewers, denotes sexual arousal.³² Presumably because it is difficult to express this in an immediately recognisable manner without being sexually graphic, the nosebleed has become the standard representation of blood rushing to the head

³¹ ‘AnimeNation Anime News Blog – Blog Archive – Ask John: Why Does Anime Include So Much Glomping?’ (<http://www.animation.net/blog/2008/07/22/ask-john-why-does-anime-include-so-much-glomping/>), accessed 23 December 2009.

³² Brenner, p. 50.

due to shock, and typically occurs when a male character accidentally spies something ‘perverted’ – catching a glimpse of a girl’s underwear as her skirt is blown up by the wind, or stumbling across a girl in the midst of dressing, undressing, or bathing. In short, the nosebleed acts as a visual pun, as based on a Japanese old wives tale that a boy will get a nosebleed due to a rise in blood pressure if he stares for too long at a pretty girl.³³

Specifically, a nosebleed is suggestive of an erection, and within certain circles in recent years, an erection has been referred to as a ‘Japanese nosebleed’.³⁴ Nosebleeds of this type are therefore usually limited to male characters, and depending on how exaggerated and comical the anime scene or manga panel wishes to be, a nosebleed can vary from a dribble to a gushing river. Female characters are also increasingly becoming subject to nosebleeds; occasionally because they have seen something extremely cute or adorable, but more often because they too, have unexpectedly witnessed something more sexually suggestive – an interesting piece of imagery to consider when reflecting on the fact that the more violent manifestations of nosebleeds, which literally knock an anime character backwards by the explosive force of it, imply actual ejaculation.

Tenchi experiences a tiny nosebleed after attempting to peek over the dividing fence separating the male and female areas of a hot spring, and when caught by the pre-pubescent Sasami, she points out his bleeding nose and laughs at him for being a ‘naughty boy’. Sunako, in the reverse-harem *The Wallflower*, has such an

³³ ‘Futsishi Anime Dictionary – nosebleed – Dictionary of Anime Fandom’ (<http://dictionary.lunaescence.com/?p=145>), accessed 23 December 2009.

³⁴ ‘Nosebleed – Television Tropes & Idioms’ (<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/Nosebleed?from=Main.TheNoseBleed>), accessed 23 December 2009.

aversion to anything too beautiful that seeing anyone whom she considers to be a ‘Bright Creature’ causes her to spout torrents of blood from her nose. *Love Hina*’s Keitaro is known so well by his female friends for his nosebleeds that Naru becomes suspicious when, at one point, a nosebleed fails to occur. Ikuto of *Nagasarete Airantou* experiences nosebleeds of such severity that he once faints from blood loss multiple times in a single episode. *Kyou Kara Maou*’s Günter has several nosebleeds over the course of the series, most noticeably when witnessing Yuri being handed a g-string, and quickly excuses himself from the room while apologising for his ‘impure thoughts.’



Figure 31

Günter suffers one of his many nosebleeds throughout the series.

A further example of a visual cue characteristic of the harem genre is the vast variety of hair colours on display. A certain freedom of expression can be seen in the harem genre which is not as common in other genres of anime, particularly since a number of harem titles also incorporate elements of science-fiction and fantasy. Whereas creators and directors such as Miyazaki tend to keep the hair dark in order to maintain a natural, realistic atmosphere, the harem genre is renowned for sacrificing realism for comedy – and, given that so many harem

characters are goddesses, aliens, and all manner of other extraterrestrials, there is already a perfect excuse to portray them with hair colours ranging from forest green to bubblegum pink.

Just as strange and exotic hair colours may hinder realism, they bring with them some potentially positive aspects. For instance, children are able to recognize and distinguish between characters that may otherwise look extremely similar in their aspects of visual design – it is no coincidence that the casts of magical-girl shows such as *Sailor Moon*, *Tokyo Mew Mew*, and *Pretty Cure* are all colour-coordinated. However, the selection of hair colour has never been limited to children's anime titles. Hair colour is also responsible for enhancing characters even in the most serious of anime titles, and aids in creating a sometimes very subtle impact upon viewers. For example, the difference between Rei and Asuka's behaviour and mannerisms in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* are reflected by their hair; icy blue and vibrant orange respectively. Far from compromising their character design, the choice of hair colours in this title has played a large role in making them two of the most iconic anime characters of all time.

The same can be said in terms of harem anime, where hair colour typically plays a large role in defining character personality. Male characters are highly likely to have black or nondescript brown hair in order to emphasise their conventionally commonplace nature and set them apart from the females surrounding him. Tenchi (*Tenchi*), Keitaro (*Love Hina*), Kaoru (*Ai Yori Aoshi*), Keiichi (*Oh My Goddess!*), and many others all fall into this category. The same can be said of reverse-harems, where the female lead is more likely to have black or brown hair,

while the male characters surrounding her will be more flamboyantly coloured, as with Haruhi (*Ouran High School Host Club*), Sunako (*The Wallflower*), Tohru (*Fruits Basket*), and Haruka (*Uta no Prince-sama*). Whilst hair colour is not necessarily an accurate reflection of the characters themselves, it does indicate what colours the creators thought best suited the character. Furthermore, as colour clichés regarding hair have become more common, anime creators have begun playing upon these stereotypes, using them either in a tongue-in-cheek manner, or else to purposefully mislead or surprise viewers.³⁵

Nonetheless, there does seem to be a rough correspondence between hair colour and personality type, particularly in harem anime, where a stereotypical and even cookie-cutter cast is often the norm. A vibrantly blonde woman such as *Tenchi's* Mihoshi is the resident ditz of the show, while the same shade of blonde in a male such as *Ouran High School Host Club's* Tamaki indicates an outgoing and somewhat mischievous individual. A vivid dark pink or light red hair colour for females may be used for the 'mad scientist' character-type, as in *Tenchi's* Washu and *Kyou Kara Maou's* Anissina. Orange hair, whether for male or female, is symbolic of a loud or assertive character, such as Kyo from *Fruits Basket* or the twins from *Ouran High School Host Club*. Dark green hair may be used as an indicator of special powers, such as with Gisela (*Kyou Kara Maou*) and Sasami (*Tenchi*), whereas lighter or pastel shades of green suggest something distinctly alien, as with Ryoko (*Tenchi*) and Lum (*Urusei Yatsura*). Within the majority of titles, these more unnatural colours are understood to be perfectly normal by the characters, and are rarely, if ever, referred to at all.

³⁵ 'Anime Project General Information' (http://www.umich.edu/~anime/info_haircolor.html), accessed 23 December 2009.

Examining Archetypes

Other traits which characterise harem titles are not directly to do with audio-visual cues, and require some pre-conceived knowledge of the genre. These include fixed character stereotypes and the subversion of these stereotypes, the differing methods of fanservice, and the lack of intimate physical contact, and will be examined in detail using *Tenchi Muyo!*, *Ouran High School Host Club*, and *Kyou Kara Maou!*

Tenchi, the quintessential harem title, tells of 17-year old Masaki Tenchi, who lives in the countryside with his father and grandfather. Curiosity leads Tenchi to accidentally release Ryoko, an infamous space pirate, who had been imprisoned in a tomb within the heart of his family's shrine for 700 years. In a series of related events, five more alien girls show up at the Masaki household: the Juraian princesses Ayeka and her younger sister Sasami; the legendary scientist Washu; and Mihoshi and Kiyone, officers of the space police force. Together, the cast get themselves mixed up in a string of comic adventures throughout the galaxy, as each of the women vies for Tenchi's affections.

Ouran High School Host Club is a reverse-harem series, and follows Fujioka Haruhi, a female scholarship student at Ouran High School in Tokyo, along with the other six attractive male members of the school's ever-popular host club. When Haruhi stumbles across the club room and inadvertently breaks an antique vase valued at ¥8,000,000, she is at first mistaken as a male because of her short hair and gender-ambiguous figure and clothing. Tamaki, the self-proclaimed

‘King’ of the club, allows her to pay off her debt by becoming the club’s lackey. Although Haruhi’s true gender is discovered by each club member during the first episode, it is agreed that she has the potential to make an excellent host, and she chooses to formally join the club, dressed as a male, in order to pay off her debt more quickly. The romantic comedy focuses on the relationships in and outside of the club, and in particular satirizes the clichés and stereotypes of many genres of anime, including its own.

Finally, *Kyou Kara Maou* is currently one of the very few all-male harem series currently in existence.³⁶ It takes place in an alternate fantasy world which Shibuya Yuri travels to by coming into contact with sources of water. The plot begins when Yuri, upon finding a former classmate being bullied, intervenes and is dunked head-first into a toilet. He is sucked through the toilet into another world, subsequently rescued by members of the royal court, and informed that he is the new heir to the throne of the Great Demon Kingdom. Yuri and his new-found family go through a series of fantastic adventures, while simultaneously learning about the strange people and customs of his new land.

By far the most obvious trait shared by each of these titles is the one for which harem genre consistently comes under the most fire – that of stereotypical characterisation. The vast majority of harem titles employ characters whose personalities are basic ‘stock’ types, whose primary function is to appeal to their teenage male (or in the case of reverse-harem, female) audience. In any given harem female cast, these character types are often predictable to the point of being

³⁶ Titles such as *Gakuen Heaven* might also arguably be considered as all-male harems, although the series in question is first and foremost a boys love title.

predetermined: the Lead Girl (or sometimes pair of Lead Girls), whose job it is to fight over the main male character and generally assert their romantic dominance, even if it is on an unconscious level; the Warrior or Tomboy, outgoing, sexy, and more direct and masculine than any other female member; the Little Sister, innocently adorable; the Rich Girl or Princess, feminine and outwardly correct to a fault; the Housewife, demure and graceful; and the Genius, the quirky but brilliant mad-scientist depiction. In each case, the fixed gender roles and representations are evident – particularly when the characters themselves purposefully exaggerate their individual traits to gain the attention of their romantic interest.

Needless to say, these are only the most common of the possible stereotypes, and a single character may embody more than one at a time – for example, *Tenchi's* Sasami becomes both Little Sister and Housewife; by far the youngest of the cast with her pre-pubescent figure, she nonetheless takes most of the domestic chores into her own hands, particularly in the kitchen. The well-meaning yet uptight Ayeka, literally a young lady of royalty, is both Lead Girl as well as Princess.

Ryoko, the second Lead, is almost the exact opposite of Ayeka in terms of personality, and together, they set up a clear dichotomy: restrained and chaotic, mannerly and crude, demure and overtly sexual. In particular, where Ayeka is usually inhibited when it comes to her body, blushing whenever she even imagines being in any way physically intimate with Tenchi despite how she fights over him, Ryoko delights in drawing attention to herself by flirting with Tenchi outrageously, groping him, and generally reminding him of her body at every

available opportunity: ‘Why are you being so shy? You’ve seen me naked before... remember? Inside the cave?’³⁷ As well as being a direct referral back to how Tenchi and Ryoko met, this line also reminds Tenchi – along with the audience – that Tenchi accidentally freed Ryoko from her imprisonment within a metaphorical womb; not only is Tenchi reminded that he has to take responsibility for Ryoko because of this, but also that he and Ryoko have spent time together inside what might have well have been a darkened closet as far as both Ryoko and Ayeka are concerned.



Figure 32

Ryoko attempts to seduce Tenchi in the hot springs.

Meanwhile, the resident mad scientist Washu attempts to attract Tenchi by being both cute and seductive by measures. She demands that others call her by the title ‘Washu-chan’ despite being several thousand years old, yet appears in a nurse fetish outfit and claims to be an ‘angel of mercy’ while conducting experiments on Tenchi. Mihoshi, the naively ditzy blonde, is both clumsy and huge-breasted, and adds to the sexual comedy by constantly tripping over and sprawling

³⁷ *Tenchi Muyo!: Ryo-Ohki*, Tokyo, OVA 4, Kajishima Masaki (Tokyo, Anime International Company, 2000).

suggestively, or by answering the phone with, ‘Hello, Masaki home. Oh, that sounds like if I were married to the family. How embarrassing. What do you think? Do you think it sounds that way?’³⁸

It is by a direct result of these character stereotypes that *Tenchi* is simultaneously a strong and a weak series. On the one hand, the narrative is often forced, lacking in cohesion, or simply not compelling. On the other hand, fans of the series are typically more interested in the characters and their interactions than with the overall story. Given that character relationships and situational comedy tends to take precedence over plot in any case, the fact that the female cast members serve more as functional roles over fully-realised personalities becomes an advantage.

A male harem cast builds on similar bishounen versions of these stereotypes: the Prince Charming, the Strong Silent type, the Intellect, and the Outgoing Cute one, to name some of the most well-known. *Ouran High School Host Club*’s characters both adhere to and subvert these stereotypes, since although each main male cast member is calculated to draw the female eye, they are also clear parodies of themselves. Tamaki, as the playful Prince Charming of the bunch, is tall, slender, blonde-haired, and almost fanatically dedicated to his duties as a host. He is extremely wealthy, accomplished at playing classical piano music, and can be particularly perceptive of the hidden feelings of others. However, Tamaki is also the main comic relief of the series; ridiculously narcissistic and shamelessly flamboyant, he is completely dense when it comes to his own feelings.

³⁸ *Tenchi Muyo!: Ryo-Ohki* (1994), OVA 8.

Mitsukuni ‘Honey’, the endearingly cute host, is short, slightly chubby, loves all kinds of cakes and sweets, and is completely childish – he takes naps in the afternoons and constantly carries around a pink plush bunny named Usa-chan. Yet he is eighteen years old, making him the senior of almost every other character in the series. In addition, he is an exceptionally strong martial artist, often sending people flying across the room with one kick. He has apparently even been told by Japan's Defence Minister not to ever show his full power, for fear of making other countries believe that Japan holds a weapon of mass destruction.

Indeed, the tongue-in-cheek manner in which every character is referenced is almost a breaking of the fourth wall. As Tamaki introduces Haruhi to the members of the host club in the first episode, believing her to be a homosexual male, he asks, ‘What type do you fancy? The wild type? The loli-shota type? The little devil type? The cool type? Or... how about you try me?’³⁹ An image of each host appears at the appropriate moment, their profile surrounded by flowers – the universally understood *shoujo*-style metaphor for beauty and love; literally a symbol of blossoming romantic potential.

The all-male cast of *Kyou Kara Maou* plays on comparable stereotypes, and while it does not parody itself in the same way that *Ouran* does, it is transparently clear from the outset that the series was very specifically designed with female fans in mind. Not only does it contain a wide range of bishounen, all of whom have extremely distinct physical and personality characteristics so that the audience can

³⁹ *Ouran High School Host Club*, Episode 1, Igarashi Takuya (Tokyo, Bones, 2006).

pick at least one firm favourite, the implications of boys love also have a strong presence.

Wolfram, the blonde-haired, green-eyed beauty, becomes coincidentally engaged to Yuri during the second episode after Yuri accidentally proposes by slapping Wolfram on the left cheek – ostensibly the method in which all native aristocrats propose, but also a moment that sets the scene for Yuri and Wolfram’s tumultuous future relationship. Gwendal, dark-haired, blue-eyed and brooding, is the commander of the demon army, but has a weak spot for knitting, cute children and animals, and all things sweet and adorable. Günter, one of the only people whom Gwendal seems to properly converse with outside of any work-related activity, has long white hair, pale skin, purple eyes, and an outrageously poetic and melodramatic nature. He is obsessed with Yuri beyond any other character, often making over-the-top comments such as, ‘I would gladly become a horse for the pleasure of being named by His Majesty.’⁴⁰ Conrad, who acts as Yuri’s bodyguard, is more than once labelled a prince by Yuri (‘Can it be that a prince on a white horse is coming to rescue me?’), and is described by Yuri as being ‘almost perfect’ in appearance and behaviour.⁴¹

Yuri himself, whilst definitively male, effectively takes the place of a female as far as other characters interact with and relate to him. At least in a romantic sense, Butler’s theories regarding unconscious gender performativity can be applied to Yuri: despite claiming on several occasions that he does not like boys, Yuri is the potential love interest of at least three male characters, with the open possibility of

⁴⁰ *Kyou Kara Maou!*, Episode 8, Nishimura Junji (Tokyo, Studio Deen, 2004).

⁴¹ *Kyou Kara Maou!* (2004), Episode 1.

several others. His actions do not reflect his words, and he does nothing to attempt to make those characters think of him differently. Moreover, Yuri is the clear stereotypical *uke* in terms of both physical design and personality, regardless of who he is paired with. The fact that the series includes several common tropes of the boys love genre – including large amounts of male cross-dressing – is a transparent way in which the series draws on both character stereotypes mixed with boys love themes in order to appeal to its overwhelmingly female audience. In turn, the series has gained extreme cult popularity; so much so that despite being over 100 episodes long, fans have petitioned for a fourth season.⁴²

The main male or female character in harems and reverse-harems also typically adheres to pre-set archetypal roles. Most noticeably, the lead male in any given harem series is almost always the teenage every-man. From his black or brown hair to his brown eyes and his exceedingly normal or even under-average looks and skills, he serves as the audience surrogate in that the viewer – particularly if they are the stereotypical Japanese *otaku*, who lusts after women but has little contact with them – can put themselves in the character's shoes. This, too, accounts for the fact that the male character does eventually have something remarkable occur in his life: he is an utterly unexceptional and boring high school student until he suddenly becomes the new landlord of a female-only dormitory, or discovers a latent magical power, or alien women crash-land into his house.

A harem series then becomes wish-fulfilment on two levels: the main character, a stand-in for the targeted audience member, is able to be in close physical

⁴² ‘真魔国を助けましょう!’ (<http://purulelu.org/shinmakoku/>), accessed 03 January 2010.

proximity to females, at least some of whom are attracted to him, and possibly one of whom he will fall in love with and earn a happily-ever-after. Furthermore, he will eventually find within himself a strength that, despite his apparent ordinariness, transforms him into an extraordinary man at heart. Concurrently, the series maintains a certain form of necessary realism even in a science-fiction or fantasy situation by featuring these sorts of male characters who are not especially handsome, do not excel at school, are not blessed with any kind of athletic ability, and are either poor, easily embarrassed by women, or simply seem to attract bad luck. However, he is nonetheless ‘special’ in some often indefinable way – a fact which is recognised either during or at the end of the story by the females surrounding him.

Tenchi’s title character is one such male. Introverted, inexperienced, and a gentleman at heart with traditional core values, Tenchi ultimately realises that he wishes to live a quiet and simple life without the burden of heavy responsibility. He discovers that he is the first prince of Jurai, a planet of a royal family, and that he possesses strong supernatural powers. However, he does not have full control over these powers, and seems only able to summon them during life-or-death situations. He is annoyed and flustered by turns at the attentions of his new female housemates, alternately blushing and having nosebleeds or becoming frustrated at their antics and exclaiming, ‘I don’t need this kind of trouble!’⁴³

Similarly, *Kyou Kara Maou*’s Yuri has a heart of gold, but does not see himself as anything more than an average schoolboy whose only talent lies in playing

⁴³ *Tenchi Muyo!: Ryo-Ohki* (1992), OVA 1.

amateur baseball. He has no romantic experience with women, and is intimidated by characters such as Lady Cecilie, the ‘sexy queen’ who is mischievously flirtatious, big-breasted, usually scantily-dressed (indeed, she has the uncanny ability to suddenly appear in a dominatrix-like red leather and mask outfit complete with a whip), and whose purpose in life is a ‘free and easy quest for love.’⁴⁴ The proud and hot-headed Wolfram, when not making passionate declarations of his love for Yuri, is constantly referring to him as a wimp and making accusations of Yuri two-timing: ‘Thinking isn't your specialty, is it? Surely you haven't forgotten who you're betrothed to?’⁴⁵

Nonetheless, Yuri is emotionally unassuming and, like Tenchi, finds that he has a strong magical power which he can only summon in dire situations or extreme anger. In fact, Yuri literally becomes another person entirely when under the influence of this power, and as a result cannot remember his own actions when ‘transformed’. His alter-ego, recognisable by the longer hair and slanted, cat-like eyes, is the epitome of many of the traits Yuri lacks, and perhaps wishes he had: decisive, powerful, and assertive. His other self is also a manifestation of Yuri’s desire to see that justice prevails over cruelty and evil.

In contrast, the main female character of many reverse-harem titles is often more self-assured than her male counterpart. Whilst she is still entirely unassuming in appearance – again, dark hair and eyes and a slight figure are the norm – many reverse-harem females such as *Ouran*’s Haruhi, *Saiunkoku Monogatari*’s Shurei, and *Hakuouki*’s Chizuru easily masquerade as males – she also sometimes

⁴⁴ *Kyou Kara Maou!* (2004), Episode 7.

⁴⁵ *Kyou Kara Maou!* (2004), Episode 15.

possesses a certain determination or resolve that male harem leads are lacking in. Very rarely does she actively chase after any of her male cast – on the contrary, the males are the ones doing most of the chasing – and indeed will often actively disdain them even if she is ultimately paired up with one of them. She also has strong ethical or social principles, extending anywhere from simply not wishing to cause any drama within the group, to an intense dislike of prescribed gender roles.

Highly intelligent, level-headed, and both physically and emotionally independent, Haruhi is a prime case in point. Her personality is at least partially a result of the death of her mother when she was five years old, forcing Haruhi to take charge of the household and her loving but eccentric father. This particular aspect mirrors several other reverse-harem characters whose lives have been changed by the death or disappearance of one or both parents, including *Pretear*, *Fruits Basket*, *Saiunkoku Monogatari*, and *Hakuouki*.

Haruhi is often straight-forwardly blunt, and remains largely unaffected by the charms of the host club bishounen. She finds these young men to be endearing but irritating, and views them as a kind of dysfunctional family. She finds the financial excesses to which the members of the host club enjoy to be farcical and, most tellingly of her character, her gender-consciousness is evidently ‘lower than that of an average person.’⁴⁶ Much to the dismay of Tamaki, who is plainly in love with Haruhi and daydreams of her soft and feminine side, she prefers wearing pants to skirts or dresses, and finds amusement in referring to herself as a male, jokingly commenting, ‘Maybe I’ll start addressing myself as ‘ore’ from now

⁴⁶ *Ouran High School Host Club* (2006), Episode 1.

on.’⁴⁷ She dislikes being reliant on anyone, but particularly upon men; in one of her only serious fights with Tamaki, she incurs his anger by saving some girls from a group of thugs with no thought for her own safety. Grabbing her by the shoulders, he yells at her, ‘Think about it a little, idiot! You’re a girl!’⁴⁸

For the most part, these types of female characters are in line with their own specific target audience, who is not looking to see only a female version of the straight harem anime, yet who is also not averse to romantic comedy. Reverse-harems consistently work on character stereotypes, but are designed to appeal to the modern young women who may desire a strong-willed female lead in which they can place themselves, and not a traditionally feminine or oversexed character.

A lesser-felt but highly significant presence in harem titles is the viewers themselves, who are regularly interposed directly onto specific characters. Particularly in recent years, anime creators of all genres have sought to pander to their most devoted viewers by inserting various kinds of shout-outs and insider jokes by way of fan acknowledgement. Whilst by no means limited to harem anime, the overall style and tone of most harem shows allows for very easy openings into breaking the fourth wall and speaking directly to the audience. Within straight harem, the male lead becomes the eyes of the audience as previously discussed; a clear substitute for any sexually frustrated young male who yearns to be something more.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ *Ouran High School Host Club* (2006), Episode 8.

However, in a reverse-harem title, the substitute for its female audience becomes not only the lead character but also the resident fangirl; the ‘rabid breed of human female’ who is obsessed with an anime character or romantic pairing.⁴⁹ Because the term is often a derogatory one, implying a loudly fanatical persona, the self-insertion within anime is usually one of parody – the female audience can see at least a part of themselves within fan characters, but the situations involving these characters are entertaining rather than insulting.

In *Ouran High School Host Club*, it is Renge who takes this role. The self-proclaimed manager of the club, Renge compulsively plays dating simulation video games, produces a school magazine containing all things relating to *moe* (the *Moe Moe Ouran Journal*), and along with the club’s female clients, deafeningly fantasises about the hosts and their possible homoerotic romances. Renge’s inability to differentiate between the characters in her video games and real-life look-a-like people cause the male members of the host club to point in shock and fear upon their first meeting: ‘An *otaku*! She’s an *otaku*! This is the first time I’ve seen one!’⁵⁰

In *Kyou Kara Maou*, the three head maids become the audience self-insertion. They spend the majority of their screen time placing bets on which character Yuri will end up with, and calculating the odds of his romantic prospects. In many ways, both Yuri’s mother, Miko, and Wolfram’s mother, Lady Cecilie, also take the place of fangirls. Miko delighted in dressing her son in female clothing when he was younger, and is so enthusiastic about Yuri’s engagement to Wolfram that

⁴⁹ ‘Urban Dictionary: fangirl’ (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=fangirl>), accessed 03 January 2010.

⁵⁰ *Ouran High School Host Club* (2006), Episode 4.

she begins planning the wedding in her head as soon as she finds out, excitedly asking Wolfram, ‘Next time you’re here, let’s go look at wedding dresses... which colour would you prefer, white or pink?’⁵¹ Lady Cecilie frequently presses Yuri to her bosom in a way reminiscent of a glomp, and is one of the chief supporters in his engagement to her son, excitedly declaring, ‘Wonderful!... See, Wolf, it’s just like I told you. All the men are after you! All the men here must be lusting after you!’⁵²

Fanservice and Family

Another common convention of the harem genre is the blatant use of fanservice. Now not simply a fan term, the word is also used by anime academics as well as occasionally within the dialogue of anime titles – most famously by Misato in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, who teasingly promises that there will be ‘more fanservice’ during her voiceovers in some post-episode trailers. Fanservice is by no means difficult to detect or to understand, but it is important to note that it is not necessarily limited to panty or cleavage shots and skimpy clothing. At its most basic level, fanservice is understood simply as being any gratuitous addition to a show that is specifically designed to please the viewers. Cameo appearances, homages to other works, and generally all varieties of insider jokes are all instances of non-sexual fanservice, and can be engaging enough to warrant whole shows based around nothing but these – for example, *Lucky Star* and *Sayanora, Zetsubou Sensei* (*Goodbye Mr. Despair*).

⁵¹ *Kyou Kara Maou!* (2005), Episode 59.

⁵² *Kyou Kara Maou!* (2004), Episode 2.

Nonetheless, because it is so common and relatively easy to add to any show, sexually-orientated fanservice is considered the anime default form.⁵³ In harem anime, this usually translates into non-graphic glimpses of nudity, implications of schoolgirl lesbians, and other forms of calculated light titillation – the teasing equivalent of a group of lingerie-clad girls engaging in a pillow-fight. Nonetheless, harem titles also often employ lesser obvious methods of this, where something as sexually innocent as a blushing schoolgirl may be considered fanservice.

In *Tenchi*, Ryoko is seen naked (sans nipples while being televised) for a full few minutes while fist-fighting with Ayeka at an onsen. On the other hand, she also blushes a fiery red when attempting to seduce Tenchi on a more emotional level, playing the role of demure and domestic maiden not only for Tenchi but for the show's Japanese-intended male audience. Intentionally walking into Tenchi and throwing him to the ground with her alien strength, Ryoko plays the ditzy and bashful young woman with her hands cupping her face shyly: 'I'm sorry, are you alright?... I wasn't paying attention, I'm so clumsy... This is so embarrassing!'⁵⁴

However, because *Ouran* and *Kyou Kara Maou* have a female target audience, fanservice techniques differ within these titles. The only nudity to be seen here is implied, although male toplessness is relatively common. Most of the fanservice in both titles stem from basic bishounen character design, implications of boys love, and costuming. *Ouran* features copious amounts of cosplay in the majority of episodes, since one of the staple jobs of the host club is to entertain their clients

⁵³ Brenner, p. 88.

⁵⁴ *Tenchi Muyo!: Ryo-Ohki* (1993), OVA 7.

by putting on different club ‘themes’, complete with lavish set designs and the appropriate clothing. The hosts wear little more than grass skirts for a tropical island theme, rich silk robes to pose as residents of an Arabian palace, cloaks and armour to play medieval knights, and pseudo-Victorian coats and top hats with vampire fangs for a Halloween-based episode, among numerous other costumes.

Arguably one of the most integral methods of physically appealing to its real-life audience, clients of the host club clients positively gush over these costumes, alongside *Ouran*’s viewers at home. Paired together with homoerotic suggestions, particularly as far as the Hitachiin twins are concerned (‘The club is lucky to have two boys with homosexual tendencies. Even better if the two struggle between a friendship and a romance. And since we’re brothers, the taboo is that much greater’), *Ouran* has become one of the most well-known anime series in terms of its mainstream female appeal.⁵⁵



Figure 33

The Hitachiin twins show off their selling point.

⁵⁵ *Ouran High School Host Club* (2006), Episode 5.

Kyou Kara Maou features similar methods of fanservice, in which each main male character other than Yuri himself is nearly always dressed in a colour-coded military uniform, reminiscent of 18th to 19th century formal military uniforms. Frequent instances of cross-dressing by various characters adds a further dimension to a series that borders on boys love without ever quite being explicit, but which serves to increase its popularity amongst its female fanbase. As part of his work as a spy, Yozak masquerades as a female on such a regular basis that he carries around a dress whenever he leaves on a mission just in case he has need of one – an amusing subterfuge, given his noticeably muscular physique. Yuri ‘disguises’ himself as a maid early on in the series to escape a kidnapping, Wolfram regularly sleeps in a long frilly nightgown complete with ribbons, and both he and Yuri infiltrate a royal ball together by dressing in fancy gowns and long wigs.



Figure 34

Yuri and Wolfram in disguise.

Nonetheless, there are very few, if any harem titles, which cross the line from fanservice to any genuine physical intimacy. Regardless of whether or not the main male character finds his one true love within the group of women he is

living with, physical closeness between the couple very rarely progresses beyond that which is either accidental or unavoidable. A chaste kiss in the final episode between the couple as they finally declare a romantic relationship is all that may be expected, and in a series that does not make obvious the main couple, even this may not eventuate. This complete lack of true sexual contact within the harem genre is not, as some might guess, due to any form of censorship.

Non-explicit and implied sex does occur in other forms of romantic comedy and drama, and relationships gradually develop on a physical level. Arima and Yukino in *Kare Kano* eventually sleep together, as do George and Yukari in *Paradise Kiss*. The two primary romantic relationships in *Nana* are consummated early on in the series; and Ryuji and Taiga elope near the end of *Toradora!*, where Taiga is introduced to Ryuji's grandparents as his wife.

Yet although several women in *Tenchi* are hopelessly infatuated with Tenchi and make repeated attempts to win his love through emotional and physical appeal, he appears to take no interest in their antics and makes no effort to reciprocate even the most obvious advances. *Ouran's* Haruhi recognises that each host member is extremely handsome, but is unimpressed the more they endeavour to impress her with their charms – particularly where Tamaki is concerned. *Kyou Kara Maou's* Yuri remains engaged to Wolfram throughout the series despite his own protestations, frequently referring to him as being 'cute', 'beautiful', and 'handsome', yet he loudly asserts that he does not like boys, shows no concern or embarrassment over being in close physical contact with any of the male characters (unless he is actually being molested by them), and seems either afraid

or averse to being in close physical contact with any mature female character other than his own mother.

The majority of the time, the male character is simply too gentlemanly to even consider ‘taking advantage’ of the women who are throwing themselves at him within harem titles. Furthermore, leaving a series open-ended has the advantage of paving the way for second seasons, films, and OVA ‘specials’, as well as freely allowing for fan speculation. However, the key difference to stress between the main male or female character in a harem or reverse-harem series is that, unlike in many romantic comedies and dramas, the protagonist becomes more of a substitute father, brother, or son (or conversely, mother, older sister, or daughter) figure than that of a potential lover.

Herein lays the most compelling reason why so few harem pairings are even implied to have been consummated. Perhaps a nostalgic look back to the past, when a sense of familial community was the norm, harem anime can be said as serving not only as an outlet of teenage male sexual tension, but also as the echoing of ‘a desire for the large, “traditional,” extended family that may soon exist only in fairy tales’ – a family likely to fall apart should the main character inadvertently break someone’s heart or otherwise alienate people by making a choice.⁵⁶

For example, Tenchi becomes not so much a romantic interest to most of the women he is surrounded by as he does an older brother to the constantly

⁵⁶ ‘Eugene Woodbury – Anime – All in the harem family’ (<http://eugenewoodbury.blogspot.com/2005/12/all-in-anime-harem-family.html>), accessed 04 January 2010.

squabbling Ayeka and Ryoko, an older brother or even father to the young and innocent Sasami, something of a younger brother or nephew to the far calmer and experienced Washu, and no more than a familial friend to Kiyone and Mihoshi. His new ‘family’ makes up for the fact that his mother is deceased, and that his father is a loving but largely non-existent entity. Sasami seems to understand this the best, becoming visibly distraught whenever any serious fighting is going on, and reminding the woman posing as Tenchi’s daughter in the second film: ‘Tenchi’s your dad, and we’re your family, remember? You mustn’t hurt your family, Mayuka, we all love you!’⁵⁷

In *Ouran*, Haruhi becomes an effective younger or older sister to most of the host club members, but is regularly referred to by the over-protective and melodramatic Tamaki as his daughter: ‘My daughter, my daughter’s missing! I can’t get in contact with her! She must’ve been kidnapped! Contact the police! Mobilise the self-defence army if it becomes necessary!’⁵⁸ As someone who has also lost a mother, Tamaki perhaps feels a strong sense of kinship with Haruhi, and makes up for a lack of family warmth at home by ‘adopting’ each individual member of the host club he himself formed, with the aid of a reluctant yet strangely intrigued Kyouya. Tamaki thus often refers to himself as ‘father’ or ‘papa’, and to Kyouya, the second-in-command or ‘Shadow King’, as ‘mother’ or ‘mama.’

Kyouya, too, must deal with an exceptionally cold father and two older brothers – the fact that his own mother is never so much as mentioned implies that she is

⁵⁷ *Tenchi Muyo! Daughter of Darkness*, Kimura Tetsu (Tokyo, Anime International Company, 1997).

⁵⁸ *Ouran High School Host Club* (2006), Episode 15.

either dead or no longer married to Kyouya's father. This may account for Kyouya's failure to protest his unofficial title, seemingly only mildly baffled whenever Tamaki, or sometimes the twins, call him by it: 'Whatever you say, but do you plan on having that husband and wife setting become established?'⁵⁹

Similarly, although *Kyou Kara Maou*'s Yuri has two doting parents and an overprotective older brother, he is bereft of his real family while living in his alternative universe, sometimes for months at a time.⁶⁰ His new land quickly becomes a second home, complete with de facto family. Conrad, Gwendal and Günter quickly become more akin to fathers or uncles than members of a royal court, due in part to Yuri's dislike of formality and status inequality – Conrad in particular is referred to by Yuri and Yuri's mother as his godfather, since it was Conrad who gave Yuri his name).

The familial atmosphere is heightened when Yuri adopts a daughter, Greta, and becomes a very real, albeit young, father-figure along with Wolfram, who reasons that, as Yuri's fiancé, he is also Greta's other parent. Greta refers to them both as 'papa', and Conrad, Gwendal and Günter as 'uncles'. When Greta must choose whether to return to her homeland or stay with Yuri, Yuri tells her, 'No matter how far apart they are, family are bound with a single thread', and Greta eventually decides that she cannot leave him, even though she would otherwise be with her last remaining blood relatives.⁶¹

⁵⁹ *Ouran High School Host Club* (2006), Episode 4.

⁶⁰ The distinct pattern of harem shows featuring main characters without parents or other blood relations in the picture encourages the formations of other kinds of 'family', which is often made up of, or even largely created by, alien interlopers and other odd or dispossessed characters.

⁶¹ *Kyou Kara Maou!* (2008), Episode 93.

As a whole, the harem genre is easily dismissed for its most common tropes: repetitive sexual innuendo, pigeonholed characters, and a formulaic plot – unlike some other genres of anime that have been discussed in previous chapters, harem anime reinforces rather than undermines binaries regarding gender and sexuality. However, although many Western fans especially believe that contemporary anime is growing stale from the amount of harem and other similarly male-orientated shows being released, numerous titles have enjoyed highly successful runs.

Tenchi was one of the first mature anime series to achieve mega-hit status in America, and served to influence and create countless Western fans of anime as a whole.⁶² The *Love Hina* manga won the Kodansha Manga Award for best *shounen* title in 2001 and was selected as Best Manga, USA release at both the 2002 and 2004 Anime Expo conventions.⁶³ *Elfen Lied* gained extreme notoriety for the way in which it paired up traditional harem with horror.⁶⁴ In 2006 – one of the most prolific years in the history of anime with over 175 new shows to be released – *Ouran High School Host Club* was a firm fan favourite.⁶⁵ Today, the harem genre continues to be a unique staple of anime which maintains commercial success both in and outside Japan.

⁶² ‘AnimeNation Anime News Blog – Blog Archive – Ask John: Does and Should Tenchi Muyo Have a Future?’ (<http://www.animenation.net/blog/2008/03/24/ask-john-does-and-should-tenchi-muyo-have-a-future/>), accessed 03 January 2010.

⁶³ ‘Kodansha Manga Award’ (<http://www.hahnlibrary.net/comics/awards/kodansha.php>), accessed 03 January 2010; ‘activeanime.com – Love Hina Again’ (<http://www.activeanime.com/html/content/view/2547/71/>), accessed 03 January 2010; ‘Anime Expo Awards – Anime Expo 2004 – Anime News Network’ (<http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/convention/2004/anime-expo/13>), accessed 03 January 2009.

⁶⁴ ‘Elfen Lied Season 2’ (<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/elfenliedseason2/>), accessed 03 January 2010.

⁶⁵ ‘AnimeNation Anime News Blog – Blog Archive – Ask John: Why Hasn’t Ouran High School Host Club Been Liscened?’ (<http://www.animenation.net/blog/2006/09/21/ask-john-why-hasnt-ouran-high-school-host-club-been-licensed/>), accessed 03 January 2010.

It is apparent that the role of family plays a large part in harem anime, although this theme is not limited to this genre alone. Taken to its most extreme point, romance between blood relations also plays a role in some anime, and it is to this theme that I now turn in ‘We Are Family: Anime and Incest’ – a chapter which moves back to discuss issues of transgression and the subversion of simple binaries.

Chapter Eight: We Are Family – Anime and Incest

In all cultures, real incest involves uncomfortable power issues and squick factor, but theoretical incest is the stuff of myths.¹

Sexual abuse, mentally disturbed parents, and deformed children: incest has long been a word that immediately conjures up strongly negative reactions, and remains one of the most taboo subjects imaginable. To ask any given Western adult about examples of incest typically results in sinister tales of fringe cult practices that are occasionally reported in news articles, or perhaps stories centred on madness, violence, and child exploitation. In contrast, asking for examples of incest in Japanese society are more likely to have people pointing to fictional accounts: pornography such as *Milk Mama*, *Super Taboo*, and *Sexual Pursuit*; dark fantasy including *Godchild*, *Angel Sanctuary*, and *Ceres, Celestial Legend*; and even the romantic comedies *Yagami-kun no Katei no Jijou* (*Yagami-kun's Family Affairs*), *Gals Saurus*, and *Onegai Twins! (Please Twins!)* are all manga and anime titles – some of them relatively mainstream – that involve overtly incestuous themes.

However, regardless of the genre in which incest becomes a theme, the reasons for exploring it are very rarely as simple as they may first appear. Some pornographic titles include incest as a means of intentionally pushing the sexual envelope, but

¹ 'The Other Love that Dare Not Speak its Name' (<http://www.comixology.com/articles/365/The-Other-Love-that-Dare-Not-Speak-its-Name>), accessed 08 July 2010.

many titles would seem to have more involved motives. Incest lends a dark and ominous atmosphere in *Black Lagoon*, provides a deeply complex method of characterisation and psychological symbolism in *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, and acts as a response to real-life restrictive societal conventions as in *Angel Sanctuary*.

If anime is indeed an art form – as numerous scholars and viewers regard it – and if art itself is a form of emotional expression – as Collingwood has written – then anything within anime must necessarily articulate elements of both the conscious and the unconscious human mind. The topic of incest is no exception as, like other representations of sexuality in anime, it takes place in an imaginative space in which the viewer can be immersed. Incest here is not about depicting a realistic or even confrontational act, but rather forms an artistic response to society. It also exists as a form of magic in terms of Collingwood's theories because, as a theme that deliberately arouses emotion, it is also a ritualised form of expression that begs a viewer response.

After examining why the creators of anime have chosen incest as a vehicle to convey their message, this chapter goes on to discuss three very different anime titles – *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (1997), *Angel Sanctuary* (2000), and *Papa to Kiss in the Dark* (2005) – in order to examine what significance portrayals of incest have in these narratives, and how incest is capable of being used as a specific form of character and relationship development. The three core texts to be discussed within this chapter have all been chosen for the fact that they each feature overt and sexual forms of incest – in other words, there is nothing

ambiguous about the relationships that are featured, and the act of sex itself between each couple is at least strongly implied, if not rendered explicit.

Culture and Myth

Even within the realms of manga and anime, incest is not a particularly common trope. However, the fact that several well-known examples over a variety of genres do exist, and given that incestuous motifs are often deliberately employed as a narrative choice rather than gratuitous fetishism, there is good reason to explore it. Despite the pervasive Anglo-American stereotype that Japan is a society of sexual extremes and dysfunctions, real life incest is no more acceptable there than it is in any other first-world country. Although Japanese audiences are far more willing to accept incest as a purely fictional and fantastical plot device than other audiences tend to be, incest in Japan is neither socially admissible nor culturally practiced, and has not been since the sixteenth century.²

Social and moral paradigms of fiction in the West closely align to that of the real world and, in the case of mass culture, seldom, if ever, challenge normative understandings of social construction, such as views on sexuality to any significant extent. However, the existence of incest as a subject for popular consumption in Japan is available because fiction is seen as something completely divorced from real life; a performative representation rather than a social critique – and therefore also divorced from concepts of realism or morality.³

² Christal Whelan, *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth: The Sacred Book of Japan's Hidden Christians* (Hawaii, University of Hawaii Press, 1996), p. 82.

³ See page 67.

Nonetheless, all manner of strange and exotic tales of incest in Japan continue to surface. The majority of these may be discarded as sensationalist accounts and urban legends, although in rare cases, incestuous stories do have some basis in reality. The much-talked about figure of the '*kyoiku* mama', or 'education mama', received critical attention after the publication of an article in the Mainichi Daily News in early 2002 – reports of Japanese mothers so concerned with keeping sons at home in order to study and pass the entrance exams of prestigious high schools that they either personally relieved their son's sexual frustrations, or else used sex as a reward for good academic performance, gained international speculation.⁴

Analogous to the American stereotype of the competitive stage mother who pushes her child to success, the idea of the *kyoiku* mama has existed for decades. Feared by her own child, responsible for the breakdown of their physical and emotional wellbeing, and blamed by society for the high rate of youth suicide, she is now one of the most well-known and least-liked figures of Japanese pop culture – the real-life Chichi (*Dragonball Z*) of the nation.⁵ American scholar and university professor Cathy N. Davidson, in writing about the arduousness of the Japanese education system, comments,

Even the most tender mother realizes that by not pushing her child, she may be sealing his or her fate, and, if the child should fail, it is considered the mother's fault ... There are also grim reports (perhaps apocryphal) of an increase in mother-son incest, rapes, as well as mothers having sex with

⁴ 'The Mainichi Daily News' (<http://mdn.mainichi.co.jp/waiwai/0201/020106moms.html>), accessed 03 July 2010.

⁵ Keiko I. McDonald, *Reading a Japanese Film: Cinema in Context* (Hawaii, University of Hawaii Press, 2006), p. 178.

their sons to help relieve the boys' tension. Such lurid stories are no doubt exaggerated, yet their prevalence in the popular media suggests the depth of Japanese misgivings about the present situation.⁶

A New Zealand professor of Japanese Studies has further noted that, although there is no research on the topic of incest in Japan to have been officially published, 'Iwao [of *The Japanese Woman: Traditional Image and Changing Reality*] is of the view that whereas the typical case of incest in the United States involves a father and daughter, in Japan it is mother and son, with 'mothering instincts spilling over into sexuality'.⁷ Iwao herself writes, 'When the son is small, he can be the object of much of a woman's need for physical contact, a need that is not satisfied by her husband. When a son is older, he may become a surrogate husband of sorts ... that helps fulfil the older woman's emotional needs.'⁸

Other alleged incestuous occurrences, true to life or not, arise from certain specific Japanese cultural and societal practices. Parents bathing naked with young children, as previously discussed in the opening chapter, is not uncommon, although seldom related to incest. Whether or not sexual interaction between cousins is considered to be incestuous largely depends on the viewer, although today, America remains the only Western country in the world that has legal prohibitions preventing cousins from marrying in some states.⁹ Given that

⁶ Cathy N. Davidson, *36 Views of Mount Fuji: On Finding Myself in Japan* (North Carolina, Duke University Press, 2006), p. 27.

⁷ Kenneth G. Henshall, *Dimensions of Japanese Society: Gender, Margins and Mainstream* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), p. 35.

⁸ Iwao Sumiko, *The Japanese Woman: Traditional Image and Changing Reality* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1998), p. 137.

⁹ Ailsa Burns, Cath Scott, *Mother-Headed Families and Why They Have Increased* (New York, Routledge, 1994), p. 84; Martin Ottenheimer, *Forbidden Relatives: The American Myth of Cousin Marriage* (Illinois, University of Illinois Press, 1996), p. 3.

marriage between cousins in Japan is legal, as well as being four times as common as it is in America, it is unsurprising that romantic relationships of this sort are frequently found in manga and anime.¹⁰ Popular titles including *Elfen Lied*, *Cardcaptor Sakura*, *Kanon*, and *Fruits Basket* each contain distinct instances of this.

Moreover, the Japanese language itself, which uses familial terms between genetically unrelated people as a form of politeness on an everyday basis, is possibly responsible for encouraging the idea particularly of sibling incest in the eyes of the a foreign audience. However, it is interesting to note that, out of all incestuous relationship types in manga and anime, sibling incest receives by far the most literary attention, with parent-child incest appearing far less frequently.

Having been viewed by authors and critica as an extremely demanding and goal-orientated society, Japan is understood by many to be a country that leaves comparatively little room for dating or any meaningful contact with the opposite sex outside of school hours. The rigorous routine of regular schoolwork and studying for school entrance exams, combined with the often mandatory participation in extracurricular school-related club activities, has been stated to have resulted in strong bonds developing between siblings.¹¹ In addition, the traditional family structure that still remains firmly in place in many Japanese households dictates that the father works long hours away from home, with the

¹⁰ ‘The Great Mate Debate: Dan Savage’ (http://chemistry.typepad.com/the_great_mate_debate/dan_savage/page/2/), accessed 15 November 2010.

¹¹ ‘AnimeNation Anime News Blog – Blog Archive – Ask John: Why is Incest Common in Anime?’ (<http://www.animenation.net/blog/2002/02/01/ask-john-why-is-incest-common-in-anime/>), accessed 03 July 2010.

effect of an older brother becoming something of a surrogate father to his sister – a trope that has been well explored in manga and anime, whether or not the story includes an incestuous relationship.¹²

For example, *Cardcaptor Sakura*'s Touya is both a physically and emotionally stoic and protective figure to his younger sister, compensating for the fact that their mother is deceased and their father, while extremely loving, spends little time at home. Although best friend Yukito even teases Touya about his 'sister complex', there is no hint that Touya and Sakura's relationship is an incestuous one. As in any scripted form of media, relationships of all kinds tend to be more dramatic regardless of what part of the world they come from. However, given that close sibling relationships exist so prevalently in manga and anime, they might perhaps be looked upon as an exaggerated aspect of Japanese culture: 'a reflection of Japanese society – not actuality, per se, but a response to constrictive social conventions.'¹³



Figure 35

Touya affectionately teases his younger sister.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

It can also be argued that Japanese mythology and legend act as a means of explaining the occurrence of incest in some anime (although, as will be discussed, much of the classical tradition also involves incestuous pairings). In Shinto mythology, Izanagi and his younger sister Izanami, the first two divine beings to be summoned into existence by the original gods, Amenominakanushi and Kunitokotachi, were entrusted with creating the first land. Having done so, they descended from the bridge of heaven and made their home on the island, and eventually mated. From their union, the ‘great eight islands’ of Japan were born, along with six other islands and a great many deities.¹⁴ Another, more obscure legend stating that star-crossed lovers are later reborn as twins may also play a part in anime themes involving incest – a belief that caused the birth of twins in early Japan to be ‘a very bad omen ... they were even more suspect if they were of different sexes for it was thought that they were the reincarnation of crossed lovers driven to commit suicide.’¹⁵

This myth is alluded to in *Ceres, Celestial Legend*, in which Mikage Aya learns on her sixteenth birthday that she is the reincarnation of a celestial maiden named Ceres. Her twin brother, Aki, is the reincarnation of Ceres’ former husband. Myth is very often the subject of fiction, and that incest exists in Japanese mythology comes as no surprise when considering the fact that there is incest in so many legendary tales from all over the world: in Greek mythology, Zeus and Hera are brother and sister as well as husband and wife, who are themselves the children of

¹⁴ Michael Ashkenazi, *Handbook of Japanese Mythology* (California, ABC-CLIO, 2003), p. 3.

¹⁵ Muriel Jolivet, *Japan, The Childless Society?: The Crisis of Motherhood* (London, CRC Press, 1997), p. 119.

Cronus and Rhea, another pair of married siblings; in Egyptian mythology, Osiris and Isis are likewise brother and sister as well as husband and wife; in Chinese mythology, the god-king Fu Xi takes his sister Nüwa as his bride; and in the book of Genesis, Lot's two daughters inebriate their father and trick him into impregnating them in order to carry on the family line, while the biblical character Amram also marries his paternal aunt, Jochebed. Incest also occurs in Norse, Icelandic, Irish, Indian, and Vietnamese mythology, among other cultures.

Whilst dating habits and mythological archetypes provides some explanation for why siblings are the most explored of incestuous themes within the mainstream anime universe, perhaps the most convincing reason is that if depictions of incest in anime deal with 'true love' – as is often the case – then it is seen as more romantic to have a relationship between brother and sister than between parent and child. Both characters involved are more likely to be young, and less likely to be presented with any substantial age gap between them. In addition, their relationship has less chance of being an abusive one, or of being a relationship based more on power than on love. In effect, the relationship, while being incestuous, still manages to be 'pretty'. It is able to be romanticised, and the bond that any two given characters share with each other is one of a beautifully tragic or compellingly forbidden love, rather than something to be viewed with distaste.¹⁶

Sibling Intimacy

¹⁶ This extremely stylised and 'pure' love could also be seen as a Lacanian love for the self or through a Jungian anima/animus lens, although this particular analysis focuses on the viewpoint of the sibling as the romantic other.

Examples of this specific type of sibling relationship in anime are numerous, and *Koi Kaze*, *Boku wa Imouto ni Koi wo Suru* (*I Love My Younger Sister*), *Myself; Yourself*, and *Angel Sanctuary* all depict sibling relationships whose stories and characters are presented seriously, dramatically, and sympathetically. Tellingly, although these titles target demographics range from *shoujo* to *seinen*, the artwork in most of them tends to involve soft, gentle lines and colours, while the characters themselves – particularly the women – are drawn with long hair, expressively large eyes, and a sense of imbued innocence.

Although these titles all deal with relationships involving an older brother and younger sister, another relatively well-known incestuous trope is that of incest between twins – otherwise popularly known as twincest. Whilst older brother/younger sister incest is often categorised by the older male wishing to protect the helpless and adorable younger female, who in turn looks up to him to the point of idolisation, twincest has found its own niche fetish in the manga and anime medium.

Black Lagoon and *Revolutionary Girl Utena* both feature male-female twin incest, although neither of these relationships can be said to be healthy. In *Black Lagoon*, two Romanian twin orphans, known only as Hänsel and Gretel, are deranged and sadistic killers – a result of being repeatedly made to participate in paedophilic snuff films in which they are either raped or forced to murder other children. Miki and Kozue's relationship in *Revolutionary Girl Utena* is one of estrangement and jealousy; Miki's crush on Anthy develops when he realises that she reminds him of his sister, and while most females in the school idolise him, Kozue threatens

any girl who attempts to get close to him. Miki is similarly protective of Kozue, and she therefore attempts to incite his jealousy by dating as many men as she can. In one scene in the film reimagining in which they bathe together, Miki tells Kozue that they can never be as close as they once were. Kozue reacts by pressing a razor to this throat and accusing him of being a traitor. *Utena* also includes a second incestuous relationship in the form of Akio and Anthy – a relationship which will be discussed in detail within this chapter.



Figure 36

Black Lagoon's Hänsel and Gretel.

More popular still are twincest couples of the same sex, since the appeal to viewers is created by playing on the fantasy of two beautiful and identical people having sex with one another – or perhaps more accurately, the fantasy of the viewer themselves sleeping with two beautiful and identical people at the same time. The androgynous, highly anesthetised look of the stereotypical twincest couple can be tied back to Butler's ideas about gender and sexual fluidity, and is a further reason for the basis of that appeal. For this reason, homosexual twincest is usually used for the purpose of titillation rather than for any real advancement of plot. For fans of boys love or girls love, adding twincest to a relationship that

already has the allure of the sinfully carnal is a means of automatically adding extra appeal.

For example, *Chobits* features some extremely intimate scenes between Chii and the ‘Dark Chii’ that appears in her mind. This proves to be her sister, Freya (also the goddess of love, sex, and attraction in Norse mythology), whose heart was taken into Chii several years prior to the series. Chii and Freya are only able to be physically told apart by their clothing; Chii is usually seen in white, pinks, light blues, and other soft colours, whereas the artwork for Freya has her dressed in black or black and white, sometimes with blood-red accents.

However, twincest is more commonly composed of males rather than females and, as one fan website puts it: ‘if it's not canon, there will be plenty of girls shipping it.’ Zero and his long-lost twin brother Ichiru in *Vampire Knight* share an interesting dynamic; after shooting Zero, Ichiru convinces his vampire brother to ‘eat’ his body so that they may finally ‘become one’, and as the two embrace, Ichiru recalls that they often slept in the same bed when they were younger. **Vampire Knight’s Yuki and Kaname are also siblings, and destined for marriage.**

The male twins Hikaru and Kaoru in *Ouran High School Host Club* resent being called ‘homo side characters’ by club president Tamaki, and it may be assumed that they only pretend to have an overt incestuous relationship as a part of their famed host act. Nonetheless, they are seen to wake up in the same bed and cuddling each other in one particular scene. Regardless of whether this is added

because the series creator wished the pair to be thought of as a serious couple, or whether it exists purely as an act of fanservice for the primarily female audience, the relationship is considered to be canon by many viewers.

Revolutionary Girl Utena, *Angel Sanctuary*, and *Papa to Kiss in the Dark*, while all involving incest as a part of the narrative to some degree, are very distinct from each other in terms of genre and storyline. *Revolutionary Girl Utena* is a surrealist series following the tomboyish teenage girl, Utena, as she fights a series of sword duels with the members of the student council in order to protect the ‘Rose Bride’, Anthy. Although the anime portrays three sets of sibling romantic relationships, only the most clear-cut of these will be focused on: that of Himemiya Anthy and her older brother, Akio. *Angel Sanctuary*, a 3-episode dark fantasy and romance OVA, is centred on the relationship between Mudo Setsuna, a troubled teen who also happens to be the reincarnation of the Angel Alexial, and his younger sister, Sara. Finally, *Papa to Kiss in the Dark* is a 2-episode yaoi OVA. Munakata Mira, a high school freshman, is involved in a romantic and very sexual relationship with his ‘Papa’, Kyouzuke. To his shock, he later discovers that Kyouzuke is in fact his biological uncle.

The most significant factors of each of these relationships can be found in the specific scenes that either explicitly show or implicitly infer the sexual act between them – indeed, implicitness, as opposed to explicitness, is precisely why romance can be linked with incest in these works. Because *Utena*, *Angel Sanctuary*, and *Papa* are all non-pornographic titles, the sex scenes themselves must convey incest without necessarily showing it – it must be obvious to the

audience what is occurring, but without displaying anything beyond what is appropriate for a mainstream anime. The way in which these titles choose to do so also act as a strong indicator of the reason behind why incest is included to begin with – the grounds for which incest was incorporated as a central theme.

Despite the obviousness of the nature of each of the relationships within *Utena*, *Angel Sanctuary*, and *Papa*, the most interesting commonality between them is that none are depicted as being immoral within the anime due to incest alone. Although the relationships can be seen as either good or bad based upon other objective factors, none of the characters are condemned for the act of incest in and of itself since, as pointed out earlier in the chapter, the incest is not intended as social criticism or realist reflection. Instead, whether or not the relationship is seen as an acceptable or even desirable one is dependent on the motives of the characters, as well as how psychologically healthy (or unhealthy) that relationship is.

Utena's Anthy and Akio are, on the surface, not particularly close as siblings. Akio himself does not make an appearance until episode 14, when Utena questions Anthy about why she is absent most weekend evenings. Anthy replies that she has 'been told that we should meet at least once a week ... My older brother', surprising Utena, who has until now not been aware that Anthy even has a sibling.¹⁷ Nonetheless, the audience is made almost immediately aware that all is not as it seems. Anthy, a girl the same age as Utena, is originally presented to the viewer as the stereotypical damsel in distress, albeit one who either does not truly

¹⁷ *Revolutionary Girl Utena*, Episode 14, Ikuhara Kunihiko (Tokyo, J.C. Staff, 1997).

comprehend this, or else simply does not care. As the Rose Bride, she is both ‘owned’ by and ‘engaged’ to whoever the current duel champion is. At the start of the series, Anthy is in an abusive relationship with Saionji, who treats her as a mindless doll incapable of disobeying him. Calmly, Anthy informs a protesting Utena: ‘Saionji-sama is the current duel champion, so he can do with me as he likes.’¹⁸ She is ‘rescued’, and subsequently passed on, to the princely Utena, who has become intent on protecting her.

Anthy’s deference to those she interacts with, along with her extremely passive behaviour, emphasises her helplessness, and she is said to have no thoughts or desires besides that of what her current master expects of her. However, her constantly vapid smiling expression masks a far darker, complex personality. Allegorically, Anthy is as much the Wicked Witch as she is the Damsel; she truly is a possession to whoever her current master is, but enjoys this position precisely because of the unique power it affords her. The members of the student council, who are constantly fighting in order to either defend her or win her back – sometimes to the point of madness – are at least in part only compelled to do so because of her very existence. Anthy’s doormat persona and practiced powerlessness hide a figure who is as cruel as she is loving, and as pitiless as she is selfless. She finally admits this to Utena near the end of the series, tearfully telling her,

‘Because I’m the Rose Bride ... because I’m a doll with no heart ... I thought that no matter what befell my body, my heart wouldn’t feel the

¹⁸ *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (1997), Episode 1.

pain. I'm sorry, Utena-sama. My suffering is my rightful punishment as the Rose Bride ... I knew everything. I exploited your innocence. I encroached on your kindness ... I'm a dirty woman. I've betrayed you all along.'¹⁹

The charismatic Akio, acting chairman of the school academy, is far more assertive. Everything about him, from his body language to his actions, exhibits his lust for power. His given name itself literally translates as 'beginning/ending of life' (曉生), while his alternate identity as Dios comes from the Greek 'divine' or 'god-like'. A charming playboy, Akio's many sexual conquests – for the most part unbeknownst to those he seduces – include his fiancée Kanae, Kanae's mother, the male student council members Touga and Saionji, the twin sister of student council member Miki, Utena herself, and of course, his own sister Anthy.

Furthermore, Akio's relationship with Anthy, both sexual and otherwise, is undeniably one born of power. It is unknown how or when the nature of their relationship became an incestuous one, but it is evident that Akio is the one in control. Anthy either is, or feigns to be, held captive by her brother; it is always Akio who initiates any type of physical contact between them, and while Akio is very rarely seen undressed during these sexual encounters, Anthy is always totally nude.

Although nothing is explicitly stated by either character, the nature of Akio's relationship with Anthy is made clear during their first scene alone together in

¹⁹ *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (1997), Episode 37.

only a few words: ‘Come here, Anthy. Were you lonely this week?’ In a voice that is dutifully soft, Anthy only replies, ‘Yes, *Onii-sama*’, before the window shutters fall with a crash, plunging the room into total darkness a moment before the episode ends.²⁰ The effect of this loud noise while all else is nearly silent is distinctly unsettling, while the closing of the shutters in themselves are heavily symbolic. Anthy’s guilt at her actions, the trap or prison in which she has willingly allowed herself to be caught up in, and even a kind of perverse intimacy between Anthy and her brother are all brought together in these few seconds of screen time.

In another just as implicitly potent scene, Akio once again orders Anthy, ‘Come here.’²¹ When Anthy hesitates, Akio repeats his command and grabs her by the wrist, jerking her forwards into his arms as the window shutters once again descend; a more violent embrace this time, and a sign of the way in which their relationship is developing.

Whatever real love Akio may have once felt or even still feels for his sister is ultimately swept away by his ambition, and both characters are caught up in an obsessive love-hate relationship with each other that remains unbroken until the final episode, when Anthy finally walks away in favour of Utena: ‘It’s alright now. Please go on playing make-believe prince in this comfortable little coffin forever. But I must go ... That person hasn’t vanished. She’s merely left your world.’²²

²⁰ *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (1997), Episode 14.

²¹ *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (1997), Episode 25.

²² *Revolutionary Girl Utena* (1997), Episode 39.

In a series such as *Utena*, where the emphasis is heavily placed not upon what is said, but rather on what is not, a visual breakdown of the scenes in which incest occurs is a necessary method to discuss this. Furthermore, because the series makes constant use of surrealism to tell a story, it must be assumed that metaphors are used just as consistently. Every colour, every sound, and every action of a character in pivotal scenes are a deliberate choice by the creators in order to impart information, either consciously or subconsciously, to the audience.

In the case of the incest between Anthy and Akio, the most obvious noise becomes the sound of the window shutters closing. They do so with a distinctive crash that breaks the silence between the characters in several episodes, and each time, the room is rendered pitch black. In some episodes, the audience is shown a small white table where Anthy's glasses are carefully positioned – an unmistakable symbol of the couple's actions, since Anthy is the only character to wear glasses, and even while bearing witness to the sword duels, her glasses are always in place.

During the most visually obvious incestuous scene, Akio and Anthy are seen from an outsider's point of view, when Nanami accidentally sees the two together. Walking into the room, she first sees Akio falling back onto the couch, one arm draped casually over the top of it and red shirt unbuttoned. Not yet comprehending the situation, Nanami only notices the true meaning behind this as Anthy's duelling dress, also bright red – the colour of aggressive desire in the series – falls with a rustle to the floor from where it was hanging over the other side of the couch. As it does so, it reveals an unclothed Anthy, her head leaning

lethargically from the armrest. Her hair, undone from its usual short and tightly pinned state, cascades downwards in a mass of purple waves; an image of overt sexuality. One of her arms dangles down with it, fingers tangled in her hair.



Figure 37

Anthy as seen from Nanami's point of view.

Traumatised, Nanami flees the scene, only to be mentally assaulted by rapid-pace flashbacks of the images she has just witnessed: Anthy's glasses lying abandoned on the table; Anthy herself laying face-up on the couch, her breasts barely covered by thick tendrils of hair; a close-up of one of Anthy's legs dangling to the floor; and a single red high-heeled shoe fallen beside her foot.

It is clear from this that the purpose of *Utena's* incest is not to titillate. Anthy's body language, as seen from Nanami's point of view, is both sensual and sexual – as we discover later, Anthy takes pleasure in tormenting Nanami with these very images – yet they are not designed to arouse the viewer. Rather, they exist as a means of creating an atmosphere that is sinister and disturbing. Incest is not included in the world of *Utena* for something as simplistic as shock value, but

instead because it enhances a series that deals with a 'baroque apocalypse ... of adolescent emotion where everything is larger than life, identity is as its most problematic, and life itself is lived in the extremes.'²³

Significantly, Anthy and Akio's relationship is seen as objectionable because, as well as being founded on psychological abuse, it is still willingly carried out by both parties. In addition, Akio, if not also Anthy, is an unsympathetic character whose motives spell destruction for every other character involved in the duels. In contrast, the relationship between Setsuna and Sara in *Angel Sanctuary* is one based on love and compassion, and whose characters inspire pity rather than dislike or contempt. Setsuna, the bleeding heart of the series, is headstrong, rebellious, and impulsive, but he is also fiercely loyal to his friends, and his spirit remains pure despite his constant misfortune.

As the reincarnation of a fallen angel, Setsuna, like all of Alexiel's reincarnations, is doomed to live a life of misery before dying a slow and painful death. His own mother, a stoic Christian who knows that Setsuna is something not quite human, treats him as an abomination; an unholy object who is to be both feared and despised lest Sara be 'contaminated' by him. She does not allow Setsuna to live with her and Sara, as Sara reveals near the beginning of the anime: 'Have you forgotten? Even though the folks' divorce got us living apart, we promised to meet once a month.'²⁴ Later on, their mother uses religion and fear of divine punishment in an attempt to drive Setsuna away, shouting at him and placing all the blame on his shoulders: 'Idiot! I knew about your feelings for her, but it's not

²³ Susan J. Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 172.

²⁴ *Angel Sanctuary*, OVA 1, Sayama Kiyoko (Tokyo, Bandai Visual, 2000).

to be ... I separated you two for your own good! Do you want to send her to hell?!'²⁵

However, it is obvious that Setsuna puts Sara's wellbeing before his own at all times, and that his feelings are not driven by anything so base as power or sexual desire. He tells her, 'I'd rather be hurt than see you hurt', and near the end of the same episode, thinks to himself, 'Search as she may to the end of the world, wait as she may for centuries, she'll never meet another man who'll love her more than I do.'²⁶



Figure 38

Setsuna kisses a slumbering Sara.

Sara, for her part, is a selfless individual who wishes to do anything she can for the happiness of her loved ones. She is also as in love with Setsuna as he is with her; there is no one-sidedness to their relationship. She stands up for her brother when their mother verbally attacks him, admitting her own romantic feelings: 'You see, I love him, too. For a long, long time, I've always loved him the

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

most.’²⁷ In response to their consummation of their feelings when they elope together, Sara does not hesitate, but rather seems to be at peace with her decision: ‘It is like a sacred ritual. Tremendously terrifying and unbearably bittersweet. Then why does it fill me with such happiness?’²⁸

That both of their actions would be condemned by society makes society itself the villain in this anime as far as the protagonists are concerned. The very concepts of morality which would denounce their relationship are viewed as immoral, and as both Setsuna and Sara struggle to force themselves into conforming to them, they are each told by different parties that their plight is not one which can be so easily criticised. Kira, Setsuna’s only friend other than Sara, dispassionately tells him,

There’s no doubt you’re the one in the wrong. But keep in mind, Setsuna, none of your persecutors have ever been in your shoes. They’re all observing from the gallery, smugly dispensing the smart but unoriginal cliché. You really love Sara, don’t you? Then you can’t help it. You’re the one that got hurt, the one that does the suffering. It’s not something anyone else can understand.²⁹

In a similar vein, a humanoid demon child whose life was once saved by Alexial makes Sara examine her beliefs without the interference of her mother, stating, ‘Is morality that important? To be tied down by someone else’s boundaries, to suppress your feelings ... I think that’s outright cowardice.’³⁰ Their love is a

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *Angel Sanctuary* (2000), OVA 3.

²⁹ *Angel Sanctuary* (2000), OVA 2.

³⁰ Ibid.

righteous one, because the strength of their love is such that it transcends the barriers of right and wrong as dictated by society. Sara ultimately sacrifices herself in Setsuna's place, taking the blast of destructive power that was meant for him, while he literally journeys through Heaven and Hell in order to bring her soul back.

Because the relationship between Setsuna and Sara in *Angel Sanctuary* is focused first and foremost on tragedy and romance rather than on power, desire, or morality, the one sex scene that takes place is subtly implied. There is no nudity because, in keeping them as chaste as possible, the love that Setsuna feels for Sara and vice versa is kept uncontaminated. That Setsuna even feels sexual desire for Sara beyond the purely emotional is alluded to only once, when he tells her, 'If I wait any longer, I'll turn into a fossil.'³¹ Before anything else, the love Setsuna has for his sister is something beyond the capability of human feeling altogether – it is therefore not tarnished by something as simple as mere lust, and is something that borders on the spiritual. It is because of this that Sara remains innocent despite her actions, and is how Setsuna remains the uncorrupted hero of the tale.

The most intimate scene between them therefore begins with two hands intertwining on the bed sheets, Sara's fingers clinging to Setsuna's beneath his own. Both characters are still clothed; we see the thin strap of Sara's light blue sleeveless dress falling from one shoulder, as well as the dusky orange of Setsuna's long-shirted sleeve against his wrist, before both of their hands clench tightly together. The camera angle then switches to a lower vantage point, to

³¹ *Angel Sanctuary* (2000), OVA 3.

where Sara's loose blonde hair falls in strands over the edge of the bed as Setsuna bends slowly to kiss her, eyes closed. When the angle again switches to Sara's face as seen from Setsuna's view, she is smiling, and reaches up a hand to gently cup Setsuna's cheek. As his hand moves to cover hers, she silently begs God to forgive her. Finally, the viewpoint changes again, and this time the bodies of the couple are seen to be reflected in the eyes of a psychic onlooker. Still holding hands, they are now laying side by side, each moving to embrace the other before the scene ends.

It is not until after the next scene that Setsuna and Sara are revisited. They are now both in bed rather than on top of it, and Sara is turned away, evidently relaxed and asleep. When Setsuna sits up, awoken by the sounds of sirens in the distance, we see that he is in his underwear. As the sheets pull away from Sara, she is still fully clothed, although now in a modest white nightgown. The sex itself has evidently already occurred, but their intimacy has not been cheapened by allowing the audience to be privy to it.

As in *Utena*, the way in which Sara's hair is shown within *Angel Sanctuary* is a noteworthy detail, and when she sleeps with Setsuna, it becomes symbolic of the freedom that she feels at having made her choice between eloping with her brother and succumbing to the will of her mother. During the first two episodes, her hair is almost always tied in a thick plait that hangs over one shoulder; a sweet but youthful look that makes Sara every bit the endearing 'kid sister' of the series.

On the way to the airport, just about to embark on a flight that will take her out of the country and away from Setsuna, Sara's hair is tied up in a ponytail, lending her a more mature appearance. However, after Setsuna finally declares his love for her in front of their mother, suggesting that they run away together, Sara pulls at the ribbon that binds her hair, letting it trail away behind her and allowing her hair to flow loosely just as she rushes into Setsuna's arms. As she does so, we hear her say reply to Setsuna's heartfelt confession: 'I don't need God's blessing. I don't need a white bouquet. All I need is you.'³²

In choosing Setsuna over her mother, Sara's appearance becomes more angelic, not less, and from this moment up until her death, her hair remains untied. Indeed, in a universe where both angels and demons wage war solely for the sake of dominance and revenge, Sara is the true angel of the series. Her love for Setsuna, while acknowledged by both of them as a grievous sin, is far more virtuous than any other relationship, sexual or not, that occurs in the series.

Although the relationship between Mira and Kyouzuke in *Papa to Kiss in the Dark* is also seen as a permissible one, it is for entirely different reasons than in *Angel Sanctuary*. As in many boys love titles, Mira plays the young and submissive boy to the older man's sexual urges, protesting Kyouzuke's actions as his 'papa' proceeds to tease him with his cries of, 'We're father and son, you know! Father and son!'³³ These half-hearted assertions are negated by the fact that Mira is as much the instigator of these sexual encounters as Kyouzuke is; in one scene, the phone rings while they are having sex, and when Kyouzuke becomes

³² *Angel Sanctuary* (2000), OVA 2.

³³ *Papa to Kiss in the Dark*, OVA 1, Matsumura Asumi (Tokyo, TNK, 2005).

distracted, Mira takes the opportunity to be demanding, licking at Kyouseuke's ear while the other is in mid-conversation. He craves Kyouseuke's attention, clinging to him when Kyouseuke comes home late and crying as Kyouseuke reassures him that he has not been having sex with anyone other than Mira: 'In this whole world, you're the only one I live for. There's nobody else who could replace you.'³⁴

In a sense, their relationship is made 'pure' by the fact that Mira has been in love with his father long before he has been old enough to lust after him. A flashback to Mira's childhood shows him at a playground with his friends, each of them taking turns in declaring their dreams for the future: 'When I grow up, I'm going to be a musician!'/ 'I'll be a soccer player!' Mira, elementary-school aged and still innocent as to the codes of society, proudly tells them, 'I'll be Papa's bride!'³⁵ Another flashback a few minutes later has Mira remembering bathing with Kyouseuke and sleeping in the same bed, and he tells himself, 'When I was a kid, I didn't understand... that doing things like *that* with your parent isn't normal!'³⁶ Yet it is because of this that Mira and Kyouseuke's relationship is viewed as a healthy one – only because their relationship is based neither purely upon sex nor upon a more one-sided desire is it morally, if not socially, acceptable.

This view is further reinforced by the fact that whilst Kyouseuke is flirtatious towards other women, he does not sleep around. He is charming but loyal, and truly loves and treasures Mira. By Mira's own volition, Kyouseuke both sleeps with and marks him. It is Mira's best friend Kazuki who notices this, and although

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

he does not approve of their relationship, he does not seem to be affronted by it: 'I'd kinda figured it out already. That you and he were doing... all kinds of things ... when we changed for P.E., there were marks on your body that looked like they'd been made during sex.'³⁷ The only reason Kazuki does disapprove of Kyouzuke's actions is because he himself is in love with Mira, and wants Mira for himself. Yet when Mira does let Kazuki touch him, he is quick to notice that even though he enjoys the physical sensations, his body 'doesn't tremble like it does with Kyouzuke.'³⁸

Instead of being pleased or relieved upon discovering that Kyouzuke is not his real father, Mira is distraught: 'Most people would probably worry about who their real parents are, but... what bothers me most is...'³⁹ When the further revelation surfaces, that Kyouzuke is Mira's uncle, Mira fully realises the depth of his love for him, and again, instead of what might be considered a more typical reaction to this news, reflects, 'Then... that means Kyouzuke and I aren't completely unrelated. I'm kind of troubled, and kind of happy... it's a strange feeling.'⁴⁰

³⁷ *Papa to Kiss in the Dark* (2005), OVA 2.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.



Figure 39

Kyousuke comforts a distraught Mira.

Throughout all of this, the fact that Mira and Kyousuke's relationship is not one that is acceptable by society's standards is not truly dealt with at all. Both characters realise that their relationship is an incestuous one, but it is ultimately an insignificant detail next to the fact that they are simultaneously in love and in lust with one another.

In sharp contrast to both *Utena* and *Angel Sanctuary*, *Papa to Kiss in the Dark* is a series that involves incest for the sole purpose of added yaoi sensationalism. Coupled with the fact that Mira is in a homosexual relationship, and added to again with the acknowledgement that Mira is only fifteen years old, the incest is the icing on the cake – a three-in-one package neatly wrapped in a visually pleasing two episodes and addressed solely to the fangirls. When Mira is discussing his relationship with Kyousuke to Kazuki, he is asked, 'What would you do if it turned out you weren't actually Kyousuke-san's son?' Yet as Mira himself quite cheerfully points out in response, 'But I guess that means the triple

problem of homosexuality, *shota*, and incest would become only double, right?’⁴¹ As fans have noted, *Papa* remains one of the only anime in existence that ‘automatically breaks the three major relationship taboos we seem to have: same sex, age difference, blood relation.’⁴² Far from putting off some boys love fans, it is clear that the incestuous element is one of the reasons for *Papa*’s modest success among its demographic.

As such, the several sex scenes between Kyouzuke and Mira are all explicit, but do not cross the boundary into pornography. There are very few implications of what activities the couple are engaging in since, unlike in *Utena*, the storytelling is not concerned with keeping things left unsaid. However, in true boys love style, each character and their actions are rendered prettily, and without showing that which could be considered vulgar or unnecessary. The point of an anime such as *Papa* is to stimulate without blurring the line between erotic and pornographic.

This becomes obvious when examining key scenes, in which each sexual encounter between Kyouzuke and Mira is approached relatively gently. Kyouzuke is the *seme* and his physical and emotional dominance is therefore shown in ways that are standard of the genre: he is tall and strongly built while still slender in body shape, his hair is blonde, he wears formal suits as part of his job and lifestyle as a famous actor, and most importantly, he is always the one on top. However, he also speaks gently, and never uses any kind of physically aggressive force. On the other hand, Mira is short and more slightly built, with dark hair and eyes, and pale

⁴¹ *Papa to Kiss in the Dark* (2005), OVA 1.

⁴² ‘Papa to Kiss in the Dark (OVA)’ (<http://aarinfantasy.com/reviews/anime-reviews/papa-to-kiss-in-the-dark-%28ova%29/>), accessed 08 July 2010.

skin that is only emphasised further by his mandatory black and navy school uniform.

When together with Kyouzuke, Mira is the one doing most of the gasping or groaning, occasionally calling out Kyouzuke's name as he clings to his lover. That he calls Kyouzuke by his given name is a slight but significant detail. Mira is no longer young enough to call his father by the pet name-like 'Papa' as he once did, yet on no occasion does he use the Japanese 'father' or 'dad' to refer to Kyouzuke. Apart from the fact that Kyouzuke is Mira's uncle rather than his father – a fact that Mira does not learn until the second episode – this is a way of both using and distancing the incestuous relationship between them. Whilst the fact that they are biologically related is one of the reasons why *Papa* is a comparatively well-known boys love production, it would perhaps have been more than a little jarring had Mira been calling Kyouzuke 'father' during sex.

It is therefore unsurprising that, although entirely obvious, the sex scenes are nonetheless approached with caution, amid plenty of blushing, muffled moaning, and close-up shots of a hand gripping the bed sheets or of Mira's large, watery eyes. The viewpoint very rarely ventures below Mira's naked waist, instead focusing on Mira's face, his tousled hair, his arms above his head in a gesture of sensual helplessness as Kyouzuke moves atop him.

In one particular scene taking place in their house lounge, the moment where Mira is presumably penetrated, complete with echoing cry, is interrupted with a view of the mantelpiece. A vase sits on top of it, several white flowers with golden centres

arranged carefully within. One of the flower heads falls from its stem, scattering petals in the dimness of the room that is lit only by the glow of the fireplace. Any perceived threat of the situation is alleviated by this, since not only is the fallen flower a metaphor for either penetration or release in lieu of anything more express, but the scene is also heavily romanticised. The viewer knows that Mira is not really being taken advantage of – the low crackling of the fireplace, the soft lighting, and the tranquil music playing in the background are all strong indicators of this.

In another pivotal scene, Mira realises his true feelings for Kyouzuke, having given in to Kazuki's desires moments beforehand and sleeping with him. He closes his eyes and sees Kyouzuke, naked and walking away from him as white feathers fall soundlessly to the ground against a deep blue backdrop: another, more dreamlike metaphor of Mira's loss of innocence. Mira watches as Kyouzuke fades into the distance, kneeling in what appears to be the bottom half of a broken eggshell made of glass. Symbolic of the feelings of uncertainty and powerlessness against the strength of his own emotion, this is also representative of the way in which Mira has discovered half of the truth of his family ties, as the walls of what is safe and comforting safety crumble about him. Tormented, Mira wonders, 'I always believed that my relationship with Kyouzuke was between father and son, a deep and tight bond born from family love. Have I been wrong all along?'⁴³ As his vision fades, Mira opens his eyes, his hand outstretched above him from where he is lying, as if to catch the feathers that continue to fall.

⁴³ *Papa to Kiss in the Dark* (2005), OVA 2.

From masturbatory fantasy, to the Japanese version of tragic romance akin to *Romeo and Juliet*, to surrealist deconstruction, incest in all its forms has found itself a small yet perceptible niche in the manga and anime market. That foreigners are often shocked or disgusted by such thematic elements is unsurprising, since manga, as a uniquely Japanese cultural form, is created primarily for domestic consumption. Such a reaction to incest, however natural from an Anglo-American perspective, has no real impact on the anime or manga industry in Japan.

Moreover, the automatic negative response to such stories, which are otherwise inoffensive, ensures that numerous titles of quality will go unread or unwatched, as Brenner notes: 'In Japanese society, as seen in manga, controversial topics are fair game and appear without fanfare and are not halted by the odd knee-jerk reaction... For many Western readers, the incest at the center of the story sours the pleasure of an otherwise appealing melodrama. Other readers are able to take the story on its own terms – as fantasy – and enjoy it.'⁴⁴ Whilst anime such as *Utena* and *Vampire Knight* are popular among both the Japanese and non-Japanese fanbase despite their incestuous themes, there seems a relationship between apparent realism and repulsion; the more mythological or fantastic the story, the more acceptable it becomes.

Having now explored two anime genres or themes which transgress common societal boundaries, a third theme, dealing with how and why the darker forms of

⁴⁴ Robin E. Brenner, *Understanding Manga and Anime* (Libraries Unlimited, Connecticut, 2007), p. 78.

sexuality in anime are used, is examined in the next chapter of this thesis, entitled 'The Cost of Identity: Anime, Sex, and Violence'.

Chapter Nine: The Cost of Identity – Anime, Sex, and Violence

Anime has been recognized as an intrinsically adult form ... its challenging storylines involving sex, violence and complexly entwined combinations of both ... prompt new models of audience investment in embracing different kinds of symbolism and social norms.¹

The portrayal of rape and other forms of sexual violence in anime is a topic that must be approached with particular care because of its difficult subject matter. The intention of this chapter is not to examine these types of concerns as a social critique of sexual violence, nor as an exposé of rape and victimhood, but rather as an exploration of how sexual violence is depicted in anime as a means of artistic expression and of furthering the narrative purpose.

The titles under discussion in this chapter are distinct from those analysed in previous chapters, in that no act of violence is rendered morally ambiguous. For example, whilst acts of sexually-charged violence within the boys love genre are often perceived to be permissible or even a playful, reveling in the lack of ethical boundaries or judgments, the violence portrayed here remains unromanticised, and is an act of transgression that places the perpetrator firmly on the ‘other side’ of the moral line. Using *Perfect Blue* (1998), *Yami no Matsuei (Descendents of Darkness)* (2000), and *Speed Grapher* (2005) as primary examples, I consider how sexual violence is used as an aesthetic device, and for what specific purpose it is

¹ Jill Nelmes, *Introduction to Film Studies* (New York, Routledge, 2007), p. 228.

included as a main part of the story line. As with those anime titles that involve the depiction of incest, the representation of sexual violence as a major narrative element can also be described as a form of art as magic – a theme which intentionally provokes an emotional response from the audience.

In order to be able to explore these themes fully, it is necessary to provide a reference point with which to set up a contrast between rape as presented as a form of titillation, and rape as a driving force behind plot development or characterisation. By first examining representations of sexual violence within other forms of Japanese anime-related media and comparing them to mainstream anime titles involving sexual violence as a major narrative theme, the differences between not only the purpose of such representations, but also how that purpose is achieved, become clear.

It has been stated that, historically speaking, pornography featuring sexual violence has always been ‘an integral part of Japanese culture.’² For example, *Ero Guro Nansensu* (often shortened to the wasei-eigo term *Ero guro*), the Japanese artistic movement originating from the 1920s and 1930s, is intensely focused on grotesque eroticism and overt sexual deviancy and decadence.³ The movement’s roots go back to erotic *shunga* artists such as Yoshitoshi, whose mid-1860s woodblock printings depicted graphic decapitations and acts of violence from

² Neil M. Malamuth, Edward I. Donnerstein, *Pornography and Sexual Agression* (New York, Academic Press, 1984), p. 173.

³ Gregory M. Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male-male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600-1950* (California, University of California Press, 1999), p. 311.

Japanese history.⁴ *Ukiyo-e* artists such as Kuniyoshi Utagawa presented similar themes involving bondage, rape, and erotic crucifixion.⁵



Figure 40

A copy of Kuniyoshi Utagawa's *Ukiyo-e* painting depicting a rape scene.

Consequently, the amount of contemporary pornographic media, including media depicting extreme sexual violence, continues to enjoy a large market. In particular, there are a variety of Japanese computer and video games in existence which, at least at first glance, appear to actively encourage sexual violence. *RapeLay*, a 3D anime-style video game released in early 2006, revolves around a male *chikan*, or train-groping character, named Kimura, who stalks and subsequently rapes the Kiryuu family, consisting of a mother and her two daughters. Played mainly via mouse control and featuring a realistic sexual simulator, the player, after groping and undressing the characters on a crowded train, has forced intercourse with all three women at his leisure. Upon completing the storyline and 'breaking' each of the three females, who at that point even

⁴ Edward R. Beauchamp, *Japanese Society Since 1945* (New York, Taylor & Francis, 1998), p. 86.

⁵ Kodansha, *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan*, Volume 5 (Tokyo, Kodansha, 1983), p. 102.

begin to beg their rapist to indulge them, there are six modes of gameplay to explore, each of which involves various options of fondling, nudity, vibrator insertion, bondage, sex positions, multiple partnering, and gang rape.

The game also has a *nakadashi*, or internal ejaculation counter, which carries a danger of impregnating the female characters. As the rapes continue, the chances of the woman and girls becoming pregnant increases, and the player must force them to get abortions. Illusion Software has also issued a free download which includes depiction of the three females locked in a cell and being subjected to torture, along with a scene of a particularly brutal rape of the elder daughter, while the mother and her younger daughter are forcibly restrained and made to watch.

The female characters are based on stock types and fetishes that can often be found in erotic anime: Yuuko, the mother, has large breasts can optionally wear glasses in order to make her produce virgin and ‘nerd’ sound effects; Aoi, the older sister, wears a sailor uniform and optionally has her hair down or in a ponytail; and Manaka, the younger sister, optionally wears cat ears in order to produce various cat noises.



Figure 41

The cover of *RapeLay*.

RapeLay gained international attention and controversy in 2009 after an Irish newspaper picked up on importers selling the game via the online Amazon site, who asserted that the game actively encouraged rape as well as child pornography.⁶ Amazon quickly dropped the product, with other retailers following suit.⁷ A New York-based feminist group, Equality Now, targeted the game and accused it of being a violation of human rights, beginning a campaign ‘against rape simulator games and the normalisation of sexual violence in Japan’, with the aim of getting *RapeLay* banned by the Japanese government.⁸

The game developers originally paid little attention to the feminist group’s demands, stating that the campaign to have *RapeLay* banned in Japan was pointless since it was legal by Japanese standards, and Illusion spokesman

⁶ ‘Exclusive: Amazon selling rape simulation game’ (<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/amazon-selling-3d-rape-simulator-game-14183546.html>), accessed 07 September 2009.

⁷ ‘“RapeLay” Goes From Banned To Worse’ (<http://news.gotgame.com/rapelay-goes-from-banned-to-worse/32281/>), accessed 07 September 2009.

⁸ ‘Women’s Action 33.1’ (http://www.equalitynow.org/english/actions/action_3301_en.html), accessed 07 September 2009.

Nakaoka Makoto indicated his bafflement at the move, given that the game was specifically produced for Japanese laws and preferences.⁹ However, Equality Now's Japanese lawyer attracted a large amount of negative media attention, not only against *RapeLay* itself but against all Japanese games involving graphic sexual assault.¹⁰ Activists penned protests to game designers and to then-Prime Minister Aso Taro, arguing that the game breached Japan's obligations under the 1985 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.¹¹

A feminist member of the National Diet of Japan picked up on the scandal, calling for an outright ban on all such *eroge* games.¹² Subsequently, the *RapeLay* developers removed the game from distribution while the Japanese ruling party organised 'study groups' to discuss how best to ban the games.¹³ Finally, the EOCS (Ethics Organization of Computer Software), a self-regulating association of adult game production in Japan, banned *RapeLay* completely, along with other titles such as *Suck My Dick or Die!* – a game involving military rape against foreign women guerrillas – and *My Sex Slave is a Classmate*.¹⁴ That the Japanese government appeared to ban such games not because of personal moral values,

⁹ 'Business & Human Right: Protests to rape game cast off [Japan]' (http://www.business-humanrights.org/Links/Repository/289412/link_page_view), accessed 07 September 2009.

¹⁰ 'Feminists Force Ban of 'RapeLay'' (<http://www.sankakucomplex.com/2009/05/11/feminists-force-ban-of-rapeLAY/>), accessed 07 September 2009.

¹¹ 'Women's Action 33.1' (http://www.equalitynow.org/english/actions/action_3301_en.html), accessed 07 September 2009.

¹² 'Equality Now: 'We Should Censor Other Countries'' (<http://www.sankakucomplex.com/2009/05/12/equality-now-we-should-censor-other-countries/>), accessed 07 September 2009.

¹³ 'Rape eroge banned by the EOCS' (<http://valu.net/2009/06/rape-eroge-banned/>), accessed 07 September 2009.

¹⁴ 'RapeLay' Goes From Banned To Worse' (<http://news.gotgame.com/rapelay-goes-from-banned-to-worse/32281/>), accessed 07 September 2009.

but rather due to the mass negative Western opinion that they had attracted, is of significant note.

One might expect that games such as *RapeLay* would result in Japan being one of the most violent, and the most morally and sexually corrupt countries, in the world. However, although there have been some instances of anime pornography-related violence, these examples are not representative of a whole society. Moreover, they serve to highlight some of the ways in which social hostility toward the *otaku* subculture has, at times, been unjustifiably reinforced.

Between 1988 and 1989, Miyazaki Tsutomu, an apprentice at a local print shop, mutilated and killed four randomly selected girls, aged between four and seven, and sexually molested their corpses. He also drank the blood of one victim and ate a part of her hand.¹⁵ On July 23, 1989, Miyazaki attempted to insert a zoom lens into the vagina of a grade school-aged girl in a park near her home and was attacked by the girl's grandfather. After fleeing naked on foot, Miyazaki eventually returned to the park to retrieve his vehicle, and was then arrested by police.

A search of Miyazaki's house turned up a collection of manga and approximately 6,000 videotapes, many of which contained pornographic anime. This collection was later used as reasoning for his crimes, and the media soon came to call him 'The *Otaku* Murderer'. Although critics such as Ichihashi Fumiya suspected that the information being released was playing up to public stereotypes and fears

¹⁵ 'Serial child-killer hanged as Japan steps up death penalty' (<http://news.scotsman.com/world/Serial-childkiller-hanged-as-Japan.4194794.jp>), accessed 22 September 2011.

about *otaku* in order to help police secure a conviction, Miyazaki's killings fuelled a moral panic against anime and *otaku* culture.¹⁶

More recently, on November 17, 2004, Kobayashi Kaoru kidnapped and murdered 7-year old Ariyama Kaede, drowning her in a sink or bathtub.¹⁷ From Kobayashi's room, police confiscated a video and a magazine containing child pornography. Journalists were quick to jump to conclusions about the crime – even before Kobayashi's arrest, Otani Akihiro suspected that the murder was committed by a member of the *figyua moe zoku* (literally 'figure budding tribe'), an *otaku* group who collected figurines. Otani claimed that this group was composed of potential criminals, and although he stated that he did not intend to blame *otaku* for the crime, his theory was that Kobayashi murdered the victim soon after the kidnapping because the killer was not interested in her living body, but in her corpse. The lifeless body could then be described as a figurine.¹⁸

The degree of social hostility against *otaku* appeared to increase following this case, as suggested by increased targeting of *otaku* by police as possible suspects for sex crimes, and by calls from local government workers for stricter laws to better control the depiction of eroticism in *otaku* materials such as anime, manga, and video games.¹⁹

¹⁶ 'Miyazaki Tsutomu Jiken' (http://www.sunfield.ne.jp/~mike/books/nonfiction/crime/author/ichihashi_fumiya/miyazaki.htm), accessed 22 September 2011.

¹⁷ 'Man held in Nara girl's slaying' (<http://weekly.japantimes.co.jp/news/nn2005/man-held-in-nara-girls-slaying>), accessed 22 September 2011.

¹⁸ 'Open Letter' (<http://picnic.to/~ami/ool.htm>), accessed 22 September 2011.

¹⁹ 'Otaku harassed as sex-crime fears mount' (<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/fd20050206t3.html>), accessed 22 September 2011.

Nonetheless, the presence of sex crime within Japan – or indeed any other kind of crime – is extremely low in comparison to many other first world countries. Strict laws regarding gun-control mean that very few people are shot and killed.²⁰ Women feel free, in general, to walk alone at night in any district of Japan without fear of being attacked – in fact, Japan is widely known as one of the safest developed countries for women in the world.²¹

Since data regarding pornography is not accurately amassed either by the government or by any Japanese private agency, it is difficult for anyone to determine the specific amounts of pornography creation and circulation, or to find a direct link between pornography and sex-related crime in Japan. Many, if not most, of the manufacturers and distributors of pornography are legitimate companies whose production figures are kept confidential.²² However, statistics on sexually explicit items collected by local authorities, including those involving violence, has seen consistent increases over recent decades: from approximately 20,000 items in 1970, to just above 37,000 in 1980, to nearly 41,000 in 1990, and to 76,000 in 1996 (the last year in which such data is available), according to one extensive study.²³ These items include materials depicting minors, since although Japanese law prohibits child prostitution, there are no laws concerning the ownership of such materials.²⁴

²⁰ ‘Japanese Gun Control’ (http://www.davekopel.com/2a/lawrev/japanese_gun_control.htm), accessed 07 September 2009.

²¹ Matthew Firestone, Timothy N. Hornyak, *Tokyo* (Victoria, Lonely Planet, 2008), p. 257.

²² ‘Pornography, Rape and Sex Crimes in Japan’ (http://www.hawaii.edu/PCSS/online_artcls/pornography/prngrphy_rape_jp.html), accessed 07 September 2009.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Along with Russia, Japan is the only other member country in the G8 that has not outlawed the possession of child pornography.

During the early-to-mid 1990s, it has been claimed that over 14,000 adult videos per year were being produced in Japan, as compared to the 2500 per year in the United States.²⁵ However, according to the Japanese National Police Agency, which has been maintaining national crime statistics since 1948, arrests and convictions for the distribution of obscene materials in Japan sharply declined during this time, from 3,298 in 1972, to just 702 in 1995.²⁶

Reported incidences of rape saw a similar decline over the same period, decreasing from 4677 reported cases in 1972, to 1500 cases in 1995.²⁷ It must also be taken into account that the population of Japan increased by over 20% throughout these years, from approximately 107 million to 125 million according to the 1996 *Nihon no Tokei (Statistics of Japan)*.²⁸ Moreover, according to J.N.P.A. records, the rate of rape convictions underwent a marked increase, from 85% in the early 1970s, to over 90% in the 1980s, and to 95% in the 1990s.²⁹ Today, Japan maintains the single smallest number of reported rape cases, as well as the single greatest percentage of arrests and convictions in reported cases of rape, of any developed nation in the world.³⁰ This would suggest that, far from the abundance of sexual explicit material invariably leading to an equal abundance of rape and sexual assault, the opposite has occurred.

A report carried out in 1988 concluded that publishers and others involved within the pornography industry maintain that erotic stories, including those presented in

²⁵ 'Pornography, Rape and Sex Crimes in Japan' (http://www.hawaii.edu/PCSS/online_artcls/pornography/prngrphy_rape_jp.html), accessed 07 September 2009.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

manga format, serve as a means of relief for adults who feel smothered by Japan's rigid and inhibited society.³¹ Another report carried out that same year by psychologist W. L. Marshall stated:

Retrospective recall provided the basis for estimating the use of sexually explicit materials by sex offenders (voluntary outpatients) and non offenders during pubescence ... Rapists and child molesters reported frequent use of these materials ... Current use was significantly related to the chronicity of their sexual offending.

Whilst evidence within this report states that pornography used by adult sex offenders was viewed immediately prior to their offense, it also indicates that exposure to pornography during formative years was usually absent altogether.³²

Concurrently, it has been found by numerous researchers that those who commit sex crimes typically have far less exposure to pornography than others, and often come from a deeply religious or socially and politically conservative background: 'The upbringing of sex offenders was usually sexually repressive, often they had an overtly religious background and held rigid conservative attitudes toward sexuality ... their upbringing had usually been ritualistically moralistic and conservative rather than permissive.'³³

³¹ James Elias, *Porn 101: Eroticism, Pornography, and the First Amendment* (New York, Prometheus Books, 1999), p. 242.

³² Elias, p. 243.

³³ Ibid.

Nicholas Groth, a specialist in the psychology of sex offenders, has written that although rapists ‘might find some pornography stimulating, it is not sexual arousal but the arousal of anger or fear that leads to rape. Pornography does not cause rape; banning it will not stop rape. In fact, some studies have shown that rapists are generally exposed to less pornography than normal males.’³⁴ A further study found that men ‘who develop deviant patterns of sexual behavior in adulthood have suffered relative deprivation of experience with pornography in adolescence’, and suggests that pornography actively aids in the prevention of criminal sex problems.³⁵

Reasoning as to why the low incidences and decreasing numbers of reported rape within Japan has been occurring is attributed, by some, to the internal restraint that is an inherent part of Japanese culture. The victims feel guilt or shame at being sexually abused, and therefore do not report the assault to police. However, it has also been pointed out that it is difficult to imagine such restraint being stronger in the 1990s than in the 1970s – Japan has, as a whole, grown less socially conservative over the years, not more.³⁶ It would seem to be more accurate to propose that the increase in female sexual availability via commercial outlets has resulted, at least indirectly, in the parallel decrease of male sex crimes.

Rape and the Narrative Role

³⁴ A. Nicholas Groth, H. Jean Birnbaum, *Men Who Rape: The Psychology of the Offender* (New York, Plenum Press, 1988), p. 9.

³⁵ Elias, p. 244.

³⁶ ‘Pornography, Rape and Sex Crimes in Japan’ (http://www.hawaii.edu/PCSS/online_artcls/pornography/prngrphy_rape_jp.html), accessed 07 September 2009.

Anime is an ideal medium for exploring sexually violent themes – many titles deal with more mature topics and situations than what may normally be expected of from any kind of animation, and scenes of rape, attempted rape, and other forms of violent sexual activity are far from uncommon. This is not to imply that anime titles containing rape and similar material are in the majority – indeed, excluding pornography, the number of anime that are explicit in this way are extremely small in relation to the number of titles being produced as a whole – but the fact that many do exist, and are still a part of some mainstream anime, suggests that depictions of sexual violence has a distinct purpose beyond mere titillation or shock value.

Rather, the inclusion of rape and other forms of sexual violence within mainstream anime is usually used as a means of introducing a dramatic turning point within a story, or of furthering the story by using it as a means of building atmosphere and background. Sexual abuse and rape, in particular, have consistently been used as a basis for characterisation within a range of mediums, both Japanese and non-Japanese, over the years: in novels (Jean M. Auel's *Clan of the Cave Bear* and Juliet Marillier's *Daughter of the Forest*), television shows (*Veronica Mars* and *Home and Away*), and films (*Rob Roy* and *The Accused*), to cite only a few examples.

It is used much the same way within anime, where growth, emotional or psychological breakdown, and even empowerment occur. The trauma of sexual abuse can lead to character maturation, lend a dark ambience to a story, or give dramatic effect to a scene intended to be of particular significance. Such

sequences provide theatrical background for the animation, and are often set in violent and turbulent countries or universes. The inclusion of sexual abuse in such cases are used to establish the reflexive cruelty of the worlds in which these anime are set, occurring as relatively natural extensions of the setting. The portrayal of rape is therefore intentionally used as a demonstration of the lack of moral parameters of such a setting – not for the purpose of comedy or drawing the male gaze, but rather as a means of illustrating the decay of the universe into which the anime wishes us to engage.

For these reasons, it would not be inaccurate to suggest that sexual abuse within mainstream anime is almost always included because it has a direct relevance to the characters, the narrative, the setting, or the artistic development of the anime itself. The anime titles *Perfect Blue*, *Yami no Matsuei*, and *Speed Grapher*, while entirely separate from each other in terms of genre and storyline, can nonetheless be explored as a group not only because sexual violence plays a key role in each, but also because the way in which sexual violence is presented, as well as the reasons for its inclusion, becomes the axis around which the storylines revolve.

Perfect Blue, a psychological thriller film, follows Kirigoe Mima, a former member of a Japanese pop-idol group named ‘CHAM!’, who has decided to pursue a career as an actress. Some of her fans are discontent with her sudden career change, in particular the stalker calling himself Me-Mania. As her new career proceeds, Mima's world begins to spiral out of control as she becomes progressively more incapable of differentiating between fantasy and reality.

Yami no Matsuei, a fantasy and soft boys love series, revolves around *shinigami* (death gods), and in particular Tsuzuki Asato and his new work partner, Kurosaki Hisoka, as they investigate and solve any supernatural disturbances in their district.

Finally, *Speed Grapher* is a crime-fiction and supernatural series whose main character, Saiga Tatsumi, is a former photographer investigating a secret fetish club for the ultra-wealthy. When he tries to photograph the club's 'Goddess,' a 15-year-old, exploited girl named Kagura, he is granted the ability to destroy anything he photographs. The subsequent story follows Saiga's quest to free Kagura, while constantly being chased by other club members, all of whom have unique abilities of their own.

Whilst sex-related violence and sexual deviancy is rampant in each of these texts, all have distinct reasons for involving these themes within the overall story – none of which are done so for purely exploitive reasons. For example, Mima's role as an actress in playing a rape victim at a strip club indicates a significant psychological turning point for her in *Perfect Blue*. After leaving CHAM!, Mima's first project is a direct-to-video drama series called 'Double Bind.' Shortly after leaving the pop group, Mima receives an anonymous fax calling her a traitor, and soon finds a website named 'Mima's Room' that contains public diary entries which are claimed to have been written by her, and which discuss her life in great detail.

Meanwhile, the producers of *Double Bind* have agreed to give Mima a leading role as a strip club dancer. Mima's manager, Rumi, warns that it will ruin her reputation, and Mima, indecisive but passive, merely responds by saying such things as, 'It's hard, but I guess it's what I decided to do.'³⁷ However, the atmosphere of the scene in question traumatises her to the point where she becomes unable to distinguish real life from her role as an actress. While Mima's drama character entertains an audience of men at a strip club, Mima herself is haunted by hallucinations of an 'other self', who calls Mima 'tarnished' and 'filthy.' Her rape scene on top of the club stage, make-believe as it is, becomes all too real for Mima, and it is at this precise juncture in which Mima finds herself slipping from reality. As Mima's character struggles to free herself from the hands of the frenzied audience, Mima becomes dazed, and her uneasiness turns into paranoid delusions.

Alternatively, the past rape of Hisoka by Doctor Muraki in *Yami no Matsuei*, is used as a way to establish the truth behind a host of strange events and the characters involved, and simultaneously as a means of bringing two main characters closer together. In a flashback, a 13-year old Hisoka stumbles upon Muraki, who is in the process of murdering an unknown woman. Realising he has an audience, Muraki impulsively rapes Hisoka and then curses him to a slow and painful death that gradually drains his life over three years. To keep Hisoka from exposing the crime, Muraki also erases Hisoka's memory of that night; Hisoka, upon becoming a *shinigami* in order to discover the cause of his death, simply states that he has died of an 'incurable disease.'³⁸

³⁷ *Perfect Blue*, Kon Satoshi (Tokyo, Madhouse, 1998).

³⁸ *Yami no Matsuei*, Episode 2, Tokita Hiroko (Tokyo, J.C. Staff, 2000).

Tsuzuki has also had forgotten dealings with Muraki in the past. Although he is easily one of the most cheerful members of the cast, it is implied that Tsuzuki once committed terrible deeds in life. Muraki eventually reveals that Tsuzuki was once a patient of his scientist grandfather for eight years. During his time as the elder Muraki's patient, Tsuzuki stayed alive without any food, water, or sleep and, as shown by the many failed suicide attempts but for his final, was incapable of dying from his wounds.

Frequent exposure to death, along with the associated loss, grief, and anger, has deeply affected both Hisoka and Tsuzuki. Reserved to the point of extreme coldness, Hisoka cares deeply for the wellbeing of others but is unable to show his affection, in part because past events have left him defensive and unconsciously ashamed and terrified. Tsuzuki, who as a *shinigami* has been killing for the past seventy years, journeys through a cycle of intense shame and guilt – eventually leading him to physical paralysis and the regaining of his suicidal tendencies, followed by repression, so that he does not draw attention or concern from his friends or work colleagues. Both characters are united by their hatred for Muraki, and ultimately survive on both a physical and psychologically level only through the aid of the other. As work partners and as romantic interests, the abuse inflicted upon them by Muraki in the course of the story becomes the catalyst for their fears and desires, as well as the catalyst of the story itself.

Sexual deviancy and its related violence take a separate role again in *Speed Grapher*, acting as an over-exaggerated critique of the capitalism and materialism

of modern society. Kagura's body fluids contain a chemical that activates a dormant virus responsible for the transformation of humans into 'Euphorians' such as Saiga. Club members, made up of only the most wealthy and influential individuals of society, strive for the honour of being 'gifted' with the Goddesses' power. It is through these club members, many of whom portray sexual appetites that are extremely vulgar, that the audience is shown the deeper reason for why sex and violence are so directly connected with one another within the story. Above all, the series is an exploration of the darkest and most distorted aspects of human nature, and uses sexuality as its primary means of taking that leap 'down the rabbit hole', as one reviewer stated.³⁹

Speed Grapher makes no pretences about this, tackling the issues surrounding this theme head on. For example, when Kagura, whose powers as Goddess are viable only if kept from reaching puberty, faints at school from malnourishment, a nurse and teacher, correctly guessing that Kagura is being abused, promises to talk to Kagura's mother for her. However, when Kagura returns home, she discovers her mother, Shinsen, aggressively having sex with the teacher in Kagura's own bed. Upon seeing Kagura's shocked and upset reaction, the teacher is clearly ashamed, whilst Shinsen appears deeply satisfied. Revealing a literal pyramid of cash, Shinsen tells the teacher that she will keep her promise: she may leave the estate with as much money as she can carry, and with nothing else. Outside, a teary-eyed Kagura can only ask, 'Why, *sensei*?', as the nude teacher flees the property. Dropping a wad of cash in her haste, the teacher only replies desperately, 'Pick that up for me, will you?' As Shinsen and the leader of the Roppongi Club,

³⁹ 'Anime Review: Speed Grapher Box Set (<http://firefox.org/news/articles/1352/1/Anime-Review-Speed-Grapher-Box-Set/Page1.html>), accessed 11 September 2009.

Suitengu, arrive on the scene, Shinsen puts the incident into perspective: ‘I’ve been teaching Kagura a lesson. You can buy everything with money.’⁴⁰



Figure 42

Kagura’s teacher flees with the money given to her by Shinsen.

Despite the distinct differences between each of these titles in terms of plot and genre, it is through their very differences in depicting the scenes involving violence and sexual abuse that they are rendered effective. The strength of *Perfect Blue* stems primarily from the fact that it contains subject matter that is, for the most part, completely foreign within the anime field. There are no rampaging monsters, no military cyborgs, nor even any character that possesses any unusual or eye-catching qualities, visual or otherwise. The setting is not a dystopian future, but rather a realistic, modern-day Japan.

This renders the theme of the film – the psychological impact of fame and a unique analysis of dementia – more disturbing by contrast. The bubblegum pop beginning of the film, depicting a cheerful Mima performing her final routine with

⁴⁰ *Speed Grapher*, Episode 2, Sugishima Kunihisa (Tokyo, Gonzo, 2005).

CHAM!, makes the rest of the film jarring by comparison, particularly given that the dark events throughout the film are all ambiguously portrayed.⁴¹ Mima, along with the viewer, experiences loss and distortion of time, amnesia, flashbacks, and hallucinations that are made further unsettling by the film's use of heavy jump cuts, foreshadowing, and the introduction of Mima's doppelganger, which the audience sees through her own eyes.

Yet the filming of the rape scene itself is arguably the single most disturbing scene of *Perfect Blue*, as Mima is 'forced to inhale and exhale the robust display and re-enactment of a morally obtuse circumstance. Her near-naked body, lifelessly slung over the edge of the strip stage like a doll, excitedly quivers at the cheering audience of hungry lechers; her lips puckering only to reassure herself that everything will be all right.'⁴²

The scene is made all the more significant in that it is easily the most visually striking within the film; flashing neon lights overhead the stage, a dark pink wash contrasting with the glowing white of the stage, and Mima's own outfit – a white and pink fetish maid costume that bears similarity to the costume she was first introduced in while singing her last song on stage – emphasises this fact. The daze into which Mima subsequently slips results in the existence of two separate yet overlapping worlds: one, a dangerous sexual dizziness that threatens to overwhelm her; the other, a faltering awareness of the dramatisation in which Mima feels forced to participate. Following Mima's acting out of the rape scene,

⁴¹ *Perfect Blue* (1998).

⁴² 'Animefringe: December 2005 – Specials – Perfect Blue' (<http://www.animefringe.com/magazine/2005/12/special/07.php>), accessed 11 September 2009.

even the audience can no longer be sure of what is truly occurring and what Mima believes is occurring.



Figure 43

Mima acts out her rape scene for Double Bind.

In comparison, it is the deeply-rooted connection between Muraki and the two *shinigami* that makes Muraki's abusive sexual advances so effective. When Muraki rapes and curses Hisoka, he sets upon him a seemingly unbreakable bond between the two of them. However, what makes this scene in particular so morbidly fascinating is that it is seen purely from Muraki's perspective. Muraki, evidently a psychotic serial killer, romanticises the rape. The viewer sees what Muraki sees, whose mind transforms his violent act into something perversely beautiful.

Moreover, the scene is without a doubt the most eye-catching and dynamic of those presented throughout the series, and is explored in artistic style by use of heavy shadowing, a showering of falling sakura petals, and rich colouring. Hisoka, as seen through Muraki's eyes, arches his back and throws his head backwards in an agonised but silent scream of pain, his eyes teary and pleading

before his nude form turns his back to the viewer and seems to drift off into a burst of light, the pink cherry blossom petals spiralling out behind him.

Although the audience is made explicitly aware that what Muraki is doing is evil and can in no way condone his actions, this scene is visually reminiscent of a stereotypical boys love sex scene, particularly where Hisoka is concerned; his pale skin, soft longish hair, large green eyes, and (to Muraki), graceful movements as he is being raped effectively turns Hisoka into Muraki's *uke*-type lover. Muraki later reveals to Hisoka, 'It would have been fine to have simply raped and killed you there, leaving it as the work of a pervert. But such an inelegant manner of death wouldn't have suited one as lovely as yourself, no? ... So no one would suspect murder, I didn't kill right away and stole your memory of that night ... Slowly ... letting the curse entice you toward death...' ⁴³ The rape is, at least in Muraki's mind, not an act of violence so much as it is one of terrible seduction.



Figure 44

Muraki rapes the terrified teenage Hisoka.

⁴³ Matsushita Yoko, *Yami no Matsuei Volume 1*, (Tokyo, Hakusensha, 1995).

Similarly, the abrupt switch from lust to violence and back again in Muraki's dealings with Tsuzuki are disconcerting, to say the least. Muraki's behaviour towards him veers suddenly from an almost soft and gentlemanly manner to threatening sexual harassment, seemingly in the blink of an eye and without any provocation or forewarning. At times, Muraki invades Tsuzuki's personal space with a kind of familiarity more fitting of lovers than that of sworn adversaries. He appears to take great amusement in initiating obvious displays of physical affection at the most inappropriate of times, such as when Tsuzuki attempts to punch Muraki in rage.⁴⁴ Muraki, evading the punch, seizes Tsuzuki by the wrist, pulls him into what is unmistakably an embrace, and nearly kisses him.

All of this is made more unsettling by the fact that Muraki's character does not take the form of a creature or monster, but rather is a *bishounen*, with silvery-white hair, icy blue eyes, ultra-pale skin, and dressed in white from head to toe. He is painted as a figure of purity during his introductory scene where Tsuzuki first meets Muraki in a church, kneeling before the altar before turning to face Tsuzuki as a lone tear courses down his cheek. His virtuous appearance and surface characteristics of concern over others as a doctor are a harsh comparison to his true nature, and this becomes something that Muraki consciously understands and uses to his advantage, covering his true nature; the audience is made instantly aware that Muraki is the villain of the series, but Tsuzuki is not. Tellingly, Muraki also physically covers the one part of his appearance that is

⁴⁴ 'Muraki/Tsuzuki (Yami no Matsuei)' (http://community.livejournal.com/ship_manifesto/54688.html), accessed 11 September 2009.

indicative of his true nature, using his long fringe to hide a right eye which is gruesomely enlarged and features a cat-like slit for a pupil.

In the case of *Speed Grapher*, the show favours overstatement in order to convey its messages. As an anime concerned primarily with social commentary and criticism, *Speed Grapher* is first and foremost a series that makes conscious use of its exaggerations for the purpose of creating a sensationalist atmosphere. The concept of a perhaps not-too-distant Tokyo existing purely as a playground for the rich and powerful, where literally any desire may be satisfied – for the right price – is a place where anything can and does happen behind closed doors. Saiga, as a citizen who is neither rich nor powerful, carries out his work throughout the seedy underbelly of the city, while dirty and poverty-stricken backdrops contrast sharply with the metallic skyscrapers of conglomerate corporations.

The setting sits comfortably somewhere between noir and science-fiction, with neither affluent nor the poor left untainted by at least the implications of sexuality. Almost no character involved within the world of the wealthy is without his or her perverse desires, all of which are reflected through their actions, mannerisms, or visual design. Those who are more financially unfortunate are forced to make their living doing whatever is necessary to endure; as Saiga makes his first escape with Kagura, they pass bars, clubs and brothels that are all too dependent upon sexuality as a means of survival. The top police officers of the city are cold-blooded sadists, there remains not a single influential politician who cannot be bribed, and entire families are annihilated simply so that others may accumulate more wealth.

The secret club for the social elite that Saiga investigates merges flawlessly into this corrupt society that *Speed Grapher* depicts – it is no surprise that the Roppongi Club itself, with its colour scheme of deep shadowy blacks, greys, and blues, and its distinctive blood-red accents, is reminiscent of a kind of decadent BDSM dungeon or Satanic church. Nor does it come as a surprise to find that busty women are employed for the titillation of their audience, particularly by means of torture, whenever a ritual is being carried out here. Essentially a huge underground chamber, the club is made up of stone walls, candle-lit chandeliers, and dark surrounding catacombs. Décor involving steel cages and heavy chains completes the backdrop.

Whilst Suitengu, as the face behind this cult-like group, remains handsome and powerfully charismatic to the last, the members who meet here are anything but. Those whose turn it is to receive the blessings of the Goddess are disrobed and stand beneath a balcony, from which the hypnotised Kagura descends. Naked but for a cheap mask, the first person the audience sees about to give Kagura's unique 'gift' is fat and middle-aged, and there is nothing remotely sensual about the crowd of men behind him, some of whom are almost drooling in anticipation, and most of whom cut pathetic figures of corrupted authority.

Despite their differences, it is interesting to note that one similarity each of the three anime titles share is that the characters who are sexually violent do not rape or abuse out of lust alone; there is almost always a reason behind sexual abuse that goes beyond simple desire or the 'evilness' of any given character. For

instance, in *Perfect Blue*, the diarist of Mima's Room is completely delusional, and the audience learns that a concentrated *folie à deux* has been constantly in motion. The faux diarist turns out to be none other than Mima's manager, Rumi, who literally believes herself to be 'the real Mima' – a forever young and graceful version of Mima who makes a scapegoat of the stalker calling himself Me-Mania. A former idol singer herself, Rumi is now a mere husk of her former identity, and deeply against Mima's transition into acting.

After Mima smashes Me-Mania with a hammer in self-defence when he attempts to rape her on the set of *Double Bind*, and then runs to get help from Rumi – now the only support Mima has left alive – Rumi decides to save the 'real Mima's' reputation as a pristine pop idol by means of murder. The overweight Rumi, dressed in the ballerina-esque costume in which Mima once performed as a singer, taunts a distraught and still confused Mima: 'Let's end all of this. We don't need two Mimas now, do we?'⁴⁵ When Mima, who is still unable to distinguish between Rumi and her imagined 'other self', protests in panic ('I am Mima!'), Rumi laughs and mockingly tells her, 'That's funny. Mima is a pop idol... and you're just a dirty old imposter!'⁴⁶

Throughout the movie, neither one of the antagonists are motivated by anything as basic as physical desire. The stalker is plainly obsessed beyond all reason with Mima, and acts only on instruction by a persuasive Rumi. Rumi herself is psychologically damaged beyond all repair, and never awakens as her true self again following her final 'transformation' and her subsequent transfer to a mental

⁴⁵ *Perfect Blue* (1998).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

institution: whilst Mima regains her self-identity, in part due to her coming to terms with her evolving image and sexuality, Rumi in turn loses hers. Had Mima not been able to finally establish real life from her panic and stress-induced delusions, she would have been the one to lose her way altogether and take Rumi's place.

A similar madness of obsession concerning Tsuzuki grips Muraki in *Yami no Matsuei*. The doctor's psychological problems stem from his childhood, and are related to both his mother and his half-brother, Saki. His mother had a fixation with porcelain dolls, and is depicted as treating Muraki as though he were a doll himself. Muraki's own love of dolls in later life remains a motif throughout the series, perversely mirroring the way in which he treats people and their bodies. It is also suggested that it was Saki, himself mad, who killed Muraki's parents when they were still children, and later attempted to kill Muraki. However, it is not clear whether these in themselves are true events – Muraki has a flashback of his mother's funeral where he sees a smirking Saki in the procession, yet he also describes himself as his mother's murderer. Regardless of the specific circumstances, Saki was later shot by one of the family's guardsmen, and Muraki, by this point mentally unstable, became fixated on the idea bringing Saki back to life so that Muraki could kill him himself.

It is only at this point that Muraki learns of Tsuzuki while researching his grandfather's notes, and rapidly merges his obsession with Saki and that of possessing Tsuzuki's body – both scientifically and carnally. His method of coping with the losses he has experienced, both as a child with the death of his

parents, and later as a surgeon with the deaths of his patients, results in an all-consuming desire to defeating death, while revelling in the pleasure he gains from seeing others suffer. He tells Tsuzuki,

Being a surgeon only brings me suffering every day. The limits of medicine, human's fragile existence ... The lives I couldn't save – this is my regret, my remorse, my anger. No matter how many I save, I still lose to Death. Just what is the reason for a doctor's existence? I don't know anymore. Since that time, I've gone mad. Since I understood the limits of human life, I've changed into a murdering killer desiring the power of darkness, craving human flesh.⁴⁷

Whilst some fans have argued that Muraki's sexual interest in Tsuzuki is merely a ruse specifically calculated to taunt and unnerve him, there is undoubtedly an element of uncontrollable impulse in Muraki's behavior. The doctor himself admits that his desire is illogical and driving him mad, yet he is unable, and indeed unwilling, to let it go:

Your spiritual energy is the very best. Thick and sweet... even just a little makes my body rage ... I thought watching you was enough. But since seeing your beautiful hair, body ... I've wanted to touch them. So even though I do that now ... I want you. My desire keeps escalating, driving me crazy. You, a man. Your power and body. Everything...⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Matsushita, *Yami no Matsuei Volume 1*.

⁴⁸ Matsushita Yoko, *Yami no Matsuei Volume 3*, (Tokyo, Hakusensha, 1995).

Even when Muraki decides to use Tsuzuki's body for experimentation, he remains sinisterly tender, kissing away Tsuzuki's tears before attempting to decapitate him.

Although perhaps not outright mad, the antagonists – and sometimes even the protagonists – of *Speed Grapher* are no less motivated by complex issues that have comparatively little to do with lust, anger, or even simple greed and corruption on its own terms. Kagura's mother, Shinsen, was once an aspiring model whose body has been 're-constructed' by a doctor named Odawara Kazuki, whom she fell in love with. Despite her rise to fame, Shinsen chose to leave it behind to marry Kazuki. Shinsen had signed their marriage licenses and waited for several days for him at a hot spring, only to be disappointed. Left permanently bitter by his betrayal, she sees Kagura as the ultimate symbol of this, and punishes Kagura for it in any way possible, in order to make her daughter's life as miserable as she can.

Ginza Hibari, a vicious policewoman in love with Saiga, is jealous of him and will do almost anything she can to make him hers. However, she is only able to get sexually excited when holding a gun, and, knowing that Saiga can only 'get it up' when taking photos, blackmails Saiga into having sex with her by stealing his camera and promising to give it back afterwards.⁴⁹ Ekoda, the Chief of the Tokyo Police Department, has an extreme leg fetish, and cuts off the legs of numerous women in order to display them proudly in his house. He has cut off both his wife's and his daughter's legs in the past.

⁴⁹ *Speed Grapher* (2005), Episode 1.

Almost every Euphoric has sexual fetishes or uncontrollable desires that are closely linked to sexual deviancy and violence – sexual desire is seen as potentially ‘dangerous’ here precisely because it is hard to control, and is accentuated in the rather exaggerated characters. Koganei Kaoru, best known as Lady Diamond, has the power to turn her entire body into diamond, becoming almost indestructible. She was once the wife of a gifted artist who gave her diamonds to make her happy, but who hanged himself after taking out an insurance policy. Since then, she has become fixated with making her body into a testament of his adoration of her.

The sadistic dentist Mizunokuchi has been given extra spider-like limbs with dental devices on them, and can turn other part of his body into drills. He revels in the pleasure he gains from torturing patients by inserting each of his limbs into their mouths and polishing their teeth slowly. He once removed Kagura’s lower molars, but did so as slowly as possible so that he could see Kagura writhing in pain. He kept one of these molars and carves it obsessively, treating it as a sort of crown jewel.

Yurigaoka Ran, an aesthetician whose power enables him to make the tattoos on his skin a reality, is able to control other people with the small spider tattoo on one of his fingers by merging with its victim’s skin. He gains his utmost pleasure in merging his spider tattoo with the skin of beautiful women in the midst of having sex with and then killing them.

Shirumaku Miharu, a former actress with a traumatic past due to a murder attempt by her mother to drown her, became mute after her mother's suicide. Miharu has since drowned every man who has ever fallen in love with her. Fittingly, she is able to turn herself into something resembling a monstrous mermaid, and is able to transform herself into a being made entirely of water.

Even Saiga, the main protagonist of the series, is a veteran war journalist whose love of photography has developed into a sexual fetish. He gains an erection whenever he takes exciting photographs; something which developed during the Vietnam War as he photographed dead bodies. His deepest and unconscious desire is realised when he is kissed by the Goddess – he is literally able to capture life with his camera, and thus has been rendered utterly unable to separate his sexual desire from his apparent fascination with violence. In this way, Saiga may perhaps be considered a metaphor for the series itself, since there are precious few characters that remain apart from the corruption and overt violent cruelty of a world which seemingly has everything to do with sex. One of Suitengu's henchmen, upon hearing the comment that Saiga had probably 'already screwed' Kagura after her escape, replies in the negative, stating, 'Euphorians can't achieve orgasms that way.'⁵⁰

Karma and Character Growth

It is also the victim, rather than the abuser, who wins out in almost every mainstream anime title, suggesting that there is a moral dimension to these depictions. This is something that notably differs from pornographic anime, in

⁵⁰ *Speed Grapher* (2005), Episode 9.

which the rapist is seen to ‘get away’ with his crime. The primary theme within pornography is often centred on female subjugation by dominant, abusive men (or occasionally by other women), and the theme of a sexual predator being gratified is, for a specific target audience that many of these titles cater to, both a safe yet satisfying cathartic image. The stereotypical male *otaku* is one who lives his entire emotional life within and through anime, video games, and other such media – such a male, who may feel intimidated or even victimised by the opposite sex, may secure a sense of validation and fulfilment through this type of imagery, and yet can feel secure in the knowledge that it is a fantasy alter-ego who inflicts punishment on women, not a real person.

Given that mainstream anime does not usually subscribe to the same theme of female subjugation, it is no surprise to find that the story, while not always concluding in a traditional happy ending, does not typically reward the ‘bad guys’ for their acts of sexual abuse.

Thus in *Perfect Blue*, Rumi remains permanently delusional and institutionalised after her final confrontation with Mima, and Mima herself, having grown from her experiences, has moved on with her life and seems content in her role of a now-famous film actress. In the final scene of the film, Mima visits her former manager in the hospital and, glancing at her reflection in the rearview mirror of her car, smiles and states cheerfully, ‘No, I’m the real thing.’⁵¹

⁵¹ *Perfect Blue*.

In *Yami no Matsuei*, Muraki loses his prize after Tsuzuki is rescued by Hisoka, while he himself is left to die in a fiery building. He also loses his *raison d'être* in Saki, who is not successfully resurrected and whose body perishes, along with Muraki's research, in the fire. It is hinted that Muraki escapes with his life, although fandom speculation suggests that Muraki was intensively physically damaged by the incident.

For the most part, *Speed Grapher*'s antagonists share similar fates. Shinsen, who once again intends to leave fame behind in order to live a quiet and peaceful life upon discovering Suitengu's true nature, is strangled to death by him. Kaoru, who kidnaps Kagura near the beginning of the series and demands a ransom of diamonds, is killed for her betrayal by Suitengu; she is broken into millions of pieces, which are then gathered up to be sold. The final shot of her body depicts a shattered face shedding one sparkling tear. Mizunokuchi meets his end when Saiga blows off his head, his prized molar lying before his outstretched hand. Ran's body is destroyed by Saiga and Ginza, with only his legs and fragments of skin left behind. Miharu dies by using too much of her power, causing her liquid form to evaporate into the atmosphere. Chief Ekoda, who is crazed enough by the point of his death that he is smiling at the sight of Ginza's legs contracting around him even as he knows he is about to die, yells, 'tighter, tighter!', as she proceeds to snap his neck.

Perhaps most significantly, Saiga begins to go blind as a side-effect of his Euphoric powers, and can no longer see at all by the final episode. He is,

however, reunited with Kagura at this point.⁵² In each of these cases, the sexual abuser or aggressor is made to pay for his or her misdeeds – with the possible exception of Saiga, who finds a unique kind of redemption when he can no longer take photos, and when his sexuality is therefore no longer intrinsically bound up with his violent power.⁵³

Just as importantly as the punishment which is meted out to those who are seen as sexually and morally guilty, the victims themselves grow from their experiences. Mima's success in *Perfect Blue* as a vocalist has been relatively mediocre; she is well aware that her sense of a lack of fulfilment stems from the knowledge that she can accomplish much more in life. As a result, Mima's transition from the music industry into the world of acting becomes the origin of her inner conflict. Mima's fundamentally passive and emotional dependent nature means that she lacks determination and confidence, and therefore allows others to speak her mind for her.

Surrounded by an over-zealous and bullying talent agent, and a motherly but smotheringly overprotective business manager, Mima leaves the decision-making to them, and is constantly being spoken over as though she is a child or lifeless product. From the beginning, she never asserts whether she truly wishes to make the transition from singer to actress at all – it is questionable whether this was even her idea to begin with. Whilst her agent emphasises Mima's new acting

⁵² The redemption of Saiga through his blindness has parallels with Jane Eyre, suggesting a romantic trope. Rochester likewise loses his eyesight during the climax of the story, and only then is reunited with Jane.

⁵³ Interestingly, although Suitengu dies at the end of the series, he is not seen to suffer for his misdeeds. However, because Suitengu is taking revenge on a corrupt financial system, he could be seen as much a hero as he is a villain in some respects – something that may account for his lack of 'punishment' in the anime.

career as an opportunity for growth, Rumi is primarily concerned with maintaining Mima's pop idol image.

Although present during this meeting, Mima simply acquiesces to whatever is being suggested, and never mentions her true opinions on the matter. Her first scene as an actor, in which she is given only one line, mirrors her own uncertainty as she utters the sentence to herself over and over again: 'Excuse me... who are you?'⁵⁴ Neither does Mima give any indication of her true feelings regarding the filming of the rape scene, where her judgment is influenced by her agent's persuasion.

Mima's phantasm, an alternate and untainted 'other self', appears as a consequence of her lack of courage in confronting and indentifying her own desires, which are being constantly overridden by those less passive than herself. Unable to deal with her deeper fears and bottled-up emotions, Mima subconsciously creates a phantom persona as a means of coping. In this, *Perfect Blue* portrays the inherent harm of complacency, submission, and lack of self-identity. In a sinister way, Mima is only able to define herself through the 'glorified filth' of her rape – only when the barrier between her life as a drama character and her life as a real person is destroyed is Mima finally motivated to throw away her indifference and attempt to become more self-aware.⁵⁵ In gaining this new sense of self, Mima becomes capable of discerning what is fantasy and what is reality:

⁵⁴ *Perfect Blue* (1998).

⁵⁵ 'Animefringe: December 2005 – Specials – Perfect Blue' (<http://www.animefringe.com/magazine/2005/12/special/07.php>), accessed 11 September 2009.

On every perfectly blue day, one must discern three realities from one another: Fantasy (what others feel to be true), Fancy (what one hopes to be true), and Reality (all that is true). In order to find out if you are who you allege to be, and in order to justify that you are ‘the real thing’ ... you must dismiss all that is not logically influencing your motive, and use your psychological endurance to carve honesty out of the darkness of your mind.⁵⁶

In *Yami no Matsuei*, it is Muraki who, albeit cruelly, forces Tsuzuki to face his past, something which Tsuzuki must do if he is to ever leave his state of ‘perpetual adolescence.’⁵⁷ In the process, he confronts Muraki over his actions, yet does not fall prey to the trap of demonising Muraki, instead realising that there is no defining line between ‘good’ and ‘evil.’ Tsuzuki also recognises that there is still an existing line, if only a fine one, between killing for work as a *shinigami* and killing for pleasure as Muraki does.

Whilst it is tempting to see Tsuzuki’s catatonic inaction during the final story arc when captured by Muraki as weak, he overcomes his helplessness in the last available moment, deliberately and unflinchingly stabbing Muraki in an act which shows a willingness to finally confront his destiny rather than run from it in denial. Like Mima, Tsuzuki, along with Hisoka, is only able to obtain some measure of freedom from his past by an unwavering examination of the self. Without becoming more self-aware, but also more self-accepting, both Tsuzuki

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ ‘Muraki/Tsuzuki (Yami no Matsuei)’ (http://community.livejournal.com/ship_manifesto/54688.html), accessed 11 September 2009.

and Hisoka would otherwise be doomed to forever repeating their mistakes and detrimental patterns of behaviour.

In a parallel approach, the relationship between Saiga and Kagura is found to rest upon the latter's maturation and the former's willingness to express his feelings. Saiga's protectiveness over the mistreated Kagura contains strong elements of parental defensiveness, but he cannot remain unaware that Kagura is also the perfect photographic subject that he has been seeking ever since the waning of his enthusiasm following the war – a subject which he can now never capture. Saiga does not acknowledge his romantic feelings towards Kagura – or perhaps is simply not aware enough to acknowledge them – until his confrontation with Suitengu during the final episode. Prior to this, Saiga grows increasingly protective of Kagura, acting as a kind of teacher in showing her a world that she has never been able to experience, but casually denying his feelings whenever he is questioned about them, asserting that 'it's not like that', or else ignoring the question altogether.⁵⁸

Kagura herself seems to hero-worship Saiga at first, and is constantly in awe of what she sees after escaping her sheltered life. Although far more honest with her feelings towards Saiga, she is naturally naïve and insecure about her position. Before Saiga confesses his love, Kagura gives in to her weakened emotive state and tells him that the world would be better off if she and Suitengu were both dead. She only recovers her will to go on after Saiga admits that he wants her to live 'more than anything.'⁵⁹ Five years after Suitengu's explosive *coup d'etat*, a

⁵⁸ *Speed Grapher* (2005), Episode 9.

⁵⁹ *Speed Grapher* (2005), Episode 23.

blind Saiga is taking pictures of the sunset when a now 20-year old Kagura returns to be by Saiga's side. The two embrace as the scene moves up towards the sunset, ending on Saiga's final piece of dialogue: 'Welcome back.'⁶⁰

The overall goal that both Saiga and Kagura move towards, and are eventually able to obtain because of their growth as individuals, is best symbolised by the repeated image of huge posters displayed around the city. The original photograph on these posters was taken by Saiga himself during the war, and depicts a foreign, poverty-stricken child who is nonetheless smiling widely and genuinely. The caption around the photograph simply reads, 'Are you happy?'

In studying these titles in conjunction with the context of Japanese media that sometimes combines ultra-violence with overt and disturbing sexuality, it is important to understand that this is not an accurate reflection of Japanese society. Rather, it is an imaginative space in which these morally transgressive portrayals can safely occur. Moreover, because there is a distinct disconnect between social practice and art, as has been discussed in previous chapters, anime can and frequently does present much of its content – sex and violence included – in ways that are intelligent, provocative, and unique to its medium.

⁶⁰ *Speed Grapher* (2005), Episode 24.

Conclusion

As has been explored by theorists such as Butler, the way in which identities are crafted in today's society is most often through the use of specific dualistic labels, through which we understand ourselves and others by such terms as male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, and normal/aberrant. Indeed, perhaps one of the reasons why anime is regarded by many new anime viewers as strange, fantastical, and evocative of sexual deviance is because it confronts common societal constructs of sexuality by doing away with the idea that these types of definitions can be applied so easily.

Anime is also a medium that has become extremely well-known for its portrayal of the strange and grotesque. The view that most adult anime deals with these types of themes may not be a particularly accurate one, but in no other art form is the likes of tentacle rape and pornographic horror productions alluded to by viewers so often. From sexualised schoolgirls in tiny school uniforms to the downright bizarre or perverse, anime is certainly unique in the sense that it consistently presents sexuality in a way that is not seen in any other medium. It challenges those sexual constructs and binaries that we are so used to and transgresses even the most extreme of societal possibilities, rules, and conventions.¹

¹ Of course, not all adult anime is sexually fantastic; *Mushishi* is one example of a mature series that does not deal with sexuality at all, while other anime, including many of Miyazaki's works, are likewise either not particularly concerned with sexuality or else are good examples of sexuality being sublimated.

The first type of boundary that the anime titles in this thesis have dealt with has to do with the division of the body and the mind into two individual and separate entities. This division, which has been a fundamental premise of Western philosophy since Plato, is addressed in anime such as *Evangelion*, which breaks down the mind/body duality and presents a vision of reality in which the mind can not only control a body that is not its own, but is also responsible for creating (or destroying) the physical world around it. Meanwhile, in the type of universe inhabited by robotic bodies that are both desired and loved by humans, or populated by machines which have evolved to such an extent that they have become capable of true human emotional expression, representations of sexuality are particularly complex, and not well suited to a dualistic mind/body or simple gendered binary model.

Another boundary that anime often transgresses is that of sexual orientation. For example, even when terms such as ‘homosexual’ are used in anime – which, as has been discussed, is relatively uncommon in comparison to the amount of anime that deals with this theme – the themes which are more usually found in gay or queer fiction in the West such as homophobia or gay identity, tend not to be a part of the story, or even a part of the world presented within the story. Such concerns may as well not exist in the majority of boys love anime, for instance, whether the narrative takes place in an alternative universe, or whether it is portrayed in an otherwise realistic present day Tokyo. Whilst in reality, ‘one has to submit to labels and names ... to be gauged against measures of normalcy’, anime frequently depicts a fluidity of sexuality that appears uncanny by contrast.²

² Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York, Routledge, 2004), p. 91.

Other boundaries that many anime titles seem to make a conscious decision to exclude or subvert are wider in scope, and less concerned with sexual orientation than they are about broader issues concerning romance and society. The usual constraints of realism and normalcy are merely a starting point when it comes to themes which involve societal ideals as a whole, so that sexuality and romance are as disconnected from what is possible as much as they are from what would be considered ‘good’ or ‘right’ were the events to take place in a non-fictional universe.

For instance, in most Western constructs, ‘true love’ is limited to a relationship between only two people. In most parts of the world, engaging in a sexual relationship with someone while in a relationship with someone else may not be illegal, but it is certainly frowned upon, and infidelity, which has been recently reclassified by many authors and psychologists to include ‘emotional affairs’, is still one of the most common reasons given for divorce cross-culturally.³ Yet harem anime – a popular genre of anime most commonly encountered as a form of romantic comedy – often espouses family values, and the fact that it is constructed around the idea that one person can be surrounded by multiple members of the opposite sex and still find true love, sometimes in more than one person, flies in the face of many real-world notions of romance.

Incest is more than just simply illegal – it is a deep-seated and fundamental sexual taboo for the most people, regardless of what culture they are a part of – but there

³ William A. Haviland, Harald E. L. Prins, Bunny McBride, Dana Walrath, *Cultural Anthropology: The Human Challenge* (Connecticut, Cengage Learning, 2010), p. 226.

are numerous mainstream anime titles which deal with incest both on a direct and indirect level. Moreover, incest is often presented as psychologically fascinating, morally sound on an individual case basis, or even titillating – often particularly in relationships which are homosexual in nature; a double transgression. The characters engaged in this transgressive act are not necessarily portrayed as evil or mentally unstable, but rather are frequently motivated by love and a strong sense of devotion.

The depiction of sexual violence, particularly in the form of rape, as a somehow positive experience is perhaps the most transgressive theme dealt with in this thesis. Tentacle rape and robot love are so obviously fantastical that they have no ability to affront most viewers, while ‘twincest’ is a sexual practice which, although within the realms of worldly possibility, is so rare as to not have any sense of immediacy, and can therefore be treated with a significant degree of abstraction and philosophic distance. However, rape cannot be treated with the same kind of emotional detachment, in large part because issues surrounding rape, including the experience of the victim, are encountered on an almost daily basis in the media. Too many people have either had a personal experience involving rape or know someone who has been raped for it to be treated as simply another literary trope, particularly for it to be represented positively. Whilst in non-pornographic anime productions this trope is most commonly depicted as a morally unethical act, it is used within a number of titles as a means of plot and character development. In some cases it is the driving force behind the motivations and relationships represented therein, and therefore becomes one of

the most striking and visually significant scenes of the anime, designed to capture the imagination of its audience because of its very transgressive nature.

Furthermore, the genres that mainstream anime explores on a relatively regular basis do not have any obvious Western equivalents in the animation world. There have been many creations of fiction that depict psychologically complex characters who are struggle with issues stemming from sexual trauma and dysfunction or the relationship between sexuality and technology, yet *Evangelion* was considered unconventional and disturbing even among Japanese anime fans because of the way it broke the 'rules' of *shounen* and mecha adventure stories. Futuristic science-fiction involving sex dolls, as well as robots that have developed human emotions, have been a recognised theme in Western science fiction since Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), but on the whole these portrayals have not received the same sophisticated or nuanced treatment compared to the many sexualised/psychologised depictions in anime.

Whilst male/male and female/female erotica is not a uniquely Japanese phenomenon, the target audience particularly of girls love, as well as the ways in which homosexuality in general is portrayed, differs greatly from any other form of media because of the key role that sexual fluidity and the lack of gender boundaries play in these two anime genres. Girls love is not simply a form of storytelling designed to cater to male-orientated lesbian fantasies, and homosexuality is usually not a form of personal identification or even a statement of sexual orientation, but is instead defined by the actions and performativity of the characters involved. Biological gender in both boys love and girls love is a

secondary concern if it comes into the equation at all, despite frequent depictions of crossdressing and gender-swapping.

The portrayal of the effects of incest and rape (and to a lesser extent ‘infidelity’ and multiple partners) on people’s lives is similarly an international staple of film and television, but such portrayals almost universally focus on the violence and destruction wrought by such acts. Moreover, these acts are typically represented as modes of behaviour that reflect mentally damaged and morally corrupt characters beyond redemption. In contrast, anime titles involving these themes are often not limited by such conventions, and routinely transgress the moral codes and ethics of everyday life as it is commonly understood. Characters involved in incest or who have multiple partners (or at least potential multiple partners) are commonly portrayed as either sympathetic or humorous, and rape is not necessarily a trope that is approached with any particular sense of caution.

However, on another level, anime does not necessary examine facets of sexuality that have not already been explored before. Rather, anime takes established themes regarding sexuality and presents them in new and innovative ways. Anime allows for explorations outside of the norm by virtue of its very medium, but by the same token, much of what is presented in anime is not new in and of itself – the aesthetics of the manner in which the story is told mark it as unique. As has been argued over the course of this thesis, anime of all genres is often influenced by cultural factors, as well as by other fictional creations both in and outside of Japan.

For example, one has to wonder whether an anime like *Evangelion* could have been created without the subversion of themes already presented in earlier science-fiction *shounen* manga, while a number of anime revolving around the link between sexuality and robots have been obviously influenced by classic works of fiction such as *Neuromancer* and *Blade Runner*. Japan has had a long and well-documented history of male homosexuality, and as has been previously discussed within the corresponding chapter, it is not difficult to compare boys love with a non-Japanese medium such as Harlequin romance novels – just as it does not stretch the imagination to draw parallels with girls love anime and Class S stories. Harem anime essentially drew its inspiration from the hundreds of romantic comedies that came before it, and depictions of incest can be seen across nearly all cultures in one form or another, most obviously in the form of mythology. Sexual violence is present in many older forms of Japanese popular media such as woodblock prints, and the use of rape as a legitimate plot device, as opposed to a form of erotica, is not an uncommon theme in television shows and novels over the world today.

Attempting to pin down any single nation's sexual 'character' is of course problematic – one person cannot speak for 127 million Japanese men, women and children, although the articles, photos, and products that can be readily found online, if they are to be taken only at face value, portray a country that is utterly obsessed with cartoons and sex. The term 'only in Japan' is commonly cited, in large part because of the export of those types of anime that would seem peculiar to almost anyone, regardless of culture. If the content of many anime and manga are to be believed, Japan is a place where cross-dressers, flamboyant

homosexuals, and lesbian schoolgirls wander the streets on a regular basis and are not glanced at twice.

However, as has been observed, in Japan, outside of the fictional realm, individual matters of sex and sexuality are generally kept private.⁴ Practices with long historical traditions such as homosexuality, cross-dressing, and transvestism are not widely publicly accepted in Japan, since to be a part of normative society means to be able to merge with the crowd. ‘*Deru kui wa utareru*’, an ancient Japanese proverb translating literally as ‘The stake that sticks up gets hammered down’, still very much applies. Therefore, as Japanese cultural critic Azuma Hiroki has noted, those members of society who are unable to make the distinction between what exists in anime and what does not are considered by the majority of their peers to be *otaku*, in the pejorative sense of the term.⁵ Anime is a marketable medium not in spite of, but because it is not a reflection of reality. The possibilities of sexuality as metaphor seem endless.

Nonetheless, there is a distinct lack of shame surrounding fantasy, precisely because fantasy has no place within the real world of school or the workplace. It has been recognised that nearly all anime, by very definition, is a type of fantasy – in part because the medium is a cartoon one – but also because, even when set in a ‘typical’ Japanese high school or involving characters who must deal with ‘real’ everyday problems and relationships, what takes place on screen is no more realistic than any romance novel, soap opera, or conventional film. Regardless of

⁴ Time Out Magazine Ltd., *Time Out Tokyo* (London, Time Out Guides, 2005), p. 29.

⁵ Azuma Hiroki, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* (Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 27.

how transgressive a story is, the imaginative sphere in which it occurs renders it harmless, in that it does not ultimately challenge social mores. Above all, anime allows for an indirect exploration of the unusual within the narrative aesthetics of the genre, and for a mode of emotional expression that does not answer to cultural conventions or stringent 'rules' of art. It is not the subject matter, but rather the way that subject matter is depicted artistically, that makes an anime 'successful' or not. In short, anime is a medium whose narrative aesthetics are at times as fantastical as its settings, and a form of Collingwood's 'art proper' that embraces the imaginative space in which it resides.

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Glossary

Bishoujo

‘Beautiful young girl’. A word that is sometimes used in anime to refer to females in their early to late teens.

Bishounen

‘Beautiful young man’. This describes the aesthetic of youthful androgyny most commonly found within anime and other forms of Japanese pop culture.

Doujinshi

Self-published works, usually in the form of manga or magazines.

Ecchi

The Japanese pronunciation of the letter ‘H’, a slang term for the erotic. It can also be used as a noun or adjective to describe someone or something seen as dirty or naughty. It is occasionally expressed as ‘etchi’.

Eroge

A portmanteau of ‘erotic game’, usually referring to Japanese video or computer games featuring anime-style artwork combined with erotic or pornographic content.

Fanservice

Material included in anime and manga that ‘services’ the fan. This most often occurs in the form of playfully salacious content such as panty shots or bikini-clad women for anime aimed at teenage or older males, or homoerotic implications for female-orientated anime.

Hentai

The term most often used outside of Japan to refer to pornographic anime or manga. In Japanese slang, it is used as an insult translating roughly to ‘pervert’ or ‘weirdo’.

Josei

Manga or anime aimed at female readers from mid-teens to forties.

Kawaii

‘Cute’ or ‘adorable’. The word can be used to refer to anything from people and pets to inanimate objects, and which culture has become part of Japan’s national identity.

Lolicon

A portmanteau of ‘lolita complex’, and used to describe an attraction to underage girls.

Mecha

A walking tank or robot derived from ‘mechanical’, many of which are human in shape and used as gigantic weapons.

Moe

A Japanese slang word usually referring to a particular love for specific fictional characters or their attributes. While some view *moe* as an offshoot of *lolicon* or a similar form of fetishism, others see it as a pure and nonsexual feeling, as a father to a child.

Otaku

A Japanese term used to refer to those with obsessive interests, particularly manga or anime. In modern slang the word is analogous to ‘geek’ or ‘nerd’, and often has negative connotations revolving around extremism and poor social skills.

OVA

‘Original video animation’. It is sometimes also abbreviated as OAV, and refers to anime released straight to video.

Seinen

Manga or anime generally targeted towards males between the ages of about twenty and thirty.

Seme

The dominant partner in a male homosexual relationship. It usually refers specifically to characters as portrayed in *yaoi* manga and anime.

Senpai/ Kohai

Most simply translated into ‘junior’, and ‘senior’, although more accurately as ‘underclassman’, and ‘upperclassman’. These terms are an essential component of Japanese seniority-based status relationships, and are frequently used in anime and manga. A *kohai* is obligated to respect and obey their elder, and in turn, the *senpai* is expected to nurture and guide their *kohai*.

Shotacon

The word used to describe an attraction to underage boys.

Shoujo

A young woman approximately seven to eighteen years in age, and translated most simply as ‘girl’.

Shoujo-ai

A Western fan term for the girls love genre, which sometimes refers to titles with overt sexual content.

Shounen

Literally ‘young man’, but can be used to describe any school-aged male under fifteen years of age.

Shounen-ai

A defunct word which originally connoted paederasty, but was later used to describe the boys love genre during the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is still used

by many non-Japanese fans to describe boys love which does not feature explicit sexual content.

Uke

The submissive partner in a male homosexual relationship.

Yaoi

The popular Japanese term used as an alternative to boys love. In the Anglo-American fan community, it often denotes boys love which contains explicitly or primarily sexual content.

Yuri

The popular Japanese term used as an alternative to girls love. It is often used as a way of describing girls love which involves explicit sexual content, or sometimes female homosexual storylines aimed primarily at men instead of women, in the non-Japanese fan community.