# GEN UROBUCHI, *MADOKA MAGICA*, AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST A HARSH REALITY

An Honors Thesis

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# ABSTRACT

**Title**:  Gen Urobuchi, *Madoka Magica*, and the Struggle against a Harsh Reality
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The focus of this paper is to provide insight into the anime by Gen Urobuchi, *Madoka Magica*. This research was conducted since Gen Urobuchi's *Madoka Magica* has not yet been academically covered in English. I intend to provide a basis for expansion of literature to this area so that this foreign masterpiece might not go overlooked.

This paper first presents Japanese literary and cultural history as contextual evidence towards a nihilistic Japan in a state of identity crisis. This is done by first analyzing the literary movements in Japanese literature, with a focus from the end of the Taisho period to the present, as the literati go through introspective journeys to find a satisfying form of expression. Analysis is then done on how the Japanese "spirit," or psyche, has been tainted years due to external influences. The Aum Shinrikyo cult is used as a window into the "black box" prevalent in modern Japanese culture. As a result, these negative chaotic emotions are portrayed as pervading into the world of the shōjo, blurring the lines between reality and fiction. This causes social tension and a restriction on views of women in Japan as the expectations and pressures on real women to become "*kawaii*" in order to feel beautiful spiral out of control. As Japanese females are trapped by society's immaturity, thus the shōjo come to symbolize social and psychological inhibitions perpetuated by desire.

This paper then goes into rebellion as exhibited by Gen Urobuchi's characters and how they appear to offer an escape from the system. Most notably in *Madoka Magica*, a pubescent girl rebels against Utilitarian concepts represented by an alien species--Kyūbei—and not only ascends to a female deity, but presents a solution through an embodiment of humanitarianism. Furthermore, by transcending gender roles and offering a solution in an identity-confused Japan, she gives hope to mankind that they can fix the problems in society while still remaining human. Through his works, Urobuchi appears to conclude that if we were confronted with a similarly harsh and nihilistic or utilitarian reality, perhaps our only hope to maintain our humanity lies in our ability to make choices--or more specifically: the choice to rebel by holding onto human values. Urobuchi presents the alternative nihilistic consequence of slipping into Utilitarianism as an apocalyptic death of emotion, causing apathy to the point in which we may no longer consider ourselves human.

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# INTRODUCTION

Imagine for a moment that you are in a situation where you must choose between the lives of your entire family or one thousand strangers. Some people might be quick to answer the former, but would your answer change if the latter number was one million? Safe from a hypothetical wall, it is difficult to say for sure what you will choose when actually confronted with that type of situation. Some people would rebel against the one asking the question, deeming it unreasonable and improbable, while others struggle endlessly between the choices and never converge on a definite answer. While the choice to save your family might be considered an understandable choice, it might be criticized as "selfish." On the other hand, the choice to save one million people might be criticized as the text-book "logical" choice, devoid of realistic human emotions. What it comes down to is a harsh battle between emotion and logic, with a "correct answer" harassing the back of your mind—a choice you might not want to consider. Even if there exists a choice that provides the "greatest good," we as humans are not so willing to ignore our emotions. This type of choice may be considered a "utilitarian" choice, or a choice based on the philosophy that "an action is right if it tends to promote happiness and wrong if it tends to produce the reverse of happiness […] of everyone affected by it."[1] Although these emotions may be considered "selfish," they are also part of what defines our humanity. This type of thought experiment is a fascinating phenomenon as it helps provide a better understanding of the psychological

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[1] *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "utilitarianism", accessed September 19, 2016.

border of humanity—in other words what can and cannot be considered a humane decision. This experiment also offers a sociocultural perspective on "utility" when considering the context and influences that go into making the decision.

Some big influences that might shape this decision are a culturally induced set of values and general psyche. Take Japan for example: a society that has a rich history of culture and traditions, collectively producing something akin to a national morality, per se. Nakamura Mitsuo, a literary critic active mainly in the Showa Era writes that Japan is a country that was once led by spiritual guidance and traditions, only to have faith lost in their "great city" of Tokyo after the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923.[2] Perhaps Japan started losing faith in spirituality altogether, especially after—according to Temple University in Tokyo Professor Jeff Kingston—the "Emperor was forced to renounce his divinity and was stripped of all political power"[3] succeeding the end of WWII. Suffice it to say that in the WWII aftermath, Japan underwent countless, compounding changes that affects the people's psyche. Eventually, Japan was swayed into a paradigm shift as Japan's locus of control presumably migrated from the inside-out as external factors, such as natural disasters or even occupation by America,[4] seemed to become the norm. Aiding to the factor during the peak of the bubble economy was a dangerous and "powerful group psychology that encouraged people to suspend their judgement and worry more about being left out of the boom,"[5] which in

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[2] Nakamura, Mitsuo. 1969. *Contemporary Japanese fiction, 1926-1968*. Tokyo: Kokusai Bunka Shinkô-kai [Distributed by Japan Publications Trading Co., San Francisco]. p14.
[3] Kingston, Jeff. *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010*. 2nd ed. E-book. Routledge, 2014. (Kindle Loc. 586).
[4] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 674.
[5] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 2175-2176

turn caused the bubble to burst as prices "escalated out of control."[6] As faith in the

market dwindled in parallel with faith in spirituality, a wave of nihilism—which is

sometimes considered as the "disintegration of traditional morality"[7]—swept across

Japan and was perhaps an impetus for social discomfort and psychological disarray.

This in turn caused Japan to experience a "moral laxity"[8] that "spurred a national

introspection, focusing on what has gone wrong."[9] Some may say that this national

introspection may perhaps be indicative of a temporary lapse in moral maturity, if you

will. In other words, this is akin to a type of identity crisis in which Japan, a country

that has had such a long and established history of culture and traditions, is shaken at

its roots causing it to struggle to make quick amends to its social and ideological

structure. However, to expand the metaphor, it seems that many people in Japan didn't

realize just how deep the damage had permeated, leaving them searching for new

ground. They began searching for the root cause of this seemingly spontaneous chaos

that was exemplified not only through the Aum Shinrikyo cult's actions, but also

through a more recent period of heightened objectification of women due to social

issues demonstrated partly by an increase in rape and molestation *hentai* pornography

and *enjō kosai*—or underage sexual activity with older men, both of which will be

discussed further in Chapter 2.

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[6] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 2175-2176
[7] *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "nihilism", accessed September 19, 2016.
[8] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 2480-2481
[9] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 2480-2481

Given all of this context, if we were to attempt to fit Japan and its citizens into this hypothetical equation, while it would be difficult to correctly guess at how an entire group of individuals might act, we might generalize given cultural clues to find Japan in a slightly volatile state with a heavy presence of nihilism. With that said, Japan as a whole might have a net social transformation towards a utilitarian choice to save the majority in an attempt to bounce back to a more stable, less nihilistic state by—for example—following the logical course and promoting a general happiness. While objectively this may be the "right" answer, it seems to strip away some humanity from the decision. Additionally, if utilitarian choices are made often enough and humanity is continually stripped away, at what point do we cease to be human?

A famous Japanese scenario writer, Gen Urobuchi, takes a great interest in these very same concepts regarding the loss of humanity and tends to depict dystopian societies with utilitarian systems and nihilistic themes throughout his many works. These works include *Maho Shojo Madoka Magica*, a psychological magical girl anime where the entire fate of the world is left up to a small group of middle-school girls; *Psycho Pass*, a psychological crime anime set upon a dystopian society that can measure one's worth with technology and act accordingly; and *Fate/Zero*, a fantasy action anime where summoned heroes from the past clash swords and ideals in a battle royal for the holy grail.

This paper will focus on perhaps the most notable of these works, *Mahō Shōjo Madoka Magica,* which was directed by Akiyuki Shinbō and produced by studio Shaft. To delve a little further into this tale, Urobuchi writes a frightening story in which an

alien species devoid of emotion—Kyūbei—takes advantage of young and innocent middle-school girls—or *shōjo*—by making them magical girls in exchange of granting one wish and then implicitly tasking them to fight against evil. These girls must then fight "witches" for the rest of their lives within a paradox of hope and despair only for Kyūbei to later devour their emotional energy for the sake of the universe. In this way, Urobuchi crafts a nihilistic setting within a utilitarian void and challenges the young female protagonists to break free. By writing this story, Urobuchi takes advantage of the culture of *kawaii*—or "cute"—to create desirable characters presumably to adhere to consumer demand based on what is popular in the anime industry. Ironically, the story seems to depict these girls as heroes escaping their oppressing circumstances due to the very same irrational reasoning that they are young, cute, and extremely volatile, which is certainly interesting. Delving further, we can assess that this is perhaps a means of providing the viewers with a first-hand example of what consumers like to consume and how it directly correlates with the protagonists' predicament. Within the story, Kyūbei takes advantage of the girls to fulfill its mission. Consequently, this leaves the girls in a trapped state of immaturity, eternally idolized as an ideal source of energy by the Kyūbei species, as well as by consumers from our universe as an ideal sacrifice for desire and drama. However, if idolizing middle-school girls as the perfect victims to become magical girls and take on the burden of saving the world or universe has become the norm, what does that say about us?

Perhaps in Urobuchi's eyes, Japan's "modes of desire"[10]—as Frenchy Lunning, a Minneapolis College of Art and Design calls it—also take advantage of females to fulfill its objectified social expectations, especially for *shōjo*—or "young girls"—to behave and act in a *kawaii* fashion. Ultimately, this is a problem that Urobuchi brings attention to that seems to inherently link back to the Japanese culture and history of *shōjo*.

Therefore, to form a complete picture, this paper will first begin with a background in Japanese literary culture to provide context for Urobuchi's concern for a nihilistic Japan in **Chapter 1.** Based on external influences and events that have led to a type of social revolution in Japan, this paper will attempt to open the "black box"[11] of emotion beneath the social facades in order to discover the changing views on what it means to be human. This paper will then go a step further to explore how Japan seems to be in a state of "national introspection,"[12] thrown into a momentary state of disarray that can be classified into an identity crisis. We will see in **Chapter 2** how, as a result of pent-up emotions, an outlet was created involving sexual and abusive acts towards women. As a result, this shines a critical spotlight back onto Japan's "patriarchal biases,"[13] while at the same time also encouraging "a growing number of women [ . . . ] to break the mould"[14] and rebel. For example, we will discover the power of *shōjo* to escape their social constraints and gender stereotypes through the transformation into a

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[10] Lunning, Frenchy. 2007. *Mechademia. 2, 2*. Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press. p269.
[11] Gabriel, Philip. 2006. *Spirit matters the transcendent in modern Japanese literature*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. p10.
[12] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 2480-2481
[13] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 1702-1703
[14] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 1702-1703

magical girl and what that might mean for a real society without magic. Using this background in Japanese culture and *shōjo*, we will explore Gen Urobuchi's main works that all share thematic elements of introspective yet dystopian nihilism in **Chapter 3**. In the process we will discuss the previous research that has been done on *Madoka Magica* by Masahiro Hirose and Riho Komatsu before moving onto my own interpretation which I call the "philosophy death match" that occurs between the characters in the TV series of *Madoka Magica* in an attempt to derive a humanitarian answer to Kyūbei's utilitarianism. We will then take a step back and analyze Urobuchi's works into further depth in **Chapter 4**. Here we will build a knowledgebase of actions taken against harsh realities based on Urobuchi's works with varying degrees of maturity to get a better understanding of the consequences and benefits of each form of presented rebellion. Finally, we will explore three philosophical extremes in *Madoka Magica* as represented by Kyūbei, Madoka, and Homura in **Chapter 5** before cycling back to reality to measure the implications of Urobuchi's works on Japan today.

As this paper will discuss, we will see through Gen Urobuchi's eyes a nihilistic Japan and how he fears that, in its chaotic volatility, it may sway towards a dehumanizing utilitarian system, inevitably causing the death of emotion. In *Madoka Magica* in particular, he tackles this directly by depicting a philosophical battle royal amongst young and cute, objectified female protagonists, trapped in an eternal state of immaturity and idolization within the social confines of expectation and desire. While criticizing patriarchal tendencies in Japanese society, he also offers an ironic first-hand experience to the viewers by using the very same unrealistic yet desirable female

protagonists. This is presumably to adhere to consumer demand and show what is "popular" in Japanese popular culture, reflecting perhaps on Japanese culture itself. Furthermore, by placing his stories in a paradoxically tragic or dystopian setting—much like the aforementioned thought experiment—Urobuchi successfully reanimates the struggle to maintain the human spirit within moral discord. Through Urobuchi's literature we can infer that if we were confronted with a similarly despairing reality, perhaps our only hope to maintain our humanity lies in our ability to make choices—or more specifically: the choice to rebel.

CHAPTER 1

# CHAOS AND NIHILISM

## *I. Nihilism and Identity Crisis in Modern Japanese Culture*

What exactly does it mean to be human? Many literati have explored this question throughout history. Japanese literati in particular have a passionate story as well, lacing the bulk of Japanese literature with dynamic progression, brimming with emotion throughout the eras. As a result, this makes it a fascinating area to study. Upon reading a work of Japanese literature, for example, you may find yourself captivated in the wisdom of ancient poetry such as the *Man'yōshū* and the *Kokinshū* from which Japanese prose originated from, or perhaps immersed in the creativity and culture presented in *The Tale of Genji*, a famous 11th century classic that is, as J. Thomas Rimer—an American scholar of Japanese literature and drama—writes, sometimes deemed the world's first novel.[15] Throughout Japanese literary history, the literati have undergone many movements in order to express their thoughts in new and different ways as they sought for a means to properly convey emotion through text. As Japanese culture demonstrates, through the movements and progressive initiatives, literati have been steadily making progress towards this goal.

While literature in Japan was rapidly changing, so was the fundamental core of thought due to external influences starting from towards the end of the Taisho era

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[15] Rimer, J. Thomas. 1988. A reader's guide to Japanese literature. Tokyo: Kodansha International. p12.

(early 1920s) and stretching through the Showa (1926-1989) and Heisei eras (1989-present). One of the major turning points happened in 1923 as a result of the Great Kanto Earthquake which shook the foundation of the Japanese spirit. The earthquake caused tremendous damage to Tokyo and surrounding regions, especially due to the time of day it occurred. Since it happened at noon during lunch time, kitchen fires escalated to a conflagration that scorched Tokyo over three days and turned it into ashes.[16] Nakamura writes that due to how easily their prized city vanished from one earthquake, the "citizens realized at a stroke how shallow and vacant the culture was in which they lived and which they considered as spiritual authority."[17] Nakamura goes on to further mention that "[i]t was because of this awareness that the spirit of the times was strongly tinted with a nihilistic feeling," consequently thrusting Japan into a state of spiritual depression since they no longer felt that their city, "which they considered as spiritual authority" was protected by a higher being.[18] Nakamura quotes Kikuchi Kan who says:

> I have seen the enormous, huge destructive power of nature. I thoroughly came to know that the idea that nature is ever favorable to mankind is all true. I came to know that the religion which teaches that there is a Being in the Universe greater than human beings who protects and reprimands men, is all nonsense.[19]

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[16] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 14.
[17] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 15.
[18] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 15.
[19] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 15.

Thus, in addition to nihilistic apathy, many Japanese turned to atheism while waiting

for some glimmer of hope. In effect, the earthquake was more or less a "social

revolution."[20]

Many Japanese people of the time found this devastating reality too much to bear

and, understandably, they did not wish to speak of it. However, Nakamura writes that

this was a problem and in order "to escape from such an unhappy state" there must be

sufficient "energy" provided "to give it some emotionally satisfactory significance."[21]

Nakamura believes that Japanese sought to find compensation for experiencing this

"once-in-a-lifetime calamity" and eventually were able to take pride in having done

so.[22] Nakamura talks about how Yokomitsu Riichi, an experimental and modern

novelist, took a detached "attitude of an onlooker"[23] to treat the "earthquake disaster

itself as one cultural event."[24] From a psychological standpoint, Yokomitsu Riichi

analyzed the event with fascination in "development in the human mind which could

not but seek 'compensation' even from this kind of disaster" presumably to use in his

"profession as a novelist."[25] The fact that Yokomitsu Riichi detached himself from the

terror in order to potentially profit off of it is intriguing due to the irony of its possible

demonstration on the very same psychological phenomenon he was interested in. This

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[20] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 15.
[21] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 18.
[22] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 19.
[23] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 19.
[24] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 20.
[25] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 19.

just goes to show how the human mind and spirit may naturally attempt to escape from

reality in order to seek out glimmers of optimism even in episodes of major distress.

The literati that were born at the time were also greatly affected. To a young

literati born in this time of nihilism and despair where "all human efforts looked empty

and meaningless," writes Nakamura, "the world of literature must have appeared as

the only reality."[26] This led to a movement called the New Sense School which sought to

move away from the realism of the factual "I" novel, and more to the "second life which

comes after sense," which was the "motion" of the "human mind and heart."[27] This

movement failed to break the "deep-rooted tradition of realism in Japanese novels"

because the literati were only able to incorporate impressions of their environments in a

mechanical fashion.[28] When a "human being appear[ed in the story], his attention was

always paid to the mental activity or outdoing the other party, and the mutual

misunderstanding and complications are observed mainly from the viewpoint of

victory and defeat."[29] Since this type of literature portrayed this binary psychology of

human nature that was not an accurate portrayal of humanity, the work of many New

Sense Writers was nicknamed the "literature of de-humanization."[30] As the literati

henceforth sought to change this in order to portray a complete "expression of

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[26] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 20.
[27] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 23.
[28] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 24.
[29] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 26.
[30] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 26.

psychology,"[31] we can see that the literati of the time were very much concerned with the concept of what makes us human.

This question about humanity seems to overlap directly with a human identity. As such, through the literati of Japan in that time period, we can see an increased focus on identity as well. After World War II had ended and occupation began, for example, American ideology had replaced much of Japan's old restrictive ways through Japan's newly rewritten constitution. As a result of this sudden democratic by-product of "political and social freedom,"[32] the nation was thrown into a state of identity crisis as some grappled for definition of who they were, while others saw this as a chance to reinvent themselves and as a result, redefined the culture of Japan as well. Nakamura comments that "[w]hen they knew that the war was ended, what they felt at first was an animal-like joy, and they had no room to consider what kind of life was awaiting them."[33]

New literati and new literature had also emerged as part of this new change in Japanese culture. For example, Ooka Shohei's *Furyoki* was a new type of "I" novel in which "the main character is well aware of the fact that he is a mere element of the whole drama."[34] This method actually closely resembled that of Western novels, but many Japanese writers did not realize this.[35] Foreign influence played a big role in the transformation of Japan during this time frame. In contrast to the Taisho era, the Showa

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[31] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 26.
[32] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 96.
[33] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 95.
[34] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 121.
[35] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 121.

era was marked by an increase in directly translated foreign works to works that only

necessitated some reputation before being translated.[36] This, in turn, allowed literati to

look outside Japan for answers to their identity and place in the world. As a result, this

postwar period of the Showa era was often marked by ideas of "cosmopolitanism."[37] In

essence, this helped move Japan away from nationalism and see the bigger picture as

described by German sociologist Max Weber, but also applicable to Japan: "[s]ound

capitalism can not be maintained based purely on pursuit of profit […] unless our

nation is a moral one enriched with great aspirations, there is no way we can continue

as an abundant nation and we most certainly will not gain the trust of the world."[38]

On their quest to seek out these universal truths, the Japanese literati began to

explore many areas of introspection, again revisiting this concept of what makes us

human and how to truly express oneself through literature. By incorporating their own

cultural ideas with global ones, they were able to make some new strides towards

reclaiming a new national identity for themselves. This is evident as authors began to

go on introspective or spiritual journeys and discuss related topics through their works.

Although a few examples of this can be found in the Taisho era, such as through the

poetry of Taneda Santoka[39] as well as *A Dark Night's Passing* by Shiga Naoya,[40] a

plethora of examples are prevalent in the later Showa era, indicating a larger paradigm

shift, likely also a result of the war. Many other postwar Showa works touched on

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[36] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 76-79.
[37] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 125.
[38] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 3577-3580.
[39] Rimer, *A reader's guide to Japanese literature,* 121.
[40] Rimer, *A reader's guide to Japanese literature,* 128.

concepts of spirituality, such as Ooka Shohei's *Fire on the Plain*[41] and Endō Shūsaku's

*Silence*.[42] When looking at these works as a whole, a thread of similarity is made

apparent in that they all show, as Gabriel Philip—a University of Arizona Professor—

puts it, "that spirit does, indeed, continue to matter."[43]

From the Taisho period onwards (1913-present) the concept of the "spirit," or

psyche, has always been a big concern in Japanese literary and cultural—examples of

which can be found quite frequently at nearly every turn. For example, let's compare

Natsume Sōseki's pre-war *Kokoro* with Masuji Ibuse's post-war *Black Rain* to serve as

checkpoints to the progress of the literati over time and see if we can find a common

thread. Sōseki's *Kokoro*, for example, may be considered an "attempt to plumb the

depths of the loneliness of modern man" as it delves into questions of identity and

existentialism through "Sensei's own journey to self-awareness" and psychological state

of mind.[44] This concept of identity is further highlighted through Sōseki's choice not to

give his characters any names and instead refer to them by their perspective and

position.[45] As a result, *Kokoro* also directly ties in with the concept of Japan's search for

an identity. Ibuse's *Black Rain*, on the other hand, offers a closer look on how the

Hiroshima bomb affected Japan through radiation sickness. Rimer writes that "*Black

Rain* represents Ibuse's attempt to come to terms with Japan's defeat" and goes on to

say "[…] Ibuse's special genius required time to grasp and respond to the shattering

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[41] Rimer, *A reader's guide to Japanese literature,* 172.
[42] Rimer, *A reader's guide to Japanese literature,* 175.
[43] Gabriel, *Spirit matters*, 10.
[44] Rimer, *A reader's guide to Japanese literature,* 102
[45] Rimer, *A reader's guide to Japanese literature,* 102

events of 1945."[46] This mirrors the aforementioned concept from Nakamura about a

"sufficient energy" being required by a society to exit from an unhappy emotional

state.[47] These novels both represent literary milestones in a way as they exhibit the

departure from the typical egocentric "I" novel and towards more human emotions,

triggering responses such as introspection and compassion. However, they can be

reconciled at the point that they both delve on the concept of humanity. While *Kokoro*

demonstrates the existential side of humanity, *Black Rain* portrays the empathy.

All of these concepts of spirit and humanity play an important role in describing

the background for understanding where Gen Urobuchi is coming from in his modern

works. While the Taisho era is notable for the social revolution caused by the Great

Kanto Earthquake, the Showa era—in which Gen Urobuchi was born—can be

characterized by the turning points of WWII and the American Occupation of Japan.

Some may argue that these events seem to have caused an overall positive outcome due

to the progress made in philosophical, psychological, and social thought. However, not

everyone can so readily accept change; sometimes change has a very adverse effect if

taken at face value without a dose of detachment like Yokomitsu Riichi. In the Heisei

era, for example, a darkness seemed to appear at the heart of Japanese culture due to

the circumstances leading up to and after the economic bubble burst—a darkness that is

perhaps similar to what Murakami Haruki considers a "black box."[48]

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[46] Rimer, *A reader's guide to Japanese literature,* 152

[47] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 18.

[48] Gabriel, *Spirit matters,* 90.

## II. Aum, the Black Box, and Darkness in Japan

In computer science and engineering, a black box is essentially a system where you only know the input and output, but the inner mechanics and functionality are unknown. In other words, when this concept applies to Japanese culture it is referring to the contrast between the reality shown through the facades we can see and the true intentions that may lurk underneath. When considering this black box idea in modern Japanese culture, the Showa era continues to provide great understanding through its literature and gives insight into how this black box might be opened by those who were brave enough to learn the truth.

Murakami was one of these brave souls who found this black box concept exceptionally interesting and thus began to explore into an area people feared to delve into: Aum Shinrikyo. Murakami himself says, "I wanted to try to pry open that black box and catch a glimpse of what it contained."[49] However, he found that on the "other side"[50] there were many features and circumstances which he thought was overall quite "disturbing."[51] One of the Aum Shinrikyo's most notable terrorist attacks was on March 20th, 1995. On this day the Aum cult attacked Tokyo subways during rush hour with a deadly nerve gas called "sarin"—killing many and injuring many more.[52] As a literati, Murakami says, "what I really wanted to know for myself, was the violence that must

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[49] Gabriel, *Spirit matters,* 90.
[50] Gabriel, *Spirit matters,* 125.
[51] Gabriel, *Spirit matters,* 90.
[52] Gabriel, *Spirit matters,* 87.

lie hidden in [Japan's] society, just below our feet."[53] After anonymous interviews with

many Aum members he came to the conclusions that there was this dark side to Japan

that existed "both inside and outside the cult."[54] What he found was that many of the

people he interviewed seemed to be affected by an extreme sense of nihilism and had a

"disgust for ordinary secular Japan," claiming that a "typical pleasure-seeking,

consumerist lifestyle" was "increasingly pointless."[55] What the Aum members were

trying to do, Namimura Akio—an Aum member—believes, was to "push the reset

button on life."[56] Takahashi Hidetoshi—a former Aum member—also agrees with

Namimura's idea of this "apocalyptic cult" that aims to save the world by destroying

it.[57] Takashi goes on further to say that in a way, "the gas attack was 'a kind of catharsis,

a psychological release of everything that had built up in Japan—the malice, the

distorted consciousness we have'."[58] In other words it's as if this was a form of

expression in the spirits of the Japanese youth as a result from accumulated despair.

  This piqued Murakami's interest on the spiritual reasoning for the Aum's

actions. In his research he learned that they sought to make life easier by "doing away

with the attachments inherent in [ . . . ] life."[59] This is especially interesting because it

seemingly falls under the category of a dehumanizing utilitarian choice as discussed

earlier. Also interesting is that in addition to being far from human, some extremist

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[53] Gabriel, *Spirit matters,* 89.
[54] Gabriel, *Spirit matters,* 90.
[55] Gabriel, *Spirit matters,* 92.
[56] Gabriel, *Spirit matters,* 93.
[57] Gabriel, *Spirit matters,* 93.
[58] Gabriel, *Spirit matters,* 94.
[59] Gabriel, *Spirit matters,* 92.

Aum members justified murder under certain circumstances with utilitarian logic. This

can be seen in an interview excerpt that Murakami had with Kano Hiroyuki:

> **Murakami**: … *For the sake of argument, though, let's say that your level shot way up to the level of Vajrayana, and you were ordered to kill someone as part of your path to reach Nirvana. Would you do it?*
> [**Kano**:] Logically, it's a simple question. If by killing another person you raised him up, that person would be happier than he would have been living his life. So I do understand that path… Let's make one thing very clear. A person who cannot discern the transmigration of another does not have the right to take their life.
> **Murakami**: *Was Shoko Asahara qualified to do that?*
> [**Kano**:] At the time I think he was.[60]

While it is "hard to determine why Asahara decided to plan the destruction of Japan

and the world," [61]  it is easier to see through this excerpt that the Aum members had

essentially locked away their spirit in the "'spiritual bank' called Asahara Shoko."[62] In

Murakami's interviews with the victims of the terrorist attack, he also found that there

was a "similar deposit made by many ordinary Japanese in the 'bank' called the

Company."[63] Murakami says, "[t]here is at work in Japanese society a kind of blind

obedience to the collective" and thus ordinary Japanese people may also be seen to

share a similarity with the Aum in "conformism, blind obedience, and subordination of

the will."[64] Since some Japanese confront the world with antipathy and consider it

"evil," they are drawn to the Aum cult which mirrors their hopes to destroy it.[65]

However, not all of the Aum members have such cookie-cutter reasons for joining. For

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[60] Gabriel, *Spirit matters,* 95.
[61] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 2331-2341.
[62] Gabriel, *Spirit matters,* 90.
[63] Gabriel, *Spirit matters,* 90.
[64] Gabriel, *Spirit matters,* 90.
[65] Gabriel, *Spirit matters,* 92.

example, Kingston quotes from Murakami's book, *Underground: The Tokyo Gas Attack*

*and the Japanese Psyche,* which reveals that some of the members were "elite students"

who were "turn[ing] their backs on good careers and plung[ing] into an obscure new

religion."[66] Regarding the reasons for joining, Kingston goes on to say:

> It is often argued that they reacted against a strait-jacket society, the suffocation of youth and a pressure-cooker educational system; joining Aum was an extreme backlash against the conformity that is often the cost of success in Japan. Others argue that they were cajoled and flattered into joining, given enormous powers and influence at an age when they would still have relatively low-level corporate or bureaucratic positions if they continued on their 'fast track' paths in a seniority-weighted system. Still others pointed to the crass materialism and spiritual void of modern Japan as a cause for their alienation and rejection of the status quo. Yet none of these explanations seem compelling or fully satisfying; the mystery continues to haunt the Japanese.[67]

As we can see, there is no concrete understanding as to why these members joined. This

unease seems to still plague Japan because it shows that, while the Aum Shinrikyo cult

was largely responsible for many terrorist attacks, a lot of the members were

frighteningly normal—just like us. Murakami explains this in a bold afterword to his

novel *Place*:

> We need to realize that most of the people who join cults are not abnormal; they're not disadvantaged; they're not eccentrics. They are the people who live average lives (and maybe from the outside, more than average lives), who live in my neighborhood. And in yours.
> Maybe they think about things a little too seriously. Perhaps there's some pain they're carrying around inside. They're not good at making their feelings known to others and are somewhat troubled. They can't find a suitable means to express themselves, and bounce back and forth between feelings of pride and inadequacy. That might very well be me. It might be you.[68]

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[66] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 2331-2341.

[67] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 2331-2341.

[68] Gabriel, *Spirit matters,* 101.

This excerpt might at first seem rather radical due to the apparent sympathy and consolation towards the members of the cult, but this was not the sole intention and does not diminish the severity of what was done. On the other hand, it is important to look past the outcome of hatred and try to find the root causes within the black box that Murakami opened up.

One thing we can understand from this black box in the context of Japanese literature is that while more expressive literati were able to convey their feelings through emotion and literature, the Aum—troubled and perhaps often misunderstood—expressed it through violence. Violence is a concept that of course has many issues, such as disrespect and dehumanization among others; however, the origin of this problem seems to link back into the ambiguous chaos that has emerged in Japan—the chaos consisting of "[t]he rising levels of truancy, bullying, materialism, moral laxity and delinquency among youth" that has caused the aforementioned "national introspection."[69] Consequently, the Aum Shinrikyo cult seems to have stemmed from this disorder to represent all the pent up emotions in people throughout this time. If what Murakami says is correct and the Aum members could have been one of us, then perhaps the Aum and their actions are a product of the mixed social circumstances in Japan such as nihilism and identity confusion to name a few.

However, the Aum Shinrikyo cult was not the only group that was perpetuating the chaos that was also affecting them. The *yakuza*, for example, made things difficult as

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[69] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 2480-2481.

well during the bubble economy. When the bubble economy in Japan had finally

popped and faith was presumably lost in the market, the only way to perhaps restore

order would be to work together. However, that was quite a tall task to ask, especially

since this this bubble arguably occurred in the first place due to the "contagious

optimism" that spread a "collective mania" mentality to take advantage of the inflating

prices to make profits. [70] Furthermore, while the banks were having trouble already, the

*yakuza's* involvement didn't help at all and instead made it even worse. Kingston writes

that like everyone else, the *yakuza* had lost a lot of money "when the value of their

assets imploded."[71] However, they harassed bankers to not "collect on loans

outstanding to them or foreclose on *yakuza* properties put up as collateral" with the

threat of murder if they failed to comply. [72] Kingston also writes that due to an incident

"following the murder of a banker pushing his luck by pressuring *yakuza* to repay," the

government had to take action to allow bankers to meet the *yakuza* demands to lower

the death toll. [73]  As a result, this caused great strains for the Japanese economy and

made it very difficult to recover, which was a big blow to the Japanese psyche. For

example, Kingston writes that the "media focused on the rising number of heads of

households committing suicide so that their families could collect money from life

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[70] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010*, loc. 2163-2174.
[71] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010*, loc. 2208-2214.
[72] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010*, loc. 2208-2214.
[73] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010*, loc. 2208-2214.

insurance policies."[74] He goes on to say that the suicide count had "surged, topping

30,000 every year, many linked to severe financial distress," which is quite unsettling.[75]

Through the comparison between the Aum Shinrikyo and the *yakuza's* actions we can

see that they both have similar outlets for expressing themselves in this chaos. The Aum

Shinrikyo seemed to develop apocalyptic ideas to cure the world through destruction

for what they presumably believed to be for the greater good, while the *yakuza* were

refusing to accept their own misfortune and instead pushing it onto others in a cruel

way. We can then perhaps infer that the outlets for both the Aum and *yakuza* groups

involved asserting their own realities and ideals upon others.

In a similar fashion, going back to the discussion on blind obedience to the

"Company," Japan's society as a whole also seems vulnerable to the tendency of finding

a scapegoat for its problems. Additionally, just as the individual human spirit tends to

distract itself when in crisis, I would argue that the collective society of Japan is

deflecting its layered chaotic emotions—due to being in an identity crisis—towards the

*shōjo*, as one of its outlets for escape. Consequently, this creates a social atmosphere in

Japan that seems to have condensed into a dark and unrelenting "cage of desire,"

trapping women under a patriarchal or perverted gaze that perhaps has served as a

distraction from the real issues at hand.

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[74] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010*, loc. 2259-2261.
[75] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010*, loc. 2259-2261.

CHAPTER 2

# SHŌJO AND MAHŌ SHŌJO

*I. Shōjo, Immaturity, and the Cage of Desire*

The concept of the *shōjo*, which again means "girl" or "young lady," seems to be a product of Japan's cultural identity crisis in that *shōjo* can be considered genderless and immature, prevented from maturing due to a society with social inhibitions that are perpetuated by desire. This desire can be said to be stemming from the Japanese "spirit," or psyche—which as we know, after the Great Kanto Earthquake, WWII, bubble economy bursting, and the despairing chaos that followed—was not in great shape.

Stepping back a bit, the individual events brought about on Japan were not completely adverse. One arguably good thing that resulted from WWII, for example, was that all the prior censorship on Japanese literature, such as explicit or implicit sexual material, had been removed.[76] Consequently, the literati soon found themselves in a situation where they could freely write about anything, and so they began to "write everything."[77] Although they were slightly censored by the U.S. government for anything to do with depictions of the war, this freedom still went a long way for the progression of Japanese literature, as now the literati had expressive liberty. However,

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[76] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 96.
[77] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 96.

unfortunately not knowing what to do with all the freedom "of emancipation, [they soon] went astray, without any means and purpose in life," leading the literati of the Showa era to an existential crisis.[78]

Among the many writers that were born during the Showa era was Urobuchi Gen, a very prominent scenario-writer for multiple forms of media, from light novels to anime. As a man born in the same era as the formation of Japan's cultural "identity crisis," it is unsurprising that he was also affected by the times and also greatly concerned with the human spirit and the associated characteristics defining what it means to "be human." His most notable work amongst fans is frequently agreed to be *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*, a new take on the *mahō shōjo*—or "magical girl"—genre. However, before we delve into *mahō shōjo*, it is important to provide more details for the background of the *shōjo*.

The problem involving the *shōjo* stems from the assumption that Japan was a nation in a state of existential reflection, that when paired with sudden literary freedom from censorship as a result of the war, created an inevitable sexual and pornographic outbreak that perhaps satiated the desire of many and presumably also served as a psychological distraction. This outbreak continued for quite some time. For example, in the 1990s right as the bubble economy was bursting, *enjō kosai*—which can be defined as "compensated dating, usually between junior or high school girls and middle-aged men, often involving sex"—became a real issue in Japan.[79] There were even rape and

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[78] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 97.
[79] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 2468-2470

molestation simulation *hentai* (pervert) games that came into the market, where the player would score points on technique and the virtual victims would be portrayed as reluctant at first but then "apparently fulfilling the players' fantasies, beg[a]n to enjoy what [wa]s being done to them by the virtual perverts."[80] There are many variations of genres, but a more relevant one to the concept of *shōjo* might be the *lolicon* (Lolita complex) subculture—the *hentai* of which focuses on indecent acts to young girls. [81] Although trying to draw a direct connection or vector of influence between the virtual world and reality is difficult, what is clear is that Japan's value system seems to have shifted to incorporate this prevailing change.

This change in gender perspective is one of many fruits of discord brought about by the aforementioned chaos in Chapter 1. However, analyzing it a little deeper, we can try and imagine just how that chaos could produce a higher level of female objectification, consequently highlighting the issue of gender inequality to the global stage where gender and race equality is evangelically paramount. For starters, it is important to note that due to Occupation, women achieved "legal equality"[82] and received all the basic rights that they were lacking. However, this was only on paper and real social change would take time. For example, even up through the end of the 20th century, "women earn[ed] only 60% as much as men and only 10% of managers [were] women."[83] Although the "gap may be narrowing" recently between male and

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[80] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 1895-1904.
[81] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 1895-1904.
[82] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 722.
[83] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 1765-1766.

female in Japan, women find themselves struggling to balance their "multiple roles"[84] due to the "lag between their everyday reality and the social context within which they function."[85] This creates a lot of stress and frustration."[86] Kingston then quotes Brinton's observation that, "…just at the point when legislation propounds equal opportunity for men and women, social conditions are promoting strongly unequal time obligations to the family."[87] In other words, even though gender equality is near, making an active effort to fight for that cause is not practical because not only does it put a strain on the family to go out of the way to be different, but it might not make sense in most cases. For example, if a stay-at-home mother was home most of the time then perhaps it makes sense for her to do most of the housework or child-rearing. The same applies to a stay-at-home father. Additionally, due to the changing social conditions women are adapting in various ways that don't necessarily help the gender equality image. For example, some adapted by helping out more at home and some others resorted to prostitution during the bubble burst for money. Unfortunately, these situations continue to perpetuate the incorrect yet lasting mentality that "most women are full-time housewives," despite statistics showing that more than half of Japanese women work in tandem with their husbands for "economic security."[88] As one might expect, this causes great strains on the gender gap and shifts the collective opinions and

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[84] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 1768.
[85] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 1777-1779.
[86] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 1777-1779.
[87] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 1769-1770.
[88] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 1774.

expectations on women in a negative way. In other words, these women are forced to assume an identity, or a reality, that they are not prepared or willing to accept.

As "social attitudes about family roles"[89] change in Japan towards women in general, we can start to see some lasting effects as well. Paired with Japan's subculture of *kawaii* – or "cute" — patriarchal pressure seemingly encourages the notion that Japanese women, especially the younger generation, need to strive to uncomfortable lengths in order to feel beautiful. This reinforces the stereotype that a young Japanese woman's duty is to be *kawaii.* After marriage, this might not change much and instead they're now expected to be a loyal and caring housewife. Although these females are met with oppression in the facets of "marriage, domesticity, and gender,"[90] the concept of *shōjo* has evolved to offer hope. For example, Kumiko Saito in her article, "Magic, Shōjo, and Metamorphosis: Magical Girl Anime and the Challenges of Changing Gender Identities in Japanese Society," describes *shōjo* as being "between female adulthood and the juvenile female stage prior to marriage."[91] She also mentions that "[t]he dream identity of shōjo originates from her status as liberated from a wide variety of obligations undertaken by men, as well as from domestic obligations of

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[89] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 1771.

[90] Saito, Kumiko. 2014. Magic, **Shōjo**, and Metamorphosis: Magical Girl Anime and the Challenges of Changing Gender Identities in Japanese Society. The Journal of Asian Studies (73): 162.

[91] Saito, Kumiko. 2014. Magic, **Shōjo**, and Metamorphosis: Magical Girl Anime and the Challenges of Changing Gender Identities in Japanese Society. The Journal of Asian Studies (73): 148.

married women."[92] In other words, there is power to be claimed by the *shōjo* in its

powerlessness—a paradox in the depiction of recent magical girls. [93]

The term *shōjo* has also evolved in a negative way that can now represent a

gender device with a meaning akin to an outlet of sexual impulses and desires. Perhaps

it was because a distraction was necessary in Japan due to this social revolution;

however, regardless of the reason, as people continue to immerse themselves in a

stereotype-filled atmosphere, people begin to lose sight of the border between realistic

and idealistic expectations of women. In regards to Japanese society as a whole, this

only served to further dampen the identity crisis that was already established.

This blurred definition of realistic women as it intrudes into Japanese culture can

perhaps also be traced to Japanese popular culture. For example, examples of identity

crisis can be seen in the paradox of the "child" being both ephemeral yet eternal in

Japanese literature. A child is ephemeral because maturity is a fact according to basic

biology, and the child in Japanese literature is also eternal due to being forced to remain

pure and innocent, as well as undefined and immature. For example, in Frenchy

Lunning's article, "Between the Child and the Mecha," she discusses how "[w]hether

male or female, adolescent or just immature, the pilot is generally posited as a human

child: a person in the formative stage of development seeking a secured identity

through a bodily identification via sexual and gender-specific tactics."[94] She then also

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[92] Saito, Kumiko. 2014. Magic, ***Shōjo***, and Metamorphosis: Magical Girl Anime and the Challenges of Changing Gender Identities in Japanese Society. The Journal of Asian Studies (73): 158.
[93] Saito, Kumiko. 2014. Magic, ***Shōjo***, and Metamorphosis: Magical Girl Anime and the Challenges of Changing Gender Identities in Japanese Society. The Journal of Asian Studies (73): 158.
[94] Lunning, *Mechademia. 2,* 269.

says that "a mature secured identity is a rare item in a contemporary postmodern culture that is obsessed and stuck in seemingly endless adolescent modes of desire."[95] This claim seems to posit Japan as a culture in which, during its cultural identity crisis, is reluctant to "mature" and graduate from its collective and obsessive desire, posing a potential problem for Japan's cultural and literary integrity. However, to such a culture, this concept of a "child" is very appealing, presumably due to the feeling of innocence that resonates with it. One could relate to a child's immature lifestyle as they reflect back on their own childhood with introspection. Watching the children's struggle to realize their own true identity may remind one of their own internal struggles. Additionally, in this postwar era, "anything that looked like literature or had the form of literature was satisfactory for healing the dissolute mind,"[96] which meant that literature with a character more broken than themselves might have provided some sense of relief and control.

This leads us right into when the *shōjo* genre was first introduced as it also exhibited similar traits to that of the child in the mecha. It can be said that the first work characteristic to the invention of the *shōjo* genre was Osamu Tezuka's manga, *Ribbon no Kishi* – also known as "Princess Knight." Toku Masami describes this as a work that:

> [ . . . ] depicts the story of Princess Sapphire, who, through an angel's mischief, was born a girl with both a male and female spirit. In the story, she transforms into a knight to defeat the conspiracy to take over the throne of Silver Land Kingdom. The story's main theme is Sapphire's identity struggle: to be a boy and rule the kingdom or to be a girl and marry a prince, Frantz Charming. The story ends happily ever after with Sapphire marrying the prince.[97]

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[95] Lunning, *Mechademia. 2,* 269.
[96] Nakamura, *Contemporary Japanese fiction,* 98.
[97] Lunning, *Mechademia. 2,* 22.

Toku then goes on to describe that this was "Tezuka's most famous shōjo manga story [that] indicate[d] the situation of female life in Japan at that time, when women had to choose between limited careers in the business world or marriage."[98] This momentary gender neutrality can also be interpreted to represent identity crisis and how it has extended to the *shōjo* genre. For example, here we see Sapphire who could become a boy or a girl, which is twice as much to think about for a maturing young child. A normal boy or girl might only think about what they want to do with their lives, but here Sapphire has the choice to choose a different starting point and thus a different stereotype. While the choice is trivialized in the series, it can definitely be considered a state of identity confusion between being male or female.

In St. Lawrence University Professor Macwilliams' book, Takahashi Mizuki's writes an article entitled, "Opening the Closed World of Shōjo Manga," in which she also discusses a similar gender neutrality concept. Specifically, among her discussion of the origins of *shōjo*, she talks about the word's etymology. She says:

> Usually glossed with the English word "girl," the term shōjo specifically indicates a young woman who is not allowed to express her sexuality. While a shōjo may be sexually mature physically, she is socially considered sexually immature and is therefore identifiable as neither male nor female.[99]

Additionally, she goes on to say that *shōjo* were considered "unused sexual resources" and that the "shōjo gender role offered girls few resources to negotiate the adolescent

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[98] Lunning, *Mechademia. 2,* 22.
[99] Macwilliams, Mark Wheeler. 2008. *Japanese visual culture: explorations in the world of manga and anime.* Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. p115.

process of identity formation."[100] From this we can gather that this forced identity on

women was dehumanizing and inappropriate. Masahiro Hirose writes in his thesis,

*Genjitsu tōhi shōjo-tachi*—or "The girls who escape reality,"[101] that in our society today, it

is us who are forcing *shōjo* into the situation where they feel the need to escape from

reality.[102] Additionally, Hirose writes that "in the socio-cultural context of Japan, 'shōjo'

is commonly associated with femininity (woman-like), cuteness, purity, innocence,

fragility, humility, and romance."[103] However, some women who adapted to this notion

of the *kawaii* perhaps aggravated the issue as well, blurring the line between fiction and

nonfiction females even further by giving hope that real women can evolve into the

pure and innocent idealizations of the shōjo. An excerpt from an article by Rippō

Numata gives excellent insight about the "shōjo image":

> To pretend to read a book that you cannot understand, to pretend to know what
> you do not know, and to pretend to be an adult are all what you should not do.
> These behaviors are disliked and laughed at rather than liked and appreciated….
> Thus, you, shōjo must be neither babies nor adults. You must be loved as shōjo
> for your gentleness, innocence, and wholesomeness.[104]

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[100] Macwilliams, *Japanese visual culture*, 116-117.

[101] Hirose, Masahiro 広瀬, 正浩. 2015. The girls that escape from reality: An essay on *Chūnibyō Demo Koi ga Shitai* and *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* 現実逃避する少女達：ー『中二病でも恋がしたい！』『魔法少女まど☆かマギカ』論ー. Sugiyama Jogakuen University Research Journal of Humanities 椙山女学園大学研究論集 人文科学篇 (46): 51-62. My translation.

[102]Hirose, "The girls that escape from reality…" 62. My translation.
> Original text: 「私たちの生きる社会の中で少女という存在に付託されたある種のイメージが、当の少女たちを『現実逃避を願わずにはいられない存在』へと追い込んでしまっているのである。もちろん、少女たちを追い込んでいるのは、私たちだ。」

[103] Hirose, "The girls that escape from reality…" 61. My translation.
> Original text: 「日本の社会文化的コンテキストにおいて、『少女』は、フェミにティ（女性性、女らしさ）、可愛らしさ、純粋性、無垢、儚さ、謙虚さ、ロマンスなどのイメージとしばしば結び付けられてきた。」

[104] Macwilliams, *Japanese visual culture*, 117.

From this we can see that the *shōjo* were indeed objectifications of women, pressuring them into a false reality in which they feel compelled to wear a mask of purity and idleness, cuteness and ignorance. The education of *shōjo* was also thought excessive due to their destiny to become housewives in the future[105]. Ironically, they are idealized as carrying the "dream of becoming happy future brides"—yet while in waiting—in order to "enforce their purity as virgins," they are "forbidden from taking on any public or private role—either as part of the workforce or as wives."[106] This creates a paradox since according to the stereotype *shōjo* should be waiting to become wives, yet they are supposed to remain pure so they can be idolized, which means that they cannot take on the full meaning of "becoming a wife." In other words, there is no way for *shōjo* to claim an identity for themselves and thus they remain trapped in an eternal state of purity and immaturity. Therefore, as Japan continues to search for its existential place of belonging and mature from its modes of desire and episode of social chaos, the women labeled as *shōjo* continue to search for an escape from an identity crisis of their own.

## II. Mahō Shōjo: The Girls of Hope

The idea of the imprisoned *shōjo* produced many stereotypes of women. Kumiko Saito mentions that those stereotypes generally leaned towards "teaching girls to become a good daughter at home and a good OL," or office lady, "at work."[107] Among

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[105] Macwilliams, *Japanese visual culture,* 116.
[106] Macwilliams, *Japanese visual culture,* 116.
[107] Saito, "Magic, **Shōjo**, and Metamorphosis…" 145-146.

these stereotypes was the concept of "fighting female characters."[108] What's interesting, however, is that there exists a contradiction between some "underrepresentations of 'real' women" and "visual representations where empowered female heroes effortlessly surpass men in physical power and social status."[109] Saito mentions that what "helped spread these contradictory images of Japanese culture is the 'magical girl'."[110] A *mahō shōjo*, or "magical girl," is the concept of a young adolescent girl who plays a role with a double identity: one as a normal girl and one with magical powers, normally tasked with saving the world or the universe, and embodying the themes of spreading love, joy, and happiness to everyone. In Masami Toko's article, "Shōjo Manga! Girls' Comics! A Mirror of Girls' Dreams," she writes that "Since World War II, the role and the value of shōjo manga have become significant in Japan, reflecting girls' and women's desires and dreams."[111] This is especially true for magical girls since they flamboyantly radiate themes of hope.

What's interesting about magical girls is that in order to change identities, a magical girl must undergo a transformation sequence. This offers one view of magical girls in that the transformation "from a mediocre girl to a cute warrior" can be seen as an "identity transcendence that undermines fixed traditional gender roles."[112] Another view is that the magical girl genre confirms the female stereotypes in such a way where young magical girls are thought to still have a chance to fulfill their stereotype, but

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[108] Saito, "Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis…" 143.
[109] Saito, "Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis…" 143-144.
[110] Saito, "Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis…" 144.
[111] Lunning, *Mechademia. 2,* 20.
[112] Saito, "Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis…" 145.

"adult women" or magical women—per se—are "simply put, the women who failed to be a wife or a mother."[113] As we can see, the former view hints at a paradox of *shōjo* being stuck between the expectations to be both *kawaii* yet also maternal—a theme that we will revisit when discussing *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*.

As we learned from Tezuka's *Ribon no Kishi*, the *shōjo* genre essentially began in manga. Soon after, however, it eventually branched out to the anime industry as well. Like with any different form of media, this provided a new perspective—in this case: a new way to look at magical girls. For example, during the transformation sequences of the magical girls you would normally see the *shōjo's* normal clothes come off and get replaced by magical clothes through a *kawaii* makeover. In manga, this might happen abruptly with only a flat view established in a typical 2D manner. However, in anime you see the *shōjo* spinning around during this sequence, with more convincing 3D simulation. Since in animation the frames are fluidly connected, you could interpret this narrative style as the "spatial dissection of the female body [which] allows the camera's gaze to explore the depth of the viewer's affection [of] the disembodied body."[114] In other words, instead of treating it as the *shōjo* being the one that's spinning, instead this can be treated as the narrative "camera" that's spinning around the *shōjo.* With further analysis, one way to decipher this can be attributed to an obsessive sense, suggesting a heavier eroticism that leans again towards the direction of the aforementioned "modes of desire."[115] However, this can be justified with yet another view that since the *shōjo's*

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[113] Saito, "Magic, **Shōjo**, and Metamorphosis…" 146.
[114] Saito, "Magic, **Shōjo**, and Metamorphosis…" 155.
[115] Lunning, *Mechademia. 2,* 269.

body is portrayed with a purity like that of a child, suggesting that the *shōjo* is not

necessarily "nude" with all of the associated connotations. Therefore, observing this

magical girl during her transformation could be seen as a mere fascination of an idol or

appreciation for a cute child, with little sexual longing attached if at all. This feeling is

often attributed to the term "*moe*" by avid fans of the anime and manga subculture, or

*otaku*. Hiroki Azuma, a Japanese cultural critic, defines *moe* as follows:

> [*Moe* (萌え)] literally means "sprouting," but it is a recent neologism among the otaku to connote the strong emotion triggered by an image or a character. Etymological origins of the word are obscure, but it is said to stem from an incorrect kanji conversion for another word [燃え] pronounced "*moe*," which means "burning" (as in the burning of a heart or passion). . . . While "burning" *moe* means all-out, burning passion, "sprouting" *moe* might suggest a more gentle, benign feeling for a cute object, although the desire can be (and often is) sexual. Yet "lust," too, is an inadequate translation for *moe*.[116]

As we can see, the word *moe* can encompass many different meanings, but can

ultimately be narrowed down to two main meanings: one meaning refers to a heavier

eroticism that seems to relate more plainly to sexual longing, yet another meaning is

that of a lighter platonic and protective love that "refer[s] to the strong sense of

sympathy felt toward anime characters."[117] Nevertheless, despite the sexual degree and

justifications of observing a *shōjo's* transformation sequence, both situations make it

hard to ignore the imaginable stereotypes of women that are perhaps formed as a result.

For example, the passionate and sexual perspective of *moe* could perhaps aid to ideas

that perpetuate patriarchal objectification of women, whereas the platonic perspective

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[116] Azuma, Hiroki. 2009. *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*. Minneapolis, US: University of Minnesota Press. Accessed September 23, 2016. ProQuest ebrary. p.128-129.
[117] Azuma, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, p.128.

of *moe* might seem demeaning towards women, moving them from the status of human beings to a species that require sympathy and protection, while at the same time also forcing an expectation on them to act and be *kawaii*.

However, despite these readily-equipped negative ideas on *moe*, Saito brings up an interesting point that for *otaku*, "flat cuties in visual text produce a system of desire independent of the desire for women in three-dimensional reality."[118] She goes on to say that "[i]t is further possible that unoriginal fetish cute girls are endlessly produced and consumed so as to sustain the ideological wall between 'real life' and the utopia of character fetishism."[119] In this way, it remains contained within an *otaku*'s "self-enclosed economy of desire"[120] and doesn't affect the real world. Whether or not this is true, we can see that the *otaku* seem to be somewhat of an ideal consumer that buys goods relating to their favorite characters "excessively."[121] Furthermore, in a relative sense it seems to have lessened the degree of full-on pornography. This is because since *moe* sells so well, producers are now giving "more emphasis on the combination of *moe*-elements rather than pornographic elements."[122] After all, there is a reason why *kawaii* culture so prevalent in Japan and a soft-power internationally.

Japan also received influence internationally as well. For example, while Tezuka's *Ribbon no Kishi* is claimed as the first *shōjo* manga, the first *shōjo* anime is generally accepted to be *Mahōtsukai Sarī,* or "Sally the Witch," which drew much

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[118] Saito, "Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis…" 146.
[119] Saito, "Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis…" 146.
[120] Saito, "Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis…" 146.
[121] Azuma, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, p.78.
[122] Azuma, *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, p.78.

inspiration from the American comedy, *Bewitched.* [123] After *Mahōtsukai Sarī* came the widely acclaimed *Sailor Moon*, the success of which "triggered the first wave of cute female-hero action programs" in the U.S. as well as Europe.[124] Saito mentions that due to similar spreads of Japanese media, the "ages, genders, and nationalities of anime viewers have increasingly diversified to the degree that one cannot infer types of audience from the content of anime."[125] While magical girl anime was once targeted solely at young girls, and then moving to also target older men, [126] it is now treated as a much more developed genre, encompassing a larger audience internationally. For example, *Sailor Moon* was clad in mythological allusions to Greek mythology, which consequently ushered in "more mature storytelling in the magical girl genre" eventually also including *Madoka Magica*, "which . . . references Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust.*"[127]

As we have seen, while *shōjo* may be trapped in a state of eternal immaturity due to the imposing social forces stemming from desire, *mahō shōjo* offer an escape through "gender transcendence." This is because not only do these magical girls surpass the stereotypes of gender role and even come to overpower males, but they are also given the hardest responsibility: to save the world. This contrasts directly with the image of *shōjo* being idle and available, "unused sexual resources."[128] However, in the end

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[123] Saito, "Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis…" 147.
[124] Saito, "Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis…" 144.
[125] Saito, "Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis…" 144.
[126] Saito, "Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis…" 147.
[127] Duggan, Anne E., Donald Haase, and Helen Callow. 2016. *Folktales and fairy tales: traditions and texts from around the world.* p49.
[128] Macwilliams, *Japanese visual culture,* 116.

magical girls are just that: magical. The solution they offer through their supernatural capabilities is simply not attainable in real life. After all, *mahō shōjo* are still *shōjo* and thus are trapped in the realm of fiction, prevented from maturing into reality. However, the possibility of escape that magical girls stand for is not to be overlooked. If nothing else, magical girls are the light at the end of the tunnel and a rebellion from patriarchal norms. To *shōjo* without guidance, just the thought of becoming a *mahō shōjo* and transcending gender stereotypes is an appealing notion.

However, as we will discuss in the next chapter, in *Madoka Magica* all of the magical girls don't have the luxury to be an ideal role model for *shōjo*. Until Kaname Madoka—who is arguably the true "magical girl" protagonist of the series—makes the wish in the end to give eternal hope for others at the cost of suffering eternally herself, the magical girls of the series are prisoners of Kyūbei's incubation. Even though Kyūbei gives them an option to become a magical girl, it is an illusion of choice as he knew desire and emotion would lead them into signing their soul away with a "contract" for personal gain with a single wish. In this strange way, just how *shōjo* in Japan are trapped by society to be eternally immature, *kawaii*, and maternal—the *shōjo* in *Madoka Magica* are seemingly manipulated by Kyūbei into becoming magical girls and then eternally trapped in duty and literal, physical immaturity in the form of *mahō shōjo*—all while continuing to fatten up with emotion for a ripe harvest.

Previous research in a few Japanese sources has also been done on this concept of maturity and how it relates to *Madoka Magica*. For example, this can be seen in *Tojikomerareta Shōjo-tachi*, which can be translated to "The Imprisoned Shōjo" or "The

Imprisoned Girls."[129] This paper was written by Komatsu Riho in 2014 and has a title

that seems to mirror the concepts mentioned earlier, where the *shōjo* was trapped,

prevented from achieving any sense of maturity. Within this paper, another

researcher—Yamakawa Ken'ichi—mentions that "if you were to look at becoming a

magical girl itself as maturing, then maturing is a type of trap."[130] This is because you

will in essence become a zombie due to the extraction of your soul from your body.[131]

Additionally, in this zombie-like magical girl form they seem unable to age; therefore,

they are prevented from further physical maturity as well. However, despite all these

negative consequences, as we will see, magical girls like Kaname Madoka contain the

potential to out-weigh the scales, transcend the system, and provide a glimmer of hope

to those who are still fighting. Although Madoka remains trapped in the stereotype of a

typical magical girl even at the very end, one could say that she at least escaped

Kyūbei's system and made her own while perhaps representing a pinnacle of hope for

*shōjo* within Urobuchi's universe.

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[129] Komatsu, Riho 小松, 里穂. 2014. "The Imprisoned Girls: An essay on Magical Girl Madoka Magica"閉じ込められた少女たち:『魔法少女まどか☆マギカ』論. Nagano National Literature 長野国文 (22) (03): 71. My translation.

[130] Komatsu, "The Imprisoned Girls…" 75. My translation.
    Original text: 「山川は、魔法少女になることそのものを「成熟」と見ており、「成熟とは、一種の檻である」と指摘する。」

[131] Komatsu, "The Imprisoned Girls…" 75. My translation.

CHAPTER 3

# GEN UROBUCHI AND *MADOKA MAGICA*

## I. *Madoka Magica, a Brief Summary*

*Puella Magi Madoka Magica* was written by Gen Urobuchi and made first into an anime with 12 episodes followed by a sequel in the form of a movie. The *Madoka Magica* series has clear connections to Goethe's *Faust*, including direct quotes appearing on film in the form of runic writings. Devoted fans have decoded this invented runic language into German letters on which it was based, before then retranslating it into English. Before writing *Madoka*, Urobuchi was already established as a successful scenario writer and became famous for his work on *Fate/Zero*, a precursor work to *Fate/Stay Night* by Nasu Kinoko. Urobuchi is a peculiar and interesting author due to his disposition to share a real life characteristic quality with each of his characters in order to get a better feel and more of an intimate relationship with all of them. Due to this installation of his own characteristic traits, most of his works including *Madoka Magica* can also be seen as a modern "I" novel.

*Madoka Magica* is an anime that revolves around a group of middle school girls, centered on Kaname Madoka, who have an encounter with an alien species named Kyūbei—short for in-Kyūbei-tor (incubator) as is revealed later in the series—and are offered the chance to make a contract to become a magical girl and fight witches for the rest of their lives and in exchange will have any one wish granted. While it can be

argued that Kyūbei gives the magical girls a choice and therefore their fate is a result of their own actions, he intentionally leaves out details that might deter them from making a contract with him, using the common excuse of "you didn't ask therefore I didn't tell you." For example, Kyūbei doesn't mention that the process of becoming a magical girl transforms the format of your soul from a concept into a tangible object, called a "soul gem" because as Kyūbei puts it, "is more convenient." Kyūbei also doesn't mention that when a magical girl's soul gem becomes corrupted they turn into the very creature they are constantly fighting: a witch. We find out that Kyūbei, while mascot-like and deceptively cute, is actually a "superior" alien life form that claims to not have emotion and is therefore interested in the human race that does. More specifically he is interested in middle school girls who go through the most emotional phases in their stages of pubescence. The Kyūbei species is interested in the long term goal of postponing the heat-death of the universe due to the constant increase in entropy, which makes the universe increasingly colder as it expands. Since they see that humans have this extra emotional source of energy, they choose a strategy to "incubate" these middle school girls, much like cattle, before harvesting their emotional energy. As a result, their strategy seems to be to provide hope by giving them a wish, changing them into magical girls, and then letting them learn the true state of the world. The true state of the world, they find, is that all their fruitless efforts to save the world are for naught as they simply become the very evil they have eradicated in the world once they die, negating all their efforts. As they fall from the very top of the mountain of hope into the valley of despair, the maximum emotional energy is produced, ripe for harvesting by

the Kyūbei race for the sake of the universe. In other words, the Kyūbei species is able

to use this energy "for the greater good" in respect to utilitarianism. Through these dark

themes that are prevalent throughout the entire series following the notable third

episode—in which Madoka's friend Tomoe Mami gets her head violently chewed off by

a witch—*Madoka Magica* is often considered a deconstruction of the magical genre,

generally classified as a "psychological magical girl anime."

To go into detail, *Madoka Magica* differs from most magical girl anime in that the

main character, Kaname Madoka, does not actually become a magical girl right away.

The majority of the anime is spent with Akemi Homura, a girl from the future, trying to

prevent Madoka from becoming a magical girl in order to prevent her inevitable death.

Homura has turned back time again and again in order to fulfill her promise to Madoka

to prevent her from becoming a magical girl in the first place to prevent their

destruction by Walpurgisnacht, or "Walpurgis Night"—the strongest witch. Homura

also wanted to pursue this reality—a reality in which Madoka would not suffer. This in

turn binds the strings of fate from parallel universes to Madoka in an increasingly

tighter fashion. As a result, they converge and give Madoka heightened magical

potential (enough to become a God), consequently leading her to finally change into a

magical girl at the very last moments of the series, throwing away Homura's efforts in

order to bring hope to all the magical girls across the universe. She does this since she

now has the power to make a wish strong enough to bring actual change. Madoka ends

up wishing for an interference in the magical girl - witch cycle, which becomes known

as the "Law of the Cycle." Under this system, the soul gems of magical girls are

destroyed before they evolve into witches. This allows the good deeds that the magical girls fought for to remain true when they die, instead of negating them all through their evil actions in the form of witches, which may have led to the death of even more humans than they originally saved. As a result of this system that Madoka created, her existence becomes extinguished from the normal plane of reality after having transcended to assume the divine role of a deity. Therefore, everyone forgets about her—except for her little brother who remembers a feeling of Madoka and Homura who remembers her completely. Unfortunately, Madoka's wish does not eradicate all the evil of the world as "witches" (魔女) are replaced by "wraiths" (魔獣). However, Madoka's wish saved the pain of magical girls near and far and offered them hope at the cost of suffering through all of their pain in a cage all by herself.

## II. *Madoka Magica, an Analysis*

<u>Gender Roles</u>

Through *Madoka Magica* we can gather great insight on the social tension between gender roles in Japan. Komatsu also focuses on this concept and relates it to the portrayal of strong women as can be seen from the gender role reversal within the series.[132] This can especially be seen in the first episode where the father is the stay-home parent and the mom is the independent, working parent. Komatsu also offers an

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[132] Komatsu Riho 小松里穂. 2014. "The Imprisoned Girls: An essay on *Magical Girl Madoka Magica*"閉じ込められた少女たち: 『魔法少女まどか☆マギカ』論. Nagano National Literature *長野国文* (22) (03): 75.

interesting theory that reinforces the story's focus on women. She mentions that witches had character and elaborate designs like the other female characters of the show, whereas the wraiths were emotionless and had simple designs like the other male characters of the show.[133] With this in mind, Komatsu concludes that the witches must be female and the wraiths male.[134] With the same logic, we can also gather that Kyūbei must also be male since his species is defined as having no emotion. Komatsu mentions that in a story that seems to emphasize female-superiority, it's ironic that a male character, Kyūbei, destroys the girls.[135]

The gender friction in this story is interesting because here we have a society that seems to be flipped in favor of females, yet an external force from the alien species of Kyūbei comes in and levels the stereotypical playing field by targeting only females since they are more emotionally unstable. In a similar way, due to external forces causing the chaos and darkness mentioned in **Chapter 1** as well as the social circumstances forcing women to employ certain roles in **Chapter 2**, the deep-rooted patriarchal tendencies seem to have been making itself more apparent. In this way, Urobuchi seems to be offering a liberal and modern criticism on gender norms with a touch of irony.

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[133] Komatsu, "The Imprisoned Girls…" 81. My translation.
[134] Komatsu, "The Imprisoned Girls…" 81. My translation.
[135] Komatsu, "The Imprisoned Girls…" 84. My translation.

Philosophical System

Framing *Madoka Magica* within the context of nihilistic utilitarianism and imprisoned *shōjo* that we explored in Chapters 1 and 2, I would like to offer my own interpretation of the major overarching philosophical system that governs the story (**Figure 1**, below). As we can see, in this system this figure highlights the three main characters with each of them representing different philosophies. Kyūbei—representing utilitarianism, Madoka—representing humanitarianism, and Homura—representing our current state of humanity within Urobuchi's universe.
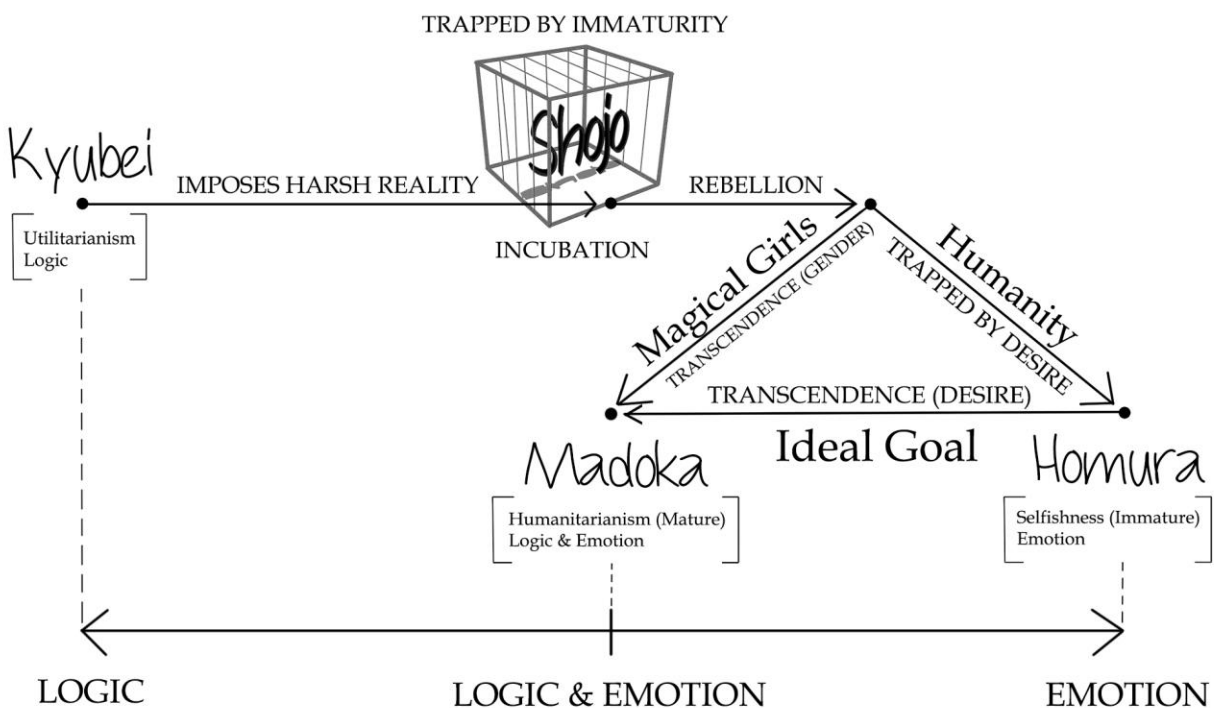


*Figure 1 - The Philosophical System in Madoka Magica*

Starting at the top-left we have "Kyūbei," who is targeting middle school girls—or *shōjo*—at the peak of their pubescent stage in order to maximize their emotional energy

as they swing from one mood to another for a good harvest. As a result, it can be said that, by explaining the importance of the girls' participation, he imposes a harsh reality onto them by burdening them with the involvement of his species' task to save the universe. While this will be explained in further detail, it is important to understand that "Kyūbei" which is a phonetic shortcut to his real name, "Incubator" (In-Kyūbei-tor), should thus be treated as the enemy of humanity. This is because the utilitarian realities he imposes call for humanity to abandon their emotions and think "for the greater good" on a scale and scope much too large to handle. This type of logical thinking devoid of emotion can be considered inhuman. On a parallel line of thought, these "harsh realities" may also represent the friction in real life to accept life as it is. This can be seen, for example, in the idealization of women and *shōjo* in Japan to be unrealistically *kawaii* instead of accepting them as actual humans. Thus, in a way, this imposing of desire is de-humanizing as well. In *Madoka Magica*, this "incubation" of desire that craves for *shōjo* to remain eternally immature and *kawaii* eventually leads to a rebellion which can then result in two different outcomes: Homura's path of uncontainable human emotion or Madoka's path of deliberated salvation. For example, to go back to the thought experiment on whether to save your family or a large sum of people, the "right thing to do" can be derived from both logic and emotion. It is "logical" to choose the greater good, but it is more human and empathetically understandable to choose one's family. Since there is really no middle ground to the situation, this creates an ethical and philosophical paradox of sorts. However, through the series *Madoka Magica*, an escape from the system via transcendence of gender roles

by becoming a magical girl is made apparent. Unfortunately, this escape was only achieved by Kaname Madoka essentially transcending to a God and altering reality to save everyone—avoiding the need to make a choice between them. Urobuchi himself also seems to think that the ideal represented by Madoka is unattainable by our current society due to human nature. Regardless, his works imply that the only choice seems to be to keep struggling against utilitarianism—as well as false realities perpetuated by desire—and keep hoping to someday attain it. Otherwise, failure to do so may result in an apathetic dystopia in which we, as a society, simply cease to be human.

The Philosophy Death Match

In *Tojikomerareta Shōjo-tachi*, or "The Imprisoned Girls," Yamakawa Ken'ichi had talked about a very interesting topic that I would like to delve into. He believes that each character in *Madoka Magica* has their own, set-in-stone, "condition for living" and the cause of that characters' death would imply that they have failed to fulfill that.[136] He begins be saying that Sayaka's condition to live is "to not use magic for the sake of other people."[137] He then says that Kyōko's condition to live is "to not have hope and follow reason."[138] Following that she says that Homura's condition is to never give up trying to

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[136] Komatsu, "The Imprisoned Girls…" 72. My translation.
    Original text: 山川は、魔法少女一人ひとりにある決まった生存条件が生存し、少女たちの死亡原因はその生存条件を守ることが出来なかったことにあると考えた。
[137] Komatsu, "The Imprisoned Girls…" 72. My translation.
    Original text: 美樹さやかの生存条件は「他人のために魔法を使うな」
[138] Komatsu, "The Imprisoned Girls…" 72. My translation.
    Original text: 佐倉京子の生存条件は「希望をもたないこと＝『条理』にしたがうこと』」

save Madoka.[139] Yamakawa talks about how Homura was able to continue to live because she followed her condition up until the end.[140] Komatsu mentions that Yamakawa leaves out talking about Mami and later brings up her own theory. She mentions that because Mami was alone when she was dying in a car accident when she made her wish, and is also said not to have any relatives, that her condition for living was to remain in solitude.[141]

I agree with this interpretation for the most part, but I think that Sayaka and Kyōko don't quite fit. Mami and Homura's conditions for living make perfect sense. Mami wanted to survive and was in solitude, so her condition is to continue living in solitude. Homura wanted to re-do her meeting with Madoka, and she never stopped trying until the very end of episode eleven where she was ready to give up. However, Sayaka and Kyōko are unique cases because they both have selfless wishes. This then calls into question when their condition for living was established. For Mami and Homura it is at the moment the contract was made, but if this was also true for Sayaka and Kyōko then they would have died immediately given the conditions given. Sayaka's condition is not to use magic for other people, but her wish to heal Kamijō's hand violated that directly. Kyōko's condition is not to have hope and to follow logic, but then she would have died when she hoped for her father's sermons to be more

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[139] Komatsu, "The Imprisoned Girls…" 72. My translation.
Original text: 「ほむらの生存条件は、まどかを守るというただ一つの希望と引き換えに、他のすべてを諦めることであるとしている。
[140] Komatsu, "The Imprisoned Girls…" 73. My translation.
Original text: 山川は、ほむらが最後まで生き延びることができた理由について、この生存条件を最後まで貫いたためであると考察している。
[141] Komatsu, "The Imprisoned Girls…" 78. My translation.

successful, or when she hoped for her family to be happy—both of which are emotion-driven and not logic-driven. If I were to amend this theory, I would say that Sayaka's condition for living would be to continue to be a *seigi no mikata,* or an "ally of justice," and Kyōko's condition for living would be to continue to remain selfish and not trusting. In this way, when Mami dies it's because she befriends Madoka and is no longer in solitude; when Sayaka dies it's because she's fallen into despair and seemed to resemble a demon  through her cold fighting style and presumable murder of two guys on a train; and when Kyoko dies it's because she started caring for and trusting Sayaka. Additionally, I've formed my own supplementary theory that I like to call a "philosophy death match" (**Figure 2**, below).
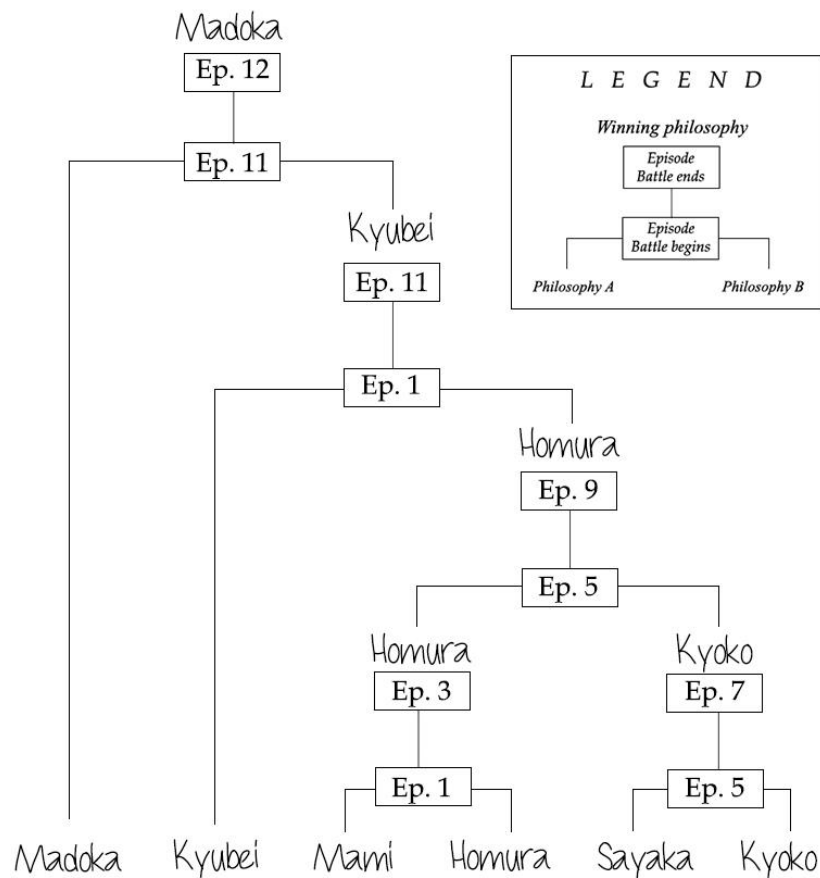


*Figure 2* - *The Philosophy Death Match in Madoka Magica*

Rather than depicting the characters as helpless to their fate in a controlling and nihilistic environment, my interpretation recognizes each character as an individual personified phenomenon, giving them each some intrinsic philosophical value. So while I agree that their conditions to live are relevant to their character as defined by the narrative itself, I also feel that each character and their choices resemble a certain moral or ethical ideology. As such, if that character dies, I feel it should be treated as a statement and demonstration that their philosophy was not the correct answer for the story.

With that said, let's delve into the diagram. The first match is between Homura and Mami and began in the first episode where we see them together for the first time. At this point Homura is trying to kill Kyūbei while Mami is fulfilling her loyal obligations to defend Madoka and Sayaka as both a magical girl and a *senpai*—or senior. This is simply the first definitive point of conflict before the first elimination. Mami was a role model for Madoka and Sayaka who was seemingly lacking in purpose and companionship, always blindly obedient to rules and simply carried out her role of magical girl as instructed. She didn't have any relatives and was practically forced to accept Kyūbei's offer to make a wish while on the verge of death in a car accident. As Komatsu mentions, her condition for living was likely to live in solitude, but by befriending Madoka she fails to follow her character's fabric and thus perishes for it in episode three. She was portrayed as an ideal, but then was violently torn apart, suggesting that perhaps she, as a representative of an ideology or philosophy, was

doing something wrong. Since Homura was the last one to have conflict with her and outlives her, we can say that Homura was the winner in this case.

The second match is between Sayaka and Kyoko when they first meet in episode five. Sayaka is a girl who spends most of her life trying to be altruistic. In this story she's in love with her childhood friend, Kamijō, who used to play the violin. However, due to what she considers an unreasonable fate, Kamijō's hand was injured in an accident and he was no longer able to play. Sayaka, convinced at showing him that miracles existed, accepted Kyūbei's contract and used her wish to heal his hand. With the death of Mami, Sayaka was now the only magical girl of the area and thus claimed jurisdiction over Mitakihara City. When Kyōko—a veteran magical girl—meets Sayaka for the first time, Kyōko tries to kill her in order to usurp her reign over the area since it was a good hunting ground for witches. However, once she gets to know Sayaka, who she finds out also made a wish for someone other than herself, she realizes how much they have in common and tries to prevent her from making the same mistakes that she made. Kyōko tries to explain that this system isn't as fair as she thinks it is and doesn't reward justice appropriately. She tells Sayaka that in order to survive she has to sacrifice a part of her humanity to let witch's familiars mature into witches so that they drop "grief seeds." Only with these grief seeds can they purify their soul gems and prevent corruption. However, Sayaka turns a deaf ear to the desperate Kyōko, claiming that they are different and instead goes on to continue her efforts to try and save everyone, including the people the familiars would eat. However, one may question if her sense of justice was truly legitimate. For example, when she first heals Kamijō's

hand and confronts Homura, Homura questions if she did it because she genuinely wanted to save him, or if she wanted him to thank her for it. Judging by her jealousy when Kamijō is healed but then starts dating Sayaka's friend instead of her, we can see that she did want Kamijō to flock to her after she proved that miracles and magic exist. Additionally, Yamakawa mentions that because Sayaka admired Mami she unfortunately adopted a fighting style that offered her no profit.[142] So if Sayaka's fighting style and wish were based off admiration and love, respectively, rather than true "justice," she could not be a true ally of justice. Thus, unable to continue fighting—having lost her reasons as Mami had died and Kamijō had left her behind—she slowly descends into despair and becomes somewhat of a demon in episode seven as she fights in a very inhumane way. Having already lost her way, we can say that Sayaka already lost in the philosophy match well before episode nine where she is completely destroyed. Since Kyoko was the most recent point of conflict and outlives Sayaka, we can say that Kyoko's philosophy was the victor.

The third matchup is between Homura and Kyoko, first occurring in episode five when Homura stops Kyoko from fighting Sayaka. Kyoko had been reserved ever since her selfless wish to save her family backfired. Her wish was for her pastor father's radical theology to be met with open ears, thus unintentionally creating a zombie-like following. Once her father understood that they didn't actually believe or follow him, he murdered the rest of the family and then took his own life. Ever since, Kyōko has

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[142] Komatsu, "The Imprisoned Girls…" 72. My translation.
　　　Original text: 「巴マミへの憧れから、己の利益を一切考えない戦い方をしてしまう。」

always put herself first and abandoned any form of altruism and trust towards others. However, then she met Sayaka who also made a selfless wish. Wanting to impulsively save her from the same despair she suffered, she violated her condition for living and started caring about her, causing her to perish in episode nine when she follows Sayaka in death. Homura is the victor in this scenario.

The fourth matchup is between Homura and Kyūbei. Homura had repeated time again and again to save Madoka and had grown weary. In episode eleven we can see her about to give up when Madoka comes and says she's going to make a wish. It is at this point that Kyūbei has won in convincing Madoka to become a magical girl. Since Homura was about to give up, we can treat Kyūbei as the winner, even though Homura survives.

The final matchup is between Madoka and Kyūbei. Madoka would have just been an ordinary girl and probably lost to Kyubei, but thanks to Homura's repeated timelines centralized on Madoka she became powerful enough to surpass even Kyubei. With a true humanitarian solution she wishes to save every magical girl from the despair of turning into a witch when they die, undoing all the good they've done. In this way she is able to preserve hope for all of the magical girls that they are fighting for a reason. Although Kyubei doesn't die, he loses here due to the new laws of the universe that Madoka creates, which go against his species' plan for harvesting emotions. Madoka is the victor.

So what does the winner of this death match signify? With Kyūbei as the main antagonist representing utilitarianism, the "correct answer" perhaps would be the

philosophy that counteracts that. As for the other characters, Sayaka would embody the philosophy of ethical altruism, Kyōko would embody ethical egoism, and Mami might embody solitude and self-preservation. At the end of the series where this is more prevalent, one would say that Madoka embodies humanitarianism, but by the end of the movie one could say that Homura embodies the current state of humanity, too selfish to care for other people beyond personal desires. In a way this post-movie Homura can also be said to portray a paradox between individual egoism and altruism as will be discussed in **Chapter 5**.

This concept of the philosophy death match in which characters are treated as embodying specific ideologies and then used as a commentary device to analyze which philosophy is the victor in the end is one of the interesting qualities found throughout Gen Urobuchi's works. Let us examine two more of Urobuchi's works to paint a more complete picture.

## III. *Psycho Pass and Dystopia*

*Psycho Pass* is an anime produced by Production I.G. from 2012 to 2013, the first season of which was written by Gen Urobuchi. The first season had 22 episodes while the second season had 11. Like *Madoka Magica*, it was made directly into an anime without any source material. Like *Madoka Magica*, this anime also touches on the concepts of utilitarian choices and nihilism. Let us now go into a brief synopsis:

This story takes place in a dystopian futuristic society where there exists a system called the Sibyl System that is able to measure people's worth in society and potential for committing crime. This measure is coined as that person's "psycho-pass." This measurement mainly occurs in the form of a gun called the "dominator," owned by the police force. When a police officer holds up the gun to a criminal, for example, it will then scan the person for their psycho-pass and deem proper judgment. The gun then commands the police officer whether or not to shoot, but not before adjusting its threat levels depending on the "crime-coefficient" of the victim. This gun may stun or kill the victim and automatically adjusts its setting appropriately. Therefore, much like how the soul and body are detached in *Madoka Magica*, a police officer in *Psycho Pass* is detached from the emotional pain and act of killing and blindly listens to the judgment that the Sibyl System deems fit. Consequently, this is a utilitarian dystopia that seeks to maximize the utility of happiness and security in this society. However, this system isn't perfect. For example, there does exist an anomaly in the Sibyl System: the criminally asymptotic. This means that the Sibyl System can't measure them and they are consequently invisible to the law. While they aren't necessarily "bad," per say, many tend to lose their mind at the thought of not being recognized by society. This causes them to commit crimes in order to get attention. Just like how magical girls in *Madoka Magica* become the very witches they destroy, the Sibyl System is comprised of the very criminals they are trying to eradicate. Let's go more into some more detail:

In this story, the main character and genius, Akane Tsunemori, is given the option to work at the police force among many others given her great test scores. She

chooses to work at the police force since it's harder to get into and she believed that capable people should fill the capacity that would benefit society the most. Throughout the story we can see her gain respect from her colleagues as she slowly finds problems with the Sibyl System, before eventually learning the truth behind it all. She learns that the Sibyl System is an aggregate collection of "criminally asymptotic" brains that are linked together in a network to form a communication link. Akane finds out that during a "psycho-pass" reading, these brains communicate to each other before relaying their decisions of the rating to their secret cyborg representative: the chief of police. However, although Akane wants to immediately change this flawed system, she ultimately decides against it. Instead, she realizes that the system is currently stable, exercises patience, and seeks for smaller steps towards changing the system from the inside out. This approach can be seen as a mature one as she takes her time to ensure change rather than displaying emotional backlash.

This anime is interesting and seems to exhibit similar concepts of a philosophical battle between Akane, Kōgami Shin'ya (the main male protagonist in the first season), and the criminally asymptotic. This anime is also interesting since the criminally asymptotic show signs of being oppressed by the dystopian society, much like how Japanese females and *shōjo* are afflicted. In this anime, society refuses to accept the criminally asymptotic because they don't fit within their society, and therefore they are presumably driven to madness for being shunned to the blind side. This relates to *Madoka Magica* as well in regards to each character's "condition for living," because when they fail to fulfill it, they essentially die. This is perhaps a fearful projection of

something similar that might happen if women rebel against their imposed stereotypes and as a result are not accepted by society. Therefore, through this anime we can perhaps infer a kind of lamentation from Urobuchi that women in Japan, especially the young, seem to have little choice but to succumb to society's rules and expectations.

## IV. Fate/Zero and the Greatest Happiness Principle

Like *Madoka Magica* and *Psycho Pass*, *Fate/Zero* was also written by Gen Urobuchi, but first as a light novel, and follows similar themes of philosophy warfare, utilitarianism, and nihilistic settings. Unlike *Madoka Magica* and *Psycho Pass*, however, *Fate/Zero* seems to contrast the most by portraying a main character with very serious flaws, yet in a way with which we can sympathize. A brief synopsis is as follows:

*Fate/Zero* is an anime with two seasons of 13 and 12 episodes respectively, both of which were written by Gen Urobuchi as light novels from late 2006 to late 2007. This series is a prequel based on Fate/Stay Night, a visual novel by Nasu Kinoko which was released first. The story takes place in a fictional world where the existence of "mages" are commonplace. The main plot element of the story is the Holy Grail War between seven "masters" (the mages) each commanding one "servant," or "heroic spirit." These servants can be summoned from mythology or history as long as: a relic of them is procured, the proper summoning ritual is observed, and the servant accepts the contract with the master. As such, the main protagonist—King Arthur—is summoned as a girl (Arturia), playing on the myth that King Arthur was a girl while also once

again showing signs of Urobuchi-style gender role reversal. Other spirits such as Alexander the Great and Gilgamesh were also summoned to the scene.

The narrative is all in all an epic battle for a fake Holy Grail. They make it very clear in the first episode that this grail is not real, but instead an omnipotent wish-granting device. In order for a master-servant pair to have their wish fulfilled, they must murder all the other masters and servants on the board. The main male lead, Emiya Kiritsugu, seeks to win the grail in order to rid the world of all evil. This was his dream and ideal ever since he was a child as he wanted, like Sayaka from *Madoka Magica*, to be an "ally of justice." With the noble and rose-like King Arturia, nicknamed "Saber" to hide her true identity, by his side, he pushes towards victory. However, we learn that the path Kiritsugu takes to get to his goal "for the greater good" is one filled with thorns, causing great friction with Saber. After finally winning the grail he attempts to wish for the eradication of all evil, knowing that only a miracle could save this desolate world. However, the grail takes the form of his deceased wife and explains to him that he must envision the process that eradicates all evil. Not knowing what to think, the grail shows him an abstract demonstration of the proper method, true to his past deeds of killing for the greater good. In other words: the grail suggests that he simply eradicate all the criminals in the world using the method he's been using all his life to save the majority at the cost of the few. However, the grail demonstrates to Kiritsugu that his method is flawed and over time he would have killed many more than he saved. Using the grail's power, this would eventually mean the death of everyone in the world until only his wife and daughter are left. What this meant to

Kiritsugu was that the grail wasn't omnipotent after all because it couldn't create a true

"miracle" that didn't need to be explicitly defined. Kiritsugu had been rather nihilistic

for most of his life, leaning on utilitarianism as his driving mechanism because it was

the most "logical" as it provided the "greatest happiness" on a case-by-case basis.

Kiritsugu realizes this is a flawed way of thinking, but it is the only answer he could

find, all the while wanting to believe in a magic that could fix everything and help him

escape from his methods and attain true justice. Towards the end of the abstract scene

Kiritsugu is in his home with his wife and daughter and, just like the aforementioned

hypothetical situation outlined in the introduction, he has to make a choice between

them and the rest of the world. He shoots his figurative daughter Illyasviel and then

begins strangling the grail which assumed the form of his wife, Irisviel. While crying, an

excerpt of the scene before he strangles her is as follows:

> **Grail-Irisviel**: My love . . . why . . . the grail . . . why do you refuse us?
> **Emiya Kiritsugu**: Six billion people, compared to two members of my family . . .
> I . . . I'll kill you . . . and save the world.[143]

What this really came down to was two choices. The first choice was to bring his

method of exterminating evil on a micro-level, to a macro scale. Instead of making

isolated choices between the majority and the minority, the grail shows him the end

result in the long-run where only his immediate family remains alive. Choosing this

option would be purely selfish. The other choice was the Utilitarian choice of saving the

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[143] *Fate/Zero 2nd Season*. "The Last Command Spell" 「最後の令呪」 Episode 24. Directed by Ei Aoki. Written by Gen Urobuchi. Ufotable, June 16 2012. My translation.
　　　Original text: アイリ、聖杯版：「あなた...どうして...なぜ聖杯を...私たちを...拒むの？」
　　　衛宮切嗣：「60億の人類と、家族２人...僕は...僕は...君を殺して...世界を...救う。」

world at the cost of his family. If we refer back to **Figure 1**, we can see that these choices

were at the far-extremes of the scale: it was either logic or emotion. However, as we can

see from the above dialogue, he ends up choosing the utilitarian choice. Although he

seems not to hesitate, it clearly pains him deeply as is evident through his tears.

Throughout the series he has been searching for another answer to save the world, but

the utilitarian choice is, again, all he knows. Through nihilistic eyes, Kiritsugu found no

hope for saving the world without bypassing the utilitarian system. Regardless, he had

played his part and rebelled at every turn. Being unwilling to accept this reality that the

grail presented him, he rebels one last time and runs away from making a decision at all

and instead tries to destroy the grail. After failing, the grail essentially backfires and as

a result the entire town is destroyed. In hindsight, had he not turned away from the

grail he might've saved many people. However, he tried to rebel against the system,

albeit with little to no success.

    *Fate/Zero* is also very interesting on the meta-level because in the *Afterword to

Volume 1 of Fate/Zero*, Urobuchi writes the following, offering a glimpse into his

perspective on life:

> Urobuchi Gen wants to write stories that can warm people's hearts. Those who
> knew about my creative history would probably furrow their brows and think
> this is a cold joke. Actually, I couldn't completely believe it, either. Because when
> I start typing out words on the keyboard, the stories my brain comes up with are
> always full of madness and despair. In fact, I wasn't like this before. I've often
> written pieces that didn't have a perfect ending, but by the last chapter the
> protagonist would still possess a belief that 'although there will be many
> hardships to come, I still have to hold on'. But from I don't know when, I can no
> longer write works like this. I am full of hatred towards men's so-called
> happiness, and had to push the characters I poured my heart out to create into
> the abyss of tragedy. For all things in the world, if we just leave them alone and

pay them no attention, they are bound to advance in a negative direction. Just like no matter what we do we can't stop the universe from getting colder. It is only a world that is created through a compilation of 'progresses of common sense'; it can never escape the bondage of its physical laws. Therefore, in order to write a perfect ending for a story you have to twist the laws of cause and effect, reverse black and white, and even possess a power to move in the opposite direction from the rule of the universe. Only a heavenly and chaste soul that can sing carols of praise towards humanity can save the story. To write a story with a perfect ending is a double challenge to the author's body and soul.[144]

From this we can see into the mind of the literati, Gen Urobuchi, and understand a little bit more about the nihilism that still lingers in Japan. We can see this nihilism radiating through his works and draw many parallels between what he's saying here and the thematic messages portrayed in *Fate/Zero* and even *Madoka Magica.* For example, he wrote this excerpt before writing *Madoka Magica* and perhaps he drew inspiration for Kyūbei's entropy problem from his line of thinking that "we can't stop the universe from getting colder." It is interesting to draw parallels as Urobuchi seems to have embedded much of his life into his work.

This anime is also especially interesting given the battle royal format that more directly coincides with the concept of a philosophy death match. In this anime, each character represents their own individual philosophies as well as a joint philosophy by juxtaposition within the pairs of the 7 different master-servant units. It is quite interesting to see, for example, Kiritsugu who wants to become a long-term *seigi no mikata* through whatever means necessary and how he is incompatible with his servant,

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[144] Urobuchi, Gen 虚淵, 玄. "Fate/Zero Afterword" "同人版 Fate/Zero 1 巻あとがきより." Puella Magi *Madoka Magica* 魔法少女まどか☆マギカ. http://www22.atwiki.jp/madoka-magica/pages/104.html.
    English translation: Baka-Tsuki Translation Community. "Fate/Zero: Volume 1 Postface 1." Baka-Tsuki. January 15, 2015. https://baka-tsuki.org/project/?title=Fate/Zero:Volume_1_Postface_1.

Saber, who is essentially the embodiment of chivalry and justice. This relates to *Madoka Magica* through Sayaka who wanted to try to save everyone through concepts of justice as she defined it, just like Saber (King Arturia). In *Fate/Zero,* Rider (Alexander the Great) highlights Saber's flaw in the following quote:

> You saved your people, but you never led them. You never showed them how a king should act. They lost their path, and you left them to it. You were content to walk alone and composed, preferring your own pretty little dreams. You are not a genuine king. You are someone trapped by an ideal of a king who exists for others, not himself.[145]

This reveals that Saber focused too much on herself and her own ideals that she didn't leave any room to lead her people, thus allowing fictional England to be destroyed when she was alive. This is similar to Sayaka who was discouraged from making a wish for someone else because then she would have to live with that choice and fight for that choice for the rest of her life. However, she chose to save heal Kamijō's hand for arguably selfish purposes. While she did want him to get better, she also wanted him to return her feelings. However, when Kamijō started dating Sayaka's friend instead, she took a big blow. The same can probably be said about Sayaka's justice. It might have been for good intentions, but the root cause might have been just to feel good about herself. This just goes to show that with every altruistic action a selfish one can be defined as well. Then where do you draw the line between selflessness and selfishness?

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[145] *Fate/Zero* フェイト・ゼロ. "The Grail Dialogue" 「聖杯問答」 Episode 11. Directed by Ei Aoki. Written by Gen Urobuchi. Ufotable, October 1 2011. Translation from Crunchyroll.com.
　　　Original text: 「貴様は臣下を"救う"ばかりで"導く"ことをしなかった。『王の欲』のカタチを示すこともなく、道を失った臣下を捨て置き、ただ独りで澄まし顔のまま、小綺麗な理想とやらを想い焦がれていただけよ。故に貴様は生粋の"王"ではない。己の為でなく、人の為の"王"という偶像に縛られていただけの小娘にすぎん」

All in all, it's clear that half-hearted or lukewarm ideologies will not last long in the

philosophy survival games.

CHAPTER 4

# **REBELLION**

Rebellion is sometimes necessary when there are unfair or unjust ideas instilled into society. Urobuchi posits utilitarianism as this very same enemy. There are many different forms of rebellion that range across many different levels of maturity with varying degrees of effectiveness. However, they all share the same human element of struggling against a harsh reality.

## *I. Strategy: Run Away*

The first kind is what Kiritsugu did in *Fate/Zero* and naively run away from the problem. While this method might not seem to be effective, it didn't end in complete despair for Kiritsugu. Among the rubble of the burning and destroyed town, Kiritsugu found a boy survivor whom he adopted. In saving this one boy he felt like he had redeemed himself. After abandoning his dreams to be a "hero of justice," his adopted boy—Emiya Shirō—decided to take on Kiritsugu's dreams and try to fulfill them in his stead. From this we can see the perpetuation of rebellion and how it can pass down from generation to generation. This sort of rebellion can be seen in *Madoka* as well. In a particular scene after Sayaka makes a contract with Kyūbei and becomes a magical girl, Madoka naively tries to take the easy way out by tossing away Sayaka's soul gem. Madoka tosses it off a highway bridge and it lands in the back of a truck which then

proceeds to drive it away. Homura immediately chases after it, having come from the future and knowing too well what this means for Sayaka. Sayaka soon collapses and Kyūbei explains that Madoka threw away her friend. He goes on saying that the soul gem was Sayaka's true self and the body was just a container and that they needed to be within 100 meters of each other. That was the point where they learned that they were essentially transformed into "zombies" just because it was more "convenient" in a tangible and concrete form. In this form, pain could be avoided altogether due to the detachment of the soul from the body. As a result, these magical girls were granted physical resilience and practical invincibility, which was useful during combat, yet was at the cost of their humanity. Eventually Homura caught up to the truck in time and retrieved it, causing Sayaka to regain consciousness. Had Homura not fetched the soul gem back she would have died. From this we can gather that, although Kiritsugu and Madoka's naive actions in these instances were redeemed by an external force, being quick to make rash decisions in the form of rebellion may be the wrong decision even when performed on good intentions. From this we can also take away that creating a new reality is difficult and in the case of failure, there is still hope that someone else may continue it for us or proactively pay it forward.

## II. Strategy: Slow and Steady Change

A second kind of rebellion is what Akane Tsunemori did. What she did took a great deal of mature self-control and patience to gently accept the system, but slowly

work towards changing it from the inside-out. Although Gen Urobuchi did not directly participate in the writing of the second season of *Psycho Pass*, the character he created—Akane—eventually goes on to change the Sibyl System after all. This form of rebellion mirrors Madoka's representation through a balance of both logic and emotion, towards humanitarianism. Akane seems to represent another ideal that parallels Madoka. Unlike Madoka, however, Akane is an adult and thus can be considered mature. Due to this, she is able to bypass the social and spiritual imprisonment that *shōjo* face. Additionally, Akane works as a female detective against the norm and her desires seem to be under control, removing the necessity for transcendence to reach Madoka's position in **Figure 1** (reproduced below).
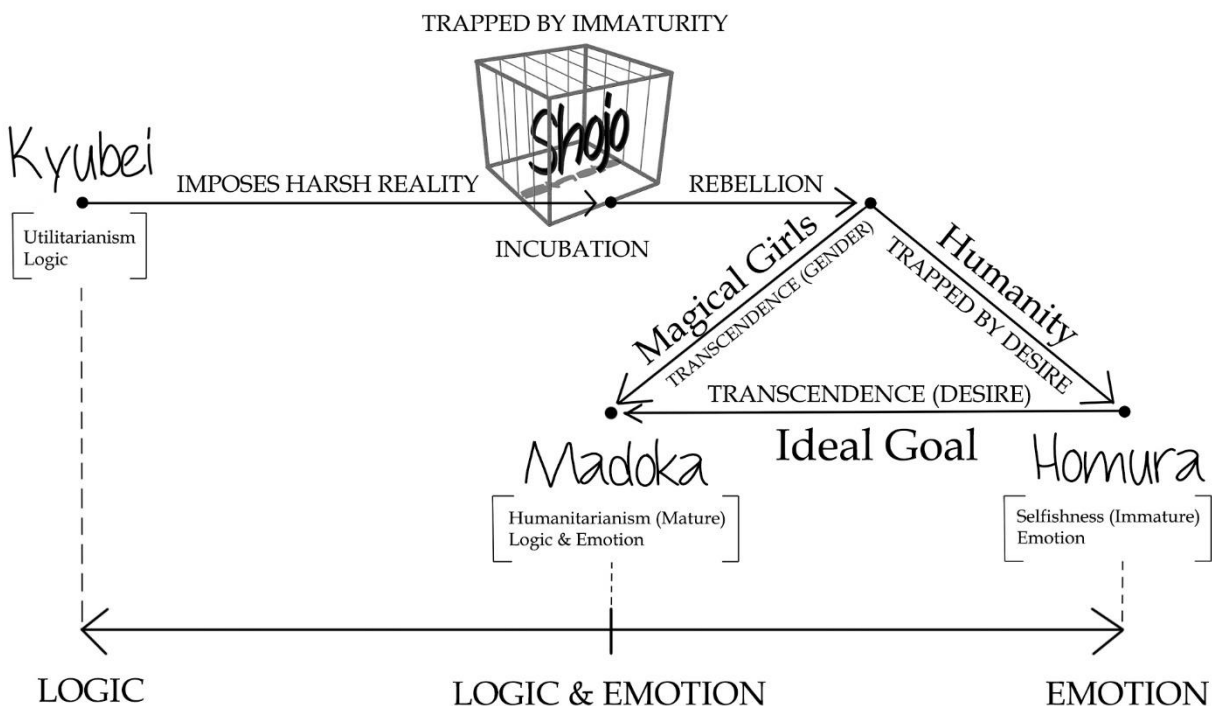


*Figure 2* - *The Philosophical System in Madoka Magica*

*III. Strategy: Escape from Reality (Literal)*

A third kind of rebellion, escaping from reality, is evidently more dramatic but can also be very effective. This can be seen in the Japanese play by Chikamatsu Monzaemon, *Shinjūten no Amijima*, or "The Love Suicide at Amijima." Carmen Blacker, a British scholar of Japanese religion, describes this story as one in which a "paper merchant [named Jihei] and a courtesan [named Koharu]"[146] stumble into a dramatic entanglement of family, honor, and love. Jihei wishes to ransom Koharu from the pleasure quarters but he doesn't have enough money to do so. In order to solve the problems of family drama and being together forever before someone else snatches away Koharu, they vow to escape and commit a lovers' act of "double suicide—a predicament which . . . was by no means uncommon in eighteen century Osaka."[147] This type of rebellion exercises an escape from an established reality due to the lovers' decision to literally be removed from reality; it also suggests that the reality in which they must both live and suffer from being apart, in the context of the drama surrounding their predicament, would be too great to bear. As a result, in order to create a new reality and mark their deaths in what at the time was considered a culturally beautiful way to leave some evidence that they were alive, they commit double suicide.

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[146] Blacker, C. 1956. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1): 92.
[147] Blacker, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society,* 92.

This kind of rebellion can also be seen in *Madoka Magica* when considering Kyōko and Sayaka. In *Madoka Magica* a "grief seed" was necessary in order to cleanse their soul gems from corruption. This corruption naturally occurred whenever they used their magical powers. However, only fully matured witches would drop grief seeds once defeated. Besides witches, there was also the concept of a witches' familiar that would only mature into full witches themselves if left unattended. Kyōko explains to Sayaka, the latter of whom is fighting a familiar at the time of this conversation, that she's doing things wrong and she should wait for the familiar to eat about 4-5 humans so it can grow into a pseudo-witch that will drop a grief seed. Killing a familiar before then, while it will save those people, will not drop any grief seed, thereby causing a net loss in soul gem purity. However, Sayaka's ideal was to become an ally of justice and save everyone. This ideal parallels directly to Kiritsugu from *Fate/Zero*. However, as we saw with *Fate/Zero*, one person cannot save everyone without sacrificing others. Kyōko understands and follows the "logic" of the system in order to stay alive and not degrade. As a result, Kyōko can be seen to abide by some of Kyūbei's utilitarian laws. She tries to warn Sayaka, saying with her famous quote among fans:

> Miracles aren't free. If you wish for hope then an equal portion of despair is scattered about. Then it all equals out to zero. And that's how the balance of the world is maintained.[148]

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[148] *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* 魔法少女まどか☆マギカ. "Can You Face Your True Feelings?" 「本当の気持ちと向き合えますか？」Episode 7. Directed by Akiyuki Shinbō. Written by Gen Urobuchi. Shaft Inc., February 18 2011. My translation.
　　Original quote: 「 奇跡ってのはタダじゃないんだ。希望を祈ればそれと同じ分だけの絶望が撒き散らされる。そうやって差し引きをゼロにして。世の中のバランスは成り立ってるんだよ。」

Sayaka on the other hand refuses to accept this zero-sum reality and as a result allows her soul gem to degrade until she turns into a witch and dies. What none of the magical girls outside of Homura know at this time is that she will not simply die, but instead turn into a witch herself. Kyōko and Sayaka had a very close connection despite the first aggressive meeting they had. Therefore, when Kyōko sees that Sayaka's ruined state of the witch is irreversible she commits herself to join her in suicide. As a result, like *Shinjūten no Amijima*, there did exist beauty to it. The beauty was that neither magical girl would wreak havoc on the city in the form of a witch, since Kyōko destroyed Sayaka in her witch-form in the process of destroying her own soul gem as well. Thus their souls could rest in peace at having done mostly good for the sake of everyone else.

## IV. Strategy: Escape from Reality (Figurative)

These concepts of escaping from a harsh reality are mirrored in the Japanese source, *Genjitsu tōhi shōjo-tachi*, or "The girls that escape from reality." This paper by Masahiro Hirose focuses on two anime: *Chūnibyō demo Koi ga Shitai,* also known in English as "Love, Chūnibyō & other Delusions," and *Madoka Magica*.[149] *Chūnibyō demo Koi ga Shitai* is about an anime where high school students still suffer from "Chūnibyō," or "middle-school syndrome." This syndrome basically entails pretending that you have super powers to make life more interesting. It's overall a story that includes battles of imagination and a heartwarming message of just being true to oneself. It is

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[149] Hirose, "The girls that escape from reality…" 51-62.

interesting that this was in the same article as *Madoka Magica*, a much darker overall

story. However, later Hirose reveals the connection and talks about the two different

ways that *Madoka* incorporates the concept of interpreting reality,[150] which is rather

enlightening. He mentions that Madoka escapes from reality by making new realities

whereas Homura escapes from reality by denying all realities besides the one she's

pursuing.[151] This can be seen in Madoka's wish that piled three new realities on top of

the old one: (1) a reality in which everyone forgot about her, thereby "erasing" her

existence; (2) her little brother Tatsuya's feeling that Madoka was still there in the form

of an imaginary friend; and (3) Homura's complete memory of Madoka.

This offers quite an interesting answer to a nihilistic and despairing reality. As

Hirose mentions, in the anime *Chūnibyō demo Koi ga Shita,* the characters seem to dwell

in a child-like and *moe* atmosphere that seems to distract them and the viewers from the

boring or painful aspects of reality. In the first season of this anime, the main female

protagonist—Takanashi Rikka—is revealed to have buried deep emotions relating to

some family problems stemming from her refusal to admit and accept her father's

passing. She delves into the world of "chūnibyō" to distract herself and attempt a

romance with the main male protagonist, Togashi Yūta. Although this story exhibits a

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[150] Hirose, "The girls that escape from reality…" 59. My translation.
　　Original text: 「以上見てきたように、鹿目まどかと暁美ほむらの間には、現実認識の技術においても大きな対立があった。」
[151] Hirose, "The girls that escape from reality…" 59. My translation.
　　Original text: 「まどかにとって現実は複数の『現実』によって構成されており、神的存在となった後も、そうした現実の構成を前提として世界を成り立たせている。一方ほむらの場合は TV 版および劇場版前後編において、時間ループによって『現実』を複製しているものの、それらをバッドエンドとして否定し、唯一のトゥルーエンドを『現実』として追求する。」

rebellion that radiates a sense of innocence and immaturity, it does not diminish the fact that this is a very human reaction, full of emotion. This can be seen in Madoka's reality alterations as well. Her choice to leave remnants within Homura and Tatsuya reveals her transparent vulnerability as a human, despite having transcended to a God.

## *V. Strategy: Asserting Your Own Reality*

Finally, this last form or rebellion via escaping from reality is brought to the next level in the movie, *Puella Magi Madoka Magica Movie 3: Rebellion*. Here we can see that Homura refused to accept any reality that did not match her goal. Homura kept resetting time, eventually hoping to reach the reality that she promised Madoka, which was to save her from becoming a magical girl in the first place. The movie was made in 2013 and introduced a new character, Nagisa (who is called Bebe in the movie) in the form of the witch Charlotte. The irony of this character was that she was partnered with Mami even though Charlotte was the very same witch that chewed Mami's head off in the series. One of the reasons this was done was to give a sense of doubt as to why the reality that the characters of the movie found themselves in felt wrong. What was actually happening was that Homura had turned into a witch, and a very powerful one since the threads of fate that tied Madoka turned out to have also bound the multiple parallel universes to Homura due to hopping through all the time-loops that she created. In the movie, everyone existed inside Homura's soul gem that the Kyūbei species was isolating in order to study the new Madoka deity and the Law of the Cycle

in hopes to learn enough about it to control it. Inside this fictional world within Homura's soul gem, everyone was happy, but some people did not belong such as Sayaka and Nagisa (Bebe/Charlotte). Homura realized that something was amiss, and being so tuned and conditioned to the frequency signal of her goal reality, she promptly understood that it wasn't real—that it was a fake reality. Madoka also did not belong in there, but Homura sensed that she was real. This was actually correct because as a deity she had wandered into Homura's soul gem to save her but then sensing that it was a trap by Kyūbei, gave her powers and memories to Sayaka and Nagisa for safe keeping. As a result, Madoka had forgotten that she was a God until Kyūbei's isolation barrier was destroyed and her memories were returned to her. After Homura confirmed the fake reality, she sought to destroy it even if it meant her own collapse. This was because Homura continues to search for the only reality that she will accept: one where she can live her life with Madoka also in it. Hirose mentions that this pursuit of Homura's own ideal reality is something people are sympathetic towards and can understand.[152] Interestingly, Hirose also talks about how Japan's society of *kawaii* forces a fake reality on women in that women must now adapt to this stereotype of *kawaii* in order to feel and be pretty.[153] In a similar fashion, the Kyūbei system in *Madoka Magica* forces a fake reality on magical girls to abandon their morals and become inhuman—such as by allowing familiars to consume on people—in order to survive, forcing them to rebel in order to maintain their humanity. This is an interesting concept that ties in with

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[152] Hirose, "The girls that escape from reality…" 59. My translation.
[153] Hirose, "The girls that escape from reality…" 61. My translation.

*Rebellion* quite nicely. Just like how Homura deflected the fake utopian reality imposed on her by the Kyūbei species where everyone was working together and happy, perhaps it is up to Japanese women to identify and deflect the fake realities imposed on them by society's modes of desire.

Later at the end of the movie when they finally destroy Kyūbei's interference barrier that was isolating Madoka from her divine powers, Madoka's Law of the Cycle starts going into effect again, but Homura seizes this chance to rebel against the Madoka system. She splits Madoka into two and then assumes her self-proclaimed role as the "devil." In this way, she was able to dodge the realities that were tossed her way and impose her own onto the world in which she gives everyone a chance at life again.

All in all, we have seen many different strategies of rebellion, from running away like Kiritsugu to temporarily accepting the change like Akane, from escaping from reality in a literal sense like the double love suicides of Sayaka and Kyōko to the figurative escape via layering better realities like Rikka and Madoka. Finally, in this last strategy we've seen Homura take matters into her own hands and assert her own reality. All of these strategies have had their own degree of maturity involved. For example, Kiritsugu, Sayaka, (Rikka), and Homura's actions are perhaps on the less mature side in the sense that they are the most emotion-heavy reactions without taking too much into consideration for the consequences. I would say that Kyōko's action is in the middle since she wanted to save Sayaka but also refused to live without her, leaving Akane and Madoka's actions on the mature side since they were choices that were well-deliberated and thought out. However, regardless of the maturity levels, I believe it is

more important to recognize that these are all sincere human reactions. While they may not all be the "correct answer," they are all ways to rebel against a harsh reality. Therefore, especially in a nihilistic society filled with chaos and harsh realities, rebellion is perhaps the greatest weapon against pure despair.

CHAPTER 5

# ETERNAL STRUGGLE

*I. Truly evil? Kyūbei revisited.*

In the *Madoka* movie, *Rebellion*, Homura calls herself a devil, but that begs that question: if someone calls themselves evil, are they truly evil? This brings us back to the Kyūbei species who do not call themselves evil, yet from a subjective human standpoint we can say they are. Let us once more reexamine Kyūbei and what he represents.

We already know that Kyūbei's system calls for sacrifice for salvation of the universe and that he gathers emotional energy from adolescent females. However, what's also interesting to note is that when considering the context under which *Madoka* was written and how Japan is still in its "identity crisis," then we can assume that Kyūbei is also taking advantage of this same crisis in a more apparent way. By targeting adolescent girls who have still not matured and formed their identity, Kyūbei becomes this external force that's consequently perpetuating the eternal immaturity of the *shōjo* by incubating them through emotional extremes with the physical inability to age. This parallels Japanese society that, in the same way, seems to be perpetuating an eternal immaturity of young women through patriarchal objectification and paradoxical expectations. Women are supposed to be pure and *kawaii* virgins while also being a perfect housewife and caretaker. This tension causes women to either accept the stereotype defined for them and unintentionally perpetuate it, or rebel against it and

risk not being accepted. In this way, Japanese society is incubating females through this lose-lose situation, presumably for the sake of distraction.

Additionally, since the Kyūbei species lack emotion and operate only on logic, the Kyūbei species can also relate to a law of the universe that operates based on what we consider logic and physics. This parallels some themes we can extract from Gen Urobuchi's works, namely the concept of gravitating towards increased logic, decreased emotion, and the eventual destination of utilitarianism. To reiterate, utilitarianism is the philosophy that one should aim to choose the action that nets the best possible consequence to the question, "What ought a person do?"[154] This is essentially equivalent to the greatest happiness principle in **Chapter 3**. Britannica also states that "if the difference in the consequences of alternative acts is not great, some utilitarians do not regard the choice between them as a moral issue."[155] In other words, it's a philosophy that seeks to maximize the total "utility"—or happiness—in a society, where morality may be disregarded for the "greater good." Therefore, in utilitarian terms, one may also say that sometimes a "sacrifice for the greater good," or for the greatest utility, may be necessary. This is especially interesting because Kyūbei lacks emotion, and thus is not plagued by moral and ethical consequences involved in making decisions.

Let us once again consider the hypothetical situation proposed in the introduction where you must choose between saving a large sum of strangers or your

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[154] *Encyclopædia Britannica Online, "utilitarianism."*
[155] *Encyclopædia Britannica Online, "utilitarianism."*

family. If you were quick to answer to save the large sum of strangers with the reasoning that, because in terms of numbers your family doesn't compare, then congratulations you are likely utilitarian at heart. If like many others you find this to be an unfair question because you want to save your family but know that's probably a selfish answer, then you may also find Kyūbei's disposition on humanity exceedingly disagreeable. However, objectively, we cannot attribute this to Kyūbei being evil because he not only gives the girls a choice and a wish, but he is also working on the bigger picture to save the universe. However, as humans we are unable to process the idea of doing something "for the greater good" in macro proportions because we are perhaps mostly concerned with the moral and psychological consequences of doing so. We have seen this when talking about Aum Shinrikyo, for example, and how some extremists seem to have stripped away the emotional threads that make them human and fallen into a pit of chaotic utilitarianism where they believe they might be able to save the world through the destruction of it.

Regardless, whether Kyūbei can be defined as evil or not depends on perspective. He cannot *logically* be called evil, but *emotionally* — as humans — we have no choice but to consider him evil or else forfeit our own emotions to utilitarianism as well. Therefore, as a human, I would say that Kyūbei is indeed "evil."

## II. Madoka's Sacrifice and Transcendence

Madoka's system on the other hand provides an alternate solution, replacing

Kyūbei's law of the universe. By transcending to a deity, Madoka creates a reality in

which she can orchestrate and provide eternal hope to magical girls throughout the

galaxies. As a result, she must bear a burden equal to the amount of hope she provides,

forever and ever. Madoka's sacrifice is especially interesting, but before we talk about

Madoka's sacrifice it's important to revisit what "sacrifice" actually means. According to

French historian and literary critic René Girard, "[i]n many rituals the sacrificial act

assumes two opposing aspects, appearing at times as a sacred obligation to be neglected

at grave peril, at other times as a sort of criminal activity entailing perils of equal

gravity."[156] In other words, "sacrifice and murder"[157] are intrinsically connected and

vary only in the degree that something can be considered "sacrificeable."[158] He later

goes on to say:

> All sacrificial rites are based on two substitutions. The first is provided by
> generative violence, which substitutes a single victim for all the members of the
> community. The second, the only strictly ritualistic substitution, is that of a
> victim for the surrogate victim. As we know, it is essential that the victim be
> drawn from outside the community. The surrogate victim, by contrast, is a
> member of the community. . . . If the sacrificial victim belonged to the
> community (as does the surrogate victim), then his death would promote further
> violence [due to an impulse for revenge] instead of dispelling it.[159]

From this we can see that there exists a paradox in that one cannot both be part of the

community and a foreigner invited into the community at the same time. However,

Madoka seems to solve this paradox because she traveled along the magical girls up

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[156] Girard, René. 1977. *Violence and the sacred*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. p1.
[157] Girard, *Violence and the sacred*, 1.
[158] Girard, *Violence and the sacred*, 12.
[159] Girard, *Violence and the sacred*, 269.

until the very end so she was very much a part of the community, yet she wasn't a magical girl until she made the wish so she can also be seen as a foreigner who was invited in. As a result, Madoka is able to avoid the "taint of impurity"[160] and becomes the perfect sacrifice, bringing her to levels of religious qualities, much like Jesus Christ, for example, which enable her to represent the ideal of humanitarianism. Furthermore, in Madoka's ascension to a female deity, in an era where patriarchal tendencies seem to have resurfaced, she embodies an extreme form of gender reversal that goes back to the aforementioned concept of identity and gender role "transcendence." It is for this reason that Madoka, free from social and human restraints, becomes a perfect symbol of hope in a socially and psychologically distressed Japan.

### III. Homura's Selfishness and Love

So if at one end is Kyūbei's utilitarianism and Madoka's humanitarianism is in the middle, where does Homura lay? At the end of the movie we can see that Homura cannot accept Madoka's system and thus out of selfishness she replaces it with her own. However, was her decision truly selfish? On the contrary, Homura seems to complicate things quite a bit by breaking an ethical paradox and exhibiting both individual egoism and altruism at the same time. Homura is 100% selfish in that she only wants her own desires to be fulfilled, but she is also 100% selfless because those desires are all for another person—for Madoka. Going back to the question if Homura is truly evil, I claim

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[160] Girard, *Violence and the sacred*, 36.

that she isn't in fact truly evil and that she is simply assuming the role of a devil just like Satan had his role to play in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The advantages of such a role is that she will likely be able to redirect outcomes that go against her ideals such that Madoka is always happy and never suffering. Some may argue that perhaps Homura was being proactive and assumed responsibility of the situation before the Kyūbei race continued their experiments and eventually controlled Madoka and the Law of the Cycle. This may be the case, but it's hard to say for sure. However, although Homura seems to make a "transcendence" from her own reality to another, from a macro standpoint it can be argued that Homura is still bound by desire. Homura is unable to trust in Madoka's choice and therefore unable to accept Madoka's godly love at the cost of her suffering. As a result, she directly contradicts Madoka's efforts by rebelling against her, consoling herself with the original promise that she would save Madoka. Since she is directly opposing Madoka's free will, it can be said here she diverges from selflessness and instead imposes her own ideal reality onto the world, for personal reasons. It is mainly for this reason that Homura might be considered selfish. In this way, Homura seems to portray our own human shortcomings and relapse into desire. Therefore, on the scale of logic versus emotion in **Figure 1**, Homura is illustrated as representing our current position with the movement away from the Madoka ideal, marked as "humanity." Referring back to this diagram we can see that Homura is on the far-right of the spectrum. This is because if logic without emotion can be considered inhumane, then perhaps emotion without logic can be considered immature. Therefore, Homura seems to offer a solution created out of "immature love." In turn, what this means is

that through *Madoka Magica* we can see that immaturity and desire represent obstacles in achieving the ideal that Kaname Madoka represents. However, even if the solution is not made readily apparent, instead of giving up and relapsing into a Utilitarian system of de-humanization, perhaps it is important to keep struggling against it, for eternity. Therefore, if there exists a reality too harsh to bear—then no matter the outcome—there also exists a choice to rebel.

# CONCLUSIONS

All in all, we can see that Gen Urobuchi is a very prominent writer born in the Showa Era and should be studied more vigorously due to the plethora of literary themes and arguments one can derive from his works, namely *Madoka Magica*. Through Urobuchi's creation of stories with overall dark tones and themes during a time period where Japanese society is in a relatively volatile state, laced with nihilism, we can infer that Urobuchi is fearful of society someday swaying towards a dehumanizing utilitarian system, inevitably causing the death of emotion. By portraying dark narratives, he is perhaps preparing us for the situation such that should we ever confront a similarly harsh reality where we may have to compromise someone or something we love for the greater good, we might take some respite knowing that simply holding onto human values is of paramount importance while all the while hoping for a more reasonable answer.

We saw how primarily in *Madoka Magica* he tackles this topic through a philosophical battle royal, while giving each character their own condition for living that is true to their character. Although the girls within this story are trapped within his narrative, which is both ironic and at the same time empathetic, they try their hardest to protect the things that they love, suggesting that there is nothing wrong with fighting for the sake of emotion, rather than logic—as it is what makes us human. Therefore the beauty that results from the ability to choose comes not from our mind, but from our

heart, and Urobuchi is saying that in order to maintain our humanity, we must follow our heart and "spirit" to rebel against dehumanizing systems.

In *Psycho Pass* and *Fate/Zero* Urobuchi discusses dystopia and the greatest happiness principle, respectively. In these stories we can see a similar dilemma of being faced with a harsh reality. In both of these stories the main protagonists were not shōjo, but adults. On one hand we had Akane from *Psycho Pass* who made the mature decision to accept the system temporarily in order to work towards fixing it from the inside-out. On the other hand, we had Kiritsugu from *Fate/Zero* who naively tried to destroy the grail once he realized that the grail was not omnipotent and true miracles didn't exist for fixing a despairing and desolate reality. While these adults were able to choose a resolution and move on, the *shōjo* in Madoka Magica remain trapped in a state of immaturity.

This brings us back to the concept of *shōjo* as genderless, eternally immature, eternally idolized, and powerless by being at the mercy of society's expectations and modes of desire. However, at the same time they are able to evolve into *mahō shōjo*, teasing a paradox of "claiming power in powerlessness."[161] We have seen how *shōjo* are trapped in a state "between female adulthood and the juvenile female stage prior to marriage," Saito writes, "suggesting the difficulty of imagining elements of power and defiance beyond the point of marriage. [162] However, Saito goes on to explain that

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[161] Saito, Kumiko. 2014. Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis: Magical Girl Anime and the Challenges of Changing Gender Identities in Japanese Society. The Journal of Asian Studies (73): 158.
[162] Saito, Kumiko. 2014. Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis: Magical Girl Anime and the Challenges of Changing Gender Identities in Japanese Society. The Journal of Asian Studies (73): 148.

perhaps this "may have been an anxious reaction to the emergent phase of romance,"[163] consequently resulting in a brief state of identity crisis in women, much like post-war Japan. Saito, referring to *Madoka Magica*, also notes that "the magical girl's true task is to fight against her own adult form called 'witch',"[164] suggesting a similar paradox that seems to be indicative of the *shōjo* concept overall.

We've further discussed how the *shōjo* are imprisoned with the expectation to be *kawaii* and how that might reflect on the image of females within Japanese society. Whether or not *otaku* have a positive or negative influence on the image is hard to say, but the good news is that gender equality seems to be heading in the right direction even during Japan's "national introspection."[165] Furthermore, during this period of Japanese identity formation, we can infer from Gen Urobuchi's works that the human spirit matters and that it is important to not give up and instead continue fight towards the outcome that allows us to maintain the most humanity. Going back to **Figure 1**, we can see that Kyūbei is on one end of the scale and Homura is on the other. As was previously mentioned, leaning to any one side can be seen as ineffective from our standpoints as mature human beings. This is because logic without emotion might be considered inhumane, and emotion without logic might be considered immature. For the case of *shōjo*, Madoka represents a solution by being a perfect balance of both: enough emotion to care about everyone and enough logic to be mature. Just like how

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[163] Saito, Kumiko. 2014. Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis: Magical Girl Anime and the Challenges of Changing Gender Identities in Japanese Society. The Journal of Asian Studies (73): 148.

[164] Saito, Kumiko. 2014. Magic, *Shōjo*, and Metamorphosis: Magical Girl Anime and the Challenges of Changing Gender Identities in Japanese Society. The Journal of Asian Studies (73): 162.

[165] Kingston, *Japan in Transformation, 1945-2010,* loc. 2480-2481

the universe continues to get colder due to entropy, society in general may be considered to gravitate towards the utilitarian Kyūbei side, devoid of emotion and morality. We have seen how there exists a dark side to Japan that may not be as readily apparent, bringing to question the integrity of the Japanese "spirit." In this way we can consider the Japanese spirit as under-developed, or "immature." It is this immaturity, coupled with human desire, which lead to the imprisonment of *shōjo*. As a result, perhaps it is important to open these "black boxes" and explore what is inside in order to save the *shōjo*—and all they represent—from eternal struggle. Failure to do so, Urobuchi believes, may allow emotional entropy to continue increasing until the point of an apocalyptic apathy in which we cease to be human. Therefore when confronted with a harsh reality, perhaps the only solution is to keep rebelling against it until an acceptable reality is found. Furthermore, we have seen that fake realities don't work. When Homura existed in her fleeting utopia within her own soul gem, for example, she noticed the difference between a reality she would accept, and the fake one that tried to invade her life. Although these realities may offer a temporary escape, they don't solve the main issues at hand. Thus, we can gather that escaping into a fake reality is meaningless and simply a distraction for the important things. This can also be seen with the Japanese stereotypes on *kawaii* women, forcing women to assume a fake reality in order to feel and be beautiful. Behind the facades, however, is only suffering. Through *Madoka Magica* and the literati, Gen Urobuchi, we have seen that it is important not to let dehumanizing principles such as the "Greatest Happiness Principle" take over our lives. Therefore, whether or not there is a true remedy in the

near future, if we keep holding onto our humanity, keep fighting for justice, and keep

pushing for a brighter future—then perhaps we, too, can someday reach a happy

ending.

# FUTURE RESEARCH AND STUDY

This paper sought to provide an overarching basis for literary expansion in the areas pertaining to Gen Urobuchi's works, mainly *Madoka Magica*. As such, there is a lot more depth to cover and the following is a suggestion for future ideas:

One suggestion is in-depth analysis on an episode-by-episode basis in order to study the witches. Particularly interesting is all the symbolic elements from the Russian-based art style of their dimensions that are shown to tie the witch to their labyrinth. An example of this is Charlotte, the witch form of Nagisa Momoe from the movie *Rebellion*. This was the very same witch that bit off Mami's head in episode 3 of *Madoka Magica*. An interesting discovery by fans is as follows:

> Based on her lair that splices hospital and dessert imagery, the fan base speculated that Charlotte was a young terminal cancer patient whom contracted with Kyūbei in order to recover, But due to evidence found written throughout the lair reveals that it was actually her mother that was sick in the hospital, as shown by a line in the design for Charlotte's labyrinth in the Official Guidebook says "It's really a delicious cheese cake. My dying mother wanted to eat it, but maybe I should have cured her disease instead. However, that surely wasn't possible."[166]

This among other evidence suggests that perhaps a backstory is provided for all the witches.

Another relevant suggestion is to study the runic writings throughout the witches' labyrinths. These writings have been fully deciphered by fans and mostly translate into German. Translating these from German to English is important because

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[166] Puella Magi Wiki, "Speculah: Prior Lives of Witches."

some thematic elements and allusions are contained in this runes. An example is lines of Goethe's *Faust* appearing in episodes one and two in the form of text on the walls or flashing on the screen. Additionally, some of the witches' familiars shout in German when throwing tomatoes at Homura in the movie *Rebellion*.

Another suggestion relating to popular culture would be how music is used artfully in tandem with the art to convey certain moods. Madoka Magica manipulates this concept with an opening theme that is deceptively cheerful. The opening theme portrays Madoka Magica as a magical girl, frolicking around and experiencing cliché *shōjo*-style situations. Allusions are made to other magical girl series such as Sailor Moon. However, as the series goes on the rain that Madoka is running through can be treated as tears. This connection can be made as Madoka is crying towards the end. Additionally, the ending song starts off with Madoka's voice actress Yuuki Aoi singing *Mata Ashita* before switching to the "true" ending song, *Magia* by Kalafina, after episode three where the true darkness of the series is displayed through the brutal death of Tomoe Mami. Furthermore, throughout the series the dark instrumental music creates a very strong emotional response at every turn.

Another suggestion would be to analyze the production and sequencing of the video. For example to go back to the ending theme, *Magia,* in the beginning it portrays Madoka walking by the other characters—all of which do not move. However, at the very end she passes by Homura who turns around and reaches out for her. Additionally, at the end of the song there is a terrifying mask that is portrayed and fans have found that it was based off a Nazi-era production of *Faust*.

Another major area of research would be into analyzing the movie, *Rebellion*. Due to its vague ending that seems to be mostly left up to interpretation, it may be necessary to do more in depth research on the allusions to see if it hints to more detail. Since the movie alludes loosely to *Paradise Lost* and shares thematic relations to *Nutcracker*, for example, there should be plenty to work with.

Another suggestion is to analyze Walpurgisnacht, or Walpurgis Night, and its connection with natural disaster and apocalypse. Ironically, during the context in which it was written, since the last two episodes of Madoka that conclude the Walpurgisnacht battles were interrupted by the 3/11 earthquake and tsunami in Japan. As a result, it might be interesting to study if there was any cultural impact or response from Madoka Magica caused by the earthquake and vice-versa.

Finally, in addition to a more in-depth look on *Fate/Zero* and *Psycho Pass*, other works of Gen Urobuchi might also be studied to observe just how strictly he follows his method of sharing a personal quality with each of his characters. This would be useful to question the concept of "death of the author." Additionally, unconsciously or not, Gen Urobuchi seems to instill the concept of rebellion in all of his works. Thus, studying them would provide a greater overall outlook on his style of writing, consequently giving greater insight into the literati of modern Japanese popular culture. These other works include the anime series *Phantom: Requiem for the Phantom*, *Suisei no Gargantia*—or "Gargantia on the Verdurous Planet," *Aldnoah.Zero*, and the visual novel, *Saya no Uta*— or "Saya's song."

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