Between Comedy and Despair: The House Style of Studio Shaft

by

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For my Dad

You never told me there was something I couldn't do
Introduction to Anime and Studio Shaft

On a beautiful spring day, the sun is out, cherry blossoms are blooming, and ethereal music is playing. A high school girl runs along the street, singing to herself “Spring, April, my heart was filled with hope.” The music stops, a quick cut to a tightening rope and a flash of red, and she notices a man hanging from a noose. After the blaring, hard rock musical opening theme, she pulls him down from the tree.

“What if I had died?” he exclaims. Their coloring shifts in a series of quick cuts, as he tells her that he “is a person whose life is worth nothing.” To this, she cheerily counters that “no person could ever attempt to take his own life on such a beautiful spring day,” and decides to call him “Pink Supervisor.” In black and white, he looks left, right, over his shoulder, and down. “I’m in despair!” he exclaims, and begins a rant on how nowadays things can only be named by large companies making big donations, predicting that one day Mt. Fuji will be re-named Mt. Shōnen Magazine as a list of other potential landmarks that could be re-named scrolls across the screen. He puts himself back in the noose, but she insists, once again, that he couldn’t possibly be trying to commit suicide. She asserts instead, to his surprise, that he must have been attempting to make himself taller, like her father who frequently did so. Thus, begins the first episode of Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei. Lying somewhere between comedy and despair – this is Shaft Style.

This thesis will examine the studio structure and collection of shows produced by Studio Shaft and address how Shaft has developed its own distinctive voice through a consistently deliberate and unique approach to narrative and style. Studio Shaft has made its mark in the anime world from its recognizable artistic voice that is
apparent in all of their creative products, and the popular and financial success its shows have attained. As one of the only anime studios to establish a succinct creative voice and find this kind of success from it, Shaft is an important and challenging figure in the anime industry, warranting further study as to what exactly their studio house style is, and how it works to create a consistently excellent creative output. The creative worldview of Studio Shaft is to illustrate the fluidity between the comedic and despairing by crafting an intimate relationship between character and audience through a distinct approach to narrative and style. Shaft approaches its narrative construction with a particular attention to experimentation with genre expectations and series structure in a narrative that is carried by the presence of eccentric characters. Narratives consistently work to undercut audience expectations, and make the audience constantly reconsider their understanding of character and narrative as a series progresses. The synthesis of these elements facilitates characters’ ability to move between the comedic and despairing, and this is additionally supported by the studio’s use of visual style. Although some shows might veer further into the surreal than others, there is a consistent visual language present throughout Shaft creative works that ultimately works towards an extreme externalization of character emotion through the use of editing and visual patterns, composition and staging, and visual shifts. In any Shaft production, the movement between comedy and despair is facilitated through a precise relationship between narrative and style in service of creating an intimate relationship between character and audience. In order to best understand the unique qualities of Studio Shaft, there is great utility in considering the
history of the anime industry, current anime studio system, and how an anime studio house style can be defined as an authorial voice.

**Anime: History, Scholarship, and Studio System**

**History**

Japanese animation, known as “anime,” has a long and rich history with a specific industrial, narrative, and stylistic development. Anime’s origins are often traced all the way back to Japanese *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints of the Edo period. These *ukiyo-e* prints are often thought to be the basis for the *akahon* ("red book") early manga (Japanese comics) which were popular during and after World War II. *Akahon* books were cheaply made, affordable to a wide audience in the aftermath of WWII, and served as an easy starting point for young artists to gain experience and distribute their work. It was through the *akahon* market that Osamu Tezuka, often hailed as the “god of manga,” got his start. According to Colin Odell in *Anime*, Osamu was the premiere innovator of modern manga and anime, and “his comics combined dynamic, movie-inspired panels into a thrilling mix of action and adventure.” In the late 1950s the current distribution model of manga was seen in its earliest stages. Manga magazines printed on cheap paper that were hundreds of pages long were inexpensive to sell on a weekly or monthly basis to specific targeted audiences, (i.e. *shōnen* for young boys, *shōjo* for young girls, *seinen* for adolescent

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1 Note on names: although it is the tradition of English language scholars to use Japanese naming order (surname, given name), in recent scholarship there has been a move towards using the Western order so as to avoid confusion in citation practices and reader understanding. Although this has been seen by some as a kind of linguistic imperialism, or confusing in comparison to other scholarship, the ultimate goal is clarity. Especially given that it is becoming a common practice for Japanese scholars publishing in English to use the Western naming order (given name, surname), I will also be using the Western naming order when addressing creators, staff, etc. and when referring to creators by a singular name, I will be using their surname.
men, *josei* for adolescent women, etc.) and the most popular stories would then become standalone multi-volume collections (called *tankobon*).¹

Outside of manga, Western animations did not arrive in Japan until about 1909, and animators did not begin using cel animation until 1923. There is little information regarding the earliest Japanese animations, as most created prior to WWII were destroyed either in the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923, or during WWII from the Tokyo Fire Bombings. In the years following WWII, few animated works were produced, until Toei Co. acquired Nippon Dōga Eiga (Japan Animated Films Company) to form Toei Dōga (Toei Animation Company) in 1956, which began a new wave of animation production. Through the 1950s, Toei Dōga produced a variety of feature length animated films, and with the growing popularity of home television sets in the 1960s, began work on TV animated series. Many of Japan’s most influential animators got their start working for Toei Dōga, such as Hayao Miyazaki, Isao Takahata, and Osamu Tezuka.²

After Tezuka’s contract with Toei Dōga expired in 1961, he left Toei to start his own production studio, Mushi Productions, and became a pioneering force in TV animations. Mushi Productions gained fame for its TV adaptation of Tezuka’s popular manga series *Astro Boy* (1963), and was soon followed by adaptations of Tezuka’s other popular manga, including *Kimba the White Lion*, the first color TV anime. Following a number of financial difficulties in the 1970’s, many animators and other staff of Mushi Productions went on to form their own animation studios, leading to a new generation of animation studios that have gained a massive following and are still in operation today, including Sunrise (famous for the long-
running *Gundam* series, among others) and Madhouse (famous for their work with Satoshi Kon, Mamoru Hosoda, and more).³

Throughout the 1970s, the anime industry as it stands today became more established, and Japan additionally saw the rise of “*otaku*” (fan) culture, one of the most important developments to the growth and development of the anime industry. Anime magazines contributed heavily to the increasing fan culture by placing “an emphasis on the anime creation process, highlighting the artistic elements of the medium and running articles about anime/manga creators.” These magazines included titles such as *Animage* magazine (1978) and *Newtype* magazine (1985), which are still in print today.⁴

The 1980s saw a further rise of the anime industry expanding from TV and cinematic releases to the rise of original video animations (“OVAs”). According to Odell, these productions “allowed more specialized material to be produced and distributed cheaply, as well as [provided] springboards for new projects to release further versions of existing anime that had passed their peak popularity but retained enough fans to ensure commercial viability.” OVAs inspired the proliferation of various artistic approaches to anime because OVA animators could experiment with their own personal style at a low financial risk. Because of the success of OVA sales, “many animators who had learned their craft working on TV anime were able to establish their own creative groups or studios,” thereby gaining even more artistic independence and retaining copyrights to their own work. This process can be seen directly at work in the establishment of Studio Gainax, one of Japan’s most influential and critically acclaimed anime studios. Founded in the early 1980s by a group of
university students, future Gainax animators produced a yearly animation to be screened at the national Daicon science fiction convention, and through their success were able to establish a small studio (Daicon Film), which would later become the larger Studio Gainax.  

The anime industry in the late 1980s was defined by Japan’s bubble economy, enabling companies to produce lavish, high-budget anime productions. Including Katsuhiro Otomo’s Akira (1988), which had a budget of over 1 billion yen – far more than any feature-length animated film to date. Akira was influential not only as a paragon of animation in Japan, but also was one of the first anime productions to gain popularity and critical acclaim abroad. Following the collapse of the bubble economy, many animation budgets were scaled back, a trend that continued through to the mid-1990s.

The release of Hideaki Anno’s TV anime series Neon Genesis Evangelion in 1995 by Studio Gainax sparked a revitalization of the anime industry and impacted the way in which TV anime was broadcast. Evangelion is a post-apocalyptic narrative that follows a young boy, Shinji Ikari, as he is co-opted by his father to fight in a giant mecha suit (humanoid robot) the monsters called “Angels” that have come to destroy the planet. The series employed many dominant styles of popular mecha anime from the 1970-80s, but also delved deep into various psychoanalytic content and references to many religious symbols. At the time of its release, director Anno fell deep into clinical depression, and the show’s many production and censorship issues resulted in one of the most controversial productions in anime history, with fans, critics, and scholars still in debate today. Evangelion was essential to the
revitalization of otaku culture, and its rise in popularity, frenzied production history, and confounding ending provided limitless topics for news coverage and fan discussion. It additionally sparked a new interest in more mature shows. Following Evangelion’s release, TV stations became stricter regarding sex and violence in anime. As a result, Odell argues, “material that wouldn’t be suitable for early evening viewing was therefore acceptable for late-night broadcast.” The number of series that were aimed at the late teen to early twenties audience to be broadcast on the 11pm-4am TV block rose even though “the stories didn’t necessarily contain high levels of sex or violence.” Throughout the later ‘90s and into the ‘00s, the anime industry grew exponentially, with more TV series, OVAs and feature length films produced each year.

Over the years, anime developed its own specific narrative and stylistic conventions that differentiate it from animated products from other markets. Susan Napier, one of the first western anime scholars, highlights the value of anime due to its particular narrative, cultural, and visual context:

Anime is a medium in which distinctive visual elements combine with an array of generic, thematic, and philosophical structures to produce a unique aesthetic world. Often this world is more provocative, more tragic, and more highly sexualized (even in lighthearted romantic comedies) and contains far more complicated story lines than would be the case in equivalent American popular cultural offerings.

Napier argues that anime is uncompromising

not only… in regards to the many specifically Japanese references within the narratives, but also in regards to narrative style, pacing, imagery, and humor, not to mention emotions and psychology, which usually run a far wider gamut and often show greater depth than do American animated texts.

Anime’s narrative construction differs heavily from that of its western counterparts, with narratives starting seemingly in the middle of the story with little to no exposition, leaving it up to the audience to catch up and interpret. Anime often pays
little regard to the storytelling conventions of Hollywood, including “ambiguous or inconclusive” narrative developments, “obscure” endings, and generally valuing “experience over narrative.” Anime also maintains a specific stylistic aesthetic. The vast majority of anime is still made using 2D animation and generally exhibits “no particular requirement to create a sense of depth or to convey three dimensions.”

Anime scholar Trish Ledoux notes that, dating back to the 1970s, anime series “absolutely overflow with tracking shots, long-view establishing shots, fancy pans, unusual point-of-view ‘camera angles’ and extreme close ups… [i]n contrast [to] most American-produced TV animation [which] tends to thrive in action-obsessed middle distance.” Characters, worlds, and emotions are highly stylized, and “presentation and symbolism seem to be more important than realism.”

The “more highly sexualized” aspects of anime can in part be attributed to the presence of fanservice, a common trope to anime. In Christopher Kay’s article “Fanservice in Anime: Perception versus Intent,” he outlines a definition of fanservice in anime:

The addition of elements unnecessary to a story simply to appease fans… more often than not, this phenomenon manifests itself in the form of the sexualization of characters (usually female) by using the metaphorical camera and framing of a shot to draw attention to and focus on… cleavage, underwear, skin, and more. Many anime use this tactic as a re-occurring trick to draw in their audience, using fanservice either as a supplement or substitute for the plot of the show.

Fanservice in anime is a highly debated topic. Although fanservice usually takes the form of hyper-sexualization of its characters, this is not always the case. Fanservice can also include placing certain inside jokes, hidden messages, and references to other anime works within a specific work, and in some cases (especially within the works of Studio Shaft) does hold an essential narrative and stylistic purpose. While there are
general narrative and stylistic trends across the anime industry, certain directors, studios, and other producing bodies are able to differentiate their work through distinct individual approaches to the wider conventions of anime.

**Scholarship**

Animation is not a genre, animation is a medium, and this fact tends to be ignored by critics and viewers. Due to the general dismissal of the animated medium, anime’s status as a subcultural product, and the lack of legal and accessible translation and distribution of anime, it has been difficult for notable modern anime to gather a following, let alone become the subject of academic inquiry. The discrepancy in scholarship can clearly be seen in the results of a simple Google Scholar search, as “film studies” returns 4,100,000 results, “animation studies” returns 319,000 results, and “anime studies” returns a mere 35,200 results.

In recent years, though, as anime has moved more into the mainstream, there has been a boom in anime scholarship. Susan Napier, one of the original anime scholars, argues for the value of studying anime in her prolific book, *Anime: From Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle*, stating that anime “is a richly fascinating contemporary Japanese art form with a distinctive narrative and visual aesthetic that both harks back to traditional Japanese subculture and moves forward to the cutting edge of art and media.” Some of the first English-language scholars viewed anime within the larger cultural context of Japan, as did Napier, who suggests anime is “a useful mirror on contemporary Japanese society… [and] is also a genuinely global phenomenon, both as a commercial and cultural force.”16
Outside of scholarly work that focuses on the overall cultural significance and aesthetic of anime, there has been little to no work focusing on the specifics of individual creative works or on a collection of work by an individual director, studio, or other anime-producing body. This could be attributed to the relative newness of anime scholarship, especially in the West. Nevertheless, among anime viewers and critics, anime studios have become a widely accepted way to differentiate films, television shows, and OVAs, to an extent even more so than individual directors. In the past decade, studios have become a means for viewers and critics to identify, categorize, and contextualize the various shows and films that are released each season. Among anime viewers, anime studios function in a similar way to directors who use their name as a mark of quality and a distinct authorial voice (i.e. the director’s name above the title, such as: Wes Anderson’s *The Grand Budapest Hotel* or Quentin Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction*). Some anime studios have garnered a reputation among anime fans for a general commitment to quality. Shows from studios such as Production I.G. and A-1 Pictures are almost always hailed for their fluid animation, attention to color and backgrounds, use of CGI, and the overall excellence of their visuals. Unlike these studios though, the prolific Gainax and Kyoto Animation have amassed both a strong fan base and scholarly attention not only for the quality of their animations, but also because there is a noticeably consistent worldview and that comes across in the works of these studios that makes their anime recognizable.

The Anime Studio System

The anime studio system in Japan is a complex and intertwined web of parent media holding companies (owning the rights to the original works, working on a
broader scale of franchise production), studios, directors, animators, voice actors, etc. According to the 2015 Anime Industry Report, 87% of all animation studios are located in Tokyo, with the majority concentrated in the neighboring Nerima and Suginami wards. This concentrated studio distribution is in part due to the presence of large, famous, or historically influential studios encouraging other newer, smaller studios to establish themselves in the same area. The geographic proximity of studios is additionally essential to the anime production process, as it allows various firms to collaborate, which is especially useful for tight production and airing deadlines. The studios’ proximity to each other allows studios, staff members, voice actors, etc. to successfully work in many productions and co-productions at once. Studios themselves house anywhere between a few to a few hundred employees, and are reliant on local freelance animators and foreign animation production studios that are concentrated mainly in South Korea, the Philippines, and China. Even though it is estimated that as much as 90% of the frames in an anime are created abroad, this work primarily encompasses the large volume of in-between animations, whereas all of the initial production planning, design work, and storytelling is completed in Japanese studios. Most animators and other staff are freelance workers, and while some may develop a relationship with a certain director, studio, or the like, few hold binding contracts to a specific production house. A single animator can have a career by moving among many different studios. As anime scholar Ian Condry describes, “For all of its international impact, Japan’s anime production remains in many ways a cottage industry…the studios operate as a fragmented but completely networked epicenter of what has become an increasingly global business.” The
interconnectedness of the anime studio system directly reflects the collaborative environment at work in the process of anime production.\textsuperscript{18}

Whether created through live action or animation, film is inherently a collaborative medium; however, what that collaboration entails for each moving image medium differs greatly. While most animated drawings are created on an individual basis, frequent meetings and a consistent project overseer maintain continuity of narrative and style throughout the run of a series. This process can be seen most apparently in the initial storyboarding stage on which the rest of the animation is based. Condry describes a storyboard meeting at Studio Madhouse for the production of Mamoru Hosoda’s \textit{Summer Wars} to illustrate the value of close collaboration:

\begin{quote}
The collective attention helped build connections, bring focus, and clarify the roles of the many people needed to complete such a large project. Such meetings did more than convey abstract information about a mechanical process of production; they helped reinforce a sense of engaged commitment. The energy in the room was contagious, and this energy begins to give a sense of something larger than the media object itself, something emerging from a collective commitment among those who care.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

The process of collaborative creation is key to a consistent anime product, and can exist not only within the process of creating an individual show, but across a studio’s filmography, revealing a distinctive approach to narrative and style.

\textbf{Studio Shaft}

In the field of anime studies, most academic literature views specific creative works as a lens through which to explore broad trends in anime and larger Japanese culture. This thesis is significant in the field of anime studies for defining and analyzing the narrative and visual properties that distinguish Studio Shaft as a cutting-edge studio pushing the boundaries of the Japanese anime industry. Studio Shaft was
founded in 1975 by former Mushi Productions animator Hiroshi Wakao, and in its early years the studio mainly completed contracted frame painting work. After releasing a couple of OVAs in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s, Shaft entered a period of collaboration with Studio Gainax for the early 2000s, allowing Shaft to take part in full anime productions made for televised release. Upon Wakao’s retirement in 2004, Mitsutoshi Kubota, who started at Shaft doing cel painting, coloring effects, and airbrushing then rose to production management in 1995, took over as the president of Studio Shaft and began a full re-structuring of the studio, starting with the arrival of director Akiyuki Shinbo and his creative team.

Since 2004, Studio Shaft has entered the league of big-name anime studios, having accumulated a massive fan base and recognition for its artistic elements and specific attitude towards the animated medium. The conscious development of a specific and recognizable style has in recent years set Studio Shaft apart from the multiple other anime studios producing shows in Japan. Studio Shaft maintains a highly distinctive visual style and narrative tendencies that have made its shows stand out for their constant questioning of the standard expectations of the anime industry, and for challenging the boundaries and artistic limitations of the animated medium itself.

Studio Shaft has achieved not only popular notoriety, but also unprecedented financial success. According to Oricon Inc., Bakemonogatari (Shaft, 2009) currently maintains the highest average sales (DVD, Blu Ray, Re-release) in Japan, with Shaft’s original work Puella Magi Madoka Magica in second place to that, and additional Monogatari series installments following soon after. These sales figures of
purchased video discs don’t even account for online streaming and unofficial viewing sources relating to these shows; combined, the numbers speak volumes to the popularity and following that Studio Shaft maintains. As the majority of creative works in the anime industry are adaptations of some sort, that Studio Shaft has also found popular and financial success in original works speaks further to the appeal and distinctiveness of the Shaft style.

The key to Shaft’s success at creating its own house style can be traced back to the artistic vision of Akiyuki Shinbo, and the process of director mentorship that he and the other creators he brought into the studio established. All Shaft directors spend a significant period of time working in various roles under established Shaft series directors before acting as series director for their own work, and through this process Shaft has been able to maintain and grow its common directorial language. Akiyuki Shinbo worked as a key animator for many different anime productions throughout the ‘80s, started work as an episode director starting in the mid ‘90s, and rose to being a series director for the 1994 J.C. Staff production *Metal Fighter Miku*. Following his work on *Metal Fighter Miku* he continued directing many OVAs for J.C. Staff among other projects, and through this time, most of his trademark visual aesthetics were developed, culminating in what is often hailed as the pinnacle of his aesthetic sensibilities, the television anime series *The SoulTaker* (Tatsunoko Productions, 2001). In *The SoulTaker*, many of the occasional stylistic flourishes that were apparent in Shinbo’s early work, such as dramatic shading and color, sudden shifts in art style, emphasis on effects animation, changing aspect ratio, and gothic imagery, became the aesthetic basis for the entire show. Following *The SoulTaker*, Shinbo
left commercial TV anime production, and from 2002-2003 worked under the name of Jyuuhachi Minamizawa making, as one blogger stated, “five of the most aesthetically unhinged and downright batshit crazy pornographic animations ever put to film.” After leaving the porn industry, Shinbo continued making more OVAs until the start of his relationship with Studio Shaft in 2004 on the television series *Tsukuyomi: Moon Phase.* Shaft President Kubota stated:

> Shinbo’s style was always established when he started directing... and I always saw talent in him. So he always had his own style, with his sense of visual composition and pacing, and this would also include hardcore drama and action. [When] we worked with him for the first time on a show called *Tsukuyomi: Moon Phase*... Shinbo worked well with our in-house Shaft creators. He had a very good respect for the in-universe characters and established a working style where he would work well with the in-house creators.

In the production of *Tsukuyomi: Moon Phase,* Shinbo brought with him two staff members who would become influential forces in the development of Shaft’s house style: Tatsuya Oishi and Shin Ōnuma. Oishi and Ōnuma worked as storyboard artists and episode directors under Shinbo’s direction for both *Tsukuyomi: Moon Phase* and their following work *Pani Poni Dash!* (2005), before Shinbo slowly moved into the role of Chief Director, leaving Ōnuma and later Oishi to take over in the role of Series Director. From this point, this relationship between Chief Director and Series Director would come to define Shaft’s method of accreditation, as well as illustrate the studio structure itself. While Shinbo remains as a kind of overseer for all Shaft projects, providing his own opinions and insight and maintaining a significant creative voice in any production, the Series Director would serve as the main director and for one specific project. Just as Oishi and Ōnuma were brought to Shaft for their own directorial vision, they both learned under Shinbo as well, creating a kind of studio directorial language. From here, Shaft worked to develop more directors who
would work under Shinbo, Oishi, and Ōnuma in various roles, learning the Shaft house style, before serving as series director for their own show. Shinbo and his original creative team thus established the process of studio mentorship and director structure that would come to define the Shaft house style. In order to understand Shaft style then, it is important to not just consider Shinbo, but to also consider the other most prolific directors working at Shaft.

As one of the first animators brought in to Shaft by Shinbo, as well as being one of the first to leave, Ōnuma’s presence in establishing the Shaft system of director mentorship is one of the most powerful, having mentored three of Shaft’s current most active directors, but also short lived. After directing two OVAs in 2006 (with Shinbo serving as Chief Director) as well as the opening theme to *Hidamari Sketch* in 2007, Ōnuma went on to direct the full TV anime series *ef: a Tale of Memories* (2007) and its sequel, *ef: a Tale of Melodies* (2008). He then served as Series Director for both installments of *Natsu no Arashi!* (2009), and after working on a few other shows between 2004-2009, Ōnuma left Shaft to establish his own studio, Silver Link, where he would take on a similar role as Shinbo at Shaft. However, in his time at Shaft he was able to work with and mentor three of Shaft’s currently most active Series Directors: Yukihiro Miyamoto, Tomoyuki Itamura, and Naoyuki Tatsuwa.

Tatsuya Oishi, the other part of the original Shaft triumvirate, worked like Ōnuma under Shinbo in the early phases of Shaft’s restructuring, and having directed Shaft’s most successful (and to some, most stylistically definitive) work, Tatsuya Oishi’s stylistic influence looms large over Shaft. Unlike Ōnuma, Oishi worked on far
more projects from 2004-2009 doing storyboards, key animation, unit direction, and production design, until taking on the role of Series Director for *Bakemonogatari* (2009). Following the unprecedented success of *Bakemonogatari*, Oishi went on to direct its prequel, *Kizumonogatari*. However, this project took over five years of production, and in between its announcement in 2010 and three-part theatrical film release in 2016, Oishi did not direct any other Shaft projects. This, combined with Ōnuma’s departure around the same time therefore created the need and provided more opportunities for younger Shaft staff members to take on directorial roles. Like Ōnuma, though, Oishi did leave his mark on the next generation of Shaft directors. Although Oishi likely was most influential to Itamura (who took over directing the rest of the *Monogatari* series installations in Oishi’s absence), Oishi also worked with Miyamoto and Tatsuwa multiple times from 2004-2009.

Yukihiro Miyamoto is one of Shaft’s current most active directors, and being both a direct mentee of the original triumvirate, and taking on mentees of his own, he is a direct product and propagator of the Shaft directorial mentor system. Miyamoto worked as a storyboard artist and episode director at Shaft before being given the role of Chief Production Director for the OVA *Goku Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* (2008), a sequel to the popular *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei*, and then as Series Director for *Maria Holic* (2009). His work on both of these shows were formative to his career, as *Goku Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* marked the first instance of Shaft’s involvement with the animation group Gekidan Inu Curry, which made the opening animation (OP) for *Goku Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* and would later do the ending animation for *Maria Holic*, as well as significant work on *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* and other
Shaft productions. Miyamoto bringing Gekidan Inu Curry into Shaft was formative not just in the development of his own personal style through his frequent collaboration with them, but in how the animation style of Gekidan Inu Curry has been adopted into the cadre of visual elements that encompass the Shaft house style. In Miyamoto’s work on *Maria Holic*, Oishi served as storyboard artist, allowing the two creators to work together and share stylistic influences as well, adding another layer to Miyamoto’s directorial inspiration. Miyamoto has continued to work as a Series Director for many of Shaft’s other series, and has held additional roles on series headed by other Shaft directors as well. Having frequently worked on Shaft’s most comedic (*Arakawa Under the Bridge*, *Maria Holic*), as well as most despairing shows (*Puella Magi Madoka Magica*), his direction clearly demonstrates that Shaft style is not limited to director (i.e. some directors use the style for comedy, some for despair). Rather, the narrative and visual conventions of Studio shaft function as a common directorial language that can be used by all staff members, and his body of work is reflective of the general Shaft attitude of fluidity between comedy and despair.

Tomoyuki Itamura is another one of Shaft’s current most active directors, however unlike Miyamoto, whose works encompasses a large body of varied shows, Itamura’s work mainly concentrated to the massive and ongoing *Monogatari* series. Following Oishi’s departure from the *Monogatari* series adaptations, Tomoyuki Itamura took over as Series Director for subsequent installments, and as such was faced with the challenge of continuing the series in the style established by Oishi, but also finding a way to make the work his own. After working directly under Shinbo for *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* and its sequels as an episode director and storyboard artist,
Itamura’s first work with the *Monogatari* series was under Oishi as an episode director for *Bakemonogatari*. Following Oishi’s relative departure from Shaft projects (outside of *Kizumonogatari*), Itamura went on to work under Miyamoto on *Arakawa Under the Bridge*, *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*, and *Denpa Onna to Seishun Otoko*, until being given the role of series director for *Nisemonogatari*, the sequel to *Bakemonogatari*, and the series’ subsequent installations. Since then, he has both continued in the style of Oishi’s original direction of *Bakemonogatari* as well as taken influence from Miyamoto in his use of a brighter and frequently changing color palette and more incorporation of the surreal, and in later installations has developed his own personal mark on the series in his movement from extreme to a more reserved use of text on screen and paper cutout visual tangents. Itamura’s direction is an interesting case in considering the cadre of Shaft directors, having been mentored by and then taking over the work of Oishi, while also taking influence from a different generation of director, Miyamoto, he demonstrates again how Shaft style functions as a common language for all directors to successfully use to continue raising the bar for their creative works.

Naoyuki Tatsuwa is the final main Shaft director to have worked both under the first wave of directors (Shinbo, Ōnuma, and Oishi) as well as Miyamoto, however unlike his counterpart Itamura, he has not been limited in his directorial work to a single franchise, providing an interesting comparison. Like Itamura, Tatsuwa additionally worked as a key animator directly under Shinbo in the early period of Shaft’s restructuring on *Tsukuyomi: Moon Phase* and *Negima!*? After his work as a storyboard artist in early installations of *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei*, Tatsuwa began
working on many projects under Miyamoto, starting with *Maria Holic*, then *Arakawa Under the Bridge*, and *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* before moving on to serve as Series Director for *Nisekoi* (and its sequel), *Koufuku Graffiti*, and *Soredemo Machi wa Mawatteiru*. Tatsuwa’s directorial filmography demonstrates a clear preference for comedy slice-of-life shows with little to no presence of the supernatural, however given his previous experience with the other Shaft directors, this does not necessarily mean that he is unable to delve into other kinds of projects. Whereas Miyamoto and Itamura’s directorial style tends to be the most stylistically experimental, Tatsuwa has distinguished himself among the Shaft directorial team for his more reserved approach, while still maintaining an undeniable Shaft overall aesthetic. Tatsuwa incorporates far less surreal imagery and keeps less of a focus on visual symmetry, however he adeptly works to incorporate many stylistic elements that have been used in shows more focused on the supernatural and surreal into shows focused on the ordinary and everyday. In a way, Tatsuwa can be thought of as keeping in the Shaft tradition of lighthearted but visually interesting slice-of-life shows as were seen in the early days of Shaft’s re-structuring (*Hidamari Sketch, Pani Poni Dash!*), while incorporating both that of his mentors and his own directorial vision.

In addition to the process of director mentorship – starting with Shinbo bringing in Ōnuma and Oishi, all of whom helped to usher in Miyamoto, then Itamura, and Tatsuwa, Shaft additionally maintains a consistent cadre working as key animators, character designers, animation directors, and in other positions. Close mentorship and staff consistency has enabled Shaft to develop its own unique house style, as President Kubota notes:
What we established through this process was for the staff to come up with a common language that they can work with and carry on to production of the next title. So each time we can just continue to raise the threshold, instead of starting all over from scratch to establish a new staff… And I think this is the collaboration between Shaft and Shinbo that has come out to be a very strong basis for Shaft style.  

Shaft has been able to develop a distinct and ever evolving narrative and stylistic approach by giving its staff artistic license and drawing on the strengths and individual approaches of all creators. This is clearly evidenced in an interview with Gen Urobuchi, the screenwriter for Shaft’s original work *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*:

By working alongside the other creative leads… I was able to borrow everyone's strengths. So I felt everyone contributed to creating this script…It was my first time of having such a level of creative freedom. The acclaim given to the script is largely due to all the people that helped build it up from that foundation.

In another interview following *Madoka Magica*’s release, Urobuchi explains how a well-assembled staff with a common vision is essential to Shaft’s success:

I could really do whatever I liked even to the extent that I did not think I could have written this screenplay in any other place. And if we talk about “being given a free hand” it seems it was not just me myself, when I asked around I found that Aoki-san (Ume Aoki, character designer) also got a free hand, Inu-curry-san (Gekidan Inu Curry animation group) also seemed to have a free hand... It was like in a situation where you usually need to match the paces when you are going for a three-legged race but you suddenly find that you don't need to tie your leg with another person's…Although everyone was running by themselves, somehow all the paces fit in well with each other...

In addition to Urobuchi, Aoki and Gekidan Inu Curry have also expressed how without the artistic liberty and network of collaboration at Shaft, *Madoka Magica* likely would not have ended up the groundbreaking success that it did.

In addition to Shaft’s process of director mentorship and allowing creators artistic liberty, the studio’s production practices also stand in contrast to many other animation studios. There has been a steady increase in the market demand for anime in the last 10 years; with more anime programs produced each year. This has led to many studios outsourcing their animation to disparate freelancers, making
consistency and quality control quite difficult.²⁷ While many studios have increased their output through these means, releasing two and sometimes three shows each season, Shaft has maintained a consistent approach to its production schedule, as Kubota comments:

I think the strength of our studio is that we maintain the same staff and work within the same space. We do not necessarily increase production to keep up with demand, but we put our passion and work into each title and each episode. So for us, we have not embarked on any significant change in production style, we just put our effort into each project that’s in front of us.²⁸

The establishment and development of Shaft Style is grounded in director mentorship, keeping a consistent cadre of staff members familiar with the common narrative and visual approach, promoting creative freedom among staff to constantly innovate their approach to anime, and the studio’s consistent approach to the production process.

After viewing the particulars of the Studio Shaft approach to anime, I believe that the accreditation of authorship for the Studio Shaft filmography can be attributed to the studio itself. While some works are certainly more influenced than others by different staff members, the sum of Studio Shaft’s creative approach is grounded in a collaborative effort throughout the studio that is acknowledged by the creators themselves. As film scholar Thomas Schatz writes about the Hollywood studios,

The quality and artistry of all these films was the product not simply of individual human expression, but of a melding of institutional forces. In each case the “style” of a writer, director, star – or even a cinematographer, art director, or costume designer – fused with the studio’s production operations and management structure, its resources and talent pool, its narrative traditions and market strategy. And ultimately any individual’s style was no more than an inflection on an established studio style.

According to Schatz, Hollywood studios were “sites of convergence” to which artistry could be attributed.²⁹ The same argument can be made about Studio Shaft. Just as in the Hollywood studios, where a director’s “freedom to create…[is a] crucial element in their identification of a studio’s style,” Shaft’s studio style may be
attributed to the freedom of artistry given not just to its directors, but to the consistent staff working at all levels of production. Not only in artistic approach, but also within an industrial context, Shaft operates in line with the kind of production practices maintained in Hollywood during the studio era. Ethan Mordden defines a studio as “not only a place of business, but a theory of business economics” and Shaft meets and exceeds this definition in its consistently successful approach to anime production methods as outlined by Kubota. Because of Shaft’s deliberate construction of a collaborative approach to making anime, as well as the studio’s consistent production philosophy – both of which distinctly differ from the norms of the anime industrial system – it can be compellingly argued that the studio itself is the primary author of its productions.

As Studio Shaft’s most prolific creative works are from the past twelve years, and English language anime scholarship is relatively new, little scholarly work specific to Studio Shaft exists. The most literature about Studio Shaft exists within the writings of various anime bloggers, or in other words, amongst fans of the works. Most blog posts are in the form of reviews, while others focus on the analysis and interpretation of different works. Throughout the blog posts and other writings of various anime enthusiasts online, the studio itself is very well known, and most writings are on the studio’s two most prolific works, the Monogatari series and Puella Magi Madoka Magica. While there are an infinite number of blog posts pertaining to story and character analysis with regard to a series as a whole there is little real analysis of how a series works on an episode to episode basis, and how the visuals specifically work in conjunction with the narrative to create such masterful
stories. Most posts pertain to the message or philosophy of a series as a whole, but tend to lean more towards interpretation over analysis. Writers may often note that a moment is “typical of Shaft,” or familiar to “those who know Shaft Style,” however in no context has anyone given a full examination of what exactly “Shaft Style” is. Through the proliferation of this phrase, it is evident there is an awareness among fans not only of the Shaft brand, but also of the distinctive narrative and stylistic approaches that are a part of the brand. There is a discrepancy, though, between the relative popularity of the phrase “Shaft Style” and its lack of formal definition. One useful source of information are interviews with Shaft creators found in various Japanese anime industry and news magazines, especially Newtype. These pieces are an invaluable resource, as they are some of the only primary source interviews and production notes in translation. Despite the fact that most creator interviews are in relation to Puella Magi Madoka Magica, the interviews provide great insight into the general working environment and studio structure at Shaft, including the amount of creative freedom that various staff members were given, especially when developing this original work.

The research approach for this thesis may lead to some potential gaps in gathering a breadth of opinion on shows, but as my analyses of the shows themselves will be original to my own observations and writings, I do not see the absence of Japanese criticism to be wholly detrimental. To mediate potential research gaps, I will be using the Oricon charts, rankings posted on Anikore.co.jp, and Newtype Magazine ratings. The Oricon charts are a popular Japanese media ranking website that uses official sales numbers to rank different media; Anikore is a Japanese website where
users can rank shows, write reviews, etc.; the Newtype Magazine is one of Japan’s largest and most popular anime and manga industry and news magazines. By using these three Japanese-language sources, I hope to reach a clear understanding of the relative financial and popular successes of Shaft productions. Through the combination of Anikore and My Anime List (an English-language equivalent of Anikore), I can grasp the relative popularity and reception of a specific show at home and abroad, and analyze if there are similar or differing trends. For example, there are sometimes discrepancies between what shows receive the highest fan ranking from Anikore versus My Anime List, as is the case with Denpa Onna to Seishun Otoko. Through examining discrepancies like these I can garner a better understanding of the kinds of Shaft productions that are more favorably received and why.

**Between Comedy and Despair**

The goal of this thesis is to define “Shaft Style” by looking at the studio’s specific approach to narrative and style. I argue that Shaft has developed as an especially notable anime studio through a calculated and deliberate attempt at an original approach to form. The house style of Studio Shaft was developed through a studio structure of mentorship and director development where, even though the different Shaft anime span a wide range of genres and tones, there remain commonalities in the kinds of narratives they approach and their stylistic treatment of such narratives. With regard to narrative, I argue that shows in the Shaft filmography exist on a continuum of comedy relative to underlying despair, and maintain certain approaches to content and structure. Shaft tends to heavily experiment with genre expectations and series structure, and this works to constantly undercut the viewer’s
understanding and expectations of narrative and character. Eccentric characters are another mainstay of Shaft shows, and their presence serves as a catalyst for achieving both moments of humor and personal character insight. The rhythm and structure of dialogue is one final way that through their approach to content and form Shaft can maintain consistent or shifting tones, and provide further insight into character psychology. Shaft style works to create intimacy between character and audience through the audience’s understanding of what informs a character’s comedy as well as their despair, and this is frequently facilitated through their approach to narrative content and structure. With regard to style, I believe that the house style of Studio Shaft has been developed by the various directors within the studio to incorporate certain recognizable stylistic calling cards in the immediate sense, but that serve a larger purpose in supporting movement between comedy and despair through a focus on the externalization of emotion. Studio Shaft maintains a clear worldview revolving around the fluidity between comedy and despair, which was successfully developed through a specific approach to narrative and style. By studying Shaft style, the question of studio auteurship is additionally raised, and I argue that because of the succinctness and way in which Shaft can be discussed in a similar way to a single auteur, it can be argued that Shaft stands as a kind of studio as an auteur. Shaft is an example of a group of creators who work using the same directorial language and share a similar artistic vision, and considering Shaft itself as the creator, additionally expands the conversation around a studio as an auteur.

My first chapter will address the commonalities to Shaft’s approach to narrative, which include experimentation with genre and series structure, as well as
the presence of eccentric characters. Studio Shaft’s approach combines both an awareness of and adherence to genre conventions by maintaining conventions on the surface, while also challenging those very conventions to create a wholly new product. Over the wide range of genres, tones, and stories Shaft has worked in, they have maintained a consistent approach in both acknowledging and challenging conventions of genre and series construction. With regard to series structure, Shaft’s approach works to consistently undercut the viewer’s understanding and perception of character and the overall narrative. The eccentric characters that operate within these narratives, and the way in which rhythm and structure of dialogue work in their conversations provides further insight into character psychology, and how that influences the show’s approach to comedy and despair. The combination of these approaches allows a frequent fluid movement between the comedic and despairing, which ultimately works to develop a greater level of intimacy between character and audience, which has greatly contributed to the studio’s success while also turning Shaft into a paragon for new artistic development in the anime industry.

My second chapter will focus on the visual style of Studio Shaft anime, and how the Shaft visual approach supports a fluid movement between comedy and despair. The various visual elements that comprise Shaft style include editing and visual patterns, composition and staging, and visual shifts. Even through shifts in genre, director, art director, etc. between shows, the combination and attention to detail to the different elements that make up these two broad categories creates a consistently recognizable look distinctive to Studio Shaft. While these stylistic attributes are recognizable on their own as a marker of the Shaft directorial hand, they
additionally serve an essential function to Shaft style in how they adeptly support the fluid movement between comedy and despair. Shaft’s use of style externalizes character emotion (both comedic and despairing) in unconventional ways that further facilitates an intimate relationship between character and audience.

My third chapter will be a case study of the *Monogatari* series, a work most representative of the Shaft house style, viewing how the distinctly Shaft approach to narrative and style work together to create a distinct and groundbreaking product. If Shaft style is dependent on the fluidity between comedy and despair, the way in which narrative and style work together in the *Monogatari* series exemplifies Shaft style at its best. As the *Monogatari* series is one of Shaft’s most widely known and longest running shows, in which many key staff members have worked on at some point, the series stands as an evolving thesis statement for the Shaft approach to anime. I will be approaching this case study by examining two arcs from separate seasons, directed by two different directors that focus on the same character, and showing how even through these changes, the directors use a common film language to create a compelling work.

My final chapter will be a second case study of *Mekakucity Actors*, a work thought of as having the most potential and achieving the least success. Whereas the *Monogatari* series stands as one of Shaft’s greatest successes, *Mekakucity Actors* stands as one of their greatest failures. Before airing, this show was predicted to be the next “big thing” from Shaft. However, despite the positive predictions, this show was commonly cited as being all style and no substance, and was widely considered a complete failure. I will examine where the potential was for *Mekakucity Actors*, as
well as how the incompatibility between narrative and style was a cornerstone reason for the show’s failure. By addressing what exactly about this show contributed to its poor reception, I hope to clarify the specific ways in which “Shaft Style” works, and does not.

My conclusion will serve as a summation of my arguments for narrative, style, and case studies, addressing why Studio Shaft is at the cutting edge of the anime industry, and where it can and possibly will go from there. I will consider known future plans for the studio, including adaptations of the manga 3-gatsu no Lion, the Zaregoto novel series, a feature length film adaptation of the novel Uchiage Hanabi, Shita kara Miru ka? Yoko kara Miru ka?, and the game Fate/Extra: Last Encore. All four of these adaptations will certainly bring the studio in new directions, providing potential opportunities for new and established Shaft directors, and experimentation with new narratives through which Shaft can continue to develop their house style. By looking at the future slated shows, I will consider what they reveal about the studio’s securing itself longevity and continual popular and financial success. Finally, I will speak to how Studio Shaft has potentially been influential to other animation studios, considering the wide-ranging impact of Studio Shaft on the anime industry at large.

In the first chapter, I will begin my examination of the various narrative trends to which style works to further. Beginning with addressing Shaft’s experimentation with genre expectations, I will then discuss their approach to series structure and the presence of eccentric characters. Throughout the chapter, I will use various small case studies from shows throughout the Shaft filmography to provide concrete examples of
the various ways that the Shaft approach to narrative facilitates fluid movement between comedy and despair and develops intimacy between character and audience.
Chapter 1: Narrative

Studio Shaft’s approach to genre, series, structure, eccentric characters, and the structure/rhythm of dialogue all contribute to the studio’s expression of the comedic, despairing, and fluidity between the two to develop an intimate relationship between character and audience. In order to discuss how Shaft uses narrative devices to express its studio worldview, it is important to first give definition to what within the Shaft worldview comprises the despairing and the comedic. Despair, within the Shaft worldview, is what informs the depths of a character’s psyche, and can be seen most often in the form of plot elements that are tragic, or in unrequited or repressed character desire and emotion. While sometimes despair may be overt and integral to narrative progression, despair is also an element of characterization that provides the viewer greater access into who the character is, and why they do what they do. The comedic, therefore, is the opposite of this, comprising plot events or character emotion that encompass and express emotions of love, happiness, joy and hope. The comedic also contains irreverence and irony, elements that may not necessarily be the opposite of despair, but are a distraction from it, or insert comedy into it. These two concepts of the comedic and the despairing frequently interact with each other, in how a character’s despair may be a catalyst for their more comedic moments, or their comedic moments are devices to pull them away from despair. With these two definitions of the comedic and despairing, Shaft’s shows are designed around illustrating the fluidity between these two elements, and narrative tools are one way in which Shaft accomplishes this.
Shows within the Studio Shaft filmography have a tendency to experiment with genre expectations through displaying both their acute awareness for the expectations of genre, while making changes to elements of plot and character that form the basis for those expectations in an act of questioning those very aspects that make up the expectations themselves. In addition to playing with genre expectations, Studio Shaft narratives tend to experiment with series structure in both episodic and causally driven narratives for the purpose of humor, distinct thematic progression, and making the audience constantly reconsider their understanding of narrative and character. Another mainstay within Shaft narratives is the presence of eccentric characters, through whom a different and distinct attitude towards character comedy and despair is revealed. Finally, the structure and rhythm of dialogue is one more tool through which Shaft is able to execute frequent shifts in tone between characters sharing a more lighthearted and comedic conversation, to enlightening moments of discovering the cause and extent of character despair. By examining the function of Shaft’s approach to the different aspects of narrative that define their shows, the studio’s attention to using various narrative tools in expressing the fluidity between comedy and despair can be clearly seen.

**Experimentation with Genre Upending Audience Expectations**

The definition of genre is debated by film historians, theorists, critics and the like, and amongst the many variations of genre’s definition and how it is applicable to film analysis specific to anime, I propose that the definition of genre as stated by genre theorist Tom Ryall, serve as a starting point to discuss Studio Shaft’s approach.
Ryall states, “The master image for genre criticism… is a triangle composed of artist/film/ and audience. Genres may be defined as patterns/forms/styles/structures which transcend individual films, and which supervise both their construction by the film maker, and their reading by an audience.” Genre can be constituted by a variety of amassed characteristics of plot and character common to a group of cinematic works that is understood by the creators, and that creates sets of audience expectations based around the most common of these amassed characteristics.

Genre theory allows for the definition of different film genres not to be limited to Hollywood, however, because of the specific industrial context for Hollywood film production, there is a greater proliferation of genre separation within Hollywood film. Such labels as the Hong Kong wu xia film, Bollywood musical, documentary, avant-garde, even anime, are accepted as genres. However, it is true that, as with Hollywood genres as well, there exist more specific sub-genres that break up and categorize films on even stricter bases of shared elements of plot and character.

Anime’s status as a genre, medium, movement, or something else entirely is a greatly contested topic, with a wide variety of appropriate definitions for its status as any one of these labels. Anime, as a part of the animated medium, shares a particular set of conventions and tendencies that comprise an artistic worldview as is outlined in the introductory chapter. Within anime, though, there are a wide variety of genres and sub-genres that exist on the basis of shared plot and character characteristics. The industrial context of the anime industry is one contributing factor to determining the different genres within anime, however, it is not the sole determinate. Anime is
frequently produced as an adaptation of a popular novel or manga, another industry in which genre and target audience essentially determines content. Different manga publishing magazines target specific audiences, which in turn influences the content that will be seen in such publications. For example, Odell defines a *shōnen* series as one that targets a young male audience featuring stories that encompass elements of “fantasy, sci-fi, sport/martial arts, mecha… [where] the heroes are plucky and often have a good heart, striving to achieve their goals. There’s plenty of action and usually lots of humor.” By contrast, Odell defines a *shōjo* series as one that targets a young female audience featuring

subject matter [that]… ranges from sweet, fluffy, high school romances to dark supernatural fantasies… [and is] usually characterized by the wide-eyed heroine, often a teenage girl, who is usually kind and compassionate, but may be a bit of an airhead. There will be plenty of male characters and… often a love triangle at the heart of the story. The male characters are likely to have a *bishōnen* appearance – beautiful rather than handsome, even bordering on androgynous.

As can be seen in these definitions for *shōnen* and *shōjo* series, both are dependent on specific elements of plot and character, but additionally have the potential to share some common plot elements, such as the supernatural, fantasy, action, etc. Genre in anime is not dependent on the inclusion of specific elements plot and character – rather, it is the specific elements of plot and character that can form a categorization of anime along a basis of a previously amassed body of works that also share similar elements of plot and character.²

The variety of genres that Studio Shaft has worked in demonstrates an acute awareness for what elements of plot and character define certain genres. Throughout the Shaft filmography, balancing between fulfilling and disturbing viewer expectation that is formed by genre allows them to insert despair into situations the audience may
expect to be comedic, or vice versa. This then allows the studio to express their worldview on the fluidity between comedy and despair through experimentation with genre. Studio Shaft displays a rich awareness for what elements of plot and character are essential to establishing shows within a certain genre, and through this its shows can often move into a commentary on the expectations of a specific genre. This is not to say though that every show is a deconstruction of genre, though elements of deconstruction do certainly exist. A deconstruction of genre would be to see the set of plot and character elements that make up a genre in a way in which any and all of the potential unpleasant consequences of these aspects are made utterly apparent. The goal of genre deconstruction is not just to demonstrate that a genre or trope is unpleasant, but rather is a way to depart from the clichés and conventional themes of that genre. The narratives of Shaft works, while they do use the essential framework of a genre, do not seek to break away from the clichés, but rather seek to find a way that despair can be incorporated into a narrative that comes with a set of genre expectations. Therefore, the Shaft approach to genre experimentation is exactly that: experimentation – trying to find where despair in a narrative lies, and showing the fluidity between it and comedy. The deep awareness of the plot and character elements of genre, which can be seen in any Shaft show, takes form through their conventional or unconventional use, and ultimately serves the purpose of creating fluid movement between comedy and despair.

The Shaft approach to genre can be clearly seen through examination of three of the most prolific works of Studio Shaft: *Nisekoi*, the *Monogatari* series, and *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*. Through *Nisekoi* and the *Monogatari* series, Shaft’s various
approaches to working within the harem genre can be clearly seen – whereas *Nisekoi* seeks to reveal despair within a harem show played with strict accordance to genre expectations, the *Monogatari* series demonstrates the ways in which Shaft changes various elements of plot and character essential to the genre to upend viewer expectations for the genre and maintain a focus on character despair. In comparison to *Nisekoi* and the *Monogatari* series, *Madoka Magica* illustrates how Shaft uses similar techniques of genre manipulation to maintain the same focus on movement between the comedic and despairing in a magical girl genre show. Viewed together, these three shows illustrate a variety of techniques and attitudes towards the essential elements of plot and character that comprise a genre that Shaft frequently uses to reveal the fluidity between comedy and despair.

**Revealing Hidden Despair through Genre Conventions: *Nisekoi***

Shaft leans heavily on the essential plot and character elements of the harem genre, and through strict adherence to genre expectations, Shaft reveals the true despair that exists behind the comedic and lighthearted façade of the romantic comedy harem show. In Shaft’s clinging to conventional plot situations and character archetypes, they reveal the despair that is present and necessary for the harem genre to function, becoming a kind of commentary to the genre itself.

In order to understand where *Nisekoi* conforms and breaks from the harem anime genre, it is important to place a definition for what a harem anime is. A harem anime is a genre in which the plot of the show revolves around a character of one gender, who is surrounded by multiple characters of the opposite gender. Although it is not necessary for any or the entire supporting cast to be romantically interested in
the protagonist, this is often the case. All that is necessary though is merely their consistent presence around the protagonist. It is additionally not necessary that a harem anime feature only one male or female character, however the series does need to concentrate its focus on the protagonist at the center of the harem or have a very skewed gender balance.³

With regard to plot, *Nisekoi* stands as a very classic example of a rom-com harem anime, featuring a single male protagonist who is surrounded by a group of friends that are mostly female, and consisting of him and the women with whom he is surrounded withs romantic successes and foibles throughout their day to day life. *Nisekoi* follows the story of Raku Ichijō, the son of a powerful *yakuza* (Japanese gangster) family, who made a promise to a childhood friend that they would one day meet again and get married.¹ On the eve of his first day of high school, his father informs him that he must pretend to be in a relationship with a girl from a rival gang, Chitoge Kirisaki, to prevent fighting between the two gangs, despite Ichijō’s promise and the fact that he has feelings for another classmate, Kosaki Onodera. The series follows Ichijō as he navigates his fake relationship with Kirisaki, tries to express his feelings to Onodera, and figure out to whom he made the promise years ago.

With Ichijō surrounded by Kirisaki, Onodera, and later Seishirō Tsugumi, Marika Tachibana, and more, most of whom employing many character archetypes associated with a harem group, *Nisekoi*’s status as a rom-com harem anime is

¹ Note on Japanese Character Names: Separate to how names for creators will be referred to in this thesis for the sake of clarity in citations, character names will be referred to by the name that they are most often addressed as in their respective shows. Whether a character is referred to as their given or family name is an important marker of that character’s relationship with others, and what they are referred to may change from family name to given name as character relationships develop. Even if the name a character is referred to by is changed, I will remain consistent in how their name appears in this thesis, using the name they are addressed as for the majority of the work.
unquestioned. Anime writer Richard Eisenbeis states on *Nisekoi’s* characters (in an article aptly titled *Nisekoi is the Epitome of a Cliché Rom-Com Anime*) that each character with romantic interest in Ichijō “embodies one of the four common female character types seen in anime and manga.” For example, Kirisaki is an undeniable *tsundere*ii, whereas Onodera is firmly the cute girl next door archetype, while Tachibana is firmly a *yandere*.iii Just as each character fully embraces a character archetype commonly found within a harem group, *Nisekoi* works on a similar level with regard to its treatment of the expectations for individual episodes and character arcs in being a harem rom-com anime.

For narrative situations of each episode, *Nisekoi* displays an acute awareness through its adept use of the commonly seen episode scenarios of a classic rom-com harem anime, such as “the hot springs episode,” “the beach episode,” and “the festival episode.”iv In its adherence to such widely recognized plot elements of the rom-com harem genre, *Nisekoi* generates a kind of commentary on the humor attained through

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ii *Tsundere*: “An archetypal character of anime and manga who is initially harsh (often violent) then later gentle, or one who is initially seen as cold and aloof on the outside, but later shown to be loving and warm on the inside. While the term is gender neutral, the character appears most often as female.” From "Tsundere," in *A/V a to Z: An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Media, Entertainment and Other Audiovisual Terms* (McFarland, 2014).

iii *Yandere*: “An archetypal character of anime and manga who is loving and warm or timid and shy but then later brutally violent or highly aggressive. While the term is technically gender neutral, the character appears as exclusively female.” From "Yandere," in *A/V a to Z: An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Media, Entertainment and Other Audiovisual Terms* (McFarland, 2014).

iv The hot springs episodes is a common episode scenario when the main cast of an anime goes to a hot springs resort together. The scenario is often used as a vehicle for fanservice, new character designs with characters wearing *yukata* summer robes, and characters accidentally or intentionally seeing each other naked. The beach episode is another common episode scenario when the main cast go to a beach together. It is often used as a kind of filler episode, or break away from the main plot, and often features a variety of comedic beach shenanigans by the main cast. The summer festival episode is an episode scenario in which the main cast goes to a carnival-like public gathering, often either at a school or local shrine. Like the hot springs episode, characters are often featured wearing *yukata*, and a common plot development is when one of the main female protagonists has some sort of wardrobe malfunction and needs assistance from the male protagonist for whom she likely has romantic feelings. Festival episodes are often settings for major relationship development or new relationship drama to occur.
these episode situations. These episodes create situations that force characters to confront their feelings and try to express them to one another, at which they often fail in a comedic fashion. In adeptly working through these scenarios, Nisekoi reveals the underlying despair – the inability to express one’s desire and unrequited love – that informs the comedy that rises from the narrative events. Although what happens to these characters may be humorous, it is additionally revealing of their inability to get what they desire. That this lack of proper expression is a driving force of the narrative then, constantly frustrating audiences as to why two characters couldn’t express their feelings to each other, reveals the true despair of the rom-com harem anime, epitomizing how Shaft’s approach works to blur the distinction between the comedic and despairing. Nisekoi hardly ever breaks from the expectations of a rom-com harem anime, but rather through its apparent awareness and over-the-top following of what is expected of it, Nisekoi serves as both the epitome of and commentary on the relationship between comedy and despair in a rom-com anime.

**Experimenting with the Harem: Formation, Character Archetypes, and Fanservice in The Monogatari Series**

Through the *Monogatari series*’ approach to formation and dissolution of the harem, character archetypes, and fanservice, the series displays a distinct attention to inverting essential elements of plot and character for a harem genre show that form the basis of audience expectation, while also showing how well versed it is in those expectations. The series follows protagonist Koyomi Araragi, a newly-turned half-vampire, as he meets, aids, and befriends various girls with many issues pertaining to apparitions and spirits, or as they are called in the series: “oddities (怪異) *kai’i*.”
While this description does fit the earlier aspects of the narrative, the story of the *Monogatari* series grows beyond this. Whereas in earlier seasons (*Bakemonogatari, Nisemonogatari, Nekomonogatari: Kuro*), each new girl introduced receives her own arc in which she is helped by Araragi (with the aid of his confidant and expert in oddities Meme Oshino) to deal with some kind of oddity, in later seasons the relationships developed over the course of the earlier seasons are tested, and grow from the influence of not only new oddities, but additionally the interference of other experts in oddities like Oshino. The *Monogatari* series is a show about the supernatural that functions within the setup of a harem, while additionally featuring comedy, horror, and the psychological – it is truly a show that defies a single genre. As anime writer Digibro states, the *Monogatari* series views genre expectations “and flips it on its head… while simultaneously emulating them. All of the classic situations you expect… are hideously twisted into something monstrous and bloody.”

While there are a great many aspects of the *Monogatari* series to examine in relation to genre expectations, two of the most revealing of the *Monogatari* series’ attitude towards genre are the way in which it builds and disbands its harem, its approach to characterization, and treatment of fanservice.

Araragi is without question the leader of his own harem, taking direct part in its very construction through his near-pathological need to help others at whatever cost: he is the main agent in gathering his own harem. Each girl that joins Araragi’s harem does so as a result of receiving help from Araragi in dealing with some oddity or aspect of the supernatural, and each of these oddities is usually a reflection of some negative character trait or a part of the personality of a character that they wish to
remain hidden. For example, the character Mayoi Hachikuji joins Araragi’s harem after he discovers that she is the lost ghost of a child hit by a car years previously, and he helps her finally find her mother’s house, what she has been seeking for years. As Araragi helps each one of them, he essentially aids them in working through their own personal despair, and gains satisfaction from it.

The formation of Araragi’s harem for the entirety of Bakemonogatari follows an established plot progression for the harem genre; with each subsequent arc, new girls slowly come to surround Araragi, all brought into the harem through his own actions. As anime blogger Isaac Akers states, watching the construction of Araragi’s harem is “a comfortable situation to watch emerge” as the building of a harem is something seen so frequently. The Monogatari series does not end though once the harem has been constructed, and over the course of the second season the Monogatari series works to slowly break apart the “comfortable” harem Araragi has built for himself.

Especially if a viewer is versed in the conventions of a harem show (but irrelevant if they are not), after watching the slow formation of Araragi’s harem, which within the plot conventions of the harem genre is a wholly expected experience, to see the harem slowly disband after its formation disturbs this familiar experience. This disturbance is felt not just by the audience, but by characters as well, because it breaks with “the fantasy that both Araragi and the audience have come to accept as reality.” While some girls truly leave the harem, supposedly never to be seen again by Araragi (this cannot be confirmed, though, as the series has yet to reach its completion) others fulfill a more emotional departure from Araragi’s harem. In either
situation, though, each girl’s departure is a product of their facing the consequences of Araragi’s aid – each of them believe that they were saved by Araragi, but because consequences still remain, they must take independent action to truly save themselves from their own despair. As they achieve this, though, it means the departure from Araragi’s harem, which then reverses the comfortable situation of the first season, and turns the despair on Araragi in his unwillingness to let go of any of the members of his harem. This situation is exemplified by returning to Hachikuji’s narrative – although she was fulfilled in the immediate sense through Araragi’s aid, in her staying in Araragi’s harem she is denying the fact that her time on earth has passed and it is time for her to move on. Araragi struggles with this to the extent that he offers to stay lost with Hachikuji forever just so she does not have to move on. She cannot accept this though, and despite Araragi’s sadness, she passes over. While characters depart from his harem by being able to confront the causes of their own despair, Araragi in turn struggles with each subsequent departure. The experience of watching characters leave Araragi’s harem in a deliberately slow and unsettling fashion defies audience expectation for a harem genre show, and highlights the despair that the characters live with and must work through.

The Monogatari series experiments with genre expectations through the specific character roles and their relationship to commonly seen character archetypes of the harem genre. Within Araragi’s harem, each character maintains the façade of an archetypal character on the surface, while also fulfilling a different deeper emotional need for Araragi. For example, while Suruga Kanbaru is the “sporty-girl,” following her arc in which she comes to accept her unrequited love for Hitagi
Senjōgahara (Araragi’s girlfriend), she develops a close relationship with Araragi, becoming his “safe, non-romantic friend,” whom he can (and does) bring to help him with tasks that he does not ask of anyone else. While Shinobu Oshino is a “loli” (young girl) archetype on the surface, due to the fact that she is the 500-year-old vampire who turned Araragi into a vampire, and the resulting immortal bond between them, she fulfills the role of Araragi’s true partner and confidante with relation to the supernatural. Most importantly, Senjōgahara is a “tsundere” on first impression, but she is Araragi’s girlfriend, the one to whom Araragi is completely and wholly devoted. Senjōgahara’s character role complicates Araragi’s harem on an even more basic structural level, though. The Monogatari series upsets the typical harem setup of the girls vying for attention and affection from the main male protagonist out of romantic interest with the hopes of a relationship through Senjōgahara and Araragi’s established romantic relationship starting from the third episode of the series itself. However, the series still maintains its ability to tease at sexuality, romance, and all other kinds of toying with each other. Through the establishment and development of the girls’ relationships with Araragi existing in a specific sexual space that is directly related to their character function in the harem, the Monogatari series not only maintains, but innovates with another element typically found in a harem anime: fanservice.

In the Monogatari series, character sexuality and fanservice is inseparable from narrative, and in addition to the Monogatari series’ experimentation with genre in terms of plot and character, the series goes one step further in disturbing genre expectations through its treatment of fanservice. Fanservice is defined as the random
and gratuitous display of sexual elements, and in most anime that utilize traditional methods of fan-service, the majority of sexual content functions outside of the context of the story, not holding an essential place in furthering the audience’s understanding of characters or their relationships. This kind of fanservice style can be seen across the anime industry and within a variety of Studio Shaft productions, in which various panty shots, gravity-defying breasts, and general sexualization of the characters are used for entertainment value and/or comedic purposes. The *Monogatari* series employs fanservice throughout, but where it differentiates itself is in its purpose to the narrative. Anime blogger Josh Dunham argues that within the *Monogatari* series, the sexuality is the narrative, writing in opposition to both common claims that *Monogatari*’s treatment of fanservice and sexuality is a deconstruction of fanservice and that it is a parody of common fanservice.\(^9\) Dunham writes that the way in which fanservice is utilized over the course of the *Monogatari* series is that “each scene of sexuality directly personifies the relationship of the involved characters,” and this is done through the addition intimacy into a trope known for its lack of such emotional weight.\(^10\)

By introducing intimacy into fanservice, the *Monogatari* series gives narrative importance to its presence, disturbing the audience expectation of its meaninglessness. Fanservice becomes another vehicle through which the *Monogatari* series can exemplify how each character relationship is based in the personal despair of those involved. The *Monogatari* series states its attitude towards fanservice and its relation to narrative from the very start of the series in Senjōgahara’s introduction, in which she confronts the trauma of sexual assault and a broken family. After offering to help
Senjōgahara with her crab god oddity, which had stolen her physical weight, and bring her to see the oddity specialist Meme Oshino, Araragi is told by Oshino that Senjōgahara must take a cold shower and return in immaculate attire in order to get rid of her oddity. In Bakemonogatari episode 2, a major portion of the episode features Senjōgahara after her shower talking to Araragi either completely naked or mostly undressed as she prepares herself to return to see Oshino. It is made utterly apparent that her physical weight contains the double meaning of the mental burden of her past trauma, and its disappearance in turn representing her inability to confront it. With this in mind, Dunham states that Senjōgahara

wanders around naked in plain sight of Araragi. She complains about how due to her weightlessness, clothes have become heavy to her. She tries on several different outfits… something is being said here…The right clothes for every occasion. Senjōgahara struggles with this concept… with the burden of her self-worth; struggles with the concept of purity. The clothes were just a vehicle for maintaining the thematic element. Two parts of the same narrative.¹¹

Senjōgahara’s actions demonstrate that her display of sexuality is not divorced from narrative relevance, and this is continued not only in her treatment of clothing itself, but additionally through her dialogue with Araragi over the course of the scene. Breaking with the traditional treatment of scenes of nudity in anime, rather than being passively caught nude by the male protagonist and displaying a sense of embarrassment, Senjōgahara commands the entire scene and conversation through her dialogue, directly addressing her blatant sexual display. Through Senjōgahara’s actions, this scene displays both an acknowledgement and reversal of the ‘female passively being caught nude’ fanservice trope by having it not be Senjōgahara who is surprised and embarrassed at accidentally being caught naked, but rather Araragi who is surprised and embarrassed at Senjōgahara purposefully displaying herself.
Senjōgahara is self-aware of her purpose, as can be seen in her conversation with Araragi as she is dressing herself:

Senjōgahara: Araragi, you haven’t gotten aroused from seeing me nude, have you?
Araragi: Even if I have, it wouldn’t be my fault!
S: Done. You can turn around.
A: [seeing her sitting in her bra and underwear] What the hell are you trying to do?!
S: What? This is a special service as a reward for today. You should at least be a little happy… Be a little bit happy, will you?!
A (thinks): She’s lashing back at me?!
S: Don’t you know the courteous thing to do would be to at least tell me what you think?
A: A response? … Y-you have a nice figure, how’s that?
S: Terrible. It’s exactly why you will forever be a virgin.

Senjōgahara tactfully utilizes the fact that she is getting dressed to poke fun at a clearly nervous Araragi, and through the course of their conversation, their teasing back and forth they develop a closer relationship. Senjōgahara’s full command over her sexual display, and the strength of her command overcomes the fact that Araragi is the narrator and the audience views this interaction from Araragi’s perspective, thus illustrating the development and nature of their relationship: Senjōgahara loves to tease Araragi, and he takes great pleasure in keeping pace with her. Fanservice and sexuality are present in this scene, but the reason for its existence is based in character despair, and it furthers the growing intimacy between the two characters. As Dunham writes, in the foundation for Bakemonogatari “Sexy shower scenes and the revelation of an attempted rape shared space.” This episode takes an element often used for comedy in harem genre shows, fanservice, and makes it inseparable from character despair, ultimately framing the scene to fluidly move between the comedic and despairing.

Inserting Despair into the Magical Girl Genre: Puella Magi Madoka Magica
While Studio Shaft certainly demonstrates its aptitude for working within a harem setup, the studio is not limited to working and experimenting with this genre, as is evidenced by *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* (*Madoka Magica*). *Madoka Magica* exists within ‘magical girl’ genre. This genre maintains a long and complex history with various subgenres operating within it, but through the great variation within it, the most common elements of character and plot are the presence of young girls who have magical powers that they use to fight the forces of evil. Shows often focus on friendship and loyalty; even though the presence of evil is a force to be grappled with, most shows are wholly optimistic in their tone and narrative execution. There is an inherent understanding that the forces of good will trump those of evil and that the power of friendship and teamwork is of the highest value.

*Madoka Magica* follows Madoka Kaname and her friend Sayaka Miki as they are faced with the opportunity from the magical cat-like creature Kyubey to, in return for any wish they could think of, become a magical girl (akin to *Sailor Moon*, *Cardcaptor Sakura*, *Magical Girl Lyrical Nanoha*) and defeat “witches” that feed off of the despair of humans. As the show progresses, it is revealed that the witches are in actuality magical girls themselves who have fallen so deep into personal despair that they transform into witches themselves, the very creature they became magical girls to fight against.

Over the course of *Madoka Magica*, the show displays its acute awareness for the traits that epitomize a magical girl show, and as the show progresses, it challenges each one of these elements by adding what does not exist in the vast majority of other prolific magical girl shows: despair. As anime scholar Jed Blue describes, *Madoka*
Magica “works through a fundamental internal struggle… between its position within the magical girl genre and its aspirations to be something new.”

In these “aspirations” comes Madoka Magica’s insertion of despair into a genre in which the audience expectation is optimism. This is not to describe Madoka Magica as a deconstruction, and Madoka Magica producer Iwakami Atsuhiro confirms the aspirations of the show in an interview following Madoka Magica’s initial run, stating that “we didn’t do Madoka as an antithesis to [Magical Girl Lyrical Nanoha, Pretty Cure, Minky Momo (other prolific and well known magical girl shows)] shows; it was purely based on the idea of what would it be like to do a dark story on a magical girl stage.”

Here, Iwakami confirms that Madoka Magica is not a deconstruction or an antithesis – Madoka Magica is a magical girl show with the inclusion of despair, which works to, as Chief Director Shinbou Akiyuki recalls that Iwakami informed him to create “a work that develops in a way that subverts prediction.”

Through organizing its narrative around the insertion and proliferation of despair into a show in magical girl genre, Madoka Magica denies audience expectations of the magical girl genre. Furthermore, the show exemplifies the way in which Shaft focuses on the fluidity between comedy and despair by creating a show commonly associated with the comedic (as previously defined) and organizing it around despair.

Madoka Magica’s experimentation with the magical girl genre and ultimate dive into a despairing magical girl narrative can be clearly seen over the course of the first three episodes, epitomized through the conflict between Homura Akemi and Mami Tomoe. Homura stands as an agent of the despairing “true” Madoka Magica,
trying to stop Madoka by whatever means necessary from entering that world of despair, whereas Mami stands as the “false” optimistic and ideal magical girl show version of *Madoka Magica*, and this opposition between becomes clear through the progression of the first three episodes leading up to Mami’s death.

In episode 1, after Madoka and Sayaka try and save Kyubey, who is, at this point, filling the cute animal mascot and confidante archetype, from being attacked by Homura (in Homura’s effort to protect Madoka from entering the world of magical girls), the two are suddenly and unceremoniously thrown into the magical girl landscape by getting lost in a witch’s labyrinth (the way in which witches, the natural enemies of magical girls, capture their victims). As this happens, the onlooking Homura can do nothing but comment “oh, not now,” demonstrating her awareness that she is bound to fail in her attempt to preserve the “false” magical girl show. In contrast to Homura’s resigned acceptance of the witch’s presence, Mami heroically enters, swooping in to save the day. Mami, as the pillar of the “false” and expected magical girl show, performs exactly as the audience would expect: following an enchanting magical girl transformation sequence (a mainstay of the magical girl genre) she swiftly and efficiently defeats the witch, and offers her friendship to Madoka and Sayaka. Furthermore, she positions herself against Homura, who enters following the witch’s defeat. Homura is actively against Kyubey, whereas Mami views Kyubey as an ally (in line with the animal’s function in a more traditional magical girl show.) In a magical girl show, the very fact that from episode one, two magical girls are pitted against each other rather than forming a friendship is an initial marker of *Madoka Magica’s* direction away from expectation and into despair.
Mami and Homura remain in opposition throughout episodes two and three, while Madoka and Sayaka ally themselves with Mami, following and believing in the optimistic and ideal version of *Madoka Magica* that Mami represents, until episode three’s conclusion – Mami’s death. As Jed Blue continues, Mami’s death “is the moment at which *Madoka Magica* transcends the norms of its genre and begins to fulfill its potential. Only a few short minutes after Mami first attacks [the witch], everything has changed: Mami is dead. Homura has saved Sayaka and Madoka. Kyubey offers no comfort as [Madoka and Sayaka] sob in the hospital parking lot.”

It is at this turning point that *Madoka Magica* reveals its true colors, featuring the death of what one would expect to be a main character, and re-casting the supposed ally of the magical girls as a threatening force. *Madoka Magica* takes such mainstays of the magical girl genre and challenges them by posing questions such as “what is the purpose of the animal companion?” and “could magical girls die?” – later moving into even bigger questions of even “why become a magical girl?” In its answers, *Madoka Magica* reveals the true despair of the magical girl. As Madoka and Sayaka view Mami’s dripping blood following Homura’s final defeat of the witch, Homura blankly states to them, “Burn this sight into your mind. This is what it looks like to be a magical girl,” making utterly apparent *Madoka Magica’s* ultimate goal of being a show entrenched within the magical girl genre while also challenging it with the addition of despair. In *Madoka Magica*, the comedic is the archetypal optimistic world of the magical girl, and despair is the real world of the magical girl. Through the insertion of despair into essential elements of plot and character that comprise the foundation of the archetypal magical girl show, Shaft expresses its studio worldview
of the fluidity of the comedic with the despairing in how elements typically associated by the audience to be comedic function as despair.

In looking at *Nisekoi*, the *Monogatari* series, and *Madoka Magica*, Studio Shaft’s deep awareness of the essential plot and character elements and audience expectations for shows of a certain genre is readily apparent. In this awareness, Studio Shaft balances working within the boundaries of these genre conventions, while also finding room to experiment with them, which can be utilized to either bring out comedy or despair in a given show. In *Nisekoi*, the harem genre is played so in line with audience expectations that character despair is revealed. The *Monogatari* series also works within the harem genre, but through changing the plot development of the harem formation to disbandment, altered character archetype function, and function of fanservice, creates a narrative that is inseparable from character despair. In the magical girl genre, Shaft takes the expected elements of the genre, and organizes them around progressing despair. By pushing the limits of genre itself through experimentation with the elements that comprise it, Shaft creates an unexpected viewing experience for the audience by challenging their expectations in accordance with that genre. Through Shaft’s work with genre, their shows reflect the Shaft worldview towards the fluidity between comedy and despair by inserting and revealing despair in narratives that would be conventionally understood as comedic. The audience is then able to develop a sense of intimacy with characters on the basis of a progressively deeper understating of the depths of their despair and how that informs their comedy.
Accumulating, Re-Locating, and Revealing Comedy and Despair through Series Structure

In addition to experimentation with genre conventions, another defining narrative tendency typical to Studio Shaft is the experimentation with series structure in causal and non-causal narrative shows to highlight the fluidity between comedy and despair and develop an intimate relationship between character and audience.

Through examination of *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei*, *Madoka Magica* and the *Monogatari* series, three of Shaft’s most successful shows that all take a distinct attitude towards series construction, the different ways in which Shaft works within a causal and non-causally driven show can be understood. *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* illustrates how Shaft uses a non-chronological non-causal series structure to create an accumulation of humor, which in turn is an essential counterbalance to the series’ focus on the comedy of despair, in which intimacy is a product of an accumulated understanding of the humor itself. *Madoka Magica* in contrast, demonstrates how Shaft uses flashback in a chronological and causally driven narrative to upend the audience’s understanding of character and narrative through revelations of character despair, and develop intimacy between character and audience through such revelations. Finally, the *Monogatari* series combines the two approaches of *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* and *Madoka Magica*, using non-chronological narrative presentation in a causally driven narrative, with the addition of unreliable narrators, to constantly challenge the audience’s understanding and create intimacy between character and viewer through a progressively deeper understanding of character despair. By looking at the similarities and differences in how Studio Shaft approaches episodic and
causally driven shows, the ways in which Studio Shaft approaches series construction to develop intimacy and reflect their focus on the comedic and despairing can be examined.

**Series Structure Creates the Comedy of Despair in *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei***

*Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* maintains a balance between comedy and despair by staying mostly comedic, but having the comedy grounded in despair. Despair runs throughout because *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* is truly the comedy of despair itself, and this is in part supported by the series structure. The narrative development (or better put, lack of development) on the episodic, seasonal, and series long scale makes apparent the series’ commitment to comedy through an examination of despair.

*Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* revolves around the eccentric and despairing teacher, Itoshiki Nozomu (otherwise known as ‘Itoshiki-sensei’) and his students. Each episode, prompted by something he either sees or a student of his points out to him, Itoshiki-sensei finds some aspect of modern Japanese society that is cause for despair. These can range anywhere from legitimate issues, such as immigration and population stagnation, to the plight of people who have multiple talents but will only be recognized for one. He teaches his class about various aspects of modern Japanese society and why they are cause for despair, and in turn each class member agrees or disagrees, providing examples or counter examples to further their point.

In *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei*, the ways in which Studio Shaft experiments with series structure in a non-causally driven narrative are apparent. *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* is an episodic narrative where episodes are often split into two or
three mini-episodes. These mini-episodes correspond to chapters of the original manga, and in Shaft’s anime adaptation, the studio frequently reorders or altogether omits manga chapters. Audience enjoyment is not necessarily contingent on viewing each episode in airing order, as there is no causality or consequence from episode to episode. However, for the purpose of humor in *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei*, it is necessary to view episodes in order. *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* changes the original ordering of manga chapters to create a series of episodes that are in service of the accumulation of gags, humor, and character introduction. Much of *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei*’s humor in later seasons works through the continuation of gags accumulated over the course of each previous season. This can range from simply understanding an individual character’s quirk, such as Chiri Kitsu’s violent perfectionism, to laughing at a familiar tagline, like whenever someone calls out Nami Hitō (who’s defining trait is that she is so normal) for being normal by flatly stating “普通 futsū (normal)” and her immediate exclamation back “普通って言うな！futsū t’eiuna (Don’t call me normal!” The list of ongoing gags that accumulate over the course of *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* are truly immeasurable, but that the humor is so dependent on picking up on those ongoing gags demonstrates how *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* prioritizes accumulation of humor and gags over accumulation of narrative. While the narrative of *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* is not necessarily serialized, the humor develops into a kind of language itself, which is dependent on an audience familiarity with the characters and jokes themselves.

Within a narrative so focused on finding the despair in everything, it is in part due to the series’ structure that *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* is comedic. By allowing for
quick narrative shifts from short story installment to installment, there is neither time for real character development, nor threat of consequence from any idea of a continuous narrative. Issues are brought up just as fast as they are let go of, and are only in service of a joke. Without consequence for the ever-present despair, what is given cause for despair can never move beyond a punch line or non sequitur. What is maintained, then, are not the different discussions of despair, but rather smaller inside jokes and visual gags that are slowly accumulated and frequently returned to as the series progresses. It is in addition to the main comedy of despair punch line, that these gags move Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei beyond a treatise on despair and contemporary Japanese society, into a pointed satire that has developed its own specific sense of humor that can only be understood by an audience intimately familiar with it, in which everything is worthy of despair, and it is the despair itself that is comedic.

“I Won’t Rely on Anyone Anymore” – Relocating Comedy and Despair through Flashback in Puella Magi Madoka Magica Episode 10

Unlike Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei, Madoka Magica is an example of how Studio Shaft experiments with causally driven narratives. Madoka Magica demonstrates one way through which Shaft uses its series structure to upset the audience’s understanding of despair as it relates to both narrative and character. Madoka Magica is fairly straightforward with its narrative presentation, and follows a conventional causal narrative structure. The events of one episode lead into the events of the next, the narrative range is essentially contained to the immediate events seen in the show, and the show rarely if ever uses flashbacks. If flashbacks are employed, they seldom provide any additional narrative information, and are mostly
in service of bringing the audience closer to the psychology of an individual character remembering a particularly horrific event, such as in episode 4 when Madoka recalls Mami’s death.

_Madoka Magica_ breaks from this series structure by constructing an episode entirely around flashbacks in episode 10, which functions to completely upset the audience’s understanding of narrative, character and universe. Through a series of flashbacks, it is revealed that Homura (who for the entirety of the series up until that point has been portrayed as an antagonist to Madoka, Sayaka, and Mami) has been continually going back in time to try and stop Madoka from becoming a magical girl in order to try and save her from dying like she does in the original timeline. Through a series of sequential flashbacks, the audience is informed that following Madoka’s death in the original timeline, Homura became a magical girl. She then proceeded to use her time travel magic to go back in time and re-live the same three months countless times, slowly learning the horrific reality of being a magical girl and trying to save Madoka from it. However, in her continued time travel, Homura was the one who inadvertently placed so much karmic energy on the fate of Madoka, thus allowing Madoka’s potential as a magical girl to increase exponentially for each time she time travels. Essentially, the more Homura time-traveled to save Madoka, the more potential Madoka had were she to become a magical girl, and the greater the potential consequences should Homura fail at stopping Madoka. Were Homura to fail at stopping Madoka from becoming a magical girl, when the resulting immensely powerful Madoka inevitably falls into despair and becomes a witch, the greater the consequences. Through Homura’s hope to save Madoka, she has dug her own grave,
trapping herself in a cycle of time travel that she cannot escape. This reveal, which undercuts the antagonistic Homura that the audience has believed to be true, throws into question the audience’s consideration of the entire narrative up until that point. The audience must now consider Homura not as an antagonistic presence who both works to protect and dissuade Madoka from becoming a magical girl, but as a hero for the show.

The placement of this episode manipulates the audience’s relationship with the characters and understanding of the show’s narrative itself by revealing that the world of *Madoka Magica* is not solely driven by the progression of magical girls’ despair, but that it is contingent on Homura’s continued hope that she can save Madoka. Through this episode, the placement of hope (previously associated with the ‘false’ magical girl show in the realm of the comedic) is moved to a character previously understood by the audience as the antagonist. This reveals through the depths of Homura’s despair how she is the true paragon of optimism of the story. *Madoka Magica* invigorates the fluidity between comedy and despair by challenging the audience’s understanding of narrative and character through changing the locations and depths of hope and despair. Through the show, Shaft exemplifies the way in which the studio experiments with narrative order to influence the audience’s relationship with the characters and story within a causally driven narrative work.

**Do You Really Know Them? – Flashbacks, Non-Chronological Narrative Order, and Unreliable Narration in The Monogatari Series**

The *Monogatari* series’ use of flashbacks, altered narrative order, and unreliable narration, constructs a narrative that constantly challenges the audience’s
understanding of the characters and story itself. Through revelations of character despair accomplished by these devices to experiment with series structure, the series ultimately works to develop a progressively more intimate relationship between character and audience, reflecting the Shaft worldview of the fluidity between comedy and despair and its connection with audience viewing experience.

Throughout the *Monogatari* series, flashbacks within an episode or arc are frequently used to add context to a certain narrative situation, or clarify character psychology. This can be seen on the small scale within multiple arcs of *Bakemonogatari*, such as in episode 5, Hachikuji’s late informing Araragi and Senjōgahara how she died, and that she is an oddity herself. Flashbacks function on the large scale as well, such as the entirety of episode 2 in the *Onimonogatari* arc, in which Shinobu tells Araragi (and the audience) her past 400-year history as a vampire, and most specifically, about the first vampire she created. In both of these situations, the flashbacks provide context for the character that the flashback is immediately about, and also further contextualize the characters that surround them. For example, the flashback of Hachikuji’s death in *Bakemonogatari* episode 5 informs the audience and Araragi that Hachikuji is not under the influence of an oddity, but is an oddity herself. This realization explains Hachikuji’s erratic behavior, while also providing a reason for her as an oddity having the affect that it does. Hachikuji’s flashback not only relates to her own personal revelation, but to personal revelations of those surrounding her as well. It enlightens the audience as to why Araragi felt drawn to interact with her: because she draws people who do not wish to find their destination, and Araragi, who had been fighting with his sisters, was a perfect target. Hachikuji’s
revelation additionally reveals that Senjōgahara lied about how she actually could not see Hachikuji at all, her reasoning being that she felt that she was the one who was mistaken, stating that “for over two years, I have not been normal. If something happened, I would think that it was my fault.” On the larger scale, learning Shinobu’s history from *Onimonogatari* episode 2 explains not only her and Araragi’s current situation (being chased by a mysterious and enveloping “darkness” that also chased 100 years previously) but additionally foreshadows the events of *Owarimonogatari*, in which Shinobu’s first (and only other) created vampire returns. Like in *Madoka Magica*, flashbacks in the *Monogatari* series call into question the audience’s relationship with characters by revealing new information about their psychology and personal despair, while also re-contextualizing their behavior in the present.

In addition to the use of flashbacks within narrative arcs, the *Monogatari* series frequently experiments with the ordering of information across the series, using flashbacks or the narrator’s recollection to tell many segments out of chronological order. Frequently, Araragi narrates events that happen at a chronologically earlier point in time within arcs that occur later in the series’ airing order. While this is sometimes done to clarify at what point in the chronological versus novel publishing order an arc is at, this is not the sole motivation. Occasionally non-chronological series construction is due to production schedule and budgetary organization, such as the case with the *Kizumonogatari* film trilogy, which was announced in 2010 but was continually delayed and not released until 2016.17 For the most part though, even within trying to adhere to the original order of novel publication, there are still times that the novel publishing order differs from the anime airing order, demonstrating
intentionality to the non-chronological narrative order on the part of both Studio Shaft and author Nisioisin.

While some portions of the Monogatari series are adapted and released in the same chronological and publishing order as the series, this is not the case for all installations. Nekomonogatari: Kuro’s placement relative to its predecessor, Bakemonogatari demonstrates how non-chronological presentation works to answer questions raised in one arc in a separate arc to challenge the audience’s understanding of character psychology and narrative. Over the course of Bakemonogatari, the alterations in narrative order elide the expanded stories of how Shinobu turned Araragi into a vampire, and the first instance of Tsubasa Hanekawa’s issue with the “触れ猫 sawarineko” oddity. This keeps the narrative focused on the introductions of each subsequent character while actively hinting at additional narrative events before what is immediately seen. When these elided portions of the overall narrative are returned to, they then act as an expansion on our understanding mainly of Araragi, but also Hanekawa and Shinobu’s character psychology by exploring new facets of their character that Araragi, as the unreliable narrator, may have wanted to keep hidden. This can be seen in episode 1 at the start of Nekomonogatari: Kuro (telling the story of Hanekawa’s first interaction with her oddity), where Araragi gives insight as to why he previously chose to elide over this part of Hanekawa’s narrative. He does this through a text flash at the start of Nekomonogatari: Kuro episode 1 stating:

I have finally decided to recall the events of that Golden Week, that time when I fooled around with Tsubasa Hanekawa to my heart’s content. It’s a bitter memory, an astringent memory, and yet a memory that is somewhat sweet and sour, but it is a memory that I want to forget if possible, and even if that were not possible, I want to act as if those events never happened. Those nine golden days are the days I shall recall.
Throughout the events of *Bakemonogatari*, characters and even Araragi himself question why he ended up dating Senjōgahara, a question that he never really answers. In *Nekomonogatari: Kuro* then, by going back to an earlier point in the chronological narrative, Araragi reveals how he did have feelings for Hanekawa at one point. After helping her during the events of that arc, though, he saw through the façade of the person that she presented herself to be and realized that his feelings for her were not genuine. Through *Nekomonogatari: Kuro*’s specific place in the *Monogatari* series construction, it answers the audiences’ questions prompted in *Bakemonogatari*, while also revealing that Araragi’s feelings to Hanekawa are purely based in attraction and admiration, not real love.

In later seasons, eliding certain portions of the narrative becomes far more extreme, switching orders within the novel release and story chronological orders, as well as Araragi recalling events that happened earlier in the chronological narrative at a later television airing time. This demonstrates a deliberate attempt to craft a calculated ordering of information that conceals and then reveals major revelations of plot and character. Two of the most noticeable trends within this crafted ordering of are the great effort to conceal and then introduce the character Ougi Oshino, as well as save narratives that are the most revealing of Araragi himself until near the end of the overall series’ run.

The majority of Ougi’s appearances are presented out of chronological or novel order, and consistently work to obfuscate Ougi’s true purpose to the larger *Monogatari* series narrative. Ougi’s first appearance is in the first episode of the
Kabukimonogatari installation of the second season, where they claim to be Meme Oshino’s niece. In Ougi’s first appearance, Araragi’s conversation with them takes place at an unknown point in time following the events of Kabukimonogatari, and their conversation prompts Araragi’s re-telling of the events of that arc. In their initial conversation, Ougi is barely given any introduction, the only explanation for their existence being Araragi’s narration that “I think she just wants to impress people, but the fifteen-year-old girl named Ougi Oshino turns such stories into massive tales of life and principles.” This is a distinct departure from the introductions of other new characters. Each previous introduction is accompanied with either some sort of explanation for their existence, such as the sudden appearance of Kaiki Deishū in Nisemonogatari which is immediately followed with the explanation that he is one of Senjōgahara’s previous con men, or finding the reason for their existence within the narrative itself, as is the case with every girl that Araragi befriends over the course of Bakemonogatari. Ougi’s appearances in subsequent installations are given just as little explanation, however, with each appearance, whether or not Ougi was present on-screen, their actions serve as the catalyst for the main action by the main character of that given arc. This behavior pattern over the course of the later half of the series slowly builds the mystery surrounding Ougi and their narrative purpose. Although Ougi appears several times throughout season two, it is not until season three that Araragi’s first meeting with Ougi is actually shown and explained. Because the Monogatari series has yet to conclude, no statements can yet be made as to Ougi’s exact role in the series, however it can be inferred from the existing narrative that

\(^{7}\) Note on pronouns: As Ougi’s gender identity has never been confirmed and has had appearances as both male and female presenting, Ougi will be referred to using the gender neutral (they/them) pronouns.
there is a deliberate effort to build up a mystery surrounding Ougi’s character to the audience in preparation for some kind of turning point or reveal, which will likely fulfill the same function of challenging the audience’s perception of narrative and character through further revelations.

The Monogatari series deliberately places the first three arcs of the final season (Tsukimonogatari, Koyomimonogatari, and Owarimonogatari), which all occur in chronologically different places, in close proximity to each other, demonstrating a use of non-chronological narrative order to thematically move inward to Araragi’s own psychology and source of despair. Similar to how Araragi’s friends had to face the continuing repercussions of Araragi’s aid in the second season, in Tsukimonogatari, Araragi must face the consequences for his decisions made in previous seasons. In every previous encounter with an oddity, Araragi relied upon vampire powers from Shinobu to defeat the oddity, and because he did this so much, he is informed that he is slowly becoming a vampire himself, independent of Shinobu. Tsukimonogatari covers Araragi facing the repercussions for his actions in how he may no longer use his vampire powers to aid others, posing a direct conflict to the way his character has operated in every previous encounter. In Owarimonogatari this trend of having Araragi begin self-reflecting is taken one step further, by having Araragi reflect on his past and see the ways in which he was not able to help someone. A defining trait of Araragi is his white knight complex – he constantly needs to help someone no matter the cost. From Ougi’s intervention though, Araragi is forced to reflect on a childhood incident with a former classmate, Sodachi Oikura, in how his lack of intervention contributed to the escalating domestic violence of her family to
lead to its complete destruction. In Araragi’s initial refusal to reflect on his actions, and later realization that he cannot avoid the fact that there was someone he did not help, the audience’s understanding of his character and motivations is undercut. It calls into question why he was so afraid to face this fact, and reveals his trepidation at divulging to the audience the places in which he has failed. The audience learns what really disturbs Araragi, in essence the source of his own despair: not being able to save everyone, and that he is willing to lie even to the audience to try and cover up for his inaction. Over the course of the *Monogatari* series, series construction to change narrative order creates a calculated flow of information that prompts the audience’s questioning of certain characters and the direction of the overall narrative itself.

The *Monogatari* series utilizes one additional element distinct from any other Studio Shaft series: unreliable narration. Throughout the series, this narrative device working in conjunction with non-chronological narrative order works to intensify the level to which the audience must question and re-assess their perception of characters and situations, and reveal character despair. Araragi is the main narrator for the entirety of the first season; however, it is not until the second season when his unreliability as a narrator becomes blatantly apparent. In the second season, Hanekawa, Sengoku, Kaiki, and Kanbaru all narrate one arc, and their differences in narration are both unreliable in and of themselves, as well as reveal the inconsistencies in character that were obfuscated by Araragi’s narration in previous installments.
While all four characters bring their own set of unreliability in their narration, it is perhaps best exemplified in *Otorimonogatari* by Sengoku’s narration. Sengoku is approached by a white snake god called Kuchinawa, and asked to aid him as reparation for slaughtering as many snakes as she did during her arc (Nadeko Snake) in *Bakemonogatari* in trying to rid herself of her oddity at that time. Acting out of guilt, Sengoku obliges and helps the snake find his body, under the condition that the search is kept private and no one would see her talking to Kuchinawa. When Sengoku finds the snake’s body in the form of a talisman in Araragi’s room, Araragi finds her. As she panics looking for the now missing Kuchinawa, she swallows the talisman, making her become a snake god herself, and attacks Araragi. Through Sengoku’s narration, this is the story that she crafts – one in which she is painted as the victim and only acted the way that she did because her circumstances led her to do so. However, at the very end of her arc it is revealed that this entire narrative is indeed not the true story. In reality, Sengoku heard from Ougi that if she returned the talisman that Araragi had to the shrine where she prays, the god residing there could grant her any wish, including her unrequited love for Araragi, and then received the white scrunchie from Ougi. Looking back on her experience in *Otorimonogatari* episode 4, Sengoku reflects, “With that as the catalyst, I had started the fabrication of a story.” Kuchinawa was merely an entity made up by Sengoku that she assigned to the scrunchie as a way for her to achieve her goals while still painting herself as a victim, not manipulative for her own self gain. Sengoku’s unreliable narration is significant not only for the narrative of her arc in *Otorimonogatari*, but reveals why her characterization was so distinctly different in *Bakemonogatari*, which is from
Araragi’s perspective. Unlike the other characters in *Bakemonogatari*, her oddity was not a product of any internal problem or trait like the other characters, but rather she was the victim of a curse set on her by one of her classmates. Her characterization throughout *Bakemonogatari* is that of the cute victim, and this is in part due to the fact that the audience views Sengoku from Araragi’s perspective. Sengoku’s unreliable narration in *Otorimonogatari* therefore undercuts our understanding of her, showing the audience how she will stop at nothing to maintain her façade as the helpless and cute victim, and will not own up to her own self-indulgence. Although unreliable narration is unique to the *Monogatari* series within the Studio Shaft filmography, it is used to similar ends as how series organization in both the *Monogatari* series and *Madoka Magica* use revelations of character despair to challenge the audience’s understanding of the narrative and character psychology.

The *Monogatari* series uses various narrative devices relating to series structure to provide revelations of character despair, which in turn constantly challenges the audience’s understanding of narrative and character. Through the audience’s continual re-assessment of these central aspects of the *Monogatari* series, the audience is able to develop a deeply intimate understanding of character through their despair, reflecting the Shaft attitude towards despair, comedy and its connection to audience intimacy with the story.

Looking at the series organization of *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei*, *Madoka Magica*, and the *Monogatari* series, an extreme attention to series structure, and how it can be used to influence a show’s relationship between the comedic and the despairing can be seen across the Studio Shaft filmography. In *Sayonara Zetsubou*
Sensei, narrative causality is removed to construct a specific accumulation of humor, which in turn works to balance with the comedy of despair that the show presents. In contrast to Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei, Madoka Magica illustrates one way in which Shaft works with a chronologically presented causal narrative until the point of a major flashback, which in turn undercuts the audience’s experience with the narrative and characters of the show thus far, and additionally re-locates the comedic and the despairing within the narrative itself. The Monogatari series then combines two of the major techniques of Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei and Madoka Magica (non-chronological narrative presentation and extensive use of flashbacks), with the added complication of unreliable narrators in a causal narrative. This works, again to make the audience constantly re-consider its understanding of narrative and character while revealing further character despair through each audience revelation. All of these approaches to series structure share one element in common: they develop an intimate relationship between audience and character through a deep understanding of character comedy and despair, reflecting the studio’s larger worldview of expressing the fluidity between the two.

A Narrative Driven by a Cast of Eccentrics

Over the course of this chapter, it is apparent that that the narratives of Studio Shaft shows are dependent on the specific personalities of their characters. Shaft works are incredibly character-driven narratives, and some of the most commonly featured characters can be defined as nothing other than eccentrics. Their presence has come to be one of the defining character traits that are essential to the specific brand of Shaft-style offbeat humor. Eccentrics in a Studio Shaft narrative can be
defined as characters with certain personality traits, an outlook on life, or specific quirks that are unorthodox from the expectations of normal society and or expectations of character archetypes typical to the anime industry. The eccentricity of these characters holds a close relationship to Shaft-style despair in how through the audience’s understanding of eccentric characters, despair towards society and or the self is revealed. By examining the definition and function of eccentric characters in Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei, Arakawa Under the Bridge, and Denpa Onna to Seishun Otoko, the way in which their eccentricity reveals despair, and how that contributes to a growing intimacy between character and audience can be clearly seen. Whereas the eccentrics of Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei are essential to creating the specific brand of ‘the comedy of despair’ that directs despair outward in a bitingly cynical look at modern society, eccentrics in Arakawa Under the Bridge direct despair inward, showing how character eccentricity can reveal deeply personal sadness. In the same vein, eccentricity in Denpa Onna to Seishun Otoko directs despair neither outward nor inward, rather, it functions as a window to past trauma, and as a positive coping mechanism to live in society. These three shows all demonstrate a distinct attitude towards the definition and function of eccentric characters in Shaft narratives, but each fulfills a similar function to reveal despair, and create an intimate relationship with the audience through their understanding of character despair.

Cynicism and Despair through the Eccentric Cast Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei

The characters of Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei each embody a specific undesirable quirk of personality, so if what comprises character eccentricity is their
undesirable traits, then it is in essence their personal despair. Rather than hide it, though, these characters not only relish in it, but their comedy is dependent upon it. Character’s do not acknowledge their eccentricity as something despairing, even though it encompasses the Shaft definition of despair, therefore it can be used for comedic ends. Character eccentricity informs the comedy that comes out of how they interact with the aspects of society that are examined in the show as worthy of despair, and the audience’s understanding of each character’s specific brand of eccentricity (and how that will inform their comedic interaction with the issue at hand) works to develop and intimate relationship between character and audience.

The characters themselves are the first step in understanding how Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei achieves its comedy of despair. As previously discussed, in a more conventional harem anime, characters often conform to certain archetypes common to the genre which inform their behavior and outlook on the world. Some of these archetypes are, for example, the childhood friend, the shy one, the sporty one, etc. Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei’s characters are also characterized through the use of archetypes, however, rather than use these prescribed archetypes common to anime, the character archetypes in Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei epitomize a trait that is either undesirable within modern Japanese society, or simply humorous for the sake of being so.

Each character in Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei is not ‘normal’ by any means, both in terms of regular society and anime character archetypes (with the exception of the character who’s only trait is that she is completely and utterly normal, and is aptly named Nami Hitō, a bit of wordplay to be translated as ‘normal person.’). While
playing the role of role-model teacher, Itoshiki-sensei is manic-depressive and exclaims despair with regard to anything and everything in modern Japanese society. From Itoshiki-sensei on, more strange characters are introduced: Chiri Kitsu (a play on the Japanese word for “precise,” きっちり kicchiri) who maintains an obsessive compulsive need for perfection to the point of comedic violence, Kiri Komori (a play on the Japanese word for “shut-in,” 引きこもり hikikomori) who is a shut-in at home who becomes a shut-in at the school, and Abiru Kobushi (a play on the Japanese expression “to bathe in fists,” 拳浴びる kobushiabiru) who is believed by all to be constantly covered in bandages because of issues with domestic violence, but actually appears so due to injuries sustained from her obsessive need to chase animal tails.

The show is deliberately not trying to be nuanced in its characterization, as evidenced by their pun-laden names, but rather is bitingly cynical in its portrayal of Japanese stereotypes, bringing them out to comedic ends. For example, the student Ai Kaga’s quirk is that she is always apologizing, epitomizing the stereotype that Japanese people apologize for anything and everything. On the other hand, another student, Mayo Mitama’s distinctive feature is that she looks mean and consistently does bad things, however because no one believes that someone could look so mean and be responsible for such bad behavior, her actions go unnoticed. This is not playing to any specific stereotype, but rather is a funny quirk for the sake of being so that allows the character to commit a variety of otherwise deplorable actions under the blanket definition of her individual quirk. By having these characters so clearly defined by their eccentricity, any action that they do is thus informed by it, giving a near
limitless number of humorous situations to put these characters in to repeat and vary the defining humor of the show.

It is apparent that the episode and series structure of *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* is based around its characters. Over the course of the initial season, each character is introduced, and their specific personality quirk becomes a major part of the punch line for the joke of the episode. For example, one segment in season one devotes itself to making humorous a stalker student of Itoshiki-sensei’s, while another addresses a student with a split personality disorder. Whereas over the course of the *Monogatari* series, each character introduction revolves around solving a supernatural problem that sheds light on the character’s inner psychology, *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* does nothing of that sort, choosing rather to use the characters and their individual personality problems as the cause or punch line of the joke. Through its character introductions, *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei*’s commitment to using character eccentricity and its interaction with the despair of society to comedic ends is clearly seen.

Moving into later seasons then, when there are no more characters to be introduced, *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* is able to maintain its use of character eccentricity interacting with the ills of society by not keeping the punch line confined to character identity, but by moving characters into situations that highlight further flaws of Japanese society. By having the characters interact with these new situations, *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* expands its comedic space to address something seen through the lens of these characters’ eccentricities, and this is supported by the episode structure.
Each arc of an episode continues in a similar pattern revolving around an aspect of life in Japan, Japanese culture, or an idiom that is taken through a logical progression to the extreme, or taken far too literally. Itoshiki-sensei will discuss something otherwise considered normal with his class, and through that discussion he will come to a realization on how this normal thing or aspect of society warrants despair, usually followed with the “絶望した！” (zetsubou shita!) “I’m in despair!” catchphrase. He will then proceed to provide more examples and expand upon that particular brand of despair through his own conjectures and those of his students. As students then contribute to the discussion, their conjectures are in turn colored by the nature of their eccentricity, and the episode ends either on some kind of resolution or non sequitur. Through quick and witty dialogue that is centered around character eccentricity leading to this comedic progression of finding and addressing despair, Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei is able to develop its own brand of the comedy of despair, which is wholly dependent on character eccentricity.

Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei’s near-procedural progression through comedy can be seen clearly at work in Zoku Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei episode 4. The episode begins at a festival where Kitsu and Kafuka complement each other on their yukatas (Japanese summer kimono), only to have Itoshiki-sensei come and compliment them on their cell phone straps. This leads into Itoshiki-sensei’s realization of a new cause for despair, where he states:

I understand what you mean, however, it can’t be helped! For some reason, humans are creatures who are drawn away from the main point! They focus on the sponsor name on his chest instead of the actual match! They focus on the position of Takuya Kimura’s mustache instead of the actual movie! The suspect’s unusual name instead of the crime committed! Once your attention’s been drawn, that’s all you can think about, and you completely forget the main point. Consequently, “Takuya Kimura’s mustache was high” was all I got out of the movie.
This is then followed up by Kitsu’s own take on the point of comedic despair that

Itoshiki-sensei has introduced, where she states:

These are English exercises. Translate into English: “What is this? It is bread.” You don’t
know what that is?! Shouldn’t it be obvious?! It’s bread! The fact that he doesn’t know what
bread is, is a bigger problem than the problem itself.

Kitsu’s commitment to perfection and proper logic is thus reflected in how she views
Itoshiki-sensei’s cause for despair: she cannot bear the illogic of someone not
knowing what bread is, and is therefore drawn away from the main point, the English
exercise. Following this, Itoshiki-sensei moves into his often-repeated “I’m in
despair!” exclamation, and from there the despair of losing the main point is brought
to an extreme when aliens begin to attack. After witnessing a huge battle where Kitsu
is able to defeat the aliens single-handedly, the episode caps itself off by pointing out
that even in the face of an alien attack, everyone still lost sight of the main point:

Itoshiki: Man, this episode had an excellent story.
Kafuka: It ruled, teacher! A battle that will leave its mark on the history of Earth!
Itoshiki: B-by the way…
Kafuka: What is it?
Itoshiki: I was so bothered by the fact that “fart” was written on the alien robot… that I don’t
remember the main point of the battle.
Ikkyu-san: And all I can remember are the bell peppers on her underwear.
Kitsu: I’m in despair.

Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei is an incredibly cynical social satire that is committed to
showing through its characters, as one writer states, “how ridiculous, illogical and
stupid the world gets at times, with people acting accordingly.” Itoshiki-sensei’s
offbeat considerations of these topics combined with how the students react in line
with their own individual quirks form the basis of the comedy of despair.

Aside from the humor that these characters can generate through the
interaction between their personality quirks and the aspects of society worthy of
despair, their eccentricities reveal another layer of personal character despair. As
Reddit user /u/kaverik comments, “everything in the anime is told from their perspective, so it's a rare opportunity to see how these abnormal, socially awkward and slightly mentally ill people perceive reality and society.”

Although Itoshiki-sensei’s near-constant manic-depressive spirals into despair are played for comedic ends, it cannot be ignored that it is his specific eccentricity to view everything in a negative light that is truly cause for despair. This extends to his students as well, as his students, through the specifics of their individual eccentric personality trait, additionally come to find aspects of society and themselves as cause for despair (with the exception of Kafuka, whose defining trait is to see everything in a positive light).

Over the course of Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei, even though the main priority is comedy, to which characters’ eccentricities are essential, the fact that it is only these undoubtedly eccentric characters that continually find the aspects of society worthy of despair reveals that it is through eccentricity that despair is revealed.

The Eccentrics versus the Normie in Arakawa Under the Bridge

Rather than direct despair outward (as in Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei), Arakawa Under the Bridge uses its ensemble cast of eccentrics to direct despair inwards towards the protagonist, using their presence in contrast to his supposed normalcy to reveal his hidden eccentricity, and by extension, despair. Whereas eccentric characters in Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei are defined by their eccentricity, and that trait often becomes a part of the punch line of a certain joke and is used to reveal an aspect of society over which to despair, Arakawa Under the Bridge presents its eccentric characters in a very matter-of-fact way. Their specific quirks are not the definition of the kind of humor that they can achieve, but instead provide various
opportunities for humor through their interactions with each other and Kō. Rather, the show uses the eccentricity of others in contrast to supposed normalcy to reveal the hidden eccentricity and despair towards the self.

*Arakawa Under the Bridge* follows Kō Ichinomiya, the near stereotypical image of the ideal Japanese businessman, who follows his father’s (the head of the large Ichonomiya conglomerate) advice to never be indebted to anyone. After an incident in which a homeless girl called Nino, who believes she is from Venus and lives under the Arakawa Bridge, saves his life, he now finds himself indebted to her. Unable to accept this, in trying to repay her, Kō discovers that Nino’s only desire is to discover love, and thus she asks him to be her boyfriend. Obliging to repay his debt, this prompts Kō to leave behind his luxurious life, and begin living with Nino and the rest of the residents under the Arakawa Bridge.

Kō at first acts as the anchor of normalcy to every other character’s eccentricity. Kō sees himself as the definition of ideal success, and at first acts as the voice of socially acceptable reason when seen in comparison to the rest of the residents of the Arakawa Bridge. As the series progresses, each character is revealed to have a certain specific quirk of personality. These range from the village chief, who proclaims himself to be a 620-year-old kappa\(^{vi}\) (in reality he is just wearing a kappa suit), to Sister, a British war veteran who wears a nun’s outfit and holds an unorthodox mass every day, to the metal brothers, Tetsuo and Tetsuro, who proclaim to be psychics and constantly wear metal head masks for fear of floating away. However, rather than these quirks of personality forming a kind of societal criticism as they do in *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei*, it is the interaction between Kō, whose

\(^{vi}\) *Kappa*: a humanoid reptile demon from Japanese folklore
initial defining feature is idealized normalcy, and these eccentrics that reveal an inner despair for Kō himself. At the start of the series, Kō is highly cynical and judgmental of the Arakawa villagers, frequently making fun of them, questioning their common sense, or simply refusing to acknowledge them. As Kō spends more time and becomes integrated into the village, though, befriending villagers and taking on a job, he becomes less cynical of the villagers, and comes to take a direct part in village life. This progresses to the point at which he is willing to defend the villagers from his father and the conglomerate, the only thing that Kō is truly afraid of, which wishes to develop the area under the bridge.

Kō’s slow movement to realizing his inner despair through interacting with the eccentricity of the villagers can be seen as early as episode 2, in which he comes to accept an act of kindness from Nino. In want of a bath after moving beneath the bridge, he finds Nino bathing in an oil drum along the river. Initially shocked and confused, Kō panics out of uncertainty if it is socially acceptable for him to be there. Kō comes to the conclusion that “I need to make up for her lack of common sense,” and as she begins to get out of the tub naked out in the open while he protests, she reveals to his surprise that she has been wearing a towel in the bath the whole time. After Nino offers, Kō then proceeds to get in the bath, and soon Nino begins to wash his hair for him. As she washes his hair, Kō reminisces about the one time that his father washed his hair for him as a child, but was then brought to a rude awakening when his father told him that he “must return the favor I did for you,” and that this would be “the last time we do any favors for each other,” as Kō cried over washing his father’s hair. At first upset that she is now doing another favor for him, Kō cannot
bring himself to protest for fear that if he spoke, she would realize that her act of kindness brought him to tears. When he tells her later that he will try and repay her, she cuts him off, telling Kō that “I washed your hair because I wanted to,” and thanks him for allowing her to do it. In this action, Kō is so struck by her kindness that he cannot bring himself to respond. In this short action, Kō was brought from criticism of Nino informed by the fact that he knows that she is an eccentric, to participating in the activity he initially was disagreeable to, to finally being struck with a realization a source of his personal sadness that ends up bringing him closer to Nino.

Kō’s progression towards acceptance and integration with the villagers of Arakawa calls into question his very own ideals of normalcy while also bringing out the parts of himself that he has deliberately denied. Through Kō’s interaction with eccentrics of the Arakawa village, he is drawn into understanding and participating in the mindset of the villagers, and he finds the eccentricity within himself, letting go of his need for normalcy and perfectionism and allowing himself to indulge in the ins and outs of village life. By bringing out his own personal eccentricity, Kō comes to realize the true despair of the normal life that he thought was perfection. Showing how the supposedly ideal citizen, when confronted with a group of eccentrics, finds happiness, Arakawa Under the Bridge uses eccentricity to reveal the despair of what is commonly considered the ideal life in a celebration of eccentricity itself.

Reeling and Healing through Eccentricity in Denpa Onna to Seishun Otoko

One final example of Studio Shaft’s penchant for eccentric characters can be found through Denpa Onna to Seishun Otoko, which expands upon the ways in which
Shaft presents and has eccentric characters act within a given narrative. Eccentric characters are not presented as part of a joke punch line (as in *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei*) or as a matter of fact existence (as in *Arakawa Under the Bridge*). Rather, *Denpa Onna to Seishun Otoko* presents eccentricity as a trait that gives insight into character trauma and psychology, and eccentricity functions as a means of escape from it.

The story begins as Makoto Niwa transfers to a new school and goes to live with his aunt, only to find out that his aunt has a daughter, Erio Tōwa, a quiet and unsociable girl who continually wraps herself up in a futon, that he did not know about. Niwa slowly finds out about Erio’s past, learning that she disappeared for six months, and finally returned with no memories of her time away, believing that she is an alien sent to monitor humanity. He later discovers that following an incident where she broke her leg believing that she could fly, she became ostracized by her classmates, stopped attending school, and began continually wrapping herself up in a futon. The events of Erio’s missing six months are never revealed, but her actions following illustrate a kind of comfort in eccentricity that she finds as a means to heal.

*Denpa Onna to Seishun Otoko* tells the story of a single eccentric becoming ostracized, and how eccentricity comes to be used as a means of healing, as well as reeling from society. Through Erio’s developing relationship with Niwa, though, Erio’s eccentricity is shown not to be the barrier to participation in society that it is so often implied to be. Over the course of the series, Niwa develops a relationship with Erio, slowly helping her to integrate back into society by helping her get a job, and introducing her to the various other friends he has made at his school. In *Denpa Onna*
to Seishun Otoko, eccentricity serves as a means to escape from despair, and is also re-cast outside of a purely negative light, as is seen through Erio re-developing friendships with those who previously ousted her. The audience’s coming to understand the internal logic of Erio’s eccentricity mirrors that of the characters within the story, illustrating how Erio and the rest of the casts come to accept and understand eccentricity itself outside of a negative connotation.

Erio’s despair prompts the start of her eccentric behavior and gives insight into an unknown past trauma. As the series goes on, it demonstrates that eccentricity does have a place in society as a means of escape from despair, and that this is not necessarily a negative thing. Looking at Denpa Onna to Seishun Otoko within the Studio Shaft filmography, it stands as another example of Shaft’s attraction to eccentric characters, and use of them to reveal the most negative aspects (despair) for the characters or the world itself. Denpa Onna to Seishun Otoko takes Shaft’s attraction to the eccentric and rather than use it to reveal despair towards society (as in Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei) or despair towards the self (as in Arakawa Under the Bridge), eccentricity is used as a shield from personal despair itself.

Throughout the Studio Shaft filmography, most narratives include the presence of eccentric characters through which some kind of despair is revealed. Whereas in Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei, the eccentricity of characters is essential to creating the comedy of despair, in Arakawa Under the Bridge the presence of eccentric characters reveals Kō’s inner eccentricity and despair. Finally, in Denpa Onna to Seishun Otoko, eccentricity is used as a way to escape from personal despair. Eccentric characters maintain a different relationship to comedy and despair –
and through the audience’s understanding of it, their eccentricity can contribute to
comedy, as well as reveal upon closer examination character psychology and flaw,
ultimately working towards developing an intimate relationship between character
and audience based on knowledge of character eccentricity’s relationship to their
comedy and despair.

**Shifting Tones through Rhythm and Structure of Dialogue**

The rhythm and structure of character dialogue is one main vehicle through
which Shaft is able to constantly shift between a comedic and despairing tone. All
shows maintain an element of despair, and it is the extent and way in which comedy
interacts with despair through dialogue that is a major contributor to setting the
primary tone for a series. Shifts between comedy and despair are sometimes subtl,
like when a moment of character banter seems comedic at first, but then when looked
at in a different or larger context reveals a character’s inner turmoil. Shifts can also be
much more literal, like when characters go from a casual conversation in one moment
to suddenly having to face some kind of large scale external opposition. In the
construction of character dialogue, subjects move freely between moments of joy and
humor, to deep character insight, and then return to the comedic, revealing how
character humor and despair are inexorably tied to character relationships with each
other and the audience. The audience comes to develop a level of intimacy with
characters through an understanding not only of what constitutes their personal
despair, but also knowing how that base line level of despair informs their character’s
comedy. The presence of despair does not necessarily mean the absence of comedy, and this is reflected through character dialogue that supports the presence of both. Looking at how dialogue rhythm and organization works in the *Monogatari* series and *Nisekoi*, the way in which Shaft uses character dialogue to accomplish quick tonal shifts between comedy and despair are readily apparent. The two series do not share the same writer of the original work, therefore the fact that they both maintain the same attitude towards how dialogue influences tone illustrates the extent to which this approach to dialogue is an essential aspect of Shaft style. Whereas the *Monogatari* series is slightly less focused on comedy in comparison to *Nisekoi*, in which a comedic tone is the norm, the similarities between how the series construct dialogue passages that swiftly move between comedic and despairing subjects reveal how the rhythm and structure of dialogue is critical to a show’s ability to carry the overarching Shaft attitude towards illustrating the fluidity between comedy and despair.

**Relationships Built through Humor and Sadness in The *Monogatari* Series**

One aspect of the *Monogatari series* that cannot be ignored is the sharp banter between characters, which is essential to accomplishing the kind of quick tonal shifts between comedy and despair that define the series. The banter that characters share, whether primarily comedic, despairing, or a combination, refines the audiences’ perception of their relationship.

The narrative of the *Monogatari* series is, thus far (as of this thesis’ completion, the full *Monogatari* series will not have been released in full) wholly
despairing, featuring characters who face trouble after trouble in recognizing, addressing, and living with their own inner demons and the parts of themselves they do not wish to acknowledge, as represented or catalyzed by different spiritual oddities. Over the course of the narrative, characters face both internal and external challenges to their individual perceptions of themselves, of others, and of the story itself. While each new arc only works to present more problems for these characters, the Monogatari series maintains an element of levity, which can in part be attributed to the series’ frequent use of tonal shifts between despair and comedy. Through Nisioisin’s (author of the novel series) skills in dialogue construction, conversations freely enter various tangents where seemingly unrelated topics become thematically relevant, only to return to the main topic, and shift between the comedic and despairing over the course of as little as one line. Characters can easily move back and forth between the highly metaphorical, the comedic, the depressing, and the joyous, making the quick and witty dialogue and wordplay essential to the series’ ability to fluidly move between tones, and not allow the Monogatari series to fall into complete despair.

The kind of wordplay within the Monogatari series can be seen directly at work over the course of Bakemonogatari episode 3. Taking place shortly after Araragi aided Senjōgahara with her oddity (in which she had no weight), on Mother’s Day, Araragi decides to leave his home after an argument with his sisters, and after wandering around town for a while finds himself alone at an empty park. Before long, Senjōgahara finds him there, and they begin to talk. On Araragi’s questioning, Senjōgahara reveals that the park is near where she used to live, enlightening the
thematic relevance of the time and place of their meeting: Araragi is in the park because he wished to escape from his mother, and Senjōgahara is there because she wanted to return to a place she associates with her mother. While the specific reason for their meeting being in relation to their respective mothers is less important, what is significant is in how this parallel reason for their being in the park is the first step in the relationship building between them that will continue through the course of the episode.

Senjōgahara tells Araragi that she wishes to find a way to express her gratitude for Araragi’s help, and from here the conversation proceeds in an entirely circular fashion. Touching on the subject of what Senjōgahara can do to for Araragi, the conversation moves into a tangent as a result of speculating what things she can do, returns to the main subject, and ultimately moves on to another tangent.

Within the narrative context, what tangents are covered in conversation are highly revealing of the developing relationship between Araragi and Senjōgahara. As a survivor of sexual assault and the victim of many fraudulent “fixers” for her oddity, the fact that Senjōgahara first questions Araragi if he intends to use her offer of gratitude as a sexual favor is highly significant. Due to the story being told from Araragi’s perspective with him as the narrator, this testing is not immediately apparent, as he does not realize that this is Senjōgahara’s intention. The conversation therefore plays out as an extended battle of seemingly irreverent banter that becomes a staple of their relationship. Even though Araragi is sometimes oblivious as to her true intentions, he can hold his own against Senjōgahara’s biting conversation. At the same time, though, Senjōgahara knows exactly what she wants out of the
conversation, but does not know how to get it.\textsuperscript{24} This back-and-forth banter in a kind of grasping to get one’s point across is a staple for dialogue not just within this episode, but across the \textit{Monogatari} series, and is exemplified in the scene excerpt for \textit{Bakemonogatari} episode 3 (Appendix A). Senjōgahara begins by continuing her teasing and testing of Araragi by goading him into requesting a variety of odd sexual favors. After his continued disagreement, though, she finally arrives at the conclusion that she can trust him, as she has not been able to do with anyone previously. This is stated in a very backhanded manner though, as she incorporates her conclusion that he “wouldn’t ever ask for anything erotic” into more teasing about his virginity. She proceeds on a tangent of her sexual experience relative to his, and when Araragi finally goads her into being honest rather than irreverent with him, the scene swiftly shifts into a more despairing tone, as she incorporates her admission of her own virginity into both another jab at Araragi with a self-deprecating but honest admission about herself. Senjōgahara shifts the conversation from humorous jest towards Araragi, and trying to figure out what his intentions are, to an honest and self-aware admission of personal despair. This swift movement between the comedic and despairing through dialogue structure is additionally supported by visual style. For shots 1-18 of this segment, Senjōgahara is always above or moving ahead of Araragi (a visual trend continued from earlier in the episode). When the scene takes a sharp turn toward the despairing through Senjōgahara’s admission though, this is ushered in by two very fast cuts (shots 22-23) that visually punctuate the shift. Senjōgahara’s switch in direction, now aggressively moving towards Araragi (as opposed to her movement above and away from him as has been the norm throughout the episode)
further marks this distinct tonal shift, and happens alongside a change in her voice tone, speaking faster and more pugnaciously than before. Araragi’s final reaction shot (shot 26) adds one final visual beat to the scene, displaying how he is so taken aback by this sudden shift in tone, and scrambles to respond. Following a commercial break as indicated in the following shot (shot 27), the conversation returns to the original topic, with a self-aware statement acknowledging just how far of a tangent these two characters have gone on to. Over the course of this bit of conversation, the two characters are able to shift from humorous teasing into legitimate and deep self-reflection within a span of 1-2 lines of dialogue.

This constant exchange, moving between casual teasing into legitimate personal concern, affects the audience’s perception of tone: whether the conversation is in a place of comedy or despair demands the audience’s constant attention to discern between the two, and ultimately blurs the line between the comedic and despairing, showing instead the fluidity between the two. Even though their banter revolves around the immediate topic of each other’s sexual experience, it additionally works as a marker of their growing closeness in how they sequentially become more honest with each other. As the episode progresses, even though the conversation’s catalyst is a show of gratitude to Araragi, the subtext is that Senjōgahara wants to be able to ask Araragi to date her, but only once she can be on equal footing without any sense of debt. As is evidenced through their long and thematically dense dialogue though, the combination of Senjōgahara’s struggle with directly expressing herself, coupled with Araragi not picking up on her attempts to get closer to him, makes the dialogue move into a circular progression through teasing, tangents, and wordplay.
While the dialogue does maintain comedy, this moment and the episode at large is essentially an extended interaction between two confused teenagers who cannot fully express themselves to each other, and continue trying to do so throughout the series. The calculated but also tangential shifts in subject matter allow for quick movement between tones as the conversation continues. By allowing the conversation to jump in a variety of directions, the audience slowly comes to see the developing relationship between Araragi and Senjōgahara beyond the events of her oddity and into a teasing but also romantic relationship.

Within the tonal shifts between comedy and despair that run throughout the Monogatari series, recurring jokes are additionally vital to maintaining the series’ humor, and keep it from falling to a show entrenched in despair. As Araragi’s relationship with each character develops, his comedic interactions with characters each tend to take on their own personality. For example, much of the humor of interactions between Senjōgahara and Araragi lie in her back-and-forth between teasing (which is horribly degrading) and expression of deep admiration and love. By contrast, Kanbaru and Araragi’s specific brand of humor often includes her teasing Araragi through her joking sexual advances, but is balanced out by their deep friendship and how ready and willing they are to do whatever they can to help each other. As a third example, the humor of Hachikuji’s interactions with Araragi are usually the product of their back-and-forth in wordplay, the running gag of Hachikuji mispronouncing Araragi’s name, and other irreverent humor, but Hachikuji additionally functions as trusted confidante for Araragi, as she consistently gives him the proper advice he is in search of. Looking at Kanbaru versus Hachikuji’s most
common humorous topics in comparison, the exchanges between the two characters is important not just for comedy itself, but for understanding the nuances between character relationships.

Over the course of Kanbaru’s arc (Suruga Monkey) in *Bakemonogatari*, it is revealed that she is in love with Senjōgahara, and it is implied that they possibly had a relationship before the start of the series. Therefore, as Senjōgahara’s current boyfriend, Araragi stood in competition to Kanbaru over the course of her arc. Following Kanbaru and Araragi’s reconciliation and developed friendship, their banter back and forth about sex and sexuality, as well as Kanbaru’s sexual advances play off as both humorous and revealing of the strength of their relationship. This can be seen clearly through their extended conversation in *Owarimonogatari* episode 7.

Continuing a narrative thread from a previous arc, needing to follow through his promise to introduce Izuko Gaen to her niece Kanbaru, Araragi asks Kanbaru to meet him at night at the deserted cram school. Kanbaru arrives in a grand entrance where she knees Araragi in the face, and the two continue into another process of circular conversation. The first conversation iteration moves from why Araragi called Kanbaru there, to why Kanbaru didn’t need to apologize for kneeling Araragi in the face upon her entrance, to her love of imagining cute page boys are on her knees, to how Araragi’s text to her was suggestively misleading, and back to the main topic. The second iteration of the conversation follows a similar pattern, and a text flash stating “Back to the main subject” separates both. The structure of the third iteration of their conversation mirrors that of Araragi and Senjōgahara’s (as well as many others throughout the *Monogatari* series) in its fluid movement from the main topic.
into various tangents and back to the main topic, which can be seen in the following excerpt:

Araragi: I want you to meet someone. I was asked by someone to introduce you, so…
Kanbaru: Oh, well. If it’s something you say, Araragi-senpai, there’s no mistake about it.
A: If possible, I’d like you to cut your trust in me by like half… But it’s all right. At the least, it won’t be a boy or girl confessing their love to you. It’s nothing of that sort.
K: I wouldn’t mind if it was that sort either, you know. I’d flat out reject them. Of course, it’d be different if the punch line was like ‘the one I wanted to introduce to you… Is me!’
A: Don’t take every chance to try dating me. Just how sexually aggressive are you?
K: No, I’m not trying to date you. All I want is a physical relationship. Since I’m sexually aggressive, I’d like to make the preying one-sided.
A: (thinks) I’ve got shivers up my spine
K: I don’t believe in mental connections at all!
A: What happened to make you like this? More like, what are you thinking about as you live your life?
K: If it looks like I’m thinking about something, you probably should take me to the hospital. And returning to our subject! Okey dokey Araragi-senpai, I understand the details. Let us be on our way! To some place that I don’t know of, to meet someone who I don’t know!
A: (thinks) You really are amazing…

Araragi and Kanbaru’s specific brand of off-beat humor goes through various tangents, but the one most commonly returned to is Kanbaru acting jokingly suggestive towards Araragi, which he fully understands as a joke. To an audience that is aware of their previous relationship, their sexual humor is in part the product of Kanbaru’s previous (and unknown if still current) despair in her inability to be in a romantic relationship with Senjōgahara. Although the two have long moved on from this point of conflict, the fact that it was from Kanbaru’s unrequited feelings that their relationship began is apparent in the development of their specific brand of humor. Visual style even works to remind the audience of their past conflict, as before this excerpt after Kanbaru enters and kneels Araragi in the face, although it does not hurt him because of his vampire abilities, there are still quick screen flashes of Kanbaru’s monkey arm, showing how Araragi clearly remembers Kanbaru’s extreme physical strength as the result of her oddity from their conflict in Bakemonogatari. Kanbaru’s brand of humor with Araragi is clearly developed from their past traumatic
experience as romantic rivals with each other. However, because their banter is grounded in mutual humor rather than despair, their interactions point to how their relationship has been able to develop into a strong friendship in which they are able to share, understand, and partake in this specific kind of humor that is special to them alone.

By contrast, Araragi’s humor with Hachikuji differs greatly than that of his with Kanbaru. Araragi and Hachikuji’s most humorous conversations often involve a high level of wordplay ranging from sentence structure, to the construction of kanji characters, to questions about perceiving one’s world around them, to outright teasing. Like Kanbaru with Araragi, Hachikuji’s specific humor with him hearkens back to the initial establishment of their relationship during her arc in *Bakemonogatari* (Mayoi Snail). Hachikuji is an oddity, the “lost snail,” who appears only to those who do not wish to be found and keeps them lost. Araragi originally met her in this context, on the same Mother’s Day when Senjōgahara found him at the park, because he did not want to be home. Knowing this about herself, she originally avoided interacting with Araragi, using her flubbing of his name, as well as incomprehensible and degrading wordplay, to not have him interact with her, so he would not become victim to herself as an oddity. By the end of her arc in *Bakemonogatari*, though, Araragi helps Hachikuji to finally find her way home, thus pseudo-curing the way in which she makes those who surround her lost. As their friendship develops past this point, the humorous wordplay, teasing, and name flubbing of their initial conversation continues. However, it takes on a new purpose of not being to keep Araragi away, but is a heartfelt aspect of their relationship. A complete turnaround from the initial terms
of their meeting, Araragi purposefully seeks out Hachikuji to engage in a language of humor that is all their own, which is grounded in the initial terms of their meeting.

The developed closeness of Araragi and Hachikuji’s relationship can be seen clearly in their conversation in Nisemonogatari episode 1. On a day where Araragi’s tutoring was cancelled, in an effort to keep himself occupied he decides to spend time with Sengoku, and on his way there, he runs into Hachikuji. As the two walk to a café, they discuss the growth of “Araragi’s harem,” as well as Meme’s recent departure from the town. As they walk, various street signs, traffic lights, and other sorts of construction materials flash on the screen (Appendix G). This, combined with the subject matter of their conversation, serves as both a visual representation of their walking through the city, but also acts as a visual cue reminding the audience of Hachikuji’s death from a traffic accident, therefore placing their specific brand of humor in the context of its prior development. When the two arrive at the café, Araragi finally arrives at his main point, asking Hachikuji’s advice as to if he should tell his family about his condition as a half vampire. As the two discuss, jokes are equally interspersed with serious inquiry, and their dialogue moves swiftly between the comedic and despairing, as can be seen in the following passage:

Araragi: Anyways, that’s not it, Hachikuji. Oh, right… I guess I can tell you. You know I’m actually a vampire, right?
Hachikuji: I see, Shuraragi-san.
A: That name’s pretty cool, and honestly, I’d like to change mine to it. But Hachikuji, I’ve told you over and over. My name is Araragi.
H: Sorry! I bit my tongue.
A: No, you did it deliberately.
H: I bwit my twongue!
A: It wasn’t deliberate?!
H: Seen the Family Mart?
A: No, I don’t know where the convenience store is! Is it love? Are you going to buy love? For 298 yen?
H: I see, a vampire. But what about it?
A: Well, it’s really hard to tell my family about it, you know? But I’m not sure if it’s something I can hide forever.
H: I don’t think it’s really necessary to just come out and tell them. I think keeping a secret or two from your family is natural.
A: Hachikuji...
H: For one thing, sharing your secret with someone means you involve them in your problems. It may make things easier for you, but your family could end up suffering for it.
A: That’s true, isn’t it...
H: Right now, what you need is: the courage to keep your secret to yourself!

Within the conversation itself, like those previously seen with Senjōgahara and Kanbaru, Hachikuji and Araragi move through their discussion in an utterly circular fashion. Araragi begins soliciting serious advice from Hachikuji, they move into Hachikuji messing up Araragi’s name (a running gag between the two of them, always taking on the same line-by-line format). They then return to a reference to an earlier part of the conversation about buying love at a convenience store, and circle back to Araragi’s issue in telling his family that he is a vampire. During the joking and irreverent portions of the conversation, the voice actors’ line delivery speeds up, and as they go deeper into bringing back the irreverent points of conversation, Araragi especially becomes more comically distraught. This change in vocal tone escalates up until Hachikuji then calmly brings the conversation back to Araragi and his family. This conversation encapsulates both the momentary humor achieved by the characters’ banter, but also touches on an important and upsetting issue for Araragi. Their collective humor keeps the scene from delving too deeply into the serious, but this does not mean that the serious is lacking in emotional weight.

Furthermore, this conversation reveals how Hachikuji has become a confidante to him in soliciting solid advice. Continuing past this conversation excerpt, after Hachikuji has convinced Araragi that he is okay to not let his family members know about his condition, the two move into a discussion of how adding “the courage to” in front of anything makes it sound positive. This second tangential shift is yet another episode
of humorous wordplay, adding a moment of levity to the conversation, only to return back to Araragi’s problem later on. By looking at the initial context of meeting, and development of tone, topic, and content encompassing Araragi’s relationship with Kanbaru and Hachikuji respectively, it is apparent how the nature of the comedy between characters underscores individual character despair, but more importantly shapes the audience’s perception of the strength and specificity of their relationship.

While dialogue-based comedy in the Monogatari series is focused mostly on momentary delight from the immediate presence of recurring jokes, wordplay, and specific comedic relationships, it is despair that runs through the core of the Monogatari series. Through the impeccable organization of dialogue structure and rhythm, the consistent attention to movement between comedy and despair illustrates the nuances of specific character relationships, and is crucial to the audience’s ability to see growing relationships between characters, as well as develop a sense of intimacy with the them.

**Laughs Masking Underlying Despair** *Nisekoi*

In *Nisekoi*, fast and shifting dialogue makes extreme the kind of teenage awkwardness and inability to express themselves that these characters go through on a daily basis. While this quick and uncomfortable dialogue works for immediate comedy, the fact that none of these characters can properly communicate or speak honestly with each other is at the same time undeniably upsetting.

Looking at Ichijō and Kirisaki especially, the way in which characters are set up to be primarily instigators of comedy that maintain a base level of despair is utterly apparent. While Ichijō is established as being smart, good looking, and liked
by many, his behavior and desires paint a picture of a dissatisfied youth who is completely unsure of himself with a crippling fear of disappointing anyone. This is evidenced through the extreme efforts he will go through to attain the approval of others out of fear that people will dislike him because of his yakuza family. Kirisaki as well maintains the appearance of being smart, pretty, and having a cheery personality. Despite this, her behavior additionally demonstrates that she is incredibly insecure, afraid to make friends with others (a product of her upbringing in a gang family), and has a horribly strained relationship with her mother (whom she is terrified to see and professes to spend mere hours with a year). The ways in which these characters cannot functionally interact are for the most part, played for comedy, such as episode 16, in which throughout the entire episode Ichijō tries to voice his feelings to Onodera while working in her family’s shop, and continually fails to do so, or when Onodera is consistently aided throughout the series by her brazen friend Ruri Miyamoto, who invents various situations for Ichijō and Onodera to be alone together. At the same time, though, this lack of proper communication can be flipped and played for despair, such as Seishirō Tsugumi’s (a long-time servant to Kirisaki’s family and friend of Kirisaki) constant awareness of her feelings towards Ichijō, but inability to say them out of her loyalty to Kirisaki. More blatantly, episodes 3-4 of the second season that address Kirisaki’s strained and distant relationship with her mother is perhaps the closest Nisekoi comes to slipping into true despair. Looking at the inability to express oneself as seen by Senjōgahara and Araragi in the Monogatari series, one could easily find a mirror image in how Ichijō struggles so to talk to Onodera or Kirisaki (both of whom he develops a romantic interest in).
As *Nisekoi* is a primarily comedic series though, careful construction of dialogue accompanying frequently used exaggerated comedic visuals never allows *Nisekoi* to delve too far deep into true despair. *Nisekoi* pays careful attention to frame its characters’ inability to communicate as mostly comedic, while also maintaining the ability to delve into the despairing at key moments. When the show does desire to delve into a more despairing mode, it is able to do so through its constant maintaining of an element of despair sitting right below the layers of built up comedy, which can be seen clearly in episode 18 (Appendix B). In this episode, Kirisaki comes to realize and struggles with the fact that she has developed feelings for her pretend boyfriend Ichijō. The two of them and their friends all go to spend a weekend at the beach together, and as Kirisaki comes to be certain that she has feeling for him, Ichijō notices that she is acting stranger than usual. Finding her sitting alone while the rest of the group are lighting fireworks, he goes up to her and asks her what is wrong.

Their conversation encapsulates two major aspects of Shaft despair: the inability to communicate with others and unrequited feelings, but through the rhythm and structure of dialogue working along with visual style, the scene keeps an element of comedy in a relatively uncharacteristically despairing moment. When Ichijō asks Kirisaki if she wants to discuss with him, his lines and Kirisaki’s reply in shot 1 are said in a sing-song intonation using Japanese formal speech\(^\text{vii}\), keeping his inquiry lighthearted, but nonetheless sincere. Kirisaki brings the conversation to a more serious tone by asking if Ichijō if he still hates her, showing how she is still apprehensive about expressing her feelings to him, as their relationship has been

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\(^\text{vii}\) Note on Language: Depending on context, Japanese formal speech can indicate sarcasm or joking, especially when used between two young people of the same age
mainly antagonistic friends up until this point. Trying not to reveal that she has feelings for him, Kirisaki keeps up her appearances by replying to Ichijō that she hates him. Her overdone reply coupled with the exaggerated animation in shot 7 adds comedy to the scene, but comedy’s presence works to hide Kirisaki’s despair – she has developed feelings for Ichijō and cannot bring herself to express them, so her comedic answer works to hide this fact. After her reply, though, she brings the conversation closer to what she really wants to say to Ichijō, prompting him to consider the idea of them in a relationship for real. This then launches Ichijō into a comedic state of panic, unsure what this question means for either of them, and forcing him to question his feelings towards both her and Onodera (on whom he has a crush). Similar to how Kirisaki’s comedy expresses her unrequited emotion outward in an attempt to hide her true feelings, his internal monologue humorously expresses how he is unsure of his own feelings. He recognizes that he has a crush on Onodera, but is then thrown into a panic when prompted to consider if, and possibly come to the conclusion that he does, actually have feelings for Kirisaki.

Ichijō’s answer that he does not think that they would have worked out as a real couple throws Kirisaki and the tone for the rest of the scene into complete despair, and this is supported through dialogue structure working alongside visual presentation. Immediately after Ichijō gives his answer, Kirisaki’s coloring in shot 25 has changed to put her in complete shadow. This distinct visual change from how she was previously lit in shot 23 and before mirrors her shift in mood. Additionally, the fact that after every major question or answer in the scene up until this point, either Ichijō or Kirisaki would launch into a comedic monologue of their thoughts, the fact that
she does not do this now furthers the gravity of her emotional change to the despairing. Rather than a comedic monologue where she would jokingly yell at him in a humorously exaggerated way, Kirisaki seriously shouts at Ichijō in shot 31. That any sort of comedic animation change (as it has been previously to maintain humor) does not accompany her shouting conveys to the audience the depth of her emotional turmoil. Not only is Kirisaki the victim of unrequited feelings, she was both rejected and never able to even convey her own feelings, and this despair is conveyed through her emotional outburst and its visual punctuation.

Even though Nisekoi is a primarily comedic show, its maintaining a base level of character despair that can be pulled to the forefront through dialogue construction illustrates the way in which carefully crafted dialogue passages are essential to Shaft’s ability to make frequent and extreme tonal shifts. Nisekoi prioritizes relationship and situational comedy (with support from visuals), but keeps prepared with relatively easy access the fact that, despite that these characters are comedic most of the time, there is an element of true despair that can be brought to the fore at any moment.

Careful construction and rhythm of character dialogue is an essential tool to Shaft’s ability to quickly shift between comedic and despairing tones. The audience’s ability to develop an intimate relationship with characters is accomplished in great part due to dialogue that grants the audience knowledge of both a character’s joy and what informs their personal despair. In the Monogatari series as well as Nisekoi, one of the great aspects of character despair is the inability to properly communicate with one another, and this is greatly reflected in how dialogue moves characters between
moments of joking with each other and to legitimate discussion or expression of past or present turmoil.

Shaft Style uses a distinct approach to narrative and style to highlight the fluidity of comedy and despair, and develop an intimate relationship between character and audience through their understanding of it. Within the Shaft definitions of comedy and despair, there exist different aspects of narrative and character that comprise the respective definitions. Despair is what informs a character’s psyche and attitude, most often in relation to past or present character physical or emotional trauma, the inability to communicate with others, and unrequited emotion. By contrast, comedy encapsulates character success, joy, and proper communication, but is additionally irreverence, sarcasm, and a kind of tongue-in-cheek attitude. Through Studio Shaft’s various approaches to aspects of narrative, including experimentation with genre expectations and series structure, the presence of eccentric characters, and the rhythm and structure of dialogue, the audience’s understanding of narrative and character is consistently challenged, working to create an intimate relationship between character and audience. Shaft using and altering genre expectations balances between fulfilling and undercutting the audience’s expectations in service of revealing character despair. Shaft’s approach to series organization works to similar ends, presenting stories non-chronologically in service of thematic organization, accumulation of humor, and undercutting the audience’s understanding of the narrative and characters. As is very apparent, Shaft narratives are incredibly character-driven, and the presence of eccentric characters proves crucial for the studio’s ability to use that eccentricity for both comedic purposes, and to highlight its
relationship to character despair. Finally, the rhythm and structure of character
dialogue freely moves between subjects revealing of character despair, or indulging in
their specific brand of comedy. An intimate relationship between character and
audience is developed through how all of the narrative devices that Shaft frequently
uses are in service of developing a deep understanding of what informs character
comedy and despair. This intimate relationship with characters is an essential tenet of
Shaft Style, and it is likely the studio’s consistent attention to crafting that
relationship that has made Shaft creative works notable and successful. The presence
of comedy, despair, and fluidity between the two forming a relationship between
character and audience is a consistent approach to expressing a studio worldview of
the creative hand of Studio Shaft.
Chapter 2: Style

The development of “Shaft Style” is contingent not only on narrative proclivities, but on how the studio’s brand of visual style works with narrative. With regard to visual style, “Shaft Style” is a distinctive approach to the animated medium that combines the talents and directorial tendencies of the Shaft cadre of directors and creators, and that uses the freedom of animation to show an extreme externalization of character emotion. Working in animation implies an inherent suspension of disbelief on the part of the audience, and Shaft uses this automatic suspension of disbelief to artistic ends, choosing to consistently use elements of style to further underscore the audience’s understanding of character emotion through the use of a collection of dominant stylistic choices. The main stylistic traits of Studio Shaft can be divided into four distinct qualities: editing and visual patterns, composition and staging, and visual shifts. All of these aspects of style work together to achieve the tonal shifts between comedy and despair and visualize character emotion. Although the dominant stylistic choices of Studio Shaft are at times used purely for graphic effects and visual interest, they primarily function to punctuate or provide subjective access to character emotion, facilitating a tonal shift between the comedic and despairing. The Shaft creative worldview of the fluidity between comedy and despair is expressed through the studio’s use of visual style working with narrative, functioning to create an intimate relationship between character and audience. While some techniques in Shaft editing patterns are not unique to the studio, anime, or even cinema itself, the way in which Shaft consistently utilizes these techniques as a common language greatly contributes to an understanding of Shaft style, and how it
works to build an intimate relationship between character and audience, the cornerstone of the studio’s success.

**Editing Patterns**

Studio Shaft anime maintains a baseline very low average shot length, and frequently use alterations to this baseline to indicate characters entering a heightened state of emotional expression. Frequent cuts that change the camera’s position to locations ranging from extreme close up, extreme long shot, or other places impossible to put the camera are commonly seen editing pattern in Shaft anime. The speed at which Shaft edits shots would be unsurprising for an action or fighting scene, however the standard fast editing speed of Shaft works is maintained irrelevant of narrative context. Compared to most TV-anime, which contains around 300 shots per episode, a given episode of a Studio Shaft anime is likely to have double that amount, sporting individual scenes that could have anywhere from 60-100 shots. Through this editing pattern, a kinetic energy from frequently moving from shot to shot is maintained throughout a show. Within this typical low average shot length, Shaft will frequently quicken the shot speed as a scene becomes more emotionally intense. This adjusted shot speed adds further kinetic energy to the scene, visually rendering heightened character emotion of the comedic, despairing, or shifting between the two. Looking at the *Monogatari* series, quickening editing patterns demonstrate how Shaft’s attention to shot length creates an externalization of character emotion for despair and comedy.

The way in which Shaft uses quickening shot length to visually express character emotion can be seen clearly in *Owarimonogatari* episode 3 in Araragi and
Sodachi Oikura’s conversation (Appendix C). In the previous episode, Araragi was reminded by Ougi about how two years prior, following an incident in which Oikura, his long-time mathematics rival, was wrongly accused of cheating on a math test in a class assembly that he was forced to facilitate, Oikura left school and Araragi had not heard from her since. The day following Araragi and Ougi’s conversation, Araragi learns of Oikura’s sudden re-appearance. Realizing that he needs to confront her, he finds Oikura, and feigns innocence as to knowing why she left school so soon after the incident two years prior. In his introduction, he jokingly introduces himself as if she has forgotten him, trying to push aside their past history. The conversation begins on a note of humor, with Araragi’s blatant over-compensation in trying to convince Oikura that he does not recognize her in shots 6-12. She sees through him, though, and Araragi finds that her hatred for him has grown exponentially over the years. The shot speed becomes suddenly quicker, with each shot lasting from 0.5-2 seconds, as Oikura’s hatred for Araragi becomes more apparent through her dialogue, and this is reflected in the shortened shot length in shots 14-28. The scene slowly returns to a slightly longer shot length between shots 40-50, with shot lengths between 3-5 seconds, as Oikura returns to more calmly accosting Araragi, until she cannot hold back anymore, and from shot 53 through to the end of the segment the shot length rapidly quickens, returning to the 0.5-2 second per shot speed.

The alternating shot length over the course of this scene visually externalizes both Araragi and Oikura’s emotional reaction to this conversation. The visual kinetic energy attained through the quickening shot speed mirrors Oikura’s rising and falling level of calmness, and progressively increasing rage towards Araragi. As this arc is
narrated via Araragi’s subjective perspective, though, the shorter shot lengths additionally create a feeling of him slowly losing control of the moment. The only time at which Araragi feels as though he is possibly in control is at the very start of the scene, especially notable in the lengthy shot 12, in which he still believes he may get out of this situation without any harsh feelings. As he progressively realizes that no reconciliation can be attained, the shot length in turn increases. The various short cuts to different camera angles of Oikura combined with fewer shots of Araragi create a visual feeling of him anxiously looking around, indicating to the audience that he is becoming more nervous and is losing control of the conversation. Throughout this scene, although the two characters remain essentially still, visual expression of Araragi and Oikura’s rising emotional states is attained by the visual energy that the alterations in shot length add, granting the audience access to the characters’ subjective emotional experience through visual style.

While through the scene it is readily apparent that Oikura is angry at Araragi, the way in which this editing pattern supports the audience’s understanding of Araragi’s loss of control is integral to the larger thematic implications of focusing on Araragi’s characterization within the arc. As previously discussed, later installments of the Monogatari series bring to focus the definition of Araragi’s personal despair – namely his insatiable need to be a savior to others. Owarimonogatari puts Araragi to the test in making him face Oikura, someone he neglected to save. Araragi knows that Oikura left school after a wrongful accusation, yet feigns innocence of that knowledge, pretending to not know why she hates him. Later in the arc, Araragi’s greater history with Oikura, which he additionally attempts to deny, is revealed. In
their middle school years, she tried to approach him for help with issues of domestic violence because his parents were police officers, and he failed to help her here as well, compounding her justification for hating him. The quickening shot length in this scene conveys Araragi’s increasing anxiety in response to Oikura’s anger in the immediate moment. But by considering why specifically he is anxious in this scene hints to the larger thematic implications of the arc – to focus in on Araragi’s larger character flaw. Araragi cannot acknowledge his failure to save someone, and rather than own up to it, he tries to brush it aside and feign ignorance. This is drastically different from his portrayal as altruistic for the entirety of the Monogatari series up until this point. Araragi’s anxious reaction in this scene, supported through quickening editing speed, challenges the audience’s understanding and asks for reconsideration of Araragi’s true character. This scene is able to use quickening shot speed to punctuate character emotion and provide subjective access to character experience, while at the same time pointing the audience in the direction of the larger thematic goals of the arc. Through visual style, the audience’s understanding of characters, especially Araragi, is furthered, working to craft a level of intimacy between character and audience.

**Visual Patterns**

Studio Shaft employs a variety of repeatedly used momentarily lasting cuts consistent across Shaft creative works, including shots and incorporation of text, specific character motions and close ups, and still images of scenery. All of these patterned shots aid in visually expressing character emotion, and are a consistent way to add visual energy to segments that do not contain any distinct character movement
or action. This is especially notable in scenes that are carried by character dialogue, but is not limited to them. These momentary flashes are easily recognizable staples of the Studio Shaft visual aesthetic that consistently aid in the externalization of emotion through form. By making this visual expression of character emotion, the audience comes further to understanding what comprises character comedy and despair, and through this understanding works to build an intimate relationship between character and audience.

Text

One repeated momentary shot that appears in many Studio Shaft works is the use of flashes or extended shots of text, which adds an additional layer of commentary to the narrative progression, and provides subjective access to character emotion. The use of text is an important stylistic choice which in its more comedic context, is often used to add additional layers to a joke bit, but in its more despairing or tonally shifting context, punctuates and/or provides subjective access to character thought. Incorporating text into a show is not new to anime, however, in its use rarely if ever is of any consequence to narrative development or the audience’s understanding of character emotion. The most common instances of text in anime come out of the tradition of manga adaptation. Frequently in manga (as in Western comics) different onomatopoeia (i.e., Boom, Pow, Clink) are used to express sound effects or humorous character reactions, and occasionally anime will incorporate these onomatopoetic words as they appear in the manga into the anime itself. This can be seen clearly the opening of the popular anime JoJo’s Bizarre Adventure, in which the visual style of the opening is directly influenced by the use of onomatopoeia in
the original manga (Appendix R, figures 1-2). In comparison to this use though, the extent to which Shaft incorporates text as an essential element to understanding character emotion and narrative development pushes the existing stylistic trend to a new and innovative tool for expressing character emotion to the audience.

Shaft’s use of text on screen can be seen as early as the first episode of *Pani Poni Dash!* and it is likely a stylistic contribution of Tatsuya Oishi’s. Among Shaft shows, the use of text flashes in one of the easiest indicators to differentiate directors – text is a mainstay in Oishi’s works, and is most blatantly apparent in his incorporation of text in the episode opening themes he directs (figures 3-4), and in *Bakemonogatari*. It has since been adopted in the works of Shinbo, Ōnuma, and Itamura, however appears infrequently if at all in Miyamoto or Tatsuwa’s work. Throughout the works of these directors who incorporate text, this stylistic choice can range in appearance and content from non-sequiturs semi-related to narrative context, to character inner monologue, to additional narrative information, to expansions on a single joke, and its evolution and use in a variety of contexts for comedy and despair can be seen throughout the Shaft filmography. While *Hidamari Sketch* and *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* demonstrate the early evolution of this technique and how it is used to visually further and add layers of comedy to a scene, its use in *ef: A Tale of Memories* illustrates how similar visual techniques previously seen for comedy can also be used to give the audience subjective access to character emotion. The *Monogatari* series finds more ways to incorporate text with a consideration for background color for text or single color flashes, and uses it for various approaches to character narration and influencing tone. Taken together, the shows *Hidamari Sketch*,

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1 All referenced figures can be found within Appendix R
Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei, * ef: A Tale of Memories, and the Monogatari series demonstrate how a single dominant stylistic trait can be applied to a variety of narrative contexts to further comedy or give insight into character despair, ultimately working towards a level of intimacy between character and audience through the audience’s understanding of the characters’ relationship to how text functions within a given show.

The initial use of text in a comedic context can be seen early in Oishi’s Shaft career through *Hidamari Sketch* episode 2, where text is both incorporated into the narrative context, and used to punctuate lines of character dialogue to further a joking segment. The episode revolves around the four main characters each painting a new nameplate for the Hidamari apartments, with each girl painting a kanji character in her own distinct way. The narrative of the episode itself revolves around the art of letters, and Oishi plays this up over the course of the episode, with frequent shots isolating the individual kanji character that someone is working on. As the girls talk while they paint, text flashes of words or parts of character dialogue appear just following the dialogue line, working to visually emphasize that particular line. For example, as Sae contemplates Miyako’s apartment proposing that it “probably has something called a shady past,” [いわく付き (iwakutsuki) shady past] flashes on the screen immediately during her line of dialogue, and occurs again along with Yuno’s exclamation of disbelief. Hiro proceeds to contemplate sequentially more ridiculous nicknames for the apartment complex in line with it having a potentially “shady past” by changing the meaning of the apartment complex’s name. She swaps first character from *Hidamari* to form *Chi-damari* (blood pool), to *O-damari* (be quiet), and the text
flashes visualize the changed first character (figures 5-6). This formal technique maintains a humorous line of thought, and adds additional layers of comedy by highlighting the verbal progression through the characters’ ridiculous speculation. Text on screen repeating lines of character dialogue to maintain a humorous thread is one way in which the stylistic technique is used to maintain a comedic tone.

*Hidamari Sketch x365* demonstrates an evolved use of text on screen from the show’s predecessor by expanding the content of what text is incorporated to include non-sequitur phrases that provide comedic rhythmic beats. This can be seen clearly in episode 1, which follows Yuno taking her school entrance exams. The episode is divided into narrative segments, which include her leaving for the exam, realizing she forgot an eraser, completing the written portion of the exam, and so on. Between each segment, a non-sequitur phrase flashes on screen for 1-2 seconds. For example, after Yuno bids her mother farewell before going in to take the exam, a text flash stating [The die is cast.] appears before cutting to her in the doorway of the examination room. Phrases like these are neither an expression of Yuno’s internal monologue nor that of anyone else. Rather, they are a shallow commentary on the events of Yuno’s exam, functioning as a kind of rhythmic beat to separate the different exam segments. Text flashes as they appeared in *Hidamari Sketch* are not abandoned, but rather *Hidamari Sketch x365* innovates even more ways to incorporate text into the visual language of the show to further an idea of humorous commentary through text on the narrative context and maintain an overall comedic tone for the series.

*Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* incorporates the way in which text on screen had been used in *Hidamari Sketch*, and expands its use to add additional layers of humor,
tack on additional jokes, and bring jokes to further extremes, maintaining the primarily comedic tone of the series. Cutting to text flashes with character lines of dialogue is maintained, but *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* additionally incorporates text expressing character emotion for comedic means. This can be seen in episode 2 when Kitsu, fueled by her propensity for perfection, fixes Kafuka’s socks to be even. Following this action, on screen next to her, text stating [Relief] boldly flashes. Kitsu is a perfectionist, and her humor is informed by this. Therefore, in this context, text grants the audience access to character emotion. As this episode is part of Kitsu’s basic character introduction to the series, punctuating her relief through the use of text is an important tool that aids in the audience’s growing understanding of her eccentricity, and how it informs her comedy. Ultimately, this use of text functions both to further a joke in the immediate moment, but also help formulate the audience’s wider understanding of her eccentricity and specific comedic function.

Like *Hidamari Sketch*, *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* additionally incorporates non sequitur phrases into the show’s visual language by using its school setting to show different phrases written on the chalkboard behind characters talking. While what is written most often has nothing to do with character dialogue, the viewing experience of hearing the dialogue in conjunction with reading the chalkboard creates multiple layers for the humor itself and works as another piece of visual stimulation in a series that revolves around character dialogue.

*Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* demonstrates a new approach to text on screen by using text directly related to the joke expressed in dialogue to further the humorous content in a visually stimulating way. One way in which this is done can be seen in
returning to Zoku Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei episode 4 (as addressed in the previous chapter). As Itoshiki-sensei laments that “people are prone to letting their attention be drawn away from the main point!” on screen text of further examples of when people’s attention is distracted moves in front of and past his face as he says this line of dialogue (figure 7). While some of these phrases are humorous critiques, others are reflective of real societal issues. The lamentations are humorous on their own, and further the main joke of the segment. Additionally, the quick presentation of text remains in line with how Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei is able to achieve the comedy of despair, as they do not allow the audience time for further consideration of the implications of the societal woes that are raised. Similar to how comedy is maintained with regard to narrative by swiftly moving between jokes, the use of text to add additional layers of humor follows the same idea towards achieving the comedy of despair.

The use of text flashes in Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei is also expanded so it may function as an extra textual commentary on a joke, and this can be seen in Goku Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei episode 2. The humorous line of thought begins with Itoshiki-sensei believing that the episode will not be published. He becomes unmotivated to do anything for the episode, and laments that “modern Japan is full of things, which, even when one knows they’re fruitless, must be done.” Kafuka, reflecting her character trait of always viewing things from a positive light, posits that because the episode won’t be published, the characters have license to do whatever they want. One of her examples is that “we can use whatever lyrics we want without paying JASRAC [Japanese copyright collection agency] a cent,” and then goes on to
sing to prove her point. What she sings is nonsense though, and a text flash stating “If this is published somehow, it will be made up lyrics,” appears. This text flash functions as a fourth-wall breaking meta commentary on the joke itself that adds an additional layer of comedy to the bit. Looking at *Hidamari Sketch* and *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei*, the various ways in which text on screen is incorporated and expanded into the show’s visual language to further jokes and maintain a comedic tone is apparent.

The use of text is not limited to a comedic context though, as Shaft additionally incorporates text to punctuate and provide subjective access to character emotion relevant to their despair. This can be clearly seen in *ef: A Tale of Memories*, where series director Shin Ōnuma adapts the comedic use of text on screen as seen in *Hidamari Sketch* and *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* to fit the despairing tone of the romantic drama. Text flashes of character dialogue is seen throughout the show, but rather than the text punctuating a joke or comedic moment, it works to visually draw attention to pivotal lines of dialogue that give insight into character emotion. What lines are chosen for punctuation indicate to the audience what parts of the conversation have stood out to the characters involved, providing subjective access to their thought process and considerations of their hopes, desires, and sources of despair. Ōnuma uses this technique throughout the show, and in episode 7, pushes the already present visual technique further to highlight a character’s emotional breakdown. In the episode, Hirono, caught in a love triangle between his childhood friend Kei and new love interest Miyako, missed his date with Miyako because Kei hurt herself in a basketball match. However, the previous day, Kei had told Miyako
that Hirono would eventually abandon Miyako, leading to Miyako’s frantic breakdown at Hirono missing their date. As Miyako waits for Hirono, she leaves him a string of messages, each one growing more frantic than the previous, and as she leaves each message, the text of her message is written on a blank white screen. As she keeps sending him messages, the screen fills up with the text of each message overlapping, and the growing size and changing orientation of the text reflects her growing more frantic (figures 8-9). This sequence goes on for a full 3 minutes and 30 seconds through to the end of the episode, and the way in which text is used to illustrate Miyako’s growing panic creates a visually discomforting experience for the audience, working to convey Miyako’s growing despair.

The Monogatari series uses all of the established methods of text on screen used in Hidamari Sketch, Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei, and ef: A Tale of Memories as a means to accomplish the tonal shifts between comedy and despair. Additionally, the way in which Itamura adapted the use of text can be seen through changes in its use over the course of different Monogatari series installations. Oishi was the series director for the first installation of the Monogatari series (Bakemonogatari), and his propensity for the use of text fit perfectly with, as Shinbo stated, the series’ overall aim to focus “on the visualization of words.” On the production process for Bakemonogatari, Shinbo stated that the production team aimed to both incorporate how text had been used in previous Shaft shows while making “the boundary line between the letters and the visuals as vague as possible… [to] not only turn text into visuals, but to leave the novel’s characteristics on them.” In order to accomplish this homage to the novel’s original form, Oishi, Shinbo, and the rest of the production
team created a set means through which text and visuals are seamlessly incorporated in order to make words visual, and carry the audience’s access to character subjectivity.

The way in which director mentorship across Shaft works can be seen in the evolving nature of text on screen over the course of the series. Oishi’s use of text on screen functioned akin to that of *Hidamari Sketch x365*, with occasional flashes of non sequiturs, as well as the use of single kanji character flashes indicating an emotion or process of wordplay that the characters are engaged with in conversation. In Itamura’s direction of *Bakemonogatari*’s sequel *Nisemonogatari*, Itamura incorporates text in similar functions as Oishi, but does so far more sparingly. This changes though when Itamura continues to direct the second *Monogatari* series season, incorporating text to a far greater degree that Oishi had in *Bakemonogatari* that performs a wider variety of functions. The use of text in Itamura’s direction of *Tsukimonogatari* and the following *Owarimonogatari*, changes again from *Monogatari* second season, occurring more infrequently with an altered visual presentation. Itamura begins using text over paper collage rather than solid color blocks (as in previous seasons). In this adapted use, text on screen balances the same essential narrative function as it held in the second season, but through its charged visual presentation and scaled-back use, gives more emphasis to what words are highlighted and when, instead of the fluid flow of text and visuals as seen in the second season. Itamura’s changing use of text can be considered demonstrative of him finding his own directorial voice, in the context of continuing a series started by a different Shaft director. Itamura faces the challenge of both continuing in the
directorial style for the series started by Oishi, but also making it his own in the context of the greater Studio Shaft proclivities of narrative and style, and this is reflected in his changing use of text.

In the Monogatari series second season, text is incorporated to a greater capacity than its predecessors in a variety of ways that gives the audience a greater access to character subjectivity. The text itself ranges from chapter titles and direct quotes from the novel, to internal character monologue, to unrestricted access to character thought (figures 9-11). Text flashes of internal monologue from the narrator frequently appear at varying speeds throughout an episode. In their appearances of a lower shot length, at normal viewing speed it is impossible for a viewer to catch every single line from the monologue, and text functions akin to a near-stream-of-consciousness peek into the narrator’s thought process. When text is presented at a higher shot length, though, it functions as a more deliberate form of narration. While sometimes these more extended text frames provide the audience greater access to the narrator’s thoughts at a particular moment, they also function as a vehicle for unreliable narration, allowing the narrator to frame the audience’s perception of scenes to his liking through their commentary. The thoughts that narrators sit on, versus gloss over, as expressed through shot length of text flashes, provides the audience insight into their subjective experience, and places where they may be acting as an unreliable narrator. Itamura’s use of text throughout the second season and later installations marks a distinct shift from text on screen functioning as an auxiliary visual emphasis or beat, into a necessary narrative device. Especially the presence of unreliable narration (as presented through text) heightens the audience’s
consciousness to decipher what is true, and what is either exaggerated or simply false. This ultimately contributes to creating intimacy between character and audience, as text prompts the audience to seriously consider the characters’ (often warped) perception of reality, as well as their thoughts and emotions in reaction to it.

The use of text on screen and color flashes can be seen throughout many Studio Shaft shows, and aids in maintaining/furthering comedy, and provides the audience further insight into character subjectivity. *Hidamari Sketch* and *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* both illustrate the initial expansions of the use of text as a visual element that can be used for comedy, and *ef: A Tale of Memories* takes what was established through these shows and applies it to a narrative focused on enlightening the audience to character despair. The *Monogatari* series then combines the use of text, as it can be seen in previous shows, to give insight to character psychology in a comedic or despairing context. Through the Shaft filmography, the different directorial iterations and refinements of this stylistic aspect as a mainstay of the studio’s house style in its use for comedy or despair can be clearly seen. The use of text and color flashes functions as one aspect of Shaft’s use of form to externalize character emotion, whether it is comedic or despairing, to facilitate a level of intimacy between character and audience.

**Specific Character Motions and Extreme Close Ups**

Shots of specific character motions and close ups are another distinct patterned shot used throughout the Shaft editing pattern that uses visual style to externalize character emotion. While the most popularly recognized of these character motions is the oft-lauded “Shaft Head Tilt,” there are many other signature shots at
work within a Shaft anime that also aid in creating visual dynamism and expression of character emotion. Three of the most commonly used and recognizable within the Shaft approach are eye and top-of-the-head close ups, and of course, character backwards head tilts, which all work to bring the audience’s attention to character emotion, highlight humor, or a combination of the two. The use of these specific character motions and close ups are a visual means that builds intimacy between character and audience, as they in essence, bring the audience’s attention to highlight character comedy and despair.

Eye and top-of-the-head close ups provide specific visual beats to the conversation, focusing the audience’s attention not on the representation of character emotion through color and text-based narration, but rather through exaggerated specific expression. As top-of-the-head close ups as a character signifier are used with greater frequency in a given show, they become concentrated images that can carry comedic or despairing beats of character emotion. While Hidamari Sketch and Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei illustrate how this visual technique can be used in a comedic context, the Monogatari series illustrates its purpose in underscoring relationship development as well as humor, and Madoka Magica in a similar fashion is able to use this character motion to underscore character despair.

Hidamari Sketch’s extreme use of visual signifiers fulfills a dual purpose of both being a cost-saving animation technique, while also a shortcut to cue the audience’s understanding of character emotion. Through frequent use of the same visual signifiers at narratively or emotionally similar moments, Hidamari Sketch develops a specific visual shorthand that can be continually used to express character
emotion. This technique has the added benefit of allowing the creative team to reduce
animation of facial expression, by achieving the same desired effect through a still
visual signifier. While there a variety of visual signifiers used throughout the series,
Yuno’s X-crossed hair clips are the most revealing of the way in which visual
signifiers fulfill a dual function in the series. Yuno’s characterization is that of a very
sweet, albeit somewhat ingénue girl – she is shy (though frequently tries to overcome
this) and is very easily embarrassed, especially by her own mistakes. When the use of
visual signifiers is applied to Yuno’s hair clips, then, it functions as a way to highlight
the comedic moments where “Yuno is being particularly ‘Yuno.’” Whether these are
moments of struggle or joy for her, a flash of the X-shaped clips works to
immediately inform the audience that this is a moment where Yuno is being
particularly herself. They almost “make fun of her for being herself,” in the fashion
that close friends would tease each other for actions that are almost too specifically
“them.” As Digibro describes, “The symbols in *Hidamari Sketch* are the very base of
the personalities of the characters… therefore, when a symbol appears on screen, it’s
like…poking the character in the side, and waiting for you to think ‘yep, that’s Yuno
alright!’” That these visual signifiers are able to fulfill this level of character
recognition, though, it indicates an inherent level of intimacy that has been
established between character and audience. The audience sees and recognizes to
whom the visual signifier is in relation, and why, illustrating how developed
understanding of visual signifiers functions as a way through which intimacy between
character and audience is established.⁴
Like *Hidamari Sketch*, *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* also uses visual signifiers as a concentrated moment of character emotion that contributes to both furthering comedy and illustrating character eccentricity and despair. Like that of Yuno’s hair clip, frequent use of top-of-the-head shots can be seen most notably through Chiri Kitsu and Ai Kaga. A quick and stylized shot of the top of her head often precedes Kitsu’s entrance into a conversation, emphasizing her perfectly parted hair. Kitsu’s part is impeccably even – a visual representation of her defining personality quirk, and the kind of humor that she will add to a scene through this quirk. This is similarly achieved with Kaga’s ponytail: when Kaga, whose main personality quirk is that she is constantly apologizing, launches into a stream of apologies, quick cuts to close ups of her ponytail nervously bouncing up and down visually punctuate her frantic apologies at moments where she is being particularly “Kaga.” These quick cuts are not something to be dwelled upon by the audience – they are visual flourishes to the Shaft editing patterns that maintain the desired comedic tone of the series by acting as a direct reminder of the kind of humor that these characters contribute. *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* operates off the comedy of despair, and these quick flashes maintain comedic attitude by humorously highlighting moments of characters’ biggest flaws. While they are used to highlight the character’s comedic addition through a visual representation of their specific personality quirk, the fact that they are based in what would be considered their character fault maintains the underlying base of despair that is present throughout the Shaft filmography, illustrating how Shaft uses visual style to carry their studio worldview of the fluidity between comedy and despair.
The *Monogatari* series builds off the use of top-of-the-head shots as visual signifiers as is seen in *Hidamari Sketch* and *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* by pushing their use to greater stylistic extremes to express character reaction and emotion. While top-of-the-head shots in the *Monogatari* series are not limited to Araragi, his *ahoge* becomes not just a visual signifier for his character, but another means of expressing his emotion through concentrated movement. These shots add visual dynamism to the frame for scenes that are carried by character dialogue, and the moments in which they occur can give insight into subjective character reactions, which can be seen early in *Bakemonogatari*, and then developed to its stylistic extreme in *Nisemonogatari*.

Returning to *Bakemonogatari* episode 3 (Appendix A), as Araragi chats with Senjōgahara, top-of-the-head shots provides the audience a concentrated representation of Araragi’s emotional state. This can be seen directly in shots 6-8 where his rising and falling *ahoge* mirrors his reaction to Senjōgahara’s words. Araragi’s *ahoge* rising after realizing how much Senjōgahara trusts him is a visual double entendre indicating his attraction to her, and excitement over their developing relationship. However, in the next shot, she quickly teases him that the reason she trusts him is because he is a virgin, giving way to rising doubts as to his own masculinity and self-worth, and the *ahoge* mirrors this and falls. Araragi’s *ahoge* is used once more (shot 15) as another reaction by Araragi to Senjōgahara’s statement that she has experience with orgies. In lieu of a reaction shot, the rise and fall of his *ahoge* inform the audience exactly as to Araragi’s reaction. Senjōgahara never comments on Araragi’s expressive *ahoge*, nor is even looking at him for a majority of

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*Ahoge*: lit. “idiot hair,” anime term for piece of stray hair that sticks up or out
the shots, illustrating that these shots are specifically meant for the audience, acting as an exaggerated representation of Araragi’s feelings. These *ahoge* shots work as a not-so-sly phallic symbol that conveys his reactions to Senjōgahara’s comments with regard to each other’s sexuality. Through their presence, they humorously indicate Araragi’s attraction to Senjōgahara, underscoring the growing relationship between the two over the course of the scene. The use of top-of-the-head shots in this sequence adds a bit of phallic comedy into a sequence of real character development where Araragi and Senjōgahara are trying (and struggling) to clearly communicate their true feelings to each other. The *ahoge*’s comedic usage in this sequence therefore visually contributes to the sequence’s quick back-and-forth between comedy and despair within Senjōgahara and Araragi’s back and forth between casual teasing and legitimate personal concern.

The use of Araragi’s *ahoge* as a visual signifier for his character is very present in *Bakemonogatari*, and the extent to which this can be achieved is pushed to further stylistic extremes in *Nisemonogatari*. In *Nisemonogatari* episode 1 (Appendix D), over the course of Hachikuji and Araragi’s conversation, Araragi’s *ahoge* becomes a visual stand-in for his face and reactions to their dialogue. As the conversation continues, Araragi sequentially becomes represented by only his moving *ahoge*. He goes from his face being present but blocked in shots 3 and 5, to being only seen via the top of his head. In turn, the *ahoge* becomes more expressive, bouncing along in response to Araragi’s engagement in the joking conversation between him and Hachikuji, and even participating in his dialogue by forming the character of one of the words he states. Here, text on screen merges with character
motion close up in a humorously extreme externalization of emotion. Once again, the fact that neither character responds to the moving ahoge indicates its presence specifically as a visual representation of Araragi for the audience. As their conversation continues, the movements of Araragi’s ahoge become more and more expressive and ridiculous, ranging from spinning like a helicopter, to a pointing arrow in various directions. The growing expressiveness of Araragi’s ahoge works not only as an expression of himself, but is another stylistic flourish to add graphic interest to a scene that is completely carried through dialogue. The humor that Araragi’s ahoge adds maintains the joking tone of the conversation. It is important to note therefore, its absence in moments of considerable reflection, such as the more somber ending portion of Araragi and Hachikuji’s conversation in which she gives him advice on how to keep his family out of dealing with the supernatural. In the Monogatari series, Araragi’s ahoge becomes a visual signifier not only for his individual presence, but its function is expanded to be able to carry emotion in a visually engaging way.

In Hidamari Sketch, Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei, and the Monogatari series, top-of-the-head or hair shots are used as visual signifiers to characterize individuals when they are being particularly “themselves,” and bring out the comedy or underscore character emotion. Puella Magi Madoka Magica keeps with this established idea, however instead of using it to convey when a character is being particularly “themselves” or bring out comedy, the show uses this visual technique in the opposite context, using it to highlight when Homura must hide her true self, underscoring her personal despair. The repeated action of Homura brushing her fingers and flipping her hair becomes a stand-in for having a distinct close up shot.
This concentrated character movement occurs specifically at moments in which she must maintain her composure, despite circumstances in which she would rather do otherwise. Homura has lived through every iteration of same three months countless times, and in moments that she must keep her wealth of knowledge to herself or that are the most difficult for her to re-live, her hair flip becomes a quick visual signal of her trying to keep herself together.

That Homura’s hair flip serves this purpose is not immediately apparent to the audience; rather, the audience comes to this realization through the re-contextualization of Homura’s character and narrative function that occurs in episode 10. Just as how the audience must re-consider their understanding of Homura’s character through this episode, they also come to re-consider the deeper meaning in Homura’s signature hair flip. In this episode, Homura’s time traveling and repeated actions are revealed to the audience, and over the course of the episode the audience sees the variety of ways that she tried to save everyone. When Homura concludes in her speech near the end of the episode after re-living the same three months multiple times, as she states that she “will not rely on anyone anymore,” she changes her hairstyle from two braids, to the long untied hair that has been the norm for the entire series. In this action, she moves away from the weak and timid original braid-wearing version of herself, and takes on a new constructed hardened and self-reliant persona who is forced to hide her growing despair. This action re-contextualizes the moments in which her signature hair flip is seen, as her hair is seen as a marker of the two different Homuras. Homura’s hair flip becomes not indicative of her true self, but
rather the fact that Homura has constructed an alternate persona to continually hide her true self.

Reconsidering one of Homura’s first hair flips in episode 3, the re-contextualization of Homura’s character as is visually rendered through her hair flip can be clearly seen. After Homura tells Mami that she cannot let Madoka become a magical girl under any circumstances, Mami accuses her of desiring this out of jealousy towards Madoka’s potential power as a magical girl. As their conversation moves closer to a fight, Homura states with a hair flip that she does not wish to fight in response to Mami’s insults and misconception of her true intentions. In the moment, this gesture comes off as one of passivity and nonchalance, not taking Mami as a threat and maintaining her composure as a cold character. However, when this moment is contextualized by the later realization of her and Mami’s previously close friendship in other timelines, and of how many times Homura has relived this moment, it takes on a wholly different meaning. It pains Homura for her actions to be misunderstood, and to not be able to frankly state that she is trying to protect Madoka because she loves her. The concentrated action of Homura’s hair flip does not signal her specific brand of comedy as it would in a more comedic Shaft show (like *Hidamari Sketch* or *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei*), but rather takes to a deeper level the kind of personal character insight to Homura’s despair through concentrated motion, aiding in maintaining the wholly despairing tone of the show. Just as the narrative re-contextualization of Homura’s character occurs through episode 10, a similar visual re-contextualization also occurs, furthering the audience’s understanding of Homura’s
personal despair, and thus facilitating a growing intimacy between character and audience.

Another major close up shot seen frequently across Shaft creative works are close ups of a character’s single eye, which works to focus the audience’s attention to the comedic or despairing emotion of a single character in a brief moment of a conversation. These eye close ups work similarly to the other patterned shots seen throughout Studio Shaft as a visually rendered rhythmic beat to the conversation, while also focusing the audience’s attention to a character to reveal some aspect of their emotional reaction to a situation. While the way in which eye close ups work as a visual signifier that carries comedy but underscores character despair can be clearly seen in its use in the Monogatari series, its use in Madoka Magica demonstrates how it can be used as visual punctuation to further the audience’s perception of pure character despair.

The Monogatari series makes frequent use of eye close ups as a visually based rhythmic beat to a conversation to point the audience’s attention towards a concentrated expression of character emotion. In earlier adaptations of the Monogatari series, still single-eye close ups appear with great frequency, however in later adaptations, they become more scaled back in frequency, but are given more emphasis through greater camera movement, contrasting colors, and reflections of words or characters in eyes. Like the changing but consistent use of text, these changes to the use of eye close ups may as well be a product of the changed and evolved directorial style of Oishi and Itamura. Similar to Araragi’s ahoge in Nisemonogatari episode 1, eye close ups can also be used to convey character
emotion to the audience for an entire scene, as can be seen in *Bakemonogatari* episode 12 (Appendix E).

In this 2 minute-68 shot scene, only 2 shots reveal Araragi’s full face, and 14 are close ups of his eye, illustrating the series’ use of eye close ups to convey to the audience Araragi’s reaction to Senjōgahara asking him on a date over the course of the scene. As Senjōgahara asks Araragi on their first date and playfully teases him in the process, expressive eye close ups alternate between sequentially tighter shots of Senjōgahara (shot 6-21), conveying Araragi’s growing nervousness and excitement over this prospective date. Despite Araragi’s initial apprehension, the execution of eye close ups maintains a comedic tone through its exaggerated expression of Araragi’s emotion in combination with Senjōgahara’s irreverent teasing. This can be clearly seen in shots 14-17 where, as Araragi panics about how to respond to being asked on a date, his pupil size goes from normally rendered, to humorously small while sweat beads go down his face. In addition to Araragi’s nervousness, eye close ups also convey his eventual resignation to the date in shots 52-56. After an extended dialogue of Senjōgahara considering her precise wording to ask him, she asks if he is against it, to which he replies that he is not, and she finally settles on the less questioning and more demanding phrasing of “go on a date with me,” leading into his final resignation as expressed by his slowly closing eye (shots 54-6). Finally, after the details of the date have been settled, Araragi’s flustered full face is revealed (shot 59), and his excitement is then punctuated with one final blushing eye close up of Araragi to express his excitement (shot 62). His eye opens wide, and he exclaims “all right!” conveying to the audience that is was not that Araragi was simply pushed into a date
with Senjōgahara, but rather that his nervousness combined with Senjōgahara’s overthinking the process of asking him obfuscated his final feeling of joy and excitement.

The way in which eye close ups convey Araragi’s emotional progression through the scene carries both comedy and despair. While Araragi and Senjōgahara’s conversation is made humorous both through their banter and externalization of emotion through eye close ups, additionally present in this scene is a meeting of the two’s inability to properly communicate their feelings and desires. Senjōgahara wants to go on a date with Araragi, however between her flirtatious behavior and overthinking her choice in words to ask him, she struggles immensely to simply ask Araragi, who at this point is already her boyfriend, on a date. In turn, he becomes immensely nervous when asked, although it is evident by the end of the scene that he is legitimately excited to go on the date. While on the surface, the scene presents irreverent dialogue, flirtatious behavior, and humorous over-reaction, it additionally is representative of a main aspect of Shaft-brand despair: the inability to communicate. Eye close ups then are integral to shape the audience’s understanding of Araragi emotional progression through nervousness, to resigned acceptance, to excitement through this scene. The way in which eye close ups provided a concentrated visual representation of character emotion illustrates the extent to which Shaft uses this dominant stylistic choice to convey character comedy while also underscoring character despair, ultimately leading to a greater level of emotional understanding between character and audience.
The use of eye close ups in *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* fulfills the same function of conveying a concentrated expression of character emotion through a close up shot, as is seen in the *Monogatari* series, however it is more reserved in its use, allowing the show to give far more weight to individual eye close ups when they do appear. This can be clearly seen in the first scene of episode 8 (Appendix F).

Following Sayaka’s discovery in episode 6 that by becoming a magical girl, her soul has been separated from her body and placed inside a “soul gem,” she falls deeper into a psychotic break, and this episode traces her final breakdown, starting with her relationship with Madoka. The scene begins with Madoka trying to console Sayaka, and leads to Sayaka reproaching and blaming Madoka for what has happened to her, which can be traced through the scene’s use of eye close ups. The first portion of the scene is dominated by close ups of Madoka’s eyes (shots 7, 9, 14, 22) and deliberately conceals Sayaka’s (shots 5, 10, 11, 13, 17, 18, 21), keeping the audience, like Madoka, unsure of what affect Madoka’s words are having on Sayaka. This continues until Sayaka finally responds, telling Madoka that if she really wants to help Sayaka she should become a magical girl and fight the witches for her, and this line is punctuated by a sequence of eye close ups (shots 23-5). After being disgusted by what has happened to her body, realizing that because of this she will never have a relationship with Kyōsukeiii, and knowing Madoka’s far greater latent potential as a magical girl – Sayaka’s suggestion is a reflection of her own declining self-worth.

The jarring reveal of her eyes at this moment presented as three quick jump cuts, in a sequence that has been so dominated by Madoka’s eyes, visually punctuates her

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iii Sayaka had used her wish necessary to become a magical girl to heal her good friend Kyōsuke in hopes of a romantic relationship with him
rising anguish. Sayaka believes that Madoka’s words are out of pity, and as Madoka struggles to deny this, close ups of Sayaka’s eyes occur faster, more frequently, and in far more unsettling framings (shots 25, 35-7, 42) in comparison to the alternating more conventionally framed close ups of Madoka’s eyes (shots 26, 30, 38). Sayaka’s mental breakdown is visually highlighted through a progression of eye close ups that convey the decimation of her own self-worth and her falling deeper into personal despair.

The “Shaft Head Tilt”⁴ is one final concentrated character motion that is an established aspect of the Shaft visual language, and has become a kind of calling card for the creative hand of the studio itself (figures 14-16). This character pose is one of the most commonly discussed visual markers of a Shaft show, best expressed in the words of one blogger, “Damnit it doesn’t feel like a Shaft produced show unless it’s got an anime character who looks like their neck is about to break.”⁵ Shaft is not the only studio to have adopted this idea of a visual studio calling card though. Studio Gainax is known for the “Gainax Stance,”⁶ of a character firmly standing with crossed arms, and Kyoto Animation director Naoko Yamada has developed the “Yamada Hands,”⁷ of characters in a stance with both palms open (figures 12-13).⁸ Interestingly, these other calling cards are all from other major studios that are, like Shaft, known for a consistent studio house style, illustrating a trend across studios with an established style to develop this kind of visual trademark. The Shaft head tilt has been noticed by anime fans, bloggers, and industry professionals as well,

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⁴ Known in Japanese as: シャフト角度 (shaft kakudo) lit. shaft angle
⁵ Known in Japanese as: ガイナ立ち (gaina-dachi) lit. Gainax stand
⁶ Known in Japanese as: 山田パー (yamada-paa) lit. Yamada Paper (in reference to rocks, paper, scissors)
accepted as a kind of call out of their own branding. Characters do not simply head tilt whenever they please though – just like the other collection of specific character poses and close ups, the Shaft head tilt works as a concentrated expression of character emotion. Unlike the other repeated close ups and character poses though, Shaft is very reserved in using the head tilt, only using it during specific moments to emphasize a character’s line of dialogue to a far greater extent than anything else. This can take place in a comedic or despairing context, visually punctuating a line of dialogue that is particularly humorous or revealing of character despair. The pose itself is “visually striking and easily recognizable,” acting as an exclamation point for a scene conveying to the audience to pay attention to this moment more than anything. While there are numerous examples of the Shaft head tilt, the context in which they are used is best exemplified through the following moments in the Monogatari series, and Puella Magi Madoka Magica.

While the head tilt can be seen in the work of Akiyuki Shinbo in his career even before working at Studio Shaft, it gained attention through its distinctive use in the massively popular Bakemonogatari. In episode 2, Senjōgahara’s extended and stylistically distinct head tilt solidified the context through which the studio would come to incorporate the character pose. Following the extended scene in which Senjōgahara teases Araragi while getting dressed to see Oshino where he will assist her with the crab oddity, at the scene’s conclusion, she suggests going to northern Japan with Araragi to eat crab. After Araragi questions why, Senjōgahara delivers her humorously suggestive line of: “Because crab is very delicious.” On this line, the lighting around her becomes much brighter and she slowly cranes backwards tilting
her neck to look over her shoulder in an extremely unnatural but visually distinctive
pose (figure 17). From the identity of her crab-god oddity, Senjōgahara is thus
associated with crabs and crab imagery. After the extended scene, underscored by
narratively-essential fanservice, with her teasing and getting to know Araragi better
(as discussed in the previous chapter), the visual emphasis given to the line through
her head tilt highlights it as a humorous double entendre, and makes it a near punch
line for the scene itself.

As can be seen in the head tilt’s use to punctuate character despair in *Madoka
Magica*, head tilts are not limited to marking humorous moments, and this can be
clearly seen in episode 8. The prior episode concludes with the climactic start to
Sayaka’s psychotic break. Sayaka goes to fight a witch, and struggles as Kyōko
(another magical girl in the city who had a mainly antagonistic relationship with
Sayaka) looks on at her. Realizing that Sayaka will not be able to defeat the witch and
could die, Kyōko goes to assist Sayaka, which she refuses. Exclaiming that due to her
soul being forcibly separated from her body, she no longer has to feel pain, Sayaka
maniacally laughs while covered in blood, frantically and brutally beating the witch
to death. Episode 8 opens to the continuation of this scene, concluding with her
defeating the witch and the labyrinth collapsing around her. Sayaka looks back at
Kyōko in a pronounced head tilt with a crazed look and half smile, and then proceeds
to toss Kyōko the grief seed (figure 18). Grief seeds can only be obtained by
defeating a witch, and are a necessary item for magical girls to purify their soul gems,
lest they fall into despair and turn into witches themselves. Sayaka nonchalantly
giving away her grief seed to Kyōko, one with whom she has been at odds for the
entirety of the series, is a true marker of how unhinged Sayaka has become. The precise timing of this head tilt is a visual cue to the audience that punctuates how Sayaka’s actions before and following the head tilt illustrate Sayaka’s wavering mental state. If her brutal attack on the witch from the previous episode was not enough to solidify her mental instability on discovering what has happened to her body, the timing and placement of this head tilt solidifies this to the audience by punctuating her action of giving away the grief seed after the witch battle. As the episode continues, Sayaka falls further into despair, to the extent that she becomes a witch at the episode’s conclusion, and the head tilt at the start of the episode to emphasize Sayaka’s growing psychosis cues the audience to her descent into despair.

Throughout the filmography of Studio Shaft, specific character motions presented as a close up shot become visual signifiers that cue the audience in to recognize character emotion or highlight humor. While hair/top-of-the-head and eye close ups occur with greater frequency over the course of a Shaft production, head tilts are far more reserved in their use. Nevertheless, these easily recognizable stylistic choices are a concentrated visual cue that focuses the audience’s attention to character emotion that underlines character comedy, despair, or a fluid movement between the two. Without a level of intimacy between character and audience, the audience cannot recognize the meaning of these visual cues. Therefore, the audience’s growing ability to recognize what about character comedy or despair these character motions conveys is a visual means through which intimacy between character and audience is achieved.

Landscape Shots
One final repeated use of imagery in the Shaft approach to editing patterns is the use of still images of scenery, which aid in establishing tone through the creation of a visual atmosphere that extends beyond the location of characters within a space. Landscape shots function as redundant visual punctuation that heightens, exaggerates, and provides subjective access to character emotion. Within the scenery incorporated into the Shaft editing pattern, what images are chosen can additionally work to evoke the audience’s awareness of character comedy or despair, which ultimately aids in achieving the kind of emotional understanding between character and audience that is integral to Shaft productions. From a practical standpoint, similar to the use of visual signifiers to reduce animated motion, inserting these still images is a very effective way to cut down on this as well. A sequence of still scenery shots can be used to illustrate the movement through space and time without animating character motion, act as transition sequences, with a few still shots occurring at the start of a scene, or they can occur periodically throughout a conversation, giving a more literal or figurative visual representation to character dialogue.

Still images of scenery used to convey movement through space and time to evoke the audience’s awareness of character psychology can be clearly seen returning to Nisemonogatari episode 1 (Appendix G). After Araragi meets with Hachikuji, their walk together is animated by a sequence of exaggerated traffic signs and symbols that visualize the content of their conversation. Each change in the traffic symbol creates a representation of the line of dialogue. For example, in shot 2 when Hachikuji asks where Araragi is going, a traffic sign with arrows pointing in multiple directions makes a visual representation of that question. When Hachikuji mentions
how Oshino has now disappeared in shot 6, a street sign of airplanes flying overhead evokes an image of leaving. This trend continues throughout the conversation until the two reach their final destination. While the choice to use traffic signs both illustrates their movement through space and time and the progression of their conversation, it additionally harkens back to the audience’s knowledge of Hachikuji’s death due to a traffic accident, re-reminding the audience of the initial context of her and Araragi’s relationship. Therefore, in this sequence, while what is on the traffic signs works as a comedic visual representation of the content of Hachikuji and Araragi’s conversation, it additionally hearkens back to Hachikuji’s personal despair through the use of images that are evocative of it. The use of still images of scenery takes a simple conversation between two characters and creates nuanced multiple layers of visual representation of both the immediate conversation and deeper character psychology in a graphically stimulating fashion.

In addition to still scenery shots in lieu of character motion, still image shots work in conjunction with character dialogue and animation to illustrate to the audience their emotional response to a situation, which can be clearly seen in *Arakawa Under the Bridge* episode 2 (Appendix H). When the villagers of the Arakawa river hold a welcome party for Kō (then re-named Recruit, or shortened to “Rec,” by the village chief), still image shots visualize his thought process as he moves from trying to impress the villagers with his superiority, to recognizing his new place within the village by accepting his new name. Following the Village Chief’s rebuke of Kō’s initial introduction in shot 12, Kō’s realization of why his introduction was not well received by the villagers is punctuated by two sequences of
scenery flashes (shots 14-21, 29-32). Kō recognizes through the very fact that the villagers have all elected to live under the bridge that they do not care about the material aspects of life that he has built his sense of superiority around, and the scenery flashes of the desolate Arakawa village visually punctuates this point of development. Nino additionally reinforces Kō’s realization in shot 23, and he re-introduces himself with his new village name.

Scenery flashes in this sequence help further the audience’s understanding of what defines Kō’s despair. His whole persona and sense of self-worth is built through an accumulated list of accomplishments, materiality, and socially acceptable normalcy. When this is challenged by the Arakawa villagers though, Kō comes closer to recognizing that what he has conceived as happiness is actually stifling his own personality and self-expression. The use of scenery flashes in this sequence visually punctuates Kō’s coming to understand and accept the Arakawa village lifestyle, while at the same time underscoring the source of his own personal despair, thus building a level of intimacy between his character and the audience through the audience’s deeper understanding of his psychology.

As can be seen in Nisemonogatari and Arakawa Under the Bridge, still images of scenery function as a way to reduce animation and convey character emotion in a graphically stimulating way. What images appear when in conjunction with character dialogue shape the audience’s understanding of a character’s subjectivity, ultimately contributing to the larger Studio Shaft goal of developing an intimate relationship between character and audience.
Shaft has created its own editing language that is able to visualize character emotion and therefore build intimacy between characters and the audience. Studio Shaft editing patterns are dependent on the inclusion of specific patterned shots of text, character motions and close ups, and scenery inserts, within an attention to swift cutting rate, that ultimately works to visualize and develop the audience’s understanding of character comedy, despair, or fluidity between the two in order to build an intimate relationship between character and audience. Signature patterned cuts are a graphically dynamic way to use visual style to establish tone and push forward character emotion, and their repeated presence in Shaft creative works makes them an integral aspect of Shaft Style.

**Composition and Staging**

In every single Shaft show, there is a marked attention to extremely organized frames inclusive of character staging and backgrounds. Nearly everything is seen from what feels like the perspective of a cinematographer committed to symmetry and balance within a frame. While these elements are not unique to Studio Shaft, animation, or even cinema in general, it is Shaft’s utter commitment to creating visually appealing frames through balance and symmetry that is a cornerstone of their stylistic tendencies (figures 19, 20, 23, 24). The careful balance of a frame is not limited to static scenes – whether characters are moving in fast paced action or exchanging in casual conversation, the same cinematic principles are applied. Characters are almost always kept towards the middle of the frame, and the camera will move in and out of from extreme close up to extreme long shot from a variety of angles to view characters. When two characters are in the same space, they are almost
always staged in a way that indicates the dynamic between two or more characters that contributes to a balanced image. Composition and staging act to make not just the occasionally provocative frame, but rather every single frame is meticulously constructed around a principle of extreme organization.

By maintaining this as a baseline method for camerawork, when the camera moves into more unbalanced framings, or breaks from the way in which a character has previously been treated by the camera, this signals a shift in character emotion, which can be seen in Homura and Madoka’s confrontation in *Madoka Magica* episode 8 (Appendix I). Throughout the series up until this point, Homura has been able to maintain a level head and steadfastly continue on her mission to prevent Madoka from becoming a magical girl. However, in this scene, after narrowly stopping Madoka from making her wish to Kyubey by shooting him, she finally breaks down and cries to Madoka, begging her not to become a magical girl.

Homura’s breakdown is accompanied by a quick shift in the symmetry and balanced framing that has been so consistently present. Homura begins in a very balanced and symmetrical frame (shots 2-3, 11). Her presence is imposing, with her body, face, and shadow taking up most of the frame (shots 6, 8-9). However, as soon as she begins to lose her composure, her balanced framing and imposing presence weakens. Her symmetry between the two lights is broken as she breaks into tears (shot 16) and the camera is under her as she falls to her knees (shot 18). Her face no longer dominates the frame, and the camera additionally looks down on her from an uneven and unbalanced angle (shots 20, 24, 26-29, 31). After Madoka leaves Homura, Kyubey re-enters, and additionally overpowers her through his staging in the frame. His shadow
overtakes Homura (shot 38), and his figure overpowers the frame (shots 40, 42, 43, 45) as he rebukes Homura for her efforts to stop him, indicating the shifting balance of power between them. This shift does not last long though, as her regaining her composure is given final punctuation through her hair flip as she slowly rises and re-takes her position in a symmetrically balanced frame between the two lights (shot 46). This shift from an impeccably balanced to an unbalanced frame visually mirrors Homura’s breakdown and regaining composure, externalizing her moment of panic and heartbreak. Shaft consistently utilizes frame composition and character staging to maintain a balanced frame, and by breaking this consistency, they are able to use composition to visually illustrate character emotional shifts, thus creating a better audience understanding of character comedy and despair, building an intimate relationship between character and audience.

**Visual Shifts**

While a Shaft show’s precise visual aesthetic may change either from show to show or within different installments of the same show, there is a consistently maintained attention to form and function for backgrounds, color, animation and art used from director to director, and this can be attributed to the consistency in art director for these shows. In the earlier Shaft series post-2004, there were a variety of art directors working at Shaft, however, it was concentrated to mainly Ken Naito, Hisaharu Ijima, Hiroshi Katō and Kohji Azuma. Naito and Ijima soon become the main two art directors though, coming to work on the vast majority of Shaft shows since 2011. As a result, it is more than likely that the regular presence of these two art directors has greatly refined and influenced the consistent look of Shaft productions.
Like the rest of Shaft’s approach to visual style, the studio’s use of visual shifts for backgrounds, color, animation and art throughout their creative projects works at times purely for graphic effects, but primarily to achieve an extreme externalization of character emotion that strengthens the audience’s understanding of character comedy and despair, creating intimacy between character and audience.

**Backgrounds**

Backgrounds and background shifts influence the audience’s perception of character comedy, despair, or shifting between the two, working to further the audience’s relationship and understanding of characters. Shaft’s use of background art maintains an attention to crafting a world that is grounded in reality, but in its representation of reality, is rendered with a surrealistic bend that mirrors character emotion. When backgrounds shift, then, it works to externalize character emotion in a comedic or despairing context, although sometimes background shifts exist purely for graphic effects. Background shifts are often working in service of comedy by pulling the viewer out of the immediate moment and emotional experience, and by contrast they are frequently avoided in moments of despair by keeping the audience in the immediate moment of emotional experience for a character. Background shifts are a commonly used stylistic choice throughout anime, however shifts are usually confined to only appearing on a momentary basis (figures 21-22). Often the color behind a character will change to a singular more vibrant hue or pattern, and will only last for the duration of one to two lines of exclamatory dialogue or visual character reaction. Studio Shaft incorporates background shifts in their more traditional use, however builds off of that visual trend by pushing its use to a new extreme, and this
can be clearly through their function in *Arakawa Under the Bridge* and *Nisemonogatari* respectively. In contrast to the more comedic use of background shifts, *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*’s lack of shifting furthers the show’s consistency in maintaining a despairing tone, whereas background shift’s function in *Hanamonogatari* demonstrates its use for pure graphic interest. Throughout Shaft creative works, backgrounds and background shifts work together to create a surreal and highly constructed environment that is occasionally used for graphic interest, but mostly works to reflect character emotion, maintaining Shaft’s overall attention to the externalization of emotion to create intimacy between character and audience through visual style.

The kind of composition and character staging that Shaft accomplishes only works relative to the backgrounds and environments that its characters inhabit. The backgrounds used for Shaft shows can range anywhere from simplistic to extremely detailed, but irrelevant to the amount of detail in background art, what remains consistent is the creation of a near-sterile environment (figures 25-26). Whether backgrounds are an artistic representation or surrealist interpretation of the world grounded in reality, they are almost always too organized, too perfect, and too symmetrical (figures 27-32). As characters move through a space, other characters irrelevant to the story are omitted, or are left as outlines or representations, leaving streets and buildings clear with the exception of the main characters (figures 33-36). Additionally, the studio has a propensity towards certain kinds of background elements, such as architecturally spectacular oversized rooms and buildings, stained glass, and industrial settings (figures 37-43). While some of these stylistic choices are
in service of establishing tone and conveying character emotion, sometimes background is simply for the sake of a graphically pleasing frame. For example, industrial backgrounds are often used in more serious or threatening situations, and important conversations often occur in oversized rooms, and omitted characters irrelevant to the story represented at outlines can convey a character’s sense of loneliness. However, sometimes there is a stylistically large room merely for the sake of it, as can be seen addressed in *Tsukimonogatari* episode 1 through a fourth wall breaking text flash addressing the size of the room directly to the audience (figure 44).

*Arakawa Under the Bridge* makes frequent use of momentary background shifts that make comically extreme a character’s emotions, contributing to the show’s ability to be primarily comedic but maintain heavily despairing undertones. Background shifts to pull the audience out of the immediate experience of suggesting character despair, maintaining a primarily comedic tone while still acknowledging the despair that exists, which can be clearly seen in episode 6 (Appendix J). Prior to this scene, while considering what job he could do in the Arakawa village to lose his label as a “moocher,” Kō took over for Nino teaching the metal twins how to swim. After Nino praises Kō for his skill in teaching, suggesting that he become a teacher within the village, Kō comes to realize that his conceptions of real work, which he believes must be “hard and take lots of energy,” are grounded in un-fulfillment, and that there is an alternative to that through eccentricity (i.e. being a teacher). Just at Kō is coming up on a sentimental moment, beginning to recognize his misconceptions about the definition of work, the background shift in shot 7 pulls the scene out of that
sentimental space. The shift to all blue swirls behind the twins on their ludicrous suggestion that precisely highlights their lunacy marks this moment as comedic to the audience, stepping away from sentimentality and realization of despair. On Kō’s irreverent response suggesting they consult Doraemon\textsuperscript{vii} (shot 10), and again on his exclamation that he hates interacting with the eccentricity of the twins (shot 12), there are two more momentary background shifts that punctuate Kō’s flat response and denial of participating in the eccentricity that the twins present. While background shifts in this scene frame Kō’s response as humorous, they additionally mark the fact that he is still not at the point of giving up his sense of propriety according to socially acceptable behavior. In this context, background shifts not only carry comedy from the characters’ dialogue in the immediate moment, but they underscore the continued source of Kō’s despair in how he cannot let go of his attachment to perfection and decorum.

In the \textit{Monogatari} series, Shaft applies the same principles of a surreal highly-organized background while also maintaining background shifts to convey character comedy and despair. While both Oishi and Itamura maintain the same aesthetic approach to backgrounds, in later Itamura-directed installations, backgrounds become more and more detailed, and delve further into the surreal. Oishi opted for more bizarre representations of locations grounded in reality for backgrounds, and in later installations of the \textit{Monogatari} series, Itamura clearly takes influence from Oishi’s use of playful backgrounds, but tends to incorporate more and grander background shifts to the extent that shifts will change the setting, or even bring characters to an

\textsuperscript{vii} Doraemon is a popular Japanese children’s anime character that time travels, explaining Kō’s reference that the twins should consult him
entirely new location. Itamura’s use of background shifts is a distinct break from the way in which they are traditionally seen in anime, as backgrounds do not just change around characters, but characters interact with those changed backgrounds, whether or not they are grounded in the real, which can be clearly seen in *Nisemonogatari* episode 1 (Appendix K).

Immediately following Araragi and Hachikuji’s conversation about his trepidations to telling his family that he is a vampire, Hachikuji leads out of her advice to him that he needs “the courage to keep your secret to yourself.” This leads the two into a comedic tangent, with Hachikiji challenging Araragi that “you can make almost anything sound positive by adding the word ‘courage.’” When the challenge begins, the background shifts from their café location to a courtroom (shots 1-3), visually echoing their debate on the use of the word “courage.” As the face off begins, they are dramatically surrounded by flames (shot 10), and the background proceeds to shift the two characters between the courtroom (shots 11, 19), to an outdoor park (shots 22, 25, 28, 31), and finally to a covered walkway (shots 33-34). Backgrounds shifts create a dramatic representation of the irreverent conversation between the two, adding visual interest and emphasizing the comedic competition between them. They additionally mark a shift from their prior serious conversation about Araragi’s relationship to his family, to the comedic through their banter. Background shifts in *Nisemonogatari* take the principle of using the visual technique to pull away from more serious or somber moments into comedy as is present in *Arakawa Under the Bridge*, and push it to new extremes through the detail and relevance to character dialogue that the background shifts present.
In contrast to background shifts in *Arakawa Under the Bridge* and *Nisemonogatari*, *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* avoids these kind of quick background shifts, allowing character despair to remain as exactly that. Were the show to incorporate the kind of background shifts as seen in these two shows, this would pull the audience out of the immediate experience of a character’s despair, a strategy that works for these shows though to maintain a comedy in the face of character despair.

Background shifts in *Shaft* are not always in service of conveying character emotion, as has been seen in the previous examples. In contrast to the use or avoidance of background shifts in order to convey character emotion, as seen in *Arakawa Under the Bridge, Nisemonogatari, and Madoka Magica*, *Hanamonogatari* exemplifies the way in which background shifts can be used purely for graphic interest, which can clearly be seen in episode 1. As Kanbaru and her old basketball rival, Rouka Numachi, discuss the politics and moral implications of gaining happiness and fulfillment out of hearing the despair of others, the backgrounds change multiple times around them. Starting in an empty field, they move from the field, to a double staircase in the middle of the field, to two rows of excavator trucks, to being surrounded by excavator trucks, to a dried-up waterfall, then back to the empty field (figures 45-49). While some of the visual elements are tangentially related to the content of their dialogue, such as the basketball court on the ground under the circle of tractors (an homage to the context of their previous relationship), and Kanbaru shown drowning in the waterfall as she struggles to rebuke Numachi’s arguments, the majority of these shifts exist more to add an element of visual dynamism to the frame for an episode that is essentially 24 minutes of continuous
philosophical dialogue. Background shifts are visually pleasing, but do not further the audience’s perception of comedy or despair in that moment.

As is demonstrated in the previous examples, sometimes background shifts are prompted by the context of character discussion to convey comedy, despair, or shifts between the two, and other times it is purely in service of graphic interest. At times, backgrounds create a reflection of character dialogue, pushing forward a visual representation of character emotion, and at times backgrounds simply create an interesting frame in which to experience character dialogue, creating a visually stimulating piece that is a cluster of metaphoric representation and visual pleasure that is grounded in an utterly surreal world.

**Color**

Along with background shifts, Studio Shaft’s use of color flashes and shifting color to create an extreme externalization of character emotion aids in the development of intimacy between character and audience. Color flashes function similarly to the previously discussed visual patterns, where a frame of a solid color will appear in a very brief shot. What color the frame is, and if that colored frame additionally has text present, can indicate character subjectivity, which can be seen clearly throughout the *Monogatari* series. Unlike color flashes, color shifts are when the baseline color scheme for a location, character, or shot, is dramatically changed in a way that externalizes character emotion. By using color to externalize character emotion, highlighting their subjective experience, this solidifies the audience’s understanding of character emotion, and contributes to developing an intimate relationship between character and audience.
Flashes of color with or without text are related to the use of text flashes, influencing the audience’s perception of a character’s emotion surrounding what color or color-text combination is present. Over the course of a scene, quick flashes of a solid color on screen provide emotional or conversational beats that specifically “color” the conversation that are integral to establishing a tone for a scene. Colored flashes function akin to momentary beats, or even mirror when a character might blink in response to the continued conversation, and the most commonly used colors for these are red and black. When red is the flashed color, either alone, with text, or simply with the kanji character for “red,” this incites a visual representation of a conversation growing more emotionally intense, or a signal for growing danger. This can be seen returning to Oikura and Araragi’s argument in *Owarimonogatari* episode 3 (Appendix C) where a quick flash of red (shot 52) is the first marker of Oikura’s rising anger at Araragi, appearing right before she tells him that “someone like you pisses me off.” The red flashes again twice (shots 65, 67), alternating between shots of her angrily yelling at Araragi when she is in the full swing of her emotional outburst. As Oikura becomes more enraged, red flashes appear more frequently in turn, expressing both her rising anger and Araragi’s increasing fear. In contrast to red flashes, when black or white is the flashed color, with or without text accompaniment, this most often acts as kind of comma, period, or beat within the conversation. This beat is often seen used for humor, as it marks a pause on some kind of punch line, non sequitur, or piece of physical comedy. This can be seen at work returning to *Bakemonogatari* episode 3 (Appendix A). Right before Senjōgahara delivers her rebuke to Araragi regarding her virginity, a black flash appears (shot 22) as she turns
around towards Araragi, punctuating the rhythmic beat of conversation right before she delivers her lengthy line that concludes her and Araragi’s dialogue tangent. These flashes, especially of black and white versus red, are essential to maintaining or shifting between comedy and despair, as they function as quick indicators as to the tone and content of a scene. Black flashes are often placed in service of comedic timing, whereas red flashes indicate a kind of growing danger or heightened emotional stakes. However, their use is not fixed to these roles, as sometimes black flashes indicate pauses or breaks for more somber moments of character contemplation, and red flashes indicate a comedic heightening of emotion, such as when a character is being harshly teased or becoming comically angry.

In addition to creating beats to a conversation, the color-text combinations can also provide insight into character subjectivity, and even enlighten the audience to a character’s unreliable narration. This can be seen frequently in the Monogatari series where, even if Senjōgahara is not present or mentioned in a conversation, a flash of purple (the same color as her hair) cues the audience that the narrator is considering her in their thought process. For example, in Otorimonogatari episode 3 (which is narrated by Sengoku) when Sengoku discusses with Araragi’s younger sister, Tsukihi, about how she is in love with Araragi. Sengoku feigns ignorance as to knowing who the identity of Araragi’s girlfriend is, only stating that she assumed one of the other girls she often sees him with must be his girlfriend. The use of background color in a text flash reveals Sengoku’s unreliable narration though. When Tsukihi talks about how Araragi and his girlfriend are “a perfect match,” a text flash saying [Just perfect] with a background color the same as Senjōgahara’s purple hair appears, indicating
how Sengoku knew all along that Senjōgahara is Araragi’s girlfriend. Color flashes therefore can work to further the audience’s identification of character narration, and in the case of the Monogatari series, can hint towards the narrator’s unreliability.

In addition to the presence of color flashes, across the Shaft filmography, there is a consistent use of a flat and saturated color palette, which is likely due to Naito and Ijima’s increasing control of art direction since 2008 (figures 50-52). In some earlier pre-2008 shows, there is a tendency to use a less bright choice in color palette, which is especially noticeable in the first installations of Hidamari Sketch, Pani Poni Dash! and Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei (figures 53-54). In these earlier installations, whereas Pani Poni Dash! and Hidamari Sketch use more pale pastels, Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei uses more faded, textured, and muted dark color schemes. While the color schemes of these shows are maintained in later adaptations the colors themselves become more saturated. While there is no absolute attribution for this change, it is possible that the change from Ryōki Kamitsubo (in his first position ever at Shaft) as series director with Akiyuki Shinbo as chief director, to Shinbo taking over full directorship from the first to second installation of Hidamari Sketch could be one reason for this shift, especially given that both installations maintained essentially the same creative team otherwise. As for Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei, a similar change from Hiroshi Katō, who worked as art director on the first installation, to Hirotsgu Kakoi to work as art director for all later installations (with Katō remaining at art supervisor) could be the reason for this change. Irrelevant of art director, though, the way in which color shifts work across Studio Shaft indicates a universal attention to externalizing character emotion through this visual technique.

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viii With the exception of Pani Poni Dash! which did not get another installation
*ef: A Tale of Memories* uses color shifts to create an extreme externalization of emotion that highlights character despair, which can be clearly seen in episode 10. Miyako calls Hirono to tell him she is leaving their town out of fear that she will be forgotten by everyone, and Hirono pleads with her to stay, rebuffing all of her reasons why she should leave. As he tries to convince her to stay by telling her that he loves her, Miyako’s phone card runs out, abruptly cutting off their call. While the phone line rings, the color slowly fades away into black and white, as Miyako comes to realize the mistake she is about to make. Suddenly, Hirono appears, having been searching for Miyako throughout their entire phone call, and once Miyako sees him all the color returns to the frame and the two reconcile (figures 55-56). As her original plan was to leave following their phone call, this color shift into black and white makes visual Miyako’s sadness about leaving, putting her in a literally colorless world without Hirono. The color returning then following Hirono’s arrival signals to the audience a shift from Miyako’s sadness to elation that Hirono found her, and visually turns Miyako’s world back to normal as his presence brings the color back into the frame. *ef: A Tale of Memories* illustrates how color shifts, unlike background shifts which are avoided to visualize character despair, are not beholden to such limitations, and can be used to externalize character emotion irrelevant if it is comedic or despairing.

It does go without saying, then, that color shifts, a stylistic tendency across Studio Shaft works, are frequently used in more comedic shows as well, which can be clearly seen in how *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* uses color shifts to give a visual punctuation on a character line or reaction to an essential element of the joke for the
episode segment. This can be clearly seen in Zoku Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei episode 10, in which the main joke of the episode is that people often fall victim to “maybe maybe fraud” in which people think “‘maybe’ to something, even though it could never work out if you thought about it rationally.” As characters consider different situations of “maybe maybe fraud,” when characters think “maybe” in response to an example, there is a color shift to a brighter or darker flattened color scheme (figure 57). The repeated color shifts on “maybe” visually emphasizes the growing number of irrational ideas met with a positive “maybe” answer, furthering the joke’s escalation until its final punch line. After repeated positive results for maybe posed by other characters, Kitsu raises her own possibly example, which is met with a hard “not.” Following this, her character color shifts three times, using the color shift to visually emphasize her comedic shock and create a visual punch line for the joke (figures 58-60). In this context, color shifts are used both to help create the escalation of the joke itself before the final punch line, and for comedic externalization of emotion of Kitsu’s shock as the punch line. While color shifts are not used in this specific repetitive method universally across Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei, or even Studio Shaft in general, this example along with the use of color shifts in ef: A Tale of Memories illustrates how Shaft uses the one visual technique of color shifting commonly across the studio for the same idea of an extreme externalization of emotion and setting a comedic, despairing, or shifting tone.

**Animation and Art**

In addition to the use of backgrounds and color shifts, art shifts and animated tangents are a final way in which Shaft uses visual shifts to externalize character
emotion, bringing forward character comedy, despair, or a switch between the two. While art shifts and animated tangents maintain different artistic properties, they both occur to meet the same ends of changing the “look” of the world. Animated tangents are brief forays out of the immediate moment, into an overtly exaggerated visual expression of character thoughts and emotions as shown through extreme expressive animation in the same style as the show. Character facial expressions or actions are slightly deformed and highly exaggerated, but the animation remains in the same general style as the predominant visual for the show. The events of the animated tangent are mostly used to comedic ends by pulling the audience out of the immediate moment and creating a humorously dramatized representation of a moment of character emotion, and this can be seen at work to further a comedic expression of character emotion in *Nisekoi*. In comparison to animated tangents, art shifts are times when the art style of a show completely changes from the predominantly used art style. Whereas animated tangents tend to last for shorter periods of time, giving brief glimpses into an extreme expression of character thought, art shifts tend to occur over a slightly more extended period of time, creating a disorienting effect by pulling the viewer out of the art style that has grown to be comfortable and putting the viewer into an alternative artistic world. This can be seen at work in *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* as visual representation of the central thematic dichotomy of the show. Like the other previously discussed visual shifts though, although art tangents and shifts are predominately in service of expressing character emotion, they are occasionally used purely for graphic effect, which can be seen in its use in *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei*. Across the Shaft filmography, art shifts and animated tangents both work to
create a completely visual representation of character emotion that brings the audience inside the character’s internal subjective reality and influence the audience’s perception of character comedy and despair, ultimately working towards building intimacy between character and audience.

*Nisekoi* very frequently uses animated tangents to make a humorously exaggerated representation of character emotion that shows a character’s subjective experience. As a predominately comedic series, these animated tangents further comedic situations, and even make comedic a character’s personal despair. This can be seen clearly in episode 4 during the group of friends’ study session (Appendix L). New to their fake relationship, Ichijō and Kirisaki struggle to keep up appearances for their relationship, while at the same time Ichijō tries to become closer with Onodera (the girl he likes). As the group encounters awkward questions that push each other towards finding out the truth of each other’s romantic relationships, animated tangents make comically visual their over the top responses in a way that additionally underscores their complete inability to communicate with each other.

In response to Kirisaki’s question to Onodera if she likes anyone, a quick animated tangent of Onodera and Ichijō both pretend spit/throwing up in response to this question makes apparent how awkward that question is for them (shot 4). Onodera likes Ichijō but is too afraid to tell him (and vice versa). This, in addition to the fact that she currently believes that Kirisaki is Ichijō’s girlfriend, further complicates her ability to answer Kirisaki’s question, prompting her and Ichijō’s humorous over-reaction to the question. Onodera’s response to Kirisaki’s question presents another animated tangent (shot 7), with her design presented in super-
deformed\textsuperscript{ix} style. On finding out that he has a chance with Onodera, Ichijō enters another animated tangent of elation (shot 9), thinking that she does not have any romantic prospects. Forgetting that she is in a fake relationship with Ichijō and trying to continue the conversation with Onodera, Kirisaki mentions how she would like to meet someone, blatantly contrary to how everyone believes she is dating Ichijō. All of their friends’ surprise, as well as Ichijō’s panic at them being found out, are expressed through an animated tangent of everyone (shots 12-14, 16), which stands in contrast to how Kirisaki remains in her normal animated form (shot 15). As soon as Kirisaki realizes her mistake though, she enters her own animated tangent in a blatantly over-done denial of her mistake (shot 18-19). Ichijō and Kirisaki’s combined nervousness trying to cover up for her slip of the tongue is conveyed through their altered twitching animation style (shots 22-23), which lasts only until Maiko poses another difficult question for the two of them. Asking how far Kirisaki and Ichijō have gone, this sends the two of them into another state of panic, punctuated by another animated tangent (shot 27). As a fake couple, they have obviously not done anything, and their animated tangent of fake spit/vomit mirrors that of Ichijō and Onodera (shot 4), using the repetition of this animated tangent style to further comedy of their reaction.

In this scene, the frequently used animated tangents make an extreme visual expression of character emotion, conveying to the audience just how awkward the entirety of the group’s social interaction is. While the animated tangents are certainly comedic in their execution, they additionally underscore major points of Shaftian

\textsuperscript{ix} Super Deformed: “A type of character common to anime; one who is very small but with an oversized head. SD characters are often used for comic effect.” From"Super Deformed; Sd," in \textit{A/V a to Z: An Encyclopedic Dictionary of Media, Entertainment and Other Audiovisual Terms} (McFarland, 2014).
despair for these characters: the inability to communicate with each other, as well as unrequited feelings. The result of the fact that they cannot properly communicate with each other is the extreme teenage awkwardness that is expressed through animated tangents, making these tangents both comedic in the immediate moment, but pointing towards underlying despair. Throughout *Nisekoi*, quickly occurring animated tangents inject a moment of comically exaggerated emotional expression that overtly brings the audience closer to understanding character emotion.

In opposition to *Nisekoi*, in which animated tangents occur only briefly for an extreme visual expression of character subjectivity, *Madoka Magica* employs infrequent but highly pronounced art shifts that create a disturbing and disorienting space for characters to enter, that furthers the characters’ and audience’s perception of the danger of the magical girl world. The witch’s labyrinths are animated using a completely different whimsical collage animation style (a staple of the long-time Shaft collaborator animation group Gekidan Inu Curry) which stands in contrast to the meticulously detailed, sterile, and organized normal world. The complete change in style that balances between cutesy and disturbing fits with the series’ overall attention to presenting a magical girl world that includes despair, whereby in despite a whimsical look, through its danger the space becomes truly unsettling both for the characters themselves and the audience. The way in which the witch’s labyrinths convey this feeling can be seen clearly in its use in episodes 1 and 3.

In episode 1, Madoka and Sayaka’s first interaction with the labyrinth conveys the transition from whimsy to horror that comes to define the rest of the labyrinths, and by extension the central dichotomy of the series. As Madoka and Sayaka, try to
outrun Homura (who is chasing them to kill Kyubey), they are slowly surrounded by butterflies on sticks, colorful paper cutout circles, and a hodge-podge of other paper-cutout items. Sayaka and Madoka’s animation style slowly renders them closer to paper cutouts than their normal animated form, and mysterious wailing soundtrack can be heard as the witch’s labyrinth slowly forms around them (figure 61). As they look around, they see cutesy giggling cotton ball creatures with mustaches and walking butterflies begin to surround them as the creatures chant a song in an unintelligible language (figures 62-63). As the creatures come closer, far more sinister imagery begins to appear, including floating snapping scissors, barbed wire, thorn-covered roses, and a change of the cutesy cotton-ball mustache creatures revealing uneven black eyes, and a growling mouth bearing its teeth (figure 64). Just as all hope seems to be lost for the two, as discussed in the previous chapter, Mami enters, and in an encapsulation of the optimistic false magical girl world that she represents, she easily defeats the witch. Because of Mami’s presence, suddenly the witch’s labyrinth world becomes safe, and this concept is furthered in the second episode when Madoka and Sayaka go hunting witches with Mami, and despite Madoka and Sayaka’s fear, the express to Mami that they feel safe with her. This false sense of security does not last long though, as it is torn apart along with Mami’s death in the third episode. The witch that kills Mami appears cute and doll-like at first, and the audience, along with Madoka and Sayaka are lulled into a confidence in the safe optimistic magical girl world (figure 65). Just as Mami performs her final attack and victory seems within sight, from the mouth of the cutesy doll-like witch emerges a giant clown-like giant polka dot worm (figure 66). It approaches a clearly
startled Mami with a grin of razor sharp teeth, and before Madoka and Sayaka’s eyes bites Mami’s head off, and proceeds to devour her entire body as they watch in helpless horror (figure 67). Just as the cutesy image of the of the witch turns sinister, so does Madoka, Sayaka, and the audience’s perception of the magical world. *Madoka Magica* demonstrates how Shaft is able to use art shifts to reflect the characters’ and audience’s changing perception of the magical girl world. Using the dichotomy of whimsical and sinister imagery, the art shifts to the witch labyrinth act as a visual encapsulation of the central concept of how the comedic and despairing interact in *Madoka Magica*, furthering the audience’s understanding of that central dichotomy, and how the characters react to it.

As previously discussed with regard to backgrounds in *Hanamonogatari*, not every stylistic decision is meant to convey something, and sometimes visual style works simply for the sake of graphic interest, and this applies to visual shifts as well. While visual shifts have the power to convey character subjectivity in a comedic or despairing way, or create an alternative disorienting world, they also can function simply for the sake of graphic interest to the frame, which can be clearly seen in *Goku Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* episode 2. Over the course of this episode, the character designs completely switch twice – the first time to the art style of the original manga author’s first serialized manga *Go! Southern Ice Hockey Club*, and the second time in the style of *Zoku Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei*’s first ending theme (figures 68-70). These character design switches are unmotivated by the characters or events in the narrative, and especially given this series’ propensity for fourth-wall breaks, it is surprising how the character design changes go unacknowledged by the characters.
themselves. That these style shifts are functionally homages to other works that audience members might be familiar with, they work more as a kind of shout out to the audience as an inside joke just to regular viewers of the show. Art shifts function here not to serve any specific emotional context, but rather as a visual delight to an audience that has any familiarity with the work itself. As *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* demonstrates, while visual shifts are often used in Shaft works to further the audience’s understanding of characters’ emotional subjectivity or world itself, sometimes Shaft’s stylistic flourishes do not have an ulterior motive, and are there to simply provide visual delight and interest.

Art shifts and animated tangents are an intrinsic part of the Shaft visual style that, like the use of backgrounds and color, work to externalize character emotion in order to generate a deep audience understanding of character comedy and despair, ultimately working towards an intimate relationship between character and audience, which can be seen clearly through their use in *Nisekoi* and *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*. This use is not always the case though, and as *Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* presents, art shifts can also be in service of pure graphic interest.

If the Shaft approach to narrative is to enlighten the audience as to character comedy and despair, visual style works to visually externalize character emotion to contribute to the audience's understanding of this. Alternating editing patterns within a baseline low shot length use the kinetic energy of moving from shot to shot to make visual the heightening of character emotion. Visual patterns of text, close ups and specific character motion, and landscape shots then form a visual shorthand for expressing character reactions and subjective experience. Within the great attention to
an extremely organized frame made up by character staging and backgrounds, breaking this standard composition indicates shifts in character emotion. Finally, visual shifts of backgrounds, color, and animation style work to visually punctuate or influence the audience's perception of character emotion. The Shaft approach creates a near-surreal representation of reality in the animated world, and uses the freedom of the animated medium to bend the world to reflect the subjective experience of the characters that inhabit it. Through the meeting of Shaft's narrative proclivities and approach to visual style, the audience is able to develop a deep understanding of character subjectivity, working to create an intimate relationship between character and audience - the cornerstone of the Shaft House Style. In the following chapter, I will use the character Tsubasa Hanekawa’s arcs in the Monogatari series to illustrate how the combined Shaft narrative tendencies work together with their stylistic proclivities over the course of a full segment of a show. Through this case study, I will show how narrative works with style in one of Shaft’s most successful series to create an intimate relationship between character and audience based on the audience’s understanding of character comedy and despair.
Case Study 1: The *Monogatari* Series

The *Monogatari* series is the ideal Shaft series to use as a case study for a variety of reasons. It is the work that brought Shaft to large-scale fame through *Bakemonogatari*, and has since been the longest running series at Shaft to date, having run from 2009 through and beyond the writing of this thesis. Shaft has committed to adapting all content of the book series, ensuring a steady stream of income, and illustrating extreme confidence in the popular and financial success of the series.\(^1\) Because the series is so long running, the evolution of Shaft style, and the two directors who have worked on its personal approach to the series, can additionally be traced through its extended run. While both directors use the same narrative and stylistic language, there is a distinct difference in the directorship of their respective installations, and even between the different installations that they have worked on individually. Finally, the surrealist-leaning visual style of the series allows for the greatest amount of Shaft trademark stylistic aspects to be not just present, but brought to the forefront. Because the *Monogatari* series is based off of a novel series instead of a manga or other work with pre-conceived visuals, Studio Shaft can build the visual world and dictate how style serves the narrative to create a fluidity between comedy and despair in service of developing an intimate relationship between character and audience from the ground up. While the majority of stylistic elements used in the *Monogatari* series are present in other Shaft shows, the surreal style allows for the freedom to be less reserved in their use. The narrative of the *Monogatari* series is steeped in tragedy, conflict, self-doubt, and miscommunication for its characters (all major elements of Shaft’s worldview of what comprises
despair). However, the series maintains just as much happiness, wordplay, sexual teasing, irreverent jokes, and more, making sure that comedy is never lost.

Through the audience’s growing familiarity as the series continues with what comprises character comedy and despair, the audience is able to develop an intimate relationship with the characters of the series, and this intimate relationship through comedy and despair is the cornerstone of Shaft Style’s success. The Monogatari series operates on the assumption of the audience’s growing intimacy and knowledge of the characters, and this is accomplished through a narrative progression that is based on characters revealing and coming to terms with the parts of themselves that they would rather not accept or acknowledge. However, despite despairing circumstances, characters are not divorced from humor. Even if the main point of a given conversation is rooted in tragedy, this does not mean that there is no room for humor. Rather, having humor contributes even more to the audience’s growing intimacy with a character. As previously discussed in chapter one, each character develops their own specific brand of humor with Araragi, and with each other, which is essential to understanding the nuanced relationship dynamics between characters. Just as one develops intimacy with characters through understanding their personal despair, the same goes for understanding their personal brand of humor, and having a fluid relationship between comedy and despair is essential to getting to know these characters.

Within the Monogatari series specifically, episodes from the individual character arcs of Tsubasa Hanekawa have been chosen for closer examination for a variety of points. As of this thesis’ writing, the Monogatari series has yet to be
completed, and as such, few of the other characters have as complete a character arc as Hanekawa, who has had the most arcs devoted to her (except Araragi, who is a participant in essentially arc). The *Nekomonogatari: Kuro* OVA, the Tsubasa Cat arc of *Bakemonogatari*, and *Nekomonogatari: Shiro* installation of *Monogatari Second Season* are all devoted to Hanekawa specifically, and she additionally appears and plays a major role in the *Kizumonogatari* film trilogy, the *Koimonogatari* installation of *Monogatari Second Season*, and the Sodachi Lost arc of the *Owarimonogatari* installation. Through the large number of arcs that Hanekawa has had a major role in, the audience is able to understand the greatest variety of characterizations of Hanekawa through the various narrators she has been viewed by. While she, like most other characters, is perceived through Araragi’s narration for the majority of her appearances, the audience additionally is able to view her characterization as narrated by Kaiki Deishu in *Koimonogatari*, and the audience is able to get inside her own head as she additionally narrates her own arc in *Nekomonogatari: Shiro*.

Through Hanekawa’s most complete and multi-faced character arcs, the narrative revolves around her battle with the different aspects of her own personal despair, and each arc that is specifically devoted to her encompasses a different one, including unrequited love, family, and jealousy. Within the despairing narrative of Hanekawa’s coming to terms with the parts of herself that she continually hides and forces away, the way in which Shaft adeptly uses stylistic elements to support a narrative rooted in despair that moves fluidly into comedic moments to further the audience’s intimate relationship with the characters can be clearly seen.
Sugar Sweet Nightmare – Shaft Style in
Bakemonogatari Episode 14

*Bakemonogatari* episode 14 exemplifies the attention to using narrative construction and the specific stylistic proclivities of Studio Shaft to create fluidity between comedy and despair that deepens an already intimate relationship between the audience and characters. The narrative construction of this episode has Araragi confront issues on two fronts: the loss of Shinobu (the vampire who he is bonded with that turned him into a vampire), and helping Hanekawa relieve her stress so she will no longer be possessed by the Black Hanekawa oddity. As Araragi tries to resolve both of these distressing issues, forays into comedy keep the episode from being otherwise wholly despairing, while also continuing the audience’s growing understanding various characters. The title to the opening theme song of this arc, “Sugar Sweet Nightmare” exemplifies the attitude towards tone that this episode, and by extension the series takes. “Sugar Sweet” evokes lightheartedness and joy, or in other words, the comedic, and by contrast “Nightmare” conveys the exact opposite, despair. By examining the key scenes of this episode, the way in which narrative setup, visual patterns, character staging, and rhythm and structure of dialogue works to create a balance between moments more centered on despair and comedy respectively can be clearly seen. The specific expression of tone in these moments facilitates further audience understanding of character relationship dynamics, and henceforth develops intimacy between character and audience.

The episodes prior to *Bakemonogatari* episode 14 provide both necessary backstory for the audience to understand the story in the context of the larger
Monogatari series chronology, and sets the stage for the audience to understand the central conflict of the arc: Hanekawa’s unrequited love for Araragi. As the narrative of the Monogatari series is presented out of chronological order, the start of the Tsubasa Cat arc, Bakemonogatari episode 11, serves as mainly a recap of the events that occur in the later-released but chronologically earlier Nekomonogatari: Kuro, which was Hanekawa’s first instance in becoming the apperntion dubbed Black Hanekawa. Araragi recalls how due to a huge amount of built up stress from her abusive family, Hanekawa turned into a white half-cat woman that attacked people by draining them of all their energy. The way in which Black Hanekawa was previously mitigated and Hanekawa was able to return to normal was through Shinobu biting Black Hanekawa and draining her of all of her energy. Black Hanekawa returned to normal with little memory of what happened while she was Black Hanekawa. This episode is significant in how it introduces the audience to the concept of Black Hanekawa, the manifestation of Hanekawa’s stress. By presenting the mechanics of how Hanekawa became essentially possessed by Black Hanekawa over the course of this episode, this allows the remainder of the Tsubasa Cat arc of Bakemonogatari to focus not on how to return Hanekawa to normal, but rather finding the reason for why Hanekawa turned into Black Hanekawa in the first place, which is the central conflict of this arc.

A direct continuation of Hanekawa’s arc could not be completed though due to a variety of production issues and delays in the series’ original run, causing the final three episodes of Bakemonogatari to be released one at a time in three month intervals direct to internet viewing. Therefore, episode 12, which moves away from
Hanekawa’s storyline and chronicles Senjōgahara and Araragi’s first date, serves as a finale episode for the season. The placement of episode 12 is significant though, in how after various arcs of Araragi gaining new friendships through helping others, it re-centers the story on his romance with Senjōgahara. In order for Tsubasa Cat to influence the audience’s sympathy for Hanekawa, but not get behind Hanekawa as the ideal romantic partner for Araragi, this episode is crucial in solidifying the strength of Araragi and Senjōgahara’s mutual love for each other before moving into the story of Hanekawa’s unrequited love for Araragi.

Episode 13 then returns to Hanekawa’s narrative, setting up the conflict for the arc in which Senjōgahara as Araragi’s girlfriend, and the threat of Black Hanekawa re-appearing (as introduced in the two prior episodes) are both directly involved. Opening with a conversation between Araragi and Hachikuji (the previously lost ghost), in which Hachikuji confirms that Hanekawa is Araragi’s friend, whereas Senjōgahara is his girlfriend. Hachikuji expresses her surprise that Araragi would choose Senjōgahara over Hanekawa, to which Araragi’s only reply is that he doesn’t think of her that way, that he owes her too much, and that she would probably reject him. While only present as a point of passing conversation, this moment is essential to setting up the later romantic conflict of the arc, as well as prompting further questions as to the exact nature of Araragi and Hanekawa’s relationship, begging the question of why he owes so much to her, to be examined further in later arcs. Later in the episode, Hanekawa asks Araragi to skip school and come to see her, where she confides in him that she has been having headaches (just as she did before she turned to Black Hanekawa the previous time) and then reveals
that cat ears have appeared on her. Araragi brings Hanekawa to see Meme Oshino (the expert in oddities) to consult him, where Oshino proceeds to knock Hanekawa unconscious with the goal of turning her completely into Black Hanekawa so they can tie her up, question her, and ascertain what is causing her stress.

The cold open of Bakemonogatari episode 14 waffles between exposition of the nature of Hanekawa’s oddity to the audience, and conveying Araragi’s perception of Oshino having a far greater knowledge than him as to the full scope of information through staging, text, and comedic art shifts. The scene builds tension through aligning the audience with Araragi’s growing anxiety that Oshino is keeping something from him, which is enforced through Oshino’s staging relative to Araragi, and text flashes that punctuate Oshino’s enigmatic lines of dialogue. As Araragi questions Oshino, similar to the way in which staging worked in Bakemonogatari episode 3, Oshino is consistently staged above Araragi, which is just one way through which Shaft visually illustrates how Oshino is one step ahead of Araragi (figure 71). In between close up shots of him, he will suddenly have moved from one side of the room to the other, going up, down, and across the room by standing on the various desks. While Araragi also moves around the room, he remains on the ground, and has a lesser range of motion.

In addition to staging, text flashes also create the feeling that Oshino is one step ahead of Araragi. Text flashes of select lines of Oshino’s dialogue punctuate the lines that cue Araragi that Oshino might be keeping information from him. When Araragi posits that the reason for Black Hanekawa’s reappearance is, like in the previous instance, from the stress of her family’s abuse, Oshino’s reply of “I wonder
about that” is punctuated by that line of dialogue appearing in a text flash against a red background as he says it. Slightly later, as Araragi mistakenly believes that the only way to help Hanekawa is “to treat the symptoms when they pop up,” when Oshino replies “Yeah, you’re right about that, but…” another text flash against a red background stating [Half Hearted Line] appears. Both of these text flashes inform the audience of how Araragi perceives these two parts of the conversation, and how he is coming to understand that Oshino is possibly keeping something from him.

As Araragi’s anxiety compounds, he tells Oshino that he “is being vague,” and the tone abruptly switches to the comedic. Oshino swiftly turns the subject away from how to help Hanekawa, moving into a more comedic tangent about how Hanekawa with cat ears reminds him of the manga “Neko Neko Fantasia” written by Nekobe Neko. Araragi is quick to jump into this comedic tangent, and in a bit of wordplay corrects Oshino that Nekobe Neko did not draw “Neko Neko Fantasia,” but rather “Goldfish Warning.”

This brisk tonal shift from Araragi’s distress to humorous wordplay is visually punctuated by an art shift to the animation style of “Goldfish Warning” as Araragi corrects Oshino (figure 72). Oshino knows Araragi well by this point in the story, and with that knowledge he deliberately jumps on to a comedic tangent he knows will distract Araragi from the real issue at hand. While this burst of comedy is funny in and of itself, it is additionally revealing of the larger issue of if Oshino is keeping information from Araragi (and by extension, the audience).

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1 Note on Wordplay: This joke is a funny bit of wordplay. The Japanese word for cat is ねこ neko, which is why Oshino mistakenly thought that the author of the manga titled Neko Neko Fantasia was written by Nekobe Neko. Therefore, for the manga Neko Neko Fantasia, who he mistakenly thinks is written by Nekobe Neko (all of these names and titles essentially containing the word neko repeatedly) to have reminded him of Black Hanekawa, a cat-human, is humorous.
While in the moment, Araragi and the audience do not know what could possibly prompt Oshino to keep things from Araragi, especially when he has not done so in the past, it is revealed at the end of the arc that Oshino was planning to permanently leave that town, leaving Araragi to handle any future issues with Shinobu or other supernatural oddities on his own. Only from that later point in time though is Araragi able to re-consider the implications of this interaction. By keeping information from Araragi, Oshino was pushing him to solve this issue for himself – to think critically and not completely rely on Oshino. In this scene, the presence of comedy adds levity to the immediate moment, comedy is present, and works by itself, but additionally maintains a relationship to character struggle in how it distracts Araragi from realizing Oshino’s true intentions.

Following Araragi’s conversation with Oshino, as he goes out searching for Shinobu, he reminisces about how he has asked the other girls he previously helped for their aid in finding Shinobu (Appendix M, scenes 3-6). Despite the fact that the reason he must call every girl to ask for their aid is rooted in a dire situation, each girl in some way attempts to add humor to his panicked call, through continuing the non-sequitur radio show gag from the previous episode, putting comedy and despair at odds with each other. This has the effect of turning what was once a comedic tangent in its original context in the previous episode, to a now recurring gag, to again splice comedy into an otherwise despairing conversation.

A major shift in tone occurs in Araragi’s final conversation with Senjōgahara though, which works to convey a greater level of intimacy between the two of them in comparison to the rest of the girls, who the audience has just seen Araragi have a
similar conversation with one after the other. Unlike every previous girl who agreed immediately to aid Araragi, Senjōgahara flatly tells him that she will not go searching. The distinct difference in this conversation is visually punctuated by a variety of elements, one of which is including Araragi in the editing sequence. In all previous conversations, only Araragi’s voice was heard through the phone, and the camera stayed with the individual girls. In this conversation, though, a shift to crosscutting between Araragi and Senjōgahara on either end of the phone creates a more intimate conversation, even though they are spatially separate. Unlike the other girls, the audience gets to see Araragi’s reaction to Senjōgahara’s words, and vice versa, giving the audience a clear understanding of their codependence and adoration for each other.

In addition to this change in editing, there is an additional color shift for this scene. In every previous conversation, the color scheme was less saturated with more pastels, but for Senjōgahara’s conversation, the implied sunset creates distinctive shadows around her eyes, and gives her location a comparatively more saturated reddish-purple tint (figures 73-75). This color shift visually differentiates Senjōgahara’s conversation with Araragi from those of the previous three girls (scenes 3-5), adding more visual weight to the moment, and drawing the audience’s attention to noticing the distinct difference in Araragi’s relationship to Senjōgahara’s in comparison to that of the other girls.

As Senjōgahara explains to Araragi exactly why she cannot go look for Shinobu, a series of shots of the different decorations and other items for the school festival go over her dialogue, using still shots of locations to further the Senjōgahara’s
sentiment about needing to stay to finish the work in Hanekawa’s stead (figure 76). In comparison to the scenery shots present in Araragi’s conversations with other girls, which are not reflective of their specific reasoning, shots of items for the school festival is a distinct change from the previous conversations in how they visualize Senjōgahara’s reasoning for not helping Araragi.

Most importantly to this scene is the half-comedic-half-despairing close to Araragi and Senjōgahara’s conversation. As the two end their conversation, Senjōgahara delivers a final line to Araragi that encapsulates the fluidity between comedy and despair that Shaft is so skilled at using tonal shifts to accomplish. In Senjōgahara’s final goodbye to Araragi, she says not goodbye, but delivers a teasing but heartfelt and meaningful line of: “Tsundere Service! Don’t get me wrong. It’s not like I’m worried about you. But if you don’t come back I’ll never forgive you.” Through this one line of dialogue, she both makes a self-aware comment that pokes fun at her surface archetypal status as a tsundere character personality, while also confirming her affection and care for Araragi. It is in this very idea of “tsundere service” that is a small microcosm of the Shaft attitude towards comedy and despair – it is both comically teasing, while at the same time heartfelt and encapsulating a genuine fear for Araragi’s well-being. It is a line of self-aware comedy that is rooted in fear and despairing circumstance.

This greater amount of intimacy between Senjōgahara and Araragi, as established through stylistic shifts and a farewell that walks the line between comedic and despairing, is both necessary for the development of their individual relationship,

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\( ^{ii} \) *Tsundere*: “An archetypal character of anime and manga who is initially harsh (often violent) then later gentle, or one who is initially seen as cold and aloof on the outside, but later shown to be loving and warm on the inside. While the term is gender neutral, the character appears most often as female.”
as well as for solidifying the audience’s understanding of their closeness, especially
given the later narrative progression. At the episode’s conclusion, it is revealed that
the source of Hanekawa’s stress has been her unrequited love for Araragi. While this
comes as a major shock to Araragi, to an audience that is the least bit familiar with
harem genre conventions, by all counts it should have been Hanekawa, and not
Senjōgahara, who is Araragi’s girlfriend. She has known him the longest, has a shared
history with him prior to the start of Bakemonogatari (which when later delved into,
only furthers this sentiment), and is portrayed through Araragi’s narration as
essentially the perfect person. Therefore, in delving into this point that Hanekawa is
in love with Araragi, for him to reject her as he does at the end of the arc, it is
necessary to have established for the audience an especially strong relationship
between Araragi and Senjōgahara. This is accomplished through the audience’s
understanding of the nuances of their relationship, as it is portrayed through how they
banter with each other, and at the same time do not hesitate to express that they
deeply care for each other’s well-being in dire situations. In this quick phone
conversation between Araragi and Senjōgahara, movement between comedy
(expressed through their banter), and despair (expressed through genuine fear for each
other’s safety) support the sentiment that the characters with the greatest intimacy are
Senjōgahara and Araragi, which becomes necessary later for further exploration of
Araragi’s relationship with Hanekawa at the end of this arc and in later arcs.

In scene 8 (Appendix M) tone shifts fluidly between comedy and despair
through the use of visual patterns that emphasize Araragi’s more serious
consideration, and fanservice which is more joking, while hinting at questions and
concerns that will be addressed at the arc’s conclusion. In his conversation with Black Hanekawa, Araragi starts off hostile, asking why she is there and trying to get an answer out of her. Following Black Hanekawa’s explanation for how she escaped, the tone moves slightly direr and questioning, as Araragi thinks to himself “Oshino, you’ve been pretty useless this time around. You let Shinobu and Black Hanekawa get away. That’s not like you.” Through Araragi’s narration, the audience is brought to consider again Oshino’s role in this arc, and this moment of consideration is ushered in and held through a quick eye close up of Araragi, to then a long held shot of text stating [Soliloquy] against a black background as Araragi thinks his line of dialogue. The eye close up and on screen text are the first instances of these commonly used visual patterns since Black Hanekawa’s arrival to the scene, and as such they direct the audience closer in to Araragi’s thoughts and narration, cuing the audience that Araragi is moving into a more serious moment of consideration.

The scene swiftly moves away from the more serious tone of considering Oshino, to a more comedic fanservice-heavy state that functions to further the audience’s understanding of Araragi’s relationship with Hanekawa. Following another eye close up and series of jump cuts of Araragi looking at the scantily-clad half-cat Black Hanekawa, Araragi’s noticing Hanekawa’s appearance undeniably apparent (figure 77). His arousal is made comically clear through a series of exaggerated animations and art shifts, clearly marking a tonal shift away from deep reflection on Oshino, to thinking about Hanekawa as a sexual character (figures 78-80). He then takes the comedic mood one step further by having Black Hanekawa recite a tongue twister – a joking way to make fun of her changed speech style when
she becomes Hanekawa, which he remarks as adorable. In this moment, Shaft adeptly uses a repeated and varied fluid movement between comedy and despair to further foreshadow Oshino’s later revealed departure. The specific way in which comedy is used furthers the audience’s understanding of the specific nature of Araragi’s relationship with Oshino and Black Hanekawa respectively. Oshino’s relationship with Araragi is based on a kind of mentor-student dynamic, so Oshino using a subject that he knows Araragi would latch on to as a comedic tangent in order to distract him from a larger issue fits with their established relationship dynamic. In turn, Black Hanekawa steering Araragi away from deeper consideration of Oshino’s role in this arc is based in a comedic expression of his sexual attraction to her.

While at this point in what the audience knows about Araragi and Hanekawa’s relationship, this interaction plays out as cut and dry sexual attraction, it is later contextualized in *Nekomonogatari: Kuro*. As *Nekomonogatari: Kuro* chronicles the first appearance of Black Hanekawa, it additionally explains further why exactly Araragi is not dating Hanekawa. Over the course of *Nekomonogatari: Kuro*, he comes to the realization that he is not in love with Hanekawa, as he thought at the start of the arc, but rather deeply admires her and is sexually attracted to her while he is sexually frustrated himself. With this later revealed knowledge, the fact that in this scene, Black Hanekawa’s sexuality is what moves Araragi from a place of serious contemplation to lighthearted fanservice works on two levels: comedic interaction on the surface, but that is rooted in the deeper issues and nuances to their relationship. While the portrayal of Black Hanekawa in this scene uses typical fanservice styled

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**Note on Language:** When Hanekawa turns into Black Hanekawa, wherever she uses the “na” sound it turns to “nya,” mimicking the sound of a cat as it is expressed in Japanese.
shots that place visual emphasis on Black Hanekawa’s figure, its purpose is in creating a fluid movement between despair and comedy that highlights the most nuanced aspects of Araragi and Hanekawa’s relationship, demonstrating how Shaft uses the fluidity between comedy and despair to create an intimate understanding of Araragi and Hanekawa’s relationship as well as further foreshadow future narrative events.

While the rest of this scene with Araragi and Black Hanekawa continues moving in a similar fashion between Araragi seriously questioning Black Hanekawa as to her motives and finding her actions comedic, the latter third of the episode continues on a more serious note, with less movement into comedy. As Black Hanekawa and Araragi discuss the nature of relationships between humans and the supernatural, the conversation remains more solemn, leading into the revelation at the episode’s conclusion that the source of Hanekawa’s stress is her unrequited love for Araragi. In order to lead to this moment that reveals Hanekawa’s true despair, Shaft is careful to manipulate the tone to contain less comedy, building from seriousness to despair to create a reveal that is far more emotionally impactful than if comedy were consistently present. Visual style additionally aids this transition, as animated tangents, art shifts, and other visual measures to convey comedy are avoided. As Araragi and Black Hanekawa move through the city searching for Shinobu, backgrounds slowly become more imposing and industrial, creating a steadily more striking and threatening atmosphere (figure 81). When the two reach the top of the building, where the true source of Hanekawa’s despair is finally revealed to Araragi, the wind is blowing strongly, and the lights from the top of the building create very
dramatic shadows on Araragi and Black Hanekawa (figures 82-83). Both of these elements add a kinetic and hostile energy to the frame, building to the reveal at the episode’s conclusion. Rather than focus on fluidity between comedy and despair, Shaft additionally demonstrates a distinct attention to when this tonal movement is not necessary for creating character intimacy. Here it is through rising hostility, that is conveyed through dialogue and visual cues, that Araragi is brought to a full understanding of Hanekawa’s personal despair. Just as Shaft adeptly uses the fluidity between comedy and despair to create a more intimate experience with character relationship dynamics, they additionally demonstrate the ability pull back the movement between the two to create a more salient moment of realization.

_Bakemonogatari_ episode 14 demonstrates how Shaft adeptly uses a specific visual language to support commonly seen narrative proclivities in a consistently fluid movement between tones. The episodes prior to episode 14 set the stage for the events of the arc by providing necessary exposition, hinting at questions to the nature of Araragi and Hanekawa’s relationship, and solidifying the audience’s support of Araragi and Senjōgahara as a couple. The first scene uses visual patterns of text and staging, as well as tonal shifts to comedy accomplished through art shifts, to convey to the audience Araragi’s doubt in Oshino. His later conversation with Senjōgahara uses the distinct stylistic differences in this conversation to those previous to highlight the strength of Araragi and Senjōgahara’s relationship. Finally, his conversation with Black Hanekawa moves between serious consideration of Oshino’s action, to escalating the audience’s awareness of Araragi’s attraction to Black Hanekawa – and the reason and way in which tonal shifts to comedy are accomplished in Araragi’s
conversations with these characters respectively is indicative of the nature of his relationship with them. In this episode, the way in which movement between comedy and despair highlight important narrative developments as well as character dynamics to create an intimate relationship between audience and character through Araragi’s perspective can be clearly seen.

“They say secrets don’t come from questioning, but slips of the tongue.” – Shaft Style in *Nekomonogatari: Shiro* Episode 2

In the *Nekomonogatari: Shiro* installation of the *Monogatari* series second season, through the combination of Araragi’s absence and Hanekawa’s narration, the audience is privileged a completely different perception of both Hanekawa and Senjōgahara, which is epitomized throughout episode 2. Viewing *Bakemonogatari* episode 14 in comparison then to *Nekomonogatari: Shiro* episode 2, the consistencies and inconsistencies in Shaft directorship moving from Oishi to Itamura, as well as the change in audience perception of characterization through a change to Hanekawa as the narrator can be clearly seen. Through Senjōgahara’s extension of friendship to Hanekawa, she aids Hanekawa in realizing her essential character flaws, and pushes her forward to reaching a point of self-acceptance on her own terms. This can be seen through examining the narrative setup of the central antagonist and Araragi’s absence for the arc in episode one, and key scenes between Senjōgahara and Hanekawa within episode 2.

The narrative of *Nekomonogatari: Shiro* episode 1 introduces all of the main thematic concerns, points of conflict, and relationship dynamics that will be explored over the course of the installation. In the cold open of episode 1, Hanekawa narrates
to the audience a small introduction to her home life, which reminds the audience of Hanekawa’s neglectful and abusive family – a main source of her despair, and the reason why she originally became possessed by Black Hanekawa (the events of Nekomonogatari: Kuro). She is woken up on her futon in the hallway by the Roomba vacuum because she does not have a room to herself. She describes how there are three sets of cookware, which she calls a good representation for her household. Nobody interacts, everyone is alone, and she is forgotten. On Hanekawa’s way to school, she briefly chats with Hachikuji, who informs her that Araragi was not at his house earlier. This small bit of information signposts a larger narrative change of this arc: Araragi’s absence. This arc is marked as different from all previous installations of the Monogatari series through both Hanekawa’s narration (the first instance of a narrator other than Araragi) and also Araragi’s absence from being an active participant in the events of the story itself, signaling a potential major turning point for the series.

As Hanekawa continues to school, she encounters a giant Tiger apparition that calls her “So white… white lies of ignorance” before walking away from her. Although no direct information as to the Tiger’s larger significance for the rest of the arc is given in this moment, it is noteworthy in how it presents to the audience the arc’s main antagonist, the Tiger, and major thematic considerations, Hanekawa’s lies to herself about her own unhappiness, through the Tiger’s dialogue.

Following this incident, Hanekawa has a conversation with Senjōgahara at school that is significant in how it sets up Hanekawa’s future considerations of how she can best help herself for the rest of the arc, and serves as an initial introduction to
the relationship development between Senjōgahara and Hanekawa. Up until this point in the series, despite the audience’s knowledge of Araragi’s current romantic relationship with Senjōgahara, and his previous complicated feelings between lust, admiration, and past love for Hanekawa, the audience has little understanding of the specific relationship between Senjōgahara and Hanekawa. In seeing their interaction through Hanekawa’s eyes, Senjōgahara’s ability to cut through a lot of what Araragi does not perceive about Hanekawa, such as Hanekawa’s complicated relationship with Araragi, can be clearly seen. Hanekawa and Senjōgahara’s conversation in this episode is significant in how it highlights the dynamics of her current relationships with Senjōgahara and Araragi from a different perspective than Araragi’s, and introduces her relationship with Senjōgahara as a main focus for the arc.

Hanekawa informs Senjōgahara of her encounter with the Tiger, who suggests that Araragi would be the better person to ask for help from in a situation involving the supernatural. Their conversation highlights Araragi’s absence from school, further signaling his absence from this arc. Because of his absence, Hanekawa confides that she has been hesitating to contact him, to which Senjōgahara replies that Hanekawa should “be a bit more impudent about things” because “that boy will never consider you relying on him bothersome, no matter what.” The audience knows very little about what Senjōgahara knows or thinks about Araragi and Hanekawa’s relationship, however this comment is significant in how it illustrates to the audience Senjōgahara’s acknowledgement of how important Hanekawa is to Araragi. Senjōgahara continues to point out that neither she nor Hanekawa have ever directly asked for help from Araragi because “he helps us before we have had the chance to.”
Through these remarks, Senjōgahara openly addresses Araragi’s role as a savior figure to both of them, but is also critical of this, asking Hanekawa if she was simply “expecting Araragi-kun to help you before you say anything,” to which Hanekawa doesn’t respond. Senjōgahara expresses how she does not think that it is okay to passively wait for his help, but that she can feel free to rely on Araragi. She continues offering her own assistance as well, telling Hanekawa that “if something happens, don’t think about trying to solve it alone… so if you don’t want to trouble Araragi-kun, get me involved… I can die together with you at least.” In these final comments to Hanekawa, Senjōgahara signposts the major narrative shift of this arc – Araragi not acting as a savior figure through his absence, and Senjōgahara’s reaching out to Hanekawa as friends for them to form their own relationship separate to Araragi.

The final narrative turning point of the episode, which pushes Hanekawa on her path of further self-discovery for the arc, occurs following their conversation where the two return to a classroom, and Hanekawa sees out the window that her house has burned to the ground. Left without a home, supportive parents, and Araragi, the combination of these events is, as Hanekawa narrates, a “devastating shock,” that disturbs the careful emotional balance Hanekawa has built for herself in order to remain the perfect person that she so diligently works to be. Believing, as she narrates, that “I’m probably completely unable to seek help from another person,” and receiving no support from her parents, she takes it upon herself to sleep at the abandoned cram school. Her statement directly contrasts Senjōgahara’s offer of assistance from the previous scene though, demonstrating that despite Senjōgahara’s reaching out to her, Hanekawa does not fully believe in the Senjōgahara’s extension
of friendship. Later that night, though, a hysterical Senjōgahara finds Hanekawa, and is incredibly angry that she did not reach out to her over spending the night in the cram school. She slaps Hanekawa multiple times, calling her an idiot, and yelling “A girl sleeping all alone in a place like this! What would you have done if something had happened!” This line is especially salient given that Senjōgahara is a victim of sexual assault herself, and demonstrates to the audience and Hanekawa the strength to which Senjōgahara cares for her. Senjōgahara’s extension of kindness to Hanekawa was not for appearances – it was incredibly heartfelt, and Senjōgahara’s reproach to Hanekawa and the fact that she spent the whole night out searching for her proves this. She then brings Hanekawa back to her apartment, where they spend the rest of the evening and afternoon the next day.

*Nekomonogatari: Shiro* continues developing Hanekawa and Senjōgahara’s relationship (as has been set up through the various circumstances introduced in the prior episode) not from a place of conflict over Araragi, but rather through mutual admiration for each other. Following the cold open, episode 2 begins right where the previous left off, in which right before going to take a shower together, Hanekawa responds without hesitation, “yes” to Senjōgahara’s question of if Hanekawa is still in love with Araragi. In any other narrative, this situation that “pits them against one another, both within the series and in the keen eyes of viewers looking to pair Araragi off with their favorite girl,” would be fodder for rivalry, jealousy, and conflict. More than any other girl featured in the series, Hanekawa especially is a potential threat to Senjōgahara and Araragi’s relationship: Hanekawa was the very first friend of Araragi’s prior to airing order start of the series, and before his meeting Senjōgahara,
Hanekawa and Araragi shared two intense experiences with the supernatural together. Araragi was even once grappling with if he was in love with Hanekawa. However, as blogger Emily states, rather than this narrative go in a direction towards competition, through this situation instead “the audience observes a genuine attempt at friendship between Hanekawa and Senjōgahara.”

The shower scene between Hanekawa and Senjōgahara expresses through Hanekawa’s narration how much Senjōgahara has grown since her first appearance in *Bakemonogatari*. After returning to Senjōgahara’s apartment, the two proceed to take a shower together, and over Hanekawa’s narration of her own internal monologue to the audience about her admiration for Senjōgahara, their shower is animated. Just as much as *Nekomonogatari: Shiro* is about Hanekawa’s coming to terms with her own personal despair, it additionally builds on the audience’s understanding of one of the series’ most enigmatic characters: Senjōgahara. Through changing the narrator from Araragi to Hanekawa, and essentially removing Araragi from the narrative, *Nekomonogatari: Shiro* proves just how much different and well-adjusted Senjōgahara is since her introduction in *Bakemonogatari*. Hanekawa is the best person to see this development through because, in a sense, she and Senjōgahara should be the worst of rivals, and Hanekawa’s utmost respect and inability to feel negatively about Senjōgahara shows how far Senjōgahara has really come.

Additionally, through Hanekawa’s realizations about Senjōgahara, she also comes to understand more about herself and her own lack of development.

The fact that Hanekawa’s narration of her own internal monologue to the audience is done over animation of their shower together does not function only to
titillate the audience. Rather, it is a paragon of how the Shaft approach to traditionally fanservice elements is inseparable from character emotion and narrative. Blogger Emily writes that “in anime’s endless parade of bath, beach, pool, and hot springs episodes, [girls] inevitably begin to compare their assets to one another, always finding themselves lacking… anime, overwhelmingly aimed at the Japanese male viewer, is far more concerned with girls comparing themselves to each other for that specific audience.” Hanekawa does not do this though. Emily continues that, “where Hanekawa finds herself lacking is not in bust size, nor hips, waist size, or any physical attribute. The scene is not accompanied by the traditional lack of consent and forced sizing up, so to speak. As the two young women explore each other for their own – and obviously the viewing audience’s – arousal, where Hanekawa finds herself lacking is in maturity or temperament.” This shower scene with Senjōgahara and Hanekawa takes the idea of visually provocative visuals, but subverts the idea of sizing each other up through Hanekawa’s deeply personal realizations about herself and Senjōgahara. Hanekawa narrates to the audience her thoughts that

Senjōgahara-san is the type of person who creates strong walls in her heart. There’s no mistake her former self, nicknamed ‘well-to-do girl,’ would never have let me stay the night or taken a shower with me. Even before that, she would never have run around the city all night looking for me. Thinking of the sheer weight of everything she’s overcome recently, I feel miserable about myself, because in the end I haven’t overcome a thing despite having similar experiences. That’s right. I have not overcome one thing. Despite the commotion during Golden Week and the day before the arts festival, I have not matured. I have not changed. That’s why I envied Senjōgahara-san so and loved her so. I couldn’t bring myself to hate her. I honestly thought that.

Here, Hanekawa is comparing, but it is for her own self-realizations and development. Hanekawa is able to recognize that Senjōgahara truly cares for Hanekawa, something she would not have been able to do at the start of

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* The two times Hanekawa became possessed by Black Hanekawa
Bakemonogatari. The shower itself taking place in Senjōgahara’s home, for the audience, additionally calls back to Bakemonogatari episode 2, where another Senjōgahara shower scene took place. In Bakemonogatari, “Araragi is forced to wait for [Senjōgahara],” but here, “Hanekawa is expressly invited to join Senjōgahara in an intimate setting.” In contrast to this distinct move towards greater intimacy with other characters, as Emily states and Hanekawa soon comes to recognize, “Hanekawa has barely advanced emotionally, eschewing her internal stress, bitterness, and jealousy into two oddities.” In the face of this deep understanding of just how much Senjōgahara has gone through and their supposed romantic rivalry, Senjōgahara’s reaching out to Hanekawa as friends becomes the catalyst for Hanekawa to begin to seriously consider herself and her own personal growth, and this idea of comparison as completed through their shower together visually furthers this emotional idea.

This monologue taking place over the shower scene additionally echoes the Shaft signature fluid movement between comedy and despair. Fanservice scenes in anime with similar visual treatment are usually considered something comedic. However, in this particular scene, typically comedic elements of fanservice are present over Hanekawa narrating her internal monologue to the audience, chronicling the personal despair of herself and Senjōgahara. The music in this scene is whimsical, and the Senjōgahara and Hanekawa playing in the shower evokes a feeling of friendly teasing and happiness (figure 84). At the same time, though, the on-the-surface fanservice visuals support the idea of Hanekawa’s deeply personal realizations about herself and Senjōgahara through a kind of comparison, creating a scene that
eloquently mixes elements of comedy and despair to come to a greater level of intimacy with both Senjōgahara and Hanekawa.

The reappearance of Black Hanekawa is implied to the audience through the use of text and Hanekawa’s narration, and Hanekawa’s willful or not denial of Black Hanekawa’s return demonstrates to the audience how intensely Hanekawa tries to deny the existence of Black Hanekawa, the manifestation of her negative feelings. In scene 2 (Appendix N) it is revealed that Hanekawa’s stress has built to the extent that Black Hanekawa has reappeared. While the audience is aware of this fact, possibly even before Black Hanekawa’s first appearance in this episode, it remains unclear if Hanekawa is aware of this. Text flashes that indicate what chapter in the original novel a scene corresponds to are frequently used throughout the Monogatari series. Through Hanekawa’s narration in this arc though, two times after she wakes up, she comments that it is strange that a couple of chapters have been skipped, saying “Oh? We skipped another chapter? What’s with that?” Hanekawa is aware of Black Hanekawa’s existence, however in her commenting on the skipped chapters, she makes it unclear to the audience if she is aware that Black Hanekawa is currently appearing. Her comments beg the question of if Hanekawa is aware that Black Hanekawa is appearing, and is lying to the audience, or if she is truly ignorant? In either situation, though, her willing or unwilling denial of Black Hanekawa’s appearance furthers the audience’s understanding of the lengths she will go to repress what she deems are the most undesirable aspects of herself. Black Hanekawa is the living representation of Hanekawa’s stress and negative feelings, and whether she is deliberately or not obfuscating the fact that Black Hanekawa has returned shows how,
in comparison to Senjōgahara, who has come to accept all parts of herself, Hanekawa still has not reached that point.

The shifting power dynamics of Black Hanekawa’s confrontation with the Tiger are visually conveyed to the audience through shifts in lighting and patterned scenery shots, confirming the Tiger’s status as the main antagonistic force of the arc. In scene 3, Black Hanekawa finding the Tiger apparition standing in the middle of a four-way crossroads hearkens back to the first time Hanekawa saw him, and her confrontation to the Tiger is visually supported through the changing frame. When Black Hanekawa finds the Tiger, she stands under a diegetically-implied spotlight from nearby streetlights. However, as there is no seen direct source for the spotlight, as she is in the middle of the road, the spotlight creates a more ominous and supernatural feeling to the frame (figure 85). As Black Hanekawa’s warning becomes more intense, building up to her threat to kill the Tiger, the spotlight in turn intensifies, as well as more shadows are added around Black Hanekawa standing under the spotlight (figure 86). These diegetically-implied changes to visuals work to create a more threatening space, however, they are soon undercut by the Tiger’s response to Black Hanekawa’s threat. He tells Black Hanekawa that because “you can’t hold back the traits of aberrations” and Hanekawa has already seen the Tiger, he has “already started acting.” The audience is able to understand that Black Hanekawa misjudged the Tiger’s power not through any additional dialogue though, but from the way that the visuals shift on the Tiger’s rebuttal to Black Hanekawa. Quick scenery shots of construction work and caution signs go over the Tiger’s dialogue, a visual cue often used by Studio Shaft to indicate a more threatening and dangerous
atmosphere. The lighting additionally becomes far more saturated, and the intensity of the spotlight on Black Hanekawa is lessened, reducing her visual dominance in the frame (figure 87). Recognizing that she is out of her league and in that moment, likely could not defeat the Tiger, Black Hanekawa was left with no other option but to run away.

Senjōgahara’s extension of friendship to Black Hanekawa, indicating her acceptance of all sides of Hanekawa, cues the audience’s understanding of how Hanekawa has yet to, and must, do this for herself, outlining the main trajectory of Hanekawa’s character development as it will continue through the remainder of the arc. Hanekawa has already outlined how she “envies” how Senjōgahara has come to a point of “maturation” through her own self-acceptance during her narration in the shower in scene 1b. For Hanekawa to also reach that same point of self-acceptance that she envies Senjōgahara has been able to attain, she must come to accept both the good and bad parts of herself, as Senjōgahara does. In scene 4, after being asked why she is awake, Senjōgahara reminds Black Hanekawa that she told Hanekawa that she is a very light sleeper. To this, Black Hanekawa replies, “It’s not like you told me,” and Senjōgahara responds with a biting line, confirming “But you’re still Hanekawasan, right?” Through this quick interaction, Senjōgahara once more confirms what Hanekawa has continually resisted: that Black Hanekawa is still Hanekawa. They are not two separate entities, and in Senjōgahara’s reaching out to Black Hanekawa, she pushes Hanekawa further towards accepting her complete self. Senjōgahara continues introducing herself to Black Hanekawa (this is their first time meeting) by offering to shake hands, and Black Hanekawa immediately rebuffs her, reminding Senjōgahara
that she drains the energy of anyone she touches, and therefore “a handshake is out of the question.” Senjougahra insists though, and in her demand, she furthers her extension of friendship to Hanekawa – she not only accepts, but insists on being known to Hanekawa and Black Hanekawa. Senjōgahara takes her introduction to Black Hanekawa one step further by asking Black Hanekawa to “take good care of Hanekawa.” In this request, she demonstrates her trust and acceptance of all parts of Hanekawa – exactly what Hanekawa herself needs to do. The absence of art and background shifts visually supports the serious tone of this moment by keeping the viewer grounded in the intense confrontation between the two characters. On Black Hanekawa discovering Senjōgahara, quick editing to different angles of Senjōgahara conveys Black Hanekawa’s surprise. There is only one eye close up in the scene, which works in conjunction with a diegetically-implied color shift that puts harsher purple lighting across Senjōgahara’s face from Black Hanekawa’s energy drain when the two shake hands, which focuses the audience’s attention to Black Hanekawa’s taking seriously Senjōgahara’s handshake and request (figure 88).

Through Senjōgahara’s actions, and the way in which visual style supports the seriousness of this scene, the audience comes to a deep understanding of the lengths to which Senjōgahara will go to both convey her friendship to Hanekawa, and prompt Hanekawa to come to the same point of self-acceptance that she has. Through this garnered knowledge of their relationship to each other, as well as the necessary point of acceptance that Hanekawa must come to, the audience is able to develop further intimacy with Senjōgahara and Hanekawa’s character.
The final scene of the episode is divided into distinct portions that outline Senjōgahara emotionally pushing Hanekawa, and the first portion is one of three distinct tonal shifts from the comedic to the serious, through which Senjōgahara pointedly questions Hanekawa in a way that prompts her towards greater self-reflection. The next morning, Hanekawa makes them breakfast, and to Senjōgahara’s surprise, Hanekawa served the entire meal without any seasoning. Senjōgahara questions Hanekawa about the various condiments she neglected to serve, and Hanekawa’s nervousness and uncertainty regarding Senjōgahara’s questions is visually supported through a repeated fish eye lens in varying degrees of close up shots of Hanekawa after each question. Like Senjōgahara is doing verbally, the camera is putting Hanekawa under a microscope, and the fish eye lens clearly conveys to the audience Hanekawa’s confusion at the conversation’s progression (figure 89). At this point, it is unclear to Hanekawa if the direction of the conversation will lean to more lighthearted ends, with Senjōgahara jesting with her about the use of condiments, or if Senjōgahara is trying to get towards something deeper, using condiments as a segue.

Senjōgahara’s questioning about the lack of condiments at breakfast soon shifts tone to a more comedic round of questioning about Hanekawa’s regular use of seasonings and condiments, and Hanekawa’s perception of this conversation being comedic is in turn supported through various repeated background shifts. On the whole, the second season of the Monogatari series is more lacking in the blatant background shifts akin to those previously discussed in Nisemonogatari, and this is especially pronounced in Hanekawa’s arc. It cannot be said for certain if this decision
was made to better represent the world through Hanekawa’s eyes, or more the changing proclivities of Itamura’s direction, however given the relative change to using more shifts in color, lighting, and framing over overt background and art shifts for the majority of the second season, it is likely that it is more the cause of the latter. In either case, though, the fact the relative absence of pronounced background shifts in Hanekawa’s arc makes their use in this situation an overt shift to a highly comedic tone. The background changes to a game show-like kitchen for each condiment that Senjōgahara asks Hanekawa about (i.e. soy sauce for sushi, sugar in yogurt, ketchup on omelets, sugar in coffee, etc.), and for each different type of food, Senjōgahara switches to the outfit of the chef that would likely make that food (i.e. sushi chef attire, a cow costume, a Chef Boyardee-like costume, a maid costume etc.). After each question, Hanekawa pulls up a red “X” like what would appear on a game show to reply that she does not use that condiment (figures 90-91). This visual shift to a game show themed round of questioning pushes the tone of the scene clearly into that of comedy through referential parody to a game-show format, and works akin to a red herring for the tonal direction of the conversation. The background shift signals to the audience Hanekawa’s perception of this moment as moving towards a casual jesting conversation with Senjōgahara, and her initial perception in this vein makes the tonal shift in the final third of the conversation, which turns her food preferences inwards as a mirror towards deep self-reflection on her own personal flaws, far more pronounced and impactful for the audience and herself.

Following this round of questioning, through her dialogue structure that brings the conversation from metaphorical speculation to character observation, Senjōgahara
shifts the conversation to a more serious tone. Going deeper into asking Hanekawa about why she does not particularly like seasoning, Senjōgahara extends that observation to an examination of Hanekawa’s character. When Hanekawa tells Senjōgahara that “food is good even without flavor,” this comment brings Senjōgahara to her larger point of conversation, moving from food as subtext into her real point. Senjōgahara’s observations to Hanekawa (Appendix O) accomplish a tonal shift from comedy to despair by pushing Hanekawa further towards legitimate self-examination of her flaws. Senjōgahara directly tells Hanekawa that she cannot feel like she and Hanekawa are truly friends if Hanekawa naturally accepts anything that comes into her life, reaching a point of more intimate conversation. Senjōgahara wants affirmation that she and Hanekawa are friends not out of proximity, but based on a level of intimacy. Senjōgahara extends this to Hanekawa’s feelings for Araragi as well, prompting her once more to consider if she really is in love with Araragi. Senjōgahara’s wanting affirmation of their friendship is especially important given their narrative potential for being romantic rivals, as it frames Senjōgahara’s comments about Hanekawa’s relationship with Araragi to not come from a point of jealousy or malice, but rather helping Hanekawa begin to self-reflect on her own relationships.

This scene’s use of repeated close-ups, text, and eye close-ups supports the movement between tones by emphasizing the seriousness of Senjōgahara’s words and Hanekawa’s unspoken thoughts, illustrating to the audience how effective Senjōgahara’s analysis of Hanekawa’s character is in bringing Hanekawa to a place of legitimate self-reflection (Appendix O). While Senjōgahara dominates the scene
through dialogue, visuals indicate the way in which Hanekawa perceives the entire interaction. Background shifts during the portion where Senjōgahara questions Hanekawa about food preferences make the scene initially more comical, reflecting how Hanekawa does not entirely realize the larger subject of what Senjōgahara is getting at. However, as Senjōgahara focuses her character analysis more and more, two identical close ups of Senjōgahara (shots 13, 16) visually punctuate Senjōgahara’s more pointed concern. Senjōgahara’s analysis of Hanekawa is broken into three parts, each interrupted by text flashes that indicate Hanekawa’s inner thoughts about the progression of Senjōgahara’s observations. In the first portion, as Hanekawa slowly comes to understand what Senjōgahara is trying to tell her, text flashes of her internal thoughts processing this initiate the audience’s and Hanekawa’s perception of the scene’s changing tone (shots 22-25). As Hanekawa becomes cognizant of the direction Senjōgahara is going, the second singular text flash (shot 28) informs the audience that the subject Senjōgahara is broaching is one Hanekawa would rather let alone. The final singular text flash following a shot of Hanekawa staring blankly at Senjōgahara, does not contain any text at all, rather three dots instead, conveying to the audience how Senjōgahara’s biting words have left Hanekawa truly flustered (shot 30). The progression through these three sets of text flashes is an externalization of emotion conveys to the audience the progression through Hanekawa’s thoughts in coming to understand Senjōgahara’s point.

The final section of Senjōgahara’s analysis and questioning of Hanekawa, where Senjōgahara re-states her question from the previous episode of if Hanekawa really loves Araragi, is visually punctuated by two sequential eye close ups of
Senjōgahara. Over these close ups, Hanekawa narrates the seriousness of Senjōgahara's gaze at her, conveying how the meaning Senjōgahara’s words is finally dawning on her. Through Senjōgahara’s analysis of Hanekawa, which moves from a metaphorical discussion of her food preferences, to a discussion of how her lack in preferences in food is reflective of her blind acceptance of “anything that comes her way,” brings Hanekawa to a real point of self-consideration. Senjōgahara asks if Hanekawa “can tell me once more that you’re still in love with Araragi-kun” not from a place of romantic jealousy or rivalry, but rather to hold up a mirror for Hanekawa to begin to reconcile a main source of her personal despair (her unrequited love for Araragi) and reach a point of self-acceptance.

Movement from the metaphorical to precise observation of Hanekawa’s character flaws is supported through the scene’s use of background shifts, text, and close ups. Senjōgahara, who has already demonstrated her acceptance of all parts of Hanekawa, pushes Hanekawa towards doing the same. By posing that the reason for Hanekawa’s unrequited love for Araragi is a product of her larger character flaw of blind acceptance of her circumstances, Senjōgahara goads Hanekawa into recognizing and accepting all of her most undesirable and negative emotions. Through this action, Senjōgahara tries to further the intimacy of her relationship to Hanekawa, while also providing revelations that develop the audience’s intimacy with both characters. The narrative structure of the episode is centered on conversations and monologues that epitomize the Studio Shaft fluidity between comedy and despair that is supported through visual style, which works to bring Senjōgahara and Hanekawa to a place of closer friendship. In every scene, Senjōgahara works to become closer and reach out
to Hanekawa, and in doing so, she brings Hanekawa further towards the self-introspection and self-acceptance that she knows Hanekawa needs to reach. Araragi’s narrative absence from this arc is fundamental for this development – the absence of his narration provides Hanekawa the time to speak for herself, and his physical absence forces Hanekawa to come to a place of self-acceptance on her own terms. Throughout Nekomonogatari: Shiro episode 2, Senjōgahara continually prompts Hanekawa through her dialogue to have Hanekawa truly consider herself, because only then once Hanekawa has come to a place of full acceptance of herself, like Senjōgahara has already done, can the two of them truly move forward as friends.

Looking in depth at Bakemonogatari episode 14, and Nekomonogatari: Shiro episode 2, the way in which narrative and style work together to create a fluid movement between comedy and despair to create and further intimacy between characters themselves, and the audience, can be clearly seen. For both episodes, narrative obstacles and character relationship dynamics that are set up in prior episodes demonstrates the importance of narrative order over the course of an arc (and the series as a whole) to accomplishing the various developments between character relationships to each other and the audience that happen within an individual episode. In Bakemonogatari episode 14, tonal shifts between the comedic and despairing seen through Araragi’s narration, as supported through the various stylistic proclivities of Shaft to externalize character emotion, further the audience’s understanding of Araragi’s relationships with Oshino, Senjōgahara, and Hanekawa. While Oshino acts as Araragi’s mentor, guiding him towards being able to handle issues with the supernatural on his own, Senjōgahara is firmly grounded as Araragi’s
love interest, in contrast to Hanekawa, who is an object of extreme adoration, admiration, and lust. In addition to grounding Araragi’s relationships, this episode additionally introduces a major source of despair for Hanekawa: her unrequited love for Araragi, which will continue through *Nekomonogatari: Shiro*. The different ways and reasons for which tonal shifts occur in Araragi’s interactions with these characters shapes the audience’s understanding and development of intimacy with them, and Araragi himself. *Nekomonogatari: Shiro* continues exploring Hanekawa’s unrequited love for Araragi by pointing to her central character flaw, that being her blind acceptance of anything that comes her way. Through Senjōgahara’s extension of friendship to Hanekawa, she leads Hanekawa towards being able to come to a point of self-acceptance and addressing the source of her own despair by herself. Over the course of these episodes, Studio Shaft adeptly utilizes a pronounced visual style to support a strong narrative progression that is rooted in despair, but moves fluidly in and out of comedy. The *Monogatari* series stands as the epitome of Studio Shaft’s narrative and stylistic approach to capturing their worldview that revolves around the comedic and despairing to develop an intimate relationship between character and audience, and through studying the series in depth a strong case can be made for the distinct approach that is Shaft Style.

As successful as Studio Shaft is, though, not every show has garnered as much success as the *Monogatari* series, and by examining a failure of the studio and finding what exactly went wrong in the studio’s approach can be equally as enlightening as to the specific functionality of Shaft Style. In the following chapter, the show *Mekakucity Actors*, a show largely considered a failure by critics and fans alike, will
be examined as a secondary case study, through which to garner when narrative and style do not meet properly, and as such the movement between comedy and despair is additionally severed.
Case Study 2: *Mekakucity Actors*

**Intro to Kagerou Project**

While most Studio Shaft anime have found a significant amount of success, popular, financial, or both, they are not infallible as a studio, and looking at one of their greatest failures contextualizes the extent to which Shaft Style works, and does not. By looking at the 2014 anime *Mekakucity Actors*, much can be learned about the distinct way in which the directorial proclivities of Studio Shaft work, and when not used correctly, fail at creating intimacy between character and audience.¹

*Mekakucity Actors* began as part of a larger mixed-media project called Kagerou Project, which began with a series of vocaloid songs composed by the music producer Jin, and music videos animated by illustrator Sidu. The pair originally met through Twitter where, after Sidu listened to Jin’s song “Jinzou Enemy,” they tweeted to Jin about how much they liked it.² After Jin found out that Sidu was an illustrator, they began collaborating on music video production for Jin’s music, wherein Sidu would first listen to a song and get an idea of a general image, and only after this would Jin explain the song narrative, and they would conceptualize a full music video for Jin’s vocaloid music.¹ Vocaloid is an electronic musical sub-genre that uses a computer program voice synthesizer to compose music. Songs care composed “by entering lyrics and a melody into the vocaloid editor. A synthesized voice will then sing the results, which can then be mixed with background music.” The synthesized

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¹ This section assumes the reader’s knowledge of the chronological plot of *Mekakucity Actors*. Plot information required to fully understand this section has been included in Appendix P

² Note on pronouns: Gender neutral (they/them) pronouns will be used, as Sidu has chosen to keep their identity anonymous through their blog
voice comes out of “stitching together pre-recorded voice clips, sung by professionals” which are “edited and sold as voice libraries” which “often have the personality and tone of the voice ‘donor.’” Vocaloid music grew in popularity because of its accessibility and freedom of creation: “anyone with access to vocaloid software can create music.” Vocaloid music grew to be immensely popular in Japan with the release of the vocaloid program Hatsune Miku, and through fans sharing their music via the popular Japanese video sharing site NicoNico.²

It is through this vocaloid popularity that Kagerou Project began. In 2012, Jin composed a variety of vocaloid songs with music videos created by Sidu, which became immensely popular on NicoNico. Each song and music video contributed to the larger narrative of the characters and situations of the growing Kagerou Project. From the popularity of the music videos and story, Jin began publishing a separate manga and novel series of the Kagerou Project story, with Sidu continuing with illustrations for both works. The novel and manga versions tell the full story of the Mekakushi-dan³ that exists through the music videos, with changes in presentation of timelines and narrative events between the works. Whereas the music videos operate as essentially small glimpses and a framework of the main points for the plot that give characterization to the main character of that music video, the novels and manga tell the full story of the Mekakushi-dan with different narrative orders and timelines highlighted in each. Taken together, the music video-manga-novel combination creates the full story of the Mekakushi-dan. In 2013, it was announced that Studio

³ Mekakushi-dan: lit. “Blindfold Gang,” the name of the gang of main characters in Kagerou Project
Shaft would be handling the anime adaptation of the Kagerou Project under the title of *Mekakucity Actors*<sup>iv</sup>, and the anime aired in 2014.

Despite the great amount of potential that many anime critics and fans perceived prior to the show airing, in its execution *Mekakucity Actors* suffered from a near incomprehensible narrative, to which visual style could not support, ultimately hindering the audience’s ability to develop an intimate relationship with characters. While the series had a strong start, following a clear three-episode narrative structure that effectively introduced characters through character interactions with each other and flashbacks, while using visual style to hint at the larger plot for the series. Following this three-episode arc though, the series’ use of a non-linear structure and frequent use of flashbacks creates too much distance between the audience’s understanding of character psychology, and seeing how it effects characters in the present moment. In this confusing narrative context, even if visual style attempts to support narrative content, if the narrative itself is unclear to the audience, visual style acts as more of an empty signifier, rather than a punctuation of narrative content and character emotion. This narrative which is divorced from visual style has the collective effect of distancing, rather than fostering intimacy between character and audience, and can be seen clearly through examination of the series’ penultimate episode.

**Where was the Potential?**

From *Mekakucity Actors*’ anime announcement, there was great anticipation for the show in Japan and abroad. In Japan, the Kagerou Project was already an

<sup>iv</sup>“Mekakucity” is a portmanteau of [目隠し(mekakushi) blindfold] and “city”
immensely popular franchise – well known from the viral music videos, and appealing to an even wider audience through the manga and novel publications, it was prime for an anime adaptation. Bringing the adaptation to Shaft was likely not coincidental as well. Coming off of the massive successes of the second season of the Monogatari series and the Puella Magi Madoka Magica Part 3: Rebellion movie, as well as the launch of the anime Nisekoi, Shaft had solidified itself as a major name in the anime industry. The project could be seen as a grab at a new franchise that could find similar success and longevity to that of the Monogatari series and Puella Magi Madoka Magica. The huge mixed-media project could only gain more popularity from an anime adaptation, and outside of the potential sales from the anime itself, bringing the Kagerou Project further into the limelight would provide additional opportunities for character goods sales, album sales of the original music, and higher sales for the manga and novel series.

Outside of the industrial context surrounding Mekakucity Actors, the content of the Kagerou Project additionally seemingly fit perfectly with the directorial proclivities, narrative devices, and themes common to Studio Shaft. In the words of one fan in anticipation of Mekakucity Actors: “the premise of the original music-video-series-thing actually seems to fit the style of Shaft’s works better than… well, all of Shaft’s other works.”3 Extreme despair, presence of the supernatural, a large ensemble cast filled with eccentric characters, a narrative structure that consistently challenges the audience’s understanding of the narrative – all staples found in the majority of Shaft works, are essential aspects of the Kagerou Project. Although his directorial debut as full series director, Yuki Yase’s previous work as an episode
director at Shaft demonstrates an attraction to and experience with unconventional narrative structures and challenging viewer perception, having episode directed *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* episode 10 (which reveals Homura’s time loop), and storyboarded *Monogatari* series second season’s episode 13 (which reveals Sengoku’s unreliable narration and psychotic break). Even the specific nature of the supernatural in *Mekakucity Actors*: that everyone has special eye abilities, is almost tailor made to Shaft – providing a multitude of opportunities to incorporate eye close ups and the like. Not just eye close ups, but the original video content of the Kagerou Project music videos shares many stylistic traits that are common to Shaft. Blogger Emily writes that:

> A common editing technique for an amateur music video is to quickly cut between still photographs or artwork, interspersed with frames of specific words and lines from the song. The videos of the Kagerou Project are no exception, and provide easy, highly-stylized cuts… This is something Shaft has used – and often been much-maligned for – in nearly every single one of their series… It’s not a case of Shaft specifically adapting the original material, but the circumstance of both the animation production studio and creator using similar techniques from the get-go.4

Through both content and form of the original Kagerou Project media (music videos, novels, and manga), Shaft’s approach to narrative and visual style was a seemingly natural fit. This accompanied with the industrial context and anticipation for the series put *Mekakucity Actors* in a prime position to be Studio Shaft’s ‘next big thing.’ Despite this though, *Mekakucity Actors* has been hailed by many as not just mediocre, but one of Shaft’s biggest letdowns.

**Episodes 1-3: A Promise of What Could Have Been**

The first three episodes of *Mekakucity Actors*, in comparison to the rest of the series, show a promise of what the series could have been. Forming a mainly self-contained arc that introduces the group, character relationships, eye powers, and the
larger plot of the series, these episodes demonstrate the series’ initial promise. The first three episodes balance hinting at the larger questions that inform the series through suggestive imagery and narrative situations, with the satisfaction of seeing the results of flashbacks and past knowledge in the present moment. The audience is able to come to an understanding of different character relationships through dialogue with each other that is centered around character unhappiness that is sometimes made humorous through the use of art shifts and animated tangents. Through the combination of sparing flashbacks and character dialogue, the audience is told enough about characters to understand them in the present situation, and the episodes raise enough questions to move forward into future episodes.

At the start of episode 1, surreal imagery points the audience towards necessary plot information, prompting questions that will inform the larger plot progression of the series. The episode opens with a surreal visual representation of Shintarō Kisaragi going back to the beginning of the time loop and seeing Ayano Tateyama in the Heat Haze. In this opening near 5-minute scene, some of the most crucial information to understanding the series is visually suggested – raising the larger question as the series progresses as to what exactly the opening scene means to the larger plot development. Imagery of clocks moving backwards, and the voice of Ayano saying “I’m glad to run into you again like this” suggest the backwards movement of time, however do not explicitly state it. Ayano guesses that Shintarō “forgot again,” and references a “last time” where Shintarō “swore that [he] would never forget” as the two of them stand on top of oversize backwards moving clock gears, raising questions to the audience as to what this “last time” was, and what
Shintarō “would never forget” (figure 92). This being the first episode, it is not immediately necessary to provide further explanation for this scene – rather it acts as a reference point for the audience to reflect upon when further information is revealed in later episodes as a kind of hint at the larger series plot.

In the following scene, Shaft uses character dialogue, frame composition, and extreme close ups of specific character motions to initially establish to the audience the half-joking-half-antagonistic relationship between Shintarō and Ene. After imagery of a burning screen and another countdown at the previous scene’s conclusion, the audience is brought to Shintarō sitting alone in his room in the present day on the date of August 14th. Ene is constantly teasing Shintarō – from making fun of his comments on anime message boards, to the fact that he has no friends, to trying to get him to go outside, she is a constant source of taunting and joking, much to Shintarō’s annoyance. This is visually furthered through many of the stylistic proclivities that Shaft is so practiced at – quick eye close ups (among other close ups of isolated movements) color Shintarō’s patient annoyance at Ene’s teasing. The set design of Shintarō’s room, having one computer screen in front of him, and another much larger one to his side, is additionally used to heighten Ene’s presence, as she can move between the two screens, becoming a physically much larger presence in the frame as Shintarō becomes sequentially more annoyed with her (figures 93-94). Ene and Shintarō’s interactions color the audience’s understanding of their relationship in how Ene’s humorous teasing of Shintarō’s life as a shut-in encompasses both the comedic (through the delivery of her teasing) and despairing (in how the subject of her teasing is that Shintarō has given up on life in the outside
A quick flashback, marked by Shintarō pressing a computer key that says [flashback], gives the audience just enough background as to how he and Ene came together, before he is confronted with having to go outside for the first time in two years to replace his broken keyboard during a holiday week. Comedy colors their relationship that is founded by Shintarō’s own despair – while their interactions are humorous, it is also apparent that Ene is trying to get Shintarō to leave his room by whatever means necessary. For what reason Shintarō has become a shut in, at this point the audience does not know, but with the knowledge that he has been a shut in for the past two years, seeing Ene’s humorous attempts at getting Shintarō to go outside, accompanied by his consistently turning her down creates a relationship that functions through the intersection between her comedy and his despair.

Shintarō makes it to the mall, and the use of color and art shifts, and character framing, make his feeling uncomfortable out in public humorously apparent to the audience. The color shifts to black and white, all of the other shoppers are animated as cyclopes, and there are eye close ups of Shintarō, all working to create a surrealist expression of his experience at the mall(figures 95-96). Shintarō bumps into Kido while he is there, and while in the moment it is taken as an opportunity for Ene to keep teasing Shintarō about how awkward he is, this interaction (unknown to the audience and Shintarō at this time) is crucial to the conclusion of the three-episode arc.

In the following scene, Shaft uses the differing balance of information between Shintarō, Kano, and the audience, to create a tonally confused scene that balances between Shintarō’s panic and Kano’s nonchalance. Before Shintarō can
purchase a keyboard, suddenly he finds himself in the middle of a hostage situation, where he meets Kano and Seto, who ask him if he has a plan of escape. Even in the face of a hostage situation, Shaft maintains a balance between the comedic and despairing no longer through Shintarō and Ene, but through Shintarō and Kano.

Kano’s humor and casual attitude at the hostage situation stands in stark contrast to Shintarō’s genuine fear, creating tension and tonal confusion between the two. Kano is aware that the rest of the Mekakushi-dan are on standby, and is also confident in the use of his powers to guarantee him safety, and can therefore afford to be comedic. This stands in contrast to Shintarō (and the audience at this point), who does not have this knowledge, and therefore to whom this situation is all too real. Through Shintarō’s conversation with Kano and Seto though, small hints are given to the audience through visuals as to a greater development happening outside of Shintarō’s immediate awareness. Although in most shots, Kano appears to be tied up like Shintarō, in two quick cuts he can be seen raising and separating his hands over his back, suggesting otherwise (figure 97). Additionally, after Shintarō tells Kano and Seto that he has an escape plan, after a quick flash of Seto’s eyes turned red, Seto confirms that this plan will work with the correct distraction, hinting towards the existence of his powers (figure 98). Following a large ruckus distraction, exactly what Shintarō needed, caused by some unknown source, he is able to use Ene to escape, and after passing out, more time imagery of him in the Heat Haze with Ayano returns before the end of the episode. This episode works well as a first episode to the series by providing strong introductions to two of the main characters, and posing questions that gently hinting at a larger plot. If this series were to be following a strictly linear
plot, one would expect the following episode to return to Shintarō with Kano and Seto, however this is not the case.

The following episode brings the audience on a tangent, using teasing and irreverent conversation (similar to that of the first episode) in conjunction with art shifts and specific character close up shots to introduce the character Momo Kisaragi, and by extension Kenjirō Tateyama. There are a few distinct differences between this episode and the first though – namely the larger use of flashbacks and surreal imagery to convey them, and the incorporation of a musical tangent. The flashback that informs the audience how Momo became an idol is much longer and informative of her past than Shintarō’s of how he and Ene came together, and surreal representative imagery to convey her loneliness is used throughout (figures 99-100). The way in which this flashback works is indicative of the way in which the rest of the series will eventually go: presenting extended flashbacks through which what information is immediately important is not readily apparent. The flashback conveys not only how Momo became an idol, but tells how her and her father drowned when she was a child, and the struggles that she has had in always being the center of attention as well. While thoroughly introducing her character, the length of the flashback at the time in which it is placed makes unclear what information is necessarily important to the audience.

Again, like the first episode though, further questions as to the nature and function of those with red eyes are raised through the events and musical interlude that Momo encounters throughout her day. Quick eye close ups of her red eyes, followed by her being chased by a large crowd of fans conveys that, like Kano, Seto,
and Kido, of whom the audience has also seen with red eyes, Momo also is related in some way to the others. Momo being chased by the crowd leads into the first of many song tangents, in which songs from the original music videos are incorporated into the episode. The music sections take clear visual inspiration from the original music videos, and in the case of “Kisaragi Attention” from this episode, the song encapsulates her feelings on her loneliness despite the constant attention on her (figures 101-102). At the episode’s conclusion, Kido is seen looking for Momo, becoming the link between this episode and the first. The question of who Kido is, along with those pre-existing about the eye powers, then makes a clear launch into the final episode of the three-episode arc.

At the Mekakushi-dan’s hideout, art shifts and animated tangents color the humorous teasing character dialogue that provides exposition and a reflection on how the eye powers have negatively impacted the lives of the Mekakushi-dan. Picking up directly after the second episode’s conclusion, the third episode begins with Momo having been brought back to the Mekakushi-dan’s hideout, where movement between comedy and despair characterizes her interactions with the group, and acts as an almost secondary introduction to all of the characters. At the hideout, finally some of the questions about eye powers that have been raised for the past two episodes are partially answered. The audience learns, as does Momo, that different people manifest different powers, and Momo is offered to learn how to control her own from the group. Throughout this conversation, the half-annoyance half-teasing between Kido and Kano is representative of typically-Shaft movement between comedy and despair, which provides the audience an intimate understanding of the nature of their
relationship. As Kano, the most nonchalant and joking one of the group, guesses the precise ability of Momo’s power, Momo opens up to them, telling them how tough it has been to have her ability and not be able to control it. In response, Kano quickly moves the conversation back into a comedic tone, making a joke at Kido’s expense, commenting “Wow! You must be so popular! The opposite of Kido!” Kido quickly punches him, and exaggerated animation of his joking-pained response solidifies the movement back to the comedic (figure 103). Kano quickly tries to backtrack his comment, to no avail, before Kido offers to help Momo master her powers. In response to Momo dejectedly commenting how her powers are “a disaster,” Kido tries to comfort her by telling her that “it can seem that way when you’re not used to it.” However, immediately after Kido says these comforting words to Momo, Kano cuts in again, swiftly moving the tone back to the comedic with another joke at Kido’s expense, commenting: “Oh yeah, you used to be the same way, right, Kido? ‘I feel like I’m going to fade away!’” Through this seemingly comedic comment, Kano takes a joke at Kido’s expense from being about the nature of her ability in the previous comment, to making fun of the psychological impact that it has had on Kido herself. This comment exemplifies the fluid movement between comedy and despair, as even though Kano’s comment is said in a joking tone trying to bring levity into the conversation, the content of the joke itself is on Kido’s personal despair. The comedy of the moment is maintained though, as a quick cut to an X-ray image of her hitting him and him pretending to pass out makes an even greater stylistic exaggeration of Kido’s response to his joke about her than the previous time (figure 104-105).

Through this scene that finally introduces the entirety of the Mekakushi-dan,
movement between comedy and despair, which is supported through visual style that additionally provides necessary exposition and an intimate understanding of character relationships, works as an efficient introduction to the full group, and launching point into the rest of the episode and series.

After the group leaves to all go to the mall, at last, the previous two episodes come to a full connection. The audience sees Kido run into Shintarō, as she did from the first episode, and Momo is shocked to see her brother outside, immediately making the intersection between the previous two episodes clear. As the Mekakushi-dan use their powers to help Shintarō out of the hostage situation, explanation as to everyone’s eye powers is given through their functional use. Once again, a fluid comedic-despairing tone is achieved through Momo and Kido against Kano. Kano’s confidence in his ability to get them out of the hostage situation stands in contrast to Kido’s fear for their safety, and Momo’s uncertainty as to the entire situation. At the episode’s conclusion, the audience is finally granted the satisfaction of seeing precisely how Shintarō managed to get Ene into the main computer system with the assistance of the rest of the Mekakushi-dan. Animated over another song, the episode’s conclusion provides a catharsis for the character and situation introductions that operated over the previous episodes, creating a grand finale to the three-episode arc. Before the episode’s conclusion though, after Shintarō passes out, the audience once more sees Shintarō in an unknown location with Ayano (about whom the audience still does not know), calling back to the first scene of the series, and re-raising the question to the audience about this unknown space and character to launch into the rest of the series.
The first three episodes follow a clear path of raising and answering questions in a condensed episode-to-episode space while keeping the focus on the actions of the characters as they exist in the present. The three-episode arc introduces some characters through both their behavior in the present and through flashback, while providing room for more characters to be further developed in the remaining episodes of the series. These episodes stand in contrast to the rest of the series though, mainly in how flashbacks and narrative order are treated as the series develops in future episodes. Where the series comes to fall apart is in delaying the answers to the further questions it asks in an untimely manner. The rest of learning about character backstories and the events that have led to the present moment through flashbacks becomes too separated from the main narrative, and while it informs the viewer more about the characters and plot itself, it creates too much of a separation between learning character past versus seeing them act in the present. Flashbacks grow longer, and how the present moment references back to them reaches too far back, pulling the audience out of the immediate moment with the characters, and obfuscating for the audience the precise timeline of events. Whereas these first three episodes present a balanced use of play with narrative order to have the audience continually re-evaluate character and narrative situations, the rest of the series relies too heavily on a non-chronological order that makes too much of a separation between the immediate moment and flashbacks that inform it, effectively distancing the audience from characters, rather than creating intimacy, the cornerstone of Shaft Style.

A Scattered Narrative Order: Episode 11, Where the Pieces (sort of) Come Together
Mekakucity Actors aims to tell a narrative in non-chronological order, frequently using flashbacks, music videos, and visual storytelling to convey a plot that is dependent on the audience understanding the full narrative situation in order to reach an emotional catharsis with the characters. While this goal is readily apparent, its unconventional narrative order and presentation creates a difficult narrative to follow that continually denies the audience an understanding of character emotion, distencing the audience from characters. One of the greatest problems with the narrative presentation of Mekakucity Actors is how every important plot point, inclusive of necessary plot information and character motivation, that leads up to the immediate present moment, is told through a near constant barrage of flashbacks. This creates too great of a separation between the audience’s piecing together the timeline of what happened to each character, how that fits into the larger plot, how that informs their motivations in the present moment, and what is happening in the present moment. The narrative construction breaks with the question-answer structure established in the first three episodes, leaving characters and situations behind for too long for the relevant information of the flashback to work towards an emotional catharsis for the audience in the present moment of the narrative.

In addition to how flashbacks create too great of a separation between the past and present moment with characters, the way in which visual storytelling is used to tell the story further obfuscates the audience’s ability to understand the narrative progression while developing an intimate relationship with the characters. One of the most successful aspects of the original music-video approach to the Kagerou Project narrative was how the sequence of music videos focused more on creating an intimate
understanding of character emotion through music, where specific lyrics and visuals of the music videos suggested the main plot points. Clearly taking inspiration from the original source material, Shaft similarly attempts to convey as much of the narrative through visual storytelling. However, while this approach works for a series of music videos, in a narrative-driven show this approach fails to highlight important narrative turning points that inform character actions and emotion, making it difficult for the audience to develop an intimate relationship with characters. In trying to convey too much essential information through stylistic visual representation, *Mekakucity Actors* ran the risk of creating an unclear narrative for viewers not familiar with the original source material, and by extension the main plot points that define the narrative progression.

The combination of a difficult to piece together narrative told in non-chronological order with an over-reliance on suggestive visual storytelling of essential plot points creates an unclear understanding of the narrative to the audience. As a result, Shaft cannot accomplish a successful movement between comedy and despair to create an intimate relationship between character and audience when the narrative situation is unclear to begin with. If it is too difficult to understand why characters are in despair, or if the audience’s understanding of their despair is delayed until far too late in the series, their movement between despairing and comedic becomes jarring, and does not lead to the kind of intimate relationship between character and audience that is a cornerstone of Shaft works. It is not that the story itself of *Kagerou Project* is not intriguing, but it is in its presentation that the high
points of the narrative are lost on the audience – and this is best exemplified in the series’ penultimate episode.

The cold open to *Mekakucity Actors* episode 11 begins with an exemplary over-reliance on visual storytelling and an assumed audience familiarity with the Kagerou Project to convey essential narrative information, that effectively confuses the audience’s understanding of the timeline of events and makes unclear the reason for Shintarō’s suicide as it is portrayed in the cold open. Returning to Shintarō for the first time since episode 8, it begins already reaching back the span of three episodes. At episode 8’s conclusion, the music video portion of the episode to the song “Lost Time Memory” replaces the closing credits sequence, and is used to convey the absolutely essential realization to both Shintarō and the audience of the existence of multiple timelines. In the original music video for “Lost Time Memory” the combined lyrics and visuals tell the two different routes of the story, and reveal the time loop to which Shintarō is the only one who can maintain memories from multiple timelines. The original music video begins with a flash of [Route 1], which is represented by a Shintarō wearing his signature red jacket, and tells of how in a previous route he joined the Mekakushi-dan, and although still upset about Ayano’s death, was able to move on (figure 106). This is only until, through some unknown processes, Konoha turns dark, and when he tries to kill himself, Shintarō tries to stop him, getting himself shot and killed in the process. The other route of the same music video, [Route XX], is another supposed “bad end,” in which Shintarō could not move on from his crippling depression stemming from Ayano’s death. This route’s distinction from Route 1 is visually indicated through a text flash stating [Route XX]
and the change in Shintarō’s jacket from red to black (figures 107-108). In this route, despite how hard she tries, Ene cannot help Shintarō, and in a worsening depression, Shintarō kills Ene before proceeding to commit suicide by stabbing himself in the throat with a pair of scissors (figures 109-110). Because of this turn of events then, Shintarō never meets the Mekakushi-dan, and when Konoha turns dark he proceeds to kill everyone else in the Mekakushi-dan. While all of this explanation may seem overly specific, in its adaptation to the Mekakucity Actors anime is where many narrative issues stem from.

By separating exposition of the different routes in the anime adaptation, and having one part of this exposition be told through a music video, the existence of two routes becomes unclear to the audience. As a result of his, the audience does not understand the emotional motivation for Shintarō’s suicide in the cold open, fostering emotional distance rather than intimacy between the audience and Shintarō. The music video portion of the episode 8’s “Lost Time Memory” song proceeds to cut out Route XX, using the song to only visually tell the story of Route 1, while also not visually indicating (as was done in the original music video) that this is one of many routes. When Shintarō is finally returned to in the cold open of episode 11 then, the Route XX portion is told, albeit in a very different manner that does not make explicit that the events occurring are Shintarō’s regained memories from a previous timeline. The only indication that this is Route XX Shintarō comes from his change in costume to the black jacket, and the repeated action of him killing himself in the same way that Route XX Shintarō of the original music video does (figures 110-111). Shintarō sits and, after regaining his memories within this Route XX, is able to talk to Ayano,
who is still trapped in the Heat Haze. Ayano’s questions to him in turn attempt to provide the audience with necessary exposition on Shintarō’s eye powers. Ayano states: “long ago, you and the queen make a vow to each other. That you would never forget this tragedy” over visuals Marry granting Shintarō his eye powers (figure 112). To an audience member that is familiar with the existing narrative of Kagerou Project, this plays as a creative and visually interesting anime adaptation of this portion of the story originally told through a single music video. However, to an audience member not familiar with the Kagerou Project, this explanation is hazy at best, and incomprehensible at worst.

Because of the cold open’s lack of narrative clarity, it additionally falters in clearly conveying to the audience the crux of Shintarō’s despair. In episode 11, while through his suicidal actions in Route XX, the fact that he is in despair is apparent, the audience is still denied a deep understanding of precisely why he is in despair. By divorcing the visual representation of Shintarō’s suicide in Route XX from the fact that it stemmed from his depression (and removing completely the fact that he killed Ene in this route), and instead placing unclear essential narrative information over it, the scene becomes a confused blending of exposition through dialogue over personal character despair through visuals. To an audience unfamiliar with the Kagerou Project, they can understand neither the existence of multiple timelines nor how those timelines relate to Shintarō’s personal despair, denying the audience the kind of intimacy that Shaft usually prioritizes.

Following the opening credits, the scene with Momo and Kido chasing Hibiya runs into similar problems as the cold open by placing too much narrative distance
between events, making it difficult for the audience to remember and understand character motivations. Once again reaching far back to episode 8, in which Kido and Momo chased after a confused Hibiya who wants to save Hiyori from the Heat Haze, the great distance between this moment in episode 8, and it being picked up again in episode 11 proves detrimental to the audience’s narrative understanding and ability to come to a deeper understanding of character emotion. Unlike the cold open, which tries to bring the audience into the heart of Shintarō’s despair, this scene tries to further the audience’s level of intimacy with Kido, Momo and Hibiya through a movement between comedy and despair.

While Kido, Momo, and Hibiya’s interactions play out like a textbook Shaft scene that uses quick editing, art shifts, and irreverent jokes to facilitate shifting between comedy and despair in a conversation rooted in a despairing narrative, the scene itself fails in using tonal shifting to give the audience a deeper understanding of character emotion. As Momo and Kido try to convince Hibiya to join them to find a way to save Hiyori, instead of acting alone, the humor between Hibiya and Momo’s bickering stands in contrast to Hibiya’s genuine concern for Hiyori. Despite this being the penultimate episode, the audience has barely had any time with Hibiya as a character, save for his introduction in episode 4, and brief appearances in episodes 2, 5, and 8. The only knowledge that the audience has as to Hibiya’s character is that he loves Hiyori, and because his character development is so limited to that, it becomes difficult for the audience to feel anything for Hibiya wanting to find Hiyori. While it is easy to understand that Hibiya loves Hiyori and wants to save her because of that, the audience has barely had any screen time with Hibiya (and even less so for Hiyori).
to legitimately care. Except for his introduction in episode 4, his existence in the show has been limited to one who is essentially dragged into the situation of the Mekakushi-dan. He knows the least about the eye-abilities, and is solely focused on saving Hiyori. The way in which Hibiya’s narrative relevance to the story is given such little explanation, and following his introduction he appears in such a limited capacity, makes his addition feel like an extra and unneeded element. Therefore, the back and forth between Hibiya with Kido and Momo in this scene does not create greater level of intimacy with Hibiya, as it does not further the audience’s understanding of his character or motivations. Leading into the next scene, in perhaps the greatest inexplicable plot point thus far, mid-conversation, Momo, Kido, and Hibiya are captured by a group of unknown people, and are brought to a cell in an unknown location. Their capture cuts immediately to Kano, walking alone, in a different location, and is not given any further explanation whatsoever by the conclusion of the series.

The scene following Kido, Momo, and Hibiya’s capture is broken into three flashback acts that aim to tie together many of the disparate plot points revealed in previous episodes, intercut with shots of Kano walking in solitude (in his first appearance since the conclusion of episode 9, where he brought Ene to where her real body is being kept). As the events outlined and connected in this three-act structure are at this point so disparate, attempting to tie together plot points from far previous episodes whose importance was not apparent to the audience, this scene works more to confuse rather than provide revelations to the audience. In the first act, through a flashback to a conversation where Ayano tells Kano that she discovered what the
larger goal is of snake possessing Kenjirō, this act ties together the events of this flashback to those of episode 9. The second flashback act then asks the audience to connect the information revealed here, to the narratives of Takane and Haruka from episodes 6-7, while also leading into the next flashback segment. Ayano reveals that the Snake of Clearing Eyes as Kenjirō (Takane and Haruka’s teacher) is plotting to kill them as the next sacrifices to bring more snakes into the real world, and tells Kano of her plan to try and confront the snake. The final act then comes together for the big reveal that the audience has been waiting for the entire series – the answer to why Ayano killed herself. What is additionally revealed though, is the reason for Kano’s greater understanding of the snake’s master plan, why he knew where Ene’s body was in episode 9, and why he had kept this information a secret for so long – it all being due to the Snake of Clearing Eyes’ threat of murdering Kido and Seto. After Ayano kills herself in the flashback, the snake divulges to Kano its intention to turn back time (at this point still through unknown means), as the series attempts to tie together the snake’s intention with Shintarō’s ability to remember previous timelines.

This three-act structure of flashbacks in episode 11 attempts to bring together the main narrative threads that have been introduced through a multitude of flashbacks and revelations of previous episodes. While in the case the flashback’s emotional resonance to Kano in the scene immediately following the flashbacks, this works to create intimacy between the audience and Kano, in terms of all other characters, who still remain too separate from the flashbacks that inform their characterization, the flashbacks do not provide this emotional understanding. To an

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*The flashback in episode 9 details how Kido, Seto, and Kano came to live with Ayano, Ayano’s discovery of her mother’s notes on the Snake of Clearing Eyes, and her theory about their father being possessed by the Snake of Clearing Eyes.*
audience already familiar with the Kagerou Project narrative, this episode feels like a
final congregation of the narrative they are already familiar with. However, to an
audience that is trying to piece together the narrative from this sequence of
revelations, as one blogger describes:

Even by the already poor standards of Mekakucity Actors this... episode was an absolute mess
– an episode that felt like a number of disparate scenes had been accidentally dropped onto a
cutting room floor and then pasted back together in a hurry with little regard for whether all of
the pieces had even been picked back up, let alone stuck together in the right order.\textsuperscript{5}

This portion of the episode falters in how it, in the course of one episode, tries to tie
together all of the disparate narrative lines that happen all over the course of the
series, as a setup into the final faceoff between the fully formed Mekakushi-dan and
the Snake of Clearing Eyes. The audience is barely given any time to breathe between
the newfound supposed understanding of how all of these characters fit together into
the larger narrative, before being ushered into a kind of final battle in the last episode.
Episode 11 acts as a larger scale version of what episode 3 was to the first two
episodes – bringing together everyone introduced for an explosive event. However,
unlike the succinctness of episode 3, because of the fact that there is so much space
between the events and narrative lines that episode 11 attempts to bring together, the
narrative clarity and feeling of catharsis at all of the characters being brought together
at the episode’s conclusion is lost.

Despite the failings of the three-act flashback structure to bring together the
larger narrative of the series, where this episode does succeed is in furthering the
audience’s understanding and sympathy for Kano. The flashback series leads directly
to Kano alone, back at Ayano’s grave. The audience, finally understanding the depth
of sadness and emotional weight Kano has been living with for so long, is privileged
a scene of true emotional depth between Kano and Seto, that acts as a cap off to the series of flashbacks just witnessed. Seto, worried and out searching for Kano, finds him at Ayano’s grave, and pays his respects to Ayano before leaving with Kano. As Seto pays his respects, Kano jokingly comments to what Seto is telling Ayano, however when Seto presses Kano slightly as to why he is rushing him, Kano loses his composure and breaks down. To the audience, after having just witnessed the cause for Kano’s true despair, and understanding the emotional burden he has been living with, seeing him break down to Seto, who in turn comforts and offers to share the burden with him, creates a deeper level of intimacy between the audience and Kano. Movement from comedy to despair in this moment works, because unlike the rest of the series, there little to no separation between the audience’s understanding of Kano’s despair, and seeing its effect on him in the present. This reveal forces the audience to re-think Kano’s characterization as it was throughout the series – his constant joking and trying to keep things lighthearted is suddenly indicative of his coping method for living with far greater knowledge than his siblings, and inability to fully protect them. Kano moves from being a mysterious and joking character, to suddenly one possibly deserving of the most sympathy in the entire show. Despite the success in creating this moment of character intimacy, this comes just too little too late, as it is the penultimate episode, and the final episode’s focus on wrapping up the narrative leaves no time for the audience to really see Kano in the present moment with this larger understanding of his character.

After bringing together all of the narrative plot points through the sequence of Kano’s flashbacks, *Mekakucity Actors* then moves to bring together all of the
characters themselves finally back to the same time and place in preparation for the final episode. After being captured, Kido and Momo use their powers to call the rest of the Mekakushi-dan to their location. This section is accomplished through the use of another music video portion, cutting between the different disparate groups of the Mekakushi-dan around the city all going to meet Momo, Kido, and Hibiya. The conclusion of the episode, in which all of the members (except for Shintarō) are finally brought together, mirrors the episode’s narrative goal of bringing together all of the characters’ intersecting plot lines. The final moment before the credit sequence, with all of the Mekakushi-dan members lined up, plays out akin to that of a gathering of the Justice League, however much like the coming together of the various disparate narrative lines, it feels too sudden and serendipitous. Rather than have the sense of a heroic gathering to the audience, because the reason that they all gather is due to Momo, Kido, and Hibiya’s capture by an unknown crowd that is given no explanation (and feels like a convenient plot device), this moment feels like a forced and far too coincidental gathering, denying the moment the feeling of emotional catharsis and audience satisfaction that it clearly intends to convey. In this moment, the lack of initial narrative clarity combined with a far too serendipitous gathering of all the characters makes the moment insincere, and thus lacks an emotional salience that would be expected of such a moment.

Finally, the post-credits sequence solidifies episode 11’s confusing narrative through its return to Shintarō. To recap, one instance of Shintarō finding Marry’s photo at the conclusion of episode 8 leads to his powers to remember the multiple timelines awakening, as is told through the “Lost Time Memory” music video.
Shintarō’s next appearance is not until the start of episode 11, showing him in a different timeline, and the only indication of such being his change in costume. This final appearance of Shintarō in the post-credits sequence jumps around again between space and timelines, with Shintarō in the current timeline (as indicated by the costume change back to his normal red jacket outfit he has been wearing in the series thus far) going to retrieve Ayano from the Heat Haze. How he entered the Heat Haze is elided, as is how the two of them intend to leave, undercutting whatever small satisfaction the audience may have gained from the ending before the post credits sequence in seeing the Mekakushi-dan all gather, and raising more questions and confusion before the final episode.

Episode 11 exemplifies the central issues of narrative construction for Mekakucity Actors, clearly illustrating how the frequent use of flashbacks creates too great a distance between the audience’s understanding of character psychology, and seeing them act in the present moment. These large gaps between flashback and the present moment deny the audience’s ability to have whatever information is gained through the flashbacks effectively inform the audience’s understanding of characters in non-flashback sequences. Furthermore, the narrative construction in and of itself being unclear through an over-reliance of visual storytelling for necessary plot points and world-building and unclear presentation of multiple timelines compounds the audience’s inability to create an intimate understanding of characters. If the audience is unclear about the narrative itself, character despair is additionally obfuscated, making it near impossible for the audience to come to a level of intimacy with character and story.
Style that Cannot Support Narrative: Episode 11 Cold Open

In a show that suffers from an unclear narrative construction, even if visual style is supporting narrative content, if the narrative is not clear to the audience in the first place, what style is trying to further it does not come across, and becomes simply a barrage of empty imagery. Despite the initial similarities of Shaft style to that of the original music videos, which led many fans to initially think that this adaptation would suit Shaft well, even though in its production Mekakucity Actors ‘looks’ like a Shaft show, the way in which visual style works in terms of how it supports the narrative falters. Shaft takes advantage of the opportunity to delve into very surrealist moments of visual abstraction by way of the narrative. The Heat Haze provides the most opportunities for Shaft to take advantage of the visual freedom allowed in creating a separate visually abstracted world, however, this abstraction bleeds into Shaft’s portrayal of the ‘real world’ as well. In addition to maintaining a visual style inspired by the ‘original images’ of the music videos, Mekakucity Actors incorporates the music videos themselves into the anime as another tool for storytelling. Shaft lets the content of the music video sections hold just as much importance in terms of character and narrative development as non-music video sections, and this is one reason through which the series struggles with narrative clarity. In a series already playing with narrative construction and ordering of information, using the abstracted imagery in and out of the music videos to convey essential plot points only exacerbates an already confusing narrative.
Throughout Studio Shaft works, visual style works to create an extreme externalization of emotion that highlights shifting between comedy and despair to create an intimate relationship between audience and character. The *Mekakucity Actors* approach to style, including incorporation of surreal and abstracted imagery, and use of music videos themselves for narrative progression, do not provide narrative clarity, but rather adds to the audience’s confusion. For style to facilitate fluidity between comedy and despair, it is necessary to have a clear plot through which visual style can create that fluidity. In *Mekakucity Actors*, visual style tries to create an emotional connection to characters for the audience, but because character and story are so lost in a muddled plot, all attempts at creating intimacy to character through visual style are additionally lost. The way in which visual style exacerbates narrative clarity, and does not succeed in creating a level of intimacy between character and audience can best be seen in the cold open of episode 11.

In the cold open to episode 11, abstract visual imagery works in a confused attempt to both clarify narrative information, telling the audience about the specifics of Shintarō’s eye ability, and convey character despair of Shintarō to the audience. As previously discussed, the cold open to this episode animates Route XX, the second part of the “Lost Time Memory” music video of episode 8. In the original music video, it is expressed that because of his worsening depression, Shintarō kills Ene, and then himself in Route XX. This information is cut completely from *Mekakucity Actors* the anime though, and as a result, without the knowledge that he killed Ene in this route, why he kills himself feels sudden, unfounded, and confusing to the audience.
Frame composition and character close ups in the scene’s opening attempt to convey to the audience the advent of Shintarō’s eye abilities, and that he has possibly killed Ene. The scene opens with a shot of video noise on the large screen in Shintarō’s room, with Shintarō sitting in front of it (figure 113). The first shot of Shintarō is a single-eye close up of his now red eye, conveying to the audience that his eye ability is now awakened. His change in costuming supposedly indicates that these events are occurring in an alternate timeline that Shintarō is remembering in the present, however this is never made explicitly clear to the audience as it had been in the music video, which specifically provides labels for the different routes. The video noise on the screen continues behind Shintarō, creating an eerie and disturbing frame, especially since all previous times the audience has seen the screen, Ene inhabited it. It is possible that the use of this static screen is to convey to an audience already familiar with the Kagerou Project that Shintarō already killed Ene in this timeline, however as nothing is explicitly shown or stated, this cannot be known for certain. To an audience not familiar with the Kagerou Project at all, this would certainly not be apparent, and the static screen merely works to create a threatening and frame.

The scene makes use of quick image flashes that contain necessary information with regard to the plot and character despair, however as the narrative information that these image flashes try to convey is unclear, the deeper effect on the audience of understanding character despair and developing intimacy with characters that these visuals have the potential to carry is lost. While these image flashes do visually convey the idea that Shintarō is receiving a flood of memories in how they flash by quickly, and play out as an almost clip show of memories, explicitly what
these memories are remains unclear. Quick flashes of the rest of the Mekakushi-dan lying dead in front of a dark Konoha, as per the result of Route XX because Shintarō never met the Mekakushi-dan and therefore could not save them from dark Konoha, flash across the screen (figures 114-115). Another set of image flashes, this time showing Marry in complete despair over the death of her friends re-setting the timeline, flash across the screen (figure 116). Dark colors and pained character facial expressions visualize despair, but without context for the cause of this despair for the audience, all sense of intimacy with characters through understanding their despair is lost. Once again, the information that these image flashes try to convey would only be immediately apparent to a fan already familiar with the Kagerou Project, so instead of developing intimacy, these images further confuse the audience’s understanding of the narrative.

When the scene moves into further exposition on Shintarō’s eye ability, representative surreal visual imagery is used to abstractly convey Ayano’s narration of how he got his eye power, which further obfuscates this essential narrative information to the audience. The voice of Ayano tells Shintarō that his power has “resided in you, even before you were born. Long ago, you and queen made a vow to each other. That you would never forget this tragedy.” Over this narration, visuals of Shintarō meeting Marry, with her medusa powers awakened, and her giving him his eye power, provide the narration some further clarity. To the audience, it is clear that “the queen” is Marry, and that his abilities bequeathed to him from Marry are for the purpose of not forgetting “this tragedy.” However, it remains unclear to the audience
that “this tragedy” that is being referred to are the past events that Shintarō is remembering, as were illustrated through the previous image flashes.

Following this section on “the queen,” while the audience can objectively understand through the use of color, shadow, and mise-en-scène that a feeling of sadness is trying to be conveyed, the emotional and narrative context for it is lost due to unclear narrative exposition. The camera stays with Shintarō, and the background art of his room clearly carries the feeling of seriousness and sadness. In contrast to most of the series, there is a distinct lack of color – the room is mostly black and white, with the only source of color coming from Shintarō’s red eyes. Shintarō himself is surrounded in shadows, and his outfit is additionally all black, creating a visualization of the depth of Shintarō’s despair. Although it is clear to any audience what feeling is trying to be visually conveyed, what is lost is a level intimacy between the audience and Shintarō. Style attempts to support the feeling of Shintarō’s despair, however as the cause for Shintarō’s despair remains unclear, the extent to which visuals can operate to create intimacy and truly have an emotional effect on the audience is lost. Visuals try to convey an anguished mood, but cannot punctuate narrative because of the audience’s lack of understanding the narrative itself, making visuals become essentially empty signifiers. The meaning of visuals is divorced from the narrative context that informs it, having visuals exist in a way that is disjointed from narrative: function becomes separate, or at odds with form.

Shintarō’s suicide at the conclusion to the cold open is the epitome of the disassociation between visual style and narrative content in Mekakucity Actors, making his extreme action empty of emotional salience to the audience. Before
Shintarō commits suicide by stabbing himself in the throat with a pair of scissors, the editing speed quickens, and red light reflects off of the red scissors, adding a further threatening feeling to the frame. Shintarō’s resigned facial expression carries so much compounded despair, and with the knowledge of the specific cause for his despair in this moment, Shaft creates a truly heartbreaking frame (figure 117). However, once again, this emotional salience is only apparent to an audience that is able to understand why he is in despair. To an audience unfamiliar with the narrative from the source material, Shintarō’s decision to commit suicide feels unfounded. Although the act of suicide in and of itself can be understood as despairing, without the specific knowledge of why Shintarō decides to commit suicide, the intimacy between audience and character is lost. Shintarō’s suicide creates shock value, but nothing more. In the cold open, provocative and surreal visuals attempt to both convey the feeling of despair, and clarify plot through abstracted visuals, and in this process, intimacy between the audience and Shintarō is lost. Rather than being all style with no substance – there is so much substance that is presented in an unclear fashion that the style does not know what to support.

Among the Studio Shaft filmography, *Mekakucity Actors* is objectively a failure. With a narrative construction that confuses any audience member not already familiar with the original work, and a surreal visual style that is unsure what of the narrative to support, *Mekakucity Actors* is perhaps best described by blogger Digibro’s statement that: “the entire thing is very pretty to look at, but I can’t tell you a single thing that happened.”⁶ *Mekakucity Actors* can be seen as not “a case of misused potential,” but rather where the potential was taken a step too far.⁷ A despairing
narrative that leaves room for character comedy to create a level of intimacy with the audience, an unconventional narrative presentation that forces the audience’s constant re-evaluation of character and narrative, and a great degree of flexibility to use surrealist visuals to create interesting and provocative frames – all of these are elements that Shaft not only typically excels at, but are cornerstones of Shaft Style. However, when they were all taken too far in a single show, the whole series suffered. The unconventional narrative presentation was taken to the point of incomprehensibility, creating not a narrative that is enhanced by the reveal of information through the use of flashback, but a narrative that is obfuscated by their use. The flexibility afforded to a surreal visual style did not work to provide narrative clarity or further the audience’s perception of character emotion, as understanding the plot is so necessary to the emotional impact of the visuals. The disjointed relationship then between narrative and style in turn hindered the show’s ability to create a level of intimacy between character and audience.

Looking at the way in which Mekakucity Actors is a failure though is very enlightening as to how Shaft Style works. Although often lauded as the specific visual proclivities of the studio, there is far more at work in Shaft Style not just in terms of visuals, but in how narrative and style act together in a specific way. Mekakucity Actors received much praise from many anime fans and bloggers for its use of visuals. As one reviewer stated:

Watching an episode of Mekakucity Actors is like taking a walk through a modern art gallery. It’s nonsensical, epileptic, the animation makes no practical sense, and I love it. Only Shaft could create something so incredibly original and interesting to watch. With the use of close ups, and constant changes in animation and color, I could take any shot from this show, frame it, hang it up on my wall, and nobody would bat an eye.
At the same time, though, as much as fans and bloggers could appreciate the art style (although many of which did not) the show was equally criticized for its unclear narrative. When airing, two of the top comments for the weekly discussion of *Mekakucity Actors* on Reddit’s anime page, were “Still confused as hell…” and “Hardest anime to follow 2014.”[^9] *Mekakucity Actors* is a show that oozes Studio Shaft from beginning to end, but in its execution, alienates rather than creates intimacy with the audience by divorcing the essential elements that make up Shaft Style from each other. For Shaft Style to effectively work, the essential elements of the studio style must work together in terms of both narrative and style that creates an intimate relationship between character and audience. While *Mekakucity Actors* had these essential elements of narrative and style, they did not come to work together to give the audience the kind of intimacy that has made other Shaft works so successful.

[^9]: "Hardest anime to follow 2014."
Conclusion

Studio Shaft is an exception among the specific Japanese anime industry – while many anime studios within the industry are able to gain notoriety and financial success for having a consistent body of high quality of work, rarely are anime studios recognized for having a distinct artistic voice. In an industry that is so dependent on the work of freelance artists, it is important to study studios that are able to develop a distinct style, as they are exceptions to the industry norm, and have generally found great success in doing so, possibly spelling an alternative future for the anime industry as a whole. As both new and experienced freelance animators begin to develop relationships with various anime studios, and in turn, anime studios seek out new talent and develop their own artistic voice, the future of anime could be looking in the direction of a proliferating studio-centric (rather than director, animator, or source material centric) industry composition. Studio Shaft can be seen as a model for the studio-centric anime production model, through its deliberate effort to foster a consistent cadre of creators who share a common directorial language, while at the same time granting and encouraging creators’ artistic freedom, constantly building off of their established house style. While future anime studios do not necessarily need to follow the Shaft-model for creating a studio house style, Shaft stands as a paragon in the current anime industry for its development of a popular, critically acclaimed, and financially successful approach to narrative and style that comprises a studio worldview.

Outside of Shaft, there are a few anime studios that have similarly developed a unique and recognizable approach to anime to comprise their own house style. Kyoto
Animation is one studio with a very different studio structure to Shaft that has a clear directorial language that can be seen throughout their works. While Kyoto Animation works are often mis-labeled as solely cute slice of life shows, they in fact work in a range of genres and stories. The real essence of their studio style is their directorial focus on nuanced moments of everyday life. Their style can be described as focusing on “emphasizing very tiny moments to create tangible emotions and lived-in spaces” containing characters that are “made real by small details of consistent body language.” Rather than building a house style out of the influence from a single director like Shaft, Kyoto Animation’s succinct style is in part a product of the Kyoto Animation School, in which animators are deliberately trained with the Kyoto Animation house style in mind. The studio rarely if ever outsources any of their work to other studios, preferring to keep all work done on a show in-house. This can in part be attributed to the studio’s physical isolation from the majority of anime studios that are concentrated in the Nerima and Suginami wards of Tokyo. Located in Kyoto, many hours and an expensive bullet train away from Tokyo, few if any staff members from other anime studios will be brought in to work on a single show in the style that freelance animators do in Tokyo. Furthermore, Kyoto Animation animators are paid on salary, rather than per frame, a major difference from the industry norm. This allows their animators not to rush through drawings for fear of lack of pay, but rather lets their animators take time on drawings, the end result being shows that are fewer in quantity but higher in quality.¹

Another example of a studio well known for its established house style can be seen in Studio Trigger. A new studio founded by Hiroyuki Imaishi and Masahiko
Otsuka, two former prominent figures at Studio Gainax, the studio’s founding allowed these industry professionals to begin to take greater risks with regard to their works, and assume a greater amount of creative responsibility as well. Trigger has become very well known for its large amount of original works with a very whimsical visual style, which often feature strong female leads, and showcase the work of young and talented animators. Trigger was also one of the first anime studios to use Kickstarter as a means to fund their projects, with the sequel to Little Witch Academia becoming fully funded within three hours of the campaign’s start. Like Shaft, Trigger is another studio that not only focuses on creating quality productions, but is devoted to developing a certain studio worldview that is part of a larger consistent and cohesive creative vision.

The creation of Shaft Style was the product of a deliberate effort made by the studio through a process of director mentorship and a consistent creative team to establish a particular approach to working in the animated medium. Through the meeting of a succinct cadre of narrative and stylistic proclivities, Studio Shaft is constantly working towards expressing the fluidity between character comedy and despair, to develop an intimate relationship between character and audience. Shaft-brand despair informs a character’s psychology. It is most often in the form of a tragic plot, or in unrequited or repressed character desire and emotion. Sometimes despair is overt and integral to narrative progression, and sometimes despair provides the viewer greater understanding of the character. On the opposite end is the Shaft brand of the comedic, comprising narrative situations or character emotion such as love, happiness, joy and hope, as well as irreverence and irony. Comedy can oppose,
distract from, or reveal despair. The balance between comedy, despair, and the way in which these elements interact through narrative and style to foster an intimate relationship between character and audience is the cornerstone of the Shaft house style.

The way in which Shaft approaches genre balances between leaning on tropes and genre expectations, and introducing disparate elements not commonly found in a specific genre. Through this approach, Shaft is able take interactions and situations that could be generally considered comedic and reveal the despair that they carry, or vice versa. Experimentation with series structure of both episodic and narratively driven shows additionally works to further the audience’s understanding of character psychology. In episodic shows, Shaft creates a body of accumulated gags and running jokes that form the basis of the audience’s understanding of character, and functions as a tool to delve into topics that are difficult to make funny, and be able to immediately pull the audience into a comedic space. In narratively-driven shows, often the ordering of narrative information masks or delays key information, in service of undermining audience expectations, and complicating the audience’s relationship with characters. By constantly re-contextualizing character actions and emotions, Shaft facilitates a growing level of intimacy between character and audience. The final main narrative feature of Shaft works is the consistent presence of eccentric characters. Eccentric characters throughout Shaft narratives breed offbeat humor, and through the audience’s understanding of what informs character eccentricity and how others interact with it, character despair towards society and or the self is revealed. Within these character interactions, the rhythm and structure of
dialogue is an essential tool to shift tones from more humorous to serious moments where subjects move freely between joy, to deep character contemplation, and are quickly left in the form of a joke, revealing how character humor and despair are inexorably tied to character relationships with each other and the audience.

Shaft Style is constructed not just through these narrative elements, but is dependent on the meeting of the studio’s main narrative inclinations to stylistic proclivities to create an extreme externalization of character emotion. The integrated use of editing and visual patterns, frame composition and staging, and visual shifts display a visual embodiment of character emotion, granting the audience a clear understanding of character subjectivity. Within a baseline low average shot length, character emotion is visually expressed through alterations to editing speed. Visual patterns of text, specific character motions and close ups, and landscape shots are frequently used within the Shaft editing system to draw attention to character emotion at a specific moment. They are a reliable way for the studio to add visual energy to scenes that do not contain much character movement or physical action, or visual variation to scenes that do. Composition and staging creates an extremely organized, almost sterile, and occasionally surreal frame, and by maintaining this as the norm for Shaft productions, when frames then leave that place of organization and symmetry, it often acts as a visualization of shifts in character emotion or narrative. Visual shifts of backgrounds, color, animation, and art additionally work to facilitate shifting tones and visualize character emotion. Every aspect of Shaft visual style works to create an extreme externalization of character emotion that furthers the audience’s understanding of character subjectivity, and through that understanding
the audience is able to develop and intimate relationship with characters – the cornerstone of Shaft style.

The *Monogatari* series is one of the pinnacle works of Studio Shaft that can be seen as a near thesis statement for their approach to filmmaking. The *Monogatari* series reflects the worldview of Studio Shaft, using their narrative and visual aesthetic to grant the audience a deep understanding of character emotion, and thus foster an intimate relationship between character and audience. While character despair becomes a driving force of narrative development, both despair and comedy become essential to characterization. Shifting tones and situations that create a holistic portrayal of characters could not be accomplished without the adept and consistent use of the variety of Shaft narrative and stylistic elements working in support of each other.

If the *Monogatari* series demonstrates the epitome of when narrative and style work together in a way that is distinctly Shaft Style, then *Mekakucity Actors* demonstrates what happens when all of the elements of narrative and style that comprise Shaft style are present, but do not work in conjunction with each other. *Mekakucity Actors* contained all of the elements that comprise Shaft Style, but in their execution, were divorced from each other, functionally alienating the audience from, rather than fostering intimacy with character emotion. With a near incomprehensible narrative, and use of visual style and storytelling that further confounded the viewer, the audience was left unable to understand character psychology, and thus making the show not able to maintain the same emotional impact as Shaft shows are usually so adept at accomplishing. By looking at *Mekakucity Actors* in comparison to the
Monogatari series, it is apparent that Shaft Style is more than a collection of narrative and stylistic proclivities. Rather, it is their use in tandem to reflect the Shaft worldview about the fluidity between comedy and despair and create an intimate relationship between character and audience is the real nature of Shaft Style.

Since the studio re-structure in 2004, Studio Shaft has become a leader in the anime industry, consistently creating works that draw attention from a large audience while staying true to their artistic vision. While the works that they have completed since 2004 have shaped this thesis’ discussion of Shaft Style, looking to what Shaft has slated for future project gives further indication as to how Shaft is working to expand their creative output, and how this expansion is reflective of the studio style they have so adeptly defined.

Aside from the continued adaptations of the Monogatari series novels, Shaft is additionally creating an 8-episode OVA series, with approximately 1 episode released per month, based on the “Zaregoto Series.” Another work by author Nisioisin, this collaboration illustrates not just a continued partnership, but is indicative of how Nisioisin’s specific authorial voice across his novels is in line with the Studio Shaft worldview, and could point to future collaborations between author and studio. Although an OVA and not a full television series, the Zaregoto series features main Shaft art director Ken Naito, and character designer Akio Watanabe (same art director as the Monogatari series) as prominent figures for this work. With Yuki Kajiura, a big-name composer not just for Shaft but the anime industry at large, composing the score in addition to these figures, this points to the Zaregoto series being a priority series for Shaft. The Zaregoto series OVA is directed by Yuki Yase, his second work
after *Mekakucity Actors*, and this indicates that despite the major problems with *Mekakucity Actors*, Yase will remain, and possibly come to have a greater presence at Shaft. Yase still maintains his understanding of Shaft Style and experience with the studio, and being given the now second work by Nisioisin to adapt (albeit an OVA and not a fully aired television series) points towards a maintained interest in Yase to become a leader in the next generation of Shaft series directors.

Not only has Shaft continued to develop its already existing cadre of directors, the studio additionally is additionally promoting new figures that have a significant amount of experience in the studio, as is evidenced through Kenjirō Okada’s directorial debut for *3-gatsu no Lion*. Having previously worked as an episode director and storyboard artist mostly under Itamura, since 2013, it is likely that Okada’s directorial style may be heavily influenced by Itamura’s style, with the addition of his own proclivities. The narrative of *3-gatsu no Lion* is, similar to *Mekakucity Actors*, seemingly a prime story for Shaft. Being centered around the main character tackling his own depression, but with comedy additionally being present throughout the series, *3-gatsu no Lion* begs the question of if it will follow suit like *Mekakucity Actors*, or deliver on the marriage of narrative and style to develop intimacy between characters.

In addition to *3-gatsu no Lion*, one final television anime that Shaft has slated is *Fate/ Extra Last Encore*, part of the larger Type-Moon company Fate franchise. Starting from the visual novel “Fate/ Stay Night,” the Fate franchise has grown to span a variety of additional visual novels, fighting games, manga, novels, anime adaptations, and other goods, making it one of the largest multi-media franchises in
Japan today. With the exception of the first anime adaptation being done by Studio Deen in 2006, all other adaptations of Type-Moon (the game company that created the Fate franchise) works have been handled by Studio Ufotable, all to great popular and financial success. It is only recently that Studio Ufotable is not handling every single Fate series adaptation, leaving the spinoff series *Fate/ Kaleid liner Prisma Illya* (and its sequels) to Studio Silver Link (the studio founded by Shin Ōnuma following his departure from Shaft), the movie special *Fate/ Grand Order – First Order* to Studio Layduce, and the *Fate/ Extra Last Encore* to Studio Shaft. Having previously completed the opening animation for the Fate/ Extra CCC game, it is an unsurprising move that Shaft would then move on to handle the anime adaptation of the game. That Shaft is one of the studios tasked with handling more Type-Moon adaptations demonstrates a distinct attention to expanding Shaft’s work with larger franchises, and possibly an attempt to take a foothold into the large and ever-expanding Fate franchise. The fact that Fate is already a fairly well known franchise, combined with the relative popularity of the Fate/ Extra game (of which Shaft’s anime is an adaptation of) means that irrelevant of the studio, this adaptation is likely to have a large guaranteed viewership. This in conjunction with Shaft’s now well-known name and status as a major studio within the anime industry will only help to bring an even larger audience to *Fate/ Extra Last Encore*. Will Shaft take inspiration from the original work’s status as a fighting game, and possibly from previous anime adaptations of other Fate franchise works? Looking at Shaft’s opening animation for the Fate/ Extra CCC game, many of Shaft’s visual trademarks are already present (eye close ups, head tilts, surreal setting), so it is likely that their anime adaptation
will be similar to the original opening animation. Yukihiro Miyamoto’s position as series director for *Fate/ Extra Last Encore* furthermore indicates a continued expansion of Miyamoto’s influence at Shaft, and that he is potentially now a new mentor figure in the lineup of studio directorial mentorship. Will Shaft style change as a result of Miyamoto’s new residency as a mentor rather than mentee? Only through viewing future Shaft series can this be discerned.

Finally, outside of television anime, Shaft’s new movie project *Uchiage Hanabi, Shita kara Miru ka? Yoko kara Miru ka?* (an adaptation of a 1993 live-action movie of the same name) is a distinct shift from the studio’s usual output. The majority of Shaft produced movies have been a part of larger series/franchises, and this move to animating a stand-alone film indicates a possible new direction of expansion for Shaft. Slated for 2017 release, little about the film is known. The film will be the directorial debut of Noboyuki Takeuchi, a production designer, art director, key animator, and all around prominent staff member at Shaft since 2004. Given his longtime experience at Shaft, Takeuchi likely has a firm grasp of Shaft Style, having worked under a wide variety of Shaft directors. Will Takeuchi remain in a directorial role for future projects, and if so, will his role be solely based around films, or also television anime shows? Given Shaft’s experience with theatrically released animated films as part of the larger *Monogatari* series franchise, this likely spells a new faction for expansion. Related to the *Kizumonogatari* film trilogy, as it will soon be completed, this likely spells either a return to Tatsuya Oishi working on television anime, or possibly jim moving on to continue in feature length films at Shaft.
Looking at the projects Studio Shaft has slated for the coming years; Shaft has a bright future with many new expansions and directorial voices. Will the addition of these creative voices into the director’s chair push Shaft in new directions? How will the studio change with previously mentee-directors becoming the mentors to a new wave of Shaft directors? Will Shaft serve as an exemplar for other studios in developing their own house style? It is apparent that Shaft has a clearly defined directorial worldview, a distinct approach to narrative and style that has built Shaft into the success it is today, and it is likely that the future holds only more opportunities for the studio to remain as an innovator and major voice in the anime industry at large for years to come.
## Appendix A: *Bakemonogatari* Ep. 3

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<tr>
<th>Shot</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Screencap</th>
<th>Visual</th>
<th>Audio</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td><img src="image1.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Senjōgahara: As a reference, I personally recommend “waking you up every day for a week, wearing nothing but an apron. I can also make breakfast for you, if you like. Isn’t viewing that from behind romantic for a man?</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td><img src="image2.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Araragi: You know, Senjōgahara... even if we make that sort of arrangement</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td><img src="image3.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>A: I think us just being “friends” will be impossible.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image4.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>S: Ah,</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td><img src="image5.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Senjōgahara jumps off of monkey bar</td>
<td>S: If you put it that way, you have a point. You’re right. Then let’s just say that erotic things are off-limits.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Hair rises</td>
<td>S: Besides, I figured that you wouldn't ever ask for anything erotic, anyway. A: You have a great deal of trust in me.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Senjōgahara head turns around</td>
<td>S: Well, of course. You're a virgin.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hair falls down</td>
<td>A: I guess we did talk about that, didn't we?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Araragi walks forward</td>
<td>S: Virgins aren't that greedy, so I'm more at ease.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>A: Umm... Senjōgahara.</td>
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<td>Page</td>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Speech</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Senjōgahara</td>
<td>A: You don't have any experience either, right?</td>
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<td>forward</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Senjōgahara</td>
<td>S: What are you talking about? Of course I have experience.</td>
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<td>walks</td>
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<td>forward</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Araragi</td>
<td>A: I see…</td>
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<td>walks</td>
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<td>forward</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Senjōgahara</td>
<td>S: Experience with orgies.</td>
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<td>walks</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Senjōgahara and Araragi walk forward</td>
<td>A: Say, even if that's true... What do you get out of telling me the truth?</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>S: I understand. Correction:</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td></td>
<td>S: I don't have any experience. I'm a virgin.</td>
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<td>Page</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Scene / Dialogue</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A: Huh?</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Senjōgahara walks towards Araragi</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>S: Which means the only girls who would talk to hopeless virgins like you are at best,</td>
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<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>late-blooming virgins with mental health issues</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
such as myself.

[Advertisement Underneath Report Below]

S: The conversation seems to have gone a bit astray… But honestly, is there anything you need help with, Araragi-kun?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shot</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Screencap</th>
<th>Visual</th>
<th>Audio</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Shot 1 Screencap" /></td>
<td>Ichijō: Is there something on your mind? As a special favor, I wouldn’t mind being your sounding board. Kirisaki: It’s not as if I have any particular issue. I: Can’t be honest with yourself, huh?</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Shot 2 Screencap" /></td>
<td>C: Don’t act like you’re my friend! You and I are a fake couple, right? I mean, you probably dislike me, don’t you?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Shot 3 Screencap" /></td>
<td>I: Huh? Now where’s all this coming from?</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Shot 4 Screencap" /></td>
<td>I: Well, I guess I’d have to say yes. Though, it’s not as much as when we first met…</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Shot 5 Screencap" /></td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td><img src="image6.png" alt="Shot 6 Screencap" /></td>
<td>I: Then how about you? Do you still hate me? K: Of course I hate you.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>K: I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I absolutely loathe you! I: Is that right? Well, I can’t say that doesn’t depress me a little.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>K: Hey… if we… I: Hmm?</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>K: If we had dated for real, do you think it would’ve worked out?</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>I: Huh?! What’s up with that all of a sudden?! That was out of character.</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>K: Never mind! Just answer the question.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>I (thinks): What the hell is wrong with her today?</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>I (thinks): She’s not acting like herself today. Something must have happened!</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>I (thinks): Wait, why am I feeling so self-conscious too? This isn’t good! I already have Onodera!</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>I (thinks): Why do I get so nervous around this girl?</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I (thinks): Also…</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Behind Kirisaki’s face is the ocean, which fades away into sparkles as she looks up towards Ichijō. I (thinks): Has she… has she always looked like this?</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I: Are…</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>I: Are you kidding? Of course there's no way it'd work out!</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>I: Are you kidding? Of course there's no way it'd work out!</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>[Wind blows]</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>I: To sum it up, you're just not my type, okay? You're ungraceful, violent, and you're hardly charming.</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I: We’d probably fight all the time like we do right now!</td>
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<td>Panel</td>
<td>Text</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I: For starters, you could be more girlish, like, feminine!</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>I: I’m telling you…</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>K: Oh, just shut up, will you?! I get it, so just shut your mouth!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>[Harp music begins]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I: Huh?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Scene</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Kirisaki looks up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>K: Sorry.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kirisaki runs away</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>I: Oh… hey!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>I (narrates): After that, right up until summer vacation ended,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>I (narrates): Chitoge [Kirisaki] and I didn’t say a single word to each other.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix C: *Owarimonogatari* Ep. 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shot</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Screencap</th>
<th>Visual</th>
<th>Audio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Araragi opens the door" /></td>
<td>Araragi opens the door</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Araragi: Oh" /></td>
<td>Araragi: Oh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Araragi walks forward" /></td>
<td>Araragi walks forward</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Araragi walks across the classroom in a tiptoe march" /></td>
<td>Araragi walks across the classroom in a tiptoe march</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A: Hmm?

A: Huh?

A: What?

Araragi takes two steps forward. [Cartoon-like bounce sound on each footstep]

A: Aren’t you Oikura? Yeah, you are Oikura! Man, you surprised me!

A: If it isn’t Oikura, who was in my first-year class, in the distant past known as two years ago! Do you remember be? I’m sure you’ve already forgotten. You know, I was attendance number 2. I’m Araragi!

[Class list with Araragi as attendance number 2]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Panel</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Oikura: I do remember.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>O: Of course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sweat beads fall from Araragi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Araragi steps backwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Camera tilts up Oikura’s body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>O: You are someone…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Eye looks around</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Boom sound]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Desks fall behind Araragi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A: I’m glad you remember me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>A: As previous attendance number 2, I, Araragi, am happy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>O: You seem to be doing well, unlike me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>O: Really you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>O: make me jealous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Camera tilt up Araragi’s body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>O: While I was cooped up in my own house, you studied, decided to try for college, got a girlfriend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Oikura’s pupils dilate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>O: Araragi, your life is truly one of smooth sailing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A: Thanks to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>O: Thanks to me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Oikura turns towards Araragi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>O: Thanks to me? Hah!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>O: I haven’t been to school this whole time. What are you saying I did for you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>64s</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
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<td>42</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3008</td>
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<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3070</td>
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<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3133</td>
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<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3206</td>
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<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3270</td>
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<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Panel</td>
<td>Image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>5</td>
<td><img src="attachment" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 50   | 3     | ![Image](attachment) | Araragi steps forward  
A: No, of all things, that's - |
<p>| 51   | 2     | <img src="attachment" alt="Image" /> | O: It is thanks to mathematics. |
| 52   | 0.5   | <img src="attachment" alt="Image" /> | |
| 53   | 4     | <img src="attachment" alt="Image" /> | O: Someone like you really pisses me off. |
| 54   | 2     | <img src="attachment" alt="Image" /> | |
| 55   | 7     | <img src="attachment" alt="Image" /> | O: No matter how big of a grudge I hold, it can’t be enough. I can’t help that feeling of hatred well up, one after another. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image1.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>O: It’s a bottomless spring of hatred.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><img src="image2.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>A: For someone like me… come on, it can’t be that much.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image3.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>O: I hate that attitude of yours!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image4.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>O: You try</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image5.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>O: to roll anything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image6.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>O: and everything up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image7.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>O: in an ambiguous manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>O: You compromise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>O: You round things up nicely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>O: Back then as well!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>O: You -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>O: [begins coughing]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Appendix D: *Nisemonogatari* Ep. 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shot</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Screencap</th>
<th>Visual</th>
<th>Audio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Araragi: Well, I told you about Sengoku, right? She's a girl I used to know. I’m going over to her place today.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Hachikuji: Given that, you seemed rather unhappy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>A: Did I? I looked that unhappy?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>H: Yeah! Like a story that’s gotten a lot of mileage from jokes about how it'll never be animated due to some screw-up. You had an awkwardness that was reminiscent of that.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>A: My face was hardly that specific!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><img src="image6.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Lens change-styled transition to next shot</td>
<td>H: Well, I can understand that you'd be wary of unexpected happiness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Panel</td>
<td>Image</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 7    | 4     | ![Image](image1.png) | Lens change-styled transition to next shot
|      |       |       | H: But any time you enter a new arena, there's something to be gained. |
| 8    | 4     | ![Image](image2.png) | Lens change-styled transition to next shot
|      |       |       | A: Something to be gained? Like what? |
| 9    | 2     | ![Image](image3.png) | H: In a word… |
| 10   | 2     | ![Image](image4.png) | H: Money. |
| 11   | 3     | ![Image](image5.png) | Ahoge bounces around
|      |       |       | A: No, aren't there other things? |
| 12   | 4     | ![Image](image6.png) | H: Huh? Is there really anything else in the world? |
| 13   | 3     | ![Image](image7.png) | Ahoge bounces up straight. Changes to 愛 (love) character on Araragi’s line.
|      |       |       | A: Sure! Like, you know… love! |
H: Huh? Love? Oh, yeah! I know love. The convenience store was selling it.

A: They were selling it?! At the convenience store?

Register ring sound
H: Yup, for 298 yen. A: A bargain!

H: Talk of money aside, Araragi-san, I’ve been looking forward to this. What kind of dance will we do during the ending theme?

Ahoge bounces from side to side A: It’s a given that we’re dancing?

H: I’m hoping for something like in *Cat’s Eye*, nice and sexy!

A: You’re okay with just silhouettes?!
### Appendix E: *Bakemonogatari* Ep. 12

<table>
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<th>Shot</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Screencap</th>
<th>Visual</th>
<th>Audio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Screencap" /></td>
<td>Raises chopsticks</td>
<td>School chimes ring. Soundtrack continues through end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Screencap" /></td>
<td></td>
<td>S: We're going on a date.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Screencap" /></td>
<td>Egg falls from chopsticks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Screencap" /></td>
<td>Egg falls from chopsticks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Screencap" /></td>
<td>Eye looks left</td>
<td>A: What?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image6.png" alt="Screencap" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Shot 1: Person raises chopsticks, School chimes ring, Soundtrack continues through end.
2. Shot 2: Character A says, "We’re going on a date."
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Speech</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Chopsticks click</td>
<td>A: Uh... what?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Head nods</td>
<td>S: Hmm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Food raised</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.15</td>
<td></td>
<td>S: Say ahh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.05</td>
<td>Blink</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.3</td>
<td></td>
<td>A: Whoa, what’s this??</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Panel</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>A: This kind of lovey dovey event between lovey dovey lovers is something you’d see in manga!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A: What’s with this! I’m not happy at all. I don’t want this.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Pupil shakes</td>
<td>A: In fact, it’s just scary!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>S: What’s wrong, Araragi-kun?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>S: I said, say ahh.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Eye closes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A: Ahh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Smiles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Senjōgahara puts rice on Araragi’s face</td>
<td>S: Gotcha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
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</tr>
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<td>27</td>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>A: I’m happy to see that you’re smiling…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>S: Araragi-kun, there’s some rice on your cheek.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>A: You put it there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>S: I’ll take it off for you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>A: Eh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td><img src="image6.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Senjōgahara removes rice from Araragi’s face. Every time she touches his face his nostrils grow and shrink.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image7.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Row</td>
<td>Image</td>
<td>Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Ahoge moves left and right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>All right, all gone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Rice thrown in garbage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Blink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Text: Thrown away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Panel</td>
<td>Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>S: Well then, we’re going on a date.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>A: Mhm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>S: No… that’s not what I mean. A date…</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Food raised</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S: Could you… go on a date with me?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Araragi takes a bite</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>S: How about… we go… on a date?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>Panel</td>
<td>Image</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
</tr>
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<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Araragi takes a bite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Eyes look right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>S: What, are you against it, Araragi-kun?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>A: Well… I’m not against it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>S: Okay, then go on a date with me, Araragi-kun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image6.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>A: So it ultimately comes down to that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image7.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>S: Do you have any complaints… rather, any questions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Image</td>
<td>Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>A: None.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>S: Okay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>11</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>S: Then after school I’ll make some excuse to go home early and get ready, so… Araragi-kun, come to my house once you’re done preparing for the cultural festival.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>A: Uhh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Food raised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image6.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td><img src="image7.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Eye opens wide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Birds fly away</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Birds fly away</td>
<td>A: That’s how today, June 13th,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>A: would come to be celebrated as the day I went on my first date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fade to white</td>
<td>A: with my girlfriend...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>A: or so I thought...</td>
</tr>
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</table>
## Appendix F: *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* Ep. 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shot</th>
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<th>Screencap</th>
<th>Visual</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Screencap" /></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Music score. Rain falling.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Screencap" /></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>M: Sayaka-chan,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Screencap" /></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Screencap" /></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>M: you shouldn’t be fighting like that</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Screencap" /></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Image" /></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Image" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Image" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Image" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>M: You’re lying when you say it doesn’t hurt. It hurt just watching you. You can’t say it’s okay to hurt yourself just because you can’t feel it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><img src="image5" alt="Image" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Hand moves from lap to bench. S: If I hadn’t done that, I wouldn’t have been able to win. I don’t have any natural talent for this sort of thing.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
M: Even if you fight like that and win, it's not going to help you out in the end.

S: And what would help me?

M: Huh?

Sayaka pulls out and reveals Soul Gem
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Row</th>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>S: Now that I’ve been turned into this thing, how can anything help me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>M: Sayaka-chan…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Walks left</td>
<td>S: All I can do now is kill witches. I’m just a rock without any other purpose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>S: I just pretend to be alive by moving around a dead body. Who would do something for me when I’m like this? Thinking about it is pointless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Head moves down</td>
<td>M: But I’m just wondering what could make you happier…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Head tilts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>From upper left corner of frame Sayaka pulls down and opens hand to reveal Soul Gem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Head tilt finishes</td>
<td>S: You should fight then.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>M: Huh?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Looks right and down at Madoka</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>S: Kyubey told me. You have more natural talent than anyone else, right? You can take out the witches just like that, without having to suffer like I do, right?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>Image</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
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<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>M: I… that’s not…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>5</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Points at Madoka S: If you want to do something for me, how about trying to walk in my shoes first?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Car headlights go by S: But you can’t, can you? Of course not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>S: You couldn’t give up your humanity just because you pity me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>M: It’s not pity. I…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image6.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Blinks slowly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Head tilt</td>
<td>S: You can do anything, but instead you sit there, and I’m the one who has to go through all of this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Camera tilts up Sayaka’s body</td>
<td>S: Don’t try to act like you know what it’s like when you’re not even willing to do it yourself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sayaka leaves</td>
<td>M: Sayaka-chan…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sayaka leaves</td>
<td>Rain falling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rain</td>
<td>Head looks back at Madoka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rain</td>
<td>S: Don't follow me. Score out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Rain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Page</td>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Image</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
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<td>------</td>
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<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Rain falling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Rain falling</td>
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## Appendix G: *Nisemonogatari* Ep. 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shot</th>
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<th>Screencap</th>
<th>Visual</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Screen Cap" /></td>
<td></td>
<td>Soundtrack throughout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Screen Cap" /></td>
<td>Sign: Light Vehicles Prohibited Camera slow pan left</td>
<td>Hachikuji: But that aside, Araragi-san, where are you going today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Screen Cap" /></td>
<td>Camera slow pan right</td>
<td>Araragi: Nowhere special…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Screen Cap" /></td>
<td>Sign: Boys Prohibited Camera slow pan left</td>
<td>H: Searching for new Araragi harem members?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image5" alt="Screen Cap" /></td>
<td>Camera shakes</td>
<td><em>Car horn sound</em> A: I never founded such a perverted group!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><img src="image6" alt="Screen Cap" /></td>
<td>Camera slow tilt down</td>
<td><em>Plane flying sound</em> H: An original member, Oshino-san, has graduated now…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Row</td>
<td>Image</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 7    | 4   | ![Image](camera_tilt_up.png) | Camera slow tilt up | Drilling sound  
H: It'll be a difficult gap to fill. |
| 8    | 1   | ![Image](camera_shake.png) | Camera shakes | Person falling sound  
A: Ugh |
| 9    | 5   | ![Image](signs_move_apart.png) | Signs slowly move apart from all being centered in one straight line to all next to each other in a horizontal line | A: Even assuming this alleged Araragi harem’s existence, why would Oshino be a member? |
| 10   | 2   | ![Image](sign_no_old_men_allowed.png) | Sign: No Old Men Allowed  
Camera shakes | Car driving and beeping sound  
A: He’s an old guy in a floral shirt! |
| 11   | 4   | ![Image](baby_ducks.png) | Baby ducks added to sign one at a time | H: Add too many members, and the story will be hard to follow. |
| 12   | 2   | ![Image](sign_watch_for_bears.png) | Sign: Watch for bears  
Camera shakes | Bear roar sound  
H: So be careful. |
| 13   | 2   | ![Image](fade_to_black.png) | Fade to black | Door slamming shut sound |
Appendix H: *Arakawa Under the Bridge* Ep. 2

<table>
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<th>Shot</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Camera moves up Kō's body to a single eye close up, into his eye to black</td>
<td>Kō: It’s time to show these wackos just how different I am from them!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Foot steps down</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fast camera tilt up</td>
<td>K: Nice to meet you everyone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Camera track in to Kō. When he says his name sparkles appear and background changes</td>
<td>K: Heir to the Ichinomiya Corporation, and its future president. I got accepted into Tokyo University on my first attempt! I'm Ichinomiya Kō!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Crowd murmurs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sparkles twinkle around Kō</td>
<td><em>Twinkle sound</em> K: As I'm sure you all know, Ichinomiya is a global -</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Scene</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Village chief flies through the air kicking Kō in the head</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Village chief flips through the air</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 9    | 2     | Film reel sides disappear  
K: What’s your problem, kappa?  
VC: That’s what I’d like to ask you. |
| 10   | 2     | Camera tilt up  
Village Chief’s body to track in to his face  
VC: You still haven't accepted your new hame, have you? |
<p>| 11   | 4     | Camera track out of single eye close up of Kō |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th>Ding sound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
<td>Ding sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ding sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ding sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ding sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ding sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ding sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ding sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Camera Movement</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
</tr>
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<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
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<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Ding sound</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Camera track out of Kō close up</td>
<td>Nino: Recruit, we want you to tell us about you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>N: What you have doesn't matter to us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fast camera pan right to Kō</td>
<td>K: Nino…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hoshi: Our crazy-cute, our crazy-lovely… our angel, Nino. Metal Twins: Mhmm, it’s true!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td></td>
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<td>-------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>K (thinks): Why am I trying so hard to make them envy me?</td>
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<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Ding sound</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>Ding sound</td>
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<td>Ding sound</td>
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<td>0.5</td>
<td>Ding sound</td>
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<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>K: I apologize. Please let me try again.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>K: I am Recruit.</td>
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### Appendix I: *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* Ep. 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shot</th>
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<th>Screencap</th>
<th>Visual</th>
<th>Audio</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Screencap" /></td>
<td>Homura walks towards Madoka</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Screencap" /></td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Screencap" /></td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Screencap" /></td>
<td>Madoka: Th- that was terrible!</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Screencap" /></td>
<td>M: You didn’t have to kill him!</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image6.png" alt="Screencap" /></td>
<td>Homura looks right</td>
<td>Homura: Why…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Homura walks towards Madoka</td>
<td>H: why do you always sacrifice yourself?</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td><img src="image" alt="Handheld camera pan left" /></td>
<td>M: Huh?</td>
<td></td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td><img src="image" alt="Handheld camera pan left" /></td>
<td>M: Huh?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Handheld camera pan left</td>
<td>H: Don’t demean yourself by saying that you’re of no use to anyone</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
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<td><img src="image" alt="Handheld camera pan left" /></td>
<td>H: or that you’re worthless. Think about the people who care about you!</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Homura puts her hands on Madoka’s shoulders</td>
<td>H: Stop doing that!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Handheld camera pan left" /></td>
<td>H: How come you don’t realize there are people</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Panel</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>H: who would be sad if they lost you?!</td>
<td></td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>H: What about the people who were trying to protect you?!</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Homura steps back and falls to the ground</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>M: Homura-chan…</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Madoka stands</td>
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<td>Page</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Image</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
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<td><img src="image" alt="Madoka looks up" /></td>
<td>Madoka looks up</td>
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<td>22</td>
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<td><img src="image" alt="Static sound" /></td>
<td>Static sound</td>
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<td><img src="image" alt="M: Have we…" /></td>
<td>M: Have we…</td>
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<td><img src="image" alt="M: Have we met before?" /></td>
<td>M: Have we met before?</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="M: Have we met before?" /></td>
<td>M: Have we met before?</td>
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<td><img src="image" alt="H: I…" /></td>
<td>H: I…</td>
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<td><img src="image" alt="H: I…" /></td>
<td>H: I…</td>
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<td>Panel</td>
<td>Text Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Madoka gets her bag and turns away from Homura. M: I’m sorry… I need to look for Sayaka-chan.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>H: Wait.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Madoka runs away from Homura. H: It’s too late for Sayaka Miki… M: I’m sorry.</td>
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<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Homura tries to get up.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>H: Wait!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Homura falls back down to the ground.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Madoka runs up the stairs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
35  3  Homura crying

36  2

37  2  Electricity spark sound
     Kyubey: You know, it’s pointless trying.

38  2  Shadow moves across Homura
     H: You don’t learn either, do you?

39  1  Homura looks over her shoulder

40  7  K: There are plenty of replacements, but someone taking one out for no reason is still annoying. It’s a waste.

41  5  Kyubey hops down from the fence and jumps on the bench
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>42</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Kyubey eats his corpse</th>
<th>Eating sounds</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Swallow sound</td>
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<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Homura gets up and puts hand to hair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Kyubey blinks</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Homura hair flip</td>
<td>K: This marks the second time you’ve killed me</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shot</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Screencap</td>
<td>Visual</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Camera tilt up</td>
<td>N: Rec, you're really good at teaching people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>K: Huh?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Camera tilt up</td>
<td>N: You've taught me a bunch of stuff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fast camera pan right to Kō</td>
<td>K: Not true!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Metal Twins: She's right! Thanks a bunch, Rec! We never thought we'd be able to swim!</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>K: You guys… MT: So Rec, for our next lesson,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Image</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>MT: can you teach us how to cross dimensions with our masks on?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Eye slowly closes</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>MT: Is there another device we can use for that? This is really exciting! K: I think,</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>K: there's a certain cat-type robot that could help you with that.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Eye blink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><img src="image6.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>K (thinks): Boy do I hate talking to those two!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shot</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Screencap</td>
<td>Visual</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Gavel bangs</td>
<td>Gavel bangs</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>[image]</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ahoge waves side to side</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>[image]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>[image]</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>[image]</td>
<td>Ahoge waves side to side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>Action</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Head turns right</td>
<td>H: Shall I demonstrate?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Head rises up</td>
<td>A: Bring it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Camera circles around Araragi and Hachikuji facing off against each other surrounded by flames</td>
<td>Fire burning sound</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>A: If you can satisfy me, I’ll do a handstand right here. H: A handstand?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>A: Yes… like getting on your knees to bow, but better.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Camera tilts up the side of Araragi’s body, circling around to his front as he points his finger towards Hachikuji</td>
<td>A: And if you can’t satisfy me, then you have to do a handstand here,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>A: wearing your skirt!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Camera tracks in to a close up of only Araragi’s eye</td>
<td>A: Your kiddy panties will be exposed to public view until I allow you to stop!</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Dialog Information</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Camera tracks in and tilts up Hachikuji’s body H: Very well, I accept your challenge.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Camera track in to Araragi’s pupil A: I praise your guts if nothing else</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>H: You’re like a phoenix to the flame, Araragi-san.</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A: No, I’m nothing as cool as that.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>H: Ahem, we’ll start with warm-ups.</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Text: Courage Series Eye blinks</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>H: The courage to lie to your lover</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ahoge stands up straight</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Image</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Image" /></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>A:</strong> Not bad…all you’re doing is simply lying, but adding ‘courage’ in it makes it sound like you’re lying for your lover’s sake, even though she hasn’t said anything suggesting that.</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
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<td><img src="image2" alt="Image" /></td>
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<td><strong>H:</strong> The courage to betray your comrades.</td>
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<td><img src="image3" alt="Image" /></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>A:</strong> What?!</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Image" /></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>A:</strong> Amazing! The end result is that you’ve betrayed your comrades. But that gives the impression that you’ve somehow protected them, even though she hasn’t said anything suggesting that!</td>
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<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image5" alt="Image" /></td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>H:</strong> The courage to be a lazy bum.</td>
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<td><img src="image6" alt="Image" /></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>A:</strong> Wh- what?</td>
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<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td><img src="image7" alt="Image" /></td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>A:</strong> It really can do anything! You’re just meaninglessly whiling away your life, but that makes it sound like you’ve positioned yourself in poverty all for some greater goal, even though she hasn’t said anything, anything at all, suggesting that! B-but I cannot admit defeat here!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Line</td>
<td>Japanese Text</td>
<td>English Translation</td>
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<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>H: The courage to admit defeat.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ahoge falls</td>
<td>A (thinks): I admit my defeat!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Araragi’s hands hit the ground</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>A: I was lulled by the awesomeness of the words into admitting my own defeat! And all I did was admit defeat… Japanese is really simple!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix L: *Nisekoi* Ep. 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Screencap</th>
<th>Visual</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
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<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Kirisaki: Hey, hey… by the way, Onodera-san…</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Onodera’s eyes widen</td>
<td>Onodera: Hmm?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>K: Do you have a crush on anybody?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><strong>Onodera and Ichijō Buwaaah sound</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Lines above Ichijō squiggle</td>
<td>Ichijō: Is that a question you just suddenly ask a person? K: Suddenly? Look, it’s freaking girls talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><img src="image6.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td></td>
<td>K: Huh? Was that a weird question?</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><img src="image7.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Lines around Onodera squiggle</td>
<td>Onodera: R-right now, I don’t think of anyone like that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Column</td>
<td>Image</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>K: I see.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Camera begins on close up of Onodera’s face. Tracks out to reveal Ichijō. [Onodera’s line echoes in Ichijō’s thoughts] Right now, I don’t think of anyone like that. Ichijō (thinks): I see! I see… so Onodera isn’t into anyone! Good job, Kirisaki!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>K: I see! I don’t have anyone like that now, either!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Sparkles twinkle around Kirisaki K: I really hope I can meet that special someone soon. But it’s just so hard, you know?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image5" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Onodera looks over her shoulder O: Huh?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image6" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Maiko looks over his shoulder Maiko: Huh?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><img src="image7" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Ruri looks up Ruri: Huh?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Scene Description</td>
<td>Dialogue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>------</td>
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<td>----------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Kirisaki’s eyes open</td>
<td>K: Huh?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Ichijō’s hands and head shake from side to side</td>
<td>Unintelligible sounds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Three dots and question mark appear one by one</td>
<td>3 beeps and a ding as each dot then question mark appear</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Kirisaki morphs from normal animated form to exaggerated form</td>
<td>K: HAH!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Camera revolves around screaming Kirisaki with friends onlooking</td>
<td>K: J-joking, I’m joking! That was a joke!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Outlines of Ichijō and Kirisaki twitch</td>
<td>I: H-hey, that was mean, honey. Don’t say those things when you’ve got me! K: S-so sorry, darling! I just wanted to tease you a little! I: J-jeez, what am I gonna do with you?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Onodera blinks</td>
<td>O: Ohh…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>Scene</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>-------</td>
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<td>------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>M: Oh, okay! You two sure are chummy!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>I &amp; K: Ahahaha!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>M: Hey, hey, Kirisaki-san, can I ask you something too?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>K: Huh?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Camera slowly tracks in towards Maiko M: Spill the beans… how far have you two gone?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Kirisaki and Ichijō Buwaah sound</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>Scene Description</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ichijō's hand covers Maiko's mouth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M: Oh, come on, you, ki-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ichijō drags Maiko up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I: You! Come with me!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ichijō slides open the door and leads Maiko away</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M: Huh? What’s gotten into you?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

K: H-how? How? How? How far? How far have we gone - what exactly do you mean?
Appendix M: *Bakemonogatari* Ep. 14

Segmentation

BH = Black Hanekawa

Cold Open
BH laughs heard around city

1. Cram School, day
Meme Oshino and Araragi talk about why Black Hanekawa is back. BH tied up on rooftop. Hanekawa’s stress is back, therefore BH is back. The issue was not fully taken care of during Golden Week\(^i\). If Hanekawa builds up too much stress BH returns. Araragi questions why it took Hanekawa 17 years of built up stress in relation to her family troubles for BH to appear, why her stress would become so bad again so quickly. Araragi asks Oshino to stop being so vague. Oshino tells Araragi that Hanekawa looks like a character drawn by Nekobe Neko. Araragi asks why they can’t use Shinobu again to relieve Hanekawa’s stress. Shinobu left on a journey to find herself.

Opening Theme – “Sugar Sweet Nightmare”
OP change from episode 11 (they usually stay consistent throughout an arc)

2. Around city, day
Araragi riding bike searching for Shinobu. Araragi worried because without him Shinobu is physically as weak as a child. Looks at Mister Donut.

3. City, day
Araragi runs into Hachikuji. Hachikuji will try and find Shinobu.

4. Sengoku’s room, day
Araragi calls Sengoku to have her help find Shinobu. Sengoku trying to calm Araragi down and tells him a funny story. Tells the same funny story that Hanekawa recalled to Araragi that she heard on a radio show in the previous episode, leading Araragi to believe that she was one of the callers to the radio show. Sengoku agrees to help.

5. Supermarket Arcade Machines, day
Araragi calls Kanbaru to have her help find Shinobu. Kanbaru is hogging the game machine and there is a huge line of people waiting. Kanbaru makes a reference to another one of the stories from the radio show Hanekawa talked about previously, leading Araragi to believe that she was one of the callers to the radio show. Kanbaru agrees to help.

\(^i\) The Japanese school holiday week. The previous time Hanekawa turned into Black Hanekawa. Covered in the *Nekomonogatari: Shiro* installation.
6. Naoetsu High School, twilight
Araragi calls Senjōgahara to have her help find Shinobu. She will not leave the school. Senjōgahara recalls the final story Hanekawa recalled to Araragi from the radio show, leading Araragi to believe she was one of the callers. Senjōgahara asks if Shinobu missing is related to Hanekawa not coming to the school, and Araragi says yes. Senjōgahara reveals that Oshino told her that Shinobu was essential the last time there was a problem with Hanekawa. Senjōgahara guesses the entire situation of Shinobu missing being detrimental to Araragi being able to help return Hanekawa to normal. Senjōgahara tells Araragi that she will not help look for Hanekawa because Hanekawa left Senjōgahara in charge of preparations for the school festival in her stead. She tells Araragi to do what he must do, and she will do what she must do. “Tsundere Service” bit. Araragi hangs up from Senjōgahara.

7. Abandoned Cram School, day
Oshino walks on rooftop. BH is gone from the cram school rooftop. Oshino looks down on street, sees Araragi riding his bike by on the street. He shouts down to Araragi and waves. Araragi sees Oshino, wonders what he is doing, and rides away.

8. City, evening
Araragi has been searching for Shinobu all day. Recalls how he is responsible for her and needs to find her. BH, who has escaped being tied up on the roof of the abandoned cram school, appears as Araragi is about to leave. He asks how she escaped, and she says she let herself loose and snuck away from Oshino. Araragi thinks how Oshino has “been pretty useless this time around” and not like himself because he let Shinobu and BH get away. Araragi has BH say a funny tongue twister to make fun of her cat-styled pronunciation. BH says she came to help Araragi, and doesn’t feel like fighting him anymore. BH says she is going to help Araragi to thank him for helping to relieve Hanekawa’s stress from back in spring break. Because BH’s purpose is to relieve Hanekawa’s stress, and Shinobu can do that with her energy drain, it is in BH’s best interest to help find Shinobu. They both get on the bike to leave to continue looking for Shinobu. When BH grabs on to Araragi she shocks him with her automatic energy drain. BH thinks that Araragi fainted from the shock of having Hanekawa’s breasts against his back. Araragi thinks that BH doesn’t realize her own power.

9. City, night
a) Araragi and BH go around looking for Shinobu. BH asks about all the other oddities Araragi has encountered since BH’s previous appearance. BH asks what Araragi thinks of oddities and aberrations. BH believes that humans and aberrations are incompatible and cannot get along together. Araragi asks what she is getting at. BH asks if Araragi wondered why Shinobu ran away, to which he does not have an answer. BH uses this as an example of just how little Araragi actually considers his place relative to aberrations, and says that at least Oshino knows his place. Araragi realizes that if aberrations’ existence is dependent on a human’s belief in them, “by treating Shinobu like a little girl, I destroyed Shinobu as an aberration.” BH’s only reply is that she hasn’t thought it through that much.
b) BH and Araragi continue searching. BH asks what powers Shinobu can still manifest. Araragi answers that she can’t manifest any if he is not near her. BH posits that Shinobu “can’t have enjoyed watching you get involved with so many of us without even a break.” Araragi realizes that Shinobu might have no longer felt as special because he was involved with so many other aberrations. BH asks what Araragi will do if he cannot find Shinobu. He replies that he would be in trouble and that Hanekawa would not be able to go back to normal. BH asks “except for what’s going on with Hanekawa, wouldn't you be better off without the vampire?” because without Shinobu he can return to being fully human. Araragi replies that he simply cannot let her go.

10. Rooftop, night
BH tells Araragi that there is another way to relieve Hanekawa’s stress without Shinobu. Because BH’s appearance is the result of Hanekawa’s stress, if the source of her stress is dealt with, BH will disappear. Because BH is the personification of Hanekawa’s stress, she knows what will make it disappear. BH tells Araragi that Hanekawa is in love with him, and if he falls in love with Hanekawa, that might make BH disappear. Araragi is shocked.

11. School, night
Senjōgahara continues making preparations for the school festival.
Appendix N: *Nekomonogatari: Shiro* Ep. 2

Segmentation

BH = Black Hanekawa

Cold Open
Various locations
Hanekawa internal monologue about Araragi. She knew about Araragi since before spring break. In junior high school he was a bit of a delinquent. His behavior isn’t that much different from junior high in high school, but he has “a big difference in his motivations.” Hanekawa doesn’t recall when exactly she fell in love with Araragi.

Opening Theme – “Chocolate Insomnia”

1. Senjōgahara’s Apartment, day
   a) Hanekawa wakes up next to Senjōgahara. Senjōgahara wakes up. They comment on how late they slept in.
   b) Flashback to Hanekawa recalling her and Senjōgahara’s shower together. Hanekawa recalls how the old Senjōgahara would never have stuck her neck out to help Hanekawa to the extent that she has.
   c) Senjōgahara and Hanekawa get ready for bed after the shower. Senjōgahara comments on Hanekawa’s clothes and hair. They decide who should sleep in what futon.
   d) Return to present. Senjōgahara decides to make Hanekawa share her futon with her.
   Senjōgahara makes them lunch. Hanekawa has no foods that she doesn't like. Senjōgahara thinks that her and Hanekawa’s food tastes are similar, and extends that to their tastes in men. Hanekawa tells Senjōgahara that she is being too frank, but Senjōgahara would rather would rather dive right in so they can truly become closer. The move to talk about Araragi.
   e) Senjōgahara moves the conversation to talking about Hanekawa’s future and where she will live following the fire at her house.

2. Senjōgahara’s Apartment, night
Hanekawa turns into BH while sleeping next to Senjōgahara. BH explains that it is because of her that the chapter skips keep occurring.
“The chapter numbers skip when my master Hanekawa is asleep because I’ve come out.”
BH says it was the trauma of Hanekawa’s house burning down that caused her appearance.

3. City, night
BH leaves Senjōgahara’s apartment and finds Tiger. Tiger is unsure of exactly what kind of apparition BH is. BH confronts Tiger that if he continues to cause harm to
Hanekawa she will kill him. Tiger reveals that it is just because Hanekawa saw him that he will be able to continue to terrorize Hanekawa. BH with a great leap tries to escape, lands in another location, where Tiger is waiting for her.

4. Senjōgahara’s Apartment, night
BH returns to apartment. Senjōgahara is awake and waiting for BH. Since it is Senjōgahara’s first time meeting BH, she offers to shake hands, despite BH’s warnings of BH’s energy drain through touch. Senjōgahara asks BH to “take good care of Hanekawa for me.”

5. Senjōgahara’s Apartment, morning
Hanekawa comments in surprise that three chapters have been skipped.
a) Hanekawa wakes up, and Senjōgahara is already awake. Hanekawa offers to make breakfast while Senjōgahara goes for a jog.
b) Senjōgahara asks Hanekawa about her eating habits and why she served everything without additional seasoning, dressing, or condiments.
c) Hanekawa believes that food is “the same whether it has flavor or not.” Senjōgahara retracts her comment that her and Hanekawa have similar tastes in food. Senjōgahara thinks that Hanekawa simply accepts any flavor. Senjōgahara widens this to that Hanekawa will “accept anything and everything as it comes your way.” Senjōgahara posits that this is the case for her and Araragi’s relationship with Hanekawa. Senjōgahara asks if Hanekawa was “really in love with Araragi?”
Appendix O: *Nekomonogatari: Shiro* Ep. 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shot</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Screencap</th>
<th>Visual</th>
<th>Audio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>[Image]</td>
<td></td>
<td>Senjōgahara: I completely take back my assertion that our tastes in food are similar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>[Image]</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hanekawa: Oh?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>[Image]</td>
<td></td>
<td>S: You’re like the polar opposite of a picky eater. Not that you have no preferences either. H: I’m sorry, Senjōgahara-san. I still don’t really understand what you’re saying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>[Image]</td>
<td></td>
<td>S: A taste of home, huh?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>[Image]</td>
<td></td>
<td>Water drips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>[Image]</td>
<td></td>
<td>S: That’s not it either. I guess it just means you accept any flavoring, Hanekawa-san.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
S: In the extreme, I’d say

S: you just need it to be edible and nutritious.

S: Or just filling

S: if it’s not nutritious.

H: Don’t make me out to be some kind of warrior!

Senjōgahara walks away from the sink and sits down across from Hanekawa

S: That you can taste is a burden. If you’re not enjoying each ingredient’s flavor I guess it ends up being that you have a big heart.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>S: But I think something’s wrong with living like that, Hanekawa-san. It’s not something limited to your eating habits. You always, you know…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>S: accept anything and everything as it comes your way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>S: To have something you detest is about as important as having something you love. You accept everything that comes your way, right? That may be the case with me, and that may also be the case with Araragi-kun.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
S: At least that’s what I think.

Text: Did we change the subject?

Text: Did we stray from the subject?

Text: Did the subject get much wider?

Text: No, that’s not it.

S: It’s not that we shared tastes in food. It was merely that your tastes in food completely enveloped my tastes.
S: No, I don’t think I can call your preferences “tastes.”

Text: Some things are better left unsaid.

S: Because if you like anything and everything, they all end up being the same thing in the end.

S: Hanekawa-san?

Text: Purple

Camera tracks in towards Senjōgahara’s eye

H (thinks): Senjōgahara-san continued without looking away from my eyes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>S: Were you really in love with Araragi-kun?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Camera tracks in towards Senjōgahara’s eye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>6</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>H (thinks): She sounded a little like she once did, with a flat tone of voice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Araragi’s silhouette in Hanekawa’s eye. Cut on when she blinks. Camera clicking sound when Hanekawa blinks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><img src="image6.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>S: Can you tell me once more that you’re still in love with Araragi-kun?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix P: *Mekakucity Actors* Plot (Chronological)

Hundreds of years ago, the medusa, Azami, was shunned by humanity. She is in possession of all the medusa snakes, and each one of them grants her a special power. After secluding herself for many years, she met a boy Tsukihiko, with whom she later fell in love with and had a child with. Azami soon realizes that in her immortality, she will outlive her husband, and likely her daughter as well, and falls into despair. Wishing to be able to spend eternity with her family, one of her snakes, supposedly the most intelligent, the Snake of Clearing Eyes, convinces her to use the power of all of her snakes to create a separate never-ending world: the Heat Haze. In there, she could live forever happily with her family.

On the day day when her and Tsukihiko are to be married before entering the Heat Haze, Tsukihiko disappears, having been kidnapped by the villager who believe that he has been taken captive by Azami. The villagers torture Tsukihiko, and enraged and saddened, she comes to believe that her involvement with humans can only cause misfortune, and decides to retreat in solitude to the Heat Haze, leaving her daughter Shion and Tsukihiko behind.

Years later, Shion has a daughter, Marry, with whom she lives in solitude, out of fear of persecution from other humans, and the effect that their abilities could have on humans. One day, Marry leaves their home alone, and is attacked by nearby villagers as a monster. Shion, going to save Marry, uses her medusa ability to turn the attackers into stone, however as she is not a full medusa, using this ability weakens her. Although she kills the attackers, it is not before she and Marry are both struck to death, and sucked into the Heat Haze.

In the Heat Haze, wishing to try and save at least her granddaughter, Azami gives the queen snake, the snake of combining eyes, which has the ability to unite and control all of the other snakes, to Marry as a surrogate life, while Shion lost her life and stayed in the Heat Haze. After giving Marry the queen snake though, Azami unwittingly created a new rule for the existence of the Heat Haze: “bring in the people who died on August 15th,” (the day of Marry and Shion’s death) and lost control of the rest of the snakes with her in the Heat Haze. The loss of the queen snake, and by extension Azami’s ability to control the snakes, enrages the snakes, under the lead of the Snake of Clearing Eyes, the one that had Azami create the Heat Haze in the first place.

Hundreds of years later, Marry lives in solitude, fearing what her powers could do to humans were she to meet them. Elsewhere, the characters Tsubomi Kido, Shuya Kano, and Kousuke Seto, all die along with someone else on the date August 15th. Kido dies along with her sister when their house is set on fire, both are sent into the Heat Haze, and Kido is given a surrogate life from the Snake of Concealing Eyes, giving her the ability to become invisible herself and extend it to others. Kano and his
mother were attacked by robbers, and after both were swallowed by the Heat Haze, Kano is given a surrogate life from the Snake of Deceiving Eyes, giving him the ability to change what people around him perceive, changing his appearance to that of someone else. Seto, trying to save his drowning dog, ends up drowning alongside the dog, and after entering the Heat Haze, is given the Snake of Stealing Eyes as a surrogate life, giving him the ability to read minds. All three, now orphans due to their circumstances, are adopted by the doctors Kenjirō and Ayaka Tateyama, researchers of the medusa’s ability, and their daughter Ayano becomes an older sister figure to the three of them. Elsewhere, also on the date of August 15th, Momo Kisaragi and her father drown, and Momo is brought back from the Heat Haze through the Snake of Drawing Eyes, which gives her the ability to focus people’s attention to her.

One day on the date of August 15th Kenjirō and Ayaka are caught in a landslide, and are brought into the Heat Haze. Upon being brought into the Heat Haze, Kenjirō’s wish to stay with his wife brings forward the Snake of Clearing Eyes, who can only be manifested through the presence of a wish. Therefore, the Snake of Clearing Eyes possesses Kenjirō, becoming his surrogate life and bringing him back to the real world, leaving Ayaka in the Heat Haze.

Brought back to the real world through Kenjirō, the Snake of Clearing Eyes tries to fulfill Kenjirō’s goal to meet his wife Ayaka again by creating a new medusa in the real world through Marry. Kenjirō is not aware of this though, as unlike the other snakes, who are manifested as a special power to the host, the Snake of Clearing Eyes possesses Kenjirō at night. However, it is through pursuing Kenjirō’s wish that the Snake of Clearing Eyes is actually trying to remain sentient himself. Without a wish to grant, the Snake of Clearing Eyes cannot exist. By creating a new medusa, which has the ability to reverse time, the Snake of Clearing Eyes can coerce the new medusa to keep re-setting time, allowing the Snake of Clearing Eyes to exist for longer in an endless loop of trying to fulfill Kenjirō’s wish.

The Snake of Clearing Eyes plots to kill Kenjirō’s two students, Takane Enemoto and Haruka Kokonose, at the school he teaches at. What Kenjirō is not aware of is the friendship and mutual ties between his students and his children. At the cultural activities fair, first Kano and Kido play the game made by Takane and Haruka, and later that day, Ayano and her friend Shintarō Kisaragi (Momo Kisaragi’s older brother) play the game. Shintarō is the only one to have been able to defeat Takane, and as a result they often butt heads, however, the four later become friends at school, as Ayano and Shintarō enter the same school a year later.

After finding one of her mother’s old research notebooks, Ayano becomes suspicious of her father’s research, and with the help of Kano, she finds out about her father’s possession by the Snake of Clearing Eyes, and it’s plan to sacrifice Takane and Haruka in an attempt to bring more snakes into the real world to create a new
medusa. In an attempt to stop him, on August 15th, Ayano tries to reason with the Snake of Clearing Eyes, and after unsuccessfully doing so, commits suicide. In her suicide, she thwarts the Snake of Clearing Eyes’ plan to unite all of the snakes in the real world because she died alone, trapping herself with one of the snakes in the Heat Haze.

In spite of Ayano’s sacrifice, the snake refuses to release Kenjirō. He forces Kano, who had seen his sister’s suicide, to aid him in continuing with his plan, lest the snake kill Kido and Seto. The Snake of Clearing Eyes plans to continue with his plan by using Takane and Haruka’s bodies as a means of starting from scratch in gathering the snakes from the Heat Haze into the real world. Kano continues forward with this knowledge, being forced to help the Snake of Clearing Eyes with his plan to protect his siblings, and having to hide his further knowledge of the specificities of the eye powers and the snake’s plan.

The Snake of Clearing Eyes accomplishes his plan and kills both Haruka and Takane. Unlike the previous death pairs though, likely due to the Snake of Clearing Eyes’ interference, both Takane and Haruka leave the Heat Haze with a snake in some form. Takane enters the Heat Haze, and is brought back through being given the Snake of Opening Eyes, which grants her the ability to become an immortal cyber being without a body. Returning to the real world as a cyber being, she has little memory of how exactly it happened up until the point at which she remembers passing out. Haruka also enters the Heat Haze, and was forced to accept a new stronger body, erasing his memories into the Heat Haze as a result. Haruka’s new body, dubbed Konoha (as its image was based off of his online character avatar’s design) possesses the Snake of Awakening Eyes, giving him the power to remake his body into one that he finds to be ‘ideal.’

In the present day of the series, Haruka, without memories as Konoha, lives with Kenjirō, and his child sister in law Hiyori Asahina and her friend Hibiya Amamiya who are living with him for the summer.

Shintarō, in a deep depression caused by Ayano’s death, becomes a recluse. Afraid of forgetting Ayano and blaming himself for her death, he remains in his room for two years. One day though, a computer program called ‘Ene’ (the cyber form of Takane) appears in his computer. Shintarō does not recognize Ene as Takane though, and Ene decides to hide her identity from Shintarō, and stays as a cyber program in his computer to try and help out of his crippling depression. One day (on the date of August 14th), after breaking his keyboard and not being able to wait for a new one to be shipped to him, Shintarō is forced to go out and buy a new computer. When he arrives as the mall, he becomes involved in a hostage terrorist attack.

On this same day, his younger sister Momo (now a famous pop star idol) after being chased by a number of fans after a chance encounter with Hibiya. Hibiya leaves her and she is taken in by Kido to the hideout of the Mekakushi-dan (the name of the
group consisting of Kido, Kano, Seto and Marry). Kano, Kido, and Seto are the original members, and Seto, one day after finding Marry, brought her into the group. Kido reveals that they were looking for her, under the assumption that she had similar eye abilities to them, and after offering to help Momo learn to control her power, Momo joins their group. They all go to the mall, and seeing Shintarō get involved in the hostage situation help him and the other hostages to escape.

Shintarō is brought back to their hideout, and despite not having eye powers, he and Ene also join the Mekakushi-dan. All of the members but Shintarō go to visit the grave of the “founder and former commander” of the Mekakushi-dan (Ayano) but not knowing that it is Ayano being referred to, Shintarō refuses and tries to go home.

Elsewhere, at an unknown time, Hibiya and Hiyori are stuck in a time loop in the Heat Haze, in which Hibiya tries and fails to keep Hiyori from danger, watching her die every time until he takes Hiyori’s place as the victim by getting himself hit by a truck.

While the members of the Mekakushi-dan visit Ayano’s grave, on his way home Shintarō encounters Konoha, who is looking for the missing Hibiya and Hiyori. Shintarō tries to help Konoha, and when they both spot Hibiya and Hiyori being dragged into the back of a van, as Konoha runs over to try and get them, Shintarō witnesses Hibiya and Hiyori being swallowed up by a giant snake.

Elsewhere at Ayano’s grave, when Ene realizes that the founder was Ayano, she tells her story and how she knew Ayano to the rest of the group, before they get a call about what Shintarō witnessed. Kano comments that Ene’s situation of how she became a cyber being is similar to the experiences of the other members of the Mekakushi-dan, and wanting to hear more information, all but Kano and Ene go to meet Shintarō at the hospital. Kano reveals to Ene that it was not just her that died that day, but also Haruka, as he tells her his own history with Ayano and the Snake of Clearing Eyes. Kano tells Ene the Snake of Clearing Eyes’ grand plan – to bring together all the other snakes to recreate the medusa in the real world, before bringing Ene to a secret lab under the school where her real body as Takane is being kept.

At the hospital, Shintarō tries to explain what happened, and the members of the Mekakushi-dan see Hibiya pass out as a result of his newly manifesting eye powers. They bring him back to the hideout, where while he is sleeping Kido explains to her knowledge to Momo the phenomenon of people who die in pairs on the date of August 15th. (Kido only knows that one person comes back with a new power, not the reason why) Overhearing this and realizing that Hiyori was likely left behind in the Heat Haze, Hibiya frantically runs out to find her, and is chased by Momo and Kido, leaving Marry and Shintarō in the hideout.

Shintarō goes to look for Marry, and in her room finds a picture of Ayano with her family (Kido, Kano, Seto, Kenjirō and Ayaka). This sparks the manifestation of Shintarō’s own dormant power, as he launches into a slew of memories from past
timelines. Shintarō remembers an alternate route, one where his depression worsens to the extent that he kills himself, all other members of the Mekakushi-dan are killed as part of the Snake of Clearing Eyes’ plan, and in her despair Marry re-sets the timeline. Shintarō additionally remembers how his eye power was not a product of him dying on August 15th, but was an ability given to him by Marry so he would remember the events of the previous timelines.

Elsewhere, as Kido and Momo try and help the frantic Hibiya, they are all captured and brought to Kenjirō’s laboratory. Using their powers, Kido and Momo call the other members of the Mekakushi-dan to come. Seto, Kano, Ene (now in her original body), and Marry who brings Konoha (who she found) with her arrive, and after Kano reveals the Snake of Clearing Eyes’ master plan, they try and find him to stop him. When they find him, the Snake of Clearing Eyes possesses Konoha’s body, attempting to kill all other members of the Mekakushi-dan in an attempt to drive Marry into such despair that she re-sets the timeline. This is the Snake of Clearing Eyes’ true goal: to push Marry to keep re-setting the timeline so he can continue to remain sentient under the guise of trying to fulfill Kenjirō’s wish. Everyone tries to stop Marry from doing so, and just as she is about to re-set the timeline, Shintarō arrives with a retrieved Ayano and Haruka from the Heat Haze. Ayano uses her eye ability (the Clearing Eyes, which allows her to project her emotions on to others) to convey all of the information from the past timelines from Shintarō. Overwhelmed, Marry swallows everyone up into the Heat Haze. She overcomes the influence of the Snake of Clearing Eyes, who then begging for a wish to grant to remain sentient, grants Haruka from the previous timeline’s wish to remain with his friends. The Snake of Clearing Eyes becomes a surrogate life for Hiyori, while Haruka is re-united with his body, and everyone exits the Heat Haze to live out their lives.
Appendix Q: Guide to the *Monogatari* Series

The *Monogatari* series is split into three seasons. Each installation corresponds to book releases containing different arcs. Below is a guide to the series airing order, book installation, episode/arc title, and original Japanese release date.

**First Season**


1. Hitagi Crab, Part One
2. Hitagi Crab, Part Two
3. Mayoi Snail, Part One
4. Mayoi Snail, Part Two
5. Mayoi Snail, Part Three
6. Suruga Monkey, Part One
7. Suruga Monkey, Part Two
8. Suruga Monkey, Part Three
9. Nadeko Snake, Part One
10. Nadeko Snake, Part Two
11. Tsubasa Cat, Part One
12. Tsubasa Cat, Part Two
13. Tsubasa Cat, Part Three
14. Tsubasa Cat, Part Four
15. Tsubasa Cat, Part Five


1. Karen Bee, Part One
2. Karen Bee, Part Two
3. Karen Bee, Part Three
4. Karen Bee, Part Four
5. Karen Bee, Part Five
6. Karen Bee, Part Six
7. Karen Bee, Part Seven
8. Tsukihi Phoenix, Part One
9. Tsukihi Phoenix, Part Two
10. Tsukihi Phoenix, Part Three
11. Tsukihi Phoenix, Part Four

*Nekomonogatari: Kuro* – December 31, 2012

1. Tsubasa Family, Part One
2. Tsubasa Family, Part Two
3. Tsubasa Family, Part Three
4. Tsubasa Family, Part Four

**Second Season**


1. Tsubasa Tiger, Part One
2. Tsubasa Tiger, Part Two
3. Tsubasa Tiger, Part Three

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*Bakemonogatari* aired the first 12 episodes from July 3 – September 25, 2009. The final three episodes were distributed on the anime’s official website November 3, 2009 – June 25, 2010.
4. Tsubasa Tiger, Part Four
5. Tsubasa Tiger, Part Five

*Kabukimonogatari* – August 17, 2013 – September 7, 2013
1. Mayoi Jiangshi, Part One
2. Mayoi Jiangshi, Part Two
3. Mayoi Jiangshi, Part Three
4. Mayoi Jiangshi, Part Four

*Otorimonogatari* – September 21, 2013 – October 12, 2013
1. Nadeko Medusa, Part One
2. Nadeko Medusa, Part Two
3. Nadeko Medusa, Part Three
4. Nadeko Medusa, Part Four

1. Shinobu Time, Part One
2. Shinobu Time, Part Two
3. Shinobu Time, Part Three
4. Shinobu Time, Part Four

1. Hitagi End, Part One
2. Hitagi End, Part Two
3. Hitagi End, Part Three
4. Hitagi End, Part Four
5. Hitagi End, Part Five
6. Hitagi End, Part Six

*Hanamonogatari* – August 16, 2014
1. Suruga Devil, Part One
2. Suruga Devil, Part Two
3. Suruga Devil, Part Three
4. Suruga Devil, Part Four
5. Suruga Devil, Part Five

**Final Season**

*Tsukimonogatari* – December 31, 2014
1. Yotsugi Doll, Part One
2. Yotsugi Doll, Part Two
3. Yotsugi Doll, Part Three
4. Yotsugi Doll, Part Four

1. Ougi Formula, Part One
2. Ougi Formula, Part Two
3. Sodachi Riddle, Part One
4. Sodachi Riddle, Part Two
5. Sodachi Lost, Part One
6. Sodachi Lost, Part Two
7. Sodachi Lost, Part Three
8. Shinobu Mail, Part One
9. Shinobu Mail, Part Two
10. Shinobu Mail, Part Three
11. Shinobu Mail, Part Four
12. Shinobu Mail, Part Five
13. Shinobu Mail, Part Six
Koyomimonogatari – January 10, 2016 – March 27, 2016
1. Koyomi Stone
2. Koyomi Flower
3. Koyomi Sand
4. Koyomi Water
5. Koyomi Wind
6. Koyomi Tree
7. Koyomi Tea
8. Koyomi Mountain
9. Koyomi Torus
10. Koyomi Seed
11. Koyomi Nothing
12. Koyomi Dead

Kizumonogatari Film Trilogy
- Kizumonogatari II: Nekketsu-hen – August 19, 2016
- Kizumonogatari III: Reiketsu-hen – January 6, 2017
Appendix R: Selected Figures

Fig. 1 *Jojo’s Bizarre Adventure* ep. 2

Fig. 2 *Jojo’s Bizarre Adventure* ep. 2

Fig. 3 *Maria Holic* ep. 2 Opening Theme

Fig. 4 *Bakemonogatari* ep. 1 Opening Theme

Fig. 5 *Hidamari Sketch* ep. 2

Fig. 6 *Hidamari Sketch* ep. 2
Fig. 7 Zoku Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei ep. 4

Fig. 8 ef: A Tale of Memories ep. 7

Fig. 9 ef: A Tale of Memories ep. 7

Fig. 9 Nekomonogatari: Shiro ep. 1
Text flash contains same content as character-narrated internal thought

Fig. 10 Nekomonogatari: Shiro ep. 1
Text flash provides unrestricted access to character thought
Fig. 11 *Nekomonogatari: Shiro* ep. 1
Chapter title

Fig. 12 *Tengen Toppa Gurren Lagann*
Gainax Stance

Fig. 13 *Hyōka* – Yamada Hands

Fig. 14 *Denpa Onna to Seishun Otoko* ep.1 – Head Tilt

Fig. 15 *Mekakucity Actors* ep. 1 – Head Tilt

Fig. 16 *Nisekoi* ep. 11 – Head tilt and eye close up in the same frame
Fig. 17 *Bakemonogatari* ep. 2

Fig. 18 *Madoka Magica* ep. 8

Fig. 19 *Bakemonogatari* ep. 3 – Characters symmetrically staged in center of the frame

Fig. 20 *Arakawa Under the Bridge* ep. 2 Characters symmetrically staged in center of frame

Fig. 21 *Noragami* ep. 1 – Background shifts are common in many anime

Fig. 22 *Ouran High School Host Club* Background Shifts common in many anime
Fig. 23 Puella Magi Madoka Magica the Movie Part III: Rebellion – Mami remains symmetrically staged in an action sequence.

Fig. 24 Madoka Magica ep. 1 – Character symmetrically staged in center of the frame.

Fig. 25 Hidamari Sketch x365 ep. 2 – Simplistic design of the Hidamari Apartments.

Fig. 26 Nisekoi ep. 1 – Detailed design of Ichijō’s mansion.

Fig. 27 Hidamari Sketch x365 ep. 3 – Artistic representation of a shrine.

Fig. 28 Kabukimonogatari ep. 3 – Surrealist interpretation of a shrine.
Fig. 29 Madoka Magic ep. 6 – Artistic representation of an arcade

Fig. 30 Tsukimonogatari ep. 2 – Surrealist interpretation of an arcade

Fig. 31 Madoka Magica ep. 1 – Extreme organization of Junko’s makeup

Fig. 32 Nisekoi ep. 1 – Extreme organization of food

Fig. 33 Hidamari Sketch x365 ep. 1 – Peripheral characters left as outlines labeled “boy” and “girl”

Fig. 34 Otorimonogatari ep. 1 – Peripheral characters animated as surreal outlines convey Sengoku’s loneliness
Fig. 35 *Mekakucity Actors* ep. 1 – Streets left empty except for Shintarō (the main character)

Fig. 36 *Bakemonogatari* ep. 4 – Streets left empty except for Senjōgahara, Hachikiji, and Araragi’s shadow (all main characters)

Fig. 37 *Mekakucity Actors* ep. 1 – Architecturally spectacular oversized room. Shintarō’s oversized bedroom, sporting a screen the size of his wall, and a three-panel computer screen.

Fig. 38 *Madoka Magica* ep. 11 Architecturally spectacular room. Homura’s apartment.

Fig. 39 *Madoka Magica* ep. 1 – Architecturally spectacular oversized room. Madoka and her mom in the bathroom.

Fig. 40 *ef: A Tale of Memories* ep. 12 Stained glass
Fig. 41 *Nisemonogatari* ep. 4 – Stained glass in Araragi’s bathroom

Fig. 42 *Madoka Magica* ep. 9 – Industrial setting as Madoka and Kyōko search for Sayaka

Fig. 43 *Kizumonogatari Part I: Tekketsu-hen* Industrial setting behind Araragi and Hanekawa during their first meeting conveys how Hanekawa makes Araragi nervous

Fig. 44 *Tsukimonogatari* ep. 1 – Fourth wall breaking text flash stating [This is taking place in the normal-sized bathroom of a normal-sized home, rather than a cavernous hall of a room like the one designed for the anime, so…]

Fig. 45 *Hanamonogatari* ep. 1 – Empty field

Fig. 46 *Hanamonogatari* ep. 1 – Double staircase in the middle of the empty field
Fig. 47 Hanamonogatari ep. 1 – Numachi stands in a row of excavator trucks

Fig. 48 Hanamonogatari ep. 1 – Numachi and Kanbaru surrounded by excavator trucks with a basketball field underneath

Fig. 49 Hanamonogatari ep. 1 – Numachi and Kanbaru at dried up waterfall

Fig. 50 Kōfuku Graffiti ep. 4 – Flat and saturated color palette

Fig. 51 Mekakucity Actors ep. 1 – Flat and saturated color palette

Fig. 52 Koimonogatari ep. 1 – Flat and saturated color palette
Fig. 53 Pani Poni Dash!! ep. 1 – Less bright & saturated palette, more pastels.

Fig. 54 Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei – Less bright and saturated color palette, more muted color scheme

Fig. 55 ef: A Tale of Memories ep. 10 – Color shift to black and white

Fig. 56 ef: A Tale of Memories ep. 10 – Black and white breaks away shifting back to bright and saturated color

Fig. 57 Zoku Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei ep. 10 Color shift to brighter color scheme when Itoshiki-sensei considers a “maybe maybe fraud” situation

Fig. 58 Zoku Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei ep. 10 – Color shift emphasizing Kitsu’s shock
Fig. 59 Zoku Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei ep. 10 Color shift emphasizing Kitsu’s shock

Fig. 60 Zoku Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei ep. 10 – Color shift emphasizing Kitsu’s shock

Fig. 61 Madoka Magica ep. 1 – Sayaka rendered like a paper cutout

Fig. 62 Madoka Magica ep. 1 – Madoka and Sayaka enter the witch’s labyrinth

Fig. 63 Madoka Magica ep. 1 – Madoka and Sayaka enter the witch’s labyrinth

Fig. 64 Madoka Magica ep. 1 – The labyrinth turns sinister
Fig. 65 *Madoka Magica* ep. 3 – The witch that kills Mami is originally cutesy and doll-like in appearance

Fig. 66 *Madoka Magica* ep. 3 – Witch’s true form is revealed, exploding out of original’s mouth

Fig. 67 *Madoka Magica* ep. 3 – The witch approaches Mami to kill her

Fig. 68 *Goku Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* ep. 2 – Itoshiki-sensei’s normal character design

Fig. 69 *Goku Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* ep. 2 – Itoshiki-sensei in the style of the manga “Go! Southern Ice Hockey Club”

Fig. 70 *Goku Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei* ep. 2 – Itoshiki-sensei in the style of the first ending theme to *Zoku Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei*
Oshino consistently staged above Araragi.

Art shift to Araragi in the style of “Goldfish Warning”

More pastels and less saturated color scheme when Araragi talks with Sengoku.

More pastels and less saturated color scheme when Araragi talks with Kanbaru.

Saturated color during Araragi’s conversation with Senjōgahara.

Still scenery shots during Araragi’s conversation with Senjōgahara.
Fig. 77 Bakemonogatari ep. 14 – Fanservice shot of Black Hanekawa

Fig. 78 Bakemonogatari ep. 14 – Art shift conveys Araragi’s arousal

Fig. 79 Bakemonogatari ep. 14 – Exaggerated animation of Araragi’s mouth dropping to the ground conveys his arousal

Fig. 80 Bakemonogatari ep. 14 – Art shift conveys Araragi’s arousal

Fig. 81 Bakemonogatari ep. 14 – Backgrounds and scenery becomes more industrial

Fig. 82 Bakemonogatari ep. 14 – Blowing wind and strong lights around Araragi
Fig. 83 *Bakemonogatari* ep. 14 – Lights create strong shadows on Black Hanekawa’s face

Fig. 84 *Nekomonogatari: Shiro* ep. 2 – Senjōgahara and Hanekawa in the shower

Fig. 85 *Nekomonogatari: Shiro* ep. 2 – Spotlight on Black Hanekawa

Fig. 86 *Nekomonogatari: Shiro* ep. 2 – Heavy shadows on Black Hanekawa

Fig. 87 *Nekomonogatari: Shiro* ep. 2 – Spotlight less intense & color more saturated than fig. 85

Fig. 88 *Nekomonogatari: Shiro* – ep. 2 Senjōgahara shakes hands with Black Hanekawa
Fig. 89 Nekomonogatari: Shiro ep. 2 – Fish eye lens on Hanekawa

Fig. 90 Nekomonogatari: Shiro ep. 2 Dressed as a sushi chef, Senjōgahara asks Hanekawa if she dips her sushi

Fig. 91 Nekomonogatari: Shiro ep. 2 – Hanekawa replies “no” to Senjōgahara’s questions

Fig. 92 Mekakucity Actors ep. 1 – Shintarō and Ayano on backwards moving clock gears

Fig. 93 Mekakucity Actors ep. 1 – Ene becomes bigger in Shintarō’s computer screen the more she annoys him

Fig. 94 Mekakucity Actors ep. 1 – Ene becomes bigger in hintarō’s computer screen the more she annoys him
Fig. 95 *Mekakucity Actors* ep. 1 – People at the mall animated as cyclopes

Fig. 96 *Mekakucity Actors* ep. 1 – Shintarō nervously looks around the mall

Fig. 97 *Mekakucity Actors* ep. 1 – Kano raises his hands over his head

Fig. 98 *Mekakucity Actors* ep. 1 – Seto’s eye turns red

Fig. 99 *Mekakucity Actors* ep. 2 – Momo’s classmates animated as flowers convey her feeling of isolation and loneliness

Fig. 100 *Mekakucity Actors* ep. 2 – Momo’s classmate animated as a gramophone with a human shadow as she accosts Momo
Fig. 101 Fans chase Momo in “Kisaragi Attention” original music video

Fig. 102 Mekakucity Actors ep. 2 – Fans chase Momo in musical portion of episode

Fig. 103 Mekakucity Actors ep. 3 – Kido punches Kano

Fig. 104 Mekakucity Actors ep. 3 – X-ray image of Kido hitting Kano

Fig. 105 Mekakucity Actors ep. 3 – Kano pretends to pass out

Fig. 106 Flash stating [Route 1] in “Lost Time Memory” original music video
Fig. 107 Flash stating [Route XX] in “Lost Time Memory” original music video

Fig. 108 Route 1 and Route XX Shintarō in “Lost Time Memory” original music video

Fig. 109 Shintarō kills Ene in Route XX of “Lost Time Memory” original music video

Fig. 109 Shintarō kills himself with red scissors in Route XX of “Lost Time Memory” original music video

Fig. 111 *Mekakucity Actors* ep. 8 – Shintarō kills himself with red scissors the same way he does in the original “Lost Time Memory” music

Fig. 112 *Mekakucity Actors* ep. 8 – Marry grants Shintarō his powers
Fig. 113 *Mekakucity Actors* ep. 8 – Video noise behind Shintarō in his room

Fig. 114 *Mekakucity Actors* ep. 8 – Dead Mekakushi-dan

Fig. 115 *Mekakucity Actors* ep. 8 – Dark I

Fig. 116 *Mekakucity Actors* ep. 8 – Marry cries out in despair

Fig. 117 *Mekakucity Actors* ep. 8 – Shintarō resigned to kill himself
Filmography

To avoid discrepancies regarding various domestic and international series release dates, methods of domestic and international distribution, and director, this filmography will include the name of the chief director and series director, title of the work, production studio, and original Japanese airing date. This citation method will remain the most consistent and provide the most relevant information on the works covered.

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19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
The proliferation of the specific art style of the animation group Gekidan Inu Curry serves as yet another example of the Studio Shaft process of director mentorship, except in this case applied to a specific animation group. Having previously met as students, Madoka Magica series director Miyamoto had a pre-existing relationship with the animation group before their work at Studio Shaft began. Inu Curry’s subsequent involvement with Shaft can be described as nothing more than accidental, as can be seen from Miyamoto’s anecdote on Inu Curry’s serendipitous involvement with the studio: “When we were working on Goku Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei, Shinbo came and wanted to change the opening theme. At that time I thought “Not good. It would be my turn to take this thing.” I had to come up with some “sacrifice offering,” so I introduced Inu Curry to him… he quickly said OK and gave the green light, so I gave them the full responsibility of the job… At that time I already knew the style of Inu Curry, so I could generally predict what kind of thing they would come up with, but the video turned out to be much crazier than expected and even Shinbo shouted “wow!” From then on Shinbo took a liking to Inu Curry and got them more and more involved in his anime.” (From: Yukihiro Miyamoto and Gekidan Inu Curry, April, 2011.) After working on the opening theme of Goku Sayonara Zetsubou Sensei, Inu Curry worked on segments of Bakemonogatari and completed the ending theme of Maria Holic before moving on to take full responsibility for the production design of the witch’s labyrinths of Puella Magi Madoka Magica. Similar to the process of director mentorship, Gekidan Inu Curry was also given smaller opportunities to work on individual shows under a variety of mainstay Shaft directors, before moving on to take a larger role in what would become one of Shaft’s most popular and influential series.

CHAPTER 3
4 Ibid.

CHAPTER 4
1 Sidu Jin, 2013.
7 Akers Title of Weblog.
8 Callum May to The Canipa Effect, May 13, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8Xb0X1QrcA.

CONCLUSION