Traumas and Recovery in Takaya Natsuki's *Fruits Basket*

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Traumas and Recovery in Takaya Natsuki’s *Fruits Basket*

A Thesis by

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Traumas and Recovery in Takaya Natsuki’s *Fruits Basket*

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ABSTRACT

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by Vesper North

This thesis examines the various traumas within Takaya Natsuki’s anime series *Fruits Basket* and how the act of transformation triggers the beginnings of recovery for numerous characters. *Fruits Basket* bears striking similarities to the French fairy tale *Beauty and the Beast* (as well as later adaptations) originated by Gabrielle-Suzanne de Villeneuve. Throughout, I draw parallels between the “Beauty and the Beast”-genre with *Fruits Basket* and how the anime expands upon shared themes, specifically trauma. Additionally, I analyse the birth of and recovery from traumas (caused by bullying, loss, abuse, and feelings of otherness) for “Beauty and the Beast” archetypes within *Fruits Basket*, along with others. Takaya’s anime demonstrates an understanding of trauma: the journeys various characters undertake stress the importance of a having strong, supportive social system to initiate the steps for recovery.

*Keywords: anime, trauma, recovery, Fruits Basket, fairy tales, Beauty and the Beast*
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Introduction

Once upon a time, God arranged to host a feast for all the animals. The mischievous rat lied to the cat, claiming the banquet would occur the day after tomorrow. On the day of the banquet, the ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, ram, monkey, rooster, dog, and boar all trekked up the mountain to see God, with the rat riding the ox the whole way. Whilst they feasted, the cat slept, dreaming of a banquet he would never join.

Figure 1. The cat, having missed the banquet, from the legend of the Chinese zodiac.¹

Fruits Basket by Takaya Natsuki has sold 30 million copies worldwide and had two television runs, in 2001 and again in 2019 (this time with Takaya involved).² The 2001 anime predates the English translation of the manga. After its release, publisher TOKYOPOP conducted a poll asking fans what manga they would like to see translated, and Fruits Basket

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¹ Fruits Basket, season 1, episode 1, “See You After School,” directed by Yoshihide Ibata, written by Taku Kishimoto, featuring Laura Bailey, Eric Vale, and Jerry Jewel, aired April 5, 2019, in broadcast syndication, Funimation, 2019, Blu-Ray.

dominated the rankings. The series has sold in major book stores, been on loan in school libraries, and streamed on Netflix and Hulu. TOKYOPOP says of its financial hit:

It doesn’t fit into the ordinary manga categories, but then, it’s not an ordinary manga. Take two parts drama, one part comedy, add a spoonful of romance and a pinch of magic and your partway there, but…something about *Fruits Basket* is special. What that special ingredient is, you’ll have to discover for yourself.

That something special is precisely what this thesis seeks to explore. While fantastical in nature, *Fruits Basket* is grounded in the human experience, making it accessible to diverse sets of audiences. Takaya’s coming of age story prominently features themes of trauma and loss with elements of time and choice that resonates across cultural lines due to its familiarity. This dissection analyses how Takaya uses the power of transformation (a common story element in anime and fairy tales, particularly “Beauty and the Beast”) to trigger recovery for characters afflicted with varying types of trauma (e.g., Tohru, Kyoko, Arisa, Kisa, Yuki, Kyo, and Akito).

**Fairy Tale Ties**

At its core, *Fruits Basket* is a coming-of-age story that touches on contemporary issues and cultural concerns shared by Japanese and American viewers. The series centres on the homeless yet incredibly optimistic teenage orphan Honda Tohru as she attempts to break the Soma family of the centuries-long zodiac curse. Takaya amends the legend of the Chinese zodiac; members of the Soma family are possessed by spirits of the original zodiac animals (including the cat and God). Possessed members transform into their respective animals when hugged by a member of the opposite sex or if their body is in distress. *Fruits Basket* bears some striking similarities to the French fairy tale “Beauty and the Beast” in plot, theme, and motifs.

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Both feature a young beauty coming to live with a (sometimes) temperamental male with inhuman physical attributes. The two fall in love, a transformation occurs, and they live happily ever after. Fractured families appear in both stories along with trauma (sometimes paired with the corruption of self-imagery) that is inevitably resolved via transformation of some kind.

The Beauty archetype found in the original, and across adaptations, finds herself thrust into the role of saviour with the fate of the archetypal Beast in her hands. With her love and acceptance, she transforms him from a hideous creature to a handsome human. Without her, he would perish, cursed and alone. “Beauty and the Beast”-type stories tend to explore society’s permissions on freedom and the ways in which people navigate through emotional turmoil.

Gabrielle-Suzanne de Villeneuve published the original *La Belle et la Bête* in 1740, which would later be adapted by Marie le Prince de Beaumont after Villeneuve’s death. de Beaumont’s version stands as the more popular of the two, having been pared down from a book to a short story, thus eliminating complicated storylines. In both versions, Beauty comes from a once-wealthy family now living in squalor, headed by one parent, her father. de Beaumont’s and de Villeneuve’s Beauties are bound by eighteenth-century custom, working within the home until they can be married off, passing from one male domain to another. Both authors present an off-beat protagonist whose sensibilities are not reflective of the norm: their Beauties do not express a drive to be married. The narrative has evolved in a way that only time allows; as women achieve more flexibility and freedom with passing generations, the Beauty changes to respond to the challenges of the era. These early Beauties choose to exile themselves to the Beast’s castle because it is the most beneficial option for all involved. Had she insisted her father go in her place, she’d risk her and her sisters becoming destitute. She also escapes facing the pressure of an arranged marriage and, instead, obtains the opportunity to choose matrimony.
Tohru, the audience surrogate in *Fruits Basket*, is a cute teenage orphan who lives in a tent at the start of the series. Like Beauty, she transitions from living a comfortable lifestyle to a poor one without fuss after the sudden death of her mother, Kyoko. The paternal side of Tohru’s family argued who would take her in instead of welcoming her outright. Her paternal grandfather welcomes her into his home without quibble, but shortly after moving in, Tohru faces the possibility of homelessness again. The need for renovations arises, forcing Tohru to seek alternative accommodations. While not explicitly said, it is implied that Tohru is not invited to stay at her paternal aunt’s, and it wouldn’t be a stretch to suppose so as she and her immediate kin express contempt for Kyoko. Wishing not to impose on her friends, Tohru opts to live independently. In contrast to her predecessors, she is neither a homebody with limited prospects nor a woman bound to a male figure (whether father or Beast). Tohru changes the mythos by distancing herself from marriage. Instead of husband hungry sisters, Tohru finds female companionship in her misfit best friends, Hanajima Saki and Uotoni Arisa. While discussing post-high school plans, Arisa suggests in jest that Tohru marry after high school. Tohru politely baulks at the idea, saying she would like to get married one day, but it’s not a priority.

Tohru lives a purely independent life. She attends school full time, works part-time, and pays her own tuition—refusing money from her financially strained grandfather, who lives off a pension. With little cash left over to pay rent, she lives outside on what she believes to be public

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5 *Fruits Basket*, “See You After School.”


8 *Fruits Basket*, “See You After School.”
land—evidently Soma land—for four to five months without anyone knowing. Her family doesn’t know; her friends don’t know—Tohru keeps it a secret because she doesn’t want to worry anyone. She transcends the role of saviour to embody strength and be a role model for those in need.

Figure 2. Honda Tohru smiling as she leaves her tent-home.

While out on a walk, Tohru’s classmate Soma Yuki (the rat) and his older cousin, Shigure (the dog), discover Tohru as she exits her tent to wash up in the river. Shigure invites her to live with him, Yuki, and eventually, Soma Kyo (the cat) rent-free. Resistant to charity, Tohru agrees to cook and provide additional domestic services (seeing as Yuki and Shigure are not adept at such things) in exchange for room and board. Barely a day into living at Shigure’s, she learns of the Soma curse by accidentally transforming Kyo, Yuki, and Shigure.

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9 *Fruits Basket*, “See You After School.”

10 *Fruits Basket*, “See You After School.”

11 *Fruits Basket*, “See You After School.”
Transformations occur in fairy tales and anime and feature as a significant plot point in “Beauty and the Beast.” Napier writes that, in anime, “the male transformation usually is in terms of body armor (such Sho in the Guyver) while female characters usually change clothes and make up.” This is not the case in Fruits Basket: the curse affects all sexes in the same way, except for Kyo, who has one additional form. When his red and white beaded bracelet is removed, he transforms into the cat’s “true form”—a foul-smelling monstrous creature, brownish in colour and large in size. According to legend, the “true form” represents the vengeful spirit of the slighted cat who was tricked out of attending God’s banquet.

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12 Fruits Basket, “See You After School.”
13 Napier, Anime, 148
Disney’s adaptations are often children’s first exposure to fairy tales, placing authors like de Beaumont and de Villeneuve into obscurity. These films tend to be more “age-appropriate” by

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15 *Fruits Basket*, “Let’s Go Home.”
omitting tragic endings or scenes of mutilations. Disney stepped away from metaphors of marriage and instead emphasised underlying themes of loss, otherness, and recovery. de Villeneuve’s and de Beaumont’s well-mannered Beast received a bitter makeover when placed on film; Disney’s Beast throws violent tantrums, terrifying and alienating anyone around him. The studio’s 2017 live-action remake implied briefly that toxic parenting caused the Beast’s unsocial personality, leaving the audience to make presumptions about his character. This is where *Fruits Basket* differs: Takaya aims her narratives headfirst into traumatic subject matter with unfettered honesty, allowing the audience to witness grief instead of implying it. In her universe, beasts are not born but made by festering trauma.

Transformations are not reserved only for Beasts; Disney’s Beauties transition from father’s keeper to a motherly role for the purpose of socialising the Beast to paramour because of their high emotional strength (de Beaumont and de Villeneuve’s stories do not have the middle transition as their Beasts are already socialised). Tohru moves herself between roles depending on the needs of whom she’s helping (friend, sister, and mother). The power of her flexibility places her in a unique position to aid an array of people in her life in a rare and remarkable way. On this point, Soma Hiro (the ram) confronts Tohru, asking, “Can you magically make people’s worries disappear or give hope when they have none? Can you erase sorrow? Eliminate pain? Can you save people?” to which she responds, “No, I can’t do anything like that.” Unlike the Beauties who came before, Tohru’s love and acceptance isn’t the end-all cure-all remedy for her

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Beast or any other troubled person. While experiencing Tohru’s love helps a great deal, it doesn’t directly cause the traumatised to love themself, nor does it make them forget.

Tohru commits herself to breaking the zodiac curse; however, the design of the curse does not require outside intervention. The zodiac curse operates differently from the ones in “Beauty and the Beast” fairy tales and films; freedom is contingent on action taken by the cursed. Did Tohru’s presence help break the curse? Yes and no. Soma Kureno (the rooster) freed himself prior to Tohru’s involvement with the Soma family. Rather, her introduction was the impetus for setting the rest of the zodiac members on the path to freedom.18 Tohru encourages and challenges the cursed Somas to be proactive rather than passive through her exhibition of *gaman*, a Japanese Zen Buddhist term defined in Susan Napier’s *Anime from Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle* as the “‘ability to endure, tolerate difficulty and persevere.’”19 Tohru’s experiences with trauma primed her for helping afflicted members of the Soma family. In scientific terms, Tohru possesses what psychologists call an “internal locus of control.” Trauma psychologist and researcher Judith Herman writes in *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* that an internal locus of control is indicated by having “an alert, active temperament, unusual sociability and skill in communicating with others, and a strong sense of being able to affect their own destiny.”20 Her experiences (to be explored further in the next section) combined with the quality of *gaman* bring about the open-mindedness and fortitude necessary to help a broad range of traumatised individuals.

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19 Susan Napier, *Anime from Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2001), 143

Gaman is a key component of shōjo, a subgenre of anime that appeals to a young female audience (the genre Fruits Basket falls under), described by Napier as “exhibit[ing] strength plus vulnerability in a way that is intriguingly female.” 21 This describes Tohru accurately: she utilises a method of cooperation rather than dependency when assisting in initiating recovery. Her success in facilitating the mitigation of trauma for others results from a balance of strength and vulnerability. There’s no shortage of discontentment among the characters of Fruits Basket— Takaya’s characters contend with an array of traumas stemming from loss, bullying, abuse, and feelings of otherness, and she positions Tohru as an agile figure who can help no matter what the source of the issue may be. Transformation is a required step in the “Beauty and the Beast” genre (usually achieved by a Beauty who exhibits gaman) that allows the Beast to gain a sense of wholeness and normalcy. The following sections explore how transformation is used in beginning the recovery process for Kyoko, Arisa, Kisa, Yuki, Kyo, and Akito.

Traumas Within Fruits Basket

The characters of Fruits Basket are plagued by a number of ailments and misfortunes, not all too dissimilar to young generations today. A 2018 study conducted by the Pew Research Center found that teenagers in the United States ranked anxiety and depression, bullying, gangs, and poverty as some of their primary concerns. 22 Several characters in Fruits Basket contend with these very issues in significant storylines. Tohru’s life was fraught with traumatic experiences before the opening pages of the series. In her youth, Tohru experienced bullying from her peers. She recalls playing Fruits Basket in elementary school, a game similar to Duck,

21 Napier, Anime, 150

Duck, Goose where each person is assigned a fruit and waits to be called. Once in, each player competes for an open seat, with there always being one shy of the number of players. The other children always designated Tohru the rice ball: “The game went on,” Tohru remembers, “and one by one, the others were called. I waited for it to be the rice ball’s turn. I waited and waited.” No one ever called her—the game was designed so that she would never be called.

Before meeting the Somas, Tohru first helped Kyoko with her trauma. After her father, Katsuya, died, Kyoko fell into a deep depression and left home for a period. At five years old, Tohru could see Kyoko’s pain and worried that her parents would be reunited sooner rather than later. To alleviate Kyoko of her despair, Tohru adopted Katsuya’s mannerisms to keep him alive for Kyoko. At such a young age, Tohru proved a level of discernment beyond her years. Of her, Yuki remarks, “I honestly don’t think that Tohru Honda experiences the world the way other people do… Her life has been harder than most others her age,” and yet she still takes on the burdens of others, namely the Soma curse. Tohru, while young in age, had to grow up quicker than most, granting her the necessary stability and wisdom to aid in breaking the zodiac curse.

Before Yuki and Kyo make strides in resolving their traumas, they bring Tohru closure on her long-standing one. Aside from her peers, Tohru’s paternal relatives also ostracised her. She listened as they gossiped at Katsuya’s wake: “[Tohru] doesn’t look a bit like Katsuya,” and “Are we even sure that she’s his?” Their slander assisted in ingraining insecurity within Tohru.

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23 *Fruits Basket*, “I’ve Been Fooling Myself.”


26 *Fruits Basket*, “It Was So Foolish.”
Living with the Honda family came with the price of stigma whereas, on the other hand, the Somas welcomed Tohru without obligation or judgement, giving her a feeling of family that she hadn’t felt since Kyoko died. Once the renovations finish on her grandfather’s home, Tohru reluctantly leaves Shigure’s to return. “I’ve been fooling myself,” she thinks, “it was silly for me to think the Somas and I could be a family… Rice balls don’t belong in a fruits basket.” Much to her surprise, Yuki and Kyo come to take her back to Shigure’s, effectively calling the rice ball into the fruits basket. Having finally found her place, Tohru is freed of her longest trauma. As with Tohru, some of the zodiac members face rejection and bullying early in their lives—a result of their first trauma.

First Trauma: the Zodiac Curse

The Soma family presents as a wealthy one: its members live on a private estate with 100 (unaware of the zodiac curse) on the “outside” and 50 (aware of the curse) on the “inside.” Parents of the cursed children fall into two categories: acceptors and rejectors. Soma Momiji (the rabbit) explains: “The mothers react one of two ways: They’re either extremely overprotective of their kids, or they end up rejecting them completely.” Unfortunately for Momiji, his mother rejected him “body and soul,” even committing self-harm in response to his existence. To relieve her of distress, Hatori offers to erase her memory. Before he does, he confirms that she

[27] *Fruits Basket*, “I’ve Been Fooling Myself.”


won’t regret forgetting her only child. “I regret that I ever gave birth to that cursed creature,” she replies.31

Figure 6. Momiji’s mother lying on the floor with bandages on her forearms, eyeing a pair of scissors.32

In contrast, some Soma parents are exceptionally loving of their possessed children—supportive to the point of distress. If their child hurts, then so do they. Momiji’s binary assessment doesn’t account for the various shades of grey the Soma parents fall into—namely Yuki, Kyo, and Akito’s respective mothers. Regardless of how the parents react to bringing a possessed child into the world, there’s no guaranteed safety from bullying or loneliness. What the over-protective parent fails to realise is that it draws attention to the otherness of the zodiac members, stimulating feelings of depression and anxiety. Tohru, as an outsider, does what these loving parents cannot: make the cursed feel right with themselves. Harmen writes that “people in the survivor’s social world have the power to influence the eventual outcome of the trauma.”33

31 Fruits Basket, “That’s a Secret.”

32 Fruits Basket, “That’s a Secret.”

33 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 61.
making connections with traumatised characters, she empowers them—a step on the road to recovery. Traumatised people are reluctant to ask for help, but Tohru answers the call anyway.

**Ritsu**

Mark Duffett writes in *Understanding Fandom: An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture* that fandom can “offer a space where individuals can investigate the possibilities of their gender identities. Sometimes this can happen with people discover particular fictional characters”—such as the ones in *Fruits Basket.* Soma Ritsu (the monkey) presents as female, wearing a traditional kimono and hair grown past the waist. While referred to with the pronouns of he/him in the series, Ritsu exhibits gender-fluidity, moving between different genders of dress. With Ritsu’s identity in flux, they/them/their pronouns suit the duality of Ritsu and their uncertainty. Ritsu discovered at a young age that there’s something about girls’ clothes that makes them feel secure, but their security comes at a cost. Wearing women’s clothes calms Ritsu just as much as it discomforts them, preventing them from achieving self-acceptance and going so far as to bring forth suicidal ideations. They exhibit traits of social anxiety disorder—something they inherited from their mother, Okami, who Tohru met first. Ritsu lives in constant worry of being a source of discontent or subject of judgement from others and enters

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34 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 133

35 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 54


into a panic when they believe they’ve caused displeasure. Having tasted Ritsu’s emotional distress, she fears the damage an outsider could bring and warns Tohru that Ritsu “has psychological wounds already.”\textsuperscript{39} However, after seeing Tohru’s positive influence on the other Somas, Okami instead hopes a friendship will blossom between her and Ritsu.\textsuperscript{40}

![Figure 7. Soma Ritsu (the monkey) having an anxiety attack.\textsuperscript{41}](image)

Ritsu seeks out Tohru at Shigure’s house, seeing as “most of the other zodiac members have already met her.”\textsuperscript{42} While sitting around the table, Ritsu accidentally causes a spill, ruining parts of Shigure’s manuscript. Mortified by their actions, they climb to the roof to jump. The reasoning may appear superficial; Ritsu responds in this moment to years of accumulated guilt: “My parents were always apologising on my behalf… Maybe a person like me should give up on

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Fruits Basket}, season 1, episode 11, “This Is a Wonderful Inn,” directed by Tomoko Hiramuki, written by Yuichiro Kido, featuring Laura Bailey, Eric Vale, and Jerry Jewel, aired June 15, 2019, in broadcast syndication, Funimation, 2019, Blu-Ray.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Fruits Basket}, “This Is a Wonderful Inn.”

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Fruits Basket}, “I’m So Sorry!”

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Fruits Basket}, “I’m So Sorry!”
Their compounding feelings of inadequacy cause them to believe people would be better off. Shigure, Kyo, and Yuki watch Ritsu from below while Tohru climbs up onto the roof unbeknownst to them, risking herself to save someone she just met. Tohru proves that Okami’s faith is well-placed: she attempts to rationalise with Ritsu, to convince them to come down safely instead of forcing them; Tohru leaves the choice to Ritsu. Ritsu confesses to Tohru, “When I look back at my life, I can’t find a single reason for me to have ever been born.” “Maybe the point of living is to find that reason,” Tohru counters, to find their life’s purpose. Her negotiation with Ritsu succeeds because she refrains from false promises; instead, she relates her own hopes, desires, insecurities, and pain to demonstrate how life fluctuates between the good and the bad. It’s not just Tohru’s words that speak to Ritsu; Tohru’s bravery and willingness to accept risk to her body sends a message to Ritsu that they have value. Tohru becomes the friend Ritsu never had, and without her therapeutic conversation, Ritsu may have continued to live under a cloud of guilt and uncertainty, leading to a fatal outcome. Tohru’s embrace of Ritsu’s otherness permits them to embrace who they need to be—and the same goes for other zodiac members who bear physical differences.

Kisa

Some members of the Soma family wear their curse in the form of hair colour: Kyo, orange; Ayame (the snake), a silvery-white; Hatsuharu (“Haru,” the cow), a dual black and white; and Kisa, a muted ginger. Typically, these hair colours would need to be achieved through dying as they are rarely naturally occurring in the world. Sporting such a do attracts attention—

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43 *Fruits Basket*, “I’m So Sorry!”
44 *Fruits Basket*, “I’m So Sorry!”
45 *Fruits Basket*, “I’m So Sorry!”
and not always the positive kind; classmates teased Kisa, one of the youngest of the zodiac, for her hair. When she tried to ignore them, they reciprocated in kind, treating her as if she were invisible, save for the occasional snicker when she spoke. The bullying broke Kisa, causing her to become mute. When silence didn’t put an end to the harassment, she skipped school and, finally, ran away. Her mother, sick with worry, and other family members failed to understand Kisa's reaction, expecting that she would reach out for help. This is often the case in reality: bullying may go unreported, leaving the victim to suffer in silence. Youth Truth Student Survey, a national non-profit, found that, on average, 26% of American students reported being bullied and that 44% said it was because of how they looked. While some people can embrace their differences (Haru) or stand up for themselves (Kyo), others like Kisa are not as confident. The trauma from bullying compounds until the weight forces them to become more and more withdrawn. Kisa develops a sense of hopelessness—deprived of a sense of self-worth, she secludes herself from the people who could help her.

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47 *Fruits Basket*, “What’s Important Is…”

Tohru first meets Kisa in her tiger form. Learning of Kisa’s recent troubles, Tohru reaches out without worry of the risk to herself, and, in response, Kisa bites her hand, gripping it with her teeth, and refuses to let go. Kisa’s mother comes to her child, distraught, asking why she chose to suffer alone. “She couldn’t tell you,” Tohru tells the mother. “When you’re being bullied like that, it’s hard to talk about…. I felt so ashamed. I felt pathetic and worthless for being bullied, and I hated the idea of my mom knowing that it happened.” Tohru conveys Kisa’s feelings to her mother through the recollection of her experience with bullying, saving the young Soma from suffering the embarrassment of confessing it herself. Kisa transforms back into human form, placing herself in Tohru’s arms. In being an avatar for Kisa, Tohru freed her of all that had been weighing her down and gifted her the opportunity to move forward.

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49 *Fruits Basket*, “What’s Important Is…”

50 *Fruits Basket*, “What’s Important Is…”
Arisa

Arisa secluded herself differently from Kisa by joining a gang in elementary school. Coming up in a broken single-parent home, Arisa lacked a proper support system. Because of her father’s inability to contend with his own issues, he drowned himself in alcohol and distracted himself with television until Arisa became all but invisible. With a physically absent mother and emotionally absent father, Arisa was utterly abandoned. She says, of the experience, “I had a real chip on my shoulder, and it showed.” Joining a gang offered a way for Arisa to spend her rage and provided her with a new family, people she could socialise with. She even found a role model in the tough trailblazing Crimson Butterfly, Kyoko—little did she know that her yankii idol left the gang lifestyle to become a mother. Upon meeting Kyoko and Tohru, Arisa expresses anger and disappointment, not for the destruction of her idol but because she begins to feel the total weight of the path she’s chosen. Arisa realises that she’s only been masking her pain, not dealing with it, and turning her back on the gang would result in grave consequences.

Journalist Stephanie Buck writes in her article, “Meet the ‘yankii,’ the Japanese subculture that embraced American trashiness”: “After the chaos of World War II, Japanese
society swung back to the country’s stereotypical uniformity. Except for the **yankii**, who openly rejected the rigidity of societal norms.”

**Yankii**s are fully aware of their otherness—flaunting it despite the displeasure of others by sporting garish hair colours or alternative forms of dress. Arisa, who was abandoned and ignored by her parents, made herself visible by becoming a **yankii**, and to give up this life would be to return to the neglected child she so desperately did not wish to be. However, she created a catch-22 by adopting the **yankii** style: in dying her hair blonde, thinning her eyebrows, and wearing deviated forms of dress, she distances herself from the majority of those around her, limiting the odds of forming new (potentially healthy) relationships. Tohru stands as the exception, willing to bridge the social gap.

Kyoko moved on from her gang life: got married, started working, and had a child. Arisa’s friendship with Tohru gives her the faith that she can as well. Developing healthy relationships that are not contingent on transforming herself broadened Arisa, allowing her to see alternate futures, rebuild her sense of self-worth, and have the strength required to leave the gang. Additionally, she takes responsibility of her father’s well-being by monitoring his drinking and salt intake, but she could not have become this if Tohru hadn’t offered her hand in friendship first. Post-gang, Arisa continues to be a **yankii**. As she matures, she continues to negotiate her identity, figuring out the person she wants to be and the life she wants to have. Napier states that anime often depicts “characters and settings that are neither clearly Western nor clearly Japanese—offer[ing] a space for identity exploration in which the audience can revel in a safe

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55 *Fruits Basket*, “She Said Don’t Step on Them!”

56 *Fruits Basket*, “She Said Don’t Step on Them!”
form of Otherness unmatched by any other contemporary medium.”\textsuperscript{57} Tohru represents that safe space for Arisa, Kisa, and Ritsu. Their relationships with Tohru moved them safely to a path of healing and to reconcile their feelings of otherness so that they may embrace what makes them each unique.

Yuki

“I’ve never laughed in front of my parents,” Yuki tells Tohru in a moment of emotional surrender.\textsuperscript{58} No one among the Somas has lived in the dark quite like Yuki. Throughout his life, Yuki became withdrawn—never confronting his neglectful parents or long-time abuser, Akito (God). He wanted to be around ordinary people who would see him as more than a rat. Zodiac members typically don’t attend traditional schools for fear of transforming, their parents opting instead for private education—especially Yuki’s mother, who had high aspirations for him. Yuki expresses a desire to run away, to escape the Somas but never does. Instead, he safely rebels by living with Shigure outside the Soma estate and attending a co-ed school—but even that resulted from others intervening on his behalf.\textsuperscript{59} He feels a minimal amount of freedom by placing distance between his parents and Akito, but it’s a façade. When Yuki witnesses Tohru’s homelessness and learns of her mother’s passing, he realises he failed to achieve the independence he longed for. He lived as a child and continued to live as a teenager a financially comfortable lifestyle. Yuki, Kyo, and presumably the other zodiac members who’re underage are

\textsuperscript{57} Napier, Anime, 27.

\textsuperscript{58} Fruits Basket, “This Is a Wonderful Inn.”

set up with personal bank accounts, receiving an allowance from the family every month. Still, even with financial comfort, Yuki likens living on the main estate to being trapped in a cage. Tohru opens his eyes; he admits he hasn’t left the cage, just expanded the radius of the bars. In their time together, Yuki and Tohru grow quite close, though not in a romantic manner. Living with Tohru broadened his understanding of how other people have fared and to make sense of his own trauma. During her first night at Shigure’s, Yuki tells his cousin, “She’s always cheerful…. I wouldn’t have guessed she’d been through so much.” In his life, Yuki had never seen someone find happiness after trauma and, in her, he believes a way through is possible.

Yuki suffers what Shigure describes as “torture” in his youth. Akito favoured Yuki from a young age—God and the rat reunited—and so his parents seized the opportunity, trading him for social gain and ignoring his health in the process. Yuki’s visits with Akito took a dark turn: as Akito’s mental state deteriorated over the years, Yuki became her prisoner. Akito locked Yuki in a dark room for hours on end, subjecting him to physical and emotional abuse. He sought refuge with his parents and older brother, Ayame, but they were of no help, turning their backs on a desperate child. Even other zodiac members did nothing to protect one of their own, which is not unusual in these circumstances. Herman states: “Without a supportive social environment, the bystander usually succumbs to the temptation to look the other way. This is


61 *Fruits Basket*, “See You After School.”


true even when the victim is an idealized and valued member of society.” And the zodiac members live dual lives as bystanders and victims of captivity themselves—they have been conditioned to relinquish their ability to speak out against Akito.

The time spent trapped with Akito resulted in Yuki developing post-traumatic stress disorder, the side effects of which were avoidance and an inability to establish relationships, among others. Yuki avoids the Soma Estate (unless strictly required) and ceases contact with his parents and Akito. He keeps his distance from his family and anyone outside the Soma estate, the very people he so wished to be around. Fear plagues Yuki throughout his life: he worries that any outsider he comes close to will have their memory erased—better to avoid disappointment by never getting close—and Akito’s presence elicits stress responses throughout the series when Akito merely threatens to come near: dilated pupils, hands shaking, and paralysis (an inability to seek safety).

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64 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 8.

65 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 84.
A large section of the characters in *Fruits Basket* are fraught with mental health issues that would have not been born if it hadn’t been for the zodiac curse, specifically Yuki and Akito. Yuki internalises his pain, effectively placing a film over his eyes that prevents him from comprehending the wants and needs of others. He cannot empathise with Kyo—“Better to be alone,” he says—thus failing to realise that Kyo is desperate for positive attention, for acceptance. Ironically, the closest relationship Yuki has is with his nemesis, Kyo. Their ongoing feud has kept them in close physical proximity with the occasional spar. Yuki doesn’t allow himself to have an emotional relationship with anyone before Tohru—except Kyo. Being the rat, Yuki is unequivocally welcomed as a zodiac member, but his acceptance comes at a cost: he is objectified by the Soma family, a tool for gain or sick entertainment. His parents, Akito, and other Somas strip Yuki of his human status through objectification. It continues later in life:

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**66** *Fruits Basket,* “You Look Like You’re Having Fun.”


**68** *Fruits Basket,* “See You After School.”
the girls and boys at school admire Yuki for his beauty, as a thing to be admired.\textsuperscript{69} The rules of the Yuki Fan Club dictate that all women refrain from developing any form of relationship with “Prince Yuki.”\textsuperscript{70} Kyo objectifies Yuki as well by rejecting Yuki’s offer of friendship. “So, you’re the rat?” are the first words Kyo said to Yuki, acknowledging him first as a creature rather than a human.\textsuperscript{71} Of his childhood, Yuki says, “Nobody cared about me. I was worthless. Insignificant…. Know I’d only be looked at with indifference, or with hatred, I grew afraid to be seen.”\textsuperscript{72} But Tohru sees him—not as the rat, not as the Prince, but as a person.

Yuki learns from Tohru, much like a child would a parent. Late in the series, Yuki confesses he sees Tohru as the mother he longed for—not because of her cooking and cleaning skills, but for her strength, guidance, thoughtfulness, and ability to love unconditionally.\textsuperscript{73} Her companionship brought Yuki out of the darkness he’d been living in for so long and gave him the strength to confront his mother, Akito, and to foster healthy relationships outside the family. Of his mother, he thinks, “My words have no power or meaning. They’re fragile things that die before they even reach you. I remember thinking, if it’s going to be that way, I might as well never speak again.”\textsuperscript{74} Before the end of the series, Yuki comes to disagree with this original assessment. He expands himself in a way he could not before, which goes for other Soma clan members.

\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Fruits Basket}, “Let’s Play Rich Man-Poor Man!”

\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Fruits Basket}, “See You After School.”


\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Fruits Basket}, “There Was, Definitely.”

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Fruits Basket}, “There Was, Definitely.”

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Fruits Basket}, “See You Later.”
Kyo

It’s difficult to excuse or even forgive the cruel actions of Disney’s Beasts because the audience does not have an opportunity to get to know them. Takaya explores her characters at great length, particularly Kyo, the Beast of *Fruits Basket*. The audience experiences his trauma with him, allowing them to understand how he came to be the way he is. The teenage Kyo mirrors Disney’s Beast in that he displays a higher level of sensitivity and is prone to outbursts of anger, but not in appearance. Like the Beast from Disney’s 2017 live-action *Beauty and the Beast*, he lost his mother at a young age, and both are left with an uncaring father who had an adverse effect on their emotional stability and ability to sustain relationships.

Complex trauma occurs when one is repeatedly exposed to traumatic events throughout their life. In Kyo’s case, he suffered emotional abuse from Akito and his father—both of which would prefer to see Kyo caged for the remainder of his life; lost his mother to suicide; endured physical abuse from his admirer, Soma Kagura (the boar); and witnessed the death of Kyoko, of which he blames himself. These experiences have compounded on the original trauma of being born possessed by the cat, the one most difficult for him to reconcile. Unlike other male zodiac members, who transform into their animal forms when first held by their mother (rabbit, ram, dog, etc.), Kyo transformed into his “true form,” not that of the cat. Being the cat comes with an immense burden: it is abhorred by many members of the Soma family, its “true form” terrifies, and it is not a welcome member of the zodiac. Simply, the cat exists to be rejected.

Kagura forced Kyo’s beads off his wrist in their early childhood, causing him to transform unwillingly. She ran, screaming in tears at the sight of him. After that, Kyo’s mother

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kept him locked inside the house, checking and rechecking his wrist for the beads. "I want to keep you all to myself," Kyo’s mother would tell him, but he didn’t believe her. He lived with a mother who couldn’t hold him, a father that wouldn’t—just a constant atmosphere of hatred and fear. René Spitz and Harry Harlow conducted separate studies on the importance of having a present and caring parent in one’s formative years. Both found that children are likely to display antisocial behaviour or have slow cognitive development without one. Kyo’s sometimes beastly behaviour can be attributed to his psychologically damaging upbringing. Adam Kardiner found in his study of combat trauma that “aggressive impulses become disorganized and unrelated to the situation.” The consistent infliction of trauma caused Kyo to develop a state of hyperarousal (a symptom of PTSD where the afflicted individual “startles easily” and “reacts irritably to small provocations”)—essentially placing him in a permanent state of fight.

After his mother’s passing, Kyo was fostered by Soma Kazuma, the family’s martial arts instructor and grandson of the previous cat. Kazuma empathises with Kyo: he witnessed his grandfather’s ostracisation and imprisonment as a child and feels guilt over rejecting the opportunity to have a relationship with the man. Kazuma becomes the parent Kyo so

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76 Fruits Basket, “Let’s Go Home.”
77 Fruits Basket, “Let’s Go Home.”
79 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 35.
80 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 35.
81 Fruits Basket, “Let’s Go Home.”
82 Fruits Basket, season 1, episode 25, “Summer Will Be Here Soon,” directed by Takahiro Kawakoshi, written by Taku Kishimoto, featuring Laura Bailey, Eric Vale, and Jerry Jewel, aired September 21, 2019, in broadcast syndication, Funimation, 2019, Blu-Ray.
desperately needed: like with Tohru for Yuki, Kazuma sees Kyo as a person first, not the cat. Still, even the love and acceptance of Kazuma isn’t enough to repair Kyo, so he turns to Tohru—believing her to be the key to helping his foster son. Kazuma forces Kyo to reveal his “true form” to Tohru, risking permanently damaging his relationship with his foster son. “To move forward, you must accept who you truly are,” Kazuma tells him. Kyo argues that he has. In his rebuttal, Kyo expresses a fatalistic view of his life, believing that being born the cat meant his life was over before it began, thus proving that he has, in fact, not accepted himself but instead surrendered to the curse. This aligns with Herman’s assessment of such individuals: “the victim of chronic trauma may feel … changed irrevocably” and may lose a sense of self. Furthermore, he continues to blame Yuki for his fate instead of taking hold of his future. Like Yuki, Kyo hides because he fears experiencing loss again, and when Tohru sees Kyo’s “true form,” he runs. Even when Tohru chases after, he continues to push her away, yelling at her to leave, threatening her with physical violence, and hitting her: “If I’m going to lose her anyway, I won’t hold back. I’ll hurt her so badly that she’ll never forgive me, so badly she’ll never have to worry about me again.” He sees himself as a monster, just as some Somas do—mainly, his spiteful father.

Traditionally, the cat is locked up until death—an expectation Kyo’s father strives to uphold. Kyo traps himself in a cage of guilt: blaming himself for his mother’s death, for damaging Kazuma’s reputation among the Somas, and for not preventing Kyoko’s death. Though none of these things are his fault, he takes responsibility because he lacks a positive self-image. He questions why Kazuma really took him in and wonders why his mother didn’t kill him

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83 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 86.

84 *Fruits Basket*, “You Look Well…”
inside of herself.\textsuperscript{85} Feelings of guilt can be severe when one witnesses the death or suffering of others, tainting their view of themself.\textsuperscript{86} Like Ritsu, Kyo has yet to find his life’s purpose, but unlike Ritsu, Kyo believes he has. Those possessed by the cat are burdened with an inescapable stigma. Kyo cedes his future to the Somas because he believes wholeheartedly that he is the monster they make him out to be. Legend says that the red and white bracelet he wears to conceal the cat’s “true form” is made of human bone (the red beads were lacquered with blood) and that at least one life had to be sacrificed to give it power. Kyo tells Tohru: “I’ve hated that thought since I was a little kid. It seemed wrong to me. Is my existence worth that kind of sacrifice? Worth more than another person’s life?”\textsuperscript{87} In conflating himself with the cats of the past, Kyo loses his identity and hope.

\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Fruits Basket}, season 2, episode 9, “My Precious...” directed by Yoshihide Ibata, written by Taku Kishimoto, featuring Laura Bailey, Eric Vale, and Jerry Jewel, aired June 2, 2020, in broadcast syndication, Funimation, 2020, Blu-Ray.

\textsuperscript{86} Herman, \textit{Trauma and Recovery}, 54.

\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Fruits Basket}, season 2, episode 8, “Well, It’s True,” directed by Yoshihide Ibata, written by Taku Kishimoto, featuring Laura Bailey, Eric Vale, and Jerry Jewel, aired May 26, 2020, in broadcast syndication, Funimation, 2020, Blu-Ray.
Akito claims that “Those who are born with the spirit are tied to that spirit’s destiny.” More than any other zodiac member, Kyo demonstrates the curse of self-fulfilling prophecy. To protect himself, Kyo isolates himself socially and sometimes physically to reduce the chance of further trauma. When trying to get Tohru to run from him in his “true form,” he thinks: “I can’t take it—I’m sick of losing people. Sick of pity, sick of being miserable, sick of having things forced on me.” Here, Kyo fails to see Tohru as she is, for the future she offers. She doesn’t pity Kyo or set expectations for him; she prioritises understanding in relationships, reserving judgment. For her, first impressions are notes, not gospel, for further study. Because of Tohru’s patience to withstand Kyo’s brash and hostile behaviour, she can comprehend why he acts the way he does. A study by Rebecca E. Grattan et al. found that respondents who had a history of trauma were more likely to have a history of violence. Kyo uses his aggression as an outlet and

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89 *Fruits Basket*, “My Precious…”

a defensive mechanism, a response to the constant finger-pointing. Kyo benefits from having a partner who can see him for who he is—not a monster but a deeply troubled person. More than anyone, Tohru reminds Kyo that he’s human, deserving of desires, a future, and love.

Kyo performs the most remarkable transformation achieved in the series. He becomes a figure of stability for Tohru: a protector when her physical body is threatened, a shoulder to lean on in times of emotional strife, a caretaker when she’s ill. At Shigure’s, Kyo is the only one among the men with a mastery of the domestic arts. Though he has his own issues to work out, Kyo begins their relationship attuned to her from the very start. He recognises her sadness, worry, fear, and comes to her, willing to transform into whatever she needs him to be at the moment. “I’ll make sure you’re okay,” he promises her. Unlike previous Beauty and Beast pairings, Tohru and Kyo’s relationship is one of constant give where both parties support each other from the beginning of the narrative to the end.

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91 *Fruits Basket,* “You Look Like You’re Having Fun.”
Akito

From de Villeneuve’s shallow mother of the Beast to Disney’s unrepentant Gaston, an antagonistic force seeks to prevent or destroy the union between Beauty and Beast. In *Fruits Basket*, Akito threatens the joining of Kyo and Tohru through manipulation.93 And it doesn’t end there; Akito seeks to undo the connections Tohru made with the other zodiac members to ensure an eternal banquet. As the series progresses, Akito grows increasingly desperate to keep members of the zodiac close to her—lashing out in frustration as they become distant. Akito’s position as God blinds her to how the others perceive her: a warden who keeps them imprisoned. Tohru views the zodiac members as people with dreams and aspirations, while Akito sees them as nothing more than objects to quell her insecurities. If the curse breaks, the zodiac members are no longer tied to Akito; she would no longer be their god—she’d be nothing more than a scared

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93 *Fruits Basket*, “My Precious…”
and damaged girl. Herman states that captors seek to destroy their victim’s sense of autonomy, and Akito will use any means of control to keep the zodiac members close.\textsuperscript{94}

Physical abuse occurs, almost exclusively, at Akito’s hand. Due to emotional instability, many zodiac members address their problems with violence—Kyo, Kagura, Isuzu (“Rin”, the horse), and Haru (in his dark form)—but Akito stands alone in receiving pleasure from it. She exists as a constant source of trauma for members of the zodiac, inflicting physical and emotional abuse over the course of years. Her sociopathic tendencies began in early childhood, not unusual for children raised in unstable home environments. Akito's staff of servants see to her every whim and reinforce the fantasy built around her. The Soma family is expected to love her, but few actually do. Being raised in a confusing environment with unparalleled pressure and little guidance caused her to react emotionally rather than thoughtfully. If she cannot receive love naturally, she forces an illusion: obedience is love. Out of fear of losing the only connections she has, Akito isolates members of the zodiac, doing her best to prevent them from developing relationships with others so that the only person whose love they need is hers. The pleasure she derives from torturing Yuki, or even the pain she causes others, isn’t a simple form of sadism: it’s an affirmation of her control and assurance that the zodiac members will remain close.

Hatori was the first of the zodiac to fall in love with an outsider. Though Kana is an extended member of the Soma family, she knows nothing of the secret until she accidentally hugs Hatori. After falling deeply in love, they seek an audience with Akito, asking permission to wed. Zodiac members too often make the mistake of giving Akito the benefit of the doubt—thinking her to be a benevolent god when she’s a malevolent one. Akito lashes out, causing

\textsuperscript{94} Herman, \textit{Trauma and Recovery}, 77.
Hatori to lose the use of his right eye. "This is your fault!" Akito screams at Kana, manipulating her into accepting fault and into a deep depression. Trapped by her guilt, Hatori frees Kana by erasing her memory; she forgets their relationship and moves on with her life, eventually marrying another. The pattern repeats when Hiro (the ram) confesses his love for Kisa to Akito. It “took Kisa two weeks to heal after Akito was done with her,” Hatori informs Shigure. Hiro avoided Kisa after Akito attacked her, therefore absent when the bullying at school began. Hiro wasn’t there when she needed him most, and so he became a bully himself. Hatori explains of Hiro, “He doesn’t know what to do with that rage.”

Akira, Akito’s father, told her at a young age: “You’re a special child, born to be loved.” Being born into a leadership position didn’t guarantee fealty—particularly from her mother, Ren, “a troubled woman: both mentally and physically.” Akira proved a positive figure in his daughter’s life, while Ren was contentious and toxic. “Your future holds no loneliness or fear, only bonds,” Akira promised. “Bonds that will last forever unchanging. You have been provided eternity. No one will leave you.” Akito never truly understood the bond between her and the zodiac animals, and she never could. Akira’s passing left Akito to be reared by a jealous mother who forced her to pose as a male. While the decision appears as a response

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96 *Fruits Basket*, “I Can’t Believe You Picked it Up.”

97 *Fruits Basket*, “I Can’t Believe You Picked it Up.”

98 *Fruits Basket*, “I Can’t Believe You Picked it Up.”


100 *Fruits Basket*, “I’ll Hold Another Banquet.”
to misogynistic leadership practices, Ren is actually responding to the threat Akito presented at birth. Ren was no longer the only woman in Akira’s life, having to originally earn her place by Akira’s side, rising from servant to mother of God. Ren challenges God’s bond to the zodiac members, declaring it a fantasy. Toxicity breeds toxicity: Ren infected her child, who thereby developed antisocial behaviour because of continued exposure to abuse and trauma, worsening Akito’s ability to have healthy relationships. Deprived of the love one is expected to receive, Akito winds up demanding it from the zodiac members, gripping them tighter and tighter as the years pass. Her need for control drives her violent tendencies, and, with no one to curb her behaviour, it continues.

After a visit with Tohru, Hatori returns to the Soma estate, where the head servant chastises him for “running off” at a time when Akito needed him:

The poor dear seems especially distraught at the moment. Honestly, Hatori, must you leave the estate so often? Just think of what could happen while you’re gone. Do not forget, Akito trusts you more than anyone else; you can’t preserve that trust if you’re constantly absent. You should remain here, where you belong.

In order to break the cycle, Akito’s social bubble needs to be broken. Unfortunately, Akito only has a handful of brief, controlled interactions with Tohru, not allowing the latter enough time to develop an understanding of the god. Only when Akito lets her guard down can Tohru make a breakthrough and end Akito’s reign of terror.

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102 *Fruits Basket*, “I’ll Hold Another Banquet.”

Akito feels placed in continuous competition with other women. As is the case with Ren, Akito believes that other women disrupt her relationships with men. In her mind, if the male zodiac members form relationships, they have the drive to sever their connection with Akito. The abuse she inflicts on Kisa, Rin, and Kana serves to keep the zodiac members alone, to herself. They, including Tohru, also represent the life (and identity) Akito was deprived of; thus, Tohru presents a threat. It dawns on Tohru that Akito is lonely and that she cannot help but act defensively. Even after Akito strikes her twice with a dagger, Tohru still tries to free that damaged little girl of her untreated trauma. “We met the wrong way,” Tohru tells her, “let’s start over.” Tohru gives Akito a second chance, and she takes it. Herman states that “each survivor must find [their] own way to restore [their] sense of connection with a wider community.” Tohru’s friendship helps Akito in this regard: the lonely god finally begins to atone for her actions, starting with setting the remaining zodiac members free.

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105 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 73.

Time Marches On

Once upon a time, a person lived atop a mountain. They were lonely; though people lived down below, this person was afraid of them, of being judged or rejected because they were different—an other. One day, a cat visited the mountain. This strange creature bewildered the person. The cat said it had been observing this person for some time and felt compelled to come. It asked if it could remain by their side, by God’s side, forever. God, taken by their companionship with the cat, sent out invitation after invitation to all the animals. Twelve arrived, climbing the mountain to feast with God and the cat. Time and again, they met to dine, laugh, and enjoy each other’s company until one night, the cat collapsed. Knowing that their time together would end, God performed a spell that would allow the animals to meet again, over and over after death—an eternal banquet. All the animals drank, starting with the rat, then the ox, and all the rest, in order. Finally, when it came time for the cat to drink, it started crying. The cat asked why God had forced it to drink when it did not wish to. The other animals were angered by

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107 *Fruits Basket*, “What’s Your Name?”
the cat, turning their backs on it in its last moments. They didn’t understand the cat’s position, that it could accept change.108

Despite anime’s proposed “stateless” nature, meaning it exists without a cultural identity, there is something universal about anime, particularly *Fruits Basket*, where it depicts a shared pain that transcends culture. *Fruits Basket* offers lessons in healing, acceptance, and forgiveness—stressing just how much weight people place on the opinions of others. After meeting Tohru, Kisa receives a letter from her teacher telling her that she cannot expect anyone to love her if she doesn’t love herself. On this matter, Yuki remarks:

> How can we find something good about ourselves when we’re trapped in darkness? The whole reason we despise ourselves is because we can only see the parts we hate. So, forcing ourselves to see good things feels pointless; we’d just be making them up. It’s a nice sentiment, but that’s not how life works. Instead, I think it’s when someone else says they love you, that you’ll finally start loving yourself. When someone truly accepts who you are, that’s when you can start to forgive yourself and suddenly see things you hadn’t all along.109

Furthermore, if all one sees is darkness, then where is the light? If all one believes in is the ugliness of the world, it becomes what they’re bound to send out.

Takaya’s characters are broken in one sense or another, each tasked with finding their own path to overcoming. A majority of the parents are not sources of emotional support for their children, leaving the offspring responsible for their own well-being (e.g., the parents of Momiji, Kyo, Akito, and Arisa). Trauma takes time to heal, and the longer it festers, the greater its toll on the mind. “Beauty and the Beast”-type stories teach the reader that what is seen on the outside isn’t necessarily reflective of what’s on the inside. Time marches on for better and for worse. Tohru’s boundless empathy for people whose plight is beyond the realm of her experience is

108 *Fruits Basket*, “Goodbye,”

109 *Fruits Basket*, “What’s Important Is…”
why the Soma curse comes to an end. Tohru demonstrates to others how one can survive and live on no matter what trials come our way, whereas Beast-like characters, such as Akito and Kyo, show how tribulations can corrupt an individual. The cat’s “true form” represents a legend perverted by judgement—the original promise, forgotten. The cat wasn’t left out but forced into a life it did not want. How could anyone know the true nature of the curse when the originators did not? Akito realises that the bond which connects her to the others is a tether shackling them. No longer clinging to artificial love, she accepts a future that may very well be without them so that she can pursue one with true love. Because of Tohru, Akito accepts change and embraces uncertainty; her fear slowly replaced by faith in the process. The sum total of her experiences does not define her but rather helps her figure out who she wants to be—and the same goes for Ritsu, Arisa, and Kyo.

Tohru’s keen mind isn’t hindered by naïve optimism or faith; instead, she approaches people with an open mind—the kind one would expect to come from family. Tohru doesn’t transform herself for others; she is transformed by them, becoming in their minds what they’ve longed for, what they need. Healing doesn’t occur in a vacuum: it’s a multi-party process where one is not rescued but reconstructed. According to Herman, “resolution [of trauma] is never final,” but they may find a way to forge a positive path forward.110 Ritsu, Kisa, Arisa, Kyo, and Akito needed to believe that change was possible, that their fates are moulded by themselves and not dictated. People are not defined by their trauma, but they may believe they are. When one can begin to see themself as something other than damaged, they may feel whole—they just need someone to show them first.

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110 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 211.
Bibliography


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