



Zilia Papp. *Traditional Monster Imagery in Manga, Anime and Japanese Cinema*

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FOR DECADES now, Japan has been experiencing a so-called *yōkai* boom, an obsession with all things *yōkai*—the monsters, spirits, and supernatural phenomena that have long played an important role in Japanese folklore and popular culture. Part and parcel of this “boom” has been a plethora of *yōkai*-related novels, manga, anime (animation), films, video games, journals, museum exhibitions, public forums, databases, and research targeting both popular and academic readerships. While most scholarly works on the subject are of course in Japanese, there is a small but expanding body of English-language academic monographs on *yōkai* and related topics (FIGAL 1999; FOSTER 2009; LI 2009; REIDER 2010). Within this context, the book under review is important because of its explicit focus not on historical, folkloric, or literary materials, but on *yōkai* imagery and the art historical context in which *yōkai* are situated.

Undeniably, a major facet of the contemporary attraction of *yōkai* has been their visualization, particularly in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century manga and anime of Mizuki Shigeru (b. 1922) and his *Gegege no Kitarō* series. Papp’s volume, as explained in the introduction, “focuses on the influence of Edo- and Meiji-period *yōkai* imagery on contemporary manga and Japanese animation, and in particular on the works of contemporary manga artist Mizuki Shigeru as well as the animation series derived from it” (1). Through this focused investigation, her broader theoretical objective is to “add to the body of research concerning art historical and aesthetic approaches towards works of animation, within the framework of Animation Studies, based on the conviction that animation and sequential art are visual art forms in their own rights, and because of this, it is important to investigate their aesthetic and art historical links” (7).

The brief early chapters consist of a review of literature relating to *yōkai* art, to animation studies more generally, and to the “New Vienna School approach” that Papp adopts for her own analysis. This introductory material helps to situate her work within a broader academic context. Ideally, the presentation here would have been more developed; to a certain extent it reads like a catalog of names and articles, leaving the reader wanting a more careful explanation of the many ideas under review.

The most impressive aspect of Papp’s work is the sheer abundance of names, artwork, and previous scholarship she mentions throughout. Her project is an ambitious one. The longest chapter, for example, “*Yōkai* Art from Prehistory to Modernity,” attempts nothing less than the daunting task of reviewing *yōkai*-related art from the prehistoric Jōmon period through to Mizuki Shigeru’s postwar manga

and anime. The chapter starts off by defining the term *yōkai* and then discussing “Mountain *Yōkai*,” “Water *Yōkai*,” and “*Yōkai* of the Village and Home” before getting to a chronological rehearsal of the ways the supernatural and otherworldly have been rendered visually during different historical periods. While providing interesting discussions of various works and several artists (most notably Takai Kōzan, Tsukioka Yoshitoshi, Kawanabe Kyōsai, and Mizuki Shigeru), the chapter presents an overwhelming amount of material, some of which—such as subsections on the Meiji Restoration and Yanagita Kunio’s folklore studies—are not effectively integrated into the broader discussion of visual culture.

Papp’s enthusiasm is appealing; she clearly takes relish in *yōkai* art and the ideas behind it and seems to want to provide as comprehensive a picture as possible. She approaches her subject with gusto and delight. But the flipside of this passion is a certain sloppiness with regard to organizing, pruning, and writing. Although the work clearly reflects an enormous amount of research and even includes a useful glossary of Japanese terms and people, there is a rushed feeling to the text. The chapter “Multitude of Monsters in Multimedia,” for example, is chock full of information about individual *yōkai* and, in this sense, is valuable scholarship. In the case of the Ratman (*nezumi otoko*) motif, Papp even provides a history of demonic and magical rats in Japanese art since the fifteenth century that might be developed into an effective stand-alone essay. Other entries in this same chapter, however, are exceedingly brief and focus only on the appearance of a particular *yōkai* in Mizuki’s work. Such an appendix-like treatment of Mizuki’s *yōkai* is of value to be sure, but the reader is left with dangling, suggestive ideas that would benefit from more systematic analysis.

Perhaps the most valuable chapter is “*Yōkai* in Cinema, 1968–2008.” Here Papp not only introduces a number of late-twentieth-century cinematic treatments of *yōkai*, but also draws on her own firsthand experience as an extra in the “Great *Yōkai* Wars” (*Yōkai daisensō*, 2005). She provides extended quotations from various artists who worked on makeup, costume design, and other aspects of recent *yōkai*-related films. Although these quoted passages provide insight into visual and cultural influences on the creation of contemporary *yōkai* images, they too would have benefited from selective editing and greater contextualization; almost no data is provided as to when, where, and by whom they were acquired. Given that she has unique behind-the-scenes experience, one also wishes Papp might have provided more ethnographic description of the filmmaking process itself.

The book is packed with images—almost two hundred of them—providing a wealth of visual material for anybody interested in the art of the supernatural. But these pictures too sometimes seem inserted rather indiscriminately, with many of them only touched upon in the written text. Indeed, given the book’s expressed focus on the art historical value of *yōkai* images, surprisingly little attention is paid to close readings of visual texts or to methods and technologies involved in their production. And this is a shame, because in the few instances in which Papp does offer guidance in this way (for example, 68–69), she does so deftly and with insight.

The current book comes on the heels of PAPP’s earlier monograph (2010). In a number of places, inevitably, there is overlap—most notably where she discuss-

es Mizuki's life and work. More importantly, however, the fact that both these books, dealing with similar material and questions, appeared (from the same publisher) in such quick succession makes one wonder if the concerns mentioned above could not have been avoided by more time and a stronger hand in the editing process. Both these books, dealing with a timely and provocative subject, provide a wealth of data and hard-to-find images, significantly contributing to the small corpus of English-language scholarly works on *yōkai*. It is all the more disappointing then that greater attention was not paid to organizing and editing the images and ideas in the current book so that it might have better fulfilled its potential as an analytic text.

As an attempt to create a comprehensive English-language monograph concerning Japanese *yōkai* images, *Traditional Monster Imagery* is an ambitious and meaningful effort. It also ultimately reflects the difficulties inherent in such an exhaustive undertaking. Having said that, I would end by noting that, with its rich imagery and detail, this book provides a useful introduction to *yōkai*-related art and particularly the work of Mizuki Shigeru who, though well known in Japan, has only recently started to receive attention—and translation—in English-language scholarship. Papp's brief review of his biography and of the multiple versions of his manga and anime will help place his *yōkai*, and his particular role in manga/anime history, into the broader context of Japanese popular culture. In this sense, the book certainly works to fulfill one of its stated objectives—"to document the influence of a special segment of Edo- and Meiji-period visual art, *yōkai* art, on the manga and animation series *Gegege no Kitaro*" (2).

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