Parade of a Hundred Demons

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Note: Image generated using StableDiffusion Image Generator by Stable Diffusion AI from the prompt 'Illustrate the whimsical spectacle of an abstract parade featuring a thousand supernatural monstrous beings and demonic clowns, infusing vibrant colours and dynamic forms to capture the lively and surreal essence of this imaginative scene'.

Abstract

Chapter 8
Japan's Folkloristic Monsters Spring for Human Morals

What do we know about Japan's monsters and humour in popular arts and media from the early modern era (1600–1868) to the present day? The warrior class ruled Japan officially, but in reality, it was the 'despicable' merchants – and some who fell outside of the class system, namely kabuki actors and geisha – who came to have real influence. Such a shift caused tension on both sides. Still, outright criticism of the ruling class could be punishable by death. The response from the public, therefore, was carnival. The crude, lewd, and ludicrous came to be prized in all forms of popular entertainment. As literacy rates skyrocketed, so too did Japan's commercial publishing industry flourish. Theatre arts thrived too and, with this, myriad monsters emerged with the implication that all was not right. They were an outlet for discontent on page and stage – they were not used to insight into a revolution, but to test limits. Monsters were a tool for subtle and often humorous transgression until shogunal rule came to an end. But Japan's monsters never went away. They continued showing their ugly and funny faces (if they had them) throughout the twentieth century, to make statements about Japan's poor state of affairs. Today, one sees Japan's monsters springing onto the international stage.

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8

Japan's Folkloristic Monsters Spring for Human Morals

M.W. Shores

Fantastic Beings with Human Qualities

This chapter explores the monster lore of Japan. Like other places in the world, this country has more supernatural beings than can be counted. They can be roughly divided into three groups – kami (gods), *yōkai* (a fluid term for supernatural beings), and yūrei (ghosts). This chapter focuses primarily on yōkai, though there will be some discussion of the others. The primary argument is that, while yōkai and other beings were once feared and dreaded as the gatekeepers of morality, from Japan's early modern era (1600–1868) they were employed to question notions of morality and conventional wisdom. They also sprung forth to entertain and thus came to be loved by mortals. This chapter examines several cases in early modern as well as modern literature, art, and performance and shows that, despite their diversity, Japan's monsters have key elements in common. They are largely misunderstood and therefore deserve sympathy; despite being otherworldly, they regularly display human characteristics and eccentricities; they have a purpose that serves humans; and those that are inherently 'bad' are usually easily outwitted. As vulgar representations of unofficial culture, Japan's ghoulish creatures stand – and float and shapeshift – in haunting opposition to "official culture, political oppression, and totalitarian order through

Shores, M.W. 2024. Japan's Folkloristic Monsters Spring for Human Morals. In B. Nickl & M. Rolfe. (Eds.) *Moral Dimensions of Humour: Essays on Humans, Heroes and Monsters*. Tampere: Tampere University Press, 205–230. https://doi.org/10.61201/tup.896

laughter, parody, and 'grotesque realism'",[1] and are a key example of the wider trend of humour uprooting guideposts for traditional morality.

Tokugawa Ieyasu (1553–1616) and his heirs heavy-handedly unified Japan at the beginning of the seventeenth century and so began the country's early modern era, also called the Edo (and Tokugawa) period. The shogunate relocated the emperor to Edo (modern Tokyo) from Kyoto, ordered *daimyō* (warlords) throughout Japan to reside in Edo in alternating years, implemented travel bans and seclusion policies, and enforced a four-tier class system. The warrior class officially ruled Japan, but it was the merchants and some who fell outside of the class system – most famously kabuki actors and geisha – who won financial and popular influence. This shift naturally caused tension. Outright criticism of the ruling class could be punishable by death. The response from the public was carnival. The crude, lewd, and ludicrous came to be prized in all forms of popular entertainment. As literacy rates skyrocketed, so too did Japan's commercial publishing industry flourish. Countless new arts emerged and thrived. It was in this milieu that an unprecedented number of ghosts and monsters came to life or took new form.

Gods, monsters, and other fantastic beings have been prominent in Japan since at least the eighth century. They have been a fixture in Japanese literature, theatre, and art for more than a millennium. Before the early modern era, their primary function was to scare people into behaving morally or punish those who did not. These beings tended not to be comical or friendly. They were a far cry from, say, the warm-hearted Totoro – a large forest sprite that resembles a cat, owl, and *tanuki* (raccoon dog) – of Miyazaki Hayao's (b. 1941) prize-winning *Tonari no Totoro* (My Neighbor Totoro, 1988). Most creatures were not inherently malevolent, but they could be powerful, fierce, and unpredictable. There was widespread belief in supernatural beings among all classes, from aristocrats to itinerant performers.

In the early modern era, Japan's monsters were increasingly employed to amuse. This development can be attributed to the rapid rise in commoner literacy and easy access to printed materials during this period. Another factor was that Japan was finally at peace after many years of war. Samurai and commoners alike revelled in play. They loved creating and reading spoofs on the classics and loved simply being irreverent. Mixing the vulgar with the elegant was at the heart of Japanese popular culture. Japan's imposing line-up of monsters from folklore was often recast as playful. Monsters took on such a human form, or at least persona, that they served as suitable stand-ins for humans when they wished to say something that might otherwise have been unsafe to express.

Monsters were employed to indirectly express criticism and discontent. These creatures were not used to incite a revolution, however. They were used to test limits. They were a tool for subtle and humorous transgression until shogunal rule came to an end in 1868. They continued showing their ugly and funny faces (if they had them) throughout the twentieth century. Today, Japanese monsters routinely

[1] Leitch, et al., "Mikhail M. Bakhtin", 1187.

make appearances around the globe. Their looks and antics can be frightening to the uninitiated, but the truth is that they usually come intending to help humans. Some aim to right wrongs or warn of impending disasters. For example, the onset of COVID-19 saw the popular return of a monster from Japan's past, the *amabie*, a glowing-green water spirit with scales, long hair, three fin-like legs, and a beak – on social media and elsewhere it was said to be trying to ward off another plague.

Two Representative Yōkai: Tanuki and Oni

There is an incredible spectrum of yōkai in Japan. The most prominent are perhaps tanuki and *oni* (ogres). Enormously different, they are pervasive in Japanese lore as well as the Japanese consciousness. They have even snuck into language. Tanuki can be seen in words such as *tanuki udon* (noodle soup served with bits of fried batter and chopped green onions), *tanukigao* (a face made when feigning ignorance), and *tanuki ne* (feigning sleep). All these words have something to do with deception, a key tanuki characteristic. Oni are seen in words such as *onigawara* (ogre roof tiles, comparable to gargoyles), *oni gokko* (game of tag), and *oniba* (snaggletooth). Popular adages include *Tanuki ga hito ni bakasareru* (tanuki get bewitched by humans, or, the tables can be turned) and *Oni ga hotoke no hayagawari* (oni become buddhas in the blink of an eye, or, bad people act like angels when in the spotlight).

Tanuki (*Nyctereutes procyonoides viverrinus*) are neither racoons nor dogs. They are real animals but in folklore, they are magical shapeshifters. In a few tales they can be mean or frightening, but in most cases, they are harmless tricksters. They are portrayed as benevolent, protecting children who are being bullied and even turning into winning lottery tickets to pay back debts to humans. Perhaps the best-known tale that features a tanuki is *Bunbuku chagama* (Lucky Tea Kettle). In one version of the story, a tea kettle is discovered to be a tanuki and is consequently abused. A tinker rescues and cares for the tanuki, who in turn makes its caretaker rich by performing acrobatics to large crowds. Thanks to its positive portrayal in folktales and other media, humans have gradually accepted tanuki as cohabitants. The *kitsune* (fox), another prominent shapeshifter in Japanese lore, are perceived oppositely.[2] Kitsune tend to be vindictive and untrustworthy. Tanuki are powerful creatures that can even change their surroundings, but they remain amusing and imperfect, sometimes with their mischievous schemes failing to comical effect. However amusing and kind or cute tanuki might be, they can still be ferocious when upholding morality or seeking revenge.

Oni are large ugly monsters that come in a range of colours, most typically red or green. They have horns, bulging eyes, and snaggleteeth. They are usually naked aside from a tiger-skin loincloth, leaving their hulking muscles and bloated bellies

[2] In some tales, kitsune and tanuki are interchangeable.

exposed. Along with their inborn surly grimaces and gigantic clubs, the oni initially looks quite intimidating. But upon closer inspection, these yōkai – like their Western counterparts – are often slow and dim-witted. Oni are more hostile than tanuki and some even have an appetite for humans. Yet oni rarely pose a great danger as they can be easily outwitted. Despite their hideous faces (in artistic depictions, etc.), there is something in oni that strikes one as poignant and perhaps even endearing.

Early Modern Monsters

In the centuries before the early modern era, Japan was at war with itself, and long periods of peace were rare. When Ieyasu unified the country – officially in 1603 – a sense of relief ensued. The era of "Great Peace" commenced. Although government and society remained far from perfect, people could turn their minds to things other than unrest, armed conflict, and fearing for their lives. Society was divided into four authorized classes – samurai at the top, followed by farmers, artisans, then merchants. Buddhist monks being the main exception, most others (from actors and prostitutes to tanners and other 'defiled' people) were deemed as detestable non-people. Still, the Great Peace afforded a sunnier life to virtually everyone. The warrior class determined the moral and behavioural codes that all in the realm were to live by, which were largely rooted in Confucianism. If there were no direct challenges to those at the top, those below enjoyed a good number of freedoms and therein found time for leisure. Literacy rates soared and Japanese people revelled in myriad forms of play, particularly in the three major urban centres of Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka. Monsters appeared in literature, art, performing arts, and other sectors.

Mami Kataoka of Tokyo's Mori Art Museum recently wrote that "a sensitivity toward the unseen world… has been preserved in Japanese culture for thousands of years".[3] One can bring this viewpoint into perspective when recalling Japan's long history of worshipping Shinto spirits, which are housed in countless natural and sacred objects and spaces. One also recalls the many deities in the Buddhist pantheon, some of which are monstrously wrath-filled and strikingly visualised in paintings and statues. It was under the influence of Buddhism that deities and yōkai – previously invisible – were brought to life.[4] By the Edo period, supernatural beings were at the heart of Japanese beliefs. This is particularly so for yōkai, which "are akin to the beings and beasts of European folklore [human-like to animalesque] … but also include amorphous intangible phenomena… Many of these creatures are shapeshifters who, in the guise of humans or other animals, cause all manner of mischief, mayhem and sometimes even murder".[5]

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[3] Kataoka, "Listening Today to a Warning from the Invisible World", 13.

[4] Kazuhiko, "From the Past into the Future", 36.

[5] Foster, "Yōkai, Fantastic Beasts of Japan", 42.

Scholars have pointed out that one of the intersections between high and low in the Edo period was a taste for the weird. Early Edo authors continued a tradition of presenting ghosts and monsters in their work, just as priests and others had done since ancient times.[6] But, differently than their predecessors, who usually employed supernatural beings to frighten people into behaving morally, Edo-period authors intended to thrill and amuse their readers or criticize those in power. With these updated monsters, one sees an inversion of what was happening in previous generations. There remained a cadre of monsters written to shock and terrify – not unlike horror genres today – but also many more monsters were now on the scene to play and take advantage of the pleasures of the human world, not least of all fashion, food, and drink. And it is quite clear that humans liked playing in the world of monsters. From the seventeenth century, countless people gathered to tell spooky stories. Such events came to be called *hyaku monogatari* (lit. one hundred [scary] tales). Participants would take turns telling scary stories and extinguishing a candle after each one. The party would grow darker (and more spine-chilling) until all sources of light were out. There were variations on the rules, but the name of the game was putting one's mettle to the test. The act of using monsters to have fun was one more way to laugh at old views on morality and surreptitiously pick at the brocade of official society.

Literature in the Early Modern Era

In 1677, an unknown author in Kyoto published a book titled *Shokoku hyaku monogatari* (One Hundred Tales from Various Provinces). It contains a range of stories, from frightening to funny. The truly scary stories feature human ghosts and the comical feature yōkai. In one, a rōnin who loves *sake* quells a troublesome shapeshifting monster. He tricks it with flattery, then after asking it to change into a pickled plum, chomps it up and washes it down with his beloved drink, then is handsomely rewarded by the emperor to boot. In another story, a shapeshifting tanuki gets grisly revenge on a monk who had caused the supernatural animal to burn its paws. In a dream, the monk is told by the Amida Buddha (Amitābha) that he must take the penance of fire but would be rescued and enlightened as a result. He accordingly makes arrangements and many gather to attend the rite. After he is set ablaze, "all of the buddhas [appear] and burst out laughing in unison. … two to three thousand tanuki [flee] into the mountains".[7] The source of humour is easy to see in the first story. A rōnin desperate for a way out of his unfortunate circumstances, tricks and eats a yōkai then gets rewarded. In the second story, tanuki get revenge on the cruel human and enjoy the last morbid laugh. The story critiques superficial piety with a reminder

[6] Jones and Watanabe, *An Edo Anthology*, 22.

[7] Anonymous, "One Hundred Tales from the Various Provinces", 193.

that tanuki, while usually jovial tricksters, can be vengeful, dangerous creatures if abused.

Satire could be a dangerous business in early modern Japan. Writers were fined or locked up for taking shots at the government, and one man was executed in 1759 for stepping too far over the line.[8] Writing monsters into stories was one way of ducking censors because, on the surface at least, monsters appeared too playful or frivolous to be taken seriously. The writer who was executed, Baba Bunkō (1718–1759), was a samurai who had fallen from grace. Though once in the service of the shogun, he later became known as a public speaker who could collect a fee from attendees. In 1758 he published *Tōdai Edo hyaku bakemono* (One Hundred Monsters in Edo of our Time), a satire that lampoons twenty-seven disreputable people from all walks of life, presenting them as hypocrites, "monsters … who appear and disappear, tricking people".[9] Here Baba uses monsters as a metaphor and the humour is in the suggestion that these people are freaks of nature by simply being themselves.

Writers learned to more or less steer clear of censors for fear of being incarcerated or worse. Jippensha Ikku (1765–1831), one of early modern Japan's most prolific and profitable authors, was a king of the comical. A few years after he himself had been manacled for fifty days, he wrote *Bakemono no yomeiri* (The Monster Takes a Bride, 1807), a spoof on Japanese marriage customs. Ikku sets the story in the world of monsters, and everything is inverted, from matchmaking and betrothal to the customary shrine visit following the birth of a newborn. Every character is a monster. The bride is "a monster through and through with not one feature to recommend her" and the groom has "scraggly whiskers and … scummy teeth".[10] Casting an entourage of drolly irreverent monsters in his book – waggishly modelled on popular books that may have served as actual "marriage manuals" – Ikku rendered matrimonial customs grotesque, thus censuring them. At the hideous couple's banquet – the cook strips meat from human limbs and serves guests the best part, the bones. The narrator drives home how tedious a wedding can be: "The young couple bill and coo as they fawn over each other, more anxious than ever for the ceremonies to end. Still, the customary toasts continue far into the night. How utterly vexing!"[11] Ikku uses monsters to humorously call out humans as the real monsters, who vainly attach excessive importance to tradition and religion.

In one more literary example, *Funadama monogatari* (Tale of the Guardian Deity of Boats, 1821), Sakuragawa no Musume Shōchō presents a fictional vendetta carried out by two young men after they trek across Japan in pursuit of their parents' killer. The work is packed with tragedy and heartbreak and contains comic relief, like many kabuki plays. In one scene, a mystical toad, obsessed by the unparalleled beauty of the young woman Tamaki, casts a spell on her. She soon falls sick and "her complexion

[8] Bunkō, "One Hundred Monsters in Edo of Our Time", 103.

[9] Ibid, 105.

[10] Ikku, "A Monster Takes a Bride", 143, 145.

[11] Ibid, 159.

grew frightful, and her stomach bloated. Her arms and legs shrank, and she wholly came to resemble a toad. She bore no comparison to her relatives whatsoever".[12] The juxtaposition of supreme beauty and revolting ugliness is a bit startling, but it is rendered comical thanks to an overblown illustration of the metamorphosis. Despite such a horrid transformation, Tamaki remains a model of virtue. It is the toad spirit that is evil and serves to tell readers that all in the world is not what it seems. And those caught up in obsession and greed – including (or particularly) those possessing great power – may end up in similar hell-like limbos.

Shapeshifting is a recurring theme in *Funadama monogatari*. In another scene, the villain Araishi Toyata comes to an eerie temple, where he decides to pass the night. Around midnight, noise comes from the ceiling before a giant arm "with hair as thick as nails" moves toward him. The agile rōnin remains composed and quickly overpowers the enormous arm. Comically, it turns out to belong to a small, mischievous, shapeshifting tanuki. Araishi promptly ties up the yōkai and, the following day receives a hero's welcome from the local villagers who had been troubled by the tanuki for some time. But this tanuki attack is hard to read as a case of simple trickery. Araishi is a fugitive who has abused the privileges that come with his samurai status. For a yōkai to go on the offensive, however laughably, suggests that samurai – supposed models of virtue and morality – must be censured when unethical and when, as in this case, a plague on society.

Art in the Early Modern Era

The books mentioned above are heavily illustrated, so they could also be discussed under the present heading. They will not be treated as such here, however, as they were conceived of and produced as commercial literary products. The books' illustrations attract a good deal of interest, but book illustrations tend to not be considered an artist's finest work (though it may have been an important source of income). Art of a much higher quality was expected for illustrated scrolls and *ukiyo-e* (lit. woodblock prints depicting Japan's "floating world"), which feature a wide range of topics from daily life and travel to kabuki and licensed pleasure districts. The supernatural, too, was frequently taken up in ukiyo-e and other media.[13] Let us look at a few examples.

A late Edo-period scroll that stands out as both impressive and humorous is Itaya Hiroharu's (1831–1882) *Hyakki yagyō* (Night Procession of the Hundred Demons, ca. 1860). The scroll's title gives the impression that the work is spooky but, upon close inspection, it features an impressive parade of yōkai, all looking rather idiotic with grins and bulging eyes. They appear to be mumbling to themselves or speaking to

12 Sakuragawa, "Tale of the Guardian Deity of Boats".

13 Supernatural creatures featured in board games, kimono, masks, *netsuke* (toggles), pottery, statues, toys, and more.

one another. Most have ears, but one wonders if they are actually listening or can even hear. In addition to many oni, one finds a *kappa* (water sprite), monkey, rabbits, mice, as well as *tsukogami*, household items that have transformed from inanimate to animate because they "have been neglected and, after they reach one hundred years of age, grow arms and legs and come to life".[14]

Where are the creatures in this procession going? Viewing the scroll in sequence, from right to left, they come out in great numbers with the dark and proceed to revel and carry on through the night until dawn breaks. Then they are forced to disperse, similar perhaps to when Dracula sees the light of day. This is a monstrous carnival, but the monsters are depicted with human qualities and popular interests, so the scroll is also a statement of resistance against rulers who heavy-handedly insist that commoners be meek and orderly subjects.

Figure 1: Itaya Hiroharu, handscroll "Hyakki yagyō (Night Procession of the Hundred Demons)" (detail), ink and colour on paper, circa 1860. Image © Art Gallery of New South Wales.

The monsters in Hiroharu's scroll haunt only the viewer who is unable to see that this procession is a festival. Yōkai dance and are occupied with keeping lesser (or more fearsome?) creatures from clawing and biting their way out of baskets and chests. One can almost hear music and footsteps as the monsters shuffle forward. Several musical instruments are in on the fun, too. Night-time processions such as this one had been depicted for centuries by the time Hiroharu painted his scroll. Earlier examples are more disconcerting, particularly the work of Toriyama Sekien (1712–1788), which became "the model for the codification and visual representation of yōkai".[15] Sekien's depictions of apparitions show gruesome creatures appearing to writhe in pain, wallow in loneliness, or be stricken with horror. They reach out as if desiring to inflict their dilemmas on the world of the living. There is an ominous and didactical quality to early examples. Hiroharu's scroll pays homage to Sekien's models, but he intends to parody and amuse, not to strike fear into the viewer. If one were to run into Hiroharu's ghoulish procession, one would doubtless be surprised, but one may be just as inclined to join the merrymaking.

As mentioned, tanuki can be funny and clever shapeshifters. Indeed, one of their famous attributes is their giant malleable scrota. At many restaurants in Japan today, one still finds large ceramic tanuki, anthropomorphic, wearing hats and standing on two legs, with their enormous members resting on the ground. Placing something

[14] Foster, "Yōkai, Fantastic Beasts of Japan", 13.

[15] Eastburn, "Japan Supernatural", 15.

humorous like this at the entrance is considered auspicious in Japan. As the adage goes, *Warau kado ni fuku kitaru* (fortune comes to gates merry with laughter). In 1836, Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1798–1861) painted pieces for an untitled series of woodblock prints that featured the incredible size and versatility of the tanuki scrotum. Some fashion their male parts into hats and umbrellas, others sit on rooves and let their scrota droop down to be used as store signs. One is a roadside fortune-teller that has fashioned its scrotum into an awning to keep the summer sun from beating down on its head. The list goes on.

Kuniyoshi's tanuki prints are hilariously irreverent. What makes them funnier is the fact that these tanuki take the place of humans in various indoor and outdoor scenes at stores, performing amateur nō and sideshow acts, net fishing, and more. All have rather fetching tanuki faces and they wear the latest fashions. Their scrota, however outlandish and funny, retain a degree of realism. This tongue-in-cheek explicitness was "perhaps intended to satisfy both censors and the market for lewd imagery and erotica".[16] As discussed, tanuki in some contexts could be frightening, but Kuniyoshi's prints show that tanuki, however tricky and magical, were celebrated in playful art and depicted in a human-like fashion. They became heroes of sorts because they could do exactly as they pleased, seemingly oblivious to the ethics and morality prescribed by the political and religious elite.

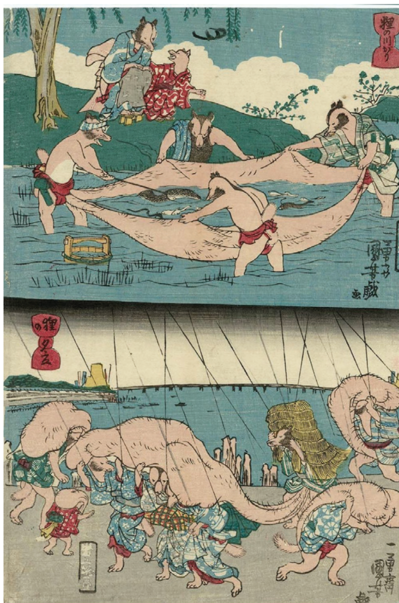

Figure 2: Utagawa Kuniyoshi, "Tanuki no kawagari, tanuki yūdachi (Tanuki Evening Shower, Tanuki River Fishing)", woodblock print, ink and colour on paper, circa 1843–1844. William Sturgis Bigelow Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

16 Folan, "Strange Seduction", 68.

In a final example of yōkai in fine art, let us briefly look at *netsuke* (toggles), which Adam Kern says were not just toggles, but also the (handy, functional and fashionable) "[e]xquisitely carved and delightfully detailed… action figures of their day".[17] Today few people in Japan wear kimonos on a daily basis because they are expensive, and one needs a good deal of knowledge to know how to properly wear and care for them. Before the twentieth century, on the contrary, kimonos were quite an everyday affair. There was a much wider range of kimono available too, corresponding to different seasons and budgets. There were also all kinds of kimono accessories. Kimonos do not have pockets, so it was common to hold items in one's *obi* (sash). Items like folding fans could simply be slid in and secured, but other items, such as decorative tobacco pouches and pillcases, were secured with netsuke and left to dangle about the waist. Netsuke came in countless designs and naturally included supernatural creatures, from oni and *tengu* (long-nosed [or beaked] mountain goblins) to folktale heroes and gods of fortune.

As one might guess, tanuki were popular as netsuke, too. One at The Art Gallery of New South Wales, carved from stag horn, holds a sake bottle at its side and is either walking in the rain or incognito – it has pulled its scrotum up over its back, placing it on its head as if a sedge hat (see Figure 3 and 4). What is said by a piece such as this? It playfully alludes to the notion that tanuki and other supernatural tricksters are in our midst. Perhaps the man who wore this accessory posited that he himself was a trickster among men. The point of netsuke is *share* (fashion, taste). Yōkai were popular in various media and put at the heart of parlour games. To wear a tastefully irreverent tanuki at one's waist showed that one was both stylish and good-humoured and was perhaps a tongue-in-cheek way of presenting that one understood that the centre of gravity in moral guidance was shifting and that they were cheerfully on board with that shift.

Figures 3 & 4: Artist unknown, "Tanuki (4.9 x 2.2 x 2.5 cm, carrying a sake bottle and covering its head with its scrotum)", stag horn; "Oni (3.2 x 2.7 cm, chanting a Buddhist sutra)", stained ivory; late 18th to early 19th century and 19th century, respectively. Images © Art Gallery of New South Wales.

[17] Kern, "Japan Supernatural", 182.

Performance in the Early Modern Era

Monsters and especially ghosts have appeared on Japan's stages for centuries. One could argue that the nō theatre would lose much of its interest if it did not come with its many ghosts. Spirits and fantastic creatures are also featured in kabuki and *ningyō jōruri* (also simply *jōruri*, or *bunraku* puppet theatre). Some of these are humorous, but just as many are scary, especially in late-Edo kabuki. An increased presence of horror and the grotesque in arts and media pointed to the fact that all was not well in the realm.

The play *Tamamo no mae asahi no tamoto* (Tamamo-no-mae and the Sleeve of the Morning Sun, 1751) was written for the jōruri theatre and then later adapted for kabuki. The play is a period piece that features Tamamo-no-mae, who is bewitched by a seven-tail fox who is out to kill the emperor and take power. Of special interest in both versions are the rapid changes Tamamo-no-mae undergoes, from human to fox and back. At the end of the kabuki version, Tamamo-no-mae turns into a blind masseur, a young girl, and a footman before turning into a stone. In jōruri, shapeshifting is made possible with mechanized puppets. The puppeteer flips the hair forward over the human face and spins the head to reveal a fox face, which has an opening and closing mouth. There is also a dedicated fox puppet employed, operated by one or more puppeteers. Numerous puppet heads in jōruri can quickly change from human to supernatural creatures.

To experience the playful incorporation of monsters in performance, one does well to look to comic storytelling, which developed and flourished in Japan's urban centres from the seventeenth century into modern times. Storytellers presented a range of tropes, and yōkai were among the many characters. There were genuine ghost stories told to give audiences starts and chills (particularly in the hot months), but one could also hear and read stories with laughable monsters (comic stories were published in books called *hanashibon*). The following story is from Shikitei Sanba's (1776–1822) *Odokebanashi Edo kishō* (Funny Tales: Edo Happy Laughter, 1806). It is clear from the preface that this was performed along with twenty-one other stories at a competition that Sanba organized with some of his renowned writer friends, all of whom shared a love for comic storytelling.

> *Bake narai* (Learning How to Shapeshift)
>
> Facing its child, a father tanuki said, "It's about time you started shapeshifting! Look at those pups over there. They're all properly changing form, taking over for their parents. Even if you never can be as good as the tanuki of old, these days all you have to do to apprentice is open your ears. Now learn how to shapeshift already!" "Okay", the young tanuki said, "I'll do it if you and mom play some music for me". Thinking this a simple request, the tanuki couple picked up a flute and drum and began to play, *hyuu doro hyuu doro*.

> They called for him to shapeshift, but the young tanuki stayed in his hole and wouldn't step out. They continued, *hyuu doro hyuu doro*. "Here we go!" they shouted. "Enter on cue! Shapeshift already!" *Hyuu doro hyuu doro*. "Oh, he's hopeless", the father snapped. "Why won't you come out of that damn hole? Get your tail out here!" As they continued playing *hyuu doro hyuu doro*, the young tanuki poked out his head. "Even with all that… I'm still shy".[18]

The humour is created by putting tanuki in a very human situation, here a touching vignette of home life. One could 'shift' the characters by simply replacing "tanuki" with "person" and "shapeshifting" with, say, "doing chores". This is another case that shows that people popularly looked towards yōkai with affection, likening them to themselves. This story comes across as harmless, but it still speaks to the young and new supplanting the old. Resistance to tradition and societal expectations does not bring about a revolution, but it pokes fun at conventional wisdom and playfully prods at its boundaries.

Modern Monsters

The Meiji period (1868–1912) is frequently cited as the time when Japan became 'modern'. However, it remains evident in arts and literature as well as other sectors such as domestic travel, marketing, and urban planning, that Japan had been modernizing for decades before this. Still, there is no question that the country changed more rapidly after Commodore Matthew Perry sailed to Japan in 1853 to oblige the country to open for trade and normalize relations with the outside world. Increased contact with and pressure from the West sent Japan scrambling to do everything it could to show that it was hardly in need of 'enlightenment'. Japan strived to prove that it was neither a feudal nor a savage society. Japan's leaders knew that the West had invaded and colonized its neighbours, so many in Japan feared that they might be next. Japan's course of action was to demonstrate that it had its own great culture, history, infrastructure, and traditions.

A consequence of this feverish push was that various forms of play – particularly frivolous and vulgar wordplay, works of a sexual or scatological nature, unrefined humour, and the like – were deemed unhelpful to the cause. Many argued that this had to be done away with or repackaged in line with the country's aspirations. Japanese language was standardized according to the Tokyo dialect and countless new words were introduced on top of all the changes. Intellectuals endeavoured to update the written language so that it would reflect the new age and the 'progress' that Japan was making. The reality was that, in many regards, Japan was figuratively speeding down the road with little time to determine where it was headed.

[18] Mutō and Oka, *Hanashibon taikei*, 198–199.

Japan's yōkai came along for the ride and they too were impacted by the changes taking place. Indeed, Japan's strange creatures sometimes violently clashed with modernity as their territory was invaded. One tale, of which several versions were told throughout the country, features a tanuki that imitates the *shu-shu po-po-po* sound of a steam locomotive only to be struck and killed. As Michael Foster points out, "one reason for the legend's resilience during the early years of the twentieth century is that on a metaphorical level it betrays deep ambivalence about modernity, and a sense of loss for the natural environment and local traditions that the train, as the vehicle of progress, would destroy".[19]

Literature in the Modern Era

Some yōkai found their way into modern Japanese literature, but, since there was a constant call for realistic work with greater psychological depth, troubled humans often replaced supernatural beings. Fictional protagonists (sometimes authors with thinly veiled disguises) were often listless 'monsters' who drank too much, betrayed family members and friends, acted out sexually and violently, or otherwise flouted societal expectations. Classic cases include Shimazaki Tōson's (1872–1943) *Hakai* (Broken Commandment, 1906), Tayama Katai's (1872–1930) *Futon* (Blanket, 1907), Shiga Naoya's (1883–1971) *An'ya kōro* (Dark Night's Passing, 1921–1937), and Dazai Osamu's (1909–1948) *Ningen shikkaku* (Disqualified as Human, 1948).

New monsters were 'created' in the scientific sense, too. As Miri Nakamura writes, "Within [the] context of promoting new and improved national bodies, images of monstrosity also proliferated: pathogenic women, evil twins, psychological doppelgängers, and humanoid automata".[20] Edogawa Ranpo (1894–1965), arguably Japan's greatest writer of detective fiction, wrote *Sōseiji* (Twins, 1923), which features an evil twin who plots to take over his brother's life. Scholars have interpreted this dark double, considering Tokyo's transformations and technological advances, as a reflection of ego. The author expresses anxieties about the mutation of Japanese cultural identity and colonialism, along with other facets of culture.[21]

Japan was set on a course to 'catch up' with the West and model how other nations could quickly do so. However, in response, some people began gravitating toward tradition to escape or counter the fast pace, exhaustion, and dizzying number of new movements of the modern era. Intellectuals such as Izumi Kyōka (1873–1939) and Yanagita Kunio (1875–1962) specifically sought out the fantastic and supernatural in Japan's folktales and legends because they felt these enriched their writings along with Japanese life. They believed the Naturalist movement was incapable of producing

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19 Foster, "Haunting Modernity", 12. Also appears in Weinstock, *A Monster Theory Reader.*

20 Nakamura, *Monstrous Bodies,* 2.

21 Ibid, 45.

this effect.[22] Yumeno Kyūsaku (1889–1936), best known for his final novel *Dogura magura* (Trickery, 1935), regarded as a "nonsensical, metafictional work", but one that wages "personal critique of the irrationality and criminality exhibited by society",[23] published the following short story in the newspaper *Kyūshū Nippō* on 21 November 1923.

> *Tanuki to Yotarō* (Tanuki and Yotarō)
>
> Every day Yotarō went to play in the neighbouring village and came home through the forest before sundown.
> He did this because his mother told him, "That forest has tanuki that change into all kinds of things – come home before the sun sets or you'll be scared to death".
> One day, Yotarō lost track of time while playing and started for home after dark. As he walked into the forest, a ten-foot-tall *hitotsume* (cyclops) entered the path before him.
> "Wow, that's a big old man", Yotarō said. "And he's only got one eyeball. How interesting. Won't you come home and play with me?"
> As he gazed at the hitotsume, it turned into a *rokurokubi*.
> "Wow, it just turned into a woman with a beautiful long neck", Yotarō said. "That's strange. How does your neck get so long? Try to stretch it out even longer. Longer!"
> Then the rokurokubi turned into an oni.
> "Yay, you've turned into an oni", Yotarō delighted. "And you look just like one of those seasonal festival dolls. This is fun! Turn into all kinds of other things now!"
> Yotarō wasn't a bit afraid of the monsters, so, now bored, the tanuki returned to its natural state. Seeing this, Yotarō's face went pale.
> "Oh no! It's a tanuki! I'll be in big trouble it starts shapeshifting! Somebody, help me!"
> Yotarō ran away as fast as he could.

Kyūsaku's story depicts a tanuki in the traditional sense, but the moral of the story – that 'monsters' exist only if one is told that they do, if one buys into the tale – relates to a gross outrage of the day. In the aftermath of the country's most catastrophic disaster, the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1 September 1923, Japanese people demonized, terrorised, and murdered Korean residents (then colonial subjects) in response to bogus rumours about their being a danger to society. Government agencies and news outlets scrambled to cover up the matter, and little justice was ever served, but this tanuki tale makes an indirect statement about who society's real monsters were.

[22] Figal, *Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan*, 157.

[23] Nakamura, *Monstrous Bodies*, 98, 101.

Art in the Modern Era

Kawanabe Kyōsai's (1831–1889) woodblock print titled *Bakebake gakkō* (Monster School, 1874; see Figure 5) is a lampoon of the education reforms that were carried out during the Meiji period. In the loud, colourful piece, monster teachers in formal Western dress teach monster students, most of whom wear kimono. Teachers use pointers and have students repeat the lessons on the board. One sees Latin characters in both print and cursive. One monster, appearing to be the headmaster, gives a tour to another that looks like a magistrate or politician – it wears fine leather shoes and dawns a top hat. Yōkai in the print include oni, tengu, and kappa. Even some of the furniture – and front gateway – is alive and goggling about. There is some order to the scene, but it is simultaneously chaotic, no doubt a statement about the times and how foolish Japanese people looked as they rushed to get with the program of modern, Western-style education.

Figure 5: Kawanabe Kyōsai, "Bakebake gakkō (Monster School, no. 3 from the series Ōju Kyōsai rakuga, Kyōsai's Drawings for Pleasure)", woodblock print, ink and colour on paper, 1874. Image © Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Tsukioka Yoshitoshi's (1839–1892) supernatural subjects are far more realistic and polished. They can be bone-chilling, too, so much so that viewers of the time may have suspected that modern science indeed rules out the world of the supernatural. His woodblock prints of murders and vengeful ghosts particularly stand out, but his yōkai are equally impressive. They are so meticulously detailed that they seem to leap off the paper. Yoshitoshi covered lighter subjects, such as a tanuki lost in thought in *Morinji no bunbuku chagama* (Lucky Tea Kettle at the Temple Morinji, 1892), as well as

more malevolent monsters, such as the ones that lurch toward an elderly woman who has fallen to the ground and appears to be losing her mind in *Omoi tsuzura* (Heavy Basket), both from the series *Shingata sanjūrokkaisen* (Thirty-Six Apparitions in New Form, 1892). Yoshitoshi painted these because the macabre was a popular favourite, but it – along with a slew of other genres from art, theatre, and sideshow acts – stood to question the wisdom of politicians and other intellectuals who endeavoured to mould Japan into a modern nation-state – with its own respectable institutions and traditions – that even Western countries would commend.

As Japan moved further into the twentieth century, people grew attracted to new forms of art and entertainment and yōkai gradually retreated into the darkness. Some academics and other members of the populace remained enthusiastic about the country's innumerable supernatural beings and their place in cultural history, but it was not until the 1960s that yōkai again became a popular culture favourite. As Melanie Eastburn points out, Mizuki Shigeru (1922–2015), the creator of the manga and anime *GeGeGe no Kitarō* (Spooky Kitarō), along with film director Kuroda Yoshiyuki (1928–2015), reinvigorated Japan's yōkai tradition in the second half of the twentieth century. Mizuki, also a historian, was inspired by yōkai of old and in turn influenced the work of contemporary artist Murakami Takashi (b. 1962).[24]

The world of the supernatural features prominently in Murakami's work as it (along with death) does in the work of other contemporary artists, such as Aoshima Chiho (b. 1974) and Matsui Fuyuko (b. 1974). However harmless or foreboding yōkai were presented as being, from the 1960s on, even with Japan's successes in the post-World War II era, a good deal of volatility remained in society, and this created an ideal atmosphere for all that was counterculture, including freakish and cute monsters, to flourish.

Performance in the Modern Era

Thanks in part to government subsidy, one can still enjoy traditional theatre art forms, such as jōruri, kabuki, kyōgen, and nō. Artists occasionally experiment and stage new plays, but these arts remain mostly unaltered thanks to authorized scripts and careful transmission. Therefore, the ghosts and monsters from these respective stages still entertain and stir audiences today. Monsters are found in other performing arts, too, such as *rakugo* (the modern descendent of earlier comic storytelling traditions). Like other traditional arts, rakugo has long-established artistic schools. Masters orally transmit stories to pupils as they did in previous centuries. Rakugo has no scripts, so each new generation of artists inevitably updates story content and language. While changes are made, the repertoire remains intact. This includes numerous stories set in

[24] Eastburn, "Japan Supernatural", 19.

the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and, in some of these, yōkai take centre stage.

One example is the story *Tanuki no sai* (Tanuki Die), which features a tanuki that repays its debt to a man (for saving its life) by turning into a die to help him win at gambling. When the man yells "eyeballs", this is a cue for the number two – the tanuki die lands face up showing its eyes, providing the win. Likewise, when the man shouts "butthole", this is a cue for tanuki to show the number one and... precisely. This tells listeners that humans can cohabitate and indeed collaborate with non-humans, but also important is that this story's protagonist (not to mention those in similar stories) is not getting with the program prescribed by Japan's leaders, choosing to spend his time less productively. His refusal to subscribe to the official agenda is equal to him laying his wager on a transfigured (or post-) morality.

One more rakugo example is *Jigoku bakkei* (Famous Sites of Hell). In the story, a man dies after eating spoiled mackerel. He walks toward the Sanzu River, which recently deceased people must cross to reach the afterlife. It is here that Great King Enma, who oversees punishments in hell, judges all souls. On his way, the man runs into some acquaintances. They cross the river in a boat punted along by an oni and learn about one of hell's bustling entertainment districts, which sits next to Nenbutsu (prayer) Town. It is said that those with a stock of sutras receive lighter judgment from Enma. Thus, while in Nenbutsu Town they pay for sutras according to their sects and means, then go to face the Great King. It is announced that today, to honour the one-thousandth anniversary of the previous Enma's death, souls will be given free passage to paradise if they can demonstrate an interesting act of some kind. Enma Town begins bustling on account of the "Hidden-Talent Contest". At the end of the event, four people – an acrobat, dentist, doctor, and yamabushi monk – are told to stay behind to be sent to hell. They manage to combine their skills to outwit an oni serving Enma until a *jindonki* (human-devouring oni) is called in to dispel with the men once and for all. The dentist tricks the jindonki and extracts all its teeth in one go. This only infuriates the monster, and it swallows the group whole. The story concludes with a remarkably absurd carnival inside the monster, where the men showcase their 'specialised' knowledge to navigate its interior and manipulate its body functions. As readers follow along, it is not difficult to imagine where they ultimately end up as they scheme their malodorous escape.

> DOCTOR: (*To DENTIST*) Oh great, thanks to you yanking out its teeth, it's gone and swallowed us whole! Now we're stuck in its stomach!
> YAMABUSHI: It looks to me like you've saved us. If those stone mills for teeth would've crunched down on us, that would have been it. Wait a minute… One, two, three… one of us is missing. It's the acrobat. Where is he? Oh, there he is, up there. He's hanging onto the uvula. (*To ACROBAT*) Hey, get down here!
> ACROBAT: Is it safe?

YAMABUSHI: Yes, come on down.
ACROBAT: Okay!
YAMABUSHI: Look at that. He's descending the ribs like a ladder. This guy's good.
ACROBAT: Okay, so here we are in the oni's stomach. What are we supposed to do now?
DOCTOR: If we stay here, we'll be dissolved.
YAMABUSHI: Dissolved?
DOCTOR: That's right. We can't stay here. I've got it – leave it to me.
YAMABUSHI: You?
DOCTOR: Yes. I'm a doctor after all.
ACROBAT: Sure, you're a doctor. But you're a quack!
DOCTOR: I may be a quack, but I at least know the basics. There's not much difference between human stomachs and oni stomachs. That means we can't stay here. We've got to find a way out. And look here, I've got my scalpel. Just a little slice–*suu*–right here and split this open and… here we go. Follow me!
DENTIST: Ha-ha. Wow, free from that stomach, look at how vast this place is.
DOCTOR: This is the oni's abdomen [Jpn. *hara*].
DENTIST: Oh, that's why it's so vast – it's a plain [Jpn. *hara*].
DOCTOR: Well, that's where the word originates.
DENTIST: There are all kinds of things in here.
DOCTOR: I know, right? Look at all the cords hanging down. See this one here? Go ahead, give it a tug.
DENTIST: Why? What does it do?
DOCTOR: Pull on it and it'll make the oni sneeze.
DENTIST: Yeah? Let's give it a go! (*pulls cord*)
JINDONKI: *Heekkushon*!
DENTIST: It sneezed! This is fun!
DOCTOR: See that thing over there that looks like a lever? Go ahead and lift it up. It pulls that tendon over there, see? That's the abdominal tendon. Give it a good tug this way and it'll give the oni stomach cramps.
ACROBAT: Just like this? *Uuun*! (*pulls with force*)
JINDONKI: *A ita-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta*!
ACROBAT: The oni's in pain! This is fun! Hey, what's this over here?
DOCTOR: Oh that. Go ahead and give it a tickle. It'll make the oni laugh.
YAMABUSHI: It'll laugh if I tickle this? This round thing here? Coochy-coochy-coo.
JINDONKI: *Ah-ha-ha*!
YAMABUSHI: It's laughing! This is fun!
DOCTOR: See the sack beneath that? Go ahead, give it a kick.
ACROBAT: What is it?
DOCTOR: It's a fart bag. Give it a kick and the oni will fart.

ACROBAT: *Bon*! (*kicks fart bag*)
JINDONKI: *Buuuuu*!
ACROBAT: Ha-ha-ha! That's funny. Hey, what would happen if we did everything at once?
DOCTOR: Well... if we did them all at once... the oni would sneeze, have cramps, laugh, and fart.
ACROBAT: Shall we make the oni suffer a bit?
DOCTOR: Not a bad idea. Okay, let's take our positions. Acrobat, would you mind going back up to the throat?
ACROBAT: To do what?
DOCTOR: Scrape at the oni's throat–that'll make it dry heave. You do that and we'll follow suit down here.
ACROBAT: Okay, got it. (*Climbs up*) I'll just climb up here and give it a good scratch like this (*scrapes*) and...
JINDONKI: *Ueee'*!
YAMABUSHI: It's working!
DOCTOR: Now you pull that!
YAMABUSHI: Okay!
JINDONKI: *Heekkushon*!
DENTIST: And now to pull this...
JINDONKI: *A ita-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta*!
YAMABUSHI: And how's this...
JINDONKI: *Ah-ha-ha*! ... *Buuuuu*!
DOCTOR: Good! Let's all pitch in.
YAMABUSHI: You pull that, and I'll pull this.
DOCTOR: I'll pull this and kick that at the same time. Everybody get ready to go on the count of three. Ready? One-two-three!
ACROBAT: Take that!
JINDONKI: *Ueee'*!
YAMABUSHI: And that!
JINDONKI: *Haakkushon*!
DENTIST: Take that!
JINDONKI: *A ita-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta*!
DOCTOR: And that!
JINDONKI: *Ah-ha-ha! ... Buuuuu!*
Gee'uu', hakkushon, aita-ta-ta, ah-ha-ha, buu–gee'uu', hakkushon, aita-ta-ta... ah-ha-ha... buu!
Oh, what the hell is going on? Those bastards are in my gut running amuck! I've gotta get to the toilet and crap those little turds out! Dammit!
DENTIST: Hey, the oni's saying it's going to go to the toilet.

DOCTOR: No, we can't have that. We've got to stay here and make it pay. If we're expelled, there's no telling what might become of us. Move down, move down!
DENTIST: Move down for what?
DOCTOR: Trust me, just head toward the bowel.
YAMABUSHI: Yes, but wouldn't that actually put us in the toilet?
DOCTOR: Never mind that. If we stay up here, we could be done in if it takes some medicine. Just go down. Come on, as far as you can go!
DENTIST: You keep saying go down, but… At the bottom I can see a light flickering on and off.
DOCTOR: That's the oni's anus.
DENTIST: It's anus? Oh, it's opening and squeezing tight. Be careful, or else we'll fall out.
DOCTOR: Don't let yourselves fall! Okay, right here. Stop at the anus and cling to the flesh. Dig in with your feet like this. You take hold here and stretch your legs out as far as you can; and I'll do the opposite on this side. You lie down above us and, that's right, we'll fashion ourselves into a well curb. No matter how much the oni exerts itself, no matter what it does, we'll be fine like this. Just don't lose your grip!
ACROBAT: Okay! No letting go!
DOCTOR: Dig those feet in! Hold on tight!
YAMABUSHI: Good. I'll hold tight from above, like this.
DENTIST: I've got my position, too.
JINDONKI: Those damn fools! How I'll make them pay once I've got them out… *Uunto*! (*pushes*)
ACROBAT: Hold on!
JINDONKI: Bastards!
YAMABUSHI: That piece of shit! This is *real* shit we're dealing with now!
JINDONKI: *Uunto*! (*pushes*)
DENTIST: Oh dear, I almost lost my grip there!
JINDONKI: *Uuun*!
YAMABUSHI: Whoa, I just about fell!
JINDONKI: *Uuu*, oh… (*cries*) Those bastards just won't come out! Fine, there's only one thing left to do… Master Enma!
ENMA: What is it?
JINDONKI: You're my last hope. I've got to swallow you now.
ENMA: Swallow me? What in hell for?
JINDONKI: I need to take some *Daiō*, so I can crap these guys out.[25]

[25] Beichō, *Beichō rakugo zenshū*, 77–81. *Daiō* (Great King, i.e., Enma) is a play on *daiō* (rhubarb root and rhizome), which has numerous medical uses including relieving indigestion. One might liberally translate the punchline, "I need to take Enma because I need an enema".

Not all rakugo is this absurd or grotesque, but punchlines tend to end stories in this fashion abruptly. The four men are left in the oni's body and there is no clear plan as to how they will get out and continue their lives in the afterlife. Maybe they will cause so much trouble that they will be granted passage to paradise after all. Or, since they've seemed to compromise even King Enma's position, perhaps they will decide to stay in the oni's body to exert their newfound power. What is key here is that even the fiercest oni, one that can swallow humans whole, is rendered powerless even over its own bowels. This eerily absurd story is to be read as carnival.

Although Japanese people customarily send off the dead with money for the journey they will make in the afterlife, the stars of this story un-solemnly head for the entertainment district, where they buy sutras, essentially bribes for their awaiting judge. It is implied that they also make the regular licenced district stops, to dally with courtesans and attend shows at kabuki theatres or visit other places of disrepute. Their journey into hell is meant to entertain and amuse, but it also lampoons the ethical guidance of religion, namely the importance of passing judgment after death and making one's way to paradise. The fact that oni and other frightening (but stupid) creatures stand as the gatekeepers to the celestial world conversely strips it of sanctity, telling listeners they need not worry about afterlife judgement and should thus live as they please (i.e., deviate and join the carnival).

Evolutionary monsters

This chapter has given an overview of Japan's monsters, primarily in the context of yōkai. We have examined the subject through works selected from early modern and modern literature, art, and performance. One argument is that, from the Edo period, monsters, which had been around for ages, evolved to be less harmful, less mean, and less scary. They remained abnormal and freakish, but they were often imbued with human qualities that made them more interesting and more endearing. Whether charming or wretched, their unusual and peculiar nature functioned to poke and pry at the mortal world and thus put into question its cultural values and morality.

The vengeful spirit trope goes back centuries in Japan. From early times, audiences were trained to look upon tormented beings and other creatures with interest rather than fear or aversion. This is tied to the belief that all things animate and inanimate possess life and therefore a capacity to feel and suffer. This is a key Japanese aesthetic, the beauty of suffering, or *mono no aware*, which Makoto Ueda renders "a deep feeling over things". As he expounds, *aware* is connected to love, but more so to grief, which people feel because they are "imperfect, weak, and easily hurt".[26] *Mono no aware* is the quality that reveals itself when someone or something is at their or its lowest or saddest–a thing of true beauty. And there is no requirement for the resolution

26 Ueda, *Literary and Art Theories in Japan*, 199.

to be happy, or for there to be a resolution at all. Japan's vengeful ghosts and other wretched supernatural beings often serve as a blown-up projection of the human state or dissatisfaction with the present situation. These monsters invert, turn upside down, and warp, but they also do so entertainingly and with humour. They distract and detract from institutional ethics and morality, and therefore inform the popular landscape and beliefs.

Japan's ghosts and yōkai (and sometimes gods) naturally embody *aware*, so those who encounter them best approach with sensitivity and an inclination to observe, learn, and empathize. After all, these creatures typically come with a message of some kind, and it is in humans' best interest to be mindful. When early modern writers and other artists recast yōkai and counterparts as laughable and loveable, they brought them into the world of humans and, as we have seen, occasionally depicted them as more human than humans themselves. In the cases where monsters are rendered senseless or downright silly, they are typically used to lampoon and wage criticism. In all cases, though, even when supernatural beings are out to terrify, they are perpetually there to bring about change and serve the people who birth, commodify, and devour them.

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