



Michael Dylan Foster, *Pandemonium and Parade: Japanese Monsters and the Culture of Yōkai*

Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009. xvii + 291 pages, 20 illustrations. Paperback, \$21.95, £14.95. ISBN 978-0-520-25362-9.

WHOEVER THINKS that a scholarly book cannot be “fun” has not yet read Michael Foster’s *Pandemonium and Parade*. His work constitutes a rollicking exploration of the seventeenth- through twentieth-century worlds of *yōkai*, a broadly inclusive term for the phantasmagoria of monsters, ghosts, mysterious apparitions, and inexplicable phenomena that have animated the Japanese cultural landscape for much of the past thousand years. Foster’s book is thoughtfully conceived and carefully researched, and it is written in a graceful, occasionally journalistic style that is both suitable to its subject and a pleasure to read. At just under three hundred pages, *Pandemonium and Parade* is neither intended as a comprehensive history or catalog of *yōkai*, nor can it serve as such; rather, it seeks to examine historically situated *yōkai* discourse as a means of probing shifts in intellectual and sociocultural paradigms. For this reason, the book is as much about modern and early-modern Japanese thought and culture as it is about the supernatural.

Faced with the daunting task of excavating and interpreting more than three hundred years of Japanese cultural production, Foster chooses to focus upon four historical “moments” during which popular and scholarly *yōkai* discourse was “especially prominent and characteristic of wider cultural concerns”: the early-modern period, “particularly from the 1660s through the 1780s”; the Meiji period, “especially in the 1880s”; the first three decades of the twentieth century; and the 1970s and 1980s (4). Each of Foster’s four principal chapters (two through five) is devoted to one of the four periods, and each chapter is “loosely structured around an appropriate trope through which the *yōkai*-related discourse of the moment might be most pertinently characterized” (26). As a result, individual chapters stand up well on their own, and may be profitably assigned for an undergraduate course on monsters and/or Japan, without the necessity of assigning the book as a whole. But this is not to say that the work suffers from being disjointed or diffuse. There are unifying thematic elements that run throughout the volume, from Foster’s interest in taxonomy—“naming, listing, and organizing and the implicit interpretation such practices demand” (11)—to preoccupations with nation, identity, and sociohistorical contexts.

Judging from its chapter titles, *Pandemonium and Parade* is concerned with all things “weird.” The book begins with a substantial introductory chapter (“Introduction to the Weird”), in which Foster provides a subtle and conscientious overview of his terminology, methodology, and theoretical concerns. Chapter 2, titled “Natural History of the Weird: Encyclopedias, Spooky Stories, and the Bestiaries of Toriyama Sekien,” takes up the place of *yōkai* in the cultural and intel-

lectual milieu of the mid-Edo period: a time in which, as Foster argues, “Japan witnessed the growth of natural-history studies and the development of an encyclopedic culture in which collecting, naming, and describing became critical methods for comprehending the world,” and in which there simultaneously flourished “a culture that placed value on recreation and play” (31). Foster sees Toriyama Sekien’s eighteenth-century illustrated *yōkai* catalogs as representing the culmination of these two colliding discursive modes—the encyclopedic and the ludic—and as marking “the moment ‘yōkai’ became an autonomous category” in the early-modern imagination (27). Chapter 3, “Science of the Weird: Inoue Enryō, Kokkuri, and Human Electricity,” explores the emerging academic discipline of *yōkaigaku* (“yōkai studies,” or “monsterology”) in the tumultuous years of the late nineteenth century. Employing science as an interpretive trope, Foster focuses on the philosopher and Tōyō University founder Inoue Enryō’s rationalistic approach to Kokkuri divination, as well as on popular apprehensions of electricity as “a scientific brand of magic, indicative not of a backward nation but of Westernization and progress” (106). In chapter 4, “Museum of the Weird: Modernity, Minzokugaku, and the Discovery of Yōkai,” Foster discusses the significance of *yōkai* in the early twentieth-century writings of Natsume Sōseki, Mori Ōgai, Ema Tsutomu, and Yanagita Kunio. As a result of rapid modernization, these and other intellectuals had become preoccupied with issues of identity, fundamental to which was the “problem” of the traditional supernatural, whether to be shunned and repressed or exhumed and preserved. Chapter 5, “Media of the Weird: Mizuki Shigeru and Kuchi-sake-onna,” jumps ahead to the 1970s and 80s, to the world of “manga, television, movies, and popular magazines” in an age of wealth and consumer culture (28). Employing the trope of “the media,” or “mass media,” Foster focuses on the work of Mizuki Shigeru, whose manga “revitalized the image of yōkai in the cultural imagination,” and on the advent of a new and particularly modern *yōkai*, Kuchi-sake-onna—a ghostly woman with a gruesomely slit mouth—who can be seen to embody contemporary concerns “about women’s roles in a patriarchal society” (28). The book ends with chapter 6, “Yōkai Culture: Past, Present, and Future,” a thirteen-page conclusion in which Foster touches upon film (J-Horror), anime (Takahata Isao’s *Heisei tanuki gassen Pom-poko* and Miike Takashi’s *Yōkai daisensō*), Pokémon, and even Harry Potter and Hello Kitty.

One of the more notable aspects of Foster’s expository style is his fondness for metaphor. Foster tends to elucidate by analogy, which, when done well, can be both illuminating and engaging. The danger, of course, is that metaphors may also mislead. The title *Pandemonium and Parade* itself alludes to one of Foster’s principal interpretive motifs: that of the *hyakki yagyō*, or “night procession of a hundred demons,” which was a frequent subject of Edo-period illustrated scrolls, and which Foster explains “provides a metaphor that transcends historical contexts and serves as a useful optic through which to interpret many of the discourses encountered in this book” (8). Foster observes that in *hyakki yagyō* picture scrolls, “the unseen (unseeable) is transformed into spectacle; the mysterious spirits of untamed nature are transmuted into familiar everyday objects; terror turns into humor; pandemonium becomes parade” (9). Foster takes this movement between

“a frightening, chaotic pandemonium and a lighthearted, well-ordered parade” (9) to be suggestive of the unstable ways in which *yōkai* were apprehended in the disparate periods of his study, shifting back and forth in people’s minds between fearsome and comical, wild and tame.

Foster’s most memorable metaphor comes from chapter 4, in which he recounts an apparently Meiji-period folktale about a magical *tanuki* that is found dead beside some railroad tracks after having been run over by a train. The death of the *tanuki* suggests the collision of “two referential ecologies” (115)—the traditional and the modern—and the end of an age. Foster writes:

The confrontation between tanuki and steam train, a common trope during this period, gestures dramatically to the changing meanings of *yōkai*. The old forms of magic, the shape-shifting talents of the tanuki, still had the power to dazzle and deceive, causing the train engineers to proceed with caution through the lonely countryside. But the instant they stopped believing and plowed full speed ahead, the iron mechanism of technology could make the magic powerless, transforming a supernatural creature into nothing more than an animal body lying dead beside the tracks of progress. (116)

Foster’s invocation of the *tanuki* trope is wonderfully evocative, but maybe excessively so, because the dead animal keeps reappearing, zombielike, throughout the course of the chapter. We are treated to references to its rotting body (117); its inspiration of a desire for “taxidermic preservation” (118); the empathy that it engenders in onlookers, who lament “their own inability to revive its lifeless form” (138); its “plaintive cry” (157); and the observation that for a scholar like Yanagita Kunio, it “can be studied only after the train has killed it” (142), perhaps because it is less likely to bite him that way. I admire Foster’s metaphor, but I cannot help but think that he overplays it a bit.

In the same chapter, Foster describes Yanagita Kunio as a “fossil hunter, discovering remains buried in the landscape” (156), which Yanagita unearths for display in a metaphorical museum. Then, in the following chapter, Foster writes that the manga author Mizuki Shigeru “reintroduces and reanimates the museum pieces shelved and ordered by the folklorists before him, marketing them as toys, as moveable characters extracted from a communal past” (181). As a result of this layering of tropes, the *yōkai*, which are themselves “surprisingly lively metaphors for comprehending broader national-cultural paradigms” (26), have become fossils that are put in museums and later marketed as toys and moveable characters. Strangely, this all makes sense, and it leaves me with only admiration for Foster’s interpretive skills. Foster demonstrates that not only can *yōkai* serve as metaphors (the decomposing *tanuki*, for example), but that metaphors can be applied to *yōkai*.

In terms of its layout and physical characteristics, *Pandemonium and Parade* is a lovely book. It contains twenty black-and-white photos and illustrations from a variety of Edo-period and modern publications, and a useful bibliography and index. The dust jacket is graced with a beautifully grotesque image from one of Kawanabe Kyōsai’s early Meiji-period *hyakki yagyō* paintings (*Hyakkiyagyō-zu: Biwa o ou otoko*, in The British Museum), visually demonstrating the notion of “pandemonium on parade.” The book is remarkably free of typesetting and formatting errors, but

unfortunately it lacks a glossary of Chinese and Japanese characters, which would have been valuable in this case due to the many names of *yōkai* and literary and cinematic works that are cited within the text.

Aside from the book's lack of a character glossary, my only serious complaint is that it gives rather short shrift to the subject of monsters in pre-Edo-period Japan. In his introductory chapter, Foster touches upon marauding ghosts of living people (*ikiriyō*) in the Heian-period *Genji monogatari*; demons of abandoned household objects (*tsukumogami*) in the Muromachi-period *Tsukumogami-ki*; and night parades of demons (*hyakki yagyō*) in late-Heian and Kamakura-period *setsuwa* literature; but he does not discuss these or other older monsters at any length. As a result, he seems to lose sight of the fact that in earlier eras, tales of monsters were typically circulated as stories of the people who killed them (or avoided being killed by them), rather than tales of the monsters themselves. As Noriko Reider has recently demonstrated (REIDER 2009), for example, *Tsukumogami-ki* seems to have been propagated by Shingon Buddhists who were intent on demonstrating the power of Shingon teachings to neutralize and even "save" *tsukumogami* by enabling their enlightenment. In formulating her thesis, Reider draws upon the work of Komatsu Kazuhiko, who in the 1990s postulated a link between *Tsukumogami-ki* and the Shingon sect. Likewise, as Minobe Shigekatsu has argued, the early-medieval tale of the demon Shuten Dōji enjoyed a popular revival in the seventeenth century because it tells of how the demon was destroyed by Minamoto no Raikō, an ancestor of the Seiwa branch of the Minamoto clan from which the Tokugawa shoguns claimed descent (MINOBE and MINOBE 2009). Even the early *setsuwa* accounts of *hyakki yagyō* demon-parades are concerned with illustrating the powers of Buddhism to prevent people from being devoured by spectral hordes (see *Konjaku monogatari shū* 14: 42, *Kohon setsuwa shū* 2: 51, and so on). Thus, considered from a premodern perspective, the tale of the steam train and the *tanuki* might be less about the *tanuki* than about the train that killed it. By focusing so wholly on *yōkai* of the early-modern and modern periods, Foster inadvertently downplays this traditional emphasis on *suppressing* the supernatural, rather than cataloguing, channeling, domesticating, or enshrining it.

But my criticism may be unfair. After all, Foster's book is not intended to provide a history of monsters in Heian and medieval Japan. All things considered, *Pandemonium and Parade* is an exceptionally fine work of writing and scholarship. Its insights and theoretical concerns transcend the field of Japanese Studies, such that it deserves to be read by anyone with an interest in monsters, monster theory, and comparative modernities.

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2009 *Shuten Dōji e o yomu: Matsurowanu mono no jikū*. Tokyo: Miyai Shoten, 139–40.

Michael Dylan Foster tracks yā'kai over three centuries, from their appearance in seventeenth-century natural histories to their starring role in twentieth-century popular media. Focusing on the intertwining of belief and commodification, fear and pleasure, horror and humor, he illuminates different conceptions of the "natural" and the "ordinary" and sheds light on broader social and historical paradigms—and ultimately on the construction of Japan as a nation. Water sprites, mountain goblins, shape-shifting animals, and the monsters known as yā'kai have long haunted the Japanese cultural landscape.