

MONSTROUS WIVES, MURDEROUS LOVERS, AND DEAD WET GIRLS

Examining the Feminine Vengeful Ghost in Japanese Traditional Theatre and Horror Cinema

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Registration Link:

https://hawaii.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_StCmFEXeSBm1fhywgXsS9A

As in many cultures, woman is often portrayed as monstrous or evil by sheer fact of her being female. Today, no Japanese horror film is considered complete without its haunting woman specter, the female onryō, or “vengeful ghost” archetype. Barbara Creed’s writings on the “monstrous feminine” illustrates an innate connection of “affinity” between woman and monster as “potent threats to vulnerable male power.” Although when writing Creed was referring to Western horror cinema, the same theories can be extended to Japanese media.

By analyzing the narrative style, visual representation, and enactment of this archetype found in Japanese theatre forms nō and kabuki compared to Japanese horror films, it becomes apparent that the female onryō reflects views of the feminine identity in Japanese society. Contrary to the portrayal of the male, only once these women have become “monstrous” can they break free from sociocultural limitations and act on their vengeance. Their frightening and grotesque forms, however, invoke more terror and horror than sympathy, transforming the victims into the villains.

Despite the change in norms of Japanese society over time, the way these female onryō are presented remains arguably consistent, positioning them as more “monsters” and “freaks” rather than women. More significant is the tendency to associate these characters with feminine traits or behavior, thereby transforming them into something grotesque, extending the association of horror to woman herself. In so doing, the female onryō may have helped serve as a means of patriarchal control prescribing women’s behavior, perhaps explaining its continued prevalence.



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