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Preface to the Special Issue on the Fairy Tale in Japan

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One of the motivating forces behind this special issue of *Marvels & Tales* was the scarcity of scholarship dealing directly with the influence of folktales and fairy tales on contemporary Japanese writers and artists. Scholarly articles that have dealt with the subject tend to be scattered pell-mell in books and journals dedicated to Japanese rather than fairy-tale studies, and when books are dedicated to individual authors, there is nary a mention of their engagement with the fairy-tale genre. In this context "fairy-tale genre" is something of a catchall term, as it includes fairy tales, folktales, myths, and legends—in other words, the classical literature and premodern tales that continue to inspire contemporary Japanese writers and artists.

Since the 1970s there has been a renewed interest in folktales and fairy tales in Japan, especially, but not exclusively, among women writers who, as elsewhere in the world, appropriated these tales to question identity, gender politics, and the role of women in contemporary society. The work of some of these women writers—Kurahashi Yumiko, Ōba Minako, Ogawa Yōko, and Tsushima Yūko[1]—is discussed in the articles by Luciana Cardi, Michiko Wilson, Lucy Fraser, and Charlotte Eubanks. The articles by Deborah Shamoon and Melek Ortabasi examine the influence of fairy tales and the demons (*oni*), monsters, and supernatural creatures (*yōkai*) of Japanese folktales on manga and anime. This special issue of *Marvels & Tales* also includes articles on the photography of Yanagi Miwa, by Murai Mayako, and the theater of Terayama Shūji, by Steven Ridgely. The issue concludes with translations of Terayama's unique re-vision of Charles Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood" and Tawada Yōko's "Futakuchi otoko" (The Man with Two Mouths).

Several of the articles in this issue consider how contemporary Japanese writers have appropriated tales from the European fairy-tale canon. Luciana Cardi analyzes Kurahashi Yumiko's retelling of the Grimms' "Snow White," Lucy Fraser discusses Ogawa Yōko's appropriation of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid," and Steven Ridgely explores Terayama Shūji's engagement with Perrault's "Bluebeard."

After briefly discussing the way in which Perrault's fictional Bluebeard has been confused with the fifteenth-century child-murderer Gilles de Rais, Ridgely goes on to explore Terayama's engagement with the Bluebeard narrative. In the first of these Bluebeard projects, Terayama conflates factual and fictional history as he parodies the views of an idealistic scholar who insists on the authority of the text and the meaning inherent in the words on the page. In the second project, Terayama grafts Bluebeard onto his own reworking of a Japanese legend: a deliberate contamination of the original nativist text that allows him, in Ridgely's words, to "destabilize the Japaneseness of the narrative." The third of Terayama's Bluebeard projects, *Aohigekō no shiro* (Duke Bluebeard's Castle), which takes its title from the Balázs/Bartók opera, is, as Ridgely writes, "a self-referential project about the metaphysics of theater."

At about the same time that Terayama was working on his play *Aohigekō no shiro* (which premièred in 1979), he was also working on a fairy-tale collection called *Boku ga ōkami datta koro: sakasama dōwa shi* (When I Was a Wolf: Topsy-Turvy Fairy Tales). Terayama's topsy-turvy fairy tales have much in common with the Bluebeard projects delineated by Ridgely. In "Akazukin" (Red Riding Hood), for example, Terayama is less concerned with repeating and reworking the themes and motifs of the fairy-tale classic than he is with drawing attention to its intertextuality. In much of his work, including his revisions of Perrault's classic tales, Terayama provocatively challenges his readers (and his theater audiences) to be actively engaged in producing (rather than passively consuming) his work. In other words, as Ridgely points out, Terayama saw the liberational potential of "taking possession of narratives by rewriting and remixing them." The translation of "Akazukin," which is actually my translation of Terayama's appropriation of Eguchi Kiyoshi's translation of Perrault's text, is a case in point; and, as it undermines the ownership of the text and the authority of the author, it raises the question, Whose text is it?

Ogawa Yōko also appropriates and reworks tales from the European fairy-tale canon in *Otogibanashi no wasuremono* (Lost Property Fairy Tales), a collection of four short stories (with illustrations by Higami Kumiko) that includes a reenvisioning of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid." As Lucy Fraser notes in her article on Ogawa, since its first translation into Japanese, "The Little

Mermaid" has been "the subject of adaption, parody, and play," and along with the strange creatures of premodern mermaid mythologies it has "inspired a rich variety of fairy-tale transformations." Ogawa's "Ningyo hōseki shokunin no isshō" (The Life of a Mermaid's Jeweler) is narrated by a submissive, self-sacrificing, mute merman who, in an ironic reversal of traditional gender roles, is completely devoted to a mermaid princess. Fraser discusses the questions about male-female relationships raised by this merman and then goes on to explore Ogawa's engagement with voice (and voicelessness) and the interplay between the text and the reader.

Questions of sexuality and gender roles resurface in Luciana Cardi's article on Kurahashi Yumiko's "Shirayuki hime" (Snow White). Kurahashi has been given any number of labels: avant-garde, absurdist, Kafkaesque, postmodern, political, apolitical, and, perhaps most frequently of all, feminist. Kurahashi resisted all these labels, however, and it is too limiting simply to describe her as, for example, a feminist writer. If Kurahashi was a feminist at all, she perhaps had something in common with Angela Carter, who, as Marina Warner has said, refused to adopt "any conventional form of feminism" (448). Kurahashi's representation of gender and sexuality has been described as "tentative and ambiguous" (Kleeman 150), and her provocative position on gender politics stirs mixed reactions that, as Cardi points out, leaves her open to accusations of misogyny. In her analysis of Kurahashi's retelling of "Snow White," Cardi demonstrates how it both reproduces and deconstructs the traditional dichotomous role of women conveyed by the Grimms' tale; she also suggests that the contrasting representations of femininity in "Shirayuki hime" are reminiscent of the depictions of women analyzed by Kurahashi in her short essay "Onna" (Woman). Cardi writes that in postwar Japanese literature female characters have been portrayed as "strange creatures, ghosts, corpses, or mannequinlike dolls void of intelligence." In her essay Kurahashi singles out the late work of Kawabata Yasunari. She is no doubt referring to tales such as "House of the Sleeping Beauties" (1961), in which impotent old men spend the night with virginal "sleeping beauties" who have been drugged into unconsciousness. This image of women as mannequinlike dolls is also parodied by the photographer and video artist Yanagi Miwa in her *Elevator Girls* series. In these photographs uniformed and uniformly slender young women with identical hairstyles and identically immaculate makeup are, as Murai Mayako writes in "The Princess, the Witch, and the Fireside," presented both as "products of a postmodern, male-oriented consumer society and as proliferators of the image of ideal femininity that can be purchased in department stores." For Murai these "vacant and lifeless" young women also embody a late-twentieth-century Japanese version of Snow White lying in her glass coffin.[2]

In the Grimms' classic tale Snow White and her stepmother are set at odds with one another when the magic mirror declares that, although the Queen is fair, Snow White is a thousand times more beautiful. As Luciana Cardi writes, it is the patriarchal voice of the magic mirror that judges aesthetic ideals of beauty and, thus framed, Snow White and her jealous stepmother are caught in what, citing Sarah Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Murai calls a "paradigmatic instance of male-generated twin images of monster-woman and angel-woman." In traditional Japanese folktales the monster-woman has a counterpart in the figure of the *yamauba* (or *yamamba*), a mountain witch who, ostracized from society, lives a bleak, marginalized life in the mountains.[3] The *yamauba* is a complex and ambiguous figure usually portrayed as an ugly old crone. A shape-shifter with supernatural strength, the *yamauba* is also a cannibalistic demon who is quite capable of eating babies and devouring men who are unfortunate, or foolish, enough to stray into her domain. At the same time, the *yamauba* can also be as nurturing as she is destructive, and she is sometimes portrayed as a beautiful, seductive young woman. The ambiguous nature of the *yamauba* raises the question of whether beautiful and alluring young women (like Snow White), become monster-women (like the mountain witch or the queen) simply because they have grown old.

The only work in Yanagi Miwa's *Fairy Tale: Strange Tales of Women Young and Old* that draws on a specifically Japanese source is "Hitotsuya" (A Lonely House), a *yamauba* tale in which an old crone and her beautiful daughter live together in an isolated cottage. Yanagi's reinterpretation of the folktale implies that (like Snow White and her stepmother) the two women are actually one and the same. As Murai writes, "The younger woman can be seen as an alter ego of the older woman, the part of her self that is beautiful and benevolent and capable of loving the other." Yanagi's blending and dissolving of the distinction between familiar fairy-tale dichotomies is, as Murai makes clear, typical of much of her work. As she problematizes the distinction between these binary opposites in what has been described as a "celebration of ambivalence" (Elliott 67–68), Yanagi makes it impossible to decide whether the *yamauba* is good or evil—a monster or an angel.

In "Ōba Minako the Raconteur" Michiko Wilson notes that Ōba's love of the Western fairy tales was matched by a lifelong fascination with the imaginative world of Japanese folktales and fairy tales. Indeed, Ōba not only incorporates folktales, fairy tales, and legends into her work but also retells classical Japanese tales, such as *Taketori monogatari* (The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter). Wilson discusses Ōba's retelling of *Taketori monogatari* before turning her attention to the refashioning of the *yamauba* motif in "The Smile of a Mountain Witch" ("Yamauba no bishō"), a subversive tale that subtly

exposes the contradictions and limitations that patriarchal society has imposed on women—a tale that Wilson describes as "one of the most provocative modern fairy tales." Despite being submissive, silent, and seemingly "obsessed with adapting herself to her husband's every whim," Ōba's *yamauba* is, in Wilson's words, "a woman of almost infinitive creative energy" who dreams of a return to the mountains where there would be nobody to trouble her and where her laughter would reverberate through the valleys.

Ōba Minako is one of many contemporary women writers who reutilize the motif of the *yamauba* in their work. Tsushima Yūko, for example, uses the *yamauba* motif metaphorically in her novel *Woman Running in the Mountains* (*Yama o hasiru onna*, 1980), and *yamauba*—or demonic, *yamauba*-like women—appear in several tales in Kurahashi Yumiko's 1984 collection *Otona no tame no zankoku dōwa* (Cruel Fairy Tales for Adults).

Before discussing the work of Tsushima and Kurahashi in "Envisioning the Invisible," Charlotte Eubanks focuses on the uses to which folklore has been put "in self-consciously literate and generally didactic settings: the gazetteer (*fudoki*) and the explanatory tale (*setsuwa*)." After exploring the social functions of these premodern literary texts that, as part of the civilizing process, have been used either to name and control specific geographical topoi in "a process of linguistic pacification" or to account for anomalous events largely in terms of Buddhist doctrine, Eubanks considers the ways that some of these texts, which, resisting typological categorization, she calls "interspecies sex tales," have been appropriated and reworked by Kurahashi and Tsushima to draw attention to issues of gender and sexuality.

Two of the articles in this special issue deal directly with contemporary Japanese pop culture. Both Deborah Shamoon and Melek Ortabasi, in quite different and distinct ways, analyze the influence of premodern Japanese folklore—specifically, the monsters, demons, and other supernatural creatures collectively known as *yōkai*—on the mass-mediated, postmodern culture of manga and anime. Whereas Shamoon, in "The *Yōkai* in the Database," considers the discrete ways in which *yōkai* have been used in manga and anime narratives by Mizuki Shigeru and Takahashi Rumiko, Ortabasi, in "(Re)animating Folklore," examines how the visual and narrative characteristics of the Studio Ghibli animated film *Heisei tanuki gassen pompoko* (Tanuki Battle of the Heisei Era) relate to traditional *tanuki* (raccoon dog) lore.

The consumption of manga and anime narratives is arguably most often associated with *otaku*—the obsessive fans who are known not only for their methodical and meticulous labeling and codifying of *yōkai* but also for breaking narratives down into increasingly smaller and smaller units that can

then be rearranged and used to create new narratives. It has been claimed that the database model of textual engagement is a purely postmodern phenomenon created by *otaku* culture; however, Shamoon refutes this claim and points out the similarities between the database approach to narrative and "the ways in which *yōkai* have been historically codified."

In Takahata Isao's *Pompoko* a band of *tanuki* find their native habitat under threat from land developers. Unlike the purely fictional *yōkai* that haunt much of the work of Takahashi and Mizuki, *tanuki* are real animals that are, like *kitsune* (foxes), renowned for their supernatural, shape-shifting powers. The battle between the *tanuki* and their human antagonists culminates, after several skirmishes, in the *tanuki* deciding to organize "Operation Yōkai" (*yōkaisakusen*)—a "ghost parade" that they hope will strike fear into the urban population. The ghost parade fails in part at least because commodification and consumption have deprived the *yōkai* of their power to shock. However, Ortabasi contends that Takahata's film goes beyond *tanuki* and *kitsune* lore and, by breaking down "the species distinction that folktales usually seek to maintain," creates an unsettling picture of postmodern Japanese identity.

The unsettled nature of postmodern identity in the transcultural present is a recurrent theme in the work of Tawada Yōko, who, since moving to Germany in 1982, has written a number of plays and stories (in Japanese and German) that, while contesting linguistic and physical borders, use motifs from the folktales and fairy tales of both her native and adoptive cultures. Her novella "Inumukoiri" (The Bridegroom Was a Dog) is, as the title suggests, a contemporary reworking of an animal bridegroom tale; "Nyūyoku" (The Bath) is disrupted by "once upon a time" fairy tales that recall Matsutani Miyoko's prize-winning children's tale, *Tatsu no ko Tarō* (Tarō the Dragon-Boy, 1967); and her German theater play *Die Kranichmaske, die bei Nacht strahlt* (1993) is based on the Japanese folktale "Tsuru nyōbo" (The Crane Wife). In another play, *Till*, contemporary Japanese consumer culture meets the traditions of German folklore when a group of tourists on a tour of Lower Saxony come face to face with the legendary mischief-maker Till Eulenspiegel. Tawada subsequently adapted the play into a short story, "Futakuchi otoko" (1998), which Margaret Mitsutani has translated as "The Man with Two Mouths." The extracts from the translation that Mitsutani introduces here are the first to appear in English.

The articles and translations in this special issue of *Marvels & Tales* attest to the wide variety of approaches that Japanese writers and other creative artists have used in their reutilization of the fairy-tale genre. By analyzing the work of writers and artists who, through literature, photography, theater, anime, and manga, have transformed fairy-tale pretexts from

sources as diverse as *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* and *Konjaku monogatari*, the articles and translations collected here go some way toward expanding the focus of fairy-tale studies into an area that remains relatively unknown and unexplored.

Notes

1. Japanese names throughout this issue of *Marvels & Tales* are given in the Japanese order: family name first. It should be noted, however, that some artists are known by their noms de plume: Toriyama Sekien, for example, is known as Sekien rather than by his family name Toriyama; likewise, Andō Hiroshige is known as Hiroshige.

2. It might be worth noting that in the *Elevator Girls* series there is a set of four photographs called "The White Casket." In the first of these photographs three young women lie on the floor of an elevator forming a triskelion. The women, all dressed identically in red uniforms, slowly dissolve into what looks like a pool of blood, which by the fourth photograph has broken up into smaller drops on a white ground that recall the drops of blood that fall onto the snow at the beginning of the Grimms' tale. Comparisons might also be made between Yanagi's "vacant and lifeless" *Elevator Girls* and Higami Kumiko's illustrations in *Otogibanashi no wasuremono*, which Lucy Fraser describes as being "dominated by flat images of expressionless pubescent girls," often with "erotic overtones."

3. Although variants are found throughout Japan, the best-known literary version of the *yamauba* legend is arguably the nō play *Yamamba* (The Mountain Crone), written by Zeami (1363–1443). For a translation of the play, see Tyler (309–28).

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