COPING WITH CAPITALISM: MONSTERS AND THE SPECTRE OF EXCESS IN SPIRITED AWAY, ONMYOJI, AND TOKYO BABYLON

by

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This thesis is intended to illustrate that monsters, as beings made of pure culture, embody social anxieties and can be deployed as a means of protest. Therefore this thesis examines monsters in Japanese anime, manga, and film that embody the excesses of capitalism. The first chapter examines *Spirited Away* and how capitalism’s excesses create monsters such as over consumption, greed, and loss of identity through the disintegration of social relationships. The second chapter examines modern onmyoji and why they are different from their ancient counterpart, especially with regards to the commodification of women and the alienation of others. By examining the societal ills that have created monsters we can determine if these representatives of capitalist excess can be managed.
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Introduction

In the Japanese cultural tradition, monsters appear at twilight. This liminal period between light and dark produces physical manifestations of the anxieties people experience when faced with a transition period. It is clear that night will come, but what it will bring is unknown. This period of uncertainty is a breeding ground for monsters, whether they are as harmless as a biwa come to life\(^1\), or as malicious as a man-eating oni. More than just an aesthetic, twilight (tasogare) reveals the anxieties of a world in transition, one that is concerned enough about changes both little and large as to give them a physical form\(^2\). There is the sense that bad things come at twilight, however, by giving them a shape there is the potential for someone to step up and mediate these apparitions.

Monsters are commonly associated with pre-modern societies, haunting the unknown places beyond the village, the uncharted expanses of the sea, or other liminal places such as the road between towns, and bridges. Monsters have never been uncommon, as David D. Gilmore explains that, “Monsters are not confined to a single tradition. Such nightmares haunt “primitive” peoples all over the world” (Gilmore 1). Yet now that the majority of the world has been mapped out there should be no dark,

\(^1\) In the Japanese tradition, objects are said to come to life after 99 years. These objects are called tsukumogami.

\(^2\) For more about the aesthetic of tasogare see Gerald Figal’s book Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan. Figal provides an overview of the works involved in the discussion of monsters and twilight during the era of twilight par excellence, the Meiji period.
unknown lands for monsters to hide. Furthermore, with the advent of the scientific revolution and the impulse to classify the natural world, creatures that would have once been labelled as monsters are now just a hereto undiscovered species, deformities are now explained by mistakes in genetic code, and mental illnesses are no longer assumed to be demonic possession. In theory then, now that the world is a rational place, and potential monsters can be categorized as belonging to the natural world, there should be no more monsters, or beings that defy categorization. From the western tradition there should be no more dragons, ogres, and sea monsters, and from the Japanese tradition there should be no more yamabito, tengu, oni, and a variety of other creatures that threaten the stability of ordinary life. One would think that their existence would be confined to legend, or pre-modern narratives.

However, this is hardly the case. Monsters have been thriving in the modern world. They no longer exclusively haunt dark woods; they are a constant presence in the newspaper, at the box office, in books, and in video games. Rather than disappearing, monsters have multiplied and take on new and frightening forms. This is because as beings that defy categorization, monsters are a cultural product, or rather the product of a cultural imagination. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, in the first of his seven monster theses, ‘The Monster’s Body Is a Cultural Body’, explains that,

The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place. The monster’s body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the
monstrum is etymologically “that which reveals,” “that which warns,” a glyph that seeks a hierophant. (Cohen 4)

Because they are a cultural body, monsters are insidious, haunting various media and even relocating to the centre of cultural production, the city. The monster is no longer an ogre that one might meet while crossing a deserted bridge, reflecting the very real dangers people might have faced while travelling alone, such as bandits, but rather beings that more accurately reflect the fears of people living in a city. The monsters we face today are not only monsters of the unknown, but also monsters of consumerism that reflect the societal ills of the city.

The object of this thesis is to observe the anxieties of living in an increasingly global capitalist culture, embodied by spirits and monster in Japanese anime and film. These monsters are more than just products created for the mindless entertainment of the masses, although they are indeed entertaining. As cultural products that shock and terrify, monsters represent issues that must be dealt with sometimes overtly, yet often subconsciously. According to David D. Gilmore in his book Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors,

Clearly, the world was and still is full of awful monsters. In the West, because of their everyday presence in popular culture—spurred on by Hollywood fantasy films—we tend to take them for granted while not believing in their actual existence. We rarely stop to consider the psychological meaning of their appeal (4).

And indeed, there must be an appeal, because whether it is an alien invasion in your standard end of the world film, machines taking over the world like in films such as the Terminator and the Matrix movies, or even traditional monsters such as the basilisk in
films like Harry Potter, monsters are as present in the Hollywood box office as they are in Japanese media. Monsters then, as a cultural product, say something about the culture that produces them. Cohen emphasizes that, “Monsters must be examined within the intricate matrix of relations (social, cultural, and literary-historical) that generate them” (Cohen 5). This is because as a product of pure culture, monsters embody specific anxieties that are not easily translated to a different time or place.

Thus, since monsters are representative of a specific socio-historical moment, and the concerns they represent are not easily translated into another cultural setting, monsters should theoretically be strictly local beings. Yet Hollywood monsters, along with anime and manga’s monsters are often successfully presented to a global audience. If popularity can be represented in terms of revenue and sales, then why are monsters in anime and film so successful on a global level? It can be argued that this success is due to increasingly global modes of production. This does not mean that the monsters are produced to appeal to a global audience, but rather the anxieties they embody are often either sub-consciously or overtly dealing with global capitalism. As the experience of a consumerist culture is not so different from one place to another and globalization is itself is a homogenizing impulse, one can explain the global popularity of monsters by the shared cultural experience of global capitalism. This is not to say that monsters can always be interpreted as reflecting global concerns, as it is beyond the scope of this study to observe whether monsters function in the same way universally.

It is also beyond the scope of this thesis to examine whether the anxieties represented by monsters change over time, or whether there is a difference between American capitalist anxieties and their Japanese counterparts. Furthermore, as monsters are a purely local cultural product, it is a given that the monsters represented in Japanese
media are culturally specific. This being said, it would be redundant to prove that there is something exclusively Japanese about monsters in anime, much like it would be useless to prove that there is something exclusively American about monsters in Hollywood films. It is much more interesting to observe why monsters translate so successfully from one audience to another. This thesis is intended to illustrate that capitalism and its excesses are global concerns, and that a local effort to manage capitalist monsters of excess can resonate across cultures.

And indeed, the connection between monsters and capitalism is one that proves to be a particularly rewarding object of study. When providing an overview of recent research on monsters, Gilmore states that,

Given the rich trove of political symbolism involved in monster imagery in Western culture, orthodox Marxist scholars have waded in. John Law, a historical sociologist (1991), sees the monster archetype in the European literary tradition (Frankenstein, Dracula, etc.) as symbolizing entrepreneurial capitalism. Such demonic beasts as vampires symbolize the awful energy that sucks the lifeblood from the masses. Restricting their scope to romantic European fiction, Marxist see monsters as symbolizing the anti-human power emanating from the predatory bourgeoisie of Leninist demonology (14).

Thus, associating monsters with the societal ills of capitalism is not a new idea, and examining said capitalist monsters provides us with insight on how the society they originate from deals with them. It is also important to point out that while monsters such as Dracula may still resonate with a contemporary audience because the themes they represent are still being discussed, how they are presented changes, reflecting a shift in
how the issue is addressed. These monsters in their various incarnations reflect the
cultural issues of the time of their creation, and so the Dracula from Bram Stoker’s novel
does not address exactly the same anxieties as Dracula in his various film incarnations.
Therefore, while it is possible to make generalizations about monsters associated with
global capitalism, it is important to take into consideration the time and place they are
created.

Because of the limited scope of this thesis, the neither genre nor format will be
taken into consideration. Anyone who enjoys Japanese animation can attest that it is
difficult to confine a story to specific genre, as it will often contain aspects of drama,
comedy, and action. It is assumed that capitalist monsters in films categorized as drama
provide the same function as monsters in films categorized as horror. Furthermore, the
objects of study are taken from Japanese media with little regard for the medium, whether
it is animation, manga, or live action, as although there will certainly be a difference in
the way the monsters are presented, once again it is unlikely that their function is vastly
different. Annalee Newitz in Pretend We’re Dead: Capitalist Monsters in American Pop
Culture puts it succinctly:

Certainly we can find dramatic differences between its literary and B-
movie incarnation. But even as they cross the line between one form of media and
another, the stories’ fundamental message remains the same: capitalism creates
monsters who want to kill you (Newitz 3).

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3 Heather L. Duda provides a fascinating overview of monsters and the people that hunt them and how their
representations have changed over time in her book The Monster Hunter in Modern Popular Culture.
The Function of Monsters in Anime

Although capitalism creates monsters that wish to kill you, the important question is why? The answer to this would be that as they are the embodiment of cultural anxiety, monsters are protesting some kind of societal excess that must be managed. Although studies linking monsters and capitalism tend to favour Western depictions of the monster, Japanese monsters, *yōkai*, likely serve the same function. Gilmore explains that monsters “provide a convenient pictorial metaphor for human qualities that have to be repudiated, externalized, and defeated” (4), and although he has confined his study to ‘the Western imagination’, this is likely true for *yōkai* in contemporary Japanese media as well. Indeed, Foster agrees that, “The *yōkai*, as has been said of the “monster” in the West, “is an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place”” (Foster 3). Stretching that comparison one step further, *yōkai*, like monsters, might also be interpreted as representing a cultural anxiety, or mobilized to protest certain aspects of consumerist capitalism.

However, Japanese monsters are likely to embody anxieties directly related to the Japanese experience of capitalism. More specifically, as most of the works observed were produced before the Japanese economy recovered in the mid-2000s, they are likely a reaction to the collapse of the bubble economy, as this is an economic trauma that would need to be addressed in some way. *Tokyo Babylon* in particular, having been first released in 1991 soon after the bubble burst, seems to be concerned with monsters of excess and the failure of social relations, however it is also the least clear about how these monsters must be managed. Although in some cases simply acknowledging the problem and
restoring harmonious social relations, such as in the story of Sachiyo’s father, is enough to manage the monster, but in others the right course of action is not so clear. In *Spirited Away* on the other hand, Chihiro manages monsters through moderation in the face of capitalist excess. However Miyazaki is also unsure as to whether the capitalist system, which initially creates these monsters, can or should be changed, as there is no clear change in the way Yubaba’s bathhouse is run.

This ambiguity with regards to capitalism is likely due to Japan’s cultural experience with this economic system. Although it was devastated by the experience of the Second World War, Japan enjoyed a period of spectacular growth during the 60s and 70s, which continued well into the 80s. Where Japan had been reviled during World War II it was now held up as an example of capitalist mastery. Its surprising economic growth gave it international prominence, as Americans were keen to put Japan’s success on display in the hopes of influencing neighbouring communist countries. Thus, it came as a shock to all, especially the Japanese, when Japan’s economy crashed in the 1990s and remained stagnant well into the next decade. Whereas once they had been masters of capitalism to the point that American companies would hold up their Japanese counterparts as a model to aspire to, now their loss of control and subsequent failure needed to be analysed and addressed.

The collapse of the bubble economy did not lead people in Japan to reconsider capitalism, but rather to question why they had failed it. Because of this, Japanese monsters do not seem to protest capitalism *per se*, merely its excesses. Although the monsters do represent many of the same anxieties about capitalism as Western monsters, such as commodification and alienation, the works examined in this thesis suggest that their presence can be mediated without resorting to destroying them completely. This
would suggest that these works do not consider capitalism to be a monster that must be overcome. After all, in *Spirited Away*, despite having mediated monsters of consumption, greed, and loss of identity, Chihiro does not really change the capitalist order of the bathhouse. Subaru and Seimei also mediate monsters created by capitalism’s excesses, such as the commodification of women and the alienation of others, however they do not take initiative to change the capitalist mode of their city, even when, at least in Seimei’s case, they are given the opportunity to do so. Thus, although it is clear that capitalism is a system that creates monsters of excess that must be managed, it is unclear how the system can be changed, or even if it should be changed.
Chapter 1—Managing Excess in Hayao Miyazaki’s Spirited Away

As explained in the introduction, in the Japanese tradition monsters appear at twilight. This liminal period between light and dark, or the end of a known era into a time of uncertainty, is a breeding ground for all sorts of monsters. In Hayao Miyazaki’s Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi (2001), known to English-speaking audiences as Spirited Away, monsters literally appear at twilight, populating the abandoned theme park Chihiro and her parents have stumbled upon. As a consequence of trespassing on this liminal space, Chihiro must enter a world where she manages monsters in an effort to stay alive and human. Since the film knowingly places itself within the discourse of twilight and in-between-ness so popular during the Meiji period, what is the real-world twilight that would have encouraged filmmaker Hayao Miyazaki to create a film about kamikakushi? 

As the film was released in 2001, a few years before the Japanese economy really recovered in the mid 2000s, this places the story in the twilight of Japan’s economic stagnation, after the Bubble Economy of the 1980s burst. Chihiro’s father identifies the abandoned theme park as a product of the troubled economy, reinforcing the notion that Miyazaki is consciously linking the period of transition from one economic state to another to the aesthetic of twilight. This linking of monsters with the economy makes the discussion of capitalist anxieties embodied by monsters an apt one. Much like the Legends of Tono were produced during the Meiji period as a reaction to perceived loss of

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1 Can be translated as ‘The Spiriting Away of Sen and Chihiro’. Kamikakushi implies hidden by the gods.
cultural traditions, *Spirited Away* can be viewed as a reaction against globalization and its
effect on the individual.

The character who is confronted with the physical manifestations of these cultural
anxieties, Chihiro, unlike Miyazaki’s usual heroines, is an ordinary girl and because of
this she is ideal for the role of mediator. She fulfils a role similar to a shamaness or
*onmyoji*[^1], as she must manage the monsters of capitalist excess that populate the
bathhouse. The obstacles that she must overcome are not completely otherworldly, rather
they are analogous to those ordinary people are faced with in a global consumerist society.
Although scholars tend to interpret *Spirited Away* as a rejection of globalism, Miyazaki
handling of the topic is more nuanced than a simple rejection, as the film seems to
suggest that the capitalist monsters cannot, and perhaps should not, be destroyed. The
monsters that Chihiro manages are not singularly evil; rather they are markers of
capitalist excesses such as extreme consumption, monetary greed, and loss of individual
identity that must be managed.

[^1]: An *onmyoji* is a master of yin and yang magic, or a practitioner of *onmyodo* that would be skilled in
divination. A more detailed explanation for the term *onmyoji* is provided in chapter 2.
Mindless Consumption

The first capitalist monster that Chihiro is faced with is that of over-consumption. Frederic Jameson in ‘Globalization and Political Strategy’ identifies the ‘culture of consumption’ as a symptom of economic globalization. He explains that, consumption itself individualizes and atomizes, that its logic tears through what is so often metaphorized as the fabric of daily life. (And indeed daily life, the everyday or the quotidian, does not begin to be theoretically and philosophically, sociologically, conceptualized until the very moment when it begins to be destroyed in this fashion.) The critique of commodity consumption here parallels the traditional critique of money itself—where gold is identified as the supremely corrosive element, gnawing at social bonds (Jameson).

This link between over-consumption and the deterioration of social bonds is addressed by many of the monsters in Spirited Away, but especially with Chihiro’s parents, Noface, and Bo.

Although the action of Spirited Away is set in the countryside, the monsters that Sen must overcome in the spirit world are anxieties created by globalization and the city. As a representative of urban Japanese youth, Chihiro begins the story whiny, rather spoiled, and dependant. Chihiro herself begins the film as a kind of monster, an outsider. She is not the least bit pleased about moving to a new place, and much like her parents is more concerned with material objects, such as her school and her flowers, than she is with social bonds. Her status as an outsider and potential monster is also highlighted by the reaction she provokes from the bathhouse workers. They all comment on her stench and are horrified by the fact that she is a human. In order to survive in the bathhouse,
Chihiro needs to let go of the ills of the city, and by doing so transforms herself into a mediator for the bathhouse and the monsters that destabilize it. Susan Napier describes her as having,

shamanness-like aspects as she deals with the gods inside the fantasy bathhouse, mediating between a variety of liminal worlds. Much in the same way Mary Schmidt describes the shaman's initiatory process, Chihiro must confront a world in which "all is chaos and dismaying juxtaposition. Everything that the child holds to be true and natural is transformed. (297)

Chihiro, when faced with food from an unknown source in the abandoned theme park, refuses to give in to the impulse to consume. Had she done so, she would have become a pig like her parents and would have undergone the monstrous transformation from consumer to consumed. By refusing to consume the food of the spirit world, Chihiro unknowingly passes a test and escapes becoming a monster of consumption. This allows her to occupy a liminal space as outsider and almost-monster, as she does not fully belong to the bathhouse, nor is she an outsider that threatens to destabilize the bathhouse’s capitalist workings. This initial refusal, along with her subsequent rejection of material objects in favour of maintaining social bonds, makes her ideally suited for managing the excesses of the monsters that threaten the bathhouse.

Although they are not a direct threat to capitalist workings of the bathhouse, the first monsters of over-consumption that Chihiro encounters are her parents. Their monstrously comical transformation into pigs is prefigured by their rather consumer-oriented behaviour. Her father’s main defining feature is his purchasing power, that is to say his ability to consume, which is highlighted both directly and indirectly. For example,
when Chihiro complains that her first bouquet is one her friends bought her as a parting gift, her mother reminds her that her father once bought her a rose. Chihiro’s father also directly brings attention to his purchasing power by telling his family not to worry about going through the forest, as he purchased a vehicle with four-wheel drive. When faced with an unmanned food stall at the abandoned amusement park he also highlights his ability to consume in two ways. Firstly, by overindulging and piling great quantities of food on many plates he highlights his ability to consume in the most basic sense of the word, that is to say by eating. Secondly, while he is consuming food in excess, he also highlights his ability to buy in excess, as he forestalls any argument Chihiro makes by telling her not to worry: daddy has credit cards and cash. He clearly believes, erroneously, that he can pay the price for the food, no matter what it is, with the money he has. Additionally, he seems to believe that money can buy anything, and even erase the social discord that would arise from presumptuously helping himself to the food without consulting whoever tends the food stall. In this way, the father’s impulse to consume is placed ahead of social relationships, as he seems to believe, rather erroneously, that one can buy positive social relations.

His purchasing power is also indirectly put on display via the family car. Rather than being of Japanese make, Audi’s interlocking ring logo clearly labels the car as not only an unnecessarily expensive purchase, but also a foreign product, as the German company is known for producing luxury cars. Had this film been made in Hollywood, the decision to identify the vehicle as an Audi might simply have been a case of clever (yet ironic, considering the film’s theme) product placement, however considering Miyazaki return to more Japan-oriented stories the choice is likely a deliberate critique of excess consumption and globalism.
Chihiro’s mother is also defined by consumerism, as one of the few lines she utters are complaints that the town they are moving to is so small that she will need to go to the next town to get her shopping done. Although she is not as defined by her purchasing power as her husband, she follows his example and encourages Chihiro to eat the food as well, regardless of its doubtful origins and unknown price. She also, like Chihiro’s father, seems to place consuming above positive social relations, as she is not set up as positive example of motherhood. In response to Chihiro complaining that her flowers are dying, her initial reaction is to apathetically tell Chihiro that she warned her not to smother them. Also, when going through the tunnel leading to the abandoned theme park, instead of reassuring her daughter who is evidently unnerved by the detour, she tells Chihiro to stop clinging so much, as it will make her trip.

Their drive to consume literally turns Chihiro’s parents into capitalist pigs. Confident as they were that they are entitled to consume whatever they like as long as they have the capital to pay for it, they do not realise that eating the food of the spirit world is an offence that cannot be compensated through cash. Although the form they take as punishment for over-consumption, that of a pig, may not ordinarily labelled as a monster, it is the transformation itself that is monstrous. They are punished for their excess consumption by in turn becoming the object of consumption. Their monstrous transformation into pigs marks a role reversal from consumer to consumed, highlighting one of the major anxieties of capitalism, that there is no difference between commodities and consumers. Newitz highlights the fact that this anxiety is not a new one,

One type of story that has haunted America since the late nineteenth century focuses on humans turned into monsters by capitalism. Mutated by backbreaking labor, driven insane by corporate conformity, or gorged on too
many products of a money-hungry media industry, capitalism’s monsters cannot
tell the difference between commodities and people. They confuse living beings
with inanimate objects. (Newitz 2)

Thus, it is rather appropriate that since Chihiro’s parents put the value of commodities
ahead of social relations, they become commodities themselves. Their transformation into
pigs is particularly monstrous as their expectation of being a consumer in the abandoned
theme park is reversed, causing them to in reality become a commodity for the bathhouse.

Interestingly, the setting for the bathhouse, and by association the spirit world, is
also a marker of excess consumption. Rather than simply falling down a rabbit hole like
Alice, Chihiro crosses into the spirit world through what her father assumes to be an old
abandoned theme park. He claims that it is one of the many theme parks built in the 90s
that went bankrupt when the economic bubble burst. Thus rather than placing the spirit
world outside the realm of capitalist production, Miyazaki marks the spirit world itself as
a product of excess consumption. This reverses the assumption that the traditional-
looking theme park acts as a haven from globalization. After all, Chihiro’s father remarks
that the traditional look of the theme park is manufactured, and barely covers up its status
as a commodity. He also suggests that the river the family crosses was man-made, tying
even something that should be a part of the natural world to capitalist commodification.
The excess of consumption is not only emphasized by the fact that the theme park was
abandoned because there was no real need for it, but also by the fact that all the booths
that the family pass are food stands. Instead of simply having one food stand and having
all the other stands sell something else, the stands in the abandoned theme park only sell
food, saturating the market with an item to the point that it is no longer a necessity, but
rather an object of excessive consumption and waste. Thus, the liminal space of the
theme park rather explicitly introduces the spirit world as a place that is as troubled by excess consumption, making it analogous to the human world.

Some scholars might suggest that the spirit world represents an attempt at cultural recovery through a return to pre-war Japanese values. It can indeed be argued that the spirit world’s emphasis on hierarchy, hard work, and the communal makes it reminiscent of the pre-war period. However, this thesis would argue that those resemblances are merely superficial. Far from being an escape from the human world, the spirit world, exemplified by Yubaba’s bathhouse, mirrors the human world in its hierarchy and capitalist endeavours. The bathhouse’s overall political structure resembles that of any capitalist company, which is not a uniquely Japanese structure. Yubaba, as the company head that sits in her cushy office on the top floor and reaps the benefits of her worker’s labour, is not a figure that is not unlike the presidents of companies in Canada, or any other country. To suggest that the bathhouse represents a return to healthy Japanese values which have been lost because of globalization would be false, as the bathhouse is not only a microcosm of capitalist culture; it is also a space that creates monsters.

The first monster of over consumption that Sen faces is the sludge monster, a being that causes all other monsters to recoil and Yubaba to disrupt business in the bathhouse. She attempts to contain the situation by sending all other customers away and refusing the sludge monster entry, however she is ultimately forced to let him in. As the sludge monster upsets Yubaba’s hopes of making a profit, it is indeed a monster that threatened the stability of the bathhouse and its capitalist enterprise. However, it is not
Yubaba that manages this monster, but rather Sen\(^6\), as it is sent to the bathhouse’s filthiest bath. Due to her status as both human and new employee, Sen is being hazed into undertaking the filthiest jobs and, unbeknownst to her, the filthiest jobs include managing monsters.

The way she manages the sludge monster sets the tone for subsequent mediations. Rather than trying to banish it, she puts in her best effort to clean it. She finds a bicycle handle and pulls out all sorts of other garbage from the spirit, revealing that the sludge monster has been misunderstood. Rather than being an evil monster that threatens to destroy the bathhouse, the sludge monster ends up being one of the most benevolent spirits of the film. Cleaning the sludge monster reveals that consumption and pollution have corrupted a very old river to the point that it is unrecognizable as such. A bike, a fridge, fishing line, and tires are all examples of garbage that has been indiscriminately thrown into the river. These objects, once they have outlived their usefulness or have been replaced, instead of being reused or recycled, are simply thrown away. This particular monster brings to the forefront the results of consuming in mass quantities, as every object that is bought eventually ends up either in a landfill, or even more cruelly, in a body of water. These used goods, because of the capitalist compulsion to consume, have corrupted something that was essentially good, an old river, and transformed it into something monstrous and smelly.

Thus, it is over consumption that has created the sludge monster, and this anxiety cannot simply be ignored. Sen manages this monster not by destroying it, as it would be an impossible task to completely overcome pollution. The film offers a more practical

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\(^6\) When Chihiro signs her contract, she is effectively stripped of her identity and renamed Sen by Yubaba. Yubaba does this by manipulating the kanji that form her name, as Sen (千) is another reading for the first character in Chihiro (千). This essay refers to her by both names.
solution to managing this monster of capitalism, as Sen simply takes the initiative and cleans the river. By doing this, Sen effectively manages the excess garbage of capitalist consumption. Her efforts are rewarded when others join her efforts, and the sludge monster’s true form is revealed. It should be noted that Yubaba only steps in later to mobilize her workers to help. Miyazaki is likely implying that the individual should not wait for those in power to take the first step, as they are unlikely to do so. Instead, they will try to delegate the task to others. Rather, the responsibility of curbing excess consumption and pollution lies with ordinary people. In this case Sen does not manage the sludge monster on her own, as although she is the one that takes initiative, pollution is a monster that requires a collective effort to overcome. The environmental message embodied by this monster is clear: pollution, as a by-product of capitalist consumption, must be managed rather than pushed aside or ignored. Furthermore, although it is unlikely that pollution can ever be permanently eliminated, effort must be exerted to improve the status quo.

As monsters of pollution are the derivative of monsters of consumption, it is only appropriate that the greatest threat in the film is a monster of consumption. Although Noface\(^7\) is an outsider much like the sludge monster, it is the bathhouse that is directly responsible for his monstrous transformation. Noface originally starts out as a blank slate and by observation and example comes to believe that consumption can create the social bonds he desires. It is his case that most clearly identifies the bathhouse as a toxic environment. Susan J. Napier, in her article ‘Matter Out of Place: Carnival, Containment, 

\(^7\) The character’s name is Kao-nashi (顔なし) in Japanese, which translates as ‘faceless’. The pun on Noh masks is therefore unintentional.
and Cultural Recovery in Miyazaki's Spirited Away’ also identifies the Noface as an anxiety that must be managed,

The problematic nature of the bathhouse is underscored by Miyazaki's insertion of characters into the film who do not belong in traditional folklore, most importantly the phantom known as No Face. This disturbing figure, who becomes a signifier of excess and carnival gone out of control, suggests a disequilibrium at the heart of the contemporary Japanese psyche that may not easily be overcome. (294)

Noface first appears on the bridge leading to the bathhouse. This is a liminal space where one would expect to find a monster, however Noface is at once striking for his blandness. He does not speak, he is transparent, and has no real defining characteristics. It is Chihiro that initially allows him into the bathhouse, and as a result of this Noface repeatedly tries to reciprocate her attention to him through material objects. This belief that material objects can buy him social relationships is one of the main factors contributing to Noface’s monstrous transformation.

Noface first attempts to buy friendship by appropriating one of the bathhouse’s bath tags and giving it to Sen when the attendant refuses to help her. She is grateful for his intervention, which encourages him to present her with a pile of them. Sen refuses the offer, and explains that she only needed one, to which Noface recoils. Noface, not knowing how to relate with others, takes this rejection of the bath tags as a personal rebuff, and disappears. And is soon becomes clear that although his intentions were perhaps good when he makes overtures towards Sen, Noface is corrupted by the greed of the bathhouse workers. While Sen insists on taking only what she needs, the bathhouse workers take all they can. The attentions they give him when he is offering them gold
give in to the illusion that money can buy him relationships. Noface mistakes capitalist transactions with social interaction, which makes him almost a pathetic figure. He does not realise that consuming is counter-productive to the formation of lasting social bonds, and will never fill the void he feels.

However, because the workers feed into the illusion that their attention can be bought, they become indistinguishable from commodities. Thus, Noface quickly becomes the only monster in the film that, after mistaking people for commodities, consumes them. Having witnessed the workers rush to collect the ex-stink monster’s gold, he lures a greedy frog with his own gold and proceeds to eat him. This consumption gives him a voice, and he then proceeds to disrupts the order of the bathhouse by having everyone wake up to serve him. By consuming in large quantities, Noface thinks he can buy himself friends, which at first seems to be the case. The bathhouse workers all flock to him, amazed by the amount of gold he has to dispose of, and entertain him with song and even more food, which makes him even more monstrous. Noface, encouraged by his success, once again offers Sen something material, this time gold, in an attempt to buy her companionship. Sen refuses, saying that she does not need any, and leaves. Noface once again seems to take this refusal for material goods as a personal rejection and proceeds to eat the next person that talks to him.

Noface goes from consuming material goods indiscriminately to consuming people, which is all the more frightening for the fact that even Yubaba is powerless to stop him. After all, as the head of the capitalist bathhouse, she is committed to the capitalist enterprise and is meant to encourage customers to consume. Even when it becomes clear that Noface has become a monster of excess and is out of control, she does not prevent his monstrous consumption spree. If anything, she only continues to feed him
by giving him what he wants in the hope that he will eventually be satisfied. Thus, when one of his demands is Sen, Yubaba obliges. She is impervious to the protest of a worker that Sen might be consumed, asking him if he would rather take Sen’s place. In this regard Yubaba is as monstrous as Noface, as she also views people as commodities.

Noriko Reider also comments on Noface’s impulse to commodify by likening him to a real-world situation,

> Without doubt, the character of No-Face (Kaonashi) is a most baffling creature, worthy of note here simply because he is so peculiar. No-Face first appears on the bridge that connects to the bathhouse. He is a mysterious man, who, "like Chihiro, came to the world of the bathhouse from a different realm. He is a pathetic creature who does not have self, and he can only communicate through the voice of someone he has swallowed" (Saito, 59). No-Face may be interpreted as a lonely young Japanese person who does not know how to make friends (Reider).

However, because Sen has escaped becoming a commodity when encouraged by her parents to consume unnecessarily, she knows that nothing good comes of excess consumption. Furthermore, Sen’s experience in the bathhouse has allowed her to form positive relationships that are built on actions rather than economic exchange; therefore she is resistant to Noface’s belief that he can buy her friendship. He offers her food, money, asks her what she wants. Sen tells him there is nothing she wants that he could offer her. Noface is perplexed by this refusal, as his previous experiences in the capitalist environment of the bathhouse have taught him that people can be bought like commodities. He believes that he can buy any relationship for the right price, and likely sees Sen’s refusal to be commodified as a comment on his own personal value. This is
not the case, as Sen is merely placing social relationships ahead of consumption, as Noface has intercepted her on her way to rescue Haku. She understands that personal relationships cannot be commodified and should be placed ahead of other concerns, so despite Noface’s best efforts to tempt her, Sen asks to leave. She also asks him whether he has other relationships to turn to. Noface responds to the negative, confirming that he is using objects to fill the void created by a lack of social relationships. Sen has already rejected him in favour of leaving to rescue Haku, so she realises that human relationships are more important than money. At this point, she makes it clear that she will not be bought, much to Noface’s dismay. However, she does not completely disregard him, as she feeds him the remaining half of the herbal cake that was intended for her parents. Enraged by this, Noface becomes determined to consume her and chases her through the bathhouse.

By refusing to give in to Noface’s impulse to consume and commodify, Sen mediates his presence in the bathhouse and shows positive modes of behaviour that will enable him to form friendships. She also lures him away from the bathhouse, correctly assessing that his impressionable nature is influenced in a negative way by the excesses of the bathhouse. Once outside the bathhouse’s capitalist influence, Noface looses his drive to consume and learns to form social relations outside of an economic context. Whereas in the bathhouse Noface was driven to consume in excess and undergoes a monstrous transformation for it, at Zeniba’s cottage he is seen eating cake without becoming a monster, as he has learned the importance of moderation. Noface, despite being a monster that consumes people, is not destroyed by Chihiro. Rather, he is managed by being shown the value of restraint in the face of capitalist excess.
Noface, despite being an embodiment of the cultural anxiety of excessive commodification that must be repudiated, is also a figure linked with the carnivalesque. He seems to fit rather nicely within Cohen’s fourth monster thesis, ‘Fear of the Monster Is Really a Kind of Desire’. Although he is a very real threat as he pitilessly eats workers, Noface is also the monster that comes closest to successfully disrupting the capitalist workings of the bathhouse. In this way, Noface might also embody the desire to break apart the capitalist enterprise and render it useless. Cohen explains that,

The monster is continually linked to forbidden practices, in order to normalize and to enforce. The monster also attracts. The same creatures who terrify and interdict can evoke potent escapist fantasies; the linking of monstrosity with the forbidden makes the monster all the more appealing as a temporary egress from constraint. This simultaneous repulsion and attraction at the core of the monster’s composition accounts greatly for its continued cultural popularity, for the fact that the monster seldom can be contained in a simple, binary dialectic (thesis, antithesis…no synthesis). We distrust and loathe the monster at the same time we envy its freedom, and perhaps its sublime despair. (Cohen 17).

We might be attracted by Noface’s disregard for the stability of the bathhouse. After all, as a customer he expects the bathhouse to serve him as mindlessly as he spends. Instead of catering to the bathhouse, the bathhouse caters to him. The hours of operation are changed to conform to his will, the workers rush to cater to him exclusively, and there is the sense that they will bend over backwards to provide him with whatever he wants. Rather than be a slave to capitalism, Noface makes it work for him. This escapist fantasy cannot last indefinitely and must eventually be managed, however Noface does have the chance to cover Yubaba in vomit before the status quo is re-established. This last trespass
clearly makes him representative of a kind of desire, because after all, who hasn’t at one point wished to see their boss humiliated in such a way? However, the anxiety that Noface represents is clear: consuming mindlessly in a capitalist system will not gain you anything of real value. Napier says that,

No Face suggests a Japan that is out of control, lacking in subjectivity, unable to connect with others and animated only by the empty urge to consume. Other infantile characters exist as well, most notably Yubaba's grotesquely gigantic baby who also is motivated only by the most basic of desires, suggesting that transgressive consumption is already part of the bathhouse culture (306). Thus, even though she is at the top of the capitalist food chain, Yubaba also makes the mistake of believing that consumption can create positive relationships. She also seems to believe that material objects can buy happiness, and because of this she creates a monster, her own son Bo. In an effort to buy her son’s love, Yubaba surrounds him with material goods to the point of smothering him. Sen first meets Bo when he is buried under a mountain of pillows, and it soon becomes clear that he is both literally and figuratively a giant baby. Bo is so smothered by his mother that he does not go outside, as he believes that it will make him sick. Because of this, he has no social skills and is used to making demands to get his way. He threatens to break Chihiro’s arm, and also tells her he will cry if she does not play with him. This would suggest that Bo, because he has had no real human contact outside of his mother, is predisposed to see people as commodities, as commodities are all he has experience with. By demanding that Chihiro play with him, regardless of her own personal feelings on the matter, he likens her to one of the many toys that surrounds him. Also, his threat of physical violence for trying to escape him, as though breaking Chihiro’s arm will make her more amenable to play, also suggests that
he puts as much value on people as he does on his toys. And considering the quantity of toys he possesses, this is likely not a great deal. Chihiro only escapes by showing him her bloodied hand, feeding on his fear of germs. In this way, Bo is likely a representative of the spoiled, rather useless children of the capitalist bourgeoisie. However, it is not his fault that he is a monster, as he is a child and only acts the way he is taught to. Bo is, like Noface, a rather pathetic figure as he is a monster not because he is predisposed to evil, but because he lives in a system that takes advantage of him. Miyazaki reveals that this comment on the social reality of children who are overly indulged is intentional, as he is fully aware of the way the capitalist system transforms children into commodities. He states that,

If you let me have my own way, I'd first reduce the amount of manga, video games, and weekly magazines. I would drastically reduce the number of businesses that target children. Our work is part of them, but I think we should let our children watch animation only once or twice a year, and ban cram school as well. If we let children have more of their own time and have their own way, they'll become more lively in a year or so. There are too many people who make money off of children. (Animage 2001).

Thus, Miyazaki is aware of the monstrous aspect of consumption. Bo is not a monster by nature, rather he is a monster because he has been taught to replace social relations with objects, which will eventually lead him to consume in excess like Noface. Miyazaki notes that this is not the children’s fault, but rather the fault lies with the parents. After all, it is not Bo’s choice to replace his mother’s presence in his life with toys. There is something clearly monstrous about parents who not only try to buy their children’s love, but who allow the capitalist system to start corrupting children at a very
early age into believing that objects can buy happiness. When they teach children to use commodities to replace healthy social relationships, parents are creating monsters. Bo is the physical embodiment of this cultural anxiety of excessive consumption, but strangely enough, it is the fact that she has unintentionally created a monster acts to humanize Yubaba. Although she views her workers as disposable commodities, this is certainly not the case with her son. She truly seems to believe that the amount of toys she gives him is proportional to her love for him. She does not realise that consumption disintegrates social bonds rather than builds them.

Interestingly, Bo is the only character that starts out as a monster, undergoes a physical transformation, and returns to his original form. The fact that he starts the story as a monster is likely because he is not an outsider to the bathhouse; rather he was born into its corrupting influence. One would think that a baby would be fairly inoffensive, but Bo subverts that belief by being introduced as a crying mass of limbs that destroys Yubaba’s office. Under the logic of one of the previous transformation, that of Chihiro’s parents, one would think that Bo would undergo a monstrous transformation. However, because he is already a monster to begin with, when Zeniba makes him undergo a transformation, it is the opposite of monstrous. If anything, his transformation into a mouse makes him exceedingly cute. This being said, Yubaba saw no problem with her son, and she reacts with disgust to the mouse, not recognizing him.

It is also interesting to note that it is not the physical transformation that modifies Bo’s behaviour. He is used to being catered to, and this continues despite the transformation. He does not walk on his own; a miniscule bird carries him. However, as he leaves the bathhouse’s influence, he begins to do things on his own. He starts to walk and works hard to create Chihiro’s hair elastic. The moral of this story with Bo seems to
be that the children of the capitalist bourgeoisie would be happier if they were taught to work and take pleasure in their efforts. Being disconnected from the realm of production, Bo does not understand the value of the objects that surround him. By being given his own independence, Bo learns to form social relationships outside of the realm of consumption, and seems much happier for it, as Zeniba notes that he could have returned to his previous form at any time, but chose not to. Bo was so coddled in the bathhouse that his mother is surprised to see that he can stand on his own two feet in the end. He also has learned to relate to others in a healthy way, and no longer views Chihiro as a disposable commodity, as he tells his mother that he will be unhappy if she hurts Sen. Thus, although it took quite a bit of downsizing (from giant baby to mouse), this change in circumstances allowed Bo to learn the real value of objects, but more importantly to value social relationships ahead of material wealth. He is made to understand that there is human labour behind the creation of objects, and that these humans are not commodities that can be replaced. It does not take much for Chihiro to manage Bo’s excess consumption, as all she had to do was take him out of his confining environment. Once he learns the value of human relations, he can place his friendship with Sen ahead of any toys his mother might buy him once he returns to the bathhouse.
Greed

Although Noface and the Sludge Monster are outsiders that threaten the stability of the capitalist bathhouse, there are also threats from within the bathhouse as well, as Bo illustrated. However, Bo learns not to view people as commodities. It is unclear whether Yubaba and the bathhouse workers learn this lesson. Although Yubaba and the bathhouse workers belong to the capitalist order of the bathhouse, they represent a threat to Chihiro and have monstrous qualities that can also be taken as markers of excess, notably their greed. Although at first this greed seems to be compatible with the capitalist mode of production of the bathhouse, however it soon becomes clear that their greed creates monsters.

Yubaba is largely defined by her greed, as she will stop at nothing to make a profit. There is very little doubt that the bathhouse is a capitalist enterprise. Patrons pay to use the facilities, and while the employees sleep on futons in a communal space, Yubaba lives extravagantly in the upper level of the building with her son Bo. Her living quarters are a stark contrast to Kamaji’s boiler room, as Yubaba lines her hallway with luxurious vases, while Kamaji sleeps where he works and drinks from an old kettle. Yubaba clearly makes a profit at the expense of her workers, who clearly do not enjoy the same standard of living as her. She is a stark contrast to Lady Eboshi from Princess Mononoke, who is also a female in a position of power. Rather than being respected, Yubaba is feared, and has none of Lady Eboshi’s compassion for the people she rules. Yubaba’s avarice and her total lack of regard for her employees, exemplified by her treatment of Haku, are what make her a monster. Although it is relatively orderly, with the exception of a few disruptive monsters, there is very little positive about her rule. She
represents the typical bourgeois capitalist that cares very little for anything beyond his or her own profit. Because of her greed, she cares solely about her profit, to the detriment of others and even the capitalist enterprise itself. As long as monsters pay, Yubaba allows them to enter the bathhouse. She does not turn them away, regardless of the damage they can cause. She does try to keep out the sludge monster, but once he pays she delegates him to Sen. She also allow Noface to dictate the bathhouse’s hours, eat her employees, and willingly offers him Sen in an attempt to pacify him instead of kicking him out.

Because of her greed, Yubaba tends to see people as a means to an end, and therefore treats them as though they are commodities. She not only callously sends Sen to be eaten by the monstrous Noface, she also intends to dispose of Haku as though he were trash. She complains that he is bleeding all over her carpet and asks that he be removed, as he is of no use to her anymore. Clearly, to Yubaba an employee near death is not worth her concern, as he will no longer be able to bring her a profit. Since she views her workers as disposable commodities, once Haku has outlived his usefulness it is only natural that she have three green heads push him into a pit conveniently located under the carpet in front of her fireplace. This is done regardless of the fact that he was injured following her orders. Thus, working for Yubaba is essentially working for someone else’s profit without the safeguards to protect employee rights. This makes Yubaba perhaps even more monstrous than Noface as she commodifies people that should be under her protection. Yubaba is very much like the giant crow-like monster she turns into when she flies away from the bathhouse during the day. While carrion crows feed on the carcasses that have been killed by others, Yubaba takes much more than just the leftovers. Her workers are not dead, but because she does not see the difference between people and commodities, they might as well be dead bodies. She tells her workers to hand over all
the gold they have collected from the River Spirit, and steals from her sister to get what
she wants. Yubaba’s greed makes it so that she will ignore harmonious social relations in
favour of a profit. After all, when Haku tells her that something precious belonging to her
is missing, Yubaba’s first reaction is to check her gold.

However, perhaps the monstrosity of Yubaba’s greed is also related to her sex.
Most of the other monsters that Chihiro encounters in the bathhouse are characterized as
male. The sludge monster’s true form has a face like an okina\(^8\) mask, after he eats a frog
Noface takes on a male voice, and Bo is male. Noriko T. Reider identifies Yubaba as
being a character based on the Yamauba, a mountain witch found in the Japanese monster
tradition; however she is also intentionally made to resemble the Queen of Hearts from
*Alice in Wonderland*. Reider explains that,

Yubaba’s appearance and demeanor, the very way she commands her minion
workforce, is reminiscent of Lewis Carroll’s Queen of Hearts character. But Yubaba,
who is also seen excessively pampering her gigantic spoiled baby-boy named Bo,
strikes me most as a descendent of a yamauba, Japanese mountain witch (Reider).

If the Queen of Hearts was said to be a thinly veiled parody of Queen Victoria,
what is Yubaba meant to represent? What is threatening about a woman in a high place,
both literally and figuratively in this case? Although Napier suggests that Yubaba’s
presence as a matriarchal figure is reminiscent of ancient Japan where women were in
charge, she is more than a possible figure of nostalgia, Yubaba is a threat. She is not
immediately represented as a positive example of a woman with power; rather, her
workers complain about her in the same way that anyone complains about a tyrannical

\(^8\) Old man
boss. Yubaba, though her character is later shown to have reasons for her avarice, is not a positive figure representing female advancement in a capitalist world. There is clearly something unsettling about her. After all, despite advancement in the position of women in the workplace, it is still not common to see women running capitalist enterprises, especially not in Japan. In this way she seems to embody Cohen’s fifth monster thesis: ‘The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible’. There is something threatening about an old woman that is completely involved in the capitalist mode of production. Rather than being less monstrous than a Yamauba that disrupts village life by stealing children, there is something equally monstrous about a witch running the whole show. And by extension, there seems to be something monstrous about a woman that eschews social bonds in favour of enforcing capitalist modes of production.

Furthermore, Yubaba’s twin sister Zeniba is used as a foil to give the audience an idea of what Yubaba would be like if she was not so invested in the capitalist enterprise of the bathhouse. At first, Zeniba seems as heartless as Yubaba, showing no concern for Haku. However, once outside of the bathhouse, Zeniba proves to be a benevolent character, giving Chihiro words of encouragement and even insisting she call her Granny. As they completely identical and are never shown together, we can interpret Zeniba being another face of the coin that is Yubaba. Zeniba’s presence would suggest that outside of a capitalist environment Yubaba would be a very different person. After all, Zeniba’s cottage is not completely unlike the bathhouse. She also feeds and entertains her guests, and has people work for her, in this case Bo and Noface. However the main difference is that Zeniba does not lean towards excess, and is not overly concerned with personal gain. Zeniba is essentially what Yubaba could be if she curbed he excess greed and valued human relationships above monetary gain.
Because of her avarice, Yubaba creates the monster that is Bo, and following her example the bathhouse workers’ greed feeds the monstrous Noface. Even though it is clear that Noface is disrupting the order of the bathhouse, the workers continue to serve him. Their greed means that collecting gold takes priority over sleep, as they heed his call to serve him during the day, their usual bedtime. It is the worker’s greed that enables Noface to transform the bathhouse into a carnivalistic space of excess consumption. The workers, much like Yubaba, hope that they will profit despite the destruction, and only flee when Noface eats one of them. But in the end, all that excess proves to be useless. Instead of making a profit, Yubaba claims that the gold she collected was not enough to cover the damages. This is exacerbated when the gold turns putrid and melts away, leaving Yubaba with even less to show for her worker’s efforts. Instead of going for instant gratification, the workers should have leaned towards moderation as Sen does. She refuses what she did not need and places relationships ahead of personal gain.

Yet despite the worker’s greed and Yubaba’s callousness, there is no reform to the bathhouse’s power structure, suggesting that the anxiety Japanese society is experiencing with global capitalism is not capitalism itself, but its excesses. Chihiro does not lead a revolution that overthrows Yubaba, and the monsters do not permanently disable the capitalist production of the bathhouse. There is no return to a non-consumerist society, though Zeniba’s quiet cottage existence is presented as an alternative to the bustle of the bathhouse, where Bo can escape to if he likes. In reality, as a mediator between monsters and the status quo, Chihiro only manages to curb the monsters of excess embodied by Noface and Bo. Greed is a monster that Chihiro cannot directly manage; it is up to Yubaba and the bathhouse workers to manage it themselves. However, it is unclear
whether they have learned their lesson, or if they will continue to create more monsters when Chihiro is gone.
Loss of Identity

However, beyond simple avarice, Yubaba’s most monstrous quality is her ability to enslave her workers. When Chihiro signs her contract to enter Yubaba’s service, Yubaba steals the name ‘Chihiro’ and renames her ‘Sen’. In this way, Chihiro has effectively signed away her name and what it represents, her identity. By stealing Chihiro’s name, Yubaba is essentially transforming Sen into a commodity, one that has no identity for the duration of the contract. This onscreen transaction of a boss stealing away a young girl’s identity in exchange for work is capitalism at its most insidious, and clearly marks Yubaba as a capitalist monster. Newitz says that,

Perhaps above all else, capitalist monsters represent the subjective experience of alienation. As Karl Marx and other philosophers have explained, there is a particular kind of social alienation attached to labor in free market capitalism. Marx describes alienation as the sensation of being brutalized and deadened by having to sell oneself for money. Alienation is what it feels like to be someone else’s commodity, to be subject to a boss who “owns” you for a certain amount of time (6).

Thus, Yubaba does not only see her workers are disposable commodities; she is actively involved in their commodification.

Haku then becomes an embodiment of the capitalist anxiety of alienation. He is said to be Yubaba’s apprentice, but it is unclear as to whether Yubaba actually teaches him anything. His duties around the bathhouse are also unclear, though it is evident that he is higher in the capitalist hierarchy than the workers, as he tells Sen to call him Haku-
sama⁹. He is shown to be at odds with the other bathhouse workers, as they regard him with contempt and do not socialize with him. It is implied that he is Yubaba’s errand boy, but it soon becomes clear that he is in fact her slave. Because he has no social relationships, Haku can be particularly dangerous, as he seems to exist solely to do Yubaba’s bidding. Sen wonders if there are two Hakus, as the one who is her friend is very different from the one who works for Yubaba. This is because as a worker, Haku becomes a vessel for Yubaba’s greed. Yubaba’s monstrous disposition is reflected in Haku, and this makes him equally monstrous. Because he has allowed himself to be deadened and become a commodity, Haku the worker does not think for himself. He mindlessly follows Yubaba’s orders, even if they are unethical, and considering Yubaba’s monstrosity, it is certain that they are. After all, she has told him to steal a seal from her sister Zeniba, which Haku risks his life to do. Yubaba sees Haku as nothing more than a commodity, and Haku, because he has signed away his identity, allows himself to be treated as one. However, this is shown to be outside of Haku’s control, as Chihiro eventually destroys a bug that Yubaba placed in him in order to enhance her power over him. The responsibility for Haku’s monstrosity should lie solely with Yubaba, despite Haku voluntarily signing his identity away. After all, Yubaba takes advantage of people when they are in a time of need, Haku when he has no home to return to, and Chihiro when she needs to work to survive. Yubaba is the one that alienates him from others and transforms him into a commodity, one that can be disposed of once it has outlived its usefulness. However, perhaps Haku is a ‘hopeful monster’, because as Newitz states,

The capitalist monster is not always horrifying. Sometimes it is, to borrow a phrase from radical geneticist Richard Goldschmidt, a “hopeful monster.”

⁹ This is translated as ‘Master’ Haku in the English dub.
Instead of telling a story about the destructiveness of a society whose members live at the mercy of the marketplace, this creature offers an allegory about surmounting class barriers or workplace drudgery to build a better world (Newitz 2).

This seems to be true for Haku, as Chihiro serves as a humanizing agent for him. He is not wholly monstrous as he is the first to come to Chihiro’s aid and offer her friendship, proving that he is capable of forming social bonds despite his servitude and commodity status. Furthermore, despite being higher in the bathhouse hierarchy than Chihiro, Haku continues to be her friend and provide her comfort. Through his friendship with Chihiro, Haku is able to escape his commodity status. Furthermore, despite being a monster, he looks out for Chihiro, his social inferior, and in that respect he undermines the hierarchy of the bathhouse.

Despite having signed away her identity to Yubaba, Chihiro does not become a monster of alienation like Haku, as she is able to maintain her identity. This is because she has preserved the farewell card that has her name written on it. This would suggest that in order to preserve one’s identity in a capitalist system and avoid being commodified, one must form social bonds unrelated to work. Although the friendships she forms with Kamaji, Rin, and Haku all allow to mediate excess and survive the bathhouse, it is the note from her classmate that allows her to escape it. Had Chihiro not remembered her name and regained an identity separate from that of the worker ‘Sen’, it is unlikely she would have been able to rescue her parents and leave the bathhouse.

It is interesting that the answer to capitalist alienation that the film gives is to remember an identity formed outside of a capitalist system. By reaffirming her status as a human being with relationships outside of the world of commodification, Chihiro is able
to terminate her contract with Yubaba whenever she wishes. Haku, on the other hand, is not so lucky. Because he does not have any other relationship aside from the one he forms with Chihiro, he is not able to escape the bathhouse and his status as Yubaba’s toy. Haku only recovers his identity thanks to his relationship to Chihiro, as she remembers her mother telling her that she fell into the river Kohaku as a child. Thanks to this happy coincidence, Haku remembers his real name and his identity outside the world of the bathhouse as a river god. If Chihiro had not told him who he was before he was a commodity, it is unlikely that he would have ever been able to escape Yubaba’s service. Because his river has been paved over and covered with apartment buildings, Haku does not have a home to return to, but now that he has regained his identity he has the option of leaving the bathhouse.

The susuwatari\textsuperscript{10}, despite their cuteness, are perhaps the best example of capitalist alienation in the film. They are monsters formed from soot that must carry coal to the furnace that provides heat for the water of the bathhouse. Though they at first seem to perform their work with dedication, when Chihiro tries to help them they are happy to feign lameness to escape it. When Kamaji reminds them that if they let Chihiro take over they will lose their job, they are revealed to be disgruntled employees. However, the susuwatari defer from the typical disgruntled employees in that should they stop working, the enchantment giving them life will end and they will turn back to soot. Thus, although they are the characters that might be the most amenable to a revolution of the proletariat, they are unable to rebel against the institution. Should they do so, they not only lose their identity, but also their life. In this way, the susuwatari are perhaps the embodiment

\textsuperscript{10} Susu (煤) soot, and meaning watari (渡り) meaning to cross. They are also present in another Miyazaki film, \textit{My Neighbour Totoro}. 

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of the pervasiveness of capitalism, as they highlight the very serious plight of those working at the bathhouse: they have no choice but to work, or they cease to exist. This warning is expounded by Haku when he tells Chihiro that if she does not get a job she will also be tuned into a pig like her parents. The problem then is that to be able to work you must sign away your identity to Yubaba, ensuring that one way or another you become a commodity for the bathhouse.

There is no escape from commodification, but having an identity outside of work gives you the freedom to leave. In Spirited Away, work neither something completely positive or negative. As long as work is a means to an end it is a positive thing. It is when one’s identity is wholly encompassed by only work that it becomes a danger. Work is what builds Sen’s character and transforms her from a sullen girl into an independent person with agency, and it is also what transforms Bo from a monstrous baby into an independent child. Napier suggests that one of the lessons that Chihiro learns is the pre-war value of teamwork, however, Chihiro’s experience in the bathhouse is more nuanced. More than just learning to work in a group, Chihiro learns to be an individual. Although she may receive help, like when the bathhouse workers joined her to clean the sludge monster, or when Kamaji gives her train tickets, Chihiro makes important choices, such as identifying her parents, alone. Ultimately, what work gives Chihiro is the potential for agency, and in this regard it is not wholly negative.

This being said, it is clear that Yubaba is the one who profits from everyone’s work. Work, in Spirited Away, seems to be a necessary evil. There is no revolution of the proletariat, as monsters do not succeed in disrupting the capitalist hierarchy. Yubaba, although she has monstrous qualities, is not defeated. It is not even clear if she experiences a change of heart with regards to how she runs the bathhouse by the end of
the film. Yubaba, and the capitalist social structure that she represents, is not a monster that can be defeated or even reformed. When Chihiro leaves, although the bathhouse’s hours are disrupted since instead of sleeping everyone is awake to bid her farewell, and even Kamaji leaves the boiler room to cheer for her, there is no sense that Chihiro has left any visible impact on the way the bathhouse is run. Yubaba is still in charge, and there is no sign that she will stop viewing her workers as commodities. Furthermore, the capitalist hierarchy is still the same. Kamaji is still in the bottom in the boiler room, Noface is still an outsider to the bathhouse, and Bo is still his mother’s spoiled boy, albeit a little more independent thanks to his experience with Chihiro. The only person whose status has changed is Haku, who is freed from his slavery thanks to Sen. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether he will leave the bathhouse, or if he will continue to work for Yubaba.

In conclusion, the monsters that threaten the stability of the capitalist bathhouse are monsters of capitalist excess such as over-consumption, greed, and loss of identity. Chihiro must manage these monsters in order to return to survive. The spirit world itself is a liminal space that is not free from the influence of consumer capitalism. Rather than being a haven encouraging the rejection of globalization a return to more local Japanese practices, the bathhouse creates monsters. Chihiro’s parents and Noface are not healed by the return to local culture that the bathhouse might be said to represent, rather they both undergo a monstrous transformation because of it. This would seem to suggest that it is not the tension between global and local that creates monsters, but rather capitalist excess no matter the context. It would be very simple for Miyazaki to advocate a return to traditional values in order to regain an identity in an increasingly global culture, but this is not the case. Capitalism itself is not a monster that can be overcome, but rather it creates monsters that must be managed. Chihiro does this by being an advocate for
moderation, as she places social relationships ahead of the desire to consume, she resists taking what she does not need, and she learns not to be a slave to work. In the end, perhaps not much has changed. The bathhouse is still a capitalist liminal space, and Chihiro’s parents are unlikely to have overcome their urges to consume strange food. However, what is important is that Chihiro now knows how to deal with the monstrous excesses that capitalism produces, such as mass consumption, greed, and loss of identity. It is not clear whether Chihiro remembers having these capitalist anxieties, however the experience is likely to help her manage the real life aspects of these monsters.
Chapter 2—Modern Onmyoji

Whereas the emperors of old might call upon an exorcist to control demons, the modern emperor in this instance summoned a different kind of specialist in the supernatural, one who had a different set of rituals by which to discipline threatening beings. By what incantations did this modern-day exorcist effect his magic? How would it come to be that by the turning of the twentieth century the rulers of Japan could emphatically declare, via a nationalized instruction, “There is no such thing as tengu”? (Figal 83)

At different times throughout Japanese history the government has set out to manage the supernatural. During the Heian period, the emperor would defer to onmyoji to ensure that he remained untouched by evil spirits and to choose auspicious days, while during the Meiji period the government denied the existence of the supernatural as unscientific, deciding to channel belief into a single Japanese Spirit. Although it would be a mistake to generalize the function of monsters throughout Japanese history, it can be said that the management of monsters has tended to favour the elite.

The onmyoryo, or the Bureau of Yin and Yang, would be where scholars of yin and yang, onmyoji, would work. Butler explains that although the origins of onmyodo, or the practice of yin and yang magic, is unclear, the Bureau was established some time during Emperor Tenmu’s reign, 673-686 (Butler 191). The purpose of the Bureau was not to help the average person exorcise a demon, but rather to protect the Emperor and by extension the government. Noriko T. Reider, in her article ‘Onmyoji: Sex, Pathos, and Grotesquery in Yumemakura Baku’s Oni’, explains that the “prime duties were to observe and examine astronomy, astrology, and divination “(109). More specifically under the category of divination, onmyoji were charged with “the avoidance of

11 For more information about the Meiji mobilization of monsters, see Gerald Figal’s Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan.
inauspicious direction, and divining of auspicious days for a wide range of activities, from marriage to coming-of-age ceremonies to attending court” (Butler 192). By managing monsters the elite could overcome, or at least temporarily displace, protest and reaffirm the status quo. However, do modern onmyoji perform the same function?

While during the Heian period reaffirming the status quo meant promoting the government and the rule of the aristocracy, today’s status quo would be something very different. The status quo at the time of the production of *Tokyo Babylon* and the early volumes of the *Onmyoji novel* would have been dominated by the presence of capitalism and consumption. Although the first Onmyoji novel was released in 1988, slightly before the economic crash, later volumes would have been produced during the economic stagnation of the 1990s and are then ideally situated to be a reaction to capitalism’s excesses.

Although the city represented in *Onmyoji*, Heian-kyō\(^\text{12}\), is a historical city that should in theory be a space free from capitalism, the fact that the author is not concerned with depicting Heian society and their norms means that Seimei must mediate monsters that can often find their analogue in modern-day Tokyo. Although the source documents that Yumemakura bases the plot of the novels on would have been mostly written during the Heian period, the fact that societal norms of the time are ignored would suggest that *Onmyoji*’s monsters represent contemporary issues. The anxieties that Seimei mediates are then as closely related to the excess of capitalism as the ones Subaru mediates.

Royal Tyler, in his introduction to *Japanese Tales*, a translation of stories taken from the *Konjaku Monogatari* and *Uji Shui Monogatari*, among many others, gives the

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\(^{12}\) Heian-kyō (平安京) is an older name for Kyoto (京都). Seimei and other characters refer to the city as Miyako (都), simply meaning ‘the capital’.
reader some historical context in order better understand the stories. He explains that the
men of the Heian period would never see the face of a respectable woman since,

Proper women remained hidden, physically as well as figuratively, though
peasant women must have been too active to imitate them. Not that women never
went outside. But among the aristocracy, a gentleman seldom saw a lady’s face
plainly in broad daylight. There was usually a curtain between them, and even
when they were in bed together it was dark or at best dim (Tyler xxvi).
Thus, the fact that Onmyoji makes no effort to hide women behind curtains would
suggest that the relationships between men and women reflects contemporary society
rather than that of the Heian period. After all, in the manga, a noble woman like
Tamakusa is openly brought to the Rasho gate demon, Gentiane openly shows her face to
the murderer Inumaro among others, Makuzu sees no problem with openly talking to
Seimei and Hiromasa, openly to the point of making comically disparaging comments to
Hiromasa, and in the film Aone moves around with impunity, following Seimei and
Hiromasa wherever they need her to go.

Furthermore, the city would have been dangerous at night, yet Seimei and
Hiromasa go to stakeout monsters by themselves, or accompanied by one or two people.
Tyler explains that,

Security in the Capital was doubtful, especially at night, even without
parades of demons that people occasionally met in the dark, deserted streets (see
below). Robberies were not uncommon, and passersby could be murdered under
the very walls of the palace compound (Tyler xxiv).
Therefore it is unlikely that the extras that accompany the heroes would provide much
protection. They do not bring servants that are armed to defend them; rather, they bring
people that may help them in the investigation. When they go to confront Kandata for the first time, only Hiromasa’s music master joins them, when Hiromasa walks to the Rasho gate following Genjo’s sound he is alone with a young servant, and in the film when Seimei and Hiromasa follow the curse serpent back to the bridge they trek through the city alone. Furthermore, the corpse of Kane-ie’s lover, rotting alone underneath a bridge would suggest two things: 1, she must have been walking through the city to be able to throw herself into a body of water, and 2, she must have been doing this alone in order to commit suicide without anyone knowing. All this would suggest that it is not only the human relationships that represent contemporary issues, but also that the city represented in Onmyoji is not the Heian-kyo of ancient times, but rather the modern Japanese metropolis.

This is reinforced by the relationship between Seimei and Hiromasa. They have an easy camaraderie, and their relationship, along with their humorous banter, is reminiscent of Holmes and Watson. However, as Reider points out,

In reality, it is highly unlikely that Seimei, an onmyoji whose official ranking was Upper Grade of the Junior Seventh Court Rank and thus lower than a nobleman’s, and Hiromasa, a grandson of Emperor Daigo (885-930) who was already conferred the Lower Grade of the Junior Fourth Court Rank at the age of sixteen and so had access to the imperial court, would work as a team to solve mysteries. Even if they did work together, Seimei’s language would have been much more deferential when he spoke to Hiromasa (Reider 115).

Instead of deferring to Hiromasa because of his superior rank, it is often Hiromasa who defers to Seimei due to his superior knowledge. Class or rank does not dictate their interactions, and for this reason it is clear that the society represented in Onmyoji is a
classless one. After all, it is relatively easy for both Seimei and Hiromasa to have access to the emperor. The only instances of class in the story appear when people are commodified. When men treat women as social inferiors and use them as a sexual commodity, women become like the working class of Marxist ideology. They must deaden themselves in order to survive is an unjust system. This is the same for workers who are commodified for their ‘otherness’.

Thus, much like the monsters that populate it, media tends to reflect the socio-historical reality of its time. Although set in two very different time periods, the Heian period and modern-day Tokyo, the monsters of Onmyoji and Tokyo Babylon embody the same modern-day concerns, especially with regards to the relationships between men and women, the relationship people have with the city, and the function of capitalism. Reider touches upon this in her article,

While Onmyoji’s backdrop is indeed the Heian period, Yumemakura’s representations of oni and the development of his human characters are quite contemporary. Frequently, Yumemakura portrays oni as lonely, misunderstood beings, and thus touches a chord of empathy with Japanese readers and viewers (108).

These monsters elicit compassion not simply because they are pathetic, but because they are relatable. They embody the anxieties of people living in an alienating system, and this is why their plight resonates with a contemporary audience. Both cities are ruled by capitalism, and Subaru and Seimei must mediate the symptoms of excess that monsters represent. Predominant anxieties in both texts are the commodification of women, and the alienation of workers. These victims of society manifest their anxieties by becoming monsters that haunt the city, and they can be managed by being given a
voice. However, it is unclear whether Seimei and Subaru are really addressing the root cause of these issues, as they do not attempt to change the city, they simply return it to the capitalist status quo.
The Commodification of Women

And when told that he should at least keep monster in their natural setting of dark woods and mountains and out of Tokyo, he (Kyoka) cryptically replied, “I want to put them in a place where a train’s bell is audible in the middle of Edo.

(Figal 166)

In various representations of onmyoji in manga, anime, and movies, there is a link between the onmyoji and the city, however it is most clearly articulated in Clamp’s manga Tokyo Babylon, released in serial format from 1991 until 1994 in Japan. Considering that that onmyoji were once civil servants and courtiers belonging to the imperial court, it is hardly surprising that they are concerned with the spiritual health of the city rather than the countryside. However, the city is no longer governed uniquely by the government, rather it is also ruled by capitalism. The city of Tokyo represents the rule of consumer capitalism, as it is a city that never sleeps, where one can buy anything, and one can die alone. The ‘monsters’ that Subaru faces are really ordinary people who are undesirables that simply don’t fit neatly into the system. Subaru unfortunately cannot change the alienating capitalist mode of the city, as Tokyo is a city that ‘enjoys its own descent into destruction’. However, he manages the physical embodiments of the culture’s discontent by offering them a sympathetic ear, thereby giving the monster a voice.
The first monster that Subaru encounters is revealing: he is called to exorcise the spirit of a woman haunting a bedroom. He reveals to his sister Hokuto and friend Seishiro that this woman has committed suicide after being told that the night she spent with the entertainer would only be a one-night stand. A similar event happens in the *Onmyoji* film, when Seimei and Hiromasa are asked to divine the origin of a gourd growing in a pine tree. Seimei reveals that this gourd has been cursed, and had Kane-ie eaten it the spell would have feasted on his intestines. When following the curse back to its origin, they discover the corpse of a woman under a bridge. Seimei divines that she has committed suicide after being abandoned by her lover, Kane-ie. Vengeful, the angry spirit has cursed him, and delights in haunting him. This woman, who has been treated as a sexual commodity and thrown away by Kane-ie protests her status by becoming a monster and producing something that will transform Kane-ie into the same thing she was: a dead body. Once Seimei manages the anxiety she represents by bringing her situation to light, it is revealed that in reality, the woman simply wanted to be with Kane-ie.

In *Tokyo Babylon* Hokuto ridicules the woman who has committed suicide for being dumped, however she then remarks that the entertainer deserved to be haunted. Subaru’s client, believing his status as male and entertainer gave him entitlement, used the woman to satisfy his sexual needs as one would use an object. In this way the woman becomes a commodity that is used for sex, and after she has been used the client disposes of her like garbage. This objectification of Akie, the woman who has committed suicide, is one that in the capitalist world of Tokyo, women are supposed to accept. After all, it is expected that men are changeable, and it is not the end of the world if it happens, since women now can support themselves financially. However, Hokuto is outraged on Akie’s behalf, saying that it is all too common for men to treat women as though they have little
or no personal value and dispose of them accordingly. The objectification of women is an anxiety that goes unpunished even in a capitalist system. If anything, capitalism has normalized it. Whereas the woman in Onmyoji who has committed suicide is treated with compassion, as Hiromasa plays his flute on the victim’s behalf, Akie is ridiculed for being naïve. This suggests that women should just accept the dominant hegemony, where men have power and can use them as sexual objects. In both cases the aggressor goes unpunished by society, however at least Kane-ie has the decency to recognize his error in objectifying the woman, as he seems to recognize the spirit as Yayoi and seems nostalgic. The vengeful spirit of this discarded woman is given a voice by Abe no Seimei, where her plight might have otherwise gone unnoticed.

Another woman who becomes an oni\(^1\) to protest her commodification is Gentiane. In the Onmyoji manga, Gentiane is a lady who lives with her mother in the woods. The emperor, who was then a prince, had been hunting near her house and decides to spend the night. Gentiane falls in love with him and sleeps with him, and in return he ‘loans’ her two dogs and gives her the promise that she and her mother will be moved to the palace. Gentiane waits 15 years for the emperor to fulfil his promise, but he has forgotten her. Thus, rather than be representative of the promise to come back, the dogs become almost a kind of payment. The dogs become the capital that the emperor has used to pay for the use of Gentiane’s body. By sleeping with her and then forgetting her, Gentiane has been commodified by the emperor, and becomes an oni in order to protest this objectification. Every night the oni moves a little closer to the royal palace using the main avenue of the city. Reider states,

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\(^1\) Often translated into English as ‘ogre’.
The *oni* in “Oni no michiyuki” is a victim of the emperor’s utter neglect. Unlike the fierce *oni* of classical literature, however, she happily goes to the other world once the emperor acknowledges his neglect and expresses sincere remorse (115).

Seimei merely has to give her a lock of the emperor’s hair and tell her that the emperor remembered her and sincerely regretted having treated her so ill, to the point of crying. Why is Gentiane exorcised so easily? By acknowledging his cruelty, the emperor has also acknowledged her humanity, since he recognizes that a human being with feelings does not appreciate being ill used. Once Gentiane’s humanity has been acknowledged, she is able to feel regret for the men she turned the tables on and disposed of during her time as an *oni*: “Devenue un être atroce, j’ai pris la vie d’hommes qui n’y étaient pour rien, je le regrette…” (Okano and Yumemakura, Vol 2, 177)

Yet another woman who has been marginalized by the system is Sukehime. Sukehime’s story is based on historical fact, as she was a courtier who committed suicide when her social position was lowered through no fault of her own. Hiromasa explains in the manga that Sukehime’s child, Hirohira, was the emperor’s first-born son. “Quand son fils Hirohira est mort et que sa position de résidence du pavillon de l’Est lui fut ravie par le prince Norihira, fils de Yasuiko du pavillon central, elle se donna la mort avec son père…” (Yumemakura and Okano, Vol 2, 118). In the manga, Sukehime is already a ghost, and she is clearly powerful since she stops Gentiane from proceeding closer to the palace. She beats the other *oni* down, smacks her with her fan, and pulls her hair, warning Gentiane that Nariakira and Norihira are hers for the kill.

While in the manga as a monster she is empowered, in film as a woman who is no more than a commodity. When Prince Atsuhira is born Sukehime’s father blames her for
their loss of status, asking her why the Emperor chose someone else, didn’t she have his heart? It is clearly not Sukehime’s fault that her son has been supplanted; yet she takes the blame for their loss in status. Her father almost seems to be accusing her of not being good enough for the emperor, as though she were a worker who was fired for being incompetent. In reality, it is as though she were a toy that was replaced in favour of a newer, shinier model. Where as a monster Sukehime is powerful and has agency, as a human being she is rather pathetic. She continuously reads the poem the emperor has given her, rather doll-like, and although she returns Hiromasa’s feelings, she does not act on them. The passive human Sukehime is a far cry from the powerful spirit that leads Hiromasa to remark that women are terrifying. As a human, the film’s Sukihime is a commodity with no agency. She only stops being commodified and gains agency when she becomes a monster. Her status as a monster allows her to hammer a nail into the head of the emperor’s effigy and strangle Atsuhira’s, both of which she believes to be the real thing. By becoming a monster, Sukehime stops being a commodified female and can act to protest her own commodification. She is able to avenge herself by attempting to turn the emperor into what she was as a human, a dead body. The emperor eventually apologises, but it is Hiromasa’s love and his recognition of her humanity and equality that liberates her. Although she is seen as a disposable commodity by the emperor, Hiromasa acknowledges the wrong done to her and treats her as a social equal. By doing so, Hiromasa effectively mediates the anxiety she represents.

The female monsters of *Tokyo Babylon* and *Onmyoji* are then representatives of the desire of women to be men’s social and sexual equal and to escape objectification. Because of this, they fit Cohen’s sixth monster thesis, ‘Fear of the Monster Is Really a Kind of Desire’. Cohen states,
The monster is continually linked to forbidden practices, in order to normalize and to enforce. The monster also attracts. The same creatures who terrify and interdict can evoke potent escapist fantasies; the linking of monstrosity with the forbidden makes the monster all the more appealing as a temporary egress from constraint (17).

Though the women who become monsters to protest being treated like a disposable commodity are indeed monstrous and threatening, part of their monstrosity stems from their disregard for gender roles. In reality, they are simply inflicting on others what has been done to them, and now instead of being consumed, they are the ones consuming men. Also, where human women depend on healthy social relationships to survive, monsters can destroy at will. The oni’s desire for vengeance is really a desire for a role reversal between men and women, or at least recognition of women’s common humanity. By becoming monsters women are able to break free from the confinement of their social role and also to function outside of social norms by becoming the aggressor instead of the other way around. Because they are victims of society, by becoming monsters they are able to even the score with a system that treats women as commodities. However, although the excess sexism has been managed, it is unclear whether there is any attempt to change the male-dominated hierarchy of capitalism.

The way women are presented in *Tokyo Babylon* and *Onmyoji* can be contrasted by a similar story translated by Tyler that is taken from the Konjaku Monogatari, *The Forsaken Lady*. In this story Fujiwara no Moroie gradually drifts apart from his wife, to the point that he does not visit her for six months. When he passes by her house and has the impulse to go visit her, he finds her reciting the Lotus Sutra. She keeps him waiting,
and when she finally addresses him, “so strange a look came over her face that Moroie flinched. “I asked you in,” she began, because I wanted to see you again one more time. Now my anger and hurt…” Her voice stopped. She was dead” (Tyler 189). It is explained that soon after this Moroie died, and opinion is divided as to whether this lady contributed to his death, or if because she recited the Lotus Sutra before she died she entered paradise. The narrator goes on to add, “But it’s also true that she died with resentment against Moroie in her heart, and while looking straight at him” (190). It is ambiguous whether she is responsible for Moroie’s death or not, thus she does not have the same kind of agency after death that Yayoi, Gentiane, and Sukehime have, and she is potentially managed by the Lotus Sutra and not recognition of Moroie’s guilt. Rather than being managed by acknowledging the power imbalance between men and women and taking steps towards changing it, there is the sentiment that her monstrosity could have been completely managed had she died concentrating on the Lotus Sutra rather than her resentment. Strangely enough, this ambiguous resolution is very similar to the contemporary version of the tale. Although a means of managing excess sexism is presented, there is no suggestion that change would be institutionalized.

Although not scorned women, Seimei’s shikigami are objects worthy of notice. With them, Seimei performs an interesting reversal: he transforms commodities, shikigami, into women. By doing so, they cease to be objects and gain the potential for agency. Because of this, Mitsumushi is able to decide to intervene during the fight with Doson in order to defend a fallen Seimei. However, Seimei’s position as defender of

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14 Shikigami are spirits that onmyoji summon, much like familiars. Seimei’s shikigami tend to be made from paper, flowers, or bugs.

15 Mitsumushi is a butterfly that Seimei killed with magic at the instigation of other courtiers. She is brought back to life as a shikigami.
women is an ambiguous one, since it is unclear if he is simply reaffirming the link between women and objects. After all, he uses them as servants, and Hiromasa finds this unnerving. However, Seimei talks to the *shikigami* women as though they were alive, and there is no significant difference between the manner in which he addresses his *shikigami* and the way he addresses others. This ambiguity suggests that the *shikigami* simply represent an extension of the mediation he performs with monsters.

Thus, although women should have more power in today’s capitalist system since they have the right to participate in it and fulfil many of the same roles as men, in reality they remain a marginalized group that avoid commodification with difficulty. The monsters that Subaru must manage in *Tokyo Babylon* are most often women. Whether it is an adulteress, a rape victim, or distraught mothers, women tend to figure predominantly. This is also the case in the film *Onmyoji*, where women become *oni* to address their grievances with the men who have abandoned them. Reider explains that *oni* have a history of symbolizing “anti-establishment vis-à-vis the central government” (110), so it is appropriate that the women in Baku Yumemakura’s *Onmyoji* become *oni* to protest an unjust system. By becoming monsters, women are given the agency to protest their own commodification.
Alienation of Others

One of the main concerns in both *Tokyo Babylon* and *Onmyoji* is ‘otherness.’ Being labelled as ‘other’ means that the monster is disenfranchised, deprived of the some rights as the non-others. Because of this, they are more susceptible to being commodified by a capitalist system. Whether they are people that society does not know how to manage, or whether they are subjects that have been discarded like objects once their usefulness has run out, these people are the same in that they have been alienated by society. Thus these monsters likely protest capitalism’s tendency to take advantage of others, as outsiders are not given the same rights as those within the system.

A variety of monsters from *Tokyo Babylon* tend to fit Cohen’s fourth monster thesis, ‘The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference’, as they have are unable to fit into the capitalist system, so they become disposable. Cohen writes,

The monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us. In its functional as dialectical Other or third-term supplement, the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond—of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within. Any kind of alterity can be inscribed across (construed through) the monstrous body, but for the most part monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual (7).

This otherness means that they somehow do not fit into the neatly ordered system. Their alienation highlights the ruthlessness of a system that transforms its workers into commodities that it can dispose of once their usefulness has run out.
The second monster Subaru must manage in the *Tokyo Babylon* manga is the one that is the most overtly capitalist in nature. He is called to exorcise a rich young woman who has suddenly become uncontrollably violent. Subaru soon realises that the clothes she is wearing are causing her change in behaviour. She had won the fight to buy a Chanel suit, and Subaru explains that the negative feelings of those who wanted the suit have permeated it to the point that it has possessed the woman. This monster is the embodiment of all the yearning of all the women who passed it and anger of women who lost the battle to buy it. The importance placed on buying this simple object makes Hokuto comment about the alienation of workers and the commodities that are produced. Although Japanese women all work to be able to buy expensive products, their realm of experience is so alienated from the production process that they place excessive value on the commodities they buy. Hokuto highlights how disconnected the consumers are from the production process by saying that even though they know it is bad for the environment, women will consume. She gives the example of women using Freon gas to dry manicures despite the environmental damage it causes, consuming magazines despite the fact that they are against the destruction of forests, taking daily showers despite knowing there’s a shortage of water. People are so removed from the production of commodities that they do not associate damage to the source of the product with the act of consuming. Furthermore, they place greater value on the objects they buy than social relations. This means their identity is based on what they consume, and this in turn makes them indistinguishable from the commodities they purchase.

The first real outsider that we are introduced to in *Tokyo Babylon* is a woman who has come to Tokyo from Fukuoka to be an actress. Her vengeful spirit haunts Tokyo Tower, and claims to hate Tokyo and all it represents. She struggled to survive in the
capitalist city, as she was unprepared to allow herself to be commodified. Instead of choosing an alienating job that would allow her to pay the bills, she chooses to take a gamble and pin all her hopes on her dream job, being an actress. However, because the lead actress does not consider the livelihood of the others working on the film, she pulls out at the last minute, and this job falls through. Had the lead actress viewed those involved in the film as human beings rather than objects that can be moved from one set to another, the woman might not have committed suicide. As a monster, she says she hates Tokyo because even though it welcomes everyone, outsiders are never really accepted. Furthermore, the city forces people conform to roles that they are unwilling to perform. Having escaped having to deaden herself in order to work and survive, this spirit has been commodified by the lead actress due to her outsider status. She embodies the anxiety of being easily disposed of because of one’s outsider status. While she could have once again deadened herself and worked for jobs she disliked, she had told her estranged mother that she had fulfilled her dream and did not wish to be commodified once again. Instead, she becomes a monster that protests the alienation of workers and outsiders.

However, the person who tends to fit Cohen’s fourth thesis the most is the young foreign girl that Hokuto meets. She works at a cabaret club, and has come to Japan to support her family. Although she works a job that she is not satisfied with in order to survive, and therefore should be involved in the capitalist system like any other worker, she is still an ‘other’ because of her status as a foreigner. Moreover, because she doesn’t have a visa and is an illegal immigrant, she is even further marginalized. She is very aware of her status as an outsider and the pervasiveness of commodification as she says that in Tokyo you can buy anything you want except the things she had at home: friends and a smile. As she is able to speak fluent Japanese, so it is unclear why she is still
socially viewed as an outsider. By subverting Hokuto’s expectations about otherness (Hokuto automatically tried to speak to her in English when they met), this girl fits Cohen’s third monster thesis: ‘The Monster Is the Harbinger of Category Crisis’.

According to Cohen, “Because of its ontological liminality, the monster notoriously appears at times of crisis as a kind of third term that problematizes the clash of extremes—as “that which questions binary thinking and introduces a crisis” (Cohen 6).

After recognizing that the girl is not so different from herself, Hokuto refuses to adhere to the binary of Japanese and foreigner. She claims that the girl can’t really be a ‘foreigner’ since she has a home to go back to, her own country. By confronting the anxiety that alienation from others provokes, Hokuto manages the monster by revealing that there is essentially no difference between them. However, this resolution is ambiguous. Although it is acknowledged that foreigners and outsiders are abused by Japanese capitalism, managing this monster by acknowledging lack of difference does not suggest that the capitalist system should be changed, but rather that it should be inclusive. This is a rather vague resolution, as it would suggest that a system that commodifies people, instead of taking particular advantage of ‘others’, should commodify them and those within the system equally.

The foreign girl, although she is deadened by her job and the alienation she feels, survives in the capitalist system because she allows herself to be commodified in order to send money back to her family. The next character is not so lucky. The old man Subaru encounters has been lucky enough to have a job he enjoyed, that of zookeeper. However once he retires and ceases to be a worker, he becomes disposable. His daughter, Sachiyo, who values material wealth over familial ties, views him as a financial burden. Her family must cut down on spending in order to survive, and so she places the blame for
their problems on her elderly father. Instead of getting rid of their house or cutting back on other material goods, Sachiyo identifies her father as the unnecessary object. To her, it is as though her father is a leaky faucet instead of a human being, and she greatly resents him for needing to be sustained. She treats him like an object that must be disposed of, and the extent of her callousness is revealed when his grandchildren ask him when he’s going to die, because their mother promised them their own rooms when he does. Finally, she directly informs him of her resentment when he says he needs to go out to buy something. Sachiyo essentially tells her father that he is a parasite, as he doesn’t earn any capital and spends the money of those who earn it. She does not view him as a being human, as she places material goods above her father in importance. Because her father no longer works and is outside the capitalist system, he is alienated from his materialistic family. His humanity is only reaffirmed when Subaru manages this monster of objectification by reminding Sachiyo that he is her father, not an object that is easily replaceable. Clamp’s message is clear: a capitalist system that places value on the acquirement of capital will not take care of the elderly when they can no longer work. When commodified workers can no longer work and contribute to capitalism, they become disposable.

In the *Onmyoji* manga the alienation of ‘others’ is once again highlighted, but this time through a biwa called Genjo, or Éléphant Noir in French. Genjo, an imperial treasure, suddenly goes missing from the imperial palace. As he is going home, Hiromasa hears Genjo and follows its music to the Rasho Gate, where he realises that it has been stolen by an oni. He returns with Seimei and together they learn that the oni who has stolen Genjo is actually its maker, displaced, as the biwa is, in a foreign land. Reider explains that Yumemakura “goes on to tell us that the oni does not rest peacefully
because of his attachment to his homeland (India) and his wife, so he steals the biwa he made to console himself with music” (111). In his own words, the oni states, “Je joue la musique de mon pays pour soulager ma solitude… qui êtes vous donc a me déranger?” (Yumemakura and Okano, Vol 1, 100).

Genjo is then more than a simple biwa: it embodies the worker’s identity. Displaced and living in an other country, Kandata, as an ‘other’, had less value than the objects he created as he was killed in his sleep. As an oni Kandata works to fix this imbalance in value. He is monstrous because he represents too strong a link between worker and object. When the object refuses to be defined by its economic value, the worker, by extension, also refuses to be commodified. Whereas to the imperial palace put value on Genjo because it is a rare commodity, Kandata sees it as an extension of himself. It represents his country, his wife, and his own self-worth. By equating Genjo with himself, Kandata is reclaiming his own value. However, when Hiromasa and Seimei talk to him on equal terms and ask him what it will take to have him return Genjo, Kandata says he wishes to spend a night with a woman that reminds him of his wife. Once Seimei and Hiromasa acknowledge his humanity, or at least his very human needs, Genjo is temporarily returned to its status as an object.

Interestingly, Kandata’s yearning for his wife makes him slightly more humane than the men discussed previously discussed that commodified women. Although he is using Tamakusa, the woman who resembles Suriya, as an object for transaction, Kandata simultaneously acknowledges her he is unable to take her by force, as he truly loved his wife. Kandata, as an oni, tries to reaffirms that his value is superior to the object he has created, and although he is eventually defeated, a confirmation of his humanity would have been enough to manage him. However, Tamakusa’s brother foils Seimei’s plans by
attempting to kill Kandata as his status as ‘other’ makes him something that needs to be disposed of. When considering that the source text that Yumemakura has based this story on does not give the oni a voice, but only has it lower Genjo down by a rope (Tyler 87), it becomes clear that the oni’s protest of his own alienation and commodification is relevant to today’s global capitalist society. By displacing the object from the local, as we are apt to do in a globalized society, objects, and by extension, workers, loose their value. Kandata is a monster protests both the dehumanization of workers when their products are given superior value, and the commodification of ‘others’.

Seimei shows an awareness of having to give people pride in their work, as to defeat a monstrous Michizane in the manga Seimei recites one of Michizane’s own poems back to him. The monsters in Onmyoji are managed by simply recognizing their value as human beings. Seimei emphasizes this when he says, “Mais tu sais, Hiromasa… finalement, contre les esprits démoniaques, ils n’est besoin que d’un peu de compréhension… plus que de la crainte, plus que du respect… de la compréhension” (Yumemakura and Okano Vol 2, 141).

In conclusion, monsters are often used as a means of protest, especially against the excesses of an unjust system. The monsters in Onmyoji and Tokyo Babylon are monsters that give voice to the commodification of women and the marginalization of workers. Modern depictions of onmyoji have mostly the same function as traditional onmyoji: manage monsters that represent the embodiment of cultural anxieties in order to return to the status quo. However, by managing these monsters, Seimei and Subaru bring attention to them, and by sympathizing with them, give the disenfranchised a voice. By bringing attention to the anxieties formed by the capitalist system, onmyoji are subtly undermining this same system. In the Onmyoji film, Seimei explicitly states that he does
not care about the government or the dominant hegemony. He says that like Doson, he
does not care who the next emperor is, or what happens to the city. He is more concerned
about individuals than upholding an unfair system, as Seimei only decides to defend the
city on Hiromasa’s insistence. Seimei essentially confirms that he is not defending a
system that creates monsters, but creating a new system is not a task he is willing to take
on. This is the same for Subaru, as when confronted by Hokuto as to why he helped the
entertainer who used Akie as a sex object, Seishiro reveals that Subaru performs
exorcisms with the well being of the victim in mind. Thus, where onmyoji were once
working for the government to preserve the status quo, modern onmyoji are at the service
of the people. They mediate capitalism’s excesses to make it more bearable to those
living within this system, however they do not attempt a revolution which would give the
disenfranchised more power. Although by managing monsters that represent objectified
women and alienated workers, onmyoji highlighting these issues and put them to the
forefront of social awareness rather than banishing them, they are merely managing
capitalism’s excesses, and not attempting to change the system itself.
Conclusion

Monsters often reveal deep-seated anxieties, as they are a pure cultural body. Monsters should be interpreted as representing a specific socio-historical moment, as the concerns they represent are specific to the culture that created them. After all, how can the figure of the Devil in the Quebecois legend of la Chasse-Galerie\textsuperscript{16} be interpreted without the knowledge that the catholic church was a major power in the province, or that the author of the best known version of the tale, Honoré Beaugrand, was anti-clerical? Because they are not easily translated into another cultural setting, monsters should theoretically be strictly local beings. As Spirited Away, Tokyo Babylon, and Onmyoji were produced in Japan, it can be safely assumed that they were created for a Japanese audience, since “The yōkai, as has been said of the “monster” in the West, “is an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place.”” (Foster 3). These products are meant to represent Japanese culture, and as such are meant to represent Japanese social anxieties.

And in many ways they do. After all, the monsters from Spirited Away embody Japanese protest of the post-Bubble economy, and the monsters managed by Seimei and Subaru in Onmyoji and Tokyo Babylon are tightly linked with the experience of living in Heian-kyo and Tokyo respectively. Hokuto explicitly labels Japanese girls as monsters, and one who is not familiar cultural experience of Japanese womanhood might misinterpret this statement. Furthermore, the monsters in Spirited Away fit the Japanese

\textsuperscript{16} The tale tells of lumber workers that make a pact with the devil to be able to leave their snowed-in camp in a flying canoe for a night with their sweethearts. They must travel without hitting any steeples or saying God’s name. The tale is most often referred to as ‘The Bewitched Canoe’ in English.
aesthetic of twilight and in-between-ness, a tradition that might not be readily identified by an American audience. The Meiji nostalgia in the film echoes the discourse of identity and identity formation that was so important during that period, and someone unfamiliar with Meiji national issues should, in theory, not understand the function of the monsters.

This is also true for Tokyo Babylon and Onmyoji, as it would be hard to find the Western equivalent of an onmyoji. Wizards, after all, were not bureaucrats. If anything, the Merlin of popular legend engineered his own revolution when he orchestrated Arthur’s birth. Although they mediated monsters, wizards were not called on to exorcise demons to protect the government. Merlin occasionally comes to Arthur’s personal aid, but he does not tell the average courtier which direction would be inauspicious to travel in. Furthermore, an uninformed audience might be unfamiliar with the Heian period and all its intricacies. This might lend itself to making the story and the monsters that populate it too disconnected from people’s reality to make them relevant. In addition, Subaru exorcises monsters that are tightly linked with the Japanese cultural experience, such as high school bullying, the desire to avoid conformity, or aging in a society that does not do enough to protect its elderly.

However, this thesis suggests that because the monsters in these stories are global capitalist monsters, they belong to a shared cultural experience of capitalism. Rather than being ‘others’ that cannot be understood by non-local audiences, these monsters break down the binary of local and global. In many ways the monsters are a very local form of protest, however this does not take anything away from their message when they are presented to a global audience, as they are still understood and appreciated. After all, if popularity can be measured by revenue grossed in theatres and by the volume of DVDs sold, then Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi, marketed to English-speaking countries as
"Spirited Away," was extremely popular internationally. This may be surprising for some, who assume that the spirits represented in the story might not appeal to an audience outside of Japan. Although not all monsters presented in the film are strictly traditional Japanese monsters, they are certainly inspired by the vast repertoire of imaginary beings Japan has to offer and address local issues. Yet despite these culturally specific aspects, the movie appealed enough to an international audience to win a multitude of awards.

The *Tokyo Babylon* manga, despite its local context, has been translated to a variety of languages, such as French, Portuguese, German, and Korean, and *Onmyoji* has also been released in several countries other than Japan. This is because far from embodying uniquely Japanese concerns, the monsters from *Spirited Away*, *Tokyo Babylon* and *Onmyoji* can be viewed as a reaction against capitalism’s excesses and their effect on the individual. People who are involved in a capitalist system can watch monsters in Japanese films and connect them to their own concerns. This is because human experience in this system is arguably similar across time and space, leading to common anxieties being given shape though monsters. It is worth repeating Newitz’s quote about capitalist monsters, replacing the question of genre and media with that of locality: “But even as they cross the line between one form of media and another, the stories’ fundamental message remains the same: capitalism creates monsters who want to kill you” (Newitz 3).

Whereas the government to promote its own agenda at times used monsters in Japan, the monsters from these specific examples are used to embody protest against a globalized system. Unfortunately, the mediators in these stories, Chihiro, Subaru, and Seimei, are not meant to allow the monsters to overthrow the system. While the monsters such as Noface and the vengeful female *oni* are an escapist fantasy about being able to
destabilize the cultural hegemony, the mediator must manage them and return to the status quo. Capitalism itself cannot be defeated, but many of its symptoms, such as mass consumption, greed, loss of identity, commodification of women, and alienation of others are addressed. Chihiro, after all, cannot reform the bathhouse. However, by managing the monsters of capitalist excess, she gives a solution to living in a system that commodifies anything: moderation, and putting social relationships ahead of the desire to consume. Subaru and Seimei also cannot stage a coup and manage their cities in whatever manner they like. Rather, by exorcising monsters they give these same monsters a voice. By allowing the monsters to talk and explain how they have been cheated they are reminding subjects of the capitalist system to view each other as individuals and not commodities.

To conclude, the object of this thesis was to observe the anxieties of living in an increasingly global capitalist culture, embodied by spirits and monster in Japanese anime and film. Although they are entertaining, as Hollywood box-office numbers can prove, monsters are often the embodiment of protest and should not simply be dismissed once they have been managed. After all, we must remember Cohen’s second monster thesis: ‘The Monster Always Escapes’. Thus, the monster will always come back to protest capitalism again.

Monsters are a reflection of the time we live in since, “As we tell and retell these monster stories over time, their meanings gradually shift to reflect changing social conditions and economic anxieties” (Newitz 6). The way they are managed also gives us a potential solution for the real-life anxieties they represent. Chihiro manages consumption, greed, and loss of identity with moderation, and the onmyoji manage commodification and alienation with the recognition of a common humanity. Monsters are not simply monstrous; they are victims of their environment. More then anything else,
monsters are a reflection of ourselves: “Hence there is always a non-fixed boundary between men and monsters. In the end, there can be no clear division between us and them, between civilization and bestiality. As we peer into the abyss, the abyss stares back” (Gilmore 191).
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