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Monstrous Ambiguity and Desire in Otsuichi's *Goth*

Monsters and monstrous characters lurk in the folkloric legends of the past, and are the origins for many contemporary monster stories. Monsters and the monstrous are not universal entities. Their terrifying qualities are unique to the cultures from which they are born. In other words, the horrifying qualities of a monster from the Western tradition will be not be the same as those monsters from the Eastern tradition. Neither one is scarier than the other; they are simply the embodiment of different cultural and social fears. Folkloric legends of monsters and monstrosity are passed down from generation to generation, transforming into the contemporary monsters that audiences know today. In the novel *Goth*, by Otsuichi, the folkloric monsters from Japanese tradition, known as *youkai*, are transported and transformed from the past into a modern Japanese setting. The novel not only revamps the monsters of the past, but also reimagines the desires of these monstrous creatures, making them frightening for contemporary audiences. As part of the contemporary retelling of folkloric *youkai* tales, the novel blurs the line between who is human and who is monster.

The novel, *Goth*, focuses on two main characters, Kamiyama and Morino¹, who cross paths with multiple serial killers. The two teenagers study these killers in order to understand them and understand themselves. The serial killers and the main characters share a monstrous

¹ In Japanese, the family name comes before the name given at birth. Also, the family name is typically used to refer to a person. So Kamiyama's full name would appear as "Kamiyama Itsuki," and for Morino it is "Morino Yuu." However, throughout the book and this paper, they are referred to as Kamiyama and Morino.

identity. In “Afterword 1: From Yoru no Sho,” Otsuichi states, “So the killers that appear in *Goth* are not human, but youkai. And the male protagonist is also a youkai with the same power as the enemies, whereas the female lead has a powerful psychic gift that attracts youkai” (Otsuichi 246). *Youkai* are demon-like spirits from Japanese folklore, who are neither good nor bad, and walk between the worlds of the living and the dead (Foster 19-21). While *youkai* have individually unique qualities, collectively, they also share an identity that does not wholly exist in either world (Foster 19-20). Kamiyama and Morino, the male and female leads of *Goth*, share a bond with the ambiguity of the *youkai* identity. Kamiyama, the male protagonist, is human on the surface-level of the story, but represents a *youkai* who drifts among the humans and other symbolic *youkai* figures. Morino, the female protagonist, is a human that after unintentionally “murdering” her sister often finds herself intersecting with the lives of the other symbolic *youkai* figures. Kamiyama and Morino find themselves creating a friendship based on not only their fascination with serial killers, but their subconscious desire to switch identities. Their friendship then becomes a balancing act of knowing of each other’s “true” monstrous identities and the identities that they attempt to perform.

Kamiyama, and Morino, attempt to perform each other’s identity through various methods, creating an ambiguity that blurs the line of not only human and monster, but gender as well. To clarify, Kamiyama attempts to perform Morino’s identity and Morino attempts to perform Kamiyama’s identity but both fail in their attempts. The monstrous identity both protagonists share does not conform to a specific gender and wavers between the worlds of different species, living and dead, thus creating the ambiguity of what constitutes a monstrous body and what does not. The main characters attempt to perform each other’s identities in the hope of obtaining a definable existence in a single world, whether it be the living world or the

“other world” where *youkai* reside. Yet as the novel progresses it becomes clear that Kamiyama and Morino are unsuccessful in their attempted performance of each other’s identity. Their unsuccessful attempts are due to the fact that they both are already ambiguously monstrous, though for different reasons, and are performing ambiguously monstrous identities, showing that they cannot break from their monstrous form. These ambiguously monstrous characters cannot and will never achieve what they desire most: a definable existence in either the world of the living or in the spirit world.

To contextualize the horror and monstrosity within *Goth*, I will first discuss how scholars situate *youkai* as monstrous entities. In addition, I will discuss the common conventions found in Western horror and how it may apply to the monstrosity of Kamiyama and Morino in *Goth*. Japanese horror traditions and American horror traditions are increasingly drawing and borrowing from each other. Therefore, expanding scholarly analysis to non-Western horror texts is important in order to provide a comprehensive look at the genre. My analysis of *Goth* explores how the text reflects Japanese cultural concerns and considers how the text fits into wider analyses of horror as the genre is positioned in the Western tradition. Although Otsuichi’s *Goth* has not gained much scholarly attention as of yet, it provides an updated *youkai* narrative, and a unique perspective into what constitutes a monstrous body while displaying the tragedy of the monstrous body unable to achieve what it desires. I argue that the ambiguous monstrous nature of Kamiyama and Morino prevents them from achieving their desires as they fail to perform their singular identities.

Youkai Scholarship

As stated previously, monsters and the monstrous mostly originate from the folkloric legends of the past. Often in the format of oral tradition, Western tales, like the *Brothers Grim*

Fairytales or even Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," have monsters that are passed down through the centuries and become cultural myths and folklore. Unique to Japanese folkloric traditions, both oral and written, some of the monstrous entities that are passed down through the generations are called *youkai*, or also spelled *yokai*. In the book, *Traditional Monster Imagery in Manga, Anime and Japanese Cinema*, Zília Papp says, "Yokai [妖怪] is a compound word where both Chinese characters mean uncanny or eerie. The term yokai can refer to eerie phenomena, feelings, sound as well as animal or human characters" (38). *Youkai* is an umbrella term to reference a multitude of phenomenon that occurs unexplainably. They are not necessarily bad or good beings, and they embody explanations for unsettling occurrences, such as perhaps a storm or even death. In this way *youkai* seem to occupy a space that is both spiritual and physical. Papp mentions, "Yokai appear on the borderline between the worlds of kami and human, of this world and the other world such as on bridges, at crossroads, at water level or forest glade" (41). Also, mentioned by Michael Dylan Foster, in his book *The Book of Yokai*, *youkai* live in the landscapes of *kami*, the Japanese word for "deity", and human (19-21). To be a *kami*, these spiritual entities must have human worshippers; However, when a *kami* is unworshipped by humans, the *kami* is forgotten by the human world and drifts in an in-between world making them *youkai* (Foster 21). Thus, a *kami* is a deity that depends on humans to grant it an identity. When they are unacknowledged they become *youkai*, where their "evilness" or "goodness" is dependent on the perspective of a human who has been affected by the *youkai* (Foster 21). *Youkai* walk along the borderlines of spirit and living worlds only being able to appear through certain types of places, and whether they are good or bad is ambiguous, which even in contemporary reimagining of *youkai* tales, especially in *Goth*, still seems to hold true.

Being creatures of an otherworldly space, the *youkai* can present themselves in three realms. In the *Book of Yokai*, Foster explains that *youkai* can present themselves as event, presence, and object (28). *Youkai* as event is the realm in which a *youkai* appeals to your senses during a strange occurrence (Foster 28). Usually it is an undesirable occurrence that elicits feelings of eeriness. *Youkai* as presence means that inanimate objects or occurrences are given souls or spirits that are associated with an emotion, like anger being associated with a devastating storm or natural phenomena (Foster 29). In the last realm, *youkai* can attach themselves to figures, images, illustrations or an item and take possession of that object, absorbing that object as part of their identity (Foster 29). For my analysis of the novel *Goth*, I will be focusing on *youkai* in the realm of objects. For example, in the novel, Kamiyama, the symbolic *youkai* protagonist, collects “souvenirs” from each serial killer he and Morino, the human protagonist, encounter. These objects, throughout the story, serve as the means in which Kamiyama and the other symbolic *youkai* figures can keep drifting through the physical world. As the tales of the *youkai* are reimagined, so are the means in which they present themselves, which is to correspond to the time period their tales are being retold.

Along with drifting through different realms, *youkai* showcase four distinct periods of change in Japanese cultural attitudes. In Jeffery Cohen’s “Monster Theory,” he presents the idea that monsters are created at certain cultural moments which embody the fear, desire, and anxiety at that point in time (4). *Youkai* have gone through many changes in their identity that reflect the changes in cultural attitudes within Japanese history. According to Zilia Papp, “Yokai is the moment of change in turning from one category to the other, representing the anxiety and fear associated with the uneasiness of change from known to unknown, from certainty” (41). *Youkai* are a cultural embodiment of Japanese anxieties at specific points in their history. According to

Foster's *Pandemonium and Parade*, the first period begins in the Edo or Tokugawa period in Japan from 1603-1867, where *youkai* were documented and cataloged. Foster then mentions that in the Meiji period (1868-1912) a western, scientific influence made its way into Japanese culture, putting the *youkai* under scientific review to confirm or deny their existence (4). The third period of *youkai* occurred from around 1912 through the 1930s, when the *youkai* is revived as a way for Japan to regain a national identity in an industrialized world (Foster 4). Then as a form of recovery from the devastation of World War II up to the present day, the *youkai* are reimagined as entities that reflect anxiety and uncertainty in the modern world and the advancements in technology (Foster 4). Otsuichi's novel, *Goth*, falls into the most current historical time period for the *youkai*. *Goth* is set in modern Japan with the technological advancements of the early 2000s, such as cell phones, and falls into the J-Horror category, which is a term commonly used to refer to popular Japanese horror, roughly from 1980s to present. Foster explains, in *Pandemonium and Parade*, J-Horror draws much of its horrific inspiration for its monstrous figures from folkloric *youkai* origins, but also the anxieties with new technology and a rapidly changing world (206). An example of a *youkai*-based J-Horror character is Sadako, who is a vengeful spirit from the 1998 film, *Ringu*².

In *Ringu*, directed by Hideo Nakata, Sadako's monstrosity is a product of the specific cultural landscape of contemporary Japan. The film depicts a female journalist, Reiko, investigating the urban legend of Sadako, who is a vengeful spirit that haunts schoolchildren (*Ringu* Nakata). In the essay, "Suicide and the Afterlife: Popular Religion and the Standardization of 'Culture' in Japan," Mary Picone notes, "Buddhist priests agreed that what

² The J-Horror film *Ringu*, has been remade several times in American cinema. *The Ring*, directed by Gore Verbinski in 2002, is the first American version of *Ringu* and of Sadako's character, who is renamed as Samara Morgan in the film.

counted was the attitude at the moment of death. A mind still attached to this-worldly desires, for example filled with hate or anger, would not obtain release from the chain of karma or negative rebirths” (394). Influences of Buddhism tend to appear especially when *youkai* and death are involved (Foster 6). Those that are murdered, commit suicide, or die because of selfish or violent means have a great chance of coming back as a vengeful ghost. Sadako is brutally murdered by her father, thus becoming a vengeful ghost. In Valerie Wee’s “Patriarchy and the Horror of the Monstrous Feminine,” she mentions that a “common feature in [Japanese] ghost stories is the female victim who is brutally murdered by a man whose socially prescribed duty is to protect her” (153). Throughout the film, Sadako wishes to exact revenge on the patriarchal institution that betrayed her by haunting schoolchildren and the ex-husband of Reiko through a video tape (*Ringu* Nakata). Sadako only emerges from technological portals, updating not only the story but the liminal space in which these spirits can reside (Foster 206). In *Ringu*, Sadako updates conventions of Japanese female ghost stories by introducing a complexity to the medium in which she can haunt, the television, and reimagines how to portray anxieties with vengeful female *youkai*.

It is interesting to note when gender is specifically attributed to a *youkai* it is usually female, like Sadako or another *youkai* named Kuchi-sake-onna, the Slit-Mouthed Woman (Foster 198-199). This is not to say that *youkai* are mostly female. Instead, in *youkai* narratives, female *youkai* are more likely to have more gender specific attributes. Zilia Papp states, “Yokai usually do not have pronounced male gender, whereas there are several particular female yokai associated with virginity, eroticism, pregnancy and birth, or old age...” (Papp 42). If we look at the case of Sadako, her gender in relation to her *youkai* state represents a female that has fallen victim to a patriarchal society. Kuchi-sake-onna, who has a mutilated face and asks her victims if

she is pretty, has become a symbol for suffering during postwar Japan and the 1970s women's liberation movement in Japan (Foster 198-199). Both of these *youkai* embody certain cultural ideologies and histories that deal with the "growing masculine anxieties" about woman advancing in the work place and rejecting traditional roles as submissive (Wee 155; Foster 199). Thus, the tragedies of the female *youkai* reflect the tragedy of the female role in particular points of Japanese culture and history. In the novel *Goth*, the specific gender of the characters that represent *youkai* are mostly male. The male *youkai* in the novel do not have pronounced masculine traits which allows them to fall into an androgynous gender category, in keeping with *youkai* tradition. Creatures of both genders and even another species occupy the liminal space within the novel, creating an ambiguous monstrous identity that transcends gender, species, and even objects.

Horror Scholarship and Theory

The horror in *Goth* is not solely derived from the tales of the *youkai*, but also considers the conventions that are found in the majority of Horror narratives from various world traditions. One of these conventions is the abject. One of the prominent aspects of the abject, as formulated by Julia Kristeva in her *Powers of Horror: An essay on Abjection*, involves the insides of the body being exposed. She says, "The body is turned inside out, sent back from deep within the guts, the bowels turned over in the mouth, food mingled with excretions, fainting spells, horror, and resentments" (Kristeva 147). Also, according to Barbara Creed, in her "Horror and the Monsterous-Feminine: An imaginary Abjection," she states that "the ultimate abjection is a corpse," which is a body without a soul (40-41). To put it plainly, abjection is that which is gross. Abjection deals with the insides coming into public view and having an adverse reaction to it. For Kristeva, abjection is horrific because the boundary of inside and outside, subject and

object becomes uncertain—the abject makes visible that which we have normalized as hidden or unseen (141). Repulsion of the interior becoming exterior objects and the presence of a corpse, blurs the lines of what is normal, therefore, becomes down-right disgusting. As Kamiyama and Morino encounter the serial killers, they witness abject and gruesome scenes of death and dismemberments. Some of the most abject scenes come from the first two chapters of the novel, entitled “Goth” and “Wrist Cut.” In the first chapter “Goth” Kamiyama and Morino stumble upon the corpse of Mizuguchi Nanami, whose head is resting inside of her stomach and her gouged-out eyes resting in her hands (Otsuichi 17). Then in the second chapter, “Wrist Cut,” Kamiyama finds a collection of hands his teacher has been storing in his refrigerator (Otsuichi 45). In each of these scenes the abject creates shock and repulsion for the audience. Bodies are horrifically mutilated, and yet the main characters in each situation do not give any indication of showing emotion at these abject scenes. If the abject repulses the viewer and blurs the lines of normal and disgusting, why do these two seemingly “normal” teenagers not react to these horrifying moments? Is it just shock? Or is it what Kamiyama states as a “unique interest” in how the victims die (Otsuichi 10)? The abject in *Goth* is used to reflect the impurity within the identities of Kamiyama and Morino. In other words, the abject is used to point out the monstrosity within both Kamiyama and Morino.

Noël Carroll’s *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart*, serves as one of the early, comprehensive academic considerations on the genre of Horror and discusses the components of a monster. Carroll claims: “Within the context of the horror narrative, the monsters are identified as impure or unclean. They are putrid or moldering things or they hail from oozing places or they are made of dead or rotting flesh, or chemical waste, or are associated with vermin, disease, or crawling things” (23). The abject, as Kristeva describes, is the literal

skin of a monster, like a zombie, as Carroll suggests. Though this is not a one-size-fits-all description of monsters, especially in relation to the not so abject-looking monsters in *Goth*, Carroll's idea of a monster as "impure" does apply in the case of Kamiyama and Morino. When the characters emotionlessly look at the dismembered body of Mizuguchi Nanami, regardless of their reason, it expresses an impurity in their character. After Morino and Kamiyama discover Mizuguchi Nanami, Kamiyama narrates, "We stood facing her in silence. Neither of us able to say anything, we simply stared silently at the corpse" (Otsuichi 17). At this moment, the abject of the scene is being absorbed into the identities of Kamiyama and Morino; they are the bystanders, who were not outwardly repulsed by the scene before them, which could be seen as not normal or impure. Though Kamiyama, Morino, and even the serial killers in the novel participate in the same impure, emotionless reactions to abject moments, the novel exposes the tragic struggle these impure monstrous bodies face in their search for purity.

The monster is a complex entity which frightens and receives pity from its audience. Carroll mentions the theme of "sympathy for the devil" within horror (143). The "sympathy for the devil," tends to come from the moments where the monster is given another dimension to its character rather than solely being an impure creature (Carroll 143). In most *youkai* tales, even in updated tales like Sadako's in *Ringu*, their impure qualities as well as the tragedies that created their *youkai* states are revealed. In this way *youkai* are figures that elicit repulsion and sympathy. For example, in *Goth*, Kamiyama encounters a little girl and her dog, who are killing the other neighborhood pets. It is later revealed that the little girl, with her dog as her teacher, is killing the pets as practice to defend herself against her mother's boyfriend, who abuses her and her dog. The situation drastically changes from viewing the little girl as an impure monster harming innocent animals to viewing her as a character who struggles to reclaim a normal childhood,

which her mother's boyfriend took away from her. Each of the characters presented in *Goth* reveal their "impurities" and the tragedies that created them. The monstrous identity of the symbolic *youkai* and Morino is complicated by their humanizing motivations that explain their monstrous actions.

In *Goth*, characters of both male and female genders, *youkai* and human, including animal and objects are represented in an ambiguously monstrous state, which impacts their journey to achieve their desires. These ambiguously monstrous characters blur the boundaries of gender and species making them irregular. Carol Clover discusses the concept of irregular gender between protagonist and monster in her work on the "Final Girl." In "Her body, Himself," Clover states, "It is not that these films [horror films] show us gender and sex in free variation; it is that they fix on the irregular combinations, of which the combination masculine female repeatedly prevails over the combination feminine male" (Clover 63). The monster and the protagonist both have gender identities that are seen as irregular, making them both "monstrous." Typically, the irregular gender combination that "prevails" is the one associated with the protagonist. Though *Goth* is not a slasher film, each of the monsters have an irregular gender. However, no specific irregular gender in the novel seems to prevail over another, because none of the desires of the monstrous figures are achieved. J. Halberstam, in "Bodies That Splatter," uses Carol Clover's criteria for a "final girl" and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* to define the related concept of monstrous gender. Halberstam argues that "the final girl, particularly as embodied by Stretch [protagonist of *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*], represents not boyishness or girlishness but monstrous gender, a gender that splatters, rips at the seams, and then is sutured together again as something much messier than male or female" (143). In Halberstam's definition of monstrous gender, abject wording is used to amplify the implied "impurity" of

possessing a gender that is “messier than male or female.” Monstrous gender does not conform to a singular identity, transcending the binary of male and female genders. Both Clover and Halberstam discuss how the characters, such as the protagonist “final girl,” have genders that are irregular, abject and uncomfortable to a single gender identity. In my investigation of monstrous gender in the novel *Goth*, I explore how the ambiguous genders of Kamiyama and Morino create the “something much messier than male or female” and how it affects their monstrous desire.

Kamiyama and Morino, who fall into the category of ambiguously monstrous, attempt to hide their identities by performing each other’s personas and collecting “souvenirs” from other ambiguously monstrous entities. As a result, Kamiyama and Morino face failure in their attempts to disguise the parts of themselves that they wish to be free of or suppress. But, why do they continue to fail and what is the purpose behind their attempted performances? I propose that due to the *youkai* and the human falling into the ambiguously monstrous identity, their attempted performances of each other reflect their desires to be fully existing in one world of either living or dead. Consequently, Kamiyama and Morino, who are part of the “something much messier than male or female,” are rejected by both the living and the spirit world.

Monstrous Ambiguity and Desire within *Goth*

The main narrator and character of the novel *Goth*, Kamiyama, is a symbolic *youkai* figure who desires to obtain an identity within the human world. Kamiyama’s symbolic nature comes directly from his name. *Kami*, which is the first part of the name Kamiyama, means a god or deity, and the second part of his name, *yama*, means mountain. Kamiyama translates to a mountain deity. While his name may mean “mountain deity,” he is instead a *youkai* and not a deity since he has no human worshipers. Although Morino is a human that follows Kamiyama throughout the story and could be seen as a worshiper, she unfortunately does not qualify

because of her own ambiguous monstrous identity. As a result, Kamiyama drifts through the living world in the liminal space that most *youkai* occupy to find followers that will acknowledge his existence.

In *Goth*, Kamiyama's voice phases in and out of the narration showing his struggles to exist within the living world. The narrative begins with Kamiyama as our unnamed and unknown narrator for much of the book; Kamiyama's proper name is not mentioned until the end of the novel. His narration fades in and out at certain points in the story causing the reader to phase in and out of believing in his existence. This narration style serves as a meta-illustration of his *youkai* identity because it simulates an infrequent acknowledgement of his existence as he fades in and out of two worlds: the human world of the story and the "unseen" other world, where *youkai* reside. In chapter one, "Goth", Kamiyama narrates his and Morino's experience with the first serial killer from his perspective (Otsuichi 7). In chapter two, "Wrist-Cut," Kamiyama alternates between narrating from his perspective and narrating from the perspective the serial killer, Mr. Shinohara. In chapter three, "Dog," the narrator switches to a little girl and a brief first-person narration from Kamiyama (Otsuichi 31). In the fourth chapter, "Memory/Twins," Kamiyama narrates in the first person Morino's story, but the chapter begins as if he is suffering from memory loss by re-telling the audience about Morino (Otsuichi 97). In chapter five, "Grave," a new narrator speaks in the third person and refers to Kamiyama as "the boy" (Otsuichi 133). In the last chapter, "The Voice," it is told in a first-person narration from the perspective of a victim, named Kitazawa Natsumi, and the narrator labels the killer as the "boy" (Otsuichi 179). This is also the chapter in which Kamiyama's full name is mentioned, as the narration shifts back to Kamiyama's first-person perspective (Otsuichi 179). As the story develops, he fades in and out of being a narrator and being present in the story. Within this

narration, it depicts a loss of humans who recognize and worship him for his true monstrous identity. However, beyond the narration, Kamiyama tries to perform a singular identity that will gain him recognition in the living world.

Throughout the story, Kamiyama knowingly performs a “normal” human identity while remaining aware of his true monstrous self. At the beginning of the novel Kamiyama asserts, “I did the bare minimum to lead a normal life. But these were surface relationships, and all the smiles I produced were lies” (Otsuichi 13). Kamiyama is fully aware of the façade he puts on for others. His conscious performance of a “normal” identity shows his dedication to achieving his desire to exist among the human world. Though the tragedy of Kamiyama’s story begins here as he tries to reconcile his uncertain fate. Later, Kamiyama narrates, “If people around me discovered how merciless and unemotional I was how much more difficult would my life become?” (Otsuichi 41). His true identity goes unrecognized by his peers because of the surface relationships and his constant worry of being seen as “merciless and unemotional”, which makes it impossible for those around him to accept his true identity (Otsuichi 41). Yet, Kamiyama believes that if he can perform a human identity he can achieve his desire. By performing human emotions it is clear that he wishes to exist in the human world. However, performing the human identity is not the same as having a human identity. So, he must find other means to acquire a human identity.

As Kamiyama drifts from serial killer to serial killer, he absorbs cross-species, male, and female identities. In separate encounters with the serial killers Kamiyama takes “souvenirs.” For example, he takes a dog from the little girl killer and set of knives from a male killer. By collecting his souvenirs from the serial killers Kamiyama participates in the third realm of *youkai* by becoming attached to physical objects (Foster 29). With these “souvenirs”, he acquires from

other *youkai*, he challenges and eliminates the competition to obtain humanity. For instance, in the final chapter of the book, the *youkai*, named the boy, confesses to his victim, Natsumi: “[Natsumi] ‘Morino? I saw you walking with her...’ [The boy] ‘Kamiyama Itsuki told you her name, right? In the end, I chose you as my next victim, and that might have been for the reason you mentioned’” (Otsuichi 223). The boy is challenging Kamiyama by not only mentioning his full name but also claiming that he thought about taking a possession of Kamiyama’s object: Morino, his human companion. In Morino, Kamiyama sees the chance to become human and, therefore, claims possession of her. When *youkai* who encounter, or attempt to harm his possession, Morino, he eliminates the threats.

Kamiyama believes that he must obtain the item that represents the purest form of humanity: hands and in particular, Morino’s hands. Kamiyama narrates, “It seemed self-evident that hands were the essence of humanity. That was why there were palm readers; palm readers said the lines on a person’s palms allowed them to determine an individual’s personality and destiny. Hands were a mirror that reflected the person’s past and future” (Otsuichi 33). To Kamiyama, hands are the symbol for a human spirit and future. They reflect mortality of a human life, while the *youkai* are spiritual creatures and usually not able to die. Kamiyama is a *youkai* stuck in his ambiguous monstrous identity, which does not allow him to have a future. Therefore, he wants Morino's hands to change that for him. He states, “The reason why I wanted her hands was because she had those beautiful scars, from when she had tried to kill herself” (Otsuichi 54). Kamiyama wants Morino’s hands for two reasons. First, Morino’s scars from her attempted suicide is a choice that a *youkai* can never make. A *youkai* cannot kill itself because it is an immortal figure that transcends death because it exists in a plane between living and dead, as previously mentioned. To have a death, or even the choice of death, would mean to be human.

Morino's scars of the past once meant death to her, but to Kamiyama they mean a future in which there can be life. Second, the scars on Morino's wrist represent an attempt to sever a connection. In *the Japanese Psyche: Major Motifs in the Fairy Tales of Japan*, Hayao Kawai states, "The phrase cutting off hands in Japanese means to sever relations" (127). By attempting to slice her wrists, Morino attempts to sever relations to the living world. In this way, Kamiyama is wanting to take Morino's hands in order to possess the relations she wishes to dispose of in the hopes of obtaining his own connections to the human world. Yet Morino's cuts are simply attempts to cut her relations to the human world and it is not a complete severing. As a result, Kamiyama is fixed on an object that he cannot possess.

Morino is a human girl who also possess an ambiguous monstrous identity alongside Kamiyama, the symbolic *youkai*. At school, she meets Kamiyama and notices that he is different by the way he pretends to smile. She asks Kamiyama, "Will you teach me how to smile like that?" (Otsuichi 13). To Morino, she believes she's met someone that shares the persona she tries to pretend to have. However, Morino is pretending an identity that is not her own and sees Kamiyama as a teacher, who she believes will teach her how to continue faking her identity. The monstrosity of Morino is also shown at a point when Kamiyama admits that he cannot understand what she is thinking: "Most of the time, her emotions didn't register outwardly, and it was hard to tell what she felt...The impression she gave off was one more like an object than something animate" (Otsuichi 99). Kamiyama, the *youkai*, is unable to read the thoughts of Morino, showing that Kamiyama and Morino are not the same figures but nonetheless monstrous. Her emotionless expressions, responses, and body language reflect unnatural forms of human expression. As Kamiyama describes in the passage, Morino is an "object" more than she is "something animate" (Otsuichi 13). In this instance, the reader notices that Morino is not

the same as Kamiyama nor does she exhibit qualities of being human. Morino performs a non-human identity in order to hide her genuine humanness.

Morino attempts to further her performance of her desired monstrous identity when she pretends to be a corpse. In the very first chapter, Morino and Kamiyama search for the body of a missing person, Mizuguchi Nanami. Once they do find the remains of her body, Morino decides to pretend to be Mizuguchi Nanami by dressing up as her. Kamiyama describes Morino's complete immersion into this new role: "Morino had her elbows on the table, and she looked happy.... But the way she smiled or looked in a mirror, examining her eyebrows, was not a copy of an ordinary high school girl— it felt as if Mizuguchi Nanami had slipped inside Morino." (Otsuichi 18-19). Her attempted performance of a *yukai* trait of possessing an object, in this case a human body, allows Morino to disrupt the natural order of life and death. By pretending to be a person that is dead, Morino is able to erase her living identity. Ironically, as a corpse Morino exhibits more lively actions such as smiling, which is a rare action for Morino to exhibit. Morino wishes so much to detach herself from a human reality that she resorts to becoming an object of the "ultimate" form of the abject to achieve her desired effect (Creed 40-41). Though Morino is performing Mizuguchi Nanami's identity before she became a corpse, Morino creates an abject, repulsive effect by possessing the qualities of a girl known to be dead. Throughout the novel, Morino specifically performs the identities of the victims, seizing an opportunity to achieve an identity that crosses the boundaries of life and death. And, her character only "look[s] happy" when she is given the opportunity to pretend to be a corpse (Otsuichi 18-19). Thus, reinforcing her impure nature as a human while alluding to a desperation to remove herself from her human form.

Ultimately, Morino's main performance in the novel is her attempt to become her sister, who is also Morino's victim. Morino's performance speaks to her desire to take her sister's place in death. Morino and her twin sister pretended to play dead to scare people. For example, "They floated face down in the water lying limp, competing to see which of them could hold out longer and look most like a corpse" (Otsuichi 107). This memory depicts Morino as someone who has always been used to performing a dead identity with her sister. To perform the identity of a corpse no matter how abject it maybe, for Morino it means the ability to connect back to her sister. The performance helps Morino, connect back to a happier, more "innocent" time in her life. Yet, the "innocent" times were destroyed by a single moment. Morino and her twin are in the shed, setting up another prank, when something goes wrong. The rope holding Yoru's, Morino's sister first name, shoulders snaps. Then it is up to Yuu, Morino's first name, to try and save her sister. Morino recounts the ordeal by stating that Yoru said: "Hold tighter, stupid." Morino then comments: "When I heard that, I stopped trying to save her. I let go" (Otsuichi 129). In that moment Morino went from being an innocent little girl to a monstrous entity. Yet this did not make her into a *youkai* but rather a guilt-written human. In desperation and to punish herself, Yuu, Morino, assumed the identity of her twin. "I thought people would know I was Yuu if I smiled. I spent nine years trying not to have any expressions, trying to be my sister. Now I can't even smile if I wanted to" (Otsuichi 131). The tragedy of Yoru weighs heavily on Yuu and forces her to destroy everything that previously made her identity distinct from her sister's. From this moment in her childhood, Morino decides to perform her dead sister's identity to conceal not only her guilt, but also the traits that render her as a living human. Therefore, Morino is a character who performs the identity of those who are not living. In the moments she can assume the identity of a corpse, she is brought back to a happier time associated with her sister. Yet

when she cannot assume the identity of a corpse she is brought back to an identity that is monstrous and ambiguously defined.

Morino is unable to sustain her performance because of her constant conflict between her monstrous qualities and her human emotions. When Kamiyama hears of Morino's attempted suicide he narrates, "I didn't know why she wanted to die, but I doubted the world made it easy for her to live" (Otsuichi 41). Morino is struggling to cope with a world that doesn't accept that she is trying to cross over the boundaries of living and dead on her own terms. This is a little trait that Kamiyama picks up on because he is also worried about having a hard time trying to exist in the human world. As the opposite to Morino, Kamiyama does not elaborate or give much detail about his struggles while Morino cannot help but to express her struggle outwardly. Later in the story, Morino explains the cuts on her wrists that Kamiyama admires and wishes to obtain. Morino says, "That's not the result of trying to kill myself—it was just a sudden impulse" (Otsuichi 102). Pretending to be unemotional and detached takes a toll on Morino's mental state. She resorts to a "sudden impulse" to harm herself to feel some type of emotion. The scars from the cuts on her wrist are a symbol of death. But it is not the type of death Kamiyama associates with life. For Morino, the scars symbolize a death to her performances and represent a realization that she is not emotionless; she is a human who has committed monstrous acts. Therefore, she is unable to sustain the singular identity in the spirit world.

Both Kamiyama and Morino attempt to perform qualities of each other's ambiguously monstrous identity, but realize that they are unable to achieve their desires for a singular identity. At the end of the novel Morino tells Kamiyama, "At first, I thought you were like me. You reminded me of my sister. But you aren't. We're nothing alike" (Otsuichi 240). In this same scene Morino's voice is described as "trembling, like a child about to burst into tears" while

Kamiyama remains stoic and unemotional (Otsuichi 240). Morino realizes that her teacher Kamiyama is not a human pretending to be a *youkai*. He is in fact a *youkai* attempting to be human, while Morino attempts to become her dead sister. Due to Morino's emotional outburst and Kamiyama's unemotional responses in the ending scene, the two discover that the identities they are performing will never be achieved. Dona Oswald's "Monstrous Gender: Geographies of Ambiguous Gender" states, "Bodies that are monstrous are not 'uncertain'— they exist in a very clear space, one that does not choose a side, but rather one that points out the futility and inadequacy of such divisions" (362). Kamiyama and Morino's monstrous identities are ambiguous in that they are in constant flux between the living, dead, different genders, and species. Therefore, their identities can never settle into one category. Though Kamiyama is a symbolic *youkai*, the designated monster figure, he finds himself performing various identities and questioning his monstrous category. Similarly, Morino's performance as a corpse puts her category of human into question. Thus, the categories of human and monster are shown as inadequate for describing a monstrous body in the novel through Morino and Kamiyama. This demonstrates that they exist in a space that does not choose either human or monster, but instead somewhere between those categories. The novel ends with the lines: "We moved in opposite directions, without even saying goodbye" (Otsuichi 241). The characters realize they will forever exist with an ambiguously monstrous identity. Kamiyama and Morino move separate ways and fade out of the story, continuing to drift in a realm of uncertainty without achieving their desires.

Kamiyama and Morino are monstrous beings who perform identities to exist in either the land of the living or the spirit world. Yet neither one of the characters can sustain the performance of a single identity because their performances are based on traits associated with

realms to which neither truly belongs, making them ambiguously monstrous entities. Therefore, they are subject to remain in an undefined realm. The horror of the novel *Goth* is not found in the grotesque details but in the tragic stories of the sufferings the *youkai* and those who encounter the *youkai* must endure. Especially in the ambiguity of Kamiyama's and Morino's monstrous identity, the horror rests in that they will continue moving through life in isolation from their desired planes of existence. Ultimately, those that fall into a category of monstrous often struggle to achieve their desires. These monstrous figures almost never achieve their desires because their identities are rejected by the things that they wish to obtain.

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