

Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf

Philosophische Fakultät

Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik

**Blurring the Lines: Merging the Monster/Human Binary in Rin Chupeco's *The Suffering***

Bachelorarbeit

Julia Weiser

Erstprüfer: Lucas Mattila

Zweitprüferin: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Birgit Neumann

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## **Abstract**

This paper investigates the self-critical perspective of the monster narrative in Rin Chupeco's *The Suffering* (2015). Rather than portraying the monster as an external antagonist, the horror emerges from the merging of Self and Other, creating an internalized source of fear. The blurring of the boundaries between monster and human is analyzed through three deconstructed binaries, revealing the co-dependency of these contrasting couplings. Using a collection of essays on Monster Theory and Deconstruction Theory, the study demonstrates the instability and fragility of the onlookers' humanity as they confront their own monstrosity. The dissolution of the Self/Other and Human/Monster boundaries compels us to critically reflect on our own monstrosity and consider how to either accept or overcome it. This repositioning of fears and the rejected aspects within the Self highlights the internal biases reflected in the attributes typically associated with the monster.

Keywords: deconstruction, monster theory, horror theory, onryo

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## 1. Introduction

As a popular trope in horror fiction, the monster is ever reappearing. Monstrous characters such as vampires, werewolves, and ghosts are potent antagonists employed across genres and offer room for complex interpretation. Created in the context of and closely bound to their social and political environment, the monster is a relevant figure to examine. They connect us to the past and the people who came before us, helping us understand the time they lived in and the fears they had. Additionally, they represent critical societal changes and momentums while reflecting the general social and political circumstances that gave birth to them. In the same way, monsters in contemporary texts offer relevant insights into modern issues and have adapted to the changes of focus when it comes to societal concerns. Thus, the modern monster can also help to understand and reflect on us and our perception.

In this discussion, I will explore how Rin Chupeco's *The Suffering* (2015) allows for a self-critical perspective on the monster narrative. Instead of a monstrous antagonist, it is the overstepping of lines between the Self and the Other that creates horror by placing the monstrous within the Self. I claim that in *The Suffering*, the blurring of monster and human produces a category crisis, forcing a critical reflection on our own monstrosity. This specifically refers to the merging of the monster Okiku and the human protagonist Tarquin into one contradictory entity, as well as to the reversal of their roles as the story progresses. This blurring of lines is present in several binaries within the text, the main focus being on the binaries 'human/monster', 'USA/Japan', and 'present/past'. Deconstruction theory provides insights into how these binaries are permeable concepts, allowing for a merging and co-dependency of the couplings. Moreover, classic concepts of horror theory like Jeffrey J. Cohen's "7 Theses", Sigmund Freud's "The Uncanny" and other common horror elements can be applied and explored to understand how the binaries observed create horror within the novel, ultimately leading to the merging of monster and human into indistinct categories. As a result, the blurred lines of the binary create an impulse for the consumers of the text to reflect on the instability and fragility of their own humanity.

As the sequel to *The Girl from the Well* (2014), *The Suffering* revisits the story of now seventeen-year-old Tarquin "Tark" Holloway and his ghost companion Okiku. Tark is a half American, half Japanese high school student living with his dad in a small town in the USA. Okiku is an *onryō*, a vengeful ghost loosely based on the Japanese ghost story

*Banchō Sarayashiki* (“*The Dish Mansion at Banchō*”). The story as well as the back story of Chupeco’s Okiku depict Okiku as a young servant girl working at Himeji Castle during her lifetime, sometime during Japan’s feudal era. Though the versions of the story vary, Chupeco characterizes Okiku as a dutiful servant who loved her master very much, but who has been falsely accused of breaking one of her master’s ten valuable plates. Repeatedly, he forces her to count the plates, only ever counting up to nine, and despite her protest of innocence, he punishes her. Okiku is consequently tortured and thrown into a well where she suffers a cruel death. Having died so painfully and for a crime she did not commit, Okiku rises from her well as a ghost to punish her murderer. In Chupeco’s novel, Okiku fails to find peace after ending her killer’s life and is doomed to remain on the earthly plain. She finds a new purpose in hunting down men who kill children and young girls, inflicting the circumstances of her own death onto them. In the beginning of the first novel, Tarquin serves as the human vessel for an evil spirit seeking to break free – a fate that has been assigned to him as a baby. Attracted by the ominous energy coming from within the boy, Okiku begins to follow and observe him, and they begin to form an unlikely friendship. As one thing leads to another, they travel to Japan where an exorcism is supposed to save Tark from the supernatural danger within. The ritual succeeds with Okiku’s efforts to fight the evil spirit, but Tark remains endangered. Since he served as a vessel for a long time, he has become a target for all kinds of malevolent spirits desiring him as a fleshly vessel for themselves. After the fight, Okiku is finally able to join the afterlife but decides to stay and occupy the empty spot within the boy and protect him.

*The Suffering* takes place a few years after these events and Tark and Okiku have developed a deep bond. They have taken to venturing out together as vigilantes to still Okiku’s inherent hunger for vengeance and violence. Tracking down murderers the authorities have not detected yet, Okiku takes care of those she deems ‘monsters’, as Tark awaits her return and makes sure the bodies are reported to the police. Soon, Okiku realizes that one of Tark’s schoolmates is bound to become a killer in the future and wants to kill him before that happens. Tark is strictly against it and a debate about ethics ensues. Despite Tark’s heavy objections, Okiku kills the boy. At the same time, a befriended *miko*<sup>1</sup> called Kagura goes missing under mysterious circumstances in Japan. Kagura previously agreed to help an American ghost hunter crew search the legendary ghost town Aitou. However, they never return from the infamous suicide forest Aokigahara. Still at odds

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<sup>1</sup> Shrine maiden

with each other, Tark and Okiku set out to Japan to find their friend and return them safely. Not long after, they get lost in the depths of the forest themselves. As they find the lost village and get trapped by its maleficent ghost inhabitants, they uncover more and more of Aitou and the cruel rituals that took place in it. The village's master of ceremonies, the *kannushi*, has sacrificed village girls under the guise of performing a ritual in which he marries the girls to boys from the village, then sends them off to rid the village of malevolent spirits and protect the families. Instead, the *kannushi* secretly killed the girls' betrothed and sacrificed the brides to a hidden silkworm tree, which is intended to become a hell's gate and give the *kannushi* unfathomable power. The last girl to be sacrificed had managed to sabotage the ritual, unleashing the ghost brides onto the village, and wiping it out completely. Tark and Okiku have no choice but to end the suffering of the village spirits and defeat the ghost of the *kannushi* to escape.

This paper will first dive into classic horror theory to summarize the relevant genre conventions and concepts which are activated in the novel. For that, an overview of Freud and Cohen's essays as well as a collection of observations about dolls, the double, and the relevance of boundaries in horror will be provided. After that, a short introduction to deconstruction theory will provide the necessary background to unravel the binaries of the primary text. In the discussion chapter, the three main binaries from the text and the elements connected to them will be analyzed and examined in view of the theories, which concludes the paper with a summary of these findings.

## **2. Concepts and Theories**

### **2.1. Classic Monster Theory: "7 Theses" and "The Uncanny"**

With Jeffrey Cohen's "7 Theses" and Sigmund Freud's essay on "The Uncanny" we can build a theoretical ground on which to better understand monsters and their genre. While Cohen refers to seven general observations to understand the role and purpose of the monster, Freud's explorations have been useful in examining the genre more closely. Based on these two concepts, further concepts of the horror genre that are relevant to the analysis of *The Suffering* can be consulted. Lastly, a broad overview on Deconstruction theory will be provided to dissect the relevant aspects of the primary text to reveal the horror that lies in-between the lines.

Jeffrey Cohen defines the monster with seven observations, highlighting its cultural significance and purpose. He begins by identifying the monstrous body as “an embodiment of a certain cultural moment” (Cohen 44). This is to say that the monster cannot be separated from the specific culture and circumstances from which it emerges. Cohen describes monsters as products of their time, or rather of their context: they are the result of culturally specific fears and desires. The figures or characteristics considered monstrous by one culture may not be considered monstrous by another. As the unknown and culturally different is marginalized and Othered, the monster becomes an object of fear embodying this difference.

Next is the observation of the monster’s impending escape: “the message proclaimed is transformed by the air that gives its speaker new life” (Cohen 45). By this, Cohen points out that it is not necessarily the monster which is reinvented. For example, vampires, ghouls, and ghosts are significant objects of fear in stories from all over the world and are nowhere near new inventions. What is reinvented instead is the message they convey, or rather the cultural moment from which they emerge. The current fears or desires, triggered by political, societal, or personal changes in the authors’ environment give the monster new meaning and thus reflect ever changing contexts. Because of that, monsters have an unfixed signification and can be interpreted in different ways. In that regard, the monster always escapes the angry mob and slips through our fingers as we try to get a hold of it.

As the harbinger of category crisis, the monster resists all attempts to be sorted into pure categories as it often fits into several contrary boxes (See Cohen 45). Instead, the monster encourages consumers of horror fiction to reflect on their “binary thinking and introduces a crisis” (46). Monsters thereby ask for a more nuanced critical assessment of their being, or rather they reject a simple classification. The zombie, for example, is a mix of opposing characteristics: clearly, it must be alive to pose a mobile threat, yet it is most certainly dead. At the same time, it remains a humanoid figure but often misses some of its limbs and shows signs of decay. Similarly, the ghost and the vampire, or even the possessed doll in the display, are all engaging with opposing attributes. This paradox has the effect that a simple and definite categorization is difficult to achieve. Instead, consumers are forced to reconsider further possibilities, in this example, an explanation outside of the binary of dead or alive. Because monsters can be both, and neither. But the result of this paradox characterization of the monster does not only serve to confuse. The

monster belongs to a realm which does not correspond with our reality, or what we believe is possible. Not only does the monster challenge our perception, but it also disputes everything we know, plunging us as its witness into a deep crisis.

While monsters reflect our deepest cultural or personal fears, they also reflect to us desires and practices that are forbidden. The monster is “an incorporation of the Outside” which is “placed as distant and distinct but originates Within” (Cohen 46f): It embodies that which we have banned and that which we have distanced ourselves from. Fantasies of violence or taboos like cannibalism, for example, can be explored through the monster which is not tied to social norms. At the same time, the monster’s extremity serves as a warning not to follow its path (See Cohen 49). It thereby limits mobility, may that be physical or cognitive (50), as it becomes the materialization of the evils that science must not bring to light, the darkest human emotions and desires, or the violence experienced by marginalized communities. It warns against crossing such lines which constitute the borders of what is acceptable, crossing them and demonstrating the consequences. Put shortly, the monster defines what is socially and morally acceptable. Because of that, “[e]very monster is in this way a double narrative” (Cohen 50). Cohen cites that the monster actively deconstructs the very pillars of society as it uncovers biased systems of belief and embodies cultural fears (51).

Not surprisingly, then, the monster also embodies human desires for forbidden practices. It allows consumers to fantasize about undesirable human acts of aggression, violence, or sexuality, enabling us to project ourselves onto an unrestricted, monstrous Other (See Cohen 52). The real horror, according to Cohen, emerges when these very boundaries between self and monster are threatened to be overstepped, or even destroyed (52). This may happen, for example, when the monster’s actions threaten to deconstruct our perception of our own reality, or we recognize too much of ourselves in it.

In the end, the monster “ask[s] us why we have created [it]” (Cohen 54). It often reflects cultural assumptions concerning “race, gender, sexuality” (54), most of which are traditionally associated with binary assumptions. For example, gender can evoke the binary of ‘male/female’, sexuality that of ‘heterosexual/homosexual’, and race that of ‘us/them’ or ‘white/non-white’. The monster, however, encourages consumers to think outside of such boxes and consider where these assumptions come from, and what consequences they may have. While this may result in a certain discomfort, horror plays with such binaries and even goes a step further: The challenging of binaries such as



‘human/monster’ or alive/dead’ among others have the power to create great horror instead.

In “The Uncanny”, Sigmund Freud explores the influence of the familiar and the repressed on the feeling of eeriness in certain situations, and towards specific objects or actions. That which we perceive as ‘uncanny’ “is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged [...]” (Freud 13). In essence, this quality of feeling does not come to be through the confrontation with something completely unknown, but instead something known that has become unfamiliar. For example, this could come to be through repression, or through changes that the familiar object has gone through. It is here where similarities to Cohen’s definition of the monster become apparent. Specifically, the monster being a reflection of ourselves which we reject, something we do not want to resemble or encounter – something that has become unfamiliar. However, at the same time, it is a projection of our inner world, both fears and desires, as it gives space to explore practices that were deemed socially unacceptable (See Cohen 54). The monster is a way to retrieve the repressed fears and desires from our insides.

An uncanny feeling also emerges at the encounter with anything that fundamentally challenges our perception. One such thing could be the confrontation with something that embodies both sides of a binary that should not go together. Falling back on Cohen, this could materialize in the form of a monster, but is a characteristic which also applies to dolls: Referring to Jentsch’s prior observations, Freud goes on to explain that dolls, wax figures, mannequins and similar inanimate but humanoid objects can be uncanny (See Freud 5). Such objects may earn our distrust if they become too life-like (8f), evoking the ‘alive/dead’ or ‘animate/inanimate’ contradiction, and becoming too similar to something animate in our minds to be an inanimate being. They conjure up the idea that they might have a mind of their own or suddenly begin to move, just like their living template would.

Dolls can be one iteration of doubles or doppelgangers: they deal with themes of “doubling, dividing and interchanging the self” (Freud 9), creating an uncanny feeling through their eerie likeness to humans in general, or a specific person. Likewise, they play into the impression that human-shaped objects may be alive, or possess human

properties, as though they might come to life and wander off. Or worse, seek out the living. The concept of the double is not limited to objects, though. It can also refer to the alter ego of a person: two unrelated people looking too similar for it to be a coincidence, or two people who are linked by fate by their similar properties (See Freud 9). The double also plays into notions of repetition, especially of the involuntary kind: Repeating conversations, situations, numbers, or icons may “result in the [...] feeling of helplessness and of something uncanny” (Freud 11). Involuntary repetition can thereby turn an otherwise innocent situation into an estranged and inescapable one, one that is threatening us in our agency and surpassing the possibility of pure chance (11). This also plays into the impression that there could be something sublime influencing our reality, again challenging our perception of the world and our agency.

Furthermore, uncanny feelings do not only arise in strange situations and are not exclusively directed at humanoid objects either. The perhaps purest example of the familiar becoming estranged to us is the process of dying or the state of death. According to Freud, the fear of the dead is deeply settled within us and related to the fear of disease or supernatural activity: more specifically, the concern that the dead might carry us away “to share [their] new life with [them]” (14). Loved ones, once alive and moving, become the ultimate source of uncanny notions once they have passed, transforming into something no longer familiar. In horror media as in life, corpses become associated with impurity, disease, or perhaps evil intent over the loss of their life. Living people, too, can be ascribed an uncanny aura according to Freud, for example once we attribute to them evil motives or notice signs of madness in their behavior (14). Both characteristics create fear and discomfort by alluding to an outer force which we cannot control, cannot prepare for, and one that could potentially harm us. Considering madness for a moment, a familiar person like the postman or one’s own mother can become a source of dread once we perceive them as mad. The vast unknown connected to madness in horror, linked to the fear of the unfamiliar, is as potent as the fear of monsters which also play with notions of the familiar and the repressed (See Cohen 46f).

## **2.2. Popular Conventions and Concepts: Dolls and Other Doubles**

“Horror, then, occurs at the boundaries of these clear category distinctions, where our sense of certainty, integrity, unity is suddenly profoundly challenged, destabilized.”

(Jones 10). Horror thrives on taking the known and accepted, and then twisting, shifting, and dissolving its boundaries. This way, distinct categories like self/other, human/non-human, or living/dead are profoundly challenged or rearranged (See Jones 10). Monsters, dolls, and doubles contest boundaries, overstepping them and creating new ones.

The double appears in a myriad of different forms as mentioned in the previous chapter. As doppelgangers, twins, shadows, repetitions, and split personalities among others, they destabilize the sense of a unified self (See Jones 84). They suggest that we are “not at home with ourselves” (84), making the familiarity and certainty of the self and our personal boundary to the ‘outside’ fall apart. After all, what is for certain if our sense of self crumbles? Addressing iterations of the double by Freud and Rank, Jones suggests that the double raptures time and space to divide body and soul (84). The encounter with it alludes to our own mortality, letting the “world of matter and the world of spirit, this life and the afterlife” (84) crash into one another. Where the double appears in the form of a divided self or split personality, it may serve as a loaded cultural symbol (86), representing two opposite sides of a person like the socially accepted and socially rejected behaviors and desires. It can also become representative of a divided national identity (86), a lived hypocrisy (87), or be connected to madness as a form of a character’s “radical Otherness” (80). As already touched upon in Freud’s essay (See Freud 14), madness in horror is built upon broken binaries and taboos (See Jones 81) and is a powerful tool to challenge the consumer’s worldview.

Another popular manifestation of the double is the doll: “As part object, part being”, the doll is a distortion that disrupts categorization (Mills 250). Mills classifies the doll as a category crisis, a possible doppelganger of its human counterpart, which “defies rationality” as an “uncontrolled, ostensibly monstrous ‘other’” (250). While the doll can be a form of the double, it also stands on its own to express cultural practices and to represent a binding factor between opposing binaries. In an essay for *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, Ellen Schattschneider examines dolls as an essential aspect in Japanese ritual and spiritual practices. During WWII, so-called *imon ningyō* (roughly translating to “comfort dolls”) were sent to soldiers on the front by Japanese women and girls, both to related and befriended soldiers as well as strangers (See Schattschneider 330). These dolls were meant to serve as a source of comfort, reminding soldiers of their home and encouraging them to keep fighting for their country – functioning “as material instantiations of the psyche or will of their bearer, encapsulating obligation and duty”

(335). More than that, at times it was their purpose to serve as a sort of bridge between life and death, as well as past and future (343). This was especially the case for soldiers of the Special Attack Corps who were eventually sent on missions in which they would inevitably die: “As *migawari* (substitute) figures [for their mothers, sisters, or lovers], they might absorb or ease some of the pilot’s terror and anxiety, freeing him to accomplish his task” and allowing a “special closeness” to those loved ones that were left behind (Schattschneider 341). Outside of the war, dolls already had a special and central role in rituals of remembrance, spirituality, and prayer. As connecting elements between humans and divine beings (Schattschneider 331), dolls can be signifiers for relationships and upcoming rituals like the *hanayome ningyō* (“bride dolls”, 332). Another purpose is for dolls to serve as ritualistic objects in memorial services to be burned or otherwise discarded (332). Many of these assigned them the important role as mediators between the spirit world and the world of the living, connecting life/death and divine/human. The Japanese word ‘*ningyō*’ itself literally translates to “human shape” (See Schattschneider 331), highlighting dolls’ connection to the double as well as their purpose to represent the living in spiritual practices, or their “capacity to facilitate eternal bonds among family members” (348). This places dolls as an object flooded with significance: as an effigy of humans, a bridging factor for both physical and spiritual distances, but also a monstrous Other.

Like the *imon ningyō* emerged as a reaction to the horrors of WWII, monsters also appear in the context of historical and social events, especially in times of crises and revolution (Jones 100f). Difficult times of social or economic change, pandemics, and wars are only a few examples of big scale events which leave people anxious. Uncertainty and existential threat ultimately make room for the spreading of fear. Unsurprising is the emerging search for a shared enemy, someone, or something to blame for the suffering. Often, this role is assigned to marginalized or Othered groups, individuals, or concepts, especially in colonial and post-colonial narratives. In horror fiction, these imaginary enemies or scapegoats can translate into the monsters at the centre of the story. Similarly, social margins and the neglected regional and provincial outskirts hold their own horrors, from rumors of non-existent ethical boundaries to vicious taboo practices allegedly being performed (See Jones 106).

Thus, the Other takes on an essential role in horror, appearing in ever-evolving forms: “Horror [...] depends on otherness, not difference. [...] Difference can be overcome, [...]

but otherness presumes a point beyond which the self cannot see or reach.” (Khair 436). We are fascinated by these unknown, unheard-of horrors that lurk beyond the borders of what we know, of our homes – and our own cultures. Japanese monsters have a firmly established place in Western horror media, drawing audiences in and shocking them with their unfamiliarity: legendary creatures and popular monsters like Godzilla have made their mark in American and European cinema spaces. The monsters from overseas combine classic horror elements with the novelty of drawing from a culture that is widely unfamiliar to the Western audience. The female, vengeful Japanese ghost is no exception. The 1990s and 2000s have popularized the image of the Japanese *onryō*: With long black hair covering her face and a white nightgown or shift resembling traditional *kimono*, the vengeful ghost returns to commit unthinkable acts of violence (See Jones 119f). She is the striking image of the colonial Other in Western horror media, arising from the marginalization of the feminine, the Eastern, the Orientalized. Jones highlights movies like *The Ring* (2002) or *Ju-on: The Grudge* (2002) as some of which popularized the now infamous depiction of a Japanese ghost in the West (119f). Rin Chupeco’s *The Girl from the Well* and its sequel *The Suffering* also portray the same type of ghost as *The Ring* or its Japanese source material, *Ring* (1998).

### **2.3. Deconstruction Theory: Displacing Binaries**

Deconstruction is a concept with many names, be it Derrida’s ‘différance’ (McQuillan 16), Bhabha’s ‘hybridity’ (15), or ‘supplementarity’ (20). It is a process which uncovers, reverses, and displaces unequal binaries, placed in contrast to each other through social conventions. The goal of deconstruction is to uncover such binaries in texts and to understand how and why they are employed, suspending them completely. Such binaries are couplings of ideas which “are not true opposites” (McQuillan 8), but rather reflect power dynamics and hierarchical thinking which have been established over time. Western thought is structured in terms of binaries, like East/West, Men/Women, Black/White, or Speech/Writing to name a few examples (McQuillan 8). While not functioning as objective opposites like on/off, binaries like man/woman are often considered opposites. This, however, strongly presupposes that these boundaries cannot be crossed, but that it is either one or the other. These presumptions are referred to as logocentrism. Logocentrism shapes thinking and consequently language, treats

subjectivity “as a matter of essential and stable meanings” (McQuillan 14) and desires a single, fixed centre of language (14).

It is important to note, then, that binaries construct identity but do not necessarily reflect reality: instead, they form around logocentrism – the privileging of certain terms over others based on biased categorization (McQuillan 10). Historically, logocentrism has anchored inequality of binary oppositions in Western thought and has thus heavily affected developments in philosophy, literature, culture, and politics (10). As a result, deconstruction as a process seeks to identify such biased binaries, and in two general steps aims to suspend them. For that process, the binaries must be reversed first to demonstrate how they are false and employed to support a “particular set of interests” (12). Secondly, the reversed binary then helps displace the entire system of binary thinking: the terms are reshaped and reinterpreted in a way that “does not involve binary logic at all” (12f). This way, the reinterpretation and rearrangement of the concepts allows for a deeper understanding of the text.

Deconstruction, then, unravels the biased language to reveal its partiality and prove that the privileged term is not superior to the marginal term. Because of that, hybridity is organically a form of deconstruction: it shows how there is no purity around privileged terms and undoes the inside/outside logic of logocentrism (McQuillan 15). Binary logic therefore depends on the understanding of and focus on difference. This means that to identify as one thing, one must differentiate oneself from those who are not that particular thing. McQuillan uses the example of tall/short: hence, to identify as tall, others must in turn be short (16). Logocentrism takes this one step further and, depending on its context, privileges one term of the binary as ‘better’ or ‘superior’ over its counterpart. The dominated term in the binary is the one that can be described as ‘subservient’, ‘excluded’, or ‘marginal’ (McQuillan 23). From a Western point of view, this includes terms like ‘feminine’, ‘exotic’, ‘irrational’, and ‘superstitious’ (9f). In comparison to the marginal term, the privileged term is considered central (McQuillan 23), relevant in the structuring of Western discourse (30), and exclusive towards other ways of thinking (31). To refer back to the previous examples, their privileged counterparts would be ‘masculine’, ‘recognizable’, ‘rational’, and ‘reasonable’ (See 9f). McQuillan notes that for the privileged term to inhabit and defend its position, it must be viewed as the natural way of thinking or as a fact, rather than a biased concept with a marginalizing agenda (31). This way, it becomes harder to challenge and replace our

perception of the world. One of the examples McQuillan uses to explain this is the success of the patriarchy and the related thinking which positions 'man' over 'woman' (12). This kind of thinking has been enforced and reproduced throughout Western history, engraining it in our thinking and thereby in cultural and societal structures and expectations. Exactly this is what makes binary structures so difficult to suspend. Similarly, Orientalism is powered by the same kind of logocentrism which marginalizes the 'East' as subordinate: namely feminine, weak, esoteric, and emotional (See McQuillan 12, 9f).

Coming back to binaries within literature, deconstruction treats each text as something special, however not isolated (McQuillan 5). Instead, texts are closely connected to their cultural, political, historical, and social context and environment (8). What this means is that a text cannot be deconstructed in the context of another text that is similar but must be viewed as the result of binary structures outside of literature. While logocentric structures in texts may be subconscious reproductions of the context in which they are created, they still shape thinking and therefore influence the literature (27). Regarding this, McQuillan notes that due to the nature of logocentrism, nothing is "outside of the text" for deconstruction (35). This means that there cannot be a distinction between the text and the real-world influence on it (37). Instead, literary texts and the 'textuality of life' are intertwined (38): text always has context and is linked to social, historical, political, or biographical issues 'outside' of the text (McQuillan 38), and so are the binaries within it. In this way, text and context can reproduce and reinforce each other.

Horror, as we established, is a genre that heavily depends on the challenging of boundaries, which often materialize in binaries such as alive/dead, self/other, familiar/unfamiliar, or even human/monster. The binary of madness/sanity is also a popular one in horror, and as mentioned before plays with the fear of a radical Otherness, an unpredictable opponent or even our own subjective perception. While traditional monsters can be the externalization or rejection of inner fears and desires, concepts like the double can become the manifestation of a binary which becomes part of the Self. For example, this can be the case if the subject embodies both sides of the binary (e.g. in the form of a split personality). Deconstruction is one way to deal with these binaries which constitute monsters and the origin of feelings of horror or uncanniness. As Cohen points out, the monster can be deconstructive as it reflects our cultural norms and fears (See Cohen 51). I argue, however, that the monster not only serves as an act of deconstruction

itself. Through a deconstructive approach to the genre conventions and their implications, an even deeper insight into the genre, the characters, and their real-world implications and concerns becomes possible.

### **3. Discussion**

#### **3.1. The Monster Within Me: Human and Monster**

There are several areas in which the merging of monster and human becomes visible in the text. Among them, three main aspects within the plot can be identified: first, the relationship and interdependence of Tark and Okiku in the human/monster binary. Second, the manifestation of Tark's American Japanese identity and the representation of these countries in the text as a USA/Japan binary. And lastly the permeability and interaction of timelines in the present/past binary, which reverts to both previous couplings.

The most prevalent character opposition which confronts us in a monster story is the human/monster binary. Central to Chupeco's text is the relationship between Tark and Okiku. Due to their physical bond, Okiku has become an essential part of Tark and ensures his well-being, protecting him from any outside threats – both of the paranormal and of the human kind. At the same time, Tark has given Okiku a reason to remain in the world of the living and has helped her rediscover her human side to an extent. Equally important, though, they have built a deep friendship and rely on each other for protection and companionship. In the human/monster binary, 'human' is the privileged or dominant term as it is 'sealed' against 'monster' as the marginal term. This is because compared to the monster, the human is conceptually pure as a being, while the monster is an abnormality and embodies everything impure. This impurity can be argued for in terms of Cohen's category crisis for one, considering how Okiku as a ghost falls into the oppositions of being dead but alive, as well as a monster with a human form (See Cohen 45ff). Moreover, she acts like a person for most of the time as she interacts with Tark and can speak to him like a friend, sometimes even appearing in the shape she had before her death (See Chupeco 96). Meanwhile, she regularly falls back into her erratic, bloodthirsty behaviors and cannot find peace until she yields to the malevolent voices in her head, imploring her to kill:



She's rattling, as if she's about to go on the attack, and she's—  
*hunger hungry kill peel off their skin*  
*cut it thin take heads and limbs*  
*little dark little dark kill*  
Uh-oh... (30)

But Okiku's impurity also stems from how she presents as a ghost: her body is withered (Chupeco 16) and dead-looking (17), her eyes hollow and unblinking (17), while she rests on the ceiling (17). Her visual similarities to a corpse evoke notions of death, infections, and decay. Okiku is the embodiment of the 'outside', transgressing the boundaries of the 'inside' by being a part of Tark (See Jones 10). In contrast to Okiku, Tark is human and bound to ethics, partaking in society, and offering a perspective that is comprehensible to the reader. Here, as a monster, Okiku is defined as the 'Other' over her difference to the human. Despite appearing in a human shape, she becomes something estranged through her decaying body (See Freud 13) and her postmortem return (14), a particularly relevant aspect since the monsters in *The Suffering* are predominantly ghosts. As also applies for Okiku, all ghosts have been human once. In the text, they have transformed into malevolent spirits after their death. Therefore, their existence as ghosts is what inherently differentiates them from humans, as the alive/dead boundary separates them, and over this distinction we can derive their radical Otherness.

Horror depends on such distinctions being made, and the reader must identify the monster as the Other and desire the distance between them to be maintained. Only when the monster transgresses these boundaries, horror emerges (See Jones 10). In *The Suffering*, this distinction is mainly established through the characterizations of Tark and Okiku as well as the influence the latter has on the human boy. Okiku is represented as a huntress through and through: she delights in the hunt, does not kill for any higher purpose, and takes lives because she can (Chupeco 14). She is a dead, bloodthirsty, three-hundred-year-old vengeance spirit (8), and her hunger for killing must be satisfied for her to keep control over herself (18). Okiku's monstrosity becomes apparent not only on the textual, but even on a structural level: Tark narrates the story from a first-person perspective and in normal prose, meaning his inner monologue consists of complete sentences in a regular format. Okiku's stream of consciousness and some of her memories, however, are often incomplete sentences. They consist of repetitive words or phrases and seem to randomly break off mid-sentence by continuing in the next line, almost looking more like verse than prose. This illustrates her frenzy on a structural level which contrasts

Tark's style of narration greatly. Sometimes, this frantic stream of consciousness takes over Tark's perception:

*For the first time, she sees the boy on his back. Wide-eyed, trembling, more skeleton than youth, the crumble of his clothes older than his age. She was not his first, and the rage*  
kill eat kill feast kill eat kill feast kill FEAST KILL FEAST  
KILLFEAST  
*grows that he could not even accord her that privilege.*  
*The retainer begins to*  
KILLFEASTKILLFEASTKILLFEASTKILLFEASTKILL  
FEASTKILLFEAST  
*scream.*  
*And when it is over, she—*  
—I sink to the floor, forgetting momentarily that I have legs. (154)

Okiku's stream of consciousness is a direct reaction to the malevolence in her, presenting itself in a disconnected, highly emotional way. This highlights her lack of control and lack of humanity in the face of her blood lust. There is no boundary between her and Tark, i.e. no boundary between the mind of the monster and the mind of the human. As is already implied in this, there is a direct influence that Okiku has on Tark. Since they are spiritually connected, Tark notices some of her monstrosity seeping over into him:

[...] because the strange malice festering inside Okiku occasionally finds its way into me, the  
*festering, festering,*  
*make them break*  
*them take them*  
shadows' voices curling into my mind. (40)

Tark goes on to explain how Okiku satisfying her desire for killing also stops the terrors of the voices in his head (40). For one, it is noteworthy how their perceptions and existence are intertwined in a way that they can not only see the same things (Chupeco 181) and share memories with each other, but also feel similar emotions. Tark is aware that the 'malice' that drives Okiku to kill also affects him: "[the] malice isn't completely gone from either of us." (45) This also alludes to notions of madness: Tark hears the same malicious voices in his head that originate from Okiku and her monstrous persona. He also admits that he noticed a certain coldness or aloofness within him, making him less affected by the deaths occurring around him, which frightens him (79). However, while

he fears the possible consequences of his and Okiku's killing sprees, he also feels a sense of satisfaction, which he both hates and enjoys, upon knowing the perpetrators are dead (Chupeco 37). In that regard, Tark indulges in the forbidden practice of torturing and killing a man on the grounds of vigilante justice without having to do it himself (See Cohen 52). This merging of human and monster in one body ultimately evokes notions of the double, more specifically its emergence as a split personality (See Jones 84): Okiku becomes Tark's manifested other Self.

Now that Okiku has been identified as the monstrous Other to Tark's humanity, it is possible to deconstruct the human/monster binary laying underneath. For that, it is necessary to examine how the binary can be reversed. First, it is worth considering that the premise of Tark and Okiku's relationship relies on the sacrifice Okiku makes to enable Tark to live. She protects the boy with all her power, endangering herself and risking it all to make sure he remains unharmed: "Okiku made no complaint or protest when I decided to come here, though she must have known what kind of creatures lurk in Aitou – the ones she is weakest against." (Chupeco 223). Okiku's behavior goes against her role as the monster, instead placing her as someone who is selfless and caring, someone not monstrous through and through. At the same time, Tark himself speaks fondly of Okiku, sometimes describing her as though they were lovers. He portrays her as a very caring though awkward friend: "She'll wrap her withered arms around me; she's not used to comforting anyone, but she tries all the same." (16). Here, the distinct Otherness of her decaying arms stands in direct contrast to her helpless attempt to care for Tark: Usually, the body of the monster repulses and elicits the wish to remain distanced to it. But instead, the same body now becomes that of a friend, one capable of friendly gestures and one with which contact might even be desired. As a result, the horror of her monstrosity is lessened through Tark's perspective. Moreover, Okiku stays nearby when he sleeps, wrapping her locks of hair around his bed and body, "like a protective cocoon", her scent soothing him (17) like that of a close companion or family member. With this, another integral part of Okiku's Otherness – the hair that malicious Japanese ghost women have become known for (See Jones 119f) – has been inverted into something less monstrous by shifting the perspective. Contrary to her monstrous behavior, Okiku also has a need to be protected. While she has become a part of Tark to protect him after the exorcism, he in turn provided her with a place to rest: The place that Okiku physically resides in and can recover in is located in Tark's chest (Chupeco 196), alluding to her having a safe

place in his heart. In a way, Tark's fond view of Okiku defuses her uncanny aura, reversing her uncanniness into something that has become familiar. Moreover, the idea that Okiku 'comes from' within Tark further supports this familiarity. Whichever form she takes on, it makes no difference to Tark, and in a conversation with a friend he refers to Okiku as "the most important person in [his] life", one he would even kill for if he had to (69). Together they try to work through the evil voices haunting Okiku as though it were a trauma: "She's still hurting, I can tell. We aren't quite okay yet. But the thing about me and Okiku is that I know we will be." (90) Tark views them as a team, and portrays Okiku as very human, contrary to her nature. From the many conversations he has with her throughout the novel, it becomes apparent that he can talk to and joke around with her like a close friend (See Chupeco 178).

As Okiku becomes characterized as more and more human, the monstrosity within Tark becomes more noticeable. Coming back to monster theory and Cohen in particular, some of the defining assumptions about the monster shift over to the human character. By entering the human body and becoming a vital part of it, the monster not only crosses the boundary of the skin that divides the Self from the Other (See Jones 10). It also transforms the human body into a category crisis (See Cohen 46f). The human's body now bears the monstrous Other within it, even depends on it to survive. Even more, the human actively and willingly supports the monster in its monstrous rampages. This ultimately goes against all that makes the human 'pure' when put in contrast to the monster. As the boundaries between Self and Other are crossed, it becomes more difficult to pinpoint where the human ends and where the monster begins. The monster's purpose to "[dwell] at the gates of difference" (Cohen 46) and "[police] the borders of the possible" (49f) cannot be fulfilled. Instead, a crisis is created as the outside can no longer be defined by the monster after it becomes part of the inside. In this inversion lies the reversal of roles: As one of the major turns in the text, Okiku sacrifices herself for Tark to save his life and defeat the ghost of the *kannushi*:

She smiles at me one last time, and then she disappears amid the swirl of cloth, binding her form forever.  
The *kannushi* is chanting, but the sound is lost in my screaming.  
She knew. There are two more rituals that can be performed – one to control the gate and one more to rule it. The sacrifices must be willing. To save my life, Okiku gave hers. (269)

As a result, Okiku's spirit is absorbed by the *kannushi*'s silkworm tree and enters the afterlife. The ritual in which Okiku and the ghost brides were sacrificed, grants Tark the malicious power of the Hell's gate which the *kannushi* sought for. Enraged, Tark kills the *kannushi* with a spiritual knife (Chupeco 271) and swears to use his new power to bring Okiku back. Though Tark's ritual succeeds and Okiku's ghost returns, there is a meaningful shift in their roles. First, Okiku's malice seems to have been purified in the afterlife:

The hundred days she spent in the afterlife gave her the ability to retain a greater semblance of who she was when she was alive. The frightening, malevolent voices no longer speak to her. The ritual took away her malice, [...]. (312f)

Okiku no longer needs to hunt for killers to retain her self-control. While she is still technically the 'monster' as a ghost, she has visibly become more human in both her appearance and her demeanor according to Tark, as though she has been healed of the malice that made her monstrous in the first place. However, Tark realizes that perhaps Okiku was never responsible for his dark, violent desires but instead the darkness was part of him all along and was possibly what "drew her to [him] in the first place" (Chupeco 295). He and Okiku still sneak out at night to pursue killers, but Okiku made peace with her darkness. Instead, Tark chooses the hunt as his personal purpose in life: "I'm no longer haunted by these midnight excursions. If I've learned anything these last few months, it's that everyone can choose their own purpose. This is mine." (312) There is a major shift in how he refers to their hunts, as he now speaks of the victims as "his targets" and stalks them for extensive periods of time to learn their schedules (311). After receiving the power from the silkworm tree ritual, Tark's narration momentarily takes on the structural form of Okiku's streams of consciousness:

I take a deep breath and embrace the darkness.  
There is  
nothing  
here  
Just the scrolling endless  
dark of for  
ever  
So  
easy  
to let  
go so easy

to let  
It  
overcome  
you  
no. (273f)

This represents the shift of Tark's role on a structural level, his fight against the malicious power resembling that of Okiku. Here it becomes especially visible how the binaries can be reversed in the text. Tark now embraces the vigilante life and decides against a normal one. He makes the hunting of killers his purpose, accepting the darkness within him and leaning more into the monstrosity that was previously associated with Okiku. When Okiku is brought back and Tark loses the power from the silkworm tree as a result, the ritual 'cleanses' Tark's capacity to be a vessel. He and Okiku do not physically depend on each other anymore, but they choose to depend on each other as companions.

There is, however, no full reversal of the human/monster binary. Okiku has not become a human but is still a ghost. Despite the disappearance of the malicious voices in her mind, she still performs the same acts of violence against undetected perpetrators. At the same time, Tark is still human and apart from his changed self-perception, nothing has changed. If anything, they have become more like each other. So, while Tark and Okiku have switched roles in a way, there are no clear and distinct boundaries to the binaries anymore. The human/monster binary proves to be fluent as it becomes increasingly difficult to apply the before-set rules of horror and monsters which substantiated the binary to begin with. Instead, the horror emerges by the breaking of these rules. If the Otherness of the monster is built on its difference from humans, there seems to be little distinction between human and monster remaining. Humans can transform into monsters, while monsters interfere with human life and become more human in the process. As these boundaries shift, the categories of the binary become blurrier. Consequently, we are forced to reflect on our own monstrosity in turn. As the human/monster binary begins to crumble in the text, the question arises what we can do to either strengthen the boundary between the human and the monstrous, or how we can learn to deal with our own monstrosity instead. In this regard, the horror of the text lies in the realization of the ease with which we may become a monstrous version of ourselves as well.

### 3.2. The Other and I, or: the USA and Japan

The previous subchapter has carved out how the close relationship between Tark and Okiku leads to a merging of the human/monster binary. This process is reinforced by the way in which Tark's identity becomes relevant in the text. As a Japanese American, he is influenced by two rather different cultures which both affect his daily life and the progress of the story. There is, however, a stronger significance to his American identity as it seems. Moreover, there is a divide within the text's engagement with the USA and Japan, both in terms of plot setting and representation. The following subchapter deals with Tark's double-identity and cultural associations within the text, represented as a USA/Japan binary, in which the 'USA' is privileged.

There are several reasons why the USA assumes the privileged position in this binary. On a more general level, Western discourse positions the West as central. This is essential to logocentrism (See McQuillan 8): Japan is classified as Eastern, which in Western discourse is associated with femininity, weakness, and irrationality (See McQuillan 12). This strings along a number of associations which become relevant in the novel. For one, Japan is coded as a place of legends and spirituality. While this is not addressed directly within the text, Japan is the country that is tied to the supernatural and where magic seems to originate from. It is where Tark learns how to deal with, or more specifically, how to exorcise ghosts: "[Kagura] offered to teach me the rituals [...]. The first exorcism I performed on my own was nine months ago in Japan." (Chupeco 16) These rituals are closely connected to Shintoism<sup>2</sup>, which from a logocentric perspective would be affiliated with a more exotic and esoteric worldview. At the same time, while there is a mention of an American ghost which Tark exorcises, most of the spirits seem to be tied to Japan – especially the ones relevant to the plot. At the beginning of the novel, for example, Tark exorcises a ghost which haunts one of his American classmates. He soon realizes that this ghost is a so-called *hoso-de*, a benign spirit "found in most Japanese households." (Chupeco 9) Tark goes on to explain that he does not know why a common Japanese ghost would reside in the USA, but simply assumes that there must be a "foreign neighbor in [the] apartment complex" (9). But the most plot-relevant ghosts are also Japanese, like the *kannushi*, the ghost brides, and even Okiku. All of them are also strongly affected by and connected to Japanese culture and history. Each has a similar

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<sup>2</sup> *mikos* work at Shinto shrines

link to Japanese traditions and rituals, and they all were brought up in Japanese culture. Okiku, for example, has grown up in Japan during her lifetime and has worked as a servant at a castle. Consequently, she has had to strictly adhere to all the attached customs and rules. The *kannushi* and the ghost brides also lived in a Japanese village, remaining mostly untouched by the Western influence at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and have never left Japan. Moreover, they have taken on different important roles within the rituals of the village. In this way, Japan comes across as the origin of the unfamiliar, the monstrous, and the supernatural threat. It is also the place where the American ghost hunter crew and Tark go to investigate supernatural mysteries, and where they run into danger. Both the American visitors as well as the *miko* Kagura, like her father before her, eventually get lost in the impenetrable depths of Aokigahara. Thus, the unfamiliar consumes the familiar. Therefore, travelling to Japan becomes equal to setting out for the unknown.

Another reason why the USA is privileged over Japan in the text is the setting of the plot and its cultural relevance for Tark's characterization. In *The Suffering*, the USA is the initial place in which the story begins, as well as where Tark not only lives currently but also where he grew up. Tark is fully immersed in American culture as his father is American. In turn, he has been estranged from his Japanese mother, who has died in the prequel and has been institutionalized for most of his childhood. Because of that, English is his first language, and the USA is the only home he knows, considering he is most familiar with its cultural customs. At the same time, Tark is rather detached from the Japanese side of his identity: he is not familiar with most of the customs and has only started to learn the language recently. This is why Okiku helps translate the relevant scriptures that Tark needs to understand the ritual and exorcise the vengeful ghost brides (e.g. Chupeco 119f, 174). She is essential to the progress of the plot, and equally important in Tark's success. In that respect and with regard to the subsequent subchapter, a clear binary is forming: The USA stands for progress, technology, rationality, the Self, the familiar, and Tark. Meanwhile, Japan stands for tradition, spirituality, legends, the Other, the unfamiliar, and Okiku. As a result of this and referring back to the human/monster binary, it becomes visible how Okiku serves as Tark's Other in the USA/Japan binary as well. Okiku, as Tark's monstrous double, serves as a representation of Tark's Japanese identity and functions as his direct connection to the country, culture, and language. This also reaches back to how the USA is Tark's home country, while Okiku grew up in Japan



during her lifetime. From that perspective and relating back to Japan as a place associated with the supernatural, Tark's Japanese identity and the Japanese culture assume the role of the Other to his predominantly American Self.

A different way in which this manifests itself is the portrayal of Tark as a human doll. Dolls play an essential part in the exorcisms and rituals surrounding spirits, hence they are firmly embedded in Japanese culture in the novel. They are used as vessels to bind ghosts to the body of the doll, until the doll can be safely destroyed, releasing the ghost into the afterlife as a result. Similarly to Schattschneider's essay about ritual dolls, they function as a connection between the earthly and the otherworldly, here serving as a corporeal binding factor (See Schattschneider 331). Tark has been used in a similar way to serve as the vessel for an evil spirit, which has left its mark and made him vulnerable to other spirits:

Whenever Okiku strays too far, other *things* start moving in to claim me as their territory. They want a body to take over. To many spirits, Kagura says, I am prime real estate, easier to inhabit because of my previous possession. (40)

Derivatively, then, the dolls capacity to host lays in their similarity to humans. Tark even explains himself that any doll is suitable to bind ghosts as long as it is intact, i.e. has all the necessary body parts (Chupeco 91). In the case of the ghost brides, their *hanayome ningyō* (bride dolls) are strictly tied to the brides they represent by means of their visual similarities (Chupeco 213). The very nature of dolls is to be human-like while being an inanimate object. The origin of their uncanniness lies exactly in this opposition and becomes even stronger the livelier they look (See Freud 5). This is why Tark's self-portrayal as a 'living doll' dehumanizes him:

I'm a moving, living, breathing doll – maybe not of the same aesthetic as the *hanayome ningyō*, but close enough. Kagura explained that enough times. All one needs is a vessel to contain malevolent spirits – *ningyō* dolls, Kewpies. Or me. I've been a vessel since I was five years old. (272)

Drawing on dolls as a comparison for Tark transfers assumptions about dolls onto him. Schattschneider describes dolls as objects that can bridge the distance between the divine and the earthly (331), which is also a trait Tark bears: Even apart from his function as a vessel, he is able to communicate with spirits and interact with them. Dolls, however, are

usually considered a monstrous Other (See Mills 250), something inherently not human. Tark's characterization as a 'human doll' is a paradox then. If we assume that dolls can host ghosts because of their lack of an own life or will, this also implies an emptiness or lack of a soul in Tark. In *The Suffering*, dolls represent the duality of body and soul in the rituals in which they are used, posing as the body without soul. This subliminally challenges the assumption that Tark has a pure soul or any at all. To go a step further, it alludes to Tark being humanoid instead of actually human. This attributes to him a certain monstrosity of his own and places his being as a category crisis (See Cohen 45), turning Tark into the monstrous Other instead. Likewise, it implies a loss of agency as dolls are objects and unable to act freely, except when they are possessed. But if Tark is a doll, then the conclusion lays near that Okiku is the soul, or spirit, that inhabits him, strengthening the portrayal of Okiku as Tark's double or the manifestation of his Japanese half. This equation of dolls and Tark twists our perception of Tark's humanity in an act of defamiliarization, falling back on his merging with Okiku from the previous chapter. As the lines between human and doll start to become blurry, the focus lays on the fragility of the boundaries between concepts of humanity and monstrosity. This way, the foreignness of Tark's Japanese identity, his portrayal as a doll and the connection to Okiku as his Japanese Other add to the defamiliarization of the human.

As the story goes on, Tark's likeness to dolls, as well as his Japanese identity and Okiku as its manifestation become more and more prevalent. The unfamiliar presents itself in form of Okiku and the ghost brides, as well as the strange rituals of Aitou. As a result, the plot's focus shifts more towards the uncovering of the unfamiliar. This can again be connected to Tark's characterization as a human doll: dolls have a very special place in Aitou, even more so than in other villages during that time (Chupeco 110). This connects Tark more to the customs of the village in a way. Apart from Okiku, another kind of double to Tark can be identified in Aitou: Hotoke Oimikado, who is the daughter of the *kannushi*, is of mixed heritage as well. Her maternal side of the family belonged to the Ainu tribe, one that was looked down on for their mixed Caucasian and Japanese identity during her lifetime (Chupeco 222). As the only one who was able to sabotage the *kannushi*'s ritual and as the only ghost bride with a free will, she takes on a central position in the final confrontation with the *kannushi*. Though it is not her hybridity itself which helps her help Tark, the similarity to Tark's identity is striking. Tark, too, made negative experiences and was treated like an outsider due to his double identity (Chupeco 22).

Hotoke is also noticeably the only ghost bride who is not exorcised by means of a *hanayome ningyō* in the end: Instead, she uses Tark as a temporary vessel to launch a surprise attack on the *kannushi* (270), before she eventually sacrifices herself to the silkworm tree (272). In sight of his depiction as a doll, his close connection to Okiku as his monstrous ‘Other’ and finally the similarities to Hotoke, the lines between human and monster blur even further.

### 3.3. Connecting Timelines: Present and Past

The final coupling which needs to be examined is the present/past binary. As a ghost story at its core, *The Suffering* engages with the confrontation of different timelines. In form of the present/past binary, several aspects connecting to it stand in contrast to each other. The ‘present’ is primarily defined through the narrative present, i.e. the ‘current’ events narrated by the protagonist. It is also represented via the technology used as well as the clear distinction between now and then through dates and numbers. The past is represented mainly through the monstrous characters – Okiku and the ghost brides –, which are closely bound to the narrative past or memories of the dead, as well as the aspects of tradition and spirituality in the novel. In this binary, the ‘present’ poses as the privileged term. This is on the one hand due to the narrative present structuring the novel itself: the narrative present represents agency and is the focus of attention. It focuses on Tark’s actions and the modern world he lives in. On the other hand, the sentiment that societies are ever progressing culturally and technologically from generation to generation is related to it, too. Another angle to view the privileged ‘present’ is to consider how it seems to be open-ended and difficult to pinpoint where it stops being the present, whereas the dominated ‘past’ can in a way be perceived as ‘finished’ or ‘closed’.

How this presents itself within the plot can be seen in the role of technology for example. In the text, technology and spirituality are representations of present and past: here, technology represents the modern ‘present’, its progress and its focus on material development. On the other side of the binary is spirituality, almost like a remnant of the past it can be associated with backwardness, superstition, and lack of scientific knowledge. In that regard, from a Western viewpoint especially, myths, legends and the belief in ghosts broadly lay back in times of lacking scientific knowledge and paranoia. Tark has found a way to use the technology of his generation to gain control over the

creatures from the past: by playing the chants used to exorcise ghosts on his cell phone, he facilitates the process of executing this very spiritual task for himself (Chupeco 92). He thereby smartly evades the strenuous training the *mikos* had to undergo over years, and that by means of technological progress. This shows how the present and its progressiveness hold a certain power over the past and the elements that represent it in the text. Also connected to the reinforcement of this binary which privileges the present is the portrayal of Tark, the other humans, and Okiku in contrast to the ghost brides. Here, the sanity/madness distinction becomes topical: the ghost brides are driven by madness, acting erratic and malicious as they haunt and kill everyone who enters the village. As they transform into the ‘radical Other’ (See Jones 80), the humans who are trying to help lift the curse off the village become the stand-in for rationality and sanity. This can also be interpreted as a reflection on our general view of the past and how, again, newer generations pose themselves as more rational than past generations.

While the present seems to be dominant in the text both on a structural as well as on the plot level, on closer inspection, the past or what represents it begins to ‘wipe out’ the present. What this means is that the ghost brides representing the past have a firm grasp on the present. This shows partly in their influence on technology as well as their ability to harm the living, thereby shaping the present as a whole. Though influenced by technology to a degree (e.g. by the pre-recorded chants), they are just as capable of using it for their purposes. As it turns out, they or their presence can manipulate digital watches:

Even the clock isn’t working. The numbers skew wildly. It tells me it’s 7:00 p.m., and then 8:31 a.m., and then 76:92 p.m., before settling into what I can only presume is a default error code. (135)

Moreover, they can move within digital photos and manipulate people in them to appear differently after the fact, for example by retroactively mutilating the people pictured who have since died (Chupeco 83, 82). Lastly, they can also intently appear on video recordings and use them to convey messages:

The camera continues to record. I wait with bated breath, torn between my horror for the man and fear that there is nothing I can do. [...] The girl comes back into view, her face so close to the screen that I reel away from the camera [...]. “He is not the one,” the ghost whispers into the camera and then reaches out for me. (148f)

The ghosts who were coded as mad not only reappear in our familiar surroundings (e.g. the USA, the present), but also take control over our modern inventions. While ghosts interfering with technology are not a new trope in horror media, it creates horror in the context of the plot as the monstrous Other makes the surroundings, here the village and everything within it, to their territory. By interacting directly with Tark both in person as well as via technology, they cross all physical and metaphysical boundaries. The separation of something like a modern, rational, and superior 'present' from an irrational and backwards 'past' has failed. Plus, even with the support of his cell phone recording, Tark is still forced to 'play by the rules' of the ghosts as technology alone cannot harm them, but only the Shinto chants and the appropriate tools like traditional *ofudas* and wooden stakes can. In terms of the 100-day ritual, Tark cannot rely on his recordings at all. They do not suffice anymore as this particular ritual requires more powerful chants and gestures to succeed (Chupeco 308). At the same time, the narrative structure is infused with bits of the narrative past, more specifically the memories of the dead which Tark sees like visions. This happens whenever Okiku retreats into his body or when he exorcises a ghost:

But then her eyes close, allowing the chants to wash her away—  
*There are eighteen dolls in the room, all seated around a small altar.  
Candles burn in every corner, throwing heavy shadows on the dolls' expressionless  
faces. She sets her doll down to complete the circle and takes a step back, unable  
to tear her eyes away from the strange sight. (180)*

These shifts between narrative present and narrative past via the memories of the dead ultimately enable Tark to use the contained information together with the clues from the scriptures to survive and escape Aitou. Meanwhile, they also show the contrast between the monsters as they are post-ritual, and the innocent girls that were sacrificed to become those monsters. Here, the boundary between monster and human blurs even further.

What can generally be observed here is how past and present actually depend on each other by being closely interwoven. Neither in the text nor in the horror genre in general are past or present sealed against the other; rather, they are in a permeable state in which the past not only influences the present but in which the connection goes both ways as they interact with each other. This fully deconstructs the boundary between

‘present’ and ‘past’. As the past is mainly represented by the lost village, the ghost brides, and the horrors that surrounded the rituals, the boundary between the horrors from the past and thus the world of the monstrous Other seeps into the rational, modern present of the living. This defies the assumption that while the ‘present’ is ongoing, the ‘past’ is completed or ‘closed’. Moreover, the success of the human characters is incredibly dependent on the help of the ghosts: not only does the ghost of the *kannushi* help Tark find the scriptures that are required to understand the ritual (Chupeco 227), but Okiku is also essential for deciphering the language that Tark has only begun learning. The flashing of memories from the monstrous Other as it is ‘defeated’ connects the characters through their shared humanity, dissolving at the same time as the rift between past and present. In a way, the permeability of past and present is horrifying, then, as it displaces that mental and physical boundary. It shows the change in the human characters who have become monsters and unveils the process that caused the transformation. This encourages us not to think of the past as a closed chapter, and it forces us to consider how easily people can turn against each other and turn each other or themselves into monsters.

As the boundaries of the final binary of present/past dissolve, the human/monster and USA/Japan binary are further destabilized. Tark is the common factor in these binaries: like dolls, he functions as a bridge between present and past through his interactions with ghosts and the lifting of the village’s curse. In the same way, he connects the earthly to the otherworldly, and in the process brings his double identity more in accord. Lastly, and as an overall result of the previous, he represents the merging of human and monster, both physically and mentally.

#### **4. Conclusion**

By analyzing the prevalent themes and conventions of horror and the related biases in the text, the human/monster binary ultimately becomes blurrier. This happens in a number of ways, all relating back to the incorporation and close examination of the monster. In consideration of the key concepts of horror, the related boundaries of ‘self’ and ‘Other’ could further be identified and deconstructed in the text. Before commencing to a more detailed interpretation of these results, it may be helpful to briefly summarize the key findings and claims of the paper, as well as the theories applied.

As a basis for the theory chapter, Jeffrey Cohen's "7 Theses" provided insights into classic monster theory, exploring the monster as a culturally significant reflection of fears and desires while defining the dos and don'ts of societies. As an embodiment of and way to explore forbidden desires and taboos, it enables us to reflect on our own biases. Sigmund Freud's essay about the 'uncanny' helps understand the process of defamiliarization and repression of the known, estranging it and creating an uncanny notion instead. Connected to this, the concepts of dolls, doubles, and madness could be explored. Darryl Jones' introduction to horror offered a closer look at the conventions and effects of crossing boundaries in horror, specifically the Self/Other, and inside/outside boundaries. Moreover, with insights into the double and its appearance in form of double identities, split personalities and the radical Other, an important basis for the understanding of the monstrous Other could be achieved. Meanwhile, Sandra Mills and Ellen Schattschneider helped examine the doll as a 'monstrous Other', but also as an important element in Japanese ritual culture. Their ability to cross both physical and spiritual boundaries could be highlighted, demonstrating their capacities as an element that bridges the rift between binaries. Lastly, Martin McQuillan helped give an overview of deconstruction theory, emphasizing the role of logocentrism in Western discourse. Thus, insights into how the privileging of terms in logocentric binaries structures thinking and reinforces worldviews were provided. By identifying, reversing, and displacing binaries, the underlying horrors of the text could be brought to surface. With that as a theoretical background, the findings of this paper could be presented in detail.

In the first subchapter of the discussion, the human/monster binary was closely examined. As the 'main' coupling which initiates the merging of human and monster, Tark and Okiku represent the binary in which the pure 'human' is privileged over the 'impure' monster. For this distinction to remain intact, the clear boundaries between self and Other must be upheld. However, Okiku as the monstrous Other becomes a part of Tark and transgresses the boundary of the skin. This way, the monster becomes the new 'inside' instead of marking off the 'outside'. Here, the body of the human could be observed to become a category crisis of itself. As a result, the monster begins to influence the human, which is why it becomes difficult to define the human over his difference to the monster. This influence, though, could be shown to not be one-sided. While Okiku's malice transfers into Tark and influences his thinking, he also humanizes Okiku through friendly interactions and through his characterization of her, bringing out her protective

empathetic side. By analyzing the structural and textual shifts in their behaviors before and after the 100-day-ritual, the reversal of their roles as human and monstrous Other becomes visible. While Okiku is purified from her malice and becomes more human as a result, Tark discovers his own darkness, realizing it was a part of him all along. At the same time, it was possible to observe that the reversal of the binary is not definite and not absolute. Instead, the findings point to a mutual influence. As the key conclusion of this chapter, this finding ultimately indicates a permeability instead of a firm boundary in the human/monster binary. Consequently, the concepts of the monster and human merge into not strictly divided categories and both parties take on characteristics of the other. This allows for a reflection on our own monstrosity as a result.

Building onto this finding, the USA/Japan binary was examined in the second subchapter. The binary mainly manifested in form of Tark's double identity, the Othering of Okiku and the underlying characterization of the USA and Japan within the text. Here, Japan was identified as the Eastern Other, characterized by spirituality and the supernatural in the context of logocentric discourse. This could be seen in various aspects of the text, most prominently in the origin of the monstrous characters and ritual practices employed throughout the novel. The USA as the privileged term is contrarily coded as the rational focal point of the discourse, representing Tark's character in the narrative while being reflected by technology as well. In contrast to Tark as a strongly Western coded character, Okiku is positioned as his Other, standing in for his Japanese side. Supporting this is the portrayal of Tark as a doll which serves to dehumanize him, questioning his purity while also alluding to his capacity to bridge the gap between the earthly and the otherworldly. By means of the paradox that compares Tark to a doll, Tark himself becomes the monstrous Other instead, while Okiku takes on the role of the soul that possesses him and gives him life. As the previously discussed assumptions about dolls are transferred onto Tark, the concept of the human is defamiliarized. Lastly, the similarities between Tark and Hotoke as the divergent ghost bride underline the relevance of Tark's double-identity and the manifestation of it in form of Okiku's Otherness. The deconstruction of the USA/Japan binary, as could be demonstrated, emphasizes the merging of the supernatural and the monstrous unknown with the familiar of the home – here represented especially by the ghosts and rituals, and respectively as Tark and the West. Again, these findings evince a relocation or merging of the inside/outside boundary.



This way, the displacement of the binary supports the preceding subchapter's findings and thus further deconstructs the initial human/monster binary.

In a third and final binary, the implications of the present/past coupling were examined in view of the narrative present and past. The two timelines were defined by several textual and structural elements of the text. The narrative present is represented by the protagonist's narration, the usage of technology. By extension, it is also connected to the USA as the term previously coded as privileged, rational, superior, and progressive. Meanwhile the narrative past is symbolized by the ghosts and characters' connection to the past via their memories, as well as the lost village of Aitou, its rituals and customs. It is thus deeply connected to Japan through the ghosts and their pasts, and as a result is coded as marginal, irrational, subordinate, and backwards. Moreover, the present is perceived as ongoing and constantly developing, while the past is seen as closed and unchanging. By reversing the binary and analyzing the interactions with the ghost brides as well as the interaction between Tark and Okiku, it becomes apparent that the past has the power to consume the present to an extent. This becomes particularly visible in how the ghost brides can influence, e.g. harm, the living and manipulate technology for their own purposes. Through this, the interference of the narrative past with the narrative present becomes apparent. Additionally, the memories and knowledge from the past not only helped but were necessary for Tark and his companions to be able to leave the village and prevent greater harm, as well as lift the village's curse. These findings support the idea that the present/past binary has no clear boundaries at all, as the concepts are permeable and not shielded from change through each other's impact. Instead, it could be demonstrated how they interact with and depend on each other to exist. As a main result, the deconstruction of the present/past boundary further destabilizes the USA/Japan binary, and consequently also the notions of a self/Other or human/monster binary.

As these three binaries are deconstructed and their boundaries begin to dissolve, the concepts of human and monster merge further and further to the point that there is no unambiguous binary anymore, but only room for interpretation. This brings me to the relevance of these findings, namely the relevance for self-reflection and reconsideration of biases. Monsters, as was discussed, serve as a reflection of our fears and biases, shocking us with the ruthlessness with which they cross and tear down boundaries carefully set up by us to keep the unwanted and undesirable 'out'. Underlying this distinction or boundary is the desire to cleanse ourselves from what makes the monster

so monstrous to us in the first place – or to at least keep a safe distance between our objects of fear and ourselves. Superficially, this boundary between monster and human is given in Chupeco's *The Suffering*: While the characters themselves do not question the allocation of roles such as 'human' and 'monster', horror theory helps identify who these roles are originally distributed to. As I have demonstrated, deconstruction and horror theory also make recognizable how they eventually fade into the background as the boundaries are deconstructed. Subsequently, as the relocating of the Other within the Self blurs the lines between monstrous Other and human purity become indistinct, these transgressions make room for critical self-reflection.

This ultimately relates to the repositioning of our fears and the rejected in ourselves. Tark figuratively embraces the monstrous inside him in form of Okiku, who not only influences him but also helps him realize the monstrous that is already a part of him. As monster theory and logocentrism by extension show, anyone is capable of creating their own monsters, or adopting the monsters that we get to know in the process of socialization. While the merging of the human/monster binary in *The Suffering* is only one example case, perhaps it offers an incentive to further investigate the monstrous within us – that, which is already there and which we do not dare address. After all, people fear the unknown and recoil from the uncanny, though their origin may often be closer to our core than we expect. This way, the monster may continue to serve as a warning to us, but one of which we understand how it came to be. And perhaps, one that does not warn us of our monstrous Other, but of our own biases instead.

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