



The inside and outside world in *The Girl from the Other Side*

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ABSTRACT: This article is about decoding image symbols and visual allegories according to the subject of soul through the paradigm of Yutaro Kubo's *The Girl from the Other Side*. The film's narrative tools connect to Japanese animistic perception in a wider field of understanding human behavior.

KEYWORDS: Anime, animism, soul, world, dimensions, yokai, Man

I. Introduction-Film plot

In Yutaro Kubo's film (久保雄太郎, Yutaro Kubo, 1990-) *The Girl from the Other Side* (Kubo, とつくにの少女, *Totsukuni no shōjo*, 2022), the world is divided into the inside and outside region. The inside is inhabited by humans. The outside is inhabited by former humans who have been transformed into strange creatures. The creatures are supposed to carry some unspecified curse. The humans are afraid of a supposed transmission of this curse to them by a contact with these creatures. So, they hunt the outside inhabitants to the border of the two worlds where they exterminate them.

On this border between the dimensions, one of the "cursed" creatures finds a little girl,

Shiva, sleeping in the forest. He takes her under his protection. Shiva does not remember how she ended up in that place, at the part of the outside world. The creature also does not remember his previous life, since he is no longer human. Shiva, however, maintains her human status. She begins to call the creature "teacher".

The Teacher and Shiva cannot touch each other (Photo 1), which is reminiscent of the forbidden, between the two existential dimensions, relationship of the heroes in the film *To the forest of firefly lights* (Ōmori, 2011).

All the inhabitants of the outside world have lost their senses and memory. Despite this, the Teacher cares for the little girl. He, still, has feelings and love inside him. He tries to protect Shiva from the rest of the cursed creatures of this place who seem dehumanized and wish to "eat" the child's soul. It is rare to find a person from the hinterland who still retains its soul in their place, let alone a small child whose soul is completely pure.

In the climax of the film, the Teacher begs the mother-goddess of this haunted place to save the girl's soul. Through an enigmatic ritual, he seems to succeed, although the film does not give direct and clear answers.



Photo 1. The girl from the other side (Kubo, とつくにの少女, Totsukuni no shōjo, 2022)

II. Soul-centric viewing of the film

This is a widely unknown anime, an adaptation of a manga series of the same name. Its short, seventy-minute, duration, seems to have left decisive points, for the understanding of the plot, outside the cinematic script. The development of the relationship between the two characters also seems incomplete. Nevertheless, the script manages to be interesting, in its own way, as its mysterious, elliptical nature, which does not give ready-made solutions but only hints, keeps the attention and does

not prevent the film's psycho-centric meanings from passing on to the appropriate viewer.

It becomes clear that this is not an ecological, but a mythological animistic anime. The inner and outer worlds are clear parables of materialism and spiritualism. Wherever we see people in the film, they are frightened, cowards, violent and aggressive. On the contrary, the supposedly "cursed" of the outer world are gentle and peaceful creatures. This is a clear anti-racist message also.



Photo 2. The girl from the other side (Kubo, とつくにの少女, Totsukuni no shōjo, 2022)



Photo 3. The girl from the other side (Kubo, とつくにの少女, Totsukuni no shōjo, 2022)

The Teacher is a peculiar demon, a kind of yokai who, despite not being able to feel pain or remember the warmth of human emotions, seems to be possessed, ultimately, by greater compassion and spiritual warmth than humans. The other "cursed" creatures, clearly darker and more threatening types of yokai, do desire the girl's soul, however, they never become truly threatening. Instead, they lead

the Teacher and the girl to some deity, some sort of kami, so that this presence can decide the child's fate.

The film's iconography is of high aesthetic value. The animation has a painterly quality and ultimately conveys, through the images, what the script, intentionally or unintentionally, hides.



The Teacher has horns, a long face and a tail, making him resemble something between an upright animal and a demon. Other “cursed” ones grow branches from their bodies and, ultimately, transform into trees. These are visual representations of their souls, as is the case with, virtually, all figures of yokai and their sub-categories in Japanese folklore. Of course, the figures in this film are original and not direct representations of existing yokai. Nevertheless, their connection with Japanese demons is clear. The pure soul of the girl, on the other hand, is visually likened to a flower (Photos 2, 3).

The watch-souvenir that the two heroes exchange with each other, validates the high value of memory as a fundamental element of the human condition. The substituent father-daughter relationship between a cursed, dark soul and the bright soul of a child, places the issue in a field of confrontation between Man and an, atypical, demon.

The Girl from the Other Side is an exceptionally illustrated and, perhaps pretentiously, mysterious film in its plot. Its visual language implies more than its script explains. It implies the coexistence of the yokai world with that of humans. Also, the coexistence of soul and matter. The inside and outside world, as, not coincidentally, are called in the film. Parallel dimensions, parallel souls.

III. Filmography

Kubo Y. (Director). (2022). *The girl from the other side* (とつくにの少, *Totsukuni no shōjo*).

Omori T. (Director). (2011). *To the forest of firefly lights* (螢火の杜へ, *Hotarubi no mori e*).