

How Strange! Are My Eyes Mistaken?: A Study of Arakida Reijo and Her Book of Fantastic Tales, Ayashi no yogatari.

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How Strange! Are My Eyes Mistaken?": A Study of Arakida Reijo and Her Book of Fantastic Tales, Ayashi no yogatari

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Abstract

Arakida Reijo has been described as the most prolific female writer in Japanese premodern history, with her literary output encompassing a huge number of texts in a variety of genres. However, her works remain for the most part untranslated from the original classical Japanese, and she is almost a nonentity in modern literary academia. Given the widespread lack of female education in the Tokugawa period combined with the era's general image of male societal domination, an argument might be made for Reijo's inclusion in modern scholarship due to her status as an educated woman alone. However, Reijo's masterful handling of complicated plots, both interesting as entertainment and rewarding for further academic study, merits a place for her in the Japanese canon even apart from her rarity as an educated female author from the Tokugawa period.

As will be examined in this paper, Reijo's treatment of supernatural women in her 1778 collection of fantastic tales *Ayashi no yogatari*, or "Tales of the Uncanny," stands as an interesting departure from the often misogynistic themes in premodern Japanese supernatural tales. Reijo's treatment of supernatural women becomes all the more interesting when compared against traditional and contemporary literature, as rather than attempting a complete reversal of ideas and motifs of her day, Reijo instead affects more subtle but important changes. While the women in her stories still often lack agency and interiority, and furthermore still play the role of the "monster," subject to supernatural metamorphoses, Reijo's tales often lack both the ultimate judgement of these characters and the subsequent didactic atmosphere present in so many similar tales. An analysis of Reijo's tales in comparison with traditional and contemporary literature reveals the uniqueness of her approach and its import in the Japanese literary tradition.

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