Rilwan Adeyemi

Professor Bucher

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The Monster’s Identity

It's often said that monsters just kill because that's their purpose. It’s also said that the monster has a reason for killing and that the reasoning stems from a messed up past or the desire for a better future. In order to create a successful monster, the creator must put their heart into the process while simultaneously putting a heart into the creation. There are some monsters that are portrayed as emotionless and there are some that actually have emotion and an end goal. But in order to truly understand the monster on the outside, the person must understand the monster within. A good example is the monster that comes from within the TV, Sadako Yamamura from *The Ring.* She is interpreted to be a monster made from the vengeful spirit of a woman who died an untimely death. Similarly, Freddy Krueger from *A Nightmare on Elms Street* is also a vengeful spirit. He is depicted to be the spirit of a child killer who burned to death only to come back and attack children in their dreams. Although Sadako and Freddy are similar in their emotional representation, they have different reasons for why they were made. Both monsters have an origin, an end goal, and an idea they represent but figuring out why they exist is key to understanding who they are.

Sadako and Freddy may be similar in their origins. Sadako Yamamura originates from Japanese folklore as the spirit of a woman who died an untimely death. The concept of the monster within the TV stems from two well known ghost stories; one being the story of a woman named Okiku and the other being the story of Oiwa. The plot of Okiku’s story called *Bancho Sarayashiki* was that Aoyama, a samurai who Okiku worked for, took a liking to her. He tried numerous times to woo her into marrying him but she always refused until one night he stabbed her and threw “her down a well”(Kido, 7). Okiku came back as an onryo, “a vengeful spirit who tormented her murderer”(Kido, 7).

Additionally, in Oiwa’s story, called *Tōkaidō Yotsuya Kaidan,* Oiwa was married to man named Iemon who when proposed to by the father of a beautiful girl decided to “get rid” of Oiwa by arranging for her to be “poisoned, disfigured, and abused” following with her being killed with a “sword sticking out of a beam”(Schmid, 2). In order to get revenge, Oiwa comes back as a “hideously disfigured ghost” with the goal of causing Iemon pain and suffering.(Schmid, 2). Okiku, Oiwa and Sadako are similar because Sadako’s original story depicts that she was raped and murdered by a man who also threw her down a well. Through her death, Sadako also became an onryo who haunted people by making them look at tapes. What Sadako takes from Okiku’s story is that she was a woman who was abused or killed in a way that was unjust and her misshapen shape comes from Oiwa. Consequently, she turns into a vengeful spirit who haunts people; however, her wrath is not limited to the one who killed her, she haunts anyone who comes into her proximity.

Freddy Krueger’s origin story is similar to Sadako’s but different in many ways. The author of *A Nightmare on Elms Street,* Wes Craven was inspired by many different situations; those being victim testimonies and his own personal memories which differs from Sadako’s origin being from previous ghost stories. During the time that Craven was brainstorming ideas, there were a series of deaths where the victims would report having recurring nightmares that would eventually cause them to die in their sleep. Craven decided to turn this into something that would “haunt the dreams of teenagers forever” with the main idea being that “they would be chased by a horrible dirty maniac”(Rockoff, 3). This would be where Craven got the idea of making Freddy kill his victims in their dreams in contrast to Sadako killing her victims in real life.

Further, the concept of Freddy also stemmed from a memory where Craven remembers seeing a strange looking man who kept staring at him as he was walking home, he hid from the man and looked at him again only to see him staring even harder until he started chasing him. When Craven got into his house, the man had disappeared. Additionally, Craven got Freddy Krueger’s name from a student that used to bully him named “Fred Krueger”(Herbert,7). It was the memory of a stronger being beating him up that gave him the idea for Freddy’s unkillable nature. As for how Freddy came to be in his story, he was originally a janitor who used to molest children until the parents of the kids burned Freddy to death. Freddy’s death contrasts Sadako’s because he was killed due to his own crimes while Sadako was killed as an innocent woman. Consequently, just like Sadako, Freddy comes back as a vengeful spirit; however, he haunts the dreams of children. What is clearly different about the two is that Sadako was based on a romantic story that had gone wrong while Freddy was based on mysterious deaths and childhood memories.

Sadako and Freddy differ in what they represent. Japanese folklore depicts Sadako as the representation of chaos, death, and negativity in physical form. Sadako was a woman who went against the spiritual and traditional norms of Japan. Her long hair represents her ability to cause horrific rituals to happen through the television screen as long hair on women in Japan was thought in part to signify “ritual communication with divinites and the dead”(Ancuta,13). Further The Japanese believed that because hair is one of the things that continues to grow despite the death of a person it could either be linked to a positive life force or a “negative valence of wild or untamed energy”(Ancuta,13). Sadako’s physical appearance causes her to look emotionless or dead inside in a way that contrasts the emotional attributes of her victims. Furthermore, the Japanese thought of dishevelled hair as “physical distress”(Ancuta,14). This would be the reason why Sadako’s hair is not only long but messy too. Additionally, Sadako was thought of to represent the emotion of hatred due to her being an onryo, the vengeful spirit of a woman who died in an unfair way. Overall, Sadako represents chaos, death, and negativity.

Freddy Krueger, on the other hand, represents the “cultural fear of an unseen threat to children”(Shimabukuro, 45). Due to Freddy’s obsession with attacking children, he could also be connected to the fear of stranger danger in the late 1900’s. Part of what truly made Freddy so significant was that he would kill his victims in broad daylight instead of at night like Sadako or other monsters. Additionally, Freddy was thought of to be the modern “boogeyman” as “bogeys of today are often portrayed as child snatchers, child killer, and sexual violators of the young”(Shimabukuro, 48). It's evident that Freddy matches the representation of the child snatcher because he was a janitor who would molest or kill children. Additionally, similar to Sadako, Freddy was thought of to represent the emotion of hatred however, his was mixed with neglect due to him being the bastard child of a nun and an unknown asylum prisoner.

Further, Freddy was thought of to be the amalgamation of what would happen if a person decided to transgress the boundaries of their society or culture which is similar to how Sadako represents chaos or the transgression of values in Japanese culture. Freddy served as a warning to parents who let their children play outside for too long, or go too far from the house; it was a warning that a stranger may kidnap their child and possibly kill him/her. Additionally, Freddy takes the form of a cautionary tale or a “lesson to be learned from the past of not repeating mistakes”(Shimabukuro, 50). In *A Nightmare on Elm’s Street,* Freddy kills the children of the parents who burned him alive as a way to remind them of what their parents did. Overall, Freddy represents cultural fear, transgression, hatred mixed with neglect, and regret.

Both Sadako and Freddy have similar endgoals. Due to Sadako being an onryo, her only goal would be to enact revenge on the person who killed her. Even if Sadako were to be exorcised, her negative energy would still remain in the space where she was because an onryo’s “vengeance can never be satisfied”(Rhys, 9). Additionally, “an onryo’s wrath not only affects the wrongdoer, but his friends and family as well”(Rhys, 9). From this, it becomes clear that Sadako’s goal is to torment and kill anyone related to the person who raped and murdered her. Additionally, in the movie *Sadako Vs Kayako,* Sadako combines with Kayako, the antagonist of the *Ju-On* film series to become an entity called Sadakaya who extends the videotape curse to all technology. Using this, and the idea that an onryo’s vengeance can never be satisfied, it could be thought that Sadako’s end goal was to make all of humanity suffer the consequence of her untimely death due to her immense hatred. Furthermore, since Sadako is a dead person whose spirit is roaming around, a hypothetical solution for her condition would be to put her to rest in a proper grave. Similarly, Freddy’s goal is to enact revenge on the parents who burned him alive by killing their children.

Bringing it all together, Sadako and Freddy have many similarities and differences when it comes to their origin, representation, and end goal. Sadako originates from Japanese folklore of the vengeful spirit of a woman who died an untimely death while Freddy originates from mysterious deaths and childhood memories. Further, Sadako is an onryo who was raped and murdered while Freddy was a vengeful spirit who died due to his own crimes. Additionally, Sadako represents chaos, death, and negativity in Japanese society while Freddy represents regret, neglect, and a threat to children with careless parents who allowed them to transgress the limits of their society. Lastly, Sadako’s end goal was interpreted to be the torment and suffering of anyone related to her killer or the torment of all humanity while Freddy’s end goal was to get revenge on the parents who burned him by killing their children. As Sadako and Freddy have their differences, they also have their similarities that put both of them under the definition of a monster.

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