

Metafiction and Genre Hybridity in Naoki Urasawa's Book *The Nameless Monster* by Emil Sebe

MARIA JOSÉ CAMPOS

The Nameless Monster (2008) is a fictional picturebook written by Naoki Urasawa, but authored both by him and Emil Sebe, and it appears in the Japanese popular manga series *Monster* (1994-2001) by Naoki Urasawa. The picturebook is very particular as it is a compilation of short stories and documents, which narrate the darkness of human nature, the theft of identity, monstrous destruction, and annihilation of life through children picturebook aesthetics. The following paper will attempt to define who is its implied reader, focusing on the boundary of metafiction and genre hybridity, and by analysing the book's materiality, marketing, the publisher's paratext and intertextuality through close reading. I conclude that this picturebook's implied reader is an experienced adult reader who is very familiar with the *Monster* universe and can decodify the metafictional and genre hybridity codes in the text, and that it is an adult picturebook disguised as a children's book, which sends the message to its readers about the child's condition.

Keywords: metafiction, genre hybridity, monster, manga, picturebooks, Naoki Urasawa, children's literature in Japan

Metafiction und Gattungshybridität in Naoki Urasawas *The Nameless Monster* von Emil Sebe

The Nameless Monster (2008) ist ein fiktionales Bilderbuch, geschrieben von Naoki Urasawa, aber mit einer doppelten Autorenangabe (zusätzlich Emil Sebe). Erschienen ist es in der populären japanischen Mangareihe *Monster* (1994-2001) von Naoki Urasawa. Das Bilderbuch ist sehr speziell, da es sich um eine Zusammenstellung von Kurzgeschichten und Dokumenten handelt, die die Dunkelheit und Abgründe der menschlichen Natur in den Vordergrund rücken, in Kombination mit Identitätsdiebstahl, monströser Zerstörung und Annihilierung des Lebens – unter der nur vordergründigen Optik von Kinderbuch-Ästhetik. Der vorliegende Artikel unternimmt den Versuch, den*die implizite*n Leser*in zu definieren und auf die Grenze von Metafiction und Hybridität zu fokussieren, wobei mittels *close reading* die Materialität des Buches (der Beschreibstoff, der Textträger etc.), das Marketing, der Paratext des Verlagshauses und die Intertextualität in den Mittelpunkt des Interesses rücken. Es kann geschlussfolgert werden, dass der*die implizite Leser*in des Bilderbuches ein*e erfahrene*r Erwachsene*r ist, der*die mit dem *Monster*-Universum in hohem Maße vertraut ist und überdies imstande, die metafictionalen und hybriden Codes im Text zu entschlüsseln: Es handelt sich somit um ein Buch für Erwachsene im „Mäntelchen“ eines Kinderbuchs, das den Rezipient*innen seine Botschaft über die Verfassung des Kindes vermittelt.

Schlagwörter: Metafiktion, Gattungshybridität, Monster, Manga, Bilderbücher, Naoki Urasawa, japanische Kinderliteratur

Introduction

What if a children's picturebook was the defining trigger for a child to become an evil heartless assassin? *The Nameless Monster* [*Namae nai kaibutsu / Obluda, Která Nemá Svě Jméno*] (2008) by Emil Sebe is a fictional picturebook in the universe of the manga series *Monster* (1994-2001) by Naoki Urasawa, which was printed shortly after the 18 volume-manga *Monster* series and published on the Japanese market. *Monster* is a *seinen*, a thriller manga series with psychological and violent themes and targeted at young adult males. It is very popular in Japan and has been adapted to an animated series of 74 episodes (2004 to 2005). In *Monster's* storyline, a boy called Johan reads a picturebook entitled *The Nameless Monster* as a child and, through it, is brainwashed to eventually become a merciless mastermind murderer in Central Europe. *Monster* tells the story of Doctor Tenma, a Japanese surgeon, who saved Johan's life but is now trying to kill him after discovering that he is a merciless assassin and learning about the boy's dark past in post-war Germany and Czechoslovakia.

The Nameless Monster is a particular picturebook as it is a compilation of short stories and documents, which narrate the darkness of human nature, the theft of identity, monstrous destruction, and annihilation of life through children picturebook aesthetics. However, its use of metafictional elements and genre hybridity makes its reader constantly question who the implied reader of the text is. In this paper, I will answer one central question: Who is the implied reader of the picturebook *The Nameless Monster*? I will focus on boundary crossings in genre, and on metafiction. I will argue that the implied reader of this picturebook is an experienced adult reader because the genre hybridity and metafictional devices require decoding from an individual with substantial literary competence.

This topic is relevant for further studies because it reflects upon how genre hybridity and metafiction devices raise questions about the ethical aspects of children's literature. The general accessibility of picturebooks by children and adults can be dangerous, as they can be exposed to any type of content, if they are able to read it. Furthermore, analysing manga is relevant as it is hugely popular worldwide; Japan has one of the biggest comic industries and fan bases in the world. According to Catherine Makino, 2.4 millions of fans or *otaku* in Japan spend more than 2.5 billion of euros in these products every year (2009, n. p.). Manga is part of the fast consumption of everyday life not only in Japan but through translations also in different countries around the world. In addition, the topic of this paper is original as a Japanese picturebook is examined through Western theory. By making use of the concepts of the implied reader, genre hybridity and metafiction, it shows how manga connects Eastern and Western culture.

Theoretical Framework

The concepts of implied reader, genre hybridity and metafiction are key issues for my research question and should therefore be theoretically framed by relevant studies. The implied reader is a concept coined by Wolfgang Iser and it has inspired many studies about the relationship between author, book and reader (Castleman 2011, 20). Aidan Chambers talks about a “reader in the book” (1978, 1) and proposes critical methods to explore it, as looking at the style, perspective, ‘taking sides’ and tell-tale gaps. The implied reader is one who has the intellectual and technical capability of decoding the meaning of the literary work. Moreover, Chambers also says that the implied reader must be identified through the literary work only, and not through the words and thoughts of the author (1978, 6). Defining the implied reader is surely a complex matter; nevertheless, the language employed by the ‘author in the book’ provides strong evidence on who may be the reader capable of decoding the message.

Furthermore, genre hybridity includes the term ‘genre’, which is not concretely defined. Paul Copley says that genre is a “set of expectations” on theme, audience and style (Copley 2001, 232). As genres are categories that have to do with the reader’s expectations and that are complex to define, it is almost inevitable that genres mix, and genre hybridity takes place. In Western children’s literature, genre classification has to do mostly with the types of “characters, settings, actions and overall form or structure” found in the book (Cullinan and Galda 1994, 6-7). Some examples include picturebooks, poetry and verse, folklore, fantasy, science fiction, realistic fiction, historical fiction, biography, nonfiction, taking into consideration that picturebooks constitute a genre based on format and not on content (ibid.). Picturebooks are natural hybrids, which create inherently the “synergy between verbal and visual language” (van Lierop-Debrauwer 2018, 81). Picturebooks are generally considered to be targeted at young children, whereas manga has a wider aged audience of mainly teenagers and experienced adults readers (Kümmerling-Meibauer 2013, 101). This suggests that a manga picturebook hybrid will play with the expectations of each genre through visual language, as well as playing with the tricky identification of the implied reader.

Genre classification in Japanese literature, particularly manga (Japanese comics), is made according to the target audience, labelled in the book’s paratext for marketing purposes. Manga is categorised mainly as *kodomo* (children’s manga), *shonen* (boys’ manga), *shoujo* (girls’ manga), *seinen* (young men’s manga), and *josei* (young women’s manga) (Cohn and Ehly 2016, 23-24). Each genre has its own set of expected storylines, drawing style, layout, themes, and Japanese writing scripts, making the manga accessible to readers who can decode these elements successfully. An important distinction between *kodomo* (children’s manga) and other manga genres is that *kodomo* is exclusively written in *kana* (*hiragana* and *katakana*), the phonetical syllables that are understood by elementary school children. Other manga genres contain *kanji*, complex concept ideograms, learned by young adults and later in their school education. According to Wesley Robertson, the use of *kanji* and *hiragana* in manga “reflect the scripts’ respective links to adults and children”, representing the identities and conventions of characters in-text and allowing access to certain readers who can decipher the scripts successfully, according to their reading experience and knowledge (2019, 2).

Regarding metafiction, Patricia Waugh says that it is “a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (1984, 2). Maria Nikolajeva adds that it “reflects the chaos and ambivalence of our life and the loss of absolute values and truths” (2001, 206). This is often seen in a negative light when it is involved within children’s literature as it breaks radically with the elements of innocence and comfort, which are conventionally part of the childhood construct. In a way, metafiction in relation to children’s literature shows the bitter, disturbing side of mixing fiction and reality in a world of dichotomies between humans and monsters, author and reader, adults and children, and good and evil. Even though metafiction studies in children’s literature are emerging, Casie Hermansson claims that metafiction in children’s literature is mostly appreciated by a seasoned, literate, and experienced reader, such as an adult (2019, 5).

Regarding metafictional devices, Sylvia Pantaleo lists 16 of them to be considered when analysing picturebooks, which include “typographic experimentation”, “new and unusual design and layout”, “illustrative framing, including mise-en-abyme” and “availability of multiple readings and meanings for a variety of audiences” (Pantaleo 2005, 35-36). These non-conventional devices allude to materiality, showing the picturebook’s “quality as an artefact” (Nikolajeva 2008, 57) and bringing the book to life, through a “unique experience of performative reading” for the reader (Scott 2014, 40). Another way is to use paratext as essential part of the internal narrative of a book and use it to convey a particular atmosphere (Pantaleo 2018, 47). Sandra Beckett says that paratexts – which include credits, prefaces and notes – suggest a certain readership in their style and presentation and that they might not be of attention to a child reader (2009, 232-233). Intertextuality is another device that links one text with other texts through a verbal and/or a visual level and expects the reader to make the connection between these texts (Nikolajeva 2001, 228). This decoding expectation regarding metafiction and genre hybridity will then help define who the implied reader is.

Analysis

Description of the Book

The Nameless Monster consists of 50 pages, a front and back cover and a jacket, which has the title character as a holographic print and a promotional flap. The book follows the traditional Japanese binding format, from right to left, and it has two titles on the front cover; the main and larger one is the author and book’s title in Czech “Emil Sebe, *Obluda, Která Nemá Svě Jméno*” [A monster who has no name] and a subtitle in Japanese “*Namae no nai kaibutsu, chiku / Emil Sebe haka yaku / Urasawa Naoki*” [A monster with no name, by Emil Sebe and others, translated by Urasawa Naoki] (*The Nameless Monster* 2008, front cover). The book is a compilation of three stories as manga (‘The Nameless Monster’ written by Emil Sebe, ‘The Man with Big Eyes and The Man with the Big Mouth’ by Jakub Faroubek, and ‘God of Peace’ by Klaus Poppe), one manuscript titled ‘The awakening monster’ and Helmut Voss’ sketch collection. There is an editor’s note at

the end and some other paratextual elements, such as the credits page, publishing information for each story and end page artwork. By exploring the elements of the book, we can determine who the implied reader is.

Text Language

All titles in *The Nameless Monster* are mainly written in Czech. There is English paratext on the tales' sources after the story's title page and there is a small caption for a publishing house illustration in German. In the manuscript's case, Czech text is used as a background watermark image and the Japanese translation is put on top, to show that the Japanese translation is based on the Czech text. The narrative text in the stories, as well as the editor's note and credits page are in Japanese, making this the main language in the book. All Japanese writing systems can be found within the book: *kana* only in the three stories and manuscript, and *kana* and *kanji* in the editor's note and credits page.

The use of language talks inherently of the book's accessibility to its readers. Even though there are four languages present in the book, it is not necessary to grasp them all to read the book as long as the reader grasps the basics of the Japanese language. There is a contradiction in the use of Japanese scripts as, on the one hand, the stories are written in basic *kana*, which are easily understood by Japanese children who read *kodomo* and *shounen* manga. On the other hand, there is an editor's note which is coded in formal, editorial language with *kana* and *kanji*, which implies an adult readership. This can lead to an interpretation that the three stories, which narrate dark themes, imply a dual audience of children and adults, while the paratext only implies an adult audience, where they learn that these stories have a dark origin and they might pose a threat to the young generation.

Book Materiality

The Nameless Monster uses materiality, which makes the book appear as an artefact playing with the gap between fiction and reality. The most eye-catching element is the monster's materiality. First, the monster in the front cover appears as a holographic print (3D effect image), which creates the illusion of it occupying a physical space in the real world and being capable of moving. In the inner cover page, the monster is missing from the frame, suggesting that it can move in and out of the book. This artifice is used, too, through the end pages, at the beginning, and at the end of the book. The monster appears sitting on the moon and many pictures of the monster appear in sequence, as if they were animation frames, flying in a circular line through the end pages. At the last end page, it says "Bye-bye!" (*The Nameless Monster*, final page), which suggests it has the ability of addressing the reader directly. The monster's materiality is reaffirmed through the front cover, inner cover, and end pages suggesting that it has independence of movement, dimension, and speech, getting closer to the reader and appearing to be alive and real. This materiality can be perceived by children and adults alike, but while

it might be perceived differently by both target groups it will be certainly impactful and memorable for the performative reading experience.

There is also reference to the book's materiality as a codex. A ripped page is used at the end of the third story, making the story *God of Peace* finish abruptly, after the god discovers in his reflection that he is a monster. This refers to the actual book's materiality; someone ripped the page, and the end of the story is lost. This raises questions as: Was it done intentionally to create suspense? Who ripped the page? The reader participates in the decoding and thus is conscious of the book as an artefact, a codex that uses its own artefact's elements as part of the narrative.

Marketing, Editing, and the Publisher's Paratext

As said before, the huge part of paratexts regarding marketing, editing, and publishing in *The Nameless Monster* is in English or high proficiency Japanese (*kana* and *kanji*), implying an experienced readership. The book has a *Monster* manga promotional flap which says: "The picturebook that appeared in the work of MONSTER printed in full color!", mentions Franz Bonaparta's sketches and bonus visual material, as well as promotes the *Monster* manga deluxe volumes and a side story called *Another Monster, The Investigation Report*. Moreover, next to every internal story cover page the following paratext can be read in English: "Japanese edition published by Shogakukan Inc., Tokyo. Japanese translation rights arranged with Moravia Inc., Praha through Japan Shogakukan Inc., Tokyo." (*The Nameless Monster*, 2008, 4, 14 and 21), which suggests that the book is a collaboration project between a Czech publisher and a Japanese publisher, and even includes a phrase in German as an image caption at the end: "Das schlafende Monstrum", Hermann Führ, Verlag Quintus, Wien/Österreich" (*The Nameless Monster*, 49), adding the collaboration of an Austrian publisher.

There are copyright disclaimers for each tale in the book, linking them to their respective authors and dates of original publishing: "Text & Illustrations © 1977 EMIL SEBE" (*The Nameless Monster*, 4), "Text & Illustrations © 1973 JAKUB FAROUBEK" (*The Nameless Monster*, 14), "Text & Illustrations © 1968 KLAUS POPPE" (*The Nameless Monster*, 21). In addition, there is a statement written by Takashi Nagasaki, the editor of the book, in Japanese *kana* and *kanji*, with no accompanying pictures. It appears as an afterword trying to explain the mystery behind these stories and documents in the book, reaching no conclusion, suggesting that no one knows the identities of the writers, the origins of the tales nor their links to real events in Europe, leaving more questions than answers to its readership. Finally, the credits page has the Czech title and Emil Sebe's name at the top, followed by the Japanese text "MONSTER Complete Edition Separate Volume Unpublished Kaibutsu October 5th, 2008, First edition issued (no stamping)" (*The Nameless Monster*, 48). The credit list in Japanese *kana* and *kanji* lists Emil Sebe et al. as authors and Naoki Urasawa, who was credited as a translator on the front cover, as the copyright holder.

Marketing, editing, and the publisher's paratext give plenty of background information regarding the book's supposed authenticity, authorship, and editorial history, connecting it to its origin in the *Monster* series. This information is encoded for an expe-

rienced readership in the paratext, which is often not read by children. In addition, this information suggests that there is a mystery involved in who the implied author is, regarding that the translator is the owner of the copyright and not the supposed authors. The information in the editorial paratext is the only one that explicitly questions the authenticity of the stories in *The Nameless Monster*, implying a trained and experienced reader who knows the difference between fiction and non-fiction. Moreover, as the flap and credits pages suggest, this book is part of the *Monster* manga series, implying that the *Monster* readership might be more suitable to decode the hidden information inside the paratext than other readers.

Intertextuality

The Nameless Monster and its intertextual relationship with its 'mother' *Monster* manga series is greatly significant, as it is known as a plot device in the *Monster* narrative. *The Nameless Monster* is introduced for the first time as a Czech picturebook in a German library found by Johan who, when taking it into his hands, enters in deep shock and loses consciousness. This incident introduces a chain of events and anecdotes regarding the book, its origins, its creators, and its purpose; to brainwash and turn post-WWII Czechoslovakian children into criminal masterminds who would do anything to become monsters, such as kill, steal identities and submerge in eternal darkness. The book's images of Johan and Anna in the sketch collection, the story of 'A monster without a name' and 'The God of Peace' giving names to children acquire a deeper meaning and importance in the *Monster* manga series.

It could be said that *The Nameless Monster* is a type of intertextual mise-en-abyme, a book within a book, and both works cannot be seen independent from each other to fully understand their cryptic and terrifying message. In the *Monster* manga narrative, *The Nameless Monster* is a picturebook used as a pedagogical tool by the Czech secret police to inspire evil, trauma and dehumanisation in children. There is another important piece of information that the *Monster* manga gives to its readers. The multiple authors, Emil Sebe et al., in *The Nameless Monster* are mentioned in the manga *Monster* as pseudonyms to a single picturebook author called Franz Bonaparta, who is one of the main villains in *Monster*, responsible in raising and brainwashing the boy Johan to become a manipulative mastermind assassin. This fact is crucial for the added shocking value of *The Nameless Monster*, which can only be understood through the intertextuality with the manga series *Monster*, targeted to an adult demographic.

Conclusion

In conclusion, based on my analysis and interpretation, the implied reader of *The Nameless Monster* by Emil Sebe is an experienced adult reader, mainly a *Monster* manga series fan. Such a reader will be able to decode effectively the metafictional and genre hybridity elements found in the manga picturebook, as they are aware of the book's background and history in the *Monster* universe because of the intertextuality between each literary

work. *The Nameless Monster* is a manga picturebook for adults disguised as a children's story collection through text usage and playful materiality in the stories. Nevertheless, its editorial paratext, the use of several languages, including Japanese *kana* and *kanji* usage shows that an experienced and trained reader will be able to decipher the book's code.

This study has limited itself to finding evidence on who the implied reader is in *The Nameless Monster*. However, it has raised questions on the ethical implications this book has as a potential pedagogical tool for imposing ideology on children. The book itself and the book as an intertextual *mise-en-abyme* in the *Monster* manga poses the literal question: "Humans [...] can become anything" (*Monster*, 13). If *The Nameless Monster* has, as the *Monster* manga suggests, children as implied readers, there is a dark message delivered by the implied author. Children's literature can be a very dangerous tool for manipulation and brainwashing and the implied author is constructing this situation and showing the implications it can have to his adult audience. The artistic work is a message to adults about the children's condition; children can access all types of literature, regardless of its content, and be ideologically manipulated and instructed to act in a certain way. He poses this message in a very imaginative and transgressing way to make a powerful impact on his adult audience. Anyone can become like Johan, anyone can become a monster, they just need to be exposed to monstrous motivation at a certain time in their life.

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Maria José Campos, BA in Audio-visual Communication from the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, associate degree in Classical Animation from Vancouver Film School, Erasmus Mundus International Master in Children's Literature, Media and Culture at the University of Glasgow, Aarhus University and University of Wrocław. Illustrator of children's books and animation artist. Focus areas: mythology for children, animation, manga and children's media creation process.
Contact: hello@mariajosecampos.com; www.mariajosecampos.com