

Noriko T. Reider. *Seven Demon Stories from Medieval Japan*. (Boulder: 2016, University Press of Colorado. Pp. 292. ISBN: 978-1-60732-489-8.)

Jacob Danson Faraday

Volume 37, Number 2, 2015

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1041494ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1041494ar>

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Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Danson Faraday, J. (2015). Review of [Noriko T. Reider. *Seven Demon Stories from Medieval Japan*. (Boulder: 2016, University Press of Colorado. Pp. 292. ISBN: 978-1-60732-489-8.)]. *Ethnologies*, 37(2), 207–209.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1041494ar>

COMPTE-RENDUS/REVIEWS

Noriko T. Reider. *Seven Demon Stories from Medieval Japan*. (Boulder: 2016, University Press of Colorado. Pp. 292. ISBN: 978-1-60732-489-8.)

Demons, ogres, and *oni*, or Japanese supernatural creatures, have been central to Japanese culture for hundreds of years. In *Seven Demon Stories from Medieval Japan*, Noriko T. Reider writes, “to study the *oni* in Japanese folklore is to study humanity” (250), and after reading this volume, it is easy to see why this might be the case. Universal themes of human society, such as good and evil, mortality, religion, ethics, sexuality, and political conflict, are explored in *oni* stories, and in *Seven Demon Stories*, Reider provides a clear, accessible overview of a selection of this *oni* literature.

The book is organized into four sections: Samurai, Scholars, Women, and It (i.e., the personified inanimate object). In each section, Reider demonstrates the significance of these characters as the primary actors in encounters with *oni*. Perhaps more importantly, however, she broadens that significance to medieval Japanese demon literature genres in general, and beyond, using these seven stories to discuss medieval political struggles, social structure, ideas of gender and sexuality, as well as the genre’s lasting influence on modern literature and media.

Seven Demon Stories has a great deal to offer contemporary scholars of medieval Japanese literature. As a companion volume to Reider’s previous book, *Japanese Demon Lore: Oni from Ancient Times to the Present* (Utah State University Press, 2010), *Seven Demon Stories* focuses specifically on the medieval period, during which *oni* were understood to be living beings. Reider incorporates an amount of practical information within the body of each essay, including, for example, where the source material is housed, and, in some cases, the possible inspirations of the original stories. An example of this last is her discussion of the Greek myth of “Cupid and Psyche” as the original source for the story in the fifth essay, “The Tale of Amewakahiko,” an assertion that was first put forward by scholars as early as 1910. Reider also includes a glossary of Japanese and Chinese transliterations with their original spellings in characters.

Reider is very clear about what is actually in the text, what is implied (e.g., satire, humour, word play), and what has to be assumed due to the inevitable lacunae caused by damage and decay of the ancient scrolls. All seven essays follow the same form, with a short introduction, notes about the source material, a plot summary of the included story, a discussion of major themes (e.g., relations between Japan and China during the medieval period), characters (e.g., Raikō, the warrior-aristocrat, who first appears in documents in the year 988), and similarities with other stories (e.g., the sixth story, “Blossom Princess,” and three comparable folktales), and concluding with a full English translation.

Though each essay could be read independently as a study of one specific story, Reider is careful to build on subsequent chapters by making reference to the characters, politics, *oni* characteristics, and historical documents from previous essays. My favourite example of this is her discussion of the characters and plot elements of the seventh story, “The Record of Tool Specters,” as a satirical commentary of the elements of the first story, “The Drunken Demon.”

The translations in *Seven Demon Stories* are generally quite dry (e.g., “One night last autumn while I was viewing the moon, the demon took me away and brought me here. I am in such a miserable state” [44]). This is, I believe, a deliberate choice on Reider’s part, as her focus seems to be on producing an accurate, “no-frills” English record of the stories. The exception here is the sixth story, “Blossom Princess,” which is much longer and much more descriptive. By including this story, Reider is not only able to draw out and discuss the rich socio-political background of this story, but also to demonstrate that academic translations in this genre can still be elegant, poetic, and artistic.

Despite the intentionally academic tone, Reider finds ways to communicate the strangeness, magic, and wonder of these supernatural beings. She shows the power of the *oni*, giving many examples, such as shape shifting, creating living human beings from bones and corpses, and wielding control over people and things. This is an important tactic to attract and retain non-specialist readers, who, like me, might be interested in the topic of demon stories in general. Reider also shows how *oni* stories can be used to actively communicate customs, beliefs, ethics, and complex religious principles (e.g., inanimate objects being able to attain enlightenment).

My primary criticism of *Seven Demon Stories* is the brevity of the introduction and conclusion. I think many readers would benefit from a

deeper, richer discussion of the major themes of the genre from the outset. These discussions do occur throughout the volume, but are often isolated in individual essays, even though they might fundamentally inform the interpretation and understanding of other stories. For example, as part of her second essay, starting on p. 70, Reider provides some excellent explanatory remarks about the history and etymology of *oni*, which would clearly be of value for any of the seven essays, and further, for the genre in general. This kind of information occasionally appears only within the body of one of the seven essays, which I think is an oversight and a missed opportunity to make the work even more accessible.

That said, Reider's overall approach to Japanese literature in general, and the *oni* stories in particular, allows for an enjoyable, informative read. *Seven Demon Stories* can be seen as a series of essays for specialists, and has the tools, tone, and structure to make a meaningful contribution to scholarly English language research. However, it can also be treated as a unique exploration of magic and myth, which are captivating, timeless topics for any audience.

Jacob Danson Faraday
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Marie Battiste (ed.). *Living Treaties: Narrating Mi'kmaw Treaty Relations*. (Sydney, NS: 2016, Cape Breton University Press. Pp. 317, ISBN-13: 978-1-77206-053-9.)

Living Treaties: Narrating Mi'kmaq Treaty Relations is a unique collection of essays describing Mi'kmaw treaties through personal stories and reflections. Marie Battiste has compiled stories from across the territory of Mi'kma'ki to address the various facets of truly living treaties from the perspectives of Mi'kmaw people and communities. These stories present the spirit and intent of the Treaties of Peace and Friendship signed between 1725 and 1761 as the authors reveal the role these treaties have played in their lives. Authors cover a wide range of topics related to treaties, including ecological knowledge, social justice, litigation, education, and language.