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Haunted Travelogue: Hometowns, Ghost Towns, and Memories of War

In late July 2007 I traveled to Sakaiminato in Tottori prefecture, hometown of Mizuki Shigeru (b. 1922), the prolific manga/anime artist famous for his graphic narratives concerning Japanese monsters and spirits known as *yōkai*. Mizuki is especially well known as the creator of *Gegege no Kitarō*, which has appeared since the 1960s as a manga and as numerous animated television series, has been adapted for video games, and most recently was produced as a 2007 live-action movie, with a sequel in 2008. In contemporary Japan, Mizuki's *yōkai* images are so deeply ingrained in the cultural imagination that you would be hard-pressed to find a child or adult unfamiliar with Kitarō or Mizuki's other paradigmatic creations. In addition to his creative and narrative work, Mizuki is also a *yōkai* researcher who has explored religious and secular traditions to illustrate and describe numerous "real" *yōkai* from around Japan, effectively (re)popularizing supernatural imagery and folk beliefs among a wide readership.¹

Another facet of Mizuki's work stems from his personal experiences as a child growing up in rural Sakaiminato and as a soldier during World War II. In a series of memoirs, both prose and manga, Mizuki's war experience figures as a terrible trial by fire out of which he emerges reborn and forever

altered. And Sakaiminato, where he innocently spent his childhood before the war, comes to represent an eternally premodern place in which yōkai, and the dreams they inspire, still have meaning. It is in Sakaiminato that he hears stories from an old woman called Nonnonbaa (Granny Nonnon), who teaches him about yōkai and how they interact with the human realm. Mizuki lionizes Sakaiminato as a pure *furusato* or hometown, a nostalgic space metonymic of a time all but forgotten in postwar and postindustrial Japan.

In the last volume of *Mechademia*, I contributed an essay on Mizuki that touched on this portrayal of Sakaiminato as an Edenic otherworld where the mysteries of the past are preserved. I concluded, in effect, that the construction of such an otherworld—through manga, anime, and the narrativization of memory—reflects not only a conservative longing for a time already passed but also a creative desire for a better future. In the final stages of writing that piece I visited Sakaiminato to take some pictures to accompany the essay, and began to think about how yōkai and the nostalgic sentiments they signify are embedded in the village itself. That trip inspired me to write the present essay, in which I reconsider Mizuki's brand of hopeful nostalgia with a slightly more critical eye, attempting to appreciate but also to resist the redemptive logic of the nostalgic narrative and seek instead the cracks that, ultimately, make such narratives meaningful.

TRAVELING TO SAKAIMINATO

Even today a journey to Sakaiminato is a slow passage through lush countryside, as if you are gradually shedding the bustling contemporary world. The train from Okayama into Tottori snakes through overgrown valleys and mountains spiked with cedar, and across shallow rocky rivers with water like scratched crystal refracting the sunlight. Crows perch on branches and an occasional egret sprouts like an exotic white plant from the banks of a creek. There are villages too: a cluster of houses balanced along a hillside or neatly ensconced among rice paddies or surrounded by fields of scallions and watermelons. And as the train trundles by, you might catch a glimpse of an old man peering up from his work, his eyes sheltered from the sun by a broad-brimmed straw hat.

Once you finally arrive in Sakaiminato, there is undoubtedly something otherworldly about the place, but the uncanniness does not stem from a disassociation with commercial enterprise and popular culture; rather it is quite the opposite. In the last several decades, villages throughout Japan have

struggled to reenergize their economies through processes known as *mura okoshi* (village revitalization) or *furusato zukuri* (hometown making). Such revitalization efforts often exploit or develop a particular cultural resource or local industry. In the case of Sakaiminato, that resource/industry is the link with Mizuki.²

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I will not investigate the economics of this revitalization project or explore the political and practical aspects of its implementation here. Rather, I would like to offer a professedly unsci-

entific travelogue through the Mizuki/yōkai narrative as it is constructed in Sakaiminato and the surrounding countryside, and also recounted in Mizuki's historical and autobiographical retelling of the events of the Shōwa period (1926–1989). In a sense, the Mizuki narrative tells of trial and rebirth, and of transcending the cataclysm of war. To set this uplifting narrative in relief, I also take another brief excursion, this one to a museum dedicated to artists who, unlike Mizuki, did not survive the war, a place that provides a narrative very different from the story of redemption displayed in Sakaiminato. In exploring these two different sites of memory, I focus particularly on the function of nostalgia as a mode of both remembering and forgetting. Because nostalgia can often be seductive, it is important to recognize that the narrative it articulates is only part of the story—or, rather, that there are also many other, less satisfying, stories that should also be remembered.

THE KITARŌ TRAIN TO SAKAIMINATO: LANDSCAPE WITH MONSTERS

The journey from Okayama to the city of Yonago takes about two hours; from there, you transfer to the Sakai Line for the forty-five minute trip to Sakaiminato. For all intents and purposes, however, the Mizuki adventure begins before you even depart Yonago. A bronze statue of Kitarō, the charming yōkai boy star of *Gegege no Kitarō*, greets you on the Sakai Line platform, and many of the trains on this local line are one-car vehicles dedicated to characters in the series. I happened to arrive on a Sunday afternoon, just in time to board the Kitarō train, festooned inside and out with colorful pictures of Kitarō himself (Figure 1).³ As I stood on the platform admiring the train, two middle-aged women asked me to take a picture of them posing in front of it. Several small children squealed with delight when they saw the train, and

then clambered onto the bronze statue of the yōkai hero, their parents clicking photos. Despite the Disneyesque feel, however, not all the passengers are tourists: in particular, junior high school students in uniform board and get off at stops along the way.

Including Yonago and Sakaiminato, there are sixteen stations on the Sakai Line, each labeled with a place-name. But in addition, every station, often nothing more than a single cement platform, also has an alternate name derived from a yōkai. Yumigahama Station, for example, has a sign denoting it as Azuki arai Station (after the *Azuki arai* yōkai found in the Tōkai region). The yōkai themselves are selected from regions throughout the Japanese archipelago—including, significantly, Okinawa and Hokkaidō.

In this way, Mizuki's yōkai world is stitched into the landscape, like a doppelganger realm supplementing the immediately apparent present. Not only do the yōkai metonymically represent their particular region of origin, reproducing across the several rural miles of the Sakai Line a map of Japan in miniature, but disparate groups (Okinawans, Ainu) are also purposefully included in the construction of the (yōkai) nation. With each region and its inhabitants signified by a particular yōkai, the forty-five-minute journey is reminiscent of the traditional literary convention of the *michiyuki*, found in *nō* theater, puppet theater, and other dramatic forms, in which characters move symbolically through a constructed landscape coded with poetic or



FIGURE 1. The Kitarō train. Photograph by author.

historically significant places names. The *michiyuki* is a device that draws the readers/audience (or in this case, passengers) into, as one scholar puts it, “a world apart, where unexpected, wondrous beings and events are likely to be encountered.”⁴

With this in mind, it is no coincidence that Sakaiminato Station, terminus of the Sakai Line and destination for so many Mizuki/yōkai fans, is named for Kitarō, the optimistic, good-hearted boy yōkai. It is as if the train has taken you back in time, to a forgotten rural town certainly, but also to a prelapsarian moment when, like the vision represented by Kitarō, the world was innocent, childish, and full of possibility. I walk out of the station and immediately see a small crowd of people gathered around a life-sized bronze statue of Mizuki himself, sitting at a bronze desk, writing. He is facing away from the station, as if generating with his pen and paper the town that spreads out before him (Figure 2).

ON THE ROAD

The primary tourist attraction in Sakaiminato is Mizuki Shigeru Road. At first glance, the Road is unremarkable—a typical narrow street, part of it covered with an arcade, with small shops and restaurants on either side. But every twenty or thirty feet there is a small bronze statue, anywhere between six and thirty inches high, perched atop a stone pedestal. Each neatly labeled figure represents a yōkai documented by Mizuki in his books. Around these diminutive statues you often find a cluster of tourists, posing and taking pictures. Children excitedly shout out the name of the yōkai in question, while older visitors bend down to carefully read the engraved nameplate.

Almost a kilometer long, Mizuki Shigeru Road is festooned with some 120 of these bronze figurines. The idea for the road was first proposed in 1989 by city employees who envisioned it as away to liven up the once-bustling shopping street near the station. The initial city investment (for a total of eighty statues) was approximately 440 million yen, and the road opened (with twenty-three statues) in 1993. In 2007, for the first time, the number of visitors exceeded one million.⁵ For people who have grown up with the yōkai images of Mizuki, a saunter down the road can excite memories of a more innocent, carefree time; eclectic writer and scholar Aramata Hiroshi describes the sensation of seeking out the next yōkai statuette: “Even if my head has been corrupted by old books and cigarettes, my heart, it seems, is still a child’s.”⁶



FIGURE 2. In front of Sakaiminato (Kitarō) Station: life-sized bronze image of Mizuki at his desk. Photograph by author.

In 1993, with some twenty empty storefronts, the shopping street reflected the general economic state of small-town Japan. While these empty shops have all but disappeared, the businesses lining the street now are anything but typical for a country town.⁷ They are dedicated to all things Mizuki, selling a cornucopia of Mizuki-related *omiyage* (souvenirs) and “yōkai goods,” edible and otherwise. You can find books, DVDs, yōkai *manjū* (bean cakes), yōkai *sake*, yōkai beer, coffee, cookies, ice cream, *senbei* (rice crackers), playing cards, key chains, cell phone straps, figurines, T-shirts, hats, postcards, stationery, fans, handkerchiefs, scarves, and jewelry. Everything has a monstrous motif or is shaped like one of Mizuki’s yōkai. You can even buy dried squid on a stick, artistically fashioned to resemble Ittanmomen, an animated, flying strip-of-cloth, and a popular member of Kitarō’s yōkai gang. The theme-park quality of Sakaiminato is underscored as you stroll down the road. Here and there you find “life-sized” wooden cutouts of yōkai characters into which you can insert your face and have your photo taken. There are taxis done up with yōkai motifs and you might even bump into Kitarō himself sauntering down the street, having his picture taken with tourists young and old alike (Figure 3).



FIGURE 3. Costumed image of Kitarō posing with bronze statue of himself. Photograph by author.

About midway along the road, you come to the Yōkai Shrine (*jinja*). At first glance, this shrine opened in the year 2000 seems like an obvious idea; after all, so many of Japan’s traditional shrines are dedicated to ambiguous figures, like *kappa*, *tengu*, *kitsune*, and other common yōkai creatures, whose demonic and deific aspects are not clearly distinguished. The Yōkai Shrine in Sakaiminato, however, is a refreshingly explicit invented tradition. Like many shrines, for example, you can dedicate a votive plaque (*ema*) to your prayer, but these plaques are illustrated with Mizuki’s images, as if the sacred “otherworld” itself can be found in a manga (Figure 4).⁸

COMING HOME

Eventually, toward the end of the street, you arrive at the Mizuki Shigeru Memorial Hall (Kinenkan). While it is not unusual in Japan for significant cultural figures to have a memorial hall or museum dedicated to them, it does strike one as odd, and somehow indicative of Mizuki’s dry sense of humor, that this particular “memorial” has been established before the individual

being memorialized is actually dead. Though well into his eighties, Mizuki is still alive and not only kicking but seemingly more productive than ever. In a sense, however, the hall does indeed serve as a memorial—for the Sakaiminato of Mizuki's childhood, for the lost Japan that his work longingly invokes. As if to emphasize this veneration of the past and the transference of memories from one generation to the next, a life-sized bronze tableau in front of the museum features a version of Mizuki as a child in conversation with Nonnonbaa, the old Sakaiminato woman from whom he originally learned about yōkai.

Inside the Memorial Hall, you walk through an illustrated narrative of Mizuki's life (replete with voiceovers by Mizuki himself), starting with his childhood right there in Sakaiminato. You then follow him through his experiences as a reluctant soldier gravely wounded in Rabaul (in present-day Papua New Guinea) and learn of his affection for the natives there and the way they helped him recover from injury and illness. Then you follow him back to postwar Japan, where he struggles to make good in a burgeoning economy. And you learn of his gradual success, both critical and popular, and his eventual rise to media fame. As a coda to the story, there are also photographs of his joyful return to Rabaul to be reunited with his old friends, and of course his triumphant reemergence as a hero of Sakaiminato, his hometown, and by metonymic extension, the hometown of so many other yōkai-loving Japanese.

The narrative of Mizuki's life—his happy-go-lucky boyhood, his blundering military career, his self-deprecating rise to prominence in the manga/anime world, his emergence at the turn of the new century as a dry-witted patriarch—is well known to readers of his memoirs. It is a narrative of authenticity, trial, and triumph. Sakaiminato (and all hometowns like it) features as a sort of paradise out of which Mizuki (and Japan) is forced to leave, and to which he (and his nation) eventually returns. In this narrative, war is an important if tragic rite of passage for both nation and individual. Pen in hand, Mizuki is at once a keen observer and also a participant; his personal story unfolds against the backdrop of the Shōwa period, with its militarism, war, defeat, occupation, and miraculous economic rebirth. The Memorial Hall is a tribute not only to Mizuki and his entourage of monstrous characters but also to this national narrative.



FIGURE 4. *Ema* (votive plaque) for sale at the Yōkai Shrine. Photograph by author.

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The same narrative, articulated in much greater detail and with beautifully intricate images, is portrayed in Mizuki's award-winning *Komikku Shōwa shi*, an eight-volume manga history of the Shōwa period. "If you think about it," Mizuki notes in the afterword, "the 'history of Shōwa' is the history of myself."⁹ And indeed, the text intertwines Mizuki's personal journey with the journey of the nation—complete

with political, economic, social, and cultural events—to document a collective experience and a moving set of shared memories.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, the war plays a central role in Mizuki's account: we witness not only the political movements and conflicts that led to the war itself but also Mizuki's own experiences as a soldier. Most striking are his battles with malaria, the loss of his left arm, and his gradual recovery through the kindness of the "people of the forest"¹¹ in the Rabaul village.

As in the Memorial Hall, *Shōwa shi* also details Mizuki's 1970 return to this native village, a pristine paradise that seems a substitute for the Sakaiminato of his childhood.¹² But in the *Shōwa shi* version, we can read a quiet, understated sadness, an intimation that the "little heaven"¹³ of Mizuki's memory no longer exists (if it ever did). In his war recollections, the village is a place of abundance and healthy fresh food, nourishment that literally saves his life. But on his return, Mizuki discovers that the water used to make coffee is full of mosquito larvae.¹⁴ He also learns that Epupe, a beautiful woman he remembers fondly and who, it is hinted, had a crush on him during the war, has led a tragic life, struggling with an alcoholic first husband, a sick second husband, and a sick child.¹⁵ Indeed, toward the conclusion of the eight-volume history, Mizuki documents one of many later return trips to Rabaul in which he takes his friends out to eat ramen noodles. When he notices one of them carefully collecting leftovers to take home for her family, he realizes for the first time "that they are poor. They probably don't get to go to a restaurant to eat ramen even once every three years."¹⁶

Later, Mizuki buys his friends a used truck, and one of them comments, "I'm glad you have returned your debts from the war." Mizuki, for his part, thinks, "I was probably dazed from malaria, so I never realized it . . . but even though they were poor, they never asked for anything." It is left ambiguous as to whether this poverty is recent or something Mizuki only understands now in comparison to Japan's newfound wealth. Whatever the case, though,

it is clear that his friends have not prospered economically, while Mizuki and Japan certainly have. The truck he buys them, not surprisingly, is a Datsun made in Japan.¹⁷

In the text of *Shōwa shi*, Mizuki's initial return to Rabaul immediately precedes another kind of homecoming, one that provides an ironic counterpoint to his own journey. These are the famous returns, several of them, of soldiers left behind during the war, soldiers who for decades did not know, or stubbornly refused to acknowledge, that the war had ended. For a quarter of a century—the same quarter of a century during which Mizuki rose to prominence as a manga artist and media star—they languished in the jungles of Southeast Asia. Of all the events from 1972, Mizuki writes, “the one that was particularly shocking to me was the homecoming of Yokoi Shōichi.”¹⁸ Yokoi was the first of three famous so-called stragglers; for some twenty-seven years he had lived in the Guam jungle, bedding down in a cave and surviving on fruits, berries, fish, and small animals, before he was finally discovered and repatriated.¹⁹ His arrival in Japan caused a great commotion; while his antiquated sense of patriotism may have seemed honorable to some, to many it was an embarrassing reminder of a bygone age of militarism and blind devotion to the Emperor. His homecoming, as noted in his 1997 *New York Times* obituary, “stirred widespread soul-searching within Japan about whether he represented the best impulses of the national spirit or the silliest.”²⁰

THE NARRATIVE OF MIZUKI
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Yokoi Shōichi's return highlighted the distance Japan had traveled in the years since the war's end. His sudden reappearance in the midst of the nation's remarkable economic revival was like that of a ghost returned from the dead, a living anachronism and the embodiment of uncomfortable, inconvenient memories. Juxtaposed with the story of Yokoi and the other “stragglers,” Mizuki's own “homecoming” to Rabaul—a journey geographically and symbolically opposite Yokoi's—underscores the advances of Japan as a nation and Mizuki as an individual. Mizuki too had survived hardships in the jungle and then struggled for economic survival back in Japan but, unlike Yokoi left to languish alone in the past, he had moved (with Japan) into a bright and promising future.

Indeed, as portrayed in his museum and his manga, the narrative of Mizuki is ultimately about transcendence and rejuvenation. He poignantly describes how during the war, after he is gravely wounded and loses his left arm, he finally begins to feel his strength coming back: the odor of a newborn

baby emanates from the stump of his severed limb.²¹ But of course the arm itself does not grow anew; rebirth is found through transcending the loss—not replacing it. Mizuki’s left sleeve, in his manga as in real life, hangs empty, a constant reminder of the war that shaped him and shaped the nation.

VOICELESS/VOICE

Several weeks after my trip to the bustling fairground of Sakaiminato, I had the chance to visit another kind of memorial hall, also dedicated to visual artists, but this one strangely and purposely silent. A sober cement building in a bucolic mountain setting in Ueda, Nagano Prefecture, the Mugonkan—literally “Voiceless Hall”—provides a startling contrast to Mizuki’s yōkai wonderland in Sakaiminato. Opened in 1997, the Mugonkan is a private museum dedicated to artwork by artists killed during the Pacific War. Many of them were art school students or recent graduates, mostly in their twenties or early thirties, who died either in Japan or while serving abroad. Displayed along with their paintings and sculptures are fragments of their daily lives—diaries, letters, and other personal effects. The artwork itself is varied. The common theme is not subject matter or style but the lives of the artists: personal narratives, one after another, that ended too soon.²²

An almost religious reverence pervades the museum. People step quietly, speak in hushed voices, and children are told to behave. This is not the quiet of a conventional art museum; rather, it is as if each painting is imbued with a meaning beyond aesthetic value, a poignancy engendered by the short biography of each artist. And each narrative is eerily similar, telling the story of a young man with great artistic promise that would never be fully realized, a life ended before it could be lived.

Of course, a sustained comparison of the Mugonkan with Sakaiminato would be unreasonable. But having coincidentally visited one so soon after the other, it was impossible for me not to contrast these two very different approaches to the conundrum of finding present-day meaning in the traumas of the past. Despite their differing objectives, the two sites share striking similarities: both are about the war, both celebrate visual artists, and both present their subjects as innocent men caught up in forces beyond their control. Ultimately, the Mugonkan is about regret and mourning, speaking silently but eloquently of the tragic stifling of potential, of the people left behind as the nation moved on. Visitors walk slowly and quietly through the museum encountering one brief episode after another: each short artist biography is

an unfinished story, lacking a satisfying narrative arc. Visitors to Mizuki's Memorial Hall, on the other hand, experience his long biography as a tale of close calls and terrible ordeals, but ultimately of triumph and narrative completion. Mizuki is the lucky artist who fulfilled the potential of all these other artists. His world—his manga, his Memorial Hall, his revitalized Sakaiminato—incorporates the trauma of war into a satisfying circle of narrative.

Indeed, this sense of narrative completion and the outward boisterousness of Sakaiminato even work to obscure the town's own story as a victim, like so many other rural communities, of late twentieth-century urbanization and economic resurgence. This tale of depopulation and empty storefronts becomes but a faint, plaintive subtext amid the vigor of yōkai commercialism. Just as Mizuki himself emerges successfully from the devastation of his war experiences, so too Sakaiminato, at first glance, seems to have artfully transcended its loss of economic relevance in modern Japan by milking the popularity of its most famous native son. Although my own visit by no means represents a thorough exploration, I did soon discover that the streets just a few yards from Mizuki Shigeru Road are practically deserted. The proprietor of a small restaurant complained to me that most tourists just come for the day, visit the road and the Memorial Hall, and then return to the larger city of Yonago for dinner and lodging. For him at least, the fantastic world celebrated one street over is a colorful façade, a bandage skillfully applied to a still unhealed wound.²³

Perhaps we can extrapolate here two distinct approaches for grappling with the traumas of the past. The Mugonkan expresses a poignant remembrance of devastating loss but also intimates the possibility that the loss will never—can never, should never—be completely expressed or transcended. Inversely, Mizuki's world actively works to transcend loss, enabling him and his hometown to prosper in the living present. To be sure, Mizuki is outspoken in his criticism of the Pacific War and of all wars. He closes *Shōwa shi* with a hopeful insignia of a peaceful future: crossed rifles with knotted barrels, and the comment that, "The history [of the Shōwa period] is a big lesson

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teaching us that we must not have any more war; we must never again commit the same mistakes.”²⁴ But in Sakaiminato, the clattering commercialization of memories and the clear, satisfying narrative drowns out the silence of those crossed rifles.

POSTSCRIPT: THE LARVAE IN THE COFFEE WATER, OR REREADING NOSTALGIA

One element that links the Mugonkan with Sakaiminato is nostalgia. Both sites nostalgically commemorate a prewar Japan that is simultaneously personal and national. In its simplest form, nostalgia might be characterized as a longing for a past (time, place, self) that is impossible to (re)claim because it no longer exists or, more likely, never did. But in contemporary cultural life, the affect of nostalgia is anything but simple.²⁵ Literary scholar and novelist Svetlana Boym has characterized nostalgia as tending to be either “reflective”

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or “restorative.” Within such a typology, the Mugonkan, by celebrating the art of students whose hopes for a bright future were stolen by a war beyond their control, suggests a reflective nostalgia that “does not follow a single plot line but explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones.”²⁶

The narrative—broken into dozens of fragments—provides no solace or closure. Nostalgia at the Mugonkan is an excruciating affliction; it is a longing for more than a homecoming, for an impossible reversal of the events that caused the breach between now and then. It forces the viewer to reconcile the terrible events of the past with the complacency of the present and the possibility of a more sanguine future.

In contrast, Sakaiminato articulates a restorative nostalgia that, in Boym’s words, “proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps.”²⁷ We experience a set of personal memories stitched into the broader national history to represent a completed narrative, a linking of the past with the present through a happy transcendence of difficult moments. The trauma of war and irrecoverable loss is softened by an indulgence in coming home; nostalgia in Sakaiminato is not a bitter draught of insatiable longing but an ease, a kind of comfort food. Through promulgating a complete narrative, an idyllic past is neatly linked to the present. The memory of pain—and the pain of memory—along with its meaningful role in shaping the future, is bridged

by a compelling story moving along energetically, inexorably, toward a happy ending. The danger is that the “fond backward gaze,” as one scholar describes the nostalgic impulse, can too easily make the present seem connected to a gloriously imagined past and accordingly threaten to “foreclose the future, to reject the possibility of productive change.”²⁸

Nostalgia is often seen in this way as a conservative, nonproductive, even dangerous form of desire, a longing for a mythical home place/time that can be manipulated for nationalist and other ideological purposes. But as Fredric Jameson once suggested, “there is no reason why a nostalgia conscious of itself, a lucid and remorseless dissatisfaction with the present on the grounds of some remembered plenitude, cannot furnish as adequate a revolutionary stimulus as any other.”²⁹ Indeed, several recent studies have set out to reclaim nostalgia as a creative, progressive force that, in John J. Su’s words, “facilitates an exploration of ethical ideals in the face of disappointing circumstances.”³⁰ My own view is that, if read critically, even ironically, with an eye for the cracks and inconsistencies, nostalgia can be translated from a wistful longing for an idealized past into productive stimulus toward a future that incorporates ideals without ignoring the realities of the present. Some presentations of nostalgia lend themselves more easily to this kind of productive critical reading, while others resist such narrative unpacking.

Boym’s notions of reflective and restorative nostalgia are useful for contemplating the way memories are presented and experienced, but they are certainly not mutually exclusive: the individual subject’s experience of one can supplement or deepen the experience of the other. Just as Mizuki’s glorious return to Rabaul assumes fresh poignancy when he understands for the first time the shocking poverty of his friends, so too the lively and prosperous Mizuki Shigeru Road takes on new meaning when you also visit the Mugonkan or venture onto Sakaiminato’s own lonely side streets.

The challenge of memory, I suppose, is like any experience of reading or interpretation. We must take care not to be seduced by our own longings for continuity, our desire for a satisfying narrative arc with a whole past, fully wrought characters, and a gratifying conclusion. There is always the danger of overlaying history with what history might have been, of convincing ourselves that Sakaiminato Station is really Kitarō Station. In a new century already wracked by international wars and lives cut tragically short, it is particularly easy, I think, to be seduced by hopeful, redemptive narratives of nostalgia. At times like this, then, it is fragmented, incomplete stories, like the disrupted narratives of the Mugonkan or the ragged subplots of Mizuki’s world, that most powerfully convey the traumas of the past. I am not disparaging all

nostalgic narratives, nor criticizing Sakaiminato's revitalization. Rather I am simply suggesting that, whether the articulation is restorative or reflective, ultimately the onus is on the reader. Even (or especially) when the presentation seems clean and smooth, we can read nostalgia critically, reflectively—so that we also see the larvae in the coffee water, the stragglers who come home too late from the war, the poverty in Rabaul, and the struggles of small shops on the side streets of Sakaiminato. Such details subvert the tyranny of the storyline, opening up the possibility of new journeys and alternative endings.

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Notes

1. For more on Mizuki, including a discussion of the 2005 film *Yōkai daisensō* as well as manga, anime, and live-action versions of *Gegege no Kitarō*, see Zilia Papp's article in this volume. For additional background on Mizuki, see Michael Dylan Foster, "The Otherworlds of Mizuki Shigeru," in *Mechademia* 3 (2008): 8–28, and Frederik L. Schodt, *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* (Berkeley, Calif.: Stone Bridge Press, 1996), 177–82. For an extended biography and analysis, see Adachi Noriyuki, *Yōkai to aruku: Hyōden, Mizuki Shigeru* (Walking with yōkai: Critical biography, Mizuko Shigeru) (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 1994). I use the word *yōkai* here as a general term for all sorts of monstrous and mysterious creatures, also sometimes referred to as *bakemono* or *obake*.

2. So-called *mura okoshi* and *machi zukuri* (town making) movements began during the 1960s in response to the depopulation of fishing and agricultural communities throughout Japan. By the early 1970s, Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei would note: "The rapid rise in urban population has caused an increase in the number of people living in the big city—with no mountain in which to chase a rabbit, no river in which to catch small carp, and only a tiny apartment to call their hometown [*furusato*]. In such a situation, I expect it will be difficult to pass on to the next generation the excellent nature and traditions of the Japanese people." Tanaka Kakuei, *Nihon rettō kaizō ron* (Theory for rebuilding the Japanese archipelago) (Tokyo: Nikkan Kōgyō Shinbunsha, 1973), 1–2. In Tanaka's comments, we find already a desire for an untrammelled past; starting in the 1980s the federal government officially promoted *furusato zukuri* programs "designed," as anthropologist Schott Schnell notes, "to capitalize on this nostalgic sense of longing by helping rural towns and villages develop (or perhaps in some cases invent) their own unique attractions." *The Rousing Drum: Ritual Practice in a Japanese Community* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 271. Not surprisingly, *mura okoshi*, *machi zukuri*, and *furusato zukuri* are often fraught with political and economic complexities on both local and national levels. See Jennifer Robertson, *Native and Newcomer: Making and Remaking a Japanese City* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991); Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); John Knight, "Rural Revitalization in Japan: Spirit of the Village and Taste of the Country," *Asian Survey* 34, no. 2 (July 1994): 634–46; and Takashi Iguchi, "Depopulation and *Mura-Okoshi* (Village Revival)," in *Forestry and the Forest Industry in Japan*, ed. Iwai Yoshiya (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002), 259–77. For a clear explanation

of the historical and political distinctions between *mura okoshi*, *machi zukuri*, and *furusato zukuri*, including references to Sakaiminato, see Yasui Manami, “Machi zukuri, mura okoshi to furusato monogatari” (Town making, village revitalization, and the *furusato* story), in *Matsuri to ibento* (Festival and event), ed. Komatsu Kazuhiko (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1997), 201–26. See also Saitō Tsugio, *Yōkai toshi keikaku ron: Obake kara no machi zukuri* (Theories of yōkai urban planning: Town building through monsters) (Tokyo: Sairyūsha, 1996), which focuses particularly on the usage of yōkai for these purposes.

3. There are also several other trains: a *Medama oyaji* (Papa Eyeball) train, dedicated to Kitarō’s faithful familiar (and father), a disembodied eyeball with arms, legs, and a high-pitched voice (the train headlights offer themselves nicely to incorporation of the eyeball theme); a *Neko musume* (Catgirl) train; and a *Nezumi otoko* (Ratman) train.

4. Anthony H. Chambers, “Introduction” to Ueda Akinari, *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*, trans. Anthony H. Chambers (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 25.

5. *Asahi shinbun*, August 19, 2007, 30.

6. Aramata Hiroshi, *Shin Nihon yōkai junreidan: Kaiki no kuni Nippon* (New Japan yōkai pilgrimage group: Weird nation Japan) (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 1997), 180.

7. With a population of some 37,045 people (statistics from December 2006; “Sakana to Kitarō no machi: Sakaiminato gaido mappu” [City of fish and Kitarō: Sakaiminato guide map], 2), Sakaiminato is officially considered a city (*shi*). The once prosperous fishing industry has fallen into significant decline since the depletion in the sardine (*maiwashi*) population beginning in the 1990s. Coincident with this reduction in the size of the catch has been an increase in the number of visitors to the Mizuki Shigeru Road. See *Asahi shinbun*, August 19, 2007, 30. While the Sakaiminato tourist board promotes a range of events and attractions, many of which relate to fish and the fishing industry, the Mizuki/yōkai connection is the primary allure for tourists.

8. In one sense, the Yōkai Shrine institutionalizes an informal practice that was already occurring before it was built; Aramata notes that when he visited the road in 1996, he was intrigued by the five-yen and ten-yen coins placed around each statue, like offerings to a deity. See Aramata, *Shin Nihon yōkai junreidan*, 182–83. During my own visit a decade later, I saw very few coins like this, with the exception of those around a figure of Medama oyaji bathing in a saucer, a shape particularly conducive, perhaps, to the placement of offerings.

9. See Mizuki Shigeru, *Komikku Shōwa shi* (Manga history of Shōwa), 8 vols. (Tokyo: Kōdansha Komikkusu, 1994). Subsequent citations will note specific volume and page numbers. The quotation here is from 8:274.

10. It is not just in Japan that the “framed, self-conscious, bimodal form” of comics has proven particularly conducive to the kind of interweaving of personal and historical narrative Mizuki employs in *Shōwa shi*. As Hillary Chute notes, “The most important graphic narratives explore the conflicted boundaries of what can be said and what can be shown at the intersection of collective histories and life stories.” Hillary Chute, “Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative” *PMLA* 123, no. 2 (March 2008): 457, 459. The paradigmatic example of this style in a Western context is Art Spiegelman’s award-winning *Maus* series.

11. Mizuki, *Shōwa shi*, 6:21–40.

12. Mizuki’s chapter on this journey back is entitled “The Battlefields after Thirty

Years,” though based on the date he provides (December 14, 1970) for his return, he had been away for approximately twenty-five years; see Mizuki, *Shōwa shi*, 7:231–46.

13. This is how he refers to the native village in one of his memoirs: Mizuki Shigeru, *Musume ni kataru otōsan no senki* (Papa’s war-diary told to his daughters) (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1995).

14. Mizuki, *Shōwa shi*, 7:257.

15. *Ibid.*, 8:28–35.

16. *Ibid.*, 8:253.

17. *Ibid.*, 8:254–55.

18. *Ibid.*, 8:40.

19. Mizuki, or the editors, mistakenly state that Yokoi had been in the jungle for “thirty-seven years” (Mizuki, *Shōwa shi*, 8:40).

20. Nicolas D. Kristof, “Shoichi Yokoi, 82, Is Dead; Japan Soldier Hid 27 Years,” *New York Times*, September 26, 1997. For more on Yokoi and other so-called stragglers, see Beatrice Trefalt, *Japanese Army Stragglers and Memories of the War in Japan, 1950–1975* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003).

21. Mizuki, *Shōwa shi*, 6:38–39; see also Mizuki, *Musume ni kataru*, 153–54.

22. For more on the Mugonkan, see Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945–1970* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 3–11; also Kuboshima Sei’ichirō, *Mugonkan: Senbotsu gagakusei ‘inori no e’* (Mugonkan: ‘Prayers in pictures’ of art students lost in the war) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2006), which includes images from the museum as well as brief biographies of the artists. For a discussion of various ways in which Japanese war dead have been memorialized, see Jan van Breman, “Monuments for the Untimely Dead or the Objectification of Social Memory in Japan,” in *Perspectives on Social Memory in Japan*, ed. Tsu Yun Hui, Jan van Bremen, and Eyal Ben-Ari, 23–43 (Folkstone, Kent: Global Oriental, 2005); also Nakamichi Hirochika, who invokes the term “interrupted lives” for the people being memorialized: “Memorial Monuments of Interrupted Lives in Modern Japan: From Ex Post Facto Treatment to Intensification Devices,” in *Perspectives on Social Memory in Japan*, ed., Hui, van Bremen, and Ben-Ari, 44–57. For a sensitive treatment of the politically controversial Yasukuni Shrine, see John Nelson, “Social Memory as Ritual Practice: Commemorating the Spirits of the Military Dead at Yasukuni Shinto Shrine,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 2 (May 2003): 443–67.

23. This is not to deny the real and meaningful economic boost Mizuki has brought to Sakaiminato, for certainly many of the shops on the road are prosperous. Rather my point is that even in successful narratives of *mura okoshi* there are also other stories, less sanguine, that should not be forgotten.

24. Mizuki, *Shōwa shi*, 8:269.

25. “Nostalgia,” coined in 1688 by Swiss physician Johannes Hofer from the Greek *nostos* (= to return home) and *algia* (= pain/grief), was originally configured as a disease of homesickness that affected both body and mind. In contemporary discourse, the concept encompasses a diverse range of feelings concerning “the juxtaposition of an idealized past with an unsatisfactory present”: George K. Behlmer, “Introduction,” *Singular Continuities: Tradition, Nostalgia, and Identity in Modern British Culture*, ed. George K. Behlmer and Fred M. Leventhal (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 7. It is often still invoked as an intense longing for home—whether temporal or geographical or both.

In Japanese, a number of words are associated with this sense of longing: *nosutarujia* or *nosutarujii*, cognate with “nostalgia”; *natsukashii*, used in poetry for centuries and still commonly invoked in everyday language as an expression of bittersweet remembrance; and *mukashi*, a word that “alludes to the Good Old Days—to modes and contexts of sociability long since transcended, abandoned, or dismantled, but reconstructable and revivifiable in a selective form through nostalgia” (Robertson, *Native and Newcomer*, 15). For a discussion of recent Japanese forms of nostalgia, particularly “nostalgia products” that draw on the mass culture of the 1920s and 1930s, see Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing*, 54–59.

26. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xviii.

27. *Ibid.*, 41. Boym’s typology is more complex than my adaptation of it here. In general, restorative nostalgia tends to allow for complacency, while reflective nostalgia inspires the possibility of creative thought and progress. In the kind of restorative nostalgia that seems to operate in Sakaiminato, “Distance is compensated by intimate experience and the availability of a desired object. Displacement is cured by a return home, preferably a collective one. Never mind if it’s not your home; by the time you reach it, you will already have forgotten the difference” (44). On the other hand, the Mugonkan inspires a reflective nostalgia, “a form of deep mourning that performs a labor of grief both through pondering pain and through play that points to the future” (55).

28. Behlmer, *Singular Continuities*, 7.

29. Fredric Jameson, “Walter Benjamin, or Nostalgia,” in *The Legacy of German Refugee Intellectuals*, ed. Robert Boyers (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 68.

30. John J. Su, *Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 4. Other examples of this more optimistic attitude toward nostalgia include Janelle Wilson, who maintains that as a concept/emotion, nostalgia has “gotten a bad rap.” Janelle Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning* (Cranbury, N.J.: Rosemont Publishing, 2005), 7. See also Peter Glazer, *Radical Nostalgia: Spanish Civil War Commemorations in America* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2005), and Tamara S. Wagner, *Longing: Narratives of Nostalgia in the British Novel, 1740–1890* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 2004).