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THE YAMAMBA-LIKE CHARACTERISTICS OF "GAGOOL" THE OLD HAG IN RIDER HAGGARD'S *KING SOLOMON'S MINES*

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Abstract

Yamamba is an old hag who lives in the mountain or forest in Japanese creation myth. Yamamba's most threatening characteristics are her avenging side and her fearful trait that cause terror mostly among men. Therefore, Yamamba is mostly known for her anthropophagus qualities that make her a terrifyingly evil woman. Based on this Japanese myth, it is also possible to see the same Yamamba-topos in Western literature. In Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), Gagool the old hag also has Yamamba-like characteristics that not only does she live in the mountain as an evil force but also threatens men by causing calamities and producing monstrosities. Therefore, Gagool the old witch in Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* can be considered an evil woman having notorious Yamamba traits. In this study, Gagool's Yamamba-like features will be scrutinized to discuss her dreadful existence as a devouring witch. It is also within the purpose of this study to illustrate how Eastern folklore influences Western literature greatly and plays a significant role in constructing a ravenous old woman image to deconstruct the male authority and power.

Keywords: *Yamamba, Old witch, Evil woman, Fearful woman, Cannibal woman, Gagool, King Solomon's Mines.*

RIDER HAGGARD'IN *KRAL SÜLEYMAN'IN HAZİNELERİ* ROMANINDA YAŞLI CADİ GAGOOL'UN YAMAMBAVARI ÖZELLİKLERİ

Öz

Japon yaratılış mitolojisinde Yamamba dağda veya ormanda yaşayan yaşlı bir cadıdır. Yamamba'nın en korkutucu özellikleri arasında, çoğunlukla erkeklerde dehşete sebebiyet veren intikamcı yanı ve korku saçan niteliği gelmektedir. Böylece, Yamamba, onu korkunç bir şekilde şeytani kadın yapan yamyam özelliğiyle tanınmaktadır. Bahsedilen bu Japon mitine de dayanarak, Yamamba'ya ait benzer tema ve öğeleri Batı Edebiyatında da görmek mümkündür. Rider Haggard'ın *Kral Süleyman'ın Hazinesi* (1885) romanında yaşlı cadı Gagool karakterinde de kendisinin sadece şeytani bir güç olarak dağda yaşaması değil, aynı zamanda insanlar arasında garabetler saçarak musibetlere sebebiyet vermesi gibi Yamambavari özelliklerin mevcut olduğu söylenebilir. Böylece, Haggard'ın *Kral Süleyman'ın Hazinesi* (1885) romanında, yaşlı cadı Gagool karakteri, kötü şöhretli Yamamba özelliklerine sahip şeytani bir kadın olarak görülebilmektedir. Bu çalışmada, Gagool'un Yamambavari özellikleri, onun yırtıcı bir cadı olarak korkunç varlığını tartışmak üzere incelenecektir. Bu çalışmanın bir diğer amacı da Doğu halkiyatının Batı edebiyatına nasıl tesir ettiğini ve vahşi yaşlı kadın tasvirinin erkek otoritesi ve gücünü alacağı etmede nasıl önemli bir rol oynadığını göstermektir.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Yamamba, Yaşlı cadı, Şeytani kadın, Korkunç kadın, Yamyam kadın, Gagool, Kral Süleyman'ın Hazinesi.*

About Yamamba's Wicked Traits

According to the Japanese myth of creation, Yamamba or Yamauba is believed to be a devouring witch living in the mountain. Yamamba's most known trait is her cannibalistic side through which her evil characteristics are represented since she chases after men and devours them straightaway. According to Kazuhiko Komatsu, Yamamba is an anthropophagite, who is defined as, "tall, with long hair, piercing eyes, and a large mouth that opens from ear to ear" (2000: 428). In Japanese folklore, Yamamba's dreadful appearance not only affects her 'cannibalistic side' but also bases her 'dark setting' as a mountain-woman. The mountain topos has a significant effect on the formation of her character. Konno Ensuke draws a parallel between the animalistic features of Yamamba and animal typed yōkai in his following words: "Yōkai-like creatures that are believed to live in the mountains are usually considered the yamahime type; and if they are old, they are called yamamba, yamauba or yamahaha" (qtd. in Reider, 2021: 6). It can, therefore, be considered that the mountain topos, which has a metamorphosing effect on Yamamba as the mountain witch, turns into her playground where she performs her notorious and savage activities.

As stated, Yamamba or Yamauba is believed to be notorious for devouring men. Based on this very specific feature of her, Yamamba also has a Western counterpart in literature apart from that of the Eastern. In European myths, tales, and stories there are also yamamba-like old women/witches who viciously devour men. Thusly, Yamamba-topos can explicitly be seen in Western literature as well. In this regard, in Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, Gagool displays Yamamba-like characteristics, and she not only lives in the mountain but also is considered to be an old-hag dealing with witchcraft. Hence, in this study, Gagool's Yamamba characteristics are going to be scrutinized as a devouring witch to demonstrate how Eastern folklore affects Western literature, especially in depicting the mythological figure of an evil woman. It is also within the scope of this study to show how monstrous female figure becomes a threatening force for men and their authorities.

Yamamba As the Evil yet Empowered 'Mountain Ogress'

What makes Yamamba frightening and notorious in Japanese myths is her cannibalistic tendency. Her anthropophagous trait makes Yamamba a "ravenous female" (Copeland, 2005: 21). Yamamba's ravenous appetite can be considered her desperate need for belonging. In other words, Yamamba's exclusion from society is considered to be the mere reason why she acts evil towards men. As Marc Sebastian-Jones puts it in his "Preface to the Special Issue on the Fairy Tale in Japan,"

[i]n traditional Japanese folktales the monster-woman has a counterpart in the figure of the *yamauba* (or *yamamba*), a mountain witch who, ostracized from society, lives a bleak, marginalized life in the mountains. The *yamauba* is a complex and ambiguous figure usually portrayed as an ugly old crone. A shape-shifter with supernatural strength, the *yamauba* is also a cannibalistic demon who is quite capable of eating babies and devouring men who are unfortunate, or foolish, enough to stray into her domain. (2013: 175)

Yamamba's destructive side is extremely fatal as expressed; however, she has also an enigmatic power through which she is able to transform herself to trap her victims. The similar theme can also be seen in Grimm's "Hansel and Gretel" in the form of an old hag as the European counterpart of Yamamba. As Noriko T. Reider also contends in her "*Spirited Away: Film of the Fantastic and Evolving Japanese Folk Symbols*," Yamamba: "conjures up the image of a mountain-dwelling hag who devours unsuspecting humans who happen upon her path. In many ways, she can be considered the Japanese counterpart of the witch in *Hansel and Gretel* of the Grimm Brothers [...]" (2005: 11). Behind her transformational power, there lies Yamamba's never-ending cannibalistic desire as a devouring witch. This is mostly related to Yamamba's overall acceptance "as a frightening-looking old woman with an affinity for human flesh" (Reider, 2010: 69). As seen, Yamamba as an old hag, has an everlasting anthropophagous tendency which serves her wicked existence. In her article titled "In Pursuit of the Yamamba: The Question of Female Resistance" Meera Viswanathan writes that Yamamba is:

a terrifying old woman with long gray hair, possessing superhuman strength and prescience, dwelling in the mountains, preying on stray male travelers who intrude on her as she occupies herself with the task of spinning; she is capable of extraordinary transformations, ranging from animal to beautiful maiden. Should her prey attempt to escape, she chases it down in the mountains and devours it with uncanny delight [...] (1996: 242).

Yamamba's transformational power is her evil strategy to make her victims paralyzed and to devour them. In other words, Yamamba as the mountain ogress, bewitches the men who dare to trespass her dark territory through her black magic and as soon as she catches the trespassers (victims) who are about to run away from her, she destroys them there and then. All in all, Yamamba the devouring witch is represented as an evil force as a part of her nature which causes mythic devastating catastrophes for men. Hence, the same thematic and mythic representation of Yamamba, the old witch image, can also be reflected in the characteristics of "Gagool" the old hag in Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*.

Having depicted mythical and distinct features of Yamamba, it is also worthy to discuss her empowered existence as a woman. This sense of empowered woman image in Yamamba's existential trait makes it possible to see her as an inspirational figure for women writers especially for the ones who demythologize the old myths and re-write the androtexts within the scope of gynocentrism. As S. Yumiko Hulvey puts it in her "Myths and Monsters: The Female Body as the Site for Political Agendas," Japanese women writers: "prefer to be feared as agents of death, as decreed by myth, rather than bow down meekly as the oppressed Other" (qtd. in King, 2000, pp. xiii). This concern can be considered the core reason why representation of women, even if it is depicted from a mythical scope, is valued rather than devalued. Based on this very feminist reading as an understanding, women in Japanese mythology are empowered and they become fear and terror for men. For Hulvey, one of the main reasons behind Yamamba's having notorious traits causing horror among men is that Yamamba "harkens back to female prototypes in ancient creation myths that impart a sense of empowerment to women [...]" (2000, p.72). It is this sense of female empowerment that makes that Japanese myth authentic but alarmingly striking. However, this is also considered to be the defilement policy of patriarchy which puts women into inferior positions since it is seen that "the Japanese creation myth which posits the female body as the site of defilement and pollution, was a play adopted by patriarchy to associate females with negative attributes [...]" (2000, p. 72). This concern which keeps women out of the system is mainly about the condemnation politics of marginalization and classification of women. As Gerda Lerner contends in her *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986), women are seen as "half and sometimes more than half of humankind [...]" (1986: 4). Based on this understanding, it is possible to see that women are otherized, marginalized and excluded just like Yamamba. In other words, that isolation and marginalization can be considered to be the core and basic reason behind Yamamba's being exposed to those mentioned negative attributions which in fact show how empowered she is despite the harsh patriarchal policies and politics against women in general, Yamamba in particular. Hence, Yamamba as a 'Mountain Ogress,' is seen as an empowered yet dangerous woman who breaks the male authority and power since she is the one who is evil by causing troubles among men.

Yamamba-like Gagool in *King Solomon's Mines*

Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* is a colonial novel signifying white supremacy over the others. In the novel, there are seminal white characters such as Sir Henry Curtis, Captain Good and Allan Quatermain the narrator, having typical white mentality. They are civilized white men who are partly in a quest for the road of King Solomon to find his great treasure. There are also some native people such as Khiva and Umbopa to accompany and serve the white men during the quest. Thusly, white men and the others are in the same path to reach the target. Then, they enter Kukuanaland the land of Solomon's treasure. In Kukuanaland, there are also major characters such as King Twala, Infadoos and Gagool as the local natives. However, Gagool the old hag is manly different from the others in terms of her witchcraft and other authentic qualities by having Yamamba-like characteristics. In the novel, Gagool takes her place for the very first time when white men are introduced to King Twala. As soon as they are welcomed, Gagool the old hag not only describes the mentality of white men but also defines their real intentions and the reason for their presence in Kukuanaland.

[...] Blood is good, the red blood is bright; there is no smell like the smell of new-shed blood. The lions shall lap it and roar, the vultures shall wash their wings in it, and shriek in joy.

"I am old! I am old! I have seen much blood; ha, ha! but I shall see more ere I die, and be merry. How old am I, think ye? Your fathers knew me, and their fathers knew me, and their fathers' fathers. I have seen the white man, and know his desires. I am old, but the mountains are older than I. Who made the great road, tell me? Who wrote in pictures on the rocks, tell me? Who reared up the three silent ones yonder, who gaze across the pit, tell me?" (And she pointed towards the three precipitous mountains we had noticed on the previous night.)

"Ye know not, but I know. It was a white people who were before ye are, who shall be when ye are not, who shall eat ye up, and destroy ye. Yea! yea! Yea!"

"And what came they for, the white ones, the terrible ones, the skilled in magic and all learning, the strong, the unswerving? What is that bright stone upon thy forehead, O king? Whose hands made the iron garments upon thy breast, O king? Ye know not, but I know. I the old one, I the wise one, I the Isanusi!" (witch doctress) [...] (Haggard, 1994: 100).

As stated in the passage, Gagool knows everything about the white men, especially about their true selves and cravings. Therefore, this foreseeing quality can be considered the ultimate sign of Gagool's having witch-like enigmatic characteristics. In a similar vein, in Japanese creation myth, Yamamba is also known as wise and cunning being; hence, Gagool represents the similar traits. What is noteworthy here is that Gagool resembles herself to Isanusi. In *Dictionary of South African English*, "Isanusi" is defined as "a traditional healer or diviner, often an aged practitioner who has developed his or her psychic gifts, and whose clairvoyant powers enable him or her to 'smell out' evil; [...] smelling doctor; witch doctor" (*Isanusi, Dictionary of South African English*). Gagool defines herself as a witch doctor who senses and foresees every intention just like her idol "Isanusi." Moreover, Gagool sees herself as a mountain deity just like Yamamba. Yamamba is also considered to be a mountain deity¹ and a great mother² in Japanese mythology. In the novel, when King Twala is killed, Ignosi (Umbopa) the rightful king of Kukuani land comes to the throne. He starts talking to Gagool about the passage to Solomon's Mines to guide the white men in finding the treasure.

"What will ye with me, Ignosi?" she piped. "Ye dare not touch me.

If ye touch me I will blast ye as ye sit. **Beware of my magic.**"

"Thy magic could not save Twala, old she-wolf, and it cannot hurt me," was the answer.

"Listen: I will this of thee, that thou reveal where is the chamber where are the shining stones." "Ha! ha!" she piped, "none know but I, and I will never tell thee.

The white devils shall go hence empty-handed."

"Thou wilt tell me. I will make thee tell me" [...].

"How, O king?"

"Nay, thus; if thou tellest not thou shalt slowly die."

"Die!" she shrieked, in terror and fury; "ye dare not touch me man, ye know not who I am. **How old think ye am I?** [...].

"Yet will I slay thee. See, Gagool, **mother of evil**, thou art so old thou canst no longer love thy life. **What can life be to such a hag as thee, who hast no shape, nor form, nor hair, nor teeth- hast naught, save wickedness and evil eyes?** It will be mercy to slay thee, Gagool."

1 As Hori Ichiro puts it, Yamamba is considered a mountain deity thusly, "the mountain deity is believed to be a goddess who gives birth to twelve children every year. She is therefore called Mrs. Twelve (Jūni-sama), and her twelve children symbolize the twelve months of the year" (1968: 167).

2 In her *Shadow and Evil in Fairy Tales*, Marie-Louise von Franz writes that "the Great Mother who encompasses both the light and dark sides can be seen in many mytho-religious figures such as the Egyptian mother Goddess, Isis, and the Hindu's Kali" (1974: 195).

“Thou fool,” shrieked the old fiend, [...].

“Cease **thine evil talk** and answer me,” said Ignosi, angrily. “Wilt thou show the place where the stones are, or wilt thou not? If thou wilt not, thou diest, even now,” and he seized a spear and held it over her [...]. “Nay, I will show it” [...] [my bald added] (Haggard, 1994: 172-173).

As mentioned in the above quotation, King Ignosi knows Gagool by heart, knows her tricks and her wicked intentions that may cause the white men’s fall. Based on that, he warns Gagool not to follow Yamamba-like traits during the journey since he already sees the impending great danger that will befall. Moreover, in the above passage, it is also possible to see Yamamba-like characteristics of Gagool from King Ignosi’s word choice. He calls Gagool as ‘the mother of evil’ having not only an evil shape and form but also evil hair and eyes just like an old witch or Yamamba. In the below conversation between King Ignosi and Gagool, Gagool accepts being a guide for the white men to Solomon’s Road in which the white men are able to reach King Solomon’s treasure; however, Gagool tells the ancestral catastrophic fallacy that is doomed for the white men. Gagool as the mountain ogress tells Ignosi about her wicked and evil Yamamba-like intentions that awaits the white men:

[...] Tomorrow shalt thou go with Infadoos and my white brothers to the place, and beware how thou failest, for if thou showest it not, then shalt thou slowly die. I have spoken.

“I will not fail, Ignosi. I always keep my word: ha! ha! ha! Once a woman showed the place to a white man before, and behold evil befell him,” and here her wicked eyes glinted. “Her name was Gagool too. Perchance I was that woman.” [...].

“Mayhap, mayhap; when one lives long one forgets. Perhaps it was my mother’s mother who told me, surely her name was Gagool also. But mark, ye will find in the place where the bright playthings are, a bag of hide full of stones. The man filled that bag, but he never took it away. Evil befell him, I say, evil befell him! Perhaps it was my mother’s mother who told me. It will be a merry journey--we can see the bodies of those who died in the battle as we go. Their eyes will be gone by now, and their ribs will be hollow. Ha! ha! ha!” (Haggard, 1994: 172-173).

Upon the command of King Ignosi, Gagool reveals the plan of the journey to treasure. She, then, shares the old memoir which is about the same cursed prophecy on the white men in the past and also states that the destiny of white victims will be the same with these new white men. Gagool thinks that collecting the bright stones will victimize the white men; hence, the evil force befalls them. The evildoer in the past was her grandmother whose name is Gagool too, now Gagool will replace her grandmother’s monstrous position just like Yamamba. When the journey begins, every character knows about the evil and wicked characteristics of Gagool. As Quatermain the narrator puts it, “Gagool was waiting for us, still with that evil grin upon her horrid face” (1994: 179). When they finally reach the gate of the mountain in which King Solomon’s treasure is located, they see stalactites and passages to cave like chambers. Gagool asks the white men, “Are you ready to enter the Place of Death?” (1994: 182). Gagool’s dark and evil Yamamba-setting is the mountain in which the evil and dead spirits exist. As Gagool says, “[t]he those who enter the Hall of the Dead, evil comes. Hee! hee! ha! ha!” (1994: 183). Finally, when the white men enter, they are stunned by the existence of the bright stones and diamonds, and they even ask “[h]ow did the old hag know all these things? [...]” (1994: 189). The white men know that Gagool is a witch, they call her hag and an old devil, and they also know Gagool’s wicked plans by heart. That is the very reason why they do not trust her since they are sure that something will happen, and they will be trapped. However, Gagool, this time, is the one who is trapped and hunted in the hunt uncannily when she is about to cause calamities and monstrosities for the white men in the end. The Yamamba figure, Gagool the old hag, is ruined exceptionally this time when Yamamba as a cunning witch is taken into consideration.

Conclusion

As stated, in Japanese creation mythology, Yamamba is known to be a devouring witch causing troubles for men. Though she is believed to be in Eastern mythological figure as an origin, she becomes an inspiration for Western literature as well. Based on that, the same Yamamba-topos are reflected in the characterization of

Gagool in Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* since she has the similar dreadful and notorious traits causing terror, horror, and fear among men. Therefore, Gagool as an old hag represents the evil side of Yamamba not only by having the same notorious traits from witchcraft to mountain dwelling, but also by possessing the same anthropophagous tendency for devouring as well as her dark rituals with black magic. However, it should also be considered that the mentioned distinct characteristics of Yamamba also show how empowered she is especially when the collapse of male power and authority is taken into consideration. It is seen that such an empowered woman breaks the normative codes of patriarchy. In other words, the patriarchal politics and androcentric policies are violated through Yamamba since she malignantly and mischievously becomes fear, terror, and a horrific threat for men. In a similar vein, the same thematic concern is also represented in Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* since Gagool is also as fearful and threatening as Yamamba. As mentioned, the distinct Yamamba-like characteristics of Gagool are reflected in this study. However, it is also possible to see the same male anxiety and fear in the representation of Gagool since she scatters the seeds of awe among men. Therefore, Gagool becomes the one who is utterly empowered. Through these distinct qualifications, Gagool reflects the similar Yamamba-like folkloric and mythical features by causing the same sense of monstrosities among men just like Yamamba as an atrociously devouring but extremely empowered old hag.

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