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### Making visible the invisible

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## **Making visible the invisible: representing religious content in manga\***

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Ghosts, spirits and ancestors have a central place in the Japanese spiritual imagination and are central to its contemporary popular culture. In visual narratives such as manga, both their way of depiction and their agency are the result of creativity, continuously in the making, at the intersection of the artist's imagination, the work of cultural and linguistic translation and the representation's legibility to the audience. This article delves into the representations of religious content in chosen manga, with a focus on image, text, and panel/frame composition.

**Keywords:** folk religion, text-image, representation, Japanese comics

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Manga is a Japanese phenomenon, both in terms of its roots and development, however, its spread and influence are certainly not limited to Japan as manga has experienced for decades expanding popularity globally (Berndt, 2014). The world of manga is vast, with an enormous range of publications, themes and narratives, and also exceedingly popular, catering to different publics and feeding an extraordinarily successful industry. Manga with religious themes are no exception. The supernatural, religious and the spiritual are often encountered in manga, to the extent that whole series are devoted to such topics. MacWilliams (2012) made a tentative categorization of religious manga into three categories: first, informational manga that teaches people about religious organizations, religious history or right ways of practice in an easily digestible format. Second, the category of manga used by new religious movements, centered on the message of social change and explaining the specific way the given religious movement sees the world. The third category, in which the manga explored in this article fall, is that of entertainment manga, where humor and leisure are central: here, religious themes are portrayed in a lighthearted and approachable manner.

Most readers visit manga for enjoyment, however, while 'manga are commercially produced for entertainment, they also serve as sources for 'imaginative consumption' for their readers, who use manga ideas and symbols to construct their sense of self, the world, and the sacred' (MacWilliams, 2012, p. 596). This medium makes learning possible and fantasies accessible. Readers learn about interpersonal situations, the appropriate expression of emotions, the proper ways of reaping benefits of lessons in life, dealing with changing social norms, as well as they gain cultural information (Kimbourg and Glassman, 2009). Role-playing, emotional identification and empathy are important mechanisms of how these graphic novels work, as readers can live gregariously through the experiences of the (main) protagonist(s). In the case of manga, enriching one's cultural, social and even linguistic repertoire are important side-effects of enjoyment.

Thematically, religious and spiritual manga tends to circle around dominant religions in Japan: Buddhist, Shinto and Christian elements are common. Moreover, folk religiosity and beliefs are prevalent in most manga. Anthropomorphism and metamorphosis, material things being alive, possessing agency and supernatural power abound (Buljan and Cusack, 2015) and are a loved part of most narratives. This is directly connected to Japanese religiosity (Ellwood and Pilgrim, 2016; Prohl and Nelson, 2012; Roemer, 2012), but also a response to the globally increasing demand for a re-enchanted world.

## Methodology

In this article manga are seen as 'cultivated and situated modes of engaging with reality' (Johannsen and Kirsch, 2020) which create and maintain religious world (Jensen, 2017) but can also contest them. The idea that religion is a sensory and mediated practice (Meyer, 2009) but also an 'imaginative practice' which mediates between sensation and

meaning (Traut and Wilke, 2015b in Meyer, 2009) guides our exploration. Learning from narrative approaches to religion we look at how the ‘virtual reality’ of the story-world (Ryan, 2015) is created, as stories and visual aesthetics have a lasting effect in shaping perceptions of reality (Meyer, 2009; Kreinath, 2019). The exploration of how religious narratives unfold and collapse, are developed, subverted, and blended with the sensation of physical time and space in order to be integrated into our perception of the world (Johannsen and Kirsch, 2020) is here of interest, especially regarding the force of visual aspects – the contemporary dimensions of iconographic efforts, efforts at depicting the beyond as part of the manga experience.

This contribution is based on the close reading of several religiously themed manga with attention given to text, images, backgrounds, frames and composition. The manga have been selected on the base of their explicit religiously themed content, being aware that religious or spiritual imaginary can be present also in not-explicitly religiously themed manga. Knowledge about religious or spiritual manga important to international readers has been acquired through engagement with user posts in the online platforms Quora and Reddit during the summer of 2021. The manga mentioned in these posts and analyzed in this article are: *Saint young men* by Hikaru Nakamura, *Natsume’s book of friends* by Yuki Midorikawa, *Kakuriyo: bed & breakfast for spirits* by Midori Yuma & Wako Ioka, *Kamisama kiss* by Julietta Suzuki, *Mushishi* by Yuki Urushibara, *Blue exorcist* by Kazue Kato, *Dororo* by Osamu Tezuka, *Shaman King* by Takei Hiroyuki, *XXXholic* by Clamp and *Yu Yu Hakusho* by Yoshihiro Togashi. This selection is based on the choices of the contributors to the online platform discussions and follows also their reading habits: the manga have been read online on the website manganelo.com in June 2022 in English translation, with a basic knowledge of Japanese. Manganelo is a free web-based library of manga, loved by Quora and Reddit contributors due to its richness, ease in navigating categories and its well-working search engine. The illustrations included in this article are screenshots made from the above-mentioned website. The purpose of the selection of material was based on the wish to understand how global readers of manga are exposed to the topics of interest to this article. Both the selection of material and the methodology used offer only an exploratory glimpse into the world of religious manga, initial steps which should be followed by a more rigorous and extensive inquiry.

In this article the aim is to explore the realm of the religious ‘beyond’ and the entities inhabiting it as has been made visible in Japanese popular culture through reader selected manga reaching a global audience. It is reflecting on both the technical details and the way the reader is involved into the recognition of an encounter of a different kind, while trying to pinpoint the way mediation, through the manga as a specific type of comic graphic narrative adds to the religious content. The research questions guiding this article are thus: What kind of religious content becomes visible through the medium of manga? What are the visual mechanics of the invisible in manga?

## Representing the invisible: concrete cases

Religious beliefs as encountered in manga can be seen as expressions of ‘vernacular religion’ (Kimbourg and Glassman, 2009) as more or less formal worldviews are placed in everyday, mundane contexts. In cultural products such as graphic novels the authors borrow from a so called ‘storehouse of religious concepts’ filtered and used with a certain purpose, which can be artistic, educative or business-minded (Thomas, 2012). Narratives that use religious imaginary do not offer realistic examples of faiths, beliefs or ways of worship – this is both not expected and not necessary, as a free, aesthetic way of depiction and some degree of superficiality and ‘fun’ is incorporated in manga as a medium (Brenner, 2007).

Belting (2005), discussing iconography from the point of view of the anthropology of images explains that depictions ‘do not exist by themselves, but they happen; they take place’ (Belting, 2005, p. 302) both via transmission and reception. That which pertains to the religious realm, the religious invisible is ‘present in their media’ as the media ‘perform the presence of an absence’ (Belting, 2005, p. 312). Media do not only mirror an external world but also makes visible ‘essential structures of our thinking’ (Belting 2005:316). The reader has an active role in making sense of content. Engaging through the visual sense with representation is a direct, embodied way of experiencing. We concur with Meyer when she asserts that ‘pictorial media streamline and sustain religious notions of the visible and the invisible and involve embodied practices of seeing that shape what and how people see’ (Meyer, 2015, p. 333).

Among the analyzed manga recognition based on iconography plays a significant role only in *Saint Young Men*, where Buddha and Jesus attempt to lead inconspicuous, quaint lives in the contemporary world. Although they attempt to remain incognito acting and dressing, their anonymity is jeopardized by moments of unmistakable recognition, such as the bleeding of Jesus's stigmata or Buddha's radiant enlightenment appearing as a halo. Recognizable iconographical details such as the crown of thorns or the hair knot form the basis for recognition and narrative tension, as despite being historical founders of major religions, the characters navigate ordinary existences in Tokyo as young men. In this sense, ‘although the series certainly rewards readers who are familiar with the life stories of Jesus and the Buddha, one does not need extensive background knowledge about either tradition to have a chuckle or even a hearty laugh’ (Thomas, 2020).

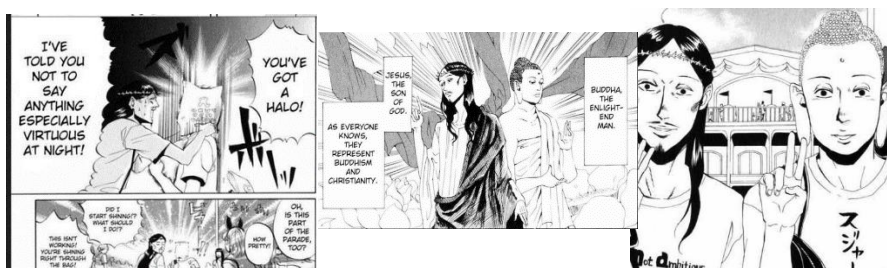


Fig. 1 - *Saint young men* by Hikaru Nakamura

Manga are multileveled media. In Japanese graphic novels text, images, backgrounds, frames and composition have an important role both in constructing the narrative and eliciting intellectual and emotional responses from the reader (Takahashi and MacWilliams, 2008; Shamoan, 2008). In manga storytelling occurs according to the laws of cinematography, with angles, fading in/out and building a visual continuum based upon a sequence. Panels structure both the content and the pace of the story, guiding the eye, but also forming units of meaning in an 'analytical montage' (MacWilliams, 2012, p. 598). Layers of signification are formed by the layout of pages, the rhythm of reading/looking. None of these elements allows comprehension of the manga narrative on its own. This, according to Thomas, is a particular way of viewing which allows the narrative to become 'a reasonable approximation of integral reality' contributing to 'the creation of religious frames of mind by inviting audiences to suppress their awareness of gaps between fictive worlds and empirical reality' (Thomas, 2012, p. 29).

Text is an important element of manga: text can be informative and explanatory, giving context and clarifying images. Explanatory text is directed directly at the reader, and especially important in manga introducing supernatural elements which are not directly recognizable. Most of the manga examined in this article present the religious and spiritual realm of the invisible through textual explanation.

One such manga is *Shaman king*. The main protagonist is a young boy who loves to play guitar and is in all ways ordinary, except being a shaman. Shamans are as 'people that connect this world with the next', while the main character explains: 'I can have spirits possess my body'. Here we encounter the iconography of the ordinary, as the protagonist is both familiar and unfamiliar to the reader, it conforms to norms of youthful behavior yet possesses supernatural skills to be explored through the narrative.



Fig. 2 *Shaman king* by Takei Hiroyuki

In the case of the *Kakuriko's bed and breakfast for spirits* we see different strategies for using text. The storyline centers on a girl with the ability to perceive spirits called *ayakashi*. She engages in working for them to settle the debt accumulated by her grandfather. Explanatory text frame the supernatural character from both sides. While the image, especially the face of the spirit, conveys emotions, making the reader feel its wrath, the text insists on its calm spiritual power, creating tension through contradiction. In another frame, text is placed in a rectangular inner panel explaining the action taking place, substantiated through speech bubbles. The depiction of all protagonists, including both

spirits and the main human character, features faces without eyes but with a mouth directed towards the explanatory text. The text is emphasized in bold, highlighting the dominance of text in the text-image combination.

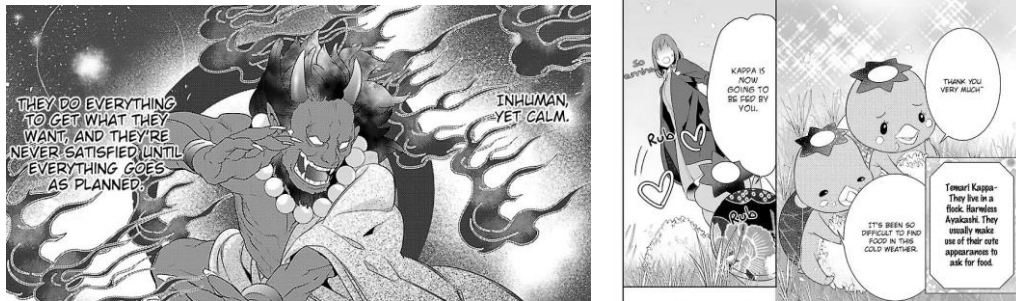


Fig.3 - *Kakuriyo: bed & breakfast for spirits* by Midori Yuma & Wako Ioka

*Mushishi* explains through text the ontology of the ‘other-worldly’ entities ‘lowly, grotesque, far different from mundane animals and plants’ somewhat chaotic, organic and unrecognizable, ‘deformed’ and names them as *mushi*. In the first panel we are not sure if we see many *mushi* or only one, we cannot really distinguish between the elements of the image: just as the text explains, the image is ‘incomprehensible’ in terms of identifiable (although visible) entities because humans do not know what to look for.

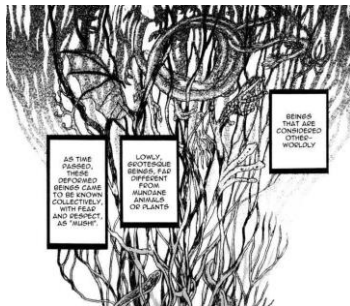


Fig. 4 - *Mushishi* by Yuki Urushibara

Visibility may depend on the level of attention of the viewer, which can be enhanced through explanatory text. In one panel of *Shaman King* we see two children sitting in a bus stop next to each other. The dialogue bubbles explain that one of the protagonists is a ghost recognizable through a semi-transparent body, allowing the reader to see the text written on the bench. Not only the boy is able to see ghosts (contact with spirits being the skill of the shaman) but also the reader is taught to recognize ghost by connecting text and image.



Fig. 5 - *Shaman king* by Takei Hiroyuki

The narrative rhythm is influenced by the management of panel orders, where the succession of panels converses with the complexity of images within the panels. In this sense panels can be compared to literal framing devices, which establish the hierarchy between, and the importance of specific bits of information. The layout of pages in manga is formed by panel sequence, determining the rhythm of the narrative. Panels are read from right to left and top to bottom although some artists might choose to change this form. The shape and size of panels differs per manga.

In *Kamisama's kiss* the order of the panel makes visible distinction and separation between different realms of existence which can unified only by (ritual) magic. A wish being made is listened to 'on the other side' through a door, while humans and non-humans remain divided by panels. Only magic (the ink mark left by a calligraphy pen) can create connection. Panel limits act here as boundaries which can be crossed only with certain conditions. We sense visually that we speak of two different dimensions (in this case of consciousness: dream consciousness versus awake consciousness) through images of portal-like round shapes which offer the most contrast in the image and to which the eye is naturally drawn. The panels, their order, shape and the placing of words in specific places in the panels alludes to different states of being and different realms of existence.



Fig. 6 - *Kamisama kiss* by Julietta Suzuki

Breaking the panel order is a manner of clarifying who does not fit or is beyond the logic of the narrative. In *Yu Yu Hakusho* a non-human entity sits casually on the line of the panels, while a ghost looks from above and beyond at the panels which represent and

contain the human realms of existence. Escaping the order and logic of the panels gives otherworldly, special status to the entities depicted in this story.

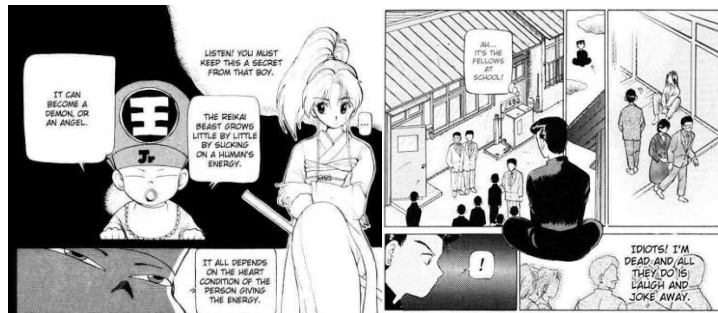


Fig. 7 - Yu Yu Hakusho by Yoshihiro Togashi

In *Natsume's book of friends* three different panels are connected visually. If the first panel centers on a non-human figure with one eye, the second panel on one side of the face of the main (human) protagonist, while the third panel presents a nature scene with dialogue bubbles explaining that the main protagonist has seen 'weird things' since childhood. The reader becomes invested in the story and emotions of the protagonist, but also experiences and learns on his own about spirits. Neither the visual information, nor the text can provide this experience on their own: it is the order and visual regime of the panels which makes the involvement of the reader possible.



Fig. 8 - Natsume's book of friends by Yuki Midorikawa

Additionally, in manga there are forms of text that have a combined visual and informational value. In this article we will use the term textographs to refer to this important category. These words are mostly onomatopoeia which imitate sounds, refer to different types of sensations or imitate visually the direction of action. Textographs represent 'actions, sensations or facial expressions' (Thomas, 2012, p. 161). The way of writing is important, for example when implying movement or loud sounds, the script is written in a slanted, elongated way. Through differences in size, the intensity of the given sound becomes visible. The translation of words pertaining to the category of textographs depends on the choices of the translator of the foreign editions. If the meaning carried by textographs is considered important, the sounds might be transliterated, if their visual value is seen as important, the original script will appear in translated editions.

Textographs occupy a liminal space through which the religious invisible makes its appearance. They visually signal the presence of something important. For example, in *XXXholic* a wind chime occupies the center of a panel. From the movement of the chime, we imply a strong gust of wind, while the sound, written both Japanese and Latin script reinforces the idea of movement. We are prepared for something extraordinary, which is confirmed by a spirit in female human form appearing in the next panel. The next panel shows the reaction of people to this apparition through textographs. Sounds act as a liminal space where the non-human entities are announced and through which they can make their entry.

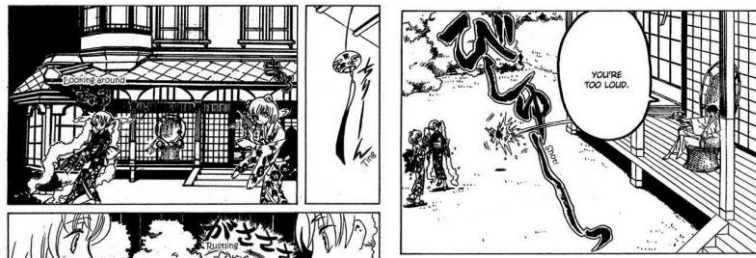


Fig. 9 - *Mushishi* by Yuki Urushibara

A frame in *Kakuriyo: bed & breakfast for spirits* shows the face of the protagonist, surrounded by textographs which fill the remaining two thirds of the panel. What looks like meaningful script transform in a slur, which at its turn introduces the possibility of something mysterious.



Fig. 10 - *Kakuriyo: bed & breakfast for spirits* by Midori Yuma & Wako Ioka

In Tezuka's *Dororo* two panels indicate a beyond human presence represented through textographs, written in an elongated way corresponding visually to the rain surrounding them, with translation added. The speech bubble talk about 'signs from the devils', giving the register of interpretation for the beyond-human presence in the panels. The reader enters the dynamic process of sensing, wondering and trying to make sense along with the human protagonist.



Fig. 11 - *Dororo* by Osamu Tezuka

In *Blue Exorcist*, non-ordinary entities undergo visual transformations. The demon, initially visible in a quasi-human form, dramatically disappears to leave behind textographs that transcend panel boundaries. Barely visible entities are recognized as spirits by the human protagonist. Blurry bodies of different shapes and materiality are surrounded by textographs: the shape of these entities is not entirely visible; they seem to blend in the background and disappear.



Fig. 12 - *Blue exorcist* by Kazue Kato

According to Ingulsrud and Allen (2009) we can identify a specific order of 'reading' and engaging with manga: most readers begin with reading the speech balloons, thus engaging with explanatory text, then look at images depicting protagonists in action, reading emotion on faces and as last, consider the frame background and other visual elements. The speed of reading is influenced by comprehension, while the specific elements of the story are consulted or neglected according to personal need. When it comes to spiritual or religious elements, there is often an element of surprise or mystery that invites further exploration.

*Kakuriko's bed and breakfast for the spirits* maintains mystery through partial visibility. The human protagonist enters a hall filled with spirits wearing (mostly animal) masks, which hide emotions, which for the protagonist and the reader heighten the mystery. A sense of unease is created by the eyes of the spirits closer to the front of the panel which are directly fixed on the reader. Not only the spirits but also the human character look at the viewer, creating a triangle of vision where connection is created across and beyond the lines of the panels.



Fig. 13 - *Kakuriyo: bed & breakfast for spirits* by Midori Yuma & Wako Ioka

The absence of eyes and characteristics of the body is crucial for creating ambiguity and interpretative possibility. In *Dororo*, a black shape, placed in the middle of the panel directs the gaze: the eyes of the viewer try to read the impenetrable figure. While the existence of this entity is certain, its identity remains hidden until the following panel, when the bodily characteristics are revealed, and recognition is ensured. However, we cannot make contact, the entity's eyes are white, blank and expressionless. This visually plays with the realm of the invisible, where we intuit, then clearly see a non-human being, however, a lot remains unclear – to be explored further in the story.

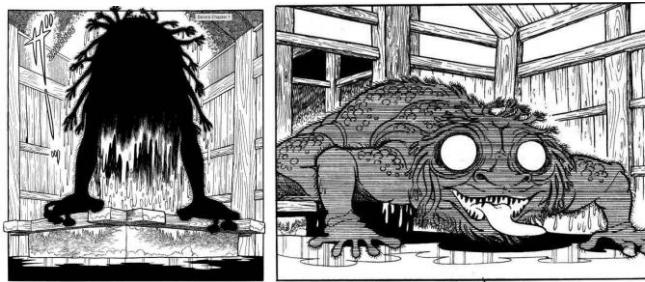


Fig. 14 - *Dororo* by Osamu Tezuka

*Natsume's book of friends* plays with visibility and invisibility by using the trope of shapeshifting. Two cats see Natsume 'running away' and follow him: they are only auditorily present through the sounds they make, however, once Natsume becomes conscious of being followed, they 'appear' as spirit women (drawn with a shaky wavy thin line, which stand in contrast to the stronger lines and colors surrounding them) taking the shape of a one-eyed spirit with wild hair and a woman-like form without hands and legs. Their nature changes during three panels from cat to spirit, with an intermediary stage of exclusively auditory presence, in a sequence of recognition, doubt, recognition. Other types of entities appear along exceptionally large animals: they have claws and unusual features, such as extraordinarily large ears, which identify them as non-human. Shapeshifting is a common feature in this manga.



Fig. 15 - Natsume's book of friends by Yuki Midorikawa

The world of *mushi* in *Mushishi* is portrayed as more chaotic and richer in detail than the human world. In it, the *mushi* are difficult to 'see', what is a *mushi* and what is 'background' is at first glance not easy to understand. The last panel isolates *mushi*, making them recognizable and visible: they are small, almost in danger to be stepped upon might one not pay good attention. Another panel develops the idea of formlessness further: a smoke like substance wraps itself around a human shape, to which the human reacts with fright, asking fearfully what this is. The adjacent panel explains that it is a *mushi*, which 'wraps around other *mushi* and doesn't let go'.



Fig 16 - Mushishi by Yuki Urushibara

## Conclusions

The relationship between text and image as characteristic of most graphic novels and the theoretical difficulties in reading this connection have already been explored (Spanjers, 2021). In this contribution attention has been given to several elements of manga, such as text, images, backgrounds, frames and composition, in relation to the theme of visibility/invisibility concerning religious and spiritual content. As we have seen, manga complicates the neat distinction between image and text with a third element identified as textographs, which is both visual and textual in nature. Textographs play an important role in leaving content open to interpretation in the narrative and calling for interaction on the part of the reader. Consequently, they act as vehicles for the introduction and expression of religious content, we conclude.

First, religiously themes narratives not only guide the interpretation of experiences, but also discipline the senses, modulating the attention (Honko, 1964 in Johannsen, 2020). One learns to pay attention to how things are 'not quite right' and that might happen

through discontinuities in the 'situational dimension of the narrative' (Johannsen, 2020, p. 76) such as discontinuities in time, space, causality, intentionality and character which can constitute a 'proposition for belief' (Fine, 1992 in Johannsen, 2020). The emphasis on sensory clues is in this most important as information relating to sensory details such as touch, smell, or bodily reactions is crucial. Sensory noise can become a signal, and separating signal from noise is being trained through the narrative. In this mechanism of sensory participation textographs are crucial. When translated, they amplify these sensations, insisting on specific aspects of their complex meaning.

Second, on the level of the image we see the way internal images are called into active participation. Not allowing the full details to be seen allows internal images of the reader to fill in the void of representation. This reminds us of Belting's description of internal and external images which 'may be considered as two sides of the same coin' (Belting, 2014). On the one hand 'in the external case, the image is the very medium of an apparition, and invites an interpretation; and, in the opposite way, the image is the end point of a search for interpreting an original, internal experience' (Morgan, 2012, p. 205). Internal images are stimulated by the visual expressions of protagonists who confront the supernatural and emotionally respond to it. The viewer reacts to the emotions of the protagonist and is invited to make sense of the cause of these emotions by consulting his/her own internal images, which are confirmed or made relatable through the flow of the narrative. What McCloud calls 'the silent dance of the seen and unseen' (McCloud, 1994, p. 92) is crucial for the signification of religious content.

If we look at images only, we can make a distinction between recognizable representations and representations which need explanation. In exploring the role of images in manga, we saw that when religious content is involved iconographic elements can be involved in images. Religious characters are recognized through iconographic characteristics, but the rules of representation are broken to allow the playful and entertaining narrative style of manga to surface. Images play with recognizable content by adding an element of surprise: recognizable protagonists in idiosyncratic or strange situations, seemingly ordinary protagonists whose appearance deceives, protagonists acting 'out of role'. The representations are in the words of Mitchell capable of 'reflection on themselves' (Mitchell, 1995).

On the other hand, lack of recognition, creates visual confusion. Unclear, ambiguity or partial visibility suggests rather than informs, which might inform a religious frame of mind in the reader (compare with Thomas, 2012). In manga faces add emotional clues to the meaning of the situation and create a link between protagonist and reader. We participate in narratives through the eyes of the protagonists while the face of the protagonist is 'the site where exchange happens as the intermingling of souls' (Morgan, 2012, p. 89). When protagonists are supernatural it is even more valid that 'the face is a depth that ontologically mingles seen and unseen' (Morgan, 2012, p. 90). These representations and attached experiences might need explanation, which mostly happens through explanatory text, also used for setting the scene or explaining the context of narratives and actions.

Third, we see the use of indirect and direct gaze. Many non-human entities are not looking directly at the reader, while this changes during the narrative, as the reader become more familiar with the plot but also with the specific religious content. Proper knowledge is reinforced by the mutual gaze (see Morgan, 2012), allows for a possibility of building a way of relating.

Forth, representation is enhanced by text. At times images are not expected to talk for themselves. In this case a 'montage of both text and image' (Eisner, 1990, p. 8) is taking place. When introducing religious content, we mostly see that text and image support each other with explanatory text helping images. Here McCloud's interdependence between images and text comes to mind: meaning is attained by the relationship between image and text, and in the case of the religious invisible, is enhanced by textographs.

Recognition based on the image can be reinforced or contradicted through the elements of text and background, which can create tension or reinforce a certain register of meaning. At times text enhances graphic details while it also acts as a distractor of attention. Explanatory text allows no doubt about the identity of that which becomes (partly) visible, new entities and realities are introduced and explained to the reader. Size, clarity, the place of different graphic and textual elements within a frame influence that which can be expected. Colors and contrasts attract the eye, while lines allow for eye movement. In contrast to Thomas we did not find the backgrounds of frames of much importance in the indication of important, or supernatural action (Thomas, 2012, p. 45). More important seemed to be the use of panels. Breaking panel order suggest supernatural possibilities or something special going on. Ambiguity is created through unusual placements of entities and objects within, between or above the frames. In this sense panels and their order organize elements of seeing in characteristic fields or gazes.

Finally, textographs play an important role in both introducing and representing the religious invisible: their ambivalent visual/textual nature allows for the suspense and the simultaneous exploration of multiple possibilities. In religiously themes manga, textographs are the first step towards making visible the invisible. They act as hints which are then explored through the narrative. They invite the invisible to appear to the senses and create suspense through their special relation between text and image. Moreover, this mechanism seems to work transculturally as both image and text are present, but meaning is suspended and available in different ways to different audiences, which is one of the specialties of the manga genre and depends heavily on the choices made during translation.

We can conclude that in the manga analyzed, we encounter a continuous process of portrayal of religious content through different techniques. The ways the invisible becomes visible are complex. With the actualization of religious themes through manga we have entered a process of transformation, adaptation and translation. Meaning is not located in particular symbols but is a function created by the connection of different constituents and the interaction among them, connection based on recognition or learning (Varela et al., 2017).

In the case of the manga which deal with religious content in an iconological way we see elements taken out of their specific religious context and are narratively used for exploring the limits and consequences of their religiosity. Images speak for themselves, but together with the different types of text which adds information and action, they develop into a rich narrative. The pictorial culture of the religiously themed manga links the human to the other-than-human and turns the invisible into the visible, bringing it palpable, visible and understandable (recognizable) within one's direct reach and direct experience. The religious invisible once made visible becomes one of the compelling 'sensational forms' (Meyer, 2006; 2011) that enable the experience and materialization of the supernatural in its multiple forms. Graphic novels become part of a reasonable approximation of reality which contributes to the creation of religious frames of mind by "inviting audiences to suppress their awareness of gaps between fictive worlds and empirical reality" (Thomas, 2012, p. 29). They contribute to the understanding and acknowledgment of the 'beyond' by engaging in direct, experience-based explorations that render the invisible (partially) visible.

## Biography

Carolina Ivanescu is Assistant professor in Religion and society at the Department of History, European Studies and Religious Studies, Faculty of Humanities of the University of Amsterdam. She works on topics connected to lived religion in a contemporary context and is currently involved in comparative research on shamanism.

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