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器面の『らんり』
The Detours of Zigomar / 「ジゴマ」の迂回路

By Abé Mark Nornes / 阿部マーク・ノーネス

The book at hand is a curious novelization of the first two Zigomar films by Victorin-Hippolyte Jasset (1911-1912), a French director known for his detective thrillers. This particular novelization is somewhat unusual for its format. In the silent era, most conversions of film narratives into printed text were shorter and broken into parts for serial publication in newspapers or film magazines. Kuwano Toka's (桑野桃華) novelization took the form of a book. Film historians in many parts of the world might wonder why these films deserve such special attention, as Zigomar is hardly as famous as the other criminal he helped inspire: the notorious Fantômas. However, Zigomar was a sensation in Japan, although his historical importance clearly lies in the censorship debates the films provoked. While this novelization was undoubtedly meant to capitalize on the success of the film, its introduction leaves no doubt that its production was haunted by the spectre of censorship. This lends the lurid tale a curious ambivalence so typical of melodrama. This is one of many possibilities for future scholarship made possible by this precious reprint, some of which I wish to point to in this kaisetsu.

Zigomar, a wicked criminal of the first order, was the creation of author Leon Sazie. The character's initial appearance was in the newspaper Le Matin, which ran a feuilleton over the course of six months from December 1909 to June 1910. The name is a play on the vernacular terms for the Roma people, often pejoratively referred to as “gypsies.” The French words include “tsigané” and “tsigane”. In the initial serial Zigomar leads a band of Roma henchmen, although this ethnic dimension seems to be left implicit in the film version and is completely absent from the Japanese novelization. In the wake of Zigomar's success in print and film, Sazie wrote a second series in 1913, this time in pulp form spanning 28 issues. He returned to Zigomar one more time in 1924 with the novel Zigomar contre Zigomar.

The film version was produced in 1911. It was adapted into a three-reel film by Victorin-Hippolyte Jasset, with Alexandre Arquillièvre playing the title character. André Liabel played his nemesis, the detective Paulin Broquet. According to Richard Abel, the director “retained and even strengthened Sazie's conception of Zigomar as evil reincarnate in the modern dress of a bourgeois gentleman: 'clever, reckless, and thoroughly immoral in his lust for lucre'...a capitalist entrepreneur pushed to the point of excess and completely at ease anywhere he happened to appear in contemporary society.” Because the original serial was over 164 episodes, Jasset necessarily winnowed the narrative down to a zigzagging set of confrontations between criminal and detective. Between these encounters Zigomar enjoys the good life, which he lustily pursues through one crime after another.

The film was popular with audiences in many parts of the world, and Éclair had Jasset make two more films even though Zigomar seems to meet his end in each outing. Zigomar contre Nick Carter (1912) brings in the famous detective in the title (played by Charles Krauss) when Zigomar dispenses with Broquet by secreting some dynamite in the wood for his fireplace. Zigomar, peau d'anguille (1913) brings back Broquet to battle Zigomar in far-flung places like Italy. This was the final installment. Jasset died suddenly after it was completed, and even if Éclair wanted to continue the author made it impossible. Sazie apparently disliked
the adaptations because he felt their characterizations of the title character departed from his own vision.

The original Zigomar arrived in Japan via the distribution company Fukuhodo. An employee sent to Britain to scout for product liked the film and brought it back. However, Fukuhodo sat on the print for some time. According to historian Yoshiya Chieo (吉田智恵男), the company judged Jasset's narrative innovations too unorthodox for Japanese audiences. It is said the company's executives, Kobayashi Kisaburo (小林喜三郎) and Takiguchi Oosaburo (濱口乙三郎), even fell asleep when they attended a preview. Zigomar only saw the light of a projector when a gap opened up in their schedule; the film made for convenient filler. Surely they were surprised at the film's explosive success. Yoshiyama Kyokko (吉山旭光) described the scene in his Nihon Eigaishi Nenpyo:

Every day, the proceeds from the fifty sen admission price totaled from 800 to a 1,000 yen. Its run was extended and lasted for over a month. The manager of the Konparukan at the time, Yamamoto Kichihiro, gave the film the first katakana title in the Japanese film world—“Zigoma”—and made the painters fill the billboards with Zigomar's face and the word “Zigomar.” This raised curiosity and made for record-breaking business. Because of the full theater, three police officers actually had to come just to protect the box office. Since they could not fit all the spectators in the seats, and had to sit some behind the screen, Yamamoto, according to his recollection, was called to the Kisakata police station and given a scolding. The place was so crowded that some spectators fell from the second floor balcony and, given that this was the age before smoking rooms were made available, ashes from one person's cigarette fell on the head of the person in front and caused burns. In the end, Zigomar was deemed harmful to public morals and banned.4

The chaos described in this anecdote is a curious synecdoche for what was (supposedly) happening on the streets. Newspapers ran stories about kids playing the roles of Zigomar and Nick Carter, a curious translation of the typical cops and robbers.5 The title even entered Japanese slang. For example, in 1934 when theater workers walked out on owner Kobayashi Kisaburo (the very same Kobayashi that established his career with the Jasset films), their agit-prop leaflets imploring spectators to avoid his theaters with the line, “Bury Zigomar Kobayashi Kisaburo!” (「デゴマ小林喜三郎ヲ葬
More importantly, groups of juvenile delinquents in the mid-1910s were often called “Zigomar gangs”; interestingly enough, one in Okayama had never seen the movie, but were reportedly inspired by novelizations like this one.7

These kinds of stories crystallized anxieties over the new media of cinema. Aaron Gerow has called the phenomenon of Zigomar “the first example of a truly mass, modern entertainment fad or fashion in Japanese history” and perhaps even announcing the success of cinema itself.8 It seems new media always has to go through a period of hysteria. In a series of Tokyo Asahi Shinbun articles on the Zigomar phenomenon, the vague connection between Zigomar and fears over the media itself are obvious:

Beyond the electric lights that dazzle the eyes and the noise from the bands that tend to stray off-key, both of which lead astray the minds of passersby, the first set of stimuli offered by the moving picture district are the placards painted in strong colors of red, blue, yellow, and purple which incite curious hearts. Men and women who set one foot in this area quickly become prisoners of the moving pictures even before they watch a film, already losing their mental balance.

Audiences stimulated and led on in this way first taste an unpleasant feeling as they enter the darkness from the light. Their state of mind, having lost its balance, eventually falls into an uneasy mood. Here the air inside the theater, inadequate to the ventilation laws, assaults people with a kind of unclean humidity and attacks the sense of smell with tobacco smoke, the fragrance of face powder, and the odor of sweat.

In an insecure and unpleasant theater, what is projected into the eyes of people having lost mental tranquility is Zigomar, Padra, and The Devil. The conditions for extending an evil influence and for causing corruption have all been prepared in these points.9

With this kind of projection taking place it is hardly surprising that Zigomar attracted the attention of conservative forces in society, particularly educators, politicians, bureaucrats,
and the police. The latter banned the film in several locales, ensuring its place in history as the “Zigomar Incident.” As Aaron Gerow has suggested, the fact that the censors ignored this novelization makes it clear that it was this new image-based, theatrical media that concerned critics.\textsuperscript{10}

I will not recount the details of this incident, as scholars such as Gerow and Makino Mamoru have already exhaustively examined it.\textsuperscript{11} Instead, I would like to point to some areas of research that this reprint could facilitate. Much of the research up to this point has focused on the censorship battles; however, this novelization, which covers the first two films, is rich with detail that could be approached from a variety of perspectives. First, it should be noted that it is not evident that Japanese film scholars have seen Zigomar. This should not be surprising, considering how few prints are extant. Richard Abel’s Ciné Goes to Town records only one print for the first film, and it is preserved at George Eastman House (884 meters). The second film is held at the U. S. Library of Congress (481 meters) and the Netherlands Film Museum (980 meters). This means that 51 meters is missing from the original length of the first film (935 meters), and 150 meters is missing from the second (1080 meters). In this sense, Japan’s novelization can provide hints at what is lost from the versions that survived to the present-day.

It will also be fascinating to see what enterprising researchers will do with this book in tandem with the film itself. Clearly, one issue has to do with adaptation and translation, beginning with Sazie’s feuilleton and ending with Kuwano’s novelization and knock-offs like the other two books being reprinted in Yumani Shobo’s series. Complex detective narratives were a well-established genre in literature since the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, with examples such as Edgar Allan Poe’s Auguste Dupin, Émile Gaboriau’s Monsieur Lecoq, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes. These detectives deploy impressive deductive prowess and Enlightenment-inflected logic to solve mysteries and catch criminals. However, when detectives appeared in silent cinema, the novels’ density of detail and complexity of intertwining narrative strands gives way to a focus on spectacle. As Tom Gunning suggests, “The approach of the mystery film genre in the early teens seems to rely more on the power of visual transformations than on the unraveling of carefully crafted enigmas. It remains a genre based on visual effects and attractions rather than intricately crafted plotting.”\textsuperscript{12} Interestingly enough, Kuwano’s novelization sits somewhere between these two poles.

Yamamoto Kiku has argued that Zigomar had an impact on the kyugeki’s emphasis on disguise and transformation, especially thanks to its impressive trick photography.\textsuperscript{13} He also suggests there is a strong relationship between the Zigomar phenomenon and the way shinpa directors set out from studios to exploit outdoor settings for action set-pieces and the spectacle of modern transportation technologies like trains, automobiles and airplanes. However, Yamamoto’s work on this film is rather anecdotal. Analytical work drawing on materials like this novelization and the films themselves has yet to be undertaken.

A comparison of film and novel would also invite inquiry into their differences. There would appear to be a number of curious departures from the original filmic text here. For example, the novelization provides a complex back-story for Zigomar’s lover, Olga. Kuwano presents her as the long lost daughter of detective Broquet, who abandoned her upon the premature death of his wife, her mother. Once Olga discovers this hidden relationship, she turns on
Zigomar and becomes a backstabbing informer for her father. Having been thrown away and turned into an orphan that ends up in Zigomar’s clutches, she has every reason to hate Broquet. However, she makes the unlikely choice to join her father’s cause. Blood trumps the circumstances of her life, and the dubious betrayal of her friends to become the dutiful daughter hints at a possible strategy on the part of the Japanese producers to fend off critics and censors.

The most significant changes occur at the end of the novel. In the second film, Olga dies after being tortured and dragged behind a galloping horse. The novelization has her survive this ordeal just long enough to apologize for her previous treachery and commit suicide. More outrageously, the novelization actually shows Zigomar himself apologizing before his suicide while in captivity. These new endings also suggest the influence of the film’s critics or a proactive attempt at an end-run around the censors. Kuwano’s introduction suggests as much. One also wonders what they tell us about the spin benshi were putting on the film inside the theaters. Indeed, one wonders how significant an intertext the benshi are for this novelization, and to what degree it may be used to understand setsumei in 1912.

Another possible research project these novelizations could facilitate concerns industrial organization. For example, in the Philippines, a dispute over the first Zigomar film was argued before their supreme court and was part of the process of setting legal precedent for the distribution of this new media. Likewise, in the United States, Richard Abel has discovered how Zigomar's success in the Midwest enabled regional film distributors to expand their territories during the “States Rights” battles between the independents and the Motion Picture Patents Company (MPPC). If Nikkatsu was formed precisely in this period and was modeled after the Motion Picture Patents Company, how did the Zigomar films participate in this industrial shift?

One possibility has to do with the creation of lengthier films, as this was one of the strategies the independents used to compete against the MPPC’s monopolistic practice (the latter’s General Film Company showed programs of various shorts at the time). Multi-reel film appeared in France in 1909 with Albert Capellani’s L'Assommoir (735 meters), Napoléon (750 meters), and in 1911 with Cappelani’s Le Courrier de Lyon (750 meters), Gérard Bourgeois’s Victimes d’Alcool (795 meters) and Louis Feuillade’s La Tare (900 meters). At three-reels in length, Zigomar was 935 meters and was a trend-setting film in this respect. Richard Abel has analyzed Zigomar’s narrative structure for the Euro-American production context, particularly in relation to the forced breaks of the reel-changes. A similar project faces peculiar challenges in Japan because of the lack of extant films, another reason why these novelizations are precious documents. However, Aaron Gerow’s Writing in Light lays the groundwork by focusing on Zigomar’s contribution to a reconceptualization of cinema in the early teens.

Finally, Japan was undergoing tremendous social, political, and psychic change precisely when Zigomar hit popular consciousness. Speaking of the impact of Fantômas, which was partly inspired by Zigomar, Francis Lacassin wrote that in Fantômas, “there was an overflowing of the fantastic into daily life which seems to have had an affinity with surrealist preoccupations — an insolent challenge to aesthetic and social taboos, a relentless demystification, an historical continuity with what André Breton called dark humor.” Tom
Gunning and others have also examined how films like Fantômas and Zigomar trade on the transmutability of identities through disguise and role-playing, the strangeness of unexpected detours and false endings, and the continuing work of spectators in an era of conventional flux. How did Zigomar fold the fantastic into daily life in Japan? The three books being reprinted here hold the potential for inspiring fascinating work on narration, the relationship of literature and film, the synergy of new media in Meiji and Taisho (cinema, book publishing, newspapers and periodicals, etc.), genre study of the detective novel and film, and the emergence of new modes of modern identity. It will be intriguing to see what new directions and agendas researchers forge with them.
Notes


2 Abel, Richard. The Ciné Goes to Town (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 360.

3 Yoshida Chieo, Mo Hitoku no Eigashi (Tokyo: Jitsusainsha, 1973), 53.

4 Yoshiyama Kyokko, “Meiji yonjyoun nen kano.” Nihon Eigashi Nenpyo (Tokyo: Eigwa Hokokusha, 1940), 150; quoted in Makino Mamoru, Nihon Eigai Ken’etsuishi (Tokyo: Pandora, 2003), 46 [Note: Makino cites the wrong page number].


7 Gerow, Writing a Pure Cinema, 151.

8 Ibid., 61.


10 Gerow, Writing a Pure Cinema, 70-71.


15 Abel, Richard. Americanizing the Movies and “Movie-Mad” Audiences 1910-1914 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 25-28. While less relevant to the situation in Japan, it is worth noting that Éclair’s success with these and other films helped it bolster its moves into international distribution with offices in Moscow, London, Berlin, Milan, and New York; it also set up an American studio in 1911 to actively nurture its American foothold, but the strategy failed when a fire razed the studio on the eve of World War I. Abel, Ciné Goes to Town, 51-52.

16 Abel, Ciné Goes to Town, 41

17 See, in particular, Ibid., 339.

18 Gerow, Writing a Pure Cinema.
