
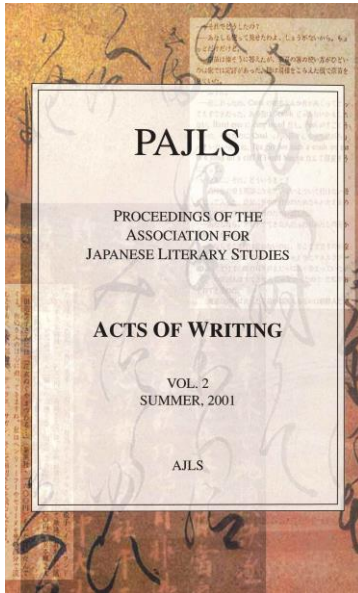


“Reading San’yūtei Enchō’s *Shinkei kasane ga fuchi* (The true view at the Kasane Marsh)”

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READING SAN'YÛTEI ENCHÔ'S *SHINKEI KASANE GA FUCHI*  
(THE TRUE VIEW AT THE KASANE MARSH)<sup>1</sup>

DANIEL O'NEILL

The late 1800s witnessed a proliferation of monsters and ghosts, particularly in the visual and theatrical arts. Among the many forms of popular culture which relied on the supernatural were the kabuki theater and, in a less ostentatious format, the *yose* (寄席 [variety halls]). Unlike the portrayal of ghosts in kabuki, the ghosts of the *yose* came to life in the dramatic recitations of the oral storyteller. A folded fan and a slight facial alteration did at times add to the performance, but the success of a typical ghost story told by the raconteur depended largely on the connotative powers of the spoken word.

When the first newspapers appeared in the 1870s, most of the oral storytellers, initially seeing the medium as a source of competition, responded to the pressure of coexisting with print by making their performances even more theatrical.<sup>2</sup> San'yûtei Enchô (三遊亭円朝, 1839-1900), however, remained committed to the rhetorical orientation of oral storytelling and actively participated in the reinvention of the genre for this new economy of the printed word. In 1884, collaborating with the stenographer Wakabayashi Kanzô, Enchô became the first oral storyteller to have his performances transcribed and published as print literature.<sup>3</sup> The advent of stenography and serialized publications of

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<sup>1</sup> Punning on the word *shinkei* (神経 [nervous disorder]), the title 真景累ヶ淵 can be also rendered as *Nervous Disorder at the Kasane Marsh*.

<sup>2</sup> The Enchô scholar Ôkitsu Kaname provides an account of the initial symbiotic relationship between oral storytellers and the newspaper in his *Meiji kaikaki no bungaku: Edo kara Meiji e*.

<sup>3</sup> Enchô's story was first transcribed as *sokkibon* (shorthand texts), a genre which was later used to promote a narrative style based on vernacular Japanese. Since the popularity of Enchô's stories demonstrated how quickly the public responded to colloquial written language, the transcriptions of his oral stories and the language reform debates are generally seen as having very close

Enchô's oral performances thus cleared a space in the uncertain terrain of early Meiji literature from which a modern ghost story would emerge.

The adaptation of Enchô's supernaturally infused oral tales to print literature both imposed limitations and created possibilities for the representation of ghosts. Published as a shorthand text in 1888, Enchô's *Shinkei kasane ga fuchi* (真景累ヶ淵) begins with a dispute in which a displaced samurai named Shinzaemon kills Sôetsu, a moneylender from the Nezu area. With this murder, Shinzaemon's title is taken away from him. The burden of the crime is then passed onto his two sons who, through fate, come to fall in love with the moneylender's daughters. None of the people involved—the sons and daughters—know about their fathers' past entanglement. The sons of Shinzaemon repeatedly find themselves in situations of betraying Sôetsu's daughters. As the story runs through its course of chance-meetings, betrayals, and deceptions, we witness a drama of revenge and fate played out over two generations as the burden of the crime is passed down in the form of ghostly possessions.

Perhaps none of this—the themes of jealousy and revenge, the trope of ghostly possessions, the moral lesson imparted through violence—would strike readers today as original. Nor perhaps would it have seemed so to the audience at the time. The revenge story is a common motif that recurs in other genres and is a part of the everyday repertoire of kabuki plays. In this respect, Enchô's *Shinkei kasane ga fuchi* is typical.

A distinguishing aspect of the story is the way in which Enchô reflects upon the motif of ghostly possessions with the language of popular science. Critics have variously speculated on the reasons why Enchô frames his ghost story within the discourse of popular science. Most have interpreted Enchô's recasting of the supernatural in scientific terms as a strategic attempt to escape the censorship of a Meiji government bent on propagating the ideas of rational thought. The demands of modernization (if we were to take "censorship" and its

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ties. The most comprehensive study done on the influence of *sokki* (shorthand) on the language reform movement is Yamamoto Masahide's "Sokki shuppanbutsu no genbun itchi sokushin," in *Kindai buntai hassei no shiteki kenkyû*.

hegemonic implications as a metonymy for modernization) was not necessarily experienced by oral storytellers as a limitation imposed on artistic expression. It can be argued, instead, that Enchō and others adopted the discourse of science precisely because it was popular and fashionable at the time of its first appearance. Such an undertaking—that is, the use of popular science—created different possibilities for representing the supernatural, possibilities that redefined and at times transcended the intentions of the oral storytellers themselves.

Within intellectual circles, the proliferation of ghosts and monsters in popular culture was considered unhealthy. Anxieties about how Westerners may interpret this aspect of popular culture specifically gave cause for philosophers such as Inoue Enryō (井上門了, 1859-1919) to push for a radical exorcism of these figures.<sup>4</sup> The critical demand for a reform of fiction and drama extended as well into the realm of supernatural content.

The terms employed by the intellectual elite to debate the status of ghosts disseminated as fashionable buzzwords in popular culture. In the 1870s and 1880s new approaches to mental illness introduced to the public a new language which denied the existence of ghosts. In 1876, for example, public discussions on fox possession appeared in various newspapers, such as the *Asano* and the *Mainichi shinbun*. Fox possession (狐憑き) was reconceived as a disease called *kohyōbyō* (狐憑病). This disease was later translated as *alopexanthropy* (アロペカントロピ [the delusion that one has become a fox]), based on the Western notion of “lycanthropy” (the delusion that one has become a wolf). Such translations and neologisms circulated in newspaper columns and medical advertisements that promised new cures for different mental afflictions. Eventually, the popular discourse on supernatural possession all came to be understood under the category of *shinkeibyō* (神経病 [nervous disorder]) a catchall term that later defined the literary production of this time.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In his public lectures, Inoue Enryō denigrates the belief in ghosts as a form of superstitious thinking associated with the primitive past. See his *Meishin to shūkyō* in Vol.7 of *Shinhen yōkai sōsho*.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion of fox possession and Meiji science see Kawamura Kunimitsu's *Genshisuru kindai kūkan*, particularly chapter 2, 82-100.

The ubiquity of this word was evident in the way the word appeared in the title of numerous works of popular drama and fiction. Two of Kawatake Mokuami (河竹黙阿弥, 1816-1893)'s plays performed in the 1880s made mention of the word.<sup>6</sup> Popular novels published during this time also featured the word *shinkei* (神経) and attempted to demystify the supernatural. The novels *Kokoro no yami kaika no kaidan* (神経闇開化怪談), *Kaidan shinkeibyô* (怪談深閨病), and *Kaidan urami no odamaki* (怪談怨緒環) were all published in 1884 and connected ghosts to mental disorder.<sup>7</sup> These popular novels all seek to domesticate the supernatural, presenting their protagonist's encounters with ghosts as mental hallucinations. In the novel *Kokoro no yami kaika no kaidan*, for example, we have a story of betrayal in which the protagonist abandons his wife in order to take on a new mistress. His forsaken wife then apparently commits suicide by drowning herself. Throughout the story, the protagonist imagines himself to be haunted by his wife's ghost. In the end, we learn that the wife survived and had actually remarried. With this ending, it becomes clear that the protagonist of the story had imagined everything, a clear case of an individual suffering from *shinkeibyô*.

Enchô similarly brings the notion of "nervous disorder" into *Shinkei kasane ga fuchi* in order to suit modern tastes. He does so, however, without completely domesticating the supernatural. Rather, Enchô's ghost story maintains a productive tension between scientific and ghostly explanations. Specifically, the ghost story is framed within a meta-narrative which interprets the supernatural for modern society. Enchô's ghost story thus assumes the form of a bifurcated structure in

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<sup>6</sup> Recognizing the popular appeal of the term, Mokuami uses the word *shinkeibyô* as a means of introducing the theme of ghostly possessions in his *Konoma hoshi hakone shigabue* (木間星箱根鹿笛), 1880, and *Ukiyo seigenkaku yozakura* (浮世清玄廊夜桜), 1884. For a discussion of Mokuami's relation to the supernatural see Yokoyama Yasuko's *Edo Tokyo no kaidan bunka no seiritsu to henshen*.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of these popular *shinkeibyô* novels, see Nobuhiro Shinji's article "San'yûtei Enchô: *Shinkei kasane ga fuchi*" in the *Kokubungaku* issue titled *Edo no kaiki, gensô kûkan* (August, 1992), 110-15.

which a traditional ghost story is put into dialogue with contemporary reflections on the supernatural.

As a part of the meta-narrative, the raconteur's asides present the reader with various interpretations of ghosts even as the story of Shinkichi (Shinzaemon's son) and Toyoshiga (Sôetsu's daughter) unfolds along traditional paths. Enchô writes:

What are called "ghost stories" have greatly declined in recent times. Hardly anyone performs them at the variety halls. Well, there are no such things as ghosts anymore. Things of this nature have all come to be called *nervous disorders*. . . Because of nervous disorder, there is no such thing as fox possession. Because of nervous disorder, there is also no such thing as being captured by goblins. People today completely see any and all frightening things as nervous disorder. But, for those enlightened and eminent people, who have established the fact that ghosts absolutely do not exist, to still insist that "it's all because of nerves" when someone shrieks and falls on his behind after something horrific appears in front of his nose is, after all, rather strange.<sup>8</sup>

While playfully questioning the smugness of those who promote the notion of *shinkei*, Enchô uses the concept to give his story another twist. The encounters with ghosts are presented to the reader as scenes witnessed only by a single protagonist. Unlike the representation of ghosts in the popular novels, *Shinkei kasane ga fuchi* does not conclude with an affirmation that the ghost was an illusion. This refusal to completely recast the supernatural as illusion keeps for the reader the possibility that the ghost was real. On the other hand, the story does not lead the reader into believing that the ghost was absolutely real as the protagonist constantly questions the truth-status of what he sees. The view that sees ghosts as products of mental disorder is thus maintained as well. As such, Enchô allows an ambiguous narrative point of view to

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted materials from *Shinkei kasane ga fuchi* are drawn from *San'yûtei Enchô shû* of the *Meiji bungaku zenshû* 10, 212. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

suggest both possibilities: that there is some sort of mental disorder at work, creating the ghostly hallucinations, and that ghosts do exist.

The ambiguity attached to the interpretation of ghosts becomes a structural problem which the story finds itself unable to resolve. Within the bifurcated structure, the narrative continues to shift registers, between classical ghost story and its commentary. On the level of content, the ghost story unfolds dramatically and according to the laws of karma without regard to modern attitudes about the supernatural (Shinkichi dies because of karma—*innen* [因縁]). The commentary framing the narrative, on the other hand, actively registers the different ways in which the status of the supernatural is contested and reconfigured (Shinkichi dies because of his nervous disorder [*shinkeibyô*]). What does it mean to make these two levels of narration simultaneously available to the reader: one which understands ghosts as aspects of a karmic universe, the other which reinterprets them as a mental phenomenon? One which reads ghosts as signs of an external moral world, while the other raises the possibility of reading them as an internal psychological image? In *Shinkei kasane ga fuchi*, these two readings of the supernatural do not cohere into a seamless narrative, but seem to impose a certain indeterminacy tracked in relation to the construction of a narrative subject, a construction that is not gender neutral. In this respect, Enchô's ghost story seems to have a structural complexity that distinguishes it from the other *shinkeibyô* stories published in the same period. This distinction, however, is achieved through a powerful deployment of gender identities.

The different modes of interpreting ghosts in Enchô's story affect the ways in which the characters Shinkichi and Toyoshiga would be read. The incorporation of *shinkeibyô* into the story has, in effect, invested Shinkichi with absolute interiority. The traditional aspects of the story, which present ghosts as an allegory for karma, however, render characters such as Toyoshiga into a trope of pure exteriority. The tension between content/frame or, on a thematic level between karma/science, forms a dialectic in which Shinkichi is invested with psychological depth as Toyoshiga recedes further into a cycle of continual metaphoric displacements. What are the disinheritings aspects of the story's language when it comes to the depictions of (female) characters as mental delusions? How does the discourse of science contribute to the

formation of the modern (male) subject, a formation which is predicated on a certain fictionalization, if not violent displacement, of the female subject?

As Shinkichi's visions are continually explained as phantom delusions produced by physiological disturbances influencing his psychology, the character Shinkichi, in the course of the story, begins to gain a degree of psychological complexity. The language of psychology employed throughout early Meiji, which implicitly refers to hysteria, explains ghost sightings as delusional effects caused by somatic maladies that occur internally without organic lesions.<sup>9</sup> According to the logic of this discourse, the problem is not with ghosts existing in the world, but with physiological disturbances that exist inside the mind. Such an explanation, of course, presumes the stability of an internal world and its various parts. In asserting a topographical set of fiction that structures the psyche and the body, the discourse of *shinkeibyô*, in fact, produces a new understanding of the internal world and how the mind may function in relation to this world. The turn from ghosts which were believed to have existed *in the world* to ghosts which exist as mental disturbances *in the mind* is a rhetorical movement that simultaneously invests those who see ghosts with interiority, fullness or, in narrative terms, roundness. Shinkichi, as the character who once saw ghosts, now becomes a subject endowed with psychological complexity. In the story, the grammar of "whether or not" returns continually to structure Shinkichi's experience with the supernatural. When Toyoshiga grabs at his collar, Shinkichi "felt the sensation of being strangled even before he could determine whether or not he felt fear." Later in the same episode, we find Shinkichi running away from the apparition, tearing down a sliding door as he makes his escape. When forced to think back on this behavior, Shinkichi tries to reassure himself with the comforting idea that he had probably "imagined" the ghost. But then again, we are told, he was not sure. In these episodes, Shinkichi is put into the position of the interpreter, a position that is not made available to other characters in the story.

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<sup>9</sup> The critic Ishihara Chiaki discusses the emergence of the psychological discourse of *shinkeibyô* in Meiji and gives an interesting interpretation of Sôseki's works based on the discussion. See his *Sôseki no kigôgaku*.



Unlike Shinkichi, the character Toyoshiga gains significance only in the context of a series of metaphoric disfigurements and substitutions. The death of Toyoshiga, the first daughter of Sôetsu, initiates the sequence of bodily possessions throughout the story. Toyoshiga, obsessed with Shinkichi, finds herself so enveloped in jealousy that she wakes up one morning with half her face covered in black boils.<sup>10</sup> She dies slowly in the story, suffering from the pain of her disfigurement. Enchô writes:

The flames of jealousy continue to burn without relent. She becomes more and more enraged with each passing moment. An odd swelling suddenly bulges out from under her eyes. As the swollen pus grows larger, its purplish color turns slightly crimson. Yellow pus begins to seep out from the swelling, clotting up one of her eyes. Nothing can compare to the repulsiveness of that face... She really looked like O-iwa or Kasane from kabuki.<sup>11</sup>

In her disfigurement, she is made into a theatrical figure. Such an appeal to kabuki makes concrete her transformation; it conjures up an image, a narrative moment which offers itself as a theatrical figure. Within this appeal to figuration (that she looked like O-iwa or Kasane), there is, at the same time, a narrative disintegration centered on Toyoshiga. She undergoes a metonymic breakdown into words to the point where she is no longer metaphorically intact. What we have left are the remains of a metaphor in ruins (swelling, eyes, face). Inscribed into the interplay of figure and disfigurement is a deformation of reference, a deformation which at the same time makes Shinkichi's predicament all the more psychologically compelling.

While the discourse of science would explain Shinkichi's experience of the supernatural, Toyoshiga's experience remains

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<sup>10</sup> There are numerous plays featuring a ghostly female figure whose face is half-deformed, the most famous of which is *Yotsuya Kaidan*. For a discussion of this genealogy in kabuki see Yokoyama Yasuko's *Edo Tôkyô no kaidan bunka no seiritsu to henshen*.

<sup>11</sup> *San'yûtei Enchô shû* in volume 10 of the *Meiji bungaku zenshû*, 232.

unaccounted for. There is no attempt in the story to portray her with subjective integrity. Rather, she functions as a trope of doubling and of turning, a trope that guarantees, at the same time, Shinkichi's psychological integrity. The more spectacular her disfiguration, the more psychological and, in a perverse way, the more modern Shinkichi becomes.

Contained within Enchô's modern ghost story then is the supposition of a feminine site associated with the disinheriting premises of the modern language of mental disorder. *Shinkei kasane ga fuchi* presents the modern reader with two stories: a story of ghostly possessions, as it develops without regard to the human entities it possesses, and a story of modern psychosis, which insists on the subjective integrity of its fictional entities.

The ethical and gender problems that such a question would pose can be circumvented, as critics are apt to do, by arguing that since ghost stories do not have "real" characters anyway, the mutilation of characters then should not be taken literally. What happens, though, when a text presents the possibility of reading both literally and figuratively? If the language of psychology is to be taken seriously as a mode of understanding the protagonist's experience, what is there to limit this mode of understanding to only Shinkichi's experience?

By committing neither to the ghostly nor the scientific explanations, Enchô's story exposes the fissure and the fragility of the discourse of *shinkeibyô* in which sexual difference is continually woven back into the fabric of masculine self-representation. The discourse of *shinkeibyô* may be and has been used to underwrite existing gender hierarchies and normative regimes. The indeterminacy brought about by Enchô's incorporation of disparate modes of narration would seem to unsettle the reifying powers of that discourse. In the way that content does not always fit the frame, Enchô's *Shinkei kasane ga fuchi* at the very least offers a critical index of a price paid—the price for having continually to consolidate a functional identity in language at the cost of sexual difference.

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