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Japanese Demon Lore

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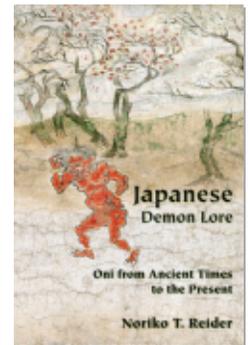
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Sex, Violence, and Victimization

Modern Oni and Lonely Japanese

THE COMMERCIALIZATION AND COMMODIFICATION of the supernatural that we have witnessed in earlier chapters have followed the oni for most of their literary existence. This trend has seemingly reached its apotheosis in current Japanese culture. Thus, oni now flourish in Japanese people's nostalgic as well as futuristic imaginations. While the traditional oni breathe within the newly reimagined oni, the oni of the present age reflect and express contemporary Japanese thoughts and beliefs. Modern authors build upon and modify earlier images of oni and adapt them to new systems of belief. When employing imaginary oni, writers pepper their stories with sex and violence to attract a larger audience. Particularly noteworthy in modern times is the portrayal of oni as victims rather than as victimizers or evil-doers. It appears almost fashionable to see oni from the oni's perspective. Often, the oni of modern fiction are lonesome creatures looking for companions. By portraying oni from the oni's viewpoint and oni as victims of mainstream society, some modern authors essentially seem to probe the Japanese psyche of new generations that, stripped of the traditional communal base such as the village community or extended family system, look for some connections to the collective past. This chapter examines oni representations that evince these trends through Nakagami Kenji's "Oni no hanashi" ("A Tale of a Demon") and Yumemakura Baku's extremely popular series entitled *Onmyōji* (The Yin-Yang Master). Nakagami Kenji's oni is a lonesome creature, looking for a companion. The disenfranchised oni in "A Tale of a Demon" could be an allegory for a community of Nakagami's roots, *buraku* (area of outcast group). Yumemakura's oni are also forlorn, but sensible. Yumemakura seems to gauge what the oni must have felt in the Japanese society of that particular time he describes, but through

a contemporary lens. The changes the authors make reflect and express contemporary Japanese attitudes toward the supernatural, and by extension, give the reader a glimpse into historical and contemporary Japanese thoughts on religion and demonology.

Nakagami Kenji's "Oni no hanashi" ("A Tale of a Demon")

Nakagami Kenji (1946–1992) is an Akutagawa Prize winner who declared that he was from the outcast quarter a year after he had received the Akutagawa Award in 1979. His portrayal of oni in his "Oni no hanashi" ("A Tale of a Demon," 1981)¹ is enigmatic and sexual. Kitagawa Utamaro portrayed an erotic yamauba or oni-woman in his illustrations as noted in chapter four. Unlike Utamaro's yamauba, the dedicated mother of Kintarō, however, Nakagami Kenji's oni-woman is a solitary and lonesome creature, looking for a companion. In that sense, she may be akin to the earlier yamauba of the medieval period, especially Noh's yamamba. Like Noh's yamamba who wants people to know her side of the story, Nakagami Kenji's oni-woman insists that oni are misunderstood creatures. Yet, while Noh's yamamba aspires for spiritual awakening and recognizes loneliness as part of her path to enlightenment, Nakagami Kenji's oni has no ambition for enlightenment, and her solitude is similar to the loneliness felt by modern people who are searching for friendship or a bond with others. Indeed, while retaining many traits of oni including cannibalism, Nakagami Kenji's oni is perhaps reflecting the author's own belief; his disenfranchised oni could be an allegory for *burakumin* or outcasts, Nakagami's roots.

"A Tale of a Demon" is based upon a story from *Konjaku monogatari shū* (Tales of Times Now Past), incorporating character elements from Ueda Akinari's "The Lust of the White Serpent" and "Hankai." Born in the *buraku* community (outcast quarters) of Shingū, Wakayama prefecture, Nakagami intimately understood discrimination by mainstream Japanese society and its government, which, the oni, as outcasts of society, also symbolize. In his work, Nakagami appears to treat the oni sympathetically, yet a close examination of the story reveals that Nakagami is not an unreserved champion of the oni's condition. Rather, Nakagami's perception of oni is oblique,

1 For the Japanese text of "Oni no hanashi," see Nakagami, *Nakagami Kenji zenshū* 5: 315–26. For an English translation, see Nakagami, "A Tale of a Demon."

sometimes double layered, and certainly enigmatic. Nakagami incorporates the beliefs, mythology, and imagery of the oni into his text. In doing so, “A Tale of a Demon” may have been Nakagami’s challenge to the hegemony of Japanese written language and its recorded historical accounts—a vehicle historically *alien* to a majority of Japan’s socially and economically displaced.

Japan is often thought of as a homogeneous society, but a number of minority groups exist and have historically faced discrimination by mainstream Japanese. *Burakumin* are one of these groups, centered on professions considered “unclean,” such as tanners, butchers, or day laborers. Before the Second World War, they lived their lives with virtually no formal schooling, leaving most of them illiterate. Nakagami Kenji was born in such a *buraku* of Shingū, Wakayama prefecture. Under the postwar equal education system, Nakagami, the youngest of his siblings, was the only one to attend school. Nakagami recalls, “I was treated like a prodigy because I could read my own name” (*Nakagami Kenji hatsugen shūsei* 6: 338–39).² About Nakagami’s narrative, Nina Cornyetz comments: “Following the political unrest of the 1960s, an ethnic boom and consumption of multiculturalism enjoyed by middle-class Japanese in the late 1970s and 1980s and the search for original nativities and the exotic within the Japanese heartland became the cultural backdrop for Nakagami’s violent narrative attacks on the myths of Japanese homogeneity” (17–18).

“A Tale of a Demon” follows a man who vows to kill an oni that is rumored to be eating people at Tatsumi Bridge in Ōmi province. Nicknamed Hankai, the man is proud of his physical strength. On the bridge, he meets a beautiful young woman with a broken statue of Kannon Bodhisattva that she is taking to be fixed. She says that she suddenly feels sick; he immediately falls in love with the woman, and after he fails to find the oni, he goes to her house. The house is called the House of Demons and belongs to Chūnagon (Middle Councilor) Asanari; the vengeful spirit of Asanari became an oni because of the unfortunate events of his human life. The fair young woman is also an oni, a maid to Asanari’s little daughter. The ersatz

2 Also, see Zimmerman 1999. Although they are no different ethnically and racially than other Japanese, discrimination against outcasts continues as evidenced by the fact that the area of their domicile is still referred to as *buraku*. This discrimination is pervasive: *buraku* still face prejudice in all areas of Japanese society. The topos of outcast communities termed *roji* by Nakagami is the landscape of his fiction including his novella *Misaki* (The Cape) for which he won the prestigious Akutagawa Prize in 1976 as the first postwar generation writer. See Nakagami, *Nakagami Kenji hatsugen shūsei* 4: 330–34.

maiden tells Hankai that oni are not always out eating people as everyone seems to think, rather it's the oni-hunters who, by bragging of their killing, render the oni's reputation more vicious. The girl cares for her new love so much that she decides to let the man kill her. While lying in bed together, she asks the man if he would love her if she were an oni. Even though he says yes, he quickly realizes her true identity, backs away and draws his sword. In the end, the young oni-woman kills Hankai.

The oni-woman's master is Fujiwara no Asanari (917–974), a historical character who is also recognized as Sanjō no Chūnagon (Middle Councilor on the Third Avenue). In classical Japanese literature,³ Asanari is known as a man who became an oni as a result of a quarrel with his kinsman Fujiwara no Koretada (924–972) regarding promotion. According to *Ōkagami* (The Great Mirror, ca. 1085–1125), despite Koretada's promise to Asanari that he would not seek the position of *Kuraudo no kami* (the Head Chamberlain)⁴ so that Asanari himself may have it, Koretada takes the position. Asanari becomes infuriated by Koretada's thoughtless and duplicitous actions. In his rage, he turns into an oni, swearing to curse Koretada and his descendants and to terminate Koretada's line. He further threatens that anyone who sympathizes with the family will also pay the price.⁵ *Hōbutsushū* (Collection of Jewels, ca. 1178) recounts that Emperor Kazan's (Koretada's grandson) early retirement at the age of nineteen was also Asanari's doing. Moreover, *Jikkishō* (A Miscellany of Ten Maxims, 1252) tells that after being humiliated by Koretada about the promotion, Asanari became *ikiryō* or a living vengeful spirit to torment Koretada.⁶

3 See for example, *Ōkagami* (The Great Mirror, ca. 1085–1125); *Hōbutsushū* (A Collection of Treasures, ca. 1178); *Kojidan* (Stories of Ancient Events, ca. 1215). For the respective stories, see Tachibana and Katō 183–88; Taira et al. 98; and Minamoto Aki-kane 126–127.

4 *Kojidan* writes about the position of *Sangi* (Consultant). Asanari, however, became Consultant two years ahead of Koretada. According to *Jikkishō* (1252), the argument is about the status of Chūnagon (Middle Councilor) that Asanari became many years after Koretada.

5 From the historical viewpoint, this information is not correct because both Asanari and Koretada become the Head Chamberlain at the same time. The *Ōkagami*'s narrator is not concerned about the historical fact. *Ōkagami* is written primarily from the point of view of the successful and victorious family of the Fujiwara clan, and while the narrator is sympathetic to Asanari, calling him superior in letters as well as worldly reputation, he does not concern himself much about a minor Fujiwara kinsman being placed in a negative light.

6 For the text, see Asami 372–74. In *Jikkishō*, Asanari desired the position of *dainagon* (Major Councilor).

Asanari's residence, located on the corners of the Third Avenue was called *Oni den* (Demon's House).

According to the heroine of "A Tale of a Demon," who, as we have seen is Asanari's female servant, Asanari's circumstance is explained quite differently. She explains:

My master is not nearly as bad as the townspeople would have him be. He quarrelled at court with his rival, Fujiwara Koretada, who had formed a regency of his own while Chunagon remained at his former rank. When Chunagon requested promotion to the new regency himself, Fujiwara refused him. Chance had it that Fujiwara died shortly afterward, causing people in the Capital to suspect that Chunagon had sent a vengeful ghost⁷ to torment Fujiwara and lead him to his death. But my master was not of such a hostile nature. Indeed, as evidence of that, two years later he literally wasted away, unable to bear the vicious slanders they spread about regarding his conduct. Thus Chunagon himself became a vengeful ghost and has been living here in the House of Demons ever since. . . . after Chunagon died, he turned into a ghost and then a demon. He haunted the streets at night and there were even sightings of him at court. *That* is what demons are like. They are not forever gobbling people up, only men like *you* who go galloping around in broad daylight, waving their sword and shouting and threatening to kill them. ("A Tale of a Demon" 113–15)⁸

Watanabe Eri observes that the oni-woman's voice denies the story of the historical tale, *Ōkagami*, which describes the prosperity of the Fujiwara Regency's male history recorded in written text, and re-narrates the story in a female voice (143–44). What is most interesting to me about the oni-woman's explanation of Asanari is that Asanari's story is, itself, narrated by an oni; this is an oni's story told from an oni's point of view.

Nakagami, who clearly sympathizes with the oni, seems to want to decode and debunk the oni myth handed down and so readily accepted by mainstream Japanese culture. The story of a vengeful spirit, a doer of malicious deeds, is probably not unlike the fiction about outcasts narrated by such writers as Shimazaki Tōson who wrote *Hakai* (Broken Commandment). Nakagami considers the outcast figures described by Kawabata Yasunari and Mishima Yukio, whom Nakagami believes were born in outcast villages, as powerfully aesthetic and moving (*Nakagami Kenji hatsugen shūsei*

7 To be accurate, Asanari had become a vengeful living spirit.

8 For the original Japanese text, see Nakagami, *Nakagami Kenji zenshū* 5: 323–24.

6: 341).⁹ So it is plausible to speculate that Nakagami wants to claim that one has to hear the voice of the people and characters actually living in the surroundings in order to accurately recount them. According to Nakagami's oni-woman, whose existence is also shrouded in social stigma, oni are harmless to people who are not involved in any grudges or feuds. She further asserts that not all oni are human-eaters, and that not all of them are representatives of pure, unadulterated evil; oni can display a wide variety of emotions and feeling and are thus complex characters with motivations and attributes similar to those of humans. To the oni-woman, the oni are just misunderstood because of the words and phrases uttered by the people in power.

Having said this, however, Nakagami's oni-woman destroys that very humane, sympathetic oni image with her barbaric actions at the end of the story. The act of eating the man completely undermines her earlier lamentation. She

...slashed open his belly with claws as hard as steel and tore off his arms with two sets of sharp fangs which had sprouted above and below her mouth. ...He lay there helpless, gasping and groaning as the demon wrenched off his legs and gobbled them down and licked and slurped and munched at his entrails. Finally, she picks up his head, severed from the torso. ("A Tale of a Demon" 119)¹⁰

How can the perpetrator of such gruesome acts make successful claims on the readers' sympathy? In order to understand this seemingly paradoxical incongruity of words and actions, one might usefully examine this complex oni-woman figure in juxtaposition to an oni described in *Konjaku monogatari shū*, "The Lust of the White Serpent" in *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* (1776), and folk legends.

The basic plot and core framework of "A Tale of a Demon" follows the story entitled "About an Oni at Agi Bridge at Ōmi that Eats Humans" in *Konjaku monogatari shū*. As mentioned in chapter one, the story goes as follows: a man who bragged about his prowess goes to Agi Bridge in Ōmi province in his attempt to exterminate an oni that has been haunting the area. At the bridge, the oni lies in waiting, about to demonstrate another of the oni's supernatural traits—transformative ability. With his greenish skin,

9 Nakagami says that nobody talks about it, but it is clear that Kawabata Yasunari and Mishima Yukio were born in outcast communities (*Nakagami Kenji hatsugen shūsei* 2: 37).

10 For the original Japanese text, see Nakagami, *Nakagami Kenji zenshū* 5: 325.

an imposing nine-foot-tall stature, dishevelled hair and three-fingered claws for hands, the mere sight of him would send most running. But, disguised as a beautiful young woman, he easily plays on the wits of his unsuspecting victim, though in the end, he fails to kill the man, who narrowly escapes. Later, the oni, now disguised as the man's younger brother, visits his house and finally murders him. Similar to *Konjaku monogatari*, the man in "A Tale of a Demon" brags about his prowess, meets a beautiful woman on the bridge, the woman turns out to be an oni, and at the end of the story, the oni murders the man. While somewhat mirroring the story of *Konjaku monogatari*, the oni-woman in "A Tale of a Demon" reflects other elements—she is a sexually active female,¹¹ echoing the supernatural creature of Ueda Akinari's "The Lust of the White Serpent."¹²

It is commonly known that Nakagami admires Ueda Akinari (1734–1809), the author of the *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*. Among the *Tales of Moonlight and Rain*, Nakagami especially likes "Jasei no in" (Lust of the White Serpent) in which Shingū, his birthplace, is a backdrop. He comments that, unlike the *Genji monogatari* (Tale of Genji, ca. 1010), sexuality is exposed in "Lust of the White Serpent" (*Nakagami Kenji zenshū* 15: 176).¹³ The protagonist of "Lust of the White Serpent" is a young woman driven to keep her man's affections at all costs.¹⁴ Her name is Manago, and she is in fact, a white serpent. Graceful-looking Manago is so in love with a dreamy, gentle-looking man, Toyoo, that she follows him everywhere in total disregard of his wishes. In creating "Lust of the White Serpent," Akinari heavily adapted the two Chinese vernacular tales, "Madam Bai Eternally Buried under Thunder Peak Pagoda" and "Strange Tale of Thunder Pagoda,"¹⁵ both based upon a Chinese legend. Akinari also used a well-known Japanese

11 The gender of the oni of *Konjaku monogatari* is not specified; probably it was not considered very important.

12 For the Japanese text, see Nakamura Yukihiko, Takada, and Nakamura Hiroyasu 357–87. For an English translation, see Zolbrod 161–84; Ueda, *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* 155–85.

13 Nakagami named one of his major stories, "Jain," or "Snake Lust," after "Lust of the White Serpent," and its female protagonist is full of sexuality and has a lustful nature.

14 In the end, Manago threatens him, "If you believe what other people say and recklessly try to abandon me, I shall seek vengeance, and tall though the peaks of the mountains of the Kii High Road may be, your blood will drain from the ridges into the valleys. You must not be so rash as to throw away your life in vain." The translation is by Zolbrod (179).

15 For the translation of the Chinese text, see Ma and Lau 355–78.

serpent folk legend, Dōjōji, popular in Noh, puppet theatre, and Kabuki.¹⁶ In Dōjōji, a woman whose passion is rejected by a handsome monk transforms into a serpent while in pursuit of the man. As he hides in the bell of Dōjōji temple, she coils around the bell and burns him to death. In the Buddhist belief, a woman is compared to a poisonous serpent because of her lustful nature. When her passion is not accepted, it is with jealousy and enmity she avenges herself upon the man and murders him.¹⁷ Akinari enhances the montage of both legends by setting the “Lust of The White Serpent” in the same courtly atmosphere as the *Tale of Genji*. Thus, “Lust of The White Serpent” resounds with the exotic appeal of the past of both China and Japan past.¹⁸

Toyoo returns Manago’s affections, but later, a priest informs Toyoo of Manago’s identity and the possible danger to his life, warning him that his lack of *ōshisa* (manliness) is what has allowed him to be possessed by Manago. Toyoo then marries Tomiko, a beauty who has served in the palace. Taken with Tomiko’s refined manner and appearance, Toyoo lets down his guard against Manago and Manago possesses Tomiko, much like Lady Rokujō possessed Aoi in the *Tale of Genji*.¹⁹ Having discovered his *ōshisa*, he follows the instructions from a revered Dōjōji priest to put an end to Manago’s reign of terror. Manago’s demise at the end of the tale follows the Chinese stories: the white serpent/Manago is buried deep in the ground, never to appear again.

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- 16 The Dōjōji legend appears in such works as *Dainihonkoku bokke genki* (Miraculous Efficacy of Lotus Sutra in Great Japan, 1043), *Konjaku monogatarihū*, *Dōjōji engi* (History of Dōjōji, ca. late 15th century). For the respective stories, see Inoue and Ōsone 217–19; Mabuchi, Kunisaki, and Inagaki, 35: 406–12; and Komatsu Shigemi, Yoshida, Shimatani, Uchida, and Oshita, 61–120, 189–94.
- 17 The Noh mask “ja” (snake), used for the Noh play *Dōjōji* expresses that fury with a pair of horns on the forehead, bare golden eyes, enlarged nostrils and split mouth with fangs. It is not human, but possesses evil dragon or snake attributes (Nogami 288–89).
- 18 Yamaguchi Takeshi contends that there is no work in which Chinese sources and Japanese sources are as beautifully mixed and crafted (49).
- 19 When slightly intoxicated Toyoo playfully talks to Tomiko who is facing down on the bed, she lifts her face and replies, “it is more hateful of you to treasure this common creature” in the voice of Manago. This sentence immediately recalls scenes from “Yūgao” and “Aoi” of the *Tale of Genji*. When the evil spirit, believed to be that of Lady Rokujō, is about to kill Yūgao, the spirit utters the same lines. Also, when the spirit of Lady Rokujō is attacking Aoi, Aoi becomes unusually gentle, and there the spirit speaks to Genji in Lady Rokujō’s voice. From this allusion, the reader can anticipate the fate of Tomiko; she is destined to die just as Aoi did. Allusions in Akinari’s text are thus interwoven with the world of the original text. For English translations of *Genji monogatari*, see Murasaki, *The Tale of Genji*.

The oni-woman's surroundings in "A Tale of a Demon" recall Manago's territory in that a supernatural creature follows a man, the target of her passion. The oni-woman-serpent paradigm is indicated at the very beginning of the story from the name of the bridge, Tatsumi.²⁰ *Tatsumi* is a directional word meaning Southeast, but *tatsu* in *tatsumi* means "dragon," according to the twelve signs of the Chinese zodiac, the fifth animal. *Mi* in *tatsumi* means snake, interestingly, the first animal of the Chinese zodiac. The woman who appears at Tatsumi Bridge signifies the snake of "The Lust of the White Serpent" as well as those serpents of old Japan—like Dōjōji—that transform into oni-serpents/dragons. The narrator of "A Tale of a Demon" also points to a snake-dragon-oni continuum as "the girl [i.e., oni-woman] knew that if she were to reveal her true form to him, his heart would be turned inside out, much as a stagnant swamp is burst asunder by a dragon rising from its bed" (117).

Like Manago, the oni-woman feels for the man and like Toyoo, the man called Hankai is charmed by what he perceives is a beautiful girl from the capital. They are enchanted by emotion-driven lust and sexuality, especially in Nakagami's story where physical contact, raw sexual passion and themes of sexuality are highlighted. In both stories, after the first encounter when they confirm their mutual lust for each other, the man has difficulty finding the woman's residence. In "A Tale of a Demon," the man looks for her house in the capital and asks around about Chūnagon's residence on the Third Avenue, but nobody knows where she resides. Similarly, in the "Lust of the White Serpent," when Toyoo looks for Manago's house, nobody seems to know its location. The oni-woman in "A Tale of a Demon" explains that the house the man finally finds on the Third Avenue of the capital is called a "House of Demons," and the master, Asanari, is in fact, an oni. In the "Lust of the White Serpent," after Toyoo believes he has been tricked by Manago, he calls her "oni" and the place where she lives, "a house where oni would live."

Manago is so infatuated with Toyoo that when he falsely proclaims he will become hers, she happily believes his words and comes to his side, transforming into her original shape. As for the oni-woman, she asks whether he would love her even if she was an oni, and he replies, "even if she was an oni." Mellowed by his words, she reveals a hint of her true form. Both supernatural beings believe their respective men's promises of love, resulting in their revealing their true forms. In the end, both men do not carry out

20 In *Konjaku monogatari-shū*, the name of the bridge is Agi.

their promises. Unlike Toyoo, who knows Manago's true identity and is prepared to sacrifice himself to save his new bride, Hankai, in "A Tale of a Demon" does not know the oni-woman's true identity nor, as it turns out, is he prepared to sacrifice his life for anyone else. The man is attracted only to the woman's beautiful human form and has no interest in getting involved with an oni. So when the man sees her true oni form, for lack of a better phrase, "he wants out."

Apparently Nakagami sympathized with Hankai, the male protagonist of "A Tale of a Demon." While Hankai is based upon the main character of "About an Oni at Agi Bridge at Ōmi that Eats Humans" of *Konjaku monogatari shū* as noted earlier, he also reflects Taizō, the main character of Akinari's "Hankai"²¹ from *Tales of Spring Rain* (1809). Taizō is a roughneck with unrivalled strength and is nicknamed Hankai as well. Taizō becomes a bandit after inadvertently killing his father and elder brother, and scaring a widow away with his excessive drinking. Similarly the man of "A Tale of a Demon" seriously considers becoming a bandit if he fails to kill the oni. Akinari's Hankai (Taizō) is no moral paragon; he takes a shrine's offertory box, gambles, drinks heavily and steals, and kills his father and brother as well as several other innocents. He is a wild boy who does not give much thought to things in general.²² Nakagami comments, "the protagonist of 'Hankai' [Taizō] is like a child (*yōjiteki*), for Akinari has kept nullifying the oppression of law and system by the protagonist's positive impulse, which is symbolized by his repeated question of, "So what!?" (*Nakagami Kenji zenshū* 15: 161). The oni-woman in "A Tale of a Demon" describes the face of the man who sleeps with his mouth pouted *like a child*, and feels dear about the man who cries that he would rather die than not meet an oni. "If only he could love her as a demon, she felt, she would be glad to fulfil his dream [of killing an oni] by letting him strike her down." She wants the man to love

21 For the Japanese text, see Nakamura Yukihiro, Takada, and Nakamura Hiroyasu 519–62. For an English translation, see Ueda, *Tales of the Spring Rain*.

22 Interestingly, Nakagami considers "Hankai" as the best villain fiction (*akkan shōsetsu*). Taizō is, however, enlightened and became a revered Buddhist priest. Akinari writes that Taizō is a good example of how "A restrained mind originates the Buddha's nature, yielding to the desires creates a monster" (Nakamura Yukihiro, Takada, and Nakamura Hiroyasu 562). Incidentally, this phrase appears in *Tsūzoku saiyūki* (*Xi you ji*) and describes the character of Songokū (or *Sun Wukong*) in *Saiyūki*. Songokū, a wild boy, causes a stir in heaven when he yields to earthly desires. But when he realizes the power of Buddha and restrains his mind, he becomes a disciple of Sanzō hōshi (*Sanzang fashi*), and attains Buddhahood. See Yan.

her for what she is, an oni, a creature largely misunderstood and according to her, misrepresented by those in the mainstream.

The oni-woman earlier explains that it was people's vicious *rumors* that made her master Asanari turn into an oni, not his grudge against Koretada. Clearly for this oni-woman words have power. The man *says* he would love her "even if she was an oni." So she slowly and cautiously reveals the true self she believes he is capable of loving. It is perhaps understandable that she tears him to shreds when the man reacts so differently from his word. However, it is not easy for an ordinary man to love a woman whose "eyes glitter as though the sockets were two golden bowls... [whose] huge mouth is filled with sabre-like teeth, [and whose] tusks grow above and below," let alone a man who does not think much—just like the protagonist of "Hankai."

Indeed, it seems naïve for the oni-woman to take the man at his word that he would still love her, even in her true oni form. But as is often *told*, there is nothing false in the words of demons.²³ The narrator *says* that she would indeed give up her life. But then again, did she really resolve to sacrifice herself to satisfy his desire or was there something more profound at work here? These questions undermine the text's reliability, and in the end, nobody can definitively know the truth. In the end, the oni ends up gobbling up the man, thus further propagating its mythical concept. Interestingly, in this story, both human and oni are left thinking they are misunderstood. For the man, to kill a strange and ominous creature lying right beside him is an instinctive act without premeditation. When the oni-woman attacks and devours Hankai, she is committing an act of preservation and instinct as well. Eventually the oni-woman does what she has warned earlier, which is attack "only men like *you* who go galloping around in broad daylight, waving their swords while shouting and threatening to kill them."

"A Tale of a Demon" also emulates *Konjaku monogatari* through its use of continuous, long sentences. A compound or complex sentence in "A Tale of a Demon" frequently lasts more than fifteen lines using subordinating conjunctions with a number of independent as well as dependent clauses, probably to make the sentences sound a little more formal. Nakagami often employs the stem form of a verb rather than the more colloquial te-form of a verb: For example, he uses "osowareta to *ii*" (says

23 The idea that demons are honest and not manipulative is not novel. See the section on "Prosperity" in chapter one.

that she was attacked) instead of “osowareta to *itte*,” and so, the sentence continues almost endlessly. Further, like *Konjaku monogatari*shū, there are no paragraphs in the entire story; the story appears and reads like one gigantic paragraph. A page is filled with letters without a space. One may say that there are many other instances when Nakagami continuously uses long sentences, refusing to make paragraphs. But in “A Tale of a Demon,” he uses absolutely no paragraphs or even quotation marks for conversations.²⁴

The written texts were historically alien to a majority of outcasts. Commenting on his Japanese language, Nakagami states, “some Japanese writers point out that my Japanese expressions are strange... the opinion that my written Japanese language which came from the world totally unrelated to written language, is strange... That indication causes me anxiety, and this causes me incomparable anger” (*Nakagami Kenji hatsugen shūsei*, 6: 345). “A Tale of a Demon” may have been Nakagami’s challenge to the heritage of Japanese written language and traditional literary pieces such as *Konjaku monogatari*shū, “The Lust of the White Serpent” and “Hankai.”

Also, Nakagami may have wanted to express the oni-woman’s loneliness, a trait of oni not entirely known to humans. Arguably the oni-woman’s all too human loneliness makes her vulnerable to Hankai’s promise. In the end, despite what the oni-woman has *said* to the Hankai about the nature of oni, the oni’s cannibalistic instincts prevail, and the image of oni remains unchanged.

The story’s poignant aftermath lingers for a while, but eventually too, dissipates in the air, and the oni’s myth continues, as does the myth of *burakumin*. Using the old tales of oni, Nakagami’s oni becomes an allegory of *burakumin*.

Yumemakura Baku’s *Onmyōji* (The Yin-Yang Master)

In Yumemakura Baku’s (born 1951) series *Onmyōji*, Abe no Seimei, a legendary *onmyōji* known for his skills of divination, magic, and sorcery teams up with aristocratic Minamoto no Hiromasa (918–?). Together they solve mysteries and crimes of supernatural origin. The popular series, which first appeared in 1988, has been adapted as an equally successful manga (graphic novel) and a television series of the same title. In writing *Onmyōji*,

24 Nakagami’s admiration for *Konjaku monogatari*shū is revealed from such a statement as “Frankly speaking, neither *Tales of Moonlight and Rain* or *Tales of Spring Rain* surpasses *Konjaku monogatari*shū” (*Nakagami Kenji zenshū* 15: 163).

Yumemakura remarks that he has always wanted to write about stories of the Heian period when darkness and oni still reside in the living space of people (*Onmyōji* 331).²⁵ While *Onmyōji*'s setting is indeed the Heian period, Yumemakura's representations of oni and the development of his human characters are quite contemporary. Similar to Nakagami Kenji's oni, Yumemakura's oni are lonely, misunderstood beings. But while Nakagami's oni—stigmatized supernatural beings—are perhaps a projection of his personal experience, community, and anger, Yumemakura's oni are primarily for the entertainment of a mass audience as well as the author himself. Yumemakura is quite skilled at touching a chord of empathy with Japanese readers and viewers.

Just as Nakagami did, Yumemakura builds upon or modifies earlier images of oni and historical characters to make his series appeal to a contemporary audience. Regarding the protagonist, Abe no Seimei, the historical Seimei's youthful years correspond to the period of Engi-Tenryaku (901–947), a time of prosperity for *onmyōdō*, during which excellent practitioners of *onmyōdō* arose. In this time, practitioners of *onmyōdō*, which included *onmyōji*, were recognized imperial servants. Their primary duties were to observe and examine almanacs, the heavens, and astrological charts for use in divination.²⁶ As noted in chapter one, the Engi-Tenryaku era was a time when the official practitioners of *onmyōdō* were consolidating their own power by serving the Fujiwara (Murayama, *Nihon onmyōdō sōsetsu* 112, 172). These court practitioners of *onmyōdō* came to be known as the aristocracy's private “cat's paws” (Murayama, “Kyūtei onmyōdō no seiritsu” 378, 385).

One anecdote often used to prove Seimei's prescient ability concerns Emperor Kazan's (968–1008) abdication. According to *Ōkagami*, in 986 Emperor Kazan was set to renounce his throne as the result of the political machinations of Fujiwara no Kaneie (929–990). Kazan's abdication would allow Kaneie to rule as regent when Kaneie's six-year-old grandson, Crown Prince Yasuhito, ascended the throne. When Emperor Kazan's entourage, on its way to a temple, passed Abe no Seimei's house “they [heard] the diviner clap his [Seimei's] hands and exclaim: ‘The heavens foretold His Majesty's abdication, and now it seems to have happened.’”²⁷ Suwa Haruo, however,

25 Yumemakura's fictional Seimei claims that his profession will be lost without oni.

26 See the section on “The *Onmyōdō* Line” in chapter one.

27 Translation by McCullough. *Ōkagami: The Great Mirror* 81. For the original text, see Tachibana and Katō 46.

writes that for Seimei who served Kazan closely, it would not have been difficult to predict Kazan's abdication (20). Some, including Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, even hypothesize that Seimei most likely knew the political circumstance in court and took part in Fujiwara Kaneie's family plot to depose Emperor Kazan (see Shibusawa, "Mittsu no dokuro" 175). This incident happened when Seimei was in his mid-sixties. Be it through psychic powers or political connections, Abe no Seimei became larger than life soon after his death.²⁸

Before Yumemakura's *Onmyōji*, Abe no Seimei was traditionally depicted either as an old man, as he sporadically appears in the classical Japanese literature, or a young boy as portrayed in plays of the early modern period. In the current Heisei era, Yumemakura's Seimei is a beautiful, good-looking adult with thin red lips. He is a sophisticated, handsome hero endowed with supernatural powers, solving the mysterious crimes of the nostalgic Heian period and facing his demonic adversary.

The world of *Onmyōji* is frequently that of *Konjaku monogatari*shū, Noh plays such as *Kanawa*, *Ugetsu monogatari*, and other classical literature. Yumemakura's approach to the classical text is simple and direct. Yumemakura substantiates the contexts and explanations left unexplained in the original stories so that the readers do not have to read between the lines. Filling the gaps, Yumemakura presents the oni's perspective. This important feature differs from classical literature where the oni's stance is overlooked by authors and readers. Yumemakura often portrays oni in a sympathetic light, enabling readers to identify with these marginalized creatures. At the same time Yumemakura peppers the plots of these old stories with a mixture of sex, pathos, and grotesque imagery involving the oni and their emotions. Many of his oni are the marginalized spirits of humans trapped in the world of the living by the overpowering force of unrequited love.

One example is "Genjō to iu biwa, oni no tameni toraruru koto" (*A Biwa [Pipa] called Genjō is Stolen by an Oni*)²⁹ which is based upon the story of the same title in *Konjaku monogatari*shū.³⁰ The episode in *Konjaku*

28 For more information about *onmyōdō* and Abe no Seimei's descendants in English, see Butler.

29 The text is found in Yumemakura, *Onmyōji* 7–78. For an English translation, see McGillicuddy 1–57.

30 For the text of "Genjō to iu biwa, oni ni toraruru koto" in *Konjaku monogatari*shū, see Mabuchi, Kunisaki, and Inagaki 37: 308–11. For an English translation, see Ury 146–49.

*monogatari*shū is a straightforward narrative; a prized *biwa* called Genjō disappears from the imperial palace. While the emperor deeply laments the loss, an enchanting melody of Genjō is heard from the direction of Rashō Gate. Minamoto no Hiromasa, an excellent musician, follows the tune, and discovers an oni at the gate playing the missing *biwa*. (The reader is never quite sure who this oni is, let alone why the oni steals the Genjō and is playing it at Rashō Gate.) Hiromasa asks the oni to return the *biwa*, an imperial treasure, and the oni obeys. Ever after, the *biwa* acts like a living being—it plays if it feels like it.

Yumemakura's *Onmyōji*, in contrast to the original, gives background information and flavor to the tale, fleshing it out in the process. The narrative is much more detailed. To begin with, the oni is the spirit of a foreign *biwa* maker who created the Genjō and died years before—one hundred twenty-eight years to be precise. That the oni is a spirit of the dead follows a Chinese interpretation discussed in chapter one. Further, this oni is identified as foreign born, thus reinforcing the view that the oni is the marginalized other. Thus, Yumemakura uses a conventional image of oni in his text. The oni does not rest peacefully because of his attachment to his homeland (India) and his wife, so he steals the *biwa* he made to console himself with music. Yumemakura creates a story behind the story and the oni is no longer so mysterious.

While the oni in *Konjaku monogatari*shū obeys a command to return the instrument to the emperor, *Onmyōji*'s oni requests a woman in trade. The oni explains to Abe no Seimei, who does not appear in the original episode of the *Konjaku monogatari*shū, that while strolling in the imperial palace, he has fallen in love with someone who bears a remarkable resemblance to his wife. The oni agrees to return the *biwa* in exchange for a night spent with the woman. Thus, the oni is endowed with human feelings and desires, filling the episode with sex and violence.³¹ Abe no Seimei accedes

31 In *Onmyōji*, the idea that the oni recognized the heavenly power of the emperor and returned the Genjō is absent. Obviously simply returning the *biwa* would not be exciting. However, it is also possible that the change is a conscious or unconscious reaction to something deeper—perhaps the admission that Emperor Hirohito (Showa Emperor) is not a god, and thus would be unable to command the oni. Yumemakura has Seimei regularly refer to the emperor as “that man.” To call the emperor “that man” was unthinkable in those days—even today it does not sound very respectful. This phraseology may reflect the author's (and perhaps many readers') attitude toward the emperor or royal family in contemporary society.

to the oni's request and the two agree that there will be no tricks during the one-night affair. But the woman's brother told his sister to take the oni's head with a hidden knife, and as she tried to do so, she was torn asunder and eaten by the oni.

The grotesque appearance of the oni is in accord with convention and so is its cannibalism. Yet, it is important to note that instead of being outwardly violent or antagonistic towards the other characters, the oni first reveals his weaknesses. He shows sadness and remorse for losing his wife and having to live as an oni. Yumemakura casts the oni in a pitiable light as the reader is informed of his love for his wife and his tragic death. While the fact that he stole the *biwa* remains unchanged, the fact that he is a creator of the very same *biwa* makes him more sympathetic. It is the human who has broken the promise that caused the oni to revert to his evil nature and thus prey on innocent humans (i.e., the woman who resembles his late wife). In the process of devouring the woman, the oni says "how sad..." (73). It sounds rather comical for a devouring oni to lament, "how sad..." but since the woman's state of mind is never described, there is not much opportunity for the reader to feel empathy or sympathy for her or for her brother who intervened in Seimei's plan and foiled it. If one pauses a moment and gives it some thought, it seems quite natural for the woman's brother to botch the plan. As the brother says, it would ruin the reputation of the family if a rumor that his sister made love with an oni spreads. (It is noteworthy that how his sister must have felt is completely absent from anybody's thoughts). Yet, the reader is asked to sympathize with the oni rather than the woman or her brother because the oni's loneliness is the focal point of the story.

In the end it is revealed that the spirit of the *biwa* maker possessed a dying dog earlier and transformed into the conventional masculine oni image. After the oni-dog is killed by the brother, the soul of the *biwa* maker comes to possess the royal *biwa* itself. That is why, Yumemakura writes, Genjō acts like a living creature—an explanation absent from the *Konjaku monogatarihū*.

Another example of Yumemakura's gap bridging is "Kanawa" (Iron Tripod), which is based upon the Noh play, *Kanawa*.³² In fact, *Onmyōji's* "Kanawa" follows the Noh text so closely that it even utilizes the language conventions of the Noh play—for example, he inserts narratives between the lines of the lyrics to explicate the Noh's ornate diction. Yumemakura

32 For the gist of Noh *Kanawa*, see the section "Noh Kanawa" in chapter three.

comments that the Noh play *Kanawa* does not sufficiently describe the woman who turned into an oni, especially the play's closing, so he wrote his "Kanawa" to offer a clear ending or explanation of that oni-woman (*Onmyōji: Namanari-hime* 385–86). At the end of the Noh text, the oni-woman proclaims that she will wait for her revenge, and the chorus recites, "Only her voice is clearly heard; the demon now is invisible. She has passed beyond the sight of men, an evil spirit beyond the sight of men" (Eileen Kato 204). Yumemakura explains what is meant by the "invisible oni" and what happens to the woman. In comparison with the Noh play, Yumemakura's characters are more nuanced, as are their dealings with each other and the events they encounter. Like the mortal characters, Yumemakura's oni are nuanced as well. By presenting the woman-turned-oni as the victim of a philandering husband, Yumemakura presents an oni whose actions are at least understandable, if not necessarily deserving of the reader's sympathy.

In his work, Yumemakura gives the man and his former wife names for the sake of convenience and adds other personal touches. The man's name is Fujiwara no Tameyoshi, and the woman, Tokuko. Yumemakura makes a significant change in the treatment of oni in Tokuko's attack scene. In the Noh play, the woman has already become an oni when she appears in the room to attack her former husband—this is the beginning of the second act and the woman appears on the stage wearing either a *hannya* (she-demon) mask or a *namanari* mask.³³ Furthermore she does not realize that she is tormenting a doll throughout the play. In contrast, Tokuko is still a human shape when she comes to Tameyoshi's residence—she is wearing a tripod, but she is a human. Importantly, she realizes that she is assaulting a doll when Hiromasa, the musician mentioned above, utters a sound of surprised disgust. When she becomes aware that Hiromasa, Seimei, and Tameyoshi have seen her grotesque appearance and violent behavior, she turns into an oni. Tokuko says, "Did you see me? You looked at this wretched appearance, didn't you? ... how shameful, my miserable appearance" (*Onmyōji: Tsukumogami no maki* 79–80). Then, for the first time, the horns start to grow on her forehead and she begins to transform to an oni.³⁴ As seen in chapter one, Yomotsu-shikome, an origin of Japanese oni, was born out of a woman's feeling of shame about her repulsive appearance and being

33 A *namanari* mask represents a being in the process of becoming a full-fledged oni. This is symbolized by small horns on its forehead (See Nogami 299).

34 This is literally visualized in Takita Yōji's film of the same title, *Onmyōji*. Part of the film version of *Onmyōji* follows the plot of "Kanawa."

watched by a man; Tokuko follows this pattern in which shame and anger turn a woman into an oni. For a woman who tries to maintain decorum, to be watched in a shameful act is powerful enough motivation to transform her into a different being. As her respectability is broken in the eyes of others, her jealousy and anger surface. This motivation follows convention, but while the classical literature omits the transformation completely, Yumemakura graphically describes its process, capturing the reader's attention with a gripping portrayal of *onification*. Failing to kill Tameyoshi, and overcome by shame, Tokuko commits suicide. In her dying moment, she asks Hiromasa to play the flute whenever she is overwhelmed by her desire to eat Tameyoshi. She says that his flute will appease her anger. Since then when the oni appears beside Hiromasa, Hiromasa plays the flute. The oni listens to the flute without saying a word and disappears. This is Yumemakura's explanation of what happens to, or what is meant by the "invisible oni."

It is important to notice that while Tokuko-oni is still possessed by anger and has a predilection for cannibalism, she offers a solution to her own problem and therefore causes no harm to anyone. In that respect, she is sensible, conscientious and restrained. Tokuko-oni is also more self-reflective. She blames herself for having fallen in love with Tameyoshi. She says, "it is I who fell in love with you. Nobody told me to do so. ... Not understanding that you play double, I pledged and shared a bed with you. ... I know it's all my fault, but..." (*Onmyōji: Tsukumogami no maki* 76).

Tokuko-oni's assault is quite vicious, but as her environment and feelings are amply explained by both the omniscient narrator and Tokuko-oni herself, the reader can sympathize with her. In Yumemakura's *Namanarihime* (2003), which further expands the story of "Kanawa," Tokuko's situation becomes more pitiful and deserving of sympathy, for she is framed by her husband, belittled by his new wife, and thus marginalized by society in general. (At the same time, her violence becomes more escalated and graphic.) Notwithstanding their violence, Yumemakura's female oni are portrayed as sensible and understanding.

The heroine-oni in "Oni no michiyuki" (Oni's Journey [to the Palace]) is also sensible, understanding, and patient. The oni's identity is the unsaved spirit of a neglected woman.³⁵ Unlike the previous examples, this story appears to be unique to Yumemakura. Fifteen years before her death, the emperor visits her, promising that he will come back to take her to the palace.

35 For the text, see Yumemakura, *Onmyōji* 233–96.

She clings to his promise, but the emperor never returns. Upon her death, she starts her journey to the palace at night to realize the unfulfilled trust. She appears as a beautiful woman of about twenty-eight years of age with a pleasant fragrance. Challenged by people on the street, however, she changes into a blue-skinned oni with a masculine hairy arm, killing and eating those who challenge her. The sudden transformation from a beautiful woman to a masculine oni is reminiscent of the oni in *Konjaku monogatari shū*, particularly the one in the familiar story of Watanabe Tsuna and an oni at Modoribashi Bridge.³⁶ The oni in “Oni no michiyuki” is a victim of the emperor’s utter neglect. Unlike the fierce oni of classical literature, however, she happily goes to the other world upon the emperor’s acknowledgement of his neglect and his sincere remorse. Before her disappearance, the oni’s anguish and marginalization serve to engender the reader’s sympathy. In the end, the oni is not an evil creature bent on harming people, but someone who simply wants acknowledgement after fifteen long years of abandonment.

Yumemakura’s view of oni is replicated in the dialogs of Seimei and Hiromasa, which in turn seem to mirror the concept of oni-*yōkai* delineated by the folklorists and anthropologists. Yumemakura’s Seimei claims that *kami* and oni are essentially the same, and their naming depends upon human perception. When a phenomenon is perceived as beneficial, it is considered the act of a *kami* whereas negative occurrences are labelled as those of an oni. Thus, Seimei claims that “oni and *kami* don’t exist without involving humans,” and further explains that “be it *kami* or oni, human minds produce them” (*Onmyōji: Hōō no maki* 57). Commenting on the water deities enshrined in the Kibune Shrine, Seimei says, “Originally, water is just water. People call it good or evil because both good and evil lie on the side of humans.” Hiromasa responds, “You mean, oni is a product of humans” (*Onmyōji: Tsukumogami no maki* 86–87). Further, Seimei and Hiromasa discuss that oni hide and live in human *kokoro* (hearts or souls) (*Onmyōji: Ryūteki no maki* 133). The expression “kokoro no oni” first appeared in the *Kagerō nikki* (The Gossamer Years, ca. late 10th century) and became a topic of discussion in the Heian women’s literature (Knecht et al., “Oni’ to ‘mushi’” 286). Through its symbolism it provides a psychological explanation for the discord and conflict of emotions in one’s heart that sometimes accompany marital relationships and relations between men and women

36 See the section “Transformation Power” in chapter one.

in general.³⁷ The discord caused by unhappy marital relationships ripples in the hearts of women, described symbolically as *oni* in the Heian literature. When women are overwhelmed by this discord they show the physical appearance of *oni*. This occurs in the Noh play as well as in Yumemakura's "Kanawa." In the latter case, as noted before, the graphic description of her transformation, tantamount to horror fiction, becomes a major focal point.

The view of *oni* as a product of the human psyche and the difference between *oni* and *kami* as one of human perspective become more prominent in the film, *Onmyōji* II (2003). In the film the *oni* is a human boy named Susa. Against his will, he is transformed into an *oni* in order to carry out the wishes of his father, the chieftain of the Izumo clan. Susa-*oni* devours various people to obtain great power. When Susa says, "I don't want to be an *oni*," his father corrects him by claiming that "No, you are going to be a *kami*." Throughout the film, the other characters who know Susa realize his humanity, and rather than trying to defeat him, set about to help him, even when he is beyond control and attacking innocent victims. His sister knows that he is transformed and out to kill her, but even so she ventures into harm's way to help him. This film turns the *oni* into a victim. This victimization of *oni* is a modern tendency; modern interpretations go deeper into the *oni*'s motivations and feelings, creating a more complex view of these creatures by humanizing them. At his core, Susa is a young man capable of evoking a powerful sympathetic emotional response from the audience of the film. The audience sympathizes with the *oni* as an outsider or loner who is unable to belong to society at large.

This sympathy and even empathy for *oni* seem to reflect modern people's affinity for the *oni*-like existence. In other words, modern authors take the *oni* as a being tantamount to a human and attempt to understand their behavior and feelings—in doing this the authors attempt to pry out their own human motivations and needs. Contemporary Japanese consciously or unconsciously view themselves as lonely individuals or marginalized creatures like *oni*. They are perhaps trying to find a niche in society, just as the *oni* are trying to do.

Onmyōji has been a driving force in a recent "Abe no Seimei boom" that has spawned a number of books on Seimei as well as on *onmyōdō*. The shrines endowed with the name of Abe no Seimei are popularly visited

37 For various meanings of "kokoro no *oni*" and its origin, see Knecht et al., "'Oni' to 'mushi'."

by countless young female *Onmyōji* fans.³⁸ Indeed, just a decade ago, the Seimei Shrine in Kyoto was quite obscure and hard to locate. But the popularity of Abe no Seimei has brought numerous visitors to the shrine, and the shrine has added new offices, renovated the buildings, and is now a tourist spot in Kyoto (Seimei jinja 47). Whether or not this represents a renewed interest in the religious aspect of these shrines, Abe no Seimei supposedly brings material wealth with him, and oni are heavily involved as harbingers of wealth. Be it Abe no Seimei or oni, the reality is that both are commodities sold for their entertainment value. Perhaps people visit the shrines associated with Seimei looking to buy access to the scenes of the stories and to immerse themselves in that time and space—to experience in the three dimensional physical space what they had imagined from the stories written on two dimensional paper—and get in touch with some romantic time and space that they imagine existed in Japan’s past, much as people visit a theme park like Disney World to immerse themselves in the Disney stories. Make no mistake, *Onmyōji* offers all the classic features of a good action film: magic, music, fighting, demons, royalty, heroic men and beautiful women, and a few nice twists in the middle and at the end of the tale.

While readers sympathize with oni or idolize Seimei, perhaps the popularity of Seimei and oni simultaneously reveals people’s continued interest in something unknown and inexplicable about life, if not in an established religion proper. As fantastic and outrageous as Yumemakura’s stories may be, the reader must consider the existence or evil doings of oni somehow as an extension of reality, whether it is reality of the imagined past or of the present. The notion that this could happen to someone who exhibits similar behavior makes the reader feel close to the stories and makes the stories more exciting. It may be likened to “rubbernecking,” not in the sense of traffic accident, but as a human trait of morbid curiosity. What is it that makes the mysterious (and shocking) events of *Onmyōji* somehow believable? People’s affinity for doomed souls who cannot go to the other world—an oni’s fate—could be a possible answer. Iwasaka and Toelken write:

[D]eath is not only a common subject in Japanese folklore but seems indeed to be the *principal* topic in Japanese tradition; nearly every festival, every ritual, every custom is bound up in some way with relationships between the living and the dead, . . . the hypothesis that death is

38 A manga version of *Onmyōji* authored by Okano Reiko (based upon Yumemakura’s *Onmyōji*) increased Abe no Seimei’s popularity among female readers.

the prototypical Japanese topic, not only because it relates living people to their ongoing heritage, but also... because death brings into focus a number of other very important elements in the Japanese worldview: obligation, duty, debt, honor, and personal responsibility. (6)

Indeed, complex Japanese funeral rituals and year-round ceremonies for the dead speak of how important the dead and their memories are for family and community. The bereaved family wishes the dead to go on to the other world peacefully. Souls lingering on earth after *shijū kunichi* (forty-nine days)—the limit according to Buddhism, when the dead are supposed to go to the other world—are believed to be dangerous to the living. Yumemakura's *Onmyōji* often describes violent death, and the culprit of the mysterious crimes is often an oni unable to go to the other world peacefully. The oni in “Genjō,” for example, is a soul who lingers on earth because of his attachment to the musical instrument. In “Kanawa,” the invisible oni remains on earth still wanting to kill Tameyoshi. The oni in “Oni no michiyuki” stays on earth to realize her wish (while crushing those who meet her on her way to the palace). The concept of the dead lingering on earth for unfinished business is familiar among Japanese, deeply rooted in the mixture of Buddhist and Shinto beliefs. If something unfortunate happens to someone, is it because an evil entity—like an oni—is working to cause it? If this is the case, wouldn't it be nice if a person like Abe no Seimei could solve the mystery?

Shimo Yoshiko (b. 1952) is a medium and healer who practices a line of *onmyōdō*, speaks on TV, and publishes how-to books about improving the individual lives of Japanese people. Her books, such as *Ryūseimei* (Flow Life, 2002–),³⁹ and interviews answer questions about what happens to one after death, or why certain (unfortunate) things happen. She explains that there is a higher force working in the universe and that it controls one's destiny. She attempts to explain how one works within the web of destiny. These concerns and questions fall within a religious field of thought. Diviners, many of them fortunetellers or prognosticators, continue to do good business, such as the contemporary figures Shinjuku no haha (mother in Shinjuku) and Ōizumi no haha (mother in Ōizumi).⁴⁰ The fact that there are still quite a number of people who live on the profession of exorcism or

39 Her books about *Ryūseimei* (Flow Life) have been published every year since 2002.

40 Some use the date and time of a birth while others may use tools such as tarot cards, crystal balls, or an abacus in the practice. Many of the visitors appear to be females who wish to know about their marriage prospects and the future of their working situations.

healing suggests that numerous people still believe in exorcists, healers, and religious workers. Among interesting news of Japanese religious belief in recent years was that unlawful dumping of garbage ceased as soon as a small (imitation) *torii* (Shinto shrine gate) was placed on the area.⁴¹ It seems that while contemporary Japanese may not necessarily claim to be familiar with religious doctrine, or firmly believe in established religions, they do believe in things inexplicable and supernatural.⁴² Japanese are curious about spiritual or supernatural occurrences and manifestations so they seek some information or guidance from healers, mediums, diviners or religious leaders.

In a wider interpretation, this *Onmyōji* boom seems to manifest people's desire to understand why and how certain things happen that cannot be explained logically or scientifically. While *Onmyōji* readers may seek tales of mystery, sex, violence, romance, etc., perhaps they also feel good about some causal relationships being explained. Many young Japanese women would doubtless look at Abe no Seimei as some kind of Prince Charming. But some Japanese may view the character Abe no Seimei as they view healers, mediums, or diviners. Abe no Seimei solves supernatural mysteries by explaining the inexplicable just as a medium, healer, or religious leader explains the working of misfortune as a causal relationship. In this paradigm, evil happenings are tantamount to an oni. There is a reason for an oni to act in a certain way and one must look at the situation from the oni's point of view as well. After all, one must feel sympathetic for the marginalized oni, as there is a chance for all of us to become an oni after death. In the final analysis, the humanization of oni portrayed in *Onmyōji*

41 In January 2003, a major Japanese newspaper reported that a Japanese company manufactured products to dissuade people from dumping garbage at unapproved sites. The product in many ways resembles a *torii*. When the product that resembles a *torii* was placed on a site where unlawful dumping of garbage had occurred, illegal waste dumping immediately ceased. The construction workers who had placed the simulated *torii* just as a test were amazed by its remarkable efficacy. Indications suggest, according to Japan's official Shrine Agency, that many Japanese respect religious sites and perhaps fear divine retribution for dumping garbage on hallowed ground. See "Torii tachi gomi tōki yamu." Six years later, in January 2009, another major Japanese newspaper reported similar news. It described the cases of success and failure of the past, as well as the spreading phenomenon of placing the miniature *torii* in illegal garbage dumping sites. This time, a spokesman of Japan's official Shrine Agency expressed his concern for or puzzlement at the connection of *torii* and garbage. See "Gomisute bōshi ni 'jintsūriki' kitai."

42 As Reader and Tanabe assert, Japanese people are "Practically Religious" and they are heavily engaged in *genze riyaku* (this-worldly benefits), an important aspect of religion. See Reader and Tanabe.

is a reflection and expression of contemporary Japanese thoughts and attitudes toward themselves—and by extension, the uncertainty of their lives.

As we have seen, some modern authors treat the oni as a being tantamount to human and attempt to explain oni behaviors and feelings in an effort to better understand our own motivations and needs. Needless to say, oni as a commodity, highly sought after for its entertainment value, remains unchanged. Riding on a high tide of commercialism, a number of contemporary oni are characterized by sex, violence or horror to satisfy the readers' appetite for entertainment. The entertainment values appear to have a close connection to people's interest in or anxieties over the idea of an afterlife and other supernatural phenomena.