

GHASTLY TALES FROM THE *YOTSUYA KAIIDAN*

Ghastly Tales from the *Yotsuya kaidan*

edited with an Introduction by

SAITŌ Takashi



CHISOKUDŌ

Adapted from the 1917 translation of James S. de Benneville, *The Yotsuya Kwaidan or O'Iwa Inari: Tales of the Tokugawa*

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Editor's Introduction

PERHAPS THE MOST famous and oft told tales of horror in Japan, the *Yotsuya kaidan* tells of a young woman named Iwa and the curse she carried out after her death against those who had wronged her in life. For nearly three hundred years in the repertoire of itinerant storytellers, in dramatic performances on stage, and in modern adaptations for anime and film, Iwa's story has lost none of its intoxicating power over the imagination. Its reception outside of Japan has depended by and large on a single English translation made in 1916, whose literary eccentricities have kept it from the wider readership it deserves. Just over a hundred years on, it seems only right to revise the text for overall readability in the hope of securing its place among the classics of world literature.

THE HISTORY OF THE TEXT

The version of the *Yotsuya kaidan* presented in this volume is based on a Kabuki play known as the *Tōkaidō yotsuya kaidan*, first performed in 1825. The author, Tsururya Nanboku (1755–1829), was a leading playwright in late Edo-period Japan. It is his name that has come to be associated with the story of Iwa's curse.

Recent research, however, has determined that the original story dates back to around 1727 with the underground publication of a work entitled *Yotsuya zōtan*. The work is presented as a documentary based on an inside account by an official of Yotsuya Ward, where the events

are said to have taken place. A mixture of hearsay and fact, the story centers on a series of scandals involving three established Tokugawa families: the Tamiya, the Itō, and the Akiyama. According to rumors circulating at the time, the ghastly punishments meted out to the guilty parties were the work of the ghost of Tamiya Iwa, the victim of their conspiracy. The evidence available in public records regarding names and places supports the claims that there is a solid core of truth behind the rumors in the *Yotsuya zōtan*. The fascinating but hazy borderline between the actual events that took place in Yotsuya Ward and their imaginary telling has inspired an entire genre of works from the Edo period down to our own times.

The version presented here is drawn from the notes of a Rakugo storyteller's performance published in 1896 as *Yotsuya kaidan*. The raconteur, Shunkintei Ryūō (1826–1894), was a celebrated representative of the art of Rakugo in the early years of the Meiji era. His skill at presenting the tales was such that it is said to have frightened people away from the theater. The scholarly consensus today is that his version of the story is more clearly based on the original *Yotsuya zōtan* than on Nanboku's later adaptation for Kabuki.

Ryūō, like his predecessors, had his text recorded in a Japanese imitation of Western shorthand rather than prepared for publication in standard Japanese literary form. This meant that it needed to be transcribed before it could be published, which in turn required some adjustment in grammar and some conjecture in the choice of Chinese characters, even with the help of the *Yotsuya zōtan* and Nanboku's script. The shorthand version no longer seems to be extant.

In short, the *Yotsuya kaidan* has come down to us in three principal forms:

1. Documentary novel (original story)
Author unknown, *Yotsuya zōtan*, 1727?
2. Kabuki adaptation for the theater
Tsuruya Nanboku, *Tōkaidō yotsuya kaidan*, 1825.

3. Oral performance (Rakugo version)
 Shunkintei Ryūō, *Yotsuya Kaidan*, 1896.

It was from the published text of Ryūō's story that James S. de Benneville, an American scholar of Japanese culture living in Yokohama at the time, prepared an English translation for publication in 1917 under the title *The Yotsuya Kaidan or O'Iwa Inari: Tales of the Tokugawa*. Numerous additions and glosses in the English not present in the original Japanese make it clear that other versions of the story were also consulted. In any case, the revised edition that is presented here is based entirely on the translation published under de Benneville's name.

SUMMARIES OF THE LEGEND

The protagonist of the tale is a woman named Tamiya Iwa. In Ryūō's version, her personal name is given as O-Iwa, and indeed the names of all the women that appear are fitted out with the same prefix. The convention is superfluous in English but is helpful in Japanese, especially in oral presentation. Simply put, the prefix "O" is linguistically fluid. It can be used like a diminutive to indicate affection; it can serve as an honorific in polite forms of address; or it can be used to distinguish a name from the literal meaning of a word. The latter is the case with Iwa, whose pronunciation is synonymous with "rock," as also with Mino (straw raincoat), Hana (flower), Taki (waterfall), Matsu (pine tree), and the numerous other women who figure in the story. The same principle holds true for references to Iwa as an *obake*. By itself, *bake* simply connotes "changing shape," but with the addition of the prefix "o," it is understood to denote a demonic ghost.

Iwa, the deformed daughter of an already unsightly mother, is betrothed to a scheming, degenerate husband who conspires with others to sell her into service as a prostitute. On learning the facts, she pronounces a curse on all those involved in the plot, after which she

appears to commit suicide by throwing herself into a sewage canal. She resurrects in a hideous form to haunt the perpetrators and deceive them into destroying the ones they love.

Such, in brief outline, is the story as Ryūō tells it. A French edition of Nanboku's text, *Les spectres de Yotsuya*, was published in 1979 by Jeanne Sigée, who was given access to the world of Kabuki by the illustrious scholar Gunji Masakatsu. Her summation of the story is worth quoting to demonstrate the contrast between the versions of Nanboku and Ryūō:

According to rumors circulating after the Genroku era, O-Iwa, the daughter of a certain Tamiya—a subordinate constable in the shogunate guard living in the Yotsuya Ward of Samon-chō—was tricked by her husband Iemon and their go-between Akiyama Chōemon, who then killed her for her jealousy. Her spiteful ghost returned to torment them. A sanctuary in the ward was dedicated to each of the spouses, who are still the object of great veneration today, particularly by those who are badgered into performing this remarkable piece of theater.¹

Two things are worth noting in the above resume. First, the wrathful spirit of Iwa enshrined in the sanctuary is still alive and continues to hound the theatrical world to stage the play. Needless to say, this may be no more than an advertising ruse dating from Nanboku's time. Second, it is the jealousy of Iwa, the lady of Tamiya, that got her killed and transformed her into an avenging ghost. Sigée's emphasis on jealousy as a psychological rationale for Iwa's actions may be only part of the picture. Ryūō's tale obliges us to look more deeply into her motivations. Consider, for example, the way de Benneville introduces the legend:

O-Iwa, the Lady of Tamiya, really did exist in the Genroku and Hōei periods (1688–1711); just ante-dating the reforming rule of the eighth

1. Jeanne Sigée, *Les spectres de Yotsuya* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1979, 1996), xiv. For a modern Japanese edition of the 1825 original, see Tsuruya Nanboku 鶴屋南北『東海道四谷怪談』 [*Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan*], ed. by Suwa Haruo 諏訪春雄 (Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 1999).



Yotsuya O-Iwa-inari Tamiya Shrine in Samon-chō

Tokugawa Shōgun, Yoshimune. Victim of an atrocious plot of her husband and others, she committed suicide with the vow to visit her rage upon all engaged in the conspiracy. The shrine of the O-Iwa Inari (Fox-witched O-Iwa) in Yotsuya was early erected (1717) to propitiate her wrathful ghost; and the shrines of Nippon, to the shabbiest and meanest, have their definite record.²

Clearly de Benneville is sufficiently sensitive to the religious elements in the background to highlight the Tamiya's enshrinement of the Inari deity in Yotsuya for the purpose of placating Iwa's spirit. To follow up on his apparent allusion to other Shinto and Buddhist sites dedicated to calming her anger, we may mention the following shrines and temples still active:

1. Yotsuya O-Iwa-Inari Tamiya Shrine
Shinjuku-ku, Samon-chō 17
2. O-Iwa-inari Yōun-ji Temple
Shinjuku-ku, Samon-chō 18

2. James de Benneville, *The Yotsuya Kwaidan or O'Iwa Inari: Tales of the Tokugawa* (Philadelphia: Lippincott Company, 1917), 9.

3. O-Iwa-Inari Tamiya Shrine

Chūō-ku, Arakawa 2-15-11

4. Myōkō-ji Temple

Toshima-ku, Nishi-Sugamo

As is not uncommon in Japan, Iwa is enshrined as a Shinto deity and, at the same time, commemorated in Buddhist temples. All of them have become pilgrimage sites popular with tourists. Ryūō has taken credit for erecting a gravestone to her in Myōkō-ji at the end of the nineteenth century, but this may also have been no more than a bit of the same showmanship we suspected Nanboku of engaging in.

The supernatural dimension of the legends swirling around the ghost of Iwa is also apparent in the superstitious fears of the publisher, as we shall see presently. Still more to the point is the postface to Ryūō's text, in which Tada Seiken, the famous novelist of detective stories, recalls his conversation with the publisher.

The protagonist is a wise and chaste woman whose uncommon virtue and grace earned her the respect of men and women for succeeding generations.... The publisher told me, "Given the uniquely miraculous nature of the Inari shrine in Yotsuya, should anyone make a ghost story out of it, that person would inevitably be met with the divine ire of Inari. In fact, no sooner had another publisher in Tokyo produced a book on the matter last year than it pulled it out of circulation for fear of incurring divine punishment. Since then, no one has dared published anything of the sort."³

De Benneville took this into account when offering his own explanation of why an Inari shrine was built on Tamiya family property after the events in question: Because she was such an uncommonly virtuous woman and had such a deep faith in the Inari deity, her anger transcended the realm of the human into the divine.

3. Tada Seiken 多田省軒, postface to Shunkintei Ryūō 春錦亭柳桜『四谷怪談』 [*Yotsuya kaidan*] (Tokyo Hifumikan, 1896), 173.

The publisher concurred on this point, fearing that if the deity were not respected and the story were not told truthfully, those involved would suffer her divine wrath.⁴ In this sense, the very printing and dissemination of the legend had an important part to play in appeasing her spirit and presenting her as an avatar of the Inari deity. It also explains why written accounts of the story came to overshadow the oral tradition.

THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION OF THE LEGEND

There are two versions of the original documentary novel, *Yotsuya zōtan*, still available. Their content is not the same, and each of them has been reprinted with modifications:

Yotsuya zōtan: Kinko jitsuroku 『四ツ谷雑談: 今古実録』
 [*Yotsuya zōtan: Actual Records Old and New*] (Tokyo:
 Eisensha, 1884). National Diet Library Digital Collections.
Yotsuya kaidan (Yotsuya zōtan) 『四谷怪談 (四谷雑談)』, in
 『近世実録全書第』 (Tokyo: Waseda University Press,
 1929), vol. 4.

In addition, there are two modern translations of the work:

「四谷雑談集」, trans. and ed. by Takada Mamoru 高田 衛,
 in 『日本怪談集 江戸編』 [Collected Ghost Stories of Japan:
 Edo Tales] (Kawade Bunko, 1992).

『四ツ谷雑談集』, trans. and annotated by Hirosaka
 Tomonobu 広坂朋信, in 『実録 四谷怪談: 現代語訳』
 [Actual Records: A Modern Translation of the *Yotsuya kai-*
dan] (Tokyo: Hakutakusha, 2013).

Konita Seiji argues that most documentary novels in the genre treat religious beliefs in the power of sacred Buddhist texts or ven-

4. De Benneville, *The Yotsuya Kwaidan*, 12–13. See also *infra*, 276ff.



Iwa's grave at Myōkō-ji Temple

eration of the wisdom and virtue of Buddhist saints in similar fashion. Nevertheless, it seems strange that the spirit of Iwa never comes finally to rest and that the *Yotsuya zōtan* reaches no religious resolution in that regard.⁵ In a detail omitted from the edition presented here, Iemon fathers five children with his new wife after Iwa's disappearance and has to call in doctors to deal with the variety of mortal

diseases that afflict them. In no case does he seem to attribute this to Iwa's vengeance, despite her appearances at the loss of his children. Despite the primitive state of medical science at the time, Iemon prefers the rational explanations of the doctors to thinking that there is anything remotely religious about their fate. According to Konita, this highlights the "irrelevance of the religious dimension" in the *Yotsuya zōtan*.

In contrast, Ryūō's text of one hundred and seventy years later is constructed more along the lines of a Buddhist instructional tale. In the final chapter, he makes it clear that the purpose of his performance is to commemorate Iwa's death, the same motivation that appears in Seiken's discussion with the publisher. This is the reason he gives for restoring her grave site in Myōkō-ji and seeing that she gets a proper burial. His rationale for telling the story implies an obligation to carry

5. Konita Seiji 小田田誠二「怪談物実録の位相：『四谷雑談』再考」[A Register of the Actual Records: Rethinking the *Yotsuya kaidan*], in 『近世文学俯瞰』[*A Survey of Modern Literature*] (Tokyo: Kyūko Shoin, 1997), 281–3.

on with placating her spirit in order to avoid further retribution from the gods. In this regard, it is not unlike the ancient Greek tragedy of *Iphigenia in Aulis*, where the sacrifice of Agamemnon's daughter to the god Artemis was required to calm the seas. It is the same rationale given for disseminating his *Yotsuya kaidan* in print.

Does this suggest that the audience Ryūō had in mind at the beginning of the Meiji era was more superstitious than they would have been in the late Edo period? Did they believe in Iwa's curse and trust more in miraculous solutions than in rational explanation? We would do well to have a brief look at the history of Rakugo performances in order better to understand the modernization of the Japanese ghosts.

THE ORIGINS OF RAKUGO IN THE EDO PERIOD

Rakugo is the art of storytelling ranging from comedy and melodrama to tales of horror. It is performed solo on stage, seated on a cushion, with the aid of a folding fan for dramatic effect.⁶ Research has shown that its roots trace back to two sources in the Edo period.

The first is from the tradition of Buddhist instructional sermons. In a study of Pure Land Buddhist sermons, Sekiyama Kazuo points out numerous terms and rhetorical devices imported into Edo Rakugo. In fact, several Rakugo performances can be shown to have derived directly from the texts of Buddhist sermons. Moreover, Anrakuan Sakuden (1554–1642), one of the originators of Rakugo and himself a Pure Land monk, authored the earliest book of Rakugo stories by collecting humorous episodes from his own sermons.⁷

6. For a general overview of Rakugo, see Amin Sweeney, "Rakugo: Professional Japanese Storytelling," *Asian Folklore Studies* 38/1 (1979), 25–80; Heinz Morioka and Miyoko Sasaki, *Rakugo: The Popular Narrative Art of Japan* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1990); and Lorie Brau, *Rakugo: Performing Comedy and Cultural Heritage in Contemporary Tokyo* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008).

7. Sekiyama Kazuo 関山和夫『説教の歴史：仏教と話芸』 [*The History of Sermons: Buddhism and Storytelling*] (Tokyo: Hakuuisha, 1992), 105–8.

For a second source of Rakugo, we look to Edo comedy culture. Nobuhiro Shinji has studied private gatherings among the emerging middle class for sharing *otoshi-banashi*, or comedic stories. Utei Enba (1743–1822), a predecessor of Edo Rakugo, was a master architect who arranged such meetings after his retirement. Having already created a kind of fan club for the famous Kabuki actor Ichikawa Danjūrō v (1741–1806), he was able to attract writers and actors from among the intelligentsia. Enba later published books on those gatherings which are testimony to this original form of what were later to become public Rakugo performances.⁸

It is worth noting that on both counts, the origins of Rakugo are connected with laughter. But as more and more performers took to the stage and drew ever larger audiences, the genre expanded as well. It is said that around the end of the Edo era, there were over one hundred Rakugo halls, where melodramatic tales and ghost stories also came to find their place.⁹

THE MODERNIZATION OF GHOSTS

San'yūtei Enchō (1839–1900) secured his position in the world of Rakugo by imitating the Kabuki plays but making his performances more accessible to the general population of Edo.¹⁰ In addition to being an extraordinary performer and a master in the San'yūtei family line, he was an accomplished author who produced a wide range of plays, including some of Japan's best-known ghost stories. His first book, *Kaidan botan dōrō* (*Ghostly Tales of a Peony Lantern*), was pub-

8. Nobuhiro Shinji 延広真治『江戸落語：誕生と発展』[*Edo Rakugo: Its Birth and Development*] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2011), 129–33. See also his short piece 「江戸の幽霊話：五人のお岩」[An Edo Ghost Story: The Five Iwa], 『はれるが』[*Parerga*] 289 (1976): 12–15.

9. Teruoka Yasutaka 暉峻康隆『落語の年輪：江戸・明治篇』[*The Growth Rings of Rakugo in Edo and Meiji Japan*] (Tokyo: Kawade Bunko, 2007), 253.

10. Okitsu Kaname 興津要『落語：笑いの年輪』[*Rakugo: The Growth Rings of Laughter*] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2004), 100–5.

lished after the Meiji Restoration in 1886 and represents a pioneering step in the publication boom that Rakugo performances enjoyed during this period. The most famous part of *Botan dōrō* consists of a love story between a young man and a woman ghost. It is said to have been based on earlier works like *Otogi bōko* (*Hand Puppets*, 1666) by Asai Ryōi and the much older *Jiandeng xinhua* (*New Tales while Trimming the Wick*, 1378) by the Chinese writer Qu You. Enchō's transformation of the story became one of the signature items in his repertoire and helped earn him the accolade of “the God of Rakugo” in later years.

Finally, we may mention his 1888 work *Shinkei kasane ga fuchi* [*The True Landscape of the Kasane Abyss*],¹¹ which opens with an apology for telling ghost stories to a Japanese audience caught up in the movement rush for “Civilization and Enlightenment”:

What are called “ghost stories” have greatly declined in recent times; there is hardly anyone who does them at the variety halls. That is to say, since there are no such things as ghosts and they all have come to be called neurosis, ghost stories are unseemly things to the professors of civilization.... By saying that it's a neurosis because there's no such things as fox-possession and goblin abduction, they completely fob off any and all frightening things on neurosis.¹²

What is interesting is that he does not allow criticism of the “professors of civilization” and arguments to explain away superstitions as fictions grounded in neurosis to obliterate the world of ghosts altogether. Given the currency among his audience of European notions of what it meant to be civilized and cultured, it was not possible for Enchō to tell his tales in the traditional way. Instead, he made use of modern terms like “neurosis” to account for the *cause* of the mysterious, unearthly, and frightening world of ghosts in a language his listeners

11. 『真景累ヶ淵』 [*The True Landscape of the Kasane Abyss*], in 『円朝全集』 [*Complete Works of Enchō*] (Tokyo: Sekai Bunko, 1926, 1963), vol. 1.

12. Gerald Figal, *Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999, 2007), 28. The translation has modified the original Japanese somewhat.

would have appreciated without at the same time denying their *effects* in actual experience. His logic ran something like this: At present, no one believes that ghosts actually exist, but neither can any of us deny the psychological phenomena associated with them. Accordingly, it was up to the storyteller to conjure up the shadowy and spine-chilling feelings elicited by the spirit world in such a way as to revive the awe-inspiring character of ghosts that had long been part of the Japanese tradition.

Ryūō, the Rakugo performer whose work we are presenting here, was a contemporary of Enchō's and a storyteller on par with that celebrated "God of Rakugo." He, too, made use of the fashionable medical terminology of the day and, to some extent, shared Enchō's reasons for doing so. Still, unlike the *Botan dōrō*, where a Buddhist monk is introduced to perform a successful exorcism of the woman ghost, Ryūō offers no such respite for the victims of Iwa's curse. She is not allowed to fall into Hell and out of reach of the world of the living. On the contrary, in a rage of jealousy she announces her plan to take vengeance, and only then turns into a haunting demon. The Shinto and Buddhist priests who are called in to drive her out are exposed as avaricious charlatans, whose incantations and rituals are exposed as so much religious chicanery.

THE BUDDHIST FRAMEWORK OF RAKUGO

When it comes to the meaning of horror stories for the people of Edo, one of the key elements is the importance of religious fear and the perspective it put on the things of life. Sekiyama explains:

There is a reason that ghosts and horror stories were popular in the Edo period. Buddhism was a vital part of everyday life, but so was the guilt people carried around with them. It is hard for us to imagine in these times the pity for the restless dead and the fear of their retribution that was prevalent at the time. So numerous were the sermons expounding on the Buddhist scriptures, and so vivid the pictures of Hell meant to

unnerve the common folk, that one may even consider these horror stories a kind of Buddhist entertainment and extension of what was being taught in the sermons. There is no denying the influence of the terror and awe these stories inspired. Indeed, we cannot escape the makings of a philosophy of everyday life behind the ghost tales.¹³

In stressing the impact of Buddhism on daily life in late nineteenth-century Japan, Sekiyama sets himself solidly against Konita's view of the "irrelevance of the religious dimension" in the tales. While there is no gainsaying the cultural and generational gap between those who listened to the story live and those coming later who only read it in a book, the difference of rhetorical genre seems more significant. The fact that the novel was published underground shows its intention of exposing the truth behind a legend. The intention behind its performance in the theater was rather to give the audience what they expected: an entertaining scare for a nominal fee.

Sekiyama's mention of a "guilty conscience" regarding the restless dead is something which de Benneville also took seriously as a long-standing element in Buddhist rituals and beliefs. In that sense, it is one more key to unlocking the enchanting power of Japanese ghost stories.

GUILT AND DREAD TOWARD THE DEAD

I find it significant that in his original preface to the English translation, de Benneville introduces his readers to the world of ghost stories by referencing records of oral performance like Rakugo and Kōdan¹⁴ that have survived through transcriptions in shorthand.

13. Sekiyama Kazuo 関山和夫『落語風俗帳』[*A Notebook of Rakugo Customs*] (Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 1991), 177.

14. Kōdan is a genre of popular storytelling, performed solo and seated on a stage much the same as Rakugo. But while Rakugo tended to more comedic and aimed at ordinary people, Kōdan tended to deal with epic hero tales and appealed more to the nobility and higher classes.

In particular, he echoes Enchō's apology in the following remark on the relationship between a sense of guilt and feeling of dread:

Curiously enough, it can be said that most Nipponese ghost stories are true. When a sword is found enshrined, itself the malevolent influence—as is the Muramasa blade of the Hamamatsu Suwa Jinja, the subject of the Komatsu Onryō of Matsubayashi Hakuchi¹⁵—and with such tradition attached to it, it is difficult to deny a basis of fact attaching to the tradition. The ghost story becomes merely an elaboration of an event that powerfully impressed the men of the day and place. Moreover this naturalistic element can be detected in the stories themselves. Nipponese writers of to-day explain most of them by the word *shinkei*—“nerves”; the working of a guilty conscience moulding succeeding events, and interpreting the results to the subsequent disaster involved.¹⁶

Although the claim that the ghost stories are “true” sounds slightly naive, it is a fact that shrines in Japan each have their own origin story—typically associated with an actual historical event or sacred treasured object—and that these stories occasionally provided a basis for ghost stories. As the passage notes, the tales elaborated by Rakugo and Kōdan authors had a strong influence on the general worldview of the time. Insofar as these storytellers inhaled the air of an enlightenment civilization with its talk of like “nerves” and “neurosis,” superstitions tended to fade away and there was little oxygen left to feed popular belief in ghosts.

This is where the “guilty conscience” comes into the picture to provide a kind of psychological framework for explaining the emotional states associated with suffering the death of a loved one from indeterminate causes or other unforeseen tragedies. The quasi-scientific nature of such reasoning was meant to replace the magico-religious modes of thought of days gone by; in fact, it simply replaced one unknown by

15. The allusion is to Matsubayashi Hakuchi 松林伯知『怪談小松怨霊』 [*The Ghostly Tale of the Apparition of Komatsu*] (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1901).

16. De Benneville, *The Yotsuya Kwaidan*, 7.

another: *ignotum per ignotius*. It was in that gap that the imaginary world of ghosts and curses and vengeance from beyond the grave flourished. In this way, the very discourse of modernity that meant to do away with that world was able to breathe new life into it. That ghosts continued to disquiet the modernized mind may only mean that as older superstitions fell away, they laid bare a genuine human need for the pangs of conscience to strike terror into our frail, rational selves.

Iwa's memorialization in Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples is more than a touristic attraction. Her story belongs very much to our own age. My hope is that the readers of this book will be able to see through the enlightened, scientific background in which modern reason thrives to savor the traditional world of haunting ghosts and recover the questions it poses about the baffling mystery of what it means to be human.¹⁷

A NOTE ON THE REVISION OF THE TRANSLATION

The original translation of James de Benneville has gone through radical revision for the present edition. A word of justification seems in order for reissuing a book that has already been reprinted several times with only a new title to distinguish it from the 1917 edition.¹⁸ As evidenced from the extracts cited in the previous pages, de Benneville's English style is rather peculiar, even by the literary standards of his age. The same impression, to varying degrees, holds for other works of his that I have had occasion to consult. In the case of the present volume, however, the more serious problem lies with oddities in the "translation."

17. Elsewhere I have tried to analyze the scene of Iwa's first apparition comparing Benneville's translation with Ryūō's text: "O-Iwa's Curse: Apparitions and their After-Effects in the *Yotsuya kaidan*, *Bulletin of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture* 42 (2018): 24–37.

18. *The Kwaidan of the Lady of Tamiya: Samurai Tales of the Tokugawa* (London: Routledge, 2001, 2010, 2016).

Simply put, the prose is often so unnatural and the underlying Japanese syntax, grammar, and turns of phrase so transparent on the surface of the text, that it is hard to imagine de Benneville to have been the author of the original draft. It seems more likely that he simply retouched the translation of a Japanese acquaintance in order to prepare it for publication in English. Even discounting mistakes in the transcription of Japanese words, irregularities in the use of definite and indefinite articles, and similar lapses typically generated by non-native writers of English, the quality of the writing as a whole does not reflect de Benneville's reputation as a scholar and translator.

Unfortunately, there is no complete Japanese text against which to compare the translation.¹⁹ De Benneville indicates that the translation is “retold from the Japanese originals” and “based on the *Yotsuya zōdan*,²⁰” but he introduces characters (such as Suzuki Sanjūrō the moneylender), conversations, details, and flourishes of expression which are not to be found there and have proved impossible to track down. How much of it was his own invention and how much the learned glosses of someone familiar with the variety of Rakugo performances we shall probably never know.

The absence of an objective check has made the revision easier at some times, more difficult at others. In particular, there are a great many passages in which the flow of the story becomes choppy or the meaning of the English has been jeopardized by errors of usage or missing words. Where the *Yotsuya zōtan* did not prove helpful, the only remedy was to reconstruct the passages in such a way as to preserve the integrity of the story line and the quaint flavor of early twentieth-century English without compromising the general readability of the

19. However, we do have a retranslation of de Benneville's book back into Japanese. The translator, Osanai Kaoru 小山内薫 (1881–1928), was a theater director and playwright of the Taishō period. Beginning in 1919, he serialized the novel in the daily newspaper 万朝報. The complete work was only published ninety years later as 『お岩：小山内薫怪談集』 [O-Iwa: Osanai Kaoru's collected ghost stories] (Tokyo: Media Factory, 2009).

20. De Benneville's transliteration of the *Yotsuya zōtan*.

text. I would like to acknowledge the kind assistance of James Heisig, a colleague at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, in overseeing the editorial process.

Even for those of my generation, born around 1980, when programs on the occult flooded Japanese television and enjoyed wide popular appeal, the story of Iwa remained something of an icon in the horror genre. While it is true that the *Yotsuya kaidan* drew on the popular imagination of the Edo period to frame the story of Iwa, there is a classic authenticity to the figure of Lady Iwa and her curse that still speaks to us today. The fascination that drew viewers in Japan and across the world into the haunting imagery of Hideo Nakata's 1998 movie *Ring* continues to this day in the enduring belief that "The enraged spirit of Sadako may still be on the roam." In this sense, she is a true successor in the line of Iwa.

My aim in dusting off this timeworn and neglected text is to stimulate renewed interest in the wide variety of Japanese ghost stories and the art of Rakugo storytelling that has played such an important role in their creation and development. Like the innocent bystanders who watched the events of Samon-chō unfold, all of us share in the fears and uncertainties—as well as the intellectual curiosity—that shroud the world of the dead and give rise to stories like the *Yotsuya kaidan*.²¹

To all of those who have helped me see this book to completion and turn the spotlight once again on the legend of Lady Iwa, I offer my deepest gratitude.

Saitō Takashi
Nagoya, Japan

21. Elsewhere I have tried to show the epistemological connection between the innocent bystanders in the story and the listening audience of the theater. See my 「呪いの口伝え：春錦亭柳桜口演『四谷怪談』における巷説の表象」[The oral transmission of curses: The representation of rumors in Ryūō's *Yotsuya kaidan*], 『研究所報』[Research bulletin of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture] 29 (2019): 20–31.