

*Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan's* Oiwa:

## Analysis of a kabuki vengeful ghost

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R. Mansi  
1893831

academic supervisor:  
Prof. dr. I. B Smits

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## Notes to Format

This thesis follows the conventions of the 2017's edition of the *Monumenta Nipponica Style Sheet*. As per Japanese custom, family names precede given names. Fully anglicised terms, such as kabuki, daimyo or butsudā, that are included in the *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* have not been italicised nor transliterated using macrons.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the seventh month of Bunsei 文政 8 (1825), the kabuki play *Tōkaido Yotsuya kaidan* 東海道四谷怪談 (Ghost Stories: Yotsuya on the Tōkaidō, hereafter *Yotsuya kaidan*) was first staged at the Nakamura-za 中村座 Theatre in Edo. Written by Tsuruya Nanboku 鶴屋南北 IV (1755-1829) and inspired by an urban legend, this five-act production presents the story of Oiwa お岩, a woman who turns into a merciless vengeful ghost as the result of having been betrayed by those closest to her.

Because it portrays a group of morally degenerated samurai, scholars have often regarded *Yotsuya kaidan* as a parody of *Kanadehon chūshingura* 仮名手本忠臣蔵 (The Treasury of Loyal Retainers, hereafter *Chūshingura*) which instead celebrates samurai virtues, foremost loyalty to one's master.<sup>1</sup> The events of *Yotsuya kaidan* take place in the *Chūshingura* world; indeed the former premiered jointly with a performance of the latter.

Nowadays, *Yotsuya kaidan* is considered one of the most important pieces in the kabuki repertoire, as well as Nanboku's masterpiece and the epitome of the "horror plays" (*kaidan mono* 怪

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<sup>1</sup> Commonly known as the "tale of the forty-seven ronin", it was adapted from the puppet theatre in 1748. It is regarded as the most famous dramatization of the *Akō Jiken* 赤穂事件 (Akō incident or Akō vendetta). In 1701, Asano Naganori 浅野長矩 (1667-1701), daimyo of Akō 赤穂 (in modern Hyōgo prefecture), was forced to commit suicide for unsheathing his sword in the shogun's castle in response to an offense received by the master of ceremonies Kira Yoshinaka 吉良義仲 (1641-1703). In 1703, forty-seven of Enya's samurai proved their loyalty to him by killing Kira. However, they also had to commit ritual suicide as punishment for not requesting the government's authorization to carry on the vendetta. In the play, because all the names of the participants to the incident were changed to avoid censorship, Asano is known as Enya Hangan 塩谷判官 while Kira as Kōno Moronao 高師直.

談物 or *kaidan kyōgen* 怪談狂言) genre,<sup>2</sup> here combined with that of the “raw-domestic plays” (*kizewa mono* 生世話物). Both categories were developed by Nanboku himself to satisfy the theatregoers’ demands—in a time of political, economic, social and moral decline such as the Kasei era 化政 (1804-1830) era<sup>3</sup>—for new, violent stimuli that would shake them to the very core of their being.<sup>4</sup> *Kaidan mono*’s professed aim was to terrify the audience by displaying all sort of frightful supernatural phenomena, and chiefly relied on the usage of spectacular stage props and tricks for their *mise-en-scène*. On the other hand, *kizewa mono* would purposely shock it by depicting the life of the lowest strata of Edo’s society, such as prostitutes and beggars, with gritty realism. Notably, they often feature scenes of torture, extortion, rape and murder.<sup>5</sup>

As the blood-chilling story of ghostly revenge with numerous plot-twists, and thanks to the employment of elaborate stage tricks—let alone the acting of great actors of the time such as Onoe Kikugorō 尾上菊五郎 III (1784-1849) who played Oiwa’s role—*Yotsuya kaidan* was an instant success. Oiwa’s ghost became soon an icon of popular culture, going beyond the boundaries of the theatrical world to be represented in a wide range of media, from woodblock prints of the last decades of Edo 江戸 period (1603-1868) to the most recent films and anime.<sup>6</sup> Due to such fame, both *Yotsuya kaidan*

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<sup>2</sup> The term *kaidan* literally means “tales (*dan* 談) of the strange, the uncanny and the supernatural (*kai* 怪)”, and it made its first appearance in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. *Kaidan mono* are widely known in English language scholarship as “ghost plays”, see for example Leiter, *Historical Dictionary of Japanese Traditional Theatre*, p. 150. However, the rendition “horror plays” is to prefer as more accurate, see Shimazaki, *Edo Kabuki in Transition*, p. 101. In fact, while ghosts are not the only supernatural beings featured in *kaidan mono*, horror is one of the defining characteristics of the genre as opposed to earlier similar productions aimed at startling the audience rather than frighten it. For a definition of *kaidan mono*, see Hattori, Hirotsue and Tomita, *Kabuki jiten*, p. 152.

<sup>3</sup> Union of the last syllables of Bunka 文化 (1804-1818) and Bunsei 文政 (1818-1830).

<sup>4</sup> Fujiwara, *Yūrei Oiwa*, p.20.

<sup>5</sup> Leiter, *Historical dictionary of Japanese Traditional Theatre*, pp. 186-187.

<sup>6</sup> See for example, Katsushika Hokusai 葛飾 北斎 (1760-1849), *Oiwa-san* お岩さん from the series *Hyaku monogatari* 百物語 (One-hundred Tales, 1831-1832); Utagawa Kuniyoshi 歌川 国芳 (1798-1861), *Oiwake: Oiwa Takuetsu* 追分お岩

and Oiwa have been among the most discussed topics by kabuki scholars such as Gunji Masakatsu 郡司正勝 (1913-1998), Hirotsue Tamotsu 廣末保 (1919-1993), Suwa Haruo 諏訪春雄, Furuido Hideo 古井戸秀夫, James R. Brandon (1927-2015) and Samuel L. Leiter to name a few. These experts have either broadly treated Oiwa's character within their extensive studies of the play, or addressed some specific matters about it such as the origins of the name "Oiwa" or whether she reached salvation or not.<sup>7</sup>

Regardless of how informative and valuable the amount of material they have produced is, a fundamental issue needs to be reconsidered if we are to achieve a better understanding of Oiwa: why did she turn into such a frightful creature?

The most popular opinion is that Oiwa is a jealous spirit. However, there is reason to argue that this view is based on the failure to acknowledge the peculiarities of her case on behalf of scholars too caught up in the stereotype of the female vengeful spirit. Since in kabuki this character was usually driven by feelings of jealousy, they have assumed that so must have been Oiwa. But what if, in reality, she was an exception to the "rule" and motives other than this prompted her revenge? If so, what could these be and how do they inform us of Nanboku's dramaturgy?

The present essay aims at providing an answer to this cluster of questions. In order to do so, it is going to proceed by first touching upon two other topics that, despite seemingly not, are highly instrumental to the point: the relation between Oiwa and her literary sources, and her pre-

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宅悦 (Forked road: Oiwa and Takuetsu) from the series *Kisokaidō rokujūkyū tsugi no uchi* 木曾街道六十九次之内 (Sixty-nine Stations of the Kisokaidō road, 1852). For a cinematographic adaptation of *Yotsuya kaidan*, see the homonymous film (1959) by Nakagawa Nobuo 中川信夫.

<sup>7</sup> See, Gunji, *Tsuruya Nanboku: kabuki ga unda mukyō no hyōgenshugi*; Hirotsue, *Yotsuya Kaidan: akui to warai*; "Oiwa wa jōbutsu shita ka"; Suwa, *Tsuruya Nanboku: warai wo bukki ni chitsujo wo tankan suru dokegata*; Furuido, "Oiwa to iu na: tsuikō"; Brandon and Leiter, "The Ghost Stories of Yotsuya on the Tōkaidō".

metamorphosis representation as an ordinary woman. Especially in the West, these matters have yet to be given the importance they deserve as, so far, more attention has been paid to Oiwa's transitional phase into a vengeful spirit and the details of her revenge. Thus, by investigating them both, this thesis would also fill a gap in the literature that, even if small, is too significant to be ignored.

As there is no extant copy of the original *Yotsuya kaidan*'s script, I have chosen to refer to Gunji's reconstructed version of the text of the first performance of 1825,<sup>8</sup> and apply the theoretical concept of intertextuality or "interconnectedness between texts". Indeed, I will consider Oiwa herself as a text that, according to such approach, is not a self-contained, closed space, but an open system that can be truly grasped only by referring to its interplay with other texts.<sup>9</sup> Expressly, I am going to focus on the role of *Chūshingura* and Nanboku's "self-referential practices" in shaping Oiwa's character.

This thesis is divided in three chapters, followed by conclusive remarks. Chapter 1 provides a summary of *Yotsuya kaidan*, the theory of intertextuality and the analysis of the relationship between the play/Oiwa, its sources, and *Chūshingura*. Chapter 2 examines Oiwa's character as a daughter, wife and mother before briefly touching upon her transition into a vengeful spirit. Chapter 3 challenges the traditional view of Oiwa as jealous by countering the argument of its most recent supporter, Satoko Shimazaki.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Tsuruya Nanboku IV, *Yotsuya kaidan*.

<sup>9</sup> Graham, *Intertextuality*, pp. 1-2

<sup>10</sup> Shimazaki, *Edo Kabuki in Transition*, pp. 150-193.

## CHAPTER 1

*Yotsuya kaidan* and intertextuality

It is the task of textual analysis to bring these relationships to light,  
or perhaps to postulate them should the needs of interpretation demand it,  
even in the absence of definite philological proof.

Marco De Marinis, *The Semiotics of Performance*

It is impossible to start any analysis of *Oiwa* without first introducing—very succinctly—the main plot of *Yotsuya kaidan*, where she stars as the daughter of Yotsuya Samon 四谷佐門 and the wife of the handsome but evil Tamiya Iemon 民谷伊右衛門. Although both men are Enya 塩谷's former retainers, they are not part of the group of forty-seven ronin planning to avenge their master's death, yet like them have been experiencing the hardships of the life as master-less samurai. Samon is now a beggar, Iemon an umbrella maker, *Oiwa* a prostitute like Osode お袖, her sister who is also married to another of Enya's former retainers, Satō Yomoshichi 佐藤与茂七.

Following her father's orders, *Oiwa* has separated from Iemon, who is accused of stealing Enya's money. During a violent argument, Iemon kills Samon and later deceives *Oiwa* into believing that he will avenge his death on the condition that they reconcile. Sometime after the events, *Oiwa* is bedridden because of some post-partum illness. She has given birth to a baby boy, but Iemon has been treating both mother and child rather cruelly, showing not a hint of happiness for the birth of a male heir. While she is asleep, Iemon does not hesitate to give a further proof of his callousness by



torturing Kobotoke Kōhei 小仏小平, a servant guilty of having stolen a precious medicine from him to cure his sick master, by snapping his fingers.

He is soon interrupted by the arrival of the wet-nurse Omaki お槇. She brings gifts for the child and a medicine for Oiwa, courtesy of her master Itō Kihei 伊藤喜兵衛, the doctor of Enya's enemy Kōno 高. In reality, the medicine is a disfiguring poison part of a plan orchestrated by Kihei: he wants to make Oiwa unattractive so that Iemon will divorce her to marry his granddaughter Oume お梅, who is madly in love with him. Informed by Kihei of his intentions, Iemon does not hesitate to betray Oiwa and accepts to marry Oume in exchange for a generous sum of money and a position in Kōno's service. Because the couple is to get married on that same night, Iemon orders the masseur Ama Takuetsu 按摩宅悦 to take advantage of Oiwa so he can divorce her on the accusation of adultery. In the meanwhile, Oiwa drinks the medicine: she immediately feels a burning sensation to her face and develops a horrendous bulge above her eye. She is unaware of what has happened to her until Takuetsu, who does not have the heart to force himself on her, gives her a mirror and confesses everything.

Overcome with rage, Oiwa starts getting ready to confront Kihei, Oume and Iemon, but the more she combs her hair, the more it falls over in big clumps of blood as the result of the poison. About to leave the house, she accidentally slits her throat with a sword and dies. Iemon accuses Kihei of his wife's murder, kills him and nails his and Oiwa's corpses to the sides of a rain door to throw in the canal before Oume arrives to the house. Iemon and Oume get married, but Oiwa and Kōhei's ghosts immediately intervene to spoil the celebrations by tricking Iemon into killing both his new

bride and Kihei. Then, they cause Omaki and Oyumi お弓, Oume's mother, to fall and drown in the in the same canal where their bodies had been disposed of.

While Kohei disappears after having successfully obtained and delivered the medicine to his master, Oiwa goes on with her revenge until all her enemies capitulate. On the verge of madness, lemon seeks shelter from Oiwa in a hermitage where his parents and monks try to warn off the evil spirit by chanting the nembutsu. However, everything is useless: Oiwa torments lemon even in his dreams and then appears out from a burning lantern. She summons a swarm of rats who kill lemon's mother while his father commits suicide. Lemon runs away under the snow, but he cannot escape his faith and is eventually killed by Yomoshichi, Osode's husband, who has come to avenge his sister-in-law.

A task equally difficult to offering the synopsis of such an intricate play like *Yotsuya kaidan* is to provide the outline of a concept as complex as intertextuality, the theoretical framework of this essay. The term "intertextuality" (Fr. Intertextualité, Jp. *Kantekisutosei* 間テクスト性) was coined by Julia Kristeva and first appeared in her 1966's essay "Word, Dialogue and Novel" to describe the interrelationship between texts that are not only literary, but also social and cultural.<sup>11</sup> According to Kristeva, "each word (text) is an intersection of words (texts), where at least one other word (text) can be read" and "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and the transformation of another".<sup>12</sup> In other, simpler words, any given text is an open system that contains within itself a myriad of other texts and vice-versa. To understand its meaning it is necessary to look at their interactions.

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<sup>11</sup> Alfaro, "Intertextuality: Origins and Development of the Concept", pp. 268-269.

<sup>12</sup> Kristeva, "World, Dialogue and Novel", p. 37.

Since its inception, several other critics, including Roland Barthes (1915-1980), Michael Riffaterre (1924-2006) and Gérard Genette (1930-2018), have reformulated the notion of intertextuality. While the former failed to provide a concrete method for the application of intertextuality to any given text, the latter were able to make it into a more practical instrument of literary criticism. In particular, Genette did so by significantly narrowing down their approach, which was far too abstract, by focusing on the *literary* text within an enclosed *literary* system rather than on Kristeva's immense thus indescribable *social/cultural* system.<sup>13</sup>

Without indulging in the complicacies of intertextuality and its different interpretations, I draw upon its basic assumption that a text's meaning can be recovered only by looking at its interplay with other texts, and apply it to *Yotsuya kaidan's* protagonist Oiwa. On a micro-level, this character itself is a text or a "mosaic of quotations" that can be tackled as the exemplar critic would do according to Genette: as a *bricoleur* who "breaks down literary works into 'themes, motifs, key-words, obsessive metaphors, quotations, index cards, and references'".<sup>14</sup> These already exist in the *literary* system but the author, a *bricoleur* him/herself, when rearranging them in his/ work hid their link to the system. Only by unravelling these connections, it is possible to know the meaning of the text.<sup>15</sup> Concretely, this means looking at the way Nanboku employed intertextuality, that Genette renamed "transtextuality", as stylistic device, i.e. he rearranged pre-existent material—in particular the tale of the forty-seven ronin and his "own (re)creations"—in form of allusion, parody or quotations, to consciously shape Oiwa's identity. However, as Kristeva herself, Barthes and Riffaterre state, intertextuality is also an interpretative strategy employed by the recipient. Thus, at the same time, it

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<sup>13</sup> Graham, *Intertextuality*, pp. 93-95.

<sup>14</sup> Graham, *Intertextuality*, p. 93.

<sup>15</sup> Graham, *Intertextuality*, pp. 93-96.

is worth attempting at reconstructing the exemplar kabuki theatregoers' perception/ reading of the "Oiwa-text" based on the assumption of a shared textual knowledge.<sup>16</sup>

Analysing Oiwa means to apply some sort of "localized" intertextuality to *Yotsuya kaidan* and to consider *which* and *how* the above-mentioned quotations, motives etc. converge in one point to create the character's individual meaning within the general one of the play. The first step to take in this direction is to touch upon *Yotsuya kaidan* and the basic intertextual relationship inherent to all kabuki productions. As Katherine Saltzman-Li points out, the key concepts of the process of playwriting are *shukō* 趣向 (plot) and *sekai* 世界 (world): the *shukō* is the "changes and additions rendered to pre-existing storylines, or 'worlds' (*sekai*), chosen as the starting point for the creation of new plays". For example, the making of Edo's *hatsuharu kyōgen* 初春狂言 (spring or New Year's plays) consisted in rearranging material from the well-known vendetta story of the Soga Brothers (*Soga kyōdai* 曾我兄弟) to accommodate the introduction of new elements, such as a double love suicide, to make it original but still familiar.<sup>17</sup>

Although it would do more logical to do the opposite, it is better to start by first considering *Yotsuya kaidan's shūko*. This is largely based on a legend best recorded by the *Yotsuya zatsudan shū* 四ッ谷雑談集 (Collection of Stories of Yotsuya, hereafter *Zatsudan*), a work dating to the Kyōho 享保 era (1716-1736) but whose author and year of composition are unknown. According to it, there was once living in Edo's Yotsuya Samonchō 四谷佐門朝 a woman named Oiwa, the only daughter of the low-rank samurai Tamiya Matazaemon 田宮又左衛門. Not only she was wicked and unpleasant,

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<sup>16</sup> The concepts of intertextuality as a textual stratagem and interpretative practice are most frequently used in media studies. Ott and Walter, "Intertextuality: Interpretative Practice and Textual Strategy", pp. 431-435.

<sup>17</sup> Saltzman-Li, *Creating Kabuki Plays*, pp. 71-72.

she was also ugly in consequence of contracting the smallpox at the age of twenty-one. Most notably, she had a gruesomely deformed, possibly blind, eye. When Matazaemon died, Oiwa married Iemon. He was a good man but he never grew into loving his wife because of her bad personality and her poor looks. Eventually, Iemon fell in love with Ohana お花, the mistress of his superior Itō Kihei 伊東喜兵衛. The two men deceived Oiwa into divorcing from her husband so that he could marry Ohana. Informed of Iemon's betrayal and overcome by a furious rage, Oiwa ran off in the streets of Yotsuya and disappeared without a trace. Nobody knew whether she was dead or alive when, many years later, she appeared as a wrathful spirit that caused the death of eighteen people, including Iemon's children.<sup>18</sup>

The popularity of the *Zatsudan* is testified by the fact that even the famous *gesaku* 戯作 (popular fiction) writer Ryūtei Tanehiko 柳亭種彦 (1783-1842) released a *yomihon* 読本 (book to read) inspired by it, *Kinsei kaidan shimoyo no hoshi* 近世怪談霜夜星 (Ghost Story of Recent Times: Stars of a Frosty Night, 1808, hereafter *Shimoyo no hoshi*).<sup>19</sup> Here the protagonist is Osawa お沢, a woman ugly since birth but whose good nature compensated for the deficit in her appearance. Betrayed by her husband, she drowned herself into a river. Reappeared as a vengeful ghost, significantly all her victims died in the proximity of bodies of water. Oiwa's deformed eye and Osawa's connection with water are both features deriving from the earlier *Kasane setsuwa* 累説話 (Kasane legend).<sup>20</sup> This relates the story of a country girl, Kasane 累, who was drowned in a river by her

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<sup>18</sup> Hirosaka, *Yotsuya zatsudan shū*, pp. 12-145.

<sup>19</sup> Tanehiko is best known as the author of *Nise Murasaki inaka Genji* 修紫田舎源氏 (The Rustic Genji) published between 1829 and 1842.

<sup>20</sup> Honda, *Yomimono no miryoku*, pp. 42-54.

husband because of her wickedness and ugly looks. When her ghost appeared, it presented a gruesome eye, result of a violent blow received at the time of her death.<sup>21</sup> The story of Kasane was adapted by kabuki numerous times and it inspired two of Nanboku's most famous works: 1809's *Okuni gozen keshō sugitami* 阿国御前化粧鏡 (Lady Okuni's Make-up Mirror, hereafter *Okuni gozen*)<sup>22</sup> and 1823's *Iro moyō chotto karimame* 色彩間莉豆 (Sensual Colours, Going to Cut Beans, hereafter *Iro moyō*).<sup>23</sup> Because of their influence on the formation of Oiwa's character, both Lady Okuni and Kasane will be discussed in the following chapters.

Nanboku interwove the material inspired by the *Zatsudan* with other three stories and implanted it into the world of *Chūshingura*, the famous *katakiuchi mono* 敵討物 (revenge play) regarded as one of the highest depictions of samurai values. It follows forty-seven of Enya's most

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<sup>21</sup> This legend was popularised by the tale *Shiryō gedatsu monogatari* 死霊解脱物語 (Tale of the Salvation of the Vengeful Spirit, 1690), which illustrates the power of Buddhism to ward off evil creatures. A man called Yoemon 与右衛門 forced his wife to kill her son from a previous marriage, Suke 助, because of his horrendous physical appearance and disabilities. Later he had a daughter, Kasane, who strangely was born with the same deformities as Suke and developed with time a very bad-temper. Because of it, she was killed by her husband, who then married another woman. She died, as well as the following four, under mysterious circumstances. Kiku 菊, his daughter from the sixth wife, was possessed by Kasane and Suke's spirit and revealed the truth about their violent death. Eventually, they were placated by the priest Yūten Shōnin 祐天上人. Hirano, *The Politics of Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 181-183. Adaptations of the *kasane setsuwa* such as *Okuni gozen* and *Iro moyō* are known as *Kasane mono* 累物.

<sup>22</sup> It was staged for the first time at Edo's Morita-za 森田座 Theatre. The lady-in-waiting Okuni is hiding at Sehei 瀬平's house after having stolen the painting of a carp, heirloom of the Sasaki family 佐々木. Set out to find it are Ichō-no-mae 銀杏前 and his fiancée Motonobu 元信, respectively the sister and a retainer of Lord Sasaki. Lady Okuni is madly in love with Motonobu and his absence has caused her physical and mental health to deteriorate. From a letter, she learns that Motonobu has only pretended to have feelings for her in order to retrieve the precious scroll and that in reality he is to marry Ichō-no-mae. Lady Okuni dies holding a deep grudge towards the couple and, turned into a vengeful spirit, immediately starts tormenting it. Eventually she is placated, the scroll recovered and peace and order restored. Tsuruya Nanboku IV, *Okuni gozen*, pp. 281-352.

<sup>23</sup> This is only the *michiyuki* 道行 (travel scene) of the play *Kesa kakematsu Narita riken* 法懸松成田利剣 (The Surplice-Hanging Pine and the True Sword of Narita), first performed at Edo's Morita-za. The lady-in-waiting Kasane is in love with the samurai Yoemon and is about to commit suicide with him. She does not know that he had a relationship with her mother, Kiku, and that together they are responsible for the death of Suke, Kiku's husband and Kasane's father. Yoemon stabbed him in the leg with a sickle while Kiku gouged one of his eyes out because he knew about their illicit affair. Suddenly, Kasane is possessed by Suke's vengeful spirit and develops his same deformities: a limp and a disfigured eye. She also learns about Yoemon's betrayal, who kills her with the same sickle he used to murder Suke. Kasane turns into a vengeful ghost ready to take her revenge on Yoemon. Tsuruya Nanboku IV, *Kesa kakematsu*, pp.287-290.

loyal retainers (*gishi* 義士) in their mission to avenge his unjust death by capturing and executing his enemy, Kōno. To anyone familiar with this play, the way the *Zatsudan* was merged with *Chūshingura* is evident since, like the forty-seven ronin, also Oiwa's father, husband, brother-in-law, Kohei and his master were all once in Enya's service and have fallen in disgrace after his death. They all still show allegiance to their late master but Iemon, who does not hesitate to betray him for purely material reasons. In fact, he joins the enemy faction, related to the Itō, becoming the antithesis of the loyal retainers, a *fugishi* 不義士 (disloyal man). *Yotsuya kaidan* is thus a sort of a spin-off of *Chūshingura*, this sense accentuated by the fact that the events of the two plays unravel and conclude simultaneously. This does not only elucidate the reason why *Yotsuya kaidan* was first performed together with *Chūshingura*, but also the modality of their joint staging. Contrary to the norm, the production chose to alternate acts from the two plays instead of performing one only once the other had been fully staged. The whole show last two days and contributed to strengthen the perception that *Yotsuya kaidan* and *Chūshingura* were one thing.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, such innovative staging revealed the extent to which *Yotsuya kaidan* and *Chūshingura* reflected two diametrically different dimensions of the same reality. Let aside the intrinsic differences between the *kizewa-kaidan mono* and the *jidai mono* genres, as Shimazaki mentions, *Chūshingura* "reflects the optimism and ideals of the first half of the early modern period", while "*Yotsuya kaidan* represents the chaotic mood and the repressed desires of Edo in the period's later decades".<sup>25</sup> The former presents the audience with a society where the samurai ethos is still alive and highly praised, the latter questions the validity of the feudal values by depicting the Edo of

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<sup>24</sup> A *jidai mono* 時代物 "period piece" and a *sewa mono* 世話物 "contemporary piece" constituted the two halves of a typical Edo kabuki program. Conventionally, the *jidai mono* was performed first (*ichiban me* 一番目), followed by the *sewa mono* (*niban me* 二番目). Since *Yotsuya kaidan* is a *sewa mono*, its staging should have followed *Chūshingura*'s, which is a *jidai mono*, instead of being performed in such an unusual fashion as mentioned.

<sup>25</sup> Shimazaki, *Edo Kabuki in Transition*, p. 119.

almost eighty years later when these are endorsed by fewer and fewer members of the ruling class. *Yotsuya kaidan* is a parody or caricature of *Chūshingura* focused on the corruption of the samurai moral universe, therefore its meaning and that of its characters are largely definable in the terms of this type of intertextual relationship.

Oiwa best exemplifies this. If we compare them, she and the protagonist of the *Zatsudan*, the “proto-Oiwa”, appear to be rather different. While Nanboku’s Oiwa is first introduced as an overall good character—and without any physical abnormality—her predecessor is instead a woman ugly not only on the outside but also on the inside. She is so despicable that the reader cannot help but empathizing with Iemon and feel sorry about his tragic fate. For now, it suffices to say that Oiwa’s improved personality and beauty are not the result of an arbitrary choice on the author’s behalf, but of a careful pondering to transform her from the heroine of an horror story into that of a revenge play on the same level as *Chūshingura*’s. Moreover, Oiwa’s perception as a positive character derives not only from her good heart, but also by her upholding of the same virtues as those of the forty-seven loyal retainers. These make of her a character that “fits” in the *Yotsuya kaidan*’s plotline but even better belongs to the world of *Chūshingura*. The following chapters will further dive into this argumentation by providing evidence in support of a predominance of *Chūshingura* into shaping of Oiwa’s character. They will be also unravelling the connections between Oiwa and other texts, such as Nanboku’s own productions.



## CHAPTER 2

**Portrait of a woman**

Oiwa's first entrance on stage as the living embodiment of the mores of the samurai class she belongs to. As the daughter of Samon and the wife of Iemon, two of Enya's former retainers, she shares the same warrior ethics (*bushi rinri* 武士倫理) and spirit (*kishitsu* 氣質) of the characters of *Chūshingura*.<sup>26</sup> However, she does so in a world that is only nominally that of the *gishi*. Although *Yotsuya kaidan's sekai* is *Chūshingura*, the reality depicted is that of general decadence of the Kasei era where loyalty, chastity, sacrifice and righteousness are no longer praised, but regarded as obsolete and pathetic even by samurai themselves.<sup>27</sup>

Amongst the expressions of Oiwa's background and anachronistic "old costumes" or *kofū* 古風<sup>28</sup> –upheld also by Samon, Osode, Yomoshichi, Kohei and his master Matanojō 又之丞, but completely disregarded by Iemon— there is a strong sense of filial piety (Ch. *xiao* 孝 Jp. *kō*). One of the Confucian virtues and the foundation of the human relationship parent-child, it was widely promoted by the Tokugawa 徳川 government. Children of all the social strata, particularly those of the warrior class, were encouraged to perform filial acts, women towards both their own parents and their in-laws.<sup>29</sup>

Worried about her father not having returned home yet despite the late hour, Oiwa goes out looking for him in the cold evening. By accident, she encounters Osode and from their conversation we are not only informed that Oiwa and Iemon are now separated, but also that she is pregnant and

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<sup>26</sup> Fujiwara, *Yūrei Oiwa*, pp. 81.

<sup>27</sup> Fujiwara, *Yūrei Oiwa*, pp. 74-77; Shimazaki, *Edo Kabuki in Transition*, pp. 130-131.

<sup>28</sup> Fujiwara, *Yūrei Oiwa*, p. 77.

<sup>29</sup> Sugano, *Women and Confucian Cultures*, pp. 170-171; Yonemoto, *The Problem of Women*, pp. 22-24.

has been secretly working as a street prostitute in order to help her father's financial situation. In fact, after the death of Enya, poverty has reduced Samon into a vulgar beggar.

The *Yūjo daigaku* 遊女大学 (The Great Learning of Courtesans, 1825), parody of the behavioural treaty *Onna Daigaku* 女大学 (The Great Learning of Women, early 1700's), mentions how "the sacrifice that many prostitutes made as daughters to secure their families' economic future by following their parents' decision to sell them to pleasure quarters" was seen as a filial act.<sup>30</sup> Oiwa's appearance in *Yotsuya kaidan* as one of these women is probably an allusion to the character of Okaru お軽 in *Chūshingura*. She is the wife of Enya's former retainer Kanpei 勘平 who is desperate to take part to the vendetta but does not have enough money. In order to restore Kanpei's name as a samurai and fund the revenge, Okaru's father Yoichibei 与市兵衛 sells her to a brothel in Kyoto. The acceptance of her father's decision makes of Okaru a virtuous woman who not only shows loyalty towards her husband and his masters, but is also an example of filial piety. Although Oiwa acts on her own initiative, she must have echoed Okaru in the mind of the audience, strengthening the link between *Yotsuya kaidan* and *Chūshingura*.

Significantly, Oiwa begins the explanation of her situation, similar to Osode's who has been working in a brothel to help Yomoshichi, by saying "No matter how poor, is (being a prostitute) an appropriate thing to do for the daughter of a samurai? (*nanbo mazushii kurashi wo shite mo, bushi no musume no arau koto ka* なんぼ貧しい暮らしをしても、武士の娘のあらう事か)".<sup>31</sup> She knows that, despite her *honno* 本音 ("true intention") being noble, her business as a prostitute is

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<sup>30</sup> Lindsey, *Fertility and Pleasure*, pp. 107.

<sup>31</sup> Tsuruya Nanboku IV, *Yotsuya kaidan*, p. 106.

likely to be misunderstood as an expression of depravity and damage her *bushi no tatemae* 武士の建前 (“samurai façade”) or public persona.<sup>32</sup> She is torn by the contradictions, recurrent *topos* in the literature of the time, inherent to her situation: if discovered, Oiwa would no longer appear as the filial child she truly is, but as an unfilial daughter who dishonours her family and aggravates her father sorrows. Oiwa’s self-perception as a member of the samurai class—from which directly stems her concern about the protection of her status—is encapsulated by the expressions *bushi no musume* 武士の娘 (“warrior’s daughter”) and as *samurai no tsuma/nyōbō* 侍の妻/女房 (“the wife of a samurai”) she uses to refer to herself. These words recur often in the play as if they were the only way for Oiwa to remind herself who she is in spite of the material and emotional hardships she has been going through.

After Samon’s death, Oiwa’s *raison d’être* becomes his revenge. Initially she is ready to commit suicide and follow her father into the grave but she is quickly talked out of it by lemon. Dying would be a selfish act, while a filial child’s duty is to avenge his or her parents. Samon’s premature and violent demise, which in the *Zatsudan* was due to illness, is more than a tragic incident meant to reveal lemon’s true nature: Samon is a necessary victim. His sacrifice is pivotal in transforming Oiwa into a figure that overlaps with that of the *Chūshingura*’s loyal retainers. By presenting her as a woman whose family was in Enya’s service and lived according to the outdated *kofū* of the samurai class, Nanboku turned the “proto-Oiwa” into a character that fitted in the *Chūshingura sekai* of *Yotsuya kaidan*. By emphasising her filial piety, he further shaped Oiwa so that she would more closely resemble the *gishi*, champions of loyalty (Ch. *zhōng* 忠 Jp. *chū*). Confucianism regards filial piety and loyalty as one the extension of the other and vice-versa: to be loyal is to be filial, and to be filial is to

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<sup>32</sup> Fujiwara, *Yūrei Oiwa*, pp. 78-79.

show loyalty to one's parents.<sup>33</sup> Still, it is only by giving Oiwa the chance to prove her filial piety, the same as the forty-seven ronin had to show their loyalty, that these figures finally merge. In other words, at this early stage of the play, Samon's revenge equals Enya's vendetta, Oiway's filial piety the *gishi's* loyalty and it is safe to assume that in the mind of the audience this must have been obvious.

More generally, Oiwa must have evoked the image of the "filial child as crusading avenger", which was most notably exemplified by the brothers Soga Jūrō 曾我十郎 and Soga Gorō 曾我五郎. On a rainy night of 1193, they attacked the hunting camp of the shogun Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147-1199) 源頼朝 at the foot of Mt. Fuji and avenged their father's death. While Jūrō died in combat, Gorō was later forced to commit ritual suicide. The blood revenge Oiwa is seeking and that the Soga brothers and the *gishi* successfully achieved is referred to as *katakiuchi* 敵討. In the Edo period, vendettas were legal if carried out following specific bureaucratic procedures the transgression of which could lead to dreadful consequences.<sup>34</sup> According to Yonemoto Marcia, although authorities discouraged blood revenge as expressions of filial piety, stories and plots revolving around this topic flourished incredibly, both in fiction and theatre, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. These often had female protagonists such as Riya in "The Daughter of Sazaki Kōemon, a Foot Soldier in the Service of the Kyōgoku Lord of Bitchū" in *Daitō fujo teiretsu ki* 大東婦女貞烈記 (Record of Exemplary Women in the Great East, 1801), by Matsudaira Yorinori 松平頼紀 (1751-1811).<sup>35</sup>

As the eldest child of a samurai household, Oiwa is bound to seek revenge for her father. This is her new identity, as Enya's *katakiuchi* is the *gishi's*. However, unlike the Soga brothers and the heroines of fiction, she relies on Iemon to carry it on. Women were mostly excluded from directly

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<sup>33</sup> Deal, *Handbook to life*, p. 224.

<sup>34</sup> Atherton, "Valences of Vengeance", p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Yonemoto, *The Problem of Women*, pp. 31-32.

taking part to the *katakiuchi* as the words of Riya's mother to her sister seem to confirm: "if she were a boy, when she came of age she might avenge her father's death through a vendetta, but because she is a girl, she cannot".<sup>36</sup> In *Yotsuya kaidan*, Oiwa's entrustment of her father's revenge to her husband is ironically paradoxical. Not only Iemon is the real culprit, but also later on he will dismiss the idea itself of *katakiuchi* by saying that he does not "feel like doing that anymore" (*iya da no*, いやだの) and that "now days avenging someone's father is so old-fashioned" (*imajibun oya no kataki mo anmari kofū da*, 今時分、親の敵もあんまり古風だ).<sup>37</sup> By insisting on Oiwa's upholding of her duties as a filial daughter, Iemon proves how it was possible to "manipulate and deceive loyal figures by appealing to the samurai code of honor"<sup>38</sup> he and other *bushi* had ditched for a life driven by lust and greed. Reminded of her obligations, Oiwa reconciles with Iemon, the man who has only been exploiting her and is ultimately the cause of all her disgraces, including her death. However, as for all the other good characters of the play, this is nothing but her own fault: it is the consequence of holding onto the samurai *kofū* in a time when nobody if not few foolish people did.

Besides an exemplar daughter, Oiwa is also a good wife and a loving mother. By giving birth to a baby boy, Oiwa has in fact upheld her social duty to produce a male heir to continue the family lineage, this being itself promoted as a filial act by treatises such as the *Onna Chōhōki* 女重宝記 (Valuable Writings for Women, 1692). Moreover, she proved her chastity (*teisetsu* 貞節) by resisting to Takuetsu's attempt of luring her into committing adultery, an act that would damage her *tatema*e as the rightful wife of a samurai.<sup>39</sup> Scholars believe that this side of her personality was inspired by

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<sup>36</sup> Yonemoto, *The Problem of Women*, p. 32.

<sup>37</sup> Tsuruya Nanboku IV, *Yotsuya kaidan*, p. 170.

<sup>38</sup> Shimazaki, *Edo Kabuki in Transition*, p. 129-130.

<sup>39</sup> According to the Tokugawa law, both rape and consensual extramarital relationship figured as adultery. This was considered a crime for moral reasons but especially because it constituted an offense to socio-political order. This was a

the homonymous protagonist of *Nobegami no kaki oki* 延紙の書置き (Note on a Tissue, 1773) a kabuki adaptation of Chikamatsu Monzaemon 近松門左衛門 (1653-1725)'s masterpiece *Shinjū ten no Amijima* 心中天網島 (The Love Suicide at Amijima, 1721). This is the story of a woman who, betrayed by her husband despite being an impeccable wife and mother, eventually commits suicide.<sup>40</sup>

Oiwa's image as presented so far shatters into pieces in the moment Takuetsu reveals to her everything about Kihei, Oume and Iemon's deception and he shows her the devastating effect that the poison has had on her face. From this moment on, Oiwa undergoes a transitional phase during which Nanboku's tendency to add layers of depth to his characters by means of "self-quotations", another intertextual practice, becomes evident.<sup>41</sup> Nanboku enriched Oiwa's meaning by alluding to the protagonists of his previous plays, most significantly: *Okuni gozen's* Lady Okuni and *Iro moyō's* Kasane.

Lady Okuni and Kasane were both once beautiful lady-in-waiting who become ugly without them even noticing and, betrayed by their partners, turned into vengeful spirits after their death. Oiwa's discovery of her repugnant aspect follows the same pattern as theirs: she is forced to look in the mirror, but what she sees—a horrendous face with a massive bulge on her eye and a receding hairline—is so extraneous to her that, at first, she thinks it is the reflection of someone standing behind her.<sup>42</sup> In fact, she utters, "That horrifying face startled me, who is behind me? (*chotto mite, osoroshiki kao yue bikkurishite i wa ,are inau, dare zo ushiro ni* ちょっと見て、恐ろしき顔ゆえ惚りしていは、アレイナウ、誰ぞ後ろに). Then, when she finally realises that is hers, she says, "My

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legit cause of divorce, a procedure women could not refuse nor ask without complications. Yonemoto, *The Problem of Women*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>40</sup> Furuido, "Oiwa to iu na", pp.28-29. Chikamatsu was the most famous playwright for the puppet theatre.

<sup>41</sup> De Marinis, *The Semiotics of Performance*, pp. 132-133.

<sup>42</sup> Hayakawa, "Kagami to henshin no enshutsu", pp. 245-248.

face is the same colour of my clothes. Is this me? Is this really my face?" (*yaya, kirui no iroai, atama no yōsu. Kori ya washi no. Washi ga honma ni, kao kai nou* ヤヤ、着類の色合い、頭の様子。コリヤわしかいの、わしがほんまに、顔かいのう).<sup>43</sup>

Oiwa's following attempt to blacken her teeth, which makes her mouth seem inhumanely large, and comb her hair only to have it falling into big bloody clumps was also tailored on Lady Okuni's and will be discussed in more details in the next chapter. Interestingly, at this stage Oiwa starts resembling an *obake* お化け, supernatural creatures of Japanese folklore with a grotesque aspect. In particular, she resembles the *ao nyōbō* 青女房 ("blue lady") that Toriyama Sekien 鳥山石燕 (1712-1788) included in his *Konjaku gazu zoku hyakki* 今昔画图続百鬼 (The Illustrated One Hundred Demons from Present and the Past, 1779).<sup>44</sup> This depicts a young lady-in-waiting with a brush for the *kane* 鉄漿 (iron liquid)<sup>45</sup> in one hand, and a mirror in the other reflecting a horrendous face with a black-smearred mouth. The resemblance between Oiwa and Sekien's print is uncanny and there is to wonder whether, given the popularity of Sekien's work, Nanboku was influenced by it, either consciously or not, or the audience made such association itself.

Nevertheless, why did Oiwa need to become an ugly woman (*akujo* 悪女)?<sup>46</sup> In the *Zatsudan*, in the *Shimoyo no hoshi* and the original Kasane legend, the protagonists were already ugly by the time the story begins: Oiwa was defaced by smallpox while both Osawa and Kasane were born ugly.

<sup>43</sup> Tsuruya Nanboku IV, *Yotsuya kaidan*, p. 179.

<sup>44</sup> Toriyama Sekien, *Konjaku gazu zoku hyakki*, p. 106.

<sup>45</sup> This is a more colloquial name of the practice of blackening one's teeth, the *ohaguro* お歯黒. It was normal for married women to wear the black but it was a taboo for women who had just given birth. The fact that Oiwa completely disregards this prohibition has been interpreted as a sign of her transition into a creature of the other dimension. Honma, "Shiken", pp. 76-77.

<sup>46</sup>This term literally means "evil woman", but here is used as a synonym of *shūjo* 醜女, "ugly woman".

Lady Okuni and *Iro moyō*'s Kasane were beautiful instead and only later became unattractive, the former as consequence of bad health, the latter as karmic punishment for being in a relationship with her father's murderer. According to Fujiwara Shigekazu 藤原成一, Oiwa's face is the painful and concrete manifestation of lemon and the Itō's betrayal, the consequence of the decadence of modern time becoming visible to an until then unaware Oiwa.<sup>47</sup> Whether the case is, there is no reason to doubt that this, like Samon's death, was a necessary step to trigger the sequence of events core of the play.

Oiwa's physical transformation prompts and matches an interior metamorphosis. The grudge she feels while staring at her disfigured reflection causes Oiwa to reject her identity as avenger of her father to become *her own* one in guise of a vengeful spirit or *onryō* 怨霊 (literally "wrathful spirit"). Now, she is at the same time enforcer and object of the revenge, a hybrid between forty-seven ronin and the master Enya. The belief that an angry soul, whether of a man, an animal or an inanimate object, would cause disasters (*tatari* 祟) until placated with appropriate pacification rituals originated far before the Nara 奈良 period (710-784). It was so eradicated that even shaped the course of events. In fact, when the capital was moved from Nagaoka 長岡 to Kyoto in 794 after only ten years, it was to escape the wrathful spirit of Prince Sawara 早良 (750-785) who had been wrongfully exiled to Awaji Province but died on the way there.<sup>48</sup> As the examples provided so far testify, vengeful spirits were a very popular subject in literature, Oiwa being only the last one of a long series.

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<sup>47</sup> Fujiwara, *Yūrei Oiwa*, pp. 85-87

<sup>48</sup> McCullough, "The Heian Court", p. 24.



In the *Zatsudan*, nobody knows whether Oiwa is dead or alive, thus whether she is appearing as an *ikiryō* 生霊, the angry spirit of a living person, or *shiryō* 死霊, that of a dead one. In *Yotsuya kaidan*, Oiwa's death turns her into an *yūrei* 幽霊 or "ghost", thus into a creature of the latter category. Although this state of uncertainty about her fate might have added to the horror of the play, Nanboku decided not to rely on it but to openly kill Oiwa and have her turn into a ghost. Why? If we once again look at the playwright's tendency to self-quotation, it appears that almost if not every vengeful spirit that appear in his works are at the same time ghosts. This was his style. In collaboration with the actor Onoe Matsusuke 尾上松助 (1744-1815), Kikugorō III's foster father, Nanboku completely revolutionized the way ghosts were represented in kabuki. Starting with the wet-nurse Ihoata 乳母五百機 (*menoto loata*) in *Tenjiku Tokubei Iko Banashi* 天竺徳兵衛韓噺 (Tales of Strange Lands: Tokubei from India, 1805), he presented the audience with a new type of ghost that had lost its materiality to a more ephemeral consistency and that from simply amusing became effectively scary beings whose power were seemingly endless.<sup>49</sup> The effort in reimagining the figure of the ghost alone could explain why Nanboku chose to make Oiwa into a *shiryō* who embarked into a merciless and brute revenge.

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<sup>49</sup> Conventionally regarded as the first *kaidan mono*, this is the story of Tokubei, a man of Korean origins and Christian faith, and his failed attempt to overthrow the shogunate. A practitioner of magic like his father, he is able to perform a whole series of supernatural deeds, including summoning a giant fire-breathing fire toad. Staging all Tokubei's "miracles" required the invention of several stage props and tricks that proved to be so effective that the production was investigated by city magistrates on the accusation of using Christian magic. Brandon and Leiter, "Tenjiku Tokubei". As far as ghosts' representation is concerned, Matsusuke introduced a new type of costume called *jōgo* 漏斗 resembling the white kimono wore by the deceased, the *kyōkatabira* 経帷子. *Jōgo* literally means funnel and indeed this garment was shaped as one, the long tail becoming narrower and narrower towards the end and giving the impression of a footless ghost fluctuating in the air. Brandon and Leiter, "Tenjiku Tokubei", pp. 33-35.

## CHAPTER 3

**Oiwa, a jealous ghost?**

Finally yet importantly, why did Oiwa turn into a vengeful spirit? What prompted her merciless yet memorable revenge?

At the beginning of the chapter “Shades of Jealousy” of her book on *Edo kabuki*, Shimazaki points out that in pre-modern Japan female ghosts and vengeful spirits “tended overwhelmingly to be in the thrall of private resentments inspired by lover’s betrayal or the pain of unrequited love”. In other words, “feelings of anger, resentment, and jealousy inspired by such betrayal in love were central to the ghost construction as a trope”.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, in the 11<sup>th</sup> century masterpiece *Genji Monogatari* 源氏物語 (The Tale of Genji), Lady Rokujō 六条御息所 (*Rokujō miyasudokoro*)’s jealousy towards her lover Genji 源氏 is so deep-rooted that she tortures her love rivals to death first as an *ikiryō* and then, after her death, as a *shiryō*.<sup>51</sup>

In the Genroku 元禄 era (1688-1704), *Kamigata kabuki* 上方歌舞伎<sup>52</sup> saw the flourishing of plays where the representation of vengeful spirits (*onryōgoto* 怨霊事) would overlap with that of jealous women (*shittogoto* 嫉妬事)<sup>53</sup> and with the performance of acrobatics (*karuwazagoto* 軽業事). Plays such as *Keisei asama ga dake* 傾城浅間嶽 (Courtesans on the Asama’s Peak, 1698) and

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<sup>50</sup> Shimazaki, *Edo Kabuki in Transition*, p. 150.

<sup>51</sup> As an *ikiryō*, she causes the premature departure of Yūgao 夕顔 and Aoi 葵上 (*Aoi no ue*), respectively one of Genji’s lower-rank lover and his official wife. As a *shiryō*, she claims Genji’s second wife Murasaki 紫上 (*Murasaki no ue*)’s life.

<sup>52</sup> The kabuki of the Kyoto and Osaka area.

<sup>53</sup> Also called *rinkigoto* 愠気事.

*Keisei hotoke no hara* 傾城仏原 (Courtesans on the Buddha Plain, 1699) would feature episodes where a woman, overcome by jealousy, turned into an angry spirit either living or dead whose *extraordinary* nature was conveyed on stage by tricks and spectacular stunts.<sup>54</sup>

Scholars have often lumped Oiwa's character together with these earlier female ghosts, using the expression "mad with jealousy" (*shitto ni kurutteiru* 嫉妬に狂っている) to describe it. Their attitude seems the result of some sort of Aristotelian syllogism: stating that jealousy is pivotal in the formation of female vengeful ghosts (major premise) and given that Oiwa is one (minor premise), then this feeling must inevitably be the motif beyond her transformation as well (conclusion). A statement, for how logically valid, is not necessary true. Among them, Shimazaki is the one who has expanded the most on the matter of Oiwa's jealousy. However, much of the evidence she provides in her analysis to support this claim can be actually reinterpreted in a way to corroborate the opposite argument: that Oiwa is not jealous at all, or at least jealousy is not the ultimate reason behind her revenge. In fact, if we adopt a new intertextual approach to the "Oiwa-text" and look at the bigger picture from a different perspective, in particular from that of the relation between *Yotsuya kaidan* and *Chūshingura*, we will see that jealousy did not shape her identity as a vengeful spirit.

First, what is jealousy? Called *netami* ネタミ, *shitto* 嫉妬 or *rinki* 愔気, the meaning of jealousy in Japanese often overlaps with that of envy and it is thus defined as: the feeling of unhappiness and rage because someone has something one wants; the fear and anxiety of losing a loved one to someone else.<sup>55</sup> Up until the Meiji 明治 period (1868-1912), jealousy was conceived exclusively as a

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<sup>54</sup> The *kaidan mono* genre can be regarded as a development of this threefold pattern, but with a significant difference: while *kaidan mono* aimed at terrifying the audience, *onryōgoto* meant to simply entertain it by exploiting the masses' interest for "unusual" phenomena. Hattori, *Sakasama no yūrei*, pp. 117-120.

<sup>55</sup> *Nihon kokugo daijiten 2<sup>nd</sup> edition online*, s. v. *shitto* 嫉妬, accessed June 30, 2018, <https://japanknowledge.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2443/lib/display/?lid=200201ebd796L5vHWEg0>

“female malady latent in every woman’s blood, capable of consuming even the most faithful wife or lover without even being aware of it”.<sup>56</sup> Such beliefs were common to both Buddhism and (Neo) Confucianism and, like in China, and would support of the male dominance in patriarchal systems.<sup>57</sup> The *Onna Daigaku*, written by the Neo-Confucian scholar Kaibara Ekken 貝原益軒 (1630-1714) states that jealousy is one of the five female shortcomings that justify the inferiority of women to men and one of the seven reasons why a man could divorce from his wife.<sup>58</sup> As a woman, Oiwa was automatically understood to be prone to jealousy. Still, for this feeling to emerge it must have meant that she loved Iemon to the point that the sole idea of losing him was unbearable, like for her models Lady Okuni and Kasane.

In *Okuni gozen*, Lady Okuni is so in love with Motonobu 元信 that his absence and unknown whereabouts have caused her to fall into such distress that her beauty has faded away and her health is rapidly deteriorating. When her host Sehei 瀬平 touches upon the relationship between Motonobu and Ichō-no-Mae 銀杏前, sister of Lord Sasaki 佐々木, she manifests her jealousy by becoming immediately suspicious.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, in *Iro moyō*, Kasane is so devoted to Yoemon 与右衛門 that she got his name tattooed on her forearm and is ready to commit double suicide despite being six months pregnant with his child. Moreover, as soon as she notices that Yoemon is hiding a letter, she becomes worried that he might have another lover and accuses him of cheating.<sup>60</sup>

At some stage Oiwa must have been in love with Iemon, at least enough to marry him without her father’s consent. At the beginning of *Yotsuya kaidan*, we are informed that Samon holds a great

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<sup>56</sup> Shimzaki, *Edo Kabuki in Transition*, p. 159.

<sup>57</sup> Wu, *The Chinese Virago*, p. 36.

<sup>58</sup> Liddle and Nakajimo, *Raising Suns, Raising Daughters*, pp. 103,104.

<sup>59</sup> Tsuruya Nanboku IV, *Okuni gozen*, pp. 294-296.

<sup>60</sup> Tsuruya Nanboku IV, *Kesa kakematsu*, pp. 287-288

deal of grudge towards Oiwa and Iemon's *korobiai* 転合 (illicit marriage),<sup>61</sup> probably the only “un-filial” act his daughter has ever performed. However, these feelings of affection had already disappeared by the time Oiwa gave birth, as the soliloquy (*douhaku*, 独白) she engages in just before taking Kihei's medicine implies:

常から邪慳な伊右衛門、男の子を産んだというて、さして悦ぶ様子もなう、なんぞ  
といふと穀潰し、足手まとひな餓鬼産んでと、朝夕にあの悪口。それヲ耳にかけば  
こそ、針の筵のこの家に、生傷さへも絶えばこそ、非道な男に添ひとげて、辛抱す  
るもととさんの、敵を討つて貰ひたサ<sup>62</sup>

Forever heartless Iemon, even though I bore him a boy, he is not happy. That brat, you have given birth to a burden, a parasite, every day he says the same horrible things. Right because I can hear them, in this house like a mat of needles my fresh wounds will never heal. The only reason I reunited with him despite everything is to obtain my father's revenge.

A soliloquy is a device often used in drama: a character speaks to oneself, disclosing its innermost thoughts, as if nobody but the audience could hear it.<sup>63</sup> Having been left alone in the house—although technically Kohei is hidden in the closet—Oiwa pours her heart out and from her words it appears clear that she now only feels resentment towards Iemon, and that she willing to put up with his vile behaviour because he promised to avenge Samon's death. If there is no love, how can there be jealousy?

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<sup>61</sup> A *korobiai* as a marriage contracted in secrete, without the permission of one's parents nor the presence of an intermediary. *Nihon kokugo daijiten 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*, s. v. *korobiai* 転び合い, accessed July 30, 2018, <https://japanknowledge-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2443/lib/display/?lid=200201a73973687paw8q>

<sup>62</sup> Tsuruya Nanboku IV, *Yotsuya kaidan*, pp. 70.

<sup>63</sup> Pavis, *Dictionary of the theatre*, p. 342.

Still, according to Shimazaki, Oiwa is jealous. Her “illness” remained asymptomatic until she discovered that Iemon had rejected her for the younger and wealthier Oume and then pushed her towards her “deranged revenge” while she is combing her hair at her vanity table.<sup>64</sup> Only mentioned in the previous chapters, “hair-combing scenes” are known as *kamisuki* 髪梳き. This theatrical convention is said to have originated by the episode, in the *Soga Monogatari* 曾我物語 (The Tale of the Soga Brothers, 14<sup>th</sup> century), where Tora gozen 虎御前 combs the hair of her lover Jūrō.<sup>65</sup> Intended as a display of intimacy between a man and a woman, the *kamisuki* was widely employed in love scenes. A variation on this theme is the *hitori de no kamisuki* 一人での髪梳き or “solo hair-combing scene” where instead a jealous woman combs her own hair “only for it to stand on as a symbol for her distraught feelings”.<sup>66</sup> For example, in *Okuni gozen*, Lady Okuni combs her own hair while gradually being overcome with jealousy after finding out that Motonobu has only deceived her and that he is actually in love with Ichō-no-mae.

In the moment Nanboku chose to employ the *hitoride no kamisuki* in *Yotsuya kaidan*, he must have known that he was superimposing on Oiwa the image of the jealous woman and that the active audience, already caught up in the stereotype of the female ghost, would make such association. Not to mention those who noticed the allusion to *Okuni gozen*, those familiar with the *Zatsudan* or who saw one of the *tsuji banzuke* 辻番付 (street corner programs) announcing the first production of *Yotsuya kaidan*. The latter, presumably inspired by the content of the *gōkan* 合巻 (combined volume) *Naritan mite no Tsunagorō* 成田山御手の網五郎 (Tsunagorō and the True Hand of Narita), written

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<sup>64</sup> Shimazaki, *Edo Kabuki in Transition*, p. 160.

<sup>65</sup> Gunji, *Kabuki: yōshiki to denshō*, pp. 51-72; Hattori, *Edo kabuki ron*, pp. 2-18.

<sup>66</sup> Leiter, *Dictionary of Japanese Theatre*, p. 156.

by Nanboku and published in the spring of 1825, presented *Yotsuya kaidan* as the story of the jealousy rivalry between Oiwa and her own sister.<sup>67</sup>

For the sole application of this convention, Oiwa is *de facto* a jealous woman. But what if the author conceived her *kamisuki* not much as a display of a woman's jealousy but, in line with the aesthetic of the *kaidan mono*, just as another way to scare the audience? The main point about Oiwa's hair combing scene is that it is frightening in its depiction of a once beautiful woman defaced by an oozing bulge above her eyes with smeared black mouth and rare hair covered in blood. Significantly, Gunji states that this scene was not included in *Yotsuya kaidan*'s first draft and that he added it after the star of the play, Kikugorō III, expressed his dissatisfaction with it. The scholar does not state the actor's specific demands but, from its words, it is safe to assume that he asked for something that, such as this scene, could appeal the decadent tastes for the grotesque of the Kasei era's theatregoers.<sup>68</sup>

This would explain both why there are no allusion to Oiwa's love to lemon before the *kamisuki*, nor expressions of jealousy following it. In *Okuni gozen*, when Lady Okuni first turns up as a ghost she pours her feelings out in front of Motonobu and Ichō-no-Mae in a manner reminiscent of the heroines of the *onryōgoto*. Later, the character of Kasane, not to be confused with the protagonist of *Iro moyō*, having heard about the couple inexplicably screams "how regretful" (*urameshina* 恨めしいなア). The room is soon enveloped in an eerie atmosphere: a bundle of gold coins turns into a snake menacingly undulating in direction of the maid Kosan 小三 and Lady Okuni's skull, that had been placed on the butsudā, flies towards Kasane and sticks to her face. The woman is possessed by Lady Okuni's vengeful spirit and immediately accuses her husband, Yoemon, of having a relationship with

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<sup>67</sup> Furuido, "Oiwa to iu na: tsuikō", p. 32; Gunji, *Tsuruya Nanboku*, pp.50-53. *Tsuji banzuke* might report contradictory information since they were produced before the actual staging of a play and did not account for possible changes.

<sup>68</sup> Gunji, *Kabuki: yōshiki to denshō*, pp. 106-108.

Kosan, who is actually Ichō-no-mae, and tries to kill her with a sickle. Everything about Lady Okuni's revenge screams jealousy: she makes her appearance as a snake, animal traditionally associated with jealousy, and turns Kasane herself into a jealous woman who also regards Ichō-no-Mae as a love rival that must be eliminated.<sup>69</sup>

The same cannot be said about *Yotsuya kaidan*. Here snakes do appear, but they do so as a transfiguration of Kohei, who was also murdered by Iemon and turned into a ghost. In the *Zatsudan*, Oiwa's grudge materialises as both red snakes and rats, but in the play it does exclusively as rats. There is a correspondence between these animal avatar and Oiwa and Kohei's zodiacal sign: the rodent represents the former because she was born in the year of the rat, while the reptile the latter because he was born in the year of the snake. According to Honma Masayuki, Nanboku inverted the traditional association female ghost-snake and male ghost-rat just for the sake of innovation. Since Oiwa and Kohei can be seen as the two faces of the same coin, as one character, he continues, the snake must be interpreted as an allusion to Oiwa.<sup>70</sup>

Still, had Nanboku wanted to stress Oiwa's jealousy, would he not have swapped her birth year with that of Kohei and have him transform into a snake instead? The image of Kohei's snapped fingers morphing into snakes might not even be a reference to any jealousy within *Yotsuya Kaidan*—Kohei himself is not a jealous man, only a devoted servant to his master— but another of Nanboku's self-quotations. This in fact connects this character to the protagonist of an earlier play, the jealous ghost of the actor Kohada Koheiji 小幡小平次 who was betrayed and killed by his wife and his lover in *Iroe iri otogi zoku* 彩入御伽草 (Coloured Nursery Tales, 1808). In other words, Kohei would be

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<sup>69</sup> Tsuruya Nanboku IV, *Okuni gozen*, pp. 320.

<sup>70</sup> Oiwa and Kohei were both wrongfully murdered and, initially, their revenge is a joint effort. Honma, "Shiken", pp. 77-80.



another example of Nanboku's usage of intertextuality as a way to add layers of depths and meaning to a character and consolidate his aesthetic, just like with Oiwa.<sup>71</sup>

Lastly, in the "dream scene" (*yume no ba* 夢の場) the poem about the reunion between two lovers that Iemon and Oiwa, here disguised beautiful country girl Iwa 岩, the exchange on the day of the Tanabata 七夕 star festival, can be read as Oiwa's attempt at luring him into her trap. Oiwa's would be her exploiting his lust as a bait rather than expressing a nostalgia for their past relation.<sup>72</sup>

The evidence provided calls for a reconsideration of the centrality of jealousy in shaping Oiwa's character, as proposed by Shimazaki, but it does not really elucidates the possible reasons behind her revenge. However, if we analyse Oiwa's reaction to the deception by taking in account her profile as presented in the previous chapters, the answer to this essay's research question is clear as daylight. Once Takuetsu has revealed Oiwa the whole truth about Kihei, Oume and Iemon's plan, she utters the following words:

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<sup>71</sup> Shimazaki, *Edo kabuki in transition*, pp. 190-191.

<sup>72</sup> Tsuruya Nanboku IV, *Yotsuya kaidan*, 364. This is a *waka* 和歌 from the *Hyakuninissshu* 百人一首 (From the Hundred Poets, One Poem Each, 1230's): "Because the current is swift, even though the rapids, blocked by a boulder, are divided, like them in the end, we will surely meet, I know" (*se wo hayami/ iha ni sekaruru/ taki-gaha no/ warete mo suwe ni/ ohamuto zo omofu* 瀬をはやみ/岩にせかるる/滝川の/われても末に/逢はむとぞ思ふ), Mostow, *Pictures of the heart*, p.369. The presence of the word "iwa" and the theme of the reunion of two lovers—the irony—makes it clear why Nanboku included this poem in the "dream scene". Interestingly, this particular *waka* 和歌 *poem* was composed by the retired Emperor Sutoku 崇徳院 (1119-1164), one of the most renowned vengeful spirits of Japan. There is to wonder whether Nanboku tried to purposely evoke this frightful figure or the audience managed to make the connection itself. In fact, by the late Edo period, the *Hyakuninissshu* was accessible to masses.

さうとは知らず隣家の伊藤、わしがところへ心づけ、日毎に送る真実は、忝ないと思ふから、乳母やはしたへ最前も、この身をはたす毒薬を、両手をついての一礼は、今々思へば恥づかしい。さぞや笑はん、くやしいわい

Unaware of it, how truly grateful I was for the gifts that every day the Itō, my neighbours, would send me! A moment ago, I joined my hands in gratitude for the poison delivered from the wet-nurse. Now each time I think of it, how shameful it is. They must laugh and laugh at me. Bitter, oh how bitter, is this humiliation.<sup>73</sup>

What Oiwa is concerned about in her darkest hour is not the prospect of losing her husband to another woman. Her thoughts do not even go to lemon: what she cannot cope with is the humiliation she has suffered, the idea of having been betrayed by those she trusted the most, and that they might laugh at her. Shame or *haji* 恥 is a concept indissolubly tied to that of honour, *meiyo* 名誉, and constitutes the core of the samurai identity as opposed to that of other social groups.<sup>74</sup> Anachronistic, last stronghold of the values of the *bushi*, Oiwa's actions up to this point—such as keeping her business as a vulgar prostitute secret, striving for her father's revenge or stoically refusing Takuetsu's advances despite her unhappy marriage—can be seen as an attempt to preserve her honour as the wife and daughter from a warrior family. Together with the absence of any proof of affection, let alone jealousy, towards lemon, an intense sense of shame is thus the most plausible source of Oiwa's grudge and the cause of the collapse of her *bushi no tatemae* and, with it her identity as the avenger of her father. A new Oiwa is born, this time as a vengeful spirit driven not only by a general sense of retribution, but also by the necessity to restore her damaged honour.

<sup>73</sup>Tsuruya Nanboku IV, *Yotsuya kaidan*, pp. 120.

<sup>74</sup>Ikegami, "Shame and the Samurai", pp. 1351-1355.

Significantly, as Fujiwara notes, also Enya's *tatemaie* shatters into pieces—in the moment he recklessly unsheathes his swords inside the shogun's castle—as result of the humiliation received by Kō, who made inappropriate remarks towards his wife.<sup>75</sup> After loyalty and self-sacrifice, is ultimately prompted by the forty-seven's desire/ duty to restore Enya's muddled reputation. The parallel is too evident to be a coincidence: it was a conscious move on Nanboku's behalf to further merge *Yotsuya kaidan* and *Chūshingura*, and thus the proof that above all it is the intertextuality between these two plays the key to Oiwa's character.

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<sup>75</sup> Fujiwara, *Yūrei Oiwa*, pp. 104-105.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this essay, I have challenged the established view of Oiwa as a jealous spirit. By drawing upon the theory of intertextuality and by looking at the interplay between the “Oiwa-text” and other texts from Nanboku’s repertoire, foremost Lady Okuni and Kasane, I was able to exclude jealousy as the cause of her revenge. However, only by taking in account the relationship between *Yotsuya kaidan* and *Chūshingura*, the play’s “world”, I was able to argue that Oiwa’s transformation into a vengeful spirit was inspired by a strong sense of shame. This feeling and the related concept of honour immediately appear to be more appropriate to the play’s context since they better accommodate the specificities of Oiwa’s character, a samurai woman who is concerned with her status but no longer loves her husband. But why honour and shame? Is it because they contribute to merge *Yotsuya kaidan* and *Chūshingura* or rather is it because of *how* they do it?

It was mentioned before that *Yotsuya kaidan* is a parody of *Chūshingura*, a type of intertextuality that Hutcheon defines as a “repetition with difference”<sup>76</sup>. For example, the vendetta is an element common to both plays, but while in the former the avenger is female (Oiwa) in the latter is male (the forty-seven ronin). The honour revenge is also an element of repetition, as Enya’s vendetta was also a matter of honour and shame. However, the fact that Oiwa carries it out with extreme barbarity—she even kills her own infant son<sup>77</sup>—and for *her* own personal gain—she is no longer avenging her father but herself, whereas Enya’s retainers acted out of selflessness towards their master—is the difference that makes of it the core of Nanboku’s parody of the decline of samurai moral universe *Chūshingura* so highly celebrated.

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<sup>76</sup> Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, p. 37.

<sup>77</sup> Oiwa is determined to extinguish Iemon’s family line, this accounting for the murder of people who were not involved into her deception such as the baby and her in-laws.

Although Oiwa's actions might be justified as rightful, as Katsuya Hirano points out, in reality she is using vengeance as "a way of achieving moral rectitude while actually pursuing selfish or heartless calculations". She embodies the contradictions of the samurai class at the end of the Edo period that would claim "moral supremacy (selfless devotion to greater causes such as peace and order, as expressed in the moral categories of loyalty, righteousness, and benevolence)" but could no longer deliver because blinded by self-interest. For the way she is portrayed, initially Oiwa seems to be extraneous to the corruption of her social class. Nevertheless, in the moment she is humiliated, she abandons her obligations towards her father and her family. Her image as the positive character shatters and she becomes the unforeseen, yet inevitable since she is the protagonist, centrepiece of Nanboku's representation of the degenerated contemporary society.<sup>78</sup> The insistence on Oiwa's *kōfu* enhances their vacuity.<sup>79</sup>

Given that the target of the parody is the decline of samurai morality, it makes sense that it would revolve around its pillars. Shame and honour do not only constitute a clear allusion to *Chūshingura*, but they are the utmost defining concept of the warrior class Oiwa belongs to. The fact that, to an extent, she shares the same motivation of the loyal retainers but acts without discerning good and evil only enhances the image of the leading class on the verge of collapse. Jealousy could have not have achieved such goal because of its democratic nature: all women, regardless of their social status, could be overcome by this feeling, from peasant girls to princesses to lady-in-waiting like Lady Okuni and Kasane. However, before a daughter, a wife and a mother, Oiwa is first a *bushi*, and jealousy would not only have clashed with her elitist nature, but would also have weakened the overall parodic framework of *Yotsuya kaidan*.

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<sup>78</sup> Hirano, *Politics of Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 186-191.

<sup>79</sup> In this sense, Kohei is Oiwa's antithesis and, together with Yomoshichi, the true hero of *Yotsuya kaidan*. Despite being tortured and murdered, instead of pursuing its revenge for retribution sake's he is selflessly motivated by the need to find his master's medicine.

By freeing Oiwa from the chains of jealousy and providing her with a reason other than it to be outraged, Nanboku presented the audience with an unconventional female ghost. This was not the first time the playwright broke kabuki conventions and gender stereotypes, as it has been noted that he would often give male characters female traits and vice-versa. Up until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ghosts featured in kabuki were mostly female as consequence of the belief that women were more prone to feel attachment than men. Nanboku reverted the situation by reintroducing on stage male ghosts such as the aforementioned Koheji or the priest Seigen 清玄 in *Sakura hime azuma bunshō* 桜姫東文章 (The Scarlet Princess of Edo, 1817) on stage and by even having them driven by the feminine feeling of jealousy.<sup>80</sup> Oiwa's pursuit of a masculine endeavour, an honour revenge, can be explained in terms in this revolutionary tendency in his dramaturgy.

By identifying with Genette's *bricoleur*, I was able to also break Oiwa into a series of literary motives, which go behind the parody of *Chūshingura* and the allusions to Lady Okuni and Kasane. Under Oiwa's appearance as a vengeful spirit, the audience might have detected the images of the "filial and crusading child", of the filial daughter who becomes a prostitute to help her family's financial situation, of the good mother and the virtuous wife, and the *obake* interweaving to make this character fascinatingly multifaceted. Hopefully, this essay did not only achieved his goal and provided new insights on Oiwa's character, but also contributed to shed a light on the "intertextual effort"<sup>81</sup> i.e. the (re)elaboration of previous material to shape the meaning of a given text on both the producer and the recipient's behalf, in the literary environment of pre-modern Japan.

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<sup>80</sup> Suwa, *Tsuruya Nanboku: warai wo bukki*, pp. 160-165.

<sup>81</sup> De Marinis, *The Semiotics of Performance*, p. 4.

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