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Deep North Gothic

A Comparative Cultural Reading of Hearn,
Yanagita, and Akutagawa

- I . Somewhere between “Discover Japan” and “Exotic Japan”
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Takayuki Tatsumi

Although it has perennially been considered one of the classics of Japanese folklore studies, Kunio Yanagita's *Tono Monogatari* (The Legends of Tono), published in 1910, may seem anachronistic at a first glance. Yanagita's text is filled with the superstitious tales that the natives of Tono, a town in the deep north of Japan, believed to be true. According to Kizen Sasaki, a native informant who provided Yanagita with these oral legends of the supernatural, Tono had been inhabited by gods called “kami” who guarded homes, ugly goblin-like creatures called “kappa” that impregnated women, and witches or shamans called “itako” who could communicate with the dead. If *The Legends of Tono* had been written as a collection of outlandish fairy tales, it would have been mainly consumed by a readership interested in popular fiction. And yet, what complicates the text is that in Japan's high-Enlightenment period in the early twentieth century Yanagita attempted to radically question the modern western distinction between science and literature, by focusing on the specific locale of Tono, where people

still encountered difficulty in telling fact from fiction, and the actual from the imaginary, just like the inhabitants of Sleepy Hollow in Washington Irving's tale. The people of Tono were not only narrating but also living what could be called "Deep North Gothic." Thus, Yanagita never took a condescending view of his native informants but carefully stylized what he collected orally from a young Tonoite named Kizen Sasaki, a walking database of Tono narratives. From this perspective, *The Legends of Tono* is not anachronistic but antidotal to Japanese modernization and westernization.

I . Somewhere between "Discover Japan" and "Exotic Japan"

Let me start by briefly reconstructing the biography of Kunio Yanagita (1875-1962), the founder of Japanese folklore studies, based on Ronald Morse's sketch⁽¹⁾. A scholar and poet who also worked as a journalist and government bureaucrat, Yanagita conducted extensive research and wrote prolifically, thereby establishing the framework for subsequent folklore research in Japan. Born in Hyogo Prefecture, he was the sixth son of Misao Matsuoka, a scholar, teacher, and Shinto priest. Following his graduation with a degree in law from the Tokyo Imperial University in 1900, he married into the influential family of Naohei Yanagita and adopted the Yanagita name. He worked as a government bureaucrat from 1900 to 1919, first in the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce and later in the Legislative Bureau and the Imperial Household Ministry. He worked as a journalist for the *Asahi* newspaper from 1919 to 1930. An avid traveler and prolific writer, he published 1,000 articles and more than 100 books in the latter part of the Meiji Period (1868-1912). *The Legends of Tono* was published in 1910, at the moment when Yanagita himself was involved as a government bureaucrat in the annexation of Korea to Japan, a coincidence

which I will discuss later.

What amazes the contemporary reader is that, even in the wake of the postmodern cyber-culture in the 1980s, *The Legends of Tono* does not lose its importance as an elegant piece of Japanese literature. Of course, as the translator Ronald Morse pointed out, between 1875, Kunio Yanagita's year of birth, and 1962, that of his death, a radical transformation of Japan's society had transpired. "Born in the era of the rickshaw, Yanagita lived to see jet airplanes. During his youth he witnessed famine and infanticide, yet before he died Japan was the most advanced nation in Asia" (Morse, "Translator's Introduction," xxiii-xxiv). Postwar Japan experienced a "creative defeat" in the words of Shigeto Tsuru, transforming its masochistic Americanization into a techno-capitalistic triumph for the Japanese side. This explains why we are prone to equate Japan's rapid high-growth with the process of hyper-urbanization, which has encouraged us to demystify pre-modernistic discourses represented by the Tono narratives. But, it is also true that, as we could see in the rise of urban folklore from the 1980s through the '90s, the mythic spirit of Tono has come to regain its significance not merely in the setting of the countryside but also in the cityscape. As weird rumors circulate in the postmodern city of the possibility that a computer virus will sooner or later biologically infect the inhabitants, we could encounter a Zashiki Warashi-like ghost in front of a coin locker, and we may have already unwittingly communicated with the dead or the lost boys through a computer network (Orson Scott Card, "Lost Boys,"; Masaki Kondo et al. eds., *The Bulletinboard of the Witches*)⁽²⁾. The nativist ethnological country of Tono has started to invade the high-tech city of Tokyo. Although the name of "Tono" literally means a "distant field" actually detached

from megalopolis, now the postmodern semiotics of “Tono” narratives has deconstructed the very distance between city and country. Far from vanishing into nothing, the significance of *The Legends of Tono* has been further amplified.

At this point, it will be helpful to review the way the revival of Tono took place in the decades of high economic growth. Here let us refer to Marilyn Ivy’s incredibly provocative book *Discourses of the Vanishing : Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*, the title of which tactically hints at her creative analogy between the Tono natives and the American Indians as Leslie A. Fiedler refigured in one of his classics *The Return of the Vanishing American* originally published in 1968. As Ivy closely analyzes in the first half of the work, from the 1970s through the ’80s the huge advertising agency, Dentsu, and a major public transportation company, Japan Railway, joined forces to promote a series of nationwide campaigns titled “Discover Japan” and “Exotic Japan.” The more Americanized Japan gets, the more nostalgic and the more “non-native” its “vanishing” culture seems to the Japanese people themselves. As a result, Japanese consumerist capitalism, hand in hand with the mass media, planned to re-shape the desire for travel and self-rediscovery among women of the younger generation, and to devise images that promise to fulfil those desires. To be more concrete, they reappropriated the scathing discourse on industrial pollution and urban overpopulation through a movement backward in time via a spatial displacement from city to country, as well as with a boom in folklore and folklore studies in the late 1960s and early ’70s (Ivy 39 & 59). This is the way Tono tourists are required to re-discover Japan in the internationalist milieu of the ’70s, and to estrange and re-Orientalize it in the multi-nationalist atmosphere of the ’80s.

It is in this transition period between the “Discover Japan” campaign in the '70s and the “Exotic Japan” campaign in the '80s that the distinguished film director Tetsutaro Murano adapted Kunio Yanagita's *The Legends of Tono* into a beautiful movie *The Legend of Sayo* in 1982, loosely basing it on several episodes in the original text. Murano stated in hindsight, “I made the film just in time, in the early '80s. Before the Shinkansen, the bullet train, was opened. The hills around here have really been logged over, too. The bullet train means the end of Tono—the end as dream, as image. Now it will be more and more of a movement of ‘preserving’ things—that’s no good” (Ivy 129).

II. The Narrative of Forbidden Love

In the film version of *The Legends of Tono*, re-titled *The Legend of Sayo*, Murano does not include all the material Yanagita had collected into the script. Instead, Murano devised his own story line of supernatural romantic love highly plausible in the setting of Tono, and embroidered into the narrative a number of mythic signs typical of Tono, for example, “Oshirasama” as the deity of silk-worms, “Zashiki Warashi” as a deity in the form of parlor child (subtitled “phantom” in the film), “Nanbu horses” as the sexual symbol of interspecies love, and so on. To follow the story, then, you have only to be aware of the extra-spatiotemporal romance between the beautiful lady Sayo Sasaki and the dead soldier Takeo Kikuchi, which cannot help but be reminiscent of the forbidden love between Heathcliff and Catherine in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847).

If you compare Murano's Sayo with director Kiju Yoshida's

1988 Japanesque remake of *Wuthering Heights*, one can quickly perceive the persistent popularity in Japan of “forbidden love” narratives with the deep countryside as the predominant setting. Now let me locate at least three “forbidden love narratives” in Yanagita’s original text, which must have strongly inspired Murano. To begin with, let us examine the interspecies romance between a girl and a horse.

Legend #69

“... Once upon a time there was a poor farmer. He had no wife but did have a beautiful daughter. He also had one horse. The daughter loved the horse, and at night she would go to the stable and sleep. Finally, she and the horse became husband and wife. One night the father learned of this, and the next day without saying anything to the daughter, he took the horse out and killed it by hanging it from a mulberry tree. That night the daughter asked her father why the horse was not anywhere around, and she learned of the act. Shocked, filled with grief, she went on to the spot beneath the mulberry tree and cried while clinging to the horse’s head. The father, abhorring the sight, took an axe and chopped off the horse’s head, which flew off to the heavens. It was from this time on that Oshira-sama became a kami. The image of this kami was made from the mulberry branch on which the horse was hanged” (*The Legends of Tono*, tr. Ronald Morse, 49-50).

This sort of equestrian imagination, which recalls Peter Shaffer’s Broadway play *Equus* in 1973, as well as the voodoo horses, has been cultivated by the Deep North geopolitical conditions of Tono in the Iwate prefecture. Let me start by looking at Legend #2: “The

town of Tono is located at the spot where two rivers running north and south come together. Formerly commodities for sale were gathered from up to forty-five kilometers back into the seven valleys around Tono. On market days as many as a thousand people and a thousand horses crowded into Tono" (12, italics mine).

Historically speaking, Tono was a planned castle town established in the 17th century, and by the late 18th century it had gained importance as a market and post town. Tono also became an active center of horse-trading, and its importance as a producer of horses lasted well into the Showa Period. Therefore, as Marilyn Ivy pointed out, Tono's characteristic house design, which is L-shaped for stabling horses, and the interspecies love affair between a girl and a horse, "both highlight the importance of horses in Tono's history" (Ivy 109). This is just why the deity of Oshira-sama is represented throughout northeastern Japan by "enigmatic paired stick figures of a horse and a human being" (Ivy 124).

Mythologically speaking, however, such an interspecies marriage is not unfamiliar in the cultures of hunters including the Ainu, the so-called "native Japanese," who conceived legends of a coupling between a man and a bear, and of a woman with a sea gull (Shinko Ogiwara 139-156). It should be noted here that the Ainu people were the earliest inhabitants of northeastern Japan, who gave Tono many of its place names, but who were gradually driven back by armies dispatched from the distant Japanese cultural centers in the southwest. For the Japanese who developed their culture on the basis of agriculture, it was the Ainu hunters who seemed the radical Others; the "Yamabito" in Tono were men who lived in the mountains. Thus, it is no wonder

that the existence of Yamabito induced people to identify the kidnapers of women and children with the ethnic Others, as we could see in Legends #7 and #8 dealing with a story of a young girl who disappeared one day but, thirty years later, “reappeared very old and haggard” (16). From a different perspective, however, the Ainu people had to content themselves with an ironical fate of diaspora within the country which was earlier theirs. In this regard, the cultural history of the Ainu people, once considered one of the lost tribes of Israel, closely resembles that of American Indians.

Another legend tells us a supernatural romance between the living and the dead, which I suppose Murano must have referred to in detail.

Legend #99

“Kiyoshi Kitagawa, an assistant headman in Tsuchibuchi village, lived in Hiishi. Kiyoshi’s younger brother, Fukuji, who had been taken into a family as a son-in-law at Tanohama on the coast, lost his wife and one of his children in the tidal wave that struck the area last year. For about a year now, he had been with the two children who survived, in a shelter set up on the site of the original house.

On a moonlit night in early summer he got up to go to the privy. It was off at some distance on the path along the beach where the waves broke. This night the fog hovered low and he saw two people, a man and a woman, approaching him out of the fog. The woman was definitely his wife who had died. Without thinking, he trailed after them to a cavern on the promontory in the direction of Funakoshi village. When he

called her name, she looked back and smiled. The man he saw was from the same village, and he too had died in the tidal wave disaster. It had been rumored, that this man and Fukuji's wife had been deeply in love before Fukuji had been chosen to marry her.

She said, 'I am now married to this man.' When Fukuji said, 'Don't you love your children?' the woman's expression changed a little, and she cried. Fukuji didn't realize he was talking with the dead. While he was looking down at his feet, sadly and miserably, the man and the woman started on quickly and disappeared around the mountain on the way to Oura. He tried to run after them but suddenly realized they were the dead." (69-70)

The discourse of impossible intercourse between the living and the dead, or between human beings and other species, is familiar not only in the tradition of American Gothic Romancers, including Edgar Allan Poe, Ambrose Bierce and Thomas Disch, but also in the context of Hollywood movies such as the *Aliens* series, *The Fly*, *Ghosts* and *American Legacy*. Here, let me repeat that the Tono people have been living at the interface of hard fact and SFX-like fiction. Therefore, when Murano's *The Legend of Sayo* culminates in extra-spatiotemporal sexual reproduction, we should take it literally as well as figuratively. To produce such a horrific effect of the catastrophe, the director Murano must have speculated upon the transgressive nature of the text. This point is demonstrated in the third legend representing a rape narrative involving the "kappa," a furless monkey-like creature living in rivers, ponds and lakes and feeding, like vampires, on the blood of drowned victims (Juliet Piggott 65-69).

Approximately the same size as a ten-year-old child, yellow-green in colour, they sometimes have fish scales or tortoise shell instead of skin, with a water-filled depression on the top of the head.

Legend #55

“Many kappa (ugly water creatures) live in rivers. There are especially large numbers in the Saru-ga-ishi River. In a household beside the river in Matsuzaki village women have become pregnant with kappa’s children for up to two generations. When they are born, these children are hacked into pieces, put into small wine casks, and buried in the ground. They are grotesque” (41).

The image of kappa has long been open to numerous interpretations. Structuralist anthropology, on one hand, considers the kappa to be a typical manifestation of the trickster, reminiscent of the African-American figure of “Signifyin’ Monkey” or Mark Twain’s satanic character called “The Mysterious Stranger.” Indeed, the Japanese folkloric figure of the kappa committing an interspecies sexual assault can be readily compared to the Western mythological figure of Satan, who transgresses the boundary between good and evil.

On the other hand, nativist ethnology reexamines the kappa not simply as the distorted image of the Ainu people (Piggott 65) or the working-class “untouchables” inhabiting the riverside (Kazuhi-ko Komatsu 227-262), but also as a representation of aborted fetuses or newborn infants killed to control the population and disposed of in streams or ponds (Ivy 123). It is this vision of kappa that undoubtedly had a tremendous impact on the novelist Ryunosuke Akutagawa, who

highly appreciated his contemporary Kunio Yanagita and his *The Legends of Tono*, and who wrote a pessimistic satirical story titled "Kappa" in 1927, presenting a situation in which the birth of a kappa depends on the voluntary will of the kappa fetus himself or herself.

..by all human standards, nothing could be quite so ludicrous as the process of Kappa childbirth. Not very long after this conversation with Chak, I went to Bag's cottage to watch as his wife gave birth to a child.

Just as we would, the Kappa calls in a doctor or a midwife to assist at the delivery. But when it comes to the moment just before the child is born, the father—almost as if he is telephoning—puts his mouth to the mother's vagina and asks in a loud voice :

'Is it your desire to be born into this world, or not? Think seriously about it before you reply.' ...

Then came the child's reply from inside its mother's womb ; it seemed to be having no small amount of scruple, for the voice was weak and hesitant.

'I do not wish to be born. In the first place, it makes me shudder to think of all the things that I shall inherit from my father---the insanity alone is bad enough. And an additional factor is that I maintain that a Kappa's existence is evil' (61-62)

Thus, the marginal, subaltern and vanishing character of the kappa unveils a hidden kinship with the "Yamabito," the elusive mountain dwellers, and "Zashiki Warashi," childlike beings who inhabit the inner recesses of old, established households. One of the horrific legends tells us that one kappa, which looked deceptively like a child

and used to ask those who passed by the pond where it lived to play pull-finger with it, ended up pulling down its victims into the water (Piggott 68). But, simultaneously, Tono folklore also informs us that the kappa as well as Zashiki Warashi “bring prosperity and fortune with them when they decide to take up residence in a house, but they also take it with them when they leave ” (Ivy 126). Thus, we are unable to determine which theory is correct. For the time being, however, the dual status of the kappa, who represents the living-dead as well as the alien rapist would lead us to safely redefine the forbidden love narrative of the kappa tale as semiotically negotiating between the themes of bestiality and interspecies adultery and extra-spatiotemporal intercourse. The hidden agenda of kappa as the radical Other is embedded within the textuality of Murano’s film.

As a point in passing, Hollywood released a number of “Alien Encounters” films around the 1980s, including Ridley Scott’s *Alien* (1979), Stephen Spielberg’s *Close Encounters* (1980) and *E. T.* (1982), which coincided with Tetsutaro Murano’s 1982 movie *The Legend of Sayo*. While Kunio Yanagita’s *The Legends of Tono* attempted to recreate the uncanny Other of western modernity in the heyday of the Japanese Enlightenment in the early 20th century, Tetsutaro Murano, who from his early years had been exposed to the influence of Hollywood industry, tried to re-Orientalize not only the vanishing culture of Deep North Japan, but also the deep structure of Hollywood cinematography itself, skillfully deconstructing the boundary between western mythologies and Japanese folklore.

III . Hearn , Yanagita , Akutagawa: A Comparative Cultural Perspective

However rigorous our attempt to deconstruct the distinction

between two cultures, we cannot ignore the fact that the very notion of “binary opposition” has long been cherished and developed by the western ideology of modernization. This dichotomy is also true of the concept behind the campaign “Discover Japan” discussed above. Certainly, the transition from the “Discover Japan” campaign in the ’70s to the “Exotic Japan” campaign in the ’80s coincides with Japanese development between the period of high-economic growth and the period of hyper-capitalism, which is sometimes called “Pax Japonica.” Marilyn Ivy, however, reveals the “Discover Japan” campaign formulated in 1970 to have already been an imitation of the “Discover America” campaign back in the ’60s. “Far from being an original slogan for a quest for origins, Discover Japan directly mirrored that of a national domestic campaign in the United States only three years earlier : Discover America. . . . Discover Japan is a perfect example of transnational flows of marketing techniques and advertising strata-gems, signaling from its inception its place within an entirely global, advanced capitalist economy : Discover Japan and its insistence on the natively local presents the strongest evidence possible for the delocal-ization promoted by an American-led transnational capitalism” (Ivy 42) .

This logic shows that even the Tono revival in the 1960s and the ’70s had already been one of the effects of transnational capitalism, not a radical reaction against modern westernization. From another perspective, nevertheless, the film version of *The Legends of Tono* might seem more revolutionary, and even more meta-cultural, for it successfully performed allegories of hybridity precisely through its hybridization of the Japanese nostalgia for the vanishing and the American imperative for transnational capitalism. In retro-

spect, as Ronald Morse explains in his “Translator’s Introduction,” “Japanese folk religion as revealed in the legends,” from its beginning, has been a hybridization of “the indigenous primitive religion with elements from Shinto, Buddhism, Taoism, yin-yang dualism, Confucianism, and other beliefs” (xxiii). Insofar as we are living in a multicultural age, I do not depreciate but highly appreciate this example of cultural hybridization.

What is more, we should not forget that the concept of Japanese nativist ethnology itself has not arisen naturally but was, from the start, a product of hybridization. One of the pilgrim fathers of Japanese folklore Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904), whose naturalized name Yakumo Koizumi sounds more familiar to the Japanese, was an author and re-stylizer of traditional Japanese ghost stories. Born on the Greek island of Lefkas, and raised in Ireland, England and France, Hearn emigrated to the United States in 1869, and to Japan in 1890, where he became such a Japanese patriot and patriarch as to collect a number of native legends. Hearn, however, did not simply translate stories into English, but transformed them into a new kind of literature (Peter High 107). The Japanese love him for doing this. As Professor Yuko Hirakawa explains, Hearn is not highly admired in the United States even now, while he has long captured the Japanese imagination (Hirakawa 407-409). Though he also predicted the conflict between Japan and the West, Hearn, if only within the limited context of American literary history, is the man who made the legends and tales of an unknown culture a part of American literature, with Hans Christian Andersen as a predecessor and Paul Bowles as a successor. In the context of Japanese literary history, however, the ghost stories of Lafcadio Hearn/Yakumo Koizumi have long been well-known to

every Japanese school child. Thus, I would agree with Bon Koizumi that it is not a Japanese nationalist but a multinational author who established our own sensibility for folklore prior to Kunio Yanagita (Koizumi 171-183).

At this point, the very origin of Japanese folkloric discourse, which Yanagita believed to be antithetical and “antidotal” to modern westernization, turns out to have already been one of the effects of the western Orientalism cherished by Lafcadio Hearn. But it is somewhat unfair to depreciate Hearn for his Orientalist and colonialist reappropriation of Japanese folklore. For, as hybrid child of an Irish father and Greek mother, Hearn did not strive to westernize Japanese folklore, but simply to deconstruct the critical difference between the Japanese South and the American Deep South. Hearn’s literary interest was based not in imperialist assimilation but in multicultural miscegenation, in which he himself engaged through a marriage with an African-American woman in Cincinnati, and later one with Setsu Koizumi in Matsue.

This point can be further illustrated with an analogy between the Japanese ghosts Hearn described in his collection *Kwaidan* and the African American ghosts that drew his interest in his earlier years in North America. It is well known that while working as a newspaper reporter in Cincinnati, Ohio, in the 1870s, Hearn fell in love with a beautiful African-American maid, Alethea Foley nicknamed Mattie, who was working as a cook in a cheap boardinghouse where Lafcadio was lodging. But the young lovers were confronted with a serious problem: The anti-miscegenation law was strict in Ohio at the time, and mixed marriages were prohibited between 1861 and 1877. It

means that Lafcadio and Mattie had to keep their romance confidential. But, despite such heavy-handed restrictions, Hearn was courageous enough to re-narrativize the exciting ghost stories he had heard from Mattie, whose visionary power of “ghost seeing” compares with his own when he was a child (Jonathan Cott 84). What makes his romance with Mattie more interesting is that, though their *de facto* marriage later broke up, Lafcadio Hearn made up his mind to move to New Orleans in 1877, partly compelled by his interest in the supernatural discourses of African American “voodoo” cultures, which were remixed with the elements of Catholic ritual. Both fascinated and repelled by voodoo magic, Hearn was especially impressed by his encounter with Voodoo Queen Marie, who died in 1881. “Admired and feared for her powers of healing and hexing as well as for her psychic and fortune-telling abilities, Voodoo Queen Marie became renowned as a kind of combination mambo-witch-shamaness, who was consulted by both blacks and whites,” including Queen Victoria in England (Cott 145).

This Deep South connection expands our comprehension of the Southern Gothic roots of Lafcadio Hearn’s “ghosts.” To put it another way, his attraction to the syncretic ghost culture of African Americans enabled Hearn to have a greater sympathy with the premodern ghost culture of the Japanese. Of course, his most famous ghost story “Hoichi The Earless” (1904) is closely based on the historical account of the fall of the house of Heike which was orally transmitted to him through his wife and greatest native informant, Setsu Koizumi. In this story, Hoichi the blind biwahoshi, a “lute-priest” whose profession is to recite historical narratives and play on the Japanese four-stringed lute or “biwa,” is so haunted by the ghosts of

the massacred Heike clan that another priest must protect his body by writing holy texts on his skin. Yet his fellow priest fails to write on his ears, which the ghosts strip away. Lafcadio Hearn's re-narrativization is so brilliant as to make the reader believe as if it were originally written by a native Japanese writer. Therefore, there is no doubt that when he featured a lute-priest in *The Legend of Sayo*, the cinematic version of *The Legends of Tono*, the director Tetsutaro Murano incorporated Lafcadio Hearn's voice into Kunio Yanagita's discourse: Murano "Hearnized" Yanagita quite radically⁽⁴⁾.

But, if you pay attention to the fact of Lafcadio Hearn's life that, while he was at school, he suffered a severe accident that left him permanently blind in the left eye, and that the partial blindness made his auditory ability much keener, one cannot help but compare his physical loss and sensory compensation to that of Hoichi the Earless whose profession is music. This background allows us to reinterpret the conclusion of the story not as a tragedy, but as a form of radical hypersensitivity, for Hearn allegorizes the ghostly world beyond the senses. With this cultural context in mind, let us turn to his lecture on the ghosts titled "The Value of the Supernatural in Fiction," given at Tokyo University in 1898:

Everything that religion today calls divine, holy, miraculous, was sufficiently explained for the old Anglo-Saxons by the term ghostly. They spoke of a man's ghost, instead of speaking of his spirit or soul; and everything relating to religious knowledge they called ghostly. In the modern formula of the Catholic confession, which has remained almost unchanged for nearly two thousand years, you will find that the

priest is always called a ghostly father – which means that his business is to take care of the ghosts or souls of men as a father does. . . . It means everything relating to the supernatural. It means to the Christian even God himself, for the Giver of Life is always called in English Holy Ghost. . . . The terror of all great stories of the supernatural is really the terror of nightmare, projected into waking consciousness. And the beauty or tenderness of other ghost stories or fairy stories, or even of certain famous and delightful religious legends, is the tenderness and beauty of dreams of a happier kind, dreams inspired by love or hope or regret. But in all cases where the supernatural is well treated in literature, dream experience is the source of the treatment. . . . I believe that there can be no exception to these rules even in the literature of the Far East. (cited in Cott 345-348)

Somewhere else in this lecture, Hearn illustrates the same point by discussing the ghost stories of Bulwer-Lytton, Lewis Carroll and Edgar Allan Poe, and offers an almost structuralist insight into the analogy between these examples from Western literature with Chinese and Japanese literature. In retrospect, most of Hearn's retold Japanese ghost stories derive from his vision as a child as well as the structural kinship between Western literature and Asian folk tales. For example, as Professor Hirakawa explains, one of his stories, titled "Mujina," in which the protagonist encounters a woman without eyes, nose and mouth, is based on the author's own vision of a girl called Jane he disliked in childhood, while another story called "Yuki-Onna," in which the supernatural femme fatale dressed in sheer white blows her smoke-like breath over human beings till they succumb and die, seems

to be greatly inspired by a Scandinavian legend called “Night Mara,” the origin of an English word “nightmare” (Hirakawa 273-279). And yet, this tale of a femme fatale in white captured the deepest parts of the Japanese imagination. Without Hearn’s image of femme fatale in white Kunio Yanagita could not have constructed, in *The Legends of Tono*, the horrific character of “Yama-uba,” the she-demon living in the mountains and threatening the village folk (Legends # 115-117).

These examples endorse the influence of Lafcadio Hearn’s Deep South Gothic upon Kunio Yanagita’s Deep North Gothic. Although Hearn himself was not so much an authority on folklore studies as he was a literary storyteller, recent scholarship of comparative literature has attempted to redefine Hearn’s status as the precursor of Yanagita. Especially emphasized is Hearn’s essay on the Japanese Smile (included in *The Glimpses of the Unfamiliar Japan*, 1894), which is now believed to have inspired Yanagita to write the book *Warai-no-Hongan* (The Real Intention of Smile) in 1946⁽²⁾. In regard to this relationship, I am more concerned with the oral and auditory aspects Hearn and Yanagita shared as a cultural medium of the vanishing. Just as Hearn listened to his native informant Setsu Koizumi’s story very carefully, Yanagita recorded with a similar intensity the stories related to him by the native informant Kizen Sasaki. In this sense, both Hearn and Yanagita psychologically assumed the role of “itako,” the traditional medium or “shamaness.”

Of course, now in the 1990s, it is not very difficult to voice accusations of colonialist and imperialist reappropriation of native cultures. As Hearn has long been underestimated by American Japanologists, so has Yanagita been recently attacked for his commit-

ment to Japan's annexation of Korea while he was writing *The Legends of Tono* (Osamu Murai 7-51). From a theoretical standpoint, Hearn westernized Japanese folk tales from a Christian perspective, and Yanagita similarly re-narrativized the legends of Tono from a colonialist perspective. But, simultaneously, we should be aware that while Hearn, in fact, criticized Christianity and modernity so radically as to become interested in Japanese polytheism, perhaps out of nostalgia for Greco-Roman mythology, Yanagita felt so antagonistic toward Japanese modernization as to invent a powerful antidote to it in the form of polytheistic literature. Furthermore, Yanagita's *Legends* # 84 and 85 seem to deconstruct the difference between two cultures by counting even western Christians as if they were a kind of Others, or one of the many gods: "during the 1850s ... there were many Westerners coming to live at places on the coast. ... Christianity was practiced secretly, and in the Tono district there were believers who were crucified. ... At Kashiwazaki in Tsuchibuchi village there is a household in which both parents are definitely Japanese, and yet there are two albino children" (58-59).

Now it will become clearer that from opposite directions Hearn and Yanagita wanted to surpass the limits of western Christian modernity and reconstructed Japanese folklore, by means of working as cultural mediums who recorded, most brilliantly, the minor, the marginal, the subaltern, the invisible and the vanishing. Yes, what Hearn and Yanagita wanted to foreground is the ghostly as a representation of the Other. In my own viewpoint, the aesthetic intersection between two cultures is far more attractive than the imperialist or colonialist politics of re-appropriation.

From this perspective, let me conclude this paper by taking a glance at one of the recent Japanese films called “Kappa,” directed in 1994 by Tatsuya Ishii, who is more widely known as rock’n’roller Karl Smoky Ishii. This movie is a perfect allegory of multicultural negotiation. While the film appears to be closely modelled after traditional Japanese folklore, including *The Legends of Tono* as well as Ryunosuke Akutagawa’s famous short story “Kappa,” the director Ishii tactically remixes the Japanese character of kappa the water monster with the Spielbergian image of Extra-Terrestrials. This brilliant film helped pave the way for the national explosion of “kappa” fever in the mid-90s, in which quite a few ecologists have promoted the creative relationship between men and nature. While Hearn’s Deep South Gothic and Yanagita’s Deep North Gothic re-narrativized the Japanese folk tales about the others, the film director Ishii’s Multinational Gothic successfully sets up an interface between the traditional Japanese folklore already re-narrativized and contemporary American city folklore, especially of the sprawling suburbia. It is very ironical that typical American entertainment like *Ghost* (1988) reminds us of *The Legend of Sayo*, whereas a movie with a Japanesque look, *Kappa*, conjures up *Close Encounters* or *E. T.* as a typical postmodern fairy tale, which right from the start was structurally analogous with the Japanese fairy tale “Kaguyahime”, the Moon Princess, who emerged from inside a bamboo stalk⁽⁵⁾. But, without this kind of representational irony, these movies could not have ignited our multicultural, post-colonialist and creatively anachronistic imagination.

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NOTES

- (1) Ronald Morse, "Yanagita Kunio," *The Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan*, 1983 ed.
- (2) Therefore, I cannot resist temptation to reinterpret not only Jugi Hisama's *Japonica Tapestry* but also Ryu Murakami's *Coin Locker Babies* as typical postmodern gothic narratives deeply inspired by the Tono legends of "Zashiki-Warashi."
- (3) Although "Minzokugaku" (nativist ethnology) as we know it today was not constituted in Japan around the turn of the century, we can now reread Hearn's insight into the Japanese smile as the earliest irony on the discipline of what will be known as "nativist ethnology" in the near future: "To comprehend the Japanese smile, one must be able to enter a little into the ancient, natural, and popular life of Japan. From the modernized upper class nothing is to be learned. . . . Emotionally, the Japanese child appears incomparably closer to us than the Japanese mathematician, the peasant than their statesman" ("The Japanese Smile," *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan*, 663-664). Despite Yanagita's own critique of Hearn's opinion, it is this essay that induced the former to reinvestigate the historical construction of Japanese sensibility in his own field. See Bon Koizumi, *Minzokugakusha Koizumi Yakumo*, 121-23 & 175-179. Also see Yuko Hirakawa, *Koizumi Yakumo*, 332-398.
- (4) The international significance of the movie *The Legend of Sayo* lies in the "biwa" priest played by Tatsuya Nakadai and the itako shamaness played by Kyoko Enami. What the director Tetsutaro Murano ended up with is a multinationalist hotchpotch of *The Legends of Tono* and *Wuthering Heights* and *Kwaidan*.
- (5) At this point, it becomes difficult to decide whether Japanese film reappropriated Hollywoodian idiom or just tried to revive its own literary heritage high-technologically. But, from another perspective, such a critical point symptomizes the moment when Japan's own Orientalism becomes more visible in the form of its conquest of the past. For, as Stefan Tanaka lucidly pointed out, Japan could not have modernized itself as a nation in another way: "Japanese were using the West and Asia as other(s) to construct their own sense of a Japanese nation as modern and oriental" (*Japan's Orient* 18).

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