

*For Ishibashi Hiroko  
in affection and admiration*

THE CATALPA BOW  
A Study in Shamanistic  
Practices in Japan

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Preface to the

In 1986 when the second edition was recorded that during the period shamanism had burst into life in Japan when the book was first written I promised I must record a similar phenomenon in the West, that is to say in England. It has now ceased to be the concern only of the occultists and religion. He has now entered the domain of institutes, groups, even Faculties of the East, to proving that this ancient figure has relevance to our modern problems. The shamanic figure is still in the twenty-first century. Anyone, in the West, needs the necessary skills to acquire a 'power' or to embark on the shamanic journey into the spirit worlds. There are even accredited shamanic tools, drums and rattle.

In Japan the scene is rather different. The movement seems to have arisen during the 'occult boom' of the 1980s. The cosmologies described in this book seemed likely twenty-five years ago to be lost. The spirits, the angry ghosts, the local deities, the Religions which appeared during the war, the *kyōsōsama* or Founders of the postwar new religions can be seen to have fulfilled the prophecies of the ancient patterns. The figures thus survive, though often difficult to recognise.

The myths, symbols and beliefs of the past remain valid. They may often be lost to us by its lowered spiritual ceiling, its ease of acceptance and its rejection of ascetic practices. But they are not so deeply lost to us as we think. A crisis, as Yanagita Kunio found, can lead to buried strata of the mind, releasing

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## I

## The Bridge

In the Nō play *Aoi no Ue* we are shown, limp and enigmatic in the middle of the stage, a single folded robe. It represents the prostrate form of the Princess Aoi, lying mortally sick of a malignant possession. To cure her condition two figures are summoned. The first is a woman called Teruhi, a sibyl gifted with the power of causing the spirits of both the living and the dead to manifest themselves and speak. She beats on a small drum, twangs her bow of catalpa wood, and recites the summoning spell:

*Ten shōjō chi shōjō*  
*Naige shōjō rokkon shōjō*  
*Teruhio wa*  
*Ima zo yorituru*  
*Nagahama no*  
*Ashige no koma ni*  
*Tazuma yurikake.*

'Pure in heaven and pure in earth. Pure within and pure without. Pure in all six roots. . . . You who draw near, loosen now the reins of your grey horse as you gallop to me over the long beach.'

Compelled by the magic words and by the sound of the bow string, the spirit molesting the sick woman appears at the far end of the bridge which gives access to the stage. She wears the serene white mask of the Nō woman. Further compelled by the twanging of the catalpa bow, she begins to speak and to name herself. She is the angry apparition of the Lady Rokujō, superseded and disgraced by the woman on whom she is now revenging herself. Overcome with hatred, she crosses the bridge, creeps towards the prostrate figure and strikes it with her fan.

Though the sufferer immediately grows much worse, the sibyl is now at the end of her resources. She can summon a spirit and cause it to speak, but she cannot banish it, nor can she remove its malice. For this task a second source of

power is needed. This, they remember, can be found not far away in the Saint of Yokawa, a holy man celebrated for the austerities he has performed in mountains. Reluctantly he leaves his hermitage and confronts the spirit. Her aspect is now fearfully changed. Gone is the tranquil white mask with its archaic smile. A mallet in her hand, she now reveals the face of a demon with horns, golden teeth and long black hair. Rubbing his rosary of red wooden beads, the Saint recites the Lesser Spell of Fudō Myōō:

*Namaku samanda basarada.*

He then invokes the Kings of the Five Directions, and intones the Middle Spell of Fudō:

*Namaku samanda basarada.*

*Senida makaroshana*

*Sowataya unkarata kamman.*

At the sound of the holy words the phantasm shrinks, drops her mallet and retreats across the bridge to a realm where, we are given to understand, her hatred will be transformed to compassion and she will achieve the salvational state of Buddhahood.<sup>1</sup>

The bridge over which the apparition has come and gone represents the tenuous joining of two divided worlds. Our familiar human world is no more than a narrow segment of the cosmos which now confronts us. Beyond it lies a further realm, altogether 'other', peopled by beings non-human, endowed with powers non-human, whose whole order of existence is ambivalent, mysterious and strange. Between these two worlds there is no ordinary continuity. Each is contained, like a walled garden, by its own order of being, and separated by a barrier which represents a rupture of level, a break in ontological plane. This barrier the ordinary man or woman is powerless to cross. They cannot at will make the passage to this other perilous plane, nor can they see, hear or in any way influence the beings who dwell there.

The spiritual beings on the other side are not so confined. To them access from one world to another is virtually free

and unrestricted. Not only can they visit our world without let or hindrance, but they hold within their control a large sphere of our lives. This sphere was believed to be roughly that over which we ourselves have no control. The fertility of the rice crop, the due onset of the rains, the occurrence of storms, sickness, fire and accident, all these lay in the gift of the inhabitants of the other world beyond the barrier. Even today, although in intellectual circles in Japan an aggressive secularism tends to be the rule, the belief still persists among many sections of the community that the causes of all calamity in human life lie in the spiritual realm. Sickness, accident, drought or fire are the work either of angry ghosts or of offended numina. To discover the causes of these misfortunes we must therefore look into the other dimension where these beings live and enquire what spirit is responsible and the reason for his anger.<sup>2</sup>

On the goodwill of these non-human beings, therefore, depends the prosperity of the community. Treat them correctly with the right rituals and offerings, summon them correctly with the right spells, and they will leave their own world to visit ours and will exercise their superior power for the benefit of man. But once offend or neglect them and they will irritate and infuriate into our world, to blast the offending community with curses.

Ordinary men and women are powerless to deal with these perilous and ambivalent forces. Certain special human beings, however, may acquire a power which enables them to transcend the barrier between the two worlds. This power bears no relation to the physical strength or mental agility with which we are ordinarily endowed. It is of a different order altogether, acquired by means which often weaken a man's bodily health and strength, and which appears from time to time in boys who are virtual halfwits. It is a special power to effect a rupture of plane, to reach over the bridge and influence the beings on the other side.

I use the word 'shaman' in the following chapters to indicate those people who have acquired this power; who in a state of dissociated trance are capable of communicating directly with spiritual beings. These people in Japan appear in two complementary forms. The first, whom I shall call

the medium or the *miko*, is exemplified by the sibyl Teruhi. She can enter a state of trance in which the spiritual apparition may possess her, penetrate inside her body and use her voice to name itself and to make its utterance. She is therefore primarily a transmitter, a vessel through whom the spiritual beings, having left their world to enter ours, can make their communications to us in a comprehensible way.

The second and complementary source of power, whom I call the ascetic, is exemplified by the Saint of Yokawa. He is primarily a healer, one who is capable of banishing the malevolent spirits responsible for sickness and madness and transforming them into powers for good. To acquire the powers necessary for this feat he must accomplish a severe regime of ascetic practice, which should properly include, besides fasting, standing under a waterfall and reciting sacred texts, a journey to the other world. Whereas with the medium, therefore, it is the spiritual beings who leave their world and come to ours, with the ascetic the passage is in the opposite direction. It is he who must leave our world and make his way through the barrier to visit theirs. This journey he may accomplish in ecstatic, visionary form; his soul alone travels, his body left behind meanwhile in a state of suspended animation. Or he may accomplish the journey by means of symbolic mimesis; the other world projected by means of powerful symbolism on to the geography of our own, he can make the journey through the barrier in body as well as soul.

Corresponding with each of these figures is a particular kind of trance.<sup>2</sup> With the medium, infused or possessed by a spiritual being, a number of physical symptoms are commonly found. These include a violent shaking of the clasped hands, stertorous breathing or roaring, and a peculiar levitation of the body from a seated, cross-legged posture. I have seen both men and women propel themselves some six inches into the air from this position, again and again for several minutes on end. A violent medium is always considered more convincing than a docile one, the non-human character of the voice and behaviour indicating more vividly the displacement of the medium's own

personality by the entry of the divinity. This kind of trance, we shall later see, can either be self-induced, or can be stimulated by a second person, usually the ascetic.

The second type of trance is entirely different. It is a deep, comatose state of suspended animation. This is the condition into which the ascetic's body must fall if his soul is to leave it in order to travel to other realms of the cosmos. His body remains behind, an empty husk, while his soul traverses barriers through which it cannot follow. We shall find that today this trance occurs only rarely. The capacity for this kind of dissociation, and for the visionary journey which goes with it, seems to have diminished in recent centuries, and today the magic journey is most commonly accomplished by symbolic action in full waking consciousness.

I have said that both the medium and the ascetic are shamans because each in their particular manner of trance acts as a bridge between one world and another. Let us at this point pause for a moment to consider what exactly are the characteristics of the shaman which differentiate him from other 'specialists in the sacred'. How does he differ from the healer or medicine man, for example, from the prophet or from the magician?

Certainly, as Eliade warns us, the word is often used with regrettable vagueness to designate almost any person possessing magic power in a 'primitive' society. More meaningful and authoritative definitions have been drawn up, however, which present the shaman in a clearer light. All base themselves on the shaman as he appears, or used to appear, in Siberia. 'Shamanism in the strict sense is pre-eminently a religious phenomenon of Siberia and Central Asia.' Siberia is the *locus classicus*, the long home of the shaman, and it is from observation of his activities among such peoples as the Tungus, the Mongols, the Samoyedes, the Eskimo and the Altaians who inhabit this vast area that the prototypical image of the shaman has been built up. The very word derives from the Tungus *saman*, which in its turn derives ultimately from the Sanscrit *śamanā* (Prakrit *samaṇa*) through the Chinese *sha-men*. This Tungusic name was applied by the Russians to similarly gifted people among the Turks and Mongols, and later came to be

adopted by historians of religion and anthropologists to persons possessing similar powers all over the world.\* Thus shamanic persons among the North American Indians, for example, or the Australian aborigines, in Indonesia, China, Tibet or Japan, have all been so designated because to a greater or lesser extent they share the peculiar characteristics of the Siberian prototype. These can be briefly enumerated.†

The shaman is, first, a person who receives a supernatural gift from the spirit world. The gift is bestowed usually by a single spiritual being, who afterwards becomes his guardian and guide, sometimes even his spiritual wife. Before this critical moment in his life, the future shaman suffers for months or even years from a peculiar sickness, sometimes loosely called arctic hysteria. The symptoms range from physical pains—racking headaches, vomiting, aches in the joints and back—to more hysterical or neuroasthenic behaviour of wandering off into the forest, falling asleep or fainting for long periods, or hiding from the light.

These symptoms usually disappear, however, at the critical moment of initiation. This violent interior experience often takes the form of a vision, in which a single supernatural being appears to him and commands him to abandon his former life and become a shaman. Thereafter his soul is snatched out of his body and carried off to another realm of the cosmos, either above or below the human world. There he undergoes the fearful experience of being killed and revived. He sees his own body dismembered, the flesh scraped or boiled off the bones to the point when he can contemplate his own skeleton. He then sees new flesh and new organs clothed over his bones, so that in effect he is remade, resuscitated as a new person.

From this terrifying but characteristically initiatory experience he emerges a changed character. His former oddity and sickness give way to a new dignity and assurance of personality, strengthened by special powers conferred by the guardian spirit who calls him to his new life and which thereafter enable him to render special services to his community.

Foremost among these powers is the ability to put himself at will into altered states of consciousness in which he can

communicate directly with spiritual beings. He can fall into the state of trance, for example, in which his soul separates itself from his body and travels to realms of the cosmos inaccessible to the physical body. By travelling upwards to the multiple layers of heavens, for example, he can acquire from the spiritual inhabitants there useful knowledge of hidden things. By travelling downwards to the underworld he can rescue the souls of sick people, kidnapped and taken there by spirits. From his knowledge of the topography of these other worlds, moreover, he can act as guide to the souls of the newly dead, who without his help might well lose their way along the unfamiliar road.

The shaman does not carry out this special work unaided. He is given indispensable help in his task, first by a retinue of assistant spirits and secondly by a panoply of magic clothes. The helping spirits, which often take the form of bears, wolves, eagles or crows, are given to him by his guardian at the time of his initiation. They appear at once at his behest, ready to act as messengers or guides. The magic clothes and instruments, of which the drum is the most important, embody in their shape, in the materials of which they are made, in the patterns and figures engraved upon them, symbolic links with the other world. Thus his drum, made from the wood of the World Tree, his cap of eagle and owl feathers, his cloak adorned with stuffed snakes and an immense weight of metal plaques and tubes, all resolve into means whereby his passage from one world to another is facilitated.

The shaman's work also requires a cosmos of a specific shape. For most Siberian peoples, the cosmos appears in three superimposed layers or tiers. In the middle lies the human world. Above it lie seven layers of heavens, a number to which a Babylonian origin is usually assigned. Below it lies a dark underworld, sometimes also disposed in seven levels, in the nethermost of which stands the palace of Erik Khan, the Lord of the Underworld, and where sometimes nine underground rivers have their mouths. Joining these various cosmic levels at the very centre of the universe is a marvellous giant Tree. With its roots in the lowest underworld and its crown of branches in the highest

heaven, this Tree in all its splendour is at once the axis of the cosmos and the source of ever-renewing life. Thus the shaman, as he travels either upwards to heaven or downwards to the underworld, to planes sealed off from ordinary ungifted persons, follows the 'hole' made through the universe by this Tree. His journey is therefore made at the very centre and core of the cosmos.

The trance in which the soul leaves the body is not the only condition of altered consciousness which the shaman can assume at will. He must also be capable of offering his body as a vessel for possession by spirits. Eliade, it is true, considers the faculty of possession to be secondary and derivative from the 'out of the body' consciousness. Other authorities, however, such as Dominic Schröder, accord it importance equal and complementary to the 'out of the body' trance.

Lastly, we may mention the power which Eliade considers particularly characteristic of the shaman, and closely connected with his ecstatic condition; mastery of fire. The shaman is impervious to heat and cold, to burning coals and arctic ice alike. This power he achieves by rousing within himself the interior heat known to mystics in various parts of the world, and which signifies that the heated person has passed beyond the ordinary human condition. He now participates in the sacred world.

Such is the special complex of powers by which the shaman is usually defined. He is thus a gifted person of a distinctive kind. He is at once a cosmic traveller, a healer, a master of spirits, a psychopomp, an oracular mouthpiece. These various powers, however, are combined and organised round the central faculty of trance; of so altering his consciousness at will that he can communicate directly with the inhabitants of the supernatural world.

We shall see in the following chapters that the medium and the ascetic in Japan can on this definition justifiably be called shamans. We shall find examples of initiation sickness, of the supernatural call, of the 'out of the body' trance in which the soul travels to heaven and hell. We shall find assistant spirits, magic clothes and instruments, and abundant evidence of the interior heat which produces

mastery of fire. The cosmos in Japan, it is true, is somewhat differently shaped, with no evidence of the wondrous giant Tree at the centre of the world. It is true too that among the initiatory visions of the medium and the ascetic few have so far come to light which describe the dismemberment of the body, reduction to a skeleton and resuscitation with new flesh on the bones. In place of the Tree, however, we shall find an almost equally splendid Mountain; and in place of the dismemberment and remaking of the body we shall find other symbolism which equally unequivocally points to the initiatory schema of death and rebirth.

We shall find too that it is not meaningful to treat either of these figures in isolation from the other. Complementary though they may at first appear, the medium and the ascetic are closely bound together. Both, we shall find, must undergo the same ascetic practice before their particular kind of power can be acquired. Both must be present at certain rituals in order to achieve the necessary communication with spirits. Sometimes both kinds of power seem to be present, or at any rate overlapping, in the same person. During the feudal period it was common to find marriages between the two kinds of people, an ascetic husband married to a female medium. Clearly we have two mutually dependent functions, which it is convenient to treat under the same nomenclature.

The phenomena of shamanism in Japan are further complicated by the fact that they do not derive from a single homogeneous source: like the Japanese race, language and mythology, shamanism in Japan is of mixed origin. Japanese ethnologists usually relate the instances of shamanism in their country to two broad streams of culture which intermingled in prehistoric times. A northern stream, deriving from Altaic or Tungusic practices on the Asian continent and spreading throughout Korea, Hokkaido and the Ryūkyū islands, mingled with another stream deriving from a southerly source, Polynesia or Melanesia.

Hori, for example, stresses the close relationship which he believes existed between the early *miko* in Japan and similar shamanic women in Korea, among the Ainu and in the Ryūkyū islands. This ancient mantic woman, references to

whom may be found scattered throughout the early chronicles, and clay representations of whom have been unearthed from the great tumuli of the fifth century, was evidently a superior and powerful figure in late prehistoric Japan. The account of Japan in the Wei chronicles includes a description of a queen, Himiko or Pimiko by name, who bears all the stigmata of the shamanic ruler. She remained unmarried, rendered service to deities which conferred upon her a special power to bewitch people, and remained secluded in her large, solemn and heavily guarded palace, only one man attending upon her and transmitting her words. The *Kojiki* too, compiled in the early eighth century, contains a description of the consort of the Emperor, later to become the Empress Jingo, who by means of a ritual became possessed by several deities, transmitting their warnings and instructions through her mouth. These ancient *miko*, whom Hori envisages as exercising influence not only in the court of late prehistoric Japan but in virtually every village community with its own tutelary deity, bears a strong resemblance to similar sacral women in other parts of north-east Asia. The Korean *son-mudang*, the Ainu *tsur*, the Ryūkyū *yūta*, all testify to a wide area where once a feminine shamanism of a northern, Siberian type was dominant, where sacral power was believed to reside more easily and properly in women, and where in consequence women were recognised to be the natural intermediaries between the two worlds.<sup>4</sup>

To this northern, Siberian stream can be traced many of the names for shamans which are commonly used in Japan to this day. The word *ichiko* or *itako*, commonly used in the north-east of the main island to designate a shamanic medium, is believed to have cognate forms in the Ryūkyū *yūta*, the Kalinuck and Yakut word for shaman, *udagan*, the northern Tungus *idakon* and the Mongol *idagan*.<sup>5</sup>

Evidence of an entirely different and more southerly stream of cultural diffusion is to be traced, however, in certain motifs of myths, folktales and legends, in the widespread cult of possession by dead spirits, and in the remnants of a belief in a horizontal cosmology, according to which, as we shall later see, the benevolent dead return in boats at

certain seasons from a marvellous land beyond the horizon of the sea.

Oka Massao, for example, sees the Japanese race in prehistoric times as composed of no less than five ethnic components, three southern and two northern, at least three of which brought with them some kind of shamanic practice. Two southern groups of people, one from Melanesia and one from south China, arriving in Japan in the course of the later Jōmon period, brought with them a matrilineal system, rice cultivation and a system of female shamans with a horizontal cosmology.

With these southern elements Oka believes were mingled two Altaic groups of people who brought with them shamanism of the Siberian type. One a north-east Asian group of Tungusic origin, the other an Altaic-speaking tribe from southern Manchuria or Korea arriving as late as the third or fourth century A.D., they brought with them a vertical cosmology according to which deities descended from a higher realm on to trees, mountains or pillars.<sup>6</sup>

Hori too sees shamanism in Japan as deriving from two different sources. What he terms the 'arctic hysteria type' of shamanic woman is to be found in Hokkaidō and in the Ryūkyū islands as well as among the foundresses of many of the religious cults newly arisen in the course of the last hundred years. From this is to be distinguished a 'Polynesian' type of shamanism, of which the blind mediums called *itako* in the north of the main island, to be described later, are the principal examples.<sup>7</sup>

We are therefore in authoritative company if we accept that by the late prehistoric period, the fifth or sixth century A.D., shortly before the coming of Buddhism, Chinese ethics and institutions and the system of writing by which they were recorded, Japanese shamanism was already a complex intermingling of two broadly different streams—northern and vertical with southern and horizontal.

To this fusion must be added the further powerful influence exerted by Buddhism. It would seem that the ascetic as we know him today is primarily a Buddhist figure. No reliable evidence of his activities is to be found before the coming of Buddhism to Japan, or indeed before the



eighth century. The mutual dependence in which we see the medium and the ascetic existing today is hence a relationship which developed during the centuries immediately succeeding the introduction of Buddhism, the seventh and eighth, until by the ninth century, as we shall see in a later chapter, the ascetic rises to real prominence in the wake of the widespread terror of malevolent ghosts which reigned at that time among the elegant inhabitants of the capital.

To the introduction of Buddhist and Chinese ideas must also be attributed the decline of the Shinto *miko*. In 645 occurred the Taika Reform, by which the old system of clan government in Japan was reorganised on the model of T'ang China. Under the new regime the appearance of mantric queens such as Pimiko and the Empress Jingo became impossible. Under the new system too the *miko* in the large shrines began to lose her mantric gift, and to become before long the figure she is today. Decorative in her red trousers and silver crown, she now dances, sings, assists in ritual, but no longer prophesies. The mantric power with which this ancient sibyl was endowed passed from the large shrines to the level of what Robert Redfield called the 'little tradition', the largely unrecorded, orally transmitted folk religion of the villages. The mantric gift of the ancient *miko* survived in a variety of humbler folk—in the travelling bands of women such as the Kumano *bikuni*, who like strolling minstrels walked the countryside offering their gifts of prophecy and divination, and in the blind women in the north who, without the music and dance so essentially a part of the older *miko*'s shamanic performance, transmit the utterances of numina and dead spirits.

With shamanic practices surviving for so many centuries in this unrecognised, virtually hidden manner, what materials are available to the student today who wishes to record the remnants of this fast-disappearing cult and to try to reconstruct what has already vanished? Broadly two types of evidence present themselves. First, there are the living practitioners. Both the medium and the ascetic may still be encountered today. The medium, it is true, survives only sparsely and in somewhat dilapidated form in certain districts of the north-east, certain islands off the Izu peninsula

and in certain village rituals where her gifts are combined with those of the ascetic. The ascetic however, is still to be found in many districts of Japan. Living alone or in enclaves, such men and women may be met in the Nara district, in the environs of Kyoto, in Shikoku and Kyūshū, along the coast of the Japan Sea, in the north-east and even occasionally in Tokyo itself. These people still employ techniques of trance and exorcism which bear the authentic stamp of an ancient origin. Wherever possible in the following chapters I have drawn on my own observations of such people made over the past ten years.

Second, the investigator has at his disposal certain kinds of written evidence. Shamanic practices may have survived chiefly on the folk level of religion, orally transmitted from one generation to another. He will find nevertheless that certain kinds of literature are an indispensable help. The collections of popular Buddhist tales, in the first place, in which Japanese literature is so rich from the tenth until the fourteenth century, contain invaluable information about the early ascetic. In works such as the *Koryaku Monogatari*, the *Uji Shūi Monogatari* and the *Nihon Ryōiki*, tales of these men may be found which tell us much about their austere disciplines and the powers which they acquired thereby.

In the Nō plays too may be found an enigmatic but illuminating aid. Many of these plays, I believe, particularly those in which a supernatural being is manifested, are in themselves concealed shamanic rituals. They contain sounds and symbols which were in former times used to call up a ghost and cause it to speak, or to cajole a divinity to descend, to dance and to deliver blessings. In these plays we may still hear the flutes and drums whose sounds were believed capable of resonance in another world, and the mantric howls and wails which were once calls to the dead and the local divinity.

In the body of recorded folk literature, myths, folktales and legends, may also be found invaluable hints. The great ethnologist Yanagita Kunio demonstrated how much, in the absence of direct descriptions, can be learnt from the motifs and types of folktales and legends. In their structure, in their symbolism, in the juxtaposition of their component elements, they convey much to us that would otherwise be lost.

Here, however, as in the *Nô* plays and in some of the medieval Buddhist tales, we are confronted by the language of symbols. In Japanese religion an intricate network of symbols exists, like mycelium beneath the ground. From this subtle fabric is thrown up, like scattered rings of mushrooms in a meadow, a legend here, a myth there, a place name, the name of a deity, the remnant of a rite. From these scattered appearances we must try to discover the subterranean network below, a task all the more baffling since the symbols, as is their wont, are many-faced. They are like the jewels in Indra's Net, each of which, lying at the intersections of the mesh, reflects at the same time all the other jewels. In the language of folktales one symbol melts into another, is identified with another, is substituted for another. To interpret the stories aright, therefore, we must learn the grammar of their signs.

Less baffling material, however, is also available for the study of Japanese shamanism in the shape of the works of the Japanese scholars in this field. It was only during the last forty years that Japanese ethnologists and historians of religion recognised that elements of shamanism were to be found in their own religion, and that the ancient *miko* was in fact a shamanic woman. Our debt to Yanagita Kunio, however, goes back to the beginning of the century. The extraordinary breadth of vision with which this illustrious scholar brought the rituals, iconography, nomenclature and oral literature of the folk tradition to bear on his almost religious quest for the origins of the Japanese race and culture, has left us with some thirty volumes of collected works. These books and essays are beyond question of fundamental importance to the study of shamanism in Japan.

Another pioneer of giant stature must be recognised in Origuchi Shinobu. The works of this scholar too, though occasionally branded as fanciful, are richly gifted with the intuitive insight and imagination that the task demanded. In the wake of these two pioneers have come a small but dedicated band of men devoted to the task of discovering, recording and interpreting the surviving remnants of this rich but fast-disappearing culture. In the works of Hori

Ichirō, Sakurai Tokutarō, Togawa Anshō, Takeda Chōshū, Ishida Eichirō, Miyake Hitoshi and many others, the most sophisticated techniques of observation, interrogation and recording have been brought to bear on the living phenomena of Japanese shamanism.<sup>10</sup>

Besides these celebrated scholars, however, the student of shamanism has reason to be grateful to a lesser-known but equally dedicated band of people—the local doctor, the local schoolmaster, the incumbent of the local Buddhist temple—who have recorded rites and practices in their district which without their vigilance would certainly have been lost.

One final preliminary observation. The area in which our investigation will take place makes nonsense of that conventional distinction hitherto observed by most western writers on Japanese religion, the separation of Shinto from Buddhism. Shinto, with its liturgies, rituals and myths, has been usually treated in isolated purity, unadulterated by Buddhist elements. The Buddhist sects have likewise been described according to doctrines respectably based on scriptures with their proper place in the Buddhist canon. The large area of religious practice common to the two, in which the worshipper is scarcely aware whether the deity he is addressing is a Shinto *kami* or a bodhisattva, has been either ignored or relegated to various snail patches with pejorative labels such as superstition, syncretism or magic.

This area, however, is the very one in which most of our researches will be conducted. We shall try to show the nature of the supernatural beings, whether they appear in Shinto or Buddhist guise, with which the shaman communicates. We shall try to locate the realm where they live. We shall try to define the means whereby the shaman acquires his special powers to traverse the bridge into their world. And we shall try to demonstrate how thereby he provides the human community with an invaluable lifeline into the realm from which so many forces emanate which affect their lives, and without which they would be desperately vulnerable, wide open through ignorance and weakness to attacks by these invisible powers.

## The Sacred Beings

The angry spectre which we saw make its way across the bridge on to the Nō stage is not the only type of supernatural being with which the shaman in Japan is called upon to deal. Four broad categories of spiritual entity exist whose nature and mode of activity fall within the scope of his powers. Two of these are accounted superior to man; in power, knowledge and status they transcend the human condition. These may allow themselves to be summoned by the shaman, cajoled, persuaded or petitioned, but never coerced. The other two categories are altogether different. They comprise entities whose state has fallen below that of man, who are in one way or another inferior, unregenerate, fallen or merely malevolent, and who stand in need therefore not merely of persuasion and summons, but also of forcible exorcism and restitution.

Of the two superior types of spiritual being the most important and powerful are the *kami*. These numinous presences have been the principal objects of worship in the Shinto cult since pre-Buddhist times. They are difficult to describe, because they are elusive, enigmatic, heterogeneous. They are best understood perhaps as hierophanies, manifestations of sacred power in the human world. Motoori Norinaga, the great eighteenth century scholar of the Shinto Revival, remarked that anything which was beyond the ordinary, other, powerful, terrible, was called *kami*. Thus the emperor, dragons, the echo, foxes, peaches, mountains and the sea, all these were called *kami* because they were mysterious, full of strangeness and power. *Kami* may thus be described in certain people, in certain trees and stones, mountains and islands; in the excellence which overshadows the practice of certain crafts, in the continuity and protection which attends a family stemming from a remembered ancestor. In all of these things there shows through, as though through a thin place, an incomprehensible otherness which betokens power.<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes this manifestation of power goes unnamed, supine, scarcely recognised except by the occasional passer-by with second sight. More often it gathers itself together, is given a name, attaches itself to a particular group of human beings. It is no longer simply a window indicating another world beyond, but a being endowed with power, impinging closely on human life and requiring treatment of an elaborately special kind if it is to remain friendly. It is conceived to dwell in a world or dimension of its own, hazily related in a geographical way to ours.

Elusive, shadowy, largely formless though these beings may be, in their disposition and status they are many and variable. Some are great *kami*, with names recorded in the mythical chronicles, who exercise power over a wide area of man's life. Sickness, fire, seasonal rain and marital happiness may all lie in their gift. Others of humbler status confine themselves to narrower spheres, specialising in easy childbirth, good fishing catches or cures for diseases below the navel. Some are remote, static, slow to take offence. Others impinge closely upon our world and are quick to react to the treatment they receive here. Some may exist in a close tutelary relationship with a particular village. Others exert the same protection over a particular family or a particular individual. Others again are prepared to consider in a benevolent light anyone who takes the trouble to make the pilgrimage to their shrine. Despite this variety of nature and potency, however, all *kami* possess certain characteristics in common which enable the shaman, with his special powers, to communicate with them.

In the first place they are able, freely and voluntarily, to cross the barrier which divides our world from theirs. This they may do of their own accord, interrupting suddenly and unexpectedly into our lives from another plane. Or they may come in response to due summons. Certain musical sounds—a koto twanged, a bowstring tapped, a drum thumped—certain songs or certain dances will cause them to leave their own world and visit ours.

Once here, in our alien dimension, how do they manifest themselves? A variety of forms and shapes have been recorded as seen by the clairvoyant eyes of the shaman.

The testimony of these people is apt to vary a good deal, but the shapes most commonly reported are those of a snake and of an old man dressed in white, with long white hair and beard.

Miss Ishida, however, a clairvoyant medium practising in Tokyo, told me in the summer of 1972 that for her the appearance of a *kami* was usually preceded by sounds. She would hear the sound of footsteps approaching with long strides, or the sighing reedy music of the *shō* or the *hishiriki* or sometimes the harp. Then the *kami* himself would appear and speak. Sometimes she could see only his feet or the hem of his robe, sometimes only his mount, the animal on which he rode. The rest of him was hidden in mist.

Miss Ishida went on to say that certain kinds of flowers, trees, birds, stones or metals were more *ritteki* or 'spiritual' than others. These things were closer to the *kami*, partaking more easily of the *kami*'s nature, than the rest of their kind. Among birds, for example, white birds like the seagull or shiny black birds like the crow were more spiritual than others. Among trees, the cryptomeria was the most spiritual, and among stones, the agate and lapis lazuli.

Mrs Hiroshima Umeko, an experienced ascetic living in the Suishōji temple at the foot of Mt Miwa, also declared that *kami* appeared to her clairvoyant eyes in many forms. She had seen them in the likeness of flowers, of animals, or human beings. And Mrs Jin, an ascetic based on Mt Iwaki in Aomori prefecture, told me that most of the ascetics in the area, including herself, had seen a vision of the deity Akakura Daigongen. This numen was apt to appear in a variety of forms. His *shōtai* or true form was that of a tall man with long black hair, hairy all over and carrying in his hands a flute and a staff with jingling metal rings. But he also frequently appeared in dragon form, and in the form of a white-haired old man.

It is relevant to note here that in the Nō plays, many of which we should rightly regard as mystical literature deriving from rituals for calling up a numen or a ghost, overwhelmingly the most frequent form in which the *kami* appear is that of an old man. In *Aiwagi*, for example, the god Izanagi appears as an old man. In *Hakurakuten*, Sumiyoshi

Myōjin appears as an old fisherman. In *Shiga*, Shiga Myōjin appears as an old woodcutter. Sometimes a pair of gods may appear as an old man and an old woman, as in *Ema*, *Gendayū*, *Kuzu* and *Takasago*. It is possible that we see here some confirmation of Yanagita's theory that most *kami* had their origin in the figure of the divine Ancestor, of which the prototype is the beaming figure of the *okina* or old man.

More often, however, it is to the sleeping eye rather than to the waking one that the *kami* reveal themselves. Dream is apparently an easier medium than waking consciousness for the *kami* to manifest themselves to the human mind. In a *reimu* or divine dream, the *kami* may himself appear in the guise of an old man or a beautiful woman, often delivering an answer to a problem perplexing the dreamer. Indeed, it seems to have been a widespread custom in medieval times for a man beset by trouble and anxiety to pass a vigil in a shrine in the hope of having the answer to his problem vouchsafed to him in a dream. In such dreams the deity, in the manner of the Greek incubatory oracle, appears and speaks, sometimes bestowing on the dreamer an object—a jewel, a dagger, a wooden spoon—which is invariably to be found by the dreamer's pillow when he awakes.

Many tales of such dreams occur in the medieval collections of Buddhist tales. Sometimes a figure, in the guise of an old man, a tall priest or a 'strange visitor', appears to the sleeping pilgrim. Sometimes the dreamer sees no figure at all; he only hears a voice of terrible and awe-inspiring resonance reciting a poem in the classical metre. Thus Taira Munemori passed a seven-night vigil in the Usa Hachiman shrine in Kyūshū. At last he was vouchsafed a dream in which he saw the door of the shrine burst open and heard from within an awful and hair-raising voice chanting the thirty-one syllables of a poem. Terrified though he was, Munemori was able to summon up the wit and courage to murmur a suitable old poem in reply.<sup>2</sup>

Again, the dreamer may see not the *kami* himself but his *takawashime* or messenger. These spirits, who may take the form of animals, birds or boys, are the intermediaries whom the *kami* employs to visit our world when he is disinclined to traverse the barrier himself. Thus Taira Kiyomori,

passing a vigil night in the Itsukushima shrine in the year 1178, dreamt that the door of the shrine flew open and that there appeared two boys, their hair neatly dressed, who delivered a message from Itsukushima Dainyōjin, the deity of the island. They gave him as a sign a silver dagger, which he found on his pillow the next morning when he awoke. A similar dream is recorded as coming to Sashōben Yukiaka. He too saw the door of the shrine burst open and two boys emerge who delivered to him an important message from the god Hachiman. Other messengers frequently encountered in dreams, and sometimes seen even in waking life, are the fox sent by Inari, the deer sent by Kasuga Dainyōjin, the doves sent by Hachiman. Fudō Myōō too has a large retinue of thirty-six boys whom he employs as messengers to our world in a variety of ways.<sup>3</sup>

The belief that the *kami* have any permanent or 'true' form which they can manifest to human senses is, however, late and derivative from Buddhist iconography. In the early cult a *kami* had no shape of his own, his occasional visionary appearances being temporary disguises only. In order to manifest himself in our world he must rather be provided with a suitable vessel or vehicle. This vehicle he could be persuaded by magical sounds to enter and 'possess', and through it to communicate with the human village.

These vessels, seats or temporary abodes of the *kami* were sometimes known as *kura*. Thus the place-name Iwakura, rock-seat, is even today commonly found on sites at the foot of holy mountains. The deity had, it is thought, to be lured down from his abode at the top of the mountain to the rock-seat below, where he could temporarily reside for the duration of the ritual. Again, the old word *mitagura*, hand-seat, represents an object held in the shaman's hand to induce divine possession, as a branch, a wand or a marionette.

The term *yorishiro* also describes a wide variety of objects used as temporary vessels for the *kami*. Many *yorishiro* were long and thin in shape—as a tree, a banner, a wand—as though the numinous presence, like lightning streaking down a conductor, could be induced by such means to descend from his higher plane to ours.

Thus trees, particularly pine trees, have always been a

favourite vehicle for the *kami's* descent. Tall pine trees are constantly found in the neighbourhood of a shrine, and innumerable place-names survive which associate trees with a numinous presence. Stones, too, frequently served as *yorishiro*, stones of the invitingly long thin shape, impressively huge rocks, boulders of suggestively phallic form. The peculiar outcrops of rock on the slopes and summit of Mt Miwa, for example, known as Nakatsu-iwakura and Okitsu-iwakura, which suggest a sudden volcanic explosion spewing gobbets of rock into clearings in the forest, contain a good many such holy boulders. To judge from the archaeological finds of ritual tools at these sites, these have been the object of cult attention since prehistoric times.

An extraordinary conglomeration of stone *yorishiro*, artificially worked, may likewise be seen on the summit of Inariyama at Fushimi and in the hamlet of Fukakusa at the foot of the hill. These strange regiments of oval stones, each inscribed with the name of the deity dwelling therein, each girt with the belt or cravat of tasselled straw, were set up, I was told, at the request of the deities themselves, transmitted through dreams, to be worshipped in that particular vessel.

Honda Yasuji believes one of the oldest forms of *yorishiro* to be a combination of these two forms: a pole, flag or spear standing upright on a rock or mound. Many place-names: he avers, survive to suggest the antiquity of such sacred sites: *hoko-iwa*, spear rock, *hatazuka*, flag mound, or *hokotaitawa*, rock with a standing spear. On a smaller scale the same pair of shapes, which Honda recognises as representing the joining of two sexual symbols, may be found in the rice-cake or sack of rice impaled by a bamboo or willow frond. The same image on a magnified scale may be seen when an entire mountain or island becomes the vehicle of the *kami*, its conical or thickly tree-covered appearance being seen to invite the numinous descent.<sup>4</sup>

Artefacts used as *yorishiro* included banners, pillars and wands, while the earliest dolls and puppets were made not for decoration or amusement, but for the sacred purpose of housing the divinity. Mirrors, swords and the mysterious curved stone called *magatama*, found in profusion in the great tombs of the third and fourth centuries, also served as

temporary vessels for the divinity. The *Kojiki*, for example, tells of a *sakaki* tree with its branches hung with strings of *magatama* beads, lengths of blue and white cloth and a large mirror. A tree decked in this manner became, by manifold inducement, the temporary abode of a deity.<sup>5</sup>

In the early stage of the cult the *kami* remained inside his tree, stone or wand for no longer than was required for the duration of the ritual. He was summoned, worshipped, petitioned, and at the end of the rite 'sent back' by appropriate magical words to his own world. At a later stage, however, certain *kami* were believed to prolong their stay. Some would remain for the greater part of the year in a vessel known as the *goshintai*, provided in the holy recess of the shrine. These more permanent abodes for the *kami* were usually of a shape similar to, if not identical with, the temporary *yorishiro*. A stone, a mirror, a sword, a spear—all these attest to the continued attraction that these particular shapes were believed to hold for the divinities.

Some *kami* would remain in the *goshintai* for all the months of the year save the tenth, when they were believed to repair to the Grand Shrine of Izumo. Others, notably the mountain god, *yamanakami*, would remain in the village for half the year, from the spring sowing to the autumn harvest, returning to their own world on the mountain for the winter months.<sup>6</sup>

Others take up their abode of their own accord, not in a prepared vessel in a shrine, but in certain natural objects. These objects usually by their very shape proclaim that something numinously 'other' lies hidden within. A camphor tree of unusual age and hugeness, for example, a cryptomeria tree of vast girth, a pine tree with its roots twisted into peculiar contortions, a stone of unmistakably phallic shape—all these are clearly vessels through which an inherent numinous presence shows as though from another world. Objects of this kind are usually distinguished by certain outward signs and emblems. The *shimenawa*, for example, or straw rope with tassels, found wound like a girdle round the tree, the rock, even the island, indicates that the object it embraces contains sacred power. Small cash offerings too testify to the awareness that a sacred

presence dwells within. On a shelf in a tea house in Nachi in 1959, I was puzzled to see a miniature landscape in a china bowl, in front of which lay a substantial heap of small coins. It was soon apparent, however, that the reason for the offerings lay in the suggestively phallic, and therefore sacrally powerful shape of the principal rock. Another dwarf landscape nearby, which boasted no such rock, had received no offerings at all.

*Kami* can therefore possess trees and stones, mountains and islands, mirrors and swords. They can also possess human beings of a special kind and can furthermore borrow their voices in order to transmit their utterances. These special human beings are of course the *miko*, already exemplified by the sibyl Teruhi. Without the *miko* the *kami* is voiceless, save in dreams, and further divinatory steps must be taken—the tortoise shell, the deer's shoulder blade, the horserace—to assess his will.

Another relevant characteristic of the *kami* is his essential amorality. His nature is ambivalent; it is neither good nor bad, but can manifest itself as benign or destructive to human interests according to the treatment it receives. Treat him correctly with the proper worship and cult attention and with the right and appropriate offerings, and the *kami* can reasonably be expected to bless, protect and succour the village, to see that the harvest ripens, to ward off flood and drought, to forestall fire and pest. Offend him, on the other hand, either by neglect or by exposure to the pollutions of blood and death, and at once his benevolence will turn to rage which will smite with fire, sterility and sickness.

The treatment which all *kami* find pleasing consists of assiduous worship, correct offerings, and above all ritual purity on the part of the worshipper. Frequent visits to the shrine, copious offerings of dried fish, rice-wine, fruit, lengths of cloth, swords, spears, horses, are all calculated to win his favour.<sup>7</sup>

Of paramount importance, however, is the ceremonial purity of the worshippers who approach the *kami*'s presence. More offensive than neglect to these numinous beings is pollution, *sumi*. In ancient times a complex variety of acts



and states rendered a man unclean in the sight of the *kami*. The full list is set out in the ritual known as the *Oharai*, and included such diverse acts and conditions as birth, the consummation of a marriage, menstruation, bestiality, disease, wounds, snakebite, and breaking down the divisions between rice fields. Most of these acts, it will be at once remarked, carry no moral guilt whatever; indeed, they are the unavoidable concomitants of the human cycle of life. Men and women in such conditions, however, could not expect to approach a shrine until a stated length of time had elapsed and unless they had undergone the approved methods of purgation and catharsis.<sup>8</sup>

In practice today the complex list of pollutions set out in the *Oharai* is ignored. Two sources of pollution only need be reckoned with, death and blood. Anyone who has been in contact with a corpse, even be it a dead dog or cat, must refrain from visiting a shrine for a stated number of days. Anyone who has eaten food cooked on the same fire as a person polluted with death is likewise rendered unclean, though for a shorter space of time.

Blood, the other principal source of pollution, comes in its most abhorred form as menstrual blood and birth blood. The reason why women were prohibited until the late Meiji period and in certain cases even today from climbing holy mountains or entering the portals of certain shrines lay in their liability to the 'red pollution' of menstruation. Blood drawn from wounds likewise caused uncleanness, though for a shorter time.<sup>9</sup>

Pollution is thus directly antipathetic to sacred power. It is the principal source of magical weakness, of the depletion of power. He who would cultivate power must therefore first purify himself from pollution. Only thus can he acquire the bottom of strength which will enable him to accomplish his task. The *miko*, if she is to be possessed by a deity, must by catharsis make herself a fit vehicle for him. The ascetic, if he is to approach the world of numina, must likewise rid himself of the unclean hindrances which make his presence unwelcome.

So much therefore for the *kami*. They represent power of a mysterious and numinous kind over human life. Their

nature is non-moral, ambivalent, perilous, unpredictable. Their world is both away from ours and behind it, showing enigmatically here and there through the familiar shapes of nature. To maintain contact between their world and ours special people are necessary, endowed with the special power of effecting the required rupture of level. This task the *miko* and the ascetic accomplish in their complementary ways.

We turn now to the second category of superior spiritual being with which the shaman in Japan is called upon to deal. These are the quiet ancestral ghosts, the spirits of the dead who, through the performance of the correct requiem obsequies, have been successfully brought to rest and salvation.

Spirits of the dead are known in general as *tama*, a word which can without misrepresentation be translated as 'soul'. The *tama* is an entity which resides in some host, to which it imparts life and vitality. Thus it may dwell in the human body, in animals, in trees (*kodama*). It may even dwell in certain words and sounds (*kotodama*), imparting to them a particular magic absent from other sounds. Once let it leave the body in which it resides, however, and its host will become enfeebled and sick and eventually die.

The *tama* is capable of detaching itself from its host and wandering about the country unanchored, occasionally revealing itself in the form of a large shining jewel or ball, to which its name proclaims its association. The ancient ritual of *tama-shizume*, or pacifying the *tama*, was thus a means of preventing or dissuading the *tama* from leaving the body of the sick person. Likewise the *tama-furi*, or shaking the *tama*, another rite of great antiquity, is considered to have been a means of rousing or activating a sluggish *tama*. By waving or shaking an object in which a *tama* was believed to reside, it was possible to stir up its magic power and hereby transfer it to the person for whom the ceremony was performed.<sup>10</sup>

When the *tama* finally and irrevocably left the human body at the time of death, however, it required certain nourishment if it was to achieve its proper state of rest and salvation. This state, usually known as *yobutsu*, is one attainable only after it has received from its immediate descendents

requiem obsequies and offerings over a prescribed period of time.<sup>11</sup> Thirty-three years is the interval usually considered necessary to final peace, though in some districts as many as forty-nine are required. When this period is accomplished, the saved spirit will slough off its individual personality and blend itself into the corporate spiritual entity, the Ancestor, in which all past forebears of the family are believed to be incapsulated. Henceforth the spirit needs no separate tablet in the family temple. One tablet suffices for all the ancestors included in this corporate being, a figure often represented by the beaming, anonymous and beneficent old man known as *okinā*, who appears in the congratulatory and luck-bringing Nō play of that name performed at New Year.

Two kinds of benevolent ghost may therefore be distinguished: the corporate ancestor, and those spirits who have not accomplished the span of time necessary to attain *jōbutsu*, but who are rendered benevolent nevertheless by assiduous worship on the part of their family. Into this category therefore will come the dead grandfather, grandmother, father and mother of the family, still retaining some semblance of individuality, still responding to calls for advice, still ready to express their opinion, through a medium, on the conduct of their children and grandchildren. Provided the correct offerings are kept up, of rice-cakes and cooked rice, and provided that the correctly powerful requiem sutras are recited, these dead spirits will continue to act as mentors and monitors to their descendants until the time for their apotheosis is fulfilled.

These benign spirits have many points in common with the *kami*. Like the *kami*, they can traverse the barrier which divides their world from ours and return at stated seasons to visit their families. Like the *kami* too they can take possession of a medium and deliver an utterance through her mouth. Unlike the *kami*, however, they are not offended by the pollution of blood, nor of course of death, and the distinctively round shining shape in which they so often manifest themselves is entirely unlike any of the guises in which the *kami* appear. We may note in passing, however, that the round ball is not the only form in which benign

ghosts may be seen. Miss Ishida told me in 1972 that to her they usually appeared in the likeness of the person they had been while alive, though frequently they wore an archaic form of dress of pale green or white. Mrs Hiroshima, on the other hand, declared that to her dead spirits differed in the form they manifested according to their *kurai* or rank. The higher they advanced and the nearer they drew towards salvation, the more they tended to resemble shining balls. Her mother, Mrs Hiroshima Ryūun, an ascetic renowned throughout the Kansai district for her powers of healing and exorcism, described in her ascetic diary several cases in which dead spirits appeared to her clairvoyant eyes. Sometimes these were clearly recognisable as the dead persons they formerly were. Sometimes, however, they were balls of light flashing like stars.<sup>12</sup>

The precise relationship between *kami* and the *tama* of dead spirits is still a matter of controversy among Japanese ethnologists. Oka Masao, for example, believes that in ancient times the two kinds of spirit were entirely separate and required separate modes of worship. Yanagita Kunio, on the other hand, firmly believed that all *kami* had their origin in the dead ancestral spirit, and were merely superior and proliferated forms of an original deified ancestor. Both Origuchi Shinobu and Matsumura Takeo likewise believe that the *tama* was an older and more primitive form of spiritual being, from which the *kami* in the course of time developed. Their theory is certainly supported by a number of enigmatic references in the chronicles to *kami* who possessed, or consisted of, two or more *tama* of opposed natures. One of these, the *nigimimana*, was gentle and benign; another, the *aramimana*, was rough and destructive. The one seems to have been capable of detaching itself from the other and appearing as an *alera anima* or exterior soul unrecognisable to its counterpart. Thus we have the curious passage in the *Nihon Shoki* which relates how the deity Okuninushi saw his own counterpartal soul floating towards him over the sea, how he interrogated it and held converse with it,<sup>13</sup> and how it declared itself to be his own lucky and wandering spirit.

In shamanic practice today, however, the two kinds of



spiritual being, *kami* and *lama*, are treated differently. The calling of a soul or ghost into the body of a medium requires a ritual different from the summoning of a *kami*, and often a different season of the year. In districts of the north-east, for example, it is specifically forbidden to summon ghosts in the lunar fifth month, when the mountain god is expected to descend from his winter retreat to supervise the work in the rice fields. If he should encounter ancestral ghosts on the road, it is believed, a quarrel would certainly ensue. In other northern rites, however, it is customary to call myriads of *kami* to the scene of the *séance* before summoning the ancestral ghost with which one wishes to speak: much as in a spiritualist *séance* in the west the medium's 'control' must be summoned before contact can be made with what Professor Broad called the 'ostensible communicator', that is to say, the ghost.

Certain specific seasons of the year have, however, been set aside since very early times as auspicious times for the recall of ancestral spirits to their old homes. Anciently these appear to have been two, New Year and Bon. Although New Year, *shōgatsu*, has now lost its character of a celebration of the return of the dead, Yanagita has shown us that the figure of the New Year deity, *tosigamisama*, bears so strong a resemblance to the benevolent ancestral old man as to leave us in no doubt as to the original character of the festival.<sup>14</sup>

Bon, however, which on the lunar calendar falls towards the middle of the seventh month, July or August, still retains its character of a welcome to the dead. At this time both kinds of benign ancestor, the corporate figure as well as the individual ghosts, are expected to return to their old home. Altars with appropriate offerings must be arranged in the house for each category of spirit, together with one for the homeless wanderers, the *muenbotoké*, next to be described. In some mountain districts paths are cut in the long grass to enable the spirits to make their way the more easily from their mountain realm to their old homes, and Yanagita believes that a horse may sometimes have been led up this path into the mountain to meet the spirits. He recalls how his own father used to put on his best clothes to go to the

door of the house to welcome the spirits on their arrival. He remembers a samurai family too in which the wife, also dressed in her best clothes with the family crest, would prostrate herself at the door with exactly the same courteous formulae on her lips as she would extend to exalted living guests. In language of the most honorific possible she would apologise for her poor and inadequate hospitality, thank the ghosts for their visit and beg them to come again in a year's time.<sup>15</sup>

In other mountain districts the special flowers reserved for Bon—feathery, fragile, redolent of the coming autumn—are gathered from the summits of the hills and brought down into the houses. They are believed to be the *yorishiro* or vessels in which the spirits can inhale for the duration of their visit. Bonfires too, kindled at the tops of hills, are a means of lighting the spirit guests back to their own world. So also is the custom of *tōrō-nagashi* or floating lanterns loosed in the darkness of the last night over the lake at Matsue. When in the summer of 1972 I reached the lakeside, the lanterns were already streaming past, thousands of dim flickering lights over the dark water. Each with the family name written on one side and a valedictory formula on the other, they floated slowly past, uncannily like a great host of spirits, and gradually receded into the darkness of the other side of the lake where one by one they quivered and went dead and black.

We shall find that in the north this season for the return of the dead is celebrated with particularly intense shamanic activity. Unless the ancestral spirits are called at this time into the body of a medium and encouraged to speak, it is believed that their progress towards salvation will be seriously hindered, and that they will appear in dreams to their descendants to complain of neglect.

This brings us to our third category of dead ancestral spirit, the discontented, wandering or angry ghosts.

If the ancestral dead are not correctly treated by their descendants, if the offerings or the obsequies necessary to their nourishment are neglected, then with frightening suddenness their nature will change. The kindly old grandfather, the sympathetic father, the loving mother will turn

in an instant into a vicious and capricious tyrant, punishing the neglectful family with curses. The spirit has slipped, without warning, from its position in our second category into our third. From a superior and benignly disposed being, it has become less than human, malevolent, spiteful, in need of succour and restitution.

Of these malevolent ghosts, several different kinds are recognised. There are those in the first place who, during the thirty-three year period between death and the attainment of *jōbutsu*, suffer neglect from their descendants. The necessary nourishment of water, rice and potent sutras is denied to them and in their starved rage they will attack their surviving relations in a variety of painful ways. Once the correct cult attentions are resumed, however, they will usually revert to their former tranquil benevolence.

A second class of discontented ghost may be seen in the *munbotoke*, spirits of no affinity. These are the ghosts of those who have died with no surviving descendants to accord them the nourishing worship they require, who die childless and without kinsmen or lost and friendless in the course of a journey. They are therefore rootless, wandering, starved, desperate of hope for rest and peace. In their misery they will attack any passing stranger whose condition, through sickness or weakness, lays them open to spiritual possession. In many families, therefore, the custom still persists at the Bon festival of providing a separate altar for these homeless 'hungry ghosts', whose sufferings may thus be temporarily assuaged.<sup>15</sup>

Most dangerous of all, however, are those ghosts whose manner of death was violent, lonely or untoward. Men who died in battle or disgrace, who were murdered, or who met their end with rage or resentment in their hearts, will become at once *onyō* or angry spirits, who require for their appeasement measures a good deal stronger than the ordinary everyday obsequies.

Many examples of such furious ghosts and the havoc wrought by their rage can be found in the literature of the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries, when terror of such spirits rose to a curious crescendo. The Prince Sawara, for example, who died a horrifying death in the year 785,

starved, degraded, exiled and finally poisoned, was later credited with a series of calamities which included a general pestilence and the sickness of the Crown Prince. The usual prayers were offered at his grave but these proved ineffectual. It was only when the posthumous title of Emperor was conferred on the dead prince, his body exhumed and reinterred in a grave of the rank of Imperial tumulus, that the disasters stopped.<sup>17</sup>

Even greater havoc was wrought by the angry ghost of the learned minister Sugawara Michizane. Unjustly exiled to the wilds of Kyūshū in the year 901, he died two years afterwards in lonely disgrace. Thereafter another succession of calamities, flood, drought, lightning, pestilence was attributed to the work of his furious ghost. Again extraordinary measures were needed to pacify the spectre. Only when its full apotheosis was brought about, its transformation into a superior *kami* under the name of Kitano Tenjin, was its enmity appeased.<sup>18</sup>

Usually, we may note, it is into a *kami* of relatively modest rank—*rejin*, *mikogami*, *ōjigami*, *wakamiya*—that such ghosts are content to be transformed. Yanagita, however, records an exceptional case of the ghost of Yambe Sebei of Iyo which was not satisfied with the title of *rejin* and continued its baleful activities until accorded the much higher rank of *dainyōjin*.<sup>19</sup>

As to the shape assumed by these discontented ghosts, a variety of testimonies present themselves. Miss Ishida told me that she could in fact see no distinction between them and their benign counterparts, though she had noticed that angry ghosts often carried an unpleasant stagnant smell. These she would see against the background of their lives. Their home, the history of their death and the reason for their malice, unfolded about them as though a long scroll painting were being unrolled. Koike Nagayuki points out that it is not until late in the Heian period that ghosts are depicted in art or literature as assuming the shape they had while alive. Before that time their presence was manifested in a variety of odd ways. Raigō Ajari, who died of rage and starvation, appeared as a horde of magical rats. Sugawara Michizane appears to have taken the form of lightning and

thunder. In the Nô plays, however, of later date the figure who appears resembles his living counterpart so closely that it is only when he announces that he is a ghost that his true nature is recognisable. Nô ghosts may also take the form of ordinary men and women, only revealing themselves in their full panoply of horned mask and long red wig in the second half of the play.<sup>20</sup>

All these varieties of malignant spirit are capable of possessing a human being and inflicting upon him sickness, enfeeblement and mental derangement of numerous kinds. In the laying and restitution of these unhappy spirits the ascetic, as well as the medium, plays a prominent part. We shall find indeed that he first rose to prominence as virtually the only specialist capable of ridding the community of the threat from these spectres, of healing those whom their malignant possession had made mad or sick, and transforming their evil power into one for good.

One more variety of lower, malign spiritual being, with whom the ascetic is likewise called upon to deal, remains to be described before we can proceed to the next stage of our investigation. These creatures, whom I call witch animals, are, however, of sufficient complexity as to require a chapter to themselves.

### 3 Witch Animals

The witch animals of Japan are creatures believed to be capable of assuming a disincarnate and invisible form, and in such guise of penetrating inside the human body and inflicting upon it a variety of painful torments.

Yanagita Kunio, the great authority on Japanese ethnology and folklore, distinguished two broad categories of witch animal: a snake, and a four-legged variety usually known as a fox or a dog. The snake, known as *tôbyô*, *tombogami* or simply *hebigami*, covers a relatively small area, being found only on the island of Shikoku and in the Chûgoku district of the main island. The distribution of the four-legged creature is far wider. As a fox, it is found all along the Japan Sea coast, in both the Kantô and the Kansai districts of the main island, and over most of Kyûshû. As a dog, *inugami*, it is found in much the same areas as the snake, that is to say Shikoku and the Chûgoku district. Under the name of *izuna*, it abounds over much of the Tôhoku district, Aomori and Iwate prefectures. And again, under the peculiar name of *gedô*, meaning a Buddhist heresy, it appears in the old province of Bingo in Hiroshima prefecture.

Even here our problems do not end, for the fox itself, *kitsune*, falls into a baffling number of sub-species. In Iâmoto, for example, it is known as *ninko*, man fox. In southern Kyûshû it is known as *yaka*, field fox. In the Kantô regions it is known as *asaki*, and in Shizuoka, Nagano and Yamanaishi it sports the name of *kuda*, pipe fox.<sup>1</sup>

Surely, it will be objected, these various names must indicate different species of animal. Apparently not so. When asked to describe what the creature actually looks like, they will tell you in all these districts, regardless of what name they give it, that it is long and thin with reddish-brown fur, short legs and sharp claws. Clearly we have the same creature appearing under a variety of names, none of which, incidentally, seems particularly appropriate. The creature described does not in the least resemble a fox or a