

**IN THE VOICE OF A MODERN-DAY MIKO:
ITŌ HIROMI'S RETELLING OF THE SANSHŌ DAYŪ LEGEND**

LEE FRIEDERICH

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

This paper will discuss Itō Hiromi's 1993 poem "Watashi wa Anjuhimeko de aru." Itō's acclaimed tale-poem is based on *Oiwaki sama ichidaiki* (*The Biography of Oiwaki-sama*), which was transcribed by anthropologists only the twentieth century after it was recited for them by spiritual mediums (commonly called *miko* in Japanese) in the far north of the main island of Japan. As will be described below, *Oiwaki sama ichidaiki* is a distant cousin of the better-known Sanshō Dayū legend, a vital story from the *sekkyō*, or Buddhist morality tale, oral tradition. The Sanshō Dayū story, which did not appear in text form until the seventeenth century, takes up the plight of two young children, a brother and sister named Zushiō and Anju, who are kidnapped from their courtly parents and sold to a slave owner, or bailiff (*dayū*), named Sanshō. After many long years of struggle on Sanshō Dayū's plantation, Anju convinces her brother to escape and find their parents, while she herself is tortured and killed by Sanshō Dayū for her part in her brother's escape. This story has been taken up and modified by several twentieth century writers, beginning with Mori Ōgai's version in 1915, which inspired the 1954 film by Mizoguchi Kenji, and, most recently, by Umehara Takeshi in 1993. In contrast to these authors' rendering of the ever-popular Sanshō Dayū myth, the lesser-known *Biography of Oiwaki sama*, on which Itō bases her poem, focuses almost exclusively on the suffering Anjuhimeko must endure as she journeys toward becoming the Shinto god (*kami*) Oiwaki-sama.

Itō's poem represents a significant rewriting of the *Oiwaki-sama* myth insofar as Anjuhimeko not only suffers physical hardship from the nearly-impossible tasks she must perform along the way to kamihood, but she is repeatedly raped by her task masters. As mentioned above, the *Oiwaki-sama* myth is narrated in the voice of a *miko*, or *itako*, as the spiritual medium in known in the northern Tohoku region, and as such, allows Itō to foreground her great talents as a performance poet, bringing to life in the multivocal voice of the *itako* not only Anjuhimeko, but her larger-than-life mother and father as well. For those who missed Itō's 2005 performance of "Watashi wa Anjuhimeko de aru" at the Women Writers Conference in Lexington, Kentucky, a remarkable bi-lingual recording of the first section of the poem was released on *Nihon gendaishi no rokunin, Masters of Modern Japanese Poetry: Six Distinctive Voices of the Postwar Era* in 1999 by Watchword Press. This paper relies on Jeffrey Angles' fine translation of the poem, published as a Sagaing Press chapbook in Kalamazoo in 2005.

I. Departures

In her 1993 poem “*Watashi wa Anjuhimeko de aru*” (“I am Anjuhimeko”) poet Itō Hiromi takes up the persona of a three-year-old girl whose mother was ordered by her husband to bury their newborn daughter alive in a sandy river bed. Repulsed by Anjuhimeko’s infant body, her father believed she was the child of another man, her mouth “so monstrously big it ...stretch[es] all the way to her ears”¹ (この子の口は耳まで裂けている).² The infant girl survived, however, with the aide of a long reed that her mother inserted in the sand for her daughter to breathe, or “suck in the dew through”³ (露をなめて).⁴ After three years, Anjuhimeko’s father, who had promised he would reclaim her if she managed to survive this ordeal, reneges on this promise and sends the three-year old girl drifting out to sea, where she embarks on a hair-raising journey of enslavement, sexual molestation, and, eventually, salvation. In the end, she will become a *kami*, or Shinto god called Oiwiki Sama, the god of Mount Iwaki, which rises out of the Tsugaru plains in Aomori Prefecture. The source on which Itō relies to construct her poem-tale is the written transcript of *Oiwaki sama ichidaiki* (*The Biography of Oiwaki-sama*), which was invoked by a *miko* and recorded by Japanese anthropologists in 1931 and 1967, according to Iwasaki Takeo’s 1978 study of the Sanshō Dayū mythic tradition.⁵

Itō’s retelling of this “Tsugaru” version of the Sanshō Dayū myth departs significantly from the twentieth century strain of the tale told most recently in the 1990s by Umehara Takeshi in his collection *Chūsei Shōsetsu-shū* (*A Collection of Medieval Stories*) and earlier, in 1915, by Mori Ōgai, whose story inspired the acclaimed 1954 film by Mizoguchi Kenji. In this more popular version of the myth, which many Japanese say they learn at the knee of a parent or grandparent, Anju is a young girl when she and her brother Zushiō are taken from their mother on their journey from their estate in northern Japan to the site of their father’s banishment in southern Tsukushi (modern day Kyushu). The abductors sell the children to a wealthy plantation owner named Sanshō Dayū as slaves, while their mother is taken to Sado Island, left to a fate of chasing birds from millet fields. After toiling for many years on Sanshō Dayū’s estate, Anju convinces her brother to escape, urging him to find their parents and carry on their good family name. In the Ōgai version, Anju commits suicide by drowning herself, taking the secret of Zushiō’s escape to her watery grave. In keeping with the earliest extant seventeenth century *sekkyō* version of the myth, summarized by Iwasaki in a separate, previously-published study of the myth, in the Umehara version, Anju is tortured to death by fire and water for her part in her brother’s escape.⁶

¹ Hiromi, Itō *I am Anjuhimeko*, trans. Jeffrey Angles (Kalamazoo: A Sagaing Press Chapbook, 2005), 1.

² Hiromi Itō, *Watashi wa anjuhimeko de aru* (*I am Anjuhimeko*) (Tokyo: Shichōsha, 1993), 8.

³ *I am Anjuhimeko*, trans. Jeffrey Angles, 8.

⁴ Itō, *Watashi wa anjuhimeko de aru*, 13.

⁵ Takeo Iwasaki, *Sanshō Dayū kō: sekkyō jōruri no sekai* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1978), 149.

⁶ Takeo Iwasaki, *Sanshō Dayū kō: chūsei no sekkyōgatari* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1973), 33-34.

The differences between these three more popular versions of the myth and the Tsugaru version Itō's poem is based on are so many we might be tempted to view them as separate myths, but at the core of both is Anju/Anjuhimeko's unshakeable spiritual forbearance: Just as Anju sacrifices her life so that her brother might live to be reunited with his family, in the Tsugaru version, Anjuhimeko is forced to undertake nearly impossible physical tasks to prove herself worthy of ascending to kamihood and, as will be described in the next section, is subjected to extreme forms of torture as well in Itō's innovative version. One of the central differences between these two strains of the myth, however, revolves around the issue of Anjuhimeko's agency. In the Umehara, Ōgai and Mizoguchi versions (which I will refer to collectively as the "Sanshō Dayū" myth from this point on), Anju's agency is limited to the spiritual realm: indeed, she plays a vital supporting role in these versions. Encouraged by Anju to flee Sanshō Dayū's plantation, Zushiō not only journeys back to his mother, but, eventually, to Sanshō Dayū's plantation as well, where he abolishes slavery as the new governor of Tango. In the Tsugaru version, however, Anjuhimeko becomes the sole agent of her own salvation as she undergoes the many physical tests and journeys that define her ascent as the *kami* known as Oiwaki-sama, as Iwasaki describes the spiritual progress of the Tsugaru version.⁷

In fact, Anjuhimeko's brother plays a far smaller role in the Tsugaru version than Anju does in the Umehara, Ōgai and Mizoguchi versions, existing only as a voice inside Anjuhimeko's head, a voice she hears "across the distance" of time, "his voice like that of an old, old, old man"⁸ (遠くから聞こえる、あの子の声は今とても、年取った、年取った男のように).⁹ In this Tsugaru version, Anjuhimeko retains her spiritual potency and takes up the very search for her parents that Zushiō undertakes in the Sanshō Dayū myth. Indeed, in Itō's version, when Anjuhimeko telepathically summons her brother, Tsusōmaru, as he is called in the Tsugaru version, with the hope that he will be able to direct her to the site of her salvation, Tennōji, he is unable to do so. Another major departure from the more popular myth is the portrayal of Anjuhimeko's father in the Tsugaru version. While Zushiō and Anju's father does fall out of favor with the reigning emperor and is banished, he is depicted as an unfairly-treated, upright man of nobility. Iwasaki claims, however, that Anjuhimeko's father has more in common with *oni* (monstrous demons) than with humans. In fact, the *oni*-father is deeply associated with the various slave-masters that Anjuhimeko encounters once she is banished from home for good, the first of whom is known as Sanshō Dayū, according to excerpts of the Tsugaru version that Iwasaki provides.¹⁰ While the molesting slave masters remain conspicuously unnamed in Itō's poem, the father too is very much implicated in the theme of child molestation that virtually consumes Itō's poem-tale and so tellingly marks it as a child's story of survival. While the sexual dimensions of enslavement are touched upon in both Mizoguchi and Umehara's versions as well, Itō, by means of her innovative

⁷ Takeo Iwasaki, *Sanshō Dayū kō: sekkyō jōruri no Sekai*, 160.

⁸ Itō, *I am Anjuhimeko*, trans. Jeffrey Angles 29.

⁹ Itō, "Watashi wa anjuhimeko de aru," 28.

¹⁰ Iwasaki, *Sanshō Dayū kō: sekkyō jōruri no sekai*, 173.

rewriting of the relatively unknown Tsugaru version, explodes this theme that so deeply haunts Japanese women's history, a dark legacy of sexual enslavement that extends well into the twentieth century.

Another extremely significant difference between the more popular Sanshō Dayū myth and Tsugaru versions revolves around the ways in which the myths are narrated. While the Sanshō Dayū myth is usually cast in the third person, the many voices of the Tsugaru version are conveyed by the first person voice of a *miko*. That is to say, the *miko* becomes a performer of many subjectivities at once, revealing the first person perspectives of not only Anjuhimeko, but those of her mother and father as well. As Iwasaki notes, the *miko*, or *itako*, as spiritual mediums are called in the northern Tohoku region, is often cast in the role of “mediating” the intimate relationships of family members who have been separated from one another by death, and in so doing, gives voice to several competing interests at the same time.¹¹

Indeed, Itō cultivates her forceful multivocal aesthetic from this narrative role of the mediating *itako*, bringing the disembodied voices of daughter, mother and father into more-often-than-not violent, but occasionally, extremely tender juxtapositions with one another. Anjuhimeko claims possession of the story in the poem's opening lines, “*Watashi wa Anjuhimeko de aru*” (“I am Anjuhimeko”). Indeed, hers is the story of the trials and great suffering she must endure to attain the status of a *kami*, and yet, as both Itō's and the earlier version of the myth cited by Iwasaki so vividly show, Anjuhimeko's story cannot exist in isolation from those of her mother and father, who, as Iwasaki puts it, tower “like dark pillars” above her.¹² As Anjuhimeko says to her mother, who chides her for seeking out reunion with such an abusive father:

I'm part of this world because I have my father, if I had no father I would never have been buried in the sand but I also never would have been able to emerge again”¹³

おかあさま、父があつての世のものだねだ、父のな
ければ砂に埋けられず、でもまた砂からいでられず。¹⁴

In Itō's version, the *miko* conveys these intertwined narratives almost seamlessly. In this work that contains so little punctuation, the period comes to signify a shift in voice and narrative perspective.

This multivocal presentation of the many competing voices that comprise the mediated “voice” of Itō's poem contributes to its strong sense of fractured identity that challenges modern notions of unitary subjectivity so strongly suggested by Ōgai and Mizoguchi's depictions of Anju and Zushiō as developing subjects. Itō's pervasive use of

¹¹ Iwasaki, *Sanshō Dayū kō: sekkyō jōruri no sekai* 163-64.

¹² Iwasaki, 169.

¹³ Itō, *I am Anjuhimeko*, trans. Jeffrey Angles, 21.

¹⁴ Itō, “*Watashi wa anjuhimeko de aru*,” 22-23.

multivocality, along with her torrential use of repetition, sound, rhythm, and tremendously entwined sentence structures, evoke emotions and senses so much larger than the sum of what the words themselves signify, allowing for what Julia Kristeva calls in *Revolution in Poetic Language* the semiotic “flow of *jouissance* into language,” or as Kristeva further describes it, “the cracking of the symbolic order, splitting it open, changing vocabulary, syntax, the word itself.”¹⁵ Indeed, compounding the speaker’s competing interests between mother, father and daughter, Anjuhimeko’s identity is split, and, at the same time built up from, three beings: the girl Anjuhimeko, the *miko* who tells her story, and Oiwaki-sama, the *kami* she is in the process of becoming. If Anjuhimeko can be known as a subject, it is only momentarily, through the ebb and flow of her language, the *temporary* sense of unity, or *jouissance* (literally, enjoyment), that Itō achieves in her pulsating rhythms, echoing repetitions and multivocality that carry the poem. As discussed below, Itō brings to full force the sense of rhythm and repetition that is also present in the recorded transcripts of the Tsugaru myth that Iwasaki refers to throughout his study.

Indeed, the mediating voice of the *miko* who literally channels the voices of the poem’s characters becomes an extremely powerful, if not volatile, vehicle for performance in the able hands of performance poets such as Itō, who, in her own performances of the poem very much evokes the image of the *miko* as the shamanistic-performer of Shinto rites.¹⁶ The performative aspects of the Sanshō Dayū myth are of no small importance in this regard either, since the story is regarded as a vital myth of the *sekkyō* tradition. While the tradition of *sekkyō* began as a “formal, solemn commemorative service performed by monks” in the Heian and Kamakura periods, it was later popularized and secularized in the Muromachi era. At this time, *sekkyō* were enacted by performers who dressed as tonsured priests to give dramatic tellings of popular Buddhist stories in religious and secular settings. Accompanied by various *sasara* – “clappers, rattles, or scrapers associated with folk music [and] *sekkyō*” – these stories were meant to “move their audiences to tears.”¹⁷

The sufferings of Itō’s Anjuhimeko has no less a dramatic effect on her contemporary audiences: Itō begins her performance of “*Watashi wa anjuhimeko de aru*” by a rhythmic drum roll, her hands pounding the ground where she is seated. Perhaps we should see poet Itō too as a medium for this “original” voice of *Anjuhimeko*, as another modern-day *miko*, linking us to the unknowable past through her performance. Indeed, in a 2005 Lexington, Kentucky performance of the first part of her poem, Itō alluded to the entwined relationship between *miko* and poet, reminding us that the poet too is a medium for the voices of the gods.

So doing, Itō draws her work into association with story-telling shamans of the past, the legendary Hieda no Are (b. 653) for instance, who, as many have believed, recited the texts upon which the *Kojiki* is based. Hieda no Are was said to be related to

¹⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Walker (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 79.

¹⁶ Earl Miner, Hiroko Odagiri, and Robert E. Morrell, *The Princeton Companion to Classical Japanese Literature*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985), 70.

¹⁷ Miner, 296.

the descendants of the goddess Ame no uzume, “the archetypal shamaness (*miko*)” who, as Doris Baren has put it “lured the aggrieved sun goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami out of her cave by exposing her genitals in a dance before the assembly of deities gathered outside the cave; their boisterous laughter led the curious sun goddess to emerge, thus returning light to a darkened world.”¹⁸ Indeed, Itō further invokes her links to Japan’s mythic past, and to the *Kojiki* in particular, through the cameo appearance of Leech-child toward the end of her poem, the child the gods Izanagi and Izanami disposed of in their first attempt at procreation. Indeed Leech-child makes a triumphant return in the poem, guiding Anjuhimeko to her final destination of Tennōji, a feat Anjuhimeko’s brother is unable to perform. *Yamanba*, the mountain crone of folklore known for her fondness for eating male genitalia, makes an appearance as well as the wildly copulating mother of Leech-child. While, as Merra Viswanathan points out, in other modern evocations of *yamanba*, such as Ōba Minako’s story “*Yamauba no bishō*” (“Smile of the Mountain Witch”), “the trajectory of the *yamamba* may be described as one of naturalization and domestication, moving from the demonic to the demotic,” the *yamanba* becomes a paragon of celebratory sex in the climactic conclusion of Itō’s poem.¹⁹

Through this act of “re-channeling” Japan’s mythic past, Itō participates in and in many ways fulfills what poet and critic Alicia Ostriker has called ‘revisionist mythmaking:’ “Whenever a poet . . . is using myth . . . the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist: that is the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible.”²⁰ Claiming that “the importance of shamanism in ancient as well as medieval life has been underestimated and essentially ignored in contemporary historical discourse,” Barbara Ruch goes on to describe the practice as “female-dominated and individual-oriented . . . in marked contrast with male-dominated and institution-oriented Buddhism”²¹ Itō accesses a compelling, virtually unknown Shinto-based version of the Sanshō Dayū story from the heart of Tohoku’s shamanistic tradition. In her radical rewriting this myth, Itō not only celebrates the sexuality of a shaman such as Ame no uzume who would “expose her genitals in a dance,” but, perhaps even more significantly, through her brutalizing depiction of the infant Anjuhimeko’s sexual molestation, exposes that which the Tsugaru transcript of the myth tends to suppress: the suffering of women that the shamanist tradition itself perpetuated. For, as Ruch points out, “at the lower edges of the shaman profession, as indeed of all professions in which women were central, hovered the slave trade, a source of young girls for any of the matrilinear professions (shamans, entertainers, prostitutes)

¹⁸Doris G. Baren, “Translation and Reproduction in Enchi Fumiko’s ‘A Bond for Two Lifetimes-- Gleanings,’” in *The Woman’s Hand*, ed. Paul Gordon Schalow and Janet A. Walker (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996), 182.

¹⁹Merra Viswanathan, “In Pursuit of the *Yamamba*: The Question of Female Resistance,” in *The Woman’s Hand*, ed. Paul Gordon Schalow and Janet A. Walker (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996), 243.

²⁰Viswanathan, 240.

²¹ Barbara Ruch, “The Other Side of Culture,” in *The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 3*, ed. Kozo Yamamura (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 523.

that could afford the purchase.”²² While many will despair the darkness of Itō’s vision, as Ostriker suggests, the revisionist act of rewriting such deeply engrained myths is one way of forging cultural change. Painful as it is, exposing women’s sexual suffering that is so often suppressed below the surface of myth can be seen as one of the strategies of “returning light to a darkened world,” to cite the marvels of Ame no uzume.

2. Branding: The Telling Mark of the Writer

As might be expected, the various versions of the Sanshō Dayū myth mentioned thus far reveal as much about the contemporary concerns of their authors as they do about the historical events that they depict, the exile of Iwasaki Hangan Masauji in 1081 and the subsequent abduction of his wife and two children by Yamaoka Dayū, to cite some of the historical background of the myth that Ōgai refers to in his “*Rekishī Sono Mama to Rekishī Banare*.”²³ In fact, if there were ever a central motif in the myth that reveals the concerns of its respective authors, it is the branding of human flesh, a brutal fact that each of the versions must account for, since this motif is central to the standard *sekkyō*. In the earliest extant versions of the text, the children are overheard talking about their desires to escape their fate as slaves by Sanshō Dayū’s son, Saburō, and are immediately summoned by the slave owner and branded on their foreheads. Not satisfied with this punishment, Sanshō next attempts to starve the children by imprisoning them beneath a large, wooden bathtub, but his intentions are derailed by his son Jirō, who feeds the children on the sly, and, as mentioned above, when Zushiō does finally manage to escape, Anju is tortured to death by fire and water.²⁴ In the modern accounts however, only in Itō’s Tsugaru version is Anjuhimeko herself permanently “branded,” though the details of her torture by fire are significantly different. The three-year old child is roasted over flaming cattails whenever she refuses to obey her various masters. In addition to Itō’s, only in Umehara’s telling is branding retained as a physical imprint upon the children; nonetheless, even in Umehara’s version, the brands vanish when the children pray to their protective *jizō*, to whom the brands are transferred. And, interestingly enough, even though both Ōgai and Mizuguchi appear to play into the sensibilities of modern audiences who would no doubt recoil in horror at the branding of such young children, in fact both writer and filmmaker find extremely innovative ways of invoking this powerful motif without physically branding the children themselves.

In his introduction to *Incident at Sakai: Volume 1 of the Historical Literature of Mori Ōgai*, David Dilworth pays homage to the ways in which Ōgai, in his “historical literature,” including both *rekishi shōsetsu* and *shiden* (biography of historical figures), “achieved a creative fusion of personal, historical, philosophical, and aesthetic dimensions through the medium of an impeccable prose narrative.”²⁵ Indeed, in his

²² Ruch, 525.

²³ Mori Ōgai, “*Rekishī sono mama, rekishī banare*.” *Kokoro no hana* 19, no. 1 (1916).

²⁴ Iwasaki, 32-34.

²⁵ David Dilworth and J. Thomas Rimer, *Saiki Kōi and Other Stories: The Historical Literature of Mori Ōgai, Volume 2 of the Historical Literature of Mori Ōgai* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1977), 5.

intense focus on the Confucian values that would cause Zushiō to risk his life as an escaped slave to restore his family name, we can see Ōgai as a “‘transitional’ figure in the transmission of Tokugawa culture in the late Meiji and early Taisho years,”²⁶ extolling, for instance, the virtues of “loyalty, sincerity...and the abiding relationships between parents and children.”²⁷ At the same time however, Ōgai’s deeply *modern interests* in the development of individual subjectivity profoundly enlarges the psychological scope of the tale, which is thereby elevated from the status of popular myth to that of “high literature.” Indeed, as critics are quick to point out, the interiorized world of the children Anju and Zushiō is given far more substance than the physical world in which they find themselves enslaved in Ōgai’s version. In their comparison between the Ōgai and Mizoguichi versions, Dudley Andrew and Carole Cavanaugh cite the fairy-tale quality of Ōgai’s telling: “...for Ōgai, the children are only a distressed Hansel and Gretel; not slaves in constant fear of their lives.”²⁸

I would assert, however, that, true to many fairy tales, Anju and Zushiō inhabit a subliminally terrifying world of looming threat, reflecting their liminal status as adolescents, ages fourteen and twelve respectively. Depicting their branding as the children’s simultaneous dream, Ōgai taps into the unfathomable reservoir of the children’s fear, giving them life as subjects, a modern subjectivity that had not existed in previous tellings of this tale. And though the children’s flesh is in fact spared, the reader is not, for we do not realize that Ōgai is describing the children’s simultaneous *dream* until their branding is etched as something very *real* in the story.

Indeed, the joint-nature of the children’s subjectivity can be read as a sign of their positions as developing adolescents. Earlier in the story, in the incident that leads to their imagined branding, Ōgai presents their “plot” to escape as part of a fantasy world the children construct together. As though in imitation of a dream, they recite their escape plans repeatedly, perhaps as a means of coping with the loss of both parents:

Every time the children spoke of their parents, they were so eager to see them that they would act out a fantasy together, pretending to decide what steps to take²⁹

二人は父母の事を言うたびに、どうしようか、こうしようかと、
会いたさの余りに、あらゆる手でを話し合って、夢のような
相談をもする。³⁰

²⁶ Dilworth, 13.

²⁷ Thomas J. Rimer and David Dilworth, *The Incident at Sakai and Other Stories: The Historical Literature of Mori Ōgai, Volume 1 of the Historical Literature of Mori Ōgai* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1977), 7.

²⁸ Dudley Andrew and Carole Cavanaugh, *Sanshō Dayū* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), 15.

²⁹ Mori Ōgai, “Sansho the Steward,” trans. Thomas Rimer. *The Oxford Book of Japanese Short Stories*, ed. Theodore W. Goossen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 14.

³⁰ Mori Ōgai, 山椒大夫, 高瀬舟 (*Sanshō Dayū, Takasebune*) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1967), 28.

The children's joint, interior world is quickly shattered, however, by the branding nightmare. Anju begins to withdraw from everyone around her, especially Zushiō, after having the dream:

Since the night the children were overheard by Saburō and suffered their terrible dream, Anju's whole being seemed altogether changed. Her expression became tight and drawn; her forehead was pinched and her eyes seemed always to be staring at something far away. And she said nothing”³¹

その晩 恐ろしい夢を見た時から、安寿の様子がひどく変わって来た。顔には引き締まったような表情があつて、まゆの根にはしわが寄り、目ははるかに遠い所を見詰めている。そして物を言わない。³²

Withdrawing into the solace of her own deepening subjectivity, an interior, and vastly “distant place,” allows Anju to develop and hone the sense of spiritual strength that she will draw upon to sacrifice herself for the good of Zushiō and their family name. Anju's is a hallowed interiority that can be seen through her willingness to cut her hair, as though readying herself for taking religious vows, before she joins Zushiō in the forest, ostensibly to do the “boy's work” of cutting wood. While we will see the ways in which Itō's depiction of Anjuhimeko's agency does exceed the agency with which Ōgai imbues Anju, it is interesting to note that Anju's subjectivity is at least in part defined by her choice to transgress her gender boundaries as a young woman by cutting her hair. If a “subject” can be defined as one who can think and act on conscious choices, then Anju's final choice, the choice to take her own life, rather than submit to Sanshō's tortures (as she must in the *sekkyō* version), is delicately rendered by Ōgai in the image of tiny shoes, discarded before she wades into the swamp:

この坂の下の沼の端で、小さい藁靴を一足捨った。それは安寿の靴であった。”³³

At the edge of this pond at the bottom of a hill, a small pair of straw sandals were cast aside. These were Anju's shoes.

In his evocative 1954 film, Mizoguchi too renders the impenetrable subjectivity of Anju's choice to take the secret of Zushiō's escape to her grave: Anju walks serenely into the swamp, disappearing beneath rings in the water that spread out above her. While Ōgai reveals much about the subjectivity of Anju and Zushiō as developing adolescents, as Andrew and Cavanaugh point out, Mizoguchi turns to their vastly more complex

³¹ Ōgai, “Sanshō the Steward,” trans. Thomas Rimer, 16.

³² Ōgai, Mori, *Sanshō Dayū, takasebune*, 31.

³³ *Ibid.*, 41.

subjectivities as young adults. One extremely provocative scene in the film version that renders Anju's interiority in almost spatial terms occurs as she hears the eerie evocation of her mother through the voice of a girl who has recently joined Anju in her task of spinning thread. Hailing from Sado island, where Anju's mother had been taken those many years before, the girl intones the low, haunting refrain of the mother's longing for her lost children: "*koishii Zushiō, koishii Anju.*"

The camera renders the impact of this voice on Anju with an almost physical dimensionality, following her as she encircles the girl who sings bent over her spinning, spinning a virtual cocoon around the girls: when Anju asks where she heard the song, the girl tells her that a courtesan made this song famous on Sado. Indeed, the song evokes the past for Anju: this is the voice of her mother as she called the children back from gathering branches their last night together in Echigo. This is the song of the children's entwined fate as well, since it is only after Anju "hears" her mother's voice calling out to her over the water separating Tango from Sado, that Zushiō is moved to escape, as if he too has heard his mother's call from the island. One must also believe that Zushiō in part recognizes his mother through her faint murmurings of this song at the end of the film, though so deeply buried inside her by this point in her life, the song, barely audible, can come to life only within the viewer's imagination.

It is the film's branding scene in particular that reveals Mizoguchi's interest in interrogating the moral depths to be plumbed in the tale. Tarō, as "the good son" is known in Mizoguchi's film, tells the children they must wait until they are adults to try to escape. The children heed Tarō's advice, but by the time they are "old enough" to escape, Zushiō has become so jaded by his fate as slave that rather than remaining devoted to the family's *jizō*, an heirloom his father has given him on his banishment to Tsukushi, in his despair as a young adult, Zushiō believes he has no choice but to devote himself to Sanshō Dayū. Zushiō lives up to Sanshō Dayū's brutal legacy by carrying out the branding of an elderly man who has worked on the Sanshō estate for some fifty years, an act that effectively makes Zushiō the "son" of Sanshō Dayū.³⁴ More significantly however, this act shows how far Zushiō has fallen in this world in which the only recourse for the oppressed is to join forces with the oppressor. Zushiō follows this act with one of equal cruelty, carrying an elderly woman, a long-time working companion of Anju's, up to the hilltop grave-yard. As of yet still alive, as Zushiō well understands, the woman will eventually die as she is eaten by carnivorous birds. It is here, at this desolate, bone-strewn site of the dead, that Anju is able to help her brother recover the keen sense of spiritual acuity that he has lost, a sense of hope that Anju herself has somehow managed to retain. As he escapes, Zushiō carries the ailing woman to the temple that harbors them both. Only after transferring her spiritual powers to Zushiō can Anju end her suffering through her choice to drown herself.

Takeshi Umehara's short story "Sanshō Dayū," which was published the same year as Itō's book in a collection entitled *Chūsei shōsetsu shū* (translated as "*Lotus*" and *Other Tales of Medieval Japan* by Paul McCarthy), manages to retain much of the brutality of the early *sekkyō* version, although, curiously enough, in Umehara's version, the children are branded on their cheeks, instead of their foreheads, and as mentioned above, the brands are soon transferred to the *jizō* they keep with them for protection. In keeping with the early *sekkyō*, Umehara reveals very little response to this painful

³⁴Dudley Andrew and Carole Cavanaugh, 23.

punishment on the part of the children, suggesting only their shame, rather than their pain. That said, however, the “vanishing brand” is rather ironic, since Umehara goes on to openly criticize Ōgai’s gentle handling of Sanshō Dayū once Zushiō becomes governor of Tango and can punish his former slave master. One cannot help but notice the mocking, almost comical tone Umehara achieves in his faithfulness to the *sekkyō* story:

I cannot bring myself to write in detail about the punishment Zushiō imposed on Sanshō Dayū. The merciful Mori Ōgai in his version of the story lets the villain go unpunished. (Surgeon-General of the Imperial Army through he was, had he forgotten the severity of the code of military justice?) But that was not the way things happened. If the people of that time had had a chance to read Ōgai’s novel, their reaction surely would have been along the following lines: “Don’t be ridiculous! Sanshō Dayū and Saburō must receive retribution for their crimes.” And for such terribly cruel acts, the punishment too needs to be a little cruel.³⁵

“A little cruel” is a bit of an understatement. True to the *sekkyō* versions, Saburō, Sanshō Dayū’s cruel son, must labor three days and nights to hack off his father’s head, as his father recites the *Nenbutsu* no less, his head sticking out of the sand. (When Saburō completes this task, he too is buried alive in the sandpit.) One of the important details of the *sekkyō* that Umehara retains is the tool Saburō must use to do the dirty deed: he must hack away at his father’s neck with a saw, written as “*takekyō*” in Iwasaki’s summary of the *sekkyō*, the same hacksaw Zushiō was forced to use to cut wood as Sanshō’s slave.³⁶ In this way, the method of revenge becomes a “proper” form of retribution in the Buddhist sense. Following this line of reasoning, it is little wonder that Anju and Zushiō’s brands vanish in the Umehara version: they are innocent victims who do not “deserve” the brandings.

As mentioned above, in Itō’s Tsugaru version, Anjuhimeko’s “branding” is in fact a “roasting” over cattails, a punishment she is subject to whenever she refuses, or is simply unable, to carry out the will of any one of the numerous men she serves:

... he reproaches me and says, Anjuhimeko, go pound the millet, go pound the rice, here I am, three years old, I can’t possible hold a pestle with this little body of mine, so he hangs me upside-down over a pile of burning cattails and he begins roasting me, I’m helpless, I just keep roasting, there is nothing I can do but hang there and roast.³⁷

このあんじゅひめ子、粟を搗け米を搗けと責められる、どうして三歳の子どものなりしたわたしが、この身体で、杵いっぽん持てるはずもない、そうしたら蒲を焚かれて逆さにつるされあぶられた。ど

³⁵ Takeshi Umehara, “*Lotus*” and *Other Tales of Medieval Japan*,” trans. Paul McCarthy (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1996), 196.

³⁶ Iwasaki, *Sanshō Dayū kō: chūsei no sekkyōgatari*, 34.

³⁷ Itō, *I am Anjuhimeko*, trans. Jeffrey Angles, 10-11.

うしようもこうしようもない、あぶられるままにあぶられているよりしかたがない....³⁸

Later, when Anjuhimeko cannot pick up the stones she is ordered to--because hers are "the fingers of a three-year-old"--the skin on her ten fingers "wears thin," and "blood begins to trickle out." She claims, "there is no way I can finish so he ends up hanging me upside-down and roasting me with the cattails, that's why even now the sight of a cattail makes me sick"³⁹ (三歳のこどもの指十本腹も皮もすり切れて、赤い血のつるつる流れる、それでも間にあうはずもないから、やっぱり逆さにつるされ蒲であぶれた、蒲という蒲を今でも見るのもいやなのは、こういうわけだ。⁴⁰)

This punishment has the desired effect of deterrence. Before long, the only way Anjuhimeko can avoid roasting is to submit herself to the will of her various masters. Occasionally, however, she is helped by mysterious strangers. An "oil vendor" appears with a piece of oiled paper, which he pastes into Anjuhimeko's hole-filled basket so she can scoop the water she is told to collect. Later, a man clad in black appears with a huge shining knife to help her cut down the ten reeds she must bring to her master, upon threat of roasting.

There is one task that these figures who appear to aid Anjuhimeko at the last moment cannot help her with though: the task of serving the men sexually. After Anjuhimeko manages to achieve the impossible by chopping down the reeds, she says that a man, or a few men, as Angle interprets Itō's "otoko," reproach her,

... telling me, Anjuhimeko, suck on this, so I suck on it against my will, next they reproach me, telling me to hold it in my mouth, I think reluctantly that being roasted by cattails is a great hardship so I hold it in my mouth against my will, next they reproach me, telling me, Anjuhimeko, put this down there, here I am, a three-year-old child, if I put this down there my body will split wide open and that'll be the end of me, I beg them with tears, no, not that, anything but that, but the men make scary faces at me, it'll be the cattails for me, the cattails for me, do men always say such unreasonable things?⁴¹

あんじゅひめ子、これをなめろと責められる、いやいやなめると、こんどは口にふくめと責められる、いやいやとおもうけれども、蒲であぶられるのはせつない、いやいや口にふくめば、あんじゅひめ子、こんどはこれをそこに入れろと責められる、三歳の子どものなりしたわたしの身の上、そんなものをここに入れたらわたしの身体は裂けちってそれでおしまい、そ

³⁸ Itō, "Watashi wa anjuhimeko de aru," 15.

³⁹ Itō, *I am Anjuhimeko*, trans. Jeffrey Angles, 11.

⁴⁰ Itō, "Watashi wa anjuhimeko de aru," 15.

⁴¹ Itō, *I am Anjuhimeko*, trans. Jeffrey Angles, 13-14.

ればかりはどうか許してと涙をながしてたのんだけれども、男たらおっかない顔をして、やっぱり蒲だ蒲だ、男とはこうまで無理なことをいうものか、蒲であぶられるのはもういやだ、死んでもともととそれをここに入れた、なんだあんがいあっけないものだったが、内臓がひっかきまわされて外に飛び出たような気がした、わたしは飛び出たわたしの内臓ひとつひとつひろってもとの身体にもどして入れた、わたしの内臓もわたしの肉もはずんですべってもどして入れるのにくろうした、でもわたしの内臓たち、あんまりきれいな色をしているのでうれしかった、まっ青やまっ赤で目もさめるような色して、うれしかったものである...⁴²

Nowhere in his fifty page study of the Oiwiki-sama myth does Iwasaki mention Anjuhimeko's sexuality, much less the kinds of horrendous sexual abuses Itō describes. In fact, Mizoguchi and Umehara make reference to the sexual implications of slavery, for women in particular: Mizoguchi rather superficially evokes the children's mother's plight as a courtesan, and indeed Zushiō first searches for her in a brothel on Sado. In addition, Zushiō suggests that Anju will be forced into prostitution after he escapes, though of course because Anju kills herself, this fate is conveniently avoided. In Umehara's version, one of the men who abduct Tamaki, Anju and Zushiō's mother, says he would like to make her his concubine. After Tamaki's maid jumps off of their captors' boat into the water where she will drown, he says to Tamaki, "Damn! If I let something happen to you, I'll lose five whole *kan*. You'll be my wife, or be sold for a whore, but the one thing you *won't* do is die on me!"⁴³

Itō, however shifts the focus to the suffering of women who were forced to live as a sexual commodity, a theme that is suggested, but never developed in the other narratives. Through the unlikely portrayal of the grossly abused three-year-old Anjuhimeko at the hands of the men who "employ" her, Itō forces the reader to reflect on the suffering of Japanese women forced to live as sexual commodities. While Itō's poem must be read as powerful testimony to the physical and psychological horrors of the sexual abuse of children, by choosing to convey this story through a myth that centers around enslavement, the helplessness of the three-year old, especially under the threat of such a cruel "branding," evokes the extreme sense of vulnerability of both girls and women as well.

3. Channeling the Semiotic

While Anjuhimeko must be read as a powerful agent capable of withstanding any hardship in the original Tsugaru version, Itō reinvents the girl as a sexual being, and her ability to survive the horrendous forms of sexual abuse she encounters on her journey to godhead contributes to, rather than diminishes, her power as a character. Indeed, Itō's graphic depictions of the bodily damage Anjuhimeko suffers through repeated rapes are deeply disturbing, as is her profound sense of accompanying psychological injury. That

⁴² Itō, "Watashi wa anjuhimeko de aru, 17-18.

⁴³ Umehara, trans. Paul McCarthy 177.

Anjuhimeko believes her father carries out such violent acts toward her out of a sense of “love” is a case in point, even if we extend Iwasaki’s theory and see the father’s abuse as yet another test of Anjuhimeko’s “spiritual endurance.” Indeed, true salvation comes to Anjuhimeko only after she bears witness to the powerful desires of *yamanba*, the traditional mythic mountain witch mentioned earlier, who, toward the end of Itō’s poem, cajoles Anjuhimeko into carrying her up to a huge mountain phallus she wants to have intercourse with one last time before she dies.

Jeffrey Angles points to the importance of *yamanba*’s teachings, describing her vast desire as one that “seeks self-gratification, independently of the pleasure of the partner.” This is of course all the more significant to Anjuhimeko because, as Angles reminds us, her own “sexual experiences have . . . not been voluntary.”⁴⁴ Given that Anjuhimeko finds her way to Tennōji temple, the site of her salvation, by following the directions *yamanba*’s progeny, the Leech-child *yamanba* gives birth to after her wild coupling with the potent phallus, we might even say that what Anjuhimeko achieves in the Itō version is as much a form of sexual salvation as a spiritual one. Indeed, in her rewriting of the *yamanba* as a positive force of women’s sexuality, Itō joins the ranks of writers such as Ōba Minako and Tomioka Taeko in their writing of what critic Mizuta Noriko calls the *han-* (anti) *monogatari*, which obliterates the dualistic, two-sexed notion of gender that underlies much traditional *monogatari*, which so often casts its female characters as sexual victims, rebuilding it from “ground zero.”⁴⁵

Itō confronts the painful legacy of the sexual enslavement of Japanese women through her presentation of a female body as alive in its pleasures as in its suffering, through the example of *yamanba* to be sure, but also through Anjuhimeko, and to some degree, Anjuhimeko’s mother as well. Whether she is talking about the raped body of the three-year-old girl who can admire the beauty of her own sexual organs as they slide from her body, or the despair of Anjuhimeko’s mother, who buries herself as well in the sandpit to be close to her daughter, Itō more often than not lines the underbelly of pain with pleasurable sensuality. Hearing their cries, feeling the warmth of the many infants who inhabit the sandpit, Anjuhimeko’s mother ponders the mystery of the swirling prints of her daughter’s individual toes. No image better epitomizes Anjuhimeko’s potential for fully-embodied pleasure than her emergence from the sandpit as a “growing, laughing, living body” (育ってわらってるいきた身体である):

they dig me up and here I am, I’m not dead, I haven’t dried up, I just warmed myself in the sand, a growing, laughing living body, mother stuck a stalk in my ear to mark me, morning and night I would suck the dew through the tiny, tiny, tiny hole, and here I am, a growing, laughing, living body, a growing, laughing, living body, a growing, laughing, living body that is what I am, that is who I am!⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Jeffrey Angles, “The Return of the Rejected: The Fantasy of Filicide, Reintegration, and Rebirth in Itō Hiromi’s ‘*Watashi wa Anjuhimeko de aru*’ (‘I Am Anjuhimeko’)” (Association of Asian Studies presentation, 2004), 15.

⁴⁵ Noriko Mizuta, *Monogatari to hanmonogatari no fūkei: bungaku to josei no sōzōryoku* (A View of Monogatari and Anti-monogatari: Literature and the Power of Women’s Imagination) (Tokyo: Tabata Shoten, 1993), 50.

⁴⁶ Itō, *I am Anjuhimeko*, trans. Jeffrey Angles, 8.

掘りあげてみればわたしの身の上は、死んだわけでもないしひからびてるわけでもない、砂の中であたたまって、育ってわらってる、生きた身体である、母が葎いっぼんするしにたてたその小さい、小さい、小さい穴から朝夕の露をなめて、育ってわらってる生きた身体、育ってわらってる身体、育ってわらってる生きた身体、それがわたしそれがわたしである”⁴⁷

This sense of graphic physicality that pervades the poem is very much supported by the physicality with which Itō embodies her language, in large part through her use of repetition. Indeed this use of repetition is one of the features of the Tsugaru transcripts that Itō brings to full fruition in her poem. As evidenced by the transcription that Iwasaki provides, the phrase “I am a growing, laughing living body” is repeated in the Tsugaru version, but only minimally:

掘りあげで見れば、わたしの身の上は死んだわけでもないし、成長つて笑てる身体である。母が葎を印にたてだ、づ穴から、朝夜の露を甜めるながら、成長てる身体である。⁴⁸

When they dig me up, I’m not dead, I am a growing, laughing living body.
Mother marked me with a stalk, and I sucked the morning and evening dew, I am a growing, living body.⁴⁹

Pushing the language of the Tsugaru transcript to the brink of sensibility, thereby taking it into her own finely-tuned sense of aesthetics, Itō repeats the phrase “I am a growing, laughing living body,” no less than four times in the section quoted above, a phrase that serves as both the title and final image of the first of her four-part poem. Here, as in so many other instances of Itō’s poem, this use of repetition allows for words to be appreciated as much for their sound and texture as their symbolic value. Through repetition, Itō releases the tremendous emotion of her characters. In these moments, one might even say that Itō accomplishes the unlikely feat of the semiotic “rupture” to which Kristeva alludes. Just as the body of Anjuhimeko literally tears open from repeated rapes, so too does the symbolic order of language that can barely contain the extremes of violence and joy Anjuhimeko’s story imparts.

This sense of mythic language that informs Kristeva’s notion of the semiotic as a means of timeless signifiers is very much reflected in the mythic landscape of Itō’s Tsugaru version, which is another stark contrast to the social landscape of the slave economy within which the Umehara, Ōgai and Mizoguchi versions exist. In these versions, there is a clear setting and mapping of the children’s journey to Tango, one slave-owner, Sanshō Dayū, and a sense of chronological time that follows the lives of the

⁴⁷ Itō, “*Watashi wa anjuhimeko de aru*,” 13.

⁴⁸ Iwasaki, *Sanshō Dayū kō: sekkyō jōruri no sekai*, 170.

⁴⁹ Author’s translation.

protagonists Anju and Zushiō. In Itō's version, however, place, time and even people are so often collapsed, or compressed, into one place, one time and one person. Although it seems that Anjuhimeko has experienced a lifetime of physical torture and hardship, she has in fact progressed only to the age of seven by the third and fourth sections, in which she reflects back on her experiences as she embarks on a search for mother, father, and ultimately kamihood. Her journey away from her parents is thus marked by her return to them.

While the narrative trajectory does very much suggest Anjuhimeko's journey to salvation and kamihood, all place names, with the exception of Tennōji, are omitted, and one senses that she is always circling back to the same place no matter how far she journeys: cast out to sea by her father, Anjuhimeko arrives crashing back into her father's house, and then runs away into the nearby wood where she is forced to carry out a series of nearly impossible physical tasks, such as filling a basket full of holes with water by not just one taskmaster, but presumably many, who are each referred to throughout the text as "*otoko*" (man). As mentioned above, these faceless, ubiquitous men become Anjuhimeko's rapists, and as such, she tells us, they are all versions of her father. Itō's Tsugaru version's orientation to time, place and person contribute to the reader's deepening sense of the fractured world of this myth and thereby challenges the previously alluded to sense of unitary subjectivity that characters achieve in both the Ōgai and Mizoguchi versions. Paradoxically, this compression of place, time, and person gives way not only to an imploded, rather than an emplotted, narrative, but also compels the sense of rupture through which the underlying "infinite signifier" of myth and metaphor can flow.⁵⁰

4. The Living Body of the Text: Slippery Leech-child

The orality of Itō's Tsugaru tale as one intoned by a *miko* also contributes significantly to the poem's mythic quality: indeed, we could say that the poet's performance of the poem's pounding repetitions gives way to the rupture and flow of the mythic that, as described above, the literal text enacts as well. As mentioned above, when she performs this poem, Itō clears the pathway for this onslaught of the mythic by pounding the ground where she kneels before she begins her performance. In most cases, the main action of the poem is described not just once, but sometimes many times over, as the poet repeats key rhythmic phrases. Itō puts this reverberation of ideas into motion from the opening lines of the poem, when the father announces his wish to kill the infant Anjuhimeko. The looming presence of the father is immediately evoked by the speaker's repetition of the word father (*chichi*), repeated three times in the opening run-on sentences that propel the forward-motion of the spoken narrative. Comparing her own story with other *monogatari*, or tales, she has read, Anjuhimeko intones,

In stories, the man they refer to as 'father' usually wasn't there, was absence itself, or that's what I believed, no matter which story I listened to, the stepmother would always tell everyone the father was dead in the house or traveling, but in my house, there is someone called 'father,' and

⁵⁰ Philip E. Lewis, review of *La Révolution du langage poétique* by Julia Kristeva, *Diacritics* Fall 1974, 31.

he is intent on killing me, he is always doing his best to do so, but I don't know what to do, I've had nothing but hardship since I was born⁵¹

父というものはたいていそこにはないものだと、不在であるものだと、わたしはおもっりました、どんなものがたりを聞いてみても、父というものは、家の中で死んでるか旅に出てるか継母のことをきいてるかである、しかしわたしのうちには現在の父がいて、わたしを殺したい一心でわたしを殺しにかかる⁵²

Itō creates a veritable round of words through these repetitions that come to signify so much more than the acts they describe. Indeed, it is as though the repetition comes to approximate Anjuhimeko's own disbelieving horror at her own experience. That is, she must repeat her tortures many times over not only to emphasize their veracity to her listeners, but, seemingly, to convince herself as well. At the same time, if we imagine the words spoken by the channeling *miko*, the repetition may also signify the means by which the *miko* can verify that what she reports from the next world is correct.

... he says let's try burying her in the sand and waiting for three years, yes, it was disappointing to hear my mother was willing to just go along with him on this, but, well, here's the problem, I'm just a newborn who can't even see, and I can't even utter a word to talk back, so mother just wrapped me in her silk underclothes and buried me in a sandy spot near a river

Speaking of which, the sandy place near the river is the place where everybody buries their babies, on both the right and left of where I was buried, there were so many buried babies that they jostled against each other . . .⁵³

父は、砂の中に埋けて三年待ってみようといった、母がそれに従うままだったのが、口惜しいといえど口惜しい、でも現在わたしの身の上は、生まれたばかりの目も見えないあかんぼで、何の口答えもできない身ではあるし、母のきぬのしたぎにくるまれて、砂の中に埋けられてしまった、埋けられたのは、川のそばの砂地であります、川のそばの砂地といえど、だれもかれもが子を埋けたところあります、わたしの埋けられたその右にも左にも、埋けられた子たちがひしめいていた . . .⁵⁴

⁵¹ Itō, *I am Anjuhimeko*, trans. Jeffrey Angles, 1

⁵² Itō, "Watashi wa anjuhimeko de aru," 8.

⁵³ Itō, *I am Anjuhimeko*, trans. Jeffrey Angles, 1-2.

⁵⁴ Itō, "Watashi wa anjuhimeko de aru," 8-9.

The re-doubling and tripling of phrases such as “砂の中に埋けて” (“bury in the sand”) and “川のそばの砂地” (“in the sandy place beside the river”), as well as the intentional use of repetitious expressions such as 口惜しいといえば口惜しい (“it was disappointing” as Angles translates it) impels the poem forward, creating its sense of urgency through the recirculation of certain sounds and rhythms.

This sense of urgency can very much be heard in the voices of Anjuhimeko’s mother and father woven into the opening pages of the poem. The father’s disgust with his daughter’s body, particularly her facial features, are rendered here in triplicate. Indeed, the grammatical emphasis on the ears redoubles back into his description of her mouth, eyelid and face, pocked with birthmarks, a kind of brand she is marked with by virtue of her birth: “

The man they call my father said, this baby’s mouth is so monstrously big
it seems to stretch all the way to her ears, her eyelids have folds in them,
she’s got moles and birthmarks all over, her ears are big, big, big”⁵⁵

父のいうには、この子の口は耳まで裂けている、一重まぶた
で、顔も扁平、黒子だらけ痣だら
け、耳は大きく、大きく、大きく。⁵⁶

As many of the passages cited here show, Itō’s rendition of the Oiwiki-sama myth can be excruciatingly physical, and in the following passage, Anjuhimeko’s mother’s pain, sorrow and guilt over the loss of her child, whom she herself buries and follows into the sandpit grave is exemplified by Itō’s emphasis on the mother’s clogged breasts and her very physical experience of burying her daughter and crying herself blind, her life consumed by sorrow. Just as in the previous passage, in which the father’s words are reported by Anjuhimeko, in this next passage, the father’s words issue from the mouth of his wife. While in the passage above, the overwhelming actions of the father are muted to some extent when his words are given voice by his daughter, this is not the case at the end of the following passage in which the father laments that he neglected to bury the wife as well, his words merged seamlessly together with those of his wife:

In only three years I gave birth to three children, but I let my husband bury
one of the babies I’d gone to all the trouble to bear, he buried her in the
sand, and now my swollen breasts are too much to manage, the holes in
my breast where the milk should come out are plugged up, feverish, and
swollen, just a simple touch and my breasts hurt so badly I think they’ll rip
open, but still I don’t know which is worse, the pain in my breast or the
sorrow at having lost my child, I spend everyday weeping from dawn to
dusk, and in the process of all this weeping, I have ruined my eyes, when

⁵⁵ Itō, *I am Anjuhimeko*, trans. Jeffrey Angles, 1.

⁵⁶ Itō, “*Watashi wa anjuhimeko de aru,*” 8.

that happened my husband said to me he didn't want me in the house any longer because I'd gone blind, you're the one who gave birth to the baby that wasn't fit for anything except burial, no doubt you've got something deep and dark in your karmic past that made you give birth to that child and made you go blind, if you stay here, your deep, dark karma will rub off on me, so before that happens, do me the favor of dying or at least getting the hell out of the house, shit, I wish I could have buried you in the sand too⁵⁷

三年で三人の子を産みふやしながら、せっかく産んだその子どもは夫に砂に埋けられる、張る乳房をもてあます、乳を出す穴という穴がふさがって熱をもち、はれあがり乳房は触れただけでも裂けちるかと思うぐらい痛んだ、乳房が痛いのか子どもが埋けられてかなしいのか、毎日ひにち泣きくらした、泣きくらしてるうちに、目が泣きつぶれた、そのとき夫がいうには、目がつぶれたからにはこの家においてくれるな、埋けられるような子を産んだおまえだ、子を産んだのも目がつぶれるのもおまえの業の、深いせいにちがいはあるまい、このままここにいられてはおまえの業の深いのがおれにまでうつってくれるようだ、そんならその前に、死ぬかおん出るかしてくれと、おまえも砂に埋けてしまえばどんなによかったかと、そういうことをいう⁵⁸

It is interesting to note the ways in which Itō dramatizes this scene, the drastic ways in she invigorates, or one might say, *explodes* the original sense of repetition that the transcript of the Tsugaru version also contains in its emphasis on the repetition of crying ones eyes out until one is no longer able to see:

砂の中さ埋げで、泣いて泣いで眼が見なくなつた。眼が見ない為に亭主に離縁される。⁵⁹

I buried her in the sand. Crying, crying, I could no longer see. Because I could not see, I was separated from my husband forever.⁶⁰

True to the character of nature-dwelling *kami*, the spiritual force of this poem resides within the physical, and, in many ways, its intense repetition recasts language as an extremely physical “medium” that embodies the mythical world of Oiwiki-sama’s rebirth. Indeed this sense of the semiotic force that resides outside of the “sense” of the

⁵⁷ Itō, *I am Anjuhimeko*, trans. Jeffrey Angles, 3.

⁵⁸ Itō, “*Watashi wa anjuhimeko de aru*,” 9-10.

⁵⁹ Iwasaki, *Sanshō dayū kō: sekkō jōruri no sekai*, 165.

⁶⁰ Author’s translation.

words is driven home by the presence of the Leech-child, Hiruko, who, appearing in the last section of the poem, has no language. Traditionally thought of as the “grotesquely formed” first child of Izanagi and Izanami, Leech-child, who was supposed to “create and solidify” the Japanese islands, was in fact, by virtue of its deformity, “floated away” on a small boat instead, as the *Kojiki* tells us.⁶¹ The Leech-child is much-redeemed in Itō’s poem: Not only does the Leech-child’s living form reflect and reaffirm Anjuhimeko’s status as a survivor--recall that Anjuhimeko too was “floated away” on a boat by her father--but at the same time, Leech-child’s survival also reaffirms the right of her mother Izanami to have “spoken first” in her courtship with Izanagi, the very act that doomed Leech-child in the first place.⁶² *Yamanba* thrusts the Leech-child onto Anjuhimeko shortly after giving birth to Leech-child, and casting Anjuhimeko into this unexpected position of mother, Itō reaffirms Anjuhimeko’s right to speak the unspeakable: the abuse she suffered at the hands of her father.

More so than any of the other versions of the Sanshō Dayū myth, Itō interrogates the limits of language, conveying the semiotic forces of the mythic through the pulse of her vibrant (and sometimes violent) rhythms and repetitions. Leech-child conveys the way to Tennōji without words, and the “intersubjectivity” that Anjuhimeko achieves with Leech-Child is vital to the semiotic progress of the poem, since, as Kristeva writes, “the symbolic becomes at once the domain of intersubjectivity.”⁶³ The medium of exchange between Anjuhimeko and Leech-child is of course poetry. Speaking as poet, Anjuhimeko laments at the end of the poem that all she has is language that slides from “the slippery surface of Leech-child.”⁶⁴ And yet, speaking to Leech-child, Anjuhimeko’s voice harnesses the semiotic power of poetry: Leech-child’s desire for the music of Anjuhimeko’s voice is slowly sated by her words. So too is the reader’s who, in the end, is delivered safely from the terrifying world Anjuhimeko inhabits.

And yet, for all of the *miko*’s spiritual ability to convey what has been lost, language, like the Leech-child Anjuhimeko carries on her back, remains a burden. Indeed, what compels the poet is the gap between what she envisions and what language can finally convey, even as it brings all of the extra-symbolic forces of rhythm and repetition to bear on the subject. Closing her poem with the image of Anjuhimeko lugging her telepathic Leech-child to Tennōji, Itō reaffirms all of the improbable ways in which Anjuhimeko has managed to rescue herself in this tale she tells as *miko*, in language that can never fully contain, or release, her.

⁶¹ Donald Keene, *Seeds in the Heart: Japanese Literature from Earliest Times to the Late Sixteenth Century*, (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 18-39.

⁶² Keene, 39.

⁶³ Kristeva, 31.

⁶⁴ Itō, *I am Anjuhimeko*, trans. Jeffrey Angles, 33.