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## Possessed by Another Self: Henry James’s “The Jolly Corner” and “Aoi” in *The Tale of Genji*

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### Introduction

In the Western world, they name the other side of one’s self as “the double.” Many critics have focused on the idea of a divided self. The double assumes the malevolent or repressed characteristics of the self, is isolated from consciousness, and becomes a shadow which presages destruction and death. *Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson, “William Wilson” by Edgar Allan Poe are famous stories of doubles.

In psychoanalysis, in addition to Rank, Freud, and Frazer, we are also familiar with Jung, who named the repressed side of the personality a “shadow” which represents a negative, evil force. Jung deepened the concept of shadow. The concept of shadow is similar to that of projective identification. From the object-relation psychoanalytic point of view, the idea of projective identification was introduced into analytic thinking by the Austrian-born British psychoanalyst Melanie Klein. All these theorists’ definitions of the double, though the term varies, seem to be linked to the process of projective identification, to use Melanie Klein’s term.

According to Klein, in the first stage of its life, the infant experiences its aggression coming at it from the outside — usually, it takes the form of attacking the breast of the mother in the phantasy of the infant. One of the ways the infant tries to deal with this destructiveness is by forcefully and controllingly intruding into the mother’s body in phantasy. What are expelled are harmful split-off parts of the infant’s self. This is a kind of externalization of the infant’s internal conflict. As a result, the mother is felt to

represent the infant's bad self. This applies to adults as well. In projective identification, one splits off bad parts of the self, that is, one's mental states such as anger, hatred or other bad feelings or one's negative characteristics which are deeply denied in the self — and attributes them to the other. The others are thereby identified with the parts of one self and are violently hated.

Melanie Klein explains several different types of projective identification. According to Betty Joseph's classification, the first one is "splitting off and getting rid of unwanted parts of the self that cause anxiety or pain." The second one is "projecting the self or parts of the self into an object to dominate and control it and thus avoid any feelings of being separate." The third one is "getting into an object to take over its capacities and make them its own." And the fourth one is "invading in order to damage or destroy the object."<sup>1</sup>

In this article, adopting a psychopathological perspective, I will focus on a living specter who appears as the result of one's projective identification. I have chosen a living specter from American writer Henry James's "The Jolly Corner" and one from Lady Murasaki's *The Tale of Genji*.

## Brydon Spencer in "The Jolly Corner"

Henry James (1843-1916) is one of the most famous novelists in what we call the American Renaissance age. Among his ghost stories, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) is the best-known one. He also wrote a short story about a living specter entitled "The Jolly Corner" (1908).

The protagonist of the story in "The Jolly Corner," fifty-six-year old Brydon Spencer, comes back to New York after thirty-three years of life in Europe, where he had pursued art appreciation. He returns because he has inherited his brother's two buildings and has to do practical tasks related to the inheritance. There is no one left in his family. After his thirty-three-year absence, New York has changed tremendously, and he is overwhelmed by its change. He becomes emotional and feels alienated.

Brydon's properties are two: one is a big apartment house, and the other is his family house on "the jolly corner." Brydon somehow has an attachment to his family house where he grew up as a child. That is why he keeps the house empty.

Brydon, however, feels that someone is in his house. He tries to investigate what it is. It might have been produced by his fantastic response to an un-lived life. Late at night, he walks around the house to find it. He becomes obsessed with the idea of his unrealized self. Every night he continues to stalk, longing for it. He imagines that it is his American self, the man he might have been had he not gone to Europe. His unrealized self which

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1 Betty Joseph, "Projective identification — some clinical aspects," in Melanie Klein *Today Vol. 1*, pp. 138-9.

he imagines is a real New Yorker, a business man side of his self. It seems that he had not been successful in Europe and had spent his life without earning money. He was supported by the money from his New York estate. His life had been fruitless and wasteful in Europe. He directs his interest to his double, who seems to have more potential. The following sentences are what Brydon is wondering to his childhood friend, Aice:

"It's only a question of what fantastic, yet perfectly possible, development of my own nature I mayn't have missed. It comes over to me that I had then a strange *alter ego* deep down somewhere within me, as a full-blown flower in the small tight bud, and that I just took the course, I just transferred him to the climate, that blighted him for once and for ever."<sup>2</sup>

One night, Brydon confronts his living specter dressed in evening wear, but with a monstrous face and two fingers missing.

Such an identity fitted his at no point, made its alternative monstrous. A thousand times yes, as it came upon him nearer now, the face was the face of a stranger. It came upon him nearer now, quite as one of those expanding fantastic images projected by the magic lantern of childhood; for the stranger, whoever he might be, evil, odious, blatant, vulgar, had advanced as for aggression, and he knew himself give ground. Then harder pressed still, sick with the force of his shock, and falling back as under the hot breath and the roused passion of a life larger than his own, a rage of personality before which his own collapsed, he felt the whole vision turn to darkness and his very feet give way.<sup>3</sup>

Brydon was shocked by the countenance of his double. He disavows whatever his double embodies and signifies. At the end of part two, Brydon has lost consciousness and fell to the floor.

## The role of Alice Staverton

Alice Staverton is an old friend of Brydon's youth. In the story, she plays pivotal role as a catalyst for understanding Brydon and his double. Though she sees Brydon after the thirty-three years of his absence, she shows gentle sensitivity toward him. At the same time, Alice has also felt the existence of Brydon's living specter. In part one of the story, she tells Brydon that she has twice dreamt of another Brydon as a New Yorker in her

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2 Henry James, "The Jolly Corner," p. 20.

3 Henry James, "The Jolly Corner," p. 57.

dreams.

“Well, I’ve seen him.”

“You —?”

“Oh a ‘dream’ —!” It let him down.

“But twice over,” she continued. “I saw him as I see you now.”

“You’ve dreamed the same dream —?”

“Twice over,” she repeated. “The very same.”

This did somehow a little speech to him, as it also gratified him. “You dream about me at that rate?”

“Ah about him!” she smiled.<sup>4</sup>

Brydon is surprised to hear what she says. She is the one who realizes Brydon’s might-have-been self.

When we read part three of the story, we find that Alice also has seen Brydon’s double in her dream at the same time Brydon has seen his double in the house on “the jolly corner.” Brydon asks her, “How did you know it was I?” Alice says, “Because, as I told you weeks ago, my mind, my imagination, has worked so over what you might, what you mightn’t have been — to show you, you see, how I’ve thought of you. In the midst of that you came to me — that my wonder might be answered.”<sup>5</sup> Alice knows that the existence in the house in “the jolly corner” is another face of Brydon, his double. She also says, “He was no horror. I had accepted him.”<sup>6</sup> She says so because she feels pity and sympathy toward his double. She has accepted both sides of Brydon’s self. She helps Brydon understand his double as a part of him, not as his enemy. From what she has told him, Brydon has been relieved from his obsession with his double. Brydon is reborn to a man with a whole identity. It is thanks to Alice’s loving support.

## Lady Rokujō in *The Tale of Genji*

*The Tale of Genji* (*Genji Monogatari*) was written by Lady Murasaki (Murasaki Shikibu), who was the empress’s maid-in-waiting at court in the eleventh century, in the Heian period.

In the narrative, Lady Aoi is the principal wife of Prince Hikaru Genji (Shining Genji), the son of the emperor. In the chapter “Aoi,” one of Hikaru Genji’s mistresses, Lady Rokujō (Rokujō-no-Miyasundokoro), a widow, is consumed with resentment and jealousy against Lady Aoi, who is pregnant by her husband, and Lady Rokujō’s other self,

4 Henry James, “The Jolly Corner,” p. 24.

5 Henry James, “The Jolly Corner,” p. 66.

6 Henry James, “The Jolly Corner,” p. 66.

her living specter, haunts and torments Lady Aoi. In this narrative, she is the only person who appears as a living specter (mononoke). Her name is Lady Rokujō, who is and was Prince Hikaru Genji's lover.

## Mononoke

The meaning of the Japanese word mononoke is an aggrieved, possessing specter. There are two kinds of "mononoke." One is *ikiryō* (a living specter), and the other is *shiryō* (a dead specter, ghost). Usually, its character is evil and malevolent, and it torments its victims, often in the act of revenge. Until late medieval Japan, people believed that they suffered diseases or died due to possession by mononoke, so Buddhist priests as exorcists were called to cure sick people with incantations, appeasing and expelling the evil spirits. Priests played the role of soul doctors in those ages.

## The reason why Lady Rokujō's self is divided

Lady Rokujō is the widow of the former crown prince, and then becomes one of Hikaru Genji's mistresses. In *The Tale of Genji*, Lady Rokujō's living specter possesses several of Hikaru Genji's wives and mistresses in addition to Lady Aoi: Yugao (Genji's mistress), Murasaki-no-ue (Lady Murasaki: Hikaru Genji's concubine), and Onna-Sannomiya (the emperor's daughter and Hikaru Genji's second principal wife). For Lady Rokujō, these women are the objects of her jealousy which is repressed and hidden inside her mind.

In Lady Aoi's case, Lady Rokujō's hatred and jealousy against her is extreme, because Lady Aoi is Hikaru Genji's principal wife and is pregnant with his child. On the Day of Lustration (*gokei no hi*) of the Kamo Priestess (*saiin*) at the Kamo Festival,<sup>7</sup> there is a carriage collision which critically injures Lady Rokujō's pride. This crash triggers spirit possession toward Lady Aoi. Lady Rokujō secretly attempts to see Hikaru Genji, who is in the procession on his horse, from her carriage. Her carriage, however, is blocked by Lady Aoi's rowdy and drunk attendants, who cause a dispute. Lady Murasaki calls the incident *kuruma-araso*i (the clash of the carriages). A few days later, while Lady Rokujō is sleeping, unbeknownst to her, another part of her self as a living specter possesses Lady Aoi, making Lady Aoi ill, and tormenting her. Lady Rokujō's specter kills Lady Aoi after childbirth.

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7 Nowadays called the Aoi Festival.

## Lady Aoi

Prince Hikaru Genji and Lady Aoi's marriage is an arranged one. Since their marriage, Hikaru Genji has not visited his wife too often. He is almost obliged to visit Lady Aoi's residence. The marriage to Lady Aoi is a political one. Hikaru Genji is the emperor's son, so for Lady Aoi's father, *Sadaijin* (The Minister of the Left), it is naturally connected with his promotion in the court. When they got married, Hikaru Genji was twelve years old, and Lady Aoi was sixteen years old. She is older than him, and therefore he feels that she is not an attractive woman and he does not love her. She is like an elder sister to him.

In the aristocratic societies of the Heian Period, husbands usually went to their wife's house. Even after marriage, women lived with their parents. It is hard for us to imagine Lady Aoi's character in the novel, because the novel is written mainly from Hikaru Genji's viewpoint. The women who he does not have an interest in are not described precisely. For him, an attractive woman is one who is unobtainable — for example, a married woman. The more significant the obstacle, the more thrilling to him. His passions are aroused to action. According to the narrative, Lady Aoi seems to be a beautiful woman. But it is hard for us to know her precise character. There are few descriptions of her appearance and attitude. She has been brought up as a princess — her mother is a first-generation princess. Her pride is very high. She is not satisfied with her marriage to Hikaru Genji because she had wished to be the emperor's wife. She is always silent during her husband's visits. Ostensibly, she does not reveal her jealousy even when Hikaru Genji visits his mistresses. It is repressed in her subconscious mind.

## Lady Rokujō's living specter

In the narrative, Lady Rokujō's self is divided into two: Her conscious self and her unconscious self, which is an evil living specter. Lady Rokujō cannot control the latter. We find that in the narrative her other self appears in her dream, too. Lady Rokujō's living specter is the projection of the repressed side of her personality. Against her will, her spirit gets into Lady Aoi's body and torments her. That is why Lady Aoi experiences difficulties during pregnancy and childbirth.

Lady Rokujō is a cultured woman, being the widow of the former crown prince, and respected by everybody at court and in aristocratic society. Her other self, however, has an evil character.

## Lady Rokujō's possession of Lady Aoi

In the narrative, Lady Rokujō's specter infiltrates Lady Aoi. Lady Rokujō's specter also possesses Lady Aoi's body, and she speaks to Hikaru Genji using Lady Aoi's voice.

That is, Lady Aoi's body is taken over by Lady Rokujō's specter. The words are Lady Rokujō's, delivered through Aoi's voice.

"... stop these prayers a while. They do me great harm," and drawing him [Hikaru Genji] nearer to her [Lady Aoi] she went on, "I did not think that you would come. I have waited for you till all my soul is burnt with longing." She spoke wistfully, tenderly; and still in the same tone recited the verse, "Bind thou, as the seam of a skirt is braided, this shred, that from my soul despair and loneliness have sundered." The voice in which these words were said was not Aoi's; nor was the manner hers. He knew someone whose voice was very like that. Who was it? Why, yes; surely only she — the Lady Rokujō.<sup>8</sup>

We find that Lady Rokujō's specter is fused with Lady Aoi. This is the third type of Melanie Klein's projective identification which is "projecting the self or parts of the self onto an object to dominate and control it and thus avoid any feelings of being separate," in Joseph's classification mentioned above.

Actually, from the beginning, Lady Rokujō and Lady Aoi have similarities: Both are high-ranking noblewomen in aristocratic society; both are cultured women; both are older than Hikaru Genji; both have extreme pride; both women are contrary, and both harbor hidden jealousy toward Hikaru Genji's other mistresses. Neither woman admits her true feelings: her love for Hikaru Genji. Because of that, Hikaru Genji's visits to these women are rare. There is a synchronicity between Lady Rokujō and Lady Aoi, so it seems that it is easy for them to fuse.

In my analysis, in the condition of projective identification, Lady Rokujō's spirit is combined with Lady Aoi's spirit. Usually, we cannot see a living specter. But we find Lady Rokujō's specter in Lady Aoi's body. Lady Aoi's jealousy toward Lady Rokujō is hidden in her subconscious mind. Lady Aoi's strong jealousy toward Lady Rokujō strengthens the power of the evil phase of Lady Rokujō, which turns Lady Rokujō into a demon-like object.

## Another self

The doubles produced by Henry James and Lady Murasaki can be analyzed through Klein's definition of projective identification. They often stand for the negative side of a disintegrating self and represent a threatened and violent self. In their works, the Other is the projection of I's inner world, and the conflict with it is thus depicted. Because of the protagonist's projective identification, the whole character of the Other cannot be grasped

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8 Arthur Waley, *The Tale of Genji*, p. 171.

properly by the protagonist: this alterity is one-dimensional in the protagonists' eyes. The Other thinks and experiences through a limited dimensionality.

For the protagonists of these stories, the construction of the double is the only means by which the protagonist's self can control his/her self-destructive impulses. It is difficult for them to integrate their divided selves. I assume that integration will not be realized as long as they are alive.

There is no sympathy or mutual support between the two, and the protagonist refuses to communicate with the others, in fact, hates him/her viciously. One of the reasons the protagonist denies the other is that they unconsciously feel a conflict within oneself, which one wants to disown. The protagonist, however, cannot neglect the existence of the other.

## Conclusion

The protagonists so far feel not only detachment from but also attachment to their doubles. This occurs because of the splitting of the protagonists' selves and their projective identification. This double is the internalized image of the bad self which is projected onto the other. To resolve the splitting and projective identification, one has to understand the other side of his/her self, and move to the stage where he/she recognizes himself/herself as a whole object.

The doubles I have dealt with are living specters (*ikiryo*). It is an existence of the other side of the self, detached from one's body, and appears as a ghost-like figure. It is different from a ghost (*shiryo*), which is an existence without a body.

In Brydon's case in "The Jolly Corner," Brydon encounters his double who terrifies him, but he eventually understands his other self, which leads him to be a single, unified identity with the help of Alice. In case of Lady Rokujō, she is not aware of her double. It acts without letting Lady Rokujō know of its existence. She has just heard the rumor of her implication in Lady Aoi's possession. Lady Rokujō feels that she might have smelled roasted poppy seeds, which are used in exorcising to cure Lady Aoi's disease, but Lady Rokujō has ignored the rumor of her implication, and as a result of that, her living specter (*ikiryo*) continues to haunt the other women of Hikaru Genji. Lady Rokujō's surface character is one-dimensional until the end of the story.

Brydon has Alice's understanding filled with her affection toward him, but Lady Rokujō does not have Hikaru Genji's understanding. Hikaru Genji has only been terrified by the existence of Lady Rokujō's specter which was combined with his wife, Lady Aoi. He never accepts Lady Rokujō as a whole identity. He is too narcissistic to understand her mind.

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