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Of Mice and Maidens: Ideologies of Interspecies Romance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Japan

Abstract

Interspecies marriage (irui kon'in) has long been a central theme in Japanese literature and folklore. Frequently dismissed as fairytales, stories of interspecies marriage illuminate contemporaneous conceptions of the animal-human boundary and the anxieties surrounding it. This dissertation contributes to the emerging field of animal studies by examining otogizoshi (Muromachi/early Edo illustrated narrative fiction) concerning relationships between human women and male mice. The earliest of these is *Nezumi no soshi* ("The Tale of the Mouse"), a fifteenth century ko-e ("small scroll") attributed to court painter Tosa Mitsunobu. *Nezumi no soshi* was followed roughly a century later by a group of tales collectively named after their protagonist, the mouse *Gon no Kami*. Unlike *Nezumi no soshi*, which focuses on the grief of the woman who has unwittingly married a mouse, the *Gon no Kami* tales contain pronounced comic elements and devote attention to the mouse-groom's perspective.

By elucidating the contrast between *Nezumi no soshi* and the earliest *Gon no Kami* manuscript and tracking the development of subsequent versions of *Gon no Kami*, I demonstrate mounting disenchantment with the irui kon'in trope as a means of telling stories about mice. Tales of interspecies marriage often end tragically; however, in fiction about mice, audience interest came to center on the utopian aspects of the imaginary mouse realm. Thus, mouse-human romance was displaced by storylines more conducive to happy endings, as in mid-seventeenth-century otogizoshi like *Yahyoe nezumi* ("The Mouse Yahyoe") and *Kakurezato* ("The Hidden Village"), or slightly later kusazoshi (woodblock-print books) like *Nezumi no yomeiri* ("The Mouse's Wedding").

The works above belong to a larger body of fiction about mice produced from the late Muromachi to mid-Edo. Previously, mice had received scant literary attention in irui kon'in tales and elsewhere. The sudden boom of "mouse tales" was driven by increased rodent-human contact due to urbanization, and also by the growing popularity of the god *Daikokuten*, whose iconography prominently featured mice. Mice were simultaneously reviled as vermin and celebrated as good omens, compelling the *Gon no Kami* stories and other "mouse tales" to negotiate between these contradictory identities.

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**OF MICE AND MAIDENS:
IDEOLOGIES OF INTERSPECIES ROMANCE
IN LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN JAPAN**

Laura Nuffer

A DISSERTATION

in

East Asian Languages and Civilizations

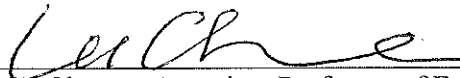
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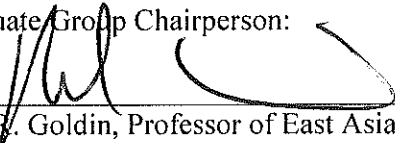
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For my family
(and also for N.A., E.D., A.G., D.G., R.G., K.H., B.Z., and all the usual suspects—you know who you are)
ἄνασσα κατά καλῶ καλῆ ἰαί ἰαί ἰαί νίκη

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ABSTRACT

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IDEOLOGIES OF INTERSPECIES ROMANCE IN LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN JAPAN

Laura Nuffer

Linda Chance

Interspecies marriage (*irui kon'in*) has long been a central theme in Japanese literature and folklore. Frequently dismissed as fairytales, stories of interspecies marriage illuminate contemporaneous conceptions of the animal-human boundary and the anxieties surrounding it. This dissertation contributes to the emerging field of animal studies by examining *otogizōshi* (Muromachi/early Edo illustrated narrative fiction) concerning relationships between human women and male mice. The earliest of these is *Nezumi no sōshi* (“The Tale of the Mouse”), a fifteenth century ko-e (“small scroll”) attributed to court painter Tosa Mitsunobu. *Nezumi no sōshi* was followed roughly a century later by a group of tales collectively named after their protagonist, the mouse Gon no Kami. Unlike *Nezumi no sōshi*, which focuses on the grief of the woman who has unwittingly married a mouse, the *Gon no Kami* tales contain pronounced comic elements and devote attention to the mouse-groom’s perspective.

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-INTRODUCTION-

ANIMAL, VEGETABLE, LITERAL:

Tracking the *Tier An Sich* in Pre- and Early-Modern Tales of Interspecies Marriage

I. LOVERS AND OTHERS:

Defining and Contextualizing Iruī Kon'in-Tan

After all the vicious drama that drove them to divorce—the lies, the secrets, the attempted murder—husband and wife exchange oddly subdued farewells. He wants to know if maybe someday she'll come back to him, and she tells him to forget her. She doesn't hate him, she says, but they're just too different: she is a woman, and he is a mouse.

This scene appears, with slight variations, in a group of popular tales originating in late medieval Japan, collectively known to modern scholars by the name of their shared protagonist, Gon no Kami—the lovelorn mouse-husband introduced above. The *Gon no Kami* tales belong to a sizeable body of late medieval and early modern fiction about mice, which, despite evidence of its widespread contemporary appeal, has received scant scholarly attention in English.¹ “If you want to clear the room of Derrideans, mention Beatrix Potter without sneering,” writes Ursula K. LeGuin.² This tactic would likely prove equally effective against literary critics of many other stripes—and even wrapped in the dignifying aura of cultural and historical distance, anthropomorphic mice of any description bear a suspiciously close resemblance to Peter Rabbit and Squirrel Nutkin . . . or worse yet, Mickey Mouse,

¹ Two stories about mice from late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century Japan are available in English translation: Virginia Skord, trans. and intro., “The Cat’s Tale,” in Tales of Tears and Laughter: Short Fiction of Medieval Japan (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1991), 31-43; D.E. Mills, “The Tale of the Mouse: *Nezumi no Sōshi*,” Monumenta Nipponica vol. 34, no. 2 (Summer, 1979), 155-168. The introductions to these respective translations constitute the sum total of English-language scholarship on the subject.

² Ursula K. LeGuin, Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences (New York: Penguin, 1990), 8.

whose very name has gone down in dictionaries as an adjective meaning “not deserving to be taken seriously; having little value or importance.”³ Small wonder that the academic monographs have not been piling up.

It is something of a truism that literary-critical sensibilities run counter to popular tastes. There is, as Wendy Steiner indicates, a professional fear of pleasure at work here, a need to disclaim the “common ground” inhabited by “all parties in aesthetic experience:”⁴ the literary critic who brings her training to bear on texts enjoyed by other people—*ordinary* people—might well be accused of enjoying them herself. In the case of the *Gon no Kami* tales and their congeners, the specter of enjoyability raised by the “animal story’s invitation to pleasure”⁵ is partially counteracted by antiquity and its attendant layers of inaccessibility. These stories are locked away in climate-controlled storage and linguistic obsolescence; they are nobody’s idea of light leisure reading. But the fact remains that once upon a time, they *were*—and that is precisely why they deserve our attention. As Fred Pfiel reminds us, “We know by now, or ought to know, that what gets us off as entertainment is rarely simple and never innocent.”⁶ And for anyone who wonders what could be more innocent than a talking mouse—what could be *less* innocent than a story about an animal seducing a human?

In proper literary-historical context, the premise of the interspecies liaison is not

³ “Mickey Mouse,” Merriam-Webster.com, Merriam-Webster, n.d, Web, 14 June 2014.

⁴ Wendy Steiner, *The Scandal of Pleasure: Art in the Age of Fundamentalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 7-8.

⁵ Steve Baker, *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity, and Representation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 159.

⁶ Fred Pfiel, *Another Tale to Tell: Politics and Narrative in Postmodern Culture* (London: Verso, 1990), 65. Quoted in Matt Cartmill, *A View to a Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature through History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 161.

quite so outré as it might first appear. When he made his literary debut sometime in the sixteenth century, Gon no Kami joined a veritable menagerie of fictional animals that had scurried, slithered, swooped, or swam their way into the hearts (and beds) of human lovers. The accounts of these unlikely romances are referred to as *irui kon'in-tan*, or “tales of interspecies marriage.”⁷ Here, I should note that my rendition of “irui kon'in” as “interspecies marriage” to some extent reflects the particular focus of this project and may not be equally fitting in all contexts. A maximally literal translation of “irui” would be “different kind(s)” or “other kind(s)”; Rania Huntington renders it as “alien kind.”⁸ The majority of irui kon'in-tan—and those that most concern me here—involve romance between a human and a non-human animal (or occasionally a plant), but in some instances the irui spouse might be an ogre (*oni*), water sprite (*kappa*), or other non-human entity without a biological referent, and

⁷ The term “irui” (異類, Ch. *yilei*) originated in Chinese Buddhist sources, making an early appearance in the sixth century Chinese “translation” of the apocryphal *Dasheng qixin lun* (Jp. *Daijō kishin ron*, “Treatise on the Awakening of Faith According to the Mahayana”). The word was in general usage in medieval Japan, and is explicitly applied to animals and animal spouses in several of the works discussed here. (Nakamura Hajime, *Bukkyōgo daijiten* (Tokyo: Tōkyō Shoseki, 1975), 38; Matsumura Akira, Yamaguchi Akiho, and Wada Toshimasa, *Ōbunsha kogo jiten* 9th ed. [Tokyo: Ōbunsha, 2007], 162; Inomata Tokiwa, “*Iru ni naru: 'hokaibito no uta' no shika no uta kara,*” *Nihon bungaku* vol. 58, no. 6 [June 2009], 2. Regarding the date and origins of *Dasheng qixin lun*, cf. Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* [Princeton University Press, 2014], 221).

“Iru kon'in” and “irui kon'in-tan” lack the lengthy etymological pedigree of “irui” by itself; they are scholarly terms associated with *minzokugaku*, or folk studies (Ichiko Teiji et al., *Nihon koten bungaku daijiten* vol. 1 [Tokyo: Iwanami, 1983], 228). The earliest use of the term that I am able to locate appears in a 1930 article by Yanagita Kunio, entitled “The Origins of Momotarō” (*Momotarō kongenki*) and published in *Bungaku jidai* vol. 2, no. 5.

⁸ Rania Huntington, *Alien Kind: Foxes and Late Imperial Chinese Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 6. Huntington addresses the concept of “alien kind” in the Chinese context, so strictly speaking she is writing about *yilei* rather than *irui* (*vide supra*).

hence lacking a “species” in the strictest sense of the word.⁹ The other half of the phrase, “kon’in,” also deserves further explanation. Premodern Japanese conceptions of marriage did not center on legally or religiously sanctioned formalization of the union; thus, many of the “marriages” in irui kon’in tales are a matter of cohabitation, or even just copulation.¹⁰

However one may choose to gloss “irui kon’in,” stories on this theme lack a ready analog in Western literary traditions. Superficially “interspecies” liaisons occur with some frequency in European fairy tales, but there, the “animal” spouse almost invariably proves to be a human under an enchantment.¹¹ In irui kon’in tales, however, the animal spouse

⁹ Here, I should note the existence of literature concerning romantic relationships between different kinds of animals. Representative examples from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries include *Okoze* (“The Stingfish”), in which a mountain god (depicted as wolf) marries a stingfish; *Fukurō no sōshi* (“The Tale of the Owl”), in which an owl marries a bullfinch; and *Tamamushi no sōshi* (“The Tale of the Jewel Beetle”), in which a grasshopper, a mayfly, and various other insects unsuccessfully court a jewel beetle. Such works, however, are conventionally categorized as “iruimono” (stories about other species) rather than irui kon’in-tan.

¹⁰ Charlotte Eubanks uses the term “interspecies sex tales” to denote “stories in which human women have sex with nonhumans or in which human women, in expressing or repressing sexual desire, become nonhuman.” Although there is obviously considerable overlap between works of this description and works typically classified as irui kon’in-tan, Eubanks states her intention to “explicitly resist” the latter category (“Envisioning the Invisible: Sex, Species, and Anomaly in Contemporary Japanese Women’s Fiction,” *Marvels and Tales* vol. 27, no. 2 [2013], 206, 215). I share Eubanks’ concern about the potentially misleading implications of the word “marriage,” and I appreciate her reluctance to treat matrimony as the defining feature of narratives of romantic and/or sexual desire. However, I remained unconvinced that “interspecies sex” captures the subject matter of the tales in question any more “interspecies marriage.” The phrase “sex tales” suggests a prurient, even pornographic tone that is largely absent from the works in question, at least in the premodern context.

¹¹ Stith Thompson, *The Folktale*, 1946 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 353; Kotaka Yasumasa, “*Gurimu no dōbutsu muko no bunrui: Nihon mukashibanashi to bunruijō no hikaku*,” *Nagano Daigaku kiyō* vol. 12, no. 1 (June 1990), 73; Nakamura Teiri, *Nihonjin no dōbutsukan: Henshintan no rekishi* (Tokyo: Bing Net Press, 2006), 10-18; Kojima Keiko, “*Indo-Yoroppa no irui kon’in-tan ni tsuite*,” *Shōnan Tanki Daigaku kiyō* vol. 16 (March, 2006), 71. I do not claim an absolute absence of truly animal spouses in European lore and literature; however, it seems safe to conclude that this theme features far more prominently in the East Asian context.

commonly assumes human guise for some portion of the narrative, but it is the animal form that constitutes the final, “real” identity. To oversimplify only slightly, in Europe, the frog turns out to be a prince; in Japan, the prince turns out to be a frog. This contrast has been widely remarked upon, and some commentators take it as indicative of an essentially Japanese reverence for nature. Jungian psychoanalyst Hayao Kawai locates irui kon’in tales midway between the folklore of “Christian-centered Europe,” which repudiates the possibility of a genuine cross-species union, and the folklore of “natural tribes” such as the Eskimo, which preserves a primal sense of “unity” passed down from “ancient times when men felt no difference between themselves and other beings.” For Kawai, Japan, à la Goldilocks, has hit on a happy medium between savagery and soulless dominionism, “never cut[ting] itself off from its natural roots” but growing far enough above them that it “absorbed European culture far more quickly than other similar cultures.”¹²

Any attempt to treat irui kon’in tales as a mirror of Japan’s national character is suspect on several counts. While historical surveys of irui kon’in literature demonstrate the long persistence of certain tale-types, they also reveal numerous sites of diachronic instability and synchronic variety. Komatsu Kazuhiko, a leading proponent of irui studies, finds a broad spectrum of attitudes toward animals in tales of interspecies marriage, ranging from “extreme rejection,” wherein the animal-human boundary is violently reasserted through the murder

¹² Hayao Kawai, *The Japanese Psyche: Major Motifs in the Fairy Tales of Japan*, trans. Hayao Kawai and Sachiko Reece (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1988), 119-120. Cf. also Ozawa Toshio, *Sekai no minwa: hito to dōbutsu to no kon’in-tan* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1979), 187-188; Ogihara Shinko, “Hito to dōbutsu no kon’in-tan: ōken shinwa kara irui kon’in-tan made,” *Setsuwa-denshōgaku* vol. 14 (March 2006), 226-228.

of the inhuman spouse, to “communion,” wherein the human spouse is absorbed into the animal realm. Komatsu argues against the teleological assumption that this spectrum is in fact a chronological stratification produced by the shift away from a “primitive” worldview that made no distinction between humans and animals. After all, as Komatsu points out, Japan’s earliest recorded *irui kon’in* tales cluster toward the “rejection” end of the attitudinal spectrum.¹³

To this day, the Japanese corpus of *irui kon’in* tales continues to grow, enriched by both “pure” literature and popular media, and increasingly informed by globalized narratives of “mad science” and ecological catastrophe.¹⁴ From the first, *irui kon’in* tales have been bound up in networks of transcultural influence; they share many of their constituent archetypes with lore and literature from China and Korea, and in some cases, they have readily-traceable roots in the “rich folkloristic stratum of animal lore common to the entire Indo-European world” as well as East Asia.¹⁵ Most of Japan’s biological species have spent the past thirty millennia cut off from mainland gene pools, but its fictional animals did not evolve in equivalent isolation.

¹³ Komatsu Kazuhiko, “*Nihon mukashibanashi ni miru irui kon’in: ‘Oni no ko’ o megutte,*” *Kotoba to bunka*, ed. Nihongo · Nihonbunka Kenkyūkai (Tokyo: Bonjinsha, 1986), 174-175. Regarding the diversity of possible outcomes in *irui kon’in* tales, cf. also Yoshida Mikio, “*Iruikon’intan no tenkai: irui to no wakare o megutte,*” *Nihon bungaku* vol. 58, no. 6 (June 2009) 17-19.

¹⁴ Examples of “pure literature” (*jun bungaku*) incorporating *irui kon’in* themes include Izumi Kyōka’s “*Kōya hijiri*” (1900), Tsushima Yūko’s “*Numa*” (1984), Tawada Yōko’s “*Inu mukoriri*” (1993), Kawakami Hiromi’s “*Hokusai*” (2005). Regarding the treatment of *irui kon’in* in modern literature, cf. also Eubanks, “Envisioning the Invisible.”

¹⁵ Esther Cohen, “Animals in Medieval Perceptions,” in *Animals and Human Society: Changing Perspectives*, ed. Aubrey Manning and James Serpell (New York: Routledge, 1994), 63-64.

The fox—perhaps the most “oft-told” (and oft-studied) of Japan’s irui spouses¹⁶—offers a prime example of continuity with continental narrative traditions. Like their flesh-and-blood counterparts, Japan’s fictional foxes have long been wily transgressors of boundaries, slipping readily in and out of human spaces, usually to human detriment. However, they also possess qualities confined strictly to the realm of the imaginary, such as magical powers and a penchant for seducing human men. Japan’s first known “fox woman” appears in the Buddhist tale collection *Nihon ryōiki* (“A Record of Miraculous Events in Japan,” ca. 823); roughly five centuries previous, the Jin-dyanasty scholar Guo Pu had already warned about foxes transforming themselves into beautiful women for the purpose of “beguiling people and making them lose their senses.”¹⁷ The pan-Sinospheric conception of foxes as shapeshifting *femmes fatale* belongs to an even farther-reaching complex of lore about vulpine cunning, exemplified in Europe by medieval “beast fables” about the incorrigible trickster Reynard.¹⁸

¹⁶ While it is impossible to provide an exhaustive listing of Japanese scholarship on fictional/folkloric foxes in a single footnote, Hoshino Yukihiko’s *Kitsune no bungakushi* (Tokyo: Shintensha, 1995) and Nakamura Teiri’s *Kitsune no Nihonshi*, 2 vols (Tokyo: Nihon Editaa Sukuuru Shuppan, 2001 & 2003) provide comprehensive overviews of the subject. English-language sources include M.W. deVisser, “The Fox and the Badger in Japanese Folklore,” *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* vol. 36, no. 3 (1908), 1-159; U.A. Casal, “The Goblin Fox and Badger and Other Witch-Animals of Japan,” *Folklore Studies* vol. 18 (1959), 1-93; Kiyoshi Nozaki, *Kitsuné: Japan’s Fox of Romance, Mystery, and Humor* (Tokyo: Hokuseidō Shoten, 1961); Karen A. Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel: Shared and Private Meanings in Contemporary Inari Worship* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1998), esp. chap. 3; and Michael Bathgate, *The Fox’s Craft in Japanese Religion and Folklore: Shapeshifters, Transformations, and Duplicities* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

¹⁷ Huntington, *Alien Kind*, 1. Cf. also Xiaofei Kang, *The Cult of the Fox: Power, Gender, and Popular Religion in Late Imperial and Early Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 16-17.

¹⁸ R.D. Gupta notes several close parallels between fables about Reynard and stories from the Pañcatantra. Although Gupta short of attributing the similarities to direct borrowing, they seem unlikely to be the result of simple coincidence. The “fox” of the Pañcatantra stories is actually a jackal, a wild canine which fills much the same ecological and folkloric niche on the Indian subcontinent as its vulpine cousins do to the north. (“Indian Parallels of the Fox Story,” in *Aspects*

By comparison, irui kon'in tales about mice lack robust ties to any continental narrative traditions; they are arguably particular to Japan in a way that similar stories about foxes are not. However, they are also particular to a relatively narrow timespan—the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries—and thus must be recognized as products of their unique circumstances, rather than reifications of some transhistorical Japanese essence. This is not to say that irui kon'in tales about mice cannot be meaningfully situated on longer timelines or larger maps; to a greater or lesser extent, all irui kon'in tales exist within the network of influences discussed above. Moreover, while there is little evidence to suggest that the notion of mice as seducers of humans came to Japan through exchange with the Asian mainland, other Japanese beliefs about mice arrived from this quarter. (So, in fact, did the mice themselves.) Although sustained cross-cultural comparison lies beyond the scope of this project, I will attempt to highlight intersections between my source texts and narratives from the broader Sinosphere, or even from the pan-Eurasian “folkloristic stratum.”

Despite the relatively circumscribed chronology of irui kon'in tales about mice, I will attempt to gesture beyond temporal boundaries as well as geographical ones. I have already touched on the persistence of the irui kon'in theme as a locus of ongoing cultural production; tracing the theme in the opposite direction leads all the way back to Japan's earliest records, the mythohistories *Kojiki* (“A Record of Ancient Affairs,” 712) and *Nihongi* (“Chronicles of

of the *Medieval Animal Epic*, ed. E. Rombauts and Andries Welkenhuysen [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1972], 241-249). Chinese and Japanese sources occasionally use the term “wild jackal” (野干; Ch. *yegan*, Jp. *yakan*) as a synonym of “fox,” which is one of several indications of a connection between Indian jackal-lore and East Asian fox-lore (Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel*, 83-84; Nakamura, *Kitsune no Nihonshi: Kodai, chūsei hen*, 75-76).

Japan,” 720). Both works contain multiple episodes of interspecies romance, beginning with the story of Hikohohodemi, a hunter who marries the daughter of the undersea Dragon King. Despite his wife’s warnings, Hikohohodemi peeks into the birthing chamber as she is in labor, and sees her as she truly is: a sea monster.¹⁹ Ashamed and outraged, Hikohohodemi’s wife returns to the ocean, leaving her newborn son behind on land to eventually father the first emperor of Japan.

Rulers across the world have legitimized their claim to power by tracing royal lineages to suitably impressive animal ancestors.²⁰ But in addition to aggrandizing the imperial bloodline, Hikohohodemi’s short-lived marriage sets the tone for the less genealogically momentous interspecies unions that would follow. As discussed above, irui kon’in tales do not follow a single fixed pattern; however, they never end with the human-animal couple living happily ever after in the human realm, and they often do not end with a “happily ever after” of any description. The odds were good that any given interspecies relationship would go bad, but this did not seem to diminish the appeal of stories on this subject. Irui kon’in tales feature prominently in Heian and Kamakura *setsuwa* collections, beginning with the above-mentioned *Nihon ryōiki*. *Setсуwa* were anecdotal tales, often (but not always) conveying a Buddhist moral; “constantly recycled and reworked,” they “provided

¹⁹ Later renditions of the myth identified Hikohohodemi’s wife (named Otohime or Toyotamahime) as a dragon. The earliest versions, however, presented her as a *wani*, a kind of sea monster believed by some scholars to be a shark (Ogihara Shinko, “*Hito to dōbutsu no kon’in-tan: ōken shinwa kara irui kon’in-tan made*,” 226).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 217-219.

a constant and deep source of material for other genres,”²¹ including the roughly five hundred works of medieval and early modern illustrated narrative fiction that are collectively known as *otogizōshi*.

In its narrowest sense, “otogizōshi” refers to the twenty-three tales derived from Muromachi sources that were issued as a set of woodblock-print booklets by the Osaka-based publisher Shibukawa Sei’emon sometime in the Kyōhō era (1716-1735).²² Initially entitled *Otogi bunko* (“The Companion Library”),²³ this collection was later republished in typeset print under the title *Otogizōshi* in 1891.²⁴ By this time, the term “otogizōshi” had for several decades been associated with Shibukawa’s anthology in particular and Muromachi (or Muromachi-ish) tales in general. The first attested usage of the word appears in reference to *Otogi bunko* in Ozaki Masayoshi’s 1801 literary catalog *Gunsho ichiran*. However, by 1830, it had come to denote simply the *sort* of tales that Shibukawa had anthologized,²⁵ and this is the sense in which it is most commonly employed today—although not without substantial scholarly dissent.

Detractors of the term “otogizōshi” regard it as a nineteenth-century neologism, and

²¹ Haruo Shirane, ed., *Traditional Japanese Literature: An Anthology, Beginnings to 1600* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 329.

²² At least some of Shibukawa’s *Otogi bunko* was reprinted using a set of woodblocks that had been carved roughly fifty years earlier, in the late seventeenth century. Seven of the twenty-three tales from this earlier edition have been discovered, and it is very likely that the woodblocks for all twenty-three tales were originally produced together as a set (Fujikake Kazuyoshi, “*Tekinikaru taamu o megutte: ‘otogizōshi,’ ‘chūsei shōsetsu,’ ‘Muromachi monogatari’ o chūshin ni,*” *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kanshō* vol. 50, no. 11 [October 1985], 31; Hashimoto Naoki, “*Shibukawa-ban,*” in *Otogizōshi jiten*, ed. Tokuda Kazuo [Tokyo: Tōkyōdō Shuppan, 2002], 54).

²³ Bunko (文庫) may originally have been pronounced as *fumikura* (Hashimoto Naoki, “*Shibukawa-ban,*” 54).

²⁴ Fujikake, “*Tekinikaru taamu o megutte,*” 31.

²⁵ Tokuda Kazuo, *Otogizōshi kenkyū* (Tokyo: Miyai Shoten, 1988), 523.

argue, correctly, that the original producers and consumers of the works now known as *otogizōshi* almost certainly did not refer to them as such. The association between “otogi” and *otogizōshi*-like narratives has a lengthier pedigree, stretching back to Shibukawa Seiemon and from there, more tenuously, to a class of sixteenth-century storytellers known as *otogi-shū* (“companion youths”).²⁶ Nonetheless, criticisms of “otogizōshi” as anachronistic are in substance accurate, if not necessarily meaningful. After all, proposed alternatives such as *chūsei shōsetsu* (“medieval novels”) and *Muromachi monogatari* (“Muromachi tales”) are even more recent inventions.

Scholars have expressed misgivings regarding the connotations of the word “otogizōshi” as well as its historical accuracy. As an obvious etymological cousin of *otogibanashi*, the modern Japanese word for “fairy tale,” “otogizōshi” stands charged of trivializing the works it denotes. But here, too, the alternatives offer little improvement. Labels like *shōsetsu* and *monogatari* also condition audience expectations, and they are in their own way damaging when applied to the works otherwise known as *otogizōshi*. Although either word might in its broadest sense be taken to simply mean “story,” both carry more specific associations—“shōsetsu” with modern novels, and “monogatari” with the courtly literature of the Heian era, most notably *Genji monogatari* (ca. 1008). The choice of terminology was no doubt intended to provide legitimization, as *shōsetsu* and *monogatari* have long been enshrined as the most “literary” of Japan’s narrative fiction. However, the

²⁶ As Fujikake observes, the word “otogi” appears in a number of popular titles roughly contemporary with *Otogi bunko*, and it is likely that Shibukawa was attempting to capitalize on this trend when he chose the name of his anthology (“*Tekinikaru taamu o megutte*,” 30).

perpetuation of this aesthetic hierarchy dooms other forms of narrative fiction to forever fall short of the ideal, even if they have been rebranded with modified forms of these desirable labels.

The manner in which said labels are modified presents equal cause for concern, as the terms “chūsei” and “Muromachi” implicitly subordinate literary history to “real” history. The corpus of works recognized as *otogizōshi* straddles one of the more formidable historiographical divides in Japanese history: the end of the medieval era and the beginning of the early modern. While numerous scholars of *otogizōshi* have noted chronological shifts in their style and content,²⁷ I believe it is a mistake to interpret these developments within the Procrustean frameworks of political regime (Muromachi versus Edo) or teleology (medieval versus modern).²⁸

The ongoing anxiety over nomenclature speaks in part to the traditionally marginal

²⁷ Kobayashi Kenji, “*Nara ehon kara e-iri hanpon e: Otogizōshi-bon no shuppan o megutte*,” *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kanshō* vol. 50, no. 11 (October 1985), 76-84; Shimauchi Keiji, “*Tawaratōda monogatari*,” *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō* vol. 61, no. 5 (May 1996), 93-94; Funata Michiko, “*Otogizōshi to shoshi: Edo jidai no otogizōshi juyō*,” *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō* vol. 61, no. 5 (May 1996), 46-47.

²⁸ Here, I must acknowledge that I employ all the standard periodizational terminology throughout this project. I do so, however, to provide readers with a chronological frame of reference; descriptors such as “early modern” and “late Muromachi” should be taken to indicate the *when* of a particular work, not the *what*.

I should also acknowledge certain aspects of my “small narrative” about the literary history of mice slot rather neatly into the grand narrative of modernization. Many of the works that I examine here can be understood as reflective of (or coproductive with) supposed trajectories of modernity: commercialization and the formation of commodity cultures, the democratization of literacy and literary capital, the “discovery of childhood,” the erosion of the religious episteme and the emergence of proto-scientific modes of inquiry, and the growing prominence of satire and parody as vehicles of discourse. While I attempt to address the intersections between these various phenomena and the works at the core of this project, I have grave reservations about treating the latter as a corollary of the former.

status of otogizōshi within the literary canon. Long dismissed as mere bagatelles for women and children, or as inferior imitations of Heian courtly literature, otogizōshi have only begun to attract substantial scholarly attention within the past half-century.²⁹ This reversal of fortunes is due in large part to Ichiko Teiji, whose 1955 *Chūsei shōsetsu no kenkyū* pointedly inverted a century of received wisdom about otogizōshi, arguing that they “represent the breaking away from earlier aristocracy-centered literature and the opening of a new world of fiction . . . portraying the world of samurai and commoners.”³⁰

No consensus exists regarding the production and reception of otogizōshi. Hayashiya Tatsusaburō posited a link between the development of otogizōshi to the emergence of a new class of semi-autonomous townspeople, or *machishū*, composed of impoverished ex-aristocrats and upwardly mobile commoners.³¹ Barbara Ruch, on the other hand, argues that otogizōshi had their roots in a body of “vocal literature” shaped and transmitted primarily by itinerant performers.³² Contradictory though their hypotheses may be, both Hayashiya and Ruch follow Ichiko in characterizing otogizōshi as fundamentally “of the people.” Certainly, this generalization contains more than a grain of truth. However, a significant proportion of the works that have been assigned to this corpus were in fact produced and circulated within the uppermost echelons of society, commissioned, owned, and even copied out by emperors

²⁹ James T. Araki, “Otogi-Zoshi and Nara-Ehon: A Field of Study in Flux,” *Monumenta Nipponica* Vol. 36, No. 1 (Spring, 1981), 6.

³⁰ Ichiko Teiji, *Chūsei shōsetsu no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1955), 69-70.

³¹ Hayashiya Tatsusaburō, *Chūsei bunka no kichō*, (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai), 232-234.

³² Barbara Ruch, “Medieval Jongleurs and the Making of a National Literature,” in *Japan in the Muromachi Age*, ed. John W. Hall and Toyoda Takeshi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 307-309.

and shoguns.³³

The long-standing marginalization of otogizōshi is compounded by the marginalization of literature about animals. *Iruimono*, or stories about animals and other nonhuman entities, compose roughly one one-fifth of the body of extant otogizōshi,³⁴ to the visible dismay of prewar literary critic Fujioka Sakutarō:

What I call “iruimono” are tales in which various sorts of beasts and birds, fish and insects, trees and plants are anthropomorphized. Primitive races make no distinction between people and other creatures, instead believing that they all possess the same qualities as humans. The Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation represents a developed and advanced form of this concept. Works such as *Konjaku monogatari* and *Nihon ryōiki* contain a great many tales embodying this concept. These served as the foundation for the emergence of irui literature. Children enjoy these tales greatly. The various characters that appear in these tales often have similar names, so rather than attempting to differentiate them, introducing strange animals, as in *Momotarō* (“Peach Boy”) and *Saru kani gassen* (“The War of the Monkeys and the Crabs”), made it easier for simple minds to follow the story. As previously stated, otogizōshi were often read by children, which is why there are so many tales of this sort [i.e., iruimono]. Additionally, the aesthetic degeneration of the era, along with the spread of literature to the ignorant lower class, is another reason that this type of literature proliferated.³⁵

Fujioka’s assertions to the contrary, animals appear so frequently in otogizōshi not because of the hypothesized influx of the unwashed masses into the literary sphere, but because they were a topic of general interest—for elites no less than the hoi polloi. Sixteenth-century aristocratic diaries mention otogizōshi such as *Shōjin gyōrui monogatari* (“The Tale of the

³³ Okudaira Hideo, “*Otogizōshi emaki no keifu*.” In *Otogizōshi emaki*, ed. Okudaira Hideo. (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1982), 14-17; Miya Tsugio, “*Otogizōshi to Tosa Mitsunobu: Nezumi no sōshi emaki kō*.” *Bijutsu kenkyū* vol. 312 (March 1980), 73-75.

³⁴ Mizutani Aki, “*Otogizōshi ni egakareta ikai – ‘Kakuresato’ to ‘Yahyōe nezumi’ o chūshin ni*,” *Nara ehon – emaki kenkyū* vol. 6 (September 2008), 20-29.

³⁵ Fujioka Sakutarō, *Kamakura Muromachi jidai bungakushi* (Tokyo: Kokuhon Shuppan, 1936), 372-373. Reprinted in *Otogizōshi kenkyū ronsō I*, ed. Fujii Takashi (Tokyo: Kuresu Shuppan, 2003).

Vegetables and the Fish”) and *Aro kassen monogatari* (“The War of the Crows and the Herons”).³⁶ The sole otogizōshi with a known author—*Hikketsu no monogatari* (“A Tale Written with a Brush”), written by a samurai named Ishii Yasunaga—chronicles the misadventures of a badger.³⁷ Animals were not an idle diversion for the simple-minded, but a powerful conceptual tool for making sense (or, by the same token, nonsense) of the world.

Claude Lévi-Strauss famously proclaimed that animals are *non comme bonnes à manger, mais comme bonnes à penser*. This dictum is most often translated as “not just good to eat, but also good to think with”; however, the original French encodes a second layer of meaning hinging on the word *bonnes*, which means “good” but also “goods,” as in commodities.³⁸ More recently, Nicole Shukin has exploited the ambiguities of the English language to formulate the double-edged concept of “rendering animals”: “render,” of course, can mean “to represent,” but it also denotes “the industrial boiling down and recycling of animal remains.”³⁹ Shukin highlights the cynical edge underlying Lévi-Strauss’s notion of

³⁶ Miura Okuto, “*Iru i gensō: ‘Hikketsu monogatari’ o megutte,*” in *Otogizōshi hyakka ryōran*, ed. Tokuda Kazuo (Tokyo: Kasama Shoin, 2008), 146.

³⁷ Barbara Ruch, “Origins of The Companion Library: An Anthology of Medieval Japanese Stories,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* vol. 30, no. 3 (May, 1971), 595; Miura Okuto, “*Iru i gensō: ‘Hikketsu monogatari’ o megutte,*” in *Otogizōshi hyakka ryōran*, ed. Tokuda Kazuo (Tokyo: Kasama Shoin, 2008), 147.

More recently, Shibata Yoshinari has documented the late sixteenth-century attribution of an iruimono otogizōshi known as *Shōjin gyorui monogatari* (“The Tale of the Vegetables and the Fish”) to the aristocrat and famous *waka* poet Nijō Yoshimoto (1320-1388). Although the veracity of this attribution is unclear (Ichiko Teiji dismisses similar claims based on eighteenth-century attributions), at a minimum it suggests that Yoshimoto’s authorship was at one point perceived as credible. (“*Shōjin gyorui monogatari’ no sakusha ni kansuru ichishiryō.*” *Kyōtō Daigaku kokubungaku ronsō* vol. 10 [2003], 52-55).

³⁸ Edmund Leach, *Claude Lévi-Strauss* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), 31-32.

³⁹ Nicole Shukin, *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 20-24.

animals as “good(s) to think with”; to her mind, thinking with animals is not a warm-and-fuzzy communion, but rather the final and finest blade in a butcher’s kit designed to strip them of usable resources with maximum efficiency. “Thinking *with* animals is not the same thing as thinking *about* them,” Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman assert even more bluntly, and pose an admonitory question: “Has the animal become, like that of the taxidermist’s craft, little more than a human-sculpted object in which the animal’s glass eye merely reflects our own projections?”⁴⁰

Prior to the recent advent of animal studies, few literary critics would have taken Daston and Mitman’s question as anything other than a rhetorical prelude to an obvious affirmative. It has long been standard practice to interpret fictional representations of animals on a primarily symbolic level, taking them as references to certain kinds of people or concepts while trivializing their relationship to their biological referents. For instance, one typically reads *Animal Farm* to discover Orwell’s views on politics, not his views on pigs;⁴¹ for critics accustomed to operating in this mode, it goes without saying that one ought not read *Hikketsu no monogatari* to discover Yasunaga’s views on badgers. This hermeneutic approach has persisted for so long not only because of so-called “speciesism” or “human chauvinism,”

⁴⁰ Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman, “Introduction: The How and Why of Thinking With Animals,” in *Thinking With Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, ed. Daston and Mitman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005): 17.

⁴¹ Susan McHugh recounts a telling anecdote from her experience teaching *Animal Farm*:

“You’d flunk the test if you said it was about animals,” ventured an undergraduate in response to the question: what had they learned about George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* in secondary school before they were assigned to read it in college? “Yeah,” another chimed in, “You’re supposed to say it’s about some war or something.”

“*Animal Farm*’s Lessons for Literary (and) Animal Studies,” *Humanimalia* vol. 1, no. 1 (September 2009).

but also because it is in some substantial measure legitimate. Fictional animals speak with forked tongues, and yes, one fork speaks to us about our fellow humans.

However, the distinction between stories told *with* animals and stories told *about* animals exists largely in the interpretive biases of the audience. As Erica Fudge observes, when we read with an eye to “the literal meaning of animals . . . what emerges is a vast body of literature that is in fact concerned not only with humans but also with animals.”⁴² Fudge’s scholarship concerns early modern Europe, but her advice applies equally well across place and time. Analyzing fictional animals *qua* animals casts light on culturally and historically specific perceptions of and anxieties about them, their relationship to humans, and the dividing line that separates—or fails to separate—the two categories.

At this juncture, some readers might object that the dividing line between humans and (other) animals exists only as a cultural construct. True enough, but in medieval and early modern Japan, the animal-human boundary was so solidly constructed as to reach down to the ontological bedrock. It was a leaky boundary—at times distressingly so—but the reality of its existence was not a matter of debate. The modern biological notion of humans as a subset of animals had no place in the episteme of the day. Instead, the Buddhist doctrine of *rokudō* divided sentient beings into six “paths”: gods, humans, warring titans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell-dwellers. Although more abstruse elaborations on this scheme posited the interpenetration of the Six Paths, they were in their most basic configuration a linear hierarchy with gods at the top and hell-dwellers at the bottom.

⁴² Erica Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006): 5.

The Six Paths served as the stage for a cosmic game of Snakes and Ladders,⁴³ in which karmic recalibrations moved beings up and down the rungs of existence with each rebirth. Incarnation in human form was a rare and fortunate occurrence, made possible only by an abundance of karmic merit; conversely, any number of missteps might lead to rebirth on a lower path. Interactions with animals constituted a particularly hazardous hamartiological minefield, whose operations were driven by the principle of poetic justice. The oxen driver who beat his oxen, for instance, would likely spend his next life as the dumb brute pulling the cart. Persons who took animal life could expect an even harsher retribution: rebirth in Hell, where they would typically be tortured at the hands (or hooves) of horse- and ox-headed demons.

Ideology is an imperfect predictor of human behavior. As Joyce Salisbury writes in her study of animal-human interactions in the European middle ages, “In spite of evidence that many classical thinkers dignified animals with human qualities . . . there is no evidence that they treated animals any better than our medieval predecessors did.”⁴⁴ A similar disjunction between preaching and practice prevailed in premodern and early modern Japan, where Buddhist injunctions against killing animals or keeping them in captivity struggled against the unwritten doctrine of pragmatism. In *Tsurezuregusa* (“Essays in Idleness,” 1332), the priest Kenkō offers an unusually matter-of-fact summary of the conundrum, and

⁴³ The “Snakes and Ladders” metaphor is borrowed from Caroline Hirosawa, who uses this phrase to describe Buddhist-themed boardgames from the Edo period. Modeled after *sugoroku*, these games challenged players to move their pieces to “paradise” while avoiding the spaces that would land them in “hell” (“The Collapsible, Inflatable Kingdom of Retribution: A Primer on Japanese Hell Imagery and Imagination,” *Monumenta Nipponica* vol. 63, no. 1 [Spring 2008], 31-33).

⁴⁴ Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 8.

ultimately comes down on the side of practicality: “We keep horses and oxen. It is awful to restrain them and make them suffer, but we cannot do without them, so there is no help for it.”⁴⁵ Mice, whose impact on human welfare hovered somewhere between ‘nuisance’ and ‘threat,’ often fell afoul of this ‘needs must’ attitude. But at the same time, they were recognized as conscious moral players on the same board as humans.

II. MEANS AND MEANINGS:

Methodological Considerations

My methodology is unabashedly eclectic, but above all, my project centers on the close analysis of texts and images within a historicized context. My approach might loosely be described as Barthesian, in that I regard each of my chosen sources as a “galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds” and seek to “gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one.”⁴⁶ However, I do not take hermeneutic pluralism as a license to hermeneutic anachronism; I remain keenly aware that, no less than actual constellations, semantic constellations take on very different shapes when viewed from different times and places. Thus, I attempt to uncover the configuration of readings that would have been “visible” to the intended audience, taking into account the epistemic possibilities available to them—the “basic map[s] of reality,” the “framework[s] within which

⁴⁵ 養ひ飼ふものには、馬、牛。繋ぎ苦しむるこそいたましけれど、なくてかなはぬものなれば、いかがはせん。Kanda Hideo, Nagazumi Yasuaki, Yasuraoka Kōsaku, ed., *Hōjōki, Tsurezuregusa, Shōbō genzō zuimonki, Tannishō, Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* vol. 27 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1971), 88.

⁴⁶ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Noonday Press, 1974), 6.

. . . data could be described and located”⁴⁷—as well as more concrete questions of production, transmission, and reception.

In seeking historically plausible readings, I find it fruitful to read contemporaneous texts against one another, not only because such a juxtaposition brings the underlying “maps of reality” into clearer focus, but also because contemporary audiences would have constructed their understanding of any given work within an intertextual scaffolding. Conversancy with prevailing narrative conventions is scarcely less of a prerequisite to meaningful reading than basic linguistic competence. The uninitiated reader gasps in shock where the initiated reader yawns at a cliché; the uninitiated reader sighs in sincere sentiment where the initiated reader snickers at a parody. Much of the intertextual knowledge necessary to make sense of the texts at hand has roots in that hazily-delineated body of twice-told tales known as “folklore,” and so I frequently draw on the work of Japanese and international folklorists.

At points, my analysis is informed by Mikhail Bakhtin’s concepts of “heteroglossia” and “polophyny.” Both of these phenomena emerge through the operation of what Bakhtin terms centrifugal forces: the outward pull that decenters and disunifies languages, societies, and the discourses they produce. According to Bakhtin, centrifugal forces stand locked in an eternal tug-of-war with inward-pulling centripetal forces, which maintain homogeneity and reaffirm central authority. Where centrifugally oriented texts permit a multitude of voices to speak without forcing them to converge upon a single finalized meaning, centripetally

⁴⁷ William LaFleur, The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 27.

oriented texts privilege monologue over dialogue, subordinating all in-text voices to the overriding agenda of the author.

Like most grand dichotomies, the distinction between “centrifugal” and “centripetal” is a blunt tool, and one that comes freighted with a certain degree of ideological baggage. The literary-historical framework within which Bakhtin develops these concepts has been rightly criticized as Eurocentric and teleological. Moreover, Bakhtin makes little effort to disguise his preference for heteroglossia over monoglossia, polyphony over monophony, centrifugality over centripetality—judgments driven no less by politics than by aesthetics.⁴⁸ I adopt Bakhtinian terminology because it aptly describes key narrative elements in some of the works that I discuss. I use these terms, however, as value-neutral descriptors; they should not be taken to reflect a work’s literary value or its ideological orientation.

In the first chapter, I address problems of nomenclature, both textual and biological. I begin by offering a historical overview of Japanese interactions with mice, and in doing so introduce representative samples of the relatively limited selection of pre-Muromachi literary sources on this subject. From there, my discussion turns to the far more copious body of late medieval and early modern fiction about mice, in particular the seven separate otogizōshi (many of which exist in several distinct textual variants) that share the title *Nezumi no sōshi*, or “The Tale of the Mouse.” In the process of distinguishing these works from one another, I stake out their thematic range: the various ways of telling stories with and about mice that

⁴⁸ Charles Platter, “Novelistic Discourse in Aristophanes,” in Carnivalizing Difference: Bakhtin and the Other, ed. Peter Barta et al. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 58; Tony Crowley, “Bakhtin and the History of Language,” in Bakhtin and Cultural Theory 2nd ed., ed. Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 69-73; et alia.

contemporary authors and audiences perceived as satisfying and meaningful. Additionally, I locate these works on a (necessarily rough) timeline, laying the groundwork for discussion of shifts in style and content, and the changing audience expectations that drove them. Finally, I consider a nagging taxonomical issue gained in translation: should the creatures at the heart of the works that I discuss be referred to in English as mice or as rats?

The second chapter is dedicated to close visual and textual analysis of the earliest *Nezumi no sōshi*, a fifteenth-century handscroll traditionally recognized as the work of the famed painter Tosa Mitsunobu. While this attribution remains unverifiable, we can reasonably assume that this scroll was produced by and for the social elite, most likely in association with the imperial or shogunal court. The diaries of Sanjōnishi Sanetaka, a frequent collaborator of Mitsunobu, reveal that works commissioned in these circumstances underwent a painstaking process of drafting and redrafting;⁴⁹ this supports a granular reading, premised on the assumption that the artist(s) and author(s) carefully constructed details for an audience expected to scrutinize them with equal care. *Nezumi no sōshi* is only one of several otogizōshi about interspecies marriage attributed to Mitsunobu and his atelier, which both speaks to the strength of contemporary interest in this theme and offers a rich vein of material for comparison.

In my third and final chapter, I move forward roughly a century to examine the *Gon no Kami* tales referenced above. The quantity of extant *Gon no Kami* manuscripts testifies to the popularity of this story, and the differences between the older and the younger lineages

⁴⁹ Tokuda Kazuo, *Otogizōshi kenkyū* (Tokyo: Miyai Shoten, 1988), 80-115;

point to changing audience tastes—specifically, a growing desire for happy scenes of a world populated by anthropomorphic mice, and a concomitant disinclination to mar this cheerful landscape with the angst that so often accompanied interspecies unions. Thanks to this shift in emphasis, *Gon no Kami*'s human wife became something of a necessary evil, a means of granting her fellow humans in the audience access to all the tantalizing nooks and crannies of the mouse realm.

-CHAPTER ONE-
FUZZY BOUNDARIES:
Titles and Taxonomy

“The scurrying of mice is very hateful,” declares Sei Shōnagon in the twenty-fifth chapter of *Makura no sōshi* (c. 995), aptly entitled “Hateful Things.”⁵⁰ In the later chapters “Filthy Things” and “Squalid Things,” she again turns her brush to the subject of mice, with no greater affection.⁵¹ More than a millennium after *Makura no sōshi* was written, much of Sei’s commentary on daily life in the Heian court has become obscure; even when they have clear counterparts in our own modern existence, many of her likes and dislikes are apt to strike us as arbitrary or even counterintuitive. (For instance, Sei bemoans the “unsuitability” of “snow falling on the houses of the common people, especially when the moon is shining,” and praises duck eggs for their elegance.)⁵² Amid all the irreducible *otherness* of Sei’s world, her distaste for mice seems to stand out as a minor human constant: reassuring, if otherwise unremarkable.

Antagonism toward mice may not be a universal phenomenon, but it is nearly as

⁵⁰ 鼠の走りありくいとにくし. Matsuo Satoshi and Nagai Kazuko, ed., *Makura no sōshi, Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* vol. 11 (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1974), 102.

⁵¹ Sei includes mouse nests [鼠のすみか] on her roster of “Filthy Things” [きたなげなるもの] in Chapter 152 (ibid., 296). In Chapter 159, “Squalid Things” [むつかしげなるもの], she recoils at “hordes of mice that have not yet grown hair tumbling out of their nests” [鼠のいまだ毛も生ひぬを巢の中よりあまたまろばし出したる] (ibid., 301). Sei’s repeated complaints in this vein suggest that they mice were a persistent nuisance for Heian courtiers, and reports from her contemporaries confirm this impression; for instance, Fujiwara no Sanesuke records in his diary that his daughter was bitten by a mouse. The wound, Sanesuke reports, was treated with a poultice made from cat dung (Kajishima Takeo, *Shiryō Nihon dōbutsushi* [Tokyo: Yasaka Shobō, 2002], 589).

⁵² Chapter 52, “Unsuitable Things” [にげなきもの]: 下衆の家に雪の降りたるまた月のさし入りたるもいとくちをし (Matsuo Satoshi and Nagai Kazuko, ed., *Makura no sōshi*, 138); Chapter 42, “Elegant Things” [あてなるもの]: かりのこ (ibid., 136).

widespread as mice themselves—which is to say, very widespread indeed. The same innovations that fueled the dramatic expansion of the human population during the Neolithic era—full-scale agriculture, permanent settlements, storage of surplus grain—drove a mirroring expansion of mouse and rat populations.⁵³ In the words of epidemiologist Hans Zinsser, humanity and its rodent parasites “have spread across the earth, keeping pace with each other and unable to destroy each other, although continually hostile.”⁵⁴ The historical (and emotional) depth of this hostility is apparent in the Atharva Veda, a collection of hymns compiled in northern India roughly three thousand years ago; one hymn implores the protective deities known as *aṣvini* to “kill the burrowing rodents that devastate our food grains. Slice their hearts, break their necks, plug their mouths so that they cannot eat our food.”⁵⁵

In Japan, the earliest known efforts to protect food stores from rodents date to the second century. Excavations of late Yayoi *takakura*, or elevated granaries, have revealed that many of these buildings were equipped with *nezumi-gaeshi*: protruding boards capping the ends of the supporting pillars, designed to prevent mice from climbing into the storehouse.⁵⁶

Rodents, however, would continue to bedevil Japan for centuries to come. The imperially

⁵³ Pierre Boursot et al., “The Evolution of House Mice,” *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* vol. 24 (1993), 135-137.

⁵⁴ Hans Zinsser, *Rats, Lice, and History*, 1935 (Rutgers: Transaction Books, 2008), 208.

⁵⁵ S. Anthony Barnett, *The Story of Rats: Their Impact on Us, and Our Impact on Them* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2001): 3. See also Ishwar Prakash, “Rodent Pests—The Threat to the Indian Subcontinent,” *Phytoparasitica* vol. 23, no. 1 (March 1995), 4; Ralph T.H. Griffith, trans., *The Hymns of the Atharva Veda* Vol. I (Benares: E.J. Lazarus and Co., 1916), 272-273. The Ṛgveda, which is believed to predate the Atharva Veda by several centuries, does not contain any direct imprecations against mice, but it does compare nagging worries to mice gnawing at weavers’ threads, suggesting that mice were viewed as pests.

⁵⁶ Utagawa Tatsuo, *Nezumi: osorubeki gai to seitai* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1965): 55-56.

commissioned history *Shoku Nihongi* (“Further Chronicles of Japan”), completed in 797, reports that in Hōki 6 (775), “Mice appeared in both Kawachi and Settsu provinces and consumed all of the grain, and even the plants.”⁵⁷ Later in the same year, “Hundreds of black mice appeared in Tsuga district and consumed the roots of all the plants within several dozen leagues.”⁵⁸ Another imperially commissioned history, *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* (“True Records of Three Reigns in Japan,” 901), records a massive rodent infestation of the capital in Jōgan 17 (875): “Recently, there have been signs of mice every night. Numberless tens of thousands of them swarm in the streets of the capital. Some move from north to south; others run into and out of the palace.”⁵⁹

An even grimmer fate befell Kuroshima, off the coast of western Shikoku, during the Antei era (1227-1229). According to the setsuwa collection *Kokon chomonjū* (“Tales Old and New, Written and Spoken”), compiled by Tachibana Narisue in 1254, “Mice swarmed all throughout the island, and consumed everything in the fields, so that even today nothing can be grown there.”⁶⁰ Ultimately, the mice cast themselves into the ocean en masse, presumably in search of greener pastures. Narisue describes these sea-going mice as “truly mysterious”; we

⁵⁷ 河内摂津両国有鼠食五穀及草木. Aoki Kazuo et al., ed., *Shoku Nihongi IV, Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei* vol. 15 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1995), 448.

⁵⁸ 都賀郡有黒鼠数百許. 食草木之根数十里所. *Ibid.*, 454.

⁵⁹ 比日毎夜有鼠跡、万無数、満京路、或自北向南、或入宮城、或出城外. (Matsushita Kenrin, ed., *Nihon sandai jitsuroku, Kokushi taikei* vol. 4 [Tokyo: Keizai Zasshisha, 1897], 414.) The statement that the mice came from the north may be a simple reflection of fact, or it may hint at an assumption that sinister forces were at work; north was the direction of the demonic. *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* also contains several complaints about mice chewing on various items in the palace, although none of these entries report rodent activity on such a grand scale.

⁶⁰ すべて彼島には、ねずみみちゝて、鼠の物などもみなくひしなひて、當時までもえつくりえ侍らぬとかや. Nagazumi Yasuki and Shimada Isao, ed., *Kokon chōmonjū, Nihon koten bungaku taikei* vol. 84 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1966), 531.

might dismiss them as downright fanciful, except that the same phenomenon has been documented in modern times. During the *nezumi sōdō*, or “rat troubles,” that bedeviled Kuroshima and several nearby islands beginning in 1949, local fishermen encountered hordes of rats swimming offshore. (Here, the “nezumi” in question were actually brown rats; the difficulty of distinguishing rats from mice in Japanese sources will be discussed below.) Despite the liberal application of rodenticide, the plague of rats persisted into the mid-1960s, lending credence to Narisue’s claim that Kuroshima remained barren for decades after the initial outbreak.⁶¹

For all that they share the same fundamental concern with rodent threats to human well-being, the mutely pragmatic *nezumi-gaeshi*, the dispassionate imperial histories, and the curiosity-seeking *Kokon chomonjū* all lack the vitriolic fervor of the Atharva Veda. Even the famously sharp-tongued Sei Shōnagon seems genteel by comparison, which is perhaps unsurprising; her objections to mice, after all, derive from vague aesthetic displeasure rather than fear of famine. But Japan was more than capable of producing genuinely passionate

⁶¹ For a comprehensive account of the *nezumi sōdō*, see Yoshimura Akira, *Umi no nezumi* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1973). Kuroshima did not go unmolested by rodents in the centuries between 1227 and 1949. According to *Sangoku meishō zue*, an official history of Satsuma domain completed in 1843, the crops of the neighboring island Takeshima were devoured by rats in Bunka 9 (1817); the famine continued for seven years, and the islanders survived by eating fish and wild plants from the interior of the island. (In this case, we can state with some confidence that the culprits were rats, because the largest specimens were said to be a foot and a half long.) In Bunka 14, Kuroshima was stricken by the same fate. While the islands off of western Shikoku appear to be especially vulnerable to sudden spikes in rodent populations, other regions of Japan have suffered from similar difficulties. In Ansei 2 (1855), an explosion of field mice (probably *Apodemus speciosus*) in Iwami province necessitated official “mouse quelling” expeditions; woodblock prints of the event show a dense mass of mice fleeing before men armed with spears, and contemporary records state that 1,504,858 mice were killed in a thirty-day period. (Utagawa, *Nezumi*, 169; Kaneko Yukibumi, *Nezumi no bunruigaku: seibutsu chirigaku no shiten* [Tokyo: Tōyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 2006]: 99).

diatribes against mice, as is apparent in the otogizōshi *Neko no sōshi* (“The Tale of the Cat”), written in the first half of the seventeenth century. *Neko no sōshi* frames its story with a near-verbatim repetition of an edict issued in Keichō 7 (1602) by the municipal administrator (*machi bugyō*) of Kyoto, who ordered that all cats in the capital be kept unleashed. Although the object of this law is not recorded, it is believed to have been intended as a rodent-control measure;⁶² this, at any rate, is the interpretation presented in *Neko no sōshi*. Shortly after the edict is passed, a holy man living on the outskirts of the capital is visited in his dreams by an elderly mouse – himself a priest – who is distressed by the massacre of his fellow mice, and has come to beg for advice. Despite his compassion for the mouse’s plight, the holy man cannot resist the opportunity to chastise him for the trespasses of his species:

I am compelled to tell you why you are the object of all this hatred. I myself, a lone priest, repaper an umbrella and set it aside to dry, soon to find the handle gnawed to bits in no time at all. When I prepare roasted beans and snacks to entertain the deacons, the food disappears overnight. You manage to chew holes not only in my robes and clerical garb but in my fans, books, screens, rice cakes, and bean curd! No matter how forbearing a priest I may be, it’s only natural that I’d want to kill you! You can’t expect ordinary people to react any differently!⁶³

“Ordinary people” did not react any differently, if other otogizōshi are any indication. An illustrated scroll in the collection of Harvard’s Sackler Museum, dated to the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, opens with a vivid image of the havoc mice could wreak in an urban environment. (This scroll has been given the provisional title *Nezumi no sōshi*, or “The Tale of the Mouse”; unfortunately, it shares this title with half a dozen unrelated works, which

⁶² Kuroda Hideo, *Rekishi to shite no otogizōshi* (Tokyo: Perikansha, 1996): 28-30.

⁶³ Skord, *Tales of Tears and Laughter*, 37.



Fig. 1 Details of *Nezumi no sōshi*. Artist unknown. Late 16th or early 17th c. Handscroll; ink and light color on paper. Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum.

I will disambiguate below.)⁶⁴ Shortly thereafter, the residents of the neighborhood are shown fuming over their mouse-eaten clothing. “Oh, I’m furious! Just look at this. There’s no end to how awful [those mice] are,” the woman exclaims, and the man beside her commiserates, “Oh, Hachiman, what in the world is this! But tonight, we’ll get them with the cat and the traps.”⁶⁵ (FIG. 1) The next illustration depicts what can only be described as a miniature abattoir: an array of elaborate mouse traps, all on the verge of being sprung. Nearby, a cat pounces on a squealing mouse, while a man slams down a weighted wooden board. “I got two at once!” he

⁶⁴ There is some reason to believe that the particular scroll in question was originally entitled *Nezumi no sōshi*, although this is far from certain. A recently-discovered scroll fragment from what appears to be an extremely similar tale (cf. note 72) was found stored in a box labeled *Nezumi no sōshi*; however, as is so often the case, it is unclear when and by whom this label was added. In any event, it is apparent that by the late eighteenth century, the title *Nezumi no sōshi* was already associated with the work in question. Evidence of this can be found in the visual encyclopedia *Koga ruijū* (“A Thematic Compendium of Ancient Images”), compiled by Matsudaira Sadanobu beginning in 1797. The volume of *Koga ruijū* dedicated to “ancient implements” contains a diagram of various mousetraps obviously reproduced from the Harvard *Nezumi no sōshi* or one of its cognates, and attributed simply to “*Nezumi no sōshi*” (Tokuda Kazuo, “*Hakubyō ‘Nezumi no sōshi emaki’ no shinshutsu dankan ni tsuite: Haabaado Daigaku hon to no hikaku*,” *Gakushūin Joshi Daigaku kiyō* 13 [2011]: 19-21).

⁶⁵ 「あらはら立や。これ御覧候へ。にくさかぎりなく。」「あたこ八幡。こはそも。たゞこよひねことりものにてとり候べし。」 Tokuda Kazuo, “*Haabaado Daigaku fuzoku bijutsukan zō hakubyō ‘Nezumi no sōshi’ emaki ni tsuite: fu honkoku*,” *Gakushūin Joshi Daigaku kiyō* vol. 11 (2009): 62.

boasts. “I’ll lift this up as soon as they quiet down.”⁶⁶ Beneath the board, their paws and noses just visible, the crushed mice squeak pitifully.

Cursory though it is, the above survey of Japanese animosity toward mice should make two points clear. The first is that in Japan, as elsewhere, dislike of mice was not a mere cultural caprice on the part of humans; rather, it was a largely predictable reaction to the behavior of mice themselves. Various scholars have invoked Kristeva’s concept of the abject to explain the modern Western aversion toward household rodents, whose “animality is compromised by their parasitical dependency on human life . . . [they are] too close to civilization to be romanticized as other, and yet too far to be admitted as akin.”⁶⁷ In a similar vein, the anthropologist Mary Douglas, in her study of taboos among the African Lele, identifies mice and rats as “anomalous animals,” which confounded Lele systems of classification and hence were viewed with suspicion.⁶⁸ But, at least in the premodern Japanese context, mice were more than an ideological affront. Unlike Douglas’ famous example of the pangolin—a scaly mammal that allegedly discomfited the Lele by the simple fact of its atypical anatomy—mice constituted a very real detriment to human interests. They

⁶⁶ 「ふたつまでかかり候。ちやうすおさへ候へば、もちあげ候よ。」 Ibid.

⁶⁷ Maud Ellman, The Nets of Modernism: Henry James, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Sigmund Freud (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 15. For further discussion of the abject status of rats and mice in the modern Western context, see Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (London: Methuen, 1986): 5, 143-147.

⁶⁸ Mary Douglas, “Animals in Lele Religious Symbolism,” Africa: Journal of the International African Institute vol. 27, no. 1 (January, 1957): 47. See also Douglas, Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo, 1966 (London: Routledge, 2002): 206. According to Douglas, the anomalousness of rats and mice derives from the fact that unlike other animals, they “live within human society” but are not domesticated. As a consequence of their anomalous status, mice and rats were considered by the Lele to be unfit for human consumption; as we shall see, the premodern Japanese did not suffer from any such squeamishness.

transgressed not only the abstract boundaries between “wild” and “tame,” “self” and “other,” but also the physical boundaries erected to repel unwanted intruders. Once they were inside those boundaries, they gluttoned themselves at the expense of their reluctant hosts, destroying food, clothing, and even books. In an economy where wealth generally took the form of rice (and, to a lesser extent, silk and other textiles), mice quite literally ate into savings.

The second point follows logically from the first: at no point during Japanese history would Sei Shōnagon’s complaints about mice be regarded as alien, or even unusual. The perception of mice as pests has persisted uninterrupted from the first attempts to keep them out of Yayoi granaries to the present day. However, beginning in the latter half of the Muromachi era, Sei’s view of mice entered into dialogue with a radically different view of mice, one that cast them as lovable scoundrels, sufferers of cruel persecution, and bearers of good fortune for those humans wise enough to treat them kindly. In the case of *Neko no sōshi*, this dialogue is literal: the old mouse pleads his case, and for all that he argues the opposite side, the holy man ultimately concedes the mouse’s point. (Unfortunately for the mice, the recently unleashed cats also participate in the debate, and prove more difficult to win over.) Other otogizōshi negotiate between divergent views of mice in a less direct manner. *Neko no sōshi* and the Harvard *Nezumi no sōshi* are only two of a dozen tales from the late Muromachi and early Edo featuring mice as protagonists. All of these works portray mice with some degree of sympathy; however, at the same time, they all acknowledge the murine penchant for trespass and theft. For the most part, these fictional mice simply steal food, much like their real-world counterparts. But in some otogizōshi, they set their sights on

a more ambitious target: human women.

As previously indicated, a great many otogizōshi bear the title *Nezumi no sōshi*, including the two tales of interspecies marriage at the center of this project. Before we proceed any further, we must pause to untangle this rat's nest of literary look-alikes. Often, the original titles of the works in question have been lost, if indeed they ever existed at all; in such instances, the title *Nezumi no sōshi* was affixed, sometimes literally, by later owners, be they modern curators or premodern collectors. The fact that so many of the latter seem to have independently arrived at the same designation for very different tales, whose only obvious similarity was the species of their protagonists, leads Ōshima Tatehiko to conclude that "*Nezumi no sōshi* was not so much the title of a particular work as it was a generic term for literature about mice."⁶⁹ And, as will soon be apparent, there was indeed enough literature about mice for the genre to merit its own name. Once mice found their way into the Japanese imagination, they multiplied there as prolifically as they would in any granary or pantry.

Harvard possesses not one but two scrolls known as *Nezumi no sōshi*, both of which were assigned that title at some uncertain date. The lesser known of these two works, which has already been introduced above, chronicles the spiritual development of a mouse by the name of Hokotarō. After he and his compatriots drive their human hosts to mass rodenticide, Hokotarō alone escapes with his life. Grieving for his lost brothers and children, Hokotarō sets out on a pilgrimage to Mt. Kōya, with the intention of taking Buddhist vows; when he arrives at the temple, however, he is confronted by a cat. As Hokotarō stands trembling, the

⁶⁹ Ōshima Tatehiko, *Otogizōshi to minkan bungei* (Tokyo: Iwasaki Bijutsusha, 1967): 77-78.

cat hastens to explain that he is a monk, and Hokotarō has nothing to fear from him. With some trepidation, Hokotarō permits the cat to shave his head. Although he is nicked by one of cat’s claws, Hokotarō—now renamed Jiami—emerges mostly unscathed from the experience, and begins his new life at the monastery. At first he is troubled by longing for his absent (and previously unmentioned) wife, but “after he had made his way to this mountain, he single-mindedly awaited the coming of Amida; now that he was here, how foolish it would be for his heart to once more wander down the path of worldly passions.”⁷⁰ After years of devoted worship, Jiami achieves rebirth in paradise. The narrator finishes by admonishing the audience not to dismiss the tale lightly, first in prose and then in verse: “Such moving occurrences are rare, and even though he was a mouse, people were moved to pity. *Do not as falsehood this eschew/ For in this world, there’s nothing true.*”⁷¹

Despite its frequently humorous tone, the Harvard *Nezumi no sōshi*, as I will hereafter refer to this scroll,⁷² contains a strong evangelistic element. In this regard, it

⁷⁰ 山此に分入て後、ひたつらにみだのらいがうをこそまちたるに、かゝるぼんなうの道に二度迷ふわが心かなと、爰は猶はしぢかし。Tokuda, “*Haabaado Daigaku fuzoku bijutsukan zō hakubyō ‘Nezumi no sōshi’ emaki ni tsuite*,” 65.

⁷¹ ためしすくなき哀さは、ねずみのうえと言ながら、人も哀をもよをせり。いつわりと思ひくだすな何事もたゞ世界のまことになれば。Ibid., 66.

⁷² As mentioned in note 64 above, the scholar Tokuda Kazuo owns an incomplete handscroll clearly related to the Harvard *Nezumi no sōshi*. Although the sole remaining illustration in the Tokuda *Nezumi no sōshi* is less skillfully executed than its counterpart in the Harvard *Nezumi no sōshi*, the text of the former contains narratively significant details absent from the latter. The Harvard *Nezumi no sōshi* offers a relatively laconic explanation of the cat’s reasons for becoming a monk: “A clan of cats had renounced the world. Why, you ask? Many of them had been starving to death, so rather than dying meaninglessly like this, they climbed Mt. Kōya.” [ねこの一門、世を捨ける。ゆへをいかこと尋ねれば、数多かつゑ死にければ、かくていたづらに死なんより、高野山にのぼりつゝ.] By contrast, the corresponding passage in the Tokuda *Nezumi no sōshi* goes into greater depth: “A clan of cats had become monks. Why, you ask? These days, the mice in the capital had been dying of hunger, and so many cats had also been starving to death. Rather than dying meaninglessly like this, they

resembles another work known as *Nezumi no sōshi*, this one in the possession of Cambridge University.⁷³ Originally created as an illustrated scroll and later rebound as a book, the Cambridge *Nezumi no sōshi* is believed to date to the first half of the seventeenth century, making it roughly contemporary with the Harvard *Nezumi no sōshi*.⁷⁴ As with the Harvard *Nezumi no sōshi*, its illustrations consist of ink outlines colored with light washes, rather than the bolder “Nara-e” paintings typical of *otogizōshi*, which are characterized by bright colors, heavy outlines, and opaque pigments. Where the Harvard *Nezumi no sōshi* imparts its moral via a tried-and-true narrative formula (loss, conversion, salvation), defamiliarized by its transposition onto animal characters, the Cambridge *Nezumi no sōshi* largely dispenses with

traveled to Mt. Kōya and became monks.” [ねこの一もんしゅつけしける。ゆへをいかことたづぬれば、比みやこに、ねずみがしのゆきければ、ねこともあまたかつへしにしければ、かくていたづらにしなんより、かうや山にまいりつゝ出家しつゝ.] Tokuda takes this as a reference to events earlier in the tale – the mice are starving because they no longer dare to steal food after the mass slaughter of their compatriots – and therefore concludes that the scroll fragment in his possession more accurately approximates the corresponding section of the hypothetical ancestral text (Tokuda, “*Hakubyō ‘Nezumi no sōshi emaki’ no shinshutsu dankan ni tsuite*,” 21-24).

While I find Tokuda’s interpretation of this passage to be plausible, I do not uncritically accept his assertion that it is necessarily more “faithful” to the ancestral text than the corresponding passage in the Harvard *Nezumi no sōshi*. This claim rests on the problematic supposition that the reproduction of manuscripts inevitably entails a one-way process of degradation from the original, “true” text, unwittingly perpetrated by incompetent copyists. While I do not dispute the reality of scribal error, we must also allow for the possibility of scribal *emendation*, as well as the attendant possibility that some deliberately introduced alterations may strike us as genuine improvements upon the original. Simply because the Tokuda *Nezumi no sōshi* contains meaningful narrative elements not present in the Harvard *Nezumi no sōshi*, we cannot assume that it *retained* those elements; it may have *gained* them instead.

⁷³ Tokuda, “*Haabaado Daigaku fuzoku bijutsukan zō hakubyō ‘Nezumi no sōshi’ emaki ni tsuite*,” 56-57. Tokuda also notes the similarity between the Harvard *Nezumi no sōshi* and *Suzume no hosshin*, an *otogizōshi* about the spiritual awakening of a bereaved sparrow.

⁷⁴ D.E. Mills, “The Tale of the Mouse,” 156. The text contains a reference to the shamisen, an instrument introduced to Japan in the latter half of the sixteenth century; additionally, one of the illustrations depicts a street performer in Portuguese costume. From this, we can infer that the original work could not have been composed before 1560, and most likely originated in the early seventeenth century, when both the shamisen and *nanbanjin* dress came into vogue.

narrative in favor of Socratic dialogue. D.E. Mills characterizes the Cambridge *Nezumi no sōshi* as a kind of *hōgo*, or sermon, and suggests that it may have been intended to instruct novices. The text conveys basic knowledge about Chinese classics and Buddhist doctrine, all thoroughly sugar-coated—or rather, fur-coated: the speaker holding forth on these subjects is a mouse.

The story, such as it is, begins with a Zen priest being startled from his meditation by the scurrying of mice. Just as he is on the verge of losing his temper, he “recall[s] the guidance one is given about how to meditate in the midst of distractions,” and imagines himself as a mouse, engaged in a debate with his human self. “Surely you’re aware that what you are doing is wrong?” the priest asks in his human form, but his rodent alter ego pleads extenuating circumstances, enumerating the hardships that mice must endure and arguing that they steal only because it is necessary for survival. Humans, he continues, routinely commit far greater wickedness than any mouse. (The mouse also takes a dim view of cats, but the cats have no opportunity to offer a rebuttal, as they do in the thematically similar *Neko no sōshi*.) At the end of his sermon, the mouse scampers off into a hole, and the priest awakens in his own body, musing that he now knows “what it must have been like for Chuang-tzu when he found himself changed into a butterfly,” and resolving to cultivate a greater appreciation of mice. As with the Harvard *Nezumi no sōshi*, the tale closes with a kōan-like verse expounding the principle of non-duality. Despite its elevated subject matter, this final poem is peppered with mouse-related puns, as are the several others that precede it.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Summary and quotations taken from Mills’ translation in *ibid.*, 158-168. Mills’ typeset

Returning from Cambridge to Harvard, we find yet another scroll with the conjectural title *Nezumi no sōshi*. Because the paintings in this scroll are convincingly attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu (1434-1525), I will henceforth refer to it as the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi*.⁷⁶ As this attribution implies, the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* predates the works discussed above by at least a century; the art historian Miya Tsugio believes it to be a relatively early entry in Mitsunobu's oeuvre, most likely produced during the Bunmei era (1469-1487).⁷⁷ Melissa McCormick, on the other hand, pronounces it "in all likelihood . . . a close copy of Mitsunobu original."⁷⁸ Whether or not Mitsunobu was indeed the artist of the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi*, there can be little question that the work was created under

transcription of the Cambridge *Nezumi no sōshi* can be found in *Kokubungaku kenkyū shiryokan kiyō* vol. 5 (March 1979), 268-275.

⁷⁶ The attribution to Mitsunobu has been in place from at least the mid-Edo. A copy of the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* dated Jōkyō 5 (1688), currently owned by Miya Tsugio, names Tosa Mitsunobu as the original artist; a late-Edo copy of the same work in the collection of Fujii Takashi gives the same attribution. (Incidentally, both copies bear the title *Nezumi no sōshi*.) *Zōho kōko gafu*, a catalogue of Japanese paintings completed in 1882, contains an entry for a scroll by the name of *Nezumi no sōshi*, painted by Tosa Mitsunobu. Both Fujii and Miya consider the attribution to Mitsunobu to be plausible. In particular, Miya finds striking stylistic similarities between the work in question and *otogizōshi* known to have been painted by Mitsunobu, such as the 1487 *Seikōji engi emaki*. (Fujii Takashi, *Mikan otogizōshi-shū to kenkyū 1* [Toyohashi: Mikan Kokubun Shiryō Kankōkai, 1956]: 117-120; Miya Tsugio, "Nezumi no sōshi emaki," in *Tenjin engi emaki, Hachiman engi, Amewakahiko no sōshi, Nezumi no sōshi, Bakemono no sōshi, Shinshū Nihon emakimono zenshū* (SNEZ) sup. vol. II, ed. Shimada Shūjirō [Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1981], 36-39.)

⁷⁷ Miya, "Nezumi no sōshi emaki," 37-38.

⁷⁸ Melissa McCormick, *Tosa Mitsunobu and the Small Scroll in Medieval Japan*, 67. McCormick agrees with Miya that the poses of the serving women and the screen-painting landscapes in the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* closely resemble those in works definitively attributed to Mitsunobu. She argues, however, that the "excessively striated mist bands" and the "exaggeratedly unsteady hill line" betray the hand of a talented imitator, rather than Mitsunobu himself. (Miya, by contrast, presents the wavering ink outlines of the landscape as evidence supporting the attribution to Mitsunobu.) McCormick also claims that the "subject matter" of the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* – that is, interspecies romance – sets it apart from the trio of ko-e she views as genuinely attributable to Mitsunobu, namely *Utatane sōshi*, *Suzuriwari sōshi*, and *Jizōdō sōshi*. This is a frankly baffling statement, given that *Jizōdō sōshi* is itself an irui kon'in tale.

elite patronage, in accordance with elite tastes. The paintings are executed in orthodox yamato-e style, with great attention to landscape and architectural detail. The text, written in the classical courtly style epitomized by *Genji monogatari*, seems likewise designed to appeal to an aristocratic audience. The creators of the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* evidently favored quality over quantity: at roughly 170 inches and 1300 characters, it ranks among the shortest intact otogizōshi, even when compared to other miniature scrolls (*ko-e*) produced by the same atelier.⁷⁹ The story itself is correspondingly brief, offering an elliptical account of the ill-fated love affair between a mouse and a human woman.

In true classical fashion, the characters of the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* remain nameless; the heroine is identified only as the daughter of an elderly nun, living together with her mother in near-total isolation. Despite the spiritual avocation of the protagonist's mother, the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* bears no trace of the overt religious didacticism that characterizes the Harvard *Nezumi no sōshi* and the Cambridge *Nezumi no sōshi*. The levity of the latter two works is also nowhere in evidence. While most tales of interspecies marriage end unhappily, few maintain such an unremitting tone of melancholy as the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi*. From the first, the narrator paints a sympathetic but not especially flattering portrait of the heroine: because of her unremarkable looks, she remains unwed at the age of the twenty, much to her mother's consternation.

The daughter, too, longs for a companion to ease her loneliness. One autumn evening, as she sits pining on the veranda, a strange man approaches her uninvited and announces his

⁷⁹ Fujii Takashi, *Mikan otogizōshi to kenkyū I* (Toyohashi: Mikan Kokubun Shiryō Kankōkai, 1957), 116.

amorous intentions. The lady's alarm soon gives way to affection, and thereafter the man calls on her every night. Although the nun initially distrusts her daughter's mysterious suitor, whom she has never met, she reconciles herself to the situation as he continues to visit faithfully, often bringing valuable gifts. After the relationship has continued for several years, the lady agrees to formally introduce her lover to her mother. The meeting goes well enough, until the nun's pet cat pounces on and kills the young man—who, as it turns out, is not a man at all, but rather a giant mouse. Torn between horror and grief, the lady descends into utter despair.

The Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* is the first of two Muromachi-era tales about mice taking unwitting human brides. The second, composed approximately a century later, differs markedly from its predecessor in style and content, although here, too, the marriage of mouse and maiden is doomed to failure. The tale in question is preserved in no fewer than nine manuscripts; predictably, all of these have been given the title *Nezumi no sōshi*, although scholars typically refer to them as *Nezumi no Gon no Kami* (“The Mouse Gon no Kami”) or simply *Gon no Kami*. For obvious reasons, I will follow this convention. I will also postpone discussion of the variant forms of *Gon no Kami* until the third chapter, and at this juncture simply offer a synopsis of their common plot, which begins with the meeting of a mouse and a maiden. Oddly enough, this meeting is engineered by none other than the bodhisattva Kannon, who answers their mutual prayers for romance with a bit of unconventional matchmaking. The lady—unaware of Gon no Kami's true identity—is carried off to his mansion in a splendid bridal procession.

At this juncture, all versions of the tale show a bustling kitchen in Gon no Kami's manor, crowded with mice busily preparing for their master's wedding celebration. Although this glimpse into the domestic minutiae of Gon no Kami's household relates only tangentially to the central storyline, it offers scholars valuable insight into late Muromachi culinary practices⁸⁰ and regional colloquialisms. (In the speech captions interspersed throughout the illustrations, many of the serving-mice speak in lower-class eastern dialect.)⁸¹ For contemporary audiences, the attraction of the scene presumably lay in lighthearted irony: in the usual order of things, mice were anything but helpful in the kitchen—but in the *Gon no Kami* tales, they chop fish and pound rice, all while exchanging witty (and sometimes raunchy) banter. Surrounded by abundant material wealth and displaying perpetually high spirits, the mice appear to inhabit a kind of paradise.

The inherent instability of interspecies unions foreordains the loss of this paradise. One day, Gon no Kami leaves his wife alone in the mansion, and her solo explorations lead her to a room full of mice—an unsettling discovery made worse by the suspicion that her husband is one of their number. Gon no Kami's wife tests this hypothesis by setting a mousetrap; Gon no Kami is caught when he returns, revealing his true nature. Cursing

⁸⁰ Izumo Asako, “*Chūsei makki ni okeru tōgoku hōgen no isō – ‘Nezumi no sōshi emaki’ no kaishi o megutte,*” *Kokugo to kokubungaku* vol. 72, no. 11 (November 1995), 64-75. For further linguistic analysis of *Gon no Kami*, cf. Izumo, “‘*Nezumi no sōshi*’ *shohon no gachūshi ni okeru ninshōshi to keigo: seisa no kanten o chūshin ni,*” *Aoyama Gakuin Joshi Tanki Daigaku kiyō* vol. 50 (December 1996), 55-87; here, Izumo focuses on gendered speech patterns rather than regional dialects.

⁸¹ For discussion of the documentation of Muromachi food culture in *Gon no Kami*, cf. Kobayashi Yoshikazu and Tomiyasu Ikuko, “*Muromachi jidai shokubunka shiryō to shite ‘Nezumi no sōshi emaki’*” parts 1 and 2, in *Tezukayama Daigaku gendai seikatsu gakubu kiyō* vol. 3 (February 2007), 11-24 and vol. 4 (February 2008), 11-22.

Kannon for giving her a mouse for a husband, the lady flees, leaving Gon no Kami to almost die before his retainers free him from the trap. Like Hokotarō, Gon no Kami is so devastated by the loss of his wife that he resolves to become a monk. Also like Hokotarō, he crosses paths with a cat-turned-priest on his way to the monastery, a subplot closely resembling the latter half of the Harvard *Nezumi no sōshi*.⁸²

The illustrations in the various versions of *Gon no Kami* display differing degrees of technical proficiency, but all lack the intricate detail found in the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi*, and all suggest popular rather than elite production. The same holds true for the text. While works belonging to the younger of the two *Gon no Kami* lineages contain numerous allusions to *Genji monogatari*—most likely garnered from literary digests such as the fourteenth-century *Genji kokagami* (“A Little Mirror of Genji”)⁸³—the language lacks the pseudo-classical polish of the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi*, tending instead toward the contemporary and vernacular. All intact manuscripts of *Gon no Kami* intermingle tragedy and comedy, sometimes in rather jarring juxtaposition, although the location and content of the humor varies; a scene exploited for maximum pathos in one manuscript might be treated as farcical in another, and vice versa.⁸⁴ By contrast, in the two partial manuscripts of *Gon no Kami*, only the sections showing the bridal procession, the kitchen, and the wedding

⁸² Although the ending of *Gon no Kami* resembles that of the Harvard *Nezumi no sōshi* closely enough to preclude mere coincidence, the direction of the borrowing is unclear (Tokuda, “*Haabaado Daigaku fuzoku bijutsukan zō hakubyō ‘Nezumi no sōshi’ emaki ni tsuite*,” 59-60).

⁸³ Saitō Maori, “*Katami no waka – ‘Nezumi no sōshi’ shichū*,” *Kokubungaku kenkyū shiryōkan kiyō: bungaku kenkyū hen* vol. 37 (March 2011), 113.

⁸⁴ Sawai Daizō, “*Nezumi no sōshi (Nezumi no Gon no Kami)’ no josei to warai – shohon hikaku no katei kara*,” *Aichi Daigaku bungaku ronsō* vol. 135 (February 2007), 59-63.

celebration have survived. This seemingly selective preservation may be mere coincidence—but, as Sawai Daizō suggests, it might also show that later owners of these scrolls had little taste for the tale’s darker elements, and were primarily interested in lighthearted depictions of a rodent utopia.⁸⁵ Sawai’s hypothesis aligns with broader evidence of an emerging preference for stories about mice that ended happily—a criterion which almost inevitably precluded themes of interspecies marriage. Mice continued to appear in otogizōshi produced after *Gon no Kami*, but they no longer became romantically entangled with humans; instead, they courted other mice.

An otogizōshi in the collection of Kōshien University offers an early indication of the growing appetite for stories of mice living happily ever after with other mice. This scroll, which is called—what else?—*Nezumi no sōshi*, appears to slightly postdate all but the latest manuscripts of *Gon no Kami*. Based on her analysis of the clothing and household objects shown in the illustrations, Ryūsawa Aya proposes a date of origin between 1595 and 1624.⁸⁶

Although the Kōshien *Nezumi no sōshi* borrows key motifs from *Gon no Kami*, it depicts the courtship and marriage of two



Fig. 2 Detail of *Nezumi no sōshi*. Artist unknown. Late 16th/early 17th c. Handscroll; ink, color, and gold leaf on paper. Kōshien University.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 69-70.

⁸⁶ Ryūsawa Aya, “Kōshien Gakuin shozō ‘Nezumi no sōshi’ emaki ni tsuite,” *Biyō* vol. 4 (September 2008), 110.

mice, in what appears to be a world populated solely by animals;^(FIG. 2) humans play no role in the story. Unfortunately, the scroll was at some point severely damaged and inexpertly remounted, leaving only fragments of the text intact, and making it impossible to discuss the verbal dimension of the tale in any depth. Visually, however, the Kōshien *Nezumi no sōshi* deserves notice, even in its incomplete state. Like the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi*, it appears to be the work of an accomplished professional painter, possibly a member of the Tosa or Kanō school.⁸⁷ The quality of the scroll is apparent not only in its elaborate backgrounds and careful attention to detail, but also in its copious use of gold leaf; evidently it was produced for a patron of some means. Ryūsawa postulates that the intended audience may have been either aristocrats or high-ranking samurai, the groups most likely to appreciate the scroll's prominent depiction of such refined pursuits as flower arranging and tea ceremony.⁸⁸

As garbled as its text may be, there is little doubt that the Kōshien *Nezumi no sōshi* ends with the joyful union of two mice. By contrast, the joyful union of two mice serves as the prelude to a tale of adventure in a family of works known collectively as *Yahyōe nezumi*. Scholars speculate that the ancestral form of *Yahyōe nezumi* originated in the late sixteenth century, although all known copies of the tale date to the early or mid- seventeenth century.⁸⁹ Like *Gon no Kami*, *Yahyōe nezumi* appears to have enjoyed relatively wide circulation, although unlike *Gon no Kami*, it did not remain confined to scroll format. The

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Matsunami Hisako, "Otogizōshi 'Yahyōe nezumi' no chiriteki sekai," *Ōsaka Aoyama Tankidai Kokubun* vol. 17 (March 2001), 1; Yang X. Jie, "Shironezumi Yahyōe monogatari' ni chūsei no gensō o yomu: kaiga hyōgen o tegakari ni," in *Nihon bungaku no sōzōbutsu: shoseki, shahon, emaki*, ed. Melissa McCormick and Suzuki Jun (Tokyo: Kokubungaku Kenkyū Shiryōkan, 2009), 114.

tale exists in six manuscripts, which can be separated into three groups, based both on content and format: three Nara ehon, two full-sized scrolls (*ōgata emaki*), and one two-volume miniature scroll (*ko-e*). The two *ōgata emaki* are considered the oldest extant manuscripts of *Yahyōe nezumi*, while the slightly younger Nara ehon are thought to belong to a parallel line of descent from a common source. Younger still is the *ko-e Yahyōe nezumi* owned by Keiō University, which is tentatively dated to the Kanbun era (1661-1673) and shows similarities to both the *ōgata emaki* and the Nara ehon.⁹⁰ Despite its comparatively recent date of origin, the Keiō *Yahyōe nezumi* retains several typically medieval characteristics, such as the inclusion of speech captions in the illustrations, suggesting that it may have been copied from a relatively early form of the tale.⁹¹

The New York Public Library’s Spencer Collection holds the better-studied of the two *ōgata emaki*, which is burdened with the rather cumbersome title *Nezumi no sōshi shusse monogatari*, or “The Tale of the Mouse: A Story of Success.”⁹² The second *ōgata emaki*, owned by Ōsaka Aoyama Junior College and long relegated to comparative obscurity, has been assigned the provisional title *Nehyōe nezumi*. (While the Nara ehon and the *ko-e* versions of *Yahyōe nezumi* refer to the tale’s protagonist as Yahyōe, both *ōgata emaki* give his name as Nehyōe, probably in accordance with the ancestral text.) Although the Spencer *Nehyōe*

⁹⁰ Matsunami, “*Otogizōshi ‘Yahyōe nezumi’ no chiriteki sekai*,” 1.

⁹¹ Yang, “*Shironezumi Yahyōe monogatari’ ni chūsei no gensō o yomu*,” 114.

⁹² This title, which was probably added by one of the scroll’s later owners during the Edo period, supporting Ōshima’s contention that the phrase “*Nezumi no sōshi*” was commonly used as a label of genre. Incidentally, the digital gallery of the New York Public Library lists *Nezumi no sōshi shusse monogatari* as simply *Nezumi no sōshi emaki*, and the scroll was recently displayed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art under the latter title.

nezumi and the Aoyama *Nehyōe nezumi* differ in certain minor details, they resemble one another closely, and are clearly not far removed from their common source. Ōsaka Aoyama Junior College also possesses a second copy of *Yahyōe nezumi*, this one a Nara ehon with a Kan'ei 9 (1632) postscript, making it one of the few Nara ehon that can be precisely dated. Perhaps even more significant, however, are the postscripts found in the other two Nara ehon editions of *Yahyōe nezumi*, both of which leave their readers with a reminder to “view this [book] at the beginning of spring”—that is, on New Year’s Day. A similar injunction appears at the end of the Spencer and Aoyama *Nehyōe nezumi*.⁹³ Like so many other books and scrolls throughout Japanese history, *Yahyōe nezumi* was both tale and talisman; more specifically, it was thought to have the power to usher in a prosperous new year. A seasonal haiku from the anthology *Hechimagusa* (“Sponge Gourd Scribblings”), compiled by Takase Sen’an in Kanbun 1 (1661), testifies to the prevalence of this belief:

<i>Kakizome o</i>	The first calligraphy of the new year
<i>kotoshi wa nezumi</i>	Perhaps this year it should be
<i>no sōshi kana</i>	<i>Nezumi no sōshi</i> ⁹⁴

The auspicious properties attributed to *Yahyōe nezumi* accord with a larger complex of folklore concerning mice. As the first of the twelve branches of the Chinese zodiac, the mouse was a fitting symbol of propitious beginnings.⁹⁵ Moreover, mice—particularly white mice—were believed to be messengers of Daikokuten (Skt. Mahākāla), one of the seven gods

⁹³ Mizutani Aki, “*Otogizōshi ni egakareta ikai – ‘Kakuresato’ to ‘Yahyōe nezumi’ o chūshin ni,*” *Nara ehon – emaki kenkyū* vol. 6 (September 2008), 25; Matsunami Hisako, *Otogizōshi-shū: gijinbutsu no sekai* (Kyoto: Dōhōsha, 1996), 172.

⁹⁴ 書初を今年は鼠の草子かな. Satake Akihiro, “*Tōji no tō,*” in *Satake Akihiro shū IV: kankyo to ransei*, ed. Imanishi Yūichirō et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2009), 191.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 201; Ryūsawa, “*Kōshien Gakuin shozō ‘Nezumi no sōshi’ emaki ni tsuite,*” 111; Hasegawa Megumi, *Nezumi to Nihon Bungaku* (Tokyo: Jiji Tsūshinsha, 1979), 190-192.

of good fortune. The association between mice and Daikokuten acts as a driving force in the plot of *Yahyōe nezumi*, which proceeds roughly as follows: Yahyōe—or, in the ōgata emaki, Nehyōe—a white mouse who lives in a temple stupa in Kyoto, woos and weds the daughter of a higher-ranking mouse. (The wedding feast consists of a massive raid on a human larder—the first indication that, unlike in the Kōshien *Nezumi no sōshi*, the story will stray beyond the bounds of the rodent world.) For some time, Yahyōe and his wife live in perfect happiness, together with their increasingly numerous offspring.

A pall falls over this idyllic state of affairs when Yahyōe’s wife becomes ill during her latest pregnancy and develops a craving for goose meat. Ever the obliging husband, Yahyōe goes out hunting; when he spies a likely looking target, he strips off his clothes, abandons his bipedal posture, and pounces. Just as he does, the goose takes flight, and Yahyōe is left with no choice but to cling on and be carried away. When the goose finally lands, he finds himself stranded in the northern wilderness of Tokiwa. Guided first by a field mouse—although he cringes at the thought of being mistaken for one himself—and then by a monkey, Yahyōe makes his way to a human town. There, he wanders into the house of a merchant named Saemon. Saemon’s wife spots the white mouse among the rafters, and, taking this as a good omen, points it out to her husband:

“Hey, Saemon. The god of good fortune has come to us. Look at that white mouse!”

When Saemon looked up, there really was a white mouse. Pressing his hands together, he exclaimed, “Oh, how wonderful! How lucky! When Daikokuten gives his blessing to a household and bestows good fortune upon it, he sends a white mouse. Quickly, quickly, make offerings!” His joy knew no bounds. After that, first fruits of all kinds were offered to Daikokuten and the white mouse, and there

was never any shortage
[of offerings].⁹⁶ (FIG. 3)

Months pass, and although Yahyōe's human hosts continue to pamper him, he longs for his wife and children. At last, Yahyōe sees an opportunity to return home when Saemon plans to travel to Kyoto.



Fig. 3 Detail of *Yahyōe nezumi*. Artist unknown. Mid 17th c. Handscroll; ink, color, and gold leaf on paper. Keiō University.

Yahyōe appears to his human benefactor in a dream and begs to be taken along; eager to remain in favor with Daikokuten, Saemon obliges. Thus, Yahyōe is carried to the capital in Saemon's luggage and reunited with his overjoyed family. As a token of their gratitude, Yahyōe and his wife and children journey to Tokiwa to present Saemon and his wife with gold and silver. Like Saemon's hospitality, Yahyōe's honorable conduct does not go unrewarded: he is summoned by the wolf, the emperor of the beasts, and granted a special title. Both Yahyōe and Saemon live the rest of their long lives in supreme comfort, watching their fortunes and families multiply.

After transitioning from romance to odyssey, *Yahyōe nezumi* ultimately develops into a tale of *ongaeshi*, or the repayment of kindness—a trope first introduced from continental Buddhist sources, and used to encourage compassionate treatment of animals as early as the

⁹⁶ 「なう左衛門殿。これへこそ福の神はましましたれ。あの白鼠御覧ぜよ」とありければ、左衛門殿、うち仰きしてみれば、誠に白鼠あり。手を合はせ、「あら、有難や。めだたやな。大黒天の御恵みありて、福を与へ給ふ時、白鼠をその家に放させ給ふなり。急ぎ急ぎ福祀りいたし候へ」とて祝ひ給ふことかぎりなし。その後は、万の物の初穂を大黒天と白鼠と言ひて供ふるほどに、乏しきこともなし。Matsumoto Ryūshin, ed., *Otogizōshi-shū*, *Shinchō Nihon Koten Shūsei* vol. 34 (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1980), 351-352.

Nara period.⁹⁷ However, *Yahyōe nezumi* downplays the moralistic aspect of the ongaeshi theme, instead emphasizing the exorbitantly good fortunes of its heroes. In essence, the tale has not one but two happy endings, one for the man and one for the mouse; perhaps this reduplication was intended to satisfy audiences hoping to benefit from the story's sympathetic magic. In keeping with their function as prosperity charms, all six manuscripts of *Yahyōe nezumi* are liberally decorated with gold leaf; while the illustrations lack the artistic sophistication of the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* or the Kōshien *Nezumi no sōshi*, they reflect a considerable investment of time and effort. In all of its extant incarnations, *Yahyōe nezumi* was produced as a luxury item, most likely aimed at upwardly mobile townspeople like Saemon⁹⁸—although members of this demographic could no doubt identify equally well with Yahyōe, who is himself a successful social climber.

Yahyōe nezumi is not the only tale to build on the folkloric connection between Daikokuten and mice; the same theme features prominently in a group of tales generally referred to as *Kakurezato*, or “The Hidden Village.”⁹⁹ Unlike *Yahyōe nezumi*, *Kakurezato* is believed to be purely a product of the early modern period, without any medieval

⁹⁷ Hoyt Long, “Grateful Animal or Spiritual Being?: Buddhist Gratitude Tales and Changing Conceptions of Deer in Early Japan,” in *JAPANimals: History and Culture in Japan’s Animal Life*, ed. Gregory Pflugfelder and Brett Walker (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 26-27.

⁹⁸ Taguchi, Taguchi Fumiya, “‘*Gijinka’ no zuzōgaku, sono monogatari hyōgen no kanōsei ni tsuite: otōgizōshi ‘Yahyōe nezumi’ (Keiō Gijuku Toshokan zō) wo shutaru taizō to shite,*” *Bijutsushi* vol. 55, no. 2 (March 2006), 334.

⁹⁹ The *Kakurezato* discussed here should not be confused with an entirely unrelated otogizōshi of the same title, this one based on the Chinese “Peach Spring” legend. (Hamanaka Osamu, “*Kakurezato: beppon,*” *Otogizōshi jiten* 195-196). Nor should it be confused with the Noh play named *Kakurezato*. Like the otogizōshi discussed here, this play draws on the folklore regarding hidden mouse villages, although it develops this theme in a more melancholy direction (Hayakawa Junsaburō, ed. *Enkyoku jūshichijō yōkyoku sue no hyakuban*. [Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1912], 456-457).

antecedents. Four copies of the tale currently exist: a woodblock print *e-iri hon* in two volumes (the first of which has been lost), belonging to the Tokyo Metropolitan Central Library's Kaga Collection and entitled *Kakurezato no monogatari*; a two-volume Nara e-hon, belonging to the University of Tokyo and entitled *Kakurezato*; an incomplete illustrated scroll, belonging to Keiō University and entitled *Nezumi no sōshi*; and a woodblock print *e-iri hon*, belonging to Waseda University and entitled *Ebisu Daikoku kassen* ("The War Between Ebisu and Daikoku"). Of these, only the Kaga *Kakurezato* is clearly dated: the frontispiece states that it was published in Meireki 2 (1656) by Yomeya Jinbei, a printing house located in Kyoto. Contrary to any facile notions about the inexorable forward march of technology, the Kaga *Kakurezato* is thought to be the earliest existing copy of *Kakurezato*, and possibly the ancestral text itself. The Tokyo and Keiō *Kakurezato*, both produced by paintbrush rather than printing block, bear a close verbal and visual resemblance to the Kaga *Kakurezato*; however, despite their ostensibly "older" medium, they contain mistranscriptions and lacunae absent in the Kaga *Kakurezato*, suggesting a greater distance from the original.¹⁰⁰

As Peter Kornicki indicates, woodblock printing never gained complete hegemony over previously dominant technologies of textual transmission, and throughout the Edo period "it was surprisingly common . . . for manuscript copies to be made of printed books."¹⁰¹ In some instances, this practice functioned as an early form of textual piracy, allowing enterprising readers to acquire favorite works without the inconvenience of actually

¹⁰⁰ Shiokawa Kazuhiro, "'Kakurezato' no kenkyū: shohon o chūshin ni," *Rikkyō Daigaku Nihon bungaku* vol. 105 (December 2010), 193-195.

¹⁰¹ Peter F. Kornicki, *The Book in Japan: A Cultural History from the Beginnings to the Nineteenth Century* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 103.

purchasing them. However, considering the high material quality of the Tokyo and Keiō *Kakurezato*—both are ornamented with gold leaf, and the latter may have been inscribed by the noted calligrapher Asakura Jūken¹⁰²—it is difficult to imagine that the transfer from print to manuscript was undertaken as a cost-saving measure. In this instance, the advantage of the manuscript format derived from aesthetic rather than economic factors: painting opened up possibilities foreclosed by the monochrome woodblock printing of the mid-seventeenth century.¹⁰³ Given the lavish production of the Tokyo and Keiō *Kakurezato*, we might even speculate that, like *Yahyōe nezumi*, these manuscripts were believed to possess felicitic powers tied to their value as physical artifacts.

Judging from stylistic evidence, the Tokyo and Keiō *Kakurezato* postdate the Kaga *Kakurezato* by roughly a decade, and are in turn slightly postdated by *Ebisu Daikoku kassen*. Under this new title, *Kakurezato* once more returned to printed format, albeit in a somewhat truncated condition. While *Ebisu Daikoku kassen* unmistakably derives from *Kakurezato*, it dispenses with the original frame narrative (which, as the latter title implies, involves a hidden village), and proceeds immediately to the thick of the action (which, as the former title implies, involves a war between Daikokuten and his fellow god of good fortune, Ebisu). In its unabbreviated form, *Kakurezato* leads into its central plot with a fantastic travelogue, which—like *Yahyōe nezumi*—follows the progress of a stranger lost in a strange land. In

¹⁰² Ishikawa Tōru, “Keiō Gijuku Toshokan-zō ‘Kakurezato’: kaidai, honkoku,” *Mita kokubun* vol. 37 (March 2003), 31.

¹⁰³ Sekiba Takeshi, “Otogizōshi no hanpon ni tsuite,” in *Miryoku no otogizōshi*, ed. Ishikawa Tōru (Tokyo: Yayoi Shoten, 2000), 44-45.

Kakurezato, however, the bemused wanderer is not a mouse among men, but rather a man among mice. While walking at night through Kohata Field, the unnamed protagonist hears the sound of voices, which he follows to a large hole in a hillside:

The human voices were coming from within. Perhaps this was an old tomb, the lair of a fox intent on deceiving humans. Or perhaps it was a hidden village inhabited by mice – just the other day, he'd heard that there was something like that in this field. Either way, it would make for quite the story when he got back to the capital. *If only I could see what's inside*, he thought, and made up his mind.¹⁰⁴

After walking into the hole for half a furlong, the man comes to an open, sunlit space, and from there to a row of imposing gates. At first he imagines that he has arrived at some exotic fairyland, “like the world inside Fei Changfang’s jug,” but when he peers through one of the gates, the sight that greets him is decidedly domestic: a kitchen full of workers chopping fish and pounding rice. Indeed, it would be an entirely mundane tableau, were it not for the fact that the workers are all mice.^(FIG. 4) For some time, the man wanders about, marveling at the gem-encrusted architecture. Like the residents of Gon no Kami’s mansion, the mice living in the hidden village appear to enjoy perpetual cheer and prosperity, at least until a messenger arrives with alarming news: Ebisu has declared war on the mice. (Along with Daikokuten, Ebisu was one of the seven gods of good fortune, as well as the patron deity of all things maritime.)

The messenger then launches into a lengthy explanation of the *casus belli*. Some time ago, a group of young mice living in Settsu province stole fish offered at Ebisu’s shrine, sparking

¹⁰⁴ そのうちにこそ人のものいふこゑこそきこゆれ。そも是は人をまよはすきつねのすむ(sic)なるふる塚にてやあるらん。もしひごろきゝつたへしこの野べには、ねずみのすむかくれざとのありといふ。ともあれ、みやこにかへりての物がたりにもなれかし。内に見ばやとおもふ心つきて。Shimazu Hisamoto, ed., *Kinko shōsetsu shinsan*, 1928 (Tokyo: Yūseidō Shuppan, 1983), 69-70.



Fig. 4 Detail of *Nezumi no sōshi (Kakurezato)*. Artist unknown. Mid 17th c. Handscroll; ink, light color, and gold leaf on paper. Keiō University.

a series of escalating hostilities with the shrine’s guardian lions (*komainu*). Outraged, Ebisu dispatched a complaint to Daikokuten, the protector of the mice, justifying his argument with quotations from classical sources: “According to the Book of Rites, one keeps a cat in order to catch mice . . . Moreover, according to *Tsurezuregusa*, ‘These are things we would be better off without: thieves in the realm, and mice in the house.’ Mice are the greatest of all calamities.”¹⁰⁵ Daikokuten rebutted, urging Ebisu to consider the matter in perspective:

“Nowhere is it decreed that cats must eat mice. People do not have to eat fish; they do so because of fisherman like Ebisu. Fleas and lice feed on people; therefore, people are born for the sake of fleas and lice. As for things that we would be better off without, a great many come to mind before mice. Instead of mice, we would be better off without such

¹⁰⁵ さればらいきに、ねこをやしなふことは、ねずみをとらしめんためなりといへり...又つれづれぐさにも、なくてもよかんもの、くに[sic]ぬす人、いゑにねずみといふならば、わざわひのものといふ、此ものにきわまれり。Ibid., 78.

Ebisu does not quote the corresponding passage from *Tsurezuregusa* with any great accuracy, nor does he remain faithful to the spirit of the original text, in which Kenkō employed animal metaphors to critique human society.

calamities as droughts, floods, earthquakes, lightning, and fires.”¹⁰⁶

This appeal to relativism only further inflamed Ebisu, who responded by “trampling every last mouse in Settsu province to death”¹⁰⁷ and vowing to do likewise to all mice elsewhere. To this end, Ebisu traveled to the Dragon King’s underwater palace and gathered an army of fish; Daikokuten responded in kind, recruiting troops of mice from all across Japan. This is why the messenger has come to the hidden village: to rally the mice living there to the defense of their brethren.

Eager to display their valor, the mice don their armor and hurry to the battlefield. The two armies face off, headed by Ebisu and Daikokuten, who trade insults with one another. Before any actual fighting can occur, Hotei—yet another of the seven gods of good fortune—happens by and negotiates a truce. At the subsequent banquet, Ebisu and Daikokuten engage in a friendly sumo match. However, just as the wrestling begins, the man suddenly awakens to discover that it was all a dream. This rather abrupt conclusion is capped off with an abrupt equally declaration that the man and all his descendants were “blessed with good fortune unto endless generations, for the next fifty years, for the next century, as unceasing as an ox’s drool, as unfailing as the leaves of an evergreen tree.”¹⁰⁸ Little wonder that the man’s dream should presage such happiness, laden as it is with propitious motifs: sumo, no fewer than three gods of good fortune, and, of course, a literal army of mice. As

¹⁰⁶ ねこはねずみをくらふものとさだまりたるいはれなし。人はかならずうをくうものならず。ゑびすのごとくれうしをするものゝあるゆえ也。のみ、しらみの人をくらふ、人はのみ、しらみのためにむまれたる也。又なくともくしからぬものねずみにまさりてかずおほし。ひやけ、大水、ぢしん、かみなり、せうもうのわざはひなどは、ねずみよりなをなくとよからん。 *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁰⁷ 津のくにのねずみどもをことごとくふみころし。 *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁰⁸ うしのよたれのはてもなし、松のはのちりうせず、つきぬ御代こそ、めてたけれ。 *Ibid.*, 83.

previously indicated, part of the attraction of *Kakurezato* may have lain in the implicit promise that those who saw the tale on paper would receive the same blessings as the man who saw it in his dreams.

The appeal of *Kakurezato* did not rest solely upon its possible function as a good luck charm. As disjointed and anticlimactic as the tale may seem to modern sensibilities, for contemporary audiences it offered a clever pastiche of familiar fiction and folklore. As indicated by the explicit allusion to Fei Changfang’s jug, the narrator’s entrance into the hidden village of the mice draws on a long line of Chinese and Japanese stories about humans venturing into enchanted realms, most notably the legend of Urashimatarō.¹⁰⁹ The scene of

Daikokuten and Ebisu wrestling derives from an otogizōshi known as *Daikokumai*, an auspicious tale (*shūgimono*) from the late Muromachi.¹¹⁰ (FIG. 4) However, in *Daikokumai*, Ebisu and Daikokuten—accompanied by



Fig. 5 Detail of *Daikokumai* (first of two scrolls). Artist unknown. Early 17th c. Handscroll; ink, color, and gold leaf on paper. National Institute of Japanese Literature.

¹⁰⁹ The narrator’s *exit* from the hidden village—to wit, awakening and realizing that it was all a dream—is also a standard storytelling device. Perhaps in an attempt to shore up its rather abrupt ending, *Kakurezato* explicitly compares the narrator’s experience to Zhuangzi’s dream of being a butterfly and Lu Sheng’s “golden millet dream.” Neither of these allusions is particularly fitting, but they both confer a certain aura of literary legitimacy.

¹¹⁰ Shiokawa, “*Kakuresato’ no kenkyū*,” 94-95.

their respective armies of fish and mice—work in concert to defend the hero of the tale from bandits. By recasting the two gods as rivals instead of allies, *Kakurezato* sharpens the edges of a well-worn trope. Moreover, the conflict between Ebisu and Daikokuten creates an opportunity to introduce elements from another popular genre: *gigunkimono*, or parodies of military epics depicting wars between various animal factions. Like many other works in this category, *Kakurezato* focuses on the spectacle of animal warriors preparing for battle and comes to a resolution without any actual bloodshed.¹¹¹

Above all, however, *Kakurezato* stands on the shoulders of earlier fiction about mice. The concept of a parallel rodent society built in the shadow of human society was hardly unprecedented: many tales about mice, including the majority of those discussed above, begin from this premise. Several scholars have observed that *Kakurezato*'s first depiction of the mice living in the hidden village—that is, as cheerful workers in a massive kitchen—hearkens back to *Gon no Kami*. (Significantly, the kitchen scene in *Gon no Kami* appears to have been preferentially preserved in partial manuscripts of the tale, and strikingly similar scenes occur in the Kōshien *Nezumi no sōshi* and the Spencer and Aoyama *Nehyōe nezumi*. For reasons that will be discussed more fully below, the image of mice as miniature cooks clearly struck a chord with contemporary audiences.) I would further propose that *Kakurezato* incorporates yet another recurrent trope in literature about mice—namely, apologism on their behalf. Ebisu and Daikokuten's lengthy debate regarding the relative merits and demerits of

¹¹¹ Other seventeenth-century otogizōshi of this type include *Uo Taiheiki* (“The Taiheiki of the Fish”) and *Keiso monogatari* (“The Tale of the Chickens and the Mice”).

rodentkind recalls the Cambridge *Nezumi no sōshi* and *Neko no sōshi*.¹¹² While comparison reveals that neither of these works made any direct textual contributions to *Kakurezato* (or, indeed, to one another), the thematic overlap nonetheless deserves notice. At the very least, it is apparent that seventeenth-century audiences were capable of entertaining—and being entertained by—arguments in defense of mice.

Among the works generally recognized as otogizōshi, *Kakurezato* would be the last to bear the title *Nezumi no sōshi*. This is unsurprising, given that *Kakurezato* was produced during the twilight of otogizōshi, insofar as we can speak of the twilight of a genre retroactively delimited by modern scholars. The disappearance of otogizōshi, however, did not preordain the extinction of the fictional animals that inhabited them; like their real-world counterparts, fictional mice proved endlessly adaptable, and continued to serve as a source of literary and artistic inspiration throughout the Edo period and beyond. The stock of visual and narrative motifs that built up around mice in otogizōshi would for the most part carry over into *kusazōshi*, commercially printed picture books produced from the late seventeenth century onwards. In particular, *kusazōshi* about hidden mouse villages and weddings between mice proved to be perennial favorites; representative works include *Nezumi nenjū gyōji* (“Mouse Celebrations Throughout the Year,” 1681), *Nezumi no hanami* (“The Flower-Viewing of the Mice,” 1716), and, most notably, a string of books entitled *Nezumi no yomeiri* (“The Wedding of the Mice”) ^(FIG. 6) or some close variant thereof, produced from the late seventeenth through

¹¹² *Neko no sōshi* particularly resembles *Kakurezato* in that both address the question of whether cats are bound by nature to eat mice. Additionally, both blame young mice for committing mischief, presumably on the grounds that their youth constitutes a mitigating factor.



Fig. 6 Pages from *Nezumi yomeiri*. Published by Tsuruya Kiemon; artist unknown. Late 17th c. Bound book; monochrome woodblock print on paper. National Diet Library.

the mid-nineteenth century.¹¹³

Over the two centuries that separated the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* from *Kakurezato*, otogizōshi about mice underwent a striking shift in emphasis. Stories driven by the troublesome and sometimes tragic interactions between mice and humans gave way to stories showcasing the cozily domestic pleasures of an all-mouse society; if the mouse and the human worlds happened to intersect, as in *Yahyōe nezumi* and *Kakurezato*, the results were felicitous rather than fatal. The species gap continued to widen in kusazōshi, as humans faded

¹¹³ Morishita Masako, “*Akahon ‘Nezumi no yomeiri’ ni miru kyōiku teki ichi to tayōsei,*” *Yōji no kyōiku* vol. 83, no. 1 (January 1984), 43; Koike Tōgorō, “*‘Nezumi no yomeiri’ to jidō no kokoro,*” *Yōji no kyōiku* vol. 37, no. 6 (June 1937), 4-14.

from the picture altogether, leaving behind a lilliputian utopia.

The mice inhabiting this “rodentopia” differed from their flesh-and-blood counterparts not only in their characterization (which endowed them with a basically human psychology), but also in their coloration. Lower-ranking mice might be gray or brown, but white mice occupied the uppermost echelons of the imagined murine society and played the most prominent narrative roles. The Harvard *Yahyōe* constitutes a partial exception to this rule; while the titular hero is a white mouse, his wife—the daughter of a lord, and hence his social superior—has black fur. All other versions of the tale, however, extend Yahyōe’s whiteness to his entire family.¹¹⁴ Indeed, in the Keiō manuscript, Yahyōe, lost in the wilderness, frets over the possibility that sunburn will darken his fur. In actuality, the privileged position imputed to white mice did not arise simply through analogy with human society, in which paleness signified limited sun exposure and hence luxury. Long-standing belief held that anomalously-colored animals, particularly albinos, possessed numinous qualities.¹¹⁵ By this logic, mice, which were sacred to Daikokuten, would of course become even more sacred if they happened to be white.

We have already seen evidence of the reverence accorded to white mice in the *Yahyōe* tales, and non-fictional sources provide corroboration. In *Honchō shokkan* (“Culinary Mirror of the Realm”), a 1697 encyclopedia of medicinal foods, the physician Hitsudai Hitomi documents the curative applications of various mouse-derived products; this accomplished, he describes another—and to his mind, less rational—use for certain members of the species:

¹¹⁴ Yang, “*Shironezumi Yahyōe monogatari’ ni chūsei no gensō o yomu*,” 115-116.

¹¹⁵ Hoshino Yukihiko, *Kitsune no bungakushi* (Tokyo: Shintensha, 1995), 20-21.

“According to vulgar belief, white mice are messengers of Daikokuten, so they are kept as pets and celebrated as ‘lucky mice.’”¹¹⁶ Hitomi sneers at this superstition, pointing out that human hair goes white as vital energies wane with age; thus, he concludes, “White mice are simply ordinary mice grown old.”¹¹⁷

The “vulgar” folk whom Hitomi criticizes would not necessarily have perceived any contradiction between the notion of white mice as supernatural and white mice as superannuated; Hitomi himself writes that “lucky mice” were said to live for a thousand years. Like albinism, advanced age was believed to grant animals extraordinary abilities. The earliest known application of this principle to mice appears in a tale from *Konjaku monogatari-shū*, “How the Mice Living in the Roof of a Temple in India Gained Benefit from Hearing the Sutras.” (The ‘benefit’ in question is immediate rebirth in the Trāyastriṃśa heaven, without passage through a human incarnation.) The tale’s primary emphasis rests on the salvific power of the Lotus Sutra; presumably any creature that happened to be living in the temple roof would have derived equal benefit from passive exposure to the monks’ chanting. However, the narrator does interject a bit of trivia regarding mice *qua* mice:

In the outer canon [i.e., the non-Buddhist canon], it is said that white mice live for three hundred years. When they reach the age of one hundred years, their fur turns white, and they are able to foretell good fortune and ill fortune a year in advance, and to perceive felicity and calamity from a thousand *li* away.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ 白者俚俗謂大國天之使而畜之相祀稱福鼠。Hitomi Hitsudai, *Honchō shokkan* vol. 11 (Edo and Osaka: Hiranoshi Denzaemon, 1697), 29.

¹¹⁷ 福鼠亦老鼠首鼠之屬也。Ibid.

¹¹⁸ *Konjaku mongogatari-shū* 4.XIX: 抑モ外典ニ云フ様。白キ鼠ハ命三百歳有リ。一百歳ヨリ身ノ色白ク成ス。其後ハ善ク一年ノ内ノ吉凶ノ事ヲ知り、千里ノ内ノ善惡ノ事ヲ悟ル。其ノ名ヲバ神鼠ト云フ。Nishikawa Masayuki et al., ed., *Konjaku monogatari. Kokushi taiki* vol. 16 (Tokyo: Keizai Zasshisha, 1901), 192.

The “outer canon” cited is Ge Hong’s alchemical treatise *Baopuzi* (“Embracing Simplicity,” ca. 317),¹¹⁹ which describes a world caught in a state of constant metamorphic flux, cycling through an intricate sequence of improbable transmutations. (Elsewhere, Ge Hong states that sparrows become clams, alligators become tigers, oysters become fireflies, and mice become quails.)¹²⁰ Although *Konjaku* demonstrates a relatively early familiarity with Chinese claims about the mystic powers of mice, at least among elite circles, this knowledge did not generate any particular interest until Daikokuten rose to prominence as an object of devotion, bringing his murine messengers along on his coattails.¹²¹

An Indic deity imported by way of China and customarily enshrined in monastery kitchens, Daikokuten attracted broad-based devotion in the Muromachi era thanks to the growing population of urban tradespeople.¹²² There is little mystery as to why Daikokuten—usually depicted standing atop bales of rice and carrying a sack laden with treasure^(FIG. 7)—would appeal to this demographic. The rationale behind Daikokuten’s association with mice is less apparent, although scholars have proposed numerous theories. One early explanation,

¹¹⁹ *Baopuzi*, inner chapter three: 鼠滿百歲則色白，善憑人而卜，名曰『仲』，能知一年中吉凶及千里外事。

¹²⁰ Roel Sterckx, *The Animal and the Daemon in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York, 2002), 203.

¹²¹ The Kakuichibon *Heike* (c. 1372) does contain an episode attaching premonitory significance to the behavior of mice; in the third chapter of the fifth scroll, a mouse makes a nest in a horse’s tail, portending the downfall of the Taira. However, the harbinger has more to do with the directional symbolism of the Twelve Branches than with the prophetic abilities of mice themselves. Interestingly, it is a later variant of *Heike*, *Genpei seisuiiki*, that first identifies mice as messengers of Daikokuten, although the association is not entirely a positive one: unlike later sources, *Genpei seisuiiki* depicts Daikokuten as a esoteric deity with potentially sinister qualities. Cf. Shigekatsu Minobe, “The World View of *Genpei jōsuiki*,” trans. W. Michael Kelsey, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* vol. 9, no. 2/3 (June/Sep. 1982), 225-226; Iyanagi Nobumi, *Daikokuten hensō: Bukkyō shinwagaku 1* (Kyoto: Hyōzōkan, 2002), 340-343.

¹²² Miyata Noboru, *Kinsei no hayarigami* (Tokyo: Hyōronsha, 1972), 102, 106.



Fig. 7 Detail of *Daikokuten-zu*. Ogata Kōrin. 1704. Hanging scroll; ink on paper. MOA Museum of Art.

recorded in *Kokkei zōdan* (“A Light-Hearted Miscellany,” 1713), a collection of essays by Shijidō Kigen, invokes the Chinese system of the Twelve Branches (*jūnishi*). Buddhist cosmo-graphical schemes represented north with the color black; thus Daikokuten, whose name meant “Great Black,” was linked with this direction—which also corresponded to the first of the Twelve Branches, namely the mouse.¹²³

Minakata Kumagusu (1867-1941), a pioneering scholar of Japanese folklore, holds that Daikokuten acquired his rodent companions through a simple iconographic transposition. Indian and Chinese depictions show Bishamonten (Skt. Vaiśravaṇa), another of the seven gods of good fortune, holding a bag of treasure and carrying a mouse; in Japan, these attributes were transferred to Daikokuten. (Bishamonten’s mouse is itself dubiously “authentic,” being a substitute—accidental or otherwise—for the mongoose originally believed to accompany the god.) Minakata further notes that Ganesha, the Hindu god of wealth, is often shown riding on a mouse; this may have made the same animal seem a particularly appropriate fit for Daikokuten, who occupied a roughly analogous niche in the Japanese pantheon.¹²⁴ Alternatively, mice may have entered

¹²³ Hayakawa Junsaburō, ed., *Kokkei zōdan* (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1922), 396.

¹²⁴ Minakata Kumagusu, *Jūnishi kō*, 1929, in *Minakata Kumagusu zenshū* vol. 1, ed. Iwamura Shinobu (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1971), 594. Cf. also Iyanagi Nobumi, *Daikokuten hensō*, 337-390, 503-544.

Daikokuten's iconography via his syncretic association with Ōkuninushi; according to *Kojiki*, a mouse led Ōkuninushi underground to safety when Susano-o trapped him in a burning field.¹²⁵

Whatever the origins of Daikokuten's association with mice, I would argue that this strand of symbolism gained such popularity because it made intuitive, experientially-accessible sense in light of its biological referents. Daikokuten was, among other things, the *genius loci* of the kitchen; what better creature than the mouse to "personify" this space? Devotional art conventionally reified the prosperity promised by Daikokuten as bundles of grain. This aligned with wider practice: even as early modern Japan shifted towards a cash economy, rice retained a quasi-monetary status.¹²⁶ The near-synonymy of rice and wealth didn't exactly prove the dictum "whenever mice gather, surely there will soon be good fortune,"¹²⁷ but it lent to truth to the logical converse: whenever there was good fortune, surely there would soon be mice. Maud Ellman interprets Daikoku's rodent totem in Bataille terms, as "a freeloader whose depredations signify an excess of wealth," and hence an incarnation of "the movement from a 'restricted economy' of thrift to a 'general economy' of waste."¹²⁸ Mice, in other words, were Bataille's "accursed share" made flesh.

¹²⁵ Hayakawa, ed., *Kokkei zōdan*, 396; Ōshima Tatehiko, *Otogizōshi to minkan bungei*, 88; Nakamura, *Nihon dōbutsu minzokushi* (Tokyo: Kameisha, 1987), 60-62; et al.

¹²⁶ Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Rice as Self: Japanese Identities through Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 67-73; Larry Allen, "Rice Currency," *The Encyclopedia of Money*, 2nd ed. (Santa Barbara: ABC Clío, 2009), 344-345.

¹²⁷ 必鼠集まる時は近き吉事あり。This statement appears in the preface to *Chingansodategusa*, a guidebook on raising mice published in 1787; *vide infra* for further details. Terashima Toshio, "Chingansodategusa: Myūtanto mausu o aigan shita Edo bunka no iki" part 1, *Microscopia* vol. 9, no. 3 (Fall 1992), 163.

¹²⁸ Ellman, *The Nets of Modernism*, 16-17. Ellman identifies Daikokuten's rodent companion as a rat

Three centuries earlier, Kigen took a rather different view of the relationship between Daikokuten and mice: “Daikokuten is the guardian deity of the kitchen and the harvest; thus, when mice damage food in the kitchen or goods in the storehouse, people pray to him on the Day of the Mouse in the eleventh month, which is the Month of the Mouse.”¹²⁹ Viewed from this angle, the murine symbolism surrounding Daikokuten was not a celebration of surplus and its wanton expenditure, but rather a sort of sympathetic magic intended to stave off shortage. By depicting mice as Daikokuten’s attendants and dedicating mouse-related dates to his worship, the faithful may have hoped to gain corresponding control over the rodents in their own lives (and perhaps, by extension, other threats to their economic security).¹³⁰ Additionally, the sacralization of mice may have served a propitiatory function, predicated on the hope that mice well-fêted at the altar would refrain from raiding the larder.

I would propose a third possible reading of Daikokuten’s mice, in which they signify neither the consumption nor the conservation of wealth but simply its circulation. This, at any rate, is the premise underlying “How Mice Gnawed at Money,” a story from the 1767 *kaidan* (“tales of the weird”) anthology *Shinsetsu hyakumonogatari* (“One Hundred Tales Newly Told”). The narrator begins by setting the scene: a small village whose wealthiest inhabitant is a saké merchant named Mr. Nakao, “whose house had prospered for countless

rather than a mouse; the difficulty of enforcing a distinction between the two categories in the Japanese context will be discussed below.

¹²⁹ Hayakawa, ed., *Kokkei zōdan*, 396.

¹³⁰ In the otogizōshi *Umezu no chōja monogatari* (“The Tale of the Rich Man of Umezu”), the hero is menaced by the bandit Nezumi Saburō and his compatriots, many of whom also have mouse-themed names. Daikokuten, despite his own affinity with mice, beats the bandits to a pulp with his hammer.

generations, buying up the titles to everything in the village, from the fields and the paddies to the clothes on people's backs."¹³¹ Mr. Nakao, however, soon receives his comeuppance:

One day, the seven-year-old daughter of a farmer who lived nearby found a gold *ichibuban* coin in the thicket behind the house. Her parents were delighted, and said they would buy her a kimono to wear for O-Bon. They brought the coin to the rich man's house and asked him to exchange it for copper *zeni*. Mr. Nakao took the coin and looked at it carefully; when he did, he saw that although it was a Keichō *ichibuban*, it had toothmarks where a mouse had gnawed at it. Because of that, he only gave the farmer eight hundred *zeni* for it.

Overjoyed, the farmer returned home, but after that, his daughter once again came home with money she had found – this time, a *koban* coin. The story spread through the neighborhood, and when inquiries were made, it turned out that there were twenty-three other people who had found *ichibuban* or *koban* coins. The total value must have come to seventy or eighty *ryō*. Things did not stop at that; the matter was brought before the magistrate, and the investigation found that every single one of the coins had toothmarks on them. As the investigation proceeded, it was concluded that the money had been taken out through a mousehole in the side of Mr. Nakao's storehouse. I myself have seen one of the coins, and yes, indeed, there were tooth-marks on it.¹³²

When Yahyōe presents Saemon with treasure, the illustrations show him and his family carrying coins in their mouths.^(FIG. 8) Similar imagery circulated widely during the Edo

¹³¹ 一村の田畑その外衣類等まで質物なども取りて、何代とも知れずつきとなりやぶたる家あり。Takada Mamoru, Hara Michio, and Tachikawa Kiyoshi, ed., *Zoku hyakumonogatari kaidan shūsei* (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1993), 252.

¹³² ある時、その隣の下百姓の女子の七歳ばかりなるもの、うらの藪にて金一步拾ひたりけるを、親に見せければ悦びて、「盆かたびらをかふて着すべし」と、隣の彼の富家へ持ち行き、「銭と両がへして給はるべし」と申しける。亭主うけ取りて、よくよくみれば其一步慶長金にて、鼠の喰ひ齒形あり。その通りをかの者にいいきかせ、鳥目八百文に買取りける。百姓おゝきによるこび帰りけるが、そのゝち又々その娘小判一両ひろい帰りける。其事近所にかくれなく、其あたりを尋ねければ、或は一両又は一步金ひろいけるもの二三十人ほどあり。およそ金子七八十両になりぬ。そのまゝにてもおかれず代官所へことほりければ、御吟味の上、表歩にても鼠の齒かたのいらぬはなかりける。段々吟味いたしければ、中尾氏の土蔵の四五間脇より鼠穴ありて引出したる金子なり。予もその一步を見待りしが成程ねづみの齒形ありける。Ibid., 252-253. Although the actual value of the *ryō* fluctuated, one *ryō* could in theory purchase a year's ration of rice. A *koban* was equivalent to a full *ryō*, which was in turn equivalent to four thousand *zeni*; an *ichibuban* was worth a quarter of that, or one thousand *zeni*. Keichō coinage, minted during the first century of Tokugawa rule, contained a substantially greater quantity of gold than coins from later mintings.

period,^(FIG. 9) and the author of *Shinsetsu hyakumonogatari*—whose concern with verisimilitude is evident in the tale’s closing line—presents a less fanastical variation on this common theme. The mice in the story, invisible save for their tell-tale toothmarks, show no more inclination than their real-world counterparts to participate in human economies of gratitude. Nor do they have access to a hidden realm of

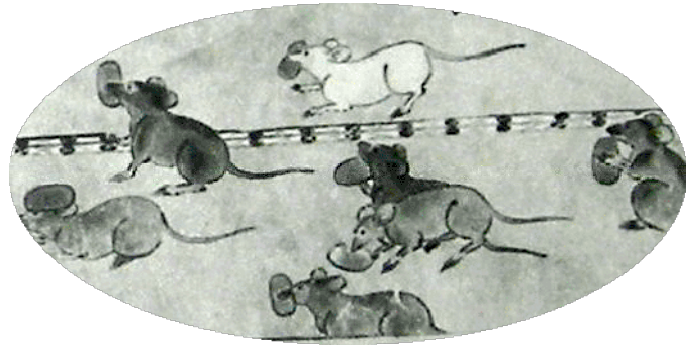


Fig. 8 Detail from *Shironezumi Yahyōe monogatari*. Artist unknown. Early to mid 17th c. Bound book; ink and color on paper. Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum.



Fig. 9 Triptych of Ebisu, Daikokuten, and mice. Kawanabe Kyōsai. 1889. Polychromatic woodblock print on paper. Rumyantsev Museum.

perpetual prosperity and good cheer. But they do have access to a rich merchant’s storehouse, opening up a new horizon of narrative pleasures: the audience can take satisfaction not only in the good fortune of the nameless farmer, but also—and perhaps more acutely—in the misfortune of the greedy Mr. Nakao. Seemingly unwittingly, the mice play the role of heroic transgressors, robbing the rich to feed the poor. (It is, I think, no coincidence that Nakamura Jirokichi [1797-1832], a historical thief popularly imagined as a Robin Hood figure, received the nickname *Nezumi Kozō*, or “mouse boy.”)

This is not to say that the treatment of mice in Edo fiction was entirely positive. Even as they were idealized as the “furry subjunctive case”¹³³ in its most optimistic formulation, mice were simultaneously but separately inducted into the ranks of the demonic, drawn thither by era’s bottomless appetite for “goblins and ghoulies and long-leggedy beasties” and anything else that went bump in the night.¹³⁴ Ansei Ogita’s *Tonoigusa* (“The Night Watchman’s Book”), a collection of *kaidan* published in 1660, contains an account of mice nibbling away at an invalid until he dies. A slightly less gruesome variation on this theme appears in Ueno Tadachika’s *Sessō yawa* (“Night Stories from a Snowy Window,” c. 1750), in which a dead man seemingly comes to life in his coffin—an illusion created by the mice eating his corpse. Supernatural bestiaries routinely featured a creature known as the *kyūso*, an “old mouse” grown to such monstrous size that it preyed on cats, in blatant contravention of the natural order.^(FIG. 10)

These darker portrayals of mice were not without medieval precedents; for instance, some



Fig. 10 *Kyūso*. Plate from *Ehon hyakumonogatari* (second of five volumes). Takehara Shunsen. 1841. Bound book; polychromatic woodblock print on paper. Brooklyn Museum of Art.

¹³³ Daston and Mitman, “The How and Why of Thinking with Animals,” 17.

¹³⁴ This phrase is borrowed from an old Cornish prayer, which Michael Bathgate quotes as a description of *bakemono* (The Fox’s Craft in Japanese Religion and Folklore: Shapeshifters, Transformations, and Duplicities [New York: Routledge, 2003], 10).

variants of *Heike monogatari* include an episode in which the vengeful ghost of the priest Raigō manifests itself as a giant mouse.¹³⁵ And, of course, the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* paints the heroine's rodent suitor as a vaguely sinister figure. However, while post-otogizōshi fiction routinely exploited mice as a source of horror, it did not do so via the device of interspecies romance.¹³⁶ Being seldom conducive to a happy ending, interspecies romance remained equally absent from the rose-tinted rodentopia of *Nezumi no yomeiri* and its ilk. At least within the realm of Japanese fiction, mice and women parted ways at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

The host of complications surrounding the seemingly straightforward title *Nezumi no sōshi* should by now be apparent. Further compounding these complications is the word *nezumi* itself, which likewise defies ready definition. Although I have thus far been glossing *nezumi* as “mouse,” this hardly captures the full range of meanings inherent in the word. In both modern and classical Japanese, *nezumi* refers equally to rats and mice; used in its

¹³⁵ This episode occurs in the Engyōbon *Heike* and *Genpei jōsuiki*, and also found its way into the expansively eclectic *Taiheiki*. By contrast, in the Kakuichi *Heike*, Raigō's vengeful ghost remains an incorporeal menace. The *Raigō nezumi* – otherwise known as the *tessō*, or iron mouse – joined the *kyūso* as a stock figure in the Edo menagerie of the monstrous, and proved sufficiently horrifying to serve as the evil mastermind in Tanizawa Bakin's *Raigō ajari kaisoden*, or “The Tale of High Priest Raigō, the Phantom Mouse,” an eight-volume gōkan published in 1808.

¹³⁶ The one exception of which I am aware is a story taken from *Taiping Guangji*, a compendium of anecdotes of the odd and uncanny, compiled by Li Fang in 978. The tale, which might best be described as Lovecraftian, proceeds as follows: a ten year old girl disappears, seemingly without a trace, until her parents hear the crying of an infant coming from beneath the earthen floor. When they dig up the floor, they find their daughter in an underground chamber, filthy and disheveled, cradling an infant and sitting beside an ancient, hairless mouse the size of a cat. The girl does not recognize her parents, and begs them not to hurt her husband when they attack the giant mouse. Even after her abductor (and its offspring) are killed, the girl does not regain her senses, and dies raving. This story appears in the *kaidan* anthologies *Kunmō koji yōgen* (Miyakawa Michisato, 1694) and *Ehon hyakumonogatari* (Takehara Shunsen, 1841), both of which explicitly attribute it to its Chinese source.

broadest sense, the word might also be applied to other small rodents such as voles and dormice, as well as soricomorphs such as moles and shrews.¹³⁷ *Nezumi* thus encompasses a semantic domain that does not map comfortably onto the informal system of classification embedded in the English language, much less formal Linnaean taxonomy.¹³⁸

Faced with the word *nezumi*, most literary translators choose between the two most obvious glosses on the basis of their emotional resonance: “mouse” to convey neutral or positive overtones, “rat” to evoke particular repugnance. However, because we are specifically concerned with understanding medieval Japanese perceptions of *nezumi*, the word must be translated consistently. To alternate between “mouse” and “rat” in response to context would be to impose an alien dichotomy on what would have been viewed as a unified (if not undifferentiated) field. On the other hand, it would be equally irresponsible to choose a gloss and charge blithely ahead without acknowledging, and at least partially correcting for, the semantic misfit. One of the foundational premises of this dissertation is that animals in literature exist in meaningful relation to animals in the real world; they are not merely Trojan horses (or turtles, or foxes, or badgers . . .) for discourse about human society. Thus, if we wish to discuss animals in literature, we must first determine as best we can exactly *which*

¹³⁷ Kaneko, *Nezumi no bunruigaku*, 250.

¹³⁸ Of course, the popular Anglophone distinction between mice and rats does not translate into Linnaean terms any more readily than the Japanese category *nezumi*. Hundreds of species distributed across dozens of genera are commonly called either “rats” or “mice,” names which are assigned on the basis of physical size rather than phylogenetic affinity: for instance, wood rats are more closely related to deer mice than to brown rats, which in turn are more closely related to house mice than to cotton rats, which in turn are more closely related to grass mice . . . My point here is not to condemn Anglophone folk taxonomy as being somehow erroneous, but rather to demonstrate that like all folk taxonomy – Japanese or otherwise – it does not neatly align with formal scientific methods of biological classification.

animals we are discussing. And in the case of *nezumi*, this means grappling with the deceptively simple question posed by the semiotician Umberto Eco: mouse or rat?¹³⁹ This is the title of Eco's recent collection of essays on the theory of translation, and a quandary that faces translators working in a great many languages—including, of course, Japanese.

It should be noted that the Japanese language historically possessed, and still possesses, the lexical capacity to distinguish between mice and rats; this distinction simply occurs at a relatively subordinate semantic level. Anglophone folk taxonomy assigns rats and mice to separate basic-level categories, or “folk genera,” to borrow a term popularized by cognitive anthropologist Brent Berlin.¹⁴⁰ In Japanese folk taxonomy, by contrast, rats and mice belong to a single folk genus, which can be further divided into several folk species, although classifications made at this level may become rather abstruse:

Folk genera are the natural kinds that any knowledgeable observer can easily identify, while folk species require skill and attention to distinguish. In practice, folk usually identify specific taxa contrastively, whereas generic taxa tend to be identified in terms of overall habit or gestalt . . . *Folk genera that are divided specifically usually include a “prototype” folk species from which the others are differentiated.*¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Umberto Eco, *Mouse or Rat?: Translation as Negotiation* (London: Phoenix, 2004); for discussion of the titular question, see the second chapter. Rat/mouse lumping is apparently a fairly common folk taxonomical strategy – cf. the Latin *mus*, Italian *topo*, French *souris*, and the Itzaj *aj-b'aj* (this last example is courtesy of Scott Atran, not Eco).

¹⁴⁰ Brent Berlin, “Folk Systematics in Relation to Biological Classification and Nomenclature,” *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* vol. 4 (1973), 259-271. See also Scott Atran, *Cognitive Foundations of Natural History: Towards an Anthropology of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Atran champions Berlin's basic schematization of folk taxonomies as a series of nested hierarchies, but prefers the term “generic-specieme” to “folk genus,” on the grounds that the majority of folk genera are monospecific. While Atran's scholarship has greatly influenced my thinking on the subject of folk taxonomy, because *nezumi* is an extremely polyspecific folk genus, I have chosen to use Berlin's terminology.

¹⁴¹ Brian W. Ogilvie, *The Science of Describing: Natural History in Renaissance Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 220. Emphasis mine. For a discussion of the (somewhat problematic) intersection between folk taxonomical hierarchies and prototype theory, cf. Atran,

Lexically, differentiation within a folk genus typically relies on the usage of binomial names:¹⁴² for instance, “deer mouse” and “harvest mouse” are English-language folk species of the folk genus “mouse.” Japanese-language distinctions between various sorts of *nezumi* operate on a similar principle—that is, the attachment of a descriptor to the folk genus—and entail a similar degree of semantic granularity; as in English, they are more often than not elided.

While modern Japanese discussions of *nezumi* frequently draw a first-order distinction between rats and mice, using the English loan words *mausu* and *ratto*, no such binary exists in premodern texts. At least half a dozen folk species of *nezumi* were recognized prior to the Edo period;¹⁴³ indeed, the very diversity of the genus was held up as one of its identifying traits. The character dictionary *Wamyō ruijushō* (“A Lexicon of Japanese Names”), compiled in 934 by Minamoto no Shitagō, defines *nezumi* as “small beasts that live in holes, of which there are many different sorts.”¹⁴⁴ Shitagō then goes on to list four subtypes of *nezumi*, beginning with the *hinezumi*, or “fire mouse,” a mythical creature believed to possess a fireproof pelt. The remaining three entries appear to describe natural rather than supernatural creatures, although it is impossible to state with any confidence exactly what

Cognitive Foundations of Natural History, 52-57; for a discussion of the use of binomial nomenclature and prototype species in subdividing polytypic folk genera, cf. Brent Berlin, Ethnobiological Classification: Principles of Categorization of Plants and Animals in Traditional Societies (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 26-35, 102-133, 152-153.

¹⁴² Atran, Cognitive Foundations of Natural History, 131.

¹⁴³ There was possibly some degree of deviation between the folk taxonomy of the lettered elites and the folk taxonomy of the unlettered masses. Even if we restrict our inquiries to elite folk taxonomy, we still cannot judge how frequently distinctions below the folk-generic level occurred in common usage.

¹⁴⁴ 穴居小獸種類多者也。Miyazawa Toshimasa, ed., Wamyō ruijushō tenbunbon, *Tōkyō Daigaku Kokugo kenkyūshitsu shiryō sōsho* vol. 12 (Tokyo: Kyūko Shoin, 1987), 422.

these creatures were, apart from “small *nezumi*”—the opening words of each entry. What we *can* confidently say is that, within the folk-taxonomical framework implicit in *Wamyō ruijushō*, “large *nezumi*” occupied an unmarked category. A similar pattern is evident in other Heian and medieval texts, and largely persists in early modern sources.

The irrepressible classificatory impulse of the Edo imposed increasingly fine distinctions on the semantic field of *nezumi*, generating a wealth of novel terminology for rodents great and small. This lexical explosion was fueled in part by the mania for exotic pets;¹⁴⁵ thanks to the proto-Mendelian efforts of breeders, new categories of *nezumi* were simultaneously created in the word and in the flesh.¹⁴⁶ However, this sudden influx of *nezumi* subtypes does not seem to have destabilized the traditional conception of the prototypical *nezumi* as comparatively large. This point emerges with particular clarity in *Wakan sansai zue* (“An Illustrated Sino-Japanese Compendium of All Things”), an encyclopedia authored by the physician Terajima Ryōan. Published in 1713, Ryōan’s magnum opus spans one hundred and five volumes, the thirty-ninth of which is dedicated to the subject of *nezumi*. Like

¹⁴⁵ For a discussion of the burgeoning enthusiasm for exotic pets during the Edo period, cf. Martha Chaiklin, “Exotic Bird Collecting in Early Modern Japan,” in *JAPANimals* and Isono Naohide, “*Meiji mae dōbutsu torai nenpyō*,” *Keiō Gijuku Daigaku Hiyoshi kiyō: shizen kagaku* vol. 41 (2007): 35–66.

¹⁴⁶ For scientific perspectives on the surprisingly advanced understanding of heredity demonstrated by *nezumi* breeding manuals from the eighteenth century, cf. Mitosi Tokuda, “An Eighteenth Century Japanese Guide-Book on Mouse-Breeding,” *Journal of Heredity* vol. 26, no. 12 (December 1935), 481–484; Terashima Toshio, “*Chingansodategusa: Myūtanto mausu o aigan shita Edo bunka no iki*” parts 2 and 3, *Microscopia* vol. 9, no. 4 (Winter 1992), 268–272 and vol. 10, no. 1 (Spring 1993), 28–35; Takashi Kuramoto, “*Yoso-Tama-No-Kakehashi*: The First Japanese Guidebook on Raising Rats,” *Experimental Animals* vol. 60, no. 1 (February, 2011), 1–6; and Kaneko, *Nezumi no bunruigaku*, 221–222. Tokuda’s opening remarks on *Chingansodategusa* are particularly eye-catching: “There are, naturally, some ridiculous mistakes in the author’s theories and a good many meaningless and traditional notes. However, the main part remains worthy of our notice even with our knowledge of modern science.”

Shitagō, albeit at much greater length, Ryōan prefaces his explication of the various *nezumi* subtypes with a general overview of *nezumi* as a class. The rodentologist Kaneko Yukibumi has little use for Ryōan’s opening treatise on *nezumi*, which he describes as a “mosaic-like” conflation of disparate species, further distorted by pure confabulation—for instance, Ryōan’s claim that *nezumi* live for three hundred years and can foretell the future.¹⁴⁷

Nonetheless, certain revealing facts can be isolated from the mix, most notably that *nezumi* were black and lived in houses (much to the dismay of their human housemates; Ryōan offers helpful advice on how exterminate *nezumi* using konnyaku jelly). Among the more than two dozen species of rodents native to Japan, only three regularly cohabit with humans: the Japanese house mouse, the brown rat, and the Asian black rat.¹⁴⁸ Thus, one or more of these species presumably served as the primary model for Ryōan’s prototypical *nezumi*. Another vital clue comes to light in the later entry on *norane*, “commonly known as *hatsuka nezumi*”:¹⁴⁹ (FIG. 11)



Fig. 11 *Norane*. Illustration from *Wakan sansai zue*, volume 39. Terajima Ryōan. 1712. Monochrome woodblock print on paper. National Diet Library.

¹⁴⁷ Kaneko, *Nezumi no bunruigaku*, 98.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 250-251. Strictly speaking, house mice (*Mus musculus molossinus*) and black rats (*Rattus tanezumi*) are not native to Japan, although they have been established there for at least two millennia. Genetic analysis has identified *M.m. molossinus* as a hybrid of two other *M.m.* subspecies: *M.m. castaneus*, native to southeast Asia, and *M.m. musculus*, native to northern Asia. The former was most likely introduced by the ancestors of the Jōmon; the latter, by immigrants from the Korean peninsula in the second century BCE, who are also thought to be responsible for the introduction of *R. tanezumi*. Fossil remains indicate that the brown rat (*R. norvegicus*) was already present in Japan by the late Pleistocene.

¹⁴⁹ The term *norane* first appears in *Wamyō ruijushō*, where it is defined simply as a “small *nezumi*.”

The size of *norane* does not exceed two inches; even when they grow old, they do not grow any larger. They are extremely nimble, and always dart out into the kitchen to steal the rice bran underneath the grindstone ... They are called “twenty-day *nezumi*” (*hatsuka nezumi*) because they are said to be the young of house *nezumi* (*ie nezumi*) that have left the nest when they are twenty days old, but this is incorrect. The newborn young of house *nezumi* are larger than *hatsuka nezumi*.¹⁵⁰

Hatsuka nezumi is the modern Japanese term for house mice, which, as the smallest of Japan’s synanthropic rodents, are almost certainly the same *hatsuka nezumi* described in *Wakan sansai zue*. What, then, of the other *nezumi*—the unmarked, monomial *nezumi*—the *nezumi* that were black and lived in houses, but were larger than house mice? They were, in a word, rats. Takashi Kuramoto—like Kaneko, a specialist in rodent biology—arrives at the same conclusion based on his analysis of the 1775 guidebook *Yōsotama no kakehashi*, or “A Bridge to Cultivating Jewel-Like *Nezumi*.” The author, identified only as a merchant from Osaka,¹⁵¹ presents himself as an expert keeper (and creator) of *nezumi*:

Through attentive caretaking, I have been able to obtain extremely rare breeds (*kihini*). In my free time, I frequently share information with my fellow hobbyists, and so I decided to compose a book about caring for *nezumi*, to save some trouble for those who seek my

The later dictionary *Myōgoki*, compiled in 1268, offers the same definition and adds that “*ne*” is short for *nezumi*.

¹⁵⁰ 鼯鼠大不過二寸雖老不敢長大、而甚進疾、每出厨下確頭竊食米糠...或謂鼯鼠即家鼠子出窠二十日可故名之者亦非也。家鼠之赤子皆大於鼯鼠大不過二寸。Terajima Ryōan, *Wakan sansai zue* vol. 2 (Osaka: Chūkindō, 1888), 80. In the same entry, Ryōan also mentions that the *norane* is commonly confused with the *amakuchi nezumi*, which he describes elsewhere as “the smallest of all *nezumi*.” Like the *norane*, the *amakuchi nezumi* is defined in *Wamyō ruijushō* as a small *nezumi* – so small that its bite causes no pain, hence the moniker “sweet-mouthed *nezumi*.”

¹⁵¹ Although *Yōsotama no kakehashi* lists its author as “the proprietor of the Shunpandō,” a contemporary catalog of publications known as *Shinpan negaiide ingyōchō* gives the name “Haruki Kōji of Matsubara-chō.” *Yōsotama no kakehashi* identifies its artist in the same fashion as its author, as “the proprietor of Kōtensai”; this figure has been identified as Kanō-school artist Tachibana Kunio (Yasuda Yōko, “*Edo jidai goki jōhō ni okeru nezumi shiiku to kihini no sanshū: ‘Yōsotama no kakehashi’ o chūshin ni*,” *Kokusai bunka kenkyū* vol 16 [March 2010], 210).

advice. First I introduce the original kinds (*korai no rui*) of *nezumi*, and then I present the breeds (*shina*) that are currently enjoyed as pets, [explaining] everything from how to feed them and how to construct their cages to how to protect the health of their unborn young.¹⁵²

The author’s introduction to the “original kinds of *nezumi*” consists mainly of material cribbed from *Wakan sansai zue*, including its definition of *hatsuka nezumi* as a discrete subclass of *nezumi*, recognizable by their diminutive size. There is little novel information here, merely confirmation that Ryōan’s classification of *nezumi* aligned with the generally accepted



Fig. 12 Illustration from *Yōsotama no kakehashi* (second of two volumes). Tachibana Kunio (?). 1775. Monochrome woodblock print on paper. National Diet Library.

folk taxonomy. The primary value of *Yōsotama no kakehashi* lies in its detailed instructions on the care and feeding—and above all, breeding—of *nezumi*. Kuramoto finds that the author describes the development and behavior of brown rats with remarkable accuracy, and confirms that all of the coat patterns shown in the illustrations occur in modern fancy rats;^(FIG. 12) it is his ultimate judgment that early modern Japanese “distinguished the rat from the mouse, and referred to the rat using the term *nezumi*.”¹⁵³

¹⁵² 余近頃これを愛し養ふて頗る奇品を得たり。又暇日ひろく同好に謀て養鼠の一巻をつづりて、我に求むるの勞に代んとす。はじめに古来の鼠類をあげ、つづくに今もてあそぶ品をしるし、食物、トヤの造法より、胎を求て長ぜしむるまで。Quoted in Nakano Mitsutoshi, *Wahon no umi e: hōjō no Edo bunka* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Gakugei Shuppan, 2009), 25.

¹⁵³ Kuramoto, “*Yoso-Tama-No-Kakehashi: The First Japanese Guidebook on Raising Rats*,” 3.

I would propose a slightly more nuanced formulation of Kuramoto’s conclusion, namely that in its unmarked, unmodified form, the word *nezumi* was *more likely* to refer to rats than to mice. It is difficult to determine just how strongly rats were favored over mice as the “best exemplars” of *nezumi*, but the word seems to have been slanted ratwards for most of Japanese history. As demonstrated above, sources from the mid-Heian onward treat small *nezumi* as a marked category, defaulting to large *nezumi*—that is, rats—as the prototype folk species. Thus, it comes as little surprise that the *nezumi* in the otogizōshi discussed here betray subtle hints of rattishness. They are frequently depicted as dark gray or black, a coloration consistent with the black rat.¹⁵⁴ (As one might surmise from its name, the brown rat is brown, as is the house mouse.) Adept climbers, black rats are also commonly known as roof rats, because of their pronounced fondness for high places—a fondness shared by at least some of the *nezumi* in otogizōshi. The name Ketahashiri, or “Rafter-Scurrier,” appears in both the Kōshien *Nezumi no sōshi* and *Gon no Kami*,¹⁵⁵ and the protagonist of *Yahyōe nezumi*

¹⁵⁴ Even in otogizōshi that prominently feature white *nezumi*, such as *Gon no Kami* and *Yahyōe nezumi*, the background characters – or at least, those of a murine persuasion – are typically colored slate gray.

¹⁵⁵ Ryūsawa, “*Kōshien Gakuin shozō ‘Nezumi no sōshi’ emaki ni tsuite*,” 94. The various versions of *Gon no Kami* assign different roles to the “Rafter-Scurrier” character, who plays a larger part in the older of the two textual lineages, although the name appears in both. The epithet “*keta hashiru*” was not confined to otogizōshi, as can be seen in this poem from the 1649 kyōka anthology *Gogin wagashū*:

まばらなる	Gazing at the moonlight
軒のあなより	through the holes
影見れば	in the ragged eaves –
月の鼠も	even the mouse in the moon
桁はしるなり	goes scurrying along the rafters

Saitō Maori, “*Nezumi no koi: Muromachi monogatari ‘Nezumi no sōshi’ no sekai*,” in *Chōjū chūgyo no bungakushi – Nihon koten no shizen kan 1: Kemono no maki*, ed. Suzuki Ken’ichi (Tokyo:

perches among the rafters of Saemon's house. And yet, dark fur and acrophilia notwithstanding, the *nezumi* of the various *Nezumi no sōshi* more closely resemble mice than rats in one vital respect: they were as easy to love as they were to loathe, at least on paper.

The distinction between the English words “mouse” and “rat” is as much one of connotation as of denotation. Both mice and rats are pests, but rats suffer from far greater stigma, burdened as they are by an almost totemic association with filth and disease. Widespread and deep-seated though it may be, this particular strand of anti-rat discourse has a relatively brief history; only in the nineteenth century did rats assume their modern identity as “the abhorred and unclean,” to borrow a phrase from one Victorian naturalist.¹⁵⁶ As increasingly stringent standards of bodily hygiene were writ large upon the body politic, what had once been blots upon London's landscape were reconfigured as blights. Decried as active threats to public health and morals, excrement, refuse, and the unwashed poor were banished to the (literal or figurative) underbelly of the city. “In this new cleansing enterprise,” writes anthropologist Birgitta Edelman, “the fate of the rat was rather obvious. Being an inhabitant of the sewers, and as such belonging to the dirty and disgusting world which ought to be unseen, unsmelled, and preferably unmentioned, the rat was to be exterminated or expelled.”¹⁵⁷ Ironically, the campaign to expel rats from the physical cityscape earned them an enduring home in the imaginary cityscape, as the ineradicable

Miyai Shoten, 2011), 228.

¹⁵⁶ Dennis Embleton, “On the Two Species of Rat in England,” in *Transactions of the Tyneside Naturalists' Field Club, 1851-1854* vol. II (London: Simpkin, Marshall, & Co., 1854), 104.

¹⁵⁷ Birgitta Edelman, “Rats Are People, Too! Rat-Human Relations Re-Rated,” *Anthropology Today* vol. 18, no. 2 (June 2002), 6.

symbols of that which must be eradicated, urban squalor incarnate.

Before they came into their current infamy, rats were merely one among a host of animal nuisances populating the English countryside, no more innately offensive than mice or moles. As Mary Fissell demonstrates in her analysis of “cheap print” household advice manuals from late seventeenth century England, rats and other vermin were reviled not for their dirtiness, but rather for their wickedness.¹⁵⁸ Popular wisdom painted vermin as inveterate thieves, tricksters, and gluttons, possessed of near-human cunning but unencumbered by human scruples. Vermin not only stole food that rightfully belonged to humans, but were themselves unfit for human consumption, making them doubly damaging to the proper hierarchy of exploiter and exploited.¹⁵⁹ However, despite their many character flaws, vermin—rats included—did not provoke visceral disgust. They were objects of recrimination and retaliation, but not of repugnance. Japanese sources from the late Muromachi and early Edo reveal an extremely similar attitude toward *nezumi*, inasmuch as complaints against these animals “emphasized those aspects . . . most threatening to the human social fabric.”¹⁶⁰ We have already encountered several instances in which criticisms of *nezumi* were framed in terms of human mores and morals; recall Ebisu’s claim in *Kakurezato* that household rodents are no better than bandits, and the remonstrations delivered by the priests in *Neko no sōshi* and the Cambridge *Nezumi no sōshi*.

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, Sei Shōnagon derides *nezumi* as “filthy”

¹⁵⁸ Mary Fissell, “Imagining Vermin in Early Modern England,” *History Workshop Journal* no. 47 (Spring 1999): 22-23.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

and “squalid.” However, given that Sei also applies these respective labels to “all faded robes, but especially glossy ones” and “the underside of embroidery,” it is difficult to imagine that her perceptions of filth and squalor were accompanied by the same horror of contamination that rats currently evoke. I am aware of only one other pre-eighteenth century text in which *nezumi* are explicitly described as unclean, an odd little tale from the late Muromachi known as *Tōshōji nezumi monogatari*—and here, too, the uncleanliness attributed to *nezumi* differs markedly from the uncleanliness attributed to rats in the modern imagination. Written in Tenbun 6 (1537) by an anonymous Zen monk, *Tōshōji nezumi monogatari* was probably intended to serve as a primer for novices, much like the Cambridge *Nezumi no sōshi*. Compared to the latter work, however, *Tōshōji nezumi monogatari* makes little effort to disguise its pedagogical agenda, which is apparent not only in the moralizing tone, but also in the long lists of thematic vocabulary interspersed throughout the narrative. “It is plain to see that *nezumi* who uphold virtue earn good fortune, while *nezumi* who delight in wickedness court disaster,”¹⁶¹ the author informs his young readers, and then proceeds to illustrate this principle with the story of Nezumi no Tarō. Despite being born into the animal realm, Tarō is moved by a desire to study the Way, and so builds his nest in the Zen temple Tōshōji. Unfortunately, Tarō’s offspring are not nearly so devout as their father, and every night they scurry through the temple wreaking havoc:

They never used umbrellas to keep off the rain, dew, snow, autumn
drizzles, afternoon thundershowers, cloudbursts, hail, slush, sleet, or sun,

¹⁶¹ 善を終する鼠は福を蒙る、悪を好(sic)鼠は禍を招くと云へる事、歴然也。Kyōto Daigaku Bungakubu Kokugogaku Kokubungaku Kenkyūshitsu, ed., *Kyōto Daigakuzō Muromachi monogatari* vol. 5 (Kyoto: Rinsen Shoten, 2000): 349.

and they never wore raincoats, straw sandals, rope sandals, wooden sandals, high clogs, half-soled sandals, or socks; they just ran all over everything in their dirty bare feet.¹⁶²

Significantly, the “dirtiness” of these murine miscreants is presented as a consequence of their poor manners (they don’t use umbrellas or wear shoes!); it is not presumed to be an innate quality of their species.

Modern readers may find something delightfully whimsical in the notion of a priest scolding household rodents for going about barefoot, but the tale quickly turns grim, as the monks grow frustrated with their uninvited guests. Traps and cats prove useless against the tiny trespassers; luckily, a blind novice is able to locate them by the sound of their scurrying, and bludgeons them to death one by one with a pair of fire tongs. The author emphasizes there was no sin in killing such wicked creatures, who brought their fate upon themselves and were, like all living things, bound to die anyway. Nevertheless, the monks plan to give their victims a proper funeral, until a certain visitor at the temple—a doctor of some renown—informs the monks that the meat of *nezumi* cures all ailments. And so the deceased rodents find themselves bound for the pot instead of the pyre: “Their skins were sliced open and peeled off . . . they were put on a cutting board, chopped up with a fish cleaver, stuck on skewers, and grilled.”¹⁶³ The author punctuates this grisly scene with assurances that the monks are not guilty of any wrongdoing: the butchered vermin are merely receiving their

¹⁶² 何の上ともいわず、雨、露、時雨、夕立、急雨、雪、霰、雨雪、霰、日も傘さす事もなく、蓑笠も着ず、草履、草鞋、木履、屐、尻切、踏皮などはく事もなく、むさくよごれたる素足にてかけまわり。 *Ibid.*, 355.

¹⁶³ まな板にのせ、魚箸包丁にて切られ、串刺に也、焙られし事...皮を切破、剥れける。 *Ibid.*, 361-362.

just karmic retribution, which prefigures their future suffering in hell.¹⁶⁴ Moreover, their punishment doubles as a sort of backhanded reward for the devout Nezumi no Tarō, liberating him from his spiritually stultifying attachment to his children and moving him to renounce the world and achieve enlightenment.

We have already seen that Buddhist thinkers struggled to reconcile their real-world interactions with animals, which were as often as not driven by utilitarian considerations, to their stated ideal of nonviolence. That a primer for Zen novices should ultimately promote the extermination of rodent pests merits little exclamation; casuistry of this kind occurs widely in medieval discourse, and often in more sophisticated formulations. What is noteworthy here is not the admission that *nezumi* are good to kill, but the assertion that they are good to *eat*, albeit as medicine rather than mere meat. For modern readers of *Tōshōji nezumi monogatari*, the healing powers attributed to *nezumi* may look suspiciously like a plot device designed to rationalize what would otherwise be a gratuitous depiction of animal mutilation. However, other sources show that *nezumi*—and various byproducts thereof—held a valued place in the medieval and early modern pharmacopeia. In *Wakan sansai zue*, Ryōan expounds at length on the medicinal uses of *nezumi* meat, bile, genitals, urine, and feces; properly applied, these ingredients could supposedly cure any ailment from colic to colorblindness, dog bites to deafness. Similar advice appears in such volumes as *Waka shokumotsu honzō* (“A Poetic Guide to Foodstuffs and Medicinal Herbs,” 1642) and *Honchō*

¹⁶⁴ Medieval Buddhist literature commonly warned against the spiritual perils of consuming animal flesh by portraying hell as a kitchen in which sinner would be butchered. *Tōshōji nezumi monogatari*’s claim that animals will be similarly punished for their transgressions against humans marks an (intentionally or otherwise) ironic inversion of this trope.

shokkan.¹⁶⁵ And three centuries before that, *Kinsō ryōjishō* (“On Healing Incised Wounds,” 1357), Japan’s first medical text dedicated to the treatment of battle injuries, was already touting the curative properties of *nezumi* feces.¹⁶⁶

Nezumi were pests, but they were not pestilent; far from being execrated as vectors of disease, they were exploited as *materia medica*. It is this lack of association between *nezumi* and contagion that ultimately makes “mouse” a less problematic translation than “rat.” Neither option is ideal, but—as the preceding pages have no doubt made clear—the decision cannot be sidestepped without prohibitive linguistic awkwardness. On a purely denotative level, “rat” might more accurately convey the physical dimensions of the prototypical *nezumi*. But to label the *nezumi* of *otogizōshi* “rats” would be a kind of character assassination, implicating them in a network of negative associations foreign to the original text. “Mouse” better reflects the ambiguous status of *nezumi* in Muromachi and early Edo society and the positive roles that were routinely assigned to them, both in imagination and in practice.

In any event, within the world of *otogizōshi*, *nezumi* confound human taxonomical systems at their most basic level; their identity is dangerously mistakable, in a way that has nothing to do with the difficulties of distinguishing between one type of rodent and another. Here, the crucial question is not “mouse or rat?,” but rather “mouse or man?” As we will see in the following chapter, the confusion of these two categories lies at the heart of the

¹⁶⁵ Hasegawa Megumi, *Nezumi to Nihonjin* (Tokyo: San’ichi Shobō, 1996): 90-91.

¹⁶⁶ Andrew Edmund Goble, “War and Injury: The Emergence of Wound Medicine in Medieval Japan,” *Monumenta Nipponica* vol. 60, no. 3 (Autumn, 2005): 318.

Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi*, in which mice possess the ability to infiltrate not just human spaces, but human societies.

“SOMEONE, ANYONE”:

The Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* and Interspecies Marriage in the Ko-e of Tosa Mitsunobu

I. INFESTATION AND IMPLOSION:

Inside the Collapsing World of the Mitsunobu Nezumi no sōshi

In her generally excellent study of the ko-e painted by Tosa Mitsunobu, Melissa McCormick describes the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* as the tale of “a young woman desperate to find a husband,” whose dreams of romance are briefly fulfilled, only to be brutally dashed.¹⁶⁷ Other scholars who have occasion to touch upon the same work offer virtually identical synopses,¹⁶⁸ none of which are factually inaccurate as such; whether they truly capture the driving emotional dynamic of the tale, however, is an open question. A more complete summary might begin “a young woman, whose mother is desperate for her to find a husband . . .” It is no accident that the narrator opens by establishing the nun’s marital ambitions for her daughter:

Not too long ago, there lived a nun who passed her days in extreme loneliness. She had an only daughter, who to her great sorrow remained unattached, although she was already twenty. The lady was not especially unpleasant to look upon, but neither was she famous for her beauty, and so no suitors came calling. The maidservants of the household, elderly but indispensable, all sat together in incomparable sorrow. Ah, they wished, if only the young mistress could be married soon, to anyone at all, and ease the reverend nun’s heart!¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ McCormick, *Tosa Mitsunobu and the Small Scroll in Medieval Japan*, 67.

¹⁶⁸ Teiri, *Nihonjin no dōbutsukan*, 157; Mito Nobue, “*Dare ga miteiru kōkei na no ka? Otogizōshi ni miru katari no shiten*,” in *Bijutsushika ōi ni warau: Kōno Motoaki sensei no tame no Nihon bijutsushi ronshū*, ed. Kōno Motoaki Sensei Taikan Kinen Ronbunshū Henshū Iinkai (Tokyo: Brücke, 2006): 290.

¹⁶⁹ 近比の事にや、最心ぼそくてすぐしける尼ぎみありけり。むすめをなん独もちて、かなしき物に思ひける、継がぬ月日なれば、甘ばかりに成りけり。見めなんとは、いたくにくからねども、世にきこゆる

Before we are granted access to the psychological interior of the ostensible protagonist, we must first pass through the psychological interior of not only her mother, but also her mother's maidservants. (It is clear from the outset that the maidservants are primarily invested in the emotional well-being of the nun, rather than her daughter, and it is the uneven balance of their loyalties that will ultimately tip the scales toward tragedy.) By the time the lady has moved to the narrative forefront, her desire for a husband comes as little more than an echo; indeed, it is far from certain that she truly wants a husband *per se*. Where the nun and the maidservants explicitly lament the lady's unmarried status, the lady herself expresses a less specific desire for companionship: "If only there were someone—*anyone*—who would speak to me with heartfelt devotion!"¹⁷⁰

Ill-conceived wishes have an unfortunate habit of coming true, particularly in fiction. In the very same sentence that the lady vocalizes her perilously open-ended appeal, a suitor materializes out of the darkness, as if summoned by her words. The illusion of instant gratification makes it easy to forget that the lady is not the only one whose gratification is at stake, but we soon receive a reminder that other agendas are at play: even as the mysterious suitor pledges his love, the lady balks at the prospect of entering into a match that her mother has not sanctioned. In the end, the specter of maternal disapproval does not prevent the lady from succumbing to her suitor's blandishments, although she is not driven by any irrepressible

程のかたちならねば、いひよる人もなし。捨てがたきふるごたひ南とつどひみて、又なくさびしきまゝには。「あはれ此君をいかならむ人にもさもあらん契いそぎ給て、尼君にもこゝろ安く見えたまへかし」などねがいけるに。Yokoyama Shigeru and Matsumoto Takanobu, ed., *Muromachi jidai monogatari taisei* (MJMT) vol. 10 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1983), 238.

¹⁷⁰ いかならむ物にても、心さしふかくかたらふ人もかな。Ibid., 239.



Fig. 13 First painting of *Nezumi no sōshi*, with details. Attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu. 1469-1487. Handscroll; ink and color on paper. Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum.

romantic impulse of her own. The lady’s fatal flaw is not her passion, but her passiveness; as the narrator declares in the final line of the first passage, “her heart was very weak.”¹⁷¹ Fittingly, these words are superimposed on the gateway that ushers the viewer into the first painting.^(FIG. 13) The overlap of text and image may be purely accidental, the consequence of the calligraphy spilling beyond its allotted space—but, intended or otherwise, the resulting

¹⁷¹ ひとつよからぬ心にあ。Ibid.

juxtaposition amplifies the tale's underlying theme of feminine vulnerability. The lady's weak heart is an open door, an invitation to visitors of the wrong kind.

*Nezumi*¹⁷² consists of three passages of text, each followed by a single illustration. Save for the “calligraphic spillover” described above, the written word makes no appearance in the paintings, which forgo the text captions commonly employed in otogizōshi. I will discuss the narrative ramifications of speech captions more fully in the following chapter, but their overall effect tends to be centrifugal, in the Bakhtinian sense of the term. Conversely, I would argue that the strict segregation of word and image, while hardly unique to *Nezumi*,¹⁷³ underscores the work's larger tendency toward narrative centripetality. Just as the absence of captions in the paintings forecloses a horizon of polyphonic possibilities, the strict adherence to classic literary conventions in the main text prohibits heteroglossic innovation. Above all, the extreme brevity of *Nezumi* demands that all discourse be subordinated to “the usual functions of characterization and plot development.”¹⁷⁴ The spotlight never strays onto peripheral characters; indeed, there are no peripheral characters onto whom it might stray. A story pared down to its innermost core, *Nezumi* holds fast against any and all decentering forces.

¹⁷² For the sake of brevity, I will refer to the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* as *Nezumi* for the remainder of this chapter. The titles of all other ko-e attributed to Mitsunobu will be similarly abbreviated after their first appearance.

¹⁷³ Komine Kazuaki, “*Emaki no gachūshi to gensetsu: etoki no shiya kara*,” *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kanshō* vol. 68, no. 5 (June 2003): 49. Although the use of in-painting captions in illustrated scrolls always remained the exception rather than the rule, it became markedly more frequent during the Muromachi era.

¹⁷⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984), 7.

To some extent, *Nezumi* shares its centripetal orientation with many of the other fifty or so otogizōshi small enough to qualify as ko-e.¹⁷⁵ McCormick regards ko-e as a distinct subset of emaki, set apart not only by their reduced size—roughly half that of a typical scroll—but also by their narrative structure and mode of reception. Unlike their unwieldy full-sized counterparts, which were scaled for communal viewing, ko-e invited intimate, even solitary, engagement.¹⁷⁶ They also invited uninterrupted engagement, as they were short enough to be easily read in a single sitting.¹⁷⁷ Ko-e derive their emotional impact not from scale but from momentum, which is sustained by “sparse and forward driven [narratives] focusing on single protagonists and episodes that directly advance the story-line.”¹⁷⁸ Their illustrations likewise remain firmly centered, dispensing with “the lengthy panoramas and dynamic action sequences of larger scrolls” in favor of “scenes of figural interaction [and] intimate encounters between characters.”¹⁷⁹ This is not to say that the paintings in ko-e merely transpose information from a verbal to a visual register without adding any meaning of their own. As my analysis of *Nezumi* will demonstrate, even illustrations that sail close to the textual shoreline can create considerable narrative depth, bringing shades of nuance to otherwise minimalist characterizations. What textually anchored illustrations do not create is

¹⁷⁵ Regarding the number of extant ko-e, cf. McCormick, *Tosa Mitsunobu and the Small Scroll in Medieval Japan*, 50-51. McCormick would contest my description of Mitsunobu’s ko-e as otogizōshi; she argues, not without justification, that “the value of this term is minimal in reference to Muromachi period picture scrolls” (Ibid., 73). However, as discussed in the introduction, preferable terms are in short supply, and ko-e—including those by Mitsunobu—are Cf. Tokuda Kazuo, *Otogizōshi jiten*, 44-45.

¹⁷⁶ McCormick, *Tosa Mitsunobu and the Small Scroll in Medieval Japan*, 65.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 64.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 43.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 44.



Fig. 14 Detail of *Fujibukuro no sōshi*. Attributed to Tosa Mitsuhsa. Early 16th c. Handscroll; ink,color, and gold leaf on paper. Suntory Art Museum.

narrative *breadth*, the kind of diegetic expansion characteristic of the later *Gon no Kami* stories.

If ko-e constitute an exception to most generalizations about otogizōshi, generalizations about ko-e must inevitably have their exceptions as well. Some ko-e really are nothing more than “standard” otogizōshi writ small—for instance, the Keiō *Yahyōe nezumi*, a miniaturized but otherwise unaltered reproduction of a tale first created as a full-sized scroll. And even works that originated as ko-e may still possess the decentered, digressive qualities more typical of otogizōshi intended for a larger format. *Fujibukuro no sōshi* (“The Tale of the Wisteria Basket”), a mid-sixteenth century ko-e chronicling the short-lived marriage between a human woman and her simian abductor, makes liberal use of in-painting text captions to report asides from minor characters. (Interestingly, the certificate of authentication, or *kiwamefuda*, attached to this work identifies the artist as Tosa Mitsuhsa, Mitsunobu’s daughter.)¹⁸⁰ Indeed, in its treatment of the irui kon’in theme—particularly the lengthy depiction of the wedding procession and subsequent feast, complete with humorous banter among the monkey attendants^(FIG. 14)—*Fujibukuro* bears a far closer resemblance to the full-

¹⁸⁰ Okudaira, *Otogizōshi emaki*, 84-85.

sized *Gon no Kami* scrolls than to fellow ko-e such as *Nezumi*.

McCormick identifies *Nezumi* as one of six representative ko-e whose “quality, sophistication, shared association with Mitsunobu, and proximity of production contexts” along with their “unity of literary agendas” make them “the best subjects for analysis.”¹⁸¹ (Significantly, *Nezumi* is only one of four irui kon’in tales in this group; the other three—*Jizōdō no sōshi*, *Kitsune no sōshi*, and *Tsuru no sōshi*—will be analyzed below at greater length.) However, even the other five ko-e in this cohort cannot quite match *Nezumi*’s tightness of focus: their storylines move across multiple locations, acquiring additional characters in the process. By contrast, *Nezumi* introduces all of its dramatis personae in the first passage, and the action never strays beyond the boundaries of a single circumscribed setting. Indeed, these boundaries contract ever further as the narrative progresses. Each of the scroll’s three paintings is more closely “zoomed in” than the last: the first positions the viewer outside and above the heroine’s dwelling, resulting in a scene partially obscured by overhanging roofs, while the next removes this obstacle by bringing the viewer down to ground level.¹⁸² The third and final painting employs a technique known as *fukinuki yatai*, or “blown-away roof,” drawing the viewer fully into the house, and into the heart of the tragedy. Taken in sequence, the illustrations of *Nezumi* show a self-contained microcosm shrinking inward on itself.

We have already seen that the first painting opens with a gateway—a clear signal of

¹⁸¹ McCormick, *Tosa Mitsunobu and the Small Scroll in Medieval Japan*, 66-67. The “unity of literary agendas” that supposedly characterizes these six works will called into question below.

¹⁸² Mito Nobue, “*Dare ga miteiru kōkei na no ka?*” 291.

the heroine's defenselessness, even without the ominous words layered atop it. The door stands ajar, riddled with holes and set in a crumbling earthen wall; the space beyond the wall has been left blank, testifying to the household's profound isolation. (This pointed omission is mirrored in the text, which makes no mention of the outside world, save for a passing complaint about the suitors who have failed to come calling.) Within the gate, but just outside the threshold of the house itself, a white dog lies curled up, napping while its mistress is seduced by an intruder only a few rooms away. The image of the sleeping watchdog further underscores the inadequacy of the household's protections, but it also hints at the true identity of the trespasser who has made his way past those protections: from the first we know that the nun and her daughter live cheek by whiskery jowl with the animal realm, however thoroughly they may have detached themselves from human society.

But just how thoroughly *have* they detached themselves from human society? In the case of the nun, we have cause to wonder, and not only because of her distinctly this-worldly fixation on her daughter's marital prospects. For all that the opening sentence states that the nun "passed her days in extreme loneliness," the first illustration paints a rather different picture: she sits across from a trio of maidservants, one of whom seems to be reading a tale aloud to the others. Although the nun is positioned at a slight remove from the other women, she appears to be participating in their entertainment, leaning towards them and looking down at the open book. Within the confines of her hermitage, the nun has cobbled together a makeshift salon; her daughter, left to brood alone on the veranda, has no such consolation. Barred from full membership in her mother's comfortably homosocial household by her

unfulfilled heterosexual obligations, but lacking the feminine charms necessary to discharge those obligations, the lady hovers in a kind of limbo, doubly alienated.

A modern Japanese idiom describes individuals left overlong in solitude as *nezumi ni hikaresō*—“fit to be led away by a mouse”¹⁸³—and the lady’s suitor finds her in precisely this condition. Rather than leading her away, however, he takes advantage of her emotional and physical isolation by letting himself in. After approaching the veranda uninvited and declaring his love in fulsomely poetic terms, the mysterious suitor then proceeds to “stroll inside as if they knew each other well.”¹⁸⁴ The first painting shows him already seated mostly indoors, barely an arm’s length from the lady and leaning in closer. Only the hem of his robes, trailing behind him on the veranda, betrays him as a recent intruder. McCormick observes that when the irui “women” in *Jizōdō* and *Kitsune* first approach the human men on whom they will work their wiles, they assume “a virtually identical seated position” on the veranda, “down to the solicitous hand softly touching the tatami border.”¹⁸⁵ (FIG 15) Medieval audiences, she says, would have recognized this as the trademark pose of “alluring sirens” and “libertine women,” which “establishe[d] pictorially the promise of promiscuity [from the]

¹⁸³ This idiom has been in use from the mid-Edo onwards, making an early appearance in the haikai of Tairai Kikaku (1661-1707):

ほとゝぎす	Oh cuckoo,
我は鼠に	I fear I may be led away
ひかれけん	By a mouse.

(Ōno Shachiku, ed., *Genroku meika kushū: tsuketari joryū haikaishū* [Tokyo: Hakubunkan, 1898]: 211.)

¹⁸⁴ 馴かほに、さしよりなんとする。MJMT vol. 10, 239.

¹⁸⁵ McCormick, *Tosa Mitusnobu and the Small Scroll in Medieval Japan*, 153.



Fig. 15 Detail of *Kitsune no sōshi*. Copy of a late 15th c. original attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu. Morizumi. 1849. Handscroll; ink and color on paper. Waseda University.

female solicitor.”¹⁸⁶ It would seem that this pose could imply similar qualities in the *male* solicitor, for the mouse-groom presents himself on the lady’s veranda in precisely the same fashion.

The mouse-groom’s suggestively “solicitous” pose in the first painting is not the only way in which his campaign of seduction involves behavior more typically gendered feminine. According to one attempt to schematize the narrative archetypes common to *irui kon’in* folklore, animal brides infiltrate human society, whereas animal grooms plunder it, carrying human women away to their own world.¹⁸⁷ While this formula seems to hold true more often

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Nakamura Tomoko, “*Nihon no irui kon’in-tan ni okeru hito to dōbutsu no aida no kyōri: ‘henshin’ no shiten kara,*” *Kōshō bungaku kenkyū* 33 (2010), 84. Nakamura offers two further observations on the differences between the “animal bride” narrative and the “animal groom” narrative. In tales of the former type, she claims, the climax occurs when the bride’s identity is revealed; by contrast, tales of the latter type reach their climax when the human bride escapes her inhuman husband. Here, too, *Nezumi* follows the pattern supposedly associated with “animal bride” stories (although given that the revelation of the animal groom’s identity coincides with his death, one might argue that it also constitutes an effective escape for his human bride). Finally, Nakamura notes that animal brides usually abandon their human husbands and return intact to their own world, while animal grooms tend to meet a more violent end; on this score, *Nezumi* proceeds according to type.

than not, numerous counterexamples do exist, among them *Nezumi*. By the fifteenth century matrilineal marriage had long since slipped into obsolescence, but the studiously pseudo-classical *Nezumi* could scarcely flout Heian literary precedent by depicting contemporary marital customs. Thus it is that mouse-groom, like the great fictional lovers of centuries past, comes calling at the lady's residence under the cover of darkness, disguised in hunting robes. (Hunting robes were the costume of choice for amorous noblemen hoping to conceal their identities; in this sense, the mouse-groom is merely observing standard courtship protocol, albeit to a rather extreme degree.)

In addition to adhering to the pattern set forth in the great Heian romances, the mouse-groom's *modus operandi*—a series of furtive nocturnal visits culminating in indefinite cohabitation—recalls the behavior of flesh-and-blood rodents in a manner most likely all too familiar to the tale's audience. Finally, and perhaps most vitally, by insinuating himself into the lady's household, the mouse-groom makes good on the threats adumbrated in the first painting—namely, the crumbling walls and the creatures waiting just outside them. The sleeping dog, which embodies both of these perils simultaneously, is not the only animal here (or rather, not the only animal recognizable as such): a pair of deer stand in the hills on the lower left. Their antlers mark them as male, and from the text we know that they are calling out. Belling stags served as a stock symbol of autumn melancholy from the days of the *Man'yōshū*, but here they also offer a hint at the true nature of the mysterious suitor, who is yet another animal in search of a mate.

(For an example of an otogizōshi that fully matches Nakamura's predictions, see *Fujibukuro* below.)



Fig. 16 First painting of *Nezumi no sōshi*, with details. Attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu. 1469-1487. Handscroll; ink and color on paper. Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum.

The animals that bookend the first painting make no appearance in the second,^(FIG. 16) in part because of the more zoomed-in view discussed above, which cuts away almost all outdoor scenery. Much of the house's exterior has also vanished beyond the tightening frame, but the architecture has clearly undergone major renovation. Gone are the decaying floorboards and snagged eaves of the previous painting; a pair of carpenters laboring on the veranda explains the sudden transformation. (The carpenters receive no mention in the text, which tells us only that “the man brought various gifts when occasion warranted”¹⁸⁸—something of an understatement, to judge from the illustration.) The interior of the house

¹⁸⁸ さるべきおりふしにはさまざまとふゝ(sic)ひければ. MJMT vol. 10, 239.

further testifies to the mouse-groom's generosity: piles of robes and bolts of cloth surround the nun and her maidservants, while incense, braziers, and other valuables crowd the shelves of a newly constructed storeroom. For all that the scene highlights the household's reversal of fortunes, it also hints at darker things in the offing. The human (or seemingly human) characters assume much the same positions as they did in the previous painting, with the nun on the right, flanked by a bevy of maidservants, and her daughter to the left, seated across from her suitor. Slight though it was before, the distance between the couple has closed even further, and the mouse-groom has moved deeper into the interior of the house. To all appearances, he has gained commensurate ground in the lady's heart; she gazes at him raptly, sparing not a glance for the costly goods beside her.

The nun, shown overseeing her maidservants as they sort through a chest of robes, would seem to possess a greater awareness of the material benefits attendant upon her daughter's blossoming romance. However, she possesses an equally keen awareness of the potential for disaster; because her daughter's lover has not made a formal commitment, the household's newfound fortune may yet prove fickle. The nun's alternating fits of joy and apprehension occupy the greater part of the second passage of text, which is focalized almost entirely through her perspective. Our only direct knowledge of the lady's emotional state comes from a terse narratorial report at the beginning of the passage: "The lady, too, returned [her suitor's] feelings."¹⁸⁹

The nun, whose old-fashioned mores prevent her from intruding on the couple

¹⁸⁹ 女もあはれをかいはしけり. Ibid.

uninvited, suffers from even more limited access to information. Indeed, she has never so much as *seen* her daughter's lover, a state of affairs that not only fuels her misgivings about her mysterious son-in-law, but also underscores the fact that he is not really her son-in-law at all. According to Heian custom, the transition from love affair to full-fledged matrimony did not take place until "rice cakes were served to the couple inside the bed curtains by the bride's mother . . . who thus symbolically discovered the groom and, by making him eat food cooked over the family fire, incorporated him into the household."¹⁹⁰ The nun, however, is in no position to make any such discovery, and not only because of her rigid sense of etiquette. While the lady has drawn nearer to her lover, she has drifted away from her mother even more dramatically; the two now occupy not adjoining rooms but opposite wings, separated by a zigzagging walkway and multiple walls.

Like the accompanying section of text, the second painting of *Nezumi* marginalizes the perspective of the lady while privileging that of the nun, positioning the latter on the far right in left-facing profile so that the path of the viewer's gaze will readily align with hers.¹⁹¹ True, the nun's field of vision does not completely circumscribe our own; unlike her, we can see the lady and her lover, albeit imperfectly, as they are partially obscured by a sliding door and a pillar. These obstructions, art historian Mito Nobue argues, signal the limits of the nun's perception while still allowing viewers to peek beyond them. Of course, the nun has her own

¹⁹⁰ William H. McCullough and Helen Craig McCullough (trans., intro., and notes), *A Tale of Flowering Fortunes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press): 297, n. 158. Quoted in Peter Nickerson, "The Meaning of Matrilocal, Kinship, Property, and Politics in Mid-Heian," *Monumenta Nipponica* vol 48, no. 4 (Winter 1993), 438.

¹⁹¹ Mito, "*Dare ga miteiru kōkei na no ka?*" 29.

means of circumventing these limits: where her line of sight terminates, a chain of strategically stationed maidservants steps in to take over.¹⁹² Peering around corners and exchanging oblique glances, the maidservants become “an antenna transmitting the image of the lady’s chambers” to their mistress.¹⁹³ As zoological metaphors go, “whisker” might be more fitting than “antenna,” but Mito’s choice of words is still strikingly apt, in that it presents the maidservants as both an extension of the nun and a single organic entity unto themselves. The gestalt identity of the maidservants comes through with even greater clarity in the text. On both occasions that the reader is made privy to their psychological interior,

¹⁹² Mito offers a detailed analysis of the positioning of the maidservants in the second painting to support his contention that they were intended to suggest a sort of domestic espionage network. According to Mito, this network begins in the nun’s chambers, where a maidservant sits leaning against a pillar. (Significantly, this pillar mirrors the one that blocks our view of the mouse-groom; recall that Mito regards the pillars as symbolic of the limits of the nun’s vision.) The maidservant cranes her neck to look outside and to the left, in the direction of the lady’s chambers, where a second maidservant stands on the veranda, looking back over her shoulder toward the nun’s chambers. A third maidservant—the only one with a direct view of the lady and her lover—sits beside the pillar in the lady’s chambers; like the maidservant on the veranda, she keeps her face turned toward the nun’s chambers. Although she is seated indoors, her hair spills outside onto the veranda and curls to the right, as if drawn by some invisible connection to the nun. (Ibid., 29-30.)

While Mito incisively captures the drama at the heart of the second painting—the maze of obstructed views, and the web of conspiratorial glances weaving through it—I would contend that he overlooks one key leg of the informational relay. In the nun’s chambers, a second maidservant sits beside the maidservant leaning against the pillar; together with the nun, they form an equilateral triangle. Unlike her compatriot, whose head is turned to the left, the maidservant in question is shown making direct eye contact with the nun. As she does so, she points leftward. On an intradiegetic level, she is presumably pointing at the robe in her hand, but it surely is no coincidence that at the same time that she so obviously commands the nun’s attention, her finger leads the viewer’s eye towards the lady’s chambers. (Regarding the extradiegetic significance of pointing in emaki, cf. Miyakoshi Naoto, “*Chūsei emaki kenkyū josetsu: e no naka de yubi o sasu hitobito*,” *Rikkyō Daigaku Nihon bungaku* vol. 84 [July 2000], 26-39.)

In contrast to her mother, the lady appears to be entirely oblivious to the maidservants around her—although this is perhaps unsurprising, given that they are positioned outside her line of sight. In short, the second painting of the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* not only presents the maidservants as a network of observers, it presents them as a network anchored unilaterally to the nun.

¹⁹³ Mito, “*Dare ga miteiru kōkei na no ka?*” 29.

they seem to share a collective consciousness—that is, the narrator attributes thoughts and emotions to the maidservants as a group—and their communal mental state invariably echoes that of the nun.

The second painting foregrounds the interpersonal dynamics that propel the tale toward tragedy, but it also foreshadows the fundamentally *animal* nature of that tragedy, perhaps even more pointedly than the painting before it. Although the dog and the deer from previous scene are nowhere in sight, careful inspection reveals a gray tabby cat in the nun's chambers, peeking around the edge of a sliding door. Like the nun and her attendants, the cat faces leftward, as if guiding the viewer's gaze across the painting toward the lady and her lover. Within the context of the storyworld, however, the cat has its sights set on something rather more mundane: the tray of dried fish airing on the veranda. Like the cask of saké beside them, the fish presumably entered the household larder courtesy of the mouse-groom—and they are about to *exit* the larder courtesy of the cat, which is crouched in an unmistakable stalking position. From its very first appearance, the cat threatens the inflow of wealth to the household, and as trivial as this threat may seem (surely the family's burgeoning fortunes can sustain a few pilfered fish?), it prefigures catastrophe on a far grander scale. Even as the nun sorts and stores the mouse-groom's gifts, the cat is poised to wantonly consume them—and soon enough, it will consume their giver as well.

“Soon enough,” that is, for the reader. In terms of raw chronology, the lady and her lover spend several more years together, although this interval occupies no more than a few formulaic words at the beginning of the third section of text: “Little by little, the months and

the years went by...”¹⁹⁴ This narrative segue withholds far more than it reveals, forcing the reader into the same position as the nun, relegated to the periphery of her daughter’s pseudo-marriage. Like her, we stand to benefit from the war of emotional attrition waged by the maidservants, who encourage the lady to introduce her lover to her mother—and, by extension, to us. At last the lady capitulates, although the narrator declines to divulge her thoughts on the matter; as in the first passage, we must wait to gain entrance into her psychological interior. Until then, we are left to look through the nun’s rather jaundiced eyes as she inspects her son-in-law and pronounces him less than ideal (“he was not particularly handsome”) but more than adequate (“but neither was he ugly, and his manner of speaking was not unpleasant”).¹⁹⁵

Significantly, we must accept the nun’s assessment of the mouse-groom’s eloquence on faith, as the narrator does not report their interaction, only her final verdict. Filtered through the nun’s perspective, the mouse-groom bears little resemblance to the aggressive seducer who strolled onto the lady’s veranda and then cajoled his way into her bed. He is the passive object of feminine scrutiny, his attractive qualities reduced to static adjectives. And when he becomes the object of *feline* scrutiny, his attractive qualities desert him completely:

Now, for many years the nun had kept a beloved pet cat, which was never far from her side. Chasing the silken hem of a maidservant’s skirt, the cat came into the room. When the lady’s husband saw the cat, the color drained from his face, and he seemed to tremble harder and harder.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ やうやうとし月にも成りぬれば. MJMT vol. 10, 240.

¹⁹⁵ とりわきよき所はなけれども、にくからず、物などいひたるさま口おしからぬけしきなれば. Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ かくてあま君とし月ねこをいとおしかりて、あたりさけずかひけるか、きぬの濯にまとはれて、此座敷へ出にけり。ねこを見つけて、聲のかほの色かはり、次第にはなはたと見える。Ibid.

We already know how the tale ends. (The tale's original audience may also have had more than a vague idea of what to expect, as I will argue below.) The cat pounces; the man is unmasked as a mouse and summarily devoured; nobody lives happily ever after. On the contrary, we are left with the impression that the mouse-groom's erstwhile wife has not merely suffered a temporary reversal, but rather has sustained a crippling psychological blow. Although she initially recoils at the realization "that she had pledged herself to *that*,"¹⁹⁷ her horror soon gives way to grief: "And yet . . . all those months and those years, all those deep words of love that he had spoken . . . she thought of it all again and again, and despaired. Truly, theirs was a bond not of this world."¹⁹⁸ The narrator's parting comment hovers somewhere between genuine approbation and sly, dark humor, but either way it offers little cause for hope that the heroine's fortunes will improve.

It is on this grim note that the text leads into the third and final painting.^(FIG. 17) I use the phrase "leads into" in a spatial as well as a narrative sense: the closing lines of the tale, from "all those deep words of love" onward, spill into the upper right corner of the illustration, pulling the reader along with them. Like the writing superimposed on the first painting, the textual incursion into the third painting may have less to do with creative intent than a minor miscalculation somewhere in the productive process.¹⁹⁹ Nonetheless, the overlap

¹⁹⁷ 身の契の程もあさましく。Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ 此とし月さままあさからずかたらひつる言のはなど、色々に思いづけてかきくらすも、まめやかに此世ならぬ契なりしとぞ。Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Mito believes the placement of the closing lines to be deliberate; *vide infra* for further discussion. On the other hand, Yoshida Yūji posits a similar scribal miscalculation for another ko-e attributed to Mitsunobu, *Bakemono no sōshi*; here, the calligrapher apparently failed to fill all of the allotted space. (Yoshida Yūji, "Bakemono no sōshi e ni tsuite," in SNEZ suppl. vol. II, 44.)



Fig. 17 Third painting of *Nezumi no sōshi*, with details. Attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu. 1469-1487. Handscroll; ink and color on paper. Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum.

of word and image inevitably inflects our reading of both, for all that the calligrapher seems to have taken pains to restrict that overlap by crowding half-sized characters into the band of blue mist along the top of the painting. As a result, our view of the illustration remains virtually unimpeded, but this visibility comes at the price of ready legibility. Written against

a dark background in delicate, diminutive script, the final words of *Nezumi* draw the reader into the painting from two directions—rightward, but also *inward*, towards the scroll itself. They compel heightened intimacy with what is already the most intimate image in the work.

As mentioned above, as the point of view shifts from one illustration to the next, we gain a progressively less obstructed view of the house and its inhabitants. This growing perspectival candor reaches its culmination in the third painting, when all architectural veils have fallen away. Our temporal peephole has widened as well; making use of a convention known as *iji dōzu*, or “different time, same picture,” the artist has captured multiple points in time within a single image, producing an effect akin to stop-motion photography. Previously, *Nezumi* skimmed through years in the space of a single sentence; now, it lingers over the events of a few moments with a gawker’s appetite for gory detail. We watch the cat bound into the room, crouch, and pounce; ^(FIG. 18) we watch the mouse-groom devolve from charming young man to uncanny creature to unambiguous animal; and we watch the lady as she watches all of this, first beaming in adoration, then staring in horror, and finally turning away in despair.

As the above description implies, the third painting of *Nezumi* consists of three distinct frames, mirroring the tripartite organization of the tale as a whole. Miya observes that the structure of *Nezumi* aligns very closely with the three-part sequence of *jo-ha-kyū* (“prelude, breakaway, climax”) used in many traditional Japanese performing arts, most famously in Noh drama.²⁰⁰ This description applies equally well to the third painting by itself.

²⁰⁰ Miya, “*Nezumi no sōshi emaki*,” *Shinshū Nihon emaki zenshū* sup. vol. II, 36. McCormick (*Tosa*



Fig. 18 Details of the third painting of *Nezumi no sōshi*. Attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu. 1469-1487. Handscroll; ink and color on paper. Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum.

The walls of the house serve as the dividers between frames, meaning that each scene takes place in a different room. (Here, I should clarify that the first scene takes place in two rooms simultaneously; I regard these rooms as subsections of a single frame because they represent a single point in time and jointly contain the five central characters who will reappear in the subsequent two frames—the mouse-groom, the lady, the nun, the cat, and a single maidservant.) Two additional maidservants make a single appearance apiece, one in the first

Mitsunobu and the Small Scroll in Medieval Japan, 72) incorrectly states that Miya describes the third painting of the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* in terms of *jo-ha-kyū*, when in fact he applies this description to the work as a whole.

frame and one in the second; by the third frame, their ranks have dwindled to a single representative. The disappearing maidservants (dis)embody a larger movement toward contraction and collapse. The first scene occupies two rooms, while the next two scenes are confined to a single room apiece. These rooms grow progressively narrower from right to left; the last measures less than half as wide as the first, and can barely accommodate both the nun and her daughter. The mouse-groom undergoes an even more dramatic miniaturization; he shrinks from man to mouse and, dangling from the cat's jaws, teeters on the verge of vanishing altogether.

As discussed above, the first painting incorporates sizable sections of landscape; in fact, the painter has adopted a disproportionately long view to fully depict the hills behind the house. The more intimate view in the second painting bares the interior of the house to closer inspection, but also cuts away most of the exterior scenery. The house extends beyond the right edge of the frame and fills it from top to bottom. The gap between the newly-constructed wings of the house creates an empty space at the heart of the painting: a symbol of the growing rift between mother and daughter, but also a prelude to collapse, a center that cannot hold. Only on the left side of the second painting do we catch a brief glimpse of the outside world—that is, if a fenced-in yard truly qualifies as “outside.” (The fence makes no appearance in the first painting, and seems to be in far better condition than the crumbling wall seen there; presumably it is one of the renovations financed by the mouse-groom—an ironic touch, given that he is precisely the sort of intruder most homeowners would hope to fence out.) A band of mist conceals the area beyond the fence, while the area within the

fence remains bare save for a lone tree. This tree resembles the tree in the hills of the first painting, although the surrounding vegetation has vanished and it stands far closer to the house—so close, in fact, that its branches overhang the veranda. By the third painting, the outside world seems to have vanished altogether. The narrow room in which the lady sits mourning opens onto the veranda, which in turn overlooks an expanse of perfectly blank paper. The tree that stood on the far left of the previous two paintings is nowhere to be seen, but a screen painting of a tree now occupies roughly the same position, decorating the sliding door that opens onto the nonexistent exterior.

The tree on the veranda door is only one of the many “paintings within paintings” (*gachūga*) that crowd every available surface of the third painting. *Gachūga* feature frequently in Muromachi art, whether as simple ornamentation or as a vehicle for narrative “meta-commentary,” to borrow a term from McCormick. McCormick ascribes the latter function to two particular *gachūga* in Mitsunobu’s *ko-e*: a screen painting of boats on a lake in *Utatane no sōshi* (“A Tale of Brief Slumbers”) that foreshadows the tale’s climactic scene, and a screen painting of cranes separated by a river in *Suzuriwari no sōshi* (“Breaking the Inkstone”) that manifests the bereavement of the character seated before it.²⁰¹ A gilt folding screen showing a similar image (unfortunately badly faded) appears in the first two frames of the third illustration of the Mitsunobu *Nezumi*, standing immediately behind the nun and her

²⁰¹ McCormick, *Tosa Mitsunobu and the Small Scroll in Medieval Japan*, 129, 183. Although McCormick offers a plausible interpretation of these *gachūga*, it does bear mentioning that extremely similar *gachūga* appear elsewhere in Mitsunobu’s oeuvre in contexts that do not support any particular symbolic reading. (For instance, the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* contains a screen painting of boats on a lake nearly identical to the aforementioned screen painting in *Utatane no sōshi*.)

daughter. Does the motif of the river operate the same way here as it does in *Suzuriwari*, foreshadowing the bereavement of the soon-to-be widow? Possibly so—but we cannot hope to decode each individual gachūga in *Nezumi* in a similar fashion. The majority of the gachūga in Mitsunobu’s work consist of generic botanical imagery²⁰²— subject matter with minimal metacommentarial potential—and the gachūga in *Nezumi* are no exception. On the other hand, the multitude of gachūga in the third illustration constitutes a marked departure from the previous two paintings, and so suggests the operation of a conscious creative agenda rather than a reflexive horror vacui.

The first illustration of *Nezumi* contains one relatively modest gachūga: waves of long grass painted on the sliding panel behind the mouse-groom, perhaps meant to hint at his connection to the non-human realm. In keeping with the general atmosphere of destitution, the walls are otherwise bare. We might expect a greater number of gachūga in the second illustration, which highlights the household’s newfound prosperity, but for all the trappings of luxury, screen paintings make no appearance. It is only when we arrive at the third illustration that we are confronted by a veritable jungle of paintings-within-a-painting, crowding every available architectural surface. (Recall that the artist uses walls to divide the sequential action into frames, which means that there are a great many surfaces available.) I use the word “jungle” not only to indicate the sheer profusion of gachūga, but also to give some sense of the many and varied flora that they depict: pine trees and cherry trees and

²⁰² Tsuji Nobuo, et al., *Sesshū to Yamato-e byōbu: Nanbokuchō, Muromachi no kaiga 2, Nihon bijutsu zenshū* vol. 13 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1993), 209; Aizawa Masahiko, “Konda Sōbyō engi no eshi to sono gafu,” *Museum* vol. 527 (February 1995), 4-18.

willows, bushes and reeds and grasses, all curving and twisting within the angles of the house. Perhaps it is the revelation of the mouse-groom's animal identity that triggers this explosion of natural imagery, although it might be more fitting to speak of an *implosion* of natural imagery. The riot of gachūga within the house stands in stark contrast to the void without, suggesting the inward collapse of the domestic boundary, the inrush of the outside world (diminished in scale, ontologically demoted from "painting" to "painting of a painting").

This profusion of gachūga produces a degree of pictorial density absent from the previous two illustrations, and this visual overload is further compounded by the triplicating effect of the sequential action. Iji dōzu sequences occur with some frequency in the ko-e attributed to Mitsunobu, but the technique is put to particularly masterful use in *Nezumi*. As I have already noted, the tripartition of the third illustration parallels the structure of the work *in toto*, and this parallel is strengthened by the reprisal of key elements of the previous two illustration in the first and second frames. The second illustration shows the mouse-groom lounging in indoor dress, but in the third painting he has once more donned the hunting robes he wore when he first came calling. In some sense, the first frame of the third illustration returns the mouse-groom to the role of untried suitor, although now it is the nun whom he seeks to win over. The artist has made it apparent that the lady's heart requires no further winning: she sits with one hand pressed to her bosom and her head tilted toward the mouse-groom, a besotted smile on her face.

The mouse-groom does not reciprocate his lover's attention, instead directing his gaze toward his prospective mother-in-law. Unfortunately, the paint on the nun's face has faded,

leaving her expression quite literally blank. Her posture, however, communicates a certain reserve; she sits rigidly upright, hands tucked inside her sleeves. By contrast, the mouse-groom leans toward her, mirroring his “solicitous” pose in the first painting. Also as before, he sits astride a boundary—specifically, the seam between two tatami mats. As boundaries go, this one may lack the symbolic weight of the threshold between the veranda and the interior, but for centuries painters of emaki had exploited the grid created by tatami matting to map interpersonal dynamics. Significantly, neither the nun nor her daughter sit on either of the two tatami mats occupied by the mouse-groom; instead, they share a single mat of their own. True, the lady sits in the mat’s far corner, her robes spreading beyond its edges, but her relative proximity to her mother is telling nonetheless; until now, the nun and her daughter have never even appeared in the same room. They do not face one another—that intimacy is reserved for the final panel—but they do sit side by side, presenting the mouse-groom with a unified front. The lady’s adoring gaze notwithstanding, her placement in this tableau bespeaks a tectonic reconfiguration of allegiances.

Unlike the two panels that succeed it, the first panel distributes the *dramatis personae* across two rooms. While the lady introduces her lover to her mother, the cat waits in the corridor next door, batting at the skirts of a maidservant passing by with a tray of food. The maidservant has turned her head to smile down at the cat, which in turn stares intently up at her; the clear eye contact between the two seems to suggest a kind of complicity. In any event, we can be certain that the artist took pains with the positioning of the cat: revealed by layers of flaking paint, a disembodied tail hovers in midair, proof that an earlier version of the

cat was painted over and repositioned.

As one might deduce from the tray-carrying maidservant in the previous panel, the second panel shows the nun, lady, and mouse-groom seated before a freshly served meal. The introduction of food at this juncture performs multiple narrative functions. Most obviously, it furnishes a plausible explanation for the cat's appearance at this particular moment; we already knew from the text that the cat entered on the heels of the maidservant, but now we know why the maidservant entered herself. Moreover, the imminent prospect of a shared meal raises the symbolic stakes of the scene. The Heian traditions that informed pseudo-classical fiction such as *Nezumi* dictated that the "symbolic discovery" of the bridegroom be followed by a banquet at the bride's house. This event, known as *tokoroarawashi*, served as the groom's "first formal meeting with his parents-in-law" and marked the final validation of the marriage.²⁰³ Although the text does not use the term *tokoroarawashi* to describe the mouse-groom's meeting with the nun, the meal spread before them implies just such an occasion. To draw a loose analogy to Western tradition, we might say that the cat bursts in just as the couple are standing before the altar.

The trays of food in the second panel also work to establish a parallel with the second painting, where the mouse-groom is shown eating from an identical tray. The golden kettle from the second painting also makes a repeat appearance in the second panel, and the maidservant who holds it assumes much the same position as she did before. The maidservant who carried in the fateful tray occupies the right foreground of the panel; her placement

²⁰³ McCullough, *A Tale of Flowering Fortunes*, 297 n. 158. Quoted in Nickerson, "The Meaning of Matrilocality, Kinship, Property, and Politics in Mid-Heian," 439.

echoes the placement of the maidservant standing outside the lady's chambers in the second painting (and surely it is no coincidence that here, too, she is shown holding a tray). This time, however, the maidservants do not look back toward their absent mistress. Like the cat crouching between them, they stare dead ahead at the now clearly inhuman mouse-groom. The wedding banquet will soon become a feast of a very different sort, and the delicacies laid out before the celebrants foreshadow the mouse-groom's fate with the grimmest of grim ironies.

Although by far the narrowest of the three, the final panel nonetheless finds room for a touch of dark humor: the maidservant in the foreground (now the only one of her cohort present) wags a scolding finger at the cat as it carries off its prey. The nun assumes a more solemn air, her face creased with sorrow as she lays a consoling hand on the hem of her daughter's robes. (Deliberately or otherwise, this gesture recalls the "solicitous" pose discussed above.) For her part, the lady appears to derive little comfort from her mother's sympathy. She huddles against the wall, one hand pressed over her eyes—sunk in recollection, as we know from the closing lines superimposed on the third painting. According to Mito, the "fade-out" effect produced by the layering of text and illustration gives viewers the impression that they are looking directly into the lady's memories—and because the illustration ends with an image of the lady remembering, the ultimate result is a kind of *mise en abyme*, an infinitely recursive unhappy ending.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ Mito, "Dare ga miteiru kōkei na no ka?" 29.

II. TWO LEGS GOOD, FOUR LEGS BAD, NO LEGS AMBIGUOUS:

*Iru*i Spouses and Buddhist Didacticism in *Tsuru no sōshi*, *Kitsune no sōshi*, and *Jizōdō no sōshi*

The Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* numbers among several ko-e on the theme of irui kon'in attributed to Mitsunobu and his atelier; other works of this description include *Tsuru no sōshi* ("The Tale of the Crane"), *Kitsune no sōshi* ("The Tale of the Fox"), *Jizōdō sōshi* ("The Tale of the Jizō Hall"), and *Bakemono no sōshi* ("Tales of Things Transformed"). *Utatane no sōshi*, which chronicles a love affair initiated in a shared dream, might also be included on this list: the text hints that the handsome young man who haunts the heroine's sleep may in fact be the spirit of the cherry tree outside her room. However, these hints remain peripheral to the core narrative and ultimately go unconfirmed, limiting the grounds for comparison with *Nezumi*. Another problematic addition to the roster is *Fujibukuro no sōshi*. *Yamato nishiki*, a catalogue of emaki compiled by the painter Sumiyoshi Hiroyuki (1755-1811), contains a record of a work by this name attributed to Mitsunobu; unfortunately, its whereabouts are currently unknown. However, the National Diet Library owns a copy of the Mitsunobu *Fujibukuro* painted in 1649 by Sumiyoshi Jokei; judging from this, Mitsunobu's *Fujibukuro* was virtually identical to the ko-e of the same title attributed to his daughter Mitsuhiisa.²⁰⁵

Unsurprisingly, art historians continue to wrangle over which (if any) of the ko-e in question were produced by Mitsunobu himself. At the very least, however, the attribution to Mitsunobu accurately reflects the period and social stratum in which these works originated.

²⁰⁵ Matsumoto Ryūshin, "*Fujibukuro no sōshi*," *Otogizōshi emaki*, 84-85; Ryūsawa Aya, "*Fujibukuro no sōshi emaki' ni tsuite*," *Biyō* vol. 2 (April 2005), 39.

Like the Mitsunobu *Nezumi*, *Jizōdō*, *Bakemono*, *Kitsune*, and *Tsuru* all speak to the tastes of the late medieval ruling elite and the talent of the artists whom they patronized.²⁰⁶ Indeed, evidence suggests that *Kitsune* once belonged to no less a luminary than the shogun Ashikaga Yoshihisa. In a diary entry dated Meiō 6 (1497), the aristocrat Sanjōnishi Sanetaka mentions a scroll by the title of *Kitsune-e* formerly owned by the recently deceased Yoshihisa. The scion of a genteelly impoverished branch of the Fujiwara clan, Sanetaka relied on his literary talents to make a living, frequently collaborating with Mitsunobu over the course of his career. Sanetaka's diaries offer invaluable if intermittent glimpse into the patronage and production of emaki and other ko-e; even the passing allusion to *Kitsune-e* conceals a wealth of implications. Miya argues, and other scholars agree, that Yoshihisa's *Kitsune-e* was most likely the work now known as *Kitsune no sōshi*.²⁰⁷

If we accept Miya's identification of *Kitsune-e* as *Kitsune no sōshi*, then it not only confirms the elite provenance of this particular ko-e, but also underscores one of the central contentions of this dissertation: stories about animals attracted a wide and varied audience

²⁰⁶ Miura Shunsuke suggests that the Mitsuhisa *Fujibukuro* may have been produced for "wealthy townspeople (*machishū*)," although he provides no evidence to support this speculation. ("*Fujibukuro no sōshi*," *Otogizōshi jiten*, 426) The seven extant manuscripts of *Fujibukuro* can be divided into two lineages, which are conventionally denoted A and B. The works in the A lineage appear to be the product of urban artisans, while the B lineage consists of the Mitsuhisa *Fujibukuro* and its congeners; the Owari branch of the Tokugawa clan is known to have possessed a manuscript belonging to the latter category. In short, *Fujibukuro* in its various incarnations appealed to a broad audience not constrained by social class. ("*Fujibukuro no sōshi emaki' ni tsuite*," 39-41)

²⁰⁷ Miya Tsugio, "*Ashikaga Yoshihisa shoji 'Kitsune no sōshi emaki' o megutte: fu 'Kitsune no sōshi emaki' shisho, honkoku*," *Bijutsu kenkyū* vol. 260 (December 1968), 33-34. In addition to the one-scroll "*Kitsune-e*" owned by Yoshihisa, Sanetaka's diary also mentions a two-scroll "*Kitsune-e*" kept at the Palace Attendants' Bureau (*Naishi no tsukasa*). Although this latter work is unlikely to be the *Kitsune no sōshi* attributed to Mitsunobu (which comprises a single scroll), it seems to indicate elite interest in stories about foxes.

not confined to the ranks of the unlettered masses. But even as Yoshihisa's imprimatur confers a legitimizing aura upon *Kitsune*, it also threatens to reinforce a line of reasoning long used to trivialize ko-e, otogizōshi, and iruimono alike: namely, that they were bagatelles meant for women and children. As Miya notes, Yoshihisa died at the age of twenty-five, meaning that he likely acquired *Kitsune* as a teenager.²⁰⁸ However, while the prominent strand of Buddhist didacticism running through *Kitsune* “fit[s] into the general pedagogical agenda for young boys in the fifteenth century,”²⁰⁹ similar themes pervade medieval works consumed by audiences of all ages.

Whether or not the moralizing bent of *Kitsune* bespeaks an intent to mold youthful minds, it makes itself felt with equal force in *Tsuru* and *Jizōdō*. All three works are driven by a shared logic, which dictates that vice and virtue—as defined in explicitly Buddhist terms—must reap their just deserts. In this regard, they differ dramatically from *Nezumi*, which displays little concern for the moral dimension of its narrative and offers the reader few overt hermeneutic cues. The opening lines of *Tsuru* illuminate the contrast:

Compassion is the most excellent of all virtues. The taking of life is the gravest of all sins. Therefore the sutras say, “The heart of the Buddha is none other than compassion. The taking of life is the end result of abandoning compassion. You must not kill any living being.” Those who take life will be repaid with brief, poor, and wretched lives, while those who have compassion invite long life, wealth, and good fortune.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 34.

²⁰⁹ McCormick, *Tosa Mitsunobu and the Small Scroll in Medieval Japan*, 76.

²¹⁰ それしひはもろくのせんこんの中にもともすよろつのあくこうの中にことにをもし。されは、経には「ほどけの御心は、たゞこれしひなり。しひにそむけるのいたりは、殺生なり。一切のいのちあらんもの、ことさらにころすことなかれ」といへり。殺生のは、いのちみしかく、まつしく、いやしきのむくひをうけ、しひある人は、いのちなかく、とみたとき、ふくをまねくものなり。(Kano Hiroyuki, “*Tosa Mitsunobu hitsu ‘Tsuru no sōshi’ ni tsuite*,” *Gakusō* vol. 5 [1983]: 92.)



Fig. 19 Detail of *Tsuru no sōshi*. Attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu. Late 15th c. Handscroll: ink, color, and gold leaf on paper. Kyoto National Museum.

The story proceeds much as this homily would suggest. A poor widower in Ōmi province encounters a hunter who has snared a crane, and trades his robe for the crane's freedom. ^(FIG. 19) The next day, a beautiful young woman appears on his doorstep requesting lodging. The widower soon marries his mysterious guest, but he has acquired a rival as well as a wife: the jealous manorial steward (*jitō*) demands that the man bring him a thousand bushels of rapeseed or forfeit his new bride. With his wife's advice, the man manages to talk his way out of this dilemma, only to be confronted by another seemingly impossible demand, this time for a beast known as "calamity" (*wazawai*). Once more the man's wife comes to rescue: her parents, she says, own just such a creature. And so the man visits his (hitherto unknown) in-laws, who thank him for his kindness to their daughter and fête him lavishly before sending him off with the *wazawai* in tow. The man presents the steward with the *wazawai*—a monstrous hybrid of wolf and bull—and true to its name, if not the stated moral of the story, the creature embarks on a violent rampage. ^(FIG. 20) The steward begs the man to bring the *wazawai*



Fig. 20 Detail of *Tsuru no sōshi*. Attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu. Late 15th c. Handscroll: ink, color, and gold leaf on paper. Kyoto National Museum.



Fig. 21 Detail of *Tsuru no sōshi*. Attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu. Late 15th c. Handscroll: ink, color, and gold leaf on paper. Kyoto National Museum.

under control, offering him the post of general (*taishō*) in exchange. This done, the newly-appointed general returns home to his wife, who reveals that she is the crane he once saved:

“I married you in order to repay your kindness. Now your fortunes are flourishing and you will live to be one hundred years old. Although it grieves me to leave you, now we must part.” She turned into a crane and flew away to the east. The man could not suppress his tears.²¹¹ (FIG. 21)

Despite the wistful note accompanying the near-inevitable dissolution of the

interspecies union, *Tsuru* comes to a far more optimistic conclusion than *Nezumi*. It also comes to a far more *conclusive* conclusion: we know why the crane chose her human husband, we know what becomes of him after she leaves, and most of all, we know exactly what it all

²¹¹ この女は「まことには、われはたすけられたてまつりし鶴なり。その御おんをほうせむかために、かやうにちきりをこめぬ。いまはたのしみさかへ、いのちも百さいまたもちたまふへし。なこりはおしけれども、いまはわかれたてまつるへし」とて、鶴のすかたとなりて、ひんかしをさして、とひさりぬ。なみたせきあへさりけり。(Ibid., 96)

means. Lest the audience mistake the moral of the tale, a brief coda follows:

Something like this once happened in China, too. A man named Zian saw someone about to kill a crane by the side of the road, and exchanging his robe for the crane, he set it free. Soon thereafter, Zian passed away and was buried at the foot of Mount Lingyang. For three years, a crane came again and again to the tree on top of the grave, calling *Zian, Zian* over and over. At last, the crane died and Zian returned to life. “As a reward for saving the crane, the crane repaid me with my own life,” he said. It is said that thereafter, Zian studied the ways of the immortals and lived to a ripe old age. Thus it is that if one has compassion, even for a bird, one will surely have one’s reward.²¹²

Educated audiences in medieval Japan would likely have been familiar with the story of Zian and the crane, which appeared in such texts as Nichiren’s *Hokke daimoku shō* (“On the Title of the Lotus Sutra,” 1266) and the fifteenth-century tale collection *Sangoku denki* (“Record of the Legends of the Three Countries”). Ultimately, it derived from the Chinese anthology *Lieyi zhuan*, compiled during the Six Dynasties period and spuriously attributed to Cao Pi. By citing the example of Zian, *Tsuru* makes an implicit appeal to the authority of Chinese canon so as to bolster the credibility of a similar event in the Japanese context. The juxtaposition of the two miracles also affirms the universality of the underlying pattern, demonstrating that they are not in the strictest sense “miracles” after all: that is, the good fortunes of Zian and the man from Ōmi do not require a “suspension of natural law,”²¹³ but instead proceed from the workings of ineluctable cosmic principle.

²¹² もろこしにも、さるためしあり。子安といひしもの、みちのほりにて、人のつるをころさむとすを見て、ころもにかへて、はなちけるに、子安ほどなく身まかりき。陵陽山のふもとにおさめしに、そのつかのうへの木へ鶴きたりつゝ、みとせのあひた、子安々とよひつゝ、つゐにむなしくなりぬれば、子安よみかへり、「われ鶴をたすけしむくひにて、鶴、又、わかいのちにかはれり」といふ。そのうち、仙のほうをならひつゝ、久しきよはひをたもてり、となん申める。されは、かゝるてうるいまでも、あはれひのころあらは、をのつから、そのむくひあるへきことゝそ。(Ibid.)

²¹³ William LaFleur, *The Karma of Words*, 33-34.

All of this notwithstanding, concluding one story about a grateful crane with yet another story about a grateful crane may seem to belabor the point. Who, we wonder, could fail to grasp the tale's message the first time around, particularly in light of the less than subtle sermonizing in the opening lines? However, contemporary audiences likely found some latitude for (mis)interpretation in *Tsuru*, given that it borrowed conspicuously from a long tradition of "crane wife" narratives, most of which showed little concern for Buddhist proselytizing. A common East Asian incarnation of the pan-Eurasian "swan maiden" archetype,²¹⁴ the crane wife has loomed large in Japanese folklore for more than a millennium. In an expansive cross cultural survey of swan maiden lore, Barbara Fass Leavy finds that the figure of the bird-turned-bride serves as a locus for anxieties and alienation from both sides of the gender divide in patriarchal societies. From a female perspective, the swan maiden testifies to the freedoms foreclosed by marriage; from a male perspective, she embodies the ineradicable otherness of women, whose natal identities and allegiances may be submerged within the marital union but never fully subsumed by it.²¹⁵

Leavy's thesis finds considerable support in Japan's earliest crane wife tales, which are recorded in *Suruga no fudoki* and *Ōmi no fudoki*, two "records of local customs" presented to the court in the early eighth century.²¹⁶ In the *Ōmi* version of the tale, a hunter spies a flock

²¹⁴ The swan maiden archetype has fascinated comparative folklorists for more than a century, and has inspired a proportionately vast body of scholarship. For a concise historical overview, cf. Alan Miller, "The Swan-Maiden Revisited: Religious Significance of 'Divine-Wife' Folktales with Special Reference to Japan," *Asian Folklore Studies* vol. 46, no. 1 (1987), 55-65.

²¹⁵ Leavy, *In Search of the Swan Maiden*, 101-155.

²¹⁶ Recall that *Tsuru* takes place in Ōmi; likely, this choice of setting is not a coincidence, but evidence of continuity with the *Fudoki* myths. The means by which the protagonist of *Tsuru* saves

of “white birds” alighting beside a pond. (Although the species of the birds remains unidentified, they are generally accepted as “crane wives” in the narratological if not necessarily the ornithological sense.)²¹⁷ Oblivious to their audience, the birds reveal themselves as heavenly maidens (*tennyo* or *amatsuotome*), removing their feathered robes and assuming human form to bathe. The hunter manages to steal one of these robes, leaving the heavenly maiden who wore it trapped in human form as her fellows turn back into birds and fly away. Now earthbound, the heavenly maiden becomes the hunter’s wife—until she discovers where he has hidden her feathered robe, at which point she flies away and abandons him. The *Suruga* version of the tale follows this general pattern but adds a coda explaining that the hunter later became a mountain ascetic and flew up to heaven himself.

Like the broader swan maiden archetype of which they are a subset, the captive heavenly maidens of the *Fudoki* have been explained in many ways: as incarnations of the

the crane’s life—by giving away his robe—also gestures toward the older form of the myth, albeit with several obvious reversals: rather than entrapping the crane-wife by stealing her garment, the protagonist of *Tsuru* sacrifices his own garment to liberate her. In both cases, however, the interspecies relationship hinges on a garment changing hands.

²¹⁷ Miller, apparently taking the term 白鳥 in its contemporary sense, presumes these “white birds” to be swans (“The Swan-Maiden Revisited,” 68). A.T. Hatto uncritically reads 白鳥 in the same fashion, although he cites evidence that the birds in Chinese antecedents of the *Fudoki* “heavenly maiden” tales were conceived of as cranes. Moreover, he expresses puzzlement that swans—which do not breed in Japan—should inspire such a myth there, ultimately conceding the need for “other than purely ornithological solutions.” (“The Swan Maiden: A Folk-Tale of North Eurasian Origin?,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* vol. 24, no. 2 [1961]: 329-330, 340). More recent English-language scholarship appears to favor the more conservative translation “white bird” (Michael Como, *Weaving and Binding: Immigrant Gods and Female Immortals in Ancient Japan* [Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2010]: 75; Edwina Palmer, “‘Slit Belly Swamp’: A Japanese Myth of the Origin of the Pleiades?,” *Asian Ethnology* vol. 69, no 2 [2010]: 315). One lexicographer of the *Man’yōshū* (roughly contemporary with the *Fudoki*) states that 白鳥 denoted “white birds such as white egrets, swans, cranes, etc.,” and explicitly rejects the hypothesis that the term referred particularly to swans (Sasaki Nobutsuna, *Man’yōshū jiten* [Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1956]: 216, 565).

Pleiades,²¹⁸ as cultic deities transplanted from China in “associat[ion] with continental technologies such as sericulture and medicine,”²¹⁹ and as shamanically-inspired personifications of “the great migratory waterfowl.”²²⁰ However, to my knowledge, no scholar has proposed a Buddhist origin for them. *Tsuru* belongs to a larger complex of Buddhist-inflected crane-wife tales promising due karmic rewards for the compassionate treatment of animals, but as Alan Miller writes,

Although the initial episode of rescuing or freeing an animal suggests a popular Buddhist deed of building merit or good karma (such acts were referred to often in diaries of the Heian period), the mysterious spouse motif is certainly not an invention of Buddhism... This points to a Buddhist overlay upon an older or at least extra-Buddhist source.²²¹

Relatively faithful descendants of the *Fudoki* “heavenly maiden” tales remained in circulation throughout and beyond the medieval era;²²² thus, Buddhist reworkings of the same motif

²¹⁸ Palmer, “Slit Belly Swamp,” 313-315.

²¹⁹ Como, *Weaving and Binding*, 78.

²²⁰ Hatto, “The Swan Maiden,” 338.

²²¹ Miller, “The Swan Maiden Revisted,” 79.

²²² The Noh play *Hagoromo* (“The Feathered Robe”) is perhaps the best-known medieval retelling of the *Fudoki* crane-wife tales. Admittedly, in this instance the term “crane wife” may be something of a misnomer: the owner of the titular robe likely has an avian alter-ego (we receive broad hints on this score, but no confirmation), but she never becomes anybody’s wife. The fisherman who steals the feathered robe wishes to gain possession of the garment itself rather than the woman who wore it, and his conscience eventually moves him to restore it to the original owner. He does, however, require the heavenly maiden to perform for him first: “an excuse for the dances,” in Arthur Waley’s words, but also an echo of the greater violation forced upon her predecessors.

The slightly later otogizōshi known as *Hagoromo monogatari emaki* also deserves notice here. True to the ancestral myth, *Hagoromo monogatari emaki* begins as a tale of a captive otherworldly bride, but then develops into a story of the repayment of kindness: struck by pity, the husband releases his bird-wife, at which point she returns to him out of gratitude. Nonetheless, like so many interspecies spouses, the two eventually part ways (Tokuda Kazuo, “*Hagoromo monogatari emaki*,” *Otogizōshi jiten*, 388).

Considered together, *Hagoromo* and *Hagoromo monogatari emaki* would seem to indicate a mounting distaste for the baldly coercive “marriages” central to the earliest crane-wife tales.

would have needed to assert their message with especial vigor.

As Susan Rubin Suleiman observes, redundancy is a mainstay of didactic literature, which “[eliminates] plural readings and inconsistencies and [imposes] a single ‘correct’ reading”²²³ by dint of sheer repetition. Suleiman defines twenty-three categories of redundancy, the first of which—“the same event or sequence of events happens to more than one [character]”²²⁴—aptly describes the story of Zian in *Tsuru*. Of course, Zian does not experience precisely the same sequence of events as the man from Ōmi, and the variations work in tandem with the repetitions to establish meaning. Both men give aid to a crane, and are aided by it in turn; only for one of them does the crane’s repayment take the form of matrimony. In other words, the story of Zian arbitrates between the two most salient narrative elements of *Tsuru*—*irui kon’in* and *ongaeshi*—and assigns overriding significance to the latter. In *Tsuru*, interspecies marriage does not constitute a didactically meaningful category unto itself; rather, it exists as one of many possible interspecies karmic transactions, significant—at least in theory—because it positions animals as conscious actors in the same moral economy as humans. In practice, however, not all interspecies karmic transactions exercised an equally powerful creative appeal. Zian’s story is a terse account of tit for tat, not even meriting an illustration; the man from Ōmi and his crane bride receive the lion’s share

However, the muting of the ‘captive bride’ trope in these two texts does not necessarily reflect a broader transformation in the body of associated folklore. Twentieth century ethnographers have recorded crane-wife tales throughout Japan that follow the *Fudoki* prototype faithfully, forced marriage and all (Keigo Seki, “Types of Japanese Folktales,” *Asian Folklore Studies* vol. 25 [1966], 79).

²²³ Susan Rubin Suleiman, “Redundancy and the ‘Readable’ Text,” *Poetics Today* vol. 1, no. 3 (Spring 1980), 120. Although Suleiman’s primary concern is “realistic” fiction, her basic typology of didactic mechanisms extrapolates well across genres.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

of the artist's and the author's (and presumably, the audience's) attention.

Much like *Tsuru, Kitsune* repurposes an irui kon'in tale-type of extra-Buddhist origin by situating it within a Buddhist moral framework. Like the swan maiden/crane wife, the fox bride has deep and far-reaching roots in East Asian narrative traditions. Early Chinese *zhiguai* collections such as *Soushenji* ("Records of Searching the Mountains") and *Xuanzhongji* ("Records in the Midst of Mystery"), both from the fourth century, already contain tales of shape-shifting vixens working their wiles on unwary human men.²²⁵ As previously mentioned, foxes rank as the most frequently represented of all irui spouses in Japanese lore and literature; thus, *Kitsune* is far from the first work to wed the fox bride motif to a Buddhist message. Indeed, a tale closely resembling *Kitsune*, and presumably ancestral to it, appears in several Buddhist-oriented *setsuwa* collections, beginning with the early twelfth century *Konjaku monogatari*.²²⁶ The title of the *Konjaku* version does double duty as a summary: "How Kaya no Yoshifuji of Bitchū Province became the husband of a fox and was saved by Kannon." *Kitsune* preserves this basic storyline, although Kannon is replaced by Jizō and Kaya no Yoshifuji by an unnamed monk.²²⁷

Unlike all other ko-e attributed to Mitsunobu, *Kitsune* opens with an illustration

²²⁵ Huntington, *Alien Kind*, 10; Igor Alimov, "Concerning 'Records of Searching for Spirits' of Gan Bao," *Manuscripta Orientalia* vol. 18, no. 1 (June 2012), 8.

²²⁶ The same tale made its first known appearance in the even earlier *Zenke hiki*, which was compiled by Miyoshi no Kiyotsura in the late ninth century and is almost entirely lost today. Happily, the *Zenke* tale is quoted in the twelfth century Buddhist chronicle *Fusō ryakki. Genkō shakusho*, another Buddhist history composed roughly two centuries later, also includes a version of the same story.

²²⁷ The substitution of Jizō for Kannon reflects the growing prominence of the Jizō cult during the Muromachi era (Miya, "*Ashikaga Yoshihisa shōji 'Kitsune no sōshi emaki' o megutte*," 32-33). As one might deduce from the title, *Jizōdō* (discussed below) offers further evidence that Jizō was a favored object of devotion for Mitsunobu's patrons.

rather than a section of text. This reversal is almost certainly an accident of preservation: the first extant textual passage of the scroll appears to pick up midway through the story.²²⁸ As best as can be determined, the missing first passage describes the meeting between an elderly monk and an attractive female messenger. “The beautiful woman took the letter and left,”²²⁹ begins the second passage—but she soon returns, bearing an invitation from her mistress to a secret tryst. The monk accepts, and awaits with mounting anticipation until at last his mysterious correspondent’s carriage arrives to whisk him away. When he dismounts, he finds himself on the grounds of an opulent mansion, its gardens resplendent with out-of-season flowers. The mistress of the house proves no less of a marvel: “Neither Yang Guifei nor Li Furen could surpass her in beauty; the monk moved closer to stand by her side, caught up in wonder, his heart pounding and his body trembling.”²³⁰

After toying with the overwhelmed monk for a while, the lady takes pity on him and takes him to bed. The next morning, she treats him to a sumptuous feast (although, crucially, the monk retains enough of his convictions to insist on vegetarian fare). So begins a round of seemingly endless pleasure, and the years roll by, until a band of young monks appears at the mansion gate. The lady and her attendants, now unmasked as foxes, scamper away in terror.^(FIG. 22) Filthy and emaciated, the monk crawls out from beneath the floor of a dilapidated temple—

²²⁸ Although several Edo-era copies of *Kitsune* exist, all of them appear to have been produced after the opening passage was lost, and thus begin at the same point as the extant original. (Ibid., 28)

²²⁹ ひてうは文とりてかへりぬ。(OTZE 104). ひてう is most likely a nonstandard spelling of *bijo*, or “beautiful woman,” but it may also be the messenger’s name (Miya, “*Ashikaga Yoshihisa shoji Kitsune no sōshi emaki’ o megutte*,” 28).

²³⁰ やうきひりふしんのよそほひもこれには過しとそ見えたる。そうつさしよりてそはにみたりいかにあることそとあまりのことにむねうちさはきわなへとふるはれたり。(OTZE 104)

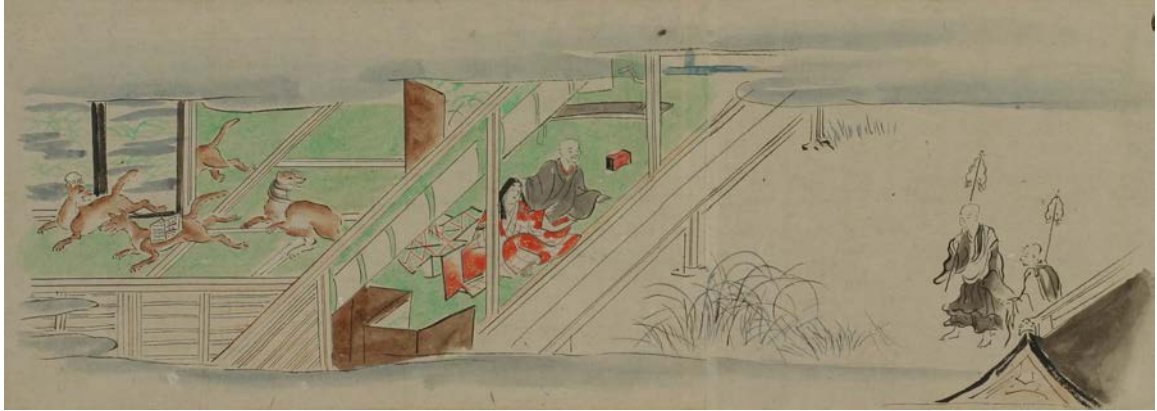


Fig. 22 Detail of *Kitsune no sōshi*. Copy of a late 15th c. original attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu. Morizumi, 1849. Handscroll; ink and color on paper. Waseda University.

the same place that he had so recently perceived as a garden of earthly delights. Dogged by the jeers of onlookers, he makes his way home to his daughter, who asks what happened to him. The monk confesses all, and then offers the final revelation of the tale: the seven years he believed he spent with the fox-woman were in fact only seven days, and the monks who saved him were none other than a manifestation of the bodhisattva Jizō.

Kitsune leaves little room to doubt the fox-woman's fundamental malignity, although we receive no insight into her motives; perhaps for contemporary audiences her species—or her sex—provided all the explanation necessary. The delights with which she plies the wayward monk prove to be not only fraudulent, but foul:

What he had taken for bamboo blinds and tatami mats were leaves and straw; what he had seen as lutes and zithers were the bones of horses and oxen; what had appeared to be bowls, washbasins, and other such utensils were shards of old pottery and human skulls. The monk was a very cowardly man, and he sat paralyzed by his shock—*what on earth is this?*—unable to move his legs and blinking his eyes constantly. The beautiful clothing that he had believed himself to be wearing proved to be a collection of wastepaper and scraps from old scrolls.²³¹ (FIG. 23)

²³¹ みすやたゝみとおもひしはむしろこもきれなり。ひわことなと見えしはむまやうしのほねなり。はんさうたらひいろ

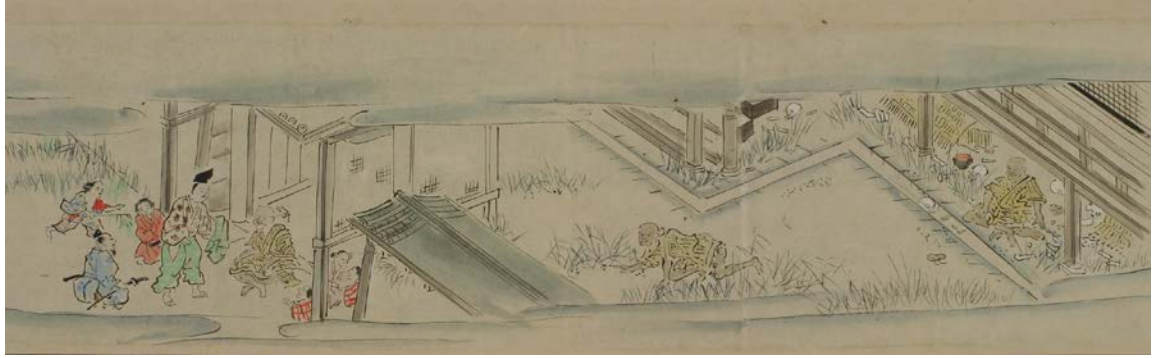


Fig. 23 Detail of *Kitsune no sōshi*. Copy of a late 15th c. original attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu. Morizumi. 1849. Handscroll; ink and color on paper. Waseda University.

Scenes of this sort were standard fare in Japanese foxlore, which credited foxes with powers of deception that extended beyond mere shapeshifting and often went hand-in-paw with a Rabelaisian flair for the grotesque. Several of the foxes in *Konjaku monogatari shū* conclude their charades as human women by dousing their suitors with urine, and one eleventh-century treatise on fox spirits claims that they host “banquets” whose unwitting human guests realize too late that they have been feasting on dung.²³² While representations of foxes as master tricksters were not intrinsically Buddhist, they dovetailed neatly with Buddhist teachings regarding the impermanence of sensual pleasures and, more broadly, the illusory nature of perceived reality. These teachings notwithstanding, few Buddhist proselytizers hesitated to promise this-worldly benefits as an inducement to faith, and *irui* tales—if not necessarily those involving foxes—could be turned to this purpose as well. Such is the case in

八のてうと見えつるはくちつほのわれされかうへとなり。そうつきわめておくひやうなる物にて、こはいかなる事そと、あしもはたらかす、身もすくみてめうちたゝきてあきれてそみたりける。色/羊にうつくしき物きたりと思ひしはほんくふるきさうしのはしをとりあつめたるにそありける。(OTZE 104)

²³² Marian Ury, “A Heian Note on the Supernatural,” *Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese* vol. 22, no. 2 (Nov. 1988), 189-194. For examples of similar scatological trickery attributed to foxes in contemporary Japanese folklore, cf. Hiroko Ikeda, *A Type and Motif Index of Japanese Folk Literature* vol. 1, 1971 (Taipei: Orient Cultural Service, 1983), 34-36.

Tsuru, where the worldly wealth and status gained through association with the crane wife give every indication of being “real.”²³³

Unlike *Kitsune* and *Tsuru*, *Nezumi* declines to clarify the ontological status of the material benefits gained through association with the irui spouse. Do the mouse-groom’s gifts outlive their giver—or, like the treasures of the fox palace, do they turn to trash as soon as the illusion is broken? Of course, *Nezumi* raises a great many questions, and this one, like most of them, goes unresolved. Such open-endedness speaks to the author’s apparent disinterest in moralizing. Unhappy though the heroine’s fate may be, it is not explicitly framed as karmic retribution, meaning that there is no didactic imperative to prevent possible misreadings by spelling out the precise dimensions of her suffering. And so the potential contradiction remains uneliminated: the heroine of the Mitsunobu *Nezumi* might just end the tale richer than she began it, if not any happier.

Both the Mitsunobu *Nezumi* and *Kitsune* lavish attention on the suffering of their respective protagonists after the identity of the animal spouse has been revealed. However, the two works channel this attention in very different directions. The Mitsunobu *Nezumi* elides description of the lady’s external circumstances, the better to dwell on her internal devastation. Conversely, *Kitsune* defines the monk’s tribulations almost exclusively in terms of the external, cataloguing the details of his abrupt descent from luxury to squalor and the public humiliations that he subsequently sustains. We know *what* the monk has lost, and we

²³³ Recall the crane wife’s assurances to her husband that his good fortune will endure even after she leaves him; lest we doubt her word, the final illustration shows him still seated in his fine house, wearing his robes and officer’s cap, as he watches the crane fly away.



Fig. 24 Detail of *Kitsune no sōshi*. Copy of a late 15th c. original attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu. Morizumi. 1849. Handscroll; ink and color on paper. Waseda University.

know *how* he has been shamed, but his internal experience of loss and shame remains inaccessible to us. Ironically, the physical symptoms of his shock constitute our greatest insight into his state of mind.

The monk's relative lack of interiority limits his role as a sympathetic character, as was no

doubt the author's intent. Both textually and pictorially, *Kitsune* takes pains to establish its protagonist as a figure deserving of ridicule. The narrator punctuates the tale with unfavorable commentary on the monk's character, and the illustrations present him in an equally unflattering light. The very first painting offers a cruelly candid view of the monk's naked, aging body as he prepares for his rendezvous with the fox-woman; ^(FIG. 24) later, the artist uses sequential action to more fully capture his ignominious exit from the ruined temple. But for all that *Kitsune* caricatures clerical concupiscence, its final emphasis rests on the salvific power of Buddhism: unworthy though the monk may be, Jizō nonetheless intercedes on his behalf.

A bare-bones synopsis of *Jizōdō* reveals fundamental similarities with *Kitsune*: in both works, a lustful monk unwittingly enters into a relationship with an irui "woman," and through the mercy of Jizō emerges chastened but unharmed. The two works, however,

diverge substantially in their development of this basic storyline. Where *Kitsune* paints its characters in broad strokes—the monk is a stereotypical lecher, the fox-woman a stereotypical femme fatale—*Jizōdō* adopts a far more nuanced approach. The protagonist, a young monk at a “humble Jizō hall”²³⁴ in Echigo province, first comes to know his inhuman seductress as a religious patron. When the tale opens, the monk has already dedicated the past two years to fulfilling a vow to copy the Lotus Sutra for one thousand days on end. One day, after listening to the monk’s “reverent” chanting, “a beautiful woman dressed in gauzy white silk and possessing an air of refinement” volunteers to sponsor the remainder of the sutra-copying rite. The monk gratefully accepts, but soon begins to press his attractive benefactress for favors of a baser sort. She puts him off until the thousand days have been completed; only then—and only after she has made lavish offerings in honor of the copied sutras—does she take the monk as her lover. Citing reasons of propriety, she insists that the affair be continued at her own residence; the besotted monk follows willingly, offering only token protest when said “residence” proves to be located at the bottom of the sea. Like his counterpart in *Kitsune*, the monk lets himself be led off to a palace of exotic delights, but unlike that other hapless monk, he eventually begins to wonder if all is as it seems:

A holy man from a remote mountain temple, the monk was uneducated, guileless, and completely lacking in good judgment. Nonetheless, his training in the Law of Dharma, even if short-lived, had instilled in him a small amount of sense. As he passed the days and months in the place and contemplated his situation, he realized that the pleasure he now enjoyed went beyond the realm of the ordinary. He wondered if in reward for his diligence in copying the sutra in accordance with the Law he had already become a living

²³⁴ This and all subsequent quotations from *Jizōdō sōshi* are taken from McCormick’s translation (*Tosa Mitsunobu and the Small Scroll in Medieval Japan*, 220-222).

Buddha. But then again, he did not get the feeling that he had been born into the Buddha realm. Recalling that he had entered the sea, he had the sneaking suspicion that this might be some such place as the Dragon Palace . . . One night, while sleeping with the woman, he saw that the hem of her heavenly garment resembled the tail of a snake. Now there was no doubt in his mind: he had entered the Dragon Palace.

The monk asks his lover—whom he now knows to be a serpent—for permission to return home.²³⁵ Not only does she agree, she offers the monk further insight into his current predicament, in the process explaining her own motives. Her desire to sponsor the sutra-copying rite was sincere, but the monk's unsolicited lust for her "turn[ed] the Buddhist exercises into a mockery." As proof of her accusation, she shows the monk the "sutra" that he copied, which turns out to be nothing more than a string of obscene scribblings: "Quickly get this over with, I want to sleep with this woman, I want to sleep with her . . ." The serpent-woman's admonishments are tempered by reassurances: the monk, she promises, can still gain enlightenment if only he copies the sutra wholeheartedly. Heartily ashamed of himself, the monk makes his way back to dry land and his old temple, where he falls asleep in the altar hall, only to awaken as a giant snake. Praying to Jizō for forgiveness, the monk manages to shed his serpentine form; his humanity now restored, he learns that two centuries have passed since he disappeared into the ocean. For the remainder of his life, the monk devotes himself to his faith, and "after many years, he finally achieved rebirth [as a Buddha]."

²³⁵ The distinction between snakes and dragons was a hazy one, and the overlap between the two categories was considerable; this is evidenced by the above passage from *Jizōdō*, in which the illusion of a snake's tail reveals the woman as a denizen of the Dragon Palace. I have chosen to split the difference between the prosaicism of "snake" and the fantasticism of "dragon" by referring to the woman as a serpent. Cf. Kubota Jun, "Ryū," *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kanshō* vol. 39, no. 12 (October 1994), 88-89.

The narrative complexity of *Jizōdō* lies partly in the tale's own powers of misdirection, and partly in the remarkable polysemy of the serpent-woman archetype, which, in Carmen Blacker's words, "refract[s] in a curious way into extremes of good and evil."²³⁶ The monk's mounting dread as he becomes aware of his lover's identity seems to gesture towards a trope well-established in medieval literature, most notably a widely circulated legend associated with Dōjōji temple: the lamia-like sexual predator whose possessive lust drives men (and especially monks) to their doom.²³⁷ But these expectations are undercut by the monk's confrontation with his "seductress." Her profession of Buddhist faith forces the audience to draw more positive comparisons, the Naga princess whose instantaneous enlightenment is celebrated in the eleventh chapter of the Lotus Sutra.²³⁸

In final analysis, the serpent-woman of *Jizōdō* falls somewhere between the extremes of divine and demonic. Despite the plot twist that reveals her as the monk's spiritual superior, steadfast in her faith while he succumbs to lust, she is nonetheless trapped in "a body that cannot be free of suffering," rendered doubly impure by sex and by species. Unlike the Naga princess of the Lotus Sutra, she is unable to transcend these limitations through her own efforts; thus, even as she offers the monk spiritual guidance, she must also appeal to him to pray on her behalf. The proof of her faith is displaced from her own body onto that of the

²³⁶ Carmen Blacker, "The Snake Woman in Japanese Myth and Legend," in *Animals in Folklore*, ed. J.R. Porter and W.M.S. Russell (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1978), 113.

²³⁷ McCormick, *Tosa Mitsunobu and the Small Scroll in Medieval Japan*, 159-162.

²³⁸ The earliest recorded version of the Dōjōji legend appears in the eleventh-century setsuwa collection *Dai Nihon Hokkekyō genki*; subsequent versions include *Dōjōji engi emaki* (tentatively dated to the fifteenth century) and the roughly contemporary Noh play *Dōjōji* (Virginia Skord Waters, "Sex, Lies, and the Illustrated Scroll: The *Dōjōji engi emaki*," *Monumenta Nipponica* vol. 52, no. 1 [Spring 1997]: 59-61).

monk, whose restoration to human form and subsequent enlightenment “rehearse[s] the transformation of the [Naga princess] herself.”²³⁹

²³⁹ McCormick, Tosa Mitsunobu and the Small Scroll in Medieval Japan, 164. Although we are assured that the monk attains buddhahood, we never do learn what becomes of his sometime paramour; in McCormick’s words, the serpent-woman’s ending is “inconclusive, undramatic, and even melancholy.” This makes for an ironic contrast with *Dōjōji engi emaki*, which closes with the unabashedly sinful serpent-woman gaining rebirth in paradise alongside her steadfastly chaste victim. McCormick notes that *Dōjōji engi emaki* was “known to have been used for proselytization and edification” and suggests that this didactic agenda necessitated the serpent-woman’s salvation, whereas the “more literary mood” of *Jizōdō* denied the serpent-woman equivalent closure (ibid). By apparently consigning the serpent-woman to her watery limbo, *Jizōdō* paradoxically ensures that she “lingers in the mind” (153), leading McCormick to speculate that ladies in GoTsuchimikado’s court may have been involved in the scroll’s creation.

While McCormick’s analysis is compelling, we should also consider other possible explanations for the lack of resolution regarding the serpent-woman. She is, after all, far from the only irui bride whose fate remains uncertain; many “women” unmasked as animals vanish from the narrative shortly thereafter, making an anticlimactic retreat to the irui realm from whence they came (Nakamura, “*Nihon no irui kon’in-tan ni okeru hito to dōbutsu no aida no kyōri*,” 84). Even some versions of the *Dōjōji* legend leave the serpent-woman unredeemed. Most notably, the Noh play *Dōjōji* reworks *Kanemaki*, an earlier play on the same subject, to “deprive the woman of salvation” (Susan Blakeley Klein, “Woman as Serpent,” in Religious Reflections on the Human Body, ed. Jane Marie Law [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995]: 103). Klein concludes that “*Dōjōji*’s reduction of the phallic serpent-woman to a purely demonic figure” reflects “a downward turn” in women’s social status during the late Muromachi (ibid., 117). Although *Jizōdō* can hardly be accused of painting the serpent-woman in a wholly negative light, the authorial decision to leave her spiritual aspirations unfulfilled could likewise be construed as an expression of Japan’s “medieval misogyny.”

W. Michael Kelsey’s analysis of serpents in Buddhist didactic literature offers yet another perspective. According to Kelsey, early Buddhist *setsuwa* tended to demonize serpents, in large part because of their association with “native” (i.e., extra-Buddhist) religious traditions. As Buddhism gained hegemony in Japan, serpents came to inhabit more nuanced territory in the symbolic bestiary of *setsuwa*, shedding their role as the monstrous “other” and emerging as “reflections of [clerical] misdeeds...a tangible manifestation of wrongdoing” that served as a warning and produced spiritual improvement. Thus, from the mid-Heian onwards, “it is not at all clear that the victim and the aggressor [i.e., the snake] are to be taken as separate entities, especially in the stories of monks. The snake has gone through a process of internalization, leading the way to the next logical step: if the snake is one aspect of the individual, then it can also be one aspect of the Buddha, and hence serve as the actual agent of salvation of the individual” (“Salvation of the Snake, Snake of Salvation: Buddhist-Shinto Conflict and Resolution,” Japanese Journal of Religious Studies vol. 8, no. 1/2 [March/June 1981]: 105-107). Viewed through this lens, the serpent-woman of *Jizōdō* can be understood as both an incarnation of sin and an instrument of salvation, simultaneously embodying the monk’s own flaws and furnishing the expedient means by

The fact that monk requires restoration to human form further speaks to the serpent woman's ambiguous moral status. First presented as a personal karmic burden, her inhuman condition ultimately assumes the dimensions of a contagion: like her less noble counterpart in the Dōjōji legends, she infects the monk with her serpentine state. In the Dōjōji legends, the carnal embrace of the serpent-woman induces a spontaneous transformation in her unwilling partner. *Jizōdō*, by contrast, specifies a chaster route of contamination: the "brocade-like" garment that the serpent-woman woman gives to the monk before she leads him into the ocean. Of course, only after he exits the undersea realm does the monk discover that "he had been turning into a snake ever since he had been cloaked in that brocade-like thing." This unhappy epiphany represents an amplified version of the plight of the monk in *Kitsune*, who belatedly realizes that the fine robes he received from the fox-woman are in fact trash. Also like his counterpart in *Kitsune*, the monk in *Jizōdō* eventually succeeds in shedding his tainted "robes," but not before his transformed state has rendered him a public spectacle.²⁴⁰ (FIG 25)

In both *Jizōdō* and *Kitsune*, egress from the irui realm entails a "walk of shame"—one of several features common to the conceptual geography that underlies both of these tales

which he overcomes them. Either of these two roles would tend to discourage the audience from perceiving her as "an independent character preoccupied with her own soteriological status" (McCormick, 153), and thus downplay concerns about her spiritual fate.

²⁴⁰ McCormick writes that the monk escapes public humiliation thanks to his anonymity; the text states that he casts off the snake's body "in the middle of the night," and that "no one . . . knew that the monk had emerged from the snake." I do agree with McCormick that *Jizōdō* treats its protagonist with more sympathy than does *Kitsune*; certainly, the monk in *Jizōdō* shows a far greater degree of interiority, and his inward sense of shame and regret plays an accordingly larger role in his moral recuperation. Nonetheless, *Jizōdō* devotes a significant amount of space, both textual and pictorial, to establishing the monk-turned-snake as an object of spectatorship. I would argue that this exposure to the public gaze—even with the monk's human identity obscured—corresponds to the scenes of public humiliation typically found in tales of wayward clerics.



Fig. 25 Detail of *Jizōdō sōshi*. Tosa Mitsunobu. Early 16th c. Handscroll; ink and color on paper. Private collection.

(and, to a lesser extent, *Tsuru*). As is typical of Buddhist miracle tales, *Jizōdō* and *Tsuru* both begin in a clearly specified real-world location. (In the absence of the opening passage, we cannot know whether or not *Kitsune* provides similar information, although its *setsuwa* predecessors are set in Bitchū province.) In all three works, the hero soon leaves behind this mundane territory, making his unwitting way to a parallel world “peopled” by animals in human guise. In *Jizōdō* and *Kitsune*, the journey beyond the human realm follows a downward trajectory, both morally and topographically: the descent into a submarine or subterranean space mirrors the clerical fall from grace. Both works locate the *irui* realm not only elsewhere, but *elsewhen*, and the errant monks discover upon their return to human society that they have gravely miscalculated the passage of time.

Travel to and from the *irui* realm operates somewhat differently in *Tsuru*, where the interspecies relationship keeps one foot firmly planted on familiar soil. The crane wife arrives on her future husband’s doorstep not to lure him away but to join him in domestic bliss; it is

the avarice of the provincial steward, rather than any personal failing, that propels the hero beyond the human sphere. Unlike the prodigal monks of *Kitsune* and *Jizōdō*, he gains admission to the irui realm by virtue of his, well, *virtue*. Appropriately, his journey leads him not downward but upward, into the mountains, and he returns richly rewarded for his troubles, without undergoing public disgrace or temporal displacement.

Nezumi, by contrast, forgoes description of the irui realm altogether; indeed, the interspecies romance is almost claustrophobically circumscribed by the domestic boundary. The mouse-groom first appears in the lady's yard, and from there insinuates himself ever deeper into her hearth and home. Although the text describes him as a nightly visitor, nothing is said about where he might be visiting *from*, and every illustration shows him already indoors. He does not merely inhabit the house, but remakes it: the second illustration shows workmen (or are they work*mice*?) busily building a new walkway.²⁴¹ Even after his death, the mouse-groom remains stubbornly ensconced in the household, lodged in the lady's memory and the cat's belly.

Nezumi stands apart from *Jizōdō*, *Kitsune*, and *Tsuru* not only in its mapping of the animal/human relationship, but also in its absence of overt moralizing. The latter three works make little effort to conceal their didactic agendas: *Kitsune* cautions against vice, *Tsuru* extols virtue, and *Jizōdō* does both simultaneously, but all are unapologetic object lessons in Buddhist doctrine. McCormick regards this catechistic bent as part and parcel of the genre,

²⁴¹ In *Tsuru*, too, the arrival of the irui spouse brings about an architectural transformation; here, however, the upgrade from mansion to hovel appears to occur instantaneously between one illustration and the next, whereas *Nezumi* draws attention to the ongoing process of change.

writing that ko-e “inevitably begin as narratives of desire but at their endings encourage retroactive reinterpretations as expedient means toward religious awakening.”²⁴² While this claim certainly applies to many of the ko-e that McCormick analyzes, she overstates her case somewhat. For all its Buddhist exposition, *Tsuru* hardly qualifies as a “narrative of desire”—from the first, the protagonist is willing to trade away his meager possessions for the sake of performing a good deed. Conversely, while the label “narrative of desire” may fit *Nezumi* well enough, the work shows little inclination press this narrative into the service of spiritual edification. While it is entirely possible to approach *Nezumi* as an expression of Buddhist philosophy—to understand it as a parable on the illusory nature of reality, or the futility of worldly desire, or the inevitability of suffering—any reader so inclined can uncover the same broad themes in the vast majority of literature from medieval Japan (and, arguably, much literature the world over). If anything, the most noteworthy aspect of any Buddhist undertones in *Nezumi* is the fact that they are allowed to remain undertones, to the extent that we can legitimately wonder whether they exist at all.

The religious vocation of the heroine’s mother constitutes the only incontrovertibly Buddhist element of *Nezumi*—and for all that the text consistently refers to her as “the lady nun” (*amagimi*), and for all that she looks conspicuously nunnish in her cassock and wimple, she displays little indication of any deeper piety. Quite the contrary: the attentive reader can uncover hints that she falls short of the clerical ideal. We know from the first that the nun agonizes over her daughter’s unwed (and hence financially insecure) status; laudable though

²⁴² McCormick, *Tosa Mitsunobu and the Small Scroll in Medieval Japan*, 67-70.

such parental devotion may seem from a modern perspective, in medieval Japan it was a “darkness of the heart” impeding spiritual progress. The first illustration suggests that the nun is vulnerable to other distractions as well: her gaze rests on the storybook spread between her maidservants, while her rosary dangles limply from one hand. More damning still, in the second illustration, we find her sorting through the mouse-groom’s gifts, an activity that implies a certain unenlightened regard for worldly possessions. And what use would a truly devout nun have for the cask of saké and the tray of fish set out on her veranda?

The nun’s seeming impiety does not elicit outright narratorial condemnation: here, as elsewhere, *Nezumi* leaves its readers to their own hermeneutic devices. But readers do not arrive at a text as blank slates; the abundance of Buddhist didactic literature in medieval Japan would have primed contemporary audiences to seek meaning along similar lines even when not explicitly prompted to do so. *Kitsune* and *Jizōdō*, both of which chronicle the sin and eventual salvation of lustful monks led astray by irui “women,” alert us to the possibility of approaching *Nezumi* in a similar manner, as a tale of the comeuppance of an errant cleric (*hakaisō no shippaidan*). Such a reading would necessarily center on the nun rather than her daughter, but this presents little difficulty, given that both the text and the illustrations generally privilege the nun’s perspective. Unlike her male counterparts in *Kitsune* and *Jizōdō*, the nun does not succumb to carnal temptation; her motives reside somewhere between the maternal and the material. (Significantly, similar motives drive the antagonist of *Tsuru*, a local strongman who wants to secure the crane-wife as a bride for his own son.)

If the nun’s wrongdoing is ambiguous, her redemption is absent altogether—another

departure from the formula established in *Kitsune* and *Jizōdō*, whose wayward monks eventually realize their wrongdoing and return to the proper path. Simply put, *Nezumi* permits a cleric-centric interpretation, in addition to the more broadly Buddhist-themed interpretations indicated by McCormick, but allows for other readings as well. *Fujibukuro* and *Bakemono*—both irui kon'in ko-e attributed to Mitsunobu, but lacking the Buddhist elements that characterize *Tsuru*, *Kitsune* and *Jizōdō*—suggest different angles of approach, different seams along which to unpick the narrative.

III. THE MONKEY'S PAW (IN MARRIAGE):

Unwise Longing and Unwise Looking in Fujibukuro no sōshi and Bakemono no sōshi

Unlike the other ko-e attributed to Mitsunobu,²⁴³ *Bakemono no sōshi* tells not one

²⁴³ Sumiyoshi Hiroyuki's *Yamato nishiki* attributes *Bakemono* to Mitsunobu's son, Tosa Mitsumochi; a undated *kiwamefuda* by Kanō Yasunobu (1614-1685) gives the same attribution. Such sources, however, are not infallible: although *Jizōdō* is generally accepted as the work of Mitsunobu, both the accompanying *kiwamefuda* and *Yamato nishiki* name Mitsumochi as the artist.

A 1602 colophon by Kanō Tan'yū unhelpfully identifies the artist of *Bakemono* as Tosa Gyōbu Taifu, or "Tosa, Director of the Painting Bureau," a post held by both Mitsunobu and Mitsumochi. Art historian Yoshida Yūji argues that *Bakemono* was most likely painted by Mitsunobu, citing stylistic commonalities with Mitsunobu's earlier work. Moreover, Yoshida identifies possible references to *Bakemono* in two of Sanetaka's diary entries from the year 1474. In the first entry, Sanetaka writes that he drafted the text of an unnamed ko-e for Emperor Go-Tsuchimikado; a month later, he records copying the text of a ko-e entitled *Yumegatari* ("Telling Dreams"), again for Go-Tsuchimikado. *Yumegatari* would seem to be a fitting title for *Bakemono* or *Utatane*, although neither identification goes beyond the level of mere speculation. (Yoshida, "*Bakemono no sōshi e ni tsuite*," 41, 44-45; cf. also Toda Teisuke, Ebine Toshio, and Chino Kaori, *Suibokuga to chūsei emaki. Nihon bijutsu zenshū* vol. 12 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1992), 230; however, cf. also McCormick, *Tosa Mitsunobu and the Small Scroll in Medieval Japan*, 113. McCormick, unlike Yoshida, believes that Sanetaka was reproducing an older work when he copied *Yumegatari*, rather than writing out a final version of the text he had drafted the previous month. Even presuming that *Yumegatari* does refer to *Bakemono*, Sanetaka's authorship does not guarantee Mitsunobu's artistry, although the two men did collaborate frequently.)

While it may never be possible to resolve the question of whether *Bakemono* was painted by Mitsunobu or Mitsumochi, the answer ultimately has little bearing on context in which the work

story but five, all of them extremely brief. The scroll might best be described as a miniature anthology loosely united by the theme of encounters with the supernatural. These encounters tend more toward the quotidian than the cosmic: although the narrator concludes three of the five tales with a stock expression of wonder—"it was very mysterious"—*Bakemono* depicts a reality in which "supernatural entities live right alongside the everyday world, and occasional interactions with them are only to be expected."²⁴⁴ In *Bakemono*, such interactions inevitably carry an undercurrent of the sinister, but they never escalate to the point of clear and present danger. At times, they even settle into a queer sort of amiability, as in the third tale, when a woman decides that the disembodied arm beckoning from her hearth is "a pretty little thing" and offers it roasted chestnuts. The narrator makes no attempt to attach Buddhist significance to any of the episodes, and any other didactic agenda is muted to the point of silence. At most, the stories carry an implicit cautionary note: the world is strange and dangerous, and appearances deceive.

In keeping with the generally understated tone of *Bakemono*, the strange manifestations showcased in each tale prove to be the spirits of either inanimate objects or invertebrates (*Bakemono* seems to present these two categories as adjacent, or even interpermeable).²⁴⁵ The disembodied arm mentioned above turns out to be the doing of a ladle

was produced and circulated. As McCormick writes, Mitsumochi's artistic output was very similar to that of his father, and the two served essentially the same clientele. (Ibid., 206-209)

²⁴⁴ Yamanaka Yasuhiro, "*Bakemono no sōshi jiyū rensō*," *Shinshū Nihon emakimono zenshū geppō* (Feb. 1981), 5.

²⁴⁵ In the first tale of *Bakemono*, a man witnesses two boys – one fat and one thin – wrestling in his garden at night. When they appear again the next evening, he shoots an arrow at them, and in the morning finds his arrow beside the dead bodies of a tick and an ant. A rather different story

lost beneath the floorboards; in another story, a discarded wine-jug transforms into a monk and develops a disquieting habit of peering into houses at night. These “household goods gone bad” call to mind a particular class of supernatural entities known as *tsukumogami*, old tools and utensils that had taken on a (usually malevolent) life of their own. In part thanks to Shingon teachings regarding the capacity of nonsentient beings to attain Buddhahood, *tsukumogami* gained increasing prominence in medieval tales of the strange, and the aristocrats who patronized Mitsunobu seem to have enjoyed works on this subject: a 1480 entry in Sanetaka’s diary mentions a set of *tsukumogami* scrolls housed at the imperial study hall.²⁴⁶

Although the concept of *tsukumogami* no doubt exerted a formative influence on *Bakemono*, the word itself appears nowhere in the text. The difference between *Bakemono* and the various *otogizōshi* explicitly concerned with *tsukumogami* goes beyond mere terminology. Take, for instance, the *otogizōshi* *Tsukumogami ki* (“A Record of *Tsukumogami*”), which chronicles the uncanny metamorphosis of old household items, their bloody revenge on the humans who discarded them, and their religious awakening and

involving an ant and a tick appears in the twelfth century tale collection *Shasekishū*; here, the pair engage in an e(n)tymological debate about the origin of their respective names (Cf. Tsukudo Reikan, *Shasekishū* vol. 1 [Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1943], 218-219). *Bakemono*’s choice of creepy-crawly combatants may have been influenced by *Shasekishū*; alternatively, it may be grounded in biological reality, as ants often prey on ticks.

The fourth tale of *Bakemono* also concerns an uncanny encounter between a human and an insect, this time a fly drowning in a bucket of water. A man happens along and rescues the fly, which then crawls up the nose of a man napping nearby. The sleeping man awakes and reports that he just had a strange nightmare: he was drowning in a vast ocean and was lifted out by some unknown force. As Yoshida notes, this story differs in tone somewhat from the rest *Bakemono*, and bears more than a passing resemblance to Zhuangzi’s famous dream of being a butterfly.

²⁴⁶ Noriko Reider, “Animating Objects: *Tsukumogami ki* and the Medieval Illustration of Shingon Truth,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* vol. 36, no. 2 (2009), 236.

subsequent enlightenment.²⁴⁷ From the first, *Tsukumogami ki* readily discloses the identity of its eponymous subjects. The transformed tools possess certain anthropomorphic features, but they are not passed off as human to the audience, nor do they ever pass as human within the storyworld.^(FIG. 26) The tsukumogami begin the tale as blatant monstrosities staging a defiant exodus from human society; from there they are redomesticated, restored to the fold of human hegemony, and, as buddhas, remade in human form. The stories in *Bakemono* proceed in the opposite direction: seemingly human *some things* infiltrate human spaces, only to be exposed and expelled.²⁴⁸



Fig. 26 Detail of *Tsukumogami ki*. Artist unknown. Muromachi period. Handscroll; ink and color on paper. Kyoto University.

Bakemono's fifth and final tale is the only one involving irui kon'in, but it plays out in much the same manner as the stories that precede it—it just happens to be playing for higher stakes. As before, the narrative turns

²⁴⁷ For a discussion of the date and textual variants of *Tsukumogami-ki*, cf. *ibid.*, 233-236. Beginning in the late Muromachi and continuing throughout the Edo period, tsukumogami were a staple of *Hyakki yagyō* scrolls (most notably the sixteenth century Shinju-an scroll), which depicted long processions of demons and other bizarre creatures. Such scrolls dispensed with narrative altogether, instead focusing simply on the visual spectacle (Komatsu Kazuhiko, *Ikai to Nihonjin: Emonogatari no sōzōryoku* [Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 2003], 159-161).

²⁴⁸ The human disguises are not always perfect; the ladle only manages to become a single limb rather than a full human, and although the wine jar makes a passable monk, its unusually large ears (reminiscent of handles) hint at its original form.

on the moment of unmasking. This time, however, the entity that requires unmasking is not an anonymous nighttime intruder, but something nearer and dearer:

This, too, happened a long time ago. There was a woman who lived alone in a certain mountain village. She did not even have anybody to repair her decaying house. Soon enough, the autumn wind chilled her flesh, and as she stood staring sorrowfully at the field in front of her gate, she said, “If any man came to me—even that scarecrow over there—I swear I would make him my husband!” Time went by like this, and then one evening, a man wearing a warrior’s cap and carrying a bow and arrows came through the gate and asked for a night’s lodging. She let him stay, and he drew nearer to her, saying this and that. That night, they talked until dawn. Like this, he came to her every single night, but one morning when he took his leave he said as he was slipping out: “My form is already familiar to the birds of the sky, and soon it shall be revealed to you as well.”

The woman did not know where her lover lived—in fact, she knew nothing about him—and thinking this remark suspicious, she tied a long thread [to his clothing] and followed it when he went home. Softly, slowly, she walked and walked, until she saw the place where the thread ended: the scarecrow in the field. Over and over, she felt shame and horror. She must have believed that it was a monster that had appeared to her, for she never saw him after that.²⁴⁹ (FIG. 27)

I have already noted that not all *irui kon’in* tales involve animals, but so far as I am aware, the fifth story of *Bakemono* is the only instance in which the *irui* spouse is an inanimate object.²⁵⁰

This story has little to tell us about human perceptions of animals, although it does speak to the complex of anxieties surrounding scarecrows, dolls, puppets, and other human simulacra.

²⁴⁹ これもむかしある山里にひとりすむ女ありけり。家のやふれたるをとりなをすものもなし。やうやう秋風も身にシミ心ほそくおほえけるまゝに門田の面にたちいてうちなかめつ「おとろかしにても来てわらハかつまになれかし」とそいひける。かくてすき行ほどにあるゆふくれに門のかたよりもミゑほしきて弓矢もちたるものやとからむといへハやとしつとかくいひよりてその夜はかたらひあかしぬ。かくてかれなくかよひけるかある暁おき別るとてへう/▼としてたてれば「空行鳥もめなれぬ我身の様もあらはれぬへし」といひけり。いつくをとまりとしもおほえぬけしきも心得られすまたこのひとりこともあやしくおほえてなかきいをつけて歸をりにつなきてみればそろ/▼とあゆみあゆみてとまりたる所をまれハ田中にあるおとろかしといふ物にてそありける。反々おそろしくあさましくおほえけり。はけあらはれぬやと思ひけんその後は見えさりけるとなむ。SNEZ suppl. vol. 2, 74.

²⁵⁰ This statement applies only to pre- and early modern Japanese literature; modern literature, primarily science fiction, offers abundant examples of romance between humans and human-made objects.

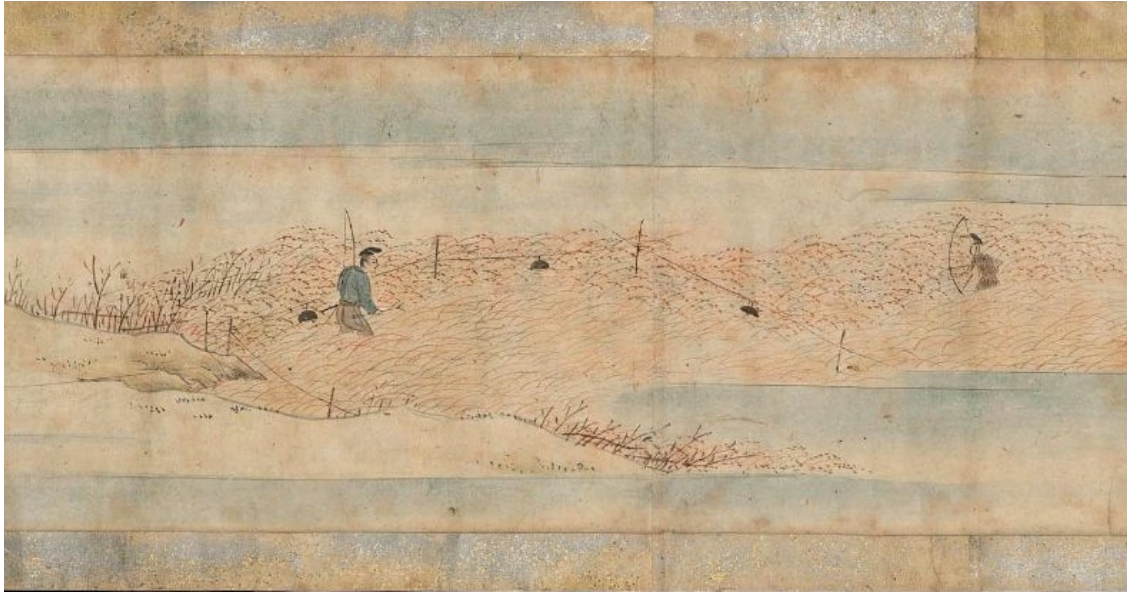


Fig. 27 Detail of *Bakemono no sōshi*. Attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu or Mitsumochi. Early 16th c. Handscroll; ink, color and silver gilt on paper. Boston Museum of Fine Art.

(It is worth noting here that animals and human simulacra occupy mirroring categories of otherness: animals possess autonomy but lack anthropomorphy, whereas simulacra possess anthropomorphy but lack autonomy.)²⁵¹

It is fitting, if somewhat ironic, that a scarecrow should impersonate a human man. However, viewed in a literary-historical context, the scarecrow of *Bakemono* is in fact impersonating a god: Ōmononushi, a shape-shifting deity often imagined as a serpent. In essence, the fifth story of *Bakemono* presents a desacralized retelling of the Ōmononushi myth, which was first recorded in *Kojiki* and until recent decades occurred widely in folklore throughout Japan.²⁵² Like so many irui kon'in tales, the myth hinges on the obfuscation of a

²⁵¹ Cf. Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 139.

²⁵² Two distinct versions of the Ōmononushi myth appear in *Kojiki*: the *ninuriya* ("red arrow") version and the *odamaki* ("hemp thread") version. The latter tale, which is also prevalent in

lover's identity; in this case, the lover in question is a mysterious man who pays nightly visits to a woman named Ikutamayorihime and eventually impregnates her. Desperate to know the identity of their daughter's lover, Ikutamayorihime's parents give her a skein of thread and tell her to sew it to the hem of her lover's robes. The next morning, they find the thread strung through the keyhole and winding up the side of Mount Miwa, into the shrine of Ōmononushi. Some variants of the legend go on to describe a confrontation with "a monstrous serpent," its throat pierced by the needle used to attach the thread,²⁵³ while others invent gruesome retributions for the woman's curiosity.²⁵⁴ However, the "old and bald" *Kojiki* tale ends as soon as the trail of thread runs out,²⁵⁵ inviting the question: "Does the Japanese woman who thrusts a needle and thread into the clothing of her mysterious nightly lover to follow him and discover his serpent identity outwit a demon or destroy her own chance for

folklore across Japan, is the one that concerns us here. (Carmen Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan* [London: George Allen and Unwin, 1975], 94; Nakamura Teiri, *Nihonjin no dōbutsukan*, 52-54.)

²⁵³ This version of the myth appears in the Kakuichi-bon *Heike monogatari* and *Genpei seisuiki*, among other sources. In some tellings, the serpent dies from the needle in its throat; in others, the lady's attendants perish of fright when they see the serpent. Cf. Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow*, 95; McCullough, trans., *The Tale of the Heike* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 264-265; Ikeda, *A Type and Motif Index of Japanese Folk Literature* vol. 1, 103-104; et alia.

²⁵⁴ A version of the myth found in *Nihon shoki* and *Konjaku monogatarishū* ends with Ōmononushi's lover being stabbed fatally in the genitals; *vide infra* for further discussion. In *Hizen fudoki*, a woman named Otohimeko attaches a thread to her mysterious lover's clothing and follows it to a monstrous serpent-human hybrid, which then drowns her in a swamp. Although the serpent creature is not identified as Ōmononushi, the similarity to the Ōmononushi myth is unmistakable. Cf. Edwin Cranston, trans., *The Gem-Glistening Cup* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 143; W. Michael Kelsey, "The Raging Deity in Japanese Mythology," *Asian Folklore Studies* vol. 40, no. 2 (1981), 231.

²⁵⁵ Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow*, 95. Nakamura believes that the compilers of *Kojiki* deliberately omitted the final encounter between Ikutamayorihime and Ōmononushi in his serpent form. According to Nakamura, this omission reflects a broader editorial aversion to snakes, which in turn reflects their ongoing debasement/demonization in mythological contexts (*Nihonjin no dōbutsukan*, 56-62). Cf. also Kelsey, "The Raging Deity," 225: "The reptilian form was the one assumed by the deity when it was up to no good."

happiness? The Japanese tales suggest these are not mutually exclusive possibilities.”²⁵⁶

This same question applies equally well to *Bakemono*, and yields an equally ambiguous answer. In a manner reminiscent of many *setsuwa*, *Bakemono* invests the discovery of a supernatural entity’s true form with a kind of exorcistic power.²⁵⁷ In the third story, the women who have been plagued by nightly visits from a strange monk organize a search of the premises: “When they looked carefully, there was an old, rusted wine jug from who-knows-when with its handles broken off. Realizing that this jug had transformed itself [into the monk], they threw it away. After that, the person who had been peering into the house never came again.”²⁵⁸ Here, the exposure and expulsion of the supernatural entity represents a clear triumph. The fifth story permits a similarly straightforward interpretation, but does not prescribe it; readers might also have chosen to perceive the severance of the relationship as a loss.

Unlike her counterpart in *Nezumi*, the woman gains no material profit from her assignation with the scarecrow, but neither does she come to harm because of it. Indeed, the relationship is precisely what she asked for—making her at best guilty of careless wishing (and therefore complicit in her own haunting in a way that the other characters in *Bakemono* are not), and at worst guilty of ingratitude. The victory typically associated with the discovery of the supernatural entity’s true form is undercut by the scarecrow’s insinuation

²⁵⁶ Leavy, *In Search of the Swan Maiden*, 103.

²⁵⁷ Masato Mori, “Konjaku monogatari-shū: Supernatural Creatures and Order,” trans. W. Michael Kelsey, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* vol. 9, no. 2/3 (June/September 1982), 164-165.

²⁵⁸ よくみれはいつの世のにかふりくさりたる銚子のえもおれたるそありける、これかいはけたるにそとてすてて後ハのそくものもなかりけり。SNEZ suppl. vol. 2, 74.

that he has chosen to reveal *himself*, and the tale's closing lines hint at a link between the woman's response to this revelation and the disappearance of her erstwhile lover. Perhaps she has not won a battle of wits but rather failed a test of character, much like Ōmononushi's human lover in one telling of the myth. In this version, the god's lover (named Yamatototohimomosohime instead of Ikutamayorihime) begs him to show her his true form, and Ōmononushi acquiesces on the condition that she not be frightened. However, when she sees him as a snake, she recoils in horror, and he never comes to her again.²⁵⁹

Whether or not the woman in *Bakemono* acts wisely when she ties the thread to her lover's robes, she unquestionably acts alone. This is not the case in the original Ōmononushi myth, in which Ikutamayorihime's parents hand her the fateful needle. Cognates of the Ōmononushi myth appear in lore and literature throughout Europe and Asia, with the myth of Cupid and Psyche being perhaps the best-known Western example;²⁶⁰ in these stories, too, the cardinal sin of curiosity is often displaced onto the bride's relatives, who press her to reveal her inhuman husband's secrets. The revelation may take the form of a first-hand

²⁵⁹ This version of the myth first appears in *Nihon shoki*, which dates it to the reign of the quasi-historical Emperor Sūjin, and is later retold in *Konjaku monogatari* (XXXI.34). In the *Nihon shoki* version, Yamato-toto-hi-momo-so-hime is overcome by shame at her own lack of decorum and stabs herself in the genitals with a chopstick; in the *Konjaku* version, the stabbing is carried out by her disappointed lover. In both cases, the injury—which is imbued with obvious sexual overtones—proves fatal. For further analysis, cf. Mukasa Shun'ichi, "Miwa-san no kami no fukaki kaikon: Hashihaka zōei to kokka sōken zentei jōken," *Jinbun ronsō* vol. 30 (March 2013), 11-24.

²⁶⁰ The Aarne-Thompson tale type index classifies myths of this sort as Type 425, "The Monster (Animal) as Bridegroom." Cf. Ikeda, *A Type and Motif Index of Japanese Folk Literature* vol. 1, 103-104, 114. Ikeda originally classified the Mount Miwa legend as AT type 425C, but then reclassified it as type 411C ("The King and the Lamia"). I confess that I do not follow the logic behind this decision; for further discussion of Ikeda's (mis)assignment of tales to AT type 411, cf. Alan Miller, "The Woman Who Married a Horse: Five Ways of Looking at Chinese Folktale," *Asian Folklore Studies* vol. 54, no. 2 (1995), 277-278.

discovery (of “information that [the bride] does not have but must not acquire”) or disclosure to a second party (of “information that she has but must not share”),²⁶¹ but in either case it sunders the formerly happy marital bond.²⁶² Tales of this type commonly assign the preponderance of the guilt to *female* relatives, a tendency that is evident in retellings of the Ōmononushi myth. The *Kojiki* version implicates both parents equally, but later iterations of the story tend to place the blame on either the mother or a nursemaid.

By coincidence or by design, *Nezumi* reproduces the contours of the Ōmononushi myth. The mouse-groom remains the best of husbands so long as the lady keeps him to herself; it is only when she attempts to appease her mother’s demands for further knowledge that the happy ending goes sour. (The text draws a clear connection between the presence of the nun and the presence of the cat, “which was never far from her side,” thus establishing the nun’s intrusion into the couple’s space as the catalyst of the disaster.) Read against *Kitsune*, *Jizōdō*, and other Buddhist-inflected tales of interspecies marriage, *Nezumi* looks

²⁶¹ William Hansen, *Ariadne’s Thread: A Guide to International Stories in Classical Literature*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 105-106.

²⁶² In Western iterations of this story, the wife is often able to regain her husband. However, Japanese AT type 425 tales typically terminate with the loss of the irui husband and do not hint at any possibility of reunion; as Ozawa Toshio writes, “This manner of ending—in which the sorrow of the parting is not explicitly recounted, but simply left to linger as an after-echo—is an artistic quality characteristic of most Japanese tales of irui kon’in.” (*Mukashibanashi no kosumorojii: hito to dōbutsu no kon’intan* [Tokyo: Kodansha, 1994], 214; cf. also Fumihiko Kobayashi, “The Forbidden Love in Nature: Analysis of the ‘Animal Wife’ Folktale in Terms of Content Level, Structural Level, and Semantic Level,” *Folklore* vol. 36 [January 2007], 141-142.) However, as Yoshida Mikio points out, there are counterexamples. (“*Iruikon’intan no tenkai: Iru to no wakare o megutte*”, *Nihon bungaku* vol. 58, no. 6 [June 2009] 17-19.) Among them is *Amewakahiko sōshi*, a mid-fifteenth century emaki painted by Mitsunobu’s father, Tosa Hirochika, with calligraphy by Emperor Go-Komatsu. *Amewakahiko sōshi* perfectly matches AT type 425B, “The Witch’s Tasks,” in which a woman who has lost her (seemingly) inhuman husband through the violation of a taboo wins him back by performing a series of impossible tasks.

rather like the story of the punishment of an insufficiently pious cleric. Read against the fifth tale of *Bakemono* and its parent mythology, *Nezumi* acquires a slightly different cautionary tenor: it is still a narrative of punishment, but in this case the crime is unrestrained curiosity. Both interpretations center on the misconduct of the nun, although if we take her curiosity to be her primary offense, then the entire household shares in the culpability—the maidservants for relaying their mistress’ requests for an audience with lady’s husband, and the lady for acquiescing. The nun’s imprudent insistence on *seeing for herself* is channeled and amplified by a larger network of female misjudgment.

Arguably, the misjudgment is female for the simple reason that all of *Nezumi*’s psychologically accessible characters are female. (By “psychologically accessible,” I mean that a character’s thoughts and emotions are conveyed via direct narratorial report. As I will discuss further below, *Nezumi* denies readers direct access to the mouse-groom’s psychological interior.) Only once does the narrator of *Nezumi* pass open judgment on one of the characters—“her heart was very weak”—and this judgment occurs at the level of the individual; it does not invoke women as a category.²⁶³ We might reasonably see *Nezumi*, with its cast of tragically flawed female characters, as a tacit participant in the pervasive misogynist discourses of the Muromachi era. On the other hand, we could just as reasonably point to a host of male characters in medieval literature who exhibit similar tragic flaws of their own,

²⁶³ For an example in which a woman’s unwise looking is explicitly linked to intrinsic feminine failings, cf. *Konjaku monogatari* XXVII.21. in which a woman violates her husband’s prohibition against opening a certain box and thereby causes his death; the narrator presents this as an exemplum demonstrating the nature of women as a category. For further discussion, cf. Hitomi Tonomura, “Black Hair and Red Trousers: Gendering the Flesh in Medieval Japan,” *The American Historical Review* vol. 99, no. 1 (February 1994), 137-140.

including some in *ko-e* attributed to Mitsunobu. Consider, for instance, the youth in *Suzuriwari* who peeks into the box containing his master's treasured inkstone and thereby breaks it, initiating a sequence of disastrous consequences—does he not commit the same basic transgression as the nun in *Nezumi*?

Regardless of whether *Nezumi* constructs femininity as a locus of moral inferiority—whether the nun and her daughter err simply as humans, or more specifically as women—it indisputably constructs femininity as a locus of metaphysical vulnerability. The story proceeds from the assumption that women without suitable male protection attract the wrong sort of callers: not just strange men, but the strange in general. The same assumption informs *Bakemono*, whose five stories form a kind of composite sketch outlining the ways in which gender was seen to condition interactions with the uncanny. *Bakemono* pointedly shows all three of its female protagonists living in destitution: the author employs descriptors like “rundown” and “decaying,” while the artist carefully captures the tattered holes in *shōji* doors and the splintered edges of rotting floorboards.²⁶⁴ As in *Nezumi*, the breakdown of architectural boundaries signals defenselessness on a more global scale. Pains are also taken to establish the absence of any male cohabitants. “This, too, happened in a place where only

²⁶⁴ Yoshida and Yamanaka both note that the paintings in *Bakemono* prominently depict architectural decay and dilapidation, and suggest that this reflects conditions after the Ōnin War (Yoshida, “*Bakemono no sōshi e ni tsuite*,” 43; Yamanaka, “*Bakemono no sōshi jiyū rensō*,” 4). While the war-torn capital could easily have furnished the inspiration for these images, any representational impulse on the part of the artist has been refracted through a gendered prism. The male characters of *Bakemono* do not live in palatial dwellings, but their houses are in good repair; this is not the case for the female characters, who uniformly live in poverty.

women were living,” the third story begins.²⁶⁵ The narrator stops short of drawing a direct causal link—‘this happened *because* there were only women there’—but the implications are clear, and they become even clearer slightly later in the same tale. Alarmed by a nocturnal prowler (later revealed as a wine jug gone rogue), the protagonist awakens one of her housemates, “an ugly, doddering old woman who dressed as man,”²⁶⁶ and sends her outside to investigate. It is apparently inconceivable that a woman dressed as a woman could perform the same function, and even a woman dressed as a man proves a poor substitute for the real thing; the elderly transvestite cannot locate the intruder, and the women cower inside in house when the apparition returns the next night.²⁶⁷

This is not to say that any male presence sufficed to ward off would-be irui husbands; in the Mitsuhsa *Fujibukuro*, a woman is snatched away by monkeys while her elderly father looks on helplessly. As indicated above, Mitsuhsa’s *Fujibukuro* is most likely a copy of the no-longer extant ko-e attributed to her father Mitsunobu. Despite the absence of the (putative) Mitsunobu original, *Fujibukuro* highlights several of the narrative conventions that inform tales of animal-woman marriage, and so deserves examination here. In contrast to the other ko-e attributed to Mitsunobu, *Fujibukuro* freely intermingles word and image, relying on speech captions to flesh out the rather terse extrapictorial text.²⁶⁸ In these speech captions,

²⁶⁵ これも女とちすミけるに。SNEZ suppl. vol. 2, 74.

²⁶⁶ かたなくておとこまねかたのよろほひみたるかひとりありける。(Ibid.; see also ibid. 42, 84.)

²⁶⁷ The corresponding illustration shows a comparatively youthful bearded man searching around the house, while the women of the household congregate on the veranda. It is not clear whether this is the result of a simple miscommunication between author and artist, or whether the illustration is meant to imply that women have sought out a man to assist them. (Ibid., 84)

²⁶⁸ Ryūsawa Aya, “*Fujibukuro no sōshi emaki’ ni tsuite*,” 40.

the generally literary tone of the prose gives way to something more vernacular, even mimetic: “caw caw” is written beside a crow, and “glug glug glug” beside a bottle of saké; an old woman sobs “boo-hoo” while her husband exclaims “you damn monkeys!”²⁶⁹

It is the plight of this elderly couple that drives the plot of *Fujibukuro*. Strictly speaking, the plight is not so much theirs as their daughter’s, but even more than *Nezumi*, *Fujibukuro* privileges the parental perspective, rendering the daughter more object than subject.²⁷⁰ Her status as a fungible commodity is apparent from the very beginning of the tale, when the old man finds a pretty infant girl abandoned by the roadside and decides that since he and his wife have no children of their own, he may as well “pick her up” (the verb used here might also be used to describe the retrieval of a dropped object) and take her home. “Home” is a hut in the mountains; like *Nezumi* and *Bakemono*, *Fujibukuro* presents poverty and physical isolation as prerequisites for irui seduction. Despite her humble upbringing, the girl grows to become an attractive young woman, at which point she once more changes hands (or paws):

One day, the old man was hoeing the field near his house, but the work was so difficult that he stopped hoeing and, without thinking, said to himself, “If anybody would hoe this old man’s field—even a monkey from some mountain—my daughter would take him as her groom.” A large monkey appeared and hoed the field; he must have been somewhere nearby, and heard the old man speaking. “Tomorrow is the day of the monkey; I will come then. Do not go

²⁶⁹ “Caw caw” is かくろゝ ; “Glug glug glug” is どぶぐぐぐ ; “Boo hoo” is しくゝさめゝ ; and “you damn monkeys!” is さるめ. MJMT vol. 11, 477-481.

²⁷⁰ In this respect, *Fujibukuro* contrasts sharply with the “monkey bridegroom” folktales collected by modern ethnologists. Although said folktales clearly have a genetic relationship with *Fujibukuro*, they present the kidnapped bride as the architect of her own escape. Cf. Chino Michiko, “*Nihon Mukashibanashi ‘Saru mukoiri’ ni miru josei no ishi*,” *Kyōto Kōka Joshi Daigaku kenkyū kiyō* vol. 49 (2011/12), 1-11.

back on your promise,” the monkey said, and vanished. The old man endlessly regretted his careless mutterings.²⁷¹

As Komatsu Kazuhiko notes, women in animal bridegroom tales function as metonyms for material wealth,²⁷² and *Fujibukuro* provides a prime example of this convention. After accidentally bartering his daughter away, the old man decides that the best way to protect her is by burying her inside of a large casket. The ruse does not succeed. The monkey-groom consults a yin-yang master (also a monkey) to divine the lady’s whereabouts and soon unearths her. Accompanied by a retinue of simian attendants, he then stages an elaborate human-style wedding procession, riding away on a palanquin with his unhappy bride. Unlike *Nezumi*, *Fujibukuro* reflects late Muromachi matrimonial customs, which were emphatically virilocal and centered around the transportation of the bride to her new husband’s residence.²⁷³ Feminist historian Takamura Itsue argues that “bride taking” (*yometori*) ceremonies developed as a sort of ritualized abduction,²⁷⁴ and the ease with which *Fujibukuro* collapses the functions of “wedding” and “kidnapping” would seem to support her hypothesis. The double-edged nature of the bridal procession gestures towards the ambiguous

²⁷¹ あるとき、おうぢ、あたりちかき所のはたをうちけるか、あまりにくるしかりければ、うちやすみてひとりごとに「いかなる山のさるなりとも、おきなかはたをうちてくれよかし、さもあらば、わがむすめをむこにとらん」となにとなくいひければ、いつくにかありて、きゝけむ、大なるさるきたりて、はたをうちて、「あすは、さるの日にて、よく侍る。やくそくたがへ給ふな」とて、うせにけり。おきなは、むやくのくちずさみして、こうくわいかぎりなし。MJMT vol. 11, 478. さるの日は a pun; *saru* means both “monkey” and “to come.”

²⁷² Komatsu, “*Nihon mukashibanashi ni miru irui kon’in*,” 175

²⁷³ Lindsey, *Fertility and Pleasure: Ritual and Sexual Values in Tokugawa Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), 72. Note, however, that only the well-to-do could afford elaborate bridal processions, and although virilocal marriage was both the ideal and the norm, the actual living arrangements of new couples were mediated by pragmatic considerations and regional customs. Cf. *ibid.*, 51-53.

²⁷⁴ Takamura Itsue, *Shōseikon no kenkyū 2* (Tokyo: Rironsha, 1969), 1129-1130

status of the union itself. If we take as given the proposition that a daughter was a kind of material asset, the monkey-groom's acquisition of his human wife occupies an uncertain middle ground between honest purchase and theft.

The lady's parents regard the marriage as illegitimate, and presumably the human audience was meant to concur; the monkeys, however, take a different view. During its opening and denouement, *Fujibukuro* remains anchored in the human perspective,²⁷⁵ but between these two points, the simian perspective receives an equal voice. The narrative alternates between the distraught parents' search for their daughter and the monkey-groom's attempts to win over his reluctant bride, inviting a kind of double vision: even as we know that the monkey groom is guilty of "simian sexual 'overreach,'" like King Kong some four hundred years later,²⁷⁶ the apparent sincerity of his emotions erodes his initial menace and renders him almost sympathetic—or, at the very least, pathetic. *Fujibukuro* differs from the other *irui kon'in* tales discussed here in that the identity of the animal spouse is never concealed, either from the audience or within the storyworld. There is no question of the monkey-groom being anything other than a monkey, and hence an eminently unsuitable match for a beautiful, *human* woman. The audience knows that the marriage is doomed to dissolution; the monkey-groom's untenable pretensions to humanity make him the villain of the tale, but also the unsuspecting butt of the

²⁷⁵ This anchoring is somewhat more tenuous in the end of the tale than in its beginning. After the rescue of the woman and the slaughter of the monkeys who kidnapped her, *Fujibukuro* devotes its attention to the revelries of the human characters; however, a captured monkey—the lone survivor of his troop—does manage to get a discontent word in edgewise.

²⁷⁶ John Knight, *Waiting For Wolves in Japan: An Anthropological Study of People-Wildlife Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 90. Cf. also Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions*, 161. Knight notes that even in modern Japan, in rural villages troubled by troupes of wild monkeys, "talk of the monkey threat to women sometimes carries a sexual connotation."

joke. His courtship of his human captive highlights his failure to grasp the fundamental difference between their stations; he plies her with nuts and berries from the forest, and orders the monkeys in his troop to “console” her with poems celebrating simian superiority:

Out of all the birds and beasts, it's we monkeys who are best,
Though we have hairy bodies, we look human nonetheless,
And although we have no wings, we soar high among the trees;
Through the mountains and the fields, we roam freely as we please.
See that moon beneath the water? We will snatch it up with ease!²⁷⁷

The lady is not consoled, although the narrator does not divulge much about her reaction to her predicament, noting simply that she is sad and frightened. Whether in her role as semi-licit daughter or semi-licit wife, the lady exists to arouse emotions rather than experience them herself. Her role as a passive object of desire culminates in literal objectification when the monkeys pack her away in a basket woven from wisteria—the titular *fujibukuro*—to render her more readily portable and storable. It is at this point that the elderly couple find their daughter, wrapped up in a basket and suspended from a tree (reproducing, in topographic inverse, her earlier interment in the ground). Only a single monkey is keeping watch over the basket, but the lady's parents cannot climb the tree to reach it.

“By the design of Kannon,” a party of hunters arrives to aid the parents. Threatening the guards-monkey with their bows, they order him to lower the basket; after releasing the

²⁷⁷ けだ物のその中にさるこそすぐれたりけれ。けこそ身にをいたれど、人のすがたにかはらず。つばさをばもたねど、木ずゑをもかけりぬ。野山をもはしりつ、水のそこの月をもわれらこそとりぬれ。(MJMT 11, 481). The image of a monkey reaching for the reflection of the moon in the water was a common symbol of folly; here, it foreshadows the failure of the monkey-groom's overambitious marriage. Cf. Ohnuki-Tierney, *The Monkey as Mirror: Symbolic Transformations in Japanese History and Ritual* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 62-63.



Fig. 28 Detail of *Fujibukuro no sōshi*. Copy of a late 15th/early 16th c. original attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu. Sumiyoshi Jokei. 1649. Handscroll; ink and color on paper. National Diet Library.

lady, they replace her with a pair of hunting dogs, and force the guardsmonkey to raise the basket once again. ^(FIG 28) When the monkey troop returns from their daily foraging, a farcical scene ensues, as the monkey-groom orders his followers to recite poetry to the growling basket. (The guardsmonkey—commanded to silence by the hunters—uses his poem to issue a coded warning, and is roundly rebuked for his efforts.) And then the basket is opened, and the farce grows teeth.

Illicit looking destroys interspecies marriages. We have already seen the truth of this in the *Ōmononushi* myths and in *Bakemono*; we have caught a hint of it in *Nezumi*, and in the following chapter, we will encounter it again less subtly in *Gon no Kami*. The same principle applies in *Fujibukuro*, although here, the usual roles are reversed: it is the animal spouse who looks when he has been warned not to, and discovers that he has gravely misconstrued the species of his beloved. The monkey-groom's exclamation when he opens the basket hints at a conscious authorial engagement with *irui kon'in* stories as a genre, manifested as a moment of playful self-referentiality: "Hail, Sannō Avatar! Save me! The lady has



Fig. 29 Detail of *Fujibukuro no sōshi*. Copy of a late 15th/early 16th c. original attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu. Sumiyoshi Jokei. 1649. Handscroll; ink and color on paper. National Diet Library.

turned into a dog – or maybe she was a dog that had turned into a lady! Oh, alas, alas!”²⁷⁸ (FIG 29)

The humor is of course lost on the monkeys themselves; they are slaughtered by the dogs, and the hunters promptly claim their spoils:

“In ancient times,” the hunters said, “King Wu of Zhou found Lu Shang while he was on a hunt. Now, without planning to, we have found a beautiful woman!” Filled with extraordinary joy, they skinned the monkeys and took the hides, set the lady on the palanquin, and hurried down the mountain back to their homes, bringing the old man and old woman with them.²⁷⁹

The means of the monkeys’ defeat reasserts their bestial status. Although the narrator mentions in passing that the hunters shoot some of the fleeing monkeys, both text and illustrations focus on the hunting dogs’ attack. The monkeys are killed like animals, *by* animals. The harvest of their pelts—the marker of inhumanity on their otherwise human-like

²⁷⁸ 南無さん王権げん、たすけ給へ、姫君の犬にばけたるか、犬がひめ君になりたるか、あらかなしくへ。MJMT vol. 11, 485. Monkeys were seen as messengers, or even incarnations, of the Sannō Avatar, who was the tutelary deity of Mt. Hiei. Cf. Lone Takeuchi, “An *Otogizōshi* in Context: *Saru no sōshi* and the Hie-Enryaku-ji Religious Multiplex in the Late Sixteenth Century,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* vol. 23, no. 1/2 (Spring 1996), 31-33.

²⁷⁹ かり人いひける「昔、周のふわうはたいこうほうをかりにえたり、今のわれらははからざるに、うつくしき女をえたる事よ」とて、よろこぶ事、なのめならず。さるどものかははきとりて、女をばこしにのせて、おうち、うばひきつれつゝ、山をいで、我家ちにぞいそぎける。MJMT vol. 11, 485.

bodies²⁸⁰—further reinforces their place in the species hierarchy. In their final (de)incarnation—a bundle of bloody hides—the monkeys are rendered (in both senses of the word, *à la* Shukin) resources for human exploitation, much like the dogs that hunted them down. (A single monkey is spared to be kept in the hunters’ stables as good-luck charm²⁸¹—a kinder fate than that of his fellows, but no less an affirmation of human dominion.)

The lady, unlike the monkeys, does not need to be forcibly remade as an object; she already was one, and this continues unchanged. Like the monkey hides, she is packed up and ported off. *Fujibukuro*—both the title and the work *in toto*—arguably fetishizes the lady’s portability, along with its obverse, her lack of volitional mobility. Other human characters walk and run; the monkeys (while alive) are still more kinetic, jumping, climbing trees, and even dancing. The lady, however, is never depicted or described as moving of her own will. She only moves when she is being carried by a male, human or otherwise: first by her adoptive father, then by the monkeys, and finally by the hunters. One of these hunters “decides” (apparently unilaterally) to marry her and “treasure” her. Her parents likely derive the greatest profit from her latest change in ownership: unlike their monkey son-in-law, their human son-in-law takes care of them as well as his wife. This outcome was a reward from Kannon, the narrator declares in the final line—lest the audience, like the malcontent monkey leashed in the stables, be inclined to doubt the happiness of the ending.

Fujibukuro approaches the irui kon’in theme from a very different angle than does

²⁸⁰ Ohnuki-Tierney, *The Monkey as Mirror*, 6.

²⁸¹ Folk belief held that monkeys kept in stables acted as a sort of protective talisman, preventing the horses from becoming ill. Cf. *ibid.*, 115-118.

Nezumi, and in many ways it anticipates post-*Nezumi* reworkings of the mouse-groom tale. The presentation of the animal-groom as a sympathetic figure, the interest in depicting interactions among animal characters, the depiction of animal characters as visibly *animal*, the detailed treatment of the bridal procession and feast, the occasionally jarring admixture of humor and tragedy . . . *Fujibukuro* holds all of these points in common with the *Gon no Kami* tales. (Note that I am not positing a direct genetic relationship between *Fujibukuro* and *Gon no Kami*, but rather the emergence of a new mode of telling stories about interspecies marriage.) But *Fujibukuro* also shares certain formative elements with *Nezumi*. Both works highlight the transactional aspect of the animal-woman relationship, and both position the woman's parent(s) as the first to reap the benefits. Unlike the old man in *Fujibukuro*, the nun does not actually sell her daughter, but she certainly takes a sizable cut of the mouse-groom's gifts.²⁸² For all that *Nezumi* choreographs its romance using Heian stage directions—*wife lives with parents, husband visits at night*—its implicit assumption that an unwed daughter is a saleable commodity bespeaks a more medieval conception of marriage.

Another, more immediately apparent commonality between *Fujibukuro* and

²⁸² The man in *Tsuru* also profits from his irui spouse, as do, temporarily, the monks in *Kitsune* and *Jizōdō*. However, in all cases, the parallel with *Nezumi* is imperfect. In all three works, the parents of the male protagonist are absent from the narrative; there is no implication that they might have a financial stake in their son's marriage. The luxuries enjoyed by the monks in *Kitsune* and *Jizōdō* seem to be more on the order of sensual pleasures than tangible assets, and they are in any case fleeting. In *Tsuru*, so far as we know, she does not directly present her husband with material wealth, but rather causes his household to prosper by her mere presence. Moreover, she is repaying her human husband for his good deed, not paying for sexual access, as is the case when the genders are reversed. Regarding the crane-bride's apparent ability to generate wealth, Kobayashi Toshiko, *Sasurai hime kō: Nihon koten kara tadoru onna no hyōhaku* (Tokyo: Kasama Shoin, 2006), 17-18, 46-47, and Wu Yan, "Iruī kon'in-tan ni okeru jendaa no nicchū hikaku kenkyū," *Dōshisha kokubungaku* vol. 75 (December 2011), 24-25.

Nezumi—shared also with *Bakemono*—lies in the narrative mechanism that triggers the appearance of the animal groom. Examination of the irui kon'in scrolls attributed to Mitsunobu reveals a broad consensus that the victims of irui seduction are first and foremost victims of their own folly. (*Tsuru* falls outside the scope of this generalization, as its protagonist is not a victim of irui seduction but rather a beneficiary of irui gratitude.) For men, “folly” takes the relatively straightforward form of lust, as demonstrated by the concupiscent monks of *Kitsune* and *Jizōdō*. The circumstances that drive women into the arms (or paws) of an inhuman lover are somewhat more complex, although they generally fall under the heading of *lack*, either emotional (loneliness) or material (poverty). This lack finds expression in an unwise wish—a casually, perhaps even unconsciously vocalized desire to marry *anyone*—upon which some mischievous cosmic force takes “anyone” at face value and supplies an animal groom. The wish can be made directly (as in *Bakemono*) or by proxy (as in *Fujibukuro*); in *Nezumi* it is both, uttered first by the maidservants on behalf of their mistress and then by the lady herself.

In Japanese folklore, as in folklore the world over, unwise wishing routinely acts as the prelude to interspecies marriage (among a host of other unintended consequences). This formula held a secure place in the “narreme pool” of Muromachi court literature; one final example should help to give a sense of its prevalence. The otogizōshi that modern scholars have dubbed *Kari no sōshi* (“The Tale of the Goose”) survives in only a single manuscript, a monochrome ko-e whose postscript states that it was copied in 1602. Although the date of the

original is unknown, it seems likely to be product of the late Muromachi.²⁸³ *Kari* very deliberately positions itself within the high literary tradition, and its abundant classical allusions mark the author as an educated member of the aristocracy or warrior elite.²⁸⁴ Unlike the other ko-e discussed here, *Kari* has no association with Mitsunobu or his atelier, but—give or take a few decades—it shared the same audience as Mitsunobu’s works. The heroine of *Kari* is a lonely young woman in straitened circumstances, much like her counterparts in *Nezumi* and *Bakemono*. Also like them, she first appears to the audience in a fit of melancholy, staring outside and brooding:

She heard a flock of wild geese come winging through the sky. Even for birds such as these, the ‘mandarin duck’ pledge between husband and wife is no shallow bond. She gazed enviously after the flock as it departed, and – what could she have been thinking – in her heart she thought “Human bonds are like morning glories and we, like the dew, can find no haven in them. Still, if there were some man who seemed truly trustworthy – even if he were one of those birds, and came only in passing – then I would go to him...”²⁸⁵

A mysterious suitor suddenly appears, and the lady soon marries him. All but inevitably, he turns out to be a goose. (Perhaps the real twist in *Kari* is not the wife’s discovery of her husband’s identity, but rather her reaction; after her initial shock, she decides that she loves

²⁸³ Ichiko Teiji et al., ed., *Muromachi monogatari-shū I*, *Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikei* vol. 54 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989), 312.

²⁸⁴ Sakaguchi Hiroki, “*Kari no sōshi’ ni miru monogatari-zōshi seisaku no mondai*,” *Komazawa kokubun* vol. 10 (June 1973), 47. For discussion of the copious literary allusions in *Kari*, cf. Yang Jingfang, “*Otogizōshi ni okeru ‘Kari no sōshi’ to senkō bungei: shika o chūshin ni*,” *Gakugei koten bungaku* vol. 3 (March 2003), 100-113 and Ōtsubo Shunsuke, “*Kari no sōshi’ ni miru irui kon’intan no hiren: kitsune nyōbō to no hikaku o chūshin ni*,” *Taishō Daigaku Daigakuin kenkyū ronshū* 34 (February 2010), 2-4.

²⁸⁵ 雲井の雁の一行飛び来たるを聞きても、かかる翼に至るまでも夫婦のゑんあうの契り浅からず、列を離れねも浦山敷眺めやるゝに、如何思ひけん、我心に「せめて、人は契りの朝顔、露の身置き所あるまじくは、かかる翼のあだなる物成とも、誠しく便ともなるべきならば、言ひもいでて」など思ひ続けて眺めいたる。 Ichiko et al., ed., *Muromachi monogatari-shū I*, 313-314.

him nonetheless. Unfortunately, her openmindedness does not trump the generic disposition toward tragedy, and her husband is shot by a hunter.) Simply put, unwise wishes were not so much foreshadowing as prophecy.

McCormick, discussing *Nezumi* and other “representative” ko-e, writes that “the revelatory endings of these small-scroll stories, typically Buddhist in nature, require a process of mental review of the entire preceding story to achieve maximum effect.”²⁸⁶ But just how much of a revelation was the ending of *Nezumi*? Within the storyworld, of course, the unmasking of the mouse-groom constitutes a traumatic discovery—but contemporary audiences, presumably well-acquainted with other irui kon’in tales that followed the same general trajectory, must have smelled a rat from the beginning. Even the handful of examples offered in this chapter suffice to establish the pattern. In *Bakemono*, a woman who says that she’ll marry anyone, even a scarecrow, finds herself married to a scarecrow. In *Kari*, a woman who says that she’ll marry anyone, even a goose, finds herself married to a goose. In *Fujibukuro*, a man who that says he’ll marry his daughter to anyone, even a monkey, finds his daughter married to a monkey. By the time we arrive at *Nezumi* and yet another woman who says that she’ll marry anyone, we know what to expect. There is no “even a...” clause here, no hyperbolic lowest threshold, so audiences would have been left guessing at the exact species of the “anyone”—but surely they could have foreseen that the lady’s wish would be fulfilled in its letter rather than its spirit. Perhaps the prime narrative pleasure of *Nezumi* lay not in the shock of sudden discovery, but rather in the satisfaction of having known all along,

²⁸⁶ McCormick, *Tosa Mitsunobu and the Small Scroll in Medieval Japan*, 69.

and the schadenfreude of watching the hapless heroine belatedly arrive at the same conclusion.

IV. OF MICE AND MEANING:

Making Sense of the Mouse-Groom

With the exception of *Nezumi*, the irui kon'in ko-e produced by Mitsunobu and his atelier all assign a definite moral orientation to their respective animal spouses.²⁸⁷ The crane-wife of *Tsuru* is transparently virtuous, the fox-wife of *Kitsune* transparently wicked. In both cases, the transparency arises in part from the didactic agenda of the narrative; any effective morality tale must clearly designate its heroes and its villains. The serpent-woman of *Jizōdō*, slippery and many-layered, proves more difficult to untangle. But again, didacticism forces clarity, here because it dictates the standards by which the serpent-woman ought to be judged. The calculations involved may be complex—tallying up her contradictory effects on the monk's spiritual progress, balancing her piety against her apparent imperfectability—but with all its explicit soteriological discourse, *Jizōdō* unmistakably positions the serpent-woman to be weighed and measured on a Buddhist scale.

The monkey-groom presents another nuanced case. *Fujibukuro's* forays into the simian perspective reveal him as the hero of his own narrative—a doting husband gently wooing a reluctant but honestly-won wife. In the end, however, he plays the villain's part, inasmuch as his death constitutes a minimally complicated happy ending. Here, too,

²⁸⁷ The scarecrow in *Bakemono* is obviously not an animal, and is difficult to categorize as “good” or “bad.” As is the case with the mouse-groom, this ambiguity arises in part from the absence of literary precedent.

Buddhism has a hand in determining the moral significance of the irui animal spouse, although in this case the religious message is a means rather than an end: the narrator's occasional desultory references to "Kannon's design" and "Kannon's reward" do not suggest a concern with encouraging Buddhist devotion so much as they suggest a concern with establishing the auspiciousness of the tale's outcome.

Japan's medieval era has been defined as the period of Buddhist intellectual hegemony.²⁸⁸ Whether or not this claim holds true for every facet of medieval experience, there can be little question that Buddhist concepts and symbols acted as powerful arbiters of meaning in medieval literature. However, Buddhism seldom held a semiotic monopoly in irui kon'in tales, whose production of meaning relied in part on a lexicon of shared "truths" about particular sorts of animals. Thus the animal spouses of Mitsunobu's ko-e—again, with the exception of *Nezumi*—came colored by a wealth of preexisting associations, encoded in a stock of lore and literature accreted over long centuries.

This is not to claim that the significance of these animal spouses was stable across time, nor that it was singular at any given historical moment. We have already examined the diverse incarnations of the crane-wife and the serpent-wife. (We have encountered serpent-grooms as well; for serpents, unlike for most irui spouses, gender was not a fixed attribute.) Fox-wives, too, wore many faces: most often malicious, but sometimes benign, even beneficent. Japan's first fox-wife tale, in the ninth-century setsuwa anthology *Nihon ryōiki*, constructs the interspecies romance as a bittersweet love story in which both parties act in

²⁸⁸ LaFleur, *The Karma of Words*, 9-14

good faith; in medieval sources, as well, one finds the occasional sympathetic fox-wife.²⁸⁹ So far as I am aware, premodern irui-kon'in literature offers no example of a “good” monkey-groom, but the degree of badness was negotiable, ranging from fumblingly romantic “sexual overreach” in *Fujibukuro* to downright demon-hood in *Konjaku monogatari*.²⁹⁰ In short, any tale of interspecies marriage involving cranes, foxes, serpents, or monkeys would inevitably exist as an intertext. While literary precedent did not pinpoint the meaning of an animal spouse, it did stake out a field of signifiatory possibilities.

The mouse-groom of *Nezumi*, however, remains a stubborn cipher. *Nezumi's* refusal to prescribe a Buddhist hermeneutic—much less resolve into a straightforward morality tale—has already been noted. Moreover, unlike the animal-spouses discussed above, the mouse-groom did not exist atop a palimpsest of irui kon'in tales about his conspecifics; on the contrary, so far as can be determined from the literary record, he had burst onto an all-but-blank canvas. This is not to claim that *Nezumi* is necessarily the *fons et origo* of all Japanese mouse-groom tales. No earlier works of its type have survived—but then, rates of manuscript preservation and transmission inevitably decline as one moves backwards in time. There is no reason to suppose that *Nezumi* must have inherited the concept of the mouse-groom from some earlier text that has since been lost, but the possibility cannot be eliminated.

²⁸⁹ Examples of benevolent fox-women include Kuzunoha, popularized in sekkyōbushi as the mother of the legendary magician Abe no Seimei, and Tamamizu, the subject of an otogizōshi of the same name.

²⁹⁰ *Konjaku monogatari* XXVI.7; *Uji shūi monogatari* X.6. Strictly speaking, this is not precisely an irui kon'in story; the monkey-god eats the women rather than marries them. However, *Uji* specifies that the monkey-god accepted only attractive women as sacrifices, and the narrative appears to be ancestral to *Fujibukuro no sōshi*. Cf. Miura Okuto, “*Fujibukuro no sōshi*,” in *Otogizōshi jiten*, 425-426.

If our knowledge of the premodern textual corpus inevitably contains lacunae, our knowledge of premodern oral traditions remains largely conjectural. Folklorists have conventionally presumed a positive correlation between the age of any given tale type and the breadth of its geographic distribution; the older a story is, the theory goes, the further it will have diffused. By this metric, *irui kon'in* tales about foxes, cranes, snakes, and monkeys—all of which occur in folklore across Japan—are very old indeed.²⁹¹ However, mouse-grooms (and, for that matter, mouse-wives), make no appearance in any of the *irui kon'in* tales recorded by contemporary ethnologists. Ōshima Tatehiko concludes on this basis that although *Nezumi* “may hint at legends about marriage between humans and mice . . . at the present stage, it is difficult to imagine that folktales of this type were ever actually told in Japan.”²⁹² Nakamura Teiri similarly asserts that mouse-groom stories were “literary creations (*seisaku*) rather than folktales.”²⁹³ His offhanded distinction between these two categories is of course problematic, but the point remains that any orally transmitted antecedents of *Nezumi* have vanished without a trace in the intervening centuries. If the mouse-groom of *Nezumi* did have a folkloric prototype, the relevant folklore was most likely neither widespread nor deep-rooted.

Nakamura does identify one possible forerunner of *Nezumi*, a tale which continues to circulate in present-day folklore under the name *Nezumi no yomeiri* (“The Marriage of the

²⁹¹ Chino, “*Nihon mukashibanashi ‘Saru mukoiri’ ni miru josei no ishi,*” 2.

²⁹² Ōshima Tatehiko, *Otogizōshi to minkan bungei* (Tokyo: Iwasaki Bijutsusha, 1967), 84.

²⁹³ Nakamura Teiri, *Dōbutsutachi no Nihonshi* (Tokyo: Kameisha, 2008), 174.

Mouse Bride”), or, less commonly, *Nezumi no mukotori* (“The Mouse Takes a Groom”).²⁹⁴ This story has its roots in an ancient Indian cycle of beast fables known as *Pañcatantra* (ca. 200 BCE),²⁹⁵ and makes its first Japanese appearance in the thirteenth-century setsuwa anthology *Shasekishū* (“A Collection of Sand and Pebbles”), compiled by the monk Mujū Ichien.²⁹⁶ The plot follows, with deliberate circularity, a mouse’s search for a powerful husband; she considers a series of candidates, each capable of overpowering the one before—the sun, a cloud, the wind, and a wall—before finally settling on a fellow mouse, reasoning that mice, who can gnaw through walls, must be the strongest of all.²⁹⁷ The *Shasekishū* fable obviously did not serve as a direct model for *Nezumi*, although it is conceivable that the mouse-groom was inspired by this earlier image of a mouse “arrogantly” (in Ichien’s words) seeking a mate outside her own kind.

Alternatively, the mouse-groom may have roots in Chinese *zhiguai* collections, particularly the fifth-century *Yiyuan* (“The Garden of Marvels”) and the tenth-century *Taiping guangji* (“Extensive Records of the Taiping Era”), both of which contain tales about a liaison between a male mouse and a human woman. In terms of their basic premise, these stories bear a closer resemblance to *Nezumi* than does *Nezumi no mukotori*, although the

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Manjushree Chauhan, “Tales from India Adapted in Japanese Folklore: A Critical Study,” in East Asian Literatures: An Interface with India, ed. P.A. George (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 2006), 208-209.

²⁹⁶ Ichien does not present the story of the mouse-bride as a stand-alone episode, but rather appends it as a coda to a setsuwa entitled “On Expelling Poverty” (*Hinkyū o oidasu koto*), in which an indigent monk successfully performs esoteric rites to drive the spirit of poverty from his temple. The link between this story and that of the mouse-bride is not readily apparent; perhaps it reflects an early association between mice and wealth.

²⁹⁷ Tsukudo, ed., *Shasekishū* vol. 2, 85-87.

parallel is still a loose one. Neither of the *zhiguai* involves a cat, or a mouse taking human form, and in both cases, the relationship produces a monstrous hybrid offspring. Nonetheless, as the coda of *Tsuru* demonstrates, the writers and commissioners of Mitsunobu's ko-e were conversant with the Chinese canon, and it is possible—although far from provable, or even probable—that inspiration came from this quarter.

Perhaps *Nezumi's* greatest resemblance to known preexisting sources lies in the overall shape of its narrative. The mouse-groom may have been an innovation—in that he was a mouse and not, say, a monkey or a snake—but *irui kon'in* tales that turned on the unmasking of the animal spouse were nothing novel. I have already argued that animal spouses elsewhere in Mitsunobu's ko-e did not arrive upon the page as empty signifiers; they came predisposed to accommodate certain meanings more readily than others. A fox and a crane, for instance, were not equally well-suited to the role of deceitful seductress. Here I should add that these animal spouses were also not isolated signifiers. They traveled with a larger body of iconography and mythology in tow, whose dimensions ranged from the cosmetic (e.g., the human skulls worn by the foxes in *Kitsune*) to the cosmic (e.g., the underwater realm of the serpent woman in *Jizōdō*). By the time that the *Gon no Kami* tales were composed, mice had become embedded in their own network of co-signifiers. The comparative iconographic nakedness of the mouse-groom in *Nezumi* a century or so earlier supports the hypothesis that mice were relative newcomers to the roster of animals deemed good to tell stories with, and had only recently been “mixed in together with *irui kon'in*

tales.”²⁹⁸

The mouse-groom does in certain respects prefigure the more fully-realized fictional mice who would follow him. Thus, even if *Nezumi* cannot lay claim to a lengthy literary or folkloric pedigree, it most likely did take cues from an emerging pattern of thought about mice, which would become the site of later elaboration and codification. (For reasons that will be explored in the next chapter, direct textual influence is a less satisfying explanation for *Nezumi*'s commonalities with its successor.) The very fact that the mouse-groom of *Nezumi* was a mouse-*groom* and not a mouse-*bride* suggests that a generally-accepted gendering of mice had already taken place. As Ishikawa Tōru notes, irui kon'in tales tend to assign a single, diachronically stable gender to animals of any given species,²⁹⁹ and mice were consistently coded as masculine—not just in irui kon'in tales, but in *all* “mouse tales,” as we can see from characters such as Yahyōe, Hokotarō, and Nezumi no Tarō. Depictions of all-mouse societies and tales of inter-rodent romance necessitated the introduction of female mouse characters, but for the most part they were, like Minnie to Mickey, very much members of the second sex. Prior to *Nezumi*, mice made only sporadic literary cameos, and—like Sei Shōnagon's hateful scurriers—they most often went ungendered and otherwise unindividuated. However, late Heian and early medieval literature do reveal some traces of a nascent conception of mice as masculine. The setsuwa anthology *Hokkekyō kenki* (“Records of the Miracles of the Lotus Sutra,” 1040) gives an account of a man reborn as a

²⁹⁸ Ōshima, *Otogizōshi to minkan bungei*, 84.

²⁹⁹ Ishikawa Tōru, “*Otogizōshi ni okeru irui kon'in-tan*,” *Kokubungaku: Kaishaku to kanshō* vol.70, no. 3 (March 2005), 106.

mouse,³⁰⁰ while both *Genpei seisuiki* and *Taiheiki* tell the story of the corrupt priest Raigō terrorizing his temple in rodent form.

Nezumi further connects to later fiction about mice in its presentation of cats and mice as mortal enemies. This notion is obviously grounded in biological reality, but earlier sources were just as likely to cast snakes as the predators of mice. (In the story from *Hokkekyō kenki* mentioned above, the most hated enemy of the man reincarnated as a mouse is himself reincarnated as a snake.) Eventually, however, cats would displace their cold-blooded competition to gain distinction as *the* archnemeses of mice—a transition linked with the deepening conception of mice as predominantly indoor creatures, which in turn reflected a general trend toward urbanization.³⁰¹

Finally, *Nezumi* hints at the identification of mice with material wealth, a symbolic connection which would be more explicitly articulated in later sources.³⁰² Poverty, as we have seen, opens the door to inhuman suitors; but unlike the mouse-groom, they do not always come bearing gifts. The scarecrow in *Bakemono*, the monkey in *Fujibukuro*, and the goose in *Kari* do nothing to improve the financial lot of their human lovers. Although the text of *Nezumi* gives only the vaguest accounting of the mouse-groom's generosity, the illustrations imply that he keeps the house well-stocked with food—a particular form of wealth with which mice would become virtually metonymic. As previously indicated, the various delicacies showcased in the second and third illustrations of *Nezumi* function as a kind of

³⁰⁰ *Hokkekyō kenki* 125. The same story also appears in *Konjaku monogatari* XIV.2 and *Zōtanshū* VII.

³⁰¹ Kuroda, *Rekishī to shite no otogizōshi*, 31-32.

³⁰² Watanabe Kyōichi, “*Nezumi no sōshi: E to shisho, gachūshi no kankei kara*,” *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō* vol. 61, no. 5 (May 1996), 117-118.

ironic foreshadowing: not only does the mouse-groom bring food, he will *become* food. But the abundance of alimentary imagery also gestures toward the elaborate depictions of mice as miniature chefs that would take center stage in later fiction about mice.

In short, the mouse-groom of *Nezumi* hazily adumbrates his literary successors, but has no known literary predecessors of his own. *Nezumi*, perhaps deliberately, declines to compensate for this lack of an informing precedent. The narrator directly reports the mouse-groom's speech only once—and even then, the mouse-groom speaks with somebody else's words, quoting a dense tissue of classical allusions. Apart from this, we receive no insight into his thoughts, and the external description of his physical reaction to the cat constitutes our only knowledge of his emotional state. The narrator makes no pronouncements as to his motives or his morals. The mouse-groom may or may not be an unreasoning animal, a Cartesian *bête machine* with a supernatural twist—we lack the evidence necessary to support any meaningful conclusion—but his mental interior remains almost entirely closed off to us. He *is* a character, but so far as we know, he does not *have* a character.

One might say the same of the fox-wife in *Kitsune*, who is just as thoroughly psychologically inaccessible; but unlike *Nezumi*, *Kitsune* offers the audience landmarks by which to navigate around this roadblock. As previously stated, literary precedent did not doom all fox-women to villainy, but it certainly biased the odds in this direction—particularly for the sort of fox-women who seduced monks and wore human skulls. The audience of *Kitsune* could not have entertained any serious doubts about the fox-woman's moral status, but the final, incontrovertible proof of her reprobacy lies in the revelation that Jizō was the one who drove her away. *Jizōdō*

and *Fujibukuro* likewise attribute the severance of the interspecies relationship to some combination of bodhisattvic assistance and Buddhist piety—and by doing so, they join *Kitsune* in clearly marking the interspecies relationship as something that ought to be severed. However, the means of the separation in *Nezumi* offers no such insight. The cat is perhaps even more opaque than the mouse-groom; we cannot define the one in opposition to the other, as we can define the fox in opposition to Jizō or the monkey in opposition to Kannon. When we strip away the human drama of *Nezumi*, a purely animal drama emerges, brutal, banal, and—so far as the narrator would have us know—utterly amoral. A mouse invades a house, and a cat eats the mouse.

Much of my analysis of *Nezumi* has centered around the unanswered question of the unhappy ending, which leaves no doubt that things have gone badly awry for the nun and her daughter but remains coy on the subject of *why*. From an extratextual perspective, there is no great mystery here: *Nezumi* ends unhappily because stories about animal-human marriages almost always do. But an intratextual explanation proves less forthcoming. Who is to blame: the lady, for her unwise wishing, her too-ready acquiescence to the demands of mice and mothers? The nun, for her spiritual laxity, her venality, her curiosity? In the end, we are left—like the maidservant in the final painting—wagging a finger at the cat and the mouse, but there is little satisfaction to be had here. As Jean Baudrillard said regarding the muteness of animals: “In a world bent on doing nothing but making one speak, in a world assembled under the hegemony of signs and discourse, their silence weighs more and more heavily on our organization of meaning.”³⁰³

³⁰³ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 137.

-CHAPTER THREE-
THE LADY OR THE MOUSE:
Taking Sides in the *Gon no Kami* Tales

I. BUILDING A BETTER MOUSE TALE:

The Many and Increasingly Furry Faces of Gon no Kami

The Mitsunobu *Nezumi* may pose something of a hermeneutic riddle, but charting its textual genealogy presents little challenge. Four Edo-period copies exist, three with illustrations, one without; apart from minor scribal errors, all faithfully reproduce the text of the original.³⁰⁴ For all that it marks the dawn of a golden age of “mouse tales,” the Mitsunobu *Nezumi* appears to have had little direct influence on its successors.³⁰⁵ The creators of later fiction about mice borrowed liberally and unapologetically from a range of sources; if they looked to the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* for inspiration, they did so with uncharacteristic

³⁰⁴ Fujii, *Mikan otogizōshi-shū to kenkyū I*, 120; Miya, “*Otogizōshi to Tosa Mitsunobu*,” 84-85.

³⁰⁵ Both Ichiko Teiji and Fujii Takashi tentatively suggest a relationship between the Mitsunobu *Nezumi* and *Kari*, on the grounds of general thematic and atmospheric similarities (Ichiko Teiji, *Mikan chūsei shōsetsu kaidai* [Tokyo: Rakurō Shoin, 1942], 157; Fujii, *Mikan otogizōshi-shū to kenkyū I*, 116). I am inclined to agree with this assessment; in particular, the scene in which the heroine of *Kari* ruminates on her inhuman lover’s newly-revealed identity closely resembles its counterpart in *Nezumi*. Although the wording of the two scenes differs enough to rule out direct quotation, a side-by-side comparison reveals that they share many of same key phrases. The overlap may be coincidental, but to my mind, this is not the most parsimonious explanation.

Tokuda Kazuo finds possible traces of influence from the Mitsunobu *Nezumi* in a different work: a set of six late seventeenth-century paintings—apparently illustrations cut out from an emaki and remounted sans text—which he has dubbed *Nezumi monogatari*. One of these paintings contains an image of a cat catching a mouse very similar to the one in the Mitsunobu *Nezumi* (“*Nezumi no dangō’ setsuwa no sōshika to kaigaika*,” *Setsuwa bungaku kenkyū* vol. 43 [July 2008], 155).

Whether or not *Nezumi monogatari* borrowed from the Mitsunobu *Nezumi* (the proposition is intriguing, but far from indisputable), it most likely drew extensively Aesop’s fables, which had been introduced to Japan by Jesuits in the late sixteenth century. Judging from its illustrations, *Nezumi monogatari* recounts the fable of the mice belling the cat, albeit with one crucial alteration: the mice succeed at their task (Ibid., 157). Assuming that Tokuda’s interpretation of the illustrations is correct, *Nezumi monogatari* corroborates one of the central arguments of this chapter: Edo-era audiences wanted happy stories about mice, and existing narratives were freely reworked to this end.

restraint. This failure to mine the Mitsunobu *Nezumi* for recyclable material likely reflects a simple lack of access; later fiction about mice was produced in a context far removed from the imperial and shogunal courts that supplied Mitsunobu's patrons. However, even if the Mitsunobu *Nezumi* had been available for consultation, it might still have gone unutilized: from the sixteenth century onward, tragedy became an increasingly disfavored element in stories about mice, even when it was prescribed by the conventions of *irui kon'in* narratives.

In contrast to the neatly unitary Mitsunobu *Nezumi*, the *Gon no Kami* tales exist in a patchwork of variant manuscripts. Many of these manuscripts are fragmentary, some of them are now lost and known only from facsimiles, and none of them are dated. Determining their age—either relative or absolute—requires some degree of conjecture, and certainty recedes even further when one attempts to situate this timeline within the equally hazy chronology of other roughly contemporaneous stories about mice, many of which have abundant textual variants of their own. Further complicating any attempts at schematization, these “mouse tales” were frequently the products of what Virginia Skord Waters calls “narrative splicing”;³⁰⁶ major plot elements circulated freely among them, along with a host of minor details—the name “Rafter Scurrier”;³⁰⁷ an image of two mice standing side-by-side, one butchering a bird and the other a fish;³⁰⁸ and so on. Sometimes these borrowings provide a basis for relative dating, but often the direction of the transfer cannot be determined. While this rat's nest of

³⁰⁶ Waters, *Tales of Tears and Laughter*, 57. Interestingly, the *otogizōshi* that Waters presents as an example of narrative splicing—*Kagami otoko emaki*, or “The Mirror Man”—involves a hidden mouse village reminiscent of the one in *Kakurezato*. Mice seem to have been especially “spliceable,” even three centuries before the advent of modern genetics.

³⁰⁷ Ryūsawa, “*Kōshien Gakuin shozō 'Nezumi no sōshi' emaki ni tsuite,*” 94

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 96-96

textual variants and intertextual influences cannot be easily untangled, it underscores the fact that “mouse tales” were not only a much-loved form of entertainment, but also a site of active experimentation. Like the flesh-and-blood mice described in *Yōsotama no kakehashi*, fictional mice were not merely reproduced—they were *refined*.

For all the gaps and guesswork in the genealogy of the *Gon no Kami* tales, we can discern a turn away from the darker aspects of the irui kon’in narrative, and a growing emphasis on the utopian possibilities of the irui topos. Before we can discuss these developments in any detail, we must first acquire an overview of the known manuscripts, which can be broadly divided into two lineages, as shown below:³⁰⁹

- A Lineage: Tenri *Gon no Kami*. One scroll, mostly complete, missing opening section.
Sakurai *Gon no Kami*. Fragmentary; illustrations remounted without text.
Tenri *Gon no Kami* II. Fragmentary; illustrations remounted without text.
- B Lineage: Suntory *Gon no Kami*. Five scrolls, complete.
Sasayama *Gon no Kami*. One scroll, complete.
Tokyo National Museum (TNM) *Gon no Kami*. One scroll, complete.
Spencer *Gon no Kami*. Three scrolls, mostly complete,
third scroll missing ending section.

Scholars uniformly recognize the Tenri *Gon no Kami* as the oldest surviving *Gon no*

³⁰⁹ The designations of individual manuscripts are derived from the names of the institutions that own them. These designations generally accord with those used by Japanese scholars, although no standardized system of nomenclature exists. For the full names of the institutions in question, please consult Appendix I.

Sawai Daizō has recently offered evidence for the existence of a third *Gon no Kami* lineage (although calling it such may be something of a misnomer, as the protagonist is named Sataso). Unfortunately, the manuscript is fragmentary. It is also held in a private collection and has been almost completely unavailable for scholarly study; as of the present, Sawai’s article constitutes the sole source of information on this work (“*Shujinkō ga ‘Sataso’ de aru ‘Nezumi no sōshi: miko no kuchiyose shishō ni furete,*” *Denshō bungaku* vol. 59 [May 2010], 37-50).

Kami manuscript.³¹⁰ Judging from its language and its illustrations, the work dates to the late Muromachi. The illustrations are executed in the Nara-e style; they lack the technical sophistication found in the B-lineage *Gon no Kami* scrolls, and are still further removed from the artistry of the Mitsunobu *Nezumi*. Like all *Gon no Kami* tales, the Tenri *Gon no Kami* makes prominent use of in-painting speech captions (the narrative ramifications of which will be discussed below). However, unlike its successors, it also imposes no clear boundary between illustrations and the “main” text, which flows messily around—and sometimes into—the paintings. Several key scenes are shown before they are told, prompting Watanabe Kyōichi to conclude that the narrative is led by illustrations rather than text.³¹¹

Whatever it might be lead by, the narrative leads inexorably to the separation of mouse and maiden. However, it passes through numerous comic episodes along the way, and arrives at a conclusion not nearly so grim as that of the Mitsunobu *Nezumi*. Instead of being caught by a cat, Gon no Kami is catechized by one, and the tale ends with him attaining enlightenment. How it *begins*, however, is an open question, as the first section of the Tenri *Gon no Kami* scroll has been lost. The broadly similar B-lineage texts allow us to draw reasonable inferences about the missing content, but for the purpose of close comparison among individual manuscripts, it is safest to pick up where the surviving text begins:

[Kannon] approached the sleeping woman’s pillow and spoke.

³¹⁰ Sawai, “‘*Nezumi no sōshi (Nezumi no Gon no Kami)*’ no josei to warai,” 51; Ryūsawa, “*Kōshien Gakuin shozō ‘Nezumi no sōshi’ emaki ni tsuite*,” 94; Miura Okuto, “*Sakurai Tokutarō ji shozō ‘Nezumi e’ kō*,” *Seikei kokubun* vol. 45 (March 2012), 125; Watanabe, “‘*Nezumi no sōshi*,” 118; Saitō Maori, “*Katami no waka – ‘Nezumi no sōshi’ shichū*,” *Kokubungaku kenkyū shiryōkan kiyō: bungaku kenkyū hen* vol. 37 (March 2011), 93-119; et alia.

³¹¹ Watanabe, “‘*Nezumi no sōshi*,” 118-119.

“Although you have prayed to me for a husband for many years, because of a lack of karmic bonds from your previous existence, your wish has not been granted. Nonetheless, your many pleas have moved me to pity, so I will tell you this: someone will soon send you a letter, and you should take him as your husband. However, do not give in at once—only reply after he has written to you many times. You will meet him in the summer,” Kannon said confidently, and then vanished as if into thin air.³¹²

The woman in question—who, unlike her inhuman husband-to-be, remains nameless throughout the tale—is almost certainly having this dream at Kiyomizudera. The Kiyomizu Kannon was (and still is) famed for blessing her worshippers with romantic success, earning her the epithet *Tsuma Kannon*, or “Wife Kannon.”³¹³ She aided petitioners in other ways as well, and oneiric visitations from her constituted a stock plot device in medieval literature.³¹⁴ However, Kannon’s behavior in this particular dream deviates from the standard formula: her advice begins in a suitably solemn vein, but soon the tone of divine wisdom gives way to one of worldly cunning, as she urges Gon no Kami’s future wife to play coy with her suitor.

From here, the narrative turns to Gon no Kami—or returns, as he seems to have been already introduced in the lost section of the scroll. Apparently, he previously made his own pilgrimage to Kiyomizudera, where he glimpsed the woman and was struck by her beauty; now, he enlists his retainer Koroku to carry a love letter to her. (In the B-lineage texts, Kannon appears to Gon no Kami as well as to the woman, and encourages him to approach

³¹² [によう]ぼうのまくらかみにたちよらせたまひて、おほせけるは「いかになんぢたねんわれをねんじ、つまをいのるといへとも、ぜんぜのきゑんなきゆえ、いまゝてかなへぬなり。あまりにわれをたのむことのおびんさに、かくおしへけるなり。いつかたよりも、たまつさのこんかたをつまとさたむへし。されとも、一度なびくへからず、たびかさならば、ともかくもへんじすへし。あわんことはなつのころなるべし」とねんころにおほせられ、かきけすやうにうせさせたまふ。MJMT vol. 10, 241-242.

³¹³ Saitō, “*Katami no waka*,” 95.

³¹⁴ Sawai, “*Nezumi no sōshi (Nezumi no Gon no Kami)’ no josei to warai*,” 54.

her; it is probable that the Tenri *Gon no Kami* originally included a similar episode.) Koroku proceeds to the woman's residence on Ninth Avenue (significantly, this was not particularly desirable real estate; by some measures, Gon no Kami, who lives on Fourth Avenue, occupies a higher rung on the social ladder). There, he waits for the sun to set:

After darkness fell, he crept up slowly; he listened, and heard no sound of people. The back garden was overgrown. When he peered through the window, he could faintly see a lone woman by the flickering lamplight. Thinking that this was a golden opportunity, he knocked softly on the paper screen of the window and called, "Pardon me."

"Who is it?" came the answer from within.

"I have come to humbly present you with a missive from my master," Koroku said, and then tossed the letter in through the window.

As soon as the woman saw it, she exclaimed, "Oh, how embarrassing! You lunatic!" and modestly concealed herself from sight.

Thinking in his heart that no matter what sort of woman she might be, she would surely give in soon enough, Koroku made his way back to Fourth Avenue.³¹⁵

The Tenri *Gon no Kami* takes a staple romantic scene—the epistolary declaration of love—and recasts it in a farcical mold. Like her counterpart in the Mitsunobu *Nezumi*, Gon no Kami's bride-to-be appears to lead a lonely and impecunious life. (Although this similarity is conceivably the product of direct influence, it is more likely that both works simply shared a set of assumptions about the circumstances that left a woman vulnerable to irui seduction.)

Gon no Kami, however, lacks the animal magnetism of Mitsunobu's mouse-groom;

³¹⁵ 目もくれかたになりぬれば、やう／＼にしひびいる、うちのやうをきゝければ、人おともせず、おくのていさぶしけにそ見へたまふ。まどより見れば、ともしびほそ／＼とかきたて、にようばうばかりほの見へてぞおはします。よきおりからとおもひて、まどのしやうじをほそ／＼とたゝき、「物申さん」といひければ、うちより「たぞ」とこたへけり。小六申しけるは「有人のかたよりたまづきのさふらふ」とてまどのうちへそなけいれけり。にようばうこれを見るよりも、「あら、はつかしや。うつゝなや」とて、物ふかくこそしのひたまふ。小六こゝろにおもふやう、たとひいかなるおんななりとも、いかてが(sic)はやくなひくへしと思ひて、四でうへそかへるなり。MJMT vol. 10, 242-243.

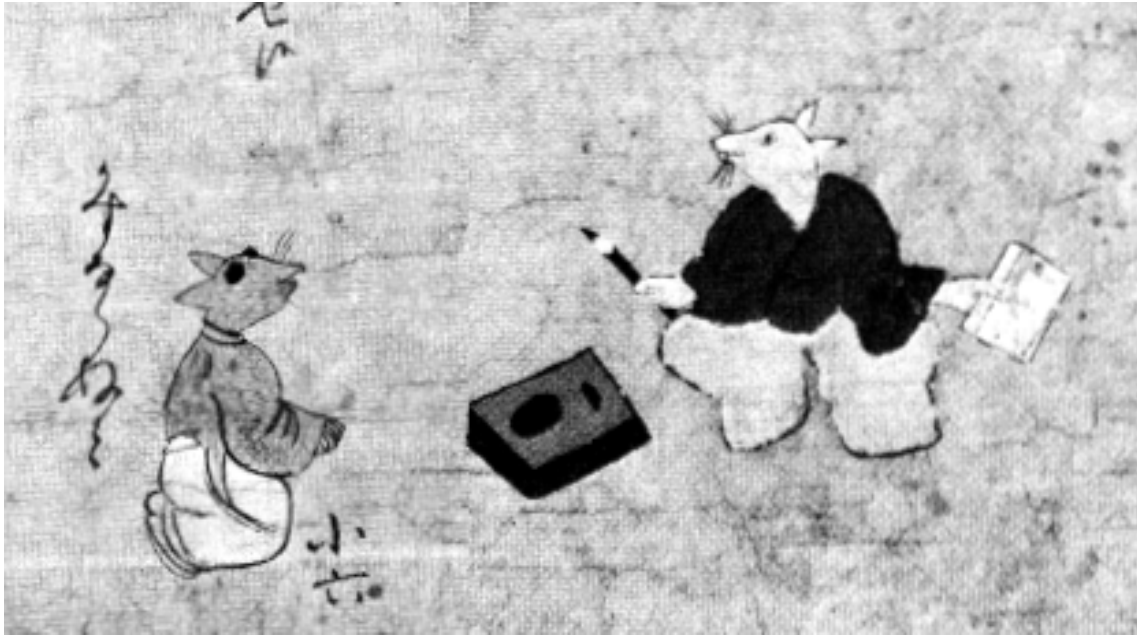


Fig. 30 Detail of *Nezumi no sōshi* (*Tenri Gon no Kami*). Artist unknown. Late 16th c. Handscroll; ink and color on paper. Tenri University.

rather than sweet-talking his way into the woman's bedroom, he must make his advances via a comically inept messenger. More importantly, Gon no Kami lacks a human disguise, at least from the perspective of the audience. The first intact illustration of the Tenri *Gon no Kami* shows a white mouse presenting a letter to a gray mouse; the pair wear human clothes, but their animal identity is unmistakable.^(FIG. 30) (The white mouse, of course, is Gon no Kami; all *Gon no Kami* tales color-code mouse society in the typical fashion, assigning albinos to the uppermost echelons.)

The audience is privy not only to Gon no Kami's species, but also to his thoughts. The narrator offers glimpses into minds of other mice as well, as in the passage above, in which Koroku acts as the focalizing character. (The very fact that there are other mice presents yet another contrast with the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi*, which renders the mouse-groom more

completely other by presenting him as the lone representative of his kind.) This ensemble of psychologically accessible mouse characters allows the woman to be viewed from multiple murine perspectives over the course of the tale, in some sense positioning *her* as the irui spouse, the “alien kind”—although, curiously, the mice do not seem to find her particularly alien. Koroku apparently perceives their primary difference as one of gender rather than species—a difference that has the paradoxical effect of making the woman entirely predictable, or so he imagines.

Despite Koroku’s optimism, the lady follows Kannon’s advice and receives several letters without responding, leaving Gon no Kami literally lovesick. A doctor is summoned, and pronounces the ailment incurable; fortunately, the lady writes back before it proves fatal:

“This is Kannon’s reward!” Gon no Kami exclaimed, clasp[ing] the letter first to his chest, then to his face, and weeping tears of joy. Bit by bit, the days and the months added up, and at the end of the summer, after they had exchanged letter after letter, the woman agreed to marry him. Gon no Kami chose an auspicious day; there was already no time left to prepare the welcome for the bridal procession, so he sent Magohyōe, Koroku, and some of his other retainers out to greet them.³¹⁶

The woman—now referred to more respectfully as *himegimi*, or “the lady”—is carried off in a palanquin to Gon no Kami’s residence, accompanied by her nursemaid, Renzei no Ama. The bridal procession stands out as one of the most significant sites of divergence between the Tenri *Gon no Kami* and the B-Lineage manuscripts. Not only do the latter works dedicate far more space to this scene, doubling the number of participants in the procession,³¹⁷ they show

³¹⁶ MJMT vol. 10, 243.

³¹⁷ Sawai Daizō, “*Nezumi no sōshi (Nezumi no Gon no Kami)’ no yomeiri gyōretsuzu: shohon hikaku no katei kara,*” *Aichi Daigaku bungaku ronsō* vol. 136 (July 2007), 59-76; Sawai, “*Nezumi no sōshi*



Fig. 31 Detail of *Nezumi no sōshi* (TNM *Gon no Kami*). Artist unknown. Late 16th /early 17th c. Handscroll; ink and color on paper. Tokyo National Museum.



Fig. 32 Detail of *Nezumi no sōshi* (Tenri *Gon no Kami*). Artist unknown. Late 16th c. Handscroll; ink and color on paper. Tenri University.

the bride escorted by a retinue of mice.^(FIG. 31) The Tenri *Gon no Kami*, by contrast, shows the palanquin-bearers and attendants in human guise, complete with a series of innocuous name captions such as “Jinsuke” and “Sanzō.”^(FIG. 32) (Indeed, it is possible that the “men” in the bridal procession are actually meant to be just that; while the groom’s family and retainers

(*Nezumi no Gon no Kami*)’ *no josei to warai*,” 54.



Fig. 33 Detail of *Nezumi no sōshi* (*Tenri Gon no Kami*). Artist unknown. Late 16th c. Handscroll; ink and color on paper. Tenri University.



Fig. 34 Detail of *Nezumi no sōshi* (*Tenri Gon no Kami*). Artist unknown. Late 16th c. Handscroll; ink and color on paper. Tenri University.

would typically perform this function, the *Tenri Gon no Kami* provides little concrete detail about the wedding arrangements.) The retainers (both confirmed mice) sent to greet the bridal procession also wear human form, although their disguises are belied by their name captions—“Walnut-Cracker Koroku” and “Ricebag-Rummager Magohyōe.” As if to mark the border between the human and irui realms, the two retainers standing behind them appear as mice.^(FIG. 33) But this slip in the facade does not last

long: when Gon no Kami welcomes his new bride, he does so from behind a human face.^(FIG. 34)

The human appearance of Gon no Kami and his retainers throughout the wedding festivities points to the lady as the focalizing character, although our greater knowledge diminishes our capacity to fully assume her perspective. We see what she sees: the man—but

we also know what she is not seeing: the mouse. The magnitude of her misperception invites sympathy, but it also places the viewer in a position of superiority. There is no accompanying text to tip the emotional scales in either direction; save for name captions and a handful of tangential speech captions from peripheral characters (a warning to the palanquin bearers to watch their footing, a reminder to the welcoming party to be on their best behavior), the bridal procession and the first formal meeting of the new couple unfold entirely in a visual register.

At this juncture, the narrative embarks on a lengthy detour from the irui kon'in plot, instead meandering through the kitchens where the preparations for the wedding feast are taking place. This section of the scroll also lacks extrapictorial text, although the speech captions of the workmice crowd the illustrations. These snippets of dialogue concern either the mundane tasks at paw ("This needs a bit more salt," declares a mouse sampling a ladle of broth) or minor dramas within the ranks of Gon no Kami's household. Sawai Daizō notes the relatively frank discussions of sex, as in a conversation among two female maidservants and Daigaku, a higher-ranking male servant who is ordering them to hurry up:³¹⁸

Nioi: "Don't scold us underlings too much, Mr. Daigaku. Once it's night, you'll be trying to sweet-talk us again. Then you'll be rubbing your hands together and begging."

Kochō: "Hey, Nioi, last night when I was sleeping in the kitchen, Mr. Daigaku came and embraced me. I shook him off and ran into the tearoom, and he went over to Akocha while he was still naked."

³¹⁸ This sequence of speech captions appears to be slightly jumbled; Daigaku's admonition actually comes to the left of Nioi and Kochō's conversation, although it would make more sense if positioned to the right. Fujishita Noriko hypothesizes that the scene may have undergone a right/left flip at some point in the tale's transmission. ("*Chūsei shōsetsu 'Nezumi no sōshi' no kenkyū*," *Koten bungaku kenkyū* vol. 5 [1996], 40-44, 48).

The moonlight was so bright that I could see everything, and he looked so funny that I almost split my sides laughing.³¹⁹

Here, the realities of human society are transposed to an animal register, their hard edges softened by a layer of fur. Actual serving woman would have experienced nocturnal advances of this sort, although it is doubtful that they regarded them with the same cheerful aplomb as Nioi and Kochō, who display “little consciousness of having been violated; on the contrary, they appear to be enjoying this ‘battle of the sexes.’”³²⁰

Daigaku soon receives a scolding of his own from Gon no Kami, who demands more hot water as he lounges in a bath—wearing neither his human body nor his human clothing,



Fig. 35 Detail of *Nezumi no sōshi* (Tenri *Gon no Kami*). Artist unknown. Late 16th c. Handscroll; ink and color on paper. Tenri University.

nakedly animal. Gon no Kami’s reappearance does not signal a return to the primary storyline; the spotlight immediately shifts to a troupe of minstrels arriving to perform at the wedding banquet, and from there to a pregnant mouse giving

³¹⁹ [にほひ]: 大がくどの、げすどもあまりなしはりたまひぞ。ゆうなりは又、ざれごとをおほせられべく候。そのとき、てをすりたまふな。[こてう]: いかい、にほひ、ゆふべはだいどころにねたれば、大がくどのゝきて、だきつきたまふほどに、ふりちぎり御ちやのまへにげたれば、はだかにてあこちやのもとへかゝり申され候、月よにてあかるければ、おかしうてはらをかゝへたよ。MJMT vol. 10, 248 Cf. also Sawai, “*Nezumi no sōshi* (*Nezumi no Gon no Kami*)’ no josei to warai,” 59.

³²⁰ Sawai, “*Nezumi no sōshi* (*Nezumi no Gon no Kami*)’ no josei to warai,” 59.

birth.^(FIG. 35) This latter scene, being unrelated to the upcoming nuptial celebration, lacks even a nominal connection to the *irui kon'in* plot; on the other hand, it does connect to general theme of marriage, an institution all but indissociable from reproduction in the late medieval era.³²¹ Although the tableau appears more painful than joyful—her eyes clenched shut, the mother-to-be squats with the midwife’s arms locked around her belly—contemporary audiences may have regarded it as a fitting conclusion to the sequence of auspicious matrimonial imagery that preceded it. Conversely, the scene may have been intended to present an ironic contrast with *Gon no Kami*’s marriage, which (as the audience no doubt suspected) was doomed to end childlessly. Or perhaps the logic of depicting a mouse in childbirth derived simply from the symbolic value of mice themselves, whose fertility was so legendary that their droppings were used to aid conception.

Despite all the attention lavished on the preparations for the banquet, the actual event goes undepicted, both in text and in image. This lacuna is shared by all of the *Gon no Kami* tales, possibly because fictional mice typically shed their anthropomorphic trappings when they are eating, instead appearing in fully naturalistic form.³²² The wedding feast in the *Yahyōe* tales provides a telling example of this convention. Here, both the bride and the groom are mice, permitting full disclosure. One moment, the celebrants are shown decorously seated in full court dress—the next, they are scurrying about on all fours, gnawing their way into baskets, dragging fish from the butcher’s block, and sipping oil from lampstands.^(FIG. 36)

³²¹ Nanbu Yōko, “*Nezumi no sōshi’ ni okeru shussan bamen no hen’yō to kaiten,*” *Gakugei koten bungaku* vol. 6 (March 2013), 128-130.

³²² Taguchi, “*Gijinka’ no zuzōgaku, sono monogatari hyōgen no kanōsei ni tsuite,*” 344.



Fig. 36 Details of *Yahyōe nezumi*. Artist unknown. Mid 17th c. Handscroll; ink, color, and gold leaf on paper. Keiō University.

The text highlights the deliberately chosen limits of the anthropomorphizing project: “Even dressed in layers of fine robes, they had not lost their mousish nature; how could they restrain themselves for even a single night? Stripping off their clothes, the ladies engaged in petty theft to their hearts’ content.”³²³

When we next encounter Gon no Kami, he is once again in human form, bidding farewell to his wife. (He tells her that he is going to a banquet at a friend’s house—another hint that to break bread with his wife would be tantamount to revealing his true nature.) In the Tenri manuscript, Gon no Kami does not outright prohibit his wife from exploring her new residence, but he does present her with a book to “console her” during his absence—a coded warning to stay out of trouble.³²⁴ The warning goes unheeded: in her husband’s absence, Gon no Kami’s wife begins exploring the mansion (a variation on the theme of

³²³ 色々の衣文を重ねても、鼠心が失せぬこそ、何かは一夜も怵ふべき。女房たち装束どもを脱ぎ捨てて、思ひ思ひの小盗みをこそせられけ。 Matsumoto, ed., *Otogizōshi-shū*, 332-333.

³²⁴ The Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* also toys briefly with the conceit of a book-within-a-book; in the first painting, one of the maidservants is shown reading, most likely aloud. Although this commonality is likely not the result of direct influence, I do think it is possible that in both cases the images of women as readers were intended as a wink to a presumed-to-be-female audience.

“forbidden looking” discussed in the previous chapter), finds a room full of mice, and sets a mousetrap to capture her husband. This spells the end of the marriage in all versions of the tale, with the partial exception of the fragmentary Sakurai and Tenri II manuscripts—which, as indicated in the first chapter, may have been deliberately “edited” in order to excise the less uplifting portions of the narrative.

Save for minor inconsistencies in spelling, the four extant B-Lineage manuscripts of *Gon no Kami* are virtually identical, and seem to have been multiply produced as a commercial product beginning in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. While they follow the earlier Tenri *Gon no Kami* in ending with the dissolution of the interspecies marriage, the B-Lineage texts foreground Gon no Kami’s sympathetic qualities while eliding some of his more sinister aspects. His sorrow for his lost wife becomes more sincere: while in the Tenri *Gon no Kami*, he responds to his loss with a series of punnish waka that are “difficult to read as poems about grief,” the corresponding poetic sequence in the B-Lineage texts is achingly soulful (if partially cribbed from *Genji monogatari* by way of popular poetic digests).³²⁵

This is not to say that Gon no Kami was rewritten as a romantic hero. If anything, he became more rather than less of a humorous figure, thanks in large part to the loss of his human face. Unlike in the Tenri *Gon no Kami*, in the B-Lineage texts Gon no Kami and his fellow mice are never shown in cross-species drag; even during the wedding ceremony, they sport paws and whiskers and tails.^(FIG. 37) Audiences would have understood from the text that Gon no Kami was capable of passing as a man, but—unlike his wife—they seemed to prefer him as a mouse.

³²⁵ Saitō Maori, “*Katami no waka: ‘Nezumi no sōshi’ shichū.*” *Kokubungaku kenkyū shiryōkan kiyō: bungaku kenkyū hen* vol. 37 (March 2011), 101.

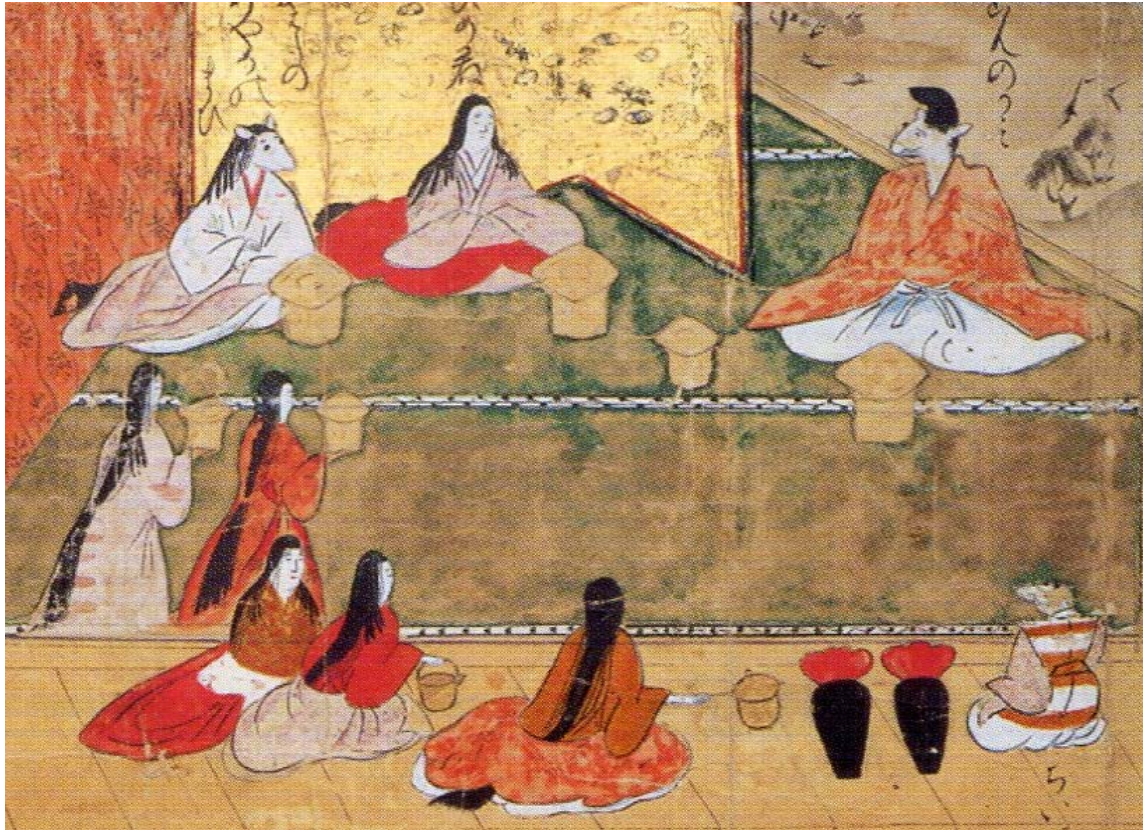


Fig. 37 Detail of *Nezumi no sōshi* (Suntory *Gon no Kami*). Artist unknown. Late 16th/early 17th c. Set of five handscrolls; ink, color, and gold leaf on paper. Suntory Art Museum.

*II. “AND SO PROCEEDS AD INFINITUM”:
A World Unfolding and Unfinalizable*

In the previous chapter, I described the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi* as “a world in collapse.” The world of the *Gon no Kami* tales is just the opposite; it overflows the confines of the *irui kon’in* plot, thanks in large part to the in-painting speech captions. As Komine Kazuaki observes, dialogue makes up the bulk of in-painting text captions in *otogizōshi*. For the most part, this dialogue is either redundant or tangential to the extrapictorial or “main” text: it may reinforce or elaborate on previously established information, preempt possible misinterpretations of the painting, provide affective cues for the audience, or simply offer

comic relief, but it seldom advances the central plot in and of itself.³²⁶

The narrative ramifications of speech captions—or the absence thereof—come into sharper focus when viewed through the lens of Bakhtinian theory. Of particular relevance here is Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia—that is, the irreducible plurality inherent in any supposedly unitary language. For Bakhtin, words are not inert and innocent vessels that transmit meaning without transforming it; they “have the ‘taste’ of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour.”³²⁷ Profoundly pervious to guilt or glory by association, language fractures along the myriad axes of social difference. The results of this fracture—the kaleidoscopic profusion of languages-within-a-language, reflecting and refracting the pluralities of class, region, gender—reveal themselves plainly in the speech captions of *Gon no Kami* and many other otogizōshi.³²⁸ Equally apparent is yet another facet of heteroglossia, the cleavage between the written and spoken word. The authors of otogizōshi seem to have had little interest in reproducing naturalistic speech within the body of the text; save for the necessary grammatical adjustments, speech acts are by and large stylistically indistinguishable from the narration itself. By contrast, in-painting dialogue—peppered with exclamations, ellipses, and all the eccentricities of spoken language—tends to occupy a distinct linguistic register,

³²⁶ Komine Kazuaki, “*Gachūshi no uchū: monogatari to kaiga no hazama*,” *Nihon bungaku* vol. 41, no. 7 (July 1992): 28. For further discussion of in-painting captions in otogizōshi, including close analysis of a sequence of in-painting captions drafted by Sanjōnishi Sanetaka, cf. Tokuda Kazuo, *Otogizōshi kenkyū*, 80-115. Like Komine, Tokuda holds that in-painting captions primarily served to explicate the images they accompanied.

³²⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 293.

³²⁸ Komine, “*Gachūshi no uchū*,” 29-33.

favoring colloquial and conversational constructions over the more formal literary tone found in the body of the text.³²⁹

This unsuppressed heteroglossia of in-painting speech captions goes hand-in-hand with their general tendency toward polyphony. Related to but distinct from heteroglossia, polyphony develops characters as “not only objects of authorial discourse, but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse . . . [which] cannot be exhausted by the usual functions of characterization and plot development, nor does it serve as vehicle for the author’s own ideological position.”³³⁰ Komine identifies a strikingly similar phenomenon in the speech captions of otogizōshi, which he terms *zatsudan*, or “excursus.”³³¹ Consider, for instance, a fragment of in-painting dialogue present in several manuscripts of *Gon no Kami*, in which a pair of serving-mice complain about the frogs muddying the well water. This exchange does not connect with, let alone contribute to, the main storyline; it can hardly be called “characterization,” given that the characters in question appear nowhere else in the work; it does not promote any ideological position, unless the author had unusually strong opinions on the subject of frogs or wells. In short, it represents polyphony in its purest form: not a chorus, not even a conversation (while the speech captions in question are a dialogue,

³²⁹ Minobe Shigekatsu, “*Otogizōshi no e to shishō*,” *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kanshō* vol. 50, no. 11 (Oct. 1985), 61-63. Cf. also Izumo Asako, “*Chūsei makki ni okeru Tōkoku hōgen no isō: ‘Nezumi no sōshi emaki’ no kaishi o megutte*”; Izumo Asako, “*‘Nezumi no sōshi emaki’ no shohon no gachūshi ni okeru ninshōshi to keigo: seisa no kanten o chūshin ni.*”

³³⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 7.

³³¹ Komine, “*Gachūshi no uchū*,” 33-34. “Excursus” is an admittedly free translation of *zatsudan*, which might be more literally rendered “small talk” or “chit-chat”; however, I believe “excursus” more accurately captures Komine’s meaning.

they are not *in dialogue* with the larger story), but simply a clamor of voices, speaking for no reasons but their own.

Komine writes that excursive captions “disperse and nullify meaning,”³³² a statement reminiscent of Bakhtin’s claim that polyphony renders meaning perpetually “unfinalizable.”³³³ However, we should not overlook the sizable proportion of speech captions dedicated to the *finalization* of meaning. As previously noted, in-painting dialogue commonly works to reestablish key plot points.³³⁴ This is not to relegate such dialogue to the role of thinly-veiled mnemonic prompts directed at an easily-befuddled audience. In the process of reestablishing information, speech captions must also reframe it from the viewpoint of an individual—and often peripheral—character. Information thus reframed may acquire implications absent from, or even contrary to, its original context.

The Harvard *Nezumi no sōshi*, mentioned in the opening chapter, offers a prime example of transformative reframing. Both the speech captions and the main text recount the mass extermination of a clan of mice by their human cohabitants. But while the body of the text privileges the perspective of the mice and presents this event as a brutal massacre, the speech captions give voice to the righteous indignation of the mouse-afflicted homeowners and their jubilation at having vanquished their tormentors. In short, reiterative speech

³³² Komine, “*Gachūshi no uchū*,” 28; but see also Komine, “*Emaki no gachūshi to gensetsu*,” 48-50. Speech captions that nullify meaning on one level, by decentering the “central” narrative, may simultaneously solidify meaning on yet another level, by imposing a definite interpretation upon an otherwise open-ended image.

³³³ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 63, 252.

³³⁴ Komine, *Gachūshi no uchū*, 29-32.

captions are ideally positioned to generate what Bakhtin terms “dialogic opposition.”³³⁵ because they speak *about* the central narrative, they can also speak *back* to it.

Regardless of their relation to the extrapictorial text, in-painting utterances have the potential to radically broaden the scope of the storyworld by foregrounding the individuality and interiority of characters who would otherwise be consigned to silence. In captioned illustrations, figures elided from the body of the text—servants, bystanders, and other such narrative nonentities—receive names and voices of their own. The snippets of speech ascribed to these background characters may not alter the course of the story, but they expand the stage on which the story is set, offering tantalizing glimpses of a world that is wider than our window into it.

In the case of the *Gon no Kami* tales, the world-building project entails not only letting garrulous animals have their say, but also letting another, very different class of animals—what might be termed “meta-animals”—maintain their bestial muteness. By “meta-animals,” I refer to those animals that retain fully theriomorphic physiology and psychology even within the anthropomorphizing space of the animal world. The “horses” ridden by the mice escorting the wedding procession in the B-Lineage *Gon no Kami* scrolls provide a prime example of this concept. They are equine in shape, but possess distinctly mousy whiskers and tails, and in some cases, paws instead of hooves.^(FIG. 38) More significantly, they give no indication of possessing self-awareness or the power of speech. These mouse-horse chimeras are unique to the B-Lineage *Gon no Kami* tales, but the conceit of animals riding on animals

³³⁵ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 252.



Fig. 38 Detail of *Nezumi no sōshi* (Suntory *Gon no Kami*). Artist unknown. Late 16th/early 17th c. Set of five handscrolls; ink and color on paper. Suntory Art Museum.



Fig. 39 Detail of *Nezumi no sōshi*. Artist unknown. Late 16th/early 17th c. Handscroll; ink, color, and gold leaf on paper. Kōshien University.

was not uncommon: in the Kōshien *Nezumi*, the mice ride on rabbits,^(FIG. 39) and in the Mitsuhsa *Fujibukuro*, one of the monkeys is shown mounted on a wild boar.

Not all “meta-animals” were domesticated. All of the *Gon no Kami* tales, with the sole exception of the Tenri manuscript, show miniature, naturalistically depicted mice raiding the kitchens staffed by “regular”—which is to say, anthropomorphic—mice. Similar scenes appear in the Spencer *Nehyōe* and the Kōshien *Nezumi*. In all cases, the anthropomorphic mice seem to regard their theriomorphic counterparts as nuisances, although they show hints of resigned tolerance as well. In the B-Lineage scrolls, one of the kitchen workers advises her comrade to make meowing noises at



Fig. 40 Detail of *Nezumi no sōshi* (TNM *Gon no Kami*). Artist unknown. Late 16th /early 17th c. Handscroll; ink and color on paper. Tokyo National Museum.

the “little mice” nibbling at a nearby bowl of rice.^(FIG. 40)

Perhaps the human was defined in opposition to the animal, and the large-scale anthropomorphizing project of the *Gon no Kami* tales demanded the invention (or reintroduction) of a more fully animal “other.” Or perhaps the audience simply enjoyed the *mise en abyme* effect. This enjoyment may well have been heightened by a sense of vindication at seeing mice bedeviled by mice of their own, a cheerfully cynical vision of endlessly recursive tiers of parasitism reminiscent of Jonathan Swift’s famous verse: “So, naturalists observe, a flea/Has smaller fleas that on him prey/And these have smaller still to bite ’em/And so proceed ad infinitum.”

-EPILOGUE-
THE TURN OF THE HELIX:
Of Mice and Modernity

“The rats fell from the ceiling and pestered me.” This unsettling sentence appears in an 1899 Nyungwe-Portuguese phrasebook authored by Victor Courtois, a Jesuit missionary stationed in colonial Mozambique.³³⁶ No modern guide to conversational Japanese is likely to contain a similar entry, but if you ever find yourself living in a former motel on the fringes of a red-light district in Tokyo, you may begin to wonder at this omission. Having spent a year in just such circumstances (Tokyo is justly notorious for its high housing costs), I have cultivated an extensive acquaintance with Japan’s urban wildlife, a class of creatures less charitably known as “vermin.”

If you include representations of animals in your survey—the charismatic megafauna whose stylishly stylized forms decorate advertising, packaging, clothing—Tokyo is a hotspot of biodiversity rivaling any rainforest, a veritable Noah’s Ark. But once you limit your count to flesh-and-blood fauna, the ark rapidly empties out. There are humans, of course, and the few animals whose company we elect to keep: dogs, cats, and a smattering of more exotic critters, among them fancy mice and rats. Then there are the animals who insist upon keeping *our* company, whether we like it or not: crows and mosquitoes (two more entries on Sei Shōnagon’s list of “Hateful Things”); pigeons and cockroaches (mysteriously spared the ire of Sei’s brush, but a source of consternation to later writers); and, of course, rodents—as

³³⁶ Kathleen Sheldon, “‘Rats Fell from the Ceiling and Pestered Me’: Phrasebooks as Sources for Colonial Mozambican History,” *History in Africa* vol. 25 (1998), 347.

Günter Grass phrases it, “serried footnotes to man, his proliferating commentary,”³³⁷ written out in triplicate: *Mus musculus*, *Rattus norvegicus*, and *Rattus rattus*.

I heard them in the walls at night. Several years later, one of my colleagues mentioned to me that his wife, who had grown up in the Japanese countryside, fondly remembered falling asleep to the sound of mice scurrying in the rafters. Perhaps the rural mice were more genteel than their urban cousins, or perhaps my colleague’s wife was simply made of sterner stuff than I, but the rodents with whom I shared my apartment did not strike me as the scurrying type. They were scramblers, scratchers, and sometimes, when they encountered one another in the bones of the old building, shriekers. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Gauratti famously hold up rodentkind as the model “becoming-animals”: in contrast to the individuated animal, which is “a pet, my little beast,” they demand “to be treated in the mode of the pack or the swarm,” which “are not inferior social forms: they are affects and powers, involutions that grip every animal in a becoming just as powerful as that of the human being with the animal.”³³⁸ Alas, the mice in my walls did not realize that they ought to be gripped in powerful involutions of becoming. They were nobody’s pets, but each of them was very much its own little beast, with the teeth to prove it.

There were stories in the nightly bouts of hissing and scuffling above my bed, though I never did make sense of them. *Mus musculus*, *Rattus norvegicus*, and *Rattus rattus* all cohabit readily, if not always peaceably, with members of their own species. In times of

³³⁷ Günter Grass, *The Rat*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Mariner Books, 1987), 6.

³³⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Gauratti, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 241.

plenty, in-group fighting is part play, part politics, but if reproduction outstrips resources, it's every mouse for himself. I could have been listening to anything from a localized Malthusian meltdown to a bit of neighborly brawling. Or perhaps I was receiving dispatches from the citywide war between two enemy nations: *kuma nezumi*, or black rats, and *dobu nezumi*, or brown rats.

Larger and more aggressive than their darker cousins, brown rats have the advantage in one-on-one fights, but the black rats are just a whisker better suited to survival in Tokyo's urban jungle, thanks to their flexible eating habits and their gift for scaling heights. For decades, the two have been locked in a seesawing power struggle, which nature writer Tozawa Yukio likens to the feud between the Taira and the Minamoto clans.³³⁹ In the bombed-out post-war cityscape, the battle stayed close to the ground and brown rats ruled the capital, entrenched in its rapidly expanding public infrastructure. (The “*dobu*” of *dobu nezumi* literally means “sewer,” a nod to the species' favored habitat.) However, the mighty do not endure, and as Tokyo's skyline rose, so too did the fortunes of the black rats.³⁴⁰

There is a third heavyweight in the ring: not house mice, who seem to prefer the suburban lifestyle, but humans, ever the ungracious hosts. Modified versions of the nezumi-gaeshi once used to block access to granaries now dot overhead wires (otherwise ideal pathways for little paws).³⁴¹ More recent inventions have joined the anti-rodent arsenal. By

³³⁹ Tozawa Yukio, *Inu, neko, nezumi: karera wa hito to dō kurashite kita ka* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1991), 177-178.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 176-183.

³⁴¹ One Japanese dictionary of basic electrical engineering terminology even includes an entry for nezumi-gaeshi. Cf. Denki to Kōji Henshūbu, ed., *Denki kōji kiso yōgo jiten* 2nd ed. (Tokyo:

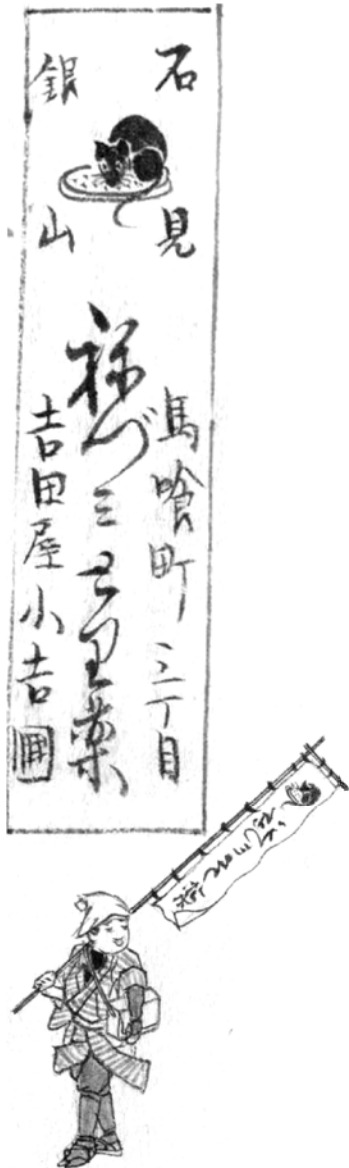


Fig. 41 Illustrations from *Morisada Mankō* (“Morisada’s Ramblings”). Kitagawa Morisada. 1852. Bound manuscript; ink on paper. National Diet Library.

the Edo period, efforts to build a better mousetrap were well underway; the entry on mice in *Honchō shokkan* lists such tellingly-named devices as “Hair-Trigger Bow” and “Fall into Hell.”³⁴² By the late eighteenth century, the war on mice had turned chemical—and commercial. Vendors in Edo went door to door selling arsenic powder branded as “Iwami Silver Mine Mousetrap” (*Iwami Ginzan Nezumi-Tori*) or “No Need for a Cat” (*Neko Irazu*), carrying flags on their backs and singing jingles to advertise their wares.³⁴³ (FIG. 41)

Mouse poison proved nearly as useful to storytellers as it did to homeowners, although in literary contexts, it was more likely to serve as a tool of homicide than a tool of rodenticide. Perhaps the most famous example of this occurs in Tsuruya Nanboku IV’s 1825 kabuki play *Tōkaidō Yotsuya kaidan* (“Ghost Story from Yotsuya on the Tōkaidō Highway”), in which the heroine’s husband and his would-be mistress conspire to eliminate her by mixing Iwami

Ōmusha, 2011), 168.

³⁴² 地獄墜 and 弓掠 respectively. Hitomi, *Honchō shokkan* vol. 11, 29.

³⁴³ Okitsu Kaname, *Ō-Edo shōbai banashi: Shōmin no seikatsu to akinai* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron, 2013), 51-53; Hasegawa, *Nezumi to Nihon Bungaku*, 159-160; Gerald Groemer, “Edo’s ‘Tin Pan Alley’: Authors and Publishers of Japanese Popular Song during the Tokugawa Period,” *Asian Music* vol. 27, no. 1 (Autumn 1995), 16-17. The arsenic marketed as “Iwami Silver Mine Mousetrap” was actually produced not in the Iwami silver mines but the nearby Sasagadani copper mines.

Ginzan Nezumi-Tori into her face cream. The plot succeeds, if not as neatly as its perpetrators had hoped: grotesquely disfigured but still alive, the heroine holds a sword to her throat and threatens suicide—and then inadvertently carries through on the threat when she trips. She has her revenge, however, driving her husband to madness and eventual death by haunting him in the form of—what else?—a giant mouse.

Life imitated art. In 1872, mouse poison became grist for the scandal mill when the geisha Okinu, caught up in an extramarital affair with a kabuki actor, used it to murder her husband.³⁴⁴ A phosphorous-based reformulation of Neko Irazu on the market well into the twentieth century, causing thousands of less titillating (human) fatalities over the decades. Most of them were self-inflicted. In 1926, Allen Klein Faust wrote in *The New Japanese Womanhood* that “the newest of all methods [of love suicide] is to drink Neko Irazu . . . The drugstores of Japan are very strictly cautioned not to sell this kind of poison to young people.”³⁴⁵ Even observers less inclined to sensationalism agreed on the magnitude of the problem. A 1935 report on suicide attempts in Japan implicated Neko Irazu in roughly half of all self-poisonings in the past decade, noting that it proved lethal more than half the time.³⁴⁶ Arsenic- and phosphorous-based rodenticides posed significant health hazards even to individuals not looking to harm themselves and were eventually banned from general sale, ushering in an age of more sophisticated poisons.

“The elimination of mice is a prerequisite for a civilized nation,” asserts the preface to

³⁴⁴ Okitsu Kaname, *Ō-Edo shōbai banashi*, 53.

³⁴⁵ Allen Klein Faust, *The New Japanese Womanhood* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1926), 158.

³⁴⁶ Satō Toshikatsu, “*Saikin jūnenkan ni okeru jisatsu o mokuteki to seru kyūsei chūdoku kanja no tōkeiteki kansatsu*,” *Nihon shōkaki byōgakkai zasshi* vol. 34 (1935), 181-182.



Fig. 42 “Super Rats: Rodents that can’t be exterminated—the background behind the population boom.” Screenshot from NHK Newswatch 9. Broadcast January 25, 2013.

a 1951 article on synthetic rodenticides.³⁴⁷ The author goes on to sing the praises of the recently invented anticoagulant Warfarin: “The lethal dose for mice is extremely low. It is odorless and flavorless, so there

is no worry of mice detecting it. It does not produce drug resistance . . . Doubtless it will come to be prized as a breakthrough rodenticide.”³⁴⁸ Sixty some-odd years later, eighty percent of the black rats in Tokyo can gorge themselves on the Warfarin-laced bait set out by public health agencies without so much as batting a whisker. These so-called “super rats” (*sūpaa ratto*) inhabit urban centers throughout Japan,^(FIG. 42) and Warfarin resistance has also been reported in brown rats and house mice.³⁴⁹ Japanese scientists warn that worst may be yet to come, citing the cautionary example of Chinese “mega super rats” (*chō sūpaa ratto*), which tolerate not only Warfarin but a broad spectrum of rodenticides. In the end, brute physical force—old-fashioned mechanical mousetraps, and the even more ancient nezumi-gaeshi—may be the last line of defense.

In short, twenty-first century Japan has inherited the age-old project of exterminating mice—and along with it, the only slightly younger sister project of exploiting them. Mice

³⁴⁷ Itō Kazuo, “*Yūki gōsei sassosai*,” *Yūki gōsei kagaku kyōkaishi* vol. 9, no. 11 (November 1951), 225.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 228-229.

³⁴⁹ Mayumi Ishizuka et. al., “Elevated warfarin metabolism in warfarin-resistant roof rats (*Rattus rattus*) in Tokyo,” *Drug Metabolism and Disposition* vol. 35, no. 1 (January 2007), 62-66.

continue to stock the shelves of petshops and, albeit on a different ontological register, bookstores. The mid-Edo assignment of “mouse tales” to the then-emergent category of juvenile literature remains in place to this day. A search of Japan’s National Diet Library database turns up more than four thousand children’s books whose titles contain the word “nezumi.” Some of these, such as *Nezumi no hikōki* (“The Mouse’s Airplane”) and *Nezumi to kyōryū* (“The Mouse and the Dinosaur”), are clearly products of recent decades, but others bespeak direct continuity with longer narrative traditions—for instance, *Nezumi no sumō* (“The Sumo Match of the Mice”), a story derived from folklore and listed 281 times on the NDL database.³⁵⁰ And then there is *Nezumi no yomeiri*, with an impressive 346 database

³⁵⁰ The *Nezumi no sumō* folktale is in essence an *ongaeshi* story, although it deviates slightly from the usual pattern in that the favor is not returned by its original beneficiary. An old man living in poverty happens upon a pair of mice engaged in a sumo match, and recognizes one of them as the mouse from his own household. He is aghast to realize that “his” mouse, being perpetually undernourished, is losing to his competitor, a well-fed mouse from the house of a neighboring rich man. The old man informs his wife of what he has seen, and the pair leave out rice cakes for their mouse, enabling him to triumph during the rematch. The mouse from the rich man's house decides to move in with his sometime rival when he learns about the poor couple's generosity; for all his wealth, the rich man is stingy. As a gift to his new hosts, the rich man's mouse comes bearing gold coins “liberated” from his former home. Twentieth-century ethnographers recorded oral forms of *Nezumi no sumō* primarily in northeastern Japan (Ishigami Katami, *Nihon minzokugo daijiten* [Tokyo: Ōfūsha, 1983], 721); however, in its textual incarnation, the tale has a nationwide range. (Incidentally, Studio Ghibli released a 2010 short film based on the *Nezumi no sumō* folktale, scripted by Miyazaki Hayao and entitled *Chū-zumō*.)

Also worth mentioning here is a tale popularly called *Omusubi kororin* (“The Rolling Rice Ball”), but known to scholars of folklore as *Nezumi Jōdo* (“Mouse Paradise”). The tale exists in two major variants, both of which begin with a man chasing after a dropped rice ball and finding himself in an underground realm inhabited by mice. One version of the tale proceeds according to the standard *ongaeshi* pattern: the man lets the mice eat his rice ball, and they give him gold in exchange. By contrast, the other version casts the man as a clever trickster, who startles the mice by imitating a cat's meow and steals their gold while they panic. The former version of the tale has been reported mainly in northeastern Japan—perhaps not coincidentally, the same region associated with the thematically similar *Nezumi no sumō*—while the latter form predominates in the southwest (Tanaka Hiroko, “*Mukashibanashi wakei no kenkyū—Nezumi Jōdo, Jizō Jodō, oni no rakudo*,” *Kodomo to mukashibanashi* vol. 4 [July 2000], 61-66). Like *Nezumi no sumō*, *Omusubi*



Fig. 43 Covers of modern *Nezumi no yomeiri* picture books. Clockwise from top left: Yonai Suiho and Ishii Tekisui, *Kōdansha*, 2002; Tani Shinsuke and Akasaka Miyoshi, *Kōsei Shuppansha*, 2004; Kogure Masao and Asakura Megumi, *Sekai Bunkasha*, 2006; Kowase Tamami and Yomogida Yasuhiro, *Fureeberukan*, 1995.

entries. Many of the works bearing the latter title superficially resemble the eighteenth century *kusazōshi* of the same name, in that they culminate with a tableau of the bride and groom decked out in miniature Edo-style wedding regalia.^(FIG. 43) (Of course, such images—originally a celebration of matrimony and material wealth—have now acquired nationalistic and nostalgic overtones.) However, present-

day *Nezumi no yomeiri* picture books are first and foremost retellings of the *Pancatantra* fable introduced to Japan in *Shasekishū*—that ironic tale of the mouse maiden who courts the sun and the clouds, only to end by marrying another mouse. In some sense, this narrative mimics the historical trajectory of “mouse tales” as a genre: just as the mouse maiden’s shifting marital

kororin has become a staple children's story nationwide; the title returns 584 hits on the NDL database. (So far as I am aware, only the *ongaeshi* version of the tale has been deemed desirable for juvenile consumption.)

ambitions inevitably lead her back to her own kind, stories of mice attempting unsuccessfully to marry up across species have given way to stories of happy murine endogamy.

Mice may remain the stuff of fiction—even if it is “only” children’s fiction—but one might expect that they have ceased to be the stuff of pharmaceuticals. Germ theory has made household pests a locus of hygienic anxiety; from the modern scientific perspective, dressing a cat bite with a poultice of mouse meat or ingesting mouse droppings to improve fertility is not only superstitious nonsense, but an epidemiological catastrophe in the making. Paradoxically, however, medical exploitation of mice occurs today on a far greater scale than ever before. In Japan and elsewhere, research labs go through rodents by the millions every year,³⁵¹ using them as models of human diseases and testing grounds for their cures. Mice may have no significant presence in modern *irui kon’in* narratives, but they continue to inhabit the troubled liminal zone between human and animal, *us* and *them*. Indeed, it is precisely this in-between status—kin, but not kind—that makes mice so well-suited to the role of “fuzzy test tubes.”³⁵² They are ethically acceptable proxies for human experimentation because they are not human, but they are practically acceptable proxies for human experimentation because

³⁵¹ Animal experimentation in Japan does not require a government license and generally takes place with relatively little oversight, making it difficult to acquire accurate data on lab animal usage. According to one estimate, Japanese labs used a total of 11 million animals in 2005, making Japan the world’s second-largest consumer of lab animals, eclipsed only by the US (Katy Taylor et al., “Estimates for Worldwide Laboratory Animal Use in 2005,” *Alternatives to Laboratory Animals* vol. 26 [2008], 332-333). This figure is consistent with a study from 1991, which puts Japan’s annual total of lab animals used at just over 12 million, with 7.5 million of them being mice (Kōno Shūichirō, “*Dōbutsu jiken e ōi naru gimon*,” *Sekai* no. 640 [October 1997], 168).

³⁵² David Malakoff, “The Rise of the Mouse, Biomedicine’s Model Mammal,” *Science* vol. 288, no. 5464 (April 14, 2000), 249.

they are close enough.

The biological proximity of mouse and men is an evolutionary happenstance, a joint inheritance from a relatively recent common ancestor. Seventy-five million years have passed since this fork in the phylogenetic tree, and during this time natural selection equipped mice with a suite of traits (including the prodigious fecundity that so impressed Edo-period physicians) that would later enable them to thrive in anthropogenic environments. This ability has long been cause for human complaint, but sometimes—when the environment in question is a laboratory—we benefit from it as well. Where natural selection has left off, artificial selection has taken over. Specialized breeding facilities produce mice in hundreds of distinct genetic strains, each a custom-crafted key to some particular cipher of human biology.

The scientific advances of the past few decades have opened the murine genome to increasingly precise fine-tuning, but the project of building a better lab mouse has its roots in the much older technology of animal husbandry—including that practiced by pet breeders in Edo Japan. As established above, the “jewel-like nezumi” of *Yōsotama no kakehashi* and other such breeding manuals most likely belonged to the genus *Rattus*. But members of the genus *Mus* also made their way onto the burgeoning Edo pet market and then, in the late nineteenth century, into the hands of European mouse fanciers; from there, they were drafted into the founding stock of the first commercial colony of lab mice in Gransby, Massachusetts.³⁵³ To this day, lab mice across the world, inbred over hundreds of generations,

³⁵³ Robert J. Ruben, “The Mouse: From Pet to Paradigm,” *Otology Japan* vol. 15, no. 3 (July 2005), 61.

carry the proof of their Japanese pedigree in their meticulously curated genomes.³⁵⁴

Fictional mice and flesh-and-blood mice were mutually productive. Characters such as Gon no Kami and Yahyōe were created in the image of biological animals, but ideas traveled in both directions across this ontological borderline. Consider the opening pages of *Yōsotama no kakehashi*, the eighteenth-century guide to breeding mice introduced in the first chapter. Before the author initiates his audience in the arcana of rodent husbandry—and in the process displays a practical understanding of heritability largely consistent with modern Mendelian models—he presents an image both fantastical and familiar: a newlywed pair of anthropomorphic mice.^(FIG. 44) Other strands of murine mythology weave through the text. Mice are messengers of Daikokuten



Fig. 44 Illustration from *Yōsotama no kakehashi* (first of two volumes). Tachibana Kunio (?). 1775. Monochrome woodblock print on paper. National Diet Library.

³⁵⁴ Toyoyuki Takada, et al., “The Ancestor of Extant Strains of Japanese Fancy Mice Contributed to the Mosaic Genome of Classic Inbred Strains,” *Genome Research* vol. 23, no. 8 (August 2013), 1329-1338.

and bearers of good fortune, the author declares with every indication of sincerity. The “jewel-like” pets depicted in [*uqvo c'pq'hengj cuj k*] were fiction rendered flesh, an attempt to recreate biological mice in the mold of the stories that were told about them. And so, in some sense, the legacy of Japan's medieval “mouse tales” lives on in laboratories across the globe.

The mice never did fall from my ceiling, although every now and again they came tumbling down from the pantry shelves. (On such occasions, I consoled myself with thoughts of Sei Shōnagon, whose firsthand experience with “hateful scurrying” did nothing to damage her reputation as a lady of consummate wit and elegance.) Early one morning as I rummaged groggily for breakfast, one particularly intrepid forager—startled from its battle with a Tupperware container—took a poorly-aimed dive for cover and landed on my foot. Whatever perverse fascination I had for my household vermin was clearly not reciprocated; after scabbling at the cuff of my pants for a fraction of a second, the mouse righted itself and darted away beneath the sink. I was left to disinfect the shelves and ponder the encounter. I arrived, I believe, at much the same conclusion as did all the tellers of “mouse tales” before me: if I couldn't make the mice go away, then at least I could make them mean something.

Appendix I: Otogizōshi Associated with the Title *Nezumi no sōshi*

Group [Content]*	Original/ Traditional Title**	Format	Location	Date	Designation Herein
Mitsunobu <i>Nezumi no sōshi</i>	Unknown	Small emaki, one scroll	Harvard Art Museums	Bunnei (1469-1487)	Mitsunobu <i>Nezumi no sōshi</i>
	Unknown	Emaki, one scroll	Tōkyō Geijutsu Daigaku	Edo	—
[Interspecies marriage]	<i>Nezumi no sōshi</i> 鼠草紙	Handwritten book, one volume (no illustrations)	Shōkōkan	Edo	—
	Unknown	Small emaki, one scroll	Private collection of Miya Tsugio	Jōkyō 5 (1688)	—
	<i>Nezumi no sōshi</i> 鼠草紙	Emaki, one scroll	Private collection of Fujii Takashi	Late Edo	—
<i>Gon no Kami</i> [Interspecies marriage] [Auspicious events] [Religious awakening]	<i>Nezumi no sōshi</i> 鼠乃草子	Emaki, one scroll, missing opening section	Tenri Toshokan	Late Muromachi	Tenri <i>Gon no Kami</i>
	<i>Nezumi-e</i> 鼠繪	Emaki, one scroll (fragmentary, no text)	Private collection of Sakurai Tokutarō	Late Muromachi or early Edo	Sakurai <i>Gon no Kami</i>
	<i>Nezumi no sōshi</i> ねずみのさし	Emaki, one scroll (fragmentary, no text)	Tenri Toshokan	Mid-Edo; Jōkyō (1684-1688) or Genroku (1684-1704)	Tenri <i>Gon no Kami</i> II
	Unknown	Emaki, five scrolls	Suntory Bijutsukan	Late Muromachi or early Edo	Suntory <i>Gon no Kami</i>
	<i>Nezumi no sōshi</i> 鼠草紙	Emaki, one scroll	Sasayama Shiritsu Aoyama Rekishi Mura	Late Muromachi or early Edo	Sasayama <i>Gon no Kami</i>
	Unknown	Emaki, one scroll	Tōkyō Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan	Late Muromachi or early Edo	Tokyo National Museum <i>Gon no Kami</i>
	Unknown	Emaki, three scrolls, second scroll missing ending	New York Public Library, Spencer Collection	Late Muromachi or early Edo	Spencer <i>Gon no Kami</i>
	Unknown	One scroll, partial	Private collection; text copied by Tokue Gensei	Early or mid-Edo	Tokue Sataso
	Unknown	One scroll, partial	Unknown; facsimiles in 2003 Bungakudō Kosho catalog	Early or mid-Edo	Bungakudō Sataso
	Unknown	Emaki, one scroll	Harvard Art Museums	Late 16 th or early 17 th c.	Harvard <i>Nezumi no sōshi</i>
<i>Nezumi no Hokotarō</i> [Religious awakening]	<i>Nezumi no sōshi</i> 鼠草紙	Emaki (second of two scrolls, fragmentary)	Private collection of Miya Tsugio	Late 16 th or early 17 th c.	Tokuda <i>Nezumi no sōshi</i>

[Continued on the following page]

	<i>Nezumi no sōshi</i> 鼠の巻	Emaki rebound as a book	University of Cambridge	Late 16 th c. – ca. 1640	Cambridge <i>Nezumi no sōshi</i>
[Debate]		Emaki, one scroll	New York Public Library, Spencer Collection	Early Edo	Spencer <i>Yahyōe</i>
<i>Yahyōe nezumi</i>	<i>Nezumi no sōshi</i> <i>shusse monogatari</i> 鼠草紙出世物語	Emaki, one scroll	Osaka Aoyama Tanki Daigaku	Early Edo	Aoyama <i>Yahyōe emaki</i>
[Auspicious events] [Social advancement]	Unknown	Nara ehon, second of two volumes (first volume lost)	Tenri Toshokan	Early Edo	Tenri <i>Yahyōe</i>
	<i>Yahyōe nezumi</i> やひやうえねずみ	Nara ehon, two volumes	Osaka Aoyama Tanki Daigaku	Kan'ei 9 (1632)	Aoyama <i>Yahyōe ehon</i>
	Unknown	Nara ehon, two volumes rebound as one	Harvard Art Museums	Early Edo	Harvard <i>Yahyōe</i>
	<i>Shironezumi</i> <i>Yahyōe monogatari</i> 白鼠神衛物語	Small emaki, two scrolls	Keiō Gijyūku Toshokan	Kanbun era (1661-1673)	Keiō <i>Yahyōe</i>
	Unknown	Printed e-iri hon, second of two volumes (first volume lost)	Tōkyō Chūō Toshokan Kaga Bunko	Published in Kyoto by Yomeya Jinbei in Meireki 2 (1656)	Kaga <i>Kakurezato</i>
<i>Kakurezato</i>	<i>Kakurezato no</i> <i>monogatari</i> かくれ里の物語	Nara ehon, two volumes	Tōkyō Daigaku Kokubun- gaku Kenkyūshitsu	Manji (1658-1661) or Kanbun (1661-1673) era	Tōdai <i>Kakurezato</i>
[Auspicious events] [Parody martial epic]	<i>Kakurezato</i> かくれさと	Emaki, one scroll, partial	Keiō Gijyūku Toshokan	Manji (1658-1661) or Kanbun (1661-1673) era	Keiō <i>Kakurezato</i>
	<i>Nezumi no sōshi</i> 鼠の巻	Printed e-iri hon, one volume	Waseda Daigaku Toshokan	Manji (1658-1661) or Kanbun (1661-1673) era	<i>Ebisu Daikoku kassen</i>
	<i>Ebisu Daikoku kassen</i> えびす大くかつせん				

* Content key: Interspecies marriage = *irui kon'in-tan*; Religious awakening = *hosshin-tan*; Social advancement = *shussemono*; Parody martial epic = *gigunkimono*;

Auspicious events = *shūgimono*; Debate = *ronsoōmono*

** Refers to titles written on the works themselves or on accompanying materials such as scroll covers, boxes, etc.

Appendix II: Translation of the Mitsunobu *Nezumi no sōshi*³⁵⁵

Not too long ago, there lived a nun who passed her days in extreme loneliness. She had an only daughter, who to her great sorrow remained unattached, although she was already twenty. The young lady was not especially unpleasant to look upon, but neither was she famous for her beauty, and so no suitors came calling. The maidservants of the household, elderly but indispensable, all sat together in incomparable sorrow. Ah, they wished, if only the young mistress could be married soon, to anyone at all, and ease the reverend nun's heart! Spring and summer passed quickly by, and the late autumn rains were unusually heavy, falling without pause and drenching the treetops. The calls of the deer and the cries of the crickets mingled together, rousing melancholy, as the moon rose over the edge of the ramshackle eaves. How long must she be here like this, the young lady could not stop thinking; how long must she sit here, staring at the eaves, as the days and months went by?

“If only there were someone—*anyone*—who would speak to me with heartfelt devotion!” she said to herself, without meaning to. Just then, she caught sight of a man in the moonlight, wearing a hunting costume of soft, fine fabric; she could not imagine where he had come from. Without any invitation, he approached her and spoke. “The clear light of the full moon stirs the depths of one's feelings,” he said, “and however foolish you may think me, ‘though the mounting hills grow thick with mountain thickets, the heart truly set on setting forth cannot be held back.’³⁵⁶ I have cared for you for some time now, and tonight, I could not bring myself to once more depart in vain.” And then he strolled in, as if they knew each other well. The lady did not know what would happen next, and was terrified. Moreover, the nun, her mother, was an old-fashioned soul, and would not approve of any match that took place without her permission, however fortunate it might be; what would *she* think? No, she thought, this man did not belong here. But he continued to ply her with sweet words, looking so young and charming as he spoke that the lady no longer wished to be cold to him, for her

³⁵⁵ Translated from the original fifteenth-century manuscript of *Nezumi no sōshi* with paintings attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu, owned by Harvard's Fogg Museum and typeset in Yokoyama Shigeru and Matsumoto Takanobu, ed., *Muromachi jidai monogatari taisei* vol. 10 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1982), 238-240. I have also consulted the late-Edo copy of the same work owned by Fujii Takashi and typeset in Fujii Takashi, ed., *Mikan otogizōshi-shū to kenkyū I* (Toyohashi: Mikan Kokubun Shiryō Kankōkai, 1957), 7-10.

³⁵⁶ The lady's suitor quotes a poem by Minamoto no Shigeyuki (d. ca. 1000):

筑波山	Though the mounting hills
はやましげ山	Of Tsukuba Mountain
しげけれど	Grow thick with mountain thickets
思ひ入るには	They pose no obstacle to
さはらざりけり	The heart set on setting forth

This poem appears in the eleventh volume of *Shinkokin wakashū*, an imperial anthology of waka compiled in the early thirteenth century.

heart was very weak.

❧

[FIRST ILLUSTRATION]

❧

After that first barrier had been overcome, the man visited every single night. As they grew to know one another, they exchanged deep promises, and the lady returned the man's feelings. When the occasion warranted, the man brought various gifts, so that the lady's formerly impoverished household soon became quite well-off. The nun resented that this had taken place without her knowledge, and that the man had given her daughter no guarantees for the future. However, their feelings for each other appeared to be deep, and the man continued to visit faithfully, so as the months passed, the nun came to approve of the match. The maidservants, too, were delighted that their wish had been fulfilled; now they had nothing to worry about.

The nun constantly resented that she had not yet met the man, but she was an old-fashioned soul, and she could hardly barge in uninvited. On the other hand, their household was flourishing, and her daughter's days seemed to be filled with merriment. Her bond with this man was indeed fortunate, even miraculous; and so the nun's mind was at ease.

❧

[SECOND ILLUSTRATION]

❧

Little by little, the months and the years went by, and maidservants urged the lady to introduce the gentleman to her mother, asking her how long she meant to continue in this fashion. And so, one day, the nun met her daughter's husband. When she saw him, she found him quite charming – he was not particularly handsome, but neither was he ugly, and his manner of speaking was not unpleasant – all in all, a man well worth meeting, the nun thought, feeling relieved and delighted.

Now, for many years the nun had kept a beloved pet cat, which was never far from her side. Chasing the silken hem of a maidservant's skirt, the cat came into the room. When the lady's husband saw the cat, the color drained from his face, and he seemed to tremble harder and harder. As the lady and her mother stared at him in confusion, the cat pounced and began to devour him. When they looked, they saw that he was a giant mouse. It was all so very mysterious that the lady was dumbfounded, and spoke not a word; she felt as if she were dreaming. How shameful, that she had pledged herself to *that!* And yet . . . all those months and those years, all those deep words of love that he had spoken . . . she thought of it all again and again, and despaired. Truly, theirs was a bond not of this world.

❧

[THIRD ILLUSTRATION]

❧

Appendix III: Translation of the Suntory *Gon no Kami*³⁵⁷

In-painting speech captions have been translated; however, name captions unaccompanied by speech captions have been omitted.

At some time—when could it have been?³⁵⁸—near the Horikawa Palace on Fourth Avenue in the capital, there lived an elderly mouse named Gon no Kami.³⁵⁹ Perhaps what happened next was a sign of these degenerate latter days . . .

Caught up in idle musings on a rainy day, this mouse summoned his retainer, Lieutenant Hole-Digger. “Hello there, Lieutenant,” he said. “I know it must be the fault of my karma from a previous existence, but how galling it is to have been born as a beast—and such a small beast at that! I’ve been thinking that I should marry some human woman—*any* human woman—so that my descendants can escape the beast realm. How does that sound to you?”

“What a splendid idea!” the Lieutenant said. “Please, resolve to do so as soon as possible, and exchange vows with some human woman immediately. If I may be so bold, when I look upon your countenance, you are no different than the Shining Genji stopping before Lady Yūgao’s house at twilight, or Captain Kashiwagi standing the shade of the cherry tree and catching a glimpse of the cat’s leash;³⁶⁰ you are like Ariwara no Narihira on the spring dawn when he gathered cherry blossoms on Katano Morr and watched the flowers scatter like snow.³⁶¹ How could someone such as your lordship be content with an ordinary

³⁵⁷ Translated from the Suntory *Gon no Kami*, which is typeset and annotated in Ōshima Tatehiko, ed., *Otogizōshi-shū*, *Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* 36 (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1974), 496-517. I have also consulted two slightly variant manuscripts of the same work: the Sasayama *Gon no Kami*, which is reproduced in photographic facsimile and typeset in Aihara Yutaka, ed., *Sasayamabon Nezumi no sōshi* (Tokyo: Miyai Shoten, 2010); and the Tokyo National Museum *Gon no Kami*, which is typeset in Yokoyama Shigeru and Matsumoto Ryūshin, ed., *Muromachi jidai monogatari taisei* vol. 10 (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1982), 257-276.

³⁵⁸ Here, the author mimics the famous opening line of *Genji monogatari*, the first of many such allusions in the B-lineage *Gon no Kami* texts.

³⁵⁹ A lavish villa constructed by the regent Fujiwara no Mototsune (836-891), the Horikawa Palace later became home to Cloistered Emperor En'yū and Emperor Horikawa.

³⁶⁰ The author refers respectively to events from the fourth (*Yūgao*) and thirty-fourth (*Wakana-jō*) chapters of *Genji monogatari*. Perhaps not coincidentally, both of the romances alluded to end tragically.

³⁶¹ Ariwara no Narihira (referred to in the original text as “the Fifth-Rank Middle Captain”) was the protagonist and putative author of *Ise monogatari*, and one of the great romantic heroes of Heian literature. According to the eighty-second chapter of *Ise monogatari*, Narihira accompanied Prince Koretaka on a hunting expedition to Katano Moor while the cherry trees were in bloom; here, this episode has been conflated with a poem by Fujiwara no Shunzei (1114-1204) from the second volume of *Shinkokin wakashū*:

またや見ん Oh, to see it once again . . .

woman?

“As if happens, the daughter of the merchant who owns the Yanagiya brewery lives nearby, at the intersection of Oil Lane and Fifth Avenue.³⁶² She is about seventeen or eighteen, and I have adored her for years, peeping at her time and again from all sorts of nooks and crannies: through the cracks in her folding screens and from the crevice underneath her veranda, out of knotholes and the wormholes in her walls where the crickets live. She is a willow bending in the wind, or a quince tree blossoming in the rain while the other flowers slumber in her shade.³⁶³ Or never mind the birds and the flowers—she is like the very spring itself! When the poet of old wrote that nothing compares to the hazy moon parting the mist as it rises, he must have been gazing upon a very similar sight.³⁶⁴ Any other woman could scarcely be worthy of your heart.

“However, in the usual order of things, such a match is unlikely to come about. From ancient times up until the present day, those who wish for love all pray at the shrines at Kibune, Miwa, Kamo, and Tadasu. Among the buddhas, there is the One who took this holy vow:

<i>Nao tanome</i>	Put your trust in me
<i>Shimejigahara no</i>	All ye wormwood weeds
<i>Sashimogusa</i>	On Shimeji Plain

交野のみ野の	Hunting for cherry blossoms
桜狩り	On Katano Moor,
花の雪散る	Petals scattering like snow
春のあけぼの	In the spring dawn.

³⁶² Oil Lane (*Abura no kōji*) still runs through modern day Kyoto. The Yanagiya brewery likewise existed historically, and receives mention in several late fifteenth-century sources, including *Inryōken* and *Oyudono no Ue no nikki*. Saitō Maori argues that the author of the B-Lineage texts deliberately selected these locations for humorous effect. Mice had a notorious appetite for lamp oil, so it is only fitting that Gon no Kami's future wife should live on Oil Lane. The name of the Yanagiya suggests feminine beauty (conventionally symbolized by willows, or *yanagi*), while its wares—saké, and the bales of rice used to brew it—were, like oil, known to be favorite foodstuffs of mice (Saitō, “*Katami no waka*,” 98-99).

³⁶³ The plant named here, *kaidō* (海棠), might be less poetically translated as “crabapple”; it is a small ornamental tree belonging to the rose family. The image of quince blossoms in the rain frequently served as a metaphor for feminine beauty in Chinese poetry.

³⁶⁴ The author alludes to a poem by Ōe no Chisato (fl. late ninth cent.) from the first volume of *Shinkokin wakashū*:

照りもせず	Neither shining bright
曇りも果てぬ	Nor wholly clouded over,
春の夜の	Nothing can compare
朧月夜に	To a mist-hazed moon
しくものぞなき	On a spring evening.

Ware yo no naka ni
Aramu kagiri wa

For so long as I
Abide in this world.³⁶⁵

“All ye wormwood weeds’ is written with the characters meaning ‘all living beings.’ How could your lordship, or even one such as I, not be counted among this number? If you have faith in this holy vow and make a pilgrimage to pray at Kiyomizu Temple, how could your wish not be granted? This is what you should resolve to do,” the lieutenant urged.

And so Gon no Kami set off at once for Kiyomizu Temple.



[FIRST ILLUSTRATION]

GON NO KAMI: *The weather is good, just as I had hoped.*



Now, at the intersection of Oil Lane and Fifth Avenue, there was a wealthy man known as Saburōzaemon, the owner of the Yanagiya brewery. Season after season, he prospered in all things. However, his heart was troubled by his only daughter, who remained unattached, perhaps as a consequence of karma from a previous life. His sorrow grew with each day and month that went by in vain; soon she would pass marriagable age, and Saburōzaemon and his wife grieved morning, noon, and night. Their daughter had prayed to a myriad of gods and buddhas with no result, and they had decided that this time she should worship at Kiyomizu Temple, so they sent her to view the cherry blossoms there, accompanied by a maidservant named Jijū no Tsubone.

At this time, Gon no Kami had been holding night vigil before the altar of Kiyomizu Temple for three weeks straight. Kannon thought in Her heart, “Although he is a beast, this mouse trusts in My vow to all living beings. His heartfelt faith in Me is moving indeed. And then there is the merchant’s daughter, who though she may search the seas and mountains, will find no match because of her karma. If only I could bring her together with this mouth, and dispel the clouds of deluded fixation in both of their hearts.”

On the dawn of the twenty-first day, Gon no Kami received a mysterious revelation in his dreams. The message came to him clearly: “Your faith in Me is moving. When dawn breaks, you will find a group of women gathered at Otowa Waterfall.³⁶⁶ One of them shall be

³⁶⁵ This poem, attributed to the Kiyomizu Kannon, appears in the twentieth volume of *Shinkokin wakashū*.

³⁶⁶ The Otowa Waterfall is a mountain spring located near the main hall of Kiyomizu Temple; this spring was believed to be sacred to Seiryū, the guardian deity of the east, and its “pure water”

given unto you as a wife.”

Joyfully wondering if this was a dream or reality, Gon no Kami quickly arose and bowed thirty-three times.³⁶⁷ It was still deep in the night, so he sat gazing at the moon above the eaves of Tamura Hall.³⁶⁸ When at last the day dawned, he set out of Otowa Waterfall; as he had been told, there was a large group of women milling about there. It must have been just after the twentieth day of the second month, for the cherry trees at the shrine of the Jishu Avatar were weighted down by snowdrifts of petals.³⁶⁹ One of the women held a spray of blossoms in her hand, and one could scarcely tell her face apart from the flowers.³⁷⁰

Thinking joyfully that she must be the woman from his dream, Gon no Kami approached her attendant Jijū no Tsubone. “Please forgive my boldness,” he said, “but I do not yet have a wife, and so I secluded myself at Kiyomizu Temple to pray that I might find a match. I received a vivid message in my dream, telling me that the first person to come to Otowa Waterfall today would become my wife. Please don’t put up a fuss; just do as I say.”

Jijū no Tsubone was taken aback by this strange declaration, but since her mistress had come here to pray for a match, she thought that this must be the work of Kannon. “If it is Kannon’s will, how could I object?” she said. “I will follow your wishes.”

Gon no Kami was elated. “I will ride ahead and arrange for palanquins to fetch you. Lieutenant Hole-Digger will accompany you and take care of all the details. Now, I must be off,” he said, taking his leave.



[SECOND ILLUSTRATION]

SON’YA: *I am here accompanying his lordship the acolyte. Oh my, the cherry blossoms of Jishu shrine truly are splendid! I have nothing else on my mind.*

TŌZAEMON: *I live around here.*

CHIMATSU: *I came here to see the cherry blossoms of Kiyomizu Temple.*

became the temple's namesake.

³⁶⁷ In the Lotus Sutra, Kannon vows to preach the law in thirty-three different manifestations, appearing the each individual in the form best suited to lead him or her to salvation. The number thirty-three is thus symbolic of Kannon.

³⁶⁸ The famous general Sakanoue no Tamuramaro (758-811) was the patron of the monk Enchin, who founded Kiyomizu Temple; Tamura Hall is named in his honor.

³⁶⁹ The shrine of the Jishu Avatar (otherwise known as Ōkununushi) belonged to the Kiyomizu Temple complex and was famed for the cherry trees on its grounds.

³⁷⁰ The “elegant confusion” of flowers and female faces was a stock poetic conceit, as was the conflation of cherry blossoms and snow in the preceding sentence.

PRIEST TAMON: *I am forever serving the Buddha. Oh, how holy, how holy . . .*

HIKONAI: *I have come here on a pilgrimage from Kazusa. My, what a splendid time to be here!*

YAICHIRO: *There isn't anywhere like this in our province.*

ㄱㄷ

The lieutenant assembled the lady's trousseau and then rode alongside her, cutting a very gallant figure as her escort.

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[THIRD ILLUSTRATION]

BUNSHICHI: *This horse is difficult to handle.*

LIEUTENANT HOLE-DIGGER: *What a grand procession! Watch your step as you walk, everyone.*

AKUBO: *No one is as strong as we are!*

SHINGO: *If you're tired, let's switch sides.*

HIKOZAEMON: *You think I've gotten tired so soon? Let's keep going!*

YASE NO HEITA: *These chests show the weight of the master's love – oh, they're heavy.*

OHARA NO MAGOSHICHI: *I think so, too.*

SAKUZO: *This is so heavy, I think my eyeballs might pop out.*

GENTA: *I wonder what's inside this long chest? I kind of want to see.*

YOSHICHIRO: *Talk like that will get your head cut off.*

MASTER OF EQUIPAGE: *Tell the spearmen not to disobey the ladies' orders!*

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Now, Jijū no Tsubone, thinking that no account of a promise from Kannon could possibly be false, allowed herself to be led away to an unknown location, taking the lady with her. When they saw the mansion, there stood row upon row of gold-gilt folding screens and sliding doors done up in fine Chinese paper. When they gazed out over the garden, willows and cherry trees grew mingled together, looking for all the world like ornaments on brocade. The cherry trees around the *kemari* court were all in riotous bloom;³⁷¹ how could any spring dawn in the capital be superior to this?³⁷²

The lady was led deeper into the mansion, and a small folding screen and an armrest were brought out for her. She was as delicate as a willow bough as she reclined, her beauty utterly without peer.

As the night deepened, Gon no Kami decided that the time was right and made his appearance. They began with the ceremonial three cups of saké, and made it up to eleven rounds altogether. After that, the torches were dimmed, and Jijū no Tsubone, Ayame no Mae,³⁷³ and the other maidservants who had accompanied the lady—now all members of the master’s household—were each escorted to their individual rooms.



[FOURTH ILLUSTRATION]

BEN NO TONO: *Kodayū, take a look at that. Have you ever seen anything like it? She’s so beautiful!*

MASTER OF THE TEA CEREMONY, SŌEKI: *The water is boiling. I am at my master’s service.*

IYAROKU: *I’ll carry any food that needs to be brought out.*

MON’ICHI: *So what if I’m blind—let me have some saké! They can’t just make me grind tea all day long. You’re so mean, Mister Izumi—give me a cup! I’m thirsty.*

³⁷¹ Kemari, which literally means “kickball,” was a sport played by noblemen.

³⁷² This and the previous sentence play on a waka by the priest Sosei, anthologized in the first volume of *Kokin wakashū* (905):

見わたせば	When I gaze out,
柳桜を	Willows and cherry trees
こきまぜて	Mingle together.
都ぞ春の	Ah, the capital—it is
錦なりけり	The brocade of springtime.

³⁷³ Here, I am following the spelling in the Tokyo National Museum and Spencer manuscripts; both the Suntory and the Sasayama manuscripts give the maidservant’s name as ‘Ayame no Mai.’ Cf. Aihara, *Sasayamabon Nezumi no sōshi*, 132; MJMT vol. 10, 264; NKBZ vol 36, 501.

MASTER OF SAKÉ, IZUMI: *This saké is “River of Heaven.” And this is the finest Egawa saké.*³⁷⁴

SANZŌ: *This Egawa saké is good stuff. On a happy occasion like this, I should be allowed to drink as much as I want. I’ve already gone through twenty or thirty cups by myself—my face must look like Shuten Dōji’s.*³⁷⁵

KINNAI: *Mind how you trim that egret, Mister Saemon. Take care that you don’t waste any.*

YASAN SAEMON: *Birds’ bones are hard—they’re a pain to cut. I’m slaving away like this because I’m hoping I’ll receive a shortsword [as a present from the master].*³⁷⁶

ICHIRŌHYŌE: *I’m hoping I’ll get a bolt of fabric.*

OGO: *Say, Matsuko, this rice is a bit soft. Please, hurry up and shoo away these flies—remember, if I get a present, I’ll share it with you. Oh, and meow at those little mice behind us. If they get into too much mischief, they’ll spoil the rice.*

MATSUKO: *Honestly, I deserve to get an obi, too. Doesn’t his lordship realize how much work it is, shooing flies?*

KOROKU: *I’ve done my best to prepare the soup. Please, Mister Magoemon, have a taste. Should I add more salt? Or should I add more saké? The decision is yours.*

MAGOEMON: *Let me have a few more vegetables—how am I supposed to tell how salty it is from just the broth? There’s not much salt in this, but it smells delicious.*

³⁷⁴ There is no historical record of saké known as “River of Heaven” (*amagawa*); however, this may be an error for the famous “Plain of Heaven” (*amano*) saké brewed at Kongōji in Settsu province in the late Muromachi. Egawa saké, produced in Izu province in northeastern Japan, was also renowned for its quality during the late Muromachi early Edo. The B-lineage texts place far greater emphasis on alcohol and drinking than does the earlier Tenri text, which speaks to the widening overlap between matrimonial practices and consumer culture (Sawai, “*Nezumi no sōshi [Nezumi no Gon no Kami]’ no josei to warai,*” 64-69).

³⁷⁵ Shuten Dōji was a legendary ogre (*oni*) with an infamous appetite for alcohol (and human flesh). He was customarily depicted with bright red skin.

³⁷⁶ Here and below, the conversations of the mice working in the kitchen concern the gifts that they anticipate receiving on the occasion of their master’s wedding. No such discussions occur in the corresponding portion of the Tenri *Gon no Kami*; their introduction to the later B-lineage texts reflects a changing sense of the proper relationship between masters and servants (Sawai Daizō, “*Otogizōshi - yakudō suru dōbutsutachi: ‘Fukurō no sōshi,’ ‘Nezumi no sōshi’ kara,*” in *Hirogaru Nara ehon - emaki*, ed. Ishikawa Tōru [Tokyo: Miyai Shoten, 2008], 126).

HIKOZŌ: *They didn't get any fish in at the marketplace today—I only managed to find these few at last. The overseer is going to scold me for being late. It's such a long way back; I'm so tired, I can't even think straight.*

MISTRESS OF THE BATHHOUSE, MATSUKO:³⁷⁷ *When I brought his lordship's bathwater, he always used to grab my hand and tease me, but I suppose he'll stop all that after tonight. But I've made up my mind, Matsugae—I won't be thrown away like that just yet!*

MATSUGAE: *What a wicked thing to say, Miss Matsuko. Whatever his lordship's feelings may be, as long as the new mistress is kind and we get our obi [as presents], we should just accept it. Still, just think what his lordship must be up to right now . . . oh, how awful he is, how awful!*

YONE: *I don't care how fast those youngsters hurry on ahead—my back is bent, and I just can't keep up.*

NENE: *Miss Kōbai, the water is all muddy; we can't scoop it like this.*

KŌBAI: *It must be the frogs making the water muddy. Oh dear, what should we do?*

ANEGO: *Tomorrow is our lord's rice-pounding.*³⁷⁸

YONE: *Lift the mortar, drop the mortar, pound it, thud, thud.*

[UNNAMED]: *This winnowing fan hasn't been broken in yet; I can hardly wave it.*

CHIYOTOMO: *My letter to my lover was lost on Seta Bridge—oh, that worthless messenger!*³⁷⁹

OTOME: *I too have lost a love letter somewhere.*

[UNNAMED]: *Since I will present this firewood to His Lordship, I have stuck cherry blossoms*

³⁷⁷ The name “Matsuko” is assigned to two separate mice, as is the name “Yone” below.

³⁷⁸ This line and the one that follows it are lyrics from a traditional rice-pounding song; presumably the mice are singing as they work. Cf. Ono Mitsuyasu, “*Chūsei monogatari emaki to kayō*,” *Ōsaka Kyōiku Daigaku kiyō: jūbun kagaku* vol. 49, no. 1 (August 2000), 67.

³⁷⁹ Again, the mice are singing; this and the following line closely resemble lyrics from a song in the kyōgen play *Fumi ninai* (ibid.).

in with it. I'm just coming back now, and I'm so tired.

NANNY YAYAKO: Go to sleep, go to sleep, little baby. If you cry, you'll get caught by a cat.

SECRETARY OF THE MINISTRY OF WAR: *Take care of matters for today.*³⁸⁰

OVERSEER OF GUEST PRESENTS: *I'm so overwhelmed, I can't keep track of the details.*



Now, the wedding must have been no secret, for all of the blind minstrels in the capital set out for Gon no Kami's mansion. From masters down to novices, from the Myōkan, Shidō, Tojima, and Genshō branches of the Ichikata School and from the Ōyama and Myōmon branches of the Yasaka school, whether they were on good terms or bad, they were all determined not to be found wanting at such a magnificent occasion.³⁸¹ They bustled busily along, carrying their lutes on their backs, a row of canes tap-tap-tapping in front of them. Just then, a tiger-striped dog came bounding out from the shadows of a small thicket; although the minstrels could not see it, the ones at the rear of the procession could hear the barking coming towards them. A pack of dogs closed in from all sides, vying to pull ahead and barking as they came. The blind minstrels clutched their canes and prepared to flee—one might draw a picture of the scene, but words can scarcely describe it.

Looking a bit further down the road, there were the Kanze and Konparu actors' troupes, all a-clamor, followed by the Kongō and Hōshō actors' troupes—what a sight the four of them made, traveling together!³⁸² If we inquire into the origins of *sarugaku* theater,³⁸³

³⁸⁰ This and the succeeding line appear to have been somewhat garbled in transmission, and are omitted from the Tokyo National Museum and Spencer manuscripts. Here, I follow Yutaka's interpretation of the lines from the Sasayama manuscript, which seem to be less corrupt than their counterparts in the Suntory manuscript (*Sasayamabon Nezumi no sōshi*, 117-121).

³⁸¹ The minstrels discussed here are *biwa hōshi*, or "lute priests"—itinerant musicians, typically blind, specializing in the performance of the epic *Heike monogatari*. Biwa hōshi operated under the auspices of a guild system, which in the mid-Muromachi was divided into two rival schools (*ryū*)—the Ichikata and the Yasaka—each claiming access to the most authoritative version of *Heike monogatari*. By the Edo period, the Yasaka school had fallen into obsolescence. Cf. Barbara Ruch, "The Other Side of Medieval Culture," in *The Cambridge History of Japan* vol. 3, ed. Kozo Yamamura (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 538-540.

³⁸² Collectively known as the "Yamato troupes," the Kanze, Konparu, Kongō, and Hōshō actors' troupes enjoyed elite patronage throughout the late medieval and early modern period, and came to hold a near-monopoly on Noh performance. Cf. Eric Rath, *The Ethos of Noh: Actors and Their Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 93-97.

³⁸³ The term *sarugaku* ("monkey music") originally referred to a medley of performing arts popular among the peasantry, and later to the form of highly stylized elite theater that is now more

we find that in China, [a heavenly maiden] came to Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang dynasty and became his tutor, teaching him the dance of “rainbow skirt and feathered cloak.” It was because of this that his love for Yang Guifei grieved him day and night.³⁸⁴ Thus it is written in “The Song of Everlasting Sorrow,” “the hair of the Pear Garden Children has begun to turn white.”³⁸⁵ These words, recited to soothe sorrows for generations upon generations, are even now said to refer to sarugaku. And in our own land, the parishioners of the Kasuga shrine of the Fujiwara clan are no ordinary men.³⁸⁶ The flip of their sleeves as they dance, even on the most casual occasions, makes one realize that this is what Sayohime must have looked like as she waved her sleeves from Matura shore.³⁸⁷

Further along still, there were Yūgiri and Kōwaka, and other master dancers behind them.³⁸⁸ This being the capital, various people of reknown turned up at the wedding, eager not to be left out, and they happily returned home bearing gifts from their host.³⁸⁹



[FIFTH ILLUSTRATION]



In this manner, they exchanged vows, and thereafter Gon no Kami’s love for the lady

commonly known as Noh. Here the word is used in its latter sense.

³⁸⁴ Legend holds that Emperor Xuanzong taught the dance he had learned from the heavenly being to his ill-fated paramour, Yang Guifei, who performed it more beautifully than anyone else.

³⁸⁵ 梨園子弟白髮新, a quotation taken from Bo Juyi’s “Song of Everlasting Sorrow” (Ch. *Changheng*, Jp. *Chōgonka*, ca. 806). The “Pear Garden Children” were an imperial troupe of opera singers and performers trained from an early age.

³⁸⁶ “The Kasuga Shrine of the Fujiwara clan” refers to the Kasuga Grand Shrine, part of a complex of powerful shrines and temples in Nara which patronized the sarugaku troops named above, hiring them to perform on various religious occasions. Allan G. Grapard, *The Protocol of the Gods: A Study of the Kasuga Cult in Japanese History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 167-168.

³⁸⁷ Sayohime fell in love with a warrior who was soon to depart for Korea; when his ship sailed, she ran after it, waving her sleeves in farewell. Her grief transformed her into stone, and her petrified form is still enshrined on Kabeshima off the western coast of Kyūshū. The legend of Sayohime first appears in the early eighth century *Hizen fudoki*, and later became the basis for the Noh play *Matura Sayohime*.

³⁸⁸ Yūgiri (along with her daughter, Asagiri) was a *kusemai* dancer active in the first half of the sixteenth century. Wakita Haruko, *Jōsei geinō genryū: kugutsu, kusemai, shirabyōshi* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 2001), 190; Ichiko Teiji, *Chūsei shōsetsu kenkyū*, 211. *Kusemai*, a kind of narrative dance, is generally regarded as ancestral to *kōwakamai*, a closely related genre named after its possibly fictitious founder Kōwakamaru (Momonoi Naoaki, 1403-1480)—presumably the same “Kōwaka” referenced here. James T. Araki, *The Ballad-Drama of Medieval Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 19-26.

³⁸⁹ Guests at wedding parties traditionally received gifts known *hikidemono*, a custom that remains in practice today.

was without equal in this world. He planted cherry trees from Yoshino Moor and maples from Tatsuno Field so that she might gaze upon them in the spring and the fall.³⁹⁰ He had her bathing chambers modeled after Huaqing Palace in China, and “springwater slid smoothly over butter-soft skin.”³⁹¹

One day, Gon no Kami approached the lady and said, “It is through the blessing of the Kiyomizu Kannon that we have pledged ourselves to one another. Ever since then, I have wished to make a pilgrimage to Kiyomizu Temple, so please allow me some time to do so. But take heed—you must not go outside of this room.” After impressing this warning upon her, he took his leave.

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[SIXTH ILLUSTRATION]

CHACHAKO: *The mistress certainly is taking a long bath.*³⁹²

❧

The lady summoned Jijū no Tsubone and said, “I have been observing this place for some time, and the people here are not normal. Perhaps I have been lured here by some foul creature and fallen into the animal realm—oh, what an awful thought! What my husband said to me just now was especially suspicious. Let’s look in at the servants through the crack in the sliding doors.” Accompanied by Jijū no Tsubone, the lady stood at the doors and spied.

❧

[SEVENTH ILLUSTRATION]

❧

³⁹⁰ The cherries of Yoshino Moor were famed for their spring blossoms, and the maples of Tatsuno Field for their autumn foliage.

³⁹¹ Huaqing Palace was Emperor Xuanzong's mountain villa, built beside a complex of geothermal springs. His (in)famous consort Yang Guifei supposedly bathed there, as described in Bo Juyi's “Song of Everlasting Sorrow,” quoted above. “Butter-soft skin” is an admittedly loose translation of 凝脂, which more literally means “congealed fat”; I have attempted to preserve some of the literal sense of this metaphor while still conveying the image of feminine beauty.

³⁹² The caption goes on to read なところをたのみ口やるな; however, the text appears to be corrupt, and the meaning is unclear. The corresponding caption in the Sasayama manuscript reads なところをさのみあらやるな, which Aihara interprets (somewhat impressionistically) as meaning “Don't wash just that one place” (*Sasayamabon Nezumi no sōshi*, 121). The Tokyo National Museum and Spencer manuscripts, which are thought to postdate the Suntory and Sasayama manuscripts, omit speech captions from this illustration altogether (Ibid., 116; Fujishita, “*Chūsei shōsetsu 'Nezumi no sōshi' no kenkyū*,” 46).

The lady turned to Jijū no Tsubone and said, “How could this be! Just as I suspected, I have fallen into the animal realm—how dreadful! If my husband really is a mouse or something of that sort, he must come in through the cracks or the holes in the earthen walls. I’ll set a trap for him and see what happens.” The lady took a string from the koto she so often played and, hastily knotting it, laid a snare. Not a moment later—it must have been fate—Gon no Kami was caught in the noose. Unable to utter anything more than a squeak, he appeared to be in grave peril.

“Is the lieutenant here? I’ve been caught in a trap—get me out before she sees,” he managed to say before losing consciousness.

When he learned what had happened, the lieutenant could only say, “What a terrible state of affairs! How could this happen, *how!*” Biting into the knot with his mighty incisors—well-practiced at cracking even the toughest chestnut—the lieutenant quickly chewed through the koto string.

Having witnessed all this, the lady fled, sending Jijū no Tsubone ahead; she did not bother to take anything with her, and she did not know where she was going. From ancient times down to the present, whether high-born or low-, the hearts of women have always been weak—and so, perhaps remembering the years [she had spent at Gon no Kami’s mansion], forgetting her anguish, the lady stopped and looked back. How fickle her heart was! When at last she departed, she saw that she had crawled out from a crumbling hole in an old grave mound. Seething with resentment of the Kiyomizu Kannon, she muttered a futile verse:

“The sorrow of thousands of undying regrets:
this is the blessing of the Kiyomizu Kannon.”

She set out for the capital, but since she did not know where she had come from or where she was going, she felt like a water bird wandering about on dry land. Thus she abandoned her hopes of returning home and decided to don a nun’s habit and pray for rebirth in the next life. She had heard of a place called ‘Saga’ or something like that, and so she walked on, asking for directions as she went.

❧

[EIGHTH ILLUSTRATION]

❧

Although he had been saved by the lieutenant, Gon no Kami mourned the loss of the lady, and he spent day and night choked with tears, sobbing *squeak squeak*. He summoned a fortuneteller—supposedly a descendant of Abe no Seimei from the old tales or somesuch, and

certainly skilled at casting lots—and asked him to divine the whereabouts of the missing lady.³⁹³

“The lady is seventeen years old, and Gon no Kami is over one hundred. The divination shows water ascendant over fire.³⁹⁴ The person who vanished at first intended to don a nun’s habit and dwell somewhere deep in the mountains, but she has exchanged vows with a man of some stature in the capital, and their pledge of love is no shallow thing.³⁹⁵ She now regards her former marriage as utterly shameful, and she keeps a cat named Fuebuki—a mouser able to reach into any nook or cranny, famed throughout the city for his fierce paws, his sharp sense of smell, and his swiftly-snapping jaws. In short, she is taking the utmost precautions, and she will not think of you again, my lord.”³⁹⁶ Having said this, the fortuneteller hastily cleared away his lots.

His hopes for divination having come to nothing, overwhelmed by grief, Gon no Kami now called upon a shamaness to summon [the lady’s spirit] with a birchwood bow.³⁹⁷ “The bowstring rings out, the bowstring sings out—hear me, wheresoever ye may be, O Avatar of Izu Mountain, O Great God of Ashigara, O Hakone Avatar, O Great God of Mishima. For love, I call hither the gods of Kibune and Miwa, and all the gods of Japan,” she invoked. Then, speaking through the one who had summoned her, the lady said, “Although I will never forget the years of closeness that I shared with you, my husband,³⁹⁸ I have now become intimate with a man of some standing. Therefore, you must not think of me again. If even the faintest wisp of affection lingers in your heart, I will set my cat on you.” Having said this, the spirit lifted itself away.



[NINTH ILLUSTRATION]



³⁹³ The yin-yang master Abe no Seimei (921-1005) gained enduring fame due to his mystical powers. “Lots” (*sangi*) were wooden sticks used to tell fortunes; they were thrown, and the resulting configuration was interpreted based on the corresponding trigram in the ancient Chinese book of divination *Yijing*.

³⁹⁴ すいこつくわ。The precise import of this phrase is unclear, but it derives from the Chinese cosmology of the “five phases” (*wuxing*) and presumably refers to the configuration of the lots.

³⁹⁵ The phrase translated here as “pledge of love” literally means “pledge [to fly] wing to wing,” a standard image of romantic devotion borrowed from Bo Juyi’s “Song of Everlasting Sorrow.”

³⁹⁶ The final clause of this sentence is ambiguous, and could also be taken to mean “you should not think of her again.”

³⁹⁷ Bows made of birchwood (*azusa*, also translated as “catalpa”) had the power to summon and exorcise spirits, including the spirits of the living.

³⁹⁸ The word used here for husband, *takaeboshi*—which literally denotes a kind of hat worn by men—is a synecdoche peculiar to the speech of shamanesses.

Gon no Kami's hopes for divination were by now exhausted, and he could only sit there in a stupor. Unable to endure, he brought out the chests and the various belongings that the lady had left behind, and gazed upon them as keepsake

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[TENTH ILLUSTRATION]

GON NO KAMI: *The sash wraps thrice around me, starved from single-minded sorrow,*
[OBI] *For I know not when we will meet again.*³⁹⁹

[KOTO] *Even now, the sound of the wind in the garden pines remains unchanged—*
*But the song of your koto belongs to the past.*⁴⁰⁰

[BOX] *The jeweled box of Urashima in days of old—*
*I know now what happens when it has been opened.*⁴⁰¹

[HAIR-TIE] *This tie that was to bind us for all eternity—*
*I weep each time I see it.*⁴⁰²

[QUILT] *There is nothing I can do but weep,*
*Whenever I see this cast-off shell.*⁴⁰³

³⁹⁹ うき事を / ひとへにそおもふ / みへのおひ / めくりあはんも / しらぬ身なれは。The final three lines are taken near-verbatim from *Yōkihi*, a Noh play about Yang Guifei by Konparu Zenchiku (1405-1471). Cf. Koyama Hiroshi and Satō Ken'ichirō, *Yōkyokushū 1, Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* 58 (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1997), 86.

⁴⁰⁰ いまとても / かはらぬ庭の / まつかせを / しらへしことは / むかしなりけり。The association between a koto left behind by a lover and the sound of wind in the pines derives from the “Akashi” chapter of *Genji monogatari*, and is emphasized in the fourteenth-century digest *Genji kokagami*—a likely source of inspiration for the author of the B-lineage texts (Satō, “Katami no waka,” 107-108).

⁴⁰¹ うらしまか / そのいにしへの / たまてはこ / あけての後そ / おもひしらるゝ。The poem refers to the legend of Urashimatarō, the human husband of the princess of the undersea realm. After many years of happiness with his wife, Urashimatarō wishes to return to his home on land. The princess lets him go, giving him a jeweled box with a warning never to open it. When Urashimatarō inevitably disregards his wife's prohibition, he discovers that he has in fact spent centuries beneath the sea, and that the box held his long-delayed old age and death. In this context, the allusion is doubly apt: both Urashimatarō and Gon no Kami's wife violate a taboo against looking, and both Gon no Kami and the sea princess are decidedly inhuman—the earliest forms of the legend identify her as a sea turtle.

⁴⁰² なかき世を / むすひこめつる / もとゆひを / 見るにつけても / なくなみたかな

⁴⁰³ とにかくに / なくよりほかの / ことそなき / このひとからを / 見るにつけても。Satō identifies this as an allusion to the “Utsusemi” chapter of *Genji monogatari* (ibid., 109).

- [MIRROR CASE] *If only it were true that old reflections linger,
There might be some comfort in gazing in your mirror.*⁴⁰⁴
- [FOLDING FAN] *Without you, I am adrift, I'll drown in tears—
Carry this message to her, O wind from my fan!*⁴⁰⁵
- [COMBS] *What good are they now, these combs,
That once slipped through your jet-black hair?*⁴⁰⁶
- [FAN] *Impossible to forget, even for one dewdrop-brief moment:
Your face will haunt me all my life.*⁴⁰⁷
- [GO BOARD] *I cannot forget the sight of you playing midarego,
Counting your stones: ten, twenty, thirty.*⁴⁰⁸
- [INKSTONE] *Where once flowed water scooped by your hands, now only stone—
I can only gaze wordlessly upon this dried-up memento.*⁴⁰⁹
- [BRAZIER] *I know not what has become of the one who once sat beside this brazier—
What use now your white-stitched robes of Tsukushi cotton?*⁴¹⁰

⁴⁰⁴ おもかけの / とまるならひの / ありとせは / かゝみをみても / なくさめてまし。This is a very close paraphrase of a poem from the “Suma” chapter of *Genji monogatari* (ibid., 106).

⁴⁰⁵ 君まして / なみにしつむ / うき身とそ / あうきのかせよ / ふきもつたへよ

⁴⁰⁶ むはたまの / そのくろかみを / かきなてし / つけのおくしも / いまはなにせん

⁴⁰⁷ 露のまも / わすられかたき / おもかけの / いのちのうち / 身にそいてまし。The final two words of the fourth line, *uchi wa*, pun on the subject of the poem, a type of fan known as an *uchiwa*.

⁴⁰⁸ みたれこを / 十廿三十と / かそへにし / そのおもかけの / わすられぬかな。This poem makes yet another allusion to the “Utsusemi” chapter of *Genji monogatari*, likely by way of *Genji kokagami*. *Midarego* was a variant form of *go* played chiefly by women; the rules are no longer known (ibid., 110-111).

⁴⁰⁹ むすひにし / かけひの水も / 石そかし / かきたへてみる / かたみはかりを。The verb for “scoop,” *musubu*, is homophonous with the word meaning “bind” or “link”; thus, the first three lines might also be translated as “the flowing water that linked us has become stone.”

⁴¹⁰ ぬりをけに / かゝりし人は / しらぬひの / つくしのわたも / いまはなにせむ。The author alludes to a poem from *Man'yōshū* by Sami Mansei (fl. eighth c.): *Shiranui / Tsukushi no wata wa / imada ki / atatakeku miyu*. Precisely what *shiranui* is intended to signify remains a subject of debate. In the Edo period, it was taken as a pillow word associated with Tsukushi and translated as “will-o'-the-wisp”; however, the original meaning was most likely “white-stitched” (Takefu Masasuke and Nishi Akihiro, “*Man'yōshū no makura kotoba 'shiranuhi' no kaisetsu ni tsuite*,” *Saga Daigaku bungaku kyōiku gakubu kenkyū ronbunshū* vol. 12, no. 2 [January 2008], 75-95). However one interprets it, *shiranui* functions here as a pivot word: it contains the verb *shiranu*

[SHELL BOXES] *These shells that we raced to match, determined not to fall behind—
A keepsake whose mere mention brings me sorrow.*⁴¹¹

[INCENSE BURNER] *Like the smoke of Mt. Fuji's flames,
I alone remain to smolder with regret.*⁴¹²

[HAIRPIECE] *The jewel-like vines, kin to the morning glory—
Though they may wind together, their bond is as fleeting as the dew.*⁴¹³

[HAND TOWEL] *All that I see before me is tears,
Whenever I look at the hand towel you left behind.*⁴¹⁴



Gon no Kami brought out the lady's keepsakes and composed poems on each and every one. Although he longed for the past, there can be no return to seasons gone by. And so Gon no Kami summoned the lieutenant and said, "I have been abandoned by the lady, and

("know not"), which completes the sentence in the previous two lines.

⁴¹¹ あらそひて / われをくれしと / あひおひし / かいの名きくも / うきかたみなり。Shell boxes, or *kaioke*, were twin containers used to store the painted clamshells used in a popular poem-matching game known as *kaiawase*. One *kaioke* contained shells inscribed with the opening lines of various famous *waka*; the other *kaioke* contained shells with the lines completing these verses. The object of the game was to correctly match the two halves of as many poems as possible. *Kaioke*, which symbolized the union of husband and wife, were a standard item in bridal trousseaux.

⁴¹² 身にかくて / ふしのけふりの / たき物の / ひとりのこりて / くゆるなりけり。The opening line appears to have been taken verbatim from a *waka* in the "Suma" chapter of *Genji monogatari*. (Gon no Kami's poem about the mirror case borrows from another *Genji waka* belonging to the same poetic exchange; vide *supra*). After this first line, the poem makes no allusion to *Genji*; it does, however, contain a dense sequence of wordplays that require explanation. *Fuji*, in addition to being the name of a mountain, can also mean "not two"; the word for "alone," *hitori*, is homophonous with the word meaning "incense burner"; and *kuyuru* can mean both "to regret" and "to smolder" (in the latter sense, it applies to both emotions and smoke).

⁴¹³ あさかほの / 花のゆかりの / 玉かつら / かけてもよしや / 露のちきりは。This poem, which alludes to the "Tamakazura" chapter of *Genji monogatari*, plays on the homophony of "hairpiece" and "vine" (both *kazura* in Japanese) as well as the wide range of meanings of the verb *kaku*. Another possible translation would be "This jewelled hairpiece, so like the morning glory / though she may wear it, our bond is as fleeting as the dew."

⁴¹⁴ さきたつは / なみた成りけり / かけおきし / このてぬこひを / 見るにつけても

though I grieve day and night, it is no use. If I do not dispel this darkness in my heart,⁴¹⁵ I surely will not attain buddhahood. Therefore, I plan to renounce the world and seek the path to enlightenment. What do you think?" he asked.

"You are already more than one hundred and twenty years old," the lieutenant answered. "Even those who mean to follow the Way of the Buddha will not succeed without the right impetus. This is just the occasion for you to strengthen your resolve," he urged, and accompanied Gon no Kami to his family hermitage, Sosei Temple.⁴¹⁶

After they had discussed this and that, the head priest tonsured Gon no Kami and gave him the name 'Nen'ami.'⁴¹⁷ "You must uphold the five commandments," the head priest declared. "What are the five commandments? The first prohibits slaughter, the second prohibits larceny, the third prohibits concupiscence, the fourth prohibits mendacity, and the fifth prohibits inebriation. The prohibition against slaughter means that you must not kill any living thing; the prohibition against larceny means that you must not steal other people's things; the prohibition against concupiscence means that you must not indulge your lusts; the prohibition against mendacity means that you must not tell lies; and the prohibition against inebriation means that you must not drink alcohol," he instructed sternly.

Nen'ami pressed his paws together and said, "I am grateful for your wisdom, and I will certainly uphold the commandments. However, please do grant me a few small allowances. Regarding the first commandment—the one against taking life—I may need to take just a *few* lives, when I'm longing for a nibble of shrimp or fish or grasshopper. And about the second one—against theft—as Your Reverence knows, I gnaw open the straw sacks in the corners of storehouses and pantries and steal whatever spills out; please do forgive me. Also, if I'm to be living in a temple, you'll have to forgive me if I help myself to any extra branmeal, chestnuts, persimmons, sugar, millet cakes, walnuts, fermented soybeans, pickled vegetables, or lamp oil. Regarding the third commandment, the one against lust, have no fear—now that I am parted from my lady, how could any such thing occur? Still, I may need allowances four or five times a month; I shall of course consult with Your Reverence first. And as for the fourth commandment, the one against telling lies, if by some chance I meet a fellow priest who happens to be a cat, I may have to deceive him. And finally, about the fifth commandment—the one against drinking alcohol—as Your Reverence knows, I cannot live without saké. I drink from the underside of saké casks and jugs, but not to the point of drunkenness. Do

⁴¹⁵ "Darkness of the heart" indicates worldly attachments.

⁴¹⁶ The exact meaning of "family hermitage" (*uji iori*) is unclear. In the corresponding passage in the Tenri *Nezumi no sōshi*, Gon no Kami goes to a temple "that he regularly relied upon" named Sojōji—*so* being written with the character for "mouse." In the B-Lineage texts, "Soseiji" is written in hiragana; however, *so* likely has the same meaning here as well.

⁴¹⁷ The *ne* in "Nen'ami" presumably derives from the *ne* of "nezumi," with the *n* being added for reasons of euphony.

permit me ten cups or so, even if they're only little ones. Please, put your mind at ease—if I am granted these allowances, I will do my utmost to uphold the five commandments.”



[ELEVENTH ILLUSTRATION]



After this, Nen'ami decided to set out on a pilgrimage. As he was climbing Mount Kōya,⁴¹⁸ holding his parasol above him, a suspicious stranger appeared on the side of the road. As Nen'ami stared in surprise, he saw that the stranger was a priest—about two hundred years old, wearing a yellow cassock and surplice—and also a *cat*. In a panic, Nen'ami threw away his parasol and cowered face-down in a clump of grass.

“How is it that you came to wear a priest's garb?” the cat asked.

Trembling, Gon no Kami answered, “After being parted from the wife who spent so many years by my side, I came to realize the sorrow of this world, and so I donned this priestly garb.”

Tears streaming down his face, the cat replied, “I, too, became a priest and sought the path to enlightenment after being parted from my wife. Now, not the slightest speck of my old wickedness remains. Be at ease, and let us be of one mind, praying for buddhahood together.”

And so cat and mouse climbed Mount Kōya side-by-side, composing poems along the way.

“Now that my head is shaven, my claws are likewise shorn;
Have no fear of me, Novice Lay-Priest Mouse.”

Nen'ami immediately replied,

“I'm afraid to say that I cannot bring myself to wholly forget
Your former guise, my dear Priest Cat.”

Conversing in this manner, they at last made their way to the Oku-no-In Masoleum.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁸ Mount Kōya is the site of a famous complex of monasteries and temples belonging to the Shingon sect. Until the late nineteenth century, women were prohibited from entering the temple complex.

⁴¹⁹ One of the holiest sites on Mount Kōya, the Oku-no-In Masoleum houses the remains of the temple founder, Kūkai, and is surrounded by a massive cemetery.

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[TWELFTH ILLUSTRATION]

NEN'AMI: *Who would have imagined that I would gaze upon the moon of Mount Kōya
While sitting side-by-side with a cat turned cleric?*

CAT-PRIEST: *Ah, Nen'ami! Just look at it – the moon of Mount Kōya!
I have no evil intent, so please, have no fear of me.*

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