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Source: *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (Autumn, 1995), pp. 325-356

Published by: Sophia University

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2385548>

Accessed: 21-07-2019 04:23 UTC

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Women, Sexuality, and Enlightenment

Kankyo no Tomo

RAJYASHREE PANDEY

AMONG the many collections of Buddhist *setsuwa* 説話, medieval tales or anecdotes, is a scarcely studied text titled *Kankyo no Tomo* 閑居友, 'A Companion in Solitude', a work believed to have been written by Priest Keisei 慶政, 1189–1268, in 1222. A striking feature of this collection is that many of its stories concern women and their search for religious enlightenment. There are few representations of women and conceptions of their redemptive potential in the popular medieval religious texts of Japan. Keisei's work therefore offers a rare insight into the complex and often contradictory ways in which women, their bodies, their sexuality, and their social and domestic functions were constructed in medieval writing.

The Buddhist attitude to the status of women was by no means monolithic and unchanging. The early Indian Buddhist texts are marked by 'a tension between certain attitudes that seem unusually positive in their assessment of women and the feminine, on the one hand, and attitudes that are much more blatantly negative, on the other.'¹ In Mahayana canonical literature there are several contesting representations of women and the soteriological path open to them. One widely found assertion in the scriptures is that women cannot become bodhisattvas and eventual buddhas without first being reborn as men. Another motif that appears in the canon is the theme of sexual transformation. The wisdom of women on the path to enlightenment can be identified owing to a sexual change in which they lose their female characteristics and acquire a male body. While the avowed Buddhist goal is to transcend sexuality altogether, it is female sexuality that becomes a major impediment, while 'maleness' is the prerequisite for enlightenment.

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¹ Alan Sponberg, 'Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism', in José Ignacio Cabezón, ed., *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender*, State University of New York Press, 1985, p. 3.

In the Devadatta chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, one of the most influential canonical texts in Japan, Sariputra, a disciple of the Buddha, expresses doubts about the eight-year-old daughter of the Dragon King possessing the prerequisites for buddhahood. In response, the girl offers Shakyamuni a precious gem and, at this, she turns into a man and is then enthroned as a buddha in her own buddha world.²

In the Pure Land Sutra, rebirth in the Pure Land is promised to all those who have faith in Amida Buddha. But in reference to salvation for women, Amida's thirty-fourth vow suggests that women can realize such a rebirth only after first being reborn as men in their next lives.³

One of the major reasons for the inferior place assigned to women in canonical writing was the identification of woman as the site of impurity and the bearer of particular vices and sins. In his *Tsuma Kagami* 妻鏡, 1300, for example, Mujū Ichien 無住一円 quotes Tao-hsüan 道宣, the founder of the Disciplinary Sect in China, to elaborate on the seven grave vices of women. First and foremost women have no compunction about arousing sexual desire in men. They are particularly given to jealousy. They are deceitful. They focus purely on themselves and expend their energies in self-adornment in order to seduce men. They are trapped in the sin of attachment. Uncontrolled desire leads them to shamelessness and delusion. Finally, 'their bodies are forever unclean, with frequent menstrual discharges . . . pregnancy and child-birth are both foul.'⁴

It is perhaps because of these seven vices that are seen to reside innately within women that 'woman' in medieval writing is often associated with the phrase *itsutsu no sawari* 五の障り, or the fivefold obstruction. This refers to the exclusion of women from five forms of rebirth—the female body 'cannot become first a Brahma god king, second the god Sakra, third king Māra, fourth a sage-king turning the Wheel, fifth a Buddha body. How can the body of a woman speedily achieve Buddhahood?'⁵ The very specificity of the numbers five and seven lends authenticity to the Buddhist claim that women by their very nature are sinful and impure.

Within the scriptural texts, however, there is another position that attempts a more radical displacement of sexuality, arguing that, viewed from within the Buddhist doctrine of non-duality, neither maleness nor femaleness can be seen as innate characteristics. All phenomena being empty and illusory, the very

² Leon Hurvitz, tr., *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma (The Lotus Sutra)*, Columbia U.P., 1976, pp. 201–02.

³ The Pure Land Sutra (*Amidakyō* 阿彌陀經, T. 366), one of the basic canons of Pure Land Buddhism, was translated into Chinese by Kumarajiva. See Diana Y. Paul, *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in the Mahāyāna Tradition*, University of California Press, 1985, pp. 169–70.

⁴ See Robert E. Morrell, 'Mirror for Women: Mujū Ichien's *Tsuma Kagami*', in MN 35:1 (Spring 1980), pp. 67–68.

⁵ Hurvitz, p. 201. For an analysis of the use of the *itsutsu no sawari* topos in waka, see Edward Kamens, 'Dragon-Girl, Maidenflower, Buddha: The Transformation of a Waka Topos, "The Five Obstructions"', in HJAS 53:2 (December 1993).

categories male and female are rendered arbitrary and transient. In the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, for example, a goddess who resides in the layman Vimalakirti's house challenges Sariputra, and in a battle of verbal play she establishes that there are no fixed identities and hence no category called 'woman'. Vimalakirti then explains that the goddess is an aspirant to the bodhisattva path engaged in teaching all human beings.⁶

Kankyo no Tomo does not enter this debate directly, nor does it engage in theological argument in order either to assert the possibility of women attaining enlightenment within their female bodies, or to insist that sexual transformation is a prerequisite for their enlightenment. Although all the stories in Volume 2 are about women, nowhere in *Kankyo no Tomo* does Keisei suggest that he wrote the work for the religious education of women in general. This is in contrast, for example, to Mujū Ichien's *Tsuma Kagami*, in which the author explains the title of his work thus: '. . . should a woman make these precepts her constant companion [as she would a mirror], she will show herself to be a person of sensibility, a follower of the Way. And so I give this work the title, *Mirror for Women*.'⁷

In the comments following each anecdote in *Kankyo no Tomo*, Keisei does indeed utilize the general category 'woman' in order to reiterate certain essentialist and unchanging propositions about female nature. But this category is constantly rendered unstable because of the intrusion of the anecdotes themselves, which are about specific women who, precisely because of the particularity of their own experiences, resist conventional readings of themselves.

One of the central religious tropes around which some of the stories in Volume 2 of *Kankyo no Tomo* are organized is the notion of woman as the embodiment of the seven grave vices. Among these vices the sin of deluded attachment to a loved one occupies a central place. 2:1, for instance, is an exemplary tale about a woman who, after the death of her beloved husband, is able to stop clinging to his memory and succeeds in becoming a nun, leading the life of a recluse. She is particularly noteworthy, we are told, because 'a woman's nature is such that whether of high rank or of low birth, she pins her hopes on all sorts of things, but in the end is unable to realize her expectations.'

There is a tension between the moral of the tale that strains to declare that relationships between lovers are at once 'pitiable and shamelessly unmindful of the Buddha's Dharma' and the bulk of the narrative, which is a moving evocation of a world from the past in which lovers express through poetry the pain of the loss of loved ones. We see at work here two competing traditions—the courtly Heian writings, on the one hand, in which lovers are the epitome of sensitivity, refinement, and feeling, and who express their love through poetry that is deeply moving, and, on the other, the Buddhist ideal of detachment and renunciation. By turning to poetic precedent the story also has the effect of

⁶ Robert A. F. Thurman, tr., *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti, a Mahayana Scripture*, Pennsylvania State U.P., 1976, pp. 56–63.

⁷ Morrell, p. 75.

recasting the condition of deluded attachment as one that afflicts all humankind, not only women but also men, thus removing it from its received positioning as an exclusively female failing.

The strategy of using the theme of amorous love, sanctified by the courtly literary tradition, and the radical displacement of it by locating it, not as a site of pleasure and fulfillment, but as a sinful practice that brings pain and suffering, is employed in a wide range of Buddhist writings in India, China, and Japan. In the sixth-century Tamil epic *Manimékalai*, a tale about a courtesan's daughter who becomes a nun, the author Cattānār draws upon contemporary literary conventions of love poetry, only to use them 'to undercut the entire concept of sexual love.'⁸

In a similar vein, in his *Hosshinshū* 発心集, 'A Collection of Tales of Religious Awakening', the medieval poet and recluse Kamo no Chōmei 鴨長明 uses the literary conventions of the Heian romances to describe amorous love. But it is by subverting the courtly tradition and by presenting the failure of love that he allows the experience of amorous engagement to become a means to transcend the sinfulness of such attachment.⁹

In *Kankyo no Tomo*, 2:2, a courtesan who is abandoned by her lover accepts her fate without rancor and receives the tonsure after performing her filial duties. While her abandonment of worldly life is praised as a rare and remarkable occurrence, Keisei seems reluctant to grant the courtesan her own agency in effecting this major change of life. He ends by claiming that it is her lover Akimoto 秋元 (who is praised in the famous biographies of people who have attained rebirth in the Pure Land) who abandons her precisely in order to lead her to enlightenment. Through the tale, however, we are presented with a portrayal of the courtesan who, after being sent back home by Akimoto, refuses to continue her work as a prostitute despite pressure from her mother. She offers her sexual favors one final time to a provincial officer, who works for Akimoto, when he comes by boat to her hometown. Even when the officer hesitates, asking her to take into account the fact that he is employed by her former patron, she defiantly asserts that it is of no consequence at all. She reverts to being a prostitute one last time to pay for the memorial services for her deceased mother. Before leaving the boat, she cuts her hair (a culturally coded symbol of renunciation laden with pathos) and leaves it in Akimoto's boat. Is this to be read as a statement of her resentment toward him? Keisei may deny the courtesan her subjectivity, yet the account itself does invite us to read her life in more complex and subtle ways.

The sin of jealousy, ranked second on the list of women's seven grave vices, was, according to both Buddhist and Confucian notions, a quintessentially

⁸ See Paula Richman, 'Gender and Persuasion: The Portrayal of Beauty, Anguish, and Nurturance in an Account of a Tamil Nun', in Cabezón, p. 130.

⁹ For a fuller discussion of this point, see Rajyashree Pandey, 'Suki and Religious Awakening: Kamo no Chōmei's *Hosshinshū*', in MN 47:3, 1992, pp. 303–08.

feminine failing.¹⁰ The courtesan in 2:2 is remarkable precisely because she does not fall prey to jealousy when abandoned by her patron. In a wide range of writings, from Heian monogatari to *setsuwa* collections, we find examples of women who are overcome by jealousy and turn into evil spirits that haunt their rivals and often destroy them, or who become demons and devour the men who have betrayed them. Or again jealousy transforms them into snakes. Thus the jealous female is seen as potentially dangerous and destructive.

Story 2:3 follows on neatly from 2:2, turning as it does to a young woman who, owing to uncontrolled jealousy, becomes a demon (*oni* 鬼) upon being abandoned by her lover. A female *oni* goes against the nurturing and subservient role generally associated with women, and her malevolence in this instance takes the form of eating not only her husband but also young children.

Story 2:9 takes as its theme another grave sin, supposedly inherent in all women, the sin of impurity. Within Buddhist doctrine there is a strong emphasis on the notion of the essential foulness of the human body (*fujōkan* 不淨觀). Within Buddhist practice this became a standard object of meditation as a means of understanding the true nature of the body. Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* spells out at great length the various attributes of foulness—the swollen, the discolored, the festering, the fissured, the mangled, the dismembered, the bloody, the worm-eaten, and so on.¹¹ Part of a monk's training involved spending time at the charnel fields to observe, in every minute detail, the putrefaction of the human body. Buddhaghosa's text goes on to say that both men and women who do not know the true nature of the body lust after each other without recognizing that in reality no aspect of the body is fit to lust after.¹²

There is an interesting slide in popular medieval accounts in Japan from a discourse on impurity, such as Buddhaghosa's, which is not bound by gender and which is aimed at teaching the ephemerality of all human existence, to one where women alone become the prime site of the impure. There is, clearly, a problem in reconciling, on the one hand, the notion of woman whose outer form is the site of beauty and sensuality and, on the other, an invisible inner essence that is impure, defiling, and likely to lead men astray. It is this paradox of the dissembling woman that becomes the ideal trope for all the transformation tales in *setsuwa*, where beautiful women suddenly reveal themselves to be deceitful foxes, snakes, *tengu*,¹³ and so on. On occasion, their transformation

¹⁰ For an informed discussion on the gendered rendition of the category 'jealousy' in *Konjaku Monogatari* 今昔物語, see Hitomi Tonomura, 'Black Hair and Red Trousers: Gendering the Flesh in Medieval Japan', in *The American Historical Review*, 99 (February 1994), pp. 138–40.

¹¹ Pe Maung Tin, tr., *The Path of Purity, Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga*, Pali Text Society, Luzac, London, 1971, p. 205.

¹² Pe Maung Tin, p. 224.

¹³ In ancient times in China, the *tengu* 天狗 was a kind of a falling star. Later the term came to denote an imaginary mountain beast that flew through the skies. It was conceived of as a large male creature with a long nose and possessing occult powers. An excessively proud person or someone who died while still harboring grudges was likely to be reborn as a *tengu*.

may work in the opposite direction: while they appear to be ordinary deluded mortals, they reveal themselves as bodhisattvas engaged in leading human beings to salvation. This is perhaps why women are often portrayed as elusive and unreliable.

In Keisei's story, 2:9, a refined noblewoman who is being wooed by a respected monk decides to cure him of his deluded attachment by stripping herself of all her normal make-up and adornment, and presenting herself to him as a repugnant and putrid figure. In addition, she covers herself in tattered and bloody robes, paints her body yellow and blue, and dishevels her hair. She thus simulates the image of the decaying female body that is then harnessed to serve as a pedagogical tool for the salvation of the errant monk. As Hitomi Tonomura has pointed out in her discussion of the tales in *Konjaku Monogatari*, 'conveniently, men's sexual desire for women can be a gateway to greater achievement in the Way of the Buddha. . . . The woman figure is a prop for the man's salvation, for which a man's passion serves as a catalyst.'¹⁴

So too in *Manimékalai*, mentioned above, the courtesan Manimékalai attempts to cure the prince, enamoured of her beauty, of his deluded attachment. She does this by juxtaposing the physical attributes of a well-known beauty with her present condition as an old hag. Her eyebrows that were once like victorious bows now resemble dried-up prawns; her teeth that were once like pearls now look like uneven yellowed seeds in a gourd, and so on.¹⁵ Like the noblewoman in *Kankyo no Tomo*, Manimékalai's demonstration of the radical transformation of every aspect of female beauty serves at once as a moral lesson on the transience of human life as well as on the unreliability of the female form.

The stories about women in *Kankyo no Tomo*, then, while subscribing to the accepted notion of the female as the embodiment of the seven grave sins, nonetheless present a wide range of women from different social classes who are actively involved in their quest for salvation and for the most part are successful in doing so. It is above all the power of faith in the Buddha that works against any essentialist notion of the innate evil in woman. In 2:5, the lady who puts her trust in the Hase deity is rewarded; in 2:8, Lady Kenreimon'in 建礼門院 is able to come to terms with the tragic loss of her son and her clan by devoting herself to prayer; and in 2:11, a menial servant gains rebirth in the Pure Land owing to her devoted commitment to reciting the nembutsu. Indeed, in this final tale, the ignorant and uneducated woman shows herself to be much closer to the Way than the erudite monks of high standing. Faith in the Buddha and in his vow to save all sentient beings becomes an ideal ground for women to stake their claim to salvation alongside men.

This is not to suggest, however, that Keisei was some sort of proto-liberal or feminist. It would be a truism to note that women were assigned an inferior

¹⁴ Tonomura, p. 147. Tonomura presents an interesting and informed discussion on the gendered rendition of the category 'jealousy' in *Konjaku Monogatari* 今昔物語.

¹⁵ Richman, p. 118–21.

place in the Buddhist world-view and that Keisei's work reflects many of the attitudes to women prevalent in thirteenth-century society. What is particularly interesting about his text is that it cannot contain itself within the boundaries of the prescriptive and the didactic. The narrative invites us to read the many contradictions between the construction of woman as a general category and the experiences, recounted within the text, of a wide variety of women that resist such categorizations.

Text

The authorship of *Kankyo no Tomo* has been a matter of some debate, but scholars are now generally agreed that the work was written by Priest Keisei (Keisei Shōnin 慶政上人), also known as Shōgetsubō 証月坊. In the Edo period there were theories that ascribed the text variously to Priest Jien and Priest Keisei. Hashimoto Shinkichi was one of the first scholars who produced evidence derived from a variety of sources to suggest that Keisei was in fact the author.¹⁶ In his explanatory notes appended to the reproduction of the Sonkeikaku Maeda 尊經閣前田 text, Ikeda Kikan also believed that Keisei was the most likely candidate for authorship, but raised some questions about the internal consistency of this theory. For example, in 1:3 Keisei remarks that he spent eight years as a mountain recluse. If this is put together with the claim made in the final story that the work was completed when Keisei was residing on Nishiyama in 1222, it follows that he lived in Nishiyama from 1214. Ikeda points out that this contradicts the fact that Keisei went to China in 1217.¹⁷

Nagai Giken takes up the issues raised by Ikeda and argues that Keisei's sojourn in China was only from the spring of 1217 to the following year and that, even if we take into account this journey, it does not alter the theory that Keisei spent eight years at Nishiyama.¹⁸ Hirabayashi Moritoku has located a variety of biographical sources and established details such as the exact year of Keisei's birth and the start of his solitary life on Nishiyama.¹⁹

The first volume of the collection contains twenty-one stories, while the second comprises only eleven. The stories are not assembled at random, but are structurally tied together by certain identifiable principles of organization. The work moves progressively from accounts of well-known, high-ranking monks to ordinary priests and then from tales about ordinary laymen to stories

¹⁶ Hashimoto Shinkichi 橋本進吉, 'Keisei Shōnin no Jisseki' 慶政上人の実績, in *Shigaku Zasshi* 史学雑誌, 22 (July 1911), and Hashimoto Shinkichi, 'Keisei Shōnin-den Kō' 慶政上人伝考, in *Dai-Nippon Bukkyō Zensho* 大日本仏教全書, 3 (October 1917).

¹⁷ Ikeda Kikan 池田亀鑑, 'Kankyo no Tomo', Sonkeikaku Sokan, Kosaku Maeda-ke Ikutoku Zaidan, 1940, p. 187.

¹⁸ Nagai Giken 永井義憲, 'Kankyo no Tomo no Sakusha Seiritsu oyobi Sozai ni tsuite' 閑居友の作者成立および素材について, in *Taishō Daigaku Kenkyū Kiyō* 大正大学研究紀要, 40 (January 1955).

¹⁹ Hirabayashi Moritoku 平林盛得, 'Keisei Shōnin Den Kō Hoi' 慶政上人伝考補遺, in *Kokugo to Kokubun* 国語と国文, June 1970.

about women.²⁰ As noted above, the tales in Volume 2 are devoted entirely to women, and these are the stories translated here.

The collection was probably assembled for the edification of a high-ranking lady who commissioned the work. Nagai has looked at the colophon of *Goshūi Ōjōden* 後拾遺往生伝, which Keisei copied, and finds mention of Keisei's connection with Go-Takakura-in 後高倉院, 1179–1223, son of Emperor Takakura. From this he infers that Keisei is likely to have written the work in response to the patronage received from a member of that family. Two likely candidates are princesses Shikikenmon'in Toshiko 式乾門院利子 and Akimon'in Kuniko 安嘉門院邦子.²¹

There is some internal evidence to suggest that the text was indeed commissioned by a lady of high birth. In Keisei's authorial comments on 1:4, for example, he addresses the work's intended reader as someone who 'sits behind brocaded curtains'.²² In the colophon, he explains that, dissatisfied with his labors, he decided to cast aside his inkstone and stop writing, but that he received orders to complete the book. Although no one is mentioned explicitly, the phrase *kaki agubeki yoshi kanete kikoese kereba* indicates that the collection had been requested by someone of high rank.²³

Author

We do not know a great deal about Keisei's life. He was born in 1189 into the influential Kujō family and was in fact the elder brother of the regent Kujō Michiie.²⁴ His wetnurse dropped him as a baby, causing deformity in his back; this physical defect may have contributed to his leaving courtly life and his early entry into the priesthood. Keisei began to lead the life of a religious recluse (*tonseisha* 遁世者) in a hut in Nishiyama from the age of twenty (1208).²⁵ He appears to have belonged to the Tendai sect. While he had some understanding of Zen and Amidism, his religious beliefs were closer to those held by priests such as Myōe and Jōkei,²⁶ active exponents of the older schools of Buddhism.

²⁰ See Kobayashi Yasuharu 小林保治, 'Kankyo no Tomo Josetsu' 閑居友の序説, 1–4, in *Waseda Daigaku Kyōiku Gakubu Gakujutsu Kenkyū* 早稲田大学教育学部学術研究, 20 (November 1972).

²¹ Nagai, p. 56.

²² In Koizumi Hiroshi 小泉弘 et al., ed., *Hōbutsushū, Kankyo no Tomo, Hirasano Kojin Reitaku* 宝物集, 閑居友, 比良山古人霊託, Shin Nihon Koten Bungaku Taikei 40, Iwanami, 1993, p. 371.

²³ Koizumi, p. 452; p. 356, below.

²⁴ Kujō Michiie 九条道家, 1193–1252, the 'Former Regent Lay-priest of Kōmyōbuji', was an acknowledged poet who contributed twenty-eight poems to *Shin-Chokusenshū* 新勅選集. He was the patron of Tōfukuji.

²⁵ Nishiyama is a mountainous area in the western part of Kyoto. Keisei is said to have built his hut at the foot of this mountain. Later, around 1226 or 1227, he established Hokkesanji in the area.

²⁶ Myōe Shōnin 明恵上人, 1173–1232, was responsible for rejuvenating the teachings of Kegon, the most prominent of the Six Nara Sects with its headquarters at Tōdaiji. For a detailed study, see George J. Tanabe, Jr., *Myōe the Dreamkeeper: Fantasy and Knowledge in*

In 1217 Keisei visited China. He is believed to have written the first three stories of *Kankyo no Tomo* before leaving Japan and to have finished the rest in 1222 after his return. We have little information regarding his activities while abroad. We do know that he requested a foreigner he met in China to write something in Persian for him, which he then sent to Myōe. This was probably because Myōe had always wanted to visit China and India, but never succeeded in doing so.²⁷

Keisei returned from his travels in China in 1218, bringing back more than two hundred volumes of sutras, which were deposited in Hokkesanji. In 1219, living in his hut on the peak of Nishiyama, he copied out several important biographies of famous monks, *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden*, *Shūi Ōjōden*, *Goshūi Ōjōden*, and so on.²⁸ He also recommenced work on *Kankyo no Tomo*, completing it in 1222, as noted above.

Throughout his life Keisei was actively engaged in copying a variety of annals that recorded the origins of temples and shrines. He is the author of *Hokkesanji Engi* 法華山寺縁起 ('Annals of the Origins of Hokkesan Temple'), 1228. He played an important part in the founding of this temple in 1225. *Hokkesanji Engi* is a useful source for reconstructing events in his life. But not all of its information can be accepted at face value, as Keisei also includes stories that are not dissimilar to some of the miraculous tales that abound in religious *setsuwa*. For instance, he claims that on the way back from China, his boat was caught in a great storm and he prayed for help to the Buddha Mahavairocana (Dainichi Nyorai 大日如来). His prayers were answered and he reached home safely. He then had an image of Dainichi made from the rudder of the boat and had it installed in Hokkesanji.²⁹

In 1239, when Kujō Michiie, who had by now received the tonsure, fell ill, Keisei was called to Hosshōji, where his brother was living, to banish the sickness by exorcism. The events that are believed to have transpired during his visit to Hosshōji have all the elements of a miracle tale. While at the temple, a young lady-in-waiting is said to have been possessed by a spirit, which proclaimed itself to be a *tengu* from Mt Hira. From the 23rd to the 28th day of

Early Kamakura Buddhism, Harvard East Asian Monographs 156, 1992.

Jōkei 貞慶, also known as Gedatsubō 解脱坊, 1155–1213, was a friend of Myōe and belonged to the Hossō sect. He lived and studied at Kōfukuji for almost thirty years, after which he became a recluse at Kasagidera in 1193. In 1208 he retired to nearby Kaijusenji.

²⁷ Minobe Shigekatsu 美濃部重克, ed., *Kankyo no Tomo*, Chūsei no Bungaku, Miyai, 1982, p. 10. Also, Robert E. Morrell, 'Passage to India Denied: Zeami's *Kasuga Ryūjin*', in MN 37:2 (1982), pp. 179–200. Keisei clearly had a close connection with Myōe; at the time of the latter's death in 1232, it was Keisei who recommended the priest who would officiate at the memorial service to be performed on the hundredth day. Koizumi, p. 558.

²⁸ *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden* 続本朝往生伝 was a collection of biographies of Japanese religious figures who had attained rebirth in the Pure Land, compiled by Ōe Masafusa 大江匡房, 1041–1111, a late-Heian poet and one of the best-known exponents of Chinese literature of his time. *Shūi Ōjōden* 拾遺往生伝 was compiled by Miyoshi Tameyasu 三好為康 in 1111. *Goshūi Ōjōden*, completed in 1139, was Tameyasu's supplement to *Shūi Ōjōden*. Keisei copied all three works.

²⁹ Minobe, p. 10.

the Fifth Month, Keisei debated with the *tengu* (who spoke through the lady) and their dialogue was recorded in *Hirasan Kojin Reitaku* 比良山古人霊託, 'The Oracle of the Old Spirit at Mt Hira'.

We know little about Keisei's final years. He is believed to have died in 1268 at the age of eighty.

The present translation and notes are based on the annotated text in Koizumi, *Hō-butsushū*, *Kankyo no Tomo*, *Hirasan Kojin Reitaku* (see n. 22, above). This text is based on the Sonkeikaku Maedabon, the earliest handwritten copy (*shahon* 写本) of the original text, dating back to the late Kamakura period.

2:1 About the Religious Awakening of the Nun who Lived in the Mountains of Tsu Province.

Long ago there was a nun who built herself a rough straw hut in the depths of the mountains in Tsu province. She abstained from eating the five cereals, and would pluck the seeds from a yew tree and use them for making her food. She dug a make-shift pond in front of her hut and soaked the seeds in the water to soften them. The nun had a pale complexion and her appearance had declined to such an extent that it would be impossible to know whether she was good-looking or ugly.

A certain person met her by chance and asked her why she was living in such a place. She replied, 'When I was at the height of my youth, I lost my husband. After completing the religious services of the forty-ninth day,³⁰ I shaved my head and entered the mountains. I have never returned to my village since. I loved my husband deeply, but when he died so suddenly I realized that the relationship between man and wife is but ephemeral, and so I became what I am today. I have several children. I owned a great deal of land and other possessions. Realizing, however, that all these are merely companions of one's dreams, I cast them all away.'

She seemed to be a person who thought deeply about things, but she did not put her thoughts into words and hold forth at length.

A woman's nature is such that whether of high rank or low birth, she pins her hopes on all sorts of things, but in the end is unable to realize her expectations. The depth of this lady's heart that made her decide to receive the tonsure was, by contrast, truly profound.

In truth we hear of many instances of couples who want to grow old together, pledging that they be buried in the same grave and praying that they may be together again in the next world. Their acts are full of expectations for the future, but in fact these constitute a deep crime.

The Emperor Hsüan Tsung pledged that, if he were born in the skies, he would like to be a bird who would fly in unison with his female partner.³¹ In the land of Yamato we have the case of the lady who lamented, 'If it be a wild field, then I shall be a quail calling plaintively.'³² Or again the lady who left behind the following words, 'I am eager to see the color of the tears of

³⁰ The period after death and before rebirth in a new life, believed to last for forty-nine days, was known as *chūin* 中陰, or intermediate state between death and the next life.

³¹ Hsüan Tsung 玄宗 of the T'ang dynasty deeply loved his consort Yang Kuei-fei (J. Yōkihi) 楊貴妃. Keisei refers here to a poem by Po Chū-i 白居易 in which the emperor, lamenting her death, prays that they be reunited in heaven like the pair of legendary birds, each with one eye and one wing, and always flying together. Masako Nakagawa Graham, 'The Consort and the Warrior: *Yōkihi Monogatari*', in MN 45 (Spring 1990), p. 15.

³² This episode appears in *Ise Monogatari* 伊勢物語. When a man gives a poem to a certain lady in whom he has been losing interest, she responds with the following:

love.³³ Also the lament of the person who wrote, 'It is indeed sad to think of you sleeping alone in the bed that you once shared with me.'³⁴ If we do not perform memorial services with total sincerity for a dead person, then it is indeed hard for that person to cease being attached to the world and to become a buddha.

Throughout their lives people constantly think about love. Comparing their love to the flames of Mt Fuji,³⁵ they display a heart that is tortured by love. Or they liken themselves to the Kiyomi Barrier³⁶ and wear their tears on their sleeves. Despite this, they turn into the smoke that rises forlornly from the Toribe fields³⁷ and disappear like the dew in the fields of Asajigahara.³⁸ How they must suffer during their lives! The sorrow of those who are endowed with great sensitivity must become much greater and deeper, depending on the time and situation they are in.

Not long after Prince Atsuyoshi become involved with the Fifth Imperial

no to naraba
uzura to narite
nakioran
kari ni dani ya wa
kimi wa kozaramu

If it be a wild field,
then I shall be a quail
calling plaintively—
and surely you will at least
come briefly for a hunt.

The man we are told is so deeply moved by the poem that he decides not to leave her. Watanabe Minoru, ed., *Ise Monogatari*, Shinchō Nihon Koten Shūsei, Shinchōsha, 1976, pp. 134–35. Translation in Helen McCullough, tr., *Tales of Ise*, University of Tokyo Press, 1968, pp. 148–49.

³³ A reference to Empress Teishi 定子, daughter of Fujiwara Michitaka 藤原道隆 and wife of Emperor Ichijō 一条; she died at the age of twenty-four. The poem, with a headnote explaining that she composed it and left it behind for Ichijō, appears in *Goshūishū* 後拾遺集 (*Kokka Taikan* #536).

yomosugara
chigiri shi koto o
wasurezu ba
koin namida no
iro zo yukashiki

If you have not forgotten
the pledge we made
through the night,
eager am I to see
the color of the tears of love.

The story of their love is found in works such as *Hosshinshū*, *Eiga Monogatari* 栄華物語, *Hō-butsushū* 宝物集, and *Jikkinshō* 十訓抄.

³⁴ An anonymous poem found in the lamentations section of *Kokinshū* 古今集, #858.

koe o dani
kikade wakaruru
tama yori mo
naki toki ni nemu
kimi zo kanashiki

It grieves my spirit
to take leave without hearing
the sound of your voice,
yet what will it be for you
to sleep in an empty bed?

Helen McCullough, tr., *Brocade by Night: Kokin Wakashū and the Court Style in Japanese Classical Poetry*, Stanford U.P., 1985, p. 470.

³⁵ The fire and smoke that rose from Mt Fuji were popular symbols of the ardor and passion of a person in love.

³⁶ The tears that drench the sleeves of lovers are compared to the waves at Kiyomi Barrier. *Kiyomigaseki* was a common *utamakura* 歌枕, or pillow word, for Suruga province.

³⁷ The area at the foot of Higashiyama in Kyoto where, from Heian times, the dead were cremated.

³⁸ A commonly used metaphor for a cremation ground.

Princess, who lived in her secluded pavilion, he passed away.³⁹ Before his death, he wrote in his own hand the following poem on the sash of the curtain in the place where she lived, 'If your repeated promise that you will never forget me is true, then mourn for me when you see the mountain mist.'⁴⁰ Having been told this story, even a man as lowly as myself cannot help but recall it every time I see the dawn in spring or the mists spreading over the edge of the mountains.⁴¹ I am also unable to forget the love that these two people bore each other in the past. When I consider how much more so the princess's heart must have been tortured when she saw the mists in spring, I am deeply moved.

Using the place name Ura no Hamayū, a person reproached a lover with the words, 'My resentment will pile up.'⁴² Then again there was the case of the person who compared his life with the ephemeral dew and said that he would gladly exchange it for one meeting with his lover. The bond that tied these lovers must have been truly hard to bear. These relationships are at once pitiable and shamelessly unmindful of the Buddha's Dharma.

2:2 How the Lady of Muro Experienced Religious Awakening upon being Abandoned by Akimoto.

Not long ago, the Middle Counsellor Akimoto⁴³ was involved with a courtesan from Muro. They had exchanged many promises of love, but then, inexplicably, his visits become less and less frequent. Finally he sent her back to her native place. The courtesan of Muro said to her mother,

'I did not expect to come back here again, but then I asked myself how could I possibly stay away from you while you were still alive. So, casting aside all shame, I have come back to my native home. But please understand that, even though I have returned, I have no intention of taking up the profession I practised in the past.' She now stopped going out completely and, calming her mind, she took to reciting the nembutsu.

³⁹ Prince Atsuyoshi 敦慶, son of Emperor Uda 宇田, died at the age of forty-four in 930.

⁴⁰ The poem appears in *Kokinshū*, #857, but in this version it is the Fifth Imperial Princess who dies rather than Atsuyoshi. The mountain mist is a metaphor here for the smoke that rises from the funeral pyre.

⁴¹ This sentence bears a close resemblance to the opening lines of *Makura no Sōshi* 枕草子, in *Makura no Sōshi, Murasaki Shikibu Nikki* 枕草子, 紫式部日記, NKBT 19, Iwanami, 1967, p. 43. Throughout this story, Keisei, while condemning the practice of love, shows his knowledge of the poetic and literary canon, which he uses to good effect.

⁴² A reference to a poem in *Gōshūishū*, #886, attributed to Priest Dōmyō 道命. The leaves of the *hamayū* 浜木綿 are clustered together in many layers and hence *hamayū* is used as a pivot words for 'piling up'.

⁴³ Akimoto, d. 1047, belonged to the family of Daigo Genji 醍醐源氏. He became Middle Counsellor and held third rank, junior grade. He received the tonsure at the age of thirty-seven, and spent several years at Yokawa and Ōhara. He died at the age of forty-eight. His story appears in works such as *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden*, *Kokon Chomonjū* 古今著聞集, *Hosshinshū*, and so on.

For a while her mother tried to stop her, but then she realized that it was to no avail. With the passing of time the house fell into a state of great disrepair, but the lady of Muro seemed hardly to notice this.

Eventually her mother fell ill and died. After every seven days the temple bells would ring and startle the lady of Muro into the realization that another week had passed. But such was her penury that she could not afford to make any arrangements for memorial services for her mother. All she did was weep uncontrollably. The few courtesans who had been her attendants made their excuses on the grounds of pollution [owing to the death of the mother] and left her.

In this way it was not long before the forty-eighth day arrived. That evening a boat came laden with goods and the courtesan of Muro, accompanied by a servant, went to visit it. An officer, who was in the employ of the Middle Counsellor, had come to the province by the boat to collect tribute and must have been on his way back to the capital.

He was startled to see the courtesan and exclaimed, 'This boat belongs to the Middle Counsellor Akimoto. How can I allow you in? Did you know this?' The lady responded, 'I did know it, but I don't see why that should matter.' Then she got into the boat.

The following morning the officer gave her fifty gold pieces for her favors. She decided to go back home, explaining that it was the last day for performing memorial services for her mother. So she cut off her hair and, leaving it behind, she left the boat. After she had completed the services of the forty-ninth day, she divided up her belongings among those who had for long served her household. Then, on that same day, she received the tonsure, secluded herself in a quiet place, and performed Buddhist practices with utmost seriousness.

The man in charge of the boat arrived back in the capital and recounted to the Middle Counsellor all that had taken place. The Middle Counsellor shed many tears, saying, 'Just as I had thought! She always seemed an uncommonly fine woman, but she turns out to be even more remarkable than I had imagined. What a pity you gave her so little money. You should have given her a hundred gold pieces.'

The woman's becoming a courtesan was a natural consequence of her karma from a past life. No matter what the circumstances, such women bring shame upon themselves. But the fact that this courtesan decided that her life had become worthless was certainly most unusual.

Those who are forgotten by their lovers become ever more resentful and pile up sin upon sin. But the fact that she gave up her attachment to Akimoto and made his desertion the instrument for escaping from this fleeting world was indeed impressive. We hear of remarkable people from the past who, unable to bear the resentment in their hearts, turned into evil spirits and left behind terrible reputations. All the more, then, was it a rare occurrence that this lady made her abandonment her guide for turning her back upon this world.

In *Ōjōden*,⁴⁴ Middle Counsellor Akimoto is recorded as an impressive example of a person who attained enlightenment. So I would go so far as to believe that he abandoned the courtesan in order to bring home to her the ephemeral nature of such attachments, something that she could not have understood by herself.

2:3 How a Deeply Jealous Woman Turned into a Demon While Still Alive.

I believe this event took place not too long ago in the province of Mino. There was a man of some means whose business took him to Mino, where he formed a relationship with the daughter of a certain person of that province. Then his visits became more infrequent. For one thing, he lived quite far away and, for another, he had probably shifted his attentions to another woman. Possibly because she had no experience of amorous relationships, the lady of Mino was convinced that he had abandoned her. On the rare occasions that he did visit her, she must have revealed her suspicions to him and this caused him considerable alarm.

Finally he stopped visiting her altogether. She then gave up eating, but as it was the beginning of the New Year, everyone was extremely busy and nobody noticed that she had stopped eating. As a rule, she would set up a screen and, covering herself with a quilt, she would do nothing but just lie there. No one was considerate enough to come to her side.

One day she took some millet jelly from a container lying nearby. She tied her hair up into five knots and smeared some jelly on them; she then let them dry so that they would look like horns. Then, putting on a red skirt, she quietly ran away that evening. Nobody in the household noticed any of this. Eventually, thinking that she had thrown herself into some pool or river on account of her unfaithful lover, her family sent out search parties to find her body. But how could her body be found?

Months and years went by, and her father and mother passed away. Word spread among people everywhere that in a remote field in that same province there was a demon who had been living in a broken-down temple for the last thirty years. It would catch the young lads tending horses and cows, and eat them. Those with good eyesight declared that the demon was hiding on the roof of the temple.

So the people from several villages got together and discussed the matter. They agreed, 'Since this is the case, let us set fire to the temple. After that we will get together and rebuild it. It would be sinful only if we burned the temple out of a feeling of enmity toward the Buddha.'

They then decided on a day and approached the temple with bows and quivers tied round their waists. They went closer, first closing off all the dark openings [where the demon might hide], and then set fire to the temple. When

⁴⁴ His story in fact appears in *Zoku Honchō Ōjōden*.

it was half-burned, a creature with five horns, wearing a red skirt, bent at the hips and looking indescribably frightening, came running out. The people thought to themselves, 'Just as we had expected!' Preparing to face the creature, they drew their bows, but at that moment the demon said, 'I'd like to say something. Without understanding the situation, please don't make the mistake of killing me!'

When the people asked her what kind of creature she was, she explained that she was none other than the daughter of such-and-such a person of that province and that, regrettably, her feelings had driven her to dress like a demon and to leave home. She confessed that she had finally caught the man who had deserted her and killed him.

She continued, 'After that, no matter how much I tried, I could not regain my former physical self. I felt so ashamed of returning to live among people that, with nowhere to go, I finally hid in this temple. It is the misfortune of the living body that it cannot give up the desire for food. Everything I do is extremely painful and it would be hard for me to describe the torture I suffer. Day and night my body feels as though it is being burned. The sense of regret and worthlessness that I feel about my life has no limit. I beg all of you to get together and with all your might copy out the *Lotus Sutra* in one day and perform religious services on my behalf. Also, those among you who have wives and daughters, do not fail to tell them my story and forbid them to let feelings such as I had to arise in their hearts.'

Then, weeping copiously, she jumped into the fire and was burned to death.

Although the woman was a frightening creature, she was nonetheless deserving of pity. Being agitated, her mind was led astray for but a moment and for this she will undoubtedly undergo a long period of suffering. This is truly regrettable and tragic. Her life in the next world will by no means be a good one. I do not believe that the person who related this story to me specified whether or not a memorial service was held for her.

2:4 How the Hair of a Destitute Woman Was Used after Her Death as an Offering for the Sutra-reading Service.

Recently in the eastern part of Kyoto there lived a girl who had been adopted by a family while still young. She belonged to the Taira clan, and after the wars between the Genji and Taira,⁴⁵ she was lucky even to be alive and she led a most humble life.

As is the way of the world, there is no guarantee that the old will die before the young, and so the young girl passed away before her foster-mother. In due course, her foster-mother also died. On the thirty-fifth morning after the mother's death, the husband of the dead girl came to the mother's home.

⁴⁵ In 1185, the struggle between the Taira (Heike) and Genji (Minamoto) clans culminated with the Taira being decisively defeated at the Battle of Dannoura.

Addressing himself to the other daughter of the deceased mother, he said, 'If my wife were alive today, she would have performed many services on behalf of her mother. I thought hard about what I could bring as an offering to the priest so that he could read the sutras for her, but I couldn't come up with anything. Finally, I wondered whether this would be suitable, and so I have brought it along.'

He took out something that was wrapped in a piece of paper and then began to weep uncontrollably. Naturally curious to see what was the matter, the daughter opened the paper and saw that it contained her dead sister's hair that had been shaved off just before her death. The sight was so heart-rending that the lady could not bear it and began to weep. The fragrance that still lingered in her hair reminded them of her and they could do nothing but cry.

The daughter then said to the husband, 'It is no good looking at this hair and thinking sad thoughts. Please hide it away.' I believe that she then turned away.

2:5 How a Lady Visited the Hase Kannon Temple Every Month.

Not long ago there was a lady of limited means who lived in the southern district of the capital. She was a lady-in-waiting at the court, but had not had the chance to form a connection with someone who could support her in her daily life, and so the days went by. Every month she would go to visit the Kannon at Hase⁴⁶ and appeal to her for help.

In this way some three years passed and winter came, but still there was no sign of help from Kannon. The journey to Hase was not easy, and with the passage of time the lady's financial situation became more and more difficult. As is the way of the world, people around her treated her badly and spoke ill of her. She realized that she could not continue to make preparations for the trip every month and so she decided that she would go to the temple one more time and plead for help—this would be her last visit. She felt that what people said about her was after all true and with this thought she quickly sank into a state of gloom and sorrow.

She purified her mind even more than usual and then visited the Kannon temple. Believing that this was to be her last visit, she noticed even the most commonplace trees and grass, and her sorrow was without limit. That evening she lay down with her sleeves drenched with tears, and instead of taking a short nap, she fell into a deep sleep. Then an old priest of extremely noble mien, who seemed to have attained a high level of virtue, appeared in her dream and told her,

'Do not feel resentful toward me, for I feel the deepest sympathy for

⁴⁶ The temple at Hase in Nara-ken. The figure housed there is an eleven-face Kannon said to have been installed there in 727. From the ninth century this Kannon gained a reputation for performing miracles, and from the tenth century onward the temple was much frequented by the aristocracy.

your plight. Quietly take the thin silk robe of the lady who is lying by your feet and return home quickly.'

Awaking from her dream, the lady thought, 'What a shameful thing to do! Finally the retribution I have earned for my deeds is such that I am to steal a person's robe. Even if I take it, how far can one piece of silk get me?'

But at the same time, she pondered, 'Even if this is true, there must be some reason behind it. I have trusted myself to such a degree to Kannon and have come to pray to her, and so if I do get caught and am put to shame, I shall consider even that a part of my service to the Goddess Kannon.'

She turned to the lady who was sleeping by her feet and saw that she had indeed covered herself with a thin silk robe. She stealthily removed it. As this was all part of the Buddha's plan, it is no wonder that nobody noticed her doing this.

She put on the robe and quickly left the temple. Her heart was pounding hard and she was quite distraught and sad. But she took hold of herself and made her way to the Hase river. But then she heard a loud clamor behind her.

'Oh, how terrible! Just as I expected!' she thought. But she realized that these were not common folk, for they were all riding toward her on horses.

One of the riders said to his attendant, 'The lady there ahead of us seems to be of high rank. I wonder why she is traveling so late at night by herself. Judging by her robe she is obviously a person of some distinction. Stop her and I will take her on my horse until dawn.'

His attendant ran to the lady and conveyed his master's message. She was quite frightened and she prayed to the Buddha; but she decided to accede to his wishes and mounted his horse. When dawn slowly came, it was possible to see each other's faces. When he gazed at her, he saw that she looked exactly like the woman whom he had deeply loved, but who had taken ill and passed away. He was delighted and took her home with him.

The gentleman was from the province of Mino and those around him held him in high regard. He was of considerable means and lacked for nothing. He was quite devoted to the lady and so they spent several years together.

Then one day he had to go up to the capital and so he told the lady, 'If you stay here, you will spend the days forlornly on your own. Aren't there people you are close to in the capital? Come up to the capital with me as I would like to explain to them all that has taken place.'

The lady did not have a single relative in the capital, but she felt that she could not very well tell him the truth. So she set off with him, saying, 'I used to have one older sister. Let's go to see her.' The gentleman then arranged for many gifts to be taken with them for her sister.

When they finally entered Kyoto through the Awata entrance, the lady's heart was in a turmoil. She thought sadly, 'I have told him baseless lies. If he finds out that I have lied, my life will become pointless. I also fear that the Buddha is looking at what I have done. What madness led me to tell such lies?'

When they reached the Sanjō district, she told her husband to wait while she asked after her sister's whereabouts there. She then approached a house that looked as if it belonged to someone of some means, for it had a gate that would allow a carriage to pass through. It seemed rather old and not at all noisy; indeed it appeared extremely quiet. She dismounted her horse, entered, and saw a young girl inside. On asking her whether her mistress was at home, the girl replied that she was indeed in and asked the lady to wait while she informed her mistress of the visit.

Then a lady of about forty years of age and clearly of some standing entered the room through the sliding door and asked her who she was. She replied,

'I feel considerable hesitation in speaking about this. For the last two or three years I have been in the provinces with my husband. When he decided to come to the capital, he asked me whether I had any relatives here and suggested that we stay with them. Would it be all right if I told him that this is my elder sister's house?'

The owner of the house assured her that this would not be a problem and asked her to go and tell her husband straight away. So the husband entered and had all the gifts that he had brought from home delivered to the lady of the house. After she had taken care of the visitors and made sleeping arrangements for them, there was a chance to talk.

The owner of the house then asked the lady to explain the situation to her, and she recounted her story from beginning to end. On hearing this tale, the owner started weeping copiously. The lady found this strange and questioned her.

The owner replied, 'The person whose robe was stolen at Hase was none other than myself. Things were not going well for me, so I was visiting Kannon to appeal to her pledge to save all human beings. But my circumstances remained unchanged. Then on top of that, when my robe was stolen, I could not help but feel resentment against the mean-spiritedness of human beings. And so after that I stopped visiting Kannon at Hase. Since then my life has become more impoverished. My husband passed away and I was at a loss as to what to do, for I realized that I would not be able to manage on my own. And now you have appeared, brightening the path of my future by bringing me all manner of gifts. On the one hand I feel that these gifts are a result of your extreme kindness, but on the other I believe they are gifts bestowed upon me by the Buddha himself. When I consider this, I cannot control my tears.'

On hearing this, the other woman also began to weep uncontrollably. Both of them cried together and there was no one there to console them.

They then both decided that it was indeed a karmic bond from a previous life that had brought them together, and they pledged with all sincerity to be real sisters to each other. Since the lady depended on her husband, she felt that there was no way she could deceive him and so she told him everything. He was deeply moved, and believed that this was all part of the Buddha's plan and hence quite profound.

Indeed, how moving are the depths of the mercy that Kannon bestows on us! Her mercy is without compare. When I was in China, I heard a story about a foolish man who tried to read the *Lotus Sutra*, but was unable to do so. Then an extremely beautiful lady appeared before him out of nowhere and became his wife. She stayed by his side and with great care taught him how to read. Once they had finished one section, she showed him her true form, that of the deity Kannon, and then she disappeared.

When we think about Kannon's rare mercy, it is extremely reassuring, for the thought that, at the time of our death, she will show us her deep mercy and welcome us on to the Lotus pedestal is indeed comforting.

2:6 How the Elder Brother of the Empress of China Became Destitute and Provided Succor to Those around Him.

When I was in China, I was told the following story. Long ago there lived the elder brother of the empress. He would quietly slip away and, with no particular destination in mind, would go off and live in all sorts of places. As he looked destitute and carried himself like someone of low birth, ordinary people could not tell that he was of royal blood.

In places away from the capital he experienced nothing but hardship and trouble. His younger sister, the empress, finally summoned him and entreated him in various ways, saying, 'From now on you should settle down quietly. I shall make all the necessary arrangements for you.'

Her elder brother would agree, but then, timing it so that no one would see him, he would slip away again, and this happened repeatedly. The empress felt that things were not going the way she wanted, and so she issued a royal declaration, which said that destitute folk wandering about homeless were to be given shelter, that arrangements were to be made for their food, and that they were to be treated with utmost kindness.

Thus, thanks to this one man, many destitute people escaped hardship and enjoyed happiness. His picture was painted and many people, feeling deep sympathy and respect for him, owned a copy. Those who did not have one would say, 'I wish somebody would come by to sell his picture. I would buy it straight away.'

I believe that this man's portrait showed him wearing a hat made of tree bark, with a bamboo stick in his hand and straw sandals on his feet. At that time, many destitute people in China wandered about suffering because they could not find any relief, even though they begged for it. And so this man took to living like these people in order to help them. Truly, he must have had a rare and compassionate heart. It is common in this world for people to make plans for the future, thinking that once their own material conditions improve, they will take pity on those who are in need.

The fact that, by contrast, this man was sincerely overcome with deep sor-

row and pity for the plight of others is truly impressive. I wonder which of the Pure Lands he must have been born into. I would dearly like to meet him.

2:7 How a Man from China Experienced Religious Awakening on Hearing the Laments of His Horse and Ox.

When I was in China, I was told that long ago there was a man of noble birth whose household was prosperous. One autumn night he climbed a tall cherry tree and gazed at the moon. The night was quiet, everyone was asleep, and there was not a single sound in the air. At that moment the horse and ox living on his estate began to talk to one another.

The horse said, 'Oh, I am full of sorrow and pain. I wonder for what past sin I am receiving such retribution! My master works me all day long. At night I ought to be able to sleep well, but because of the pain from the wounds inflicted on me by whips I am unable to sleep as I would wish. I think about how I will be worked on the following day and this prevents me from sleeping at night.'

The ox replied, 'Yes, I know, it is the same with me. What a sad and pitiful situation! Although I know that it is as a result of my deeds in a former life that I have been reborn as an ox, I cannot stop resenting my master deeply.'

When the master heard this conversation, his heart was filled with sorrow. Unable to calm himself, he related what he had heard to his wife and daughter.

He told them, 'I am planning to leave secretly tonight. If I continue to live here as in the past, my cruel deeds toward these animals will only pile up one on top of the other. In truth, wealth is man's greatest enemy. Casting away this house, I shall go to some quiet place where nobody lives, and I shall think about my life in the next world. Both of you should stay here.'

At this, his wife and daughter protested that, since they had no one else to depend on, they could not stay behind and entreated him to let them accompany him. The man agreed, and so the couple and the daughter left their home stealthily and went far away. They built themselves a suitable hut at the foot of a remote mountain, and made three bamboo baskets every day and sent the daughter out to sell them. And so the time went by.

One day no one bought the baskets and the daughter returned home forlornly. On the following day she set off with three more baskets, that day's quota, but again no one bought them. On the third day she set off with the previous days' baskets as well as that day's quota, all in all, nine baskets. Again no one bought them.

The girl thought sadly, 'The days are going by and if things continue in this way it will be hard for my parents to go on living. What should I do?'

Just as she was grieving thus, she found one thousand *zeni*. She tied the baskets to the string that held the coins together and, removing the *zeni* that would be the exact payment for her baskets, she left the rest of the money and the baskets there.

When she told her parents what she had done, her father was extremely surprised and said, 'What did you think you were doing, taking the money? It could have belonged to the parents of the person who dropped it, or it could have belonged to his or her master. If you had to take the money, you should have taken the equivalent of one basket. Would one person buy as many as nine baskets? I find it despicable that you should possess so tainted a heart. Go right back and tie up these coins to the string, and come back with only the baskets.'

The daughter went back and found that the money was just as she had left it. She put back the rest of the money and, taking the baskets, she returned home to find that both her mother and father were dead, their hands folded and their heads bowed down. She was deeply saddened and, feeling that it was pointless for her to continue living, she too passed away by her parents' side.

When I heard this story, I found it extremely moving. In truth, it is precisely with this kind of heart that we should follow the Buddha's Way. Alas, although we attempt to apprehend the Buddha's Path, our hearts are steeped in impurities and so we commit the crime of betraying the Three Treasures.⁴⁷ When I think of what will become of us in the next world, I am filled with sorrow and pity for our condition.

As for those three people from the past, I wonder what kind of bodhisattvas they have become. I wonder in which of the Buddha's Pure Lands⁴⁸ they are living. I pray that they may take pity on me and that my heart will become like theirs.

I was told that portraits of these three people were painted and sold. Everywhere in China, people are deeply moved by such things, even after those concerned have passed away. In our land of Yamato there is no one who would buy the portraits of such people. People who would paint such pictures and try to sell them are also hard to find.

2:8 How a Former Emperor Secretly Visited the Hut of the Former Royal Consort Kenreimon'in.⁴⁹

In the spring of the year Bunji 2 [1186], Former Emperor Go-Shirakawa wondered how the former royal consort Kenreimon'in, who had cast aside

⁴⁷ *Sambō* 三宝, that is, the Buddha, the Law, and the priesthood.

⁴⁸ The various buddhas were believed to reside in their own buddha lands. Amida Buddha was said to live in the Pure Land of Utmost Bliss (*gokuraku jōdo* 極樂淨土).

⁴⁹ This story bears a close resemblance to *Heike Monogatari*, Book 12, in which Former Emperor Go-Shirakawa 後白河 visited Kenreimon'in at Ōhara. Takagi Ichinosuke 高木市之助 et al., ed., *Heike Monogatari*, NKBT 33, Iwanami, 1970, pp. 429–40. The fact that there were written materials concerning this incident is mentioned by Keisei at the end of the story. Before receiving the tonsure, Kenreimon'in, 1155–1213, was known as Taira Tokuko 平徳子. She was the wife of Emperor Takakura and the mother of the infant Emperor Antoku 安徳. After the defeat of the Taira, she became a nun and lived at Jakkō-in in Ōhara.

worldly life and was living in seclusion, was faring, so he visited her in secret, deep in the night.

When the former emperor arrived at her place, he met an old nun of extremely humble appearance and he asked her where he might find Kenreimon'in. She replied that the lady had gone to the top of the mountain to pick flowers.

The former emperor was deeply moved and said, 'I realize that she has abandoned worldly life—but to perform such tasks herself!'

The nun answered, 'Since she has left home to become a nun, how could she not perform these kinds of religious observances? To enjoy for millions of years the pleasures of Tōriten⁵⁰ or the pleasures of deep meditation in Daibonten⁵¹—it is only through the power of such observances that we can enter these worlds. When we leave this ephemeral world and wish to be reborn into one of the Buddha lands, how can we not perform religious observances if we have abandoned secular life? It is precisely because the lady disregarded such religious observances in her past life that she met with such a sad fate.'

The former emperor's attendants remarked to one another that, although the old nun looked lowly, she spoke in a deeply affecting manner. The former emperor too was deeply moved.

Then when the former emperor looked into Kenreimon'in's dwelling, he saw that in one room there was a statue of Amida Buddha, to whom the lady had obviously offered flowers and incense. It seemed that she slept in another room, for it had some rough-looking clothes, a paper robe, and so on. Words from the sutras were written on the sliding doors, and it looked as if she had been reading the sutras at her desk. There were religious writings that could calm the heart; there were also pictures of the various hells and other things that were all in keeping with the lady's life. None of these objects bore any resemblance to the treasures that had surrounded her in the past, and, as he thought of this, the retired Emperor was deeply moved and saddened. Clearly everyone was greatly touched. Some of his attendants hid their faces in their sleeves; others turned their faces toward the walls and fell silent.

Just at that moment, two nuns came down from the top of the mountain. One was holding a basket of flowers and the other was carrying twigs that she had gathered for a fire. As they came closer, it was possible to see that the one carrying the basket of flowers was Lady Kenreimon'in. The nun carrying the twigs had been her lady-in-waiting in close attendance in the past. The former emperor and Kenreimon'in greeted each other from a distance and, shedding tears, expressed great surprise.

Then Lady Kenreimon'in approached and, joining the sleeves of her robes together, she greeted the former emperor formally. He talked about various things and said, 'What sad and painful events you must have been through.'

⁵⁰ 忉利天, also known as *Sanjūsanten* 三十三天, was located on top of Mt Sumeru (J. Shumisen 須弥山).

⁵¹ 大梵天, the Mahābrahman Heaven.

She denied this and told him, 'Why should my life be viewed as impoverished and sad? Indeed, the unfortunate events of the past have served as a means to lead me to the Buddha's Path. Often when I remember the past, I am unable to check my tears. Whenever I turned back after leaving the capital, I could not help but remember my home. But smoke rose all around me and I was so blinded with tears that I did not know where I was going. Such was my state, I could not tell mountains from rivers. When I reached the village of Yajima, all the people around carried bows and arrows. They were quite unlike the people I had seen in the past, for they had worn the silken robes of aristocrats.

'This place too became dangerous, and so we left Yajima, boarded a boat, and sailed on the seas with no particular destination in mind. From morning to night we were drenched in tears. Then suddenly some extremely frightening men came on to the boat. My mother⁵² took my son, Emperor Antoku, in her arms and jumped into the water. Others, holding up the imperial sacred jewels or the imperial sword, jumped into the sea and sank in the water, declaring that they would accompany the emperor. Those who were left behind either lost their lives before my very eyes, or else were captured and tied up by the enemy, who showed absolutely no mercy to anyone.

'This was the point at which, as I mentioned earlier, my mother, feeling that the time was ripe to enter the sea herself, put to her chest some warming stones and other things that would make her sink. Then she took Emperor Antoku in her arms. She first made him face Ise Shrine and offer obeisances, and then she made him pray in the direction of the west. At that time I too decided to enter the water.

'Just as I was about to jump in, my mother said, "From olden days it has been the custom that even in war, women are not killed. You must live on no matter what and pray for our future lives. The prayers that are offered by a parent or a child are bound to be effective. If you do not do this, who will pray for my future and that of the Emperor?"

'At this time the emperor himself seemed quite unaware of the situation. When I saw him there with his hair tied in loops at the sides, wearing his royal blue-grey robes, my heart sank with sorrow, and I never thought that I would live on to this day. But to save my mother and son, I became a nun and, not caring for my own life, I have devoted myself to prayer. How then could the buddhas and bodhisattavas ignore my prayers? This is why I firmly believe that the sad events of the past served as a means for my following the Buddha's Path.'

It was late at night and the moon began to sink. It was then, I believe, that

⁵² Although the text does not directly say who embraced Antoku and jumped into the sea with him, we can infer that the person was Kenreimon'in's mother as she asks Kenreimon'in to pray for her mother's future. This accords with the *Heike* version, in which Nii no Ama 二位尼, the mother of Kenreimon'in, accompanies Antoku to his death. *Heike Monogatari*, 2, p. 439.

the former emperor's attendants, who were also drenched in tears, left together with their master.

This description is to be found in some works that have recorded events in the life of Kenreimon'in. I came across them and found it hard to ignore them, and so I have written this down.

2:9 How a Noble Lady Serving at Court Displayed Her Impure Form.

Long ago there was a certain priest of high standing who fell in love with a lady-in-waiting of royal birth. He must have been unable to keep silent, for he fervently revealed his feelings and the depth of his heart to her.

The lady hesitated a while and said, 'Why do you torment yourself so? When I return home from the court, I shall certainly let you know.' The priest had thought that his interest in the lady was in no way out of the ordinary, but now his feelings quite surpassed those he had held for her before.

Not long after, the lady informed him that she had returned to her home and that she would be there that night. The priest made the necessary preparations and set off to meet her.

When he arrived, the lady appeared before him and said, 'What I wanted to say was so important that it could not be done lightly, and so I came back here.

'This body of mine is an indescribably smelly and foul object. The inside of my head is filled to overflowing with gray matter. Inside the skin, bones and flesh are coiled together. Blood and pus flow through the whole body, and there is not a single thing in the body that one would want to get close to. Despite this, I have somehow made this body appear attractive by decorating it and using all kinds of perfumes. If you were to see my true form, you would undoubtedly find it most repulsive and frightening. It was to tell you this in some detail that I invited you here to my home.'

The lady then called to one of her servants to bring in a light, which was burning bright red on a stand. She then removed the partition between them and showed herself to the monk. She said, 'This is what I look like. How can you bear to look at me?'

Her hair was standing up, extremely dishevelled like that of a demon. Her face, once so refined, was blue in some places and yellow in others. Her legs had lost their former color and were filthy. Her robes were covered here and there with blood, and smelled unbearably repulsive. She came forward and, weeping without restraint, continued her lament.

'What would happen if I stopped using cosmetics and adorning myself? If I no longer took care of my body and let it follow its natural course? Then both my physical form and my clothes would undoubtedly look like this. As you are a person who is closely associated with the Buddha's Way, I was afraid of showing you my false form, and so I have dropped all pretenses and showed you my real appearance.'

The priest was dumbfounded and, shedding tears, he told her, 'I have indeed met a true friend who has guided me to reform myself.'

I believe that he then hurriedly got into his carriage and left.

Truly this lady had a splendid and wise heart. Even nowadays, once people cast aside worldly life, they end up looking ugly and quite unlike their former selves, even though they may not appear so frightening as the lady in the story above. There was once a lady who saw her reflection in the water and committed suicide. This shows how much she must have been saddened at seeing the face that had become so unattractive that she could no longer show it to the world.⁵³

In the works recording information about the poetess Ono no Komachi,⁵⁴ we find that both her physical form and her clothes became such that they offended the eye. All the more so, then, if a woman who does not have a particularly lovely face does not dress well and make her face up, most certainly she will look no different from the hideous form that the noble lady took on to enlighten the priest. It goes without saying that when we stop breathing and our bodies grow cold, as the nights and days pass, our skin disintegrates, pus flows, sinews melt, the flesh falls apart. This is something we should carefully contemplate after calming our mind.

2:10 How a Certain Lady of High Birth Made a Request to the Buddha Shakyamuni.

This happened not so long ago. Owing to certain circumstances, I came to know slightly a certain lady of high birth. One day I heard that she had been taken ill. I was deeply saddened by the news, but thought that it would not be a good time for me to visit her. There were, for example, several taboos that had to be observed, and so I hesitated about going to see her.

Several days passed, and then I heard that there would no longer be any impediment to my visiting the lady, and so I went to her home. She had greatly changed and seemed extremely weak. There was a statue of the Buddha Shakyamuni on the other side of the curtain on the west side of the room, and a five-colored string has been placed in his hand.⁵⁵

When I saw this, I said to her, 'Of course, I too pray to be born in Buddha's Land. Which of the Pure Lands do you wish to be born into?'

⁵³ This story appears in *Yamato Monogatari*. Sakura Atsuyoshi 坂倉篤義 et al., ed., *Taketori Monogatari, Ise Monogatari, Yamato Monogatari* 竹取物語, 伊勢物語, 大和物語, NKBT 9, Iwanami, 1962, pp. 326–27.

⁵⁴ Ono no Komachi 小野小町 was a famous poet of the early Heian period. It is impossible to recover the historical woman from the legends that grew around her (see Sarah M. Strong, 'The Making of a Femme Fatale: Ono no Komachi in the Early Medieval Commentaries', in MN 49:4 [Winter 1994], pp. 391–412). She was depicted as a woman of passion, but by the Kamakura period there were many stories suggesting that she came to a sad end.

⁵⁵ In the Pure Land school, the image of Amida welcomed aspirants to the Pure Land by offering them a five-colored string by which they would be lifted up to paradise.

At this she replied, 'I have grown accustomed to praying for the Pure Land of Ryōjusen,⁵⁶ and so that is where I would like to be reborn.'

Now when I think about it, this Pure Land is not one that most people pray for. But did not all the buddhas without exception pledge to lead human beings to enlightenment? It goes without saying that among them the Buddha Shakyamuni, the Original Teacher, is especially worthy of praise. According to the interpretation of the Tendai master Chih-i,⁵⁷ the Pure Land of Ryōjusen is the place here on earth where the bodhisattvas dwell. Then again, this is also known as the place where ordinary, deluded human beings live together with the enlightened ones; it is the Pure Land where both live together.⁵⁸ Since this is where ordinary deluded human beings occupy a central place, it is surely not difficult for us to be reborn there.

In our times, India has become a place where the grasses and trees have grown thick and unruly.⁵⁹ Even if you receive the life of a low-born and poor person on Mt Ryōju, that is satisfactory because *Hōjū no Ki* says, 'Among the sixteen arhats, you will receive the blessings of the fifteenth arhat Ajita, together with the fifteen hundred other arhats who keep him company.'⁶⁰

As this is the case, we ought to reflect on the fact that, once we have received the teachings from these arhats, we will overcome the delusion in our hearts and our hearts will be inclined toward enlightenment.

No matter which Pure Land we pray for, the Buddha Shakyamuni was a great teacher all his life and so we must without fail pay obeisance to him. If we reflect on this calmly, we will understand that the Original Teacher, the Buddha Shakyamuni, came to this tainted world for the sake of us shameful creatures and preached the teachings of the Great Vehicle and the Lesser Vehicle.⁶¹ Even now, after he has passed away, he teaches us the Dharma in a variety of ways. Despite this, as soon as we gain some understanding of his teachings, we begin to seek for rebirth in this or that Pure Land and put aside his teachings. I cannot help but wonder how we can do this.

Whenever I think about how rare and noble was the Buddha Shakyamuni, I find myself uncontrollably shedding tears. If you turn to *Hikekyō*⁶² and read the details of the Buddha's pledge, you will find the following words:

⁵⁶ Ryōjusen 靈鷲山, or Vulture Peak, where Shakamuni preached.

⁵⁷ Chih'i 智顗, 538–597, systematized Chinese T'ien T'ai (J. Tendai) teachings with a philosophy based on the *Lotus Sutra*. Keisei refers here to his *Hokke Mongu* 法華文句.

⁵⁸ Chih-i is here expounding the doctrine of non-duality (*funi ittai* 不二一体). All elements that manifest themselves are in no way distinct from Ultimate Reality. The world of phenomena and the world of enlightenment are identical, and so there is no difference in locus between the two worlds.

⁵⁹ In the Kamakura period, it was widely believed that the holy places in India associated with the Buddha were suffering neglect and decay.

⁶⁰ According to *Hōjū no Ki* 法住記 (the abridged title of *Dai-Arakan Nandai Mittara Sho Settsu Hōjū Ki* 大阿羅漢難提蜜多羅所說法住記), at the time of Shakyamuni's death, the arhats (J. *arakan* 阿羅漢 or *rakan*) vowed to uphold and protect the Dharma.

⁶¹ The Mahayana and Hinayana teachings.

⁶² 悲華經 (T. 157) celebrates the compassion of the Buddha Shakyamuni.

I have taken on and revealed myself in different forms to teach the Dharma to human beings. If after their death they were to fall into the three evil realms, unable to be reborn into my Pure Land, I would lose each and every one of the teachings that I had learned in order to gain enlightenment, and all the merit that I had accumulated through good deeds would be reduced to naught.

He also pledged the following:

As for those people who commit the five deadly sins⁶³ and through their deeds fall into the hell of everlasting pain, I shall receive their pain on their behalf and will make sure that they can make a karmic connection with all the buddhas. I will ensure that they enter the kingdom of Nirvana.

Just reading these words is truly a remarkable experience. After taking the pledge of a bodhisattva, the Buddha sacrificed himself innumerable times and lost his life. The merit that he accumulated he wasted on worthless beings such as ourselves. Even talking about this fills me with shame. Is it not terrible? We do our utmost to make ourselves bad and thus cause great grief to the Buddha Shakyamuni. This crime is indescribable. As it is explained in the sutras, 'Everything, even governing the country and looking after the people, comes from discerning the Buddha's wisdom and is a gift; it is his benevolence that he gives to us.'⁶⁴ And so there is no act that exists on its own, independent of the Buddha's kindness.

Unfortunately we spend our lives looking at ourselves in a mirror and giving ourselves visual pleasure. We fall in love with the attractive figure we see reflected on the water's surface. Is this not so because the Buddha takes on all our pain, and places our reflections on the water's surface in such a way that they will not drown? Take the case of warriors advancing, quickly pulling out arrows from their quivers, and soldiers waving their swords, proclaiming their names, and slaying their enemies. It is solely due to Buddha Shakyamuni's power that they have become what they are. They have floated up into this world from the lower realms and have taken on the form of human beings. When we think about this, it is clear that the Buddha's mercy is everywhere. If we continue to think about it and are sometimes filled with feelings of thankfulness toward the Buddha, it will be the first step toward understanding His mercy.

As we continue to live in this world and think in this way, how can we possibly consider this noblewoman's deeds in any way inadequate? I pray that those who read about this lady will think about the principle underlying her deeds.

It is only because of the Buddha that we have received birth in this world and are able to discern good from evil. How then can we possibly think of Him lightly? In olden times the famous priests from India and China spread out the

⁶³ *Gogyakuzai* 五逆罪, that is, killing one's father, killing one's mother, killing a saint, injuring the body of a Buddha, and causing disunity in the Buddhist order.

⁶⁴ Source unknown.

winds and lay down in the clouds,⁶⁵ spending their lives untainted by the dust of the secular world. How much greater, then, were their opportunities for truly understanding the Buddha Shakyamuni!

When a person lives alone in a small hut in the depths of the mountains, it is as easy for the heart to bend to the Buddha's teachings as it is for the grasses to sway in the breeze. But if that person leaves these surroundings and mingles in the secular world, so full of pain and trouble, then it is hard to calm the heart, just as the reflection of the moon that does not stay still on the waves.

When we are somehow able to calm both the body and the mind, then without any effort we will be able to be enlightened with regard to the Buddha Shakyamuni.

After leaving the noble lady's house, I could do nothing but recite the name of this Buddha. I could not help but remember how long ago Buddha's disciple, the Venerable Mokuren,⁶⁶ got lost while he was in a distant land and so he called out to the Buddha. The sound of his voice carried across the vast distance and reached the place where the Buddha was. At this, one of his disciples, the Venerable Anan,⁶⁷ asked who was calling out the revered Buddha's name. The Buddha replied that it was Mokuren who, having lost his way, was calling out to him. When I thought of this, I did not doubt that Shakyamuni, dwelling in the skies of Mt Ryōjū, would hear our voices reciting His name. I felt sure that what Shakyamuni and Anan would say would in no way be different from what they had said about Mokuren.

When we think seriously about this, we realize that even the snakes that live in the grasses and are so feared could in one of their past lives have been people such as us. These snakes may well be those beautiful women who painted their eyebrows like willows, the sight of whom puts the color of spring to shame;⁶⁸ or women whose perfume puts the four directions to shame and from whom men are reluctant to part. Yet is it not really sad that when foolish people like us see snakes, we are frightened and start running away?

Depending on their inclinations, human beings will love a particular thing and then on another occasion be fearful of it. How utterly beautiful those around her must have found the wife of Emperor Wu Ti. But after her death she became a big serpent and expressed her grievances to the emperor.⁶⁹ From now on I will not keep serpents and even earthworms away from me, nor will I look at them as creatures that have nothing to do with me. They could well be

⁶⁵ A popular metaphor for the life of a recluse living deep in the mountains.

⁶⁶ 目連, one of the ten disciples of the Buddha.

⁶⁷ 阿難, a cousin and one of the ten disciples of the Buddha. After the Buddha's death, Anan is said to have recited his sermons, which were later compiled as a collection of sutras.

⁶⁸ A Japanese rendering of a Chinese conceit. Eyebrows like willows were a metaphor for a beautiful woman.

⁶⁹ The wife of Emperor Wu Ti 武帝 is said to have appeared in his dreams after her death. The fact that she is supposed to have been reborn as a snake indicates that she was intensely jealous of the emperor's concubines.

parents or lovers from one of our remote former lives. All the more so, the Buddha treats the myriad living creatures equally like his children; he loves and shows mercy to them. And so if we consider them as bearing no relationship to us, it would be like distancing ourselves from the Buddha's heart.

These various thoughts crossed my mind. I wished to write about the Buddha Shakyamuni, and so I am indeed pleased that the story of the noble lady who prayed to be reborn in Shakyamuni's Pure Land has served as an opportunity to do so.

2:11 How a Young Girl of Higashiyama Attained Rebirth in the Pure Land.

This event probably took place quite recently. There was a woman of low birth, about twenty-two or twenty-three years of age, who worked for a priest at Higashiyama. One day she fell sick during an epidemic and was bed-ridden. Without taking a moment's rest, she constantly recited the nembutsu. The master found this devotion particularly moving as she was a woman of low standing. One evening the woman said, 'I am going to die tomorrow at the hour of the tiger.'⁷⁰ Please keep watch over me and do not blow out the lamp.'

The master replied, 'Even those who perform the most rigorous of Buddhist practices are unable to predict their own end and this is a source of great distress to them. And so I find it hard to believe what you say. What proof do you have for your claim?'

The woman answered, 'When I went shopping for you, I would mingle with people in the marketplace, and what with one thing and another, it took up a lot of time. Still, for the past seven or eight years I have not missed saying the nembutsu thirty thousand times every day. I have done this not to gain benefits in this world, but simply to have an undeluded mind at the moment of death, as this is necessary for rebirth in the Pure Land.

'Owing to my constant recitation, an extremely impressive-looking person appeared before me and instructed me thus. "At the hour of the tiger, I shall come for you. Do not be distressed by this." '

That night the master of the house did not sleep and kept watch over the woman. She counted the hours of the rat and the ox announced by the conch horn,⁷¹ and then realized that her hour had come. She arose and, lifting her voice, recited the nembutsu ten times, after which she stopped breathing. Everyone found this an extremely moving occurrence.

People of such low rank normally do not even think of things beyond this life, and merely grieve or rejoice over momentary things. The fact that this woman could have adhered to the practice of reciting the nembutsu every day without failing even once, must surely have been the result of her karma in this life as

⁷⁰ Between 3.00 a.m. and 5.00 a.m.

⁷¹ From 11.00 p.m. to 3.00 a.m.

well as of her former lives. I wonder if she had established karmic bonds with the people who lived in Mujōnen's kingdom?⁷²

But in the case of this woman, she did not understand the nembutsu practice deeply, nor did she rely on it totally. Still, I think that she thought of it as a good friend. Whenever her heart felt calm and untroubled, she would quite unconsciously recite the name of the Buddha. Whenever she heard or saw something sad and pitiable, she would find herself, first and foremost, reciting the nembutsu. Her bond with the Buddha from all her previous lives must indeed have been really strong. This is why the Tendai master Chih-i explained, 'There is an absolute karmic bond between the Buddha Amida and the most wicked of ordinary human beings.'⁷³

On hearing the story of the lowly woman, I would earnestly like to make the following request to her. I pray that when I finish my life in my straw hut in this ephemeral world and bid farewell forever to the pine doors, she will follow the traces of my brush with which I have written this story quite imperfectly, and return without fail to form a karmic bond with me and welcome me to the Pure Land.

If we follow, however inadequately, the accounts of eminent priests who have attained enlightenment, then no matter what kind of religious practice we may pursue, our hearts will be clear of all impurities. When the wind blows, when the waves rise, at all times we must calm our hearts and think of the great figures that appear in the biographies. We should regard them as close friends who will lead us to the Pure Land. Among these, you will find that, from ancient times, many lived by the sea or in the plains. But living in the depths of the mountains is particularly conducive to ridding the mind of impurities. If we read about the great religious personages of India and China, we discover that many of them lived deep in the mountains.

I cannot be counted among these great men, but even someone as wretched as myself has made the wind rustling in the pine trees my friend. I have become intimate with the white clouds. Sometimes in the evening when the wind blows through the young leaves, I gaze at the color of the desolate moon; at other times at dawn, I listen to the cries of the lonely monkeys in the tall pines, or else I listen to the rain lashing at the window as if it were questioning me. At other times I befriend the storm that blows ever more violently over the mountain peaks; I get accustomed to it and control my tears as I stand by the window of my hut. As I meditate seated on the floor, somehow my heart becomes clear of all impurities and this becomes my source of pleasure in this life.⁷⁴

⁷² 無常念, a king in the country called Sansairan. According to *Hikekyō*, he and his thousand children aspired to enlightenment; he later became Amida and his children became Kannon, Seishi, and other buddhas and bodhisattvas.

⁷³ Source unknown.

⁷⁴ This passage is reminiscent of Kamo no Chōmei's description of his recluse life in *Hōjōki*. Miki Sumito 三木紀人, ed., *Hōjōki, Hosshinshū*, Shinchōsha, 1976, pp. 31–32. When writing *Kankyo no Tomo*, Keisei seems to have been deeply conscious of Chōmei's work. At the end of the first story in Volume 1, for example, he sets out to distinguish his own work from Chōmei's *Hosshinshū*. For an analysis of his connections with Chōmei, see Harada Kōzō 原田行造,

Even if we do all this without thinking of it as religious practice, it will work toward our salvation. And so, simply entertaining the heart with these activities is surely not a bad thing. When we are by the seashore, we let our hearts be cleansed by the waves; when we hide ourselves in the depths of the valley, we let our minds be purified by the winds blowing through the pines on the mountain peaks. Even if we do not think that doing all this is for the sake of the next life, surely it must serve to cleanse the mind. It goes without saying that if we turn our thoughts to the Buddha's Path, keep at arm's length people who are tainted, do not get involved in things of this fleeting world, lead our lives without being sullied by the dust of the secular world, then there is no reason why all this would not be a good thing.

Alas, in this gossamer-like world we are absorbed in gaining a name for ourselves, even though it is something merely temporary. We spend a long night of delusion and are bound by the shackles of sexual love, which is no more than a fabrication; we aimlessly use up the good karma of having been born human as a result of following the five precepts⁷⁵ in previous lives. All this is truly saddening. Thus we sleep the deep sleep of ignorance, and even though we do not consider the world a wonderful place, we pass our yesterdays pointlessly and our todays too go by forlornly.

But it is at nightfall that the same temple bells that we have heard before, begin to sound sad and, unable to stop shedding tears, we suddenly experience religious awakening. Although we lament because we want to stay forever in this state of enlightenment, achieved through the aid of the Buddha, it is hard to sustain this state of awakening. This is why we pass through many cycles of births and deaths, and our hearts become attached to our bodies. Thus we spend our days. Is this indeed not sad and foolish?

I pray that the Buddha Shakyamuni, the Buddha Amida, and all the buddhas of the four directions, remember their original pledge to save all human beings, and that they shower their compassion on us.

I began to record this work in two volumes, but my style is poor and my knowledge insufficient. So I spent my time forlornly and the days passed by fruitlessly. Ashamed, I cast my inkstone aside. But as I have been requested to pick up my brush again and finish writing, I have done so, not heeding any of the criticism I may receive.

I pray that the person to whom I am offering this work reads it with compassion, keeps it within her merciful heart, and does not show it to anybody else. I have finished recording this work in the middle of the Third Month in the spring of Jōkyū 4 [1222] in my ten-foot-square thatched hut on the peak of Mt Nishiyama.

'*Kankyo no Tomo ni okeru Keisei no Chōmeikan: Sono Seiritsu Ishiki no Nagare wo Megutte*' 閑居友における慶政の長明観:その成立意識の流れを巡って, in *Setsuwa Bungaku Kenkyū* 説話文学研究, 8 (June 1973).

⁷⁵ *Gokai* 五戒: not to kill, steal, commit adultery, lie, and drink intoxicants.