

of recognition and success, Gennai began to show signs of psychological deterioration. In 1779, during a fit of madness, he killed a disciple with a sword and died in prison later that year.

ROOTLESS WEEDS (NENASHIGUSA, 1763)

In 1763 the popular *onnagata* (woman's role) kabuki actor Ogino Yaegiri drowned while pleasure boating on the Sumida River. In Gennai's *Rootless Weeds*, which gives a comic twist to this incident, Enma, the king of hell, falls in love with a picture of Segawa Kikunojō II (d. 1773), an *onnagata* kabuki actor, and tries to summon him to hell—a satire of the scandalous infatuation by Mizoguchi Naonori, a castle lord from Echigo, with the real Kikunojō. Following orders from the dragon god, who has been asked by Enma to find Kikunojō, a *kappa* (water spirit) takes the shape of a young samurai and manages to become intimate with Kikunojō while he is pleasure boating, but in the end Ogino Yaegiri jumps into the water, sacrificing himself for Kikunojō.

Gennai was influenced here by witty *mitate* (superimposition) narratives such as *Tales of the Outrageous* (*Furachi monogatari*, 1755) in which hell bears the features of contemporary urban life, including a new licensed quarter. In *Tales of the Outrageous*, news of these excesses in hell reaches the Pure Land, causing Shakyamuni, the buddha, to subdue this world. Gennai used the hell narrative found in works like *Tales of the Outrageous*, wove in satiric sermons and debates, and provided a completely uninhibited description of society—all of which revolutionized the dangibon genre. *Rootless Weeds* offered readers not only an elegy to a stage star but also a vivid depiction of the diversity of contemporary urban life in Edo.

The passage, translated here, that describes contemporary life on the bridge at Ryōgoku on the Sumida River became a famous example of *haibun* (haikai poetic prose), a kind of *fu* (rhyme-prose) about a noted place. Gennai was a great satirist who believed that fiction (“lies”) should be used to reveal truth. *Rootless Weeds*, a metaphor for “books without foundation,” is a book of such “lies,” revealing the truth about contemporary Buddhist priests and bakufu-domain officials. It appeared during the period (1764–1787) dominated by Tanuma Okitsugu (1719–1788), a powerful official in the Tokugawa shōgunate who was known for his corrupt ways and for his lack of interest in censoring the various arts, including Gennai's books. The corruption and hypocrisy of the bakufu and daimyō are reflected in the behavior of Enma and the other officials of hell. *Rootless Weeds* was so popular that it was followed by *A Sequel to Rootless Weeds* (*Nenashigusa kōhen*) in 1769, generating debate about whether *Rootless Weeds* or Jōkanbō Kōa's *Modern-Style Lousy Sermons* was superior. In later years, *Rootless Weeds* had two important influences: it spawned narratives describing hell, and it inspired imitations of the “Hiraga style” (Hiragaburi), with its sharp satiric observations.

In Hell (chapter 1)

In ancient China, which none of us has ever seen, the wife of a drowned man expressed her unbearable grief in a poem³⁹ we still read:

Husband, don't cross that river!
But at last you waded out.
In the current you fall and die.
Ah, you, what shall I do?

And then in the Sixth Month of 1763, a kabuki actor of women's roles, Ogino Yaegiri, also went into a river and died. Conflicting rumors abound, and no one knows anything for certain about his drowning.



This woodblock print (ca. 1757) portrays Segawa Kikunojō II (1741–1773), a noted kabuki female impersonator, popularly known by his haikai name Rokō (written to

the right). Kikunojō appears here as a courtesan, holding a long tobacco pipe and wearing a kimono marked with the Segawa family crest and tied with a sash in front. The chrysanthemum and butterfly patterns on the robe allude to Kikunojō's alternative crest. Kikunojō became so popular that his style of tying a sash came to be known as the "Rokō knot" and was imitated by the women of Edo. A hokku, "Weary of a blizzard, the sight of a plum blossom in the cold" (*kanbai no / fubuki wo itou / sugata kana*), which praises Kikunojō, appears to the left, next to his name. The name of the ukiyo-e artist Ishikawa Toyonobu (1711–1785), known for his prints of beautiful women, appears next to Kikunojō's right foot. (Courtesy of the Tobacco and Salt Museum, Tokyo)

Careful inquiry shows, however, that Yaegiri was no Qu Yuan,⁴⁰ who indignantly wrote, "Could I let my pure whiteness be soiled by the world's dirt?" and then jumped in the Miluo River. Neither was he like the diver in the *nō* play *Fisherwoman* who lost her life retrieving a jewel from the Dragon Palace on the ocean floor. It all began in the other world, halfway between paradise and hell, at the court of the most august king Enma, supreme judge of newly dead souls. This great king rules over three thousand worlds, together with nine lesser kings and countless retainers who oversee numerous agencies and departments.

In the human world, warriors, farmers, artisans, and merchants all were very busy pursuing the separate occupations appropriate to each class. Enma's palace had once been a place of leisure, but now it, too, was bustling. In recent years human minds had been growing more and more twisted, and people were committing all sorts of crimes. The number of offenders Enma had to condemn to hell was rising daily, with no limit in sight, and the great king faced a crisis. There was no longer enough land left in hell as we had known it.

Profiteering developers and shady contractors took advantage of the land shortage and fought with one another to be first to present their petitions, privately meeting the officials in charge and gaining approval for their projects through flattery, fraud, and bribery. They searched along all the roads through the trillion buddha lands this side of paradise to find desolate, unused wasteland, and they cleared land at the very edge of hell, extending to the eggplant fields in the merciful bodhisattva Jizō's territory. Some contractors dug lakes hundreds of miles wide and boiled redwood dye in them to

make the water look like the steaming blood in the traditional hell, while others constructed artificial mountains and planted sharp seedlings on them to make them resemble the old Mountain of Swords which dead souls had to cross. Since there no longer were enough rank-and-file hell guards to pound and mash all the convicts in mortars, contractors built waterwheel devices to do the job, and in the Hell of Burning Heat they installed a large bellows.

To supplement the Hell of Shrieks, the Hell of Great Wailing, the Hell of Continual Dismemberment and Rememberment, the Hell of Hot Cables, the Hell of Unending Pain, and other traditional properties, the developers opened various new areas that they called Hells of Unlicensed Hookers.⁴¹ Claiming that the old woman by the River Between Worlds who strips newly dead souls of their last belongings couldn't possibly oversee all the new hells herself, the developers got officials to pardon and recall the old woman in Asakusa who cracked open visitors' heads, the old female demon who ate passersby in Adachigahara, the old woman moneylender in the Sakaichō theater district in Edo who rented out boys and female prostitutes dressed like traveling nuns, and all the other old women who had abused their sons' brides or hated their stepchildren.

As hell gradually expanded, the shady developers came to officials with still more petitions. "I would like to become a landlord in one of the new hell blocks," proposed one. "But the payments⁴² I get for manure from the houses of the hungry ghosts aren't going up at all. Those famished ghosts just aren't allowed to eat anything. So I beg you to raise the special seasonal tenant fees to two hundred coppers per festival." Another sought contracts to procure tongue-pulling tongs, iron cudgels, and fiery wagons. "And you won't need to order new cauldrons," he stated. "I can collect all the old abandoned cauldrons without bottoms in traditional hell and have them recast for you. I can also provide you with the wicks you force your convicts to use to try to dig up bamboo roots. If you let me buy up odd pieces from candle makers, your savings will be dramatic." The speculators knew even a very small project would eventually grow like a piece of dust into a whole mountain during the minimum of a million eons that hell would be around.

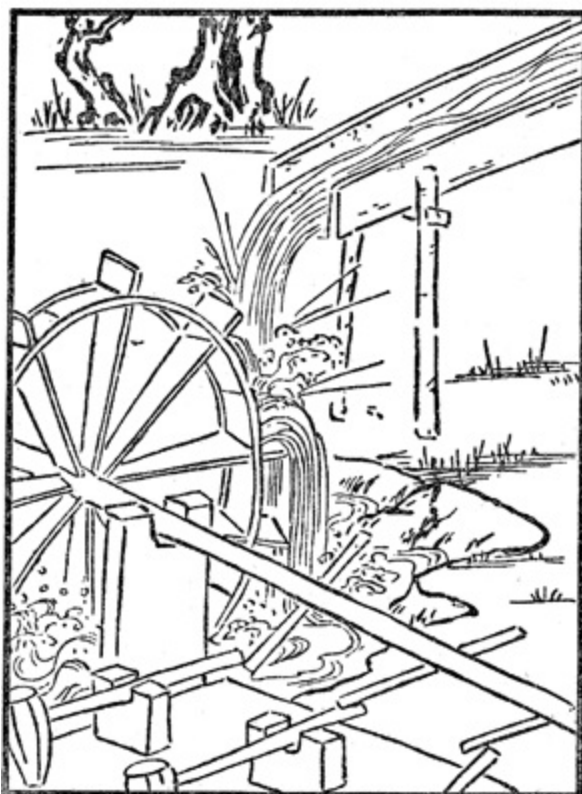
One entrepreneur asked to be granted a monopoly on handling clothes taken from the newly dead before they crossed the River

Between Worlds. In return, he guaranteed, whenever hell guards lost at dice, he would give them very low interest rates on the tiger-skin loincloths they pawned with him. “If implemented,” said petition after petition, “your benevolence will spread downward for the betterment of all hell”—as if the profits were for others. Even in hell, they say, money talks. It’s a very canny place.

King Enma was so busy making the final decisions on all these projects and other official matters that he no longer had any free time. One day some devil magistrates, preceded by guards holding up lanterns marked with the first character for “hell,” came to him with still another criminal. Gazing down from a distance, Enma could see the man was a Buddhist monk of about twenty. Pale and thin, he was in handcuffs and an iron collar. Tied to his waist was something wrapped in fine crepe.

“And what is his crime?” Enma asked.

The registrar god standing beside the throne walked out before the king. “This monk,” he said, “was an acolyte in a temple in Edo in the land of Japan in the southern sector of the universe. He fell helplessly in love with Segawa Kikunojō, a beautiful actor who plays young women’s roles in kabuki plays in Sakaichō, one of their theater districts. In order to buy private meetings and sleep with this actor, the monk stole money from his own master. Then he took all the scarlet brocade curtains from the sacred halls and statues. They ended up fluttering in a secondhand market! And then he caused the precious image of Amida Buddha carved by the holy man Gyōki⁴³ to manifest itself, surrounded by bodhisattvas and purple clouds, in the storehouse of a pawnshop. The monk loved the young actor much too much. He couldn’t keep his hips shut, things came out, and the situation went from bad to worse. Finally the other monks locked him in a room in the temple. The monk realized he could never meet Kikunojō again, and the actor’s soul didn’t come visit him in his dreams, so he fell very ill. His longing was too strong for his body, and he left the other world and came here. But even in his death throes he never forgot the actor’s picture. He still refuses to let go of it. That thing at his waist is a portrait of Kikunojō done by one of their leading artists, Torii Kiyonobu.



An official wearing double samurai swords and a developer inspect a newly installed apparatus in hell for mashing condemned souls. In Gennai's time, similar devices had actually been developed for hulling rice and crushing herbs. From the 1763 edition.



A dead acolyte monk is led directly to King Enma's court for judgment. Since it is a complex case, the acolyte is not being tried by the three magistrates sitting in the building (*upper right*).

"Just because the monk was young and hot-blooded doesn't excuse his crime of deceiving his master, who was like a father to him. Each of his crimes is written right here on this iron plate. On the other hand, all monks these days pretend to be pious but spend most of their time chasing women. Or eating duck meat, which they refer to as a 'god,' and onions, which they call 'Shintō priests.'⁴⁴ Compared with that, loving a young actor seems like a lesser crime. How about giving him an easier route over the Mountain of Swords? And he likes young men, so he must like pots.⁴⁵ How about letting him off with a soak in a boiling cauldron?"

Enma, outraged, answered in anger: "Most definitely not. His crime may look minor, but don't be deceived! I'm told something called 'male homosexuality' can be found all across the human world, and I absolutely cannot allow this kind of thing. The Way of the husband and wife is the natural harmonizing of yin and yang. This is as it should be. A man should never violate another man. It has long been so since the days of ancient China. The *Book of Documents* clearly warns, 'Do not keep company with loose boys.' After King Mu of Zhou loved the Chrysanthemum Boy Sage, people began to talk about the Chrysanthemum Seat.⁴⁶ There were others of that ilk as well, like Mi Zixia, loved by the duke of Wei, or Dong Xian, the favorite of a Han emperor, or the poet Meng Dongye, who loved another poet, Han Yu.⁴⁷

"They also appeared in Japan. While Saint Kōbō⁴⁸ was on a pilgrimage to India in the ninth century, he stopped along the Upper Liusha River in China and exchanged vows of love with Manjusri, the beautiful boy bodhisattva of wisdom. After that encounter, Manjusri became known in Japan as Rear End Monjushiri,⁴⁹ and Kōbō's name lives on in shame as the founder of the Way of Loving Young Men in Japan. And a well-known legend claims that the famous warrior Kumagai⁵⁰ pulled down his enemy, the fetching young Atsumori, and took him right there on the beach at Suma. As a boy, Yoshitsune⁵¹ was embraced by a mountain goblin. The ancient Buddhist holy man Zōga loved the young poet Narihira; Emperor Go Daigo had the boy Kumawaka; and the great warlord Nobunaga loved his page

Ranmaru. The famous monk Mongaku, who rebuilt the Jingo-ji temple in Takao, lost his head over the boy Rokudai. Later he was rebuked by the shōgun, Yoritomo, for suggesting that the shōgun replace the emperor, but he kept on plotting. Finally he was exiled, and his boy lover was executed. After that, whenever a human was punished for a bad deed that came to light later, people spoke of ‘the tail end arriving.’

“The reason so many men go to heal themselves in the hot springs at Kinosaki and Sokokura is obvious. They’re almost all homosexuals. The Chinese character for ‘hemorrhoids’ combines one part meaning ‘ailment’ with another meaning ‘temple.’ Perhaps that is because in ancient times, homosexuality was practiced only by Buddhist monks. But recently it’s been spreading beyond the temples. All kinds of men have begun to like it. It’s outrageous and the height of wickedness. Issue an order strictly forbidding homosexuality in the human world!”

Councillors repeated “Certainly, your Majesty” to this awesome command. All except Tenrin, the tenth of the ten kings and the manifestation of the merciful Amida Buddha. He walked out in front of Enma’s throne. “It is with the greatest trepidation,” he said, “that I ask Your Majesty to revoke a royal edict, yet if I did not speak my mind I would fill to bursting with my thoughts. As Your Highness has most excellently said, homosexuality is not harmless. Nevertheless, the harm it does is much less than that done by the love between men and women. These two different kinds of love should not even be discussed on the same day. Heterosexual love has a sweet taste to it, resembling honey, while homosexual love is light and uncloying, like water. It has a taste without taste⁵² that is hard to appreciate unless you experience it and enter into an extremely interesting state yourself. Your Majesty doesn’t know anything about loving young men, so he is like a connoisseur of saké who wishes to prevent others from entering rice-cake shops. Moreover, although it is only a rumor from the human world, there has been talk for some time about this Kikunojō’s being unbearably attractive. It would be a memorable experience just to see what he looks like, even if only in a portrait. For this proposal,” he pleaded, “I ask Your Majesty’s most generous understanding.”

“Different people,” Enma began, obviously displeased, “like

different things.' Whoever coined that phrase must have had you in mind. Yet your petition is earnest and impossible to refuse. Go ahead, look at the picture if you want. But I dislike looking at young men, so I'm going to close my eyes for as long as you have the picture out. Hurry. Quickly, quickly!"

After Enma had closed his eyes, they hung the portrait on one of the palace pillars. The young actor was as fresh as the early moon rising through willow branches in spring, as voluptuous as peach blossoms touched by morning haze. Everyone stood transfixed before his indescribably graceful form. The sounds of exclamations continued for some time.

In the human world, they say the most beautiful sight of all is a celestial woman descending through the sky, but that is only because the most distant things seem most attractive. In paradise, sky-flying women are as common as kites, and their fluttering robes might as well be squid legs. Heavenly women are so common that no one considers them beautiful. To compare Kikunojō with one would be to liken Enma's crown to a hungry ghost's loincloth. The actor was even more beautiful than he was reputed to be, beyond anything the kings or anyone else in the palace had ever seen. The eyes of the seeing-head demon glistened; the sniffing-head demon began to breathe hard;⁵³ and even the ordinary bull-headed guards and ox-headed torturers wagged the horns on their foreheads and exclaimed in wonder.

When the commotion did not subside, Enma opened his eyes in spite of himself and looked. He was overwhelmed by the actor's beauty. He had intended to laugh, but now he was staring as if in a trance, unmoving, the mere empty shell of himself. Suddenly he tumbled from his throne. His shocked attendants lifted him up again, and when he had finally returned to consciousness, he sighed deeply.

"Now, well, how embarrassing to have that happen in front of you all," he said. "When I saw the actor just now in the picture, he was so very refined, I was simply overcome. I lost my way, like the monk Henjō⁵⁴ when he saw a maiden flower. My, my, my. There have been some very famous beautiful women over the centuries, but none compares with this Kikunojō. He has Xi Shi's eyes, Komachi's eyebrows, Yang Guifei's lips, Kaguya-hime's nose, Feiyan's supple

waist, and Sotoori-hime's elegant way of dressing—all in one. People in Japan sing about shōguns' daughters who are like empress trees or young women being like mountain lilies or wild pinks, but next to this actor they're all just ordinary. Even cherry blossoms and full moons and graceful bodhisattvas can't equal this young man. No one like him will ever be born again, in either China or Japan. Therefore I hereby resign as supreme ruler of the afterworld. What's a precious throne worth when I can go to the human world and share a pillow with him?"

Enma's eyes were glazed, and light-footed with love, he began to leave the palace. Sōtei, third of the ten kings, ran out and grabbed Enma's sleeve. "Your Majesty's conduct," he said scowling, "is most unbecoming. If you abandon your position as supreme ruler of the afterworld and cohabit with humans simply because you feel attracted to one of them, there will be no one to oversee the governance of hell and paradise. And if there is no place where good and evil actions are judged, what doctrine can we use to rule the beings in the three thousand worlds?"

"If Your Highness stoops to buying young men, the gold dust covering paradise will soon belong to the Sakaichō theater district in Edo. No matter how much gold we had, it would never be enough. Later Your Majesty would come to regret what you'd done and be reduced to singing children's songs about money trees. We would have to sell everything, even the golden skin of Shak-yamuni Buddha, the don of all paradise, to scrap-metal dealers. And Jizō, the gentle bodhisattva who cares for dead infants, would become the laughingstock of children in the street, just like the monk Chōtarō in Edo. The sweet-singing heavenly kalavinka birds, why, they would end up in cages in freak shows beside Ryōgoku Bridge. The celestial flying women would be sold off to prostitution brokers; the old woman guarding the River Between Worlds would be reduced to hawking homemade laundry glue; and the guardian demons of Buddhism would have to use their muscles to carry riders in cheap palanquins. Hell and paradise would collapse in no time at all. Your Majesty is not too old to realize that.

"And supposing Your Highness does copy their latest styles and wears a short bat cloak and long dagger, ties your hair in a long topknot, smokes a silver pipe, and acts in a way that shows you're

looking for young men—no human man would ever agree to meet you, not with that face of yours. When Ichikawa Danjūrō II played Your Majesty in the kabuki play about Kagekiyo several years ago, the humans who saw him shuddered with fear. If Your Majesty tries to go out into the streets dressed like that, you will immediately arouse suspicion and be taken into custody. When the authorities question the local landlords about you, they could say Your Grace is Shakyamuni himself, and the block leaders could swear your Highness is the Great Sun Buddha Dainichi—but unless Your Highness has someone to vouch for him, they will surely put him in among the outcasts. It would be a miserable experience. If that prospect does not deter Your Majesty, then I, King Sōtei, will cut myself open right here before him. I await Your Majesty’s reply.” In the heat of his admonition, Sōtei struck the throne.

Then Byōdō, the eighth king, stood up quietly and came before the throne. “King Sōtei’s warning,” he began, “rivals that of Bi Gan, who reproached a Yin king and had his chest split open, or Wu Zixu, who had his eyes gouged out for cautioning the king of Wu, or Kiso no Chū ta, who reprimanded his lord Yoshinaka and then cut himself open. Recently Your Highness has become very stubborn. Once he makes a proclamation, he refuses to consider changing it. Counseling him is, as Mencius put it, like pouring a cup of water on a wagon-load of burning firewood. No matter how much advice we give, it has no more effect than wind on a horse’s ear or a bee sting on a cow’s horn. It would not show Your Majesty’s wisdom as supreme ruler of all hell and paradise to abandon his position like a reckless young human male simply for the sake of this beautiful Kikunojō, who looks like a man and a woman in one body. If Your Highness absolutely must see him, then send a royal messenger to fetch him for you and bring him here. Could there be anything wrong with that? What do you all think?”

Everyone agreed that King Byōdō’s counsel made excellent sense and was worth heeding. Unable to resist any longer, Enma reluctantly approved the plan. And so the deliberations turned to choosing who would abduct Kikunojō. . . .

In the remainder of the chapter, other kings offer various badly thought-out plans.

Finally it is decided that Kikunojō should be kidnapped while he is boating. The head dragon god, who rules over the element of water, is made responsible for capturing Kikunojō and is called before Enma, who sheepishly asks the dragon to bring him the young man. Then Enma declares an amnesty and decrees the legality of all the male entertainment and prostitution districts in Edo, although it is made a crime for anyone but Enma to go near Kikunojō.

The second chapter reconstructs the history of kabuki, presenting its origins in the performances of the gods. The society of the gods is thrown into chaos and darkness when the sun goddess goes into a cave and stays there. At last she is lured out by her desire to see a superb kabuki performance in which women's roles are played by female gods. "After kabuki became all male, the first male actors who played women's roles grew up thinking and speaking like women, even believing they suffered women's ailments. Acting women's roles is the most difficult kabuki art, and actors do not measure up to the earlier high level. Only Segawa Kikunojō II has both the artistry and the physical beauty to play young women on the stage as they should be played."

The third chapter takes place at the bottom of the sea, in the palace of the head dragon god, one of eight described in the Lotus Sutra. The dragon is presented as a daimyō ruling over the water domain who has received a supreme order from the shōgun-like king, Enma. "When the dragon lord asks for volunteers to fetch Kikunojō, numerous sea creatures, resembling domain elders, advisers, and administrators, offer various ingenious and learned excuses for avoiding the responsibility and not going. The dragon lord grows very angry until finally a lowly kappa water spirit, who works in the palace guardhouse, volunteers." The spirits, who have the ability to capture humans, have hollows in the tops of their heads in which they carry water, allowing them to live out of the water for short periods, and they are known in legends for stealing humans' intestines. But the king also knows this reputation comes from their fondness for loving human males, making the water spirit a dangerous choice. The spirit, however, swears his absolute loyalty to his dragon lord and is given the honor of capturing Kikunojō, who has been persuaded by another actor, Ogino Yaegiri, to take an all-day pleasure boat ride on the Sumida River in Edo.

Ryōgoku Bridge (chapter 4)

The river flows ceaselessly, yet its water is never the same. So wrote Kamo no Chōmei⁵⁵ centuries ago. His brush and inkstone left behind deep thoughts that continue to be read. The pure water of the Sumida River, too, has from antiquity flowed between Musashi Province, which now includes Edo, and Shimōsa Province farther east. Ryōgoku, the Bridge Between Two Realms, is so named because it spans this border. A thousand years ago, when the area was rough frontier, the poet Narihira addressed a gull on the Sumida

as “capital bird”⁵⁶ and wept remembering Kyoto. But today boats pass each other constantly, numerous as floating autumn leaves, and Ryōgoku Bridge lies long across the water like a sleeping dragon.

On one bank of the Sumida the large drum of an acrobat show echoes up to the clouds so loudly that even the thunder god runs away in shame. In a riverside restaurant, cool thin white noodles are shaken dry⁵⁷ and heaped high as a snowy Mount Fuji on the Island of Tiny People. A mother with children holds up her wide, hanging sleeve so her children won’t see as they pass a sign advertising Long Life Ointment for lengthening men’s lovemaking. A cautious country samurai notices a man wearing a wide sedge hat suspiciously far down over his face and moves out of the man’s way, gripping the front of his robe and the purse inside. A smooth-talking juggler sends beans and saké bottles spinning up into the air, and a watermelon seller on the street curses a red shop-lantern nearby for stealing the fresh color from his slices.

The cries of insects! A salesman brings autumn early to the city in cages hanging from both ends of his shoulder pole. “Cup of water? Cold water!” A water seller calls from the shade of a willow, which, unlike the country willows that poets praise, has no clear stream running beneath it. A low voice chanting a puppet play in an impromptu reed-screen shed is drowned out by “Repent! Repent!” as passing pilgrims pour purifying water over their heads. A fragrance comes from Igarashi’s Hair-Oil store, followed by the smell of spitted eels broiled in soy sauce. People peep into boxes at moving stereoscopic prints, imagining they’re in other worlds, and the crowd around a glassblower wonders whether icicles have formed in summer. Potted trees revive and suddenly look fresh when a florist sprinkles water on them, while papier-mâché turtles hanging out for sale move in the wind and take on souls.

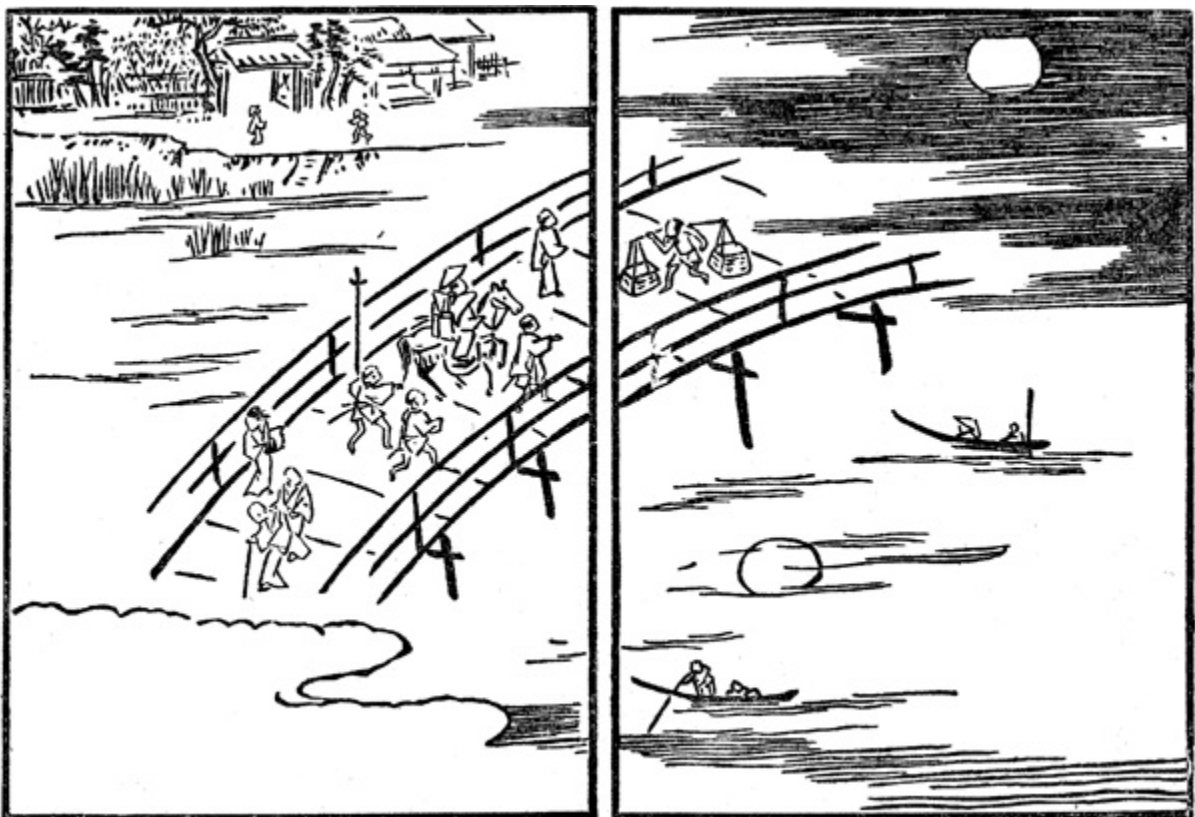
The soft tofu is salty; the jam-covered rice cakes are very sweet. The waitresses at the Kanbayashi restaurant have pinch marks on them, and the big second-floor room at the Wakamori hums with sounds of eating and entertainment. It won’t be long until the Feast of Souls, and the sellers of lanterns for greeting returning souls are doing a brisk business, amid shouts for more saké to go with shad sushi. Colorful crests cover the sliding door of a hairdresser’s shop, and the kettle in a riverside teahouse has been scrubbed until it

shines. From a makeshift hut comes the high voice of a man reading and commenting on classical tales; from the street, a sharp “Eggs! Eggs!” and a candy seller’s voice even sweeter than his wares and then the country accents of a man peddling nutmeg throat lozenges. Coral formations decorate a toy shop selling dyed shell noisemakers. Nearby, large kernels of baking corn bulge like sharkskin.

The booming of the evening bell at the temple for the nameless abandoned dead reminds people of their mortality, and profligates finally feel the sting in the writings of the raconteur Buddhist preacher Jōkanbō. Horses neigh in the water, taking stunt riders across the river, while in teahouses nearer the temple unlicensed hookers called “wildcats” go discreetly upstairs with monks and pilgrims. For a copper you can buy a turtle and set it free: grateful, it will grant you long life, and your chances in the next world will improve, too. Hired monks, legs moving for coins, trek to the temple to the bodhisattva Kannon to say others’ prayers. A father buys a fishing pole, his face as contented as the ancient sage Taigong Wang, while his daughter compares herself with a famous beauty depicted in a woodblock print and frowns as deeply as the unlucky Han court woman Wang Zhaojun when she studied a portrait of her that the painter hadn’t touched up. Bats forage the sky for mosquitoes, and on Earth, streetwalkers try to stop men. “Need a boat?” “Need a boat?” Calls from boatmen cross the water. On the bank, palanquin carriers wait for riders.

Monks mix with ordinary people and men with women, while gawking country samurai serving at the Edo mansions of domain lords mingle with stylish commoners wearing the latest long combs and short capes. The attendant of a lord’s son carries a glass goldfish bowl, and a woman-in-waiting follows a lord’s wife, dangling a brocade pipe sheath. A chambermaid’s thighs rub as she pulls her behind after her, and a low-ranking samurai who hires himself out to big mansions looks like he’s stabbing himself as he walks awkwardly with pretentiously long swords. The man over there seems to be a popular doctor, and that man trying to look very elegant must be a haikai linked-verse master. The amorous-looking woman pulling her sleeves stiffly away from the men who tug on them looks like a professional dancer who already has a lover, and that other stiff

woman with an amorous look on her face must be a maid looking for love on a rare day off from the women's quarters in Edo Castle. And over there are the smooth body motions of a master swordsman; the steady movements of the bearers of a large palanquin; the relaxed humming of a blind masseuse who knows exactly where he's going; the two-colored formal robes of a merchant who sells to great lords; the old, ripped divided skirts of an unemployed samurai; the loose, light cape of a retired man; the leisurely strides of kabuki actors; the clipped motions of artisans; the long topknots of construction workers; the loose sidelocks of farmers, hunters coming, and woodcutters going.



On the left in this two-part view of the Sumida River, Ryōgoku Bridge is crossed by commoners and a lord with a spear carrier, while on the right, a full moon rises above the Sumida River at a quieter location downstream, described later.

So many different styles and customs, and such diverse faces, in crowds too dense to push through—has Edo emptied the houses of the provinces? Dirt and dust rise, filling the air as if the world's clouds formed here. They say you can always see at least three minor lords with spear bearers crossing the bridge, but that must

refer to ordinary times. From the middle of summer until early fall, when people come to the Sumida River to cool off, there are always at least five to ten minor lords with spear bearers crossing the bridge. The banks of the Kamo River in Kyoto by Fourth Avenue are also famous as a place to cool off and are very lively, but compared with Ryōgoku, they're like one of those young men with thin sidelocks you hire as an attendant.

Amid all the Ryōgoku sounds, a samurai footman listens, enraptured, to an outcast woman playing her shamisen and chanting a puppet play for coppers in the street. He's fallen in love with her and forgets gate-closing time at his lord's mansion. A man follows a woman's backside, works his way ahead through the crowd, turns, and glimpses her face—to his regret. Another man praises a pretty woman, but her friend behind her smiles sweetly back at him. Fireworks shoot up from tubes on the Tamaya boats into marvelous patterns, while the Kagiya crew, on other boats, tries to steal the night with an ingenious new program. People look up and exclaim, and when a shooting star cluster bursts and hangs above the river, the crowd on the far bank surges noisily onto the bridge, trying to get closer. From vending boats below come "Baked bean curd sake!" "High-class sake!" The drooling man in that boat looks like the Tang drunk Ru Yang, and over there's the poet Li Bo throwing up. Liu Ling, a hard-drinking sage of the bamboo grove, empties his purse completely, and the red-cheeked elf Xing-xing throws up even the hot wine-absorbing stone in his stomach.

There are tea-vending boats, flat-bottomed ferries, fast one-passenger boats, boats with awnings, and, here and there, large, roofed pleasure boats. The elegant *Yoshino* is decorated with a cherry blossom design; the *Takao* flutters with the scarlet sleeves of dancers; and the *Ebisu* rocks with the laughter of merchants. On the *Daikoku*, monks rendezvous with mistresses, and the *Hyōgo* carries a whole island of fish in a sea of sake. Kotos mingle with shamisens, stately kabuki music with lively pieces, finger counting with *shōgi* chess, imitations of actors' gestures with vocal impersonations. From one boat comes quiet, soulful kabuki background chanting. On another, people are singing so loudly to shamisens and drums that even the boatman quickens his oar to the rhythm. Elsewhere people hit hanging gongs and large drums to the music of the Gion Festival

or bang without reverence on Buddhist hand gongs and cymbals. Every kind of boat and raft is here, even foul-smelling freighters taking human manure from the city to farmers in the north and east. Such prosperity can surely be found only in Edo.

One of these large pleasure boats had been rented for the day by Kikunojō. With him rode Ogino Yaegiri, Kamakura Heikurō, and Nakamura Yosahachi, and other kabuki actors, who were drinking and performing and generally making a great commotion on board. Actors play the shamisen and chant passages from puppet plays as naturally as scholars give lectures, retired people chant sutras, rice pounders shoulder pestles, or carpenters carry adzes in their belts, and other boats gathered around to watch and listen. It resembled cherry blossom viewing, when even those who drink quietly have a nice time just wandering around, watching other people sing and dance. Reserve was as pointless as a lantern under a full moon. The actors weren't performing for the boats around them, and the onlookers felt relaxed and free.

The group of boats anchored first in one place, then another. Finally the actors decided to go somewhere quiet, and they had their boat row downstream to Mitsumata. To the south, they could see the Sumida entering the bay and then the sea, although it was hard to tell exactly where the clouds met the sea at the horizon. In the middle distance, sails were gliding like butterflies, and farther away, ships dotted the mouth of the bay between Awa and Sagami as if brushed in ink in a single flowing stroke. To the west, the actors could barely make out Hakone, Ōyama, and other low mountains, but above them the peak of Mount Fuji was clearly visible. It was the hottest time of year, and Fuji had been bare at noon, but summer snow lay on it now, just as in an ancient poem.⁵⁸ Closer by, the actors saw nothing but houses and early evening smoke trailing up from the people's cooking stoves. Once the wide Musashino plain had been covered with high grass, but now it was covered with human dwellings, and the moon rose and set beyond house eaves. People making their way along streets and roads looked like ants on their errands, and the actors felt as if they'd entered the realm of Daoist sages. Suddenly they found themselves beating for joy on the sides of the boat.⁵⁹ Then they began to sing very softly. Someone said dust was scattering in delight from the boat's roof beams and

clouds were wavering in the sky,⁶⁰ and everyone felt extremely good. Incense was lit, and they enjoyed it in silence. Then they decided to get into dinghies and go look for small freshwater clams on the shore of Nakazu.

“I’m writing a hokku now,” Kikunojō told the others. “I want to finish it here. I’ll catch up with you later.”

It was the fifteenth of the Sixth Month, and the full moon appeared in the east while the sun was still going down over the mountains to the west. Small waves rose on the surface of the river, and the air grew cool. It was hard to believe now that the day had been so hot. Kikunojō felt he had entered another world. He pulled close a brush and inkstone and wrote:

Changing the color
of late sunlight on the waves—
summer moon

He smiled to himself, feeling he’d done justice to the subtle changes brought by the cool moonlight to the sunset color of the waves, and he read the verse out loud. Then he heard a faint voice:

From darkening cloud peaks,
the booming of a temple bell.

Amazed, Kikunojō wondered who could have written this sensitive second verse and linked it to his hokku to form the opening of a sequence.

Searching the water nearby, he found a young samurai alone in a small boat without a boatman. Absorbed in fishing, he wore his wide hat far down over his face. Kikunojō realized that this must be the man who had linked the second verse to his hokku, and he wanted to know who he was. He went to the edge of the pleasure boat and gazed at the man. When the man raised his head and looked up, Kikunojō could see he was twenty-four or twenty-five, fair skinned, and beautiful. His smiling face revealed a love too strong to be kept inside, but the feelings obviously rising inside him kept him from looking directly at Kikunojō. He gazed instead at Kikunojō’s clear reflection on the water. I’m not an unfeeling rock or tree, Kikunojō thought. If he loves me, I can’t ignore him. Kikunojō gazed back, full

of longing. For some time, neither man was able to speak. Then a soft breeze began to blow, and the young samurai looked up and made a third verse:

My body—
would it were wind in
your summer robe.

Kikunojō replied immediately, linking a fourth:

My fan has stopped moving—
I watch you through its slats.

Both men grew less reserved, and the young samurai poled closer. He tied his small boat to the pleasure craft and climbed on board. He spoke about how cool it had become after sundown and concealed his feelings with other small talk, so Kikunojō brought over a saké holder and a cup.

“My hokku was very clumsy,” Kikunojō told the man. “After you replied with that wonderful second verse, I realized you were no ordinary person. Perhaps a relationship in one of our previous lives has brought us together like this. Where are you from? And please tell me your name.”

“I live in Hamamachi along the river,” the man said. “To escape the heat I like to go out poling alone. The view from here is really quite nice. But today I caught sight of you. The sky suddenly clouded over with my desire, and my fishing boat rocked back and forth. My heart is a deep ocean with wild shores. If we could only spend a night of love together on the waves and share our deepest secrets . . . it would be the greatest wish of my whole life.” The man took Kikunojō’s hand and moved closer to him. He was sophisticated, but his feelings for Kikunojō were obviously quite real. Kikunojō was also attracted to him and felt awkward.

Unable to speak, Kikunojō held the saké dipper and offered the man the cup. The man took it and politely placed it under the dipper mouth to be filled. He emptied the cup and offered it to Kikunojō. Again and again, each drank and then offered the cup to the other. Alone, they could dispense with formalities. The cup moving directly back and forth between them seemed—like their own meeting—the

work of the god who brings lovers together.

It was already past eight o'clock, and they were quite intimate. Then they decided that one would become clouds and one a dragon rising toward heaven.⁶¹ When crows cried out, mistaking the bright moonlight for dawn, the two men swore by the Kumano crow god that they loved each other from the bottoms of their hearts. Their pledges were not shallow ones, and they did not simply go to the floor of the boat or immediately sleep together. They untied each other's sashes very gently. What they whispered on their touching pillows and what dreams they saw are beyond anyone's knowing.

The Lover Reveals His True Form (chapter 5)

The world has long been called changeable and unreliable. But it is people's minds, not the world, that are changeable and unreliable. The poet Su Dongpo said a moment of evening in spring is worth a thousand pieces of gold, while another man says the whole floating world is worth only three and a half coppers.⁶² But nobody's ever paid a thousand gold coins for a moment of spring evening, and no one's ever remaindered off the floating world for three and a half coppers, either. Talk never paid the rent, yet in the floating world good and bad are determined by the way we speak. The mutability of the world is the mutability of people's minds.

Even the sage Confucius hitched up his robes and left his native land of Lu. It was a big place, but he never met anyone there who could really understand him. The very first time he met Chengzi, however, both men understood each other immediately. Confucius had his attendant hold his big parasol over Chengzi, and they talked so long that Confucius got leg cramps. Without such understanding, even parent and child and brother and brother become bitter enemies. With understanding, every man in the world can become your older or younger brother.⁶³ These are the words of someone who has looked long and hard at both sides of the world.

Kikunojō was considered the consummate young actor of female roles, and there was no one who didn't desire him. Men became very excited at just seeing his beautiful face at a distance or catching a glimpse of the entwined cotton cord crest on his robe, and although a few wealthy men had slept with him, no one had actually

become his lover. Yet somehow an unknown man had suddenly come and met directly with Kikunojō, and Kikunojō had fallen in love with him and pledged himself to the man forever. The man was truly the supreme lover among all those following the way of male love.

Later the two men sat up again and washed their hands gracefully and nonchalantly in the river as if nothing had happened. Then they went back to where they had been sitting before and sat facing each other. But the way they exchanged cups of saké now was perceptibly more intimate. The full moon continued to rise and shone down on the boat so brightly that now it seemed to be noon. A cool breeze ruffled the surface of the river, making both men realize that fall was coming soon, even while summer lingered.

As they were enjoying the magnificent night, the samurai began to gaze soulfully into Kikunojō's eyes. He looked very lonely, and then a feeling he could no longer hide showed itself on his face, and tears streaked his cheeks.

Kikunojō, concerned, moved closer to him. "What is it that's bothering you?" he asked very gently.

But the man looked down even more sadly, still crying and unable to speak.

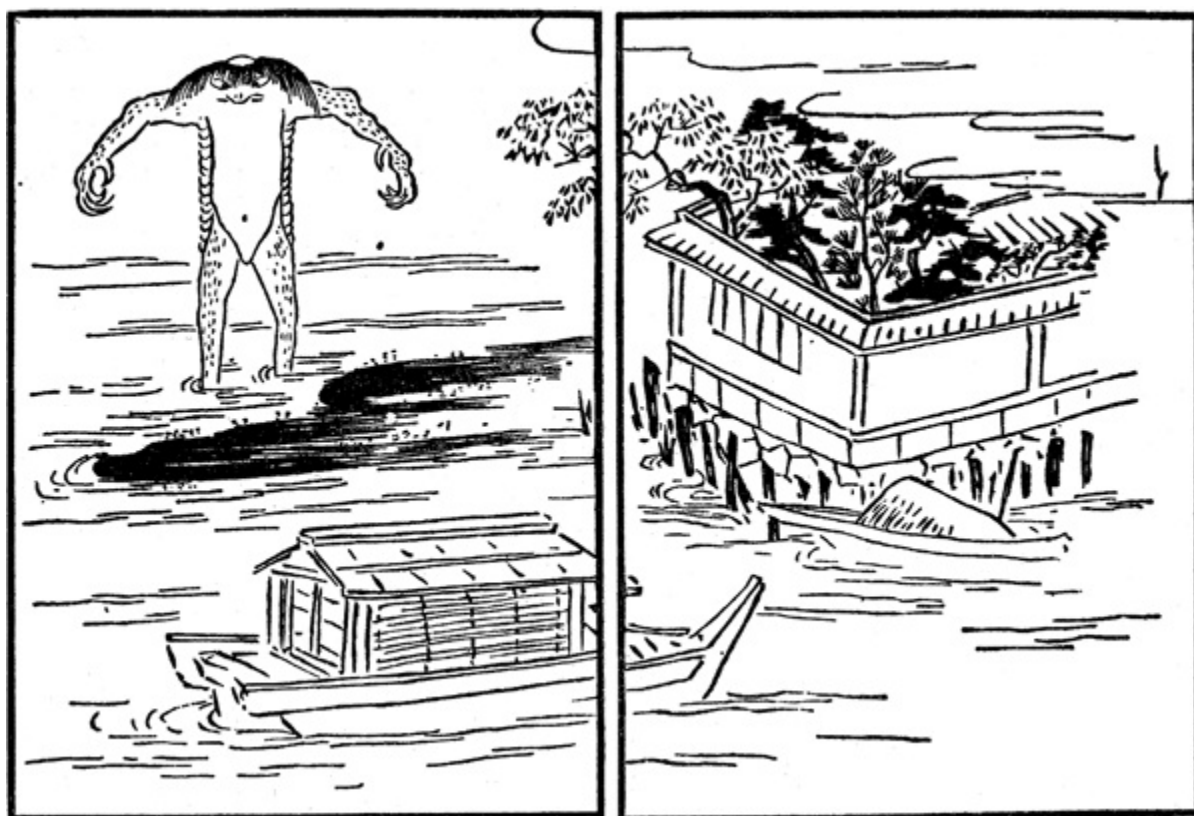
Kikunojō felt uneasy. "Do you find something lacking in my love for you?" he asked. "Please tell me. Why should we hide anything from each other when we've come this far?"

Hearing a sulking tone of soft reproach in Kikunojō's voice, the man brushed away his tears. "Despite your deep feelings for me," he said, "I ignored you and said nothing. It is very, very hard for me to say anything. If I speak, you'll dislike me, and if I don't speak, you'll be angry with me. Though I love you more than I can express, I made you feel that I disliked something about you. When I heard what you said just now, your words went through me and shook my whole body. I realize now that I have to tell you everything. But please don't be shocked by what I have to say. Please. I'm not actually human. I'm a kappa water spirit. I live down on the ocean floor, and I spend my time swimming through very rough waves."

Kikunojō was astonished, but he tried to keep calm and waited to hear more. Then he realized he felt afraid. He was cold all over and was looking around nervously in every direction. After a while he managed to control the pounding in his chest. He said some charms

and prayers silently to himself and went on listening.

“I’ll explain to you why I came in this human shape,” the man said, wiping away more tears. “It’s very hard to explain completely, but King Enma in the other world has fallen deeply in love with you and wants you very much. So Enma ordered the seven-headed dragon god, who’s the lord of all the oceans, to bring you to his palace. A lot of discussions about how to capture you went on at the dragon palace at the bottom of the sea, where I live, and I said I would do it even at the risk of my life. Finally the dragon god agreed, and I was given the mission of bringing you back to his palace in any way I could. Out of loyalty to my lord, I devised a plan to capture you. Tonight, following my plan, I stole a small boat that someone had left on the shore and changed myself into the shape of a human samurai. I then used my divine powers to link haikai verses with you. That allowed me to row near you. After I got close enough, I planned to grab you and jump back down into the water with you.



Beyond the pleasure boat, the samurai lover appears in his true form as a kappa, who stands near the shore of Nakazu, a landfill area at the confluence of the Sumida and Hakozaiki Rivers. It was an area of teahouses and restaurants (*right*).

“But I was overcome by your beauty. I lost control of myself, and I

told you of my love for you, even though I knew it was completely impossible. But then you responded with deep feeling, and I began to feel that I wanted to be with you forever. My heart wrapped hopelessly around and around you like vines around a tree. Together we took off our sashes and put on a single robe of love. And the things we said to each other then, I can never forget them. Most of all, I'll never forget our promise to meet again.

"My mind's completely different now from what it was when I came here earlier. Everything's changed, just the way the Asuka River shifts, with its depths suddenly becoming shallow pools.⁶⁴ For me, too, there are no more depths I could take you to. Now there are only shallows.

"So I've decided to give up my life. If I went back to the dragon palace and told the dragon god that even using all my powers, I couldn't capture you, he'd punish me terribly. He's done it before. Once long ago, when the dragon god's daughter Otohime was very sick, he asked a jellyfish to get hold of a live monkey liver for her to eat as a cure. The jellyfish went up, tricked a monkey, and came back down with him, but then the jellyfish stupidly mentioned his plan and the monkey realized what was happening and escaped. The dragon god was so furious he ripped out every one of the jellyfish's muscles and bones. That's why jellyfish are in the pitiful formless shape they're in today. They can hardly live down the shame.

"But I, well, I didn't just let out a secret. I went up in front of endless rows of every kind of sea creature and shot off my big mouth about what I was going to do. I won't be able to face any of them again. So I've decided to commit suicide instead. I'll throw myself into a deep forest on some mountain and die from lack of water. I've been able to help you, though, so now I don't mind dying. But there is one thing. When I'm dead, my body will turn back into its true shape, and you'll find me disgusting. And not only that. Ordinary lovers can promise to meet again on a lotus in the Pure Land paradise after they die, but in our case, well, King Enma is going to keep you for himself, and I'll surely be reborn as an animal. So we'll never be able to meet again, ever. When I think about our karma, how we'll never be together again in all eternity, my heart turns into a slab of ice. Please, after I'm dead, if you say even one Buddhist requiem for me, I'll be able to escape the worst suffering. Even so,

I'll never be able to go near any river or seashore again. There are some pretty mean characters down there in the water who know a lot of tricks." Then the man began to weep again.

Kikunojō also was crying. "I'm overwhelmed by your story," he said, "and I'm completely amazed. But don't give up hope like that. It's not impossible for animals to be reborn as humans, you know. In China they say the spirit of a plum tree became a beautiful woman and loved a man. And in Japan, Abe no Yasuna lived with a female fox, and their child was human. He became the famous diviner Abe no Seimei. We've been together only a short time, but we've vowed always to be true to each other. I simply can't allow someone I love to die instead of me. It goes completely against the way of true love between men. And I won't live much longer, anyway. If King Enma desires me, then his order's bound to catch up with me. Please, please, don't die! Take me with you down into the ocean." Kikunojō got up and stood by the railing, preparing to jump.

The man grabbed Kikunojō and stopped him. "Your wish to die for my sake makes me very happy," he said. "But even if I were to take your life and go back with you, rumors would start. People would say that after all I really was just a lowly creature who betrayed a human who'd showed him love and killed him in return. And the shame wouldn't be mine only. My parents and brothers and all my relatives would be completely disgraced. And besides, I couldn't bear to see your beautiful face on the ocean bottom after you drowned. Stop, please. Reconsider. Let me die, and everything will be all right."

"Never! You're my lover. Men never cause their true loves to die."

As the two men argued about who would die, they heard a loud "Hey, wait!" It was the actor Ogino Yaegiri. Surprised, Kikunojō and the samurai tried to jump, but Yaegiri grabbed them both and held them.

"Calm down," he said. "Don't lose your heads. I went with the others to catch clams on Nakazu, but I was just too drunk, so I came back in a small boat. I thought something strange was going on when I saw you sleeping together, but I didn't want to bother you, and I decided to wait and see what happened. I hid on the other side of the boat, and I heard everything you've been saying. Mayflies, as they say, die at nightfall, and summer cicadas live only one season.

They value every moment they live, yet you two are arguing over who should kill himself. Each of you wants to die for your lover. That's admirable, very admirable. But if Enma's fallen in love with you, Kikunojō, and issued a royal edict, then there's no way you'll get out of it. Remember, though, Enma's never seen you in person. So let me go instead. That way you won't have to die.

"You both must wonder why I want to die instead of Kikunojō. But there's nothing strange about my motives. Kikunojō, you know well enough about my family line. It began with Ogino Umesaburō and came down to my father, Yaegiri. They all played women's roles using the stage name Ogino Yaegiri. They were well known in Kyoto, Osaka, and Edo, and in Kyoto my father served as head of a theater company, so the family's quite famous. But my father, Yaegiri, died young, when I was only three. My mother took me with her, and we managed to survive with some family friends. But when I was five my mother died, too, and I became an orphan. I would have become an outcast beggar, but Kikunojō, your father, who was a friend of my father's, pitied me and took me in. He brought me up very carefully, as if I were his own son. He even had a nurse and a helper look after me. And when I was old enough, he taught me singing, shamisen, dancing, body movement, and how to speak in women's voices. He made me into the professional actor I am. He said he wanted to give his own stage name to me and have me become the next member of his line, but he felt strongly I should take my father's name and honor my ancestors' souls in that way. So I took the name Yaegiri, and he adopted you and gave the name Kikunojō to you. Remember how he always used to tell us to think of ourselves as brothers?

"I'm nowhere as good as my father was, but I've managed to appear in major theaters in Kyoto, Osaka, and Edo. I feel very grateful to my father, but I'm even more grateful to my stepfather for helping me become what I am today. As both a father and a teacher, his great love for me is something I'll never forget. When he was about to die, he called me to him and told me he didn't mind dying, since he'd been able to gain fame and respect for the name Kikunojō, and his younger brother Kikujirō would also keep the family name famous. But he was worried about you, Kikunojō. He asked me to be your guardian and to teach you his art until you could act

well enough to become the second Kikunojō. He was crying when he said that. Those were his last words.

"I was deeply moved, and I vowed to your father that the most important thing in my life from then on would be to look after you and help you become worthy of the title Kikunojō II. I assured him that he didn't have to worry about anything. When he heard that, your father smiled, and then he died. I can't help crying every time I remember it. You were still young then, and your father was also my stepfather and had done so much for me, and I was glad to help you in turn. Then, five years ago, I taught you all the acting secrets your father taught me, and you started out on your own. After that, you became more and more famous, and it made me much happier than if I myself were becoming so famous. Every time you achieve a new success, you know, I go and sit in front of your father's memorial tablet and pray to him proudly, telling him all about it. His deathbed wish is always in my mind, and I want very much to see it fulfilled.

"Just now I stopped you from jumping, because if I let you die, I could never explain it to your father's soul. And not only that. I don't want the name Segawa to disappear. Even if I die, I have a son, so the name Ogino will continue. Now, after all these years, I want to repay all the great kindness your father showed me ever since I was five. But there is one thing I want to ask you. Please look after my wife and family after I'm gone. Don't ever forget them. That's the only thing I worry about. When I go to Enma's palace, my beauty will be nothing compared with yours. But that's a minor problem. Turning ink into snow and crows into white herons is something I've been trained to do. Kikunojō, please live the way you should, and don't drink too much and ruin your reputation. Concentrate on your art, practice hard, and become an actor whom people will consider even greater than your father and uncle. If you do that, I'll feel very content over there in the other world."

Yaegiri spoke with such deep emotion that Kikunojō and the samurai were in tears. Kikunojō clung to him. "After my father died," he said, "you took care of me and taught me everything, and you did it all with loving care. Your offer to die for me is something truly precious. I'll never forget it, no matter how many times I'm reborn. But I owe too much to you. I could never go on living knowing I'd caused your death. Please, please let me die."

“Never,” Yaegiri said. “Let me.”

“No! I will,” the samurai said.

The three men argued on and on about who would die until suddenly they heard the loud sounds of Heikurō, Yosahachi who was acting as captain, and the others coming back with their clams. The three men panicked and didn’t know what to do. Then the two actors realized the samurai had disappeared as silently as a shadow.

“Wait! Don’t go yet!” Kikunojō wanted to shout, but the others were too close now and would hear. While Kikunojō was searching the surface of the river for a trace of the samurai, Yaegiri made up his mind. He climbed to the roof of the cabin and jumped into the water with a loud splash, sending up spray in all directions. He disappeared beneath the water and left nothing behind to remember him by but the bubbles briefly on the river’s surface.

Suddenly everyone on board was in an uproar, shouting that Yaegiri had jumped into the river and committed suicide. But the only reply was the sound of the stiffening wind. They looked frantically here and there among the waves but found no sign of Yaegiri anywhere.

Kikunojō, tears running down his face, refused to explain anything. He felt he would never be able to face other people now and go on living, and he made up his mind to jump in the river together with Yaegiri, to whom he owed so much. Heikurō didn’t know what was happening, but he saw Kikunojō edging toward the side of the boat and held him back.

“Don’t worry,” Yosahachi told Kikunojō. “You were the one who hired the boat for the cruise, but we’ll say Yaegiri fell in the water by accident. We’ll never tell anyone you were alone with him. We’ll say we were all here on the boat the whole time. Nobody will ever think of blaming you. And when we report it to the authorities, we’ll stick together and swear we were all together here on the boat, no matter how they threaten us or punish us.” He and the others said many different things, and finally Kikunojō agreed not to jump.

Kikunojō didn’t even try to explain what had happened. He kept it in his heart, crying again and again, and those who saw him also cried as they went on looking everywhere among the rising waves for Yaegiri. They strained to see anything resembling a body, but they found nothing at all. Yaegiri had been carried away, pitifully, forever.

Then suddenly, rain began to fall, making their search even harder. They prayed fervently to many gods, but nothing helped. At last they gave up hope and made the journey back.

On land, the roads seemed visited by souls as the actors walked to the house of Yaegiri's young widow, who was as radiant and filled with life as new spring grass. When they told her what had happened, her soul almost left her. After she had recovered, she realized how alone she was and how helpless to do anything. The man she loved so dearly had disappeared without a trace under the waves. She would never even see his body again.

"I feel," she told them, "like the woman in that ancient poem:

How inconsolable
the woman who waits
each day to see
her husband lying
at the bay's bottom.⁶⁵

It must have been written about me." Her grief was as endless as the sands of the shore. No sea of ink in a human inkstone is deep enough to record it, and no one who heard her had dry eyes.

[*Furai Sanjin shū*, NKBT 55: 37–93, translated by Chris Drake]

THE MODERN LIFE OF SHIDŌKEN (FŪRYŪ SHIDŌKEN DEN, 1763)

Under the pen name Fūrai Sanjin, Hiraga Gennai published *The Modern Life of Shidōken* in 1763, the same year he published *Rootless Weeds*. The protagonist is modeled on another star of popular culture, the lecturer and showman Fukai Shidōken (ca. 1680–1765), who performed on a street corner in Asakusa in Edo, but the content is almost entirely fictional. The first chapter describes the divine birth of Asanoshin (as the son of the Kannon bodhisattva at Asakusa), his entry into a Buddhist order, and his encounter with a beautiful woman who takes him to a utopian place. When he awakens from this dream, a Daoist hermit, a pedagogically inclined sage-wizard called Fūrai Sanjin (whose name deliberately echoes the author's), instructs him to leave the order and to teach the masses through humor and the vulgar, and gives Asanoshin a feather fan that enables him to fly.

The Modern Life of Shidōken has been compared with Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and other imaginary travel literature that became popular in Europe during the eighteenth century. In this period of *sakoku* (the bakufu

policy of national seclusion), Gennai drew his views of other lands from a variety of sources, including the Muromachi-period (*otogi-zōshi*) tale *Yoshitsune's Visits to Various Islands* (*Onzōshi shima watari*), in which the legendary Yoshitsune wanders to various foreign lands; Chinese-based encyclopedias like Terajima Ryoan's *Illustrated Encyclopedia of China and Japan* (*Wakan sansai zue*, 1713), which describes strange peoples from the Chinese tradition; and information about the West derived from Chinese translations. In *The Modern Life of Shidōken*, Gennai transposes various contemporary circumstances onto the landscape of other lands. In “pointing out the holes” (*ugachi*) in contemporary society, showing the backside of the bakufu-domain system, and condemning, among others, Confucian scholars, Buddhist priests, and the ignorance of the populace, he creates a sharp and humorous satire. The story about the Land of the Chest Holes, for example, is a satire of the bakufu-domain system in which a man without samurai blood (a man without a chest hole) could not be recognized for his abilities. The *dangi* (satiric sermon) element, which appears in the form of interwoven debates and lectures, is stronger than it was in *Rootless Weeds* and moves the dangibon genre in a new direction by taking the form of a biography and a travel narrative through many countries.

Asanoshin Meets the Sage (chapter 1)

In the precincts of the Asakusa Kannon Temple in Edo, there is an utterly unique and fearless man named Shidōken. He advertises himself as a reciter of old warrior tales together with commentary, but he holds a strange wooden object shaped like a mushroom and beats it on his low desk to the rhythm of his tales. His bawdy, humorous stories are so zany and impossible they're like trying to wipe your rear with your ear, and he makes people laugh so hard they dislocate their navels. Sometimes he clenches his toothless gums; sometimes he shakes his head with its waves of cascading wrinkles; and sometimes he stares coldly down at his fellow humans and denounces them in whatever scathing terms come into his mind. Then, though he's a thin, haggard man of almost ninety, he's suddenly making the movements and speaking the words of young kabuki actors of women's roles. He captures them so intricately he is truly a marvel to behold.

The message he preaches is a mixed Shintō, Confucian, and Buddhist broth served with a spicy Daoist fish salad, ice soup, and deep-fried lightning. His groundless, nonsensical stories make the most unhappy babies laugh, and even hired men who carry sandals around for their employers know that “Idiot Monk” refers to