

Konjaku Monogatari-shū:
Supernatural Creatures and Order

MORI Masato

INTRODUCTION

In analyzing the collections of brief tales known as *setsuwa*, it is necessary to construct something such as the following three categories:

1. The *editorial* act.
2. The *selection* act.
3. The *narrative* act.

By editorial act, I mean the actual gathering of the narratives and the subsequent provision of unity to the collection. By the selection act, I mean the assigning of function and meaning to each story in order to fulfill the editorial plan of the collection. And by the narrative act, I mean the concrete choice of words to clarify the function and meaning of each individual tale.

Hence, fundamentally, narrative is subordinate to selection, and selection is subordinate to the editorial act. Selection, however, is not completely controlled by the editorial plan, and the individual selections are thus able to stand on their own as independent units. There is, accordingly, a relationship of both harmony and friction born from the gap between the acts of editing and selection. Further, the narrative act does not serve merely to further the meaning of any given selection, and there are cases in which the narrative alone comes to have a life of its own. There is, then, the same relationship of harmony and friction existing between the acts of selection and narration. Collections of tales are made up of such interrelationships between the three acts of editing,

Translated by W. Michael Kelsey.

selecting and narrating, and the relationships between these three factors are constantly shifting.

In this essay I will consider *Konjaku monogatari-shū*, and in particular its volume XXVII ("Japanese tales: spirits") from the perspective outlined above, concentrating in particular on an attempt to clarify the meaning assigned to supernatural creatures during the Heian period.¹ Through this consideration I hope to touch on the overall structure of *Konjaku monogatari-shū*.

SUPERNATURAL CREATURES: TIME CONSIDERATIONS

The reader of Volume XXVII of *Konjaku monogatari-shū* will soon be struck by the fact that supernatural creatures are active primarily during particular, set time periods. Their activities are concentrated mainly during the nighttime, and excepting that class of creatures called *kami* ("deities"), this is true of such diverse creatures as ghosts (*rei*), demons (*oni*), spirits (*sei*), wild boars (*inoshishi*) and foxes (*kitsune*). Nighttime seems indeed to have been the time period made especially for these creatures. Nighttime was clearly a special time, one exempt from the order controlled by humans during the daylight hours.

Supernatural creatures were most active during the middle of the night. Both the ghost of the minister Minamoto no Tōru which appeared before the retired emperor Uda (XXVII. 2), and the spirit which came to steal the oil from the lamp in the palace (XXVII. 1) are said to have appeared "in the middle of the night." There were, however, also spirits which began moving earlier, during the evening. When the couple coming to the capital from the Eastern provinces stopped at Kawara-no-in they had no problems during the daytime, but when evening fell a demon murdered the wife (XXVII. 17). At an estate called Sōzu-dono, a red robe

1. For a general introduction to this collection of stories, made about 1100 by an unknown Buddhist monk, see Kelsey 1982. English translations of some of the tales dealt with here are available in Ury 1979, and for my own source see References.

came flying into the top of a tall nettle tree from the main living quarters just at twilight (XXVII. 4). This was doubtless a proclamation of the start of a new time frame, different in essence from the daylight hours, and a warning to human beings of this fact. Supernatural creatures roped off their own time frames.

Konjaku monogatari-shū, accordingly, has this to say about supernatural events which take place during the daylight: "Such ghosts appear during the nighttime, and when they make a commotion during broad daylight, this is truly something to fear." This, in short, is indicative of a real fear that supernatural creatures would break through the bounds of their normal time frame and penetrate into the everyday world. Their appearances, also, could continue until dawn. There is, for example, the following case:

The office at the central governmental bureau began work in the early morning. The officials would light the lamps and prepare for work even before it grew light. One day a certain official knew his superior would have already reported for work, and in a state of agitation about his own late arrival he came into the office. The light was extinguished, and it did not appear that there was anyone around. When he lit a lamp he saw only a bloody head at his superior's desk. The man had been eaten by a demon (XXVII. 9, paraphrase of the tale).

The superior had doubtless arrived at his office just a little too early. He had, thus, unintentionally violated the time frame claimed by supernatural creatures. Such time periods as this, when it was difficult to ascertain whether it was supernatural time or mortal time, were thus extremely dangerous.

SUPERNATURAL CREATURES: LOCATIONS

Supernatural creatures also lived, or appeared, at certain fixed locations. These were places such as old residences, halls in which no one lived, or abandoned warehouses. These went by names such as Oni-dono ("demon palace") in XXVII. 1, or "the extremely evil place called Sōzu-dono," in XXVII. 4, and it was thought that certain specific supernatural creatures had made their homes at such places.

Supernatural creatures with this type of character did not, as a rule, leave their own grounds and appear at other places. These creatures were mostly spirits of those who had formerly lived at the site they now haunted. The spirit which appeared before the retired emperor Uda, the current owner of Kawara-no-in, was Minamoto no Tōru, the former owner of the land (XXVII. 2). The house to which the official Miyoshi no Kiyoyuki moved in XXVII. 31 was said to be an “evil house,” and when he moved in several demons did indeed appear, using a number of means to try to frighten the new resident and drive him away. Both the ghost of Minamoto no Tōru and the demons who inhabited the house into which Miyoshi no Kiyoyuki moved strenuously pressed their prior claims to ownership, and complained that they were now cramped for want of adequate space, but they were reasoned with and finally dispersed by the new owners. But these must have been particularly weak ghosts and demons, and the new owners people who had accumulated particularly unusual amounts of virtue.

In most cases when a person treaded unprepared into a haunted place he would arouse the wrath of the supernatural creatures living there, and generally lose his life. For this reason, the *Konjaku* compiler constantly repeats his didactic messages: “You should never take even the smallest of steps into an area you do not know. It is needless to say that you should find spending the night in such a place unthinkable” (XXVII. 7), or “You should never spend the night in old halls when there is no one around” (XXVII. 6). Thus it is easy to appreciate why the *Konjaku* compiler has added a detailed geographical explanation of places considered haunted, beginning with such places as Oni-dono and Sōzu-dono and extending to other areas in which supernatural creatures were likely to appear. These spirits controlled such locations, and it was necessary for humans to learn that they should not invade them. Volume XXVII of *Konjaku monogatari-shū* might be considered a map of sites occupied by humans and supernatural creatures.

One also notes that those places in which supernatural creatures lived and made appearances frequently were bridges or river-banks. Stories 13, 14, 41, 42, and 43 of Volume XXVII provide examples of this. It is probably possible to explain this by considering these spirits to be related to water deities. Such an explanation would not be in error, but it would also tend to bring such supernatural creatures down to the same dimension, closing off any possibility of clarifying either the diverse characters such creatures possessed, or the various concepts and imaginative powers held by the Heian Japanese; further, it is in danger of bypassing the central problems found in *Konjaku monogatari-shū*.

We cannot deal separately with the fact that supernatural creatures on the one hand generally limited their appearances to times that were not a part of daily life and to locations also not a part of daily life, such as abandoned, rundown houses and buildings, and, on the other hand, that they often appeared around bridges and river banks. We need a unified explanation for these two facts.

It is well known that since ancient times one of the most famous places for the appearance of demons had been the gate known as Rajōmon.² This first became widely known through the legend of the Heian warrior Watanabe no Tsuna's conquest of a demon there. As far as can be determined, however, this legend can be traced only to the performance of the Nō drama *Rashōmon*, and we can find no sign of it in the Heian period. The oldest known version of the legend of the Rajōmon demon is, rather, the following:

On a moonlit night a person was walking past the Rajōmon Gate, humming the poem of Miyako no Yoshika:

The air clears; the wind blows through the young willow's hair.

-
2. This gate is known now as Rashōmon rather than as Rajōmon, partly due to the fact that the title of the Nō play discussed below and a famous short story by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (later made into a movie) are called *Rasōmon*. In this essay, however, we will use the Heian pronunciation except when referring to the Nō play.

The ice melts; its waves wash through the old moss's beard.
At that time he heard someone saying, "Touching, touching" from the room
at top of the gate. It was a demon, moved by the skill of the poem being
recited (*Gōdanshō* IV, paraphrase).

The Chinese style poem in this story is said in another source
to have been a joint effort between Miyako no Yoshika and the
demon:

When Yoshika was passing in front of the Rajōmon Gate he recited the first
line of this poem, and a voice from the room at the top of the gate added the
second. When Yoshika told the poem to Sugawara no Michizane, Michizane
knew immediately that the second line was the product of a demon (*Jikkishō*
X, paraphrase).

The Rajōmon demon also had a deep interest in music, partic-
ularly in the stringed instruments:

A famous *biwa* known as Genjō was lost from inside the palace. One day, a
master *biwa* player named Minamoto no Hiromasa heard the sound he re-
membered to be that of Genjō, and, pursuing it, arrived at Rajōmon. He
knew that it must be a demon playing, because this was a *biwa* that none but a
master could handle, and facing the top of the gate he called out that he
had come to reclaim Genjō. The demon then tied the *biwa* to a rope and
lowered it down to him (*Konjaku* XXIV. 24, paraphrase).

There is another version of the story in which a demon steals
the *biwa* Genjō. In this version the thief is the Suzakumon
Gate demon. In this tale Hiromasa does not make an appearance,
and the demon lowers the *biwa* by rope from the top of the gate
during a Buddhist ceremony dedicated to its recovery (*Gōdanshō*
III; *Jikkishō* X, *Shichiku kuden*).

There are several other tales concerning the Suzakumon demon.
There is, for example, a tale in which either the monk Jōzō, or
Minamoto no Hiromasa, or Ariwara no Narihira is passing by the
Suzakumon on a moonlit night playing the *fue* ("flute") when a
demon, moved by his technique, presents the hero with the famous
flute Hafutatsu (see *Gōdanshō* III, *Jikkishō* X, *Kyōkunshō*, etc.).

There is also an episode in the picture scroll *Haseo no sōshi* in which Ki no Haseo discovers that the person he has defeated in a dice game is the Suzakumon demon.

The Rajōmon and Suzakumon demons are mutually interchangeable in the story of the theft and recovery of the *biwa* Genjō. This is because these two gates resemble one another in a striking way. The main southern entrance to the imperial court was the Suzakumon, and if one went straight south from there along the Suzaku main road, one would arrive at the main entrance to the capital city, the Rajōmon. The two were, in short, the most centrally important gates in the city, dividing respectively the imperial palace from the outside, and the capital city itself from the outside.

What, then, is the meaning in the fact that demons lived and appeared at such gates? If we think of the Suzakumon as symbolizing the imperial palace and the Rajōmon as symbolizing the capital city, then we might interpret them as representing the decline of the imperial holdings and the decay of the court. This interpretation would not necessarily be in error, but it is by no means the whole story. Apparitions seem to have frequently appeared around gates, and these apparitions are not limited to demons (*oni*).

For example, a man passing the gate called Ōtenmon during the dead of night caught sight of a pure green, shining object, and heard an eerie laughing voice. It is said he thought it was probably a fox (*Konjaku monogatari-shū* XXVII. 33). It would thus seem that the various extraordinary events that occurred around gates are related to the function of gates themselves.

The story of Watanabe no Tsuna's conquest of the demon can be found in the Nō *Rashōmon*, in the special volume "Tsurugi no maki" ("Stories of swords") in the Yashiro text of *Heike monogatari*, and in Volume 23 of *Taiheiki*, and it differs slightly from source to source. If we were to list a combination of all these episodes it would look like this:

- I. The incident itself:
 1. Tsuna hears rumors of the demon's appearance.
 2. Tsuna goes to the location of the appearances.
 3. The demon appears in the form of a beautiful woman.
 4. The demon seizes Tsuna's helmet, or his hair.
 5. Tsuna cuts off the demon's arm.
 6. Tsuna presents the arm to Minamoto no Yorimitsu.
- II. The sequel:
 1. Tsuna, or Yorimitsu, goes into religious seclusion.
 2. The demon assumes the form of a relative of Tsuna, or Yorimitsu.
 3. The demon regains his arm and leaves.

The Nō *Rashōmon* lacks I. 3, I. 6 and all of II; *Heike monogatari* lacks I. 1 and I. 6, and *Taiheiki* lacks I. 3. *Rashōmon* has the location of the demon's appearance at Rajōmon; in *Heike monogatari* it is the bridge at Ichijō, and in *Taiheiki* it is a forest in Uda County of Yamato Province. We can, accordingly, see that gates, bridges and forests are interchangeable as sites for the appearance of demons. This observation is strongly reaffirmed if we follow it up with a look at *Konjaku* XXVII. 13.

This tale has the bridge called Agi no hashi, in Ōmi Province, as the site of a demon's appearance, and a warrior fights with this demon. The warrior makes a bet with his compatriots that he will be able to cross the bridge, and, insofar as he succeeds, we have the episodes I. 3 and I. 4; ultimately, though, his head is chewed off by the demon, and here we have II. 3. Excepting I. 6, all of the structural elements noted above for the Tsuna tale complex are also present here.

The reason that gates and bridges have such interchangeability should be understood in light of the fact that they were seen as having identical characters. Simply speaking, that which unifies the bridge and the gate is the fact that each is a boundary. That is to say, they both distinguish "this side" from "that side," and are the connectors that tie two different spaces together; they

also provide a disruption between the two. Demons live and make appearances at boundaries. This fact is closely tied to the essential nature of the demon.

Let us recall here the practice of ushering in spring by throwing beans and calling out, "Wealth to the inside, demons to the outside." Demons are dispersed if hit by seeds of grains believed to contain magical power. There is, also, the following tale:

A fortuneteller made a divination and reported, "on such-and-such a day to come, a demon will surely visit this house." On the predicted day the members of the household went into strict religious seclusion, and then a solitary male appeared from the gate. At the fortuneteller's words, "That is the demon," all trembled, but the young son shot the man with an arrow. The arrow was true to its mark, and all thought the demon would run away, when it suddenly completely disappeared (*Konjaku* XXVII. 23, paraphrase).

From such examples we can see that the demon is a creature who invades the inside from without, a creature one should not allow in, a creature one must purge to the outside. In other words, that creature which existed outside the order formulated and supported by human beings (the worlds of politics, culture, daily life and the like), and that creature which invaded this order and attempted to destroy it—that creature was the demon. Demons represent confusion and chaos.

Demons therefore manifest themselves in those areas where the power of order which drives things *to* the outside and the power of chaos which invades *from* that outside overlap. As long as confusion remains completely outside order it cannot become a focal point of human consciousness. Confusion is presumably first recognized as confusion at that vital spot where it clashes with order. The place at which the powers of order and confusion overlap becomes the boundary between the two worlds. Rivers are natural boundaries; fences and walls are artificial ones. Gates and bridges, then, come between the inside and the outside, between "this side" and "that side," and, according to the needs of the moment, either stop the flow between the

two or cause it to move again. Thus it happens that demons reveal themselves at gates and bridges, those places which link the center with the surroundings, or order with confusion.

It is not only demons who appear at boundaries. A fox appeared at the bank of the Kōya River (*Konjaku* XXVII. 41), and the ghost of a woman who had died in childbirth at the bank of a river in Mino Province (*Konjaku* XXVII. 43). Further, the boundaries at which supernatural creatures appear are not limited to gates, rivers and bridges. In the Suzuka Mountains, which constituted the boundary between Ise and Ōmi provinces, there was an old temple held to be the residence of a demon (*Konjaku monogatari-shū* XXVII. 44). Also, there is the following story:

A man who was skilled at singing *kagura* songs wanted to cross from Mutsu Province to Hitachi Province. He awakened with a start from a doze on horseback, and seeing that he had indeed arrived in Hitachi, sang a Hitachi song. At this he heard a frightening voice from deep in the mountains call out, "Ah, delightful!" The man died that night at his inn. He had been taken by the god of the mountain, who liked his song so much (*Konjaku* XXVII. 45, paraphrase).

The man here was far too unprepared. Boundaries belong to both the areas they mark off. Alternatively, they belong to neither. They are thus characterized by the fact that they are the places where two orders meet, interact, and mingle together, and it is necessary for those who would pass through them to take special precautions.

SUPERNATURAL CREATURES AS OPPONENTS OF ORDER

According to *Taiheiki*, the demon conquered by Watanabe no Tsuna appeared in a forest. This is because the forest is an unopened area, in contrast to villages and cities where one finds human civilization. Demons attacked people or domestic animals going through forests primarily because this was the area the demons had initially controlled, and they did not want to permit the invasion of culture into it.

Demons had their own order, as demons. The facts, then, that on the one hand supernatural creatures made their appear-

ances at boundary areas such as gates, bridges and the like, and on the other, that they lived in residences and buildings, are not separate problems. And this, in turn, is not a problem separate from the fact that demons were active during a fixed time frame, at night. That which we call "demon" is the concrete manifestation of the chaos which was conceived of as being outside order.

Demons were, accordingly, often imagined in frightful forms, as having large bodies, grotesque horns, piercing raised eyes, sharp tusks, and the like. Such forms accurately transmit the demon in his character as a representative of confusion. At the same time, though, we should turn our attention to the fact that the demon was a creature that often could not be seen. Several sources attest to this nature of the demon:

"Poetry . . . moves even those demons which cannot be seen by the eye" (Preface to *Kokinwakashū*).

"Demons which cannot be seen by the eye" (*Genji monogatari*, Hahakigi chapter).

"Demons and women should not be seen by people" (*Tsutsumi Chūnagon monogatari*, "The Princess who Loved Insects").

The demons which appear in tales very frequently do so without actually showing their form. One rainy night Ariwara no Narihira took a woman to a warehouse where they spent the night; the woman who was supposed to be by his side was eaten by a demon who left only her clothes and head (*Konjaku monogatari-shū* XXVII. 7). An official was eaten by a demon when he reported for work early in the morning; in this case, too, only the head was left (*Konjaku* XXVII. 9). In neither of these stories was the demon actually seen by anyone. The demon who stole the *biwa* Genjō returned it by a means that would allow him to remain hidden.

Demons were thus invisible, and lived in an invisible dimension. By "invisible dimension," I mean a dimension of chaos which was not illuminated by the light of human civilization, a world of

confusion that human consciousness could not encompass.

When a demon who did not reveal his shape interacted with the human world, he would frequently show just one part of his body. This was the arm:

A married couple was traveling from the eastern provinces to the capital, and stopped for the night at Kawara-no-in. That evening their room was opened suddenly from the outside and something—the shape of which they could not determine—quickly thrust a hand inside, dragging the wife to the room next door. When the husband could not open the door he broke it down with an axe and went in, but his wife was already dead and there was no sign of anyone else around (*Konjaku monogatari-shū* XXVII. 17, paraphrase).

One night, as the elder of two brothers who were hunters waited in a treetop for game, something grabbed his hair and tried to pull him up. He saw that it was a demon's hand. The hand was shot off by his younger brother's arrow, and the demon fled without showing itself (*Konjaku* XXVII. 22).

At court, someone attempted to grab the sword of Fujiwara no Tadahira. He saw that it was the hand of a demon. When Tadahira called out, the demon fled (*Ōkagami*, Vol. II).

In addition to these examples, we have the story about Watanabe no Tsuna, in which the demon grabbed his helmet or, in some versions, his hair, and attempted to pull him up. Conspicuous characteristics of the image of the demon are, thus, factors such as reaching out, grabbing, pulling up, or dragging off. In narratives in which only the arm is described the demon's shape remains unclear, indicating that their true forms were not clearly understood. This is a concrete example of the fear of confusion invading the world of order from the outside, crossing the boundary for only a brief instance and attempting to drag the internal order into the outside confusion.

As long as the demon is a representative of confusion, it must constantly be in conflict with the forces of order. In particular, it must conflict with those rightful representatives of order, the public sphere and the imperial authority.

In the Nō *Rashōmon* the reason that the demon must be con-

quered is loudly proclaimed as the following:

Both the earth and the trees belong to our great lord . . . is not Rashōmon indeed the southern gate to our capital? Even if supernatural creatures like demons are living there, are we to permit this?

And in Ōkagami, Fujiwara no Tadahira disperses the demon with the following authority:

What manner of creature is it that attempts to lay hands on one who has come to carry out an imperial order? Not to comply would be evil indeed.

And, further, when the Japanese ambassador to the T'ang court, Kibi no Makibi, encountered a demon in China, he made the following proclamation:

What manner of being are you? I am none other than the messenger of the Emperor of Japan. Nothing should stand in the way of Imperial business. How, demon, could you interfere? (*Kibi Daijin nittō emaki* and others).

Further, in *Shichiku kuden's* description of the disappearance of the *biwa* Genjō, the Emperor has a proclamation read that there is no one—even if it be a spirit—who is exempt from obeying an imperial edict, and the demon, muttering, “I must follow the imperial edict,” lowers the *biwa* from the top of the gate.

Demons, then, were frequently brought under control by the words of the central government or the Emperor. We have a glimpse here at the relationship between the governmental and imperial authorities and how they imagined the demon, as a creature who stood outside their authority and came into conflict with it, the preservation of order, authority and centralism.

Demons were not, of course, the only creatures who were invisible. The creature who came during the middle of the night to the court to steal the oil for the lamps ultimately flees without revealing its shape (*Konjaku monogatari-shū* XXVII. 10). And it was not only demons who came into conflict with the central government or the emperor. The ghost of Minamoto no Tōru, who was the former owner of the Kawara-no-in, is overwhelmed

by the imperial authority in the words of the retired emperor Uda and must leave (*Konjaku* XXVII. 2). Supernatural creatures, nearly without exception, are squeezed out of the human world of order and must come into conflict with that world.

THE EDITORIAL ACT

Konjaku monogatari-shū is made up of a total of 1,059 stories, and is organized on the following three general principles:

1. Spatial (with stories set in India, China and Japan).
2. Topical (stories concerning both Buddhist and secular themes).
3. Time.

Volume XXVII, which is composed of stories about supernatural creatures, belongs to the Japanese secular tales, and the question is what ranking has been given to it within the Japanese secular stories.

One way to answer this question is through an investigation of what forms the central hub of the Japanese secular stories in *Konjaku monogatari-shū*. I would like to approach this problem by first giving the reader a general idea of the structure of the first half of the collection's Japanese secular stories. These contain the following subject matter:

- Volume XXI: No longer extant.
- Volume XXII: History of the Fujiwara family (stories 1–8).
- Volume XXIII: Stories of strength and proficiency (stories 13–26).
- Volume XXIV: Stories of artistic and literature accomplishment (stories 1–57).
- Volume XXV: Histories of warriors (stories 1–14).

Volume XXI is no longer extant. It is generally considered to have been planned to contain stories about the history of the imperial family, but that it was never completed. This supposition seems true, especially in light of the fact that Volume X, which

contains secular tales from China, begins with a history of the Chinese ruling dynasties.

Volume XXII contains biographies of the major Fujiwara ministers, and the fact that these stories are arranged in order of their generation indicates that the volume was intended as a history of the Fujiwara family, or at least as a history of the ministers. These tales again correspond to those found in Volume X, where we have, following the history of the Chinese ruling dynasties, tales about clever governmental ministers. Volume XXIII begins from story 13, and has a very unnatural form. It is possible to explain this unnaturalness, and the fact that the volume contains such a small number of stories, by taking the position that Volume XXIII was initially compiled as one volume together with Volume XXV, whose stories resemble those in XXIII, and that later, because of a change in the overall structure of the collection, this single volume was split in two, with the first half being moved to what is now Volume XXV and the second half being made into Volume XXIII. Such an explanation seems acceptable if we once again consult Volume X, where the stories of clever ministers are followed by a group of tales about warriors.

Because the stories in Volume XXV are arranged in chronological order, it seems acceptable to consider this volume as a history of warriors in Japan.

Thus the secular tales in *Konjaku monogatari-shū* were originally organized as follows: Imperial history, history of the Fujiwara family, and a history of warrior families. In these three volumes the *Konjaku* compiler intended to narrate the history of Japan. This structure was never realized, due to the facts that the imperial family history tales were never completed and the stories concerning the history of warrior families were broken up into two separate volumes, but we can nonetheless say with some certainty that the central axis of the Japanese secular stories was the authority of the public (imperial and court) sector. If this is the case then Volume XXVII constitutes a somewhat paradoxical effort to devote one volume of stories to tales of supernatural creatures—in short,

creatures outside of the framework of order—within a section that is generally devoted to the affirmation of the authority of the central government. The paradoxical relationship that Volume XXVII holds within the collection is significant both to the volume itself and the overall collection.

A diversity of supernatural creatures appears within the stories in Volume XXVII of *Konjaku monogatari-shū*. They are diverse, but it is possible to classify them at least to a certain extent, and it would seem that the *Konjaku* compiler himself has attempted such a classification.

His classification by and large is based on their names: the five categories include ghosts (*rei*), demons (*oni*), spirits (*sei*), animals (*dōbutsu*) and deities (*kami*). The distinctions between the individual categories are not always clear, but “ghosts” are the souls of humans (almost always of dead people), “demons” are violent, frightening creatures, “spirits” are the souls of inorganic things, and “animals” are creatures such as wild boars and foxes that trick human beings. By far the majority of these supernatural creatures are demons and ghosts. Thus the word *reiki* (“spirits”) used in the title of the volume itself should not be thought of as “strange demons called ghosts,” but rather as “ghosts (*rei*) and demons (*ki*, or *oni*).” Volume XXVII was, in short, titled by the compiler’s selection of two of the typical supernatural creatures who appear in its stories.

The five categories into which the supernatural creatures appearing within Volume XXVII fit constitute the first principle by which the stories in the volume have been arranged. The tendency of the volume to associate stories from the same group is actually quite conspicuous. This cannot be explained merely as a matter of convenience in the disposal of the tales. As I will explain in greater detail below, supernatural creatures were viewed as themselves existing in a certain ranking, and their ranking within the collection by and large reflects this.

To put it in other words, *Konjaku monogatari-shū* has attempted to provide a ranking to the supernatural creatures. Here we must

consider the following reality. In short, the first supernatural creature treated in Volume XXVII is the ghost of a man killed by lightning before the establishment of the capital in Kyoto; he is, in other words, the oldest of the supernatural creatures existing in the capital. The narrative proceeds, so to speak, from the birth of supernatural creatures in the capital, and the tendency penetrating nearly completely through *Konjaku monogatari-shū* to place the story of creation at the beginning of the volume also manifests itself here.

We can, thus, see *Konjaku monogatari-shū* as a work attempting to organize its ideas on supernatural creatures and systematize them. The mere imagination of supernatural creatures is not the same thing as actually transferring that mental picture to words and organizing it. The act of narrating and editing stories about supernatural creatures is a positive undertaking, aimed at bringing light into the darkness of confusion and providing order.

THE SELECTION ACT

The selection act is fundamentally subordinate to the editorial act. The insertion of a single tale is done for the realization of the plan, and the selection thus inserted is not independent from its place in the overall organization.

As an example, let us consider *Konjaku monogatari-shū* XXVII. 28:

The daughter of Fujiwara no Michinaga, the princess of the Jōtōmon'in, heard during the height of the cherry blossom season at the palace Kyōgaku-den a voice recite the following couplet:

Overflowing in their fragrance,
these cherry flowers!

She had someone investigate to see who had recited this couplet, but they could not find the poet. Thinking it must have been the work of a spirit, she reported it to the prime minister (her brother Fujiwara no Yorimichi), who replied, "Things like that are always happening around that area." (Paraphrase.)

Konjaku monogatari-shū has taken this tale from a work of poetry

theory, *Toshiyori zuinō*. This work in turn has included the tale in a group of stories concerning the composition of *waka* in ancient times, and reports, "Thus, spirits and the like think of this as an auspicious poem, and are constantly reciting it, and indeed it is a superior poem." It goes on to say that this poem, which was in the collection *Shūishō*, although it is not especially well known, is indeed a great poem.

Although the tale plays this type of role in *Toshiyori zuinō*, in *Konjaku monogatari-shū* Volume XXVII its function is to provide an example of the frightening appearance of ghosts during the daytime. The act of selection has thus added a dimension of meaning and function to such tales, and this addition has allowed the tale to support the collection's overall editorial plan. The editorial plan has, in effect, realized the act of selection, and the act of selection has made the editorial plan more real—this is an interdependent and flexible relationship between the two.

Konjaku monogatari-shū has, through its editorial act, classified a diverse group of supernatural creatures, and this classification presupposes a recognition of the existence of these individual supernatural creatures. The result of this recognition is the implementation of the editorial act. The act of recognition, however, is finally accomplished only through the act of selection. In other words, so long as verbal descriptions have not been provided to the tales, the true form of the supernatural creatures which appear within them is bound to remain unclear. If we think in such terms, then the "act of selection" is none other than the act of recognition of supernatural creatures.

Within *Konjaku monogatari-shū* the question of the true form of any supernatural creature is considered extremely important. The fact that there is so frequently a probing into the nature of this true form at the end of the tales is an expression of this concern. This is above all because it was necessary to consciously classify in order to implement the editorial act, and further, because it was also the purpose of the act of selection itself.

If one knew the true form of a supernatural creature, then it

would be possible to deal effectively with that creature in the event one happened to encounter it. For example, not all supernatural creatures had the same type of power—demons ate people, but wild boars and foxes merely tricked them—and hence one had to be careful not to enter any unknown place that might contain demons, but in the case of wild boars and foxes, it was necessary to maintain a calm, courageous attitude. There was a ranking among the supernatural creatures. Volume XXVII. 34 provides a good example:

A hunter sometimes heard, when passing by a wooded area, something or other calling out his name. Whatever it was, it did not call out from the hunter's left side—that is, the side at which he held his bow—but it called from his right side. At about that time his younger brother, who had been living in the capital for a long time, returned home, and when he passed the same area in an experiment, he was called by his brother's name. Thinking that if it were a demon or spirit it would never mistake the younger brother for the elder one, the younger brother decided that it was a worthless fellow indeed. The next night the younger brother mounted his horse backwards, to confuse whatever it was into thinking that his left hand, where he held his bow, was his right hand, and passed the area. As usual, it called out his elder brother's name, and he quickly got off an arrow in the direction of the voice. The next morning they found that a large wild boar had been killed by the arrow (Paraphrase).

If a supernatural creature is found out like this, it is an invitation to defeat. Alternatively, when a supernatural creature has conceded defeat, it will show its true form. For example, when the creature that had been appearing around the palace Reizeiin and frightening people was caught, it said, "I am a water spirit," and then disappeared. This water spirit never appeared again (*Konjaku XXVII. 5*).

Thus to learn the true form of an extraordinary being is to overpower that being. The act of selection in *Konjaku monogatari-shū* is, accordingly, an attempt to clarify the true form of supernatural creatures, an attempt to provide order to confusion, an overpowering of supernatural creatures through the power of

language.

There are, however, also examples such as Volume XXVII, 10:

A creature would come every night to steal the oil from the palace lamps. The Emperor ordered a high ranking aristocrat, Minamoto no Kintada, "Make it reveal its shape." While Kintada was waiting for it he heard the sound of footsteps, although he could see nothing. When Kintada kicked at the sound, it ran away. When a lamp was lit they found a blood trail that led to the room called the Nurigome, but there was nothing inside. The creature did not, however, come back again to steal the oil (Paraphrase).

Kintada defeated this supernatural creature and drove it away by injuring it and drawing blood, which is equivalent to making it reveal part of its own body. In its description of Kintada's victory *Konjaku monogatari-shū* has, by the power of words, been able to realize the overwhelming of this supernatural creature.

Konjaku does, however, consistently refer to the supernatural creature that appears in this story by the name *mono*. Because this "mono" is a general expression for supernatural creatures which do not have clear forms, *Konjaku* has not here been able to see through to the true form of the creature and call it by its proper name. The compiler has not, in short, been able, through the act of selection, to completely overwhelm the supernatural creature in this case.

THE NARRATIVE ACT

The act of narrative is fundamentally subordinate to the selection act. The story in *Toshiyori zuinō*, in which a spirit recites a poem, has been adapted by *Konjaku monogatari-shū* and the topic changed. This shift is effected through a concrete act of style. Let us compare the two works:

- (1) When the princess looked out through her screen, there was no sign of anything, or of any human presence, and she said, "What is this? Who said that?" She summoned several people and had them look around, but they reported, "There is no sign of anyone, either near or far," and she was frightened, saying, "What is this? It must be a spirit." (*Konjaku mono-*

gatari-shū XXVII. 28.)

Saying, "What person is that?" she looked, but there was no sign at all of any human presence, and she was frightened . . . (*Toshiyori zuinō*).

(2) Thinking of this, we can see that this was not something a fox said. A ghost or the like thought, "This is a wonderful poem," and ghosts thus recite it each time they look at flowers. Such ghosts appear during the nighttime, and when they make a commotion during broad daylight, this is truly something to fear (*Konjaku* XXVII. 28).

Thus, that ghosts and the like think this is a wonderful poem and constantly recite it shows that it is truly a good poem (*Toshiyori zuinō*).

Because the *Konjaku monogatari-shū* compiler is here guided by following a selection act that calls for emphasizing the fear of ghosts that appear during the daylight hours, it uses a more detailed style, as in (1), and through its narration of the princess' actions and fears, it shows us that the creature had to have been a spirit. This, then, is again recognized in (2), where the *Toshiyori zuinō* function of praise for the poem as a hidden masterpiece is made more vague in *Konjaku*. The two examples of narration noted above help in the realization of the act of selection.

Konjaku monogatari-shū executes its acknowledgement of supernatural creatures in its selection act on three levels. It does so first by directly naming the supernatural creatures appearing in its pages, which is accomplished through having the people who have encountered extraordinary phenomena tell about their experiences or speculate on them. Secondly, *Konjaku* gives specific names to supernatural creatures in other passages within the narrative. Thirdly, it ascertains the true form of supernatural creatures in the concluding passage at the end of the tale, or alternatively, speculates about these true forms. These three levels generally agree in any given selection.

Let us take as an example Volume XXVII. 44:

Here it is said that in an old Buddhist hall in the Suzuka Mountains "a demon is living" (a). Three men decide, "It's probably nothing more than a wild

boar or a fox," (b) and decide to test their theory by spending the night there. Something strange then does happen at the temple, but when one of them draws and brandishes his sword, the creature disappears. Then at the conclusion of the story the compiler concludes that this was the work of a fox, but that it had been mistakenly said to be a demon (c).

Through transmitting the speculation and bravery of action of the three men, *Konjaku* corrects the erroneous (a), affirms the correctness of (b), and brings, with (c), the selection to a close.

There are, however, frequently cases in which these three levels differ. Let us look at XXVII. 29:

Level I: Minamoto no Masamichi sees that there are two exactly identical nursemaids in his house, and decides that "one must definitely be a fox or something"; when he threatens them with his sword, one of the nursemaids disappears.

Level III: In the concluding remarks we find: "It might have been a [transformed] fox, or, again, it might have been a ghost: we will never know."

Here, the passage on the third level does not wholly credit the recognition of the supernatural creature made on the first level. Evident here is a disagreement, or a split in the narrative act. This is also true in Volume XXVII. 42:

Level I: Kuni no Toshinobu becomes lost on the road, and thinks, "I have been possessed by the god of confusion, and made to wander insanelly."

Level III: At the conclusion of the story, we have the words: "Thus, it is very rare to meet with the god of confusion. He was thus [deceived] and lost his way" (a), and further, "could this have been the work of a fox?" (b).

In this case the recognition on the first level is confirmed by that in (a) on the third level, but it does not conform to (b) on the third level. It is not only that there is a split in the narrative act within the same selection; we also can see a schism within the same level of narration. It is unclear whether (a) and (b) indicate that the supernatural creature was a fox *instead of* the god of confusion, or whether the god of confusion *was* a fox. This unnaturalness grows not merely from the fact that the narration on the first level is

objectified by (a) on the third level, but also from the fact that (a) on the third level is also objectified by (b).

To state this more concretely, this happens because *Konjaku monogatari-shū*'s method is to re-narrate a story which has already been narrated, that is, which has already been expressed in writing. This story (XXVII. 42) is recognized as having come from the same source as *Ujishūi monogatari* 163, but in *Uji shūi* we do not have (a) or (b). If we thus assume that *Konjaku*'s source did not have (a) or (b), we can see that *Konjaku* has, through (a), accomplished a faithful narration of its source, and through (b) has achieved a critical narrative act. This attempt at a critical objectification causes the act of narration to become split, and brings about disunity to the selection. If we assume that the selection act in *Konjaku monogatari-shū* is an effort to overwhelm supernatural creatures by words, this disunity would be a failure to do so, and would also be linked to a failure of the editorial act. It is, however, impossible to deny that the posture of this critical objectification is rooted in the collection's motive, which is to provide order to confusion.

In point of fact, things which are supposed to establish and support the editorial and selection acts actually work in such a way to destroy these very acts and to provide an ever-changing pattern of harmony and contradiction. This is the world of *Konjaku monogatari-shū*.

GLOSSARY

<i>biwa</i> 琵琶	<i>Haseo no sōshi</i> 長谷雄草子
<i>dōbutsu</i> 動物	<i>Heike monogatari</i> 平家物語
<i>fue</i> 笛	<i>inoshishi</i> 猪
<i>Genji monogatari</i> 源氏物語	<i>Jikkimshō</i> 十訓抄
Genjō 玄象	<i>kagura</i> 神樂
<i>Gōdanshō</i> 江談抄	<i>kami</i> 神
Hafutatsu 葉二	Kawara-no-in 河原院

MORI Masato

Kibi Daijin nittō emaki 吉備大臣入唐絵

卷

kitsune 狐

Kokinwakashū 古今和歌集

Konjaku monogatari-shū 今昔物語集

Kyōkunshō 教訓抄

mono 物

Ōkagami 大鏡

oni 鬼

Oni-dono 鬼殿

Ōtenmon 応天門

Rajōmon (Rashōmon) 羅城門

rei 靈

reiki 靈鬼

sei 精

setsuwa 說話

Shichiku kuden 糸竹口伝

Suzakumon 朱雀門

Taiheiki 太平記

Toshiyori zuinō 俊賴髓腦

Tsurugi no maki 劍の巻

Tsutsumi Chūnagon monogatari 堤中納

言物語

Ujishū monogatari 宇治拾遺物語

Yashirobon 屋代本

REFERENCES

KELSEY, W. Michael

1982 *Konjaku monogatari-shū*. Twayne World Authors Series.
Boston: G. K. Hall.

Konjaku monogatari-shū 今昔物語集

1962 Yamada Yoshio 山田孝雄 et al., eds. *Nihon koten bungaku taikei*
日本古典文学大系 [Compendium of Japanese classical literature],
vol. 25. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.

URY, Marian

1979 *Tales of times now past: Sixty-two tales from a medieval Japanese
collection*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California
Press.