

HUMOR IN JAPANESE ART

A Survey of Humor in Japanese Art
from Three Selected 200 Year Periods

by

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ABSTRACT

The Japanese, as a people, are very different from the Chinese. As far as one can talk of national characteristics, they are less ebullient and extrovert than the Chinese. A sense of humour seldom appears in their daily life whereas, oddly enough, their art shows a lively wit. The reverse is true of the Chinese who are a witty gay people in life but are not generally so in their art.¹

Peter Swann's provocative statement prompted this investigation regarding the absence or presence of humor in uniquely Japanese art. A secondary aim was to try to define the nature of any humor discovered. The study was limited to three periods of Japanese history in which there was a minimal amount of direct influence from China and in which there developed relatively pure Japanese art forms.

Humor is defined as "a critical, yet sympathetic, human response to a stimulus occurring unexpectedly in an otherwise ordered existence." It is discussed as an intellectual-emotional response. The intellectual aspect implies an understanding of events. The emotion encountered is never one of anger, bitterness or sarcasm. It is not noble, sublime or mysterious. It is a response of warmth.

The first era studied, the protohistoric period, produced haniwa, clay figures, which were investigated. While it was not possible to state that haniwa were humorous in intent, many emerged exemplifying

¹Peter C. Swann, Art of China, Korea, and Japan (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), p. 8.

the foregoing definition of humor. These happy and laughing tomb figures elicit a response of humor today. The nature of the humor-response was of two varieties. One was indeed Swann's "lively wit" and the other emerged as a gentle, subtle type of humor.

The second period studied was that of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in which the main body of emaki was produced. The historical background to the growth of this truly national style of Japanese art was covered and many emaki were investigated. Summarizing the kind of humor found, it became evident that the Japanese is a race able to laugh at itself. Yashiro's "sympathetic smile of good will" is shown in the emaki itself and is elicited from the observer. "Lively wit" was found in scenes from the Shigi-san Engi, the Ban Dainagon Ekotoba and in the Chōjū Giga. A gentle, subtle humor was observed in the Yamai no Sōshi scroll and in the Gaki Zōshi. In both of these latter emaki, the pathos toned down the nature of the humor making it less lively than in the former scrolls.

Finally, the last period under consideration was the two hundred and fifty years of Tokugawa shogun exclusionist policy--1615-1867. The Japanese form of art known as ukiyo-e was investigated. It was necessary to understand the historical background of these Japanese prints in order to determine if and when stimuli occurred upsetting a natural order of existence. Again, it was discovered that at least two kinds of humor were present. Overt and "lively wit" was demonstrable, as was a subtle, not-quite-hidden, touch of gentle humor.

While there was no difficulty in proving the presence of humor in uniquely Japanese art, the nature of that humor was more difficult to determine. Swann's contention that Japanese art shows a "lively wit" was found to be true, but only in part. A subtle, quiet and warmly sympathetic kind of response was also demonstrated. Examples of these two types of humor were found both in the actual objects investigated and, also, in the nature of the response elicited from the observer. Although humor evinced different characteristics, both types found show a critical, yet sympathetic, response to stimuli occurring unexpectedly in an otherwise ordered existence.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
LIST OF PLATES	vi
PREFACE	1
CHAPTER I	7
A Discussion of Humor or "Buried Laughter."	
CHAPTER II	15
Haniwa	
CHAPTER III	25
Emaki	
CHAPTER IV	44
Ukiyo-e	
CONCLUSION AND COMMENTS	91
NOTES ON PLATES	96
PLATES	101
BIBLIOGRAPHY	158

LIST OF PLATES

- I. The Futatsuyama Tumulus, Nitta-mura, Gumma Prefecture.
- II. Haniwa. Woman Carrying Jar on her Head.
- III. Haniwa. Woman with Baby on Back.
- IV. Haniwa. Head of Smiling Man.
- V. Haniwa. Man Laughing.
- VI. Haniwa. Smiling Farmer.
- VII. Haniwa. Smiling Man Carrying a Shield.
- VIII. Haniwa. Closeup of Plate VII.
- IX. Haniwa. Laughing Male Figure.
- X. Enaki. Shigi-san Engi. The Flying Storehouse.
- XI. Enaki. Shigi-san Engi. Old Man, Nun and Old Woman Talking.
- XII. Enaki. Ban Dainagon Ekotoba. The Plebs.
- XIII. Enaki. Chōjū Giga. Animals Frolicking.
- XIV. Enaki. Chōjū Giga. Animals Frolicking.
- XV. Enaki. Chōjū Giga. Animals Frolicking.
- XVI. Enaki. Chōjū Giga. Animals Frolicking.
- XVII. Enaki. Chōjū Giga. Animals Frolicking.
- XVIII. Enaki. Chōjū Giga. Animals Worshipping.
- XIX. Enaki. Chōjū Giga. Monk and Nun in Neck-Tug-of-War.
- XX. Enaki. Yamai no Sōshi. Strange Disease of Black Nose.

- XXI. Emaki. Yamai no Sōshi. Mental Derangement.
- XXII. Emaki. Gaki Zōshi. Hungry Ghosts.
- XXIII. Ōtsu-e. Benkei Carrying the Stolen Bell.
- XIV. Ukiyo-e. Monkey and Hanging Scroll in Boat. Hanabusa Itcho.
- XV. Ukiyo-e. Gigwa. Hotei, God of Happiness. Nishimura Shigenaga.
- XVI. Ukiyo-e. Courtesan Album. Yoshiwara Street Scene. Okumura Gempachi Masanobu.
- XVII. Ukiyo-e. Jealous Wife Confronting Husband and Paramour. Okumura Gempachi Masanobu.
- XVIII. Ukiyo-e. Sake Party and Dozing Maid. Hasegawa Mitsunobu.
- XXIX. Ukiyo-e. Cat as Buddhist Priest. Kyosen.
- XXX. Ukiyo-e. Night Rain on the Daisu. Kyosen.
- XXXI. Ukiyo-e. Weaving. Suzuki Harunobu?
- XXXII. Ukiyo-e. The Summer Shower. Suzuki Harunobu.
- XXXIII. Ukiyo-e. Love-letters. Suzuki Harunobu?
- XXXIV. Ukiyo-e. The Fox's Wedding: The Meeting Together. Tachibana Minko.
- XXXV. Ukiyo-e. Actor Print. Frog. Bunchō.
- XXXVI. Ukiyo-e. Young Man Asleep. Koryūsai.
- XXXVII. Ukiyo-e. Women Preparing Stuffs for Dresses. Utamaro.
- XXXVIII. Ukiyo-e. Elegant Set of Darling Children. Child Upsetting Goldfish Bowl. Utamaro.
- XXXIX. Ukiyo-e. Self-portrait. Hokusai.
- XL. Ukiyo-e. The Mirror Grinder. Hokusai.
- XLI. Ukiyo-e. Selection from Hokusai's Manga.
- XLII. Ukiyo-e. Selection from Hokusai's Manga.

- XLIII. Ukiyo-e. Selection from Hokusai's Manga.
- XLIV. Ukiyo-e. Selection from Hokusai's Manga.
- XLV. Ukiyo-e. Selection from Hokusai's Manga.
- XLVI. Ukiyo-e. Selection from Hokusai's Manga.
- XLVII. Ukiyo-e. Selection from Hokusai's Manga.
- XLVIII. Ukiyo-e. Selection from Hokusai's Manga.
- XLIX. Ukiyo-e. Shiji Koka. Four scenes from Streets of Edo.
Kitao Masanobu?
- L. Ukiyo-e. Ōiso. Tiger Stone. Utagawa Toyohiro.
- LI. Ukiyo-e. Monkey and Crab. Toyohiro?
- LII. Ukiyo-e. Turtle and Water-Weed. Hiroshige.
- LIII. Ukiyo-e. Surimono. Tortoises and Water Weeds. Hiroshige.
- LIV. Ukiyo-e. The Fifty-Three Stages of the Tokaido. Okitsu.
Hiroshige.
- LV. Ukiyo-e. The Fifty-Three Stages of the Tokaido. Yokkaichi.
Hiroshige.
- LVI. Ukiyo-e. Bewitched Foxes Rehearsing Their Roles. Kuniyoshi.
- LVII. Ukiyo-e. White Mice. Shibata Zeshin.

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PREFACE

HUMOR IN JAPANESE ART

A Survey of Humor in Japanese Art from Three Selected 200 Year Periods

Peter Swann can be held partly responsible for the idea behind this thesis with his following provocative statement:

The Japanese, as a people, are very different from the Chinese. As far as one can talk of national characteristics, they are less ebullient and extrovert than the Chinese. A sense of humour seldom appears in their daily life whereas, oddly enough, their art shows a lively wit. The reverse is true of the Chinese who are a witty gay people in life but are not generally so in their art.¹

The main purpose of this study was to ascertain the absence or presence of humor in the arts of Japan that are uniquely Japanese. If humor was indeed present, a secondary aim was to discover, if possible, the nature of that humor. Because of the enormity of the task, the investigation was limited to those periods of Japanese history in which there was a minimal amount of direct influence from China. In every one of these distinct periods, an art form developed which can be construed as relatively purely Japanese. Chinese-Japanese art, which also thrived throughout these years, is briefly mentioned. However, the latter was not investigated for examples of humor as the purpose was to identify Japanese-source humor only. There may well be humor in the complex forms of Chinese-influenced art discussed, but it would be difficult to

¹Peter C. Swann, Art of China, Korea, and Japan (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), p. 8.

prove the origin of any such response found. It was logically better to investigate the most representative purely Japanese art. The fact that the three periods under scrutiny happened to be of approximately 200 years duration may have been either accidental or fortuitous. I am not suggesting that a period of 200 years' peace is necessary to produce the quiet, harmonious social background perhaps necessary for the growth of humor.

For the purposes of this investigation humor is defined as follows:

Humor is a critical, yet sympathetic human response to a stimulus occurring unexpectedly in an otherwise ordered existence.

For obvious reasons this study is confined to the visual arts.

Humor is an intellectual-emotional response. A balanced image of the world or a harmonious state of mind is upset by a stimulus which disrupts this order. The reaction to such a stimulus is one both intellectual, implying an understanding of events, and emotional, implying a certain warmth of response. The common English word "humor" implies a certain warmth. The emotion is not one of anger, bitterness or sarcasm. It is not noble, sublime or mysterious as it has to do with a disruption of the real world, not an eruption into another world. There is no fear or uncertainty with humor as it concerns a recognized balanced order of things and the reaction when this order is upset. Bitter sarcasm does not contain warmth and is therefore not considered humor as such.

Because there is no word in the Japanese language corresponding exactly to the English word "humor" it does not follow that the response is non-existent in the Japanese culture. The three words commonly used today in Japan are warai which means laughter, kurui which implies

something mad and irrational, and okashi which meant interesting and, later in the Tokugawa Period, funny. As the English word "humor" is adopted into the Japanese language and is written in Katakana we know there is no equivalent Japanese word. But there is no equivalent word in the German language either. The German Humor is etymologically the same word as the English, but slightly different in nuance to the English "humor". The French humeur is more closely connected to "mood" than is the English. In Chinese, again, the situation is the same. There are many related words but none is equivalent to the English. However, no one would assume that the German race or the French or the Chinese had no sense of humor.

An understanding of related words for humor is one thing. A concept of humor is another. We find the Japanese concept of humor which qualifies most properly with the English concept illustrated in Kyōgen theatre which flourished at the time of No drama in the fifteenth century. Kyōgen comic plays were usually performed without masks. Stylized, they were usually not bitterly sarcastic but described the daily life of everyone for all to laugh at. On stage were shown conceited daimyō, ignorant or drinking servants, a husband too weak, a wife too strong. The reaction to these comedies was not one of cold, intellectual criticism, but a critical, yet sympathetic, response. In the full sense of the English word, this response is the English sense of humor.

However, Japanese art is my subject. In the first era studied, during the "Old Tomb Period"² haniwa, clay figures, were investigated.

²So-called from the custom of burying important dead in huge mounds as in Korea.

The idea of using such figures at burial sites may have originated in China, but the Japanese produced forms quite distinct from anything made there:

The Haniwa style is very different from terra cotta figures in Greece and in the Han and the Six Dynasties in China. The Haniwa appear different and are characterized by simplicity, naivete and improvisation of characterization. This might have been due to the use of Haniwa in an extensive way, to the skill of the artisans handling the clay and, also, perhaps to the fact that the Japanese national character has liked such expressions.³

In contrast to the wealth of Nara Buddhist sculpture and painting during the Nara Period when Buddhism became the state religion, the haniwa were not produced by organized efforts of a consciously China-oriented society. In the Buddhist art there was a deliberate extension of both Chinese and Korean styles from the Six Dynasties (221-589) to the T'ang Dynasty (618-907). There is practically no sign of any humor in the Japanese Buddhist art of the Nara Period. The native haniwa may not have been humorous in intent but many emerged close to the foregoing definition of humor.

The second period studied was the beginning of the tenth century until the early Kamakura Period (1185-1249). This was a time of semi-isolation for Japan as in 894 A.D. official relations with the Chinese court ceased. During these years the Japanese, in their splendid new capital at Kyoto, evolved a court culture which produced a sluggish, peaceful two hundred years of script, calligraphy, poetry and painting. The emaki were produced only in this culture and die out when the inbred court social structure with its luxury and refinement collapsed. Kyoto

³Noma Seiroku, Nihon Bunkashi Taikai. The Outline of Japanese Cultural History (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1956), p. 327. Trans. by S. Kato.

society was isolated not only from China but from the rest of Japan as well. During this time, Buddhist art still Chinese-inspired, developed an inner sadness or melancholy as typified by Jōchō's work.⁴

At this time a particular style known as yamato-e or Japanese style developed. The emaki, painted handscrolls, were executed in this style as opposed to the kara-e or Chinese style, and depicted Japanese subjects in stories from Japanese history and legend.

The final period under consideration was the one of true isolation, the Tokugawa or Edo period (1615-1867), with peace and great economic prosperity. The urban population enlarged rapidly and a new moneyed merchant class arose which quickly took over the financial leadership from the great feudal lords, the daimyō. The merchants and their employees provided the milieu for the successful ukiyo-e, the wood block prints. The origins of wood block printing technique can be traced back to China where, in the T'ang Dynasty, Buddhist iconographical pictures were printed in black and white outline. However, in Japan, ukiyo-e became a purely Japanese development and the expression of the plebian population of the cities--especially of Edo, the seat of the Tokugawa shōguns. The rapidly growing, ebullient, wealthy, witty population demanded an art that was timely, topical in subject, lively and inexpensively available. The Kanō School was the 'official school' and produced Chinese style paintings with accomplished monochrome brushwork.⁵

⁴For example, the Amida Buddha in wood gilt in the Byōdō-in in Kyoto. Charles S. Terry, Masterworks of Japanese Art (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1960), Plate 59.

⁵A brief discussion of the Kanō School follows on pages 47-48.

But a physical separation occurred in the Tokugawa Period. The chōnin developed their own Japanese ukiyo-e. The intellectuals who studied the Confucian classics supported the Chinese-oriented Nanga art.

Following the application of a given definition of humor as understood from the English concept of the word to uniquely Japanese forms of art in three separate periods and, with the understanding that humor is a deeply-rooted human response, one that is perhaps universal, I expected to find examples of humor in the art. It may indeed well be the same as the English sense of the word implies.

Research for this project included trips to pertinent museums in Seattle, Toronto, Washington, D.C. and Hawaii where works of Japanese art were studied, a few objects photographed and informed people interested in the subject were contacted. A month was spent in Japan going through many of the museums, shrines, temples and monasteries in order to reach a better understanding of things Japanese. Primary and secondary source materials relating to all central aspects of this thesis, with particular reference to humor in Japanese art, were used.

CHAPTER I

A DISCUSSION OF HUMOR OR "BURIED LAUGHTER"

Humor is a familiar emotion. It becomes elusive, however, when it is looked at intellectually. Few people really know anything about it, fewer are able to analyze it--or even think constructively about it. Anyone can give examples of humorous things; the difficulty lies in analyzing why something is amusing. An analytical appraisal of humor is inclined to deaden or remove entirely the light-hearted aspect.

Since 1900, writers have attempted to classify humor, with the result that many different definitions have emerged. It can be studied from the point of view of motive or by the amount and type of laughter-response. Koestler arrived at his analysis with both motive and response considered:

(a) the quality of the emotional charge (sexual, overtly aggressive, malicious, and so forth); (b) the nature of the bisociated fields; (c) the nature of the junction (puns, comic of situations, and so forth); (d) narratives with a single junction as opposed to those which have a sustained bisociative character (witticism and humorous epic); (e) the degree of implicitness (rich versus dry humor, overt or riddle character).¹

¹Arthur Koestler, Insight and Outlook (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1949), p. 108.

Munro has divided his study of humor into ten explicit causes or stimuli:

1. Any breach of the usual order of events.
2. Any forbidden breach of the usual order of events.
3. Indecency.
4. Importing into one situation what belongs to another.
5. Anything masquerading as something it is not.
6. Word-play.
7. Nonsense.
8. Small misfortunes.
9. Want of knowledge or skill.
10. Veiled insults.²

However, his series is incomplete as a full, workable definition. Every one of his points is easily understood, but the laughter-response occasioned by any of them might easily be criticism that was sarcastic, unkind or otherwise unsympathetic. This would appear to be handling humor as a primarily negative concept.

Oliver adds fear and distortion to a capricious and uncertain basis for humor, while admitting that humor does give man stability if it enables him to understand reality.

Humor has a special value to a being so capricious and uncertain as man, unable to live wholly in the present, remembering yet creating myths even in the memory of his own life, confronting a future even more distorted than his past because it is falsified by his own fears and hopes. Humor gives him some stability, for it allows him to make an honest confession of his relativity.³

From all of these it becomes evident that humor is a difficult emotion to define. It is often used with the greatest degree of

²D.H. Munro, Argument of Laughter (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1951), p. 40.

³E.J. Oliver, Hyprocrisy and Humour (London: Sheed and Ward, 1960), p. 9.

looseness, as when a man is endowed with humor because he laughs readily. Because a definition of humor is elusive, yet another scholar's ideas should be pursued. Sully, one of the earliest analysts of the subject, numbers among humor's dominant traits:

....a quiet survey of things, at once playful and reflective; a mode of greeting amusing shows which seems in its moderation to be both an indulgence in the sense of fun and an expiation for the rudeness of such indulgence; an outward, expansive, movement of the spirits met and reparded by a cross-current of something like kindly thoughtfulness.⁴

Here is an understanding of humor which shows it to be sympathetic, moderate, perhaps apologetic but, above all, kind and thoughtful.

It is impossible to be certain, but humor may thrive best at the level of ideas. "Yet the element of intellect which is vital to humor does not imply subtlety of mind, still less the presence of ideas remote from the plane of ordinary men's understanding."⁵ The type of mind needed to nourish humor, both for our own good and for this discussion, is a mind given to musing on what it observes, having a sufficient life and independence of movement to rise above the dull mechanical acceptance of things, and to pierce these with the ray of fresh criticism. Any shrewd mind is capable of the distinguishing intellectual element in humorous contemplation because it possesses that power which enables it to grasp things together and study their relations one to another, which is, after all, at the root of all the higher perceptions for the laughable. These minds also see things against

⁴James Sully, An Essay on Laughter (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902), p. 299.

⁵Ibid., p. 300.

their backgrounds, see incidents in complete settings and, therefore, are able to note the "relations of contrariety"⁶ which are of the essence of the ludicrous. An understanding of the setting is dependent on a process of imaginative reflection, for the background which humor requires is not the visible one but a re-constructed one.

Not only the background needs to be understood. It must be realized that humor, itself, is part of the understanding. It is certainly concerned with no single aspect or operation of character. It really holds no brief for any specific group or for any one person. Humor is laughter springing from an objective, but sympathetic, reflection upon individual character as a factor in life as a whole. But it is more than amused tolerance; it is understanding. Smith describes this aspect with insight:

I regard humor as the highest modification effected upon laughter by civilization. It is a last grace, the gift of having lived, of having enjoyed and suffered greatly, like Tennyson's Ulysses. Humor is laughter purged of its grosser elements; egoism, selfishness, and superiority. Humor is laughter that has passed through the mind and acquired a sympathetic warmth. Humor is laughter that can readjust man to the moral harmony of the universe.⁷

Smith endows humor with grace, reflectiveness and sympathetic warmth. Rapp supports these characteristics and adds the measure of sorrow that, for him, accompanies humor. He points out that the laughter-response is not one of bitterness or aggressiveness or hate.

Upon consideration of the foregoing, for the purpose of this

⁶Ibid.

⁷Willard Smith, The Nature of Comedy (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1930), p. 146.

investigation, humor is defined as follows:

Humor is a critical, yet sympathetic, human response to a stimulus occurring unexpectedly in an otherwise ordered existence.

If the nature of the response is understood, humor then serves as a communicative agent. It says something about what is observed and, in turn, more about the observer. However, it is not a wildly extravagant emotion: "...never disproportionate--if in excess, it becomes ridiculous."⁸

Material concerning Japanese humor from the oriental point of view is scarce. What there is suggests that the Japanese regard humor as the English understand it. Blyth⁹ states that he finds the Japanese the most humorous of all nations.¹⁰ He singles out the sympathetic response inherent in Japanese humor by stating that there is no spitefulness or rudeness or personal animus in Japanese humor.¹¹ He finds one main difference between Japanese and English styles of humor; the Japanese is less on the surface.¹² In general, he finds Japanese humor, "of a great variety and limitless scope, without being either overblasphemous or sneering."¹³

⁸Paul Lauter, Theories of Comedy (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964), p. 112.

⁹R.H. Blyth, professor at Gakushūin University and lecturer at Tokyo University, is a scholar of Japanese literature both ancient and modern, as well as an authority on English literature. He reads Japanese with ease and speaks and understands it perfectly.

¹⁰R.H. Blyth, Japanese Humour (Tokyo: Japn Travel Bureau, 1963), p. vii.

¹¹Blyth, Oriental Humor (Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, (1959), p. 201.

¹²Ibid., p. 204.

¹³Blyth, Japanese Humour (Tokyo: Japan Travel Bureau, 1963), p. 19.

Blyth agrees with the occidental writers who point out that humor requires an honest and sympathetic appraisal of mankind, and finds that Japanese humor "springs from the genius of perception of the fitness of things."¹⁴ He further states that Japanese humor is "of no contrast between ideal and real, words and actions, the expected and the actual."¹⁵

Blyth is supported in his analysis by the Japanese Kaneko who discusses jokes in Japanese culture. Nearly every joke is recognizable as similar to amusing situations occurring in the Christian world and can be appreciated from the English point of view.¹⁶

One other Japanese source was discovered that discussed humor from a purely Japanese point of view. Yashiro said that he considers the character of Japanese humor, generally speaking, as a "sympathetic smile of good will."¹⁷

There is one final aspect of humor that should be considered--laughter. Laughter is really the beginning of humor. And, as Bergler points out, the irony of all investigations on laughter or on humor and wit, lies in a contradiction which becomes also a cyclic paradox. One laughs when and because something is funny, and something is funny

¹⁴Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 127.

¹⁶N.N. Kaneko, The Old Japanese Humor (Tokyo: The World Information Service, Ltd., 1949)

¹⁷U. Yashiro, Nihon Bijutsu no Tokushitso. Characteristics of Japanese Art (2d ed., Tokyo: Iwanami, 1965), p. 632. Trans. by S. Kato.

because and when one laughs.¹⁸

Bergler also affirms that laughter is a necessary and healthy internal debunking process. It therefore reduces fear. It is also not only the most personal but also the only incorruptible human trait:

Men can be bought and their allegiances swayed; men can be drugged (even without money or promises) through the use of slogans, lies, prejudices, and what not. Laughter can be officially pointed in the wrong direction or misused for unsavory purposes. But no dictator in the world can successfully interdict personal laughter.¹⁹

Even people who are superficially submissive can redeem their self-esteem with hidden laughter directed against their tormentors.

Now, the connecting link between laughter and humor is seen when we arrange laughter in a series, from laughs of triumph or scorn to a sympathetic sense of the ludicrous, and realize that the list represents a steady humanization into humor. Laughter rings the bell announcing man's departure from the world of instinct. He is then emancipated from the humorless laws of the biological urge and from the fanaticism of purposeful single-mindedness; he becomes bisociatively double-minded. Man is able to see both faces of the coin at the same time. He can turn things over and around in his mind. He can see the trivial aspects of his tragedy and the tragic absurdity of his routine.

I agree with the methods Blyth has chosen to support his contention that Japanese humor does not differ in essentials from occidental humor. Both he and Kaneko also demonstrate that, while what one laughs at may change through the centuries, basically the Japanese are laughing sympathetically at occurrences that disrupt their social order and

¹⁸Edmund Bergler, Laughter and the Sense of Humor (New York Intercontinental Medical Book Corporation, 1956), p. vi.

¹⁹Ibid., p. xiii.

fitness of things. Therefore, my presentation of humor as a human response of sympathetic warmth to a stimulus occurring unexpectedly in an otherwise ordered existence can refer both to occidental and oriental cultures. Humor is produced by the contrast of the thing as it is or ought to be and the thing smashed out of shape and as it ought not to be.

As early as art and letters themselves, humor found its expression in drawing, and in words. "Even a savage could draw a man with a long nose. Indeed his main difficulty was to draw him with a short one. Hence the art of caricature could not get far till the art of correct drawing had got further."²⁰ The same thing happened with words. When language got properly formulated it became possible to use words to call up a funny or ridiculous idea and to get fun out of the words themselves. A contrast or incongruity could be got out of the difference between the apparent and real significance of the sounds and characters. Then wit was born and humor was presented in a way involving an unexpected play on words and taking fun out of the actual words themselves.

So humor as an element in art and letters has come down to us from the centuries. Most important, we must not forget that humor in its highest meaning does not depend on verbal incongruities or on tricks of sight and hearing. It finds its basis in the incongruity of life itself, the contrast between the fretting cares and the petty sorrows of the day and the long mystery of tomorrow. Humor becomes the contemplation and interpretation of our life.

²⁰Stephen Leacock, Humor and Humanity (London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd., 1937), p. 13.

CHAPTER II

HANIWA

The protohistoric period in Japan, its Iron Age, which began about the first or second century A.D., bequeathed monumental tombs and small clay figures to future eras. The tombs are the tumuli of the emperors or great chieftains. In fact, the practice of elaborate tumulus burial was the one unifying force throughout the various stages of protohistoric Japan. Mountain-like burial barrows were built up and were of necessity restricted to persons of wealth and social importance, the most impressive examples being the tumuli built for deceased emperors.¹ Some ten thousand burial mounds are known today from this period, an impressive number. We therefore refer to this era as the Tumulus Period. It was only with the advent of Buddhist culture in the sixth century that the new religion began to bring to an end the costly tumulus cult.

The historical period in Japan is usually considered to begin with the Asuka Period (552-645), followed by Early Nara or Hakuho (645-710) and Later Nara or Tempyo (710-794). For practical purposes the last years of the Tumulus Period must be considered to overlap well into the early

¹Photographs showing tumuli are to be found in the following: Fumio Miki, Haniwa: The Clay Sculpture of Protohistoric Japan (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1961), p. 16; Noma Seiroku, The Arts of Japan: Ancient and Medieval (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1966), pp. 22, 23; Peter C. Swann, An Introduction to the Arts of Japan (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1958), p. 4.

historical beginning of the Asuka period.

The earliest tumulus were simple artificial hills of considerable scale covering the interred remains. These soon developed into the most representative type of tumulus, consisting of two mounds, one circular, the other triangular, merged into one another and the total barrow mound in over-all shape resembled a keyhole. The moat or moats generally found surrounding the whole helped to emphasize the over-all keyhole outline. The interment took place in a sarcophagus of stone or pottery in the back circular mound, usually in a burial chamber or vault of unhewn stones, often reached by a stone corridor.

The slopes of the tumuli were broken up into a series of terraces, and it was on these side terraces, as well as on the top of both the circular and rectangular portions of the mounds, that the unglazed earthenware objects known as haniwa (hani means 'clay' and wa 'circle' or, literally, 'clay cylinders') were placed. The circular bases were pressed into the soft earth of the newly heaped-up tumulus. These pottery objects, though only lightly baked and fairly fragile, are virtually impervious to time and have come down to us today in large numbers. Plate I is a diagram of a tumulus indicating placement of haniwa.²

Haniwa may be divided into two classes: representational figures and simple cylinders. The latter appear to have been the only variety produced in the earliest part of the Tumulus period and their function in the burials, imperfectly understood today, was obviously a vital one.³

²Miki, Haniwa. fig. 2, p. 17.

³Ibid., p. 18.

They were set up or partly interred in large numbers around the base of the burial mounds, in regular rows up along their side slopes, or along the upper ridges.

It is thought that the representational haniwa figures and models were set up on the tumulus at places of special religious and ritual significance, for theirs seems to have been both a spiritual and liturgical function. It is reasonable to assume that the subject-matter was primarily determined by the function of the figures, but the range of subject-matter was a wide one. Men and horses would appear to be most common, but virtually every other animal known to the time is also represented, with special and feeling attention devoted to the domesticated animals that shared man's primitive dwellings. Among the items of material culture, those concerned with the arts of war pre-dominate, and models wearing armor are found, as well as an impressive array of ceremonial regalia. Important also appear to be the models of dwelling houses and boats

The origin of these clay figures probably lies in China and, perhaps, because this could be so, certain of the haniwa, especially those depicting houses and boats, bear a superficial resemblance to similar objects well-known from China. Noma mentions this occasional similarity but points out that the haniwa style is very different to the Chinese figures and mentions their simplicity, naivete and improvisation of characterization.⁴ Fumio Miki agrees with Seiroku and says that the "art of haniwa was, throughout its long and dimly understood history, purely and essentially Japanese."⁵

⁴See page 4, Preface.

⁵Miki, Haniwa, p. 18.

Japan's society was a class society with carefully defined strata and painstaking attention to status. It was a society without the feeling of conqueror and conquered. Racially, it was already virtually homogeneous.⁶ As we look at examples of them, we cannot help but feel that the haniwa seem to reflect a very human relationship between the upper and lower strata of this early society. We do not know if the contemporary society found certain haniwa amusing. And, yet, the feeling that there is humor in the haniwa persists. Why is this? The social background in which the figures were produced was static, peaceful and a continuation of the Yayoi Period which was one of calm following the dynamic and tempestuous Jomon era. Knowing that the world of the haniwa was static, any movement suddenly introduced into it tends to produce a startled response. Many of the haniwa were dramatic and over-exaggerated characterizations of man and women performing ordinary occupations. Many of the haniwa appear to be dancers, musicians, singers and clowns, some of these wearing wide smiles. Occasionally a warrior also smiles. There are laughing peasants and Miki speculates that these happy faces may have had "some association with or prescience of a bountiful autumn harvest."⁷ Smiling peasant faces are seen on the Harvester Vase from Hagia Triada, c. 1500 B.C. Why were amusing figures placed among the others on the tombs? They may, of course, have been meant to provide entertainment for the dead, just as live entertainers had provided him with amusement when he was alive. If we knew the figures were to stand as companions for the dead which,

⁶For a concise description of the relevant history consult G.B. Sansom, Japan: A Short Cultural History (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1962), part I.

⁷Miki, Haniwa, p. 157.

after all, is the best speculation as the idea parallels similar burial customs and beliefs in other parts of the world, we could then point to various laughing haniwa as amusing to the people of the haniwa world as well as ourselves. There is no literature commenting on the definite use of the clay figures and we can only guess as to their meaning. Until evidence is uncovered their purpose can be only supposition.

The oldest haniwa burials are in the Kyoto-Nara area, the historical centers of old Japanese culture. Had the haniwa figures actually been developed to be substituted for the cruel practice of burying alive servants and retainers of important persons⁸ one would naturally expect that the earliest haniwa forms known would be those showing human beings. But such is not the case. In the Kyoto-Nara area the human figures do not appear until the middle of the Tumulus Period, and even then they are extremely rare. Later on, as the haniwa spread throughout Japan, more and more human figures were produced, while in the provinces comparatively far from the influence of the Kyoto-Nara area, the human-figure haniwa showed the charming results of the introduction of many popular themes, often approaching genre. Once this happened, these developments appear in turn to have made themselves felt back in the Kyoto-Nara area, in a kind of reverse flow.

It is now time to look at some of the haniwa figures in this search for humor. Working with a long, flexible rope of kneaded clay the haniwa artisan quickly built up a simple cylinder and adorned it with simple modeled features and punched-out eyes and mouth. There is

⁸J. Edward Kidder, Early Japanese Art: The Great Tombs and Treasurers (Princeton, New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1964), pp. 78-82.

no hint of sorrow, pain or any deformation of form. As are tomb figures from other countries, many of the haniwa are happy and laughing, some so full of life that it cannot be completely contained within the narrow limits of their confining clay cylinders.

It must be pointed out that there may be humor where none was intended. The nose may be and often is far too large for the face on which it has been set; the ears, often on the same figure, also may be quite out of scale with the other features. But it is important to be aware that the best, although they may appear unnatural and unstable, are actually quite cunningly balanced. It is also important to bear in mind that of the many complex processes out of which the views and theories of modern art have slowly evolved, the haniwa artisans were totally unaware. It would be a mistake, indeed, to let the superficial qualities of their work seduce us into attributing to them any of the motivations for which we today find in our own art. The haniwa artisans did not have modern attitudes. Theirs were the simple, natural attitudes that belonged to the dawn of Japanese civilization. They saw clearly and expressed clearly what they saw, eliminating non-essentials. The result was their reality. No one can fail to be impressed by the freshness of the figures or be untouched by the vigorous enthusiasm expressed in their characterization.

The first example, Plate II,⁹ is chosen because of the over-emphasis of a proud, dignified bearing and mien of the woman carrying the jar on her head. Her pride of stance, the expression of her small, straightly-cut mouth, the position of the large nose on her face, the

⁹Miki, Haniwa, Plate 39.

angle at which the jar is balanced, the hair arranged so far back on her head, the forward thrust of the chest and the two-tiny protruding breasts combine to create a woman larger than life itself and yet she is only fifty centimeters high. Because everything is so exaggerated, she causes a startled, sympathetic response as she is recognized for what she really is--an ordinary woman performing a very usual daily task. The over-emphasis of characterization may not have been appreciated by the haniwa people, of course, but, today, she elicits wry recognition of a particular type of human behaviour.

She can be compared to the next figure, a woman, singing, with a baby strapped on her back papoose-fashion and also balancing a jar or cup on top of her head,¹⁰ Plate III. She portrays the "art of artlessness",¹¹ and survives as a woman of considerable charm and strength. She wears a necklace of stones almost as large as her tiny out-thrust breasts. Her face shows determination and vigor in the positioning of the features and set of the head on the shoulders. She commands a response of sympathetic warmth as we notice her outstanding forcefulness and verve compared to the tiny, satisfied face of the baby sleeping against her back.

Both women are ingenious. One is amusing because of her pretentious strutting, the other because of the difference between her forcefulness and the helplessness of the tiny baby. They may, or may not, have amused the haniwa people. However, humor seems to be definitely

¹⁰J. Edward Kidder, The Birth of Japanese Art (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), fig. 91, p. 141.

¹¹Ibid., p. 157.

indicated in the next few works. Plate IV¹² shows us the head of a smiling man. The entire face is built around the fine, appreciative chuckle in which the figure is indulging. The expressive technique capitalizes upon the contrast between the slit-like eyes, pulled down humorously at both ends, and the large, crescent-moon mouth. In many haniwa figures special attention appears to have been paid to facial gestures of singing, wailing, etc. in a work, emotions that could be clearly and completely handled through manipulation of facial elements. In this example, as always, the haniwa face was virtually the sum total of its eyes and mouth, and when, as in a laughing face, the mouth was widely exaggerated, the result introduced enormous action and movement to the whole face.

Plate V¹³ shows a man laughing and either beating his breast or clutching it in a spasm of mirth. I do not agree with Noma Seiroku that it should be entitled an "angry man."¹⁴ Seiroku was obviously concerned only with the slit mouth and did not take into consideration the curvature of the chin exactly paralleling the mouth and the rounded eyes which would have been slits also had the emotion been one of anger. It is a fine representation of a laughing person of low status, probably a peasant. He has a sickle at his waist. The eyes and crescent-shaped mouth give an irresistible air of a simple, uncomplicated mirth. It is

¹²Miki, Haniwa. Plate 48.

¹³Ibid., Plate 51.

¹⁴Noma Seiroku, The Heritage of Japanese Art (Tokyo: Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai, 1967), Plate 8.

a good companion piece for the next example, Plate VI.¹⁵ Here the agricultural tool carried on the shoulder is a hoe, in contrast with the sickle at the waist. Both figures were found in the same tumulus. Again, this is an unpretentious and unsophisticated mirth, expressed in the lines and cuts of the eyes and the crescent-shaped mouth.¹⁶

There is yet another pair of seemingly-related haniwa. Plates VII¹⁷ and VIII¹⁸ show a smiling man carrying a shield. He is taller but similar in other respects to the next example. Each is a joyful figure wearing an unusual hat and holding a shield. Here the shield has been highly abstracted and all that appears is a flat, rectangular appendage to the figure, decorated with a simple geometric device. No one could fail to respond to the hearty humor depicted. Eyebrows, eyes, uplifted nose, curved mouth and even the placement of the hollowed horn-like ears demand a smiling response. The forward tilt of the conical hat seems to add to the joyous feeling expressed by the figure.

Plate IX¹⁹ is another laughing male figure brandishing a highly

¹⁵Miki, Haniwa, Plate 54.

¹⁶For a representation in color see: J. Edward Kidder, The Birth of Japanese Art (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), Plate I.

¹⁷Miki, Haniwa. Plate 66.

¹⁸Yukio Yashiro, 2000 Years of Japanese Art (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., n.d.), p. 169.

¹⁹Miki, Haniwa. Plate 67.

abstracted shield which, at first glance, looks more like a corset and its surface decoration has been simplified into a set of vertical stripes. Note in this instance how the laughing eyes and mouth are set into an outlined oval-shaped pan. The raised lines of the cheeks, paralleling the outer silhouette of the face itself emphasize the uplifted lines running to the corners of the eyes and add to the appearance of levity. Here, too, the ornament on top of the hat seems to be flying away and is expressive of light-heartedness.

The definitely laughing and widely smiling haniwa faces illustrated agree with Yashiro's definition of Japanese humor:

I consider the character of Japanese laughter, generally speaking, to be a sympathetic smile of good will.²⁰

No matter what the purpose of the haniwa figures, many are shown to epitomize this characteristic of "good will."²¹ The figures are simple and uncomplicated. The humor would appear to be simple and uncomplicated. It is sympathetic, not malicious or biting. As for the "lively wit" mentioned by Swann, if he means by this an overt display of good humor, it is indeed seen in the last six examples. The two feminine haniwa, however, depict humor of a gentler nature and more suggested than grossly depicted. This humor is underplayed rather than over-scored. There is therefore both "lively wit" and a gentle-sympathy type of humor in the haniwa.

²⁰U. Yashiro, Nihon Bijutsu no Tokushitsu, p. 632.

CHAPTER III

EMAKI

The term emaki refers to a type of picture scroll produced in large numbers in Japan in ancient and medieval times from the tenth century on. Widely varied in subject matter, they illustrate, usually with an accompanying text, literary works, moral tales, biographies and legends concerning the origin of celebrated shrines and temples. Because this investigation is concerned with humor primarily Japanese, it is necessary to look at, briefly, the evolution of emaki in its historical context and show how it was possible for a purely Japanese form of picture scroll to develop. For the mature development of a "truly national style"¹ of Japanese art, the section of Japanese art history covering the growth of emaki in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries possesses as much interest and importance as the development of the ukiyo-e to be studied in the next chapter.

In 894, official relations with the Chinese court ceased, and the Japanese were left to themselves to assimilate and adapt to their own needs and tastes the Chinese culture which they had been importing.²

¹Robert Treat Paine and Alexander Soper, The Art and Architecture of Japan (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1960), p. 65.

²For material concerning the cessation of official relations with China, the reader is directed to Sansom, Japan: A Short Cultural History, Part III, p. 185 f.

The lapse of official relations did not, of course, mean that all contact with China ceased. There was still a going and coming of priests, students and traders. However, generally speaking, the Japanese began to stand on their own feet and work out their own methods for using the borrowed culture by the end of the ninth century. There was even a slight reaction at this period in favour of purely Japanese studies.³ It is a great mistake to think that the Japanese have excelled only as copyists of foreign institutions. As Sansom points out:

That they had the courage and wisdom to copy in the first place is greatly to their credit; and their later history shows that they have never rested content with an uncritical acceptance of imported models.⁴

The emaki was first suggested by similar scrolls from China. It is not clear just when the Chinese first conceived the idea of painting pictures on a horizontal scroll. In China, however, the scroll is older than any other form of book, and it seems likely that the picture scroll was only a natural sequel to the original written scroll. We know that works in this form already existed under the Han Dynasty in the first century A.D.⁵ The total number of picture scrolls produced in China from Han to T'ang times was truly enormous. A fair number of these Chinese scrolls must have been brought across to Japan, probably with other books and paintings, around the time when Buddhism was first

³Ibid., p. 209.

⁴Ibid., p. 210.

⁵Hideo Okudaira, Emaki: Japanese Picture Scrolls (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1962), p. 44.

introduced into Japan (552 A.D.).

Buddhism increased enormously in popularity in the Nara period and transcription of the scriptures reached its greatest height. It is among the surviving scriptures copied during this period that one finds the earliest extant specimen of the picture scroll--the E Inga-kyō. This work, an illustrated version of the Sutra of Cause and Effect,⁶ relates the life-story of the Buddha; his birth, his leaving home, his religious activities and his final entry into Nirvana. The scroll is divided horizontally into two portions, corresponding to the text below. Though it is thus no more than a sutra scroll with illustrations, it nevertheless constitutes a form of emaki. As this kind of illustrated sutra scroll, in which pictures and text are aligned horizontally, was also found among the sutra scrolls unearthed at Tun-huang, it is fairly certain that illustrated scrolls of this kind were not a Japanese invention but copies of originals brought from China.

The Japanese showed great interest in the form of the Chinese picture scroll. But, before the Japanese emaki could appear, it was necessary for a truly native culture to develop in Japan to give the new form nourishment. The first signs of this new culture appeared when Japan stopped sending envoys to T'ang China. When the T'ang Dynasty collapsed in 907, the Japanese replaced T'ang culture with their own ideas. In 905 the first Imperial anthology of 31-syllable poems or native waka, the Kokinshu, was compiled.

At the same time, the coming into use of the kana syllabary paved the way for a truly Japanese literature and eventually brought

⁶Ibid., color plate I, fig. 1.

about the great age of "kana literature" and of the romances. Screen paintings of Japanese beauty spots, customs and yearly observances came into sudden vogue. The use of things purely Japanese as subjects for such paintings increased suddenly from the beginning of the tenth century. Under the influence of this sudden emergence of a native Japanese culture and art, the picture scroll, similarly, was to make a new start as the truly Japanese emaki. To this new style the name yamato-e has been given, signifying "Japanese-style paintings," in contrast to styles more after the Chinese manner.

The stimulus of the new native culture on the emaki was considerable. There are various reasons why the story-and-picture scroll form achieved such popularity. Making them was a popular pastime among aristocrats. The picture scroll which could be small and easy to handle was ideally suited to the pleasure-loving life of the nobility. Even though the scroll appeared small in size, it could unroll to reveal an unexpected length of picture with a constantly changing scene. There was also a vogue for picture contests, an ideal social sport. It can therefore be seen that the picture scroll at this time was encouraged to develop literary and decorative characteristics by the favor it found among the aristocracy.

The period from the reigns of the Emperors Daigo and Murakami to that of the Emperor Ichijō (897-1036) saw both the birth and the efflorescence of the purely Japanese emaki.

Four emaki masterpieces were produced in the court-oriented, pleasure-loving society of Kyoto in the Heian Period of the twelfth century--the Genji, Shigi-san, Ban Dainagon and Chōjū Giga scrolls.

The late Heian Period (1086-1185) saw the aristocratic culture reach its peak. Then, receiving little stimulus from abroad and isolated within the narrow confines of the Imperial capital at Kyoto, it began to lose its power of originality and started to stagnate. The system of government by "cloistered Emperors" which took the place of the Fujiwara regency was, indeed, a decadent and abnormal phenomenon, and it soon collapsed. The warrior class slowly but surely increased its power. The court aristocracy, its old security and assurance gone, lost most of its former brilliance.

One result of this tendency was the spread to the aristocracy of elements from the culture of the common people, a culture that was at a lower level than and of different stock from their own. Popular songs and dances came into favor. In literature a new type of work appeared, dealing with characters such as warriors and people from the provinces, hitherto scarcely regarded as human beings, and which used for its themes the stories of martial prowess and the comic or vulgar tales popular among the lower classes.

A combination of worship of the past, which is how the aristocracy viewed the days of the Fujiwara regency, and an interest in the new realities of the present was reflected in the picture scroll. A product of the interest in the past was the Genji Monogatari Emaki (Tales of Genji), the classic romance of Japan.⁷ The text of the scroll is written in graceful, flowing kana script on the finest paper which is inlaid with gold flakes, gold dust, fine silver stripes and

⁷For illustrations see: Okudaira, Emaki: Japanese Picture Scrolls, fig. 2, Color Pl. 2; Paine and Soper, The Art and Architecture of Japan, Pl. 56; Yukio Yashiro, 2000 Years of Japanese Art (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.), Plates 95, 96, p. 170.

floral patterns. The pictures, of narrow width, alternate with the text. Most of the scenes are of interiors of nobles' mansions, and a characteristic "bird's-eye view" technique with the roofs removed to allow the rooms and their occupants to be viewed from above is added. Tilted backgrounds offer a perspective which gives scope for story-telling. Depth, as such, is a subsidiary factor. Producing effects of dreamy unreality, placid and expressionless faces are painted with the eyes merely two single curved lines and the nose a single hook.⁸ The 'dash eye' stems from China as it can be observed in the painted brick of late Han or early Six Dynasties date (second to fourth century A.D.) which depict an Animal Fight in the Shang-lin Park.⁹ Nowhere, perhaps, more clearly than in this Genji Monogatari scroll, can be read the longing of the aristocracy for the departed glories of the Fujiwara society.

The Shigi-san Engi (Legends of Shigi-san Temple), and the Ban Dainagon Ekotoba (Story of the Courtier Ban Dainagon), on the other hand, are products of the new age. This second great tradition of scroll painting was based on popular, not classical literature. It is now possible to say, too, that the Japanese themselves found the scrolls amusing. Yashiro speaks of "the sympathetic smile of good will" in emaki of this period, particularly the Shigi-san Engi and the Chōjū Giga scrolls. He emphasizes that the amusing scenes in the emaki are "light humor" rather than bitter irony.¹⁰

⁸Okudaira, Emaki: Japanese Picture Scrolls, fig. 3, 76.

⁹Paine and Soper, The Art and Architecture of Japan, p. 66.

¹⁰Yashiro, Nihon Bijutsu no Tokushitsu, pp. 632-633.

The Shigi-san Engi,¹¹ uses a narrative for its subject matter something in the nature of a popular legend. It combines three stories--the story of a miracle that happens to a devout priest at the Shigi-san monastery in Yamato Province, and the story of his discovery by his sister, a nun, who has not seen him since he left home twenty years before. Though it is in one sense the biography of a man of religion, the emphasis is less on piety than on popular, narrative content. There is one incident relating to court life but the prevailing tone of the whole is plebian. What is more, the artist does not see his ordinary people merely as figures serving to illustrate social manners and customs, but approaches them with a positive curiosity as representatives of the new order that is just evolving. This in itself suggests that he does not belong to the newly emerging class.

While the Genji illustrations are short, these are long, continuous pictures measuring some thirty feet. In these, too, the color is not so brilliant and not heavily applied, but is a wash used to accent the speed of the line drawing. The well-known method of continuous representation was used and the same figures appear again and again in lively episodes.

In our example (from the first scroll), Plate X,¹² we see the magic flying iron bowl of the Buddhist prelate Myōren (who, in the early tenth century, made the Chōgōson Temple on Mount Shigi in Nara

¹¹For illustrations see: Okudaira, Enaki: Japanese Picture Scrolls, Fig. 4, Color Pl. 3; Paine and Soper, The Art and Architecture of Japan, Pl. 59; Yashiro, 2000 Years of Japanese Art, Pl. 98, p. 172.

¹²Paine and Soper, The Art and Architecture of Japan, Plate 59.

Prefecture famous) carrying the rice storehouse of a wealthy man from the foot of the mountain to the hungry hermit waiting at the top. The passersby are extremely excited and agitated at the spectacle. We find them gesticulating and, in general, "carrying on." The new style that places emphasis on line--a style that is at once light, rhythmical, and admirably suited to the expression of movement and speed--gives lively movements to the characters and portrays the faces in such a way that particular characteristics are emphasized to the extent that they verge on caricature. In the Genji scrolls the faces were devoid of individuality. Not so here. The separate characters are individually handled from the three wildly gesticulating men on the left, to the astounded owner mounting his horse to take off in pursuit in the center, to the figures rushing in consternation onto the scene at the right. The humor is evident in this strange occurrence that abruptly shatters a formerly placid world. The manner in which the characters are portrayed shows their startled incredulity which, in turn, becomes humorous. The excitement and the realistic and dramatic descriptive elements shown here had formerly been unknown in emaki. In this context the Shigi-san Engi marks the beginning of the new age.

Another scene from the same emaki, Plate XI,¹³ shows a small group of three people excitedly talking about the Imperial Messenger who has just left after asking Myōren on Mount Shigi to pray for the Emperor's health. The old man's face on the right is contorted with

¹³R.H. Blyth, Japanese Humour (3rd ed.; Tokyo: Japan Travel Bureau, 1963), p. 67.

laughter wrinkles. A nun with her large mouth agape in a wide smile is adjusting her hat, and an old woman with an exceptionally bright bulbous nose is gesticulating excitedly with her widespread hands. Gaiety, excitement, and a sense of joyous interaction with one another and participation in the story are all shown with the use of very few lines. Even though the figures border on caricature, there is no sense of maliciousness or unkindness. There is a sympathetic response to an unexpected event.

The Ban Dainagon Ekotoba,¹⁴ continues the dramatic possibilities when a number of excited figures rush about or gesticulate wildly on a scroll painting. In three scrolls it tells the true story of a state minister, courtier Tomo Ban no Yoshio, who set fire to the Ōtemmon Gate of the Imperial Palace in Kyoto and laid the blame on the Minister of the Left, Minamoto no Makoto, in an attempt to ruin him. However, the true facts are exposed and Dainagon is exiled on a remote island. The painter was probably Tokiwa Mitsunaga, a famous artist of the late twelfth century, but this has not as yet been proven satisfactorily. While the reality of the story seems cruel, many of the scenes contain figures in humorous attitudes.

As well as nobles serving at court, many characters from the lower levels of society are worked in and, in the scene in front of the burning gate, the tiny figures are individually drawn, every one showing confusion, excitement, fear or astonishment. Free use is made

¹⁴For illustrations see: Okudaira, Emaki: Japanese Picture Scrolls, Pl. 2, Color Pl. 4; Yashiro, 2000 Years of Japanese Art, Plates 102, 103, p. 176, 177; Sansom, Japan: A Short Cultural History, fig. 30, p. 218.

of vigorous lines which bring out the liveliness of their movements. The story is like the Shigi-san Engi in that it lays more emphasis on action than, as do the Genji scrolls, on mood.

Our sample Plate XII,¹⁵ shows with amusing insight the characters of three men living in Kyoto eight hundred years ago--Snout the Tinker, Bottom the Weaver, and Flute the Bellows-mender.

The three faces, as well as the postures, are well contrasted, but Bully Bottom in the centre has a graceful awkwardness, a tongueful earnestness, a taste in clothes which raises him above the others. To parody Homer, he is by far the silliest, though all are silly. But there is nothing rude or cruel in the eye or hand of the artist.¹⁶

Bottom and Flute must surely be loud-mouthed argumentative men who are braying and noisily disagreeing with Flute who is performing in the most disagreeable fashion. The fawning Snout on the left is listening to Bottom with a sychophantic posture and expression. All are posing as fops. But their true character is handled with clever humor.

Another emaki produced at this time is the Chōjū Giga.¹⁷ These are known as "The Frolicking Animal Scrolls." The contents of every scroll are different. The first scroll, from which the examples are taken, portrays monkeys, rabbits, frogs, etc. playfully impersonating human beings. The second scroll pictures horses, cows, hawks, eagles,

¹⁵Sansom, Japan: A Short Cultural History, Fig. 30, p. 218.

¹⁶Blyth, Japanese Humour, p. 68.

¹⁷For illustrations see: Blyth, Japanese Humour, pp. 86, 87; Okudaira, Emaki: Japanese Picture Scrolls, Fig. 6, pp. 74-77; Paine and Soper, The Art and Architecture of Japan, Plate 60, A & B; Yashiro, 2000 Years of Japanese Art, Plates 100, 101, pp. 174, 175.

lions, tigers and dragons in their "natural" forms; real and imaginary animals are intermingled. The third scroll is divided into two parts with Buddhist priests and laymen enjoying games of chance in the first part, and with monkeys, rabbits and frogs again sporting about, imitating human beings, in the second section. The fourth scroll shows Buddhist priests and laymen at play. All the scrolls are line drawings in India ink. The first and second are by the same artist, but the others are by different artists and are believed to date after the beginning of the Kamakura period, in the thirteenth century.

In the examples two types of ink, thick and thin, are used. All four scrolls are in the hakubyō style, using black lines only. Skilful use is made of the distinction between thick and thin India ink; the lines are broad, light in touch, and full of variety and speed. The speed is fluent, and the variety is flexible. We have, then, a picture fresh and unpretentious. There is very little awkwardness. The line is not only used to demarcate, it also forms the picture, making it dynamic and descriptive. So light and fluent is the line that the monkeys and hares and frogs it depicts seem to leap and sport with complete freedom as if they were alive, Plates XIII, XIV, XV, and XVI.¹⁸

We see that animals are shown playing with each other, fighting, jostling, making mischief, and also satirizing the foibles and hypocrisy of the Buddhist priests, Plate XVII.¹⁹ Yashiro describes

¹⁸Okudaira, Emaki: Japanese Picture Scrolls, pp. 74-77.

¹⁹Yashiro, 2000 Years of Japanese Art, Plate 101, p. 175.

the antics as follows:

Rabbits, monkeys and frogs play leading parts. We do not know the meaning of the rabbits but the large-mouthed frogs may well be intended to represent talkative priests mouthing empty doctrines with loud voices. Monkeys, on the other hand, are notorious for their cunning and hypocrisy. They are also considered to be the servants of the Hie shrines which are closely connected to the Enryaku-ji Buddhist temples. Here the monkeys may well represent the Enryaku-ji priests . . . much of the charm of this scroll comes from a simple good humour and real malice forms only a small ingredient.²⁰

He goes on to point out that, in his opinion, a master priest-painter was merely having a good time by depicting his favourite animals disporting themselves as his fertile humor directed the brush.

In the chapter discussing ukiyo-e we shall find prints of foxes behaving as human beings and a few monkeys humorously depicted in amusing situations, but nowhere in Japanese art do animals cavort with such glee or entertain simple mischief in such a truly light-hearted, delightful fashion as in the Chōjū Giga. If we do not choose to read the scroll as a satire, we can still find much to enjoy in the innocent gamboling and merry-making. However, I believe that the scroll was intended as a parody of the actions of men through the antics of animals. The creatures are caricaturing the monks who lived at Mount Hiei, or Kōya. The artist certainly seems to be laughing at his fellow-clerics. In the mock worship of the Buddha-like frog, Plate XVIII,²¹ the burlesque on the dignity of the church becomes almost blasphemous. Here we have the frog sitting in front of three

²⁰ Yashiro, 2000 Years of Japanese Art, p. 174.

²¹ Paine and Soper, The Art and Architecture of Japan, Plate 60A.

banana leaves, the Buddha with his halo. Before him kneels a monkey-monk breathing out smoky nonsense and offering a persimmon. Behind him a fox and a rabbit are reading a sutra. Above them are shown other animal humbugs, one weeping with ostentatious abandon.

One scene from another of the Chōjū Giga scrolls is a sketch caricaturing Buddhism directly, Plate XIX.²² A monk and a nun are grimly engaged in a kind of neck-tug-of-war. (The nuns are wearing kerchiefs and have pendant withered breasts.) Two nuns and two monks are laughing uproariously on the right, while a man and a monk are in convulsions on the left. It is a scene of humor, humanity, religion and innocence. "Bishop Toba seems to be telling us his idea . . . of what Buddhism could be, how the sexes should mix, and what the aim of life is."²³ The intensity and variation of expressions are exaggerated with humorous effect for the intention of the scroll was to produce humor. It is not a bitterly sarcastic criticism, but one of amused tolerance and understanding. Blyth finds that the Japanese are more free than Westerners in what they laugh at:

It is difficult even for an agnostic . . . to laugh at Christianity. Japanese Buddhists will laugh or smile at the most trenchant criticisms of Buddhism.²⁴

The four emaki mentioned are said to form the backbone of the whole picture scroll history in Japan. But the greatest popularity of the emaki occurs in the Kamakura Period (1185-1392) and these are

²²Blyth, Japanese Humour, pp. 86-87.

²³Ibid., p. 87.

²⁴Ibid., p. 148.

primarily secular scrolls. They are of many kinds, based on romances, poems, legends and fables, war chronicles and historical records. The popular-literature trend was paralleled in emaki by the appearance of scrolls based on colorful, fantastic legends or on real life. The Yamai no Sōshi (Scroll of Diseases and Deformities), is a combination of fantasy and realism.²⁵ Plates XX and XXI²⁶ give details of strange diseases and deformities to be encountered in various parts of the country. The pictures, while completely realistic in their portrayal of these more repulsive aspects of humanity, at the same time bring to bear on them a kind of wry humor. Plate XX shows how "the artist was attracted by curious deformities and abnormalities which could be treated humorously."²⁷ We see a soldier with his family in a scene combining both humor and pathos. The affliction depicted here is of course the black nose passed from father to every one of his children, including the rather large baby at his mother's breast. The humor here lies not only in the impossible genetic misfortune but also in the completely oblivious attitude adopted by the participants. The mother is blissfully feeding her child, listening to her husband's discourse and the other children play unconcernedly in the foreground. The husband's attitude is more difficult to describe. We do not know what he is discussing, only that he is obviously the progenitor of the

²⁵Okudaira, Emaki: Japanese Picture Scrolls, Plate 12, p. 84.

²⁶Yashiro, 2000 Years of Japanese Art, Plates 93, 94, pp. 168, 169.

²⁷Ibid., p. 168.

unusual affliction. The onlooker is startled into a sympathetic response as he realizes the significance of the rare malady.

Plate XXI²⁸ gives what Yashiro calls a most graphic picture of mental derangement. We see a very ill man, head tightly bound, lying on his tatami mat and suffering from hallucinations in which many tiny priests carrying long sticks advance on him. There is humor in the situation in that it is only a hallucination. Indeed, the wife is smiling as she tries to attract her husband's attention. As with the foregoing illustration, the response to this picture is not one of indifference or bitterness, but one of sympathetic understanding for an unusual occurrence in an otherwise normal, if painful, situation.

Another scroll which should be mentioned here is the Eshi no Sōshi (Story of a Painter),²⁹ from the Imperial Collection which tells, with humorous touches, the tragic episodes in a life of a poverty-stricken teacher of painting. Like Yamai no Sōshi it combines the humorous with the pathetic and would seem to be based on real life.

Paine and Soper show an example of a fantasy legend depicted in a picture scroll. In a picture from the Jigoku Zōshi (The Scroll of Hells)³⁰ we see women swimming around in the waters of Hell with enormous wasps flying over their heads. One woman is pointing a finger of scorn at another whose head has just been stung, while over her own head a great wasp is just settling down. "Such satire, used here to

²⁸Ibid., p. 169.

²⁹Okudaira, Emaki: Japanese Picture Scrolls, Plate 13, p. 85.

³⁰Paine and Soper, The Art and Architecture of Japan, Plate 61A.

expose the human follies of the inhabitants of Hell, is much more profound than the didactic pictures of the Kings of Hell which were popular at the end of the Kamakura period."³¹ The punishments shown in the Scroll of Hells are so startling and unexpected that one is forced to respond with sympathy.

The Kamakura period also saw a remarkable development in the religious picture scroll. The subject matter was varied and some scrolls satirized the overbearing ways of the clergy. We are going to look at one of the pictures from the Gaki Zōshi (Scroll of Hungry Ghosts) which, like the Jigoku Zōshi, is a one-scroll collection of accounts taken from the scriptures. There is no 'plot' and the pictures are mostly short, resembling illustrations. Plate XXII.³² The belief of the time was that people who were dead returned, if they were to be punished, to the world as ghosts, unable to be seen by anyone. Here we have the incongruity of the ghosts being forced to suffer as do humans. One can only respond sympathetically to this reversal of the norm. Both scrolls are based on the Buddhist idea of the transmigration of souls between the Six Realms. The weird gaki of "hungry ghosts" are shown undergoing the torments of their own particular realm. The example, although seemingly cruel and uncompromising, conceals an ironic touch not without flashes of a kind of humor. The belief prevailed at the time that the Latter Day of the Law, as predicted by the Buddha, had arrived--a conviction born of the

³¹Ibid., p. 69.

³²Okudaira, Emaki: Japanese Picture Scrolls, Color Plate 7.

social upheavals and uncertainty of the late Heian and early Kamakura years. The despair and disgust with their present life engendered by this uncertainty drove men toward the faith in the Pure Land of the new Buddhist sects. This scroll would seem to have been produced partly with the aim of heightening longing for this Pure Land by exposing the evils of the present world and the terrors of the transmigration cycle. The realistic outlook of the age can again be seen in the literalness with which the grotesqueness of the gaki are depicted. In the chapter on ukiyo-e we shall see that Hokusai exploits the humor in his grotesques too.

We have seen that in the Kamakura period the content and range of subject matter in the picture scroll increased in variety. New elements appeared that reflected the more realistic bent of the up-and-coming warrior society. These, together with the great development occasioned by reforms in the religious world, gave the emaki in this period a very great variety of content, a variety matched by the diversity of the styles employed. An increasingly plebian taste in the choice of subject matter is a conspicuous feature. The range of human experience covered is wide--love, battle, labor and religion, the noble, the repulsive, the tragic, the elegant and, as we have seen, the comic.

During the Muromachi Period (1392-1573), the political struggle which had been going on between the court nobles and the samurai, based in Kyoto and Kamakura respectively, ended with the capitulation of the court nobles. A new warrior culture based on the old court culture but adding to it new qualities peculiar to the

samurai class began to take over. Moreover, the same period saw an increase in the influence of the Zen sect, which became closely bound up with the samurai class and a stepping-up of trade with the mainland, which meant the introduction of cultural elements from Yuan and Ming China. This mixture of different elements ends for our purposes the cultural climate in which we can categorically state that the emaki we watched grow and develop was a purely Japanese form of art. Indeed, we find that in the Muromachi period the originality apparent in the works of Heian and early Kamakura times had almost completely disappeared. The style had become stiff and stereotyped and the content increasingly devoid of any artistic inspiration.

Summarizing the kind of humor found in the emaki, we realize that the Japanese are a race of people able to laugh at themselves. They do this with predominantly light humor, even when handling such subject as hell and diseases. Yashiro's "sympathetic smile of good will" is either shown directly in the emaki, as in the three people animatedly discussing the Imperial Messenger in the Shigi-san Engi, or is elicited from the observer as he looks at "The Frolicking Animal Scrolls." Whenever the normally even tenor of events is upset, the response is one of sympathy not bitterness. And the foibles of mankind are not handled maliciously or unkindly.

The Animal Scrolls do show Swann's "lively wit". I find the same characteristic in the conversation scene of the Shigi-san Engi. The humor in the neck-tug-of-war from the Chōjū Giga, however, is more subtle in its depiction. In the Yamai no Sōshi scroll, the

pathos added to the humor also tones down the nature of the humor. Here it becomes less lively and more subtle and gentle. In all cases, the response is one of sympathetic warmth.

CHAPTER IV

UKIYO-E

The Japanese print is fun. It comprises one of the most totally delightful art forms ever devised. Its colors are varied, its subject matter witty, its allurements infinite.¹

The term "Japanese print" refers to the popular print of the Ukiyo-e School which flourished largely in Edo from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. Other types of Japanese prints--Buddhist, folk, shijō, Osaka, Nagasaki, Yokohama and many modern kinds--form separate categories and no attempt is made to cover them here. Mention will be made of one specific kind of folk print inasmuch as it presages the spirit of the ukiyo-e print. There is also no attempt to cover the thousands of ukiyo-e available but many hundreds were scrutinized in the search for various types of humor depicted in this purely Japanese art form.

That the final period at which we look is relatively free of other-than-Japanese influences is due to a unique situation. In the Tokugawa or Edo Period of 1615-1867 the Tokugawa shoguns who ruled Japan at this time were responsible for the exclusionist policy in effect. In contrast to the openness and expansiveness of the preceding Momoyama Period (1573-1614), the history of these two and a half centuries becomes

¹James A. Michener, The Floating World (New York: Random House, 1954), p. vii.

increasingly narrow in its outlook and full of introspection. The cultural climate of Japan was therefore, at that time, almost perfect media for the growth of the Japanese form of art known as ukiyo-e. In order to understand the environment in which these prints were produced, it is necessary to glance briefly at the historical events leading to and responsible for the period in question.

In 1590 Tokugawa Ieyasu settled upon Edo (the present Tokyo) as his military headquarters. In 1603 Edo was decreed the new capital and the center of power remained there for the next few centuries. A succession of Tokugawa shoguns struggled to maintain the feudal spirit which was the source of their might. They ruthlessly discouraged any excesses which would have eaten into this power. So we have a country which withdrew into itself and embarked upon a long course of national isolation.

The reasons leading to the exclusionist policy which went into effect in 1637 and which closed Japan to all foreign intercourse (except for a few Dutch ships permitted in the harbour of Nagasaki) are best explained in Sansom.² The result, of course, was that Japan became virtually self-contained for the second time in its history. Indeed, according to Paine,³ by the eighteenth century even new Chinese ideas had a difficult time in penetrating the blockade. The Japanese were not permitted, under pain of death, to travel out of their country. With the exception of the crews of the few Dutch ships, no one was allowed to enter the country. The ban included books from the rest of

²G.B. Sansom, Japan: A Short Cultural History.

³Robert Treat Paine and Alexander Soper, The Art and Architecture of Japan, p. 103.

the world.

However, the Tokugawa government had much to commend it. Order was maintained. Justice, such as it was, was prompt and the necessary sentences expedited. A dedicated leadership tried to serve with intelligence. The weaknesses of the system were those inevitable in a dictatorship. Miscreants were beheaded, burnt alive and crucified in order to keep the nation in line. During this entire period there was not available to the general public one history of Japan or one work on either economics or philosophy. Literature was written in Japan but allowed only to the powerful ruling daimyo. Most of the scholarly manuscripts of the time which we have preserved today are marked: "This work was not published but was circulated secretly."⁴

The dictatorship, beginning as a military one, gradually shifted to a type of civilian bureaucracy. Also, slowly, the period saw a change in the development of the economy, from wealth measured in rice to the more usual one of money. The trend imposed great hardship on the military clans and made possible a new bourgeoisie holding great wealth. As the world has seen before, for example in the Netherlands in the time of Vermeer, the luxuries of life were wrested from those whose power was the sword and given to those who had money to pay for them.

⁴Michener, The Floating World, chap. ii.

The restrictive legislation of the bakufu⁵ prevented industrial growth and inhibited the growth of incentives. Samurai began converting their rice allocations into money, a transaction on which merchants made handsome commissions besides gaining control of the rice for speculation. Thus, a travesty developed. The bakufu continued to govern Japan as if the old samurai-dominated order existed, whereas the real power was passing steadily into the hands of that most despised element of society, the merchant. By 1730 most samurai had lost the control of their feudatory lands in return for cash. The merchant became a money-lender and the balance of economy was reversed. The bakufu was powerless to stop the trend. Repressive measures failed to curb the growth of the merchants' wealth and only helped foster a desperation and daring which is shown in the art, literature and theatre of the time. The prints became what Michener calls "bombastic and richly seductive," the literature "picaresque" and the theatre "violent and passionate."⁶

The society we have been talking of was organized into four classes descending from the lords and samurai, through farmers and artisans to merchants at the bottom. In the Tokugawa Period the Kanō and Tosa schools of art were patronized by the upper class. The Kanō School in general carried on the traditions of painting which had come from China. It had been patronized by both Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi

⁵"Tent government." Originally, the headquarters of an army in the field, it came to mean a description of the Government Headquarters of a military dictator and then was applied to the dynasty of the Tokugawa shoguns.

⁶Michener, The Floating World, p. 20.

Hideyoshi the previous shoguns, and now was the representative school of the Tokugawa dictators; the official school of art. Because ancient Chinese masters were copied, and paintings of the Ming Dynasty artists known and appreciated, the art of the Kanō school has no place in a discussion searching for purely Japanese characteristics. Also, this was an eclectic age and the Kanō and Tosa styles were often thoroughly mixed. The Tosa school was contemporary with the Kanō and lasted, like it, throughout the Edo Period. In theory, it devoted its talents to subjects and methods descending from the ancient art of Japan but, in fact, it was interwoven with concepts from the Kanō school and cannot be studied as a purely Japanese endeavor. For example, Tosa Mitsuoki (1617-1691) settled in Kyoto in 1634 where he was appointed Edokoro no Azukari, the title of painters attached to the court. He became famous for his paintings of quails in which "he followed Chinese prototypes attributed to Li An-chung of the twelfth century."⁷ He was also the first of the Tosa line to sign his works, a custom usually associated with the Chinese school. The official school was now standardized and very regimented. According to Paine and Soper:

Taste had become moral not in the former Zen manner of concentration of will but in the Confucian tradition of pragmatism. Art was to ennoble man, to illustrate models of conduct, to serve in the purpose of good government, and to suggest virtues symbolically. This was a crushing programme, and art in the service of the good government soon ceased to be great art.⁸

⁷Paine and Soper, The Art and Architecture of Japan, p. 110.

⁸Ibid., p. 107.

Mention must also be made of a school which did not subscribe to the above burdensome dicta. The artists returned to nature and more ancient Japanese traditions. It was founded by Honnami Koetsu (1558-1637) perhaps in conjunction with Nonomura Sotatsu (d.1643), and was continued by Ogata Korin (1658-1716). The new style showed a vividness in colour and a decorative sense of patterned form which appealed overall to the senses rather than to the mind. I am not suggesting that there is humor in the famous decorative screens and poem scrolls designed by members of this Japanese school. The reader is directed to the many beautiful books illustrating the work and providing an evaluation of the various artists concerned. But, because there can be no doubt that the school was classically Japanese,⁹ it is brought into this discussion to show that Japanese traits in art could be expressed in various ways, not merely in Chinese-Japanese confrontation. The exclusion of foreign influences and the consequent introspection of the age prepared the way for the emergence of a new and truly Japanese art form.

The artistic spirit of the Japanese prints to be discussed is so akin to that of modern art that it is difficult to believe that they were produced three hundred years ago. Many speak to us of familiar things and situations and express the same thoughts and emotions as does much of the art produced today. Here, then, is a bridge linking East and West, Kipling notwithstanding. Yashiro says of the ukiyo-e

⁹Ibid., p. 112.

that, from the Japanese point of view:

It is obvious that in this kind of modern picture the Japanese did not accept strong or powerful satire and liked the kind of humor and jokes with which the people laughed at and amused themselves which shed its own light on irrationality or unnatural things.¹⁰

Finding humor was relatively easy; indeed, the humor seemed to march out to meet me.

Before looking at specific examples there are a few background points that must be grasped for an understanding of the new art form. The rise of the ukiyo-e school brought what Muneshige Narazaki calls "new vitality into Japanese art."¹¹ The popular artists succeeded in finding many new subjects and in imparting fresh beauty and significance to the old conventions. The prints have a "wholesome breezy quality, a freshness and spontaneity, a wayward grace and fragrance--all of which typify the lighter side of the Japanese character."¹²

The "new vitality" is first seen in a study of Ōtsu-e. As a precursor of ribaldry in native wit these quick paintings are fun and alive. The line is strong and the mass in each well disposed. This folk art is worthy of a close scrutiny. It is, however, hard for the Western world to appreciate fully the narrow conventions of the peasant mind which produced paintings such as these in the Japanese village of Ōtsu. This was a barrier town on beautiful Lake Biwa ten miles from Kyoto the ancient capital. Through these crossroads passed ~~the~~

¹⁰Yashiro, Nihon Bijutsu no Tokushitsu, p. 634.

¹¹Muneshige Narazaki, The Japanese Print: Its Evolution and Essence (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1966), p. 13.

¹²Ibid.

rich merchants, feudal lords, beggars and pedlars, on foot and on horseback, going to and from the Imperial city. Here they were searched for contraband and here the aristocracy stopped to rest and change into fresh clothes for entry into Kyoto.

Ōtsu was lined with shops. Booths sold souvenirs of the journey between Kyoto and Edo. Among the cheapest and most popular of these souvenirs were the crude paintings which, in their early days during the seventeenth century, were confined to religious subjects.¹³ In the beginning of the eighteenth century the subject matter shifted. Now illustrations of homely proverbs were in demand. For example, one was of Oni no Nembutsu who was a demon dressed as an itinerant friar beating his gong and praying for the sick. He is recognized as our "wolf in sheep's clothing." By 1709, when a book was published concerning Ōtsu-e, more than half its forty-two illustrations were non-religious. Their place was taken by humorous comment on life at hand. "One of the most popular subjects poked fun at the pompous standard bearer of the daimyo's procession, whom commoners despised for being arrogant while lacking real authority."¹⁴ Although at first religious, they sprang not from temple or priest, but from ordinary village painters. There was no connection with any formal school of art. They were unsigned and appeared only in Ōtsu, being so inexpensive that the poor could buy. Two or more sheets of brownish paper were glued together and then smeared with clay. Working very quickly with cheap pigments,

¹³Michener, The Floating World, p. 7. 1630 might represent the beginning, although there are no specific written records antedating 1660.

¹⁴Ibid.

the artist slopped on lighter colors, indicating with smears of paint heads, bodies, arms and legs. He worked speedily and, when the work was dry, marked with quick dark strokes the outlines of the body. Sometimes imitation frames were painted and two sticks of wood were glued on, imitating the hanging pictures of the wealthy.

Plate XXIII¹⁵ is one of these paintings from Otsu completed in about eight minutes. It depicts the wandering priest Benkei, Yoshitsune's servant, who was supposed to be "eight feet tall, strong as a hundred men and accustomed to ten gallons of soup."¹⁶ This subject was used as a guarantee that a home was protected from fire and theft. Benkei became a wandering priest and is shown here carrying off the stolen bell from the Mii Temple near Mount Hira. The story has it that the bell refused to ring and only whispered, "Take me back to Miidera." In a rage, Benkei kicked it all the way back, scratching it deeply with marks that still show on the bell today. The illustration is included here to point out certain characteristics found later in ukiyo-e. The folk art shows an inherent feeling for balance of masses, an economy of line, a quickness of execution and, above all, a feeling for vibrancy and immediacy inextricably interwoven into an understanding of humor. No one today could fail to be moved by the heroic figure toting the massive bell (which actually weighs nearly a ton). However, if we find it amusing now, this does not mean that it was humorous almost two

¹⁵Ibid., p. 293.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 292.

hundred years ago. It was used as a protective charm and marked one incident in the life of this legendary hero. The relationship of the painting to the later ukiyo-e will be clearly seen in following illustrations. The main point to grasp is the quick, insouciant manner in which the man is presented as he strains to carry the heavy bell, with eyes bulging, muscles flexed and chin thrust forward in a determined manner. The upward fillip of his sword adds a saucy element, complementing the gay swirl of the line at the bottom of the baggy pantaloons. Humor may not have been the objective in this instance, but evidence of it is undeniably present.

From the Ōtsu-e, it seems a natural step to the world of print making. That there should have been a print tradition at all and that this tradition should be grander, more varied and more sophisticated than any folk art stands as one of the most remarkable by-products of the Tokugawa governmental system. The new art was made for and by the common people, especially the city dwellers, the artisans and the traders. Because artistic sensibility can be seen as quite independent of other aspects of education, it is possible to understand how the artists and leaders of this ukiyo-e tradition rose from the lowest order of the social hierarchy. A true genre character in the prints emerged, showing evidence of the changing taste. New subject matter appeared depicting man and his activities, particularly man indulging in either the search for or the enjoyment of his pleasures. The lives of the lowest groups of Japanese feudal society have been captured for all time. The new type of art, because it could be duplicated cheaply, could be purchased by the poor. Because of the continual changing of the restless taste of the masses, each fashion of the moment could be faithfully

portrayed. Pictures of great courtesans in all their finery and famous actors in the latest costumes and styles circulated freely. The closest analogy we have today would be the cheap pulp gossip magazines emanating from Hollywood in their heyday prior to television. The most popular translation of the words ukiyo-e is "pictures of the floating world" and it is in this fascinating media that we now look for examples of humor.¹⁷

The selection of prints to be discussed was guided solely by evidence of humor. Because it is not the main point of this thesis, a discussion of the artistic aspects of ukiyo-e is omitted. It must be understood that a search for humor is a highly specialized one and, for the purposes of nailing down the lid, so to speak, many examples of humor now follow in a staccato, nail-banging fashion. It must be taken for granted that the esthetic values of the Japanese print are usually of a very high level. Also, the technical aspects of the print--the beauty of the block lines, the colors, the perfection of the printing--are still marvels of the art of wood carving unique in the annals of art history. The one aspect presented here is that the prints express some of the most significant characteristics of the Japanese people--among them, humor.

¹⁷The word ukiyo-e is composed of three characters: uki meaning "floating" or "transitory," yo meaning "world," and e meaning "picture" or "pictures." Thus, the whole meaning is "pictures of the floating world." The term as it is now used refers generally to the plebian art of Japan (both prints and painting) which developed in Edo in the latter part of the seventeenth century and flourished for the next two hundred years--until the Tokugawa rule ended and Japan opened its doors to the world. The term came to suggest a light-hearted devotion to amusements and pleasures, a sort of hedonism, solely concerned with the present, without any concern for the future.

Let us look at our first example. Anyone, anywhere, with a slight knowledge of monkeys will surely appreciate Plate XXIV.¹⁸ It is by Hanabusa Itcho (1625-1724) who, banished for twelve years to an island as punishment for a humorous picture, carried on with his spirited drawings while in exile. They were all published posthumously in woodcut books. In our illustration we are asked to extend our imagination to include the Kakemono as a sail as the monkey's right arm is extended to provide the mast. There is humor in the angle of the upturned face with its round peering eyes scanning the top of the hanging scroll. The subject matter is more important than the actual depiction--the boat and reeds are just suggested, while the water is shown by means of two and a half curving lines. Credibility is stretched just beyond the possible, to the point where the whole becomes delightfully ludicrous.

Next we have a humorous picture--a gigwa--which typifies a deliberately planned amusing subject, in this case shown with happy faces and carefree postures. Plate XXV.¹⁹ It is by Nishimura Shigenaga (1697-1756) and depicts Hotei, the God of Happiness, supporting one small smiling figure above his head while a second relaxes in a happily dissipated pose below the god's right leg. The main figure is one of a fat, jolly, abandoned, carefree male, shining with goodwill. We know very little about the artist. He was born in Edo and was probably the

¹⁸Willy Boller, Masterpieces of the Japanese Color Woodcut (Boston: Boston Book & Art Shop, Inc., 1957), p. 68.

¹⁹Hajek-Forman, Japanese Woodcuts: Early Periods (London: Spring Books), Plate 33.

pupil of Okumura Gempachi Masanobu (1686-1764). The oldest works known to have come from his hand are illustrations to stories about dead souls (Shiryo Gedatsu Monogatari) published in 1712. In contrast to other designers his themes ranged over a very broad field. Sheets are known with pictures of birds, landscapes and Buddhist subjects. About 1740 he followed Masanobu in painting sheets with European perspective (uki-e). There are no colour prints of his from the forties and later; he died in 1756. Side by side with the name of Nishimura Shigenaga he also used the names of Sentado and Eigado.

If one master were chosen to demonstrate the wide range of forms in ukiyo-e, it would surely be Nishimura's probable teacher, Okumura Gempachi Masanobu (1685/6-1764). This artist's long life of seventy-eight years from 1686 spans the period from the strong early black-and-white prints and the great hand-colored orange prints, through the lacquer prints, small and large, all the way down to the red prints that just precede the development of full-color printing. In addition, Masanobu worked in practically all the experimental ukiyo-e forms of the first half of the eighteenth century (and may have invented several of them): the triptych, bust portraits, Buddhist subjects, stone-rubbing prints, large perspective prints, elongated pillar prints, and the early landscape and flower-and-bird prints. Moreover, unlike several other long-lived ukiyo-e artists, Masanobu's production is surprisingly even: from his first black-and-white prints, done in his early teens, to his last red print done in his mid-seventies, there is no flagging in that inventive genius and native wit that characterizes all his work.

We have two examples of Masanobu's to study--Plates XXVI and XXVII. In Plate XXVI²⁰ we see the earliest known print by Masanobu, from a Courtesan Album published in the year 1701. Note the beginning of the "Edo wit and verve that was to characterize the best in eighteenth-century ukiyo-e, and owed its origins above all to Masanobu."²¹ We are looking at a Yoshiwara Street Scene. Fire buckets are stacked in the background and a wealthy rake and his manservant are seen entering from the right. As was customary in the larger pleasure quarters, deep reed hats were often purchased or rented before entering; thus, faces hidden, the gallants could enjoy a modicum of anonymity. At the left side of the print we see the principal subject of the album, the high-ranking Yoshiwara courtesan, accompanied by a woman who handled her affairs and appointments. The courtesan is the famous Kasugano, identified both by name and crest; she wears a wildly flying kimono bearing bold patterns of giant chessmen, while her attendant, an older woman, wears a kimono of simpler floral designs, with a kerchief placed upon her hair and purse and keys dangling from her sash. Note how the swifter movement of the two men with their angular bodies and even more angularly dynamic black swords is balanced by the slower but more solid progress of the vividly bedecked courtesan.

The humor is subtle and suggested in these drawings because of the differences of motion and purpose of the two groups. The print

²⁰Richard Lane, Masters of the Japanese Print (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962), Plate 42, p. 104.

²¹Ibid., p. 103.

is a spoof of the upper classes and was made to amuse a new, lower-class audience. Masanobu designed at least a dozen albums, of a dozen prints each, every one devoted to humorous and paradoxical approaches to the classics as seen through modern eyes.

Plate XXVII²² is a fine parody and shows a jealous wife advancing threateningly at the right, with her apologetic husband cowering in the center and, on the left, partially hidden under a kotatsu (quilted brazier), is the husband's youthful paramour. The picture alone is not sufficient for the impact of the whole situation. The title "Kotatsu Dojoji" is necessary (as it was for the Japanese reader) and then the famous No play springs to mind. An amorous maiden, spurned by a handsome Buddhist priest, chases him into the bronze bell of a temple, then in her rage transforms herself into a dragon, wraps her coils around the bell and burns the scornful priest to a crisp. Here, instead of a large temple bell there is an ordinary household brazier, in which a frightened girl huddles in an attempt to hide. The fury of a betrayed wife being legendary means that the girl is in the same danger that the burned priest found himself. However, no inside knowledge of a "mysterious Orient" is needed to appreciate the rather humorous situation drawn for us here. Knowledge of the double entendre shows us how the followers of Masanobu enjoyed the picture on two separate levels, one enhancing the humor of the other. Note how the young woman crouched in her hiding place resembles a huge animal,

²²Ibid., Plate 43, p. 105.

perhaps an ox, settling down behind the imploring husband.

Next we come to Hasegawa Mitsunobu (worked ca. 1724-1754) and another scene in a home, but this time of different humor and more "homely." Plate XXVIII.²³ Mitsunobu, whose dates are unknown, seems to have been a native of Ōsaka and to have spent most of his life there. He made paintings and illustrations for small books. His few larger prints like the one discussed here are decidedly rare and come from albums, all of which appear to have been issued between 1724 and 1754. His art family name was Hasegawa, his art names being Ryūsuikei and, later, Shōsuikei. Our second interior scene shows three figures again, with the rich black of the costume of the man between the woman on the left and the little servant on the right adding strength to the grace of the composition. Evidently a sake party is in progress, with the woman watching with interest as she holds out an empty sake cup to her male companion about to wake up the little maid who is dozing over the kettle. He appears to be pushing forward a sharp instrument of some kind and we can imagine the startled, apologetic response of the maid as she returns to abrupt consciousness. The scene is amusing in that the little girl is totally unaware of what is happening about her and we join with the other two figures in anticipation of what will occur. The suspense sharpens our involvement with the incident. As there is nothing malicious indicated, our enjoyment of the print is on a sympathetic level. We are not even asked to show pity. The maid will

²³Japanese Prints of the Primitive Period in the Collection of Louis B. Ledoux. Vol. I of Japanese Prints of the Ledoux Collection (New York: E. Weyhe, 1942), Plate 32.

no doubt be chided for her lapse.

Another comic dimension widely recognized is irony. Kyosen is the artist who has given us the example of this form of wit. Plate XXIX.²⁴ Both in China and in Japan private patronage first made color-printing economically possible: but it was only in Japan that it became a successful and large-scale commercial activity.²⁵ The most important steps to realizing this were taken exactly two hundred years ago, at the end of 1764, with the preparation of privately printed calendars for the New Year of 1765. At this time, Kyosen was the best known of the connoisseurs whose names appear on the prints and our example is by him. We know very little about him. We are told that he was a Bakufu hatamoto (or bannerman) with a stipend of 1600 koku; and that under his real name Ōkubo Kanshirō he worked as a steward in a noble household. This identification is uncertain, but we need not be surprised that Kyosen and his friends were clearly regular patrons of the Yoshiwara.

Calendar prints were not a new idea. What was original at this time was the idea of working calendrical information into an illustrative design--first used as early as 1686 in a book illustrated by Moroshige.²⁶ The vagaries of the lunar calendar made it necessary to know for each year which were the long, and which the short months. In the illustration there is a cat dressed as a Buddhist priest looking up at a rat in the claws of an escaping bird of prey. The nodes of the

²⁴D.B. Waterhouse, Harunobu and his Age (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1964), Print 93, p. 227.

²⁵Ibid., p. 22.

²⁶Ibid., p. 22.

chrysanthemum design on the cat's robe bear the numbers of the long months (2nd, 3rd, 5th, 8th, 10th) for 1765. The inscription reads Kinoto tori chūshū saikaku sanjin shōkō 'Mid-autumn; The Bird Year (=1765) under the sign of Wood's Younger Brother. Commissioned for a joke by the Dilettante of the Western Enclosure'. Seal Sanjin (with a different character San-). The 'Dilettante of the Western Enclosure' is Kyosen, who also used the pseudonym Jōsei Sanjin, 'The Hermit West of the Castle'.

The Bird is certainly in control here. The humor, of course, lies in the fact that because the cat is emulating a Buddhist priest he cannot reach out to take a life. Does this also infer that Buddhism is stronger than natural instincts, even a pseudo-Buddhism? The lines of the print are succinct, and the look on the cat's face is one of bemused frustration. His eyes are bright and excited, and his claws are raised half-way in anticipation. His smile might also reflect the irony of the situation in which he finds himself.

Kyosen has left us examples of delightful, lighthearted interior scenes as well. We will study one entitled "Night Rain on the Daisu." Plate XXX.²⁷ Here we have another girl fast asleep. She is seated in a room beside the daisu (stand for a water heater). A playful young boy is putting in her hair a small stick with a paper pendant. Behind them another girl stands looking on. Note the alert rabbit's head encircled on the sleeve of the boy's kimono. There is no criticism either indicated in the print or expected from the audience

²⁷The Clarence Buckingham Collection of Japanese Prints.
Vol. II. Catalogue by Margaret O. Gentles (Chicago: The Art
Institute of Chicago, 1965), Print 65, p. 42.

of a bitter nature. The response is more correctly one of sympathetic warmth and, as such, is humor. The girl will probably not be startled awake, as in Plate XXVIII, but will merely provide a source of amusement for her friends until she is aware of what has been put into her hair.

The print by Kyosen showed how calendar markings were indicated cryptographically on the prints. This was partly a conceit (the imagination of the recipient was challenged), but also it should be noted that the privately published calendars were in violation of a government regulation. Regular calendars were the monopoly of certain publishers designated by the government. Narazaki points out that the mere fact of technical defiance undoubtedly added a certain note of piquancy to the e-goyomi, and it was certainly a typically ukiyo-e touch.

The three following examples of humor, calendar prints, come from the brush of Suzuki Harunobu (1725-1770). His appearance as a major artist occurred with the publication of some privately printed e-goyomi (pictorial calendars) for the New Year of 1765. Most of the facts of Harunobu's life are very obscure, but he was directly connected with the development of the full-color print (nishiki-e), and he is generally considered among the three or four most important artists in ukiyo-e.²⁸ His mature work was done in a very brief period, from 1764 to the year in which he died, 1770.

Much of Harunobu's early full-color designing was done for the groups of amateurs who exchanged the calendar prints. In working

²⁸ Muneshige Narazaki, The Japanese Print: Its Evolution and Essence, p. 70.

out the e-goyomi, the artists appear to have taken great pains to produce good works of art. Anything that was crude or clumsy or tasteless was, of course, alien to the original conception of the print, and it can be imagined that the commissioner and the artist worked tirelessly over every detail, every nuance of line, every subtle difference of shade, and probably every sheet of paper was carefully inspected and only perfect sheets used.

The first one we are going to look at is attributed to Suzuki Harunobu and is called "Weaving." Plate XXXI.²⁹ Against a solid red background, a simple but startling device, a girl is shown working at a loom. She holds a shuttle in her right hand, thrust back over her shoulder, while she works the crossbar with her left hand. With one foot she works the treadle. She is weaving a piece of white cloth, and in the tray beside her are some spindles of white yarn. Engrossed in her weaving, she is unaware that a young boy has crept under the loom and is lifting the hem of her skirt. The slightly salacious note is underlined by the fact that the boy has his tongue hanging out. Again, we have someone taken unawares. The audience is able to appreciate the whole action. And we note that the raised right large toe is only inches away from the youngster's mouth! Will he end up biting it? Again, a sympathetic response is elicited. The even tenor of the domestic scene is about to be abruptly shattered. It is amusing to be a third party to the event, watching the boy ogle

²⁹Ibid., Plate 21, p. 85.

the young lady's legs as she, totally engrossed in her work, weaves unknowingly.

Another calendar print by Harunobu is "The Summer Shower." Plate XXXII.³⁰ This is one of the earliest polychrome prints and bears four signatures. Gwakō (designer) Suzuki Harunobu; Chōkō (engraver) Endo Soryoku; Senkō (printer) Yumoto Sachiye; and Hakusai, who probably supplied the idea for the picture. A graceful young girl has flown out to her clothesline in order to bring in the washing as an approaching storm threatens to thoroughly soak and tear away the clothes from the line. In her haste she has dropped her right geta and she twists around to glance helplessly at it, waving her bare foot in the air. Her kimono is being shipped about her by the wind, the clothes are being drenched by the rain and the whole scene is one of frustration and inevitability. An amusing, poignant situation, understandable to most women today. It is dramatic in its impact, both with the onslaught of nature and also by use of strong diagonals in the clouds, the rain, the clothes, the kimono and the stick in the girl's hand with which she reaches the clothes.

The humor lies in the helplessness of the young girl trying to fight the elements. Her calm world has been shattered. We, the appreciative audience, sympathize with her in her predicament.

Our third and last example from this artist is also unsigned, but attributed to Harunobu. Plate XXXIII.³¹ A girl in rose beside a

³⁰J. Hillier, Japanese Masters of the Colour Print (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1954), Plate 16.

³¹Japanese Prints by Harunobu & Shunsō. Vol. II of Japanese Prints of the Ledoux Collection (New York: Privately Printed, 1944), Print 14.

black and white ox carrying large green wicker baskets filled with love letters written to her, glances down at the ground nonchalantly at yet more letters by the head of her broom. Note the woven curves of the total design which add to the felicitousness of the picture. The idea that a young lady could receive so many love letters that she is unconcerned about a few that may blow away is delightfully expressed by her glance and the pose of her right hand carelessly placed beneath her chin. The ox seems to be staggering under the happy burden. A gentle form of amusement, surely, and harmless. But, nevertheless, a commentary on both the sybaritic life of wealthy women of her time and a damning statement of her way of looking at the world. The humor here lies in the spoof of a member of the upper classes who receives so much written adulation that she has to sweep up her letters with a broom. It is amusing, too, that both the woman and the ox should be so unable to cope with their individual "burdens." The wit here lies in the implied message of uselessness in one sense; yet, surely any woman worthy of so much written adulation deserves her place in history!

Haunobu influenced many artists, among them Tachibana Minko (active ca. 1762-1775). He is known principally by his designs for a book of "all trades" published in 1771, called "Coloured Pictures of Classified Artisans," in which stencilling of the most refined order was employed. He also designed calendar-prints with hidden "Long" and "Short" months. The amusing print shown here, Plate XXXIV,³² is

³²Jack Hillier, Landscape Prints of Old Japan (San Francisco: The Grabhorn Press, 1960), Print 4.

one of a series of six known as "The Fox's Wedding." The six scenes followed a well-established order: "The Meeting Together" (Plate XXXIV); "The Exchange of Presents"; "The Going Away of the Bride"; "The Wedding"; "The First Birth"; and "Going to the Temple." Harunobu designed a set with human performers and it would be tempting to think that Minko was poking fun at his contemporary's prints, but, as it happens, one print of the Minko set is dated 1765, and Harunobu's set was almost certainly later.

The scene we are studying is a tea-house at the entrance to the Temple of Inari. The bridegroom-to-be is seated on a bench, and his "intended," with mother and attendant, is being accosted by the go-between whose business it was to make the requisite introductions. The landscape is lightly indicated in a way that recalls scrolls of Sotatsu and his followers in the seventeenth century. The two female foxes are glancing back over their shoulders at the handsome suitor. We recognize in the antics of the foxes ourselves with wry amusement. How simple to point up the foibles of the human race using actors of another species. And yet, all is quite proper, as it should be. Decorum is being preserved. We receive our shock when we realize that it is foxes which are performing the main roles, not humans. Our response is one of sympathetic understanding as the animals are going through their paces exactly as would people.

We have seen before the Japanese artist using animals in place of people, performing people-like antics. We will find this again in our search for humor, always handled impeccably but with

understated or underscored tongue-in-cheek.

The actual transformation of a human figure into another species, this time a frog, is shown us in the work of Bunchō (flourished mid 1760's through 1770's), Plate XXXV.³³ Ichikawa Yaozō II is standing on a bank beside water under a brownish sky. He is drawing his sword and staring down in horror at a gigantic and mournful frog. The print is mainly in tones of rose, brick red, purple and green which are almost perfectly preserved. It is as brilliant as it is amusing. The production of a drama entitled Tenjiku Tokubei Kokyo no Torikaji took place at the Nakamura-za in the ninth month of 1769. In this play, Tokubei's ability to transform himself instantly and at will into a huge frog may often have baffled his enemies. It also seems as if it brought occasional moments of anxiety to the wonder-worker himself. Here he seems to be anxiously wondering whether the trick was going to work this time. Would the startled and horrified warrior continue to draw his sword, or would the weapon be resheathed? The expression on the frog's face is repulsive to look at, but his feet and thin legs turned inwards and the large eyes gazing upwards, coupled with the downturned mouth, add a feeling of helplessness to this magic creature. The expression of horror and uncomprehending wonderment on the face of the warrior are beautifully expressed with the angle of the eyebrows and the inquisitive nose and agape sagging mouth.

³³Japanese Prints Bunchō to Utamaro. Vol. III of Japanese Prints of the Ledoux Collection (New York: E. Weyhe, 1948), Plate 1.

Bunchō's dates are unknown. We know he completed a calendar in 1790.³⁴ His art name was Ippitsusai, and family name, Mori. He is said to have composed haiku, probably as one of the avant-garde Edo-za group. His output consisted mainly of actor prints, also courtesans. In Japan, the connections between both literature and the theatre and that of prints were particularly close. Many prints were made of the actors performing their roles.

Continuing with our chronological pattern we come to another artist, almost equally obscure, who flourished from the 1760's through the 1780's--Koryūsai. One source³⁵ says that he was a rōnin (masterless samurai) and that he once lived in the Yagenbori district of Edo, later receiving the Buddhist title hokkyō, which was by that time being conferred on lay craftsmen. He illustrated two black-and-white books: Konzatsu Yamato kusa-e (1781) and Hokuri no uta (n.d.: put by Nakada at 1784 or 5). His output of color prints was very large--over 600 designs. Koryūsai's many pillar prints are perhaps his most distinguished work. In the one chosen for discussion, Plate XXXVI,³⁶ we have again returned to that popular joke of playing a trick on someone while he is asleep. In this case, a young man is asleep beside a kōtatsu, with an open book under his right elbow. A young

³⁴Waterhouse, Harunobu and His Age, p. 30.

³⁵Ibid., p. 32.

³⁶The Clarence Buckingham Collection of Japanese Prints. Vol. II. Catalogue by Margaret O. Gentles (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1965), Print 4, p. 183.

woman is deftly tying a strip of paper in his hair. Through the open shōji a garden is seen in falling snow. We have discussed the gentle, non-malicious humor found in scenes of this type and need only point out that the soft curved poses of the participants, plus the sleepily falling snowflakes, add a quiet restfulness, almost a mesmerizing effect, to the whole.

Much has been written about the artist of the next selection. Utamaro (1753-1806) owed his popularity with the Edo public to the fact that he created a woman more infatuating than his predecessors and contemporaries. Even when gently poking fun at the ideosyncracies of women, he leaves no doubt as to how he visualizes their graceful, elegant forms. Today, perhaps, we are in no position to judge the total physical appeal of his feminine figures to those who came under her spell. Although to them she appears to have been the essence of femininity, to us she appeals more because of her exquisite trappings, the patterned dresses, the brocaded sashes, the fantastic coiffures, and the elegant movement and studied gesture by which such adornments were displayed.

Utamaro's art was not limited to pictures of beautiful women. He was an exceptionally versatile artist, and he produced some excellent work in landscape and natural history, most notably in a series of handsomely printed albums. About 1794 there appeared one of his loveliest works, the triptych of "Women Preparing Stuffs for Dresses" of which there is an exceptionally well-preserved

specimen in the British Museum. Plate XXXVII.³⁷ The triptych had become one of the favourite forms of ukiyo-e and adorned many a screen and sliding panel in the Japanese houses of the artisan and middle classes. The two outer panels with their pyramidal construction balance one another, as do the found fan on the left and the round mirror on the right. The children match each other in their placement and the four heads of the girls are all contained in the upper register. The three panels are linked by pieces of cloth and the glances of the women at each other.

This scene of intimate domesticity with the girls thoroughly absorbed in their task is lifted out of its seriousness by the delightful by-play of the children. On the left we have a very active, almost naked child, climbing over the woman's knee intent on reaching the fan. On the right we have an older child grinning with delight as he shows the arched cat its reflection in the round mirror. The balance of seriousness and frolicking fun is such that the whole scene becomes alive and must have been planned with this purpose. Two-thirds of the upper register maintains its concentration of women at work, while the lower one-third enters the frivolous realm of children at play in the two outer sheets and repetitive curving shapes of the main figure in the center panel matching the line of the boy's back as he entertains the cat, as well as the shape of the young boy reaching for the fan.

³⁷J. Hillier, Utamaro: Colour Prints and Paintings (London: Phaidon Press, Ltd., 1961), Fig. 51, p. 84.

The humor lies in the juxtaposition of women intent on their work and the playful antics of the children disporting themselves at their feet. It is subtle, light and gentle. We respond to the scene with warm understanding. The delicate understatement was one of Utamaro's gifts.

Utamaro has also given us a "sleeping" print. Plate XXXVIII.³⁸ He designed many "Mother and Child" sets of prints, one of the best known being the Fūryū kodakara Awase, 'Elegant set of Darling Children' of which the one shown here of the little boy upsetting a gold-fish bowl while his mother sleeps, leaning on her workbox, is perhaps the best known. Note the quiet, determined air with which the little 'darling' is holding down the edge of the bowl to allow the water to gush over the floor and the gold-fish to escape. His face is determined and his body is heavy and pudgy, while his arms and hands in no uncertain terms go about their business of spilling the watery mess and clutch a plant in a death-like grip at the same time. Blissfully unaware, the charming mother sleeps on and we cannot quite decide whether her reaction will be one of severe annoyance or indulgent laughter. Meanwhile, the fish flip out their lifespan and the water courses out of the print.³⁹

At this point the development of the print in the latter part of the eighteenth century should be reviewed and placed in a somewhat larger context. Briefly, ukiyo-e during the last three decades of the

³⁸Ibid., Fig. 92, p. 137-8.

³⁹Ibid., p. 138.

eighteenth century was an expression of the fully developed culture of the Edo townsmen. According to Muneshige Narazaki:

Although social conditions were unsettled, the times were generally prosperous for the Edo townsmen, and the laissez-faire policy of the government--at least during the early part of the period--permitted a full expression of the Edo townsmen's culture . . . A majority of the most important ukiyo-e artists appeared during the last three decades of the century. Of the six artists who are generally considered the greatest masters of the print (Harunobu, Kiyonaga, Utamaro, Sharaku, Hokusai and Hiroshige), four appeared and flourished during this relatively brief period.⁴⁰

During this period, the strongest artist groups had difficulty in maintaining coherent units. The Katsukawa school which was formed by Shunsō (1726-1792), had attracted many brilliant followers, but was continually plagued by defections and lasted for only two generations. Hokusai (1760-1849), originally a pupil of this school, broke away from it early in his career. Sometime later a school formed around him, but it hardly survived Hokusai's own lifetime. We are going to break our headlong rush here and consider many works by this prolific artist.

Hokusai stands alone among the artists of ukiyo-e.⁴¹ It is very difficult to compare any other artist to him. He became famous during his long lifetime and through all of his work there runs a flavor that is distinctly and unmistakably his own. Strength, character and dynamic quality permeate every sketch, drawing or painting he did. He succeeded in surmounting the barriers and limitations of his own class and of his countrymen in general. We find in his work dozens of

⁴⁰Narazaki, The Japanese Print: Its Evolution and Essence, p. 78.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 182.

subtle insights commentating on the daily life of the people of his time. At the time they were a revelation of man's world to himself, a sort of gigantic social mirror. Even today we react with amazement that one man should have had so much insight into the foibles of his fellow creatures. Ideas crowded into his mind and he was able to express them swiftly and effectively.

Let us start with a self-portrait of Hokusai done at the age of eighty-three (1842). Plate XXXIX.⁴² It speaks for itself. Here is an old man still imbued with that inexhaustible love of life that emanates from every one of his works. His high spirits and joy of living is shown in the postulate to his One Hundred Views of Mt. Fuji, a culmination of his work published in 1834 at the age of seventy-five:

From the age of six I had a mania for drawing the forms of things. By the time I was fifty I had published innumerable designs; but all I produced before the age of seventy is not worth particular mention. At seventy-three I learned a little about the real structure of existence; of animals, plants, trees, birds, fishes, and insects. In consequence, when I am eighty I shall have made further progress; at ninety I shall master the secrets of things; at a hundred I shall certainly have reached a marvelous stage. When I am a hundred and ten everything I do, whether a dot or line, will be enlivened. I beseech those who live as long as I do to see if I do not mean what I say.⁴³

He signed these words with the signature "The Art-Crazy Old Man" revealing his confidence and ebullient outlook.

He had been born in the centre of Edo in September of 1760 and was captivated by the ukiyo-e of his early days. When he was nineteen

⁴²J. Hillier, Hokusai Drawings (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1966), Plate 110.

⁴³Michiaki Kawakita, Hokusai Manga: The Sketchbooks of Hokusai. Translated by George Saito (Tokyo: Unso-do Col. Ltd.), Introduction.

he became a pupil of Katsukawa Shunsō and the next year received the formal art name Shunsō. He produced drawings depicting formalized scenes of theatrical life. Instead of seeking lyrical beauty he focused his efforts on powerful truth and straightforward reality. He always looked for clues to unify physical realism and temporal realism. In 1798 he adopted the name Hokusai. Even though he kept very busy, he remained poor to the very end. Living only for his art and scorning money and fame, he would hardly have known how to keep money even if fortune had smiled upon him.

Fortune may not have smiled on him, but he continued to smile at the world. Here is a drawing that Hokusai did in 1815. Plate XL.⁴⁴ It is a humorous sketch illustrating that the syllable character of the word Kagamiya (mirror grinder) can be transformed into the picture of a mirror grinder. It is the line here, of course, that is important, but the face beams with goodwill as the little man happily grinds away.

The rest of our examples come from the Hokusai Manga. Hokusai personally selected the title Manga, translated as "random sketches" or "sketches from life," presumably because he wanted to depict the whole world of scenes, objects and people freely, and at random, as his incomparable brush led him. Fifteen crowded volumes were published from 1814 up until 1878, twenty-nine years after his death. In them, Hokusai provides us with a glimpse of his Japan, of the people, the fauna, the flora, landscape, architecture, grotesqueries, legendary

⁴⁴Boller, Masterpieces of the Japanese Color Woodcut, p. 148.

Japan and Japan of the past. He provides us with a glimpse of what men were like in Edo and its environs in the early years of the nineteenth century: how prostitutes approached customers, how women bathed, how farmers sweated, and how workmen brawled in public, with special emphasis on the games and sports engaged in by the people of that day. His pages appear cluttered, with each separate individual existing often by himself. Plate XLI⁴⁵ shows, at the top, four typical figures from a street scene--including a courtesan lighting her way with a lantern and a noodle peddler, his two cases balanced on a shoulder pole. The lower scene is one that delighted woodblock artists and public alike and is why this page was chosen. It depicts a public bath with the bored male attendant reading a spicy novel, oblivious to his nude women customers. The child scrubbing at the bottom has accompanied his mother to the bath, while the woman in the lower right corner is wearing a white obi around her waist in accordance with an old superstition that its wearing on the Day of the Dog in the fifth month of pregnancy assures an easy delivery. Bathhouses much like this one abound in Japan today. The humor here is self-evident and each figure is drawn with a kindly perception and understanding that was always present in Hokusai's work. Perhaps he understood that the best humor of all is provided by human antics, especially by people performing their daily functions without any awareness that they are funny. For this, one cannot mock or deride humanity, but do just what Hokusai

⁴⁵James A. Michener, The Hokusai Sketch-Books: Selections from the Manga (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1962), Plate 7, p. 52.

did--understand mankind's foibles and weaknesses and gaze at all humanity with compassion and soft amusement.

Plate XLII⁴⁶ gives us at the top left a workman making paste from soybeans. It smells rank as the onlooker shows. Below, a man makes horns to frighten a child, while to their right a wife bawls out her drunken and confused husband. The samisen player is a beggar who uses a mask to hide his identity. On the lower right we find pilgrims going off to some shrine. In the centre is a juggler on high wooden clogs and the running figure lower left is a yakko, a lowborn servant of a samurai. A fitting leaf to the sheet of figures shown previously, and for the same reasons.

We are now going to look at seven fat sumo dandies in jovial poses, drawn with great humor. Plate XLIII⁴⁷ presents a jolly wrestler sitting on the ground at the left, holding a fan on which are painted characters meaning "Victory." Not anatomically accurate, perhaps, but all very fat--a fact that has always been enjoyed by the Japanese public who worships the sumo wrestlers. They perform their tasks heroically, even though many of the movements must have been done with difficulty.

Our next sample, Plate XLIV,⁴⁸ is of Buddhist priests and illustrates Hokusai's gentle irony where formalized religion was concerned. He delighted in caricatures like the middle row of monks

⁴⁶Ibid., Plate 8, p. 53.

⁴⁷Ibid., Plate 16, p. 61.

⁴⁸Ibid., Plate 21, p. 66.

bawling their routine prayers. Note the expressions of almost stupid, doting pleasure on most of the faces. In the upper left, an artisan-priest inscribes a sacred sutra, while two priests bow before the venerable patriarch who sits with the horsehair wand which drives away temptation and evil spirits. The bottom procession includes two monks holding in cloth-covered hands the famous Buddhist begging bowls, and a young monk carrying on his back a box containing an image of the goddess Kannon.

We now have a well-known diptych, Plate XLV.⁴⁹ It is an amusing scene of what a mischief wind can do to otherwise solemn and sober people. The vigor of the drawing and the fine observation of wind, so effectively indicated by the flying leaves and the broad bands of gray wash, have few equals in art. The solitary character, top left, looking much like one of the leaves, reads "wind." The two left figures are Buddhist monks; one has lost control of his accordion-folded breviary, its long swirls lending character to the design, and the other struggles with his hat, turned inside out by the force of the wind. The boy hidden in his whipped-up clothing, lower left, is probably delivering an important letter to some dignitary, for it was customary to carry these in black-laquered boxes covered with an expensive cloth and held on a wooden carrier, so that the servant's hands would not smear the polished surface of the box. Papers blowing, clothes lashing about in a frenzy, umbrellas scudding away--all making us smile ruefully

⁴⁹Ibid., Plates 25-26, p. 70, 71.

as we recognize both the near hopelessness of the situation and, also, the joy to be experienced in pitting one's strength against nature. The one face open to us is full of happy anticipation of joined battle in the struggle, and the whole picture has a dancing, moving, abandoned effect.

Instead of foxes, we next see mice playing the role of men. Plate XLVI.⁵⁰ This is a view of Kakure-sato, the mythical hideout of mice. Here the boss sits on top of the rice bales and works his abacus. Others haul in a sack load of gold coins. Three keep books on the riches, and others weigh baskets of coins.

The well-known tale of "The Rolling Rice Cakes" tells of a man who was lucky enough to penetrate into Kakure-sato. He had gone to his fields to gather firewood and, while eating lunch, allowed one of his rice cakes to roll into a hole in the ground. When he knelt down to retrieve the cake, he heard tiny singing voices. Overcome by curiosity, he dropped all his rice cakes into the hole, and ended up by tumbling down himself. He was amazed at the rich kingdom he had uncovered, but the mice, although grateful for his rice cakes, insisted that he return home. As a present they gave him a very small bale of rice and then dismissed him. When he reached home he discovered that the tiny bale was a wonderful and magic gift. It always remained full to the top, no matter how much rice was taken from it.

The carefully drawn expressions on the mice's faces and their concentration on the job in hand add credence to the masquerade. One

⁵⁰Ibid., Plates 37-38, p. 82, 83.

amusing touch is the mouse who uses his tail as an extra rope to haul in the sack full of gold coins. They also use their front legs and forepaws just as we do our arms and hands. Badly drawn back paws do not seem to be a hindrance. A gentle humor again, accentuated by the overtone of busyness and industry that would be appropriate if humans were the actors.

Hokusai has been compared to Hieronymous Bosch in that he found in life many grotesque aspects, which he loved to lampoon. He loved to contemplate the ridiculous and we see in Plate XLVII his wry speculation on what would happen and what would be the advantages, if one had a long neck.⁵¹ He also debated sequences on magic, whereby a man could make himself invisible, or could breathe bees or make waves spring from between his palms. These are folklore materials common to most societies, and they are not distinguished artistically, but emanating from Hokusai's fertile imagination they have a humorous quality that endears them to us. "In fact, his grotesqueries in this form have been lauded as authentic Japanese humor."⁵²

In our example we find the women at the right able to smoke at a safe distance from the bedclothes, doubtless enjoying a respite from the wooden pillow which the elaborate Japanese coiffures made necessary. Next to her, an old woman can remain seated but nevertheless get her head into a better position for listening to the monk play the samisen. Having a third arm helps with her pipe-smoking, too! And one of the

⁵¹Ibid., Plates 133-134, p. 202, 203.

⁵²Ibid., p. 196.

artist's happiest conceits is the enterprising oculist who has devised an especially appropriate set of glasses for his friend. A further amusing touch is that the samisen player does not seem at all disturbed by the upside-down apparition hanging in the air before him!

Our two final examples from Hokusai are shown in Plate XLVIII.⁵³ Here we have two facing pages of swimmers and underwater figures which show Hokusai daydreaming about the problems of men in water: how to swim when fording a river and clutching to a horse; how to work one's way down when aided by a pole; what happens to your clothes when immersed; the enjoyable ease with which a man could catch a fish. The centre figure right panel, seems to be peering through a glass wall under water--or it could be a foetus swimming in amniotic fluid. And what about the Beebe bell-jar suspended in the ocean, containing a man gazing at all the mysteries? Complete abandonment, complete freedom, is shown in these delightfully drawn figures. Even in such an unusual environment none of the men is unhappy. They may be learning to do something not native to their abilities, but all are thoroughly enjoying the experience.

It is hard to tear oneself away from this treasure trove of sketches and, indeed, there are literally hundreds of examples of humor untouched. However, enough have been shown for my purpose and there are still artists to discuss.

Looking, at a first quick glance, not unlike a page of Hokusai's

⁵³Ibid., Plates 149-150, p. 224, 225.

work, is the next example. Plate XLIX.⁵⁴ It is signed by both Kitao Masanobu and Kitao Shigemasa, but we are taking it as a work by Masanobu (1761-1816) as he was a pupil of Shigemasa's and it was not unusual for the pupil to also put the name of the head of his school on his work. If Shigemasa had done the work, his name alone would have been on the print. The Kitao school, founded by Shigemasa, was one of the most interesting of the secondary schools in ukiyo-e during the latter part of the eighteenth century. The school was not destined for a long life and expired early in the next century. However, Kitao Masanobu occupies a relatively important position in the history of ukiyo-e. He started designed kibyōshi (yellow-covered illustrated storybooks) in 1778 at the age of eighteen. He also wrote fiction under the name of Santō Kyōden (a name compounded of several elements from his own personal name, from the name of the district in which he lived, etc.). During the 1780's he worked as a print designer, book illustrator and fiction writer and achieved outstanding success in all his endeavors. He died in 1816 at the age of fifty-six.⁵⁵

The perfect evocation of ukiyo-e is a curious book called Shiji Koka (Miscellany of the Four Seasons), which presents in twelve double-page spreads a visual survey of Edo streets in the year 1798. For variety, vigor and the sweep of Edo life, this delightful book excels. Our example shows scenes of the fourth month, presided over by the Cuckoo. From right to left, top to bottom, we see a samurai on horse-

⁵⁴Michener, The Floating World, Plate 19, opp. p. 282.

⁵⁵Narazaki, The Japanese Print: Its Evolution and Essence, p. 110.

back, a cake seller and a Buddhist. Next come a komuso with hat and three monks trundling a temple bell and begging alms, the first man bearing a banner which states that a belfry is to be built. The man lower right is pounding rice to make cakes as a shellfish vendor with pole on shoulder passes a jelly merchant. Next comes a man with fish to be sold either raw or cooked, while a servant carries a box of gifts and iris, the flower of spring, to a temple about to be visited by a housewife. The other eleven prints show the brawling, the comedy and the Casucertian life of Edo, but none is better designed than this. Plate XLIX. The small scenes are more compact and the figures inter-related in their actions more, than in the work of Hokusai. As a mirror to contemporary life it is successful, though, and even the two small dogs seem to be enjoying life in a kind of bucolic haze. The beggars are portrayed with their mincing, cringing approach; the fish-seller trundles his wares along intent only on reaching the marketplace; the servant with the flowers goes on his mission contentedly.

The mainstream of ukiyo-e in the later years was the Utagawa school. This school originated with Toyoharu (1735-1814) and was developed by his pupils, Toyohiro (1763-1828) and Toyokuni (1769-1825). From them it passed into the nineteenth century, when it became the dominant school of ukiyo-e.

Utagawa Toyohiro is the artist of the next example. Plate L.⁵⁶ He was a graceful draftsman who produced much good work, most of it

⁵⁶Narazaki, The Japanese Print: Its Evolution and Essence, Plate 78, p. 174.

characterized by a feeling of gentleness, sincerity and good taste. This small print is one of a series of Tōkaidō designs probably drawn during the first decade of the nineteenth century. Twenty-five years later, his most important pupil, Hiroshige, gained great fame with the publication of his renowned "First" Tōkaidō series. Plate L is a modest forerunner of the famous Hiroshige series. Some of Toyohiro's series illustrate historical events; some show glimpses of scenery; others show the meibutsu (famous local products) for which many of the Tōkaidō stations were noted. There is a restrained, gentle, lyric note to the series which is very characteristic of Toyohiro.

Two travellers are shown here at Ōiso; the one at the lower right has laid aside his broad-brimmed hat, black stave and bundle (seen in the lower right corner of the print) and is shown laboriously lifting the famous Tora-ga-Ishi ("Tiger Stone"), while his companion at the left cheers the remarkable feat. "There is a touch of gentle humor, both in the grim expression on the face of the man lifting the stone and in the wild gestures of his companion."⁵⁷ Again the word "gentle" describes the type of humor found.

Ōiso was the eighth station on the Tōkaidō highway. It was located on the seacoast, about forty-two miles southwest of Edo. The Tora-ga-Ishi was one of the famous landmarks. The poem at the top of the print is a kyōka (satirical thirty-one syllable verse) signed at

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 174.

the left of the poem by Ichiyōsai Gofū (a pen name). The verse reads:

Daite mita	Trying to lift
Sono Ōiso no	The Tiger Stone
Tora-ga-ishi	Of Ōiso
Mukashi no koi no	Is like remembering
Omoni naruran	Past loves.

We find now, another friend, the monkey. They are famous in Japanese legend, where the saying "See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil" originated. In Plate LI⁵⁸ we see a clever monkey who has met a crab about to eat a rice cake. The monkey tricks him into trading the cake for a dry persimmon seed. The crab accepts his loss, plants the seed, and produces a fine fruit tree but has to ask the monkey to climb it to throw down the ripe persimmons. The story goes on to say that the monkey gorges himself instead and then pelts the crab with hard, green fruit. The monkey's friends, a chestnut, a bee, some seaweed and a mortar and pestle, decide the time has come to punish the arrogant monkey and invite him to a feast held in his honor. As he sits by the fire the chestnut hidden within explodes and burns him. The monkey runs into the kitchen for water and the bee stings him. He slips on the seaweed and the mortar and pestle fall on his head and tale, causing him so much pain that he runs away and never pesters the crab again.

As we have seen before, a feature of the monkey in Japanese art is the limitless reach of his right arm. This delightful print shows the monkey leaning over the stupid crab to play a trick on him. Note

⁵⁸Michener, The Floating World, Plate 20, opp. p. 284.

the wicked grin on the monkey's face.

The finest ukiyo-e of the first half of the nineteenth century is to be found in the designs of Hokusai (already discussed), and Hiroshige (1797-1858) and Kuniyoshi (1797-1861) to be discussed next. These artists considered the realistic structure of their designs more carefully than their forebears, but they all stressed and emphasized the lyrical elements of their art.

At the time Hokusai reached his maturity, around 1798, Hiroshige was only two years old. Born the only son of a minor hereditary fire official in the service of the Tokugawa government in Edo, he forsook the family occupation and became a pupil of Toyohiro. At the very beginning he possessed certain qualities not found in the ordinary ukiyo-e artist. He had a deep interest in poetry, and it is essentially the mind of a poet at work in his prints. His life was full of tragedy. During his early childhood he was orphaned by the loss of both his parents. In early middle age he lost his first wife and his only son, Nakajirō. Something of his loneliness and sadness is apparent in his work. It may be this quality as much as anything else that set his work apart from that of Hokusai. The Japanese term for this quality is aware, or mono-no-aware and it has many implications. It can be translated as "pathetic" or "sorrowful" or "compassionate" and to all of these a connotation of charm must be added to get exactly the right meaning. It is aware that is revealed at a first glance at Hiroshige's work. He depicted nature gently, lovingly, poetically, in a way that would be understood by all mankind. The Japanese, as a people, have

been accumulating within them from ancient times this feeling of mono-no-aware. It is this characteristic that is so inextricably interwoven into their humor.

Hiroshige's drawing is usually simply done and most of his effects are obtained by his use of color. In this respect his work is different from Hokusai whose work depended so heavily upon line expression. I am looking for humor, however, and it is to Plate LII that we turn.⁵⁹ Turtles, as a symbol of longevity, were a very common motif in the paints and prints of all schools. It is the combination of the brushwork and the feeling for his subject that makes this an amusing print. Under no stretch of the imagination could these turtles be said to be hurrying. They plod along in their gentle, slow fashion, the one in the rear following the leader blindly. The front turtle is the one who peers about to see what obstacles lie ahead. The posture and the determination of the turtles add a humanizing touch which accounts for the gentle humor in the print.

Hiroshige did another, a surimono (a print, usually of small size and on soft, thick paper, intended as a festival greeting or memento of some special occasion), also of turtles, which is interesting to use in comparison. Plate LIII⁶⁰. These turtles show more life, the one on the left gazing stonily ahead, while the other moves towards him with a sly grin marking its features. Both designs have been

⁵⁹Jack Hillier, Landscape Prints of Old Japan (San Francisco: The Grabhorn Press, 1960), Plate 37.

⁶⁰Edward F. Strange, The Colour-Prints of Hiroshige (London: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1925), opp. p. 106.

drawn with insight and love. Both remain gently amusing.

The two final examples of Hiroshige's work come from his Fifty-Three Stages of the Tōkaidō. This work brought him instant fame. The popularity that had been Hokusai's was transferred in large part to him almost overnight. For years he reigned supreme in the world of woodblock prints. Our first example, Plate LIV,⁶¹ shows us the area around Okitsu, six miles from Yui, and comprised of the coast of Tago and the forest of Miho, both celebrated scenic spots. The scenery is relegated to the background and we concentrate on a pair of sumo wrestlers being carried across the Yui River. The spectacle of a group of porters bending under the weight of the giant wrestlers is both human and humorous. Note the difference in size of the porters to their burdens and the anguished strain on the faces of the carriers.

The second print chosen from this series is of Yokkaichi, about seven miles southwest of Kuwana. It was a port and a thriving market town. Plate LV.⁶² This shows a scene by the Mie River just outside the town and is one of the most expert wind pictures ever turned out by a Japanese artist. The willow tree waves violently, and the coat of the man at the right seems on the point of ripping. A delightful touch is the excited face of the man who is chasing his hat. Human, warm and humorous. The sudden turn of events elicits our

⁶¹Ichitaro Kondo, The Fifty-Three Stages of the Tokaido by Hiroshige (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1965), Print 18.

⁶²Ibid., Print 44.

sympathetic response. We agonize with the man running after his hat and wish him success.

In the nineteenth century ukiyo-e prints were aimed at the common people throughout the whole of Japan. They were no longer directed to the special class of Edo merchants who had patronized ukiyo-e in the earlier days. Some of the changes that occurred can be traced in the work of Kuniyoshi. People of the lower classes are now depicted in the prints and the life and emotions they suffered. We see, for perhaps the first time, a purely plebian taste expressed--not an illusionary taste borrowed from the nobility.

Kuniyoshi might well be cited as the last important active figure in traditional ukiyo-e. His great forte was the historical print, particularly the powerful portrayals of ancient warriors in violent combat. His efforts in two other fields, satire and landscape, have more significance to us today.

The gradual weakening of the Tokugawa government led to the increasing appearance of satire in ukiyo-e, and Kuniyoshi was perhaps the greatest master of this genus. Once, when he went too far in his lampooning, he was punished by the government for such prints. We show here one of his print satires, Plate LVI,⁶³ showing the traditional transformation possible to bewitched Japanese foxes. The few human figures are half turned into foxes as they watch the antics of those who have been transformed before them. It is a rather over-

⁶³Lane, Masters of the Japanese Print, Plate 139, p. 289.

crowded scene, but throughout the picture it is possible to pick out animals behaving as humans.

My last example is one by Shibata Zeshin (1807-1891).

Plate LVII.⁶⁴ Zeshin, one of the finest lacquer artists of Japan of any age, was also one of the chief painters of the nineteenth century. He made only a few designs for prints. This is considered his finest. It is a masterpiece of composition, drawing and balance. Notice the diagonal running from the upper left hand corner to the lower right, and the perfect relationship between the lacquered signature and red seal on one side and the blank space on the other. An endearing print, it is a humorous and delightfully sensitive presentation of mice. Their noses seem to wiggle and their whiskers to vibrate. They have suspicious eyes. The solitary mouse in the corner is being considered as though he was a candidate under scrutiny by the Committee on Admissions of some particularly wealthy, snobbish club. Gentle humor shown again with the added spice of a possible story unfolding due to the composition. A fitting finale to the selection.

The collapse of feudalism and the downfall of the Tokugawa government resulted in the restoration of the emperor to power and the inauguration of the Meiji era in Japan. With the beginning of this new era, in 1868, a great influx of Western culture began. And, for the purposes of this discussion, Japan was no longer only Japanese.

⁶⁴Japanese Prints Sharaku to Toyokuni. Vol. IV of Japanese Prints of the Ledoux Collection (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), Print 56.

Foreign influences began their work with almost alarming swiftness.

However, there have been enough examples of ukiyo-e to show that in this uniquely Japanese work humor did indeed exist, both overtly and in a subtle fashion. Hanabusa Itcho's monkey is quietly ludicrous. Hotei, the God of Happiness, emerges full of a slow-paced, good-natured humor. Masanobu's rendering of humor is subtle and provocative in a gentle fashion. The ukiyo-e showing tricks being played on sleeping victims are full of suggestive "startle" reactions, but not necessarily lively wit. Harunobu's humor is suggested as slow moving and gentle. Utamoro's humor, again, is not rollicking and boisterous, but of under-stated sympathetic warmth.

On the other hand, Hokusai is a master of lively line depicting lively wit and amusing introspection. He is no judge of mankind's foibles but looks at the world with soft amusement and a lively intellect. Lively wit is also shown in the two scenes from Hiroshige's travel series.

Therefore, it will be seen that two very different characteristics of humor are found. On one hand, there is the subtle, not-quite-hidden, touch of gentle humor and, on the other, an overt and lively depiction of the same emotion.

CONCLUSION AND COMMENTS

There was no difficulty in proving the presence of humor in uniquely Japanese art. The nature of the humor found was more difficult to determine. Swann's contention that Japanese art shows a "lively wit" was found to be true, but only in part. An appraisal of the entire humor investigated also added a subtle, quiet and sympathetic kind of response as well as the "lively wit" aspect. Of the two different characteristics of humor found, "lively wit" was the more easily demonstrated. The other gradually manifested itself as an understated, sympathetically warm response to an unexpected stimulus. The subtle humor was harder to demonstrate convincingly, even though many signs of it were present.

The definition chosen for this investigation--that humor is a critical, yet sympathetic, human response to a stimulus occurring unexpectedly in an otherwise ordered existence--was applied to the haniwa, emaki and ukiyo-e. Examples of either the subtle or "lively wit" types of humor were found both in the actual objects investigated and, also, in the nature of the response elicited from the observer.

It is recognized that it is not yet possible to determine the use for which the haniwa were made, although one may speculate. Therefore, it is not possible to say whether the haniwa people themselves found humor in the clay figures. However, an observer today

is aware that there is apparent humor in the haniwa, and this may suggest that many of them were meant to be joyful and amusing. Many of the figures appear to be dancers, musicians, singers and clowns and some of these wear wide smiles. Many other haniwa are happy and laughing figures and show what Yashiro describes as the "sympathetic smile of good will."¹

The two jar-bearing women, Plates II and III, evince the subtle kind of humor. Our response to them today is one of sympathetic warmth. On the other hand, we more actively relate to the haniwa head indulging in a hearty chuckle, Plate IV, and the two companion pieces, one of the man laughing and beating his breast, Plate V, and the peasant in the throes of mirth, Plate VI. These are manifestations of the "lively wit" kind of humor. Again, the two men carrying shields, Plates VII and IX, demonstrate an overt joyfulness with their hearty humor. It is not my contention that female haniwa show a gentle, subtle type of humor, while male haniwa depict "lively wit." However, it might well be the purpose of a future study to determine if invariably such was the case.

We see, therefore, that in the haniwa, the two kinds of humor are demonstrable. Again, in the emaki, both types of humor emerged. In the picture scrolls it became evident that the Japanese race was able to laugh at itself. Even though the humor discerned was perhaps often light and inconsequential, it was of both the subtle and the "lively wit" variety.

¹Chapter II, Haniwa, p. 24.

The former kind of humor is found in the neck-tug-of-war scene from the Chōjū Giga scroll, Plate XIX. Pathos blended with gentle humor in the Yamai no Sōshi, Plates XX and XXI, made the humor presented even more subtle than would have otherwise been possible and elicited a sympathetic, warm response. It was interesting to find humor present in a topic concerned with diseases and deformities. The Gaki Zōshi scroll of Hungry Ghosts, Plate XXII, is also a combination of pathos and humor, again rendering the latter emotion gentle and almost hidden. On the other hand, an active response is more suitable to the "lively wit" depicted in the crowd scenes of the Shigi-san Engi, Plate X, and the conversational groups in both this, Plate XI, and in the Ban Dainagon Ekotoba, Plate XII. The scenes in which the animals disport themselves with gay abandon in the Chōjū Giga, Plates XIII to XVIII inclusive, demonstrate an overt and lively sense of humor and, also, ask for the same strength of response from the onlooker.

In all cases of the emaki investigated in which humor was found, the subject matter itself was of both types of humor described. Whenever the normally even tenor of events was upset, the response, whether of a subtle or a "lively wit" nature, was one of sympathy, not bitterness. The foibles of mankind are not handled maliciously or unkindly.

As for the ukiyo-e, the very print itself was "delightful"

and "full of fun."² In the subject matter, humor was found of both the subtle and the livelier variety.

Quietly ludicrous were the monkey woodcuts, Plates XXIV and LI. Even more subtle, perhaps, were the gentle turtles depicted in Plates LII and LIII. We find Hotei, Plate XXV, emerging full of a slow-paced, good-natured humor. Masanobu's spoof of the upper classes, Plates XXVI and XXVII, are full of traces of subtle humor. Harunobu, Plates XXXI, XXXII and XXXIII, and Utamaro, Plates XXXVII and XXXVIII, are masters of the understated, sympathetic emotion. And nothing could be more gentle or subtle than the humor suggested in Zeshin's mouse print, Plate LVII. Here the humor becomes almost sly in its quiet aspersions cast on various aspects of human behavior.

On the other hand, Hokusai emerges full of verve and spontaneous "lively wit" as shown in the ten prints reproduced here. So does Hiroshige in his Tokaido series, Plates LIV and LV.

What emerges, of course, is that while the subject itself expresses either the subtle or the "lively wit" type of humor, the observer's response can be of either kind in any of the situations. I am mainly concerned in this study in discovering the nature of the humor in the actual object depicted in Japanese art. However, it is nearly impossible to separate the response of the observer from the object inducing that reaction, even though the response is and

²Mitchener, Floating World, p. vii.

must be a personal statement.

All that can be demonstrated at this time from the foregoing study is that humor does indeed exist in Japanese art. The nature of this humor would seem to be of both the "lively wit" variety and, also, a gentle and subtle kind. Both types are critical, yet sympathetic, responses to stimuli occurring unexpectedly in an otherwise ordered existence.

NOTES ON PLATES

- PLATE I The Futatsuyama Tumulus, Nitta-mura, Gumma Prefecture. The small figures and circles (these latter representing cylinders) indicate the locations of the Haniwa as discovered; the two outermost lines define the moat.
- PLATE II Woman Carrying Jar on Head. From Takato, Takahagi-shi, Ibaragi Prefecture, Kantō Region. Height: 50 cm. Collection: Anthropology Seminar, Faculty of Science, Tokyo University.
- PLATE III From Kyōizumi, Mōka-shi, Tochigi Prefecture, Kantō Region. Height: 41.5 cm. Collection: Tokyo National Museum.
- PLATE IV Head of a Smiling Man. From Takato, Takahagishi, Ibaragi Prefecture, Kantō Region. Height: 34. cm. Collection: Anthropology Seminar, Faculty of Science, Tokyo University.
- PLATE V Man Laughing and Beating Breast. From Akabori-mura, Saha-gun, Gumma Prefecture, Kantō Region. Height: 56.5 cm. Collection: Tokyo National Museum.
- PLATE VI Smiling Farmer With Hoe on Shoulder. From Akabori-mura, Saha-gun, Gumma Prefecture, Kantō Region. Height: 92 cm. Collection: Tokyo National Museum.
- PLATE VII Smiling Man Carrying Shield. From Ibaragi Prefecture, Kantō Region. Height: 99.8 cm. Collection: Tokyo National Museum.
- PLATE VIII Close-up of above.
- PLATE IX Man Carrying Shield. From Yabuzuka-hommachi, Nitta-gun, Gumma Prefecture, Kantō Region. Height: 48 cm. Collection: Mr. Toshiharu Ogue, Tokyo.
- PLATE X Shigi-san Engi (The Legends of Shigi-san Temple). Attributed to Kakuyū (Toba Sōjō). Late Heian Period (12th century). Color on paper. Three scrolls. Height 31.52 cm. In the Chōgosonshi-ji, Nara. National Treasure.

- PLATE XI Same as Plate X.
- PLATE XII The Plebs in the Heian Period. After the Ban Dainagon Ekotoba (The Story of the Courtier Ban Dainagon). Attributed to Tokiwa Mitsunaga. Late Heian Period (12th century). Color on paper. Three scrolls. Height 31.52 cm. In the collection of Sakai Tadahiro, Tokyo. National Treasure.
- PLATE XIII Chōjū Giga (The Cartoons of Animals). Attributed to Kakuyū (Toba Sōjō). Heian and Kamakura periods (12th and 13th centuries). Ink on paper. Four scrolls. Height 30.61 and 31.81 cm. Owned by Kōzan-ji, Kyoto. National Treasure.
- PLATE XIV As above.
- PLATE XV As above.
- PLATE XVI As above.
- PLATE XVII As above.
- PLATE XVIII As above.
- PLATE XIX As above.
- PLATE XX Yamai no Sōshi (The Scroll of Diseases and Deformities). Attributed to Mitsunaga. Early Kamakura period (12th century). Color on paper. Height 26.06 cm. In the collection of Sekido Arihiko, Aichi. National Treasure.
- PLATE XXI As above.
- PLATE XXII Gaki Zōshi (The Scroll of Hungry Ghosts). Attributed to Mitsunaga. Early Kamakura period (12th century). Color on paper. Height 26.26 cm. One scroll in the National Museum, Tokyo. One scroll in the Kyoto National Museum. National Treasure.
- PLATE XXIII Location of this painting: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Size: 13 5/8 X 9 3/4 in. Date: Unknown, but later than 1780. Signed: No signature, but a few Ōtsu-e of this type were signed by artists of whom nothing is known. Translation: Tokaido Ōtsu Juku Sekisenen (Ōtsu Station on the Tokaido, at the Garden with the Spring near the Barrier).
- PLATE XXIV Reproduced from the second volume of the Itcho-gafu, 1770. 20.5 X 15.5 cm.

- PLATE XXV Signed: Nishimura Shigenaga. Publisher: Iga-ya. Urushi-e print with gold dust. Hoso-e size: 30.7 X 15.7 cm. 1720-1730. Collection of the National Gallery in Prague.
- PLATE XXVI Masanobu. Yoshiwara Street Scene. 1701. Large Album Plate.
- PLATE XXVII Masanobu. Jealous Wife Discovers Rendezvous. 1710's. Large Album Plate.
- PLATE XXVIII Hasegawa Mitsunobu. Sumi-e. Unsigned. Size: 10 1/2 X 15 in. Probable date ca. 1730.
- PLATE XXIX Kyosen: Chūban, 26.6 X 19.9 cm.; 5 color blocks, karazuri; faded; trimmed. Date: 1765.
- PLATE XXX Signature: Kyosen. Seals: Jōsei Sanjin and Kyosen no in. Printed in lilac, two shades of beni, two of green, yellow, brown, buff, two shades of gray, blue, and opaque white with embossing on wall pattern, kimono and obi patterns, and cup. Chuban: 11 1/4 X 8 1/2 inches.
- PLATE XXXI Chūban. Publisher Unknown. Attributed to Suzuki Harunobu. Date: around 1765. Atami Art Museum.
- PLATE XXXII Harunobu. Date: 1765. Morse Collection, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, U.S.A.
- PLATE XXXIII Unsigned. Attributed to Harunobu. Size: 10 1/2 X 8 1/4 inches. Date ca. 1766.
- PLATE XXXIV Tachibana Minko. The Fox's Wedding: The Meeting Together. Size: 10 3/4 X 7 7/8 inches.
- PLATE XXXV Signed: Ippitsusai Bunchō gwa. Sealed: Mori uji. Size: 12 1/2 X 5 3/4 inches. Date: 1769.
- PLATE XXXVI Signature: Koryūshai ga. Date: c. 1769. Printed in beni, pink, pearl-gray, two shades of green, lilac, and blue (faded) with embossing on robe, obi, screen, and quilt. Chūban 10 1/4 X 7 1/2 inches.
- PLATE XXXVII Utamaro. Women Preparing Stuffs for Dresses. Triptych.

- PLATE XXXVIII Utamaro. Child Upsetting Goldfish Bowl, from a set entitled "Elegant Set of Darling Children." About 1800.
- PLATE XXXIX Self-portrait of Hokusai at the age of eighty-three (1842), from a letter to his publisher. 10 1/2 ins. deep. Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden, Holland.
- PLATE XL Hokusai. A page from Gado Hitori Keiko, Drawing Self Taught, 1815. 15.2 X 11.2 cm.
- PLATE XLI Volume I, Manga, Plate 12, Left.
- PLATE XLII Volume I, Manga, Plate 10, Left.
- PLATE XLIII Volume IX, Manga, Plate 11, Left.
- PLATE XLIV Volume I, Manga, Plate 4, Right.
- PLATE XLV Volume XII, Manga, Plate 10, Right, Plate 9, Left.
- PLATE XLVI Volume X, Manga, Plate 29, Right, Plate 28, Left.
- PLATE XLVII Volume XII, Manga, Plate 14, Right, Plate 13, Left.
- PLATE XLVIII Volume IV, Manga, Plate 26, Right, Plate 25 Left.
- PLATE XLIX Location: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Size: Double page 8 1/2 X 11. Publisher: Tsuruya Kiemon. Signed: Kitao Masanobu and Kitao Shigemasa. Date: 1798. Translation: Upper right: Fourth Month.
- PLATE L Signed: by Toyohiro at the lower right. Ōiso, from "The Fifty-three Stations on the Tōkaidō" Koban. Publisher unknown. Date: early 1800's. Collection of C. H. Mitchell, Tokyo.
- PLATE LI Location: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Size: 14 X 9 1/8. Date: probably between 1790-1800. Signed: No signature, but another copy in Chicago is signed Toyohiro ga. Sealed: Ryusai. Sumizuir-e, but printed from two blocks, black and gray. No key block for monkey in order to simulate fur.
- PLATE LII Ichiryusai Hiroshige. Turtle and Water-Weed. Size: 6 1/4 X 13 3/4 inches. Date: Between 1847-1850.

- PLATE LIII Surimono. Original Design. Tortoises and Water
Weeds. Signed: Hiroshige fude. Seal: Utagawa.
- PLATE LIV Hiroshige. Okitsu. Hoei-dō version of the Tōkaidō
series.
- PLATE LV Yokkaichi. Hoei-dō version of the Tōkaidō series.
- PLATE LVI Kuniyoshi. Bewitched foxes Rehearsing Their Roles.
1840's. Medium-sized color print.
- PLATE LVII Signed: Zeshin. Sealed: Koman. Size: 11 1/4 X 16 7/8
inches. Date: ca. 1880.

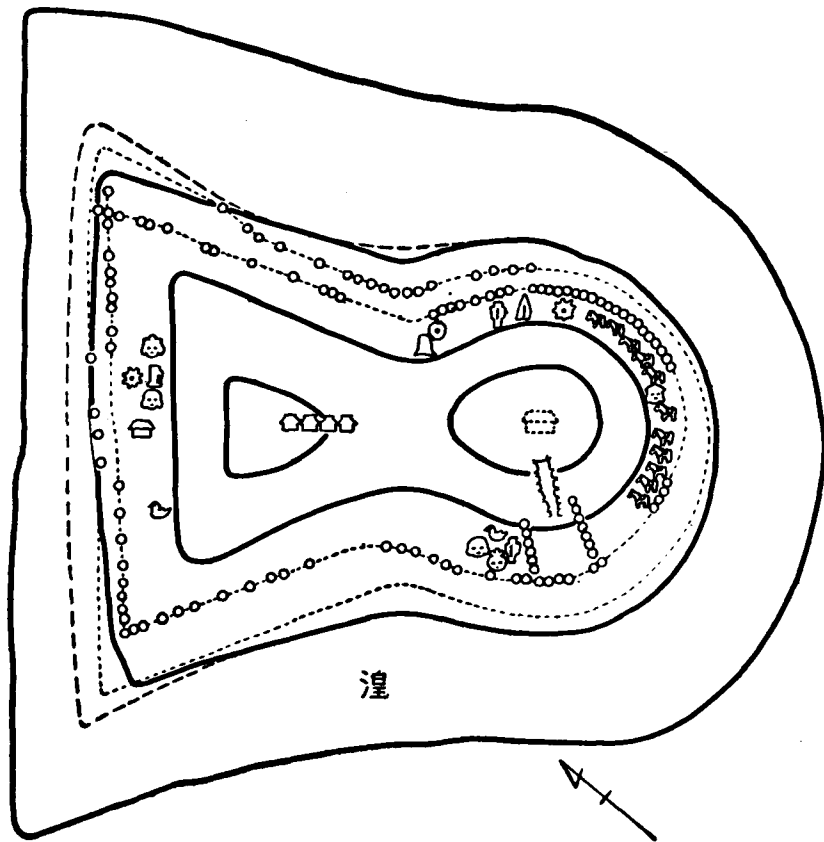


Fig. 2. The Futatsuyama Tumulus, Nitta-mura, Gumma Prefecture. The small figures and circles (these latter representing cylinders) indicate the locations of the Haniwa as discovered; the two outermost lines define the moat.



PLATE II



PLATE III



PLATE IV



51

PLATE V





PLATE VII



PLATE VIII



PLATE IX



PLATE X



PLATE XI



PLATE XII



PLATE XIII



PLATE XIV



PLATE XV

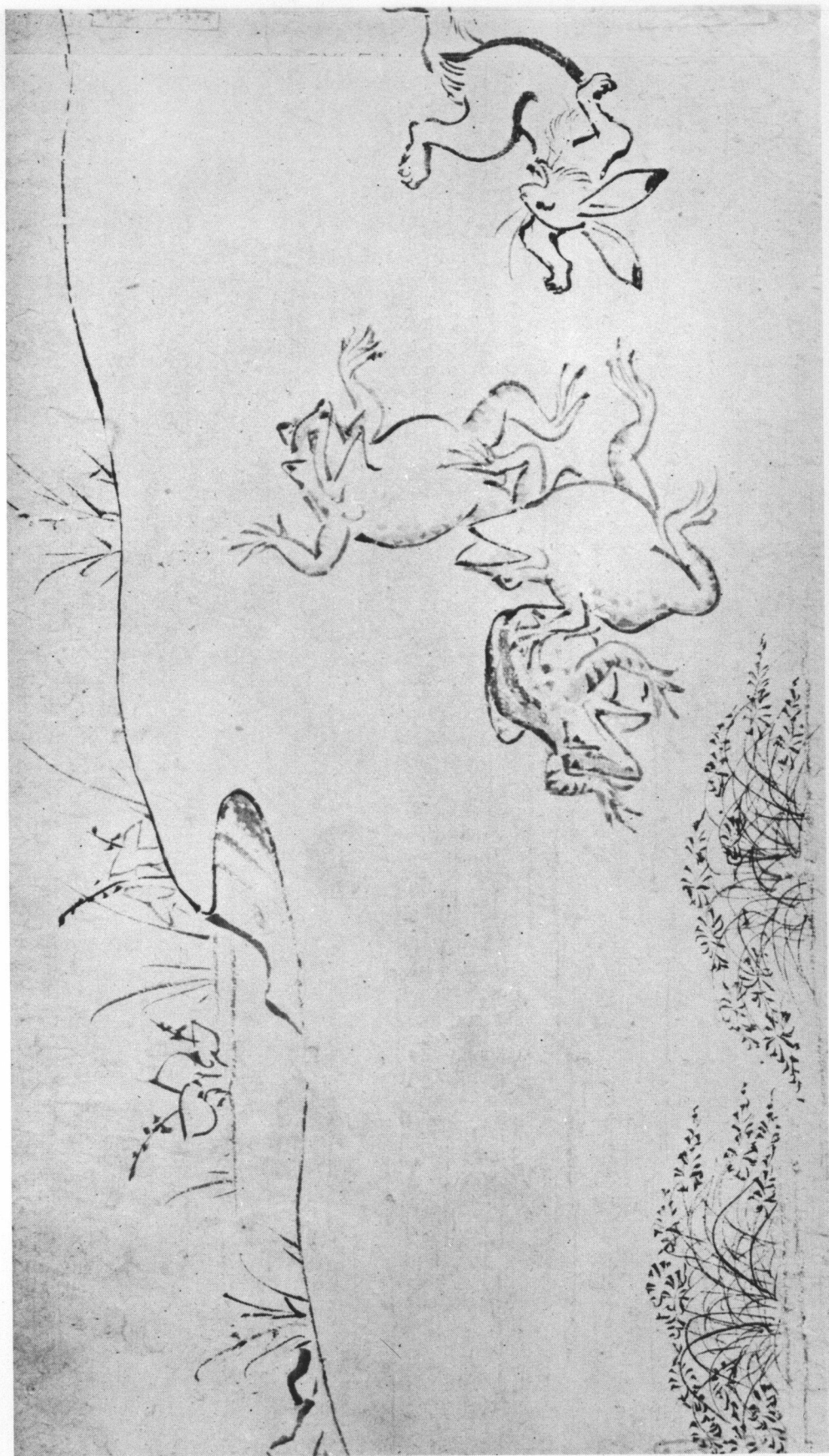


PLATE XVI

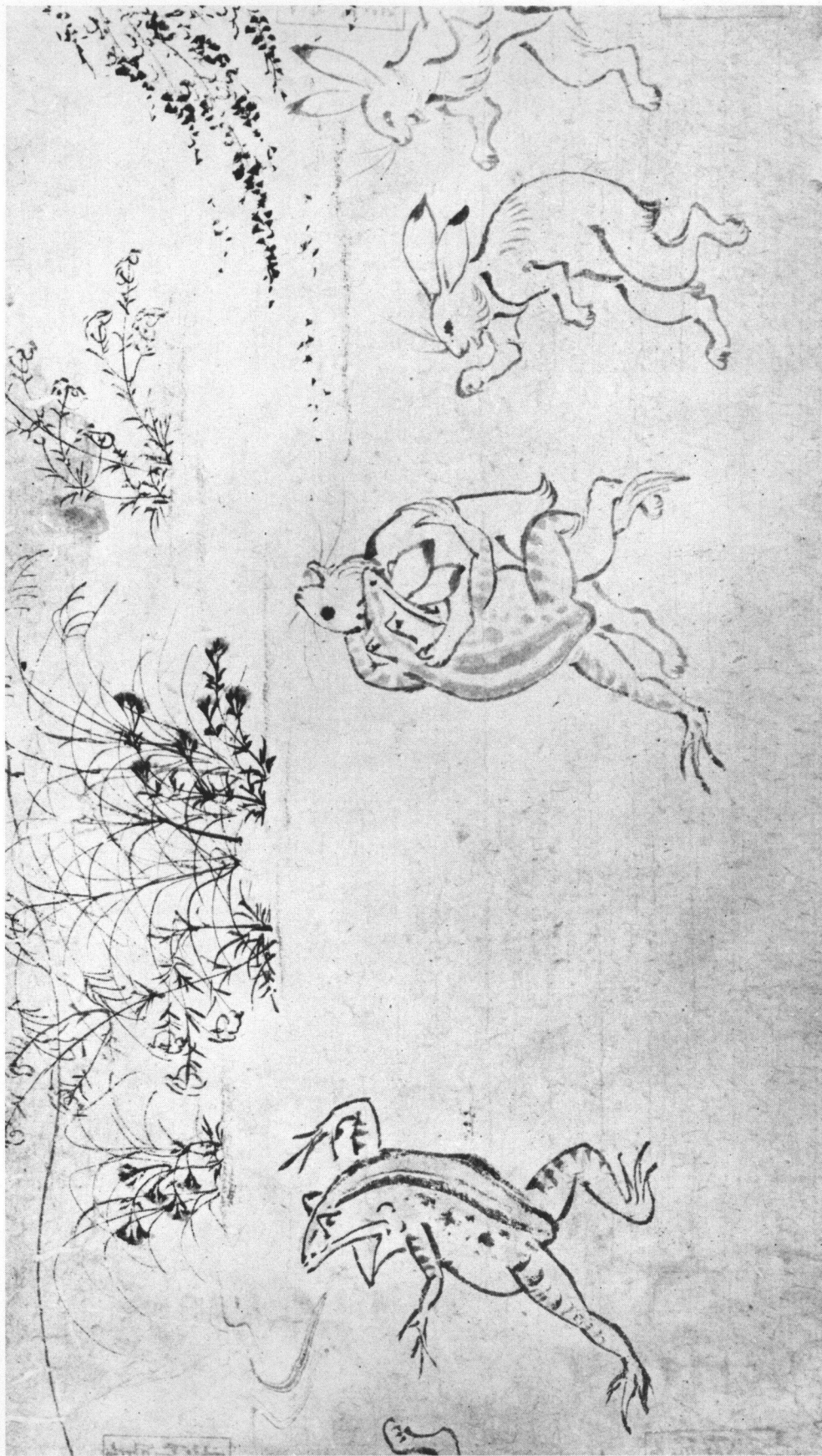


PLATE XVII



PLATE XVIII



PLATE XIX

大程圖平靜の、この書は、
 に、た、た、た、た、た、た、
 如、た、た、た、た、た、た、
 如、た、た、た、た、た、た、

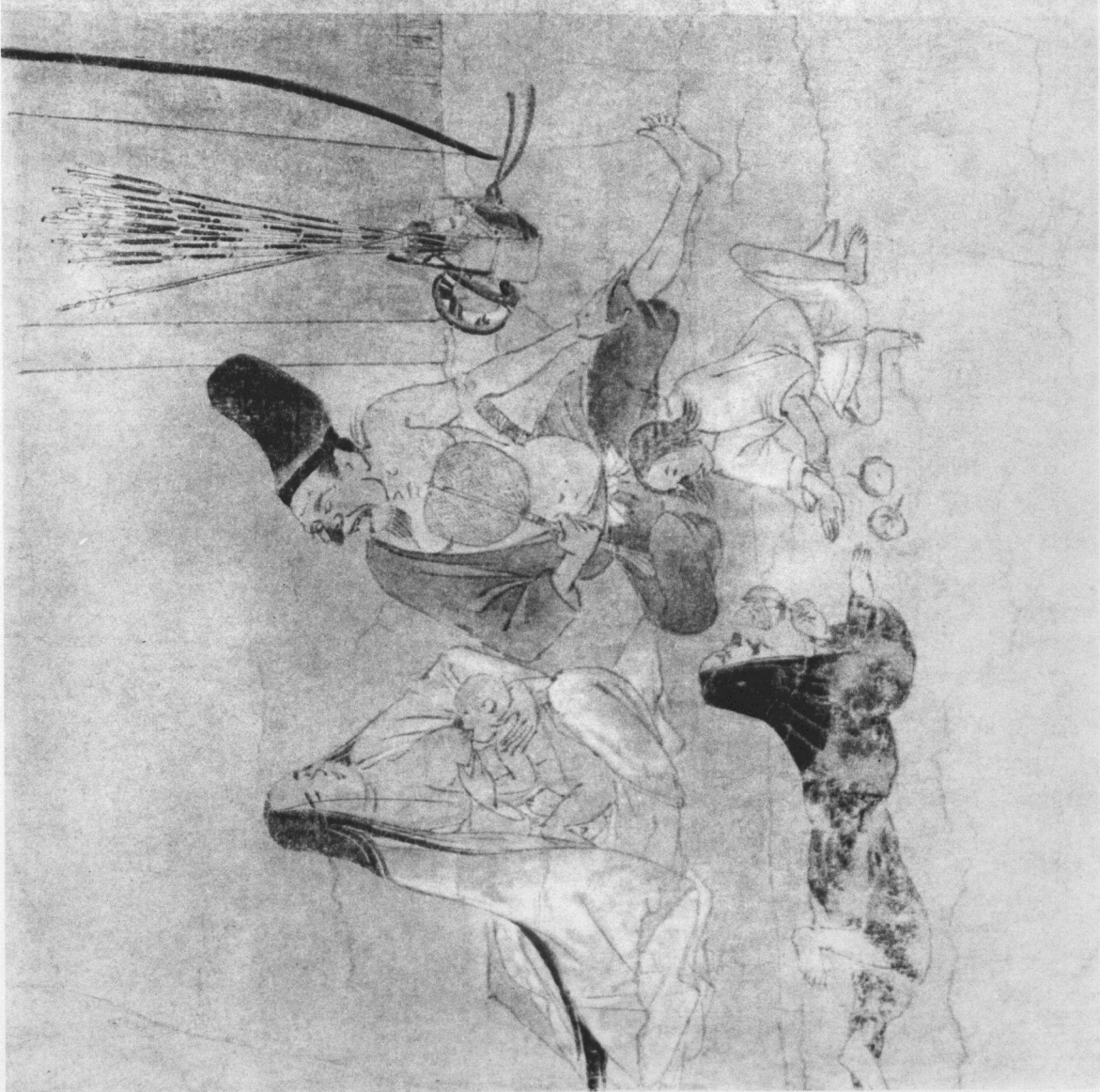




PLATE XXI

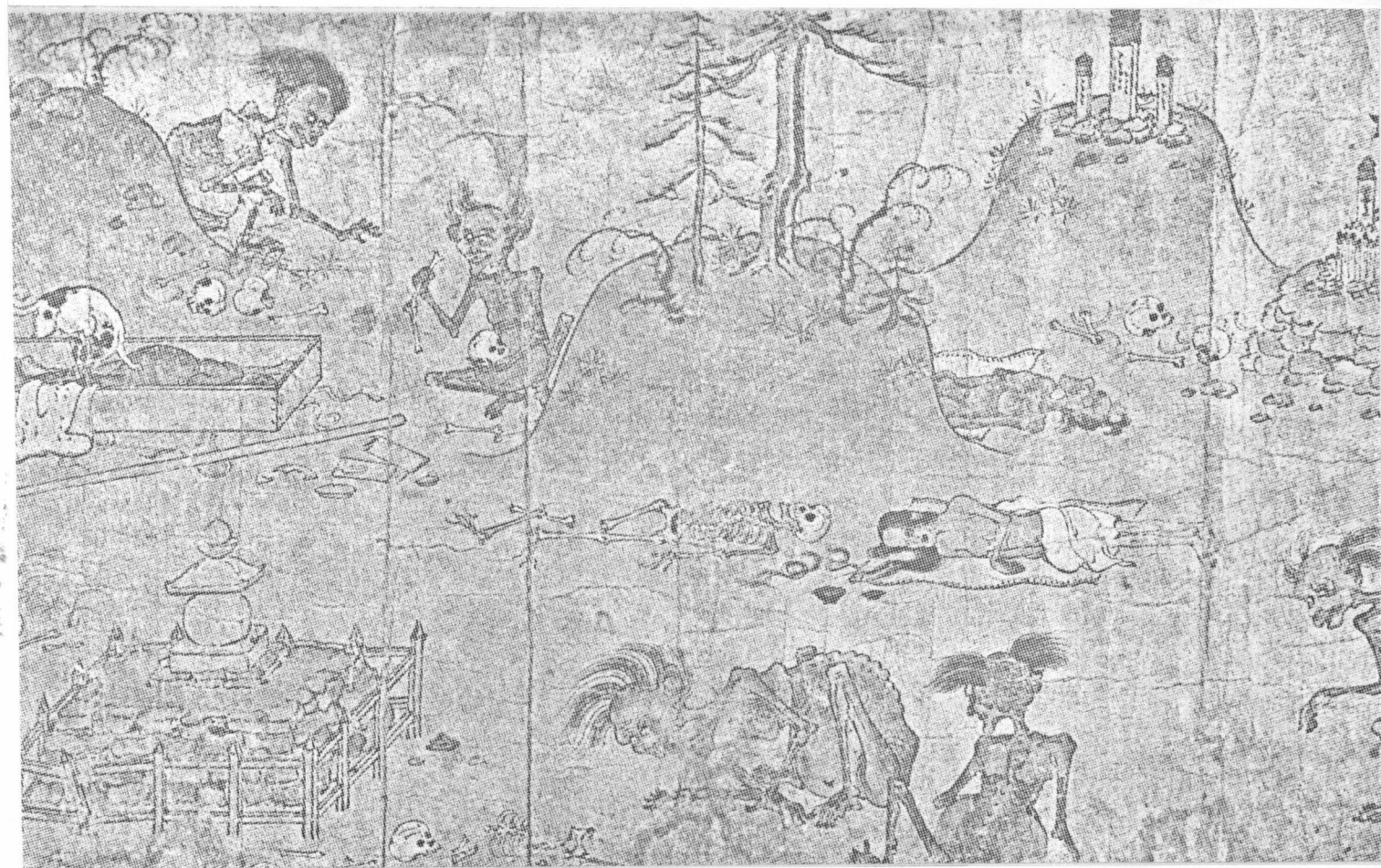


PLATE XXII



PLATE XXIII

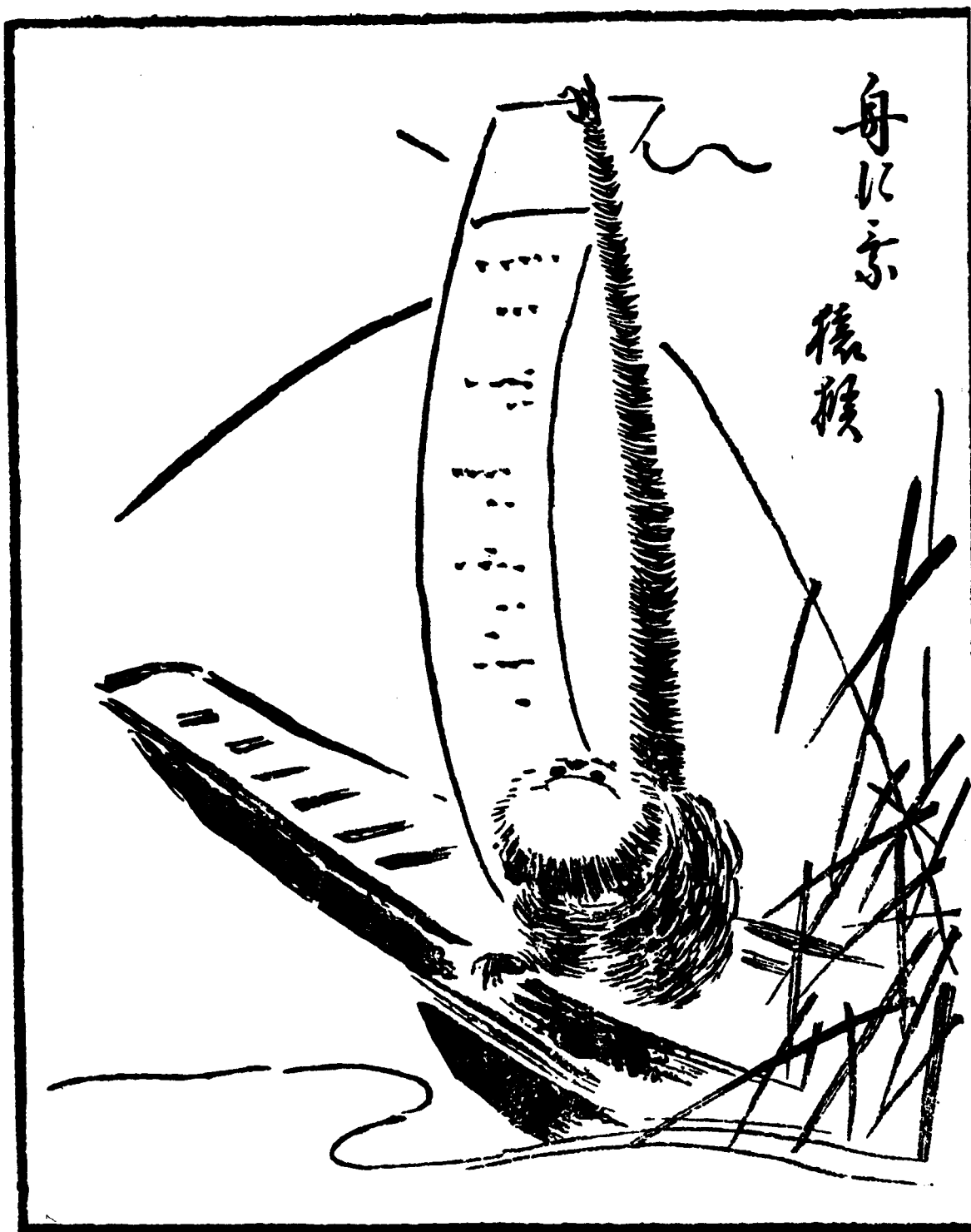


PLATE XXIV



PLATE XXV





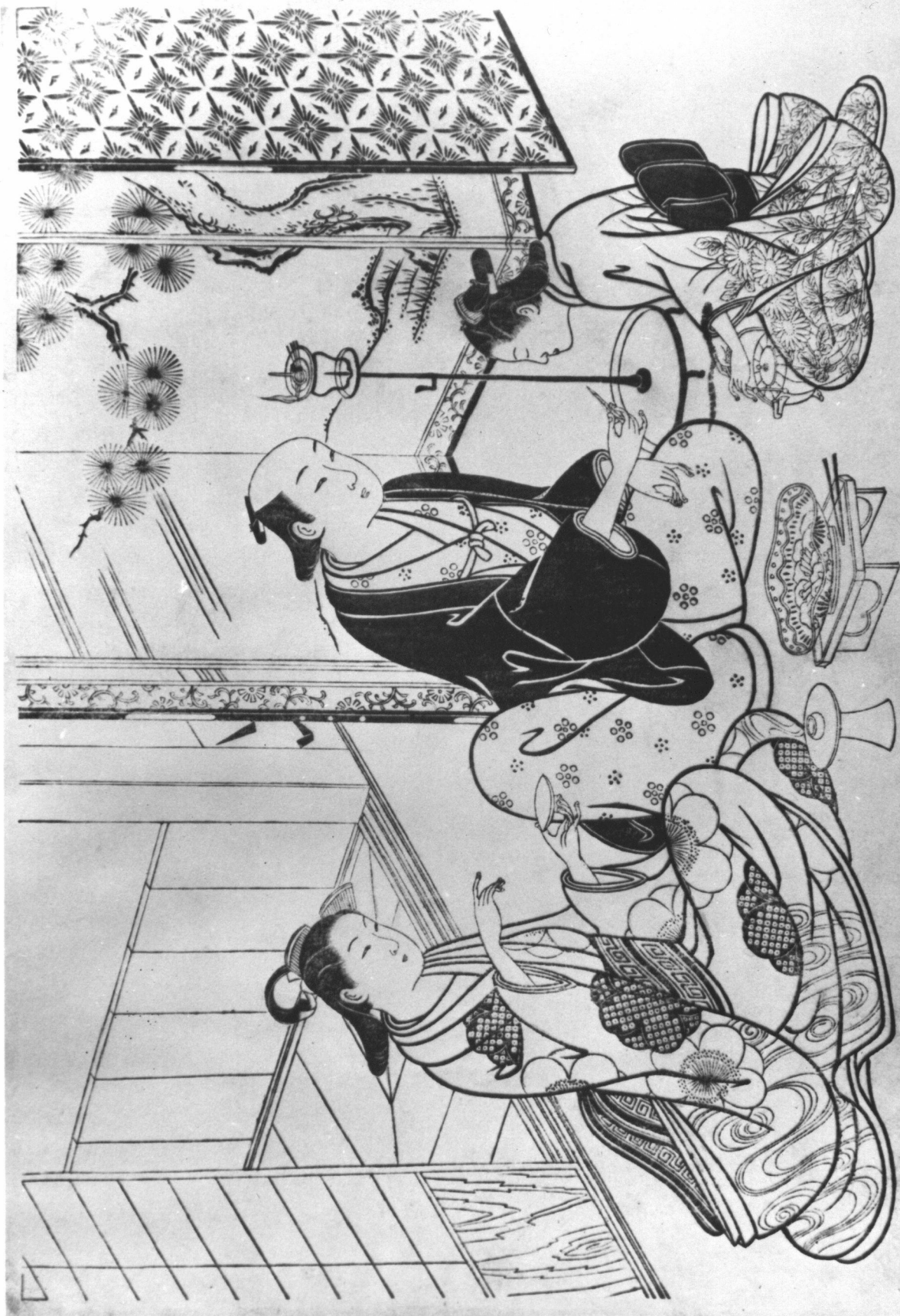






PLATE XXX



PLATE XXXI





PLATE XXXIII

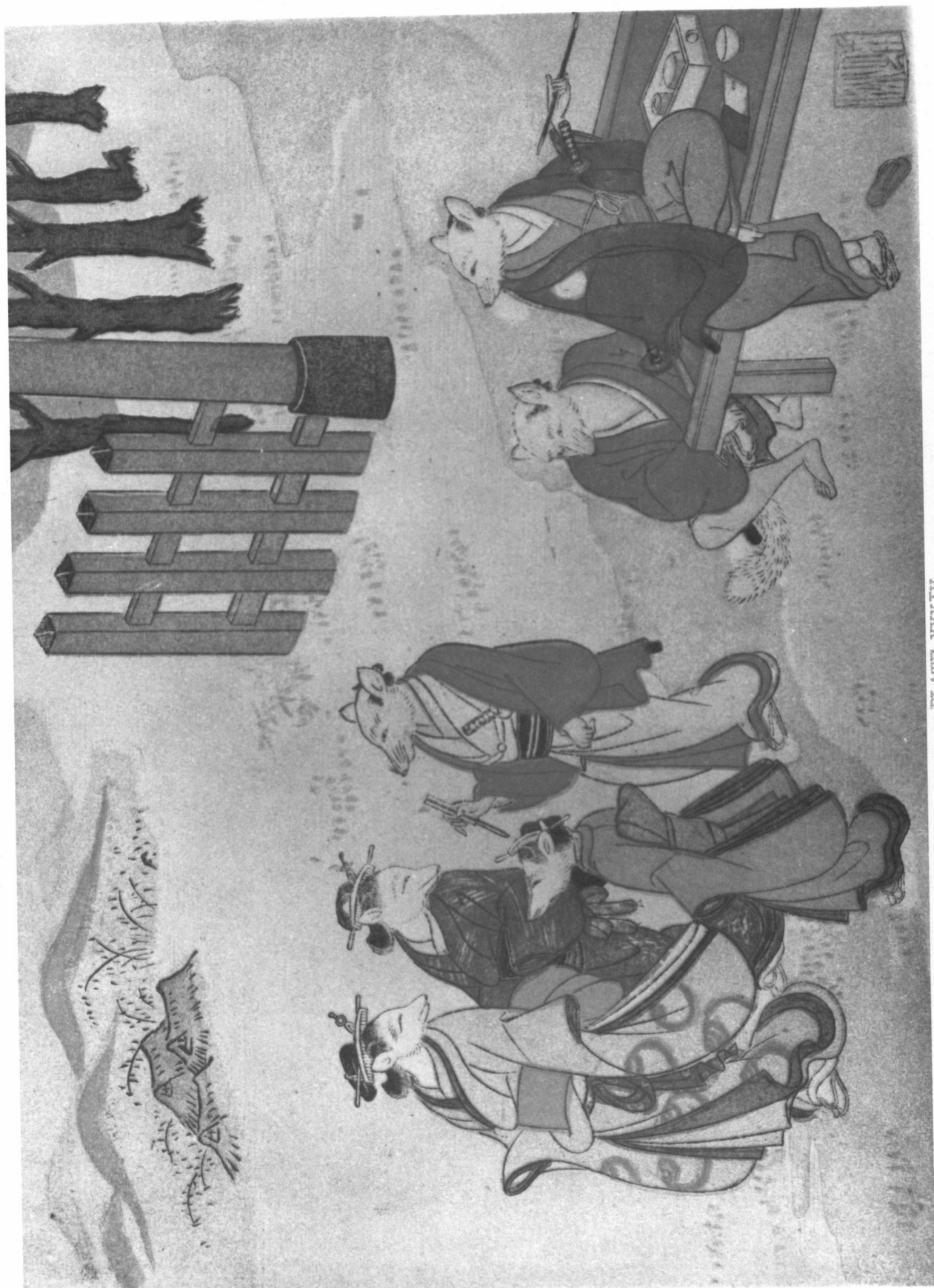


PLATE XXXIV



PLATE XXXV



湖龍齋画

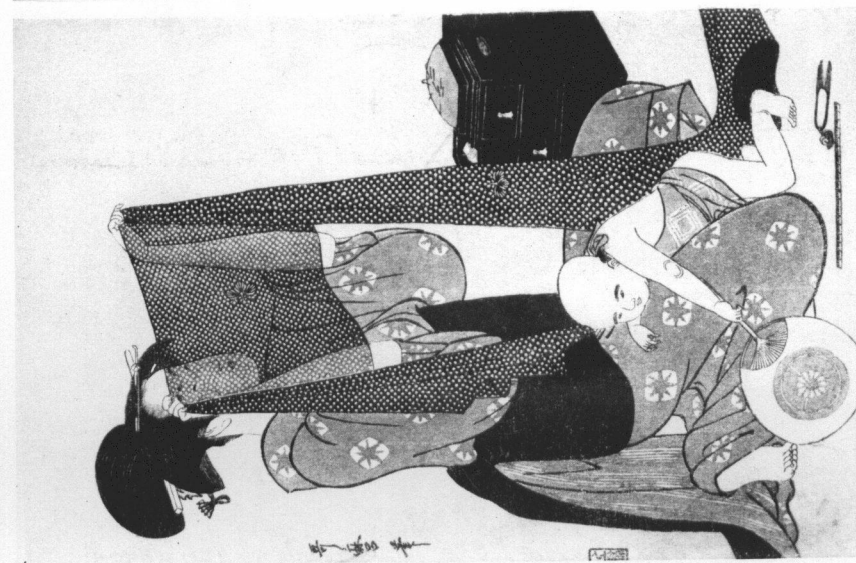


PLATE XXXVII

哥磨呂筆
風流子實合



泉市藏

相と書卷中は有りて無き者入甲二歳に画し
 ありて人ありて此の如きものありて
 廿二歳にありて授けりて
 此の如きものありて
 此の如きものありて
 此の如きものありて



十二歳
 此の如きものありて



PLATE XLI

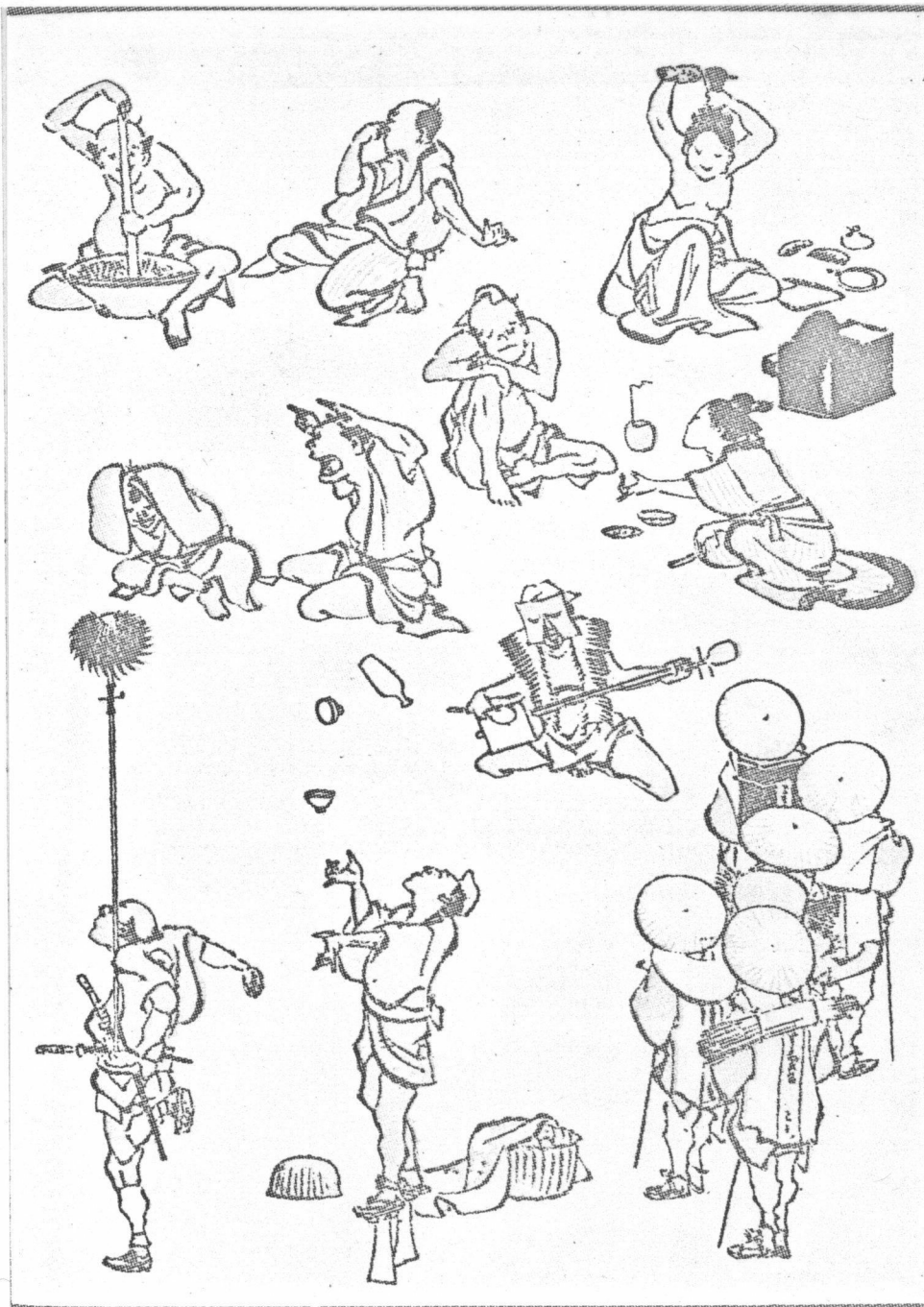


PLATE XLII



PLATE XLIII



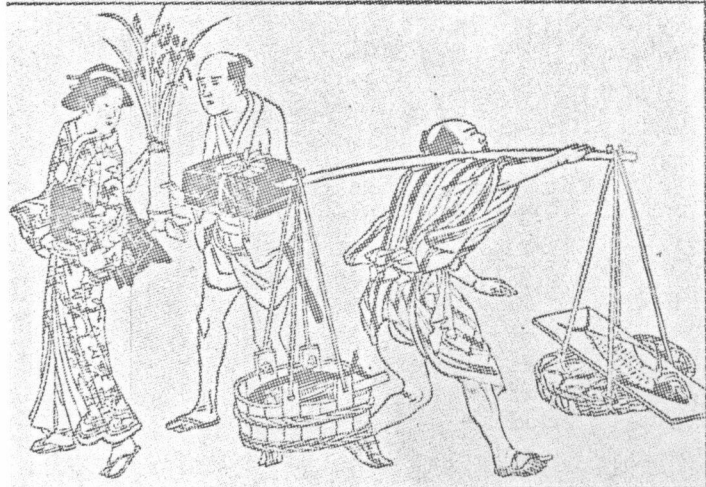
PLATE XLIV











大磯

一筆新極風

抱くんそ

大磯の

とろ名
ひりの

志の

まゐあ

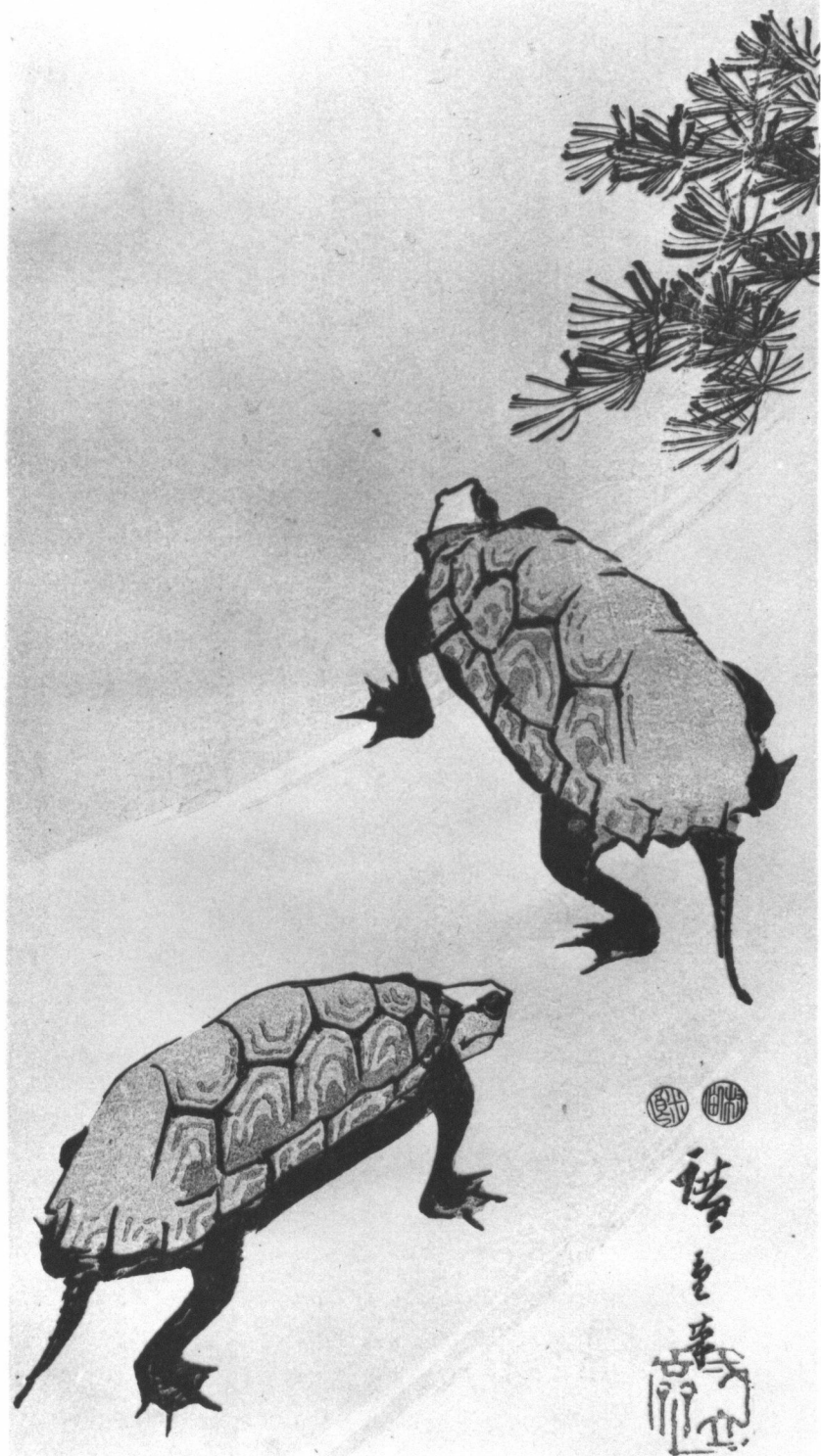
かゝる
そめ

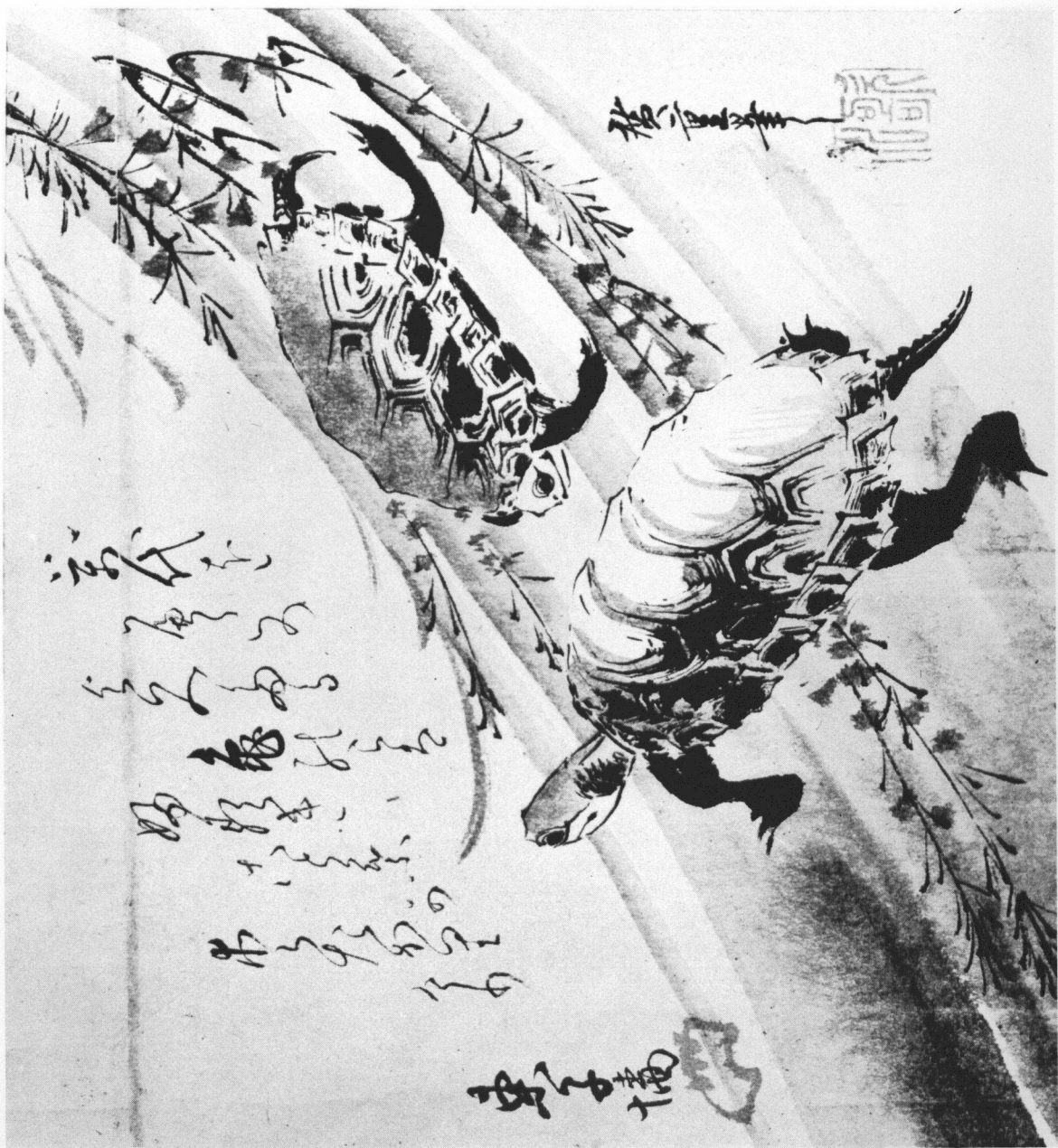


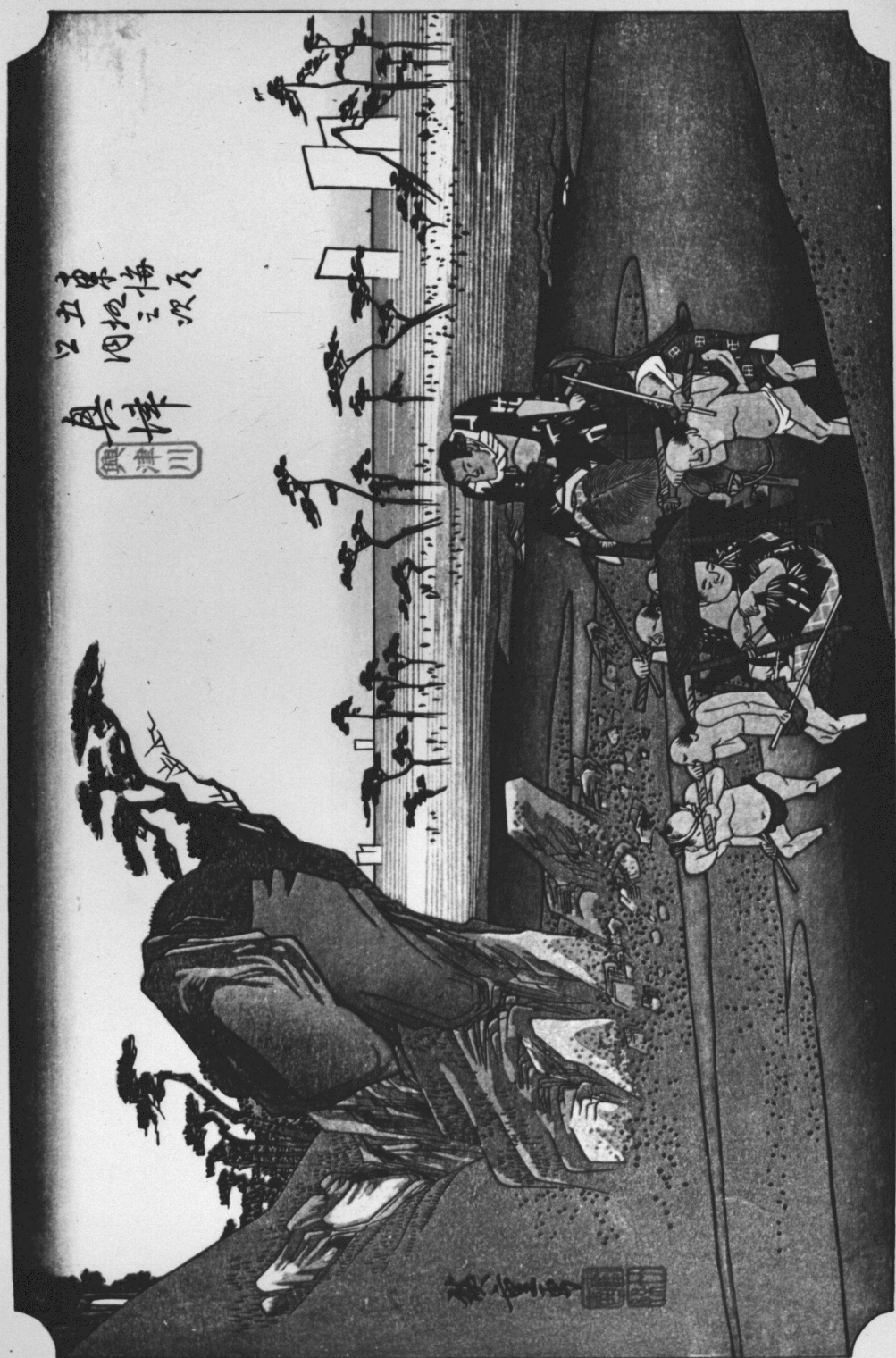
あゝとんま



PLATE LI









東海道

東海道
之拾遺
四日所
三重川

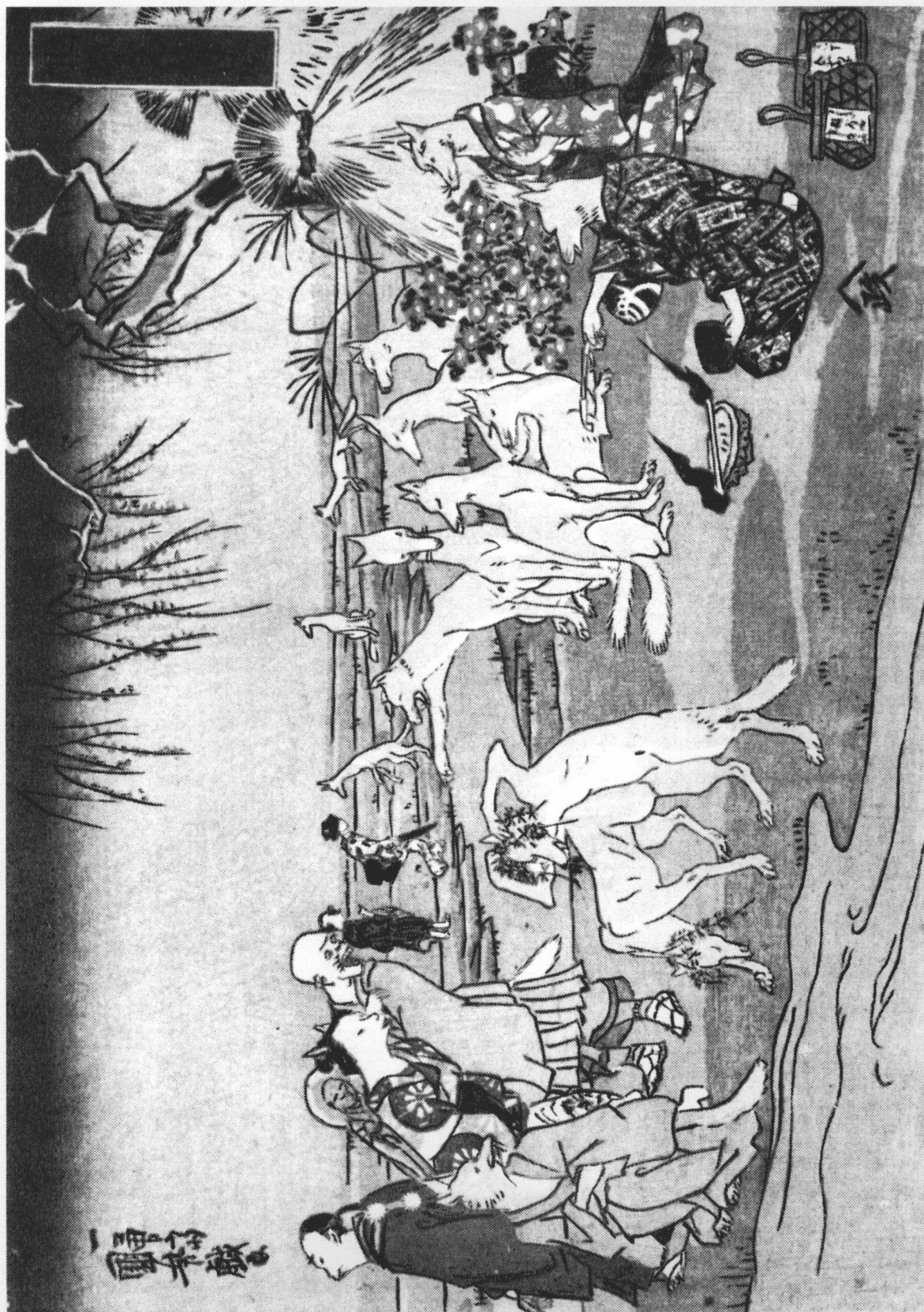


PLATE LVI

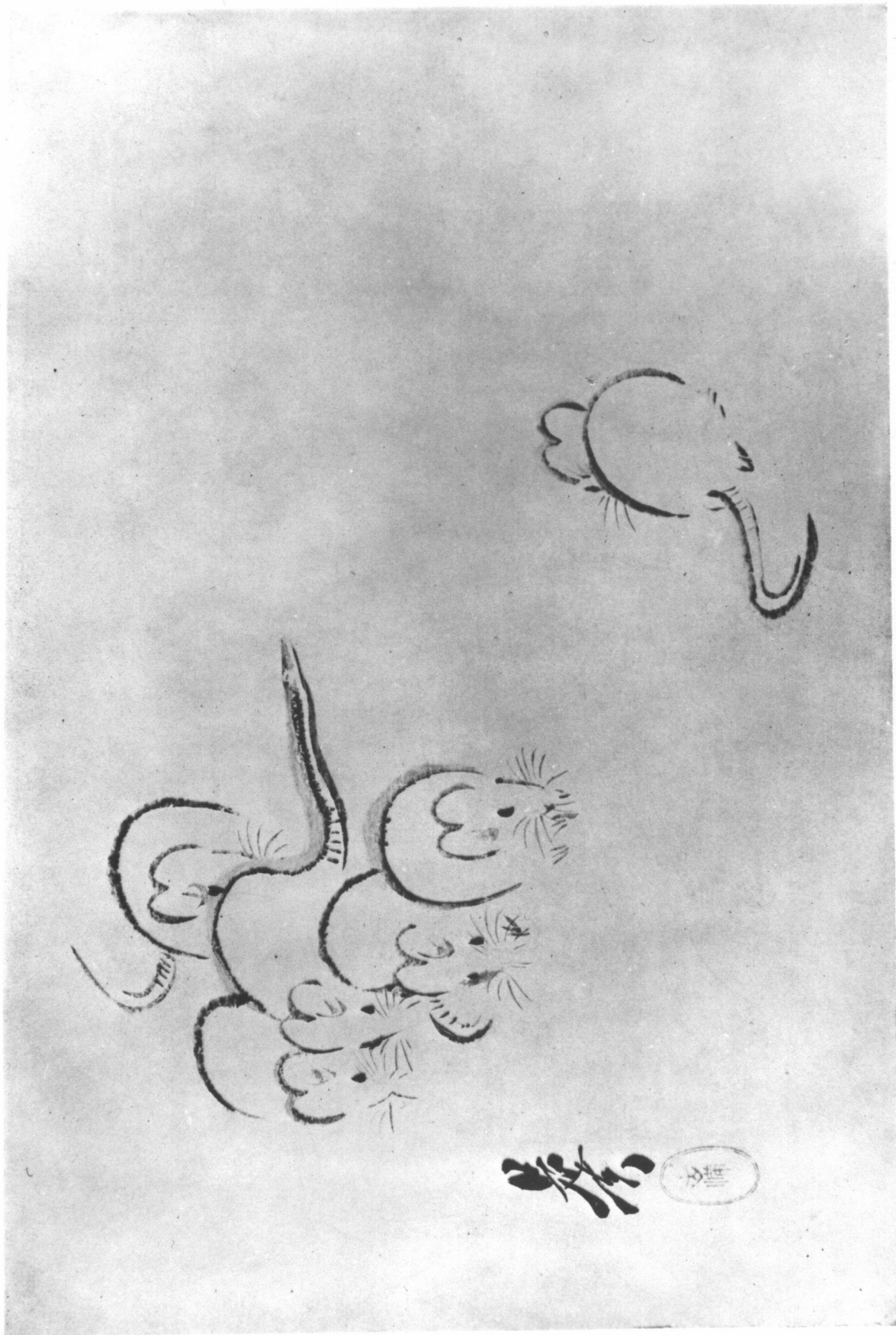


PLATE LVII

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