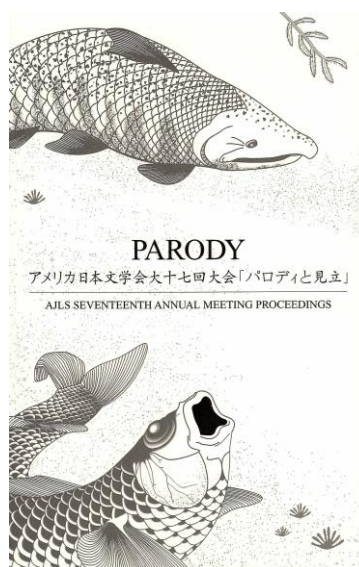


“Parodying the Parody: The Example of *Ken* Songs”

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PARODYING THE PARODY: THE EXAMPLE OF *KEN* SONGS

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酒は拳酒 色品は 蛙一ひよこ 三ひよこひよこ 蛇ぬらぬら 蛞蝓参りましょ
ソレじゃんじゃかじゃかじゃか じゃんけんな
婆様に 和藤内が 叱られた 虎は這う這う とてつるてん 狐でサアきなせえ
*Sake wa kenzake/ iroshina wa/ kaeru hitohyoko/ mihyokohyoko/ hebi
nuranura/ namekuji mairimasho/
sore/ janjaka jakajaka janken na/
basama ni/ Watōnai ga shikarareta/ tora wa hauhau/ totetsuruten/
kitsune de /sā/ kinasē*
Sake has to be *ken-zake*/ but there are different kinds./ The frog jumps
one time./ three times./ The snake comes slippery./ Let's take the snail!/
Ding-dong, ding-dong stone-ken
By his hardhearted old mother/ Watōnai was scolded./ The tiger creeps/
accompanied by a shamisen./ Come with the fox!¹

This song, which is commonly known under the name *Totetsuru-ken* とてつる拳, originally was part of the dance interlude (*shosagoto* 所作事) *Warau kado niwaka no shichi fuku* 笑う門にわか七福 (A *niwaka* dance of seven-fold luck at the door where one laughs). It was first performed in the first month of *Kōka* 4 (1847) at the *Kawarazaki-za* 河原崎座 theatre in Edo as part of a *Soga* 曾我 play, the sort of plays about the revenge of the *Soga* brothers usually given as the first play in a new year. Written by *Sakurada Jisuke* 桜田治助 III, its title is of course a pun on the saying *Warau kado ni wa fuku kitaru* 笑う門には福来る, meaning “Luck comes to the door where one laughs”.

The contents of this *shosagoto*, as is the case with most of them, are very simple: Three people are chatting with each other, when one of them, a bath-house servant (*osso* オッソ), which was one of the lowest ranked occupations Edo society had to offer, suddenly announces that he is planning to start a new career as a male entertainer or male geisha, a *taikomochi* 太鼓持ち or *hōkan* 幫間. His friends make fun of him, because for this profession he would need at least some kind of artistic skill (*gei* 芸), which they think he has not. At this point he says that his *gei* is *ken* (拳), a very popular drinking game, and he starts to sing the above-

¹ Text on several single-sheet and three-sheets woodblock prints from the year *Kōka* 4 (1847). See Linhart 2008.

mentioned *Totetsuru-ken* song and to dance to it, with his friends joining him at once.²

Given this background, the song, which looks rather mysterious to an uninformed person, is easy to understand. It consists of nothing but a funny enumeration of the four main *ken* games that were played all over Japan in the middle of the nineteenth century: it starts with the *ken* of small animals (*mushi-ken* 虫拳), continues with stone-*ken* (*jan-ken* じゃん拳) and tiger-*ken* (*tora-ken* 虎拳), and ends with fox-*ken* (*kitsune-ken* 狐拳). These are also the four *ken* games which the *osso*, performed by Nakamura Utaemon 中村歌右衛門 IV, pretended to master, and which should qualify him as a *taikomochi*.

Before these *ken* games became popular, the numbers' *ken* (*hon-ken* 本拳 or *kazu-ken* 数拳) was first introduced in Edo through books of the *Yoshiwara saiken* 吉原細見 genre in 1743, and *ken* was thus from its beginnings onwards closely associated with the licensed quarters. By the time when the *Totetsuru-ken* appeared, however, *ken* was no longer only a drinking game at places of erotic entertainment, but was being enjoyed by all strata of society and by people of both sexes as well as all ages. A *taikomochi*, on the other hand, needed many more artistic skills besides that of being a perfect *ken* player; he had to master dances, songs, poems, conversational arts, small performances, jokes, and all sorts of drinking games. This is what made the *shosagoto* funny: the idea that someone should believe that to know *ken* alone, which everybody knew and played, would suffice to qualify him as a male entertainer, although a thorough knowledge of *ken* games was certainly a prerequisite for this job. At the same time, the *shosagoto* can also be interpreted as a parody of the contemporaneous activities of a group of *ken* maniacs who were just in the process of trying to establish *tōhachi-ken*, a more complicated variety of *kitsune-ken*, as a *geidō*.³ *Ken* had a special importance as drinking game: it was by far the most popular drinking game, as it still is in China today. When we consider the years preceding the 1847 *Totetsuru-ken shosagoto* performance, we see that these were years that put heavy stress on the common people through the so-called Tenpō Reforms of 1841–43. The politician responsible for these reforms was chief senior councilor Mizuno Tadakuni 水野忠邦. His policies were extremely unpopular both with the commoners and with many daimyo, resulting in his having to step down from office in the ninth month of Tenpō 14 (1843). After half a year, he was called back to office in the

² Synopsis of the text contained in the *Fujiokaya nikki* vol. 3, p.129.

³ Linhart 1994, and Linhart 1998, p.159–171.

sixth month of Tenpō 15 (1844), before he finally resigned in the second month of Kōka 2 (1845). Since it was never announced, however, whether or not the measures instituted by the reform were any longer in force, people were extremely cautious before they returned to ‘business as usual’. Mizuno’s successor Abe from Fukuyama was a comparatively young, conciliatory man of only twenty-nine years of age, who was to stay in office for the next ten years.

The Tenpō Reforms aimed at ending the luxurious, playful life of the common people and at installing in them a puritan life style. Theatres and the licensed quarters as well as colorful woodblock prints (*nishiki-e* 錦絵) and books, which described them, were the main targets of the Reform. Our song is a homage to play, *asobi* 遊び, which is often said to consist for men in *nomu* 飲む, *utsu* 打つ and *kau* 買う, drinking, gambling and buying women. Celebrating *asobi* was, of course, in conflict with the aims of the reforms. *Ken* is a kind of gambling, which is played while drinking, often together with the female inhabitants of the licensed quarters, a kind of foreplay to later sleeping with women. Therefore, *ken* can also be interpreted as a metaphor for *asobi* itself. In the variety of the then very popular *sugoroku* 双六 games⁴ that was devoted to ideal human life courses, the goal section (*agari* 上り) shows what kind of ideal way of living the people aspired for. In several of these *sugoroku* games, the picture in this section consists of two or three people drinking sake and playing *ken*.

This interpretation of *ken* as a metaphor for the whole world of play makes especially sense if we see how enthusiastically this simple *shosagoto* and its core song were welcomed by the Edo populace. There are various contemporary reports about the enormous popularity of this performance. The *Kōgai zeisetsu* 巷街贅説 states: “This comical *ken* was so popular that many single sheet prints were published and that many variations of this song appeared.”⁵ In the chronicle *Bukō nenpyō* 武江年表 we read: “The spring performance of the Kawarazaki theatre included a dance with small animals-ken, fox-ken and tiger-ken and the people imitated this dance at all festivals.”⁶ The longest description is contained in the diary *Fujiokaya nikki*: “Kōka four, year of the sheep, second month. ...I also went to see the cherry blossoms in Yoshiwara. At that time the play *Totetsuru-ken* was an overwhelming success at the Kawarazaki theatre in Saruwaka-chō. Everybody who came to see the

⁴ On *sugoroku* games, see the contribution by Susanne Formanek in this volume.

⁵ *Kōgai zeisetsu*, p. 273.

⁶ *Buko nenpyō*, vol. 2, p. 111.

cherry blossoms, old biddies included, considered it a great shame not to know that *ken*. Therefore they bought an exercise book for 16 *mon* to learn the *Totetsuru-ken*, and all, all those going home practised this *ken* game.”⁷

The best proof for its great popularity are the many woodblock prints depicting this performance, most of them drawn by Kuniyoshi and his pupils, and the many *kaeuta* 替歌 that were produced after this song. *Kaeuta* are song parodies which are funny because their wording differs from, while still being very similar to, the words of the original they imitate. I remember that when in middle school we were forced to learn Goethe’s and Schiller’s long ballads by heart, we got some consolation out of remembering not only the original, but simultaneously circulating parodies of these poems. In Goethe’s famous ballad *Erlkönig* (Erl-King) the two introductory lines

*Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Wind?
Es ist der Vater mit seinem Kind.*

O who rides by night thro' the woodland so wild?
It is the fond father embracing his child; (transl. by Sir Walter Scott)

in our inofficial fun version became

*Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Sturm?
Es ist der Vater mit seinem Buam.*

Wind, wind, in these two lines is replaced by *Sturm*, tempest or gale, and therefore the rhyme demands another expression for *Kind*, child. *Buam* is a dialect version of *Bub* (boy), and through these two changed expressions the poem suddenly becomes very funny. The immensely popular nineteenth century Viennese dramatist Johann Nestroy was a master of this kind of parody, and wrote whole dramas which were nothing but word parodies of already existing dramas.

Here a few words on my usage of the term ‘parody’ seem appropriate. Parody is ‘a work created to mock, comment on, or poke fun at an original work, its subject, or author, or some other target, by means of humorous, satiric or ironic imitation.’⁸ A lawyer concerned with copyright infringements defines that ‘A parody exists when one imitates

⁷ *Fujiokaya nikki* vol. 3, p.129.

⁸ Wikipedia 2008.

a serious piece of work, such as literature, music or artwork, for a humorous or satirical effect.⁹ In the case of our *kaeuta* this definition works very well, with the only exception that they are imitations of a humorous, not a serious piece of cultural work, a parody of a parody. The more refined recent definitions of parody from literary science make it difficult to treat our *kaeuta* as parodies, while they at the same time do not fit into categories such as pastiche or simulacrum. What is important in them are two factors: **imitation** of an earlier cultural work with the aim to evoke **laughter** from the recipient. By way of this basic definition, *kaeuta* which are usually translated in Japanese-English dictionaries as ‘parody of a song’ can also be treated satisfactorily as parodies in this analysis.

Japanese poems and songs do not rely on rhymes, but always have a certain rhythm and structure. In order to make the original recognizable, *kaeuta* thus not only imitate its wording, but also retain its rhythm and structure. In structure, the *Totetsuru-ken* consists of two clearly divided parts. The theme is set by the first seven syllables (*sake wa kenzake*). The first part ends with the suggestion *mairimasho*, ‘let’s go’, then follows an intermediate line: *janjaka jakajaka janken na. Janjaka jakajaka* is onomatopoeic for the clipping sound of scissors and thus introduces the well-known *janken* (stone, paper and scissors) game. In connection with *na*, however, it is also reminiscent of *jaken na*, hard-hearted, which can be connected to ‘old mother’. *Janken na* thus operates as a kind of *kakekotoba*, introducing the second part which begins with *jaken na basama ni* and ends with *kitsune de sã kinasẽ*, ‘come with the fox’, a standard formula that appears in almost all *ken* songs.

As for the rhythm of the *Totetsuru-ken*, the order of syllables is:

7 – 5 – 7 – 5 – 6 (7) – 4 – 5/8 – 5 – 10 – 5 – 7 – 6 – 5(6) – 4

or, if corrected:

7 – 5 – 7 – 5 – 7 – 5 – 5/7 – 5 – 7 – 5 – 7 – 7 – 5 – 5

Thus its rhythm consists in a constant change between seven and five syllables’ groups, as do most established Japanese poetical forms, without, however, being equivalent to any of them. Neither can the *Totetsuru-ken* be broken down into several *dodoitsu* 都都逸, a very popular poetic form of the time that had a 7-7-7-5 syllables rhythm.

The comic effect of the *kaeuta* is attained through the easy recognition of the original song’s structure, rhythm and wording, and the funny result increases the less funny or even the more tragic the theme of the *kaeuta* itself is because of the surprise of the recipient involved. This

⁹ Rich 1999.

phenomenon, which can be observed in much of the Edo period's *gesaku* literature, seems to fulfill a certain therapeutic effect to overcome situations otherwise difficult to bear.¹⁰

Having said so much, we can now have a look at some *kaeuta* of the *Totetsuru-ken*. The sources for these *kaeuta* are various *nishiki-e*, the well-known diary *Fujiokaya nikki*, the collection of satiric poems and sayings *Edo jidai rakusho ruiju* 江戸時代落書類聚,¹¹ and the collection of songs on cheap prints *Kawaraban no hayariuta* 瓦版のはやり歌.¹² From these sources, I could identify about 30 *kaeuta* of the *Totetsuru-ken*, most of which were produced in the year 1847, but some also later until the year 1871.

One of the first *kaeuta* that appeared tells us about the following story: On the twentieth day of the second month of Kōka 4 (1847), a drunken samurai in Asakusa forced an apprentice to hand him over his umbrella, since it had started to rain. Another samurai, a sword fighter, saw this scene, took side for the young boy, and finally beheaded the drunkard, becoming a hero of the common people. Thereupon in Edo there could be heard the following song:

酒ハけんのん/隠居さん/首はとひよこ/三ひよこひよこ/血はぬらぬら
/劍使でまいりましよ/雨はざらざらざんざらだ/小僧は番頭に/しかられた
た/所は浅草/三筋町/御番所に/さあきなせ

Sake wa kennon/ inkyo-san/ kubi wa hitohyoko/ mihyokohyoko/ chi wa nuranura/ kenshi de mairimasho/ ame wa zarazara zanzara da/ kozō wa bantō ni/ shikarareta/ tokoro wa Asakusa/ Misuji-chō/ gobansho ni/ sã kinase

Sake is dangerous, old man! The head jumps one time, three times, and the blood is streaming! Let's go with the sword fighter! The rain pours down. By the shop head the apprentice was scolded. The place is Misuji in Asakusa. Come to the police!¹³

Half a month later, on the fifth day of the third month of the same year, a bold drunken thief tried to steal the eyes from a big statue of King Enma 閻魔 in an Enma temple in Naitō Shinjuku, but he fell down and was captured. The people in Edo thought this to be great fun and sang, as we know from several woodblock prints issued about this incident:

¹⁰ On this subject compare Linhart 2000.

¹¹ *Edo jidai rakusho ruiju*.

¹² Mitamura 1926.

¹³ *Edo jidai rakusho ruiju* vol 2, p. 232–33; *Fujiokaya nikki* vol. 3, p.126–27.

さても閻魔の/ 目を取に/ 這入る人こそ/ ひよこひよこと/ 夜そこそこ
/ 目抜にまいりましょ/ しやんしやんかんかん/ 念仏堂/ 坊様に/ だろ
坊が/ しかられた/ 玉ハかへしましょ/ おいてきなせへ

*Sate mo Enma no/me o tori ni/ hairu hito koso/ hyokohyoko to/ yoru
sokosoko/ menuki ni mairimasho/ shanshan kankan/ nenbutsudō/
bōsama ni/ dorobō ga/ shikarareta/ tama wa kaeshimasho/ oite kinasē*

He wants to take the eyes of King Enma, but there are many, many visitors. Let's come again at night to take it! But ding-dong, cling-clang! In the Amida Hall the thief was scolded by the priest. I will return the jewel! Put it here and come!¹⁴

Shortly after this incident, on the twenty-fourth day of the third month, a great earthquake occurred in Shinshū, and the epicenter of the quake, which was said to have resulted in 30,000 victims, was located exactly beneath the famous Zenkō-ji 善光寺, a national pilgrimage center. Thereupon again, the *Totetsuru-ken* song was used as a model for several songs about the earthquake:

さてハしんしう/ せん光寺/ かいてうもうでて/ ふたりつれつれ/ なぐ
さみでまいりやしょ/ /それ/ぢしんじやかじやか/たいへんだ/ あみたに
/ ぢしんが/ しかられた/ りやぢんほうほう/ 諸国のむかいが/ さあきなせ
*Sate wa Shinshū/ Zenkōji/ kaichō mōdete/ futari tsuretsure/ nagusami
de mairiyasho/ /Sore/ jishin jakajaka/ taihen da/ Amida ni/ jishin ga/
shikarareta/ ryajin hauhau/ shokoku no mukai ga/ sā kinase*

Now let us make a pilgrimage to the exhibition of the Zenkō temple in Shinshū province, the two of us. Let's go to comfort them! This quake – ding-dong – is really terrible! By Amida Buddha it was scolded. The travelers are creeping. Come to meet them from the various provinces!¹⁵

A little more than a month later, on the tenth day of the fifth month of Kōka 4, the corpses of three young drowned girls turned up near Eitai-bridge 永代橋. Even this tragic accident was made into a parody of the *Totetsuru-ken*:

さても神田の/ 稲荷川岸/ 女の身なげを/ 引て来た/ 見物どろどろ/ 山ほど
だ/ 川から上ります/ だんだんたづねりや/ 三人だ/ 男は番屋に/ しぼられて
/ 親達アなくなく/ てこづりてん/ 気違で/ サアきなせ

¹⁴ *Edo jidai rakusho ruiju* vol 2, p. 234; *Fujiokaya nikki* vol. 3, p.131.

¹⁵ Words on a single-sheet woodblock print. Other versions in *Fujiokaya nikki* vol. 3, p.154 and in *Buko nenpyō*, vol. 2, p. 112.

*Sate mo Kanda no/ Inari kawagishi/ onna no minage o/ hiite kita/
kenbutsu dorodoro/ yama hodo da/ kawa kara agarimasu/ dandan
tazuneriya/ sannin da/ otoko wa banya ni/ shiborarete/ oyatacha
nakunaku/ tekozuriten/ kichigai de/ sã kinase*

On the river bank near Kanda's Inari Shrine a drowned woman is about to be pulled out from the river. There are so many spectators, that they look like a mountain. Now she is coming up from the river! After asking you hear that they were three! A man was enfettered by a policeman. The parents are crying. Come with the fool!¹⁶

Not only special incidents were taken up to compose *kaeuta*. Others also appeared, the meaning of which seems to be unclear like that on a single-sheet print by Kuniyoshi entitled *Dōke Daruma-ken* 道外だるまけん (third month, Kōka 4).

さけはきんしゆで/ いろけまで/ やめるところで/ みおきよめ/ ひびな
るかべ/ ながめてくらしましょ/ それかんでものんでも/ ぎぜんまめ
/ ぼんさんが/和朝へ/ わたられて/ それで法ぼう/ ひろむる天/ し
うしお/さあひろめよ

*Sake wa kinshu de/ iroke made/ yameru kokoro de/ mi o kiyome/ bibinaru
kabe/ nagamete kurashimasho/ sore kandemo nondemo/ zazen mame/
bonzan ga/ wachō e/ watararete/ sore de hōbō/ hiromuru ten/ shūshi o/
sã hiromeyo*

Sake is not allowed nor is women. Let us purify our body with a renouncing heart! We shall live looking at the humble wall! Biting small beans and drinking the bonze came over to Japan thereby broadening the heaven. Let us propagate our faith!¹⁷

The picture on this sheet shows three Darumas playing *ken* with an incongruously grim expression on their faces. It is probably not too far-fetched, therefore, to assume that the picture and the song have a deeper meaning. For me, the print was intended as a heavy critique of the government's above-mentioned Tenpō Reform policies that tried to curtail even the simplest pleasures life had to offer to the common people. Even the holy monk Daruma, as a symbol of perseverance, would have been unable to cope with life under circumstances such as these, it seems to say.

¹⁶ *Edo jidai rakusho ruiju* vol 2, p. 241; *Fujiokaya nikki* vol. 3, p.163. This source contains three more verses on the unlucky three girls.

¹⁷ UVDB No. 10073.

Further, there were nonsense verses imitating the *Totetsuru-ken*, such as the *Neko tsuru-ken*, probably written by the artist Kuniyoshi who liked cats and is said to have owned more than fifty of them:

ねこのけんくわハ/いろぐるい/はいげ白ぶち/三毛ちよこちよこ/のどご
ろごろ/ならしてねだりましよ/それ/にやんにやごにやんにやご/じやれ
つくな/からすが/くびつ玉/しばられた/どらハほうぼう/かけづるてん/
ねずミで/にやアきなせへ

*Neko no kenka wa/ irogurui/ haige shirobuchi/ mike chokochoko/ nodo
gorogoro/ narashite nedarimasho/ sore/ nyan nyago nyan nyago/
jaretsuku na/ karasu ga/ kubittama/ shibarareta/ dora wa hōbō/
kakezuruten/ nezumi de/ nyā kinasē*

All the quarrels of cats go back to love. The grey one and the white one and the three-coloured one are coming. Let's pet their throats until they purr. Miaow, meow, she is flirting! The neck of the crow is being squeezed. The tiger is everywhere. Come with the mouse!¹⁸

Other *kaeuta* consist merely of a loose enumeration of actors' names, such as the following two songs.¹⁹

扱もはやるは/ 八代目は/ いるおきやくは/ 多見蔵つね世と/ 桑三でま
いりましよ/ /合/じやんじやかじやんじやか/ 大友/ 三津右衛門/ 芝十
郎は/ ことらはうほう/ なかつるてん/ 三升で/サアきなせへ/ チョ
ンガヨイヤサ

*Sate mo hayaru wa/ HACHIDAIME/ hairu o-kyaku wa/ TAMIZŌ
TSUNEYO to/ KUMEZŌ de mairimasho/gō/ janjaka janjaka/ ŌTOMO/
MITSUEMON/ SHIBAJŪRŌ wa/ KOTORA hauhau/ nakatsuruten/
MIMASU de /sā/ kinasē/ chochon ga yoi ya sa*

The most popular star is the Eight. Many people always come to see him, Tamizō and Tsuneyo, but we prefer Kumezō! And there are also Ōtomo, Mitsueemon, Shibajūrō. Kotoro comes a-creeping. Come with Mimasu! Oh, how nice!²⁰

芸は歌右衛門/みよしやで/かゆふしうかに/菊二郎/きやくはぞろぞろ/
ひろぢでまいりやしよ/ /合/ かん三羽左衛門かわら埼/ /合/ 梅幸せき
三彦三郎/ こらいやが/ ばりばり大あたり/ 紀の国やで/サアきなせへ/
かん彌でまいりましよ

¹⁸ UVDB No. 00005.

¹⁹ In the following transcription, I have capitalized the actors' names for better comprehension.

²⁰ Mitamura 1926, p. 16–17.

Gei wa UTAEMON MIYOSHIYA de KAYŪ SHŪKA ni KIKUJIRŌ kyaku wa zorozoro hiroji de mairiyasho/gō/ KANZA UZAEMON KAWARAZAKI /gō/ BAIKŌ SEKISAN HIKOSABURŌ KŌRAIYA ga baribari ōtari, KINOKUNIYA de /sā/ kinasē KAN'YA de mairimasho
 Utaemon and Miyoshiya, Kayū, Shūka and Kikujirō represent real art! The visitors come constantly. Let's take the broad road! Kanza, Uzaemon, Kawarazaki, Baikō, Sekisan, Hikosaburō, and Kōraiya are all great stars. Come with Kinokuniya!
 And let's go with Kan'ya!²¹

Since, in general, erotic parodies were especially widespread and produced on almost every successful literary work, we would expect that there were also erotic *kaeuta* of the *Totetsuru-ken*. They are difficult to find in public libraries, but I was lucky to at least come about one loose page from an erotic book, containing the first part of the so-called *Tobotobo-ken* 交合けん, or Sexual Intercourse-ken, the second part of which I was unfortunately not yet able to locate.

ぽぼはさまさま/ いろごとハ/へのこひよこひよこ/ 三ひよこひよこ/
 ぽぼぬらぬら/ くぐりとまいりやしよ/じやんじやかなんだかじやんじや
 かな

*Bobo wa samazama/ irogoto wa/ henoko hyokohyoko/ mihyokohyoko/
 bobo nuranura/ kuguri to mariyasho/ janjaka nandaka janjaka na...*

There are various vaginas for sex! The penis jumps one time, three times, the vagina is slippery let's turn around in her²²

To sum up: the parodies of the *Totetsuru-ken* treated almost everything, trivial or important matters, with the exception of politics which they did not take up or at least not openly. *Kaeuta* were composed about catastrophes like earthquakes, unusual events like a tragic triple suicide, a quarrel ending in murder, an attempt to steal the eyes of an Enma statue, kabuki stars, cats, darumas, erotic matters and many other events and things. Some of the poems consisted of news which was presented in a form resembling the famous *Totetsuru-ken* song closely. On the other hand there were funny verses about cats and many other things without deeper meaning, which contained plenty of word-plays

²¹ Mitamura 1926, p. 16.

²² Author's collection.

and word-wit. And finally there were also funny verses which probably contained a hidden message like the mentioned *Daruma-ken*.

Besides these parodist songs there is also at least one song which can be interpreted not only as a parody of the Totetsuru-ken, which it is too, but also as a parody of the Kawarazaki-za's and the other two big Edo theatres' use of *ken-shosagoto* for attracting a large audience, a parody of the parody. This I found on a vertical black-and-white single sheet print in oversize entitled *Niwaka no anji* 俄の案事 (Guide to the Niwaka Dance), probably an announcement for a *yose* theatre in Kyoto, because the actor *Uji Kiyoshi tayū Sakuragawa Yoshitaka* 宇治喜義太夫桜川善孝 who is being advertised on this leaflet is mentioned in the *Kabuki nenpyō* 歌舞伎年表 as owning a small theatre in Kyoto.

づるけん
 扱ハけんのん/ 色さとハ/ 蛙水つら/ 身欲身欲/ へびづるづる/ なめく
 と相談しよ/ /ヲチヤヒクバン/ なんだかひそひそ/ もくろんで/ お先に
 / 露八が/ つかはれる/ はたハぐづぐづ/ もめてるてん/ 俄でまうけま
 しよ

Zuru-ken

*Sate wa kennon/ irosato wa/ kaeru mizutsura/ miyokumiyoku/ hebi
 zuruzuru/ nameku to sōdan shiyo/ /o-cha hiku ban/ nandaka hisohiso/
 mokuronde/ o-saki ni/ Tsuyuhachi ga/ tsukawareru/ hata wa guzuguzu/
 mometeruten/ niwaka de mōkemasho*

Cunning ken

It is dangerous, the love village! The frog has a cool face, decent and full of avarice, and the snake is slippery. Let's consult with the snail! /Tea-break/ Secretly they make a plan and Tsuyuhachi is the first one to be used by them. The people get uneasy, start to mutter. Let's make profit with the niwaka!²³

While in this parody the great theatre-owners of Edo seem to have been accused of their overly profit-seeking attitude, this critique did not hinder them to imitate the *Totetsuru-ken shosagoto* in many performances to come as one means to attract visitors.

Ken seems to have been so popular that the theatre-owners almost yearly included at least one *ken-shosagoto* in their productions as one of their marketing strategies, as we would say today. Table 1 gives an overview of all the *ken* performances that I have been able to identify so far. Thus, between 1847 and 1889, there were at least 15 *ken-shosagoto*

²³ Author's collection.

performances in the great Edo theatres, six between 1847 and 1853 and four between 1858 and 1861, all of which were depicted on *nishiki-e* and listed in the *kabuki* chronology *Kabuki nenpyō*.

Table 1: *Ken-shosagoto* performances between 1847 and 1889 in Edo

Totetsuru-ken とてつる拳 (1847.1, Kawarazaki-za)
Tsuku mono-ken 付くもの拳 (1847.9, Kawarazaki-za)
Hōrai-ken 蓬萊拳 (1848.1, Nakamura-za)
Sangoku-ken 三国拳 (1849.1, Ichimura-za)
Yoshiwara-ken 吉原拳 (1852.2, Nakamura-za)
Asakusa-ken 浅草拳 (1853.1, Ichimura-za)
Inase-ken いなせ拳 (1858.2, Nakamura-za)
Yonaoshi-ken 世直拳 (1859.1, Nakamura-za)
Jigoku-ken 地獄拳 (1860.1, Ichimura-za)
Hatsuuma-ken 初午拳 (1861.2, Ichimura-za)
Itsuiro-ken 五色拳 (1867.2, Morita-za)
Tarō-ken 太郎拳 (1869.3, ?)
Senri-ken 千里軒 (1875.5, Kawarazaki-za)
Kaika no rokken 魁花の禄権 (1879.2, Shintomi-za)
Kenpō happu iwai no kenzake 憲法発布祝の拳酒 (1889.3, Kiri-za)

Of all these *ken shosagoto* performances, only the 1849 *Sangoku-ken* (*Ken* of the Three Countries) seems to have been really successful, even to a degree comparable to the *Totetsuru-ken*. It contrasted the relative strengths of India, China and Japan as impersonated by their representative gods or saints, Buddha Shakyamuni, Confucius, and Amaterasu. The accompanying *ken* song seems to have been popular well into the Meiji period. A version which combines the *Sangoku-ken* and the *Totetsuru-ken* song is even mentioned as a special hit song of the year Meiji 5 (1872).²⁴

The popularity of the *Sangoku-ken* again manifested itself in the great number of parodies produced. To name just a few examples, the *Sanbutsu-ken* 三仏けん or *Ken* of the Three Buddhas treated the death of three famous actors, while the *Ryūkō gorishō-ken* or Popular *Ken* of the Divine Favor was devoted to the three gods who enjoyed enormous popularity during 1849.²⁵ I estimate that there is at least the same number of *kaeuta* of this *ken* song as of the *Totetsuru-ken*.

²⁴ For the text see Komota et al. 1994, p. 141.

²⁵ Tabako to shio no hakubutsukan 1999, p. 76, 78.

CONCLUSION

It is well known that parodying was a kind of common entertainment of the people of Edo. Parodies of all kinds of almost all well-known literary works are known. In poetry, there exist e.g. many parodies of the *Hyakunin isshu* which everybody knew. The example of the *ken* songs teaches us, though, that people also imitated and parodied in the simple way of a *kaeuta* new contemporary works, which were not yet part of the literary canon. It also gives proof of the enormous spontaneous creativity of the Edo people in this field of activity.

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