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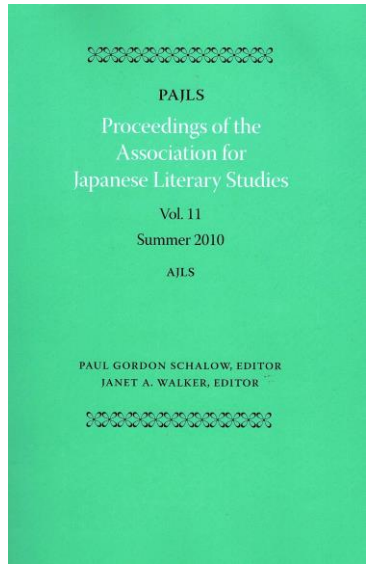

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A Woman Named "Otoko"

Moral Certainty and Gender Indeterminacy in Kyokutei Bakin's *Eight Dogs*

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The defining event in Kyokutei Bakin's 曲亭馬琴 late-Edo masterpiece *Nansô Satomi hakkenden* 南総里見八犬伝, the plot point that sets the stage for the novel's 180-plus chapters and thousands of pages, is this: Fusehime 伏姫, daughter of daimyô Satomi Yoshizane 里見義実, marries the family dog. They settle down on a mountain, and before long Fusehime realizes she's pregnant. She's horrified. There has been—the narrative is clear about this—no hanky panky. And yet she's pregnant. How did this happen?

A divine child appears to her and explains. He blames the pregnancy on a mystical principle that he calls *butsurui sôkan* 物類相感, the "mutual affinity between disparate classes of things." Fusehime doesn't really understand, and neither does the reader: we're not meant to. The point is, it's magic. Mysterious happenings.[1]

For Maeda Ai 前田愛, in his seminal 1969 article "Hakkenden no sekai," *butsurui sôkan* is key to understanding, not just Fusehime's mysterious pregnancy, but the entire book. He writes:

> "The world of *Hakkenden* is literally one of *butsurui sôkan*. Humans and animals—humans and all manner of natural objects—empathize with one another, respond to one another, fuse with one another, and struggle with one another. The spirits of the dead are reincarnated and come back to the world of the living. Past, present, and future are not separated by firm boundaries, but bleed into one another."

[1]This incident occurs in Chapter XII. *NSH* Vol. 1, 298. I refer to *Hakkenden*'s internal divisions (chapters and volumes) using Roman numerals, and divisions in the modern printed edition (volumes) with Arabic numerals.

> 「八犬伝」の世界は、文字どおり「物類相感」の世界なのである。人間と動物、人間とさまざまな自然物は交感し、呼応し、融合し、また闘争する。死者の霊は輪廻転生をとげて、ふたたび現世によみがえる。過去、現在、未来ははっきりした境界をもたず、相互に滲透しあっている。[2]

Maeda is speaking here specifically of the first half of the book. Like many readers, Maeda sees *Hakkenden* as breaking down roughly into two parts, a yin and a yang: a dark, chaotic first half in which disorder reigns and monsters breed, followed by a brightly-lit second half in which order is restored and monsters are quelled. And, like many critics, he seems to prefer the fecundity of the first half to the comparative sterility of the second half.

However, a careful consideration of the novel as a whole shows that the liminality Maeda identifies continues right up to the end of the book. In fact boundary effacement and category confounding is central to Bakin's project in *Hakkenden*. He states at the outset that his goal is *kanzen chôaku* 勧善懲悪, "encouraging virtue and chastising vice"—didacticism, in a word. It's possible to overstate *Hakkenden*'s didacticism—Bakin wrote *kibyôshi* 黄表紙 before he turned to *yomihon* 読本—and I would argue that he never lost his old sense of humor. Nevertheless, neither can we ignore his claims of *kanzen chôaku*. *Hakkenden* does in fact set forth a particular vision of good and evil. The clarity of that vision depends on Bakin first casting an obscuring fog over his readers' preconceptions of good and evil.

What does good and evil mean in *Hakkenden?* The novel operates on a fairly conventional, even hackneyed, view of what constitutes good: loyalty, honesty, benevolence, filial piety, propriety, etc. The Eight Confucian virtues embodied by the Eight Dog Warriors. But it applies this conventional view of morality in unconventional ways.

Edo society was riddled with hierarchies, and it was assumed that these hierarchies had a moral dimension. To take the category that will concern us here, men were considered to be superior to women, among other reasons because both Buddhism and Confucianism found women to be less intrinsically capable of morally upright action than men. *Hakkenden* invokes this attitude as well, but only to challenge it. This it does in two ways: first by furnishing numerous examples of women behaving well and men behaving badly, and second by blurring gender categories themselves. *Hakkenden* does this consistently, using the good-evil dichotomy not to underscore social assumptions regarding gender, but to undermine them.

In order to sketch how the book does this, I'd like to turn to what is actually a rather minor episode. It's found late in the story, and it concerns an ex-samurai named Takabayashi Tatsumi 竹林巽 and his common-law wife, Otoko 於兎子.[3]

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[2] Maeda 1969, p. 22.

[3] The events discussed hereafter take place in Chapters CXLI through CXLIII of *Hakkenden*. Kyokutei Bakin 2003–2004, Vol. 9, 287–357.

Tatsumi was once a retainer in the employ of a lord in the province of Bungo, but he had an affair with the wife of another retainer; when the affair was about to be discovered, Tatsumi and his lover, Otoko, ran away. When we are introduced to them, they have settled in a village near Kyoto, where they present themselves as husband and wife. The village temple contains statues of twelve heavenly generals, one for each animal in the Chinese zodiac. Visitors pray to these statues, and give offerings of votive plaques. The statue for the year of the tiger—nicknamed Tora-dôji 寅童子, or "Tiger Boy"—is the most popular.

Tatsumi and Otoko soon use up the money Otoko stole from her husband, and in desperation they befriend their neighbor, an elderly man named Minashi Kurihei 箕梨九里平. Once a farmer, Kurihei now rents out his land and supplements his income by selling votive plaques to those coming to pray at the temple. Tatsumi and Otoko manage to win over the childless Kurihei, and he adopts Tatsumi as his son. Kurihei dies, and Tatsumi and Otoko take over his business.

Tatsumi has some artistic talent, and he and Otoko prosper—for a while. Then Tatsumi's eyes go bad, and the couple falls on hard times. Tatsumi begins to feel guilty, and concludes that their troubles are the result of their misdeeds—Tatsumi's drinking, their disloyalty to his former lord and her former husband, and, above all, their own illicit relationship. Tatsumi convinces Otoko to join him in repentance: they begin to faithfully pray at the temple, and they stop sleeping together.

Their new way of life brings rewards: Tatsumi regains his sight, and his business recovers its footing. Then one day a beautiful young boy visits Tatsumi's shop and proposes to hire him to paint a votive plaque with a tiger on it. The boy gives Tatsumi an ancient scroll, and tells him to study it, so that he can paint a more realistic tiger. The eyes of the tiger on the scroll are blank. The boy warns that if the eyes are ever filled in the tiger will come to life and wreak havoc.

The boy visits Tatsumi several times, and Tatsumi's abilities grow steadily under the boy's guidance; the boy also cautions Tatsumi not to abuse his talents, but to paint animal-plaques only as long as he needs to in order to pay off his debts, after which time he must turn to painting Buddhas. If he does this and keeps up his devotions, his sins will be erased, the boy promises.

The boy only visits Tatsumi when Otoko is out of the house, and Tatsumi never tells her about the boy. One day, however, immediately after the boy has left, Otoko appears and accuses Tatsumi of conducting a romantic affair with the boy. Tatsumi tells her what has been going on, and says he thinks the boy is probably a manifestation of the statue known as Tiger Boy, but Otoko refuses to believe him. She attacks him, they come to blows, and in the end are only separated by the intervention of a village woodcutter named Yamasachi Shôroku 山幸樵六. Shôroku—with his mountaineer's wisdom—convinces Tatsumi that he is being led on by a fox, not a god, and that it would be better if he relaxed his religious dedication. Tatsumi agrees, and Shôroku assures them that he will take care of the trickster fox.

Tatsumi and Otoko go back to living as lovers, drinking and carousing; Tatsumi sinks back into his old habits, neglecting his work as well as his devotions. One day Otoko has to leave the house, and, worried that the boy will return in her absence, she asks Shôroku for help; Shôroku hides in a grove near the house with his musket and watches. The boy appears, asking about the plaque he had commissioned from Tatsumi. Tatsumi makes excuses, but the boy sees through them, accusing Tatsumi of backsliding. The boy says he was doing the Buddha's bidding by giving Tatsumi a chance at redemption, and that now he is going to leave the scroll with Tatsumi to bring woe on him and the world.

The boy leaves, and as he does so, Shôroku shoots him in the back. But when Shôroku runs up to check the body, he finds Otoko lying there dead. Tatsumi runs up, sees that Shôroku has killed his wife, and beats the woodsman to death with his own musket. Then, afraid he will be blamed for both deaths, Tatsumi runs away, taking the scroll and leaving a note for the village saying that he had caught Shôroku and his wife in adultery and killed them both, and that now in horror at his own deed he is leaving to become a monk.

In fact, Tatsumi tries to set himself up in another town as a painter, but finds that his talent has entirely deserted him. Desperate, he tries to sell the scroll to the Kyoto *kanrei* 管領 Masamoto 政元. Masamoto commands Tatsumi to paint in the tiger's eyes. Tatsumi fills in the pupils. Immediately a huge tiger appears and bites Tatsumi's head off.

Thus ends the story of Tatsumi and Otoko. So, what does it mean? Let's start with the names.

Bakin takes great care in naming his characters. Most of the non-historical characters who appear in *Hakkenden* are given names that reflect either their nature or their place in the story, often in a humorous way.

In the story of Tatsumi and Otoko, for example, we have two good examples of his naming practice in Minashi Kurihei and Yamasachi Shôroku. Minashi's name is written with characters that mean "winnowing-basket" (*mi* 箕), "pear" (*nashi* 梨), and "nine-*ri* plain" (*kurihei* 九里平), but the first four elements of this are homonymous with the word *minashikuri* (or *minashiguri*) 身無し栗, meaning a chestnut that lacks meat. It's a fit name for a man who lacks offspring, i.e., anyone to carry on his substance. "Yamasachi 山幸," meanwhile, means (i.e., both the characters and their pronunciation match) "blessings from the mountains," a term still used today to refer to products of mountain forests, such as mushrooms; the *shô* 樵 in his personal name is also read *takigi* and means "firewood." Together this character's names are amusingly appropriate for a woodsman, but also ironic in that both the advice (beware of bewitching foxes) and the skills (musketry) that he brings from the mountains prove to be curses for Tatsumi and Otoko, not blessings.

Tatsumi's and Otoko's names hold their own secrets. Tatsumi's name (巽) is homophonous with words for "dragon" and "snake," as they appear in the Chinese zodiac, while the second character 兎 in Otoko's name means "hare;" both names, therefore, tie these characters to the twelve zodiac statues in the local temple.

Furthermore, Tatsumi's surname, Takabayashi, with its first character meaning "bamboo," fits the phrase *take ni tora* 竹に虎 ("[like] bamboo and tigers"), proverbial for two things that go well together, as in a pictorial scheme, as pointed out by Takada Mamoru 高田衛.[4] This not only links Tatsumi to yet another animal in the temple, but foreshadows his intimate relationship with the Tiger-Boy statue, the youth that appears as its avatar, and the tiger that kills Tatsumi.

As we have noted, the *to* in Otoko means "hare," but as Takada points out, *oto* is also another word for tiger. Usually this word is written with the same first character as in Otoko's name and a slightly different second character (which can nevertheless be used as a substitute for the one meaning "hare" in her name): 於菟. However, as Takada notes, the entry for *oto* in the 1777 dictionary *Wakun no shiori* 和訓栞 (A guide to Japanese readings) uses the exact characters that appear in Otoko's name.[5] In short, both Tatsumi and Otoko are given names associated with tigers.

I have observed that this kind of naming is a way in which Bakin lends the work an undercurrent of humor, or at least play. Bakin also uses meaningful names to underscore his scheme of *kanzen chôaku;* he refers to this practice in the pages of the novel as *myôsen jishô* 名詮自性, "the name names the thing." Interestingly, while many meaningful names go unremarked-upon by the characters, in some cases an actor in the story will be aware of the principle of *myôsen jishô,* and appeal to it when striving to explain a calamity that has befallen him or her. Thus *myôsen jishô* functions outside the story as a narrative tool, allowing the author to foreshadow events or underline lessons, and inside the story as a sort of means of divination-by-name. Unfortunately for them, Tatsumi and Otoko are unaware of the significance of their names. All the same, it should already be apparent that some careful *myôsen jishô* is at work here, as Bakin is linking both of these characters to the tiger that could be their salvation but that in the end spells their doom.

But the tiger imagery is not all that these names contain. "Otoko" is, of course, homophonous with the word for "male," which is written variously in the text. This causes at least two effects worth noting. First, it creates a cognitive dissonance within the reader, who is constantly faced with a woman called "man." This dissonance reaches its highest pitch when Otoko discovers that Tatsumi has been secretly meeting with the boy, whom she presumes to be Tatsumi's lover. Tatsumi is busy seeing the boy off when suddenly he hears an accusing voice behind him address him as "husband!" Actually the characters 丈夫 with which Otoko addresses Tatsumi here can be interpreted as "husband" (*otto* をつと), but in this case they are glossed *otoko* をとこ.[6] It's a strange double-take moment, where Otoko is addressing her husband by, in effect, her own name. This is, among other things, a joke.

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[4] Takada 2005, 472. *Nihon kokugo daijiten* 日本国語大辞典 lists an occurrence of this proverb in a *senryû* 川柳 of 1821, well before the publication of this installment of *Hakkenden* in 1838.

[5] Ibid., 473.

[6] For an example of Bakin glossing these characters *otto*, see Chapter XXVIII. Kyokutei Bakin 2003–2004, Vol. 2, 192ff.

The blurring of gender here is amusing, but it also functions to underscore the motif of *nanshoku* 男色 that pervades this episode. Otoko assumes that her husband is having an affair with the boy. But on a verbal level, by carrying on his love affair with Otoko, Tatsumi has already been sexually involved with a "male," an *otoko.* Bakin may be intending a contrast here between husband-and-wife marital relations and non-marital relations. The lexical pairs *nannyo* 男女 and *fûfu* 夫婦, "man-and-woman" and "husband-and-wife," appear in these chapters with noticeable frequency, putting the reader in mind of male and female, husband and wife, roles; and of course Tatsumi's and Otoko's fates are mostly decided by the nature of the relationship they share. When introduced to the reader, they are illicit lovers: to their neighbors in the village, they appear to be married, but the reader knows that Otoko is married to another man. Later, when Tatsumi tries to change his ways, he decides to stop living with Otoko as if they were married—to stop having sex with her. This decision is rewarded; similarly, a key part of Tatsumi's backsliding consists of slipping back into his old relationship with Otoko, and this, of course, is punished. Tatsumi and Otoko's story is, on one level, an examination of proper and improper gender relations—how a man and woman should behave toward one another, in and out of matrimony. The double imaging that presents Tatsumi and Otoko's relationship as simultaneously an illicit male-female one and a male-male one may be suggesting a moral equivalency toward those two types of sexual relationships uncontained by marriage.

"Otoko," then, means both "male" and "tiger." Tatsumi's wife Otoko is, rather literally, Tiger Boy—just like the statue known as Tora-dôji, whose avatar visits Tatsumi. This is perhaps the most important effect this name creates in the story: it makes Otoko and the boy mirror images of each other. This mirroring accentuates the moral dilemma Tatsumi finds himself in. One tiger-boy, the avatar of Tora-dôji, is calling upon Tatsumi to do good—to turn his back on his old sins, devote himself to moral conduct, and eventually dedicate his life to Buddhism. The other tiger-boy, Otoko, tries to convince Tatsumi to do the opposite. Ironically, Otoko's strongest leverage over Tatsumi is her accusation that he is doing with Tora-dôji's avatar exactly what Otoko wants him to do with her, i.e., engage in a sexual relationship with an *otoko.* This doubling of Otoko/Tora-dôji's avatar is emphasized by the fact that the two never appear to Tatsumi together, and never meet each other—it is as if they cannot both appear at the same time because they are the same person. And of course, their identity is sealed when Shôroku shoots the boy and kills Otoko. But the doubling and reversals continue even after Otoko's death, as we begin to see the consequences of Tatsumi's act—following the boy's advice would have led him to become, if not a monk, then at least a lay devotee of Buddhism, while we see that after yielding to Otoko, he ends up posing as a monk in his note to the villagers. One path would have made him a true believer, the other made him a false one.

Otoko is not a mere allegory, but through the alchemy of her name she does represent more than merely Tatsumi's common-law wife. The narrator calls Otoko

a "demon-king" (*maô* 魔王) triumphing over Tatsumi's "Buddha-heart" (*hotoke-gokoro* 仏心): an external force defeating his better nature.[7] And yet, as Otoko, a "man," she is not entirely separable from Tatsumi, whom she addresses as *otoko,* and who, after all, is the only real human *otoko* of the three. She and the boy are, in a way, both manifestations of the moral choices available to Tatsumi, aspects of his own nature pulling him in opposite directions.

All of this is possible because, by naming this woman "Otoko," Bakin has destabilized her gender in the eyes of his readers. She is a woman, but she is also a man, and while this duality helps open up a discourse on masculine and feminine responsibilities, it also confuses those categories. Otoko tempts Tatsumi into backsliding, but this is hardly a case of a weak or wicked woman corrupting a man—any such currents in this story are hopelessly muddled by our sense that she is also a man corrupting a man, and perhaps even a man corrupting himself. In the end gender distinctions in this episode are less important than the distinction between good and evil, between the courses each tiger-boy proposes.

Good and evil are the one consistent dialectic in the novel. *Hakkenden*'s world, like Bakin's own, is one that proposes a number of dichotomies with moral dimensions. Prominent among these is the gender distinction. Male and female are presumed to be opposite and mutually exclusive categories existing in a morally-determined hierarchy. Women are defined as, by their very natures, less capable of moral rectitude than men. The same is true of the human/animal distinction and the samurai/commoner distinction.

Part of the chaos and disorder that characterize the world of *Hakkenden* is the fact that these distinctions are broken down in the course of the story. The categories do not hold. They are destabilized both by the frequent occurrence of virtue in realms where it should not be found and vice in spheres where it should not intrude, and by the prevalence of characters who in themselves cross and recross the boundaries between these categories. What should be a black and white world, a world of sharply defined opposites, becomes a gray area, a liminal zone in which male, female, human, animal, monster, samurai, commoner, outcaste, paragon, and pariah all collide, merging and blending so that none emerge pure with all oppositions intact.

The one exception to this, and the main beneficiary of the artfully created confusion, is good and evil. These are not blurred; rather, they are made to stand out clearer by being separated from the other dialectics to which they were originally said to be congruent. Bakin's stated aim throughout the story is to promote virtue and chastise vice, and he does it by creating a world in which moral certainty is challenged and attenuated, stripped of extraneous assumptions, decoupled from spurious frameworks, until all that is left is the basic fact of good and evil themselves. Virtue and vice are severed from identity. In *Hakkenden,* good is not something you *are,* but something you *do.*

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[7] Kyokutei Bakin 2003–2004, Vol. 9, p. 325.

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