

# **Urban Legends and the Japanese Tale**

**David Schaefer**

**1990**

**Monograph Series No. 29**

*THE INSTITUTE FOR CULTURAL RESEARCH*

Copyright © 1990 Institute for Cultural Research

The right of the Institute for Cultural Research to be identified as the owners of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

*All rights reserved*  
*Copyright throughout the world*

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical or photographic, by recording or any information storage or retrieval system or method now known or to be invented or adapted without prior permission obtained in writing from the publisher, the Institute for Cultural Research, except by a reviewer quoting brief passages in a review written for inclusion in a journal, magazine, newspaper or broadcast.

Requests for permission to reprint, reproduce, etc. to:  
The Institute for Cultural Research, PO Box 2227, London NW2 3BW

Monograph Series No. 29

This version prepared for free download 2006.

The original hard copy edition:

ISSN 0306 1906 – ISBN 0 904674 19 3 – Published 1990

may be purchased from the address given above, or on the ICR website,  
[www.i-c-r.org.uk](http://www.i-c-r.org.uk)

Opinions expressed in monographs published by the Institute for Cultural Research are to be regarded as those of the authors.

## **THE AUTHOR**

David Schaefer graduated, cum laude, in Japanese literature from Columbia University, New York. He has worked for the Japanese government and as a company director in Tokyo, London and New York. He is currently teaching European and Far-Eastern languages in a secondary school in England, and plays semi-professional Flamenco guitar.

# Urban Legends and the Japanese Tale

## A study of common characteristics and motifs

I have always assumed that oral traditions of story-telling are in decline world-wide, and that they have virtually disappeared from industrialised societies. Most other people seem to share this belief, particularly those who see the trend as one of the evils of modern life, and who blame this deplorable situation on the advent of various electronic media. Some, including me, even belong to organisations like the College of Storytellers, getting together infrequently to preserve what we think of as another doomed, quaint activity of the past. The assumption, then, is that people just don't sit down and tell each other stories any more. Folklorists, however, know better. They have recognised and identified certain types of stories in oral circulation throughout the world which they have named "urban legends". These are told, usually in informal settings, such as parties, as "really really true" stories of events that were reported in the media or actually happened to a "friend of a friend".

One of the most interesting aspects of these "true" stories is that, although they often deal with modern situations and involve the latest technology, they are based on motifs that can be traced back to other cultures and even back to ancient myths and legends. The same phenomenon has been observed, of course, in the similarity of traditional myths and legends from different eras and cultures, first noted in the West in the anthropological studies of Sir James Frazer. But the existence of a flourishing oral culture in industrialised countries, evolved from earlier forms, is a recent discovery. The fact that these stories, recounted as actual events, are in fact part of an oral culture of "urban legends" has been popularised by folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand in *The Vanishing Hitchhiker* (1981), *The Choking Doberman* (1984), and *The Mexican Pet* (1986). In his books, Brunvand presents a number of urban legends, many collected from Indiana. This is not so surprising in view of the fact that Indiana University, which Brunvand attended, is one of the foremost centres of folklore study in the United States. He then traces earlier variants of some of these stories to Europe and even Asia, and to as early as a century ago (Brunvand 1981, 33–34). It seems, however, that many of the characteristics of urban legends can also be found much earlier, in a literary genre from classical and medieval Japan.

## SETSUWA A BUNGAKU

*Setsuwa bungaku* (tale literature) is the modern name for a body of literature which flourished in Japan during the Heian and Kamakura periods (794–1185, 1185–1333). The term *setsuwa* (from *setsu*: explanation, and *wa*: talk) itself is a recent one, and has been a cause of frustration ever since it appeared around the beginning of this century for both literature scholars and folklorists alike. The founder of folklore study in Japan, Kunio Yanagita, wanted to restrict its definition to that of *hanashi* (oral narrative) – specifically to tales that open and close with fixed incantations (like the European fairy tale’s: “Once upon a time ... they lived happily ever after”) and whose geographic locale is not specified (Moore 1982, 5). But its main purpose was to provide a Japanese equivalent for the Western terms “folk tale”, and “fairy tale”, distinguishing these from legends and myths (Mills, 2). The term is now used, however, to describe “a brief tale about some extraordinary event” (Kelsey, 156) which has been placed in a *setsuwa* collection (*setsuwa-shuu*). There is strong evidence that a clear distinction was made in the medieval period between true stories, in which category *setsuwa* were included, and fabricated tales (*tsukuri-monogatari*) or fiction (Kelsey, 100). Many of the *setsuwa* collections deal to some extent with Buddhist subjects, such as miraculous tales involving saints or famous religious figures. Some also contain large amounts of non-Buddhist material – historical anecdotes, or simply stories of strange, inexplicable, and amusing events.

The earliest extant *setsuwa* collection is the *Nihonkoku Genpoo Zen’aku Ryooiki* (Miraculous Stories of Karmic Retribution of Good and Evil in Japan), usually known as *Nihon Ryooiki*. It was compiled in the early ninth century by a monk, Kyookai, for the propagation of Buddhist thought in Japan. It also contains, however, a number of distinctly non-Buddhist stories, whose purpose seems to be simply to show what a strange place the world is. *Nihon Ryooiki* provided the format – a mixture of Buddhist and secular material in one collection – for the most influential tale collections in Japanese literature, as well as supplying many of their actual stories.

The two most important of these collections are *Konjaku Monogatari*, completed early in the eleventh century and containing some one thousand tales, and the shorter *Uji Shuui Monogatari*, compiled in the early thirteenth century, with around two hundred tales. It has been pointed out that these two works, along with *Shasekishuu*, a collection written in 1283 by the Buddhist priest Mujuu, differ from the majority of Buddhist tale literature in that they contain a disproportionate number of these anecdotes or “actual”

events that stand out from the overall edifying tone of the collections because of their humour, earthiness, or downright strangeness (Moore, 22). It is in this type of *setsuwa-shuu* that one finds stories with characteristics and motifs strikingly similar to those of urban legends.

## URBAN LEGENDS

What exactly is an urban legend? The term itself, like *setsuwa*, is hard to define, as well as being quite a misnomer. Brunvand himself would rather call them “modern legends”, since they are not restricted to cities (Brunvand, 1984, ix). However, in view of the antiquity of some of the basic themes, even that term will come to seem inappropriate. “Really Really True Stories” is cumbersome, yet, provided that we remember to include the all-important ironic quotation marks, it captures the essential concept, and also helps to identify the genre immediately to anyone who has ever heard one of these legends. “Urban legends”, however, is what folklorists are calling them, and, thanks to the popularity of Brunvand’s books and television appearances, that is probably how they will be known for a long time.

The most effective way to recognize them is to be given a few examples. Most people will recognize at least one; then, all that remains is to demonstrate that, though they will undoubtedly have heard it told as a true account of something that happened to a friend of a friend of the teller, in fact the same story or a close variant of it has been collected by folklorists over several decades and in every part of the world. The clincher here is the statistical unlikelihood of the same specific details having happened to dozens of different people in different decades on different continents.

*The Vanishing Hitchhiker* and *The Choking Doberman* include many if not all of the major urban legends in circulation in the English-speaking world during the first half of the 1980’s, and almost everyone will recognize one or more of them. Who has not heard and passed on, for example, the story about the retired American couple on a world tourist cruise with their pet dog, who, in a Hong Kong restaurant, use sign language requesting to have their dog fed, and end up having it served to them as the main course? Or about giant alligators living in the sewers of New York City? Or fatally incompetent baby-sitters? Wide-spread child abduction? Numberless accounts of disgusting things being discovered in packaged food, or being substituted for “proper” food by commercial caterers? (See below for the earlier variant in *setsuwa* literature.) It is virtually a certain bet that not one of these accounts you may have heard is actually true. The people who investigate these incidents seriously are never able to find a single reliable

witness to them. Well, now that some of our most cherished party conversation fillers have been exposed as folklore, we are ready to list some of their common characteristics, and trace them to other stories from far away and long ago.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF URBAN LEGENDS

### I. They are “true”

Of all the characteristics of urban legends, the most striking is the teller’s insistence that they are “true”. This is a central and essential element. The same anecdote without this characteristic is merely a joke, or a fable, or something else; it is not an urban legend. In fact, the teller’s over-insistence on this element is often the main clue to an experienced listener that he is hearing an urban legend. For example, Mujuu has a perfectly realistic account, in tale number 6:4 of his *Shasekishuu*, of the unfortunate accident which befell an itinerant preacher in Yamato province. The latter was given an old drum for lack of a ceremonial platform to preach from, and fell into the drum when it broke in the middle of his sermon. The story ends: “His son, who was also a priest, witnessed this. It is a true story” (Morrell, 185). Why does Mujuu so insist on the veracity of a perfectly plausible incident? It is hard to say from the events described whether this is an urban legend or not, though I suspect it fits into the category Brunvand calls “hilarious accidents” (Brunvand 1981, 181), but more than that, it is the very insistence on its truth that arouses suspicion. This suspicion arises from the fact that the listener detects in it a defensive tone that seems designed as much to convince the teller himself as the audience.

Our suspicions tend to be confirmed when we discover that Mujuu believes with equal fervour the story about a dead girl whose bones turn into snakes. He compounds the account by insisting that the event happened no more than ten years prior to his recording it, but conveniently frustrates any attempt to verify the facts by saying that, though he knows the names of the people involved, he cannot disclose them for fear of causing embarrassment (Morrell, 200).

Credulity is also stretched in certain stories which resemble jokes. Brunvand points out that some urban legends show up in other contexts as jokes (Brunvand 1981, 142–143). This is particularly noticeable when one of the points of the story seems to be to make fun of an individual or group. Two “true” stories, which share the theme “foolish women who get in trouble because they cannot read properly”, illustrate this. From *Uji Shuui Monogatari* comes the story of the young wife who wants an easy-to-read

calendar (i.e. one written in phonetic *kana* rather than in Chinese characters). A mischievous priest prepares one for her which starts normally enough with the usual auspicious and inauspicious days prescribed for various activities. Later, however, it gives such unusual directions as: “Do not go to the lavatory” on several consecutive days. The story ends with the poor woman in considerable discomfort, to the intended amusement of the reader (Mills, 244). In the modern equivalent, a housewife is responsible for the complete destruction of her home by fire. Panic-struck by a small conflagration, she wastes valuable time looking for a non-existent figure eleven on the telephone in order to dial the standard U.S. emergency number “911” (Brunvand 1984, 208).

The importance of the insistence on the “truth” of these stories will be discussed in more detail later. But regarding this extreme stretching of credulity, Marian Ury has noted that “the reader need not believe fully – but he has a commitment to try. (This is true even where the story is improbable – perhaps especially where the story is improbable.) The task for the purveyor of marvels is to strain the reader’s credulity without breaking it” (Ury, 11).

## **2. They are primarily oral**

Urban legends are oral by nature, even though they can eventually appear in print; if nowhere else, at least in books about urban legends. More commonly they are found in newspapers and on television, in letters to advice columns and in “human interest” segments. *Setsuwa* are now known only in their written forms, but there is an increasing concentration of study on the direct oral origins of many of the secular ones (Mills, 30–31), and there is speculation that *Konjaku Monogatari*, for example, was meant to be used by preachers to tell stories accompanied by pictures (Ury, 8). The oral origin of secular *setsuwa* is by no means a proven fact, but rather is assumed to be true on the basis of pretty convincing circumstantial evidence. This includes their short, incidental quality (Kelsey, 19–20), and the fact that very few of them can be traced directly to written sources (Kelsey, 95). In addition, the decidedly “gossipy” flavour noted in many of the stories indicates they were probably in oral circulation before being recorded (Mills, 29; Kelsey, 19). One of the clearest indications is found in Kyookai’s preface to *Nihon Ryooiki*, where he specifically states that he has recorded oral traditions (Nakamura, 35).

Theories have of course been developed to test oral origins, notably by Milman Parry and Albert Lord in *The Singer of Tales* for the case of epic poetry, but it has been pointed out that this method, which consists of

searching for the frequency of certain repeated formulaic patterns, is not well suited for short works (Bynum, Preface): It might be interesting and useful, however, to develop some similar special criteria for analysing *setsuwa*, both in terms of their oral origins and of their literary development. It is very likely that various stories made the transition from purely oral circulation into literary collections at widely disparate times; the Indian miraculous tales were certainly written down many centuries before the relatively fresh court gossip that coexists with them in *Konjaku Monogatari*, for example, and there may be significant changes in reporting style (beyond the differences among the various languages) that might indicate how long a story has been in literary form.

### **3. They are short**

Urban legends are short because they have to be remembered by the hearer in order to be passed on, and the same is true originally for *setsuwa*, perhaps for the same reason. This is one of the characteristics that distinguishes them from other oral traditions of storytelling, such as the epic poem or narrative. In those traditions, of course, astounding feats of memorisation were commonplace, but they were the preserve of professionals. Each urban legend relates essentially only one incident, and there is virtually no character development or complication of plot. This imitates the casual conversational style we use in daily life to report actual incidents.

Michael Kelsey, in his book *Konjaku Monogatari-shuu*, lists three main characteristics of *setsuwa*, all of which naturally apply to urban legends, and the first two of which emphasise their brevity:

1. They are generally short, taking no more than five or six written pages.
2. They are centred around some event, and the emphasis is on this event rather than the hero. Titles are thus often of the “How so-and-so encountered such-and-such and did such-and-such” variety.
3. The event depicted is almost always extraordinary in nature, but it is not something which would have been considered implausible by a contemporary audience (Kelsey, 19).

### **4. They tend to be linked together**

Another interesting parallel is that both genres seem to involve the linking of stories. In urban legends, this takes the traditional form of one story reminding someone of another, and so on. They are told in highly sociable settings such as parties, bars, and children’s summer camps, the same sorts of situations in which jokes and ghost stories often proliferate. (Indeed,

urban legends, jokes, and ghost stories have so many features in common, it is sometimes difficult to make clear distinctions among them.) Since the premium in these situations is on sustained conversation, it is natural that an effort be made to perpetuate the mood. As urban legends contain many similar motifs, an element in one story often provokes an association with another story, and a chain of them ensues.

This linking by association has been pointed out as one element of the structure of *setsuwa* collections, particularly the carefully composed *Konjaku Monogatari*. This work is noted for its organisation into chapters containing stories from India, China, and Japan, and within each section, is further subdivided into Buddhist and secular sections. Kunisaki Fumimaro has described in detail the complex linking technique between stories, which consists basically of pairing stories which share the same theme, then connecting the pair to the following pair on the basis of yet another similarity between the pairs (Kelsey, 108). The effect is to provide exactly the kind of linking by association which occurs in an oral story-telling session.

## **5. They tend to be unusually detailed**

Detail is the spice of any narrative endeavour, fiction or otherwise. Without it a story is bland; it lacks flavour. Frank Kermode has found this kind of embellishment even in biblical parables, where one would assume it was not particularly necessary. He also points out, however, that a further purpose is to add verisimilitude (Kermode, 35), and this is surely the more important reason for the addition, in subsequent re-tellings, of details that the re-teller could not have witnessed. There are many examples of this process in the evolution of stories from the ninth century *Nihon Ryooiki* to their expanded form in *Konjaku Monogatari* two centuries later. There has been considerable embellishment in the new versions, including the addition of quoted dialogue (Kelsey, 145).

A further characteristic of the minutiae is that they tend to be concrete. The kind of detail reported is that of dress and setting, including place names. It is quite quickly noticed that there is no psychological subtlety in these stories; the characters are broad stereotypes, and the emotions and reactions ascribed to them are just what the audience would naturally impute to them, given the circumstances faced in the stories.

## **6. They cannot be traced to reliable witnesses**

This is the most frustrating of the characteristics; the hardest one for most people to accept. The protestations of truth are so vehement, the witnesses

seemingly so easy to trace, that many listeners simply cannot accept that there is usually not a shred of truth to the accounts. In his books, Brunvand gives several pathetic instances of conscientious journalists and curious laymen who spend months, not to mention money, trying to track down the source of a legend, always in vain. They are lured on by the tantalising technique used in telling the stories of implying that verification is just one or two informants away. The modern technique relies on the use of what a British story collector, Rodney Dale, has termed the “foaf” (friend of a friend). A protagonist in the incident, or a witness, is usually a foaf of the teller, or a foaf has the actual copy of the newspaper article that describes the event. The foaf, of course, always leads to another foaf, ad infinitum.

In *setsuwa* collections, other means are used, including the one mentioned above of withholding names to “protect reputations”. More often, names and verifiable information are simply omitted. Thus Michael Kelsey naively assumes that the presence of lacunae in *Konjaku Monogatari* where one would expect names and dates “indicates that the compiler did not have the appropriate information at his fingertips and intended to do some further research and add it at a later date, then was unable to do so for one reason or another” (Kelsey, 141). I hope to make it unequivocally clear that the “reason” is simply that with all the time in the world, the compiler would not find even one reliable witness. Here, as an example, is how story number 57 from *Uji Shuui Monogatari* ends:

The woman who had saved the snake became very rich, and not very long ago got married. I’m not sure who her husband was, but he was a very wealthy man, the under-steward of one of the Ministers of State, so that she came to have everything in life that she wanted. I believe that if you made inquiries, you could easily find out who she was. (Mills, 226)

## REPRESENTATIVE STORIES

The characteristics shared by certain *setsuwa* and urban legends indicate that they are similar genres, but the connection becomes much closer when we find the same detailed motifs appearing in both traditions. It might not be too presumptuous, in this light, to claim that urban legends are merely the current evolutionary form of *setsuwa* and similar traditions, or that certain *setsuwa* really are urban legends which have found their way into literature. This is by no means a rare phenomenon, in fact it is quite common. Brunvand mentions urban legends appearing in the works of Chaucer, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Thoreau (Brunvand 1984, 91, 108).

The following examples should sustain my claim for the case of *setsuwa* convincingly, and in addition should help widen the geographical and historical range of some urban legend motifs. If this endeavour has a familiar ring, it is because the same kind of work has been carried out extensively in the field of myth, starting with Sir James Frazer and continuing with Joseph Campbell and Mircea Eliade; for fairy tales by Vladimir Propp; for parables by Frank Kermode. Nothing so extensive has been done for urban legends, simply because it is only relatively recently that large numbers of people have become consciously aware of their existence. The first motif is one of the most widespread, both in area and in time.

### **The Misunderstood Dog**

In tracing the development of the Choking Doberman legend, Brunvand follows the trail of other dog legends, including the famous Welsh story about Prince Llewellyn's faithful dog Gellert, whose supposed actual grave can be visited near Snowdon in Wales. The motif (number B331.2 in the Motif-Index of Folk-Literature) is summarised roughly thus: a faithful dog has just saved a child by killing a serpent. The father sees the dog's bloody mouth, thinks the dog has eaten the child, and slays the dog. The father later finds the child alive, and is stricken with remorse for misunderstanding the dog. There are many variants of this story, and it has finally reached North America (Brunvand 1984, 33). It has also been traced by folklorists to the Middle East and to the "ancient Orient", probably a reference to the Indian variant featuring a mongoose (Brunvand 1984, 32). There is an equally ancient telling of this theme in *Konjaku Monogatari*, in which the dog lives. The closest Japanese version to the famous Llewellyn and Gellert tale, though, is found in Richard Dorson's *Folk Legends of Japan* under the title "The Faithful Dog of Tametomo", the text from *Bungo Densetsu Shuu*, 88–89, collected by Toshiko Iwao:

Akaiwa is situated between Mt. Kibaru and Mt. Miyake, astride an important road which since olden times has connected Kuchizuna and Takeda.

The ancient hero Minamoto Tametomo, an heir of the Genji clan who lived in the twelfth century, displayed from early childhood the marks of an unusually strong and violent disposition. His father Tameyoshi worried about him and decided to send the youth to the province of Bungo, with a samurai servant named Hatano Jiro, and entrust him to the care of the Ogata family who lived there. The master and the servant set out on their journey with a pet dog and eventually

reached Bungo. They traversed mountains and fields and came to Akaiwa Pass. The view from that point was so beautiful that they decided to rest under a big pine tree and admire it the longer. Tametomo was entirely charmed with the splendid scenery all about.

Then the dog, which had been squatting down quietly beside Tametomo, suddenly burst out barking and sprang violently at Tametomo. Rough and quick-tempered, Tametomo impulsively unsheathed the sword he wore at his waist and in a moment cut off the dog's head. But it did not drop to the ground. Instead, it flew up into the pine tree and bit the throat of a big snake glaring down at them with fierce mien from the tree. The unexpected attack of the dog's head gave the snake a mortal injury. Writhing in agony, it breathed its last and fell down to the ground as the great tree itself toppled and fell.

The master and servant were dumfounded at this event. When they had recovered, they looked at each other sorrowfully. Tametomo regretted the imprudence that had led him to kill his faithful dog. They buried the dog's corpse carefully and left there in mourning. (Dorson, 167)

In addition to the obvious theme of regret for misunderstanding a faithful pet and other parallel details, it is worth noting here that in both cases the story is attributed to a famous historical hero.

### **Dreadful Contaminations**

The most common of all urban legend themes is probably the one Brunvand calls "dreadful contaminations". This one exploits the fear of food from unknown origins; it always involves either food brought in from outside, or food prepared by commercial caterers, never food prepared at home. The list of stories is endless, from "The Kentucky Fried Rat" to "The Mouse in the Coke" to "The Snake in the Melon". In fact, here is "The Snake in the Melon", with famous people thrown in for authenticity, including the magnificent Regent Michinaga, who partly inspired the character Prince Genji of *The Tale of Genji*. This version is from Kunio Yanagita's *Japanese Folk Tales*:

Once long ago Hachiman Taro Yoshiie, a famous warrior, and Abe-no-Seimei, a noted augur, and the distinguished physician Tada Akira, and Kanju-Soojoo, a well known priest, all happened to meet at the home of Midoo Kampaku Michinaga.

That was on the first day of May. A basket of early melons had been sent as a gift from Nara, but since it was a day of fasting at the palace, there was doubt about letting such things from the outside to be brought in. Abe-no-Seimei was asked right away to make an augury. He announced that there was poison in just one of the melons. Kanju-Soojoo was then told to perform an incantation. After he had prayed for some time, suddenly one among all the melons began jumping up and down, by which they knew it was the poisonous one.

Since that was the case, the physician Tada Akira received a command to use needles to draw out the poison. He took the melon up in his hands, and after turning it around, he punctured it in two places with needles. These stopped the melon from jumping. Then Hachiman Taroo Yoshiie drew his sword from his hip and cut the melon open to see. There was a small poisonous snake inside, just as the augury had hinted.

The two needles which the physician Tada Akira had stuck into the melon had each pierced an eye of the snake. Although Yoshiie had seemed only casually to cut the melon open, his sword had actually severed the head of the snake precisely. (Yanagita, 231–2)

This fear is also expressed in the many stories about fast-food chains and ethnic restaurants serving rat or cat meat or other unacceptable substitutes for the expected dish. My own most recent encounter with this legend occurred a couple of years ago when I was told by a neighbour in New York that a local Chinese restaurant we used to frequent, and which had just ceased operating, had actually been closed down by the health authorities when frozen rats were discovered lined up in the kitchen's freezer. Brunvand has of course collected many variants of this theme, and one entire chapter in each of his books is devoted to them. It may in fact be one of the most widespread themes in all of modern urban legends. How comforting, then, to find, in *Konjaku Monogatari*, story number 31, "About the Old Woman who Sold Fish at the Headquarters of the Crown Prince's Guard":

At a time now past, when the former Emperor Sanjoo was crown prince, there was a woman who came regularly to the headquarters of the Crown Prince's Guard to sell fish. The officers of the guard sent someone to buy some, and tasted it. It had a delicious flavor, and so they made it a staple of their meals, the favorite accompaniment for their rice. The fish had been dried and was in tiny slices.

Now, in the eighth month of the year the guards were in Kitano enjoying some hawking when they came across the woman. The guards recognised her face. What on earth could a low creature like that be

doing here, they wondered, and galloped over to her. She was carrying a capacious-looking bamboo tub, and she held a whip upraised. At the sight of the guards she cowered as though she would flee; she was quaking from head to foot. The guards' attendants approached her and tried to see what was in the tub, but she clutched it to her and refused to show it to them. Their suspicions aroused, they snatched it away. Inside they saw snakes cut into four-inch lengths. "What's this for?" they asked, but she did not answer and just stood there trembling. It turned out that what the villainous creature did was frighten snakes from the thickets with a whip and kill them when they crawled out; then she would cut them up and carry them home, cure them with salt, dry them, and sell them. And that is what the guards, all unknowing, had made a staple of their meals.

Now think: it's said that eating snakes makes people sick. You wonder why they weren't poisoned.

Everyone who's heard this story agrees that you must have your wits about you when you buy fish to eat. Don't buy it if it's been cut so fine that you can't tell what it looked like originally. So the tale's been told, and so it's been handed down. (Ury, 197)

The penultimate paragraph points out again that there is often a stretching of credulity in these stories, which is often overlooked by our rational intellect, temporarily suspended as it is in the particular condition of rapt attention which we devote to listening to stories. On subsequent reflection, we are sometimes given pause by some implausible detail, but this is usually forgotten, all the more quickly when we are impatient to pass on the good story in our turn. It is only after repeated exposures to urban legends that the hearer's nagging doubts turn into "urban legend alert" warning bells. Another personal experience, on the occasion of the telling of a local story in Virginia, provides an example.

### **More Snakes**

The story which follows features a nest containing a variety of poisonous North American snakes. The telling of this story led to the telling of others, some true, some not. Some time later in the evening, someone knowledgeable about snakes expressed serious doubts on the likelihood of different species of snakes sharing a nest. It suddenly became apparent to everyone there that the story almost certainly was an urban legend. It is very rare, though, that any doubts are voiced during the actual telling of a story, not only because of the mental state of the listeners, but perhaps also because of strong social taboos against interrupting the fun by calling the storyteller a liar.

The story belongs to what is officially known as “The Bed of Snakes Motif in Southern Folklore” as reported in *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, vol. 42 (1978) (Brunvand 1986, 28). Indeed, I heard it on the back porch of my great-aunt Ellen Peyton’s house in Rapidan, Culpeper County, Virginia, told by Gary Jones of Aroda, Madison County, Virginia, in November of 1985. This is approximately how he told it:

A few years ago, a State trooper was going along Skyline Drive (the scenic highway that threads along the top of the Blue Ridge Mountains). As he passed a rest area on the side of the road, he saw a car parked, with just two small kids sitting in the back seat. He thought nothing of it, but later when he passed back the other way, he saw that the car was still there, just the way it had been a few hours earlier, with the kids still in the back. When he stopped and investigated, he discovered that the children’s mother – there was no one else – had stopped to pick some flowers that were down a steep embankment, and that she had slid and fallen into a nest of snakes. There were rattlesnakes and moccasins and copperheads and she was bitten to death.

Urban legends are generally conceded not to have any overt moral, except where this is tacked on artificially (see later). If this story is examined in the light of other related tales, however, one can catch a glimpse of what lies behind its surface. Consider, to begin with, the very common theme in *setsuwa* literature of women having sexual relations with snakes. There are examples in *Nihon Ryooiki* (#11.41), *Shasekishuu* (#7:4), and of course *Konjaku Monogatari* (#XXIX.39). The act is considered evil and lustful, indicative of the woman’s moral turpitude, whether she is a willing participant or not, and deserving of severe punishment. Snakes have long been a tired cliché for male sexuality, and the reference here is clearly to infidelity.

Add to this the story from *Nihon Ryooiki* entitled “On a Licentious Woman Whose Children Cried for Milk, Receiving an Immediate Penalty” (Nakamura, 242). The dissipated young woman had denied her children her breasts, hoping to continue attracting the many men she craved. Her punishment was having her breasts painfully swollen and covered in sores. Returning to the Virginia story, it is not difficult to see in it now an admonition to women not to neglect their children for the pursuit of wanton pleasures. Note in addition that the woman in the Virginia story also appears to be a single parent ...

Incidentally, it would be a mistake to assume that only women have close encounters with snakes. There is a rich history regarding men, from the completely preposterous *Konjaku* tale number XXIX.40, which cannot

even be summarised decently, to a long European tradition – motif #B784: *Animal (usually a snake) lives in person's stomach*. This motif has even reached into the future, in a sense, in a very grisly scene in the science fiction film *Alien*. Mercifully, there is also a lighter, if no less lurid, side to urban legends involving men.

### **Nude Surprise**

Here is a very common story, told as true, in circulation in mid-twentieth century America. This version was collected in 1959; the events allegedly took place in Somerset, Kentucky.

There was a young couple of well-to-do families who were engaged to be married. On the girl's birthday, the two of them went out, but returned home rather early. Upon returning to the girl's home it was discovered that the parents were away. The two of them decided to do something "different" and removed all their clothing. Soon thereafter, the telephone rang. When she answered it, the girl was asked by her mother to please go to the basement and turn off the automatic washer, which she had forgotten. When the conversation ended, one of the couple decided it would be fun if the boy carried the girl downstairs piggyback. This they proceeded to do, and when they reached the bottom of the stairs, the lights came on and a large group of friends and relatives yelled, "Surprise!" The girl, I was told, had a nervous breakdown and was institutionalised. The boy has neither been seen nor heard of since. (Brunvand 1981, 144)

Here is an older handling of the theme, from the *Uji Shuui Monogatari*, compiled in the early 1200s. Note that the shock reaction at the end of this story takes more of a "hilarious accident" form.

Again, long ago the Minamoto Major Counsellor Sadafusa had a retainer named Kotooda, who lived in, along with his wife. Their daughter also served in Lord Sadafusa's household. Being in charge of Lord Sadafusa's household business, Kotooda had built up quite a little empire and was quite conscious of his own importance. His daughter was married to a well-born young fellow. One night, this young man paid a stealthy visit to his wife's room, but in the early morning it began to rain, and so he remained in her bed, unable to go home.

His wife went off to her duties in Lord Sadafusa's apartments. Meanwhile her husband lay in bed surrounded by screens, unable to leave because of the spring rain which had suddenly come on. His father-in-law, Kotooda, thinking he must be bored, went into him with a tray of food in one hand and a jug of wine in the other. He was afraid he

would be spotted if he went in from the verandah and so, trying to look as unconcerned as he could, he entered from the inner room. His son-in-law was lying on his back, with the bedclothes pulled up to his head, feeling bored and impatient for his wife to come back. When the door was opened from the inner room, he was sure it was his wife back from her duties, and pulling the bedclothes right up over his face, he took out his what-you-may-call-it and arched his back to make it stand up erect. Kotooda was so flustered that he fell over backwards, the food went flying, the wine all slopped over and he came down flat on his back, with his beard waving in the air. He hit his head such a crack that he lay there quite stunned, so they say. (Mills, 150)

## Horror Stories

As I have already pointed out, there is a very strong affinity between urban legends and ghost stories. They tend to frequent the same kinds of gatherings, and they share many motifs. A story has to be considered an urban legend, though, when there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of the teller's, or at least the audience's, belief in its truth. This sincerity is no easy matter to judge. Suffice it to say that there are some people who believe in traditional ghosts, and many more people who, under the right circumstances, believe these horror stories. In any case, these stories are very popular, especially among teenagers. A typical ending:

So real late that night this other girl heard a scratching and gasping down the hall. She couldn't lock the door, so she locked herself in the closet. In the morning she let herself out and her roommate had had her throat cut, and if the other girl had opened the door earlier, she (the roommate) would have been saved. (Brunvand 1981, 58)

The young bride in story number 11.33 of *Nihon Ryooiki* suffers a similarly gruesome fate on her honeymoon because, in her case too, a plea for help was not heeded.

That night a voice was heard three times from the bedroom saying "It hurts!" Her parents heard, but ignored it and slept again, saying to each other, "She feels pain because she is not used to it."

The next morning because it grew late and she still did not get up, her mother knocked at the door of the bedroom, calling her daughter but getting no answer. Feeling uneasy, she opened the door and found her daughter completely eaten up except for her skull and one finger. Her parents were horrified and grieved at the sight. (Nakamura, 205-6)

## Retribution for Cruelty to Animals

This theme is quite popular with medieval compilers of *setsuwa*. Here is a typical example:

In Yamato province there was a man whose name and native place are not identified. He was not benevolent and liked to kill living beings. He caught a rabbit and set it free in the fields after skinning it alive. Before long he contracted a fatal disease; his whole body was covered with scabs that broke out in extremely painful sores. He was never cured and died groaning loudly.

Ah! How soon wicked deeds incur a penalty in this life! We should be considerate and benevolent. Above all, we should show mercy. (Nakamura, 127)

This could certainly be classified as a story with a typically Buddhist theme, rather than as a purely secular tale, and one could easily overlook it in a search for urban legends, but for two things: first, the telltale “whose name and native place are not identified,” and second, the documentation of “animal’s revenge” stories all over North America and, here, Australia:

This one’s got the feel of an urban folktale to us – no names, no date, vague source – but we’ll report it anyway because if it’s not true it ought to be.

According to a short item in *New Scientist* (vol. 103, no. 1417, August 1984), which they attribute to “a free magazine distributed to Australian expatriates in London”, two men in South Australia recently paid handsomely for a little mindless cruelty they cooked up for a rabbit they caught. The men decided to strap a stick of the high explosive gelignite to the rabbit, light the fuse, and set the animal free. However, they didn’t count on the frightened animal taking cover under their four-wheel-drive vehicle. The men escaped injury, but their \$20,000 vehicle didn’t. It was demolished.

(From *East West Journal*, March 1985, p. 13.) (Brunvand 1986, 36)

## The Vanishing Hitchhiker

The eponymous story from the book that first popularised urban legends has almost become a generic term for them. They are known in some circles as “Vanishing Hitchhiker Stories”, and this is perhaps not entirely inappropriate, in view of the astonishing ubiquity of the theme. Brunvand reports variants from China and Korea as well as countless versions from Europe. Here is the standard horseback form which has endured for centuries:

(Collected by Catherine S. Martin, 1943, from her mother Grace C. Martin, who lived as a girl in and near Delmar, a small town eight miles southwest of Albany, New York. The story was current in the 1890's.)

Mother has told of tales that she has heard of a ghost rider who used to jump on young men's horses as they went past a certain woods near Delmar on their way to parties. The rider, a woman, always disappeared when they arrived at their destination. She was believed to have been a jealous one, but did little harm except riding behind the young man. (Brunvand 1981, 31)

Before going on to the inevitable Japanese version, let us look at a typical modern variant, naturally updated to take place in a car, whose story elements have been conveniently labelled by Mr. Brunvand:

A travelling man [driver] who lived in Spartanburgh [authentication] was on his way home one night [setting] when he saw a woman walking along the side of the road [hitchhiker]. He stopped his car and asked the woman if he could take her where she was going. She stated that she was on her way to visit her brother who lived about three miles further on the same road [her address – destination]. He asked her to get in the car and sit by him, but she said she would sit in the back of the car [her choice of seat]. Conversation took place for a while as they rode along, but soon the woman grew quiet. The man drove on until he reached the home of the woman's brother, whom he knew [more authentication]; then stopped his car to let the woman alight. When he looked behind him, there was no one in the car [disappearance]. He thought that rather strange [curiosity or concern], so went into the house and informed the brother that a lady had gotten into his car to ride to see him, but when he arrived at the house the lady had disappeared. The brother was not alarmed at all and stated that the lady was his sister who had died two years before [identification]. He said that this travelling man was the seventh to pick up his sister on the road to visit him, but that she had never reached his house yet. (Brunvand 1981, 25)

Now let us proceed to the *Konjaku* version, identifying the elements as we go:

How the Fox of Kooyagawa Turned into a Woman and Rode on Horses' Croups.

At a time now past, there was east of the temple Ninnaji a river called Kooyagawa [authentication], and on its banks toward sundown [setting] a pretty young girl would be standing [hitchhiker]. Whenever someone passed by on horseback [driver] on his way to the capital she would say, "I'd like to go the capital [destination]. Let me ride behind

you, on the croup of your horse [her choice of seat].” “Get on,” the rider would say, and lift her on, but after she had ridden four or five hundred yards she would suddenly leap down from the horse and take to her heels [disappearance], and when the rider chased her [curiosity or concern] she would change into a fox [identification] and run from sight, barking shrilly. (Ury, 167)

### **The Virgin Birth**

The most startling similarity I have found in motifs as well as details between a *setsuwa* and a relatively recent urban legend occurs in two stories with the theme of The Virgin Birth. The theme is of course universal. It appears in the *Tripitaka* (Jones, 141), and also in the *Nihon ryooiki* (Tale number 31), as well as in the folklore of almost every culture. First, the American version, from a book called *Anomalies and Curiosities of Medicine* by George M. Gould and Walter L. Pyle, first published in 1896, and noted in *The Choking Doberman*.

L.G. Capers, of Vicksburgh, Miss., relates an incident during the late Civil War, as follows: A matron and her two daughters, aged fifteen and seventeen years, filled with the enthusiasm of patriotism, stood ready to minister to the wounds of their countrymen in their fine residence near the scene of the battle of R-----, May 12, 1863, between a portion of Grant's army and some Confederates. During the fray a gallant and noble young friend of the narrator staggered and fell to the earth; at the same time a piercing cry was heard in the house near by. Examination of the wounded soldier showed that a bullet had passed through the scrotum and carried away the left testicle. The same bullet had apparently penetrated the left side of the abdomen of the elder young lady, midway between the umbilicus and the anterior superior spinous process of the ilium, and had become lost in the abdomen. This daughter suffered an attack of peritonitis, but recovered in two months under the treatment administered.

Marvelous to relate, just two hundred and seventy-eight days after the reception of the minie-ball, she was delivered of a fine boy, weighing eight pounds, to the surprise of herself and the mortification of her parents and friends. The hymen was intact, and the young mother strenuously insisted on her virginity and innocence. About three weeks after this remarkable birth Dr. Capers was called to see the infant, and the grandmother insisted that there was something wrong with the child's genitals. Examination showed a rough, swollen, and sensitive scrotum, containing some hard substance. He operated and extracted a smashed and battered minie-ball. The doctor, after some meditation,

theorised in this manner: He concluded that this was the same ball that had carried away the testicle of his young friend, that had penetrated the ovary of the young lady, and with some spermatozoa upon it, had impregnated her. With this conviction he approached the young man and told him the circumstances; the soldier appeared skeptical at first but consented to visit the young mother; a friendship ensued which soon ripened into a happy marriage, and the pair had three children, none resembling, in the same degree as the first, the heroic *pater familias*. (Brunvand 1984, 135)

This motif really is extraordinarily persistent: an almost identical account to the one above was carried in the first week of April, 1986 issue of *Star* newspaper, under the headline “BABY BORN HOLDING BULLET”. One should also mention the American Indian variant, reported by an Indian who insisted that it is an ancient Indian story and that the means of artificial insemination were a bow and arrow (Brunvand 1984, 138). Here is the *setsuwa* version, story number XXVI.2 in the Japanese secular tales section of *Konjaku Monogatari*, translated by Susan Jones as “Tale 28. How an East-Bound Traveler Fathered a Child by a Turnip” in *Ages Ago*.

Ages ago, there was a person who was on his way down East from the capital. As he passed through a certain hamlet, province and district unknown, a sexual urge suddenly struck him and while he was worrying himself distracted over how to get anything that would qualify as a woman, there beside the high-road he noticed inside a fence some so-called greens which had grown very tall and luxuriant. Since this was the tenth month, the turnip roots should be well developed. Instantly the man got down from his horse, entered the enclosure, pulled a large turnip root, hollowed it out, and when it had served its purpose tossed it back into the enclosure and rode on.

Afterwards, the proprietor of the field took to the field a number of woman-servants, as well as his young daughters, to harvest the greens. During the harvesting, a fourteen- or fifteen-year-old daughter, still unwed, strolled along the fence as she harvested and noticed the turnip that the man had tossed back in. “Why here is a hollowed-out turnip root,” she said. “What on earth!” But after toying with it for a time she sliced it at the grooves and ate it. Then along with all the servants she returned home.

Afterwards this daughter unexplainably experienced a vague distress, refused to eat this and that, and seemed so unlike her usual self that her parents remarked anxiously, “Something must be the matter.”

Meanwhile, as the months wore on, it became plain that she was pregnant. In utter dismay, her parents questioned her regarding her

supposed shameful conduct, but the daughter replied that she had never been near a man. “A queer thing happened, though,” she said. “One day I noticed a peculiar turnip root and ate it. Since that day I have never felt the same.” To her parents this did not make sense. They could not believe any such thing and made inquiries. But the household help also said they had never seen any man about, and so, with it still a mystery, the months wore on, and when her time came she was delivered of a fine bright boy. After that there was no use talking and the parents reared the child.

Meanwhile, the man once on his way down, was now, after some years in the provinces, on his way up again, along with a number of others. As they passed that field, it seems that it was again the tenth month and that the girl’s parents, having decided to harvest the greens, were in the fields with their servants as before. As he came alongside the fence, this man, swapping yarns with the others, said quite loudly, “Listen to this! The other year, when I was going down to my home province, I passed this place. I was up against it. An uncontrollable urge. So I went inside the fence, took an enormous turnip, hollowed it out, and when I was through with it tossed it inside the fence again.”

The mother, inside the fence, heard him clearly, and remembering what her daughter had said emerged from behind the fence exclaiming in astonishment, “How’s that? How’s that?”

Supposing that she was challenging his having said he had stolen a turnip, and thinking it nonsense, the man simply edged away. But the mother was so determined that he found he had no choice but to listen. “Please tell my husband that,” she said, almost in tears, and, wondering what he was in for, the man replied, “There is nothing I need conceal. Neither am I responsible, nor was there a theft. I am an ordinary honest person, and [1 character lacuna] if I said ‘I’ it was for the sake of the story.”

At this, the mother’s tears burst forth. Weeping all the way, she practically dragged the man home with her, and, though still seeing no sense in it, he was talked into entering the house. Then the woman told him the situation and that what she really wanted was to compare the child with him. Next she brought the boy in and soon saw that he resembled this man down to the smallest detail. Then the man himself was moved. “Yes, it must have been so predestined,” he said. “This can happen to people.”

“Now you have only to consult your own feelings,” the woman said. And when the boy’s mother was called in, he could see that

though of humble birth she was very sweet. A woman of about twenty. The child was five or six and a very fine bright boy. As the man looked at them he thought, "I have no father, mother, family, kin, or dependents to necessitate my going on up to the capital, whereas to this place I appear predestined. Why not simply make this girl my wife and remain here?" and having weighed the matter he married the girl and settled down there.

This was a strange thing. None the less, that a man did impregnate a woman without having had intercourse with her and that she bore a child is the tale that has been handed down. (Jones, 80–2)

At first, this theme appears complex, due to the relatively long telling, but it is clear that it is still merely incidental – that is, the stories have just one point to make: that a couple chosen by accident or fate to conceive a child together can be remarkably compatible. Every other element in the stories serves only to reinforce this point. What makes these two stories appear so similar, in spite of the considerable differences in detail, is that the same elements are used to emphasize both that the child really is the offspring of the couple, and that the couple really is compatible.

The fact that the stranger is the only possible father has to be established by showing that the girl is a virgin. In the *setsuwa* version this is vouchsafed by the servants, who say that no man has been seen around her. In the Civil War story, the evidence is more direct: "The hymen was intact ...." In order to further emphasise the point, the child resembles the father to an unusual degree. The couples' physical compatibility is imputed by the birth of an unusually healthy child in both cases.

## REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

### The Problem of Definition

By listing characteristics and giving examples, I hope to have identified what is meant by the term "urban legend," and to have shown conclusively that some of the stories in the *setsuwa* collections belong to this new sub-categorisation of folklore. What I have not done, and I am very much aware of it, is to *define* "urban legend," but then, folklorists themselves have yet to do this. The reason they have not is that the conscious awareness of this genre has only recently surfaced, incredible as that may seem. When Brunvand published his very important and comprehensive survey, *The Study of American Folklore*, in 1968, he vaguely referred to "urban tales",

but these did not even merit a separate chapter. The situation is of course very different now, thanks to the same Professor Brunvand.

The genre, however, is still not defined; perhaps it can be delimited by showing how it differs from related genres. Urban legends, for example, differ from traditional legends in the fact that they take place recently, relative to the date of the telling. This is one factor in the continual updating that occurs in their transmission. Unlike parables, with which they share equal space in many Buddhist tale collections, they are never allegorical. They do not share, generally, fixed functions or elements such as those abstracted by Propp in his work on folk and fairy tales, and when they do, they usually have only one or two elements, which puts them well outside the tradition of elaborate and lengthy developments.

Certain kinds of urban legends are very close to jokes, and, as has been said, the same story can show up either as a joke or an urban legend, depending perhaps on the level of sophistication or gullibility of the audience. It may be that when an urban legend is too preposterous to be believed by a certain group, it is told to them as a joke. Again, many urban legends resemble ghost stories, but have to be excluded by the fact that they are readily believed by people who do not believe in ghosts. In any case, the two categories, jokes and ghost stories, must be considered mutually exclusive, except under the most contrived circumstances, and therefore neither one can serve in the definition of urban legends.

Definitions will certainly emerge as the field is studied in more depth, and as urban legends are exposed in the wide range of social circumstances where they occur – little has been made so far, for example, of their connection to certain kinds of quasi-superstitions. They are frighteningly insidious; even after long exposure to the genre, one can easily be caught innocently passing one on. At least their identification should be useful in categorising certain types of folklore and literary genres. I believe this can be done with the group of secular *setsuwa* that has up to now gone under the “other” category, or under no identity at all.

### **Urban Legends, Belief, and Truth**

This type of *setsuwa* can then be reintegrated within the overall purpose of the *setsuwa* collections if it can be shown that its purpose, like that of the religious tales, is really didactic. The instructional function of these stories has been recognised by both Brunvand, in the case of modern urban legends, and by Marian Ury in the case of *setsuwa*. Both of them also assert that the insistence on their truth is an important part of their didactic function. Brunvand thinks that this is partly due to people’s belief that “if it’s true,

it's important" (Brunvand 1981, 11), so that the "truth" of the story reinforces its moral. Ury sees the *setsuwa* teller as "giving information about the world, and his intended reader's belief is an essential ingredient in the process" (Ury, 11).

The question of belief, however, is rather more complex than that. Already in late Heian Japan, the awareness of the distinction between fiction and non-fiction was bringing up difficult paradoxes in the evaluation of literature. Heian novels certainly were literature, but since they invented worlds that did not exist, they had to be considered evil, from a Buddhist point of view. Secular *setsuwa*, on the other hand, were known as true stories, though they could hardly be considered literature. This situation was not made any clearer by the arrival, with Tendai Buddhism, of the concept of *hooben* (*upaaya*) – expedient lies used to bring a person to the truth.

The question of belief with regard to modern folklore has been addressed in some detail by Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi in their article "Legend and Belief" (Dégh). They explore a phenomenon which is experienced by many ex-believers in urban legends, namely that one does not always fully believe the story, even at the time of hearing it. This leads to the apprehension of a kind of continuum of belief, with total scepticism at one end and complete acceptance at the other.

### **The Purpose of Urban Legends**

Whether told as literally true or not, whether fully believed or not, urban legends seem to be transmitted in order to convey something to the listener of what the world is like. This is such a diffused aim that it has prompted Douglas Mills, for instance, to say that secular *setsuwa* have "no special purpose" (Mills, 27). While it is true that all the stories in *Konjaku Monogatari-Shuu* end with a moral, in the case of the secular tales this usually amounts to no more than something like: "These things happen." Furthermore, it is clear from the variants in the earlier *Nihon Ryooiki*, which have no moral, that those in *Konjaku* were tagged on by the compiler. Nevertheless, the stories clearly exist in order to admonish, to warn, or to instruct, even though there appears to be no specific canon on which their didacticism is based.

It is my feeling that the purpose of these stories is to promote not morality, but rather sociability. In other words, the stories address human beings at a common denominator "lower" than that of being good decent people, it addresses them as members of their society. The messages are extremely simple, and very conservative: "Be careful"; "Beware of new fashions" like bee-hive hairdos, which can harbour spiders; "Beware of new

technologies” like microwave ovens, which can behave unpredictably. “Do not be too quick to trust strangers”; “Do not let strangers prepare your food”; “Do not act precipitously”; “Things have a way of working out”.

With regard to the questions of the truth of the stories, of people’s belief in them, as well as of the motivation to repeat them, I think as strong a clue as any to the answers is given in the introduction to the one about the rabbit blowing up the truck, from the section on “Retribution for cruelty to animals” (p.21). The reporter who is passing on the story, in print, even though he strongly suspects that it is an urban folktale, justifies himself by saying: “If it’s not true, it ought to be.”

## WORKS CITED

- Bergson, Henri. *Le Rire*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1940.
- Brunvand, Jan Harold. *The Choking Doberman*. New York: Norton, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Mexican Pet*. New York: Norton, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Study of American Folklore*. New York: Norton, 1968.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*. New York: Norton, 1981.
- Bynum, David E. *The Daemon in the Wood*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1978.
- Dégh, Linda, and Andrew Vázsonyi. “Legend and Belief.” *Folklore Genres*. Ed. Dan Ben-Amos. Austin: U of Texas P, 1974.
- Dorson, Richard. *Folk Legends of Japan*. Tokyo: Tuttle, 1962.
- Jones, S.W. *Ages Ago*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1959.
- Kelsey, w. Michael. *Konjaku Monogatari-shuu*. Boston: Twayne, 1982.
- Kermode, Frank. *The Genesis of Secrecy*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1979.
- Lord, Albert B. *The Singer of Tales*. New York: Atheneum, 1974.
- Maranda, Pierre, Elli Köngäs Maranda, eds. *Structural Analysis of Oral Tradition*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1971.
- Mills, D.E. *A Collection of Tales from Uji*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1970.

- Moore, Jean Frances. *A Study of the 13th Century Buddhist Tale Collection "Senjuushoo"*. Ph.D. dissertation. Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1982.
- Morrell, Robert Ellis. *Sand and Pebbles (Shasekishuu)*. Albany, N.Y.: S.U.N.Y. Press, 1985.
- Nakamura, Kyoko (translator and annotator). *Miraculous Stories from the Japanese Buddhist Tradition*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1973.
- Propp, Vladimir. *Morphologie du Conte*. Trans. Marguerite Derrida. Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1965.
- Stewart, Susan. *Nonsense*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978.
- Ury, Marian. *Tales of Times Now Past*. California: U of California P, 1979.
- Yanagita, Kunio. *Japanese Folk Tales*. Tokyo: Tokyo News Service Ltd., 1954.