Title
Violence and the Illegible Body: Transformation as Social Transgression in Kitsune Narratives of Late Heian Japan

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Publication Date
2023

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Violence and the Illegible Body: Transformation as Social Transgression in *Kitsune* Narratives of Late Heian Japan

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree Master of Arts in East Asian Studies

by

Allison Rae Robertson

2023

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Violence and the Illegible Body: Transformation as Social Transgression in *Kitsune* Narratives of Late Heian Japan

by

Allison Rae Robertson

Master of Arts in East Asian Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Torquil Duthie, Chair

This thesis examines the function of transformation in *setsuwa* (anecdotes) from the late Heian-period collection *Konjaku monogatarishū* 今昔物語集 (ca. 1120). The three *setsuwa* analyzed here depict violent interactions between human males and *kitsune* that adopt human female forms. Despite differences in narrative details, *Konjaku* tales 27:38, 27:39, and 27:41 present the *kitsune* as a non-gendered figure whose embodiment in human female produces illegible qualities that incite unprovoked, irrational violence against them. However, unlike their narrative precedents, each of the *kitsune* in these tales eludes the precarious human female condition via physical transformation. The ambiguous tone of *setsuwa* problematizes the notions of 'reality,' 'identity,' 'sexuality' and 'desire' as fixed, universal categories—the narratives thus enable and encourage multivalent readings that suggest alternate realities and modes of existence. The *kitsune* is a figure whose transgressions and transformations potently disrupt the natural and patriarchal social order. I argue that the *setsuwa's* description of the *kitsune's* violent experience suggests a secondary narrative that *justifies* their transgressions,

supporting queer embodiments through transformation as a way to imagine alternative, non-normative realities.

The thesis of Allison Rae Robertson is approved.

Hyun Suk Park

Satoko Shimazaki

Torquil Duthie, Committee Chair

University of California

2023

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My goal in this project is to examine the nature of transformation as the *kitsune*'s response to their experience in the human female form as represented in *setsuwa* narratives. As Hiroshi Araki argues, while *setsuwa* (説話, a modern term for anecdotal tales) are characterized as stories of the past, 'the past' merely functions as a literary frame, a formality that signals "the construction of a narrative world by the narrator."[2] Each of these *setsuwa* has a 'primary narrative' relaying the disruptive instance of a *kitsune* transforming into a human female and the subsequent need for their eradication from the perspective of the compiler—that is—from an aristocratic, male perspective.[3] Primary narratives,

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[1] Translation by Rania Huntington following Stephen Owen. Rania Huntington, *Alien Kind: Foxes and Late Imperial Chinese Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 227-228; Stephen Owen, *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginnings to 1911,* ed. Stephen Owen (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 525.

[2] Hiroshi Araki, ed., *Setsuwashū no kōsō to ishō: Konjaku monogatarishū no seiritsu to zengo* (Shohan, Tōkyō: Bensei Shuppan, 2012), 12.

[3] Araki, ed., *Setsuwashū no kōsō to ishō*, 46; The identity of the compiler of the *Konjaku monogatarishū* is unknown and often speculated upon. Hitomi Tonomura offers that they were likely a "Buddhist lay monk of aristocratic rank who was well-acquainted with classic literary traditions and had a sharp eye for the life of

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conceptualized by Joan N. Radner and Susan S. Lanser as representative of any given socially dominant group, can "obscure" a more 'encoded' secondary narrative that may be deliberately veiled because it implies that "somewhere else in the text, a significant category is being dismantled."[4] I argue that the secondary narrative in these *setsuwa* offers a critique of not only the late Heian patriarchal order but of all boundaries, hierarchies, or categories enforced through violence. As a figure who evades the socially-acceptable attempts to expel, torture, or kill it, the *kitsune*'s transformation in the face of violence communicates a coded criticism of their experience in human female form.

While the term '*kitsune* 狐' primarily refers to the fox (*Vulpes* spp.), it carries an alternate meaning, that of a legendary, supernatural animal known to cause mischief and dwell at the borderline between civilization and the wilds. As conceptualized in this thesis, the *kitsune* is neither a fox nor a supernatural entity but a hybrid figure of the two, characterized by illusory abilities such as shapeshifting and trickery. Literary and oral narratives in premodern East Asia describing foxes taking on the guise of human females further associate the *kitsune* with women, particularly those occupying marginal or outcast societal positions. The *kitsune*, as analyzed in this study, is a literary construction—an archetypal-like figure akin to a trickster, a character type that can be read as a "literary embodiment of liminality."[5]

Tales 27:38: "How a Fox Took the Form of a Woman and Met Harima no Yasutaka," 27:39: "How a Fox Took the Form of a Person's Wife and Came to His House," and 27:41: "How a Fox at the Kōya River Took the Form of a Woman and Rode on the Back of a

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commoners…" Hitomi Tonomura, "Black Hair and Red Trousers: Gendering the Flesh in Medieval Japan," *The American Historical Review* 99, no. 1 (1994): 130.

[4] Psyche. Z. Ready, "The Transgender Imagination in Folk Narratives: The Case of ATU 514, "The Shift of Sex"" *Open Cultural Studies* 5, no. 1 (2021): 227, 233; Marjorie B. Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 16; Joan N. Radner, and Susan S. Lanser, "The Feminist Voice: Strategies of Coding in Folklore and Literature" in *The Journal of American Folklore* 100, no. 398 (1987): 412; Kay Turner and Pauline Greenhill, eds, *Transgressive Tales*: *Queering the Grimms* (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 2012), 76.

[5] Sara L. McClintock, "Compassionate Trickster: The Buddha as a Literary Character in the Narratives of Early Indian Buddhism," in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79, no. 1 (2011): 99.

Horse," are part of what might be referred to as the "supernatural section" of the *Konjaku monogatarishū* 今昔物語集, an anthology of anecdotal tales compiled in Japan's late Heian period (c. 1120).[6] According to Kazuaki Komine, a critical element in *setsuwa* narratives is the depiction of encounters between people that exist "in a world unto itself, cut off from the flow of temporality and space."[7] Moreover, he continues, story development would not be possible without "fully grasping the description of character," which lies solely in the hands of the compiler's "omniscient gaze"[8] As such, these *setsuwa* do not necessarily reflect past moments or social realities but are "actively constructing," *producing* the *kitsune*, one of many actors employed to create various meanings, as a marginal, transgressive and illegible figure.[9]

For the *kitsune* to transgress, however, we must acknowledge that the narrative *constructs* a space of social 'normalcy' in contrast. That which is presented as 'normal' or 'normative' may or may not mirror reality but almost certainly reflects the ideals, desires, or goals of the author or compiler concerning social dynamics, power, and entertainment. The *Konjaku* compiler revels in the uncanny—he constructs the narrative world around people's varying reactions to the "unidentifiable" and, ultimately, the fear of the "unknowable."[10] The compiler's perspective ultimately controls the primary representation of that which is considered normal, abnormal, right, or wrong. However, a secondary narrative perspective allows us to shift the focus onto figures that threaten, provoke, and transgress, thereby uncovering their paradoxical power over those who fear them or *represent* them as figures to be feared.[11]

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[6] Hereafter I will mostly refer to these *setsuwa* by number only.
[7] Kazuaki Komine, ed., *Konjaku monogatarishū no keisei to kōzō* (Shohan, Tōkyō: Kasama Shoin, 1985), 216.
[8] Komine, ed., *Konjaku monogatarishū no keisei to kōzō,* 221; I am indebted to my committee chair, Dr. Torquil Duthie, for pointing me towards this direction of inquiry.
[9] I am indebted to my committee member Dr. Hyun Suk Park for this insightful take on representation and textual mediation of marginal figures.
[10] Komine, ed., *Konjaku monogatarishū no keisei to kōzō,* 262, 267.
[11] Again, I am indebted to Dr. Park's guidance in fleshing out this concept.

Once the *kitsune* is 'described' as a woman (*me* or *muna* 女) within the text, we no longer view them as an animal or a supernatural entity, regardless of any narrative information that indicates otherwise. Although the fantastical aspects described in *setsuwa* underscore their fictive quality, we *read* the illusions conjured by the *kitsune* acting in human female form as 'real.' The events, encounters, and emotions experienced by the *kitsune* while occupying this physical space echo the concept of "embodied experience," a nuance explained by Jan Bengsston:

> When experience is embodied, experience is relative to the individual body that experiences, that is, to the lived body as subject. One of the first things that may be noticed with this theory is that children with small bodies have a different perspective of experience than adults…Children's experiences are different than adults' experiences not only because of the different size of the body, but also because their lived bodies have not yet sedimented a tradition in their way of seeing, acting, feeling, etc…The experienced content of children has a meaning relative to their short history of experience.[12]

Following this line of thought, the *kitsune*'s experience in vulpine form differs drastically from their experience in human form, which, with each transformation, can be characterized as a relatively 'new' bodily experience. This connection between embodiment and perspective guides, and perhaps amplifies, our interpretation of the *kitsune* as a figure that should not be defined by association or taxonomy but rather by their experiences, reactions, and emotions. Despite their representation as a marginal, mysterious figure, shifting the focus to the *kitsune*'s embodied experience highlights the horror and violence they experience as a consequence of their illegibility and the fear it incites.

Because the *kitsune* in these *setsuwa* are bereft of names or social status, they are presented as transgressive figures outside the social order. This constructed narrative feature implicitly links them to discriminated groups of the late Heian period, such as the *hinin* 非人 or *kawaramono* 河原者, who occupied a "status without status" and lived in marginalized

[12] Jan Bengtsson, "Embodied Experience in Educational Practice and Research," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 32, (2013): 48, 49.

locations, such as riverbeds.[13] Female entertainers (*asobi* 遊女), also associated with the *kitsune*, played up the paradoxical appeal of their ambiguous status, marking themselves as 'out of the ordinary' via elegant, eye-catching costumes and exposed made-up faces.[14] The *kitsune*'s experience is profoundly affected by the male protagonist's fearful reaction to what they perceive as their anomalous qualities within the constructed social space of the narrative. This thesis thus treats the *kitsune* as a figure that represents a type of disruptive, "social queerness," following the notion that the term "queer," at its core, communicates "deviation" and a "type of destabilizing redirection."[15]

As a literary character whose function within the text is to disturb the protagonist's sense of 'normalcy,' the *kitsune* queers the narrative. Their transformation between animal and human forms is a disruptive transgression against the natural order, in which "the blurring of interspecies frontiers is deemed uncomfortable."[16] The *kitsune*'s hybrid body "interrogate[s] the very notion of humanity as a discrete state," marking them as species-queer.[17] Furthermore, these *setsuwa* do not specify the fox's gender before their human transformation or after, an ambiguity that points to the illusory aspect of their presented gender at any given time within the narrative. The *kitsune*, as a literary character, can thus be read as genderqueer with transgender possibilities as defined by Kay Turner and Pauline Greenhill's "'transgender imagination,' the conceptualization that a person—self or other—is or could be of a different sex or gender than they appear."[18]

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[13] Ian Neary, Teraki Nobuaki, and Kurokawa Midori, "Formation and Development of Society in the Middle Ages and the Lifestyle and Culture Of Discriminated People," in *A History of Discriminated Buraku Communities in Japan* (Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 51.
[14] Janet R. Goodwin, "Shadows of Transgression: Heian and Kamakura Constructions of Prostitution," *Monumenta Nipponica* 55, no. 3 (2000): 327, 329, 334.
[15] I am indebted to my committee member Dr. Satoko Shimazaki for this helpful interpretation of my argument; Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 161; Pauline Greenhill, "'Fitcher's [Queer] Bird': A Fairy-Tale Heroine and Her Avatars," *Marvels & Tales* 22, no. 1 (2008); 147.
[16] Krisztina Bianka Kocsis, "Becoming (Non)Human. Animal Representations in the ATU 514 Fairy Tale," *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Philologia* 67, no. 2 (2022): 83-84.
[17] Turner and Greenhill, eds, *Transgressive Tales*,, 84-85; Jack Halberstam,"Animating Revolt/Revolting Animation: Penguin Love, Doll Sex and the Spectacle of the Queer Nonhuman," in *Queering the Non/Human*, eds. Myra J. Hird and Noreen Giffney (London: Ashgate, 2008), 266.
[18] Turner and Greenhill, eds., *Transgressive Tales*, 200.

This project focuses primarily on close readings of *Konjaku* 27:38, 27:39, and 27:41, with analysis that draws upon the concept of the secondary narrative, transgender and queer theory, feminist and animal studies, and recent scholarship that applies these frameworks to premodern Japanese texts and folk narratives. Of paramount importance is the avoidance of anachronistic readings in applying modern frameworks and understandings of gender binaries or terms such as 'agency' to premodern texts and figures.[19] However, due to the *setsuwa*'s inherent ability to configure itself differently for each reader or listener—certain characters or experiences, especially in terms of queer or alternate modes of being, can signal a "text's opening of [a] space for imagining otherwise."[20] This thesis seeks to locate such spaces in *setsuwa* through the notion of the secondary narrative and the frameworks mentioned above.

We can never assume a perfect correlation between representations of gender and sexuality in literary worlds and premodern Japanese society. However, we can consider how texts reflect desires and voices not always apparent on the first read by applying a queer theoretical approach "in an attempt to reveal the narrative's latent content."[21] Turner and Greenhill expand upon the potential reconfiguration of premodern narratives through a queer or trans theoretical lens:

> Queer theory's defining principles problematize sex, gender, and sexuality. They refigure the possibilities of relationality along lines that challenge fixed or normative categories but also address concerns about marginalization, oddity, and not fitting into society generally…Trans theory explores the potential for expressing individual and collective identities that reverse, transcend, complicate or deny sex/gender of male or female or species binaries of human and animal.[22]

The *kitsune* analyzed here are queer—their transformation and intrusion into human society destabilize the text's construction of 'normalcy,' and their gender fluidity endows these

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[19] Rajyashree Pandey, "Rethinking the Politics of Gender and Agency: An Encounter with the 'Otherness' of Medieval Japan," *Japan Forum* 32, no. 4 (2020): 463; Psyche Z. Ready, *"She Was Really The Man She Pretended To Be": Change of Sex in Folk Narratives,* MA Thesis, George Mason University, 2016, 7-8.
[20] Reginald Jackson, *A Proximate Remove: Queering Intimacy and Loss in* The Tale of Genji (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), 115.
[21] Turner and Greenhill, eds., *Transgressive Tales*, 15.
[22] Turner and Greenhill, eds., *Transgressive Tales*, 15-16.

setsuwa with queer possibilities.[23] Hence, as mentioned earlier, the concepts of 'normative' and 'non-normative' as employed in this thesis hinge upon what the narrative *assumes* to be normal.[24]

Because the *setsuwa* are "actively constructing" and thus dynamic, their narrative form maintains a certain ambiguity and malleability, rendering the genre particularly ripe for alternate approaches. A queer lens need not take away from a text's historical period or culture but can, indeed, work to reveal more about them than a 'primary' interpretation. Ultimately, the *setsuwa*'s "significance…lies in its reception."[25] Elizabeth Freeman expands on the role of the reader in mediating the past through a queer perspective:

> As new readerly responses become possible, new modes of writing emerge and older modes become suddenly, dazzlingly accessible to us. Readerly responses, erotic in the broadest sense of the term, depend on the sensations possible, thinkable, and tangible in a particular historical period.[26]

Such an approach offers a valuable opportunity for re-evaluating texts and genres that inherently lend themselves to multivalent interpretations, such as folktales, folklore, and *setsuwa*.

Judith Butler's notion of gender performance is particularly pronounced in *setsuwa*, whose compact, simplistic literary style reduces most characters to gender and class stereotypes, thereby illustrating—but not necessarily endorsing—assumed binaries and hierarchies through its reproduction of them. Butler elaborates:

> Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time–an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which

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[23] Greenhill, "'Fitcher's [Queer] Bird,' 147; Ready, "The Transgender Imagination in Folk Narratives," 228.
[24] I am indebted once again to Dr. Park for her help in fleshing out this concept.
[25] Donald Haase, "Response and Responsibility in Reading Grimms' Fairy Tales." *The Reception of the Grimms' Fairy Tales*, ed. Donald Haase (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 234. Turner and Greenhill, eds., *Transgressive Tales*, 7.
[26] Elizabeth Freeman, "Introduction." In "Queer Temporalities," ed. Elizabeth Freeman, Special issue, GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies 13 (2–3), 168; Turner and Greenhill, eds., *Transgressive Tales*, 7.

> bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.[27]

According to Rajyashree Pandey, such binaries are not fixed and are highly contingent upon narrative context. Nevertheless, as the *kitsune*'s embodied experience reflects, "gender difference was central to the hierarchical ordering of both the cosmic and social order of medieval Japan, and women within it were without question positioned as inferior to men."[28] Thus, this thesis considers the implication of a narrative supporting the disruption of these hierarchies via the illusory, performative, and constructed nature of gender.

As Saeko Kimura convincingly argues in her study of queer desire in premodern Japanese court literature, Buddhist beliefs in reincarnation and attaining enlightenment via physical transformation endorse understandings of sexual embodiment and desire "not limited to the heterosexual."[29] My aim here is to thus recover the transformation *topos* as not simply a fox's 'trick' but as an expression of the non-normative and queer potential of the *kitsune*. Psyche Z. Ready explains that :

> Queer theory is not just the study of writing by queer authors, but is also a shift in critical focus that allows sexuality and transgressive expressions of gender and gender roles to take up a central space in the theoretical analysis of any text. A queer reading of a cultural text, therefore, is any reading that takes into account an analysis of gender roles, gender, and sexuality in a way that does not prioritize heterosexual readings.[30]

Following these scholars and many others, I emphasize readings of the *kitsune setsuwa* that, like Kimura's work, "highlight how literary depictions can prompt us to reconsider aspects of gender and authority we might take for granted as being prescribed or totalized by Heian

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[27] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 519.
[28] Rajyashree Pandey, "Regendering the Literary and Buddhist Textual Tradition of Medieval Japan," *Intersections (Perth, W.A.)*, no. 42 (2018): 5; According to Pandey, "classical Chinese medical texts, which formed the basis of Japanese medical theories, conceived of the ideal androgynous body [as] one which held the perfect balance between the feminine (yin) and masculine (yang) principles…. The medical discourse of yin and yang was based on a hierarchy that privileged male over female…"; Pandey "Rethinking the Politics of Gender and Agency," 464.
[29] Kimura's arguments engages heavily with the *Devadatta* chapter of the Buddhist sūtra, the *Hoke-kyō* 法華経 (*The Lotus Sūtra*), in which the daughter of the Dragon King attains Buddhahood through the physical transformation into a human male body–a matter I will discuss in subsequent sections. Saeko Kimura, "Kyūtei monogatari no kuia na yokubō (Queer Desire in Court Literature)," *Japanese Literature* 63 no. 5 (2014): 37-38.
[30] Ready,*"She Was Really The Man She Pretended To Be,"* 5.

systems."[31] Kimura's analyses of narratives such as the late Heian *Torikaebaya monogatari* とりかへばや物語 (c. late 11th century) and the Muromachi *Shinkurōdo monogatari* 新蔵人物語 (14th to 16th centuries) demonstrate the social possibilities reflected in their depictions of gender performance, transgender bodies and the desire for transforming from one's given gender to their self-identified gender—"Heian, Kamakura and Muromachi court tales are fundamentally queer."[32] Similarly, this analysis is thus less interested in forcing a queer reading of the *kitsune setsuwa* and instead aims to illustrate how these texts and the *kitsune* figure *can be read* as queer.[33]

Setsuwa **and the** ***Konjaku monogatarishū***

Setsuwa are generally understood to be didactic stories presented within a Buddhist framework that range from the humorous and miraculous to the frightening and fantastical.[34] They are essentially about "happenings" —their standard narrative form depicts a protagonist who experiences an unusual event or encounter that produces unexpected consequences.[35] Within the constructed narrative space of *setsuwa*, characters are kept to a minimum, shifting the focus to the uncanny aspects of the story, which often describe illusory or inexplicable phenomena. Most of the *Konjaku setsuwa* are accompanied by the compiler's concluding

[31] Jackson, *A Proximate Remove*, 15.
[32] The authors and exact dates of both of these works are unknown; *Shinkurōdo monogatari* was originally in *e-maki* 絵巻 or picture scroll format; My translation; Kimura, "Kyūtei monogatari no kuia na yokubō," 37-42, 42; Kimura, "Surviving Queer: A Reading of Shinkurōdo monogatari," lecture at University of British Columbia, UBC Japan Lecture Series, February 1 2023.
[33] Jennifer Orme discusses Alexander Doty's argument about 'queer' versus 'queering' a text: "I tend to agree with Doty that "any text is *potentially* queer," and like him, "I'd like to see queer discourses and practices as being less about co-opting and 'making' things queer….and more about discussing how things are, or *might be understood* as, queer." Alexander Doty, *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon* (London: Routledge, 2000), 2; Turner and Greenhill, eds, *Transgressive Tales*, 150.
[34] Charlotte Eubanks translates *setsuwa* 説話 as "explanatory tales," a compelling alternative to the more commonly used 'anecdotes.' Charlotte Eubanks, "Locating Setsuwa in Performance," In *Miracles of Book and Body: Buddhist Textual Culture and Medieval Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 210.
[35] I am indebted to my advisor Dr. Torquil Duthie for this insightful description of *setsuwa*.

remarks, and each narrative ends with a claim to veracity—the set phrase, "and so it has been told, and so it has been passed down (トナム語リ伝ヘタルトヤ)."[36]

That *setsuwa* evolve as they are 'passed down' grounds this thesis. *Setsuwa* "attempt to engage the popular imagination" by depicting characters from all walks of life, and their brief simplistic structure renders them tremendously malleable.[37] This flexibility was imperative for *sekkyō bushi* 説教節 (itinerant monks who recited *setsuwa* orally to "crowds of commoners" of "mixed social classes" beginning around the late Heian period), but also has tremendous implications for any audience past or present—reader or listener—and how the narrative is processed through individual experience.[38] As Hitomi Tonomura notes, "We know nothing about the precise size, type, or location of the audience for these tales, but the reappearance of themes from the *Konjaku* in collections of tales from subsequent eras—throughout pre-modern and modern times—attests to their popularity and transmission to later generations."[39] Although the employment of certain specifics, such as names, dates, and locales (most of which can be verified through historical records), may appear to infuse the narrative with credibility, many *setsuwa* are bereft of such particulars or contain 'stock' elements. These universalities abstract the narrative and suggest that *setsuwa* do not reflect one specific reality, opening them up to multivalent readings.

The enigmatic narrative climate of *setsuwa* is particularly ripe for interpretations that run counter to the compiler's concluding commentary, which can be—but is not always—moralistic and totalizing.[40] Moreover, inconsistencies in the concluding comments

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[36] All *Konjaku* translations are mine, unless otherwise noted, and are derived from Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū 38. Kazuo Mabuchi, Kunisaki Fumimaro, and Inagaki Taiichi, eds., *Konjaku monogatarishū*, Vol 4. Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū 38 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1999), 118-123; 126-132.
[37] Eubanks, "Locating Setsuwa in Performance," 210.
[38] Eubanks, "Locating Setsuwa in Performance," 210-211; Tonomura, "Black Hair and Red Trousers," 130.
[39] Tonomura, "Black Hair and Red Trousers," 130.
[40] Yoshiko Dykstra observes that the compiler's attempts to rationalize displays of wickedness and cruelty in the *Konjaku* in terms of karmic retribution "are not always appropriate to the content of [the] tales" and that "some tales completely lack moral remarks." Dykstra, trans., *Buddhist Tales of India, China, and Japan: Japanese Section: A Complete Translation of the Konjaku Monogatarishū* (Honolulu: Kanji Press/University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), xiv.

undermine the possibility of a one-sided or canonical reading and invite the audience to consider multiple perspectives and alternate possibilities. The compiler's assessments of the three *setsuwa* analyzed in this study are conspicuously—and, perhaps, inexplicably, disparate despite the apparent similarities in their basic narrative structure and depictions of violence. Such inconsistencies and ambivalence diminish the prescriptive authority of the closing remarks and encourage the audience to re-evaluate the events, motives, and outcomes described on their own terms. Furthermore, as Tonomura argues, the formulaic claim that these 'true' accounts have been faithfully handed down "genealogically authenticates the tale's transmission to the 'here and now,' thereby helping to legitimate its explicit and implicit messages and integrate them into the listener's field of vision and knowledge."[41] Adaptations from Tang China and earlier premodern Japanese models notwithstanding, the inherent ability of the *setsuwa* to re-animate and re-mold itself to various times, places, and contexts solicits readings that defy relegation to the time and place of the *Konjaku*'s compilation.

Setsuwa dealing with the supernatural deeply emphasize the uncanniness of the encounters described, but their focus on the character's reactions and emotions, particularly regarding fear, is their driving force and, perhaps, the main source of their wide appeal. As Komine argues, the *setsuwa* narrative renders the feeling of fear as a general, shared human emotion via encounters with the "unidentifiable" and the "eerie," the narrative allure of which he attributes to "the universal fear of death and strong will to live."[42] While the stories tend to focus on the supernatural entity as the source of fear, the *setsuwa* analyzed here also describe the fear experienced by the *kitsune* at the hands of violent men. For these reasons, this study is particularly interested in exploring the relationship between fear and power dynamics

[41] Tonomura, "Black Hair and Red Trousers," 131.
[42] Komine, ed., *Konjaku monogatarishū no keisei to kōzō,* 267-268.

through depictions and perceptions of the *kitsune* as a character that both instills and *feels* fear.

Shapeshifters and *Kitsune*

Illusion, transformation, and trickster figures frequently appear in Buddhist and secular *setsuwa*. Buddhist *setsuwa* that depict shapeshifters generally aim to exemplify Buddhist notions such as *sāmsara* (Jpn. *rin'ne* 輪廻), the cycle of rebirth, and *upāya* (Jpn. *hōben* 方便), wherein a counterintuitive device or element is used as a "heuristic technique to lead people to enlightenment."[43] Shapeshifting motifs in Buddhist and secular anecdotes interrogate the borders between the mundane and the supernatural realms and our ability to discern right from wrong, truth from deception. As Pandey notes, transformation is deeply embedded in the belief systems and *setsuwa* of the late-Heian and medieval periods: "This is a world in which women turn into foxes, men, women and beasts reveal themselves to be manifestations of the gods and buddhas, and snakes copulate with humans."[44] But transformation, while accepted in a cosmological sense, is nevertheless employed in the literary world to characterize miraculous, inexplicable, frightful, or out-of-the-ordinary figures and perhaps—more significantly—how to recognize and categorize such figures. As Komine argues, the *Konjaku*'s usage of terminology such as "*kawarimono* 変者 " and "*tadabito ni arazu* 只人ニ非ズ," both of which describe a person whose behavior or character is out of the ordinary, emphasizes "the unknowable aspects of mysterious presences" but also enables the compiler to maintain some control through naming and categorization.[45] A shapeshifter's ability to transform between human and non-human

[43] Richard Bowring, *The Religious Traditions of Japan, 500-1600* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 121.
[44] Pandey, "Regendering the Literary and Buddhist Textual Tradition," 7.
[45] Komine, ed., *Konjaku monogatarishū no keisei to kōzō*, 262.

embodiments and forge relations with humans can thus be threatening in its very *concrete* potential to disrupt the social order if such encounters are not properly navigated.

Skillfully and successfully discerning a shapeshifter's 'true' form and motivation demonstrates an individual's virtue and social value, whether in a Buddhist or secular context. On the other hand, being outwitted by a shapeshifter has grim ramifications, including social ridicule, exile or banishment, and physical or spiritual ailments. The threat of the latter necessitated attempts to 'categorize' and thereby gain more control over shapeshifters and supernatural creatures, a tendency we often see at the end of *setsuwa*.[46] Despite their illusive qualities, shapeshifters, as figures who, in the eyes of late Heian society, "possess an independent and alarming reality," mirror and amplify human behavior in an unambiguous and often disruptive way.[47]

The shapeshifting fox or *kitsune* is one of the most enigmatic shapeshifters depicted in *setsuwa* and East Asian premodern narratives and encounters with them can be beneficial, detrimental, or simply bewildering. While the full extent of *kitsune* lore and symbolism cannot be adequately covered in this thesis, one cannot overstate the ubiquity of the supernatural *kitsune* in Japanese religions and culture, what Michael Bathgate calls the "Japanese *imaginaire*"—"the fundamental contours of meaning in which human beings live their lives, mental images that form the template of shared categories, entities and relationships that mediate our experience in the world."[48] A *kitsune* in this system might be seen as a figure portending good or bad omens depending on the color of their fur, a messenger of Inari 稲荷大神, a *kami* associated with rice and fertility, or a trickster in the guise of a beautiful, seductive woman—to name only a few.[49] Any narrative reference to the

[46] Masato Mori, "Konjaku Monogatari-Shū': Supernatural Creatures and Order," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 9, no. 2/3 (1982);164-165.
[47] Marian, Ury, "A Heian Note on the Supernatural," *The Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese* 22, no. 2 (1988): 189.
[48] Michael Bathgate, "The Shapeshifter Fox: The Imagery of Transformation and the Transformation of Imagery in Japanese Religion and Folklore," PhD Diss., The University of Chicago, 2001, 19-20.
[49] Yoshino Hiroko, *Kitsune: In'yō gogyō to inari shinkō* (Shohan. Tōkyō: Hōsei Daigaku Shuppankyoku 1980), 39-41; Carmen Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan,* (Richmond: Japan

kitsune thus carries an implicit understanding of the fox as a figure that straddles the boundaries between the propitious and the ominous.

Like other well-known shapeshifting animal figures such as the *tanuki* 狸 or *mujina* 貉, the *kitsune*'s characterization as a supernatural being in *setsuwa* draws from both literary associations and the animal's natural tendencies in the wild:

> This peculiar ability to magically transform and bewitch and befuddle humans was rooted in the liminality of their habitat and behaviour. *Tanuki* had always flourished in the coppiced forests of the *satoyama* (里山), the managed borderlands on the periphery of human settlement between farmland (*sato*) and the mountains (*yama*). The ancient *satoyama* landscape has a particular emotional resonance in Japanese culture, representing the old traditional, rural Japan, where the relationship between nature, human culture and the spirit world was in a state of time-polished harmony. The *tanuki*, *kitsune* and *mujina* who inhabited its woodlands lived alongside the villagers, but, glimpsed rarely or from a distance, were also part of a realm of magic and strangeness which underpinned the natural topography, rich with supernatural beings and strange tales.[50]

The *kitsune*'s association with borders—and transgressing them—emphasizes their liminality in terms of physical movement, as well as their gender fluidity and supernatural hybridity. This perceived duality, what Steven Heine dubs "bivalent fox iconography," is partially due to the fox's natural tendencies to linger at the threshold of civilization and countryside as an "undomesticated loner existing on the fringes of human society [that] represents a realm of marginality or peripherality."[51] It is precisely this perception of the *kitsune*'s liminal existence—its ability to evade the fixedness of human society and norms, that encourages possibilities for interpreting these *setsuwa* from the perspective of the marginalized or non-normative—those who live "betwixt and between."[52]

Library, 1999), 53-54; Karen Ann Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel: Shared and Private Meanings in Contemporary Japanese Inari Worship* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 76.

[50] Anne Louise Avery, "Tanuki: Mischief, Magic and Change in the Japanese Countryside," *Folklore Thursday*. September 27, 2018; Haruo Shirane, *Japan and the Culture of the Four Seasons: Nature, Literature, and the Arts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 114-115; I am indebted to Dr. Shimazaki for steering me toward this line of inquiry.

[51] Steven Heine, *Shifting Shape, Shaping Text: Philosophy and Folklore in the Fox Kōan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 192, 30-31.

[52] Turner and Greenhill, eds., *Transgressive Tales,* 102.

As a character in *setsuwa*, the *kitsune* stands out as having an apparent curiosity about the human world that endows them with a sort of tragic, naive charm in spite of their supernatural abilities and trickery. In his extensive study of the trajectory of shapeshifting animals in *setsuwa*, Hadzuki Nakagawa argues that *kitsune* began to shapeshift because "they could not engage in dialogue with humans in their biological form."[53] We can thus surmise that the conscious construction of the *kitsune* as a literary figure that looks and speaks like a human has several possible functions. First, the compiler can express their own ideas about taboo subjects, marginalized people, or those with less authority, such as women, via the *kitsune* and their exploits in human female form. Second, as a marginal figure, the *kitsune* has the potential to convey meanings associated with those who cannot speak for themselves within the narrative.

Violence and Transgression: *Kitsune* in Premodern East Asian Narratives

As with the selected *setsuwa* of this study, premodern East Asian narratives depicting a fox's experience in the human female form bring the themes of sexuality, violence, deception, and transgression to the fore. The key literary precedents and likely influences for the *kitsune setsuwa* are shapeshifting fox narratives from Tang China (c. 607-918) collections, sometimes classified as *zhighuai* ('anomalous tales' or 'tales of the strange') and the *Nihon ryōiki* 日本霊異記, a Buddhist *setsuwa* collection written and compiled by Kyōkai between the late 8th to early 9th centuries.[54] Hiroko Yoshino argues that the fox of the Japanese *imaginaire*, specifically, the notion of the marginal, seductive shapeshifter, is a

[53] Hadzuki Nakagawa, "Setsuwa bungaku ni okeru hebi to kitsune tan no hensen: "Kojiki" kara "Konjaku monogatari-shū" e, Kuni bungaku ronsō 61 (2016): 18.
[54] Bathgate, "The Shapeshifter Fox," 18; Heine details the narrative genealogy between Tang motifs and *setsuwa*: "The main Chinese sources of fox folklore are the *Sou-shen chi* (335–349), one of the earliest texts, and the *T'ai-p'ing kuang-chi* (completed 978), an immense encyclopedic collection of tales of the anomalous…The main Japanese folklore sources include the *Nihon ryòiki* (ca. 821), *Konjaku monogatari* (ca. 1100), *Uji shûi monogatari* (early thirteenth century), and *Kokonchomonjû* (1254), among many others, which contain numerous stories translated into Japanese or refashioned in the new cultural setting." Heine, *Shifting Shape, Shaping Text*, 32.

blend between the "*kitsune no seitai* 狐の生態" (fox 'ecology,' or 'mode of life') and premodern Chinese beliefs: "The notion of the 'Chinese fox' cannot be summed up succinctly in just a few words—the content is highly complicated and diverse. Some transform into human women as *yin*-spirits and drain the *yang* energy of human men, while other older foxes transform into human men and violate human women."[55] Furthermore, as Yoshino and other scholars have noted, the belief that the fox's *yin* nature necessitates its assumption of the human female form regardless of its own gender carries with it the implicit understanding that *kitsune* are gender fluid figures that embody "non-normative expression[s] of gender."[56]

Shen Jiji's *Renshi zhuan*, or "The Tale of Miss Ren," is particularly relevant to this study. As a story that is "perhaps the first and most complex T'ang tale of fox anthropomorphosis that seems to have become paradigmatic for countless subsequent versions in East Asian literature and art, especially morality tales," the fact that Miss Ren, a shapeshifter often described as the embodiment of the Tang feminine ideal, is brutally hunted and killed by a pack of hunting dogs sets a narrative precedent that the *Konjaku setsuwa* analyzed here do not follow.[57]

In the case of premodern Japanese texts, violent encounters with foxes are described in the imperial semi-mythical chronicles the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (720), the *Shoku nihongi* 続日本紀 (797), the *Shoku Nihon Kōki* 続日本後紀 (869), and the *Man'yōshū* 万葉集, an anthology of *waka* poetry compiled in the late 8th century. These collections often recount

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[55] Yoshino continues: "The white fox is considered auspicious, and the black fox is regarded as a bad omen suggesting human death—a symbol also understood as an ancient evil. Foxes are extremely intelligent among animals and can read and write, they can predict the future, and there are scholarly foxes who give lectures." (My translation); Yoshino, *Kitsune: In'yō gogyō to inari shinkō*, 40-41.

[56] Yuki Miyamoto, "Fire and Femininity: Fox Imagery and Ethical Responsibility," *Imagination without Borders: Feminist Artist Tomiyama Taeko and Social Responsibility*, eds. Laura Hein and Rebecca Jennison, (University of Michigan Press, 2010), 77; Marinus Willem De Visser, "The Fox and Badger in Japanese Folklore," *Transactions of The Asiatic Society of Japan* 34, no. 3 (1908): 10; Turner and Greenhill, eds., *Transgressive Tales*, 11.

[57] Heine, *Shifting Shape, Shaping Text*, 34; Huntington, *Alien Kind*, 12.

instances where the fox is perceived as a threat and killed by either dogs or humans.[58] Similar examples of *kitsune* deaths can be found in the *Konjaku*—some *kitsune* are shot for sport, and one dies a martyr—but all die seemingly pointless deaths.[59] One of the first and most well-known narratives to depict a transforming *kitsune* is a *setsuwa* that appears in the *Nihon ryōiki*.[60] The tale belongs to the broader East Asian genre of the "fox-wife" motif (Jpn. *kitsune nyōbō-tan* 狐女房譚) and is far less violent than many of those found in the chronicles, the *Konjaku* or *Renshi zhuan*.[61] Nonetheless, it confirms the *topos* that shapeshifters represent figures that must be systematically removed from the social order even when genuinely loved by their human counterparts.

Kitsune are outliers—disruptors that transgress the boundaries of human and non-human realms. Because their identities and hybrid bodies are presented as socially and sexually illegible, they transgress and interrogate the traditional boundaries of gender and social norms. Moreover, the transgression of transforming—of violating physical thresholds and social and gender binaries—not only arouses suspicion but *necessitates* the expulsion of the *kitsune* from society, often through violence. As Xiaofei Kang argues, even if shapeshifting foxes are "portrayed sympathetically [as] paragons of female beauty and virtue, [they] are still seen as outsiders who have to be unmasked and destroyed."[62] Why do these particular narratives end in transformation instead of death for the *kitsune* like their predecessors? While the surface aspects of the narratives confirm the kitsune's transgressive

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[58] Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel* 76; de Visser, "The Fox and Badger in Japanese Folklore," 16-18.
[59] *Konjaku* 14:5 "How a Man Copied the Hokekyō for the Deceased Fox," 25:6 "How Ason Minamoto no Yorimutsu, an Officer of the Office of the Crown Prince, Shot a Fox," and "27:37: "How a Fox Transformed into a Large Cedar Tree Was Shot to Death," in Dykstra, trans., *Buddhist Tales*, 211-212, 720-722, 863-864.
[60] Dykstra claims that the oldest written tale about a fox in Japan appears in the *Ryōiki;* Dykstra, trans., *Buddhist Tales*, 857.
[61] This *setsuwa* describes a *kitsune* that transforms into a woman who marries a man and bears a son, but is ultimately exposed as a "wild fox" by the family dog and flees. "On Taking a Fox as a Wife and Producing a Child (1:2)," in Burton Watson, trans*., Record of Miraculous Events in Japan: The Nihon Ryōiki* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 14-15; Yoshino, *Kitsune: In'yō gogyō to inari shinkō*, 39-40; Bathgate, "The Shapeshifter Fox," 44-47.
[62] Xiaofei Kang, *The Cult of the Fox: Power, Gender, and Popular Religion in Late Imperial and Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 25.

actions against men and society, I argue that the depiction of violence in these three *setsuwa* encourages reflection on the social order and its effects on subordinated, marginalized, or illegible figures. Describing the painful experience in the human female form provides a narrative space in which we sympathize—even empathize—with the *kitsune*.

Organization

What is it about the *kitsune* in human female form that elicits fear and violence in these narratives? Why does the *kitsune* transform, and what are the implications of their transformation back to a non-human, gender fluid form in the face of violence? Why does the *kitsune* choose to stay liminal, queer—illegible—despite their initial attempts to become human?

This thesis is divided into two main parts that confront the above questions. First, I analyze how the *kitsune*, as queer shapeshifter, disrupts the social order by undermining patriarchal authority and destabilizing boundaries between human and animal, male and female, and the supernatural and the mundane. The *kitsune* refuses the legibility demanded by society—placing the male protagonist in a vulnerable position that induces a violent impulse to categorize and contain the hybrid figure. Second, I elucidate how, through transformation, the *kitsune*'s perceived duplicity mirrors and exposes the duplicity men (and humans in general) exhibit in enforcing hegemonies over women, marginalized or liminal peoples, and animals. The *kitsune* exposes the faults in human society, and its transformation posits alternate realities in which social binaries, hierarchies, and the violence enforcing them are rejected in favor of a perpetually liminal, illegible, and queer state of being.

"*The old grave fox, bewitching and ancient…Whether she sings, whether she dances, or whether she sadly wails, jade eyebrows not raised, a flower face held low.*"—Bai Juyi (772-846), "The Old Grave Fox 古冢狐"[63]

Chapter One: *Kitsune* - Violence and the Illegible Body

Overview - *The Kitsune as Queer Shapeshifter*

This chapter argues that the *kitsune* in *Konjaku* 27:38, 27:39, and 27:41 are transgressive figures whose illegibility destabilizes Heian social norms, thereby eliciting violence. In the primary narrative, Heian narrative normativity suggests that we read the exposure of the *kitsune* and subsequent flight into the woods as a victory for the male protagonists and society at large. However, the ability to shapeshift reinforces the *kitsune*'s prerogative to retain their illegible form indefinitely, thus presenting an eternal threat to the social order. In denying the urgent demand for "a fixed, legible identity," the *kitsune* maintains the upper hand in a power dynamic that would typically be (or *needs to be*, plot-wise) reversed, whether one reads the *kitsune* as a human, animal, or supernatural being.[64] Thus, the kitsune becomes a figure through which the marginalized, subjugated, and non-normative can identify and imagine alternate modes of existence. If, in Sara Ahmed's words, "to make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things," the *kitsune* is indeed eternally queer, as a close reading and analysis will show.[65]

The normative binaries of man/woman and human/animal appear to be ultimately upheld by the primary narrative and the compiler's commentary, which, in the *Konjaku* as a whole, often reflect the desire to overcome supernatural threats and "frequently reduce

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[63] Translated by Jordan Alexander Gwyther, the entire first set is as follows: "*The old grave fox, bewitching and ancient. It transforms into a* [*woman*] *with a countenance so fine. Hoar changed into cloudy loops. Face changed with made-up cheeks. A great long tail dragging behind is made into a long red skirt. Slowly she walks alongside the deserted village road. About in dusk's hour, in a quiet place with no people around. Whether she sings, whether she dances, or whether she sadly wails, jade eyebrows nor raised, a flowery face held low*." Jordan Alexander Gwyther, "Bai Juyi and the New Yuefu Movement," MA Thesis, University of Oregon, 2013, 142-143.

[64] According to Bathgate, "The collection of medieval *setsuwa* was an enterprise dominated by men [making] it likely that their tellings and redactions would reflect a male gender-perspective," Bathgate, "The Shapeshifter Fox," 75; Turner and Greenhill, eds, *Transgressive Tales*, 240; Mori, "Konjaku Monogatari-Shū' 165.

[65] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 161.

women to an essentialized category and set up boundaries within which female sexuality must remain."[66] However, the *kitsune*'s queerness, which, according to Lee Edelman, "marks the excess of something always unassimilable that troubles the relentlessly totalizing impulse informing normativity," allows us to reconsider alternate interpretations of these *setsuwa*.[67] By first exploring the impulses, biases, and anxieties motivating the men's violent reactions to the *kitsune*, this analysis will later tease out a secondary narrative that sympathizes with the *kitsune*'s experience entering a society hostile to deviance. The following sections will identify how the *kitsune* transgresses normative structures and boundaries regarding 1: Social Identity, 2: Gender Performance and Gendered Associations, and 3: Sexual Fluidity and Hybridity. First, I explore the *kitsune*'s disruptive resistance to social identification through abridged readings of the *setsuwa*. Second, I analyze the *kitsune*'s less evident but highly salient transgressions related to the above themes, placing the *setsuwa* in conversation with each other to discuss the nature of violent reactions to the *kitsune*'s illegibility.

Destabilizing Social Identity

The *kitsune* undermines patriarchal authority by refusing to divulge their identity. They lack a fixed identity within the Heian social hierarchy, which, in a normative interpretation, might suggest a lower or outcast status. Traveling alone at night and not identifying oneself would have certainly raised eyebrows in late Heian society, especially at a time when "the very gods were thought to have deserted the capital," Heian-kyō, which had "fallen into ruin."[68] Anyone with an illegible identity—be they a thief, prostitute, or supernatural creature—was outside the sociopolitical system, and run-ins with such figures

[66] Tonomura, "Black Hair and Red Trousers," 133; Mori, "Konjaku Monogatari-Shū' 165.
[67] Carolyn Dinshaw, Lee Edelman, Roderick A. Ferguson, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Judith Halberstam, Annamarie Jagose, Christopher Nealon, and Nguyen Tan Hoang, "Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion," in "Queer Temporalities," ed. Elizabeth Freeman, Special issue, GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies 13, no. 2–3 (2007); 189; Lewis Carl Seifert, "Queer Time in Charles Perrault's 'Sleeping Beauty,'" *Marvels & Tales* 29, no. 1 (2015): 21.
[68] Ury, "A Heian Note on the Supernatural,"191; Haruo Shirane, *Classical Japanese Reader and Essential Dictionary* (New York: Columbia University Press), 2007, 95.

were inherently dangerous.[69] The fear of illegibility and shapeshifting creatures is one critical reason why the *Konjaku* is so preoccupied with truth, identification, and classification—after all, "to learn the true form of an extraordinary being is to overpower that being."[70] However, it is the *kitsune* that wields that power by refusing to divulge any information about themselves to the men they meet. In the following pages, I present abbreviated close readings of the *setsuwa* that highlight the initial encounters between the men and *kitsune* and the violent measures taken to extract a legible identity from the *kitsune*.

In *Konjaku* 27:38, a low-ranking imperial officer travels through the palace grounds and comes across what he perceives to be a beautiful young woman walking alone:

> 夜内深更テ、宴ノ松原ノ程ニ、濃キ打タル袙ニ、紫苑色ノ綾ノ袙重ネテ着タル女ノ童ノ、前ニ行ク様体頭ツキ云ハム方無ク、月影ニ—テ微妙シ。安高ハ長キ沓ヲ履キテ、コソメキ行クニ、歩ビ並テ見レバ、絵書タル扇ヲ指隠シテ顔ヲ吉クモ見セズ、額頬ナドニ髪捻懸タル、云ハム方無ク厳気也。安高近ク寄テ触バフニ、薫ノ香極ク聞ユ。
> It was deep into the middle of the night. When he came upon En no Matsubara, a young girl wearing a pale lavender garment decorated with diagonal surface patterns over a lustrous, dark violet inner lining was walking in front of him. [ ] in the shadow of the moonlight, her silhouette and the shape of her hair, in particular, were indescribably exquisite. Because Yasutaka was wearing long riding shoes that made a rustling sound as he moved forward, *once he was alongside her and looked at her, she swiftly covered her face with a decorated fan so that it was not fully visible*. The way her hair hung down over her forehead, cheeks, and the like, was unspeakably charming. *When Yasutaka drew closer and touched her, he took in the scent of sandalwood incense* (emphasis added).[71]

Yasutaka thus far shows no signs of fear or suspicion—it appears that lusty intrigue has spurred his impulse to view the woman's face. While from a primary narrative perspective, we know that the *kitsune* is hiding their hybrid nature, what is striking in this initial encounter is Yasutaka's physically aggressive approach and the *kitsune*'s subsequent reaction. Yasutaka's assertiveness assumes a certain authority over women's bodies and the male prerogative to scrutinize their beauty up close. These *setsuwa* are usually interpreted through the paradigm of this gendered power dynamic, wherein "male desire is inherent, intrinsic, and

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[69] Haruo Shirane, ed., *Traditional Japanese Literature: An Anthology, Beginnings to 1600,* Abridged ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 259, 400.
[70] Mori, "Konjaku Monogatari-Shū" 165.
[71] [ ] indicate lacunas in the original texts; Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*, 118-119.

uncontrollable," and "active male passion is taken for granted and goes uncriticized."[72] However, Yasutaka's behavior can also be read as disturbingly predatory from a secondary narrative perspective that considers the *kitsune*'s experience in human female form.

Once Yasutaka has invaded the *kitsune*'s physical space, he goes on to inquire about their identity and motives for being out so late. Here, we see a flicker of suspicion seeping into the sexual intrigue. When the *kitsune* tells him that they are responding to an invitation to the capital, Yasutaka attempts to lure them into spending the night with him instead. The *kitsune* responds to this solicitation with, "*dare to shite ka wa* 誰ト知テカハ," which can translate as "you don't know who I am" or "do you know who I am?"[73] This playful hint that Yasutaka is more in the dark than he might realize does not appear to deter him, and they continue on.

Tellingly, it is their subsequent proximity to the Burakuin 豊楽院, an imperial banquet hall known to have been frequently bewitched by *kitsune*, that ignites a chain of suspicions and associations.[74] Yasutaka's internal dialogue is thus:

> 「豊落院ノ内ニハ人謀ル狐有、ト聞クゾ。若シ、此レハ然ニモヤ有ラム。此奴恐シテ試ム。顔ヲツフト不見セヌガ怪キニ」
> 'I have heard there are foxes that deceive people in the Burakuin! Could it be possible that this is one too?! I'll try to threaten this thing and find out. Furthermore, *it is quite odd that they were so quick to prevent me from seeing their face*' (emphasis added).[75]

It is crucial to note here the manner in which Yasutaka refers to the now-suspected *kitsune*. Unsure whether this is a human female or shapeshifting fox, he refers to them as "*koyatsu* 此奴," which is used here as a derogatory term that one can apply to *either* a person (man or woman) or an animal. In other words, Yasutaka cannot discern whether this figure is male or female, human or *kitsune*.

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[72] Tonomura, "Black Hair and Red Trousers," 148.
[73] The first translation is Dykstra's, mine is second. Dykstra, trans, *Buddhist Tales*, 864; Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*, 119.
[74] The late Heian literatus Ōe no Masafusa's (1041-1111) *Kobiki* 狐媚記 ("Record of Fox Magic") refers to various bewitchments in the palace banquet halls attributed to *kitsune* as "fox banquets" or *kitsune no daikyō* 狐の大饗. Ury, "A Heian Note on the Supernatural," 189, 191.
[75] Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*, 119-120.

In realizing the disturbing illegibility of his companion and the association of the Burakuin with *kitsune*, Yasutaka becomes unreasonably hostile. Just as it appears they might be parting ways, he grabs the *kitsune* and tries to stall her in order to confirm his suspicions. However, as this only makes the fearful *kitsune* more resistant, Yasutaka resorts to alarmingly violent measures. Pretending to be a road bandit, he pulls out a "sharp-as-ice nine-inch dagger (八寸許ノ刀ノ凍ノ様ナルヲ抜テ)" and presses it against the *kitsune*'s neck. Then, pinning them up against a pillar and pulling their hair, he demands their robes, "Wretch! *I will slit your throat*! (シヤノムド掻切テム)" (emphasis added).[76] Although the *kitsune* transforms and flees into the woods after this disturbing attack, the reader is left to ponder a social mindset that necessitates subjection to intense threats and bodily harm over an illegible identity.

Konjaku tale 27:39: "How a Fox Took the Form of a Person's Wife and Came to His House," tells of a lowly handyman who becomes increasingly concerned when his wife, having left earlier to attend a pressing matter in the capital, does not return by evening:

> 「何ド遅ハ来ナラム」ト怪ク思テ居ルタリケル程ニ、妻入来タリ。然テ暫許有ル程ニ、亦同顔ニシテ有様露許モ違タル所モ無キ妻入来タリ。夫比レヲ見ルニ、奇異キ事無限シ。
> '*Why is she taking so long that she hasn't returned*?' As he was thinking this, his wife entered the house. Then, again, just a short while later, *another wife* with the same facial features and *no perceivable differences in appearance* from the first entered. When the husband saw this, he was terribly frightened. 'In any case, it would be terrible indeed *if* one of them was a fox,' he thought. However, *because he did not know which of the two was his true wife,* his mind went back and forth (emphasis added).[77]

Although the situation may initially appear quite dissimilar to Yasutaka's *kitsune* encounter, these *setsuwa* are uncannily alike in their portrayal of the late Heian preoccupation with identification. Like the *kitsune* in the previous story, this *kitsune* thwarts the handyman's ability to determine his wife from a genderqueer shapeshifter. It is also apparent that the

[76] Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*, 120.
[77] Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*, 121.

husband is already in a state of panic before the *kitsune* enters the home, as his wife has not returned by an agreeable hour.

Making a rash judgment that the first woman must be a *kitsune*, the frenzied husband attempts to run her through with his long sword, but once she begins to cry, he questions himself again and tries to stab the other woman instead. In his confused desperation, the husband eventually seizes the first woman, who transforms into a *kitsune* and flees. The *kitsune* and the wife are both referred to as "*tsuma* 妻" (wife) up until the transformation, a detail that enables us to read the experience of the two 'women' as equally traumatizing and elevates the *kitsune* to the same status as humans. This *setsuwa* emphasizes the madness—the complete erosion of common sense—that occurs when the power dynamic cannot be restored in the man's favor. What if the husband had actually stabbed his own wife in his violent fervor to establish power and order? We are left ruminating upon the very real threat of death as punishment for not being able to identify oneself satisfactorily.

Konjaku 27:41: "How a Fox at the Kōya River Took the Form of a Woman and Rode on the Back of a Horse" is a comparatively lengthy *setsuwa* that describes a courageous young Takiguchi guard who volunteers to capture a *kitsune* renowned throughout the capital for being cunningly evasive. The *kitsune* transforms into a female and deceives guards by asking for rides on horseback, only to jump off abruptly and disappear after a short distance. Compared to the previous two, the plot line of this *setsuwa* is somewhat more complex due to its elongated form. It is also unique in that there is no question of identity here. Instead, the motive is to *expose* the identity of a creature whose antics have humiliated and emasculated men throughout the capital. To be the first man to achieve this impossible feat would mean restoring the balance of power in gender, animal, and supernatural contexts. The competitive atmosphere of the patriarchally-structured guard station is reflected in their heated debate over whether such a man exists:

一人ノ若キ滝口ノ、心猛ク思量有ケルガ云ク、「己ハシモ彼ノ女ノ童ヲバ必ズ搦候ナムカシ。人ノ弊テ逃スニコソ有レ」ト。―滝具共ノ勇タル此レヲ聞テ、「更ニ否ヤ不搦ザラム」ト云ケレバ、此ノ搦メムト云フ滝口、「然ラバ、明日ノ夜必ズ搦テ将参ラム」ト云ケレバ、異滝口共ハ云立ニタル事ナレバ、「否不搦ジ」ト、固ク諍テ...
Then, a courageous and prudent young guard said, 'Indeed, if it were I, I would surely capture that young girl! *Those other men let her escape because they are clearly foolish.*' Hearing this, one [ ] bold guard said, "*You will never capture anything whatsoever*," to which the warrior who said he would capture her replied, 'If that is the case, I will capture her and come back with her tomorrow evening without fail.' When he said this, the other guards stood up and said, '*You will not capture her,*' vehemently opposing him (emphasis added).[78]

The guard's motive is thus to force legibility onto a being whose power over men comes from its very *illegibility.*

Spurred on by the stories told by his fellow guards and the overinflated macho challenge of doing the impossible—capturing the *kitsune* and exposing their 'true' identity—the young guard heads to the Kōya River and finds a female figure at the bank. Without asking them to identify themselves in any way, the guard, relying on pure hearsay, resorts to violence surprisingly prematurely:

乗スルマ、ニ、滝口儲タリケル物ナレバ、指縄ヲ以テ女ノ童ノ腰ヲ鞍ニ結付ツ。女ノ童、「何ド此ハシ給フゾ」ト云ケレバ、滝口、「タサリ将行テ抱テ寝ムズレバ、逃モゾ為ト思ヘバ也」ト云テ、将行クニ、既ニ暗ク成ヌ。
But the very moment she had mounted, *because the young guard had prepared some things*, he *bound the young girl to the saddle* using the rope of the horse's bridle. When the young girl said, "Why are you doing such a thing?!" the young guard replied, "*I intend to take you to sleep with me this evening, so I thought it would be troublesome if you were to escape*." As they continued to travel forth, it became completely dark (emphasis added).[79]

The Takiguchi guard *presumes* the identity of what appears to be a human female as that of a *kitsune*. This presumption is highly problematic in its own right regarding the unrelenting desire to identify and expose—what if the hostage is *actually* a human? Moreover, when the guard returns to the river bank after the *kitsune* outwits him and escapes, he encounters a *different* woman but assumes she is the same *kitsune* based on hearsay, his prior experience, and her request for a ride:

[78] Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*, 127.
[79] Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*, 128.

> 打返ケル度、川辺ニ女ノ童立テリ。前ノ女ノ童ノ顔ニハ非ズ。前ノ如ク、「馬ノ尻ニ乗ラム」ト云ケレバ、乗セツ。
> When he turned back, a young girl was standing on the river bank. *Her face was not that of the girl from before.* 'Might I ride eastward on that horse?' *she said in the same manner as the previous girl*, and he took her on the horse" (emphasis added).[80]

This twist in the *setsuwa* seems to emphatically underscore the arbitrary nature of who is suspected of being a *kitsune* and who is not—like the Yasutaka and handyman stories, the men's suspicion comes down to associations and presumptions related to social hierarchies and binaries.

Once the guard successfully brings the *kitsune* back to the station, the guards rally around him, and the *kitsune* is subjected to extreme bodily torture. The agonies of being dragged to the station, strangled, and surrounded by a bloodthirsty group of men force the *kitsune* to shapeshift. Once in fox form, the *kitsune* is repeatedly shot at with arrows and singed with torches so that they have virtually no fur on their body. Barely able to walk, they limp away into the darkness of the night. Several days later, the guard returns to the river bank and spots the *kitsune* in female form, though now appearing quite ill, and decides to invite her on his horse once again, but the *kitsune* declines, "Even though I wish to ride, *it is unbearable to be burned* (乗ラムトハ思ヘドモ、焼給フガ難堪ケレバ)"(emphasis added).[81] This ending illustrates that *kitsune* can and *do* return—supporting the previous argument that the *kitsune*'s ability to shapeshift indefinitely poses the ultimate threat to societal stability. As long as the *kitsune* escapes with their life, they continue to hold power over those who cannot identify them or control their movement between embodiments.

The struggle for power vis-à-vis identification in these *setsuwa* is evident in the men's raging reactions to illegibility. Not only can the *kitsune* take on a *different* human form each time they shapeshift, but in evading eradication, they ensure perpetual instability for Heian society, a society that relies on identification to maintain the social order.[82] Based on this

[80] Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*, 131.
[81] Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*, 132.
[82] Bathgate, "The Shapeshifter Fox," 10.

initial exploration of *kitsune* encounters, it is apparent that the problem of an illegible social identity is but a gateway to a host of other associations, fears, repressed feelings and desires, and biases that shape the violent reactions in these *setsuwa*. The following section further explores these associations and anxieties, explicit and implicit, and their function as motivators of violence toward the illegible *kitsune*.

The Other: Gender, Sexuality, and Hybridity

The men's suspicions regarding identity stem not only from preconceived gendered stereotypes related to disobedient or deceitful women, *kitsune*, and courtesans but also from more latent and less defined fears and anxieties stirred by the *kitsune*'s otherness. In these *setsuwa*, the *kitsune* adopts the physical female form and performs the female gender. However, their gender fluidity undermines the men's ability to distinguish male from female. This "gender confusion" destabilizes gender binaries and constructs of gender identity.[83] Furthermore, as a hybrid being that straddles the lines between human, animal, and supernatural taxonomies, the *kitsune*'s uncanny abilities to transform and create illusions keep the balance of power in their favor, destabilizing the hierarchies within these categories.

Disrupting Gender Performance and Gendered Associations

The *kitsune*'s embodied experience as a human female is fundamentally shaped by Heian expectations of gendered behavior. Their way of speech, bodily comportment, the tone of their interactions with the men they encounter—all of these aspects are subject to inspection and judgment as long as the *kitsune* retains the female form. Following Pandey's application of Butler's theory of gender performativity to premodern Japanese literary

[83] Butler defines gender confusion as "cultural configurations of gender confusion [that] operate as sites for intervention, exposure, and displacement" of the "reified framework" of the masculine/feminine binary." Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*: *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990, 1999), 31; Turner and Greenhill, eds., *Transgressive Tales*, 115.

contexts, in 'becoming' a Heian woman, the *kitsune* is expected to perform the female gender as one follows a script in a play:

> It is through the endless repetition of certain acts that we create the illusion of the stability of gender. In pre-modern Japanese literary texts gender functions precisely as a kind of script, and it is the specificity of the gendered performance, that is to say, the particularity of the script that is enacted that gives substance to the categories 'male' and 'female.'...Gendering [was] produced and stabilised primarily through stylised performative modes and stances.[84]

What happens, then, if the *kitsune* goes against the script—if they disobey this gendered code? Or, what if they are unaware of certain cultural subtleties that might come with such a script?

The *kitsune* in these *setsuwa* refuse to identify themselves, which could indeed be interpreted as a disobedient act against a man, whether they be an authority figure, suitor, or husband. Quoting Butler, Kay Turner argues that "disobedience is a failure to 'repeat loyally,'" in other words, a failure to act according to a gendered script, obedience being "the reiteration of the normative."[85] These *kitsune* do not conform to the conventional exchange of identities on the road. The more Yasutaka pursues his *kitsune*, the more the *kitsune* hides their face behind a fan, even after he asks them to spend the night with him. What at first was perceived as a flirtatious response ("do you know who I am?") haunts Yasutaka, as he very much *does not* know who they are.

The *kitsune*'s disobedience is subtle but damaging to their female performance. It does not take much to transgress a gendered norm and arouse suspicion, as "a woman who is anything more than a passive recipient of a man's advances can come under suspicion of not being a woman at all but a dangerous fox or perhaps a *tengu.*"[86] The double-wife *setsuwa* reflects how this type of suspicion can lead to the collapse of distinctions between human, animal, and supernatural. Although the *kitsune* weeps and begs for mercy in the same manner

[84] Pandey, "Regendering the Literary and Buddhist Textual Tradition," 5; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 8.
[85] Turner and Greenhill, eds., *Transgressive Tales*, 258; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 220.
[86] The *tengu* 天狗 is another shapeshifter figure found in Japanese beliefs and narratives known for their deceptive antics; Tonomura, "Black Hair and Red Trousers," 147.

as the real wife, they still refuse to divulge their identity when threatened, a transgression that puts both themselves and the real wife at significant physical risk.

The Kōya River *kitsune* is perhaps the most disobedient in their resistance to the guard. Despite being tied up and abducted, the *kitsune* evades exposure by creating an illusion that causes the guard to lose consciousness, then spirits him away to Toribeno 鳥辺野, "one of three sites outside the city proper where the dead of the capital were discarded."[87] As discussed earlier, when the guard hunts down the *kitsune* for a rematch, he finds a female figure with different features instead, suggesting the *kitsune* has changed their appearance to further extend their resistance to the guard's attempts to subjugate them, thus retaining the upper-hand in the power dynamic.

Deception is a particularly malevolent form of disobedience, at least from the perspective of the men in these *setsuwa*. Although deception is an overarching theme in the *Konjaku*, often illustrating the Buddhist concept of "overcoming illusion," there is a more veiled understanding of deceit that links the *kitsune* with disobedient women.[88] Tonomura notes that "the feminine" in the *Konjaku* is often negatively coded and attributes this problem, in part, to Buddhist and Confucian conceptualizations of women as jealous, duplicitous, and lecherous.[89] The connection between sensuality and deceit is particularly relevant to *kitsune* who adopt the female form. The *Konjaku* was compiled at a time when views on women's sexuality and behavior were becoming increasingly censured—though by no means uniformly—following various ideological shifts. Janet Goodwin explains:

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[87] Susan L. Burns, "The Geography of Exclusion: Rai in Premodern Japan," in *Kingdom of the Sick: A History of Leprosy and Japan* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2019), 27.
[88] Heine, *Shifting Shape, Shaping Text*, 35-36.
[89] Tonomura explains how this conceptualization evolved further: "According to both Buddhist and Confucian notions, jealousy is a defining quality of women, and it was later emphasized as a quintessentially feminine trait in such works as *Tsuma kagami* (1300)...Other expressions of these grave vices of women include: 'Women have no compunction about arousing sexual desire in men,' '[Women have] a disposition prone to deceit,' 'Neglecting their religious practices and concentrating on how they may deck themselves out with fine clothes, they think of nothing but their appearance and desire the sensual attention of others,' '[Women take deceit as their guide and…often vow to bring evil to others,' '[Women] have no shame.'" Tonomura, "Black Hair and Red Trousers," 138, 140.

> No clear picture of a sexually transgressive woman emerges even by the end of the Kamakura period; *but such a picture was under construction…Both laws and setsuwa could function as tools of social engineering employed by elites to construct models of orthodoxy and transgression*…In the late Heian and Kamakura times [women were] increasingly subjected to behavioral restrictions and censured for activities and relationships they had once pursued with little blame (emphasis added).[90]

The *kitsune* in these *setsuwa* are thus entering a society still in the negotiation phase where gendered behavior is concerned. Every aspect of their countenance and movement is subject to scrutiny. This unsettling climate partially explains why the handyman husband cannot distinguish between the two 'wives': the true wife, having returned home far later than expected from running an unspecified errand, appears deceptive and is subsequently subjected to the same level of suspicion as the *kitsune*.

The association between lecherous, deceitful, and destructive women and the shapeshifting fox in Tang China narratives and beliefs was well-known among the Heian *literati*. A primary concern reflected by the eroticized stories was to "recognize and expose the fox" to safeguard against seductive fox-women, who "embody the power of excessive *yin* that threatens the well-being of the male *yang*."[91] Kang emphasizes not only a direct link between the dangers of female sexuality and fox enchantment but also traces its origins to Tang patriarchal anxieties:

> Evidently, the soul-stealing activities of the fox demon were associated with the impropriety of rule by empress dowagers…The official history implies that the empress dowagers' rule violated the supreme power of the imperial patriarch and subverted the normal order of *yin/yang*.[92]

Moreover, the correlation between the shapeshifting fox, courtesans, and prostitutes was well-known, as reflected in the comparison between *kitsune* and Japanese *asobi* (sexual entertainers) and Tang narratives, such as *Renshi zhuan*, mentioned earlier, and Bai Juyi's

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[90] Janet R. Goodwin, *Selling Songs and Smiles: The Sex Trade in Heian and Kamakura Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 42, 45.
[91] T. W. Johnson, "Far Eastern Fox Lore," *Asian Folklore Studies* 33, no. 1 (1974): 43; Kang, *The Cult of the Fox*, 20; Yoshino, *Kitsune: In'yō gogyō to inari shinkō*, 40.
[92] Kang, *The Cult of the Fox*, 19-20.

poem, "The Old Grave Fox 古冢狐."[93] These associations suggest that the contemporaneous *Konjaku* audience would have recognized the danger inherent in *kitsune* encounters.

However, unlike the vulpine seductresses in Tang literature, the *kitsune* in these *setsuwa* do not appear overtly eroticized or sexually aggressive in any way, even if the implication is present. The *kitsune* in *Konjaku* 27:38 arguably seeks to *avoid* Yasutaka's sexual advances—his apparent infatuation with the *kitsune*'s alluring figure is seemingly one-sided. On the other hand, while the deceptive appearance of the wife-double *kitsune* evokes the sexual bewitchment trope, their motives are ambiguous. There is no mention of them attempting to seduce the husband. Furthermore, one could say that the Kōya River *kitsune* merely puts on a charming appearance to exploit lustful men for access to equestrian transit.

The *kitsune*'s assumption of the human female form exposes the very arbitrariness of gender constructions through the use of empty signifiers and interchangeability. In the Yasutaka *setsuwa*, the *kitsune* is described as the quintessential Heian beauty, bedecked in lavender and violet silken garments, long locks of hair framing the face just so, their body emitting the scent of fragrant incense. Gender was visually communicated through clothing and hairstyle in premodern Japan, and these generic feminine signals initially titillate Yasutaka.[94] However, his inability to discern the *kitsune*'s facial features and identity renders the *kitsune*'s femininity highly abstract—disrupting conventional conceptions of the

[93] Goodwin provides this anecdote for further consideration: "Despite the atmosphere of cheerful slumming promoted by the Heian literature of appreciation, it is possible to sense an occasional hint of danger in consorting with *asobi*. Minamoto Michichika (1149-1202) describes an encounter between *asobi* and the party of the retired sovereign Go-Takakura on pilgrimage to Itsukushima shrine in 1180: 'We set up lodgings for the retired sovereign at the port of Muro. The sovereign disembarked and hot water was ordered for his bath. The *asobi* at the port gathered around us near the sovereign's lodgings, like foxes from some old grave mound that take the forms of women and seduce men as dusk is falling. Since no one was interested they went away.' The description is quite damning: foxes who distinguished themselves as women and seduced unsuspecting men were a standard emblem of deception and danger in late-Heian *setsuwa* literature." Goodwin, *Selling Songs and Smiles*," 129; According to Huntington, "In 'Renshi zhuan,' Miss Ren states that she was an entertainer, and all of her contacts in Chang'an seem to be in the entertainment quarters…The essential point of similarity is that both prostitutes and vixens who have become women are sexually aggressive, available women of unknown origins, whom men pursue at their own cost." Huntington, *Alien Kind*, 187-188.
[94] Pandey, "Regendering the Literary and Buddhist Textual Tradition," 3.

feminine. If stripping a body of its clothing is tantamount to "[destroying] the external markers of status and beauty," Yasutaka's attack on the *kitsune*, demanding their robes, confirms the utter futility of relying upon outer appearances to determine anything about the identity of an individual.[95] Interestingly, Kimura argues that in Heian court literature, personal scent had a primarily nostalgic function, as a "remnant of a rendezvous," rather than arousing sensual desire for an individual, whether a man or a woman.[96] The *kitsune*'s clothes, hair, and fragrance are thus empty gender markers that obscure rather than clarify, infuriating Yasutaka all the more.

The details of the wife-double *kitsune*'s physical appearance are not mentioned, but we can surmise that they have donned the same attire and hairstyle as the real wife. The two are virtually interchangeable in appearance, as the first 'wife' (the transformed *kitsune*) enters the house without raising suspicion. In contrast, the second, *real* wife has "the same facial features" and "no perceivable differences" (亦同顔ニシテ有様露許モ違タル所モ無キ妻入来タリ) from the *kitsune*.[97] The notion that two 'women' (or a woman and a genderqueer shapeshifter) can be interchangeable again emphasizes the emptiness in external signifiers and gender constructs. Deprived of any authority "to see, to name, to judge," the handyman's sense of normative reality is so weakened that he "can't tell the difference between what looks like a woman and what actually is a woman" and turns to violence.[98]

The Kōya River *kitsune* is described rather generically as a young girl whose "warmly affectionate" manner of speech is "most enchanting" (ト打咲テ憎カラズ云フ様、愛敬付キタリ).[99] However, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, distinguishing physical features are virtually meaningless to the Takiguchi guard, who picks up two *kitsune* that are entirely different in appearance and possibly different *kitsune* altogether ("her face was not that of the

[95] Tonomura, "Black Hair and Red Trousers," 151.
[96] Kimura, "Kyūtei monogatari no kuia na yokubō," 23.
[97] Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*, 121.
[98] Turner and Greenhill, eds, *Transgressive Tales*, 218; Greenhill, "Fitcher's [Queer] Bird," 161-162.
[99] Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*, 128.

girl before" (前ノ女ノ童ノ顔ニハ非ズ).[100] In all three *setsuwa*, gender markers are completely destabilized, proposing a secondary narrative space in which the *kitsune* figure avoids the "arbitrary nature of the power differential that results from distinct gender embodiment" to "annex new latitudes of subjective, embodied experience."[101]

The *kitsune* performs the Heian feminine—they cross-dress—but not to seduce or cause harm in the traditional, often malevolent sense. They appear less interested in "passing" as a woman than in "[using] cross-dressing in a metaphoric or strategic way that comments upon the contructedness of gender in the real world occupied by the readers or viewers."[102] It cannot be, then, that the *kitsune* undermines patriarchal authority or disturbs the social order through their association with disobedient, deceitful women alone. The *kitsune* disrupts because they are queer—they are neither woman nor man, human nor mundane animal. The *kitsune* refuses categorization.

Fluidity and Hybridity

While shapeshifters and tricksters are often defined by their social transgression and liminal status, the *kitsune*'s body is also transgressive in its ability to defy categorization in the normative sense. The *kitsune* is gender fluid; their gender is never specified in these *setsuwa*, an attribute consistent with other *kitsune* in the *Konjaku*, regardless of the gender they assume in human form.[103] The ability and choice to transform between a non-gendered supernatural fox form and a gendered human form thus suggest that the *kitsune* is a transgendered figure. As such, they exemplify what Pauline Greenhill and Emilie

[100] Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*, 131.
[101] Turner and Greenhill, eds., *Transgressive Tales*, 239.
[102] Victoria Flanagan, *Into the Closet: Cross-Dressing and the Gendered Body in Children's Literature and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 15; Turner and Greenhill, eds., *Transgressive Tales*, 238-239.
[103] See *Konjaku* 14:5 "為救野干死与法花人語." Kazuo Mabuchi, Kunisaki Fumimaro, and Inagaki Taiichi, eds. *Konjaku monogatarishū* Vol. 3. Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū 35 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1999), 417-421; *Konjaku* 27:37 "狐変大椙木被射殺語." Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*, 115-118; For Dykstra's translations: 14:5 "How a Man Copied the *Hokekyō* for the Deceased Fox" and 27:37 "How a Fox Transformed Into a Large Cedar Tree and was Shot to Death." Dykstra, trans., *Buddhist Tales*, 211-213, 863-864.

Anderson-Grégoire call "a transgender imagination—thinking about or expressing the idea that a person, self or other, is or could be a different sex/gender than it appears."[104] Moreover, the *kitsune*'s body transgresses the boundaries between human/animal and mundane/supernatural. This combination of gender fluidity and hybridity instills them with an unnervingly destabilizing presence—that of the *other*—which, compounded with the modes of disruption discussed above, elicits violence in its subversion of socially-constructed hierarchies and boundaries.

A critical way the *kitsune* agitates, albeit less evident to a modern audience, is that the gender they assume as a human need not correlate to their biological sex or chosen gender identity. In other words, the *kitsune*'s particular brand of shapeshifting puts forth the possibility that any 'person' may or may not be the gender they present, let alone human. The *kitsune* presents as queer through their body and social markers being "out of alignment."[105] This fluidity has significant implications for the patriarchal hierarchy following *yin* and *yang* cosmology. Regardless of their gender, the fox is categorized as belonging to the *yin* (feminine) category and thus requires *yang* (masculine) energy. Scholars often point to the fox's fundamental *yin* attribute to explain why "even a male fox transforms itself into a woman" to balance their "masculine energy with the feminine yin attributes."[106] Although, according to Pandey, conceptualizations of bodies and gender are not "set in stone," in the premodern Japanese worldview,

> 'Male' and 'female' were understood as complementary rather than mutually opposed, antagonistic forces. This did not imply, of course, that the two were equal: *the male principle was the normative one and necessarily superior* (emphasis added).[107]

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[104] Pauline Greenhill and Emilie Anderson-Grégoire, "If Thou Be Woman, Be Now Man!: 'The Shift of Sex' as Transsexual Imagination," in *Unsettling Assumptions* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2014), 56.
[105] Kimura, "Kyūtei monogatari no kuia na yokubō," 39.
[106] Yoshino, *Kitsune: In'yō gogyō to inari shinkō*, 49; Quoted in Miyamoto, "Fire and Femininity," 77.
[107] Rajyashree Pandey, *Perfumed Sleeves and Tangled Hair* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2016), 24, 20.

From the male perspective in these *setsuwa*, the inability to definitively determine whether another person is a male or female utterly disrupts their sense of authority. The gender fluid *kitsune* perpetuates this uncertainty through an endless cycle of transformation.

Another example of how transgender and gender fluid figures disrupt the social order can be found in the *Shinkurōdo monogatari* and its introduction of the term "*henjō nyoshi* 変成女子," which can be loosely translated as the transformation of a person born as a male into a female. The concept of *henjō nyoshi* is a reversal of the Buddhist concept of "*henjō nanshi* 変成男子," a term used to explain miraculous transformations of women into men in order to attain Buddhist salvation.[108] Kimura argues that this term was first introduced in this *emaki*, which tells of a biological female who "asserts their masculinity" by claiming that they are not a woman in male embodiment but the other way around and subsequently lives their life as a male in Muromachi society.[109]

The *Shinkurōdo monogatari* grapples with many of the same issues discussed above, such as the arbitrariness of gender signifiers and performance. The protagonist is queer—their queerness antagonizes those who cannot discern their gender, reflecting the same anxiety surrounding identification, boundaries, and power dynamics that the *kitsune* finds themselves subject to in the *Konjaku*. According to Kimura, the story is an example of "gender trouble" in its representation of transgender embodiments that stand in opposition to Buddhist and social hierarchies, "since '*henjō nanshi*' was originally introduced to solve the problem of "women failing to attain Buddhahood," according to Buddhist thought, there is no reason for someone to go out of their way to transform into an impure woman's body."[110] This observation has intriguing implications for the gender fluid *kitsune* who transforms into a woman. For instance, a male-gendered *kitsune* that chooses to transform into a woman can

[108] Kimura, "Kyūtei monogatari no kuia na yokubō," 37-42; Kimura, "Surviving Queer: A Reading of Shinkurōdo monogatari."
[109] Kimura, "Kyūtei monogatari no kuia na yokubō," 42.
[110] Kimura, "Kyūtei monogatari no kuia na yokubō," 41.

be read as expressing homoerotic or transgender desire for "sexual access that may not have been accessible."[111] Greenhill argues that even when characters in gender-bending narratives revert to normative pairings, implying a "heterosexual fantasy," the messages contained within depictions of same-sex attraction "may not be exclusively heterosexual." The *kitsune*'s transformative ability thus allows for alternate readings that identify with non-normative desires and embodiments.

An inquiry into why and how the *kitsune*'s liminal body elicits violence must also consider the impact these disruptions have on the individual in premodern society. If boundaries and categories are rendered useless, so are hierarchies, as the "'thin veil between worlds' of sacred and secular" provides no reassurance of individual human significance.[112] As a figure that exists between genders, taxonomies, and realms, the *kitsune*'s gender fluidity reminds those who come in contact with them that their own identity and existence rests on flimsy structures, prone to change and void of any finite meaning. Margaret Yocom quotes Judith Lorber and Lisa Jean Moore on transgendered people: "Border crossers and those living on the border have opened a social dialogue over the power of categories. . . Multiple genders, sexes, and sexualities show that the conventional categories are not universal or essential.[113] In this vein, as a hybrid figure, the *kitsune* is an ideal vehicle through which to imagine alternate modes of existence wherein marginality is normalized and binaries are destabilized.

As a species-queer figure, the *kitsune* signifies all that cannot be domesticated, controlled, or foreseen. Thus, a more implicit explanation for the men's uneasiness is the threat of the foreign, the unknown, and the other that they sense in the *kitsune*. This association is inherent in the vulpine species, which is "traditionally excluded from the class

[111] Pauline Greenhill, "'Neither a Man nor a Maid': Sexualities and Gendered Meanings in Cross-Dressing Ballads," *The Journal of American Folklore* 108 (428): 1995, 170, 171.
[112] Heine, *Shifting Shape, Shaping Text*, 34.
[113] Judith Lorber and Lisa Jean Moore, *Gendered Bodies: Feminist Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 162; Quoted in Turner and Greenhill, eds., *Transgressive Tales*, 102.

of domestic animals…its presence in the world of human beings [representing] a fundamental intrusion of the wild."[114] Indeed, as a hybrid border-crosser, the reactions that the *kitsune* elicits by association alone echo Julia Kristeva's conceptualization of abjection and the monstrous. According to Barbara Creed:

> The place of the abject is 'the place where meaning collapses,' the place where 'I' am not…The monstrous is produced at the border between human and inhuman, man and beast…; in others the border is between the normal and the supernatural, good and evil…; or the monstrous is produced at the border that separates those who take up their proper gender roles from those who do not…; or the border is between the normal and abnormal sexual desire.[115]

This very otherness can also be a point of attraction, creating a mixture of intrigue and horror that powerfully disturbs the men's understanding of their own desires and fears. For instance, reflecting the Tang belief that the fox's "transcendent powers" are to be feared and revered, the male scholar who becomes enamored of Miss Ren in *Renshi zhuan* is both "fascinated and frightened" regarding her as "someone from a totally different world."[116] Like Miss Ren, the *kitsune*'s undeniable magnetism comes from the very source that repels—their illegibility.

The male protagonists in these *setsuwa* appear to suffer from anxiety that arises from a forbidden attraction to a powerful other. After allowing the *kitsune* to escape, Yasutaka and the Takiguchi guard become obsessed with finding them again, each revisiting the initial contact site. From an animal studies point of view, the *kitsune*'s transformation "disputes human-centered hierarchies," and the men's fixation aligns with a primary narrative motive to exact revenge and reassert their dominant position in the power dynamic.[117] However, the connotations of sexual attraction in these *setsuwa* should not be overlooked. Yasutaka is so overwhelmed by his desire that he forgets all decorum, his *asagutsu* 浅沓 making a distinct

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[114] Bathgate, "The Shapeshifter Fox," 57.
[115] Barbara Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection," in *The Monster Theory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 213, 216; Quoting Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2.
[116] Kang, *The Cult of the Fox*, 24; Wolfgang Kubin, "The Girl from Chang'an Walks by: Towards the Image of Women in the Tang Dynasty," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 30 (2008): 88.
[117] Pauline Greenhill, "Wanting (To Be) Animal: Fairy-Tale Transbiology in *The Storyteller*," *Feral Feminisms* no. 2 (2014): 39.

rustling sound as he rushes forward to touch the *kitsune*.[118] Moreover, if we are to assume that the Takiguchi guard is *positive* that the first girl he encounters at the Kōya River is a *kitsune*, why does he explain his forcibly binding them to his saddle as a precaution to ensure sexual relations with them? Rania Huntington discusses this paradox in Tang premodern fox narratives: "As the most sensitive violation of human boundaries, sexual illusion aroused the most anxiety and exerted the greatest fascination."[119] This confused, dangerous attraction to the *kitsune*'s otherness places the men in highly vulnerable positions that necessitate their violent actions.

A critical source of fear and subsequent violence in all three *setsuwa* is the genuine possibility that these men could become intimate with, and thus let their guard down around, a non-human—an illegible being. If the *kitsune*'s "foreignness" comes from their "crossing into human domestic space from the wilderness beyond" and the deception they employ to hide their hybridity, then the men's feelings of attraction and anxiety are only accelerated by liminal locations and their unsettling associations.[120] All three encounter the *kitsune* at borders—thresholds between the domestic and the untamed, the dead and the undead, and the realms of the known and the unknown. Just as encounters with hybrid beings disrupt normative categories by interrogating the meaning of "artificial boundaries" between humans, animals, and supernatural beings, borders "bring about encounter[s] between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability."[121] Moreover, liminal and marginalized spaces, such as graveyards and abandoned buildings (areas known to be frequented by *kitsune* and other supernatural creatures), did not belong to either party, equalizing and thus disrupting power hierarchies upheld in standard societal settings.[122]

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[118] *Asagutsu* is a type of wooden clog shoe worn by nobles, officials and other members of the Heian court. They would have been quite noisy if one needed to run quickly while wearing them.
[119] Huntington, *Alien Kind*, 11-12.
[120] Bathgate, "The Shapeshifter Fox," 55.
[121] Halberstam,"Animating Revolt/Revolting Animation, 266; Turner and Greenhill, eds., *Transgressive Tales*, 84-85.
[122] Mori, "Konjaku Monogatari-Shū," 149, 156; Heine, *Shifting Shape, Shaping Text* 30.

These marginal locations stir unrest in the men, who appear to lose their wits and strength through their mystifying *kitsune* encounters and in failing to maintain authority within these spaces. As discussed above, Yasutaka only realizes that his companion *might* be a *kitsune* when they pass the Burakuin, a hot spot for *kitsune* bewitchments. The banquet hall is located in a pine grove (*matsubara* 松原 or *En no matsubara* 宴の松原) within the imperial palace compound (*dairi* 内裏).[123] Strikingly, another *setsuwa* in the same section of the *Konjaku* details an incident in which a man approaches a group of women at the same pine grove at night, lures one behind a tree, and proceeds to devour her, leaving only her limbs behind.[124] One can surmise that in a location like this, especially after nightfall, a time "exempt from the order controlled by humans during the daylight hours," any man would feel their authority plummet as their anxiety soars.[125]

Playing off well-known Tang and premodern Korean precedents associating seductive and dangerous shapeshifting foxes with graveyards, the Kōya River *kitsune* inverts literary convention by spiriting the Takiguchi guard to Toribeno, which, as mentioned earlier, was a graveyard and charnel ground outside the capital.[126] The guard becomes so disoriented, physically ill, and ashamed that he requires bed rest for several days. Toribeno was also an area occupied by marginalized peoples (*hinin* 非人, often translated as "untouchables"), such as those suffering from leprosy and beggars.[127] As Susan Burns explains, premodern Toribeno

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[123] En no Matsubara," entry in *Nihon rekishi chimei taikei [henshū Heibonsha Chihō Shiryō Sentā]*, Vol. 27 (Tōkyō: Heibonsha, 1979), 35.
[124] *Konjaku* 27:8 "於内裏松原鬼成人形噉女語," Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*, 37-38; "How a Demon Assumed Human Form and Devoured a Woman in the Pine Grove of the Imperial Palace," Dykstra, trans, *Buddhist Tales*, 820.
[125] Mori, "Konjaku Monogatari-Shū," 148.
[126] Bai Juyi's poem, "The Old Grave Fox 古冢狐" is a precautionary tale warning against the whiles of a vixen who mimics the shapeshifting fox (like the famous Tang concubine Yang Guifei) that emerges from a grave mound, thus suggesting that "a fox disguised as a woman does little harm, whereas a woman who acts like a 'vulpine enchantress' can lead to ruin." Janet Goff, "Foxes in Japanese Culture: Beautiful or Beastly?" *Japan Quarterly,* 44 No. 2 (1997): 68; Gwyther, "Bai Juyi and the New Yuefu Movement," 142-143; Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel*, 130.
[127] Neary, Nobuaki, and Midori, "Formation and Development of Society in the Middle Ages," 32.

was a sight where "corpses were often simply discarded to decay," its liminality regarded as particularly ominous:

> When someone died within the city, the *hinin* at Kiyomizu-zaka were called upon to transfer the corpse to Toribeno. Thus, Kiyomizu-zaka was a liminal space that lay between the sacred grounds of the temple and the polluted realm of Toribeno, the world of the dead and the world of the living.[128]

The *kitsune* sending the Takiguchi guard to Toribeno is a supreme power play. Rather than being an instrument in his quest for patriarchal triumph and sexual dominance, the *kitsune* physically and mentally weakens the guard to his core. The dark inversion of the graveyard association makes a mockery of the trope of the eroticized *kitsune* and the guard's proclamation to abduct and sexually assault the *kitsune*.

The violent reactions to the *kitsune*'s hybridity and invasion of domestic space can also be explained by a gendered anxiety created by the men's own projections of the other. Otherness, in this case, applies to femininity in general. Creed argues that "all human societies have a conception of the monstrous-feminine, of what it is about a woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject."[129] Though the *kitsune* that enters the handyman's home undermines the authority of the patriarchal household, the husband's willingness to stab both 'wives' underscores the totalizing aspect of women's association with the abject. Barbara Fass Leavy notes that in the case of East Asian fox-wife narratives, "demonic women often appear [to] be themselves the invention of the men who fear them. Such a premise can be romanticized."[130] This observation emphasizes the internal paradox that agitates the men in all three *setsuwa*, spurring them on their irrationally violent paths.

In short, the *kitsune*'s hybridity confounds these men. It attracts and repels them, speaking to their carnal urges and fantasies whilst rapidly eroding their sense of patriarchal authority. The violence elicited by the *kitsune*'s hybrid, illegible nature reflects "the negative

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[128] Burns, "The Geography of Exclusion," 27.
[129] Creed, "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine," 211.
[130] Barbara Fass Leavy, *In Search of the Swan Maiden: A Narrative on Folklore and Gender* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 196-197.

perception of species-queer individuals who are automatically indexed as evil, as the blurring of interspecies frontiers is deemed uncomfortable."[131] At the same time, the men find themselves seduced by the *kitsune*'s otherness rendered in an idealized female form that "reflects the eternal mystery of woman, her power, and her elusiveness."[132] The *kitsune*'s perpetual illegibility disallows any reconciliation of these anxieties and desires.

This chapter has outlined the multivalent ways the *kitsune*'s liminal body can disrupt normative codes of behavior and hierarchies. Their denial of identification collapses all categories and boundaries pertinent to the premodern society as presented in the narrative. The potential of the secondary narrative lies in how *we* read these *setsuwa*. Does the *kitsune* 'read' as a human, animal, or supernatural figure? As a genderqueer hybrid figure, the *kitsune* is not a woman, but they are treated as such according to the situation. Likewise, they are not merely a mundane fox but are treated as such when deemed appropriate. These *setsuwa* thus blur the boundaries between taxonomies so that violent experiences are not perceived in terms of a specific embodiment—cruelty is cruelty. This slippage between embodiments and identities enables the *kitsune* to become a signifier for those, whether within or on the fringes of society, that find themselves in positions of marginalization or subjugation by the patriarchal order. The *kitsune*'s transformative ability and refusal to adopt a legible identity encourage us to consider the perspective of the societal other, be they illegible, disobedient, deviant, shapeshifting, genderqueer, hybrid, or any combination of these, in our secondary reading of these *setsuwa*.

[131] Kocsis, "Becoming (Non)Human," 83-84; Leavy, *In Search of the Swan Maiden*, 205.
[132] Raymond D. Jameson, *Three Lectures on Chinese Folklore* (Peiping, China: San Yu, 1932), 90; Quoted in Leavy, *In Search of the Swan Maiden*, 196-197.

"Monstrosity becomes beauty when the viewer moves outside the binary of human and Other."—Caroline Webb and Andrea Hopcroft (2017)[133]

Chapter Two: *Kitsune* - Transformation as Social Transgression

Overview - Reframing the Narrative

This chapter introduces a secondary narrative analysis of these *setsuwa* that emphasizes the *kitsune*'s violent experience in human form and triumphant survival through physical transformation. While Chapter One explores the numerous biases, tensions, and associations motivating the men's violent reactions to illegibility, Chapter Two considers the *kitsune*'s motivations to abandon the human female embodiment in favor of a perpetually liminal existence. The primary narrative, following convention, frames the *kitsune* as a social transgressor requiring eradication, albeit somewhat ambiguously. A secondary narrative shifts the perspective and reframes the *kitsune* as a relatable figure justified in their response to the hegemonic order they find themselves subject to within the literary premodern Japan.

There are several critical ways that these *setsuwa* enable us to imagine alternate possibilities for the *kitsune* and, vicariously, for a non-normative audience. Most significant is the fact that, although they experience fear and pain, the *kitsune* do not die in these *setsuwa*, like Miss Ren or other *kitsune* in the *Konjaku*—they transform. While metamorphosis is a fundamentally transgressive act against society, the *kitsune* has the potential to stand in for all those who share the "desire for transformation…the narrative form of the disempowered."[134] Their experience thus becomes one of survival and transcendence—of cruelty, domesticity, social norms, and expectations—in its anticipation of alternate futures.

The following sections refocus the discussion of violence to consider moments within the narrative that allow for secondary interpretations supporting the *kitsune*'s embodiment as an experience plagued by fear, torture, subjugation, and sexism. They come to learn

[133] Caroline Webb and Helen Hopcroft,"'A Different Logic': Animals, Transformation, and Rationality in Angela Carter's 'The Tiger's Bride,'" *Marvels & Tales* 31, no. 2 (2017): 332.
[134] Webb and Hopcroft, "'A Different Logic,'" 316.

first-hand that human existence is one of indifference, cruelty, and ego, despite its superior position in the karmic cycle to attain enlightenment.[135] The *kitsune*'s victory lies not in the mere 'escaping' of humanity—their transformation subverts normative human notions of productivity and domesticity, exposing the duplicity and corruption in human interactions and hegemonic ontologies. Moreover, the *kitsune*'s survival implies a "narrative" or "hero's reward," in which good triumphs over evil, the 'good' being the genderqueer *kitsune* and the 'evil' being the violent men that abuse them.[136] Ready explains the pivotal significance of this 'reversal' of traditional roles: "The ending of a story tends to be a judgment of the characters—the good/normative ones live, and the bad/transgressive ones die."[137] While *setsuwa* are more ambiguous in their judgments, and it may be that neither party can be definitively deemed good or evil, I argue that the *kitsune*'s transformation and transcendence of the human realm can be read as a narrative reward—a justification of their transgressive reactions to the cruelty and injustice they encounter.

This chapter begins by repositioning the narrative's characterization of cruelty and violence through the compiler's commentary, which leaves considerable room for confronting the social and cultural norms that enable this behavior and the dangers of domestication. The chapter ends with an analysis of the implications of transformation as social transgression, in which alternate, more liberating realities and futures can be imagined through the *kitsune*'s eternally liminal existence.

Reframing Violence as Cruelty - The Compiler's Commentary

The *kitsune*'s ability to alter their species and gender at will allows them to maintain an eternal state of liminality. This ability poses a substantial threat to the Heian society

[135] *Setsuwa* often depict animals and non-humans struggling to attain enlightenment either by becoming human or regaining a human form from a previous life, the human form being the most desirable second only to Buddhahood; Heine, *Shifting Shape, Shaping Text*, 33.
[136] Ready, "The Transgender Imagination in Folk Narratives," 224, 226, 229.
[137] Ready, "The Transgender Imagination in Folk Narratives," 229.

reflected in *setsuwa* narratives, a society organized around classification and Buddhist conceptualizations of identifying 'truth' in a dangerously illusory world. However, while the *kitsune*'s embodied liminality arouses suspicion, frustration, and violence from the male protagonists, the *kitsune*'s actions are not particularly deserving of this reception. In fact, the compiler's commentary sometimes berates the men's actions while commending the *kitsune*. The conclusions are sometimes ambivalent, but this only adds to the flexibility of the narrative, which can be remolded and redefined to reflect the needs of any audience at any given time. In the case of this inquiry, the compiler's comments serve as a retroactive springboard of sorts from which we can reassess how violence is depicted by focusing on the *kitsune*'s experience.

Predatory Assumptions

At the end of the Yasutaka *setsuwa*, the compiler notes that the fox never returned, perhaps having "grown wiser from experience," and goes on to compliment its skill of "splendidly transforming into a woman" (狐微妙キ女ト変ジテ).[138] However, though the commentator commends Yasutaka for not "being consumed by the woman" (女ニ強ニ不耽ズ), he issues a warning:

> 人遠カラム野ナムドニテ独リ間ニ、吉キ女ナドノ見エムオバ、広量ジテ触バフマジキ事也。
> …When you are all alone in the wilds, far away from other people, even if a beautiful girl or something of that nature appears, *it is not appropriate to rashly approach and touch them* (emphasis added).[139]

As much as it advises against the dangers of the pine grove at the Burakuin, this moral essentially asks us to reconsider Yasutaka's own predatory actions against the *kitsune*.

Such a statement actively acknowledges the invasion of the *kitsune*'s space and the cruel treatment suffered at the hands of Yasutaka over his inability to identify or dominate

[138] Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*, 120.
[139] Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*, 120-121.

them sexually or physically. Although Yasutaka does not rape the *kitsune*, his forcing a knife on their throat and demanding that they remove their robes is evocative of sexually-motivated violence, and indeed comes from a place of sexual frustration once he becomes suspicious that his love interest is not what they appear to be. Tonomura argues that *setsuwa* depicting sexual violence reflect a one-sided, patriarchal perspective:

> In these examples men's uncontrollable desire finds an outlet in the body of an unwilling female. Neither the narrative nor the compiler's comment reproaches the man for his sexual act. The tales' masculinist constructions offer little insight into the women's reactions to being (what we would call) raped or to having their clothes stolen. We assume that the actual penetration of the body would be humiliating and horrifying experience; removal of clothes would bring added shame, embarrassment, and economic loss…[140]

Furthermore, there is no mention of legal or societal repercussions for Yasutaka's offenses or for the perpetrators of similar violations depicted in the *Konjaku*.[141] It is up to us, then, to recover the trauma experienced by the *kitsune* or any victim in such narratives.

Although the compiler does not outwardly acknowledge the fear or shame experienced by the *kitsune*, the unambiguous disapproval of Yasutaka's irrational acts reframes them as senselessly cruel. In this light, his use of sheer force against a female figure he still has yet to determine as *kitsune* reads as disturbingly abusive. Moreover, the comment implicates Yasutaka's severe cruelty as the reason for the *kitsune*'s successful evasion of his revenge, having "grown wiser" (狐懲ニケル)" Yet, as Yasutaka did not successfully capture and kill the *kitsune*, he is not a hero by any means. If the *kitsune* has wisened up to the fact that the "true monster in this story… is the apparently normal man," their transformation, rather than *termination*, is a pointed comment on this social irony.[142]

The *kitsune*'s transformation into fox form can thus be read as a reaction to an unprovoked traumatic experience— a transformation that transcends a social order that

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[140] Tonomura, "Black Hair and Red Trousers," 151.
[141] Hitomi Tonomura, "Coercive Sex in the Medieval Japanese Court: Lady Nijō's Memoir," *Monumenta Nipponica* 61, no. 3 (2006): 287-288.
[142] Greenhill, "'Fitcher's [Queer] Bird,'" 163.

subjects them to abuse—whether they are perceived as a human female or a genderqueer shapeshifting fox. When their metamorphosis is characterized as a justified response to violence, the *kitsune*'s body becomes a transformative tool that "offers potential for alternatives that do not demonise, or even simply other, non-normative embodiments."[143] This potential is all the more magnified when the narrative "rewards" the *kitsune* by endowing them with the perpetual power to shapeshift.

The Dangers of Domesticity

The double-wife *setsuwa* paints a vivid portrait of the emotional and physical agony experienced by a *kitsune* who takes on the female form in a specifically domestic setting. The desperate reactions of *both* 'wives' to the husband's indiscriminate stabbings suggest a harsh critique of domestic abuse and "violent patriarchs."[144] The husband first attacks the second wife, who cries tearfully, "How could this be?! How could you do such a thing to me!" (此ハ何カニ。我レヲバ比ハ為ルゾ). Similarly, the first wife weeps as she begs for mercy, frantically rubbing her hands together.[145] Because the audience, like the handyman, is not privy to which wife is the *kitsune*, the terror felt by the two 'women' is equalized—in other words, we read both characters' experiences as *equally* traumatic, regardless of their true form. In this description, the *kitsune* trope recedes momentarily to the background and, in turn, reveals a narrative that, to use Jeana Jorgensen's terminology, "queers kinship by exposing the sine qua non of heterosexual relationships—between bride and groom, husband and wife—as explicitly adversarial, dangerous, even murderous."[146] Secondary narratives often function as a space to confront "irresolvable conflicts" within society, such as domestic violence, patriarchal hierarchy, and subjugation, that cannot be questioned straightforwardly,

[143] Greenhill, "Wanting (To Be) Animal," 40.
[144] Ready, "The Transgender Imagination in Folk Narratives," 232.
[145] Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*, 122.
[146] Turner and Greenhill, eds, *Transgressive Tales*, 87; Greenhill, "'Fitcher's [Queer] Bird,'" 150.

at least not without repercussions.[147] In 'doubling' the wife's abusive experience, the *kitsune*'s transformation magnifies the true wife's oppression suffered at the hands of an irrational husband as something that can only be overcome through the disruption of normative power dynamics.

The coda of this *setsuwa* devotes most of its space to reprimanding the handyman husband's indecisiveness and the public disappointment at his failure to capture and kill the *kitsune*:

> 此レヲ思フニ、思量モ無カリケル男也カシ。暫ク思ヒ廻シテ、二人ノ妻ヲ捕ヘテ縛リ付テ置タラマシカバ、終ニハ顕レナマシ。糸口惜ク逃シタル也...然レバ此様ノ事ノ有ラムニハ、心ヲ静メテ可思廻キ也。希有ニ実ノ妻ヲ不殺ザリケル事コソ賢ケレ、トゾ人云ケル...
> Upon reflection, this was a foolish man. If he had thought things over carefully for a short while and captured and tied up the two wives, everything certainly would have become clear in the end. It is quite regrettable that he ended up letting the fox go…Therefore, if and when something of this nature occurs, it is best that you calm down and think the matter over. 'It is indeed horrifying that he miraculously missed killing his real wife!' the people said.[148]

While the real wife's perspective is not directly addressed here, the compiler emphasizes the incomprehensible nature of the husband's cruelty by noting the level of public embarrassment caused by the incident. The admonishments made by the villagers align with the common viewpoint found in supernatural wife motifs in reflecting "the woman's desire that in her most intimate relations, she *not* be treated as an animal."[149] The commentary is less impressed with the *kitsune* as the Yasutaka *setsuwa*, noting that its actions were as "pointless"(益無キ) as those of the husband. However, the added dismay of the handyman's peers brings more shame to him than the *kitsune*, who is, after all, acting according to type.

[147] Ready, "The Transgender Imagination in Folk Narratives," 233; Quoting Garber, *Vested Interests*, 16.
[148] Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*, 122.
[149] Leavy, *In Search of the Swan Maiden*, 243-244.

Cruelty is Cruelty

The social critique inherent in the experience of the Kōya River *kitsune* involves the unrestrained abandon with which hegemonic forms of cruelty are exercised over animals, women, and by proxy, subjugated and marginalized peoples. As discussed in Chapter One, the Takiguchi guard abducts a female figure who may or *may not* be a *kitsune*, as far as he knows, binds them to his saddle, and announces his intention to sleep with them against their will. Although the audience is aware that this is part of a ploy to safeguard against the *kitsune* realizing they've been exposed, there is no apparent reason for this explanation other than it being a plausible reality for women in premodern Japan. As Tonomura argues, within the realm of *setsuwa*, men, especially those of higher rank, "seem incapable of violating women," and there is "no injunction against the act of abducting women" for sexually-motivated purposes or otherwise.[150] With this predicament in mind and contrary to the traditional conception of the *kitsune* as a fox that merely takes on the form of humans, a secondary narrative can imagine them as a real woman seeking to escape an unbearable existence in human form.

The *kitsune* in this *setsuwa* reads as a human female much of the time, and the torture they experience in both human and animal forms emphasizes the fundamental principle that cruelty is cruelty, no matter the status of the recipient. Through the *kitsune* trope, the narrative conveys the disturbing experience of a kidnapped and tortured woman, outnumbered by murderous men:

> シヤ肱ヲ捕へテ、門ヨリ入テ前ニ火ヲ燃サセテ、本所ニ将行タレバ、滝口皆居並テ待チチケレバ、音ヲ聞テ、「何ニゾ」ト口々ニ云ヘバ「此ニ搦テ候フ」ト答フ。女童ハ泣テ、「今ハ免シ給ヒテヨ。人々ノ御マスニコソ有ケレ」ト侘迷ケレドモ、不免ズシテ将行タレバ、滝口共皆出テ立並廻テ...
> Seizing her by her upper arms, [the guard] entered through the gate and had the retainers light the way ahead of him as he took her to the Takiguchi Station. All the guards were waiting in a row at the station, so when they heard voices, they all asked, 'How did it go?' The young guard replied, 'I've captured and brought her here.' The

[150] Tonomura, "Black Hair and Red Trousers," 152.

> young girl was crying and said, 'Let go of me right now! There are so many people here!' But despite her anguish and bewilderment, he did not release her, and as he brought her forth, the other guards all came out to surround them.[151]

As with the usage of "*tsuma*" to refer to the disguised *kitsune* in the double-wife *setsuwa*, the Kōya River *kitsune* is referred to using the character for woman "女" (glossed as "め *me*") throughout these scenes depicting their torture and up to their transformation. This detail once again reinforces our 'reading' of the *kitsune* as a human female despite the primary narrative acknowledgment that they are not. The vague boundaries between taxonomies expose the corruption in hegemonic structures through cruel treatment.

The *kitsune* escapes the guard by creating a mirage wherein illusory guardsmen request he releases the fox so they can shoot at it. However, the haunting descriptions of the *kitsune* experiencing torture as a young woman, crying and pleading as she's dragged from the horse and seized by her upper arms (引落シテ、シヤ肱ヲ捕へテ) and later, pulled by her hair (女ノ童ノシヤ髪ヲ取テ) and restrained so tightly she can barely breathe, read as a disturbingly realistic portrayal of unchecked violation of female bodies. The singed fur is particularly significant for females, for in premodern Japan, hair was seen as "metonymically linked to the body and self."[152] Moreover, as Leavy observes of shapeshifting narratives, "the burning of animal skin or some analogous act in which the animal woman is harmed or maimed may come to symbolize virtual wife abuse," the transformation of the Kōya River *kitsune* can be seen as a powerfully triumphant attempt to recover the self from hegemonic effacement.[153]

Interestingly, the *kitsune* transforms at the point where their body can no longer withstand the torture they've been subjected to. Webb and Hopcroft note that "for female characters especially, transformations [often] mark a point where human existence has become untenable…the animal shape acts for the disempowered as an imaginative nexus

[151] Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*, 129.
[152] Pandey, *Perfumed Sleeves*, 7.
[153] Leavy, *In Search of the Swan Maiden*, 229.

between present reality and desirable future."[154] This concept works well for the previous two *kitsune*, who remove themselves from harm via transformation. This *kitsune*, however, suffers all the more once they've become a fox, as the guards scorch the *kitsune* with torches until it has no fur and shoot at it repeatedly with arrows, rendering them almost completely immobile. Moreover, the usage of the derogatory prefix "シヤ (*shiya*)," which denotes an abusive or demeaning tone toward the subject's body parts and appears multiple times in references to the Kōya River and Yasutaka *kitsune*, paints a disturbing picture in which a seemingly innocent young woman is spoken to no differently than the lowliest criminal or animal.[155] This *setsuwa* thus carries the implicit statement that animal cruelty is commensurate with cruelty toward humans, especially those who are at a disadvantage in the power dynamics of that society.

The Kōya River *kitsune* endures pain in human and animal forms to underscore the precarious condition of women, marginalized peoples, and any other group or individual subjugated under the late Heian patriarchal systems. The line between woman and fox in this *setsuwa* is constantly blurred so that the *kitsune*'s rejection of normative structures becomes that of whatever form they take on. Whether one reads this story as one of a human female or a genderqueer *kitsune* surviving torture and cruelty, transformation is paramount to imagining a future characterized by freedom. After all, if "to remain a woman [and human] is to be deprived of whatever choices are implied in the shapeshifting motif," then the *kitsune*, as a figure that embodies a perpetually liminal state, represents the optimistic possibilities of change for the oppressed.

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[154] Webb and Hopcroft, "'A Different Logic,'" 318-319.

[155] "しや (*shiya*)," often preceding words for body parts of the subject has the connotation of looking down upon or having contempt for someone or something. Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*, 120; "しや (*shiya*)" is used as a prefix in the context of cursing or insulting someone or something. Kazuo Mabuchi, Kunisaki Fumimaro, and Inagaki Taiichi, eds., *Konjaku monogatarishū*, Vol. 3. Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū 37 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1999), 205.

It is significant that the compiler awards their most effusive comments to this *kitsune*, who, arguably, suffers the most intense physical pain of the three discussed here. The brief rationalization that the fox "experienced great pain because it tried to deceive humans (人謀ラムト為ル程ニ、糸辛キ目見タル狐也カシ)" is almost entirely eclipsed by the gushing review of the *kitsune*'s extraordinary display of its abilities to create illusions, spirit men away, and—most significantly—use these skills not to cause pain but to draw our attention to man's faults:

> 然レドモ此レハイチジルシク謀テ、鳥部野マデモ将行タル也...人ノ心ニ依テ翔ナメリトゾ人疑ヒケル...
> This was a masterfully-executed bewitchment, even taking him all the way to Toribeno…as many have long suspected, a fox's actions appear to depend on a person's frame of mind.[156]

From a secondary narrative standpoint, this coda suggests that the *kitsune*'s experience is less a product of their active disruption but instead "complicated by the reactions of others," the violence they are subject to, thus arising from "the intolerance of forces beyond" the *kitsune*.[157] The compiler's comments are indeed ambiguous in their admonishments and clearly promote, or at least reinforce, Heian society's advocating the eradication of the shapeshifting *kitsune*. However, within these codas, we find a space where the *kitsune* is justified in their final transformation, in their refusal to obey the hierarchical rules of a society that places power within the hands of impetuous, predatory, and foolish men like Yasutaka, the handyman husband and the Takiguchi guards.

Transcending Narratives of Normativity

Mentions of *kitsune* in imperial histories, *setsuwa*, and poetry collections show that torturing and killing foxes was nothing new in premodern Japan.[158] Smyers' analysis of the

[156] Mabuchi et. al, *Konjaku monogatarishū*,
[157] Greenhill and Anderson-Grégoire, "If Thou Be Woman, Be Now Man!" 70.
[158] According to Smyers: "The two foxes that had the misfortune to run into the palace in 833 and 849 were clubbed to death and killed by a dog, respectively, and the emperor shot the one that wandered in in 855."

kitsune finds that "the fox in disguise" is usually killed the instant it is revealed to be a fox, but this cruelty is rarely justified, suggesting a veiled commentary on human immorality:

> There are a number of fox stories in Japan in which humans take delight in killing or hurting the fox…The single fox reference in the *Manyōshū*, [Japan's] earliest extant poetry collection (mostly from the Nara and Heian periods), is in a poem that expresses a rather cruel delight in hurting a fox doing nothing more than crossing a bridge: Boil water, my lads/ In the kettle with a spout!/ We will dash it on the fox,/Coming from the Ichihi Ford/ Over the log-bridge of cypress.[159]

Similarly, Miss Ren is ravaged by a pack of hunting dogs in spite of her efforts to become the ideal, dutiful wife in *Renshi zhuan*. Huntington thus suggests that the inherent lesson in all shapeshifting fox stories is that internal values and intelligence "provide no defense against violence when their species identity [is] exposed. Regardless of the precise nature of the deception, human relations with foxes often end in the violence of the hunt and the fatal exposure of the foxes' deceptions."[160] However, by surviving human torture, the *kitsune* in this study refuse this finite aspect of the fox narrative. The optimism of their eternal access to transformation, in turn, highlights the suffering of those who may not be able to conceive of such an outcome.

Despite their attempts to visually perform the Heian feminine ideal, the *kitsune*'s queerness arouses suspicion. Yet, as Turner argues, while queer can be defined as "being both outside and troublesome to the heteronormative kinship system and thereby a target for abuse by that system," their transformative ability marks the *kitsune* as a figure "full of potential to shape a radically altered version of [oneself]."[161] This view of queer transformation hints at the *kitsune*'s prerogative to fashion their embodiment to fit their own ideals that do not necessarily align with those of late Heian society. Greenhill, quoting Marina Warner, argues

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Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel*, 76; "In 887 [a fox] rain in the daytime upon the roof of the Crown prince's palace, but was killed there by a very brave man." de Visser, "The Fox and Badger in Japanese Folklore," 16-18.
[159] Smyers, *The Fox and the Jewel*, 98-99.
[160] Huntington, *Alien Kind*, 13.
[161] Kay Turner, "At Home in the Realm of Enchantment: The Queer Enticements of the Grimms' 'Frau Holle,'" *Marvels & Tales* 29, no. 1 (2015): 51.

that the dynamic of transformation includes "a prodigious interruption of natural development" and "an organic process of life itself" that "breaks the rules of time, place, of human reproduction and personal uniqueness."[162] The *kitsune*'s eternal access to transformation creates a space of fluidity that transcends the violence espoused by marginalization, hierarchies, and binaries and imagines non-normative futures. The possibilities created by such a message need not be limited to modern audiences, for as Kimura argues, there was indeed an audience for narratives such as the *Shinkurōdo monogatari* that depict transformation and transgender bodies as conceivable alternatives to normative structures in premodern Japan.[163]

The *kitsune*'s transformation from a female human body to a genderqueer shapeshifter is a social transgression that disrupts heteronormative orientation. It is critical to note here that a secondary narrative is not beholden to a story's depiction of heteronormative events or endings. Instead, a secondary narrative emerges from those spaces in which non-normative possibilities arise. Through their transformative capabilities, the *kitsune* can be seen as a figure unbound by gender binaries and expectations, free to explore the potentials of non-normative desire. According to Greenhill, such explorations lie in the malleability of the narrative and how transformation resonates with a particular audience:

> Queer theorists dispute the need to write off an entire work on the basis of an apparently heteronormative [ending]. So the conclusion need not divert audiences/readers permanently from exploring representation of the often violent love/hate between [animal] and human. Further, that the creature is not human, but wishes to be, does not permanently install normativity. The desire for bodily transformation grounds many identities, including transsexuality.[164]

When transgressive characters are rewarded with powers that transcend the binds of hierarchical societies, their transgressions become meaningfully relevant and relatable to a receptive audience. Moreover, the non-normative and "transgender capacity" of *setsuwa*

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[162] Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (London: Vintage, 1994), 27; Greenhill, "Wanting (To Be) Animal," 32.
[163] Kimura, "Surviving Queer."
[164] Greenhill, "Wanting (To Be) Animal," 29-30.

depicting queer and transgender characters "[tell] us about the way storytellers and their audiences have felt and thought about gender" in both premodern and modern contexts.[165]

This capacity applies not only to the *kitsune* analyzed in this study but to other queer literary figures, such as the New Chamberlain in the *Shinkurōdo monogatari* and the siblings in the *Torikaebaya monogatari*. Both narratives depict women who live as men and whose non-normative desires do not change despite complications to their lifestyle caused by pregnancy, demonstrating that "desire is disconnected from the state of the body."[166] Nevertheless, these stories are transgressive in their disruption of the Heian regency system, which relies on productive sex and the threat inherent to such a system when sexuality is "disguised."[167] Similarly, the *kitsune* figure suggests a misalignment between heterosexual courtship and productivity implied by their female embodiment in their resistance to the men's desire to learn more about them, whether this desire is sexually motivated or not, and their transformation to fox form.

In the case of women, transformation can also be seen as a type of "animal disguise," in which "being a beast [can] be preferable as a temporary measure to the constrictions of a woman's shape."[168] The concept of feeling constricted by one's body also carries a queer resonance, for, as we've seen, the *kitsune* is a figure that is forced to "find a way to survive when others want [them] to behave in a way [they] cannot," and thus, "like many pre-transition transsexual people, [they] may feel, at times, that [they are] living in the wrong body."[169] Aside from the erotic motivation implied by literary precedents, no definite motivation is given for the *kitsune*'s assumption of the female form. However, the unbearable experience of female embodiment and the "desire to trade skins" aligns with queer notions of

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[165] Ready, "The Transgender Imagination in Folk Narratives," 229.
[166] Kimura, *A Brief History of Sexuality*, 58.
[167] Saeko Kimura, "Love and Sexuality in Heian Text: 'Productive' and 'Non-Productive' Sex," *PMAJLS 5*: *Love and Sexuality in Japanese Literature* (1999): 54.
[168] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, 354; Greenhill, "Wanting (To Be) Animal," 35.
[169] Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 69; Turner and Greenhill, eds., *Transgressive Tales*, 94.

feeling trapped in the wrong body "because there is something wrong with our world."[170] In this sense, the *kitsune*'s ability to transform thus puts forth the possibility that transformation not only liberates one from restrictions of social constructs but dissolves the distinction between the normative and non-normative altogether.

Implications of Transformation as Social Transgression

The *kitsune* is characterized as a figure constantly modifying and adapting their physical form and gender in response to the hostility, irrational violence, and social pressures they encounter through human contact. As such, their experiences demonstrate the danger, pain, and fear caused by social restrictions and gendered hierarchies. It is precisely at these moments—when the *kitsune*'s traumatic experience becomes relatable, or at the very least comprehensible to an audience—that social transgression and transformation become normalized—morally justified. In late Heian Japan or any society wherein identity is dictated by status, class, and gender, alternatives to the life one is born into are few and far between—if not impossible to conceive. The *kitsune* serves as a beacon of hope in such cases. While men and women could indeed 'abandon' their given role in premodern society and renounce (or avoid) worldly desires and secular life by taking the tonsure, the *kitsune* maintains a different type of freedom.[171]

By embracing a liminal, illegible lifestyle, the *kitsune* represents the possibilities of an existence in which desires can be freely explored without censure, their transformation collapsing the distinction between normative and non-normative, along with all other binaries and hierarchies. Such an existence presents "possibilities for a re-invention of [one's] social

[170] Alexis Shotwell, "A Knowing That Resided in My Bones: Sensuous Embodiment and Trans Social Movement" in *Embodiment and Agency*, eds. Sue Campbell, Letitia Meynell, and Susan Sherwin (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 63; Prosser, *Second Skins*, 69; Turner and Greenhill, eds., *Transgressive Tales*, 237.
[171] Rajyashree Pandey, "Desire and Disgust: Meditations on the Impure Body in Medieval Japanese Narratives," *Monumenta Nipponica* 60, no. 2 (2005): 218.

self."[172] The *kitsune* can thus be read as a hero/heroine (or anti-hero/heroine) through their championing of illegibility:

> The [hero] leaves behind the identity belonging to his role in his society and can adopt various roles and identities in accordance with the spaces which he traverses. He becomes an 'unknown' person, on which no specific identity is inscribed, except that of the traveler, the stranger and the 'other', a status with both positive and negative connotations.[173]

Following this line of reasoning, the *kitsune*'s abandonment of social markers, especially those connected to gender, such as robes and hair, which is how the premodern Japanese body is "most powerfully apprehended," resonates not only as a renouncement of humanity but of gendered conceptualizations of the body, as "shedding human garments is akin to shedding social skins."[174] Because transformation in these narratives can also stand "not for the rejection of sexuality but the condition of it," the *kitsune* embodies a literary space of respite for those suffering from the restrictions of patriarchal structures.[175]

The trauma the *kitsune* experiences come not from their devious actions toward humans but from the lack of compassion they find in the human realm. Indeed, when reading the *kitsune*'s experiences as women's experiences, these *setsuwa* come across as "portrayals of male insensitivity" that implicate less the individual men's inefficiencies but instead the "inefficiencies of the masculine model for [their] behavior."[176] Although the *kitsune* figure is associated with (and targeted for) its deceptive, illusory capabilities, these tropes function, as the *Konjaku* compiler reminds us, as a reflection of human corruption, deception, and conceit. Like the protagonists of *Shinkurōdo monogatari* and *Torikaebaya monogatari*, the *kitsune*'s disruption of social structures "reveals [that] the foundation of power" itself can be deceptive.[177]

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[172] Nada Kujundžić, "Moving (Up) in the World: Displacement, Transformation and Identity in the Grimm's Fairy Tales," Libri and Liberi 3, no. 2 (2014): 231; Richard van Leeuwen, *The Thousand and One Nights: Space, Travel and Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2007), 15.
[173] Van Leeuwen, *The Thousand and One Nights*, 15.
[174] Pandey, *Perfumed Sleeves*, 7; Turner and Greenhill, eds, *Transgressive Tales*, 85.
[175] Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde*, 358; Greenhill, "Wanting (To Be) Animal," 35.
[176] Leavy, *In Search of the Swan Maiden*, 206.
[177] Kimura, "Love and Sexuality in Heian Text," 54.

Tang stories such as *Renshi zhuan* and Bai Juyi's "The Old Grave Fox" emphasize the patriarchal prerogative to prioritize beauty and outward appearances over inner character.[178] Heine suggests that pointing out the inability to look beyond the external to the internal in human connections is a "key pedagogical factor" of *Renshi zhuan*, prompting the author, Shen Jiji, to advise us that "one should investigate the principle of transformation and *examine the boundary separating spirits and humans*."[179] Indeed, as Huntington notes, the author's lamenting the irony that a "creature so alien" can embody the love and sorrow of the human condition "elevates her on the grounds of both passion and morality."[180] While the *setsuwa* compiler does not emphasize the *kitsune*'s capacity for feelings, desire, and morality, a secondary narrative recognizes the *kitsune*'s painful experience as one that similarly exposes the duplicity, cruelty, and conceit of mankind.

The *kitsune* is a figure of the abused, misunderstood, rejected, and misplaced—othered. Above all else, the fundamental reason for their relatability is their characterization as a being who *feels*. However we taxonomically categorize the *kitsune*, their experiences in these *setsuwa* exemplify how the feelings and desires of animals, supernatural, and otherwise illegible beings are no different from those of humans.[181] Through a secondary narrative perspective, social constructs, especially those related to gender and power, are called into question, destabilized, and ultimately exposed as unsatisfactory. As with other premodern stories such as the *Shinkurōdo monogatari* and *Torikaebaya monogatari*, transgressive characters who are not framed as villainous and who embody the feelings and desires of those who do not identify with normative society are heroic in their validation of the other.

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[178] Margy Chen, "Hidden Patriarchal Mentality Behind Ren's Story," *Emory Journal of Asian Studies*, (2021): 3.
[179] Heine's emphasis. Heine, *Shifting Shape, Shaping Text*, 35
[180] Huntington, *Alien Kind*, 227-228.
[181] Pandey, *Perfumed Sleeves*, 149-150.

Metamorphosis in these *setsuwa* acknowledges gender fluidity and creates space for imagining alternate realities in which social and gendered expectations do not restrict humans in our natural drive to shape our own identities and create our own futures. In all their disruptive, illegible glory, the border-crossing *kitsune* is essentially a unifying figure—a trait emphasized by the fact that such representations of transformation "[allow] for an opening of worlds—both for those who fit in, and for those who do not."[182] In reminding us of the hazy border between humans, spirits, animals, and genders—all social constructs of distinction—the *kitsune setsuwa* suggest that the fiction lies not in the supernatural capabilities of the shapeshifter but in human perception as a whole.

Conclusion

Setsuwa, especially those that feature shapeshifter characters like the *kitsune*, are often interpreted as upholding social and gender norms. While gender and marginalization are obvious themes in these narratives, the ultimate aim to injure, evict, or eradicate the fox is almost always reflected by the characters or the compiler. However, perhaps because so many *kitsune* narratives take their cue from Tang precedents, the fluid sexuality and gender of the shapeshifting fox are either taken for granted or glossed over as a vaguery that is part and parcel of *setsuwa* ambiguity. The primary narrative allows for multivalent interpretations, but these rarely seem to consider the experience of the *kitsune* nor the true motivation behind the violence they provoke in their encounters.

A secondary narrative perspective enables us to recuperate the neglected experiences of not only literary figures but those whom they can "stand in" for, no matter the time or place. The *kitsune* can resonate with women feeling the restraints of gender norms and expectations, with non-normative persons who feel "out of place" in society and in their

[182] Greenhill and Anderson-Grégoire, "If Thou Be Woman, Be Now Man!" 71.

bodies, and with any marginalized and subjugated person who harbors little hope of upward mobility or positive changes on the horizon. The secondary narrative uncovers desires, fears, associations, and frustrations in *kitsune setsuwa* that, though less perceptible on the surface, nevertheless represent meaningful lives and perspectives. Moreover, these expressions have manifold potential to resonate with audiences through time and space as the *setsuwa* are circulated and retold.

The *kitsune* is a transgressive figure that continues to captivate through its cunning use of transformation and illusion to adapt, provoke, mystify, and, ultimately, teach. A figure that champions the prerogative to shape one's own future, the *kitsune* stands in opposition to hegemonic structures, their transgressions exposing man's conceit of wielding power over others—itself a violation, a transgression against fellow humans, animals, and so forth. Premodern narratives that depict transgressive and non-normative characters like the *kitsune* are reflective of the gender confusion that existed during the time of their creation or compilation and continues to be a point of contention for modern audiences. Premodern, early modern, and modern depictions of *kitsune*, *oni*, female ghosts, and other supernatural characters presented as odd, horrific, and inhuman deserve a second and third look—*who* exactly represents and perceives these characters as 'frightening' or 'transgressive,' and why? In the future, I aim to uncover more about the flipside of these constructions—the very relatable emotions and physical experiences of the very figures we are told to regard as eerie, different—queer. The *kitsune* and their transformative body deserve a far more prominent place in modern scholarly debates as a cultural and literary figure that enables us to further explore the complexities of gender, non-normative desires, marginalization, and liminal existences.

Appendix: Translations of the *Setsuwa*

狐をむなのかたちにへんじてはりまのやすたかにあふこと
狐変女形値幡磨安高話第三十八[183]

Konjaku 27:38: How a Fox Took the Form of a Woman and Met Harima no Yasutaka

Long ago, there was a low-ranking imperial officer called Harima no Yasutaka. He was the son of Sadamasa, the third officer of the imperial guard of the Right. When he was young, Yasutaka served as a security guard to Minister Hōkōin. Since the minister was at the imperial palace, Yasutaka was also in attendance, but because Yasutaka lived in Nishi no Kyō, he thought he would go to his home to his abode. However, Yasutaka's servant was nowhere to be found, so he traveled alone along the Uchino-dōri. It was just about the middle of the Ninth Month, on the tenth day, and the moon was exceptionally bright. It was deep into the middle of the night. When he came upon En no Matsubara, a young girl wearing a pale lavender garment decorated with diagonal surface patterns over a lustrous, dark violet inner lining was walking in front of him. [ ] in the shadow of the moonlight, her silhouette and the shape of her hair, in particular, were indescribably exquisite. Because Yasutaka was wearing long riding shoes that made a rustling sound as he moved forward, once he was alongside her and looked at her, she swiftly covered her face with a decorated fan so that it was not fully visible. The way her hair hung down over her forehead, cheeks, and the like, was unspeakably charming.

When Yasutaka drew closer and touched her, he took in the scent of sandalwood incense. "Who might you be, traveling at this late hour, and where are you going?" Yasutaka asked, and the girl replied: "I've been invited by a person in Nishi no Kyō, so I am traveling there." Yasutaka then said, "Rather than going to that person's place, you should come to my house." The girl said with a coquettish laugh, "Do you know who I am?" Her manner of

[183] All translations are mine, translated from: Mabuchi Kazuo, Kunisaki Fumimaro, and Inagaki Taiichi, eds., *Konjaku monogatarishū*. Vol 4. Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū 38. Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1999.

speaking was exceedingly adorable. Talking to each other in this way, they went on until they had walked into the vicinity of the Konoe Gate.

Yasutaka then remembered, “I have heard there are foxes that deceive people in the Burakuin! Could it be possible that this is one too?! I’ll try to threaten this thing and find out. Furthermore, it is quite odd that they were so quick to prevent me from seeing their face.” Yasutaka then grabbed the girl by her sleeve and said, “Please stay here for a little while. There is something I intend to say to you.” When he said this, the girl hid her face with the fan all the more. Yasutaka then promptly said, “The fact is, I am a road bandit! You wretch—I will strip you of your robes!” As he was saying this, Yasutaka unraveled the string of his robes, and baring one of his shoulders pulled out a sharp-as-ice nine-inch dagger he wore at his waist. “Wretch! I will slit your throat!” he said, pressing the dagger against her. “Hand over your robes!” he said, pulling her by the hair and pinning her against a pillar. Then, as he was pressing the blade to her neck, the woman suddenly sprayed Yasutaka with unspeakably putrid-smelling urine. At that moment, Yasutaka loosened his grip in astonishment. Once he’d let his guard down, the woman promptly transformed into a fox and ran through the gate, howling “Kon, kon,” as it fled northward up Ōmiya Boulevard. As he watched this, Yasutaka thought, “Precisely because I had thought, ‘They might perhaps be human,’ I didn’t kill them. If only I had known it would be like this, I would have killed them without fail.” But although he was extremely furious and frustrated, nothing could be done about it now.

Thereafter, Yasutaka would quietly traverse the Uchino-dōri in the middle of the night and into the early morning, but perhaps the fox had grown wiser from experience, as he never encountered it again. The fox had splendidly transformed into a woman intending to [ ] Yasutaka, and, indeed, remarkably, he did not die. Therefore, when you are alone in the wilds,

far away from other people, even if a beautiful girl or something of that nature appears, it is not appropriate to rashly approach and touch them.

We can also see that Yasutaka was prudent; he did not become entirely consumed by the woman and was not [ ], and so it was told, and so it was passed down.

• • •

きつねひとのめのかたちとへんじていへにきたる
狐変人妻形来家話第三十九

***Konjaku* 27:39: How a Fox Took the Form of A Person's Wife and Came to His House**

Long ago, the wife of a low-born handyman who lived in the capital had an important matter to attend to. While the sun was setting and it was growing dark, she set off on the main road, but because quite a while had passed without her return, the husband thought anxiously, "Why is she taking so long that she hasn't returned?" As he was thinking this, his wife entered the house. Then again, just a short while later, another wife with the same facial features and no perceivable differences in appearance from the first entered.

When the husband saw this, he was terribly frightened. "In any case, it would be terrible indeed if one of them was a fox," he thought. However, because he did not know which of the two was his true wife, his mind went back and forth. "The wife who entered later must surely be a fox," he thought, and drawing his long sword, he threw himself onto the wife that had come in later and tried to stab her. "How could this be?! How could do such a thing to me!" said the wife, weeping. So the man then sprang upon the other wife who had entered first to try and stab her, and she too rubbed her hands together, begging for mercy as she broke down in tears.

And so, the man, unsure what to do, became extremely agitated, and while his mind was racing, he felt more and more that the wife who had entered first was suspicious. When he seized her unexpectedly, that wife quickly sprayed putrid-smelling urine. The husband could not endure the odor, and when he loosened his grip, that wife promptly transformed

into a fox and ran through the open front door toward the main road, howling “Kon, kon,” as it fled out of sight. At that point, the man was incredibly mortified and furious, but nothing could be done about it now.

Upon reflection, this was a foolish man. If he had thought things over carefully for a short while and captured and tied up the two wives, everything certainly would have become clear in the end. It is quite regrettable that he ended up letting the fox go. The local people also gathered there and made a great fuss over what they had seen. The fox’s actions were also pointless! It is remarkable that it escaped with its life. After seeing the wife on the main road, the fox took a chance and took the form of the wife.

Therefore, if and when something of this nature occurs, it is best that you calm down and think the matter over. “It is indeed horrifying that he miraculously missed killing his real wife!” the people said, and so it was told, and so it was passed down.

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かうやがはのきつねをむなにへんじてむまのしりへにのる

高陽川狐変女乗馬尻話第四十一

Konjaku 27:41: How a Fox at the Kōya River Took the Form of a Woman and Rode on the Back of a Horse

Long ago, there was a river called Kōyagawa to the East of the Ninna-ji Temple. It is said that when it grew dark at the bank of the river, there was a comely young girl who would stand there, and when a man came riding on horseback towards the capital, the young girl would say, “Might I ride to the capital on the back of that horse?” To this, the man would say, “Get on,” but once she mounted, she would ride on the back of the horse for only four or five hundred meters, then abruptly jump off and run away. When one chased after her, she would transform into a fox that would howl, “Kon, kon,” as it fled out of sight.

This became something that happened quite often. Because it was much talked about, when a large group of guards were chatting at the Takiguchi station inside the palace, they

began to talk about that young girl of the Kōya River who rode on the back of people's horses. Then, a courageous and prudent young guard said, "Indeed, if it were I, I would surely capture that young girl! Those other men let her escape because they are clearly foolish." Hearing this, one [ ] bold guard said, "You will never capture anything whatsoever," to which the warrior who had said he would capture her replied, "If that is the case, I will capture her and come back with her tomorrow evening without fail." When he said this, the other guards stood up and said, "You will not capture her," vehemently opposing him. And so the following evening [ ], without a companion and completely alone, he traveled to the Kōya River on an exceptionally fine steed, but when he crossed the river, the young girl was nowhere to be seen.

He promptly turned around and headed back towards the capital, when there stood a young girl. Seeing him as he was passing by, the girl said, "Please give me a ride on the back of your horse." Smiling, the warmly affectionate manner in which she spoke was most enchanting. The young guard said, "Make haste and get on. Where are you heading toward?" When he inquired, the young girl said, "I am going to the capital, but because it has grown dark, I had hoped to ride there on the back of your horse." He promptly took her on the horse. But the very moment she had mounted, because the young guard had prepared some things, he bound the young girl to the saddle using the rope of the horse's bridle. When the young girl said, "Why are you doing such a thing?!" the young guard replied, "I intend to take you to sleep with me this evening, so I thought it would be troublesome if you were to escape." As they continued to travel forth, it became completely dark.

Heading east toward the capital on Ichijō Road, they were passing the Nishi-Ōmiya Road when they saw a row of many lit torches coming from the east and a great number of carriages lined up. As the raucous group advanced toward them, the young guard thought, "It appears that a worthy party goes there." He turned around, heading south down Nishi-Ōmiya

Road to Nijō Road. From there, he went eastward, traveling from the Higashi-Ōmiya Road to the Tsuchimikado Gate. Having told them earlier, “Wait at the Tsuchimikado Gate,” he asked, “Are not my retainers here?!” to which they said, “Everyone is here,” and around ten men emerged.

At that time, he loosened the bridle rope binding the young girl and dragged her down from the horse. Seizing her by her upper arms, he entered through the gate and had the retainers light the way ahead of him as he took her to the Takiguchi Station. All the guards were waiting in a row at the station, so when they heard voices, they all asked, “How did it go?” The young guard replied, “I’ve captured and brought her here.” The young girl was crying and said, “Let go of me right now! There are so many people here!” But despite her anguish and bewilderment, he did not release her, and as he brought her forth, the other guards all came out to surround them. Lighting their torches, they said, “Release her into the center here.” Although the young guard replied, “It would be disagreeable if she escapes. I will not release her,” they all set their [arrows] into their bowstrings. “Release her just slightly. It’ll be amusing. We’ll shoot at the wretch’s waist to stop her. If it’s one person, they might fail to hit her, and that would be a shame,” they said, and around ten guards set and aimed their arrows. Then the young guard said, “Well then,” and released her into the center. At that moment, the young girl transformed into a fox, howling “Kon, kon,” as it fled out of sight. The other guards standing in a row were gone, too, as if they had vanished into thin air. The torch fires went out, and all went completely dark.

The young guard flew into a panic and called out for his retainers, but there was not even a single retainer to be found. When he looked about, the guard saw that he was in a field of which he did not know the location. Extremely rattled and disoriented, the horror he felt was immeasurable. Although paralyzed with fear, he endured and looked around for a short while. Observing the distance of the mountains and other aspects of the area, he was

evidently in the heart of Toribeno. “I definitely got off of my horse at Tsuchimikado Gate,” he thought, but it appeared that the horse was not there. “Ah, I was certain I had circled Nishi-Ōmiya Road, but it seems I came here. It also would seem that I was [being deceived] by the fox when I encountered the group with the lit torches I encountered at Ichijō Road,” he thought. Even so, had to attend to matters other than this, so he traveled back gradually on foot and arrived around the middle of the night.

The next day, the young guard was overwrought with anxiety and remained lying down in bed as though he were completely dead. Because the other guards had waited for him that previous evening and he hadn’t turned up, they laughed about it, saying things like, “That gentleman who had said, ‘I’ll capture the fox of the Kōya River!’ How do you think it went?” They dispatched a messenger to call upon him, and it was as late as the evening of the third day that the young guard, with the appearance of someone suffering from a severe illness, came to the Takiguchi station. When they asked, “How did it go with the fox from that night?” the young guard replied, “That night, I became unbearably ill and retired, so I could not go. That being the case, I will go out and try tonight.” Although when he said this, the other guards jeered at him, saying such contemptuous things as, “This time, capture two of them, eh?!” the young guard reticently took his leave.

Inwardly, he thought, “Since I deceived the fox before, surely they won’t come out tonight. If it does come out, even if it takes all night, I cannot let go of it even for a moment, or it will escape. If it doesn’t come out, I’ll permanently stop appearing at the Takiguchi station and hide myself away at home.” This evening he had brought along several brawny retainers on horseback, and they all traveled to the Kōya River. “To think that I shall be utterly ruined by such a pointless matter,” he thought, but since he had been the one to propose it, he was resolute in seeing it through.

He crossed the Kōya River, but the girl did not appear. When he turned back, a young girl was standing on the river bank. Her face was not that of the girl from before. “Might I ride eastward on that horse?” she said in the same manner as the previous girl, and he took her on the horse. As before, the young guard had brought a bridle rope, tied her firmly to the saddle, and headed back toward the capital on Ichijō Road. Because it had grown dark, he had some of the retainers remain with him while he had others ride ahead with lit torches, and still others flanked the horses on either side. Serenely, they continued on, boasting proudly—they did not encounter a single soul. When they reached the Tsuchimikado Gate, they got off their horses, and, seizing the young girl by her hair, the young guard took her toward the Takiguchi station. Although the girl tearfully refused, they eventually reached the station.

When the other guards asked, “How did it go? How did it go?” he said, “I have her here” At that point, he bound her even more tightly so that he was strangling her. Though she had looked like a human for a short while, she finally transformed into a fox due to the physically agonizing censure. Then, using the fire from their torches, the guards scorched the fox until it had no fur, burning it repeatedly and shooting it over and over again with arrows. “You there! From now on, don’t you ever perform this kind of deed again,” they said, and although they released the fox without killing it, it appeared that it could not even walk. But little by little, it made way. Subsequently, the young guard gave the other guards a detailed account of how he had been bewitched the previous time and had even gone to Toribeno.

After that, about ten days had passed, when the young guard thought, “All the same, I’ll give it a try,” and when he traveled to the Kōya River on his horse, the young woman from before now had the appearance of someone suffering from a severe illness, and was standing at the bank of the river. In keeping with the previous manner, the young guard asked,

“Have a ride on the back of the horse, my dear.” The young girl replied, “Even though I wish to ride, it is unbearable to be burned,” and vanished.

You see, the fox experienced great pain because it tried to deceive humans. This is undoubtedly an incident of our own time. It was a rather peculiar event, so I am passing it down.

Upon reflection, it has been commonplace for foxes to take on the form of humans since long ago. However, this was a masterfully-executed bewitchment, even taking him all the way to Toribeno. Be that as it may, I wonder why there were no carriages or altered roads the second time…Still, as many have long suspected, a fox’s actions appear to depend on a person’s frame of mind.

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