

# A Genealogy of Saikaku's *ukiyo-zōshi*

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## Introduction

In an article published in 2014 in *Bungaku* 文学,<sup>1</sup> Nakano Mitsutoshi 中野三敏 repeated his previous call for an extension of the term *gesaku* 戯作, or “comical writings”—used to describe most vernacular prose from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward—to those prose works of Ihara Saikaku 井原西鶴 (1642–1693) known collectively as *ukiyo-zōshi* 浮世草子, and even to the literary works of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century known as *kana-zōshi* 仮名草子. This article, presented the same year at the spring session of the *Saikaku kenkyū kai* 西鶴研究会 (Society for Saikaku Studies), was the starting point of a heated debate, something which is seldom seen lately in the field of Edo-period literary studies. Nakano Mitsutoshi's view was rejected by his colleagues in Saikaku studies, and the debate ended once again inconclusively.<sup>2</sup> Still, this episode is notable because it underlined the need to retell and reinvent the history of Edo-period prose literature, and to replace the existing narrative based on traditional categories such as *kana-zōshi*, *ukiyo-zōshi*, *yomibon* 読本, and *gesaku*. These are probably still indispensable, but are also too vague and lack precise definitions, being in addition too local, something that makes it difficult to relate Edo-period literature to the global movement of world literature in modern times.<sup>3</sup> Nakano Mitsutoshi is certainly right when he underlines the continuity between Saikaku—or even Saikaku's predecessors—and later prose writers (*gesakusha* 戯作者) such as Hiraga Gennai 平賀源内

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<sup>1</sup> “Saikaku gesakusha setsu saikō” 西鶴戯作者説再考, *Bungaku* 15:1 (2014), pp. 140–158. In this article, Nakano Mitsutoshi argues that Saikaku's *ukiyo-zōshi* should be included in the broad category of Edo-period comical prose *gesaku*, as defined by the following three characteristic features: (1) a positive affirmation of reality and the absence of any critical stance towards the existing order and authorities, (2) a style of literature giving more importance to expression than to content and characterized by its playfulness and parodic spirit, and (3) a body of content mainly consisting in a mixture of moralistic and comical discourse.

<sup>2</sup> Reactions to Nakano's article by Shinohara Susumu 篠原進, Udō Hiroshi 有働裕, Nakajima Takashi 中嶋隆, Horikiri Minoru 堀切実, Someya Tomoyuki 染谷智幸 and others can be read on the official site of *Saikaku kenkyū kai*. See: <https://bungaku-report.com/saikaku/>

<sup>3</sup> In particular, Nakajima Takashi pointed out the importance of bringing in the viewpoint of literary history. Someya Tomoyuki's objections stressed the necessity of a broader perspective extending to other Asian countries, and proposed to categorize *ukiyo-zōshi* as *shosetsu* 小説 (novels), a Chinese term familiar to all the national traditions influenced by China.

(1728–1780) and Kyokutei Bakin 曲亭馬琴 (1767–1848). He is also right when he criticizes the old tendency of presenting Saikaku as an exception in his time, of relating him to our modern age rather than to his own literary and historical context. Yet paradoxically, Nakano’s call for a historical approach to Saikaku also substantializes and de-historicizes the Edo period as a culture altogether different and separate from the general movement of world literature in modern times. Stressing continuity from the 17<sup>th</sup> through to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he tends to overlook or minimize the important historical, social, and cultural differences between the early, middle, and late Edo periods. Finally, his insistence on the importance of expression and on the lack of political consciousness among Edo-period townsmen has the result of emptying Saikaku’s literature of any serious content, putting the whole of Edo-period literature at risk of being reduced to a fancy or a hobby (*shumi* 趣味), unrelated to other fields in the human or social sciences. In other words, while he stresses the common comical inspiration of Edo prose from Saikaku to Bakin, Nakano Mitsutoshi does not propose a theory of laughter, limiting himself to the affirmation that Edo-period comical prose (*gesaku*) put parody and laughter in first place.

As was objected to Nakano Mitsutoshi by Nakajima Takashi, such an extension to Saikaku of the term *gesaku*, to be understood in a broad sense as encompassing all Edo-period literary production from *kana-zōshi* to late *yomibon* or *ninjōbon* 人情本, does not advance our understanding of the specific place occupied by Saikaku in Japanese literature at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It simply blurs differences without solving the question of how Saikaku’s works relate to the cultural and literary history of his time, or to the later developments of the movement he initiated. At the same time, it is clear that the need for a common designation for the popular prose of the Edo period is growing, as more and more works from the period are published and studied. And in point of fact, in the electronic version of *Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* 新編日本古典文学全集, Shōgakukan’s reference collection of classical Japanese literature, Saikaku’s *ukejyo-zōshi* are found classified under the category of *gesaku* already, pre-vindicating Nakano Mitsutoshi’s appeals despite the skepticism they have met within academic circles. Such a situation makes it all the more important to probe further the precise nature and genealogy of the *ukejyo-zōshi* genre.

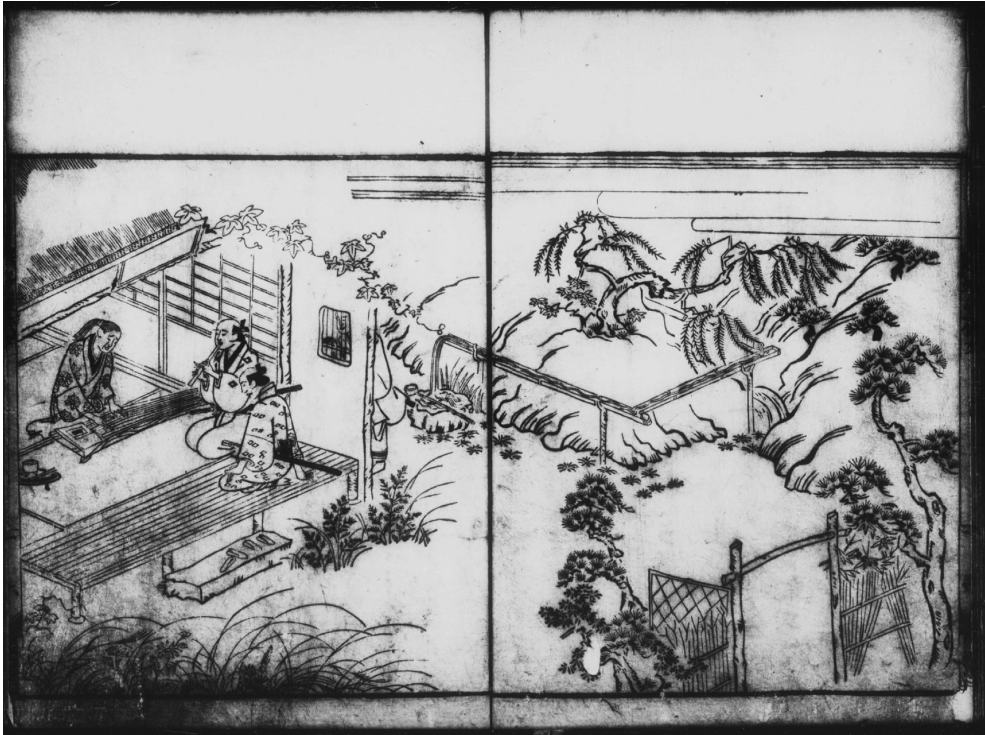
In the present study, I will limit myself to some aspects of the “genealogy” of Saikaku’s *ukejyo-zōshi* works, without entering any further into the broader problem of their historical situation. While Saikaku’s works may have been a new phenomenon on the scene of 17<sup>th</sup>-century Japanese literature, they did not spring out of nowhere, and the question of their origin cannot be avoided. Of course, there are many possible approaches to this problem, one of which might be to look into the relationship between Saikaku’s prose and his *haikai* poetry. But the focus here will be on a different aspect, starting with the hints Saikaku himself provides to the reader to help him understand the meaning of his writings.

### 1. *The Life of an Amorous Woman (Kōshoku ichidai onna 好色一代女)*

*The Life of an Amorous Woman*, one of the most celebrated of Saikaku's works, is known for being the confession (*zange monogatari* 懺悔物語) of her life story by an old woman now retired to a hermitage called Kōshokuan 好色庵 (Hermitage of Passion) near Kyoto, as related to two young men who have come to visit her and ask her about her past. At the beginning of the work's first chapter, a man on his way from Osaka to Kyoto overhears the two men's conversation and follows them on a mountain path until they arrive at the Kōshokuan. Textual allusions, and the scenery of the hermitage as represented in the illustration, create an atmosphere reminiscent of *Essays in Idleness (Tsurezuregusa 徒然草)* by Kenkō-hōshi 兼好法師, a text widely reprinted, annotated, and imitated from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and one therefore well-known to Saikaku's readers. No further mention is made of this character who has followed the young men to the Kōshokuan—and in whom we can recognize a representation of the author—but his importance is strongly underlined by his presence in the image illustrating this first chapter (**Figure 1**). In a setting reminiscent of Kenkō-hōshi's retreat as represented in illustrations of *Essays in Idleness*, a man is shown eavesdropping on the conversation between the old woman and her visitors.

This character evocative of the author is not only represented in the first chapter of Volume 1, both in the text itself and in the illustration: he in fact reappears at least two more times, at the beginning of the first and again the third chapters of Volume 3. This reappearance at key moments in *The Life of an Amorous Woman* of a representation of the author is hardly mentioned at all by any commentator of this work, yet it seems to bear heavily on the work's overall interpretation. For *The Life of an Amorous Woman* is not simplistically the monologue of a woman confessing the story of her life, but is rather the overlapping of at least two different voices: the voice of the author, and the voice of the old woman acting as proxy for the author while remembering her own life. The first chapter of Volume 3, entitled "A Townsman's Parlourmaid" (Chōnin koshimoto 町人腰元),<sup>4</sup> starts with a long introduction where a male character, apparently from Osaka, talks about the different experiences he had and the observations he made on a trip taken to Kyoto. He had encountered a funeral procession in the streets of Kyoto in the heat of summer and, as he followed it, overheard various conversations around him. Thus he learned that the man who was being buried was a merchant who had died prematurely for having married a woman of remarkable beauty. Then come some considerations on marriage. Among other things, the character affirms that one gets tired even of the most beautiful things, recounting a visit he once made to the bay of Matsushima, a place famous for its beautiful scenery, and how he got tired of it very quickly for all its splendor. He then complains that

<sup>4</sup> Here and below, English chapter titles reflect the translation of Ivan Morris, *The Life of an Amorous Woman and Other Writings* (New York: New Directions, 1963).



**Figure 1.** Illustration from *The Life of an Amorous Woman* (I.1). (Tokyo Metropolitan Library, Kaga Collection).

<https://doi.org/10.20730/100029312> (image no. 8)

women neglect themselves after they have gotten used to married life, so that one should rather not get married if a wife is not necessary to take care of the household. Then he again contradicts himself, and quotes a peasant he once met on another excursion in the Yoshino mountains. This old peasant had told him that the only solace capable of relieving his loneliness was the company of his wife. The final conclusion of this long essay-like development is: “Nothing is more difficult to get rid of or to control than this way of love!”<sup>5</sup>, which echoes a famous remark from *Essays in Idleness*: “The



**Figure 1a.** Ibid. Detail.

<sup>5</sup> 捨てがたく、やめがたきは、この道ぞかし。Ihara Saikaku *shū* 井原西鶴集 1, *Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* 新編日本古典文学全集 66 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1996), p. 461.

love of men and women is truly a deep-seated passion with distant roots. The senses give rise to many desires, but it should be possible to shun them all. Only one, infatuation, is impossible to control.”<sup>6</sup> This particular literary allusion to *Essays in Idleness* is in fact a central motif of *The Life of an Amorous Woman*, especially of the central chapters where the heroine experiences different positions as a household servant and where these words recur as a leitmotiv in almost every chapter. What is important to underline here is that this entire introduction to the first chapter of Volume 3 can be read as a fragment from an essay (*zuihitsu* 随筆), or as a pastiche by Saikaku of the *zuihitsu* style in the form of a series of free-ranging considerations on different matters, thematically related to subjects which are taken up in *Essays in Idleness* such as marriage, love, and funerals. A characteristic example is the affirmation that “one should never marry,” another quasi-quotation from *Essays in Idleness*.<sup>7</sup> If we admit that the heroine of *The Life of an Amorous Woman* acts as a proxy for the author, the whole work may be read as a modern version of *Essays in Idleness*, or as a “Vulgar *Essays in Idleness*,” to use the title actually given to one posthumous collection of Saikaku’s stories (the work known as *Saikaku zoku Tsurezure* 西鶴俗つれづれ). Indeed, *The Life of an Amorous Woman* can be seen as a series of considerations and observations on the ways of the modern cities, from the point of view of love and pleasure. Yet we know that in 1686 Saikaku was already working on merchant tales and exploring new approaches, whose influence can indeed already be traced in earlier works like *The Life of an Amorous Woman*. That such a reading of Saikaku as a sort of contemporary Kenkō-hōshi was familiar to the readers of his time is demonstrated by the way Saikaku’s portrait is placed by an editor at the beginning of the posthumous *Saikaku zoku Tsurezure* (Figure 2), a portrait that represents Saikaku as a modern Kenkō-hōshi contemplating from his hermitage the bay of Naniwa.

I see further confirmation of this reading in two other key passages of *The Life of an Amorous Woman*. The first of these is the passage in praise of letters and of letter-writing in the fifth chapter of Volume 2, entitled “A Woman Letter-writer Expert in Love Matters” (Shorei onna yūhitsu 諸礼女祐筆), which immediately precedes the first chapter of Volume 3 discussed above. This passage is famous because it was singled out by Kōda Rohan 幸田露伴 (1867–1947) as the only example of *bunshōron* 文章論 (discussion on the art of writing) by Saikaku.<sup>8</sup> In this chapter, the heroine gets serious, and tries her luck in the trade of being a public letter-writer and teacher of calligraphy, but soon ends up writing infallible love-letters for her clients until, at last, she becomes the victim of her own stylistic

<sup>6</sup> ただ、かのまどひのひとつやめがたきのみぞ。 *Tsurezuregusa* 徒然草, in *Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* 44 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1995), p. 88. *Essays in Idleness*, trans. Donald Keene (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1981), p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> 持つまじきは女なれども (後略)。 *Ibara Saikaku shū* 1 (op. cit.), p. 461; see *Essays in Idleness* (op. cit.), p. 163.

<sup>8</sup> “Saikaku” 西鶴, *Kokumin no tomo* 国民之友 (May 1890), p. 757.



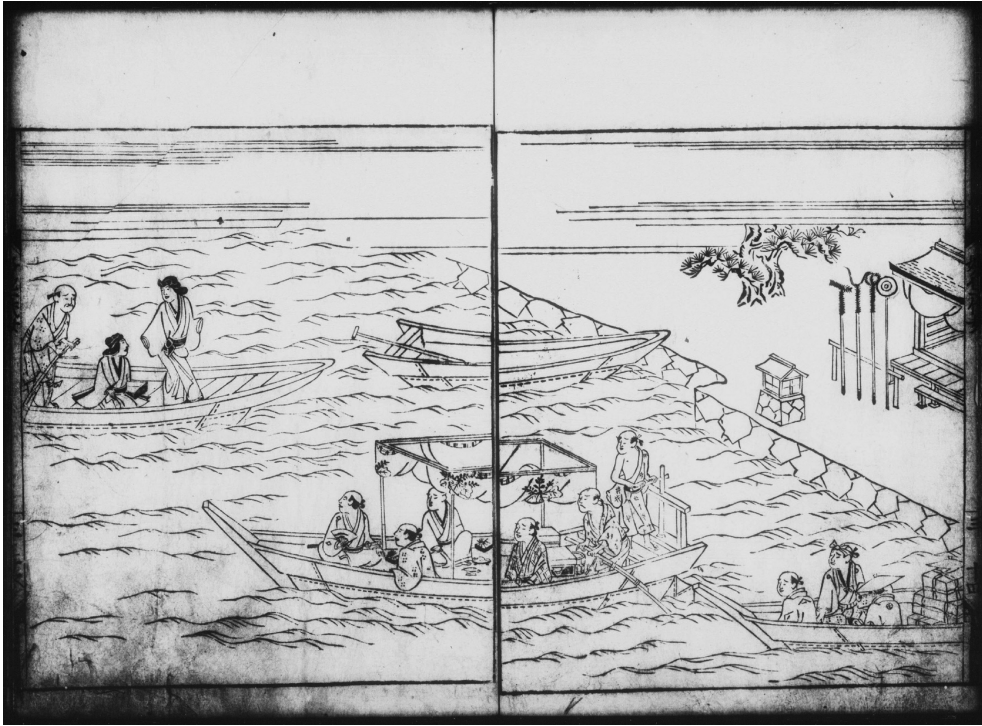
**Figure 2.** Opening illustration for *Saikaku's Vulgar Essays in Idleness* (*Saikaku zoku Tsurezure*). (Main Library, Kyoto University).

<https://rmda.kulib.kyoto-u.ac.jp/item/rb00013212> (image no. 3)

traps, when she falls in love with one of those clients who had asked her to write letters for him. “There is no better way to learn people’s feelings than letters,”<sup>9</sup> observes the narrator, and the voice we hear in this passage is indeed the voice of the author rather than that of the Amorous Woman herself.

The second passage does not seem to have attracted much attention so far. It is another long introduction, that of the third chapter of Volume 3, entitled “Singer Boats to Make Merry” (*Tawabure no utabune* 調謔歌船). The location is Osaka. A group of townsmen set up a place in a boat for a night party, but the boat gets stuck in the mud obstructing the channel, and the company is forced to wait for the rising tide in order to continue its journey and have dinner. No indication is given about the character who tells the story, but again we can recognize in him the figure of the author, who has already appeared in the initial chapters of Volumes 1 and 3 and now appears here also, sitting in the boat shown in the illustration (**Figure 3**). On this occasion he seems to be playing the

<sup>9</sup> みみ なぎけ たより  
文程、情しる便ほかにあらし。Ihara Saikaku *shū* 1 (op. cit.), p. 449.



**Figure 3.** Illustration from *The Life of an Amorous Woman* (III.3). (Tokyo Metropolitan Library, Kaga Collection).

<https://doi.org/10.20730/100029312> (image no. 68)

role of an entertainer for the rest of the company. To relieve the tedium of the waiting, he observes with some curiosity the flat boats called *akuta sutebune* 芥捨舟 (“garbage-disposal boats”) devised to take out the city waste at night. Then he picks up a letter from one of these boats and reads it aloud. It happens to be a business-style letter from a man in Kyoto trapped in a love affair and begging money from a friend in Osaka. The men assembled in the boat burst into laughter, but a city employee (*chōdai* 町代) well acquainted with their situations dampens their spirits, murmuring that all of them have similar financial troubles, and yet are still incapable of renouncing the pursuit of pleasure. Ashamed, the men promise to themselves to renounce the Way of Love. But the passage concludes skeptically with the same saying from *Essays in Idleness*: “Still it is impossible to control this way of love!”<sup>10</sup>

Read together, all these different passages can be seen as delivering a consistent message, and functioning also as clues for the reading of *The Life of an Amorous*

<sup>10</sup> なほやめがたきこの道ぞかし。Ibid., p. 475.

*Woman*, playing thus a structural and global role in the organization of the novel, on top of their more local role as introductions to separate chapters. The motif of the letter found in a heap of rubbish is a humorous variation on the canonical association, one frequently alluded to already by Saikaku in his *haikai* 俳諧, between the words *fumi* 文 and *chiri* 塵—an association that originates in Chapter 72 of *Essays in Idleness*:

Things which are not offensive, no matter how numerous: books in a book cart, rubbish in a rubbish heap.<sup>11</sup>

“Books” (*fumi*, which also means “letters”) and “dust” or “rubbish” (*chiri*, which in *waka* poetry has also the Buddhist meaning of “things of this impure world,” doubling as synonym for the *ukiyo* or “floating and sad world”) are thus set in relation.<sup>12</sup> The third chapter of Volume 3 starts with a sentence humorously rejecting this affirmation of Chapter 72: “It has been written ‘it is not offensive no matter how numerous,’ but nothing is more annoying than the waste that piles up in people’s houses.”<sup>13</sup> Saikaku’s genius is to have related the motif of old letters with the modern problem of city waste, in which he sees an image of the hidden life of townsmen. The thrown-away letter can be seen as an allegorical representation of Saikaku’s novel. Thrown away as a worthless piece of waste, it reveals its value and interest when collected and read by an observer of the ways of society, such as Saikaku, who in turn conveys it to his readers. We know that during approximately this same period, Saikaku was working on a collection of short stories in epistolary form called *Ten Thousand Thrown-away Letters by Saikaku* (*Saikaku yorozu no fumihōgu* 西鶴万の文反古), which he never completed, but which originates from this same conception, a fact he states clearly in his preface to the same unfinished collection.

Read together, these various passages from *The Life of an Amorous Woman* provide us valuable hints not only for the reading of this work, but also for the understanding of Saikaku’s larger literary project. They stress the key role played by the usually invisible author in mediating between the social and human reality on the one hand and the reader on the other. This aspect of Saikaku’s work has not been sufficiently taken into account in the past. The scholar who came closest to it was Taniwaki Masachika 谷脇理史, in an article where he connects Saikaku’s conception of literature not to *Essays in Idleness*, but rather to the *Tale of Genji* and

<sup>11</sup> *Essays in Idleness* (op. cit.), p. 64.

<sup>12</sup> These motifs resonate also with the following passage in *Essays in Idleness*, Chapter 19: “Mine is a foolish diversion, but these pages are meant to be torn up, and no one is likely to see them” (op. cit.), p. 20. In Saikaku’s times, this passage was often known in a slightly different version, reading: “these pages are meant to be thrown out.” This latter text is quoted in the postscript to *The Life of an Amorous Man*. See *Ihara Saikaku shū* 1 (op. cit.), p. 250.

<sup>13</sup> 多くても見ぐるしからぬとは書きつれども、人の住家に塵、五木の溜る程、世にうるさき物なし。 *Ihara Saikaku shū* 1 (op. cit.), p. 473.



its famous discussion on novels known as *monogatari-ron* 物語論.<sup>14</sup> In this article, Taniwaki attempts to relate Saikaku's view of *ukeiyo-zōshi* to the views expressed by Hikaru Genji in his discussion of novels, but he does so by connecting Saikaku to the *Tale of Genji* itself, ignoring the rich history of the reception in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Japan of *Essays in Idleness*, as well as the history of the essay genre (*zuibitsu*) that this persistent interest in *Essays in Idleness* helped to create.

## 2. *The Life of Wankyū (Wankyū isse no monogatari 椀久一世の物語)*

Thus a complete genealogy of Saikaku's *ukeiyo-zōshi* should take into account many different elements, but in this study I would like to place the emphasis on his work's links to the reception of *Essays in Idleness* during the 17<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>15</sup> emphasizing also its links to the development of a style of writing known as *zuibitsu* or *zuisō* 随想, a style influenced by Kenkō-hōshi's own work as well as its associated commentaries, and one which benefited greatly from the development of printing. We also know that written commentaries were not the only way in which *Essays in Idleness* was diffused, and that it was also spread by means of public lectures, something which certainly helped it gain much popularity. In discussing the influence that *Essays in Idleness* exerted on Saikaku, we do not intend so much to discuss Saikaku's personal knowledge of or appreciation of the text, but rather the overall cultural phenomenon that Kenkō's text represented. This includes such seminal works as *Nozuchi* 野槌, a commentary on *Essays in Idleness* by the Confucian scholar Hayashi Razan 林羅山 (1583–1657), and *Tsurezuregusa mondanshō* 徒然草文段抄, a compendium of various commentaries old and new by the *haikai* master Kitamura Kigin 北村季吟 (1624–1705), as well as *Kashōkei* 可笑記, a collection of moral considerations inspired by *Essays in Idleness*. This last work was a bestseller of the time, one which was frequently reprinted and widely used as a textbook, and which Saikaku himself referred to when he published his own *Shin Kashōkei* 新可笑記. This link connecting Saikaku's *ukeiyo-zōshi* with the non-narrative genre of *zuibitsu* or *zuisō*—as illustrated by the *zuisō*-like passage at the beginning of *The Life of an Amorous Woman*, or again in the first chapter of Volume 3—is key to any understanding of Saikaku's œuvre and its place in the movement of Edo-period vernacular prose. *The Life of an Amorous Woman* is a landmark work particularly rich in hints about Saikaku's literary ideas, similar in importance to

<sup>14</sup> Taniwaki Masachika, “Genji monogatari no juyō to Saikaku: bungei ishiki no kitei wo nasu mono” 「源氏物語」の受容と西鶴：文芸意識の基底をなすもの, *Kokubungaku kenkyū* 国文学研究 103 (1991), reprinted in *Saikaku kenkyū to hibyō* 西鶴研究と批評 (Tokyo: Wakakusa Shobō, 1996). I translated this important article in French under the title “La réception du *Roman du Genji* et Saikaku : les fondements de la conscience littéraire de Saikaku” in *Autour de Saikaku : le roman en Chine et au Japon aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles, Études japonaises* 1 (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2004), pp. 53–68.

<sup>15</sup> For further detail on this subject, see Kawahira Toshifumi 川平敏文, *Tsurezuregusa no 17-seiki: kinsei bungei shichō no keisei* 徒然草の十七世紀：近世文芸思潮の形成 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2015).

*The Life of an Amorous Man*, of which it is a feminine replica as the similarity of the titles suggests. At the same time, *The Life of an Amorous Woman*, though categorized as a collection of amorous tales (*kōshoku-mono* 好色物), is closely related to Saikaku's later collections of merchant tales (*chōnin-mono* 町人物). Indeed, most of the tales in the former are in fact situated in the merchant quarters with the merchant life as their background, as are also the essay-like passages mentioned and quoted above. This is an affinity that can be found already in earlier works such as *The Life of Wankyū* (*Wankyū isse no monogatari*), the story of a wealthy merchant from Osaka known as Wankyū who exhausts his family fortune in the pursuit of pleasure. The opening lines of this short novel, comprised of two volumes and nine chapters, showcase a popular ritual at the shrine of Minoo 箕面 Benzaiten 弁財天 to the north of Osaka, where many townspeople come to pray for wealth. Among them is Wankyū, carried by four men in a palanquin and extravagantly dressed in a garment decorated with scenes from the *Tale of Genji*.

毎年正月七日に、津国箕面山の弁財天の富突とて、諸人福德を願ひまいる事あり。是を思ふに、皆欲に目の見えぬよるの道、浮世しやうちの悪所駕籠、四人そろへのひとへ物に染込の扇の丸、肩で風きらして行く人を見れば、大坂堺筋に名を聞きし椀久といへる男、しまぢりめんの浅黄に、白襦子の長羽織に、京の幽禅が墨絵の源氏、人の目だつ程なれども、其頃いまだ世に衣裳法度もなき時ぞかし。

Every year on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the First Month, Benzaiten's lottery is organized at Mount Minoo in the Province of Tsu and many people come to beg the divinity to make them wealthy. When you think about it, everybody's eyes are obscured by greed; in the middle of the night here he goes on the Street of the Floating World, sitting in a palanquin used to go to the pleasure quarters, carried by four men dressed in the same unlined suits with an encircled-fan motif. They cut their way through the wind with their shoulders, and when you see them you know that they carry the famous Wankyū from Sakai Avenue in Osaka. Over a pale-green striped robe, and a long white-twill *baori* coat, there is a decoration of scenes from the *Tale of Genji* painted with ink by Yūzen in Kyoto—a very conspicuous sight indeed, but at that time edicts against luxurious dress had not yet been issued!<sup>16</sup>

*The Life of Wankyū* starts abruptly *in medias res*: Wankyū appears on the move from the very first lines and will not stop moving until he exhausts all his fortune and drowns in a canal in Osaka. In this sense, *The Life of Wankyū* is centered on the story of its main character. Nevertheless, it also presents elements of reflection that link it to *zuisō* literature. The underlined phrases *kore wo omou ni* 是を思ふに (“[w]hen you think about it”), *bito wo mireba* 人を見れば (“when you see them”), and *zo kashī* (“indeed”) exemplify this commentary-like style—one reminiscent of the style of *Essays in Idleness*—which here introduces into the background a narrator figure similar to the one who appears in the opening

<sup>16</sup> *Taiyaku Saikaku zenshū* 対訳西鶴全集 4 (Tokyo: Meiji Shoin, 1978), p. 5.



**Figure 4.** Illustration from *The Life of Wankyū* (I.1). From the image collection in *Saikaku ukiyo-zōshi zen sashi-e gazō* 西鶴浮世草子全挿絵画像 CD, as included in *Saikaku to ukiyo-zōshi kenkyū* 西鶴と浮世草子研究 1 (Tokyo: Kasama Shoin, 2006).

chapter, or in Volume 3, of *The Life of an Amorous Woman*. This narrator is observing and commenting on the scene at some distance from the crowd “[whose] eyes are obscured by greed,” as well as from Wankyū, who has also come to beg for money, and whose mind is not set on getting wealthy but rather on spending and exhausting his parents’ fortune. His eyes too are obscured, though not by greed, but by his obsession with the world of pleasure. By contrast with the world of avarice represented by the townspeople, Wankyū stands for the extravagancy of the pleasure quarters which leads to ruin. The narrator stops short of criticizing this behavior and limits himself to describing the provocative luxury of Wankyū’s attire or hinting at the condemnation of extravagant spending by the shogunal authorities. The figure of the narrator is also made manifest by the poetic play on words found in *mina yoku ni me no mienu yoru no michi* 皆欲に目の見えぬよるの道, where the phrase *me no mienu* (the eyes are obscured, i.e. one cannot see), marked above by the wavy underline, is to be read not only with the words *mina yoku ni* that precede it—“everybody’s eyes are obscured by greed”—but also with the words *yoru no michi* that follow, i.e., eyes cannot see because of the darkness of the road at night. Such rhetorical figures, familiar in classical poetry as well as in *nō* 能 or *jōruri* 浄瑠璃 lyrical theater, occur from time to time in Saikaku’s prose. Their function is to add a pathetic tonality to some passages, but they serve also

to remind the reader that the narrator is a poet, engaged in the pursuit of wit and elegance, and familiar with the poetic tradition.

The goddess Benzaiten appears to Wankyū in his dream, surrounded by acolytes, and gives him the key from the family storehouse so he can spend the money therein for his pleasures (**Figure 4**). She warns him to act carefully and to restrict himself to the most affordable pleasures, but she is rebuked by an indignant Wankyū who rejects any such idea of compromise. This dispute between himself and Benzaiten, the goddess of Prosperity, occupies most of the chapter and sets the theme of the whole novel. Returning home, Wankyū finds a key hanging from the branch of a tree in front of his family house and so begins upon a life of dissipation which will end with his ruin.

*The Life of Wankyū* is of course a piece of fiction, and not an essay, but the narrative itself is about the conflict between two sets of values. This polyphonic nature of Saikaku's fiction relates it to the ongoing discussions found in the essay-like productions inspired by *Essays in Idleness*. Several essay-like passages can be found in *The Life of Wankyū*, such as in Chapter 2 of Volume 1, where Wankyū witnesses a conjugal quarrel at his friend's home, or as in Chapter 1 of Volume 2, with the episode of Wankyū's bankruptcy, where we can find a long essay-like development on domestic economy, starting with these words: "When one thinks about it, people's financial situations are always a matter of make-believe."<sup>17</sup> In many ways, the world of merchant stories collections (*chōnin-mono*) is already present in *The Life of Wankyū*.

### 3. *Some Final Words of Advice* (*Saikaku oridome* 西鶴織留)

Another important source for studying the link that exists between Saikaku's *ukiyo-zōshi* and the genre of the essay are the posthumous works published after Saikaku's death, such as the collection of epistolary short stories I have already mentioned, as well as, among others, the work *Some Final Words of Advice* (*Saikaku oridome*), translated into English by Peter Nosco in 1980.<sup>18</sup> We do not know when Saikaku wrote these texts, nor the reasons for their remaining unfinished. But we can presume that some of these texts might have been written during the period of Saikaku's elaboration of those merchant tales which did see publication in two collections of short stories—*The Japanese Family Storehouse* (*Nippon eitaigura* 日本永代蔵, 1688) and *This Scheming World* (*Seken munesan'yō* 世間胸算用, 1695)<sup>19</sup>—only to ultimately be discarded and left unpublished for some reason. As such, they provide precious insights into Saikaku's working method as a prose writer. *Some Final Words of Advice* is made up of several unfinished projects, and

<sup>17</sup> これを思ふに、人みな内証は張物ぞかし。Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>18</sup> *Some Final Words of Advice*, trans. Peter Nosco (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1980).

<sup>19</sup> *The Japanese Family Storehouse*, trans. G. W. Sargent (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959); *This Scheming World*, trans. David C. Stubbs and Masanori Takatsuka (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1965).

is particularly interesting from this point of view, since it is closely related to the world of *Essays in Idleness* and contains many essay-like chapters or passages. Here I will comment on three examples from this work to illustrate the link between Saikaku's *ukiyo-zōshi* and essay literature.

The first example is from the second chapter of Volume 1, called “Secrets on Turning Mushrooms into Money” (Shinadama toru tane no matsudake 品玉とる種の松茸). It is a long chapter, in which short episodes from merchant life are intertwined with essay-like considerations on the difficulty of succeeding in your business if you have no money to begin with. This truth is illustrated by an evocation of the rapid change of seasons that leaves no time to breathe for the merchant who is always pressed by his debts:

ない物は銀にて、さる程にせはしの世や。節季節季は六十日の立事夢のごとし。正月の掛鯛の山草すこしかるゝとおもへば、はや蓬売声、軒の花菖蒲、今も所々に見ながら、灯笼出す暮に胸も躍て、蓮の葉の食ぬくもりもさめぬに、又菊の酒屋の書出し見れば、おもひもよらぬ酔の出るもおかし。(中略) 九月を過て大暮までは百日にあまれば、すこし爰にて息をすとおもへば、常の物前と違ふて、大分の払ひかた、心当ほど商ひしてから、たらぬ所見えて

...we would still lack the money. It certainly is a hectic world in which we live. The sixty days that lie between each of the five major festivals pass by as quickly as a dream. No sooner have the sprays of mountain shrubs with which we decorated our sea-bream offerings of the New Year begun to wither than we begin to hear the voice of the sagebrush hawker peddling his wares in preparation for the Festival of the Third Month. Even now we can still see stuck here and there among the eaves of the houses those irises left over from the Festival of the Fifth Month, and it is already time to hang out the lanterns of the Festival of All Souls. All this excitement is enough to make our hearts leap, and if we pause to remember that it is on the eve of each of the holidays that our bills fall due for payment, it really is enough to make our hearts skip a beat. It is funny the way our heads spin so unexpectedly upon seeing the bill from the liquor store for holiday chrysanthemum *sake* after the Festival of the Ninth Month when our rice balls wrapped in lotus for the Festival of All Souls have not even had a chance to grow old. (...) Just when you stop and think you can allow yourself a bit of a breather from paying all those holiday bills in the hundred or so days between the Festival of the Ninth Month and New Year's Day, you realize that what makes the New Year celebration different from other holidays is that you have to settle every last one of your outstanding debts.<sup>20</sup>

It is not difficult to see that the whole passage is a parody of the famous Chapter 19 of *Essays in Idleness*, beginning with the words “The changing of the seasons is deeply moving in its every manifestation,” and describing month after month, from spring through to winter, the changing of the seasons from the viewpoint

<sup>20</sup> *Taiyaku Saikaku zenshū* 14 (Tokyo: Meiji Shoin, 1976), p. 20; *Some Final Words of Advice* (op. cit.), pp. 47–48.

of poetical emotion.<sup>21</sup> This elegant world of poetic emotion is humorously transposed by Saikaku into the cramped (*sewashi*) universe of the merchant city, with its very different kinds of emotions, among which the most notable is fear of the debt collectors. The superimposition of these two worlds, the poetic and the prosaic, is obviously a device that belongs to the technique of *haikai*, but here we see it imported into prose, creating a kind of “*zoku Tsurezure*” (*Vulgar Essays in Idleness*). Such a technique is also illustrated in the phrase underlined above by the use of the adjective *okashi*, a word characteristic of Classical Japanese prose—found thrice in Chapter 19 of *Essays in Idleness* and very frequently used in the *Pillow Book* (*Makura no sōshi* 枕草子) of Sei Shōnagon 清少納言—where it means “charming” or “interesting.” It is used here in its modern sense of “funny” and is humorously applied to the dizziness one feels when looking at the liquor-store bill. *Some Final Words of Advice* thus clearly points to *Essays in Idleness* as its model, or rather, as Gérard Genette would put it, as its “hypertext.”

The second example is to be found at the beginning of the third chapter of Volume 2, entitled “A Modern-day Kusunoki Masashige [楠木正成]” (Ima ga yo no Kusunoki bungen いまが世のくすの木分限).

吉田の兼好がひがし隣に、同じ北面の侍ひ、榎木原信道といへる人、屋形ならべて住ける。いかに禁裏の役人なればとて、五十余歳まで銭に文字ある裏表をも見しらず、然れば短尺の上下をも覚えず、公家にも俗にもならず男、明暮碁に打入て、三百六十日の立事をわすれ、大年の晦日には借錢に乞たてられ、其時代も覚悟わるき人の迷惑、今の世に替る事なし。留守つかふて戸をたゝかれたるあり様、松など灯連て、夜の明るまで、「酒屋で御座る」といふ声、せはしき人の心を書残せり。

Next door to the great writer Yoshida Kenkō there lived a man named Enokibara Nobumichi who served with Lord Yoshida in the palace guard of the Emperor Go-uda. Perhaps it was due to his service in the Imperial Palace, but even into his fifties the gentleman remained ignorant of the fact that copper coins had writings on both sides. Nor did he have any idea of how to hold a poem card right side up. This man, who could not properly be called either courtier or commoner, spent his days and nights playing *go* so intently that he lost all sense of time until the eve of the New Year, when he would find irate bill collectors at his door. People who lack proper foresight encountered the same troubles in that long-ago age that they do now. Lord Yoshida has left a splendid account of the agitated state of the man who pretends not to be at home when the bill collector, brandishing a pine torch through the long night, raps at the door and announces: “It’s the liquor store, sir.”<sup>22</sup>

Here again Saikaku is humorously alluding to Chapter 19 of *Essays in Idleness*, particularly to its evocation of the winter season and the New Year rituals at the Imperial capital:

<sup>21</sup> See *Essays in Idleness* (op. cit.), p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> *Taiyaku Saikaku zenshū* 14 (op. cit.), pp. 68–69; *Some Final Words of Advice* (op. cit.), pp. 99–100.

つごもりの夜、いたう暗きに、松どもともして、夜半過ぐるまで人の門たつき、走りありきて、何事にかあらん、ことごとしくののしりて、足を空に惑ふが、暁がたより、さすがに音なくなりぬるこそ、年の名残も心ほそけれ。<sup>23</sup>

On the last night of the year, when it is extremely dark, people light pine torches and go rushing about, pounding on the gates of strangers until well after midnight. I wonder what it signifies. After they have done with their exaggerated shouting and running so furiously that their feet hardly touch the ground, the noise at last fades away with the coming of the dawn, leaving a lonely feeling of regret over the departing old year.<sup>24</sup>

This fanciful evocation of Kenkō-hōshi and his fictitious neighbor is, of course, meant to be read as parody. Yet parody is not only a matter of form, as Nakano Mitsutoshi seems to imply, but also of content. As in the previous example, the parodic style here highlights the presence of the author, and his role as a modern-day Kenkō-hōshi. The description of Kenkō as “ha[ving] left a splendid account of the agitated state of the man” (*sewashiki hito no kokoro wo kakinokoseri*) can be applied to Saikaku himself. *Sewashi*, translated above as “hectic,” does not literally mean “agitated,” but rather something more like “cornered” or “hard-pressed.” It is a key notion in Saikaku’s representation of the life of the contemporary city as seen in, e.g., *This Scheming World*, and a notion which itself also originates in *Essays in Idleness*.

I will briefly introduce a third passage, from the fourth chapter of Volume 3, entitled “The Traveling Salesman who Sold Advice” (Nani ni te mo chie no furi-uri 何にても智恵の振売), another fanciful story with references not only to *Essays in Idleness* but also to the *Zhuangzi* 莊子. The chapter begins with a long and burlesque enumeration of all the possible means to earn one’s living in a large city, and then introduces the main character, a man who makes his living by selling advice for any kind of problem “no matter what it may be.” His skills are then requested on the following occasion:

すぎにし秋の比、三軒屋川口へ砂魚釣舟に出し人、酒に乱れて後、釣たるはぜを丸焼にして、数喰事を手がらに、おのおのあばれける中にも、殊更一疋一口にせし人、俄に咽をくるしめける。

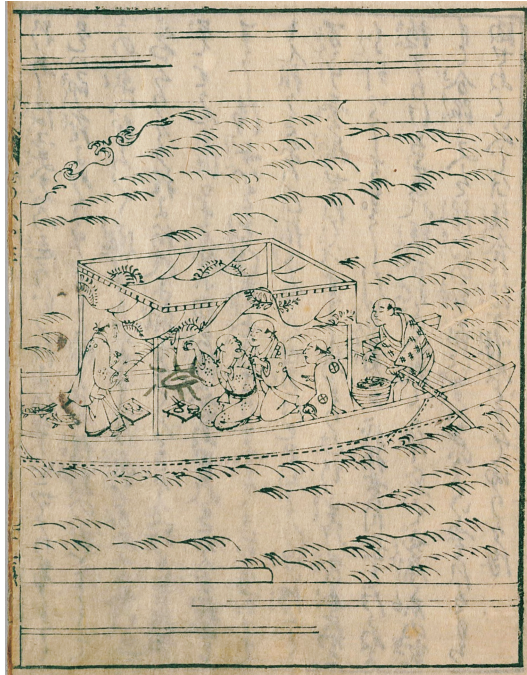
In the autumn of last year some men hired a boat by the mouth of the Sangen’ya river to take them to goby fishing. After getting rowdy with all the *sake*, they barbecued the gobies they had caught and had a contest to see who could eat the most of them. In the middle of their gluttonous game, one of them took a fish and tried to swallow it whole, but immediately his throat began to hurt . . .<sup>25</sup>

The man’s friends try to draw out the fishing hook stuck in his throat, but to no avail (**Figure 5**). The scene is explicitly compared to the similar famous scene

<sup>23</sup> *Tsurezuregusa* (op. cit.), pp. 97–98.

<sup>24</sup> *Essays in Idleness* (op. cit.), p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> *Taiyaku Saikaku zenshū* 14 (op. cit.), p. 109; *Some Final Words of Advice* (op. cit.), pp. 144–146.



**Figure 5.** Illustration from *Some Final Words of Advice* (III.4). (National Diet Library).  
<https://doi.org/10.11501/2554437> (image no. 18)

in Chapter 53 of *Essays in Idleness*, in which a priest of Ninna-ji 仁和寺 temple gets his head stuck in a pot that he had put on his head while dancing. As Saikaku continues:

さまざましてもぬける事なく、此難義すべきやうなく、船中、鞆・三味線も鳴をやめて、つれづれに書残せし法師のあしかなへのごとく迷惑して

No matter what they did, the hook would not budge, and there seemed no way to help their friend out of this misery. With the boat's drum and *shamisen* silenced, they felt as helpless as the priest whose head got stuck in the pot in Yoshida Kenkō's *Tsurezuregusa*.<sup>26</sup>

The man who sells advice is finally consulted, and he easily finds a way to remove the hook. But when someone else from among the company, a merchant who is some twenty *kanme* of silver short at the end of the year, asks him to advise him on how to straighten out his business, he is unable to propose any solution:

「女房衆の親もと分限か。又は銀持の出家に弟はないか」といふ。「それはもちませぬ」といへば、「此談合は埒が明ぬ」と申て、帰りける。

<sup>26</sup> *Taiyaku Saikaku zenshū* 14 (op. cit.), p. 110; *Some Final Words of Advice* (op. cit.), p. 146.



“Does your wife come from a rich family,” asked the miracle worker, “or do you have any younger brothers who happen to be wealthy priests?”

“I’m afraid the answer’s no on both accounts,” replied the man.

“Then I’m afraid I can’t help you.” And with these words he picked himself up and went home.<sup>27</sup>

This chapter is notable for its essay-like character, common to many of the chapters found in *Some Final Words of Advice*. It explicitly transposes a situation from *Essays in Idleness* to modern-day Osaka. As in the third chapter of Volume 3 of *The Life of an Amorous Woman*, the setting is a boat party, where townsmen indulge in pleasures unaware of the uncertainty of their condition. The “salesman who sold advice” has solutions for all kinds of problems, but he proves unable to help a merchant whose business has gone wrong. We can read in this story a humorous warning addressed by Saikaku to his readers. The “salesman who sold advice” would then appear as another figure of the author, as an example of self-derisive reflection on the meaning of *ukiyo-zōshi*.

## Conclusion

Extending the term *gesaku* to 17<sup>th</sup>-century literature, to *kana-zōshi* and to *ukiyo-zōshi* in accordance with Nakano Mitsutoshi’s suggestion, cannot be a solution because all of these terms, convenient as they may be, are too vague, allowing neither a precise categorization of the Edo period’s vast literary production, nor a clear view of the various continuities and discontinuities in the long history of the evolution of Edo-period prose. The link between Saikaku’s *ukiyo-zōshi* and the reception of *Essays in Idleness* during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the role that the genre of the essay (*zuihitsu* or *zuisō*) itself played in the development of *ukiyo-zōshi*, both offer important clues for understanding the nature of Saikaku’s comical prose and the nature also of the influence it exerted over the narrative prose of the later Edo period. To stress the continuity that exists between Saikaku’s fiction and *Essays in Idleness*—as well as its continuity with numerous other works that the *Essays* inspired—does not belittle in the least Saikaku’s originality, or his importance as a prose writer. Saikaku attained originality by combining in completely new ways, and with a new perspective, different elements which he found in the literary production of his time. Most importantly, he himself provided clues to help his readers understand the purpose of his writings. *Essays in Idleness* was the single most influential and most annotated classical work in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Japan, and it is not surprising that Saikaku would choose it as a model for creating a new kind of prose literature himself.

<sup>27</sup> *Taiyaku Saikaku zenshū* 14 (op. cit.), p. 111; *Some Final Words of Advice* (op. cit.), p. 147.