



Red Snow

Susumu Katsumata , Taro Nettleton (Translator)

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AN AWARD-WINNING BOOK FROM A LEGENDARY MANGA-KA

Continuing D+Q's groundbreaking exploration of the fascinating world of *Gekiga*, this collection of short stories is drawn with great delicacy and told with subtle nuance by the legendary Japanese artist Susumu Katsumata. The setting is the premodern Japanese countryside of the author's youth, a slightly magical world where ancestral traditions hold sway over a people in the full vigor of life, struggling to survive the harsh seasons and the difficult life of manual laborers and farmers. While the world they inhabit has faded into memory and myth, the universal fundamental emotions of the human heart prevail at the center of these tender stories.

Katsumata began publishing comic strips in the legendary avantgarde magazine *Garo* (which also published his contemporaries Yoshihiro Tatsumi and Yoshiharu Tsuge) in 1965 while enrolled in the Faculty of Science in Tokyo. He abandoned his studies in 1971 to become a professional comics artist, alternating the short humorous strips upon which he built his reputation with stories of a more personal nature in which he tenderly depicted the lives of peasants and farmers from his native region. In 2006, Katsumata won the 35th Japanese Cartoonists Association Award Grand Prize for *Red Snow*.

Red Snow Details

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From Reader Review Red Snow for online ebook

Michael says

D&Q's latest peek into the work of "gekiga," popularized by Yoshihiro Tatsumi, is a collection of short stories by Susumu Katsumata. Like Tatsumi, the tone is dark and the depiction of humanity a little bleak. Unlike Tatsumi, the stories often feel incomplete or unfocused. Some are good, some are vague. The last couple are probably the most satisfying.

Jacobmartin says

I picked up Red Snow trying to experience more of that gekiga (manga produced to rebel against the manga? style of Osamu Tezuka which was stereotyped as too Disney-like and stuck with children's manga instead of tackling more adult themes) which I've heard so much about in Tatsumi's *A Drifting Life*. *A Drifting Life* is very different to Red Snow, but Red Snow feels a lot more raw and supernatural. *A Drifting Life* is a good introduction to the history of gekiga and the history of manga in general, but Red Snow is a lot braver in how it depicts the inherent violence (physical or psychological) that went down in Japanese country towns. The book is comprised of short stories in country areas of Japan that haven't been fully modernised yet – harking back to the country childhood of the mangaka's youth. What you see here is gekiga in its rawest form, simplicity but beauty of illustration, which conveys human emotion and actions very, VERY well indeed. It's the best vintage style manga I've seen outside of Tezuka, and while I highly recommend Tezuka's works the mangaka of Red Snow who is also deceased now achieves so much in his short story manga that it's hard to imagine him as other than a manga haiku poet, since his tales often have layers of meaning you only pick up on with additional readings. It is a manga volume meant to be contemplated over many years.

The style of manga in Red Snow takes some getting used to for readers used to say, *Negima!* – but *Negima!* has its place and I don't want to be an elitist manga snob. All I can really say to manga fans more used to the 21st Century moe style of manga is... give this a try and see what you learn about a different side to Japan than you normally see. I really recommend it not just on an artistic standpoint but for manga fans not quite ready to jump into the massive multi-volume franchises that manga has spawned, as these eat up a lot of money if you're not prepared. Red Snow is a stand alone volume that drags surrealist and supernatural elements to the winter snows of regional farmland Japan, it's subtle, it deals with human sexuality on a deeper level than manga and comics as a combined whole have been prepared to deal with, and it doesn't shy away from depicting the harshness of rural Japanese life. The men are sexist pigs who can't stand it when a woman outwits them, and the women are constantly on the alert lest a gossip ruin their reputation. These people live hard, but beautifully constructed lives that sing with every regret. It is an easy first read but the more times you read it the bleak minimalist aesthetic to exploring what are essentially both happy and unhappy lives – you'll notice that your life by comparison isn't as bad. Even if you're not attacked by kappa demons on a daily basis. It's steeped in Japanese folk legends and in that respect it's what I call "Mythologically Accurate" which is like Historical Accuracy for mythology.

I highly recommend Red Snow for older manga readers and people who are ready to deal with adult themes in manga beyond shoujo and seinen titles. It's dark, but you see the light glimmering as you near the end of each tunnel.

Mza says

... dark little book ... lots of adultery and loneliness ... My main reference point for this style of manga (*gekiga*) is **Yoshihiro Tatsumi** -- Katsumata's comix contain a weird sexual mood similar to Tatsumi's, a combination of desperation and resignation that leads to odd pairings. The big difference here is setting: Katsumata features the rural poor, who are more alien to my experience than Tatsumi's urban misfits. In a rural, prewar Japan that is further defamiliarized by the existence of anthropomorphic amphibians whose lives overlap the human sphere, Katsumata finds and sustains a melancholy note that translates clearly across time, geography, and culture. His farmers, brewers, street vendors, and prostitutes suffer harsh weather, slow business, mischief of supernatural origin, and domestic violence, and there's a sense that if something bad's not happening, just wait another minute or two. Katsumata's humour, when it surfaces -- a village of abandoned women sharing the sexual services of a monk they keep tied up in a sack? -- comes attached to a wave of brutality. He's not hilarious or demented like Tatsumi. The shyness of his writing and his delicate drawings prevent the stories from escaping their own melancholic gravity. The way that poor people can't escape being poor, Katsumata's stories begin with sadness and disconnection and always return to them.

The interview and other contextualizing material at the end of the book were helpful to understanding Katsumata's worldview -- he lost his mother at a young age and never knew his father, and it seems his number one wish in life was to have a blood relative. Reading *Red Snow* as an inevitable form of ongoing therapy for the author is a good way of letting some light in the room.

Daria Tarawneh says

Beautiful Japanese folk stories.

Karen Mardahl says

This book is a collection of comics by the late Japanese manga artist, Susumu Katsumata. I am no expert in Japanese manga. Far, far from it! I have only read a handful of manga. For me, it is a fascinating peek into the totally unfamiliar territory of a very different culture from my own. This book is especially unfamiliar. I have learned (by googling after reading) that manga means "whimsical pictures" while gekiga means "dramatic pictures". According to the Wikipedia entry on gekiga, it's akin to the difference between comics and graphic novels. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gekiga>) Katsumata shows dramatic pictures - or tells tales from a pre-modern Japan in these pages. This is life in the northern, rural Japan. The line between reality and magic is very blurred at times.

Although I sense that Katsumata is highly regarded as an artist and that this collection is quite good, I confess that I must give it 3 stars because a lot of it is beyond me - the references and culture are not known to me so I am probably missing some points and reacting to something without understanding the context. In some places, I would even say it is a bit bizarre.

I have listed the stories in the book, and most of the comments are so I remember the basic idea of the story as I read it. The stories are rather earthy, but I guess that is to be expected for tales from a rural area about 70-some years ago. They seem straightforward about all bodily functions. It's the trappings of society and class that cause a lot of the problems, as well as superstitions and tradition.

Mulberries

Boy meets girl who likes mulberries. The young girl works at a nearby brothel. I think this is just a snapshot of an everyday moment. The girl has the tedious duties of bringing people towels and putting up with harassment, and she enjoys escaping into the woods and enjoying the mulberries on her own.

Echo

The daughter of a coal-burner has the spirit of the chestnut tree as her lover. The father has no clue of how to raise his daughter in their remote village. He lets some big-wig from town buy the tree to get some money, and the chestnut spirit rushes to get help from the girl. He asks her to hold a requiem for him. The tree cutters cannot topple the tree despite cutting it. The girl arrives. She calls out "my love", touches the tree, and it topples.

Cricket Hill

In a small village, everyone pokes fun at an old woman called "young bride". They all gossip a lot and talk about reputations and how they want to "have fun", but not end up like "young bride". She lives in a ruined hut on a hillside where the hot springs give her hut the warmth that they say keeps her alive. They say she used to be rich, but a servant took advantage of her. Her life went downhill from there, and they all think she is a bit crazy. They like teasing her to get her to take off her robes. One night, some drunks attack her and think they will have their way with her. She pulls out a knife and they run off frightened. She is found dead in the morning. The shock of the attack reminded her of the attack 60 years ago, and her heart couldn't bear the trauma.

Pulp Novel About a Sack

In a town where all the men are out on Sakhalin (as sailors? fishermen?), the women get all excited when a monk comes begging in their village. The monk and one of the women get rather cozy. Then, at some point, the monk is in a sack. I don't quite get how that happened - if he slept in a sack, or someone put him in a sack. The upshot is that over the coming days, the women borrow the sack. They take turns taking the sack to their homes for the night! This goes on for some time, and some women worry whether they are wearing out the monk in the sack. The tax collectors are rumoured to be coming by their village to tax their alcohol. The women rush to hide their supplies and decide to get rid of the sack. The last scene shows a wrinkled monk left to crawl away over a mountain pass.

Kokeshi

This story introduces the magical creatures called kappa, which are probably kin to mischievous elves. If the kappa sleeps with a human, the baby is like a changeling and is returned to the spirit world. Here a special kappa is taking advantage of a lot of women whose men are working elsewhere. He was born in a time when there was a terrible famine and people killed their children if they had too many mouths to feed. This one child was killed and buried, but he returned from the spirit world and seemed extra strong. He is not quite an ordinary kappa, but he is not human either. His siblings died mysteriously and all assume he sucked their life out of them. Now, he was sleeping with any women whose husband was away. When the woman gets pregnant, he stops seeing her and gives her a wooden doll, a kokeshi, to keep her company, when the spirit world comes to get the kappa child. Finally, the "regular" kappa get fed up with him and gang up on him. They gut him and then disappear from the village forever. This human/kappa creature now suns himself on the veranda every day- as a gutless person! Very strange ending!

The Dream Spirit

A monk is going about begging and stays for a while in a hostel. He begs for his food, and he also collects odds and ends, apparently for bartering. One day, he finds a jar of facial cream. This apparently excites him so much that he cannot breathe. He dashes out of the hostel and seems to transform into a crow. The crow

flies back to the hostel and turns into the monk who then makes love to the woman in the hostel. The next scene shows him sitting up in bed and sighing that it was just a dream caused by the smell of the face cream. I guess this is just to show that a monk is only human.

Specter

A old blind musician travels to remote villages, with her adopted daughter as a companion, to entertain the villagers. She tells them that the girl's mother was raped by her master in his mansion. She got pregnant, and went home to her parents where her father beat her regularly for the shame she brought on the family. She died in childbirth. Soon after, fireflies appeared in the mansion by the droves. They formed the shape of a woman, which haunted the man and drove him mad. The villagers debate whether the spirit of the woman possessed him or the fireflies poisoned him.

Torajiro Kappa

More kappa. Villagers discuss a woman in an abusive relationship. Her husband married above himself. Once a month, he beats his wife. All talk about it, but no one does anything. A young boy tells the kappa about the situation, and the kappa decide to try to help. It turns out that the man is meek and humble, and stays away from his wife. Except when he gets drunk. Then he turns violent. The kappa decide to have a competition in the hope that the man will lose and never beat his wife again. The wife shows up while they are fighting and gives the man alcohol. The reasoning is that this is the only way she gets sex, and it's the only reason she puts up with the monthly beating! This was a terrible story in many ways. I don't think Katsumata was endorsing it in any way. He was just recounting old tales and the hierarchy of life in the remote villages. The woman was really stuck. The man was an employee who married the boss' daughter. He felt humiliated by that. She was totally dependent on a man - her father or her husband - for her status. She couldn't just up and leave and go to another village. They were all trapped. And none of the villagers did a thing. The kappa tried to help, but gave up. In fact, they declare that the place isn't fit for kappa any more!

Wild Geese Memorial Service

An old man finds a traveller nearly dead in the snow and brings him home to his home where he lives with his daughter. They bring him back to his health. However, his lifestyle is such that he is now doomed. He is a travelling salesman is not allowed to linger anywhere on the road. He has obviously lingered here a long time after nearly dying of the cold. Doing so brings shame on his employer! The daughter has fallen in love with him. In the end, the old man and some friends set up a fake funeral so they have something to send to the company to clear the young man's honour and name. Then, he is free to live there together with these villagers. They compare this to the tale of wild geese who travel south for the winter, but don't all make it back in the summer.

Red Snow

A tale of some people who make sake. A young woman asks a young trainee brewer for some yeast so she can make sake for a girls night at her place. Most of the story takes place in the brewery where men tell crude tales and make fun of their boss as they work. They discuss one young man's visit to a nearby brothel where he was entertained by a woman they call the mountain hag. They then talk about a snow fairy who once mocked the hag and her menstruation. Once in a hundred years, red snow falls. It is the mountain hag's menstrual blood. The snow fairy is cursed to turn into a slut every time red snow falls! The young man is given the job of cleaning the sake vats. The vapours make him dizzy and he goes out into the night to come to his senses. He thinks he sees the mountain hag lying there waiting for him. He meets the young woman who wants the sake. She has gotten drunk in the meantime and crawls into a barrel to sleep. The young man drags her to safety so she doesn't freeze to death. Some kind of flowers are falling in the snow. They turn into red flowers. The young man crawls into the barrel to keep the young woman warm.

Derek Royal says

Susumu Katsumata is one of those mangaka that not only entertains, but makes you take serious notice of the form. I love the stories collected in this work, and I find it ironically fascinating that a cutting-edge (perhaps not the best descriptor) or even iconoclastic (?) practitioner of the form is so embedded in pre-modern Japanese culture and settings.

Sonic says

A remarkable book that shines a light on rural life in pre-modern Japan. The book alternates between cute and very adult with a somewhat simple drawing style that somehow packs an emotional punch. There is a looseness to the drawings that occasionally lead to confusion, however by the end of each story one is struck by the resonance of resolution. On the whole the stories are indeed moving.

Seth T. says

The care with which Drawn & Quarterly packaged this collection of Susumu Katsumata's short stories somewhat troubles me. It really is a handsome edition, a durable hardcover wrapped in pleasing design and containing in its backmatter an interview with the mangaka as well as an article describing the importance of the work. For those built to appreciate Katsumata's achievement here, this edition of *Red Snow* is almost certainly a treasure. I'm only sorry I couldn't be counted among those who would so value the production.

Red Snow, for me, has exactly one use. It proposes an unveiling of a mid-twentieth century rural Japan that stands as an illumination of a society that may be forever lost to the march of time. The details of rural, traditional Japanese culture are fascinating and Katsumata does a good job adding in trivialities that add a sense of realism to often magical stories. In "Red Snow," the story that gives the collection its title, Katsumata spends some pages showing the labour involved in preparing sake yeast. In another, he leans on the use and social texture of mulberries. Several tales involve the activity of traveling Buddhist monks. In manner similar to Stan Sakai (though more pervy), Katsumata involves some of the more mythical aspects of traditional Japanese folklore, such as kappas and tree spirits.

Most forcefully what *Red Snow* accomplishes, however, is to present a picture of a people. I have no measure by which to gauge the honesty of the portrait Katsumata paints through his stories, but if they are to be believed, non-urban Japan was built on the lives of a very earthy people. These are men and women whose entire lives are built on hard work and sex. If memory serves, every single story featured infidelity, rape, whores, or some manner of lusty embrace. If Katsumata's world is to be believed, then mid-century Japan was a pretty horny place in which women are routinely beaten and the patriarchy is well established and indelibly ingrained.

Yep. This guy is more upset by the fact that the curly-haired woman was a little drunk than by the fact that she is plainly being raped. Charming.

Not that the women don't sometimes give as good as they get. In "A Pulp Novel about a Sack," the women of

a village tie up a traveler in a sack and pass him from house to house while their men are away tending to the business of their agrarian society. It's never certain just how willing a participant the man in the sack is: has he simply accepted his lot, enjoying his time in the sack or is he being somehow raped in weakened state?

The problem with *Red Snow* is that as fascinating as this vantage into Japanese culture may be, the stories themselves play out awkwardly as the narrative sometimes lurches from panel to panel. Often, and this may be due to my ignorance of the culture being portrayed, it's difficult to tell exactly what is happening between panels and sometimes even in a particular panel. Katsumata's transitions, while sometimes beautiful, are more commonly too abrupt, giving the reader too few clues as to what he has in mind. And while some of his brushwork is handsome, most of his characters are drawn in a way that makes it difficult to understand exactly what they are meant to be expressing.

In the end, while there were things I appreciated in *Red Snow*, there were more things that I didn't. It's not a work to which I will likely return. I felt there was value in reading it but there was no enjoyment in the experience. *Red Snow* felt more like a chore than it did one more step into enjoyable comics literature.

[Review courtesy of Good Ok Bad.]

Emilia P says

So this made me feel a little dumb - my ma once said "I just don't get Japanese narrative" in response to watching Miyazaki films, and this made me feel the same way. What? What were these stories about? Kappa -- weird turtle people? Those were cool. Sexual violence? Ok...but...ok? These felt like riffs on story the readers were already supposed to know, and clearly I didn't know those stories. They were beautiful though, and had something of traditional art/myth about them, which I liked. Still, needed some cliff notes. Guess I'm dumb.

Scott says

I never get what some people are trying to get out of their reviews of books. They either didn't understand the book, so they write a lot of educated mumbo jumbo to show how much more they understand on the subject than the author ever did.

You know if you don't like a book or didn't understand the author it's ok. People will have more respect for you and get more out of your review if you tell it like it is

I enjoyed the book, I think for the author who grew up without much family felt the short time he spent in the country were his happiest. So what if he did or didn't exaggerate on some of the stories it helped make many of them much more entertaining. I spent much of my youth in the country during the summer time. What I found fascinating is how many of the stories were similar when you strip away the cultural nuances. Very fun reading!!!

Michael says

Like many other gekiga-ka, Susumu Katsumata began his career in the late 60's, drawing fairly traditional yonkoma gag strips. He was strongly influenced by the usual Garo greats: Shigeru Sugiura, Yoshiharu Tsuge, and Sanpei Shirato. The notoriously taciturn Tsuge, who was especially tightlipped about his contemporaries, would later become one of Katsumata's most vocal fans and supporters. He was not alone: artists such as Seiichi Hayashi, Hinako Sugiura, and Shigeru Mizuki all count him as an outstanding influence. The appreciation for his work culminated in 2006, when a collection of his work titled Red Snow won him the prestigious 35th Japanese Cartoonists Association Grand Prize, less than a year before his death.

Unlike most of his gekiga contemporaries, Katsumata's stories are emphatically removed from the bleak, urban slums of modern Japan, offering instead a view of a decades-old quiet rural life. These tranquil mountainsides and farming villages are nonetheless form a sort of adult fairy tale world, occasionally visited by ghosts and kappa, and yet filled with the same kind of sordid situations and characters that permeate most gekiga books.

The stories in Red Snow (perhaps as a manner of their pastoral setting) are quiet, contemplative, and pithy, giving them a haiku-like quality. There is a traditional narrative structure, and each generally has an emotional, climatic action, and yet even these are understated, and the reader is always left with an ellipsis.

Part of the composure of these stories comes from the art, which appears simple and effortless, yet belies a great refinement and balance. The characters are iconic and slightly elastic, and the gentle brush lines forming their contours often don't connect. As such, they are people full of holes and gaps, their environments leaking into their bodies.

Their faces are a graceful balance of cartoony expression and zen-like poise; Katsumata shows us how a wealth of emotions, attitudes, and motivations can come from but a few lines on a face. Even the most contemptible characters have a subtle cuteness to their countenances; perhaps it is these endearing designs that give the stories their necessary lightness in the more unsettling instances.

But it is these instances that give the stories their importance: without the darkness, these tales would be nothing more than an exploration of the countryside nostalgia. It is crucial for the author to show that beneath the agrarian ideal, there was a bleak world of violence, rape, avarice, drunkenness, and social oppression. With all the desolation and dolor of modern Japan presented by other gekiga, only Katsumata was showing us that these same issues can manifest anywhere.

Torajiro Kappa is one of Katsumata's best and most representative stories. It features all his favorite players: a gung-ho young boy, an abusive older man, a downtrodden woman, and a kappa who stands at the border between our world and the mythological.

The boy quickly evinces his eagerness to join his fellow townspeople as an adult, mimicking their behavior in a superficial manner. In the second panel his character is pithily defined: he encounters a passing farmer who offers him a greeting, and the boy returns it by parroting the greeting, removing his hat and taking a deep bow in an exaggerated show of respect (perhaps this is something he learned from the manga he is seen reading in the 7th panel). Right away the boy is portrayed as a cocksure youth who thinks he knows how to act righteously in the world.

This is why, upon seeing an elder farmhand beating up his wife, he implores a local kappa to avenge her. A duel is arranged, and it seems to come to draw until the man's wife gives him some saké that strengthens him enough to severely wound his kappa opponent. Why did his beaten spouse come to his aid? Because apparently he only hits her when he drinks, yet he can only "fulfill his duties as a husband" when he drinks. So upset by this sordid situation, the kappa leaves the village, saying, "That place isn't fit for kappa anymore."

The kappa, the boy, and the reader come away disillusioned with the darkness and complexity of "real" adulthood. In fact, the boy and the kappa seem to share the same mind on all counts, lending credence to the theory that this kappa is a bit of imagination. But this is too dismissive; he and the kappa are on the same page because they share the same relationship to the town. They are both like a man and yet not, looking out for the well-being of their town, but not understanding much about it. They are each isolated within their own home.

Though the boy's behavior is simple and childish, it is he who shows most potential of character, if he can withstand the influence of his backwater town. The only characters to directly address the kappa are the boy and the man when he is sober. When he imbibes the poison of adulthood, he loses this power.

For all the best intentions, nothing is changed by the end of the story. Katsumata leaves us, as always, with a lack of closure, giving his audience something to think about, without leading us towards one conclusion or another. His haiku-manga is dreamy only in that regard, and his story is fantastic only inasmuch as it includes kappa; beyond that, the world he shows us is upsettingly real.

Dave-O says

Snippets of stories that involve undersexed poor Japanese villagers and the overlords, demons and witches that haunt them. Surprisingly dull.

Katherine Burgess says

So it turns out that I wasn't actually missing as much context as I thought. Being unable to decipher the story had little to do with a lack of cultural insight, as I'd thought, but that frame-by-frame sequences more often than not simply don't flow together in any obvious way. It would make more sense if Katsuyama's frames were illustrations to a longer story. On its own it doesn't feel complete.

I expected a lot more out of this, since the hardcover edition is packaged so beautifully. What I got was a few disjointed snippets of twentieth-century life in rural Japan that you would think would be really insightful and interesting with the mystical elements added - but it's not. It wasn't even fun to read.

Vogisland says

I loved this book! It reminds me of Kenji Miyazawa's short stories in the slightly magical (but not magical realist) way he captures these odd aspects & details of old rural Japan in the short stories. Art is wonderful too.

Aaron says

Indeed, no matter the peoples, no matter the culture, and no matter the century under scrutiny, there is time and place for the bawdy, the abusive, and the sacrilegious. Susumu Katsumata's **RED SNOW** is a collection of stories that regards such an elliptical romp through Old Japan.

Katsumata's work is entertaining but yields to the dubious notion that all one needs to know can be gleaned from the gossipy predilections of blind bards, horny wives, and roguish old men trying to feel up the local servant. For most readers, **RED SNOW** is a flighty exercise in dirty humor. However, after multiple reads, something more important bleeds through. . .

Who can speak to the character of the passing seasons better than drunken monk? What better vessel to regale readers of the arrogance and futility of infidelity than the ghost of a woman whom, abandoned, died in childbirth?

These persons are both real and not, and their stories of jealousy, domestic violence, and neglect are likewise both real and not. The tales are tall, sure, but the emotion and sentimentality wrought by these hopeless creatures are equally genuine.

RED SNOW, for example, includes the short comic "Wild Geese Memorial Service," which follows an old man, his young daughter, and a traveling merchant whom the old man rescues from a snow bank. The merchant looks like the young woman's betrothed (lost at sea), and it's the woman's late night spooning that ultimately brings the merchant back from the brink of death.

Amusing, yes, but the story doesn't end there. Weeks pass, and the merchant, slowly regaining his health, contemplates returning to his village to face condemnation (for purportedly abandoning his crew), versus staying with the young woman and her father. He packs and unpacks his things several times. Eventually, he decides to stay, but not before cutting his hair and holding a funeral service, effecting killing off the precociousness and indecision that led him to the young woman in the first place.

RED SNOW is *gekiga* of a slightly different flavor. It's not action heavy and its motions are not predetermined by the rhythms of its characters' angst and ambition. The stories herein are short and sweet. And in Katsumata's art, one discovers flare after flare of narrative succinctness of the most fascinating kind.

In the story "Kokeshi," about a philandering kappa lord, panels in which Genzo Kappa makes silent love to a scrunch-faced woman are both elegant and brutal. Genzo doesn't make a sound when he has sex, but the woman grunts with noticeable restraint. Visually, Genzo doesn't actually appear . . . readers only mark his presence by silhouettes cut from the woman's pale nude form -- a hand, a hip, something more (And if Genzo, essentially, is the darkness, then what does it mean if the women of this village are helpless against the muscled arousal that is the night itself?).

In the final comic in this collection, titled "Red Snow," a young sake-maker, Ichitaro, must deal with his whiny would-be girlfriend, Tsuyako. She's angry he went to a whorehouse. What she doesn't know is that although Ichitaro certainly went to the place, he roomed with the fattest, ugliest woman there . . . and couldn't close the deal ("My dick shriveled right up."). The guys at work have a good bit of fun with it, and so entertain the young man with the tale of a mountain hag -- whose droopy breasts and period blood mark the snowy landscape once every 100 years.

It's silly and it's vulgar, but it's also terribly funny. That is, until Ichitaro looks out into the coming snowstorm and sees the mountain hag for himself, and to his utter amazement, the hag is a *gekiga* goddess: an unapologetically large-bodied woman, her curves pull away from the howling hills and billowing snow as if they were born from her and not the other way around; her sagging bosom and puckering belly rolls glisten in the moonlight and it's immediately clear the mountain hag is indeed one dizzying maelstrom after another -- she is lightning, she is wind, she is the sea; she is the snowstorm.
