

# THE ANIMAL COURT



A POLITICAL  
FABLE  
FROM OLD  
JAPAN



# THE ANIMAL COURT

A POLITICAL  
FABLE  
FROM OLD  
JAPAN

BY JEFFREY HUNTER

TRANSLATED FROM ANDO SHOEKI'S  
*HOSEI MONOGATARI*

NEW YORK • WEATHERHILL • TOKYO

This translation has previously appeared in *Ando Shoeki: Social and Ecological Philosopher of Eighteenth-Century Japan*, published by Weatherhill in 1992.

Illustrations are from the eighteenth-century encyclopedia *Wakan Sansai Zue*.

First edition, 1992

Published by Weatherhill, Inc.  
420 Madison Avenue, 15th Floor  
New York, New York 10017

© 1992 by Jeffrey Hunter

Printed in the U.S.A.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Andō Shōeki, fl. 1744-1763. [Shizen shin'eidō  
Hōsei monogatari. English] The animal court : a  
political fable from old Japan / translated by Jeffery  
Hunter. — 1st ed. p. cm. “translated from  
Ando Shoeki's Hosei monogatari (“Tales of the  
world of law”), and illustrated with woodblocks of  
the period”—CIP t.p. verso. ISBN 0-8348-0268-6 :

\$12.95 I. Title. B5244.A633S5413 1992

181' . 12—dc20 92-19902 CIP

ISBN 0-8348-0268-6

# INTRODUCTION

*The Animal Court* is a translation of *Hosei Monogatari* (“Tales of the World of Law”) by Ando Shoeki, a largely unknown but highly original philosopher of Edo-period Japan. Shoeki was not a famous figure during his time, and what little we know about his life has been pieced together from fragments and remains fraught with uncertainties. He was born in 1703 in Niida, now Odate City in the northern Japanese prefecture of Akita. As a young man, he may have entered a Soto Zen monastery with the intention of becoming a monk. He seems to have left the Zen order for some reason and become a doctor. He probably studied in Kyoto, Japan’s cultural capital, for some time, and may have visited Nagasaki and Edo. At about the age of forty, he returned to northern Japan with a wife and child to serve as a doctor in Hachinohe in what is now Aomori Prefecture. He stayed there until 1758, when he returned for unknown reasons to Niida, where he died in the tenth month of 1762.

From at least his time in Hachinohe, Shoeki began to develop his own distinct philosophy, and he also began to write it down. A circle of disciples gathered around him, men from a fairly wide variety of backgrounds and professions. An early version of his encyclopedic work *Shizen Shin Ei Do* was published, after a challenge by the censors and some strategic excisions. But after his death, Shoeki’s circle broke up and his writings were lost for more than a century, when an

## THE ANIMAL COURT

edition of them was discovered in an antiquarian bookshop by educator and collector of rare books Kokichi Kano in 1899.

Research on Shoeki was just getting underway when the Great Tokyo Earthquake of 1923 destroyed most of the nearly complete set of his writings carefully stored at the library of the University of Tokyo. And though a few other manuscript and printed versions were later discovered, Japan's political climate from the 1920s until the end of the Pacific war was not conducive to the study of such a harsh and penetrating critic of authority as Shoeki. Only after the war did the Canadian historian E.H. Norman, working with a distinguished circle of Japanese historians, begin to open the Shoeki trunk again. Since that time, much progress has been made in the study of Shoeki, and an English translation of a selection of Shoeki's writings with a lengthy introduction by a leading Japanese scholar of the subject, Toshinobu Yasunaga, has recently been published.\*

Though there is much to engage the scholar in the study of a figure as complex as Shoeki, several of his works have a much broader and more immediate appeal. *The Animal Court* is one of these works, revealing Shoeki as a parodist of Swiftian stature and an impassioned spokesman for both human and animal rights. Shoeki's prescient opinions make us think, while his wit and satire make us laugh.

## SHOEKI'S WORLD

Most of *The Animal Court* is a critique of the philosophies and religions, dogmas and "isms" that reigned in Shoeki's day. They can be divided roughly into four categories. The first is the huge body of

\*Ando Shoeki: *Ecological and Social Philosopher of Eighteenth-Century Japan* (New York: Weatherhill, 1991).

## INTRODUCTION

Confucian literature that Japan inherited from China. Shoeki's attack starts with the mythical sage-kings of prehistory and moves through Confucius, his disciples, and all the Confucian revisionist and revivalist movements that followed over the centuries, up through and including native Japanese contributions to Confucianism.

The second target of Shoeki's criticism is Buddhism. As was true in Japan until this century, Shoeki knows little of the Indian founder of the religion or its early form in South Asia. His understanding is based entirely on traditional Japanese accounts of latter-day Buddhist sects and their doctrines, and it is the sects of Japanese Buddhism that become the particular targets of his criticism.

Shoeki also criticizes the native Japanese religion, Shinto—but since Shinto has always been a rather informal, unorganized amalgam of animistic beliefs and rituals, it isn't as easy a target as Confucianism or Buddhism.

Finally, Shoeki the doctor criticizes traditional Asian medical theory and practice with a vehemence that seems to come from personal experience. In the Asian context, his criticism of medicine is a criticism of science as a whole, for medicine in Asia played the role that physics did in Europe—it was the umbrella under which most scientific thought and experimentation took place and the language in which premodern science spoke.

Shoeki's basis for criticizing *every* "ism" in his tradition is twofold, philosophical and political. Philosophically, he claims, none of these systems apprehend the world as it truly is, and so all of them are false. Politically, they all simultaneously create and depend upon the exploitation of producers (the farmers) by consumers (the ruling elite), and so all of them are wrong.

## THE ANIMAL COURT

### SHOEKI'S THOUGHT

It is impossible to examine Shoeki's complex and evolving philosophy in any detail here. To fully appreciate *The Animal Court*, however, a review of a few of his major ideas is helpful.

Shoeki believed that the entire cosmos is alive, and lives by its own subtly inherent Law, which he called the Living Truth and the Way of Heaven. The world is a constant flow of the energy of the Living Truth in advancing and retreating phases.

Shoeki was an absolute dualist. Every thing and force existed, he believed, in pairs sharing mutual natures. Man and woman, for example, are such a pair, distinct as phases but essentially a dyad that only truly exists as the unit man-and-woman, or the human person. The basic unit of each form of existence is, likewise, an apparent pair of opposites that is in fact a dyad of mutual natures.

The premises of Shoeki's philosophy are rife with self-contradiction, a common feature of perennial philosophies. The edifice begins to creak and totter noticeably when he seeks to extend what was essentially an intuition—life is whole, one, and alive—and a deduction, however faulty, based on observation—that all things exist as dyads—into a cosmology that accounts for every thing and force, physical and mental, that exists. For our purposes it is enough to know that his thinking spawned a series of twos and multiples of two: two mutual natures, two phases of movement; four elements, four degrees of advancing and retreating, four parts of the body, four full organs, four empty organs; eight energies, eight organs of the face, eight emotional faculties and states, eight mental faculties and states, stars of the eight directions; sixteen periods of the year, and so on.

## INTRODUCTION

The linkages of these many items weaves a cat's cradle of combinations that requires more explanation than it provides, and it is ironic indeed that though Shoeki is so critical of the human proclivity for reification and grand, abstract systems of thought, he is also the originator of one more unwieldy than most, and one that, for all its claims to be based on empirical observation, is very hard to see in the life around us.

In his philosophy Shoeki allowed one major exception to the rule of twos, and in fact this is the doctrine that is most conspicuous in *The Animal Court*: the three energies, or vectors—the upward movement of energy, downward movement of energy, and sideways movement of energy. These vectors play an important role in Shoeki's view of creation by the Living Truth, and also the created: when the Living Truth moves in an upward direction, human beings are created; when it moves in a downward direction, plants are created; and when it moves in a sideways direction, animals are created.

As they are created, so are they oriented and ruled. According to Shoeki, animals, ruled by the sideways energy, are oriented sideways. They do not stand upright like human beings, their field of vision is "sideways," and they exist in a "sideways" chain of bigger eating smaller. Humans are oriented upward. They stand upright, they see forward and unobstructed, and their social order is naturally one of upright individuals, each an equal among equals.

The Way of Heaven gives to each living thing its inherently proper, right activity, which Shoeki calls Right Cultivation. The Right Cultivation of animals is to eat each other. The Right Cultivation of humankind is to cultivate grain for food and weave fiber for clothing.



## THE ANIMAL COURT

This is the sum total of proper human activity, and in fact defines humanity. Anyone who fails to do so is not truly human, a point made insistently and sardonically throughout *The Animal Court*.

Thus Shoeki's natural philosophy cannot be separated from his political philosophy. While animals live in a natural hierarchy of different species, we humans are all one species. Rulers are not larger than the ruled, they don't have more eyes or hands. There is no natural form distinguishing ruler and ruled among human beings, and so those distinctions must be unnatural inventions.

Invented by whom? The sages, the Buddha, and all other thinkers and founders of religions or philosophies. And why would human beings invent such unnatural systems? The motive is greed, the desire to eat greedily without cultivating; the cause is sickness, a fluctuation in the natural upward human energy that allowed a certain individual to be born under the influence of another category of existence—the sideways-oriented animal kingdom.

## SHOEKI AND ANIMALS

Following the Sino-Japanese natural history tradition, Shoeki conceived of animals divided into four types: birds, beasts (animals with fur), creatures, and fishes. We generally recognize Shoeki's birds as birds, with a few fabulous avians thrown in; beasts are mostly mammals, but not all mammals—whales are classed as fishes. The "creatures" category is perhaps the least coherent to us today, for it includes insects, most reptiles and amphibians, and even some shellfish.

Shoeki's natural history has animals created in several ways. Basi-

## INTRODUCTION

cally, they are products of the sideways energy in either its advancing or retreating phase, in combination with one or more of the four elements and whatever it might be linked to as a mutual nature. The energies are frequently influenced or shaped by the animal's habitat—the sea's dampness or the shade of a mountain glen. In addition, Shoeki held a theory of metamorphosis, that animals passed through stages, and just as a caterpillar changes into butterfly, a mouse grows old and turns into a bat, or a conch is a metamorphosis of a pheasant. Furthermore, in their creation or subsequent life, animals may produce "surplus energy" that becomes an "outgrowth" manifesting itself in the form of another animal—which may or may not be similar to the animal (or animals) from which the surplus energy comes. For example, the hog is said to be an outgrowth of the surplus energy of the dog and the deer.

These complicated and entirely abstract theories concerning animal origins are very strained, but Shoeki's enthusiasm for animals and his respect for their integrity as living things with their own ways and minds is heartfelt. He condescends to animals only when he forces them into human roles. When he makes them speak for themselves, it is abundantly clear that he believes they know themselves better than we do, and as such they not only deserve far better treatment than they get at the hands of humans, but our profound and humble respect as well. Their eloquent pleas to have their inherent rights respected are quite moving even today, but in Shoeki's time and culture they were positively revolutionary.

# CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

*page vii*

*First Session*

## THE BIRDS

*page 3*

*Second Session*

## THE BEASTS

*page 33*

*Third Session*

## THE CRAWLING CREATURES

*page 65*

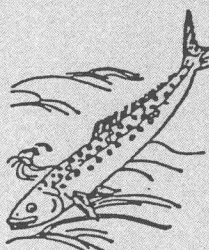
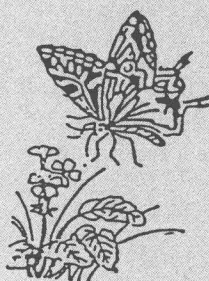
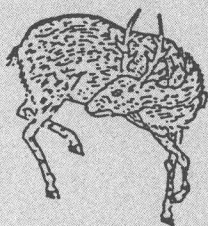
*Fourth Session*

## THE FISHES

*page 91*

## NOTES

*page 111*



# THE ANIMAL COURT



*First Session*  
**THE BIRDS**

GATHER TO DISCUSS THE WORLD OF LAW

The birds had gathered to discuss the merits of the World of Law, and it was the pigeon who spoke first.

“Here is my considered opinion: on the land, the middle region of the earth which lies in the midst of the waters and below the heavens, a myriad of creatures flourish. Among them, human beings are dominated by the upward energy, while the sideways and downward energies inhere within them. Therefore it is that the upward flow of the Living Truth is not blocked in humans, and their lot is to make the Right Cultivation of all the world their sole occupation, with no need to engage in other tasks. And thus it is, too, that among humankind there are no divisions into superior and inferior, noble and lowly, rich and poor. Humans do not eat humans and are not eaten by humans, they do not give or take from each other, and each finds his or her appropriate mate. This is the proper state of human society, whose essence is of the upward energy.



“We members of the animal kingdom—the birds, beasts, crawling creatures, and fish—are dominated, however, by the sideways energy, while the upward and downward energies inhere within us. Those creatures in which the advancing phase of the sideways

## THE ANIMAL COURT

energy is especially strong are born as birds. By nature, then, our upward energy is subdued and we are dominated by the advancing phase of the sideways energy. The Eagle, which of all birds has the strongest advancing energy, is our ruler. The Crane is our court noble, our great lord steward. The Hawk, our feudal lord; the Crow, our craftsman; the Magpie, our merchant; the Buzzard-Eagle, our master; and all the smaller birds are their servants. And so it is that the Eagle makes geese and hawks his meal, and the Hawk eats crows, sparrows, and all other birds. The Crane eats pheasants, and the Crow eats sparrows and doves. In this fashion, the larger eats the smaller. This is because we are born dominated by the advancing phase of the sideways energy, and in us the Living Truth is directed sideways. This order of eater and eaten, from large to small, is our rule and practice, the Right Cultivation as practiced by birds. We are this way because the Living Truth of Heaven runs through us in a lateral direction."

All animals are born to eat those smaller than themselves and be eaten by those larger. To eat and be eaten by each other is their original nature. But humankind is not destined to capture and eat animals. This practice was initiated by the sages, and it is a crime against nature. Here already the sages had violated the Way of Heaven.

"And you, Friend Crow, what do you think of this?"

The Crow replied. "Yes, it is just as you say. People are born with the upward energy of Heaven's Truth flowing through them, and in accord with that truth each and every one of them should make their living in the Right Cultivation of grain. Yet when the sages and the Buddha appeared in the world, they refused to cultivate the land.

## THE BIRDS

First they stole the products of the Heavenly Truth of Right Cultivation and ate greedily what they did not grow; then they stole the Truth itself by inventing self-serving laws, and with the introduction of rulers, nobles and generalissimos, lords, warriors, craftsmen, and merchants, the World of Law was born. The ruler enforced the laws of the realm, and each rank on down enforced the laws of its own station, as did those without rank or station as well. Those who violated the laws were punished with death.



“Because all, above and below, enforce and observe these laws, their world is called the World of Law. By the rule of these laws, the ruler sets the nobles and generalissimo to work for him and consumes the fruits of their labor. The nobles and generalissimo eat the fruits of the labor of the feudal lords, the feudal lords eat the fruits of the labor of their retainers, the retainers live off the labors of the craftsmen and the merchants, the master eats the labors of his servants, as do the Buddhist monks, doctors, shrine priests, and mountain ascetics. This is no different from our law of big eating small, and the human world is no different in this respect from ours. There is nothing superior or elevated about the human realm. What think you, Friend Kite?”

The Kite spoke then. “Ah, but that’s not the half of it. How could we criticize the human world simply because it is no better than ours? In fact, it is worse. Among humans there are those who claim the





fields that are all part of this earthly realm and make them their kingdom, their province, their fief. They thieve the Heavenly Truth of Right Cultivation and stuff themselves greedily. And on top of that they live in a World of Law where big eats small. Yes, the human World of Law is far more deeply plunged in greed and ignorance than ours."

When the Sparrow heard these words, it hopped forward from the edge of the assembly and ventured: "It is just as Sir Kite has spoken. Humans are greedy and ignorant. But worse than that, among them is a profession called the fowler. The fowler captures us poor sparrows with bird lime and makes food of us for their hawks, and for themselves as well: roast sparrows! But we birds do not exist to be food for humans. Humans were meant to eat grains and vegetables. Now in addition to stealing the grain produced by others instead of cultivating their own, these humans kill us and eat us as delicacies! Ah, this is a great crime, surely," it cheeped, with tears plashing from its eyes.

The sight of which led the Duck, who had been sitting there all along, to raise a plaintive quack. "Yes, as the poor sparrow says, humans of the World of Law are a greatly greedy lot indeed. We ducks are birds of the water, and we live off the fishes provided us by the Truth of Heaven. There should be no reason for humans to hate us, yet they capture us with bird lime and kill us. Then they eat us, all the while claiming that we are a rare delicacy more restorative than ginseng. This is without question a great crime, and it shows that the