

Scenes of Sexual Assault: A Case Study on Hokusai

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The love relations represented in the *shunga* erotic prints are of the most varied range, comprehending situations real and imaginary, realist and symbolic, logical and irrational. The allegories in their composition sometimes can be deciphered only very painstakingly. While there is no lack of ethereal spring images of sex as joy or as allegory of life, there is also a large number of images that depict “ugly, dirty, and bad”—and quite often dispossessed—people.

The relationship between sex and power has been intensively studied, the most distinguished work being Michel Foucault’s “The History of Sexuality,” and in the West the centrality of males as consumers and perpetrators in modern pornographic production has frequently been pointed out, especially by fierce feminists. In Japan, working independently from their Western counterparts, writers such as Hayakawa, Mihashi, and Shirakura have pointed out that erotic representation has been free from the bridles of Christian religious morality and has treated sex as a source of joy and laughter in general, differentiating itself in this sense from *pornographie*.

If, on one hand, “joy” and “laughter” are not found present in all *shunga* production, on the other hand, its character of “expression of truth” (as Hayakawa observes) certainly cannot be denied, for representations of those who have been excluded from the fruition of sex pullulate, be it because of their low social and/or economic class, or be it because of physical or psychological incapacity.

This chapter aims precisely to focus on a situation in which “joy” and “laughter” do not seem to be present: two situations of sexual assault in an 1833 work of Katsushika Hokusai, *Manpuku wagōjin* 万福和合神 (Gods of Harmony and Extreme Happiness¹), in which two protagonists have their life histories narrated in alternative ways, following a rhythm that is not symmetrical. The poor Otsubi and the daughter of a prosperous home Osane walk paths that take them through some activities common to women (daughter, wife, babysitter, concubine, sex professional woman in different levels and economic classes, mother, heir of commercial house, sexually predatory widow), and they suffer on the seesaw of destiny.

Manpuku wagōjin is a masterpiece distinctive of Hokusai’s talent. Although the prints were made later, the date fourth year of the Bunsei era (1821) is found at the end of the third volume. The painter would have been sixty-one years old then, and in the phase of his life in which he gave some of his energy and attention to the enterprise of personally making pictures and writing texts in the *yomihon* 読本 style and also some erotic books. Researcher Fukuda Kazuhiko remarks on his special talent for creating images that are very close to comic books (*kokkeibon* 滑稽本), and notes also that he had an affinity for Tamenaga Shunsui’s 為永春水 romantic narratives (*ninjōbon* 人情本). As I pointed out in an earlier study,² *ukiyo*e and *ukiyo-zōshi* originated in parallel, but while painting in this vein continued to be labeled with this term *ukiyo*e, literature of this type came to be called by different terms. They remained, nevertheless, closely connected.

Although the dimensions of *Manpuku wagōjin* are small, the richness of printing details, the generosity in the usage of color and, obviously, the composition and draftsmanship come to match it with other works of Hokusai that were produced in larger formats and with richer pigments. Indeed *Manpuku wagōjin* surpasses many of these more ambitious pieces, making clear its importance.

The title alludes to the deity very popular by the end of Edo period, Fukurokuju 福祿壽, one of the seven fortune gods who promise happiness, richness and longevity. Fukurokuju was also worshipped as a god of harmony among couples, a creed of Daoist background imported from China's Southern region and which still persists, being popular in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Okinawa.

The three volumes contain erotic chapters that interconnect: the daughter of an economically prosperous family, Osane, and another girl named Otsubi, born in a very poor home, perform in parallel. The plots are typical of *ninjōbon*-style romantic romances, in which the characters' lives unfold according to an already previously delineated destiny of karmic connections. In this instance the stories are in erotic pilgrimage and turn around many corners, clearly discriminating bright and obscure sides. Although imbued with compassion toward the "human feelings" of their protagonists, the direct, sarcastic and hilarious style reveals well Hokusai's distinctive style as a writer.

It not within the scope of this chapter to analyze the structure of *Manpuku wagōjin* as a literary or narrative work. Here I offer an abbreviated reflection on the sexual assaults that the protagonists encountered, describing the scenes and the characters portrayed in them. The first scene that serves us as source comes from Book 1, image 7, entitled "Otsubi's History." At twelve years of age, to help her parents, Otsubi goes to work as babysitter and in charge of domestic services. Two lads appear with the pretext of buying soy paste and *tōfu*. They rape Otsubi, leaving her in a pitiful condition with her parts all broken, and thus she loses her virginity, without any pleasure. As they bear only a sword and are very informally dressed, it can be deduced that they are of low class. Besides, one of them has the depreciated penis covered of prepuce, considered very vulgar by the sex aesthetes. A text in nervous calligraphy fills the whole upper and lower part of the image. It is impossible to interpret images such as these without reference to the texts that accompany them, and a study that did not devote attention to such deciphering would very likely result in an understanding quite different from what is actually presented by the artist. Let us start, therefore, by reading the text, translated here following Kazuhiro Fukuda's transliteration:

Well, Otsubi, the daughter of Hinbee of the Very Poor House where they did not even eat, when she had her twelve springs, was sent to serve as babysitter and to take care of the domestic details in a certain important house, so that her poor parents could rest a little. Her sad figure was reduced to a sleeping kimono underlay with its cotton all patched up, kitchen clogs with bamboo fiber strips, her hair disposed in a Shimada hairdo with the strip tied by hand, a cotton strip too narrow for her kimono; however, her eyes were bright and very well delineated, and in addition her buttocks were attractive in a certain way, and when she was about to buy soy paste and *tōfu*, having in hand a bamboo basket for the soy paste, two youngsters from nearby who had been laying in wait

for her pulled her into a street corner and, lamentably, tied her hands and feet, and her whole body was immobilized. They pinched her little plumpy vulva, which had no hair yet, filled it with saliva and, when one of them was going to hastily stick in the place his big penis of horselike vigor, he got off the mount screaming, “*are, aa aa . . .* what a pain, what a pain,” and became immovable pressing it, and when he finished, the other youth came to replace him with his long penis; allowing no forgiveness to that new vase,³ he thrust it in and stayed, swinging it there in the bottom, in the bottom, and poor Otsubi could only shed tears [*hara-hara*] and it was inevitable for her to suffer the second time, with pains, with sufferings; she was only able to walk like a crab, close to the ground; with a crying expression on her face, she ended up going to the *tōfu* store, but her little vulva was purple and swollen, it was painful to her to wash herself in a basin and, even if she rubbed a herb called *sanshichi*, for some unknown reason, it was getting more and more painful and she couldn’t sleep; so she was granted a rest, with no omission, and went back home; due to what happened, the mother, having her misery increased, offered condolence for the pain of that vulva which had been a “new vase” and anointed a brocade with an oily balm and brought it near to her parts, and for a while Otsubi walked in a strange way. As for intangible and unimaginable things, such as confronting the unexpected loss of virginity or the [resultant] sufferings, [they] became more and more frequent. According to the recollections of her mother Osase, [her



Fig. 1 Katsushika Hokusai. Image 7 from Book 1 of “Otsubi’s History.”

own] first time accommodating the huge penis of Hinbee had seemed to her an unbearable pain.

Inserted text:

Lad: What a misery! How can you not bear this? In exchange, I will buy you a stained kimono with my payment. *Fufufuu fufufuu*. Ah, it has not yet entered as much as I wanted. *Heee*, I am almost coming, almost coming, *fufufuu fufufuu*, aah, good, good!

Woman: It hurts! It hurts! It hurts! It hurts! *Aaare aare*, assassin, assassin, *hee!* It hurts! It hurts!

Lad: Ah, come on, girl. It is like that, the first time it really hurts. It is only for a little while. Stand still! Ee, what a good girl! Ee (lips: *chutsu chutsu*)

Woman: Urgh, how dirty! *Petsu Petsu Petsu*. . . .

Reading the text, in addition to elements that connote an “expression of truth” of elements of the period (here I draw on Hayakawa’s readings), many linguistic puns and an undeniable intent to provoke the reader to laughter can be noticed, and these serve to extenuate the violent action of the sexual assault perpetrated in the story. In addition to verbal signs, also a set of visual signifiers are inserted in the image: symbols of good luck—the figure of a little hammer on prosperity’s straw, a red Daruma image, the deity Hotei, an inscription in Sanskrit—would point, according to Pollack (2005, p. 277), to an irony contrary to the situation. Analyzing the scene from the point of view of the complete narrative, however, it can be interpreted that those signs foretell the luck she will have in the future, ascending in the social and economic scale exactly due to her mastery of the art of sex. The ideograms that mark the clothes of the inelegant lads, *mitsu kinoe* or *mitsu uchiwa*, a possible corruption of the expression *miuchi wa (katto atsuku natta)* [one’s whole body (burned in flames—due to excitement or shame or fury, or to the three feelings)] (Pollack, p. 297) and, on the back, *kai* [opening], an Edo slang for *bobo* [vagina], relates to the inscription in the Daruma image: *ichimotsu-ari* [“that which has the only and true thing”], that is, the ciphered term both for “penis” and “money.” Thus, the inscriptions provide a surreptitious reading of Otsubi’s destiny: through her “opening” (*tsubi* is used as an adjective for a beautiful vulva, round and fleshy) that manipulates vegetable baskets (where the term *mara* [penis] is inserted), will become the owner of a heritage and of how many *ichimotsu* she wants to acquire, as the coins around it show. The assault she suffers, devoid of any romanticism, marks the point of her initiation into the realm of sexual exercise.

In a study on the representation of the evil ones in erotic images, Mihashi Osamu (2005, pp. 239–313), through analyses of innumerable images, even characterizes them as having body hair, beard, broad face, large nostrils in the base, dark color, lack of hair, thick lips, penis with prepuces, parched feet, large mouths, hair in the anus, provincial accent, lower social position. In many images they appear either as observers of sexual scenes (almost always in masturbation) or as perpetrators of forced sex: “it cannot be said that all *shunga* pictures serve to cause pleasure” (p. 259), expressing, before, “a strong awareness of the social class division” (p. 295). Regarding the image analyzed here, Mihashi maintains that the last thing Otsubi says (“Urgh, how dirty”) should

be interpreted as an expression of rejection not of the sexual assault act, but rather of the unbeautiful features of the young perpetrators. Thus he concludes that in the time of Hokusai the “desire expressed by those of lower position was seen by society as *kitanaï*” (dirty, impure, polluted, messy, ugly, unpleasant, indecent, rough, despicable, miserable). Such consideration could lead us today to add the adjective “poor” to the expression, current among us, “ugly, dirty, and bad.”

On the other hand, the story of Otsubi’s rich neighbor Osane (*sane* is one of the many nicknames for “clitoris”) goes on descending in a diametrically opposed way, always marked by a self-centered sexual appetite, and the sexual assault scene that is perpetrated on her in Book 3, image 4, entitled “Tenth History of Osane,” shows in an accentuated way her capacity for satisfying herself in any situation:

Osane, due to the penis, passed through innumerable sufferings. She wanted to visit an acquaintance but, as she could not visit him after 12 o’clock at night, she stayed wandering here and there when she was discovered by some five or six men of bad character who seized and carried her, a thousand times already decided. The first of this group repeatedly penetrated into her thighs, furiously moving the head, a portentous metal-penis hard as iron of which the thick veins seemed like hemp ropes, and she went: “*Ee, oo,*” and he groaned: “Hey, hey, it’s of no use, hey, *o, o, oo, oo, oo, fuufuu,* hey, ouch, *oo, oo, uumumu, haa haa,* I’m going to come, *haa, mumumu,* I’m losing *haa,* consciousness, *yo, areare,* I’m going, I’m going, I’m going, I’m going!” While she endured the suffering, the second in line was Rokurōsuke, the one with the lathe-penis,⁴ inside her vulva that now expanded, now narrowed; feeling as if her forty-four bones were going to melt, she sobbed while her body shrank, “Hey, you know?, hey, hey, again, again, *aa aa aa,* once again see, once again, *aa,* I’m going to come again, I’m going again, I’m going again, I’m going again, again!” The semen [making sounds:] *byoko byoko byoko byoko byoko,* slipped smoothly in the inner part of her thighs. After [Rokurōsuke] withdrew, it was the turn of the third, Echigorō,⁵ the one with a penis of prepuce; not even had he thrust in and, each time, the skin of his penis was now removed, now torn, and changed its taste; Osane, not being able to take anymore, issued sounds *gobo gobo gobo, nura nura nura,* and said: “*Oo,* hey, *oo,* again again, really again, really again, really again, I’m going to come again, I’m going to come again, *haa haa, suu suu!*” As he delayed to take [the penis] out, the one who would be the fourth, Kanroku, the one with the “seven wheels”⁶ penis, as he shut the vulva with his instrument “tall like a goose,” the little fruit [the clitoris] inside her started to burn and, as he barely took out his cinder, he would fall aside with great noise. Osane, being unable to stand it anymore, only sobbed out loud: *hii hii.* She didn’t even know how many times she had come, and her liquids, as if they were hot water, were conduct to her ass; thinking it was already enough, she cleaned them, but soon who thrust in among that humidity was Yojirōbee, the one with twisted penis⁷



Fig. 2 Katsushika Hokusai. Image 4 from Book 3 of “Tenth History of Osane.”

where erect knolls involved their enormous dimensions as if they were spirals, and soon his thoughts confounded and he, maddened, didn't have limits in his pleasure: he was exactly as a fountain gushing semen [issuing sounds:] *byoko byoko*. Finally, to finish the entertainments, Fusuke, the one with “wheat husk” penis. He extended all over the vulva, *yawa yawa yawa*, what tender thighs. Still not satiated, they repeated the possession three more times; the vulva was just like a peony; until night opening such displeasure went on. See, watch this so helpless figure. . . .

Inserted text:

Osane: “Ah, you know? Aaa, it seems that someone is still going to do it, the seed starts to move *hiko hiko*, *ee*, again, *aa*, I'm going to come again, I'm going to come, I'm going to come, I'm going to come, I'm going to come.”

Even if the words attributed to Osane are not read, the expression of deep satisfaction on her face (in addition to the innumerable used small “love handkerchiefs” around her) is easily recognizable. Having represented the poor, “ugly, dirty, and bad” in the first image of sexual assault, Hokusai concentrated those qualities in the written text as his brush depicted, without romanticism, the visual image of postcoital contentment.

Thus, if for Otsubi the sexual assault was the starting point for the mastery of the art of professional sex, for Osane, it became a maddening obsession: “See, watch this so helpless figure . .

.” Hokusai advises us, as if morally criticizing the total surrender to lust of an “amateur woman” whom he equates to animals tossed out onto the street, in the dead of the night, as a later image will show, in a behavior parallel to a couple of dogs.

As to forced sex, when Otsubi is still virgin and when Osane is already almost in the final fall, sanctions regarding the act are not debated in *Manpuku wagōjin*: no revolt or sense of injustice follow after the suffering (in Otsubi’s case) or the painful pleasure (in Osane’s case) inflicted on the young women. This suggests that the reader should understand the act as just one more of the many experiences in two lives that “float” along, and should not consider them negatively. What is depicted is not crime, it is not lack of morals. Instead it would be, first and foremost, “lack of taste,” for the perpetrators are ugly, inelegant, and inferior in the social hierarchy. On the other hand, the lasses (or the lads, as many images of youngsters show) who are susceptible to being assaulted are also inferior to others in the hierarchy, and therefore they are “available.” The objective cold reality of this causes our lips to curl in a bitter smile of complicity with Hokusai, who represented with so much detachment situations in which floating desires were at the essence of human existence.

What the text silences, the image utters; what the image silences, the text complements; and thus, the narrator-painter shows to readers, including himself, that sex is the only way by which these two protagonists can ascend, descend, and enjoy lives in their brief existences as townspeople. Hokusai arouses in us the kind of compassion that infuses Edo-period “books of human feelings” (*ninjōbon*). This genre exhibits a sensibility that stands in contraposition to the refined and courtly compassion of an earlier era, the sensibility expressed definitively in the *Genji monogatari* and conveyed by the word *aware*.

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NOTES

1 Other translations found, of the title only: “The Gods of Myriad Conjugal Delights,” “The Gods of Intercourse.”

2 In Madalena Hashimoto, *Escritura e Pintura do Mundo Flutuante: Hishikawa Moronobu e ukiyo-e Ihara Saikaku e ukiyo-zōshi* [Writing and Painting of the Floating World: Hishikawa Moronobu and *Ukiyo-e* Ihara Saikaku and *Ukiyo-zōshi*].

3 Virginity was referred to as a “new vase,” *arabachi* 新鉢.

4 *Rokuro mara* 魔羅, in addition to making a pun with the name of its owner Rokurōsuke 六郎助, written as “the sixth man,” is the term for the sexual position in which the woman is on top supporting herself on the knees.

5 The name may allude to the province from which he came, Echizen 越前.

6 As the previous pun uses images of ceramics making (a *rokuro* is a potter’s wheel), here the same procedure is also used: a *shichirin* 七輪, “seven flower corollas,” is a little round oven for charcoal, made of pottery or porcelain. Kanroku (1746–1805), in his turn, was the name of the founder of the house of calligraphers that were masters of the *kantei* style; associated with the Nakamura company of *kabuki* theater, he did the calligraphy on the signs used to advertise the plays.

7 The pun with the term “twisted,” *yojire* 捩れ, refers to the name Yojirōbee 与次郎兵衛, or “private who changes place many times.” Yojirō, in Kansai dialect, denotes “social outcast head.”