

## The Turn toward Reception: Reception History and Illustrations

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There seems a noticeable trend in *kokubungaku* over the last twenty years towards reception history (*kyōju-shi*), most noticeably in the work of Ii Haruki, Katagiri Yōichi, Itō Masayoshi, and Imanishi Yū'ichirō, among others. Studies by scholars such as these recover earlier "readings" of canonical texts, rather than simply trying to establish the "correct" reading of any specific work. The recovery of these readings allows for a new, plural, non-phallogocentric, and even decentered reading of familiar, canonical, works. More importantly, it allows us to see more clearly the various ideological uses to which texts from the Heian and later periods have been put.

For example, we can compare the three oldest extant pictorializations of Episode 4 of the *Tales of Ise*—all dating from the thirteenth century: the so-called Hakubyō *emaki*, the Kubo-family version, and the Ihon version.<sup>1</sup> The work of Katagiri allows us to see that these three works have chosen different ways of interpreting the seemingly insignificant phrase *abara naru ita-jiki*. While most commentaries understand the phrase to mean that the floorboards of the mansion had become dilapidated, and some, such as *Chikenshō*, make their condition a metaphor for Narihira's feelings, the Reizei family tradition insists that the phrase simply means that the house is unoccupied.<sup>2</sup> This is the interpretation pictorialized by the Ihon version, no doubt related to the political environment in which the Reizei tradition was created, that is the relatively marginal society of the bakufu in Kamakura. Freed from the necessity of establishing one single meaning for this episode, we can more fruitfully appreciate the discrete acts of appropriation these three images represent, especially with the Hakubyō being designed for a predominantly feminine spectatorship and copied, if not originally designed, by an amateur hand, in contrast to the fetishistic encrusting of rich pigments in the Kubo version, emphasizing the function of the *Ise* as cultural capital to the calligrapher and patron, Emperor Fushimi (r. 1288-98).<sup>3</sup>

I would like to trace an apparently similar contrast between a feminine and a political reading by comparing examples of *Ise* illustrations from the Meiji period and the Heisei era. The remainder of my presentation is focussed on a series of images, all related to Dan 83 of the *Tales of Ise*, the so-called "Hermitage of Ono" (*Ono no iori*) episode.<sup>4</sup> In fact, I will discuss only the pictorializations of the second half of this episode:

. . . one day, while he [Narihira] was in constant attendance at the palace, he was astonished to learn that his patron [Prince Koretaka] had become a monk. When the First Month came around, he resolved to go and pay his respects to him at Ono, a place blanketed with snow at the foot of Mount Hiei. With much difficulty he made his way to the hermitage, and found the prince looking bored and forlorn. He lingered on and on, reminiscing about the past; but though he

would have like to remain still longer, his official responsibilities obliged him to start back at nightfall. As he set out he recited,  
*wasurete ha* Forgetting,  
*yume to ha* the snow to see my lord?  
He went back to the capital in tears.<sup>5</sup>

The earliest example of a pictorialization of this scene is a panel on silk from what is believed to have been a screen, now hung as a hanging scroll, and believed to date from the Kamakura period . It shows Narihira making his way through the snow into the prince's residence, an attendant holding an umbrella over him, and a page-boy following behind. The fourteenth-century Ihon, in contrast, shows Narihira arriving on horseback, and then speaking with the monk-prince in his abode; and it is this part of the episode that the early sixteenth-century Ono Family scrolls choose to represent this episode as a whole—note already the quasi-conjugal emphasis with the introduction of mandarin ducks, as it is guessed that such works were made as trousseau objects—we'll see something similar at the end of my talk. The imagery of the Kamakura-period screen re-appears in the late Muromachi Hokuni scrolls,<sup>6</sup> and it is this image that then is standardized in the early Edo-period Saga-bon . Having Narihira arrive on foot better conveys the sense of the poem's line *yuki fumi-wakete* ("stepping through the snow"), and the fact that he does so in bare feet is a suitable image of devotion to the prince (a rigor not required of him in the Kamakura period screen, where he is clearly shod).

In fact, in the Edo period, the image of someone making their way through the snow with an umbrella over them becomes something of a topos for loyalty and devotion, with the *Ise* episode playing the clear role of a sub-text. The clearest case is a kind of double-*mitate*, Kuniyoshi's "Evening Snow at Yoshino" from his *Kenjo hakkei*, or *Eight Views of Virtuous Women*.<sup>7</sup> The text reads:

Shizuka Gozen

Daughter of the Zen master of Iso. Her features were without compare, and since she was skilled at *otoko-mai*, her name was famous. Yoshitsune's love for her was deep, and when she parted from her lord at Yoshino, she gazed out, and while her tears fell, she composed the following poem:

<i>yoshino yama</i>	As I step through
<i>mine no shira-yuki</i>	the white snow of the peaks
<i>fumi-wakete</i>	of Yoshino mountains,
<i>irinishi hito no</i>	how precious are the traces
<i>ato zo koishiki</i>	of he who has entered there!

Popular legend had it that Yoshitsune, in flight from his half-brother—the new shogun, Yoritomo—took his beloved companion, Shizuka, with him as far as the mountains of Yoshino, where he was finally convinced to separate from her and flee further with just his male retainers. Kuniyoshi's image shows the dancer in front of a massive mound of snow—a kind of visual allusion to Mount Hira of the "Eight Views of Ōmi" (*Ōmi hakkei*), as pictured by artists such as Hiroshige. Shizuka is barefoot, walking through the snow, footprints behind her. She wears a wide hat and straw snow-coat, the wind seemingly blowing at her back.

We might also detect a further sub-text and *mitate* to Episode 83 of the Saga *Tales of Ise*. Note the compositional similarities: Narihira's umbrella has been replaced by Shizuka's large straw-hat—what was the handle of the umbrella has been transformed into Shizuka's walking-stick. In both pictures the landscape rises up on the left, adorned with snow-encrusted trees. The association was probably fixed in the minds' of contemporary readers as well by the similarity of the two poems, and especially the fact that the share the phrase *yuki fumi-wakete*, or "stepping through the snow."

Note that there seems nothing parodic here. Although using the *mitate* technique, this is the kind of image of feminine self-sacrifice and devotion approved by the ruling military regime of the Tokugawa era. In fact, allusions—both verbal and visual—created a sense of over-determinancy that suggested a kind of cultural homogeneity: Shizuka's act of devotion to Yoshitsune looks the same as Narihira's act of devotion to his prince, and the very real historical and political differences between Japan in the tenth century and Japan in the twelfth—or nineteenth—are ignored. It is perhaps against this background that we can understand how quickly and powerfully text and image were harnessed to contribute to the creation a modern nation-state during the Meiji Restoration of 1868, and beyond.

Evidence for this comes from a Meiji-period print by Watanabe Nobukazu, a pupil of Chikanobu's who is most often thought of—when he is thought of at all—in connection with prints of the 1894-95 Sino-Japanese War.<sup>8</sup> The image is clearly identified as "Fidelity" (*shin*) and includes Narihira's *fumi-wakete* poem as well as a biography that constructs him as a loyalist patriot, making his way over a stream and on to the prince's hut that can be made out in the background.

The *ka no kutsu* shoes are a historical touch, which suggests the influence of the painter Kikuchi Yōsai (1788-1878). In particular, his massive *Zenken Kojitsu* (Wise Men of the Past, Ancient Customs), a ten-volume compendium of the pictures and legends of 571 historical personages from Japan's ancient age up to the Nanboku-chō period, is credited by Kinoshita Naoyuki with "opening up the new genre of history painting." Yōsai completed this work after eleven years, in 1836 (Tempō 7), but it was not published until thirty-two years later, in 1868, that is, the first year of Meiji. In that same year, Yōsai presented a copy to Emperor Meiji. He was later awarded the title "Knight-Painter of Japan" (Nihon gashi). *Zenken Kojitsu* includes images of both Narihira and Prince Koretaka—notice the very non-monastic look of the latter.

Far more impressive, though, is Yōsai's 1875 painting now in the Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst, Berlin, entitled "Narihira Visiting Prince Koretaka." Yōsai has clearly returned to the Ihon imagery. However, he replaces the ornate gate and flowering tree with an expanse of snow, reduces the prince to a barely visible hovel, and depicts Narihira on horseback, in a martial image. All this is integrated through the use of "western perspective," which, I would argue, has provided a new meaning to Narihira's visit, one useful to Japan's emergent imperialism.

Continuing with the issue of historicism, I would like to end by considering one last work. *Ise monogatari* is one of nine works included in the "NHK Manga de Yomu Koten" series, first published in 1993, and already through four printings by 1998. This is clearly a post-"Silk Road Boom" production, and includes the delightful historicism of dressing the

two sisters of Episode One in Tang-derived, Nara-period clothes .

Like the Ihon, the manga version employs only some of the 125 episodes, woven together to form a biographical narrative of Narihira. In fact, the manga version reduces the entire *Ise* to eight chapters. Given this extreme reduction, it seems particularly significant that the penultimate episode is none other than “Nagisa no In” (episode 82), which includes the Ono no Iori episode:

Finally, after having spent that Spring night in pleasant conversation with His Highness, I heard:

“What did you say? His Highness . . . ? Is it true?”

“They say he has renounced the world . . . and put together a hermitage at the Village of Ono . . . at the foot of Mount Hiei.”

Your Highness . . . you said nothing . . . nothing. Or is this what you meant when you said “What lasts long in this world of pain?” Your Highness. . . how pitiful!

The new year dawned, and in the First Month I made up my mind and visited His Highness where he was residing at the Village of Ono

“It has been a long time, Your Highness.”

“Oh, Narihira!”

“—Your Highness. . . .”

“Come, come, closer to the fire here . . . It’s so good of you to have come, Narihira.”

“What do you do to pass the days?”

“Well . . . there’s nothing to do . . . I just pass each day in a daze, you know.”

“—Your Highness. . . .”

“When I think of it, last year seems completely like a dream . . . admiring the cherries with everyone seems long ago . . . those were the good days . . . when all I wanted to do was savor elegance . . . it is so sad, that I can never return to those beautiful days. . . .”

cough “Your Highness!” cough cough

“It’s all right . . . it’s nothing serious, Narihira. . . .”

Ah, I wanted to stay by his side like that and serve him . . . but . . . there were ceremonies, and work for me at Court. Never had I resented my lot as much as at that time.

Seeing how he looked now, I really felt that it was not at all real, but had to be a dream. Never did I think to see myself making my way through snow this deep to meet my lord.

The episode ends, however, with the following editorial comment :

Regarding Imperial Prince Koretaka’s sudden renunciation of the world, it was said that it was due to the fact that, although he was the emperor’s eldest son, he did not ascend the throne, and it was his younger brother, Imperial Prince Korehito, who acceded to it. However, this happened fourteen years earlier.

According to *The True Record of Three Reigns (Sandai Jitsuroku)*, it was recorded that the Imperial Prince renounced the world “due to illness.”

This is a very rich text. First, we note that it is told in the first person, by Narihira, reflecting the traditional of reading the *Tales of Ise* as Narihira’s autobiography. Second, the political reading of Prince Koretaka’s retirement from the world is explicitly raised, but dealt with in a very ambiguous fashion, which allows the text to, in a sense, have its cake and eat it too.

For his part, Koretaka is certainly presented as a political exile. There is not the slightest suggestion that there was any religious motivation in his renunciation. Indeed, he seems rather confused by his own predicament. Yet on the other hand, he is also made culpable. This culpability is suggested by his phrase: *ano koro wa yokatta. Watashi wa tada, fūryū wo ai shite itakatta no da ga. . .* “All I wanted to do in those days was savor elegance.” This phrasing suggests that at some other, subsequent point in time he wanted, that is, actively desired, to do something other than simply enjoy the flowers. What would that have been? To become emperor? This simple desiderative hints at some sort of political plot that Koretaka became involved in—a plot that failed and resulted in his exile.

Yet all these hints and suggestions are short-circuited by the Prince’s cough, and the report from the *Sandai Jitsuroku* that Koretaka renounced the world due to illness. Yet even here, this information is presented in the weakest possible way, with a double-marking of reportage (. . . *ni yorimasu to. . . to ki sarete imasu*), and quotation marks around the information. Certainly, such care does not inspire confidence, but makes the information appear more like “the party line.” Finally, there is the introduction of the camellia in the snow, an image completely created by the artist, and one that I would argue suggests a sense of sacrifice, something like a “Tsubaki no miya.” In fact, Koretaka has been refigured as a Marguerite, renouncing the throne rather than Armand, but both for the greater good of the patriarchy.

There is certainly a *yaoi* aspect to Narihira and the Prince. Koretaka is feminized, and Narihira clearly devoted (though forced to go “back to work” against his true desires). The frail and sickly image of the Prince (again, like a consumptive Marguerite) clearly calls forth a desire in the older Narihira to care and protect, creating an emotionally satisfying model of love analogous to that presented in both *yaoi* and Takarazuka.

We see then how an explicitly loyalist read of *Ise* was used in the Meiji period to rehabilitate Narihira. This recuperation emphasized his position as a captain in the military, and his devotion to the imperial family. In the manga version, too, the issue of imperial politics is squarely faced. Partly, the presentation of the Koretaka/Fujiwara conflict reflects contemporary scholarship, which the manga’s readers have probably been taught in college. Yet the work of the manga text goes much deeper. Especially important is its presentation of a feminized, yet culpable, imperial family—one which calls forth the unfailing, if thwarted, love of the autobiographical protagonist. Considering the role of imperials such as Masako in the feminine press (and the fact that the women who marry into the imperial family are always “commoners”), it seems fair to suggest that this NHK manga is to some extent attempting to frame its readers’ relationship to the modern emperor-system every bit as much as the Meiji-period productions.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Reproductions of all the *Ise-e* discussed (except where noted) can be found most easily in Chino Kaori, *Emaki Ise monogatari-e*, Nihon no Bijutsu no. 301 (Shibundô, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Katagiri Yôichi, *Ise monogatari no kenkyû : shiryô-ben* (Meiji Shoin, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> See Joshua S. Mostow, "Gender and Cultural Capital: The *Hakubyô* and *Kubo-Family* Tales of *Ise Illustrated Scrolls*," in *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, vol. XV (December 2003): *Japanese Art: The Scholarship and Legacy of Chino Kaori*.

<sup>4</sup> Much of the discussion below is drawn from Joshua S. Mostow, "Canonization and Commodification: Illustrations to the *Tales of Ise* in the Modern Era," in Stephen D. Miller, ed., *Issues of Canonicity and Canon Formation in Japanese Literary Studies*; Proceedings of the Association for Japanese Literary Studies, vol. 1 (Summer 2000), pp. 89-119.

<sup>5</sup> Prose translation from Helen McCullough, *Tales of Ise* (Stanford University Press, 1968).

<sup>6</sup> Reproduced in Itô Toshiko, *Ise monogatari-e* (Kadokawa Shoten, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> The discussion of Kuniyoshi is drawn from Joshua S. Mostow, "Court Classics and Popular Prints: Poetry and Parody in Ukiyo-e," in Ann Yonemura, ed., *Masterful Illusions: Japanese Prints from the Anne van Biema Collection*, (Washington, D.C.: The Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Images for the following discussion can be found in Joshua S. Mostow, "*Ise monogatari-e: sôzô-teki na mohô to seiji-teki na tōyô*" ["Tales of Ise Pictures: Creative Copying and Political Stealing"], in *Plagiarism, Imitation, Originality: Questioning the Imagination of Japanese Literature*, Proceedings of the 27<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Japanese Literature, National Institute of Japanese Literature (2003).