

Allegories of Love

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It is widely acknowledged that early modern European pornography was a political medium. In Japan, however, partly on account of the artistic merit of much of its early modern pornographic production, the possibility that representations of sex could have circulated as political signifiers has been overlooked. This article takes the pornographic works of the early eighteenth century Kyoto artist Nishikawa Sukenobu as a case in point. Between 1710 and 1721, Sukenobu produced in the region of 50 erotic works. These differed from earlier pornographic works in that the accompanying narratives—supplied largely by the author Ejima Kiseki—dwelt not on the blissful comedy of sex that had hitherto dominated the medium, but on stories of thwarted love and the sexual desolation of the brothels. This is significant, for discussions of consensuality and affective marriage were not confined to pornography. The popular Shinto preacher Masuho Zankō, for example, was at the same time attributing the demise of affective relations to the imposition of Confucianist social norms. The same opposition between sexual love and Confucian constraint is echoed in Sukenobu's pornographic works and versions thereof emerge in his later illustrated books (*ehon*). Given that the metaphorical possibilities of romantic love as a political signifier were being discussed at the same time in Shintoist and Kimon circles in relation to the political writings of Chinese heroes of the Warring States period, we should not overlook the possibility that the early modern pornographic endeavour was, in part, a sophisticated rhetorical strategy.

Keywords: Nishikawa Sukenobu, Ejima Kiseki, Masuho Zankō, *Endō tsugan*, Asami Keisai, Wakabayashi Kyōsai, Nakamura Ranrin, sex, politics, metaphor

The ambiguity of the aesthetic status of erotic images has fuelled considerable discussion around the distinction between art and pornography. This is particularly true in the field of early modern Japanese erotica, a body of work which often combines unparalleled levels of artistry with highly explicit content.¹ There has, however, been relatively little consideration of the discursive aspects of these works, and in this sense the study of early modern Japanese erotica has diverged significantly from that of its Western counterparts.² While the allegori-

1 Some of these debates are highlighted in Berry 2004 and Screech 1999.

2 It is above all as a political medium that early modern pornography in the West has been understood. See, for example, Darnton 1996, Hunt 1993, Mowry 2004, and Toulahan 2007.

cal status of Western pornography in the early modern period is uncontested, the possibility that contemporary Japanese pornography might also have enlisted the trope of coitus for political ends remains largely unexplored. Yet there is evidence that by the early eighteenth century at least, romantic love had emerged as a powerful political metaphor, commandeered by authors of recreational literatures (including the pornographic), political thinkers—for example, Asami Keisai 浅見綱齋 (1652–1712)—and popular preachers. This article will suggest that a similar metaphorical shift may have inflected representations of the act of coitus: that representations of sex could be seen as rhetorical, a medium for articulating socio-political concerns. The pornographic works of the popular Kyoto artist Nishikawa Sukenobu 西川祐信 (1670–1751) will serve as a case in point.

Sukenobu's career as a producer of erotic art lasted from 1710 to 1722 when *kōshokubon* 好色本—a blanket term which appears to have referred to contemporary fiction (*ukiyo zōshi* 浮世草子) and illustrated materials ranging from the amorous to the explicit—was outlawed by the Kyōhō 享保 reforms. His output over this period, estimated at some fifty *shunpon* 春本, or erotic works, dwarfed that of his contemporaries.³ Popular fiction made frequent references to women in daimyo quarters consoling themselves with a *yasashiki Nishikawa-e* やさしき西川絵 (or Sukenobu *shunpon*) and by the 1750s, the term *Nishikawa-e* was widely adopted in *senryū* 川柳 as a generic term for an erotic image.⁴

In some ways, the Sukenobu *shunpon* had simply succeeded to an already flourishing tradition of printed erotica: Hishikawa Moronobu 菱川師宣 (1618–1694), Sugimura Jihei 杉村治平 (active 1681–1703) and Yoshida Hanbei 吉田半兵衛 (active 1664–1689) had been all celebrated producers.⁵ Yet Sukenobu's erotica was in fact radically distinguished from its predecessors, and its most significant difference lay in its increasingly discursive tendency, a function, in turn, of its extended narratives.



Figure 1. Hishikawa Moronobu. *Ehon kōshoku hana no sakazuki* 絵本好色花の盃. 1687. International Research Center for Japanese Studies.

3 Figures based on the *Kinsei enpon sōgō dētābēsu* 近世艶本総合データベース at <http://www.dh-jac.net/db13/ehoncatalogue/about.html>. Artists producing erotica over the same period were Okumura Masanobu 奥村政信 (1686–1764) and Torii Kiyonobu 鳥居清信 (1664–1729), both of whom appear to have produced around ten erotic works during the first two decades of the eighteenth century. See Shirakura 2007 and Lane 1995, pp. 174–77. It should be noted that many Sukenobu erotic books (or *shunpon*) exist in variant forms: images from one work can be randomly incorporated in another with alternative narratives, often with significant inconsistencies. For whatever reason, these works were widely looted and recycled, either through the process known as *kabusebori* or as a result of blocks changing hands. This means that dating of works can be difficult and that quotations are volume specific: narratives may differ in works of identical titles in different collections. This is an area of study that has received some attention in Hayashi 1997, pp. 9–32.

4 Admittedly, *ukiyo zōshi* which invoked the *Nishikawa-e* were works illustrated by Sukenobu himself. Hachimonjji Jishō's *In'yō iro asobi*, for example, describes women placing sweet *Nishikawa-e* to their cheek: *izure mo Nishikawa ga ukiyo-e no yasashiki o hobo ni irite* いづれも西川が浮世絵のやさしきをほほに入て. See *In'yō iro asobi*, p. 236. For examples of *senryū* referencing *Nishikawa-e*, see Hanasaki 2003, p. 16.

5 For examples of Moronobu's work in translation, see *Danjo aishō wagō no en* 2002 and *Toko no okimono* 2002. Moronobu, Hanbei and Jihei are all well represented in Izzard 2008.

The format of printed erotica of the latter part of the seventeenth century—the double page image with a brief narrative section in the upper register—had largely been set by the thirty or so erotic works published by Moronobu between 1677 and 1695, exemplified in the following extract (Figure 1) from his *Ehon kōshoku hana no sakazuki* 絵本好色花の盃 of 1687:

There once was a happily married couple. As soon as they reached the bedroom they liked to make love. Once they set to, the daughter fled. But one day a young boy she liked explained that these were heavenly delights. There and then, he picked her up and forced himself upon her. Her parents watched from their room (no one can resist the way of love) “Shhh, shhhh!” they called, but the maid was listening: “I can’t bear it” she said “I need a man too!” and she slid her fingers inside herself and began to move them around. At the sound of the white juices flowing, the parents declared “Let’s do it too!” and all three scattered together their blossoming flowers.

The subjects of these earlier works had ranged from the sexual passion of the rich and beautiful—the act of coitus in elegant surroundings, enhanced by textual allusions to the *Tales of Ise* or *Tale of Genji* (Figure 2)—to the burlesque and bawdy (women in daimyo service competing for the largest dildo) (Figure 3).⁶ Their theme might be recast in different forms: Yoshida Hanbei’s *Kōshoku kinmō zui* 好色訓蒙図彙 (1686) provided an overview of sex by class from the courtier to the town crier, Moronobu’s *Danjo aishō wagō no en* 男女相性和娯縁 (1678) explored sexual compatibility—genital size and sexual stamina—in terms of Daoist categories of the five elements.⁷ But these witty acts of *mitate*, or parodic analogies, simply provided new packaging for the same celebration of the sexual act, or, in Moronobu’s term, “the great art of making love.”



Figure 2. Sugimura Jihei. Untitled album. The text, from episode 37 of *Ise monogatari*, cites the final two lines of the poem: It was from you that I came to understand/ that which others, it seems, call love. International Research Center for Japanese Studies.

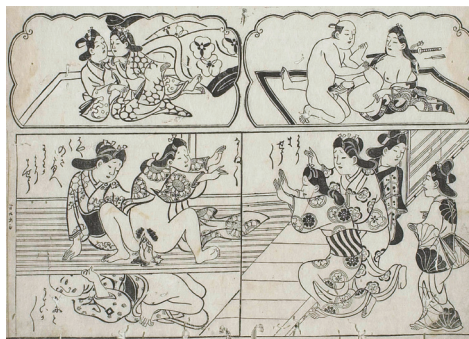


Figure 3. Hishikawa Moronobu. *Toko no okimono* 床の置物. 1684. International Research Center for Japanese Studies.

6 The genital focus of some of these works is inherited from earlier erotic works such as *Eiri Narihira taware-gusa* 久入なり平たはれ草 of 1663—an early sex manual with chapter titles such as “How to Conceive Children,” “Concerning Penises Big and Small,” and “Concerning Medicines to Enlarge the Penis.” Reproduced in Yagi 1976. I am grateful to Joshua Mostow for details of this work.

7 Reproduced and translated in *Danjo aishō wagō no en* 2002. According to the *Kinsei enpon sōgō detābēsu*, there are around twenty extant *shunpon* by Moronobu, ten by Yoshida Hanbei, and five by Sugimura Jihei. Shirakura Yoshihiko suggests around thirty works for Moronobu (unpublished conference paper presented at Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, December 2009).

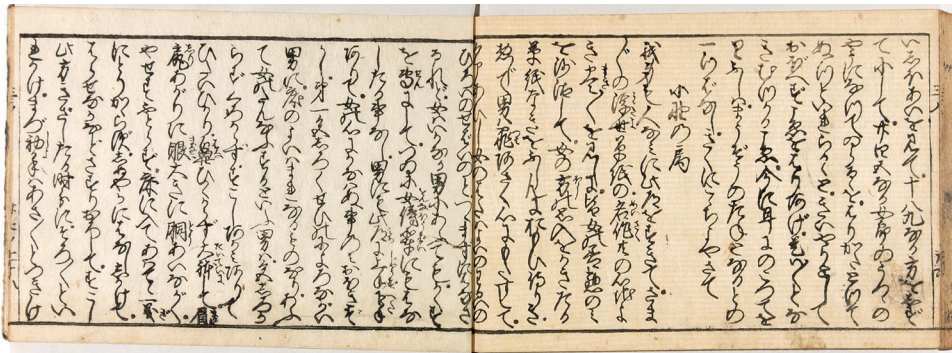


Figure 4. Ono no tsubone 小野の局. *Makurabon Taiheiki* 枕本太平記. 1720. Honolulu Museum of Art, ex Richard Lane Collection.

By the early years of the eighteenth century, the erotic narrative, hitherto relegated to a few sentences, was acquiring greater importance. Influenced by the immense popularity of the amorous tales (*kōshokubon*) of Ihara Saikaku 井原西鶴 (1642–1693), authors began to explore the narrative potential of eros. The balance between text and image shifted, the brief gloss now making way for several pages of narrative accompanied by a single image.⁸ Narratives bore the name of their authors, they also became more self-consciously literary: the few surviving erotic works of the Kamigata author Nishizawa Ippū 西沢一風 (1665–1732), although not sexually explicit (their eroticism was expressed uniquely through the images), lifted much of the text verbatim from amatory moments of contemporary *jōruri* 浄瑠璃 or *ukiyo zōshi*.⁹

By the 1710s, the erotic narratives of the Sukenobu *shunpon* had largely dismissed the scopic ribaldry evident in earlier erotica. Extended narratives would continue to track the picaresque endeavors of their protagonists to find sex, but there was a new emphasis on the emotional sexual moment itself. The flaunting of genital size made way for highly mimetic descriptions of affective sexual encounters, where physical prowess took a back seat to deep emotional sublimation. The following account of an orgasmic moment from his 1719 *Enjo tamasudare* 艶女玉すだれ is representative of the new mood:

You gaze at the beautiful soft skin, the finely drawn hair line, it's like touching a velvet mattress, she's wet, she's warm, it's indescribable [. . .] you're nearly in tears, you move gently in and out of her, no rush, she lets out a low cry as she comes, you hold her tight...oh and then—beyond the power of this clumsy brush to express.¹⁰

The distancing of erotica from its earlier ribaldry and its new emphasis on moments of orgasmic fusion were, in part, the result of the context of production. The narratives of the Sukenobu *shunpon* were penned by the same duo responsible for the *ukiyo zōshi* of the

8 For two examples of these turn-of-century narratives, see Hayashi 1973, pp. 38–54. Erotic narratives from the same period by authors such as Tōrindō Chōmaro 桃林堂蝶磨 are introduced by Ozaki Kyūya in other volumes of the same journal: see *Tokushū: himerareta bungaku (honkoku, shōkai)* 特集: 秘められた文学 (翻刻・紹介), *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō* 国文学 解釈と鑑賞, vols. 32 (1967), 33 (1968), and 38 (1973).

9 Ishigami 2008.

10 “Tayū shoku no fūzoku” 太夫色の風俗, in vol. 1 of *Enjo tamasudare*.

period, Ejima Kiseki 江島其磧 (1667–1736) and Hachimonji Jishō 八文字自笑 (d. 1745). Close productive links between the two genres meant that many of the humanist concerns of early eighteenth century *ukiyo zōshi*—in particular the growing preoccupation with the demise of affect signaled by the commercialization of sex, loveless marriages and the domestic emphasis on duty over love—made their way into *shunpon*: “since the primordial division of heaven and earth, love between man and woman has fallen into decline” (*imose no katarai wa ametsuchi no hajimari yori otorite* いもせのかたらひは天地のはじまりよりおとりて), intoned the preface to Sukenobu’s 1711 erotic work *Fūryū iro kaiawase* 風流色具合.¹¹ For the first time in the history of Japanese erotica, the blissful sexual encounter acquired a more troubled dimension. Good sex (now presented as the affective consequence of mutual desire rather than genital compatibility) was increasingly sought outside of and in opposition to oppressive social structures: the family, the brothel, life in service. It was within this oppositional context that sex became a more complex signifier. As a vindication of personal liberties in the face of authoritarian structures, it offered up new metaphorical possibilities for the expression of disaffection.¹²

The mood of pessimism that characterized the fictional production of the early decades of the eighteenth century is palpably evident in Kiseki’s novel of 1716, *Wakan yūjo katagi* 和漢遊女容気. Posing as a sequel to Saikaku’s *Kōshoku ichidai otoko* 好色一代男—which concluded with Yonosuke’s departure westward for the Isle of Women, accompanied by a handful of comrades and trunk loads of sex toys—Kiseki’s novel opens on the island where women wait on the shore for the winds to pleasure them (their unique source of gratification in the absence of men).¹³ Yonosuke arrives, only to be immediately conscripted into sexual service. The close of the first chapter finds him panting with sexual exhaustion on the shore, on the verge of death, foiled in a desperate attempt to escape.¹⁴

The parodic reversal of the assumptions of the original book—sexual paradise becomes sexual hell, the consumer becomes the consumed—suggests, at the very least, that new questions are being asked around sexual relations; that sexual servicing (single male amidst many women, or the opposite) is dehumanizing; and that numerical inequality amidst the sexes (women in daimyo service, in brothels) is unnatural. And in case the analogy between the frustrated women on the shore and their sisters in daimyo service should by chance be overlooked, it is carefully signaled:

The women were just like the women back home in daimyo service (*wakoku no okuzutome no jochū* 和国の奥づとめの女中) who contract their eyebrows longingly as they leaf through erotic images, and then console each other with the help of a dildo.¹⁵

The narrative resumes with an account of the adventures of Yonosuke’s son Yotsuginosuke (Heir of Yonosuke), himself conceived on the island; but far from retailing sexual exploits, it dwells on the problems of organized sex, of bankruptcies, arranged marriages, inadvertent incest, futile affairs and betrayals: of a world that has lost its way.

11 *Fūryū iro kaiawase*, Preface.

12 For the relationship between liberty and libertinism in the context of eighteenth century France, see Darnton 1996, in particular pp. 190–96.

13 For a discussion of the Island of Women in Japanese visual and literary sources, see Moerman 2009, pp. 351–80.

14 *Wakan yūjo katagi*, p. 16.

15 *Wakan yūjo katagi*, p. 13.

Wakan yūjo katagi took as its theme the less enchanted side of male-female sexual relations. The hedonism that characterized *Kōshoku ichidai otoko* had made way for a more reflective tone. Disturbed and dissonant, fantasies of serial sex have made way for fantasies of reciprocal love, notions of sexual conquest have yielded to the pursuit of reciprocal desire and enduring affection. Sex, rather than a matter of consumption, had become inscribed in debates around *nasake* 情—affectivity—above all, the privileged intimacy of sexual love. Yotsuginosuke (for all his faults) takes a perfectly respectable daughter of a good family as his wife (*rekireki no gosokujo o sai ni* れき々々のご息女を妻に) and ends his days in a contented marriage.¹⁶ His father would have been horrified, but times had changed.¹⁷

The demise of affective relationships is a theme which pervades the literary production of the period. In his *Seken musume katagi* 世間娘気質 of 1717, Kiseki noted that young girls were treated by their parents as little more than chattels (*akinai mono* 商い物).¹⁸ Commercial sex, on the other hand, was simply an orchestrated deception designed to assure not client satisfaction but continued custom; his *Keisei kintanki* 傾城禁短気 (1711) was (amongst other things) a cynical rehearsal of the different means deployed by the courtesan to ensure not her client's happiness, but his return. The dismal state of conjugal relations had emerged as a major theme of contemporary fiction. In *In'yō iro asobi* 女男色遊 (1714), Jishō commented that women would have less need of sex toys if they were better satisfied in love; elsewhere, he wonders by what fate a man never loves his wife, nor a wife her husband.¹⁹

These fictional tropes of troubled conjugal relations found echoes in the collaborative endeavor that was the Sukenobu *shunpon*. Here, too, thwarted love, forced marriage and reluctant prostitution are recurrent themes: young girls are sequestered by their parents, maids and court women consigned to group celibacy, young widows fear for their reputation, prostitutes are kept like caged birds (*tsukami dori* 掴み鳥) for wealthy clients.²⁰ Mutual desire, crucial for the consummated encounter, was often lacking. A narrative in *Nishikawa fude no umi* 西川筆の海 blames the illiberal behavior of ambitious parents, or parents simply unwilling to admit that their children were children no longer, for many of society's woes:

The parents convince themselves that their daughter is simply tall for her age; she's still a child, you know, just a child. They have no idea, she's much more switched on than they are... she remembers the excitement of love from the *Tales of Ise*, spies a young lad still sporting his forelock ...²¹

In *Fūryū iro medoki* 風流色著, a girl is locked in her room by her parents with a view to conserving her for an advantageous marriage (her servant lover manages to lock them in the storehouse and defeat their plan in the nick of time);²² elsewhere, a girl pretends to be

16 *Wakan yūjo katagi*, p. 69.

17 Tetsuo Najita has suggested the general shift in outlook between the Genroku and Shōtoku periods was symptomatic of what he terms the troubled condition of the landscape: "Strains generated by the uneasy structural relationship between agricultural production and commerce in the cities had rendered the celebration of passion and the burlesquing of virtue inappropriate" (Najita 1987, p. 13).

18 *Seken musume katagi*, p. 412.

19 *In'yō iro asobi*, pp. 230–38.

20 "Tayū shoku no fūzoku," in vol. 1 of *Enjo tamasudare*.

21 *Nishikawa fude no umi*.

22 *Sumimaegami wa kokoro no marui musume no kiniiri* 角前髪は心の丸い娘の気に入, in vol. 1 of *Fūryū iro medoki*.

haunted by a fox spirit, in order to trick her parents into admitting her young actor lover;²³ yet another—who, like the princess in Ise, didn't know the difference between dew and pearls (or so they thought)—is discovered in the loft with the servant.²⁴ And if parental coercion marred the lives of many women so, too, did the structures of organized sex. *Enjo tamasudare*—a rare work that deals explicitly with the world of organized sex—tracks the menu of commercial sexual options from the *tayū* 太夫 (the highest ranking courtesan) to the dyer of cloth, presenting a satirical portrait of the etiolation of the sexual appetite in a commercial environment:

Sex establishments these days are all form [. . .] You sit there jammed like bundles of firewood facing a woman across a table—this isn't what it's about. And the sex is no better—she just pulls off her *obi*, thrusts about a while, and the next thing you know, she's snoring away beside you (*ichigi shimau to ibiki kashimashiku* 一義仕舞と鼾かしましく).²⁵

The visitor to the brothel could not help but notice (Kiseki repeatedly complained) that sexual desire was often not reciprocal. *Nishikawa fude no umi* looked at the matter from the prostitute's perspective:

People overrate the pleasure of meeting up with a man. You're there, counting the cracks in the ceiling ... your mind wanders. You try not to feel it (*makoto no ki no ugokanu yōni to* 眞の気のうごかぬやうにと). Even the professionals get sick of it sometimes.²⁶

Against this background of affective dysfunction—gendered sequestration, brothel life—the trope of sexual desolation acquires rhetorical power. The plangent voice of the maid in service is a recurrent one. *Fūryū iro medoki* takes up the tale of one such woman:

Not since she'd slept in the arms of her father as a child had she touched a man's skin. So young, so full of desire....²⁷

Compulsory celibacy, she concludes, is like “living in the realm of starving demons”:

We use the horns of our demon hearts, plunging them into each other in a guilt-frenzied (*kashaku no seme hodo* かしやくの責ほど) nighttime battle.²⁸

In a work produced around 1720—*Makurabon Taiheiki* 枕本太平記,²⁹ a woman in service in a daimyo household gives a withering account of men's sexual finesse:

23 “Irochaya musume no fūzoku” 色茶屋娘の風俗, in vol. 1 of *Enjo tamasudare*.

24 *Musume no senjin nukekake ni au o-chichi no hito* 娘の先陣ぬけかけにあふお乳の人, in *Enjo iro no ne no hi*. 1720. The Ise reference is to the Akutagawa episode (no. 6) when the abducted woman, having lived a sheltered life, confuses dewdrops with pearls.

25 “Hakunin no fūzoku” 伯人の風俗, in vol. 2 of *Enjo tamasudare*.

26 *Nishikawa fude no umi*.

27 *Ikimono wa tōsanu goshojo no kakochigusa* 生物は通さぬ御所女のかこち草, in vol. 1 of *Fūryū iro medoki*.

28 *Ikimono wa tōsanu goshojo no kakochigusa*.

29 The furigana *Taiheiki* permits the punning alternative *Pillow Book of the Great Vulva*.

I like sex as much as the next person; but whenever you read about it in novels, even the really famous ones, they just tell you what's good or bad about the women. None of them tell it from the woman's side, it's crazy. But not all men are good in bed, and there are lots of things that don't turn a woman on ... like just clasping her neck and thrusting a bit—she's on her way to Edo, but he gives her the push at Kuwana. She isn't even remotely aroused—and he's through. Then he suddenly remembers, looks at her as if to say, "Haven't you come yet?" "Still some way off," she says. Even if she's cursed with a man like that all her life, the woman can't speak out. But the gods don't forgive: divine punishment takes its toll (*namanaka mairanu kami no bachi wa atarinu yo* なまなか参らぬ神のばちはあたりぬよ). You know, if a woman's left wanting, she's just not going to sleep soundly....³⁰

This appeal for the gods to avenge sexually dissatisfied womanhood acquires greater emphasis when read in the context of the work in which it appears: for this is the concluding sentence of a set of three erotic narratives concealed within a reprint of a non-erotic text by the author Nishizawa Ippū, each volume now supplemented with pornographic images by Sukenobu. The concealed erotic text could easily double as a trope of erotic concealment: eros as allegory.

It is surely significant that in these erotic narratives, the trope of female sexual dissatisfaction was not represented uniquely as a consequence of the paucity of sexual opportunity: it implied a lack of affectivity and consensuality.³¹ Compare the preceding account with Moronobu's flippant survey of sexual compatibility in his 1687 *Danjo aishō wagō no en*, glossed in Daoist terms of the five elements: "no matter how inauspicious the pairing, a couple in which the man's thing is vigorous, long and thick, won't fall into discord."³²

For Kiseki, much of the problem lay with constraints imposed by those in authority: ambitious parents, brothel owners who sequestered nubile young girls, rich old men with young concubines, figures he lumped together under the term *shuoya* 主親.³³ The trick, he suggested, was to evade the coercive machinations of organized love and follow one's heart. Hence the following discussion (adapted from *Enjo tamasudare*) of an engagement with another low-ranking prostitute, the *hashi jorō* 端女郎:

Since the sex on offer commercially is so disappointing (*awarenu shubi ni natte* あわれぬ首尾になつて) the solution is to strike up a relationship on the sly. The girl pretends she needs a breath of fresh air and a short walk to sober up. She steps outside, spies a

30 "Ono no tsubone," in vol. 3 of *Makurabon Taiheiki*.

31 This significantly distinguishes the figure of the sexually voracious woman in eighteenth century Japanese erotica from her counterpart in seventeenth and eighteenth century European erotica. For, whereas the illimitable female sexual appetite was portrayed as a congenital given in the West, in the erotic works of Sukenobu and Kiseki it was inevitably read as a symptom of a fundamental social dysfunctionality.

32 *Toko no okimono* 2002, p. 43.

33 "Irochaya musume no fūzoku," in vol. 1 of *Enjo tamasudare*. The *shuoya* had been identified as the scourge of the people in popular song from the late seventeenth century: a figure of oppression, from whom one sought respite in the floating world. For example the sailors' song cited in Miyazawa 1980, p. 213: 重い重いものにとりては主の御恩に父母の恩... 兎角浮世は軽いがましよ重ひはころせん沈むゑい、重いは沈むやんさ、軽いがましじゃいのんゑい。 Oh, they weigh you down, the gratitude you owe your master, the gratitude you owe your parentsoh, give me the lightness of the floating world, these heavy things will be the death of me, they weigh me down, they weigh me down, give me the lightness of the floating world.

firefly in a willow tree (you are waiting beneath it), “Oh, sir, you with the straw hat, give us a leg up,” she begs, and things fall into place perfectly naturally.³⁴

Kiseki called it “the quick stand-up shag against the willow tree” (*yanagi o koi no kakehashi ni shite tachinagara no hayawaza* 柳の恋のかけはしにして立ながらの早わざ) and the maneuver was demonstrated in the accompanying image (Figure 5). Indeed, if this work celebrates anything, it is the joys of spontaneous sex. Not a single image depicts a woman having sex with a paying client: each finds free love, elsewhere. The daughter of the *irochaya* 色茶屋 owner tumbles with a young actor half in, half out of a cupboard (Figure 6),³⁵ the *hakunin* 伯人 does it in the kitchen with the cook, inadvertently observed by the *oyakata* 親方 (brothel owner) who remonstrates, “This is inadmissible—she’s slipped away from her client upstairs.” His wife replies, “Ah, but it’s true love” (*bonkoi shinjū ja* 本恋心中じや) (Figure 7).³⁶ An image at the end of the second volume shows the otherwise-engaged fan seller holding a sign that reads, “Just popped out on business” (*konouchi hōkō ni mairi mashita* 此中奉公ニ参りました) (Figure 8).³⁷ Sex, it suggested, took place when the eye of authority was averted, in the interstices of business proper: it was an act of freewill.



Figure 5. *Enjo tamasudare: Hashi jorō no fūzoku* 艶女玉すだれ: 端女郎の風俗. 1719. International Research Center for Japanese Studies.



Figure 6. *Enjo tamasudare: Irochaya musume no fūzoku* 艶女玉すだれ: 色茶屋娘の風俗. 1719. International Research Center for Japanese Studies.



Figure 7. *Enjo tamasudare: Hakunin* 艶女玉すだれ: 伯人. 1719. International Research Center for Japanese Studies.

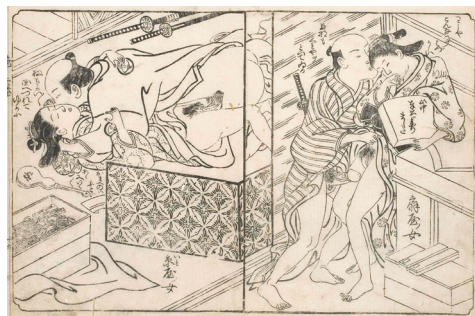


Figure 8. *Enjo tamasudare: Ōgiya onna* 艶女玉すだれ: 扇屋女. 1719. International Research Center for Japanese Studies.

34 “Hashi jorō no fūzoku,” in vol. 1 of *Enjo tamasudare*.

35 “Irochaya musume no fūzoku,” in vol. 2 of *Enjo tamasudare*.

36 “Hakunin no fūzoku,” in vol. 2 of *Enjo tamasudare*.

37 “Itoya ōgiya no fūzoku” 糸屋扇屋の風俗, in vol. 2 of *Enjo tamasudare*.

Dispatching the mechanics of authority, *Enjo tamasudare* proposed, between the lines, the glimpse of an alternative. In line with Western pornography of the early modern period, the Sukenobu *shunpon* combined libertinism with liberty; it celebrated what Joyce Appleby, writing on English seventeenth century pornography, has termed “the minor skirmishes of everyday insubordination.”³⁸ Yet such characterizations, while apt, fall short of accounting for the overwhelming emphasis within these works on the issue of consensuality.

The often aggressive vindication of love in these tales may well have drawn on emerging debates around marriage. Harald Fuess has shown that divorce rates at this period were soaring, not just in commoner households, but also amongst samurai.³⁹ Muro Kyūsō’s 室鳩巢 popular primer, *Rikuyu engi taii* 六論衍義大意 (1722) had occasion to deplore the trivial grounds alleged in many divorces, and to counsel greater forbearance.⁴⁰ Thwarted love, moreover, found similar expression in the work of the populist Shinto preacher Masuho Zankō 増穂残口 (1655–1742), a prolific proselytizer who addressed packed audiences outside temples, teahouses, and in other public spaces.⁴¹ His *Endō tsugan* 艶道通鑑 of 1715—a lengthy paean to marriage—lamented the demise of affectivity (“When did love between man and wife go so wrong? How did we find ourselves in this desperate state of affairs?”),⁴² placing the blame squarely at the door of Confucian precepts:

Born in the land of the gods we turn our faces from the house of the gods, we forget the word for harmony that brings such peace, we have given precedence to the teachings of other countries.⁴³

and again:

Our precepts may be based on the law, our teachings on righteous principles, but if these don’t come from within, we lose touch with our inner soul: a woman doesn’t really serve her mother-in-law, she simply satisfies outward appearances, deep down, she curses her countless times a day....⁴⁴

Sexless marriages had undermined the foundations of society:

38 Appleby 1993, pp. 162–73. It is perhaps no accident that the same Shōtoku-Kyōhō period that witnessed the dominance of the Sukenobu *shunpon* also witnessed a surge in the publication of conduct books. The works of the educationalist Kaibara Ekiken—in particular *Yamato zokkun* 大和俗訓 [*Wazoku dōji kun* 和俗童子訓]—were bestsellers; so too were the conduct books produced by Nishikawa Goken and they unleashed a tide of similar manuals on the market. Codes of conduct issued by the great trading houses began to appear in this period, while conduct books for *chōnin*, or townsmen, together with all manner of women’s and children’s conduct books flooded the market. Publication of women’s conduct books (which remained brisk throughout the eighteenth century) peaked, precisely, during the Kyōhō period.

39 Fuess 2004, pp. 22–25.

40 *Rikuyu engi taii*, p. 370. *Rikuyu engi taii*—based on a popular Ming preceptual work which made its way to Japan via the Ryūkyūs—was produced as a primer at the behest of the Yoshimune in 1721 and distributed to *terakoya* in the three great cities. See Henderson 1970 and Matsuoka 2009.

41 For an account of Zankō’s activities, see Nakano 1976, pp. 401–408. The writings of Zankō have begun to attract scholarly interest: see in particular, Maeda 2002, Nakano 2007, and Nosco 1997.

42 *Endō tsugan*, p. 211.

43 *Endō tsugan*.

44 *Endō tsugan*, p. 303.

Once the fundamental relationship between man and wife is demeaned, both the Way and truth founder and we find ourselves in a troubled world bereft of both filial love and of loyalty.⁴⁵

The opposition between native affectivity and Confucian restraint found resonant expression in Sukenobu's *shunpon*. In *Enjo iro ne no hi* 艶女色子日 (1720), for example, the son of an affluent merchant from Sakai, a boy of marriageable age (Irogorō), remains stubbornly uninterested in the various marital propositions put forward by his father, preferring to devote himself to his books: Confucius, Mencius, and other Chinese classics. In a felicitous moment of reprieve from his studies, he overhears strains of a melody on the *koto*, catches a stray phrase from a *kouta* 小唄 (a popular song), and is gradually inducted into the world of affect represented by these canonical Japanese arts. Music leads to poetry, and poetry leads to literature:

He had never so much as glimpsed a volume of popular fiction (*kana zōshi* 仮名草紙); but upon discovering that for the last few years, amorous and erotic novels (*kōshokubon*) had been appearing one after the other and were to be found all over the place, he grew curious and decided to procure for himself several volumes. The *kana zōshi* certainly had an appeal; the tales were of the feel-good variety. Smiling inwardly, Irogorō thenceforth gave himself over to the pleasures of sex (*emi o fukumi kore yori iroke no shinteki* ぬみをふくみ是より色気の心てき).⁴⁶

Irogorō realizes he has been misled by the admonitions of his Chinese teachers that “to lose oneself in the ways of love and consort with women leads to the ruin of the country, the loss of one’s home.”⁴⁷ Love, he now sees, is the essence of life; the conjugal bond—*fūfu no katarai* 夫婦の語らひ—its supreme expression.

For both Zankō and Sukenobu's *shunpon*, the way of humanity originated in sexual relations between man and woman: *hito no michi no okori wa fūfu yori zo hajimaru* 人の道の起りは、夫婦よりぞ始まる. The bedroom was the source of life, the first duty of any man.⁴⁸ Marital love was the pinnacle of love: *saiiai* 妻愛, love for one’s wife, and *saiiai* 最愛, supreme love, were convenient homonyms.⁴⁹ Kiseki alluded to the same trope in the preface to *Enjo tamasudare*,⁵⁰ a work which, having surveyed the wretchedness of commercial sex concludes with the marriage of the narrator and the cloth dyer (who had previously offered sex as a sideline):

So they pledged themselves to one another, took a house and lived happily. There may have been a few floorboards missing, it didn’t matter. They’d start early in the evening, you’d hear them moaning, “Oh, oh, this is unbelievable....,” the pillow would be pushed aside. She’d be crying with happiness, the cloth dyer, a married woman. She gets called Madam now, and sits majestic (*zushiri to* ずつしりと) in her kitchen...⁵¹

45 *Endō tsugan*, p. 210.

46 *Endō tsugan*.

47 *Endō tsugan*.

48 *Endō tsugan*, p. 210. This characterization of Zankō’s thought paraphrases sections referenced in nos. 23–26.

49 *Endō tsugan*, p. 211 and note. Zankō used the graphs 夫婦 (*fūfu*—husband and wife) with furigana さいあい (*saiiai*); Kiseki wrote 妻愛 with the same gloss.

50 In vol. 1 of *Enjo tamasudare*.

51 “Suai no fūzoku” さいあいの風俗, in vol. 2 of *Enjo tamasudare*.

After two volumes of indifferent sex in brothels, the work thus closes with a vision of sex, domesticity, and a home of one's own.

Marriage, consensuality, love, these were clearly issues on the contemporary mind. To some extent they drew on contemporary debate. But it is possible that they were intended as displaced references, allegories, of the political landscape. Consider for example, a more chaste version of the same conjugal trope in a later Sukenobu *ehon* 絵本, or illustrated book, the 1745 *Ehon Wakakusayama* 絵本若草山. The image shows a group of townspeople—a family—visiting a temple (Figure 9). A votive plaque or *ema* 絵馬 hangs from the eaves depicting a horse between two crests, linked by an inscription (which reads *go hōze no kake tatematsuri* 奉掛御宝前) The male servant bears the child on his shoulders; a samurai (with two swords) looks up at the image and scratches his head, perplexed. The father, by contrast, turns back to his family, alerting them to the significance of the image. The text reads:

The two crests on the dedicatory image (*ema*): they're about passion. But to put the parallel lines of the *komochi suji* 子持筋 design used in wedding robes, together with two husband and wife *mon* 紋 on the image, you can't say it more brazenly. But they just think its commonplace, they don't suspect a thing.⁵²

The child on the servant's shoulders wears the *komochi suji* design on its robe—the thick horizontal stripes of wedding garb. The two crests on the *ema* likewise symbolize conjugal devotion. Yet there appears to be more to this expression of conjugal love than meets the eye: of deep significance to the commoners, it perplexes the samurai whose confusion becomes an object of derision. There is an implication that it conceals a deeper meaning: a covert declaration of love that remains deliberately imperceptible to the eye of authority.



Figure 9. *Ehon Wakakusayama* 絵本若草山. 1745. National Institute of Japanese Literature.

52 In *Ehon Wakakusayama*.

Ehon Wakakusayama was a work produced in collaboration with Mizumoto Shinzō 水本深蔵 (1697–1761), known as a writer of children’s stories. Under his real name, Nakamura Ranrin 中村蘭林, he published a number of works on topics such as Chinese historiography and its Japanese reception. An example is *Kōshū yobitsu* 講習余筆 of 1747, an ostensibly scholarly tract which, within a couple of lines of its conclusion, offers the following observation:

Sexual intercourse between man and woman is the true way of humanity. Thus it is written in the commentary to the Sheng Min section of the Da Ya (Major Odes of the Kingdom). Likewise, Kong Yingda (574–648) notes that the way of humanity is the way of sexual intercourse. This is an ancient transmission.⁵³

Ranrin’s meaning, camouflaged by a welter of references, is inherently ambiguous because the love songs of the *Book of Odes* had been construed from an early date as allegorical expressions of political sentiment. It is possible that Ranrin had this in mind. But love as a political metaphor had been invoked more recently, notably in the work of the Kimon 崎門 scholar and passionate imperial supporter Asami Keisai 浅見綱斎 (1652–1712) and his disciple Wakabayashi Kyōsai 若林強斎 (1679–1732).⁵⁴

In 1686, Keisai had written an eight-volume work entitled *Seiken igen* 靖献遺言. It was an account of the writings left by eight Chinese vassals of the Warring States period who had retained their integrity in the face of injustice and corruption. Not published in its entirety until the Bakumatsu era (when it became a bestseller and the bible of imperial restorationists) and thus subject to the vagaries of manuscript circulation and word of mouth, it was nonetheless influential.⁵⁵ It had formed the subject of a number of Keisai’s lectures, for example, his *Seiken igen kōgi* 靖献遺言講義 recorded by Kyōsai and published (posthumously) in 1744. This text dwelt on just one of the original eight heroes, Qu Yuan 屈原 (340–278 B.C.), a virtuous statesman of the Warring states period banished as a result of slanderous allegations made by his enemies. In exile, he composed poetry, most famously *Li Sao* 離騷—a lament on exile, separation from, and devotion to his lord: a devotion expressed in terms of romantic love. The *Li Sao* subsequently formed the subject of Kyōsai’s lecture on Chu Hsi’s 朱熹 preface to the Songs of the South, *Soji joshō kōgi* 楚辞序章講義—in which Chu Hsi had described the *Li Sao* in terms of unfathomable depth (*shin’en* 深遠). Kyōsai glossed the term as follows:

Unfathomable depth (*shin’en*): this describes a love that cannot declare itself, a love far from shallow, a love with profound intent. The work is composed entirely in this mode: yet it issues from Qu Yuan’s unerring integrity, the aching pain of his passion. By writing of the wife yearning for her husband, through metaphors of trees and the grasses; without mentioning either his lord, or his detractors, he expressed his love and his yearning for his master, and for this reason his work has unfathomable depth.⁵⁶

53 *Kōshū yobitsu* 1979, p. 72.

54 For a discussion of Keisai and Kyōsai, see for example *Asami Keisai, Wakabayashi Kyōsai* 1990.

55 That the work continued to be perceived as a major threat by the bakufu is evident from its reaction to the Hōreki Incident of 1757 and the repeated endeavours of the authorities to ascertain why Takenobuchi Shikibu had chosen to lecture on the work to the court. See Kondō 1990, pp. 130–34.

56 *Sōji joshō kōgi*, p. 261.

Qu Yuan (Kyōsai suggested) had laid claim to tropes of romantic love and the natural world in order to articulate his feelings for his lord. It was a rhetorical strategy that permitted the circuitous expression of forbidden love, a love forced by the climate of hostility and the unattainability of its addressee to clad itself in metaphors borrowed from other domains of feeling. Yet it left its trace clearly on the page: Kyōsai concluded his lecture with the following peroration:

Mare (seldom) means being unable to express your love, being unable to confess your feelings to your loved one [...] and since it is impossible to express our love, because we can never confess it to the one we love, it inevitably finds an outlet in the words of common people.⁵⁷

If affectivity in the Sukenobu *shunpon* had become oppositional, an appeal for love in a climate that sought to repress it, this was the paralipsic expression of something similar: unutterable yet endlessly confessed devotion. And if Kyōsai was here referring to Qu Yuan's rhetoric, his own was little different. Both Kyōsai and Keisai referred to the sentiments of the true vassal for his lord in terms of *itōshisa*, often expressed in katakana イトヲシサ, at other times with the characters for love (*ai* 愛) or supreme love (*saiai* 最愛).⁵⁸ This latter variant would reappear in the work so of both Kiseki and Zankō. Keisai's description of the vassal's reunion with his lord, moreover, was surprisingly close to Kiseki's account of orgasm:

How to describe the sensation when all distance between the two hearts disappears: warm, pleasurable, beyond the powers of cognitive intelligence, beyond reason (*fuchi fukaku* 不知不覺): a sweet, delicious intimacy (*imijimi shinsetsu na* 意味滋味親切ナ), yet something beyond even this (*saritote wa to omou tokoro ga aru* サリトテハト思フトコロガアル).⁵⁹

The congruence of the deployment of conjugal and sexual tropes in the writings of Sukenobu, Zankō and Keisai is of profound interest. It was a cluster of tropes allied, in each case, with the expression of dissent. Sukenobu's erotica had distinguished itself from earlier erotica by taking issue with coercive sexual authority (with sex firmly on the nativist, non-Confucian side). Zankō's eulogy of marital sex—which he elsewhere described as the celebration of the divine yin-yang union—masked a visceral rejection of Confucian doctrine.⁶⁰ Keisai's hostility to bakufu government was the obverse of a passionate devotion to the emperor, such that in idle moments, he would betake himself to the imperial palace to stand guard, like the true vassal, outside his lord's dwelling place. The specter of consummated love, the devastation of thwarted love, haunted the writings of each. It seems within the bounds of possibility that metaphors of marriage harbored a radical political referent: that the (erotic) medium was the message itself. Consider again the words of the woman

57 *Sōji joshō kōgi*, p. 265.

58 *Satsuroku*, p. 220. The term *itōshisa* occurs throughout Keisai's writings. See, for example, *Jinsetsu mondō shisetsu*, pp. 265–67.

59 *Jinsetsu mondō shisetsu*, p. 288.

60 *Kamiji no tebikigusa*, p. 214.

in daimyo service: “Even if she’s cursed with a man like that all her life, the woman can’t speak out. But the gods don’t forgive: divine punishment takes its toll.” Were these words, intentionally concealed in the body of a separate, non-erotic narrative, really intended as no more than the empathic representation of sexually dissatisfied womanhood?

There are, in fact, numerous indicators that political disaffection was vividly on the contemporary mind. A close reading of Sukenobu’s works in the wake of the Kyōhō reforms—his post-*shunpon* production—reveals unmistakable signs of *pro-imperatore* sympathies combined with deep-felt hostility to the bakufu: sentiments carefully articulated via metaphors and riddles. It seems highly likely that similar sentiments informed his erotic production. The influence of Shinto-inspired restorationist thought on the early eighteenth century popular mind and related artistic production, fostered by Keisai and his disciples and often expressed in terms of passionate love, has not yet been fully understood. A closer examination of the discursive aspects of recreational art and literatures may well shed light on a hitherto shadowy side of eighteenth century popular thought: the careful art of sedition.

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