

No Laughing Matter: A Ghastly *Shunga* Illustration by Utagawa Toyokuni

HIGUCHI Kazutaka

Edo period erotic art, which we now call *shunga*, was known in earlier times as *warai-e* (laughing pictures) or *warai-bon* (laughing books). *Warai* meant that the books were to show the emotions of enjoyment and happiness, and it also had the hidden meaning of the vulva. These *warai-e* also were meant to be humorous. Suzuki Harunobu's famous print series *Enshoku Mane'emon* showed the adventures of a tiny "Bean-man" spying on the carnal affairs of individuals around the country, and usually showing the funny side of such encounters from the perspective of the voyeur. This humor was revealed both in the images and in the text.

Ôyogari no koe, printed in 1822 by Utei Enba II and Utagawa Toyokuni I, was a work that integrated text and image masterfully in the form of comic, erotic short stories. However, among the images there is the unpleasant scene of a corpse being raped. This violent scene can be traced back to the kabuki play *Kokoro no nazo toketa iro ito* (1810) by Tsuruya Nanboku IV and Sakurada Jisuke II, which in turn was based on an actual incident in Edo. In the latter part of the Edo period, the humor of *warai-e* gradually lessened, and the article analyzes this particular image as pivotal in this development of non-consensual sexual relations, by showing the complete lack of communication between the man and the dead woman.

Keywords: *shunga*, *warai-e*, humor, sexuality, Utagawa Toyokuni, Utei Enba, necrophilia, violence, Tsuruya Nanboku, *Kokoro no nazo toketa iro ito*

Japanese pictures that illustrate sexual activity are today in Japan generally called *shunga*. Scholars internationally are also increasingly using this term. The effort to identify a suitable technical term is useful when examining the characteristic features of Japanese erotic art in comparison with erotic art produced in other cultures. The term *shunga* has its origins in the Chinese term *chungong hua* 春宮画 (spring palace pictures), but how were the pictures identified during the Edo period? The connection between terms and pictures may not seem a problem essential to the analysis of *shunga*, because what the pictures were called probably made no difference to the pleasure of viewing them. Yet, in certain cases, a term can reveal aspects of the special features of *shunga*. This article will focus on two of the principal Edo

period terms for *shunga*—*warai-e* 笑い絵 (literally, “laughing picture”) and *warai-hon* 笑い本 (literally, “laughing book”)—and will consider the relationship between laughter and *shunga*. From the standpoint of laughter, we will analyze *Ōyogari no koe* 逢夜鷹之声 (1822), a typical erotic work illustrated by the ukiyo-e artist Utagawa Toyokuni I 歌川豊国 (1769–1825). This book includes a ghastly scene that offers nothing funny and will more likely compel the viewer to turn away. Here we will explore the significance of the picture by comparing it with evidence from contemporary kabuki and *shunga*.

The Term *Warai-e*

First let us consider a few terms that have been used to denote *shunga*. As is often the case with such things, speakers of Japanese have formulated numerous slang terms.¹ Here discussion will be limited to the main ones. One ancient term that incorporates the meaning of *shunga* is *osokuzu no e* おそくづの絵 (literally, “pictures of reclining,” that is, erotic pictures). This word occurs in *Kokon chomonjū* 古今著聞集 (1254), compiled by Tachibana Narisue 橘成季, in the context of a story told about Toba Sōjō Kakuyū 鳥羽僧正覚猷, who is said to have drawn humorous pictures. The story concerns *osokuzu no e* by him in which he exaggerated the size of sexual organs. A famous work traditionally ascribed to him is the *Kachi-emaki* 勝絵巻 (15th century) depicting a penis-size competition and a farting battle.² In his *Tamakatsuma* 玉勝間 (1793), Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 states, “*Osokuzu no e*: I’ve heard that when the author of *Kokon chomonjū* writes, ‘You will have seen *osokuzu no e* drawn by skilled hands of long ago,’ etc., he is referring to what today we call *makura-e* 枕絵 (pillow pictures). In China they call the pictures *chunhua* 春画.” Pictures previously called *osokuzu no e* came during the Edo period generally to be called *makura-e*. One finds this term in *Taka tsukuba* 鷹筑波 (1642), Ihara Saikaku’s *Kōshoku ichidai otoko* 好色一代男 (1682), and *Kawazoi yanagi* 川傍柳 (1780). In addition, the word *makura sōshi* 枕草紙 (pillow writings) was also used. The book *Shūgen ironaoshi* 祝言色女男思 (1825) is an example of such a book and the first illustration shows the proprietor of a lending library delivering this very book to a customer. The published book is being advertised within the book itself, a kind of meta-publication. The talkative proprietor reports as follows: “In our guild we refer to *makura sōshi* as *wa-jirushi* 和印 (*wa*-mark).³ We call them ‘*wa*-mark’ because they are *warai-hon*.” This indicates that *warai-hon* and *warai-e*, the source of the term *wa-jirushi*, were both *shunga*. In Saikaku’s *Kōshoku ichidai otoko*, one finds the terms *makura-e* and *hitori warai* ひとり笑い (literally, “solitary laughter”). And the following lines are found in *Kanadehon chūshingura* 仮名手本忠臣蔵 (1748): “This long box contains personal articles ordered by the wife of a certain daimyo, including *shunga* books (*warai-hon*) and sex toys (*warai dōgu* わらい道具). Her name is written on each article, even on the order for the erotic materials. If you open the box you will be exposing to public view the name of a great family.”⁴ How then were *warai* and sex related? What in essence was *warai*?

1 Nagatomo 1999.

2 See the article by Yano Akiko in this issue.

3 Generally speaking, *shunga* was indicated by the term *makura sōshi* 枕草紙 (pillow book), an application of the title of Sei Shōnagon’s collection of miscellaneous writings *Makura no sōshi* 枕草子 (ca. late 10th–early 11th centuries). See the “Gokusaishiki no *Shunsho shō*” 極彩色の春曙抄 section of Yano 1999.

4 Here the term *warai dōgu* refers to the dildo (*harigata* 張形) and other sex toys. Translation adapted from Keene 1971, p. 158.

The word *emu* 笑む suggests, in addition to the meaning “to laugh,” the idea of buds emerging and flowers coming into bloom. Historically the term was also represented by the character 咲 (*saku*, blossom). The phrase *emi wareru* 笑み割れる (literally, “laughing and splitting”) meant the natural bursting open of a chestnut burr or fruit as it matures. Due to its connection with “bursting open,” *emeru* became a slang term for female genitalia.⁵ *Warai* refers to an action expressing joy and also to something sexual.

So did the term *warai-e* absorb only the sexual aspect and not the comic aspect of the term *warai*? That is certainly not the case. In ancient times the comic and the sexual were inseparable.⁶ According to *Kojiki* 古事記 (712), when the goddess Amaterasu shut herself in a cave, depriving the world of light, Amanouzume performed a dance and exposed her genitals. Seeing this, the myriad gods burst out laughing, and Amaterasu opened the door to the cave a little. At that moment the powerful god Amanotajikarao forced open the cave door, and light returned to the world. Here a sexual performance is the occasion for laughter. Again, all the stories in the twenty-eight volumes of *Konjaku monogatari* 今昔物語 (late 12th century) could be called funny, and among them one also finds tales that are bawdy. In the realm of painting, *Yamai no sōshi* 病草紙 (late 12th century) and the previously mentioned *Kachi-e emaki* both contain vulgar motifs intended to elicit laughter.

From the world of *shunga*, consider the example of the famous work *Enshoku Mane'emon* 艶色真似ゑもん by Suzuki Harunobu 鈴木春信 (d. 1770; Figure 1). The protagonist Mane'emon drinks a potion and shrinks to the size of a bean, and then travels around

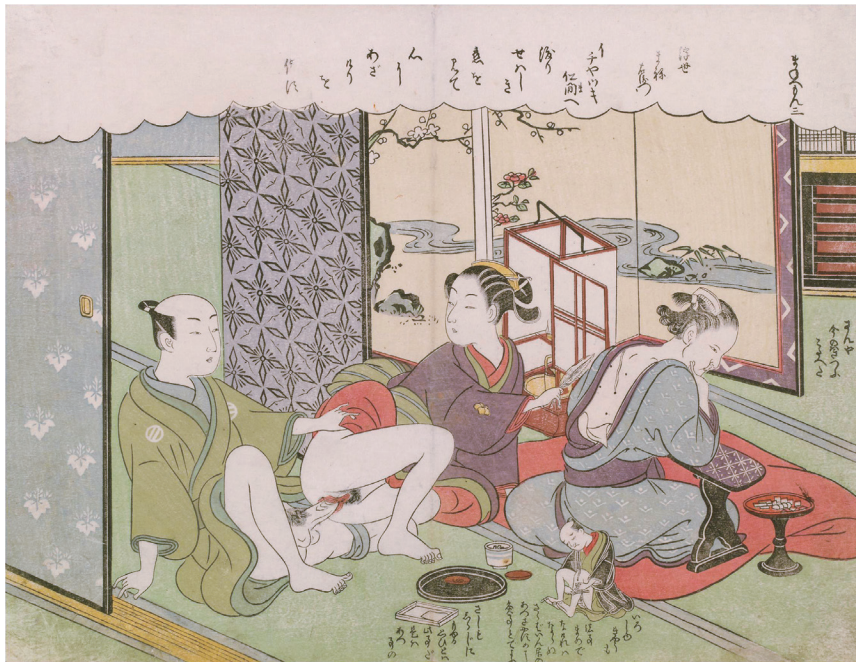


Figure 1. Suzuki Harunobu. *Enshoku Mane'emon*. 1770. International Research Center for Japanese Studies.

5 See “Warai” section of Nakano 1993.

6 The “erotic comedy of wedding art” was important not just in Japan but also for example in the humor of Italian Renaissance art. See Barolsky 1978.

observing various sexual situations. Seeing through the eyes of the invisible Mane'emon, the viewer of the pictures enjoys a laugh at the humorous foibles of human nature.⁷ In Figure 1, a man is making love to a serving maid from behind, while she in turn is applying moxa to the back of an elderly woman. The maid is a lover who knows how to multi-task. The division between her upper and lower halves is itself funny, as she attends on the one hand to the elderly woman who remains unaware of the goings-on behind her, and to the man who is being faithful to his own desires. But what clinches the humor is the text contained in the picture—Mane'emon's realization that, "One has to be a diligent worker even in the practice of love-making." He makes this comment as he, weary from his journey of erotic pilgrimage, applies moxa to his own legs. Although he is in the picture, Mane'emon maintains an objective point of view, as though taking the side of the viewer. The connection between moxa and sexual relations elicits one laugh, and Mane'emon's admiration elicits a second laugh. Mane'emon stands for us, oddly lovable as we laugh looking at *shunga*.⁸ Of course an essential feature of *warai-e* is the pictures, but while sexual relations in a highly improbable context may be funny, laughter is further encouraged here by Mane'emon's third-person remarks. These are sometimes ironic, sometimes satirical or comical, but in all cases the text serves a highly important function.

Shunga works rarely consist solely of illustrations without text. Researchers tend to focus on the pictures drawn by famous artists, but the text actually accounts for a large proportion of *shunga*. *Warai-e* and *warai-hon* should be studied not just as compilations of pictures but in totality, as integrated works combining pictures and text. *Shunga* texts can be divided into four kinds: prefaces (*jobun* 序文), narratives (*kotobagaki* 詞書), intra-pictorial phrases (often conversations between the protagonists in the picture; *kakiire* 書入れ), and "appended texts" (*tsukebumi* 付文). Prefaces frequently take the form of a historical survey of the origins of love and sex, and old texts about these. The authors of *shunga* prefaces even wrote intentional parodies of the *kana* preface to *Kokin wakashū* 古今和歌集 (905). The source for this kind of playfulness was the so-called island birth myth, reported in ancient commentaries on the *kana* preface, which told how Japanese poetry was born when the two deities Izanagi 伊弉諾命 and Izanami 伊弉冉命 met beneath the Bridge of Heaven and introduced sexual intercourse to Japan. Moreover *Kojiki* reports that at their initial meeting the female deity spoke first, resulting in a failed encounter. Perhaps the story was a favorite because it contains the archetype of the lusty woman, a *shunga* fantasy.

It should come as no surprise that the preface to an imperially commissioned poetry collection celebrating archetypal Japanese emotions in lyrical verse should be linked with the more lowly emotions treated in *shunga*. The reason is that according to the preface to *Kokin wakashū*, Japan's first imperially commissioned poetry collection, poetry softens

7 According to Yasumura Toshinobu, sex is the medium that brings together peeping and laughter. See Yasumura 1993, pp. 99–101.

8 The inscription also includes the line, "This is what they mean by, 'My burning passion will probably remain unknown to her'" (*Sashimo shiraji ni moyuru omoi to wa kono koto da* さしもしらじにもゆる思いとは此事だ). This line depends on an informed reader's being already familiar with a poem by Fujiwara Sanekata 藤原実方 (act. c. late 10th century), included in the anthology *Hyakunin issbu* 百人一首 (early 13th century), which reads, "Like the firegrasses of Ibuki, my burning passion will probably remain unknown to her" (*Kakuto dani e ya wa Ibuki no sashimogusa sashimo shiraji na moyuru omoi o* かくとだにえやは伊吹のさしも草さしも知らじな燃ゆる思ひを). Firegrass (*sashimogusa* さしもぐさ) was used in moxa treatment. The line presupposes a readership able to laugh at the clever association between burning passion and moxa, based on the classical poem.

the hearts of men and women.⁹ Parodies of the preface were intended not so much to lend *shunga* authority by imitating the form of a serious text, as to find humor in the disparity between the serious-seeming preface and its actual contents, and also laughter (*warai*) in the notion that people have been thinking about nothing but love since ancient times.

Two kinds of text are associated with *shunga* pictures: extra-pictorial narratives and intra-pictorial phrases. The former, which consist of short stories inscribed above the illustrations, were common until around the mid eighteenth century, after which they disappeared. Intra-pictorial phrases consist of dialogue, and serve more vividly to reveal the psychology of the figures in the illustrations. Both types occur in *Enshoku Mane'emon* (Figure 1). In this case, the *kotobagaki* explains the situation in the illustration. Then the *kakiire*, Mane'emon's running commentary, gives rise to humor through its synergistic integration with the picture. This is a form of humor, not possible with a picture alone, which emerges precisely because picture and text are combined.¹⁰ Appended texts (*fubun*, also read as *tsukebumi*) were bawdy stories at the end of a volume. Shirakura Yoshihiko has suggested that they are *kotobagaki* liberated from pictures.¹¹

The basic structure of a *shunga* volume, consisting of preface, illustrations, and bawdy text was established around 1788, the year of Kitagawa Utamaro's 喜多川歌麿 *Utamakura* 歌枕 and Katsukawa Shunshō's 勝川春章 *Ehon haikai yobukodori* 会本拜開よぶこどり. There is no doubting that the text in both these books aimed for a humorous effect. The term *warai* comprises many forms of laughter with a whole range of nuances of meaning, such as explosive laughter, bitter laughter, scornful laughter, a thin smile, suppressed laughter, or chuckling.¹²

The Friendly Competition between Pictures and Text in Utagawa School *Shunga*

The year 1822 saw publication of an important *warai-hon* entitled *Ōyogari no koe*, with text by Utei Enba II 烏亭焉馬 (1792–1862) and illustrations by Utagawa Toyokuni. The twenty six illustrations in this three-volume work (the covers measure 23 × 16 cm) were printed in color. For all intents and purposes, this can be considered Toyokuni's first *warai-hon*, and the first from the Utagawa school, which Toyokuni led (see also the Matsuba article in this volume). The book is historic in marking the beginning of the golden age of cooperation between Enba and the Utagawa artists. It also set a lasting precedent in the format of its publication. From this time onward almost all *shunga* would be published with color illustrations in the multi-volume (*sasshibon* 冊子本) format, meaning that apart from a few exceptions, other types of *shunga* that had coexisted until then—such as books printed in monochrome ink, or color-printed albums—essentially disappeared. *Ōyogari no koe* marked a turning point in late Edo period *shunga*.

The Utagawa school was founded by Utagawa Toyoharu 歌川豊春 (1735–1814) and it came to dominate the world of ukiyo-e from the late eighteenth through the nineteenth centuries. Toyoharu's students included Toyokuni and Toyohiro 豊広. Toyokuni's students

9 Compare Enba II's preface to *Ehon kaichū kagami* 絵本開中鏡 (1823), illustrated by Utagawa Toyokuni. See Higuchi 2008, pp. 86–87 and 152–53.

10 For a discussion of the humorous function of inscribed dialogue, see Shirakura 2000, pp. 30–48.

11 Shirakura 2002, pp. 66–72.

12 Timon Screech has taken the view that *shunga* was “solitary-use pornography” and has asserted that the term *warai* referred to masturbation, but the source for this assertion is unclear. See Screech 1998, p. 12, and Screech 2009, p. 16.

included Kunisada 国貞 and Kuniyoshi 国芳, while Toyohiro's studio produced Hiroshige 広重. The school remained vigorous well into the Meiji era. It was largely thanks to Toyokuni's efforts that the Utagawa school became the largest and most influential school in ukiyo-e. In the generation of his pupils, each major artist established his own pictorial territory: beautiful women and actors (the two main subjects of ukiyo-e) for Kunisada, warriors and caricatures for Kuniyoshi, and landscapes and bird and flower subjects for Hiroshige. And of course as with all Floating World artists of their day, they also designed *shunga*.

What kind of *shunga* did Toyokuni produce? When we consider the large number of such works by Kunisada and Kuniyoshi, one would expect their teacher to have been prolific in the genre, but in fact Toyokuni designed only a few *shunga*. During the Edo period, ukiyo-e artists were expected to produce *shunga* as a matter of course. It is something of a puzzle, then, that while at the peak of his form, during his thirties and forties, Toyokuni did not illustrate any *shunga*. The 1844 manuscript copy of *Zōho ukiyo-e ruikō* 増補浮世絵類考 annotated by the Edo townsman Saitō Gesshin 齋藤月岑 (1804–1878), in the collection Cambridge University Library, includes the following information about Toyokuni: “Up until his last years, he drew no *shunga*, but in the two or three years before his death he produced illustrations for several volumes. All were written by Shōjurō Nagatoshi 松寿楼永年, who was Enba II.” This statement requires a degree of caution, since it was written some nineteen years after Toyokuni's death, and moreover it is recorded hearsay, something reported by “a certain person” (*aru hito iu* 或人云). Even so, Gesshin was more or less a contemporary of Toyokuni, so the account can at least be used as the basis for discussion.

The scholar Hayashi Yoshikazu laid the groundwork for a study of Toyokuni's *shunga*. In Hayashi's estimation, Toyokuni designed two *ehon* 艶本 (another term for *shunga* books) at the end of the eighteenth century and four between 1822 and 1825. Then after Toyokuni's death his students added to and posthumously published a set of his draft *shunga* drawings as a two-volume *shunga* book.¹³ Yoshida Teruji also introduced an album of *shunga* paintings dated 1826.¹⁴ It appears therefore that after designing two examples at around the age of thirty, Toyokuni did not turn his brush to *shunga* again for more than twenty years, until the age of fifty four. He died within three years, placing the later *shunga* works among his very last designs.

The reason for this hiatus may be found not so much with Toyokuni himself but rather in the overall situation of the Utagawa school. In the years before 1822, when *Ōyogari no koe* appeared, only four *shunga* works can be identified as products of the Utagawa school: two by Toyokuni and two by Toyomaru 豊丸, all dating from the last few years of the eighteenth century.¹⁵ Given that Toyokuni and Toyomaru both produced illustrations for a mere two *shunga* titles early in their careers, that both artists interrupted their work in the genre over roughly the same period, and that neither Toyoharu nor Toyohiro designed *shunga* prints at all, it can be suggested that Toyoharu, the founder of the school, must have prohibited involvement in the genre. Although the reason for this is not presently known, the matter seems to have been decided not by individual artists but as a deliberate policy of the school as a whole.¹⁶

13 Hayashi 1964.

14 Yoshida 1963.

15 Shirakura 2007.

16 Higuchi 2008, pp. 9–18.

After Toyoharu's death in 1814 at the age of eighty, Toyokuni became head of the Utagawa school in name and fact. Then eight years later, deciding that the time was ripe, he produced *Ōyogari no koe*. This was followed by *Ehon kaichū kagami* 絵本開中鏡 (1823), *Iku yo monogatari* 幾夜物語 (1824), and *Mitsugumi sakazuki* 三ツ組盃 (1825). On the eve of Toyokuni's breaking of the Utagawa *shunga* hiatus, the world of Edo *shunga* was dominated by Katsushika Hokusai 葛飾北斎 (1760–1849) and his students, and Keisai Eisen 溪斎英泉 (1790–1848). These were the conditions under which Toyokuni decided to enter into the world of *shunga* illustration. There can be no doubt that he made this important decision from his position as leader of the Utagawa school. He already enjoyed a strong reputation throughout the world of ukiyo-e, so his entry into the arena of *shunga* would have required something original, something not available in the work of Hokusai or Eisen. What was the bold new quality that distinguished his *Ōyogari no koe* from previous *shunga*?

In previous *shunga* print sets and illustrated books, each illustration was independent of the next, and the appended texts were unrelated to the illustrations. In contrast, *Ōyogari no koe* is a collection of short stories that develop over the course of two or three illustrations. Author and artist collaborated to produce illustrated sequences. In addition, a few of the tales relate to the final appended text. Thus the book was not produced through a division of labor—illustrations by the artist and appended text by the author—but through close cooperation between author and artist so that text and pictures follow the same line of development. This is what made *Ōyogari no koe* new and it was a formula to which later Utagawa school *shunga* would adhere.

Utei Enba II was the author of all four of the *warai-hon* that Toyokuni published at the end of his life. As previously mentioned, the texts for Toyokuni's *shunga* were signed by Shōjurō Nagatoshi, which Saitō Gesshin noted was the pseudonym of Enba II. Enba's real name was Yamazaki Shōjirō 山崎嘗次郎; his father was a constable of the Tokugawa regime. He is generally referred to as an author of comic fiction, but actually his main area of activity was composing *shunga* texts. In the preface to *Mitsugumi sakazuki*, he wrote, "I am a shadowy man of love who has spent many long years (*einen* or *nagatoshi* 永年) living at the foot of the Mountain of the Immortals. My writings on sexual relations number more than one hundred and they have been perused by a great many people." One hundred may be something of an exaggeration, but Enba's texts for Utagawa school *warai-hon* approach forty in number, so it is certainly true that he was a popular author.¹⁷

One book that Enba and Toyokuni had in mind when considering how they could bring something new to *Ōyogari no koe* was Hokusai's epistolary *Manpuku wagōjin* 万福和合神 (1821; Figure 2). Read together, the letters and pictures in this book tell two interlocking life-stories: the fall of Osane おさね (Clitoris), who was born into a wealthy family, and the rise of Otsubi おつび (Vulva), who was born into a poor family. Hokusai is thought to have produced both the illustrations and the text, and it is likely that, having some competence in the field of comic fiction, he was also responsible for the outline of the story. Each picture illustrates part of the tale, and the text consists of narration and dialogue. *Manpuku wagōjin* is a *shunga* that develops along narrative lines, and this fact undoubtedly influenced the direction that Enba and Toyokuni's creative talents now followed. However, the duo avoided the tediousness of having a tale develop over the course of three volumes. In their book,

17 Data from Shirakura 2007.



Figure 2. Katsushika Hokusai. *Manpuku wagōjin*. 1821. International Research Center for Japanese Studies.



Figure 3. Utagawa Toyokuni. Vol. 1, illust. 2 of *Ōyogari no koe*. 1822. International Research Center for Japanese Studies.



Figure 4. Utagawa Toyokuni. Vol. 2, illust. 7 of *Ôyogari no koe*. 1822. International Research Center for Japanese Studies.

each narrative is completed in around two or three illustrations, keeping up an appealing pace for the reader.

The appended texts in *Ôyogari no koe* are entitled, “Kaidan eiga detchi” 開談栄花丁稚, and they tell of the humorous romances of Sukejirō 助次郎, a merchant’s assistant. The book consists of three volumes, each containing one complete short story about Sukejirō. In volume one, early on a New Year’s morning Sukejirō is having fun with Osuki おすき, the wife of a shop owner. The punch line to the story is that the name card attached to a New Year’s gift intended for a customer reads, “Toshima Okujirō” 戸嶋奥次郎, which has the supplementary reading, “Let’s finger the older woman” (*toshima o kujirō* 年増をくじろう). The first three illustrations in this same volume depict a lusty widow who is not easily satisfied (Figure 3). The reader who proceeds from illustrations to story may experience a confusing sense of *déjà-vu*, and may then review the three illustrations with Osuki in mind.

The appended story in volume 2 reports the misadventures surrounding Sukejirō’s attempts to meet with Osase おさせ, a leading shop keeper’s daughter. Following many complications the two are joined, but after making love, their pubic hair ends up drying matted together (Figure 4). The story concludes with a neighborhood watchman calling out the warning, “Let’s be aware of hair,” a play on the standard warning to “Beware of fire.” The second illustration in this volume shows courtesans trimming their pubic hair before heading to work, ensuring that it will not become entangled with their partner’s during sex; the scene bears a subsidiary relation to the story.

A few of the short stories have no connection at all with the appended narrative. For example, the seventh illustration in the second volume shows a couple making love in broad daylight, on the veranda of a room overlooking Edo Bay. This is their seventh time



Figure 5. Utagawa Toyokuni. Vol. 2, illust. 8 of *Oyogari no koe*. 1822. International Research Center for Japanese Studies.

in a row, and the man wants to call it quits, but the woman apparently still has not had enough. Turning the page to the eighth illustration and last in the second volume, the reader sees a man in a watchtower intently peering through a telescope. We notice that he is amazed and envious, and that the image itself is not an erotic setting (Figure 5). A closer look at the man's lower half reveals that what at first appeared to be part of his leg is in fact his fully erect member. The inscribed text above him is his monologue explaining the situation, "My, oh my, the days are long, so I've borrowed a telescope. And what an amazing sight I've discovered!" The man has evidently not been looking out for the safety of Edo, and at this point we return to the previous illustration and find the man's black watchtower rising above the railing of the room where the couple is engaged in intercourse. Some squinting is required, but one can see the man's telescope pointed in the couple's direction. Perhaps not many will have noticed this telescope the first time they saw the picture. It was planted by the artist for discovery after seeing the subsequent illustration, a clever joke that elicits a laugh.

The book is a collection of short bawdy tales, each completed in two or three illustrations. There are also loose connections between the tales and the appended stories. The book is not therefore merely a series of illustrations, one after the other, of people having sex, with an appended story that has no connection with the pictures; but rather a world created by author and artist on the basis of a consistent idea. This *warai-hon* does not proceed from beginning to end along a straight line, but encourages a certain meandering for pleasure, occasionally returning to a previous page and finding that the seeds of a playful trick had been sown here and there in both text and image. When Toyokuni entered the world of

shunga, the direction of *shunga* changed dramatically, as author and artist worked together to construct a highly narrative erotic book. Although Enba and Toyokuni collaborated on only a few works, surely this book deserves to be appreciated for having had a lasting effect on late Edo *shunga*.

An Unfunny Picture

Ôyogari no koe is the *warai-bon* that best represents the creative collaboration between Toyokuni and Enba. Its three volumes contain twenty six illustrations, each highly finished and with mostly cheerful contents that invite a laugh. However, one picture among them will surely make the viewer turn away (Figure 6). The picture illustrates the violation of a corpse. The two men are a cemetery guard and a crematorium worker, and the setting is the ceremonial bath near a graveyard, where bodies were purified before burial. One man returns from the temple and finds the other violating the corpse of a woman whom he had always fancied. The woman's pale blue face and lifeless limbs are unbearable to see. Through comparison with other *shunga* and contemporary kabuki plays, let us investigate why Toyokuni would have illustrated *shunga* of this kind.



Figure 6. Utagawa Toyokuni. Vol. 2, illust. 4 of *Ôyogari no koe*. 1822. International Research Center for Japanese Studies.

Before proceeding to examine this picture further, something must be clarified. Judgments regarding that which is humorous or not humorous must be made according to the contemporary standards of the Edo period, when *shunga* were published. We must set aside our modern feelings about what we may consider good or bad in a picture. For example,



Figure 7. Katsushika Hokusai. *Kinoe no komatsu*. 1814. International Research Center for Japanese Studies.

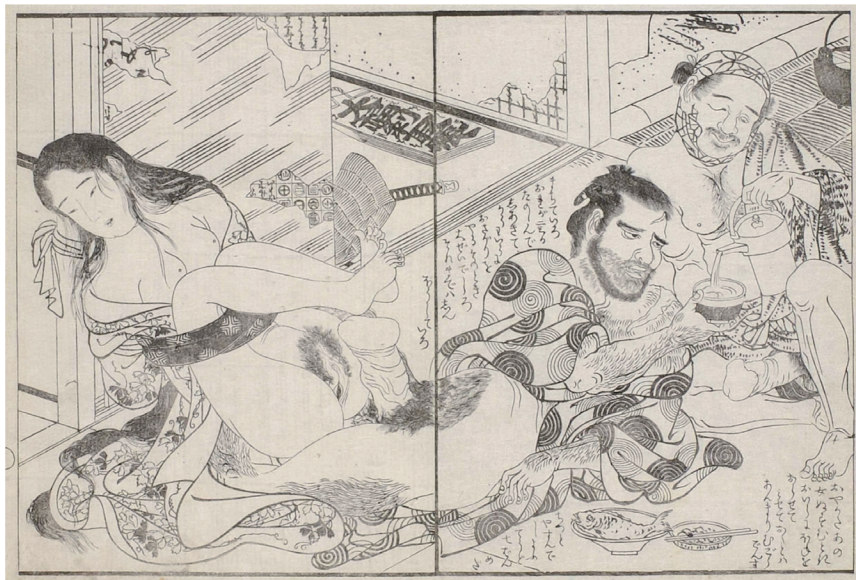


Figure 8. Katsukawa Shunshō. *Ehon jinkōki*. 1789. International Research Center for Japanese Studies.

rape scenes are sometimes illustrated in *shunga*. Modern opinion would consider such pictures not at all funny; however, a number of *shunga* of this kind were nevertheless produced.

Mihashi Osamu has examined the characteristics of violent men's faces in *shunga* with a view to defining evil appearance.¹⁸ He identified a combination of four features: a hairy body, a large nose and broad face (or head, and sometimes thick lips), dark skin, and a closed foreskin (phimosis). In Katsushika Hokusai's *Kinoe no komatsu* 喜能会之故真通 (1814), a *mochi* maker who speaks like a complete provincial is attacking a young woman (Figure 7). The man's nose is unappealingly large, and his penis shows signs of phimosis, meeting two of the qualifications for an evil appearance. The young woman is calling him "filthy" (*kitanarashii* きたならしい) and openly expressing her physical disgust. Her genitals are firmly closed, and she shows no sign of welcoming him. In fact, reading the inscribed dialogue one learns that a neighbor heard her screams and hurried to the scene, surprising the attacker and allowing the young woman to escape.

The man's evil appearance foretells his failure to have sex with the woman, and that is the outcome, due to her rejection and defiance; for this reason the scene may be considered to fall within the realm humor. However, if so, this would be laughter ruled by a masculine point of view. And in fact not all evil rape scenes end in failure and the ridicule of a worthless man. *Shunga* can include rape scenes that reveal a taste for the grotesque. For example in *Ehon jinkōki* 絵本腎強喜 (A Strong Constitution; n.d.), illustrated by Hokusai's teacher Katsukawa Shunshō 勝川春章 (1726–1793), one picture shows a woman who has been abducted and tied up by a bandit; she appears in a powerless state, unable to resist (Figure 8). The bandit is turning to his henchmen and telling them to be patient because he will let them have their way with her when he is finished. Picture and text are both filled with sadness and gloom; there will be no rescue for this young woman. For these reasons, one cannot say that all *shunga* are enjoyable. The examples just cited must be considered in a context different from ordinary humor.¹⁹ Or, at the risk of being misunderstood, perhaps one could say that these pictures represent a negative and brutal kind of humor. Be that as it may, and setting aside the question of whether they are good or bad, the fact remains that a limited number of rape scenes do occur in *shunga*.

Now let us return to the main topic of this article. The violation of the corpse is the most unusual scene in *Ōyogari no koe*. The woman of course does not resist the attack. She is a corpse with no power to resist. However, the creepiest aspect of this scene rests not in the corpse, with its blue skin and dangling limbs, but in the man who is attacking the poor woman, oblivious to everything else. The man returning to witness the scene is unshaven, one characteristic of an evil appearance, but the man violating the woman shows no signs of an evil appearance.²⁰ As mentioned earlier, some *shunga* did illustrate scenes of sexual intercourse in which the woman has no power to resist, and toward the end of the Edo period, sex scenes with ghosts and beasts, or ghosts taking the form of beasts, were also depicted. However, the history of *shunga* seems to include no other scene involving a corpse. Where did the idea for this unique picture come from?

18 Mihashi 2000.

19 Mihashi considers that, at first, an evil appearance represented anyone who performed acts of violence, but gradually it came to represent a discriminated class. The idea became fixed that the lower classes perform bizarre acts of violence against women.

20 Even so, crematory workers and cemetery guards were treated as social outcasts.

At the beginning of 1810, twelve years before *Ōyogari no koe* was published, the Ichimura-za kabuki theater in Edo presented for the first time a production of *Kokoro no nazo toketa iro ito* 心謎解色糸, a domestic drama jointly written by Tsuruya Nanboku IV 鶴屋南北 (1755–1829), Sakurada Jisuke II 桜田治助 (1768–1829), and others. Act III contains two scenes related to the violation of a corpse. In the earlier scene, Ofusa お房, the daughter of a thread-shop proprietor, has been promised in marriage to a man she does not love. Sagobei 左五兵衛, the head clerk, has fallen in love with her and plots to prevent the marriage by giving her a potion that will simulate death. He plans to revive her and, by way of repayment for his efforts, insist that she become his wife. By chance a masterless samurai named Honjō Tsunagorō 本庄綱五郎 learns that Ofusa has been placed in her coffin with one-hundred gold pieces, and with the intention of retrieving the money he goes off with her corpse. Ofusa revives and Tsunagorō makes her drink an energizing potion from his mouth that he has found. He holds her close to give her warmth and, after caring for her, places her near the ritual bath for washing corpses. In the later scene, Sagobei thinks he is about to revive Ofusa, but does not know that instead he has found the body of a different woman buried the same day. To revive her, he tries to make her drink from his mouth what he thinks is the potion but is actually a pepper solution. He strips the corpse and himself naked to hold her close, trying to care for her, but of course the woman does not revive.

The author responsible for this complicated plot of intertwined lives was the leading writer Nanboku. One of his strengths was finding ways to dramatize incidents that had actually taken place. And in fact, in 1809, the year before this production, there was an incident in Edo involving the violation of a corpse, as reported in *Waga koromo* 我衣, a miscellaneous record of daily life written by a doctor named Katō Ebian 加藤曳尾庵 (b. 1763). Ebian wrote, “In the same area [Ushigome 牛込] the second son of a certain daimyo, a foolish fellow, fell in love with the daughter of the proprietor of a *tōfu* shop located near the entrance to the family mansion. It is said that when she died, he uncovered her body and violated it at the ritual bathing area.” The reality was more bizarre, evidently, than the stage drama. It is said that Nanboku took his inspiration from this incident. The earlier scene, in which the man nurses Ofusa and then places her near the ritual bath, also hints at sexual relations between the two characters. The close mixing of life and death is typical of Nanboku, and the play counts among his masterpieces.

The idea for the violation of the corpse scene in *Ōyogari no koe* probably originated in the actual incident of 1809, and the conception of the illustration is probably attributable to the author Enba. The scene of a man violating the corpse of a beloved young woman in the ritual bath area seems closer to the real-life incident than to the kabuki drama. However one cannot disregard the significance of the kabuki drama that used the incident as its source material, because Toyokuni, the leading artist of actor prints and the ukiyo-e artist closest to contemporary kabuki, also designed prints for the original kabuki production.²¹

Enba's style was also influenced by the theater. For example consider the appended text at the end of volume three of *Ōyogari no koe*. Sukejirō and a maid are in the middle of having sex in an outhouse, when a manservant opens the door. He says, “I've discovered immoral goings-on. Nobody move,” at which point the author remarks, “Let's draw the

21 Honjō Tsunagorō was performed by Bandō Mitsugorō III 坂東三津五郎, and Ofusa was performed by Iwai Hanshirō V 岩井半四郎, but the illustration in *Ōyogari no koe* is not an actor likeness.

curtain on this for today,” a clear parody of a kabuki performance ending with the drawing of a curtain. Further, in the last volume of *Kaidan yoru no tono* 開談夜之殿 (1826), written by Enba and illustrated by Kunisada, Toyokuni’s foremost student, an entire illustration is given over to a scene from a kabuki performance.²² Enba was a writer of *shunga* who had a definite awareness of kabuki. No other performance of *Kokoro no nazo toketa iro ito* is known in the twelve years leading to the publication of *Ōyogari no koe*.²³ Enba must have kept the play in the back of his mind as material to be used at some point.

As we have seen, the one unfunny illustration in *Ōyogari no koe* derived from an actual historical incident, from a kabuki play, and from Enba’s own imagination. The fact that no other scene involving the violation of a corpse was subsequently depicted in *shunga* suggests that this particular illustration had crossed some unspoken line of acceptability. Although the gloomy violation of a corpse was in fact made the subject of a picture, the incident concerns the desecration of a lifeless body, and in that sense does not involve a “forced” violation. Nothing else quite like this grotesque image appears in late Edo *shunga*, but there are occasionally brutal scenes that one would prefer not to see. In discussing Kunisada’s *Kaidan yoru no tono*, Hayashi Yoshikazu noted a late Edo trend toward the depiction of scenes that deviate from the original purpose of *shunga* as “laughing pictures” (*warai-e*).²⁴ For example, Kunisada’s *Shiki no nagame* 四季の詠, authored as one might expect by Enba, includes a cruel scene of a bandit raping a woman whose legs are bound to a pole (Figure 9). Rosina Buckland has pointed out that, in general in *Shiki no nagame*, the scenes of sexual activity show no sense of real emotional engagement between the male and female protagonists.²⁵



Figure 9. Utagawa Kunisada. *Shiki no nagame*. 1829. Collection of Uragami Mitsuru.

²² Hayashi 1996.

²³ The play was eventually revived at the Ichimura-za theater in the first month of 1829.

²⁴ Hayashi 1996, p. 56

²⁵ Buckland 2010.

After Toyokuni's death, Kunisada assumed leadership of the Utagawa school and continued to work with Enba II, who composed the majority of texts for *shunga* works illustrated by the Utagawa school. Together they promoted a late Edo trend toward the unpleasant and the decadent that was foreign to the traditional *shunga* called *warai-e*. Their pictures show scenes of sexual intercourse that have an impoverished sense of communication between the people involved. Earlier we found that *shunga* were “laughing pictures” comprising a combination of pictures and text. The inscribed dialogue revealed the relationship between the characters and developments in the plot. Even in the rape scene in Shunshō's *Ehon jinkōki*, the men are conversing in an atmosphere of dark laughter, however unpleasant that may seem. By contrast no conversation takes place in the violation scene from *Ōyogari no koe*: each man addresses only himself. And then in *Shiki no nagame*, the woman is gagged and unable even to scream. The violation of a corpse would not occur again in *shunga* subsequent to *Ōyogari no koe*, but that scene, devoid of communication, marks a major step in the late Edo trend toward the loss of laughter from “laughing pictures.”

(Translated by Alfred Haft)

REFERENCES

- Barolsky 1978
Paul Barolsky. *Infinite Jest: Wit and Humor in Italian Renaissance Art*. University of Missouri Press, 1978.
- Buckland 2010
Rosina Buckland. *Shunga: Erotic Art in Japan*. The British Museum Press, 2010.
- Hayashi 1964
Hayashi Yoshikazu 林美一. *Ehon kenkyū: Toyokuni 艶本研究: 豊国*. Yūkō Shobō, 1964.
- Hayashi 1996
Hayashi Yoshikazu. *Utagawa Kunisada: Ehon kaidan yoru no tonō* 歌川国貞: 絵本開談夜之殿. Vol. 10 of *Teihon ukiyo-e shunga meihin shūsei* 定本・浮世絵春画名品集成. Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1996.
- Higuchi 2008
Higuchi Kazutaka 樋口一貴. *Utagawa Toyokuni: Shunga no sekai* 歌川豊国: 春画の世界. Yōsensha, 2008.
- Keene 1971
Donald Keene, trans. *Chūshingura: Treasury of Loyal Retainers*. Columbia University Press, 1971.
- Mihashi 2000
Mihashi Osamu 三橋修. “Shunga no akusō hyōgen” 春画の悪相表現. In vol. 1 of *Ukiyo-e shunga o yomu* 浮世絵春画を読む, ed. Shirakura Yoshihiko 白倉敬彦 et al. Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2000, pp. 239–313.
- Nagatomo 1999
Nagatomo Chiyoji 長友千代治. “Shunpon no dokusho” 春本の読書. *Bungaku* 文学 10:3 (1999), pp. 74–82.

Nakano 1993

Nakano Eizō 中野栄三. “Warai” 笑い. In *Edo no bigo jiten* 江戸の秘語事典. Keiyūsha, 1993.

Screech 1998

Timon Screech. *Shunga: Katate de yomu Edo no e* 春画: 片手で読む江戸の絵, trans. Takayama Hiroshi. Kōdansha, 1998.

Screech 2009

Timon Screech. *Sex and the Floating World*, 2nd ed. Reaktion Books, 2009.

Shirakura 2000

Shirakura Yoshihiko 白倉敬彦. “Shunga o dō yomu ka” 春画をどう読むか. In vol. 1 of *Ukiyo-e shunga o yomu* 浮世絵春画を読む, ed. Shirakura Yoshihiko 白倉敬彦 et al. Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2000, pp. 5–86.

Shirakura 2002

Shirakura Yoshihiko. *Edo no shunga: Sore wa poruno datta no ka* 江戸の春画: それはポルノだったのか. Yōsensha, 2002.

Shirakura 2007

Shirakura Yoshihiko. *Eiri shunga ehon mokuroku* 絵入春画艶本目録. Heibonsha, 2007.

Yano 1999

Yano Kan'ichi 矢野貫一. “Inyu goi” 淫諭語彙. *Bungaku* 文学 10:3 (1999), pp.104–14.

Yasumura 1993

Yasumura Toshinobu 安村敏信. “Warau yōkai onna tachi: Warai to sei to nozoki to” 笑う妖怪女たち: 笑いと性と覗きと. *Nihon no bigaku* 日本の美学 20 (1993), pp. 99–101.

Yoshida 1963

Yoshida Teruji 吉田暎二. “Shodai Toyokuni no nikuhitsu higajō” 初代豊国の肉筆秘画帖. *Ukiyo-e* 浮世絵 4 (1963), pp. 34–46.