

X. PARODIES OF THE CLASSICS

Question 10. The texts in *shunga* are difficult to decipher today because of the calligraphic style and use of different syllabary. Could common folk of the time read these works? We also see numerous references and allusions to classical literature and poetry, but did the common people have education to understand these references?

A. Japanese modern compulsory education began from 1890, but in the Edo period there was a system of private schooling called “*terakoya*” (temple or village schools). This system began from demand in Kyoto and Osaka from merchants and artisans, and later spread to Edo and other cities. Eventually this reached to farming and fishing villages, and by the eighteenth century had spread nationally, increasing particularly during the nineteenth century. In the 1860s there were reputed to be about 1,500 schools in Edo, and more than 15,000 nationwide. These schools varied in size from small numbers of ten pupils or so, to 100.

Children would begin schooling aged five or six, and then both boys and girls usually went into service at the age of twelve or thirteen. Some schools were just for boys or girls, but mixed-sex schools were most common. In *shunga*, we sometimes encounter scenes set in *terakoya*.

The curriculum comprised the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic (*soroban*). Aside from these, they were taught social and other practical skills. The textbooks used were printed not in modern squarish regular script but in a cursive style and from today seem to be difficult to read. However, anyone receiving a *terakoya* education could read Edo-period woodblock printed books, and so *shunga* texts would not have been hard for them. Literacy rates are not as precisely measured as today, but it is estimated that in the large cities by the middle of the nineteenth century, literacy was about 70–80 percent and about 35 percent nationally. This is relatively high by world standards of that time.¹¹

Since there was a need constantly to innovate in *shunga*, artists and writers of parody needed well known works, and one source of material was texts commonly used in *terakoya*, and therefore widely familiar. Among the types of textbooks used in *terakoya* were subgenres such as *teikin ōrai* 庭訓往来 (textbooks on domestic life), *shōbai ōrai* 商売往来 (on business), and *hyakushō ōrai* 百姓往来 (on farming). Children learned about medicine, trade, geography, customs, history, and fiction from these basic textbooks,

11 “*Kiseki*” no *Nihonshi*: *Rekishi o kaeta unmei no shunkan ni semaru*, ed. Rekishi no Nazo Kenkyūkai. Seishun Shuppansha, 1998.

but there were also more specialized ones which focused on Confucianism, Japanese and Chinese history, Japanese and Chinese poetry, and others that paraphrased classical stories. Parodic versions of such textbooks can be readily found in *ukiyo-e shunga*. Artists would transform the very stiff and proper contents of the didactic primers cleverly into *shunga*, and the contrast between them was the attraction. *Shunga* can therefore be seen as part of the broader irreverent comic tradition of Edo-period culture.

**66. *Onna teikin gesho bunko* 女貞訓下所文庫
(Library of Feminine Virtues for the Vulva)** (Image of Sayohime)

Tsukioka Settei (1726–1786). Ink woodblock printed *ōhon* book. Ca. 1768.

This *shunga* is a parody of *Onna teikin gesho bunko* 女庭訓御所文庫 (Courtly Library of Feminine Teachings, 1767). The image here is of the legendary role model for women Matsura Sayohime 松浦狭夜姫, whose story is transformed into *shunga*. Let's compare the texts in the original and the parody.



Figure 66

Onna teikin gosho bunko (Courtly Library of Feminine Teachings)

Sayohime Turned into a Stone

Sayohime was from the village of Shinohara in Matsura, Bizen, which faces towards China; she was born to the head of the province. In the time of Emperor Senka, it was reported that China planned to invade Silla (Korea). Since Silla was under the control of Japan and regularly gave tribute to Japan, the Emperor ordered the Japanese army to attack and save Silla. Therefore, Sadehiko, son of Ōtomo no Kanamura, was made commander and the army dispatched to China. Sadehiko was already married to Sayohime but there was no assurance that he would return alive from the battles in China. Fearing that he would never see her again, he left tearfully on the ship.

Sayohime was devastated to be separated from her husband and climbed a mountain peak to see him off in the distance, waving a shaw (*hire-furi*) till the boat disappeared over the horizon. After the ship was gone from sight, Sayohime wept and eventually died of grief. After that the mountain was called Mt. Hirefuri. Since she was so saddened by her husband's departure that she died, feeling pity for her, people built a memorial grave. The phrase "life is fleeting like a dewdrop" reflects her fate.

In another version of this story, Sayohime turned into a stone while standing on Mt. Hirefuri, and even to this day, that stone still exists. In China, as well, there is a story of a husband setting sail for another country and the wife climbing a mountain to see off his boat, weeping, and turning to stone. The mountain came to be called Mt. Bōfu ("Longing for her husband"). So the case of Sayohime is not without precedent.

Onna teikin gesho bunko (Library of Feminine Virtues for the Vulva)

On Sayohime

Sayohime was married to Sadehiko, son of Ōtomo no Kanamura, but Sadehiko had to set off for battle in a foreign land. Sayohime regretted his departure and said, "Since you may not return from battle, before you leave please hurry and make me a happily satisfied woman." Especially since this was an auspicious sending off to battle, until the day of departure, she was embraced continually by her husband and caressed lovingly. They made love without a care for the world till the moment of his departure. After that Sayohime grew exhausted with grief from waiting for her husband, and climbing up the mountain peak day and night. Finally Sadehiko returned and so they had much to talk about now being back together. Delighted at his safe return, they prepared to make love to celebrate.

However, because she had grieved for so long, her vulva had grown hard like a stone, and even applying medicine it would not budge. Nevertheless, Sadehiko persisted trying all sorts of secret methods and finally it grew soft and moist, and became a magnificent pussy with delicious delights. The people at the time said that

she grew weak from grief for her distant husband and her pussy turned to stone. It was fascinating that Sadehiko was able to soften it again with his rod (*mara*), which made people joke that he was the true son of Kanamura, which sounded like “kana-mara” meaning “steel cock.” It is true that if a woman is too chaste and loyal, and restrains all enticements and desires, then her pussy will become hard as stone.

The image here below the comic text is the scene when they exchange passionate vows before Sadahiko departs. The dialogue is as below, but without knowledge of the original legend, we cannot see its humor.

Sadahiko: “There is still time before the ship sails. Let’s do it one more time.”

Sayohime: “Hurry and come on home.”

Tsukioka Settei produced several such parodies, such as *Onna dairaku takara-beki* 女大楽宝開 (Great Pleasures for Women and Their Treasure Boxes, ca. 1755), a parody of *Onna daigaku takara-bako* 女大学宝箱 (Treasure Chest of Great Learning for Women) of 1716; *Onna shimegawa oeshi-bumi* 女令川趣文 (Love Letters and a River of Erect Precepts for Women) of ca. 1768, a parody of *Onna imagawa oshie-bumi* 女今川教文 (Family Admonitions for Women and Letters for Teaching), of 1768; and *Bidō nichiya jobōki* 艶道日夜女宝記 (A Treasure Book for Women on the Way of Love, Day and Night), mid-1760s, a parody of the bestselling popular medical text *Idō nichiyō chōhōki* 医道日用重宝記 (Treasure Book of Medicine, Day and Night), of 1692.

67. *Ise monogatari haikai mame-otoko: Musō no zukin* 伊勢物語俳諧豆男夢想頭巾 (*Tales of Ise, Comic Verse, Bean Man and the Dream Cap*) (vol. 3, image 4)

Okumura Masanobu (1686–1764). Horizontal ink woodblock printed book, 3 vols. Ca. 1704–1711.

This book, as we can tell from the title, uses a fantastical motif and is based on a classical work. The main character is a poet familiar with *The Tales of Ise* (ca. tenth century), which contains many poems and romantic stories with Ariwara no Narihira as the main protagonist. In a dream he makes an offering to the deified Ariwara no Narihira, and from two other deities, male and female, he receives a magical cap. Wearing this cap shrinks him to the size of a bean that no one can see. This poet wears the cap and sets off on a journey from Kyoto to Edo, in imitation of *Tales of Ise*, and along the way discovers all varieties of sexual encounters, about which he composes haiku—a very clever and innovative narrative technique. The Harunobu “Mane’emon” series introduced earlier was an imitation of this concept.

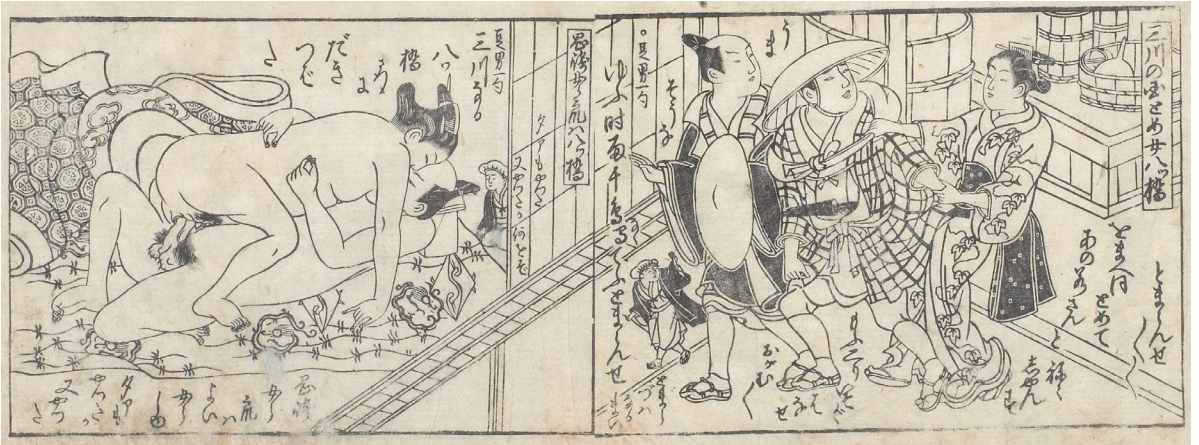


Figure 67

The image here is a parody of the “Yatsuhashi” (zigzag bridge with eight planks) chapter of *Tales of Ise*. The image to the right has the title “Stopping at Yatsuhashi in Mikawa Province” (which punningly refers to the woman Yatsuhashi at an inn in Mikawa who is luring customers to stay at her inn).

Touting woman: “Please come to stay at my inn. Welcome, welcome. I want to have you stay here so I can sleep with the young fellow.”

Traveller One: “We are going on for at least five miles longer. Let go of me.”

Traveller Two: “What a delicious looking bird!”

.....

Bean Man: “They’re sure to stop here.”

Bean Man’s poem: Evening shower in autumn / plovers singing / come stay with me

On the left we see the sequel “Yatsuhashi, the prostitute of Okazaki.” The travellers have stopped at Okazaki where they are entertained by the prostitutes.

Traveller Two: “The prostitutes of Okazaki are excellent girls. Last night was great. Looking forward to doing it again.”

.....

Bean Man: “What did he ‘do’?”

Bean Man’s poem: Mikawa’s Yatsuhashi / how nice / to pluck a rabbit-ear iris

His verse alludes to a poem in the *Tales of Ise*, knowledge of which shows the wit of Bean Man.

68. *Fūryū zashiki hakkei* 風流座敷八景 (Eight Elegant Scenes of Lovemaking) (Autumn Moon at Lake Dongting) (image 4)

Suzuki Harunobu (1725?–1770). Set of eight *chūban* color woodblock prints. Ca. 1769.

This is a set of eight *shunga* prints which is modeled on another of Harunobu's non-*shunga* series entitled *Zashiki hakkei* (Eight Scenes of Rooms), transforming the scenes into erotic encounters.

Zashiki hakkei is based on the famous Chinese set *Shōshō hakkei* 瀟湘八景 [Eight Views of Xiaoxiang], and transformed them into “drawing room” settings. Xiaoxiang is south of Lake Dongting, where two rivers flow together, and has been a favorite site for painters and poets. Below are listed the eight traditional Chinese scenes.

Autumn Bells from a Temple in Distant Mountains
Early Summer Clouds and Wind in a Mountain Village
Evening Rain at Xiao and Xiang Rivers



Reference Image 68-1. “Autumn Moon at Lake Dongting” from *Shōshō hakkei* (Eight Views of Xiaoxiang), painted by Shōkei. Ink on paper with pale coloring. Late 15th century. Collection of Hakutsuru Fine Art Museum.



Reference Image 68-2. “Kyōdai no shūgetsu” (Autumn Moon in a Mirror) from *Zashiki hakkei* (Eight Scenes of Rooms) by Suzuki Harunobu. Set of eight *chūban* color woodblock prints. Ca. 1766.

Sailboats Returning from Afar
Dusk in a Fishing Village
Autumn Moon at Lake Dongting
Geese Alighting on the Shore
Snow on the Mountains at Dusk

Many Chinese literati visited these sites over the centuries, composing poems and paintings, and from the late fourteenth century some of these were brought to Japan and inspired Japanese poets and artists.

Reference Image 68-1 is by the priest-painter Shōkei (ac. late 15th century), “Autumn Moon at Lake Dongting,” which shows the full harvest moon in a monochrome ink painting. Harunobu modeled his *Eight Scenes of Rooms* on works like these. Reference Image 68-2 is his variation on Lake Dongting, entitled “Kyōdai no shūgetsu” 鏡台の秋月 (Autumn Moon in a Mirror), which shows a girl having her hair arranged in front of a mirror. Her kimono has the design of “plovers over the waves,” which alludes to Lake Dongting. The pampas grass outside the window also suggests the season.



Figure 68-3

Now, let us consider the *shunga* parody of this “Autumn Moon in a Mirror” scene, Figure 68-3. We see a round mirror in the picture and a woman fresh from her bath putting her hair up, with her kimono wrapped loosely around her. Her husband takes advantage of the moment to playfully entice her loins and from behind he opens the folds of her kimono. The wife has not shaved her eyebrows, signaling that they are a young yet childless couple.

An autumn evening / before viewing the moon between the clouds / climbing the dais / seeing the autumn moon

To understand why Harunobu parodied this Autumn Moon over Dongting scene, it is helpful to consider the poem above. It expresses feelings at viewing the autumn moon, referring to the shining light of the full moon as it appears between the clouds. Harunobu imagines this image of a hidden moon suddenly appearing through the clouds to be a curved shape now reflected in the mirror, that is, the sudden appearance of the woman’s normally hidden body now fresh from her bath. He boldly juxtaposes the woman’s scantily-clothed body against the familiar image of the moon that viewers would have in mind. We are treated to a playful transformation of the image of the autumn full moon reflected in the water, to a scene of a young wife’s curvaceous body after her bath suddenly revealed, and the effect it has on her husband.

We also see on the veranda a *nadeshiko* (pink) flower that is a traditional symbol of a beautiful and desirable woman. Harunobu’s *shunga* are complex because allusions and parodies are regularly employed. The deciphering of such works is their delight.

69. *Imayō tsuma kagami* 今様妻鑑 (Mirror for Modern Wives) (vol. 1, image 2)
Suzuki Harunobu (1725?–1770). Ink woodblock printed *hanshibon* book, 3 vols. Ca. 1771.

This book, as we have seen, alludes to poems from the *Wakan rōeishū*, transforming them into *shunga*. The collection of famous Chinese and Japanese poetry was compiled by Fujiwara Kintō (966–1041) as a wedding gift for his daughter. Organized according to the seasons and other themes, it proved to be a popular book and was printed often in the Edo period.

The image here is from the section “Early Spring,” with a Chinese poem by Ono no Takamura. The meaning of the poem is:

Gazing at the fields / the purple shoots of the *warabi* (bracken) / look almost like / human fists

Gazing at the shore / the green buds of the reeds / look almost like / a drill poring a pouch

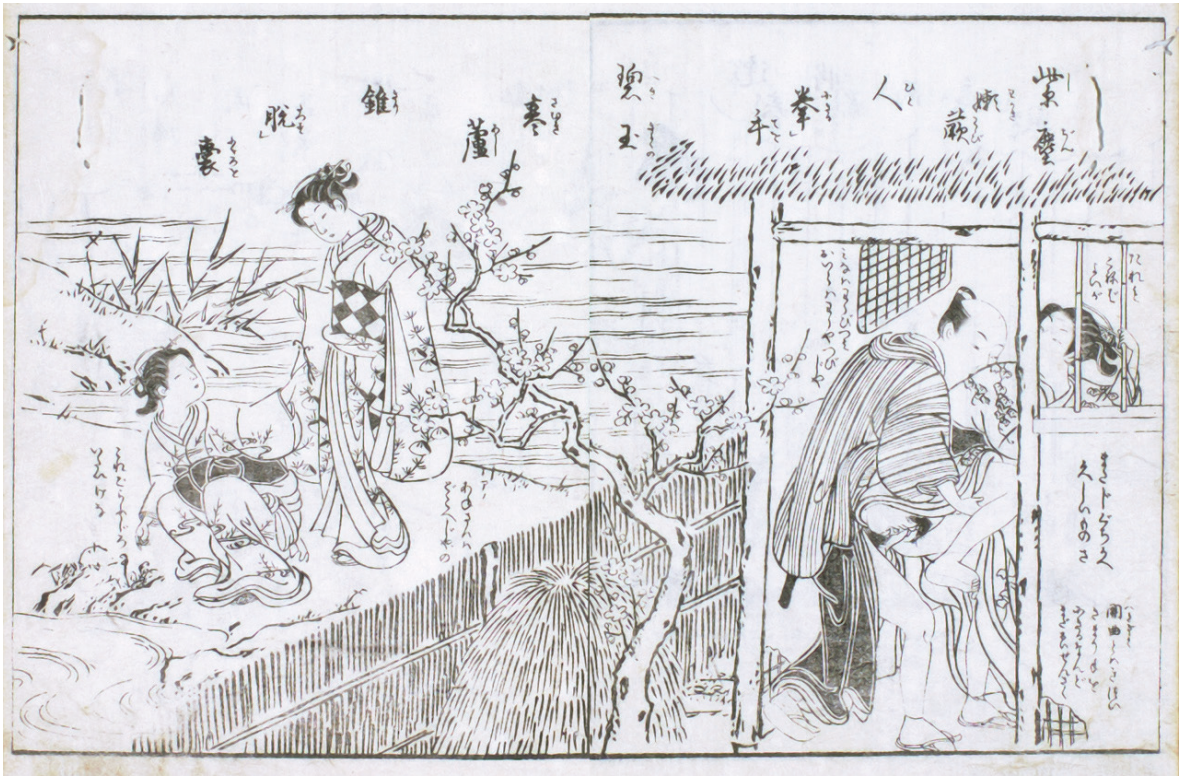


Figure 69

The image follows the poem in showing to the left young girls picking *warabi* along a shore where reeds grow, but the focus is the little thatched hut to the right. A young man and woman are in the unusual position known as “*ushiro-dachi kanae*” (A three-legged vessel from behind), hurrying to do their business.

Let’s listen to their dialogue:

Woman: “Hope no one sees us.”

Man: “They’re all picking *warabi*, while we’re here rustling through thatch.”

Woman: “There you go again with your punning. Always at it, aren’t you.”

Man: “Bit tedious and dull to hold hands. Let’s try for an unusual position.”

The man makes jokes referring to the poems, knowledge of which is necessary to see the wit. Along the shore the two girls also speak:

Girl One: “Here, look at this. How charming.”

She picks *warabi* innocently while the other holding a *kiseru* pipe says:

Girl Two: “Where did Sis get to?”

She begins to worry about her missing older sister. Perhaps Harunobu intended for the two girls to represent “early spring (young love).”

**70. *Shokumotsu baka honzō* 色物馬鹿本草
(Fool’s Guide to Lovemaking)** (vol. 1, image 9)

Isoda Koryūsai (ac. 1764–1789). Ink woodblock printed *hanshibon* book, 5 vols. Ca. 1778.

This set of books is an erotic parody of the *Shokumotsu waka honzō* 食物和歌本草 (Guide to Food and Poetry). *Honzōsho* were guidebooks to various things like plants and minerals, and was a popular genre, and this *shunga* book imitates its structure and style.

The image here is under the title of the syllable “ri,” highlighting *rinkidori* (green-eyed jealous bird).

On Birds

Rinki bird, salty, and very hot, poisonous

What kind of bird? It is has the usual straightforward characteristics of a bird. It always wants to eat (sex) and has no poison. If the bird has problems with other birds, then it becomes poisonous, and hurts people. Someone said that a *Rinki* bird is best when it is eating day and night.

When a *Rinki* bird gets angry and forces itself to eat, it becomes all squishy.

Those who were familiar with the style of *honzō* books would not be able to help laughing at the parody.

The dialogue in the illustration is:

Wife: “What, you wanton man! I’ve had enough.”

Husband: “You’re unreasonable! Murderer woman!”

Woman: “Wow, what a scary face!”



Figure 70

71. *Ehon haru no akebono* 笑本春の曙 (**Dawn in Spring**) (vol. 3, image 2)
 Kitao Shigemasa (1739–1820). Ink woodblock printed *hanshibon* book, 3 vols. Ca. 1772.

This book alludes to the classical *Pillow Book* (*Makura no sōshi*) by the court lady Sei Shōnagon, again parodying its structure and style. It takes various categories from the original such as “Things that are different than expected,” or “Large things that are good” and transforms them into *shunga* discourse.

The image here is of “Hateful things,” but to understand the parody, let’s first look at the original text:

Hateful things
 Finding a hair in the inkstone when preparing ink
 Finding a pebble in the ink when you grind it, making a gritty sound
 A loquacious guest when you are in a hurry to leave
 A dog that growls when you have secret visitor; could kill it!

The parody follows the original closely.



Figure 71

Hateful things

Making love in a hidden place and suddenly a dog finds you and starts barking
 Secretly visiting a prostitute whom you like, but getting caught and upbraided by the madam
 Just as you think you've seduced a woman, the head clerk comes to fetch her; could kill the man!

The image illustrates the item: "Making love in a hidden place and suddenly a dog finds you and starts barking." The man is ready to throw a stone at the dog.

Man: "What a stupid dog. If I catch you at it, I'll throw water on you!"

Woman: "Ah, leave him alone. My body's melting."

Dogs and cats often appear in *shunga*, but here the woman is so turned on that she doesn't care about the dog, while the man is really angry. His threat of throwing water on the dog if he catches it in the act, makes him seem comically like a child.

72. *Jikkai no zu* 十開之図 (Ten Realms of Pussy Knowledge) (image 5)

Keisai Eisen (1790–1848). Set of ten *aiban* color woodblock prints. Ca. 1823.

Buddhism divides the world into six realms of illusion (hell, hungry ghosts, beasts, fighting *ashura* demons, humans, heavenly gods) and four realms of enlightenment leading to Buddhahood—altogether ten levels. This is called *jikkai* (ten realms) and there are pictures of these ten realms. Here the character “kai” has been changed from “realm or level” to one meaning “pussy,” and Eisen has created a series showing ten kinds of lovemaking. Furthermore, each image has characters from kabuki plays.

The image is a parody of the fifth “human” realm and the couple represent the famous courtesan Yūgiri and her lover Izaemon, who was the heir of a wealthy merchant family. He fell for the beautiful Yūgiri but was disinherited and eventually descends into poverty without a cent to his name. Even then he could not forget Yūgiri and comes to her shop, standing spellbound outside it. After this there are lots of further incidents. The image here shows the man infatuated with the courtesan’s charms and totally head over heels in love. The theme is the essence of human nature.



Figure 72

Title: “Ten Realms of Pussy Knowledge”: Humans

Unable to hold back with his cock erect, he enjoys sex for the first time in a long while. Yūgiri, too, refused to give herself to any other clients and worked to enable Izaemon to continue to see her, keeping faithful to him. Ah, the human world is a wonderful place!

Izaemon: “I don’t care if I look poor and disheveled. In the future, I’ll somehow make you my wife, and be able to fuck you to my heart’s content. I’ve heard that there are some new-fangled sex aids. Shall I buy one so we can try it. Oh, my head feels as if its being grabbed and sucked inside. Ah, ah, . . .”

Yūgiri: “Now, no more of your chatter. Hurry up and move it to the right. Now at the top. That feels fantastic, fantastic. Don’t know how many times I came. It’s been almost exactly a year. I just had 360 days worth! Ah, nice, nice. . .”

Edo folk were conversant with kabuki and knew the stories well. This series uses references to both kabuki and to the Buddhist ten realms to create a humorous tale.

73. *Enshoku shina sadame* 艶色品定女

(**Commentaries on Women’s Charm**) (Matsukaze image; Nowaki image)

Utagawa Kunimori II (ac. 1830–1861). Color woodblock printed *hanshibon* book, 3 vols. Ca. 1852.

The title alludes to a famous scene in the *Tale of Genji* (ca. 1008) “Hahakigi” (Broom Tree) chapter. On a night in the rainy season, Prince Genji, together with three other young men, Tō no Chūjō, Sama no Kami, and Tō Shikibu no Jō, discuss the merits and demerits of various types of women. This “rainy night discussion” is not directly the model for this *shunga*, but rather the fifty-four chapters of the tale are used for erotic scenes. Each image has a *kai-awase* (a game of matching sea shells by shape, color and type). Inside the shell we see a scene from the *Tale of Genji*, and a poem card features a poem from the novel.

In the “Matsukaze” scene in the shell, Prince Genji’s lover, the Lady Akashi, has come from Suma to Kyoto and is living near Ōi River. She is playing the *koto* zither. The poem reads:

Coming alone / hidden away / the wind in the pines / reminds me / of the sound of
the winds in the pines at home

The first scene shows Prince Genji and Lady Akashi vowing their love. The second scene is “Nowaki” (Typhoon) and the shell picture shows a typhoon in autumn, when Yūgiri



Figure 73-1



Figure 73-2

(Genji's son) visits Genji's Rokujō Palace and catches a glimpse of the beautiful Lady Murasaki. The poem reads:

The winds rustle / the clouds rush about / the beauty seen at night / cannot forget /
though I try

The image shows the disheveled state of Genji and Lady Tamakazura, after the storm when Yūgiri has seen them. This book expects that the reader will be familiar with the outline of the *Tale of Genji* and the poems.