

CHAPTER 5

IMAYÔ TSUMA KAGAMI: SHUNGA WITH MITATE OF CHINESE POEMS

Explanations of the Illustrations

The *mitate-e* by Harunobu examined previously were based on famous old poems or popular contemporary *kyôka*. Next I would like to introduce the *Imayô tsuma kagami*, a *shunga* volume which takes poetic ideas from Chinese poems and creates *mitate* of them in the form of contemporary love scenes between men and women.

The Chinese poems written above each illustration in this volume are all drawn from the *Wakan rôeishû*, a collection of poetry compiled by the famous Heian-period poet Fujiwara Kintô (966–1041). It includes 216 *waka* and 588 Chinese poems (*kanshi*) divided into the categories Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter, and Miscellany. Originally it was a private poetry collection, given to Fujiwara Kintô's daughter upon marriage. The poems were avidly read and copied over the centuries. In the Edo period it was published in woodblock form, and by the eighteenth century the poems gathered together in it were widely chanted even among ordinary people of non-aristocratic birth. Harunobu's teacher, Nishikawa Sukenobu, designed the illustrated book *Ehon nezame no tane* (1744) in which Chinese poems from the *Wakan rôeishû* were appended to contemporary genre scenes as in this set. Harunobu probably consulted the *Ehon nezame no tane* when he designed his set of books, but he attempted to create even more interesting *mitate* with *shunga*. It is easy to imagine *shunga* based on erotically charged *waka*, *kyôka*, *haikai*, or

senryū, but one must admit that the pairing of *shunga* with well known Chinese poems is quite unusual.

This work consists of three volumes. The first volume includes an introduction by Suiganbō. Each volume consists of a frontispiece printed in monochrome, eleven *shunga* illustrations, and two short romantic tales. Here I will deal only with the *shunga*, which total thirty-three illustrations. Following the general trend in sets of *shunga*, I have chosen the format of twelve illustrations and will proceed with explaining the *mitate* of the *shunga* and the refined Chinese poems. As in the previous chapters, I will begin the explanations with the Chinese poems appearing at the top of the illustrations and do simple annotations.

Plate 1 (Volume One, first illustration)

*They follow the breeze and secretly bud,
not waiting for the time of fragrant flowers;
welcoming spring, they suddenly transform,
hoping for the grace of rain and dew.⁴*

(*Wakan rōishū*, opening page, spring section, an early spring poem. Ki no Yoshimochi, who has suffered some misfortune, is unexpectedly invited to a palace banquet to celebrate the New Year. This is his poem which was offered to the emperor at the banquet.)

Based on the poem, Harunobu has placed a blossoming plum tree in the right-hand side of the picture. Of course this is an external *mitate*. The nucleus of Harunobu's *mitate* is the young couple—a young man with forelock and a girl wearing a *furisode*. In other words, Harunobu is likening the budding romance of the young couple facing puberty to the plum blossoms starting to open when caressed by the first spring breeze. As a hint, the robes of the two figures are decorated with the motif of plum blossoms.

However, there is another level in this illustration. Anyone who has

4. All of the poems from the *Wakan rōishū* included here follow the translations in J. Thomas Rimer and Jonathan Chaves, *Japanese and Chinese Poems to Sing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

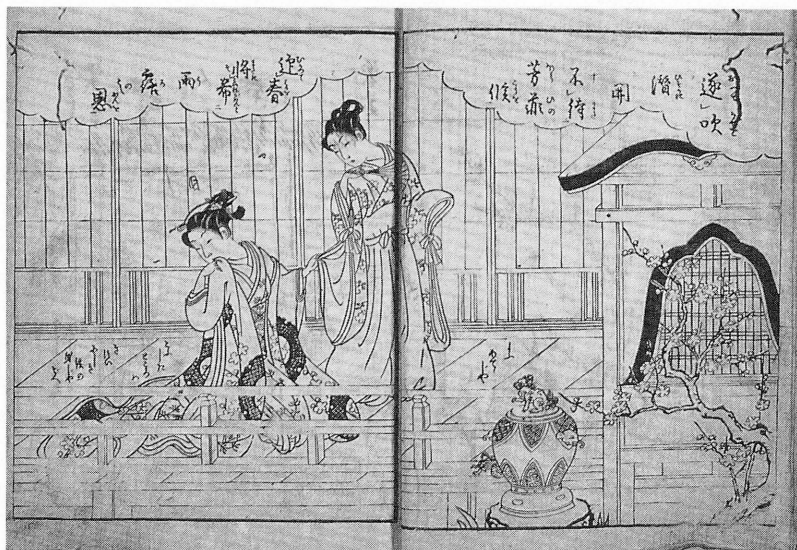


Plate 1

read the tale in the first volume will quickly recognize it as a portrayal of the first passage. In this scene, a woman has made a hole in the sliding paper door in the background, and her voyeuristic eye is represented (left center, above the girl's head). When one realizes this, the situation in the picture becomes real. A girl who has come on a pilgrimage with her mother is smitten with a handsome acolyte (*chigo*; youth employed as a servant at temples). This scene shows the girl trying to seduce the acolyte in the back of the main worship hall, taking advantage of the fact that no one can see them. The text accompanying this scene reads as follows:

The girl catches the acolyte's sleeve, and bashfully taking her own sleeve in her mouth says nervously, "Oh, acolyte, I'm so delighted to have been brought to such a nice place. You know, I'm [quite smitten] with you." The acolyte is embarrassed and when he tries to separate himself, she won't let go, clinging to him saying, "Mmm,

I think you are darling. I'm really embarrassed—I don't know how to say it."

Once we apprehend that the scene is about flirtation, then the dialogue between the girl and the boy (written within the illustration) makes sense. The girl says, "This is just like in the candid woodblock prints (*rokotsu na nishiki-e*)."
Rokotsu na nishiki-e undoubtedly refers to ukiyo-e *shunga*. It is not a scene of sex, but the girl was probably prompted to describe it as being like *shunga* because scenes of women aggressively taking the initiative frequently appear in ukiyo-e *shunga*. In response, the acolyte says in admiration, "You hit it right on the mark." This kind of conversation between the two is somewhat unnatural for the scene actually depicted. But if viewed as an expression of the unique world of *shunga*, this sort of dialogue adds an extra touch of humor to the scene.

Having understood the context so far, as another bit of amusement let's try to put this together with the poem above—a verse which a destitute writer presented to the emperor. Underlying the poem is the idea that I (the writer) am an unknown person of low social status, just like an old plum tree. Being invited to today's banquet and being able to present this poem to you (the emperor) is just like the plum facing spring. Like the plum blossoms anticipating the "blessing of rain and dew," I am respectfully hoping for your favor. If one knows this background, the romantic mind of the girl seeking the "blessing of rain and dew" from the youth whose sleeve she is clinging to can be seen as a *mitate* for the idea in the poem. As noted in the previous explanation of the "clouds of Fuzan," in literary tradition "clouds and rain" refer to sexual encounters between men and women, and in addition "dew" is secret language for sexual fluids.

Be that as it may, parents seem to be blind to the budding puberty of their children. The exchange between the temple priest and mother in this tale goes as follows:

The chief priest gives his standard greeting, saying, "Your daughter has really grown up in the time I haven't seen her," whereby the mother smiles and laughs saying, "No, no, only her height is increas-

ing. She's still a child," indicating that the parent doesn't know her daughter's mind.

While in the mother's eye she is still a child, the budding of sexual desire is undoubtedly beginning to occur within a boy or girl approaching puberty.

Plate 2 (Volume One, third illustration)

*Beneath the flowers, forgetting to return,
because of the lovely scene;
facing my wine cup, urging me to drink,
none other than spring wind!*

(Spring section, poem about the height of spring pleasure. It is a verse from a poem by Po Chu-i, who along with a friend passed the civil service examinations, so the two celebrate by going out flower-viewing together.)

Based on the poem, a samurai party is depicted under a cherry tree in



Plate 2

full bloom, surrounded by a curtain. It appears to be a scene of a drunken man and woman cavorting. Here again, however, the main thread of Harunobu's *mitate* is something different. First let's read the lines of the cavorting man and woman.

Man: In my opinion, this is better than the blossoms. I would appreciate a match with you. Now this is a truly lovely scene.

Woman: Oh no, there seems to be a mistaken identity. I'm not Okô-san.

The man who is feeling good due to the sake imbibed during the cherry blossom viewing is flirting with his female companion and she is lightly dodging him. The man says, "*Kore wa honto no bikei da!* (This is a truly lovely scene!)" In Japanese, the words *bikei* (lovely scene) and *bikai* (lovely vagina) are similar in sound, so the man is making a pun on *bikei* in the poem. But the characters can't be looking at the poem written above—this is also part of Harunobu's creative intention. The woman referred to as "Okô-san" is probably the man's wife. Watching the pair, the other man says, "This is getting interesting—it's that guy's habitual practice."

The servant peeping at the proceedings through an opening in the curtain is disgusted, and says, "The master is fooling around yet again." Then, worried about what his master will say to his wife when he returns home, the servant adds, "You will probably be questioned by your wife, who will say, 'I've been worried. Why you are so late in returning?'"

The humor of this picture lies in the lineup of characters—the lecherous samurai, his jealous wife, and the servant standing in the middle who is worried about his master's explanation. In addition, with regard to the master's pun of *bikei* and *bikai*, if we see *shunpû* (spring breeze) as a pun on *shunjô* (sexual passion), the *shunga mitate* upon the poem is consummated.

Plate 3 (Volume One, sixth illustration)

*At times he dangles precariously from the doorway's lintel;
he has no prospect of walking freely in his garden back home.*

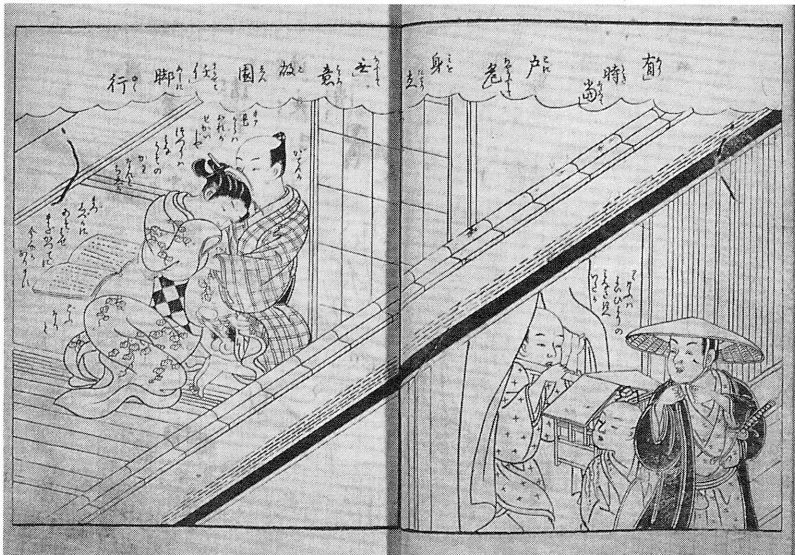


Plate 3

(Summer section; during the annual Boy's Festival on the fifth day of the fifth month, it was the custom to place dolls woven of artemisia above doors to ward off evil. This is a poem by Sugawara no Michizane on behalf of an artemisia doll.)

In this illustration, no kind of decoration connected with either artemisia dolls or the Boy's Festival is depicted. Therefore the *mitate* in this print can only be discovered by interpreting the situation.

On the right side of the picture, a man seeming to be the master of the house is going out the gate with his male servants, saying, "Ah, what a nice day it is today. Has everyone gone on ahead?" Looking at the male servants behind him, shouldering a burden on a carrying pole, it appears that he has gathered the family together and is going off on some kind of excursion. However, one couple remains within the house. They converse:

Man: Saa, from now on it's all ours. Your saying that you have a

headache was a complete lie, wasn't it? How brilliant!

Woman: Hush. There is still a servant in the kitchen.

After awhile . . .

Man: Is it OK now?

Woman: I'm ready to do as you please.

From the couple's exchange, it can be surmised that just as the family was getting ready to depart on their trip, the young wife feigned illness and remained with her husband. It probably isn't necessary to explain why. In this scene, Harunobu seems to be likening the mind of the young wife to the thoughts of the artemesia doll. Made simply of straw, it is happy to have been given the form of a human. No matter how dangerous its position may be, it has no intention of returning to the original garden where its friends are. The young wife's feelings, who in her joy of knowing the ecstasy of that "thing" wants to remain with her husband even if she has to tell a lie, are a *mitate* for the thoughts of the artemesia doll, who even though dangling precariously from the doorway's lintel wants to remain as it is in human form. Rather than go off on an excursion with everyone, the wife chooses the pleasure of just the two of them. One can't help but smile.

Harunobu's powerful imagination enabled him to see the overlapping between the difference between the artemesia grass and the artemesia doll, and the young married couple's change of mind before and after experiencing the pleasures of sex. It is not simply wit, but one can almost feel the actual physical sensations. The essence of the *mitate* lies within the power of imagination accompanying this kind of actual perception.

Plate 4 (Volume One, seventh illustration)

*The dew-moistened mat freshly glitters,
glossy as it welcomes night;
my breeze-swept lapels refreshingly flutter,
cool long before the fall.*

(Summer section; a poem about enjoying the coolness of evening. This is a verse from a poem written by Po Chu-i about a scene of cooling off by the edge of a pond.)



Plate 4

Based on the poem, two young women and a man are depicted on a platform, relaxing and enjoying the evening cool. The woman sitting with one knee up and the young man resting his chin on one hand and snuggling against her from behind are staring at a small potted plant. It is probably a kind of pine needle orchid popular at that time. They are admiring it while enjoying the cool on the raised platform.

It goes without saying that since this is *shunga*, it can't stop there. The young man is reaching one hand around to the underside of the girl's thigh, exploring in front. The couple's eyes are facing the potted plant, but their minds are elsewhere. The girl blurts out, "Look, the sparkler is already starting!" Is she referring to the sparkler-like appearance of the plant in the pot, or is this a metaphor for the pleasant sensation she is feeling from the man's finger play? It is probably a mixture of visual and sensual sensibilities.

In addition, the woman's feeling the touching sensation in her private area is a *mitate* for the line in the poem about the "glossiness of the dew

moistened mat,” and the “coolness of the breeze along my lapels” is likened to the cool feeling due to her pulled up hem. The pleasant feeling of cooling off at night is wonderfully transformed into the pleasure of light sexual play.

The older sister-like woman, who looks back over her shoulder upon hearing their conversation, is surprised and says, “Fireworks coming from *nanikusa*? This child says foolish things.” Obviously she isn’t aware of what is going on. This becomes a laughing point for the viewer.

Plate 5 (Volume One, eighth illustration)

*The fireflies' lights fly randomly—
autumn's getting near;
Mercury sinks early now—
nights begin to lengthen.*

(Summer section; poem about fireflies. This is one verse from the poem “Night Sitting” by the Tang poet Yuan Zhen.)



Plate 5

Based on the poem, fireflies are dancing vigorously by the waterside, and the *mitate* as *shunga* is rather difficult to see. However, if we call into play the association of ideas, the “fire” of “fireflies” can be associated with the “secret language” words “place of fire” (vagina) and “candle” (penis), and from there, lighting the fire of sexual union between man and woman comes to mind. To be sure, lovers flock to the waterside in summer, and when night falls, here and there the “fires” of men and women are being “lit.” If these “fireworks” are a *mitate* for the flickering lights of fireflies, then it materializes as a *shunga mitate*. In looking at the man’s words, “Yeah, sounds are coming forth,” and the woman’s expressions of pleasure, “*Ha, aremo, hai, ha,*” there is no doubt that the couple’s “fire” is burning vigorously.

If this couple is a *mitate* for “fireflies,” then the two women peeping at them from behind the willow tree must be a *mitate* for Mercury. The planet closest to the sun, Mercury only appears just after sundown and just before sunrise, shimmering near the edge of the mountains. So the women peeping from behind the willow could be a *mitate* for this special character of Mercury. In other words, the persons spying are hiding behind something, and are poking their heads out just a little from behind their cover. The woman spying from behind the willow says with great interest, “Hey, listen to those sounds.” The other woman cautions, “Don’t get too close. Let’s get going.” Nevertheless, the voyeur woman is still covering her face with the handmade paper mask, causing us to chuckle in spite of ourselves. Wanting to watch other people’s secret activities, yet not wanting one’s own face to be seen is an unchanging aspect of the psychology of human cunning in any age.

Plate 6 (Volume Two, first illustration)

*Chattering, chattering beneath the darkened window,
droning, droning deep within the grass—
on autumn days, grieving women’s hearts,
through rainy nights, saddening the ears of men!*

(Autumn section; poem about insects. One verse from Po Chu-i’s poem “Autumn Insects.”)

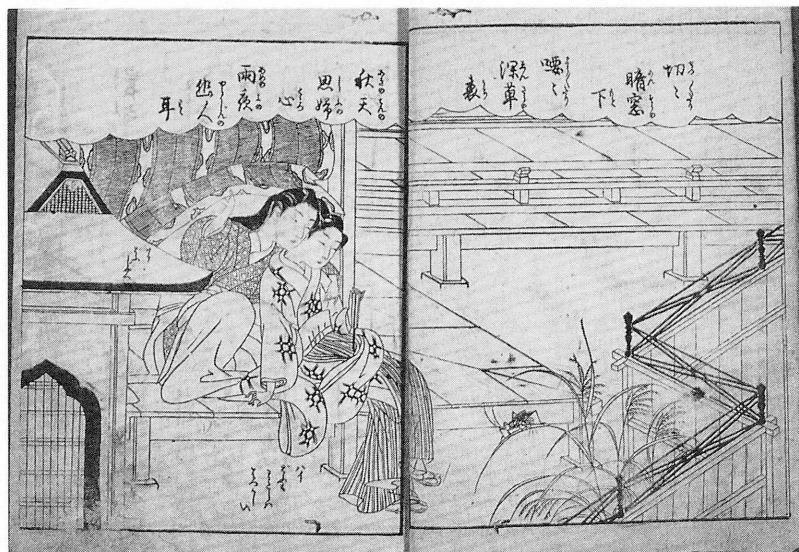


Plate 6

Adhering to the poem, an insect has been placed on top of the pampas grasses in the garden—only one. A young man wearing a *furisode* and holding a dancer's fan is sitting on the veranda of a *shinden zukuri* (noble's residence) style building. A long-haired woman has put her arm around his shoulder and is whispering something in his ear.

Woman: Come on, how about it?

Man: All right, but I'm feeling a little embarrassed.

In other words, the woman is seducing the young man. Judging from appearances, the long-haired woman is in the service of the court, and the young man with a fan in his hand wearing a *furisode* seems to be an *iroko*—a man aspiring to be an *onnagata* (male player of female roles) actor. Both figures have a social status that situates them in a different world from ordinary society. Even though kabuki actors established themselves on the glamorous stage, they were regarded as “outsiders” in their day. In addition, *iroko* had the status of apprentices.

Well then, in what way does this picture represent a *mitate* of the poem? To begin with, there are *mitate* occurring within the poem in this illustration. The sound of insects “chattering” beneath the darkened window is likened to “grieving women’s hearts on autumn days.” The sound of crying insects who have come under the window at nighttime can be heard as the voice of a woman complaining of feeling lonely at the sorrow of not being able to meet her lover. As to whether or not this fits in with the characters in this illustration, it tallies with the whispered words, “Come on, how about it?” of the court lady, who in her position ordinarily cannot meet people from outside. Within her whisper is concealed a suppressed passionate appeal for love.

Another *mitate* is “rainy nights, saddening the ears of men” being likened to insects “droning deep within the grass.” The sound of chirping insects in the shadows of a deep grass hamlet can be heard as the lonely voice of a person who shies away from this world. By implication this accords with the hesitant mind of the *iroko* who usually engages in sex with men, when he says, “I’m feeling a little embarrassed.” Therein is contained the weak mind of a person who cannot face the world.

The form of the court lady putting her arm around the shoulder of the *iroko* and whispering in his ear, like the insects beneath the window ardently voicing their ordinarily restrained sentiments, becomes a *mitate* for the insects hiding themselves from this world in the deep grass.

Plate 7 (Volume Two, sixth illustration)

*Across the stars of the Northern Dipper
fly the wild geese;
beneath the moon of the southern tower
they full cold-weather clothes.*

(Autumn section; poem on the theme of fulling cloth. A verse from a poem about the sentiments of a woman thinking of her husband who has gone off to war in the north.)

In connection with the poem a fulling block and wife-like woman are depicted, but the situation is difficult to read by looking only at the illustration. Let us read the dialogue.

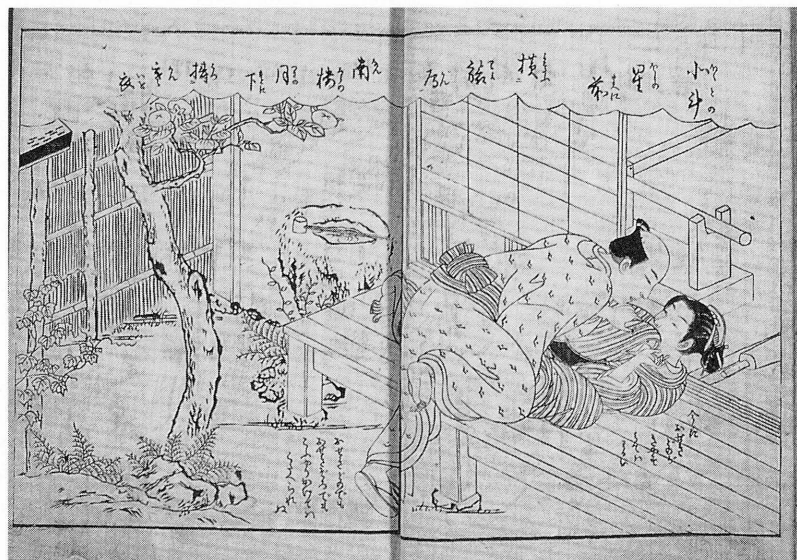


Plate 7

Woman: Madame Oseki will be coming around now. If she sees us, it will be bad.

Man: Even if Oseki is coming, at this point I can't hold back.

Judging from this exchange, Oseki is the name of the man's wife, and so it seems that a married man is involved in an illicit love affair with the wife from a neighboring house. It is a scene where one night when the woman's husband was away, this man snuck in the back door and is forcibly wooing her on the veranda. He had probably gotten word that the husband was away on a trip through some neighborhood gossip.

One can view this just as a *shunga*-esque representation of the thoughts of a wife looking after the home during her husband's absence as in the poem, but within the casual conversation exchanged between the two is concealed an elaborate play on words. Firstly, the sound of the name "Oseki-dono" can be understood as "*sekisho*" (barrier), implying that for this man, the most dangerous place is his wife's "*oseki*." Secondly,

“*oseki*” also carries the meaning of a dam (*seki*) which stops the flow of water. The allusion is to the surge of a man’s sexual passion bursting through a dam, as in the man’s words “at this point, I can’t hold back.”

Lastly, the ladle laid casually across the stone water basin for washing hands probably alludes to the “Northern Dipper” in the poem.

Plate 8 (Volume Two, ninth illustration)

*In the woods, we warm our wine
burning the red leaves;
on the rocks, we inscribe our poems,
brushing off green moss.*

(Autumn section; poem on the theme of the pleasures of autumn. One couplet from Po Chu-i’s famous poem with the lines “Sending off my friend to his mountain temple home, we compose poems on the mountain temple’s view.”)

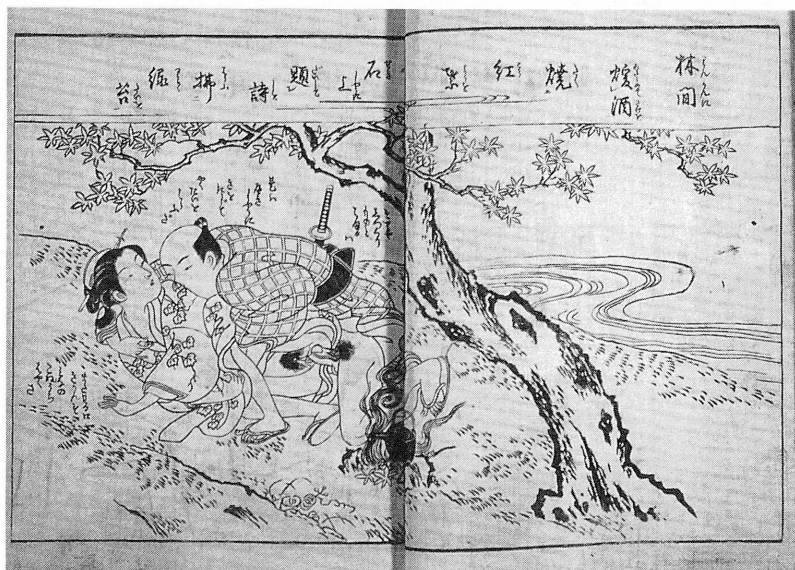


Plate 8

This illustration faithfully depicts the scenery in the poem: a kettle for warming sake is suspended over a fire of burning maple leaves. The man's remarks are a perfect parody on the second line of the poem, for he says, "I'm perfectly contented. Getting rid of people who are a hindrance and ejaculating into a woman's vagina. This is it." In Japanese, the words for "green moss" and "obstacle/hindrance," "rock" and "vagina," "poem" and "ejaculation" have similar sounds. It is difficult to conceive that this kind of word play could have easily rolled off the tongue of someone at that time. They are probably puns created by Harunobu as he was designing this picture. The woman's response is, "Again another bad pun. Do it quickly while everyone is away."

Speculating from this exchange, the couple was celebrating with good friends earlier. They have sent off the friends (people who are a hindrance) who had come with them with some appropriate excuse, and in that interval, while drinking sake, they have begun to make love.

The outer *mitate* of this print is the pun on the man's actions in the poem, but the inner *mitate*, which touches upon the meaning in the poem, is the likening of accommodating oneself to circumstances, an activity which naturally occurs in a mountain temple, to the arising of an opportunity for an impromptu assignation during an excursion.

Plate 9 (Volume Three, first illustration)

*Her gauze dress becoming a heavy robe,
she resents the heartlessness of the woman who wove it!
The pipes and strings playing a lengthy tune,
she's angry with the musicians for never ending!*

(Miscellany section; poem on the theme of a dancing girl. One verse from a poem composed by Sugawara no Michizane upon watching a dancer at an imperial banquet.)

In this composition, a young man with forelock and a girl wearing a *furisode* are making love in the light of the lamp. The two women who have discovered them have wound the man's *obi* sash around a pillar as a little practical joke. A *mitate* on the poem is not overtly represented in the picture. The lines of the embracing couple are simply:



Plate 9

Man: Oh, lovely.

Woman: Ahh, eeh—do it harder.

And thus it is difficult to decipher a *mitate* on the poem's meaning from the dialogue as well.

Let us then turn our attention to the psychology of the two women mischief-makers. Judging from the situation, it is likely that these women are feeling some jealousy toward the woman in the young man's arms. Turning their jealousy around, they are worrying that the woman underneath the young man surely is feeling his weight, and that if it goes on for a long time she will suffer. It's the same kind of idle concern as the poet thinking about the "gauze dress being too heavy" or the "lengthy tune" while watching the slim dancer perform. Furthermore, just as Michizane was feeling spiteful of the weaver and getting annoyed at the musicians, these women are feeling light anger toward the young

man and get it into their heads to play the prank of pulling his *obi* so it will interfere. Herein lies Harunobu's *mitate* of the poem's idea.

Plate 10 (Volume Three, second illustration)

*Male sword at his waist,
when he draws it: three feet of autumn frost!
"Female ocher" from his mouth,
when he chants, indeed a sound of cold jade!*

(Miscellany section; poem on the theme of a general. One verse from the preface presented by Minamoto no Shitagô to Fujiwara no Koremasa, who was skilled in both military and literary arts. *Shiô* (yellow ocher, literally "female yellow") is a kind of yellow painting pigment used in making corrections on poetry and prose in China. "Holding yellow ocher in the mouth" means to be skilled at poetry.)

A *mitate* of the poem is not overtly depicted in this illustration. On

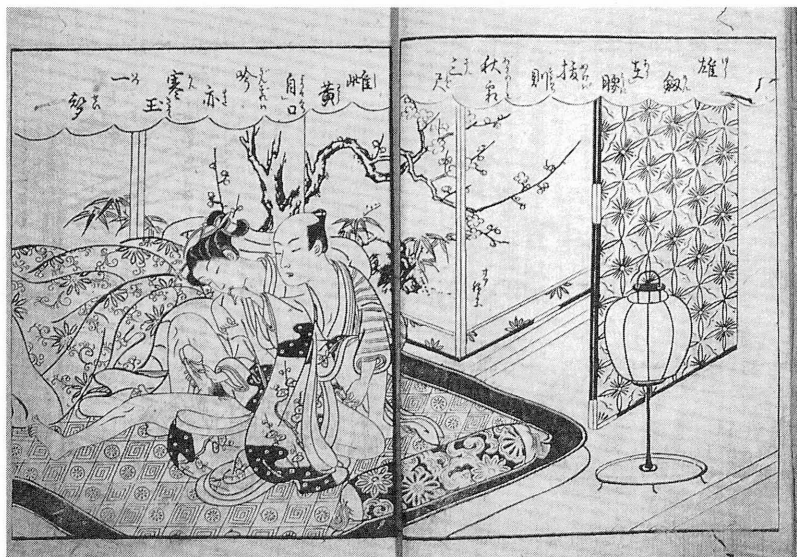


Plate 10

top of a two-layer, large futon, a couple are toying with each other's genitalia. A stylish lamp is placed by the pillow and they are surrounded by a magnificent folding screen. While at first glance it looks like a room in the Yoshiwara pleasure district, the furnishings such as the long pillow to be shared which has been arranged on top of the futon suggest it may be the sleeping quarters of a young couple from a wealthy family. The husband is gently urging, "Well then, let's go to bed."

If the "sword at his waist" in the poem is a *mitate* for the man's penis, then we can consider "female ocher from his mouth" as a *mitate* for the new wife's chaste "jewel gate." Thus, when the man's penis emits a white gleam, a "pure and beautiful voice" emanates from the new wife's mouth. In this way, Harunobu wants us to see the glory of married couple's male-female union as a *mitate* for Minamoto no Shitagō's praising of skills in martial and literary arts.

Plate 11 (Volume Three, fifth illustration)

*The palace women kept waiting and waiting,
put on their robes and cosmetics and make an appearance!*

*On an autumn evening, awaiting the moon—
then we see its pure radiance emerging from the mountain!
On a summer day, thinking of the lotus—
then first seeing its red loveliness breaking the water's surface!*

(Miscellany section; poem with the theme of concubines. One verse from a preface written by Sugawara no Michizane about the spectacle of palace women finally making their appearance at a court banquet.)

In connection with the poem, a lotus flower is blooming in the garden pond. A lantern has been lit and in the adjoining room, mosquito netting can be seen. Lying down and fanning himself with a round fan, the man is saying to the woman, "It's going to be a hot night tonight." The woman, wearing an unlined cotton kimono loosely over her bare skin, is looking back over her shoulder. This is probably a married couple cooling themselves on the veranda after emerging from the bath on a hot summer evening.



Plate 11

One can probably easily read the *mitate* in this illustration. The naked skin of the wife exposing her shoulder is likened to the “pure moon emerging from the mountain,” and the man’s peering at his wife’s private parts from the hem of her summer kimono is likened to the “pink-colored lotus flowers poking their heads out from the surface of the water.” In ancient India as well as China, lotus petals were metaphors for the splendor of female private parts.

However, from the representation in this illustration, one doesn’t sense the mood of “waiting” in the poem. One could consider the feelings of the husband waiting for his wife to get out of the bath, but to what extent does he embrace feelings of anticipation? This sense of anticipation is not the refined waiting for the palace women to appear, but isn’t it rather the sense of anticipation experienced by everyone in their everyday lives? The main point of Harunobu’s *mitate* lies in showing the shift from the poem’s elegant sense of anticipation to the familiar sense of

anticipation in daily life.

Plate 12 (Volume Three, seventh illustration)

*Among the Buddha lands of the ten directions,
the west is cynosure;
of the lotus thrones of all nine levels,
even the lowest suffices.*

(Miscellany section; Buddhist theme. One verse from a petition written by Yoshishige no Yasutane on the occasion of the construction of the temple Gyokurakuji.)

On top of a double layered futon and surrounded by a gorgeous folding screen, a young man and what looks like an older woman are making love. The woman tightly embracing the young man has her eyes closed and blurts out, "If I were to die right now, I would be perfectly satisfied." The rapturous words "If I were to die now, I would be perfectly satisfied"



Plate 12

are a *mitate* on the idea of praying for rebirth in the “Pure Land.” Meanwhile, the young man being held tight by both arms and both legs of the woman says, “This is not such a blessed thing for you. A person of low status like me is not worthy of climbing on top of someone like you. That this is occurring is all due to the existence of the Osaka teahouse called Sakasamaya.” Judging from the man’s lines, it can be presumed that this is an unexpected assignation with a wife or young woman of a different class.

I do not know whether or not a teahouse called Sakasamaya (“Topsy-turvy House”) actually existed in Osaka, but surmising from the situation in this illustration it was probably a teahouse that advertised that one could take pleasure in reversing one’s social status or position (a kind of role playing). If this is the case, one could say that the man’s sentiment that “a lowly person like me experiencing this kind of bliss is too blessed” is likened to the poem’s “even the lowest suffices”—as long as I’m reborn in the Pure Land I’ll be satisfied. Moreover, there is no question that the Sakasamaya in Osaka is an allegory for “paradise in the west,” since from Edo, Osaka lies to the west.

Plate 13 (Volume Three, final illustration)

In this illustration, there is no longer a verse from the *Wakan rôishû*. It is just a picture of a woman resting one elbow on a bookcase and dozing.

Behind her are two *shamisen* and a plectrum case; this and the name placards hanging in a row on the wall to the left suggest that this woman is a *nagauta* teacher. A scene from the teacher’s dream showing a grand procession is depicted within the wind-like frame she is blowing out. Since the title of the old instruction book laying beside her is *Kikujidô* (Chrysanthemum Boy), it would be natural to interpret her dream as deriving from this story. In this regard, the design of the room’s wallpaper is unmistakably chrysanthemums. What is it that Harunobu is trying to convey in this illustration?

Kikujidô is a children’s story about a young boy who received the favors of King Mu of Zhou in ancient China. Through the scheming of some jealous retainers, the boy, who had exclusively attracted the king’s favor,



Plate 13

was banished to the deep mountains for a petty offense. However, by drinking the dew from his beloved chrysanthemum flowers in the deep mountains, the boy never aged or died, and thus became an immortal who preserved his youthful form forever. In Japan this tale was recited in poetry, *nô* chanting, and *nagauta*, so that a broad audience was familiar with it. In the *nagauta* song “Kikujidô,” the 700-year-old boy appears before a retainer who had been ordered by a king at the time to search deep in the mountains for the elixir of eternal life. The boy thereupon poured forth his reminiscences about the favor he had received from King Mu, and gave the retainer some chrysanthemum sake for eternal life.

Seeing that the heads of all of the figures in the dream of the woman *nagauta* teacher are depicted with tortoise heads, isn't this the scene where the boy is reminiscing about life at court during the time in which he received the king's favor?

If this illustration deals with the *nagauta* "Kikujidô," how does it tie in with the *Imayô tsuma kagami*? What is recalled here is a famous line from a verse in the Kikujidô *nagauta*, "700 years is also yesterday and today." Seven hundred years overlaps exactly with the period from the time the *Wakan rôishû* was compiled to Harunobu's day. In other words, just like Jidô's vivid recollection of King Mu's patronage 700 years earlier, Harunobu is bringing back to life verses from the *Wakan rôishû* of 700 years ago. Here it would be good to recall the following verse from Suiganbô's preface to Volume One.

Whether reciting poetry from the *Wakan rôishû* or *meriyasu*,
when it melts it is the same water in the valley stream.

In other words, what Harunobu is attempting to do in this set is to show that when an elegant poem from the *Wakan rôishû*, or a *meriyasu* (a kind of song from kabuki popular at that time) "melts," it is the same "water in the valley stream" (a metaphor for sexual fluids). In Japanese, *to keru* (to melt) can be written with two different characters, but the meaning is the same. Probably the writer of the preface regarded classical poetry as "frozen," and thought in order to truly appreciate it one has to melt the cold, hard "ice." In order to melt this "ice," the most effective sensibility is that surrounding the sexuality possessed by all humans. If one tries to "melt" the refined classics, they return to the same sensual "water" as worldly poems. That is a pretty fascinating interpretation.

I have provided interpretations of some of the *mitate* in the *Imayô tsuma kagami* above, but with regard to the *mitate* of the poems' contents, many are based on my own judgments, and I don't know to what extent other people will agree. However, I think the structure of Harunobu's *mitate-e* demands that viewers use their own powers of imagination. If one enjoys looking at Harunobu's *mitate-e* with free imagination, the source of their fascination is not simply the wittiness, but the fact that underlying the

mitate is what one could call a physical sense of reality. One could say the artistic device which appealed to most Edo people was the concept of *mitate*—likening things to sentiments surrounding human sexuality. In sum, the concept “No matter if it’s the *Wakan rôeishû* or *meriyasu*, when it melts it is the same water in the valley stream” does not apply only to the *Imayô tsuma kagami*, but can be employed in interpreting other *mitate* by Harunobu and even to the whole body of Edo-period *mitate*. I believe that this idea can provide some important clues in the consideration of an important theme in Edo culture—the merging of the sublime and mundane/classical and modern.

