



DECADENT ECCENTRIC AND POETIC MOON-VIEWER¹

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ABSTRACT: This article deals with the personality and art of Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1839–1892), one of the last *ukiyo-e* masters in Japan. Educated before Japan opened to the world, Yoshitoshi absorbed the best of his country's traditions. Developing his career in the decades of rapid change in Japanese culture and society, Yoshitoshi also mastered new trends and brought stunning originality into the field of woodblock printing. The Náprstek Museum is proud to have a large collection of Yoshitoshi's work, including his phenomenal album "*One Hundred Aspects of the Moon*". This article offers a deeper analysis of some of the most intriguing pieces from the NpM collection.

KEY WORDS: Tsukioka Yoshitoshi – *ukiyo-e* – Japanese woodblock printing – One Hundred Aspects of the Moon.

1. Yoshitoshi in the Japanese Collection of the Náprstek Museum

The Japanese collection of the Náprstek Museum includes 58 prints by Tsukioka Yoshitoshi. Of these, 46 were bought by Joe Hloucha in 1906 when he travelled for the first time to Japan. He donated them together with other items from his private collection to the Náprstek Museum in 1955. Of the remaining prints ten were purchased from private collectors, two were donated by Karel Jan Hora, who also collected prints during his stay in Japan, and three were stored in the Náprstek Museum's library as presents received by Vojta Náprstek and Josefa Náprstková. It is highly probable that these prints were also purchased in Japan by Karel Jan Hora or by another traveller or collector and were later donated to Mr. and Mrs. Náprstek.

Beside single prints this catalogue includes the famous album by Yoshitoshi called *One Hundred Aspects of the Moon*. This album was also given as a present to Mr. and Mrs. Náprstek and is thus part of the historical library. There is a letter pasted inside

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the album, written in German by Y. Shimoda, a teacher at a girls' school in Tokyo. However, it does not seem to have anything in common with the album. It discusses Murasaki Shikibu's novel Prince Genji, and is dated 22nd April 1901. The album is also marked with the stamps of E.St.Vráz and Vojta Náprstek. All the prints in the album are perfectly preserved, because the album has never been exhibited. All the colours show their original quality, not having been given the chance to oxidize.

2. The Life and Work of Yoshitoshi

Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1839–1892) is often considered the last master of *ukiyo-e*. Born into the old feudal Japan, he began his career shortly before the Meiji Restoration and witnessed his country change as it opened to the world after several hundred years of separation. Indeed, Yoshitoshi was one of the last artists to stick to the traditional way of producing woodblock prints and although widely inspired by the West, he always preserved his nation's traditions. Yoshitoshi was a descendant of the famous Utagawa School of woodblock printing founded by Toyoharu (1735–1814). Towards the end of the Edo period (before 1868) the school divided into three groups according to its leading artists: Kunisada, Kuniyoshi and Hiroshige. It was the Kuniyoshi line that produced the most outstanding artists, including Yoshitoshi.³

Yoshitoshi's family background was not ideal; however, there was a warm relationship between him and his uncle who supported the artist in his studies with Kuniyoshi. During the 1850s Yoshitoshi studied in his teacher's studio, starting his own career around 1860. Five years later he had already produced two major successful series and was listed among the 10 most popular artists in Edo (later Tokyo). In 1860 (8 years before the Meiji Restoration) the government banned illustrations of contemporary subjects. As a result, many prints from this time tend to refer to contemporary events under the pretext of depicting historical incidents or legends (as we shall see later when examining Yoshitoshi's series Famous Places of the Tōkaidō from 1865). Kuniyoshi's studio was for long a major inspiration for Yoshitoshi. His master's adoration of caricature and his collection of Western art (especially Dutch graphic art) became an endless source of ideas for the young artist. Kuniyoshi's studio was also a very modern place, where life drawing was practised. This became an essential base of Yoshitoshi's mature refined compositions.

On the subject of drawing from life, in 1868 Yoshitoshi witnessed the bloody Battle of Ueno. Equipped with his sketchbook, the artist wandered through the fields of the dead and made drawings of their distorted bodies. This experience led to a growing amount of realistic details in his work, eventually resulting in the phase of his brutal prints. For many, Yoshitoshi's name is associated mainly with this kind of art. His warriors and ghosts surrounded by blood and uncommon cruelty are often considered his trademark. In reality, the brutal phase was most probably a reaction to the enormous changes in the political and social life of Japan at that time. The closing years of the Edo period brought much insecurity and economic depression which led to an

³ In Japan, artists' names often changed as their lives and careers developed. In the case of Yoshitoshi, his name was derived from his teacher's name, which was a common practice in artistic circles: Yoshi is taken from the ending of his teacher Kuniyoshi, who derived his name in the same way from his master Toyokuni.

increase in explicit violence in the arts (in woodcut prints as well as the theatre).⁴ Furthermore, Yoshitoshi's relationship towards women is not very clear and suggestions have been made that he actually found cruelty towards women rather exciting. Whatever the concrete reasons, Yoshitoshi's brutal phase did not last very long and in a few years it had been transformed into a sophisticated liking of the mysterious and the occult.⁵

Yoshitoshi's career was interrupted twice by serious nervous breakdowns. The first of them took place in 1872–3, and was most probably caused by a combination of malnutrition and constant stress. It is likely that Yoshitoshi was a man of great inner sensibility although he certainly was not an easy person to deal with.⁶ Looking at his work it is evident he was smart, educated and sensitive. Therefore it is very well possible his inner psychological inclinations have played a significant role in his two breakdowns.

When he recovered, Yoshitoshi celebrated by changing his first name to Taiso, literally meaning the Great Resurrection.⁷ Shortly after, the artist started to concentrate on newspaper illustration, which was a major success. In fact, Yoshitoshi is said to be the first ever Japanese artist to produce topical newspaper illustrations.⁸ He was very well paid and his work for the newspaper enabled him to lead a decent life, own a house and teach in his own studio. His biggest competitor in newspaper illustration was the artist Yoshiiku. At the beginning of his newspaper career with *The Postal News*, Yoshitoshi had to portray current events, which were often murders or acts of violence. Later he worked for the *Yamato Newspaper*, where he produced a series of exclusive prints depicting great personalities of modern times. This led to the formation of what was later to become his mature style.

During the 1880s Yoshitoshi enjoyed a reputation as one of the most popular artists of his day. This was the decade in which he came to full artistic maturity, resulting in the creation of his most distinctive series: *Newly Selected Edo Colour Prints* (1885), *Lives of Modern Outstanding Persons* (1886), *New Forms of Thirty-Six Ghosts* (1887) and finally *One Hundred Aspects of the Moon* (1885–92). He was sufficiently well off to enjoy the freedom to choose topics he found attractive. Among them the traditional Kabuki and Noh theatre played a key role. Yoshitoshi created billboards, lantern illustrations and stage sets for Kabuki plays, as well as exclusive portraits of actors, who were often his close friends. His Moon series and a set of vertical diptychs, among others, often deal with stories of Noh or Kabuki plays. In 1873 Yoshitoshi even started to study Noh recitation under Umewaka Minora, a leading performer of the day. During this decade the study of Noh drama was almost his greatest interest.⁹

⁴ KEYES, R.S., KUWAYAMA, G. *The Bizarre Imagery of Yoshitoshi*, p. 11.

⁵ Edo Japan was very much obsessed with occultism, ghosts were a popular theme and it was generally believed that they not only existed but often interfered with the world of the living. Even Yoshitoshi once described an encounter with the ghost of his mistress Okoto.

⁶ Although Yoshitoshi had many women, most of his relationships ended in a catastrophe. Some say he was actually homosexual, and had various liaisons with his male students. Many also suggest he required cruelty as part of his sexual life. Nevertheless, his work ensures us he was primarily a perceptive and thoughtful person.

⁷ According to Segi, Yoshitoshi chose the name partly because he wanted to identify himself with two other artists, whom he did not know personally but who were distantly related to the family. SEGI, S., *Yoshitoshi: The Splendid Decadent*, p. 35.

⁸ KEYES, S., KUWAYAMA, G. *The Bizarre Imagery of Yoshitoshi*, p. 11.

⁹ VAN DEN ING, E., SCHAAP, R. *Beauty and Violence: Japanese Prints by Yoshitoshi 1839–1892*, p. 14.

Yoshitoshi's influence on the art of *ukiyo-e* was enormous. Never before had *ukiyo-e* been considered noble enough to depict the sophisticated, symbolic and almost religious plays of Noh, and never before had there been such an emphasis on the psychology of the depicted characters. Unlike the traditional approach, Yoshitoshi found a way of presenting his heroes as individuals with specific features and with different reactions to various emotions. Probably due to his own experience with psychological disorder, he was extremely good at portraying stress. Hence his prints of explicit violence are overshadowed by the later pictures with a deeper psychological insight. Inspired by Noh, Yoshitoshi mastered the use of symbols and allusions to achieve the right atmosphere and used all means to narrate the story well. The combination of his love for tradition with the lessons learned from Western art resulted in an unparalleled artistic output. Although Yoshitoshi was still quite young when he died after the second breakdown in 1892, what he left behind is a unique oeuvre worthy of particular attention.

3. Yoshitoshi's Prints in the NpM Collection (chronologically according to series)¹⁰

FAMOUS PLACES OF THE TŌKAIDŌ (*Tōkaidō Meisho Fūkei*) 1863 and „FAN“ TŌKAIDŌ (*Suehiro Gojūsan Tsugi*) 1865

The earliest prints by Yoshitoshi in the NpM collection are two prints from the two series on the Tōkaidō Road¹¹: *Famous places of the Tōkaidō* and the „*Fan*“ *Tōkaidō*. It seems both were produced to commemorate the Shōgun's journey from Edo to Kyōto to visit the Emperor in 1863. The procession was a huge event as the power of the shōgunate was in decline and there had not been such a noble tour for a long time. Therefore, two series were issued to celebrate this event; it was a collaborative effort between some 16 artists and 24 publishers. Each series contained more than 55 prints. Among the contributing artists were such famous names as Utagawa Hiroshige II and Kunisada.¹² Both series remain a partial mystery today, as no complete list of the prints exists.

The print called *Maisaka* (47999) comes from the first series, often referred to as the *Processional Tōkaidō* (*Gyōretsu Tōkaidō*). It shows a huge ferry decorated with lively coloured banners and standards. Yoshitoshi has chosen a typical feature of this spot, since at Maisaka, the thirteenth station of the Road, an earthquake in 1499 created a connection between the Hamana Lake and the ocean. As a result, travellers did not usually walk around the lake on the mainland, but preferred to take the ferry in order to arrive earlier at the next stop at Arai. The rich decoration of the ferry shows the importance and the grandeur of the noble journey it was to celebrate.¹³ The „*Fan*“ *Tōkaidō* series was issued two years later and can be easily told apart from the first

¹⁰ The number in brackets behind each print title refers to the inventory number of the print within the NpM Japanese Collection.

¹¹ The Tōkaidō Road is a traditional theme of Japanese woodcuts (and literature) of the Edo period. It usually shows the 53 stations of the road between Edo (nowadays Tōkyō) and Kyōto.

¹² VAN DEN ING, E., SCHAAP, R. *Beauty and Violence: Japanese Prints by Yoshitoshi 1839–1892*, p. 34.

¹³ The two series were ordered to celebrate the important journey, but neither of them was meant to portray the actual travels of that particular shōgun. They were rather meant to refer to historical events or geographical characteristics associated with each Tōkaidō station.

series by the little folding fan which appears in the right hand corner of each print. Fifteen prints by Yoshitoshi are known to be part of this series. The print called *Mitsuke* (A15662) shows the twenty-eighth station on the Road. Its name literally means “viewpoint” which refers to the fact that this was the first station (travelling towards Edo) from where it was possible to see Mt. Fuji. The most characteristic feature of this place was once again the busy traffic on the river. Yoshitoshi’s composition smartly combines a realistic accent on the boat traffic with historical allusions, as the man standing at the front of the ship is probably a warrior going to battle. This print is sometimes compared to Hiroshige’s work on the same topic from the 1830s.¹⁴ The similarities can be seen in the fading background with its edges disappearing in the mist. The front right hand side of both prints is occupied by part of a boat, but Hiroshige’s print represents a more realistic scene, with the local boatmen waiting for their customers. Yoshitoshi’s print on the contrary shows the subject with allusions to the past.

ONE HUNDRED STORIES FROM JAPAN AND CHINA (*Wakan Hyaku Monogatari*) 1865

One Hundred Stories from Japan and China is one of Yoshitoshi’s first series. It is the very first set of works featuring ghosts, a subject that remained in the artist’s repertoire for several decades. This series was inspired by a number of well-known folk tales and works of popular literature. It also refers to the popular practice of people gathering at Buddhist temples at night to listen to a storyteller who would ceremoniously light one hundred candles. Each candle would be blown out after one of the many scary stories was finished.

As the title suggests, the whole set was to have been composed of one hundred prints. However, Yoshitoshi finished only 26 of them. This set of prints plays an important role in our attempt to understand Yoshitoshi’s artistic development. Although he is at the very beginning of his career, he already shows his great skill in drawing and originality in constructing the compositions, still mostly of ghosts and monsters. The monsters tend to be drawn with a caricature-like approach, which probably comes from the artist’s training with Kuniyoshi, who is also known to have admired caricature.¹⁵ Although yet young, Yoshitoshi already shows psychological insight into his heroes, portraying them at moments of extreme emotion or great tension. Later he would go through a phase full of brutality and spurting blood. This early ghost series is, therefore, unique because it shows Yoshitoshi’s mastery of mystery and occult topics without the extreme violence that he temporarily adopted later.

The NpM owns five prints from this series. *Kon Sōshō facing the storm dragon* (36617) is based on the popular novel *Suikoden – Tales from the Water Margin*. Originally a 13th century Chinese story, it features the 108 outlaws of the Song Dynasty period. Ironically, the story became more popular in Japan than in its home country. The first translation into Japanese dates back to the 18th century. One of the most famous editions is the one from 1805 illustrated by Katsushika Hokusai. Between the years 1827–30 a huge series of prints called *The 108 Heroes of the Water Margin* was made by Utagawa Kuniyoshi and proved a great success. Yoshitoshi also produced a popular *Suikoden* series between 1866–7, but had already been inspired by the *Suikoden* stories when working on the earlier Ghost cycle.

¹⁴ 29th print of Hiroshige’s Tōkaidō Gojūsan no Uchi series from 1831–34 URL

<http://www.hiroshige.org.uk/hiroshige/tokaido_hoeido/tokaido_hoeido_03.htm> [cit. 2011-11-15]

¹⁵ KEYES, R.S., KUWAYAMA, G. *The Bizarre Imagery of Yoshitoshi*, p. 8.

Here he shows Kon Sōshō, a powerful magician, summoning up a huge storm dragon.¹⁶ Kon Sōshō stands on a rocky shore with a tremendous wave crashing on it. The wave is beautifully drawn, constructing a kind of ornament that frames the whole of the hero's figure. The composition is dominated by the dynamic drapery of the hero's robes, coloured yellow to indicate he was a sorcerer. Around his waist we see gourds containing magical potions. The sorcerer's hair is carved unusually delicately, resulting in extremely fine thin lines. The posture of the main figure was taken from a print by Kuniyoshi depicting the same subject and created around 1828.¹⁷ This clearly demonstrates how strongly Yoshitoshi was influenced by his teacher.

Another print from this series, called *Toki Daishirō fighting the demon (36616)*, also shows a dynamic fighting scene. As the story goes, Toki Daishirō was staying at an encampment near Mt. Inohana in Kai Province, where strange and magical things were said to happen in an ancient temple nearby. The brave man decided to have a closer look at these events and went to the temple at night. Inside he found a group of evil demons disguised as Buddhist saints. The largest and most frightful of them took the form of a tremendous temple guardian figure. It was this biggest one that Toki Daishirō decided to fight. When fighting he noticed all the other demons had disappeared.¹⁸ Yoshitoshi's composition is full of action and the facial expressions indicate the strong violent mood of the combatants. The background consists of a number of bluish skeletons with limbs distorted as if they were very soft or almost liquid. A similar treatment of form can be seen on many of Yoshitoshi's later draperies, which seem almost to be made of water and to stick to the bodies of their owners as if glued directly to their skin. His depiction of old men's wrinkled skin often looks similar.

A more subtle composition is presented on the print called *Lord Teishin with a demon behind a screen (36615)* which is dominated by the monumental central figure of Lord Teishin. Also known as Sadanobu, Lord Teishin lived in the 10th century and was in the Emperor's service. One evening in the palace, on his way to the Emperor, Teishin suddenly felt a hairy paw with claw-like nails catching his arm and understood it was a demon attempting to fight him. Being brave, Teishin yelled at the demon in a deep voice, saying that he had important matters to discuss with the Emperor and no one should stand in his way. Surprised by Teishin's audacity the demon backed away leaving the man alone.¹⁹ Even though Teishin is seen from behind, we can still see his profile; the hero's strength is reflected in his eyes and in the determined expression on his face. Visually the print offers a beautiful contrast between the large green curtains and the reddish appearance of the demon. Teishin's mighty figure, dressed in ceremonial black robes, looks both graceful and elegant at the same time. This is emphasized by the delicate brocade-like decoration of the black mantle, visible only in sidelight.

Kusunoki Tomonmaru Masatsura surprising a badger ghost (36619) is a scene from one of the many variants of the badger story. Badgers (*tanuki*) play an important role in Japanese mythology. They are associated with a number of happy ending stories where

¹⁶ SEGI, S. Yoshitoshi: *The Splendid Decadent*, p. 128.

¹⁷ VAN DEN ING, E., SCHAAP, R. *Beauty and Violence: Japanese Prints by Yoshitoshi 1839–1892*, p. 35.

¹⁸ LACMA Collection online catalogue URL <<http://collectionsonline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=104588;type=101>> [cit. 2011-12-15]

¹⁹ LACMA Collection online catalogue URL <<http://collectionsonline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=104676;type=101>> [cit. 2011-12-15]

the *tanuki* play a positive role. Yet, the *tanuki* also have a negative effect, as they are known to alter their shape and therefore deceive people easily.²⁰ Kusunoki Masatsura was a famous warrior of the 14th century. In real life he was a supporter of the Southern Imperial Court during Japan's Nanbokuchō Wars. His very early death at 22 led to the creation of many different heroic stories, one of them being the tale of Kusunoki defeating an old badger who took the form of a ghost or a priest, depending on the variation of the story. The dominant colour of this print is a soft green, which takes on different shades as we follow it through the composition. The badger's face looks frightened and miserable as the strong warrior surprises him and draws his sword. The print is very colourful and the full variety of drapery designs leaves a strong impression.

Yoshitoshi's very original approach to composing a print shows in *Mashiba Dairi Hisayoshi Kō in lightning* (36625). The bright red flashes of lightning divide the pictorial space into geometrical sections. The geometrical dynamism is even more emphasized by the straight thin lines representing rain. The splashing raindrops on the lower part of the print create a kind of fan-shaped ornament, which is reflected in the similarly-shaped umbrellas, torn by the strong wind. The story behind the print comes from a Kabuki theatre play in which Hisayoshi is said to have challenged the sanctity of the temple on Mt. Kōya. As a result of Hisayoshi's rudeness the spirit of the temple caused a huge storm in order to expel the intruder from the sacred precinct.²¹ Yoshitoshi's portrayal of the thunderstorm is very convincing and artistically original. The lightning flashes add a bit of Western-inspired perspective, since they are quite thin in the far distance growing larger as they approach the front of the picture. The thickest beam in the very front is also a see-through so it has both a great atmospheric and artistic effect.

HANDSOME HEROES OF THE WATER MARGIN (*Biyū Suikoden*) 1866–7

The subject of this series is once again the originally Chinese novel *Tales from the Water Margin* about a group of Chinese brigands during the Northern Song dynasty (1101–26). The theme was extremely popular, and it also became the subject of Kuniyoshi's first set of warrior prints in 1827.²² Yoshitoshi held his teacher in high regard, and the *Suikoden* became one of his favourite themes. We know of several later prints of his on the same topic.

In this work Yoshitoshi decided not to go for too much innovation and stuck to a classical portrayal of the heroes. The colours are vivid and lively, the compositions are crowded and dynamic, and not a single place is left undecorated. The individual features of the heroes are not highlighted much and their postures are derived from classical *ukiyo-e* art. The influences of the West, which later formed an important part of Yoshitoshi's style, are kept to a minimum here.

ILLUSTRATED TEACHINGS ON GOOD AND EVIL 1880 (*Kyōkun Zen'aku Zukai*)

This series consists of *ōban* sized sheets each containing two contradictory *chūban* images.²³ One of them shows a positive example and the other displays the

²⁰ HARADA, V. H. (1976). The Badger in Japanese Folklore. *Asian Folklore Studies*, 35, 1-6. <<http://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/publications/afs/pdf/a287.pdf> [2012-07-17]>

²¹ LACMA Collection online catalogue, URL <<http://collectiononline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=104698;type=101>> [cit. 20011-12-15]

²² Yoshitoshi – an online Exhibition, The Fitzwilliam Museum, URL <http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/gallery/yoshitoshi/works/P.26-2003_detail.html> [cit. 20011-12-15]

²³ *ōban* – 25.4 x 38 cm, *chūban* – 25.4 x 19 cm.

corresponding negative one. Today the *chūban* prints are often found separated, as in case of the two prints in the NpM collection. One of the prints shows *A fickle geisha staying on with a client* (A16614); its counterpart once was *A geisha who does her work well leaving a client* (not part of the NpM collection). The images of good or bad behaviour feature little figures with kanji signs instead of faces: *akudama* represents the bad and *zendama* the good souls.²⁴ In this series each set of the two images is united by a common background colour. In the case of the disobedient geisha it is bright yellow. The faces not only in this print but throughout the whole series display Yoshitoshi's mastery of caricature and the virtuosity of his drawing. The old lady's face, contorted with anger, contrasts with the pretentious features of the irresponsible geisha and her client. The facial expressions are strongly tragicomic, mainly in the negative prints showing bad behaviour, like the one in the NpM collection called *Apprentices with no regard for their master's care at a street-stall* (A 16615). Here, the background colour is blue-gray. The other print from the pair showed apprentices obeying their master and working hard. This series, together with Yoshitoshi's later newspaper prints, prove that he was not only a man of great imagination, but also a precise observer of contemporary life.

YOSHITOSHI'S BRAVE WARRIORS (*Yoshitoshi Musha Burui*) 1883–6

This series was dedicated to presenting the famous and renowned warriors from all periods. The print called *Uesugi Kenshin Nyūdō Terutora* (36188) portrayed Uesugi no Terutora (1530–78), more often called Kenshin, who is known mainly for his long lasting conflict with Takeda Shingen (1521–73). The two fought each other for seventeen years over the possession of Shinano province. Although enemies, the two warriors held each other in high regard as they were the top two fighters of their time. Their long-lasting dispute was characterised by dignity and courtesy, and was finally ended by the intervention of the Shōgun Ashigaka Yoshiteru in 1563. Yoshitoshi shows Kenshin riding on horseback surrounded by swirling clouds of dust.

This series exists in various reprints. The earliest one is characterized by two small square red seals in the left hand margin, the complete date, the publisher's name Kobayashi Tetsujirō and a three-colour series cartouche at the top corner. Later series vary in characteristics; the reprint of 1886 bears the publisher's name, Tsunajima Kamekichi.²⁵ The NpM print lacks the date and the two red square seals; its cartouche is composed of two colours, so it is definitely not from the earliest series. It also is not from the latest series as this series lacks the black outline of the print. The NpM print is of outstanding quality in terms of sharpness and precision, indicating that it cannot possibly be one of the later reprints.

The dominant visual feature of this composition is the white-beige drapery on Kenshin's head. Most of the warrior's body is covered with richly decorated fabrics, depicted with sharp edges and a strong accent on the expressive black line, which replaces shading. It was a speciality of Yoshitoshi's to portray sharp-edged draperies with the folds almost forming a geometrical ornament. Draperies were probably his favourite challenge as his prints show various ways in which he designed them. Yoshitoshi did not have just one way of drawing something, he was very innovative

²⁴ Little figures like this have been used in woodcut prints to distinguish moral from immoral since the 18th century.

²⁵ VAN DEN ING, E., SCHAAP, R. *Beauty and Violence*, p. 65.

and original and therefore the range of his portrayal ranges from moderate realism to sketchy ornamentalism. Almost everything he drew, though, was of outstanding quality.

The series *Yoshitoshi musha burui* marks the artist's development from his early vivid expressive works towards the refinement of his later and most famous Moon series. In the print called *Matsunaga Hisahide before his suicide (36226)* the emphasis is fully on the intense mood of anger of the warrior. Matsunaga Hisahide (1507–77) was once the Shōgun Ashikaga Yoshiteru's chief minister. Hisahide nevertheless forced him to commit suicide in 1565. Yoshiteru's brother, the last of the Ashikaga shōguns, later asked Matsunaga for help against the warlord Oda Nobunaga, whose son defeated Matsunaga in 1577. This event finally compelled Matsunaga to commit ceremonial suicide, or *seppuku*.²⁶ Matsunaga is therefore shown here in a moment of extreme anger.

The pictorial composition consists of an imaginary triangle, formed by the raised hand of the warrior, fluttering red ribbons and the edge of the background curtain. Such a compositional structure allows the picture to be highly dynamic although it actually shows only one seated person, against a monochrome backdrop. Matsunaga's skin is also a dominant feature of this print. The skin is wrinkled and old and strongly enhances the emotions of his facial expression. Yoshitoshi's depiction of the old man's skin is so naturalistic it almost resembles his typical way of drawing draperies.

Another story of bravery is that of *Nitta Shirō Tadatsune (36227)* who is said to have fearlessly entered into a mysterious cave on Mt. Fuji even though none of his companions had the courage to follow him.²⁷ Yoshitoshi's print shows him as a determined yet self-controlled man whose placement in the very middle of the composition is nicely disrupted by the red flames and pink-violet smoke of his torch. This work once again shows how well Yoshitoshi mastered the creation of a specific atmosphere.

YOSHITOSHI'S SKETCHES (*Yoshitoshi Manga*) 1885–6

By 1885 Yoshitoshi's work had gained maturity and artistic richness. It was in this period (since 1885 onwards) that his most valued series came to life: *Yoshitoshi's Sketches (Yoshitoshi Manga)*, *Newly Selected Edo Colour Prints (Shinsen Azuma Nishikie)* and *One Hundred Aspects of the Moon (Tsuki Hyakushi)*. The NpM is proud to own a few prints from each of these first class series (in the case of the Moon series, the NpM owns the whole album).

In the *Yoshitoshi Manga* series, most of the prints keep to the same principle of pictorial composition: the main male figure is lying or sitting in the bottom left corner, while the additional female figures are on the right at a (slight) distance. This applies to the stories of Urashima, Yukihira, Watanabe no Tsuna and Sakata. The same principle also applies to *The Sparrow with the Cloven Tongue* (although the main hero there is an old woman instead of the male hero of the other prints). In case of Otonomiya Morinaga the principle is reversed, with the main male figure on the right.

Yukihira meets the fisherwomen Murasame and Matsukaze at Suma Beach (38743) is the story of the high-ranking official Ariwara no Yukihira (818–93) who was the governor of several provinces. His younger brother Narihira (825–80) was considered one of the Six Immortal Poets of the 9th century and is portrayed in the famous Tales of

²⁶ KEYES, R. S., KUWAYAMA, G. *The Bizarre Imagery of Yoshitoshi*, pl. 21; VAN DEN ING, E., SCHAAP, R. *Beauty and Violence*, p. 128.

²⁷ Claremont Colleges Digital Library, URL <http://ccdlib.libraries.claremont.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/cyw&CISOPTR=360&CISOBX=1&REC=2> [cit. 2011-12-16].

Ise. Yukihiro's encounter with the sisters Murasame ("village rain") and Matsukaze ("pine breeze") originated in a Noh play called *Pine breeze* by Yūzaki Kan'ami (1333–84). Later it also appeared in puppet theatre and kabuki plays *As If It Were Now at Suma* (*Imayō Suma*) and *The Love Song of Matsukaze by the Bay* (*Hama Matsukaze Koiuta*).²⁸

The half naked bodies of the beautiful sisters show clearly that Yoshitoshi was acquainted with the Western practice of drawing nudes from life. The realistic postures and physical details (like the nipples) are evidence of the artist's virtuosity in combining a very traditional topic with a modern approach. Yoshitoshi was very much intrigued by contemporary Western art, but he never adopted it completely. He took from it only what he considered useful for his artistic purposes, which meant that he never became a victim of the turbulent change in styles after the Meiji Restoration.

Otonomiya, Prince Morinaga, third son of Emperor Godaigo, reading the lotus sutra during his imprisonment in an underground dungeon at Kamakura (38746) is the very long title of another superb print in this series. The father of Prince Morinaga, Godaigo (1288–1339) was an Emperor of Japan whose goal was to restore imperial power in the country. However, he was defeated in 1331 and sent to exile by Hōjō Takatoki, as it was the Hōjō family who possessed most of the power in those days. Together with his son known as Otonomiya (1308–35) the heroic Emperor successfully attacked and burned down Kamakura, which led to Hōjō Takatori's suicide. Nevertheless, the victory was not long-lasting. Soon the young prince was imprisoned as a result of General Ashikaga Takauji's intrigues. The last moments of the prince's life in the underground dungeon near Kamakura are the topic of Yoshitoshi's print.²⁹ Although Yoshitoshi was an expert in depicting explicit violence, this print is an example of his mature style, in which he depicts not the brutality itself but instead concentrates on extreme psychological tension. The viewer already knows that the prince's assassin is on his way and will interrupt the sutra reading any minute. This moment of great inner calm and spiritual concentration is enhanced by the ornamental smoke slowly rising toward the top of the cave. The young prince is seen in profile, his dress displays the typical Yoshitoshi depiction of drapery with the accentuating sharp lines of the fabric folds. His female companion sits resignedly on a mat, her dominant feature being her shiny orange skirt. This colour was very popular with Yoshitoshi, although it is extremely sensitive and tends to oxidize. Therefore many examples of this print show a transition from orange to brownish-black, as in the case of the NpM print.³⁰

Yoshitoshi was indeed very skilful at depicting facial expressions of old people, which was of course due to his interest in caricature. *The Sparrow with the Clove Tongue – The greedy old woman leaving the three sparrows (38747)* is a good example of this. The aged woman's greedy face reflects her negative character in this traditional

²⁸ SEGI, S. Yoshitoshi: The Splendid Decadent, pp. 135–6; VAN DEN ING, E. – SCHAAP, R., Beauty and Violence, pp. 81, 137.

²⁹ Yoshitoshi – an online Exhibition, The Fitzwilliam Museum, URL <http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/gallery/yoshitoshi/works/P.25-2003_SE.html> [cit. 2011-12-16]; VAN DEN ING, E. – SCHAAP, R. Beauty and Violence. p. 137.

³⁰ A beautifully shiny orange can be seen on the print in Josephine Asselbergs-Siebers collection in the Netherlands. (VAN DEN ING, SCHAAP pg. 80) Another example of the orange is the print Mount Yoshino Midnight Moon from the Moon series; this print is in the NpM collection and displays the stunning orange unharmed by oxidization.

fairytale; the large heavy basket she took from the little sparrows will turn out to be full of monsters once she gets home.³¹ Another evil old woman, this time a demon in disguise, is the subject of a print called *The demon of the Gate Rashō visits Watanabe no Tsuna disguised as an old woman in order to retrieve her severed arm* (38744). Here too the lady is a clearly negative figure, which is demonstrated by her repulsive facial features. Pretending to be a human, the demon in disguise tricked a Heian warlord, Watanabe no Tsuna, in order to get back her arm, which the brave warrior cut off her earlier. The story is based on the Kabuki play *Ibaraki*, which premiered in 1883. Yoshitoshi's love for the theatre can be documented throughout the whole of his career.

Yoshitsune learns martial arts on Mt. Kurama (38748) tells the legend of Minamoto no Yoshitsune (1159–89). When Taira no Kiyomori massacred Minamoto no Yoshitomo, he spared his offspring, although this led in the end to the defeat of the Taira clan. The young Yoshitsune was placed in the care of a secluded temple on Mt. Kurama. In the nearby forest he met a group of *tengu*, who are unparalleled in their knowledge of martial arts. The print shows a *tengu* and Yoshitsune during their fighting lesson. The composition is very lively; we can almost feel the rush of air caused by the young man jumping up in the air. Beside the waterfall in the background sits a bronze tripod (said to be used for elixirs). A curiously shaped "immortal mushroom" can be seen issuing from the rock.³² Both the mushroom and the tripod have their origins in China. Yoshitoshi's frequent use of Chinese motifs shows how deeply educated he was and how much he wanted these precious motifs to survive the massive westernisation of his time.

Urashima Tarō returning home from the palace of the Dragon King (38745) also features Chinese motifs, since the Palace of the Dragon and its inhabitants are depicted as if they were Chinese. The beautiful princess, once the wife of Urashima, looks sadly at her lost love. Although Urashima is seen in profile, his face expresses clearly his feelings of sadness and regret. The box on his back is a gift from the princess and it contains his old age. He was therefore instructed never to open it. After returning home Urashima finds out centuries have passed since he left. In desperation he opens the box and dies soon thereafter. Yoshitoshi has done very well in depicting the turbulent waves of the sea which sways wildly as it divides the two lovers and carries Urashima closer to his death. The print is full of emotion, although most of its dynamism is not in the figures but in the sea itself. The realistic way in which Urashima is sitting once again shows that Yoshitoshi often drew from life and included his sketches in final designs.

NEWLY SELECTED EDO COLOUR PRINTS (*Shinsen Azuma Nishikie*) 1885–9

In this series, Yoshitoshi shows his love for the traditional Kabuki theatre, as all 23 prints from this series were inspired by famous Kabuki plays. He nevertheless presents the stories in a realistic setting (as opposed to the stylized Kabuki theatre) and invents situations which are only partly inspired by the actual play scenarios – a truly innovative approach.

The NpM possesses the left part of a diptych called *The Story of Priest Nittō of Emmei'in Temple* (A20530). The story was made famous by a Kawatake Mokuami play,

³¹ VAN DEN ING, E., SCHAAP, R. Beauty and Violence, p. 137.

³² SEGI, S. Yoshitoshi: The Splendid Decadent, p. 135; VAN DEN ING, E., – SCHAAP, R. Beauty and Violence, pp. 82, 137.

The Star-Fated Verdict of 1803. Ushisuke, the handsome son of Kabuki actor Onoe Kikurō I, was involved in various romances, one of them ending in a murder. As a result, he had to flee Edo and enter the priesthood of the Nichiren sect in Taninaka. His Buddhist name was Nittō and he never hesitated to continue in his numerous liaisons even under this name. One of his most famous lovers was Okoro, the head servant girl of the wealthy Wakizaka family. Nittō's profligacy finally led to his death in 1803.

On this print Nittō looks very young as he lifts the hanging scroll in the *tokonoma*³³ while his lover is fixing her hair, probably after their passion has been consummated in one of the guest rooms of the Wakizaka mansion.³⁴ On the left hand side of the print only the rim of Okoro's kimono can be seen. The greenish *tatami* mats in the foreground are depicted as an area of plain colour with no details or shading. This emptiness corresponds nicely with the rather frightened expression on Nittō's face. Although he is usually described as a man of great lust for life, here we see him disconsolate. After a passionate moment with his mistress, Yoshitoshi could have shown Nittō satisfied and perhaps still in the arms of his lady. Instead, the artist makes us look at a man who could not rein in his lust, who gave into the lures of bodily pleasures and yet derived no pleasure out of it. Nittō's face is full of grief, which could be cured neither by his pretended monastic life, nor by physical love. For Yoshitoshi, who was known as a womaniser and who also suffered a nervous breakdown in 1870 and then again in 1887, this could have been quite a personal topic.

A HISTORY OF MODERN OUTSTANDING PERSONS (*Kinsei Jinbutsushi*) 1886–8

The set of prints depicting outstanding personalities of the time was a very successful series, issued by the *Yamato Newspaper* as 20 monthly supplements to subscribers.³⁵ Yoshitoshi's work for the newspaper was an enormous success which brought him both a reputation as an excellent artist and a sufficient income.

Although the title *Egawa Tarōzaemon plays the koto* (A10550) seems to be clear about Egawa's role in the print, the composition itself suggests that Egawa is more likely to be the older man seated facing the viewer, while the younger man playing the *koto* remains anonymous. The *koto* player is of great importance to the composition, though, since he accentuates the diagonal, slightly asymmetric view of the room's interior. The scene evokes the elegant atmosphere of a small company listening eagerly to the delicate sounds of the *koto*. In real life, Egawa was a military advisor and a progressive thinker who collaborated with the Tokugawa Shōgunate before Japan's opening to the world. Although the depicted moment has nothing to do with Egawa's actual story, Yoshitoshi chose a very sophisticated way of showing that Egawa was an intelligent and educated person worth of respect.

Nishigori Takekiyo painting (A18974) refers to a lawsuit which began earlier in 1887. Nishigori Takekiyo's master Sōma Tomotane (1852–92) was declared mentally ill and locked up in an asylum. Nishigori was nevertheless certain of his master's good health and suspected the whole action was set up by distant members of Sōma's family who knew he had no direct descendant and wanted to ensure the family fortune would go to them after Sōma's death. Unfortunately Nishigori lost his legal battle, but he won the admiration of the public. For many he became an icon who reminded them of

³³ Tokonoma is a built-in alcove in a traditional Japanese room, where arranged flowers and poetic calligraphy are usually displayed.

³⁴ SEGI, S. Yoshitoshi: *The Splendid Decadent*, p. 137.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 52.

traditional values, and he was therefore often portrayed as a loyal vassal avenging his master's disgrace. Later the story continued with a series of twists and turns even after Sōma's death in 1892. The case became known as the "Sōma incident", and in the end it helped to establish a revolutionary new legislation protecting mentally ill people (1900).³⁶

Yoshitoshi's choice to portray Nishigori as a painter shows once again how educated he was and in what high regard he held traditional cultural values. As in the case of Egawa, he chose to portray the grandeur of a hero by his adoration of the arts. Listening to a *koto* concert or devoting one's time to painting shows enough quality in itself, so there is no need to fill the composition with references to the hero's actual story. The love for traditional Japanese arts was for Yoshitoshi a guarantee of a rare and heroic personality.

PRINTS OUTSIDE SERIES (1880s)

Besides his many print series, Yoshitoshi also produced prints which were not officially part of any particular set. In the case of the following examples from the NpM collection, the prints are unified by their common size (vertical *ōban* diptychs). Together with his later Moon series, these prints represent the absolute peak of Yoshitoshi's art. Unifying classical technique with the best of Western influences, these prints embody Yoshitoshi's spirit, fantasy and refined skill.

Hyōshito Rinchū kills officer Riku near the Temple of the Mountain Spirit (36372) tells the story of Gao, Minister of War, one of the 108 heroes of *Suikoden* (*Tales from the Water Margin*) who had Rinchū imprisoned. Later the punishment was changed to appointing Rinchū as a guard in a remote army camp. Nevertheless Minister Gao still aimed to kill him so he arranged a plot with Officer Riku who then set fire to the guard's house in an attempt to make the murder look like an accident.³⁷ Fortunately Rinchū was not inside and saw the sight of the burning house from a nearby temple, understanding immediately what had happened. In this print we encounter the victorious Rinchū standing above the body of his assassin, whom he surprised and killed with a huge spear.³⁸ The peaceful landscape covered with snow, dominated by the giant mountain in the background, reveals Rinchū's silent yet overwhelming victory. The remains of the burning house shine from the background with its bright colours soothed by the rising mountain covered with snow, as if to show that the immediate danger has been overcome by means of a supernatural power. The atmosphere of the landscape is further intensified by the use of white pigment (*gofun*) spattered onto the surface of the print, evoking falling flakes of snow. The mountain's surface is drawn in crystal-like wild lines, the same kind that Yoshitoshi used to depict different kinds of draperies.

Taira no Koremochi vanquishes the demon maiden of Mt. Togakushi (36371) is another outstanding print from 1887. The legendary story depicted is said to have taken place in the eleventh century, when Taira no Koremochi, the Heike clan warrior,

³⁶ WEST, M. D. *Secrets, Sex and Spectacle: the rules of scandal in Japan and in the United States*, pp. 324–5; URL <http://members.jcom.home.ne.jp/yosha/nm/stories/KJS-10_nishigori_takekiyo.html>; http://ssj.iss.u-tokyo.ac.jp/archives/2007/12/ssj_4883_modern.html> [cit. 2011-12-16].

³⁷ VAN DEN ING, E., SCHAAP, R. *Beauty and Violence*, p. 83.

³⁸ KEYES, R. S., KUWAYAMA, G. *The Bizarre Imagery of Yoshitoshi* p. 492; URL <http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/gallery/yoshitoshi/works/P.26-2003_SE.html> [cit. 2011-12-16].

hunted deer during autumn in the Shinano mountains. Suddenly he saw a beautiful princess surrounded by her maidservants who joyfully invited him to join them in merry celebrations dominated by the princess's seductive dance. All of a sudden Koremochi was overcome with tiredness and fell asleep, to dream of Hachiman, the God of War. In his dream a messenger from Hachiman, the guardian of samurai, told Koremochi that the princess was actually an evil demon intending to kill and devour the warrior. The messenger Takeuchi gave Koremochi an enchanted sword which would help him to get rid of the demon. This story was also dramatized for the Noh theatre in a play called *Maple-Viewing Time (Momijigari)* and Yoshitoshi's friend Ichikawa Danjūrō IX starred in an adaptation of the play for Kabuki.³⁹ The dynamism of the dance is captured in the draperies fluttering wildly in the autumn wind.

The most stunning part of this composition is the use of the motif of water as a reflective mirror. The idea of the river surface as a mirror does not appear in the Noh play and is therefore an invention of Yoshitoshi's. Yoshitoshi's interest in Western art means that it is highly possible that the reflection motif could have been fostered by foreign influences. In the West the mirroring power of water has a long lasting tradition. Beginning perhaps with the Greek myth of Narcissus, which was still exceedingly popular throughout the Renaissance and Baroque periods, the mirror and the power of one's reflection ultimately became a top theme in the second half of the 19th century. The psychological depth of this symbol has been employed by various artists among whom Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921) provides a good example. His numerous versions of the drawing called "*Avec Grégoire le Roy, mon coeur pleure d'autrefois*" of 1889 (two years after Yoshitoshi's print) are an excellent illustration of the symbolist treatment of the topic. A girl's face is seen in profile as her lips gently kiss her own reflection in a round mirror. In the mirror's background we see a bridge over a calm river; gradually, the river's surface waves transform into the outline of the mirror itself. The drawing's atmosphere is that of intense melancholy and quiet introspection. In the case of Koremochi, the water surface does not reflect his own inner self, yet it saves his life thanks to its revelation of the true nature of the princess of his fancy. Of course the specific stories behind these pictures might differ, but the atmosphere of natural beauty combined with melancholy or strong emotions (from fancy to danger) are characteristic features of both Japanese prints and the symbolist movement in Europe.

Kuniyoshi, as Yoshitoshi's teacher, had a strong influence on his apprentice and had used the reflecting surface effect previously. When portraying the story of Taira Koremochi, Kuniyoshi used the reflection of the demonic lady in a bowl of liquid.⁴⁰ Yoshitoshi drew the same theme with the reflection in a bowl (and effectively the same composition as his teacher) in his *New Forms of Thirty-Six Ghosts* series of 1889–92. The motif of the water reflection also appears in the classic story and Kabuki play about the samurai Ōmori Hikoshichi. Yoshitoshi depicted this story in the above-mentioned 36 Ghosts series.⁴¹ Ōmori is said to have been carrying a beautiful princess across the river and suddenly noticed a pair of horns on her reflection in the water. The reflection

³⁹ SEGI, S. Yoshitoshi: The Splendid Decadent, pp. 74, 139–40.

⁴⁰ URL <<http://www.museumsyndicate.com/item.php?item=29613>> [cit. 2011-12-16].

⁴¹ The LACMA Japanese collection: URL <<http://collectionsonline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=record;id=104439;type=101>> [cit. 2011-12-16].

warned him that the princess was turning into a demon.⁴² The atmosphere of this story is quite different to that of *Maple-Viewing Time*, although the particular moments that Yoshitoshi chose from the two tales are very much alike. The Japanese and Chinese believe that a mirror displays the true soul of whoever looks in them; therefore foxes and demons appearing in human form can be uncovered by finding their reflection in a mirror or, as in the case of Yoshitoshi, in a reflecting water surface.⁴³ In *Maple-Viewing Time*, the water plays several roles at the same time. It works as a mirror and saves the hero's life; at the same time the floating maple leaves are reminiscent of classical poetry with its comparisons of floating leaves and brocade.

Much earlier, back in 1879, Yoshitoshi once again depicted the Koremochi story but presented it with much less invention. That time the print was part of a series called *Mirror of Famous Commanders of Great Japan*. This series concentrated on warrior action and therefore Yoshitoshi chose to depict Koremochi's actual fight with the demon. The later print from the NpM collection, however, shows a much more profound attitude towards the topic, emphasizing the psychological tension rather than the fight itself. This could have been caused by both the inspirations of modern Western art and Yoshitoshi's personal artistic growth. Classical stories, legends and plays appear repeatedly in Yoshitoshi's work. Therefore, it is often not the story itself, but the concrete moment he shows that tells us how the perception of and the taste for art changed over the years.

Yaoya Oshichi burns her own house (36373), a print dating from 1888, is based on a true story. In 1681 a fire swept through some of the districts of Edo, forcing the locals to flee to a nearby temple. Among them was a young girl named Oshichi, the daughter of a well-off vegetable merchant. According to the later Kabuki play based on her story, her myopic mother was helping a young man remove a splinter, but with no success, so she called her daughter over. The moment they met, the handsome man Kobori Samon and Oshichi fell in love. Since they both spent that night in the temple with all the other victims, they secretly consummated their passion. After everyone had returned to their homes, the couple suffered badly because of their separation. Therefore, Oshichi decided to set fire to her own house, hoping this would once again unite her with Samon in the temple. She was, however, discovered and punished by being burned alive; her lover committed suicide as soon as he heard of the tragedy.⁴⁴

Yoshitoshi depicts Oshichi in a typical pose on a ladder. The ladder scene had been shown earlier by other artists, such as in the Kunisada print of 1857. The ladder also plays an essential role in the Bunraku (puppet theatre) play inspired by Oshichi's story. It is therefore not surprising that Yoshitoshi concentrated on depicting Oshichi

⁴² The princess, called Chihaya, was the daughter of Ōmori Hikoshichi's old enemy Kusunoki Masashige whom he had earlier defeated and killed. The princess intended to transform into a demon and revenge her father's death. However, Ōmori Hikoshichi won over her and since she explained who she really was, he was kind enough to invent a little trick which enabled him to give the princess a precious sword belonging originally to her father. The Hikoshichi story therefore has a different atmosphere from Momijigari, where the demon has only bad intentions and is killed in the end. The beauty of the Momijigari princess is only a disguise for her thirst for blood. In Hikoshichi it is the other way around; the demon's appearance is only a disguise for the princess's honourable intentions and love for her deceased father.

⁴³ BAIRD, M. *Symbols of Japan*, p. 265

⁴⁴ SEGI, S. Yoshitoshi: *The Splendid Decadent*, p. 140.

climbing the ladder, the true symbol of her love story. The diagonally-composed picture is dominated by the girl's kimono swirling in the wind while the huge fire she has set devastates the city in the background. The dynamism of the whole print corresponds with the passionate emotions that led to the tragic actions of the main hero. Here we encounter Oshichi isolated and desperate as she sees her plan has turned into a catastrophe. Yet again, what we witness here is Yoshitoshi's mastery in depicting atmosphere and emotions.

Shunkan watching enviously from Kikai island as Yasuyori is unexpectedly pardoned and returns to the capital (36377). The tale of Shunkan, dramatized for both the Noh and later the Kabuki theatre, is one of the most moving stories of grief and despair.⁴⁵ The Zen priest Shunkan cooperated with Fujiwara no Naritsune and Taira no Yasuyori in an attempt to harm Kiyomori, the head of the Heike (Taira) clan. Their conspiracy was discovered in 1177 and all three were sent to the deserted island of Kikaigashima. One year later Kiyomori granted a general amnesty which he offered as a gift to the gods in connection with the forthcoming childbirth of his wife (or daughter, according to a different version). As a result of the amnesty a messenger is sent to the island to bring the prisoners back to the capital. First the three men are full of joy, but when the messenger reads the document, not a single word is said about Shunkan in it. Shunkan reads the paper again and again, and also tries to soften the heart of the officer, but with no success. The final scene of the story is that captured by Yoshitoshi in his print. Shunkan stands on the sea shore in desperation, crying and yelling at his former companions as he sees them vanishing in the waves. In the Noh play, Shunkan cries in desperation:

"Hark! Birds and beasts are crying out my anguish with me!"⁴⁶ The hopeless and agonized man is left alone only with the birds and the foam of the wild sea waves, precisely as Yoshitoshi shows him.

Shunkan's drapery is constructed of Yoshitoshi's typical crystal-shaped lines and enhances the dynamic movement of the robes in the strong wind. Shunkan's legs look skinny and old, his face bears signs of madness and the gesture of his arms is full of desperation and longing. The cliff under his legs divides the composition diagonally to display the wildly boisterous sea waves and the distant sight of the ship with his only companions being carried away, leaving Shunkan completely alone. His desolation is demonstrated by the rocky mountain he stands on; the only sign of any vegetation on it is the silhouette of a pine in the background.

Two valiants in combat atop the Hōryūkaku Pavilion (36378) shows the valiant heroes Inuzuka Shinobu and Inukai Gempachi (unaware that they are brothers) fighting atop the Hōryūkaku Pavilion of Koga Castle on the banks of the Tone River. In the end they both plummet into the river and float unconscious in a boat towards further adventures. This is one episode from the famous *Tale of the Eight Dogs of the Satomi Clan* by Bakin. The eight heroes are all descendants of a princess and a courageous dog who won her hand by capturing an enemy castle for her father. All of them are born into different families since the princess committed suicide rather than bear the dog's children. After her death the eight jewels flew away from her womb to implant themselves in other women – thus each of the brothers never knew of the existence of

⁴⁵ KEYES, R. S., KUWAYAMA, G. *The Bizarre Imagery of Yoshitoshi*, pl. 35, pp. 70–71.

⁴⁶ UPTON, M. *A spectator's handbook of Noh*, p. 61.

the others. All of them were born clasping a jewel emblazoned with a character indicating one of the Confucian virtues. They also each had the character for dog in the family name and a peony-shaped mark on their bodies. In this print Yoshitoshi clearly copied the composition from the same theme portrayed by Kuniyoshi (dated 1852).⁴⁷ The dominant red colour in this print is aniline dye, very sensitive to light and water.

Genji in the provinces (36379) is another print inspired by popular literature of the time. Ryūtei Tanehiko's successful novel *The Fake Murasaki with Genji in the Provinces* took inspiration from the original Genji character created by Murasaki Shikibu, but placed it in a different atmosphere and concentrated more on the actual flow of the story's action (rather than the psychology of the hero, as in the original 11th century masterpiece). Yoshitoshi's print shows Ashinaga Mitsuuji and the Lady Tasogare huddled together in a bamboo *sudare* mat as they walk through the countryside in a rainstorm. This print was never published, because it was said to have portrayed a high degree of sexual intimacy and was thus banned by the authorities⁴⁸. Today, the print could by no means be called indecent. It does not show anything obscene and is a far cry from the widely popular *shunga* or "spring prints", which specialize in depicting erotic themes. Yoshitoshi never produced a single *shunga* and yet the authorities considered his Genji a threat. Once again we are confronted here with the mature Yoshitoshi who is not at all straightforward but instead prefers to evoke our fantasy. We do not see any concrete erotic deed in this print, but when looking at a couple curled up together in a bamboo mat in a storm, we automatically understand what must have preceded. It is precisely the viewer's anticipation that Yoshitoshi managed to master.

In the area of the sky, the dark black stains indicating clouds are a result of the technique called *atenashi bokashi* (shading without definition). *Atenashi bokashi* is however not very visible in the NpM print; it was used to underline the light clouds on the left from the moon, but only very delicately in comparison to other prints, like the one from the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, or the one published by Segi.⁴⁹ This type of shading was hand-made for every single print. No two prints are therefore the same, and the differences may be quite striking.

The austerities of the monk Mongaku (36380) tells the love story that took place during the war between the Genji and Heike clans. The monk Mongaku, once called Endō Moritō of the Heike clan, fell deeply in love with his cousin Kesa Gozen. His enemy Minamoto Genji Wataru was, however, already engaged to Kesa. Kesa finally agreed to marry Moritō if he would get rid of Wataru first. However, Kesa decided to interfere in the plot to kill Wataru, changing places with the planned victim so that it was she who ended up killed. Heartbroken, Moritō became a monk and under the name of Mongaku moved to the secret precincts of Mt. Nachi in Kii province. However, one day a warrior passing by recognised the monk as Moritō and tried to capture him as a member of the Heike clan. Somehow things went wrong and the scene ended up with Moritō killing the warrior. Driven by madness, the monk decided to end his life by jumping into the Nachi Waterfall. The waterfall itself was believed to be of a supernatural kind. While Mongaku was falling, a Buddhist deity, Fudō Myōō, appeared as a symbol of the unshakable strength of faith and saved the monk's life.

⁴⁷ KEYES, R. S., KUWAYAMA, G. *The Bizarre Imagery of Yoshitoshi*, pl. 28; SEGI, S., *Yoshitoshi: The Splendid Decadent*, p. 141; VAN DEN ING, E. – SCHAAP, R., *Beauty and Violence*, p. 131.

⁴⁸ SEGI, S. *Yoshitoshi: The Splendid Decadent*, p. 81, 144–5.

⁴⁹ SEGI, S. *Yoshitoshi: The Splendid Decadent*, p. 81.

This story was also dramatized in the Kabuki play *Mongaku's Devotions on the Bridge* in 1883 (Yoshitoshi's friend played the central dual role of Mongaku and Fudō). In real life, however, Mongaku became a successful warrior priest very much involved with the world, not at all the holy man of this print. The story of Mongaku's beloved Kesa Gozen was also portrayed by Yoshitoshi in his 1887 print from the series *Twenty-four Accomplishments in Imperial Japan*. Here he focused on the female part of the story, showing Kesa's strong conviction that sacrificing her life was the only honourable solution to her situation.

The composition makes very good use of the prolonged vertical format. The figures of Kannon (the Goddess of Mercy) and Fudō are relatively small in size compared to Mongaku (and yet only part of his body is visible above the water surface). The monk's facial features are quite similar to those of Seigen, a monk in hopeless love also portrayed by Yoshitoshi as a separate print outside any series. Both men have very distinctive eyebrows and their faces are clenched in sorrow.

Yoshitoshi had already dealt with this subject in 1851–2 when still a student at Kuniyoshi's studio. Kuniyoshi himself also designed a print on this topic using even three *ōban* sheets connected vertically. The composition is quite like Yoshitoshi's one, perhaps with more accent on the verticality, as the middle *ōban* sheet is almost totally occupied by the vertical stripes of falling water.⁵⁰ Yoshitoshi's work is more elegant, the water takes on a slightly more abstract and lightened look. An interesting feature is the accent on realistic depiction of Fudō grasping Mongaku. Kuniyoshi shows the monk seated below the waterfall, while in Yoshitoshi's piece we can see the action of the actual saving. In the upper part of the waterfall stands Bodhisattva Kannon, the Goddess of Mercy, here the famous Nachi Kannon of the Seigantoi temple.⁵¹

The Battle of Ichinotani (36399) refers to the battle of 1184 fought near Ōsaka by the rival clans of Genji (Minamoto family) and Heike (Taira family). The print is derived from the *Tale of the Heike* which describes the story of the 16-year-old Atsumori of the Taira family. At the end of one battle, Atsumori did not make it to the boat with his co-fighters, so he found himself stuck in the waves. His enemy from the Minamoto clan, Naozane, persuaded him to return to the beach and fight like a proper samurai. As Atsumori was approaching the bank, Naozane saw his rival was only sixteen, the same age as himself. Naozane therefore felt a strong urge to spare his enemy, but unfortunately the rest of the Minamoto fighters had meanwhile arrived at the river bank so there was no choice left and Naozane had to kill his boy rival. Shortly after, the young Minamoto left the world of samurai for monastic life.⁵²

The print once again confirms Yoshitoshi's psychological skill. He draws our attention to the figure of Naozane, while Atsumori is only partly visible in the far background. Naozane's raised hand indicates the moment when he forces his teenage rival to return and fight. It is this very moment that immanently contains the whole story, for at this moment the ending is already inevitable, although the characters involved are not yet aware of it.

The main character wears the partly see-through *horo* cloak, which had been popular since 12th century and used to be arranged so as to make the warrior look bigger, since it filled with air as soon as the warrior rode a horse. It was usually made

⁵⁰ VAN DEN ING, E., SCHAAP, R. *Beauty and Violence*, pl. 47 p. 68.

⁵¹ SEGI, S. Yoshitoshi: *The Splendid Decadent*, p. 138.

⁵² SEGI, S. Yoshitoshi: *The Splendid Decadent*, p. 74, 139; VAN DEN ING, E. – SCHAAP, R., *Beauty and Violence*, p. 138.

of precious fabrics, often silk. Yoshitoshi used the see-through effect of the textile to add exclusiveness and elegance to his composition. The violet stylised pigeons on the warrior's dress are the symbol of Hachiman, the God of War.

Seigen's story, depicted on the print called *The expulsion of the monk Seigen* (36400), has many popular variations. Central to all of them is the love affair between the abbot of Kiyomizu temple in Kyōto and the beautiful Sakurahime (Cherry Princess) from a well-off family. In one version, the affection is mutual and passionate and eventually leads to the expulsion of Seigen from the temple. In another version the girl refuses to love the monk and therefore drives him crazy. In some of the other variants one of the two lovers dies but keeps returning as a ghost causing his/her partner to constantly plunge into heartbroken sorrow.⁵³

Yoshitoshi's composition shows the love-tortured Seigen clutching the richly decorated kimono of his lost love, who appears in a dreamy vision in the upper part of the diptych. His body and facial features are twisted in desperation, resembling the crooked limbs of the figures of Egon Schiele (1890–1918) a few years later. Schiele's two works from 1912 *Agony* and *Cardinal and Nun aka Caress* show a striking similarity in depicting emotions. The inner drama of a broken heart or of the everlasting impossibility of capturing real love for long is in Schiele's works transformed into the convulsive constriction of human limbs and bodies. Seigen is tortured by the conflict of physical love versus his spiritual duties, just like the praying monks in Schiele's *Agony*, or his kneeling and cautiously hugging cardinal and nun.⁵⁴ These similarities make us realize both the roots of modern art as well as Yoshitoshi's stunning topicality. It has become a trademark of the mature Yoshitoshi to transform the features of traditional Japanese stories into psychological reflections equal to those that became the foundation stones of Western modern art.

ONE HUNDRED ASPECTS OF THE MOON (*Tsuki Hyakushi*) 1885–92

Yoshitoshi's last major series, which took several years to finish, represents the absolute peak of his art. The NpM is proud to own the complete album of the one hundred prints.⁵⁵ The series was a great success and the prints were usually sold out on the very morning the shops offered them to the public. The reason for such excitement was the strikingly new approach to woodcuts that Yoshitoshi displayed. Of course his work had been known before, but it was not until the Moon series that his style became so refined and elaborate. All the themes that Yoshitoshi portrayed in this series had a lot to do with Japanese history, mythology or artistic tradition. At the same time his way of drawing was very different from the traditional *ukiyo-e* praxis. His experience with

⁵³ KEYES, R. S., KUWAYAMA, G. *The Bizarre Imagery of Yoshitoshi*, pl. 36, p. 70–71.

⁵⁴ Seigen's features are quite similar to those of the monk Mongaku from another Yoshitoshi print (36380) discussed earlier. In the case of Mongaku, however, the spasmodic appearance of his body is due to the fact that he is falling into the waterfall and is being grasped by his saviour. However, Seigen is primarily tortured, as it were, „inside out“, his inner emotional desperation being the reason for his outer unnatural poise. After all, studying the effects of depression and hysteria on the body shapes and poses of mentally ill patients in France had an enormous influence on the art of many prominent artists (like August Rodin) at the turn of the 19th and 20th century.

⁵⁵ The prints were issued as single sheets gradually over the years, the complete series then being bound into an album after the whole set was finished. It is thus now possible to find the prints both as separate sheets and as a complete set in the form of a book. Naturally, the album prints tend to be better preserved than the single sheets. The NpM album is in excellent condition.

drawing from life and realistic observations bore fruit in the form of unparalleled depiction of emotions while at the same time Yoshitoshi's knowledge of the many drawing styles of a number of traditional Japanese schools led to a stunning combination. Every technique he employed was used for both aesthetic and symbolic reasons. His knowledge of Western art strengthened Yoshitoshi's originality but not at the price of denying his Japanese roots. In the Moon series, tradition and innovation have come together to create a perfect balance.

Thematically, the series consists of a wide range of motifs. According to John Stevenson, the subjects of the series can be divided into four categories⁵⁶: 1. Mythology and folklore 2. Figures from Heian court 3. Figures from Tokugawa era, and finally 4. Non-political and lively themes represented by anonymous townspeople or characters from literature and entertainment. Tamara Tjardes groups the prints into three other categories⁵⁷: 1. Literature, myth and music 2. Warrior prints 3. The floating world. All of these categories work as a useful tool to help us understand the wide range of subject matters that Yoshitoshi displayed. Most of the stories were part of the common knowledge of the time. Sometimes, however, Yoshitoshi chose a story of minor importance because what he liked was the atmosphere of the tale or a concrete situation of its hero. The series is therefore a proof of both his wide cultural knowledge and vivid imagination.

Apart from the historical or literary allusions, Yoshitoshi's main interest was with no doubt in portraying emotions. As someone who had personal experience with depression and relationship failures, Yoshitoshi had a deep understanding of the psychology of his heroes. The Moon series can be almost viewed as a textbook of various emotions connected to a variety of life situations and the many possibilities of their depiction. As opposed to his early works, in his mature phase the artist preferred to show the moments either preceding or following the actual action to which the print title referred.⁵⁸ Unlike his early lively prints, the Moon series is mainly about the mood of a particular situation. It shows us the heroes as individuals tortured by their inner turbulence or outer injustice.

Yoshitoshi's love for the traditional Noh theatre left an indelible imprint on his approach to the Moon series. Central to Noh is the aesthetic principle of *yūgen*, which also formed the basis of the artist's concept of beauty. *Yūgen* stands for a profound and mysterious sense of the beauty of the changing seasons, a sense constantly affected by the transient nature of human life. The subtle profundity of all things is demonstrated in all nature, objects and people's lives. The passing of time, which captures and finally distorts all the hopes and feelings of the human soul, is in the arts merely implied by simple allusions or gesture. The classical poetry therefore works mainly with hints and symbols and leaves the poems to be completed by their reader's own inner voice. Just

⁵⁶ STEVENSON, J. Yoshitoshi's One Hundred Aspects of the Moon, p. 58.

⁵⁷ TJARDES, T. One Hundred Aspects of the Moon, p. 6.

⁵⁸ This is beautifully illustrated by the Moon of the Lonely House print (album sheet no. 24). The topic of the murdered old woman had been depicted many times by Yoshitoshi himself as well as by Kuniyoshi and others. Yoshitoshi could have chosen to show the old woman approaching her victim or the actual moment of the murder. Instead he preferred to show the woman on her way to the lonely house where a murder is about to take place. By showing the woman alone on a moonlit night the artist concentrates our attention on the psychological level of her personality and her deed. STEVENSON, J., Yoshitoshi's One Hundred Aspects of the Moon, p. 54.

like the sophisticated Noh theatre where every single gesture has a meaning and every slight detail is of crucial importance to the story, Yoshitoshi too works with allusions and symbols and invites the viewer to join in with his or her own imagination and reference frame.

Basically all the prints from this series are masterpieces worthy of the viewer's closer attention.⁵⁹

Let us now have a look at some interesting features of a few of the best prints. The moon is the unifying motif, yet on some prints it is not physically present. This is the case of the picture of the reclining courtesan (album sheet no. 74). Resting on mats, she gazes at the shadow of a pine tree cast by the moon. We cannot really see the moon, but we are assured of its presence via the beautiful shadow. The heart-broken lady-in-waiting at the Heian court, Ariko no Naishi (album sheet no. 40) plays the key role in a gorgeous print where the moon is only indicated by its strong light reflected on the river surface. The unhappy young beauty is about to end her life by jumping into the waves. Her gentle gesture and the intensity of her emotions are framed by a perfectly constructed composition which uses the diagonal of the boat, opposing it with the further diagonal of the lady's lute.

Compositions like this show Yoshitoshi's rich imagination and witty playfulness. An example of a dynamic composition is the *Moon of the Pure Snow at Asano River* (album sheet no. 75). Chikako, a daughter full of filial devotion, is seen here as she jumps into the water to end her life, which has been ruined by her father's bad business decision. The composition, inspired by an earlier print by Hokusai, is beautifully dynamic and captures the girl's emotions well. Her colourful garments fly into the air as she takes the fatal leap, and a pair of birds flies away disturbed by Chikako's deed. In the background a huge full moon adds depth and gravity to the overall atmosphere. The girl's facial expression and her pose underline her brave determination. The snowy landscape frames the cold and cruel surroundings and contrasts with the vivid colours of the kimono worn by the unlucky daughter, whose life is about to end any minute. As always with Yoshitoshi, every detail of the composition plays an important role in the picture.

A stunning image of fire is captured on a print showing a fireman gazing into the flames (album sheet no. 56). Seen from behind, the fireman's figure draws the viewer into the picture and makes him feel as if he were standing right next to the tragedy. This is a trick used throughout the history of Western painting, perhaps best embodied by Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* from 1818.⁶⁰ Just as in the case of Friedrich's *Wanderer*, Yoshitoshi's fireman leaves us uncertain about his emotions as we cannot see his face. Unsure of the fireman's state, the viewer is forced to reflect both on the sprawling flames and on the fireman himself. Apart from this smart game with the viewer, which is of course crucial to this print, there is also a story behind it. The fireman is actually a standard-bearer of the "Number One Company" of firemen. As Stevenson explains, there were several rival companies which fought the many fires which often destroyed large areas of the city. In the distance the standard-bearer of a competitor company can be seen.⁶¹ The company which put out the fire first

⁵⁹ John Stevenson's wonderful study of the series is definitely the best source of detailed information for anyone interested in a deeper analysis of each print.

⁶⁰ The painting can be seen at the Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

would be richly rewarded, so it was very important to make clear which company was dealing with each fire. The shape of the standards therefore played a key role. Yoshitoshi thus connects several levels: a scene of catastrophe as it is contemplated by a motionless man, and a glimpse of fire-fighting practice of the time. All this is brought to perfection by means of artistic expression: the flames are beautifully portrayed with the scattering effect created using lime (*gofun*) for each print separately, thus causing each print to be unique. The firemen's standard, shown as a large unshaded circle and cube, works nicely as a geometric and light coloured plane in contrast to the vibrant flames of the background.

The witty play with silhouettes, seen in the above print, is echoed in some other prints in Yoshitoshi's oeuvre. Within the Moon series, the print depicting *The Moon of Yamaki Mansion* (album sheet no. 79) uses the silhouette as its main compositional feature. The Japanese sliding screens and doors, covered with paper, facilitate this shadow play and certainly kindle the artist's imagination. No wonder this motif was among the favourite of Western artists visiting the fin de siècle Japan. Artists like Helen Hyde, Bertha Lum and Emil Orlik, who repeatedly travelled to Japan and often spent long periods of time there, shared a mutual love for the subtle play of light and shadow on the traditional sliding door surfaces and made use of them in their own art works.⁶² Yoshitoshi's print *Dawn Moon in the Theatre District* (album sheet no. 43) is populated by silhouettes of townspeople strongly resembling Orlik's prints of the pleasure quarters as well as Lum's night scenes depicting the streets of the theatre district. The genius of Yoshitoshi's artistic language was thus appreciated not only by his countrymen but had a great impact internationally.⁶³

The Moon series concluded the rich and inspiring oeuvre of Yoshitoshi. Although the artist had a number of students and was known to devote a lot of time and care to teaching, none of his followers was gifted enough to overshadow his teacher. Yoshitoshi thus remained the last great master of the traditional woodcut prints of Japan. Unparalleled in invention as well as craftsmanship, Yoshitoshi represents a fascinating crossroads of tradition and modernism, of Japan and the West. Brought up in the atmosphere of traditional old Edo, he never betrayed its aesthetic ideal. At the same time he was ingenious enough to experiment with imported techniques and approaches and adopted the best of them. Skill, technique, psychological insight and a sense of originality – the *ukiyo-e* tradition could not have possibly culminated with a better combination, embodied by a single artist.

⁶¹ STEVENSON, J. Yoshitoshi's One Hundred Aspects of the Moon, pl. 22.

⁶² Helen Hyde (1868–1919) and Bertha Lum (1869–1954) were both Americans who returned to Japan for inspiration and built their reputations on Japonisme. Both adopted the traditional method of *ukiyo-e* printmaking and were commercially very successful in Japan as well as in the States. Both concentrated mainly on idealized visions of Japanese women and children. Emil Orlik (1870–1932) was born in Prague and lived mainly in Berlin. Orlik travelled to Japan twice to study traditional printmaking techniques. While in Japan he produced a large album called *Aus Japan* featuring many contemporary Japanese motives drawn from real life. However, in his later career he refused to be closely associated with the wave of Japonisme as his oeuvre covered a large scale of topics and his Japanese phase was just a temporary episode.

⁶³ Although we do not have any concrete evidence of Hyde, Lum or Orlik owning Yoshitoshi's prints, it is highly probable they were acquainted with his works. All three of them were in touch with Japan's contemporary artists and since Yoshitoshi was highly praised even after his death, it is almost certain that his prints were known to these Western visitors.

4. Yoshitoshi's Works in other Collections (outside Japan)

Yoshitoshi's prints are owned and often exhibited by a number of famous museum and institutions. Within the Czech Republic, apart from the Japanese Collection of the Náprstek Museum, 79 prints by the author can be found in the National Gallery, Prague.⁶⁴

Within the USA, The Claremont Colleges (CA) have a collection of 109 various prints by Yoshitoshi, including some preparatory sketches.⁶⁵ The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MA) owns about 400 prints, among them a few unique sketchbooks showing the artist's fascinating preparatory work and motives drawn from life.⁶⁶ The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (CA) has more than 450 art works, including a huge collection of Yoshitoshi's newspaper illustration, as well as a number of preparatory sketches.⁶⁷ Within Europe, the British Museum, London (GB) owns about 200 works by the artist, including a few of his extremely rare paintings.⁶⁸ The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (GB) owns approximately 40 prints, and many of them play a role in the museum's online exhibition on Yoshitoshi.⁶⁹ Yoshitoshi's work is also highly valued in auctions all over the world and forms a substantial part of many private collections worldwide.

5. Symbols in Yoshitoshi's Prints

The themes depicted in Yoshitoshi's prints are especially interesting as they tell various stories from Japanese and Chinese history. However, they are also fascinating because of the very broad range of symbols that Yoshitoshi used. The Japanese are able to perceive most of the symbols without being aware of it. The symbols represent a certain kind of clue to understand the story depicted in the print.

All the symbols in single prints and also in the album can be divided into two or three categories. The first category includes primordial symbols such as the turtle (longevity, inv.no. 36374), dragonflies on a samurai's trousers (transience of human life, album sheet no. 41), a crane on a screen (magnificence and longevity, album sheet no. 100). The second category is represented by symbols which are somehow incorporated in the theme. Mostly they can be characterized as patterns on heroes' clothes, illustrating their stories. Here, Yoshitoshi shows his extremely rich imagination and knowledge of Japanese culture and history. For example, Buddhist clothes are patterned with lotus (a symbol of purity and of Buddhism generally, inv. no. 36380 and album sheet no. 96). The motif of dragons (album sheet no. 96) is also connected to

⁶⁴ Online Catalogue of the National Gallery, Prague. URL <<http://ng.bach.cz/ces/centrum.html?msg=srec&words=jo%C5%A1ito%C5%A1i&un=1A1v>> [cit. 2011-12-16].

⁶⁵ Claremont Colleges Digital Library, URL <<http://ccd.libraries.claremont.edu/cdm4/results.php?CISOOP1=exact&CISOFIELD1=creato&CISOROOT=/cyw&CISOBOX1=Yoshitoshi>> [cit. 2011-12-16].

⁶⁶ Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Online Catalogue, URL <<http://www.mfa.org/search/collections?keyword=Tsukioka+Yoshitoshi>> [cit. 2011-12-16].

⁶⁷ LACMA Collection Online Catalogue, URL <<http://collectionsonline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?keyword=Tsukioka%20Yoshitoshi;request=keywordimages>> [cit. 2011-12-16].

⁶⁸ British Museum, Online Catalogue, URL <http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_results.aspx?orig=%2Fresearch%2Fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx&searchText=Yoshitoshi&x=0&y=0&fromDate=&fromadbc=ad&toDate=&toadbc=ad> [cit. 2011-12-16].

⁶⁹ The Fitzwilliam Museum, Online Exhibition, URL <<http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/gallery/yoshitoshi/index.html>> [cit. 2011-12-16].

Buddhist philosophy. Even a motif of clouds and triple whirl (in Japanese *mitsutomoe*, album sheet no. 38) can be classified as a popular Buddhist pattern.

Peonies as a symbol of prosperity (album sheet no. 84), stylized sea waves (*seigaiha*, inv.no. A18814), or plovers above sea waves as a characteristic pattern of geishas from the Kyōto district of Pontochō (album sheet no. 73) can be counted among the traditional patterns. Hemp leaves (*asanoha*, inv.no. 36373) were also a popular pattern for kimono fabric. The *asanoha* motif is typical of prints depicting actors in the Kabuki theatre. Yoshitoshi's print (inv.no. 36373) combines it with stylized arrows, which are also very popular. Japanese silk kimonos worn on festive occasions have three or five family crests (two on the chest, three on shoulders) and they are depicted in this way on sheet inv.no. 36355, where an actor has a family crest of two *tomoe* whirls on a samurai's *kamishimo*. On album sheet no. 100 a high-ranking samurai has family crests on his outer *kamishimo* as well as on his under-kimono. Also the *koto* player, Egawa Tarōzaemon, (inv.no. A10550) has family crests on his kimono.

The third category is the most interesting because making out the meaning of the symbols demands more in-depth knowledge of Japanese culture. The sheet inv. no. 36399 depicts Kumagai Naozane holding a commander's fan (*tessen*) in his hand. The same commander's fan can be found on album sheet no. 8, where Minamoto no Yoshitsune throws the fan after Benkei. The commander's fan represents a symbol of power and it can also be used as a weapon (the *tessen* has two outer ribs made of metal, which means it is very heavy and can be used as a weapon).

According to Japanese legends, ghosts have long arms but their legs are almost invisible, fading into some sort of mist. This allows ghosts to be easily distinguished in pictures such as in inv.no. 38742. Legends also say that picturing somebody's hands means stealing his soul. This can be seen especially in the first portrait photographs taken in the second half of the 19th century. Many of the women portrayed are hiding their hands in their kimono sleeves. Yoshitoshi appears to have heard of this superstition, since he painted a woman (album sheet no. 43) dressed up in a festive kimono but with her hand hidden in the sleeve. Yoshitoshi also often depicted heroes getting ready to commit suicide. On album sheet no. 40 Ariko no Naishi is going to kill herself because of unrequited love. Her suicide is perhaps the reason why Yoshitoshi dressed her in a kimono with Buddhist wheels of life on it. The novel *Suikoden – Tales from the Water Margin* – was very popular in Japan and some of the brigands in the novel were celebrated for their tattoos. Manual workers at the end of the 19th century who worked almost naked loved to tattoo their bodies. An album sheet (no. 5) portrays one of the *Suikoden* heroes who had nine colourful dragons tattooed on his body.

Interesting customs captured in Yoshitoshi's prints include straw boots for horses' hooves so that their clatter could not be heard (inv.no. 22692 and album sheet no. 12 – the same print) and a large number of barefoot figures. Going barefoot was a very normal part of Japanese life, especially inside, where everyone took their shoes off. Not only humble folk are depicted barefoot in the countryside; samurais and the heroes of various legends are often either barefoot or only in their socks. Sometimes they have simple straw sandals.

An outstanding symbol of the sun can be found on Toyotomi Hideyoshi's helmet (album sheet no. 67). Hideyoshi's helmet is lost, but its precise copy can be found in Ōsaka castle. The sunbeams on the helmet are remarkable because they resemble the later shape of the sun on the Japanese flag in Yoshitoshi's time. The appearance of this

flag formed an important part of propaganda prints at the time of the Sino-Japanese war.

The legend of the rabbit on the moon (album sheet no. 15) is a generally well-known theme dating back to the *Kojiki*, the oldest Japanese chronicle. This legend is connected to stories that came to China from India about a rabbit creating a potion of immortality on the moon. A rabbit is also one of the zodiac symbols and a very often a theme of decorative art (sword guards, *netsuke* decorative buttons etc.)

The last motif to be mentioned is the not only visual but also auditory motif of pounding linen (album no. 16). Chinese and Japanese lyrical poetry likes this image very much – a symbol of loneliness and longing for a lover or a loved husband while the quiet night is disturbed by a mallet pounding. The verb “*tsuku*” means to pound and in the form of “*tsuki*” – pounding – is homonymous with the word “moon” – “*tsuki*” but written in a different character. That means the moon (*tsuki*) shines on the pounding (*tsuki*) of linen.

Album sheet no. 87 shows how complicated the symbols of prints can be. The print depicts an actor in the Kabuki theatre who specialized in playing women’s roles, or “*onnagata*”. He wears a violet scarf on his head because “*onnagata*” players were required to shave their foreheads as, for example, samurais did, but actors covered the shaven area with a scarf. The rest of his hairstyle is a combination of a male topknot and female loose hair over the back of the neck. The actor wears a very colourful kimono with long sleeves – a kimono style reserved for male prostitutes called “*wakashū*”. Homosexuality was quite a common phenomenon among Kabuki actors, and leading actors of theatres often operated male brothels from where they could recruit promising young actors to play “*onnagata*”.

The above shows that a proper evaluation of individual prints requires thorough research not only of the circumstances under which the master painted the picture but also of symbols he used to capture, for example, a figure of an actor standing in the country under a sakura blossoms.

Photographs by Jiří Vaněk

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Fig. 1: 36371 – Taira no Koremochi vanquishes the demon maiden of Mt. Togakushi



Fig. 2: 36380 – The austerities of the monk Mongaku



Fig. 3: 36400 – The expulsion of the monk Seigen



Fig. 4: 38743 – Yukihiro meets the fisherwomen Murasame and Matsukaze at Suma Beach



Fig. 5: 38748 – Yoshitsune learns martial arts on Mt. Kurama



Fig. 6: Album No. 40 – Ariko no Naishi



Fig. 7: Album No. 75 – Moon of pure snow at Asano river (Chikako)



Fig. 10: Album sheet No. 87 – Onnagata actor