

Two Times Nine is Eighteen

A single man in Kyoto visits Kiyomizu Temple to make a petition to have a wife provided. After making the petition he is determined to stay all night waiting for any sign that his petition had been successful. In a dream that night he is instructed to go and see a woman at the west gate of the temple.

With a palpitating heart he goes to the gate and looks around. Sure enough he meets a woman, who, when asked, answers by way of waka-poems, saying that she is single and lives at a place mysteriously described as “the place where the air stagnates.” Construing the figurative meaning correctly he further asks her the house number. At this point she simply says, “Niku!” literally meaning “How I hate you!” But again he takes her word as providing some clue, and interpreting it as two times nine, he visits her at No. 18.

He was right. He finds the woman waiting for him in a fashionable area in Kamigyō-ku. He gladly carries her home on his back, thinking he is a happy man to have been provided with such a cultivated and unaffected wife. Swearing that they will live a happy life together, he takes off her head covering. Alas, she is the ugliest woman he has ever seen: he flees from her in horror. Eager not to lose this capital opportunity, she chases after him

Yūgao (“The Moonflower”)

A priest, living in Bungo province (present-day Ōita prefecture), travels to the capital in order to visit Otokoyama-Hachimangu. Taking advantage of his sojourn in Kyoto he visits noted temples and shrines, and on this particular day he saunters about the neighbourhood of Gojō, where shabby cluttered houses of common people stand. A short way away from these houses stands one from which is heard a female voice reading waka-poems. A little later when a woman comes out, he asks her what house it is. She replies that it is the villa of some nobleman.

“The villa of some nobleman,” as the woman calls it, is in truth part of the ruined Villa of Minamoto-no-Tōru(822-895), once called “Kawara-no-in,” in which Toru, the noted epicurean, lived a gorgeous life at the height of his fame and prosperity; but in *The Tale of Genji* it is simply mentioned as “the villa of some nobleman” in which Yūgao, mistress of the Shining Prince, was haunted by an evil spirit leading to her untimely tragic death. The priest remembers that by a happy coincidence Tamakazure, Yūgao’s daughter, had come down to live in the province of Bungo, and proposes to perform a memorial service for the repose of Yūgao. The woman then narrates an account of unhappy and pitiful life of Yūgao before disappearing.

At midnight while the priest is chanting the Lotus Sutra, Yūgao appears in her former grace and beauty and expresses her joy of having attained the Buddha’s promise of Heaven; but as day breaks she disappears into the morning clouds.