

IHARA SAIKAKU

Tales of Japanese Justice

Translated from the Japanese by Thomas M. Kondo and Alfred H. Marks. University of Hawaii: The University Press of Hawaii, 1980. Pp. 100. \$6.50.

It is not surprising that, with westernization and modernization, Japan has acquired a taste for the detective story. As early as 1887, Edgar Allan Poe's story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" was translated, and from then on the genre developed and flourished. Remarkable, however, is the fact that not only writers of literature for entertainment took to this new literary form. From the beginning, "serious" novelists tried their hand at it as well, and many recognized authors have written detective novels which are considered as an integral part of their work and of high literary value.

One of the reasons for this may be that detective stories had not been completely unknown before the Meiji Restoration (1868). At the beginning of the Tokugawa period (1603-1868), Chinese stories about famous judges, their cases and judgments, had been adapted and found an avid readership. The *Tōin Hiji Monogatari* (1649), for example, is based on the collection *T'ang-yin Pih-shih* (Trials in the Shade of a Pear Tree). When, however, the famous realist writer Ihara Saikaku took up that subject, he turned to Japanese models. His *Honchō Ōin Hiji* (Japanese Trials in the Shade of a Cherry Tree), which Thomas M. Kondo and Alfred H. Marks present here in translation reminds the reader—by its title—of the earlier works, but the stories are based almost exclusively on the cases and records of two Japanese government officials: Itakura Katsushige (1545-1624) and Shigemune (1586-1656).

After the battle of Sekigahara (1600), having brought almost the entire country under this control, Tokugawa Ieyasu appointed Katsushige to the office of Shoshidai in Kyōto. (In their introduction, the translators give a detailed account of the functions and duties of that office.) Katsushige, and later his son, were responsible for law and order in the whole region; they became famous for their intelligence and wit as well as for their wisdom and sophistication. Both had been trained in

Zen and practiced the tea ceremony, and several anecdotes about them can be found in writings concerned with *chadō*, "teaism." Saikaku, who was born in Ōsaka in 1642, could still have met Shigemune personally. Most of the cases brought before "His Lordship" (Saikaku gives him no name) are about money, fraud or theft, or he must decide a dispute; rarely has he to investigate a murder. When an investigation becomes necessary, "His Lordship" usually leaves it to his aides; his "method" is the instant understanding of a situation. (Though it is not spelled out in the text, the connection with Zen and the calm austerity of the tea ceremony is obvious.) All stories in this collection are entertaining; many are also of interest from a sociological point of view. Two cases are specially intriguing: In "Gowns through which Evil Deeds Show," the chief investigator determines which of sixteen maids has murdered her mistress; he lets them all put on long sleeved silk kimonos and houses them for one summer night in the same room. All suffer terribly from mosquito bites and toss and turn in their sleep. The guilty one, however, "was so concerned about herself throughout the night that she could not rest. Since she did not lie down at all, her kimono was by far the least wrinkled" (p. 44). In "A Loser, A Finder," the Elder Councillor finds an almost Solomonian solution in a dispute about who should have three gold pieces—the loser or the finder. His Lordship, however, sees deeper and detects the intended fraud behind the dispute.

The language of the translation deserves special praise: in its compact clarity it retains the flavor of the original text, in which many details are left to the reader's imagination. Here is an example: "A long time ago in the outskirts of the Capital near Kitano, lived a man who ran a pawn and sake shop. He soon became a millionaire, and as his business prospered he acquired as a servant a seamstress accustomed to wearing very attractive clothing. After a time, she began to crave green plums, and it gradually became apparent that she was pregnant" (p. 33). All lovers of Japanese literature and/or detective stories will welcome this work of Saikaku, which has been here translated for the first time in its entirety and provided with a competent introduction. There are three details, however, that might be corrected in a second edition: 1. a *literal* translation of the title should be provided in addition to the one chosen to illustrate the analogy to *T'ang-yin Pih-shi*; 2. it was not Katsushige who held

the office of Shoshidai for thirty-five years but his son (p. xiii); 3. Why is the Chinese word for "Shade" transcribed "Ying" and not "Yin"?

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PATRICIA S. WARRICK
The Cybernetic Imagination in Science Fiction.
Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1980. Pp. 282. \$15.

In the introduction to *The Cybernetic Imagination in Science Fiction*, Patricia Warrick confesses to high ambition. Her goals, she says, are to chart the history of artificial intelligence in science fiction; to describe the subgenre of science fiction that deals with computers and robots, analyzing the relationship between that subgenre and the scientific and technological developments it draws from; and to use the subgenre as a testing ground to judge the literary worth of science fiction as a whole. These are lofty goals, and I applaud them; however, I found all too little to applaud in the body of the book. Writing in prose that is murky and often repetitive, Warrick abandons many of the tried and true techniques of literary analysis without successfully opening up the new territory she hopes to explore.

As often happens with theoretical works, the bulk of this text is a defense of a methodology that we are never allowed to see in operation. In this case, Warrick decides to use the computer to analyze stories about computers. Starting with a body of novels and short stories that is large but perhaps not so overwhelmingly large as Warrick makes out (225 stories, mostly short stories, published between 1930 and 1977), she tells us that she selected thirty-three characteristics for computer analysis. We are never told what these "descriptors" are, except that among them are "date of publication, setting in time and space, computer application, and method of plot development" (p. xv). Though the rest are left in mystery, it might be guessed from these few that the resulting computer analysis will be oversimplified and, if the

term might be excused, mechanical. "Method of plot development," for instance, generally turns out to be limited to three choices: conflict, puzzle solving, and everything else. Identifying the plot in a short story as a conflict between man and machine is only the first step in analyzing that plot. We would also like to know what values are placed on each side, how the conflict is introduced and escalated, and whether it is resolved or merely ended.

Without further discussion of her descriptors and the computer correlation of them, Warrick jumps to a general analysis of cybernetic science fiction based primarily on Ervin Laszlo's *Introduction to Systems Philosophy*. She approaches each work of fiction as a system; that is, not merely as a set of elements but as a set of interactions among elements: an order, an organism. The works in question she groups under three headings: isolated systems, closed systems, and open systems. In her discussions of these categories it becomes clear that she is talking not about the story but about the fictional world within the story. Isolated system stories are those in which the scope of the fiction is artificially limited to a microcosm of one or two characters and a single, clearly defined problem. Closed system stories are those which portray static, deterministic societies, primarily, in modern science fiction, dystopias. Open system stories usually portray an evolving universe, one which is transformed during the course of the narrative by exploration and the acquisition of knowledge. Fictional universes are important in science fiction, but not so exclusively important that a work may be judged by its setting without consideration of character, narrative structure, point of view, or style, and yet that is what Warrick seems to be doing. Closed systems are equated with inferior science fiction, isolated systems with early, experimental science fiction, and open systems, because they allow for peaceable interaction of man and machine, with good science fiction.

When, in the final chapter, Warrick takes leave of her methodology to render a judgment of the material, she offers a valid criticism: many science fiction writers substitute subliterate conventions for a real understanding of science and thus fall short of fulfilling science fiction's promise to draw scientific discoveries into the sphere of human values and emotions. She points out with reasonable accuracy the ways in which much science fiction fails as