
MIYAZAWA KENJI AND HIS ILLUSTRATORS

JAPANESE VISUAL CULTURE

Volume 7

Managing Editor
John T. Carpenter

Miyazawa Kenji and His Illustrators

Images of Nature and Buddhism in Japanese
Children's Literature

BY
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BRILL

Leiden – Boston
2013

Published by

BRILL
Plantijnstraat 2
2321 JC Leiden
The Netherlands
brill.com/jvc

Design

SPi, Tamilnadu, India
Studio Berry Slok, Amsterdam (cover)

Production

High Trade BV, Zwolle, The Netherlands
Printed in Hungary

ISBN 978-90-04-24307-1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kilpatrick, Helen.

Miyazawa Kenji and his illustrators : images of nature and Buddhism in Japanese children's literature / by Helen Kilpatrick.

p. cm. -- (Japanese visual culture ; v. 7)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-90-04-24307-1 (cloth with dustjacket : alk. paper)

1. Miyazawa, Kenji, 1896-1933--Criticism and interpretation. 2. Miyazawa, Kenji, 1896-1933--Illustrations. 3. Illustration of books--Japan--20th century. 4. Children's literature, Japanese--Illustrations. 5. Nature in literature. 6. Buddhism in literature. I. Title.

PL833.I95Z6947 2012

895.6'344--dc23

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This work was published with the assistance of a grant from the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

Cover image:

Detail of fig. 99. Shimada Mutsuko (1937 –); p. 3, *Chūmon no Ōi Ryōriten*; Kaiseisha, 1984.

2012038890

*For Richard, and for my beloved sisters, Joan and Robyn Masters,
both of whom departed this world too soon.*

*And for the children of Fukushima and a world now beset,
after Japan's triple disaster of March 11 2011,
with challenges that make it ever more important
to understand the ideologies expressed through Kenji's work.*

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Acknowledgements

THERE ARE NUMEROUS people who have helped bring this book to fruition. The project initially began at Macquarie University, after my supervisor John Stephens suggested that I blend my understanding of Japanese language and culture with my newfound interest in children's literature by looking at Japanese picture books. With that spark, the concept for the project developed and flourished. Without John's intellectual curiosity and stimulation, the research may not have reached its final stages, and I still very much value his continued support and friendship. My colleagues at the University of Wollongong have offered much moral support and encouragement, and special thanks must go to Paul Sharrad and Vera Mackie who have been ever-ready with practical suggestions and advice. My PhD examiners, Tomoko Aoyama, Kerry Mallan and Orié Muta have also continued to offer their encouragement and assistance, for which I am eternally grateful.

I am completely humbled by the generosity and goodwill of the illustrators whose artwork is discussed in this book. They have all unhesitatingly provided permission to reproduce their work. I have also had the pleasure of personal contact with many of them, including the privilege of spending time with Satō Kunio and Kobayashi Toshiya at their respective studios. (The latter has a stunningly beautiful, old Japanese 'atelier' in a mountain valley.) Both answer my sometimes out-of-the-blue letters with prompt and cheerful efficiency. Lee Ufan and Kim Tschang Yeul have also been generous in providing their permission for this book and other research papers. Other permissions have been received with the kind help and advice from officials at publishing houses like Kumon, Kaiseisha, Miki House and Fuzambō. They have all shown great goodwill and support for the project. The Japan Folk Craft Museum provided a digital version of the Kozakata prints

of Munakata Shikō, while the artist's grandson, Mr Munakata Ryo, kindly provided permission to use them. I am deeply indebted to all of these people.

On my visits to Japan, staff at the Miyazawa Kenji Museum in Iwate have always been ready and willing to provide assistance. Kenji scholar, Nishida Yoshiko, shared her knowledge and offered much advice and friendship in the early stages of the project. She generously accompanied me on a trip from Osaka to Iwate Prefecture and guided me around Kenji's home town with an infectious enthusiasm. Endō Jun and Yasuko Doi at the IICLO have provided research assistance and much valuable help and advice and friendship over many years. Suzuki Kenji has also provided assistance along the way.

I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the editors at Brill, Inge Klompmakers, Nozomi Goto, who assisted in the initial stages, and Anna Beerens, who took over from Nozomi in a remarkably smooth transition. Their ever patient and kind guidance is much appreciated. Lajos Vermesi at High Trade has also been incredibly efficient in handling the pictures.

I am also greatly indebted to the institutions which have provided financial support for research and for the book. The project began with a fellowship from the International Institute of Children's Literature, Osaka (IICLO), and an Australian Postgraduate Award at Macquarie University. More recently, the Australian Academy of the Humanities awarded a generous publication subsidy to assist with the inclusion of the coloured illustrations in this book. The Faculty of Arts at the University of Wollongong also kindly granted funds for the publication.

Finally, I wish to extend a huge thank you to the many friends and family members who have seen me through the best and worst of times. I am

especially grateful to my dear departed sister, Joan Masters, along with Meredith Engel, Jennifer Taylor, Beatrice Trefalt, Ross Telfer, Claire Walker, Lyn Swierski and Martin Veres for reading early drafts of chapters and providing helpful suggestions and editorial assistance. Thanks too, to the many long-suffering friends who have generously offered their time and support by listening to and adding their thoughts to my (often rambling and incohesive) ideas over good food, coffee or wine.

Heartfelt thanks must also go to my husband, Richard Kilpatrick, for his unwavering love, endless patience, and his firm support. He has been ever-ready with emotional and practical help, not only for the duration of this project, but for the duration of my academic life which began well after we met. I'm sure he had no idea as to what he was getting into when I embarked on this journey. Without his devotion, this book would never have been realised.



Introduction

MIYAZAWA KENJI (1896–1933) is one of the most renowned figures in the field of modern Japanese literature. He was devout Buddhist whose work heavily reflects his non-humanist worldview.¹ Together with his Buddhist beliefs, he was also a natural scientist, with many other research interests that influenced his thinking and writing, including chemistry, agriculture, geology, education, art, astronomy and other religions such as Christianity. In other words, Kenji was an inimitable modernist who combined an eclectic array of thought into his literary work. Predominantly, however, he showed a real concern with the interconnection between the human and natural world that, from an ecological perspective, now seems prescient. His unique blending of science, nature and metaphysics often results in an idiosyncratic ‘otherworld’ that was revolutionary in its day and still remains extraordinary. Many of his prose narratives, self-titled as children’s tales (*dōwa*), bring this concern with blending the human and natural world to the fore. This cosmological world view can be seen particularly within the (post-) modern picture books that are finding broad currency today. These books form the focus of this present work.²

Although Kenji’s stories were not widely read during his own life, since his death they have

become increasingly prominent. Many of these tales form the subject of extensive scholarly study and are now a fully-fledged part of the canon of Japanese literature, for both adults and young people.³ As such, Kenji’s work has become firmly entrenched in Japan’s education system, from primary to tertiary level. Despite the fact that his stories were purportedly written for children, there is still some debate about whether they are actually ‘understood’ by children, and discussion about their suitability as children’s literature (*jidō bungaku*) continues.⁴ Regardless of such debate, Kenji’s tales are widely distributed, critiqued and discussed within the field of children’s literature and the picture books which form the focus of this study are generally considered to fall within that sphere.

There are literally hundreds of illustrated versions of Kenji’s work which are available today. In fact, Kenji has become one of the most frequently-illustrated literary figures in Japan, with artistic exhibitions of this work often touring throughout the country.⁵ In particular, picture books of Kenji’s *dōwa* have been flourishing in Japan since 1983, the fiftieth anniversary of Kenji’s death, when copyright restrictions on his work expired.⁶ Although Kenji’s stories are readily available in a variety of formats, including *manga* and *anime*, like much of the excellent literature produced for young people which is often unfoundedly dismissed as inferior or simple, most of these picture books have been largely ignored by literary and cultural critics.

Munakata Shikō (1903–1975); *Kozukata Hangasaku* (Kozukata Prints). Property of Japan Folk Crafts Museum (Nihon Mingeikan in Tokyo).

Similar to Kenji's stories themselves, much of the artwork accompanying these works is highly sophisticated. Despite their status and recognition through continued nationwide distribution, and despite the fact that Japanese audiences are very familiar with the notion of illustrated texts for adults (from early scroll-works through to today's *manga* and *anime*), picture books of his tales have attracted very little sustained analysis. This project seeks to redress that imbalance by providing the first attempt to closely compare different picture book versions of several of Kenji's most popular tales.

Just as Kenji's narratives form part of the standard of well-known modern classics for Japanese young people, the picture book representations of his tales also form a principle part of the canon of children's literature. The choice of particular tales as subjects for pictorialisation, for instance, operates within the principles of the canon. Publishers and educationalists privilege certain stories and their subject matter as appropriate for illustration, and picture books themselves are usually (though not always) aimed at children.

Perhaps one of the most outstanding aspects about picture books of Kenji's work is that artists and publishers do not edit or abbreviate Kenji's words to accommodate the pictures. Whereas most longer, canonical works of prose are shortened in picture book re-visionings, Kenji's original narratives have been fiercely 'protected' under the influence of the academy of Kenji scholars such as Nishida Yoshiko and Ōfuji Mikio.⁷ For example, Satō Kunio's modification of Kenji's words for 'Ginga Tetsudō no Yoru' (Night on the Milky Way Railway) attracted considerable criticism from the Kenji academy.⁸ Hence, this picture book is now out-of-print and subsequent publications with Satō's pictures have incorporated Kenji's full verbal text. Furthermore, scholars like Ōfuji have argued strongly against any pictorialisation of Kenji's work even though Kenji himself had artist Kikuchi Takeo illustrate his 1924 self-published volume of nine tales, *Chūmon no Ōi Ryōriten* (The Restaurant of Many Orders). Another scholar whose comments support this principle is Ushiyama Megumi who,

for example, "would like to let children develop, as much as possible, their own concrete images"⁹ This kind of view not only underscores at least part of the process of canonisation of Kenji's words, but also points to some of the underlying challenges that artists face in illustrating his stories. Nevertheless, such perspectives have not stopped artists or publishers from continuing to depict and publish them, and the seven tales that form this corpus are a selection of the most frequently illustrated and re-printed Kenji stories now available in picture book form. These particular stories, therefore, have been considered more ideologically suitable, both for pictorialisation and for children, than those tales that have been illustrated less often. All the picture books used throughout this project continue to be reprinted in Japan today. Such republications mean that not only are these picture books readily available, but that they form a major part of the canonical enterprise through which ideologies are transmitted to audiences.

Because children's literature is predominantly about promulgating cultural ideologies to the next generations, the widespread pictorialisation of Kenji's tales intrinsically forms part of the acculturation process of Japanese children. Children's literature provides the format for one of its universal metanarratives, that of personal development, the "'growth' from self-involvement to altruism."¹⁰ Such growth involves the notion of subjectivity: "that sense of personal identity an individual has of her/his self as distinct from other selves, and as being capable of deliberate thought and action" and this is formed in dialogue with society, language, and with other people.¹¹ In this case, investigation into the interaction between word and picture in publications of Kenji's tales necessarily explores how Kenji's less humanistic notions of self and subjectivity are being constructed and conveyed to young Japanese audiences.

The continuing status of Kenji's tales, in particular those reinvigorated as picture books, allows for the exploration of how his idiosyncratic writings from the 1920s and 1930s have come to have such receptivity in the (post-) modern Japan of the late

twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In general terms, most studies of Kenji's narratives are concerned with the reasons for which Kenji attracts so much attention today, especially as the literary circles in Tokyo largely ignored him during his own time. It is, however, not only important to ask why Kenji's tales have become so eminent. It is also essential, especially within the field of children's literature, to investigate how the picture books go about disseminating their ideologies to the next generations; that is, how the pictures achieve meaning in interaction with Kenji's original words and within the discourse of contemporary Japanese culture.

Given that Kenji's original words are held sacrosanct, these picture books offer the unique opportunity to explore the different meanings that pictures produce in response to a fixed source text. How, for example, do the various artists 're-present' the stories and their underlying significances? How are they able to forge a relationship with Kenji's 'sacred' pre-existing texts (pre-texts)? How do their pictures illuminate particular aspects of story and what messages are being obtained or (re-)inscribed in the pictures? Do the pictures liberate or constrain the pre-eminent words? What influences are exerted by pictorial omissions, emphases or extra-textual references? How are the pictures to be 'read'? What reading positions are being created for audiences? Such questions provide a position from which to explore the interaction between the pictures and Kenji's fixed words, and to further investigate the stories' deeper underlying significances.

It is only relatively recently that the picture book has been recognised in Japan as an artistic form worthy of research in its own right.¹² There is still a dearth of scholarly investigation into the interplay between words and pictures in Japanese picture books in general, let alone into those of Kenji's work. Consequently, there has been little critical analysis of how the visual images are working together with his pre-texts, though there have been a few general surveys that discuss subjective preferences and artistic authenticity to Kenji's original

words. More recently, some studies have compared the illustrations in different picture books produced for a single story. For example, Tsukamoto Michiko has discussed illustrated versions of Kenji's 'Restaurant of Many Orders' from an educational perspective.¹³ There has, however, been no previous attempt to synthesise the research on the ideals in Kenji's literature with current theoretical approaches towards culture, art and picture books. This study has the advantage of drawing together, through an intertextual approach, many intriguing elements of Kenji's work, pointing to ways in which cultural ideologies are being transmitted through the combination of picture and word.¹⁴ It considers picture books of Kenji's tales as 're-presentations' or 're-visionings' that enter into dialogue, not only with their pre-texts, but also with the canonical enterprise and the larger cultural framework. The retelling and re-presentation of classics for children forms part of the cultural dialogue that serves important functions such as initiating children into aspects of a social heritage and transmitting a culture's central values, assumptions and shared allusions and experience.

PICTURE BOOKS AS IDEOLOGICAL RE-PRESENTATIONS

Although values in children's books are often presented as *natural* (especially when commended), commentators and re-tellers (such as artists, for instance) are engaged in producing, and sometimes changing, interpretations of the world by changing the consciousness of readers and their attitudes towards pre-existing narratives and concepts.¹⁵ Despite the widespread perception that picture books are easier to interpret than words, they are naturally polyphonic and, as Hunt (among other eminent scholars) points out, "even the 'simplest' require complex interpretative skills."¹⁶

Picture books offer two forms of narrative discourse through which to explore cultural encoding, words and pictures. Pictures can be discussed in a similar way to language because, like all

texts, images are symbolic representations and are, therefore, interpretations of the actual world. They carry attitudes which inscribe both explicit and implicit ideologies.¹⁷ It is also important to note that pictures can never faithfully replicate the verbal texts, nor their respective significances. It is precisely because of the double narrative feature of picture books that they provide a deeper level of meaning than words alone. The combination of these two representational codes thus provides a powerful means of conveying acculturating messages.

Unlike other artists who have the freedom to modify narratives by other writers, artists who depict Kenji's stories have to work not only with Kenji's privileged pre-text but also within the confines of the broader metanarratives at play. Regardless of any other personal or artistic aim, therefore, the very act of producing the picture book actually works within wider parameters to reaffirm the canonical enterprise. Because these artists are bound both by Kenji's pre-texts and their surrounding ideological framework, the artwork is further legitimising that enterprise. While the canonical enterprise legitimises and affirms the status of 'classic' texts such as Kenji's, however, illustrations can also open a critical dialogue that can bring such pre-texts into question, offering much to think and disagree about.¹⁸ Because the pictures are sitting alongside Kenji's original, unchanged pre-text, they are not quite like other narrative pictorialisations which may reaffirm a pre-text or conversely contest it as a "site of resistance" to either the pre-text itself or the "ideological basis of the canonical enterprise."¹⁹ Although many of these re-visionings of Kenji's tales offer an opportunity for alternative dialogue, any such 'dialogue' is rather limited, so any deconstructive project remains an artistic challenge.

The spiritual or metaphysical nature of Kenji's ideals and aspirations has, however, provided the opportunity for many contemporary artists to create a dialogic tension in the ways subjectivity is articulated at both a psycho-symbolic level and in the historical and social analysis of the semiotics of

representation. On the one hand, many of the re-visionings of Kenji's tales that appear to be deconstructive in terms of the semiotics of representation are actually affirming the pre-texts' rejection of individualistic ideologies. Many pictures engage with the metaphysical aspects of Kenji's pre-texts to connect with their syncretic philosophical ideologies, thus supporting a larger anti-humanist project. On the other hand, even those artists who would seek to subvert Kenji's cosmological ideologies by inscribing more humanist morés still have to operate within the larger endeavour that is promulgating non-humanist ideologies. Hence, even those that more monologically replicate the story events and create characters that are more humanistic in orientation work to confirm the particular pre-text's non-individualistic ideologies about the interconnectedness of humanity and nature, but ultimately less effectively.

Nevertheless, the visual images, by entering into dialogue with the 'pre-texts' and the prevailing metanarratives, can and do often subject them to questioning. The pictures are always re-nuancing the pre-text. Such nuancing brings certain significances to the attention of readers within a larger cultural framework that is operating at a different historical moment from that of the original text. The more dialogic the pictorial representation of Kenji's pre-texts, the more it will open the text out and help disclose the ideologies that drive it.

PICTURE BOOK CORPUS AND STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

Given the abundance of picture books of Kenji's work, the corpus of work that can be effectively analysed is necessarily selective. The 'top seven' tales here represent the most oft-reprinted picture book publications from the 1980s until today. This provides about twenty picture books and over a hundred illustrations through which the pertinent themes and motifs are covered. Even though picture books of some of Kenji's later, more realistic tales such as 'Gusukōbudori no Denki'

(The Biography of Gusukōbudori), ‘Kaze no Matasaburō’ (Matasaburō the Wind Imp) and ‘Ginga Tetsudō no Yoru’ (Night of the Milky Way Railway) have maintained certain popularity in the picture book format, they have been excluded here because they are much longer than more conventional picture books. In addition, these narratives have previously been analysed in some depth in English.²⁰ Space constraints have precluded the inclusion of two other widely pictorialised tales, ‘Yodaka no Hoshi’ (The Nighthawk Star) and ‘Nametoko Yama no Kuma’ (The Bears of Mount Nametoko), which I have discussed elsewhere.²¹

For the most part, the picture books under analysis are made up of Kenji’s earlier stories that are brighter and more humorous (and sometimes more didactic) than many of the later tales that Kenji wrote after about 1926.²² Five of these seven tales (as asterisked) have appeared on the school curriculum since the late 1970s.²³ The corpus consists of, in approximate chronological order: ‘Futago no Hoshi’ (The Twin Stars 1918); ‘Yukiwatarī’ (Snow Crossing 1921); ‘Donguri to Yamaneko’ (Wildcat and the Acorns 1921); ‘Chūmon no Ōi Ryōriten’ (The Restaurant of Many Orders 1921); ‘Yamanashi’ (Wild Pear 1922); ‘Serohiki no Gōshu’ (Gōshu the Cellist 1925); ‘Kenjū Kōenrin’ (Kenju’s Wood 1923).²⁴ These tales all retain a profound sense of humanity’s interconnection with the natural world, so the artistic re-visionings offer insight into concepts of self and subjectivity from this broadly non-humanist perspective.

While the analytical chapters concentrate primarily on the interaction between the verbal and visual discourses in the picture books, Chapters 1 and 2 provide some preliminary exploration into the emergence of Kenji’s work within the field of children’s literature in Japan, providing insight into its current status and establishing the context for the later picture book discussion. Chapter 1 briefly explores some of Kenji’s biographical details in order to draw out and clarify some of the distinguishing characteristics and main ideologies operating throughout his tales, briefly contextualising his work and ideas to help gain an understanding of the

cultural context of constructions of (non-) self and subjectivity.

Because both cultural conventions and artistic coding have implications for how picture book narratives may be read and interpreted by a Japanese audience, Chapter 2’s discussion of these codes also provides the basis for the later semiotic discussion of how intersubjectivity is working in the picture books. This chapter shows how the artists can construct reading positions that inscribe cultural notions of subjectivity. Investigation into reading viewpoints and subject positioning in the interaction between the pictorial and verbal representations also offers a deeper insight into the intersubjective construction of (non-) self from a textual bottom-up level. Focussing on how specific non-humanistic ideologies in the tales are re-nuanced through the interplay between text and pictures, the cultural threads are drawn together with the artistic discourse.

The five main chapters then provide a close analysis of several pictorial representations of the seven select tales in order to address their different interpretations of specific Buddhist ideologies. Each of these analytical chapters (Chapters 3–7) revolves around a Buddhist theme related to nature. Each provides a synopsis of the relevant story and teases out how the underlying Buddhist philosophies are operating in the artistic re-visionings of that tale. Kenji’s concept of humanity’s relationship with the natural world is, in slightly different ways, central to each tales’ non-humanist ideologies, and many of the artists access his holistic cosmological principles through their inventive visual depictions. Despite the expression of a complex range of emotions such as anxiety, irritation, grief, loneliness, rivalry, fear and insecurity that originate from accumulative *karma* upon being born into this world (*kono yo*) of “desires, competitions and deceptions,”²⁵ Kenji’s wit and irony critique humanity’s estrangement from nature (as in, for example, ‘Wildcat and the Acorns’ or ‘The Restaurant of Many Orders’) with an incisive humour that also reflects an ultimate optimism. The cosmological union with nature is evident,

for example, in ‘Snow Crossing’ (Yukiwatari) and ‘Wildcat and the Acorns’ (Donguri to Yamaneko) where the protagonists enter an extraordinary time and place in a kind of ceremonial absorption into the universe. Gōshu in ‘Gōshu, the Cellist’ harmonises with nature through music, while the twins in ‘The Twin Stars’ (Futago no Hoshi) and the crabs in ‘Wild Pear’ (Yamanashi) are absorbed into their natural macro- and micro- cosmos respectively. Specific concepts analysed are: competition and ego in relation to self and subjectivity (in ‘Wildcat and the Acorns’ – Chapter 3); the transcendence of dualism (in ‘Snow Crossing’ – Chapter 4); *dekunobō*

(foolishness/uselessness) as a path to selflessness, in (‘Kenjū’s Wood’ and ‘Gōshu, the Cellist’ – Chapter 5); life, death and redemptive innocence (in ‘Wild Pear’ and ‘The Twin Stars’ – Chapter 6); and the threat of erasure through material embeddedness (in ‘The Restaurant of Many Orders’ – Chapter 7). These chapters demonstrate how the stories are being coded or nuanced for a contemporary Japanese audience through, for instance: the artistic medium; the pictorial aspects omitted or emphasised; the particular story moments selected for depiction; or the different possible interpretive codes that come into play in the reading process.



I

The Significance of Miyazawa Kenji's Ideals in (Post-) Modern Japanese Children's Literature

KENJI'S CHILDREN'S STORIES, as opposed to his poetry, have been comparatively overlooked in English-language research and translation. Within the fifteen volumes of Kenji's complete works, nearly five volumes are devoted to his children's tales (*dōwa*). During his short life, he wrote about one hundred and thirty stories.¹ Despite steadily increasing interest in Kenji and his relative prominence among translated Japanese literature, there are still relatively few translations of his tales available. To date, only about thirty have been translated into English, the majority of these by John Bester.² More recently though, a picture book series of ten of Kenji's stories has been published in English, and RIC Publications are in the process of publishing another picture book series in English (with illustrations by Satō Kunio).³ With regard to English-language research into Kenji's tales, there is a similar situation. In contrast to research into Kenji's poetry, reference to Kenji's children's stories has been limited to the occasional mention in doctoral dissertations and within articles about his life or his poetry. Most study has focussed on Kenji's most representative tale, the epic fantasy, 'Night on the Milky Way Railroad' (*Ginga Tetsudō no Yoru*), which has been

made into an animated film and translated into English by several translators.⁴ Sarah Strong's study guide and Hagiwara's thesis represent the major scholarly works in English on this particular story.⁵ Much of the examination into Kenji's own essays about life, art and literature has provided the basis for research into his poetry,⁶ rather than his children's tales, with the notable exceptions of Takao Hagiwara's examination of 'innocence' in his tales,⁷ and Kerstin Vidaeus's research into the characters in his tales.⁸ More recently, David Golley has offered important insight into the relationship between realism, science and ecology in both Kenji's poetry and tales within the context of Japan's aesthetic movement of high modernism.⁹

This paucity of research into Kenji's children's stories is, however, in no way indicative of the situation in Japan, where both popular and scholarly interest in all his work is thriving, although there has been a tendency towards hagiography. The Kenji boom perhaps reached its zenith in 1996 with the centenary celebrations of his birth that saw many television programmes and various activities revolving around his life and work. Many picture books were also published or reissued in this year, to say nothing of the advent of new 'Kenji' tomes, journals and periodicals for both general and academic audiences. A theme park was built in Hanamaki which aimed at "familiarising children with

Itō Wataru (1921–); p. 35; *Kenjū Kōenrin*; Kaiseisha, 1987. Detail of fig. 73.

the writer's work,"¹⁰ exemplifying much of the hype and publicity surrounding Kenji's life and work. Research continues to expand, and at least two Japanese organisations and two online sites are devoted to him.

There are many reasons for the enduring popularity and significance of Kenji's work. In a 1993 newspaper article, Miyazawa Yūzō, the then Director of the Miyazawa Kenji Commemorative Museum in Japan, propounded several possible explanations, not the least of which was Kenji's concern for nature and the environment, a topical issue of the *fin de siècle* which still endures.¹¹ The same article also mentions the fact that Kenji is known in Japan by one or more of his many facets: as the poet who wrote the now-famous *Ame nimo makezu, Kaze nimo makezu* (Undaunted by the Rain, Undaunted by the Wind);¹² by his 'masterwork,' *Ginga Tetsudō no Yoru* (Night on the Milky Way Railroad); as an agriculturalist and teacher; as a scientist who tried to elaborate on Einstein's fourth dimension; or as a practical person who tried to help suffering farmers.¹³ The newspaper article suggests, however, that it is Kenji's anticipation of a society where people and all living things can live together peacefully which is the universally attractive aspect of many of his stories. It is, Miyazawa Yūzō feels, Kenji's foresight about this point which will continue to increase the significance of his tales world-wide. As Makoto Ueda points out, Kenji, in his work, was urging people to reflect seriously upon any doctrines which centre solely upon either humanity or on an omnipotent science.¹⁴ Kenji believed that religion had been replaced by a cold modern science and that art had been degraded and lost a necessary critical spirit. He did not want his literature to follow suit.

Much of the research on Kenji has been hagiographic or biographical in content and theme, tending to explain his work in terms of his life and art. As eminent scholars like Hara Shirō have pointed out, amidst the mid-1990s there were few thorough studies into the works themselves.¹⁵ Hara points out that scholars often critique, for instance, the author himself, his religious leanings,

or concentrate more on how a work is made instead of on the work itself.¹⁶ Even Hara's recommended style of criticism, in seeking to accept certain 'fashionable' versions of Kenji's work (like animated *manga*), is rather monologic because it calls for an understanding of Kenji's original meaning.¹⁷

This investigation concentrates on the works themselves, or more specifically, the visual representation of Kenji's tales, taking a more intertextual approach in the later analysis of picture books. Although the purpose of this project is not biographical, a brief sketch of Kenji's life is important, not because of a monologic need to understand Kenji or his intended meanings, but because the works' underlying significances or ideologies may otherwise be missed.¹⁸ Some detail of Kenji's life in light of his beliefs not only provides the historically different socio-cultural context from which the tales arose, but also helps draw out issues related to holistic constructions of self and subjectivity, providing a deeper appreciation of some of the codes intrinsic to the representations under analysis.

Given that Kenji's stories are generally seen as Buddhist parables or spiritual metaphors, explanation of Buddhist elements operating in the tales provides the basis for the later analysis. Both cultural and artistic traditions that form the basis of cultural coding have implications for how the picture books will be read in both verbal and pictorial representation. Before going further, however, it will be helpful to briefly acknowledge the cultural nature of reading signs.

People learn to distinguish uses of signs, and the attitudes and emotional positions which are signified by these signs, "by living in the culture which produces them."¹⁹ Although this highlights a rather controversial dialectic inherent in this research, that of an outsider 'speaking for the other', an exploration of cultural and artistic coding is an attempt to allay the pitfalls, constraints and dilemmas of such a project. Space prevents this issue being dealt with in depth here, but it is necessary to acknowledge the dangers of assuming an

authoritative 'monologicistic' position such as that which Gayatri Spivak calls the "arrogance of the radical European humanist conscience, which will consolidate itself by imagining the other or, as Sartre puts it, 'redo in himself the other's project, 'through the collection of information.'"²⁰ It is also important to establish at the very outset that the discussion will centre on representations and potential significances that the texts may offer rather than meanings that any actual audience may comprehend, though these representations will impact on a reader's or viewer's interpretation or 'reading' strategies.²¹ This proviso and the limitation to Buddhist ideologies within the text are also intended to mitigate the dangers inherent in much *Nihonjinron* literature. Such literature generally excludes otherness and explains Japanese as 'unique'; that is, it treats 'the Japanese' as a homogenous group with no variations and also as distinct from non-Japanese.²² As Barthes has pointed out,

*It is necessary that ... a slender thread of light search out not other symbols but the very fissure of the symbolic. This fissure cannot appear on the level of cultural products.*²³

This investigation therefore concentrates on many of Kenji's Buddhist ideals that are broadly considered to be enigmatic. In other words, the biography and cultural analysis is meant to uncover some of the ideologies inherent in Kenji's pre-texts and their pictorial representations.

BIOGRAPHY

Kenji, the eldest of five children, was born on 27th August 1896 into a prosperous family of pawnbrokers who were pious Buddhists of the Pure Land Sect (*Jōdo Shinshū*).²⁴ He grew up in the rural village of Hanamaki in the north-eastern prefecture of Iwate, an impoverished rice-growing region known for its "unaccommodating climate, topography, and soil."²⁵ As a child he displayed the interest in both minerals and wildlife that later manifested throughout his life and literature. He spent most of his life in this bleak region and while still in middle school

came under the influence of the local poet, Ishikawa Takuboku (1886–1912) who encouraged him to jot down his thoughts and impressions of nature.²⁶ Kenji continued his tertiary study at the Morioka State College of Agriculture and Forestry in the same region, graduating in 1918. Throughout this period he had been consistently writing *tanka*.²⁷ His first two children's tales, 'The Spider, the Slug and the Badger' (*Kumo to Namekuji to Tanuki*) and 'The Twin Stars' (*Futago no Hoshi*), are recorded as having been written and read to his family in 1918.²⁸

Immediately after graduating from the Morioka State College in 1918, Kenji was appointed as a special research assistant in geology. He maintained this appointment for the next two years, researching soil science and fertilisers. In particular, he studied the effects of artificial and natural fertiliser on the soil, acquiring knowledge that he later used to help local farmers. In the later part of 1918, his younger sister Toshiko, who was studying in Tokyo, fell ill with a fever and Kenji travelled there with his mother to look after her. He remained in Tokyo until her recovery in early 1919. Kenji was extremely fond of Toshiko and during her illness he wrote home daily to report on her condition.

When Kenji was in high school he had been profoundly affected by reading the *Lotus Sutra* which motivated his conversion from his family's *Jōdo Shin* Sect to the Lotus or *Hokke* sect. It thereafter became the guiding force of his life and writing and he devoted himself to its concern with the 'happiness' and salvation of all beings and the attainment of enlightenment for the world.²⁹ Kenji's proselytising, however, together with his distaste for the family business and its preoccupation with money and social status, brought him into conflict with his father whom he apparently tried persistently to convert.

Kenji's religious conviction, his study of farming and his interest in the ideals of Karl Marx, Albert Einstein and William Morris, for instance, brought him to the personal realisation that working the land was an occupation which offered salvation for human society. Sympathy for the poor farmers from whom his father profited in the

pawn-shop business caused Kenji to repudiate commerce altogether. He gave up his rights of inheritance to his younger brother, Seiroku, and decided to return to Tokyo in the January of 1921. In Tokyo, Kenji offered his services to the *Kokuchūkai* (Pillar of the Nation Society) and apprenticed himself to Tanaka Chigaku (1861–1939) the well-known priest and leader of the society at the time. Kenji led a strenuous life preaching, and often engaged in street proselytisation of the *Nichiren* faith. He spent a lonely and poverty-stricken nine months there but, spurred on by the advice of another priest, Takachio Chiyō, he utilised the time to write a prolific amount of children's stories (said to be three thousand pages a month). Takachio had apparently discouraged him from entering the priesthood by explaining that *Nichiren* believers should try to reach a higher level of faith in their own chosen profession until faith manifested itself without conscious effort. As he applied the advice to pursuing his literary art, this marked a turning point in Kenji's creative life.

When Toshiko again became ill in September of the same year, 1921, Kenji returned home with a suitcase full of manuscripts. He took a position as a teacher in his home town at the Hanamaki Agricultural College. Here he taught the poor students from local farming villages whom he most wanted to serve. He also became interested in Western music during this period and began to collect records, especially those of Bach and Beethoven. In November 1922, his sister died at age 24. The intensity of Kenji's grief was such that he composed three poems on the day of her death under the title of 'Voiceless Lament' (*Musei Dōkoku*). His desire to search for her in the afterlife is considered to have intensified his convictions about a higher plane of interdependent co-existence.³⁰ After a subsequent period of quiet, he continued his literary pursuits while working at the agricultural school, and in the May of 1923 he began composing the poems for the book *Spring and the Demons* (Haru to Shura) which he had published (at his own expense) in April, 1924. In December, 1924 he also self-published a book of nine stories, *Chūmon no Ōi Ryōriten* (The

Restaurant of Many Orders).³¹ Neither of these publications was widely read in his lifetime, the latter apparently mistaken by some as a cookbook. Whereas these tales were about wildlife and nature, his poems tended to incorporate the mundanities and hardships of farming life, tilling soil, gathering manure, rice planting, famine fertilisers and irrigation. They also included graphic descriptions of physical matters such as the symptoms of pleurisy (from which he suffered).

In practice, Kenji expressed his religious beliefs through his concern for Iwate's poor farmers and suffering peasants who were directly interacting with nature in their production of food. In 1926, the end of Japan's so-called democratic period (Taishō, 1912–26), he resigned his teaching post at the Hanamaki Agricultural College to devote himself to farming and put his theoretical knowledge into practice. He founded a farmers' group, which he called *Rasuchijin* Society (*Rasuchijin Kyōkai*), aimed at studying and synthesising agriculture, science and the arts.³² This was when Kenji wrote his now well-known treatise on the concept of agrarian art that was purportedly inspired by the ideas of John Ruskin and William Morris on the role of arts in society.³³ The ideologies of the likes of Tolstoy, Ruskin and Morris were spread through the widely dispersed literary journal of the time, *Shirakaba* (White Birch) that Kenji is said to have read.³⁴ Kenji taught neighbouring farmers about various new models of cultivation and printed and distributed free pamphlets on soil fertilisation. The group was also a cultural club and Kenji's home was the venue for discussions of novels, dramas and poetry, and music recitals. As part of his *bodhisattva* ideal, Kenji wished to enrich the labourers' lives in whatever way possible.³⁵ Such ideas are reflected in one of his later tales, *Serohiki no Gōshu* (Gōshu, the Cellist), the story of a farmer who, in his struggle for proficiency with the cello, comes to realise the interconnection between music, nature and life (discussed in Chapter 5). The *Rasuchijin* Society lasted two years, dissolving during the upsurge in militarism in Japan in the late 1920s. As Kenji was called in by the police for questioning about the

group's activities, its dissolution was possibly due to a risk of political oppression by the government.³⁶ As Golley points out though, Kenji's work was concerned with the social and ecological (rather than national or ethnic) implications of life.³⁷

Kenji's vision of an idealised farmer is encapsulated in the poem 'Undaunted by the Rain' (*Ame ni mo Makezu*), which many regard as the "ultimate expression of Buddhist sincerity."³⁸ This poem is a subjective, romantic depiction of a simple, honest country farmer, expressing a "lack of greed [with an] emphasis on self-effacing, child-like ignorance, and self-sacrificing devotion to the welfare and happiness of others."³⁹ It is included in textbooks and has become famous among people from all walks of life. Despite debates about its literary merits,⁴⁰ it is thought to be largely responsible for Kenji's saint-like status in Japan.⁴¹ (Kenji became known as Kenji *bosatsu* (Bodhisattva Kenji) after his death.)⁴² This poem has attained such a level of popularity that, to this day, it is often attributed iconographic status, revered nationally almost as an object of worship. For example, it is portrayed on souvenir plaques, textiles and scrolls, and people from all walks of life frame it for hanging in special alcoves around the home or in temples for contemplation. As such, the poem's message of *bodhisattva*-like selflessness forms part of the metanarrative that surrounds his work.

Despite falling ill and developing pneumonia in 1928, Kenji, when he felt well enough, kept up his daily habit of transcribing several pages of the *Lotus Sutra*. Due to his concern for all life he had become a vegetarian (in 1918) and his adamant refusal to eat more nourishing food adversely affected his recuperation. During a short recovery in 1931, he took a job as a consultant for a rock-crushing company, but in September of that year, on a visit to Tokyo, he again became ill with pneumonia and was sent back to Hanamaki in a serious condition. His health improved slightly in 1932, but he never fully recovered. Despite this, he continued to write, study and advise farmers until his death in the autumn of 1933. He made a deathbed request to his father that one thousand copies of the *Lotus Sutra*

be printed in Japanese translation and distributed to friends with a note saying: "The purpose of the work of my entire lifetime was to deliver this sacred book into your hands, and to enable you to enter the Highest Path by bringing you into contact with the Buddha's teachings."⁴³ It is this strong sense of purpose that provided the impetus and inspiration for much of Kenji's writing. His beliefs influenced his life intensely and the idea of the integration of humanity with nature and science is a prevalent concern throughout his writing.

RECEPTIVITY TO KENJI'S TALES WITHIN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Even though Kenji was writing during the emergence of a golden period of children's literature and illustration in early twentieth-century Japan, his tales were not well known or well received during his lifetime. This was partially due to the idiosyncratic and regional nature of his work, but as Karen Colligan-Taylor suggests, his work may have been passed over due to Japan's more pragmatic concerns with economic development at the time.⁴⁴ She later points to its appeal within an increasingly industrialised and urbanised Japan that is distinguished by the continuing destruction of nature and an increasing dearth of spirituality.⁴⁵ At any rate, Kenji's work remained on the periphery of the canon until the 1960s, when the ideas and idealism in his children's tales gradually began to attract a greater following.

Japanese children's literature is considered to have developed from the time of the Meiji period (1868–1912) with the publication of Iwaya Sazanami's (1870–1933) '*Koganemaru*',⁴⁶ in 1891.⁴⁷ In the Meiji period, Japan opened up to outside influences after a long period of isolation and, along with Sazanami's stories, there was a flow of imported translations and adaptations led by Wakamatsu Shizuko. Industrial development and modernisation at the end of Meiji saw a turning away from the moralistic format and style of fairy and folk tales of the feudalistic age to more creative

children's literature. Earlier children's literature had never been highly artistic, neither fostering individuality nor creativity.⁴⁸ The late 1880s, just before Kenji was born (in 1896), also saw the completion of a dramatic change in the written Japanese language which made prose conform more closely to vernacular speech. Great advances were pioneered in literature and the arts and the development and crystallisation of new forms of writing expressed the spirit of this age of urbanisation and democracy, culminating with a modern Japanese literature in the early twentieth century.

This modern spirit came to be reflected in Japanese children's literature from about the 1910s in the democratic Taishō period (1912–1926).⁴⁹ At this time, fresh ideas from the United States and Europe were having a profound effect upon Japan and ideas about education found a new freedom and innovation. An intellectual movement advocating liberal education and the development of children's culture helped bring about the revolution in children's literature.⁵⁰ This was a period of discovery about children's psychological development which was disseminated through songs and stories of authors like Ogawa Mimei, Hamada Hirosuke and Chiba Shōzō.⁵¹ Kenji's work, although always outside the mainstream, arose in the midst of this culture.

Kenji's tales were only slowly recognised, especially within the field of children's literature. Suzuki Miekichi, the editor of the period's most respected children's journal, *Akai Tori* (Red Bird), refused to publish them.⁵² Although he purportedly found them 'interesting', he wanted to know what kind of person "accepts both geology and angels" and also had reservations about Kenji's use of local dialect.⁵³ He apparently thought it 'unkind' (*fushinsetsu*) to use dialect in a national journal for children,⁵⁴ where the standard language emanated from Tokyo. Despite Suzuki's lack of support, some of Kenji's tales were published in his lifetime. Modernist poets like Satō Sōnosuke and Kusano Shimpei had lauded his work in the poetry journal *Shishin* (God of Poetry) as early as 1924.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, his tales still failed to find much receptivity and

became submerged by the militaristic trends that arose in children's culture from about 1931. Some of Kenji's work was used as propaganda material during World War II, but it remained obscure throughout the following years.⁵⁶ After the war, Kenji's work came to be more highly regarded, largely due to the influence and efforts of the aforementioned Kusano Shimpei and another major modernist poet, Takamura Kōtarō, who both admired his writing.⁵⁷ Although a few stories began to be published, both with illustrations and without, it wasn't until 1960 that his *dōwa* became more widely recognised through an article written by the widely respected children's author and translator, Ishii Momoko (1907–2008), and published in *Kodomo to Bungaku* (Children and Literature). Here she extolled the virtues of Kenji's simple style and expression and, amongst other matters, brought up the 'problem' of textual differences between various publications.⁵⁸ While this article was very influential in enhancing publication of, and receptivity to, Kenji's tales, it also contributed to the now-established practice of publishing his work without any textual changes. Kenji's stories began to be better recognised in the 1960s and 1970s, during another golden period of children's literature that saw the emergence of the picture book as a popular medium. This was when artists first began to illustrate Kenji's tales in picture book form.

During these years, researchers like Amazawa Taijirō worked diligently to record all of Kenji's works. For instance, he played a major part in compiling the *Kōhon Miyazawa Kenji Zenshū* (The Complete Works of Miyazawa Kenji), henceforth *KMKZ*, which was published by Chikuma Shōbō between 1973 and 1977. It assiduously records the original versions of Kenji's works and all their revisions, showing the differences between various manuscripts and notes.⁵⁹ These fifteen volumes also carry extant letters, notes and related paraphernalia, including reproductions of Kenji's own artwork. Its publication has no doubt also influenced the avoidance of shortened versions of Kenji's tales in any of their subsequent publications.

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