

MORI Ogai's Views on Fine Arts and *Utakata no Ki* —Creation of Picture of Lorelei by imagination—

Misuzu Danbara

In the study of Ogai's story *Utakata no Ki* so far, arguments have split into two opinions; that is whether the "picture of Lorelei" was completed, or not completed, judging from the look of KOSE, who, at the end of the story, lost the violet-selling girl Marie and was kneeling down at the picture. But it seems rather embarrassing that most of the previous studies have supported its incompleteness.

While the picture of Lorelei of the last part was reflected on the discussion in order to search for the internal structure of the work and thus various readings were developed, the work's mythical and legendary depths and its image as a German Romantic art were manifested. However, its side view as an artist story is apt to be made little of, and hardly discussed enough yet, though having been indicated from early on.

In this paper, I will refer to Ogai's art criticizing activities before and after the story's publication, and show that *Utakata no Ki* was written under the influence of the so-called aesthetical dispute between MORI Ogai and TOYAMA Masakazu. And I also try to present another viewpoint that the work should be read as an artist story written on the basis of Ogai's aesthetical views, and at the same time, in relation to the question of the picture's completion or incompleteness, as an aesthetical message for the Meiji art world and the story readers, not to mention TOYAMA.

To begin with, on the scene of the art world in Japan around 1889 and 90, I would investigate Ogai's views on aesthetics which we found in the art dispute between MORI Ogai and TOYAMA Masakazu, and its relation to the story *Utakata no Ki* published immediately after the dispute.

As Ogai said, for instance, in *Jisaku Shosetsu no Zairyo* (*Materials of My Novels*), that the Japanese painter KOSE in *Utakata no Ki* was modeled after HARADA Naojiro, who studied at Munich Academy of Art for three years since 1884. He also mentioned that the fine art criticism in his essay collection *Tsuki-kusa* was under the influence of HARADA Naojiro. In

Ogai's *Doitsu Nikki (German Diary)* we also read their companionship during their stay in Munich. This encounter with HARADA probably opened him the way to a fine art critic. He was given a great chance to deepen his knowledge on Western art and to learn the character and tendency thereof.

After returning home, Ogai got well known in the medicine and the literature fields, but he was also active in the art world critique toward its modernization.

The Westernization in the fine arts at the dawn of the Meiji Era got to assume some nationalistic tendency with Fenollosa's speech as a turning-point. Tokyo Art School was established in February 1889 under OKAKURA Tenshin as Director, but Western art department was not there. The anti-Western painting movement being vigorous, the artists of Western painting united themselves, and in May 1889, they organized *Meiji Bijutsu Kai* (Meiji Art Society), that is, Japan's first body of Western painting artists. HARADA Naojiro was one of the promoters, and it was Ogai who eagerly supported him. Next year, in 1890, Director of the Department of Humanities of Tokyo (Imperial) University, TOYAMA Masakazu, who was also a supporting member of *Meiji Bijutsu Kai*, made the famous lecture by the title of *Nihon Kaiga no Mirai (Future of the Japanese Painting)* at the second mass meeting of *Meiji Bijutsu Kai*. As a matter of fact, this lecture was to cause a sensation and arguments both for and against his idea, among which the severest counter-argument was Ogai's *Toyama Masakazu shi no Garon wo Baku-su (Criticisms of Mr. TOYAMA Masakazu's Views on Painting)*.

To begin with, let us survey the process of the dispute between TOYAMA and Ogai.

TOYAMA Masakazu's views on painting shown in the lecture consist of eight arguing points. According to TOYAMA, it was a problem that his contemporary painters were at a loss for their themes of painting and that they had tendency to "try to paint an imaginary thing not in the least based on a real thing", as was the case with the picture *Kiryu Kannon Zu* by HARADA Naojiro. TOYAMA insisted that only the picture painted with "emotion" that a painter got when he touched the "real", could render the very same "emotion" to others. He also emphasized that themes of painting had undergone historical changes in accordance with the degree of enlightenment of the society, and now, religious themes which had been popular in ancient times could not be "what modern people pay most attention to". Based on such realism with respect for the real thing or on a so-called social evolution theory that themes of painting should be historically changed, TOYAMA disparaged his con-

temporary imaginary or religious pictures. In short, his opinion was that painting from now on should choose “themes of human business” and depict “thought pictures” that “contain and express complicated thoughts”.

As shown above, TOYAMA made a victim of and criticized HARADA Naojiro’s *Kiryu Kannon* more than once. It’s an oil painting, which HARADA sent to the 3rd National Industrial Exhibition in April to July, 1890. Despite of its formal title *Shasui Kannon*, it is called so because this Kannon is standing on the back of a dragon. Arguments arose; never before had Kannon been oil-painted, never before modeled after a woman, and the figure of Kannon by Harada looked too sexy. TOYAMA poignantly said that he wondered if the picture might show Chiarini’s girl walking a tightrope by torch light. He meant Chiarini’s Italian circus company, performing in Japan.



Naojiro Harada, *Kiryu Kannon*, 1890, 272 × 183cm

Thus he emphasized absurdity of a painter with no piety to paint a Buddhist picture in the faithless age. Possibly, Ogai could not help retorting upon TOYAMA’s denouncement against HARADA’s picture, because they had been on intimate terms since their study in Germany. Realism in choosing themes of painting, which TOYAMA emphasized most, was the very point where Ogai found a clue to retorting.

Ogai devoted the major part of his self-editing magazine *Shigarami-zoshi* published on 25th May, 1890, to his essay *TOYAMA Masakazu shi no Garon wo Baku-su*. OGAI divided TOYAMA’s eight viewpoints of painting into twelve parts, quoted TOYAMA’s words from each, and criticized them respectively. Here Ogai, armed with his fresh knowledge of aesthetics by Eduard von HARTMANN, tried to challenge TOYAMA.

For supporting HARADA’s picture, Ogai developed in his essay affirmative arguments for the significance of “imaginary painting” and religious pictures. It is true that some questions are left concerning disputing strategy, but what Ogai said depending on HARTMANN’s aesthetics shows his views on fine arts, and it can be a circumstantial evidence for

understanding of *Utakata no Ki*. He argues, by the help of HARTMANN's idea of Micro Cosmos, that religious pictures are purely aesthetical existence and stand aloof from change of times. He also said "the idea of Micro Cosmos lets the gods live for ever in *hitokata*, or human figure. That is, in the Micro Cosmos, the idé of gods can exist eternally by being expressed in human figures. KOSE in *Utakata no Ki* aspired to "hand down the figure of the flower-selling girl to the eternal future" by expressing the legendary siren of the Rhine as Lorelei, which is, in a sense, a goddess-like transcendent existence, in the girl's *hitokata*. In this art method and desire for aesthetical eternity, we find a clear correspondence with the Micro Cosmos Idea.

Ogai also wrote that "it was both *Kannon* that Mr. KOSE made and that Mr. HARADA made." Here, the family name KOSE and HARADA Naojiro, the model of *Utakata no Ki*, were connected in a common feature as painters of *Kannon*. The words above by Ogai indicate that he took into account TOYAMA's mention in *Nihon Kaiga no Mirai* about "KOSE no Kanaoka and his many descendent Japanese painters", that is, Japan's traditional Buddhist painters' family KOSE. This background is thought to be the origin of the name of KOSE as the leading character of *Utakata no Ki*. The Buddhist painting by KOSE school was no more than an imitation and repetition of oldish style as TOYAMA criticized, but HARADA's *Kiryu Kannon* had individual beauty, freed from following and imitation of old times. Ogai appreciated such novelty of HARADA. Ogai must have had some intention, when he dared to name the leading character of his story KOSE, the name of Japan's traditional Buddhist artist, and make KOSE paint such an imaginary picture as Lorelei. In those days of Meiji Era, the descendant in the direct line of KOSE family was Kanaoki with pseudonym Shoseki of the 37th generation. He was a professor at Tokyo Art School, and painted many Buddhist pictures, stubbornly following the style preserved for more than a thousand years. As to his connection with HARADA, it was HARADA who was to be a professor at Tokyo Art School at first, but the department of western fine arts got abolished, and in the result, KOSE no Shoseki was sent for from Kyoto fine arts world. Is it too penetrating a remark if I say the reason Ogai chose the name KOSE in his story is not a little connected with the fate of these two artists?

It is also remarkable that Ogai later allotted the kanji characters of *Kū-zō-ki* that means "empty figure story" in order to express the title *Utakata no Ki*. The *Kū-zō-ki* was probably derived from a sentence in TOYAMA's *Nihon Kaiga no Mirai*. TOYAMA said, "it is a long-rooted evil of recent years to try to paint ardently a picture of *Kū-zō* (imagination), not knowing that none of the imaginary pictures by great masters of any age has been

painted without any basis of real thing.” TOYAMA thus used the word *Kū-zō* in a derogatory sense such as a product of imagination mixed up in the mind. But Ogai converted TOYAMA’s statement, put aside the derogatory sense of the word, turned it to a more positive sense, and made KOSE take his way toward the creation of *Kū-zō* or *Kū-sō* picture (that is, imaginary picture). Thus, as is seen in the refutation to TOYAMA, we will be able to grasp that the picture of Lorelei by KOSE practiced Ogai’s view of fine arts that “an artist should be able to construct freely even what he hasn’t touched yet with actual feeling, from among what he has actually touched before”. For Ogai, the fine arts would be to transcend an experimental realism and extract fictional figure. So, it may safely be said that the word *Kū-zō* in *Utakata no Ki* or *Kū-zō-ki* is the condensation of Ogai’s views on aesthetics, in which the source of fine arts’ value lies not in the reproduction of the real, but in the expression of imagination inside the artist.

Possibly under a clear self-consciousness, Ogai began to try to construct an aesthetical method as the common critical standard for both literature and the fine arts.

It is important that for the first time people became aware of the science of aesthetics through this dispute. From then on, Ogai challenged TOYAMA to a debate repeatedly, but there was no answer from TOYAMA. Paid attention to by the fine arts world and the surroundings, the story *Utakata no Ki* was published two month after the refutation in the very same magazine *Shigarami-zoshi*.

Thus, as has already been pointed out in connection with the refuting essay, *Utakata no Ki* was written based on Ogai’s views on art influenced by the art dispute above.

Next, let us investigate inside the story and find what Ogai intended to write. *Utakata no Ki* was published on August 25, 1890, in *Shigarami-zoshi* No.11. It is an artist story on how a Japanese painter KOSE finishes the picture of Lorelei modeled on Marie. The scene of the story is Munich, a city of art in Germany.

It has a simple structure of three chapters: *jo*, *chu*, and *ge*, that means upper, middle, bottom. In the chapter *jo*, it is told through KOSE’s recollection in Café Minerva how the picture of Lorelei was given birth to in KOSE’s mind.

Six years before, when he stopped over at Munich on his way to Dresden, he happened to save a poor violet-selling girl of twelve or so. He was deeply impressed by the girl’s

“beauty of the face”, especially by the blue eyes full of deep grief. Thereafter KOSE started his first stage of study, through “copying” the masterpieces typical of woman’s beauty like Venus, Leda, Madonna, and Helena, but in whichever picture he stand before, the image of the violet-selling girl recurred in front of him prevented him from working. After writhing in agony, he made up his mind to keep the violet-selling girl’s image eternally on canvas.

He didn’t want to express her directly in a portrait, and he was neither content with the Greco-Roman classical themes like “delightful colors commanding the view of spring tide”, “dreaming heart sending off the sunset clouds”, or “standing in an ancient site in Italy with white pigeons flying”, and finally he decided to draw her figure in a romantic image based on the German Lorelei legend in order to express her eyes with “abyss of grief” that “almost broke him to the heart”. KOSE’s imagination changed the standard of beauty into a spiritual stage that would manifest the internal agony by, for instance, “setting the girl on a rock at the bank of the Rhine, with a harp in her hands, and making her weep.” We may safely say that KOSE’s painting have reached the stage of “creation” beyond “copying”. In the motif of the Lorelei, we find, a fisherman, that is a reflection of KOSE himself, looking up to the girl with full of eternal love in his face, and fairies like nixies and nymphs bantering. With such various elements, the idea of Micro cosmos may be elaborated here. When KOSE visited Munich again with a view to finishing his picture, he met Marie again at Café Minerva. Marie was no longer a pretty and pitiful violet-selling girl that she had been, but a strong-minded girl like Bavaria (goddess of victory, and of art). Her appearance must have made KOSE’s imagination all the richer to make her the model of his Lorelei picture.

In this story, we find severe comments on the fine arts uttered by Marie. The discourse bore some satire on pictures in those days, and her criticism against the epigones who could not get over imitation of Michelangelo or Rubens can also be interpreted as a satire on Japan’s fine arts world. Among all the painting students gathering at Café Minerva, named after the art goddess, only KOSE was given a kiss of praise by Marie. It probably meant that KOSE was the very painter chosen by the art goddess Bavaria.

In the chapter *chu* of the work, in KOSE’s atelier, he was told Marie’s life of suffering for six years. When he touched the inside of Marie, who was obliged to live in mimetic madness among those ill-behaved artists, his idea of picture of the Lorelei must have got more and more profound and certain. Here Marie said that “any person prominent in the world

of art, studies, or other fields, is sure to have more or less madness.” This is the theory of “impartibility of the talented and the madness”. The theory of talent which makes much of inspiration given by God or sublime spiritual stage in creation of the fine arts is what German scholars of Romantic literature and aesthetics advocated most. The grace Marie, as the Goddess of art, would give to the selected artist, KOSE, would be awarding of such “madness”. We need pay attention to the fact that the theory of “impartibility of the talented and the mad” in this chapter is an important foreshadow for judging whether the picture of Lorelei was completed or not completed in the last part of the story.

In the chapter *ge*, upsurge of love was expressed in the scene KOSE and Marie heading for Lake Starnberg, and it reached the climax, but the sudden encounter with Ludwig II had Marie lose her short life in the lake, and it was a deep grief for KOSE.

The end of the story is described like following:

“An idea hit Extel, and he visited KOSE’s atelier and entered, only to find his appearance was far from what it had been three days before and looked strikingly thin, and he was kneeling down at the picture of Lorelei.”

Was the picture of Lorelei modeled on Marie completed or not completed? Nothing is written explicitly. Among traditional ideas, it has been dominant to think that KOSE could not complete the picture because he lost Marie on the way. But, judging from what we have seen, it is possible to think that the loss of Marie would get his imagination about her to grow more and more, so the picture would bear fruit, not swayed by the substance of Marie. If I dare to cling to Ogai’s views on aesthetics, an artist can complete his painting by imagination (that is, *kū-sō*), even if he has never touched the subject in reality. KOSE lost Marie but I think he was awarded talented insanity while he was working in his atelier, got “inspiration (*shin-rai*)”, reached the sublime spiritual madness, and did complete his picture of Lorelei by the help of imagination.

In *Utakata no Ki*, the painter KOSE modeled after HARADA Naojiro goes through the process of creating art, and it urges people to think over the imaginary picture of Lorelei. Ogai gave an aesthetical message not only to TOYAMA Masakazu but also to anyone who had interest in fine arts, around the question of the pictures completion and incompleteness. In other words, if following Ogai, the picture of Lorelei as an imaginary picture is completed, and if following TOYAMA’s experimental “realism”, the picture is not completed.

We can, therefore, consider *Utakata no Ki* to be written with the aim of establishing aesthetics in Japan in the 20's of Meiji era, when the fine arts got promoted into systematization.

Lastly, let me add a few words. Though YOSANO Hiroshi and MORI Junzaburo have suggested that *Utakata no Ki* should be written before his maiden work *Maihime*, it will not be affirmed, because judging from the study above, *Utakata no Ki* was written spurred by the dispute over the fine arts between TOYAMA and Ogai.

(This paper is based on what I read for the 10th International Conference of the European Association for Japanese Studies (EAJS) at Warsaw on August 28th, 2003.)