

# Text and Image in Pre-war Japan: Viewing Takehisa Yumeji through Sata Ineko's 'From the Caramel Factory'

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Illustrated text has a strong presence in Japanese cultural production with a tradition of narrative accompanied by images evident across a wide range of genres at different times in Japan. These genres include the illustrated poetry of the *hyakunin isshū*, medieval picture cards each with a verse,<sup>1</sup> Chinese influenced *sansui-ga* – literally ‘mountain-water pictures’ or landscape painting<sup>2</sup> – depicting remote sites with accompanying meditative poetic commentary, and *kanazōshi*,<sup>3</sup> illustrated Edo era (1603-1868) didactic narratives – ranging from the heroic to the supernatural – which became the first widely distributed literary material in Japan. In this discussion, however, I move away from these integrated examples to, instead, ‘yoke together’ two ‘heterogenous’ examples of twentieth-century Japanese illustration and print,<sup>4</sup> both of which represent the pre-war Japanese working-class girl or young woman. The first is the girl as she appears in selected images of commercial artist/illustrator, poet and designer, Takehisa Yumeji (1884-1934), while the second is the fictional account of an adolescent factory-girl featured in a short story entitled ‘Kyarameru kôjo kara’ (From the Caramel Factory, 1928),<sup>5</sup> the

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion of these cards see Joshua Mostow, *The Hyakunin Isshu in Word and Image* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Citing Usemi Keiji, Karatani Kojin notes that the term *sansui-ga* only came into currency upon being “established as a descriptive category” by Ernest Fenollosa following the introduction of western concepts of landscape painting into Japan. See Karatani Kojin, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, ed. Brett de Bary (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed account of these narratives, see Richard Lane, ‘The Beginnings of the Modern Japanese Novel: Kana-zoshi, 1600-1682,’ *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 20, no. 3-4 (December 1957), pp. 644-701.

<sup>4</sup> This is a paraphrase of the famous critique of the poet, John Donne (1572-1631), delivered by Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) and later revisited by T.S. Eliot (1888-1965).

<sup>5</sup> The Japanese language text of the work cited here is Sata Ineko, ‘Kyarameru kôjo kara,’ in *Meiji, Taishô bungaku zenshû* 51 (The Complete Collection of Meiji, Taisho Literature 51) (Tokyo: Chunyôdô, 1931), pp. 219-228.

debut narrative of proletarian woman writer, Sata Ineko (1904-1998).<sup>6</sup> I bring together these two disparate cultural products confident that to consider the two in conjunction with each other enhances our understanding of both. My analysis will demonstrate how visual and written texts have the capacity to scaffold and corroborate the impact of each other – a process that I will discuss in terms of intertextuality – while broadening the possibilities experienced by readers and viewers alike.

The artist Takehisa Yumeji is best remembered for his illustrations of *bijin*, beautiful women and girls. This is largely the result of the selective presentation of his material in a number of popular collections and publications that focus on the artist's images of this genre. With key models taken from his chaotic love life, exhibitions of the artist's work tend to emphasise Takehisa's eroticised, elongated feminine images with their flawless although often dolorous visages. These works, which continue to make an impact on viewers today, have been instrumental in Orientalist constructions – or even self-Orientalist constructions created by Japanese critics themselves<sup>7</sup> – of Takehisa's cultural production as a populist expression of sublime Japanese aestheticism. This response prevails in spite of the fact that the artist's material features a range of global influences, influences that are apparent in the earliest published Takehisa works. Hosano Masanobu, in fact, notes that the artist's very first *koma-e* – illustrated magazine insert often accompanied by verse or prose text – published in 1905, was characterised by disproportionately large eyes,<sup>8</sup> evidence of his receptivity to inspiration from outside Japan. Even when

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<sup>6</sup> Unless a writer or artist produces material in English or works in an English-language context, Japanese name order – family name first – has been retained. Thus Takehisa and Sata are family names while Yumeji and Ineko are the given names.

<sup>7</sup> An example of this approach is found in Kojima Mitsunobu's introduction to a publication celebrating the 125<sup>th</sup> year of Takehisa's birth. Here, Kojima acknowledges Takehisa's "humanist" character, his "anti-authoritarianism" and his desire to "help others regardless." Nevertheless, the illustrations to the essay are the rather nationalistic early Taisho image of a small, tearful boy in samurai attire being urged – as a "Japanese boy" – not to cry no matter how sad he may be, and two highly aestheticised images of women. The first is a 1918 portrait of a woman, while the second is the 1931 representation of the goddess of spring as a young woman in modernist red *furisode* (long, flowing-sleeved) kimono standing in front of Gumma Prefecture's Mount Haruna. There are no images of the humanism, anti-authoritarianism or desire to help others referred to in the text. See Kojima Mitsunobu, 'Yumeji tanjô hyaku nijûgo nen ni omou' (Thoughts on Yumeji's One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Year), in *Tanjô hyaku nijûgo nen kinen: Takehisa Yumeji ten: futatsu no furusato, futatsu no korekushon* (Celebrating One Hundred and Twenty-five Years Since his Birth: The Takehisa Yumeji Exhibition: Two Hometowns, Two Collections), ed. Inoue Yoshiko (Tokyo: NHK Saabisu Sentaa, 2009), pp. 8-9.

<sup>8</sup> Hosono Masanobu, *Takehisa Yumeji* (Osaka and Tokyo: Hoikusha, 1972), p. 115.

Takehisa's women wear what is fundamentally traditional attire, a modernist western influence – expressed through devices such as accessories and hairstyles – is often apparent in his work. This is especially the case in illustrations that circulated during the 1920s in Japanese women's magazines that extolled the benefits of commodity consumption.<sup>9</sup> Takehisa also produced a considerable body of work specifically for children,<sup>10</sup> material that is a fitting complement to the European tradition of children's illustrations created by such iconic artists as Kate Greenaway (1846-1901), Amy Millicent Sowerby (1878-1967) or Charles Robinson (1870-1937).

Koyama Shizuko points out that pre-war Japan's sole normative role for women was that of *ryōsai kenbo*, good wife and wise mother.<sup>11</sup> Takehisa was one of the country's most popular commercial artists whose work appeared in the high-circulation, mainstream magazines that gave tacit support to the policies of the authorities. It is not surprising then that, in spite of the discreetly sexualised nature of some of his works, his feminine images produced for the mainstream media often comply with the hegemonic discourse of the Japanese girl or young woman as either beautiful 'good wife and wise mother' in-waiting or modest young wife and mother. The artist's aesthetic scope, however, went well beyond this genre and, although less widely acknowledged in the popular reception of his material, includes a range of images of working class people – both rural and urban, women and men. These images, moreover, clearly depict the wretched conditions, particularly the exhaustion and despair that characterised the lives of the labouring classes of imperial Japan. The relatively limited attention given to this material is apparent in the fact that, upon first viewing the artist's working class images, art critic Ozaki Hotsuki recalls how he realised that, in addition to the artist that created beautiful women and girls, there was "another Yumeji" (*betsu no Yumeji*).<sup>12</sup>

Occasionally, Takehisa's images of working men and women come perilously close to aestheticising poverty and suffering, and, therefore, to

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<sup>9</sup> For discussion of these magazines, see Barbara Hammill Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003). Takehisa was closely associated with *Fujin gurafu* (Ladies' Graphic), which ran from 1924-1929.

<sup>10</sup> The artists' illustrations for children can be found in collections such as the 1923 *Yumeji-ga tehon* (Handbook of Yumeji Illustrations). See, for example, *Tanjō hyaku nijūgo nen kinen: Takehisa Yumeji ten*, p. 117.

<sup>11</sup> Koyama Shizuko, *Ryōsai kenbo to iu kihan* (The Normative Standard of Good Wife Wise Mother) (Tokyo: Keisō shobō, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Ozaki Hotsuki, 'Yumeji no ikita jidai' (The Age in which Yumeji Lived), in *Takehisa Yumeji: bessatsu Taiyō 20* (Takehisa Yumeji: Taiyō Special Edition 20), (Autumn 1977), p.164.

aestheticising the social injustice that leads to these conditions. Some scholars might even assess his material as supporting the fascist policies of the pre-war state. Images with a rural setting can be particularly susceptible to this reading and might therefore be coupled – mistakenly, I would argue – with other bucolic cultural products from the pre-war era that comply with fascist aesthetics. These are images which, to borrow Alan Tansman’s words, operate as a “connection to nature” and thereby a “connection to the spiritual”<sup>13</sup> – or at least to the perversely politicised notions disguised as the spiritual that prevailed in imperial Japan. I have written previously, however, on the obligation of the pre-war commercial artist to elide any suggestion of the widespread poverty and ill health that was characteristic of that society.<sup>14</sup> Takehisa’s images subvert this obligation by at least attempting a representation of women from a social sector whose lived experiences the authorities worked constantly, through an extensive censorship regime, to erase from the public view. These images, however, rarely invoke “the beautiful new society in which individuality could be both exalted and sublated by the exquisite discipline of natural unity and sacrifice” that Kim Brandt cites as a “central goal of fascist thinkers and policy makers.”<sup>15</sup> Rather, Takehisa’s work is much more likely to force viewers to confront the desperate material circumstances, noted by Mikiso Hane,<sup>16</sup> of the vast majority of Japanese of the time. The ability to create images of this nature was remarkable given the heavy retribution – both in terms of financial penalty and imprisonment – exacted by the authorities from artists who were judged as failing to comply with the cultural demands of the Japanese state.<sup>17</sup> In order to understand Takehisa’s production of this material we might consider some aspects of the artist’s early life, particularly the struggle he faced to establish his artistic credentials in the first few years after leaving the provinces to go up to the capital.

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<sup>13</sup> Alan Tansman, *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2009), p. 74

<sup>14</sup> Barbara Hartley, ‘Performing the Nation: Magazine Images of Women and Girls in the Illustrations of Takabatake Kasho, 1925–1937,’ *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, no. 16 (March 2008), at: <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue16/hartley.htm>. Accessed 21/02/2012.

<sup>15</sup> Kim Brandt, ‘The Beauty of Labour: Imagining Factory Girls in Japan’s New Order,’ in *The Culture of Japanese Fascism*, ed. Alan Tansman (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 116.

<sup>16</sup> Hane Mikiso, *Peasants, Rebels and Outcasts: The Underside of Modern Japan* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), pp. 203-204.

<sup>17</sup> For details of the censorship system of pre-war Japan, see Richard Mitchell, *Censorship in Imperial Japan* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983).

The artist, Takehisa Yumeji, was born on 16 September 1884 in Honjō Village, Oku District, Okayama Prefecture, a little to the east of present-day Okayama City. After attending elementary schools in the local area, Takehisa entered Kobe Middle School in 1899 but withdrew later that year, the same year that his family relocated to Kyushu. Unwilling to remain in the isolated precincts of the most south-westerly of Japan's four main islands, Takehisa defied his father's wishes and made his way to Tokyo. Here, the artist came into contact with Japan's burgeoning socialist movement. As a result, some of his earliest published material appeared in June 1905 in *Chokugen* (Direct Expression), a journal produced by Heiminsha, the beleaguered publishing collective run by two of the country's leading activists and radical thinkers, Kōtoku Shūsui (1871-1911) and Sakai Toshihiko (1871-1933).<sup>18</sup> Takehisa's affinity with the conditions of working people was surely partially the result of his own precarious circumstances while becoming the artist as a young man in the capital. He also had a strong interest in the teachings of prominent Christian-socialist and pacifist, Abe Isoo (1865-1946), based for some time in Okayama.<sup>19</sup>

In Tokyo, estranged from his father and without any remittance of family funds, the young Takehisa took any work to survive, including *nikutai rôdô* – physical labour – such as rickshaw puller.<sup>20</sup> Although he eventually capitulated to his father's wishes and enrolled in *Waseda jitsugyō gakkō* (Waseda Practical School), monies sent from home barely covered tuition expenses. During these early years in Tokyo, Takehisa developed close relations with a number of key radical activists. Arahata Kanson (1887-1981) – imprisoned after the 1908 Red Flag Incident and the one-time partner of famed woman anarchist, Kanno Suga (1881-1911) – boarded with Takehisa for a time after Arahata's return from the provinces and was instrumental in bringing Takehisa's work to the attention of *Chokugen* editors, Kōtoku and Sakai. In May and June of 1910, the authorities conducted a nation-wide round-up of

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<sup>18</sup> Insights into the theoretical position adopted by these men, who established Heiminsha in opposition to increasingly strident calls for war with Russia, are clear from the fact that Kōtoku was the Japanese translator of Kropotkin's *The Conquest of Bread*, while Sakai translated Emile Zola, William Morris and Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*.

<sup>19</sup> Ogura Tadao discusses Abe's influence on Takehisa. He notes that, while never a Christian, Takehisa had a life-long interest in Christianity. Ogura Tadao, 'Yumeji no shōgai: gaka toshite no hattatsu' (The Life of Yumeji: His Emergence as an Artist), in *Takehisa Yumeji: bessatsu Taiyō* 20, p. 24.

<sup>20</sup> For details of these travails and of the artist's involvement with the socialist movement during his early years in Tokyo, see Nagata Mikio, 'Shafu, shosei, heiminsha no koro' (The Rickshaw-puller, the Student and the Heiminsha Era), in *Takehisa Yumeji: bessatsu Taiyō no. 20*, pp. 28-32.

socialists and anarchists in the brutal crackdown on dissent that became the first stage of the notorious High Treason Incident, which saw a total of twelve accused sentenced to death and another twelve imprisoned for life on trumped-up charges of plotting to assassinate the Meiji emperor. In the five years that elapsed between 1905 (when his work first appeared in print in a socialist journal) and the High Treason Incident of 1910, Takehisa had established himself as a respected illustrator for mainstream and generally conservative publishing houses, including industry heavyweight, Hakubunkan.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, he himself was interned and questioned for two days.<sup>22</sup> When a number of his former Heiminsha colleagues were among the eleven men and one woman (Kanno Suga) convicted of high treason and executed on 24 and 25 January 1911, Takehisa held a wake at his Higashigoken-chô home. This was an act of great bravery at a time when the authorities were looking for any fabricated excuse to eradicate even mild resistance.

Throughout his life Takehisa remained receptive to the struggles of the underclasses and this receptiveness continued to confrontingly erupt in his illustrations for the entire length of his career. Commenting on this tendency, Ogura observes that, although “he broke any connection with political movements, Takehisa retained all his life a sense of resistance to authority, a commitment to pacifism and social ideals, sympathy towards the weak position of the ordinary people [we might use the term ‘masses’] and an awareness that he, too, was himself one of those ordinary people.”<sup>23</sup> These observations are confirmed by Hosono who writes of Takehisa’s affiliation with “the weak and oppressed” in society.<sup>24</sup> It is this capacity which ensures that Takehisa’s images suitably complement the work of proletarian writer, Sata Ineko.

Sata Ineko’s ‘In the Caramel Factory’ confirms the intimation apparent in a number of Takehisa’s working-class girl images that, notwithstanding the myth of the benevolent emperor bestowing good fortune upon his subjects, life for many young women was less than ideal in imperial Japan. Born in Nagasaki in 1904 as Tajima Ine – she would later reject both Tajima, the name of her father, and Kubokawa, the name of her husband, in favour of the family name of an uncle who encouraged her literary interests – Sata moved as a child with her family to Tokyo. Here, as an eleven-year-old, she was taken out of school and sent to work in the caramel factory that became the setting for her first narrative. Working later as a café waitress and then in the relatively

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<sup>21</sup> The most notable publication of this company was the journal, *Taiyô* (The Sun), which ran for over thirty years from 1895 to 1927.

<sup>22</sup> Ozaki, ‘Yumeji no ikita jidai,’ p. 165.

<sup>23</sup> Ogura, ‘Yumeji no shôgai,’ p. 26.

<sup>24</sup> Hosono, *Takehisa Yumeji*, p. 113.

elevated position of shop assistant at Maruzen, Japan's famed importer of foreign books and accessories, Sata experienced first-hand the poverty evoked in elements of Takehisa's work. She was particularly demoralised by being subject to the exhaustion that is featured in a number of Takehisa's representations of both women and men, and even considered suicide to escape the drudgery of poorly paid work.<sup>25</sup> In addition to expressing her ideas in writing, she became so radicalised that, in 1932, she joined the outlawed Japanese Communist Party.

Notwithstanding differences in their preferred methods of cultural production, it is interesting to compare the respective backgrounds of the two artists. Sata, although later reviled – she would also revile herself<sup>26</sup> – for participating in troop visits organised by the war-time authorities, was a key presence in the late 1920s and early 1930s proletarian writing movement. Although suppressed totally with the February 1933 murder in police custody of novelist, Kobayashi Takiji (1903-1993), this movement was nevertheless highly influential in the limited time during which it flourished. We have seen that, while sympathetic to the working classes, Takehisa, in contrast, had no political affiliation. The association linking the work of the two, nevertheless, is their compassion for the ordeal of the worker – particularly girls and women – in pre-war Japan. Sata was closely associated with the leftist coterie, led by proletarian luminary, Nakano Shigeharu (1902-1979), that published and contributed to the pre-war journal, *Rôba* (Donkey), eventually marrying one of the group; Kubokawa Tsurujirô (1903-1974). Victoria Vernon Nakagawa, in fact, argues that when many leftist writers recanted under pressure from the authorities, Sata, with Nakano and Kubokawa, was one of the few who “managed to produce a literature which used various methods of keeping alive the spirit of the earlier movement.”<sup>27</sup> However, in spite of being classified as a dyed-in-the-wool leftist, Sata saw herself as essentially a petit-bourgeois whose family had fallen on hard times.<sup>28</sup> In other words, her background was perhaps

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<sup>25</sup> For information on Sata's thoughts of suicide, see Ronald P. Loftus, *Telling Lives: Women's Self-Writing in Modern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), p. 196.

<sup>26</sup> The writer's anguish at this is the topic of her post-war text, *Kyôgi* (Falsehood, 1948). For a discussion of Sata's self-deprecatory response to criticism directed against her see Nakashima Kenzô, 'Hito to bungaku' (The person and her writing), in *Miyamoto Yuriko, Sata Ineko shû: Nihon bungaku zenshû 38* (Collected Works of Miyamoto Yuriko and Sata Ineko: Complete Collection of Japanese Literature 38), (Tokyo: Chikuma shobô, 1970), pp. 486-488.

<sup>27</sup> Victoria Vernon Nakagawa, 'Three Japanese Women Writers: Higuchi Ichiyô, Sata Ineko and Kurahashi Yumiko' (Ph.D. diss., University of California Berkeley, 1981), p. 119.

<sup>28</sup> For Sata's thoughts on this aspect of her background, see Loftus, *Telling Lives*, p. 199.

not so different to that of Takehisa. Her mother, pregnant with Sata at fifteen, was forced to leave middle school to give birth. While Japan introduced four years of compulsory elementary education from 1872, raising this to six years in 1907, middle school attendance remained the province of girls from families with means.

In spite of protests that may come from proletarian purists or scholars of fascism concerning the aestheticisation of Takehisa's images referred to above, we can productively draw on the artists's material to expand our reading of proletarian writing, including the Sata narrative being discussed here. Critic Nakamura Mitsuo (1911-1988), a former member of the proletarian movement, distanced himself from this literary genre on the grounds that "Marxism as an ideology had no meaning for him."<sup>29</sup> While the theoretical mechanics of the dialectic may indeed have been removed from either the intelligentsia or the worker experience in Japan, viewing Takehisa's material confirms that the work of Sato and her proletarian confreres provided valuable accounts of the lived struggles of significant sectors of pre-war Japanese society. Furthermore, the fact that Takehisa's images come from the eye of an artist who is not specifically aligned with any particular cause and who, in fact, moved to distance himself from radical politics, adds to their legitimacy as dispassionate visual narratives of social experience.<sup>30</sup> Sata's texts are based on her real-life experiences as a child labourer in a caramel factory while, as the observations by Hosono and Ogura demonstrate, significant elements of Takehisa's material drew on the ordeals he faced while establishing himself as an artist after moving to Tokyo. Thus while there are clearly differences in the experiences of the pair, there are also useful similarities.

We might here consider the work of Julia Kristeva and Gérard Genette, both trailblazing theorists in the field of intertextuality, which, I would argue, suggests that overt associations do not need to be evident for cultural products to be intertextually compatible. Kristeva notes, for example, that the subject may appear in cultural production as "fragments of character, or fragments of ideology, or fragments of representation."<sup>31</sup> This fragmentation points to the

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<sup>29</sup> See Iwamoto Shin'ichirô, 'Nakamura Mitsuo's Modern Thought (*kindaishugi*): Literary Criticism as Social Revolution', at <http://www.kyoto-seika.ac.jp/event/kiyo/pdf-data/sa21/iwamoto.pdf>. Accessed 22/02/12.

<sup>30</sup> We might consider this in conjunction with the cultural production of Mori Ôgai (1862-1922) whose criticisms of the Meiji authorities carried increased weight precisely because, as Army Surgeon-General, he was part of the machinery of that authority.

<sup>31</sup> Julia Kristeva with Margaret Waller, 'An Interview with Julia Kristeva,' in *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction*, eds Patrick O'Donnell and Robert Con Davis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 281. Also available at: <https://www.msu.edu/user/chrenkal/980/INTEXINT.HTM>. Accessed 20/2/2012.



fact that it is not necessary to have a precise logico-positivistic correspondence of subject material in order for dialogue to occur between differing works of cultural production. On the contrary, such an association of the heterogeneous recognises the value of what Kristeva – borrowing from Freud – terms ‘free association.’ While Kristeva specifically applies this to print narrative, the notion has equal applicability to other kinds of texts, including visual images. This possibility is confirmed in Margarete Landwehr’s consideration of the work of Genette and her conclusion – based on the writing of Genette himself – that it is possible to use Genette’s intertextual literary taxonomy “to analyse interarts relations.”<sup>32</sup> Landwehr further notes how Kristeva’s “anonymous, infinite” notion of intertextuality “encompasses the cultural, historical, or political discourses, codes, or texts that an artist may deliberately employ or” – importantly for the current discussion – “that implicitly exist within a work.”<sup>33</sup> When expanding on the issue of free association, Kristeva notes how, as “readers of intertextuality,” we must have the capacity to identify with “different types of texts, voices, and semantic, syntactic and phonic systems at play in a given text,” in order to “be reduced to zero, the state or crisis” that she regards as a “precondition” of aesthetic pleasure.<sup>34</sup> It is at this “point of speechlessness”<sup>35</sup> – a term she also cites to Freud – that loss of conventional and predictable meaning occurs and that the reconstitution of meaning is able to take place. For both readers of Sata’s forthright and economic language and for viewers of Takehisa’s boldly evocative images, the capacity to reconstitute meaning is greatly enhanced by considering these materials in tandem.

Sata’s ‘From the Caramel Factory’ appeared in 1928 when the writer was twenty-five years old and is one of pre-war Japan’s best known texts by a women writer. The narrative opens with the girl protagonist, Hiroko, leaping out of her *futon* bedding to hurriedly eat her breakfast. Place and setting are important features of the narrative, particularly the depiction of the cramped, poorly-lit and inadequately-heated spaces that are the living quarters and workplaces of the labouring classes. As Nakagawa points out, the room in which Hiroko’s family lives is so small that she must turn back the edge of her still-sleeping brother’s bedding in order to make a place to sit to eat her

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<sup>32</sup> Margarete Landwehr, ‘Introduction: Literature and the Visual Arts: Questions of Influence and Intertextuality,’ in *College Literature*, vol. 29, no. 3 (Literature and the Visual Arts, Summer 2002), p. 8. Landwehr here refers, for example, to two contributions to this special edition that examine the influence of visual art on the work of Sylvia Plath. Landwehr, ‘Introduction,’ p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Landwehr also notes this capacity in the work of Roland Barthes. Landwehr, ‘Introduction,’ p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> Kristeva and Waller, ‘An Interview with Julia Kristeva,’ p. 282.

<sup>35</sup> Kristeva and Waller, ‘An Interview with Julia Kristeva,’ p. 282.

breakfast.<sup>36</sup> Outside, the winter morning is bitterly cold and Hiroko's grandmother therefore urges the girl to have a fateful second bowl of rice that results in the Hiroko's arriving late at the caramel factory where she works. Riding the commuter street-car, she is alarmed to see that the dress of the other passengers is that of office workers rather than the factory labourers who ride the early services. This is a sign that she will be late for the seven o'clock morning curfew imposed by the factory management and, therefore, locked out and docked a day's wages. These wages are critical to the welfare of her family and we learn that Hiroko feared being locked out even more than being frozen with cold.<sup>37</sup> Barred from entering, the girl returns to the station from the sealed iron gate of the factory, her body braced as if "off to battle."<sup>38</sup> While this narratorial observation might be read as a predictable reference to the class warfare that was a key principle of the proletarian platform, it also emphasises the traumatic impact on the protagonist girl of both the harsh specific working conditions that she must endure and her generally de-privileged social position.

Hiroko is clearly a child among adult commuters and a kindly man on the street-car inquires after her welfare. "What does your father do?" the man asks. "He has no job," she explains.<sup>39</sup> The man berates such a good-for-nothing father whereupon, according to the text, "compassionately, the people around" averted their eyes from the forlorn girl among their midst. We are told that they do so because Hiroko was "an image of their own children," an embodiment of what has become, or of what could become, of their own flesh and blood. Her "presence," therefore, "touched them directly."<sup>40</sup> There is, however, a darker interpretation of what is the effective erasure of Hiroko's plight from the consciousness of her fellow passengers. Here, surely, we see the embryonic emergence of the Japanese post-war aspiration to identify as middle class.<sup>41</sup> In part, this longing had its genealogy in the pre-war discourse that denied the existence of need or want under the reign of an emperor descended from the sun goddess. The putative paternal care bestowed by this great father on his subjects ensured that there could be no social inadequacy – except where this resulted from individual failing. Such a discourse very effectively educated the masses of imperial Japan that social need was non-existent and that, if such

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<sup>36</sup> Nakagawa, 'Three Japanese Women Writers,' pp. 96-97.

<sup>37</sup> Sata, 'Kyarameru kôjo kara,' p. 220; Nakagawa, 'Three Japanese Women Writers,' p. 210.

<sup>38</sup> Sata, 'Kyarameru kôjo kara,' p. 220; Nakagawa, 'Three Japanese Women Writers,' p. 210.

<sup>39</sup> Sata, 'Kyarameru kôjo kara,' p. 220; Nakagawa, 'Three Japanese Women Writers,' p. 211.

<sup>40</sup> Sata, 'Kyarameru kôjo kara,' p. 220; Nakagawa, 'Three Japanese Women Writers,' p. 211.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Brian J. McVeigh, *Japanese Higher Education as Myth* (New York and London: East Gate Book, 2002), p. 12.

need perchance passed before the line of sight, obedient subjects must shield their eyes and look away in order to affirm their loyalty to the throne.

The decision that Hiroko enter factory work was taken by her father, one the many incompetent, narcissistic and – as Nakagawa points out<sup>42</sup> – bullying men in the cultural production of pre-war Japan.<sup>43</sup> With his first wife and the mother of his children dead, and estranged from his petit-bourgeois second wife, Hiroko's father takes the family to Tokyo, although “with absolutely nothing in mind and not one single plan.”<sup>44</sup> With this father out of work, the family is reduced to surviving on the piece-work that the grandmother takes in. Their accommodation is the six-mat tatami room (that is, a room that is six tatami mats in size) that Hiroko, her father, brother and grandmother share with the father's younger brother, whose modest endowment for study the father has squandered.<sup>45</sup> When the latter notices a positions vacant advertisement for a caramel factory worker, he arranges for Hiroko to leave school and take this position in order to earn extra income for the impoverished family.

A recurring theme in the narrative is Hiroko's desire for an education. On the street-car returning from work, she looks with envy at her school-girl fellow passengers. When her father shows her the newspaper advertisement for the caramel factory job, all she can do is distractedly continue to eat mouthfuls of rice until, bursting into tears, she cries “But what about school.”<sup>46</sup> The father, however, is adamant and, after some token inquiries about the legality of Hiroko's age, the factory management give the girl the job. Since the factory is a forty-minute tram ride away from home, however, the fare alone takes up much of Hiroko's meagre wage. The narrator explains that workers who did not live near the worksite generally reside in the factory dormitory. Hiroko's

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<sup>42</sup> Nakagawa, ‘Three Japanese Women Writers,’ p. 104.

<sup>43</sup> For incompetent men in Japanese film see Freda Freiberg, *Women in Mizoguchi Films* (Melbourne: Japanese Studies Centre, 1981). For these men in literature, see the translation by Barbara Hartley of Okuno Takeo's ‘Shōsetsu wa honshitsuteki ni josei no mono ka’ (Is Fiction Inherently the Realm of Women?), in *Woman Critiqued: Translated Essays on Japanese Women's Literature*, ed. Rebecca Copeland (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2006), pp. 66-71.

<sup>44</sup> Sata, ‘Kyameru kōjo kara,’ p. 221; Nakagawa, ‘Three Japanese Women Writers,’ p. 212. I have modified Nakagawa's translation here.

<sup>45</sup> Nakagawa gives the size of the room as ‘nine by twelve’ feet, less than twelve square metres. Nakagawa, ‘Three Japanese Women Writers,’ p. 224. The uncle mentioned here is a fictional representation of the uncle from whom Sata took her family name.

<sup>46</sup> Sata, ‘Kyameru kōjo kara,’ p. 221; Nakagawa, ‘Three Japanese Women Writers,’ p. 213.

father had considered none of this. We learn, moreover, that there are times when, not having the fare, Hiroko must walk to or from work.<sup>47</sup>

At the factory, Hiroko works with two other “new girls,” one small and feeble-looking with trachoma, wrapping and boxing the caramel. At school she had been praised for her achievements and although she longs to do well here, too, Hiroko can barely manage half the output of the quicker workers. Management makes a daily noticeboard announcement giving the names of the fastest and slowest workers. Since all in the workshop are eager to be labelled “productive,” they collectively “drove their fragile bodies with all their might.”<sup>48</sup> Their work rate, however, is impeded by the freezing temperatures of the sunless workroom, particularly in the evening, where the girls and women try to protect themselves with their fathers’ old cut-down underwear. A high point of the day, therefore, comes when the girls light the stove to warm their frozen lunchboxes. It is also a time when they exchange conversation about their lives and aspirations:

“My Mum’s having another baby. But we already have too many kids. I spend all my time after work taking care of them. I’d be better off working as a maid.”

“It’s New Year soon, but I have no money to spend. How boring it will be.”

“Maybe I should take a job as a maid. My Mum is the only one who works in our family, so I need a job that pays more than they pay here!”

“Why don’t you think about being a geisha?”

“Oh no! I don’t want to do that sort of work.”

“Don’t you? When my big sister comes home to see us she always wears such beautiful kimono.”

“I don’t care. I don’t need any fancy clothes.”<sup>49</sup>

Hiroko’s mind, however, remains set on learning and she whispers to the girl with trachoma, “Don’t you want to go to school?”<sup>50</sup> The girl replies that she can’t because her eyes are bad. At afternoon break, management allows the consumption of a baked sweet potato and docks the girls’ pay accordingly. The miserly practices of the factory authorities are even more evident in the fact that, although on-site the workers can eat the caramel fragments discarded during production, they are forbidden to take these off-cuts home.

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<sup>47</sup> Sata, ‘Kyameru kôjo kara,’ p. 226; Nakagawa, ‘Three Japanese Women Writers,’ p. 223-224.

<sup>48</sup> Sata, ‘Kyameru kôjo kara,’ p. 223; Nakagawa, ‘Three Japanese Women Writers,’ p. 217.

<sup>49</sup> Sata, ‘Kyameru kôjo kara,’ p. 224; Nakagawa, ‘Three Japanese Women Writers,’ p. 218-219. I have made some stylistic modification to Nakagawa’s translation.

<sup>50</sup> Sata, ‘Kyameru kôjo kara,’ p. 224; Nakagawa, ‘Three Japanese Women Writers,’ p. 219.

Real disaster strikes for Hiroko, however, when the payment system changes from a daily rate to payment by goods produced. While the pay of a few quick workers increases, the majority take a cut, with Hiroko's being reduced by one third. Desperate to regain their former rate of pay, the girls now labour "like rats in [sic] a treadmill."<sup>51</sup> Since her work has become a complete liability to the family, Hiroko quits and finds a live-in position in a cheap noodle shop. The narrative concludes with her receiving a letter from a former teacher urging her to try to find someone who might pay her school fees so that she can at least complete her elementary education. "Going back to school is not that difficult,"<sup>52</sup> the teacher writes, clearly without any notion of the penury now faced by this girl who had so much promise. The final lines see Hiroko re-reading the letter in the noodle shop toilet, crouched down on the floor in tears.

There are a number of points from Sata's text that I want to emphasise, including the longing of the girl for an education, the mobility of this girl – although Hiroko merely commutes, the distance that she travels is not inconsiderable and evokes the constant movement around Japan of girls seeking work – and the desperation of the girl crouched down in tears. Each of these – the latter two underpinned by the stress, exhaustion and ill-health that were a function of the exploitative working conditions of the time – is a focal trope in Takehisa's material that, when juxtaposed against Sata's text, foregrounds and simultaneously corroborates her narrative. As mentioned previously, this is not a direct correlation or correspondence. Paradoxically, it is the very fragmentary nature of the association between the two sets of material that galvanises our attention and that forces us to consider once more both the narrative and the images.

The working conditions of the caramel factory women and girls recall Mikiso Hane's observation regarding the great burden carried by the majority of the population in pre-war Japan.<sup>53</sup> Takehisa's eye, too, was sensitive to the circumstance of workers in a range of settings – whether a lonely figure on the seashore or one leading stock along a country path – and his images give a strong sense of the limited material circumstances of the subjects depicted. In discussing the emergence of landscape in modern Japanese literature, the critic, Karatani Kojin, assesses these sorts of distant images of humanity depicted in narrative as 'perverse.' Why, he asks, should we express interest in someone with whom we have no connection?<sup>54</sup> Yet, it is precisely by successfully representing the travails of his unknown subjects that Takehisa forces us to

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<sup>51</sup> Sata, 'Kyameru kôjo kara,' p. 227; Nakagawa, 'Three Japanese Women Writers,' p. 225.

<sup>52</sup> Sata, 'Kyameru kôjo kara,' p. 228; Nakagawa, 'Three Japanese Women Writers,' p. 227.

<sup>53</sup> Brandt, 'The Beauty of Labour,' p. 116.

<sup>54</sup> Karatani Kojin, *Origins of Japanese Literature*, pp. 22-25.

look beyond the neat and tidy image of the nation state circulated by the authorities. This is not to say that the artist's material elides the possibility of a better option, or, as some might argue, always elides the possibility of a fascist aesthetic moment. These possibilities, however, are often muted or undercut by a reverberation of destitution or even impending death. The sparkling image shown here, entitled 'Haru yori aki e' (From Spring to Autumn) is thought to be produced in the mid Taisho era (around 1918 or 1919). The precise nature of the image is ambivalent. While one prominent print collection of Takehisa's work interprets the focus figure as girl carrying a doll on her back, the image nevertheless evokes the notion of *komori* – a child who works as a nursemaid. This ambivalence notwithstanding, the child in the centre of the illustration persistently draws our attention with her royal blue bow, pink patterned sleeves and bright, shining eyes.



Figure 1: 'Haru yori aki e' (From Spring to Autumn); thought to be mid-Taisho (approx. 1918). Image courtesy of Ikuho Takehisa Yumeji Museum, Ikuho, Gumma Prefecture, Japan.

This combination, in conjunction with the flash of red that is the swaddling of the doll or infant that she carries on her back, can be viewed as an aestheticisation of the innocence of childhood, or –given the evocation of *komori* – even an aestheticisation of the labour of the child.<sup>55</sup> While we might initially categorise the scene as one of the artist’s many illustrations for the very young, the presence of a male figure slumped on a bench in the background, head on chest, trousers torn and ragged, cuts across the clarity of the foreground. The viewer is thus urged to look once more and to reconsider what lies behind the ambivalently entrancing front image. In considering what “lies behind,” I will profile the three issues identified above from Sata’s work – the school-girl, mobility and images of despair – and investigate the appearance of these in Takehisa’s images.

The school-girl is a constant presence in the material of Takehisa, as she was of almost every commercial artist working in Japan at the time. The majority of school-girl images in circulation were to some extent modelled on Kiyokata Asasuzu’s firmly bourgeois depiction of this iconic girl.<sup>56</sup> The bourgeois school-girl exemplified the future wife and mother of the nation – education for pre-war Japanese girls was designed to this end – disciplined to become the demure consumer of approved commodities such as tasteful fashion accessories. In visual representations, these school-girls are often depicted in pairs, strolling through verdant bowers – in marked contrast to the notorious modern girl who took to the streets and public thoroughfares to display her new subjectivity. However, in an extraordinary juxtaposition of girls from different strata of Japanese society, Takehisa demonstrates that there was a deep division in the capacities of girls to perform the bourgeois school-girl role. In other words, the artist brilliantly resists the hegemonic visual discourse of this genre of images. In doing so, he simultaneously provides a rare foregrounding of the tensions facing the working class girl who, while longing for the same education as her bourgeois sister, remained obligated to perform housekeeping and childcaring duties away from the classroom.

The title of the image presented below, a 1907 illustration published in the educational magazine entitled *Chûgaku sekai* (Middle School World), is ‘Classmates.’ The girl on the right is undoubtedly the daughter of a family of means. Although merely a black and white sketch, the viewer’s line of sight is

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<sup>55</sup> As Mariko Tamanoi makes clear, life for these *komori* child nurses was far from the bright and cheery existence suggested by this foreground. See Mariko Tamanoi, *Under the Shadow of Nationalism: Politics and Poetics of Rural Japanese Women* (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1998), pp. 55-84.

<sup>56</sup> For details of this image, see Mariko Inoue, ‘Kiyokata Asasuzu: The Emergence of the *jogakusei* Image,’ *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 51, no. 4 (Winter 1996), p. 641.

momentarily drawn to the extravagant hair-adornment, possibly a ribbon, and the western-style heeled boots. This stylish girl wears a long kimono coat, perhaps over the *hakama* men's-style trousers favoured by many girl students, made from an ikat-patterned fabric. The flowing sleeves are a further modest extravagance that confirms the financial comfort of her family.



Figure 2: 'Kurasumeeto' (Classmates); first published in *Chûgaku sekai* (Middle School World), vol. 10, no. 4 (March 1907), p. 189. Included in the 1909 Spring edition of *Collected Illustrations of Yumeji*. (Acknowledgements to the Prefectural Kanagawa Museum of Literature.)



The attire of this well dressed girl certainly makes an impact upon the viewer's eye. Nevertheless, Takehisa to some extent elides this figure that is the conventional representation of the schoolgirl by having her back to the viewer and hence concealing her face. Instead, the face we see is that of her less well-off companion. In this sense, the artist uses a skilful visual narrative strategy similar to the concessional 'yes/but' rhetorical structure of writing.<sup>57</sup> And while the title of the piece might be 'classmates,' there is an irony in the marked difference of the circumstances of the girls. In a manner similar to Hiroko's workmate who returned from the factory each day to care for her family's brood of children, this schoolgirl is the nursemaid for her siblings. The relatively straitened circumstances of her family are evident in the plain stripe of her kimono fabric, the modest cut of her garment, and her practical and inexpensive *geta* (Japanese clogs) style shoes – which further suggest that the area in which the family resides is, in contrast to what is certain to be the modern residential area of her companion's home, likely to be unpaved. Although a 1907 work and therefore produced during Takehisa's early years in Tokyo almost two decades before Sata's textual production, the image demonstrates the artist's incisive capacity to depict the fissures in imperial Japanese society which, in spite of on-going rhetoric to the contrary, were a consistent feature of pre-war Japan.

Mobility was also a feature of imperial Japan. Harry Harootunian is one of a number of scholars who have noted the drift of workers from the country to the city, a trend that commenced in pre-modern times but which swelled to a huge wave of itinerants by the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>58</sup> Not all traffic, however, moved towards the cities. Citing the way in which average wages only rose at half the rate of the cost of living in post-World War One Japan, Ozaki discusses the phenomenon of rest-stations at temples in provincial areas crowded with unemployed who had failed in the capital and who sought to make their way on foot back home.<sup>59</sup> Girls were part of this human drift across the country. Often moving from one part of the country to another to take work – we might remember that Hiroko's factory, like most industrial sites of the time, had a dormitory for workers whose homes were remote from the site – girls were often only able to make the tremendous contribution they did to the economy of pre-war Japan by leaving home. Seriously contesting

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<sup>57</sup> Nakagawa notes this as a characteristic of the writing of Higuchi Ichiyô (1872-1896) in her comparison of this writer with Sata and Kurahashi Yumiko (1935-2005). Nakagawa, 'Three Japanese Women Writers,' pp. 97-98.

<sup>58</sup> Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture and Community in Inter-war Japan* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 7-10.

<sup>59</sup> Ozaki, 'Yumeji no ikita jidai,' p. 168.

assumptions of the sessility of girls and women, and the good wife wise mother notion of their confinement in the home, these girls roved the land with their few meagre possessions often, like Hiroko, in search of work to support their families. Whether, once again like Hiroko, merely commuting or whether undertaking a more substantial journey, these travels demonstrate how, in spite of expectations to the contrary, the security of a fixed hearth and/or home eluded many of the nation's girls and young women.

Takehisa's corpus repeatedly features the itinerant girl or young woman. Often seated, like the one shown here produced in 1920 for a large folding screen, resting pensively on a bench, *furoshiki* (cloth wrapper) beside her holding the few personal possessions with which she travels, these figures rarely display hope.



Figure 3: 'Aki no ikoi' (Resting in Autumn, 1920); image on a folding screen. Image courtesy of Takehisa Yumeji Museum, Okayama.

The autumn leaves that frame the image create a momentary impression of voluptuous abundance – recalling John Keats’ “season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,”<sup>60</sup> a maxim that also expresses the Japanese attitude to autumn plentitude. Yet, rather than creating a sense of fulfilment, the neutrally blank expression of this wandering figure suggests she is aware that her options are few and that arduous labour awaits her, be it in the home, the factory or on the land.

The despair of the peripatetic population of pre-war Japan is brilliantly captured in one of Takehisa’s most powerful ‘distressed girl’ prints entitled ‘Misaki’ (The Cape), a 1916 work that profoundly conveys the misfortunes of the girl or young woman of the time and that also encompasses the tropes of mobility and desperation that are evident in the artist’s wider corpus. An experimental composition of rich, dark orange – an effect that was achieved by burnishing the print – the image features a woman who, while upright, has her face buried in the handkerchief which she holds in the hands that cover her face. With the face so covered her age is indeterminate although the figure appears to be travelling along a path that runs between sand hills or sand mounds that loom threateningly above her head. In the right foreground, the starkly dried-out branches of a small bush confirm the barren and unforgiving landscape of pre-war Japan. Atop a rise in the right background is a disembodied face – which might also be a European style theatrical mask – that grins grotesquely beside a fragment of shoulder.<sup>61</sup> These elements create a surrealist effect that greatly magnifies the desperation of the figure that seems to flee, although with heavy feet and heart, an indeterminate menace. Of the many Takehisa images of girls or women who, either upright or crouching, desperately cradle their hands in their faces, this one most clearly conveys the sense that, regardless of the personal context of her sorrow, it is the social surrounds – the harsh ‘landscape’ from which there is no path of escape – that is the primary cause of her anguish. The viewer is ultimately left in no doubt that the girl depicted is forced to be mobile and that this mobility is accompanied by a deep desperation.

We have seen how Sata’s narrative drew to a close with the pitiful figure of Hiroko, crouched down and, cradling her face in her hands like the figure in the ‘Misaki’ print, crushed by the realisation that she can probably never escape the circumstances into which she had been forced by an incompetent

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<sup>60</sup> John Keats, ‘Ode to Autumn,’ at <http://www.potw.org/archive/potw279.html>. Accessed 24/07/2012.

<sup>61</sup> An anonymous commentator in *Takehisa Yumeji: bessatsu Taiyô* interprets this element of the image as “a man dropping his shoulder on top of the sand.” *Takehisa Yumeji: bessatsu Taiyô* 20, p. 194

father and a society that, like the street-car passengers, decline to look.<sup>62</sup> Girls and women in this pose are a recurring trope in Takehisa's work. Heads bowed, face in their hands, the sorrow of these young women is often presented in the context of betrayal by a man. This betrayal, however, rarely incurs our wrath, for it is almost inevitably associated with poverty. Even Hiroko's father, inept bully that he is, can scarcely be blamed in full for the family's situation. This fictional paternal figure is undoubtedly based on Sata's own father, who, we must remember, was himself only eighteen when his fifteen-year-old wife gave birth. There was almost an inevitability to the outcome of his life and the lives of the other members of his family, particularly following the death of his child bride. This is an inevitability that Takehisa, himself the child of a less-than-perfect father who had a penchant for both sake and geisha, fully understands and skilfully conveys in his images. The demeanours of these girls, perhaps forced to work by a father's debt or the need to pay a brother's school-fees, range from the impassive to the overtly desperate.

A 1925 sketch entitled 'Shûtai' (Distress), for example, pictures a prostrate girl or young woman, face concealed, seemingly sobbing. The hastily penned accompanying text expresses the desire of the figure depicted to "somewhere, sometime" be able to "live without abandoning happiness."



Figure 4: 'Shûtai' (Distress, 1925). Image courtesy of Takehisa Yumeiji Ikaho Museum, Gumma Prefecture.

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<sup>62</sup> Nakagawa notes that, while Hiroko's father is incapable of understanding that he will never get ahead, her despair at the novel's close is the result of her knowledge that "the future promises only continuation of the present distress" and that she has no option other than her current circumstances. Nakagawa, 'Three Japanese Women Writers,' p. 114.

The source of the girl's sorrow is unclear and, as suggested above, may be the result of disappointment in love. Nevertheless, there is an uncanny reverberation between the figure presented and Sata's depiction of the bereft Hiroko, left literally hopeless and alone in her grief in the fetid enclosure of a cheap eatery latrine. The pose of Takehisa's figure, moreover, captures the exhaustion experienced by this exploited sector of society, the very same exhaustion that drove the real-life Sata to consider suicide.

We have seen that, while insufficient in themselves to fully express the lived experience of the subjects of imperial Japan, Takehisa's striking two-dimensional narratives have an immediacy of impact that obliquely directs viewer attention to issues of women, poverty and work. Sata Ineko wrote the narrative of one of these workers, a mere girl, forced by family circumstances and a society unable to look – and, therefore, unable to act to intervene – to forgo the education she longed for and to move away from home to work. As two-dimensional stills, Takehisa's images give a representation of one point only captured in the time and space of the worker experience. As a narrative that moves through time and that also moves between the cramped spaces into which pre-war Japan's labourers were forced, Sata's short story provides a plethora of detail that must, of necessity, be absent from the work of the visual artist. Nevertheless, Takehisa's riveting visual cues capture our immediate attention and force us to view – in a way that the street-car passengers could or would not – the plight of the figures presented. In this way they expand and complement our understanding of the straitened circumstances of the caramel factory girl and her workmates, while the details that feature in Sata's material bring a third dimension to the artist's creations. Together, Takehisa's images and Sata's text irrefutably confirm the struggle of the workers of pre-war Japan, especially that of young women and girls.