

Katsukawa Shunshō (1726-1792)

Chapter Twelve, from the series

***“The Tales of Ise in
Fashionable Brocade”***

Japan, Edo period, ca. 1772-1773

Woodblock print; ink and color on paper

Gift of Mr. Felix Juda, 1962

(14820)

In chapter twelve, a man kidnaps a young woman and conceals her amongst the grass of Musashino (the Musashino Plain) while being pursued by the provincial governor. This print depicts a scene in which the governor is about to light the grass on fire in order to flush out the lovers.

Katsukawa Shunshō (1726-1792)

Chapter One, from the series

***“The Tales of Ise in
Fashionable Brocade”***

Japan, Edo period, ca. 1772-1773

Woodblock print; ink and color on paper

Gift of Mr. Felix Juda, 1962

(14821)

In this chapter, the protagonist, who has just received his first set of court robes (*karikinu*), is headed on a hunting trip to the village of Kasuga in Nara. He is distracted, however, by two beautiful girls from the village, and, ripping off a sleeve of his silk hunting cloak, he immediately writes a poem on the sleeve, which he sends to them. The man's robe is dyed with the pattern of the “purple patience” flower, thus his message is doubly effective:

*Young purple in Kasuga field
mingled in wild patterns printed on my cloak
hide my heart's unknowable
boundaries of disarray.*

Katsukawa Shunshō (1726-1792)
Chapter Nine: Yatsuhashi, from the series
“The Tales of Ise in
Fashionable Brocade”

Japan, Edo period, ca. 1772-1773

Woodblock print; ink and color on paper

Gift of Mr. Felix Juda, 1962

(14822)

The name *yatsuhashi* (eight-planked bridge) comes from an incident in the *Tales of Ise* in which the story's protagonist and his companions stop to rest at a famous iris marsh—traversed by an eight-planked bridge—on the way to his exile in the East. Yatsuhashi, famous for irises, was originally located in Mikawa (in what is now Aichi prefecture), just off the Tōkaidō Road.

In the *Tales of Ise*, the protagonist, often identified as Ariwara no Narihira (825-880), composed the following poem:

*I have a beloved wife
familiar as the skirt
of a well-worn robe
and so this distant journeying
fills my heart with grief.*

The poem is actually a clever reference to irises, for in the original (classical) Japanese it is an acrostic; the first syllable of each line, when read vertically, spells out *kakitsubata*, the Japanese word for iris.

Katsukawa Shunshō (1726-1792)
Chapter Seventeen, from the series
“The Tales of Ise in
Fashionable Brocade”

Japan, Edo period, ca. 1772-1773

Woodblock print; ink and color on paper

Gift of James A. Michener, 1991

(24310)

This print was conserved with the support of the
Robert F. Lange Foundation.

In chapter seventeen, the handsome nobleman and poet Ariwara no Narihira and his friends visit a lady's house to view *sakura* (cherry blossoms).

The lady composes the following playful poem (at the top of the print):

People call them evanescent
these cherry blossoms
yet they have waited
for someone whose visits
are months apart.

The cherry blossoms represent the lady, who has been waiting for her lord to visit.

Katsukawa Shunshō (1726-1792)

Chapter Nine: Sumida River,
from the series

***“The Tales of Ise in
Fashionable Brocade”***

Japan, Edo period, ca. 1772-1773

Woodblock print; ink and color on paper

Gift of James A. Michener, 1991

(24313)

Sumida River flows through the eastern part of Tokyo, down to Tokyo Bay. In chapter nine, the protagonist comes across a bird called a "capital-bird" and recites the following poem:

*If you are true to the name you bear
there's one thing I would ask you,
capital-bird
does the person I love
still wait for me or not?*

This poem was created when he was exiled to the east, far from the ancient capital city of Kyō (currently called Kyoto).

Katsukawa Shunshō (1726-1792)

Chapter Six: Akutagawa,

from the series

“The Tales of Ise in

Fashionable Brocade”

Japan, Edo period, ca. 1772-1773

Woodblock print; ink and color on paper

Gift of James A. Michener, 1991

(24316)

**This print was conserved with the support of the
Robert F. Lange Foundation.**

The scene depicted here is from chapter six, in which a man runs off with a court lady. The couple passes a stream called Akutagawa. Seeing dewdrops on the grass, the lady asks the man what they are. That evening he finds shelter for his beloved, and stands guard all night long. But the next morning, the lady has disappeared. In despair, the man recites the following poem:

*When my beloved asked,
'Is it a clear gem or what might it be?'
I had replied 'a dewdrop!'
and it perished.*

Katsukawa Shunshō (1726-1792)

Chapter Five, from the series

***“The Tales of Ise in
Fashionable Brocade”***

Japan, Edo period, ca. 1772-1773

Woodblock print; ink and color on paper

Gift of James A. Michener, 1991

(24588a)

In this chapter, the protagonist has secretly been visiting a princess for some time. Her brothers take notice and place guards in the location where he normally enters her living quarters. In the scene depicted here, the protagonist is hoping that the guards will fall asleep, so that he can sneak past them to visit his lover.

Katsukawa Shunshō (1726-1792)

Chapter Three, from the series

***“The Tales of Ise in
Fashionable Brocade”***

Japan, Edo period, ca. 1772-1773

Woodblock print; ink and color on paper

Gift of James A. Michener, 1991

(24588b)

The protagonist sends *hijiki* seaweed (a valuable commodity at that time) along with a romantic poem to her lover, who is going to marry the emperor. In Japanese, the word *hijiki* is a pun, as the word means “bedding” as well as a variety of seaweed. In essence, the poem suggests that the two elope, despite her impending nuptials.

Katsukawa Shunshō (1726-1792)
Chapter Ninety-four, from the series
“The Tales of Ise in
Fashionable Brocade”

Japan, Edo period, ca. 1772-1773

Woodblock print; ink and color on paper

Gift of James A. Michener, 1991

(24588d)

In this chapter, the protagonist sends a letter (poem) to a former lover, an artist, with whom he has a child. In the letter, he requests that she paint something for him, but she does not respond immediately, because her current love interest is visiting.

The protagonist grows angry, and sends another letter, complaining about her attitude. When the woman replies, she reminds him that although her current affair is more important at the moment, romances do not last forever. (In the original Japanese, her lovers are compared to spring cherry blossoms, and autumn foliage, both of which are transient.)

Katsukawa Shunshō (1726-1792)

***Chapter 49: Young Grass,
from the series “The Tales of Ise in
Fashionable Brocade”***

Japan, Edo period, ca. 1772-1773

Woodblock print; ink and color on paper

Gift of James A. Michener, 1991

(24588e)

In this chapter, the protagonist sees his beautiful half sister and tells her that she is as beautiful as “young grass.” He is worried that she will soon enter into a relationship with another man. Although it was forbidden for half brothers or sister to marry during the Heian period (9th century), it was not uncommon for step-siblings to form attachments to one another, and Heian-period literature often included tales of their romantic entanglements.

Katsukawa Shunshō (1726-1792)
Chapter Sixty-Nine, from the series
“The Tales of Ise in
Fashionable Brocade”

Japan, Edo period, ca. 1772-1773

Woodblock print; ink and color on paper

Gift of James A. Michener, 1991

(24588f)

In chapter sixty-nine, the protagonist goes hunting and encounters a lady with whom he forms a romantic relationship. This chapter is about their love story.