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The Fictional Worlds of *Tōkaidōchū hizakurige* and *Ukiyoburo*: the “Anti-World” and the “Idealistic World”

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Abstract. The article deals with the problem of “inner space” in two prominent works of *kokkeibon* (“funny books”), a genre of *gesaku*, light popular fiction of Tokugawa period (1603–1867), *Tōkaidōchū hizakurige* by Jippensha Ikku and *Ukiyoburo* by Shikitei Sanba. The creation of the unique settings, namely, the Tōkaidō road and its post stations in *Tōkaidōchū hizakurige* and a public bath in *Ukiyoburo* is considered to be a special artistic method, which is not just a device to develop a light and funny atmosphere of the literary works mentioned, but also a mechanism uncovering deeper layers of psychologism and mindset of Tokugawa period’s townsfolk. There are two types of “inner worlds” found in the works of Ikku and Sanba: an “anti-world” (following M. Bakhtin’s term) of *Tōkaidōchū hizakurige*, where the spirit of grotesque, absurdity and situational comedy prevails, and an “idealistic world” of *Ukiyoburo*, in which humor and morality are found in the everyday situations and conversations of a public bath’s visitors. The main layers of this “anti-world” are distinguished, among them the opposition between provincials and *edokko*, the “situational comedy’s” space of Tokaido road, and the level of theatricality are analyzed closely. As for *Ukiyoburo*, the dimensions of the public bath, the city of Edo, and the floating world in whole are studied. It is also assumed that the tags of “anti-world” and “idealistic world” in terms of these literary works can correspond with the “men’s world” of masculinity, rude humor, situational comedy, and the “women’s world” of light humor, melancholy, and daily wisdom respectively.

Keywords: *gesaku*, humorous fiction, *kokkeibon*, Jippensha Ikku, Shikitei Sanba, *ukiyo*.

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Миры произведений «Токайдотю хидзакуригэ» и «Укиёбуро»: «антимир» и «идеальный мир»

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена проблеме «внутреннего пространства» двух выдающихся произведений в жанре *коккэйбон*, «Токайдотю хидзакуригэ» Дзиппэнся Икку и «Укиёбуро» Сикитэй Самба. Вымышленные миры в данных литературных памятниках, а именно тракт Токайдо с его почтовыми станциями в «Токайдотю хидзакуригэ» и общественная баня в «Укиёбуро», рассматриваются в статье в качестве особого художественного приёма. Данная техника служит не только созданию лёгкой, непринуждённой, юмористической атмосферы, но и вскрывает глубинные уровни психологии и мировосприятия японского горожанина эпохи Токугава. «Внутренние пространства» анализируемых *коккэйбон* имеют разную природу: на страницах «Токайдотю

хидзакуригэ» создаётся «антимир» (термин М.М. Бахтина) с его духом гротеска, абсурда и «комедии положений», тогда как мир «Укиёбуро» во многом идеалистичен, в нём юмор соседствует с моралью и этикой в повседневных ситуациях, в самых банальных разговорах посетителей общественной бани. В рамках «антимира» Токайдо выделяются несколько основных измерений, среди которых подробнее рассматриваются следующие: оппозиция между миром провинции и столичных жителей, пространство тракта Токайдо как уровень «комедии положений», а также измерение театральности. Что касается «Укиёбуро», то в качестве основных уровней вымышленного пространства произведения здесь выделяются мир общественной бани, мир города Эдо и, наконец, эфемерный мир *укиё* в целом. Также выдвигается предположение о том, что эти вымышленные пространства могут быть соотнесены, соответственно, с «миром мужчин» – пространством маскулинности, грубого юмора и ситуативной комедии – и «миром женщин», измерением лёгкого смеха, меланхолии и житейской мудрости.

Ключевые слова: *гэсаку*, юмористическая проза, *коккэйбон*, Дзиппенся Икку, Сикитэй Самба, *укиё*.

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The two literary works to observe in the article, namely, *Tōkaidōchū hizakurige* (jap. 東海道中膝栗毛, *Shank's Mare*, next – *Hizakurige*) by Jippensha Ikku 十辺舎一九 (1765–1831) and *Ukiyoburo* (jap. 浮世風呂, *A Floating World's Bathhouse*) by Shikitei Sanba 式亭三馬 (1775–1822), are classified as representatives of *kokkeibon* 滑稽本 (“funny books”), a genre of *gesaku* 戯作, entertaining popular fiction in Tokugawa Japan. The light and humorous character of these works, altogether with the commercial purposes of their creators and the low rank of *gesaku* literature in whole, often leads to underestimating and even neglecting the deeper levels of the works mentioned. Speaking of which, many *gesaku* writings are not just funny stories, but much more complicated structures – valuable historical, linguistic, and sociocultural sources of sophisticated and influential literary works of the new Meiji literature, needing further analysis and research.

The analysis in the article below will be focused mainly on the inner fictional dimensions of the two literary works, specific settings of which operate as independent literary devices, developing both the plot and the whole atmosphere of the books. The ultimate goal of the article is to determine whether the inner worlds of *Hizakurige* and *Ukiyoburo* have a deep, multi-layered and multi-functional construction, or these “inner worlds” are just elaborate decorations for the humorous dialogues, the two pieces being nothing more than a light entertaining text for the mass reader. In studying popular literature, to which, undoubtedly, the *kokkeibon* genre belongs, it is important not to forget about the pragmatic factors, like earning money, which have a great impact on the structure and specific features of these works. However, *Hizakurige* and *Ukiyoburo*, outstanding among the great amount of their counterparts due to their original ideas and high-leveled artistic techniques, are clearly more than just funny stories. In the times of restrictions, Ikku and Sanba, both prominent writers of the epoch, found a metaphorical way to express their personal views in the forms of humorous worlds of their books, each representing a unique approach to the problem. Therefore, it seems that the research of these approaches not only can reveal the characteristics of the writing style of the two authors, but also help to understand several traits of

the Tokugawa townsfolk's psychology, as they have been both the object of the worlds constructed in *Hizakurige* and *Ukiyoburo* and the main characters, living in these fictional dimensions.

The article is based mainly on psychological theories of humor mixed with literary approaches, namely, M. Bakhtin's concepts of the "carnival" and the "anti-world". It is also connected tightly with the release theories, as the representations of the "anti-world" in *Hizakurige* and the "idealistic world" in *Ukiyoburo* are viewed here as a tool to escape the tight reality of the rigidly structured society of Tokugawa Japan as well as a way to release the tensions connected to it. Taking into consideration the universal character of the two works' humor, approved by generations of readers of different epochs and countries, these modern theories might still be used in the analysis. Attention was also paid to Japanese scholars' research, where they concentrate primarily on the types of the verbal and referential humor and the classification of the characters presented in the *kokkeibon* studied altogether with their cultural, historical, and literary origins.

Apart from this theoretical background, the work is carried out essentially around the original texts themselves. Through close reading of the texts, the episodes are labeled and grouped to form different layers of the inner space of the literary work. The present article concentrates on several principal dimensions, leaving the rest for future analysis. There is also a brief mention of the question of overlaps between these "inner fictional" spaces and the worlds of male and female characters in *Hizakurige* and *Ukiyoburo*, again, needing further research to complete.

Starting with *Hizakurige*, published from 1802 to 1809 (in eight parts), the action there takes place in the space of the Tōkaidō road and its post stations, which mark the journey of the two main characters, Yajirōbei and Kitahachi, from Edo to Kyoto and Osaka. The inner space of *Hizakurige* is studied here in the light of M. Bakhtin's concept of an "anti-world" of humorous fiction, which is an upside-down, grotesque reflection of real life, creating a new view of the world, enabling a reader to escape and at some point have an impact on a harsh reality by laughing at literally everything. As Bakhtin calls it, it is a space of a "carnival", where the reflected reality prevails and justifies all the strange behavior of the participants, at the same time revealing the essential core of popular culture of the townsfolk [Bakhtin, 1990].

At first glance, the plot and settings of *Hizakurige* might seem very realistic. Following the tradition of travel literature (especially those established by Tomiyama Dōya's 富山道治 (1585–1634) *Chikusai* 竹斎 and Asai Ryōi's (?–1691) 浅井了意 *Tōkaidō meishoki* 東海道名所記, *Famous Sites on the Tōkaidō*), Ikku depicts a journey of two male characters through fifty-three stations of Tōkaidō, paying much attention to the practical aspects (like the distance between two points or prices at tea houses and local shops) alongside with the plot itself [Traganou, 2005]. Due to that fact, a number of researchers even describe *Hizakurige* as a fictional guidebook. However, even at that point the fictional part starts to prevail comparing to the practical one, when Ikku begins to create a unique self-sufficient space on the pages of his *kokkeibon*. In contrast to his literary ancestors, while depicting the setting, Ikku ignores the famous geographical and historical sights, putting much more emphasis on the teahouses, inns, and brothels on the way of Yajirōbei and Kitahachi. According to a prominent Japanese scholar Matsuda Osamu, this can be as well interpreted as a hidden contrariness of the author against the restrictions and traditionalism of the Tokugawa society [Kinsei bungaku kenkyū jiten, 1986, p. 134]. A setting like that also shows a distinguishable change of interests of the readers, who, by the latter half of the Tokugawa period, had switched their attention onto the everyday pleasures of the floating world.

Placing the main heroes and other characters in this specific setting, Ikku creates a basis for an “anti-world” to develop. It is interesting to mention that this tendency of the world’s tumbling is carried out in the different dimensions of the literary work. Let us now briefly look at some of its variations.

The first one is an opposition between life in the capital and in provinces, being one of the fundamental motives of *Hizakurige* in whole. During their journey, the two main characters are trying to represent an image of *edokko* 江戸っ子, sophisticated snobs, proud to be Edo-born and placing themselves above the vulgar life of provincials. Ironically, the characters themselves were originally born and raised in Suruga province, from where they moved to Edo searching for better life. Thus, pretending to be *edokko* they in fact reveal their own rusticity and, on the deeper level, tumble the world of *Hizakurige* down again. Their unawareness of the provincial traditions and rough manners cause conflicts with the provincials, who often turn out to be much more intelligent and refined than the protagonists. A good example of this is an episode from the fifth part, where Yajirōbei and Kitahachi visit a house of Gomajiru, a provincial amateur poet, and have a lunch there. A traditional dish of the region, konnyaku (a jelly from a plant of the same name), is served on hot stones in order to keep it warm. The main heroes, unaware of this way of serving and being too arrogant to ask a host, suppose the stones to be eaten as well with the konnyaku. In the end Gomajiru, dying of laughter, stops them and explains how to eat this dish [Ikku, 1958, p. 266]. *Hizakurige* is full of scenes like that, which reflect the average mindset of the epoch while at the same time create one of the “anti-world” levels.

The next one is formed by the special “games” of the fictional space in *Hizakurige*. This is the dimension where all the situational comedy episodes take place. The space of the Tōkaidō road and its post stations, where Ikku places his heroes, often seems to behave as an independent character of the literary work, deliberately putting the protagonists in all kinds of strange grotesque situations. Stupid conflicts, fights, fallings, misunderstandings – these are the challenges to which the inner space of *Hizakurige* brings Yajirōbei and Kitahachi during their journey. The comic spirit of the situational comedy creates an atmosphere of grotesque and absurdity (close enough to Bakhtin’s “carnival”), with not only light, harmless humor existing, but also the darker irony and sarcasm arising. In this turned upside-down universe it becomes possible even to criticize the social and political system, which was not allowed by any other means after the persecution of *gesaku* authors at the end of the 18th century. It can be seen, for instance, in the episode with the feudal procession, when Yajirōbei and Kitahachi, despite the norms of Tokugawa Japan, following which all the average townsfolk and peasants had to go on their knees and let the procession pass, not only refuse to give way to the feudal and his warriors, but make some rude jokes about them [Ikku, 1958, p. 54–55]. This shift of social statuses could become possible only in the reality of the “anti-world”, where, in the atmosphere of journey, the stigma is broken and the social critique comes out [Teruoka, Gunji, 1967].

The third dimension of “anti-world” in *Hizakurige* is the level of theatricality. Theatricality is a common characteristic of many *kokkeibon* (some of them, like Shikitei Sanba’s *Gejō suigen maku-no soto* 戲場粹言幕乃外, *A Fascination of Theatre on the Other Side of a Curtain*, have their plot and structure concentrated on the theatrical performance [Cross, 2004]), starting with the very form of these literary works – a long bunch of dialogues between the characters, sometimes interrupted by the author’s remarks, which, in whole, resembles a libretto a lot. Furthermore, there

are some traces of a theatrical line of character, typical of certain groups of Ikku's work's heroes. To begin with, there has been a great influence of *kyōgen* 狂言, medieval farces, on the structure and nature of humor in *Hizakurige*. In his work, Ikku not only uses a number of *kyōgen* techniques, like the comical communication of *shite* and *ado*, the main and the secondary plan actors in *kyōgen*, whose parts are often interpreted by Yajirōbei and Kitahachi, but sometimes even adopts whole arcs of famous farces [Early Modern Japanese Literature, 2002, p. 733]. For example, it happens in the fragment about the magical fox-*kitsune*, which is, basically, an interpretation of *Kitsunedzuka* (jap. 狐塚, *Foxes' Hill*) *kyōgen*, where, like in *Hizakurige*, a servant mistakes his master for an evil fox-*kitsune* and ties his hands, while the master tries to talk him round and set free. Apart from the plot adaptations, numerous citations and reminiscences of the popular theatrical pieces, all of the characters in Ikku's work have much or less obvious role specializations, like theatrical lines. For instance, the coachmen guarantee the plot's development by moving the main characters from one point to another, while the inn girls at the beginning of a fragment introduce each new post station on their way. These patterns are repeated throughout the book, adding an effect of artificiality to the very realistic storylines and dialogues of *Hizakurige*. Furthermore, theatricality finds its way in the speech of the characters, which is full of word-puns and other elements of popular oral performances of the Tokugawa period. A huge amount of humor in *Hizakurige* is connected to all the kinds of wordplays, homonyms, misinterpretations, and so on. By means of this theatricality, being close enough to carnival, with all its costumes, masks and conventionality, it, again, becomes possible to create an effect of the "anti-world" in *Hizakurige*, to tumble down the social restrictions and to dip them into the ocean of grotesque and humor.

The last thing to mention about the inner world of *Hizakurige* is its correlation with the world of men and masculinity. First of all, most of the acting characters there are men, filling the world of the Tōkaidō road with their interests and their discourse. Chasing the ideal imitation of real oral speech of the epoch, Ikku concentrates mainly on the community of townsfolk and provincial men, whose spirit of practicality, rude humor, sexuality, craving for the simple pleasures of life defines the atmosphere of the literary work in whole.

The three primary levels mentioned are not the only ones found in *Hizakurige*. This literary work offers at least two more dimensions, which can be viewed as an opposition between the world of reality and the fictional grotesque space. The first one is the world of the past in contrast with the present. The problem of time is, indeed, one of the most interesting and complicated questions of *Hizakurige*. Starting from the point that the main characters live in a specific "dimension of eternity" – throughout the journey they do not grow older, their temper and behavior do not change a bit, and the conflicts and comic situations resemble one another, following the patterns proven by time and popular with the readers [Konita, 2004, p. 9]. On the one hand, it is clear that this strategy enabled Ikku to publish more and more sequels of the story that made him famous and provide him with money for living. However, at the same time, apart from the practical reasons, this method breaks the ordinary flow of time and, again, serves the distorted laws of the "anti-world". Moreover, Ikku also tends to look at the past a lot – whether it is a nostalgic passage on the golden times of ancient emperors at the very beginning of *Hizakurige* or a reminiscence of Saigyō's poetry in the episode where Yajirōbei and Kitahachi see his monument in one of the provinces. Whether the past or the present (or both) can function as an "anti-world" dimension in Ikku's work, still remains a question to study.

Another intriguing point is a space of fantasy in *Hizakurige*. As a *kokkeibon* representative, it is very down-to-earth and practical, lacking any traits of the fantastic, superficial or mysterious. All the “fantastic” episodes of *Hizakurige* are, in fact, an imitation – a ghost on the tree outside Yajirōbei’s window turns out to be drying underwear, an evil spirit on the road is a smoke from the fire where litter is burned, the friar’s lanterns are the lights on the pariah’s cart, and the magic fox-*kitsune* is, in fact, Kitahachi, who got in a stupid situation due to some circumstances. The only true magical episode of the work is an episode with the medium, enabling Yajirōbei to communicate with his deceased wife. How do these quasi-fantastic fragments correlate with the distorted reality of the “anti-world” of Ikku’s Tōkaidō road? How does that reflect the mindset of the readers, being, in their mass, average citizens? These questions, clearly, require further research and analysis.

Ukiyoburo (1809–1813) represents another model of the inner world of *kokkeibon*. The work of Shikitei Sanba consists of a series of sketches, in which different visitors of a public bathhouse communicate in a variety of situations. The only constant of *Ukiyoburo* is the scene of action, a bathhouse, which is the center of conversations, gossips, rumors, jokes, complaints – a perfect inner space for a literary work aiming to represent a wide picture of the townsfolk’s manners and daily life.

The world of *Ukiyoburo*, as well as the inner space of *Hizakurige*, is not a homogenous construction. The first layer to be discovered here is the space of a bathhouse itself. It is not a particular place, but rather an abstract “decoration”, an image of an average public bathhouse of Edo of that time. The choice of this scene can be explained in different ways, but as Sanba writes at the very beginning of *Ukiyoburo*, “there is no shorter way to wisdom than that which lies through a public bathhouse” [Sanba, 1989, p. 5]. In Sanba’s point of view, in a bathhouse, when everyone gets naked and, therefore, equal, a specific “idealistic world” is being born, where all five virtues of Confucianism can be found and people wash off their sins and share daily wisdom in short conversations [Sanba, 1989]. Taking that into account, Sanba expects his work to be read not only as a piece of light popular literature, but as a book containing precious moral and ethical lessons given in an entertaining form [Sanba, 1989].

It is also important to mention that the narration in *Ukiyoburo* is divided equally between the men’s and the women’s bathhouses, which both have a unique atmosphere and set of characters. The men’s episodes resemble *Hizakurige* a lot. Most of these scenes are a situational comedy, in which an eccentric character with an emotional, expressive mode of speech full of wordplay is in the center [Leutner, 1986]. Like in Ikku’s works, they often speculate on the theme of regional differences between the customs and traditions in provinces and the capital city of Edo, and the comical situations occurring because of that. A man from Shikoku wiping his face with someone’s underwear soaking in the washbasin is a classic example of such scenes. There are also many puns as well as the rude, naturalistic humor usual for Ikku. However, throughout the narration, from the first parts of women’s bathhouse and onto the very end, the spirit of the inner world changes in *Ukiyoburo*. In women’s episodes, rude puns are replaced by more subtle, sophisticated irony, a light smile arising from the most ordinary situations and conversations, through which Sanba laughs at the common human weaknesses and sins [Jinbo, 1951, p. 30]. In these parts, the author himself shows a high-leveled ability to depict the psychological portraits of the characters [Tanaka, 1950, p. 86], developing a foundation for the next popular genre of *gesaku*, *ninjyōbon* 人情本 (“the books about feelings”), the major representative of which, Tamenaga Shunsui 為永春水 (1790–

1844), was one of Sanba's disciples. To sum up, it can be assumed that the "ideal world" of Sanba's *Ukiyoburo* is, in contrast to Ikku's men's world, by its nature a women's world, where humor takes its exquisite forms and the atmosphere of light melancholy prevails [Shinpan Nihon bungaku-shi, 1973].

Moving forward from the layer of the bathhouse itself, it should be noticed that the bathhouse is, in fact, a metaphor of a bigger scale system, namely, the city of Edo. A bathhouse of *Ukiyoburo* with all its visitors and the connections emerging between them is indeed an "Edo in miniature", representing the brightest episodes of the townsfolk's life. A city of Edo at the beginning of the 19th century was the core of Tokugawa Japan, and the complicated network of relations between its citizens defined its social structure and appearance. The oppositions between the *edokko* and the provincials, the townsfolk *chōnin* 町人, with their new mindset based on pragmatism, and the warriors all formed an eclectic world of the Japanese capital [Smith, 1993]. Sanba, being an Edo-born, had the specific nostalgic feeling about the city, which is reflected on the pages of *Ukiyoburo* [Leutner, 1986, p. 108]. The author tries to avoid the dark sides of the city life in his book, creating an "idealized" Edo image, where social outcasts are unlikely to be found among the characters, most of whom are from the middle-class Edo townsfolk, well known to Sanba.

Going further, we now approach the deepest dimension of *Ukiyoburo*, which can be defined as the floating world (*ukiyo* 浮世) in whole. Even the title of Sanba's work implies this connotation. Putting the word *ukiyo*, a term for a mindset concept basic for the Tokugawa period, in it, Sanba implicates that the space of a public bathhouse is a symbolic representation of the ephemeral world [Jinbo, 1951, p. 33]. The characters appear in this world with their small talk and petty problems and some moments later they fade away for good in the stream of life. At the same time, the functioning of a bathhouse does not stop when one visitor leaves and the other one comes – just like the course of life does not stop when someone passes away. Therefore, Sanba, laughing at the short-term concerns of his characters, touches on the most difficult questions of human existence. It is also important to mention that the author here sticks to the concept of the "idealistic world" of the floating world's bathhouse, showing a great sympathy towards its imperfect characters and finding a way out or at least a relief for them when they are in trouble.

In studying *Ukiyoburo*, further comparison with the sequel novel, *Ukiyodoko* (jap. 浮世床 *A Floating World's Barbershop*, 1813–1814), can be done. Being a secondary product by the side of *Ukiyoburo*, it still offers another variation of an inner fictional space with its own features and artistic methodology. By now, it is clear that the dimension of a barbershop in *Ukiyodoko* is more structuralized and artificial. There is a figure of a barber, who is in control of the action, and the plot is represented not by the chaotic set of daily-life sketches, but rather by more or less organized sequence of scenes. It is also clear that the humor of *Ukiyodoko* is much sharper than in the previous *kokkeibon Ukiyoburo* – there are, in fact, many truly satiric episodes containing the critique of culture and society. Therefore, the problem to explore in the further study is how these changes in author's approach affect the world of *Ukiyodoko* and the impact it has.

To sum up, analyzing the main types of fictional dimensions in *Hizakurige* and *Ukiyoburo*, we can confirm that these "inner worlds" are not mere stage sets, but independent literary devices with complex structure, having a great impact on the plot development, the characters' actions and the literary works' atmosphere, at the same time providing for their popularity among the readers. Therefore, while finding a balance between the universal theories of humor and the specific, local

features of the Japanese humor of the Edo period, altogether with the harmony between the deeper meaning and the commercial nature of the *kokkeibon*, it is important to broaden the scale of the *kokkeibon*'s study. In the tradition of literary research, *gesaku* genres, *kokkeibon* among them, have long been considered nothing but popular fiction, lacking any high artistic values. At the end, the craving for money and success and the specific character of the Japanese humor of those times do not seem to overlap the essential depth and idea of the literary works studied. Being placed in a position of a bystander towards their plots, considered to be *muda* 無駄 (“useless”), the most talented and prominent authors of the *kokkeibon*, trying at the same time to express their own mindset and to amuse and catch the readers' attention, chose the best way to fulfill these goals by constructing the special inner dimensions in their books. These inner spaces enabled them to entertain the reader, who found a lot of well-known places and situations in these worlds; to prepare an environment for their characters to act throughout a number of sequels; to express themselves safely by tumbling the fictional world upside-down and thus breaking the strict rules and censorship, or by building a safe ideal space, where the mankind's sins diminish and the life's hardship can be overpassed with the worldly wisdom. The humorous dissonance made the higher and the lower social groups even, and in a distorted, metaphorical way revealed the very essence of the human-being [Grygoryeva, 1979]. Bearing in mind the importance of these literary pieces as a valuable source on the history, culture, and daily life of the Edo epoch's townsfolk and, at the same time, of the deep psychological aspects represented in the literary techniques, the current study is of immediate interest and broad perspectives.

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