

# SPATIAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN IZUMI KYŌKA'S *A MAP OF SHIROGANE*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *In my paper I intend to focus on Izumi Kyōka's "A Map of Shirogane", analyzing the way actual places and architectural structures are described through the eyes of the main character, the old kyōgen actor Hagiwara Yogorō, who goes to Shirogane to look for Omachi, a girl whom he had previously met and who he thinks will help him play his roles more convincingly. A central place in the economy of the novel is taken by the University of the Sacred Heart (Seishin Joshi Gakuin), which was built in the western architectural style in 1910. As sites for acquiring advanced western learning, many colleges had been built in the western style since the beginning of the Meiji period, so in that sense there is nothing particularly new or remarkable about the structure of the University of the Sacred Heart. Rather, what is remarkable is the way in which the old man gradually comes to see it as two overlapping images: a western architectural structure, and an Inari torii (site of reverence of the fox deity since ancient times). His viewpoint might symbolize the gradually changing face of Shirogane, where the quiet residential site of a samurai family's villa is transformed by the construction of a university. Through the detailed analysis of the images of the places and buildings described in the novel, I will attempt to clarify the way Kyōka articulated the consciousness of the people living in these changing spaces and went on to create a unique world of his own.*

**Keywords:** *Izumi Kyōka, space, Edo, Tōkyō, transformations, architecture, body.*

In the urban spaces of the present day, traveling facilities (cars and trains, traffic lights) and multi-story buildings appear and disappear as symbols of an unprecedentedly abrupt transformation. It seems that for writers (at least in Izumi Kyōka's works one can think that such a question is constantly asked), how we perceive the space in which we are living "now", a space in the middle of a changeable place, has been an important problem I have decided to consider this issue by analyzing Izumi Kyōka's *A Map of Shirogane* (published in *Shinshōsetsu*, January 1916).

In the first place, I would like to shortly introduce Izumi Kyōka (1873-1939). His real name was Izumi Kyōtarō and he was born in the city of Kanazawa,

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Ishikawa prefecture. His father was an inlayer of metallic ornaments and has become a model in Kyōka's novels. As well, from his mother, whom he lost in infancy, he had received illustrated books (*kusazōshi*). This "world of illustrated books" and his feelings towards his mother, and furthermore his impressions on his native place Kanazawa have become important motives in his later novels.

Kyōka went to Tokyo aiming to be a writer and he became Ōzaki Kōyō's pupil. He also became a member of the Ken'yūsha group and in 1892 he made his literary debut in the *Hi no De* newspaper, where he serialized his novel *Yazaemon Kanmuri*. Afterwards he published *Gekashitsu* (in *Bungei Kurabu*, May 1985), a story which describes the love at first sight between a countess and a surgeon in a botanical garden. Izumi Kyōka has been made into a representative writer of conceptual novels, provided that in his early works there have been many in which Kōyō's intervention is visible. Kōyō had a big influence on Kyōka's work. He also objected to the relationship between Kyōka and the geisha Momotarō (Itō Suzu by her real name), later to become Kyōka's wife, which led to their temporary separation, an episode described in *Onna Keizu* (serialized in *Yamato Shinbun*, January–April 1907). In this story, the master opposes the relationship between the main character, Hayase Chikara, and the geisha Otsuta and the novel evolves towards the tearful scene of the separation. After the Russo-Japanese War, when naturalist literature had become the mainstream, Kyōka lived a period of obscurity, but even during that time he continued to publish books and left behind a great number of masterpieces during the Meiji, Taishō and Shōwa periods. *The Holy Man of Mount Kōya* (*Kōya Hijiri*, published by *Sinshōsetsu*, February 1900) is a novel written as the experience of a monk telling the story of a beautiful woman living in the mountains, who transforms the men approaching her, driven by lust, into insects, birds and wild animals. His unique literary style characterized by a strong fantastic element exerted a strong influence on the coming writers. Mishima Yukio and Minakami Takitarō have highly praised his works and were avid readers.

It can be said that Izumi Kyōka has laid the foundations of modern Japanese fantasy literature. Be that as it may, when we try to read his works paying attention to the space that Kyōka creates in them, even though the story is a fabrication, we cannot actually say that it is merely an alternative world, completely separated from reality; we also have to notice the many aspects that are being set on the stage of the real world. By using images of real places and buildings deeply rooted in a specific period, Kyōka has built a rather peculiar world, letting himself just slightly deviate from the image of the real place.

In this essay I would like to closely analyze the world in Izumi Kyōka's works taking as an example *A Map of Shirogane*, a novel that, although set in the Tōkyō of the Taishō period and based on real situations, illustrates how the space of the real world is being reinterpreted and rebuilt.

The plot of *A Map of Shirogane* is as it follows:

The famous kyōgen performer of the Sagi school, old Hagiwara Yōgorō had to play the role of Hakuzōsu from the kyōgen play *Tsurigitsune*. After his failure on stage, Yōgorō recalls how his heart had been touched by his meeting with Omachi, a student of the University of the Sacred Heart (Seishin Joshi Gakuin). When

previously in Tōkyō, he had got lost around Shirogane and had been instructed by Omachi, who helped him find his way.

In order to be able to make a convincing performance, he goes back to Shirogane to beseech Omachi for her teachings and decides to look for her, but he loses his way again, unable to find Omachi's house. He succeeds in meeting her again, in the end, but despite his pleas, he is sent away by Omachi's father, and ends up going back and forth with his request. Although Yōgorō had been rebuked by Omachi's father, touched by his enthusiasm, Omachi herself meets him one night at an Inari shrine, and Yōgorō manages to break fresh grounds within his art. Having seen this, Yōgorō's friends praise Omachi as a patron god of the shrine.

But before actually analyzing the text, let me briefly discuss in the next chapter the importance of the fact that this work has been published in 1916, during the First World War.

### **1. Yearning for the Past – the Developing Tōkyō versus the Edo of the Olden Days**

At a time when Japan had decided to become engaged in the unprecedented events that marked the beginning of the First World War, Tōkyō was starting to gain international acclaim as a modern and developed city. In particular, the Taishō Tōkyō Exhibition, held in 1914, preached the importance of seeing the progress of the national industry 60 years since the opening of the country in the image of “contemporary” Tōkyō, which was then growing at high speed<sup>2</sup>.

At the same time, attempts at rediscovering the old Tōkyō, or Edo, were being enthusiastically made, in order to see the history of the capital's progress. For example, the guidance for the exhibition was sold in a package which also included tours of the historic sites of Tōkyō. In other words, there was a feeling of remembering a fading “Edo”, which was slowly disappearing, engulfed by the present, where Tōkyō had become an international modern city. There were many attraction guides and articles that praised the searching for “traces of Edo” during this period<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, “*The Taishō Tōkyō International Exhibition Guide*” explains the significance of the International Exhibition as follows: “the International Exhibition opened under the auspices of the Tōkyō Prefecture, and its purpose was, needless to say, to urge the progress of industry. But there is also a deep meaning in the fact that the two characters for “Taishō” were added to the name of the exhibition held during the reign of the Taishō emperor. (...) Also, from one point of view, it is a miniature picture of the new Japanese civilization, showing clearly in what way, to what extent, the industry had advanced, 64 years after the so-called “opening of the country” that urged an unprecedented high-speed development in our country.” On the other hand, a renewed interest in the history of Tōkyō was also prompted: “Standing in front of the huge buildings of the Exhibition, with their air of contemporary, new times, if you think of the historic importance of Ueno Park, the very site of the Exhibition, you become even more and more fascinated. Especially when you show around Chinese or Western people, you want, by all means, to tell them about the history of Ueno.”

<sup>3</sup> For example, *Edō no Omokage 1 [Vestiges of Edō – 1]* (in the *Shinshōsetsu* magazine, September 1914) states: “The upheaval in Europe extended and brought about the World War, giving birth to an unheard-of fight. (...) Seeking for vestiges of Edō in nowadays Tōkyō, painted day by day in international colors, is like trying to spot on the faces of descendants of noble families, the

Protected during the Edo period by the Bakufu and the daimyō, and having a poor connection with the common people, kyōgen had begun to decline in the Meiji period. Kyōka's *A Map of Shirogane*, having as its hero Yogorō, a master of the Sagi school of kyōgen (which fell into decline and eventually died out in the 1920s), who regrets the lack of popularity of kyōgen, but who eventually brings his art to a full achievement, appears to be one of the stories celebrating the memory of the Edo period. However, what we see here is not simply a celebration of the memory of the Edo culture. There is also an impressive description of Yogorō's feelings, while he wanders around Shirogane, a place, like many others in Tōkyō, which is undergoing rapid changes. In Kyōka's text, we can see the process through which Shirogane is remodeled by Yogorō into an original space, different from the real one, although connected to it.

It is not difficult to imagine that Kyōka chose as a main character for this work a master of kyōgen because kyōgen was rapidly declining, and also because, as grandson of a Nō master, he himself had a strong interest in kyōgen. But these were probably not the only reasons for his choice. Kyōka talks several times about kyōgen<sup>4</sup>, and from his statements we can see that he believed that the kyōgen master is able to interpret his part freely, relying only on the subtle "breath" of his own body, inviting thus the spectators into a different space and rebuilding that space with the power of his art. Therefore, we can probably say that Kyōka judged that in the act of "re-reading space", a kyōgen master would be the perfect choice for his main character.

Let us see in what way exactly this "re-reading of space" is carried out, by analyzing the text closely in the following chapter.

## **2. Shirogane during the Taishō Era—Musashino/ Shinkai**

The text begins with the following memorable fragment, in which Yotarō's search for Omachi is depicted:

*On one side, the sky was clouding up, looking like it would rain any moment; near the woods that seem dark even at noon, there were some explosives warehouses; on the lonely path along the black fence meandering around the warehouses, a man was walking slowly.*

*"Only hearing the words 'gunpowder warehouse' I get shivers down my spine... It's all nice and dry, so just one spark, and it will all go up with a boom!", the man is mumbling to himself.*

*(...) The road goes through this large piece of mudflat, wild trees and bushes growing on it. (...)*

*"Oh, my, I really shouldn't lose sight of that blue-green kite!"*

*"Don't you have your glasses? The blue-green kite you're talking about is the base of the lightning rod on the roof of that girls' school, Seishin Jogaku-in, I think it is called."<sup>5</sup>*

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genetically transmitted features of their ancestors. (...) I think that, at this point in time, it is most urgent to seek for the vestiges of Edō in Tōkyō."

<sup>4</sup> Izumi Kyoka, *Conversations about Nō Theatre* (September 1911) and others.

<sup>5</sup> All Japanese quotations from *The Map of Shirogane* are from *The Complete Works of Izumi Kyoka*, Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, 1975, vol.16, p.522-523.

Here, Shirogane is described as a vast expanse of land, with gunpowder warehouses lining up amid fields and tree groves, with the building of Seishin Joshi Gakuin visible in the distance. In other words, it is a space made up of a mixture of natural scenery and western architecture.

The actual image of Shirogane during the late 1910s does not, indeed, differ much from the one described in *Kyōka*'s novel. During the Edo period, numerous suburban residences of the *daimyō* were built in this area, but with the decrease in the number of samurai after the Meiji Restoration, most of the houses became uninhabited, and the town fell to ruin. Around the end of the Meiji period (1900), new houses started to be built, and the area flourished again. Seishin Joshi Gakuin, the girls' school that plays an important role in this text (referred to as Seishin Joshi-in in *A Map of Shirogane*), was actually opened in 1910, in the former location of the Date clan suburban residence.

Let us take a look at an actual map of Shirogane during the Taisho era (Fig.1). Indicated by 1 is the school Seishin Joshi Gakuin, while 2 indicates the location of the explosives warehouses mentioned at the beginning of the text. The thick line numbered as 3 is the path along which Yotarō presumably walked, while 4 is a line dividing Shirogane into two distinct areas: north of the line one would find a neighborhood inhabited by people from the middle and lower classes, with small shops and factories, while south of the line the villas of noblemen and the military were predominant. The sharp contrast between these neighborhoods is also clearly described in *A Map of Shirogane*. Despite the differences, it must be mentioned that both areas were newly developed ones. Finally, number 5 indicates the possible location of Omachi's house.

Fig.1 Ando Rikinosuke, *Tōkyō Shōgyō Chizu* (Okura Shoten, 1918, 13<sup>th</sup> edition)

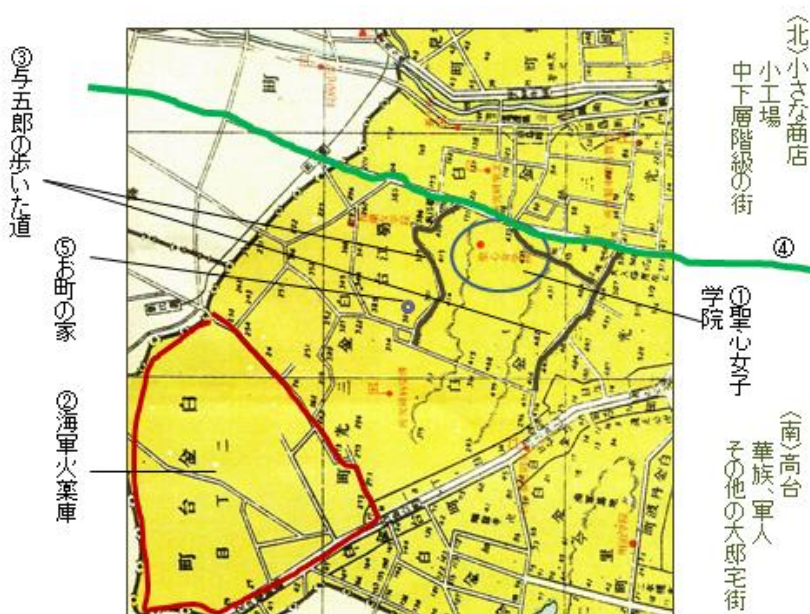
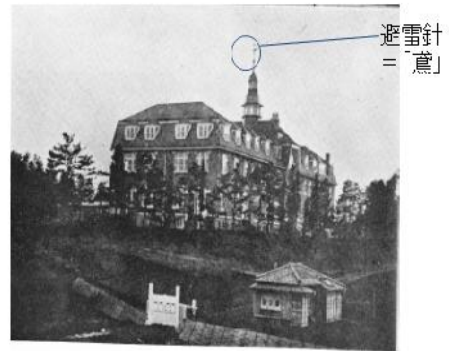


Fig. 2 Edited by Seishin Joshi Gakuin, *Seishin Joshi Gakuin Sōritsu Gojūnen-shi* (Seishin Joshi Gakuin, 1958).



聖心女子学院(正門より本館を望む)



聖心女子学院(裏門近くから見た本館, 1909)

- a. Seishin Joshi Gakuin: the Main Hall seen from the front gate.      b. Seishin Joshi Gakuin: the Main Hall seen from the back gate (1909)

Figure 2 shows two photographs of Seishin Joshi Gakuin at the end of the Meiji Era and the beginning of the Taisho era. In both images, I have indicated with a circle the lightning rod on top of the Main Hall, the one Yotarō refers to as “the blue-green kite”.

In the newspapers of the time, the Main Hall was described as a truly magnificent construction, and its western architecture, with three floors and a basement, was praised as “aristocratic-looking”. The same articles also mentioned that the building stands out in the middle of the surrounding natural elements, and that from the gate to the Main Hall one has to go through something like a great park, with ponds and groves<sup>6</sup>.

In *A Map of Shirogane*, the narrator gives the following description of the scenery:

*Away from the city, and away from the entire world, the blue sky spreads out as far as the eye can see. The building of Seshin Jogaku-in, whose flying blue-green kite the old man has chosen as his guide, is maybe the only thing that connects the town of Musashino with the new town of Shinkai, now, when, by the western calendar, we are counting so many hundreds of years since the birth of*

<sup>6</sup> “I have recently visited Seishin Jogaku-in, which opened this month. As you go up the Sanko slope, on the right there is a strange gate, built in a mixture of western and Chinese styles. (...) After you go in, the campus is really impressive; from the gate to the main building you have to walk for about five or six hundred meters. On your way, you’ll come across tree groves, ponds, and stone-paved paths—almost like a real park. (...) The main hall is a splendid 3-floor building in the western style; it also has an underground room. It is brand new, and quite impressive, for that reason. (...) It does look like a school for the aristocracy.” (Anonymous reporter, *Seishin Joshi Gakuin wo miru*, in *Yomiuri Shinbun* newspaper, 4/13/1910).

*Christ*<sup>7</sup>.

The building of Seishin Joshi Gakuin stands in the middle of two different types of scenery, Musashino and Shinkai, as a symbol of a changing Tokyo. Nevertheless, as the first quotation shows, Yotarō seems to be paying no attention at all to the western architecture of the school, and focuses mainly on its rather ordinary lightning rod, which he recurrently refers to as “the blue-green kite”.

The way Yotarō perceives his whereabouts is, doubtlessly, quite peculiar. When he reaches the top of the hill where Seishin Joshi Gakuin stands, and sees for the first time the scenery described by the narrator in the previously-quoted excerpt, he speaks out his sense of discomfort: “That ominous bird, up in the sky above this wasteland spreading limitlessly east and west, that kite gives me the creeps, it does.”

Further along in the text, the scenery that Yotarō first perceived as ominous and uncomfortable is transformed into a “familiar” space while interiorized and reinterpreted through Yotarō’s own senses.

### **3. Reassembling Space—the Road to Artistic Achievement**

As I mentioned before, Yotarō has eyes only for the lightning rod at the top of Seishin Joshi Gakuin, and refers to it as the “ominous kite”. On the other hand, the kite is also a very important landmark, one that can take him to the place where he had first met Omachi. This fact is clear especially in the episode that describes Yotarō, disappointed and exhausted after his failure on stage, suddenly remembering the kite, and from the kite being reminded of Omachi, who he believes will help him discover the essence of his art. Therefore, while on the one hand admitting that the “ominous bird” gives him “the creeps”, Yotarō has to follow the guidance of the kite if he wants to encounter Omachi again. Even though he tries to keep his eyes on the “blue-green kite”, Yotarō loses his way a few times, but the way he does it is actually quite significant.

The first time Yotarō gets lost in Shirogane is also the time when he meets Omachi. She is the one who shows him the way on a map (which Yotarō actually calls “a drawing”). While Omachi is explaining the geography of the place to him, Yotarō is fascinated rather by “her limpid eyes”, and by her “gentle heart”; that is why he also sees the map as “a secret scroll on artistic accomplishment”, and not a mere piece of paper containing information useful for finding one’s way, that is, something that accurately represents real places in written form. If we take into consideration the fact that guidebooks of the time recommended that one buys a map and grasps the overall perspective of the place they want to visit before actually going there<sup>8</sup>, it is obvious that Yotarō’s perception of maps and their function is quite peculiar.

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<sup>7</sup> p.535.

<sup>8</sup> “In order not to get lost, you will probably have to ask a lot of people for instructions, but, before that, you should make sure that you get the gist of Tokyo’s overall geography. (...) If you want to be able to keep your bearings, the fastest way would be to look at a map.(...) If it’s your first time in Tokyo, a map is what you really have to buy, even if you have to go without something else instead. (*Tōkyō Annai*, p. 295-296, Jitsugyō no Nihonsha, 1914).

In other words, Yotarō's stroll does not follow contemporary rules, which say that one should walk according to the indications and discover one by one, in the actual scenery the landmarks represented on the map. This is obvious in the following excerpt too, where Yotarō is seen asking the way, and trying to remember the name of the building with the kite on top:

*"Are you maybe talking about that school for girls, Seishin Jogakkō? That must be it."*

*"A school for girls?"*

*"Yes, but it's not Seijin, it's Seishin, written with the character for 'heart'"*

*"Oh, it might very well be. I went past that place the other day, and it was Sei-something. I just remembered it as Seijin. Old people like me are really careless."<sup>9</sup>*

With the western structure of Seishin Joshi Gakuin as his landmark, Yotarō is finding correspondences between the "blue-green" kite and the view that he had seen before on the one hand, and the scenery that he is walking through at present, on the other. Moreover, the way Yotarō sees the kite is quite peculiar everytime, although to him the lightning rod is, to the end of the story, a real bird; when he looks at it from the main gate of the university, he exclaims: "That shining thing up there, is it its eye? If so, it does look like it could just stretch and carry me off right away!" Trying not to lose heart and telling himself that he cannot get lost while he has the kite guiding him, he walks further. And then, when he finally finds Omachi, the narrator describes Yotarō's feelings: "Now that he finally meets her, it seems that even the blue kite, up in the warm autumn sky, has changed the direction it was flying, pointing towards Omachi."

And this is how Yotarō, with the kite as his sole guide, meets Omachi, and believes that he will find the way to discover the essence of his art too; he finds the girl's house again, and keeps wandering around Shirogane after that, too, trying to reach, with her, the purpose of his search.

The merchants in Shinkai call him "a fool", while Omachi's father despises his art, referring to it as "a farce"; this space rejects him, and Yotarō himself perceives it as uncanny, in the beginning. Nevertheless, while wondering through this uncomfortable scenery, little by little Yotarō succeeds in giving it a different interpretation, as a path towards understanding his own art. For example, when he passes in front of a shop, the errand boy steps on his sleeve; Yotarō tries to turn in midair but fails, and then tells everyone around to laugh at him, if they feel like it. He shouts that he was playing the role of a fox, and asks the spectators to let him know what they thought of his act. Moreover, when one man who was trying to pick up a fight with him is chased away by a dog, he turns the incident into a song, changing some of the words in the *Chikubujima* Nō play. This is how, in the end, Yotarō reassembles the ostracizing space around him, reinterpreting it through direct, bodily experiences.

And thus, in the end, at the Inari shrine, when Omachi responds to Yotarō's plea, he superimposes her image—a simple student at the Seishin Joshi Gakuin,

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<sup>9</sup> p.524.



without any connections with the world of art—on the image of his late wife, who had been the daughter of his master, and had supported him in his artistic endeavors all her life. This correspondence between past and present encourages him to start out on a new path for discovering the essence of his art. Needless to say, the building of Seishin Joshi Gakuin, a symbol of western knowledge and Christianity to all people of that age, to Yotarō is reduced to the image of the kite, symbolizing his aspiration to reach higher levels of accomplishment in art.

Finally, Yotarō's indecision and doubts disappear, and his art is complete. At the same time, Shirogane changes, for him, into a mythical land, where the god of art resides.

Let us conclude by saying that, in a way, the image of Yotarō, roaming through Shirogane in search of Omachi is also a metaphor of the wandering artist, striving to find his way in a society where his art is no longer appreciated. In *A Map of Shirogane*, Kyōka has described the process through which the elements of an unstable and menacing environment are reassembled into a space that will make artistic achievement possible.

The search for a lost “Edo” was quite popular during the years when the new capital, Tokyo, was developing at a very fast pace, but what Kyōka has explored in his work is of a completely different nature: the focus of *A Map of Shirogane* is on describing the way people learn to live in new environments, changing these environments by superimposing on them their various life experiences. Let it be added that not only the text which has been the focus of this paper, but most of Kyōka's works have as their foundation an inclination for articulating the consciousness of the people living in these changing space

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