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***Ningyō* : An homage to the films of Kawamoto Kihachirō¹**

ABSTRACT

This article provides a personal as well as scholarly exploration of the short films, and two longer films, by puppet animator Kawamoto Kihachirō (1925–2010), with special attention to the influence of conventions from traditional Japanese theatre and doll ceremonials in Japan. Select themes in the films (such as weaving, archery, transformation, union between souls) are highlighted, leading to a longer discussion of two Kawamoto films: Dōjōji (1976) and Shisha no sho/The Book of the Dead (2005). The article also offers a journey through the exhibition galleries of the Kawamoto Kihachirō Puppet Museum in Iida City, Nagano prefecture.

KEYWORDS

puppet animation
ningyō
dolls in rituals
the sacred on screen
Japanese traditional
theatre
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'Ningyō wa ikite iru!' 'The puppets are living!'

This message can be heard in Iida City in Nagano prefecture where the late puppet animator Kawamoto Kihachirō (1925–2010) decided to build his Puppet Museum. There are signs of puppets everywhere in Iida City – in the train and bus stations, on the sidewalks, in shop windows. As spring approaches, the mountain light cleanses a spirit tired after a harsh winter. Since the residents there have grown up with puppets and dolls, the miniature figures feel right at home in that clear mountain air.

1. Some portions of this article were presented at the Association of Asian Performances Conference in Chicago, August 2011. Unless attributed to a publication, the quotes from Kawamoto Kihachirō were from a series of videos I was allowed to watch as a private screening

at the Kawamoto Kihachirō Puppetry Museum (none of which is available with subtitles). All translations are mine, with the assistance of Kishi Yoshiko.

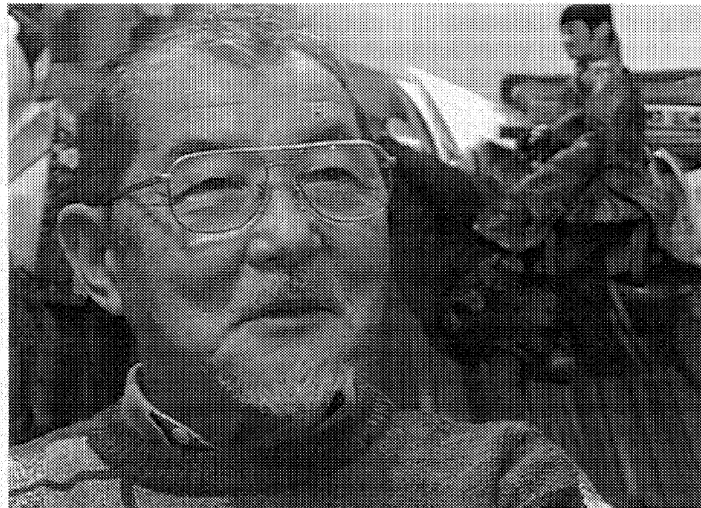


Figure 1: Kawamoto Kihachirō amid some of his creations

I have always preferred shadow puppetry to any more ‘lifelike’ puppetry form, and yet the puppet animation of Kawamoto Kihachirō drew me. Alas, I waited too long to meet him personally, but I was able to spend three days in his museum in February 2011 gathering materials, viewing rare videos and just getting to know his creations better. The result is this homage that highlights some recurrent themes in his work and looks at the influence of *Noh* and bunraku conventions. I will also take some side trips into a consideration of the nature of the puppet, and an overview of Kawamoto-sensei’s career. This lyric essay is intended to supplement the overviews of the film-maker’s work by Jasper Sharp, Satō Tadao, Yokota Masao, among others.

Kawamoto’s painstakingly beautiful work has not received the attention worldwide that it deserves. Fortunately, in 2008 Kino Films produced a DVD collection of Kawamoto’s short films (*The Exquisite Short Films of Kihachiro Kawamoto*) and another DVD just of his final film, *Shisha no sho/The Book of the Dead* (2005), both with English subtitles. In his review of the first Kino DVD (and drawing on the title), Tim Lucas writes ‘The stories Kawamoto chooses to tell are ... *exquisitely* meditative, spiritual without being humourless, and oblique in ways that resonate rather than frustrate’ (2008: 88, emphasis in original). Unfortunately, the former fails to include the extraordinary *Fusha no sha/To Shoot without Shooting* (1988), and the latter does not include the informative ‘Making Of’ documentary available (without subtitles) on the Japanese DVD. The US version of *The Book of the Dead* substitutes an English-language voice-over for the Japanese voice-over of veteran actress Kishida Kyōko in one of her last contributions to a film before her death. In addition to those sources, there is also a complete laser-disc collection of Kawamoto films produced by Geneon Universal Entertainment, Japan (2007).

The English word ‘doll’ implies something cute, more appropriate for child’s play than for participants in epics and profound tales of spirituality and loss. In his *Midnight Eye* interview with Jasper Sharp, Kawamoto said: ‘dolls are children’s toys, or things you dress up and display. Puppets, or marionettes, are things that act. This is a crucial difference’ (2004). As I experienced them in the Iida museum, Kawamoto’s creations were dolls. In motion in the films, they are puppets. For those who might want to complain about the dual

translation, please recall that the actual word is *ningyō* – all else is just a translation with all the inadequacies of nuance a translation implies.

Expertly crafted, the bodies of Kawamoto's dolls miraculously *seem* to have muscles that flex and are ready to move them forward. We adjust our perspective, but not in the same way we might with bunraku puppets. If we have truly entered into the performance, we cry when a bunraku puppet dies, just as we marvel when one of Kawamoto's creations achieves enlightenment. Like the hermit Kamo no Chōmei of the thirteenth-century narrative *Hōjōki/Account of My Hut*, Kawamoto was both drawn to the Buddhist ideal of non-attachment and also charmingly attached to his own creations.

Kawamoto located one extraordinary aspect of a *ningyō*'s power of expression in the *kudoki* (exposition by gestures) and was aware that puppets/dolls can project profound expressions (*fukai hyōgen ga dekiru*). This mirrors my uncanny feeling upon watching bunraku performances that the puppeteers are restraining the puppets rather than the other way around. Kawamoto reported that, originally, he had liked the *kimari* (poses) of the bunraku puppets but not the transitions, which he found too undefined and pliant (*funya funya*). This changed over time to the point where he would watch bunraku performances completely entranced. Sensitively crafted puppets can do almost anything, including dream sequences and even symbolic lovemaking scenes (see Kawamoto's *Ibarahime matawa Nemurihime/Briar Rose or the Sleeping Beauty*, 1990, if you do not believe me). Of course, I am not talking about Barbies, in which thousands of identical plastic dolls are produced en masse. Nor am I referring to horror films in which dolls come threateningly to life.

In his forward to a study of the work of pioneer puppet animator Ray Harryhausen, animation director Randall William Cook writes: '... since the stop-motion animator lives such a lone wolf existence, it's no wonder that some of the art's most significant figures are unsung' (Harryhausen and Dalton 2008: 6). As described by Peter Lord (co-founder of Aardman Animations studio), stop-motion animation is 'a form of film-making which refuses to be mass produced [...] a unique blending of sculpture and performance', adding that this kind of animation has 'never been a *crowded* profession' (Harryhausen and Dalton 2008: 9, emphasis in original). In Europe (dating all the way back to Méliés), such films tend to be called puppet or model animation, and in the US stop-motion animation.

As rather long 'shorts' (averaging nineteen minutes) and short feature-length films (averaging 70 minutes), Kawamoto Kihachirō's *ningyō* animation films defy easy categories. Although he produced only a limited number of completed films on a miniature stage, the resonance of his work is expansive. I wanted to explore in more detail what it might mean to have (in Kawamoto-sensei's words) '*ningyō no tame no monogatari*' / a tale for a puppet/doll. I learned that, when the director would read a story, he would ask himself if a *ningyō*'s face appeared before him (*ukande kuru*). As an example of a story in which only a human face appeared to him, he cited *Gone With the Wind*. In contrast, he cited his film *The Book of the Dead* as impossible (*muri*) for human actors.

Still, I wondered – how can a stop-motion animation figure express such intense emotion, such graceful movements? How can her hair be tossed by the wind as she dances outside? How can a male doll express desire through his eyes and the powerful expanse of his chest? To hear of these moments in words is surely to inspire disbelief. Is it all in the performance with its expressive lighting and evocative sets? In the museum, the dolls with their special poses and groupings are extremely powerful in themselves. They house

movement within their draped bodies, and especially within their carved faces. How this is accomplished can be seen in part in the 'Making Of' documentaries on the Japanese DVDs, but the whole mystery evades explanation, as even a master like Kawamoto-*sensei* repeatedly pointed out in his interviews and writings.

To begin this exploration, let's enter into the museum.

THE MUSEUM

The Kawamoto Kihachirō Puppet Museum (Kawamoto Kihachirō Ningyō Bijutsukan) opened on 25 March 2007, in Iida City (Nagano prefecture). Visitors enter after climbing a tall flight of stairs where they see an automatic door on the left and expect to enter immediately into the building. Instead they find themselves in an interim space, facing another set of curved automatic doors. Disorienting? Yes, a little. But later, upon reflection, I realized that this interim space allows us to put everyday concerns and everyday logic behind us. We enter into a different world – not necessarily the one we expected to find.

The 'greeter' in the entrance alcove is a large doll of Kōme (Chu-ko Liang), made especially for that space. (The one who appeared in the NHK [Japan Broadcasting Association] live-action puppet show *Sangokushi/Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (1982–1984) is with his cohorts on display in the exhibit hall.) In another small room for greeting guests (and for private video screenings), staff members have placed the director's favourite sweets before a smiling photograph of Kawamoto-*sensei*. They speak of him with affection and respect as if he were still a part of their lives. In his honour, we ate his favourite *wagashi* (Japanese decorative pastry, an extremely sweet variety indeed!).

The exhibit hall on the second floor begins with another disorienting effect. Unless other visitors are already in the hall, a motion detector ensures that the solitary person will enter in complete darkness. Suddenly a series of glass cases – each one a home for an impressive doll, or group of smaller dolls – reveals itself. The exquisite array of colours and the powerful poses



Figure 2: Kōme (Chu-ko Liang) from the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*Sangokushi*) television series.

are overwhelming; in fact, some children have been so frightened they have refused to enter the hall.

I was fortunate to be escorted into the spacious storage area where dolls at rest are placed on shelves with *washi* (handmade paper) and cloth over their heads and hands. I saw the doll of Rihaku for the Swedish commercial advertising Absolut Vodka that Kawamoto had designed. Although the doll looks large on-screen, I was surprised how small it really is (30 centimetres) as it leans drunkenly backwards, clutching a cup and gourd. Visiting Russian animator Yuri Norstein made that particular pose, one which Kawamoto-*sensei* commented he himself could not have conceived. I also held the actual doll for Katada Hoju, the honest leader of the village who helps Rennyō in his struggles, in the film *Rennyō to sono haha/Rennyō and his Mother* (1981). This small figure projected an amazing sense of integrity and steadfastness. The 93-minute *Rennyō and his Mother* features music by Takemitsu Tōru, voice-over by the great actor Mikuni Rentarō, among others, and script by director/screenwriter Shindō Kaneto (based on the fictionalized novel by Hirai Kiyotaka). It is a tale of the sadness and destruction brought on by societal divisions, and about one brave man who teaches equality among people. The actual Rennyō Shonin (1415–1499) was associated with the revival of the Honganji school of Buddhism. The backgrounds of the film mix *emakimono*/picture scroll effects with live-action location shots in such places as Otani Honganji, Miidera and Lake Biwa. Unfortunately, this film is not available commercially anywhere – I was fortunate to have had a private screening of it.

Hanging on one of the inner walls of the main gallery is a puppet with no costume in order to illustrate the poles and levers used for manipulation of the puppets for the television series. This Chinese soldier from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* shows visitors to the museum how the arms, legs and neck move. Many of the puppet operators in Kawamoto's two NHK series (*Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Heike Monogatari/Tale of the Heike*, 1993–1994) were women, so the animators were aware that the dolls could not be too heavy because they were sometimes held aloft for long periods. The heaviest of the *Heike Monogatari* dolls (e.g. that of the great warrior Benkei) weighs five kilos, with the average weight being two kilos. Unlike the stop-motion animation of Kawamoto's art films, these hand-held puppets tend to move in a slightly jerky fashion, though they can also be very engaging.

The costumes in all of Kawamoto's creations, at their oldest, are from materials from the Edo/Tokugawa period (1603–1867), even if the story is set in an earlier period. It is no longer possible to get materials from the Heian period (794–1185) or subsequent feudal periods for such a purpose. Kawamoto-*sensei* seemed most comfortable working with *obi*/kimono sash fabrics from Japan. He even used them for the Chinese tale *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and he brought them with him to the Czech Republic when he filmed *Briar Rose* there.

Photographs of the construction and filming process grace the museum's wall. From these photographs, we can learn about the ups and downs in this pioneering animator's life.

BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

The young Kihachirō's interest in dolls was sparked by his grandmother's skill in making them from *washi*, and he made his first doll at the age of 4. As he grew up, he continued to lean towards the arts and, in 1944, he graduated

with a degree in architecture from Yokohama National University. He recalled fondly the free thinking (*jiyūshugiteki na kangaekata*) of his architecture professor, who had been trained in Paris (Akagawa 2008: 186). For the last year of WWII, he was in the military but was stationed in Japan (where he witnessed the fire raids on Tokyo).

In 1946 Kawamoto began work in art direction at Tōhō studio (then the studio of such luminaries as Kurosawa Akira, Kinugasa Teinosuke, Toyoda Shiro and Naruse Mikio), thanks to an introduction by a former classmate, Muraki Yoshirō (who went on to work as an art director on Kurosawa films). Although Kawamoto never worked with Kurosawa, he assisted such directors as Kinugasa, Goshō Heinosuke, Naruse, Yamamoto Satsuo and Ichikawa Kon. With the labour disputes at Tōhō, Kawamoto lost his job in 1950. From 1953, he trained with Mochinaga Tadahito, the Japanese father of stop-motion animation. Along with publisher Iizawa Tadasu, Kawamoto made puppets for photos in storybooks for children and also for television commercials. Some of his earlier dolls are those of the Slavic witch figure Baba Yaga, French-style dolls and dolls of popular movie stars like Audrey Hepburn. Although he made one puppet animation episode about the Silk Road for an NHK programme, he did have a dream of making a whole series someday and he actually wrote a script for it that would use puppets and CGI. 'But I would need 50 more years ...' he commented, with a sad smile.

In this way, Kawamoto initially made a living producing stop-motion animation commercials and educational television series for children (including proceeds from products with images of the puppets he had created for television). In 1958, he and Iizawa co-founded Shima Production Company, but they ended up mostly working for television commercials. This situation frustrated the creative Kawamoto.

In 1948, at age 23, Kawamoto's attention had been caught by a viewing of *Cisaruv slavík/The Emperor's Nightingale* (1949) by Czech director Jirí Trnka (1912–1968). At the age of 38, Kawamoto made the unprecedented decision to uproot himself and go to Prague to study with that master. This was Kawamoto's first trip abroad. The year was 1963 and Japanese people could only take a little money out of the country for a sojourn overseas. Kawamoto pretended to be a journalist in order to get a visa. The only language in common he and Trnka had was French, but they shared the language of their artistry. From this experience, Kawamoto became very sure that puppet animation was his *sekai*/his world or chosen career.

When he arrived in Czechoslovakia, Trnka was busy with a project and made Kawamoto wait one month before admitting him into his atelier. One can only imagine the spectrum of emotions the fledgling traveller experienced during that month – a recollection he later put to screen in his twelve-minute short film *Tabi/The Trip* (1973). *Tabi* departs from the puppet animation milieu to enter the world of drawn animation. It expresses Kawamoto's memories of disorientation on living abroad, and also his dismay about the 1968 Soviet invasion of Poland. *Tabi* is explained by Kawamoto as being based on the Buddhist precepts of the 'eight sufferings' (which include both physical and mental sufferings).

Kawamoto recalls Trnka as a man with large hands who spoke little. His first question to Trnka was: 'What is a puppet?'. The 52-year-old Czech animator's reply was that a puppet is not a substitute for a human being. Japanese people were rare in Eastern Europe at that time, and the Trnka Studio staff was so intrigued by the dragon tattoos Kawamoto had on his back that they made a short film of them (!) At the time he first went to Czechoslovakia,

Kawamoto recalled that there were still lamplighters illuminating the streets. The Japanese director stayed twenty months in Prague until his money ran out. (He subsequently returned to Prague to place a rose on Trnka's grave and later to work with Trnka studio animators on the film *Briar Rose*.)

Kawamoto's return to Japan after his formative stay in Czechoslovakia was particularly discouraging for him because he was again relegated to doing commercials. At the age of 43, he was able to make his first short (fourteen minute) animated film *Hanaori/The Breaking of Branches is Forbidden* (1968) based on a scenario he had written while in Czechoslovakia. The film was shot in 16mm with no dialogue. This was the beginning of an alteration in Kawamoto's career between more commercial work and concentration on his unique art films.

In 1988 Kawamoto won the Winsor McCay Award (for lifetime achievement) at the Annie Awards, and in 1995 he received the prestigious Order of the Rising Sun. He received the Noburō Ōfuji Award for excellence and innovation in animation five times (plus once more for the omnibus film *Fuyu no hi/A Winter's Day* [2003]). From 1989, he was the director of the Japan Animation Association (JAA), following the illustrious Tezuka Osamu in that role. In addition to his film work, Kawamoto's puppets have made appearances on *omikoshi* (portable festival shrines) and even in a stage show entitled *Kawamoto Kihachirō no sekai/Kawamoto Kihachirō's World* (1999). Along with his more private creative work, Kawamoto was also a fine educator and he offered workshops for students where they could build their own dolls and animate them.

Kawamoto's subsequent travels abroad included a visit to Isfahan, Iran, to participate in a festival of films for adolescents. Retrospectives of his work have been held at the Karlovy Vary Film Festival (2005) in the Czech Republic; at the University Art Museum in Berkeley (2006); and a 2008 British touring retrospective (*Kawamoto the Puppet Master: Demons, Poets and Priests*), organized by Jasper Sharp. Among the awards his films have received abroad are: the Grand Prix at the 1982 Varna Festival (Bulgaria) for *Kataku/House of Flames* (1979) and the Grand Prix at the China International Cartoon and Digital Art Festival for *The Book of the Dead*. Upon his return to Trnka's country in 1998 at age 73, Kawamoto found electric lights in Prague and the Trnka studio space hosting a restaurant and movie theatre. (A television documentary records this return visit.)

Kawamoto Kihachirō died suddenly at age 85, following a bout with pneumonia. In total he created ten short works and two feature-length films: *Renmyō and his Mother* and *The Book of the Dead* (although only the latter was completely his creation). Kawamoto's face had a cherubic aspect but, when he was working on his films, he could be very demanding. To move figures frame-by-frame, and to stop each time to photograph them in precise lighting, requires the patience of a saint. I wasn't surprised to hear that he was an expert practitioner of Tai Chi.

To continue our investigation – what might it mean to animate a *ningyō*?

THE NATURE OF PUPPETS/DOLLS (WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON JAPAN)

Puppets inspire a subtle blend of memory and anticipation. Throughout history, puppets have played many roles – as entertainment, to transmit legends, cure illness, as an invocation to the gods, to teach religious doctrine,

offer philosophical enquiry and even (in some contemporary times) to deliver public service messages, foster political activism and present avant-garde performances. Many people do not realize that there are a variety of types of puppets: hand (as in Taiwan or England), rod (as in Japan), shadow (as in Indonesia, Turkey and Greece), to name a few. Puppets can be dangled from strings, held like gloves on hands or their shadows can be cast against a screen. Constructed of felt, carved out of wood or leather, or even just gathered with the corners of a handkerchief, puppets draw us into a special world. There is no question that viewing a puppet-animation film requires imagination on the part of the audience, a kind of double vision. Theatre historian Steve Tillis explains that the audience sees the puppet two ways at once – ‘as a perceived object and as an imagined life’ (1992: 7).

As historian of religions Jane Marie Law reminds, in Japan traditionally,

effigies and body substitutes of different types ... have been used to guard tombs, purify the emperor, imitate sexual union ... instill fecundity in rice seedlings and fields, ensure safe pregnancies and childbirth, protect tiny infants and growing children by becoming surrogates for their illnesses, remove pollution from both bodies and homes, ward off plagues, and act as spirit vessels for deities summoned from beyond the human realm.

(1995: 256)

She also notes the ‘mixture of fascination, awe and dread’ with which those figures have been received.

In Japan there is a saying that *teashi ga aru mono ni, tamashī ga aru*/there is a soul in an entity that has arms and legs. *Ningyō kuyō* is a doll ceremony where worn-out dolls are brought to a temple, prayed over and then burned. In ancient times, Japanese *haniwa* dolls were buried to serve the dead, and Japanese people used to release a doll into an ocean or river as a kind of *migawari* (substitute body) to pray for the health and safety of one’s child. As the curator of a special doll exhibition in the Hikone Castle Museum pointed out to me, in early periods, dolls were conceived of as capable of housing one’s illness and were thus sent down the flow of a river or ocean (*nagare*) as a kind of *migawari*.

Hina Matsuri (3 March) is a special festival in Japan in which *hina ningyō* are dressed in Heian period costumes and are arranged on tiers, reenacting court scenes. (See the second dream in *Yume/Akira Kurosawa’s Dreams* [1990] for images of those displays.) I was in Japan during the Hina Matsuri of 2011, and was able to visit special displays of dolls dating back to the early Edo period, in various sites in Shiga prefecture, and in Hōkyōji (nicknamed ‘*Ningyō-dera*’/‘doll temple’) in Kyoto. In the ancient dolls, we can sense the traces of past generations, with their elegant poses, and rich dyes darkening with the years. Every October, a memorial service dating back to the fourteenth century is held in Hōkyōji for no-longer-active dolls.

With these kinds of traditions behind him, who did Kawamoto use as models for his dolls? Not human beings – the dolls would end up, in his words, as ‘clumsy actors’ (*heta na yakusha*). Instead he used bunraku puppet character types (e.g. the *waka otoko*/young man, *baba*/grandmother) and added individual characteristics to them. Ray Harryhausen spoke of ‘foam rubber actors’ and Kawamoto referred to them as *shibai o suru ningyō*/puppets/dolls who perform. The process was not always a smooth one. ‘For Kōme, I had to make

four different heads before I got it right', Kawamoto reported. 'Finally there was one where I heard a voice saying: 'I am Kōme' (*watashi wa Kōme da*). The director calls this process mystical (*shinpiteki*), beyond any easy explanation. I wonder how many CGI artists would use that same term? Kawamoto's puppet animation seems both familiar and strange at the same time. His creations are personalities, both confined and expansive. If at first the puppets might seem a means towards an end, the careful attention given to them by Kawamoto and his staff soon reveals another dimension. In a letter to the Japanese animator, Trnka wrote of puppets as transcending the boundaries of nationality, skin, religion, race. For Kawamoto, puppets were a connecting presence (*tsunagu sonzai*) between the divine and the human. As Kawamoto asserted: 'When a *ningyō* animation fails, many people blame it on the puppet. But actually this is not the puppet's responsibility. It's the responsibility of the artist who made a work that didn't correspond (*awaseru*) with the puppet' (Akagawa 2008: 191).

Kawamoto's view of molding puppets resembled that of Renaissance sculptor Michelangelo towards his own creations – drawing the figure out from the foundational material. Kawamoto waited to see what the dolls reveal (*mukō o matte kuru*), until '*kanjō ga bakuhatsu suru*'/'the feeling wells up'. This helped him understand the role as revealed to him. His approach to his films was thus that of a hands-on craftsman, with less attention to the commercial aspects. He and his staff made all aspects of the dolls rather than buying any parts ready-made, although for something very specific like armour he relied on guest artists. The costumes are handmade; the miniature props are handmade; the wigs are made of silk. Each one is distinct and nothing is artificial. This is not a 'fast-food' approach; in fact, there is nothing fast at all about this art form except for an illusion of speed at times in the battle scenes. Kawamoto used cinematic effects such as the long shot, close-up, dissolve and swish pan to create a sense of movement. Each of the 24 frames per second of the film is measured out on a ruler, meaning that – on average – he and his staff could do about 200 frames in one day.

Eyeballs on the puppets can move left to right (a needle is inserted to give this movement). Mouths can open and close with the help of a stylus (but not like the mouths of bunraku puppets). Clothes, especially sleeves, shawls and long hems, can move, creating the sensation of muscles that move. Kawamoto tended to cover the papier maché heads of the puppets with kidskin to give a particularly porcelain-like appearance. Staff members told me that some children have expressed fear at the realistic wrinkles on the dolls of elderly figures, even more than fear of the soldiers with their swords raised ready to fight.

I had assumed that some parts of the puppets, for example the heads, wigs and costumes, would be recycled from one film to another, but this was not so. A doll created by Kawamoto and his staff was made for one particular role and that role alone. Kawamoto contrasted this to a human actor who could be in a samurai *jidaigeki*/historical drama one day, and an advertisement for whiskey the next. The puppets are not interchangeable nor are any of their parts interchangeable.

NOH THEATRE

While in Czechoslovakia, Kawamoto was entranced by western forms of puppet animation, but his mentor Trnka advised him to return to his Japanese roots, to the Noh and bunraku, for his base. As Sharp points out,

'The considerable craftsmanship and attention to detail involved in creating the characters and their costumes has its basis in the elaborate *hina ningyō* culture, while the sense of physicality and emotional expressiveness is much akin to that of bunraku theatre ...' (2007: 60).

The classical Noh theatre served not only as a source for several of the Kawamoto films but also as an inspiration for the expressive faces and gestures of the dolls themselves, and even for an attitude towards performance. The difficulty of orchestrating a character's movements in puppetry animation aligns it with the Noh. Each movement must be condensed and reveal multiple meanings. No movement can be wasted. Kawamoto's *ningyō* encapsulate and transcend personality, like a Noh mask (*Nōmen*). Like the *Nōmen*, the faces of Kawamoto's dolls entice and grab the light – '*ugokasu to hyōjō ga deru*'/'when you move it, the expression comes out'. Kawamoto did note that, in the Noh mask, the nose is different than the human nose, the eyes are also larger, and the area around his puppet's mouth differs from the same area on the human face (Akagawa 2008: 193).

The faces of the puppets in Kawamoto's first film *Hanaori* are modelled after *Mibu-kyōgen* masks. *Mibu-kyōgen*, which originated from the *nenbutsu* ceremony (reciting of the names of the Buddha), is generally performed as a silent entertainment. In addition to inspiration from the masks, *Hanaori* draws on the mime and on the Buddhist origins of that theatrical form. I was fortunate to see a performance of *Mibu-kyōgen* during the Setsubun festival in Mibu-dera in Kyoto. To an overflowing and curious audience, the performers presented mimed narratives in this rare theatrical form that mixes aspects of Noh drama (particularly the use of masks) with more casual folk and comic forms of traditional theatre. Even this brief glimpse was compelling. I could see why Kawamoto-*sensei* drew on those lively masks for the puppets for *Hanaori*. The apprentice monk's face is as round and white as the cherry blossoms that dangle enticingly above him. The trunk of the majestic cherry is as wizened as the face of the stern elder monk. Film historian Satō Tadao notes how Kawamoto's characters have a distinctly 'human-smelling humor' (*ningen kusai yūmorasu na mono*) (2005: 11).

Underlying the delightful comic touches, Kawamoto's art films draw on the sense of evanescence (*mujōkan*) conveyed by Noh. The pacing of the films based on Noh plays is the *jo-ha-kyū*/slow, medium-paced, fast of the plays themselves, although *The Book of the Dead* transcends even that attachment.

SELECTED THEMES

In addition to the Noh- and bunraku-inspired elements, there are certain recurring themes in Kawamoto's films that I noted after repeated viewings. This is not to imply that this list is an exhaustive one. Although many of his films draw on plays or novels, Kawamoto tended to add a unique spin to the stories, especially to the endings. I will highlight at least one film in each section below, and fill in some of the details of the storylines, with the hope that readers will then watch the entire film.

Weaving

Weaving is a central theme in several of Kawamoto's films, and the art designer must construct a miniature loom for its presentation. Weaving is found in *Shijin no shōgai/A Poet's Life* (1974), *To Shoot without Shooting* and *Briar Rose*.

Kawamoto's nineteen-minute rendition of the Abe Kōbō (1924–1993) story *A Poet's Life* presents a stark, sepia-coloured world of factory workers, strikes and the inspiration of poetry. The poet's mother works on her loom into the night, literally weaving her exhausted self into the wool. Later the son takes the wool to have a sweater made for him to protect him from the fierce winter. The sweater (of yarns incorporating his mother) is a disturbing red, in contrast to the crystal white snowflakes. The poet rouses his fellow workers to demand better conditions. As this brief description indicates, this story partakes both of surrealism and Marxist philosophy. *A Poet's Life* employs the rare technique (for Kawamoto animation) of *kirigami*/cut paper. The director was aware that, as he put it, 'puppets don't do well with such realistic stories'. The dialogue came from the Abe Kōbō tale without any additional words. For Kawamoto, the story evoked his memories of the immediate post-war period in Japan – a time he found less affluent economically but more affluent spiritually than that of contemporary Japan. Despite how this film has frequently been received by critics, Kawamoto himself did not consider it a political tale. According to the director, it is 'a poem one can see with one's eyes' with the addition of music and sounds.

Another example of the weaving theme can be found in the 22-minute *Briar Rose*. Kishida Kyōko's adaptation of the Sleeping Beauty tale for adults helped link that iconic actress with Kawamoto's work. In the museum, several lovely photos of this diminutive star grace the walls. In her writings on the film, Kishida noticed a connecting thread between *Dōjōji* (1976) and *Briar Rose* – how a woman immerses herself (*hitasura ni*) in thoughts about one man. Mysteriously, the daughter in *Briar Rose* does not prick herself on the spindle as prophesized.

In the Kishida adaptation, the daughter, age 15, discovers her late mother's journal from the same age. In this decidedly Freudian rendition of the fairy tale, the mother and daughter live parallel lives, and the daughter even briefly becomes the lover of her mother's former beau – the man the mother thought had been killed in war years earlier. Kawamoto employs the iris effect of silent-film days, as well as skewed camera angles and multiple dissolves to show moments of disorientation. He also cross-cuts between the mother's story (as revealed in her diary) and the present (the daughter's response).

Briar Rose was made with the collaboration of the Trnka Studios. Kawamoto noted the different way of walking and fighting in an Eastern European country, in comparison to Japan, and consulted with the Czech animators for this (and other) aspects. Visiting the Czech studio, actress Kishida Kyōko was amazed that the miniature trees in the sets truly created a forest, but she also reflected that the Japanese concept of forest (*mori*) might differ from the European one (Kishida in Kawamoto, 1994b: 87).

Some other examples of weaving in Kawamoto's films appear in *To Shoot without Shooting*, where the determined young archer Ji Chang concentrates on his wife's moving loom as a way to train his eyes so he will learn not to blink, and in *The Book of the Dead* where the heroine weaves a beautiful cloth from threads drawn from lotus flowers to cover the cold shoulders of her beloved.

Archery

Archery figures into each of Kawamoto's *jidaigeki* to some extent. His NHK television series, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Tale of the Heike* involved a large number of dolls – approximately 400 for *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*

and 500 for *Heike. Romance of the Three Kingdoms* ran for one and a half years on television, with each segment 45-minute long. The *Heike* segments were about twenty-minute long apiece. After the success of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* with its Chinese sources, Kawamoto decided he wanted to do a series on a Japanese tale. He considered the *Heike Monogatari* puppets *otonashi*/gentle, restrained in comparison to the *Romance* dolls. This film opens with an *emaki-mono* effect, with a voice-over reading the famous opening passage of the epic. It took ten years to complete the productions for the *Heike* series based on the *Shin Heike Monogatari* of Yoshikawa Eiji (1892–1962).

The battle scenes, such as the final battle by sea at Dan-no-ura, is replete with fierce fighting with bow and arrow, as is the scene of Benkei's death as he defends his lord. These *ningyō* offer interesting echoes of live-action films. For example, the tender regard between the puppets of Benkei and Yoshitsune draws to mind the performances by star actors in Kurosawa's *Tora no ō o fumu otokotachi*/*Men Who Tread on the Tiger's Tail* (1945).

Even in these long epics told through puppetry, the *kosei*/individual characteristics of the characters is clearly depicted by the puppets (with the help of identifying subtitles), and the human drama is compelling. (Perhaps 'human drama' is an odd word to use for puppet animation, but it seems to fit.)

An earlier Kawamoto film, *Oni/The Demon* (1973, eight minutes), with its lacquer-like black backdrops, shows two sons travelling through a beautifully painted golden forest, grasping their bow and arrows. The aged mother's transformation from an ill woman to a fierce avenging demon is powerfully depicted. This film is based on a tale from the *Konjaku monogatari*/*Anthology of Tales from the Past*, a 31-volume collection of stories written during the Heian period (794–1185), many of whose tales deal with karmic retribution.

To Shoot without Shooting was produced in conjunction with the Shanghai Animation Film Studio. In this allegorical tale, the young archer Ji Chang (following the minimal instructions of master archer Fei Wei) trains relentlessly, employing unorthodox methods until he overcomes all need to blink and until he can shoot a miniscule insect, magnifying it countless times just with the power of his eyes. Eventually, after nine years of living with Taoist



Figure 3: Benkei, the warrior monk who loyally guarded Minamoto no Yoshitsune in the Tale of the Heike (*Heike monogatari*).

elder Gan Ying on a remote mountaintop, he conquers even the desire to shoot an arrow at all. This 25-minute fable is based on the novel *Meijin-Den* by Nakajima Atsushi (1909–1942) and expresses the animator's hope that a peaceful spirit can become a path towards world peace and an end to the arms race. As Yokota Masao wrote (in terms of this film and *Rennyō*) 'Kawamoto Kihachirō was interested in shaping the face of Buddhahood' (2003: 39).

Water, wind, fire and transformation

Water, wind, fire and transformation play key roles in *Dōjōji* (*Dōjōji Temple*), *A Poet's Life*, *House of Flames* and *A Winter's Day*. In *House of Flames*, the maiden Unai Otome must choose between a poet and warrior who court her, and she finds herself unable to cause either one any pain. As a contest, the two men shoot the wing of one of a pair of mandarin ducks, causing its death. This adds to the woman's grief at having caused pain, even inadvertently, and she takes her own life. Rather mysteriously, this innocent maiden then lives in a torment of flames for 500 years until achieving some reprieve. The ending of the film immerses the *waki* (travelling priest) and us in a world enflamed.

The film is based on the Noh play *Motomezuka/The Sought-for Grave*, attributed to Motokiyo Kannami (1333–1384). It is a two-part dream play of the fourth group of Noh plays that takes place as winter is giving way to spring. The mound itself becomes central to the play, as the *waki* (a Buddhist priest) is travelling in search of the mound under which Unai is buried, and the *shite* (the ghost of the maiden Unai) is the only one who seems to know its location. Following Buddhist thought the chorus describes the world as 'a Burning House', a description that Kawamoto takes to heart in his animation of hell in the second half of the film. As the *shite* bemoans near the end of the Noh play:

When the darkness falls, shrouding all around/
Once again I now come back to the Burning House, where I've lived so
long/
But where is my dwelling place?

(Yasuda 1989: 389)



Figure 4: The maiden Unai Otome takes her own life in *House of Flames* (Kataku).

UNION BETWEEN SOULS

Like most cinematic forms, *ningyō anime* is a collaborative art form. In *A Winter's Day*, the 40-minute omnibus film supervised by Kawamoto, we find Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694), the famous travelling haiku poet, surrounded by his friends. This film involved 35 top independent animators from Japan, Russia, Belgium, France, the Czech Republic, Great Britain, Canada and the PRC – all responding with a one- to two-minute animation to a couplet of a *renku*/linked verse by the noted Edo-period poet. *A Winter's Day* is a lesson in the world of animation itself since it includes a plethora of forms: puppet animation, CGI, claymation, drawn animation and so on. Of special note are the opening drawn animation by Yuri Norstein (with Bashō's hat whimsically blown away in the breeze), and the *kage-e*/shadow puppet style of Canadian Co Hoederman's contribution. Some of the animated sequences transport Bashō's story to contemporary times, or even to surreal dimensions. Many, but not all, are comic. Particular exceptions include a terrifying earthquake scene and frozen winter scenes. (As Kawamoto points out in his interview on the DVD, this is 'asobi'/'play' but also serious.) Traditional references include images of rice planting, a rustic hut with thatched roof, *ohakamairi* (visiting a grave), threatening crows, *ukiyo-e*, a *Kannon-sama* (Goddess of Mercy) and a *pipa* (Chinese traditional musical instrument). There is even a brief nod to the ending of Kurosawa's *Kumonosu-jo/Throne of Blood* (1957) and to Botticelli's painting *Primavera (Allegory of Spring)*, ca. 1482). A female perspective in several of the short sequences, including graphic images of childbirth, expands how we usually view Bashō's writing.

In Kawamoto's contribution, the poet enters with a burst of light, shaking off petals from his straw hat. His startled disciples applaud and go out to the garden with him, seeing it anew. Kawamoto also contributed the last sequence, drawing on one of the more mysterious characters in the *Heike Monogatari*, and on the image of petals falling. This rare film was particularly meaningful to me because, just weeks before seeing it, I had visited Gichūji Temple in Zeze – Bashō's last resting place – and had seen on display what is believed to be Bashō's last walking cane.

Kawamoto's solidarity with his fellow animators was also apparent in the way he completed *Chūmon no ooi ryōriten/A Well-Ordered Restaurant* (1991, based on a story by Miyazawa Kenji), after the sudden death of his friend, animator Okamoto Tadanari (1932–1990). Kawamoto was asked by Okamoto's widow to complete the film. This surreal tale, told in shades of brown with touches of red, takes place in a dense forest hiding a mysterious castle in which seductive women turn into leopards. According to Kawamoto, a particularly difficult aspect was the fact that Okamoto had left no clear instructions about how he wanted to finish the film.

Now I would like to focus on ways two of Kawamoto's key films present themes of transformation, and union between souls.

FOCUS: DŌJŌJI (DŌJŌJI TEMPLE)

The Kawamoto version of this famous tale is closer to the Buddhist *setsuwa* (didactic tale) in the *Konjaku monogatari* version (see 'Oni' above). It also is close to the version depicted in the *Dōjōji engi emaki* (picture scroll), probably from the fourteenth century. In fact, the setting of this film contrasts a delicate *emaki* style with vividly constructed puppets. Kawamoto eliminates the aspect of the *shirabyōshi* dancer found in the Noh play – that intoxicating woman

who manages to get into the temple precinct after the head monk has ordered that no women be admitted.

Dōjōji, as we know it through the Noh play (attributed to Kanze Nobumitsu), offers no moment of salvation to the woman enamoured with a young monk who subsequently abandons her. In the earlier (and longer) version of the Noh play entitled *Kanemaki/Enwrapped in a Bell*, the woman is offered enlightenment by the close of the play, as her dancing for the dedication ceremony of the bell allows her to transcend her passion and gain release. No such option is left for the woman in the Noh play *Dōjōji*, or in Kawamoto Kihachirō's version. The animated film stresses the young widow's sense of disorientation and grief, but the ending is dreary – a jealous woman transformed into a dragon, a young monk fried to a crisp within a temple bell, and a dragon turned back into a woman who steps silently to her death by drowning. Here is death by fire and death by water. Where do our sympathies lie – with the clumsy, wide-eyed young priest or with the young woman alive to his untapped charms?

The Noh play reflects the aesthetic taste of the Muromachi/Momoyama period (1336–1603) as theatrical spectacle takes centre stage and Buddhist teachings move to the background. In the final moments of the play, the *shite*/protagonist takes a running leap through the curtain at the end of the *hashigakari* bridge (entrance and exit way to the stage). As Susan Klein comments in the conclusion of her detailed essay on this play, 'It seems that, by the late Muromachi period, producing dramatically satisfying theater more than justified depriving the woman of release from the pain of her passionate anger' (1991: 322).

Kawamoto's cinematic version of this story shows an extraordinary attention to light. The backgrounds are a delicately painted wash of villages and flowering trees, which are later replaced by lively and then overpowering waves. The scene of the two monks sleeping in the widow's house employs the *fukinuki yatai*/blown roof convention of *emakimono*. The light on her face reveals her change of emotions, especially her growing distress and anger at having been abandoned.



Figure 5: Distraught, the young woman in *Dōjōji* tries to offer her kimono to the boatman in exchange for a ride across the rough waters

In the roaring river, the woman forsaken, desperate, becomes a dragon unable to control her ferocity. One long horizontal form, this abandoned woman engulfs the men who have wronged her – drowning them or burning them alive as they try to hide. Mistress of fire, mistress of the deluge. Kawamoto seems to ask: where can she go in this world to find rest?

FOCUS: THE BOOK OF THE DEAD

Based on the novel of the same title by Orikuchi Shinobu (1887–1953), which was in turn inspired by the Noh play *Taema*, Kawamoto's 70-minute film uses 138 dolls and was filmed with a digital camera. After first reading the novel, it took Kawamoto 30 years to make the film. Eventually, it was completed thanks to literally hundreds of private contributors. As many as 400 people worked on the film, which took one year to complete. The Tama University of Fine Arts in Hachiōji lent an entire building for the year-long production process.

The story is set in the Nara period (710–784 AD) when Buddhism was just entering Japan from China, and specifically refers to the story of Chūjōhime, a young woman who became a nun at age 17. Like Chūjōhime, the protagonist of the film, Lady Iratsume, from the southern branch of the Fujiwara family, has become entranced by this new religion of Buddhism. Iratsume immerses herself, day after day, in copying out the Amida Sutra late into the night, by the light of an oil lamp. After Iratsume makes her 1000th copy of the Amida Sutra, she walks out of her house in a great storm, guided by some unseen force. Between the twin peaks of Mount Futakami, she has seen a glowing image of the Buddha. Her scarf billows out behind her like the sleeves of a celestial dancer. Her hat is blown off and her hair, usually combed austerely, flies free in the wind. Inexplicably, she is drawn to an area of a remote temple where women are forbidden. It turns out that the ghost of Prince Ōtsu has mistaken Iratsume for Mimimo no Tōji (Iratsume's ancestor), the empathetic woman he saw only once, just before he was unjustly killed. From the world of the dead, he longs for that woman and for a child to bear his name. In Japanese popular forms of Buddhism, there



Figure 6: Lady Iratsume in *The Book of the Dead* (Shisha no sho).



Figure 7: Kawamoto filming with Prince Ôtsu who has returned from death to claim his love.

is a belief that worldly attachments can cause a spirit to wander through Six Realms before gaining freedom from the cycles of death and rebirth (Gerstle 1986: 53–68).

To Iratsume, the image she sees is both a Buddha and a love (in Kawamoto's words: '*Buddha de ari, shikamo koibito de aru*'). Needless to say, Kawamoto and his staff had intense discussions about this aspect of the story. It is hard to imagine how difficult it would be to depict faith (and in this case, faith combined with eroticism) through a drama of puppets. For the making of Prince Ôtsu, Kawamoto himself took over the design and construction. He recognized how serious the representation of such profound emotions can be in puppet form. (The historic Ôtsu Miko lost his mother at a young age, and was himself killed at age 24. Several of his poems appear in the poetry collections *Kaifūsō* and *Manyōshū*.)

While there is a certain austerity to this tale, the characters are wonderfully varied, including Musa, the down-to-earth servant, and the vain 50-year-old general Yakomochi who fails to attract the attention of the woman of his choice. Although there was one body for Iratsume, Kawamoto and his staff completed five varieties of heads with different facial expressions.

The Book of the Dead is about mistaken identities that are really, at heart, true identities. It also shows the overlap between the sensual and the spiritual. Film critic Tim Lucas compares this film to Mizoguchi's classic *Ugetsu monogatari* (1953), Kieslowski's *Three Colours Red* (1994) and to earlier films like *Peter Ibbetson* (Henry Hathaway, 1935) and *Portrait of Jennie* (William Dieterle, 1948) as 'one of the great inexplicable love stories of the cinema' (Lucas 2008: 88). Many of these films contain an element of early death and a love between people meeting across different layers of time. *The Book of the Dead* shares with *Peter Ibbetson* a profound sense of mental telepathy between two lovers. Add to this list Apichatpong Weeethakul's *Loong Boonmee raleuk chat/Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010), and Manoel de Oliveira's *O estranho caso de Angélica/The Strange Case of Angelica* (2010), where a seamless entry of the dead into the lives of the living is presented as something both natural and disorienting.

In the Noh play *Taema* attributed to Zeami (c. 1363–1443), the *shite* and *waki* are actually the Amida Buddha and Kannon-sama (Goddess of Mercy) appearing as a nun and young girl. In the second part of the play, the chanting of Princess Chūjō forms a prayer:

We are beings from the past/
A nun and a girl/
We transformed ourselves and came in the dream you dream.
(Yasuda 1989: 451)

At the end of *The Book of the Dead*, Iratsume looks back with a tear as the others sit mesmerized by the splendour of the tapestry she has painted on a cloth woven of the finest lotus thread. Is she entering a blinding light, or love, or Death, or all of these?

In his *Midnight Eye* review of this film, Dean Bowman notes how *The Book of the Dead* 'warns against both an overt attachment to the divine or to the secular worlds' (2007). The director dedicated this remarkable film to innocent people killed in wars around the world. It truly exemplifies one of Kawamoto-sensei's main themes: *gedatsu*, a Buddhist ideal of liberation from earthly desire and pain.

TAEMA-DERA

Taema temple, the site of Iratsume's mysterious retreat, is located at a distance from central Nara, and even now one passes by long stretches of rice fields en route. The vistas out to the distant mountains are long ones, unbroken by high buildings. One can imagine Iratsume wandering there, far from the dusty city, to the temple compound nestled deep in the protecting mountains that turn a deep shade of purple in the late winter and offer up peonies in the spring.

Taema-dera houses the Taema Mandala (763), one of the oldest surviving mandalas in the world and a national treasure of Japan. According to legend, this square tapestry, which shows the world of *Gokuraku jōdo* (Western Paradise, Pure Land), was woven in a single night by Chūjōhime with the help of the Amida Buddha. A portion of the large Kamakura-period tapestry in the Main Hall (Hondo) is a wonder of symmetry and variation. In the film, it is this mandala that Iratsume paints on the special cloth. Taema-dera also houses the oldest large clay statue of the Buddha in Japan – older even than the huge bronze statue in Todaiji in Nara. Dating back to the Hakuho period (673–686), its broad peaceful features reflect a time far from the militaristic stance of the later feudal period. Taema-dera is the site of the ceremony called *Nerikuyo-eshiki*, which started in 1005. A total of 25 figures of the *Bosatsu*/Bodhisattva wearing masks and costumes reenact Chūjō-hime's progression to Paradise. The ceremony takes place annually at 4:00 p.m. on 14 May.

To say that a Buddhist temple offers a soothing presence is perhaps redundant, but as I walked slowly around the gardens and grounds of Taema-dera – first in a hail storm and then in sunshine – I felt at home in this unassuming, very ancient temple complex. I visited Taema-dera late in the morning of Friday, 11 March, and was travelling back towards Nara when, suddenly, there was an announcement that my train would run a little slower than usual because of an earthquake. I truly did not understand the magnitude of the catastrophe until hours later when I saw the images on television of the unimaginable destruction. And then came the confusing news of those

nuclear reactors, and of towers shaking in the air. In my mind I pictured the earthquake sequence in *A Winter's Day* and the ending of *House of Flames* where the priest enters a surrealistic world entirely encased in a chaotic red. With regret and concern, I left Japan one week later.

CONCLUDING NOTES

From a distance, it is harder to speak as assertively about the way the 'puppets are living' as I felt during those peaceful days in Iida City in February. Descending from the clear air of that gracious mountain town, I found myself again in a world of chain stores and of highly forgettable, replaceable objects. Compared to the pressing, anonymous crowds in large cities, each puppet/doll in the Kawamoto memorial museum was immediately distinctive. As Tim Lucas wrote in his *Sight and Sound* review: 'Kawamoto's characters may be unblinking but they are brimming with soul' (2008: 88).

In all of his films, Kawamoto explored the parameters of faith while never losing sight of the real humor and hardships of humanity. Film historian Satō Tadao notes how Kawamoto created an entire worldview by presenting, not only beauty, but also the mysterious elements that lie deep within that beauty – a mystery of which human existence is a part (Satō 2005: 10).

At the end of my last day at the Puppet Museum, I entered the main gallery alone. A thick darkness engulfed me, and then the lights came on and the dolls greeted me. Having just seen *A Winter's Day* on a small screen in the viewing room, I wanted to see the actual dolls of Bashō and his disciples. In his glass case, Bashō was teaching a wordless haiku before setting off on his journey. I could see my own shadow on the wall of the gallery. As I left, I bid farewell to the main figure of *House of Flames* in her elegant lilac and light green costume, the colours of sorrow.

I was reminded that miniatures are used in art for devotion, memorials, play, decoration. Does the miniature become an approachable world for us, or does it heighten our sense of unknowing? Or both? Does the restriction in size add to its power?

A life of stop-motion animation surely wasn't an easy path for Kawamoto-*sensei* but – with his sense of openness, dedication and artistry – he managed to escape the factories of the world to produce something both lyrical and dynamic. He went deeply into his own national traditions but also moved outside of the Japanese milieu to bring a Chinese epic and a European folk tale to life.

Ningyō wa ikite iru. How to convey this deeper meaning? It goes beyond attributing an expressiveness to a puppet's face and posture. When pressed by an interviewer as to whether the *ningyō* represented a family to him, or were like children to him, Kawamoto immediately answered 'no'. If pressed further, he might speak of them as ideals (*risō*), but you could see in his face that this explanation did not satisfy him. Instead, he preferred to refer to them as something profound and hard-to-grasp (*oku no fukai, tsukamudokoro no nai mono*).

Ningyō no awaresa/the pathos of puppets/dolls. Dolls nestled in the mountains. Shadows cast by *ningyō*. To some it might seem rather silly for grown men and women to care so much about puppets. Silently, these miniature figures teach us with their evocative poses and mysterious smiles. Like human actors, they wait patiently, surrounded by lights, cameras and sets. Suddenly we are reminded that we are not absolute rulers of all we survey. As animator Okada Emiko wrote, there are aspects of the stories in Kawamoto Kihachirō's films that escape our attempts to understand them through logic alone (2003: 222).

Kawamoto cited two of the major problems in his art: (1) how the puppets are perceived and (2) if they are truly living or not. 'Just because a puppet is moving, it doesn't mean it's living' he reminded. And his eyes filled with tears momentarily in an interview when talking of dying puppets. Are the puppets living because we feel affection towards them – love and gratitude, a sense of wonder – or are they living because we feel sad when our role in their lives is finished, when we realize we will never see them in their unique role again? In Kawamoto-*sensei's* words: '*mō nido to aenai*'/'We can't meet them again'. The *ningyō* are unique, not interchangeable. The same could be said about the animator himself.

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