



One-panel woodblock print by Utagawa Toyokuni III (1786–1864). Morita-za, Edo, tenth month 1857. The artist has combined what were probably two separate scenes from the dance finale, *Bountiful Brushwork*, *Folk Pictures from Ōtsu* (Sai-shitsue no Ōtsu-e). The "Wisteria Maiden" (Nakamura Fuku-suke I), trailing a sprig of flowers over her shoulder, is dressed in a sensuous, long-sleeved kimono decorated with wisteria vines and blossoms and a black obi into which are woven the actor's family crests (two small drums, reverse peony, and crossed scrolls). Beside her, an actor, possibly Bandō Mitsugorō VI, dressed and made up as a "monkey," clutches a "gourd" while riding on a "catfish," three images that were popular in Ōtsu-style folk paintings. (Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum of Waseda University)

The Wisteria Maiden
Fuji Musume

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TRANSLATED BY LEONARD C. PRONKO



The Wisteria Maiden

INTRODUCTION

The Wisteria Maiden was originally one of five dances performed one after the other in rapid sequence by the same dancer who effected multiple quick changes of costume, wig, and makeup. These transformation dances (*hengemono*) were very popular in nineteenth-century kabuki and exhibited the virtuosity of the actor-dancers. The entire dance from which *Wisteria Maiden* derives was known as *Ôtsu of the Ever-Returning Farewells* (Kacsu Gaesu Nagori no Ôtsu). It featured characters that appeared in the popular, naive folk pictures known as *Ôtsu-e* (Ôtsu pictures), which were sold in the Ôtsu region to tourists visiting the area around Lake Biwa. In the original dance, Seki Sanjūrō II (1786–1839) performed as five different characters: the wisteria maiden, the god of calligraphy, a footman (*yakko*), a boatman, and a blind man. The only dance that has survived is the first, *Wisteria Maiden*.

The original dance is short and contains the traditional sections: "entrance dance" (*de*), "narrative" (*monogatari*), "lamentation" (*kudoki*), "rhythmic finale" (*odoriji*), and "ultimate finale" or "scattering" (*chirashi*). In 1854, the actor Nakamura Nakazō III (1800–1886) introduced after the lamentation section a short, popular boatman's song known as "Itako Dejima" (a place name). It became traditional to include this section, or at least portions of it, in the performance until 1937, when Onoe Kikugorō VI (1885–1949), known as "the god of the dance," changed the entire format of *Wisteria Maiden*. It is not known in exactly what setting the first dance was performed; perhaps it was in front of panels representing the five Ôtsu pictures, which came alive as the actor stepped out of the panels to dance. Kikugorō changed the decor to the brilliant one used today: the trunk of a pine tree from which bright purple wisteria blossoms fall in dazzling profusion. He also replaced the "Itako Dejima" section with a newly composed "Fuji Ondo" (Wisteria Dance), based on a folk song and dance. It stresses the more mature, experienced, womanly feelings of the wisteria maiden and is danced twice, the second time in slightly inebriated fashion, since during the first round the maiden has partaken of sake. The skill of the dancer is revealed in his ability to express drunkenness without vulgarity.

To dazzle the audience further, Kikugorō did not enter on the *hanamichi*, but was already onstage when the music began. The first bars of music are sung in a totally darkened auditorium, and just as the dancer is about to begin, the lights

are suddenly turned on at full intensity. Kikugoro also introduced a number of costume changes that take place behind the broad tree trunk, the dancer emerging several times in different kimono or with the top pulled down (*hadanagi*) to reveal different colors beneath.

Among variations on this popular piece are those that attempt to return to the original dance, garbing the performer in a kimono copied from the original *Oluse*. The choreography differs from one dance school to another. Indeed, some schools have a number of variations on specific sections: one sees the *kudoki*, for example, performed holding a hand towel (*tenugui*), or using the black lacquered hat as a prop, or empty-handed.

The lyrics of *Wisteria Maiden* are a tissue of allusions, esoteric references, and plays on words, thus making ready comprehension virtually impossible, even for the scholar. Because the meaning is somewhat tenuous, the movement patterns (*furi*) are often less realistic than those in more down-to-earth dances. Instead, they tend to suggest emotions, character, and attitudes in a general way. The lyrics pile meaning on meaning, referring, for example, to the "Eight Famous Views of Ōmi," since Ōtsu is in that region. All eight are named in the song, and each evokes for the classically trained observer a particular emotion: autumn moon at Ishiyama, for example, or night rain at Karasaki. But many of the names carry other meanings as well: Ishiyama (Rock Mountain) suggests the firmness of a vow; Awazu is the negative form of the verb *au*, to meet, and the word bell, associated with it, is a homonym for promise; Seta is also a word for deception. The place name Karasaki is an example of a *kakekotoba*, or pivot word, which has one meaning as the ending of one word cluster and a different meaning as the beginning of another: *utsu-semi no kara* means the sloughed-off shell of a cicada, but *kara* is also the first syllable of the place name Karasaki. In the "Fuji Ono" section, the phrase "Return is a forbidden word" implies that one would not want the bride to return to her parents' home. In the final section, skirt (*tsuna*) can also mean husband. These intricacies are explained here in order to avoid interrupting the flow of the lyrics.

The "entrance dance," which might most logically be performed on the *hana-michi*, is today performed almost invariably at stage center. Whereas in nineteenth-century performances the maiden's kimono was black with a pattern of bright wisteria blossoms, today's basic costume color is likely to be more vivid. Across her shoulder, the maiden carries a long branch of wisteria, which she holds in various positions. A liberal use of graceful feminine movements adds charm to the dance: the slip-step (*suberashi*), for example, or the characteristic three-part head movement (*mitsuburi*). During the entrance dance, the dancer must create a feeling of

dignity and spirituality in keeping with the spirit of the wisteria vine—at least this was Kikugorō's interpretation. It is only in later parts of the dance that the performer begins to embody the more coquettish aspects of a woman.

In the entrance dance there occurs a good example of the tortured rhetoric of the lyrics. As the dancer gazes at the branch, or sometimes points or beckons to it, the singer describes the "wisteria that writes 'I love you.'" The word "*itoshii*" in the lyric means "sweetheart" or "beloved." But also, if one writes the Japanese syllabary symbol for "i" ten ("*to*") times, each beneath the other, and then writes "*shi*" in a long, graceful swoop right down the middle, like a central vein, one has drawn a stylized wisteria vine.

The "narrative" actually contains no narrative characteristics, but it is so called in order to fill out all the requisite dance segments. The attenuated movement patterns may include looking off into the distance at the mountains, pointing with the branch, and hiding the face shyly. Frequently this segment is omitted.

The "lamentation" begins as the singer comments on man's fickleness. Using her hat, a towel, or her hands, the dancer may suggest looking into a mirror, the ringing of a bell (at the word "*Miidera*," a temple famous for its bell as well as for its associations with the classic ancient novel *The Tale of Genji* [Genji Monogatari]), the joining of lovers as she locks one finger to another or holds them side by side, and feelings of jealousy as she strikes at the absent lover. The reference to letters usually shows the maiden kneeling, mixing ink, wetting her brush (a finger or her hat ribbons), and writing, then offering the letter, often represented by the hat.

At this point either "*Itako Dejima*" or, more frequently today, "*Fuji Ondo*" is inserted. Either one strikes a nice balance between languor and strong rhythm and can be counted as part of the first "dance finale." Whichever one the dancer chooses, the usual prop is a fan. Some performers may opt for the original form, which includes neither of these sections and goes straight to the true *odoriji*, which is partly based on a folk song and, with its fast tempo and marked rhythms, offers a striking contrast to the sad and leisurely lamentation. Here, forgetting the faithlessness of the man, the lyrics sing erotically of the pleasure of being with one another. Needless to say, the lasciviousness of the lyrics is only vaguely suggested in the choreography; the most obvious moment represents sleep, with one hand curled near the ear as a pillow.

Finally, in the brief "scattering," which ends the performance, the maiden takes up her branch once more and gazes off into the twilight sky, attempting to follow the flight of the wild geese, symbolizing her sweetheart.

A dance appealing more to the connoisseur than to the uninitiated, *Wisteria*

Maiden is subtle, graceful, and full of exquisite traditional Japanese feminine feeling. One often hears audience remarks such as, "How pretty it was!" or "What a beautiful maiden he makes!" Beauty, however, is only the surface of such dances. To deserve masterwork status they must be performed with a depth of feeling expressing the underlying anguish of a woman's heart, dependent upon a man who, despite his protestations of love, is nonetheless faithless. This difficult dance calls for an understanding of life far beyond the experience of most young actors and requires a mingling of chastity with eroticism that tests the capabilities of even seasoned performers.

This translation is based on the text in Morisada Ichirō, *Nihon Buyō Kyōku-shūran*. Stage directions are based on a videotape with Onoc Kikugorō VII (b. 1942), choreography by Fujima Kanjūrō. I am indebted to Ogawa Shichirō and Tomono Takao for help in problematic areas of this translation.

CHARACTERS

WISTERIA MAIDEN, sometimes conceived of as the spirit of the wisteria vine
NAGAUTA, musical ensemble of singers, shamisen, drums, flute, and small gongs

(With the theatre in total darkness, the first line of the NAGAUTA music is sung.
This is the "introductory song" [okuta].)

NAGAUTA:

The light purple of the wisteria waves / resembles the ten-times / returning
flower of the pine.

(The lights come up suddenly to total brightness, and we see the WISTERIA MAIDEN standing at center, back to the audience, holding her wisteria branch over her shoulder. The stage is dominated by a huge pine tree from which hang purple wisteria blossoms. The singers and shamisen artists are seated downstage left, the percussionists and flute player downstage right. The MAIDEN begins her "entrance dance" [de].)

A hat to hide from people's glances, / lacquered hat, and with / a branch held neatly across her shoulder. / Deep purple, happily dyed / in the water of the waterway, / her happy emotions. / Wisteria that writes "I love you." / It can't be helped. / Here, here, my skirt askew.
(She turns toward the audience and gazes off into the distance. She kneels, her branch sweeping the floor, and moves gracefully while still bent low, the blossoms representing the flowing water of the waterway. She briefly embraces the wisteria,



Wearing a black kimono decorated with lavender wisteria flowers, the Wisteria Maiden (Nakamura Tokizō V) appears at the beginning of the dance posed beneath huge, trailing bunches of wisteria blossoms while carrying a branch of the flowers over her shoulder. One of the several *nagauta* singers kneels behind the actor. (Umemura Yutaka, Engeki Shuppansha)

almost caressing it with her right hand, while moving sideways in a graceful slip-step. She beckons toward the blossoms, then frames her face with the wisteria branch, and finally retreats behind the tree. There follows the "narrative" section [monogatari], usually omitted but included in this translation.)

Mirror Mountain reflects, / instead of other peoples' / weaknesses, my own / mirrored in the saltless sea, / a maiden's reflection, / oh, how shameful!

(Here commences the "lamentation" section [kudoki].)

What is hateful in a man's heart / is that, although / he promised by the gods never / to meet another woman, / he may be worshipping someone else. / Awazu and Middera's bells / recall promises / firm as Rock Mountain, but in truth, / empty as the shell / of a cicada that has flown. / I pine, waiting in the evening, / but he is indifferent, / cold as the snows of Mount Hira, / although he melts when near. / Ah, I am so jealous! / He truly deceived me. / I have sent letters in vain. / My heart is turning to resentment.

(The MAIDEN reappears from behind the tree, wearing the same kimono but holding the hat in her hand. She poses briefly among the low-hanging wisteria branches, then comes to center and beckons as though to her lover. She strokes the red ribbons of the hat, then holds them up to represent her and her lover, and ties them together. She makes a number of graceful hand movements, then cradles someone or something lovingly in her arms. She kneels and strokes gently the edge of her upright hat, rises and strikes provocatively at her lover with the ribbons, then dodges back and hides her face. She thinks of writing a letter, strikes her thigh resolutely, then kneels to rub the inkstone and, using the ribbon as a brush, writes a letter on the hat, which she proffers toward him as she rises. She hides her face behind the hat and poses, back to the audience, with the hat hanging by the ribbons over her right shoulder. Once again she goes behind the tree, and the instrumentalists play an extended interlude, beginning with the shamisen, then adding percussion. The "Fuyi Ono" described below, is performed to the following lyrics.)

Wisteria blossoms in clusters, / lovely colored and long. / Intending to cherish him, / I bought sake / and offered it to him. / Embracing my beloved, / just as the wisteria / twines round the pine. No matter what, / it's just like the name Togae: / return ten times. / "Return" is a forbidden word.

(A brief instrumental segment of ondo music is performed.)

Even though flowers aren't supposed / to talk, it's no good / pretending one doesn't know, / as they do in Nara. / Some like to hang from the pine, / some like to twine / round the pine. The relationship / of loving and being loved, / never apart, is evergreen. / Never leaving, always / together, you and I. /

What joy! What joy!

(When the MAIDEN emerges, she is clad in a pale lavender kimono with a wisteria pattern and a black obi also patterned with wisteria. She glances coquettishly from

among the long hanging wisteria branches, then, accompanied by rapid shamisen music, goes to left and bows, repeats the bow at right, and finally does a slower bow at center, eliciting audience applause. She now performs the "Wisteria Dance." The first half is a hand dance, featuring, at first, graceful poses with the hands and the sleeves, all to languorous music of shamisen, flutes, and drums. At the mention of sake, she mimes pouring sake from a bottle made of her sleeve; then she begins to drink from her other sleeve as if it were a cup, but pours it out without drinking. She walks slowly, obviously reacting to her lover's grasp. She puts out her hands to keep him from leaving, weeps at his leaving, dries her eyes with her sleeves, and weeps again. Then she performs what can be considered the *ondo* proper, a strongly rhythmized dance in which the accompaniment features a prominent use of bells. The movements are abstract and include a number of stamping and hand patterns of grace and complexity. Finally, as she turns upstage, she takes her fan into her right hand and begins the second "inebriated" part of the "Fuji Ondo." With the open fan, she mimes a window, opens it and glances out, nods to her lover, then closes the fan-window. She mimes lovers' quarrels and flirtations as he pulls her back by the sleeve. She fans herself, pours sake again from her sleeve, drinking it this time from a small cup symbolized by her partly opened fan. She raises the fan as though it were a knife and suggests she might cut off her raised little finger—a proof of love sometimes given in the pleasure quarters. Once again the true *ondo* music returns and she performs her abstract, rhythmic dance of stamps and hand patterns, but this time as though slightly drunk, since she has just taken a drink of sake. At the dance's end, she poses under the hanging wisteria, fanning herself coyly, then disappears once more behind the tree. The "rhythmic finale" [*odoriji*] begins.)

"If you're going to plant a pine, please / plant it in Arima Village." / Vows unchanging, she tucks up her skirt. / However much we are intertwined / one with the other, / we never get to sleep enough together. / Although we come early / to bed, we never get / sufficient time to sleep. / "I want to sleep with wisteria twined about me." / Ah, what shall I do, / what shall I do? My tiny pillow / is the pillow of his arms.

(The MAIDEN appears partly hidden by the tree trunk and poses, showing the red kimono that she now wears on top, having pulled down [*hadanugi*] the top part of her lavender kimono. She comes stage center and dances the *odoriji*, which is strongly rhythmized and rapid. The first line and the one about sleeping with wisteria twined about one are from folk songs. Some of the finale is made up of rhythmic slapping of the hands and stamping, and some of it is somewhat mimetic. The MAIDEN mimes, for example, putting on a bridal hat and gown and walking, then sleeping. She leans back and looks up at the pine tree; she lies down and beckons with her hand, then joins both hands in a gesture of entreaty or prayer. The "scattering" [*chirashi*] begins.)

In the misty glow of the evening sky, / the wild geese fly off reluctantly.
(As a bell announces the coming of evening, the MAIDEN goes to the base of the tree, where she retrieves the branch of wisteria with which she first appeared. She faces the audience and gracefully passes the branch behind her so that the blossoms fall over her left shoulder, and gazes up into the distance, thinking perhaps of her lover, symbolized by the wild geese. To the sound of the *ki*, the curtain slowly closes.)