

Note: In August of 1990, I traveled to Japan to attend a math conference in Sendai and the International Congress of Mathematicians in Kyoto. I wrote the following memoir, which covers the first ten days of my visit, in installments for some friends who lived in California.

A Japan Memoir, or
An Incentive to Study Science
(In Particular, Mathematics)

I. TOKYO, SENDAI, MATSUSHIMA.

(1):

I arrived at Ueno Station in downtown Tokyo at around 7 in the evening on August 10. I had planned to go to one of the tourist information offices and ask where I could find a capsule (or “cubicle”) hotel [more about this below!] to spend the night. But all the offices seemed to be closed. When I had been walking around the station—with my luggage—for 5 or 10 minutes, a Japanese man approached me and asked,

“Habla español?”

I replied:

“Si. Poco.”

(Two days were to pass before I noticed how surreal this encounter was.)

He explained to me that the tourist offices were all *cerrado* (closed). We walked around the station for a few minutes together, until we were approached by two young men—one American and one Japanese. The American explained what I was looking for to his Japanese friend, and with *their* help (they thought of asking a policeman), I found a *capsuru hoteru* just a half a block from the station. As they returned to the station, I bowed to them and said, for my first (but not last!) time in Japan, “Domo arigatoo gozaimashita.”

I walked up to the office on the second floor.

“Eigo-o hanashimasu ka?” I asked. [Do you speak English?]

The two clerks—a middle-aged couple—said, “Nihon-go?” [Japanese?]

“Sukoshii no nihongo-o hanashimasu.” [I speak a little Japanese.]

There was a quick conference. They decided to let me stay. [I would not have been out on the street if they had said no. There was a more expensive “business hotel” next door.] I took off my shoes and put on the slippers that were provided. I was given a key to a locker, where I put my shoes.

The man took me up to the 4th floor, where the “rooms” were. I had a locker, where I could hang my clothes and put my backpack (my big suitcase stayed down in the office). My room was a

capsule, roughly 3' by 3' by 7'. My feet were at the open end, where there was a counter-weighted shade which I could lock down from the inside. The capsule had its own light, a television (facing the closed end), a radio, and an alarm clock. It also had a clean bathrobe—called a *yukatta*—which I changed into immediately.

(Time-Life has a series called The Library of Nations. On page 120 of *Japan* there is a picture of a capsule hotel and men in yukattas. My hotel looked just like that.)

When I had paid for the room, I had been given a clip-board with a copy of my bill on it. Between my little bit of Japanese and his little bit of English, the man explained to me that the clipboard was my ticket to use the shower/bath upstairs.

If I'd been more adventurous, I could have had a genuine, communal Japanese bath that night. There were one or two shower stalls in the large (and very clean) "shower room," but mostly there were many stations where you were supposed to sit, soap up, and then rinse yourself off *completely*. After that you could get into the very hot (and soapless) water of the whirlpool bath (the whirlpool part is not traditional). I was extremely tired, so I just showered and went to bed. It was 8 or 9 pm.

I awoke around 2 am, unable to go back to sleep. I turned on the television, and saw the NHK news announcer signing off. When he was done he bowed to the camera. I couldn't figure out how to operate the station-select. I think that is the reason why this is the one time that I could *not* find a baseball game on Japanese TV.

I managed to go to sleep after a while. I got up around 6:30. When I had come in the night before, it had been raining, 81 degrees, and unspeakably humid. Outside, the rain had stopped, but it was already very warm and very humid. Japan—north and south—was the most humid place I have ever been to (this may be because I have never been to Houston). And the nighttime low might have been 72 degrees—once. I visited the seashore while I was in the north, and even there it was no better.

After much tiresome walking around (in Ueno Park, next to the station), I found a locker big enough to take my large suitcase. The JTB (Japan Travel Bureau) office had opened up, and they assured me that it would take no more than 20-30 minutes to get to a certain temple—Sengakuji—in southeastern Tokyo.

With the help of a very kind woman, I bought a subway ticket from one of the machines and, a few minutes later, was on my way to Sengakuji Temple.

I hear you ask, "Why Sengakuji Temple?" To answer that, I must tell you

THE TALE OF THE 47 RONIN

In 1701, a country nobleman named Asano was in Edo (Tokyo), where he was to take part in a ceremony at the Shogun's palace. He was supposed to ask the Shogun's chamberlain, a Lord Kira, for instructions concerning protocol, proper dress, etc. Asano either did not know or chose to ignore the fact that Kira expected to receive a large bribe for his advice. Because of this, Kira gave Asano incorrect information. Asano showed up dressed in the wrong kimono, and was humiliated. Asano thereupon drew his sword and slashed at Kira, wounding him on the forehead (but not killing him). It was a capital crime to draw one's weapon in the Shogun's palace, and Asano was ordered to commit *seppuku* (better known as *hara-kiri*). His property was confiscated and all of

his samurai immediately became *ronin* (masterless samurai¹).

These ronin were obliged by the law of *giri*, or duty, to commit seppuku along with their master. But 47 of them, led by Oishi, Asano's chief retainer, believed that this would not be sufficient. They had to avenge him.

Unfortunately, Kira was very watchful, and he lived in what amounted to a small fort. They had to get him to drop his guard. They did this by pretending to go to the dogs. For approximately a year, they frequented taverns and brothels, let their swords get rusty (very shameful for a samurai), and openly mocked at ideas of duty and honor. One man even sold his own wife into prostitution, to support his life of dissipation.

Then, one night in January of 1703, they struck. They attacked Kira's house². Kira at first escaped, but they traced him to an outbuilding. One of the ronin stuck in his sword to see whether anyone was inside. The sword came out clean. The sword had actually impaled Kira, but Kira had wiped the blood off on his kimono as it was withdrawn.

The ronin finally broke into the shed and pulled him out. He insisted that he wasn't Kira. Then one of the ronin lifted up the hair on Kira's forehead and revealed the scar from the wound. They told him to commit seppuku right there. He refused. So, with their master's sword—the one he had drawn in the palace—they cut off his head.

They then carried the sword, the head, and a letter to their master, to Asano's grave at Sengakuji Temple, where they laid them. (The letter survives to this day.) As they marched from Kira's house to Sengakuji, people came out of their houses and bowed down to them, praising them as true sons of Japan; as shining examples of the warrior spirit; as supreme samurai.

The Shogun was also very impressed, and he praised them in similar terms for their loyalty to their master. Nevertheless, they had carried out an unauthorized vendetta³, and were therefore obliged to commit seppuku; which they did. And all of them are buried with their master at Sengakuji Temple.

This is a story which every Japanese knows—to the same degree that every American knows who Babe Ruth was. The story of the 47 has been made into novels, plays, and movies, many times (Mizoguchi's *Chushingura* is based on it; actually, it's based on a play that's based on it). Yet it is hardly known at all outside Japan. I read, in more than one source, that if you wanted to understand anything about the Japanese, you had to know this story. Therefore I had to see Sengakuji.

I got off the subway. The guard who took my ticket stopped me at the barrier. Had I paid too little? No: I had paid too much, and (shock) he gave me change. Up the hill then, and into the temple—

¹ So, the samurai in *The Seven Samurai* are actually ronin. Nowadays, students who fail their university entrance exams—and so have wait a year to try again—are called ronin.

² The sister—or sister-in-law—of one of the ronin had cased the joint for them by working there as a servant. She was therefore obliged to commit suicide after the plot was carried out, to prove that she had been on the right side.

³ It *was* possible to carry out an authorized vendetta, but the Shogun would never have allowed one against someone so highly placed as Kira.

It is not architecturally remarkable. It has a large wooden gate, topped by a sort of guardhouse (I think): it looks like a big black gazebo on stilts. On the grounds you can look into the tatami-matted common rooms, which were empty then. On one side of the temple courtyard is a feature that I was going to see over and over again in temples and shrines throughout Japan: a bell-like a metal imitation gourd—suspended high up on a hook, and attached to a thick rope that dangled down to the ground; just behind the rope was an open wooden box, the size of a crate, with parallel wooden bars over the top; if you'd been standing by the rope, the bars would be pointing toward you. It's a kind of prayer shrine. A Japanese person will toss a few coins into the box, shake the rope (thus ringing the bell: this summons the spirits), step back, fold his hands, and bow for a moment. Occasionally he might clap once or twice: this is another way of getting the spirits' attention. At Sengakuji I witnessed this event for the first time.

There's a little museum on the temple grounds. The graves are behind it.

As you walk through the gate to the graves, you pass an office on your right that sells bundles of green incense sticks—joss sticks, I think they're called. This part of the temple is surrounded and shaded with trees, and the trees are full of cicadas. They drone like this: *we-o, we-o, we-o, weeeee-uh*. Wherever there are trees in Japan, it seems that there are cicadas—lots of cicadas. Their drone reminded me of the chants of Shinto priests I'd heard in a movie; and the resemblance is certainly intentional.

The ronin are buried around and on a raised platform; Asano's grave (and that of his mother) are off to one side. With two exceptions, all of the ronin's graves are simple: a single vertical stone, with some Japanese writing on it, mounted on a square base, with a shallow stone dish in front to hold incense. The two exceptions were the graves of Oishi and Oishi's son. Not only were they two or three times larger than the others; they were also protected under wooden shelters. Dozens of pieces of paper, with writing on them, were stuck onto the shelters and onto the two gravestones: I think they were prayers. Incense was burning in front of every one of the graves.

A family was there—kids, parents, and grandma—and the father pointed out whose grave was whose for me. Then he had me for pose for a picture, standing next to grandma in front of Oishi's grave. I wish I'd thought to ask him to send me a copy!

The museum has a collection of arms, armor, and documents from the 1700's. Unfortunately—and this shows how very Japanese the place is—the museum had no signs in English. I can only say that it's very probable that I saw the letter which the ronin wrote to their dead master; and also the receipt which the priests of Sengakuji received from Kira's family, when they returned his head.

I took the subway back to Ueno, got my suitcase, and caught the *shinkansen* (bullet train) up to Sendai. There were no more reserved seats available (it was near Obon—August 15—a big festival), so I had to get on a car that had unreserved seating. I. e., I had to stand, but just for the first hour, when we reached Fukushima and a lot of people got off. Many other people were standing, too.

The Japanese do not seem to have heard about the deleterious effects of second-hand smoke. They do not seem to have heard about the deleterious effects of *first*-hand smoke. They still have cigarette commercials on TV, and there are cigarette vending machines everywhere [more about vending machines later]. The car I was in—standing, tired from walking, still halfway jet-lagged—

was full of cigarette smoke. (I remember the dominant odor of downtown Tokyo as being a mix of cigarette smoke, incense, and curry.)

I had read that the Japanese are great readers, and about half the people on the train were reading, even among those who were standing. What I was not told was that roughly half of the readers would be reading comic books! I don't mean like Batman Comics. They were reading full-size (even over-size) paperback books written in comic-book format. They were of all types: adventure, science fiction, lots of romances (*à la* Harlequin).

The country along the route reminded me of what I've seen driving up through the California's Central Valley, but on a smaller scale. The mountains were closer—no great vistas. All of the fields were planted with rice, and they were smaller; and the towns were much closer together.

After an hour I got to sit down. An hour later, the train reached Sendai. I walked the block and a half to the hotel and checked in. It was around 4:30 in the afternoon. I had been in Japan for 24 hours.

More next time (if anybody wants more).

(2):

One of the books I read before going to Japan was *The Samurai* by Shusaku Endo. Endo is a Roman Catholic; he is known as “the Japanese Graham Greene.” I read a lot of Endo before my trip. I almost didn't read *The Samurai*; but I changed my mind when, flipping through it, I came upon the name “Hasekura.” I had read about a Hasekura who was from the Sendai area. The novel was indeed based on his story.

Around 1610, Date Masamune, the warlord of the Sendai area, sent Hasekura and several of his other retainers on a voyage across the Pacific Ocean. Their ship was built by the Japanese, although it was designed and sailed by Spaniards. The purpose of their voyage was to open up direct trade with Mexico, thus avoiding the middlemen in the Philippines and Macao. In exchange for these trade privileges, Masamune was willing to open his fiefdom up to the Spanish missionaries (Christianity had already been proscribed in most of the rest of Japan).

Hasekura crossed the Pacific, crossed Mexico, crossed the Atlantic, and finally even met the Pope. He converted to Catholicism—almost certainly as a diplomatic gesture, to aid the success of his mission. The Pope awarded Hasekura Roman citizenship and gave him a pair of crystal candlesticks to take back to his master.

The trade talks came to nothing; not least because, while Hasekura was in Europe, the Shogun made Christianity illegal throughout Japan. When Hasekura returned to his country, he was an outcast; no one is sure what happened to him.

Hasekura's lord, Date Masamune, is *the* big historical figure in the Sendai area. He's known as the One-Eyed Dragon, because of his fierceness, and because he lost an eye to smallpox as a child. The ruins of his castle—which was demolished by the Restoration forces in 1877—overlook the city, and pictures of him are not everywhere, but are not at all hard to find, either: they're on shopping bags, keychains, advertising, toys, etc. I brought home a little mirror that has a plastic-relief figure of him on the back, with these curious words: *THE DAY IS GOOD DAY. A message from clear nature for your trendy life.* It comes in a plastic bag with the slogan, “Tomorrow for you with beautiful love.” [I will have more to say about Japanese English later.] Hasekura and his voyage

are also commemorated; there is a bronze statue of him on the road that leads up to the castle.

The next day, August 12, I took the train out to Matsushima Bay. The Japanese hold Matsushima to be one of the Three Great Scenic Wonders of their country. (I've forgotten what the other two are, but I know that Fuji isn't one of them.) They've thought so for roughly a thousand years, since the days when people were exiled by being sent 30 miles from Kyoto.

The bay's beauty derives from the more than 200 rocky, pine-covered islands (and islets) that lie in it. The wind and water have shaped many of them into weirdly eroded forms: upended dumbbells, breaking waves, destroyers at anchor. It is like a vast *natural* Japanese garden. It was the conscious inspiration for at least one famous Japanese garden, and has probably been the unconscious inspiration for many others. There is a boat tour that travels around the islands, which I didn't take, and there are two islands that you can get to by bridges. I think I spent 3 hours exploring on them; my boys would have had a marvelous time.

There are two famous shrines in Matsushima: Godaido, right on the sea, and Zuiganji, which is down the street and back a couple hundred yards. Godaido, because it gets the sea air all the time, has had all its paint worn off it, and the wood is weathered and gray: the effect is actually rather charming. Zuiganji was the (or a) family shrine of Date Masamune. It is an official National Treasure. It has stunning painted paper screens, heraldic displays, polished woodwork: it's pointless to describe these things without pictures.

The grounds in front of the temple are shaded by pines which are (of course) full of cicadas. The path along one side of the grounds goes past man-made caves dug into a rocky cliff. The caves have figures carved in them, which were done by temple novices as part of their training.

There is also a small museum attached to the temple. It contains artwork, writing, common utensils, armor, etc. from the time of Masamune. However, the most interesting thing that I saw there was not Japanese, and I think that's why it caught my attention. Mounted in a plain wooden box, above the rest of the objects, and with no special sign or lighting, was what what appeared to be a pair of (rather dingy) crystal candlesticks.

A pair of crystal candlesticks . . .

They were indeed the candlesticks which Hasekura brought back from the Pope.

And then . . .

Sorry, folks: gotta go. Catch ya next time!

(3):

Sorry this is taking so long!

After I saw the candlesticks, nothing happened—of course. I left the museum and spent another fifteen minutes or so wandering around the temple grounds. On the southern side of the entrance—opposite to the side I'd come in—there was a row of Buddhas, on stone pedestals, on which were balanced, in various places (heads, hands, knees, shoulders, etc.) coins. At the end of this row, near the exit to the temple area proper, was a room-sized artificial cave filled with statues. They were roughly half life-size, and evidently quite old. The front of the cave was blocked by a wooden grill. On the bars of the grill were balanced dozens of colorful little (about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches high) wooden dolls. They were as colorful as Mexican serapes or—more appropriately—Japanese ceremonial robes. I saw a boy place one on the bars. The dolls had a hole in the bottom, into which one was supposed

to place a tiny roll of paper, containing a prayer. Dolls and printed prayers were for sale at a stand on the other side of the walk.

I think I spent another hour or so just walking around Matsushima. I had heard that the Japanese did not eat ice cream on the street, but I saw them doing it there. I looked at the shops. There was one called “Papaya Republic.” In America that would be a joke. In Japan you can’t be sure. Permit me to leap ahead here and give an overview of Japanese English.

The Japanese love the English language¹, but it’s like the song, “You always hurt the one you love.” In Ueno Station (Tokyo), the stairway leading up to the Japan Rail (JR) offices had a sign that read “JR–DON’T UP.” For whom is that sign meant? Advertising slogans (especially in Sendai): “Speak Lark” (the cigarette), “I feel Coke” (accompanied by a picture of a perspiring athlete), “Ladies use the word ‘sweat’ when they feel it best for their best” (the proudly-displayed slogan of the Café Dorf, a pleasant—and not at all sleazy—little restaurant near the Kyoto International Conference Hall), “Nestlé–Mild to Body and Taste”; brand names: “Mild Seven” and “Cabin” (cigarettes), Pocari “Sweat”² (a soft drink with Gatorade-like properties. I had a can; it *was* rather tangy), a line of menswear named “Ecological Museum”; names of restaurants: Café Look, Bronze Pal³. In Sendai I bought a backpack (the one I’d brought from America had developed a tear). The slogan on the sewn label reads:

ALWAYS
PRESENTING A SENSE
OF FRESHNESS. FINE

By the way, the backpack was made in China.

In Kyoto, I saw a television commercial for instant soup. It showed an American woman, in a business suit, striding in and out of Manhattan skyscrapers, and it ended with the words, “Soup—career woman.”

Those are things that I saw for myself. I read about something that allegedly happened at a Japanese spa. Remember that, in a Japanese bath, you soap up, rinse off completely, and then soak in the hot tub, leaving the water clean for the next person. At this spa some ignorant Westerners

¹ Technical linguistic observation: There are three kinds of writing in Japanese: *kanji*, *hiragana*, and *katakana*. Kanji are Chinese characters, generally used for the most familiar, common sorts of words—“child,” “mountain,” “food,” “night.” A Chinese colleague, who knew no Japanese, had no trouble reading many of them. Hiragana is a phonetic script made from modified Chinese characters. It is used for some particles (such as the “no,” used to form possessives—McDonald’s in Japan is literally “McDonald no”) and to spell words denoting things that are less common, but still thought of as being Japanese. Katakana is a different phonetic script, parallel with but utterly unlike hiragana, which is used for words denoting things of foreign origin. The Japanese words for “bread,” “bus,” and “telephone” are written in katakana, as are those for the French, Spanish, and German languages. However, the word for the English language, “eigo,” is written in *kanji*! Also, the word for “tobacco” is written in hiragana; this is consistent with the fact that I saw many ads for tobacco in Japan, but none for bread.

² Note the recurrent perspiration motif.

³ The only truly bad meal I had in Japan. Would you believe milk on the rocks?

were draining the tub when they got out; the next patron would find it empty. Therefore the management put up a sign: “Foreigners are requested not to pull cock in Japanese bath.” (This and other howlers can be found in *Gems of Japanized English*, by Miranda Kendrick, published by the Charles E. Tuttle Co.)

Back to the story. I returned to the train station and went to the machine to get my ticket back to Sendai. I require another aside here. The Japanese word for “inhabitant of” is “jin”; so, an American is an *amerikajin*, a Japanese is a *nihonjin*, etc. The Japanese word for “foreign country” is “gaikoku” (maybe “gaikogu”—it’s been some time); hence in Japan foreigners are properly referred to as “gaikokujin.” The Japanese frequently shorten this to “gaijin,” just as we (they explain) shorten “Britisher” to “Brit.” Yes; but we also contract “Japanese” to “Jap,” and I had read that “gaijin” is closer to the latter in emotional force. I had also read that schoolchildren liked to call foreigners “gaijin” to tease them.

A girl who looked to be about seven years old was peering up at me while I examined the ticket machine—its numbers and buttons, and the fare chart up on the wall. I was getting ready to insert a 1000 yen note—

“Gaijin.”

Once again I raised the note—

“Gaijin. Gaijin.”

My hand was not moving. She pointed—“helpfully”—to the money slot.

“Yes. I know. Thank you.”

I—

“Gaijin.”

“Hai. Watashi-wa gaijin desu. Anata-wa nan desu ka?” [Yes. I am a gaijin. What are you?]

I had prepared this response for precisely this sort of encounter, but I hadn’t expected to use it.

She answered in Japanese, too fast for me to understand. I tried to nod sagely; and then she left me alone.

A few minutes later I had my ticket and was sitting on a bench on the other side of the tiny station (it was the size of a very small rural post office). Meanwhile her parents had returned, and they were waiting by the ticket machines. Now and then I would glance over toward them. She was looking at me.

The train ride between Sendai and Matsushima passes through steep rocky hills, which strongly resemble Matsushima’s islands; and that is supposed to be what those islands once were. In many places the tracks pass through narrow gorges, which branch off into even narrower clefts. These clefts—along with occasional wide spots beside the tracks—were at that time either underwater or planted with rice.

When I got back to the hotel, I took a bath and changed my clothes. I showered/bathed 2-3 times a day (usually 3) while I was in Japan, and I changed clothes at least twice a day. By doing this, and giving my shirts plenty of time to air out, I was able to get by without doing laundry once. (“That’s gross”—Lori’s comment.)

That evening I walked up to the ruins of Aoba-jo, Date Masamune’s castle (“jo”=“castle,” and the Aoba River runs through Sendai). The Restoration forces destroyed the castle to prevent

it from becoming a dangerous strong point. They did a good job: there isn't much left, except massive–Cyclopean–walls and foundations. There is also a large modern Shinto shrine, a memorial to the war dead.

The path up to the castle took me past the statue of Hasekura that I mentioned earlier, and the ruins of the gate-house (also very impressive: a little castle in its own right). I came down the mountain by a different route. There were voluminous stone rain gutters along the side of the trail. I thought, “These things must be here for a reason.” They were.

Sendai is a modern city; almost all of the old buildings were destroyed by American firebombs. Walking through it is a little like being in a dream. All around you are modern structures, modern advertisements (frequently with Western models), and much English—but, as I've said, it's a weird, half-conscious English: the sort you meet in dreams. And next to the English, often in the same sign, are Japanese words, which seem like random, or libido-laden symbols thrown up by your unconscious.

It's easy to get around the city on foot. There are two large shopping arcades—not malls, but covered streets, which themselves cross streets. (I saw these in Kyoto, too. The Japanese seem to prefer them to malls; however, Osaka has the largest underground shopping mall in the world.) The Aoba-dori (“dori” = “street”) arcade extends westward from Sendai Station, and the Ichibancho crosses it at the western end to form a T. Each is about a kilometer long. They make a convenient landmark.

As I said, they cross streets. At major intersections (this was also true in Kyoto), the stoplights chirp–like birds—as well as blink. This is for the benefit of blind people. They chirp one way for crossing north-south, and another way for east-west. The Japanese also put patterned tiles in their sidewalks, to help the blind; the pattern changes when you come to a corner.

I did no sightseeing the next day (Monday, August 13). I walked up town and attended the 10:00 service at St. Mary's Episcopal Church (at least I think it was St. Mary's). Including the rector and his assistant, there were 4 people present. It was all in Japanese; I followed along in a printed English translation, guided by a few familiar Japanese words, such as “kami” (“God”—as in *kamikaze*, “divine wind”) and “anata” (“You.” Before going to Japan, I hadn't realized how common the word “you” is in popular songs—even more common, I believe, than “love.” “You” can slip by unnoticed, but you can't miss those anata's.).

I haven't told about breakfast yet. (Breakfast was included in the price of the hotel room.) On the “application form”⁴ sent to me in America, it was called an “American breakfast.” It was *not*, and I'm glad it wasn't. Every morning when I entered the little restaurant, three or four waitresses in aprons and smocks, lined up at one end of the buffet, would call out, “Irrashimase!” [Welcome!], and one would step forward to take my breakfast ticket and serve me. Rice, rolls, chunks of salted fish—hot, cold, or batter-fried—soup, fried vegetables, and all the tea, coffee, and juice you could drink. It was easy to get too full. There were Japanese and Western style tables, but I always ate at the Japanese tables, sitting cross-legged on the *tatami* mats. I had never used chopsticks before, it wasn't that hard to learn how; I think *having* to use them helped—I don't think that the restaurant had Western tableware.

⁴ That's what it said.

That evening the other mathematicians started appearing at the hotel. I resented their arrival a little because for the last three days I had almost felt as if I had the country to myself (except for the Japanese).

The shuttle bus up to Tohoku University stopped in front of the Hotel Sunroute, about block and a half from the Chisan, where I was staying. The bus took us through Sendai and up into the hills until we wound up at Tohoku.

I expected the lecture room at Tohoku to be like this: twelve-foot ceilings; windowless; fluorescent lights; orange-cloth wallpaper with black wood trim; electric blackboards; dark phony-wood desks with roomy leatherette chairs that swiveled and had armrests; and air conditioning.

None of these “predictions” came true. The lecture hall was large, airy, with steeply banked rows of seats. The big windows were open to the outside. Tohoku University is set in the midst of a forest, and the trees are full of cicadas. Sometimes they almost drowned out the lecturer. The seats were the kind that fold down on hinges and the writing desks were of Formica. The space between the desk and the back of the chair was so narrow that when you sat down you felt locked in—it was like getting ready to ride Space Mountain.

There was no air conditioning. Two oscillating fans on stands sprayed the sedentary audience, while the active speaker threw off body heat as best he could. I have a picture of myself that was taken at the beginning of my talk (just after lunch on the second day). I can tell that it’s at the beginning, partly from what’s written on the board, but also because my shirt is all one color. It was all one color at the end, too. It was interesting to see the sweat stains spread over other people’s shirts—a little like watching an animated film about the expansion of the Ice Age glaciers.

Some humid humor. There was one morning that was *not* hot and humid. The sky was overcast, and there was a breeze. I walked up to Prof. Mizuhara (one of the organizers), pointed to the sky, and asked, “Yuki ga furimasu ka?” [Is it going to snow?].

Mizuhara looked at the sky.

“No, no. *Ame*: rain.” Then he looked at my face. “Ah: joke!”

Later, when it had become—as usual—Texas-cockroach hot-&-humid, I walked by Mizuhara and another Japanese mathematician, pointed to the sky, and said, “Yuki ga furimasen.” [It’s not snowing.] They burst out laughing.

The conference went on for 5 days (August 14-18); there were some talks. That is enough about that!

There was a banquet Thursday night. The banquet was at a hotel in the northwest corner of the city. Afterwards a group of us walked back to our hotels, which were all in the southeast corner. It was a two or three mile walk. There did not seem to be anything unusual about the neighborhoods we passed through. I learned later that we had been in the red-light district. (A related observation. It was not uncommon to see—sometimes on the street, but usually taped up around pay phones—cards with photographs and phone numbers on them. The photographs were of naked or topless women. Ads for call girls, we supposed.)

Friday evening, just as we were about take the bus back down the hill, it began to rain. It rained as if the roof of the sky were lined with garden-hose nozzles. It was still raining hard when we got back to the hotel, and even after I’d had my obligatory long bath. That was the night when

I had planned to do my serious shopping. In particular I had wanted to get a poster of *Back to the Futur III* in Japanese (it was showing at a theatre up the street). I had never owned an umbrella before, but the circumstances called for drastic action, so I bought one. After that I carried my umbrella everywhere in Japan, and was not rained on again. (I got the poster, incidentally.)

The following afternoon I took the bus out to Sendai Airport. JTB (Japan Travel Bureau) had made a mistake about my flight time, so I arrived 3 hours too early. While I was waiting, a group of 30 or 40 NTT employees (NTT is the phone company, like AT&T) came in. They entered as a group, were dressed identically (dark pants, white shirts, ties), and had identical NTT-monogrammed luggage: blue two-toned gym bags on wheels. I searched for some differences in their attire: they were not all wearing exactly the same kind of shoes. I wish now that I'd paid attention to their belts.

I was wearing my "Æstiva Formenoriensis" T-shirt, which I think explains the following incident. A couple were standing next to me as we waited to board the plane. The man asked me, "Excuse me. What country are you from?"

"America."

He turned back to the woman.

"See? I told you."

When we got onto the plane—it was a 767, and packed—the movie projectors were showing a baseball game. As the plane got ready for take-off, they switched to the view out the pilot's front window. Then, when the plane had been in the air for a couple of minutes, the view changed again—to a camera that was pointing straight down! Soon after that they began showing cartoons and commercials, which continued for the rest of the flight.

I arrived in Osaka. Osaka is, like Sendai, a completely modern city, and for the same reason. From the air it looks like the part of Los Angeles where the Pasadena and Hollywood freeways intersect. I got my luggage and, with the help of a Japanese couple, found the ticket machines for the Kyoto bus.

I was pretty sure I had found the right bus. To be certain, I asked the young woman in line ahead of me, "Kyoto e ikimasu ka?" [Is it going to Kyoto?]

She nodded. A notice in Japanese was posted next to the line. She spent a few seconds reading it and then turned to me.

"It says that the traffic is very heavy, and that the trip will probably take twice as long as usual."

She spoke perfect, *American*-accented English.

I told her that I had come from a math conference at Tohoku. She was from Sendai originally. Kyoto was beautiful, she admitted, but she still liked Sendai: it was so much less hot and humid up there.

Kyoto next time.

II. KYOTO AND OSAKA

(4):

I arrived at Kyoto Station at around 9 PM on Saturday, August 18. The layout of Central Kyoto is a little like that of Disneyland: Kyoto Station is where the old-time train station should

be, Karasuma-dori is Main Street, and the old Imperial Palace is just about at the right place for the Fantasyland castle. Only, the scale is larger in Kyoto. My hotel, the Kyoto Prince, was near the border of Fantasyland and Tomorrowland: approximately a three mile walk. I hailed a cab, and asked the driver if he could take me to the Prince Hotel.

“Takaragaike Prince?”

The Takaragaike Prince is a terribly expensive hotel in the far northeastern corner of the city, near the KICH (Kyoto International Conference Hall)¹.

“No. The Prince.”

He’d never heard of the place.

I went back through the pedestrian underpass, with my luggage, and got on the subway. I rode it to Kitaoji Station, the northern terminus. There I found a cabdriver who *had* heard of the Kyoto Prince, and a few minutes later I was there, and checked in. I walked a block and a half up the street to a sidewalk deli—part of a chain—called “Kamo-doya” (more about that later), and got myself a box dinner which I brought back to the hotel. Then I had a bath and went to bed.

Kyoto was never bombed during World War II. Henry Stimson, Roosevelt’s Secretary of War, specifically removed it from the list of fire bomb (and, later, atomic bomb) targets, solely for the sake of its cultural value—a deed which, I think, should have won him a Nobel Peace Prize. Because of him, Kyoto is not all glitter, neon, and high-rise buildings, but still retains a kind of Old World charm that can put one in mind of . . . Pasadena, California.

I’m not kidding. One effect of never having been rebuilt in modern times is that much of Kyoto has a rather scungy look. Not run down, but not new, either: like the places where Archie Bunker shops², but with the difference that there is no graffiti (at any rate, I saw none), practically no crime, and everything is clean. Kyoto does not have a distinctive ambience, like London or San Francisco; or, it does not have the the ambience you expect—that of one of the world’s half-dozen or so great imperial cities.

Kyoto’s down-at-the-heels appearance is not peculiar to the 20th Century. When the city was founded in 794, the Emperor planned that it should resemble Chang-an, the capital of the Chinese Empire. It was to be a square, with the Imperial Palace and its grounds in the middle of the north side, and a neat rectangular grid of broad streets. It halfway worked. The eastern side of the city was well maintained, but the western half soon became a semi-wasteland, a haunt for thieves and foxes³. A great avenue went southward from the Palace to the city’s Southern Gate—the *Rasho Mon*. It was supposed to be the capital’s triumphal entryway, but by the end of the Middle Ages it had fallen into decay and become a hangout for prostitutes, cutthroats, and beggars. The ruin that you see in *Rashomon* is realistic.

None of the ancient city, including the Rashomon, remains today. Most of it burned down; indeed, most of it burned down several times. A traditional Japanese house is made of paper,

¹ It is appropriate that both buildings lie in Tomorrowland.

² Or would, if he were a Buddhist.

³ In Japanese folklore, foxes are possessed of magical powers—recall the scene in *Ran* where the samurai brings the lady the stone fox’s head—so one can almost read that as, ‘thieves and evil spirits.’

wood, and cloth, and until modern times these houses were lighted with oil lamps and heated by charcoal braziers. This combination produces a house that, in the winter months especially, is cold, drafty, dark, and in constant danger from fire. The Palace burned down so often that the Imperial Household had standing arrangements with certain high officials to move in with them whenever it was being rebuilt.

From 710-784 the capital was in Nara, about 40 miles south of Kyoto. Before 710 the capital would move with the Household, changing with every new Emperor. I believe that a permanent capital was founded in the hopes that it would help the Emperor to better resist the considerable power of the Buddhist clergy.

By 784 there were so many Buddhist temples and priests in and around Nara that the Emperor was beginning to think that he would be more comfortable someplace else. The capital was moved 30 miles north, to Nagaoka, where it stayed for 10 years. In 794 it was moved further northward, to Kyoto.

According to tradition, the site of Kyoto (the name means “capital city”) was discovered accidentally, on a hunting trip. Kyoto lies in a green, well-watered valley that opens to the south—a lucky direction in Japan (which is why the Imperial Palace faced [and faces] south). Better, a high mountain, Mt. Hiei, overlooks the valley from the northeast; and the northeast is the unluckiest direction of all. A Buddhist temple was established on the mountain’s summit to ward off baleful influences.

Today, Kyoto has nearly 1600 Buddhist temples (along with about 600 Shinto shrines). For several centuries it was regularly subjected to raids by bands of armed priests, who would afterwards retreat to their unassailable refuge on Mt. Hiei. The raids have stopped, but the temple remains, along with several TV broadcasting towers.

The first period of Kyoto’s history, called the “Heian,” lasted from 794-1185. (The Heian order was destroyed by the rise of the independent warlords. Things stabilized somewhat after 1192, when the first shogunate was established at Kamakura, near present-day Tokyo.) “Heian” means splendid or brilliant—Kyoto’s original name was “Heian Kyo”: splendid capital. To modern people this period of Japanese history must seem very *un*-Japanese. The following is from Ivan Morris’s *The World of the Shining Prince* (p. 141):

“If the informed Westerner was asked to enumerate the outstanding features of traditional Japan, his list might well consist of the following: in *culture* No and Kabuki drama, Haiku poems, Ukiyoe colour prints, samisen music, and various activities like the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, and the preparation of miniature landscapes that are related to Zen influence; in *society* the two-sworded samurai and the geisha; in *ideas* the Zen approach to human experience with its stress on an intuitive understanding of the truth and sudden enlightenment, the samurai ethic sometimes known as *Bushido*, a great concern with the conflict in demands of duty and human affection, and an extremely permissive attitude to suicide, especially love suicides; in *domestic architecture* fitted straw matting (*tatami*), large communal baths . . . ; in *food* raw fish and soy sauce The list would of course be entirely correct. Yet not a single one of these items existed in Murasaki’s [i. e., the Heian] world, and many of them would have seemed as alien to her as they do to the modern Westerner.”

Given these facts, it is interesting to note what things *have* survived from ancient times.

One is the taboo on wearing shoes inside the house. There is a practical reason for this nowadays. A good housewife changes her tatami mats once a year. Shoes would chew them up in a month. However, in Heian times the floors were mostly bare wood. The taboo goes deeper, and perhaps has to do with ritual cleanliness (or just ordinary cleanliness).

Another is an extremely refined sense of aesthetics and propriety. This was parodied by Bruce Jay Friedman in his book *Tokyo Woes*. At one point the American protagonist is given a tour of a Japanese factory. During the tour he excuses himself and goes to use the rest room, where he finds a piece of graffiti that reads, “Our section leader has several flaws.” The only problem I have with this is that the Japanese seem to be too refined to write graffiti at all. But the tone is right. The best (real) illustration of this that I know is a long passage from *The Tale of Genji*. In order to make it intelligible I will have to make another aside (within *this* aside).

The Tale of Genji is a novel written almost exactly 1000 years ago by a woman known to us as Murasaki Shikibu; she is the “Murasaki” mentioned in the Morris quote. Much about her is a mystery to us, beginning with her name: it means “purple.” She seems to have been one of the Empress’s less important ladies-in-waiting, and a quiet, retiring person, even by the standards of that day (unlike the witty and promiscuous Sei Shonagon, Murasaki’s contemporary and the other great prose writer of the period—of whom more later). It is possible that *Genji* is partly autobiographical. It has a character named Murasaki, who is Genji’s favorite (and, as I recall, childless) wife. But the similarity in names cannot be pushed too far. Nearly all of the characters have names like that: they’re named for a flower or a color or an epithet (“Genji” itself means “shining prince”).

Genji is a high official in the Imperial Court. He belongs, biologically, to the Imperial family, but he was legally made a commoner because it was hoped that the Emperor could then better make better use of his talents. The novel is very long, and I confess that I have only read the first 500 pages (almost half of it). But in that first part Genji holds a series of offices (interrupted by a brief period of exile), and collects a number of women, whom he puts up and maintains in his home, the “Nijo Mansion.” One of these is a very young woman named Tamakazura, a long-lost illegitimate daughter of another court official and friend of Genji’s. Genji has been raising her up in seclusion—while letting rumors of her beauty slip out—educating and preparing her, just as a loving father would, for the day when he will present her at court, and she will make her way in the world as one of the Emperor’s concubines or perhaps the wife of a high official. In the passage that follows, she has been living in his house for some time, and he is beginning to think that she is perhaps a little too good to give up. (The two unrhymed couplets are snatches of Chinese or Japanese verse; giving and getting such poetic allusions was a necessary part of cultured conversation in the Heian age.)

He thought a great deal about Tamakazura. He often visited her and he was of service to her in many ways. One quiet evening after a rainfall, when the green of the maples and oaks was clean and rich, he looked up into a singularly affecting twilight sky and intoned a phrase from Po-Chü-i [a Chinese poet]: “It is gentle, it is fresh.” At such times it was more than anything the fresh glow of the new lady he was thinking of. He slipped quietly away to her apartments. At her writing desk, she bowed courteously and turned shyly away, very beautiful indeed. Suddenly, gently, she

was exactly like her mother. He wanted to weep.

“You must forgive me, but I cannot help it. When I first saw you I did not think you looked so very much like her, and yet there have been times when I could have mistaken you for her. Yugiri [Genji’s son] is not in the least like me and so I had come to think that children do not on the whole resemble parents. And then I come on an instance like this.”

There was an orange in the fruit basket before her.

“Scented by orange blossoms long ago,
The sleeve she wore is surely the sleeve you wear.”

“So many years have gone by, and through them all I have been unable to forget. Sometimes I feel as if I might be dreaming—and as if the dream were too much for me. You must not dismiss me for my rudeness.”

And her took her hand.

Nothing like this had happened to her before. But she must not lose her composure.

“The sleeve bears the scent of that blossom long ago.
Then might not the fruit as quickly vanish away?”

He found this quiet confusion delightful. She sat with bowed head, unable to think what to make of his behavior and what to do next. The hand in his was soft, her skin smooth and delicate. He had made his confession because beauty and pain had suddenly come to seem very much alike. She was trembling.

“Am I so objectionable, then? I have worked hard to keep our secret, and you must help me. You have always been important to me. Now you are important in a new way. I wonder if there has ever been anything quite like it. I can think of no reason that you should prefer those others to me. I cannot imagine feelings deeper than my own, and I cannot bear the thought of passing you on to them and their frivolity.”

It all seemed rather beyond the call of paternal duty.

(From Chapter 24—“Butterflies”—of the translation by Edward Seidensticker, published by Knopf)

The nude scene that follows is anticlimactic.

The delineation of character and action (such as it is) in *Genji* is unbelievably refined and subtle. The people in Genji’s circle have almost no work to do, except for ceremonial duties. They’re like administrators and tenured faculty at a small New England university. They relieve their boredom by writing poetry and carrying on love affairs (very often these two activities are combined). They hold contests. There was one to see who could mix the best perfume (i. e., incense). In another, two factions among the court ladies squared off in a competition involving paintings. The point of it was not to see who could paint the better pictures, but to see who had the better *taste* in pictures. I have forgotten which side won.

The appreciation of *Genji* is, like that of the *Iliad*, an acquired taste, and I regret to say that I have not acquired it. Sei Shonagon’s *Pillow Book* is another matter. Shonagon was, as I said, a contemporary of Murasaki’s. Some people thought she was learned and brilliant; others said that she was facile. She was quick-witted, and also quick with allusions (which is what made her seem learned). Her *Pillow Book* is a collection of anecdotes, reflections, lists of things which pleased her,

displeased her, or simply attracted her attention. She wrote them down at odd moments, with no intention of showing them to anyone; the book came to light by accident. I hope you will be patient if I quote a few passages from it (they're from Ivan Morris's translation, in the Penguin Classics):

Things That Give a Hot Feeling:

The hunting costume of the head of a Guards escort.

A patchwork surplice.

The Captain in attendance at the Imperial Games.

An extremely fat person with a lot of hair.

A zither bag.

A Holy Teacher performing a rite of incantation at noon in the Sixth or Seventh Month. Or at the same time of the year a copper-smith working in his foundry.

Squalid Things:

The back of a piece of embroidery.

The inside of a cat's ear.

A swarm of mice, who still have no fur, when they come wriggling out of their nest.

The seams of a fur robe that has not yet been lined.

Darkness in a place that does not give the impression of being very clean.

A rather unattractive woman who looks after a large brood of children.

A woman who falls ill and remains unwell for a long time. In the mind of her lover, who is not particularly devoted to her, she must appear rather squalid.

A Preacher Ought to Be Good-Looking:

A preacher ought to be good-looking. For, if we are properly to understand his worthy sentiments, we must keep our eyes on him while he speaks; should we look away, we may forget to listen. Accordingly an ugly preacher may well be the source of sin . . .

From Birds:

. . . The poets describe the hototogisu as lurking in the u no hana and the orange tree; and there is something so alluring about the picture of this bird half hidden by the blossoms that one is almost overcome with envy. During the short summer nights in the rainy season one sometimes wakes up and lies in bed hoping to be the first person to hear the hototogisu. Suddenly towards dawn its song breaks the silence; one is charmed, indeed one is quite intoxicated. But alas, when the Sixth Month comes, the hototogisu is silent. I really need say no more about my feelings for this bird. And I do not love the hototogisu alone; anything that cries out at night delights me—except babies.

From At First Dawn a Carriage Passes:

It is delightful also when a man on horseback recites poetry at dawn. I remember that once I heard a splendid line of verse accompanied by the flapping of a horse's mud-shields. Who could the rider be? When I put aside what I was doing and looked out, I was dismayed to see that it was a vulgar commoner.

I Remember a Clear Morning: [My favorite passage]

I remember a clear morning in the Ninth Month when it had been raining all night. Despite the bright sun, dew was still dripping from the chrysanthemums in the garden. On the bamboo fences and the criss-cross hedges I saw tatters of spider webs; and where the threads were broken the raindrops hung on them like strings of white pearls. I was greatly moved and delighted.

As it became sunnier, the dew gradually vanished from the clover and the other plants where it had lain so heavily; the branches began to stir, then suddenly sprang up of their own accord. Later I described to people how beautiful it all was. What most impressed me was that they were not at all impressed.

The next two passages—which are the last two in the book—relate, respectively, how the *Pillow Book* became public and how it came to be written.

When the Middle Captain:

When the Middle Captain of the Left Guards Division was still Governor of Ise, he visited me one day at my home. There was a straw mat at the edge of the veranda, and I pulled it out for him. This notebook of mine happened to be lying on the mat, but I did notice it in time. I snatched at the book and made a desperate effort to get it back; but the Captain instantly took it off with him and did not return it until much later. I suppose it was from this time that my book began to be passed about at Court.

It Is Getting So Dark:

It is getting so dark that I can scarcely go on writing; and my brush is all worn out. Yet I should like to add a few things before I end.

I wrote these notes at home, when I had a good deal of time to myself and thought no one would notice what I was doing. Everything that I have seen and felt is included. Since much of it might appear malicious and even harmful to other people, I was careful to keep my book hidden. But now it has become public, which is the last thing I expected.

One day Lord Korechika, the Minister of the Centre, brought the Empress a bundle of notebooks. ‘What shall we do with them?’ Her Majesty asked me. ‘The Emperor has already made arrangements for copying “The Records of the Historian.”’

‘Let me make them into a pillow,’ I said.

‘Very well,’ said Her Majesty. ‘You may have them.’

I now had a vast quantity of paper at my disposal, and I set about filling the notebooks with odd facts, stories from the past, and all sorts of other things, often including the most trivial material. On the whole I concentrated on things and people that I found charming and splendid; my notes are also full of poems and observations on trees and plants, birds and insects. I was sure that when people saw my book they would say, ‘It’s even worse than I expected. Now one can really tell what she is like.’ After all, it is written entirely for my own amusement and I put things down exactly as they came to me. How could my casual jottings possibly bear comparison with the many impressive books that exist in our time? Readers have declared, however, that I can be proud of my work. This has surprised me greatly; yet I suppose it is not so strange that people should like it, for, as will be gathered from these notes of mine, I am the sort of person who approves of what others abhor and detests the things they like.

Whatever people may think of my book, I still regret that it ever came to light.

The Japanese delicacy lives on. In *Chushingura*, a play based on the story of the 47 ronin, when “Oishi” and his men finally catch “Kira,” the first words “Oishi” speaks to the villain are an apology for the grave discourtesy of having broken into his home. *Then* he tells him to commit seppuku. At the end of World War II—when the B-29’s had turned almost all of Japan’s major cities into smoking ruins, and she did not have enough shipping afloat even to carry on inter-island commerce, and, finally, the two atomic bombs had obliterated Hiroshima and Nagasaki in a few thousandths of a second—the Emperor spoke to his people and told them that the war “had not turned out necessarily to Japan’s advantage.”

I hope that this excursion into Japanese history hasn’t been too tedious. Next time I promise to tell the story of how I met a geisha.

(5):

Postscript on the previous entry: The Japanese love of indirectness is also evident in the language. “Anata” does not literally mean “you,” but “your direction”: it avoids an explicit (and thus unseemly) reference to the person. Similarly, to introduce somebody to Mr. Yamada, one says, “Kochira-wa Yamada-san desu.” “Kochira” does not mean “this person,” but “this side.” And, there is “chotto.” It literally means “a little” or “a bit,”—“Chotto matte kudasai,” means “Just a second, please.” However, it is frequently used as a softener. The present tense of “understand” (regardless of person or number) is “wakarimasu.” The negative is formed by changing the final “u” to “en”—“wakarimasen.” So a Westerner would expect “Chotto wakarimasen” to mean “I don’t quite get it.” But it doesn’t. A Japanese colleague said that it means, “I don’t understand at all!”

The hotel rooms were small. My room in Sendai, including the bathroom, was 6’ × 12’; I measured it by lying on the floor. That would make it a “four-mat” room (a tatami mat measures 3’ × 6’). On the inside, the bathroom was about 4’ × 4’—very roomy, if the hotel had been an RV. It reminded me of what my father said about the bathroom in his and my mother’s first apartment: “You had to enter it pointing in the right direction.”

The bathroom was on the right as I entered the room. Its door opened outward and you stepped up into it, something like a sauna. The bed took up the rest of the space along the right wall between the bathroom and the window. There, next to the head of the bed, was a small desk, with a chair that fitted completely underneath it, and a reading lamp.

Against the left wall was a compact refrigerator with a television on top. (It was *very* tight in there.) The refrigerator was stocked with drinks and goodies; whatever you took out was automatically added to your bill. These refrigerators are common in Japanese hotels.

The room in Kyoto was three times larger, or about half the size of a typical Travelodge double. However the bathroom was the same size. I believe the reason for this is that the bathroom is really just a large shower booth with a sink and a bath compartment. There was a drain in the floor, and the shower was on a hose, like a Dishmaster, so that one could, after soaping up, rinse off completely before getting into the tub for the hot soak.

The tub was not very long, but it was deep: a true *tub*. I couldn’t stretch out in it, but I was always completely relaxed, with my feet propped against one side (the water came up over my knees). The Japanese like their baths hot, and when it was turned to “all hot,” the water that came out of the tap was almost hot enough to make tea (I used it for instant coffee many times).

Sunday, August 19: After showering and dressing, I went downstairs (my room was 712, or *nana-hyaku-juu-ni*—“seven-hundred-ten-two”) and started walking south toward the Imperial Palace grounds. I had breakfast at McDonald’s, and boarded the subway at the Imadegawa-dori station (at the the northwest corner of the Imperial Park) and rode it to Kyoto Station.

I wanted to go to Osaka and see *bunraku*, a kind of puppet theater which I will explain below. I bought my ticket and went to the correct train platform, but once there I did not know which train to get on; this is the difference between *theoretical* and *practical* knowledge.

I asked for advice from a slender woman who looked to be in her early forties. She was wearing a kimono, and she was carrying a box wrapped in silk and a small satchel. She was going toward Osaka, too. We boarded the next train together.

We rode together for about half an hour. She told me that there were four stops on the way. She was getting off at the third—“Shin-Osaka.” I was to get off at the fourth—“Osaka-Eki” [Osaka Station]. She told me which subways to take to get to the National Bunraku Theater.

With my little bit of Japanese and her little bit of English, we talked about our families. I showed her pictures from my wallet of family and friends (including my dog, Tinker, who died 10 years ago). I had not dreamed that the words for “(my) wife,”¹ “mother,” “father,” “child,” “friend,” and “dog” would ever be of any use in Japan. But thanks to them I had a wonderful conversation with a very kind and gracious woman. I learned that she had two sons, ages 18 and 23. She told me her name: it was either “Inamura” or “Imamura”—I will call her Imamura. She gave me one of her “meishii,” or calling cards. She gave also me three “telephone cards.” These are thin cards with magnetic strips, used to make calls from pay phones; a thousand-yen card gets you a thousand-yen’s worth of calls. They typically have photographs on them. These three had a picture of a samurai, a picture of a nature scene, and a picture of her, in which she was wearing the white facial make-up of a geisha.

She opened her satchel and pulled out a book—one of what looked like at least a dozen. She handed it to me. It was a guide to Kyoto, all in Japanese.

“Ikura desu ka?” I asked. [How much does it cost?]

She shook her head and waved the question aside. “Agemasu.” [I give.]

“Domo arigatoo gozaimashita.”

“Doo itashimashite.”

She got off at Shin-Osaka (and reminded me one last time to get off at the next stop). Just before the train pulled out, she tapped on my window, and waved goodbye.

In Osaka Station I found an international telephone and called home. I told Lori where I was, something of what had happened since the last time I called her (I’d called her when I reached Sendai), and that soon I would find out whether I would get to see a bunraku performance.

Kabuki, noh, and bunraku are the three traditional forms of Japanese theater. Kabuki and noh are performed with live actors. I did not see a performace of either. Bunraku is performed with puppets that are one-half to two-thirds life size. There are usually three puppeteers to a puppet. The least experienced of the them manipulates the legs; the next most experienced operates the left hand and arm; and the most experienced one operates the head (which, like a ventriloquist’s

¹ There’s a different word for someone else’s wife. Likewise for mother and father.

dummy, can open and close its eyes and alter its expression to some extent) and the right hand and arm. The puppeteers are robed and hooded in black, with possible exception of the one who operates the head, because he is frequently a big star in his own right; and they are visible from the waist up. Narration and the characters' voices are provided by a man (usually only one)—called a *joruri*—who sits on one side of the stage and is also visible. He speaks from his diaphragm; he even wears a weight under his clothing to give him support there. I cannot describe the sound he makes, but I will be happy to imitate it over the phone (please don't call collect). Musical accompaniment—really more like a musical commentary on the action—is provided by a line of *samisen* players, who sit on one side of the *joruri*. A *samisen* looks like a banjo; however, the strings are beaten, not plucked, with a heavy piece of whalebone shaped like an ice scraper.

Bunraku reached its mature form in the 18th Century, when Chikamatsu, a successful kabuki playwright, switched over to write for it. For a time bunraku was so popular that kabuki actors were imitating the jerky motions of the puppets. Bunraku sometimes deals with historical or mythological subjects: *Chushingura* (based on the story of the 47) was originally a bunraku play. But the favorite subject of traditional bunraku is love-suicide: two lovers, forced to decide between love and duty, choose love, and fulfill duty by committing suicide together. Bunraku was dying out until a world tour brought it international acclaim; it is now subsidized by the government². I first learned about bunraku in one of a series of 30-minute videotapes called "Faces of Japan." (There are 13 tapes in all; they're hosted by Dick Cavett. By the happiest of coincidences, our town library had them on loan from the State Regional Library near the beginning of last summer. I recommend them **UNRESERVEDLY** to anybody who's going to Japan.) When my sons saw the bunraku puppets, they cried, "I know what I want Daddy to bring *me* back from Japan!" (Yeah, sure.) I decided then that I would try very hard to get to a bunraku play and, if possible, buy a videotape of a performance—if they had them.

However, while I was riding underneath the streets of Osaka, I did not know: whether they had videotapes, how much the tickets cost (although I had an estimate), the showtimes, the availability of tickets, and whether I would need a reservation. Why, you may wonder, didn't I ask all this from JTB while I was in America? I did, and they didn't know, either.

I arrived at the theater at 11:15. The morning show had started at 11. I bought a highest-price ticket (about \$30—hey, this was once in a lifetime) and went in.

Sigh. It was glorious. The play was based on the Russian fairy tale, "The Stone Flower," though I didn't learn this till I bought a program afterwards. Spectacular staging! There was a fight with a multi-tentacled monster in a dark forest. The creature was genuinely frightening. The long hairy tentacles were handled by hooded, but plainly visible figures (all of the puppeteers were hooded until the final scene): they were like attendant demons. The action of the puppets was so lifelike that at one point I felt that the male character would have had an easier time fighting if he could just break free from those people who were holding his arms and legs.

In a later scene, a goddess flew onto the stage, riding (with one puppeteer) on the back of a

² Noh survives for a similar reason. Oddly enough, it owes its survival to, of all people, Ulysses S. Grant. When he visited Japan in 1879 he witnessed a noh performance. Afterwards, he told his hosts, "You must preserve this."

magical bird. They were supported by an apparatus that looked like a tank, robed in black, with the bird perched on the end of the gun. The tank came on from the left, turned toward the audience and moved out to the edge of the stage, until the great white bird, its wings slowly flapping, was above the front rows: it was almost over my head. We applauded. (I should mention that the theater was not very big, which made the effect all the more impressive.)

After the next scene, the theater grew dark—but not totally dark. The curtains were drawn back. Onstage I could see shadowy forms moving back and forth as the scenery was changed. Then the commotion stopped. Everything became quiet.

Simultaneously, all the lights came on, and there was a sound—*woh*—like a torch flaring. The hero and the heroine, held by two unhooded puppet masters, were standing at the top of a field of brilliant lavender flowers. It was *real* magic: it compelled applause.

The masters walked the puppets down to the bottom of the stage, had them take a bow, and the play was over.

There was a 30 minute intermission. Box lunches like those at Kamo-doya were on sale in the lobby. Unlike in American theaters, the concessionaires did not scalp their customers. Not only that, the lunches came in elegant wooden boxes (Kamo-doya's were plastic): I wish I'd had space to bring one home.

After lunch there was a short comic play about fishing for wives—literally.

I went to see the bunraku museum, just off the lobby. There were antique playbills, scripts, a joruri's reading stand. There was a large exhibit which showed how the puppets were made. Puppets for professional performance are hand-made, carved from wood—gopherwood, I think. The interior mechanism of the head is quite complicated: an intricate tangle of levers and strings. So is the stage mechanism—trapdoors, turntables, etc.—all essentially 19th Century technology. There was also a samisen, with its plectrum, out where you could (try to) play it.

I bought two silk hangings but still had not found the desired videotape. There was a tape for sale, in English, about bunraku, but that was *not* what I wanted. I finally found what I was looking for—a Toho Video production of Chikamatsu's *Sonezaki Shinju*, a traditional love-suicide which was to be the 5 o'clock show. When I looked at the label the price appeared to be 4300 yen—about \$30.

“Kore ga hoshii n'desu.” [I want this.]

The salespeople were confused.

“No English!”

“Nihon-go ga hoshii n'desu.” [I want Japanese.]

“Sure?”

“Hai.”

They rang it up. The price was actually 14300 yen—nearly \$100. But hey, this was once in a lifetime. I swallowed hard and bought it. (It's beautiful. If you're ever in Hinesburg and have 90 minutes to spare we'll show it to you.)

I wanted to get a poster for Philip. I didn't like the ones that were for sale. There was a very nice black and white poster of a female puppet in one of the glass cases, but it was one of the older posters that were no longer being sold. I was asked to wait while somebody went back to see if there were any extras in storage. There was one. They gave it to me as a present.

I went outside. The sky was clouding over. I had brought along my little black umbrella, but I did not know how much protection it would provide against a Japanese downpour. I went back to the subway and rode it up to Osaka Castle.

The ground was wet when I came out: it had rained while I was underground. I walked around the castle grounds but did not go inside—it's a reconstruction, anyway. I was tired, hot, and weighted down with fragile souvenirs. I rode the subway back to Osaka-Eki.

Before getting on the train, I did wander around some in the “largest underground shopping mall in the world.” It was enormous—like being in a post-apocalyptic subterranean-civilization science fiction movie—and a Japanese one at that. While there I picked up a rather nice fan for Lori (the first of three; they got better³).

Back on the train. The three things I had most wanted to see in Japan were Sengakuji, Matsushima, and bunraku, and I hadn't really expected that I would get to see any of them. Awe-ful good fortune.

A funny thing, but I had a consistently difficult time making myself understood when referring to Sengakuji or bunraku. With bunraku it would go like this:

“I'm going to see bunraku.”

“Huh?”

“Bunn-raku.” [Make the ‘n’ more nasal]

“Huh?”

[Count on my fingers]: “Kabuki, noh . . .”

“Oh! Bunn-lraku!” [rolled ‘r’; actually more like a corkscrew than a roll]

A few days later:

“On Sunday I saw bunn-lraku.”

“Huh?”

“Bunn-lraku.”

“Huh?”

“Kabuki, noh . . .”

“Oh! Bunraku!”

It was the same with Sengakuji. To get my meaning across I would mention the “yon-juu-shichi-nin no ronin” and make a hara-kiri-like motion over my stomach.

I arrived in Kyoto Station, spent an indeterminate number of minutes hunting for the subway, and at last boarded a car. A woman got on just a few seconds after me. The next moment we were both laughing; because she was Imamura, my geisha friend! We talked all the way up to Kitaoji Station, where we said goodbye for the second and last time. From there I walked back to the hotel, feeling very tired and humble.

(6):

There is evidence that the Japanese have some connection with the Polynesians. The traditional Japanese house is excellently adapted to life in the South Pacific—where it never snows. The Japanese emperor is in many ways like a Polynesian god-king (as explained in Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*). His person is sacrosanct, but he has no power. This is probably

³ And more expensive.

why Japanese dynastic history is so different from that of China or Europe. The contrast with China is extreme. The Chinese Emperor had *absolute* power. There, as in Europe, royal houses rose out of obscurity, fell into decay and were annihilated. But Japan has had only one imperial family for at least 1400 years. Indeed, the Emperor Akihito's lineage is so ancient, high and uncontested¹ that he does not even have a family name (such as "Bolingbroke"). The reason for this has to be that the job of Emperor was not worth fighting for—unlike that of Shogun, over which there were dynastic wars.

One tragic characteristic of the Polynesians was their weak resistance to the diseases of the Europeans. I see a parallel to this in Japanese culture. Japanese art, literature and manners are extremely refined, and this appears to have given them a very low resistance to Western—in particular American—kitsch: once it gets into the system, it runs rampant. This is especially evident on Japanese television.

I've told you about "Soup-career woman." Now I'm going to tell you about the talking Pampers: The baby is crying. Mom changes him into Pampers. A clean pair of Pampers, superimposed on the screen, talks to the camera, leads us through a wetness test, hovers over the little boy while he sleeps through the night and is there when his thankful mother comes to get him in the morning.

A Westerner who looks like a thinner Roger Moore, in a dinner jacket, gets into a magician's crate on a stage. It looks like a conjuring trick, but it's really a trap—the man is a spy. There is an explosion, a cloud of smoke; the box is gone; but the spy is standing in the wings (with his arm around a Beautiful Girl). He delivers the punchline: "Speak Lark."

A housewife goes into her bathroom. It is like any other bathroom, but it has a device on the wall that emits perfumed steam. She gives the mirror flirtatious looks while the bathroom mists up. She has exciting fantasies about playing croquet. When she comes out of the bathroom she is full of excitement and energy. Her bored husband snaps his newspaper and continues to read; and her two young sons stare at her with the most perfect zombie looks I've ever seen (this last part was pretty cute).

There is some overlap between Japanese and American TV. I saw a bit of *Anne of Green Gables*—the one with Megan Follows (it was the part where Anne saves the baby with croup); *Götterdämmerung*, in German, with Japanese subtitles; and *Fraggle Rock*. I believe this last was a special Japanese version, and not just dubbed, because after one Fraggle collided with another, he definitely bowed when he apologized. There is a weekly program—9 PM Wednesdays, I think—that features American movies. Before the movie, the host talks about it for five minutes or so, with the film's logo in the background. I saw this opening section twice. I couldn't follow the man's Japanese, but he seemed to present both films as serious works of cinematic art. They were *Silver Streak* and *Conan the Barbarian*. Both were dubbed. Arnold Schwarzenegger was okay in Japanese; I think the film's fantastic/barbaric setting helped. But *Silver Streak* was incongruous and weird. Leaving facial features aside, Gene Wilder is neither humble nor macho enough to look Japanese. Patrick McGoohan has the right air of samurai stoicism (and ruthlessness). When he gave a waiter a curt "Hai," his manner was convincing—but the waiter should have bowed.

We have westerns; the Japanese have samurai westerns. They pay as much attention to

¹ It is the oldest unbroken royal line in the world.

plausibility in characterization and action in theirs as we do in ours. I saw a program in which two women had a swordfight while wearing kimonos. Now, I can barely walk in a kimono, but this fight involved some very intricate maneuvers—à la the light-saber duel in *Star Wars*—there was even a handspring. (Maybe I just need practice?) A couple minutes before the last station break, the samurai hero was ambushed in a garden by 20 or 30 armed adversaries, whom he singlehandedly vanquished in time for the commercial. His sidekicks then ran onstage. One of them was a *female* ninja.

Following the samurai western was a show about a mild-mannered archaeologist who was also an amateur detective. He had a female sidekick, too, but she wore designer suits. The story involved some mysterious happenings at a girls' school by the sea. Young women were being invited up to have heart-to-heart talks late at night on the edge of a cliff, and being found the next morning floating face-down in the bay. Through clever deduction, some lucky eavesdropping and an adroitly placed voice-activated tape recorder, the professor and his friends (he also had a male sidekick: the team reminded me of *Ironsides*) were able to incriminate the villains and send them off to *To-Kyo Cen-trall*.

In Sendai I watched a portion of a program that probably could not exist anywhere but Japan, where there is simultaneously a widespread, passionate love of golf, and very little open land. The show consists of nothing more than watching a famous golfer (at least, I assume he was a famous golfer) play against a half-dozen perfectly ordinary Sunday golfers on beautiful and enormous golf courses in exotic places, like Hawaii and California. (A non-TV observation. The Japanese satisfy their lust for golf with hundreds—or thousands?—of shooting ranges. These look like tall wire-mesh tents. When I first saw them from the train I thought they were aviaries. However, I could see no birds: *abandoned* aviaries?)

Unquestionably, the best show I saw on Japanese TV was *Yamadakaddenai Terebi*. A linguistic note here. “Yama” means “mountain”: Fujiyama=Mt. Fuji (not Mt. Fujiyama). This may account for the frequent presence of “yama” in Japanese names—Yamada, Yamaha, Uchiyama, etc. To a Japanese person, “yama” probably sounds like “hill” or “berg.” “Yama” also occurs in words meaning “super” or the “the best”: the “Super-Express” bullet train to Sendai is called the “Yamabiko.”

Yamadakaddenai Terebi literally means, “the best show on television.” It is, as you can guess, a comedy show. The name contains another joke: the show's star is a young woman named Yamada Kuniko; Yamada is her family name. (I learned her name and the name of the program from a Japanese woman who was seated next to me on the plane coming home. This woman also told me that the Japanese have not heard of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.)

The lead-in was a cascade of grapes, cherries, chunks of watermelon and pineapple, etc., that formed itself into a fruit cocktail King Kong, who then waved at the camera. There were a couple of commercials, and then the first routine.

Three people—a man and two women—were seated on the floor around a circular rotating table. One of the women looked like she might be an actress; she was obviously a guest star. The other was Kuniko, who, while not bad-looking, is no starlet. (Think of a Japanese Gilda Radner.) Kuniko was wearing a baseball uniform. The man—who appeared to be Kuniko's sidekick—was also wearing a baseball uniform, and over that he was wearing a baseball—a *large* baseball, that covered his body

from his hips to his chest. On his head was big blue baseball glove, mounted as if to catch a pop fly.

One of the props was a lightweight baseball roughly the size of a soccer ball. The man persuaded the women to toss the ball at his glove, where he caught it. The glove did not close—it seemed to work by electrostatic attraction or Velcro.

After this impressive demonstration, they got down to business. There was a big vaudeville-type baseball bat and an inflatable die, with their names—or caricatures of their faces? I’m not sure now—on the sides. One of them would toss the die to the man, who would bat it.

Now, on the table were bottles of mustard and ketchup, and foot-long hot dogs in buns, complete with lettuce, tomatoes, onions, etc. The three of them would sit at the table and spin it. Whichever name (or face?) had come up on the die had to eat the hot dog that stopped in front of him (or her), after the other two had liberally doused it with condiments. This person would eat through until he found something *strange*: you couldn’t miss the expression when he hit it. Then he had to name whatever it was; and he had to keep eating until he got it right—once it was chocolate and once it was watermelon. Then they would bat the die again.

They found the watermelon on the third try. There seemed to be a running joke about watermelon. As soon as it was identified—“*Suika!*”—an entire baseball team came out and sang a song.

Station break!

I’m not sure about the order of the routines that followed (except for the final one). There was one in which Kuniko came into a noodle shop—i. e., a diner—where a black man was seated at the counter. They recognized each other; his name was John and, judging from his accent, he was West Indian². She sat down beside him and they started talking about the food. He was having trouble eating the noodles with a fork. She explained that one had to use chopsticks, and she demonstrated by taking a fresh pair out of their paper wrapper and splitting them apart at the base. John got the idea. He held up his fork in both hands, split *it* apart, and after that did fine.

There were commercials. It is not unusual for a TV show to make fun of commercials, but this is the first time that I’ve seen a program parody its own sponsors’ ads.

There was a Nestlé’s ad. A woman in a black strapless evening dress, elegant and sleek, sitting at a table under sepia-toned light, languidly reaches for a cup of coffee. A voice-over in Japanese, ending with the slogan (in English): “Nestlé: mild to body and taste.”

The parody had Kuniko in the same situation and the same dress, languidly reaching for . . . a slice of watermelon! The camera pulled back and revealed a line of 5 or 6 people, seated at a long table, each with a slice of watermelon in front of him. A whistle blew and they dove in. A businessman on the far right finished his first, dropped the rind on his plate and folded his arms in triumph. The slogan: “Suika: mild to body and taste.”

There was an ad for either perfume or women’s clothing. Art-deco-ish pictures of women in slinky dresses and with slicked-back hair came into view (and back out) from the sides, top and bottom of the screen. The parody had pictures of Kuniko in the same attitudes and outfits. Whenever the picture froze she would make a ludicrous face at the camera; and she has the face

² They both spoke English during this routine.

for it.

The final routine started out with women, including Kuniko, disco dancing in kimonos. They were soon joined by frugging Shinto priests. (Those *couldn't* have been real kimonos.) A couple of minutes in, the camera cut to a girls' aerobics class dancing to the same music. The show ended with Kuniko's sidekick cracking the girls up by asking them embarrassing questions.

August 20. I slept in. After my obligatory shower, I got breakfast and took the subway to Kyoto Station. I planned to see, in this order: Sanjusangendo, Kiyomizudera [both are temples], Shinmonsu [a famous street] and the Imperial Palace. If time and energy allowed, I would also visit the Nijo Castle.

I followed a promising pedestrian walkway out of the station and came up onto the street, lost and disoriented. After asking many questions, carefully watching landmarks and walking for about 45 minutes, I entered what I was pretty sure were the grounds of Sanjusangendo. Still, I had been wrong once that morning.

I approached the ticket booth. Ahead of me were two Japanese-American girls who obviously did not know any Japanese. Nevertheless, the two young women in the booth kept trying to talk to them in Japanese. The girls would respond, carefully enunciating: "We want *two tickets*"—two fingers held up—"Two tickets to the *temm-pull*."

The girls eventually got their tickets and went in.

I walked up and addressed the women in the booth:

"Kore-wa Sanjusangendo desu, ne?" [This is Sangusangendo, isn't it?]

They burst out laughing.

Sanjusangendo Temple was built in 1164 as an emperor's palace. It burned down and was partially rebuilt in 1266. "San-ju(u)-san" (three-ten-three) means 33. "Gen" is a measure of length (the traditional length for the interval between pillars). The chief part of the temple is a long hall which is supposed to be 33 gen long, but that is in fact 66 gen long. A walkway goes down the east side and up the west side. On the east side are 1001 statues of Buddha—no kidding. There are 1000 life-size statues and a big one sitting in the middle. Every statue has 1000 arms—well, actually 40, but each arm can save you in 25 different ways. The collection of Buddhas—no two identical—is supposed to contain every possible Japanese face.

On the way down the hall I bought a sutra scroll for a friend who was taking one of my classes. The two priests who sold it to me found my purchase amusing.

On the southern wall is a display of centuries-old bows and arrows. (There's a famous archery contest in the temple every year; the all-time best score was achieved in 1686.)

On the western side, in back of the Buddhas, are a series of statues of various Buddhist deities—I think there are 28 of them. They *don't* all look the same. One looks like a soldier from the English Civil War; another is a super-Dickensian Ghost of Famines Past.

I left the temple and headed north. The ICM (International Congress of Mathematicians) opened the following day, so mathematicians were beginning to appear in the city. I ran into many gajjin on my way up to Kiyomizudera.

Kiyomizudera is built on the side of a hill, and I had to walk up a steep street to get there. It has a pagoda with a tall spire that you can't miss when you come in on the train.

It's actually a complex of temples, spread over the undulations of the hillside. I'm afraid that I don't remember much of it very clearly—I remember seeing lots of foreigners—and it would be tedious to recount the parts that I do remember—except for one thing (I hope)—what I believe was a class for novice priests (and nuns, too?) in one of the pavilions. The students sat while one priest rang a bell and a woman in white danced—I think—while shaking a kind of tambourine.

The temple is quite a ways up the hill—recall that Kyoto lies in a valley—and it has a good view of the city. A broad, stage-like platform, supported on a trusswork of wooden beams, juts out from one of the main temples. It's the most striking structure in the complex. There's a good picture of it in *Introducing Kyoto*, by Herbert Plutschow. I find it interesting to compare that picture with what I actually experienced. The picture appears to have been taken on an overcast day in autumn. A group of schoolchildren is standing on the platform; there is a sense of coolness. I got there at around noon on a cloudless day in August. The heat and humidity were so intense that I felt like I was in another dimension.

I walked down the hill, going past many, many shops. Most of them did not have front doors but just had the fourth wall open to the street. I ingested some iced caffeine—I forget the flavors—and bought two fans. One was a cheap (200 yen) Korean-style fan—i. e., non-opening: just a stick attached to a circular piece of plastic. It was decorated with a picture of three cartoon characters and bore the obscure legend, “Nori-Nori Rock.” That fan was for survival (when I returned to America I gave it to Tom, our youngest, and, remarkably, as of today—July 24, 1991—it still exists). The other was the *second* fan I bought for Lori. The first one, you remember, was very nice. This one was (and is) beautiful: wood and black paper, with gold Japanese characters on the paper.

When I got off the hill I headed north again. I was walking through the Gion, which is the theater-&-nightlife district of Kyoto. It was strikingly run-down, like Los Angeles near Western Avenue. I don't remember seeing any foreigners there.

I was going to a street called Shinmosen, which I was told had excellent crafts and antique shops. When I got there I found what my guidebook had led me to expect: a narrow, unpretentious street lined with astronomically expensive shops.

Reaching the other end, I crossed the Kamo River, walked over to the subway and took it north to Imadegawa Station, at the northwest corner of the Imperial Park. While I was looking for the right exit I ran into a young British couple. I asked them:

“Are you mathematicians?”

“*No.*”

They were the only non-ICM foreigners I was to meet all week.

We came up onto the street. Like me, they wanted to take the tour of the Imperial Palace, which started at around 2. They were not sure how to get to the Imperial Household Office. Having been in the city for nearly 48 hours, I offered my services as an old Kyoto hand. “This way!” I said.

It turned out that I was trying to lead us to the wrong place. Fortunately, I also chose the wrong direction. My errors canceled out and we got to the right place at the right time. But the couple started to have doubts about me when I pointed to the the wall of the Imperial Park across the street and told them that it was a girls' school. As soon as we got to the office, and during the

tour, they tried to stay as far away from me as possible ³.

The tour is free, but you have to get permission from the IHO. This involves showing your passport and filling out a form, which is then stamped. Why do you need permission? At the time, nobody could tell me, but since returning from Japan I've learned that the IHO tries to guard the mystery that surrounds the Emperor with an obsessive jealousy.

There were about 30 people in the group. Nearly all the foreigners seemed to be ICM. We waited in the guide's-lodge-cum-souvenir-shop while the group gathered. Inside there was an electric fan, some benches and a water cooler. The ground outside was brutally reflective white gravel. The walls and paper panels of the Palace were also white.

Finally everybody was there. The tour was in "English." The guide was a very sweet, very nervous middle-aged woman whose face would tighten up into a smile whenever she stopped talking. Her smile was infectious, in the sense that it efficiently communicated her discomfort.

There is unfortunately not much to see on the tour. You are not allowed to enter the Palace itself, and you get to look into only one room. The room is not remarkable: unpainted paper walls, plain tatami mats. A typical room, the guide told us. The garden is nice—stone lanterns, bridges, ponds, rocks; the usual stuff. It might seem more impressive if you were allowed to go further into it. The most interesting parts of the tour were some things the guide said. Prince Charles stayed there, and he hated it. The Palace has few modern conveniences; in particular, no air conditioning. After three days the Prince moved to a hotel.

President Bush⁴ also stayed there, or was at least received there. Because he is not royalty, he had to enter through the eastern gate. (Prince Charles was allowed to come in by the south.)

I had planned to visit the Nijo Castle, which is a few blocks west and south of the Palace. But I was zeroed. I went back to the hotel and soaked.

Soon after returning to America, the following story occurred to me. I did not hallucinate it or dream it. It's less spontaneous than that but, I think, less contrived than a "story." I believe that it expresses something of what it felt like—for me, some of the time—to be in Japan.

Perhaps one should think of it as an "artificial nightmare."

A Westerner is standing at the busy intersection of Imadegawa and Karasuma, near the Imadegawa subway station. Across the intersection he sees a Heian man—pale, fat-faced, wearing a kimono and a black lacquered hat—pass through the crowds—who take no notice of him—and go down the stairs to the subway station.

The Westerner walks south on Karasuma. He is on his way to take the Imperial Palace tour. In the street he sees a Heian ox-cart; it looks like a compact Conestoga wagon. The other drivers move around it. It attracts no special attention from them or from the people on the sidewalks.

The tour. The group is standing outside one of the Palace rooms. The guide has her back to the paper panels, which are shut. As she speaks, sounds begin to come from the room: moans and grunts of a couple having sexual intercourse. The group does not look at the guide, but at the wall. The guide continues to speak; a smile is fixed on her face. She keeps trying to glance behind her

³ "Americans are so pushy; always thinking they know it all. We met the most perfect idiot in Kyoto."

⁴ Or "Bush-san," as she called him.

without turning her head.

(Later, security guards visit the room. It is evident that nobody has entered it for weeks, but in the center of the floor there is a splotch of fresh blood.)

The Westerner is standing on a subway platform. Sitting on a bench is a Heian woman—pale and fat-faced, wearing a kimono, and with thick black hair that reaches to her feet. She is sobbing and holding her face in her hands.

The Westerner walks up and places his hand on her shoulder.

“Sumimasen,” he says. [Excuse me]

She looks up; she has stopped crying. Then the Westerner notices that the platform has suddenly become very, very quiet. He looks around. Everybody is staring at him.