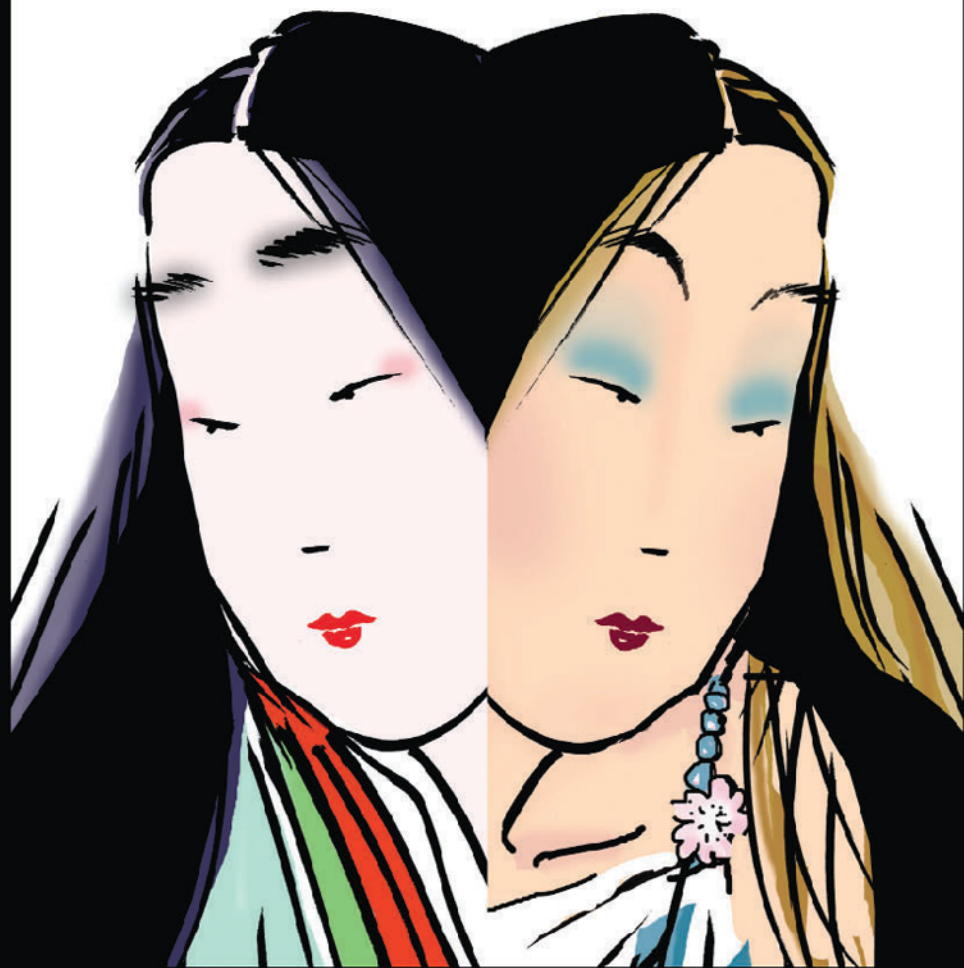
Japanese Women Poets

An Anthology



Translated and with an Introduction by

Hiroaki Sato

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To Nancy

I sent a poem to a man I was in love with as fleetingly as dew:

White dew, dreams, this world, illusions: all these last for eternities in comparison.

—Izumi Shikibu

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Note and Acknowledgments

All Japanese names in this anthology are given the Japanese way, family name first. Following Japanese custom, poets are sometimes identified by personal name or penname, sometimes by family name. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine. Several *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* translations originally appeared in *From the Country of Eight Islands: An Anthology of Japanese Poetry* (Doubleday, 1981; Columbia University Press, 1986); a passage from *Mumyōshū* quoted in the introduction, a passage from the *Masu-Kagami* in the Kunai-kyō section, as well as all the poems of Princess Shikishi, in *String of Beads: Complete Poems of Princess Shikishi* (University of Hawaii Press, 1993); "Record of an Autumn Wind," complete and fully annotated, in *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 55, no. 1 (Spring 2000); all the poems of Ema Saikō, in *Breeze Through Bamboo: Kanshi of Ema Saikō* (Columbia University Press, 1997); Yosano Akiko's "Cochineal Purple" (from *Midaregami*), "May It Not Come to Pass that You Die," "The Woman," "In Praise of May," and "Auguste's Single Strike" in *The University of California Book of Romantic and Post-Romantic Poetry;* some of Nagase Kiyoko's poems, in *Poetry Kanto 2006*; many of Fujiki Kiyoko's haiku, in *ant ant ant ant ant* (Fall 2003); some of Ishigaki Rin's poems, in *From the Country of Eight Islands* and *Poetry Kanto 2006*; Takarabe Toriko's "Talk of Horses" in *Circumference* (Fall 2003), several in online magazine *Fascicle* (Summer 2005), and several in *Poetry Kanto 2006*; all of Shinkawa Kazue's poems, in *Not a Metaphor: Poems of Shinkawa Kazue* (P.S., A Press, 1999); many of Tada Chimako's poems, in *Anthology of World Poetry of the 20th Century*, Volume II (Green Integer); all of Tomioka Taeko's poems, in *See You Soon: Poems of Taeko Tomioka* (Chicago Review Press, 1979); some of Koyanagi Reiko's poems, in *Rabbit of the Nether World* (Red Moon Press, 1999); all of Kimura Nobuko's poems, in *The Village Beyond: Poems of Nobuko Kimura* (P.S., A Press, 2002); one of her poems, "Over There," also in the Asia special issue of *Atlanta Review* (Spring/Summer 2002); all of Nagashima Minako's poems, in *The Girl Who Turned into Tea: Poems of Minako Nagashima* (P.S., A Press, 2000); fifteen of Kamakura Sayumi's haiku in *Modern Haiku* (Fall 2000); Abe Hinako's "Garden Party" and "The Future Belongs to Olenka" in online magazine *Fascicle* (Summer 2005) and Nagami Atsuko's poem, "Descending to 'Hell Valley' in the Nippara Stalactite Cave," in the *Tin House* magazine (Summer 2003, Vol. 4, No. 4) and some others, in *Bomb* (Spring 2004); all of Park Kyong-Mi in online magazine *The Green Integer Review*, No. 2 (March–April 2006); Hirata Toshiko's "Recent Photos" and "A Woman's Life or Nakayama Atsuko" and Koike Masayo's "The Most Sensuous Room" in online magazine *How2* (2005); most of "A Brief Survey of Haiku by Women," in *Modern Haiku* (Autumn 2002) and most of "A Brief

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My primary readers were, as always, Robert Fagan, Lenore Parker, and Nancy Rossiter.

This book would not have been possible without the patience and generosity of everyone.

Hiroaki Sato

Chronology

Nara Period (710–784)
712: *Kojiki (Record of Ancient Matters)*
720: *Nihon Shoki (History of Japan)*
751: *Kaifūsō (Fond Recollections of Poetry)*, anthology of kanshi
Late in the century: *Man'yōshū (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves)*
Beowulf

Heian Period (794–1185)
814–827: three imperial anthologies of kanshi
905: *Kokinshū (Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems)*, first imperial anthology of Japanese poems
Early 11th century: *Genji Monogatari (The Tale of Genji)*

Kamakura Period (1192–1333)
1205: *Shin-Kokinshū (New Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems)*, eighth imperial anthology of Japanese poems
late 13th century: *Yoru no Tsuru (The Night Crane)*, Abutsu's treatise on poetics

Muromachi Period (1331–1573)
1357: *Tsukubashū (Tsukuba Collection)*, semi-imperial renga anthology
Christine de Pizan (1364–1430)
1439: *Shin-Zoku-Kokinshū (New Sequel to the Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems)*, 21st and last imperial anthology of Japanese poems
From the latter half of the 15th century to the late 16th century: Japan's Age of Warring States
Isabella d'Este (1474–1539)
Louise Labé (1520?–66)
1557: *Tottel's Miscellany*

Edo Period (1600–1868)
Ann Bradstreet (1612?–72)
Aphra Behn (1640–89)
Juana Ines de la Cruz (1648–95)
1684: *Kokin Haikai Onna Kasen (Thirty-Six Ancient and Modern Women Haikai Poets)*, collection of 36 women haikai poets compiled by Ihara Saikaku; first such anthology
1702: *Mikawa Komachi (Mikawa Beauties)*, second half devoted to women haikai poets, compiled by Ōta Hakusetsu

1747: *Tamamoshū (Coralline Collection)*, collection of women haikai poets compiled by Yosa Buson
1789: *Umiyama (Sea and Mountain)*, anthology with a substantial collection of haibun by a woman
Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–61)
Emily Dickinson (1830–86)
Christina Rossetti (1830–94)

Modern Period (since 1868)
1868: Tokugawa shogunate replaced by monarchism
Amy Lowell (1874–1925)
Edith Sitwell (1887–1964)
1882: *Shintai-shi Shō (New-Style Poetry)*, first attempt to introduce Western-style verse
1901: *Midaregami (Hair in Disorder)*, collection of tanka by Yosano Akiko
1904–05: Russo-Japanese War
1911: Hiratsuka Raichō starts a women's magazine, *Seitō (Bluestockings)*
1941: Japan assaults Pearl Harbor
1945: Japan surrenders

Twelve Months

Until it adopted the solar calendar in the early 1870s, Japan used the lunar calendar. In the lunar calendar, a month consists of twenty-nine or thirty days. To make up for the obvious shortfall, seven intercalary months are inserted every nineteen years. Lunar months are about forty days behind those of the solar calendar, though an intercalary month sometimes throws this off. Unlike the solar calendar, in which spring begins in March, in the lunar calendar spring begins in First Month.

The basic Japanese names for the twelve months, lunar and solar, are numerical: *ichi-gatsu,* "First Month," for January, *ni-gatsu,* "Second Month," for February, and so on. But each lunar month also has a variety of names, some originating in China, some in Japan. A list of the most common alternative names for the twelve lunar months, along with their etymological explanations or conjectures, is given below, each illustrated with a haiku by a woman. Much of the information comes from Muzuhara Shūōshi, Katō Shūson, and Yamakoto Kenkichi, eds., *Nihon Dai-Saijiki* (Kōdansha, 1983), a massive compendium of fifteen thousand *kigo,* "seasonal words," each seasonal indicator accompanied by haiku—sometimes dozens of them. I have also consulted the four-volume *Haikai Saijiki* (Shinchōsha, 1950–1968) and the five-volume *Haiku Saijiki* (Kadokawa Shoten, 1955–1980).

Intimate Month *(Mutsuki)* for First Month. The name is said to reflect the tendency of people to get together and become *mutsumaji,* "intimate," during the New Year festivities. Kusamura Motoko (1919–1974) wrote, referring to the pine decorations for the New Year known as *kadomatsu,* "gate pines":

Matsu torete nochi no Mutsuki no kakeashi ni
After the pines taken off Intimate Month trots away

Clothes Doubled *(Kisaragi)* for Second Month. With the word consisting of ki (clothes) and saragi (wearing more), it tells you that the lingering cold can sometimes force you to wear more clothes. Hosomi Ayako (1907–1987) wrote:

Kisaragi ga mayu no atari ni kuru gotoshi
As though Clothes Doubled came near my eyebrows

More Growth *(Yayoi)* for Third Month. The name is thought to derive from *iyaoi,* "irrepressible growth," in reference to the time of year when the growth of plants becomes ever more pronounced. Ichiriki Tamiko (dates uncertain) wrote:

Hoshimono o sukoshi yoru hosu Yayoi-zuki
I put up some clothes to dry at night under the More Growth moon

Deutzia Month *(Uzuki)* for Fourth Month. The shrub with white flowers called *unohana* or *utsugi (Deutzia crenata* or *scabra)* flourishes during this month. Some regret the infelicitous sound of the English and Latin names of the plant and substitute deutzia with "mock orange" or "saxifrage"; both English and Latin names come from Jean Deutz, mayor of Amsterdam and patron of botany. *Unohana* is prized for the bright white clusters its flowers make, which in classical poetry are often compared to snow or crystal. Chiyo-jo (1703?–1775) captures that aspect of this flowering shrub in her hokku:

Unohana wa hi o mochinagara kumorikeri
Deutzia flowers hold forth their light on a cloudy day

Seedling Month *(Satsuki)* for Fifth Month. Some say *satsuki* is an abbreviation of *sanaetsuki,* "rice-seedling month," and some that it is that of *samidare-tsuki,* "rainy-season month," although, for that matter, *sa* in *samidare* itself is said to mean Fifth Month, *midare* meaning "water-dripping." Yamazaki Tomiko (dates uncertain) uses one of the non-abbreviated names of *satsuki* in the following haiku in which *ni,* "load," suggests a basket filled with rice seedlings:

Shimabito no mina ni o ou ya Sanaetsuki
The island people all carry a load: Rice-seedling Month

Waterless Month *(Minazuki)* for Sixth Month. Japan's rainy season *(tsuyu),* which lasts for about thirty days, is followed by hot, sun-drenched days during this month, hence the name. In the following haiku of Hasegawa Kanajo (1887–1969), the water in the rice paddies still hasn't evaporated:

Minazuki no tagoto ni sagi o tenjikeri
In Waterless Month each paddy's dotted with herons

Letter Month (*Fumizuki*) for Seventh Month. *Fumi* means "letter," "writing," "book," etc. The seventh day of Seventh Month is Tanabata, Japan's star festival when the once-a-year meeting is allowed to take place between Princess Weaver (Vega) and the Oxherd (Altair) across the River of Heaven (the Milky Way). As U. A. Casal describes it in *The Five Sacred Festivals in Ancient Japan* (Sophia University, 1967), on this day freshly cut bamboo is "adorned with numerous pieces of gaily colored paper: neat strips which twirl on a thread, and which, closer inspection will show, are covered with inscriptions, poems in fact." The name of the month comes, some say, from the act of opening anthologies for children to copy appropriate poems on those gaily colored strips of paper. In

Hasegawa Kanajo's piece on the month, sasafuri, "bamboo leaves falling," is a summer kigo, which may onomatopoeically suggest rain, and the word *hana,* "flowers," points to the colorful strips of paper. Rain on Tanabata prevents the two lovers from having their annual tryst. Some haiku practitioners argue you can't use two kigo in a single piece.

Sasafuri ya Fumizuki no hana ochi nagashi
Bamboo leaves falling Letter Month flowers drop and flow

Leaf Month *(Hazuki)* for Eighth Month. The tanka poet Fujiwara no Kiyosuke (1104–1177) says in his treatise on poetics, *Ōgishō,* that the name derives from the fact that during the month tree leaves turn color and fall. The renga master Matsumura Jōha (1524–1602) argues in *Shihōshō,* a treatise on poetics he prepared for the warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi, that the Chinese characters to be used for *hazuki* should be those that mean "first" and "month" because it is in this month that geese, coming from the north, first appear in Japan. In the following haiku by Kashiwamura Sadako (born 1916), Otoko-yama most likely refers to a hill south of Kyoto which has atop it the famous shrine for the deity of war, Iwashimizu Hachiman-gū:

Otoko-yama kudarite Hazuki no te o nurasu
Coming down Mount Male I wet my Leaf Month hands

Long Month *(Nagatsuki)* for Ninth Month. Nights become longer during the month, hence the name, some say. Shibata Hakuyōjo (1906–1984) has:

Nagatsuki no ichiju katamuku hoshi-akari
In Long Month a single tree tilts in the star light

Godless Month (*Kannazuki*) for Tenth Month. Yoshida Kenkō (1283–1351?) devotes Section 202 of his *Tsurezuregusa* (*Essays in Idleness*) to a discussion of the striking name: "There is nothing that says that, Tenth Month being called Godless Month, we should avoid deity-related services [during this month]. There is no authoritative source on this, either. However, the name may derive from the fact that there is no shrine festival this month. There is a theory that in this month all the thousands of deities gather at the Grand Shrine [of Ise, where the presiding deity is Sun Goddess Amaterasu-ō-mi-kami], but there is no authority on this. In the event, Ise should make it a particularly festive month, but it does no such thing. In Tenth Month, there are a number of imperial visits to various shrines, but many are inauspicious." In other words, according to Kenkō, why this month is called "godless" is not known. In more recent accounts, all the deities are said to gather at the Grand Shrine of Izumo, where the chief deity Ōkuninushi-no-mikoto is male, perhaps for a fall banquet, and because they vacate their own

shrines to congregate in one, the month, it is explained, is "godless." Katsura Nobuko (1914–2004) has written a mystifying piece:

Hashigo yori hito no nioi ya Kannazuki
From a ladder comes someone's smell this Godless Month

Frost Month (*Shimotsuki*) for Eleventh Month. The name is understood to reflect the meteorological phenomenon of the month. Watanabe Kazuko (dates uncertain) wrote:

Shimotsuki ya chashibu shimitaru fukin hosu
Frost Month: I dry a napkin soaked with tea puckeriness

Priests' Run *(Shiwasu)* for Twelfth Month. So called because during the last month of the year even monks and priests, who are supposed to maintain transcendental calm, are forced to run about to take care of unfinished business and chores. Conversely, some say the name derives from *shihatsu,* "month in which to finish doing things." Matate Masayo (dates uncertain) has:

Machi Shiwasu ten ni mukaite ashiba kumu
Town in Priests' Run: toward heaven scaffolds build

Introduction

Something held women back when it came to the writing of poetry, and since whatever it was that held them back failed to hold women back from writing novels, we must suppose that the inhibition had something, at least, to do with the antiquity and prestige of the art.

—James Fenton[1]

Japanese poetry, which dates from the seventh century or earlier, has two distinct features: the sizable presence of women poets from the outset and a verse structure based on simple syllabic patterns.

Japan's oldest extant book, the *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters*), compiled in 712, and the more elaborate retelling of the same mythological and semi-mythological imperial lineage, the *Nihon Shoki* (*History of Japan*), compiled in 720, together contain a total of 190 distinct songs, and 58 of them, or 30 percent, are attributed to women. The figure falls to 12 percent for the *Man'yōshū* (*Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves*), the great anthology of about 4,550 poems that took shape in the late eighth century. In "the twenty-one imperial anthologies," compiled from the early tenth century to 1439,[2] the number of women included sometimes becomes very small, but they are always present. In the case of the fourth imperial anthology, the *Go-Shūishū* (*Collection of Later Gleanings*), compiled in 1087, 104 of the total of 329 poets are women, as are the three best represented: Izumi Shikibu (born late 970s), Sagami (991?–1061?), and Akazome Emon (957?–1041?).[3] This came about, explained the poet and ethnological student of Japanese literature Orikuchi Shinobu (Shaku Chōkū; 1887–1953),

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1. James Fenton, *The Strength of Poetry: Oxford Lectures* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 103.

2. The idea of compiling verse anthologies by the order of the emperor apparently came from China, but China never pursued the matter in earnest. Japan, in any case, is almost certainly the only country in the world that produced so many anthologies at the behest of the head of state. See Maruya Saiichi's short history of Japanese literature, *Nihon Bungaku Hayawakari* (Kōdansha, 1984), 7–8.

3. The "real" names of women poets in early periods are often unknown. The names we know are usually "court (nick)names," and the naming can be capricious. Izumi Shikibu was so called because her husband, Tachibana no Michisada, once served as governor of Izumi Province, and her father, Ōe no Masamune, was an officer in the Shikibu-shō, Ministry of Ceremonial. Sagami, who had nothing that might correspond to the second part of a "full name," was so called because her husband, Ōe no Kimiyori, once served as governor of Sagami Province. Akazome Emon was so called because her father, Akazome Tokimochi, was an *emon*, a palace guard. She was also called Masahira Emon because her husband was Ōe no Masahira.

because of Japan's "historical habit of recognizing women's poetry as the same as men's in rank."[4]

In contrast, women's presence in Western poetry until recent centuries is so meager as to tempt James Fenton to make the kind of assertion cited at the outset of this introduction. Or, as Burton Watson once put it, explaining how the situation is different in Japan, "Try writing 'Sappho' on a sheet of paper and listing under it all the other famous women poets in Western literature down to the middle of the [nineteenth] century and you will see what I mean."[5] In England, for example, *Tottel's Miscellany,* the first anthology of English verse, published in 1557, does not seem to include a single woman, even among the "uncertain authors."

In certain of the later periods—in particular, from the late fourteenth century to the early seventeenth century, when the court was overshadowed by the military government and the whole country was in a state of constant warfare—women poets may not have done as well as their forebears, but they were never completely eclipsed. When it comes to the past one hundred years or so, several books of poems by women have created national sensations. Among them are *Midaregami* (*Hair in Disorder*), in 1901, by Yosano Akiko (1878–1942), who sang in romantic delirium of a young woman's desires and fantasies; *Chibusa Sōshitsu* (*My Breasts Lost*), in 1954, by Nakajō Fumiko (1922–1954), who chronicled the effects of a breast cancer that eventually killed her; *Sarada Kinenbi* (*Salad Anniversary*), in 1987, by Tawara Machi (born 1962), who described youthful love affairs with the sort of lightheartedness that was thought to characterize a generation known by the sobriquet *shin-jinrui,* "new mankind"; and *B-men no Natsu* (*Summer on Side B*), in 1994, by Mayuzumi Madoka (born 1962), who depicted an illicit love affair in a book-length sequence of haiku. One might add *Yorikakarazu* (*Relying on Nothing*), a 1999 book by Ibaraki Noriko (born 1926), which, because a popular column of a major daily mentioned it, sold 300,000 copies.

Anthologies are always arbitrary in their selections to a greater or lesser extent, but two recent ones seem to set new standards for tanka poets in modern times. In Takano Kimihiko's *Gendai no Tanka* (Kōdansha, 1991), 38 out of the 105 poets selected for the period since the late nineteenth century are women. In Okai Takashi's *Gendai Hyakunin Isshu* (Asahi Shimbunsha, 1996), 34 of the 100 poets selected for the period since the end of the Second World War are women.

The title of Okai's book, incidentally, comes from the most famous mini-anthology ever compiled in Japan: the *Hyakunin Isshu* (*One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets*). In that canonical selection, prepared in the thirteenth century by Fujiwara no Teika (1162–1241), 21 of the 100 poets are women.

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4. Orikuchi Shinobu, *Josei Tanka-shi* (*History of Tanka by Women*), vol. 11, *Zenshū*, 4th rev. ed. (Chūō Kōron Sha, 1984), 48.

5. Burton Watson, Introduction, in *See You Soon: Poems of Taeko Tomioka*, trans. Hiroaki Sato (Chicago Review Press, 1979), 11.

Women Assessing Their Own Position

This is not to say that Japanese women poets have been mostly content with their lot. *Mumyō Sōshi (Nameless Book)*, a remarkable work of literary criticism that is attributed to the poet known as Lord Shunzei's Daughter (1171?–1252?)—actually a grandchild of Fujiwara no Shunzei (1114–1204), who adopted her—creates a setting in which an old nun listens to a group of young women discuss women's literary achievements: There is *Genji Monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*), one of the women says, "a rarity that couldn't have been born of the forces of this world alone." There is, says another, *Sagoromo Monogatari* (*The Tale of Sagoromo*), "second only to *Genji* in popularity." And there is *Yoru no Nezame* (*Awaking at Night*), whose focus on one woman's suffering "touches you deeply." (*Sagoromo Monogatari* is attributed to Minamoto no Yorikuni's Daughter, also known as Rokujō Saiin Senji [died 1092]. The author of *Yoru no Nezame* is unknown but is assumed to be female.)

Among the writers and poets, the women go on to say, Ono no Komachi, judging from her poetry, "must have been exquisite in every way—in her appearance, her conduct, her heart." Sei Shōnagon may not be "as good a poet as you might expect" but has "fully expressed her heart in *Makura no Sōshi* [*The Pillow Book*], detailing all the wonderful, pitiful, exquisite, and felicitous things in it." There are, in addition, Koshikibu no Naishi and her mother, Izumi Shikibu, as well as their employer, Empress Teishi, not to mention Murasaki Shikibu and her employer, Empress Shōshi, also known by her Buddhist name, Jōtōmon'in.[6]

As it happens, this discussion is touched off when one of the group laments the "mortifying" (*kuchioshi*) state in which women find themselves. Anthologists—such as Shunzei, who, at Retired Emperor Goshirakawa's command, edited a few years earlier the seventh imperial anthology of Japanese poetry, the *Senzaishū*—often end up including mediocre pieces of those of higher status as a mark of deference, the young woman notes. "That must be humiliating, don't you think?" she asks. "Yes, it must be," she responds to her own question before continuing: "But nothing is more mortifying than being a woman. Since long ago many of us have fine-tuned our sensibilities and studied the Way of Poetry but not one has been asked to edit an imperial anthology. Isn't that mortifying?"

The young woman ends her complaint saying that aspiring poets must try to "imitate" superior poets of the past and the present, "even those who are only slightly better" than they, imitation being *de rigueur* in writing poetry. To this, another person, perhaps the old nun or Lord Shunzei's Daughter herself, says: "You know

6. *Mumyō Sōshi* is thought to have been written around 1200. A century earlier, the scholar of Chinese classics Ōe no Masafusa (1041–1111) assessed the situation differently. He cited Izumi Shikubu and Akazome Emon as representative poets but mentioned neither Murasaki Shikibu nor Sei Shōnagon, apparently because he did not regard the ability to write prose in the indigenous Japanese language as worth noting.

mimicking is something you shouldn't do. If you do it, you'll fall into an abyss!" With that, "everyone laughs."

Here, Lord Shunzei's Daughter may have been self-consciously joking. She was skilled at *honkadori*—the art, which was then being codified by poets such as Shunzei's son, Teika, of incorporating into a poem a word or phrase found in someone else's poem. And this brings us to versification.

Development of Verse Forms

When poetic forms first took shape in Japan, there were at least five, all based on units of five and seven syllables. Two of them were dominant: the 5-7-5-7-7-syllable *tanka*, "short song," and the *chōka* or *nagauta*, "long song," which repeats the 5-7-syllable combination three times or more, usually ending with an extra seven and often followed by an envoi of one or more tanka. (*Ka* is a sinified pronunciation of the Chinese character for the Japanese word *uta*, "song.") As the early English student of Japanese literature W.G. Aston (1841–1911) wrote, in 1899, the chōka was "an instrument not unfitted . . . for the production of narrative, elegiac, and other poems." But that verse form began to be neglected early on, so that a mere 5 of the 1,111 poems in the *Kokinshū* (*Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems*) were chōka; virtually all the others were composed in the tanka form. Subsequently, the tanka became the almost exclusive poetic vehicle for those writing in Japanese—a development Aston pondered as "a question which it is more easy to ask than to answer."[7]

I say "writing in Japanese" because Japanese poets also wrote verse in classical Chinese, called *kanshi* (*hanshi* in Chinese). In fact, the first three "imperial anthologies" were of poems the Japanese wrote in Chinese: *Ryōunshū* (*Cloud-Borne Collection*), in 814, *Bunka Shūreishū* (*Collection of Literary Masterpieces*), in 818, both compiled by order of Emperor Saga (786–842), and *Keikokushū* (*Collection for the Ordering of the State*), in 827, compiled by order of Emperor Junna (786–840). Included in the *Keikokushū* is Princess Uchiko (aka Uchishi; 807–847), Saga's daughter with a member of the Korean royalty, whose kanshi has been described as among the very best written by the Japanese. It was a period of what Mishima Yukio (1925–1970) called "intoxication with a culture from abroad."[8] The statesman-scholar-poet Sugawara no Michizane (845–903), for one, took the remarkable step of writing a seven-character, four-line kanshi for each tanka he selected for his "newly

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7. W.G. Aston, *A History of Japanese Literature* (Heinemann, 1899; repr., Charles E. Tuttle, 1972), 59. Inexplicably, the reprint edition drops part of the preface in which Aston discusses the eternally insoluble difficulty a translator faces in conveying the literary connotations of certain plant names and philosophical or aesthetic concepts.

8. Mishima Yukio, *Nihon Bungaku Shōshi* (*A Short History of Japanese Literature*), vol. 35, *Mishima Yukio Zenshū* (Shinchōsha, 2003), 577.

selected *Man'yōshū,*" in 893—whether he did so to explain to a Chinese or a Korean, should one happen to come by, what the Japanese verse was trying to say, or to demonstrate that Japanese verse also had some poetic value, we don't know. Here is an anonymous tanka in the *Kokinshū* (no. 215, attributed to the imaginary poet Sarumaru Dayū when included in the *Hyakunin Isshu*), followed by Michizane's kanshi:

> *Okuyama ni momiji fumiwake naku shika no koe kiku toki zo aki wa kanashiki*
>
> When I hear deep in the mountains the call of a deer picking its way
> through crimson leaves, the autumn makes me full of sorrow
>
> *qiu shan ji ji xie ling ling*
> *mi lu ming yin shu chu ling*
> *shen di xin lai you yang chu*
> *wu peng wu jiu yi you leng*
>
> The autumn mountain hushed, hushed, the leaves falling, falling,
> Antlered deer are heard calling in many places.
> In a place where a winning view is sought for a picnic
> I have no friend, no sake, and my heart grows even more cold.[9]

We notice at once that the kanshi with its twenty-eight syllables manages to say a great deal more than the tanka with its thirty-one.

Trying to write like Chinese poets such as Po Chu-i (772–846) and Yuan Zhen (779–831) and doing so in a foreign linguistic medium, Japanese poets inevitably gained a number of ideas from them, including that of composing poems on given topics (and about paintings) and categorizing them accordingly. In this process, one fateful turn of events was the failure of the Japanese poets to follow their models in addressing political and social issues in poetry—what the great scholar of Chinese classics Yoshikawa Kōjirō (1904–1980) summed up as "the urge for *kōgai*" or lamentation, "a sensibility for human destiny with social solidarity at its center."[10] In his massive history of Japanese literature, Konishi Jin'ichi has called that failure "a bizarre phenomenon from the viewpoint of common sense in the world."[11] Writing poems in Chinese, at any rate, became so dominant that verse in Japanese could hardly be shown "in public places," such verse having become

9. A selection from the *Shinsen Man'yōshū* is included in Kojima Noriyuki and Arai Eizō, ed., *Kokin Waka Shū* (Iwanami Shoten, 1989). This pair is cited on p. 368.

10. Yoshikawa Kōjirō, "*Zakkan*," *geppō* accompanying Kojima Noriyuki, ed., *Kaifūsō*, etc. (Iwanami Shoten, 1964), 7.

11. Konishi Jin'ichi, *Nihon Bungei Shi* (*History of Japanese Literary Arts*), vol. 2 (Kōdansha, 1985), 195. As he notes, Sugawara Michizane was an outstanding exception.

"partially a [learning] aid of ladies and could not be brought before gentlemen," as the Japanese foreword and the Chinese afterword of the *Kokinshū* memorably lamented when it was compiled in the early tenth century. And even after Japanese verse was officially recognized, kanshi continued to be written—until it quickly withered away in the early twentieth century.[12] In Japan and some other East Asian countries, Chinese played a role akin to Latin in European countries.

To go back to Japanese prosody: While chōka thrived, the 5-7-5-7-7-syllable tanka tended to break into 5-7, 5-7, and 7. But by the tenth century the form was more often breaking into 5-7-5 and 7-7. As that happened, and as the upper and lower hemistiches of the tanka began to be composed by different hands and then linked, the *renga,* "linked verse," was born. Initially a witty exchange made up of just the two units, it developed into a sequential group composition alternating 5-7-5- and 7-7-syllable units up to fifty times, to a total of one hundred long and short hemistiches. In that formation, the most important part was the opening unit, called the *hokku.* Required to indicate the time and place of composition, it had to be able to stand on its own. As a result, hokku began to be composed independently, probably in the sixteenth century, spawning what may be the world's shortest poetic form, haiku, although that name did not gain currency until early in the twentieth century.[13]

So, indigenous Japanese verse forms have grown in a simple genealogical line, from tanka to renga to hokku/haiku. It was a process of a brief form fragmenting, then further contracting, which amazed not only W.G. Aston, but also other early English students of Japanese literature, such as B.H. Chamberlain (1850–1935)[14] and Arthur Waley (1889–1966). These old forms survive to this day nonetheless, coexisting, for over a century now, with longer, much more flexible poems that came into being toward the end of the nineteenth century under Western influences. At first, "new-style" poems, as they were called initially, were composed in various combinations of the time-tested five- and seven-syllable units, as well as newly created ones with six and eight syllables. But soon the influence of *vers libre* swamped the land, and the use of syllabic patterns, both traditional and new, was washed away from the new genre. One book that exemplifies this transitional phase, with the strong hold of the "set forms" of tanka and hokku/haiku manifest, is *Uta Nikki* (*Verse Di-*

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12. Burton Watson's two-volume *Japanese Literature in Chinese* (Columbia University Press, 1975–76) is the first major work in this genre. The translations of the titles of the three imperial anthologies are his.

13. For more detailed descriptions of the early prosodic development of Japanese verse, see Robert H. Brower's essay, "Japanese," in *Versification: Major Language Types*, ed. W. K. Wimsatt (New York University Press, 1972), 38–51, as well as Brower's earlier work with Earl Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry* (Stanford University Press, 1961), 56–78.

14. For Chamberlain's exasperation, see his *Things Japanese* (1905; the title later changed to *Japanese Things*; repr. Charles E. Tuttle, 1971), 376–77.

ary), a substantial collection of poems Mori Ōgai (1862–1922) wrote during the Russo-Japanese War.[15]

In Japan, as elsewhere, free verse was part of the movement to adopt colloquial language. In tanka and haiku, this led to the idea of *jiyūritsu,* "free rhythm," which ignored syllabic units and count.[16] In both genres, but in haiku in particular, remarkable poets have appeared, but neither the complete adherence to colloquial language nor free rhythm has become the mainstream.

Today the term *shi,* "poem" or "poetry," commonly refers to vers libre (though few use the French term or its Japanese equivalent now). This practice raises an immediate question: Aren't tanka, renga, and haiku also "poems"? They are, but they are seldom put in that category because of the strong sense of specialization in Japan. In a country where those who write tanka are called *kajin,* those who write haiku *haijin,* and those who write shi *shijin,* some haiku commentators even try to differentiate haiku from *ichigyō-shi,* "one-line poem"—a proposition possible only because of the assumption that the haiku, which, like the tanka, is regarded as a monolinear verse form by most haiku practitioners and commentators, functions in its own domain. In any case, poetry in Japan today, as in most other countries, is hard to define, except to say that it is "that which its own author considers to be poetry," in the words of the translator and anthologist Eliot Weinberger.[17]

One recent development to be noted is not prosodic but ethnic: a growing interest in the writings in Japanese, including poetry, by people of Korean descent. In 1910 Japan annexed Korea, then called *Taehanjeguk,* Great Han Empire. As a result, many Koreans migrated to Japan (just as many Japanese did to Korea) and learned Japanese and began writing in it (though not many Japanese are known to have reciprocated). With Japan's defeat in the Second World War, in 1945, Korea regained its independence, and many Koreans and people of Korean descent returned to Korea, but many stayed in Japan. For this anthology I have selected two poets from the postwar generation, Cheon Mihye (born 1955) and Park Kyong-Mi (born 1956), as representing two differing ethnic sensibilities.

Poetic Devices

The simple syllabic structures of classical verse forms do not mean that tanka, renga, and hokku are rhetorically simple. They employ a number of sophis-

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15. A selection of these poems in my translation is included in J. Thomas Rimer, ed., *Not a Song Like Any Other: An Anthology of Writings by Mori Ōgai*, (University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 280–311.

16. One surprising development may be the popularity of free rhythm haiku among the Japanese immigrants on the West Coast of the United States. See Violet Kazue de Cristoforo, ed., *May Sky: There Is Always Tomorrow: An Anthology of Japanese American Concentration Camp Kaiko Haiku* (Sun and Moon, 1997).

17. Eliot Weinberger, *American Poetry Since 1950: Innovators and Outsiders (Marsilio*, 1993), xii.

ticated devices: *makura-kotoba*, *joshi*, *kakekotoba*, *mitate*, and *uta-makura*, among others.

The *makura-kotoba,* "pillow word," is an epithet consisting of five syllables or less, which conjures up the word that follows by sense or alliteration or both. Thus, *akane sasu,* "madder-illuminating"—"madder" here being a red dye extracted from the roots of the plant *akane* (*Rubia tinctorum*)—precedes or modifies *hi,* "light" or "day." *Saho-yama,* "Mount Saho," precedes *sao,* "pole," and *Kurabu-yama,* "Mount Kurabu," precedes *kurashi,* "dark."

The importance of makura-kotoba in early poetry was such that Fujiwara no Kintō (966–1041) observed in his treatise *Shinsen Zuinō* (*New Essential Poetics*): "Ancient people often put a makura-kotoba in the first part [of a poem], revealing the intended meaning in the second," adding that even though the practice became less prevalent during the *Kokinshū* days, "it was still regarded as bad form to reveal the thought at the outset." Much later, Orikuchi Shinobu expanded on the idea and speculated that ancient poets simply strung together images as they saw them until the words reached a requisite length, then added "a thought," almost an afterthought. His example is one of the three songs the first (mythological) emperor, Jimmu, is said to have sung in smiting the army led by his adversary, Prince Tomi:

> *Kamikaze no* (divine-wind-of)[18] *Ise no umi no* (Ise-of-sea-of) *ohishi ni* (boulder-on) *hai-motorofu* (crawl-go-around) *shitadami no* (periwinkle-of) *i-hai-motohori* (be-crawl-go-around) *uchiteshi-yamamu* (smite-and-stop)[19]

Here, the only "thought" is the last part, meaning "We shall stop only with the enemy smitten." (The phrase became one of Japan's military slogans during the Second World War.) The rest consists simply of things that he saw, from larger to smaller ones. This speculation is worth bringing up because some translators ignore pillow words as cumbersome. Cumbersome they certainly are, especially because the word order must usually be reversed in English. But I always retain them in my translation. (A poem that is comparable to Jimmu's song is the one that begins, "By the river of Yamashiro, of continuous peaks," on page 9, which is attributed to Princess Iwa, Emperor Nintoku's consort.)

The *joshi,* "introductory phrase," which consists of two or more opening syllabic units and therefore often takes up over half of the length of a tanka, functions like a makura-kotoba by bringing in a word by sense or alliteration. It also serves as a simile or metaphor.

The *kakekotoba,* "pivotal word," is a pun and comes naturally to Japanese, a language full of homonyms and homophones. As is often pointed out, puns are

18. Makura-kotoba.

19. Orikuchi's essay *Jokeika no Hassei (Origins of Poems Describing Landscape)*, quoted in Yoshimoto Takaaki, *Kodai Kayō Ron* (Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1977), 147–48. The song is "primitive" in that the syllabic units are not "regular": 5-6-4-6-5-7-7.

usually employed for comic effect in English today, but not necessarily so in classical Japanese poetry, and they were used routinely in "serious" verse. The *engo,* "associative word," which also relies on the homonymous and homophonic nature of Japanese, is a means of achieving unity in imagery.

Mitate, literally, "regarding one thing as something else," is a simile or metaphor. Minamoto no Toshiyori (1055–1129) calls it *nisemono,* "resembling thing," and elegantly cites examples in his treatise *Zuinō* (*Essential Poetics*): "To liken cherry flowers to white clouds; compare scattering flowers to snow; compare plum blossoms with the robe of one's lover; doubt if deutzia flowers are really not the waves breaking on Hedge Island; analogize crimson leaves to a brocade; wonder if the dewdrops on a grass bush are not uneven beads unstrung; regard them, as they spill in the wind, as tears on one's sleeves; compare the ice at water's edge to the surface of a mirror . . . ; and analogize the felicitous person to the pine or bamboo, or argue that he can easily compete with a crane or a tortoise in longevity."

Having said this, Toshiyori cast doubt on the modern validity of such "ancient things," adding, "Something has to be done about them." But he did not propose any remedy. In the many centuries that followed, poets continued to use the same similes and metaphors.

There are also *uta-makura,* "poetic pillows." Mainly place names, they are expected to evoke certain images and sentiments because they appeared in famous poems of the past. Poets—especially those during the Edo period—traveled long distances simply to "relive" the sentiments associated with those names. The foremost example in this anthology is Arii Shokyū (1711–1784), who attempted to trace parts of the route Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694) followed in his famous journey to the interior. I have already mentioned honkadori—the kind of allusion that, incidentally, would be treated as plagiarism today. The practice of *daiei,* composing a poem on a given topic, might also be included in the rhetorical devices of classical Japanese poetry. Daiei includes *byōbu-uta,* the practice of composing poems for screen paintings.

As an example in which some of these prosodic devices render their translation impractical, I might cite a tanka by Izumi Shikibu, "Poem 691" in the fourth imperial anthology *Go-Shūishū.* After Kintō praised it as Izumi's best, this poem generated a good deal of arcane debate. It is a "love poem" composed in response to a man who had, one headnote says, complained, unreasonably, that she wouldn't allow him to visit her to make love (*warinaku uramuru hito*).

> *Tsu no kuni no Koya tomo hito o iubeki ni hima koso nakere ashi no yaebuki*

Tsu no kuni (Province of Tsu, the area where today's Osaka and Hyōgo join) and Koya (the northwestern part of today's Itami City) are both makura-kotoba, with *tsu* also meaning "port" or "ferry." Much of the province at the time was under water or otherwise marshy, so *ashi,* "reeds," which grew profusely, is an engo. *Koya* also means "hut" and "come" (in the imperative mood). The upper hemistich forms a

joshi. Moving on to the lower hemistich, *hima* means both "free time" and "space" or "gap"—with the phrase *hima-naku* (from *hima koso nakere,* in which *koso* is an emphatic) meaning both "so closely woven," in reference to the roof thatched with "reeds in eight layers" (*ashi no yaebuki*), and, by poetic convention, "with people watching me uninterruptedly." This hemistich also contains an inversion. So, the *meaning* that Izumi wishes to convey, ever cleverly, might be given as "I should tell him to come to my reed-thatched hut but too many people are watching," but that would only scratch the surface. Little wonder Ivan Morris (1931–1976) lamented, surely with some exaggeration: "There can be no literature in the world less suited to translation than classic Japanese Poetry."[20] Still, for all the punning and other rhetorical devices on display—to Arthur Waley "the least pleasing features of Japanese poetry"[21]—Orikuchi Shinobu, for one, admired the poem, saying it is "blunt," as it is "utterly different from the kind of women's poetry that tries to draw men's attention through sinuous feelings and clinging ways."[22]

Brevity and Context

The tanka—the mother of the renga and the grandmother of the hokku/haiku—is short. When puns and other overlaying devices are ignored, the tanka generally says, in English translation, about as much as a heroic couplet does. In 1882 Toyama Shōichi (1848–1900) famously pronounced that, when it came to the duration of "thought" it could express, the tanka was like the *senkō hanabi*, "fizzler," the most delicate of the fireworks. For that matter, Yatabe Ryōkichi (1851–1899) declared that for a Japanese to write kanshi was like someone trying to "swim in a room." They made these dismissals in compiling with another scholar, Inoue Tetsujirō (1855–1944)—none of them was a poet—the first principled attempt to introduce longer Western poems to Japan, the *Shintai-shi Shō* (*Selection of New-Style Verse*).[23] Brevity invites obscurity, as Aston said of the hokku of Bashō, citing Horace: *Brevis esse laborat*, *obscurus fit.*[24] To make up for this deficiency, some context was often provided—mainly in three ways: circumstantial, narrative,

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20. Ivan Morris, trans., *The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon*, vol. 1 (Columbia University Press, 1967), xix. In this book Morris translated the 150-plus tanka mostly in three to five lines.

21. Arthur Waley, *Japanese Poetry: The "Uta"* (1919; repr. University Press of Hawaii, 1976), 11.

22. Orikuchi Shinobu, *Josei Tanka-shi*, 29–30.

23. Yano Hōjin, ed., *Meiji Shijin Shū* (*Anthology of Meiji Poets*; Chikuma Shobō, 1972), 1:4. For a complete English translation of *Shintai-shi Shō*, with citation of the originals of the poems translated, see *Literature: East & West*, vol. 19, *Toward a Modern Japanese Poetry*, 1–4, 7–33.

24. Aston, *A History*, 294. Despite the perennial adulation of the poet, Aston's observation more than a century ago remains true: "A very large proportion of Bashō's [poems] are so obscurely allusive as to transcend the comprehension of the uninitiated foreigner." He could easily have dropped "foreigner."

Portrait of Yatabe Ryōkichi (1851-1899): One of the three compilers-translators of the *Shintai-shi Shō* (*Selection of New-Style Verse*).

and, what for want of a better term, may be called formulaic.

First, as to circumstantial reinforcements, some scholars conjecture that *uta,* "songs," arose from ritualistic *mondō,* "inquiry and reply," which went on to become what were categorized as *sōmon,* "inquiring about each other," which then led to the custom of composing verse for *zōtō,* "exchange [of gifts]."[25] Mallarmé would later call similar productions *vers de circonstance.* It was natural, then, that the compiler of such pieces, be it a poet or an anthologist, should often add notes on the circumstances of composition, and such notes, even when they do not go beyond brief memos, help clarify the context.

Context-giving becomes central in *uta-monogatari,* "poetic tales," in which tanka are generally said to have come first, narratives second. The earliest extant collections of such tales are *Ise Monogatari* (*Tales from Ise*) and *Yamato Monogatari* (*Tales from Yamato*), both from the tenth century. The "tale" that graces the opening of *Yamato Monogatari* reads in its entirety:

> When the Retired Emperor at the Teiji Mansion was about to abdicate, Lady Ise wrote on a wall of the Koki Palace:
>
> > I depart but the Inner Palace will think nothing of it. Why does not seeing it make me so sad?
>
> When the Retired Emperor saw it, he wrote next to it:
>
> > I'm the only one who won't be here. You should all be able to return and see it, should you not?

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25. Orikuchi Shinobu sought the origins of women's skills in verse composition in the ritual of *kakeai*, "give and take," in various festivals where men and women selected for one group competed to beat those selected for another group. In such contests wit and cleverness, not gender, played the primary role; *Josei Tanka-shi*, 15–20. This account almost exactly describes some of the improvisational public haiku contests popular in the United States today.

Here the Retired Emperor is Uda (867–931), who abdicated in Seventh Month, 897. Lady Ise (875?–939?), one of the attendants to his consort, Onshi, bore Uda a child about the time of his abdication. To the modern reader, the short, episodic "tale" may not make itself sparklingly clear even with such background information; but without the context the tale suggests, the two tanka cited will be hopelessly obscure.

The other side of this development, as may be expected, is the use of tanka in prose narratives, such as diaries and romances. For example, more than 250 tanka are sprinkled throughout the *Kagerō Nikki* (*Gossamer Diary*), the autobiography of Michitsuna's Mother (937?–995), in which the author describes prolonged difficulties with her husband Fujiwara no Kaneie (929–990). A ranking aristocrat who held the high posts of regent, chancellor, and prime minister, Kaneie was typical of men in polygamous Heian Japan and moved from one woman to another. In describing life with such a man, Michitsuna's Mother—so called because her son with Kaneie was named Michitsuna (955–1020), who attained the rank of major counselor—created a poem that has achieved immortality. Not long after she gave birth, Kaneie began paying attention to another woman.

> One evening he left home, saying, "I'll be too busy at the Palace to get away." I doubted his word and had a maid follow him. She came back and said, "He stayed at such-and-such a place in Machi no Kōji." That was what I had thought, and I was terribly depressed, but I did not know how to say it to him. A few days later, toward daybreak, someone knocked on the gate. I knew it was he, but I felt too depressed to have it opened. In the end he left in the direction of what I thought was the usual house. In the morning I decided not to let it go at that, wrote the following with far greater care than usual, and tied it to a withered chrysanthemum [and sent it to him]:
>
> The night when, aggrieved, you sleep alone, you know how long before the day breaks

This poem, included in the third imperial anthology *Shūishū* and, later, in the *Hyakunin Isshu,* is clear enough on its own, but the pain it describes becomes clearer when you learn the circumstances through the narrative.

As for formulaic compositions, they were inevitable. The oldest extant such effort by an individual poet, which happens to be the most extensive, is a set of 368 pieces by Sone no Yoshitada (923?–1003?): A total of 364 of them are tanka, with thirty for each month, plus four, each one preceded by a chōka that opens the section for each of the four seasons. A true sequence, the set is remarkable also as it includes many tanka composed before restrictive rules on poetic diction and other matters took over, some describing "love" with *Man'yō*-style immediacy. His chōka are notable as well; they do not follow the regular 5-7 pattern or the combination of 7-5 syllables that was becoming more popular.

It is subject to debate whether Yoshitada or Minamoto no Shigeyuki (923?–

1000?) was the first to compose what would later become the standard format called *hyakushu-uta,* "one hundred tanka." But by the early eleventh century, composing a set of one hundred had become common enough. In 1024 Sagami, whom we met earlier, dedicated to a shrine just such a set, complaining about her estranged husband, wishing for a baby, talking about her dreams, and so forth. To her amazement, no doubt, she received a response in the same format, in the name of the deity of the shrine. The following year, she dedicated another set in gratitude.

The hundred-piece set was formalized in 1105–1106, when sixteen poets agreed to work out one set each, with a topic specified for each of the hundred poems. The set, called the *Horikawa Hyakushu* because Emperor Horikawa (1079–1107) was the ruling monarch at the time, was made up of six major categories: spring (twenty pieces), summer (fifteen), autumn (twenty), and winter (fifteen), love (ten), and *zō,* "miscellany" (twenty). Temporal progression was incorporated into each category.

Versification as a Serious Undertaking

There were, in fact, two types of tanka: those composed informally, impromptu (*ke*)—for instance, as an aubade and a response to it—and those for official presentation (*hare*). For the latter, poetry contests (*uta-awase*) were frequently held, and poets were sometimes asked to submit a hundred-piece set. One or two poems might be chosen from such a set for inclusion in an imperial anthology.

Composing tanka for official presentation was a serious matter. How serious may be discerned from the portraits Kamo no Chōmei (1153–1212) drew of two women poets in his treatise on poetics, *Mumyōshō* (*Nameless Excerpts*). Of the two, Lord Shunzei's Daughter is already familiar to us. Kunai-kyō (1185?–1204?) is a young woman whom Retired Emperor Gotoba (1180–1239) asked to join the ranks of accomplished poets when he was thinking of preparing the eighth imperial anthology, the *Shin-Kokinshū:*

> In the present imperial reign, the person known as Lord Shunzei's Daughter and Kunai-kyō—these two are the most accomplished poets and need have felt no embarrassment among the ancient masters. Their methods of making poems are quite different. People tell me that Lord Shunzei's Daughter, when making poems for official presentation, begins days in advance to read various poetry collections over and over; when she has looked them over to her heart's content, she sets all of them aside, lights a lamp dimly in some isolated place, and works her poems out.
>
> Kunai-kyō would have books and scrolls spread in front of her from beginning to end and, with the light on a low lamp-holder set very close to her, write down bits and pieces, never neglecting the work night or day. She thought about poetry so hard that she would become ill, once almost dying. Her father, a lay priest, would warn her: "You can't do anything at all unless you are alive. Why do you work so hard at it that you become ill?"
>
> But she did not heed his warnings and in the end exhausted her life and died, probably because of all her worries.

The portrait of Lord Shunzei's Daughter, reminiscent of that of her grandfather Shunzei in the treatise on poetics *Kiribioke* (*Paulownia Brazier*), which is attributed to Teika, suggests the prevalence of a certain attitude expected in poetry composition: "On nights when the cold became extreme, my late father would turn a faint lamp away, put on a white, sooty priestly robe, tie its strings, pull a quilt over it, hug a paulownia brazier under the quilt, plant his elbows on the brazier, and, utterly alone in hushed quietude, on his bed, compose poems." Indeed, there was a reason verse composition was taken with gravity. In *Korai Fūtei Shō* (*Styles of Poetry since Ancient Times*), his treatise on poetics with a mini-anthology prepared for Princess Shikishi (died 1201), Shunzei argued: "Those who immerse their minds in the way of poetry [*kono michi*] . . . may, on account of the profound meaning of Japanese poetry [*Yamato uta*], understand the inexhaustibility of the Buddhist scriptures, gain the opportunity to go to Paradise after death, and enter the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue's Sea of Salvation."

With such a religious dedication, and with generations of poets focusing on such a short poetic form, the tanka—and, later, renga—became highly refined. But this also led to stultification, at least from today's perspective. The rules and constraints devised for the verse forms stifled innovation. To show how tanka writing was codified early on and how that approach influenced tanka poets for the many centuries that followed, I have translated *Yoru no Tsuru* (*The Night Crane*), a treatise on poetics by the nun Abutsu (1222?–1283).

Why, then, did men and women continue to write tanka? One answer is that their aim was not to be "original." Originality is a "modern cult," as Wendell Berry noted.[26] In the formulation the literary historian Konishi Jin'ichi posited, there were two contrasting notions that underlay any artistic and literary pursuit in Japan from the medieval period onward: *ga,* "elegance," "an effort to become part of eternity through achievement of perfection," and *zoku,* "earthiness," a decision to "remain in a natural state." So defined, ga is a form of classicism that stresses such things as professionalism, heritage, universality, and authority, but not, say, romantic or individualistic creativity. One product of the ga ideal in literature was the notion of *hon'i,* "essential meaning"—the conceit that every phenomenon should have a single true attribute, such that *harusame,* "spring rain," must fall quietly, even though in reality rains in spring may often be torrential; and *koi,* "love," must be a perpetual state of suffering, even though in reality someone in love may be deliriously happy. So, those who took up tanka—an embodiment of ga—did not at all mind turning out similar-sounding pieces; in fact, that was exactly what they expected to do.[27]

This is evident even with someone like Sakuma Tachieko (1814–1861), who com-

26. Wendell Berry, *Standing by Words* (North Point Press, 1983), 13.

27. Konishi made this his central argument in his small book *"Michi"—Chūsei no Rinen* ("*The Way*"—*The Medieval Principles*; Kōdansha, 1975) and later expanded on it in his five-volume history of Japanese "literary arts," *Nihon Bungei Shi* (Kōdansha, 1985–92), especially in volumes 3 and 4.

posed tanka in trying circumstances. It took Yosano Akiko to break out of the mold. Akiko's diction was not radically new, but the matters she chose to describe—narcissistic admiration of her own youthful body, for example—and the way she described them, were. To be liberated from convention, poets needed a stiff wind, which in Akiko's case was the Pre-Raphaelite romanticism and fin-de-siècle culture of the West.

"Earthy" Elements

So tanka stultified. After Eifukumon'in (1271–1342), who, along with her consort, Emperor Fushimi (1265–1317), is thought to represent the last glow of classical tanka, I have selected only two tanka poets before Akiko: Rikei (died 1616), because she described a military campaign and its aftermath, and the just-mentioned Tachieko, because she shows what tanka was like only a few decades before Akiko.

Fortunately, there was the zoku tradition. Parallel to the composition of classical tanka, attempts were made to explore new diction and subject matter. These were most successful in renga. Not long after this verse form came into being, it branched into two types: orthodox and unorthodox. The latter, which went on to predominate by the sixteenth century, was marked by the use of everyday language and mundane subject matter. The shackles of court dictates in poetry were such that change in language and subject matter alone was considered *haikai,* "humorous" or "entertaining," hence the name of the genre, *haikai no renga* or simply *haikai.* It was in this genre that Bashō worked. And as haikai—often used as an umbrella term for all activities related to the genre—spread among ordinary people, it became a "democratizing" force as well as an educational tool. In describing Igarashi Hamamo (1772?–1848), who traveled all over the land, initiated and presided over women-only haikai sessions, and compiled the records of eighteen of them in *Yae-yamabuki* (*Eightfold Globe Flower*) around 1810, the scholar-poet Bessho Makiko (born 1934) has written:

> There could have been no better method than haikai for home education. You could memorize rhythmical 5-7-5 [and 7-7] pieces as if singing them. You learned reading and writing. You came to know seasonal words, let your mind play with the changing of seasons, pay attention to grass, tree, insect, fish, bird, and beast, and know the traditions of snow, moon, and flower. It was an entrance to the classics, and you acquired the ability to make appropriate salutations.[28]

By "the changing of seasons," Bessho, herself a haikai practitioner, refers to the requirement of renga composition that things described in a sequence must shift in their seasonal suggestions from time to time, according to complex rules. The snow, the moon, and the flower have been representative of the winter, autumn, and spring ever since two lines from Po Chu-i became a celebrated favorite among Japanese poets: "Friends over lute, verse, and wine, you've all left me; / I think

28. Bessho Makiko, *"Kotoba" o Te ni shita Shinsei no Onna-tachi* (*Ordinary Women Who Got Hold of "Words"* (Origin Shuppan Center, 1993), 99.

of you the most at the time of snow, moon, and flower." The writer of the opening unit, the hokku, had to refer to the occasion in a celebratory or self-deprecating way, hence "appropriate salutations."

What is typical of the haikai spirit? Since Bessho has argued that Bashō's democratic attitude helped popularize haikai among women,[29] let us cite as an example a hokku that Bashō praised in his letter to the poet:

> *Haru no no ya izure no kusa ni kaburekemu*
> In the spring field which grass gave me this rash?

The poet is Nozawa Ukō (died 1722?), and she composed it, a headnote tells us, when she went into the field to collect young herbs with her friends. The act of going out in a field to gather spring herbs was perfectly acceptable in orthodox tanka and renga, but not something as inelegant as *kabure,* "rash," hence the piece is haikai.[30]

Haikai spawned three distinct subgenres: *haibun, kana-shi* (also known as *washi*), and *senryū.* Haibun, which Bashō first identified as a genre, is a piece of prose imbued with the haikai spirit, however you may define it. Usually graced by a hokku or two, it is a direct offshoot of poetic tales. Kana-shi, "verse in Japanese script," refers to a group of often rhyming verses à la kanshi that the haikai poet Kagami Shikō (1665–1731) and his circle of poets created. One notable prosodic decision the group made was to regard fourteen syllables in Japanese as the equivalent of the seven-character line in kanshi.[31] Kana-shi were composed throughout the Edo period but never attracted a large body of practitioners. The reason may be that Japanese versifiers instinctively felt rhyming wasn't quite right in their polysyllabic language.

Senryū was born of the competitive game of *maeku-zuke,* "follow-up to the preceding unit," originally part of the practice for haikai no renga composition. Renga, in essence, was based on the art of linking two verses, called *tsukeai,* "joining together," and this in later periods turned into the competitive game of maeku-zuke. So, in a 1761 contest, a 7-7-syllable statement was offered:

> *mottomona koto mottomona koto*
> that's understandable, that's understandable

Among the winners with a 5-7-5-syllable response was someone identified as Sakuragi:

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29. Most notably in her history of women in haikai, *Bashō ni hirakareta Haikai no Josei Shi* (*History of Women in Haikai Opened by Bashō*) (Origin Shuppan Center, 1989).

30. For Bashō's letter, see p. 164f.

31. More than two hundred years later, Nakamura Shin'ichirō (1918–1997), the poet and student of French literature who experimented in rhyming in Japanese, would determine that the seventeen-syllable haiku was the equivalent of the seven-character line in kanshi as well as the alexandrine in the amount of information that could be conveyed; Nakamura Shin'ichirō, *Edo Kanshi* (Iwanami Shoten, 1985), 83–85.

atsusō ni hotaru o tsukamu musume no ko
as if it were hot a young girl holds a firefly

In time the preceding units dropped away and the senryū, too, became independent. The genre name, meaning "river willow," though eponymous of the enormously popular maeku-zuke judge Karai Senryū (1718–1790), gained currency retroactively around 1900.

Finally, out of tanka—sometimes described as the oldest poetic form in continuous use—grew *kyōka,* "mad tanka," a 5-7-5-7-7-syllable verse composed for humorous or satirical effects, mainly through puns and allusions. Though the founder of the genre is traditionally Fujiwara no Tamemori (1265–1328), the genre reached its peak about the time senryū did, between the second half of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. Chie no Naiji (1745–1807), Kaneko Michi's pen name, meaning "wife with no wits," and Fushimatsu no Kaka (1745–1810), Yamazaki Matsu's pen name, meaning "knobby pine's old woman"—kyōka writers created jokey names for themselves—were counted among the best women poets in the genre. For example, Chie no Naiji has left us a piece with the headnote, "Because it rains on the fifteenth night," that is, the night of the full moon by the lunar calendar:

Meigetsu no kumoma ni hikaru kimi masade saenu amayo no monogatari kana

Without you who shine like a full moon between clouds, we tell stories this insipid rainy night

How is this composition humorous? The setup itself at once reminds the reader of Murasaki Shikibu and her *Tale of Genji,* in particular a scene in the "Hahakigi" chapter in which Genji and several of his male friends, rained in, discuss the women they have known. The reference to *kumo,* "cloud," suggests Murasaki's most famous poem, which begins with "We met again" (see p. 58), and the phrase *hikaru kimi,* here translated "you who shine," is a give-away: it can only refer to Genji the Shining Prince, the protagonist of the *Tale.* The word *ama* means both "rain" and "women." So the piece also says, "Absent the Shining Prince, we none-too-bright women talk about our experiences," obviously, of men.

Fushimatsu no Kaka has a kyōka on "Warrior's Love":

Mononofu no yatake-gokoro no hikaruru wa imo ga yanagi no mayumi narikeri

What draws the warrior's ferocious heart are the willow eyebrows of the one he loves

The humor of this piece, which is elegant and clever, comes from two punning words: *yatake,* which means both "ferocious" and "arrow-bamboo," and *mayumi,* "true bow," which includes the word *mayu,* "eyebrow." The word *hikaruru,* here given as "draw," is an engo, associated with the drawing of a bow.

Translation

The problems of verse translation are perennial. "The whole question as to the best equivalents for alien metres is a notoriously difficult one," B.H. Chamberlain observed in presenting a paper titled "Bashō and the Japanese Poetic Epigram" at the Asiatic Society of Japan in 1902.[32] By epigram, he referred to what the term meant "in its earlier acceptation, as denoting any little piece of verse that expresses a delicate or ingenious thought"—in this instance, "*Hokku* (also *Haiku* and *Haikai*)."[33] Chamberlain noted that "the Japanese epigram has exactly the same number of syllables (seventeen) as the hexameter, when the latter runs to its full length of five dactyls." Then he cast the "epigram" into a tetrameter couplet whenever he could. Here's his translation of a famous hokku by Kaga no Chiyo (1703?–1775):

> Where may he have gone off today—
> The hunter after dragonflies?[34]

The Victorian scholar also pointed to the two results translators of Japanese verse into English since then have confirmed time and again. Commenting on recent translations by his contemporary Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904), he observed: "Some of the renderings are in the metre of the elegiac distich, which, owing to the far larger number of syllables of that form of verse, necessitates more or less expansion of the originals. Others, rendered literally, though less attractive as English—or Anglicised—poems, possess superior value for the scientific enquirer."[35] Here is Bashō's hokku rendered into an elegiac distich:

> Never an intimation in all those voices of *sémi* . . .
> How quickly the hush will come . . . how speedily all must die.[36]

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32. B. H. Chamberlain, "Bashō and the Japanese Poetic Epigram," *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* 30, no. 2 (1902): 253.

33. Ibid., 243.

34. Ibid., 300. The original Chamberlain cites is a variant: *Tombo-tori / Kyō wa dokora ye / Itta yara.* The standard version is: *Tombotori kyō wa doko made itta yara.* See "Dragonfly-catcher," p. 150, for my translation.

35. Ibid., 362.

36. Lafcadio Hearn, *Japanese Lyrics* (Houghton Mifflin, 1915), cited in *The Classic Tradition of Haiku: An Anthology*, ed. Faubion Bowers (Dover, 1996), 17. Original: *Yagate shinu keshiki wa miezu semi no koe.* Hearn also rendered a number of tanka into elegiac distiches. In the glossary of *Historical Manual of English Prosody* (1910; repr. Schocken, 1966), George Saintsbury defines *distich* thus: "A synonym for 'couplet,' but of wider range, as there is no reason why the verses should be metrically similar. There is, however, in the practical use of the word, an understanding that there shall be a certain completeness and self-containedness of *sense.*" The last part reminds us of one of the original requirements of the hokku.

And as an example "rendered literally," Chiyo's hokku cited above comes out, in Hearn's hand, as "Catching dragon-flies! . . . I wonder where *he* has gone to-day!"[37] The point, of course, is that "more or less expansion of the originals"—or amplification or embellishment—is inevitable when corresponding numbers of syllables are given in English translation, whether by according a "line" to each of the 5- and 7-syllable units, as Stephen Carter does in *Japanese Traditional Poetry* (Stanford University Press, 1991), or by treating as a line each of the 17-syllable upper hemistich and the 14-syllable lower hemistich, as Royall Tyler does in *The Tale of Genji* (Viking, 2001). This is simply because a syllable in Japanese, which is a polysyllabic language, has less value than in English, which is not.

In any event, I have chosen to follow more or less the second approach in the full knowledge that literal renditions, as I have shown, are seldom possible. I have done this even in the matter of verse forms. The prevailing view in Japan is that "the tanka is a one-line poem," to quote the opening sentence of the astonishingly multifaceted argument for "tanka as modern poetry" by the poet Ishii Tatsuhiko (born 1952).[38] In contrast, at least in American academia, the prevailing view is that the tanka is a five-line poem. One force behind this belief seems to be the sense that "a one-line poem—at least in Western languages—is willy-nilly at the same time a no-line poem . . . to speak of a 'one-line poem' is to speak of something that cannot exist,"[39] an assertion belied by fact and practice. To cite an esoteric example, Ralph Hodgson (1871–1962), who in the late 1930s helped a Japanese committee translate a substantial selection from the *Man'yōshū* into English, was, according to his fellow English poet James Kirkup (born 1923), "a pioneer among the type of modern poets who prefer the clarity and concision of the monostich."[40]

So I apply the "set form" of one line to tanka (except "ancient songs" and those in the *Man'yōshū*) and hokku/haiku unless the original manner of presentation shows otherwise.[41] I translate both classical (pre-mid-nineteenth century) and modern poetry, and I need to pay heed not only to medieval theories and practices such as scattered writing (*chirashigaki*) employed purely for aesthetic effects, sometimes in total disregard of syntax,[42] but to modern practices as well. The latter include lineation (*gyōwake*), the use of punctuation (*kutōten*), and the use of spacing

37. Lafcadio Hearn, *A Japanese Miscellany* (ICG Muse, 2001), 99.

38. Ishii Tatsuhiko, *Gendai-shi to shite no Tanka* (Shoshi Yamada, 1999), 15. The sentence in question reads: *tanka wa ichigyō no shi de aru.*

39. William R. LaFleur, "Marginalia: The Expanse and the Limits of a New Anthology," *Monumenta Nipponica* 38, no. 2 (Summer 1983): 199–200.

40. James Kirkup, *Eibungaku Saiken* (Daishūkan Shoten, 1980), 58.

41. I am by no means the first to translate hokku/haiku consistently in one line. In his tract "Issa's Life and Poetry," Asiatic Society of Japan, Second Series, vol. 9 (December 1932), Max Bickerton translated in one line all of the haiku he cited.

42. For samples, see illustrations in the following pages. Koizumi Yoshinaga devotes chapter 3 of his PhD dissertation, "The Calligraphic Model Textbooks for Women in the Edo Period" (1999) to the discussion of *chirashigaki*, finding its earliest extant example in the mid-tenth century. The dissertation is online.

within a line (*wakachigaki*). Lineated tanka, made famous by Ishikawa Takuboku (1886–1912), have tended to lose syllabic patterns, as may be seen in Orikuchi Shinobu's four-line poems and in the five-line tanka (*gogyō-ka*) that Kusakabe Enta (born 1938) has advocated. A liberal, imaginative use of punctuation and spacing is most typically found in the works of Ishii Tatsuhiko, who also argues that tanka can be most effective when sequentially composed. Among Japanese poets, after all, such differences, at least in modern times, continue to attract the kind of attention that the distinctions between Spenserian and Shakespearean sonnets once did among English poets.[43] I will bring up such matters as they become relevant in this anthology in introducing each poet, but for those tempted to object, I have a simple question: What would a believer in the tanka as a five-line poem do when confronted with a tanka actually written in five lines, such as those in an alliterative sequence by Koike Sumiyo (born 1955) in her book *Gazoku* (Roppō Shuppansha, 1991)?

Itsu kaeru	5
itsu ku itsu au	3-4
itsu wakaru	5
itsu yuku ware o	4-3
itsu wasururu ya	7

When will you go home
when will you come when will we meet
when shall we part
when will you forget me
when I go

Or with the prize-winning Imahashi Ai (born 1976), who, in her first book, *Ō-kyaku no Hiza* (Hokumeisha, 2003), casts her tanka in one to eight lines, sprinkles them with what appears to be arbitrary punctuation and in-line spacing, making some look like concrete poems, and often ignores syllabic count or blurs syllabic distinctions? In fact, if there is a single notable trend in recent tanka, it is not so much lineation as the nullification of syllabic patterns even when the total number of syllables approximates thirty-one.

43. For a detailed discussion of tanka lineation in Japanese, see my article "Lineation of Tanka in English Translation," *Monumenta Nipponica* 42, no. 3 (Autumn 1987): 347–56. I discuss how Hagiwara Sakutarō (1886–1942), regarded as the first "modern" Japanese poet, approached tanka lineation in *Howling at the Moon: Poems and Prose of Hagiwara Sakutarō* (Green Integer, 2002), 19–25. In "Forms Transformed: Japanese Verse in English Translation," included in Frank Stewart, ed., *The Poem Behind the Poem: Translating Asian Poetry* (Copper Canyon, 2004), 172–82, I look at the same question from a different angle.

Chiyo-ni's painting of morning-glories and a bucket with a hokku which reads, from right to left:
Asagao ya / tsurube / torarete / moraihi / mizu
The well-bucket taken by morning-glories, water sought

Jogakusei no mure 8
tsubushitemo onaji yō ni yattekurukara 5-6-7
kanojora wa ari 7

Throngs of girl students
you squish them but since they keep coming the same way
they're ants

Keitai o wasureta gogo. wa 5-6-1
dare kara mo kata o tsukamareteinai kankaku 5-11-4

Afternoons I forget to bring my cell. Phone
no one's grabbing me by the shoulders is the sensation

All this is another way of saying that in translating poems, I try to remain faithful to the original poem to the best of my ability, and that includes the original line formations.

Chiyo-ni's landscape painting with a hokku which reads, from right to left:
Hatsukari ya / yama he / kubare / ba / no ni tarazu
First geese: if placed against the mountain, too few in the field

I should add a word on tanka, renga, and haiku written in English. Tanka in English are relatively new, and most poets regard the form as a five-line poem. I know only two poets who have written tanka in one line: Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Kimiko Hahn. Renga—or *renku*, to use the term retroactively applied—has recently become popular, at least among American poets.[44] Most write renga by alternating three- and two-line units, but some by alternating long and short lines.[45] Haiku are not new, and among haiku aficionados one-line writers are common, notable among them Janice Bostok, marlene mountain, and Chris Gordon. Among non-haiku poets, John Ashbery, in *A Wave,* Allen Ginsberg, in *Death & Fame,* and Michael O'Brien, in *The Floor and the Breath, Sills,* and *Six Poems,* have published one-line haiku—with Ginsberg and O'Brien deploying seventeen syllables as well.

Selection and Presentation

The selection of poets for this anthology follows to a great extent personal predilection. Some poets familiar to anyone with a cursory knowledge of Japanese

44. The most famous "Western" attempt in renga composition was made by Octavio Paz et al. in *Renga: A Chain of Poems*, originally published in France in 1971.

45. The rules range from nonexistent to complex, although even when they are complex, they seldom approach the complexity demanded in "traditional" renga, which is the way it should be, as I have argued.

literature may be missing, both in classical and modern periods, while some names unknown to even those who closely follow the genre may be present. Among modern tanka poets, to include Okamoto Kanoko (1889–1939), while ignoring such obvious luminaries as Gotō Miyoko (1915–1988), who taught Empress Michiko, and Baba Akiko (born 1928), for example, will, I know, raise some eyebrows. Also, even though I am highly selective with tanka poets, I have tried to be inclusive with haiku and senryū poets—itself an overstatement: A recent anthology of women haiku poets, *Joryū Haiku Shūsei* (Rippū Shobō, 1999), which covers eighty-one poets during the hundred-year period from the late nineteenth century onward, cites about fifteen thousand haiku.[46]

I have stressed kanshi, a genre mostly neglected until recently even in Japan. But I've been sparing with three genres of verse: renga, kana-shi, and kyōka. I have included only a few samplings of renga because of the complexity of its rules, which Chamberlain called, in the days when anthropological evenhandedness in cultural studies was unknown, "puerile."[47] Less dismissive, Konishi Jin'ichi once compared reading an old renga sequence to reading a musical score or a play whose performers ceased to exist long ago.[48] More important, though it would surely be instructive to translate, with detailed commentary, at least one of the eighteen sequences Hamamo composed with women in its entirety, there is as yet no fully annotated text, and I am far from familiar with all the intricate rules of renga.[49] I have not included kana-shi, because I was unable to find women among those who wrote them, and kyōka—except the two cited in this introduction—because, even though puns and allusions are not necessarily heavier than those deployed in orthodox tanka, the "fun" is lost when it is explained.

The anthology is chronologically arranged, by year of birth of the poet, when it is known, not by year of writing or publication of the poem. This overall scheme does not apply to three sections: "Haikai Poets as Eccentrics," "A Brief Survey of Senryū by Women," and "A Brief Survey of Haiku by Women." The first presents the Edo period's view of haikai and those who dabbled in it in summary form, even though all the poets in it appear later in their own sections. The two "surveys" cover poets who, in my opinion, do not have enough fasci-

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46. For the modern period, there is a two-volume anthology: Leza Lowitz and Miyuki Aoyama, trans., *Other Side River: Free Verse* (Stone Bridge Press, 1995) and Leza Lowitz, Miyuki Aoyama, and Akemi Tomioka, trans., *Long Rainy Season: Haiku and Tanka* (Stone Bridge Press, 1994).

47. Chamberlain, "Bashō and the Japanese Poetic Epigram," 258.

48. Konishi Jin'ichi, *Sōgi* (Chikuma Shobō, 1971), 65–66. Konishi was writing before a recent renga revival, although it is doubtful that the crusty academician would recognize today's renga as such.

49. Konishi Jin'ichi recalled Yamada Yoshio, an orthodox renga master and a redoubtable scholar of Japanese literature, saying it would take at least twenty years of "practice" before one could compose a proper renga; ibid., 67.

nating work, along with those who appear later in regular chronological order. I have presented these sections as separate entities to provide a quick grasp of a particular perspective or genre.

Despite such omissions and other deficiencies, I hope I have covered enough material in this anthology to show the history, the variety, and the scope of Japanese women poets.

Ancient Songs

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Songs from the *Kojiki*

The *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters*) is a history of Japan compiled in 712 on the basis of the accounts left by Hieda no Are, a young court attendant of exceptional brilliance who "could repeat whatever he read, memorize whatever he heard." At the time, Japan had not devised its own writing system out of Chinese characters, and the *Kojiki* displays a hybrid use of Chinese characters—sometimes Chinese as it was, sometimes for their meanings, sometimes for their sounds.

As its foreword says, the *Kojiki* "begins with the Opening of Heaven and Earth and ends with the Reign of Owarida," namely, Empress Suiko (554–628), by semi-mythological tradition the thirty-third ruler of Japan. It is a mixture of myths, legends, and facts and incorporates folk songs. Ōkuninushi-no-mikoto, "Great Land-Ruler Prince," a deity whose "song" is the first cited below, defeated his eighty siblings to found the nation, the account says. "Deity of Eight-Thousand Spears" is a translation of Yachihoko-no-kami, one of several names given him.

Prince Ōkuninushi and Princess Nunakawa

When the Deity of Eight Thousand Spears went to night-visit[1] Princess Nunakawa in the Country of Koshi,[2] he sang as he reached her house:

The Divine Prince of Eight Thousand Spears,
finding no wife to pillow in the Country of Eight Islands,
hearing there was a wise woman,
hearing there was a beautiful woman
far, far away, in the Country of Koshi,
set out to night-visit her,
came here to night-visit.
Sword thongs still untied,
pullover still untied,
at the wooden door where the maiden sleeps
I stand, pushing and shaking,[3]
I stand, pulling and shoving,

1. *Yobau*, "call to each other" or "crawl [into a lover's bedroom] at night." In his translation, *Kojiki* (Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 104, Donald Philippi gives the word "woo."

2. *Koshi no kuni*, "the land beyond": the northern region.

3. The switching of grammatical elements—here, speakers—in an apparently single speech is called enallage and occurs, for example, in The Song of Solomon, 1:2.

and on the green hills thrashers call;
birds of grass fields, pheasants resound;
birds of the garden, roosters call.
Don’t I hate them, those calling birds!
Won’t someone hit them and shut them up?
This is the way the story’s told
by the low-running fisherman messenger.

Princess Nunakawa, not yet opening the door, sang from within:

Divine Prince of Eight Thousand Spears,
because I am a woman, a pliant grass blade,
my heart is a bird on an inlet.
For now I am my own bird,
but later I will be your bird.
Your life, do not let it die!
This is the way the story’s told
by the low-running fisherman messenger.
When the sun hides behind the green hills,
night will come, black as black-lily seeds.
Then, like the morning sun, come, smiling radiantly!
These arms white as mulberry rope,
breasts youthful as soft snow,
hold them with your bare hands, caress them;
your arm and my arm crossed for pillows,
thighs outstretched, we’ll sleep our sleep.
So do not speak with too much love,
Divine Prince of Eight Thousand Spears.
This is the way the story’s told.

Accordingly, they did not meet that night but came together on the night of the following day.

Prince Ōkuninushi and Princess Suseri

Then the Deity’s chief wife, the Divine Princess Suseri, became extremely jealous like a concubine. Her husband deity, at a loss, was about to leave Izumo for Yamato. When he had dressed and stood ready, he put one hand on his horse saddle, one foot in the stirrup, and sang:

When, having carefully put on
a robe black as black-lily seeds,
I look down at my chest like an offshore bird

and flap my wings, no, this won't do.
Like a shore wave, toss it back!
When, having carefully put on
a robe in kingfisher-green,
I look down at my chest like an offshore bird
and flap my wings, no, this too won't do.
Like a shore wave, toss it back!
When, having carefully put on
a robe dyed with the juice of a dye-tree,
indigo grown on the hill and pounded,
I look down at my chest like an offshore bird
and flap my wings, yes, this is good.
My dear love, my princess,
though I flock away like a flock of birds,
though I recede like birds receding,
you won't cry, you say,
but like a pampas grass stalk on the hill,
head dropping, that's how you'll cry,
like morning rain that rises in mist,
my young-grass wife, my princess.
This is the way the story's told.

Here his wife fetched a great sake cup and, approaching, offered it to him, singing:

Divine Prince of Eight Thousand Spears,
    Greater Ruler of our Land,
because you are a man,
at every island point you go round,
at every shore point you row round, no exception,
you must have a young-grass wife.
But I, because I am a woman,
I have no man besides you,
I have no husband besides you.
Under fluffy painted curtains,
under downy silken covers,
under rustling mulberry covers,
my breasts youthful as soft snow,
arms white as mulberry rope,
hold them with your bare hands, caress them;
your arm and my arm crossed for pillows,
thighs outstretched, sleep your sleep.
Kindly have this superb sake.

She sang; then they were united through the cup and embraced each other. They remain so to this day.

The Maidservant from Mie and the Empress

Another time, Emperor [Yūryaku],[4] seated under a zelkova tree with a hundred branches, in Hatsuse, was holding a banquet, when a maidservant from Mie, of the Country of Ise, offered him a large sake cup, reverentially holding it high. A zelkova leaf fell and floated in it. But the maidservant, unaware that a fallen leaf was floating in the cup, continued to offer the sake. When he noticed the leaf, the Emperor struck her down, put his sword on her neck, and was about to cut her apart, when she said to him, "Please do not kill me, my lord." Then she sang:

The Hishiro Palace, in Makimuku,
is a palace where the morning sun shines,
a palace where the evening sun gleams,
a palace where bamboo roots grow amply,
a palace where tree roots crawl everywhere,
a palace of eight hundred weight of pounded earth.
By this Imperial Gate of cypress, the luxuriant tree,
by the Hall for Tasting the New Harvest,[5] grows
a zelkova tree with a hundred ample branches.
Its upper branches cover heaven,
its middle branches cover the East,
its lower branches cover the countryside.
From its upper branches, a leaf at the tip of the branches
falls and touches its middle branches;
from its middle branches, a leaf at the tip of the branches
falls and touches its lower branches;
from its lower branches, a leaf at the tip of the branches
falls into a beautiful cup held up
by a child of Mie, in a silk robe,
and immerses itself like floating fat,
the water curdling, curdling,[6]
how awe-inspiring all this,
Honored Child of the High-Shining Sun!
This is the way the story's told.

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4. Twenty-first emperor.
5. The hall where the emperor ceremonially samples the autumn harvest.
6. Both "floating fat" and "curdling, curdling" refer to the beginning of the *Kojiki,* where the creation of the Japanese archipelago is described; they are, therefore, thought to be felicitous.

Because she offered this song, the Emperor forgave her for the crime. Thereupon the Empress sang. In her song she said:

On this high ground of Yamato,
the elevated gathering place,
by the hall for tasting the new harvest grows and stands
a broadleaf sacred true camellia tree.
Seated like its leaves spreading wide,
seated like its blossoms shining bright,
is the Honored Child of the High-Shining Sun.
To him kindly offer abundant sake.
This is the way the story's told.

Songs from the *Nihon Shoki*

The *Nihon Shoki* (or *Nihongi, History of Japan*) is a formal version of the *Kojiki* and was compiled in 720: written entirely in Chinese, in the manner of China's dynastic chronicles, and studded with borrowings from Chinese sources. It was, in short, "an attempt at an official national history which could be shown with pride, should the occasion demand, to any foreign embassy or court."[7] It, too, begins with the creation of Japan—"When Heaven and Earth were yet to be separated and Ying and Yang not divided"—but it ends with the forty-first ruler, Empress Jitō (645–702), transferring her power to a successor, Emperor Mommu, in 697. It includes folk songs and poems not found in the *Kojiki*.

Princess Iwa, Emperor Nintoku's Consort

In Intimate Month in the spring of the twenty-second year [of his reign], Emperor [Nintoku][8] talked to his Empress[9] and declared, "I'd like to bring in Princess Yata and make her my spouse." The Empress would not hear of it. Thereupon the Emperor begged her, singing:

This a nobleman's express word:
like a spare bowstring I'd be with her when you're away,
I wish to have you side by side.

The Empress sang in reply:

With robes, two layers may be fine.
You, who want two night-beds side by side,
you terrify me!

The Emperor sang again:

Like the parallel beaches
at the cape of sun-dominated Naniwa,
the child wanted me to put you side by side!

The Empress sang in reply:

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7. Philippi, *Kojiki*, 16–17.

8. The sixteenth emperor. In *Shinwa kara Rekishi e (From Mythology to History)*, volume 1 of the twenty-six-volume history of Japan, *Nihon no Rekishi* (Chūō Kōron Sha, 1973), pp. 370–84, Inoue Mitsusada argues that with Emperor Nintoku's father, Ōjin, the Japanese imperial lineage ceased to be entirely mythological. If Ōjin did exist, he may be the Japanese ruler who appears in Chinese documents from around 420 to 430.

9.They were married for twenty-one years by then, and she had borne him four sons.

Like the robe of the summer worm, the silkworm,
to hide and lodge in two layers,
how could this be good?

The Emperor sang again:

The one taking the road, half weeping,
along the Hika slope of Morning Wife,[10]
would do best with a companion.

The Empress, determining not to approve of it, kept silent and would not reply again.

On the eleventh of Long Month in the autumn of the thirtieth year [of his reign], the Empress traveled to the Country of Ki; she collected trifoliate oak leaves at Cape Kumano and returned. The Emperor, taking advantage of her absence, summoned Princess Yata and installed her in the Palace. When she reached Naniwa Ferry, the Empress heard that the Emperor had wed Princess Yata, and she became greatly upset. She threw the trifoliate oak leaves into the sea and did not stay there. As a result, people of that time called the sea where she scattered the oak leaves Oak-Leaf Ferry. The Emperor, however, who did not know she had become angry and had not stayed, went to Ōtsu and, while waiting for her ship, sang:

Naniwa people, hold the bell-ship,
up to your waists in the water, hold the bell-ship,
hold that great ship!

But the Empress not only did not stay in Ōtsu; she turned back, went upriver, and, turning around Yamashiro, headed toward Yamato. The following day the Emperor dispatched Aide Mountain Bird[11] to make her return. He sang:

Catch up with her in Yamashiro, Mountain Bird,
catch up, catch up with her
and see my lovely wife!

The Empress would not return but kept on. When she reached the Yamashiro River, she sang:

By the river of Yamashiro, of continuous peaks,

10. *Asazuma*: The name of the place Princess Iwa came from.
11. *Toriyama*: Personal or family name suggesting a messenger.

I go upriver and, as I go up,
at the river bend there grows and stands
a tree with eighty leaves, less than a hundred,[12]
like the Great Lord.

She then went over Nara Hill, where, as she saw Kazuraki in the distance, she sang:

By the river of Yamashiro, of continuous peaks,
I go up to the Palace and, as I go up,
I pass by Nara, where the blue clay is good,[13]
I pass by Yamato, of little shields.
The country I'd like to see
is Kazuraki, in Takamiya,
there where my home is.

She then returned to Yamashiro and built her main house to the south of Tsutsuki Hill and resided there.

In winter, on the first day of Godless Month, the Emperor dispatched Subject Mouth Held,[14] the ancestor of the Ikuwa Clan, to call back the Empress. When he reached the Tsutsuki Palace, Mouth Held was granted an audience with the Empress, but she kept silent and would not respond. He prostrated himself in front of the Empress's Great Chamber, remaining there night and day, wet with snow and rain, and would not leave. His sister, Princess Kuniyori, who served the Empress, happened to be in close attendance at the time. Seeing her older brother wet with rain, she shed tears and sang:

In Yamashiro, at Tsutsuki Palace,
I see my older brother trying to say something,
and tears come to my eyes.

The Empress said to Princess Kuniyori, "Why do you weep?" The princess replied, "The one prostrating himself in the courtyard, trying to say something, is my older brother. He's wet with rain but won't leave. He remains prostrate, trying to see you. I can only weep, Your Majesty." The Empress told her, "Tell your older brother to go back at once. I shall never return." Mouth Held returned in consequence and made his report to the Emperor.

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12. *Momo tarazu*, here given as "less than a hundred," is a makura-kotoba for *yaso*, "eighty." Similar ways of counting exist in other languages. *Yaso* also means "many," "innumerable."

13. *Aoni yoshi*, here given as "where the blue clay is good," is a makura-kotoba for Nara. The reason, it is explained, is that the area produced blue clay used as paint.

14. Kuchimochi: Personal name suggesting a messenger. The clan Ikuwa included a powerful bowman who shot through an iron shield brought by visitors from Koguryo, Korea.

Princess Kage

. . . The Crown Prince[15] for the first time knew that Shibi (Tunny) had taken Princess Kage (Shadow) before he did and realized that neither the father, Minister Matori, nor the son, Shibi, had any respect for him. He became furious and his face reddened. That night he went swiftly to the mansion of Kanamura, of the Ōtomo Clan, and plotted to gather soldiers. The Ōtomo Clan, leading several thousand soldiers, blocked the road and killed Shibi on Mount Nara. [One account has it that Shibi, who was staying in Princess Kage's house, was killed that night.] Princess Kage hurried to the place where he was killed, and saw that he indeed was. Alarmed and terrified, she was utterly lost, tears of sorrow filling her eyes. Finally, she made a song, which went:

We pass by Furu, of Isonokami,
we pass by Takahashi, of the rush pillow,
we pass by Ōyake, of many things,
we pass by Kasuga, of the spring day,
we pass by Osaho, where wives hide.
We even load our bowl with rice,
we even load our cup with water,
Weeping, soaked with tears, she goes,
poor Princess Kage!

Princess Kage, having finished burying him, was about to go home, when she said, sobbing, "I'm so bitter that I've lost my dear husband today." Depressed and shedding tears, she sang:

In a valley of Nara, where blue clay is good,
he's hidden in a waterlogged place, like a beast.
Do not root up the water-spurting young Tunny,
baby wild boars.

The Older Prince of Nugari and Imperial Princess Kasuga

In Long Month, the Older Prince of Nugari[16] wedded Imperial Princess Kasuga on his own. One moonlit night, he talked and talked with her until, before he knew it, it was daybreak. Then his poetic thoughts quickly turned into words, which he sang himself:

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15. The twenty-fifth emperor, Buretsu, who was partly mythical.
16. The twenty-seventh emperor, Ankan, who was partly mythical.

Finding no wife to pillow in the Country of Eight Islands,
hearing there was a beautiful woman,
hearing there was a good woman,
in the Country of Kasuga, of a spring day,
I push open and enter myself
the wooden door of cypress, the luxuriant tree,
tug at the hem toward her feet,
tug at the hem toward her pillow,
make my love's arm pillow me,
make my arm pillow my love,
arms holding each other, crossed like vines,
and we sleep our sleep well like boar on a skewer.
Birds of the garden, roosters have called,
birds of grass fields, pheasants resound.
That I love you I still haven't said,
yet the day has broken, my love.

The princess sang in response:

Down the Hatsuse River, of Komoriku,
bamboo flows toward us, woven bamboo, fresh bamboo.
I'll make a koto out of its trunk,
I'll make a flute out of its tip;
playing it, I climb up
Mount Mimoro, stand there, and look round:
In the pond of Iware, of luxuriant vines,
even the fish in the water come up to lament.
Our Sovereign familiar with the eight corners[17]
wears his sash of detailed design,
its knot hanging, head hanging, everyone's here to lament.[18]

17. *Yasumishishi,* here translated as "familiar with the eight corners," is a makura-kotoba that modifies *wago ōkimi,* "our Soverign."

18. In this context this is an aubade expressing sorrow at the parting at dawn. Some suspect that this song is a misplaced imperial threnody.

Poems from the *Man'yōshū*

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The *Man'yōshū* (*Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves*) is an anthology of 4,550 poems in twenty volumes, its coverage ranging from songs attributed to mythological figures to what may be called the "diary poems" of Ōtomo no Yakamochi (718–785). Yakamochi, in fact, played a major role in the last phase of its compilation and editing, which had apparently started some decades earlier: The last four of the twenty volumes give the impression of being his personal collection, and a total of 473 poems, or more than one tenth of the poems, included in the anthology are his. Yakamochi was of a distinguished military clan and in his last position was Commander-in-Chief to Subjugate the East. His political involvement at the time of his death is thought to have delayed bringing the *Man'yōshū* to light.

The songs and poems in the anthology were written down in the same way as in the *Kojiki* with a hybrid use of Chinese characters. This highly inventive, imaginative use of the Chinese writing system made the collection increasingly unintelligible, especially as the simplified writing systems of *hiragana* and *katakana* were devised and accepted, so that in 893 Sugawara no Michizane lamented about the *Man'yōshū*: "Its sentences and phrases are convoluted, these are neither verses nor odes, the writing system is random and warped. It is difficult to get into it and understand it." Finally, in 951, Emperor Murakami assigned five scholar-poets to decipher the anthology. Since those men worked in the female quarters of the palace, some say that the women's desire to understand the poems of bygone days was an impetus to the first systematic attempt to read the large collection.

Chronologically, the first woman poet to appear is Princess Iwa, whose poems top the "Love" (*Sōmon*) section of volume two. (For Princess Iwa, see also pp. 8–10). Her first poem here, whose beginning in my translation, "Since you went away, days have grown long" (*Kimi ga yuki ke nagaku narinu*), may remind some readers of the first line of "Autumn Leaves" by Johnny Mercer and Jacques Prévert, is attributed to Princess Sotōri, "See Through," a nickname of Princess Karu, in the section that immediately follows. However, the latter version is slightly different, suggesting that the poem or song was popular. Princess Karu had an incestuous relationship with her brother and was exiled—either along with him, according to one account, or alone, according to another. Her nickname came from her beauty, which, it is said, was so intense it glowed through her robe.