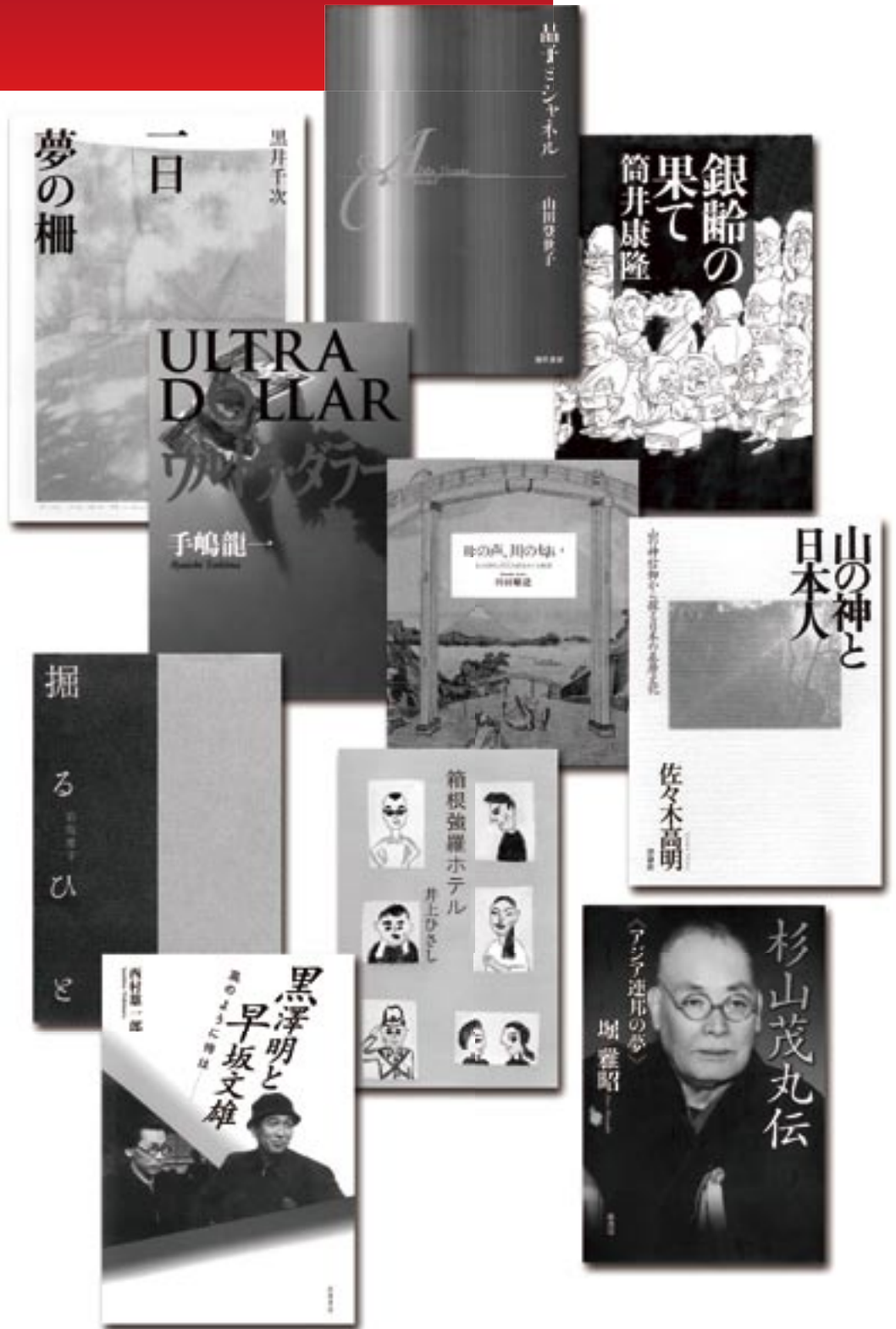


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My Time in Seattle

Tawada Yōko

Beginning in 2004, the Japan Foundation has been working out of its New York office to run a series of presentations by Japanese authors, both established writers and young newcomers, in locations around the United States. This project, which aims to introduce modern Japanese literature to a broad North American audience, brought Tawada Yōko—the popular Japanese writer who lives in Germany—to speak in Seattle, Washington, with the cooperation of the Japanese Consulate in that city. Below she tells about this experience.

* * * * *

After giving a reading at the University of Arizona I headed for Seattle. I had seen on the news that the biggest blizzard in years was covering the East Coast in snow, but I was in fine spirits, traveling from the desert heat of the American Southwest to the shores of the bright Pacific. K, a young American working at the Japan Foundation's New York office, picked me up at the Seattle airport. Worried that the storm might prevent flights from leaving New York, he had come out to the West Coast early. He had rented a car and was ready to go.

K had majored in Japanese, and was deeply interested in Japanese literature. During his high school years, he had also entertained the idea of becoming an actor, and was now quite excited about the opportunity to give a public reading of the English translations of my works at the gathering.

This was not my first time in Seattle. I had spent one day there before when a friend drove me to the city from Vancouver, Canada, where I had attended a literary festival. One vivid memory from that trip was the border crossing. I had expected almost no border between Canada and the United States, so I was surprised to see guards stopping each car and searching through all the travelers' luggage. I have a particular interest in the idea of national borders, and these boundaries often appear in my writing. During that crossing the immigration officer asked me about my work when he checked my passport. I told him I was a writer, and he replied with: "What's that? A banker?" To this day I can't figure out how my pronunciation turned one into the other.

I once spent a month at the University of Kentucky. While I was there I heard a lot of talk about the city of Seattle. S, a professor of Japanese literature, had studied in Seattle and recalled the city with great fondness. Today you can get a delicious cup of coffee wherever you go, but this was before coffee-shop culture swept the country. This professor often talked about Seattle as the city of coffee.

Now I was back in Seattle, in one of its famous coffee shops, where K and I were preparing for the event to be held in a nearby bookstore later. The plan was for K to

read one of my works in English translation. In between his readings I would recite some of my own shorter poems in Japanese, and we would wrap things up with a question-and-answer session.

Over our second cup of coffee K and I discussed translation and poetry. K had taken a seminar on poetic translation, where he produced English versions of French and Japanese verse. When he shared his translations from the Japanese, the other participants in the course were invariably full of praise for the "poetic quality" of the works. He found this input both amusing and frustrating, coming from people with no knowledge of the original language.

I believe that he earned this praise because his translations actually were poetic. Translators must understand the foreign language they are working with, but more importantly, they must be talented writers in their own language. Some people may think that any native speaker of a language can formulate it well, but this is not necessarily the case. There is no textbook to teach a person when words must be polished and when they must leap energetically off the page. And if the translator doesn't breathe the appropriate life into those words, then it does not matter how faithfully the original ideas have been presented; that writing is not a successful translation.



My favorite place to drink coffee in Seattle is the Panama Hotel Tea and Coffee House. A fifth-generation Japanese American had told me that this was not just the place to go for a great cup of tea, but a must-see location for anyone who wanted to learn more about the history of the Japanese people who had emigrated to America over the years. Toward the back of the tea house one section of the floor has been replaced with glass. Looking down into the basement, you can see stacks of traditional wicker suitcases from Japan and antique Western-style trunks. These are the belongings of Japanese Americans, who stored them here when they were shipped off to America's internment camps during World War II. After learning

that many succumbed to disease in the harsh conditions of those camps, I wondered how many of these people actually made it back to collect their belongings from the hotel's basement.

Many bookstores in America have a coffee shop located right inside. The Elliot Bay Book Company, where I gave my Seattle presentation, is one such store. The basement café level is filled with people who take books down from the shelves and thumb through them while they sip their drinks. Simple, elegant wood shelves sit against the red brick walls of the shop, holding books decorated with small notes from the store clerks. These notes are not bland advertisements for the works, but contain individual observations. They are fascinating to read.

I opened up the monthly program that was sitting next to the cash register and checked the schedule. Elliot Bay is always open until 10:00 P.M., and just about every evening there is a reading or lecture. If I lived in this city I could see myself lingering in this shop, drinking the coffee and enjoying the experiences it offers. The people who came to my event here all seemed like real book-lovers. K did a fantastic job with the English readings, and they received him most warmly.

During that trip I was also invited to visit the University of Washington campus. Japanese literature instructors and students at the school had read my books in preparation for our meeting, and they had plenty of incisive questions to ask. Two of the teachers whose focus was in modern Japanese literature helped to raise the level of our discussion considerably, injecting their own views from time to time. A third instructor, who specialized in the classical literature of Japan, apologized for the fact that my modern writing was outside his area of research and held back during the proceedings. He made me very happy, however, when he said that he could tell how much importance I placed on Japan's ancient literature.

The Japanese language, to me, does not begin and end with the version that is spoken today. Looking back over the lengthy history of this tongue, I constantly dig up treasures from among the phrases in ancient texts and put them to use in my own writing. I do this because I believe that without the ability to reread this old literature and rearrange it in a modern mode, we cannot create a Japanese that will remain vital on the international stage into the future. This belief might have to do with the fact that I have been living in Germany for more than 20 years.

Seattle's Central Library is another place that has captured my imagination. This library may well be the most noteworthy landmark in all of downtown Seattle. The Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas designed this building. To me it looks just like a great vessel sailing across the sea, pitching from side to side as it goes. Perhaps this is because it was produced by a man from a seafaring nation. The library's glass walls let you look in to see the hundreds of readers sitting among the shelves, books in hand.

Kinokuniya Bookstores kindly arranged an event at the Seattle Public Library's International District/Chinatown Branch. This branch, which opened last year, features a collection of works in Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and many other languages of Asia. Unlike the magnificent, bright Central Library, this branch is small and cozy. Its shelves are decorated with beautiful ceramic



A flyer for the Tawada reading at the Seattle Public Library.

pieces as well as books. The crowd that came to my reading there included many long-time Japanese residents of Seattle, as well as Japanese Americans.

The Japanese Consulate in Seattle organized a reception. Ordinarily the word *reception* makes me think of the sort of event I dislike, with fancy drinks and endless small talk. But this event was pleasantly different: I was actually asked to do a serious reading from my work. I was even more happily surprised at the insightful questions after my presentation. Most pleasing of all was the presence of Seattle writers at this gathering. The author Rebecca Brown was there, sharing her views on my works and kindly offering me a copy of one of her own books in Japanese translation. During my visit to Seattle I did not have time to read much. It was not until my next trip, which took me to the other side of the globe, that I finally had a chance to read Brown's book, which made me think once more about Seattle.

Books are my favorite thing in the world, and it is books that lie at the center of my travel memories, no matter where I have been. Another Seattle memory is of the University of Washington's East Asia Library. A kind student guided me through the spacious reading room to a small staircase, and we descended to the lowest level. Toward the back of that floor was an impressive collection of recently published Japanese novels. I had heard that the University of Washington was home to many Japanese literature majors, but it was still impressive to see this tremendous selection of extremely contemporary books from Japan. I have never seen collections like it in other universities outside Japan. The Japanese members of the library staff put great effort into it indeed.

Having flown to Seattle from Germany, the city seemed unimaginable distant. Spending time in Seattle made me feel that though the city was indeed far from Europe, it was a lot closer to Japan. Indeed, a look at the map shows that Seattle is one of the closest major American ports to the Japanese isles. That is only natural, since the world is round.

FICTION



Kuroi Senji

Born in 1932. Has lived almost his entire life in the Tokyo area, mainly along the Chūō Line in the western suburbs depicted in his Gunsei [trans. Life in the Cul-De-Sac], winner of the Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize. Currently serves on the Akutagawa Prize Selection Committee.

Ichinichi yume no saku [One Day Dream Barrier]

By Kuroi Senji

Kōdansha, 2006. 215x155 mm. 269 pp. ¥1,900. ISBN 4-06-213116-1.

Kuroi Senji is a member of the so-called Introspective Generation of writers that emerged in Japan in the postwar period. This book is a collection of short stories that he wrote over the past decade or so. The protagonist in all of them is an elderly man much like himself—retired, over the age of 70, and living in the suburbs with his wife after his children have all moved away. While this may appear at a glance to be a realistic portrayal of the lives of the elderly in Japan today, the main characters all find themselves experiencing small but baffling adventures and mysteries within their otherwise ordinary everyday lives.

For example, in the title story “Yume no saku” [Dream Barrier], the central character finds a note while he is at the hospital that reads: “Never receive a medi-

cal treatment after having a strange dream because it’s dangerous.” This leads into an erotic dream the man had the night before about a housewife from his neighborhood. In “Marunouchi,” an adventure unfolds around a mysterious phone number that appears inside the breast pocket of a man’s jacket. In “Yōzō no yoru” [Yōzō’s Night], the protagonist is followed one night by a suspicious young man after exiting the train on his way home.

While looking closely at what it means to be old, this excellent collection of short stories also provides a taste of the absurdities and fantasies that give us a glimpse into the deep fissures of life.

Urutora Darā [Ultra Dollar]

By Teshima Ryūichi

Shinchōsha, 2006. 195x140 mm. 334 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 4-10-382303-8.

In May 2002, an extremely realistic counterfeit \$100 bill called an “ultra dollar” appeared in the possession of a man who supported the terrorist Irish Republican Army while serving as the head of Ireland’s Labor Party. This man, whose code name was “Red Fox,” got the bogus notes from North Korea. In 1968, long before this incident, a young engraver suddenly disappeared from Tokyo. And in 1988, it was discovered that a sample of the pulp used to print US currency, which is made only by a company called Norton in Dalton, Massachusetts, was mysteriously lost. The following year in Lausanne, Switzerland, one printing machine went missing from the legitimate order of a printing tycoon after being shipped to Macao. In 1990 in Copenhagen, Denmark, a manager from a Japanese printing company

who was highly skilled in the field of antique printmaking suddenly went missing.

The author connects these events, bringing the reader to a startling realization. This is an informative novel on an international scale written by the former Washington, DC, bureau chief of Japanese public broadcaster NHK.



Teshima Ryūichi

Born in 1949. Led continuing 24-hour broadcasts over a period of 11 days after September 11, 2001, when serving as NHK’s Washington bureau chief. Became an international affairs journalist and a writer in 2005. Since 2006 has served as a visiting professor at the Waseda University Graduate School Faculty of Political Science.



Tsutsui Yasutaka
Born in 1934. Author, playwright, literary critic, actor, and jazz clarinetist. After one of his older works, which was included in a high school textbook, was criticized for furthering discrimination, declared that he would quit writing and did so in protest of the publisher's self-censorship. Retracted his declaration in 1996 after reaching an agreement with the company. Won the Medal with Purple Ribbon from the government in 2002 for his literary achievements. His official website is <www.jali.or.jp/tti>.

Ginrei no hate **[To the End of the Silver Society]** By Tsutsui Yasutaka

Shinchōsha, 2006. 195x140 mm. 239 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 4-10-314528-5.

Tsutsui Yasutaka is a renowned science fiction writer whose work makes him seem like a combination of French author Boris Vian, Poland's Stanisław Lem, and Italy's Italo Calvino. He has had legions of fans within Japan over the past 40 years. But while all his works are still in print, it is regrettable that he has seen few of them translated for a foreign audience in comparison with other writers of his generation, such as Ōe Kenzaburō. Tsutsui's writing is steeped in black humor and parody, and it overflows with an energy that feels the need to mock any and all taboos.

The theme of this book is graying society, something that has become quite serious in Japan in recent years. In this novel, to deal with the problem the government passes a law decreeing that people over the age of 70 must fight each other to the

death. On every street corner, there are old people brandishing guns, caught in a tragedy that could have been taken from a Sam Peckinpah movie. In the end, they band together and plan an attack on the officials who created the law. With the exception of the protagonist, all the old people are shot to death.

A half-century has passed since the release of Fukazawa Shichirō's *Narayama bushikō* [trans. *The Ballad of Narayama*], a story of a small village where residents upon reaching the age of 70 must be abandoned on the top of Mount Narayama. Tsutsui's book, with its deep vision of current Japanese society, will fascinate the readers of today.

Higeki shūkan **[Tragic Week]**

By Yahagi Toshihiko

Bungei Shunjū, 2005. 193x135 mm. 564 pp. ¥1,905. ISBN 4-16-324640-1.

This book is a fictional autobiography of famous Japanese poet Horiguchi Daigaku (1892–1981), telling about the Mexican revolution and his love in the springtime of his life. Horiguchi had a significant impact on the history of poetry in the Shōwa era (1926–89) through his *Gekka no ichigun* [Beneath the Moon], an anthology of French poetry he compiled and translated.

The book starts off with a parody of a famous sentence from Paul Nizan's *Aden, Arabie*: "The year was 1912. I was 20 years old. I can't tell anyone what kind of year it was."

As he was born outside the front gate of the Tokyo Imperial University, the "author" was given the name Daigaku, or "university." He was the son of Horiguchi Kumaichi, a diplomat who was involved in the assassination of the last queen of

Korea's Choson dynasty, Empress Myongsong (1851–95). In 1911, Daigaku drops out of Keio University at age 19 and goes to study French in Mexico City, where his father is stationed. He takes part in the Mexican Revolution and falls in love with the daughter of the revolution's first leader, Francisco Madero. While laying out a tale of revolution and love, this story takes place against the backdrop of the end of the nineteenth-century world, the emergence of the United States, and the end of the Meiji era (1868–1912), a sort of youth for modern Japan.

Daigaku's happiest days end in Paris, mimicking a line from "Le pont Mirabeau," a poem by Guillaume Apollinaire that he translated: "The days go by, I remain behind."



Yahagi Toshihiko

Born in 1950. Made a name for himself in the 1970s by creating scenarios for radio and TV dramas while continuing to write short stories and draw manga. Co-created the smash hit manga *Kibun wa mō sensō* [I'm in the Mood for War] with Ōtomo Katsuhiro in 1980. Is also active as a movie director. Won the Prix des Deux Magots for *A-Ja-Pan* and claimed the Mishima Yukio Award for *Ra ra ra kagaku no no* [The Son of Science].



Iwasaka Keiko

Born in 1946. Won the Noma Award for New Writers for *Mimoza no hayashi o* [*Mimosa Forest*], the *Hirabayashi Taiko Award* for Gaka Koide *Narashige no shōzō* [*Portrait of the Painter Koide Narashige*], the *Education Minister's Award* and the *Murasaki Shikibu Award* for *Yodogawa ni chikai machi kara* [*From the Town by the Yodo River*], and the *Kawabata Yasunari Award* for *Ame nochi ame?* [*Rain, Followed by Rain?*]. In addition to her novels, has won acclaim for critical biographies.

Horu hito **[The Digger]**

By Iwasaka Keiko

Kōdansha, 2006. 195x135 mm. 202 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 4-06-213247-8.

This collection of short stories tells of the crises and salvation that exist in an average, bland life. The title work is about the everyday life of a housewife who continuously digs a hole in her backyard to dispose of garbage. Her husband is a businessman who has been sent by his company to a different city, and the woman lives with her mother-in-law. One morning in late fall, after the rain has stopped, the protagonist thinks to herself, "This is perfect weather for digging." The story continues: "It was as though warm blood had just begun to flow through a body that had just woken up. The gears began to slowly turn inside a head that had not yet fully emerged from its slumber."

The mother-in-law, meanwhile, has begun to go senile and has trouble remem-

bering afterward that she has eaten a meal. The woman's husband rarely comes back home. As the woman continues to dig the garbage pit in her yard, she becomes the subject of rumors in the neighborhood. She cannot stop digging, though, as this is the sole act that she has undertaken under her own will, based on her own feelings. Digging this hole is this housewife's identity. This is a disturbing story.

ESSAY

Haha no koe, kawa no nioi **[Mother's Voice, River's Smell]**

By Kawada Junzō

Chikuma Shobō, 2006. 195x135 mm. 222 pp. ¥2,400. ISBN 4-480-85598-X.

The author is the eighth-generation son of a rice dealer in downtown Tokyo that has been operating since the Edo period (1603–1868). He attended a university in the city's uptown area, and after undergoing training in cultural anthropology under Claude Lévi-Strauss, he spent a long time conducting research in the savannahs of Western Africa. Kawada had long devoted himself to studying an alien culture in a faraway land, avoiding talk about his own hometown. At one point, though, the memory of the world that had preceded him came back to life, like "concealed rocks reemerging when the tide goes out." This was his memory of the canal-front family house, which was built in the Edo period.

He remembered the smell of fish from the barges that went down the canal and

the fact that his mother, who loved *musume gidayū* theater since she was young, pronounced "hi" as "shi." In going back over these memories, the author recollected a rich cultural heritage through the medium of water and began to write down his thoughts. To borrow a phrase from the Italian intellectual Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), this work is an effort to measure "cultural mulch." The fires and the high tides made life in Tokyo's downtown district an unstable proposition. This area, though, with its many connections to the rest of the Kantō area via waterways, invoked a splendor different from that of Kyoto and Osaka. In particular, this book holds a unique place in theories about Tokyo regarding the thinking concerning fighting fires.



Kawada Junzō

Born in 1934. A professor at Kanagawa University specializing in cultural anthropology. Received his doctorate in ethnology from the University of Paris V: René Descartes after graduating from the School of Arts and Science at the University of Tokyo. Major works include *Kōtō denshō ron* [*Oral Tradition*].



Yamada Toyoko

Born in 1946. Covers the cultural history of the media as a professor at Aichi Shukutoku University. Is a scholar of French literature. Her books include *Media toshi Pari* [*Media City Paris*] and *Mōdo no teikoku* [*Empire of Fashion*].

***Akiko to Shaneru* [Akiko and Chanel]**

By Yamada Toyoko

Keisō Shobō, 2006. 195x135 mm. 337 pp. ¥2,200. ISBN 4-326-65313-2.

Who was the most interesting woman in twentieth-century Japan? From the perspective of East Asian history, it must be Li Xianglan. In terms of feminism, it was probably Abe Sada, who served as the model for Ōshima Nagisa's *Ai no korīda* [trans. *In the Realm of the Senses*]. But when it comes to greatly transforming the sensibilities of the Japanese and renewing literary traditions, we cannot overlook Yosano Akiko (1878–1942). This book compares the celebrated poet with the French designer Coco Chanel.

While the two never actually met, they shared many things in common. Each of them was born into a family that was not wealthy, and they worked all their lives, exerting a decisive impact on the self-awareness of women of their times. Chanel took utilitarian things like sweaters

and shoulder bags and made them popular among women as fashion, while Yosano broke into the world of traditional poetry as an outsider, encouraging women to give self-expression to romanticism. The two were also similar in their skepticism toward the popular feminism of the time. Using Chanel as a mirror, this excellent work brings into relief the history of Japanese women in the early twentieth century.

***Sugiyama Shigemaru den* [Biography of Sugiyama Shigemaru]**

By Hori Masaaki

Genshobō, 2006. 190x130 mm. 230 pp. ¥1,900. ISBN 4-902116-49-9.

The many mysteries of the life of Sugiyama Shigemaru (1864–1935) have until now not been publicly debated. But his existence is key to understanding the process by which Japan became a colonial power. Sugiyama was born into a samurai family just before the 1868 Meiji Restoration. He never held a public job, with the exception of a time when he worked as a substitute teacher in his youth. Even so, he wielded a tremendous amount of influence over the nation's political and business circles as an outsider.

When he was young, he plotted the assassination of Prime Minister Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909), and after that failed, he switched his stance, urging Itō to achieve the annexation of Korea. Sugiyama proposed purchasing the Philippines under the banner of pan-Asianism,

and he supported an Indian independence activist seeking refuge in Japan. He was viewed as quite capable by all stripes of nationalists. Strangely, though, he wrote fantastic memoirs, and his son Yumeno Kyūsaku became a writer of fantasy worthy of being called Japan's E. T. A. Hoffmann.

This book is the first objective portrayal of Sugiyama, and as such it is an important resource in understanding Japan's development as a modern country.



Hori Masaaki

Born in 1962. After working as a researcher at a pharmaceutical company and then a middle school teacher, became a writer and local historian. His works include *Ikusa uta* [*War Songs*], which details the spiritual history of the common people as it was forged through war songs and contains episodes relating to the birth of martial music.

POETRY



Ōoka Makoto

Born in 1931. Poet, literary critic. A former president of the Japan PEN Club, a professor of Japanese literature at Meiji University and at the National University of Arts & Music, and member of the Advisory Board of Poetry International (Rotterdam). Has received numerous awards, including Officier Ordre d'Arts et des Lettres from the French government.

Nihon no shiika: Sono honegumi to suhada
[trans. *The Poetry and Poetics of Ancient Japan*]
 By Ōoka Makoto

Iwanami Shoten, 2005. 145x105 mm. 216 pp. ¥900. ISBN 4-00-602097-X.

This book is a compilation of the lectures delivered at Collège de France in 1994 and 1995 by Ōoka Makoto, a prominent poet and critic in Japan today. It has already been published in French under the title *Poésie et poétique du Japon ancien*, and a Japanese version was released by Kōdansha in 1995, followed by the publication of an English version in 1997. This new release in an accessible form is highly welcomed, though, as it provides the sort of superb overview of classical Japanese poetry that can hardly be found elsewhere.

As the original audience was French, classical Japanese poetry is explained in an easy-to-understand manner in clear language for the benefit of readers who approach the subject from a very different European perspective. The book first takes up the late-ninth-century Chinese-

style poet Sugawara no Michizane. After a reexamination of the potential for social and political expression in his preferred genre, it moves on to consider the poetics of the 31-syllable *waka*, noting that Ki no Tsurayuki, one of four poets selected by the emperor to compile the *Kokin wakashū* anthology of poetry in the early tenth century, held that harmony was the original basis of *waka*. Also covered in the lectures in this book are the female poets of the Middle Ages, the ballads of that period, and poetry on natural scenery, which the author gives an especially important place in Japanese poetry. This book contains a vast number of insights supported by the author's deep knowledge and his refined sense as a poet and is thus the ideal introduction to classical Japanese poetry for the interested foreign reader.

DRAMA

Hakone Gōra Hoteru
[Hakone Gōra Hotel]

By Inoue Hisashi

Shūeisha, 2006. 180x115 mm. 211 pp. ¥1,300. ISBN 4-08-774794-8.

This is the latest drama from the renowned modern Japanese playwright Inoue Hisashi. It was first performed in 2005 when it was directed by Kuriyama Tamiya at the New National Theatre, Tokyo, where it received rave reviews. Inoue mixes fantasy with the results of an assiduous study of historical truths, boldly constructing a comic world with the result being a solid *Lesedrama* (a play intended to be read).

The play is set in a resort hotel in Hakone (roughly 70 kilometers from Tokyo) in May 1945. Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs was exploring the possibilities of reaching peace with the United States through the mediation of the Soviet Union, with which Japan still held a mutual nonaggression pact. In Inoue's play, the Foreign Ministry evacuates the Soviet

Embassy in Japan to the Gōra Hotel, where Ambassador Yakov Malik holds discussions with Prime Minister Hirota Kōki. Inside the hotel, which must make hurried preparations to take in the Soviet Embassy, a great deal of bargaining ensues among the soldiers, sailors, and agents of the secret police brought in as personnel.

The author highlights the conflict between the Foreign Ministry, which wants to reach a peace agreement, and the military, which is hoping for a decisive battle on the Japanese mainland. This comedy conveys a serious message urging the audience to rethink the meaning of the historic moment when Japan was actually forced to make this ultimate choice.



Inoue Hisashi

Born in 1934. Novelist, playwright, and chairman of the Japan PEN Club. Writes with a light touch, but possesses a feel for language and has written many essays on Japanese. Is a famously slow writer and has on occasion forced delays in the performances of plays he was commissioned to write. Is politically active, calling for peace through leaving Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution unchanged.



Sasaki Kōmei

Born in 1929. A professor emeritus at the National Museum of Ethnology since 1997. Served as director of the Foundation for Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture until 2003. Major works include Higashi-Minami Ajia nōkō ron [Theories of Agriculture in East and South Asia] and Inasaku izen [Before Rice Cultivation].

Yama no kami to Nihonjin [Mountain Gods and the Japanese]

By Sasaki Kōmei

Yōsensha, 2006. 195x135 mm. 251 pp. ¥2,500. ISBN 4-89691-999-8.

The Japanese have long lived by depending on the bounty of the mountains and the forest. They also came to revere the gods of those natural places, who provided these gifts. This book examines the formation and development of the belief in mountain gods from the perspective of the key role that this spirituality played in the creation of the core of Japanese culture.

Sasaki wrote this book because swidden agriculture and the lifestyles of the mountain residents who undertake it have been a constant theme in his work since he began his ethnological research. He has traveled to the mountain forests of Japan's southern islands of Kyushu and Shikoku and to mountain villages in such places as India, Nepal, and Southeast Asia, along the way learning of the deep reverence

residents in these places have for the gods that rule the mountains and forests. Drawing on this experience, he notes that the Japanese image of the hometown is bound to this respect for mountain gods. Previous research had indicated that this belief was essentially the same throughout Japan, but the author endeavors here to demonstrate that there are major regional differences. This book is the result of exacting local surveys.

Nihon shūkyō shi [History of Japanese Religion]

By Sueki Fumihiko

Iwanami Shoten, 2006. 170x105 mm. 242 pp. ¥780. ISBN 4-00-431003-2.

The author is known as a great scholar of Japanese Buddhist history, but in this work he goes beyond Buddhism to include the ancient Japanese religion Shinto, the Christianity that came to Japan in the early modern period, and a number of new religions that have emerged in recent years, packing them all into a concise, pocket-sized book. He looks at the ancient histories *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* and debates more modern phenomena, like the 1995 sarin gas attack by the Aum Shinrikyō cult and the controversy over Yasukuni Shrine, where the spirits of class-A war criminals are venerated.

This book presents a broad overview of the history of religion in Japan. While it is based on the findings of recent research, it does not delve too far into the details of religious ceremonies or the

inner workings of religious groups, so it is easy to digest. Focusing mainly on religious thought, this should be a greatly welcomed overview by those who have an interest in Japanese religion.

At the root of the author's view of history is the idea that the deep strata of the Japanese spirit are not fixed and unchanging, but have rather been formed through a dynamic historical process. In order to get at the essence of Japanese culture, the author argues against "groundlessly extolling its virtues," insisting on the necessity of "once again digging out the hidden core and tracing its path dispassionately." In order to better understand the spiritual foundation of modern Japan, following the development of Japanese religious thought from this kind of perspective is invaluable.



Sueki Fumihiko

Born in 1949. Professor at the Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology at the University of Tokyo, where he teaches Japanese Buddhism. Works mainly on the reconstruction of the intellectual history of Buddhism in Japan from ancient to modern times. Has contributed several articles in English to the Japanese Journal of Religious Studies and other journals.

THOUGHT



Masuda Katsumi

Born in 1923. Retired in 1989 after a long stint as a professor at Hosei University. Has gone beyond Japanese literature and used historical and ethnological methodologies to shed light on the spiritual origins of the Japanese.

Suzuki Hideo

Born in 1938. Professor of literature at Seikei University and professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo.

Amano Kiyoko

Born in 1940. Professor of literature at Hosei University.

Masuda Katsumi no shigoto 2: Kazan rettō no shisō [Masuda Katsumi's Work, Vol. 2: The Philosophy of a Volcanic Archipelago]

By Masuda Katsumi (edited by Suzuki Hideo and Amano Kiyoko)

Chikuma Shobō, 2006. 150x105 mm. 607 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 4-480-08972-1.

Masuda Katsumi is a researcher of classical Japanese literature with broad knowledge in mythology, history, and ethnology, and has left an impressive track record that spans greater than half a century. The focus of his quest, in short, is the various forms that archaism has taken in the imagination of the Japanese. Masuda begins with an analysis of the diary of Murasaki Shikibu, the author of *Genji monogatari* [trans. *The Tale of Genji*], based on a thorough study. Afterward, he turns to mythology and narrative literature, tying these strands together as he moves on to the spiritual history of the Japanese. This is part of a five-volume series, and in the title piece originally released in 1968, Masuda quotes liberally from sources

ranging from ancient folk songs to the texts of nineteenth-century religious movements, searching for how Japanese have thought about their origins. Through thorough analysis, the author concludes that the most unique type of gods in Japan, a home to earthquakes, volcanoes, and hot springs, are volcano spirits.

In other articles, he explains the characteristics of Japanese shamanism and introduces the thirty-ninth son of Emperor Daigo (885–930), a forgotten prince who happened to fall from the imperial family record. Masuda's anthology draws on his limitless knowledge to present insightful findings to the reader.

CINEMA

Kurosawa Akira to Hayasaka Fumio [Kurosawa Akira and Hayasaka Fumio]

By Nishimura Yūichirō

Chikuma Shobō, 2005. 195x140 mm. 815 pp. ¥3,900. ISBN 4-480-87349-X.

Hayasaka Fumio, who handled the soundtracks to such Kurosawa Akira movies as *Rashōmon* (1950), *Ikiru* (1952), and *Shichinin no samurai* [trans. *Seven Samurai*] (1954), passed away suddenly in 1955 at the age of 41. The author, who has spent considerable time researching Kurosawa, sketches out the life story of this musician based on his conversations with the legendary director over many years, interviews with a number of people, and a variety of newly discovered materials, including Hayasaka's diary. As it reveals the depth of Kurosawa's knowledge of music, as well as previously unknown aspects of his filmmaking, this book is a valuable resource that sheds light on another aspect of Kurosawa history.

The author got the idea for the book in 1984, the year before *Ran* was released,

when he visited the Kurosawa home to have the director check a manuscript. It was to be a book based entirely on a long interview that he had conducted with the filmmaker. Kurosawa wept when he read the portion about Hayasaka's score for *Seven Samurai*.

Kurosawa was known for making very masculine films, so why did he shed tears while remembering Hayasaka some 30 years after his passing? Using this event as its axis, this book delves into the footprints left on postwar Japanese cinema by these two giants.



Nishimura Yūichirō

Nonfiction writer and film and music critic. After graduating from Waseda University worked for Kinema-Junpo, Co., in Paris, before going on to produce commercials and video clips. Has served as general director of the Furuyū Movie Festival in Saga Prefecture since 1985.



Yomota Inuhiko

Born in 1953. Is active as a critic on comics, cooking, urban theory, modern thought, and other topics related to film and culture. Studied religion as an undergraduate at the University of Tokyo and comparative culture at its graduate school.

“Kawaii” ron [The Theory of *Kawaii*]

By Yomota Inuhiko

Chikuma Shobō, 2006. 175x105 mm. 206 pp. ¥680. ISBN 4-480-06281-5.

The Japanese adjective *kawaii* (cute) is applied to a number of globally popular Japanese characters, like Hello Kitty, Pokémon, and Sailor Moon. What does *kawaii* mean, and why have *kawaii* Japanese characters become so popular? Taking a look at these questions by going back in history and examining the meaning of the word, the author skillfully delves into one root of Japanese culture.

According to the author, the word *kawaii* dates back to the eleventh-century work *Makura no sōshi* [trans. *The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon*]. It was used in Kabuki and popular novels in the Edo period (1603–1868), and has been kept alive by modern writers like Dazai Osamu, refined to the point where it represents a unique aesthetic. The author also notes that the elements of *kawaii* include

ugliness and a hint of the grotesque in addition to beauty.

The author analyzes how university students use the word via surveys of students at Meiji Gakuin University, where he teaches film history, and Akita University, where he previously lectured. He also looks into the background of how *kawaii* culture made its way overseas. In short, this is a very interesting discourse on Japanese *kawaii* culture.

Zokuzoku hikaku engeki gaku [Still More Comparative Theater Studies]

By Kawatake Toshio

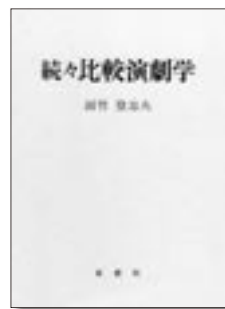
Nansōsha, 2005. 215x160 mm. 652 pp. ¥19,048. ISBN 4-8165-0338-2.

The author published *Hikaku engeki gaku* [Comparative Theater Studies] in 1967 and *Zoku hikaku engeki gaku* [More Comparative Theater Studies] in 1974. Some three decades later, he has completely revised the subject matter and released this work, which adds roughly 300 more manuscripts written for this volume. The first part of this work is an overview of comparative theater studies; the second part looks at both universal and unique elements of traditional theater; and the third looks at the universality and uniqueness of the beauty of Kabuki as seen in performances overseas.

The first section places the field of comparative theater in the context of the development of traditional theater studies, delving into the purposes, objects, and methods of comparative theater. Using

comparative research with European theater, the second portion examines empirically the unique characteristics of Kabuki and other traditional Japanese theater arts. The third part contains discourse on Shakespeare’s plays in Japan, performances in Vienna by the theatrical troupe led by Kawakami Otojirō (1864–1911), and Kabuki showings under the Allied Occupation after World War II.

The author’s great-grandfather was the Kabuki playwright Kawatake Mokuami and his father was the Kabuki researcher Kawatake Shigetoshi. He conceived of this project by divining clues from comparisons of European theater and Kabuki. The fact that he majored in physics in his youth makes the logical construction in his work quite clear.



Kawatake Toshio

Born in 1924. Professor emeritus at Waseda University and a corresponding member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Chairman of the Japan Theatre Arts Association, president of the Hōsō-Bunka Foundation. Has authored more than 80 books. Was recognized as a Person of Cultural Merit on the occasion of the publication of his book Kabuki in 2001.

No. 4: Japanese Traditional Theater

Japan's traditional forms of theater have long histories and are integral parts of the nation's culture and art. Of course theatrical arts can only be truly appreciated on stage—no matter how many introductory texts one may read, it is still not the same as actually seeing a play. This does not, however, mean there is nothing to be gained by reading a primer before attending a performance. The traditional forms of theater took shape centuries ago, and there are bound to be elements that modern people will not understand. Below is a look at some works providing an introductory look at these arts and their background.

A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words

True theater is meant to be appreciated on the stage. Reading book after book on the theatrical arts will never measure up to actually seeing these arts in live action—something that can, indeed, be said of stage performances in any country in the world.

For a long time, I had wanted to see a stage performance led by the Italian director of opera and theater Giorgio Strehler (1921–97). I especially wanted to see his rendition of Carlo Goldoni's *Il servitore di due padroni* [trans. *The Servant of Two Masters*]. Goldoni's works had been translated into Japanese, but I always had a hard time understanding them. Whether reading the plays themselves or explications of them, I was unable to grasp their essence. Eventually, though, a Strehler production of *The Servant of Two Masters* came to Tokyo. Upon seeing it for myself, I understood it all; this truly was a case of a picture being worth a thousand words.

There are four forms of traditional Japanese theater: Noh, Kyogen, Bunraku, and Kabuki. All four took shape hundreds of years ago, have a number of conventions, and possess specific methodologies. This complexity would probably make most people want to reach for a primer in the belief that having some knowledge ahead of time would make these art forms easier to understand. That would be a mistake, however, as it could lead the readers to hold unnecessary preconceptions. It is best to first take in a play without any preconceived ideas. If you watch a performance with an open mind and still find it impenetrable, that work—even if it is considered to be a centuries-old classic—is either lacking in true artistic merit or a hopelessly outmoded “antique.”

I believe watching videos may be more instructive than reading overviews of these performing arts. In this day and age, there are plenty of videos of traditional Japanese theater for sale. For Noh, I would recommend a performance of Kanze Hisao's *Izutsu* [The Well Curb] or *Shunkan*, the story of the exiled twelfth-century Buddhist priest of that name, or Umewaka Rokurō's *Dōjōji* [The Dōjō Temple]. For Kyogen, the comic interludes often presented between Noh performances, I would suggest Nomura Mansaku's *Tsurigitsune* [The Fox and the Trapper]. This is one of the most challenging plays in the Kyogen repertoire, demanding the highest skills from the most seasoned performers. There are few videos of Bunraku, Japanese puppet theater, but audio CDs of *gidayū*—the vocal performers who recite the tale to match the puppets' movements—are widely available, including the complete works of the great Toyotake Yamashirō Shōjō.

Kabuki is the focus of a video series titled *Kabuki meisakusen* [trans. *The Best Selection of Kabuki*]. This contains performances by a number of famous actors, such as the late Nakamura Utaemon, who was renowned for his work in female roles. This series also features legendary actors from the early twentieth century, including appearances of the seventh Matsumoto Kōshirō, the fifteenth Ichimura Uzaemon, and the sixth Onoe Kikugorō in versions of the play *Kanjinchō* [The Subscription List]. One of the most popular Kabuki plays, this story was even made into the movie *Tora no o o fumu otokotachi* [trans. *They Who Step on the Tiger's Tail*] by Kurosawa Akira.

From Noh to Kabuki, watching these videos will allow you to understand the nature of traditional Japanese theater. Even if you do not grasp all the details, you can still feel the living and breathing spirit of these grand masters onstage. It almost goes without saying, but it is this spiritual presence, not intellectual knowledge, that is needed to truly know the theater. Without the sensation of this spirit, there can be no understanding of the play. Conversely, when this spirit comes across clearly, it can make up for incomplete understanding of some aspects of a production. This breathing spirit is the essence of the theater.

Two points need to be kept in mind when viewing videos, however. The first is that the images onscreen are different from an actual stage performance. It is a mysterious thing, but stage performances cannot be completely captured on film or by camera—there is a certain aura that can only be seen directly with the eyes. Nonetheless, videos do still present some portion of the essence of the theater.

The second point is that people who do not understand Japanese need to familiarize themselves with the basic story. It is here that having a text at hand would be useful. People wishing to learn about traditional Japanese drama by watching a video will have more success with access to a translation of the plot. All forms of traditional Japanese drama are based on physical movement, to be sure, but also to an unexpectedly large extent on words, words, words. Some understanding of those words is required.

While keeping these two points in mind, enjoy a video. This will serve as an invaluable introduction, and when you get a chance, go see a drama live onstage. Even then, no deep level of specific knowledge is necessary; all you need is an open mind.

I became enamored with the charms of Kabuki at the age of six, when I saw the sixth Onoe Kikugorō playing the role of Satō Tadanobu in *Yoshitsune senbonzakura* [Yoshitsune and the Thousand Cherry Trees]. Could a six-year-old boy have an intimate knowledge of the story, or of Kabuki itself? All I had was pure innocence and in-

sight. Nevertheless, Kikugorō instantly captured my heart—such was the power of this legendary actor.

This should not, however, be taken to mean that it is not necessary to read some sort of general introduction to the art forms. As traditional theater took shape several centuries ago, there are bound to be elements that modern people will not understand, and written overviews of the theater can fill in those gaps in knowledge.

The perfect time to read an introduction is immediately

after watching a video, when the mind is filled with questions. There is a major difference between reading a primer just for the sake of getting through the book and reading it to answer specific questions. The true value of an overview is most apparent when it is read at a time like this. It provides the reader with living wisdom. Below are listed four such introductions.

(Watanabe Tamotsu, theater critic)

***Nō—genzai no geijutsu no tame ni* [Noh: The Formation of Today's Art Form]**

By Tsuchiya Keiichirō

Iwanami Shoten, 2001. 150x110 mm. 214 pp. ¥800. ISBN 4-00-602033-3.

Noh is an abstract type of theater that celebrates deep meditation. This wonderful book analyzes this meditation from a modern perspective. It was originally written as an introduction to Noh, Kabuki, and Bunraku. I handled the Kabuki section, and Mizuochi

Kiyoshi wrote the part on Bunraku, which is also an exceptional work. Neither is contained in this paperback version, so readers seeking the entire work will have to look for the original edition of this concise, easy-to-understand introduction put out by Shin'yōsha.



***Waga Kabuki* [My Kabuki]**

By Toita Yasuji

Wakei Shoten, 1948. 180x125 mm. 224 pp.

***Kabuki e no shōtai* [An Invitation to Kabuki]**

By Toita Yasuji

Iwanami Shoten, 2004. 150x110 mm. 283 pp. ¥1,000. ISBN 4-00-602080-5.

Kabuki critic Toita Yasuji's 1948 book is a masterful introduction to the art. While unavailable in a current printing, it is worth searching for in used book stores. More readily available is his more recent overview of Kabuki, written as part of a two-volume set, the other of which is titled *Zoku Kabuki e no shōtai* [An Invitation to Kabuki, Part II]. These two books are available in paperback form.

***Kyōgen handobukku* [Kyogen Handbook]**

By Kobayashi Mitsugu and Aburatani Mitsuo (eds.)

Sanseidō, 2000. 210x150 mm. 265 pp. ¥1,650. ISBN 4-385-41043-7.

This book is an accurate and concise introduction to Kyogen. This text is part of a series also including *Nōgaku handobukku* [Noh Handbook], edited by Toida Michizō and Kobayashi Yasuharu, and *Kabuki handobukku* [Kabuki Handbook] and *Bunraku handobukku* [Bunraku Handbook], both edited by

Fujita Hiroshi. All of these books are excellent, accessible overviews.



Major Kabuki Theaters

(1) Kabukiza

Matinees: 11:00 A.M.–3:45 P.M.

Evening performances: 4:30 P.M.–9:00 P.M.

4-12-15 Ginza, Chūō-ku, Tokyo 104-0061

<http://www.shochiku.co.jp/play/kabukiza/theater/>

(2) National Theatre of Japan

4-1 Hayabusachō, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-8656

<http://www.ntj.jac.go.jp/english/>

Noh and Kyogen Theaters

(1) National Noh Theatre

4-18-1 Sendagaya, Shibuya-ku,

Tokyo 151-0051

<http://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/unesco/noh/en/>

(2) Kanze Noh Theater

1-16-4 Shōtō, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo

150-0046

<http://www.kanze.net/> (in Japanese only)

Major Bunraku Theaters

(1) National Theatre

4-1 Hayabusachō, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo

102-8656

<http://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/unesco/bunraku/en/>

(2) National Bunraku Theatre

1-12-10 Nipponbashi, Chūō-ku, Osaka

542-0073

<http://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/unesco/bunraku/en/>

Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes

In July 2006, the 135th Akutagawa Prize was awarded to “Hachigatsu no rojō ni suteru” [Thrown Away on an August Road] by Itō Takami. First published in the June 2006 issue of *Bungakukai*, the story depicts a day in the life of a man who has decided, just before turning 30, to file for divorce the next day. Itō, 35, made his literary debut in 1995, winning the Bungei Award while still a student at Waseda University. His oeuvre spans serious works, lighthearted entertainment pieces, and children’s literature. His wife, Kakuta Mitsuyo, received the 132nd Naoki Prize in 2005, making the two the first married couple ever to have split these two prestigious prizes between them; they join Fujita Yoshinaga and Koike Mariko, married novelists who both won the Naoki, in the small group of prizewinning couples.

The 135th Naoki Prize, meanwhile, was shared by Miura Shion, for *Mahoro ekimae Tada Benri-ken* [The Tada Handyman’s Shop in Front of Mahoro Station], and Mori Eto, for *Kaze ni maiagaru binru shīto* [Plastic Sheet Flying in the Wind]. Both works are published by Bungei Shunjū.



From left: Itō, Miura, and Mori pose with their prizewinning works. (Courtesy: Jiji Press)

Japan’s Richest Literary Prize Awarded

The first Poplar Publishing Grand Prize for Fiction—at ¥20 million, the highest-value prize given to a work of literature—has been awarded to Katabami Daishi. The 26-year-old won the prize for his *3-pun 26-byō no sakujo bōizu: Boku to haru to kōmori to* [The 3:26 Deletion Boys: Spring, the Bats, and Me]. Poplar Publishing has been involved in children’s literature for some 60 years, but over the last five

years has been focusing more on publication of books for adult readers. The prize money is intended to give the winners several years’ worth of financial freedom to pursue their craft, thus helping Poplar foster talented writers and bring their works to market. Katabami’s book will be on shelves in October this year.

New Akutagawa Translation

One new addition to the English-language Penguin Classics series this year was *Rashomon and Seventeen Other Stories*, a new translation of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s works. The translator—Jay Rubin, a professor of Japanese literature at Harvard University—has also produced English versions of books by Murakami Haruki, who provides a preface to this new volume. The original proposal for this book came from the Penguin Group, which made the project conditional on Murakami’s participation. Rubin doubted the Japanese writer would be interested in providing the preface, but Murakami was very receptive to the idea. Akutagawa is not so well-known overseas, but his “Rashōmon” gained fame after Kurosawa Akira refashioned it into his classic film. This collection of stories should see high reader interest thanks to Murakami’s input, too.

Obituary

Yonehara Mari, 56, author, May 25, 2006.

The writer Yonehara Mari was also a talented Russian-Japanese interpreter. In addition to her essays, which gained her many fans, she was known for her pointed, well-targeted columns written for regular publication. Born in Tokyo, she spent her youth in Prague, Czechoslovakia, with her father, a high-ranking officer in the Japanese Communist Party. After learning Russian in a Soviet school there, she returned to Japan to earn her degree from the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies and a doctorate from the University of Tokyo. She then went to work as an interpreter, which she continued right up through the collapse of the Soviet Union. She then turned her hand to writing, winning the 1995 Yomiuri Prize for Literature

(in the essays and travel journals category) for *Fujitsu na bijo ka teishuku na busu ka* [Treacherous Beauty or Virtuous Hag?]. In 2002 her *Usotsuki Anya no makkana shinjitsu* [The Absolute Truth of Anya the Liar] won the Ōya Sōichi Prize. *Japanese Book News*, No. 46, introduced her 2005 work *Pantsu no menboku, fundoshi no koken* [The Prestige of Underpants, the Dignity of *Fundoshi*]. The cancer that took her life was one of the final subjects of her writing.

Tokyo International Book Fair

The 2006 book fair was the biggest ever, attracting some 750 publishers from 30 countries in all. The Japan Foundation was there, distributing *Japanese Book News* from its booth for all four days of the event, from July 6 to 9. Electronic publishing for mobile phones was one hot topic at the fair. Publishers are seeing rapid growth in the distribution of comics to mobile terminals, and major players like Shūeisha and Kōdansha entered the mobile content market this year.

New Work by French, Japanese Cartoonists

An anthology of short stories in manga form written by French and Japanese artists has been published in seven languages, including English, French, and Japanese. *Japon* [trans. *Japan as Viewed by 17 Creators*] contains fantastic works as well as realistic tales, and is an entertaining omnibus of highly expressive art. The French manga artists spent two weeks in various cities around the Japanese islands as part of the process of creating their original works. The Japanese creators, meanwhile, took this project as a chance to tell stories of their hometowns or the areas where they now live. By setting Japan as the theme of this collection, the book’s organizers (L’Institut franco-japonais de Tokyo et Yokohama and the Alliance Française) sought to make it a vehicle for intercultural communication via manga. French manga creator Frédéric Boilet, who lives in Japan, was lead editor for the publication, which won the thirty-fifth Japan Cartoonists Association Special Award.

US Journal Introduces Japanese Literature

A Public Space, a new literary journal launched earlier this year, dedicated nearly 50 pages to modern Japanese literature in the "Focus" section of its inaugural issue. Roland Kelts, an editor for the magazine and a lecturer at the University of Tokyo, interviewed Murakami Haruki and Shibata Motoyuki, two of Japan's top translators of American fiction. The issue contained in-depth discussion from other Japanese writers and translators, as well as several translated stories appearing in English for the first time.

Final Volume Published for Color Compendium

The 88-year-old Ihara Aki has at last completed her five-volume *Nihon bungaku shikisai yōgo shūsei* [A Compendium of Color-Related Words in Japanese Literature]. This ambitious work covers everything from the *Man'yōshū*, the eighth-century compilation of ancient poetry, up through the *Ukiyoburo* [The Bathhouse of the Floating World], a series of tales written by Shikitei Sanba in the early nineteenth century. The author compiled this massive amount of informa-

tion on colors—how they resonate in Japanese culture and the ways these perceptions have changed over time—during more than 30 years spent working in the National Diet Library, among other places.

Two volumes covering the literature of ancient times, one on the early medieval period, and one on the late medieval period have now been joined by the final tome, which covers the major literary works of the early modern era. Phrases dealing with color have been painstakingly selected from the original texts and recorded in the compendium along with their surrounding phrases. The book classifies these entries according to whether they appeared in poetry or prose writing, and the work can be used as a dictionary, with its entries easy to look up according to the era in which they appeared or in *kana* order.

The entries come complete with information on the content and nature of the works from which the color words came; Ihara provides data on the authors, their goals in writing the works, and even their philosophical backgrounds. This five-volume work gives readers the chance to pursue color as a cultural construct through the ages, watching as the aesthetic world of color blooms along with advances in

dyeing technology. She caps the work by focusing last on black and white—the two tones indicating a lack of color—as the ultimate expression of hue-related thought.

Announcement

The Japan Foundation is launching a new grant scheme for fiscal 2007–2008, the Translation and Publication Support Program, aimed at promoting Japanese studies around the world.

This program partially covers expenses for translating and publishing Japan-related works, particularly those in the humanities, social sciences, and arts. Only publishing companies, both Japanese and foreign, are eligible for grants from this program. Texts selected for translation will ideally come from the Foundation's "List of Recommended Works," available on our website, and projects are to be completed between April 1, 2007, and February 28, 2008.

For further information on this program, please contact the nearest overseas office of the Japan Foundation. Contact information for these offices is available at <<http://www.jpff.go.jp>>. Applications for the Translation and Publication Support Program will be accepted from September 2006; the deadline is November 20, 2006.

Did you enjoy a particular feature in this issue of *Japanese Book News*?
Do you have any suggestions on how we can improve our publication?
Let us know!

What is your general impression of this issue of JBN?

- Very interesting Not so interesting
 Somewhat interesting Not interesting at all

Which feature in particular did you enjoy? _____

Were there any features you found uninteresting? _____

What topics would you like *JBN* to cover in future issues? What genres of writing? What authors? _____

Send your comments by email to <booknews@jpf.go.jp> or by fax to +81-3-3519-3519. Thank you for reading!

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Short Stories and Novels

In Japanese, the novel is referred to as *chōhen shōsetsu* (literally “long story”), while short stories are the more directly translated *tanpen shōsetsu*. Just looking at the names, one would think that the only difference is that of length. In English, though, different words describe these genres, leaving an impression of something very different.

So what is the truth of the matter? One gets a sense of lasting continuity when reading a novel. For some readers the ideal work would be one that never ends. Everyday life comes to a stop for a period of time as the reader enters a different world, taking a small journey. It is the novel that creates this special time for us.

Short stories, by contrast, are read at a sitting rather than enjoyed in parts. The density of the narrative and the speed with which it progresses are important. Framing the two in the terms of human relations, novels are like a long acquaintance; they often trace the entire life story of the protagonist. Short stories, meanwhile, are akin to a fleeting encounter and a parting, and it is thusly that they leave a vivid impression.

What is the difference to the author? An outline is generally needed to write a novel. After establishing the basic framework, the author decides on the ages, genders, occupations, and personalities of the major characters, beginning to write only after establishing the basic flow of the story. There are of course exceptions—the late Akutagawa Prize-winning author Ishikawa Jun said that this was the approach of an amateur, and he claimed to have written a novel that was serialized in a monthly magazine while relying only on a single memo that had the names of the characters.

In writing a short story, the first thing one needs is an idea. After coming up with a short episode or situation, the question is the extent to which the writer can dexterously bring it to life. Criticism of short stories thus tends to focus on their technical aspects, and one oft-heard word of praise is “skillful.”

Everyday occurrences often provide the material for short stories. Writers can find the seeds for these tales within any number of things, such as a childhood memory related by a friend, something seen or a story heard while on vacation, an acquaintance’s different take on some matter, a mistake from long ago just remembered, or even a nondescript newspaper article. When such a thing is set aside for a while, it begins to grow on its own; it can eventually beg the author to write it.

In some cases, a seed can be used on its own. At other times, more than one germ will be combined. When a story based on just one seed seems somewhat lacking, it can be left aside for years until new material appears to give it vitality. This is like making a dish from ingredients that have been stored in the refrigerator of the author’s mind along with fresh foodstuffs that have been purchased that day.

In recent years, I have put my energies into writing novels and have not authored many short stories. I wrote very few of the latter, creating just enough material over a decade or more to fill two volumes of short stories. There

were two occasions when I set out to write a short story but found that the configuration was inadequate, leading me to eventually develop them into series of stories and finally full-length works. This led me to believe that the novel suited me better.

Recently, though, I find myself writing short stories. Returning to this form after a long absence, I can say it is extremely compelling. I have realized that I have a variety of shapeless feelings within me, like I am oversaturated with some liquid. When I absorb another episode from my life, it is deposited into the core of that liquid, and if things go well, the result is a beautiful, sparkling crystal.

This process has inspired me to write stories about all sorts of things: spilled coffee beans on the floor of the guesthouse on a Canadian island, getting off a crowded train in Mexico to deliver a single rose, dejectedly having dinner alone after missing a flight, and a world that turns around at last after being held stationary under a long spell. There is also a story about Helsinki that I have not written yet.

For the first time in a decade, I think that I will be able to release a collection of short stories this year.

Ikezawa Natsuki’s Books in Other Languages

English

Still Lives. Trans. Dennis Keene. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1997.
A Burden of Flowers. Trans. Alfred Birnbaum. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2001.
On a Small Bridge in Iraq. Trans. Alfred Birnbaum. Okinawa: Impala, 2003.

French

La Vie Immobile. Trans. Véronique Brindeau and Dominique Palmé. Arles: Philippe Picquier, 1995.
Des os de corail, des yeux de perle. Trans. Véronique Brindeau and Corinne Quentin. Arles: Philippe Picquier, 1997.
Tio du Pacifique: les histoires que me racontait. Trans. Corinne Quentin. Arles: Philippe Picquier, 2001.
La Sœur qui portrait des fleurs. Trans. Corinne Atlan and Corinne Quentin. Arles: Philippe Picquier, 2004.
Sur un petit pont en Irak. Trans. Corinne Quentin. Okinawa: Impala, 2003.

German

Aufstieg und Fall des Mecias Guili. Trans. Otto Putz. Berlin: Edition Q, 2002.
Auf einer kleinen Brücke im Irak. Trans. Otto Putz. Okinawa: Impala, 2003.

Italian

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