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"UFOs in a Recreation Park"

Translating Contemporary Japanese Poetry

Juliet W. Carpenter

The late Edward Seidensticker said it well: "Translation is impossible, but necessary." It was in that spirit that I felt emboldened to tackle the daunting task of rendering contemporary free-verse Japanese poetry (*gendaishi*) into English. I have translated eight such collections, all winners of the Nakahara Chūya Prize, dedicated to the memory of the famous poet from Yamaguchi Prefecture who died at age 30 in 1937. Besides these forays, over the years I have also translated contemporary tanka (*Sarada kinenbi* [trans. *Salad Anniversary*] by Tawara Machi) and modern haiku (*Kokoro no ho* [trans. *The Sail of My Soul*], 100 haiku by Yamaguchi Seishi). The main difference between tackling those more traditional forms of poetry and the free-verse variety is not just the greater length but the complete lack of any fixed form (5-7-5-7-7 for tanka, 5-7-5 for haiku) to bother about. Overall, I have found that the experimental, freewheeling form and spirit of these free-verse poems makes translation at once easier, because one feels liberated, and more difficult—because the meaning can be so hard to tease out, among other things.

The poet Nakahara Chūya at age 18. (Courtesy: Chuya Nakahara Memorial Museum)

First, a brief introduction to the Nakahara Chūya Prize: Established in 1995, it is awarded yearly to an outstanding collection by a promising new poet displaying a "fresh sensibility." For the first 10 recipients,* each chosen by a distinguished panel from a field of several hundred candidates, the prize consisted of (a) having the winning collection translated into English and distributed worldwide, and (b) a cash award of ¥1 million. Beginning with the eleventh prize, instead of being translated into English the winning poet receives a replica of a bronze bust of Chūya by the renowned sculptor Takata Hiroatsu, who knew him. Apparently the expense of translating, printing, and distributing the poems became prohibitive, while the goal of enhanced recognition for Chūya, the prize, and the city of Yamaguchi, Chūya's birthplace, was adequately served by the first 10 translations.

The constant challenge in translating poetry, apart from matters of form, is conveying both the sound and sense of the original. Accomplishing the former is, unfortunately, in the realm of the impossible, although one does what one can. Accomplishing the latter is complicated when poetry of "fresh sensibility" is so often opaque, even to discriminating readers. In the poems of Wagō Ryōichi, declares an approving critic, "words yearn boundlessly toward nonsense." The poets themselves, though patient and helpful, seem to expect bafflement. When I asked Hiwa Satoko about the meaning of one poem, she reflected, "*Pin to konakereba ii*" (It's fine if people don't get it). And Song Min-ho brushed aside my puzzlement: "I've already expressed myself perfectly in the poem. There's nothing else to say!"

One critic praising the second volume, Hasebe Namie's 1998 *Moshiku wa, Rindobāgu no hatake* [trans. *Or Maybe Lindbergh's Field*] advises readers to approach the poems "as if they were UFOs in a recreation park. . . . If there were a UFO in a park, beyond any question of understanding or not understanding, we would certainly turn on such a mysterious object gazes full of curiosity and wonder." The translator's task, then, is not so much to render the poems comprehensible in English as to preserve their sense of strangeness, allowing readers to feel curiosity and wonder.

Let me quote one short example, titled "Kanki" [The Dry Season], from Hasebe's book:

Hiroha yusayusa	Broad leaves swish
zō ga iru	An elephant is here
hana o nobashite	Trunk outstretched
boku o miteiru	Looking at me
ichiban ōkii midori ga	A second-floor elephant
morokoshiiro ni yaketeiru nikai no zō da	The biggest green burned now the color of maize
kutsu o nuida chiisana musume datta	It was a little girl with her shoes off
kinō no ban wa	Last night

Like most contemporary Japanese poetry, the original uses no punctuation, and in this translation I have likewise avoided it. Here it perhaps makes little difference, but over the years, in consultation with my editor I did relent

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* Toyohara Kiyoaki, for *Yoru no jinkō no ki* [trans. *Nocturnal Man-made Trees*], 1997; Hasebe Namie, for *Moshiku wa, Rindobāgu no hatake* [trans. *Or Maybe Lindbergh's Field*], 1998; Song Min-ho, for *Burukkurin* [trans. *Brooklyn*], 1999; Wagō Ryōichi, for *After* [trans. *After*], 2000; Hachikai Mimi, for *Ima ni mo uruotteiku jinchi* [trans. *The Quickening Field*], 2001; Arthur Binard, for *Tsuriagete wa* [trans. *Catch and Release*], 2002; Hiwa Satoko, for *Biruma* [trans. *Biruma*], 2003; Nakamura Megumi, for *Hi yo!* [trans. *Flame*], 2004; Kutani Kiji, for *Hiru mo yoru mo* [trans. *Day and Night*], 2005; and Misumi Mizuki, for *Ōbākiru* [trans. *Overkill*], 2006.

on this point and begin to use punctuation more freely when English requires it for clarity. Strangeness may be good, but unreadability is not. I also moved away from the formality of capitalizing every line as here.

The word rendered here as "swish" is *yusayusa,* which the dictionary defines as the "swaying of something very big." English lacks a word with this shade of meaning, but then something of that nuance is already supplied by the word "broad." Although different, the verb "swish" is a deliciously onomatopoetic word conveying both sound and motion.

The "*boku*" of line four tells us the speaker is male, perhaps a young boy; but there is no way to introduce this information in English. The first four lines do seem to be leading us into a boy's adventure of some kind. In line five, the image "*ōkii midori*" ("big green/greenery") connects back to *yusayusa,* since *midori* means vegetation, but with the next line meaning begins to unravel and the poem takes an unexpected turn. Part of the difficulty is precisely in the lack of punctuation: does *yaketeiru* (burned) describe the elephant or the vegetation, or somehow both? I reversed the order of the lines and translated *midori* as "green," rather than "greenery," to try to convey some of the strangeness in the juxtaposition of images. Expectations are overturned again, the poem ending abruptly with the image of a barefoot little girl. The words and images themselves are perfectly ordinary, and yet they conjure up a kind of "UFO" after all, a story that does not follow comfortable conventions. There are unspoken depths here, and allowing the reader to absorb them without embellishment seems only fair.

Next let me quote the start of a poem called "Irome" [Coquettish Glances] from Kutani Kiji's *Hiru mo yoru mo* [trans. *Day and Night*]:

Hontō ni	No doubt about it,
densha no naka to iu no wa	the inside of a train
kutsukutsu to nieyasui mono de	cooks things to a turn.

Whenever possible, I like to keep the order of images the same. That's why for the first line I chose a phrase that could stand alone, and that would suggest someone who is thinking out loud rather than trying to convince someone of something. *Kutsukutsu* describes food bubbling over a low fire, but as the poem is also about relationships being forged in the close atmosphere of a train (if only in the poet's mind), the expression "to a turn" seems a happy choice—it describes things not only simmering but reaching a point of readiness. This short poem contains no less than six such reduplicating expressions, the others being *furafura, horohoro, tsurutsuru, yurayura,* and *noronoro*. Their respective translations are "wobbly," "to a juicy pulp," "smooth," "swaying," and "at a snail's pace." The English expressions do not conform to any one pattern as the Japanese ones do, nor do they need to.

English editions of the first 10 Nakahara Chūya Prize winners. (Courtesy: Yamaguchi City)

Elsewhere Kutani does not hesitate to invent an onomatopoetic word of his own where he sees fit. The title poem contains, in English, these lines: "From the depths / of windows / whose yellow mouths stood open / and hollow . . ." Looking back, I fear that I have not done justice to the brilliant inventiveness of the original, which reads "*Powara* / *powara* / *to* / *kiiroi kuchi o* / *hiraiteru* / *mado no* / *oku kara*." The key word is *powara,* Kutani's own coinage, which he explained suggests hollowness. How to convey the sound, and the creativity of this word? One possibility might be to leave it as is, writing it out in *rōmaji,* but that simply won't work—the sounds alone convey something of the meaning to Japanese, but they can't possibly have the same effect for English readers. I opted to give the underlying meaning, but perhaps a more creative translator could have come up with a similar invention in English. In Song Min-ho's poem "Imōto" [Little Sister], I did leave as is the expression *pi po pa po,* used to describe Asian gibberish—but there the image is auditory, which makes it easy to understand.

Another problem is that many of these experimental poems have a deliberate visual impact that can only be approximated in English, partly because of space restrictions: horizontal writing has less space to work with per line than vertical. Sometimes a poem will be written all or in part in katakana; here something comparable can be done by using italics, or all-caps, or a different font. I tried where possible to imitate other special visual effects—making lines of successively shorter or longer length, for example, or seeing that identical words come at the same place in successive lines. But where, as above, a particle like *to* constitutes an entire line of the original, I am at a loss; English cannot do this. In general, I think the visual impact needs to be completely rethought in translation.

In fact, that is exactly what Arthur Binard—an American poet who rendered his own Japanese originals into English—did. His translations are fascinating, often taking liberties beyond the scope of what translators usually do. His poem "Taggu" [Tag] begins and ends with a reference to his mother, but in the translation, she is mentioned only once, at the beginning. Binard explained that the resonance of *haha* is different from "mother," and that mentioning her again in English would make him sound like a mama's boy. Okay—but if I were the translator, I cannot imagine myself cavalierly removing the second mention of his mother on those grounds. Nor could I make other

(Continued on page 14)

FICTION

Yoshida Shūichi

Born in 1968. Received the Bungakukai New Writers Award for Saigo no musuko *[The Last Son] in 1997, and the Yamamoto Shūgorō Prize for* Parēdo *[Parade] and the Akutagawa Prize for* Pāku raifu *[Park Life] in 2002.*

Akunin
[The Bad]

By Yoshida Shūichi

Asahi Shimbunsha, 2007. 194x138 mm. 424 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-02-250272-8.

This is a crime novel set in contemporary Japan, with the cities of Kyushu as its backdrop. The plot unfolds in a thrilling manner that will hold the readers in rapt attention; this is the sort of book that is difficult to put down once begun. The body of a murdered young woman is found in a remote Kyushu forest. A junior college graduate, she had been an office worker in a Fukuoka insurance agency. The two men who come to the fore as suspects in her killing are opposites: one is the no-good son of a wealthy family, a university student who cruises the streets in an expensive sports car, while the other is an impoverished young man who ekes out a living doing manual labor in the city of Nagasaki.

The novel switches between multiple points of view as it paints the lives of these characters and images of the people around them. Eventually the reader learns that the dead woman had actually been romantically involved with a number of men she met through an Internet dating service, and that the young laborer bears the scars of a tragic past, having been abandoned by his mother in childhood. The book also paints elaborate portraits of other members of the families of the victim and her killer. As a result it lays out a panorama of modern Japanese society, a patchwork composed of people of various classes and occupations, some scraping by in abject poverty. Also prodding the reader to consider deeply the nature of evil and wrongdoing to modern humanity, this novel can be considered a modern literary achievement the like of which is rarely seen. *(NM)*

Metabora
[Metabola]

By Kirino Natsuo

Asahi Shimbunsha, 2007. 194x138 mm. 600 pp. ¥2,000. ISBN 978-4-02-250279-7.

Kirino Natsuo

Born in 1951. Received the 1993 Edogawa Rampo Prize for her debut novel Kao ni furikakaru ame *[Rain Falling on My Face] and the 1998 Mystery Writers of Japan Award for* Out, *whose English translation made her the first Japanese national to be nominated for an Edgar Allan Poe Award. Received the Naoki Prize in 1999 for* Yawarakana hoho *[trans.* Soft Cheeks*].*

An enormously popular mystery writer, Kirino has won numerous literary prizes with her work, a number of which have been made into movies and TV programs. She has also built an international name for herself, with one of her books being nominated for an Edgar Allan Poe Award in the United States.

This book, a depiction of the wanderings of lonesome souls on the southern island of Okinawa, represents an attempt at an entirely new type of "road novel." It is an important social exploration that focuses on aimless young people in a world of crumbling morals, drifting through the underclasses of society until they are trapped completely, with no way out. Readers experience the harsh conditions facing temporary workers, the world of club hosts engaged in fierce sales competition, the "guest houses" filled with young people with nowhere to truly belong, and even the "Internet suicides" in which people at the ends of their ropes reach out to others on the Web and end their lives together. This is a precise presentation of the dark side of contemporary Japan.

All of Kirino's works are characterized by an overpowering tension present from the first page to the last. This book is no exception: it begins with the fear felt by a young man who wakes up in the deep forest of Okinawa with no memory whatsoever of how he got there and continues to hold the reader's rapt attention with a succession of events that draw the narrative tighter and tighter. This makes the image of that protagonist all the more heartbreaking as he follows a thin trace of light through these hopeless conditions. *(MT)*

Satō Yūya

Born in 1980. Debuted in 2001. Works include Kodomotachi okoru okoru okoru *[The Children Are Angry Angry Angry] and* Kurisumasu teroru: invisible x inventor *[Christmas Terror: Invisible x Inventor].*

1000 no shōsetsu to Bakku Beādo
[1,000 Novels and Back Beard]

By Satō Yūya

Shinchōsha, 2007. 197x137 mm. 256 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-10-452502-7.

The author, a young writer in his twenties, started out by producing mysteries and works in the genre of "light novels" for teens. In this work, he creates a protagonist who works as a *hensetsuka,* or "fragmentary novelist"—a member of a group of writers that creates stories to order for customers of their company. After his employer fires him on his twenty-seventh birthday, he is visited by a mysterious woman, who asks him to search for her missing younger sister.

The man begins working on the case, but is dragged into an ongoing war between Yami [darkness], a group of people who detest novels, and the *hensetsuka*. The story goes on to see the man captured by a monster named Back Beard, which imprisons him in a secret library located underneath a hotel in Tokyo's Shinjuku district. He barely escapes with his life.

This is a bizarre plot. Satō's book, however, manages to be a pleasing, almost game-like work of metafiction, sprinkled with references to Japanese literature—in which respect it is evocative of the writing of Takahashi Gen'ichirō. It also features elements of high-quality fantasy that put one in mind of Murakami Haruki. The author pushes the entire narrative along at an energetic pace achievable only by a young writer seeking to blaze new trails of literary entertainment. This book may seem like a flippant romp, but at its heart it actually represents an incisive questioning of literature itself: an unexpectedly serious investigation of what sort of new forms the novel must take in the modern era. It won the 2007 Mishima Yukio Prize. *(NM)*

Heso no o wa myōyaku
[The Umbilical Cord Is a Miracle Cure]

By Kōno Taeko

Shinchōsha, 2007. 197x136 mm. 176 pp. ¥1,900. ISBN 978-4-10-307809-8.

This book brings together four short stories that tell the tale of days gone by and the empathetic ties between the living and the dead. Throughout these stories runs a strong undercurrent of "the people left behind"—a key motif in Kōno's writings in recent years. The title piece is a particularly strong presentation of this, giving readers a taste of gentle humor while it builds toward the terror of an unflinching examination of the protagonist's very soul.

The protagonist of the story undergoes a subtle psychological shift, beginning when she reads a novel in which an umbilical cord proves to be an effective medicine for serious diseases. This shift is first evidenced in her childhood, when she views the umbilical cords—a small segment of which is traditionally snipped and kept as a memento of a child's birth in Japan—of herself and her siblings. Hers is the only one that shows signs of having been unwrapped. She begins to think that her mother opened up the wrappings when the protagonist came down with pneumonia at the age of 10 months, and again when she was a second grader, when she struggled with another bout of pneumonia. In comparison with the lengthy cords of her siblings, her umbilical cord withers to a tiny stub over time.

Decades later she watches her sister battle cancer for nine months before succumbing. She then recalls her umbilical cord, and rues that she did not think to bring it out and give some to her sister to test its efficacy one last time. *(MK)*

Kōno Taeko

Born in 1926. Graduated from the economics department of Osaka Women's College (now Osaka Prefecture University). After World War II, underwent prolonged medical treatment for a lung condition. Has won various literary awards for her fiction and criticism, including the Akutagawa Prize for the novel Kani *[Crabs].*

Setouchi Jakuchō

Born Setouchi Harumi in 1922. Debuted in 1956. Took Buddhist vows, and the name Jakuchō, in 1973. Her numerous works include Hana ni toe *[Ask the Flowers], which received the 1992 Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize. Known for translating* Genji monogatari *[trans.* The Tale of Genji*] in its entirety into modern Japanese. Recognized as a Person of Cultural Merit in 1997 and awarded the Order of Culture in 2006.*

Hika
[Hidden Flowers]

By Setouchi Jakuchō

Shinchōsha, 2007. 197x140 mm. 256 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-10-311222-8.

This novel paints a picture of the celebrated Noh figure Zeami (1363–1443) in his last days, after he had been exiled to the remote island of Sado. Its title comes from Zeami's "If it is hidden, it is the Flower," a key argument in his *Fūshi kaden* [trans. *The Flowering Spirit: Classic Teachings on the Art of Nō*] for revealing only tantalizing portions of the art to heighten its aesthetic appeal. In addition to being a famous Noh actor, Zeami produced numerous Noh plays and critical writings on the art. After his father Kan'ami died, Zeami took over the family Noh troupe at the age of 22; he wrote *Fūshi kaden* at around the age of 40, during the lengthy period when he enjoyed the patronage of the Ashikaga shogunate. At 45 he performed before the emperor at the Kitayama palace (later the temple Kinkakuji).

His fortunes changed when later Ashikaga leaders pushed him out of the court. At the age of 72, for reasons that are unclear, he was exiled to Sado. His *Kintōsho* [The Book of the Golden Isle], released two years later, is the last record of his existence; nothing is known about him after that. In her novel Setouchi presents her take on the end of the Noh giant's life.

The novel presents two distinct images of Zeami: the beautiful actor in the full flower of his youth and the aged exile. His tale takes on overtones of the life of Emperor Juntoku (1197–1242), another famous Sado exile, as he slowly loses his sight and hearing. In a vibrantly human touch, Setouchi introduces the character of Sae, a woman more than 40 years younger than Zeami, to comfort and accompany him in his final years. *(MK)*

ESSAY

Afurika nyorori tabi
[Wriggling Through Africa]

By Aoyama Jun

Kōdansha, 2007. 188x132 mm. 288 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-06-213868-0.

The "freshwater eel group" at the University of Tokyo's Ocean Research Institute gained a measure of fame when it became the first in the world to pinpoint the egg-laying locations of *Anguilla japonica,* the Japanese freshwater eel. The author of this book, a member of the group, was tasked with capturing a specimen of the rare *A. bengalensis labiata,* the only one of the world's 18 eel species not represented in the university's collection. Together with a professor and a younger student, he set out for Africa. There the team endured temperatures that soared above 50 degrees centigrade, slept in flophouses, ate unfamiliar foods, flinched at the malaria-carrying mosquitoes and filthy toilets, and were left aghast at the wasted lands left behind by the battles of civil war.

At first glance this story looks like it could be just another tale of travel on a shoestring budget, but these researchers are not like backpackers who tour the world in pursuit of their own personal interests. Since their purpose is scientific research, they must operate within their limited budget; they must also spend their days in patient waiting, not knowing when or where they might encounter the rare eel that they seek. The figures of these scientists wandering through Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique, coming face to face with ways of life that stagger the imagination, make this book go beyond the harrowing to become at times humorous. At last the researchers find their eel, but in the end this is nothing but a prelude to the most hellish days of their entire journey. *(MT)*

Aoyama Jun

Born in 1967. Earned his doctorate from the Graduate School of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Tokyo; went on to conduct work on eels as a research assistant to Professor Tsukamoto Katsumi at the Behavior and Ecology Laboratory in the university's Ocean Research Institute, which attracted worldwide attention in 2006 for determining the spawning sites of Japanese eels. Is an avid essayist in addition to a researcher.

POETRY

Sasaki Yukitsuna

Born in 1938. Poet and editor of the Kokoro no hana *[Flower of the Spirit] literary magazine and professor at the School of Political Science and Economics at Waseda University. Former editor-in-chief of Kawada Shobō Shinsha's* Bungei *[Literature]. Has compiled numerous tanka anthologies, including the 1971 Association of Contemporary Tanka Poets Prize recipient* Gunrei *[The Masses],* Konjiki no shishi *[The Gold Lion],* Taki no jikan *[Hour of the Falls], and* Tabibito *[Travelers].*

Man'yōshū no "ware" [The *Ware* of the *Man'yōshū*]

By Sasaki Yukitsuna

Kadokawa Gakugei Shuppan, 2007. 189x127 mm. 320 pp. ¥1,700. ISBN 978-4-04-703408-2.

The traditional tanka form of Japanese poetry is overwhelmingly composed in the voice of the first person singular. This work plumbs the significance of this through an examination of the *Man'yōshū,* Japan's oldest collection of verse.

The *Man'yōshū* contains some 4,500 poems. The word *ware,* "I" or "me," appears in around 40% of them. This is an astoundingly high ratio compared to later imperial collections like the *Kokinshū* (about 13%) and *Shin Kokinshū* (less than 0.1%).

Masaoka Shiki, the poet who revolutionized tanka for the modern age, held the *Man'yōshū* in high esteem; this may have been in part due to the formation of the first-person poetic voice in its pieces. Both the age of the *Man'yōshū* (primarily the seventh and eighth centuries) and the Meiji era (1868–1912), when Masaoka was active, were times of great international exchange and national awareness for Japan. Indeed, it was during the *Man'yōshū* era that *Yamato* first came into existence as a name for the country, as well as the term *tennō*—the word for "emperor," and a symbol of an entirely native culture.

Based on the above, Sasaki states that the first-person verse often seen as a unique feature of modern tanka had actually appeared centuries earlier, in the *ware* poetry of the *Man'yōshū*. He looks at such poetic issues as the delineation between *ware* and others, questions of setting, the existence of similar verses borrowing from one another, codes applied by readers, and the attributions supplied with the ancient poems. He makes a strong argument that the question of *ware* is one that poets continue to grapple with to this day. *(MK)*

ARCHITECTURE

Kindaika isan tanbō [Investigating the Legacy of Modernization]

By Shimizu Keiichi

Photographs by Shimizu Jō

X-Knowledge, 2007. 210x148 mm. 240 pp. ¥2,800. ISBN 978-4-7678-0608-2.

The "legacy of modernization" in this book's title refers to the industrial, transportation, and civil engineering heritage that contributed to the modernization of Japan. When modern architecture is made the focus of research, it is generally from the viewpoint of appreciating the structures as artistic creations. In contrast to this, the legacy taken up in this book consists primarily of factories, warehouses, old dams, and the like—structures that were built with an emphasis on function, not designed with the goal of making them aesthetically pleasing. The author has traveled the length and breadth of Japan to visit these sites, not to observe their beauty, but to try to discern the stories behind their creation.

This text, a compilation of the results of Shimizu's investigations, covers sites from the coal mines of Yūbari, Hokkaido, in the north to buildings in Tsushima, Kyushu, in the south, introducing structures dating from the Meiji (1868–1912) through the early Shōwa (1926–89) eras. In addition to factories and warehouses, the book touches on such legacy structures as countryside estates, churches, schools, and railway stations. For the most part these are not famous buildings, but the stories behind them do indeed provide a clear look at another facet of the history of a modernizing Japan. Featuring numerous color shots by the photographer Shimizu Jō, this book is a first-rate visual reference as well. *(NM)*

Shimizu Keiichi

Born in 1950. Chief of the Center of the History of Japanese Industrial Technology and of the Division of History of Science and Technology at the National Museum of Nature and Science. His works include Kensetsu hajimete monogatari *[Construction Begins].*

Shimizu Jō

Born in 1951. Photographer. Graduated from the Department of Photography at the College of Art at Nihon University. His photos appear in Kenchiku modanizumu *[Architectural Modernism], among others.*

BIOGRAPHY

Saishō Hazuki

Born in 1963. A nonfiction writer who deals with such themes as the relationship between science and technology and humanity, sports, and education. Her works include the 1997 Shōgakukan Nonfiction Award winner Zettai onkan *[Perfect Pitch] and* Ano koro no mirai: Hoshi Shin'ichi no yogen *[The Future Back Then: Prophecies of Hoshi Shin'ichi], a collection of analytical essays.* Hoshi Shin'ichi: Sen-ichi wa o tsukutta hito *won the 2007 Kōdansha Non-Fiction Award.*

Hoshi Shin'ichi: Sen-ichi wa o tsukutta hito [Hoshi Shin'ichi: The Man Who Wrote 1,001 Stories]

By Saishō Hazuki

Shinchōsha, 2007. 196x136 mm. 576 pp. ¥2,300. ISBN 978-4-10-459802-1.

Hoshi Shin'ichi (1926–97) left behind a body of 1,001 "short short" science fiction stories—tiny, engaging works that seem at times to foresee the future within their humorous passages. He has long been read avidly by readers of all ages. Tens of millions of books full of his stories have sold over the years, and they remain popular today, a decade after his death. In 1963 a selection of his tales were translated into English, touching off a wave of global popularity that has seen more than 650 of Hoshi's works appear in a total of more than 20 languages. New translations are still appearing.

Readers of this biography will learn that this wildly popular writer had a past that he kept sealed away from the public view. He was constantly burdened by the "negative legacy" of the history of his father, a powerful business figure; it was in the world of science fiction that he found some temporary emotional refuge. There were more aspects of his life that made it a tragic one in ways, though: producing the unending stream of "short short" tales that came across as such light-hearted material was actually a brutally draining creative process that took a severe toll on the author.

Saishō spent some five years writing this book on the "god of the short short story." She worked with an astounding amount of material as she polished her picture of this mysterious man, carrying out detailed interviews with 134 people related to Hoshi's life and examining numerous items left behind by the late writer. It is this labor that makes Hoshi, a man who lived such a complex life, leap vigorously off the pages of this biography. *(MT)*

Michiko-sama no koibumi [Empress Michiko's Love Letters]

By Hashimoto Akira

Shinchōsha, 2007. 197x138 mm. 256 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 978-4-10-304271-6.

The author of this book was a classmate of Emperor Akihito. As a result this work is filled with illuminating episodes involving the emperor. It depicts the distress that Shōda Michiko, the first commoner to become crown princess, felt as she made her decision to marry Akihito.

Empress Nagako, Akihito's mother, was opposed to the marriage, and people sympathetic to Nagako's viewpoint placed constant pressure on Michiko after she had entered the family, even flinging harsh words at her after she suffered a miscarriage. Also clarified in this book are the relationships involving the court chamberlains, the truth behind the event in which Michiko was mistakenly thought to be spreading Christianity within the court, and the causes of the temporary loss of her voice.

Perhaps the key letter is the one that Michiko wrote to Akihito on her decision to marry him. She states: "What must I do to avoid causing any undue stir in your household? This is my primary concern now." She also writes: "I believe that my most important task will be to create the kind of family that can serve you in some way as you perform your duties."

In the end Michiko's willpower stilled the discontent of the "old guard" in the imperial household and successfully created that new family. This book offers insight into the imperial household at a time when Crown Princess Masako's adjustment disorder is receiving worldwide attention. *(SH)*

Hashimoto Akira

Born in 1933. Journalist. Graduated from Gakushuin University. Joined Kyodo News in 1956, thereafter serving as the Geneva bureau chief, Los Angeles bureau chief, and deputy managing director of the international department. In 1987 became the general manager of the Japan Business News Center.

Nakano Mitsutoshi

Born in 1935. Scholar of Japanese literature. After a professorship at the School of Letters at Kyushu University, became a professor at the Fukuoka University's Department of Japanese Language and Literature. Retired in 2006. His many works include the 1981 Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities recipient Gesaku kenkyū *[Research on Gesaku], and* Kinsei kodomo no ehonshū *[Premodern Children's Picture Books], which won the 1985 Mainichi Publishing Culture Award.*

Sharaku: Edojin to shite no jitsuzō [Sharaku: The True Image of a Man of Edo]

By Nakano Mitsutoshi

Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2007. 173x109 mm. 206 pp. ¥760. ISBN 978-4-12-101886-1.

Tōshūsai Sharaku burst onto the *ukiyoe* scene from 1794 to 1795, immediately building a name for himself as a popular creator of woodblock prints. Following World War II, historians came up with numerous theories about his lineage, and books and films exploring "the real Sharaku" were produced. This book is likely to become the last word in the field of research on Sharaku.

The author argues that Edo culture itself was something that always moved in concert with the class system in place at the time. Sharaku lived during the time of Matsudaira Sadanobu, the powerful figure whose 1787–93 Kansei Reforms mandated that samurai comport themselves in a manner appropriate to samurai. This was, therefore, a time when it would be taboo for a warrior to create pictures of low-class people like actors, and any samurai doing so would have to conceal his true identity. The author presents the theory that Sharaku was Saitō Jūrōbē, a warrior of the Awa domain in Shikoku.

The German scholar Julius Kurth refocused attention on the artist with his 1910 *Sharaku*. Nakano looks at his book, along with Saitō Gesshin's 1843 *Zōho—ukiyoe ruikō* [A Study of *Ukiyoe*: Revised and Enlarged], to which Kurth referred, skillfully backing up the evidence in these works with new historical resources. Nakano's book reads like a mystery novel as it proceeds toward its goal of Sharaku's true nature and presents a clear picture of the historical and literary research methodologies used. The text itself provides a delightful reading experience with its storytelling voice. *(SH)*

COMMERCE

Sebun Irebun oden bukai: Hitto shōhin kaihatsu no uragawa [The Seven-Eleven *Oden* Team: Behind the Scenes of Hit Product Development]

By Yoshioka Hideko

Asahi Shimbunsha, 2007. 172x108 mm. 240 pp. ¥740. ISBN 978-4-02-273134-0.

This book is a brilliant presentation of the strategies that convenience store operator Seven-Eleven uses as it develops its most popular products. The rise of the convenience store has brought about deep changes to the lifestyles of young Japanese, and it is Seven-Eleven's ability to create new products in step with those lifestyle changes that has propelled the company to the top of the convenience store industry.

One of Seven-Eleven's most popular offerings has been its *oden*. This selection of stewed fish cakes, eggs, and other ingredients appeared in the chain's shops in 1979, the year of the creation of an *oden* warming pot that would eventually be installed in every outlet in the country. The 1982 development of an easily distributed bottled *oden* broth let the company offer the meal in all outlets across Japan.

It is no overstatement to say that this *oden* has made Seven-Eleven what it is today. As Yoshioka notes: "Many of Seven-Eleven's corporate employees today once worked part-time jobs in the company's stores during their student days, developing a fondness for the firm that led them to enter it later. Just about all of them say that the most enjoyable part of the job was selling *oden*." Readers will learn some surprising facts about the company's *oden* strategy, such as the fact that while providing a consistent product nationwide, Seven-Eleven also makes use of six regional flavors in the broth. *(MK)*

Yoshioka Hideko

Freelance writer. Became independent after working as a writer for a printing and production firm. Pens articles that focus on hit products of major convenience store chains. Well-known for her reportage on the goings-on of the retail world.

HISTORY

Hara Takeshi

Born in 1962. Specializes in the history of Japanese political thought. Currently a professor in the Faculty of International Studies at Meiji Gakuin University. Works include the 1998 Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities recipient "Minto" Ōsaka tai "teito" Tōkyō *[The People's Osaka versus the Emperor's Tokyo] and the winner of the 2001 Mainichi Publishing Culture Award,* Taishō Tennō *[Emperor Taishō].*

Takiyama komyūn 1974
[Takiyama Commune 1974]

By Hara Takeshi

Kōdansha, 2007. 194x133 mm. 288 pp. ¥1,700. ISBN 978-4-06-213939-7.

In the 1970s Hara attended the Takiyama No. 7 Elementary School, located in a mammoth housing project on the outskirts of Tokyo. Even at that age, he felt some discomfort at some of the activities there: classes in which the students divided into groups to compete in their studies, students publicly criticizing themselves and others in homeroom meetings, and student council elections that pitted children against each other in fierce campaigning.

Today a university researcher, the author sets out to understand just what took place during those years on the basis of interviews with people who were teachers and students at the school. He finds that one young teacher was working with the local Parent Teacher Association to create "democratic classroom groups"—a form of Soviet-style communal education promoted by one part of the Japan Teachers Union. The 1970s are generally thought of as a time when the leftist revolution collapsed, but in fact these years saw the Japanese Communist Party and Japan Socialist Party make considerable gains in the Diet, and labor movements were particularly vehement, with strikes bringing the Japanese National Railways to a standstill. The "classroom groups" formed at the Takiyama school were another sign of this leftist vigor.

The author gives the name "Takiyama commune" to these activities, asking what effects they had on the children, what the teachers and students think about them today, and why he alone was able to dispassionately observe them at the time. This provocative work prompts a reexamination of the 1970s in Japan. *(SH)*

SPORTS

Keru mure
[The Kicking Crowd]

By Kimura Yukihiko

Kōdansha, 2007. 188x130 mm. 344 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-06-213767-6.

Athletes are never able to divorce themselves entirely from issues of politics, religion, and ethnic conflict. In this book the author, a journalist who covers soccer all over the world, reports on the players who clash on the sports field even while being buffeted by international conditions. It is a collection of short nonfiction pieces that plumb the profound depths of this sport, which allows so many people to find hope in their lives.

Among the figures appearing in this book are Iraqi players, who bare their antipathy toward the American forces stationed in their country; the Turkish player Ilhan Mansiz, an immigrant to Germany who swings back and forth between his native and adopted countries; the Albanian players who decided to defect during a match against France; and Kim Myeong Sik, who created a vibrant soccer community among ethnic Koreans living in Japan. The determination and pride of those who believe in the sporting spirit is evident in the words of Dutch-born Hans Vonk, who as goalkeeper became the only white player on an all-black South African team in the years following apartheid: "There is only one goal to defend. Our only task is to do what must be done there."

Kimura is known for works like *Oshimu no kotoba* [Osim's Words], based on interviews with Japanese national soccer team coach Ivica Osim, and *Owaranu "minzoku jōka": Serubia Monteneguro* [Unending "Ethnic Cleansing" in Serbia and Montenegro], which he wrote while reporting from that region for six years following the end of the Kosovo conflict. *(SH)*

Kimura Yukihiko

Born in 1962. Nonfiction writer and video journalist. Formerly with independent film production company Shissoh Production, Inc. Specialties include Eastern European and Asian ethnic issues and discussion of figures in sports.

BIOLOGY

Fukuoka Shin'ichi

Born in 1959. Graduated from Kyoto University. After doing doctoral research at Rockefeller University and Harvard Medical School, taught at Kyoto University as an associate professor. Now a professor in the Department of Chemistry and Biological Science at Aoyama Gakuin University, where he specializes in molecular biology.

Seibutsu to museibutsu no aida [Between Living and Nonliving Things]

By Fukuoka Shin'ichi

Kōdansha, 2007. 173x106 mm. 288 pp. ¥740. ISBN 978-4-06-149891-4.

During the twentieth century, simplified models that broke living beings down into mechanical components brought great progress to society in areas from medicine to economic systems. All humanity benefited from this sort of thinking. In the present century, though, we are seeing the rise of problems in environmental, life science, and economic fields that cannot be adequately managed according to these models. The advent of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or "mad cow disease," has been one such problem.

The author, a molecular biologist, borrows from Rudolf Schoenheimer's concept of "dynamic equilibrium"—which says that our bodies, although they seem to be unchanging from day to day, are actually constantly and quickly being replaced on the molecular level. Pointing to the positive and negative results of genetic manipulation and organ transplantation, he argues the impossibility of reducing life to a set of mechanical principles. In short, this book is a call for a paradigm shift from the mechanical view of life to an organic view, and an objection to the cutting edge of molecular biological studies today.

The book goes beyond being a scientific treatise to present beautiful passages on the days the author spent pondering questions of life, while enjoying his contact with nature as a child or during his research career in places like New York and Boston. It is evident that Fukuoka possesses a rare command of the literary language for a scientist. *(SH)*

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Atama no uchidokoro ga warukatta kuma no hanashi [The Tale of the Bear Who Bumped His Head]

By Andō Mikie

Illustrated by Shimowada Sachiyo

Rironsha, 2007. 188x135 mm. 136 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-652-07902-7.

"When the bear woke up, he was sitting on the ground, his head in his paws. . . . He knew that he must have bumped his head somewhere . . . but he could not remember a single thing about it." In the title story in this collection, this bear struggles with memory loss as he roams about in search of the female bear he loves. Other stories tell the tales of a tiger that rues the fact that it devoured a fox, a snake trying to bring its shattered family back together, a crow constantly making impossible wishes, and a buck deer that becomes fed up with matters of deep significance that intrude on his life. The animals in these tales, wrestling with worries and loneliness as they fling themselves wholeheartedly into their lives, are at once humorous and evocative of deeper emotion.

This collection of stories, with titles as odd as their content, is certain to appeal to readers of all generations. Small children will enjoy the animals' silly behavior, while older children will take pleasure in the unexpected twists and turns, perhaps thinking about important lessons for life along the way. Adults, meanwhile, will find something that resonates in these tales steeped in sarcasm and irony, coming away with wry grins. However the reader approaches these stories, though, they are certain to provide a spark of the energy we need in the course of our lives. In this sense Andō's works are evocative of the world of Miyazawa Kenji, whose works have been cherished by readers throughout the years and across national borders. *(MT)*

Andō Mikie

Born in 1953. Author of children's books. Other works include Ten no shīsō *[See-saw in the Sky] and* Doko made itte mo hanbunko *[I'll Share with You to the Very End].*

Shimowada Sachiyo

Born in 1968. Illustrator. Graduated from Setsu-Mode Seminar. Her works have been featured in advertisements and special features in public relations magazines.

No. 9: Japanese Gardens

There are various different ways of getting acquainted with the pleasure of Japanese gardens. One is to pay numerous visits to Japanese gardens up and down the country; another is to hear what people who have already taken this path have to say. A good method for familiarizing yourself with Japanese gardens is to arm yourself with knowledge through the books presented below and then to visit and appreciate the gardens. The titles selected for presentation here are highly readable texts suited well to this approach.

Descriptions of Japanese gardens generally examine their historical development, explaining the characteristic styles found during various historical periods, the most important gardens, and the people and publications associated with gardening. But while different books may order and explain things the same way, the true worth of a book on Japanese gardens lies in the extent to which its explanations reflect the sensibility of the gardens' creators and the spirit of the ages during which they worked, and in whether the book addresses the perspectives on nature and gardens that were common to each period. Rather than simply laying out the facts of what happened, a book has to give an account of the background and the reasons for why a particular garden came to be created in a particular location during a particular period of history. One book compiled from this point of view is Mori Osamu's ***Teien*** **[Gardens]** (new edition; Tōkyōdō Shuppan, 1993). Mori devoted his entire life to the study of Japanese gardens and authored a great many books on the subject. There is also Amasaki Hiromasa's ***Zusetsu chaniwa no shikumi*** **[Illustrated Guide to Tea Gardens]** (Tankōsha, 2002), which takes the tea garden as a starting point to home in on the question of what gardens are, as well as the Japanese people's perspectives on nature and gardens.

The next two books also take a unique point of view from which to explain Japanese gardens. The single term "Japanese garden" encompasses a broad range of creations; throughout history each period has had its own characteristic style of garden, and there are many aspects to gardens that depend on this period style together with the location and environment within which they were created. What is it that these disparate sites all share in common? Shinji Isoya's ***Nihon no teien: Zōkei no waza to kokoro*** **[Japan's Gardens: The Art and Spirit of Landscape Creation]** (Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2005) explains Japanese gardens from the dual perspective of the ideas behind the creation of a garden and the techniques used in landscaping. The other book is Inaji Toshirō's *Nihon teien nyūmon: Tateya to teien no kakawari* [Introduction to Japanese Gardens: The Relationship Between Buildings and Gardens] (Inax Shuppan, 1996). While many other texts provide commentaries focused only on the garden, Inaji's well-written book looks at the connection between Japanese buildings and gardens and the spatial relationships between interior and exterior. Another Inaji study on the same topic, *Teien kurabu: Nihon teien no "ariyō" o motomete* (Gakugei Shuppansha, 1995) was translated into English and published with added illustrations as *The Garden as Architecture* (Kōdansha International, 1998).

A recommended way for the beginner to learn about Japanese gardens is to build up an understanding from existing gardens. Guides are available to sites across the country, and the next two books are particularly handy. *Nihon teien kanshō binran: Zenkoku teien gaidobukku* [Handbook of Japanese Garden Appreciation: Nationwide Garden Guidebook] (Gakugei Shuppansha, 2002), edited by the Kyōto Rinsen Kyōkai, covers Japan's major gardens and is replete with essential knowledge for appreciating gardens and information on their locations. Kawahara Taketoshi's *Meien no midokoro* [Highlights of Top Gardens] (revised edition; Tōkyō Nōgyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1996) is a companion to visiting gardens, with outline plans of 160 gardens, routes along which they are best viewed, and their most attractive aspects. Both these books give an exhaustive introduction to gardens across the whole country that can be considered cultural assets. In Nomura Kanji's *Tabi ni detara yotte mitai niwa 30* [Thirty Gardens to Visit When Traveling] (Shōgakukan, 1997), the author limits the number of gardens he comments on, as his aim is to go into more depth about the history and stories behind the creation of each of them. Take this book along when visiting the covered gardens to bring the various episodes relating to them vibrantly alive.

Let us look now at books about gardens written with a rather different interest from those so far. First are books written by people who view gardens. In what way have Japanese people enjoyed Japanese gardens, including those associated with their everyday lives, and how are the sites best appreciated? Ultimately, the people who view gardens have to look for the answer themselves; helping them is *Kobijutsu dokuhon: (3) Teien* [Ancient Arts Reader: Vol. 3, Gardens] (Kōbunsha, 2006), edited by Takenishi Hiroko with editorial supervision by Inoue Yasushi (the first edition was her *Kobijutsu dokuhon: Teien* [Ancient Arts Reader: Gardens], Tankōsha, 1987). The book comprises 15 essays on gardens written by noted personalities from different fields, giving a variety of appreciative viewpoints. Next are books written by people who create gardens. Unfortunately, other than specialist books on techniques or design, there are hardly any books written by gardeners. In this respect, ***Sakura no inochi niwa no kokoro*** **[The Life of the Cherry Blossom, the Soul of the Garden]** (Sōshisha, 1998) by gardener Sano Tōemon of Kyoto, who is well known for his work protecting cherry trees, is a rare work.

Finally, I would like to introduce two books written primarily in simple, nontechnical terms to help people acquire an understanding of Japanese gardens. One view holds that to get to know Japanese gardens, one can start from the question of what significance is generally given

to a garden; another approach is to learn about gardens across the world and compare them to Japanese gardens. However, to see this through to the end would involve reading through a huge number of books. One work, though, deals with the question of what a garden is, and with the particular features of European and Japanese gardens, while including perspectives on creating gardens. This is Tatsui Matsunosuke's *Yasashii teien nyūmon* [An Easy Introduction to Gardens] (Kenchiku Shiryō Kenkyūsha, 1985), which is aimed at the beginner. This book is a revised edition of a work originally entitled *Teien* [Gardens] (Sanseidō), which was published as a school textbook when social studies were added to the junior high school curriculum in 1947, and subsequently republished several times. In my *Nihon no niwa, sekai no niwa* [Japanese Gardens, World Gardens] (Rural Culture Association, 2005), I have taken the same approach. Using many photographs and illustrations, this book asks what gardens are and sets out the similarities and differences between Japanese gardens and gardens around the world in a visual format aimed at children. Both books are useful introductions that can be recommended to adult readers as well.

(Suzuki Makoto, professor, Department of Landscape Architecture Science, Tokyo University of Agriculture)

Teien
[Gardens] (new edition)
By Mori Osamu

Tōkyōdō Shuppan, 1993. 193x135 mm. 448 pp. ¥2,800.
ISBN 978-4-490-20218-2 (4-490-20218-0).

Published as a volume in the *Nihonshi shōhyakka* [Short Encyclopedia of Japanese History] series, this book is complete with illustrations, photographs, and an index. It has been compiled as a handy guide, but nonetheless has the format of a systematically ordered encyclopedia relating to Japanese gardens and is an invaluable companion to their study.

Zusetsu chaniwa no shikumi
[Illustrated Guide to Tea Gardens]
By Amasaki Hiromasa

Tankōsha, 2002. 210x148 mm. 192 pp. ¥1,900.
ISBN 978-4-473-01888-5 (4-473-01888-1).

This book looks at tea gardens, which are not simply to be appreciated but are passed down and developed as gardens to be used. It also touches on their relationships with other forms of Japanese garden, such as those used for the palatial architecture of the Heian period (794–1185) and the Muromachi period's (1336–1568) dry landscape gardens. The unique focus brings the reader near to the perspective Japanese people have on their country's gardens.

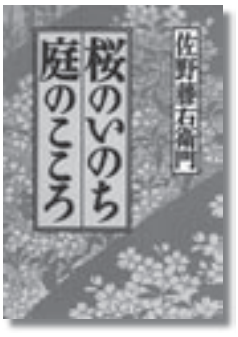
Nihon no teien: Zōkei no waza to kokoro
[Japan's Gardens: The Art and Spirit of Landscape Creation]
By Shinji Isoya

Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2005. 173x109 mm. 294 pp. ¥820.
ISBN 978-4-12-101810-6 (4-12-101810-9).

The author explains in simple terms, which even newcomers to this field will find readily comprehensible, 15 techniques of landscape creation relating to Japanese gardens, together with the thinking behind them. In the second half of the book the author introduces 36 gardens, including contemporary ones, from his own perspective and looks at the future of Japan's gardens.

Sakura no inochi niwa no kokoro
[The Life of the Cherry Blossom, the Soul of the Garden]
By Sano Tōemon

Sōshisha, 1998. 193x137 mm. 224 pp. ¥1,600.
ISBN 978-4-7942-0815-6 (4-7942-0815-4).



This is a discussion on the art of gardening by Kyoto gardener Sano Tōemon, who is well known for his work protecting cherry trees. The book brings together a collection of Sano's witty discourses about the original way of life of the Japanese people, views on the preciousness of nature, the soul of the people who nurture gardens, and the thinking and skills of the gardener.

(Continued from page 3)
changes that are rooted in the original experience that inspired the poem, and that he drew on to rewrite the poem in English. (Only in "Tag" are we told he is sitting at his desk when he has the insight central to the poem.) We translators are not privy to such information, and even if we were, I'm not sure we would feel free to alter the text to that extent. There is much to ponder here.

The English poet James Kirkup likens the translation of poetry to the decanting of wine: the container changes, the essence stays the same. That is an ideal that sounds simple and beautiful, but is beyond difficult in practice. I am left again with the bleak comfort of Seidensticker's dictum that translation is impossible—and yet a vital necessity. Perhaps, I often think, the translator herself is the greatest beneficiary of this entire process. Certainly I am grateful for the experience of translating such a rich and sparkling diversity of contemporary Japanese poetry.

Juliet W. Carpenter

Professor in the Department of English, Doshisha Women's College of Liberal Arts. Did doctoral studies at the University of Michigan until 1975. She specializes in modern Japanese literary studies, translation of literature into English, and translation theory.

Events and Trends

Shizuoka Translation Competition

On September 29, the Seventh Shizuoka International Translation Competition was opened for submissions. Entrants are required to select and translate designated works from the original Japanese into one of the target languages, which are English, German, and Korean for the seventh competition. All entries must be received by December 10, 2008. The Grand Prize winner is awarded a one-year scholarship to attend a university or other educational institution in Shizuoka Prefecture and ¥1 million.

Haiku and *Senryū* Enjoy Wide Appeal

Not as well known outside Japan as tanka and haiku, *senryū* is a style of Japanese poetry composed of three lines in a 5-7-5 syllabic pattern. Structurally similar to haiku, but without the need for *kigo*—words related to the season—*senryū* is considered easy to compose. The name *senryū* comes from the pen name of the Edo-period poet Karai Senryū (1718–90), whose real name was Karai Hachiemon. Karai acted as a judge for a poetry contest called *manku awase* (collected verses), which became popular throughout Edo (Tokyo). A selection of verses from the competition was later published as the collection *Haifū yanagidaru,* launching the genre (and the name of Senryū) into the public consciousness. This year marks the 250th anniversary of the first *manku awase* in 1757, which gave birth to the *senryū* form of poetry. To commemorate the occasion, publication of the *Senryū sōgō daijiten* [Comprehensive Guide to *Senryū*], eventually to fill four volumes, is underway.

Even after 250 years, *senryū* is still popular among the general public just like haiku, as evidenced by the number and variety of competitions held. Examples include the Ito En "Ōi ocha" New Haiku Contest (the submissions are haiku, but there are no strict regulations about such components as *kigo*), which started in 1989 and in 2006 received entries in the English haiku category from some 38 countries; the Salaryman Senryū Competition sponsored by Dai-ichi Mutual Life Insurance Company; and the Haiku Kōshien, a national haiku tournament for high-school students organized by the city of Matsuyama (Ehime Prefecture, Shikoku).

Lecture by Japan Foundation Award Recipient Royall Tyler

To commemorate his receipt of the 2007 Japan Foundation Award, Royall Tyler (former professor and head of the Japan Centre, Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian National University) gave a lecture at the University of Tokyo titled "*Genji monogatari* and *The Tale of Genji*: Toward an English Reading of the Tale." The audience, which filled the 220-seat classroom to capacity and even included people standing along the walls, listened attentively throughout the discourse. Speaking about English translations of *Genji monogatari* [trans. *The Tale of Genji*] published up to the present, Tyler touched on the difficulties he experienced with this translation, the literary qualities of *Genji monogatari,* and the work's reception in countries like the United States.

Royall Tyler addresses the University of Tokyo audience.

New Cover for *Ningen Shikkaku*

In June, Dazai Osamu's magnum opus *Ningen shikkaku* [trans. *No Longer Human*] appeared with a new front cover illustrated by popular manga artist Obata Takeshi, best known for his work in *Hikaru no Go* and *DEATH NOTE*. Abandoning the abstract cover design typically used for "masterpieces," the new edition had sold 130,000 copies as of October, an unusual feat for a classical literary work. Finding a place in the manga section of some bookstores, the book may spark the interest of readers unfamiliar with modern literature.

Dazai Osamu's Ningen shikkaku *[trans.* No Longer Human*]. (Courtesy: Shūeisha)*

Completed about one month before Dazai took his own life in June 1948, *Ningen shikkaku* is said to be both a quasi-autobiography and a suicide note. Told in the first person in a brutally honest manner, the novel deals with feelings of distrust in humanity, failed suicide attempts, drug addiction, and the miserable life experiences of a man incapable of revealing himself. The novel's first "notebook" section penned by the narrator opens with the famous line, "Mine has been a life of much shame."

Obituaries

Oda Makoto, 75, author, July 30, 2007.

During his graduate studies at the University of Tokyo, Oda participated in the Fulbright Program at Harvard University in the United States. After returning to Japan in 1961, his book on his world travels, *Nandemo mite yarō* [I'll Go Everywhere and See Everything], became a bestseller. Oda's unforgettable experience of the bombing of Osaka during World War II, when he was 13 years old, profoundly shaped his ideas and writings and led to his involvement in the peace movement. In 1965, he formed a citizens' group to vocally oppose the war in Vietnam. The year after experiencing the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 1995 at his home in Hyōgo Prefecture, he established a citizens' association that has been active in calling for public assistance in the wake of natural disasters. In 2004, he became an inaugural member of the Article 9 Association, which seeks to protect Japan's pacifist constitution, continuing his lifelong participation in peace activities as an "activist author." His 1998 release *Gyokusai* [trans. *The Breaking Jewel*] has also been dramatized for a BBC radio program. In 2006, a book containing Oda's original novel as well as a Japanese translation of the radio program adapted by British broadcast scriptwriter Tina Pepler was published under the same title. The book also features a dialogue between Oda and Japanese literature scholar Donald Keene, who translated the novel into English (2003), and other writings from all three contributors.

Edward G. Seidensticker, 86, professor emeritus at Columbia University, August 26, 2007.

Born in Colorado, Seidensticker studied at the US Navy Japanese/Oriental Language School during World War II and went to Japan as a diplomat after the war. Retiring from service in 1950, he did graduate studies in Heian-period literature at the University of Tokyo, and became a professor at Columbia University in 1977. Known particularly for his complete English translation of *The Tale of Genji* released in 1975, Seidensticker also produced translations of Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's *Sasame yuki* [trans. *The Makioka Sisters*] and *Yukiguni* [trans. *Snow Country*] by Kawabata Yasunari, along with several other contemporary literary novels. Alongside his compatriot Donald Keene, Seidensticker was a leading scholar of Japanese literature in the United States.

Narita Branch Museum Opened

On September 15, 2007, the Museum of Modern Japanese Literature (Meguro, Tokyo) opened a branch facility in Narita, Chiba Prefecture. At the end of 2006, the number of documents currently in storage at the museum reached 1,224,000. The decision to construct the Narita branch was made as the main museum was reaching its maximum storage capacity.

Announcement

Japanese Literature in Translation Search

The Japan Foundation maintains a database of Japanese literary works that have been translated into other languages, mostly after World War II. Available on the Foundation's website, the data is searchable by author, title, translator, publisher, and other terms in either Japanese or Roman letters.

The Japan Foundation is collecting information on new works to periodically update its database. If you are aware of any information concerning Japanese literary works translated into foreign languages that is not listed in this database, please let us know by using the notification form linked to the database.

Correction

The review of *Sekai de ichiban ureteiru kusuri* [The Most Acknowledged Medicine of the World] (*Japanese Book News* No, 53, p. 11) mistakenly referred to Ms. Yamauchi Kimiko as "he." We regret the error.

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The Flamboyant Vigor of the Pleasure Quarter

Be prepared to find yourself totally immersed in the Yoshiwara pleasure quarter of eighteenth-century Edo (Tokyo), home of the courtesans celebrated in woodcut prints and Kabuki plays. Matsui Kesako's Naoki Prize–winning whodunit *Yoshiwara tebikigusa* [An Introduction to Yoshiwara] unfolds as a thrilling mystery and a sweeping, sensuous portrait of an exotic world, where courtesans and clients were expected to cultivate and display the ideals of refinement, élan, and savoir-faire.

The book opens with cries of "Our warmest welcome!"—greetings from the mistress of a teahouse, an intermediary for a brothel. As she does for all new guests, the old lady explains how the walled-in quarter functions, and how to behave in Yoshiwara, to a stranger—a man pretending to be a naive client in pursuit of clues to the baffling disappearance of an *oiran,* a high-class lady of the night.

Neither the missing *oiran* nor the undercover agent makes a direct appearance in the novel, though. The story is told entirely through the sides of conversations spoken by such Yoshiwara inhabitants as an elderly woman working for a brothel, a male entertainer, a geisha, a woman trafficker, and the regular clients of the *oiran*. As the reader learns the speakers' sides of the story, the mysteries gradually disentangle, and the sights, sounds, images, smells, and textures of the Yoshiwara world vividly emerge.

"It's a gimmick to make the Yoshiwara town itself stand out," says Matsui of the conversational format. She chose to make the people in different professions talk with unique styles and argots "to present telling insights into the book's true subject, which is Yoshiwara."

On this point the book is colorful and informative. This glittering place was not merely for the pursuit of sensuality and hedonism, but was full of lavish customs, elaborate protocols, and implicitly understood rules of play. In Yoshiwara expert customers and skilled courtesans became legendary, while boors and poseurs became the butt of jokes.

The philosophy that created Yoshiwara, with its rituals, drama, and patterns, remains deeply rooted in Japanese society even today. "There's a need in Japan for guides on how to conduct a love life, as men and women alike are hesitant to relate to the opposite sex," she notes. "I wanted to illuminate this abiding trait of the Japanese."

One example of the close resemblance between an Edo-period (1603–1868) bordello and a cabaret club of today is their "common law" principle for matchmaking. Once a customer is assigned to an *oiran* or hostess and becomes a regular client, he is expected not to pick other girls, unless he goes to other houses. "The Japanese have constantly been seeking what I call a 'space for pseudo-dating games' in society," comments Matsui.

As a writer of Edo-period fiction today, Matsui has no equal. Born into a family running a traditional Japanese-style *ryōtei* restaurant and celebrity hangout in the geisha district of Kyoto, she counts among her relatives a Kabuki actor classified as a living national treasure. It is perhaps no surprise that Matsui delved deep into Kabuki at graduate school, gaining a deep understanding of classical drama and history. In a rare move for a woman, she wrote scripts for Kabuki plays, staged them, and wrote a series of magazine articles on the performing art before she became a novelist in 1997.

Her academic and family background underpins her writing. Striving to achieve authenticity not just in the historical details, the scholar-author is also faithful to the vernacular of people of the time. In this award-winning novel, she reproduces the colloquial speaking style of Yoshiwara, designed to erase traces of the courtesans' places of origin, and the provincial dialects of their clients.

"I am fussy about the dialogue, as the language represents the speaker's mentality and social standing," notes Matsui, who also confesses that her motive in writing period fiction is to let the present generation in Japan know about the past, both the good and the bad, to confirm where they stand in history.

Unlike historical fiction, which portrays alternate accounts or dramatizations of historical figures, the period fiction that Matsui creates depicts the lives of ordinary people. In a popular serialized detective story of hers, an apprentice Kyogen writer catches up on gossip in the town and reports back to his master—historically a standard practice for unearthing material for new Kyogen scripts.

In *Bakumatsu adoresan* [Adolescents in the Shogunate's Twilight Years] she introduces the second son of a samurai family, who claws his way up to become a playwright. In this work she showcases the struggle of boys who, because they were not the first-born sons, had no right to succeed their samurai fathers as warriors.

With a deft touch, Matsui has also managed to bring forgotten real-life figures into the limelight, populating her writing with names like Nakamura Nakazō, a famed Kabuki actor, and Koman, a spunky woman of chivalrous spirit who made appearances in *jōruri* (puppet drama) and Kabuki productions.

Few writers can extract raw information from historical documents to produce such absorbing novels as Matsui. Whether they are town-dwellers in Yoshiwara, or anonymous actors and playwrights, Matsui situates her characters in a meticulously observed world, offering readers a privileged glimpse into the lives and hearts of people in Edo-period Japan.

(Kawakatsu Miki, freelance writer)

Photo: Ohashi Eye

Matsui Kesako

Born in 1953. Received a master's degree in theatrical studies from Waseda University. Engaged in Kabuki production at Shochiku Co. The first Kyoto-born Naoki Prize winner. Lives in Tokyo with her pet tortoises, which inspired her to write an Edo-period mystery featuring "turtle magistrates." Her award-winning *Yoshiwara tebikigusa* is scheduled to be translated into French, Korean, and Chinese. Her blog is viewable at <www.kesako.jp>.