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Dazai Osamu's Allure

Andō Hiroshi

Dazai Osamu is one of the most popular figures in modern Japanese literature, alongside the authors Natsume Sōseki, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, and Mishima Yukio. Over the past several decades Dazai has been the topic of more university graduation theses than any other author, a testament to his enduring popularity.

Dazai's masterpiece novel, *Ningen shikkaku* [trans. *No Longer Human*], is an extremely long-selling book for a serious literary work—since its publication 60 years ago, it is said that more than 10 million copies have been sold. Told from the perspective of a man incapable of leading a normal life, it depicts his indictment of the hypocrisy and egoism of people who trifle with him. Its confessional style is the reason the book strikes a chord with many young people who suffer from the inferiority complex peculiar to early adolescence. This work contains elements that strongly appeal to universal feelings deep within us: the distress of wanting to know one's own value but being unable to do so; fierce pride combined with a fear of injury to that pride; shyness and a sense of inferiority toward others; and the worry accompanying the inability to forge positive relationships with others.

The year 2009 marks the 100th anniversary of Dazai's birth, a fact that has received considerable media coverage. Public attention is once again on the writer; special exhibitions are being held in many different locations and a number of film versions of his books are in production. Let us take a look at the allure of his literature by examining his life.

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Dazai Osamu was born as Tsushima Shūji in 1909 in the Tsugaru area of Aomori Prefecture, located at the northernmost tip of the island of Honshū. *Tsugaru* [trans. *Return to Tsugaru*], a book based on a return visit that he made during World War II, describes the unique disposition of the area's natives, marked by a distinct rebelliousness cultivated in a harsh natural environment and a friendliness expressed through excessive hospitality. Dazai was born into a household headed by a landowner and emerging merchant who had quickly accumulated wealth at the onset of the Meiji era [1868–1912] and was

one of the prefecture's richest men. His father went into politics, gaining a seat in the House of Peers by virtue of the large sums he paid in taxes. The family home, a mansion located on grounds covering nearly 2,000 square meters, is now the Dazai Osamu Memorial Hall Shayōkan, a well-known public museum.

From the time he began attending the local higher school, Dazai became increasingly burdened by his bourgeois origins. His sense of being caught in a class-related dilemma was expressed in a variety of forms in his composition pieces during this period. In 1930 he enrolled at the Imperial University of Tokyo (today's University of Tokyo), where he studied French literature and got involved in illegal leftist political activities. Dazai's student years were fraught with turbulence: a geisha from his hometown followed Dazai to Tokyo and he was disowned by his family for marrying her; he entered into a suicide pact with a bar hostess, but he survived and the woman died.

In 1932, having abandoned his illegal activities, Dazai took up writing in earnest, and three years later he made his formal literary debut. His writing career, spanning just 15 years or so, coincided almost exactly with the chaotic period before, during, and after World War II. Its trajectory is commonly divided into three parts based on the literary styles he embraced during each respective period. The “early period,” from 1933 to 1937, is characterized by avant-garde experimentation; the “middle period,” from 1938 to 1945, is distinguished by a more optimistic tone, and was when Dazai's talents as a storyteller flourished; and the “late period,” from 1945 to 1948, is marked by a relapse into decadence.

The early period was the stormiest time of Dazai's real life. He appeared to be making a satisfactory mark, pub-



The house where the author was born is now a public museum, the Dazai Osamu Memorial Hall Shayōkan. (Courtesy: Goshogawara City)

lishing his first book, the short story collection *Bannen* [The Late Years], in 1936. During this period, however, he attempted suicide again, ran up enormous debts to friends and acquaintances due to his addiction to the morphine-based painkilling drug Pavinal, and, in despair over his wife's infidelity, made yet another attempt at double suicide, this time with his wife. He was known at this time for a literary style that has been described as verbose, a reflection of excessive self-consciousness. He repeatedly tried out experimental techniques, such as pausing in the middle of a novel to reveal the novel's structure and then



From left, the first editions of Udaijin Sanetomo [Minister of the Right Sanetomo], Tsugaru [trans. Return to Tsugaru], and Ningen shikkaku [trans. No Longer Human]. (Courtesy: Goshogawara City)

deliberately demolishing that structure. Commonalities have been noted between Dazai's writing and the "pure novel" concept advanced by André Gide, a prominent adherent of postmodernism who tried to rebel against accepted conventions of "description." Dazai's wordy narrative style has also drawn comparisons to that of the American writer J. D. Salinger.

In 1939, after a brief period of inactivity, Dazai's life stabilized and his literary voice changed, becoming more hopeful. Among his works from this period, "Fugaku hyakkei" [trans. "One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji"] and "Hashire Merosu" [trans. "Run, Melos!"] are still required reading in Japanese language classes at many middle and high schools and are thus known throughout Japan. The short story "Fugaku hyakkei" describes a man who tries to make a new start in life while carrying on a dialogue about Mt. Fuji. "Hashire Merosu," a short story based on a Greek myth, is a paean to the beauty of friendship and trust.

Dazai became especially adept at parody during this period. Examples include *Shin Hamuretto* [New Hamlet]; "Onna no kettō" [Women's Duel], Dazai's original reworking of a German short story; and *Otogizōshi* [Fairy Tales] and *Udaijin Sanetomo* [Minister of the Right Sanetomo], both of which are based on Japanese classics. More than mere adaptations, Dazai's parodies are distinguished by his knack for presenting the original story while also depicting the behind-the-scenes process that determines how he changes the original story. He was also a skilled practitioner of the first-person confessional style and employed a variety of devices to impart a colloquial flavor to his novels. The short story "Kakekomi utae" [An Urgent Appeal], which portrays the distorted emotions of Judas in a confessional tale narrated by Christ's betrayer himself, is a masterpiece. Dazai also excelled at writing monologues narrated by young women. In "Jo-seito" [trans. "The School Girl"], "Kirigirisu" [Grass-

hopper], and "Chiyojo" [trans. "Chiyojo"] he expresses his unique aesthetic sensibility and artistic vision through women's perspectives.

Dazai was one of the most active literary writers in Japan during the war, partly because he was exempt from military service. His "late period" started with Japan's defeat. During the war he had been evacuated to his ancestral home. There he witnessed firsthand the state of economic decline, the result of postwar agrarian reforms. Although he had been disowned by his family, the demise of that community of relatives, which he had secretly considered his last refuge, had crucial significance in his life. *Shayō* [trans. *The Setting Sun*], his tale of ruined aristocrats, was based on this experience; its primary motif was despair over the inability to bridge the gap between wartime and the postwar era. The novel became a bestseller so popular that it spawned the term *shayō-zoku* ("setting sun tribe"), referring to society's upper-class members in decline. Amid the confusion of the postwar years, Dazai was catapulted into the spotlight as the standard-bearer of the *buraiha*, a group of writers who rejected all kinds of conventional morality. In 1948, after the publication of *Ningen shikkaku*, which represented the culmination of all his talents, Dazai took his own life at the age of 38.

Sixty years after his death, Dazai Osamu's reputation has changed along with the times. For some time after he died, Dazai was strongly associated with the *buraiha* image, regarded merely as someone who tried to mount a one-man rebellion against the traditional authority of society. Today, in an era characterized by online communities, he is once again attracting interest as someone who embodied isolation. Dazai's readers definitely seem to have changed as well. His writing, which appeals strongly to the confused emotions of adolescence, used to be referred to as "the adolescent measles"; everyone succumbs to it when young, and then grows up and leaves it behind. However, as his superb narrative modeling and talent for parody in his "middle period" are reappraised, Dazai's works have gained support from all kinds of readers, including connoisseurs of the novel, as fully readable, universal literature with contemporary values.

There are more than 300 translations of Dazai's works in English, French, German, Russian, and various other languages, and these are making a sizable impression on the world at large. As we observe the centennial of his birth we look forward to seeing how Dazai Osamu's reputation will grow in the future.

Andō Hiroshi

Born in 1958. Associate professor of Japanese literature in the Faculty of Letters, University of Tokyo. Specialist in modern Japanese literature, with a particular interest in the I-novel in modern literature and in studying style and expression in novels from a historical perspective. Principal works include *Ji-ishiki no Shōwa bungaku: Genshō to shite no "watakushi"* [Self-conscious Shōwa-era Literature: The "I" as Phenomenon] and *Dazai Osamu: Yowasa o enjiru to iu koto* [Dazai Osamu: Acting Out Weakness], as well as *Dazai Osamu zensakuhin kenkyū jiten* [Encyclopedia of Research on the Complete Works of Dazai Osamu], which he coedited.



FICTION



Tendō Arata

Born in 1960. Won the Yasei Jidai Prize for New Writers in 1986 for *Shiro no kazoku* [Family of White]. Received the Mystery Writers of Japan Association Prize in 2000 for his bestselling *Eien no ko* [Eternal Child], which was also made into a television drama series. Received the Naoki Prize in 2009 for *Itamu hito* [The Mourner].

Itamu hito [The Mourner]

By Tendō Arata

Bungei Shunjū, 2008. 195 x 137 mm. 456 pp. ¥1,619. ISBN 978-4-16-327640-3.

Tendō Arata consistently writes stories on those who have been hurt. His *Eien no ko* [Eternal Child] (1999) gave many readers a deep shock, making a great impression. Though new works from this author appear just once every few years, their profound and heavy themes have always become the topic of the day. This work, the result of seven years of the author's efforts, has been highly praised by critics and won him the 140th Naoki Prize.

Every day the news carries a stream of stories on crimes and accidents. After learning of these incidents in newspapers and other media, protagonist Sakatsuki Shizuto visits the places where they took place to mourn for those who died. With absolutely no religious affiliation, the motive behind his perpetual grieving is a mystery. Stories concerning peripheral

characters—which include a cynical magazine journalist, a wife who killed her husband, and the protagonist's mother, who suffers from terminal cancer—unfold into intricately threaded tales of love and hate, life and death.

“Can a person mourn everyone's death?” emerges as the overwhelmingly solemn theme, and at times it becomes suffocating. Yet the book remains a bracing read throughout, no doubt thanks to the author's deep-seated faith in humanity, a tenderness that springs from the difficult drudgery of coming back after having sunk inexorably to the depths of hopelessness. As it nears its conclusion, this solemn work morphs into an intense yet beautiful love story. *Itamu hito* is truly a masterpiece. (MT)

Kari no mizu [False Water]

By Ian Hideo Levy

Kōdansha, 2008. 195 x 134 mm. 167 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-06-214841-2.

Ian Hideo Levy is a singular phenomenon in contemporary world literature. Although born in the United States, he mastered Japanese perfectly and became a novelist who writes, remarkably, only in that language; but he is not satisfied as such. Western Japanologists with deep knowledge of Japanese culture are not particularly rare today, but most of them who have fallen in love with the country devote their lives to mastering its culture. Levy, on the other hand, has not settled in his second homeland of Japan, but frequently travels in China as he continues to explore a multilingual, multicultural world in which Chinese resonates in addition to English and Japanese—and not just the Mandarin dialect, which Levy knows well, but other dialects that he does not speak.

This book is a collection of four short stories based on the author's travels in China. He stays in a hotel in “a city south of the Huang He,” or Yellow River, travels the expressways in an Audi with a hired local driver, takes a train alone and visits tourist attractions in Gansu Province, and strolls around Kaifeng, the site of an old Jewish community. Although he is constantly called a *laowai* (foreigner), in his encounters with natives of China's hinterlands, the narrator reconfirms his own identity and provides vivid depictions of some seldom seen realities of contemporary China. (NM)



Ian Hideo Levy

Born in California in 1950. Won the National Book Award in 1982 for *The Ten Thousand Leaves: A Translation of the Manyōshū*, Japan's Premier Anthology of Classical Poetry, vol. 1. Won the Noma Prize for New Writers in 1992 for the novel *Seijōki no kiko enai heya* [A Room Where the Star-Spangled Banner Cannot Be Heard] and the Osaragi Jirō Prize in 2005 for the novel *Chiji ni kudakete* [Broken into Thousands of Pieces] (see JBN No. 46). Awarded the Japan Foundation Special Prize for Japanese Language in 2007 for his writings to date.



Minato Kanae

Born in 1973. Won the Shōsetsu Suiiri Newcomer's Prize in 2007 for "Seishokusha" [The Cleric], the first chapter of her debut novel Kokuhaku [Confession]. With the addition of five more chapters, her work went on to become one of the top-ranked mystery novels of 2008 and won the 2009 Hon'ya [Bookseller] Prize.

Kokuhaku [Confession] By Minato Kanae

Futabasha, 2008. 195 x 135 mm. 271 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 978-4-575-23628-6.

"Manami's death wasn't an accident. She was killed by students in this classroom."

This novel tells the story of a teacher whose daughter was killed at her school; it opens with the identification of the murderers, two male students, during the final homeroom lesson of the term. The distorted state of the educational scene is the theme underlying this powerful psychological thriller, which pursues the truth behind the monologues of the classmates, the murderers, and their families.

This is a genuinely terrifying story, one with the potential to leave readers shivering in their seats. Told entirely through monologues and diary entries, it conveys the sense that the killers and those involved are standing right at the reader's side as they utter their testimony. Monologues are by nature subjective, no matter

what sort they may be. It is possible that unconsciously and without the speakers' intent, the facts and emotions are twisted. What makes this story all the more chilling is that the reader comes to perceive these distortions as the twisted nature of the characters delivering the monologues.

The truth behind the incident and the psychological state of those involved gradually take shape. A wrenching drama evolves in the confines of characters' minds, coming to the dramatic and shocking climax. This book has earned high praise from critics for its subtlety and its impressive writing for an author's first publication. It attained the top grade in the annual year-end ranking of Japan's mystery novels. (MT)

Myūjikkū buresu yū!! [Music Bless You!!]

By Tsumura Kikuko

Kadokawa Shoten, 2008. 195 x 135 mm. 223 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-04-873842-2.

Tsumura Kikuko was awarded the 30th Noma Prize for New Writers for her *Myūjikkū buresu yū!!* and the 140th Akutagawa Prize for "Potosu raimu no fune" [The Boat of Lime Pothos]. She depicts with both seriousness and humor the lives of forlorn young women of the present age, and is currently one of the most popular young female writers.

Azami, Tsumura's protagonist in this work, is a high school senior who believes that "it's far more important to think about music than about the future." Although the university entrance exam season has arrived, this scatterbrained girl has no idea about what to do with her future. Azami is an eccentric, a low flier leading an unfashionable existence. As she loafs through her daily routine, she is sustained by her beloved punk rock

music and by conversations and e-mail exchanges with friends who are tuned to her wavelength.

To an outside observer, Azami seems like a slightly unusual but more or less normal high school student. With a certain kind of impetus, however, she ends up behaving in unexpected ways. She does not become delinquent, though, or turn into the kind of kid who is apt to erupt in anger at any time. Tsumura is painfully effective at depicting the feelings of a high school girl searching for something to hold onto and vacillating all the while. In that sense she has written a masterpiece, one that vividly conveys the emotional state of a high school student in Japan today. (MT)



Tsumura Kikuko

Born in 1978. Awarded the Dazai Osamu Prize in 2005 for *Man'itā* [Maneater] (retitled *Kimi wa eien ni soitsura yori wakai* [You Will Always Be Younger Than Them]). Awarded the Noma Prize for New Writers in 2008. Nominated for the Akutagawa Prize for the third time in 2009 and won, for "Potosu raimu no fune" [The Boat of Lime Pothos].



Shigematsu Kiyoshi

Born in 1963. Began writing after working at a publishing company. Published his first book, *Bifo ran* [*Before Run*], in 1991. Produced a series of topical works focusing on contemporary families. Awarded the *Tsubota Jōji Literary Prize* for *Naifu* [*Knife*] and the *Yamamoto Shūgorō Prize* for *Eiji* in 1999. Awarded the *Naoki Prize* in 2001 for *Bitamin F* [*Vitamin F*] (see "In Their Own Words," JBN No. 42).

Tonbi [Kite]

By Shigematsu Kiyoshi

Kadokawa Shoten, 2008. 195 x 135 mm. 384 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-04-873891-0.

The setting is Bingo, a fictional city on Japan's Inland Sea, in the year 1962. Twenty-eight-year-old Yasu is happier than ever, rejoicing in the birth of his eagerly awaited first son. As time passes and the parents watch their baby grow, he savors their bliss, but their happiness is abruptly shattered by a tragic accident. This is the story, spanning half a lifetime, of a father who values his son's happiness above all else, despite being perplexed and distressed at every new hardship. For Shigematsu Kiyoshi, who has written on the joys and sorrows of Japanese families in his previous books, this novel represents something of an endpoint.

Yasu, an awkward, bashful man who devotes himself to watching over his only son, is a splendid character. Yasu loves his only son Akira, the people around them

love them both, and the author, above all, loves these characters. In many ways this is a happy tale filled with blessings. Its readers will find it touching and breathtaking; many will be moved to tears by its depiction of simple human goodness.

Shigematsu is very good at portraying life when Akira, who would be about the author's age, is growing up. The Shōwa era [1926–89] was a time when people committed themselves wholeheartedly to life and when friendly mutual-support networks of neighbors still functioned. This book presents a vivid portrait of Japanese society during that period, and for that reason it presents a heartfelt appeal for a return to the mutual appreciation that abided in the Japan of the recent past. (MT)

CRITICISM

Murakami: Ryū to Haruki no jidai [Murakami: The Era of Ryū and Haruki]

By Shimizu Yoshinori

Gentōsha, 2008. 173 x 108 mm. 280 pp. ¥840. ISBN 978-4-344-98095-2.

It was known as the "double Murakami" era: the decade or so following the publication of Murakami Ryū's *Koin rokkā beibīzu* [trans. *Coin Locker Babies*] and Murakami Haruki's *1973 nen no pinbōru* [trans. *Pinball, 1973*], which both came out around 1980. It lasted until around 1994, when Ryū's *Gofungo no sekai* [The World Five Minutes Later] and Haruki's *Nejimakidori kuronikuru* [trans. *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*] were published.

Shimizu Yoshinori knows all this. In his introduction, he notes that nowadays practically no one mentions these two writers in the same breath, although they were once called "double Murakami." "They probably hate it," he writes. However, Shimizu bundles the two together in this book to explore his conviction that "these authors' works defined our times."

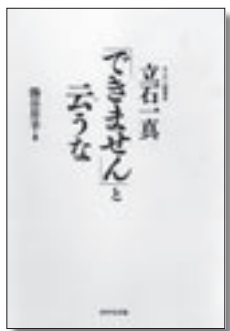
According to him, "One of them would take the lead and publish some noteworthy work, and without fail, after a while the other would come out with a book reflecting on that work." Even now, he claims, the "sporadic jam session" between the two writers continues.

One wonders whether this is really the case. Shimizu's interpretation may simply reflect the wishful sentiment of one who belongs to the same approximate generation as his two subjects. Ryū seems inclined to treat literature as information to transmit, while Haruki appears to have wandered into the realm of spiritual writing. Even granting this criticism, this book will probably attract many readers to the works from the era. (MK)



Shimizu Yoshinori

Born in 1954. Worked as a high school Japanese-language instructor before becoming a literary critic. Won the 1986 *Gunzō Prize for New Writers* for *Kijutsu no kokka: Tanizaki Jun'ichirō genron* [State of Description: A Theory of Tanizaki Jun'ichirō]. Has produced works concerned with the teaching of Japanese-language composition, including *Kōkōsei no tame no bunshō dokuhon* [A Reader for High School Students] and many other books cowritten with colleagues from his teaching days.



Yutani Shōyō

Born in 1952. Covered banking and the financial industry for the business magazine *Shūkan daiyamondo* [Diamond Weekly] for more than 20 years before becoming chief editor and later a member of the board of the same magazine. After retirement, taught at Ritsumeikan University as a visiting professor. Major works include *Meisō suru ginkō* [Banks That Go Astray], *Seiho kiki no shinjitsu* [The Truth About the Life Insurance Crisis], and *Samurai kādo, sekai e* [Samurai Cards for the World].

“Dekimasen” to iu na: Omuron sōgyōsha Tateishi Kazuma **[Don’t Say “I Can’t”: Tateisi Kazuma, Founder of Omron]** By Yutani Shōyō

Diamond Sha, 2008. 194 x 136 mm. 335 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-478-00633-7.

This is a biography of Tateisi Kazuma, founder of the Omron Corporation, which is well-known for its online automated teller machines and other products. In 1933, at the age of 32, he established a small factory called the Tateisi Electric Manufacturing Co. Until his death in 1991 at the age of 90, he remained at the forefront of the development of new technologies. When his firm resumed production of electric heaters and other products after World War II, he established the following business principles: First, borrow no money. Second, procure all parts from outside contractors. Third, give priority to investment in research. Fourth, don’t become affiliated with any major corporate group. And fifth, take a cooperative attitude toward collaboration with major cor-

porations. These principles testify that Tateisi’s business goal was not to make a profit but to contribute to society by producing “the good stuff.” By maintaining this philosophy he also continued to develop new technologies.

Peter Drucker, an authority on modern management whose memorial essay is included in this book, praised Tateisi as a man of foresight in his field: “He first—as early as 1959 or 1960—saw the turn in biology from pharmaceuticals to medical electronics.” Tateisi used to say, “Don’t say you can’t do it before you’ve tried. Try it first.” His words have become a principle of action for all company employees. (MK)

Orikaeshiten: 1997–2008 **[Halfway Mark: 1997–2008]** By Miyazaki Hayao

Iwanami Shoten, 2008. 194 x 137 mm. 524 pp. ¥2,700. ISBN 978-4-00-022394-2.

The animator Miyazaki Hayao’s work has enjoyed overwhelming popularity among adults as well as children, from *Arupusu no shōjo Haiji* [trans. *Heidi, Girl of the Alps*] and *Kaze no tani no Naushika* [trans. *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*] to his most recent film, *Gake no ue no Ponyo* [trans. *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea*].

The start of Miyazaki’s “halfway mark,” 1997, was the year *Mononoke hime* [trans. *Princess Mononoke*] was released. Prior to that he had published *Shuppatuten: 1979–1996* [Starting Point: 1979–96] (Tokuma Shoten), a collection of interviews and essays. This volume is made up of essays, interviews, lectures, and the like from the 12-year period following the publication of the previous book. In “Atogaki ni kaete” [In

Place of an Afterword], Miyazaki writes of the strong emotions he experienced upon realizing that more than a decade had passed since the release of *Mononoke hime*. He does not wallow in emotion, though. “I’ve done the best I could each time, and what I’ve somehow arrived at are the movies I’ve made,” he says, referring to such works as *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* [trans. *Spirited Away*], *Hauru no ugoku shiro* [trans. *Howl’s Moving Castle*], and *Gake no ue no Ponyo*. “I’ve given it all I had,” he writes.

Miyazaki would probably say that people who are curious about his life should just watch his movies. This book is not only for Miyazaki’s fans but is also for readers unfamiliar with his work, who will ponder his life as well. (MK)



Miyazaki Hayao

Born in 1941. Popular Japanese animator and film director. Representative works include *Kaze no tani no Naushika* [trans. *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*] (1984), *Tonari no Totoro* [trans. *My Neighbor Totoro*] (1988), and *Mononoke hime* [trans. *Princess Mononoke*] (1997). His films are popular around the world. His 2001 film *Sen to Chihiro no kamikakushi* [trans. *Spirited Away*] won the 2003 Academy Award for Best Animated Feature. Won the Japan Foundation Award in 2005.



Ishikawa Naoki

Born in 1977. Photographer and adventurer. Received the 2008 Kaikō Takeshi Nonfiction Award for this book. His other works include *Subete no sōbi o chie ni okikaeru koto* [Replacing All Equipment with Wisdom] and *Ima ikite iru to iu bōken* [The Adventure of Living Right Now], as well as the photo collections *Pole to pole: Kyokken o tsunagu kaze* [Pole to Pole: The Wind That Connects the Polar Regions], *New Dimension*, and *Polar*.

Saigo no bōkenka [The Last Adventurer]

By Ishikawa Naoki

Shūeisha, 2008. 193 x 135 mm. 214 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-08-781410-1.

In January 2008, a man set off solo in a hot-air balloon, planning to cross the Pacific Ocean. He was never seen again. Kanda Michio would have been 59 this year. In this book Ishikawa, who served as Kanda's copilot on an attempted trans-Pacific flight in 2004, recalls his four-and-a-half-year acquaintance with the adventurer.

Kanda, fascinated with balloons since his twenties, was a top-ranking balloonist, having set world records for the longest flight by distance in an AX-10-class hot-air balloon in 1994 and for the longest by duration in 1997. Ishikawa, meanwhile, was the youngest person in the world to scale the Seven Summits, the highest peaks on seven continents. Unlike Kanda's adventures, however, Ishikawa's feat belonged to a bygone era; there were few trackless

lands left to explore or geographical firsts to achieve.

On their journey, Ishikawa observed Kanda's relentlessly positive attitude, his good luck, and his ability to capitalize on it. Kanda, who regarded ballooning as an indulgent "hobby," felt that his adventures, even the near-fatal mishaps, provided him with a store of useful experiences. The two men encountered unexpected trouble and went down in the ocean. They were rescued by a container ship, narrowly escaping death, but Kanda, undaunted, was determined to make another attempt in a rattan basket. Ishikawa could not bring himself to volunteer for a second try. As he tries to trace Kanda's final flight, Ishikawa ponders the meaning of adventure. For Kanda, perhaps, "An adventurer, in order to truly live, takes the path toward death." (SH)

CULTURE

Katachi no Nihonbi: Wa no dezaingaku [The Japanese Beauty of Form: Japanese-style Design]

By Mitsui Hideki

NHK Shuppan, 2008. 129 x 183 mm. 216 pp. ¥920. ISBN 978-4-14-091123-5.

Japanese design sensibilities have attracted worldwide attention in areas ranging from fashion and crafts to posters and industrial design. This book explores the reasons why Japanese design has come to be regarded so well internationally and examines the historical and cultural contexts for this phenomenon. It also analyzes some of the distinctive features of Japanese design and discusses the elements that set it apart from its Western counterparts.

According to the author, Japanese people have long cultivated an exquisite sensitivity to nature, living amid beautiful natural surroundings that abound with the changing manifestations of the four seasons, and they have developed and refined a unique sense of design. From this emerged many techniques, such as oblique lines, empty spaces, shading, and

blurring, that are employed in ukiyo-e, *ni-honga* (Japanese-style painting), and other traditional Japanese arts. In contrast to Westerners, for whom symmetry and the golden ratio have been norms since the days of the ancient Greeks, the Japanese prize asymmetry and amorphous forms and have made these their standards. This traditional sensibility, writes Mitsui, has helped shape today's "cool Japan" with its global popularity among young people. It has also been handed down through manga, anime, and other subcultural channels, as well as the *kawaii* (cute) fashion vogue. This lucid, comprehensive introduction explaining Japanese aesthetics from the design perspective is recommended for any reader interested in Japanese fine arts and culture. (NM)



Mitsui Hideki

Born in 1942. Currently a professor at Tamagawa University College of Arts. Professor emeritus at Tsukuba University. Specialist in composition and media art. Author of many books, including *Tekunoroji āto* [Technology Art], *Bi no kōseigaku* [The Study of Aesthetic Composition], *Katachi no bi to wa nani ka* [What Is the Beauty of Form?], and *Furakutaru zōkei* [Fractal Forms].



Mizumura Minae

Born in 1951. Moved to the United States at the age of 12 when her father was posted there. Studied French literature at Yale University. Published Zoku meian [Light and Darkness Continued], a sequel to Natsume Sōseki's unfinished Meian [trans. Light and Darkness], in 1990, for which she won the Minister of Education Award for New Artists. Won the Noma Prize for New Writers for Shishōsetsu from left to right [A Personal Story: from left to right] (see JBN No. 14), published in 1995, and the Yomiuri Prize for Literature for the 2002 book Honkaku shōsetsu [A Real Novel] (see JBN No. 42).

***Nihongo ga horobiru toki: Eigo no seiki no naka de* [The Fall of the Japanese Language in the Age of English]**

By Mizumura Minae

Chikuma Shobō, 2008. 194 x 137 mm. 335 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-480-81496-8.

This latest essay by Mizumura Minae has evoked an unusually strong response and has been widely reviewed, both favorably and unfavorably. This is not simply due to its sensationalistic title. Mizumura, who resided for many years in the United States, is bilingual, with a perfect command of both Japanese and English. Her strong language skills, considerable literary knowledge and talents as a novelist, and wealth of international experience combine to make her provocative essay on the Japanese language very persuasive.

Through her interaction with writers from various countries in the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa, Mizumura has rediscovered the fact that the people of the world actually write in many different languages and has come

to believe that, amid the overwhelming influence of English—"the universal language"—the world's many "national literatures," which people write in their own tongues, are facing extinction. The author concludes the book with a concrete proposal: while it is essential to cultivate superior bilingual abilities among the Japanese, the objective should not be to make all Japanese people bilingual but to use education to help preserve Japanese as the national language. This book is not simply a pragmatic discourse on language, however. It is also an excellent discussion of modern Japanese literature, and as such it deserves to be read by anyone who has an interest in the culture of Japan. (NM)

***Shin in'ei raisan: Utsukushii "akari" o motomete* [A New "In Praise of Shadows": In Search of Beautiful "Light"]**

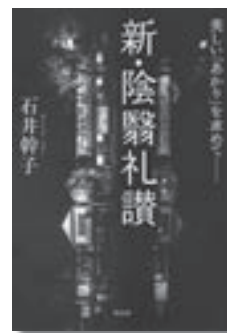
By Ishii Motoko

Shōdensha, 2008. 195 x 134 mm. 264 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-396-61312-9.

A desire to remake the nightscape of Japan is at the root of the illumination designer Ishii Motoko's "light up" concept. She has applied this concept in illumination projects at Tokyo Tower, the Rainbow Bridge spanning Tokyo Bay, the historic village of Shirakawa-gō, and elsewhere. As suggested by the title of this book, an overt reference to a well-known work by Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, Ishii's approach is not to treat light and darkness as opposing forces but to discover beautiful forms of lighting, inherent to life in Japan, that present a softer spectrum of light fading into darkness. One might call this "Japanese-style lighting." It focuses on the gentle relationship between light and darkness that, in combination with the country's traditional

wooden houses and paper screens, has helped shape traditional aesthetic sensibilities. It reveals the beauty in the shadows that emerge as light yields to darkness.

Ishii's early lighting work was the simple illumination of darkness. Back then her relatively unsophisticated work was considered novel in Japan, but it was also apt to be criticized as tasteless. Recently, however, her method for illuminating the beauty of traditional *gasshō-zukuri* farmhouses in Shirakawa-gō has taken on the character of an area-wide glow, as if the entire subject is enveloped in the light of the full moon. In this sense, Ishii Motoko has come home to Japan. (MK)



Ishii Motoko

Born in 1938. A top Japanese illumination designer. Active in the United States, Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia as well as in Japan. Attracted attention in Japan and overseas for her 1989 lighting design for Tokyo Tower. Received awards in 1990 for her Light Fantasy Electricity Pavilion at the International Garden and Greenery Exposition and in 1994 for her Rainbow Bridge lighting design. Will design lighting for the Elizabeth Bridge over the Danube in autumn 2009 to commemorate the 140th year of relations between Japan and Hungary.

ESSAY



Fujiwara Shin'ya

Born in 1944. Author of collections of essays and photographs on subjects including India, Tokyo, and the United States. Received the Kimura Ihei Award for the 1977 *Shōyō yūki* [Memoirs of Wanderings]. Received the Mainichi Art Award in 1982 for *Zen Tōyō kaidō* [All the Eastern Highways]. Author of many other books, including *Tōkyō hyōryū* [Drifting in Tokyo], *Memento mori*, and *Amerika* [America].

Nihon Jōdo **[The Japanese Pure Land]**

By Fujiwara Shin'ya

Tōkyō Shoseki, 2008. 194 x 133 mm. 239 pp. ¥1,700. ISBN 978-4-487-80214-2.

Fujiwara made a sensational debut with his 1972 *Indo hōrō* [Wanderings in India]. Since then his unique style, which combines essays with photographs, has not changed, even when his books are set in Japan. Here he relates his experiences traveling around Shimabara, Amakusa, Yanai, Onomichi, Noto, and Bōsō, among other places, along with personal memories connected to each location, interspersing these with his own photographs. The sites appearing in this book, however, are neither tourist spots nor destinations of natural beauty or historic interest. In this sense Fujiwara's travels are unspectacular visits to various places on a quest to encounter "beauty in obscurity," and he is all too aware that such opportunities are gradually disappearing in Japan. As he puts it, "Finding beautiful scenery is get-

ting as hard as fishing for a needle in the sea." He refuses to give up hope, however, collecting such images as the blue sky over a rural city or a homeless cat—"little things of beauty that no one recognizes"—to let the reader know that "somehow, even in this world, they still exist." From the author's recollection of his first kiss, bestowed by a serving girl at an inn managed by his father, to his memories of calla lilies cultivated with great care by a sick boy confined to a wheelchair, this book is full of unforgettable episodes. (NM)

SOCIETY

Imin kanryū: Nanbei kara kaette kuru Nikkeijin tachi **[Circular Migration: People of Japanese Descent Returning from South America]**

By Sugiyama Haru

Shinchōsha, 2008. 197 x 137 mm. 256 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-10-412102-1.

Legal revisions in 1990 made second- and third-generation Brazilians of Japanese descent, along with their spouses, eligible to claim long-term resident status in Japan. Many Japanese-Brazilians subsequently moved to Japan to work as laborers. While reporting on a murder, the author became aware that these people live in a state of "societal neglect," overlooked by both countries. As economic globalization transformed employment patterns, these people were the very first to be incorporated into the system as "bottom-level laborers." Among them are parents who are unable to ensure that their children receive an adequate education. Many of these children are subjected to bullying, dropping out of school and becoming delinquents.

The author observed repatriated Japanese-Brazilians back in Brazil and found them suffering from isolation. Amid the accumulation of individuals who have been stranded in the gap between two countries, what emerges is a society with no hope. Unlike the descendants of earlier Japanese emigrants, these people, who are unfamiliar with Japanese culture, and their often non-Japanese spouses find it difficult to establish an identity in Japan or Brazil.

Not only foreign workers but also Japanese people are trapped in a social structure where it is hard to make a comeback. This book perceptively confronts us with a 300,000-member community of resident Japanese-Brazilians as a microcosm of a future Japan. (SH)



Sugiyama Haru

Born in 1958. Worked as a magazine editor before becoming a freelance writer. Investigates and writes about child rearing and parent-child issues. Received the Shōgakukan Nonfiction Award for her 2004 book *Negurekuto* [Neglect].



Ōkubo Kazuhiko

Born in 1965. Has a long list of accomplishments as a food consultant, including ensuring the success of a tonkatsu (pork cutlet) chain. Published his first book, *Dare mo iwanakatta in-shokuten seikō* [*The Eating and Drinking Establishment Successes Nobody Talks About*], in 2002, and has since energetically written books and lectured on the restaurant business.

***Sushiya no karakuri* [Sushi Bar Gimmickry]**

By Ōkubo Kazuhiko

Chikuma Shobō, 2008. 174 x 106 mm. 208 pp. ¥700. ISBN 978-4-480-06458-5.

The depletion of marine resources and high fuel costs have been driving fishermen out of the business at an increasing rate, and Japan's sushi restaurants are facing a crisis. In the face of adversity, restaurants in Japan and elsewhere are employing inventive business tactics. In this book Ōkubo, a food industry consultant, gives the inside story on sushi restaurants, from conveyor-belt shops to high-class establishments, explaining their business mechanisms and survival strategies.

Conveyor-belt sushi restaurants employ robots with the skills of true sushi specialists. At these shops professional help is secondary to the manager's ability to assess customer needs. Mass-market restaurants, which usually charge flat fees from ¥100 per serving, procure their ingredients

directly from fish farms and seek to provide a crowd-pleasing performance.

The main differences between high-class sushi restaurants and mass-market establishments are the quality of their tuna and their knowledge of the fish in season. The highly ranked restaurant Yoshitake procures choice ingredients and provides a custom calendar detailing fine distinctions associated with the season or place of origin, presenting sushi as the embodiment of Japanese culture. The author points out that popular sushi restaurants overseas, which defer to the prevailing tastes of the countries where they are located, are now a separate genre from Japanese sushi. Now that some new survival strategies have emerged, more attention should be paid to experimentation by sushi restaurants. (SH)

PSYCHOLOGY

***Saburiminaru inpakuto: Jōdō to senzai ninchi no gendai* [Subliminal Impact: A Modern Era of Emotion and Implicit Cognition]**

By Shimojō Shinsuke

Chikuma Shobō, 2008. 174 x 106 mm. 320 pp. ¥900. ISBN 978-4-480-06460-8.

Why are people subjected to so much stress in contemporary society, supposedly the result of the pursuit of our desires? Perhaps those desires are at odds with what we are truly seeking. The author, a cognitive scientist, employs recent scientific findings to explain the subconscious influence of games, music, commercials, and other phenomena. We don't cry when we feel sad; we feel sad when we cry. We don't choose to watch something because we like it; we come to like it as we find ourselves watching it. The author points out that even though it seems like we decide things by our will, in fact, contemporary people behave according to unnoticed, unconscious emotional approaches.

In the present age we seek the greatest

rewards, but this, as a result, increases our stress. In other words, it is an era when pleasure and suffering exist side by side. Human beings in such an environment are apt to become increasingly "animalistic." But how can one be free from these influences? The author stresses the importance of developing some underlying resistance. "Carefully analyze the overall situation," he writes; "get a good understanding of it, and then forget about it." Envisioning future possibilities involves forgetting—that is, stockpiling explicit knowledge within one's implicit knowledge, so that one is able to "freely traverse and continuously think in" both domains. (SH)



Shimojō Shinsuke

Born in 1955. Professor at the California Institute of Technology. Studies cognitive processes, particularly vision-related processes, using experimental psychology methods. Awarded the Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities in 1999 for *Ishiki to wa nan darō ka* [*What Might Consciousness Be?*]. Other works include *Manazashi no tanjō* [*Birth of a Look*], *Shikaku no bōken* [*The Adventure of Vision*], and *Saburiminaru mindo* [*The Subliminal Mind*].

No. 2: Japanese Political Thought

In the second installment of this series, Professor Karube Tadashi of the University of Tokyo, a specialist in the history of Japanese political thought, provides illuminating commentary on the formation of Japan's modern society and the genealogy of its political theory. He also recommends outstanding works in this field that, it is hoped, will one day be translated into other languages and made available to overseas readers.

Japanese Political Thought from the Eighteenth Century to the Present

The starting point for “modernization” in the field of Japanese political thought, as many readers will be aware, is generally traced to the reception of Western ideas that commenced at around the time of the Meiji Restoration in 1868. To gain a proper understanding of the path of these changes, however, we must first understand the background: namely, the development of thought in the latter half of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868). Needless to say, Japanese thought was not a vacuum into which Western ideas were imported. The Japan that absorbed Western political thought had already, in the Tokugawa era, experienced the development of such intellectual movements as Confucianism, *Yōgaku* (Western studies), and *kokugaku* (native Japanese studies).

The renowned Meiji-era (1868–1912) thinker Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901), for example, is famous for his rigorous criticism of Confucianism and for positioning the Western concept of “civilization” as the cornerstone of modern Japanese thought. Yet it has recently been noted that when it comes to his view of the human and his vision of social order, Fukuzawa's ideas actually have a great deal in common with the Confucian and Buddhist thinking of the premodern era. The English translation of Fukuzawa's 1875 *chef-d'oeuvre*, *Bunmeiron no gairyaku* [trans. *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*], has recently been reissued (Keiōgijuku Daigaku Shuppankai, 2008), and this and his other works need to be reinterpreted from the perspective I have just described. The complexity of the ideohistorical process of transition from the thinking of premodern Japan to Westernization can also be seen in the works of other early Meiji-era thinkers.

Even if one accepts these points, however, it is still true that for Japanese intellectuals, the reception of Western political concepts was indeed an encounter with quite different ways of thinking. The central concepts of the tradition of Western political thought—such as “freedom,” “rights,” and “constitutions”—had, almost without exception, been absent from premodern Japanese thought. The modern Japanese state was the result of an effort to understand and master this foreign system of thought. Of the Japanese studies that have been translated into English, Takii Kazuhiro's *The Meiji Constitution: The Japanese Experience of the West and the Shaping of the Modern State* (Kokusai Bunka Kaikan, 2007) paints an especially dynamic picture of this process.

In the nineteenth century, the main thread in the history of Japanese thought was the encounter with the Occident phrased in terms of differences between the two sides. In the twentieth century, however, it became commonplace

for the world's nations to face the same problems at the same time and for similar changes in thinking to take place simultaneously in the West and Japan. Although it was quite slow compared with the pace of today's globalization, the development of transnational communication in combination with Japan's rapid industrialization and urbanization greatly increased the speed at which new Western trends influenced Japan. That democracy and pacifism became popular and that the feminist and socialist movements flourished in the Taisho era (1912–26) can be interpreted as a legacy of this early globalization.

The years from the Great Depression that began in 1929 up to the end of World War II in 1945 can be seen as a time when nationalistic thinking rose in reaction to the preceding period. Against a backdrop of continuous conflict from the 1931 Manchurian Incident to the Sino-Japanese War beginning in 1937 and World War II, various strains of nationalistic thought raged in Japan during this period. These included the “Japanese spirit” theory based on a traditional view of the state, totalitarian theory imported from the West, and the command and control economics espoused by converted communists.

Consequently, the principal aim of the postwar democratic thought that developed alongside the democratization of the political system after 1945 was not to defend the national interest but, above all, to free individuals from the community and cultivate these atomized individuals into the active agents of democracy. The thought of “postwar democracy” has retained its status as the orthodox doctrine regarding the ideals to be pursued by politics in Japan. The process by which nationalists and realists, on the one hand, and socialists and the “new left,” on the other, leveled their various criticisms against this thinking would set the parameters for postwar political thought until the 1960s.

(Karube Tadashi, professor, School of Legal and Political Studies, University of Tokyo)

Recommended Works

Maruyama Masao kōgi roku, 4–7 (Nihon seiji shisōshi) [The Lectures of Maruyama Masao, Vols. 4–7 (The History of Japanese Political Thought)] By Maruyama Masao

Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1998. 216 x 155 mm. 366 pp. ¥3,600. ISBN 978-4-13-034204-9 (4-13-034204-5).

Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1999. 216 x 155 mm. 344 pp. ¥3,400. ISBN 978-4-13-034205-6 (4-13-034205-3).

Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 2000. 216 x 155 mm. 372 pp. ¥3,600. ISBN 978-4-13-034206-3 (4-13-034206-1).

Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1998. 216 x 155 mm. 374 pp. ¥3,600. ISBN 978-4-13-034207-0 (4-13-034207-X).

In the lectures recorded in this work, Maruyama Masao, one of Japan's key postwar political thinkers, traces the history of political thought in premodern Japan. Although the book was published nearly 40 years ago, it remains attractive as a historical work replete with insights. Those interested in the life and thinking of Maruyama himself might consider my own *Maruyama Masao: Riberarisuto no shōzō* (Iwanami Shoten, 2006) [trans. *Maruyama Masao and the Fate of Liberalism in Twentieth-Century Japan*, Kokusai Bunka Kaikan, 2008].



Higashi Ajia no ōken to shisō [Confucianism and After: Political Thoughts in Early Modern East Asia]

By Watanabe Hiroshi

Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1997. 194 x 136 mm. 294 pp. ¥3,400. ISBN 978-4-13-030113-8 (4-13-030113-6).

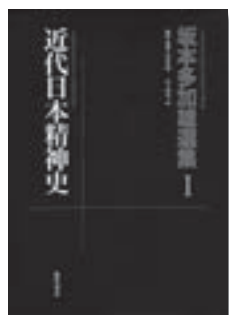
How did the ideas of the Tokugawa period (1603–1868) sow the seeds of modern nationalism and lay the foundations for Japan's reception of Western thought? This masterly work explores this question from an expansive perspective encompassing China and Korea.

Shintei Nihon seiji shisō shi: "Jiyū" no kannen o jiku ni shite [A History of Japanese Political Thought Focusing on the Concept of "Freedom"] (Revised)]

By Miyamura Haruo

Hōsō Daigaku Kyōiku Shinkōkai, 2005. 209 x 149 mm. 339 pp. ¥2,800. ISBN 978-4-595-30521-4 (4-595-30521-4).

This work examines the history of Japanese thought surrounding the core theme of "freedom" during the long period of change from ancient times to the 1880s. Through this examination, the book invites the reader to ponder the essence of freedom philosophically.



Sakamoto Takao senshū I: Kindai Nihon seishin shi [A Selection of Sakamoto Takao's Works, Part I: A History of the Modern Japanese Spirit]

By Sakamoto Takao; edited by Sugihara Yukihiro

Fujiwara Shoten, 2005. 216 x 155 mm. 680 pp. ¥8,400. ISBN 978-4-89434-477-8 (4-89434-477-7).

There are almost no books that succeed in painting a lucid history of Japanese thought in the twentieth century; in fact, this may be the only one. The entire work is infused with the ambition of attempting to analyze the history of political thought from a different perspective to that of mainstream postwar scholars like Maruyama Masao.

Murakami Receives Israeli Prize

Japanese writer Murakami Haruki won the 2009 Jerusalem Prize for the Freedom of the Individual in Society. In his speech delivered at the February 15 award ceremony in Jerusalem, Murakami referred to Israel's attacks on the Palestinian district of Gaza, criticizing the use of military force with comments comparing humans to eggs and stating, "I will always stand on the side of the egg."

In Japan, the author faced opposition from nongovernmental organizations and other groups urging him to refuse the biennial award so as not to appear to support the Israeli government's policies on Palestine. In his speech, Murakami admitted he had wondered whether to go, but decided it was best to do so: "I chose to come here rather than to stay away. I chose to see for myself rather than not to see. I chose to speak to you rather than to say nothing." Likening individual humans to an egg and institutional systems to a wall against which the egg is dashed, he stressed: "Yes, no matter how right the wall may be and how wrong the egg, I will stand with the egg."

On the nature of the wall, he stated: "The wall has a name: It is The System. The System is supposed to protect us, but sometimes it takes on a life of its own, and then it begins to kill us and cause us to kill others—coldly, efficiently, systematically."

Murakami is a popular author in Israel, with several of his works available in Hebrew translation, including *Umibe no Kafuka* [trans. *Kafka on the Shore*] and *Noruuiei no mori* [trans. *Norwegian Wood*].

2009 Hon'ya Prize Announced

The Hon'ya [Bookseller] Prize is awarded each year to a work selected by bookstore clerks across Japan, who vote for the book they found enjoyable or would most want to recommend and sell to their customers. The 2009 winner is Minato Kanae's *Kokuhaku* [Confession], introduced on p. 5 of this issue of *Japanese Book News*. This is the first debut work by an author to receive this award, presented

for the sixth time this year; the Hon'ya Prize is the latest in a string of recognitions for *Kokuhaku*, which ranked highly in a number of best mystery novel lists after its publication in summer 2008.

Upon learning her book had won this prize, Minato expressed her joy: "I feel like my feet are floating around 5 centimeters above the ground. I hope to keep writing books that share with readers the joy of fiction, taking them to worlds that they couldn't ordinarily imagine."

More than 400 bookstore employees select 10 finalists from among all Japanese novels published up to the end of November of the previous year. In the second stage, a group of more than 300 voters rank those finalists to determine the winner. Every Hon'ya Prize recipient to date later became a bestseller.

Environmental Data Published

Since its first publication in 1925, the natural science data compendium *Rika nenpyō* [Chronological Scientific Tables] has gone through 82 editions. Now a volume bringing together data on environmental issues, *Kankyō nenpyō* [Chronological Environmental Tables], has been published separately. The publisher Maruzen describes this new work as a response to requests from readers for more environment-related data in a time when interest in environmental issues is on the rise. *Rika nenpyō* had long contained such data as average temperatures in different regions, atmospheric carbon-dioxide concentrations, and species distributions. However, increases in the volume of data and number of categories over the years made it feasible to publish *Kankyō nenpyō* as an independent volume alongside the older data collection.

The environmental edition has 397 pages, around 40% as many as its scientific cousin. Its 10 sections cover such areas as climate change and global warming, the ozone layer, the terrestrial environment, and industrial and living environments. With numerous maps, illustrations, graphs, and other visual aids, it is ideal for use in middle- and high-school lessons. The text also includes columns penned by

specialists that take up timely issues like the torrential, localized rainstorms thought to be connected to the warming environment and the lively debate on the relationship between CO₂ emissions and global warming, including views that cast doubt on the connection between them.

Compiled by the National Astronomical Observatory of Japan, *Rika nenpyō* is a specialized collection of the latest scientific data in areas that include almanac statistics, astronomy, weather, physics, chemistry, physical geography, biology, and the environment. As a compendium of information from all different scientific fields, it is unlike any other resource in the world, and it is widely used by researchers and students who take it as their starting point for scientific investigations. Similar resources are hard to come by in other countries, and today *Rika nenpyō* is also in use in places like China and the United States, where Japanese researchers have taken their copies and spread the word about the book.

Third Ōe Kenzaburō Prize

The third annual Ōe Kenzaburō Prize, sponsored by publisher Kōdansha, has gone to *Hikari no mandara: Nihon bungakuron* [Mandala of Light: A Theory of Japanese Literature], a collection of critical essays by Andō Reiji. The winning work focuses in particular on *Shisha no sho* [Book of the Dead] by the ethnologist and literary scholar Origuchi Shinobu as it lays out an original perspective on the worldviews of writers like Haniya Yutaka and Edogawa Ranpo. Andō's collection is scheduled to be translated and published in foreign-language editions.

Andō, a former employee of a publishing company, is a literary critic and associate professor at Tama Art University. In 2006 his *Kamigami no tōsō: Origuchi Shinobu ron* [Strife of the Gods: On Origuchi Shinobu] won the Education Minister's Geijutsu Senshō Prize for New Writers.

Academy Awards Impact Book Sales

The Japanese survey firm Oricon has

announced that two books related to *Okuribito* [trans. *Departures*], which won the 2009 Academy Award for best foreign-language film, are enjoying a swell of popularity as a result. The revised, expanded Bungei Shunjū edition of Aoki Shinmon's *Nōkanfu nikki* [trans. *Coffinman: The Journal of a Buddhist Mortician*], which inspired the film, was out of the top 100 bestsellers before the Oscar was announced, but rapidly shot up the charts afterward. Also enjoying booming sales is *Okuribito* (Shōgakukan), the official film novelization by Momose Shinobu.

Tsumiki no ie [trans. *La Maison en Petits Cubes*], which won the Oscar for best animated short, is also leading to increased sales for the picture book edition (Hakusensha), drawn by Katō Kunio, who directed the short, and written by Hirata Ken'ya. This book shot into the top 10 list of bestsellers after the Academy Awards were announced.

The movie *Okuribito* tells the story of a cellist who takes on a new job as a person who dresses a dead body for display in its coffin. An affirmation of the importance of family ties, the film was well received around the world, winning the top prize for domestic films at the Mainichi Film Awards and the grand prix at the Montreal World Film Festival. The 12-minute animated *Tsumiki no ie*, meanwhile, depicts an elderly man who lives alone in a house that is gradually sinking beneath the rising waters. It also won the top prize at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival, held in France.

World Heritage Status for Fuji

As part of efforts to get Mt. Fuji, a globally recognized symbol of Japan, registered as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2012, Shōgakukan has published *Fujisan: Shinkō to geijutsu no minamoto* [Mt. Fuji: The Well-spring of Our Faith and Arts], a collection of information on the celebrated peak aimed at sharing a deeper understanding of Mt. Fuji with people in Japan and abroad.

The book was produced by the governments of Yamanashi and Shizuoka Prefectures and the National

Council on Mt. Fuji World Heritage, an NPO formed to promote the UNESCO bid. It is filled with beautiful photographs and illustrations and takes a multifaceted approach to its subject matter, covering the history, nature, and cultural aspects of the peak. A goal of the publication is to spread awareness of Mt. Fuji as not just a Japanese treasure but a site of value to the entire world. The book, which will be submitted to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee as part of the official research materials accompanying the bid, is a bilingual text in both Japanese and English.

Natsume Sōseki Report Found

While studying in England, the writer Natsume Sōseki filed several reports with the Japanese minister of education. A copy of one of these reports that had been undiscovered to date has been found in the collection of Kumamoto University's Gokō Memorial Museum. Apparently the first report he sent back to Japan, it contains such observations as: "Prices are high, making it truly difficult to live here. I feel impoverished on my academic stipend of £15." It appears to back up the comments Sōseki included in the preface of his *Bungakuron* [trans. in *Theory of Literature and Other Critical Writings*] about the hardship he experienced during his time in London.

Sōseki left for England in October 1900, when he was a professor at the Fifth Higher School (now Kumamoto University), traveling there as the first overseas student sponsored by the education ministry; he returned to Japan in January 1903. Although he was required to report to the minister each January and July in exchange for the funding to cover his studies, only two of his reports have come to light so far.

The new find is his report dated January 31, 1901, just three months after his arrival. Murata Yumi, a part-time instructor at Kyushu Lutheran College, made the discovery. The report is written on a single sheet of B4-size paper. In it Sōseki writes that he has stopped attending lectures in English literature at University College London and started studying under the Shakespeare scholar William Craig:

"Lectures at the university," notes the Japanese writer, "are not worth paying money to hear."

2009 Tokyo International Book Fair

This year's Tokyo International Book Fair will be held on July 9–12. Last year's show saw more than 60,000 visitors come to see offerings by 763 exhibitors from 31 countries. The fair will take place at the Tokyo Big Sight exhibition center in the Ariake waterfront district. For more information, see <<http://www.bookfair.jp>>.

Announcement

International Book Fairs

New publications introduced in recent issues of *Japanese Book News* will be exhibited at the Japan Foundation/PACE booth at international book fairs held in Belgrade, Serbia (Oct. 2009); Frankfurt, Germany (Oct. 14–18, 2009); Moscow, Russia (Dec. 2–6, 2009); Doha, Qatar (Dec. 2009 to Jan. 2010); New Delhi, India (Jan. 2010); Havana, Cuba (Feb. 12–22, 2010); Vilnius, Lithuania (Feb. 2010); Muscat, Oman (Feb. to Mar. 2010); and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (Feb. to Mar. 2010). When not specified above, exact dates are to be announced.

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Rescuing Poetry from the Pedants

No figure has loomed so large in Japanese poetry over the past 60 years as Tanikawa Shuntarō. He offers his readers an urbane feast of amusement, discovery, and philosophy. Though simple, his poems touch people on levels much deeper than mere words can express.

Moving away from the traditional haiku and tanka, Japan's best-loved living poet has experimented with free verse, looking for new meters and rhythms. Providing great variety in form and subject, Tanikawa has drawn a wider readership to Japan's contemporary poetry, which has often been obscure or excessively self-referential.

"For me, readers are everything, so I'm always searching for every possible trick to take them with me," asserts Tanikawa. "Modern poetry lacks interaction with others, which I don't think is right."

This reader-friendly approach has been consistent throughout his career, which began in 1949, when he was 18. Tanikawa quickly became a leading figure in Japanese poetry, winning every significant Japanese literary prize and seeing his work translated into nearly 20 languages. Now 77, Tanikawa is still captivating the hearts and minds of readers around the world.

Making poetry more accessible is Tanikawa's ambition. This drive initially stemmed from economic necessity. After refusing to go to college and realizing that he did not fit into Japan's corporate culture, he settled on writing as the means to support himself. He accepted all kinds of work, writing lyrics for the theme song to *Tetsuwan Atomu* [trans. *Astro Boy*], Japan's first animated TV series, anthems for 140 schools, texts for picture books, and scripts for cinema, radio, and TV, in addition to pure poetry.

No matter what he writes, this prodigious poet avoids repetition. He tirelessly seeks out new forms, themes, and ways to better communicate with the public. His poems are usually composed in short lines, but he also juggles with sonnets, prose poems, and countless other inventive forms featuring a broad range of voices. This adventurous approach has helped him overturn certain stereotypical views of poetry as learned, esoteric, and humorless.

Tanikawa produces his share of inspirational and contemplative poems, but he puts his humor on display in fun, upbeat word-play songs that stress an aural dimension and jocular poems that appear nonsensical at first but manage to be meaningful. His work is not derivative of Western styles, but Tanikawa admits to having been influenced somewhat by Mother Goose rhymes and the comic strip *Peanuts*, which he translated into Japanese for many years. "From Mother Goose I borrowed the idea of bringing crime stories into nursery rhymes and creating accumulative rhymes in Japanese," he says.

Another Western practice he has embraced is the poetry reading. He began his own readings after hearing poets from around the globe reciting at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., in 1970. Just like Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Gary Snyder, who makes eye contact with the audience while reading, Tanikawa says he wishes to "hand his poems with his voice" to the listeners.

Today, Tanikawa tours with his son, who composes music and accompanies him on the piano. Many artists, including his close friend Takemitsu Tōru, have turned Tanikawa's verses into melodies, but he divulges that his son's tunes blend most comfortably with his verse. For a poet who "may live without poetry, but cannot live without music," these programs present a perfect match of poetry and music, side by side. On stage, the father and son always play it by ear to amplify the audience's satisfaction.

Tanikawa is a rare poet who bridges the gap between popular appeal and academic clout. Unlike pedantic, isolated poets, he welcomes connections. "As I sit alone in front of my computer to type and polish my verses, I get the urge to go out and play with people," he says.

He receives a steady stream of requests to collaborate with artists in other genres. Poems he was asked to write for pictures drawn by children are soon to be published; the film *Yāchaika* [trans. *Yah Chayka!*], which he co-scripted and -directed, is now playing in theaters across Japan after its screening at the 2008 London Film Festival; and his translation of Bruno Munari's picture book *The Circus in the Mist* and a children's book featuring his poems on death will soon hit bookstore shelves.

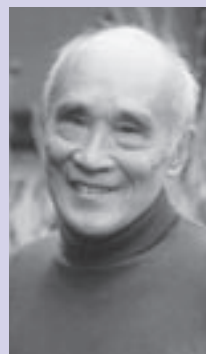
Tanikawa is quite open to new methods to promote poetry to the mass market. He states, however, that he remains devoted to writing poetry in the traditional way, with printed words and line breaks, and to publishing in magazines before releasing anthologies.

"Shibafu" [trans. "Grass" in *Shuntaro Tanikawa: Selected Poems* by William I. Elliott and Kawamura Kazuo] is one of his favorites among his own creations. Tanikawa confesses that he may hold the world emerging here within him forever:

So, coming one day
from somewhere,
suddenly I was standing on the grass;
and because my cellular memory signalled
unfinished business
I have a human shape,
And have even talked about happiness.

As long as Tanikawa Shuntarō continues to jog his own cellular memory, his poetry is certain to remain vibrant.

(Kawakatsu Miki, freelance writer)



Tanikawa Shuntarō

Born in 1931. Japan's most popular living poet, he is also a dramatist, essayist, and translator. Frequently named as a potential candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature. Received the 1988 American Book Award for *Floating the River in Melancholy*, the translation of his *Merankori no kawakudari*. Nominated for the 2008 Hans Christian Anderson Award for his contributions to children's literature. Has read his work in cities throughout the Asia-Pacific, North and South America, the Middle East, Russia, and Europe.