

# JAPANESE BOOK NEWS

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# A Dialogue with the Japanese People

## —The Life and Work of Inoue Hisashi—

Roger Pulvers

“One person can do a little. Two can do a little more. Three people together can do even more for others.”

Inoue Hisashi made this simple statement on Japanese television on October 7, 2004, from Bologna, Italy, a city with a radical political tradition that had fascinated him for thirty years. To my mind, it symbolizes his motivation for his writing and his faith in the goodness of human nature. Inoue, Japan’s most brilliant and popular modern playwright, was, above all, a humanist.

Where did his inspiration come from?

“I will never get out of my mind,” he told me back in the mid-1970s, “the suffering of the people of Tōhoku who streamed into Tokyo for many decades before and after the war looking for work, uprooted and having to scrounge around for sustenance.”

The primary theme running through his writing is the plight of the weak and their struggle to keep their head above water in a heartless society. He never let his gaze slip from society’s dispossessed. He strove to give underdogs the benefit of the doubt and the tools to rectify their helpless circumstances.

“I want to show people who have little power the way to use their ingenuity in order to make their presence felt, so that they may gain some advantage in their misery,” he said to me.

It is precisely these humanistic themes that run through his more than sixty plays and forty novels. In addition to these, he published in excess of fifty books of essays and miscellany, virtually all of them permeated by a scholarly approach to their subject.

One more personal reminiscence: In the early 1980s, while working as literary editor at the *Mainichi Daily News*, I decided to translate and serialize his historical novel on the life of sixteenth-century Portuguese missionary Luis Frois, *Waga tomo Furoisu* [trans. *My Friend Frois*]. (The translation was subsequently published by Inoue’s theater company, Komatsuza.) This novel, needless to say, includes many references to the names of ships and the like, all of which were rendered in katakana in the Japanese text. It was long before the era of the Internet when the original spellings of these things could be readily looked up.

“I’m having trouble with the historical references,” I said to Inoue on the phone. “Could you send me a few of the books or whatever you used for research?”

“Sure. I’ll get them out to you by courier,” he replied.

A few days later a huge box of books was delivered to my home. Every volume had scores of lines highlighted. I phoned him again.

“I received the books, and thank you so much. But, my

God, did you really do such prodigious research for the Frois novel?”

“Well,” he said, “I sent you only about one-third of what I used. Want the rest, too?”

“No, no. It’s enough. Thank you!”

Inoue, who loved books, established a library called Chihitsudō, or “Late Writer’s Hall,” in his hometown, providing a whopping 100,000 volumes for its collection. Inoue was notorious for keeping directors, actors, and publishers waiting for his scripts and manuscripts (hence, “late”), due to the fact that he delved deeply into minute historical detail for every one of his works, and was generally unable to deliver on time. He spent most days at home in his study poring over books, often not going out of the house for weeks. He was essentially a shy and very reserved man. He did not like partying and had disdain for Japanese men who easily became inebriated and lost their inhibitions. (This disdain stemmed, in part, from his aversion to the behavior of his stepfather, who by his account became crude and violent when he drank.)

Despite his scrupulous attention to detail—especially in the kind of language a particular character in a particular era or setting would use—Inoue never lost sight of the big picture. And the big picture for him was his dialogue with the Japanese people over their history, culture, and future.

In his plays he took up the lives of famous Japanese people, from writers as disparate in temperament and style as Matsuo Bashō, Higuchi Ichiyō, Natsume Sōseki, Miyazawa Kenji, and Dazai Osamu to generals (Nogi Maresuke) and monks (Dōgen). These are warts-and-all portraits. Inoue was intrigued not by those elements in their personalities that set them apart from ordinary people, but rather those that bind them to the commonplace. These characters, with their quirks and foibles, resonated with audiences, forming a human-based—as opposed to a conceptual, sociological, or ideological—notion of what it means to be Japanese in our day and age.

This character-centered humanist approach set Inoue apart from most of his contemporaries, such as Terayama Shūji and Kara Jūrō. The moment I saw his play *Dōgen no bōken* [The Adventures of Dōgen] in 1971, I was attracted to his ingenious use of language, his cutting humor, and his radically critical take on the narrow orthodoxies of Japanese culture. And yet, Inoue was somehow left out of critical discussions about the revolution that Japanese theater had undergone in the 1960s. Because his dramaturgy was ostensibly less iconoclastic than that of the playwrights mentioned above and because he was, thanks in large part to the soft humor in his works, reach-

ing wide audiences, he was not easy to categorize as an “underground” playwright.

“You are an amazing humorist,” I said to him when I first met him in December 1974.

“Thank you. But that’s not such a good thing in Japan. Japanese critics prefer very serious writers. They look down on humor.”

The critics long failed to see that lurking behind Inoue’s wonderful wordplay and the clever situation-comedy-like skits within his plays was a slyly hidden and sharply honed blade aimed straight at the heart of ruthless authority. Ironically, now that he is gone, many people, looking over his entire body of work, have begun to see just how deftly he wielded his Juvenalian whip. Humor to Inoue was satire; satire, a weapon in the hands of the weak.

Even the villains in his plays are treated with the psychological respect he feels they deserve as fully drawn characters. One of his favorite novels was Charles Dickens’ *David Copperfield*. He shared with Dickens the astute inner depiction of evil, not only in its effects but also in its causes.

Inoue Hisashi was born on November 17, 1934, in the small town of Komatsu, now Kawanishi, in Yamagata Prefecture. His father, who aspired to be a writer, died when he was five.

“The only memory I have of my father,” he told me, “was of him carrying me on his back as we went into the subway at Ueno on a trip to Tokyo.”

His mother sent him off to board in Sendai at a school run by the Catholic order of the De La Salle Brothers. From there, armed with a recommendation from the brothers, he entered Sophia University in Tokyo. But he then was far from the studious person he turned out to be, spending more time—and learning more?—at the Furan-suzo, the vaudeville France Theater in Asakusa, where he cut his teeth on writing dialogue for the actors. The trendy areas of Shibuya, where Terayama had set up his Tenjō Sajiki Theater, and Shinjuku, where Kara Jūrō was pitching his red tent, were the seminaries of the new theater. But for Inoue, Asakusa—with its *shitamachi*, or low-city, culture—was home ground. It was also the area of the city where many of the uprooted of Tōhoku had drifted to and remained.

His initial popularity came from being co-author of scripts on the NHK children’s television show *Hyokkori Hyōtanjima*, set on an island of the same name, which ran from 1964 to 1969. In 1969 Teatro Echo mounted a production of his first play, *Nihonjin no heso* [The Belly Button of the Japanese]. This was a comedy with music and songs, a genre that dominated his works for the stage from then on.

His early radio work must be noted, too. In 1964, NHK produced his play about a small region in Tōhoku called Kirikiri that declares independence from Japan, *Kirikiri dokuritsusu* [Kirikiri Goes Independent]. Seventeen years later, in 1981, he published this as a novel that quickly became a bestseller. Again we can see in this book Inoue’s approach to satire. The residents of Kirikiri speak their thick version of the Tōhoku dialect. This novel is an attack on the centralized culture of Tokyo imposed on people all around Japan. It is Inoue’s bittersweet revenge

struck in the name of all of those poverty-stricken people compelled to leave their Tōhoku home in search of a decent living in the nation’s capital.

In the 1990s, Inoue began to turn his vision in the direction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the introduction to the published version of his play *Chichi to kuraseba* [trans. *The Face of Jizo*], he wrote:

“Hiroshima. Nagasaki. When these two are mentioned, the following opinion is increasingly heard. ‘It’s wrong to keep acting as if the Japanese were victims. The Japanese were the victimizers at the time in what they did in Asia.’ The second sentence is certainly on the mark. The Japanese were the perpetrators of wrong throughout Asia. But as for the first sentence, I remain adamant that this is not the case. This is because I believe that those two atomic bombs were dropped not only on the Japanese but on all humankind.”

With this statement, he turns the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki into the tragedy of Japan, transforming that, in turn, into a tragedy for all humankind.

In the months before he died on April 9, 2010, he was working on a play set in Okinawa. He said, “We Japanese must come to terms with what happened in Okinawa during the war and what Okinawa represents for us today.”

I saw him for the last time on October 3, 2009, at the opening of *Kumikyoku gyakusatsu* [Suite Slaughter], his play about the life and death of the proletarian writer Kobayashi Takiji.

“You look great,” I said.

“Really? I’m falling apart at the seams. Who knows, Roger, maybe I’ll have another ten years, maybe more.”

As it turned out, a couple of weeks later he was diagnosed with the lung cancer that killed him six months later.

There is an expression in Japanese about just such a person—*yonin o motte kaegatai*, which means: There will not be another like him.

The voice for reason, peace, and hope that he symbolized will project—if I may use a word from the stage—far beyond the stage. If it manages to cross over the oceans and to be heard by people in other countries, then my dear, gentle friend Inoue Hisashi will come to represent the generous, open-minded, kindhearted, and peaceful face of this country.

What more could be asked of any writer?



Roger Pulvers

Born in 1944. An American-born Australian author, playwright, theater director, and translator living in Japan. He has published 40 books in Japanese and English and, in 2008, was the recipient of the Miyazawa Kenji Prize. In 2009 he was awarded the Best Script Prize at the Tehran International Film Festival for *Ashita e no yuigon* [trans. *Best Wishes for Tomorrow*].

## FICTION



Asai Ryō

Born in 1989. Currently attends Waseda University. Won the 2009 Shōsetsu Subaru Prize for New Writers for this novel, his debut as a writer.

## ***Kirishima, bukatsu yamerutte yo*** **[Kirishima's Leaving the Volleyball Club]**

By Asai Ryō

Shūeisha, 2010. 194 x 135 mm. 208 pp. ¥1,200. ISBN 978-4-08-771335-0.

When the volleyball club's Kirishima—"the captain we can count on"—suddenly retires from club activities, it has a small but palpable ripple effect on the lives of five other students at a provincial high school. "Club activities" is the key phrase that links five members of as many different clubs—baseball, volleyball, brass band, girls' softball, and film—in a variety of ways.

Readers will first of all be drawn in by the novel's rhythm and language; they will also appreciate the vivid imagery conjured by its numerous metaphors. While writing that contains many metaphorical expressions can be difficult to read if poorly rendered, in this work they communicate with brilliant clarity the atmosphere of the world of 17-year-old high school students and their unstable

emotions. The energetic flow of language has the same effect as listening to a J-pop tune; catching the rhythm of this groovy melody brings lifelike depictions of the young characters into sharp focus.

With the depiction of each character's frustrations and joys, a realistic portrayal of a group of students takes shape in bold, three-dimensional relief thanks to the author's clever compositions. Such is the degree of perfection that it is hard to believe this is the debut novel of a twenty-year-old writer. This work is a masterpiece among novels of adolescence. (MT)

## ***Shinran*** **[Shinran]**

By Itsuki Hiroyuki

Vol. 1: Kōdansha, 2010. 194 x 135 mm. 311 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-06-291000-2.

Vol. 2: Kōdansha, 2010. 194 x 135 mm. 319 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-06-291001-9.

This entertaining novel portrays the first half of the life of Shinran (1173–1262), the founder of the Jōdo Shinshū sect of Buddhism. It progresses through his childhood and adolescence to the point at which he assumed the name Shinran and became independent.

The story is also based on the author's personal postwar repatriation experience: namely, the anguish of whether or not the wicked—"those who live by shoving others aside"—can be forgiven. The author's shock at encountering Shinran's philosophy, which holds that forgiveness is possible even for such people, becomes the motif of this work. In this sense, the novel can also be described as an ideological story dressed as entertainment.

The author also considers Japan's current

malaise—the seemingly inescapable recession and suicides of upwards of 30,000 people each year—as paralleling conditions during the time spanning the end of the Heian (794–1185) and early Kamakura period (1185–1333), when Shinran lived. In this sense, the work is a modern novel constructed with historical material.

Shinran learns to relate to villainous characters, and a number of enchanting women materialize to place him at the mercy of his earthly desires. In contrast to Shinran's preaching that "all the wicked can be saved," an antagonist appears in the form of Fushimi Heishirō, an evildoer who believes that all such people are doomed. Complex religious dogma is vividly explicated via the characters appearing throughout the novel. (MK)



Itsuki Hiroyuki

Born in 1932. After studying at Waseda University, worked in jobs including editor and investigative reporter. Won the 1967 Naoki Prize for Aozameta uma o miyo [See the Spooked Horse]. Won the 1976 Yoshikawa Eiji Prize for Literature for Seishun no mon: Chikuhō hen [The Gate of Youth: Chikuhō] and other works. Won the 2002 Kikuchi Kan Award for work as a writer garnering a wide range of readers over many years.





Ubukata Tow

*Born in 1977. Won the first Kadokawa Shoten Sneaker Award in 1996 for Kuroi kisetsu [The Black Season] as a university student. Won the 2003 Nihon SF Taishō Award for Marudukku sukuranburu [Mardock Scramble]. Won the 2010 Hon'ya [Bookseller] Prize and the Yoshikawa Eiji New Writers Award for this work.*

## **Tenchi meisatsu** **[Discerning the Movement of the Universe]**

**By Ubukata Tow**

Kadokawa Shoten, 2009. 194 x 136 mm. 477 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-04-874013-5.

This work received the 2010 Hon'ya [Bookseller] Prize, an award created seven years ago. In contrast to the more established literary prizes, winning titles are voted for by bookstore employees throughout Japan as the books they have recommended most to customers. They garner attention for reflecting reader tastes, and every work to receive the award has achieved bestseller status.

Ubukata is a hit author of the “light novels” hugely popular among readers in their teens and twenties. Like many authors in this genre, his writing also appears in video games, comics, and a wide range of other mediums. This is his first work for a general audience. Protagonist Shibukawa Harumi led the project to create a Japanese version of the lunar calendar in the early Edo period (1603–1868).

The story, while depicting the turbulence of his life, is also a refreshing coming-of-age tale about a placid, easygoing youth.

While Shibukawa's trials include power struggles within the shogunate and maneuvering with the imperial court, he always proceeds undaunted, with a positive frame of mind. Though this is due in part to his serene and carefree nature, no doubt it is also a consequence of his constant study of the grand and unshakable principles of fields like astrology, arithmetic, and the Japanese game of go. As a result, the book remains stimulating from start to finish. Dashing swordplay and other scenes common to historical dramas are absent; nonetheless, the novel's exhilarating narrative is certain to be enjoyed by readers. (MT)

## **Jūjika** **[Cross]**

**By Shigematsu Kiyoshi**

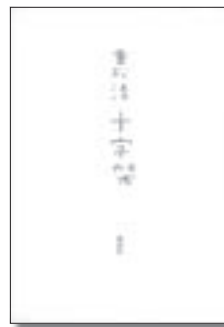
Kōdansha, 2009. 194 x 138 mm. 319 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-06-215939-5.

A bullied junior high school student nicknamed Fujishun takes his own life. In his suicide note he thanks one classmate, apologizes to another, and names two of his tormentors. The story concerns the lives and thoughts of these four students in the twenty years following the incident, as narrated by the unnamed boy unexpectedly thanked in the victim's note for being a “true friend.”

The night before his death, Fujishun's romantic overtures are rejected by Nakagawa. In his final note he writes, “I'm sorry to have troubled you.” Her burden, even more terrible than the narrator's, results in a period of wretched torment. Nor is there any peace for the boys who perpetrated the bullying. The victim's parents ask the narrator accusingly why, if he was a “true friend,” did he not come

to his aid, even as they blame themselves still more for failing to realize what was happening.

The narrator's involvement with two individuals—a magazine journalist who vilified the school and his classmates and a female reporter from a local newspaper who followed the story of the victim's family—makes him begin to realize the consequences wrought by suicide. Twenty years later he has a child of his own. He comes to the conclusion that “if forgetting is the road to recovery, then I'd rather not forget.” The “cross” is a burden destined for those left behind. (SH)



Shigematsu Kiyoshi

*Born in 1963. Began writing after working for a publishing company. Became an author with Bifora ran [Before Run] in 1991. In 1999 won the Tsubota Jōji Literary Prize for Naifu [Knife] and the Yamamoto Shūgorō Prize for Eiji. Won the 2000 Naoki Prize for Bitamin F [Vitamin F]. His many other works include Tonbi [Kite], reviewed in JBN No. 60. (See “In Their Own Words,” JBN No. 42.)*



Shimamoto Rio

Born in 1983. Was honored as runner-up for the 2001 Gunzō Prize for New Writers for *Shiruetto* [Silhouette]. Won the 2003 Noma Literary Prize for New Writers for *Ritoru bai ritoru* [Little by Little]. Nominated for the Akutagawa Prize in 2004 for *Umareru mori* [The Birth-giving Forest] and in 2006 for *Ōkina kuma ga kurumae ni oyasumi* [Sleep Before the Big Bear Comes]. Other works include *Anata no kokyū ga tomaru made* [Until Your Breathing Stops] (see JBN No. 56).

## *Mawatasō no jūintachi* [The Residents of Mawatasō]

By Shimamoto Rio

Bungei Shunjū, 2010. 194 x 136 mm. 279 pp. ¥1,333. ISBN 978-4-16-328940-3.

The setting for this work is Mawatasō, a two-story wooden boarding house that time appears to have forgotten. At first glance, daily life at this room-and-board dwelling seems relaxed and idyllic. Closer inspection, however, reveals the dark shadows of rape, domestic violence, failed romance, and other relationship troubles clouding each of the residents' pasts. Bearing these scars, the characters seek wholeheartedly to form connections with others.

Some have been successful at forming positive relationships; others have not. However, they all live with the realization that it is best to shoulder the burden of their scars. Each chapter is told by a different character in a different style, thereby providing a glimpse of that person's closeted past and what becomes of

the individual's fading hope of a romantic happy ending.

The author has previously written about love from a variety of different angles, for example in *Ritoru bai ritoru* [Little by Little], a portrayal of the awkward romance between two young people that she published at age 20, and *Naratāju* [Narratage], the story of a man and woman whose affection for one another ends up hurting them both. The author's youth makes her all the more able to depict such worlds effectively. This work mixes humor with a delicate portrayal of the distance between two people, and it is both an entertaining novel and a love story of the highest caliber. It is no exaggeration to say that it represents the breaking of new ground for this romantic novelist. (MT)

## 1Q84 (Book 3)

By Murakami Haruki

Shinchōsha, 2010. 198 x 139 mm. 607 pp. ¥1,900. ISBN 978-4-10-353425-9.

This is the long-awaited follow-up installment in the work that became a record-breaking bestseller immediately after hitting bookstore shelves in May 2009. The previous volume finished at a climax, with heroine Aomame having placed the barrel of a gun in her mouth in a bid to commit suicide. The sequel opens with the revelation that she did not pull the trigger, and proceeds to reveal new developments in the story of how Aomame and male protagonist Tengo find themselves thrown into the year 1Q84 (a play on the Japanese homophony between the letter Q and *kyū*, or "nine," to suggest "1984"), a bizarre parallel universe in which two moons appear in the night sky.

The author worked a multitude of conundrums into the first two books: Is it acceptable for a man who committed

senseless violence against women to be killed in revenge? Why do people join cults? Is there any respite for children abused by their parents? Just what is the world of 1Q84? And in Book 3, he presents a new puzzle: conception without sex. Answering none of these questions, the author wages a kind of magnificent battle of retreat as he concludes his work by transitioning to a boy-meets-girl love story. There is now a passionate debate underway among readers in Japan as to whether or not the ending provided a satisfactory conclusion and is, in fact, truly the end of the story. (NM)



Murakami Haruki

Born in 1949. Won the 1979 Gunzō Prize for New Writers for his debut work *Kaze no uta o kike* [trans. Hear the Wind Sing]. Won the 1982 Noma Literary Prize for New Writers for *Hitsuji o meguru bōken* [trans. A Wild Sheep Chase] and the 1985 Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize for *Sekai no owari to hādo boirudo wandārando* [trans. Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World]. His *Noruei no mori* [trans. Norwegian Wood] (1987) was a huge bestseller. *1Q84*, which was published last year, has become a social phenomenon (see JBN Nos. 62 and 63).



Murayama Yuka

Born in 1964. Won the 2003 Naoki Prize for *Hoshiboshi no fune* [Voyage Through Stars]. Won three literary awards in 2009, the Shibata Renzaburō Award, the Shimase Romantic Literature Prize, and the Chūō Kōron Literary Prize for *Daburu fantajī* [Double Fantasy].

## ***Harukanaru mizu no oto* [The Sound of Distant Water]**

By Murayama Yuka

Shūeisha, 2009. 195 x 136 mm. 343 pp. ¥1,500. ISBN 978-4-08-771327-5.

This is the latest work from an author who got her start writing novels for young adults. In 2003 Murayama won the Naoki Prize, bringing her recognition as a mainstream “entertainment” novelist. In 2009 she hit her stride, winning three different literary prizes for *Daburu fantajī* [Double Fantasy]—the Shibata Renzaburō Award, the Shimase Romantic Literature Prize, and the Chūō Kōron Literary Prize—increasing her popularity even further.

“If I die, I hope you’ll scatter my ashes in the Sahara.” To honor her younger brother’s final request, protagonist Hisako, an employee at a travel agency in Paris, sets out for Morocco. Joining her are her brother’s friends Kōsuke and Yui and a wealthy, middle-aged gay Frenchman. Monologues from the four charac-

ters intermingle with the voices of their guide, Sayid, and Hisako’s dead brother, as the grudges held by each are brought to the surface.

*Daburu fantajī* garnered attention for its overpowering depictions of carnality and its profound love story. Here, however, the author turns her attention to a delicate portrayal of the subtleties of the human psyche. As the characters influence one another with their loud idiosyncrasies, the novel builds toward a beautiful finale in which each catches hold of a certain “something.” The author is at her very finest in this masterful tale of journeying toward personal discovery. (MT)

## **BIOGRAPHY**

### ***Itō Hirobumi: Kindai Nihon o tsukutta otoko* [Itō Hirobumi: The Man Who Created Modern Japan]**

By Itō Yukio

Kōdansha, 2009. 194 x 138 mm. 607 pp. ¥2,800. ISBN 978-4-06-215909-8.

This is an authentic biography of the life of Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909). Itō was the institutor of Japan’s Meiji Constitution, the country’s first prime minister, and the man who arguably embodied the Meiji government.

Itō has already been the subject of much research, but few biographies approach him head-on. This is the fault of misplaced attacks on his character. Specifically, he is criticized for the Meiji Constitution, which held the emperor to be supreme and was the main culprit for Japan’s being pulled into war. He is thus charged with oppressing the movement for democracy. He is also scorned as a womanizing power monger.

The author attempts to counter these assertions boldly in three ways. The first is by carrying out an exhaustive critique of

historical materials; the second is by penning an authentic account of his subject. Lastly, he positions Meiji Japan as part of the process of the nation’s democratization.

Succinctly put, the author holds Itō’s “constitution politics,” or constitutionalism, to be the spirit of the Meiji government. In this sense, he was both a political leader who sought to build the country into a democracy and, in the words of the author, a “hero of modern Japan” for attempting to accomplish “a job more difficult than that of the first generation of the Meiji Restoration.”

According to the author, Itō did not study the constitutions of European countries in a bid to “accumulate power”; rather, he clearly recognized that a constitution would place a limit on the emperor’s authority. (MK)



Itō Yukio

Born in 1952. Currently a professor at the Graduate School of Law, Kyoto University, specializing in the political and diplomatic history of modern Japan. Among his many works are *Meiji Tennō* [The Meiji Emperor] and *Yamagata Aritomo*.

## ESSAY



Ishiguro Hiroshi

*Born in 1963. Currently a professor at the Graduate School of Engineering Science, Osaka University, specializing in intelligent robotics. He is a leading researcher on humanoid robots. Other works include Andoroido saiensu [Android Science].*

## ***Robotto to wa nani ka: Hito no kokoro o utsusu kagami*** [What Is a Robot? A Mirror That Reflects People's Hearts]

**By Ishiguro Hiroshi**

Kōdansha, 2009. 173 x 105 mm. 240 pp. ¥740. ISBN 978-4-06-288023-7.

“In an environment where humans are present, the robot will interact with them. This is where the possibilities lie for a new robot, unlike conventional factory robots.” So says author Ishiguro Hiroshi, a scientist who has gained international fame for creating the Geminoid, a robot with a realistic human appearance. This book is a scientific essay setting out Ishiguro’s school of thought on robots.

Ishiguro focuses on the machines’ outward appearance, an area that has been ignored in robot research to date. It is this interest that has spurred him to create robots that are identical to himself or his daughter. Through work that includes creating images and a plaster model of his own brain, he is investigating the extent to

which humans can judge others on the basis of outward appearances. Ishiguro wonders uncomfortably whether his own Geminoid resembles him, but his colleagues say it is a complete likeness. Other people see things in you that you do not—as Ishiguro writes, “you may know less about yourself than others do.”

The theater director Hirata Oriza has used Ishiguro’s robots on the stage. He says that robots can express the inner being simply by moving in such a way that they appear to have one. A robot is a “mirror that reflects human beings,” and so searching for the human in robots has the same significance as the quest to comprehend human beings themselves. (SH)

## ***Boku wa bōsan*** [I Am a Priest]

**By Shirakawa Missei**

Mishimasha, 2010. 188 x 129 mm. 288 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-903908-16-8.

In this book the author, who became the head of a Buddhist temple at the age of 24, charts his work as a priest. In a light style interwoven with the words of the Buddha and Kōbō Daishi (774–835), Shirakawa recounts his religious training, the day his head was shaved, his first funeral and memorial service, and his nervousness while reciting sutras in front of elderly people.

When he first set out to officiate at a funeral and at other times of strain, he was encouraged by a voice from inside that said, “There is no one else. You have to do this.” Readers unfamiliar with the everyday life of priests may be surprised to learn that even people who have taken holy orders get nervous.

Shirakawa says he wrote this book to prompt today’s younger generation to

question the significance of religious faith. As befits an author who once attended advertising school, his writing has a straightforward, frank style that reaches right to the reader’s heart. The author sees religious faith as “something you can choose, something where you can come or go as you please, something that is not closed off and stuffy.” This view of religion is probably just right for the Japanese, who will visit Shinto shrines or Buddhist temples and take part in Buddhist rites while claiming to be areligious.

Religion has always focused on what people have in common, and is a sort of “preservation device” through which we inherit something valid that is neither scholarship nor ideology. This seems to be the passage in which one can see the author’s central thrust. (SH)



Shirakawa Missei

*Born in 1977. Worked in a bookstore after graduating from Koyasan University’s Department of Esoteric Buddhism, and at the age of 24 became chief priest of Eifukuji, the fifty-seventh temple of the 88 holy places of Shikoku.*





#### Hidaka Toshitaka

Born in 1930. One of Japan's pioneering ethologists. The first president of the Japan Ethological Society, which was founded in 1982. Among his numerous works is *Chō wa naze tobu ka* [trans. *Why Do Butterflies Fly?*], which won the Mainichi Publishing Culture Award in 1976. Died of lung cancer in 2009.

## ***Sekai o konna fū ni mite goran*** **[Try Looking at the World This Way]**

By Hidaka Toshitaka

Shūeisha, 2010. 195 x 136 mm. 167 pp. ¥1,300. ISBN 978-4-08-781436-1.

This book is a collection of essays illuminating the spirit of scholarship of an ethologist who passed away in the autumn of 2009 at the age of 79, as well as transcripts of his lectures. His essence is particularly evident in the lecture titled “Imagination, Illusion, and Apparition” — a reflection, perhaps, of his lifelong interest in why animals behave as they do.

When Hidaka was making his way into the world of biology, the question of how animals behave was an area of scholarly study. This was particularly the case at the Department of Biological Sciences of the University of Tokyo's Faculty of Science. Hidaka's interest, however, lay in *why* animals behave the way they do. Why does the swallowtail butterfly fly high? Why does it always fly along the same route? These questions became Hidaka's best-

known book, *Chō wa naze tobu ka* [trans. *Why Do Butterflies Fly?*].

Among the translations Hidaka worked on is the book *Rhinogradentia*, which describes strange animals from a now-vanished archipelago that walked with their noses. People around Hidaka told him that there were no such animals, and that the book was quite obviously untrue. Yet therein lay the perfect theory—people think of things in terms of theory, so if something stands to reason they believe it. This was Hidaka's “illusion,” and many students and university professors believed it to be the truth. This is just one of the amusing episodes that he reveals. (MK)

## ***Jinsei no iroke*** **[The Allure of Life]**

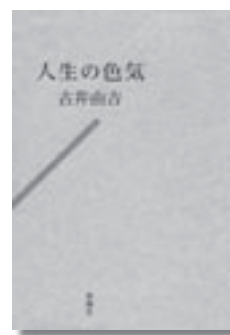
By Furui Yoshikichi

Shinchōsha, 2009. 196 x 135 mm. 224 pp. ¥1,600. ISBN 978-4-10-319208-4.

Furui Yoshikichi is among the most highly respected of what might be called the “pure literature” authors of his time. He writes recondite, profound prose in a mysterious style, making translation of his works into other languages difficult, so that he has not received recognition outside Japan commensurate with his merits. For this book the editorial team arranged talks given by Furui on a number of occasions, and the author himself subsequently corrected the draft. The style is thus extremely simple, and the free and easy way in which it moves from one topic to another brings to mind the lightness of *zuihitsu*, the traditional Japanese genre of essays.

In this book, Furui speaks to his heart's content on everything from society and customs to his own worldly wis-

dom and literary viewpoint while looking back on forty years of life as a writer. Readers are likely to be drawn into Furui's peculiar world through the language he uses. There are a great many expressions that, while simple, remain lodged in the memory. For example, “In various different occupations now, the main thing is seven parts seriousness and three parts self-indulgence.” Or, “Our task is a bit like looking after the house of society when no one is at home.” Running through the work is what is perhaps the author's own individual Eros view—“Eros is in difference. Eros can help to break down or to overcome differences.” This single volume manages to be both a guide to the best of Furui's literature and an introduction to Japanese aesthetics. (NM)



#### Furui Yoshikichi

Born in 1937. One of the leading authors of the “introvert generation.” Completed a course in German literature at the Graduate School of the University of Tokyo before working at posts that included tutor at Kanazawa University and assistant professor at Rikkyō University. Became a full-time writer after winning the 1971 Akutagawa Prize for *Yōko*, and has been a prolific author ever since. His many works include *Asagao* [Morning Glory], for which he won the 1983 Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize.

## PHILOSOPHY



Kumano Sumihiko

*Born in 1958. Currently professor at the University of Tokyo Faculty of Letters, where he is engaged in research into modern ethics and philosophy. As well as research that traces thinking from classical philosophers such as Kant and Hegel to modern thinkers such as Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas, he has written many works, including a series on the history of philosophy.*

## ***Nihon tetsugaku shōshi: Kindai 100 nen no 20-pen*** [A Short History of Japanese Philosophy: Twenty Works from the Last One Hundred Years]

**Edit. Kumano Sumihiko**

Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2009. 173 × 108 mm. 354 pp. ¥900. ISBN 978-4-12-102036-9.

This is a concise overview of the history of Japanese philosophy since the beginning of the Meiji period (1868–1912). At that time, Japan's own philosophy was developing via the Japanese language while being heavily influenced by Western ideas. Up until then, there had been no word in Japanese corresponding to the English word “philosophy.” Nishi Amane (1829–97) coined the Japanese word *tetsugaku* and established it as part of the Japanese lexicon.

In the first part of this book, Kumano Sumihiko outlines the course of Japan's modern philosophy over the subsequent 100 or so years, focusing mainly on what is known as the Kyoto school of philosophy. Not even running to 150 pages, this part manages perfectly to cover a large

number of Japanese philosophers, ranging from Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945) to Ōmori Shōzō (1921–97), and looks at how modern Japanese philosophical thought developed while incorporating such diverse streams as German idealism, French philosophy, ancient Greek philosophy, and Marxism.

The book's second part looks at the best-known theses of twenty of these Japanese philosophers, with a brief commentary on each one given by a specialist. This volume has a convenient paperback size, yet almost no books before it have taken such an extensive look at modern Japanese philosophy. It will prove to be an essential companion for all overseas students of Japan with an interest in modern Japanese philosophy. (NM)

## ARCHITECTURE

## ***Hōryūji o aruku*** [Walking Around Hōryūji]

**By Uehara Kazu**

Iwanami Shoten, 2009. 173 × 105 mm. 228 pp. ¥760. ISBN 978-4-00-431222-2.

As an art historian, Uehara has traveled to see historic ruins, architecture, and paintings the world over. In this book he gives a guide to the temple Hōryūji and, in turn, a discussion of Shōtoku Taishi (574–622).

Uehara was first of all a scholar of Western art history and aesthetics. However, some fifty years ago, when he was taking a group of students from his university to the Ōhara Museum of Art in Kurashiki as part of their coursework, the students suggested touring some of the temples of ancient Japan en route as part of the long journey. For the first time, Uehara walked around the temples of Asuka, Ikaruga, and the city and suburbs of Nara. This was when he discovered for himself the epochal significance of Hōryūji. He subsequently shifted his re-

search focus from Western art to ancient Japanese art. At the end of his thirties, he started his research into Shōtoku Taishi.

Forty years later, in this book Uehara has tried to put forward a compilation of his studies in the form of a walk around Hōryūji together with the reader. Perhaps it is this that allows the light style of narration despite the extremely high level of the subject matter. A wealth of diagrams and photographs show sculptures and paintings and illustrate the hidden facts of Shōtoku Taishi, aiding the reader's comprehension. As well as giving the highlights of the world's oldest wooden building, this book also reveals links with the ancient history of East Asia. (MK)



Uehara Kazu

*Born in 1924. Professor emeritus at Seijo University. He has made research into the Tamamushi-no-zushi miniature shrine his life work, and won the 1975 Kamei Katsuichirō Prize for Ikaruga no shiroi michi no ue ni: Shōtoku Taishi ron [On the White Road of Ikaruga: Theories on Shōtoku Taishi].*



**Kawaguchi Yumiko**

*Born in 1962. Her mother contracted amyotrophic lateral sclerosis in 1995 and required mechanical ventilation from the following year. Kawaguchi was appointed director of the Japan ALS Association in 2005 and became a director of the International Alliance of ALS/MND Associations in 2009.*

## ***Ikanai shintai: ALS-teki nichijō o ikiru*** **[The Undying Body: Everyday Life with ALS]**

**By Kawaguchi Yumiko**

Igaku-Shoin, 2009. 210 × 148 mm. 271 pp. ¥2,000. ISBN 978-4-260-01003-0.

Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis is a nervous disease for which no remedy yet exists. There is gradual loss of physical strength, while consciousness remains completely clear. This book comprises the notes written by the author while she nursed her mother, an ALS sufferer. It depicts the reality of the disease and its care, which until now only ALS sufferers and their families have known.

Kawaguchi's mother was an activist at first, seeking the right for ALS patients to vote from their homes. Her condition rapidly deteriorated, however, and within four years she was housebound. Family members took it in turns to look after her. At the end, Kawaguchi's mother could not even blink and elected for her eyes to be closed. (Some ALS patients opt to keep their eyes open, covering them in plastic

wrap to keep them from drying out or becoming dirty.)

One hears of cases of "murder," in which the family disconnects the breathing apparatus. In her private life, caring for her mother cost Kawaguchi her marriage, and she was on a knife-edge about whether to become party to "murder" herself. However, she set her sights on gaining the special skills needed for ALS nursing. She started a care-giving company and became involved in running a patients' organization. With her eyes shut, Kawaguchi's mother kept watch over her daughter's busy life.

"Her spirit was gently set free like the soul of a plant, her instincts gathered together only to be with us." The daughter received the strength to go on living just through the presence of her mother. (SH)

## ***Infuruenza 21 seiki*** **[The Twenty-first Century of Influenza]**

**By Sena Hideaki**

Bungei Shunjū, 2009. 173 × 108 mm. 504 pp. ¥1,250. ISBN 978-4-16-660733-4.

Diseases that can be transmitted between humans and animals epitomize the viral threats of the twenty-first century, and are menaces to human life that know neither national nor species boundaries. Sena is both a well-known novelist and a doctor of pharmaceuticals. In this book, he looks back over the pandemic of influenza known as swine flu, tracing the actions of the World Health Organization and health center officials on the front lines of epidemic prevention, as well as the flow of information from the day the outbreak was reported on April 24, 2009.

The on-site report from the southern part of China, believed to be where the influenza originated, is extremely interesting. Worthy of particular attention, however, is the use of data from statistics experts to investigate the effectiveness of

the vigorous preventive measures, such as the quarantines onboard aircraft. Scientific verification brings areas for reconsideration into relief, so that appropriate countermeasures to be taken in the future come into view. No matter how hard those on the ground strive to contain the disease, it will never be enough. Sena points out that a pandemic is a problem of communication, and it is important that people are rightly afraid of the disease—something that strikes the reader with a moment of realization.

Built on carefully gathered data and solid thinking, this book helps the reader consider the imagination and courage needed to face the pandemics of this century. One hopes that it will also draw attention to Japan's world-class research into infectious diseases. (SH)



**Sena Hideaki**

*Born in 1968. Writer and doctor of pharmaceuticals. His debut work was Parasaito Ibu [trans. Parasite Eve], written as a graduate student at Tohoku University, for which he won the 1995 Japan Horror Novel Prize. Was a lecturer at Miyagi University and later a specially appointed professor of SF mechanical engineering design at Tohoku University's Division of Mechanical Engineering until 2009. Other works include Brain Valley, for which he won the 1998 Nihon SF Taishō Award.*

## No. 3: Yamamoto Shūgorō

The third installment in the “Literature in the Movies” series looks at the writer Yamamoto Shūgorō (1903–67), whose historical novels thrilled both readers and filmgoers. The great director Kurosawa Akira, a fan of Yamamoto’s writing, made his tales the basis for a number of his best-known films.

### Looking to History for Human Tales

The *jidai shōsetsu*, or historical novel, is an important and distinctive genre of Japanese fiction, quite unlike anything found elsewhere in the world. Set during the years of samurai rule that lasted from the Kamakura period (1185–1333) to the end of the Edo period (1603–1868), *jidai shōsetsu* typically depict the heroic exploits of master swordsmen and great military leaders.

The historical novel emerged in the years following the Meiji Restoration, as Japan became a modern state. It is an amusing paradox that people living in modern society should get such enjoyment from reading about the samurai world that modernization swept away. *Jidai shōsetsu* are still written in large numbers today, and continue to attract a wide readership in twenty-first century Japan.

The earliest historical novels tended to have master swordsmen and famous generals as their main characters. After a while, however, novels began to emerge with outsiders as their main figures, such as *rōnin* (masterless samurai), drifters, gamblers and gangsters, or simply ordinary people living at the bottom of feudal society.

Yamamoto Shūgorō liked to write about the ordinary people of Edo. Even his samurai characters rarely fit the usual stereotype of the honorable warrior. In his famous essay “*Rekishī to bungaku*” [History and Literature], Yamamoto remarked:

“The business of literature is to not to give an account of what happened in Osaka Castle on such-and-such a day of such-and-such a month in the fifth year of the Keichō era, but to describe the misfortune that befell a poor apprentice in Doshōmachi on that day, and the course of action this misfortune forces him into.”

Time and again, Yamamoto turned his gaze to ordinary commoners, describing vividly the lives of the people at the bottom of society’s pile. When he does depict samurai characters, it is their weaknesses and human frailties that command his attention. The film director Kurosawa Akira loved Yamamoto’s work. His films *Tsubaki Sanjūrō* [released with the English title *Sanjuro*] and *Akahige* [Red Beard] are based on original works by Yamamoto, but there are important differences between the films and the original stories.

The differences are particularly pronounced in the case of *Tsubaki Sanjūrō*. A *rōnin* fallen on hard times gets caught up in a local dispute as he travels through a feudal domain, and decides to lend his assistance to some young samurai trying to make changes to the local administration. The basic plot is the same in both film and the original, a short story called “*Nichinichi heian*” [Days of Peace], but the image of the main character is quite different. In the film version, Sanjūrō (Mifune Toshirō) is swordsman with almost superhuman skills. In the original

story the swordsmanship of the main character Sugata Hirano is much less impressive, and the hero is frequently forced to rely on his wits rather than his martial prowess to get him out of trouble. And while in the movie Sanjūrō helps the youngsters out of a sense of righteousness and support for the underdog, in the story Hirano is motivated (much more realistically) by the prospect that with any luck he might be able to secure a position with the local lord by helping the young samurai achieve their aims.

In the film version, Sanjūrō disappears off into the distance at the end of the final scene; in the original story, the young samurai invite Hirano to join their domain, and his last words are of humble thanks.

Sanjūrō never loses his pride in his own status as a samurai, no matter how low he falls, but Hirano works hard to become a domain official. Sanjūrō is a hero; Hirano is just an ordinary person.

The often harsh reality of ordinary people’s lives meant far more to Yamamoto than heroes. It is here that the true value of Yamamoto’s work lies. It is grown-up literature in the true sense, and his work continues to entertain large numbers of adult readers to this day.

Published in 1940, Yamamoto’s breakthrough short story “*Jōchū no shimo*” [Frost in the Castle] depicts the final moments of Hashimoto Sanai, a reform-minded warrior sentenced to death during the 1858–60 Ansei Purge. It was a central tenet of the Bushido creed that a samurai should be able to look death calmly in the eye, but Sanai’s last moments are spent gazing longingly in the direction of his home in Echizen province and shedding tears of bitter disappointment at ending his life at the age of just twenty-six.

Although Hashimoto Sanai does not conform to the usual idealized image of a samurai hero, Yamamoto depicts him as a person who understands what it means to be human. And by allowing Sanai’s sweetheart to praise him for his conduct in his last moments, Yamamoto makes an implied criticism of the male-centric principles of the Bushido code.

Bushido was a creed that placed great emphasis on death, but Yamamoto was a writer who respected and valued human life. *Akahige shinryōtan* [Red Beard’s Surgery], the source text for Kurosawa’s *Akahige*, tells the story of a skilled doctor who struggles to free the poor people of Edo from illness and disease.

In the widely praised short story “*Yojō*,” Yamamoto depicts the great swordsman Miyamoto Musashi unflatteringly as a samurai trapped by the stifling morality of the Bushido code.

Similar criticisms of Bushido can be seen in many other works, such as the tragicomedy “*Hitogoroshi*” [The Killer], in which a strange sequence of events forces a cowardly samurai to attempt to kill a master swordsman



on the orders of his master. “Hashi no shita” [Under the Bridge] deals with the pointlessness of samurai duels in a story in which the main character is a samurai reduced to begging for a living.

This down-to-earth humanism and a worldview that valued life over death were typical of Yamamoto Shūgorō, and can be seen in his works depicting the humble people of Edo, such as the novel *Sabu* and the story “Chan,” as well as in the relatively few works he set in a modern locale, such as *Ao beka monogatari* [The Blue Fishing Boat] and *Kisetsu no nai machi* [The Town Without Seasons].

*Kisetsu no nai machi* was later filmed by Kurosawa Akira under the title *Dodeskaden*. Probably no writer has had more of his books and stories made into film and TV

dramas. Even today, forty years after his death, he still has many devoted readers. It would be no exaggeration to describe him as one of the nation’s most beloved writers.

He had few dealings with the literary world. In 1943, his collection of stories titled *Shōsetsu: Nihon fudōki* [Tales of the Lives of Japanese Womanhood] was recommended for the Naoki Prize, and in 1959 *Momi no ki wa nokotta* [The Fir Tree Remains] was recommended for the Mainichi Publishing Culture Award. But Yamamoto refused both these awards, believing that only readers were in a position to award prizes. His nickname was Kyokken, meaning “cranky.”

(Kawamoto Saburō,  
literary and film critic)

## An Introduction to the Films

### **Akahige [Red Beard] (1965)**

**Directed by Kurosawa Akira**

Based on *Akahige shinryōtan* [Red Beard’s Surgery]. Depicts the relationship between a noted Edo-period doctor, known as Red Beard (played by Mifune Toshirō), and a young man who comes to work as a trainee under him (Kayama Yūzō). At first outraged by what he sees to be the older man’s stubbornness, he eventually comes to respect him as he sees the efforts Red Beard takes to help the poor.



Akahige  
© 1965 TOHO CO., LTD. (¥3,990)



### **Inochi bō ni furō [We Gave Our Lives For Nothing] (1971)**

**Directed by Kobayashi Masaki**

Based on the short story “Fukagawa Anrakutei” (The Anraku, Fukagawa). A gang of outlaws who gather to drink in an establishment in the Fukagawa area of downtown Edo undertake a deadly battle to defend the love between a young merchant and his local sweetheart. The lead role is played by Nakadai Tatsuya; the script was written by his wife, Ryū Tomoe.

Inochi bō ni furō  
© 1971 TOHO CO., LTD.

### **Hitogoroshi [The Killer] (1976)**

**Directed by Ōzu Hitoshi**

Based on the short story of the same title. This unusual and lesser-known tale is a masterpiece among Yamamoto’s works. The biggest coward in the domain (Matsuda Yūsaku) finds himself ordered by his lord to kill a master swordsman (Tanba Tetsurō). The situation forces him to take desperate measures that would only occur to a coward. Both the story and film are full of humor.



Hitogoroshi  
© 1976 Kadokawa Pictures, Inc. (¥3,990)

## Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes

The awards ceremony for the 143rd Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes was held at the Tokyo Kaikan on August 20. The Akutagawa Prize went to Akazome Akiko for *Otome no mikkoku* [The Maiden's Anonymous Tip], which first appeared in the June issue of the literary journal *Shinchō*. The Naoki Prize was given to Nakajima Kyōko for *Chīsai ouchi* [Small Home] (Bungei Shunjū). Both women were first-time nominees.

Akazome Akiko's 2004 literary debut *Hatsuko-san* garnered the Bunkakukai Prize for New Writers. *Otome no mikkoku* chronicles the day-to-day life of female students at a university for foreign language study as they prepare for the *Diary of Anne Frank* German language speech contest. The story uses the back-and-forth among the students and their pronunciation-drilling teacher as the backdrop for a meditation on identity and war.

Nakajima previously worked at a publishing house and made her literary debut in 2003 with *Futon. Chīsai ouchi* is the fictional memoir of an old woman working as a servant in a middle-class Tokyo household before and during World War II. Nakajima's novel vividly portrays the life and customs of the era.

## The Mishima Yukio Prize

The Shinchō Society for the Promotion of Literary Arts has selected Azuma Hiroki's debut novel *Kuontamu famirīzu* [Quantum Families], published by Shinchōsha, to receive the 23rd annual Mishima Yukio Prize for new literary works.

*Kuontamu famirīzu* is a science fiction piece set in two parallel timelines: one in the present and one in the year 2035. The story is set in motion when a letter arrives addressed to the protagonist from his still unborn daughter living in the year 2035. He tries to shift to the parallel future but something is in the way. The narrative moves back and forth between current reality and the parallel world of "what might be" to tell the story of the protagonist's family.

Azuma Hiroki (1971–) has written on a variety of topics, including con-

temporary thought, postindustrial information society, and *otaku* culture. His first published essay, "Sonzaion-teki, yubin-teki: Jakku Derida ni tsuite" [Ontological, Postal: on Jacques Derida], published in 1998 while he was a graduate student at the University of Tokyo, received the Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities and was also a candidate for the Mishima Yukio Prize. He is currently a specially appointed professor at the Tokyo Institute of Technology Center for the Study of World Civilizations. His other works include *Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan: Otaku kara mita Nihon shakai* [Animalization in the Postmodern Era: Japanese Society from the *Otaku* Perspective] (see *JBN* No. 38) and *Gēmu-teki riarizumu no tanjō: Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan 2* [The Birth of Gamelike Realism: Animalization in the Postmodern Era 2].

## Tōhan Publishes Bestseller List for the First Half of 2010

Book distributor Tōhan Co., Ltd. has announced its list of the bestselling books of the first half of 2010 (Dec. 2009–May 2010). The top-selling book over the period was *Bando ippon de yaseru! Maku dake daietto* [Slim Down with One Band: The Body Wrap Diet] by Yamamoto Chihiro. According to the book's publisher, Gentōsha, over 1.7 million copies have been printed to date. This is the first time that a weight-loss guide has taken the top spot since the inception of Tōhan's list in 1990.

Taking second place on the list was Murakami Haruki's *IQ84* (Book 3), published by Shinchōsha. Many bookstores reported customers lining up for the midnight release of the widely anticipated sequel. (See *JBN* No. 62 for more on Murakami's novel.)

Iwasaki Natsumi's *Moshi kōkō yakyū no joshi manējā ga Dorakkā no "Manejimento" o yondara* [What If the Female Manager of a High-School Baseball Team Read Peter Drucker's *Management?*] (Diamond) ranked fourth, adding to Drucker's recent popularity across generations in Japan. In the book, a student manager improves her school's team through the application of Drucker's organizational philosophies.

Fifth on the list was *Nihonjin no shiranai Nihongo 2* [Japanese That Japanese People Don't Know, Vol. 2], a "comic essay" on cross-cultural communication between a Japanese language teacher and her foreign students by Hebizō and Umino Nagiko (Media Factory). The first volume was published in 2009. A live-action drama based on the series began airing on Japanese television this July.

This year's Hon'ya [Bookseller] Prize recipient, *Tenchi meisatsu* [Discerning the Movement of the Universe] by Ubukata Tow (Kadokawa Shoten), ranked eighth. (See p. 5.) Bookstore employees vote to award this prize to the book they most want to sell.

## E-Book Market in Japan Growing Up

The recent arrival of portable devices like Apple's iPad, Amazon's Kindle, and Sony's Reader has brought e-books closer to the average consumer. The May 2010 debut of the iPad in particular has inspired Japanese publishers to embrace the new formats. Industry watchers are following closely as Japan's biggest publishing houses experiment with electronic distribution of new books for the first time.

Kōdansha, for instance, published an iPad edition of *Shineba ii no ni* [Just Die], the new mystery novel from Kyōgoku Natsuhiko. For the first two weeks of its release, the iPad edition was priced at ¥700, after which the price was raised to ¥900. These prices represented a considerable discount from the traditional edition, which retailed for ¥1,700. Kōdansha also made the first volume of Itsuki Hiroyuki's new novel *Shinran* available for free download for one month beginning May 12.

At the same time, publishers are concerned that authors will bypass the middlemen and begin to take their works directly to the electronic market, as in the case of *AiR*, a digital magazine produced by Sena Hideaki and Sakurazaka Hiroshi. The e-book market in Japan, until now generally limited to manga editions formatted for mobile phone consumption, looks to be in for big changes.

## International PEN Congress in Tokyo

The annual International PEN Congress will take place in Tokyo on September 23–30. The 2010 Congress will be the third in Tokyo and Tokyo's first since 1984. International PEN is an organization of authors and other members of the literary field with 145 branches in 104 countries. The theme of the 2010 Congress is "Environment and Literature: What can words do?"

The opening ceremony will include a group reading of the late Inoue Hisashi's "Mizu no tegami" [Letter for the Water]. Additional readings and presentations will be given by international authors including Nobel Prize winner Gao Xingjian (China), Booker Prize winner Margaret Atwood (Canada), and popular detective novelist Sara Paretsky (USA). Attendees are also invited to participate in a number of discussion-focused seminars including "Environmental Justice in Literature and Meaning in Contemporary Society," "Portraying the Environment in Manga and Anime," and "Haiku: Nature and the World Within."

Organizers expect 250 international authors and editors from seventy different countries to attend the Tokyo Congress. International PEN hopes to provide a forum to bring foreign literature to Japan and to share Japanese literature with the world.

## Obituary

*Tsuka Kōhei, 62, playwright, director/producer, July 10, 2010*

Tsuka began his career as a playwright while studying at Keio University. He became the youngest recipient of the Kishida Kunio Drama Prize in 1974, when his *Atami satsujin jiken* [The Atami Murder Case] received the award. Tsuka's honors also include the 1982 Naoki Prize for his novel *Kamata kōshin kyoku* [The Kamata March]. A successful film based on the book was released in the same year [released internationally as *Fall Guy*].

In addition to his published works, his legacy includes numerous contributions to contemporary Japanese theater. He helped to establish theater

companies in the city of Ōita and Tokyo's Kita City and worked to encourage the cultivation of theatrical actors outside of urban centers.

Tsuka also contributed to increased cultural exchange between Korea and Japan. In particular, he arranged performances in Korea of a revised version of his *Atami satsujin jiken* set in Seoul: *Souru-ban Atami satsujin jiken* [The Atami Murder Case: Seoul Version].

Tsuka and his works remained at the forefront of Japanese theater through the 1970s and 1980s, during the "Tsuka boom." On stage, his production style was said to be unforgiving and energetic. He was known for physically moving performers around on stage and often requiring actors to speak on and on without pause. Many performers who appeared in Tsuka's productions later went on to become popular actors. His career left an indelible impact on Japanese theater.

## Announcement

### Publication Grants

The Japan Foundation supports the publication of books related to Japan in various languages with the aim of promoting Japanese studies and understanding of Japan around the world. Grant applications can be downloaded at <<http://www.jpff.go.jp/e/>>.

Seventy-six grants were made through this program last year. Here are some of the titles.

### • Original Works

- *The History of Modern Contemporary Art in Japan*, Lee Jung Hee, Yekyong Publishing Co., Korea (Korean)
- *Meiji Duy Tan Va Viet Nam* (The Meiji Restoration and Vietnam), Tien Luc Nguyen, Education Publishing House, Viet Nam (Vietnamese)
- *Selected Works of the Contemporary Japanese Theater*, Dr. Adel Amin Mahmoud Saleh, Nawafez Society for Translation, Development & Dialogue, Egypt (Arabic)
- *Landshaftnoe Iskustvo Yaponii: Is-*



*toki, Traditsii, Sovremennost* (The Garden Art of Japan: Origins, Traditions, Modern Concepts), Sergey Alexandrovich Mostovoy, Festu Dalnauka Publ., Russia (Russian)

### • Translations

- *A Drifting Life* [Gekiga hyōryū], Tatsumi Yoshihiro, Drawn & Quarterly, Canada (English)
- *Le Temps et l'espace dans la Culture Japonaise* (Time and Space in Japanese Culture) [Nihon bunka ni okeru jikan to kūkan], Katō Shūichi, CNRS Editions, France (French)
- *Snezna Dezela* (Snow Country) [Yukiguni], Kawabata Yasunari, Založba Sanje d.o.o., Slovenia (Slovene)
- *The Dragon and the Dazzle: Models, Strategies and Identities of Japanese Imagination* [Ryū to inazuma], Marco Pellitteri, Tunue S.r.l., Italy (English)



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## The “Sceneless” That Sees Far and Wide

In her latest collection of essays, *Sora ga kaoru* [Savoring the Sky] (Bungei Shunjū, 2010), Sannomiya Mayuko observes the seasons using only her senses of hearing, touch, and smell, and by doing so, succeeds in drawing the reader into a positive and loving perceptual world.

Sannomiya became what she calls “sceneless” at the age of four after a botched eye operation. This term signifies that while she cannot see the scene in front of her, she can create her own imagery in her mind. By repeatedly using the word “sceneless” in her works, Sannomiya has tried to popularize the term to replace more common expressions like “visually impaired” or “disabled.”

“Terms like ‘handicapped,’ or even ‘challenged,’ have a negative connotation,” says Sannomiya. “I have lost one out of my five senses, and that puts me in a tough spot, but I can turn this disadvantage to my advantage, such as by quickly acquiring foreign languages by ear only. So I came up with this word, ‘sceneless,’ which has a more neutral tone.”

Sannomiya admits she had to take it one step at a time after coming out of a hospital in her “sceneless” state. Starting from scratch, she learned Braille and went on to master English and French on top of her native Japanese. She now works as a full-time translator at a news wire service in Tokyo, but essays and haiku are also important media for her personal and professional development.

A master of positive energy, confidence, and fun, Sannomiya cherishes every moment of her life, sees the invisible, feels the intangible, and writes exquisitely.

“I’ve cultivated the ability to elevate the sound I hear to a world of senses and to put those senses into words,” says Sannomiya. “I hope sighted people can also garner some joy from my world.”

Sannomiya’s experience prompts the reader to rethink the meaning of “seeing.” Once, while walking through a forest valley among the birds she loves, she caught the almost imperceptible sound of grass seeds snapping out, one after another, and visualized the ground beneath her feet as “a feast of exploding seeds.” “The seeds split open with precision and multiplied,” she writes, “and I stood rooted to the spot, filled with the joy of hearing their breathing, their words, and the sound of their lives.”

Sannomiya became aware of the blessings of nature through the rhythm of plants. But what first prompted her to create a three-dimensional awareness of the scenery and write essays were birds, particularly the paradise-flycatchers singing in the mountains, she says.

“When I placed myself amid their chorus, I suddenly felt as if the birds were interpreting the state of the sky for me,” Sannomiya says. “For the first time in many years, I felt certain that I could actually see the sky, which I had longed to do since becoming ‘sceneless.’ It was a life-changing, mystical experience,” she adds.

Through her interaction with birds, Sannomiya manages to perceive something of herself in them, especially as they are fully alive to each moment, no matter how tiny they are. “I think I had some sort of epiphany in which I

realized that it is none other than God that gives the power of life to both birds and myself,” says Sannomiya.

Today the author can distinguish 135 different types of birdcalls. By mimicking the high, middle, and low notes of a bush warbler, for example, she boasts that she can keep birds captivated for about ten minutes while communicating with them. “My trick is to hit the wrong note on purpose, and let the birds correct me,” she giggles.

Such playfulness and a quirky sense of humor are the raw materials that make her essays so addictive to read. In her latest collection’s title essay, based on her sense of smell, Sannomiya describes the sweeping rain as a playful whim of the gods.

“I sensed that the god of rain saw me coming out of the house, and immediately flipped the rain switch with a child-like sense of fun—smiling mischievously, saying ‘Yo, Mayu. Here’s the rain for you!’”

The charm of her work also lies in her naturally laid-back, amusing, and sound-centric haiku, which Sannomiya includes throughout the book. Taking advantage of being “sceneless,” this haiku practitioner with more than fifteen years under her belt has found a wonderful way of capturing the subtleties of nature in the seventeen-syllable Japanese poem.

Sannomiya’s talent, however, does not stop here. She is a motivational speaker, has lectured at schools, and has appeared on TV and radio programs. She is known for her acute sense of timing, and never forces a retake by flubbing her lines on the air. She also enjoys practicing traditional Japanese flower arrangement, a pastime in which she is a licensed grand master, and occasionally gives high-caliber performances on her favorite piano.

“I’m really grateful that I kept up the piano as a hobby and writing as my profession,” says Sannomiya, who gave up on the chance to become a concert pianist due to a lack of physical strength. “If my words help to brighten people’s souls then I couldn’t be happier.”

After publishing more than a dozen collections of essays full of hope, healing, and optimism, Sannomiya says she now aims to tackle new genres like fiction and criticism. Whatever she decides to turn her hand to, it is almost certain that her wisdom and captivating writing style will lift her readers’ minds to an entirely different tier . . . much like a bird in flight.

(Kawakatsu Miki, freelance writer)



**Sannomiya Mayuko**

Born in 1966. Earned a master’s degree in French literature from Sophia University. Awarded the NHK Gakuen literary award for personal history for her debut essay collection *Tori ga oshiete kureta sora* [The Sky the Birds Taught Me] and the Japan Essayist Club Award for *Sotto mimi o sumaseba* [Gently Opening My Ears]. Posts essays on her website, <<http://www.006.upp.so-net.ne.jp/hashiyasume/>>.