

Modern Japanese Poetry: One Hundred Years

English versions with an introduction
By Haider Ali Khan
Japanese Poems Selected
By Ooka Makoto and Tanikawa Shuntaro

For Izumi

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by Haider Ali Khan

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Introduction: Poetry and Difference

Haider A. Khan

Today, Japanese poetry is an important part of a truly international movement. However, the beginning of modern Japanese poetry was not auspicious. By modern I refer here to what the Japanese termed Shintaishi or poetry of the new style during the Meiji era. The publication in 1882 of Shintaishisho (Collection of Poetry in the New style) by three young academics in Tokyo signalled a desire to imitate the new Western style. Their poems with (unintentionally ironic) titles like "On the Principles of Sociology" replete with references to Darwin and Spencer could not have been very inspiring. However, the translations from English must have inspired the reading public, for the volume sold out quickly.

It is Shimazaki Toson (1872-1943) who really deserves to be called the founder of modern Japanese poetry. In November, 1896 his poem Akikaze no Uta (Song of the Autumn Wind) - inspired by Shelley's Ode to the West Wind was published in Bungakukai. His qualities as a genuine lyrical voice were established immediately. His Wakanashu from which the poem "First Love" is taken is a consummate romantic poem. The most gifted poets of Toson's generation caught up with the recent trends in poetry with amazing speed. Ueda Bin's translation from French poets introduced the serious poets to Parnassist and Symbolist tendencies. Kunikida Doppo's "Sanrin ni Jiyu Sonsu" shows such influences. At the same

time the influences of the old Chinese style poems and traditional Japanese poetics also mark these early poems by Doppo and Bansui. Our Japanese selectors poke gentle fun at the poet's high seriousness which to us also must seem a bit out of place: "When we talk about Bansui, we can imagine a high school student of that time who wears a coat, a torn cap and special wooden clogs... he reads poems which are written in literary style and seven-five syllabic mode while drinking sake."

While the element of artificiality in Bansui can be ridiculed today, Yosano Akiko's famous anti-war poem has rightfully captured the attention of many succeeding generations. Written during the Russo-Japanese War the poem gently parodies the seven-five-seven syllabic rhythm of the then current patriotic poems. The irony and the genuine longing for peace both transcend the specificities of the particular historical time and culture. Not until Tamura Ryuichi's 'Four Thousand Days and Nights' do we come across another equally powerful poem about the horror of war.

Both Takamura Kotaro and Hagiwara Sakutarō were progenitors of poems rooted in genuine everyday speech. Their poems in this volume also indicate their meticulous attention to sound. Hagiwara, in particular, is well-known in Japan for his many onomatopoeic inventions. In *Neko* (Cat) the conversation between two cats goes:

"Owan, good evening."

"Owan, good evening."

"Ogyan, Ogyan, Ogyan."

"Owan, the master of this house is sick."

The dark overtones of the phonemes further darken the morbid atmosphere that is so much a part of Hagiwara's psychological landscape.

Almost all the major (and some minor) poets from Ishikawa Takuboku to Yoshimasu Gozo are covered in the present volume. However a major division can be made temporally by the watershed of the second world war. As Ooka Makoto, one of the two editors of this anthology, says in his essay 'Modern Japanese Poetry - Realities and Challenges':

The year 1945 brought many new experiences to the Japanese. It was, first of all, the first experience of defeat for Japan as a nation-state. Second, it was the year the nuclear age began with two unspeakably destructive atomic bombs being exploded over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Third, it was the year the militarism and fanaticism that had ruled Japan since the early 1930s were militarily crushed and the ultranationalistic ideology that had supported the militarist system was discredited and destroyed. Fourth, it was the year the Allies occupied Japan and instituted American-style democracy, setting off far-reaching changes in the Japanese political, economic, and social systems, symbolized by the establishment of a new national constitution. The reorganization of the Japanese educational system during the American occupation is a striking example of how traditional Japanese society was shaken to its foundations. Fifth, 1945 was the year of burned-out cities, hunger, black markets, homeless children, the wounded, and almost every other kind of hardship - a situation that did not improve until the economy began to recover during the Korean War. Eliot's The Waste Land, and Auden's The Age of Anxiety seemed to many Japanese titles that summed up their own country. And wars of many kinds continued to break out, in China, in Korea, in Algeria, in Hungary, in Cuba, and on and on. And it was only after World War Two that the basic attitudes and concepts expressed in Paul Valery's cultural criticism, T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land, André Breton and Philippe Soupault's Les champs magnétiques, Breton and Paul

Eluard's L'Immaculate Conception, and similar works made sense in Japan and evoked a profound, sympathetic response. (pp. 19-20)

The power of imagination and the human voice is affirmed by our poets even in the midst of utter ruin. Yoshimasu Gozo acknowledged this earlier by saying that with his shouting the first line of his poem, "A carving knife stands up madly in the morning." The poem by Kondo Azuma, "The Japanese Language" presents the prostitute from the "Green Coat" lines. The repressed anger suffused throughout the poem and the sense of irreparable damage to the Japanese psyche is expressed in the broken English phrase, "me go Yokohama." Japan could no longer be the same again.

It was in this atmosphere that the Japanese poets and intellectuals truly absorbed the critical side of the modernist literary avantgarde. A new conviction arose "that poetry was an alternative to religion and science that could successfully resist the devastations, mass death, and despair..." Ooka refers to the appeal of the slogan "Bring back totality through poetry" to the post-war writers until the 1960s.

Technically, Japanese poetry became much more conscious of itself after World War II. Although there were innovators like Hagiwara and Nishiwaki even before the war, the demand for the restoration of totality through poetry led to meticulous attention to form, images, metaphors, sounds and sensibility. The acts of seeing, hearing and feeling afresh assumed paramount importance. Through these acts the poets tried to restore meaning to a

language that has been abused by the militarists and the manipulations of capital.

The poems in Utsukushii Nihon no Shi were chosen at least in part because of their technical excellence. Although some very good poets such as Ayukawa Nobuo, Yoshioka Minoru and Shiraishi Kazuko do not appear here almost all the major postwar tendencies are represented. Several poems in dialects add incomparably to the value of the anthology. The poem "Sooty Calendar" by Takagi Kyozo written in Aomori dialect is a strikingly successful example. One is indeed inclined to agree with Tanikawa and Ooka when they comment: "how boring it would be if Japanese consisted only of the standard version."

In 1970s emerged the post-modern affluent Japan of mass communication (masukomi) out of the era of high speed growth. Perhaps masukomi and masugomi (mass gabage) are not far apart. The "copy civilization" of Japan seemed to confirm at least half of Walter Benjamin's thesis about the "work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction." The loss of artist's aura, however, has not led to any signs of immediate liberation. The situation is more in keeping with Andy Warhol's prediction about short-lived instant fame.

Poets and critics like Ooka, however, are still optimistic about the future of poetry. With all the signs of the end around it does poetry still have a miraculous power to recuperate meaning out of the crumbling civilization of which it itself is a part? It might if we are "given the power to enjoy which makes the dry

tree matter," as the French poet Anne-Marie Albiach has written:

la simplicité

nous est-elle donnée le possible de jouir,

pour laquelle

l'arbre sec fait différence.

What a difference can the recognition of a dry tree make
for poetry in our time!

[1] *Sanrin ni jouissance*¹

[Sanrin ni Jiyu Sonsu]

Kunikida Doppo

Freedom in the mountains and forests
 Chanting this phrase makes me feel
 The boiling in my blood
 Ah! Freedom in the mountains and forests
 Why did I leave the forests and mountains

Ten years ---
 Months and days passed into dust
 Since I climbed the road to vanity's longing
 Freedom's home is already far away,
 I feel

Looking out of the corner of my eyes
 Looking at the sky far away
 I see the high peaks of mountains far away
 Ah! Freedom in the mountains and forests
 Chanting this phrase makes me feel
 The boiling in my blood

My nostalgic home where is it?
 There I was a child of the mountain
 If I look back far away
 There are huge rivers and mountains
 Freedom's home is sinking
 In the clouds far away

[2] *The shadow of a giant hand*

[Ooi naru Te no Kage]

¹ the Japanese title is " Sanrin ni Jiyu Sonsu." The title literally means Freedom (Existing) in the Mountains and Forests. However the play of words with the French jouissance can easily be seen.

Doi Bansui

the moon sinks
the stars hide themselves
the silent storm
the clouds sleep at midnight
looking up high in the sky
there is a shadow of a giant hand.

one million human habitations
all of them quiet
echoes of earthly desires
have ceased at midnight
looking up high in the sky
there is a shadow of a giant hand.

ah! the dreams of the human world
are far away
the darkness of mysteries points at you
looking up high in the sky
there is a shadow of a giant hand.

[3] *First Love*

[Hatsukoi]

Shimazaki Toson

you had swept back your bangs for the first time
 when I saw you under the apple tree
 the flower-comb in your hair
 I thought you yourself were a flower too.

you stretched out your pale white hand gently
 giving me an apple:
 like the ripening red of the autumn fruit
 my first feeling of love

my sigh, without any awareness
 touched your hair
 the joys of love's offerings
 drinking your love...

under a tree in the apple orchard
 nature's narrow road
 who left this token here?
 your question gave me a piercing pleasure.

[4] *Please do not die*

[Kimi shinitamau koto nakare]

to my younger brother in the enemy encircled Port Arthur

Yosano Akiko

Ah, younger brother, I cry for you

please do not die.
 because you are the youngest
 our parents love you the most
 but did our parents teach you
 to wield a sword and kill other people?
 to kill and die
 while bringing you up till you were 24?

Being from the famous merchant family in Sakai city
 because you will succeed your father
 please do not die.
 what does it matter
 if the Ryojun castle is destroyed or not
 you will not know
 it is far from the concerns of a merchant's family.

Please do not die.
 the emperor is not going to the battle by himself
 yet seems to tell people
 to spill one another's blood,
 to die like beasts,
 and seems to say dying is honorable;
 because the emperor has deep feelings,
 What could he be thinking?

Ah, younger brother,
 in this battle please do not die.
 last autumn our father passed away
 but our mother still lives
 in deep sorrow
 her child called to the front
 only she protects the house
 although it is heard
 that the reign of our emperor is comfortable,
 her hair is more gray than black.

Your delicate and young wife cries
 lying behind the curtain,
 did you forget her,
 or do you think of her?
 you have not lived together
 for more than 10 months,
 please think of a young woman's heart,
 you are the only one in the entire world,
 who else can all of us rely on?
 please do not die.

[5] *A ragged ostrich*

[Boro Boro na Dacho]

Takamura Kotaro

what's so funny about raising an ostrich?
with only a few square yards of mud in a zoo,
aren't the legs too long?
the neck, isn't it too long?
in a country of falling snow
aren't its wings too ragged?
because the stomach is empty
I guess it eats tough loaves of bread,
yet the ostrich eyes are looking
only at a distance, aren't they?
is it burning desperately?
is it waiting for the coming

of the blue wind?
 is there a surge of the dreams of infinite
 in that small simple head?
 this is not an ostrich any more,
 is it?
 people, stop doing this.

[6] *Spring river*

[Haru no Kawa]

Yamamura Bocho

Abundant in its fullness
 the spring river
 is it flowing?
 or, is it not flowing?
 a floating straw is moving
 that is how you know
 that the river is flowing

in the same way

the joy of seeing the big river
 in the countryside in spring
 I am seeing joyfully
 the happiness flowing
 calmly like a cloud
 merrily without any sign of weariness

in the same way

abundant in its fullness
 with small rivers
 the spring is overflowing
 the spring is overflowing

[7] *The evening primrose*

[Yoi-machi-gusa]

Takehisa Yumeji

waiting for the person
 who did not come
 the primrose
 is disconsolate
 this evening
 the moon too
 will not come

[8] *Blow your horn*

[Tsuno wo Fuke]

Kitahara Hakushu

My friends, come, let us go now
 together to the fields
 let us sing,
 blowing the water buffalo horn.
 Look, already the fruits are ripe
 in the fields the rice paddy ears are drooping
 between the sounds of the wind blowing,
 the voice of the wild dove,
 friends, blow your horn.
 Good bye, now
 people from Java
 pass beyond the potato fields
 into their gardens.
 Over that hill
 the temple bell stops ringing
 the candle light grows dim and dies sipping
 fig juice
 let us sing a hearty song
 Blow the horn
 tied to your necks.
 My friends,
 listen to the bells
 going down the fields
 through the village
 with grape vines ripening
 Good bye now

the pädre in black dress
has already finished
his early morning duties
now visible
now invisible
as he disappears quietly
behind the palm tree leaves
Until that time
let us sip fig juice
and sing a warm song
Come now
together let us
blow the horn
my horn my friends
awaken and come to the fields
to sing a warm song
Let us blow our
water buffalo horns.

[9] *Which one is true?*

[Dochiraga Hontoka?]

Mushanokoji Saneatsu

Weather,
are you fine - is it true?
or is it true
that it is raining?
or is it true
that the sky is cloudy?
or is it true
that the wind is blowing?
or is it true
that it is not windy?

River,
are you clean - is it true?
or is it true
that you are getting muddy?
or is it true
that you are getting swift?
or are you quiet, truly?

I just don't know.

[10] *Wind*

[Kaze]

Kato Kaishun

the wind has a big round head,
 the wind is a creature with a shaved head
 the wind is a monster
 without hands or legs
 walking slowly like an elephant,
 disappears quickly
 inside two or three leaves
 of thickly grown reeds,
 losing itself over
 the shallow water,
 all kinds of wind are changing
 to the shape of grass or trees.

the wind whistles
 so engagingly,
 it plays mischievously
 around the white legs
 of a young girl,
 the wind changes its shape
 into that of a human being.

Look!
 the wind that hid just a little while ago
 at the bottom of water,
 it already appears on the next bank
 raising its head.
 then turning its head towards us
 it is laughing.

[11] *Aeroplane*

[Hikoki]

Ishikawa Takuboku

Look!

 today too
the aeroplane
 is flying high
in the pale blue sky.

a rare sunday -
the office boy off from his work
his mother sick from lung disease
only the two of them in the house
alone on his English reader
reading by himself
his eyes grow weary.....

Look!

 today too
the aeroplane
 is flying high
in the pale blue sky.

[12] *The cat*

[Neko]

Hagiwara Sakutaro

Two cats
totally black
on the roof
a languid evening
the crescent moon hazy
stretched like a single thread
from the ends of their tails.
"Owan, good evening"
"Owan, good evening"
"Ogiyan, Ogiyan, Ogiyan"
"Owaan, the master of this house is sick."

[13] *Secret*

[Himitsu]

Senge Motomaro

before sleeping
the naked child is spinning about

in the house happy in his nakedness
 like a small bird flying
 out of the cage
 like a prince
 out of his magic box.
 clashing against the sliding doors
 against the wall
 against all things
 with his head
 with his hands
 with his behind
 happy to touch the cold air directly
 he is running around

the mother is running after him
 carrying his small nemaki².
 the naked child
 slender as a fairy
 presses his face
 against the corner of the walls
 holding his breath as if dead,
 really small, with his back to his mother
 the mother catches him and
 quickly wraps him in the night kimono
 as if she is hiding her precious secret.

[14] *Until the night*

[Yoru made ha]

Murou Saisei

men are hanging
 dingle-dangle,
 walking nonchalantly.
 great men,
 as well as not-so-great men,
 are hanging alike.

² Japanese traditional pajamas

they have no feelings of shame.
 good weather
 warm day
 Mr. Dingle-Dangle wrapped up,
 and again wrapped up
 wrapped up with care,
 calmly walking around.
 if I may ask your exalted being:
 "today whom have you met?
 and where?"
 spring breeze in town
 Mr. Dingle-Dangle sings
 in high spirits.

[15] *Scene of crime*

[Hanzai Chitai]

Sato Sonosuke

ru ru ru ru
 imagining with one eye only
 at the level of the bright hill
 bursting into flames
 a tree
 the yellow flower glitters
 a leaf hanging from one eye
 far away the smoke from the port rises
 further down a man is passing
 the man disappears stealthily
 like a dog

again one eye only imagining
 on top of the eyelashes of that eye
 is a hirugao³ trembling
 ru ru ru ru
 the eye also trembles
 ru ru ru ru

[16] *Childhood days*

[Shonen no Hi]

Sato Haruo

1
 going to the fields
 the mountains
 the seashore
 the flowers spread on a hill at noon
 your eyes made the sorrow
 more blue than the blue sky.

2
 following the forest
 with many shadows
 loving the beautiful eyes

³ Hirugao is a kind of morning glory. It flowers in day time.

in deep dream
spreading the flowers on the hill
during the warm noon
ah! the young day.

3

your eyes are round and
your heart is difficult to fathom
separated from you, all alone,
now I throw a stone in the moonlit sea.

4

you are knitting wool every night
the wool knit by a silver needle
is deep black, red thread
a mat for a lamp stand
for whom?

[17] *Noon hour dream: scherzo*

[Hiru no Yume]

Horiguchi Daigaku

the Buddha is
 in the area of faint light
 with one knee drawn up
 raising his chin
 fascinatingly on one hand
 a seductive figure
 with naked chest
 women feel shy
 to look at him

the gracious Buddha smiles
 while a prayer folds his hands
 his skin unconcealed
 by his transparent clothing
 what is he thinking?
 dreaming eyes
 the faint reddish lips
 the kindly Buddha beacons
 when being prayed to
 (come here, dissipated traveller
 throwing your money
 bow low on the floor
 then you can enter
 the land of happiness)

[18] *At the hometown*

[Furusato nite]

Tanaka Fuyuji

the smell of broiled dried flounder
at the hometown time for a sad, scanty lunch

there are stones
on the shingles
in every house

signs of poverty
the smell of broiled dried flounder
at the hometown time for a sad, scanty lunch

the deserted white mainstreet
one man by himself
is walking around
selling the snow from the mountain

(scenes from my childhood
in a village by the Japan Sea)

[19] *Rain*

[Ame]

Nishiwaki Junzaburo

The south wind has brought soft goddesses.
It has wet the bronze, wet the fountain,
Wet swallow's wings, wet golden feathers,
Wet the tide water, wet the sand, wet the fishes,
Gently wet the temples, baths and theaters;
This procession of gentle, soft goddesses
Has wet my tongue.

[20] *Love 8 - the fart of a noble princess*

[Aijou 8]

Kaneko Mitsuharu

whatever you say,
the mistress is no longer here.

such abundant pliant lambent buttocks
are in this world no more.

from these buttocks
came the high-pitched sound of farts,

one...
two...
three...
four...and
beside his mistress counting them

the emperor of China
his happiness more than a substitute
for his four hundred provinces

"thirteen is an unlucky number,
please do one more"

In her effort to please
eyebrows raised in tension
holding her breath
she is a masterpiece to behold.

[21] *Speaking with the eyes*

[Me nite Iu]

Miyazawa Kenji

it's hopeless
 there is no stopping it
 the blood gushes forth
 since last night sleepless
 the blood continues to pour out
 steadily turning me blue
 it seems I will die soon
 But what a wonderful breeze
 spring is near
 and from the blue sky
 as if the beautiful breeze grows there
 young buds of maple leaves
 and flowers like hair
 waves of autumn grass
 the thin grass mat
 a spot burnt
 brown

the rest is also blue
 I don't know if you are returning
 from a medical conference
 wearing a black frock coat
 you tried to treat me earnestly
 even if I die
 I will have no complaints
 In spite of blood rushing out
 I feel carefree I am not suffering
 because my soul has half departed
 from my body
 But it is terrible
 that because of this blood
 I cannot express my feelings
 from your point of view
 this is a miserable scene
 But from my view point
 after all
 there is the clear blue sky
 and a transparent wind only.

[22] *February*

[Ni-gatsu]

Murayama Kaita

you are going
 the big sky dark and bright
 stripes of faint light
 in February

a chain of ancient stone charms
 decorates the sky
 when the snow is falling
 from the beautiful sky
 in the afternoon
 you can hardly see it

even the goddess Nakisawame
 of Kashihara sheds
 some silvery tears...
 the farmers longing for
 the faint light
 from the divine sake altan

is it twilight or midday?
 you are going
 the big sky fearsome
 stripes of faint light
 while watching this
 you and I go together
 this is my pleasure.

[23] *I want to climb luminously*

[Koko to Nobotte Yukitai]

Yagi Jukichi

particularly
if the day is perfectly clear
then your heart feels a violent sadness
that is hard to wipe out
a sad aching day
do you not think of climbing
the sloping road forever?
and do you not think of climbing luminously
a hill much much higher?

[24] *Avalanche*

[Nadare]

Ibuse Masuji

the snow splits
at the summit
an avalanche

a bear
mounts the avalanche
sitting cross-legged
it takes the shape of someone
smoking tobacco
there is a bear there

[25] *River-mouth*

[Kakou]

Maruyama Kaoru

the ship sinks its anchor.
the heart of the sailor sinks its anchor.

the seagulls from the fresh water
greet the creaking rope.
the fish from the sea are
approaching the bilge.

the captain changes his clothes
tinged with salty sea breeze
and goes ashore.
the evening has come already
but he does not return from town.

already how many more oysters
have allowed them selves to the ship?

at the twilight hour
his son, the boy-sailor lights
a blue lamp at the prow.
from the far dark sea I cannot see
the seagulls already looking at me,
had been crying.

[26] *The shore of the sky*

[Sora no Nagisa]

Miyoshi Tatsuji

the traveler from far away
rests under the withered top
of a tree in winter
the top branches at the shore of the sky
their ends whispering
hazy bending
whispering hwis hwis
looking up and listening
the sound from far away
fallen leaves gathering
fallen leaves gathering
over the warm rays of the sun

already here horn-shaped objects sprout
 each one of them
 unravel a wrapped bundle
 at the street corner under the trees
 on the stones
 the midday wind stops walking
 if you are a traveller
 you will naturally
 cross your little finger
 the wind stops coiling around it
 at the moment
 today's destination pointing with
 the end of the little finger

[27] *To Shiga Naoya*

[Shiga Naoya e]

Oguma Hideo

Master Shiga striking many poses
 composed a few works
 having plenty of time on his hands
 he could think for a long time
 on any one of them
 creating clever utterances

no one could compete with the master.
 on this side,
 Confound it!

the policy of a street vendor:
 to serve quickly
 the open-mouthed short-tempered customer
 waiting for the warm food,
 sometimes I have to rush

and the quality suffers
I want the master to eat
the concoction made of crickets
and the prison ration,
Hey,
sorry to have kept you waiting,
I am done with one parody
of Sir Shiga Naoya's Poem.

[28] *Javelin throw*

[Yari-nage]

Murano Shiro

What are you aiming at,
the neo-primitive man?
trembling, the light flies
in that direction
suddenly a terrifying shout
Look!
pierced by the javelin in the back
someone is trying to escape
for an instant staggering
but everything will soon be still

[29] *Night train*

[Yoru no Kikansha]

Okamoto Jun

crowded warehouses
a steel tower
the signal
water supply tank
the empty places where goods were kept
lines of freight cars were there
as if they were left there
by someone in forgetfulness
all of them lying silently
at the midnight station yard.
the huge frame of the locomotive alone
on the cold shining rail
keeps coming and going
suddenly, violently
spouting its flame-colored smoke
writhing like a beast
as if dragging the rail behind it
with the violent sound of the steam whistle
the engine hurls itself
against the wagon trains
it seems that its anger cannot
be contained easily

[30] *Absence*

[Rusu]

Takahashi Shinkichi

Tell them

I am not here

Tell them

no one is here

After 500 million years

I will come back

[31] *A song*

[Uta]

Nakano Shigeharu

Don't sing!
 Don't sing of a knotweed flower
 or of the wings of the dragonfly
 Don't sing of the whispers of the breeze
 or of the fragrance of a woman's hair
 Drive out all weak things
 all the inarticulate objects
 all the weary things
 Expel all elegance
 Sing of simple honesty
 of the necessary things in real life
 of things that rise from
 the inside to the extremities of the chest
 Sing songs that rebound when struck
 the drawing out of courage
 from the depth of disgrace
 in intense rhythms
 with an expanded throat
 Drive through the chest
 of the people passing

[32] *Death and umbrella poem*

[Shi to Komori-gasa no Shi]

Kitazono Katsue

Star

rose of
the umbrella skelton
of black melancholy

May

evening
even the rain
is dark

Wall

is reflected
in its own shadow

Death's

bubble
a fold around a cone

Black wings

of damp loneliness

Or perhaps

an icon with
black nail
and beard

[33] *A conversation on an autumn evening*

[Aki no yo no kaiwa]

Kusano Shinpei

cold, isn't it?
 ah, it's cold.
 the insects are crying, aren't they?
 ah, the insects are crying.
 pretty soon they will go inside the earth, won't they?
 inside of the earth is bad, isn't it?
 you lost weight, didn't you?
 you too lost a lot of weight, didn't you?
 where do you think it hurts?
 in the stomach, you suppose?
 if we take our stomach out we will die, won't we?
 we don't want to die, do we?
 cold, isn't it?
 ah, the insects are crying.

[34] *A letter to the little sister*

[Imouto e Okuru Tegami]

Yamanoguchi Baku

what an innocent little sister!
 – you, my elder brother will surely succeed,
 I believe, and...
 – where in Tokyo are you now,
 I wonder, and so on...
 a letter from her through another
 I see her eyes watching over me
 from the pages
 after an absence of six or seven years
 I, too, am trying to write to her
 I don't know if I will succeed or not
 but I am thinking of marriage
 I cannot write that kind of thing
 in Tokyo I have the look of a wistful dog
 I don't write that kind of thing either
 I don't have a fixed address
 I cannot even write that
 I feel like someone
 who cannot move his body
 not being able to tell the whole truth
 while being questioned closely
 finally, with all my strength
 I wrote
 IS EVERYBODY WELL?
 that's what I wrote.

[35] *Sooty Calendar*

[Susukeda Koyomi]

Takaki Kyozo

the day my elder sister
became a bride and left us
the Russian olive in the garden was really red

the day my mother died and left us
wet snow was falling... I heard

when dad died
the ice on the roof
began to melt

the night I left home
fireworks for the festival eve
were going off

[36] *The Japanese Language*

[Nihon-go]

Kondo Azuma

I tried to appear as indifferent as possible
but I could not help feeling curious
inside the late night train
the woman in the green overcoat

seated next to me
 awfully drunk
 every so often leaned against me
 would she be able to get off
 at her station?

at last I set her straight
 with a push of my shoulder...
 kindly asked about
 her destination
 and then
 as if annoyed
 the woman opened her eyes slightly
 "me go Yokohama yo."
 thus replying
 she closed her eyes again

as if she despised
 both me and the Japanese language
 as if she despised
 both me and the Japanese language

[37] *Before the sunset*

[Hinokure chikaku]

Hara Tamiki

Before the sunset
 human faces with narrow eyes
 crouched in rows by a river bank

drawing a slender, slender breath
 right around their feet
 in the water

the heads of children
their features changed completely
the dead children

the color of sunset
darkens on the narrow eyes

silently
terrifyingly
helplessly

[38] *Like a distant ocean long, long ago*

[Ito Haruka Naru Umi no Gotoku]

Nagase Kiyoko

I am like an ocean long, long ago
I do not change
as the microbes float
inside me something shines
something disappears

flickering and floating
but I will not hesitate
drifting away...
but I will not forget

the returning tides
form a ring
like my blood vessels
inside my chest

dark warm things
cold swift things

like the snow
that falls and disappears
the things going past
melt inside me
I remember all things
with a woman's tears

the transient things
are not transient
the flowing things
are forever

I am unchanging
like the ocean from the ancient times
much sadness from far away
yet the salt is gradually
going to be thicker

[39] *Magic flower*

[Suichu-ka]

Ito Shizuo

The magic flower for children is sold in the night stalls during the festivals in the summer. It is made of fine thin compressed wood chips. It is quite ordinary, but once put in water, it turns into a beautiful flower with red, blue or violet colors. It stands still on the water inside a cup in brilliant sadness. Among the city folks there are some who cannot forget the impression of this artificial flower when gaslight is thrown upon it.

this year in June
why is it so beautiful?

if you look under the eaves
like breathing
wreathes of shinobugusa⁴ have burst forth.

without any old memories to endure
what is it that I regret?

⁴ shinobugusa is a kind of perennial Japanese fern.

between the evening and the noon in June
everything in the universe
glows brightly by itself for a while.

at last the shadow of a person
I have never met
stands in front of a hollyhock.

because I cannot resist it
I throw the magic flower
at the sky.

the shadow of the goldfish
flickers there also.

everything invites me to die.

why is my June so beautiful?

[40] *Heaven*

[Ten]

Takami Jun

where does heaven begin?
is it the place where the kites fly?

hiding from human eyes
here there are fruits ripening quietly
Oh! the surroundings of this fruit
already belong to heaven

[41] *On the lake*

[Kojo]

Nakahara Chuya

when the moon comes out, floating
 let us go and set the boat afloat.
 wavelets may rock the boat,
 there may be just a little breeze.

out there in the sea
 it may be dark,
 the sound of water
 dripping from the oars
 so intimate when you hear it,
 ...breaking in between your words.

the moon may listen intently,
 May come down a bit closer,
 when we kiss
 it will be just above our heads.

you will talk some more,
 lover's talk without reason
 talk while pouting,
 I will listen to it all,
 ...without stopping my hands from rowing.

when the moon comes out, floating
 let us go and set the boat afloat.
 wavelets may rock the boat,
 there may be just a little breeze.

[42] *The October poem*

[Ju-gatsu no Uta]

Inoue Yasushi

Far away in the south in a coral reef
the children of typhoon are being hatched
this year.

Soon they will be discharged to the north
from the barrel of a limestone gun.

At that time most of the Japanese archipelago will have a bight
moon.

Every moment autumn advances, somewhere a boy
is writing the Chinese characters for modesty.

[43] *Ah...Ah*

[Aaa]

Amano Tadashi

At last
saying ah...ah
man dies

when he was born
at that time too
he cried

ah...ah

In a long life
man remembers so many things
runs around busily
doing so many things

and then...
he dies

I guess I also will say ah...ah
when I die

because I have done
almost nothing with my life
I guess I will just say - being embarassed -
ah...ah

[44] *The pine trees*

[matsu no ki]

Mado Michio

when i walk along this road
 by the pine trees...
 the sound of wind
 against the pine trees... sawa sawa

though today my pochi passed away
 the pine trees are still here
 touching the top of the pine trees
 the wind sings sawa sawa

and now i am pochi
 walking along the same road...

[45] *Temptation of sleep*

[Nemuri no Izanai]

Tachihara Michizo

Good Night	kind-faced girls
Good Night	their soft dark hair braided

a candle burns near the pillows
 something vivacious dwells near them
 (in the world the rustling of finely powdered snow)

I will sing forever
 outside the dark window then inside the window
 and then inside sleep deep inside your dreams
 again and again I will keep on singing

like the lamp-light
 like the wind like the stars
 my voice will carry the melody far and near...

you will see the white apple blossoms
 then the small green fruit and
 the pleasant red ripening afterwards
 in your sleep

[46] *Late summer*

[Banka]

Kinoshita Yuji

pumpkin vines are climbing up
 the station's platform

a crack at the door of a closed flower

a ladybug is looking outside

the light train came
no one got on
no one got off

the young ticketpuncher
is making a hole in the millet leaf
near the fence
with his punch

[47] *A fall*

[Kakou]

Sugiyama Heiichi

just now it seems
parting from a close friend
the smile on the girl's cheek
still remains

she entered the elevator
on the sixth floor
on the fourth floor
the lips closed tightly

on the third floor
the cheek turned stiff

on the second floor
the eyes became cold

on the first floor
all traces of smile vanished

when the elevator door opened
the lifeless face merged in the black crowd

[48] *An apple taking the fighting stance*

[Inaori Ringo]

Ishihara Yoshiro

only one apple
that has been left behind
was trying to be
a little aggressive

what could a single apple do
by appearing to be aggressive?

however,
the apple with so much timidity
with so much helplessness
finally decided to look aggressive

looking around
at the edge of the tatami mat

rolling over
as if crying, "better give up."
it took the fighting stance

[49] *Small last statement*

[Chiisana Isho]

Nakagiri Masao

My child, please remember at the time of my death,
when in a drunken stupor I lost all understanding
with my tears floating I called out your name loudly,
please remember also,
thirty years of shame and regret
I have endured only for you.

My child, please don't forget at the time of my death,
the fears and hopes of the two of us,
also our solace, our purpose,
every one of those
the two of us shared in common,
the same birthmark in our breasts,
the same thin eyebrows,
please don't forget these.

My child, please don't cry when I die,
because my death will be a small death,

and because people have been dying
 for the last four thousand years
 since the ancient times.
 Don't cry
 instead think of the meaning of the forgotten button
 inside a drawer.

My child, please smile at the time of my death,
 my body could sleep only in a dream,
 because I did not exist until I died,
 please carry my body to a place under the sun
 where the shadows are short,
 let my bones shine like the soldiers
 who died from hunger.

[50] *The telephone rings in the morning*

[Asa, Denwa ga Naru]

Anzai Hitoshi

When I am about to turn on the washing machine
 the telephone rings
 that man's upper body only
 has come out from the night
 far away there is a noise
 like the growl of a lumber mill
 shaving an electric razor
 he repeats the same words
 "I slept a lot by myself in my apartment"
 "I want to eat ham and eggs that you cook"
 that's what you say.
 then who was that other woman?
 sitting back to back
 staring at the wall
 now she is putting on her bra.....
 if he did not call me
 but the lie would not be exposed
 the morning when the phone does not ring
 I feel like a broken washing machine
 I am proud that I am a hard worker

diligently everyday
I renew the yesterdays
I like to spread fine weather
through the whole garden

already my child almost torn by wind
has gone off to school
my husband's face a grimace
in his stiff collar
he is riding in a bus

every ten days or every two weeks
this man takes me out to a sad city

he puts his fingers in my mouth
in my ears
everywhere without caring
and turns me inside out.

[51] *Cliff*

[Gake]

Ishigaki Rin

at the end of the war
 in the Saipan island
 the women's bodies
 follow one another
 jumping to their deaths.

virtue
 and
 duty
 and
 the right appearance
 and
 so on
 cornered
 sometimes
 by the fire
 and sometimes
 by the menfolk

one must jump
 therefore they jumped
 one must go to the place
 which is nowhere
 (the cliff always
 lets the women invert
 themselves completely)

you know,
 not a single one of them
 reached the ocean
 in fifteen years.

what happened... I wonder
to these
women...

[52] *In the middle of the night*

[Mayonaka]

Kiyooka Takayuki

"from my itchy indistinct
hip bone,
suddenly a strong wide tail
like that of a crocodile
will sprout stiffly"
just worrying about this
keeps a man awake at night.
"if it really grows...,"
he daydreams.
"I wonder if it will grow endlessly
and go around the earth.
if it is like that,
it will be quite funny.
like the wire that severed
a dancer's body
will I squeeze the earth tightly
and cut it into two plant bulbs?"
"no,no," he reconsiders.
"why do I think such grand thoughts?
actually,
a prettier tail than a squirrel's
and a bushy tail
won't it grow like that?
no one will notice that kind of tail.
I'll be slightly proud.
but the woman who loves me desperately,
the one with nipples all over her body
must grasp my tail
when she returns from her ecstasy
she will touch every part of my body.
what a farce!
she will faint for an instant.
at any rate
an unexpected and strange tail from my coccyx
won't it grow?"
who is the man that can't sleep at night
worrying about this only...?

[53] *A hypothesis concerning a man connected with whisky*

[Hito]

Tamura Ryuichi

I think
because you are still young
it is better for you
not to drink whisky

the English novelist, Colin Wilson
formulated a hypothesis
until a horse becomes a horse
thirteen million years
until a shark becomes a shark
one and a half billion years

until a man becomes a man
thirteen thousand years only

moreover,
more violent change has occurred
within the last ten thousand years
the change from intelligent chimpanzee
to Rodin's Thinker

why this change called evolution
of mankind's condition occurred?
according to Mr. Wilson's hypothesis
it was the fermentation of alcohol
by mankind since 8000 B.C.

but because you are young
it is better not to drink whisky.
up to now
horses have never killed other horses
sharks have never killed other sharks

why then men kill other men?

why do human beings love one another?

[54] *Important*

[Daiji]

Saito Yoichi

A Buddhist priest also said
 a former teacher also said
 such a good bride
 must be taken care of very well
 But I don't understand
 how she can be looked after so well
 Because she gets up
 while it is still dark in the morning
 shall I grasp her hand in the bed
 and not let her go?
 When she cuts straw for the horse
 shall I carry it?
 Shall I take her to a movie
 during a festival in town?
 Not like that
 She is only dozing off to sleep
 If I buy her a good kimono
 she will only put it in the drawer
 There is no time to put on rouge or powder
 If I think of making love to her
 opening her mouth like a petal
 soon she falls asleep, ha!
 I am troubled:
 "how to take good care of her?"
 I asked the old woman Kan.
 Laughing loudly the old woman Kan answered:
 "I have never been treated with importance
 I have never been loved
 I have been ill-treated a lot
 many times I cried from such treatment
 But the cruel old man
 is already dead."

[55] *The eighth lunar month*

[Ha-zuki]

Sakata Hiroo

tonight
 I waited two hours
 why didn't you come?
 I really became heartbroken

very heartbroken

I want to jump into the Kansai Rail Line
and kill myself

however, I do not hold a grudge against you

because you are a kind, fine person
I will not kill you

it is I who is going to die

your heart is straight
mine is crooked

still punching a hole in my chest
the wind whistles through

cold
painful

just like being thrown into a jail

while the light has gone off
really painful, look here, moon

.....moon?
oh my
talking such nonsense

good bye, I am really no good
can't help dying

the train is good
the wheels will come screeching
Ga-a-a-a-a-a-k

my neck, cut-off will roll down
with a single slashing sound

but since ancient times
has there ever been a man
who killed himself
because the woman he loved
kept him waiting for two hours
and did not come?

I am ashamed of even thinking about it.

[56] *To the firstborn*

[Hajimete no Ko ni]

Yoshino Hiroshi

a few days after your birth

like vultures
those people came and
were opening and closing repeatedly
the lids of their black leather bags.

they were the life insurance agents.
(fast hearing)
I was caught by surprise

those people were answering
 with smiles.
 (we smelled the news)

your face did not even have a distinct shape
 I wonder where in your soft body
 was given a share of a small death.

isn't it to be said
 that already a sweet fragrance
 is adrift?

[57] *June*

[Roku-gatsu]

Ibaragi Noriko

Isn't there a beautiful village somewhere?
 after the day's work
 one glass of dark beer
 letting the hoe rest
 putting down the basket
 men and women
 drink from large beer mugs

Isn't there a beautiful city somewhere?
 edible fruits hanging from
 the trees lining the streets
 endless
 the violet sunset filled with
 tender voice of young people

Isn't there a beautiful collective vigor somewhere?
 living together in the same time
 familiarity mirth anger
 appear and coalesce in sharp energy

[58] *Kite*

[Tako]

Nakamura Minoru

the sky at daybreak
 the wind was blowing
 the air was dry
 the wind continued
 the kite was motionless
 it wasn't motionless
 high up in the sky
 it was trying to soar continuously

in fact it was flying without interruption
 since it was tied over the earth
 with a thin string
 while enduring the wind
 it was being carried by the wind
 finely balanced

ah! the swamp sinking into the bottom of memories
 the ruined and crumbled cities

people crushed with grief
then the dry sky above.....

the wind was blowing
the kite was motionless
it wasn't motionless
high above in the sky

though the moaning sound was hard to catch

[59] *Boiling stone*

[Ishi wo Nite]

Takano Kikuo

I live- boiling a stone
simmering the stone
boiling stone boiling stone
I live- boiling a stone

not because of anger
not because of love
not because of hunger

needless to say
not because of longing
only a pebble
only simmering a stone
without any reason
without any hope
needless to say
an act of sanity

[60] *Seeds scattering on the earth*

[Chikyu ni Tane ga Ochiru Koto]

Kishida Eriko

scattering seeds
on the earth
ripening fruits
piling up fallen leaves
these are also events
on the sky

[61] *Stranger's sky*

[Tanin no Sora]

Iijima Koichi

the birds came back.
they picked at the fissures on the dark soil.
went and down on unfamiliar roofs.
they seemed lost.

as if after eating a stone
the sky is holding its troubled head.
lost in thought.
the blood no longer flows
instead it circulates
like a stranger in the sky.

[62] *The Swan*

[Hakucho]

Kawasaki Hiroshi

swan, your wings will get wet
 if I look carefully
 while your wings shatter into pieces
 the faint sound of your wings

wet in the dream
 in whose dream
 are you being looked at?

then, being full
 falling drip drop
 that shadow
 as if it is streaming into the wings
 speaking of various things
 the stars

upon reflection in the blue sky
 has the shadow become white?

from your birth
 you have known the secret
 before long
 inside the pattern of the light
 the morning sun that smells
 will be dyeing the inside
 of the sky

the swan's shape
 has been already defined
 blushing
 soon the white swan will
 become almost colorful

of swan!

[Shitsudai Shihen]

Irisawa Yasuo

when we come for the double suicide
 jajanka waiwai
 the mountain will beam joyfully
 and spout out sulfurous smoke
 jajanka waiwai

not a bird sings
 when we are climbing the growing rock mountain
 to try double suicide
 from the clouds fall
 the weak rays of the sun
 jajanka waiwai
 falling from the clouds

when we come for the double suicide
 the mountain will beam joyfully
 jajanka waiwai
 and spout out sulfurous smoke

not a bird sings
 the growing rocks mountain
 jajanka waiwai
 the two of us climbing
 to commit suicide
 the weak rays heavy on our spines

if we do not die
 the mountain will not forgive
 the mountain will not forgive
 jajanka waiwai

jajanka jajanka
 jajanka waiwai

[64] *Lullaby*

Ooka Makoto

Sleep,
my beloved!
in this lovely corner of the cosmos
a lost child
Sleep!
in the arm of the star of life

safely asleep.

Your lips
 alive
 move ever so slightly
 as if speaking
 words I cannot hear at all
 words you do not know at all
 drawing out the happy alphabets

Sleep,
 my beloved!
 in this lovely corner of the cosmos
 a lost child
 sleep
 sleep

[65] *Kappa*

Tanikawa Shuntaro

Kappa shoplifted
 Kappa filched a trumpet
 trumpeting his trumpet he escaped

Kappa bought green vegetables

Kappa bought one bunch of vegetables
 bought cut ate

[66] *An emotional song*

[Kanjoteki na Uta]

Iwata Hiroshi

I hate students
 I hate glue and polyethylene
 sake and the belt-buckle
 I hate their money orders
 and cash envelopes
 I like the pen in the stand
 and the ink buried in marble
 posters

I like I like

doves

extremely curved lines
 the kid with the red cheek
 going around in a tricycle
 I hate

I hate
 special remedy for hemorrhoids
 kotatsu frames
 wells, flags and conferences⁵- women's gossip
 Japanese type writer, varnish and stylus
 stapler and bar girls and holders
 printed Chinese characters and
 companies and cleaning
 the cursive Chinese characters
 I hate them all

defecation and tax evasion
 ostriches and cheap candies
 percussion pieces
 owner of a certain tobacco shop
 short in stature
 and his wife
 I like them all
 I like bus stops
 I really like them

I like the secondhand book shop
 run by the former special high class police
 I hate the critic who dress informally
 their noses or moles or red warts
 or white bumps or sticky plaster
 or boils that look like human faces
 I hate

I like the professor
 who is about to cry
 I hate the exalted general
 who is about to laugh
 a fair fife and drum corps
 an authentic procession with lantern
 I really hate
 I hate the newspaper editor
 who at 11 a.m.
 thumbs through the pages

⁵ "Ido ga Hata ga Kaigi" in the original poem literally means "a well, a flag and a conference". However, this part sounds like "Idobata-kaigi," which means talks by the wells, namely housewives' gossip.

of my collected poems
 leaves the bookstore
 without buying
 and then writers nonsense about them
 I like fried rice
 I also like people who cry easily
 I hate annexes of buildings
 I like monkeys and pigs
 and also fingers

[67] *Non - sense*

[Mu Dai / Nansensu]

Yoshihara Sachiko

the wind is blowing
 the tree is standing
 ah such a night!

the tree is standing

the wind is blowing
 the tree is standing
 making a sound

alone
 in the bathroom
 at midnight
 soap bubbles
 vomited like crabs
 bitter pleasure
 lukewarm water

a slug is crawling on the wet tiles in the bathroom

ah such a night!
a slug is crawling

I am putting some salt on you then you will disappear
but you will still be here

 the horror of the question
 to be or not to be

though
again the spring
again the wind is blowing

I am the salted slug
I don't exist
anywhere

I must now be flowing out
buried under the soap bubbles

ah such a night!

[68] *A sound*

[Mono-oto]

Nakae Toshio

silently things look back
"who"?
that word raising both hands
towards dusky darkness
is already running away
at that time
the world of the two of us
became opaque
both our hearts touched
each other
without a thought
"what are we going to do?"
wavering we smile...

[69] *Lyrical composition according to the theory of the feeling near the muscle of the mouth*

[Kohen kin-niku kankakusetsu ni yoru jojoteki sakuhinsho]

Suzuki Shiroyasu

Sakuhin 2 (Composition 2)

gurottomantika
gurottomantika

niipeporutopein
iiiiiii

eruso
masotomuune

gurottomantika
tomantika

iiso iiso
runrunrunrun

nipo

Sakuhin 10 (Composition 10)

popo

numunumumonarami
nurunurumomonumu

gireccho
zurumaccho

numunumumonarami
nurunurumomonumu

zurumaccho
poe

[Ginga]

Yoshimasu Gozo

the man is washing a shirt. while thinking about the universe, he is washing the fine beautiful fabric with a metallic luster. music is flowing. moss is quivering at the bottom of the tank and the finger inside the water draws a curved line painting designs on the wood. ah! long ago the hot air in the cosmos affected the body and the finger became frostbitten. drawing curved lines like a ship with his fluttering hair he no longer runs around the universe. on Monday and Wednesday he takes a bath. on Monday and Wednesday he takes a bath. late autumn, in front of the house the red fruit of nanten. in some loitering place the man is washing his shirt. as usual, as if someone is there chattering away. he is not singing. he is just washing the fine beautiful fabric with a metallic luster. soon the fixed stars, the giant trees and the memory of the beautiful woman will supposedly become bubbles and sink in the milky way where a fine snow is falling. he sticks his burning finger in the water! or one, two, sky-knocking tanka⁶. several thousand years could pass already, the man is still washing a shirt. it was a dress for the last journey. it is whitish, but is beginning to turn crimson. soon the man begins to slowly roll up the sleeves to his arms.

[71] *The engagement*

[Kon-yaku]

⁶ a Japanese poem of thirty-one syllables

Tsuji Yukio

nose next to nose
this close
(this being the case already
it is beyond happiness,
isn't it so?)
since I inhale your breath
and you inhale mine
before long
I wonder if we'll die.
next to the window
in the wonderful month of May
suffering from Oxygen starvation.