Steven Carter, ed. & trans.

Traditional Japanese Poetry

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Translator's Note

All genres of classical Japanese poetry involve combinations of five- and seven-syllable lines: 5-7-5-7-7 for the *tanka* or *uta*, 5-7-5 for the *haiku* or *hokku*, etc. The translations in this collection attempt to reflect this pattern by using alternating long and short English lines, albeit with careful attention paid to English rhythm. Likewise, the translations attempt to retain the order of images as they appear in the original poems, whenever syntactic patterns make that possible in English.

In these two respects the translations represent nothing new. In punctuation and line format, however, I have attempted to find new ways to suggest the variety of pauses and stops in the original poems. To this end, I begin flush left each new poem and generally every new line following any punctuation mark, then indent two spaces the next one or two lines when those lines constitute one complete sentence or phrase, with the restriction that this "jogging" of lines will never continue for more than three lines. The most common pattern is thus,

202. SUMMER. Topic unknown

A barge of timber
  floating down a logging stream
    makes a sad pillow—
but in summer it's a cool place
  to lie down for the night.

somagawa no / ikada no toko no / ukimakura / natsu wa suzushiki / fushido narikeri

But there are several variations, as in the following examples:

314. WINTER. "Leaves Falling at Dawn"

Raindrops, I first thought
  as I lay awake in my bed—
but what I heard
  was the unbroken patter
    of leaves overcome by storm winds.

shigure ka to / nezame no toko ni / kikoyuru wa / arashi
ni taenu / ko no ha narikeri

515. WINTER. Written on the first day of the Tenth Month

Autumn's gone away.
The wind has blown from the trees
every single leaf;
and the mountains are forlorn
now that winter has come.

aki wa inu / kaze ni ko no ha no / chirihatete / yama
sabishikaru / fuyu wa kinikeri

958. SPRING

Term of duty done,
he stops, umbrella in hand—
gazing at dusk rain.

dekawari ya / karakasa sagete / yūnagame

1058. SPRING

Snow starts melting
and the village overflows—
with children.

yuki tokete / mura ippai no / kodomo kana

All together, this approach succeeds, I hope, in suggesting the syntax of the original Japanese poems in ways that the uniform formats used by many other translators cannot.

Poems are introduced with information taken from the original sources—the topical book of an imperial anthology, headnotes, and so forth—as in this example.

662. SUMMER. A verse on "Cooling Down," written for a thousand-verse sequence at the house of the governor of Ise

Oh, for some blossoms—
to bid storm winds to visit
this summer garden!

hana mogana / arashi ya towan / natsu no niwa

Titles or topics written in Japanese (as opposed to headnotes) are set in quotation marks; titles on poetry in Chinese are italicized. Sources for the poems are given in a separate section at the back of the book, keyed to the anthology numbers. A list of abbreviations used there and in the text appears on pp. 468–70.

Whenever possible, I have kept notes with the poems, but a handful of long notes containing important but sometimes complex information seemed better cast as supplementary notes. These notes, referred to as s.n. 1, s.n. 2, and so forth, are keyed to the footnotes and appear in a separate section at the back of the book. For convenience, on poems of five lines or less, the romanized versions of the originals are printed beneath the translations, with slashes separating five- and seven-syllable units for the benefit of those accustomed to the parsing used in standard indexes. Longer romanizations are given in sequence as supplementary notes. I have followed the practice of most translators in providing romanizations based on current native Japanese pronunciations rather than attempting to reconstruct the pronunciations of the various historical periods.

In choosing poems, I have assumed that the anthology will be used in the college classroom, and I have therefore given priority to authors and works well recognized as of artistic and/or historical importance by Japanese scholars. For this reason major poets such as Kakinomoto no Hitomaro, Izumi Shikibu, Saigyō, and Matsuo Bashō are particularly well represented, as are important collections such as *Man'yōshu*, *Kokinshū*, and *Shin kokinshū*. In addition, the volume contains generous samplings from poets and works representing other genres and sensibilities—from Chinese verse written by Zen monks to comic poetry. In particular, it gives more attention to the late medieval age (1333–1600) than other anthologies, reflecting the new interest in the poets and poems of that age now being shown in Japan and the West. Introductory material and explanatory notes have been included to assist the first-time student in approaching the poems, with particular attention given to historical context, aesthetic ideals, and rhetorical techniques. The organization of material is by historical period, beginning with the earliest native poems and ending with a few samples of traditional forms still being used in the twentieth century.

An asterisk on a poem heading indicates that the poem was translated by Helen Craig McCullough. All other translations are my own.

Introduction

What is poetry? Shelley called it "the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds."[1] But for readers acquainted with T. S. Eliot or Robert Lowell or Allen Ginsberg, that definition simply will not do. A happier and better definition, as well as one more useful for introducing an anthology of traditional Japanese poetry, comes from Ezra Pound, who saw great literature as "simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree," and poetry, his own chosen art form, as "the most concentrated form of verbal expression."[2] Certainly, this is particularly appropriate for students—as Pound was himself—of the great poets of Japan, who wrote poems as charged and compressed as poems can be.

The reasons why traditional Japanese poetry should so clearly fit Pound's definition are various. The most obvious no doubt derives from the nature of the Japanese language, whose sound system, with its few consonants and even fewer vowels and diphthongs, did not lend itself to expansive forms, making small seem better and perhaps more powerful. There is also the historical context in which Japanese poetry as we know it today first developed—the highly refined society of the early courts of Nara and Kyōto. In this setting, for complex psychological and sociological reasons, poetry came to be used as much for communication between lovers or friends as for artistic expression, and a tradition of cryptic statement evolved, with notes passed from sleeve to sleeve or conundrums exchanged furtively in the night. Add to this the high sense of decorum that dominated court society for centuries, and you get the conditions in which developed the classical *uta* (also referred to

1. "A Defence of Poetry," in G. B. Harrison, ed., *Major British Writers* (New York: Harcourt, Brace), 1: 314.
2. Ezra Pound, *An ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1934), p. 36.

as *tanka* or *waka*), the thirty-one-syllable poem that is the foundation of virtually all poetry written in Japanese between 850 and 1900.

The success of the uta meant that traditional Japanese poetry came to be characterized by certain phenomena resulting from or reacting against the short verse form: first, a strong emphasis on internal alliteration and assonance, which provided the poet with his only musical tools; second, an absence of rhyme, which inevitably would have produced tedious, sing-song rhythms; third, the use of ellipsis and various forms of compressed syntax; and fourth, a reliance on the concrete image as the primary vehicle of expression. That many of these same features characterize much modern poetry in English—whether in short forms or long—is an accident of history that goes far in explaining why the poetry of so remote a culture held such an attraction for Pound and his modernist cohorts at the turn of the century.

To be sure, some possibilities were lost to Japanese poetry by its reliance on short verse forms. There is no epic poetry in the Japanese tradition, nor any dramatic form akin to the plays of the Elizabethan stage. Instead, the Japanese poets stayed within the bounds of a quiet lyricism that explored a few privileged topics, chief among them the beauties of the natural world and the obsessions of the human heart.

If one is looking for a Milton or a Browning, then, one will not find him in the poetry of Japan's classical age. And although one is more likely to find there lines reminiscent of Wordsworth or Keats, one should probably put even such comparisons aside in order to be fair to the Japanese poets. The poems of Japan's classical ages have virtues of their own, unique to their own situation, and it is for those virtues that the poems deserve to be read. For if one does not find the grandeur of Hamlet's soliloquies in classical Japan, neither does one find in Shakespeare's sonnets the careful understatement of a lyric like this one (poem 57, below):

Our life in this world—
to what shall I compare it?
It is like a boat
  rowing out at break of day,
leaving not a trace behind.

yo no naka o / nani ni tatoemu / asabiraki / koginishi
fune no / ato naki gotoshi

Of Sami Mansei, the author of this poem, we know almost nothing except that he was active in the early eighth century. Yet we do not need

to know anything about Mansei or his time to respond to the simple but moving image that he creates in just a few lines. It was the ability to create such an image under the great linguistic stress of a short verse form that was respected above all else among poets of Mansei's time; and it is the ability to respond to such an image that should be the goal of a study of Japanese poetry.

After the end of the classical tradition as such in the sixteenth century, some changes did take place. But, contrary to what one might expect, the verse form got shorter with the emergence of the *hokku*, known as haiku in the West. And although some fresh topics were treated in the new genre, the old boundaries were still generally respected, and the focus continued to be primarily on the natural world for imagery and on the impressionistic portrayal of human perception and emotion.

Of course this should not be taken to mean that the premodern tradition of Japanese poetry is all of a piece; from age to age there were changes in thematics, rhetorical devices, topics, and so on. But these matters are best treated in relation to specific poets and poems, as I have attempted to do in the introductions to the authors and works represented in this book. Here what is needed is a more precise definition of the genres of the Japanese poetry and how they relate to each other in time.

We must begin with an exception to much of what has been said above. For the earliest genre of the Japanese tradition is not the uta, but the *chōka*, which translated literally is "long poem." Although it too was a courtly genre, the chōka was clearly a longer and more complex form, as a famous example shows (poems 36–37):

ametsuchi no	5	Since that ancient time
wakareshi toki yu	7	when heaven and earth were sundered,
kamu sabite	5	like a god soaring
takaku tōtoki	7	in high-towering majesty
suruga naru	5	over Suruga
fuji no takane o	7	has stood Fuji's lofty peak.
ama no hara	5	Turn your eyes upward
furisakemireba	7	to heaven's high plain and see
wataru hi no	5	how it hides from sight
kage mo kakurai	7	the sun in its constant course
teru tsuki no	5	and obstructs our view
hikari mo miezu	7	of the moon in its shining,

shirakumo mo	5	blocking even clouds
iyukihabakari	7	from going on their way—
toki jiku so	5	and how always on its peak
yuki wa furikeru	7	snow is falling, ever falling.
kataritsugi	5	We praise it now, and ever more—
fuji no takane wa	7	the lofty peak of Fuji.

Envoy

tago no ura yu	6	At Tago Bay
uchiidete mireba	8	I came out, and looked afar—
mashiro ni so	5	to see the pure white
fuji no takane ni	7	of Mount Fuji's lofty peak,
yuki wa furikeru	7	amidst a flurry of snow.

A simple paean? Perhaps; but this poem, written by Yamabe no Akahito sometime in the early eighth century, does much that its descendant the uta could not, employing parallelism and repetition for a grand effect that would be impossible in the shorter form. Akahito's delicately articulated structure—moving from the beginning of time to the present moment of the poet's vision, while at the same time tracing the timeless arc of the sun, the moon, the stars, and the mountain itself—was something later uta poets could admire but never reproduce.

But the fact is that the chōka did not survive. *Man'yōshū* (A Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves; ca. 759), our first sourcebook for Japanese poems, contains only 266 examples of the form, as opposed to over 4,000 uta. Whether for reasons that have to do with the sound structure of the language or with literary developments at court, the chōka was a dying genre even before the end of the Ancient Age (fifth century–794). With it died the possibility of sustained poetic narrative.

Nevertheless, the chōka bequeathed much to the new tradition forming at court, including the spirit of aesthetic celebration so apparent in Akahito's poem and the gentle humanism so important in defining Japanese standards of taste. In formal terms, it also bequeathed to later poets the basic 5-7-5-7-7 prosodic structure that appeared in its envoys (Akahito's poem presents a slight deviation) and the use of so-called "pillow-words." These *makura kotoba* were fixed imagistic epithets ("night, black as leopard-flower seeds"; "Nara, where the earth is rich"; "Kara, the cape of wave-chatter like Cathay speech") that would perform an economic function for poets into the centuries to come. Consequently, lines by Kakinomoto no Hitomaro (fl. ca. 680–700; from poem 15),

Thus the courtiers,
men of the *stone-built* palace,
align their vessels
to cross the morning river . . .

momoshiki no / ōmiyabito wa / fune namete / asakawa watari

are echoed by Retired Emperor Juntoku (1197–1242), writing in the 1200's (poem 514):

In the *stone-built* palace
the old eaves are overgrown
with Memory Fern—
but ah, what a past is here
still left to be remembered!

momoshiki ya / furuki nokiba no / shinobu ni mo / nao amari aru / mukashi narikeri

This is not direct allusion; the Emperor is drawing on a whole tradition, not on a single poem. Yet for those who know its long history, the image presented in the epithet "stone-built" (*momoshiki no*) gains extra power and authority borne by its rhetorical connection to the past.

So the chōka poets left behind them a specific body of images and epithets that went far toward defining the focus of Japanese poetry. More important, they left behind a heritage of lyricism that would inspire generations of poets to come. It is largely because of the chōka, in fact, that the Japanese still think of the seventh and eighth centuries as an optimistic, happy time when Japanese culture had its first flowering.

The Classical Age (794–1185), often referred to as Heian after the capital (Heian Kyō; modern Kyōto), was more elegant but less open. With the remove of the nation's capital from Nara in the broad Yamato plain to the hill-lined valley of the Kyōto basin, poetry too took an inward turn, becoming a more strictly courtly art, with elaborate conventions and strict rules on proper imagery and themes that allowed for no more "vulgar" influences. And no longer was its inspiration the Japanese state or Mount Fuji. Now the model looked to by poets was Chinese—a tradition that poets of *Man'yōshū* had been aware of, but less obviously influenced by.

As it happened, the Chinese looked to by the Japanese at the time were not those of the *Shi jing* (The Book of Poetry) or the great Tang

poets closest to them in time, such as Li Bo (701–62), Du Fu (712–70), and Bo Juyi (772–846). Instead, in a sort of "time-lag" that would characterize much of Japan's cultural borrowing from the continent for ages to come, Japanese poets of the Classical Age read the poets of the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries—the period known as the Six Dynasties. These poets, who had fallen into relative obscurity in China itself, were known less for philosophical profundity than cleverness, charm, color, and wordplay. "Breaking the Willows," by Xiao Gang (503–51), shows the style at its height:[3]

> The willows tangle like silken threads;
> people pull and break them at the beginning of spring.
> The leaves are dense: bird flight is impeded;
> the breeze is light: flower fall is languid.
> In lofty castles short flutes begin to sound;
> in lonely groves painted flutes echo sadly.
> There is no difference in the songs;
> all express thoughts of long separation.

Little exegesis is needed to point out the basic qualities of this style: lyricism and a reliance on parallelism as a basic organizing principle. Xiao's poem is an extension of earlier Chinese traditions, but his elegant conceits make for a density of expression and an indirect rhetorical stance that mark his work as the product of a new kind of verbal perception.

Some of this newness had already been experienced by Japanese poets in the eighth century. It was in the mid-ninth century, however, that the Six Dynasties style became a defining factor of the uta, whose rhetorical stance and thematics can often be traced directly to models by Chinese courtiers writing several hundred years before. One need only compare the following poem (223) by the courtier Ōshikōchi no Mitsune (d. ca. 925?) with Akahito's envoy quoted above to see the effect of the new sensibility on the poetry of the Japanese court.

> Its effort is vain,
> the darkness of this spring night:
> true, we cannot see

3. Translation from Helen Craig McCullough, *Brocade by Night: 'Kokin Wakashu' and the Court Style in Japanese Classical Poetry* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985), p. 62.

> the color of the plum blossoms—
> but how can it hide their scent?

> haru no yo no / yama wa ayanashi / ume no hana / iro
> koso miene / ka ya wa kakururu

In Akahito's description of "Fuji's lofty peak, amidst a flurry of snow" we have only one major metaphor, no syntactic hesitations, and no questioning of perceptions. Mitsune, by contrast, is more tentative and more cerebral—producing a clever conception, using personification and a plea to the reader's reasoning powers to complicate what could have been a simple exclamation on the wonderful scent of the plum blossoms.

It was this somewhat convoluted, highly rhetoricized approach that became the foundation of court poetry in the uta form, enshrined first of all in *Kokinshū* (Collection of Early and Modern Japanese Poetry; 905). This was a work compiled by imperial order and intended to represent the poetic accomplishment of the courtly classes, for whom poetry had become a constant feature of life—whether informally in conversation or formally in poem contests or at banquets. In its pages we find many poems like Mitsune's, appealing to studied logic or courtly taste for their effects. Others poems use similar devices. For instance, in the following poem (430) we confront a *kakekotoba*—a "pivot-word," or pun involving one word used in two senses at once, and often in two syntactic positions.

> I must depart now
> for the pines that await me
> at Mount Inaba—
> but should I hear that you too pine,
> I will hurry back to you.

> tachiwakare / inaba no yama no / mine ni ouru / matsu
> to shi kikaba / ima kaerikon

Composed by Ariwara no Yukihira (818–93) before leaving for his post as provincial governor in Inaba, this poem was probably intended to convey his steadfastness to a lover. Rather than announce his devotion openly, however, he has chosen to cloak it in a poem that employs two puns, the first involving *inaba*, functioning as both a place-name and an inflection of the verb *inu*, "to go," and the second *matsu*, or "pine," a word that fortunately can mean both the tree and "to wait"

in English as well—although to actually render them as a single word without repetition is impossible in translation.

The list of devices could go on; what is important is that all of them owe something to the Chinese poetry of the Six Dynasties period—a tradition that, after *Kokinshū*, became part of the heritage of Japan. In coming years, twenty-one such anthologies were compiled by imperial order, the last appearing fully five centuries after the first. In all but a few cases, the compilers were courtiers whose allegiance was to their past. Quibble though they might about some matters, their basic agreements defined poetry and resisted fundamental change in genre, basic subject matter, and so forth.

This does not mean that there were no developments in later years, as the introductory material to various later poets and works below should make clear. For instance, one definitely finds a new seriousness of tone in the Early Medieval Age (1185–1330; often referred to as the Kamakura Period), represented most fully by the eighth imperial anthology, *Shin kokinshū* (The New *Kokinshū*; 1205), which features poems like these by Monk Saigyō (1118–90) and Fujiwara no Teika (1162–1241); poems 302 and 401, respectively):

That spring long ago
at Naniwa in Tsu:
was it all a dream?
Now only dead leaves on the reeds
rustle in the passing wind.

tsu no kuni no / naniwa no haru wa / yume nare ya / ashi
no kareba ni / kaze wataru nari

The years have gone by,
with my prayers still unanswered—
as Hase's bell
signals evening from its peak,
sounding somehow far away.

toshi mo henu / inoru chigiri wa / hatsuseyama / onoe no
yama no / yoso no yūgure

These poems—presenting a stark autumn scene that seems a Buddhist contemplation of the law of change and the forlorn complaint of a rejected lover—have little of the lightheartedness of *Kokinshū* days, to be sure. And in general the poems of this later period follow the same pattern, with more direct means of expression, as is even clearer in another famous example, by Monk Jakuren (1139?–1202; poem 324):

Ah, solitude—
it is not the sort of thing
that has a color.
Mountains lined with black pine
on an evening in autumn.

sabishisa wa / sono iro to shi mo / nakarikeri / maki
tatsu yama no / aki no yūgure

In its appeal to the natural world for an image to express a state of mind, Jakuren's poem reveals its continuity with the court tradition, but it does so in a quieter, more straightforward way than the *Kokinshū* poets would have chosen.

Yet it is important to note that Jakuren's poem was written not as true natural description but as one of a group of one hundred poems submitted to a patron upon request[4]—that is, it was a product of imagination mediated by traditional conventions and expectations. And this is true of Saigyō's and Teika's poems as well, the first because it refers directly to an earlier poem, by Monk Nōin (998–1050?), that described the beauty of spring at the same location (poem 247), the second because it relies partially for its effect on the pivot-word Hatsuse, which functions both as a place-name associated with a famous temple and the verb *hatsu*, "to come to an end."

Upon study, then, seeming breaks with tradition prove often to be merely shifts within it. Moreover, the influence of China continued. For example, the somber, contemplative qualities of many poems in *Shin kokinshū* derive partly from the profound impact on Japanese courtiers of the poets of the Tang Dynasty. Thus the tradition begun in the early days of Heian culture continued on through most of the Late Medieval Age (1333–1600; often referred to as the Muromachi Period)—through the civil wars of the mid-1300's to the final collapse of aristocratic society in the 1500's. Changes were occurring, but always within the limits of a conservative tradition. The form of the uta continued, although with new developments in syntax and caesura. The basic themes of the *Kokinshū* poets—the four seasons, love, felicitations, travel, and

4. The poem (SKKS 361) originally appeared in a hundred-poem sequence submitted to Fujiwara no (Go-Kyōgoku) Yoshitsune (1169–1206) in 1191.

so on—remained the same, even as newer and more complex topics within those themes were introduced and subgenres were developed to organize anthologies in new ways. Pillow-words and pivot-words were still employed. And, above all, the tradition remained a courtly one, with courtiers—though now sharing their art with men of the military families—still its primary poets and court tastes always at its foundation.

Yet some other changes did take place. One was that the composition of Chinese poetry became popular again, this time in Zen monasteries. More important, though, was the growth that took place in *renga*, or "linked uta." At first the new form was nothing more than an elegant verse-capping game, in which one poet provided the first half of an uta (the 5-7-5), and a companion the conclusion (the final 7-7). But in time the game became a serious business, with the art of "linking" at its heart. By the age of *Shin kokinshū*, poets like Fujiwara no Teika were composing one-hundred-verse sequences.

It is a testament to the power of courtly attitudes, that the new child in most ways responded positively to the discipline of its parent—working within the thematic bounds of the imperial anthologies, for instance, and demanding the same standards of decorum. For, as an example from the fifteenth century shows, renga—at least the renga that have been preserved for us—represent nothing more than an extension of uta aesthetics.[5]

1. Takayama Sōzei [d. 1455]

The green underleaves
  of wisteria in bloom:
seaweed on the waves.

saku fuji no / uraba wa nami no / tamamo kana

2. Monk Ninsei [mid-15th century]

Borrowing color from spring,
the pines are a deeper hue.

haru ni iro karu / matsu no hitoshio

5. Translation from Steven D. Carter, "A Lesson in Failure: Linked-Verse Contests in Medieval Japan," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 104.4 (Fall 1984): 733–34.

3. His Holiness Gyōjō [1405–69]

In this morning's rain
  the snow on the mountain peaks
    starts to melt away.

mine yo yuki / kesa furu ame ni / kiesomete

4. Venerable Senjun [1411–76]

Shining faintly in the haze,
the moon before break of day.

kasumi ni usuku / nokoru tsukikage

5. Bishop Shinkei [1406–75]

The warbler still sleeps
  as I bed down in the fields,
travel my pillow.

uguisu mo / mada nuru nobe no / tabimakura

6. Sōzei

The house-paths cannot be seen,
so dark is the gloom before dawn.

tare ka ieji mo / mienu akegure

7. Ninsei

Despite the fields
  of clinging kudzu vines,
autumn takes its leave.

makuzuhara / kaeru aki mo / tadoruran

8. Gyōjo

On last year's bush clover
  blossoms are fragrant once more.

furue no kohagi / nao niou koro

These verses were composed by monks and men of warrior background who might have been expected to do something entirely new. And at first glance their work does appear to hark back to the chōka, with a longer, more complex prosodic form. But, in fact, these verses were neither composed nor interpreted as a whole; rather they were treated as individual links, with rules that made for constant change and variety—although only within the thematic limits of the uta tradition that would classify the first verse as in the spring category, the sixth as miscellaneous, and the last two as autumn. Once again, the poetry of the court stood as the authority, which the major renga poets seem to have treated as an absolute, adopting a neoclassical attitude in both their poetry and their critical writings.

Real change could come only when the old authority structure was displaced, which started just after the above sequence (dated 1453) was composed, with the wars that began in the capital in the late 1460's and continued on until the great unification of 1600. In the world of poetry, these were years of great contrasts. Ironically, courtiers of this time were often joined in their meetings and contests by warrior barons eager to obtain the trappings of culture. But the fragmentation that was fundamental to linked verse (a signal of changes to come sent out by that genre, almost despite itself) was more true to the trend of the age. For poetry too was undergoing a reorientation—moving away from the capital as the center of culture, into the provinces, the castle towns and trade centers.

It was in this atmosphere that *haikai renga* (also referred to as *haikai renku*), the last major genre of premodern poetry, evolved. In essence still another development from within the tradition, the new form maintained classical form but allowed for broader thematic range. A link from around 1500 illustrates the point (poem 787):

Is there any hair, or not?
He feels around, to make sure.

With no disciple,
the monk has shaved his head
all by himself.

ke no aru naki wa / sagurite zo shiru; deshi motanu /
bōzu wa kami o / jizori shite

One can easily imagine such a bawdy verse being composed earlier in Japanese history, in a formal linking session; but in those days such

lapses in decorum had not generally been recorded. Not until the sixteenth century, a time of great upheaval and change in Japanese society, would such work be preserved. This alone signals a change in the values of the poetic world. As the aristocratic classes lost their wealth and, along with it, their privileged place in Japanese culture, their elegant tastes were replaced by those of the new classes—the samurai, the artisans, and the merchants.

These changes continued on into the Early Modern Age (or the Edo Period, 1600–1868), an era that can be seen as either the end of an old tradition or the beginning of a new one. Formally speaking, it was clearly the former, since the basic 5-7-5 syllable scheme remained intact; but in terms of thematics, haikai represented a new and plebeian trend. For while poets of the new linked verse still seem to have conceived of their work in terms of the old categories of the seasons, love, and so on, they felt free to work all sorts of material into those categories that earlier poets would never have allowed. Hence Matsuo Bashō (1644–94) and a few friends were able to create a series of scenes never even considered possible by *Kokinshū* or *Shin kokinshū* poets.

823. Tsuboi Tokoku (d. 1690)

White briar-rose:
frost on a horse's bones,
in second bloom.

hana mubara / bakotsu no shimo ni / sakikaeri

824. Okada Yasui (1648–1743)

I saw a crane from that window—
and now that faint dawn moon.

tsuru miru mado no / tsuki kasuka nari

825. Matsuo Bashō (1644–94)

A day with no
autumn wind—a day with no
sake in my pot!

kaze fukanu / aki no hi kame ni / sake naki hi

These verses can be fitted into the categories of orthodox renga—winter for the first, autumn for the last. Not so, however, their images of a horse's bones or a *sake* pot. Indeed, what the verses seem to present is a parody. This was the case with much work in the last two-and-a-half centuries of premodern Japan. Uta were written, but either parodying *Kokinshū* and *Shin kokinshū* poets or looking for inspiration further back, to the age of *Man'yōshū*; finally, even haikai itself was poked fun at by *senryū*, a madcap form that reacted against Bashō's relative seriousness.

In the end, then, one can claim that even the poetry of the Early Modern Age owed its allegiance to past tradition, although it paid its tribute obliquely, through comic imitation. And more: clearly, the most prestigious forms of the period, Chinese verse and the hokku, or haiku—a subgenre deriving from the "first verse" of a haikai sequence—can be seen as extensions of the past in every way. For is not this verse (poem 965) by Yosa Buson (1716–83)

Fuji all alone—
the one thing left unburied
by new green leaves

fuji hitotsu / uzuminokoshite / wakaba kana

more than vaguely reminiscent of Akahito's chōka, just as a Chinese couplet (from poem 1065) by Monk Ryōkan (1758–1831)

In the blue heavens, cold geese calling.
On the empty hills, leaves flying.

reminds us of Saigyō or of the Chinese poems by Zen monks? For all their irreverence, most Early Modern poets were still working within the strictures of a tradition they had inherited as a state of mind.

More fundamental change, in formal and philosophical terms, came with the introduction of Western culture into Japan in the late nineteenth century. Now poets had true alternatives, from Shakespeare and Wordsworth to, eventually, Eliot, Lowell, and Ginsberg. It was these new influences that made it possible for the contemporary poet Yoshioka Minoru (b. 1919) to title a work "Paul Klee's Dining Table" and use words like these:

Forks grow like feeble weeds
Glasses that have lost lips tilt in the air

And a sour drink flows
Sausage skins and fish bones go under
In the city of water that can't be surveyed from above[6]

In such lines, obscure in reference and unfettered by any strict sense of form, almost nothing of the premodern world remains. Thus, with true clarity, the reader of Japanese poetry at last confronts something almost absolutely new.

Yet, to conclude, most of the old forms have survived. This is especially true of haiku, which still supports a large poetic community, and, to a lesser extent, even of uta—now referred to by its practitioners as tanka. What has continued on in these traditions is form rather than subject matter, perhaps because not all poets feel comfortable with free verse and find some sense of security in the rhythms of their own heritage. And even linked verse, the most difficult of classical genres to master, is receiving new attention both in Japan and abroad by those who find something very modern in its fragmented vision.[7]

What all of this will ultimately mean is something we cannot know at present, of course; but the one thing affirmed by such developments is that classical poetry of Japan, like that of China or Greece, is still very much a living force in the modern world—as the twentieth-century examples included in this "classical" anthology attest.

6. Translation of Hiraoka Sato, in Howard Hibbett, ed. and comp., *Contemporary Japanese Literature: An Anthology of Fiction, Film, and Other Writing Since 1945* (New York: Knopf, 1977), p. 340.

7. See, for instance, a Western renga (in English, French, Italian, and Spanish, no less) in Octavio Paz et al., *Renga, a Chain of Poems* (New York: Braziller, 1971). Another sign of interest in the form is indicated by William H. Gass's reference to it in *Habitations of the Word* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), p. 272.