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NUMBER SEVENTEEN
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON CHAPBOOKS
Edited by Glenn Hughes

FIFTEEN POETS *of*
MODERN JAPAN
A Book of Translations

Fifteen Poets of Modern Japan

A Book of Translations

By

GLENN HUGHES

and

YOZAN T. IWASAKI



1928

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON BOOK STORE
Seattle

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Printed in the United States of America

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FOREWORD



THE extraordinary appreciation accorded our earlier book of translations, *Three Women Poets of Modern Japan*, has led us to prepare the present collection, and to issue it as a companion volume to the other. Our aim this time is broader than before. Instead of confining ourselves to the feminine point of view and the *tanka* (thirty-one syllable) form, we are introducing poets of both sexes and a variety of lyric forms. It has frequently been said that Japanese poets have no ability to sustain their effects—that they are limited, either by temperament or tradition, to the briefest poetic flights. In general this assertion is borne out by fact. More and more, however, the longer lyric is finding a place in Japanese literature, and while the average Western reader is not accustomed to look upon a poem of fifteen or twenty lines as long, such a poem appears quite extensive to one whose con-

ception of poetry is based chiefly on a familiarity with minute *hokku* and slightly longer *tanka*.

The rapidly-spreading knowledge of the fundamental characteristics of Japanese poetry would seem to make unnecessary another expository essay in that field. The spontaneity, the simplicity, the mental ingenuity, the charmingly impressionistic pictorialism which we have come to expect from Japanese poets are all exemplified once again in the present collection. It is a pleasure to bring to Western shores such charmingly wrought gifts as these—even though they may have been marred somewhat in their long journey from the East.

—G. H.

FIFTEEN POETS *of*
MODERN JAPAN
A Book of Translations

HARU ASAO

1

My lips took from your hand
Blood-red strawberries.
Since that day
My heart is stained
With their color.

2

RED cosmos flowers
Stand in the fog
Like figures in a dream
Of happy love.

3

A MAIDEN grieves
For love on earth.
Let the clouds of heaven
Split asunder,
And a fiery rain descend!

4

It is too late
For this love to be forgotten,
And in this life
It can never be fulfilled.

BENIJI FUKIYA

Pink Lanterns

SWAYING,
Bobbing,
Gay
Pink lanterns.
Drooping now
From the night-rain,
Weeping gently
In the morning light.

TAKUBOKU ISHIKAWA

1

A HUNDRED times
I traced in the sand
The character signifying "greatness."
Then I arose and departed,
Forsaking my plan of suicide.

2

To die? For what? For this?
To live, then! For what? For this?
Let the argument cease!

3

I CLIMBED to the top of the mountain.
I took off my hat and waved it.
I came down.

4

THE stupid people struggle
And crowd forward to draw lots.
I feel inclined to draw one myself.

5

WHENEVER I get angry
I shall break a dish.
Before I die
I shall have broken
Nine hundred and ninety-nine.

6

I WENT into a vacant house
And smoked cigarettes.
I wished to be alone.

7

IN the soft drift of snow
I buried my hot cheek.
I desired that kind of love.

8

I CAME to a shop filled with mirrors,
And was amazed
At the miserable spectacle
Of myself walking.

9

I WANTED to ride on the train,
But when I got off
I had no place to go.

10

I LONGED to say something good
Of someone.
I had grown tired
Of my own selfishness.

11

FEELING inclined toward charity,
I agreed with a friend of mine
Who is conceited.

RYUKO KAWAJI

Dusk

INTO the beautiful dusk
Light has gone to its death.
On the busy street
Shadows disappear.

The soft sounds of evening
Tempt from the tired, dreaming earth
The little breezes,
And the street-trees cry in low tones.

The lights of the street
Give welcome to the night—
Darkness of gold and death.
Light has gone to its death
Far beyond the wind.

A Chair

THIS structure
Resting on the floor
Gives comfort to man.
Only common wood,
But faithful to its master—
More faithful than a dog or a woman.

HATSUO KITAMURA

Rough Sea

SHE dips her feet in the full tide;
The moonlight falls on her fair body;
Her hair streams out.

Her hand trembles as it touches the fruit.
A chair dances.
The captain's daughter laughs
A green laugh.

The cape is out of sight;
Seagulls fly high and low,
Following the fragrance
Of the boat.

The rain has cleared away.
The sky is blue;
The sea is blue.

TOKOKU KITAMURA

The Parting of the Butterflies

Two butterflies on a branch,
Resting, their wings lowered.
The grass droops beneath the weight of dew;
Flowers fade before the cruelty of autumn.

Without a sign to each other
The butterflies rise together
And soar away.
Behind them, the lonely field;
Before them, a cold wind.
Their dreams are all of departed spring.
They wonder where to go.

Two butterflies filled with the same sorrow;
Four wings that are heavy.
Though they fly together
They dread the sword of autumn.
Male and female, both weary,
Return.

Again they rest upon the branch—
Rest for a little while—
Two butterflies together.

The evening bell resounds.
Frightened, they rise in air,
One to the east, one to the west.
Looking backward at each other
They fly away.

TAKEKO KUJO

1

THIS quiet is so precious!
No voice sounds in heaven or on earth.
The moon and I are alone.

2

I do not know
If it be the fire of God
Or the fire of Satan,
But where its light leads me
I will go.

3

THIS rain,
Unlike the gentle showers of spring,
Reminds me of your voice
When you are angry.

4

SPRING days, they say, are long.
Yesterday seemed so short,
But today—alas!

5

You are not here,
And I am waiting and waiting for the moon,
Which does not rise.
It is a heart-breaking night
For man and sky.

6

THE evening breeze
Blows the cherry-blossoms
Back to heaven.
They are too beautiful
For man's earth.

7

THE sinking sun
Is the soul of a giant.
Like my soul
It is bloody and burning.

DOPPO KUNIKITA

The Island in the Offing

A LARK rises
From an island in the offing.
Where the lark lives
There is farm-land;
Where there is farm-land
There is man;
Where there is man
There is love.

SANEATSU MUSHAKOJI

One Woman and Three Men

THERE was a beautiful woman
Loved by three men.
One of them became her husband;
One of them fell into despair and ruin;
The other became a poet—
His name was Dante.

SOSEKI NATSUME

1

TONIGHT, as I waited for you,
I thought the rain would come.
The rain did not come. . . .
The cuckoo sang. . . .

2

HAD you been here with me
I should have slept.
Hark! The cuckoo singing in the dawn.

YASO SAIJO

By the Sea

I COUNT seven stars,
Nine golden lighthouses,
And numberless white oysters
Among the rocks.
But the love in my heart
Is single
And lonely.

NOBUTSUNA SASAKI

1

At the forge,
Where steel melts and flames flow,
There they sang their song of love.

2

THE good-looking kittens
Have all been given away.
Only one remains.
Spring is nearly over.

3

THE sexton trudges slowly away
And does not look back.
The bell-rope still swings.

4

WHEN I see the rose-leaves
That the worms have eaten,
I weep for the fate
Of delicate women.

AKIKO YANAGIWARA

1

FOR love of the moon
The sea ebbs and flows.
How long their love endures!

2

WHEN the rain falls,
You, toad,
Go dragging yourself slowly about.
You are one of the riddles of the universe.

3

FOR the sake of this dull life
All day long have I spoken lies
And listened to lies.

4

To the laws and conventions of man
I offer no word—
Only tears.

5

FOR a moment only did I dream
As I lay napping.
Have a hundred years passed by?

6

WHAT is jealousy?
What is love?
A shadow that comes
And goes.

7

I AM not going.
I am not returning.
I am not staying.
Am I alive or dead?

8

I AM here.
Where is God?
It is night,
And the lonely stars are twinkling.

9

I CURSE the sadness of my bottomless heart
That made the song called "I."

10

THE incense smoke,
Rising and wavering,
Thins and dissolves.
My heart goes with it.

AKIKO YOSANO

1

Not knowing love,
I sought beauty in God.
Now I see the beauty of heaven
And the beauty of earth
In you.

2

As I behold the rainbow
It seems that I look upon
Things I have lost
Or things I could not get.

3

GOODBYE, then,
If you will go.
Your youth will be spent alone,
In a cold, rocky place,
And you will remember with sadness
The sunshine of spring.

4

AFTER our parting
I had not walked thirty steps
Along the meadow path
Until the autumn flowers
Began to resemble your face,
Which I shall never see again.

ISAMU YOSHII

1

I GAZE into the wine
And perceive that its melancholy color
Is reflected
From my soul.

2

I HAVE broken all five commandments,
But my tears flow
Because the autumn has come.

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