



PENGUIN CLASSICS

*The Penguin Book of Japanese Verse*

*From the Earliest Times to the Present*

## The Penguin Book of Japanese Verse

*Anthony Thwaite (editor), Geoffrey Bownas (Introduction)*

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Poetry remains a living part of the culture of Japan today. The clichés of everyday speech are often to be traced to famous ancient poems, and the traditional forms of poetry are widely known and loved. The congenial attitude comes from a poetical history of about a millennium and a half. This classic collection of verse therefore contains poetry from the earliest, primitive period, through the Nara, Heian, Kamakura, Muromachi and Edo periods, ending with modern poetry from 1868 onwards, including the rising poets Tamura Ryuichi and Tanikawa Shuntaro.

## The Penguin Book of Japanese Verse Details

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## From Reader Review The Penguin Book of Japanese Verse for online ebook

### Eadweard says

An excellent book to pick up if you haven't any experience with Japanese poetry. I've read quite a few of the poets and poems that are featured but it was still nice to read them again. The New Style Poetry section was specially enjoyable.

Some I liked:

PRINCE ?TSU

Poem exchanged with Lady Ishikawa

In the dew dripping  
On the broad-flanked hill,  
Waiting for you  
I stood dampened  
By the dew on the hill.

LADY ISHIKAWA

Poem exchanged with Prince ?tsu

Waiting for me  
You were dampened.  
O that I could  
Be the dew dripping  
On that broad-flanked hill.

----

My tangled hair  
I shall not cut:  
Your hand, my dearest,  
Touched it as a pillow

--

Like the few ears salvaged  
After deer and boar have plundered  
Rice fields newly opened up,  
My love is all shrivelled

--

The autumn moon

We saw last year  
Shines again: but she  
Who was with me then  
The years separate for ever.

--

'Heaven and earth' –  
Only when their names  
Become extinct  
Would you and I  
Meet no more.

--

As flowing water  
Does not return,  
As the wind that blows  
Is never seen,  
So, without a trace,  
Being of this world,  
My wife has left in death.  
Spreading the lonely sleeves  
Of the tattered clothes  
She made for me to wear,  
I must lie alone.

--

#### PRINCESS HIROKAWA

The grass of love would load  
Seven high harvest carts.  
Such grass grows tall, and grows  
Heavy on my heart.

#### LADY HEGURI

A thousand years, you said,  
As our hearts melted.  
I look at the hand you held,  
And the ache is hard to bear.

--

?TOMO YAKAMOCHI  
Presented to Lady ?tomo of Sakanoue's elder daughter

To the pit of my heart I pine,  
Not knowing what to say,  
Not knowing what to do.  
You and I, hands clasped,  
That morning stood in the garden:  
That night making our bed,  
White sleeves intertwined, we slept.  
O that it be so always.

--

Heian Period (794–1185)

#### MIBU TADAMINE

Since that parting  
When she seemed as unfeeling  
As the moon at morning,  
Nothing so cruel  
As the light of dawn.

When the wind blows,  
The white clouds are cleft  
By the peak. Is your heart,  
Like them, so cold?

--

Kamakura and Muromachi Periods (1185–1603)

#### TAIRA TADANORI

The capital at Shiga –  
Shiga of the rippling waves –  
Lies now in ruins:  
The mountain cherries  
Stay as before.

-

Overtaken by the dark,  
The shade beneath a tree  
I make my inn;  
And tonight my host  
Shall be a flower.

--

### PRIEST SAIGY?

Is it a shower of rain?  
I thought as I listened  
From my bed, just awake.  
But it was falling leaves  
Which could not stand the wind.

-

Every single thing  
Changes and is changing  
Always in this world.  
Yet with the same light  
The moon goes on shining.

--

### FUJIWARA SHUNZEI (TOSHINARI)

In autumn, lodging at a temple near his wife's grave

Even at midnight,  
When I come so rarely,  
The sad wind through the pines:  
Must she hear it always  
Beneath the moss?

-

Oh, this world of ours –  
There is no way out!  
With my heart in torment  
I sought the mountain depths,  
But even there the stag cries.

--

### LADY SANUKI

The sleeve of my dress,  
Like a rock in the open sea,  
Unseen, unknown to man,  
Even when the tide ebbs,  
Is never for a moment dry.

--

### MUROMACHI BALLADS

Rain beating down  
On top of snow.  
Add any more and my heart  
Melts, melts, melts.

--

ARAKIDA MORITAKE  
Fallen flower I see  
Returning to its branch –  
Ah! a butterfly.

--

Edo Period (1603–1868)

YASUHARA TEISHITSU

Oh! oh! is all I can say  
For the cherries that grow  
On Mount Yoshino

--

ENOMOTO KIKAKU

Harvest moon:  
On the bamboo mat  
Pine-tree shadows.

--

UEJIMA ONITSURA

They bloom and then  
We look and then they  
Fall and then...

--

MIURA CHORA

You watch – it's clouded;  
You don't watch, and it's clear –  
When you view the moon.

--  
?TOMO ?EMARU

Fall on, frost!  
After the chrysanthemum  
No more flowers.

--

Senry?

A horse farts:  
Four or five suffer  
On the ferry-boat

-

The ladder-seller  
Hears the cry 'Swords drawn!'  
And scrambles to the roof.

-

Judging from the pictures,  
Hell looks the more  
Interesting place.

-

Letting rip a fart –  
It doesn't make you laugh  
When you live alone.

----

Modern Period (from 1868)

EMPEROR MEIJI  
In my garden  
Side by side  
Native plants, foreign plants,  
Growing together.

--

YOSANO AKIKO

You never touch  
This soft skin

Surging with hot blood.  
Are you not bored,  
Expounding the Way?

-  
Spring is short:  
Why ever should it  
Be thought immortal?  
I grope for  
My full breasts with my hands.

--

#### ISHIKAWA TAKUBOKU

Working, working.  
Yet no joy in life,  
Still staring emptily  
At empty hands.

-  
Today, my friends seemed  
More a success than I.  
So I bought flowers  
And took them to  
My wife, to make her happy.

--

#### TAKAHAMA KYOSHI

Autumn wind:  
Everything I see  
Is haiku

--

#### IIDA DAKOTSU

In the winter lamp,  
Dead face not far  
From the living face.

--

#### KAWABATA B?SHA

Bright moonlight:  
The wounds in the deep snow  
Will not be hidden.

--

Modern Senry?

In the child's homework

A word he doesn't know –

Father's face.

Found while spring-cleaning  
But too precious to throw out,  
The first love's letters.

A famous horse,  
Now, in the zoo,  
Forgotten.

Shintaishi ('New-Style Poetry')

HAGIWARA SAKUTAR?

Sick face at the base of the earth

At the base of the earth, a face:

A sick and lonely face.

In the gloom at the base of the earth  
Grass stalks slowly starting to shoot,  
A rat's nest beginning to sprout;

Tangled in the nest

Countless hairs quivering.

At the winter solstice,

From the sick, desolate earth

Slender bamboo roots sprouting green,

Starting to sprout.

So full of sadness,

So tender, so weak,

So full, full of sadness.

In the gloom at the base of the earth

A sick and lonely face.

MIKI ROF?

After the kiss

'Are you asleep?'

'No,' you say.

Flowers in May

Flowering at noon.  
In the lakeside grass  
Under the sun,  
'I could close my eyes  
And die here,' you say.

--

HORIGUCHI DAIGAKU  
Landscape

Curves of a woman's body,  
Swelling, undulating, tangled:  
The triangle of a sun-baked island floating  
In a beautiful soft sea of milk.  
Lacklustre ferns growing luxuriantly:  
Gentle curves flowing plumply in three undulations Across the heart of the island.  
At the nub,  
In the shadows of the trees grown rank in the valley,  
The tapered roof of the headman's house, now here, now out of sight;  
Peach-pink tapering house, now here, now out of sight.

--

SAIJ? YASO  
The crow's letter

I opened and read  
The small red envelope  
The mountain crow had brought:  
'On the night of the moon  
The hills will blaze  
Savage and red.'  
I was going to reply,  
When my eyes opened.  
Ah yes, there it was:  
A single red leaf.

--

MURANO SHIR?  
Black song

From eyes, from ears,  
Blackness pours;  
Melted in the night,  
Flesh gushing from my mouth.  
What can it be,  
This black song?

Here no dawn reaches:  
A vacuum In the earth's shade,  
No tree, house, dog.  
And here, a heart  
That will not die,  
That will not sleep,  
Singing, singing.  
Friends of the world,  
Listen to its song,  
Black song of peace.

--

TAKENAKA IKU  
Stars

Over Japan there are stars.  
Stars that stink like petrol  
Stars that speak with foreign accents  
Stars that rattle like old Fords  
Stars the colour of Coca-Cola  
Stars that hum like a fridge  
Stars as coarse as tinned food  
Stars cleaned with cotton wool and tweezers  
And sterilized with formalin  
Stars charged with radioactivity.  
Among them, stars too swift for the eye  
And stars circling on an eccentric orbit.  
Deep down  
They plunge to the base of the universe.  
Over Japan there are stars.  
On wintry nights –  
Every night –  
They stretch like a heavy chain.

--

KURODA SABUR?  
I've changed completely

I've changed completely  
Yes I'm wearing the same tie as yesterday  
I'm as poor as yesterday  
As useless as yesterday  
Even so I've changed completely.  
Yes I'm wearing the same clothes as yesterday  
I'm as blind drunk as yesterday  
As clumsy as yesterday  
Even so I've changed completely.

Ah

Faced with all the half smiles and grins  
Curled sneers and guffaws  
I shut my eyes tight and stay still  
And  
Fluttering through me towards tomorrow  
Goes a beautiful white butterfly.

--

TAMURA RY?ICHI

October poem

Crisis is part of me.  
Beneath my smooth skin  
Is a typhoon of savage passion.  
On October's Desolate shore a fresh corpse is thrown up. October is my empire.  
My gentle hands control what is lost  
My small eyes keep watch on what is melting  
My soft ears listen to the silence of the dying.  
Terror is part of me. In my rich bloodstream  
Courses all-killing time. In October's  
Chilling sky a fresh famine shudders.  
October is my empire.  
My dead troops occupy every rain-sodden city  
My dead patrol-plane circles the sky over  
...aimless minds  
My dead people sign their names for the dying.

--

IBARAGI NORIKO

The fruit

On a high branch  
A big green fruit  
A local lad slid up  
Stretched his hand and fell back  
What looked like fruit  
Was a moss-covered skull.  
Mindanao  
Twenty-six years on  
On a baby jungle tree branch  
Caught by chance  
The skull of a Japanese soldier killed in battle  
Eye socket nostril  
In the sturdy young tree  
Grown vigorously.  
In his lifetime

This face  
Irreplaceable cherished  
Surely some woman must have cared for it.  
The fontanelles of the tiny temples  
Who was the mother who had doted on them  
Twining her fingers in his hair?  
Who was the woman who had drawn him tenderly to her? If it had been me...  
I broke off a year has passed  
I took out the draft again  
Unable to find a final line  
More years have gone by.  
If it had been me  
In the end unable to produce a line to follow.

--

### SHIRAI SHI KAZUKO

Street

Dark street seedy town  
Raining a bit too cold  
We wore raincoats we had a black umbrella  
However much we signalled, the taxis didn't stop  
So we set off walking  
Our bodies close, clinging  
What kind of future did we face  
As we walked, drenched to the skin?  
Warm hotel  
Bodies  
Heated  
But the words  
And acts of our loving –  
I cannot recall  
A single one.

-

Pond

‘Go home,’ I said  
‘Tonight I don’t want you, so  
Go home,’ I said  
Sniffling and sobbing  
You went off  
I have no place to go back to.  
Your path as you went weeping from my heart  
I traced again and again  
Your tear stains  
Spread across my body  
To become a pond  
And that pond engulfed my heart

That night I went to sleep.

---

### **Sarah says**

"I may be silent, but  
I'm thinking.  
I may not talk, but  
Don't mistake me for a wall."  
-Tsuboi Shigeji, "Silent, but..."

This fairly sleek little book is really a fantastic survey of Japanese poetry, starting at around 270 AD and going all the way up to modern times. As somewhat of an aficionado for Japanese literature, this is the jackpot. It's got everything I could possibly ask for: haikus, tanka, waka, kanshi, free-form poems, excerpts from novels. It's wonderful to see the evolution in a chronological way. But on a more superficial level, I find that Japanese poetry is really some of the best I've come across; it's probably even better in Japanese than it is translated into English. But since I don't speak any Japanese, I am happy with what I can get from this translation.

I don't think I have a specific favorite part of this collection, but I can safely say I wrote down a lot of poems from different time periods just for my own pleasure and entertainment. Nerdy, I know... But definitely worth the time.

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### **Karl Hallbjörnsson says**

Some of the poetry was great and some wasn't as great. But all in all the book is a good introduction to the various Japanese poets and their style.

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### **John Pappas says**

While not quite as comprehensive or informative as David Hinton's Anthology of Classical Chinese Poetry from a few years back, this updated edition of Japanese poetry provides a survey of 1,500 years of Japanese verse. There are many poems here, including some new 20th century additions that did not appear in the earlier editions, representing the diverse kinds and modes of Japan's poets. The editors often include just one poem from a particular poet and favor breadth instead of depth in most cases -- we only get to know a few poets deeply, and those poets often are featured in their own collections. It would be nice to read more of the poets who we can not find so readily as Basho or Issa. The strength of this collection certainly lies the poems included from the modern era, and in the prefatory notes on language, culture and history that elucidate the major periods of poetry in the collection.

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### **Painting says**

What a delight it is...

to find a book with a this poem by Tachibana Akemi.

---

### **Paul says**

Not bad, but there are better collections/translations out there; Carter's anthology for Stanford Press is far superior.

Also I'd like to have a long conversation with the editor at Penguin who chose to devote a total of three pages to Matsuo Basho, one page to Yosa no Buson . . . and 90 pages to twentieth-century Japanese poets, all of whom are terrible (they even manage to leave out Santoka Taneda, who is literally the only good haiku poet after 1910 or so).

For reference, this would be like publishing a one-volume collection of English-language poetry in Japanese translation, and devoting three pages to Milton, one page to Shakespeare . . . and 90 pages to William Carlos Williams, Robert Frost, and John Berryman.

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### **Gavin says**

I feel able to say it at last: haiku is pathological, a genre absolutely limited to the engraving of flat single images. And single (or paired) verbal images of nature do nothing for me; it is relation and juxtaposition and story and reductio and original presentation that give images life. The haiku leaves almost no room for these. (This is not about length; the *senryu* retains wonderful possibilities, because they are animated by satire rather than po-faced nature-worship. Jokes can stand alone.)

This book cannot be blamed for being half haiku, because that mechanical law ruled Japanese poetry for thousands of years and this is first of all a historical selection. Lots more to see.

Currently I am only fond of the ancient gnostic hermits and the droll postwar internationalists (no multiculturalists here). Many of the others emote at us too directly - the likes of "*Oh how // I miss my wife // out here // on the border wall*" - which brittle superficiality fails Wei Tai's test and mine. In general their ancients have dated much better than ours, perhaps because they grokked ironic minimalism a thousand years before us.

The emperors and shoguns all write poetry, are still all required to profess about the land that they perch upon. Meiji:

*In newspapers, all seethe doings of the world, which lead nowhere. Better never written!*

Amen. I liked Yamanoue Okura, Yakamochi, the Kokinsh?, Ki Tsurayuki, Tsuboi Shigeji, Kaneko Mitsu hara, Takahashi Mutsuo. I absolutely do not have sufficient knowledge to stop there. Skip Bownas' enormous Preface too, you don't need it.

*In one sentence: ?*

---

**Samantha Bee says**

I think, for the most part, I enjoyed the older poems to the newer ones, but this was still an enjoyable read. I liked the vast range of poetry that was presented, and it was nice to find some new poets to read in future.

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**Matt Morris says**

To read my review of this book and others, please visit:

<http://mismss.blogspot.com/2012/12/t...>

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**Akemi G. says**

I guess I've read most of the poems in the original Japanese. Yes, poetry is that popular in Japan. And I like the translation I've seen in this book.

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**James Violand says**

In general, the Oriental mind has a more sensitive talent in depicting man's life in Nature. Succinct, beautiful verse. However, unlike the Chinese talent for reflecting all of experience, the Japanese tend to be brutally pessimistic about the vicissitudes of life.

---

**\*Sklip\* says**

I also picked this up for my advanced English class during our poetry analysis unit, and liked it.

A lot of the poems were about people and nature, and my favorite ones were "Stars" by Takenaka Iku and "Growing Up" by Tanikawa Shuntaro. These two were my favorites because I could sense the emotions and messages in the poem.

---

**Laura says**

This was a lovely collection of poetry that I could have found a beautiful passage to quote on any given page. A couple of my favorites:

*November Third*

Miyazawa Kenji

Bending neither to the rain  
Nor to the wind  
Nor to snow nor to summer heat,  
Firm in body, yet  
Without greed, without anger,  
Always smiling serenely.  
Eating his four cups of rough rice a day  
With bean paste and a few vegetables,  
Never taking himself into account  
But seeing and hearing everything,  
Understanding  
And never forgetting.  
In the shade of a pine grove  
He lives in a tiny thatched hut:  
If there is a sick child in the east  
He goes and tends him:  
If there is a tired mother in the west  
He goes and shoulders her rice sheaves:  
If there is a man dying in the south  
He goes and soothes his fears:  
If there are quarrels and litigation in the north  
He tells them, 'Stop your pettiness.'  
In drought he sheds tears,  
In cold summers he walks through tears.

Everyone calls him a fool,  
Neither praised  
Nor taken to heart.

That man  
Is what I wish to be.

---

*Story*

Takenaka Iku

Quietly the cloud cast its shadow,  
Passing over avenues of trees, over ponds, over fields.  
Enduring both joy and sadness, the cloud silently drifted on...

Then, above the sound of a single flute, the cloud stopped,  
Seeking the one who played: but there was no one.

And then the cloud began again its long journey  
Through the hemisphere of night, not knowing its direction.

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## Edward says

*Introduction, by Anthony Thwaite*

*Japanese Poetry and Japan's Poets, by Geoffrey Bownas*

*Further Reading*

--The Penguin Book of Japanese Verse: From the Earliest Times to the Present

### *Notes*

#### *Appendices:*

1. *Glossary of Japan's Poetic Forms*
2. *Taste-words: The Japanese Aesthetic*
3. *Some Prosodic Techniques of the Japanese Poet*
4. *Glossary*
5. *Chronological Tables*
6. *Map: Japan*

### *Index of Poets*

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## James says

If you are interested in Japanese poetry, then this is an ideal place to start. The first three-quarters of this poetic anthology focuses primarily on traditional Japanese poetic styles such as Choka, Haiku, Imayo, Tanka, and so forth. Separated into chronological sections, and a comprehensive introduction, this is an anthology welcoming to those new to Basho, Issa, Senryu, and so on. There's also an extensive section in regards to more contemporary Japanese poetry after the 1868 Meiji Revolution, in this "New-Style" of poetry, notably more convoluted than the precise mechanisms seen by the old poet masters. A criticism I found with the latter section of the book, was that many of the modern poems read, sounded more like nonsense, or at best came across haphazard. A highlight though of this section was Asubuki Ryoji's "I classify". In conclusion, I'd recommend this anthology to anyone with an interest in Japan, or poetic literature, as this acts as an ideal stepping stone.

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