IAN HIDEO LEVY

The Ten Thousand Leaves

A TRANSLATION OF THE
Man’yōshū,
JAPAN’S PREMIER
ANTHOLOGY OF
CLASSICAL POETRY

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THE REIGN OF EMPEROR YURYAKU, WHO RULED
THE REALM UNDER HEAVEN FROM THE ASAKURA
PALACE IN HATSUSE (456-479)

Poem by the Emperor

Girl with your basket,
    with your pretty basket,
with your shovel,
    with your pretty shovel,
gathering shoots on the hillside here.
I want to ask your home.
Tell me your name!
This land of Yamato,
    seen by the gods on high—
it is all my realm,
in all of it I am supreme.
I will tell you
my home and my name.
THE REIGN OF EMPEROR JOMEI, WHO RULED
THE REALM UNDER HEAVEN FROM THE
OKAMOTO PALACE AT TAKECHI (629-642)

Poem by the Emperor when he climbed Kagu Hill
to view the land.

Many are the mountains of Yamato,
but I climb heavenly Kagu Hill
that is cloaked in foliage,
and stand on the summit
to view the land.

On the plain of land,
smoke from the hearths rises, rises.

On the plain of waters,
gulls rise one after another.

A splendid land
is the dragonfly island,
the land of Yamato.

3 and 4

Poem which Princess Nakatsu bud Hashrhito Oyu
present when the Emperor went hunting
on the fields of Uchi

Our Lord, sovereign
of the earth's eight corners,
in the morning.

1 "Dragonfly island" (akitsuchina). The Kojiki explains this traditional epithet for Yamato with the incident recorded during an excursion to Yoshino by Emperor Yuryaku in which the Emperor was bitten by a horsefly, which in turn devoured by a dragonfly.

held and caressed
his catalpa bow.
In the evening
he stood resient.
I can hear its golden tips resound.
Now he must be setting out
on his morning hunt.
Now he must he setting out
on his evening hunt.
I can hear the golden tips
of his catalpa bow resound.

Envoy

Lining his steeds
on the plain of Uchi,
he must be walking
over morning fields—
those fields so rank with grass!

5 and 6

Poem written by Prince Ikusaashelooked at the
mountains where the Emperor had gone on his
procession to Aya County in the land of Sanuki

Not even knowing
if the long spring day
has drawn through its mist
into evening,
my heart,
these twines of inner flesh,
in pain.
II.

At Cape Karā on the Sea of Iwami, where the vines crawl on the rocks, rockweed of the deep grows on the reefs and sleek seaweed grows on the desolate shore. As deeply do I think of my wife who swayed toward me in sleep like the lithe seaweed. Yet few were the nights we had slept together before we were parted like crawling vines uncurled. And so I look back, still thinking of her with painful heart, this clench of inner flesh, but in the storm of fallen scarlet leaves on Mount Watari, crossed as on a great ship, I cannot make out the sleeves she waves in farewell.

For she, alas, is slowly hidden like the moon in its crossing between the clouds over Yagami Mountain just as the evening sun coursing through the heavens has begun to glow, and even I who thought I was a brave man find the sleeves of my well-woven robe drenched with tears.

Envoys

The quick gallop of my dapple-blue steed races me to the clouds, passing far away from where my wife dwells.

0 scarlet leaves falling on the autumn mountainside: stop, for a while, the storm your strewing makes, that I might glimpse the place where my wife dwells.

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2 Preceding "Cape Karā" is an untranslatable epithet, "koto sariku," "Karā" also means "China," and the epithet's meaning, "babbling words," refers to the incomprehensible foreign tongue. This is a purely formal pillow-word—a pun—and has nothing to do with the place Cape Karā itself.
wilting
like the summer grass,
staggering
like an evening star,
reeling
like a great boat,
we cannot console ourselves,
we do not know what to do.
At least let us remember,
if only the sound,
if only the name,
forever far and long
as heaven and earth.
Ten thousand ages
to the Asuka River
that bears the name
of our beloved Princess:
her memento,
it is here.

197 and 198

_Tanka_

If they had piled branches
across the Asuka River
to stop its course,
even the streaming waters
would have become quiet.

Asuka, river of
“tomorrow’s fragrance”:
hoping, but in vain, to meet her
at least tomorrow, I cannot forget
my Princess’ name.

Poem by Kakinomoto Hitomaro at the time of the
temporary enshrinement of Prince Takechi at Kinoe

with _tanka_

I hesitate to put it in words,
it is an awesome thing to speak.
Our Lord,
who, while we trembled,
fixed the far and heavenly
halls of his shrine
on the fields of Makami in Asuka
and, godlike, has secluded himself
in the rocks _there_,
he,
who ruled the earth’s eight corners,
crossed Fuwa Mountain,
lined with thick black pines,
in the northern land of his realm
and went down,
as from heaven,
to the provinces,
encamping on the plain of Wazami,
Wazami
of the Korean swords.
To hold sway over the realm under heaven
and bring his dominions to peace,
he gathered his soldiers
in the eastern country,
where the cock cries,
and gave the task to his son,
he being an imperial prince:
to pacify the raging rebels
and subdue the defiant lands.

Then our Prince
girded his great body with his long sword
and took in his great hands his bow.
The sound of the drums,
calling the troops to ready,
boomed like the very voice of thunder,
and the echoing notes
of the signaller’s flute
grew, to the terror of all,
like the roar of a tiger
with prey in its eyes.
The rippling of the high-held banners
was like the rippling of the fires
struck across every field
when spring comes, bursting winter’s bonds,
and the roar of the bowstrings they plucked
was so fearful, we thought it a hurricane
whirling through a snowfallen winter forest.
When the arrows they let loose
swarmed like a blinding swirl of snow,
the resistors, standing defiant,
also resolved to perish,
if they must,
like the dew and frost.
As they struggled
like zooming birds,
the divine wind
from the Shrine of our offerings
at Ise in Watarai
blew confusion upon them,
hiding the very light of day
as clouds blanketed the heavens
in eternal darkness.

Thus pacifying this land,
abundant in ears of rice,
our Lord, sovereign
of the earth’s eight corners,
a very god,
firmly drove his palace pillars
and proclaimed his rule
over the realm under heaven—for ten thousand generations,
we thought.
But just as his reign flourished
brilliant as the white bouquets
of mulberry paper,
suddenly they deck his princely halls
to make a godly shrine,
and the courtiers who served him
now wear mourning clothes of white hemp.
On the fields
before the Haniyasu Palace gate
they crawl and stumble like deer
as long as the sun still streams its crimson,
and when pitch-black night descends
they crawl around like quail,
tuning to look up at the great halls.
They wait upon him,
but they wait in vain,
and so they moan
like the plaintive birds of spring.
Before their cries can be stilled
or their mournful thoughts exhausted
the divine cortege
is borne from the Kudara Plain,
borne away.
Loftily he raises
the palace at Kinoe,
good of hempen cloth,
as his eternal shrine.
A god, his soul is stilled there.
Yet could we even imagine
that his palace by Kagu Hill
will pass away
in the ten thousand generations
he intended as he built?
I turn to gaze on it
as I would on the heavens,
bearing it in my heart
like a strand of jewels,
preciously remembering,
awesome though it be.

200 and 201

Envoys

Although you rule
the far heavens now,
we go on longing for you,
unmindful of the passing
of sun and moon.

Not knowing where they will drift,
like the hidden puddles that run
on the banks of Haniyasu Pond,
the servingmen stand bewildered.

202

One book has for an envoy,

Offering him sacred wine,
we pray at the shrine of Nakisawa,
the marsh of tears.
But our Lord is gone
to rule the high heavens.

In the Forest of Classified Verse, the
above poem is said to be “by Princess
Hinokuma, in her anger at the
Nakisawa Shrine (for the Prince’s absence).” The Nihonshoki states
that the later Crown Prince, Takechi,
died in autumn, on the tenth day of
the seventh month, in the tenth year
of the reign (696).

203

Poem by Prince Hozumi crying in sorrow on a winter
day after the death of Princess Tajima, as he looked
through the falling snow toward her grave

Falling snow,
do not fall so hard.
Do not be a barrier to my sight
of Ikai Hill in Yonabari.
Another poem by Prince Nagata

Today I saw the Satsuma Channel, Satsuma of the wild Hayato men, distant as the dwelling of the clouds.

Eight poems of travel by Kakinomoto Hitomaro

Fearing the billows off Cape Mitsu, you have passed the night by the island on your boat in the hidden cove.

Passing Minume, where they cut the sleek seaweed, our boat has drawn near Cape Noshima, rank with summer grass.

A variant has,

Passing Otome, where they cut the sleek seaweed, I build my temporary lodge on Cape Noshima, rank with summer grass.

At Cape Noshima in Awaji, the cords of my sleeves that my wife tied for me are blown backward in the beach wind.

Do they see me as a fisher catching perch in Fujre Cove, of the h
cloth,

Do they see me as a fisher angling in Fujie Cove, of the white cloth, I who journey?

A variant has,

Even as I think how hard it is to leave behind the fields of Inabi, the island of Kago, for which my heart yearns, comes into sight.

Will I part rowing to the sun that sinks into the Akashi Straits, bright with lampfires, the land of home beyond my sight?

\[\text{1 This translation is based on a reading of the last two phrases of the original poem as \textit{funa nare kimi wa yado nari shima ni}, one of a dozen possible readings of the obscure characters 船公於奴喝酒的.}\]
Over a long road, from barbarian lands
at the far reach of the heavens,
I have come, yearning.
And now the Straits of Akashi
open on the island, Yamato.
A variant has,
open on the land of my home

The surface of the sea at Kehi
looks peaceful; I can see,
bobbling out in confusion
like rushes scythed from roots,
the boats of fishermen.
A variant has,
The surface of the sea at Muko
looks peaceful; I can see,
above the waves,
the boats of angling fishermen.

Poem about Kagu Hill by Lord Kamo Tarihito
with tanka

When spring comes,
with rising mists,
to heavenly Kagu Hill,
descended from the firmament,
the wind in the pines
raises waves on the pond,
and darkening leaves
thicken on the cherry trees.
On the offing
the lone duck cries for its mate,
by the shore
the spotted ducks flock and rustle.
Courtiers of the great palace,
its ramparts thick with stone,
have taken their leave;
/oars and poles
are gone from the boats,
and it is lonely,
with no one there to row them.

Two envoys
And I can clearly see
that the boats lie unrowed,
for the diving mandarin and the teal
have made them their home.

When did Kagu’s halberd cedar
turn so venerably aged
that moss spreads on its roots?
Poem by the Priest Manseit about floss-silk

He was the imperial attendant who built the Kannonji Temple in Tsukushi. His lay name was Kasa Maro.

Keeping it with me, I have yet to put it on. But it looks warm, this floss-silk from Tsukushi.

Poem by Yamanoue Okura, upon leaving a banquet

Okura shall take his leave now. My child must be crying and its mother, who bears it on her back, must be waiting for me.

Thirteen poems in praise of wine by Lord Ōtomo Tabito, the Commander of the Dazaifu

Rather than engaging in useless worries, it's better to down a cup of raw wine.

Great sages of the past gave the name of "sage" to wine. How well they spoke!

What the Seven Wise Men of ancient times wanted, it seems, was wine.

Rather than making pronouncements with an air of wisdom, it's better to down the wine and sob drunken tears.

What is most noble, beyond all words and beyond all deeds, is wine.

Rather than be half-heartedly human, I wish I could be a jug of wine and be soaked in it!
How ugly!
those men who,
with airs of wisdom,
refuse to drink wine.
Take a good look,
and they resemble apes.

How could even
a priceless treasure
be better than a cup
of raw wine?

How could even a gem
that glitters in the night
be as good as drinking wine
and cleansing the heart?

Here in this life,
on these roads of pleasure,
it is fun to sob drunken tears.

As long as I have fun
in this life,
let me be an Insect or a bird
in the next.

Since all who live
must finally die,
let's have fun
while we're still alive.

Smug and silent airs of wisdom
are still not as good
as downing a cup of wine
and sobbing drunken tears.

Poem by the Priest Mansei

To what shall I compare
this life?
the way a boat
rowed out from the morning harbor
leaves no traces on the sea.
456

Longing for you,
there is nothing I can do,
so, like the cranes
among the reeds,
I weep and cry aloud
in the morning and the evening.

457

Lord whom I thought I would serve
far into the distant future,
you are no more,
and my heart has lost its bearing.

458

Crawling like a baby,
I weep, and I cry aloud
in the morning and the evening,
now that you, my Lord, are gone.

The above five poems were written
by Tabito’s servant, YoMyogun,
who loved his master as a dog or
horse would, unable to repress the
emotions in his heart.

459

My Lord, I never tired
to look upon you
while you were alive;
such sadness now that you are gone
like the scattered leaves of autumn.

Agatanoinukai Hitogami,
Administrator of the Board of Inner
Ceremonies, was ordered to minister
to Lord Ōtomo’s illness. But the
medicine had no effect. Running
water cannot be stopped—the Lord
died. Agatanoinukai, grief-struck over
this, wrote the above poem.

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Poem by Lady Ōtomo Sakanoue in the seventh year of
Tempyō (735), grieving over the death of the nun
Rigwan

with tanka

Hearing that this
is a good land,
she came from Silla,
land of mulberry-woven nets,
and crossed to Japan,
where she had no relations,
no brothers and sisters to talk to.
The sun-blessed capital
of our Lord’s realms
is packed with many quarters and houses,
but—what could have been
in her mind?—
she was drawn,
like a weeping child
to its parents,
to the Saho mountainside,
so foreign to her.
There she built a house
where she could place
her well-woven pillow,
and has dwelled there
through the long years.
But she could not escape
the fact that all who live
must die;
while everyone she depended on
was away on a journey,
with grass for pillows,
she crossed the Saho River
in the morning
and, glancing back
on the fields of Kasuga,
disappeared toward the mountainside
as one fades
into the gathering darkness of evening.
There is nothing I can say,
nothing I can do,
so I wander
all alone
without a moment
to dry my white mourning robes—
do these tears
I cry in my grief
trail as clouds over Arima Mountain
and fall as rain?

Envoy
Life's course cannot be stopped,
and so she is gone
out from the house
where she kept her well-woven pillow,
and is hidden in the clouds.

The above refer to a nun from Silla
in Korea, her name Rigwan. She felt
our ruler's virtue from afar, and came
to our holy realm and was
naturalized. She lived in the home of
Lord Ōtomo Yasumaro, Chancellor
and Commander of the Army, and
had been there for some years when,
in the seventh year of Tempyō(735),
she suddenly came down with a fatal
disease, and was soon away to the
realm of the dead. At this time Lady
Ishikawa was at the hot springs of
Arima for her cure, and was unable
to attend the funeral. Her daughter,
however, asked that she be allowed
to interrupt her journey and go alone
to perform the obsequies. Thus she
wrote this poem and sent it to her
mother at the hot springs.

Poem written by Ōtomo Yakamochi in summer, the
sixth month, of the eleventh year of Tempyō(739), in
his grief over his dead concubine

Soon the autumn winds
will be blowing coldly;
how can I sleep
through the long nights alone?
Six poems respectfully presented in response to Asada Yasu’s, expressing Kumakori’s intention for him

By Yamanoue Okura, the Governor of Chikuzen

Preface

Otomo Kumakori was a man of Mashiki County in the province of Higo. At the age of eighteen, on the seventeenth day of the sixth month of the third year of Tempyo (731), he became a retainer in the service of the governor of that province, who had been appointed Bearer of the Sumō Wrestlers, and set off for the capital. But—could it have been Heaven’s will?—unfortunately he contracted a disease on the road, and died at the Takaba horse station in Saeki County in the province of Aki.

Just before his death Kumakori gave a long sigh and said, ‘I have heard it recounted that, ‘Man’s body, a temporary assemblage of the elements, is easily destroyed, and the course of life, like bubbles on the water, is hard to hold back.’ Thus the thousand saints have all passed away, and the hundred sages could not remain in this world. How, then, could a mere common man like myself, of mean station, possibly escape from death? But I am concerned about my aged parents, both of them alive in their humble hut, who pass their days waiting for my return. Naturally their hearts will be rent with grief. If I do not return when they expect me to, I know their tears will be enough to blind them. 0 my father, how sorrowful for you! 0 my mother, how painful for you! It does not bother me that I myself must tread the road of death. I only lament the hardships my parents will face when they are left behind without me. Today we must part for eternity—in what life will we ever meet again?’

Kumakori then composed six poems, and died. The poems:

886

To go up to the palace swept with sunlight, I left my mother’s arms, my mother with her milk-full breasts, and set out for the depths of lands I have never known, and crossed beyond a hundred folds of mountains. Talking with my companions and wondering how soon I could set my eyes on the capital— then pain struck my body, I collapsed on a corner of the road—a jewelled spear—and, plucking grass and spreading gromwell for my bed, I lay down, and as I lay I sighed with longing:

If I were in my homeland, my father would hold and nurse me; if I were in my house, my mother would hold and nurse me. The world, it seems, comes but to this— must I end my life falling by the roadside like a dog?
In which direction will I leave, my soul darkened, parting from my mother, with her milk-full breasts, unable to meet her eyes?

How can I make my way through the darkness down the long road I have never known? I have no provisions.

If I were home and my mother held and nursed me, it would soothe my heart, even-if I must—even if I were to die.

0 my father and mother who must be waiting for me, counting the days since I went away and thinking, “Today! Today!”

Must I depart for eternity, leaving behind my father and mother, whom I can never see twice in a single lifetime?  

Dialog of the Destitute with tanka

“On nights when rain falls, mixed with wind, on nights when snow falls, mixed with rain, I am cold. And the cold leaves me helpless: I lick black lumps of salt and suck up melted dregs of rake. Coughing and sniffling, I smooth my uncertain wisps of heard, I am proud— I know no man is better than me. But I am cold. I pull up my hempen nightclothes and throw on every scrap

23 If read literally, this poem seems redundant. But “whom I can never see twice in a single lifetime” is a quasi-synthetic modification of “my father and mother,” operating like a formal (i.e., non-semantic) “pilcrow-word.”
It has been recounted down through time since the age of the gods: that this land of Yamato is a land of imperial deities' stern majesty, a land blessed by the spirit of words. Every man of the present sees it before his eyes and knows it to be true.

Men fill this land with their numbers, but among them our Emperor, sovereign of the high-shining sun, a very god, in the fullness of his love, chose for this mission you, the son of a house that governs the realm under heaven. And with the favor of his great command, you have been sent to the distant borders of China.

As you set out, all the mighty deities that, in their godliness, abide by the shore and by the offing, there to rule the plain of waters, lead you by the prow of your ship. And the mighty gods of heaven and earth, first among them the Supreme Spirit of the Land of Yamato, soar from the distant heavenly skies to watch over you.

And on the day when, your mission accomplished, you return, again the mighty gods shall take the prow of your ship in their noble hands and bring you straight as a black rope stretched from Chika Cape to your berth by Otomo's noble beach. Go without hindrance, go with good fortune, and quickly return!

Envoys

I shall sweep the beach clean by the field of pines at Otomo's noble cove, and stand there waiting for you. Quickly return!
When I hear the news
that the imperial craft
has berthed at Naniwa Cove,
I shall run to greet you,
my waistcord trailing loose.

On the third month, first day, of the fifth year of
Tempyô, you visited me at my borne. I present
you this on the third.
From Yamanoue Okura, with humility
To His Excellency the Ambassador to China

An essay lamenting his own long illness
By Yamanoue Okura

In my private thoughts it occurs to me that even those
men who obtain their livelihood by hunting, morning and
evening, on the mountains and the plains are able to make
their way through life without calamity (I speak of those
who, with bow and arrow in their hands, ignoring the six
fasting days on which the taking of life is forbidden, slay
every animal they come across, regardless of young or old,
pregnant or not). Even those who fish day and night in the
rivers and on the sea are vouchsafed their fortune and their
safe passage through life (I speak of the fisherman and the
diving woman, each with his or her effort of work, the man
clutching his bamboo pole who angles skillfully over the
waves, the woman, with scythe and basket tied to her waist,
who dives into the sea to pluck life from the depths).

But I, since the day I was born until today, have intended
to do only good deeds and have had no thoughts of doing
evil (I have followed the teachings “to eschew the various
evil deeds” and “to perform the various good deeds”). I
have revered the Three Treasures—Buddha, Law, and
Priesthood-, foregoing not a day of effort (reading the
sutras every day and atoning for my sins). I have venerated
the myriad deities, neglecting not an evening (doing homage
to the various deities of heaven and earth). Oh how shame-
ful! What crime have I committed, that I should meet with
this dreadful disease! (Is this for past crimes, or is it the
result of present transgressions? How could I, who am
innocent of sin, be struck down with this illness?)

Many are the months and years since I first contracted
this disease (it has been more than ten years). I am presently
seventy-four years old. My hair is spotted white, and
my muscles have lost their strength. And now to the suf-
ferings of old age, now to those burdens has been added
this affliction of sickness. This is what the proverbs must
mean when they speak of pouring salt into a painful wound,
of cutting off the edges of a stick already too short. I cannot
move my four limbs, my hundred joints all ache, my body
feels terribly heavy, as if I were carrying a load of a hundred
and fifty pounds. Clutching a strip of cloth, I try to pull
myself up, only to collapse like a bird with broken wings.
Leaning on my cane and trying to walk, I am like an old
donkey whose legs are gone.

My body is sunk deeply in the vulgar, and my heart is
tainted with the dirt of this world. Therefore I wished to
know where affliction lurks and where the curse of retri-
bution is hidden. I went to inquire at every sorcerer’s gate,
to every shaman’s chamber. Whether true or false, I fol-
lowed all their instructions, never failing to hang prayer
cloths and offer invocations. But the pangs of disease only

18 The original text has “kinshiki” (きんしき) - a curious combination of two
different weights. This is followed by an interlinear note which, going
through the various weight equivalents in use at the time, concludes, “four
kin (斤) equal one saku (担), all together 120 kin (斤).” This would be 158.4
pounds.