

Some poems not in the course reader

Shin-Kokin waka shû / 新古今和歌集

New Compilation of Japanese Poems Ancient and Modern

<p>He who I thought as old even in the old days— how much I long for him now!</p> <p>(#1815, Misc. Poems)—mukashi dani mukashi to omohishi tarachine no naho kohishiki zo hakanakarikeru</p>	<p>By Fujiwara no Shunzei (Teika's father). In this poem placed in the Miscellaneous section of the anthology, Shunzei thinks lovingly of his father, who died while Shunzei was still young.</p>
<p>A floating bridge, waving spring night's dream, breaks and is lost. A sky where trailing cloudwisps part from mountain peaks.</p> <p>(#38, Spring, Book I)—haru no yo no yume no ukihashi todaeshite mine ni wakaruru yokogumo no sora</p>	<p>This famous poem by Fujiwara no Teika (Shunzei's son) harmonizes the human world (the poem's top half where a spring night is a night of romance) with the natural world (the bottom half), establishing a relationship of gorgeous beauty and pathos—the most highly prized combination of the time. The poet awakens from a "dream" to gaze upon the clouds as they slowly drift from the mountain peak, taking their leave as he must do with his lover. A floating bridge is one temporarily spread across a river, constructed atop flotation devices; the word was used in poetry as a symbol of the uncertain. It is also the title of the last chapter of <i>The Tale of Genji</i> and the entire poem, indeed, can be read symbolically as the poet's frame of mind after finishing the <i>Tale</i>. Teika was more symbolic than most poets of his day; also, this poem also has a strong narrative element, contrasting it from the tendency towards capturing a lyrical moment. It has a strong "after-effect" as was anticipated of the era's poems, but this "after-effect" emphasizes beauty over loneliness, a balance not often seen.</p>
<p>Moonrays slanting past the eaves spill onto my brocade sleeves —where rests the plum's fragrance— to struggle there for a place.</p> <p>(#44, Spring, Book I)—mume no hana nihohi wo utsusu sode no uhe ni noki moru tsuki no kage zo arasofu</p>	<p>This poem by Teika again brings together beauty and sadness, the human and the natural. The plum was taken as representing the memory of one lost or gone and that it perfumes the sleeves is both a real phenomenon emphasizing its powerful fragrance and the perfume of a lover who once rested her head on those same sleeves. The moonlight is both gorgeous and lonely. I have translated "noki" (eaves) here as slanting <i>past</i> the eaves though traditionally this is taken as a mottled-light effect, with eaves in such poor repair as to have holes in them, a very lonely scene. Of course part of the poetic technique in this poem is combining smell with light.</p>
<p>The first wind of autumn— It makes even those forsaking all thought of this world think.</p> <p>(#299, Autumn, Book I)—oshinabete mono wo omohanu hito ni sahe kokoro wo tsukuru aki no hatsu kaze</p>	<p>Priest Saigyô is one of the most loved poets of Japan. He was a traveling poet of great warmth, lonely airs, and quasi-priestliness. I have selected a poem known less for its technical beauty than its charm. (Though his poems are also admired for the virtuosity.) Here we have a monk who has vowed to cut off all thoughts of the world ("to think" <i>omou</i> was also the most common way to express having romantic thoughts) but whose response to nature is so, well, natural, that he cannot help but be moved. The poem reads, more literally, "Even within one who has forsaken all thoughts, the first wind of autumn makes a heart." It is a simple and direct statement in keeping with the persona of the poet overtaken by the season.</p>