

## BOOK REVIEWS

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smoothly and it is enjoyable to read. He has good supporting evidence for his ideas based on talks with those who teach and work within Japanese education and those who have risen high in Japanese society as a result of their success in the education system. He identifies the most important area of concern as accountability. "Body and soul, the Tokyo Imperial University was an institute founded on service to the state: to legitimate it, to perpetuate it, and to strengthen it" (p. 62).

This book is recommended reading for school administrators and teachers in the K-12 schools, and for undergraduate college classes on Japan. It can also be used in the high school classroom for a comparison of educational systems and an understanding of the lives of students in different school systems and their view of their place in future society. ■

Barbara Mori

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## The Broken Bridge

### Fiction from Expatriates in Literary Japan

SUZANNE KAMATA, ED., INTRODUCTION BY DONALD RICHIE  
BERKELEY: STONE BRIDGE PRESS, 1997

As the subtitle proclaims, *The Broken Bridge* is a collection of writing by resident foreigners in Japan. The thirty-six stories in this lively and eclectic collection, which range from several-page vignettes to stories of some twenty pages, span the first fifty years of the postwar period—1945 to 1995—although the great majority are of recent vintage. In his excellent introduction, Donald Richie, who surely deserves the title of uncrowned monarch of Japan's expat community, notes that the collection is "not definitive." This ought to go without saying, for with the single exception of the Pacific War years, Westerners—both long-term residents and all manner of tourists—have been a fixed feature of the Japanese landscape since the 1850s. Their accumulated impressions, memoirs, travel sketches, and reminiscences constitute a noteworthy subgenre of Japanological narrative.

What immediately distinguishes the collection under review is that it consists of fictional narratives, rather than the more standard autobiographical fare of those who recount their Japan experiences. The fictionality here, though, is often rather thinly veiled, which is certainly understandable in such an anthology. And in view of the blurring of "fact" and "fiction" that distinguishes so much modern

Japanese writing, it is not surprising that *The Broken Bridge* would provide moments when the story at hand felt like a Japanese work in English translation!

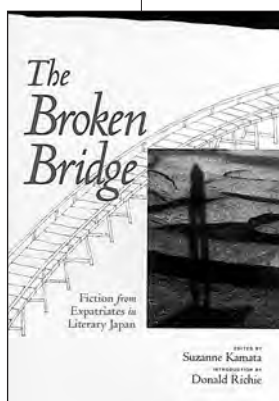
In any event, we have here something for everyone: the sexy, the sentimental, the satiric, the postmodern. If anything, the volume both confirms and confounds the enduring stereotype of Japan as remote and impenetrable. The thirty-six authors (a number traditionally associated with sets of Japanese poems, prints, etc.) do indeed represent a gamut of expat experience and expression. Readers with more than a casual acquaintanceship with Japan will sense an immediate camaraderie with the collective voice of fellow outsiders for whom Japan represents the ultimate Other. But the volume deserves a wider audience than the implied readership of savvy and/or jaded *gaijin*. With few exceptions, these stories are interesting, entertaining, and instructive.

The collective authorship is a mix of nationalities—British, Australian, Canadian, but predominantly American. The gender balance is tipped in the male direction. Some of the authors are names familiar to Japanologists, but most are not. Some are gifted writers; others rather less so. The appended biographical notes reveal, as one might expect, a mix of resumes: teachers, journalists, poets, Zen adepts, vagabonds. Some are permanent residents, some have returned regularly for extended stays, others have been there and come home, or gone elsewhere. Very few Asian surnames are represented, and not one that is Japanese. In other words, the volume does not incorporate the *Nikkeijin* experience; i.e., writing by individuals of Japanese ancestry. They will require their own anthology. In any event, the stories' protagonists are for the most part *gaijin*, but even the collection's Japanese protagonists themselves figure as outsiders—for instance, the *yakuza* wannabe of Alex Shishin's "Shades" (214–22).

With its free play of styles and narrative gambits, *The Broken Bridge* offers up variations on the theme of otherness and reveals rich possibilities for expressing the outsidership that confronts famously "insiderish" Japan. Some of the stories form thematic clusters, the most prominent of which concerns mixed marriage and its attendant complexities and crises. The protagonist of Daniel Rosenblum's "The Podiatrist" (273–80), for instance, plies her trade while husband Koji remains away on international business. In "Summer Insects" (102–06), David Burleigh presents a series of Kawabata-like exchanges between Kenji and his foreigner wife, and Holly Thompson's "Bloodlines" (285–93) concerns Akiko, disowned by her father for marrying Carl and thus polluting the family line.

Yet another cluster explores insider-outsider relations via the traditional arts. For example, in "The Circuit" (205–13), Michael Fessler details a biographer's quest for O. J. Kendall, enigmatic haiku poet and (as it turns out) industrial spy. As its title suggests, "Enlightenment With Tea" (177–81), by Kate the Slops (!), utilizes tea ceremony as the occasion for her protagonist's musing on identity and otherness, and "Season's Greetings" (321–27) by Joseph LePenta presents generational conflict in the confrontation between a traditionalist ikebana master and his son, who chafes against the arid conventionalism of the Nakamichi School.

In line with my own predilection for the comic, I especially enjoyed pieces such as James Kirkup's "The Bonsai Master" (77–81), a send-up of traditionalism in which the aging protagonist is taken to



task for tormenting defenseless dwarf trees, and there is “Mr. Robert” (236–42) by Viki Radden, which recounts the gala reception given to the newly-arrived English-language teacher in a small Japanese town, and the comic confusion that ensues when the young man turns out ‘not’ to be an obese Mexican, as the townsfolk had somehow come to expect.

*The Broken Bridge* owes much to the aforementioned Donald Richie, who was instrumental in the volume’s production. I should mention that the book begins with his fine introductory essay (9–16) and ends with his “Six Encounters” (342–53), a mini-anthology of vignettes that in effect recapitulates the entire volume.

In conclusion, one imagines any number of interesting applications of *The Broken Bridge*, either in whole or in part, in courses concerning Japan, cross-cultural relations, comparative literature, and the like. It is a decidedly “good read” and surely merits an audience larger than the circle of Asianist academe. ▯

Marvin Marcus

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## Bashō’s Narrow Road

### *Two Works by Matsuo Bashō*

TRANSLATED WITH ANNOTATIONS  
BY HIROAKI SATO  
BERKELEY: STONE BRIDGE PRESS, 1996

**M**atsuo Bashō (1644–94) is, of course, history’s most famous master of haiku: the poetical form that so epitomizes the profound simplicity of Japanese aesthetics. Haiku provides something of a cultural link between the contemporary West, where it has become a popular poetic form, and traditional Japan. Hiroaki Sato’s book vastly augments the educational potential of our familiarity with haiku by supplying a wealth of context along with his unaffected and engaging translation of two important related works.

*Narrow Road to the Interior (Oku no Hosomichi)* is written in a genre called *haibun*, which was a new style of prose mixed with poetry. Sato explains and illustrates the various forms that underpin the haiku: most significantly, the *renga* or “linked verse,” to which several participants contributed short stanzas according to set rules, under the guidance and judgment of teaching masters such as Bashō. Leaving aside the precise definitions for the moment, one can think of the *Narrow Road* roughly as narrative prose peppered with haiku. The work possesses an intriguing dimension that a conventional anthology would lack, however, for the occasion of individual pieces of verse is revealed further in the prose account. We witness the genesis of each individual haiku embedded in the more extended fabric composed of the history, art, culture and geography that inform Bashō’s experience of pilgrimage into the interior of Japan.

At its most straightforward level, the work is Bashō’s travel diary of a five-month circuitous journey in 1689 from the capital Edo to Kisakata in the north, along the coast of the Sea of Japan through Niigata and Tsuruga, and back inland to Ōgaki. Sato includes a double-page map of the route showing the major stopping places—a handy device to keep us attuned to the progress of the narrative and its grounding in real terrain. In order to take in some *uta-makura*—“poetic pillows” or places charged with literary significance due to repeated reference throughout history—he and his companion Sora forsake the high road for one “seldom used by people but frequented by pheasants, rabbits, and woodcutters” (83). They take a wrong turn but are treated to a panoramic view of Mount Kinka across the sea from Ishinomaki port. Shortly after, they chance their way afloat down the Mogami River, with its “terrifyingly dangerous spots” with rocks and rapids, toward Sakata on the western coast (95).

Thus the country reveals itself through the travel narrative of the poet. And as we readers journey through the poetic tale, the manifold historical, religious and aesthetic dimensions of Japan are reconstituted before our eyes. Roland Barthes’s expression, “empire of signs,” seems apt, since each experience along the way reverberates with significance. At Ōta Shrine, near Kanazawa, Bashō meditates on the helmet of the warrior Minamoto no Sanemori (1111–83), the subject of Zeami’s (1364?–1443) Nō play *Sanemori*. The story is that Sanemori’s final mortal foe Yoshinaka (1154–84) donated the helmet as a mark of pity; he dispatched it to the temple with the dead soldier’s friend, Jirō, as messenger. Confronted with Sanemori’s head carried back from battle, Jirō had exclaimed, “Oh, how cruel!” Bashō reiterates the expression in his haiku, which echoes with a shriller cry: “Cruel: under the helmet a cricket” (117). Bashō’s exquisite ironies are often informed from historical depths; furthermore, subtle allusions to Chinese art and literature abound as the poet casts his experience into a contiguous aesthetic form.

*The renga A Farewell Gift to Sora* complements the main part of the work, providing a perfect instance of the communal production that was one of the *raisons d’être* of the poet master, along with rare technical insights into the way he worked. *The Gift* connects with the *Narrow Road*, marking Sora’s departure from the journey on account of illness. Sato’s translation conveys the *renga* session of Bashō, Sora and Hokushi in all its brilliance, and he provides extended explanatory notes on content and the rules of *renga*.

From the incomparable Bashō, through Sato’s thoroughly accessible translation and illuminating annotation, capped with illustrations by Bashō’s great admirer, Yosa Buson (1716–83), this is a stunning piece of work. Sato’s ingenious layout faces each page of the *Narrow Road* with a page of notes, which refer in turn to comprehensive endnotes. We are free to flow with the narration or deviate from it to join in Sato’s reconstruction of the background tapestry. *Bashō’s Narrow Road* has everything to recommend it to the classroom with an interest in Japan. ▯

Michael Guest

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