

*The Columbia Anthology of
Modern Japanese Literature*

VOLUME 1:
FROM RESTORATION TO OCCUPATION,
1868-1945

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With poetry selections by Amy Vladeck Heinrich and Leith Morton



COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS
NEW YORK

Once again he pressed his throat hard with his left hand and said, 'What good's a doctor. . . . It hurts. . . . Hurry pull it out . . . Please.' I didn't know what to do; all I did was keep looking at him. At such times—it's strange but true—eyes have tongues. My brother's eyes kept hounding me and saying 'Quick, quick!' Everything was spinning around in my head. His eyes kept up their dreadful plea. Worse, their look of reproach gradually grew sharper and finally turned into a glare of hostile hatred. Seeing this change, I finally decided I had to do as he directed, 'All right, you win,' I said, 'I'll take it out.' Immediately his eyes completely changed expression; they became serene, truly joyful. 'You have to go through with it quickly,' I thought to myself. I knelt down and leaned forward. He settled himself back onto his side; the arm that had been raised to his throat dropped onto the bed. I got a tight grip on the handle of the razor and pulled it all the way out.

"At this moment the front door, which I had closed from inside, opened, and in walked the neighbor woman whom I had asked to tend my brother while I was out. It was already pretty dark inside the house, so I didn't know how much she saw, but she gasped and dashed out without shutting the door. When I pulled the razor out I had tried to jerk it straight out, but from the way it felt when I pulled, I figured it had cut some part that wasn't cut before. The blade had been facing outward, so the outer flesh may have been cut. With the razor clutched in my hand, I just sat there in a daze and watched the old woman come in and then dash out of the house. After she'd gone, I snapped out of it and looked at my brother—he'd already breathed his last. Blood was gushing from the gaping wound. Until the leaders of the neighborhood association came in afterward and ushered me off to the town hall, all I did was set the razor by my side and stare at the face of my brother, his eyes half-open in death."

Kisuke had been speaking with his head slightly bent forward and his eyes turned upward at Shōbē, but when he finished his story his glance fell to his knees.

His story was very consistent. Almost too consistent. This was because he had recalled the event any number of times during the past half year and had been forced to recount each detail very carefully every time he was questioned at the town hall or examined at the magistrate's office.

As he listened to the tale, Shōbē felt as if the scene were actually taking place before his eyes. Halfway through it, a doubt rose in his mind whether one could really call this fratricide or murder at all; even when he'd heard the whole story, he couldn't dispel the doubt. Kisuke's brother thought he'd die if the razor were pulled out, so he asked him to pull it out. Yes, one could argue that by pulling it out he made him die, he killed him. But it seems his brother was doomed to die anyway, even if he'd left him alone. The reason he said he wanted to die quickly was that he couldn't stand the pain. Kisuke couldn't bear to see him suffer so. He ended his life to free him from suffering. Was that a crime? Had he killed him, it would certainly be a crime. But when one con-

siders that he did it to free him from suffering. . . . There's where the doubt came in, and he was unable to dispel it.

After mulling over all aspects of the problem, Shōbē came to the conclusion that the only thing to do was leave it to the judgment of those above; all he could do was go along with the decision of the authority. He decided to make the magistrate's judgment his own. Despite this decision, though, something still gnawed at his peace of mind, and he couldn't help wishing he could somehow discuss it with the magistrate.

The gloomy night slowly wore on, and the *takase* boat with its two silent occupants slid softly over the black waters.

NAGAI KAFŪ

Nagai Kafū (1879–1959) first became known and respected while still a young writer because of his slightly fictionalized, highly personal accounts of his travels in America and France. Throughout his long career, he composed ironic and elegiac stories and essays chronicling the tenuous existence of what he felt still remained of an earlier and elegant Japanese culture amid an ever more populist and tiresome present. An elderly recluse during the Pacific War, Kafū's disdain for the military mentality made him a hero in postwar Japan.

Kafū's collection *Tales from France* (*Furansu monogatari*) was finished in 1909, but the original publication was censored, presumably because of some erotic episodes. It first was published, in a revised form, in 1915. The collection provided a number of evocative sketches of the country that Kafū so admired and of his own adventures there. "The Mediterranean in Twilight" (*Tasogare no chichūkai*), written on his way home from Europe to Japan, conjures up his nostalgia and also touches on his heartfelt love of Western music.

THE MEDITERRANEAN IN TWILIGHT (TASOGARE NO CHICHŪKAI)

Translated by Mitsuko Iriye

We passed the Gulf of Gascony and proceeded southeast along the shores of Portugal. And when we reached the Spanish coast and entered the Mediterranean, overlooking the land of Morocco and the pure white houses of Tangier to the south and watching the triangular Rock of Gibraltar to the north, I could not help but wish fervently that the ship I was traveling on would somehow be damaged or caused to sink by accident. Then I would be put on board a rescue boat and taken to the land on the other side that was clearly visible and stretching a mere three miles to the north and south. If that happened, I would be able once again to tread on European soil instead of going back to Japan against my will. I would be able to see the pleasure land of Spain, a European country but far removed from the center of its civilization, where men wore flamboyant

clothes and played serenades under the windows at night and women, with roses in their black hair, danced and flirted all through the night, wearing mantillas over bare shoulders and bosoms.

The mountain over there that I see now so clearly from this side of the ship—the earth is dry under the scorching sun, there are few trees, and houses with white walls can be seen here and there amid valleys covered only with yellowish grass—if I crossed that mountain, wouldn't I find myself in the Andalusia celebrated by Musset in his poems? Wouldn't that be the native place of Carmen about whom Bizet composed that immortal music? Wouldn't anyone who adores brilliantly colored costumes or passion-filled music and longs for carefree love dream of Spain, the homeland of Don Giovanni?

In that country, where the sun is hot and radiant, love simply means men and women frolicking with abandon and has nothing to do with such killjoys as morality, marriage, or home that people in the north talk about. If you tire of the beauty of the woman you pledged yourself to on the night of the festival, go immediately to the fair in the afternoon and make love to another woman. If she turns out to be a married woman, seduce her by hiding under her window at night and singing "Deh, vieni alla finestra, O mio tesoro!" ("Oh, do come to the window, my love," from Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*). If you are caught, one sweep of your sword and bloodshed will take care of it. To live for the ephemeral dream of passion that flares up an instant, only to be extinguished in the next moment, must be the way of life in this passionate land. Oh, the tempestuousness of this country's music, to which young Andalusian maidens, who beat time violently with their hands and feet to the accompaniment of tambourines, clicking castanets in both hands, dance exuberantly as they kick up their multicolored hems. Rapidly accelerating to its climax like a storm, the music and dance dazzle and mesmerize all who listen and watch, and when they suddenly come to an end, one feels as though a beautiful jewel has just been crushed into pieces, flung away, and scattered, making you sigh, belatedly, from exhaustion. Life in this country must be like this music. . . .

Yet the ship moved on, slowly, as if completely unconcerned with my unrealizable wishes, pushing away the water of the strait right and left, and reached far out into the sea. The protruding rock of Gibraltar was rising high in a blazing fire, reflecting the light of the sun that was just then setting behind it. Right in front of it and across the whole stretch of water, houses in Tangier and low-lying mountains in Morocco were changing their color from rose to purple.

By the time the twilight began to fade away, both the mountains and the rock had sunk below the horizon, far away to the west. When, after dinner, I came out to lean again against the railing, all I could see was the wide expanse of the water, whose navy blue color, glistening like velvet, was startlingly different from that of the Atlantic Ocean. But the color of this water, even more than that of the mountains, rivers, or lakes, caused me to indulge in indescrib-

able, sweet daydreams. When I gazed at it, I felt as if I could readily accept as totally natural and reasonable the historical fact that ancient arts developed along the shores of this water, or the myth that the beautiful goddess Venus arose from its purple waves.

Stars began to twinkle. Their beams were sharp, their sizes large, and they gave the impression that they had the exact pentagonal shapes seen in symbolic paintings. The sky was clear, and its dark blue color was exceedingly deep. The water had the same color as the sky, but the boundary between the two was sharply marked. Even though it was a moonless night, everything was bright beyond description. It seemed as if somewhere in this vast space where one could not discern even a mountain, some appropriate sense of order and harmony reigned. Ah, how exquisite was the night in the Mediterranean! Quite unexpectedly, it called forth in my mind the ancient nude statues with their clearly demarcated contours, the beautiful art of the classical period, and the rows of uniformly trimmed trees in the gardens of Versailles. How I wished my own work could match them! Enveloped in such nocturnal, indefinable melancholy, I could not help ardently wishing that my work would be like one of those brocade curtains that hung solemnly, having been woven perfectly by people touched by the sensations of color, sound, and fragrance.

I think it was in the evening of the second day after our ship entered the Mediterranean. We saw land very far away in the south. It must have been Algeria in North Africa.

When I went out on the deck after dinner, there was not a single wave in the sea in the evening's calm. Its deep blue surface was glistening even more, like a polished gem, and it seemed as if my face were reflected on it when I looked down from the rail, that of a beautiful young boy. There was not a trace of a single cloud in the endless expanse of the sky. The sky had been the most transparent indigo color under the torrid sun, but now it looked dimmed and opaque, tinged with a pale rosy hue. The blue shimmers of twilight exactly like those I used to see in France were now shedding a gentle and mysterious shadow over everything on the deck—the gangways, railings, cabin walls, and various ropes. It was as if a strange life had been breathed into the lifeboats that had been neatly painted white.

The balmy breeze, refreshing and quiet as if in a midspring night, lulled my senses, and the silence prevailing on the sea calmed my mind. I felt completely empty. I could sense not sorrow, loneliness, or joy. I was conscious only of an exquisite feeling of comfort. Still, as though suffering from an acute pain, I sank into a nearby lounge chair and turned my eyes toward the horizon. I could already count several shining stars in the evening sky. As I gazed at those beautiful lights, I felt an irrepressible poetic urge that became harder and harder to suppress. I wanted to sing beautiful songs, from the bottom of my heart and at the top of my voice, at the Mediterranean in twilight. Then, even before I actually began, I felt as if my imaginary songs were being conveyed in a beau-

tiful voice over the gentle waves until they gradually receded and finally disappeared in the distance.

I stood up from the chair, let my face feel the pleasant breeze, breathed the warm and calm air all the way into my lungs, gazed at a particularly beautiful distant star, and then opened my mouth to sing. Alas, I must have been too impatient, for I had completely forgotten which song to sing. Never mind, I said to myself, I don't have to worry about the words; the tune alone would do. So I started to vocalize "la, la, la." But again I was at a loss over which tune to choose. I was aghast at myself and tried desperately to remember some tunes. The purple waves were undulating as if they were expecting my clear voice to float forward while the stars were sparkling impatiently like the eyes of a young woman.

Finally I thought of the opening siciliana of *Cavalleria Rusticana*, sung to the sad accompaniment of the harp as the curtain opens. That tune expressed the violent emotions of southern Italy as well as the indescribable desolation of an isolated island. To a Japanese ear, the long, drawn-out tune of the aria sounds like a boatman's song. Nothing seemed more suitable for the occasion, and, feeling quite encouraged, I tried to sing the opening passage. But all I could remember was "O Lola, bianca come [sic]."

I realized that this could not be otherwise, for the song was in Italian. So I decided instead to sing the song of the sailor on the mast in the opening scene of *Tristan und Isolde*, which would actually be more fitting in my situation. Alas, this time I remembered the libretto but not the tune. No matter how much I wanted to sing Western songs, they all were very difficult. Had I, born in Japan, no choice but to sing Japanese songs? Was there a Japanese song that faithfully expressed my present thoughts—a traveler who had immersed himself in love and the arts in France but was now going back to the extreme end of the Orient where only death would follow a monotonous life?

Yet there was more to my disappointment than just being unable to sing difficult Western songs. People would often sing "Oshoro Takashima" and praise its tune as suitably sad and fine, but apart from the mere coincidence that this *oiwakebushi*, a packhorse-driving song, had something to do with traveling, was it not too incongruous to one's feelings toward the twilight in the Mediterranean that was so evocative of Greek mythology? All *jōruri* ballad dramas, including those of the Takemoto and the Tokiwaza schools, expressed complex emotions quite well, but considered as "music," they were more like poems recited to the accompaniment of musical instruments than songs and were too remote to appeal to immediate sensations. *Utazawabushi* popular ballads merely conveyed the faint laments heard in the pleasure quarters in a bygone era, while *yōkyoku nō* chant, filled as it was with Buddhist pathos and classical grace, was simply out of character in a twentieth-century steamboat and should instead be heard aboard a rush-roofed boat as one listened to the sound of the oars against the scenery of a distant seashore lined with pine trees, like an India-ink draw-

ing. There were other examples, such as *Satsuma biwauta*¹ and the sonorous recitation of classical Chinese poems, but these would arouse a sense of simple, melancholic beauty only when their initial monotones matched the peculiarly Japanese monochromatic background.

I was plunged completely into despair. It was as if I belonged to a country that had no music to express overflowing emotions or contradictory sentiments, no matter how deeply one was moved by them. Was there another such nation, another such race, in the world?

At that moment, from the deck below I heard two or three English railway laborers on their way to work in the colony of India, singing with a woman of uncertain background who apparently was going to Hong Kong. Judging from the comical and frivolous tone, the songs were apparently popular in music halls or some such places in London's East End. They had no musical value whatsoever, but for that very reason, as I listened attentively, I thought they expressed remarkably well the mood of English laborers traversing the ocean to work in distant tropical lands, in perfect harmony with the atmosphere of the shabby third-class cabins or the dimly lit deck.

Oh, happy people! English culture has bestowed even to the lower-class laborers a kind of music that is fit to convey the forlorn feelings of a traveler. In contrast, Meiji civilization has caused us only endless anguish without giving us any means to express it. Our feelings are already too far removed from the antiquated music of the feudal era, and yet if we rush to embrace the music of the West, we will find the inevitable distance from its climate and manners, no matter how strongly we profess our attachment to it. We are a miserable people. You Poles who have lost your homeland and you Russians who have lost your freedom—you still have your Chopin and your Tchaikovsky!

As the night advances, the dark water glistens, and the sky gradually comes to possess a strange luster, making it look frighteningly unfathomable. It is astounding how bright the stars are and how many of them there are. Toward the mysterious sky above the Mediterranean, as we proceed near the coast of North Africa, the songs of the English laborers are plaintively vanishing. Sing, sing; you happy people.

Gazing at the star-filled sky far above, I think of the dreadful islands lying at the end of the long, long passage, some forty days from now. How could I ever have left Paris so unthinkingly?

OZAKI KŌYŌ

Ozaki Kōyō (1868–1903) was perhaps the most popular novelist of his day. Many of his stories and novels were published by a leading national newspaper, thereby ensuring a wide readership. By far the most successful of his novels was

1. *Satsuma biwauta* are songs from Satsuma accompanied by the *biwa*, the Japanese lute.