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POEMS  
OF A  
MOUNTAIN  
HOME

*Translations from the  
Oriental Classics*





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TRANSLATED BY  
BURTON WATSON



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POEMS  
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SAIGYŌ—for a Japanese reader, the name evokes images of thatched-roofed retreats in isolated mountain settings, of a solitary traveler over distant roads, a Buddhist poet-priest who in his works celebrated both the beauty and the evanescence of the phenomenal world, and was not ashamed to confess his unending passion for blossoming cherries and the moon in the night sky. Though relatively little is known about his life—the popularly held image of him is strongly colored by later legend—there can be little doubt of his importance as a poet. He is the leading figure in the famous anthology entitled *Shinkokinshū* or “New Collection of Ancient and Modern Times,” being represented by a total of ninety-four poems, while his collected works, the *Sankashū* or “Mountain Home Collection,” preserves some fifteen hundred poems from his hand. Because of the originality that marks his best works, their simplicity, directness, and air of somber beauty, he has come to rank as

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one of the most influential figures of the Japanese court poetry tradition.

Saigyō started out in life under the name Satō Norikiyo, the son of a well-to-do warrior family that was a branch of the eminent Fujiwara clan. He was born in 1118 in Kyoto, the capital of Heian period Japan, where his father held a military post. As a young man he received training in the martial arts and became a retainer to the Tokudaiji family, another branch of the Fujiwara clan. The Tokudaijis at this time boasted several male members in high ministerial posts in the imperial government and a daughter, known as Taikemmon-in, who was consort to Emperor Toba (r. 1107–1123) and mother of emperors Sutoku (r. 1123–1141) and Go-Shirakawa (r. 1155–1158). Through his connections with the Tokudaiji family, Norikiyo was able in time to become a member of the *hokumen-no-bushi*, the elite private guard of Emperor Toba, who by this time had abdicated and was living in retirement.

In 1140, when Norikiyo was no more than twenty-two—twenty-three by Japanese reckoning, which counts a person as one year old at birth—he abruptly quit this post to enter religious life as a Buddhist priest. Various reasons have been suggested for the action: an unhappy love affair, possibly with a woman far above him in social station; shock at the sudden death of a family member or members; disillusionment with the seamier aspects of aristocratic life; or general unease over the far-reaching social changes of the period. All such suggestions are mere guesswork. The only thing certain is that, for someone of his youth and affluent background, the step was an unusual one. He may at the time have had a wife, and perhaps even children, though nothing is known for sure.

By the closing years of the Heian period, when Saigyō lived, the system of imperial rule was functioning very imperfectly. The great Fujiwara clan, which had earlier dominated the government, was beginning to wane in influence, and the emperors were attempting to exercise their right to rule as they had in previous times, often by abdicating at an early age and then wielding authority from behind the scenes in a manner known as *insei* or "government by cloistered emperor." But increasingly the truly decisive power in political affairs was passing into the hands of the warrior clans that had grown up in the provinces, particularly the Minamoto clan, with its base in northeastern Japan, and the Taira clan, whose lands and influence lay in the central and western provinces.

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In 1156, when a dispute over succession to the throne known as the Hōgen disturbance broke out in the capital, warriors of both the Minamoto and Taira clans became involved in the fighting. In 1159, a second outbreak of hostilities in the capital found the two clans confronting each other as competitors for dominance. The Taira emerged victorious, and for the following twenty years their leader, Taira Kiyomori, conducted himself as virtual dictator of the nation. But by the time of his death in 1181, the Minamotos were once more openly challenging the rule of their rivals. Eventually they drove the Taira forces from the capital and hounded them to final defeat at the sea battle of Dannoura in 1185. Establishing a shogunate or military government at Kamakura in the east, they initiated a new system of warrior rule, an event that marks the close of the Heian and the beginning of the Kamakura period.

To many Japanese, particularly those like Saigyō who were closely allied with courtier circles in Kyoto, these cataclysmic social upheavals seemed to spell the demise of all that was worthwhile in their nation's culture and filled them with foreboding. In addition, there was another important factor that inclined the people of the time to a pessimistic outlook. According to Buddhist belief, after a Buddha dies—Shakyamuni Buddha, in the case of our present universe—although his teachings may prosper for some hundreds of years, they are destined in time to become debilitated by growing formalism and an ebbing of the tide of true faith. Eventually, in a period known as Mappō or the End of the Law, they will lose all power to guide human beings to enlightenment. When that happens, many people asserted, the only hope of salvation will lie in a savior known as Amida Buddha. For Amida has vowed to enable all those who have faith in him to be reborn in his Pure Land or Western Paradise, where enlightenment will be easy to attain. According to the reckonings of Japanese Buddhists, the fateful period of Mappō had already begun in 1052, over half a century before Saigyō's birth. The social chaos of the time, it was claimed, merely confirmed the fact that the world had entered an era of moral and spiritual decay.

Viewed against the background of these beliefs and historical events, Saigyō's abrupt abandonment of secular life becomes somewhat less surprising. In the later years of the Heian period a number of persons, usually members of the lower aristocracy or bureaucrats, embittered by the inequalities of

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class difference or frustrated in their careers, withdrew from society, in some instances to devote themselves to aesthetic pursuits or pure hedonism, but more often to take up some form of religious life. Already in the *Tale of Genji*, a work of the early eleventh century, we see the ideal of the eremitic life taking shape, a life that customarily combined literary and artistic interests and a keen sensitivity to the beauties of nature with the practice of Buddhist devotions and austerities.

In Saigyō's case, his main aim in quitting secular life, at least initially, may simply have been to create for himself an atmosphere of quiet in which his poetic talents could mature and flourish most effectively. We know that he was greatly influenced by earlier monk-poets such as Nōin (998–1050), or contemporary literary figures who lived in seclusion, and seems at an early age to have conceived a desire to imitate their example, though whether it was the religious aspect of their activities that appealed to him or the aesthetic, we cannot say. In the lives of such persons, aesthetic and religious concerns existed side by side, and it is perhaps unrealistic to attempt to draw too sharp a line between the two.

After becoming a monk, Saigyō at first went by the religious name En'i, but eventually settled on Saigyō, which means "Western Journey" and presumably derives from beliefs relating to Amida's Western Paradise. At this time such beliefs had not yet led to the establishment of any distinct sect or sects of Buddhism, as they were to do later, but flourished in the traditional centers of Tendai and Shingon Buddhism such as Mount Hiei and Mount Kōya, or at older temples like the Shitennō-ji in the area of present-day Osaka City.

For the first few years of his new life, Saigyō resided in mountain areas close to the capital such as Higashiyama, Kurama, and Saga that were favored spots for reclusion, sometimes in temples but more often, it would appear, in small huts or retreats of his own. Judging from his poems, he experienced considerable difficulty in tearing himself away from his friends and connections in the capital. Later, when he had presumably become better adjusted to the monastic calling, he lived much of his time on Mount Kōya, the headquarters of the Shingon sect with which he was affiliated, or on nearby Mount Yoshino, famous for its flowering cherries.

During these years he continued to devote much time to the writing of poetry, taking part in poetry contests at temples and shrines, visiting and exchanging poems with recluse

friends, and keeping in close touch with poetry circles in the capital.

Such assiduous attention to literary pursuits on the part of a man who had supposedly dedicated himself to religion was eyed askance in some quarters. According to an anecdote recorded in a work entitled *Seiashō* by the poet Ton'a (1289–1372), Mongaku, an eminent Shingon priest who headed the Jingo-ji temple in the environs of Kyoto, though he had never met Saigyō, expressed strong disapproval of Saigyō's "aesthetic activities" (*suki*), observing that if one became a monk in the Buddhist Order he should devote himself solely to religious matters. Mongaku added that if he ever happened to encounter Saigyō, he intended to "split his head in two!" In time, the passage relates, Saigyō appeared at Mongaku's temple requesting permission to participate in a religious ceremony. Mongaku, far from splitting Saigyō's head in two, received him with great courtesy, evidently won over by the sincerity of Saigyō's manner.

Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing just how Saigyō himself viewed his poetic activities, whether he saw them as conflicting with, or supplementing, his religious strivings. One has the impression, however, that, particularly in his younger days, Saigyō had greater confidence in himself as a poet than as a practitioner of the Buddhist Law.<sup>1</sup>

As will be evident from the poems in the selection that follows, Saigyō made a number of trips around the country to visit shrines and temples or places famed for their scenic beauty. Two of his longest journeys were to the Michinoku region of far northern Honshu, which he visited once in his late twenties and again when he was nearing seventy. His paternal grandfather had been a member of the illustrious branch of the Fujiwara family that dominated that area, and

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1. There are anecdotes such as that describing Saigyō's meeting with the priest Myōe (1173–1232) at Takao or with the priest Jien (1155–1225) at Mount Hiei that suggest he regarded the writing of poetry in Japanese as an act of religious devotion or an expression of Buddhist enlightenment. But these anecdotes appear in works compiled many decades after Saigyō's death and it is difficult to accept them as proof of his attitude toward poetry. For a fuller discussion of the relationship between poetry and religious practice in Saigyō's life, see Herbert Eugen Plutschow, "Japanese Travel Diaries of the Middle Ages," *Oriens Extremus* (1982), 29: 1–136, especially pp. 73–83, and Mezaki Tokue, "Aesthete-Recluses during the Transition from Ancient to Medieval Japan" in *Principles of Classical Japanese Literature*, Earl Miner, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 151–180.

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Saigyō was no doubt anxious to visit it for that reason, as well as to view its scenery. Another extended trip was to the island of Shikoku, where he paid his respects at the tomb of Emperor Sutoku, who had died there in exile, and at the birthplace of Kūkai, the founder of the Shingon sect in Japan.

In 1180, when fighting broke out between the Taira and Minamoto clans, Saigyō retired to the relative quiet of the Ise region, which he had visited on previous occasions and where he had friends. There he conducted poetry contests with the priests of the famous Shinto shrines at Ise and instructed them in the art of poetry.

In 1186, after peace had been restored, he set off on his second trip to the far north. One purpose of the trip was to raise funds for the rebuilding of the great Tōdai-ji temple in Nara, which had been burned to the ground by the Taira forces in 1180. On his way he stopped in Kamakura, the seat of the newly-established military government of the Minamotos. An often-repeated anecdote in the *Azuma kagami*, a history of the period, states that he was summoned to an interview by Minamoto Yoritomo, the founder of the shogunate. Yoritomo questioned him on matters pertaining to the martial arts, and at the conclusion presented him with a silver image of a cat. When Saigyō emerged from the interview, he handed the silver cat to a child who was playing nearby before proceeding on his way.<sup>2</sup>

After returning to the capital area, Saigyō lived for a time in Saga west of the city, and later moved to a mountain temple called Hirokawa-dera, in Kawachi, south of present-day Osaka. He died there in 1190 at the age of seventy-three by Japanese reckoning. His grave in the temple grounds continues to the present day to be the site of various activities commemorating his life and literary achievement.

With the exception of a few works in *renga* or linked verse form, none of which are translated here, all of Saigyō's poems

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2. The anecdote is of course meant to impress us with Saigyō's contempt for worldly goods, though for someone who was on a fund-raising tour, it seems a rather foolish act. Anecdotes of this type, which attempt to supplement and lend color to the meager biographical information contained in Saigyō's own writings, apparently began springing up quite early, perhaps even while Saigyō was alive, and in the century following his death swelled to considerable proportions. There is no way at this late date to tell whether such anecdotes have any basis in truth, I have repeated a few of them here only because they are too famous to ignore.



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are in the 31-syllable *tanka* or *waka* form, the form most favored in Japanese court poetry. The *Sankashū* or "Mountain Home Collection," which contains the bulk of Saigyō's extant poetry, is arranged by subject rather than chronological order, and relatively few of Saigyō's poems give any indication of their date of composition. It is therefore next to impossible to discuss his works in terms of stylistic development. All we can say with assurance is that, while turning out a large number of poems on conventional themes and in a more or less conventional style, he also labored to create a wholly new style that in time would come to be viewed as characteristic of the late twelfth century as a whole. In doing so, he worked in cooperation with his lifelong friends, the courtier Fujiwara Shunzei (1114–1204), a leading poet of the period and a pioneer in stylistic development, and the latter's son Fujiwara Teika (1162–1241), an equally outstanding poet.

Prior to this, Japanese poetry had twice achieved noteworthy peaks of artistic excellence. The first of these is embodied in the eighth-century anthology known as the *Man'yōshū* or "Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves." The second occurred a century and a half later and is reflected in another famous anthology, the *Kokinshū* or "Collection of Ancient and Modern Times." The *Man'yōshū*, however, because of its archaic diction and the complex and difficult writing system in which it is recorded, exercised little direct influence upon the poetry of the centuries immediately following its appearance. Rather it was the poetry of the *Kokinshū* that became the model for poetic composition in the centuries immediately previous to Saigyō's time.

The poetry of the *Kokinshū* is distinguished for its decorum in subject matter and diction and its air of wit and subjectivity. Chinese loan words, as well as diction that was thought to be unduly colloquial or inelegant, were rigorously shunned, and efforts were made to sustain a tone of purity and elevation in both language and content. Emphasis was upon the poet's response to a particular scene or situation rather than upon the scene itself, with the poet frequently musing upon the process by which he perceives his surroundings. Because of this subjective approach, the poems tend to contain a relatively large number of verbs relating to the poet's feelings and reactions, often in highly inflected forms, and a rather small number of nouns. A smooth, flowing syntax is favored, with frequent use of word plays and other rhetorical devices.

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Although there were sporadic attempts at innovation, this *Kokinshū* style remained in vogue down to the time of Shunzei and Saigyō, though in the two centuries following its creation it had lost much of its original vigor and become increasingly shallow and mannered. The time was clearly ripe for some sort of stylistic revolution, and this was what Shunzei and his associates set about to effect.

The new style that they evolved was in many respects the antithesis of the *Kokinshū* manner. In it, the subjective element so prominent in the earlier style was reduced and greater space allotted to description, which resulted in fewer and simpler verb forms and a larger proportion of nouns. The flowing effect prized by previous poets was rejected, the syntax often being deliberately broken in the middle or impeded by fragmentation. Though the diction remained basically conservative, there were efforts, notably by Saigyō, to introduce colloquialisms and to broaden the range of subject matter. Most important, probably as a result of the ominous social and political unrest of the period and the influence of the Buddhist concept of *Mappō*, the new style was marked by a bleak and somber air quite uncharacteristic of earlier periods, a tendency to favor imagery suggestive of drabness, loneliness, and melancholy, qualities summed up in the Japanese term *sabi*.

To illustrate some of these characteristics as they are reflected in Saigyō's style, or variety of styles, let me cite a few examples. The first is a poem on spring, included in both the *Sankashū* (120) and the *Shinkokinshū* (126), which shows Saigyō writing in the old flowing, highly subjective style typical of the *Kokinshū*:

Nagamu tote	Gazing at them,
hana ni mo itaku	I've grown so very close
narenureba	to these blossoms,
chiru wakare koso	to part with them when they fall
kanashikarikere	seems bitter indeed!

The poem, it will be noted, contains only one image, *hana* or "blossoms," which here designates cherry blossoms; the remainder of the poem is wholly given up to the subjective reflections of the poet. Note also that the third and fifth lines or units of the poem are occupied entirely by inflected verb forms descriptive of the poet's feelings. The poem in fact lacks only a play on words or other rhetorical flourish to be a typical

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specimen of the old *Kokinshū* style, though a *Kokinshū* poet would probably not have expressed so intense and personal an identification with nature.

The next sample, *Sankashū* 1152, is from the section of the work labeled *zatsu* or "Miscellaneous" and, as the heading indicates, was composed on a *dai* or set theme. Despite this fact, it is clearly a deeply felt work and undoubtedly reflects Saigyō's own experiences and his sincere appreciation of human companionship.

*With others, writing on the theme "In Tree Shade, Enjoying the Cool"*

Kyō mo mata	Today again
matsu no kaze fuku	I'll go to the hill
oka e yukan	where pine winds blow—
kinō suzumishi	perhaps to meet my friend
tomo ni au ya to	who was cooling himself there yesterday

Here the number of images is much greater—hill, pine winds, friend—and the subjective element less prominent than in the first example. The poem, as often with Saigyō, opens with an exclamation by the poet, direct and conversational in tone, followed, after a pause at the end of the third line, by an explanation of the reason for the initial statement. As a part of his religious training, Saigyō deliberately forced himself to endure isolation and loneliness; yet again and again in his poetry we see this type of longing for companionship breaking through. And where the possibility of human company is lacking, he often seeks fellowship in the creatures of the natural world. Such unabashed confessions of loneliness and the yearning for companionship in fact constitute one of the qualities that readers have found most appealing in Saigyō's poetry, lending it an impulsive warmth and saving it from the studied detachment that marks so much Buddhist poetry in Chinese and Japanese.

The third poem to be cited is one of Saigyō's most famous and often discussed works. It is preserved in both the *Sankashū* (470) and the *Shinkokinshū* (362) and depicts an autumn scene.

Kokoro naki	Even a person free of passion
mi nimo aware wa	would be moved
shirarekeri	to sadness:

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shigi tatsu sawa no    autumn evening  
aki no yūgure        in a marsh where snipes fly up

This poem, like the previous one, falls into two distinct parts, with a sharp break in syntax at the end of the third line. The first part offers a general observation on the theme of melancholy; the second utilizes four nouns to present a richly imagistic depiction of the autumn scene. The poem ends with a noun, a frequent occurrence in poetry in the new style created by Saigyō and other writers of this time.

The opening phrase, *kokoro naki mi*, means literally "a person without heart/mind." Some commentators believe it denotes a person lacking in sensibility, interpreting it as Saigyō's modest way of alluding to himself, i.e., "even a dull clod like me." The more common interpretation, however, takes it to mean a person who has ceased to be unduly swayed by emotion, one who has reached the state of calm detachment and acceptance that is the goal of Buddhist practice. Saigyō seems to be suggesting that even someone who has attained such a level of detachment could not fail to be moved by the scene before him. He then evokes the scene itself: the stillness of an autumn evening as it is broken by the sudden fluttering up of a snipe or snipes (we have no way to determine whether the poet intended the image to be singular or plural). Something in the fading light, the desolate marsh, the jarring flight of the bird or birds, stirs him so profoundly that he cannot conceive of anyone, even the most disciplined practitioner of Buddhist calm, remaining unmoved in such circumstances.

Here Saigyō, as was often the case with his contemporary poets Shunzei and Teika, has deliberately turned his back on the showier and more patently attractive sights of nature so frequently celebrated in earlier poetry, to focus on a scene that is essentially drab and colorless in nature. Perhaps he and his fellow poets felt that the very drabness of such scenes, their dim half-light and autumnal sadness, more aptly reflected the age of social decline in which they lived than could any brighter and cheerier landscape.

Though we may not be certain exactly what symbolic overtones were conveyed to Saigyō's contemporaries by the poems so far quoted, we may be sure that the natural images employed in them are intended to function on the metaphorical as well as the literal level. In some of his works, however, Saigyō appears to have abandoned the conventions of Japa-

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nese court poetry altogether and experimented in producing works of pure description. He was greatly aided in such experiments by the fact that his travels took him to areas of the country not ordinarily visited by the court poets, where he could view scenes scarcely even touched on in earlier poetry. Here, for example, is a poem—from the "Miscellaneous" section of the *Sankashū* (1380)—that was evidently written on a trip to the Inland Sea and Ise region, perhaps around 1167:

Amabito no	Fishermen home from
isoshiku kaeru	their day's work:
hijiki mono wa	on a bed of seaweed,
konishi hamaguri	little top shells, clams,
gōna shitadami	hermit crabs, periwinkles

Perhaps, as is often the case with Saigyō's poems on fisherfolk, the poem is intended as a reproach to these men and women whose daily livelihood involves the taking of life, though such a sentiment is nowhere expressed in the poem. Rather the poet seems to be taking a kind of childlike delight in peering into the fishermen's baskets and learning the names of the shellfish and crustaceans they contain, a delight perhaps intended to illustrate the assertion that all creatures of the universe, no matter how lowly, are embodiments of the Buddhist Law. Aristocrat readers and writers of poetry residing in the capital at this time would have been fully equipped to appreciate the significance of images such as cuckoos and bush warblers, kerria roses or pampas grass, for they had mastered the allusions and poetic lore associated with these images. But what could they possibly have made of Saigyō's hermit crabs and periwinkles? Yet the fact that a poet of Saigyō's stature ventured to write on such lowly and unconventional objects was of great significance to the later development of Japanese poetry. In doing so, he helped to broaden the scope and conventions of court poetry and to open up new paths for the *renga* and *haikai* poets of the centuries that were to follow.

Because of his extensive travels, Saigyō had an opportunity to visit a number of the so-called *uta-makura*, places famed for some particularly noteworthy natural feature or sight, and to write poems on them. Such spots were regarded as especially appropriate for poetic treatment, and later poets visiting them often alluded in their works to earlier compositions on the subject. Thus, in his journeys to northern Japan, Saigyō took

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care to visit and write on places earlier treated by the monk-poet Nōin, whom Saigyō greatly admired. Still later, it became the practice to inscribe on stone the poems composed at these sites and set them up as testimonials of literary activity, so that today such *uta-makura* fairly bristle with poetic monuments.

In addition to poems on conventional sights and themes, Saigyō, because of his commitment to religious life, wrote a number of poems on specifically Buddhist topics, paraphrasing passages of scripture or meditating on the principles of the Law, so that in this respect his works differ somewhat from those of purely secular writers of the period. He is also noted for the frequency with which he runs over the prescribed number of syllables in a line, particularly in the first line, or for ignoring the prohibition against employing the same word twice in a single poem—see, for example, the poem on page 219, which uses the verb *sutsuru*, "to cast off," a total of four times. His poetry in fact at times displays a freedom and indifference to convention that was probably quite beyond the imagination of more custom-bound poets of the time. In addition, like many of the great Japanese poets, he was not afraid of saying something very simple.<sup>3</sup>

In Saigyō's younger years, his poetry undoubtedly circulated in manuscript and was known to some extent in both court and religious circles. The first official recognition of his work came with the compilation of an imperially sponsored anthology called the *Shikashū* or "Collection of Verbal Flowers." Compiled around the years from 1151 to 1154, it included one poem by Saigyō, that already cited in the paragraph above. The poem was listed as *yomibito shirazu* or "author

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3. In stressing the simplicity, directness, and originality of Saigyō's poetry, and in presenting translations of his poems without in most cases describing the conventions upon which they draw, I am perhaps in danger of making Saigyō's poetry appear more unconventional than it actually is. Where Saigyō is directly alluding in his work to an earlier poem or text, I have explained the allusion. But it is impossible to explain for each poem the vast body of older usages that underlies its images and sentiments. Suffice it to say that in the selection that follows, what in English translation may appear to be a straightforward description of a natural scene is often in fact an elaborately "intertextual" reworking of conventional phrases and images, a fact that would have been quite apparent to readers of his time who were familiar with the texts and conventions that he drew upon. On this question of the allusive nature of the poetry of this period, see Haruo Shirane, "Lyricism and Intertextuality: An Approach to Shunzei's Poetics," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* (June 1990), (50)1 77-85. Professor Shirane's discussion centers on the poetry of Shunzei, but much of what he says could apply equally to that of Saigyō.

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unknown," probably because of Saigyō's relatively low social position, though the people who were of importance in poetry circles were most likely quite aware of the author's identity. Interesting as it is, it is hardly representative of his work as a whole.

A far greater degree of artistic recognition came to him some thirty years later with the compilation of another imperial anthology, the *Senzaishū* or "Collection of a Thousand Years," which was begun in 1183 and completed in 1188. It was compiled by Saigyō's lifelong friend Fujiwara Shunzei and included eighteen poems by Saigyō.

*Uta-awase* or poetry contests, in which two teams competed in composing poems on stated topics, were a frequent and highly serious feature of the literary life of the period. In addition, poets engaged in *jika-awase* or personal poetry competitions, arranging their own poems in pairs, each pair dealing with a single topic, as though they were the work of competing writers, and often inviting a friend or associate to judge which of the two poems in each pair should be regarded as the winner. Saigyō put together two such sequences of poems, both named for rivers in the Ise region where he was living at the time, the *Mimosusogawa uta-awase* or "Poetry Contest at the Mimosuso River," compiled in 1187, and the *Miyagawa uta-awase* or "Poetry Contest at the Miya River," compiled in 1189. He sent the former to Fujiwara Shunzei and the latter to Shunzei's son Teika for judgment. Their judgments and critical comments have been preserved and indicate the high esteem in which these men held Saigyō's work.

When Saigyō died in 1190, he must have known that he had carved out for himself a position of lasting importance in the history of Japanese poetry. Whether he could possibly have foreseen the overwhelming prominence that would be conferred upon his poetry with the compilation of the *Shinkokinshū* some sixteen years later, we can only speculate.

It is not known just when or by whom the *Sankashū* or "Mountain Home Collection" was compiled, though it appears to date from Saigyō's lifetime and may well have been compiled by Saigyō himself. It contains about 1550 poems—the number varies somewhat with different versions of the text. Not all are by Saigyō, as the collection includes exchanges of poems carried out between Saigyō and his friends. The poems are arranged by topic, beginning with sections devoted to the four seasons, followed by a group of love poems, and ending

## Introduction

with a section entitled "Miscellaneous" that has apparently been added to at a later date and represents a catchall for poems that do not fit easily into other categories.

Western readers may wonder what a section on love poems is doing in the collected works of a man who was a Buddhist monk for almost all of his adult life. But the theme of romantic love, particularly as it progresses stage by stage in the psychological attitude of the participants, was one of the most frequent topics in Japanese court poetry, and anyone with pretensions to being a serious poet would be expected to produce works dealing with it. Some of Saigyō's love poems may date from the years before he entered religious life, but it is clear that he continued to compose on the subject throughout the remainder of his years. Many of the love poems are written from the woman's point of view, a common convention in love poetry even when composed by men. There is a possibility that some of the love poems, like some of the poems in other categories that are quite unrelated to religion, are in fact intended to convey a deep religious meaning.

The *Sankashū* appears to contain the bulk of Saigyō's poems written up to about 1180, but it does not by any means include all his extant poems. The ninety-four poems by Saigyō preserved in the *Shinkokinshū* include many that are not found in the *Sankashū*. In making my selection, I have therefore drawn from both the *Sankashū* and *Shinkokinshū*, as well as from several other imperial anthologies. Since the poems in the *Shinkokinshū* are arranged in categories similar to those used in the *Sankashū*, I have placed poems from the former with those from the latter that belong to the same category, except that the *Shinkokinshū* includes sections on travel poems and Shinto poems that have no counterpart in the *Sankashū*. For expedience sake, I have placed poems from these last two sections in the "Miscellaneous" section.

Poets of Saigyō's time often composed poems on *dai* or topics expressed in a two-character or four-character phrase in Chinese such as "New Greens" or "Winter Deepens in a Mountain Home." In order to make such topics in Chinese readily identifiable, I have capitalized the principal words. Where the heading of the original poem is in Japanese, I have capitalized only the first word. Headings in the original that contribute nothing to the reader's understanding of the poem, such as *Dai shirazu* or "Topic unknown," I have simply omitted in translation.



## Introduction

In 1929 a short text known as the *Kikigaki shū*, containing 263 poems by Saigyō, none of which are found in the *Sankashū*, was discovered. It includes several groups of poems such as that written "In a light vein" that date from Saigyō's late years and are of unusual interest because of their colloquial diction and the insight they give into Saigyō's personality. I have ended my selection with examples from this text.

My translations from the *Sankashū* are based on the texts found in Kazamaçi Keijirō and Kojima Yoshio, *Sankashū, Kinkai wakashū*, Nihon koten bungaku taikai 29 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1961), and Gotō Shigeo, *Sankashū*, Shinchō Nihon koten shūsei (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1982). The text of the *Kikigaki shū* is found on pp. 274–289 of the former work. My translations from the *Shinkokinshū* are based on the text in Minemura Fumito, *Shinkokin wakashū*, Nihon koten bungaku zenshū (Tokyo: Shōgakkan, 1974). The numbers in parentheses that follow the romanized texts in my selection refer to the poems as they are numbered in these works. The abbreviation SKS refers to the *Sankashū* and SKKS to the *Shinkokinshū*. The romanized versions of the poems are meant simply as guides to readers or students of Japanese who wish to visualize the originals; they are not intended to represent the poems as they were pronounced in Saigyō's time.

Readers of English who want to read further on Saigyō should consult the sections on Saigyō and his contemporaries in Robert H. Brower and Earl Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961) and the translation of 173 Saigyō's poems by William R. LaFleur, *Mirror for the Moon* (New York: New Directions, 1978), which contains an excellent introduction. There is a complete English translation of the *Sankashū* by H. H. Honda, *The Sanka Shū* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1971), but the introduction and notes are minimal and the translations indescribably drab.

Some of my translations appeared earlier in the anthology of Japanese poetry entitled *From the Country of Eight Islands*, Hiroaki Sato and Burton Watson (New York: Doubleday, 1981; Columbia University Press, 1986), and are included here in somewhat revised form.

In addition to the works cited above, I have drawn on the following works for material in the introduction and notes:

Ishida Yoshisada, *Inja no bungaku*, Hanawa shinsho 17 (Tokyo: Hanawa shobō, 1969).

## Introduction

- Kawada Jun, *Saigyō shū*, in *Sanetomo shū, Saigyō shū, Ryōkan shū*,  
Koten Nihon bungaku zenshū 21 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1960).
- Kubota Jun, *Sankashū* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1983).
- Mezaki Tokue, *Saigyō no shisōshi-teki kenkyū* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa  
kōbunkan, 1978).
- Watanabe Tamotsu, *Saigyō Sankashū zenchūkai* (Tokyo: Kazama  
shobō, 1971).
- Yamada Shōzen, *Saigyō no waka to Bukkyō* (Tokyo: Meiji shoin,  
1987).
- Yamaki Kōichi, *Saigyō no sekai*, Hanawa shinsho 53 (Tokyo: Ha-  
nawa shobō, 1979).
- Yamaki Kōichi, *Saigyō waka no keisei to juyō* (Tokyo: Meiji shoin,  
1987).



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Spring



Ice wedged fast  
in the crevice of the rock  
this morning begins to melt—  
under the moss the water  
will be feeling out a channel



Iwama tojishi kōri mo kesa wa tokesomete  
koke no shita mizu michi motomuran

SKKS 1 (7)

Spring



The deep snow that  
fell and piled up on the high peaks  
has melted:  
white waves dot the flow  
of Clear Torrent River\*

~

Furi tsumishi takane no miyuki tokenikeri  
kiyotakigawa no mizu no shiranami  
SKKS 1 (27)

\* Kiyotakigawa or Clear Torrent River flows through  
the hills west of Kyoto

Spring



You can tell  
from the outline of the hills,  
the way it's hazed over—  
from this morning on  
we'll have springtime dawns\*

~

Yama no ha no kasumu keshiki ni shiruki kana  
kesa yori ya sa wa haru no akebono

SKS 1 (2)

\* Said by Sei Shōnagon in the opening of her *Pillow Book* to be the most beautiful dawns of the year.

Spring



*Seashore Haze*

There on the shore  
where they're boiling seaweed salt,  
the rising smoke lingers,  
rises up and mingles  
with the spring haze\*

~

Moshio yaku ura no atari wa tachinokade

kemuri tachisou haru kasumi kana

SKS 1 (12)

\* Seawater was poured over racks of seaweed and the water dripping down was then boiled to extract the salt, a common method of salt production.



Spring



*New Greens*

While the old year lasted,

Kasuga Field

was buried in snow.

Now it's spring

and new shoots are poking up\*

~.

Kasugano wa toshi no uchi ni wa yuki tsumite

haru wa wakana no ouru narikeri

SKS 1 (19)

\* On the seventh day of the New Year, people gathered the shoots of herbs and prepared a seven-herb rice gruel that was believed to ward off illness throughout the year. Kasuga Field in Nara was a well-known spot for gathering such herbs. The poem plays on *tsumu*, "to pile up" as of now, and *tsumu*, "to pluck" as of shoots.

*S p r i n g*



*On young herbs, thinking of the past*

Sad the haze in the meadow  
where I pick young herbs  
when I think  
how it shrouds me  
from the faraway past

~

Wakana tsumu nobe no kasumi zo aware naru  
mukashi o tōku hedatsu to omoeba  
SKS 1 (21)



*The Bush Warbler Idling*

Seeping through the haze,  
the voice  
of the bush warbler—  
few people passing,  
mountain village in spring

Uguisu no koe zo kasumi ni morete kuru  
hitome tomoshiki haru no yamazato\*

SKS 1 (25)

\* *Yamazato* or "mountain village" usually designates a small community or settlement in the mountains. But Saigyō often seems to be using it to refer to a single mountain dwelling where he lives alone in retirement. In his poetry the word has strong connotations of isolation and loneliness.

Spring



*Pheasant*

It sounds as though  
he's hunting  
new shoots that've sprouted—  
pheasant crying in the field  
in springtime dawn

~

Moe izuru wakana asaru to kikoyu nari  
kigisu naku no no haru no akebono  
SKS 1 (31)

*S p r i n g*



*The Plum Tree at My Mountain Hut*

Take note:

the plum by my rustic hedge

halted in his tracks

a total stranger

who happened by

~

Kokoro sen shizu ga kakine no mume wa aya na  
yoshi naku suguru hito todomekeri

SKS 1 (36)

Spring



This spring I'll stay  
close to my rustic hedge,  
make friends  
with people who come  
in search of the plum's fragrance

~

Kono haru wa shizu ga kakine ni furebaite  
mume ga ka tomen hito shitashiman  
SKS 1 (37)

Spring



*When I was living in Saga, the wind would  
scatter plum blossoms from the monk's lodging  
across the road.*

How the owner  
must hate it  
when the wind blows,  
though over here, pure joy  
in the fragrance of the plum

~

Nushi ika ni kaze wataru tote itouran  
yoso ni ureshiki mume no nioi o  
SKS 1 (38)

*S p r i n g*



*Spring Showers in a Mountain Dwelling—written  
at Ōhara*

Curtained by spring showers  
pouring down from the eaves,  
a place where someone lives,  
idle, idle,  
unknown to others



Harusame no noki tarekomuru tsurezure ni  
hito ni shirarenu hito no sumika ka

SKS 1 (45)



Spring



*Rice Seedling Beds*

Mist seems to  
draw the water, leading it  
into seedling beds,  
as it hovers above  
the irrigation troughs

~

Nawashiro no mizu o kasumi wa tanabikite  
uchihi no ue ni kakuru narikeri

SKS 1 (50)

Spring



*Mountain Home Willow*

Poor people of the hills,  
a piece of the long slope  
taken over for their shack,  
and as though for a boundary,  
that jewel of a young willow!

~.

Yamagatsu no kataoka kakete shimuru io no  
sakai ni miyuru tama no oyanagi

SKS 1 (52)

Spring



*Willow in the Rain*

Tangled even further  
in the wind  
that dries them—  
threads of green willow  
wet with rain



Naka naka ni kaze no hosu ni zo midarekeru  
ame ni nuretaru aoyagi no ito

SKS 1 (53)

Spring



On Mount Yoshino

snowflakes scattering down

from cherry limbs—

one of those years

when blossoms will come late\*



Yoshinoyama sakura ga eda ni yuki chirite

hana osoge naru toshi ni mo aru kana

SKKS 1 (79)

\* Mount Yoshino, in Nara Prefecture south of the city of Nara, is the site of several famous temples and shrines and is noted for the thousands of cherry trees that bloom in spring on the mountain. Saigyō frequently visited it and for a time lived in a hut there.

*S p r i n g*



I'll forget the trail  
I marked out on Mount Yoshino  
last year,  
go searching for blossoms  
in directions I've never been before

~

Yoshinoyama kozo no shiori no michi kaete  
mada minu kata no hana o tazunen

SKKS 1 (86)

Spring



Since the day I saw  
Mount Yoshino's  
blossoming treetops,  
my body's one place,  
my heart in another

~

Yoshinoyama kozue no hana o mishi hi yori

kokoro wa mi ni mo sowazu nariniki

SKS 1 (66)

*S p r i n g*



I'd have it first one way, then the reverse—  
in blossom-viewing spring,  
never mind nighttime,  
in moon-viewing autumn,  
do away with days!



Hikikaete hana miru haru wa yoru wa naku  
tsuki miru aki wa hiru nakaranan  
SKS 1 (71)

Spring



If only I could  
divide myself,  
not miss a single tree,  
see the blossoms at their best  
on all ten thousand mountains!\*

~

Mi o wakete minū kozue naku tsukusaba ya  
yorozu no yama no hana no sakari o  
SKS 1 (74)

\* The conceit of dividing the body into countless selves derives from Buddhist scriptures, in which the Buddhas are frequently depicted doing this. Saigyō perhaps borrowed it from the four-line poem by the Chinese poet Liu Tsung-yüan (773-819) entitled "A Poem to Send to Friends in the Capital," the closing lines of which read:

If I could change into a million selves  
I'd send one to climb each peak and gaze far off  
toward home.

See my *Columbia Book of Chinese Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 282



Spring



Why should my heart  
still harbor  
this passion for cherry flowers,  
I who thought  
I had put all that behind me?



Hana ni somu kokoro no ika de nokoriken  
sute hateteki to omou waga mi ni  
SKS 1 (76)

Spring



Let me die in spring  
under the blossoming trees,  
let it be around  
that full moon  
of Kisaragi month\*

~

Negawaku wa hana no shita nite haru shinan  
sono kisaragi no mochizuki no koro  
SKS 1 (77)

\* Kisaragi is the Japanese name for the second month of the lunar year. Shakyamuni Buddha is said to have died on the fifteenth day of the second month. Saigyō fulfilled the wish expressed in his poem in a striking manner by dying on the sixteenth day of the second month of 1190, a feat that greatly impressed the people of his time, who were familiar with this poem

Spring



To the dead  
make offerings  
of cherry flowers—  
so I would say if someone  
were to mourn me when I'm gone

~

Hotoke\* ni wa sakura no hana o tatemasure  
waga nochi no yo o hito toburawaba

SKS 1 (78)

\* *Hotoke* means literally "a Buddha," but it is used in common parlance to refer to a deceased person, since according to Amidist belief all who die in the faith will in time attain Buddhahood.

Spring



*Viewing cherries in the spring dawn and hearing a  
bush warbler's call*

The color of the blossoms  
must be dyed in that sound—  
a warbler's call  
lovelier than ever  
in spring dawn

~.

Hana no iro ya koe ni somuran uguisu no  
naku ne kotonaru haru no akebono

SKS 1 (91)

*S p r i n g*



Take a good look:  
even the blossoms  
of the old cherry seem sad—  
how many more times  
will they see the spring?

~.

Wakite min oiki wa hana mo aware nari  
ima ikutabi ka haru ni aubeki

SKS 1 (94)

Spring



*Mountain Path, Fallen Blossoms*

First snowfall  
of cherry petals  
starting to scatter—  
how hateful, tramping through it  
over the pass from Shiga!\*

~.

Chiri somuru hana no hatsuyuki furinureba  
fumiwake ma uki shiga no yamagoe  
SKS 1 (105)

\* Shiga is the Lake Biwa area beyond the mountains east of Kyoto

*S p r i n g*



Gazing at them,  
I've grown so very close  
to these blossoms,  
to part with them when they fall  
seems bitter indeed!



Nagamu tote hana ni mo itaku narenureba  
chiru wakare koso kanashikarikere  
SKS 1 (120), SKKS 2 (126)

*S p r i n g*



*Recalling blossoms after they've scattered*

Once I see  
the new green leaves,  
my heart may take to them too—  
if I think of them as mementos  
of blossoms that scattered

~.

Aoba sae mireba kokoro no tomaru kana  
chirinishi hana no nagori to omoeba

SKS 1 (158)





*Violets*

Never visited,  
the whole garden rank with  
low-growing cogon grass—  
who pushed a way through,  
coming to pick violets?

~.  
Ato taete asaji shigereru niwa no omo ni  
tare wakeirite sumire tsumiten

SKS 1 (159)

Spring



*Azaleas on a Mountain Trail*

Moving from rock to rock,  
I clutch at azaleas,  
but not to pick them—  
on these steep slopes  
I count on them for a handhold

~

Iwa tsutai orade tsutsuji o te ni zo toru  
sagashiki yama no toridokoro ni wa  
SKS 1 (163)

Spring



*Kerria Rose*

How hateful of someone  
to have planted them  
so close to the riverbank!—  
sprays of kerria rose  
broken by the waves\*

~

Kishi chikami ueken hito zo urameshiki  
nami ni oraruru yamabuki no hana

SKS 1 (165)

\* The *yamabuki* or kerria rose is a large bush with showy yellow flowers that blooms in late spring. Those growing along the Tama River at Ide south of Kyoto are frequently mentioned in early Japanese poetry. Watanabe Tamotsu in his commentary on the poem asserts that Saigyō is concerned not that the actual sprays of the plant will be broken in the water, but that their reflection will be distorted by the ripples. The original, which says "blossoms of the kerria rose," may be taken either way.

*S p r i n g*



*Frogs*

When we flood  
the mountain paddies  
grown over with sedge grass,  
what joyful faces  
on the croaking frogs!

~

Masuge ouru yamada ni mizu o makasureba  
ureshigao ni mo naku kawazu kana

SKS 1 (167)

Spring



Frogs

Muddy inlet

so scummy even moonlight

won't linger there—

it's home to us!

say the croaking frogs

~

Misabi ite tsuki mo yadoranu nigorie ni  
ware suman tote kawazu naku nari\*

SKS 1 (168)

\* There is a play on *sumu*, "to live," and *sumu*, "to be clear."





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S u m m e r



Cuckoo—

I've yet to hear him

but I'll wait for him here

in this stand of dense cedars

on Yamada moor\*

~.  
Kikazu tomo koko o se ni sen hototogisu

yamada no hara no sugi no muradachi

SKKS 3 (217)

\* Yamada moor is near the Ise Shrine, in the area where Saigyō lived in his late years.

S u m m e r



Cuckoo has emerged  
from his faraway  
mountain peak—  
along the rim of the foothills  
his note comes drifting down

~

Hototogisu fukaki mine yori idenikeri  
toyama no suso ni koe no ochikuru  
SKKS 3 (218)



*Evening Cuckoo*

The twilight cuckoo  
now quite at home in our village—  
I pretend not to hear,  
hoping to make him  
speak his name again



Sato naruru tasogaredoki no hototogisu  
kikazugao nite mata nanorasen  
SKS 1 (181)

S u m m e r



Rock-damned marsh—  
in fifth-month rains  
so full of water  
you can't pick your way  
over the stones any longer



Samidare wa iwa seku numa no mizu fukami  
wakeshi ishima no kayoido mo nashi  
SKS 1 (209)

S u m m e r



Staring blankly  
at the drops  
from rafter ends,  
barely getting through the days—  
fifth-month rainy season

~.

Tsukuzuku to noki no shizuku o nagametsutsu  
hi o nomi kurasu samidare no koro  
SKS 1 (211)

S u m m e r



In fifth-month rains  
no trace of a path  
where I can make my way,  
meadows of bamboo grass  
awash in muddy water

~.

Samidare wa yukubeki michi no ate mo nashi  
ozasa ga hara mo uki ni nagarete  
SKS 1 (226)

S u m m e r



In willow shade  
where clear water flows  
by the wayside—  
"Just a while!" I said  
as I stopped to rest



Michi no be ni shimizu nagaruru yanagi kage  
shibashi tote koso tachidomaritsure  
SKKS 3 (262)

S u m m e r



Across the face of the field

wilted grasses

darken:

the chill clouding-over

of a sudden storm sky

Yoraretsuru nomose no kusa no kageroite

suzushiku kumoru yūdachi no sora

SKKS 3 (263)



S u m m e r



*Traveler Passing Where Grasses Are Deep*

Traveler pushing his way  
through a summer meadow,  
grasses so thick  
his sedge hat seems  
to float over their tips

~

Tabibito no wakuru natsuno no kusa shigemi  
hazue ni suge no ogasa hazurete  
SKS 1 (237)

*S u m m e r*



Summer nights I doubt  
they can even see the moon—  
poor people in their lean-to,  
burning smudge fires  
to keep off the mosquitoes

~  
Natsu no yo no tsuki miru koto ya nakaruran  
kayaribi tatsuru shizu no fuseya wa  
SKS 1 (241)



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A u t u m n



Even in a person  
most times indifferent  
to things around him  
they waken feelings—  
the first winds of autumn

~.

Oshinabete mono o omowanu hito ni sae  
kokoro o tsukuru aki no hatsukaze  
SKKS 4 (299)

A u t u m n



Ah, how many drops of dew  
will spill  
from leaves of grass—  
fall winds are rising  
on Miyagino plain\*

~

Aware ika ni kusaba no tsuyu no koboruran  
akikaze tachinu miyagino no hara  
SKKS 4 (300)

\* The plain of Miyagino in the Sendai area of northern Japan is famous for its bush clover and other autumn-blooming plants.



*Pampas Grass Thick on the Path*

With blooms of pampas grass

for markers

I push my way along,

no trace of the trail

I vaguely remembered

~

Hana susuki kokoro ate ni zo wakete yuku

hono mishi michi no ato shi nakereba

SKS 1 (274)



*Reeds*

Sounding even  
more mournful  
than I'd expected,  
an autumn evening wind  
tossing in the reed leaves

~

Omou ni mo sugite aware ni kikoyuru wa  
ogi no ha midaru aki no yūkaze

SKS 1 (285)



A u t u m n



How lonely, the light of the moon  
filtering into my hut,  
the only sound, the clackers  
that shoo away birds  
in the mountain paddies

~

lo ni moru tsuki no kage koso sabishikere  
yamada wa hita no oto bakari shite

SKS 1 (303)

A u t u m n



I used to gaze at the moon,  
my mind wandering endlessly—  
and now again  
I've come on one of  
those old time autumns

~

Tsuki o mite kokoro ukareshi inishie no  
aki ni mo sara ni meguri ainuru  
SKS 1 (349), SKKS 16 (1530)

A u t u m n



*When I was paying my respects at Kasuga,  
the moon was even brighter than usual and I  
was moved to write this.\**

Gazing at this moon  
over Mikasa tonight,  
I know how he must have felt,  
that man who  
"looked far off"

~  
Furi sakeshi hito no kokoro zo shirarenuru  
koyoi mikasa no tsuki o nagamete  
SKS 1 (407)

\* Kasuga is a famous Shinto shrine at the foot of Mount Mikasa in Nara. Saigyō is recalling a poem by Abe no Nakamarō (701–770), an envoy to the Tang court in China during the Nara period. Abe wrote the poem in China in 752, when he was about to board a ship to return to Japan. The poem expresses his longing for his homeland, and is preserved in *Kokinshū* 9 (406).

Ama no hara	I turn to look
furisake mireba	far off at the sky—
kasuga naru	the same moon
mikasa no yama ni	that used to rise
ideshi tsuki ka mo	over Mount Mikasa in Kasuga!

Abe's poem is especially poignant in view of the fact that, after he had embarked for Japan, his ship was blown far off course and wrecked on the China coast. He made his way back to the Tang capital but died there without ever returning to Japan.



*Hearing Wild Geese at Dawn*

As banked clouds  
are swept apart  
by the wind at dawn,  
the cry of the first wild geese  
winging over the mountain

~

Yokogumo no kaze ni wakaruru shinonome ni  
yama tobikoyuru hatsukari no koe  
SKS 1 (420); SKKS 5 (501)



*The Moon Seen on a Journey*

Moon-viewings in the capital  
when I thought  
such sad thoughts—  
now I know they were no more  
than idle pastimes

~  
Miyako nite tsuki o aware to omoishi wa  
kazu yori hoka no susabi narikeri

SKS 1 (418); SKKS 10 (937)



*The Call of Wild Geese Far and Near*

Wild geese departing,  
their wings in white clouds,  
call longingly to their friends  
in the paddies  
outside my gate

~

Shirakumo o tsubasa ni kakete yuku kari no  
kadoda no omo no tomo shitau nari

SKS 1 (422), SKKS 5 (502)

A u t u m n



Autumn, when even  
without it  
all things seem mournful,  
the sound of the stag's cry  
brings tears welling up

~

Saranu dani aki wa mono nomi kanashiki o  
namida moyōsu saoshika no koe

SKS 1 (432)



*Insects in the Rain*

In the little weeds  
that sprout in my wall  
a cricket wails—  
he must be peeved at the dew  
that soaks the garden

~.

Kabe ni ouru kogusa ni waburu kirigirisu  
shigururu niwa no tsuyu itoubeshi  
SKS 1 (461)





*Insects on an Evening Road*

On the road with not a soul  
to keep me company,  
as evening falls  
katydids lift their voices  
and cheer me along

~

Uchigusuru hito naki michi no yūsare wa  
koe nite okuru kutsuwamushi kana\*

SKS 1 (463)

\* For the first phrase, I follow the reading in the *Rokkashū* text. The insect is called *kutsuwamushi* or "horse-bit bug" because its cry suggests the sound of a bit in a horse's mouth, hence the traveler in the poem feels as though he has company on the road

A u t u m n



So deep into autumn  
their fellow flowers  
are all gone—  
if the frost would only hold off,  
leave me the incomparable chrysanthemums!

~

Aki fukami narabu hana naki kiku nareba

tokoro o shimo no oke to koso omoe

SKS 1 (468)

A u t u m n



Even a person free of passion

would be moved

to sadness:

autumn evening

in a marsh where snipes fly up

~

Kokoro naki mi nimo aware wa shirarekeri

shigi tatsu sawa no aki no yūgure

SKS 1 (470), SKKS 4 (362)

A u t u m n



Crickets—

as the cold of night

deepens into autumn

are you weakening? your voices

grow farther and farther away

~

Kirigirisu yosamu ni aki no naru mama ni

yowaru ka koe no tōzakari yuku

SKKS 5 (472)

A u t u m n



A mountain village  
at autumn's end—  
that's when you learn  
what mournfulness means  
in the blast of the wintry wind

~

Yamazato wa aki no sue ni zo omoi shiru  
kanashikarikeri kogarashi no kaze

SKS 1 (487)

A u t u m n



*All night long regretting the end of autumn*

Regret as I may,  
even the bell  
has a different sound now,  
and soon frost will fall  
in place of morning dew

~

Oshimedomo kane no oto sae kawaru kana  
shimo ni ya tsuyu o musubi kauran  
SKS 1 (490)



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W i n t e r



Clouds have all scattered  
from the tall peak  
where I wait for moonrise—  
what kindness in the first  
of these early winter showers!

~

Tsuki o matsu takane no kumo wa harenikeri  
kokoro arubeki hatsushigure kana

SKKS 6 (570)

W i n t e r



In Akishino

is it raining

in the foothill villages?

Clouds hang over

Ikoma's peak\*

~

Akishino ya toyama no sato ya shigururan

ikoma no take ni kumo no kakareru

SKKS 6 (585)

\* Akishino is west of the city of Nara. Mount Ikoma separates Nara from the Osaka area

W i n t e r



Leaves have fallen  
in this village  
at the foot of Mount Ogura  
and I can see the moon  
shining in the tops of the trees\*

~.

Ogurayama fumoto no sato ni ko no ha chireba  
kozue ni haruru tsuki o miru kana

SKKS 6 (603)

\* Mount Ogura is in the hills west of Kyoto

W i n t e r



Was it a dream,  
that spring in Naniwa  
in the land of Tsu?  
Now the wind blows over  
the dead leaves of the reeds\*

~

Tsu no kuni no naniwa no haru wa yume nare ya  
ashi no kareha ni kaze wataru nari  
SKKS 6 (625)

\* Naniwa is the area of the present-day city of Osaka.  
Saigyō is alluding to an earlier poem by Priest Nōin  
(998–1050) preserved in *Goshūishū* 1 (43):

Kokoro aran	If only I could show them
hito ni miseba ya	to someone of real feeling—
tsu no kuni no	the sights of spring
naniwa watari no	hereabouts in Naniwa
haru no keshiki o	in the land of Tsu!

W i n t e r



*Falling Leaves at Dawn*

Wondering if it's a winter shower,  
I wake in my bed  
and hear them—  
the leaves that  
couldn't withstand the storm

~

Shigure ka to nezame no toko ni kikoyuru wa  
arashi ni taenu ko no ha narikeri  
SKS 1 (496)

W i n t e r



*On the theme "Cold Grasses in the Field," written  
at Sōrin-ji\**

Fields we saw  
blooming with  
so many different flowers,  
frost-withered now  
to a single hue

~

Samazama ni hana sakikeri to mishi nobe no  
onaji iro ni mo shimogarenikeru

SKS 1 (506)

\* A temple in the eastern hills of Kyoto where Saigyō  
lived for a time.

W i n t e r



If only there were  
someone else  
willing to bear this loneliness—  
side by side we'd build our huts  
for winter in a mountain village

~

Sabishisa ni taetaru hito no mata mo are na  
iori naraban fuyu no yamazato  
SKS 1 (513); SKKS 6 (627)

W i n t e r



Neglectful, we've yet  
to fix the towrope  
to the sled—  
and here they're piled up already,  
the white snows of Koshi!\*

~

Tayumitsutsu sori no hayao mo tsukenaku ni  
tsumorinikeru na koshi no shirayuki

SKS 1 (529)

\* Koshi is the Japan Sea coastal area, noted for its heavy snows.





*Snow Buries the Bamboo*

Heaped with snow,  
bamboos in the garden  
bend and topple—  
flocks of sparrows hunting  
for another roost

~

Yuki uzumu sono no kuretake orefushite  
negura motomuru murasuzume kana  
SKS 1 (535)

W i n t e r



*Boat in a Hailstorm*

Little boat with no treadboard  
crossing the straits,  
take care!

The hail pelts wildly  
and the swift wind sweeps in

~.

Seto wataru tana nashi obune kokoro seyo  
arare midaruru shimaki yokogiru  
SKS 1 (544)

W i n t e r



*Hail Deep in the Mountains*

Woodcutter

sleeping all alone

in his pine bough shelter,

the only sound,

his only visitor, the hail.

~

Somabito no maki no kariya no adabushi ni

oto suru mono wa arare narikeri\*

SKS 1 (545)

\* There is a play on *oto suru*, "to make a sound," and *otozuru*, "to visit."

W i n t e r



Living alone  
in the shade of a remote mountain,  
I have you for my companion  
now the storm has passed,  
moon of the winter night!

~

Hitori sumu katayama kage no tomo nare ya  
arashi ni haruru fuyu no yo no tsuki\*

SKS 1 (558)

\* The last phrase follows the reading in the *Rokkashū* text.

W i n t e r



*Winter Deepens in a Mountain Home*

At the first snowfall, yes,  
some visitors pushed their way through,  
but now all trails  
are cut off  
to this village deep in the mountains

~

Tou hito wa hatsuyuki o koso wakekoshi ka  
michi tojitekeri miyamabe no sato

SKS 1 (569)

W i n t e r



*At year end, sent to a certain person\**

Without having to be asked,  
I thought the person would come  
out of kindness,  
but while I was hesitating,  
the year came to an end

~

Onozu kara iwanu o shitau hito ya aru to  
yasurau hodo ni toshi no kurenuru  
SKS 1 (576), SKKS 6 (691)

\* According to one interpretation, the "certain person" was Saigyō's former wife.

W i n t e r



Mount Arachi so steep,  
no ravine to descend by,  
but the white snow  
offers us  
a snowshoe trail

~

Arachiyama sakashiku kudarū tani mo naku  
kajiki no michi o tsukuru shirayuki\*

SKS 1 (577)

\* This poem is found only in certain versions of the *Rokkashū* text; see *Sankashū* (Nihon koten bungaku taikai 29), p. 269. Mount Arachi is in present-day Fukui Prefecture.

W i n t e r



A garden that recalls the past,  
but in it I stack  
driftwood for fuel—  
hardly the kind of year-end  
I used to know\*

~

Mukashi omou niwa no ukigi o tsumiokite  
mishi yo ni mo ninu toshi no kure kana

SKKS 6 (697)

\* Some commentators see in the word "driftwood" an allusion to the Buddhist parable, found in the *Lotus Sutra* and elsewhere, that likens the difficulty of attaining enlightenment to that of a blind turtle encountering a piece of driftwood to which it can cling. I.e., "stacking driftwood" here stands for religious endeavor.





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Love



Moon at break of day,  
what memories it wakes  
of times when I lingered  
like the banked clouds  
that trail away in the dawn sky\*

~

Ariake wa omoiide are ya yokogumo no  
tadayowatetsuru shinonome no sora  
SKKS 13 (1193)

\* The moon recalls to the speaker times when the lovers parted at dawn.

*L o v e*



He never came—  
the wind too tells  
how the night has worn away,  
while mournfully the cries of wild geese  
approach and pass on

~

Hito wa kode kaze no keshiki mo fukenu ni  
aware ni kari no otozurete yuku  
SKKS 13 (1200)

Love



No promises—yet I wait,  
thinking perhaps you'll come.

If only the night  
wouldn't dwindle away  
but be over all at once!

~

Tanomeni ni kimi ku ya to matsu yoi no ma no  
fukeyukade tada akenamashikaba

SKKS 13 (1205)

Love



Why should I resent  
a person's growing cold?  
Time was  
when he didn't know me  
and I didn't know him either

~  
Utoku naru hito o nani tote uramuran  
shirarezu shiranu ori mo arishi o  
SKKS 14 (1297)



*Cuckoo at the Time of Parting*

At best of times,  
hard to break away,  
and now with the flush of dawn  
cuckoo makes it worse  
by singing out!\*



Saranu dani kaeri yararenu shinonome ni  
soete katarau hototogisu kana  
SKS 2 (586)

\* In Chinese and Japanese poetry, the cuckoo is the bird of memory.

L o v e



*Love Likened to Lemon Grass*

Does this love of mine

face one way only,

never perversely straying?

Rather it is the lemon grass in the meadow,

tossed in ever-shifting winds

~

Hitokata ni midaru tomo naki waga koi ya

kaze sadamaranu nobe no karukaya

SKS 2 (603)



*L o v e*



Her face when we parted,

a parting

I can never forget—

And for keepsake she left it

printed on the moon

~.

Omokage no wasuraru majiki wakare kana

nagori o hito no tsuki ni todomete

SKS 2 (621), SKKS 13 (1185)

L o v e



Does the moon say "Grieve!"

does it force

these thoughts on me?

And yet the tears come

to my reproving eyes

~.

Nageke tote tsuki ya wa mono o omowasuru

kakochigao naru waga namida kana

SKS 2 (628)

*L o v e*



When the moon shines  
without the smallest blemish,  
I think of her—  
and then my heart disfigures it,  
blurs it with tears.

~.

Kuma mo naki orishimo hito o omoiidete  
kokoro to tsuki o yatsushitsuru kana

SKS 2 (644), SKKS 14 (1268)



Love



When I gaze at it  
these days,  
lost in thoughts of love,  
how deeply the moon's hue  
seems dyed in sorrow

~

Mono omoite nagamuru koro no tsuki no iro ni  
ikabakari naru aware somuran

SKS 2 (649); SKKS 14 (1269)

*L o v e*



As rays of moonlight stream  
through a sudden gap  
in the rain clouds—  
if we could meet even  
for so brief a moment!

~

Amagumo no warinaki hima o moru tsuki no  
kage bakari dani aimiteshi gana

SKS 2 (650)

L o v e



Now I understand—  
when you said "Remember!"  
and swore to do the same,  
already you had it  
in mind to forget

~  
Kyō zo shiru omoiideyo to chigirishi wa  
wasuren tote no nasake narikeri

SKS 2 (685); SKKS 14 (1298)

*L o v e*



"I know  
how you must feel!"  
And with those words  
she grows more hateful  
than if she'd never spoken at all

~

Nakanaka ni omoi shiru chō koto no ha wa  
towanu ni sugite urameshiki kana  
SKS 2 (688)

Love



My thoughts keep  
growing lush,  
like summertime weeds,  
though the sadness of autumn surfeit  
I know lies ahead

~.

Natsugusa no shigeri no mi yuku omoi kana  
mataruru aki no aware shirarete

SKS 2 (703)





Why does no one say "Pitiful!"

or come to comfort me?

In the house

where I long for my love

the wind blows over the reeds

~

Aware tote tou hito no nado nakaruran

mono omou yado no ogi no uwakaze

SKS 2 (705); SKKS 14 (1307)





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M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*When I was in retirement in a distant place, I  
sent this to someone in the capital around the  
time when there was a moon.\**

Only the moon

high in the sky

as an empty reminder—

but if, looking at it, we just remember,

our two hearts may meet

~

Tsuki nomi ya uwa no sora naru katami nite  
omoi mo ideba kokoro kayowan

SKS 2 (727); SKKS 14 (1267)

\* In the *Shinkokinshū* this is included among the love poems. Without knowing more about the identity of the person addressed, however, it is impossible to say if it deals with love or friendship.

Miscellaneous



*When I abandoned the world and was on my way to Ise, I wrote this at Suzukayama (Bell Deer Mountain).\**

Bell Deer Mountain:

I shake off this sad world,

put it aside,

but what lies in store for me,

what note will I sound?

~  
Suzukayama uki yo o yoso ni furi sutete

ika ni nari yuku waga mi naruran

SKS 2 (728), SKKS 17 (1611)

\* Suzukayama is on the road between Kyoto and the Ise region, where Saigyō had friends. The poem was probably written not long after he entered religious life. The words *furi* (shake), *nari* (sound), and *naru* (to sound/to become) are linked to the bell image in the name of the mountain.



*Expressing Feelings*

Is it because my mind  
keeps dwelling  
on every worldly thing  
that the world seems  
more hateful to me than ever?

~

Nanigoto ni tomaru kokoro no arikereba  
sara ni shimo mata yo no itowashiki

SKS 2 (729), SKKS 18 (1831)

Miscellaneous



*On my way to Tennō-ji I was rained on and asked for lodging at a place called Eguchi. On being refused, I wrote this.\**

It's hard to despise  
the whole world  
as a borrowed lodging,  
but that you should begrudge me  
even one night's such lodging!

Yo no naka o itou made koso katakaramé  
kari no yadori o oshimu kimi kana  
SKS 2 (752), SKKS 10 (978)

\* Tennō-ji is the Shitennō-ji temple in present-day Osaka. Eguchi was a port on the Yodo River near Osaka where travelers frequently stopped. It was famous for its brothels.



Miscellaneous



Reply\*

Because I heard you were someone  
who had left the household life,  
my only thought was to warn you:  
don't let your mind dwell  
on this borrowed lodging!

~  
Ie o izuru † hito to shi kikeba kari no yado  
kokoro tomu na to omou bakari zo

SKS 2 (753); SKKS 10 (979)

\* in the SKKS, the writer of the reply is identified as a prostitute named Tae. The legend grew up that the reply to Saigyō's poem was written by one of the prostitutes at the house where he asked for lodging. She later became known as Eguchi no Kimi or The Lady of Eguchi and was regarded as a manifestation of the Bodhisattva Samandabhadrā. The incident forms the basis of the Noh play "Eguchi."

† In the SKKS version of the poem, the opening phrase reads Yo o itou, "someone who despises this world"

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



How have I spent  
these many years and months  
in this world  
where those here even yesterday  
are no longer here today?

Or, according to another interpreta-  
tion:

Why have I been allotted  
so many years and months  
in this world  
where those here even yesterday  
are no longer here today?

~.

Toshitsuki o ika de waga mi ni okuriken  
kinō no hito mo kyō wa naki yo ni  
SKS 2 (768), SKKS 18 (1748)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*Written when he was feeling very downcast and discouraged and heard a cricket singing close to his pillow.*

At that time  
on my pillow  
under roots of mugwort,  
then too may these insects  
cheer me with friendly notes\*

~

Sono ori no yomogi ga moto no makura ni mo  
kaku koso mushi no ne ni wa mutsureme  
SKS 2 (775)

\* Saigyō is imagining the time when he will be in his grave.

Miscellaneous



*On the phrase "All Phenomena are Fleeting"\**

I think of past times,  
so swift  
in their vanishing,  
the present soon to follow—  
dew on the morning-glory

~

Hakanakute suginishi kata o omou ni mo  
ima mo sa koso wa asagao no tsuyu  
SKS 2 (777)

\* From the famous verse in the seventh chapter of the *Nirvana Sutra*: "All phenomena are fleeting, / this is the law of birth and death / When you have wiped out birth and death, / nirvana is your joy "

Miscellaneous



*When I was traveling in the province of Michinoku, I saw in the fields a grave that seemed more imposing than ordinary. I asked someone and was told it was the grave of the Middle Captain. I then asked who the Middle Captain might be, and learned that it was Sanekata, which made me feel very sad. The scene was already desolate enough, with pampas grass withered by frost dimly visible whichever way one looked. And when I tried to describe it later, I felt as though words had failed me.\**

His name alone,

imperishable,

he left behind—

pampas grass in withered fields

I see as his memento

~

Kuchi mo senu sono na bakari todome okite

kareno no susuki katamini ni zo miru

SKS 2 (800); SKKS 8 (793)

\* Fujiwara Sanekata, a captain in the imperial guard and son of Fujiwara Sadatoki, was a distinguished poet whose works are included in the *Shūishū* and other imperial anthologies. After quarreling with another member of the Fujiwara family in the palace, he was assigned the post of governor of the province of Mutsu or Michinoku in the far north and died there in 998.

Miscellaneous



*After the Lady-in-Waiting of the Second Rank  
to Taikemmon-in died, I wrote these ten poems  
in company with others.\**

On the waters  
of the flowing river,  
a jewel, a bead of foam—  
the pity  
of this fugitive world!

~  
Nagare yuku mizu ni tama nasu utakata no  
aware ada naru kono yo narikeri  
SKS 2 (817)

\* The Lady-in-Waiting of the Second Rank was Fujiwara Asako, the second wife of the statesman Fujiwara Michinori (d. 1159). She was wet nurse to Emperor Go-Shirakawa and lady-in-waiting to Taikemmon-in, the consort of Emperor Toba and mother of emperors Sutoku and Go-Shirakawa. She died in the first month of 1116. Saigyō, who had been a close friend of her and her two sons, was forty-nine at the time.

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*From "Ten Poems for the Lady-in-Waiting of  
the Second Rank"*

We saw you off,  
and returning through the fields  
I thought the morning dew  
had wet my sleeve,  
but it was tears

~.

Okuri okite kaerishi nobe no asa tsuyu o  
sode ni utsusu wa namida narikeri  
SKS 2 (819)

Miscellaneous



*From "Ten Poems for the Lady-in-Waiting of  
the Second Rank"*

Adding one more  
to the graves  
at the foot of Boat Hill,  
we make you  
"someone of the past"\*

~  
Funaoka no susono no tsuka no kazu soete  
mukashi no hito ni kimi o nashitsuru  
SKS 2 (820)

\* Funaoka or Boat Hill is a small hill in the northern outskirts of Kyoto where bodies were cremated and buried.



Miscellaneous



*From "Ten Poems for the Lady-in-Waiting of  
the Second Rank"*

"Pray for me in  
my life to come!"  
she begged me promise—  
those words a legacy  
never to be forgot

~

Nochi no yo o toe to chigirishi koto no ha ya  
wasuraru majiki katami narubeki  
SKS 2 (822)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*From "Ten Poems for the Lady-in-Waiting of  
the Second Rank"*

The path we search for  
in your wake  
you've already entered,  
never straying among  
the bitter hills of death\*

~

Ato o tou michi ni ya kimi wa irinuran  
kurushiki shide no yama e kakarade  
SKS 2 (824)

\* The "path" is the way of the Buddha, the lady-in-waiting has already gone on to her next existence.

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*From "Poems on Impermanence"*

Fishermen

by a rocky shore,

winds blowing wildly,

in a boat unmoored—

such is our condition!

~

Kaze araki iso ni kakareru amabito wa

tsunaganu fune no kokochi koso sure

SKS 2 (846)

Miscellaneous



*From "Poems on Impermanence"*

Though whose remains lie here  
I do not know,  
Mount Toribe at sundown:  
one by one  
the terrible graves\*

~

Naki ato o tare to shiranedo toribeyama  
ono ono sugoki tsuka no yūgure  
SKS 2 (848)

\* Mount Toribe is a hill east of Kyoto used as a crematorium and graveyard

Miscellaneous



*From "Poems on Impermanence"*

Rowing, rowing  
through a world  
where waves tower,  
all of us tying up at last  
at the foot of Boat Hill

~  
Nami takaki yo o kogi kogite hito wa mina  
funaoka yama o tomari ni zo suru  
SKS 2 (849)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*With others, writing on the theme "The Undetermined Nature of the Inborn Mind"\**

Like star lilies  
that sway in thick-grown fields  
where larks fly up,  
this mind bound  
to no one thing



Hibari tatsu arano ni ouru himeyuri no  
nani ni tsuku to mo naki kokoro kana  
SKS 2 (866)

\* The innate mind has the potential to achieve various states of enlightenment, a fact symbolized by the swaying blossoms of the lilies. There is a play on *yuri/lily* and *yuri/wavering*.



*Reciting the Buddha's Name at Dawn*

In rhythm with  
the tolling of the bell  
that wakens us from dreams,  
ten times I intone  
the sacred name

~

Yume samuru kane no hibiki ni uchisoete  
totabi no mina o tonaetsuru kana  
SKS 2 (871)



*Meditation on the Mind*

Darkness dispelled,  
is the radiant moon that dwells  
in the skies of the mind  
drawing nearer now  
to western hilltops?\*

~

Yami harete kokoro no sora ni sumu tsuki wa  
nishi no yamabe ya chikaku naruran

SKS 2 (876); SKKS 20 (1979)

\* West is the direction of death and of the Western  
Paradise of the Buddha Amida



Miscellaneous



*Sent from Mount Kōya to someone in the capital\**

Clarity of mind comes  
from one's surroundings,  
I tell myself,  
but this mountaintop where I live  
is a cheerless place!

~  
Sumu koto wa tokorogara zo to iinagara  
takano wa mono no aware naru kana  
SKS 2 (913)

\* According to one theory, the "someone" is the poet's wife, whom he left when he entered religious life

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



In this mountain village  
where I've given up  
all hope of visitors,  
how drab life would be  
without my loneliness

~

Tou hito mo omoi taetaru yamazato no  
sabishisa nakuba sumi ukaramashi  
SKS 2 (937)

Miscellaneous



The twilight bell  
I waited for  
is sounding—  
if tomorrow is granted me,  
I'll listen for it again\*

~.

Mataretsuru iriai no kane no oto su nari  
asu mo ya araba kikan to suran  
SKS 2 (939), SKKS 18 (1808)

\* The *iriai no kane* or twilight bell is sounded at most temples at the close of day. Its striking reminds one of the closing of a lifetime and the evanescence of the world.

Miscellaneous



Mountain village  
where wind makes sad noises  
in the pines—  
and adding to the loneliness,  
the cry of an evening cicada



Matsukaze no oto aware naru yamazato ni  
sabishisa souru higurashi no koe

SKS 2 (940)

Miscellaneous



A single pine tree  
growing in the hollow—  
and I thought  
I was the only one  
without a friend

~

Tani no ma ni hitori zo matsu mo taterikeru  
ware nomi tomo wa naki ka to omoeba  
SKS 2 (941)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



I don't know  
what's beyond the mountain  
where the late sunlight streams,  
but already I've sent  
my mind on ahead\*

~

Irihi sasu yama no anata wa shiranedomo

kokoro o kanete okuri okitsuru

SKS 2 (942)

\* The mountain of the setting sun symbolizes the Western Paradise of Amida Buddha

Miscellaneous



The sound of water  
is my companion  
in this lonely hut  
in lulls between  
the storms on the peak

~

Mizu no oto wa sabishiki io no tomo nare ya  
mine no arashi no taema taema ni  
SKS 2 (944)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



In reaped fields  
where quail cry,  
rice stubble puts up new shoots,  
rays of a crescent moon  
lighting them dimly

~

Uzura naku karita no hitsuji oi idete  
honoka ni terasu mikazuki no kage  
SKS 2 (945)



M i s c e l l a n e o u s



In this lodging  
that no one visits,  
where no one comes to call,  
from the moon in the trees  
beams of light come poking in

~

Tazune kite kototou hito no naki yado ni  
ko no ma no tsuki no kage zo sashi kuru  
SKS 2 (949)

Miscellaneous



In a hailstorm  
you can hear  
they're there all right—  
the dried leaves fallen  
from the twigs of the oaks

~.

Arare ni zo monomekashiku wa kikoekeru  
karetaru nara no shiba no ochiba wa\*

SKS 2 (964)

\* For the first phrase I follow the reading in the *Rokka-shū* text. The Yomei bunko text reads *Aware ni zo*, which yields the translation:

Mournful,  
with a sharp sound,  
you hear them—  
the dried leaves falling  
from the twigs of the oaks

Miscellaneous



On a little ridge  
of evergreens  
where two rivers meet,  
woodsmen on the rocks—  
how cool they must be!

~

Kawaai ya maki no susoyama ishi tatete  
somabito ika ni suzushikaruran  
SKS 2 (974)

Miscellaneous



In a tree that stands  
on the crag  
by abandoned paddies,  
a dove calling to its companion  
in the desolate twilight



Furuhata no soba no tatsu ki ni iru hato no  
tomo yobu koe no sugoki yūgure  
SKS 2 (997); SKKS 17 (1674)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



Butterflies darting  
so familiarly among the flowers  
that bloom by the fence—  
I envy them, yet know  
how little time they have left



Mase ni saku hana ni mutsurete tobu chō no  
urayamashiku mo hakanakarikeri  
SKS 2 (1026)

Miscellaneous



Cherry petals,  
like the tears  
of someone who's lonely,  
showering down  
when the wind blows cold



Wabibito no namida ni nitaru sakura kana  
kaze mi ni shimeba mazu koboretsutsu  
SKS 2 (1035)

Miscellaneous



Mount Yoshino—

I doubt

I'll be leaving it soon,

though friends I'm sure are waiting,

saying, "Once the blossoms have fallen—"

~

Yoshinoyama yagate ideji to omou mi o

hana chiranaba to hito ya matsuran

SKS 2 (1036); SKKS 17 (1617)

Miscellaneous



Were we sure of seeing  
a moon like this  
in existences to come,  
who would be sorry  
to leave this life?

~

Kon yo ni mo kakaru tsuki o shi mirubekuba  
inochi o oshimu hito nakaramashi  
SKS 2 (1040)



M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*Poem written when parting from a friend going to  
the province of Michinoku\**

And when you're gone  
I'll keep on gazing,  
as though waiting for the moon,  
gazing eastward  
at the evening sky

~

Kimi inaba tsuki matsu tote mo nagame yaran  
azuma no kata no yūgure no sora  
SKS 3 (1046), SKKS 9 (885)

\* In far northeastern Japan

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*On Mount Kōya, writing with others on the  
theme "Late Night, the Sound of Water"*

The storm at the window  
has ceased its roaring,  
and the sound of water,  
lost in the din before,  
tells us night is far gone

~

Magiretsuru mado no arashi no koe tomete  
fukuru o tsuguru mizu no oto kana

SKS 3 (1049)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*In the bright light of the spring moon, looking  
at branches of cherry that haven't yet begun to  
blossom as they sway in the wind.*

Looking at the moon,  
I see the branches of cherry  
trembling in the wind  
and almost tell myself,  
"They're in bloom!"



Tsuki mireba kaze ni sakura no eda naete  
hana yo tsuguru kokochi koso sure  
SKS 3 (1069)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*Once long ago, when I was on my way to Mount Shosha in Harima, I came on a pool of clear water in the midst of a meadow. Some years later, I happened to pass by the spot in the course of religious practice and found it looking as it had before, quite unchanged.\**

Clear waters unchanged

in a meadow

I saw once long ago,

will you remember

this face of mine?

~

Mukashi mishi nonaka no shimizu kawaraneba

waga kage o mo ya omoi izuran

SKS 3 (1096)

\* Mount Shosha, near the city of Himeji in Hyogo Prefecture, is the site of Enkyō-ji, one of the most important temples of the Tendai sect of Buddhism

Miscellaneous



*Writing a poem on travel*

Parting me  
from the capital,  
these mountains I've crossed—  
now even they  
are fading into the mist!



Koe kitsuru miyako hedatsuru yama sae ni  
hate wa kasumi ni kienu meru kana  
SKS 3 (1100)

Miscellaneous



We'll look at the moon  
and remember!—  
so we vowed when I left.  
Tonight someone at home too  
must be wetting a sleeve with tears.

~

Tsuki miba to chigirite ideshi furusato no  
hito mo ya koyoi sode nurasuran  
SKKS 10 (938)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*I paid reverence to the Three-Tiered Waterfall.  
It was particularly awesome and I felt that all  
my sins of the three types of karma must be  
wiped away.\**

Heaped on my body,  
sins of words too  
are washed away,  
my mind made spotless  
by the Three-Tiered Waterfall†

~  
Mi ni tsumoru kotoba no tsumi mo arawarete  
kokoro suminuru mikasane no taki  
SKS 3 (1118)

\* The poem is one of a series describing a pilgrimage to holy places at Mount Ōmine in present-day Nara Prefecture. The three types of karma are actions of the body, mouth, and mind.

† By "sins of words" Saigyō may simply mean words spoken in anger or unwisely, though it is possible that, like many poets who were also devout Buddhist believers, he felt that his literary activities were to some degree in conflict with his religious goals.

Miscellaneous



The loneliness  
of my ramshackle  
grass hut,  
where no one but the wind  
comes to call

~

Abaretaru kusa no iori no sabishisa wa  
kaze yori hoka ni tou hito zo naki  
SKS 3 (1148)



Miscellaneous



*With others, writing on the theme "In Tree Shade,  
Enjoying the Cool"*

Today again

I'll go to the hill

where pine winds blow—

perhaps to meet my friend

who was cooling himself there yesterday

~.  
Kyō mo mata matsu no kaze fuku oka e yukan

kinō suzumishi tomo ni au ya to

SKS 3 (1152)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*After the last light of the setting sun had vanished,  
the moon shone in my window*

Replacing the rays  
of late sun  
that streamed in the window,  
shedding a different light:  
an early evening moon

~

Sashikitsuru mado no irihi o aratamete

hikari o kauru yūzukuyo kana

SKS 3 (1153)

Miscellaneous



*The Lay Priest Jakunen is living in Ōhara. I  
sent him these from Mount Kōya.\**

So remote the mountains,  
the only callers to break  
the tedium of my window  
are top branches of sumac  
just starting to change color

~

Yama fukami mado no tsurezure tou mono wa  
irozuki somuru haji no tachieda  
SKS 3 (1200)

\* Saigyō sent a set of ten poems to his old friend Jakunen (Fujiwara Yorinari), who was living in religious retirement at Ōhara, a village north of Kyoto. The poems all begin with the same phrase, *Yama fukami*, and describe Saigyō's retreat at Mount Kōya. These are the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, eighth, and tenth in the series

Miscellaneous



So remote the mountains,  
on a carpet of moss  
a monkey sits,  
unconcernedly  
chattering

~

Yama fukami koke no mushiro no ue ni ite  
nanigokoro naku naku mashira kana  
SKS 3 (1201)

Miscellaneous



So remote the mountains,  
I collect water  
as it drips from the rocks,  
in intervals gathering horse chestnuts  
that come plop-plopping down\*

~

Yama fukami iwa ni shidaruru mizu tamen  
katsugatsu otsuru tochi hirou hodo  
SKS 3 (1202)

\* The horse chestnuts are pounded into meal and used for food

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



So remote the mountains,  
no friendly birds  
chirping close by—  
only the fearful  
voice of the owl



Yama fukami kejikaki tori no oto wa sede  
monoosoroshiki fukurō no koe  
SKS 3 (1203)

Miscellaneous



So remote the mountains—  
then I hear someone  
chopping brush for kindling,  
the noise of the ax  
raising a clatter

~

Yama fukami hota kiru nari to kikoetsutsu  
tokoro nigiwau ono no oto kana  
SKS 3 (1205)

Miscellaneous



So remote the mountains,  
deer fearless enough  
to come right up close  
tell me how far I am  
from the outside world!

~

Yama fukami naruru kasegi no kejikasa ni  
yo ni tōzakarū hodo zo shiraruru

SKS 3 (1207)



M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*From "One Hundred and Ten Love Poems"*

Though it reaches  
deep into the heart,  
the fragrance is meaningless  
while the sprig of plum  
remains unplucked

~

Kokoro ni wa fukaku shimedomo mume no hana  
oranu nioi wa kai nakarikeri

SKS 3 (1255)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*From "One Hundred and Ten Love Poems"*

Keen to the danger,  
constantly I shun  
the eyes of others,  
treading like one on a plank trail  
rigged across the face of the cliff

~~~~~  
Ayausa ni hitome zo tsune ni yogarekeru  
iwa no kado fumu hoki no kakemichi.  
SKS 3 (1333)

Miscellaneous



*From "One Hundred and Ten Love Poems"*

As the leaves  
of the kudzu vine,  
no longer cupping dew,  
turn about in the buffeting wind,  
turn your thoughts to me!

~

Fuku kaze in tsuyu mo tamaranu kuzu no ha no  
uragaere to wa kimi o koso omoe  
SKS 3 (1335)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*From "One Hundred and Ten Love Poems"*

My love will end  
in hopelessness—  
these longing sighs  
I bring on myself  
are empty as the cicada's shell

~

Munashikute yaminubeki kana utsusemi no  
kono mi kara nite omou nageki wa  
SKS 3 (1337)

Miscellaneous



*From "One Hundred and Ten Love Poems"*

However looked at,  
it's a world  
to be loathed—  
but as long as you live there  
I'm drawn to it!

~

Tonikaku ni itowamahoshiki yo naredomo  
kimi ga sumu ni mo hikarenuru kana

SKS 3 (1348)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*From "One Hundred and Ten Love Poems"*

What else  
could have made me  
loathe the world?  
The one who was cruel to me  
today I think of as kind\*

~

Nanigoto ni tsukete ka yo o ba itowamashi  
ukarishi hito zo kyō wa ureshiki  
SKS 3 (1349)

\* This and the preceding poem are sometimes cited as evidence that Saigyō entered religious life because of a disappointment in love

Miscellaneous



*I made a journey to Sanuki, and at a place  
called the port of Matsuyama, searched for the  
spot where the Retired Emperor resided, but  
could find no trace of it.\**

That ship that came,  
washed on the waves  
of Matsuyama,  
in no time vanished  
into nothingness!

~

Matsuyama no nami ni nagarete koshi fune no  
yagate munashiku narinikeru kana

SKS 3 (1353)

\* In 1167 or 1168 Saigyō journeyed to the province of Sanuki in Shikoku to pay respects to the memory of Emperor Sutoku (r. 1124–1141), who was banished to Sanuki in 1156 as a result of his part in the Hōgen civil war. He died there in 1164.

Miscellaneous



The waves  
of Matsuyama—  
their aspect is unchanged,  
but of you, my lord,  
no trace remains

---

Matsuyama no nami no keshiki wa kwaraji o  
kata naku kimi wa narimashinikeri  
SKS 3 (1354)



Miscellaneous



*In the same province, on the mountain near the place where the Daishi lived, I built a hut and lived in it. I wrote this when the moon was exceptionally bright and I looked out at the cloudless sea.\**

I look out  
from the cloudless mountain  
at moonlight on the sea,  
its islands so many rents  
in a sheet of ice

~

Kumori naki yama nite umi no tsuki mireba  
shima zo kōri no taema narikeru  
SKS 3 (1356)

\* Written on Saigyō's journey to Sanuki. He was staying at Zentsū-ji, a temple located at the birthplace of Kōbō Daishi or Kūkai (774–835), the founder of the Shingon sect of Buddhism in Japan

Miscellaneous



*On looking at the pine that stands in front  
of my hut*

Live through the long years,  
pine, and pray for me  
in my next existence,  
I who'll have no one  
to visit the places I once was\*

~

Hisa ni hete waga nochi no yo o toeyo matsu  
ato shinobubeki hito mo naki mi zo  
SKS 3 (1358)

\* As Saigyō is now visiting the site of Kōbō Daishi's birth.

Miscellaneous



When I tire of this spot as well,  
too gloomy to live in,  
when I drift  
on my way, pine,  
you'll be left alone



Koko o mata ware sumiukute ukarenaba  
matsu wa hitori ni naran to suran  
SKS 3 (1359)

Miscellaneous



*On a snowfall\**

Under the pines,  
a color like the sky  
when snow falls,  
the rest of the mountain trail  
one swath of white cloth

~

Matsu no shita wa yuki furu ori no iro nare ya  
mina shirotae ni miyuru yamaji ni

SKS 3 (1360)

\* This and the following poem were written when Sai-gyō was living in retreat in a hut at Zentsū-ji.

Miscellaneous



How timely  
the delight of  
this snowfall,  
obliterating the mountain trail  
just when I wanted to be alone!

~

Orishimo are ureshiku yuki no uzumu kana  
kakikomorinan to omou yamaji o  
SKS 3 (1364)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*Observing divers coming and going in Ushimado  
Channel, gathering turban shells and loading  
them in boats\**

In a channel  
where turban shells live,  
the sight of divers busily  
hunting them  
in the hollows of the rock

~

Sadae sumu seto no iwatsubo motome idete  
isogishi ama no keshiki naru kana  
SKS 3 (1376)

\* Ushimado is on the Inland Sea in Okayama Prefecture

Miscellaneous



The float-rigged strands  
of the nets  
that catch little bream  
seem to be moving shoreward—  
sad work in Shiozaki Bay\*

~.

Kotai hiku ami no ukenawa yorikumeri  
uki shiwaza aru shiozaki no ura  
SKS 3 (1378)

\* Shiozaki Bay is on the southwest coast of Awaji Island in the Inland Sea. Here, and elsewhere, Saigyō deplures occupations such as hunting and fishing that involve the taking of life, since they create bad karma for the persons engaged in them.

Miscellaneous



Fishermen home from  
their day's work:  
on a bed of seaweed,  
little top shells, clams,  
hermit crabs, periwinkles



Amabito no isoshiku kaeru hijiki mono wa  
konishi hamaguri gōna shitadami  
SKS 3 (1380)



M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*When I crossed over to Irago, I found clam-like shells called mussels that often bear pearls. I wrote this on observing the towering piles of shells from which such pearls had been extracted.\**

Pearls plucked,  
the mussel shells  
lie heaped in mounds,  
showing us  
the aftermath of treasure

~

Akoya toru igai no kara o tsumi okite  
takara no ato o misuru narikeri  
SKS 3 (1387)

\* Irago is a peninsula south of Nagoya in Aichi. Saigyō had crossed over from the nearby Shima peninsula in Mie Prefecture

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*A strong wind came up from the offing and the  
boats that fish for bonito returned to port.*

Side by side

the bonito boats approach

the cape of Irigo,

bobbing on the waves

of the northwest wind

~

Irigozaki no katsuo tsuribune narabi ukite

hagachi no nami ni ukabitsutsu zo yoru

SKS 3 (1388)

Miscellaneous



*Poems on small birds*

If they didn't sing  
we'd just take them  
for deeper-hued leaves—  
the flocks of greenfinches  
feeding on willow buds



Koe sezuba iro koku naru to omowamashi  
yanagi no me hamu hiwa no muradori  
SKS 3 (1399)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*Poems on small birds*

Lined up,  
never leaving their companions,  
the willow tits  
count on the lower limbs  
of the pasania for their roost

~

Narabi ite tomo o hanarenu kogarame no  
negura ni tanomu shii no shitaeda  
SKS 3 (1401)

Miscellaneous



*Written on a moonlit night when visiting Kamo\**

In the bed of the Mioya River,  
flooded in clear moonlight,  
the frost is cold.  
I hear plovers crying  
as they fly far off

~.

Tsuki no sumu mioyagawara ni shimo saete  
chidori tōdatsu koe kikoyu nari  
SKS 3 (1402)

\* The Shimogamo Shrine in Kyoto, the Mioya River is probably the small Tadasu River that runs through the grounds of the shrine, though it perhaps indicates the much larger Kamo River nearby.

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*Traveling in the province of Sanuki, I arrived at a port called Minotsu. The moon was bright and the fishermen's frames\* could be seen as far out in the water as they could be erected. Sea birds were flying all around the poles that hold the frames in place.*

Sheath of spreading

moonlight one would

almost take for ice,

flocks of teal circling

the poles of the fishermen's frames

~

Shikiwatasu tsuki no kōri o utagaite

hibi no te mawaru aji no muradori

SKS 3 (1404)

\* Rough frames of bamboo erected for catching fish or raising oysters or edible seaweed

Miscellaneous



I have cast off the world  
but there are thoughts  
I cannot cast away—  
I who have yet  
to part from the capital



Yo no naka o sutete suteenu kokochi shite  
miyako hanarenu waga mi narikeri  
SKS 3 (1417)

Miscellaneous



Who would remember,  
who would come  
looking for me,  
pushing his way along this mountain path  
so drenched in dew?

~

Omoi idete tare ka wa tomete wake mo kon  
iru yamamichi no tsuyu no fukasa o  
SKS 3 (1427)



Miscellaneous



*From "One Hundred Poems: Ten Poems Expressing Feelings"*

Time to say goodbye  
to such glories—  
thoughts of them end now—  
to long familiar blossoms  
on the peak of the immortals\*

~

Iza saraba sakari omou mo hodo mo araji  
hakoya ga mine no hana ni mutsureshi  
SKS 3 (1503)

\* The "peak of the immortals" is believed to be a reference to the retired emperor's palace and the poem to express Saigyō's determination to leave the service of the Retired Emperor Toba and enter religious life.

Miscellaneous



*From "One Hundred Poems: Ten Poems on  
Impermanence"*

Drops of dew  
strung on filaments  
of spider web—  
such are the trappings  
that deck out this world

~

Sasagani no ito ni tsuranuku tsuyu no tama o  
kakete kazareru yo ni koso arikere  
SKS 3 (1514)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*From "One Hundred Poems: Ten Poems on  
Impermanence"*

Since I no longer think  
of reality  
as reality,  
what reason would I have  
to think of dreams as dreams?

~

Utsutsu o mo utsutsu to sara ni omoeneba  
yume o mo yume to nani ka omowan  
SKS 3 (1515)

Miscellaneous



*From "One Hundred Poems: Ten Poems on  
Impermanence"*

The great net  
has been hauled in  
close to shore—  
how many living things  
are tangled in its meshes?

~

Migiwa chikaku hikiyoseraruru ōami ni  
ikuse no mono no inochi komoreri  
SKS 3 (1519)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*From "One Hundred Poems: Ten Poems on  
Impermanence"*

Is it time now  
for peaceful death?  
Accept the thought  
and at once  
the mind replies, "Oh yes!"

~

Uraura to shinanzuru na to omoi tokeba  
kokoro no yagate sa zo to kotauru  
SKS 3 (1520)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



From "One Hundred Poems: Ten Poems on  
Buddhism"

Would the flames of thought  
that envelop your body  
ever be quenched?  
Never but for the blowing  
of these cool winds!\*

~

Mi ni tsukite moyuru omoi no kiemashi ya  
suzushiki kaze no augazariseba  
SKS 3 (1538)

\* The winds are the Buddha's teachings, particularly as set forth in the *Lotus Sutra*. The poem is one of three on the *Muryōgikyō* or *Sutra of Immeasurable Meanings*, which is often treated as an introduction to the *Lotus Sutra*.

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*From "One Hundred Poems: Ten Miscellaneous  
Poems"*

In a mountain village  
when I'm lost in the dark  
of the mind's dreaming,  
the sound of the wind  
blows me to brightness

~

Yamazato no kokoro no yume ni madoi oreba  
fuki shiramakasu kaze no oto kana

SKS 3 (1549)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*From "One Hundred Poems: Ten Miscellaneous  
Poems"*

Gazing at the moon,  
yes—then my mind  
drifts wholly away from me,  
but why does it wander  
even when skies are black?

~

Tsuki o koso nagameba kokoro ukare ideme  
yami naru sora ni tadayou ya nazo

SKS 3 (1550)



Miscellaneous



When you consider,  
all in this world  
are blossoms that fall—  
and this body of mine,  
where will I lay it down?

~

Yo no naka o omoeba nabete chiru hana no  
waga mi o sate mo izuchi ka mo sen  
SKKS 16 (1470)

Miscellaneous



If I've truly renounced it,  
I should show how I abhor  
this troubled world—  
for my sake, cloud over,  
moon of the autumn night!

~.

Sutsu to naraba uki yo o itou shirushi aran  
ware ni wa kumore aki no yo no tsuki  
SKKS 16 (1533)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*Written on a journey to the eastern provinces*

Did I ever think

in old age

I would cross it again?

So long I've lived,

Saya-between-the-Hills\*

~

Toshi takete mata koyubeshi to omoiki ya

inochi narikeri saya no nakayama

SKKS 10 (987)

\* A long winding road over the mountains in present-day Shizuoka Prefecture. The poem was written on Saigyō's second journey to Michinoku, when he was nearing seventy.

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*On Mt. Fuji, written when carrying out religious  
practice in the eastern provinces.*

Trailing on the wind,  
the smoke of Mount Fuji  
fades in the sky,  
moving like my thoughts  
toward some unknown end

~.

Kaze ni nabiku fuji no keburu no sora ni kiete  
yukue mo shiranu waga omoi kana  
SKKS 17 (1613)

Miscellaneous



Though in mind  
you may journey easily  
into the depths of the mountains,  
without living here  
how can you know their loneliness?

~

Yama fukaku sa koso kokoro wa kayou to mo  
sumade aware o shiran mono ka wa  
SKKS 17 (1630)

Miscellaneous



Who lives there,  
learning such loneliness?—  
mountain village  
where rains drench down  
from an evening sky

~

Tare sumite aware shiruran yamazato no  
ame furisusan yūgure no sora  
SKKS 17 (1640)

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*Hearing that someone was embarking on an  
unthinkable course, I sent this from Mount  
Kōya to the person of whom it was reported.*

Not stopping to mark the trail,  
let me push even deeper  
into the mountain!  
Perhaps there's a place  
where bad news can never reach me!\*

~.

Shiori seji nao yama fukaku wakeiran  
uki koto kikanu tokoro ari ya to  
SKS 3 (1121), SKKS 17 (1641)

\* There is no way to determine the exact nature of the distressing report that reached Saigyō and the background of the poem remains a riddle.

Miscellaneous



A seedling pine in the garden  
when I saw it long ago—  
years have gone by  
and now I hear the storm winds  
roaring in its topmost branches

~.

Mukashi mishi niwa no komatsu ni toshi furite  
arashi no oto o kozue ni zo kiku

SKKS 17 (1677)



Miscellaneous



Could this be it—  
the spot where I lived  
long ago?  
Moonlight glitters  
in the dew on the mugwort

~

Kore ya mishi mukashi sumiken ato naran  
yomogi ga tsuyu ni tsuki no kakareru  
SKKS 17 (1680)

Miscellaneous



If I can find  
no place fit to live,  
let me live "no place" —  
in this hut of sticks  
flimsy as the world itself



Izuku ni mo sumarezuba tada sumade aran  
shiba no iori no shibashi naru yo ni\*

SKKS 18 (1778)

\* In the last two lines of the original there is a play on the words *shiba*, "sticks" or "brushwood," the material from which the recluse's hut is made, and *shibashi*, "fleeting," which can apply both to the hut and to the world as a whole.

Miscellaneous



My mind I send  
with the moon  
that goes beyond the mountain,  
but what of this body  
left behind in darkness?\*

~

Tsuki no yuku yama ni kokoro o okuri irete  
yami naru ato no mi o ika ni sen  
SKKS 18 (1779)

\* The mountain here stands for the Western Paradise  
of Amida Buddha

## M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*When the priest Jakuren urged people to join him in composing hundred-poem sequences, I declined to participate. But while I was on my way on a pilgrimage to Kumano, I had a dream in which the bettō Tankai appeared and said to Shunzei, "Though all other things may decline, the Way of Japanese poetry alone continues without change even in this latter age. One should compose poems as requested." After I awoke from the dream, I hastily composed the set of a hundred poems earlier requested and sent it to Jakuren. As a postscript I added this poem.\**

Even in a latter age

this art alone

remains unchanged!

But had I not had that dream,

I'd have thought it none of my affair

~~~~~  
Sue no yo mo kono nasake no mi kawarazu to  
mishi yume nakuba yoso ni kikamashi

SKKS 18 (1844)

\* Priest Jakuren is Fujiwara Sadanaga (d. 1202). Tankai, an old friend of Saigyō, was the eighteenth bettō or administrator of the Kumano Shrine in the Kii peninsula to which Saigyō was making his pilgrimage. He had probably been dead several years at the time of the dream. Shunzei is the famous poet Fujiwara Shunzei (1114–1204), a close friend of Saigyō.

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



He who casts himself away—

has he truly

cast himself away?

The real castaway is one

who casts nothing away at all!\*

~

Mi o sutsuru hito wa makoto ni sutsuru ka wa  
sutenu hito koso sutsuru narikere

*Shikashū* 10 (371)

\* By "casting oneself away," Saigyō means renouncing one's position in secular society and entering religious life. A variant of the first line reads *Yo o sutsuru*, "He who casts off the world."

M i s c e l l a n e o u s



*In the reign of Emperor Takakura (1171–1179),  
I had occasion to submit a memorial to the  
throne and appended this poem to it.\**

Let us seek the past,  
be an age  
that cherishes the old—  
then our "today" one day  
will be someone's "long ago"

Ato tomete furuki o shitau yo naranan  
ima mo arieba mukashi narubeshi

*Shinbokusenshū* ch. 17

\* We do not know what Saigyō's memorial was about, though perhaps it concerned one of the imperial anthologies. The poem, which is preserved in the *Shinbokusenshū*, an imperial anthology completed around 1234, appears to represent Saigyō's statement on poetics: Look to the past, for only then can your work serve as a model for the future.

Miscellaneous



*Composed when visiting the Tsukiyomi Shrine in  
Ise and viewing the moon*

Shining from the sky  
over the tall peak  
of Eagle Mountain,  
the groves of Tsukiyomi  
filtering, softening its rays\*


~

Sayaka naru washi no takane no kumoi yori  
kage yawaraguru tsukiyomi no mori  
SKKS 19 (1879)

\* The moon shining in the poem stands for Shakyamuni Buddha, who preached the *Lotus Sutra* at Eagle Mountain in India. The supreme and universally valid wisdom of the Buddha is "filtered" and adapted to local spiritual needs through the person of the Japanese Shinto deity Tsukiyomi, the goddess of the moon.





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P o e m s f r o m t h e K i k i g a k i s h ū



*When I was living in Saga, I and others wrote  
poems in a light vein\**

Startled by the sound  
of children blowing wildly  
on straw whistles,  
I wake from my summer  
noonday nap

~

Unaigo ga susami ni narasu mugibue no  
koe ni odoroku natsu no hirufushi

*Kikigaki shū*

\* A series of thirteen poems written by Saigyō some-  
time in his late years. They are unusually colloquial in  
tone. The following are the first, third, fourth, fifth,  
sixth, tenth, and thirteenth in the series

P o e m s f r o m t h e K i k i g a k i s h ū



*From the series of thirteen poems "in a light vein"*

Not for stilts  
but as a cane  
bamboo serves me now,  
I who call to mind  
the games of childhood\*

~  
Takeuma o tsue ni mo kyō wa tanomu kana  
warawa asobi o omoi idetsutsu  
*Kikigaki shū*

\* Children used partially split stalks of bamboo as stilts.

P o e m s f r o m t h e K i k i g a k i s h ū



*From the series of thirteen poems "in a light vein"*

Just to play

hide and seek

the way I did long ago—

crouched down in a corner,

squeezing in so tight

~

Mukashi seshi kakure asobi ni narinaba ya

kata sumi moto ni yori fuseritsutsu

*Kikigaki shū*

P o e m s f r o m t h e K i k i g a k i s h ū



*From the series of thirteen poems "in a light vein"*

Drawing his  
sparrow-hunting bow  
of bent bamboo,  
the little boy seems to be wishing  
for a guardsman's black hat

~

Shino tamete suzume yumi haru o no warawa  
hitai eboshi no hoshige naru kana

*Kikigaki shū*

P o e m s f r o m t h e K i k i g a k i s h ū



*From the series of thirteen poems "in a light vein"*

I too

grew up the same way,

passing the years

playing games like them

in the garden sand

~

Ware mo sazo niwa no isago no tsuchi asobi

sate oitateru mi ni koso arikere

*Kikigaki shū*

P o e m s f r o m t h e K i k i g a k i s h ū



*From the series of thirteen poems "in a light vein"*

My love was real,  
yet treated as a joke—  
in that long ago  
childhood,  
how I felt it!\*

~.

Koishiki o tawabureraeshi sono kami no  
iwakenakarishi ori no kokoro wa  
*Kikigaki shū*

\* Saigyō is apparently recalling some childhood infatuation that was dismissed lightly by the other party.



P o e m s f r o m t h e K i k i g a k i s h ū



*From the series of thirteen poems "in a light vein"*

Overgrown with water shield,  
sunk in the pond,  
the upright stone  
no longer upright  
by the water's edge\*

~

Nunawa hau ike ni shizumeru tateishi no  
tatetaru koto mo naki migiwa kana  
*Kikigaki Shū*

\* The "upright stone no longer upright" presumably conveys some kind of allegorical meaning

P o e m s f r o m t h e K i k i g a k i s h ū



*From the series "Looking at pictures of hell"*

Hard as it is  
to be born a human being,  
having risen this high,  
who could fail to take warning,  
sink down again!\*

Ukegataki hito no sugata ni ukami idete  
korizu ya tare mo mata shizumubeki

*Kikigaki shū, SKKS 18 (1749)*

\* Ordinary unenlightened beings are believed to be subject to rebirth in one of six realms which, in ascending order, are those of hell, hungry spirits, animals, asuras, human beings, and heavenly beings. The deeds one has done in previous lives determine which realm one will be reborn in. The human realm, being next to the highest, is difficult to be born in, but in it one may hear the teachings of Buddhism and learn not to commit the kind of evil deeds that will condemn one to rebirth in the lower realms.

P o e m s f r o m t h e K i k i g a k i s h ū



*From the series "Looking at pictures of hell"*

Did I hear you ask  
what the fires of hell  
are burning for?  
They burn away evil  
and the firewood is you!

~.

Tou to ka ya nani yue moyuru homura zo to  
kimi o takigi no tsumi no hi zo kashi

*Kikigaki shū*



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