

Rimer, J. Thomas (ed.): *Not a Song Like Any Other: An Anthology of Writings by Mori Ōgai*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004. 316 S., US \$ 42.

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To this day the name Mori Ōgai is generally associated with short stories such as *Maihime* (*The Dancing Girl*) and *Gan* (*The Wild Goose*). The full range of this author's creative endeavours, scientific writings, comments on the fine arts, plays, poems of various styles and contributions to many other genres remains little known. Some are surprised to discover that *Ōgai Zenshū* (*The Collected Works of Mori Ōgai*) issued by Iwanami Publishers comprises as many as thirty-eight volumes.

Not a Song Like Any Other: An Anthology of Writings by Mori Ōgai, the collection of writings edited by J. Thomas Rimer – Professor of Japanese Literature at the University of Pittsburgh and an acclaimed translator and expert on Ōgai's works – is groundbreaking. It throws light on Ōgai's many talents as a writer, critic, intellectual, bureaucrat and private individual. Rimer's Ōgai anthology contains a variety of text genres, each conveyed into English by one of thirteen different translators, amongst them renowned scholars such as Richard Bowring, Helen Hopper and Marvin Marcus as well as researchers at different stages of their careers, two doctoral students, a translator and an essayist. The generous range of contributors proves an asset since it provides readers with a fine selection.

On the whole, the style of presentation is a success: the well-structured layout, illustrations and the fact that the translations are preceded by an introductory section all encourage readers to indulge in the pleasure of reading for the sake of reading. The wealth of information about Ōgai's world of thought is an added bonus.

As to the audience, this volume appeals to a wide circle of readers, from the curious wishing for a first glimpse of Ōgai to the initiated eager to discover more, and to experts already steeped in research. Rimer's book provides academics with the opportunity to look into less popular topics in this field such as Ōgai's lyrical opus.

The anthology is subdivided into seven chapters. The first section *The Author Himself* contains writings with a strong autobiographical background such as *Ōgai Gyoshi to wa tare zo?* (*Who is Ōgai Gyoshi?*), *Watakushi ga jūgo* (*When I was fourteen*) and *Safuran* (*Saffron*). All of these texts have been translated into English for the first time and greatly enrich the collection of Ōgai's works available in Western languages. The second chapter

called *In Germany* deals with Ōgai's stay in Bismarck's Germany from 1884 to 1888 and includes texts from the *Naumann Debate*, Ōgai's fierce exchange with the geographer Edmund Naumann. In March 1886 Naumann had held a provocative lecture about Japan at the annual meeting of the Geographical Society in Dresden having spent several years as an *oyatoi gaikokujin* [a foreign specialist hired to assist in the modernization of Japan]. The third chapter, *The World of Politics*, provides an introduction to *Fuasuchiesu* (*Fasces*) and *Fujidana* (*The Wisteria Trellis*). *Fasces* is a dialogue between a journalist and a government bureaucrat, both persona in fact representing the two sides of Ōgai's own professional self. It provides valuable insight into his struggle to bring the two roles into line. The main character of *Fujidana* is Hidemaro, a wealthy young man who studied abroad and has now returned to Japan; he has a fresh way of looking at his own country. Clearly, the distinctly autobiographical features indicate Ōgai's own problems reintegrating into Japanese society after his return from Europe.

The fourth chapter takes a look at the visual arts and includes critical essays written between 1890 and 1897 on the work of painters such as Toyama Shōichi and Kuroda Seiki, shedding light on Ōgai's profound interest in the fine arts.

Continuing the theme of the arts, the following chapter *The Contemporary Japanese Theatre* provides examples of Ōgai's writing for the stage, including translations of one-act plays such as *Ikutagawa* (*The Ikuta River*) or *Nanoriso* (*Without Introductions*).

Four Unusual Stories then contains original English versions of *Nezumizaka* (*Rat Hill*) and *Ōshio Heihachirō* (a Japanese name). The last chapter, *The Art of Poetry*, contains some of Ōgai's lesser known lyrical works. Introducing the collection, Rimer points out three important differences in Ōgai's contribution to the art of poetry: firstly in his work as a translator, introducing European poetry to Japan with the collection *Omokage* (*Vestiges*); this was published in 1889. Secondly he encouraged contemporaries and younger poets to experiment with the creation of new and authentic Japanese poetry. Finally, there was Ōgai's role as a poet. His first collection of poems *Uta nikki* (*Verse Diary*) was published in 1907.

There is no doubt that this wide selection of writings constitutes a positive step forward, just as it could provide an incentive for research institutes to extend the range of scholarly studies on Ōgai's work. However, I could not help but wonder about the rather colloquial translation of some passages, e. g. "When mother learned this, she made her swallow human shit to force her to vomit." (p. 286, translation by Hiroaki Sato). Whether "shit" is the appropriate term here, or whether somewhat less coarse expressions such as "faeces" or "excrement" would be more adequate,

should be left to discussion. More studied Ōgai scholars will also notice a number of minor factual mistakes: Ōgai's friend, the painter Harada Naojirō, is said to have died in 1889, however, he actually passed away a decade later. There are some printing errors, e. g. on pages 44, 79 and 149.

As with every anthology worth its weight, it provides a list of selected translations of Ōgai's works. Unfortunately one contribution to the study of Ōgai's opus, namely Rosa Wunner's *Mori Ōgai – Studies and Translations in Western Languages: A Bibliography* stands out in its absence.¹ Still, even a stickler would agree that Rimer's insight into Ōgai's life and his marvelous choice of contributors and texts assure this volume a place amongst the treasures of secondary sources in Ōgai studies.

REFERENCES

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- Rimer, Thomas (ed.) (1994): *Youth and Other Stories*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Wunner, Rosa (1998): Mori Ōgai – Studies and Translations in Western Languages: A Bibliography. In: *Japonica Humboldtiana*, No. 2, pp. 195–244.

¹ Yearbook of the Mori Ōgai Memorial Hall, Berlin Humboldt University, Vol. 2, 1998, p. 195–244.