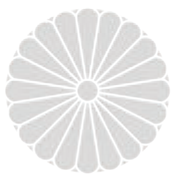

The Japan Society Review 81

Book, Stage, Film, Arts and Events Review

Issue 81 Volume 14 Number 3 (June 2019)

Welcome to the June issue of *The Japan Society Review*. The Japan-related event of the UK summer is without doubt the impressive *Citi exhibition Manga* マンガ at the British Museum. Marketed as 'the largest exhibition of manga ever to take place outside of Japan', it aims to explore manga's global appeal and cultural crossover, examining the origins and history, the main genres, authors and characters and the role that this distinctive form of Japanese popular culture plays in contemporary society across the globe. Our reviewer Malene Wagner has visited the exhibition and gives us some insights into its content and approach.

Beyond manga, other works of Japanese literature have also reached us in translation, offering some excellent choices for summer reading. *The Penguin Book of Japanese Short Stories* is a varied and fascinating collection of 34 short stories from across the literary spectrum and spanning nearly 150 years of modern Japanese literature. Edited by Jay Rubin and introduced by Murakami Haruki, the collection is ordered by theme – e.g., 'Japan and the West', 'Loyal Warriors', 'Men and Women',– rather than chronologically, leading to some unexpected and stimulating connections.

This issue also includes two reviews of novels by Japanese women writers Kanai Mieko and Nakajima Kyoko. Both of them are located in domestic settings in which the main protagonists interact with family, friends and cats. *Oh Tama!*, written by award-winner author, critic and poet Kanai Mieko, delves into the dysfunctional lives of a cast of eccentric characters living in Kanai's own neighbourhood Mejiro, in downtown Tokyo. Tama is not only the protagonist's cat , but also embodies the notion of the unconventional family that is at the heart of this novel. *The Little House* by Nakajima Kyoko are the fictional memoirs of Taki, a housemaid in suburban Tokyo in the early years of the Showa era (1926-89). Framed by the well-crafted story of Taki's relationship with her employer's family and their secrets, the novel is filled with historical insight into the political and social events of pre-war Japan.

Finally, but first in order of appearance, the opening review of this issue examines the academic study *Electrified Voices: How the Telephone, Phonograph, and Radio Shaped Modern Japan, 1868-1945*. This volume approaches the cultural history of Japanese modernity from the point of view of Sound Studies, reflecting on the role of auditory technologies and practices in modern society and media.

Alejandra Armendáriz-Hernández

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Editor

Alejandra Armendáriz-Hernández

Reviewers

Francesco Cioffo, Poppy Cosyns, Jill Dobson, Malene Wagner and Robert Paul Weston.

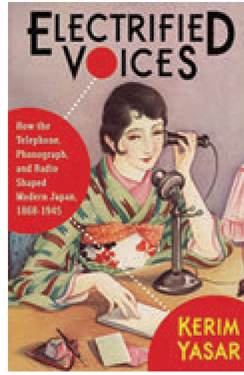
Image: Kawanabe Kyōsai (1831-1889), *Shintomiza Kabuki Theatre Curtain*, 1880, displayed at the British Museum's Citi Exhibition Manga マンガ

Electrified Voices: How the Telephone, Phonograph, and Radio Shaped Modern Japan, 1868-1945

by Yasar Kerim

Columbia University Press (2018)
ISBN-13: 978-0231187121

Review by Francesco Cioffo



Kerim Yasar, currently assistant professor of East Asian languages and cultures at the University of Southern California, is a scholar of eclectic intellect. He began his studies as an ethnomusicologist and electronic/experimental music, but soon transitioned into literature and film studies in graduate school. This experience led him to cultural history and media study, which represent the starting point for this book.

Electrified Voices is articulated upon a key postulate that appears to be surprisingly counter-intuitive in some academic circles: 'none of the senses is any more "base" or "noble" than another, and none is more "important" than another in any absolute sense'. Yasar begins his narrative about the ways in which modern auditory technologies such as the telephone, the phonograph and the radio have shaped 'modern Japan' (1868-1945) by asserting that 'sound occupies an important place in the economy of the human sensorium' (p. 4). The study of modernity, in fact, has for long privileged visual representative forms of cultural production such as photography, cinema and cartoons.[1] This tendency to privilege the visual has been challenged in the past decades by the emergence of new fields of enquiry such Sensory Studies, the history of smells and Sound Studies.[2] Yasar takes the perspective of Sound Studies to analyze modern Japan. At the core of this field is the rediscovers of the interactions between people and the soundscapes around them, which, at the same time, shape and are shaped by social relations. *Electrified Voices* thus stipulates that 'sound is central to social and ritual life, and the ability to reproduce and transmit sound has radically altered human beings' relationship to sound and thus to social life, including economic and political life' (p. 5).

The author argues that the newly introduced auditory technologies represented a sharp technological rupture with Japan's past, while at the same time functioning as vectors for a reformulation and thus re-popularization of some of Japan's oldest oral practices. Contradicting popular narratives that portrait 'tradition' and 'modernity' as two warring opponents, Yasar demonstrates how Japan's 'residual orality' (such as *naniwabushi*, narrative singing accompanied by shamisen, kodan, storytelling based on historical events, or *heikyoku*, recitation of the Tales of Heike) provided a receptive environment for the introduction of auditory technologies ('technologized orality').[3] Traditional forms of orality not only did not contrast with modernity, but they were actually galvanized by it. Through new technologies, 'residual orality' experienced a renaissance, while concomitantly transforming into new genres as they transitioned into new media and distribution platforms.

The first half of the book (chapters 1, 2 and 3) focuses more specifically upon sound and orality and the ways that these interact with language and music. Furthermore, alongside the aforementioned main argument, this first half also stresses another interesting insight: 'media and materiality do matter, that the materialities of media transform people, institutions and societies' (p. 9). In chapter 1, Yasar takes as case study the telegraph and the telephone, arrived in the late 19th century, to argue that these technologies were crucial in spreading phonocentric discourses (the assumption that speech and oral communication is inherently superior to written language) which informed Meiji language reforms. In chapter 2, the author explores the transition from premodern soundscape and tradition music to urban soundscape with Western and Westernized music. Thus making 'indigenous musical tradition to be made foreign on its own soil' (p. 16). The third chapter takes into consideration the emergence of the 'sonic archive' and the changes in conceptions of copyright and authorship that arose from the appearance of technologies that turned sound and voices into reproducible cultural artifacts.

The second part of the book (chapters 4 and 5) is instead intended to explore the interactions of sound technologies with the larger 'media ecology'. Chapter 4, specifically focuses upon the acousmatic (body-less) voices from radio sport broadcasting and those directing morning *rajio taiso* (radio exercises). He argues that the human voice assumed a 'new materiality and cultural role' that was used by the Japanese state for political and ideological goals. The author, in Chapter 5, theorises radio drama as a distinctive narrative genre, which played e significant role in developing sound effects and voice acting (two key components of cinema, television and anime as well). The final and sixth chapter is divided in two main sections. The first part is dedicated to theoretical debates about the uses and function of film dialogue and soundtrack music, paying special attention to the writings by film critics Nakane Hiroshi and Yasuda Kiyoo and director Mizoguchi Kenji. The second part of the chapter is instead focused on the development of a specific dialogue style in *jidaigeki* (period dramas). It points out that period drama (a 'technologized cultural production') generated its own new language, although based upon a romanticized understand of the past.

Yasar's contribution is an important first step in expanding Sound Studies beyond its Euro-American focus. In a field that has been criticized for its still prepondering whiteness in terms of scholars and subjects studied, a focus on Japan, the first non-Western nation to have undergone a substantial process of modernization, is indeed helpful to complicate a certain positivism and to see how technological transfers do not follow a fixed path and the responses to new technologies are always negotiated according to specific local conditions.[4] Thus problematizing the assumption that what happened in the US and in Europe in terms of society-technology relationship can be used as a blueprint for other cases.

One very interesting point raised by Yasar is the centrality of sound and sound technologies in shaping the *kokutai* (national body) and the Japanese imperial project. Needless to say, it would be impossible for one volume to cover all aspects of the Japanese soundscape, yet it would have been interesting to see how sound and orality were received and negotiated within the diversity of the Japanese imperial society. When approaching modern Japan, it is very crucial to bear in mind that the perceived racial homogeneity of today was neither a historical fact, nor part of certain discourses about the Japanese polity.[5] Since the conquest of Hokkaido, the Ryukyu Kingdom, Taiwan, Korea and parts of mainland China, Japan had expanded to be a wide raging empire assimilating many 'races'. As we open to the possibilities of a different racial structure within Japan, then it will be interesting to see scholars like Yasar from Sound Studies to ask more question about the interplay of perceptions about races and the different soundscape that these create; as well as investigating the various 'residual oralities' that were brought in Japan by its inter-imperial networks. One interesting example might be, for instance, the popular Korean anthem 'Arirang'. It would be interesting to use the analytical frameworks of Sound Studies to analyze the evolution of this popular tune from a simple song, to a nationalist anthem for Koreans, to finally become a rallying anthem for the entire Japanese empire.[6]

Notes

[1] William O. Gardner, *Advertising Tower: Japanese Modernism and Modernity in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006).

[2] See the *Journal of Sensory Studies*; Constance Classen, David Howes and Anthony Synnott's *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (London & New York: Routledge, 2014); the April 2011 issue of the *American Historical Review* dedicated to 'The Senses in History'; as far as Sound Studies are concerned, see Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003) and *Noise. The Political Economy of Music* by Jacques Attali (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).

[3] Yasar takes the terms 'technologized orality' and 'residual orality' from Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World* (London: Routledge, 1982).

[4] Gustavus Stadler, *On Whiteness and Sound Studies*, https://soundstudiesblog.com/.

[5] Eiji Oguma, *A Genealogy of "Japanese" Self-images*. Translated by David Askew. (Rosanna: Trans Pacific Press Pty. Ltd., 2002).

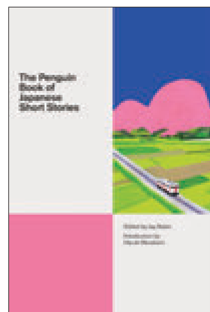
[6] Taylor E. Atkins, 'The Dual Career of "Arirang": The Korean Resistance Anthem That Became a Japanese Pop Hit', in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 66. N. 3 (Aug. 2007). §

The Penguin Book of Japanese Short Stories

edited by Jay Rubin

Penguin Classics (2018)
ISBN-13: 978-0141395623

Review by Jill Dobson



In the two decades since the publication of *The Oxford Book of Japanese Short Stories* (1997), Japanese literature in English, a miniscule subset of the whole, has been transformed not only in quantity but in the kinds of writing – and writers – made available in translation. Beyond the blockbusting Murakami Haruki (an international phenomenon rather than a mere author), writers such as Ogawa Yoko, Kirino Natsuo, Kawakami Hiromi and the author of the recent hit *Konbini ningen* (*Convenience Store Woman*), Murata Sayaka, are being published by small independents or mainstream literary imprints. While Japan's economic might has flatlined in the last two decades, its cultural 'soft power' has grown, and Japanese literature in translation is no longer dominated by the postwar 'holy trinity' of Tanizaki, Mishima and Kawabata.

English-language publishers may be accused of looking for the next Murakami or Kawakami, someone who fits the 'quirky' image Western readers may have of Japanese writers. The compiler of *The Penguin Book of Japanese Short Stories*, Murakami's long-standing translator Jay Rubin, was allowed free rein in his selection, which was only limited by the availability of copyright, and this diverse and fascinating collection of 34 stories is free from any compulsory marketable 'quirkiness'. Unusually, the

collection is ordered by theme – e.g., 'Japan and the West', 'Men and Women', 'Dread' – rather than chronologically, leading to some startling and stimulating juxtapositions: Akutagawa's classic story, the horrifying 'Hell Screen' (1918), rubs up against Sawanishi Yuten's frankly bizarre 'Filling up with Sugar' (2013).

In 'Japan and the West', Rubin includes Tanizaki's novella 'The Story of Tomoda and Matsunaga', the tale of a man who is so torn between a cosmopolitan, Western city life of sherry, steak and foreign prostitutes, and his provincial life with a traditionally refined Japanese wife, that he alternates between two physically distinctive personas. This captures the cultural dislocation of the Meiji and Taisho periods, when the breakneck modernisation imposed by the state threw Japanese identity into turmoil. This is also the theme of Natsume Soseki's work, represented here by an excerpt from *Sanshiro*, his gentle tale of a provincial youth heading up Tokyo to study and being overwhelmed by the 'modern' sophistication of women, starting with one he meets on the train, who makes him an offer he is too innocent or gormless to take up.

In the section 'Loyal Warriors', Mishima Yukio's 'Patriotism' provides a chilling insight into the mindset of a couple for whom joint suicide is both a duty and the ultimate consummation of their passion. It is impossible to read the unflinching details without thinking of Mishima's actual suicide ten years later, and to wonder if his own suicide lived up to his vivid, ecstatic imaginings.

Interestingly, the section 'Men and Women' includes five women writers and only one man, Nakagami Kenji. Did Rubin not think any male writer had anything noteworthy to say about women (surely not) or does he simply not categorise writing by men in the same way? Kono Taeko's short 'In the Box' relates an instance of microaggression between two women in a lift; men don't come into it. In the same section, Tsushima Yuko's 'Flames' is a subtle evocation of a single mother's uncertainty as she waits, with increasing ambivalence, for her absent husband to sign the divorce papers, her state of mind mirrored by the number of deaths she notices around her. Her sense of self is restored one night as she and her small daughter watch a conflagration. Tsushima's reputation is undergoing a revival in the Anglosphere, thanks to the efforts of her long-time translator, Geraldine Harcourt. In Yoshimoto Banana's 'Bee Honey', another woman on the brink of divorce goes to Buenos Aires, an unfamiliar city where she does not speak the language, to nurse her confusion and sorrow. Witnessing a procession by the mothers of the disappeared, she reflects on her own mother back in Tokyo, and her perspective shifts. Ohba Minako's 'The Smile of a Mountain Witch' is a retelling of the Japanese folk story of the *yamanba* (briefly a youth fashion trend as well) from the point of view of the mountain witch who has chosen to suppress her nature and live among humans, providing a devastating commentary on what society expects of women – complete submission – along with the suggestion that all women are potentially or secretly *yamanba*.

The first story in 'Nature and Memory', Abe Akira's 'Peaches', starts with a man's clear, treasured memory of himself as a boy, walking with his mother one night with a pram-load of peaches. He has never questioned this memory until his sudden awareness of one clashing detail – peaches in winter? – calls into question the entire incident, and thereby his certainties about his family and himself, summed up by the final, unsettling image of the man as a boy, wheeling his infant self in the pram.

Ogawa Yoko's quiet, elegant and disturbing fiction has established itself in English translation. The latest addition, 'The Tale of the House of Physics', is an unsettling and densely atmospheric tale of a transient connection between a little boy and a vagrant woman living in an abandoned research institute. Amid the luxuriant and rotting overgrowth of its grounds, a group of boys find freedom to play without boundaries. The woman brags to them that she used to be a writer, and they mock her. One day, finally daring to enter the building on his own, the narrator discovers that the woman has fallen ill from eating mushrooms that have grown from the ground where the boys buried a dead weasel. Feeling guilty, the boy brings soup to the woman. As she recovers, he writes down the story she is muttering to herself: a fantastic story of an atomic particle journeying through the universe, entirely alone. The boy presents her with a clean copy, bound in a cardboard cover. When she disappears from the house, and is forgotten, the book disappears with her. The whole story is framed as the reminiscence of a retired editor, thinking back over all the authors whose work he has midwifed. He accounts *The Tale of the House of Physics* as the first book he edited. His transition from heartless little boy to someone capable of sympathy and service, his main attributes as an editor, may have come about through his encounter with the nameless woman, although such an obvious inference seems too crude for Ogawa's subtle fiction.

Japan's unique experience of atomic warfare is represented by two stories, one by Nagasaki author Seirai Yuichi. 'Insects', first published in the collection *Ground Zero, Nagasaki*, describes the long-term physical and spiritual destruction wrought on the city's Christian community. The narrator Mitsuko, an elderly Christian woman, is looking back on her life. At 15, she lost her parents and all four siblings in the blast. Amid the awful aftermath, only insects seem to survive and even flourish, starting with the 'bright green grasshopper' who crawls up Mitsuko's mutilated leg in the opening scene. Disfigured, Mitsuko

only feels comfortable around others whose lives have been blighted, like her colleagues at the printing factory where she works. The exception is Sasaki, a former soldier whose health and vigour awakens her desire. Her injuries make her unmarriageable, although another colleague, Ozaki, whose face has been shattered, seems to appeal to her sympathy: 'There were two types of people now: those whose lives had been affected by the bomb and those who hadn't suffered.' Predictably, Sasaki marries Reiko, a cheerful younger woman seemingly untouched by war or deprivation. Mitsuko nurses her jealousy and infatuation for years, while Reiko treats her as a friend, possibly out of pity. But Mitsuko has a secret: on one trip back to Nagasaki, the now middle-aged Sasaki forces himself upon her. She welcomes the encounter, her only sexual experience. It turns out that the apparently devout Sasaki does not believe in God: his faith was destroyed by the bomb and he regards people as no better than insects. He mocks Mitsuko for believing she survived by the grace of God: 'We're like your insects... God doesn't keep an eye out for every insect that's born or dies... What makes you think people are any better than bugs?' Like Mitsuko, he has been permanently ruined by the bomb, but invisibly so. Mitsuko is sustained in her old age by the memory of their single encounter and by the secret knowledge she has of Sasaki's true nature – that of a godless insect – which she considers revealing to Reiko in a final, triumphant letter. The story ends by returning to the first image of the large grasshopper mounting the injured young Mitsuko as she lies in the rubble.

A review of anthology of 34 very different short stories is necessarily selective; another reviewer would have made other choices. In his introduction, Murakami Haruki compares the collection to the New Year's *fukubukuro* (lucky bag) sold by Japanese department stores. A reader prepared for the new and unexpected will not be disappointed. §

Oh Tama!

by Kanai Mieko
translated by Aoyama Tomoko and Paul McCarthy

Kurodahan Press (2014)
ISBN-13: 978-4902075670

Review by Poppy Cosyns

From the pompous narrator of Soseki's epic satire *I Am A Cat*, to the elusive interloper in Hiraide Takashi's poignant novella *The Guest Cat*, Japanese literature has more than its fair share of felines. Knowingly positioning her work within the cannon of what translator Paul McCarthy calls "cat literature", celebrated poet and novelist Kanai Mieko has peppered this novel with little nods to classics of the genre. To name a couple: a cameo from a cat called Lily, will ring a bell for those who have read Tanizaki Jun'ichiro's *A Cat, A Man and Two Women* and the title is itself a play on Uchida Hyakken's ode to a missing cat, *Oh, Nora!*

The second in a series of works set in Kanai's own neighbourhood of Mejiro, in downtown Tokyo, this novel – which won Kanai Japan's Women's Literature Prize – delves into the dysfunctional lives of a cast of eccentrics who live in the area. Some of these same characters crop up elsewhere in the series, though each novel has a standalone narrative.

As the story starts, freelance photographer Natsuyuki Kanemitsu has a heavily pregnant cat called Tama unceremoniously dumped on him by his friend, the affected and slightly vacuous Alexandre. There is nothing particularly remarkable about Tama, who Kanai presents as a typically aloof stray. As the novel progresses, however, her significance gradually emerges. From her position on the side lines of the story's action, she becomes a grounding influence on Natsuyuki and his oddball band of associates, while also embodying the notion of the unconventional family that is at the novel's heart.

Natsuyuki's friends are drawn with varying degrees of detail, as they wander in and out of his modest apartment in Mejiro. There is the pretentiously self-styled Alexandre, a model and occasional porn actor, who at various points in the story avails himself of Natsuyuki's reluctant hospitality. An unashamed intellectual lightweight, he objects to his friends' tendency for niche cultural references and appears to float through life having shrugged off the burdens of convention and respectability. The latter's sister Tsuneko – who, like Tama, is pregnant – is the subject of much gossip among Natsuyuki's circle, as they debate who is most likely to be her unborn baby's father. The reader never meets Tsuneko, allowing us to share in the atmosphere of intrigue and outrage that surrounds her, without ever hearing her story first hand. Spiritually twinned to some extent with the equally silent Tama, Tsuneko represents the archetypal wayward woman and the antithesis of the Japanese ideal. The hypocrisy of the male characters in their criticisms of Tsuneko suggests a feminist undertone to Kanai's writing here.

The central character of Natsuyuki is rather thinly drawn, with Kanai inviting her reader to draw their own conclusions about him, through description of his decisions and the company he keeps. His fixation with the fictional photographer and "unknown artist" Amanda Anderson – whose background and photographic style is related

in impressively believable detail – is perhaps the most remarkable eccentricity we discover about our protagonist.

Natsuyuki is initially striving to be taken seriously and to appear relevant among his contemporaries in the art world. He eventually concludes however, that he would rather maintain this obscure finding as part of his private fantasy and that to share it would only dilute the fascination it holds for him. His eventual dedication to the care of Tama and her litter of kittens appears to suggest that only through the nurturing of life, can these selfish and pretentiously inclined characters, hope to find any way out of their existential crises.

As with much of Kanai's work, *Oh, Tama!* takes a bit of getting into. Her experimental, almost stream-of-consciousness style is abundant in examples of wordplay, literary references and characters getting their wires crossed. As an example, much of the chapter titled 'Wandering Soul' is given over to the characters' unfocused ruminations on film makers Daniel Schmid and Jean-Luc Godard and novelist Vladimir Nabokov. Translator Aoyama and McCarthy have conquered the formidable challenge of communicating Kanai's famously skittish tone and love of the double entendre and happily, once one has settled into the peculiar rhythm of her prose, the novel becomes an enjoyable and often very funny read. It must be said, however, that those who like their fiction with a meaty plot to get stuck into, had better look elsewhere. Kanai's unremitting sense of the absurd and the subtly drawn interactions between her characters are what make this a worthwhile read, the plot is gossamer thin. §

The Little House

by Nakajima Kyoko
translated by Ginny Tapley Takemori

Darf Publishers (2019)
ISBN-13: 978-1850773160

Review by Robert Paul Weston

The Little House shares a title with a 1942 picture book by American children's author Virginia Lee Burton. In that story, a small house, built on a hill in the remote countryside, becomes intrigued and then engulfed by urban sprawl. With age she feels shabby and forgotten, especially squashed between pompous mansions and indifferent skyscrapers. Eventually, having stoically accepted she will soon be demolished, the little house is surprised to find hope and renewal when the great-great-granddaughter of her original builder comes knocking. The echoed title is no accident. The famous children's book (it was adapted as an animated short by the Disney Corporation in 1952) plays a pivotal role in Nakajima Kyoko's novel, appearing as one of the final clues to a poignant mystery that reveals the deft skill of a subtle storyteller.

On the surface, *The Little House* is a collection of memoirs by Taki, a housekeeper and governess who spends years in the service of the wealthy Hirai family. When the story opens Taki is an old woman, recently commissioned to produce a garishly titled, ghostwritten volume of household advice, "Granny Taki's Super Housework Book". Following its success, the editors are ready for a sequel. Taki, however, wishes to write something more meaningful: an autobiography.

She begins in 1930, still a young girl fresh from elementary school but already leaving her family in northern Honshu to serve as a housemaid in Tokyo. She recalls the practice was common at the time, particularly for large rural families of modest means. As early as seven, she writes, young girls 'either went to primary school or were sold off' to Geisha houses and brothels. Understandably, Taki counts herself lucky. In Tokyo, she is relatively well treated in the employ of several households, including a stint in the home of a famous author. Under the Hirai's roof (atop the "little house" of the title) the story coalesces around Mistress Tokiko, the beautiful wife of a toy factory manager, and their son, Kyoichi. Taki's relationship with the Hirai family and its secrets — as well as the discovery of her own — drive the novel. The tale is told in Taki's voice until nearly the end, when we arrive at a last chapter that suddenly shifts the point of view. The result is a final punch of imagery, dramatic irony and wistful regret that persists well beyond the boundaries of the book.

Of course, this last shift makes it difficult to discuss the story in too much detail without spoiling the impact of many bittersweet moments Nakajima sets up throughout. I will say, however, *The Little House* compares favourably with other notable works that tackle similar themes. Fans of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day* or even Mishima Yukio's *Confessions of a Mask* will find things to like here.

Along with a delicately crafted story, *The Little House* is also filled with captivating historical insight into twentieth century Japan. Early on, Nakajima briefly focuses on Japan's preparation for the Tokyo Olympics and the Grand International Exposition, both planned for 1940. Meant to celebrate the 2600th anniversary of the accession of Japan's first Emperor Jimmu to the throne, the Grand Exposition featured events planned solidly from March to August of that year. Delegations from around the world were set to attend, which is to say nothing of the 1940 Tokyo Olympics, meant to immediately follow in September.

Nakajima reveals how, in the minds of average Japanese, it was easy for these internationally prestigious events to overshadow distant wars in Asia and Europe. Mr. Hirai, for instance, a successful toymaker, is particularly caught up in preparation. He exuberantly begins designing all the many sporting- and patriotic-themed trinkets he will inevitably sell when the world's eyes turn to Tokyo. With the outbreak of war in Europe, however, the Japanese government has little choice but to cancel both events.

Having said this, the book's historical detail is not included solely for authenticity. It is not merely a way of gaining the reader's trust and sharpening the atmosphere. It serves these purposes, certainly, but it is clear Nakajima chose each detail to serve the story. Indeed, Mr. Hirai's exuberance — and especially his sudden need of talented new toy designers — plays a pivotal role come the book's climax. Also worth mentioning is a second level of detail, that of food and cooking. Anyone familiar with Japanese popular culture will be aware that food — its production, preparation and consumption — pops up with unusual frequency in books, film, television, manga and even music. In *The Little House* Nakajima makes artful use of the trend. Taki is a housekeeper, after all, expressly charged with feeding the Hirai household. This results in passages of the novel that are, quite literally, delicious.

Shortly after joining the Hirai family, Taki wishes to explain 'why the end of the year used to be such a busy time.' She goes on to list the many discrete ingredients and timings required for a successful *osechiryōri*, the elaborate New Year's dish meticulously prepared days in advance of January 1. Later, after the war begins and certain ingredients falter, the sudden arrival of visitors forces Taki to prepare an impromptu meal with limited resources. 'While the guests enjoyed a drink with a couple of snacks of vegetables simmered in soy sauce and whitebait boiled in sweetened soy sauce, I steamed some rice together with shellfish preserved in mirin, ginger, and soy, and cut up some sardines marinated overnight into bite sized pieces, coating them in potato starch before deep frying them'.

Out of context (or perhaps to readers without a taste for Japanese cuisine), this listing of ingredients could appear dull, but once again Nakajima's details inform the story. Taki's relationship with the Hirai family is one of formal service; food is her most sensual connection to the people with whom she spends her life. Taken this way, her meticulous memory for kitchen work speaks volumes about a character who, even at times unknowingly to herself, expresses emotion and desire in the language of cooking, serving and eating.

The result is a slowly gathering weight of wistfulness and dramatic irony, peppered with moments when readers may come to believe they know Taki better than she knows herself — and they may be right. Nakajima strikes a tantalising balance between what each character knows and what readers may assume. The effect is a subtle suspense every bit as varied and delicious as the grand first meal of the year. §

The Citi Exhibition Manga マンガ

The British Museum (23 May-26 August 2019)

Review by Malene Wagner

As I set off to explore British Museum's *Citi exhibition Manga* マンガ, I am puzzled by my first encounter: the very British 19th-century heroine, Alice. Is she there to reassure me that all is not totally unknown and mad in this other kind of Wonderland that is manga? Luckily, I quickly find myself in the company of some very Japanese heroes such as Astro Boy, Monkey D. Luffy (leader of the Straw Hat Pirates) and Pikachu. And I bump into a range of Japanese monsters, ghosts and goblins peeking out from the dimly lit gallery who strangely reassures me that I am in fact no longer 'at home'. Although still considered somewhat foreign and exotic by many of us in the West, some aspects of Japanese culture have been adopted into mainstream Western culture – just think of sushi, sake and sakura. With this exhibition, the largest one on manga held outside of Japan to date, British

Museum shows that manga too has a place in modern-day Western (pop) culture.

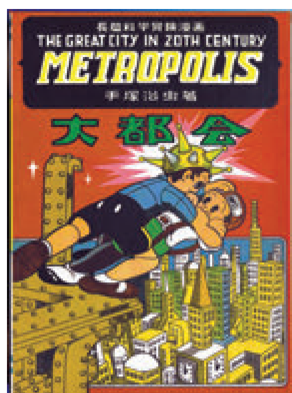
But what is manga exactly?

Some people will associate manga with Hokusai (1760-1849), Japan's most famous artist whose *Great Wave* has become a global icon beyond its Japanese roots. It was with Hokusai that the term manga was made widely known when he used it for the title of his drawing manual in fourteen volumes, *Hokusai manga* (北斎漫画), published from 1814 onwards. The meaning of manga in that context was 'random drawings' or 'pictures run riot' reflecting the

content of the books' weird and wonderful scenes of daily life, nature and animals, the supernatural and not least humans often depicted with a humoristic twist.

But, to many others, manga (マンガ) are modern-day comic books or graphic novels, read by both children and adults, with subjects ranging from adventure to comedy, to drama, to horror, to mystery, to romance, to science fiction and sports, even erotica, and the list goes on. There really is, as one headline in the exhibition states, "A manga for everyone". That is not to say that the two kinds of manga are not related – they are! Both a visual narrative art form, they are historically and artistically connected; one could argue with roots going back to the 12th-century *Handscrolls of Froclicking Animals* (*Choju giga*), displayed as a later copy in the exhibition.

The focus of the exhibition is manga as the contemporary story-telling. We learn how to both read and draw manga and we are introduced to how manga is produced in Japan today. A mock-up of the oldest manga bookshop in Tokyo (which closed only in March this year) invites us into the everyday-life of manga consumers as we can enter the 'shop' and read classics like *Princess Knight* or 1980s *Dragonball* or maybe one prefers Oda Eiichiro's *One Piece*, which broke the Guiness Book of World Records for the most copies sold for the same title by a single author.



Left: Tezuka Osamu, *Metropolis*, 1949 ©Tezuka Productions
Right: Hoshino Yukinobu, *Professor Munakata's British Museum Adventure*, 2011 © YUKINOBU HOSHINO/ SHOGAKUKAN INC.

The exhibition truly feels like a contemporary manga universe. But we are reminded of its links to Edo-period *ukiyo-e* (woodblock prints) and Meiji-era magazine illustrations by examples throughout the exhibition acting as an undercurrent to the modern-day manga. And although it is tempting to compare the two, the classic 'masterpieces' are best seen as context for the contemporary manga drawings, not a literal equal. One example, is one of Hokusai's best works, the skeletal ghost *Kohada Koheji,* part of the series *Hyaku monogatari* (One Hundred Ghost Tales) from c. 1833. Rather than making a one-to-one visual comparison, one can appreciate the influence of the comic and grotesque Edo-period *ukiyo-e* on today's manga.

A highlight and truly unique piece of the exhibition also manifests the historical undercurrent: a 17 x 4 metres

Kohada Koheiji from *One Hundred Ghost Tales*. Colour woodblock, 1833 © The Trustees of the British Museum

big theatre curtain painted by pupil Kawanabe Kyosai (1831-1889) in 1880 for the Shintomiza theatre. The curtain features scary and ghosts and demons – a returning theme in Kyosai's art works – but they are in fact popular kabuki actors of the time, identifiable by facial characteristics and their family crests (*mon*) featured above each figure. Another father of manga is Tezuka Osamu (1928-1989) with his hero Astro Boy, known in Japan as *Mighty Atom*. The story of Astro Boy was first featured in the monthly magazine Shonen in 1952 (and continued until 1968). Since then, Astro Boy has grown into an icon and he has become one of the faces of Japan's 'soft power' policy. For the Tokyo Olympics 2020, he will act as one of the official ambassadors. He is proof that manga is more than just entertainment but also an integral part of Japanese culture, on both a national and a global scale.

This exhibition seeks to tell the story of modern manga, from its origins in late 19th-century Japan to its role as a global phenomenon in today's culture. For the British Museum to take up a pop culture theme like manga is refreshing. It would have been easy to make an exhibition focusing on the great *ukiyo-e* masters of Japanese art and only referencing contemporary manga in the passing. Instead British Museum has done the opposite and sheds light on a pop culture phenomenon that has moved beyond its Japanese roots and 'role models'. Manga is a mad world. But in no way too frightening or foreign. It's really about not taking it too seriously and just letting yourself fall down that rabbit hole (in true British style).

Manga マンガ opened at the British Museum on 23 May and will run until 26 August. Accompanying the exhibition is the publication *Manga* edited by Matsuba Ryoko and Nicole Coolidge Rousmaniere, the main curators of the exhibition. It is published by Thames & Hudson in collaboration with the British Museum. §