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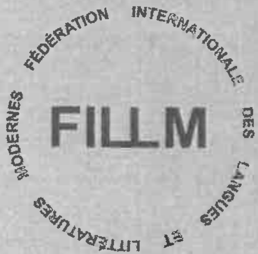
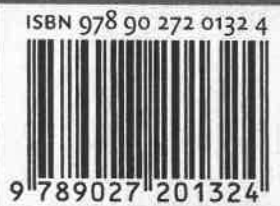
In 1978, Nelson Goodman explored the relation of "worlds" to language and literature, formulating the term, "worldmaking" to suggest that many other worlds can as plausibly exist as the "world" we know right now. We cannot catch or know "the world" as such: all we can catch are the world versions – descriptions, views or workings of the world – that are expressed in symbolic systems (words, music, dancing, visual representations). Over the twenty-five years since then, creative works have played a crucial role in realigning, reshaping and renegotiating our understandings of how worlds can be made and preserved in the face of globalizing trends.

The volume is divided into three sections, each engaging with worlds as malleable constructs. Central to all of the contributions is the question: how can we understand the relationships between natural, political, cultural, fictional, literary, linguistic and virtual worlds, and why does this matter?




ISBN 978 90 272 0132 4
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FILLM 5

Clark, Finlay & Kelly

Worldmaking

FILLM Studies in Languages and Literatures

Worldmaking

Literature, language, culture

EDITED BY
Tom Clark, Emily Finlay
and Philippa Kelly

5

John Benjamins Publishing Company

FILLM Studies in Languages and Literatures

ISSN 2213-428X

For an overview of all books published in this series, please see *http://benjamins.com/catalog/fillm*

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Volume 5

Worldmaking. Literature, language, culture
Edited by Tom Clark, Emily Finlay and Philippa Kelly

Worldmaking

Literature, language, culture

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Amsterdam / Philadelphia

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences – Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

DOI 10.1075/fillm.5

Cataloging-in-Publication Data available from Library of Congress.

ISBN 978 90 272 0132 4 (HB)
ISBN 978 90 272 6616 3 (E-BOOK)

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Series editor's preface

The *Fédération Internationale des Langues et Littératures Modernes* (FILLM) is UNESCO's ceiling organization for scholarship in the field of languages and literatures. The Federation's main aim is to encourage linguists and literary scholars from all over the world to enter into dialogue with each other.

During the twentieth century, linguistic and literary studies became steadily more professional and specialized, a development which significantly raised the overall standard of research, but which also tended to divide scholars into many separate and often smallish groupings between which communication could be rather sporadic. Over the years this became something of a handicap. New ideas and findings were often slow to cross-fertilize.

Given the rapidly globalizing world of the early twenty-first century, the relative lack of contact between scholars in different subject-areas became a more glaring anomaly than ever. Against this background, FILLM decided to set up its own book series, in the hope of fostering a truly international community of scholars within which a rich diversity of interests would be upheld by a common sense of human relevance.

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Roger D. Sell

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CHAPTER 4

The wor(l)dmaking of centenarian poets

Mado Michio and Shibata Toyo

Tomoko Aoyama

What sort of world do the centenarian poets create? Since ancient times, old age has been associated with misery. Cicero's *Cato* (2004:22) identified four reasons for this: first, that it withdraws us from active employments; second, that it enfeebles the body; third, that it deprives us of nearly all physical pleasures; and fourth, that it is another step closer to death. These negative connotations of old age certainly permeate many cultures, including that of Japan. Cicero's text, which has apparently been a standard Latin textbook, actually refutes these negative assumptions and emphasizes that it is possible to live positively and meaningfully in one's old age. Indeed, some regard this work as an early example of an anti-ageing manifesto although it is doubtful if second-year students of Latin appreciate its wisdom – just as very few Japanese adolescents would find it interesting to read comments on old age from the canonical medieval text *Tsurezuregusa* (Essays in Idleness, c. 1330) by Yoshida Kenkō (1282?–1350) in their classical Japanese classes.[1]

The topic of ageing has thus been discussed from ancient times, if with some limitations. In more recent years, however, it has attracted substantially greater attention in both general and scholarly fields in Japan. One obvious reason is that Japan is widely recognized as one of the most advanced ageing (or super-ageing) cultures. On "Respect for the Aged Day" (15 September) 2012 the number of people aged 100 or above reached 51, 376 (McCurry 2012). Even though the triple disaster in North East Japan in March 2011 has negatively affected the average lifespan, Japan has the highest number (34.85) of centenarians per 100,000 people, far greater than France (27.01), Thailand (26.80) and Spain (26.44) (Wikipedia 2014). The increasing prominence of the elderly population is evident in media and cultural production and consumption. One of the most celebrated cases is the twin sisters Kin-san and Gin-san. Narita Kin (1892–2000) and her sister Kanie

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1. I cite all Japanese names in Japanese order (i.e. surname first followed by personal name) unless referring to the authors of publications originally written in English under anglicized name order.

DOI 10.1075/fillm.5.04aoy
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Gin (1892–2001) were transformed from ordinary citizens to national "idols" after their 100th birthday. The fact that they were identical twins named Kin (gold) and Gin (silver) added an extra sense of auspiciousness to their longevity. They appeared in numerous commercials, on variety shows and at public events, and were involved in some studies on geriatric health. Although the media treatment of Kin-san and Gin-san exhibited a somewhat condescending tone towards the elderly, the sisters promoted an image of happy and cheerful elderly people. When asked about the money they earned from their media appearances, their answer was that they were saving it to provide for their old age (BBC News 2001).

This presents a stark contrast to the darker image of old age that permeated much of the second half of the twentieth century, in which traditional family values such as filial piety were questioned and the elderly and disabled were often treated as a burden and an impediment to the pursuit of economic growth and development. Ariyoshi Sawako's novel *Kōkotsu no hito* (translated as *Twilight Years*, 1972) shocked Japanese society with its detailed and realistic depiction of an elderly man with advanced senile dementia and the struggle of his daughter-in-law as his main caregiver.[2] As the population continues to grow older, and as old women outnumber and outlive old men, literary and cultural representations of old age have become noticeably more diverse than they were a few decades ago. More and more writers have continued or even started to publish in their nineties or later. Many of these publications attempt to treat old age not as a dark and depressing prospect or a serious social "problem" but as something that offers everyone – from children to the very old – a wide range of positive and interesting topics and creative texts in a variety of genres.

In accordance with this general socio-cultural change, there is a growing interest in research on the "poetics of ageing" – a field that sees ageing as ongoing purposeful creativity and a continual process of "storying" and "restorying" our experience through time (McKim and Randall 2007: 149). So far the emphasis has been placed on life-writing. There have also been various attempts to explore what Edward Said (2006) called late style. The Nobel laureate Ōe Kenzaburō is one of the Japanese writers who most consciously explored possibilities of "late style" in his fiction writing. With Ōe as a keynote speaker, the 2011 Association for Japanese Literary Studies conference had the theme of "The Poetics of Aging: Confronting, Resisting and Transcending Mortality in the Japanese Narrative Arts." The "poetics of ageing" deserves further study that explores a wider range of genres, issues and periods. There is very little work, for example, on the humour that is produced by aged protagonists, writers or narrators. It is worth examining

2. The title literally means "a person in a trance," which became a vogue term for people with senile dementia. The novel has been translated into English by Mildred Tahara as *The Twilight Years* (1984).

laughter rather than, or sometimes in addition to, the tears, anger, disillusionment, boredom and other negative traits and feelings that have tended to be associated with old age, often in combination with the issue of gender.[3] And the focus should be old people creating laughter, rather than being the object of laughter or derision because of their physical, mental, and emotional states or the discrepancy between their reality and fantasy. The humour may be heart-warming or caustic, profound or frivolous, cathartic, didactic or surrealistic. In this chapter I will discuss two collections of poems (although each book also includes photos, drawings, essays, memoirs and interviews): *Hyakusai nikki* (Diary of a 100 year-old) by Mado Michio (b. 1909) and *Hyakusai* (One hundred years) by Shibata Toyo (b. 1911). Each has "A Hundred Years Old" in its title, as each was published as a celebration of its author's 100 years of life.

Before examining these books, however, it is useful to discuss the social context in which they were produced and to note a few other publications by centenarian writers. As already mentioned, in today's "super-ageing" Japan, being an active 100 years old is not as rare and extraordinary as it once was. There are many books on and by centenarian writers, artists, scholars, and business and political leaders. *Hyakusai no kotoba hyakusen* (100 selections of centenarians' words, 2011), for example, is an anthology of centenarian maxims. The editor of this book and former president of St Luke's International Hospital in Tokyo, Hinohara Shigeaki (b. 1911), was himself 100 years old at the time this book was published, and, to our amazement, was (and apparently still is in 2014) a practising medical doctor. Following Hinohara's introduction, the book cites the words of the scholar of Japanese literature and philology, Mozume Takakazu (1879–1985): "I'm so busy all the time that I don't have time to die" (Hinohara 2011: 22). Even though Mozume actually died in 1985 at the age of 106, he kept publishing books such as *Hyakusai wa orikaeshi ten* (100 years is a [mid-life] turning point, 1979), *Zoku hyakusai wa orikaeshi ten* (100 years is a turning point, sequel, 1980), and *Hyakusansai. Honjitsu mo seiten nari* (103 years old. The weather is fine again today, 1982). While Mozume's example was certainly extraordinary at the time, there are now a number of active and creative centenarians, including Dr Hinohara, and bookshops have shelves that feature their books. In one of the many books Hinohara published in 2013, he quotes Martin Buber's words, "To be old can be glorious if one has not unlearned how to begin" (Hinohara 2013: 11).[4]

3. See Aoyama (2012). My paper at the Association of Japanese Literary Studies in 2012 "The Aging Ame no Uzume: Gender and Humor in Sano Yōko's Writing" (Aoyama 2015) also deals with humour and old age.

4. For the original English quotation I have used "Martin Buber" (2014). Hinohara does not indicate the source and the Japanese (literally, "One stays young as long as one has not forgotten how to begin/create") is slightly different from what is given here.

Another recent example is a book published shortly after the death of internationally acclaimed film director/screenwriter, Shindō Kaneto (1912–2012). This book, entitled *Hyakusai no ryūgi* (A centenarian's style, 2012), is not an edited volume but a single-author collection of original essays. Shindō begins with this declaration:

> So, it's been a century – a long time.
> I turned 100 on 22 April 2012. I don't necessarily think it's something to celebrate, but I feel excited. My film *Postcard* that premiered in August last year (2011) is still being shown around the country this year. It was selected as the best Japanese film in the 85th *Kinema junpō* Best Ten and I received many other accolades including the director's prize at the 35th Japan Academy Awards and at the 54th Blue Ribbon Awards. Regardless of age, it's always nice to be praised.
> (Shindō 2012: 18–19)

In over 200 pages and seven chapters that include "Respect Women" and "Do Not Make Light of Sex," Shindō writes of his passionate commitment to filmmaking and the constant challenges he encounters in achieving his goals.

The production and reception of the poetry collections that I discuss in this chapter certainly share some sociological features with such recent publications that exemplify positive ageing. With the ever-expanding ageing population, it is vitally important to provide not only medical, economic, and social support and welfare for the elderly but models and incentives that enable people to pursue "aesthetics" and "poetics" as part of positive and active ageing. While the positive "poetics of ageing" found in contemporary Japan can be linked to cultural and religious traditions of the celebration of longevity and respect for the aged, the recent surge in art and literature relating to ageing is by no means a revival of traditional Shinto, Confucian or Buddhist values but a new phenomenon that reflects the longing of the aged as well as those of other generations for not just a long but a happy and meaningful life. In addition to these socio-cultural interests, my choice of topic for this chapter is based on the belief that these poetry collections offer interesting thematic and formal features as literary texts.

Mado Michio

The two poets are very different in background. Mado is a celebrated poet/artist who has produced a number of award-winning books since the early 1950s, many of which are targeted at young audiences. His poem about a baby elephant and its mother, "Zō-san," in particular, has been enjoyed by millions of children, along with music composed by Dan Ikuma. Empress Michiko has translated his works in four booklets: *The Animals* (1992), *The Magic Pocket* (1998), *Rainbow* (2013) and *Eraser* (2013).[5] Here are two of the shortest examples from *Eraser* with Mado's original Japanese presented first to show the visual effect, followed by the Romanisation in brackets and Empress Michiko's translation. The first line of each poem is the title.

ケムシ (kemushi)	Caterpillar
さんぱつは　きらい (sanpatsu wa kirai)	No! No haircut for me!
	(Mado 2013a: 10–11)
ノミ (nomi)	Flea
あらわれる (arawareru)	Coming into sight
ゆくえふめいに　なるために	
(yukue fumei ni naru tame ni)	Only to be lost (Mado 2013a: 6–7)

As these examples show, Mado's original poems are written in very simple language and in simple phonetic kana script without any Chinese characters. Although the brevity may remind us of some free verse (i.e. not the traditional 5-7-5 metre) haiku, the imagery, atmosphere and ideas are completely different from haiku such as these two very short examples by Ozaki Hōsai (1885–1926):

咳をしても一人 (seki o shite mo hitori)	Coughing alone
墓のうらに廻る (haka no ura ni mawaru)	Go around to the back of the grave[6]

Mado's caterpillar, flea and other short poems originally appeared in 1951 in children's books. Amazingly, Mado has retained his gentle humour and innocent, childlike sense of wonder – at small and large animals, plants, and the earth, wind and stars – for a century.

The first poem included in his *Diary of a 100 Year-Old* is entitled "Ojiisan" (An Old Man). It begins like a nursery rhyme or a fairy tale: "There was an old man / who turned 100 this year" (Mado 2010: 10). One morning, while still dark, he wakes up and sees a bright star far above. "But it was, in fact, / a far-away drop of an old tale / that just came into his mind / the old man had heard it in his childhood / from someone…" (11). This old story he remembers consists of a very simple line: "From heaven there fell / a long long, long long loincloth" (11). The old man realizes that what looked like a bright star was indeed this tale, which "started shining naturally / because it was so very nice / to see the old man again / as he remembered, after almost 100 years…" (11).

5. The last two collections are available in bilingual and illustrated editions by the same author, translator, illustrator and publisher in the same year: Mado (2013a); Mado (2013b).

6. Both haiku are included in the online collection, Ozaki Hōsai (2014). My translation.

This little poem told in very simple language contains a very simple story. The tale of the long, long loincloth is a nonsensical and almost surrealistic folktale that is about nothing but a long, long, infinitely long loincloth. In some versions it is a rope, a string or a scarf, but the loincloth is clearly the most humorous and is likely to capture the hearts of many children as well as adults.[7] Thus, both the poem and the story within it are simple and short, almost momentary, but at the same time they have infinite length, multiple viewpoints, reversals and surprises. It is not the old man who feels *natsukashii* (nostalgic); it is the old tale he remembers that is so pleased to see this ojiisan again after such a long time. The theme of 100 years may remind us of some other literary works such as Natsume Sōseki's "Yume jūya" (Ten Nights of Dream, 1908), Gabriel Garcia Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1968) or some canonical Noh plays such as *Sekidera Komachi* and *Sotoba Komachi*.[8] While one hundred years in these works are associated with solitary waiting, rise and fall, or the impermanence of life, Mado's poem focuses on the shining power of an old tale that may seem ephemeral and meaningless but embeds profundity and eternity. The old man is alone in his bed, but he is not lonely as he has the story *who* is happy to be with him again. Mado has certainly 'not unlearned how to begin.'

Mado writes in this book that he never expected to live so long and that, grateful as he is, he is quite tired:

> Having lived this long, it would be best if I could die suddenly. I just eat and sleep uselessly, snoring and yawning instead of responding, and farting as my perpetual fanfare. [...] Somewhere inside me there may be this spoilt feeling that since I'm 100, whatever I write will be excused. [...]
>
> However, I do feel that old age may open up a new world. It might only be possible in old age to discover a world that seemed too stupid and ridiculous when one was young. (Mado 2010: 14–15)

Writing and drawing play very important roles in this process of infinite discovery of the world.

> The world is infinitely wide. There must be innumerable flora and fauna that human beings have not yet noticed. Every day something new continues to emerge but we just don't notice. The area I can reach is narrow. So even though it's impossible to write about everything, I'd like to write as much as I possibly can. (Mado 2010: 20)

7. Writer Kanai Mieko (1985) writes about the fascination of this nonsensical tale that was repeatedly told by her father when she was young, and even uses the title of this story for her collection of essays.

8. *Sekidera Komachi* was written by Zeami (c.1363–c.1443) and *Sotoba Komachi* was written by his father Kan'ami (1333–84). Both plays deal with the early ninth-century poet and legendary beauty Ono no Komachi in old age.

And here is just one of his attempts to keep on writing (and writing about the urge to write):

> I can't help saying something [*iu]
> because I can't say a thing without words
>
> I can't help saying something
> because I can't say everything in words
>
> I can't help saying something
> because I can't live on my own
>
> I can't help saying something
> because I can only live on my own. (Mado 2010: 22–23)

The poem is written all in hiragana script with only one Chinese character, the character for "live." As is clear even from the above translation, the same simple words and phrases are repeated, and the repetition and changes capture both the possibility and impossibility of verbal expression and life.

Mado keeps a diary in order to "say something," and on the first page of each new diary he writes his greeting to the new book:

> How do you do? I am / Ishida Michio. / My pen name is Mado Michio.
> I'm the notorious / Alzheimer's and prostate patient.
> I keep making all sorts of blunders.
> I mean no harm but / I can't help it.
> I keep writing the same old drivel
> but please excuse me!
> And how do you do, from me, his companion, Red Guy![9]

"Red Guy" (Akasuke) is Mado's alter-ego commentator who uses a red pen to express what his heart says while the black pen/pencil represents his thoughts. The last line is written in red. This dialogue (or three-way conversation with the diary and Red Guy) consoles and amuses him even when he is by himself. The enjoyment he creates with his words and drawings comes through the pages. Mado does not preach or advise. He simply shares his enjoyment by making these pictures, poems and essays accessible. If some readers do not share his joy in worldmaking through words, there is no need to despair; they might be able to do so if they lived to be 100 to discover the infinity and profundity of simple things and words.

9. A photograph of this handwritten "greeting" is included before the title page of Mado, *Hyakusai nikki* (2010).

Shibata Toyo

Unlike Mado, Shibata Toyo only began to write poetry when she was around ninety. To everyone's surprise, her first collection of poems, *Kujikenaide* (Don't Lose Heart), which was published in 2010 as a "White Celebration" 白寿 [*hakuju*, which celebrates the 99th birthday, as the character for white 白 looks like a hundred 百 minus one 一], sold more than 1.6 million copies and has been translated into several languages. As its title suggests, this collection, consisting of poems written in simple form and language, encourages people to persevere when life is hard, because "morning will come" (Shibata 2010: 82). The final poem in the collection is entitled "Himitsu" (Secret):

> You know, many times
> I have felt like dying
> But since I started to write poems,
> many people have encouraged me
> I don't grumble any more
>
> I'm 98 but
> I fall in love
> and dream
> and feel like riding on a cloud. (Shibata 2010: 94–95)

The "encouragement" she mentions here includes letters from her fans as well as warm reviews and comments from poet Shinkawa Kazue and others. It is worth noting that Shibata was one of millions of amateur contributors to the poetry pages of newspapers and magazines. Every major Japanese newspaper has regular haiku and tanka sections to which readers can contribute. Shinkawa was a judge/commentator for the free verse column of the *Sankei shinbun* newspaper, and wrote introductions to both of Shibata's books. The theme of encouragement permeates Shibata's poems, many of which are addressed to someone – including her son, herself, and even the perpetrators and victims of scams that target old people. Commonly known as *ore, ore sagi* ("Hey, it's me" scams), these scams involve someone ringing an elderly person who lives alone, pretending to be his/her grandchild or relative, and asking for urgent help – by bank transfer – to get out of some fictitious trouble. Shibata wrote three pieces for the Saitama Prefecture Police campaign against "Hey, it's me" scams – one addressed to the perpetrators, another for the victims, and another one entitled "Watashi dattara" (If it happened to me) which includes what she would say to the caller if she received such a telephone call:

> Ken'ichi [her son's name], I wish I could transfer the money now,
> but Mummy is not very well
> I'll be in hospital from tomorrow
> but there's a policeman I know
> I'll ask him now, so just wait there. (Shibata 2011: 59)

With gentle humour she points out through the poem the importance of staying calm and consulting someone.

Writing helps Shibata to overcome loneliness and hardship, and her writing also helps other people. The poem titled "To Myself II" begins with description of her daily life, which requires carers and nurses for shopping, cleaning, washing, cooking and taking a bath. "Without their help I cannot live." "But," she writes in the second half:

> But I can
> spin words by myself
> and tie a thread
> to someone's heart
>
> Now raise your head
> and look at the sky. (Shibata 2011: 49)

This self/other encouragement and communication through words may sound rather naïve, but it has been warmly welcomed by a wide audience. Apart from the Saitama Police campaign, Shibata wrote two poems for the victims of the 3.11 disaster: "I pray, please don't get your heart washed away / by the tsunami of misfortune" (Shibata 2011: 69), which were published in the *Sankei shinbun* newspaper.

Shibata passed away in January 2013. A film based on her poems and biography was released in October 2013 in Japan and was screened in Sydney in the following month. Three celebrated actors (Ashida Mana, Dan Rei and Yachigusa Kaoru) played three stages of Shibata's life. The poet herself was very photogenic. In her introduction to the second collection Shinkawa Kazue comments:

> Toyo-san's poems give her readers power for life. They are certainly full of elements that deserve to be loved and respected, but her greatest masterpiece is her face. (in Shibata 2011: 4–5)

Acclaimed poet Shinkawa praises Shibata's poetic skills as fresh, witty and soothing, and "beyond amateur level" (5). In her introduction to *Kujikenaide* Shinkawa dubs Shibata "a wonderful forerunner [*senpai*] to us, women, and a dependable mother to men" (Shibata 2010: 5). Here and elsewhere Shibata is cited as "Toyo-san" (like Kin-san and Gin-san), rather than "Shibata-san" using her surname, which is the form of address that appears in her earlier poem, "To the Doctor":

> Please do not call me Granny [*obaachan*]
> "What's the day of the week?"
> "What's 9 + 9?"
> Don't ask me such silly questions.
> "Mrs Shibata, do you like the poetry of Saijō Yaso?[10]
> What do you think of the Koizumi cabinet?"[11]
> They're the kind of questions I would welcome. (Shibata 2010: 30–31)

Although no cynical comments have been found in my somewhat limited research on this poet, it would not be surprising if some regarded her as a celebrity created by successful publicity/marketing. A sceptical reader might also find in this endearing "Toyo-san" a kind of "cute grandma" (*kawaii obaachan*),[12] the ideal that feminist sociologist Ueno Chizuko (2005: 28) regards as "a woman's strategy for survival as a dependent being." It may not be as overt as in the case of Kin-san and Gin-san, and as is clear from the above poem, Shibata objects to being addressed as "obaachan" or treated as an impersonalized old woman. Nevertheless, well-meaning praise such as "beyond amateur" and the respectful yet endearing use of her personal name suggest various boundaries, some of which she is supposed to have crossed. One might also note that it would suit the state to have an exemplary old lady who did not complain, but consoled and encouraged a population that was suffering through natural and human disasters as well as social problems such as fraud and bullying. Some might question the literary value of Shibata's writing, detecting a certain formula and predictability. In an interview included in the second book she says:

> I give a kind of closure in the last part of my poems. I never use difficult words but try to write with simple words. I delete all unnecessary phrases and use only those that are necessary, the words that "will do." This is actually quite difficult. But it's fun because it's difficult. (Shibata 2011: 88)

There is nothing particularly new or surprising here, but it is strangely convincing – perhaps because she talks about the process of selecting words as challenging and enjoyable. The "kind of closure" she mentions here includes what Shinkawa recognizes as the "wit" that only "those who know the taste of tears" can have (Shibata 2011: 7).

Earlier, I introduced Mado Michio's poem that includes an old story and the passing of 100 years. Shibata's poems, too, often capture various unforgettable moments in the past. In one poem, Shibata, as a child worker, is weeping by the Kōrai Bridge and her best friend, also a young girl worker, cheers her up (Shibata 2010: 92–93). This is the poet's recollection of an event that occurred 80 years earlier. In another poem, the friend has to leave the shop, perhaps to go home because her mother is ill; "On the willow trees cotton-like / flowers were blooming / tears came up / and didn't stop" (Shibata 2011: 23). In yet another poem, her son, who as a little boy lay on the road in front of a toyshop, nagging her to buy a toy sword, is now greying and sometimes admonishes her. "Buy me some medicine / for rejuvenation! / This time, shall I nag, / lying down on the tatami?" (Shibata 2011: 19). So there is a drama in each poem and if that drama at times seems rather like television drama (the popular drama from the early 1980s, *O-Shin*, for example, which depicted the life of the eponymous woman from her early childhood to old age), there is still something fresh and warm that speaks directly to millions of people and perhaps dissolves cynics' doubts.

I have discussed two very different centenarian poets here. One is an acclaimed professional poet with childlike qualities and a profound philosophy, and the other, a model amateur poet, a true late starter, whose simple words create a world that crosses time and space and reach a wide-ranging audience. The celebrity factor works in the dissemination of their poems. However, their respective ways of "not unlearning how to begin," especially with simple yet powerful words, not only give pleasure, courage and consolation to a large and mixed audience but also provide hints that enable readers to keep exploring their own ways of beginning.

10. Saijō Yaso (1892–1970) was a poet and scholar of French literature. His works include symbolist poetry and words for children's songs and popular songs.

11. Koizumi Jun'ichirō was the Japanese Prime Minister between April 2001 and September 2006.

12. For a discussion of this, see Aoyama (2012: 22).