

Katsushika Hokusai and a Poetics of Nostalgia

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the activation of aesthetics through the examination of an acute sensitivity to melancholy and time permeating the literary and pictorial arts of Japan. In medieval court circles, this sensitivity was activated through a pervasive sense of aware, a poignant reflection on the pathos of things. This sensibility became the motivating force for court verse, and through this medium, for the mature projects of the ukiyo-e 'floating world picture' artist Katsushika Hokusai. Hokusai reached back to aware sensibilities, subjects and conventions in celebrations of the poetic that sustained cultural memories resonating classical lyric and pastoral themes. This paper examines how this elegiac sensibility activated Hokusai's preoccupations with poetic allusion in his late representations of scholar-poets and the unfinished series of Hyakunin isshu uba-ga etoki, 'One hundred poems, by one hundred poets, explained by the nurse'. It examines four works to explain how their synthesis of the visual and poetic could sustain aware themes and tropes over time to maintain a distinctive sense of this aesthetic sensibility in Japan.

KEYWORDS

cultural memory, Hokusai, ukiyo-e, poetic allusion, nostalgia, *mono no aware*

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Introduction: *Mono no aware*

How can an aesthetic sensibility become an activating force in and through poetic and pictorial amalgams of specific cultural histories and memories? This article examines how the poignant aesthetic sensibility of *mono no aware* (a 'sensitivity to the pathos of things') established a guiding inflection for social engagements of the Heian period (794–1185CE) Fujiwara court in Japan. Its pervasive presence in Japanese culture survives to the present day. It can be provoked through observations on the passing of youth and beauty, and in ephemeral motifs of seasonal change, or snow, moon or blossoms (Shirane, 2012). This aesthetic consciousness generated sensitivities, informed codes of social intercourse and attitudes to nature, and most especially, it shaped the refined literary themes of the Heian age. A sensitivity to *aware* repeatedly provided the generating impetus to (and was, in turn, sustained by) the composition of medieval short verse (*waka*), and the word itself appears no less than 1018 times in Murasaki Shikibu's (c. 978-c.1014 or 1025) court novel *Genji Monogatari* (Morris, 1969). For the nineteenth century artist, Katsushika Hokusai (1760–1849), the activating force of *aware* sustained through poetry provided the motivating themes of two late-career pictorial projects. The sustained memories of the sense of *mono no aware*, experienced through their poetic tropes, were to stimulate the development of his own deeply affecting and nostalgic constructions of bucolic worlds beyond the city. In these works, he was to meld the poetic and the pictorial in gently constructed syntheses of worlds of past and present. The following discussion examines this amalgam of the poetic and pictorial as an activating aesthetic sensibility in these later works of Katsushika Hokusai.

A Poet in Exile

The sense of *aware* informing classical verse inspired, and was maintained through, many of the themes adopted by Edo period (1615–1868) *ukiyo-e* ('floating-world picture') artists. Indeed, early Buddhist appreciations of *ukiyo* as 'this fleeting, sorrowful world' mirrored the sensitivities of *aware* itself. For Katsushika Hokusai, these themes were to provide perfect vehicles for the aesthetic preoccupations of his mature reflections on the poetic and the nostalgic. Between 1833 and 1834, Hokusai designed a series of 10 pictorial compositions on themes of great poets of earlier eras titled *Shika shashinkyô* ('A True Mirror of Chinese and Japanese Poets'). The Chinese-themed compositions include *Haku Rakuten*, a representation of the Chinese poet Po Chu[^]-i, (772–846; Po Chû-i Wades-Giles; Bai Juyi, *pinyin*; Hakkyoi, or Haku Kyoi, Japanese); a poetic scene from the *No*[^] play *Tokusa kari* (*Tokusa-gari*, or 'Peasant Carrying Rushes'); *Ri haku*, a portrait of the Chinese poet Li Po (701–762; Li Po, Li Bo, Wades-Giles; Li Bai, *pinyin*; Rihaku, Japanese); *Tôba*, the Chinese poet and calligrapher Su Tung-p'o (1037–1101; Su Tung-p'o, Wades-Giles; Su Dongpo, *pinyin*; Su Tôba, or Tôba, Japanese); and *Shônenkô* ('The Journey of Life'), illustrating a Chinese poetic theme of the young man setting out from home. The Japanese prints represent themes on the poets Minamotu no Tôru (822–889), *Tôru no daijin* ('The Minister Tôru'); Ariwara no Narihara (823–880); Sei Shônagon (fl. 1002); Abe no Nakamaro (698–770); and Harumichi no Tsuraki (fl. 920).

Hokusai's composition of the Japanese scholar Abe no Nakamaro is set in China. He has located the poet on a high patio overlooking the Eastern Sea between China and Japan, seated with three distinguished guests, with an attendant serving food and beverage. The foreground is dominated by an enormous perforated rock formation at lower right, a steep-pitched roofline behind it, and a tall branch of pine reaching right to the top of the composition. In the background, rocky outcrops extend into the sea towards a group of fishing boats. It is a deeply poignant scene; Nakamaro turns away from his guest and his servants, gazing wistfully out across the sea, towards a shining full moon hovering in the evening sky in the upper left.

This is a complex, layered composition. In one sense, it is an historical representation. The Japanese scholar-poet Abe no Nakamaro (701–770 CE) resided in China. He accompanied a priest, Genbô (d. 746), and the aristocratic scholar, later ambassador, Kibi no Makibi (695–775) on a study mission to China in 717. He remained there when the embassy returned in 718, subsequently sitting the Chinese civil service examinations and serving, under the Chinese name Chao Heng, in the administration of the T'ang Emperor Hsü Chang'an and Hanoi until his death in 770. Nakamaro's enjoyment of the privileges of birth, education and position are evident in the rich setting and servants, in his fine brocade clothing, and in the delicate grace of his disposition as he turns to look towards the moon, and across the gulf that lies between China and his home. His privileged position and scholarly status seems to have brought him into contact with respected Chinese poets including Li Po (Li Bai) and Wang Wei (Mostow, 1996). Though he did maintain senior administrative positions on the mainland, Nakamaro's residency was effectively one of exile. Attempts to return to Japan in 734 and 753 were confounded by shipwrecks, and at times, his movements were constrained by periods of political instability. Consequently, Hokusai's composition reflects something of an ambivalence between the security of a man comfortable in his institutional status on the one hand, and one hopelessly longing for a return to his home on the other. Here, and in other compositions on the theme, Hokusai clearly locates Nakamaro on the Chinese mainland (Morse, 1989). Both the Chinese architecture and the perforated limestone rock formations are conventional indications of this setting (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Abe no Nakamaro. From the series *Shika shashin kyō*, by Katsushika Hokusai, 1833–1834. Private Collection. Printed with permission

Beyond its representation of a real figure in a Chinese setting, this composition is suffused with poetic allusions resonating feelings of loneliness and longing for home, and sustaining broader seasonal themes and early Japanese aesthetic sensibilities. Associations of contemplative reclusion with poetic sensibilities also have long traditions in Chinese literary and art history, and the subject of the Chinese scholar-poet recluse has been a recurrent pictorial theme from early times. In Japan, the ideal of aesthetic reclusion and its associations with poetics, learning and wisdom had enjoyed a significant revival in *sumi-e* ink painting during the Momoyama period immediately preceding the Edo period of Hokusai's time (Brown, 1997). This revival established a firm, and immediately accessible, field of reference for Hokusai's own explorations of the theme.

Both Hokusai and Abe no Nakamaro were able to draw on an extensive stock of motifs from the natural world and its cycles of seasonal change to charge their pictorial or literary constructions with an acute sense of melancholy. Autumn (*aki*) and images of the autumn moon and autumn breeze had been associated with melancholic themes since as early as the compilation of the *Man'yōshū* ('Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves', post-759 CE), the oldest of the Japanese poetry anthologies. In poetry, 'autumn is associated with sorrow, sadness, personal frustration and a sense of mortality' (Shirane, 2012, p. 43). Thus, in a verse from the Imperial *waka* anthology *Kokinshū*:

<i>Monogoto ni</i>	In all things
<i>aki zo kanashiki</i>	autumn is sad
<i>momijitsutsu</i>	when I think of what happens
<i>utsuroiyuku wo</i>	when the tree leaves
<i>kagiri to omoeba</i>	turn colour and fade. [Autumn 1, No. 187]

(Shirane, 2012, p. 43)

For Heian readers, this feeling of melancholy provoked a sense of *mono no aware*, an awareness of the pathos of things, or a sense of the mysterious depth of *yugen*, '... expressive of desolation and rich mysterious beauty coupled with sadness' (Miner, 1968, p. 165). The moon (*tsuki*) became a poetic staple for sorrow and pathos, as in this anonymous verse from the *Kokinshû*:

<i>Ko no ma yori</i>	When I see the light of the moon
<i>morikuru tsuki no</i>	leaking through the trees
<i>kage mireba</i>	I know
<i>kokorozukushi no</i>	the heart wrenching autumn
<i>aki wa kinikeri</i>	has arrived. [Autumn 1, No. 184]

(Shirane, 2012, p. 41)

For Abe no Nakamaro, the image of the full autumn moon, rising simultaneously over both his present location and his home, is a poignant and nostalgic reminder of his isolation. The pine tree provides a clue as to the source of his reflection. A homophonic reading of *matsu* ('pine') as *matsu* 'to wait' generates associations with waiting, especially waiting for a lover:

<i>Ume no hana</i>	If the flower of the plum tree
<i>sakite chirinaba</i>	blooms and scatters
<i>wagimoko wo</i>	I will be the pine that waits
<i>komu ka koji ka to</i>	wondering if my beloved
<i>aga matsu no ki so</i>	will come or not come. [<i>Man'yôshû</i> , 10 1922]

(Shirane, 2012, p. 137)

In Hokusai's composition, the association alludes to Nakamaro's love and longing for his home.

For Hokusai, these contemplative and melancholic themes of the past were to activate the aesthetic pre-occupations of his own Edo period present, realized through the pictorial medium of the *ukiyo-e* floating world prints of his time. These works could then, in their turn, re-activate those elegiac sensibilities for a new generation of viewers. Hokusai's creative purvey in these projects reached beyond the literary and pictorial pasts of his own Japanese world to embrace also models of Chinese precedent. The landscape subject and Chinese setting of his portrayal of these themes is complemented by his adoption of conventional Chinese pictorial constructions. The vertical *nagaban* (c. 25 × 56 cm) print format echoes the Chinese-style hanging scroll format, so popular, in Japan. The Chinese spatial convention of stacked 'zones' of water, architecture or foliage and warm and cool colour provides a cohesive structure in which the highest strata were understood to be further distant than those lower in the pictorial field. A sense of suspension, of floating, indicated in the fluid *bokashi* modulations of transparent hue and tone in the sea and sky and in the cantilevered architecture is also consistent with the fugitive forms and surfaces of Chinese scroll painting. The Chinese-style asymmetrical 'corner-directedness' of the composition is characteristic also of Japanese *shinsai* 'formal-style' painting. Within these conventional means, Hokusai is able to forge an intimate synthesis of Japanese sensibilities (*Yamato gokoro*) and Chinese sensibilities (*kara gokoro*) that linked poetic aesthetic tastes of his world with those of the ancient Nara and Heian courts. The naturalism of this conventional construction made it easy for Hokusai's pragmatic viewers to accept the imaginary reconstruction of a distant event as a real view on an actual scene. Like the verses on autumn loneliness, it is an idealized construct, a complex and richly allusive pictorial ideal of the poet-scholar in reclusion built around a poetic nostalgia for an idealized memory of Japan, refined Japanese sensibilities, and a lost world of aesthetic, literary and social elegance.

One Hundred Poets

For Hokusai, the mature career projects of the Fuji series and poetic and literary themes became centred on the construction of idealized pictorial worlds like those of the *Shika shashin kyô* series. In all of these works, Hokusai removes his pictorial interest away from the immediate urban subjects of the Edo ‘floating world’, to situate his figural engagements in bucolic rural settings. The synthesis of the poignancy of *mono no aware* with his deeply felt nostalgia for the aesthetic sensibilities of distant worlds became the activating theme of his final pictorial engagement with the poetic. The major undertaking of a full set of illustrations for the *Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki* (‘One hundred poems by one hundred poets, explained by the nurse’, c. 1835–1836) was never completed, though many of his designs survive as working drawings (Morse, 1989). Hokusai’s compositions for this series fall into two groups: one of representations of the poets of the anthology, and the larger one in which its poetic themes are represented obliquely, in idyllic scenes of country life. All are removed from the city; their genre interest is located in coastal, mountainous, village settings or farming scenes consistent with the recurrent pastoral motifs of the *Hyakunin isshu* collection. Even those with Heian-kyô court subjects barely reveal the capital. Removing each view from the here-and-now of the city to rural locations also, implicitly, obscures the temporal distance between the ‘now’ of Hokusai’s own viewers and the much earlier origins of the works in the anthology.

The original *Hyakunin isshu* anthology was compiled by Fujiwara no Teika (alt. Fujiwara no Sada’ie, 1162–1241) some time after 1239 (Herwig & Mostow, 2007). Successive publications maintained its popularity and exemplary status through to Hokusai’s time. Abe no Nakamaro’s poem, the earliest in the *Kokinshû* anthology, had been composed during the Nara period. Most of the *waka* in the *Hyakunin isshu* dated from the Heian period—Muneyuki’s (Plate 4) from before his death in 983CE, and that of Sanjô In (Plate 3) from before his abdication in 1016. This ‘blurring’ of temporal distance must have enhanced the immediate appeal of classical themes for Hokusai’s contemporary audiences, most of whom would have been well versed in classical literature. Removing each composition from a specifically identifiable time also effectively informed a degree of timeless universality consistent with the classic themes and status of the verses themselves (Figure 2). For his illustration on Abe no Nakamaro, Hokusai draws on the same iconographic stock as that of the earlier composition. Here also he situates the principal figure on the Chinese mainland. He employs a similar, if more extensive, figure group, and again the poet’s status is reflected in his fine brocades, and emphasized in the respect indicated by the two figures kowtowing to him. The same devices of pines and moon, (now reflected on the sea), emphasize themes of sorrow and loneliness and isolation from home.

The compositions for Hokusai’s *Hyakunin isshu* are distinguished from the earlier series of Chinese and Japanese poets by the inclusion of the *waka* from the anthology, each inscribed in a square cartouche, over a stylized colour field suggesting layers of autumn mist. As in the earlier composition, Abe no Nakamaro is represented above the sea, standing on a hilltop, gazing longingly across the Eastern Sea towards Japan. Joshua Mostow’s (1996) reading of Nakamaro’s poem emphasizes its expression of melancholic isolation and wistful yearning:

<i>ama no hara</i>	As I gaze out, far
<i>furi-sake mireba</i>	across the plain of heaven,
<i>kasuga naru</i>	ah, at Kasuga,
<i>mikasa no yama ni</i>	from behind Mount Misaka,
<i>ideshi tsuki kamo</i>	it’s the same moon that came out then! (p. 129)



Figure 2. Abe no Nakamaro. From the series *Hyakunin issu uba ga etoki*, by Katsushika Hokusai, c. 1835–1836. Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Printed with permission

In retaining the quietly exclamatory ‘Ah!’ of earlier transliterations (Joly, 1908), Mostow preserves a suggestion of the poignant Heian period sensibility of *mono no aware* pathos (Morris, 1969). The suggestion links Hokusai’s representation quite explicitly with aesthetic sensitivities to autumnal themes of sorrow, melancholy and loneliness of Heian taste. A commentary in an early version of the *Kokinshû* confirms that the poem was composed on the occasion of a banquet held in China on the eve of his attempt to return to Japan:

Long ago, Nakamaro was sent to study in China. After he had had to stay for many years, there was an opportunity for him to take passage home with a returning Japanese embassy. He set out, and a group of Chinese held a farewell party for him on the beach at a place called Mingshou. This poem is said to have been composed after nightfall, when Nakamaro noticed that an extraordinarily beautiful moon had risen. (McCullough, 1985, p. 97)

A sense of occasion is illustrated explicitly in both of Hokusai’s compositions, in the inclusion of distinguished guests, servant and banquet food in the earlier version, and here in the inclusion of Chinese officials and the gaily coloured banners and screens of a festive occasion.

Including the *waka* text invested Hokusai’s representation with an explicit indication of the source of Nakamaro’s sadness. The identification of both Kasuga Shrine and Mount Misaka (Wakakusa-yama, overlooking the old capital of Nara) maintained both nostalgic and spiritual allusions. The nostalgic reference emphasizes his poignant memory of the distant, earlier, time and place. Traditionally, pilgrims had prayed for their safe return at Kasuga Shrine. In comparing the moon he sees from the Chinese shore and that at Kasuga, Nakamaro is making a direct comparison between the moon he observed when praying at Kasuga on the eve of his departure in 717, and the moon he sees now (Mostow, 1996). The pictorial and poetic association emphasizes the wistful nostalgia of the Nakamaro theme.

In composing his *waka*, even during the eighth century, Abe no Nakamaro was able to draw on a catalogue of natural world subjects with established connotations. The associations of the moon and mists with autumn sadness and sorrow or the pine with waiting, longing and love were such conventional allusions. Over one thousand years later, Hokusai was able to draw on the same conventional iconographies as maintained through poetic and painting traditions, and in written commentaries and pictorial illustrations in volumes of the *Kokinshû* and the *Hyakunin isshu*. Mostow (1996), for example, draws on illustrations of Nakamaro from Hishikawa Moronobu, 1678, *Hyakunin Isshu Zôsan Shô*; Moronobu, 1695, (*Fûryû*) *Sugata-e Hyakunin Isshu*; an anonymous artist included in *A Hundred Verses from Old Japan*, by William N. Porter, 1909; and an anonymous 1749 Kyoto artist for Hakagawa Tsuneki’s edition of the *waka* anthology *Man’yô Shû*.

The illustrators drew on a range of Nakamaro-appropriate staples. Unless the poet is represented with no background, the universal convention is for a shoreline setting, overlooking rolling waves on the Eastern Sea between China and Japan. The full moon is generally viewed shining in a patch of clear sky between layers of cloudy autumn mist. Though Hokusai’s *Hyakunin* illustration has the moon in reflection on the calm sea surface, his earlier preparatory drawing follows the conventional sky setting (Morse, 1989). Nakamaro is generally represented wearing elegant decorative brocades of Nara period fashion, together with the rather awkward-looking black *hikitate eboshi* headwear, rather than the decorative *kammuri* style popular amongst the aristocracy. His companions may include other poet-scholar figures, typically bearded, or participants in the farewell celebration. Perforated rocks and rambling, tortured trees, often with creeper covered branches, signified the Chinese location of the poem’s composition. In a number of illustrations, Nakamaro’s outstretched, upturned hand alludes to the perfection of the moment; the whole scene held in his hand.

Though the pictorial constructions and stylistic modes Hokusai developed were remarkable in their day for their innovation and novelty, they still drew on these broadly accepted and understood traditions of representational devices. For poets and artists alike, these themes and subjects of the seasons, nature and human sensitivities to suffering informed the aesthetic construction of ‘...a

largely harmonious universe in which nature ... functions as an elegant and often highly nuanced expression of human thought and emotion' (Shirane, 2012, p. 54). Drawing on classical conventions and melding them with contemporary modes made these enduring subjects and subtly allusive themes accessible to new, and more pragmatic, audiences. Within this professional flux between convention and innovation, Hokusai, like Nakamaro before him, was constructing something of a nostalgic ideal that maintained poetic values of the past within his own Edo world (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Sanjō In. From the series *Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*, by Katsushika Hokusai, c. 1835–1836. Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Published with permission.

Classical and Bucolic Ideals

This mutually activating interface of classical sensibility and poetic/pictorial means was also to galvanise Hokusai's aesthetic synthesis of court themes and rustic idylls in the landscape/genre compositions of this series. Some of his illustrations for the *Hyakunin isshu* contain time-specific references to the classical court of Heian-kyō (shrines, pavilions, ceremonies or celebrations); others are set in 'timeless' bucolic, rural settings far removed from the crowded urbanity of Edo. His *Sanjō In* composition belongs to the former group. Like Nakamaro's, Sanjō's *waka* turns on the *aware* sensibility of the melancholic alignment of suffering (Sanjō experienced chronic ill health), autumn, the passage of night and the moon:

<i>kokoro ni mo</i>	Though it is not what is in my heart,
<i>arade uki yo ni</i>	if in this world of pain
<i>nagaraheba</i>	I should linger, then
<i>kohishikarubeki</i>	no doubt I shall remember fondly
<i>yoha no tsuki kana</i>	the bright moon of this dark night!

(Mostow, 1996, p. 343)

The first three lines refer to Sanjō's abdication at this time, and beyond this, suggest a longing for freedom from the painful shackles of life. The inclusion of the syllables *uki* and *yo*—together 'floating world'—evokes a sense of both his own suffering and of the original Buddhist meaning of *ukiyo* as this 'fleeting, sorrowful world'. Sanjō found his release in the following year.

Hokusai's illustration embraces both the nocturnal setting and the lunar emblem, clearly framing the latter just above and to the right of the centre of the composition. The *kumogata* bands of cloud forms intruding across from upper left and lower right are reminiscent of autumn mists and their allusions of sorrow and mystery. The setting is a Heian Shinto temple ceremony for the Shinto moon god (and brother of the Goddess Amaterasu) Susanō O no Mikoto (Morse, 1989). Coincidentally, Susanō is sometimes credited as the inventor of the 31-syllable *waka* form (Morse, 1989). The ceremony is held in autumn, on the 15th day of the eighth month. This autumnal subject evokes the deeply contemplative pathos of *mono no aware*. Together with its nocturnal context, it suggests something of the depth and mystery of *yugen*. This is reflected in the solemn dispositions of the figures themselves: the attendant priests and noblemen (beyond them to the right) are completely self-absorbed. There is no clear engagement between the figures, and none engage directly with the viewer. This avoidance of engagement is sustained throughout the series of designs of Hokusai's *Hyakunin isshu* series (Figure 4).

Like the *Sanjō In* illustration, Hokusai's composition for *Minamoto no Muneyuki ason* (Plate 4), is a nocturnal scene, but in a mountain landscape setting. Though the hunters and woodsmen are all animated, crowding around the same warming blaze, it seems difficult to locate any genuine sense of companionship or communication. Their words seem lost in the rising waves of smoke, silenced by the muffling layers of snow around them. Rather than fraternity, the picture seems to suggest isolation. This sense of silence and loneliness is reflected in Lord (*ason*) Minamoto no Muneyuki's (d. c. 939) *waka*:



Figure 4. Minamoto no Muneyuki Ason. From the series *Hyakunin isshu uba ga etoki*, by Katsushika Hokusai, c. 1835–1836. Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Printed with permission

yama-zato ha In the mountain village,
fuyu zo sabishisa it is in winter that my loneliness
masarikeru increases most
hito-me mo kusa mo when I think how both have dried up,
karenu to omoheba the grasses and people's visits

(Mostow, 1996, p. 226)

Hokusai's setting and iconography conform to poetic and pictorial conventions for this theme. Snow (*yuki*) is the universal signifier of winter (*fuyu*), often closely linked with mountain settings like Yoshino-yama, Fujiyama, Shirayama or Atagoyama in *utamakura*, scenes of places rich in poetic evocations of the past (Shirane, 2012). Pictorial iconographies for this verse include a secluded mountain village or sometimes a single humble cottage in a mountain valley (Mostow, 1996). These were also the standard settings, in Chinese and Japanese painting traditions, for scenes of scholastic and poetic reclusion. The isolation of hermetic life, introduced explicitly in the second line of the poem, is echoed poetically in the poignant analogue of its final two lines, and pictorially in the chill isolation of Hokusai's mountain scene.

Hokusai's compositional construction for *Minamoto no Muneyuki ason* complements these sensibilities. The frozen movement of his figures informs the sense of stillness and silence. Hokusai has emphasized this frozen moment by the articulation of a carefully wrought spatial tension evident in the complex three-dimensional construction in the exaggerated twist of each figure, and through the web-like interrelations of figures, fire, columns of smoke, branches and architecture right across the pictorial space. This interwoven tracery of diagonal dispositions acts against the stability of the horizontal layers of snow-covered ground, dark foliage behind the figures and the night sky above. The tension is enhanced further by the unusual spatial ambiguities Hokusai has constructed here. The interweaving branches of the trees at upper right, for example, appear alternately in front of, or behind, one another. This spatial ambiguity extends down through the arrangement of branches, trunks and snow-covered eaves to the bottom of the composition. In constructing this network of ambiguities, Hokusai was engaging in a kind of pictorial play that would have delighted his Edo audiences' taste for novelty and pictorial provocation. The effect also enhanced the allusive potentials of the pictorial composition in a way that complements those of the poem, and informs a degree of timelessness shared with so many of his *Hyakunin isshu* designs.

In this work, as in all of his compositions for the series, Hokusai avoids references to specific scenes in the city, or moments in his own time. Employing rural settings removed his subjects from the present, engaging his audiences in an intercourse with pastoral and bucolic themes now so completely removed from their own immediate urban experience that they had acquired something of a timeless quality. Hokusai's is a fondly expressed view on the past. His figures live in ideal harmony with their natural and rural surroundings in pastoral idylls, preoccupied in reflective contemplation of pines, water or moon, gracefully rising wafts of smoke or steam or the delicate pleasures of elegant dance and music. Even where they focus on the Spartan conditions of manual labourers, farmers, woodsmen, fisher folk or travellers, these are quiet, ideal worlds, far removed from the pragmatics of everyday life in the bustling mercantile centre of Edo. The distance, together with the idealism of his portrayals, generates a profound sense of nostalgia that complements the parallel idealism and timeless, universal themes of the *Hyakunin waka* of a thousand years before.

A Poetics of Means: Maintaining Conventional Practices of the Past

The activating force of these sensibilities was dependent on their intimate synthesis of conventional precedents of both verse and painting traditions. Both poets and artists forged their profession within clearly defined conventional parameters. The principal poetic form of the great anthologies was the 31-syllable *waka*, or *tanka*, 'short poem' format of five lines, arranged in a sequence of five,

seven, five, seven and seven syllables. This structure suited the closely melded synthesis of a small range of motifs (moon, snow and pine) and sensibilities (*aware* loneliness or sorrow, or in love poems *yôen* romantic ethereal beauty (McMillan, 2008)) in highly allusive combinations. Within these constraints, poets developed delicately wrought variations on classical subjects, themes and wordplays.

Typically, a *waka* might be conceived and constructed in response to, and as a subtle variation on, an earlier or contemporary verse.

Donald Keene, for example, explains how, while arranged within the same conventional structures of *waka* verse, a composition by the court poet Lady Sagami (998-before 1061) could turn on the same sentiments, word constructions and subjects as a near contemporary poem by Fujiwara no Michimune (d. 1084) (Keene, 1956, pp. 24–25). Both poets build through the same word images of perennial emblems of *aware* pathos, the vulnerable under leaves of lespedezas, the arrival of autumn, and the cold autumn winds blowing across the moor. They differ only in their selections of two plaintive motifs: in Michimune's verse, of crying quail, and in Sagami's, of the crying of young deer. Sagami has added one further delicate refinement, an enduring emblem of the crystal beauty, but ephemeral fragility, of the gathering dew in the chill morning air. As Keene notes, the two poems are essentially the same, in their structure and in their suggestiveness around complementary sentiments and motifs. They are distinguished only by the inflections of elegant rephrasings, shaped by the subtly differing sensibilities of their individual composers.

Conforming to the same structural modes ensured the 'serial unity' (McMillan, 2008, p. xxx) or maintenance of stylistic consistency over time, and informed the compositions of the Heian *waka* poets with a degree of elegance, economy and restraint. Building from common sensitivities, using complementary language and emblems, maintained a consistent aesthetic sensibility. In a similar way, Hokusai's dependence on conventional formal means informed the structural cohesion of his designs and the naturalistic credibility of their landscape and genre views. A balance between informational sufficiency, economy (especially in comparison to later Edo pictorial extravagance) and restraint generated a degree of elegance commensurate with the poetic forms. The small *ôban* (26.5x39 cm) print format lent the pictorial medium an intimacy consistent with that of the *waka* verse form.

Though Hokusai's diverse training endowed him access to a wide variety of conventional modes, the compositions of the *Hyakunin isshu* draw most heavily on both Chinese precedents and *Yamato-e*, or distinctively Japanese modes of representation, of the classical Heian traditions of the poets. Chinese-style 'perspective' conventions included spatial arrangements of 'stacked' strata of landscape motifs. Hokusai combined these interlocking constructions of diagonally alternating forms and spaces with the asymmetrical 'corner-directed' principles of *shin* 'formal' painting. He employed the full diversity of Chinese-style mark-making and linear modes (Bowie, 1952) in all their descriptive and allusive varieties to construct pictorial surfaces visually consistent with the elegant calligraphies of the poems. The empirical naturalism of the *Hyakunin isshu* compositions conforms to Chinese injunctions to observation from nature, and controlled mastery or 'freshness' (*sheng*) of skills promoted by painter-scholars like Ku Ning-yüan (Hua Yin; fl. 1780; Lin, 1967) or restraint and the avoidance of vulgarity advocated by Shen Tsung Tien (Chieh-chou; Hsu' eh Hua P'ien; fl. 1781; Lin, 1967).

By Hokusai's time, these Chinese-sourced modes had been thoroughly assimilated into the painting styles of *Yamato-e* ('national', or distinctively Japanese pictures) and later *nanga* ('Southern-style', i.e. Chinese), Tosa and Kanô school paintings. *Yamato-e* models informed Hokusai's adoption of isometric orthogonal projections for architectural constructions, as in the architectural forms of the earlier Nakamaro scene, and the internal architectural space in the *Sanjô In* composition. These solid, clearly defined volumes provide a stable pictorial structure, and a measure for the interpretations of scale and interaction in genre scenes. In *Sanjô In*, Hokusai has also employed the *fukinuki yatai* 'roof-blown-away' convention of viewing the architectural construction from above,

as though the roof and sometimes a wall were removed, to provide a clear view on the figural interaction within. For this composition, Hokusai also employs the *Yamato-e* convention of flat, stylized cloud bands, or *kumogata*, to frame the architectural and figure construction between intrusions of the cloud-like bands from left above and from the right below. The device coincidentally pushes the pictorial scene back, separating it from the viewer's world, emphasizing its situation in an earlier era.

Hokusai's landscapes in this series are, often broadly conceived, expansive. The figures that populate them are necessarily small, yet Hokusai was able to animate them, informing a lively sense of activity in his rural genre scenes. The old-school *hikime kagibana* nose and eyes convention suited Hokusai well here. It informed a singular degree of descriptive vitality in tiny facial constructions, and it sat well beside the rich descriptive variety of Kano School brush stroke Hokusai applied to a diversity of linear, textural and dynamic effects. These effects were often contained within the rich and precise contours of *Yamato-e* painting. They were also combined with the softer definition of edges of tonal or colour surface in the *mokkotsu* or 'boneless' style (i.e. without linear contour) of the Japanese Tosa school painters. The Tosa painters had also maintained the polychrome style of *Yamato-e*. Again, Hokusai adopted the colourful diversity to enliven his pictorial surfaces, and to invest them with a credible naturalism consistent with *Yamato-e* convention and with the ways people could view the landscape and its people themselves. Importantly, and again consistent with *Yamato-e* precedents, however, idealised they may be, each pictorial subject of the *Hyakunin isshu* scenes is distinctly Japanese in focus, if not (in the case of the Nakamaro work) in setting.

In these works, and in his other mature works, Hokusai was not constrained to work within these conventional modes; he chose them to suit his purpose. Elsewhere in his oeuvre, he employed a rich range of other contemporary modes, including the perspectival representational devices of the Western painters evident in some scenes in this series. The taut, twisting Katsukawa School single-figure types of Hokusai's teacher Shunshō provide models for the sturdy hunters of *Minamoto no Muneyuki ason*. The rising columns of smoke above them are relieved by the stylized rhythmic linear decoration of Rinpa school origin. In both of the Nakamaro compositions, a western-style diminution of scale generates the deep spatial projection that tangibly emphasizes Nakamaro's impossible distance from his home. Most importantly, however, these other conventions complement the effectiveness with which the fundamental conventional modes of Chinese and *Yamato-e* derivation inform the convincing realism, structural coherence and pictorial credibility of Hokusai's inventive constructions around themes from the past.

What is remarkable about Hokusai's *Hyakunin isshu* series is the seamless synthesis of such diverse sources and conventional means, and the cohesive way in which he melds these with the classical poetic tropes of his sources. Hokusai's pictorial constructions balance convincing representations of human and natural world subjects with elusive *aware*-infused poetic tropes and literary themes from a thousand years before. They closely complement the intense visuality of the verses themselves (McMillan, 2008). Hokusai's cohesive crystallisation of the conventional economies of poetic means and aesthetic sensibilities with the expansive pictorial methods at his own disposal generated a coherent sequence of poetically charged pictorial compositions accessible by the entirely new middle-class audiences of the later Edo period.

Conclusion

In engaging in this pictorial project, Hokusai was motivated by *aware* sensibilities of the poetic classics that had been sustained for almost one thousand years. These sensibilities found expression in poetic and pictorial appreciations of nature, realised in *utamakura*, poetically significant landscape settings (mountains, caves, rocks and waterways, in Shinto traditions the locus of spiritually significant phenomena), or motifs rich in conventional associations—the moon, pine trees, bamboo or willow (sorrow, longevity and integrity, strength and flexibility and resilience,

respectively). Many made explicit reference to sites of special cultural and spiritual significance—Mount Misaka, Kasuga Shrine or the Heian-kyô Fujiwara Court. Hokusai's compositions embraced aesthetic virtues of *aware*, humility and 'symbolic poverty' (Brown, 1997, p. 73) resonating sensibilities favoured in *chanoyu* (the way of tea) and craft traditions, and consistent with Chinese injunctions to humility, simplicity and the 'avoidance of vulgarity' of Shen Tsung Tien (Lin, 1967, pp. 201–202). These informed the wholesome simplicity of Hokusai's motifs of rural life, honest manual labour, simple *sôan*-style rustic dwellings or themes of scholarly retreat or aesthetic reclusion (Brown, 1997). The nostalgic significance of these subjects, themes and sensibilities found their most appropriate expression in Hokusai's adoption of formal conventions of *Yamato-e* and Chinese-sourced traditions.

Hokusai's engagements of *aware* were framed through nostalgic views on the past; his Heian themes and landscape/genre compositions construct poetically charged and idealised views on times, themes and habits that lay beyond the immediate experience of his Edo audiences. In sustaining these themes, Hokusai became an active agent in the maintenance of aesthetic habits of cultural ('collective' and 'social') memory, the amalgamation of social, material and cognitive memories through which individuals and communities mediate the relations between their present experiences and those of the past (Erlil, 2008). Mnemotechnical devices of places, objects, behaviours, ideologies, physical or imaginative sites—*loci memoriae*, or *lieux de me'moire*—provided the means through which significant cultural memory could be sustained (Boer, 2008); *aware* sensibility provided its motivating impetus. In Heian Japan, the poetic anthologies themselves had provided effective vehicles for this function. These metaphorical 'media of memory' (Assmann, 2011) had found poetic expression in the motif of a 'floating bridge of dreams' (*yume no ukihashi*) or as 'pictures of the heart' (Mostow, 1996). Haruo Shirane adopts the phrase 'traces of dreams' to describe the fugitive elegance of these aesthetic sites in his study of the haiku poetics of Matsuo Bashô (1644–1694). In Hokusai's day, the *utamakura* poetic landscape topography (Shirane, 1998) provided geographical sites; poetry clubs and their *za* gatherings or *uta-awase* poetry contests offered social sites; *waka*, *kyôka* 'crazy verse', haiku and *ukiyo-e* provided literary and pictorial aesthetic loci for the mediation of experiences of *aware*.

Underpinning the late reflective projects informing Hokusai's engagements with the poetic, bucolic, ephemeral, melancholic or nostalgic lay this motivating but elusive sensibility of *mono no aware*. Its pervasive presence infected his projects more profoundly than any contractual obligation. In his illustrations for *Abe no Nakamaro* or *Sanjô In*, he was constructing poetically charged aesthetic sites of cultural significance in refined pictorial form, drawing selectively from precedents, means and sensibilities of the past. He was building on the graphic stock of cultural and aesthetic memory through which Heian, Kamakura, Muromachi or Momoyama audiences had made sense of and maintained the histories, manners, and above all, the poetic sensibilities through which they maintained their elegant tastes and sense of social and aesthetic identity. Hokusai's was a carefully contrived vision, an *aware*-infused nostalgic and pastoral idyll of an ideal past. Projects like the *Hyakunin isshu* could maintain these culturally significant memories in ways that revived this poignant sensibility anew for the audiences of his own world.

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