

## The unread critic. Higuchi Ichiyō's diaries as *bungei hyōron*

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### Abstract

The diaries of Higuchi Ichiyō (1872–1896) are usually seen as examples of autobiographic writing, whereas her critical attitude is seldom considered. I argue that some parts of her *nikki* can be seen as criticism even if they do not resemble canonical forms of this kind of writing. As early as 1893, for instance, Ichiyō commented on *shintai* questioning the presumed 'modernity' of the most recent stylistic trends, and close reading of her notes reveals her deep knowledge of Japan's literature. These sections signal her literary consciousness at a very specific time: the years between 1893 and 1894, when, according to the dominant scholarship, her narrative production was still heavily dependent on previous models, thus not yet mature, a reading that my contribution will try to challenge. Further, her relationship with the contemporary *bundan*, as well as her acquaintance with Kagawa Kageki's thought will be considered, in order to assess her critical attitude against the backdrop of both her time and her literary education.

### Introduction

Often regarded as a *trait d'union* between modern women's writing and the Heian *nikki* 日記 tradition, the diaries of Higuchi Ichiyō 樋口一葉 (1872–1896) are generally considered from the perspective of autobiographism and the inherently biased standpoint of *joryū bungaku* 女流文学. In a bid to distance Ichiyō's journal writing at least in part from this general discourse, in what follows I shall focus on excerpts dealing with the literary styles and trends of her time where she displays the acumen of a veritable critic. My premise is that Ichiyō's diaries are a corpus of complex and diverse texts that, despite having been amply appraised in the context of autobiographism and intertextuality, have received scarce attention in terms of the author's ability as a critic. I argue that the excerpts mentioned above can be seen as a critique – albeit, sometimes, in a sort of veiled form – adding a further, supposedly 'private' dimension (perhaps even gendered – after all, as Bunker and Huff (1996: 20) remind us, "women's diaries [...] posit a questioning of and an emphasis on the social circumstances of the writer"), to both Meiji literary criticism and Ichiyō's studies.

If we look at Ichiyō's diaries as a mixture of genres, styles, themes, and motifs, we implicitly set ourselves the challenge of considering these terms in a way that goes beyond their usual meaning. In particular, we may want to address the question of what can be done

with a diary, on the one hand, and to gauge to what extent a text can exceed the pre-set boundaries of canonical *bungei hyōron* 文芸評論, on the other. Is a presumed private, albeit sometimes overtly shared, text excluded altogether from the realm of criticism, and if so, why? We expect criticism to be influential, provoking, constructive, damaging – in a word: relational. Criticism engages texts and authors and is expected to cause reactions, but what happens when it is not or it cannot be anything but private? These questions will guide the discussion below.

As early as 1893, Ichiyō commented on the relatively new poetic style known as *shintai* 新体 and challenged the presumed ‘modernity’ of the most recent trends, displaying a deep knowledge of the situation in the Japan of her day. Less organised than canonical *bungei hyōron*, these sections help gauge the extent of the author's literary awareness at a time when, according to the dominant scholarship,<sup>1</sup> her narrative production was still heavily dependent on previous models, thus not yet sufficiently mature; a line of thinking that analysis may eventually help to dismiss.

## 1 Literature review: from autobiography to a text on its own

Wada Yoshie's influential work on Ichiyō's diaries surely paved the way for further theory and research on this part of her output. Pointing out the decisive influence of Heian *nikki* literature, he considered *Ichiyō nikki* as a *watakushi shōsetsu* 私小説 (Wada 1960: 139; Wada 1956: 55), a reading that Keene endorsed in his 1995 contribution, where he stressed the fictional character of a work best described as an autobiographical novel (Keene 1995: 284–303). Gamō Yoshirō (1995: 121–122) questioned, at least in part, the “*watakushi-shōsetsu* theory” observing that the combination of narrative (*monogatari* 物語) and records (*kiroku* 記録) forming the bulk of her diaries<sup>2</sup> should be rather considered as an attempt at image formulation of her own self in the way that was most congenial to her. Noguchi Seki displayed a similar approach, suggesting that, in her diaries, Ichiyō tried to keep track of her transformation from being the poor, helpless “Natsuko” to the writer “Ichiyō”, as evidence of her personal and artistic growth. Noguchi, however, speculated that this form of self-writing was not intended for an external audience but for Ichiyō herself, so that, by rereading it from time to time, she could keep in touch with her past self and measure her evolution, seeing for herself how far she had grown (Noguchi 1976: 8). Seki Ryōichi, and Kan Satoko with Yamada Yūsaku hold positions that seem consonant with Noguchi's to some extent, as they consider *Ichiyō nikki* a work of self-idealisation (with Ichiyō displaying an idealised version of herself) and self-figuration (Seki 1970: 201; Kan/Yamada 2004: 19).

<sup>1</sup> Cf. MAEDA 1979: 180, DANLY 1981: 79, and KEENE 1998: 174.

<sup>2</sup> Here Gamō draws on SEKI 1970 although later on he displays a different orientation.

Building on these premises, Katarzyna Sonnenberg has more recently distinguished three fundamental functions of Ichiyō's diaries within the broader context of her literature. First of all, *Ichiyō nikki* represent a biographical source, useful for gathering information on Higuchi Ichiyō's life; secondly, the diaries are used as a paratext, a suitable resource for reading and analysing her stories; thirdly, *Ichiyō nikki* is a text on its own terms, of interest as it activates “tensions or oppositions [...] between the private and the public characters of the text, between its truthfulness and fictitiousness” (Sonnenberg 2011: 81). Quite understandably, the most popular tendencies among scholars are the first two, i.e. the biographical and the intertextual, since, as Sonnenberg has noticed elsewhere: “[i]f the diaries of Higuchi Ichiyō may encourage the critics to read them as an example of a fictionalized diary (or perhaps an I-novel, as Wada suggested), the allusiveness of her short stories, on the other hand, may promote the intertextual reading” (Sonnenberg 2010: 131).

This third function, that of an independent text, appears particularly fascinating as it calls into question a number of problems, stressing how, for instance, throughout her diaries Higuchi Ichiyō seems concerned about those who will read the text, claiming that her diary is not meant to be seen, yet inviting the reader into it. This clarifies two main points about *Ichiyō nikki* that will be crucial to the discussion to hand: first of all, the author's concern about being read reminds us of some Heian precedents, namely Sei Shōnagon 清少納言,<sup>3</sup> who stressed the private nature of *Makura no sōshi* 枕草子 (*The Pillow Book*; after 990) while acknowledging that her work was anything but private,<sup>4</sup> an attitude that, however, has also been considered a legacy of a centrepiece of Kamakura-period literature such as Yoshida Kenkō's 吉田兼好 (1283–1350) *Tsurezuregusa* 徒然草 (*Essays in Idleness*; 1330)<sup>5</sup>; and, even

<sup>3</sup> “I wrote these notes at home, when I had a good deal of time to myself and thought no one would notice what I was doing. Everything that I have seen and felt is included. Since much of it might appear malicious and even harmful to other people, I was careful to keep my book hidden. But now it has become public, which is the last thing I expected. [...] I was sure that when people saw my book they would say, ‘It's even worse than I expected. Now one can really tell what she is like.’ After all, it is written entirely for my amusement and I put things down exactly as they came to me. How could my casual jottings bear comparison with the many impressive books that exist in our time? [...]” (MORRIS 1982: 263–264).

<sup>4</sup> After all, as Joshua Mostow reminds us “it is a thoroughly modern prejudice that sees women's nikki of this period as solely ‘confessional’ and apolitical. In fact, many of the early instances of this genre were commissioned by men with a political purpose in mind” (MOSTOW 2004: 1).

<sup>5</sup> SUZUKI Jun (2003: 40) refers to section 19 of Kenkō's work, “Changing of the Seasons”, where he admits that little is left to be written about the beauty of the four seasons after Heian court literature but then explains his reasons for engaging in this activity anyway: “[...] I make no pretense of trying to avoid saying the same things again. If I fail to say what lies on my mind it gives me a feeling of flatulence; I shall therefore give my brush free rein. Mine is a foolish diversion, but these pages are meant to be torn up, and no one is likely to see them” (SHIRANE 2007: 827, trans. by Donald Keene). SUZUKI refers, in particular, to a section of *Wakaba kage* [The Shadow of the Young Leaves; 1891], the journal Wada Yoshie considers having been heavily influenced by *Tsurezuregusa* (WADA 1956: 55).

more importantly, her awareness of the position she held (or would soon hold) within the literary world: why else should someone be interested in reading her notes if not for the fact that she was (or would soon be) a writer, part of the *bundan* 文壇 of her time?<sup>6</sup>

This literary awareness is indeed the premise of my argument. Fascinating as it may be, the topic of autobiographism is beyond the scope of this article. The conflation of Higuchi Ichiyō's persona with the author of her diaries and the protagonists of her short stories is a vast and complex subject investigated for decades, often leading to significant re-examinations and re-discussions of this important writer. Wada's work pursues a typical *sakkaron* 作家論 (author studies) methodology that outlines a theory of *Ichiyō nikki* while positioning it firmly within her biography – and vice versa: Ichiyō's life itself seems to be at the core of a research that aims to bring together the author's existence, her fiction writing, and her diaries and letters into a coherent framework. While the utility of such an effort is undeniable, close reading of Ichiyō's diaries (and Wada's work itself), suggests that one should not downplay the point that the text, as we know it, is the result of a complex editing process and that it is in fact a composite work whose timeline has been fixed posthumously. In other words, the linearity of the text should not be considered unbreakable, nor should the evidence of its adherence to Ichiyō's life and artistic development be deemed unquestionable. Notwithstanding the effectiveness of Wada's approach in the context of his own research – the very fact that he likens *Ichiyō nikki* to *watakushi shōsetsu* bolsters his argument that the diaries should be read as fiction, as well as the notion that the Heian *nikki bungaku* 日記文学 was a sort of ancestor to the I-novel – the diversity of the text permits a number of alternative approaches.<sup>7</sup> In the 1970s, Yamane Kenkichi examined the diaries, suggesting new possible categorisations regarding the genre of each single piece of text (Yamane 1974: 107), but although this kind of approach brings forth a new outlook on *Ichiyō nikki*, analysis of the topics – recent events such as the Sino-Japanese War, her own personal hardships, and her relationship with the Haginoya 萩の舎 and Nakarai Tōsui 半井桃水 (1861–1926) – reveals his substantial adherence to previous scholarship. Certainly, Noguchi Seki

<sup>6</sup> In this regard it is worth noticing, as observed by ŌHATA, that from the spring of 1895, when her fame as a novelist began to draw the literary world's attention to her, her diary became increasingly a record of the time spent with her colleagues rather than of her inner emotions and intimate thoughts, focusing on her literary persona, on “the writer Ichiyō” rather than the woman Natsu (ŌHATA 2003: 158–159).

<sup>7</sup> A particularly fascinating one is KANAI Keiko's, whose understanding of *Ichiyō nikki* eschews the notion of diary writing as a merely self-referential activity and encourages the reader to consider it an act of both attunement with, and conceptual elaboration of the world. KANAI rejects temporal linearity also on the basis that the first ‘modern’ (= European-style) diary, with entries arranged by date, has been published in book format in Japan only in 1895, years after Ichiyō began to write her *nikki*. Interestingly, it was *Kaichū nikki* 懐中日記 [Pocket Diary], the diary of Ōhashi Sahei 大橋佐平 (1836–1901), founder of the publishing house Hakubunkan 博文館 and Ōhashi Otowa's 大橋乙羽 (1869–1901) father-in-law (KANAI 1995: 133–134).

also stressed the diversity of the texts coming under the umbrella definition of *Ichiyō nikki*, ascribing some of them to genres, such as the *kashū* 歌集 (collection of poems), which do not necessarily entail, or at least not exclusively, the autobiographical perspective (Noguchi 1966).

Alongside Wada's seminal work and the rich literature I have already touched upon, another contribution worth mentioning is Molly des Jardin's dissertation, which tackles the demanding and fascinating issue of the construction of a literary persona through the editing of *zenshū* 全集 (collected writings) and *senshū* 選集 (selected writings). Des Jardin, among others, stresses the important role played by Ōhashi Otowa, the editor of the first *zenshū* of 1897, and Kōda Rohan 幸田露伴 (1867–1947), who edited the 1912 *zenshū* (the first one that included her diaries), in fashioning 'Higuchi Ichiyō' in the way we have known her for more than a century (Des Jardin 2012: 162–167). Another decisive actor in the establishment of Ichiyō's persona was her sister Kuniko 邦子, who retrieved and edited the diaries. Apart from the somewhat hagiographic connotations evoked in her approach to the text, Kuniko's work is of interest to us also because it brings up the question of abridgement: how, for instance, did she intervene on the sections of Ichiyō's diaries dealing with the work of other writers? Did she remove or modify any content that might irritate the *bundan* in any way? These are very difficult questions to answer as far as it is almost impossible today to imagine the text without Kuniko's interventions.<sup>8</sup> For the moment, however, what I set out to examine is the way Ichiyō interacts with the literary world from the pages of her diaries. Kuniko sought to construct an image of her sister as a writer fully integrated in the *bundan* of her time.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Ichiyō devoted part of her notes to reflections on literature and writing that appear as a forcible reminder of more organised and canonical literary criticism.

Looking at *Ichiyō nikki* outside the sphere of autobiographism or paratextualism is a necessary step in deepening our understanding of this important author. It goes without saying that Ichiyō's thoughts on writing and literature can be considered an additional

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<sup>8</sup> Kuniko's role in the process of publishing of *Ichiyō nikki* is thoroughly explained in Wada's work, where her relationship with Baba Kochō 馬場孤蝶 (1869–1940), Saitō Ryokuu 齋藤緑雨 (1868–1904), Rohan and Mori Ōgai 森鷗外 (1862–1922) is also clarified (WADA 1956: 6–14). Accordingly, Kuniko told Baba in 1903 that she wanted to have the diaries published as soon as possible, convinced as she was that the enterprise would be successful. Baba would discuss Kuniko's suggestion with Ōgai and Rohan, who were not entirely convinced, neither would Togawa Shūkotsu 戸川秋骨 (1871–1939) and Shimazaki Tōson 島崎藤村 (1872–1943) agree in the first instance. After some mediation and further discussion, however, the diaries were edited, a timeline was set, and even *fuseji* 伏せ字 (redaction marks used to conceal content) were added with a view to publication. See also ODAGIRI 1984: 223–231.

<sup>9</sup> Kuniko was hardly the only one concerned about this. For instance, when he edited the first official anthology of Ichiyō's works, Otowa highlighted her fellow authors' commitment to the enterprise entrusting it with a very specific purpose, as DES JARDIN argues: "In emphasizing the crucial role of these writers in compiling the anthology, Otowa associates both Ichiyō herself and this specific project with their authority" (DES JARDIN 2007: 3).

element in the analysis of her works, following the logic that subordinates her diaries to her narrative fiction. But it should be borne in mind that her diary writing accounts for the major part of her literary output and has all it takes to be considered a corpus of texts in its own right. While the tendency to liken it solely to Heian *nikki bungaku* can now be considered outdated,<sup>10</sup> the third function envisioned by Sonnenberg, the idea of *Ichiyō nikki* as a text on its own terms, demands further investigation even in directions that until now have only received cursory treatment, if any at all.

## 2 On the “new style”, metre, and the importance of the classics

There is a long entry in *Chiri no naka* 塵之中 [Amid the Dust; 1893–1894], dated 1 December 1893, where Ichiyō comments on *shintai* 新体詩. Other sections of her diaries tell us that, earlier that year, she had challenged herself to produce this kind of composition:

*Ame wa haretari, nokiba no wakaba midorisuzushiku / hito wa matsu ni yoshinashi  
kansō no naka / tada naeuri no koe hinabitaru o kikite / sara ni yomitsuzuku Tō shisen.*

The rain stopped, green and fresh new leaves rise above the eaves / Pointless it is to wait for someone in my house quiet / I hear the rustic voice of the seedling vendor / and delve into reading a collection of Tang poems.<sup>11</sup>

This poem, modelled after Ōwada Takeki's 大和田建樹 (1857–1910) song *Wakaba no kage* 若葉の陰 [The Shadow of the Young Leaves; 1893], is an example of her *shintai* writing and appears very different from the *waka* 和歌 she used to compose. The metrical scheme does not follow the typical 5-7-5 pattern, and some words and images are also unusual; *wago* 和語 and *kango* 漢語 appear together in a poem that has little in common with the corpus forming the cornerstone of Ichiyō's education.

In the 1 December entry, however, she discusses *shintai* at length, and her opinion is not entirely positive. She is commenting on Baba Kochō's poem *Sakawagawa* 酒匂川 [The Sakawa River; 1893], published in the November issue of *Bungakukai* 文學界, [Literary World] and observes that poems in the ‘new style’ (*shintai*) tend to reject traditional topics, now deemed inappropriate to the cultural climate of the time. Accordingly, most poets of the younger generations follow these trends, seeking the reader's approval but ultimately appearing unauthentic and pretentious. Ichiyō agrees that in modern times one should no

<sup>10</sup> Drawing on SUZUKI T. (2001: 72–79), the above-mentioned Molly DES JARDIN has suggested that the very decision to include the diaries in the *zenshū* edited by Rohan might have been motivated by the desire to emphasise Ichiyō's connection with *kana* 仮名 literature at a time when Heian women's writing was seen as a precursor of the modern novel (DES JARDIN 2012: 188).

<sup>11</sup> *Higuchi Ichiyō Zenshū* (hereafter HIZ) 3a: 270 (雨ははれたり、軒ばの若葉ミどりすゝしく 人ハまつによしなし閑窓の中 たゝ苗うりの聲ひなびたるをきゝて 更によみつゞく唐詩選).

longer adhere to the old rules of *tanka* 短歌 and wishes she could grasp the logic of change in order to describe “sky and earth, nature's mysteries and the variety of human experience”. But she does not feel ready, and she does not seem to believe that anyone else is either. What she does believe, on the other hand, is that traditional poetry is better able to penetrate the human heart, while *shintai* cannot plumb the depths of human nature and is not yet mature enough to adapt itself to a time of transition like the one they are experiencing. She concludes that *fūryū* 風流 is still essential to poetry and that the imperative of *zoku* 俗, considered here mainly as realism, should not lead poets to cast aside old rhythmic patterns (HIZ 3a: 347–348).

This period of Japanese literary history has been defined by Yamamoto Masahide as an “exploratory phase in the modern style of writing” (Yamamoto 1971: 12–18). Only few years before Ichiyō's observations, Yamada Bimyō 山田美妙 (1868–1910) published *Nihon inbun ron* 日本韻文論 [On Japanese Poetry; 1890], with much emphasis placed on metre as the most distinctive quality of poetry. With her comments, Ichiyō unknowingly (at least in part) situates herself in the context of the *ronsō* 論争 on style and language that began in the 1880s and intensified in the 1890s, with Shimamura Hōgetsu 島村抱月 (1871–1918) and Takayama Chogyū 高山樗牛 (1871–1902) as protagonists. It was the subject of a critical debate originally inspired by the recent translations of Western poetry, and in particular *Shintaishishō* 新体詩抄 [A Selection of Poetry in the New Style; 1882].<sup>12</sup> Obviously, Ichiyō did not take part in this debate officially, as her comments on the topic were private. Nonetheless, she touched upon the very issues that Hōgetsu and Chogyū would discuss years later, such as metre and vernacular language, showing that her concerns were not limited to her own poetic writing but had a more universal dimension and, as a matter of fact, were shared or would soon be shared by canonical authors of literary criticism.

<sup>12</sup> On this debate, see TOMASI 2007: 113–122. The most salient phases can be summarised as follows. In *Wagakuni shōrai no shikei to Toyama hakushi no shintashi* 我邦将来の詩形と外山博士の新体詩 [Dr. Toyama's Shintaishi and the Future Form of Our Poetry; 1895] Takayama Chogyū claimed the need for a new style, whereas in *Shintaishi no katachi ni tsuite* 新体詩の形について [On the Form of the Shintaishi; 1895] Shimamura Hōgetsu stressed the importance of metre, though not of a specific one; in 1896, an essay entitled *Shintaishi no kyō kono goro* 新体詩のけふこのごろ [The Present State of Poetry in the New Style; 1896] appeared (probably written by Chogyū), arguing that the excessively mediating presence of sophisticated language compromised the immediacy of aesthetic experience. Only a month later, Hōgetsu wrote for *Waseda bungaku* 早稲田文学 [Waseda Literature] the well-known essay *Mōrōtai to wa nan zo ya* 朦朧体とは何ぞや [What is the Elusive Style?; 1897], where he claimed that the distinction between *ga* 雅 and *zoku* 俗, according to which the former was poetic whereas the latter was unpoetic, should be dismissed; it was the poet's task to make ordinary language poetic. Years later, back from a sojourn in Europe, he wrote *Isseki bunwa* 一夕文話 [One Night's Conversation; 1906], in which he reasserted the previous idea, claiming that the creation of a truly modern Japanese poetry demanded that people stopped considering the vernacular inelegant: it could now become the language of poetry, as it was in England.

Little more than one year after her observations on *shintai*, Ichiyō resumes the discourse on poetry, this time with special reference to old models and new motifs. In a note dated 1 February 1895, she attributes to the classics the dignity she believes they deserve even at a time when, as we have seen, it was thought imperative to adopt a new style. Whereas, in the note from *Chiri no naka*, she had focused on metre and words, in the 1895 entry she appears especially concerned with topics. Although she agrees with the general notion that modern-day poetry must depict the modern world,<sup>13</sup> she does not endorse the idea that age-old topics such as flowers and other natural elements are no longer suited to representing the new reality. She observes that, even though metres and styles may change, the inherent transience of these natural elements makes them the most appropriate choice for producing poetry that will last forever, like classics such as *Genji monogatari* 源氏物語 (*Tale of Genji*; early XI century) did (HIZ 3b: 765–766). Assuming that Ichiyō was completely unaware of the debate revolving around the reform of poetry, Keene is somewhat dismissive of her attitude towards poetic composition, stating that “For all her doubts, she had apparently reached the conclusion that although the spirit of the new age could best be expressed in the poetry in the new style (*shintai*), the beauties of nature and the seasons were still the proper business of tanka” (Keene 1998: 176). I do not share this view precisely because I consider Ichiyō's attachment to age-old topics a position firmly rooted in her belief that the classics were an effective tool for the expression of modern concerns. Further, given her acquaintance with many influential writers of the time and her desire to emerge as a writer herself, she was probably well aware of the major debates going on at the time.<sup>14</sup> As Timothy Van Compernelle has argued, Ichiyō's commitment to Japan's literary heritage was anything but an indulgence in nostalgia: according to her approach to literature, the classics should be seen as a way to “engage [...], understand [...], confront [...] and critique modernity” (Van Compernelle 2006: 2). Her relationship with classic literature was intimate and her knowledge of the classics deep-seated, which also explains why the teaching style she adopted in her lectures on *Genji monogatari* in 1895, when she was only twenty-three years old, seemed so natural and easy for the audience to follow, as emerges from the recollections of Togawa Zanka's 戸川殘花 (1856–1924) daughter Tatsu たつ (Odagiri 1976: 1).

It is particularly interesting that, between 1893 and 1895, Higuchi Ichiyō seems to be carrying on a prolonged reflection on poetic renewal, as these were the years of the crucial

<sup>13</sup> As INOUE Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎 (1855–1944) clearly states in an essay included in *Shintaishishō*: “Poetry written in the Meiji era ought to be poetry of the Meiji era. It should not be old poetry” (TOYAMA et al. 1884: 19–20).

<sup>14</sup> And it is perhaps noteworthy that, as KŌRA Rumiko has suggested, Ichiyō had also very precise ideas about politics, that she was urged to express as ambiguously as possible by both NAKAJIMA Utako 中島歌子 (1845–1903) and NAKARAI Tōsui at the beginning of her career (KŌRA 2013: 50–55). Finally, it has been demonstrated that she was a regular reader of the major literary journals of the time such as *Jogaku zasshi* 女学雑誌 [Women's Education Magazine], *Waseda bungaku* and, obviously, *Bungakukai* (TAKITŌ 1990: 40).

transition from *Yuki no hi* 雪の日 (*A Snowy Day*; 1893) through *Ōtsugomori* 大つごもり (*On the Last Day of the Year*; 1894), *Nigorie* にごりえ (*Troubled Waters*; 1895) and the other works that, according to Maeda Ai (1979: 180), mark her emancipation from the classics, and thus the accomplishment of her artistic growth. The years between 1893 and 1895, when the two entries were written, separate *Yuki no hi*, generally considered too heavily charged with intertextual references, from *Ōtsugomori*, Ichiyō's 'coming-of-age' novella, where she places reality, rather than classical literature, at the very centre of her horizon and her style of writing (Matsuura 2014: 508). But the considerations she recorded in her diaries show that her alleged dependence on previous models was anything but unconscious and, putting aside the question of how, and whether, it really hampered her development, it can be considered symptomatic of her literary awareness.

### 3 Higuchi Ichiyō and Kagawa Kageki<sup>15</sup>

The 1 December entry on *shintai*, mentioned above, clarifies Ichiyō's opinion about modern poetry:

There is refined elegance in the secular world, and there is great vulgarity in refined elegance. But new-style poetry appears vulgar and *waka* seems elegant not only because of tradition. Modern poetry is inferior because it does not enter into the human heart or sing its truths; it does not match the broad-minded thoughts of the present era. Even if the words are vulgar, a poem's melody will naturally have dignity as long as there is elegance at its heart (Ōmori 2006: 144).

This excerpt is a further example of her rapport with classical literature, discussed in the previous section, while in what follows I shall examine Ichiyō's attitude as a reader of criticism, a topic that demands particular attention to the emphasis she places on what Ōmori translated as "melody" (*shirabe* 調).

Her choice of the term *shirabe*, that may also be rendered as 'rhythm' or 'tuning', indicates Ichiyō's familiarity with the work of Kagawa Kageki 香川景樹 (1768–1843), late Tokugawa poet and founder of the Keien school of poetry or Keien-ha 桂園派, whose influence was still considerable in the first decades of the Meiji period; he was known above all as an admirer of Ki no Tsurayuki 紀貫之 (872–945) and for his work on the *Kokin wakashū* 古今和歌集 (*A Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems*; c. 905–914). Judit Árokay describes Kageki's notion of *shirabe* as a term referring "to a certain quality of linguistic enunciation through which the emotions of the sender are directly transmitted to the listener. *Shirabe* is

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<sup>15</sup> I am grateful to Maria Cărbune, whose presentation on Kagawa Kageki in the 7th Forum for Studies in Japanese Literature at the University of Heidelberg in May 2019 sparked my interest in the relationship between his legacy and Ichiyō, ultimately leading me to reflect in greater depth on his influence over her.

[...] the potential of a poem to transmit emotions authentically and at the same time the capacity of sentient beings to understand emotions and to be moved either to tears or to compose a poem” (Árokay 2014: 95).

Ichiyō clearly appropriates Kageki's interpretation of the term *shirabe* as she stresses the importance of the human heart's “truths” and therefore emotions, in poetry writing. The empathetic interplay between poem and reader, their exchange of emotions as envisioned by Kageki, is certainly relevant to both Ichiyō's poesy and her prose,<sup>16</sup> as demonstrated by the re-elaboration of traditional motifs in her novellas.<sup>17</sup>

It is common knowledge that in the 1890s Kageki would become one of the main targets of Yosano Tekkan 与謝野鉄幹 (1873–1935) and Masaoka Shiki's 正岡子規 (1867–1902) attacks regarding the presumed effeminacy of *waka*, especially those composed by poets associated with the Official Bureau of Poetry (Outadokoro 御歌所);<sup>18</sup> furthermore, criticism against him was also a by-product of the efforts to un-dogmatise Tsurayuki and the *Kokin wakashū*.<sup>19</sup> He would eventually become less influential, albeit never completely. But back in 1888, when the Official Poetry Department (Outagakari 御歌掛), which had replaced the Official Department of Literary Affairs (Bungaku goyō-gakari 文学御用掛) two years earlier, was replaced in turn by the Outadokoro, many of its affiliates belonged to the Keien-ha (Tuck 2018: 180). Among those whose poetic style was influenced by Kageki was Nakajima Utako, even though she had been studying under Katō Chinami 加藤千浪 (1810–1877) and composed *waka* following the conventions of the Edo-ha 江戸派, the school of poetry founded in Edo by Katō Chikage 加藤千蔭 (1735–1808) and Murata Harumi 村田春海 (1746–1811), disciples of Kamo no Mabuchi 賀茂真淵 (1697–1769)<sup>20</sup> and advocates of a moderate

<sup>16</sup> It has also been suggested that the Keien-ha's precepts undergirded Ichiyō's notion of literature, and that this influence explains the difference between her and the other *Bungakukai* writers, for instance Rohan (whom Ichiyō admired deeply) whose main reference, in this respect, was the *haikai* of Bashō (1644–1694) (TAKITŌ 1990: 40).

<sup>17</sup> For instance, VAN COMPERNOLLE (2006: 70) has stressed how she seemed to want the reader to become engaged in interpretation.

<sup>18</sup> On this topic, refer to chapter 5 of TUCK 2018: 147–191, and MURAI 1999: 65–92.

<sup>19</sup> As in Shiki's renowned remark in *Utayomi ni atauru sho* 歌よみに与ふる書 [Letters to a *tanka* poet; 1898] that Kageki's “worship of the *Kokinshū* and Tsurayuki” was a further demonstration of his “poor judgement” (MASAOKA 1947: 8).

<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that Chikage and Harumi had criticised Kageki in their essay *Fude no saga* 筆のさが [The nature of the brush; 1802] for resorting far too often to *zoku* (both in terms of words, *zokugo* 俗語, and content, *zokui* 俗意) in *waka* composition, to which Kageki responded with the treatise *Niimanabi iken* 新学異見 [Objections to new learning; 1811], that directly addressed Mabuchi's *Niimanabi* [New learning; 1765] (see MARRA 1999: 81). The controversy that followed took the name of Chikage and Harumi's essay. On this, see THOMAS 1994. Thomas' work shows how the coexistence of *ga* and *zoku*, that “had provided a creative tension in other genres”, was a harder issue to tackle in *waka* (459). On *Niimanabi* in relation to *Niimanabi iken* see ÁROKAY 2014: 93–96. On *Niimanabi* and Mabuchi in relation to Motoori Norinaga's thought, refer to FLUECKIGER 2019: 118–122.

national scholarship, focused more on literary activity than the search for an “Ancient Way”, which was Motoori Norinaga's 本居宣長 (1730–1801) primary concern (Flueckiger 2011: 199). Ichiyō herself describes her instructor's style as “reminiscent of Kageki's” in an entry of her diary dating 10 August 1893 (HIZ 3a: 316). Thus, it is no surprise that she displays Kageki's profound influence when discussing poetry.

Five years earlier, she had paraphrased and commented on two essays by Ikebukuro Kiyokaze 池袋清風 (1847–1910), an affiliate of Keien-ha who was also involved in the activities of the Outadokoro, published in the *Yūbin hōchi shinbun* 郵便報知新聞 and the *Tōkyō nichi nichi shinbun* 東京日日新聞 in the summer of 1888, entitled *Waka enkakushi* 和歌沿革史 [The history of *waka*] and *Waka gairon* 和歌概論 [An introduction to *waka*] respectively. The first instalment of *Waka gairon* appeared in the 29 June issue of the journal, in the same month that the Outadokoro opened, and both texts appear broadly supportive of Kagawa Kageki and adamant regarding the importance of his legacy within the *kadan* 歌壇 (Gōtō 1975: 83). Ichiyō copies paragraphs from Ikebukuro's texts, most of them dealing with the *Kokin wakashū*, a further demonstration of the affinity of her literary world with Kageki's poetics (HIZ 3b: 540–541).

*Tsuyu shizuku* つゆしづく [Dew droplets; 1894] includes a number of *waka* where Kageki's influence can easily be detected, for instance when she appropriates the *makura kotoba* 枕詞 *Shikishima no uta* 敷島の哥, a conventional name used for *tanka* (*Shikishima* means “scattered islands” and stands for Japan) since antiquity, but in the same configuration of a poem included in the “Moon” book of Kageki's *Keien isshi* 桂園一枝 [A shoot from the Judas-tree garden; 1830] (HIZ 3b: 743–744). Lines from the same source also appear in the opening page of *Chiri no naka nikki* 塵中につ記 [Journal amid the dust; 1894], two months later (HIZ 3a: 379). Besides Nakajima Utako's influence and the peculiarities of Ichiyō's literary training, however, an additional stimulus might have come from the re-edition of Kageki's most representative collection printed by Tōkyō-based publisher Shikishima hakkōjo in 1892.

In *Sao no shizuku* さをのしづく [Drops dripping from the rod; 1895] she mentions Kageki's *Niimanabi iken* along with *Keien isshi* and blames the worsening of poetry on the degeneration of the times, on the fact that “people have lost their purity of feelings” (*sunao no kokoro* すなほの心) hence the only possible solution is to retrieve and embrace the old way of *waka* (*uta no michi* 歌の道) (HIZ 3b: 775). Again, *Niimanabi iken*'s recent re-edition (1892) from Shikishima hakkōjo might have played a part in Ichiyō's extensive reading of its author's output.

But the real point of convergence between Ichiyō and Kageki is best described by their engagement with the *Kokin wakashū*, one of the classics that she used as a prism through which she firmly believed that reality could – and should – be scrutinised. And if her “literary memory”, to borrow Van Compernelle's definition, the “appropriation and creative negotiation with antecedent texts” (Van Compernelle 2006: 32), allowed her to construct

fictional narratives focusing on the present rather than the past, it also provided her with a framework for the development of her *bungei hyōron*.

Nakamura Minoru observed that Ichiyō's own poems do not thematise notions such as 'I' (*ware* 我) or 'self' (*jiga* 自我) enough and are still too closely attached to traditional values and conventions, to be considered innovative or revolutionary, but she should not be dismissed as utterly old-fashioned, because she looked at her life seriously, objectively, and took it into the realm of poetry (Nakamura 2012: 332). According to the scholar, she did bring about a revolution, albeit within the territory of traditional *waka*: Ichiyō's poems, especially those from 1892, reveal her aspiration to take *waka* beyond the limits imposed by age-old patterns and codes, focusing more directly on feelings, although her reticence to assert her own inner 'self' interferes with her attempt to break out of those boundaries (Nakamura 2012: 334–336). But the attempt was not at all futile, because she managed to broaden the meaning of old symbols and images, and even though she was writing before the *tanka* reform that would take place in the late Meiji period, her personal poems nonetheless enriched the genre of modern *tanka* (Nakamura 2012: 356–357).

Kumasaka Atsuko (1974: 55) argued that Ichiyō progressed from praising refinement exclusively to emphasise the importance of true feelings once she was 'forced' to face up to real life. Gaining first-hand experience of death, poverty, and the hardships of everyday existence determined a shift in focus from poetry to prose, as shown by her exploits in the mid-1890s. While it is true, as also noted by Nakamura (2012: 352), that good *waka* decrease in number in her diaries as her fictional writing intensifies, her interest in poetry was so consistent throughout her life that such a schematic view looks like an oversimplification. While I agree that Ichiyō's thoughts on poetry appear increasingly analytical and rooted in reality, I would attribute this change to both her lived experience *and* reading and discussion (through letters and meetings) rather than consider it within the single framework of autobiographism.

What her diaries demonstrate is that her poetic, as well as narrative practice, was not solely instinctive, rooted in her natural talent and/or acquaintance with classical literature, but the result – one of the results – of a regular, though private or semi-private, critical practice that included prolonged meditation on canonical criticism.

#### 4 On translation

Another topic of great importance in the 1880s that captured Ichiyō's attention and found a place in her journal was translation. Although she is known to have read Ōgai's *Shirururu den* シルレルル傳 [Life of Schiller; 1891],<sup>21</sup> Uchida Roan's 内田魯庵 (1868–1929) 1892 version of *Crime and Punishment* and also sections of the Bible and some of Shōyō's translations of

<sup>21</sup> Cf. HIZ 3a: 103.

Shakespeare (Wada 1956: 300; Van Compernelle 2006: 221n20), she is seldom, if ever, associated with foreign literature. Diary entries, however, demonstrate that she had an interest in translation – in its actual practice – quite early on.

Stepping back to late spring 1888, when she was only sixteen years old and studying at the Haginoya, it comes as no surprise that many sections of *Ichiyō nikki* revolve around the matter of writing. What one may not expect to find, however, is a fairly long entry about poetry in translation at the very time when the debate on poetic language and modern poetry was going on.<sup>22</sup> To some extent, Ichiyō seems to anticipate many of her colleagues as she meditates on the difficulties one has to face when translating poetry. She mentions English texts<sup>23</sup> and takes *kanshi* 漢詩 into account, the latter being a hot topic, at the time, as regards the definition of what was Japanese and what was other (the popularity of *kanbun* 漢文 was then declining) and she writes that even translating “our” *waka* into “our” language seems impossible (HIZ 3b: 558). She picks a poem from the *Kokin wakashū*<sup>24</sup> and transforms it into free verse to demonstrate her thesis that even though the meaning is the same, the result is no longer a *waka* (HIZ 3b: 559).

Her meditation revolves around the concepts of *chokuyaku* 直訳 (word-by-word translation) and *hon'yaku* 翻訳 (adaptation), centred on structure and meaning respectively.<sup>25</sup> Placing emphasis on the former rather than the latter, Ichiyō seems to anticipate Bimyō's claim that metre should be considered the essential element of poetry. But most of all, this entry shows that as a teenager she had already become involved, albeit privately, in a cogent debate on questions raised by the publication of *Shintaishishō*, that had been addressed by the most prominent figures of the *bundan* ever since. Yatabe Ryōkichi 矢田部良吉, in an essay he wrote for the collection, had focused on structure and meaning, arguing that traditional rhythmic patterns could hamper the transmission of

<sup>22</sup> In a diary entry from 1893 she also relates part of a conversation on the difficulties of translation from English with her friend Itō Natsuko 伊東夏子 (1872–1945) (HIZ 3a: 233–234).

<sup>23</sup> Such as a hymn by E.P. Hammond (1831–1910).

<sup>24</sup> Poem 712: *Itsuwari no naki yo nariseba ika bakari hito no koto no ha ureshikaramashi* (いつはりのなき世なりせばいかばかり人のことのはうれしからまし). “If only this were a world without falsehood, how happy I would be to hear a lover’s words”.

<sup>25</sup> Although Ichiyō does not speculate further, in this entry, on her usage of translation terminology, from the connotations she attaches to them, pairing *chokuyaku* with structure and *hon'yaku* with meaning, we may infer that her sense of the two terms was not dissimilar from, for instance, Aoki Sukekiyo's 青木輔清 (?–1909) notion of the former as a practice that “involves adding Japanese equivalents and inversion marks to the source text without overlooking every single word, while the latter involves taking the meaning of the text and adapting this into Japanese without being constrained by the order of the original” (WAKABAYASHI 2009: 185). In other words, *hon'yaku* should be considered as a sort of adaptation rather than for the wider meaning that the term has acquired in more recent times. WAKABAYASHI noted that today *chokuyaku* is a “sub-category” of the umbrella-term *hon'yaku* (2009: 185), whereas Ichiyō's usage of the terms in her diary shows clearly how she differentiates them.

meaning (Toyama *et al.* 1884: 32–33), and one year after Ichiyō's note, Mori Ōgai published *Omokage* 於母影 [Vestiges; 1889], where he struggled to find a balance as a translator between content (*i* 意), syllable (*ku* 句), rhyme (*in* 韻) and metre (*chō* 調) (Wixted 2009: 100n69).

In his preface to the *Shintaishishō*, Yatabe had stressed the importance of ordinary language in poetry (Toyama *et al.* 1884: 4), exerting an influence on later works such as *Shintai shiika* 新体詩歌 [Poems in the New Style; 1883], edited by Takeuchi Tadanobu 竹内隆信 (also known as Setsu 節, dates unknown); in the preface he wrote for *Shintai shiika*, Komuro Kutsuzan 小室屈山 (1858–1908) also highlighted the importance of everyday language as a tool for expressing inner feelings (Amō 2001: 3).

Even though Ichiyō was not a translator herself, her reflections on the possibility of transferring meaning from one language into another without losing the feeling (*kanjō* 感情) the authors entrusted to their words confirm that her meditations, discussed above, on the interplay of words, feeling, and technique at work in poetical writing were dynamic and adaptable to different and new literary phenomena.

Additionally, the emphasis she places on language, and recourse to the notion of 'foreign language' to explain her pessimism regarding translation can also be considered another demonstration of Van Compernelle's insight that tradition, for her, related to language rather than nationalism: "Ichiyō did not have a strong sense of being a national subject, but she was acutely aware of being the heir to a rich literary heritage and did her best to further it" (Van Compernelle 2006: 7).

Her sense of existence, in other words, had a literary structure: for her, literature indeed constituted the spectrum of emotional and cognitive responses to reality and represented her nearest horizon. Ichiyō was part of a system as much as her colleagues whose participation in literary life was more open and institutionalised.

## 5 Conclusion

At the beginning of this article, I introduced a set of questions that would orientate my discussion towards certain aspects of Ichiyō's critical writing. The key issue to tackle was arguably what we may define the 'relationality' of literary criticism: the practice of *hyōron* entails a twofold engagement with one text (or multiple texts) and one reader (or multiple readers). In particular circumstances, however, this twofold-ness is unachievable: how could Ichiyō, a young (and underprivileged, and unmarried) woman, constantly irritated by those who could not see her simply as a writer instead of stressing her female identity,<sup>26</sup> make her voice heard in the realm of literary criticism?

<sup>26</sup> As she wrote in her diary in 1896: "Of all the visitors I receive, nine out of ten come merely out of curiosity, because they find it amusing that I am a woman. [...] They do not have enough insight to

Ichiyō's voice as *hyōronka* 評論家 is a gendered one, meaning that her position and condition determine an attitude towards literary criticism that seeks to engage with texts while expanding them, opening up their meanings and inviting new interpretive possibilities rather than encouraging a conversation with an immediate reader. Because, despite her many acquaintances in the literary world, she probably knew that she would never find a place – both figuratively and realistically speaking – for her criticism. Without readers, she could only relate to the texts. But her concern for topics such as style and language, translation, and poetic renovation appears timely and establishes a dialogue, though implicit, with the literary community of her time.

Previous scholarship has demonstrated how Kuniko, Baba Kochō<sup>27</sup> and the editors of Ichiyō's *zenshū* have been eager to fashion “Higuchi Ichiyō” as perfectly integrated in the *bundan*, stressing her acquaintance with the most important writers of the time. In her diaries we read that she received regular visits from Kawakami Bizan 川上眉山 (1869–1908), Ueda Bin 上田敏 (1874–1916), and Shimazaki Tōson, and of course, it is well known that Saitō Ryokuu, Kōda Rohan, and Mori Ōgai praised her work lavishly, while perhaps it is less widely known that she was even invited to join them in the literary board of the journal *Mesamashigusa* めさまし草 [The Grass of Awakening], with the idea of transforming their column, called *Sannin jōgo* 三人冗語 [Idle talks among three], into *Yotsudeami* 四つ手あみ [Four-armed scoop net] (Wada 1956: 310). Ichiyō herself reports this episode in her diary. The 2nd of June 1896 Mori Ōgai's younger brother, Miki Takeji 三木竹二 (1867–1908), paid her a visit and invited her, on behalf of the editorial board of *Mesamashigusa*, to join the three contributors of *Sannin jōgo* (HIZ 3a: 490); in July, Rohan also visited Ichiyō asking if she would like to write something with him for the journal, but only two days after his visit she had a conversation with Saitō Ryokuu, one of her closest confidants at the time, who dissuaded her from accepting (HIZ 3a: 522–527). It is not entirely clear what Ichiyō replied to Miki nor if the two proposals were correlated in any way, but considering that, by the 19th of August, major newspapers began to report on her illness, we may also assume that her poor health was the reason, or one of the reasons, behind her refusal. According to Noguchi, an additional motive might have been Ryokuu's desire to protect his good friend Ichiyō from a *bundan* that he considered excessively competitive (HIZ 3a: 531). If that was really the case, it would surely be ironic that the very person who “didn't treat her like a ‘woman writer’ [and] didn't handle her with kid gloves” (Danly 1981: 154) eventually deprived her of the only opportunity she was ever offered to have a readership for her

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fathom my deepest thoughts, and they only delight in the fact that I am a woman writer. Thus they reveal nothing in their criticism. Even if there are flaws in my work, they cannot see them. And when there are good things in my works, they cannot explain them” (ŌMORI 2006: 147).

<sup>27</sup> ODAGIRI Susumu (1984: 224–230), in particular, has stressed the important role played by Baba in the publication of *Ichiyō nikki*.

criticism. But although *Yotsudeami* never saw the light, Miki's proposal may be indicative of the fact that some of the most respected authors of the time intuited her critical attitude.

Yet her relationship with the literary milieu has never been considered outside the particular framework of her personal associations with authoritative male colleagues, although her crypto-criticism would arguably ensure her a place within the debates that ultimately contributed to fashioning that very literary milieu.

Closer attention to her diaries, as well as the rest of her corpus, including correspondence with fellow writers and critics, if removed from the autobiographical rationale, can open up new interpretative vistas and reveal a previously unknown insider perspective on a personal and collective literary awareness in the making.

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### Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Title
HIZ	<i>Higuchi Ichiyō zenshū</i> 樋口一葉全集. Shioda, Ryōhei 塩田良平 <i>et al.</i> (ed.). Tōkyō: Chikuma shobō, 1974–1994.

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