**JAPAN 350 F19**

**Midterm Exam**

***Please read all instructions carefully before proceeding. If you have questions, please contact the instructor* (jackstoneman@byu.edu).**

**This exam is due at the beginning of class Monday October 21.**

**You have three options for this exam. Choose and respond to *only one* of the prompts.** **This exam is meant not only to assess the skills you have acquired thus far in this course (analysis of Japanese literature), but is also meant to be a learning experience in which you encounter new texts and new ways of reading and appreciating texts.**

***Option #1***

The aim of this exam prompt is to better understand the expressive qualities and functions of Japanese poetry in comparison to Western lyricism. To do this, you will compare and contrast a Japanese poem by Hitomaro (briefly introduced in class this semester) with a traditional song from the British Isles.

1. Here is the poem attributed to the *Man’yōshū* poet Kakinomoto no Hitomaro (flourished ca. 680-700), first in the original, then original with kanji, then Romanization, then three English translations.

ほのぼのとあかしの浦のあさぎりにしまがくれゆく舟をしぞ思ふ

ほのぼのと明石の浦の朝霧に島隠れ行く舟をしぞ思ふ

*Honobono to akashi no ura no asagiri ni shimagakureyuku fune o shi zo omou*

In the dim, dim light

of the early morning mist

on Akashi Bay,

a boat fades behind the isles—

my heart following in its wake. (Steve Carter)

Faintly with the dawn

That glimmers on Akashi Bay,

In the morning mist

A boat goes hidden by the isle—

And my thoughts go after it. (Edwin Cranston)

Faintly, so faintly night dawns at Akashi Bay through the morning mists

that boat I long for vanishes beyond the isles. (Jack Stoneman)

2. Here are the lyrics to the old song ‘The Water is Wide.’ This is a glorious and haunting song in both tune and lyric, one of the best to have survived the many centuries it has been in circulation.

The water is wide, I can-not cross o'er.

And neither have I wings to fly.

give me a boat that can carry two,

And both shall row, my love and I.

A ship there is and she sails the seas.

She's loaded deep, as deep can be;

But not as deep as the love I'm in

And I know not if I sink or swim.

O love is sweet and love is kind

The sweetest flow'r when first it's new

but love grows old and waxes cold

And fades away like the morning dew.

There are many, many versions of this song. You’ll even find a few versions by Japanese singers among the videos below (it is in fact well-known among folk singers in Japan, perhaps because of its artistic resonance with traditional Japanese poetry and music). My personal favorites are by James Taylor, Eva Cassidy, and Maura O’Connell; and Mark Knopfler’s amazing way of making a guitar sound like it’s singing.

James Taylor <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJp2ymL08xg>

Eva Cassidy <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADX8GRfRKHg>

Maura O’Connell <http://youtu.be/eypBHOHQuX4>

Goshima Yoshiko <http://youtu.be/4SojXwg0rvs>

Iwai Fusayo <http://youtu.be/A3eXF_U3WMg>

Coyote Bun Yoshi <http://youtu.be/uPmbc3p2EcA>

Masaaki Kishibe <http://youtu.be/AVCdQeo_OFY>

Niamh Parsons <http://youtu.be/9zrUYuRbD8I>

Karla Bonoff <http://youtu.be/7EfHZtCKJGY>  
Sheryl Crow <http://youtu.be/8HBVdyNOCvk>

Hayley Westenra <http://youtu.be/fvbEgPlvgGE>

Chloe Agnew <http://youtu.be/NUub6ttNFxM>

Charlotte Church/Enya <http://youtu.be/dAJ5jRLPZ6o>

Joan Baez <http://youtu.be/8uCehZkO7Fw>

Emmylou Harris <http://youtu.be/rW7eOzHpvGg>

Irish Roses <http://youtu.be/AJmOe9OPmRg>

Indigo Girls/Sarah McG <http://youtu.be/65gOml0AXz8>

Renee Fleming <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kb7_6dEY0VA>

Judy Collins <http://youtu.be/2g2t5N3WD70>

Kathy Sundquist <http://youtu.be/clSZU1HRxJE>

Pete Seeger <http://youtu.be/wenQ_ThYksA>

Mark Knopfler <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lfQtPR-ZlA>

John Gorka <http://youtu.be/I_0VdRLhM68>

Cindy Parker <http://youtu.be/sIukKX1ZpSA>

Joan Baez <http://youtu.be/l4pDTSKREvU>

Bob Dylan <http://youtu.be/MznqOjVrhKg>

Dusty Springfield <http://youtu.be/1p0sJk5qJh4>

The Seekers <http://youtu.be/QOOjbKmSV1o>

Tommy Fleming <http://youtu.be/ug8b8EmJDhU>

Orla Fallon <http://youtu.be/x9Cb15PA9K4>

Guthro/Rankin <http://youtu.be/EYxLUvksElU>

Kindergartener <http://youtu.be/gumIt4O7tgE>

Rita Eriksen <http://youtu.be/iZe-s9oAwYc>

Jane Olivor <http://youtu.be/Z0ycfT0j0Z8>

Here is a link to the Wikipedia article on ‘The Water is Wide.’

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Water_Is_Wide_(song)>

**Instructions:** Write an essay which compares and contrasts Hitomaro’s Akashi poem and ‘The Water is Wide.’ First, describe similarities. This may include such things as form, expressive qualities, content, historical contexts, and so forth. For this first part, you should be able to point out what makes both works insightful and well-composed expressions of the human condition. Second, concentrate on differences. Specifically, analyze what makes the Japanese poem uniquely Japanese, identifying characteristics and rhetorical aspects that are indicative of the Japanese poetic tradition. We don’t have to worry about what makes ‘The Water is Wide’ uniquely Celtic, Scotch or Anglo-Saxon (the song’s origins are debated). The important thing is to use your comparison of these two works in order to understand what is Japanese about the Akashi poem, using ‘The Water is Wide’ as counterpoint in order to highlight the Japanese aspects of the Akashi poem.

Take time to really understand both works deeply. Contemplate what the possible readings might be, and how we might interpret them. And take time to formulate a convincing argument for how the Akashi poem presents important attributes of Japanese poetics.

Approximately 1500-3000 words.

***Option #2***

In his article “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” (available on learning suite), Nicholas Carr worries that contemporary media and digital modes of delivering information are not only transforming the way he reads, but the way he thinks. He writes:

As the media theorist Marshall McLuhan pointed out in the 1960s, media are not just passive channels of information. They supply the stuff of thought, but they also shape the process of thought. And what the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation. My mind now expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving string of particles. Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski. (p. 57)

In class this semester, we have discussed many of the strange things that Japanese of the Heian period thought, did, and expressed. Often, however, we have found that their experiences and feelings were not that different from our own. Nevertheless, the way they thought and expressed themselves is profoundly different from our modes of thought and expression today, making it sometimes difficult for us to access the core of their experiences. *The Tale of Genji* is not a sitcom, and a waka is not a tweet. Royall Tyler, speaking about the classics of Japanese literature, wrote the following: “Among other things, they remind us of how much we've lost—lost ways of seeing, speaking, doing, being. Through the undoubted constants of human experience, they show us the depth of change and time.”

Recently I finished reading a biography of Gustav Mahler (1860-1911), one of my favorite composers. The author, Norman Lebrecht, went out of his way to show how Mahler helps him to navigate the complexities of contemporary life. As you read the following passage, please replace in your mind “Mahler” or “Mahler’s music” or “he” with any of the literary works we’ve read this semester, or an author’s name, or simply “classical Japanese literature.” Lebrecht writes:

The modern world is a blizzard of information without an igloo for shelter. How we receive and make sense of it all becomes tenuous as new media are invented that make news instantaneous and every transient acquaintance a Facebook friend. Mahler’s music is a fast track to deep-core emotion, a way of connection with true self and, through that connection, with cherished others. . . . He teaches us that no message can be taken literally or in isolation. Every statement has a subtext, commentary, and inbuilt contradiction; every declaration needs to be treated with more skepticism than our forebears might have applied to speeches by Churchill, Gandhi, or Abraham Lincoln. When we listen to leaders in the third millennium, we need to hear what they are saying beneath the message if we are to avoid disaster. When we trawl the information superhighway, each discovery must be treated with kid gloves, put on hold, and worked into a larger perspective if the human mind is not to be atrophied to that of a firefly. Mahler offers breadth and depth to the thought process. In a speeded-up, homogenized society, he allows us to think that the individual mind can survive. He urges us to see the bigger picture, to listen to the unsaid. He continues the conversation. He makes critics of us all. (*Why Mahler? How One Man and Ten Symphonies Changed Our World*, pp. 257-58)

In an essay of 1500-3000 words, please provide your own analysis of your reading of pre-modern Japanese literature thus far this semester. Address the three quotations above in your analysis. Do you agree with the statements of these authors? Why? Do you disagree? Why? Cite your own experiences as well as works you have read this semester. Some questions you might address include, but are not limited to, the following: What are the differences in modes of thought and expression between Heian-period Japan and the world you live in? Are there ways to bridge these differences? Are they things to be learned from Heian-period Japan that can be valuable in today’s world (not just stories, but ways of delivering stories, ways of thinking and communicating)? Are there some similarities in modes of thought and expression between Heian-period Japan and today’s world? Like the Net transforming the way Carr processes information, has your encounter with pre-modern Japan’s different ways of delivering information, of communicating human experience, somehow changed the way you read, think, or act? How so?

This should be a personal essay along the lines of Carr’s “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” It is not necessary to have a thesis paragraph and 3-5 supporting paragraphs and a conclusion. The format can be more fluid than that. *However, there should be analysis supported by your own experience as a reader of pre-modern Japanese literature and specific reference to the works we have read this semester*.

***Option #3***

In 2005, Van Gessel (former Dean of the College of Humanities & Professor of Japanese Literature) gave a devotional address called “The Welding Link of Culture,” in which he describes the role of culture (literature especially) in our eternal progression. Go to learning suite: course materials: the welding link of culture, to get the text of the devotional or to listen to it. After reading and/or listening, write an essay of 1500-3000 words in which you analyze the role pre-modern Japanese literature could play in your own eternal progression. When Joseph Smith described a “welding link,” he was referring to our ancestors. Japanese people of the Heian period are likely not your ancestors, and certainly fictional characters are not your ancestors. So, how does this work? How can pre-modern Japanese literature become a welding link in your life?

This should be a personal essay. It is not necessary to have a thesis paragraph and 3-5 supporting paragraphs and a conclusion. The format can be more fluid than that. *However, there should be analysis supported by your own experience as a reader of pre-modern Japanese literature and specific reference to the works we have read this semester*.