

UTAMARO:

SONGS OF
THE
GARDEN

Introduction, notes, and translations by

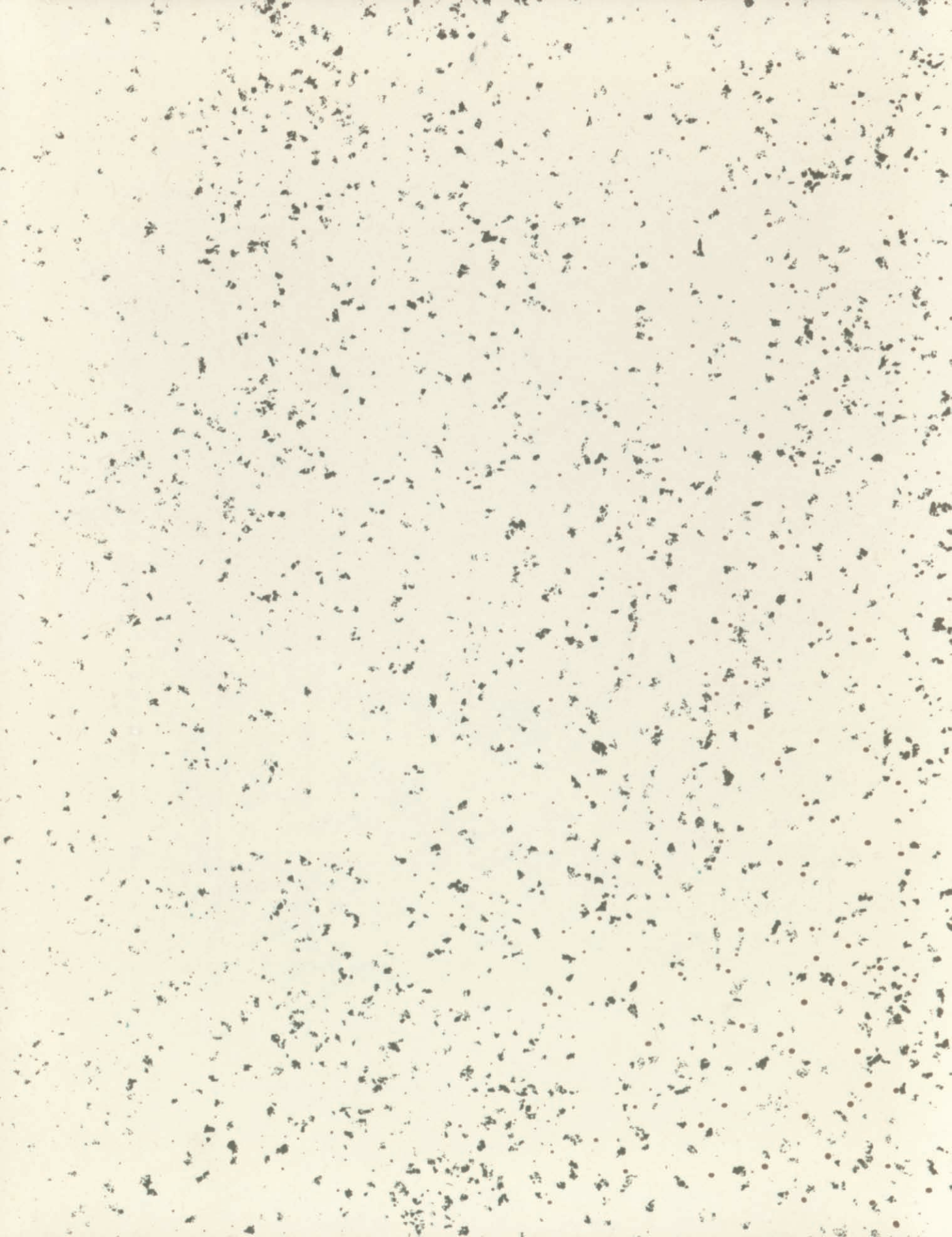
YASUKO BETCHAKU

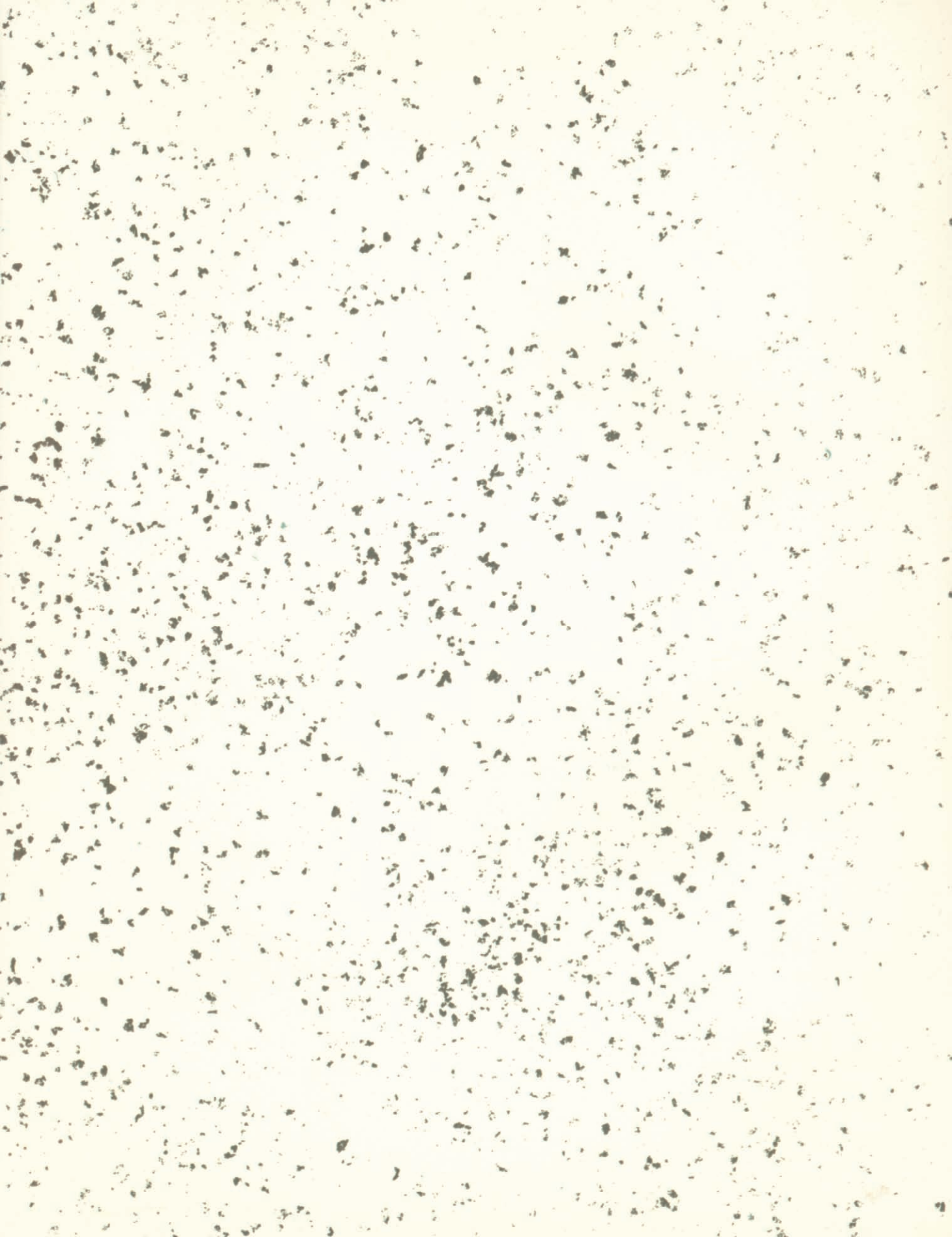
and

JOAN B. MIRVISS

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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Introduction

Although far removed in subject matter from the elegant courtesans for which Kitagawa Utamaro (1753–1806) is justly renowned, the “Book of Insects” (*Ehon mushi erabi*, literally translated as “Picture Book of Selected Insects”) is not merely a footnote to the artist’s lifework. Rather, it is a pivotal work, one that assured Utamaro’s future artistic career and anticipated subsequent developments in Japanese art. For in the book’s fifteen delicate designs, the artist has woven threads of Japanese and Chinese artistic tradition together with a naturalism obtainable only through keen powers of observation. Although the title mentions only insects, a variety of plant and animal life is portrayed and rendered with such subtlety and graceful simplicity that the true genius displayed by the artist can be easily overlooked.

By the time this book was published in 1788, flowers and plants had appeared in Chinese and Japanese painting for hundreds of years. Two seventeenth-century Chinese printed picture books of nature studies, “The Mustard-Seed Garden Manual” and “The Ten Bamboo Studio Albums,” presented a new approach to these subjects, and their popularity in Japan created a taste for naturalistic depiction. Designed to serve both as artistic instruction for the amateur painter and as beautiful images for the connoisseur, these manuals conveyed to Japanese artists, who relied heavily on Chinese prototypes, a feeling of spontaneity, sensitivity to color, and clarity in composition. The flatness and rigidity of form often apparent in these Chinese examples, however, are not to be found in the intimate scenes of Utamaro’s “Book of Insects.”

Insects were rarely depicted in Far Eastern art and when they did appear, they were usually presented as stiff and artificial secondary motifs in traditional flower and bird compositions. A Japanese printed book of the Muromachi Period (1392–1573), “Competitive Verses on Four Living Creatures” (*Shishō no*

uta awase), includes a section devoted to insects, in addition to sections on birds, fish, and other animals, and was an unusual work for its time. In the seventeenth century, another poetry competition based on four types of animals, including insects, was compiled by Kinoshita Chōshōshi, a well known poet. This anthology was later issued with simple black-and-white printed designs of thirty types of insects, arranged so that there were two species illustrated in each design, paralleling the selections of poetry. At the conclusion of Chōshōshi's book is an announcement of the future publication of volumes on birds, animals, and fish. Clearly, these early books are thematic predecessors to the "Book of Insects," since its publisher also includes a notice of his intention to issue future books on the remaining three topics.

As a pupil of the artist Toriyama Sekien (1712–88), Utamaro became acquainted with classical painting traditions and poetry and was influenced by his teacher's interest in the supernatural. When Sekien directed his attention to the world of woodblock prints in the middle of his career, his student mastered the new aesthetic as well, while he independently pursued an interest of his own: naturalism. It is the "Book of Insects" that best illustrates Utamaro's understanding and command of diverse painting styles, which have been successfully translated into the printed form without losing a sense of delicacy or spontaneity.

In the late eighteenth century, Japanese culture generally experienced a new attraction to realism, which was in part fostered by the infiltration of Western ideas. Just as Utamaro was drawn toward natural subjects, contemporary artists began to take a more scientific approach to painting, one that stressed the importance of direct observation. Ahead of artistic fashion, Utamaro displayed a fascination with natural life during his childhood, for, as Sekien notes in his postscript to the "Book of Insects," his student's early love and appreciation of nature enabled him to capture the essence of the world of insects in his designs. The selection of such mundane creatures as the earthworm and horsefly, as well as the more classical butterfly and firefly, which had appeared in paintings for centuries, indicates that Utamaro used the real world as inspiration and did not rely entirely on artistic tradition. Even the title departs from convention, as it is free of literary or poetic overtones. Nor did the book conform to the established woodblock-print trends, which until this time had favored portrayals of beautiful women and the world of the kabuki theatre. By using insects as a central rather than secondary theme and by rendering them and their surroundings in such a

realistic manner, Utamaro posed a challenge to the classical artistic traditions, as Sekien implies in his essay: “. . . he has outshone the glory of ancient paintings . . . he has learned the true form of nature. . . .” It is ironic that the tremendous popularity of this book in 1788 led to a great demand for more printed works by Utamaro not of natural subjects but of typical print themes, such as beautiful women.

The “Book of Insects” was not the work of Utamaro alone. Indeed, it represents an unusually successful collaboration between artist, poet, and publisher. Tsutaya Jūzaburō (1748–97), the publisher, had a unique ability to perceive exceptional talent in relatively unknown artists, which he could then direct and cultivate, eventually producing some of the finest prints ever created. When he commissioned the brilliant designs of Utamaro, whom he had discovered in 1786, he conceived the book as a work that would appeal to a very sophisticated audience, and no effort or expense was spared in developing and executing the project. He insisted on using such costly and complex printing techniques and materials as blind embossing, overprinting, and deluxe pigments. Mica applied to the wings of some insects not only created a natural effect but also added a gentle decorative quality, as did burnishing on the surface of some of the plants. The quality of the woodblock carving was also exceptionally high, as Sekien indicates in his postscript by praising the engraver’s work, a most unusual gesture. Interestingly, the cost of producing such a publication was so high that later editions issued during the nineteenth century were unable to match the luxuriousness of the first edition.

Although this book is now treasured for its illustrations, it was originally designed not simply as a picture book but as an anthology of specially commissioned poems on the subject of insects. In fact, the verses composed for each plate, new translations of which appear at the back of this volume, are appropriate poetic companions to Utamaro’s unorthodox drawings. Yadoya no Meshimori, who compiled the poems and wrote the preface, was the leader of the *kyōka* (comic verse) movement, which emerged as a reaction against rigid classical traditions and allowed for great freedom of subject and style, for the poems often incorporate humorous or amorous undertones. In his preface Meshimori reveals that the idea for a selection of poetry based on the theme of love but apparently devoted to insects occurred to him and his friends as they sat listening to crickets and cicadas along a riverbank, an activity popular as early as

the tenth century in Japan but given new life here as the poetic form and theme depart radically from tradition.

Together with these comic poems, the representations of insects and other garden creatures, flowers, and plants do not at first glance appear terribly significant. But in fact the “Book of Insects” so convincingly conveys a sense of growth, movement, and realism that it stands today as a landmark in eighteenth-century Japanese art, a tribute to the collective brilliance of the poets, the publisher, and, most important, the artistic genius of Utamaro.

The original *Ehon mushi erabi* consists of two volumes bound so that the fifteen designs form double-page illustrations, each one including depictions of two different species and two accompanying poems. Based on a superb first-edition copy in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Songs of the Garden* reproduces the fifteen designs by Utamaro in a facsimile size, arranged in a fold-out format to be viewed in Western fashion, left to right. The printed texts, unlike the original, follow the illustrations and a note about the poetry and the translations. We are grateful to Alice Gray of the American Museum of Natural History and to John Behler of the New York Zoological Society for their identifications of the subjects, and special thanks must also be extended to Suzuki Jūzō and Kimura Yaeko for their invaluable suggestions.

*This advertisement appears
at the end of the second volume in the original.*

Notice is hereby given of three proposed books, on birds, animals, and fish, to be illustrated by Kitagawa Utamaro and compiled by Yadoya no Meshimori.

These books are to be published shortly, and the subjects for the poems will be announced by the publisher. If you wish, please compose appropriate love poems on these subjects and send them in to the publisher.

First month, year of the monkey, the eighth year of the Tenmei era (1788).

TORII ABURA CHŌ, KŌSHO-DŌ [town, publishing house]
TSUTAYA JŪZABURŌ [publisher]

NOTE: A modern version of the bird book, *Momochidori kyōka awase*, 1789, was published in 1981 by The Metropolitan Museum of Art as *Utamaro: A Chorus of Birds*. Utamaro never designed the book on animals, and his fish book was issued as *Shiohi no tsuto* (“Gifts of the Ebb-tide”), c. 1790, featuring shells instead of fish.

Ehon Mushi Erabi / PREFACE



On this fourteenth night of the eighth month, in order to listen to the chirping and singing of the insects in the fields, our regular crowd of poets goes together to the banks of the Sumida River located near Iozaki, to the north of Ryōgōku and to the east of Yoshiwara, where there is a restaurant whose specialty is carp. [The Japanese word for carp, *koi*, sounds the same as the word for “love.”] There, seated on mats, we can judge the true sound of each insect. We have purposely banned both wine and women, and people may imagine that we are having a spartan banquet. Mixed with the chorus of insects, the chanting of a sutra is faintly heard from a distant temple. This soothing voice strongly reminds us of the ancestral hall built by Kuenshi for a princess. If we dare to compose a humorous poem in an old-fashioned way, people will ridicule us as if we were selling day-old produce at the morning market. So in order to be different, we have decided to compose comic verses on the theme of love imitating the insect-poem competition compiled by the renowned Chōshōshi. As we write our amorous poems, the night advances. Since no one owns the mountains, rivers, wind, or moon and there are no landlords who lease the land, the singing insects are the hosts of the banquet held on the grass. We stand up after politely bowing toward the grass where the dew and insects lie. This is common courtesy.

Written by YADROYA NO MESHIMORI



蜂

尻焼猿人

こいつよりほ蜂のきれあふかえやうほーををみろのあらん

毛虫

アサキ

もぎあいにくまらやかしんさーつてくまみうありにちいさうりあは







けら

耶素伎波良年加布

あつゝゝゝゝゝゝゝゝゝゝゝゝゝ

いけとせの

あん乃あつやよ

あつゝゝ

あつゝゝゝ

桂眉住

ゝゝゝゝゝゝゝゝゝゝゝゝゝ

きれゝゝゝ

あつゝゝゝ

名ゝゝ

純ゝれ







蝶

稀年成

夏の暑は蝶も忙しく吸くまむ恋しき人乃花のららひ

蝶吟

一富士二鷹

人こころあきらむむいとちあはふ世をあらハやらーとりカぢれ千









松虫

土師搔安

松をとりて人まら虫ハちくちくとあまおかしら先祿と云

しやあ

堂

酒樂齋瀧磨

佐保川れあも汲まは刃ハ管中よりれを枯くさし世をんく





さくら

喜多野新黒成

おきくさるさくらとてよははおまじくつま戸のまきらくとまきく

端崎

浅草市人

くらりさるさくらとてよははおまじくつま戸のまきらくとまきく







ひらりー

百喜齋森角

人目よりちやうとこのまに抱つてせりあき証ハひらりー

くも

つりり 光

ふんとをきせようさけく証やみ葉へようま

くものつりり





赤蜻蛉

朱樂苘江

赤のふより 赤いそいそね 赤蜻蛉のの おひひ

瘦ひこけりも

いふこ

斬端杉丸

赤きちり 赤ねしそいそい 赤きちり 赤きちり

うま







地

千枝鼻元

かきおくるみもとくろと

まきほふよ

つちまじいのさけ

ちうむー

とけ 問金酒船

きりりりらみやま

まきとけ

菊葉あしゆ

這まらん





管虫

立花裏也

晴れおと西ハともやうくぬも
 ちのよあまりのくれものむ

瓊虫

唐来三和

意志ちを瓊虫ともありぬ
 志のいの緒さくきれを







蝸牛

富利菊主

ちねやらぬとの空まよかたつらぬまをちねつこのや出ん

巻虫

貸本古毒

うまき女子ゆるらつと出あれちちつん

アんきやあく





きんぎょく

金魚の池

さのこよハ 鳴きあひてりきりくもふり入 聲も耳のある世なり

浮

三浦杉門

うき人のこころハ 蝶子似たりと 夢をうりしと 夢をみせぬを









蛙

宿を飯草

人つらにくみけと首と

うりけり

かりまれつらん

あらしきそ

うき

こまじ

小笠兼友伎

あらねともこよ

おんくの

こまむー

こまきあまきれ

きんよるの

床



Commentary on the Poems

K*kyōka*, or humorous verse, which developed as a poetic genre in Kyoto early in the eighteenth century, reached its peak of popularity in the bustling capital city of Edo (present-day Tokyo) as the form of poetry preferred by local cultural circles, which included warriors and merchants as well as artists. These comic poems were created not only for pure amusement but also served as vehicles for emotional expression in this eighteenth-century society, which was very rigidly structured. Edo *kyōka* found an even broader audience throughout Japan during the Tenmei Period (1781–89) and is consequently often referred to as *Tenmei kyōka*.

By combining *kyōka* with the popular medium of woodblock prints, Tsutaya Jūzabūro, a publisher and poet himself, perhaps contributed more than any other individual to the popularization of this form of poetry. The delightful poems were as pleasing to the mind as the exquisite designs commissioned by Tsutaya were to the eye.

Edo *kyōka* poets would play with established classic poems, weaving in contemporary and often inelegant inferences, a process called *honkadori*. By changing the meaning, the poets were able to add an element of humor, lowering the lofty conventional verses to a more relevant, plebeian level. Knowledge of the classics was essential for an understanding of these parodies. One of the best-known sources for the *kyōka* poets was “One Hundred Poems by One Hundred Poets” (*Ogura Hyakunin Isshu*), a collection amassed in the thirteenth century. References to this popular anthology, even in the eighteenth century, would have been easily recognized.

Not every parody or pun can be so readily discerned by the modern reader, however. For example, in the last paragraph of the preface to the “Book of Insects,” a phrase appears that has, to date, been uninterpretable: “This is a courtesy observed by the same companions of the three hundred and sixty.” In

saying this, the author has, perhaps deliberately, confused all but a very small number of his readers of the period. In the poetry as well, participants in the *kyōka* competitions must have revelled in composing references and puns that would have confounded everyone except those in their immediate circles. Consequently, for the reader of today, the essence of many of these comic verses is open to numerous interpretations.

One such complex problem can be seen in the poem by Yadoya no Meshimori on the subject of the frog:

Hito zute ni	I sent a love letter by a go-between,
Kudoke do kubi o	But she simply shook her head
Furu ike no	As though it were merely water splashing
Kairu no tsura e	On the face of a frog
Mizukuki zo uki	Jumping into a pond.

To all Japanese readers the parallel with a famous poem by Matsuo Bashō (1644–94) is immediately apparent:

Furuike ya	Old pond
Kawazu tobikomu	The sound of a frog jumping in the water
Mizu no oto	Is heard.

In the *haiku* poem by Bashō, the image conveyed is one of absolute quiet shattered by the splash of a jumping frog. Meshimori, however, has added further meaning to the line “Kairu no tsura e/mizu,” which can also be interpreted as an idiom describing one who shows no reaction to others. In addition, the word “mizukuki,” meaning water reeds, may also be defined as “calligraphy” (i.e. a love letter). To complete the allusion to an unrequited lover, the verb is changed from “jump” to “shake” (i.e. shake one’s head). This conveys the image of a man rejected in his pursuit of a woman. Thus, while the *kyōka* poem clearly pays homage to Bashō’s masterpiece, it also includes a level of meaning more accessible and entertaining to the eighteenth-century reader.

The enthusiasm shown for *kyōka* in the Edo Period (1615–1868) would seem to be a logical development in a peaceful society that was also isolated and suppressed, for it provided those interested in poetry with a means of intellectual release and permitted them a certain freedom of expression.

Hachi



Kemushi

Hachi. Paper wasp. Genus: *Polistes* of the order *Hymenoptera* which also includes hornets and honeybees. The poet's reference to a honeybee is undoubtedly to the species *Apis mellifera*, which is not illustrated, indicating that he probably did not work from Utamaro's design but simply from the word "hachi."

Kowagowa ni
Toru hachi no su no
Ananie ya
Umashi otome o
Mitsu no ajiwai

As timidly as one collects honey
From a beehive
Have I exchanged marriage vows
With such a lovely maiden.
She is like the taste of honey.

SHIRIYAKE NO SARUNDO

Kemushi. Hairy caterpillar. Family: *Arctiidae*, in the order *Lepidoptera* of butterflies and moths, which in their larval stage appear as caterpillars. The poet speaks of the bristly nature of this caterpillar, which is crawling on an arrowroot plant (*Maranta arundinacea*).

Ke o fuite
Kizu ya motomen
Sashitsukete
Kimi ga atari ni
Habikakarinaba

Beware!
If you reach too close
You may be stung
And end up
Exposing your own weakness.

YOMO NO AKARA

Umaoimushi



Mukade

Umaoimushi. Katydid. Family: *Tettigoniidae*, of the order *Orthoptera*. The katydid, or long-horned grasshopper, is nicknamed "horse driving" in Japan, undoubtedly because of its shape. This katydid is perched on a species of galin-gale (*Cyperus microiria*), a member of the sedge family.

Yoruyoru wa
Umaoimushi no
Ne ni zo naku
Kimi ni kokoro no
Hazuna nobashite

Night after night
I cry aloud
Like a "horse-driving" grasshopper
With the reins of my heart
Stretched out to you.

KARAGOROMO KISSHŪ

Mukade. Centipede. Class: *Chilopeda*. The poet may be referring to the venom that a centipede uses to kill its insect prey; it is not saliva but a secretion of the glands located in the first pair of legs. This centipede is crawling on a type of aconite or wolfsbane (*Aconitum chinense*).

Negawakuba
Kimi ga tsubaki ni
Toketoke to
Tokete nebuto no
Kusuri to mo gana

Could my wish be fulfilled,
I would want to be the balm
For a sore,
Dissolved
By your saliva.

SHIKATSUBE NO MAGAO

Kera

Hasamimushi



Kera. Mole Cricket. Family: *Gryllotalpida* of the order *Orthoptera*. The front legs of this cricket are adapted for burrowing and it spends much of its time underground in shallow tunnels beneath the surface of the earth where it feeds on roots.

Adashimi wa
Kera chou mushi ya
Imotose no
En no shitaya ni
Fukairi o shite

How fleeting is the life of a mole cricket.
The union between husband and wife
Is equally transient,
No matter how deep it may appear
On the surface.

YANAGIBARA MUKOU

Hasamimushi. Earwig. Family: *Forficulidae* of the order *Dermaptera*. Earwigs possess sharp pincers which protrude from the rear section of the abdomen, but the bite is not harmful to humans. This earwig is on a bamboo shoot.

Mishi hito o
Omoikiru nimo
Kirekanuru
Hasamimushi teu
Nakoso ozokere

What a fool you are,
Earwig!
Having a dull pair of scissors,
You cannot even cut the knot
You tied.

KATSURA NO MAYUZUMI

Chō

Tonbo



Chō. Butterfly. Family: *Pieridae* (?) of the order *Lepidoptera*. Species in this family of butterflies are relatively common and feed on the nectar of blossoms, in this case an opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*), which they help to pollinate.

Yume no ma wa
Chō tomo keshite
Suite min
Koishiki hito no
Hana no kuchibiru

I wish
I could become a butterfly,
For in my dream
I would lick the lips of the sweetheart
For whom I long.

MARE NO TOSHINARI

Tonbo. Dragonfly. Order: *Odonata*. Most dragonflies are superb flyers, darting, hovering, soaring, and even making long-distance migratory flights. A traditional pastime of Japanese children is to catch dragonflies by using *torimochi*, small sticks covered with glue.

Hito gokoro
Akizumushi tomo
Naraba nare
Hanachi wa yaraji
Torimochi no sao

Try!
If you want to fly away
Like a dragonfly,
I will catch you
With a stick of glue.

ICHIFUJI NITAKA

Abu

Imomushi



Abu. Horsefly. Family: *Tabanidae*, of the *Diptera* order. Female horseflies do not have stingers but bite with a piercing apparatus located on their mouths. This horsefly is poised on a bindweed flower (*Calystegia japonica*), a member of the morning-glory family.

Mimi no kiwa no
 Abu toya hito no
 Itou ran
 Sashite uramin
 Hari mo motaneba

I am a hated horsefly
 Buzzing around your ears.
 But
 I don't even have a stinger
 To take my revenge on you.

KI NO SADAMARU

Imomushi. Green caterpillar. Order: *Lepidoptera*. In this larval stage caterpillars feed voraciously in preparation for their pupal phase when they will metamorphose into the winged adult moth or butterfly. This caterpillar is inching toward the leaf of a taro plant (*Colocasia antiquorum*).

Imomushi ni
 Nitari ya nitari
 Korokoro to
 Wakareji samuki
 Fune no kobuton

I look like a roly-poly green caterpillar
 Separated from you and all by myself,
 Wrapped in a quilt in a small boat,
 Swaying from side to side
 Like a roly-poly green caterpillar.

JŌMON KITSUMARU

Hotaru

Matsumushi



Hotaru. Firefly. Family: *Lampyridae* in the order *Coleoptera*. Two of the fireflies are posing on a ditch reed (*Phragmites communis*), which we may assume is growing near a stream. Fireflies in Japan have always been associated with water, but Utamaro has broken tradition here by not actually depicting the river itself.

Saogawa no
 Mizu mo kumimasu
 Mi wa hotaru
 Nakayoshi no ha no
 Kusare en tote

Being a firefly,
 I am as one with the water
 Of the Sao River.
 Such intimacy is
 Like that between the reeds
 and the river.

SHURAKUSAI TAKIMARO

Matsumushi. Tree cricket. Family: *Gryllidae*, of the order *Orthoptera*. Like grasshoppers, crickets are great songsters, producing their sounds by rubbing their wings together over the back. Each species has a characteristic note and song pattern. This cricket is balanced on the ear of a smartweed plant (*Polygonum caespitosum*).

Kaya tsurite
 Hito matsumushi wa
 Naku bakari
 Nani omoshiroki
 Nedokoro ja nai

Though I wait for you under a
 mosquito net,
 All I hear is the cry of a cricket.
 No wonder!
 This is not a place
 For a pleasant dream.

HAJI NO KAKIYASU

Batta

Tōrō



Batta. Cone-headed grasshopper. Family: *Tettigoniidae*. These grasshoppers make very loud noises by rubbing their front wings together, and they also produce a severe bite. This one is perched on the pod of a black-eyed pea (*Vigna catjang*).

Osaetaru
 Batta to omou
 Matsu yowa mo
 Tada tsumado nomi
 Kichikichi to naku

While waiting for you well into
 the night
 I thought I caught a grasshopper,
 But it was just my imagination.
 All I heard was the rattling of a door,
 Sounding like the cry of the grasshopper.

IKIMI NO KURONARI

Tōrō (kamakiri). Praying mantis. Family: *Mantidae* of the order *Orthoptera*. The legs of mantids are armed with spines and teeth to grasp prey, which often includes the male of the species, who may be decapitated and consumed by the female after mating. They often hide on plants—here a muskmelon (*Cucumis melo*)—to lie in wait for victims.

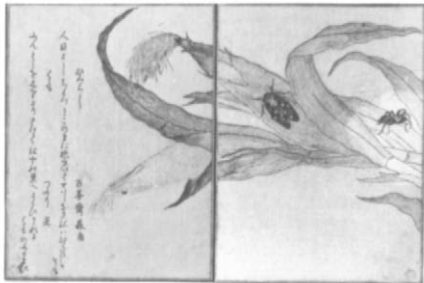
Kutsugaeru
 Kokoro to shirade
 Kamakubi o
 Agete tōrō no
 Ono bakari matsu

Not knowing
 That she may change her mind,
 Overconfident praying mantis,
 You are waiting for her
 With your head held high.

ASAKUSA NO ICHINDO

Higurashi

Kumo



Higurashi. Evening cicada. Family: *Cicadidae* of the *Homoptera* order. Male cicadas are famous for their lovely song, especially in Japan where they are valued for the musical sounds they make during the evening hours.

Hitome yoshi
 Chotto konoma ni
 Dakitsuite
 Sewashi nakine wa
 Higurashi ka somo

Evening cicada, is it you
 Who steals the right moment
 To fly into another's arms?
 But you cry constantly
 Like a poor soul living one day
 at a time.

HYAKKISAI MORIKADO

Kumo. Spider. Class: *Arachnida*. Almost all spiders produce silk, spinning out filaments as they move from place to place. This spider is spinning on the leaf of an ear of corn (*Zea mays*), an American plant introduced into Asia as early as the fifteenth century.

Fundoshi o
 Shiri yori sagete
 Neya no su e
 Yobai kakareru
 Kumo no furumai

A spider returning to his nest
 Reminds me
 Of a man furtively dragging his clothes
 And
 Creeping up to a lady's boudoir.

TSUBURI NO HIKARU

Aka-tonbo

Inago



Aka-tonbo. Red dragonfly. Order: *Odonata*. Dragonflies are often brilliant, even iridescent, in color, and many species are predominantly red. Their naturally slender bodies and exceptionally long wings are superbly adapted for flight.

Shinobu yori
Koe koso tatene
Aka-tonbo
Ono ga omoi ni
Yase hikoketemo

Burning with love
And
Enduring the pain in silence,
I have wasted away to a skeleton
Like a thin red dragonfly.

AKERA KANKŌ

Inago. Locust. Family: *Acrididae*. These noisy short-horned grasshoppers are voracious eaters and are also known for their jumping ability as they move from plant to plant. This locust is poised on a bamboo fence that supports two flowering plants, a Chinese bellflower (*Platycodon grandiflorem*) and a wild pink (*Dianthus superbum*).

Tsuyu bakari
Kusa no tamoto o
Hiki mireba
Inago no ina to
Tobinoku zo uki

Pulling your sleeve,
I made a pass at you,
But immediately saying "no"
You jumped away like a
frightened locust.
How disappointing it was!

NOKIBA NO SUGIMARU

Hebi

Tokage



Hebi. Rat snake. Family: *Colubridae*. Genus: *Elaphe*. This is a relatively common nonvenomous snake that preys primarily on rodents and birds. Unlike many snakes, the rat snake has the ability to climb trees and bushes; this snake is working its way through a dayflower plant (*Commelina communalis*).

Kaki okuru
Fumi mo toguo o
Makigami ni
Tsumoru omoi no
Take wa nagamushi

I am sending you a long, wistful letter
Written on paper
Rolled up like a coiled snake.*
My pent-up passion,
Is as deep as a snake is long.

CHIDA NO HANAMOTO

Tokage. Skink. Family: *Scincidae*. This large group of relatively small lizards contains many species native to Southeast Asia. Most skinks are ground-dwelling lizards which feed principally on insects.

Kirawaruru
Urami ya iro mo
Ao-tokage
Kuzuha naranedo
Hai matouran

Because I am so disliked,
My grudge against you, my love,
Has turned me into a green lizard
Which crawls around
The leaves of arrowroot vine.

TONYA NO SAKEFUNE

* A Japanese letter in olden days was written in one long continuous sheet of paper which was then rolled up.

Minomushi



Kabutomushi

Minomushi. Bagworm. Family: *Psychidae* of the order *Lepidoptera*. The bagworm larva hatches in spring from its egg and scrapes together leaves and fibers, fastening them with silk to make a portable case in which it can move around. In winter, the cases may be seen hanging from branches; this one is on a Japanese bushclover (*Lespedeza bicolor*).

Yami no yo ni
Nishi wa dochi yara
Wakane domo
Shinobu amari no
Kakure minomushi

In the moonless night
I can't tell which way is west.
To endure my thoughts
Hidden in a cocoon,
I want to reach for you.

TACHIBANA NO URANARI

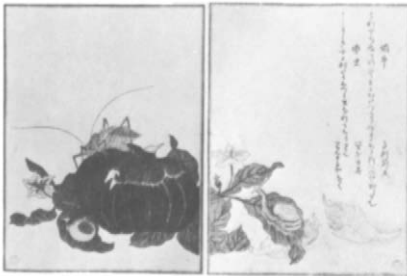
Kabutomushi. Horned scarab beetle. Family: *Scarabidae*. The horns, which the poet describes as a helmet, protrude from the thorax or head of the male beetle. This one is perched on a plantain lily (*Hosta fortunei*).

Koi shina ba
Kabutomushi tomo
Narinu beshi
Shinobi no o sae
Kire hateshi miwa

If I die of a broken heart,
I will be reborn as a helmet-beetle
For my patience has snapped
Like a helmet's broken cord,
Which cannot be tied together.

TŌRAI SANNA

Kutsuwamushi



Katatumuri

Kutsuwamushi. Giant katydid. Species: *Megapoda elongata*. Like other members of the *Tettigoniidae* family, the giant katydid is an exceptionally noisy insect, and its sound is associated in Japan with the jingling of a horse's bit, for which the Japanese word is "kutsuwa."

Kashimashi ki
Onna ni nitaru
Kutsuwamushi
Nare mo chiririn
Rinki niya naku

Giant katydid,
How similar you are to a boisterous
woman!
You too cry out
In a fit of a jealous rage,
Don't you?

KASHIHON FURUKI

Katatumuri. Land snail. Genus: *Euhadra* in the gastropod class of mollusks. The "horns" of the snail are sensory tentacles, not a breathing apparatus as the poet implies; land snails actually breathe through pores in their mantles. This snail is seen on the leaf of an eggplant (*Solanum melongana*).

Hareyanu
Sono soragoto ni
Katazufuri
Nururuhodo nao
Tsuno ya dashiken

A snail draws out its horns,
As it gets
Wetter and wetter.
But I draw out my "horns" in anger
As you lie and lie again.

KŌRI NO KARINUSHI

Kirigirisu



Semi

Kirigirisu. Grasshopper. Order: *Orthoptera*. Like the cricket and the cicada, grasshoppers are prized in the Orient and often kept as pets in cages especially designed for them. This insect is clinging to the vine of a *Luffa aegyptiaca*, a relative of the loofah plant.

Sanomi niwa
Nakine na tatezo
Kirigirisu
Fukairu kabe mo
Mimi no aru yo ni

Grasshopper,
Don't chirp so loudly
For all your secrets may be heard!
If you are making love,
Be wary, for even the walls have ears.

KURABE NO YUKISUMI

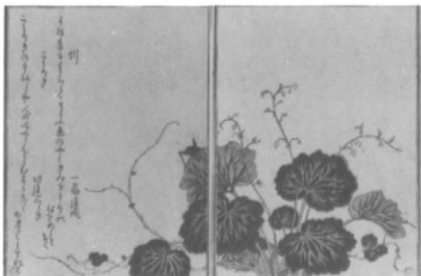
Semi. Cicada. Family: *Cicadidae*. These musical insects seem to be invisible to humans because they are most often and most clearly heard at night. This cicada is hanging from the gourd of the *Luffa* plant.

Uki hito no
Kokoro wa semi ni
Nitari keru
Koe bakari shite
Sugata miseneba

Oh! A cold-hearted person
Is like a cicada,
Which can be heard
But
Is nowhere to be seen.

MIWA NO SUGIKADO

Mimizu



Kōrogi

Mimizu. Earthworm. Class: *Oligochaeta*. Species: *Lumbricus terrestris*. Earthworms spend most of the daytime hours under the ground, where they serve the important function of aerating the soil. They do surface at night, however. This one is twined around the stem of a saxifrage plant (*Saxifraga sarmentosa*).

Yoru hiru mo
Wakara de mayou
Koi no yami
Kimi o mimizu no
Ne o nomi zo naku

Being lovesick,
I wander around in darkness
Like an earthworm under the ground
Without knowing day or night.
I cry and cry, unable to see you.

HITOSUJI MICHINARI

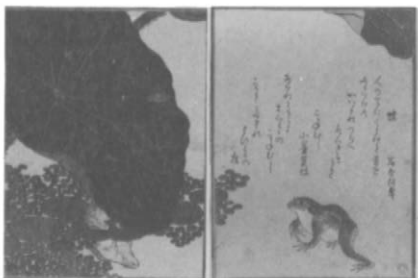
Kōrogi. Cricket. Family: *Gryllidae*. This type of cricket often hides in the leaves of plants and grasses and feeds upon their roots. This cricket has nearly disappeared behind the leaf of the saxifrage plant.

Kōrogi no
Sune to ya hito no
Omou ran
Uramu ma mo naku
Orete misureba

You must think
I am as weak as a cricket's leg.
Although resenting your stone-heart,
I am still a slave
To your will.

KONOMICHI KURAKI

Kaeru



Koganemushi

Kaeru. Frog. Family: *Ranidae*. Although Utamaro's rendering of these frogs, like many of the other creatures in this book, is generalized, making accurate identification impossible, they appear to be in the group of true frogs, which live in swampy areas and freshwater lakes. Here, one frog can be seen in the water's reflection as it sits on a lotus leaf, while its mate approaches, emerging from the water.

Hito zute ni
Kudoke do kubi o
Furu ike no
Kairu no tsura e
Mizukuki zo uki

I sent a love letter by a go-between,
But she simply shook her head
As though it were merely water
splashing
On the face of a frog
Jumping into a pond.

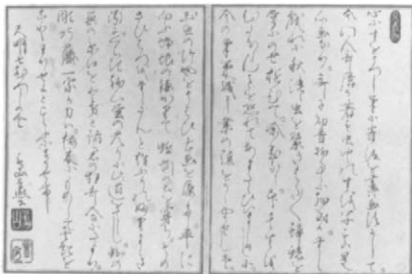
YADOYA NO MESHIMORI

Koganemushi. Gold beetle. Family: *Chrysomelidae* (?) of the *Coleoptera* order. This may be a leaf beetle, which feeds on a variety of leaves. This one is crawling on the leaf of a lotus plant (*Nelumbo nucifera*).

Aware tomo
Miyo makura ka no
Koganemushi
Kogaruru tama no
Haiyuru no toko

Pity me!
The burning desire of my heart
Will creep up to your bed
Like a little golden beetle
Under your pillow.

KOSUDARE NO SUGAGAKI



Postscript

To capture the essence of life in one's heart and mind and then to recreate it with the brush is the real art of painting. In the pictures by my pupil Utamaro, the nature of life is embodied in true paintings from the heart. Since childhood, Utamaro has enjoyed observing minute details. He would become so absorbed while playing with a dragonfly tied to a string and with a cricket held in his palm that I would caution him not to hurt the living creatures. Now, with the well tutored brushwork in this book of insects, he has outshone the glory of ancient paintings which sparkle like the iridescent jewel beetle (*tamamushi*). Borrowing the confidence of the praying mantis¹, he has burrowed like an earthworm, digging into the field of painting. In searching for correct colors and shapes, he has learned the true form of nature even from the mosquito larva (*bōfuri*). Utamaro has diligently pursued the art of painting, pointing the way to the beginner, directed by the light of fireflies. The skillful engraver, Tōissō², as if untangling a spider's web but guided by the humorous poems, has carved the designs from blocks of cherry wood. I have written this upon request.

Winter, year of the goat, the seventh year of the Tenmei era (1787)

Written by TORIYAMA SEKIEN
[sealed] TORIYAMA TOYOFUSA

¹The phrase "tōrō no kama" is literally translated as the axe of the praying mantis, which is a metaphor for one who continually overestimates himself.

²Tōissō may also be read as Fuji Kazumune.

