

A Narratological Look at a Correspondence between Yakamochi and Ikenushi:

Reading *Man'yōshū* Poems 17: 3962 to 3982 as a Closed and Self-Contained Work

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Since some poems by Ōtomo no Yakamochi show an unequivocal interest in narrative arrangements, their study requires narratological approaches. In winter 746 or early spring 747, Yakamochi fell severely ill. While he was recovering, he began a correspondence with Ōtomo no Ikenushi, a local government official. The communication, which is contained in *Man'yōshū* Book 17, comprises Chinese prose of different text types, Chinese poems, and Japanese poems, and is an important contribution to the history of Japanese literature. Examinations and translations include the group of poems from the sickbed (3962 to 3964) but not the subsequent group of the five poems 3978 to 3982. However, a thorough narratological reading will plead for assigning the subsequent group to the preceding sequence starting with poem 3962. The whole sequence displays distinctive narrative strategies, mainly based on the arrangement of time and space, and a comparison at the end of the paper will show that Yakamochi made use of similar narrative strategies in composing the fifteen poems opening Book 19.

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(correspondence between Yakamochi and Ikenushi)

In summer 746, Ōtomo no Yakamochi 大伴家持 became Protector of the Land (*kokushu, kuni no kami* 國守) Etchū or Koshi no Naka 越中, which covered the area today belonging to Toyama Prefecture and Noto Peninsular. The preface to the *Man'yōshū* 萬葉集 poems 3962 to 3964 in Book 17 shows that Yakamochi had fallen seriously ill. Nevertheless, a couple of days later, he composed the poems 3965 and 3966 and sent them together with a letter to Ōtomo no Ikenushi 大伴池主. Presumably, the reason for this was to decline an invitation, which is not contained in the anthology (cf. Tetsuno 2007, 104 [original 1990], Haga 2003 [original 1993], 650, Nishi 2000, 20). Ikenushi shared the same family name and was another government official in Etchū, subordinate to Yakamochi. The familial relationship between the two poets is unclear, but poems from a poetry gathering held in 738 show that they had known each other for many years before then. Yakamochi's message started a correspondence with Ikenushi that ended with another letter by Yakamochi containing poems 3976 and 3977.

Yakamochi wrote group 3962 to 3964 in the year 747 on the 20th Day of the 2nd Month of the old lunisolar calendar. The correspondence started nine days later, on the 29th Day, and ended on the 5th Day of the 3rd Month. Again, two weeks later, on the 20th Day of the 3rd Month, Yakamochi wrote a *chōka* 長歌, a “long poem,” with four accompanying *tanka* 短歌, “short poems” (3978 to 3982), and the fact alone that this was his first group with a long poem and four *tanka* deserves attention. The whole sequence from poem 3962 to poem 3982 is part of *Man'yōshū* Book 17 and, besides this sequence, there are no other contributions in the spring of the year 747. Tetsuno Masahiro and Haga Norio examined certain aspects of the correspondence and both scholars took the first group of poems (3962 to 3964) into account but not the subsequent five poems 3978 to 3982, written two weeks after the correspondence (Tetsuno 2007, Haga 2003, 649). Likewise, the chapter “Ōtomo no Yakamochi and Ōtomo no Ikenushi II: Yakamochi's Illness” in Edwin A. Cranston's *Man'yōshū* translations includes the first group but omits the group of the subsequent five poems (1993, 599-614).

The reasons for keeping the poems 3978 to 3982 separate from the correspondence seem to be obvious. The group of five poems is not accompanied by a letter and has a different addressee, namely *imo*, the “beloved.” Presumably, she was Yakamochi's wife, whom he had to leave behind in Nara. Furthermore, there is a gap of two weeks between the last letter of the correspondence and the group. Other reasons concern the different nature of the contents. The central date of the correspondence is the 3rd Day of the 3rd Month. This was an important day for

a poetry gathering at the banks of a river or lake to drink wine, and listen to *koto* music and birds while composing poetry. Banquets on the 3rd Day of the 3rd Month can be traced back to old Chinese rituals, but already in China, they had changed into a courtly event. After the arrival on the Japanese islands, Jitō Tenno institutionalized the day as a national holiday (*sechie* 節會), which was later incorporated into the Yōrō constitution of 718.¹⁾ Some poems from the *Kaifūsō* 懷風藻, the first Japanese anthology of Chinese poems (*kanshi* 漢詩) from 751, corroborate the political relevance of the event (cf. Tatsumi 1997, 108-109).

Finally, while the correspondence was carried out during Yakamochi's sickness as the poet emphasizes repeatedly in the texts, Japanese scholars are unanimous in understanding the group of five poems as expressions of frothy vigorousness and overwhelming desire for a certain woman addressed as *imo*, literally "little sister," meaning "beloved." In my estimation, this interpretation was unshakably established by Kubota Utsubo 窪田空穂 in his well-known *Man'yōshū* commentary "Hyōshaku" 評釈:

Compared to the poems of the preceding correspondence with Ikenushi, this long poem is filled with conspicuous vitality and a good mood. It almost seems to be written by another person. (Kubota, quoted from Itō 9: 233, my translation)

The extraordinary will to live after recovery from grievous illness made this kind of poetry possible and it seems that it was not a mood, in which [Yakamochi] usually was. (Kubota, quoted from Inaoka 4: 213, my translation)

The five poems 3978 to 3982 are not considered to belong to Yakamochi's masterpieces and some scholars are rather critical of them. In "Lectures on all *Man'yōshū* poems," Aso Mizue writes,

[y]et, there were no intentions to show the [five] poems to anyone. The words, which seem as if he wrote them down just as they came into his mind, drag on interminably. There is no real outburst of passion, no impatient thought, and apparently, he did not polish

1) Yōrō *ritsuryō* 養老律令. The text does no longer exist but is known from the *Ryō no gige* 令義解, a commentary from the early ninth century; for the national holidays cf. Dettmer 2010, 553.

[the poems]. (Aso 9: 182, my translation)

In her explanations, Aso quotes from another commentary that some expressions in the long poem lack coherency. She adds that the short poems consist to a large extent of repetitions of words from the long poem and calls into question the grounds for having four short poems in the first place. She moreover argues that Yakamochi uses an “unripe expression” (9: 184). However, the assumption that the poems are a sigh of relief that the correspondence with Ikenushi was finally over and Yakamochi, therefore, able to relax (Aso 9: 182) is of particular interest because it connects the five poems to the correspondence. It corroborates my hypothesis that the group belongs to the preceding sequence examined by Tetsuno, Haga, Nishi Kazuo (2000) and translated in one chapter by Cranston.

Nevertheless, while the coherence of the correspondence itself is self-evident, one has to ask for the reasons to link the preceding group 3962 to 3964 to the correspondence. Cranston explains that although not belonging to the correspondence “it introduces the subject of Yakamochi’s illness” and it “seems the best place to begin” (1993, 599). Nishi (2000, 24, 37), whose objective was to scrutinize the textual relationships between the group and the correspondence, demonstrates with the help of the peritexts, i.e. pretexts and postscripts, and two alternative letter endings that the textual relationships were strengthened and polished retrospectively.

Tetsuno’s influential examination of the correspondence is titled “Yakamochi at his turning period (*tenkanki* 転換期).” He opens the article with a list of the poem groups showing the “productions during the illness,” which, together, represent a “turning period.” The list consists of group 3962 to 3964 and the six deliveries of the correspondence, but it does not include the subsequent group of five poems (Tetsuno 2007, 98-99). Parts 2 and 3 of Tetsuno’s paper focus on the main issue, i.e. the “image of the sickbed” (*byōga no keishō* 病臥の形象), in which he provides evidence that the origins of that image go back to Chinese literature (pp. 104-117). Accordingly, he includes the first group, which concerns the sickbed issue. Among other things, he uses the introductory part of his paper to correct an portrayal produced by Takagi Ichinosuke 高木市之助, who was extremely critical of Yakamochi’s works in Etchū. According to Takagi, Yakamochi was an epigone of his father Tabito 旅人 and of Yamanoue no Okura 山上憶良, whose poetry he allegedly imitated extensively. Tabito and Okura were responsible for

Man'yōshū Book 5 with poems and prose texts written in Dazaifu in the north of Kyūshū until 733. After scrutinizing Yakamochi's poems 3962 to 3964, which are an introduction to the "sickbed theme," Tetsuno reinterprets Takagi's judgment of "conformity (*dōchō* 同調) and submission (*kutsujū* 屈従)" to "succession and transformation (*keishō to hen'yō* 継承と変容; Tetsuno, p. 100)."

In short, none of the scholars elaborate on their reasons for not taking the five poems into consideration. Naturally, Tetsuno, focusing on the sickbed, discounts the vigorousness and energy of the five poems. It is, however, surprising that Nishi, whose explicit aim is to get to the bottom of the textual relationships, does not investigate whether the "group of works" (*sakuhin-gun* 作品群) or "chain of works" (*ichiren no sakuhin* 一連の作品) actually ends with group VII, the last contribution to the correspondence (cf. Nishi 2000, 20, 28, 38).

In this context, another point needs to be addressed. Although Tetsuno's understanding of the correspondence as a "turning period" sounds reasonable as such, the period that allegedly changed Yakamochi's poetry is so short it could be argued that its briefness invalidates his point. The expression *tenkanki* can be translated into English as "turning point" too, which might be more suitable (cf. *Shin wa'ei daijiten* 新和英大辞典, 5th edition, digital). The idea that sickness can lead to something new was expressed by the German poet Novalis: "Doesn't the best everywhere start with sickness?"²⁾ For Yakamochi, the correspondence with Ikenushi was undoubtedly an intensive experience that changed his poetry, and so, in line with Tetsuno's suggestion, it may be argued that the unusual group 3978 to 3982 after the correspondence is the first product of that change. In this perspective, too, the group is connected to the poems from the sickbed.

In contrast to previous contributions that excluded the five poems (without elaborating on the reasons for this), the following examination aims to show that, from a narratological point of view, the group from the 20th Day of the 3rd Month is connected to the correspondence and that the whole sequence from poem 3962 to poem 3982 should be treated as a coherent and closed work (*hitotsu no sakuhin* 一つの作品). Including the five poems does not extend Tetsuno's

2) My translation. "Fängt nicht überall das Beste mit Krankheit an?" (Novalis, quoted from Friedell 1979, 59). As the subtitle, „From the Black Death to the World War”, indicates, Egon Friedell's "Cultural History of the Modern Age" (*Kulturgeschichte der Neuzeit*, 3 vol., original 1927–1931) was guided by Novalis' rhetorical question.

“turning period” significantly, but, as we will see later, in connection with the first group, it provides an effect on the correspondence comparable to a blow-up of a photograph. The effect is triggered by Yakamochi’s assumptions and imagination and is dependent on the depiction of time and space. A reading of the whole sequence as a coherent narrative discloses the textual and narrative relationships with which Yakamochi continued to experiment in subsequent poems.

1 The relevance of the correspondence

The correspondence and the two frame groups have been repeatedly translated into English, usually accompanied by annotations and brief discussions.³⁾ However, the depths of the work have not yet been plumbed and particularly the correspondence deserves more attention. First of all, it is perfectly suited to elucidate the intertextual relationships between the literature of the Nara period (*jōdai bungaku* 上代文学) and classical Chinese literature.⁴⁾ The correspondence consists of different text types, such as preface, foreword, letter, postscript, and poems, which in some cases form hybrid texts. Especially the letters, Ikenushi’s foreword to his Chinese poem, and the two Chinese poems display rich influences from classical Chinese literature. These influences can be seen in choice of words and phrases as well as formal aspects, such as the letter-writing etiquette, sentences in verse form, and parallel verses (*tsuiku* 对句). In addition to the structure of the letters, the idea of a preface or foreword was adopted from Chinese models. Moreover, thematic influences can be ascertained, which concern the expression of emotions or

3) Doe (1982, 136-142) presented only the correspondence (with omissions) without original text and Cranston (1993, 599-614) did not provide the original text either; for a brief discussion of the letter exchange, see Denecke 2014, 96-100 (without poems or original text). Complete translations of the prose texts, paraphrases of the poems, and the annotated original text are provided by Vovin 2016, 98-136. Older translations (rare) are by Pierson, Jan L. (1929-1963): *The Man'yōshū Translated and Annotated*, vol. 1-20, Leiden: E.J. Brill (with the original text) and Honda Heihachirō (1967): *The Man'yōshū. A New and Complete Translation*, Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press (without original text and annotations).

4) I use “classical Chinese literature” following *chūgokugo koten bun* 中国語古典文 (Komatsu 2006, 233) or *koten chūgokugo-bun* 古典中国語文 (Yamada 2018, 8-9) to distinguish the term from “Chinese literature” (*kanbun* 漢文) written on the Japanese islands. “Classical” is not restricted to the “Confucian Classics” (cf. Owen 1992, 8, 50) and particularly includes works from the Six Dynasties, such as *Wen xuan* 文選 (Japanese *Monzen*) and *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 (Japanese *Bunshin chōryō*) which were treated on the Japanese islands as “classics.”

thinking processes, and even of world perception. Furthermore, for the first time in Japanese literature, the correspondence contains reflections on poetics and the history of literature. They appear in rather simple form, but their origins can be traced back to classical Chinese literature, particularly the literature of the Qi and Liang Dynasties (479 to 557).

Since the correspondence is also closely connected to preceding and to subsequent poems within the *Man'yōshū*, a comprehensive understanding of these relationships supports the understanding of the anthology as a whole. There are, for example, conspicuously tight connections between Book 17 and Book 5 with poetry by Tabito and Okura and both books have interesting aspects in common. They were written far away from the political and cultural center Yamato, which during Shōmu Tenno's years, had eventually changed from the absolute rulership of the Tenno (*kōshin seiji* 皇親政治) to a bureaucracy. The Fujiwara family was able to occupy the most important positions, while the political power of the old families, such as Ōtomo or Tachibana, loyal to Shōmu and supported by him, had weakened extremely. Without a doubt, Yakamochi's father Tabito was intentionally kept far away in Dazaifu and Yakamochi had to spend five years in Etchū, which was unusual, too. In addition, both Books are "predominantly written in phonographic script" (Vovin 2009: XV). That also applies to Books 14, 15, 18, and 20, but an essential formal difference is that Books 5 and 17 contain longer prose texts and poems written in Chinese, which builds a sharp contrast to the predominantly phonographic script (*ongana shutai* 音仮名主体).

Owing to space limitations, only a portion of the subjects I deal with in my monograph on this correspondence (Wittkamp 2021b) can be examined here. Moreover, since most of those and other subjects are explored by Japanese scholars, the aim of the present paper will be to tackle questions that remain unanswered or cannot be addressed by Japanese research due to certain conventions and restrictions. An example would be the unreliable narrator, who must be distinguished from the historical author on whose "consciousness" (*ishiki* 意識) and historical reality almost all scholarly attention by Japanese researchers is focused.

The following examination contributes to the discourse on coherent and self-contained works (*sakuhin-ron* 作品論), which has been described as text-immanence-based analysis (cf. Wittkamp 2020: 17). The narratological approach will identify the sequence as a closed and self-contained work. This was not a product of the authors but of the compiler, presumably Yakamochi. The following table gives an overview of the sequence or the "work."

Group	Poem numbers	Date	Contributor	Text type
I	17: 3962—3964	20 th day 2 nd month	Yakamochi	1 <i>chōka</i> and 2 <i>tanka</i>
II	17: 3965—3966	29 th day 2 nd month	Yakamochi	letter with 2 <i>tanka</i>
III	17: 3967—3968	2 nd day 3 rd month	Ikenushi	letter with 2 <i>tanka</i>
IV	17: 3969—3972	3 rd day 3 rd month	Yakamochi	letter with 1 <i>chōka</i> , 3 <i>tanka</i>
V	no count	4 th day 3 rd month	Ikenushi	<i>kanshi</i> with foreword
VI	17: 3973—3975	5 th day 3 rd month	Ikenushi	letter with 1 <i>chōka</i> , 2 <i>tanka</i>
VII	17: 3976—3977	5 th day 3 rd month	Yakamochi	letter with <i>kanshi</i> , 2 <i>tanka</i>
VIII	17: 3978—3982	20 th day 3 rd month	Yakamochi	1 <i>chōka</i> , 4 <i>tanka</i>

chōka = Japanese long poem, *tanka* = Japanese short poem, *kanshi* = Chinese regular poem (*lǜshī* 律詩, Japanese *risshi*). Only the groups I, II, IV, V, and VIII have pretexts, but all groups are provided with postscripts.

2 Summary of the contents

Since the present paper follows a narratological approach and does not take aesthetic and literary aspects into account, providing a translation of the texts is unnecessary. For English translations, the reader is referred to above-mentioned works. However, a reading of the narrative requires a summary of the contents and themes concerning the narrative aspects.

The preface to **group I** explains the situation and the reasons to compose the poems. It says that Yakamochi fell suddenly severely ill and had already been on “the way to the Yellow Springs,” the realm of the dead in Chinese myths (*Huang quan* 黄泉). The three poems were composed to express “sad feelings” (preface).

In the *chōka*, which is his first “monologically composed long poem” (*dokuei chōka* 独詠長歌, see below), Yakamochi expresses longings for his family, which he had to leave behind in Nara. The first twelve verses explain the reasons for his being in Etchū and how busy he was before he “sank into sickness.” Verses 13 to 18 describe the present situation of being forced to stay in bed and to suffer great pain and the following verses are imaginations about his family at home. They concern his mother in verses 19 to 25, his wife in verses 26 to 38, and their children in verses 39 to 42. We will see later that the suppositions and imaginations, which are expressed through the auxiliary verb *ramu*, essentially support a reading of the sequence as a coherent narrative. Verses 43 to 54 again are dedicated to Yakamochi’s situation: being alone, far away, and helpless.

The first of the accompanying *tanka* is an observation on the ephemerality of human life and dramatically expresses the fear of dying while the “spring blossoms are falling in disarray.” The second one again laments his isolation and incapacity. While the postscript reveals the date and place of composition, the poet’s name is not given directly but metonymically by mentioning the Residence of the Protector of the Land Etchū who “was lying ill and in deep sadness.”

From the preface to **group II** we know that Yakamochi sent “two sad poems” to Ikenushi. The group opens the correspondence and, like the poems, the letter starts with the explanation that the writer had suddenly fallen seriously ill. Though still in pain and weak, the letter shows signs of the writer’s recovery. The recuperation is a distinct element of the narrative, and in group VIII, the poet seems to have completely recovered.

An expression of gratitude, whose addressee was presumably Ikenushi, leads to a parallel verse construction, which is the climax of the letter and introduces one of the main themes of the correspondence:

春朝 春花流馥於春苑 / 春暮 春鶯囀聲於春林

Just now on spring mornings the spring flowers pour their fragrance through the spring garden, and on spring evenings the spring warblers twitter among the spring groves.
(Cranston 1993, 602)

In this well-balanced parallel construction, the repetition of “spring” (春) is conspicuous. Japanese research revealed it as a poetic technique inspired by classical Chinese poetry. Yakamochi had already experimented with it before coming to Etchū and applied the technique again in the long poem of group VII. The letter continues that now was the perfect time for a poetry gathering with 琴罇, “*qin/koto* music and wine,” which is a topic from Chinese banquet poetry.

Although Yakamochi had already acquired the right state of mind, which is a sign of the aforementioned recuperation, he was not yet strong enough to leave his sickbed. After another remark on loneliness, the letter closes with “some poems to give the addressee something to laugh about.” The letter’s exposition and final follow Chinese etiquette and the letter itself is filled with allusions to and quotations from classical Chinese literature. The intertextual relationships as well as the connections to other *Man’yōshū* poems concern the work as a whole

but, as mentioned above, the present paper has to exclude them.

The two accompanying *tanka* pick up the themes of the parallel verses and of two other remarks in the letter, namely the expressed regret at being too weak to go out and the yearning for *kimi*, “you,” the addressee. Letter and poems do not mention Ikenushi by name, but we know from his response that he was meant by *kimi*.

Group III, Ikenushi’s message from the 2nd Day of the 3rd Month, consists of a letter and two *tanka*. The letter opens with an expression of gratitude, of being deeply honored to receive Yakamochi’s communications. The phrases also conform to the Chinese etiquette of letter writing and the whole correspondence gives the impression of a kind of competition between the two poets in self-deprecation on the one hand and adulation of the partner on the other. We can read this competition as another theme of the correspondence and it is imperative to realize that formal aspects are as important as the contents. Aso expressed her discomfort with regard to these exaggerations (9: 161, cf. SNKTK 4: 126), but since the competition was carried out in Chinese, incorporating allusions and quotations, it was proof of the poets’ education and, at the same time, articulated a strong feeling of shared identity.

The next part of the letter replies directly to Yakamochi’s parallel verses with another parallel construction. It contains topoi from Chinese banquet and landscape poetry and is without doubt the climax of this letter. Again, one has to notice the formal aspects such as the well-balanced “quatrain in four-six style” (cf. Middendorf 2008, 156), i.e. four verses with four and six characters respectively. In the present letter, it is a four-five style, which is equally well-balanced.

紅桃灼灼 戲蝶迴花舞 / 翠柳依依 嬌鶯隱葉歌

The red peach blooms brightly, and the merry butterfly flutters around the blossoms; the green willow trails gracefully, and the charming oriole hides in the leaves and sings.
(Cranston 1993, 604)

In the translation of these verses, the grammatical number of the bird *uguhisu* 鶯, the “warbler” or “oriole,” is changed to singular, which is more appropriate because the *uguhisu* (*uguisu*) bird usually sings alone.

The parallel verses contain typical Chinese banquet topoi and introduce the theme of the

poetry gathering. The next verses exhibit Ikenushi's regret for not being able to spend these days at a *kyokusui no en* 曲水宴, a "winding-water banquet" (Cranston, p. 608), together with Yakamochi. Like Yakamochi, Ikenushi also wrote some "clumsy poems," which he "dared to send" to the addressee to return the favour of providing amusement.

The two *tanka* are concretizations of Yakamochi's undifferentiated "spring blossoms" (*haruhana*) with "blooming cherry trees" (*sakeru sakura*) and "mountain roses" (*yamabuki*). These flowers are recurrent themes in the subsequent letters and poems and, as we will see later, the ephemerality of the flowers contributes to the narrativity of the whole sequence (for "narrativity" see Abbott 2014, lhn). Like Yakamochi in his preceding *tanka*, Ikenushi expresses his wish to gaze at these blossoms together with his friend and to break some twigs.

Ikenushi composed his message in two days. Interestingly, Yakamochi, who repeatedly points out his sickness and weakness, replied within one day, which is particularly impressive since **group IV** consists of a letter, a *chōka*, and three accompanying *tanka*. Such a level of productivity contradicts the repeated remarks of being desperately ill and exposes Yakamochi as an unreliable narrator.

The letter of group IV is famous for Yakamochi's confession that in his "tender years [he] never betook [himself] to the gates of Yama or Kaki, so that now when it comes to fashioning a poem [he] loose[s his] words amidst thickets of grass and trees" (Cranston 1993, 606). The identities of "Yama or Kaki" have long been debated, but despite the ambiguity, the self-aware remark may be read as showing off a certain knowledge of the history of Japanese literature. The admission of lacking talent is followed by the "competition" and the accompanying poems continue and deepen the themes of the poems of the preceding group.

In the *chōka*, Yakamochi complains that "The hurt in my body / Grew worse from day to day" (Cranston, *ibid.*; my underlining). Unlike present tense translations into modern Japanese such as *kurushimi ga hi goto ni mashimasu to* 苦しみが日ごとに増しますと (SNKBZ 9: 183) or *kurushimi ga hi goto ni masu node* 苦しみが日毎に増すので (Inaoka 4: 199), Cranston translates the first part of the poem into past tense. Reading the correspondence as a coherent narrative requires that choice. The reason is that in the letter of group II, Yakamochi writes that he has "obtained some relief" (Cranston, p. 602). The expression *hi ni ke ni mase ba* can be translated using "because" (causal) or "when, as" (temporal). The usual translation with the present tense in Japanese commentaries could be misunderstood and reduce the reliability of

Yakamochi as the narrator.⁵⁾

Ikenushi answered with two separate contributions. **Group V** contains a preface and a Chinese poem and the preface can be read as a narration within a narration, a “metadiegetic narrative” with Ikenushi as the “intradiegetic narrator” (Pier 2014, lhn). The intradiegetic narrator recounts the events and experiences from the 3rd Day of the 3rd Month. The day would have been perfect, he states, if only the “star of the highest virtue,” by which Yakamochi was meant, had been with them. The Chinese poem deepens the descriptions of a “winding-water banquet,” which ended “unrestrainedly drunk” (Cranston, p. 609). While Ikenushi was still working on group V on the 4th Day, Yakamochi’s communication from the previous day arrived. Ikenushi took the message as an invitation to reply.

Group VI contains a letter, a long poem, and two short poems. The letter consists almost exclusively of self-deprecation and glorification of the addressee but is nevertheless an interesting piece of literature. Ikenushi opposed Yakamochi’s claim of being untalented by comparing his poetical abilities with those of some famous Chinese poets. In terms of the content, the letter adds very little. However, it is noteworthy how eloquently Ikenushi incorporates passages from classical Chinese literature. The poems, likewise, return to old themes and do not provide developments. The expression at the end of the long poem is difficult to understand but seems to be another invitation for a poetry gathering in nature in spring.

Yakamochi’s poetical experiment of merging Chinese and Japanese poetry in Group II was turned down by Ikenushi’s diplomatic description of it as *washi* 倭詩, literally “Japanese Chinese poem,” in group III. At first glance, this newly-created expression looks like praise, but Ikenushi did not commit to the proposal and continued to keep Japanese and Chinese literature separate. Since Yakamochi understood his next dispatch with group IV as “another try” (*sara ni* 更; preface) without attempting another merger, the experiment appears to have failed. In a subsequent experiment, Yakamochi introduced the poetic discourse, which Ikenushi admired and praised. His contributions in groups V and VI cannot be understood as a continuation of the poetic discourse but must be seen, rather, as another trial to motivate Yakamochi to join another gathering in nature in spring.

5) Translations into modern Japanese allow this kind of ambiguity because one can read the verses as historic present (*rekishiteki genzai* 歴史的現在). However, from a narratological perspective, the translation should be more precise: it should reflect Yakamochi’s process of recovery.

Group VII shows Yakamochi's understanding of Ikenushi's demands. It consists of a letter, a Chinese poem, and two *tanka*. The letter continues the "competition" and would remain monotonous and stereotypical were it not for the intriguing self-descriptions:

但惟下僕 稟性難雕 闇神靡瑩 握翰腐毫 對研忘渴

And yet your lowly servant has a nature difficult to carve, a dark spirit impossible to burnish. I take my brush in hand and rot the tip; I face the inkstone and forget it is dry. (Cranston, 1993, 613)

These and other verses are beautifully arranged into groups of four or six characters and the letter again is filled with quotations from and allusions to classical Chinese literature. Together, these formal aspects again contradict Yakamochi's claim of a lack of talent and, consequently, corroborate his character as an unreliable narrator. So far, we only have hints supporting this assumption, but, as we will see later, group VIII distinctly reveals the poet as an unreliable narrator. Yakamochi continues with an expression of the fear of not yet being well enough to attend the poetic banquet, in other words, a refusal to Ikenushi's new invitation. The letter ends with the rhetorical devices previously discussed in the earlier letters.

This letter possesses an alternative ending, which is marked with smaller characters arranged in two lines. This alternative ending—some handwritten copies possess another alternative ending of Yakamochi's letter in group IV—is helpful for the reconstruction of the genesis of the work. Together with the peritexts, it shows that someone, presumably Yakamochi, worked on the texts after the correspondence was terminated (cf. Nishi 2000).

The first half of the Chinese poem deals with the traditional day of the "winding-water banquet" and consists of landscape descriptions. The depictions of "arriving swallows" and "departing geese," which form the third and fourth verses, are of special interest because three years later, Yakamochi transformed the verses into the two *tanka* 4144 and 4145 in Book 19.

The two poems of group VII have a complicated structure. 3976 again deals with the yellow *yamabuki* blossoms and Japanese research assumes that Ikenushi sent some branches together with his last message. The poem is the only spring description in Yakamochi's texts that is based on actual perception. The second poem describes a dream in which Yakamochi saw Ikenushi "by the fence of reeds" (Cranston, p. 614). To see someone in a dream was understood

to mean that the person appearing yearned for the dreamer. The postscript again mentions that “Ōtomo no Sukune Yakamochi [...] lay sick in bed” (Cranston, *ibid.*).

Group VIII was written fifteen days after Yakamochi’s last communication. The *chōka*, which is understood as the second “monologically composed long poem,” addresses a certain *imo*, who in poetry usually is the “beloved.” Itō (9: 233) and Inaoka (4: 213) subdivide the poem into three parts. The first part is a description of the good relationship between the poet and the woman. The second part starts with the stereotypical remark about coming to remote Etchū by order of the ruler. Verses 21 and 22 mention the spring blossoms falling to the ground. Part three is usually understood as an expression of looking forward to visiting home and to seeing his wife again. Important for the narrativity of the whole sequence are the poet’s thoughts about his wife, which are expressed through the auxiliary verb *ramu*. The whole poem is an expression of strong desire and loneliness filled with words belonging to the semantic field “longing, yearning” such as *kokoro*, “heart,” *omofu*, “thinking of someone constantly,” *ahi-miru*, “seeing each other” or “seeing something together,” and, of course, *kohi*, “longing, yearning.” The same semantic field is expressed in the peritexts and the accompanying four *tanka*, which contain repetitions of words and phrases from the *chōka*.

3 Reading the narrative

Some of Yakamochi’s poem groups indicate his strong interest in narrative arrangement. A convincing example are the fifteen poems 4139 to 4153 introducing Book 19. Although they tell a different story, they have a narratological technique in common with the sequence from Book 17, which will be discussed in the last part of the paper. The guiding question of this part concerns the narrativity of the whole sequence and the connections of group VIII to the preceding seven groups. The first look at the matter is dedicated to the peritexts.

The first text of the sequence is a pretext, the last one a postscript. In general, peritexts provide background information to poems, i.e. information about who composed the poems where, when, and why. The last four books of the anthology (*sue yonkan* 末四卷) do not continue the traditional order of the first sixteen books. Since the peritexts of the last four books present the poems in a relatively tight chronological order, they are distinguished from the other ones as a “poem diary” (*uta nikki* 歌日記) or “poem logbook” (*uta nisshi* 歌日誌), but this understanding contradicts the interpretation of the sequence as a self-contained and coherent

work singled out from the flow of diary entries. However, the pretexts of the poems from the year 747 (17: 3962 to 4015), the year of the correspondence, reveal that there are no other spring poems before or after the sequence. Japanese scholars unanimously regard the lack of New Year poems of that year as a consequence of Yakamochi's illness. The preceding group with poems 3960 and 3961 was composed in the "11th Month" (746) and the postscript mentions falling snow. It is not clear when Yakamochi fell ill, but within the literary context, the tiny possibility remains that New Year poems as well as other spring poems were avoided to strengthen the spring coherency of the sequence.

The pretext to group I does not mention spring but the postscript does and spring remains a continuing theme all through the sequence. The postscript to group VIII is the last (though indirect) reference to spring; it mentions 三月廿日, the "20th Day of the 3rd Month." The handwritten copy *Genryaku kōbon* is dated the 25th day and SNKBZ (9: 195) emended the date accordingly. However, the problem is the pretext to the next two poems 3983 and 3984. Although it starts with 立夏四月 *rifuka* (*rikka*) *shigatsu* (SNKBZ, *ibid.*), "Summer rises, 4th Month," the postscript to the group ends with "3rd Month, 29th Day." The postscript to group 3985 to 3987 also gives the 3rd Month ("30th Day of the 3rd Month"; SNKBZ 9: 198) and one has to ask for the reason to present "Summer rises, 4th Month" immediately after group VIII only to mention the 3rd Month again.

Japanese research seeks the solution in the historical fact that the first day of summer 747 fell on the 25th Day of the 3rd Month and that the first day of any season was the beginning of a new month (cf. SNKBZ 9: 195, Inaoka 4: 216). That would explain the reason to label the 3rd Month as the 4th Month but not the necessity to mention the 3rd Month again in the postscript and to continue with poems from the 3rd Month. The pretext to poem 3983 having "Summer rises, 4th Month" as its introductory words follows immediately after the postscript to poem 3982 containing the "3rd Month" and it is as if the compiler tried to draw a line between the two poem groups.

What complicates the question is that poems 3983 and 3984 were composed to express the "resentment" or "grudge" (*urami* 恨) against the silence of the cuckoo (*hototogisu*). The postscript to the group explains that the cuckoo "decides" when summer starts by calling. Although "summer is already some days old" (pretext), the cuckoo had not yet called. The *chōka* 3978 from group VIII also mentions the cuckoo: "The month when the cuckoo comes and

calls, I wish that it will be soon!” (paraphrasing Aso 9: 181). Therefore, the *chōka* and the two poems from “Summer rises” seem to be connected, but there is something that sets them apart. While the cuckoo in 3978 is an imagination expressed as a wish and, thus, a part of all the imaginations or speculations in Yakamochi’s landscape descriptions during the whole sequence, the missing call of the cuckoo in 3983 and 3984 is presented as a real-life experience. Yakamochi was finally able to leave the sickbed and the essential difference in literary staging the outer world as imagination versus experience draws a line of separation. The opposition “spring versus summer” classifies group VIII as belonging to the sequence.

As we have already seen, SNKBZ followed the *Genryaku kōbon* and emended “20th Day of the 3rd Month” from the postscript to group VIII to “25th Day.” Since poem 3982, the last poem of group VIII, undoubtedly belongs to spring, as evidenced by the mention of *haru-hana*, “spring blossoms,” the emendation contradicts the explanation that the 25th Day was the first summer day (*rikka*). Could it not be that the last poem of group VIII intentionally contains *haru-hana* to underline that spring encompasses this poem? The expression *haru-hana* is not only a repetition of the undifferentiated “spring blossoms” from group I but contributes to the function of both groups, to serve as a frame for the sequence. We will see later that the repetition of *haru-hana* amplifies the “blow-up effect.”

The element showing the narrativity of the whole sequence most clearly is the chronology given in the dates of the peritexts. However, expressions denoting the passage of time are mentioned in the prose texts and the poems as well. Some expressions in the prose texts are rather uncertain, but Ikenushi’s preface, his Chinese poem in group V, and Yakamochi’s Chinese poem mention the 3rd Day of the 3rd Month explicitly.

初巳 in Yakamochi’s Chinese poem has the same meaning as 上巳, the “First Day of the Serpent” (Cranston, p. 609), in Ikenushi’s preface and his Chinese poem. Both expressions point to the date 晚春三日, “late spring, 3rd Day,” mentioned in the pretext to Ikenushi’s group V. Seen from the 3rd day, the groups V and VII, which refer via 上巳 and 初巳 to that day and which were written on the 4th and 5th day, respectively, emphasize the progression of time.

Another aspect calls for attention. Yakamochi dated his group IV on the 3rd Day and the message reached Ikenushi on the 4th day. On the 5th Day, Ikenushi wrote in the letter of group VI that “Yesterday I related my paltry sentiments, and this morning I defile your ears and eyes” (Cranston, p. 610). Yakamochi’s reply with group VII was also written on the 5th day and he

opened the letter with “Last evening’s messenger to my great good fortune bestowed upon me your *shih* [*shi*, Chinese poem] on a late spring excursion; your second message this morning, of which I am shamefully unworthy [...]” (Cranston, p. 612, my adding). Both letters start with expressions of the “competition,” which are now enriched with the opposition “yesterday versus today” perfectly arranged in parallel verses. Essential for the narrativity of the sequence are the reflections on the passage of time understood as a cooperation of expressions in the peritexts, the prose texts, and in the poems.

The articulation of the passage of time in terms of reflexivity continues on the level of the Japanese poems, in which the passage of spring is presented by the ephemerality of spring blossoms. They appear for the first time in poem 3963, which is the first *tanka* of Yakamochi’s group I from the “20th Day, 2nd Month” (postscript). Alexander Vovin paraphrases the three verses *haru-hana no chiri no magahi ni shinu beki omohe ba* as “(5) When [I] think that [I] must die (3/4) when spring blossoms fall in disarray!” (2016, 101). All spring sceneries in Yakamochi’s poems of the sequence were mere imaginations. Of course, the reason is that he was not able to leave the sickbed, but as Tetsuno showed, the imaginations were inspired by classical Chinese literature from the sickbed. The date from the postscript to group I indicates that spring blossoms were still a long time from “falling in disarray” and we will see that the situation had completely changed at the beginning of group VIII.

The short poem 3965 from group II was composed nine days later. Yakamochi wrote *haru no hana ima ha sakari ni nihofu-ramu* and Vovin’s paraphrase “(1) Spring flowers (2) are now at the peak of their blooming, and (3) are probably fragrant” (p. 104) represents a problem. It is essential to understand that the auxiliary verb *ramu* expressing suppositions or speculations about something going on in the present time governs all three verses. That is why *haru no hana ima ha sakari ni* also belongs to Yakamochi’s imaginations and why Cranston translated it as “The spring blossoms/must now be out in splendor,/In all their fragrance” (p. 603). In comparison to group I, the temporal adverb *ima*, “now,” indicates a narrative development.

In poems 3967 and 3968 from group III, composed on the 2nd Day of the 3rd Month, Ikenushi confirms the narrative developments in Yakamochi’s imaginations. In poem 3967, he concretized Yakamochi’s abstract und undifferentiated *haru no hana*, “spring blossoms,” with *yama-gahi ni sakeru sakura*, “cherry blossoms blooming (1) in mountain gorges” (Vovin, p. 106). The auxiliary verb *ri* in *sakeru* (in attributive form *ru*) corresponds with *ima*, “now,” and is

equivalent to the English present progressive form (“are blooming”). The next poem contains a new narrative development because Ikenushi expresses his concern that the flowers will have fallen before Yakamochi had the chance to touch them.

Ikenushi’s poem 3968 introduces the “*yamabuki* roses” or “wild mountain rose” (Cranston, p. 604). The blossoms are another concretization of Yakamochi’s spring flowers (*haru no hana*) and, at the same time, a new element supporting the narrativity. That they bloom a little longer than cherry blossoms is not based on extratextual knowledge but information from the subsequent texts (see below). Vovin paraphrases the rhetorical question *utagata mo kimi ga te furezu hana chirame ya mo* as “(3/5) would [they] really fall down (4) without [my] lord’s hands touching [them]?! [—Certainly, they would not!]” (p. 107).

The rhetorical question contains the anxiety that the spring blossoms will fall soon. *Chōka* 3969 from the 3rd Day shows that Yakamochi had realized the threat and his visions from the sickbed concerning the spring scenery form the peak of the poem. They are expressed by stringing together the four spring images “blossoms of spring” (*haru-hana*), “springtime fields” (*haru no no*), “spring herbs” (*haru-na*), and “soft spring rain” (*haru-same*; Cranston, p. 607), which are rather abstract expressions. The verses contain quotations from poems by Japanese poets and the repetition of *haru*, “spring,” was influenced by classical Chinese poetry from Six Dynasties. They are a good example of what Wiebke Denecke called “*Wa-Kan* Game” (2014, 96) although the “beginnings” of that game, which Denecke argues are found in the correspondence discussed here, are in evidence much earlier, for example in *Kojiki* (712) or the experiments carried out by Tabito and Okura in Book 5 twenty years earlier. All things considered, the spring verses in Yakamochi’s *chōka* give an impression of extreme excitement intermingled with the anxiety to miss the spring scenery.

Ikenushi’s long poem 3973 and the short poem 3974 from group VI were composed two days later on the 5th Day. Poem 3973 again picks up the cherry blossoms and poem 3974 thematizes the mountain roses. While in poem 3973 the verses *yama-bi ni ha sakura-bana chiri*, “(25) At the mountain sides (26) cherry blossoms are falling” (Vovin, p. 121), confirm the apprehensions about the falling blossoms and therefore show a narrative development, the *yamabuki* in poem 3974 are still in bloom. Vovin paraphrases *yamabuki ha hi ni hi ni sakinu* as “(1) [mountain] roses (2) are blooming day by day” (p. 123), but the undertones of *hi ni hi ni* in combination with *sakinu* imply the approaching of the end of spring. The auxiliary verb *nu* denotes *kanryō*

完了, i.e. “completion, conclusion” (cf. *Zen'yaku kogo* 全訳古語, 4th Edition, digital; *Shin waei daijiten* 新和英大辞典, 5th Edition, digital). In *tanka* 3976 composed on the same day, Yakamochi confirms that the *yamabuki* blossoms are still blooming (*sakeri*). As already mentioned, the confirmation was presumably based on some branches sent by Ikenushi together with his last message. The verses corroborate the impression that *yamabuki* roses bloom longer than cherry blossoms.

The theme of the spring blossoms comes to an end in group VIII and reading the sequence from group I to group VIII as a coherent narrative helps to explain a particular grammatical problem which should be addressed briefly. The verb stem *ahi-mi* appears as 相見 in five verses of the group and poems 3978, 3979, and 3982 contain the phrase *ahi-mine ba*. As one of the keywords of the group together with *haru-hana* and a few other expressions, *ahi-mi* is written logographically. Furthermore, the verb *ahi-miru*, “see each other” or “see together,” connects group VIII to the correspondence because sight and visions belong to the continuing themes. Verses 11 to 24 from the *chōka* are presented below in German and in English to point out the specific problem in terms of translation.

大王能 美許登加之古美 阿之比奇能 夜麻古要奴由伎 安麻射加流 比奈乎左米尔等 别来之
曾乃日乃伎波美 荒璞能 登之由吉我敝利 春花乃 宇都呂布麻泥爾 相見禰婆 伊多母須敝奈美
*ohokimi no / mikoto kashikoshi / shihiki no / yama koye nu yuki / ama-zakarū / hina wosame
ni to / wakare-koshi / sono hi no kihami / ara-tama no / toshi yuki-gaheri / haru-hana no /
utsurofu made ni / ahi-mi-ne ba / itamo sube nami*

11 Des Großen Fürsten/12 erhabenen Worten in Ehrfurcht gehorsam/13
BESCHWERLICHE/14 Berge überschreitend, [weite] Gefilde durchziehend,/15 um die
HIMMELWEIT [von der Hauptstadt] ENTFERNTE/16 ländliche Gegend zu verwalten,/17
17 habe ich mich [von ihr] getrennt und bin [hierher] gekommen, und/18 da seit jenem
Tage [der Trennung]/19 SICH ERNEUERENDE/20 Jahre gegangen und wiedergekehrt
sind,/21 und wir uns, bis die Frühlings[blüten; my change]/22 nun schon verblichen
sind,/23 nicht wiedergesehen haben,/24 bin ich ganz trostlos. (Florenz 1933, 45-51)

[...] (18) from the day (17) that [I] came here, parting from [you (my Great Lord; my
addition)], (14) going through fields and crossing mountains (13) with low feet, (16) to
rule a countryside (15) that is far [from the capital] as Heaven (11/12) because the

command of the Great Lord is awesome, (19) new (20) years go and return and (23) because [we] do not see each other (21/22) until spring [blossoms; my changing] all fade away, (24) [I] am extremely helpless, so [...]" (Vovin 2016, 131)

If we understand verse 24 as a description of Yakamochi's emotional situation at the time when he wrote the poem, which would be the poem's "here and now," the preceding verses are an analepsis, a flashback. Florenz translates *toshi* in verse 20 as plural "Jahre," but because Yakamochi went to Etchū in summer 746 and the poem was written at the end of spring 747 the singular "year" ("Jahr") is correct. Vovin makes the same mistake, which, among other things, leads him to the understanding of the poem as a "giant poetic metaphor" (p. 132). He explains that Yakamochi "spent less than a year at his post before the date this poem was composed" (ibid.), but does not elaborate on his reasons for translating the word as plural.

Florenz translates the three verses *haru-hana no utsurofu made ni ahi-mine ba* as "und wir uns, bis die Frühlingsblüten nun schon verblichen sind, nicht wiedergesehen haben." Seen from the here and now in verse 24, the spring blossoms have already ("nun schon") fallen (original "verblichen", "faded, grew pale"). Vovin's paraphrase „because we do not see each other until spring blossoms all fade away“ (p. 131) sounds as if Yakamochi, so to speak, looks into a future in which the spring blossoms are still falling.

Before approaching the translations of the repeated three verses in poem 3982, a look at *tanka* 3979 is required because it contains the second use of *ahi-mine ba*. Florenz translates the three verses *aratama no toshi kaheru made ahi-mine ba* as "Da wir, bis das sich erneuernde/2 Jahr wiederkehrt,/3 einander nicht wiedergesehen haben." Although *ahi-mine ba* is the same expression as in poem 3978, the verse "bis das Jahr wiederkehrt" transfers the translation grammatically into the future. This future orientation is even more evident in Vovin's paraphrase "(3) Because [we] will not see each other (1/2) until the new year comes" (p. 134; my underlining).

In poem 3982, Florenz translates the three verses *haru-hana no utsurofu made ni ahi-mine ba*, which are a word-by-word repetition from the *chōka*, as "3 Da wir einander nicht wiedersehen werden/1 bis die Frühlingsblumen/2 verblichen sind," and this time, the translation is explicitly transferred into future tense. The same is true in Vovin's paraphrase "(3) Because we will not see each other (1/2) until spring flowers all fade" (p. 136; my

underlining).

Neither Florenz nor Vovin consider narratological knowledge to support the translation. However, it must be taken into account that narratology had not been developed in Florenz' times. The preceding texts from the correspondence show unequivocally that in the here and now of group VIII the time of the cherry blossoms is undoubtedly over. Even if the *yamabuki* roses are still blooming, we must not overlook the fact that Yakamochi returns to the abstract "spring blossoms" (*haru-hana*) from poem 3963 with *haru-hana* and poem 3965 with *haru no hana*, which Ikenushi had concretized into cherry blossoms and mountain roses in his first dispatch in group III. In other words, the spring theme is introduced on an abstract level, concretized within the correspondence, and finally abstracted again. Indeed, Yakamochi touches upon the approaching summer with a visualization of "deutzia flowers" (*u no hana*), which bloom in summer, in verse 49 of the *chōka*. The prescript to poem 3983, which does not belong to the sequence, confirms "Summer," which had now turned into reality. This is another reason why the spring blossoms of that year had already fallen.

Finally, we have to take a brief look at the grammar in *ahi-mine ba* and *utsurofu*. The postposition *ba* after *mine* can be read causally as "since, because," but one has to consider the negative marker *zu* in its present flexion form *ne*. In Japanese, this form is called *izenkei* 已然形, translated by Bruno Lewin as "Konditionalform" (1975, 105, with explanations of the functions). That might be a little misleading because the word *izen* means that something is already the case or already present, completed, or finished (cf. *sude ni okotta koto* すでに起こったこと; *Kanjikai* 漢字海, 3rd Edition, digital, or *sude ni owatta koto* すでに終わったこと; *Kanjigen* 漢字源, 5th Edition, digital). Consequently, "da wir einander nicht wiedersehen werden" in Florenz's translation and "will not see each other" in Vovin's paraphrase cannot be correct because both translations use the future tense.

The auxiliary verb *fu* in *utsurofu*, which is typical of Old Japanese, denotes repetition and continuation. The verb *utsuru* expresses transition or change in space or time and important is *made ni*, "until." Since *ahi-mine ba* is "because we did not see each other," the verse *utsurofu made ni* also emphasizes that the spring blossoms had already fallen or that their falling was about to come to an end. Spring is incontrovertibly over and so is the narrative of the sequence.

As we have seen above, the spring theme is introduced on an abstract level and returns to this abstract level again before it ends. This fits a more general characteristic of the sequence,

which can be understood as framing the correspondence from groups II to VII. To be more specific, the moment most responsible for the frame function is the range of suppositions and imaginations mainly expressed through the auxiliary verb *ramu*. The long poem of group I contains speculations concerning his “mother” (*haha*), his “wife” (*tsuma*), and his “daughters and sons” (*imo mo se mo*) all expressed through *ramu*. Because *ramu* appears later in Yakamochi poems 3965 and 3966 of group II, 3969 and 3971 of group IV, and 3978 and 3982 of group VIII, and because Yakamochi expresses reflections and imaginations with other means as well, this can be understood as a leitmotif, i.e. a “dominant recurring theme” (*Merriam Webster* online, “leitmotif”).

In group I, the speculations and imaginations are about the family at home far away in Nara. In group II, the range of the supposition is reduced to the nearby surroundings in Etchū and it has to be stressed again that the entire depiction of spring scenery by Yakamochi is not based on recent experiences but mere speculations and imaginations. Of course, the “real,” i.e. the historical reason, was Yakamochi’s sickness, which kept him confined to bed. This he mentions repeatedly. However, seen as literary construction inspired profoundly by classical Chinese literature, these conspicuous repetitions help to identify the spring sceneries as imaginations.

Now we can see that in group VIII, Yakamochi did not only return the cherry blossoms and mountain roses to the abstract level of “spring flowers” to indicate the end of spring. In the same group, he extended the range of speculations from nearby Etchū back to his wife, who was far away in Nara. The reduction and extension of the range of assumptions has been compared above with the blow-up technique in photography. Interestingly, the imaginations about the wife were enriched with narrative elements, too. In the long poem of group I, they were put into a parallel construction containing a “morning-evening opposition” (*chōyū-tsui* 朝夕対). This opposition also appears in other parallel constructions of the sequence but not in the long poem of group VIII. In that poem, the imagination concerns an evening when she was standing at the gate and a night when she was lying in bed waiting for him. The move from evening to night is different from the traditional day and night opposition and can be understood as “Verfremdung” (*Merriam-Webster*, digital; “distancing, alienation”, Japanese *ika* 異化). Whether this is a narrative development or not is difficult to decide, but reading both *chōka* as a coherent narrative produces a subtle and mutually complementing picture of the wife during the day, evening, and night. However, the last poem of group VIII again presents an image of

the wife embedded in the traditional day-and-night opposition. Vovin paraphrases *tsuki-hi yomi-tsutsu imo matsu-ramu so* as “(5) [my] beloved is probably waiting for [me], (4) counting month and days.” (p. 136).

Concerning the functions of the frame, another formal aspect requires attention. As we have seen already, Japanese research has described group I as Yakamochi's first *dokuei chōka* 独詠長歌, the first “monologically composed long poem” (Kanai Seiichi 金井清一 1977, quoted from Haga 2003, 649, Tetsuno 2007, 104). The term, which means that the *chōka* was not composed within an exchange situation, was also applied to the *chōka* of group VIII. Therefore, it would be Yakamochi's second *dokuei chōka* (Inaoka 4: 213), which also is his first *chōka* accompanied by four *tanka*. Within the whole sequence and in particular the texts of the correspondence, the formal aspects are as important as the contents, and seen in this context, it appears that Yakamochi put a lot of energy into the composition of group VIII. This effort, on the one hand, fits the energy he put into writing his contributions to the correspondence, and on the other hand, is a sign of the poet's complete recovery. As has been mentioned above, the process of convalescence represents evident narrativity, too.

A look at a unique expression, which also ties group VIII to the correspondence, will close the analysis of the sequence. The pretext to the group contains the expression 戀緒 *rensho*, “the longing in my heart” (Cranston, p. 604), literally “threads of longing,” which seems to be a genuine product of Japanese literature (cf. SNKTK 4: 139, 142). Consequently, it is essential to realize that Ikenushi uses the expression in his letter to group III because it ties group VIII and group III together. To put it in other words, while Yakamochi addresses an unnamed *imo*, the “beloved,” Ikenushi is still on his mind. Ikenushi uses 戀緒 again in the poems 18: 4132 and 4133 addressed to Yakamochi.

The assumption is corroborated by the theme of seeing someone in a dream. In the long poem 3978 addressing *imo*, the “beloved,” Yakamochi writes “although I see you in my dreams without dropping one single night (= every night)” and in the accompanying short poem 3981, he repeats the claim of having dreamt of her. However, in poem 3977, which is the last poem addressed to Ikenushi, Yakamochi claims that he has seen him in a dream. In the oldest handwritten copies as well as in modern anthologies, poem 3977 is close enough to 3982 to remain in the reading memory, i.e. the memory the reader gains while reading the work (in contrast to the reader's memory, which contains previous knowledge, education, cultural

background, etc.; cf. Humphrey 2005), particularly if the last four books (*sue yonkan*) are read as a diary. Yakamochi swears that he has dreamt of *imo* every night, but he cannot have forgotten the intensive dream about Ikenushi from a couple of days ago. In a nutshell, Yakamochi seems to be an unreliable narrator.

4 The “blow-up effect”

The last part of the paper is dedicated to the fifteen poems 4139 to 4153 opening Book 19. They are concerned with the three days from the late afternoon of the 1st Day of the 3rd Month to the 3rd Day, when a banquet was held at Yakamochi’s villa. The last three poems present the literary results of this banquet. In Itō Haku’s unique theory, the first twelve poems do not form a “coherent series of poems” (10: 32; *rensaku* 連作), by which he possibly meant narratively arranged poems or poems connected by contents. His assumption is that Yakamochi presented these twelve poems on the 3rd Day at the banquet (10: 75–76). Itō (10: 66–69) carefully analyzed the time structure of the twelve poems, but his criteria for a *rensaku* remain uncertain—at least here, without further explanations. While his theory is based on assumptions about extratextual realities, a reading of all fifteen poems as a coherent narrative is possible without extratextual knowledge. Here again, I will refer to this coherent narrative as “sequence.”

The pretext to the first two poems from the 1st Day presents Yakamochi “gazing at the blossoms of the peach and damson trees in my spring garden, on the evening of the first of the third month of Tempyō-Shōhō 2 [750]” (Cranston 1993, 466). Cranston translated the two poems and the next ones in his anthology are Nos. 4143, 4146, 4147, and 4150. Indeed, these are the most popular poems of the sequence. As with the original, the English translations are not perceived as belonging together (cf. Doe 1982, 153–160).

One more poem belongs to the 1st Day and the pretext to poem 4142 is dated the 2nd Day with nine poems. Poems 4142 to 4145 thematize several visual observations such as a “branch of willow” (Doe, p. 156), “pink sweet-lily blossoms” (Cranston, p. 467), “arriving swallows,” and “departing geese.” It seems that the poet had nothing better to do than frolic in nature and write poems. In poems 4146 to 4150, which were composed between the middle of the night and dawn, the themes change to acoustic observations. Two poems are dedicated to “the cry of the plover in the night” (Doe, p. 157; cf. Cranston, p. 468) and the next two poems are “on hearing the pheasant cry at dawn” (Doe, p. 158). The last poem has the title “A poem on

hearing far off the song of the boatmen going up the river” (Cranston, p. 468). The fact that the pretext to the subsequent three poems gives the 3rd Day, means that poem 4150 belongs to the unit of the 2nd Day, which is also evident from its acoustic observation. Having previously experimented with the combination of the visual and acoustic world, the last three poems of Book 19, which are probably his most famous ones (cf. Wittkamp 2021a), represent among other things Yakamochi’s mastery of the technique.

Poems 4151 to 4153, which have not been translated by either Doe or Cranston, are the last three in the sequence and identified by the pretext as having been written on the 3rd Day. Looking at the three poems and their somewhat odd contents in isolation makes discounting them an understandable choice. However, seen in the larger context they are intriguing for a number of reasons.

First of all, the sequence in Book 19 is enriched with tight connections to the sequence from Book 17. They are most evident in the dates from the pretext. The 3rd Day of the 3rd Month is the central day in the correspondence, the day of the poetic “winding-water banquet” (Cranston, p. 608). It has to be mentioned that no banquet took place between the failed one in late spring 747, the year of the correspondence, and the year 750. This banquet was the first one in Etchū and, as Itō (10: 73) pointed out, the three *tanka* are the first Japanese poems from a winding-water banquet.

Before taking a look at the banquet poems, two more links to the correspondence have to be noted. The most obvious connections are the two poems 4144 and 4145. They are marked as a subgroup by the pretext “Two poems on seeing geese flying home” and represent transgeneric poems, or, as Ikenushi might have said, *washi* 倭詩, “Yamato Chinese poems.” That is how he called Yakamochi’s experiment to incorporate the Chinese parallel verses from his letter of group II into Japanese *tanka* poetry. In the correspondence, the experiment failed, but now Yakamochi finally transforms the spring scenery from his Chinese poem from group VII into two *tanka*.

Another obvious connection is the expression *kurenawi nihofu momo no hana* 紅尔保布 桃花, “Radiates a crimson glow: Blossoms of the peach” (Cranston, p. 466) from poem 4139. The “red peach” and the “green Willow” in poem 4142 are topoi of Chinese poems on winding-water banquets, but Ikenushi combines *kurenawi* and “peach” in 紅桃灼灼, “the red peach blooms brightly” (Cranston, p. 604), in his parallel verses in the letter to group III.

A further possible connection is the verb phrase *ide-tatsu*, “steps in view” (Cranston, p. 466), in the first poem of Book 19, written logographically 出立. The expression itself is not unusual (cf. Omodaka 1977, 30–31) and Yakamochi used it repeatedly, such as in poem 3972, the last poem from group IV in Book 17. However, the meaning in poem 4139 is vague and mysterious and the phrase has been discussed intensively (Itō 10: 36–40). In 3972, *ide-tatsu*, “step out of [the house],” is almost synonymous with *ide-koshi*, “stepped out and came here,” from the long poem 3969, to which *tanka* 3972 belongs. Earlier poems by Yakamochi such as 1479 and 1568 from Book 8 provide evidence that the idea of *ide-tatsu* constantly motivated him to carry out poetic experiments. It is of interest in this context that 3969 contains the phrase *yo sugara ni*, “the whole night through” (Cranston, p. 607), which also appears in the poems from the 1st and 2nd Day of Book 19.

The three poems from the 3rd Day are introduced by the pretext “At the 3rd Day, three poems from the banquet at [...] Yakamochi’s villa” (SNKZS 9: 299). The banquet must have been held in the villa and not on the bank of a “winding-water” and the fact that all three poems are by Yakamochi alone is strange, although not entirely unusual (cf. Itō 10: 76). The last two poems address other participants directly, but the group neither reveals their names nor presents their poems. It leaves the reader with the aftertaste that Yakamochi held the banquet alone. Particularly strange is the use of the word “today,” *kefu*, contained in every poem and written logographically 今日. Itō (10: 74–75) interprets the repetition as a means to express the especial joyfulness of the day, but considering the intensification *kefu* (“today”) → *kefu ha* (“today!”) → *kefu so* (“Oh yes, today!”), the three poems sound like an incantation and bring the main theme to the fore, which is time.

After New Year, the 3rd Day of the 3rd Month was the most important day in spring. In the literary construction, Yakamochi had to wait three years until he was finally able to hold a winding-water banquet. Apparently, he was so excited that he could not sleep at all the previous night. The poems 4144 to 4150 give a strong impression of a long and sleepless night and judging by the detailed and leisurely observations, even the 1st and 2nd Days were long and slow days. This extremely slow passage of time forms a distinct contrast to the poems from the 3rd Day and the impression of suddenly fast-moving time they create.

Within this arrangement, the three poems from the 1st Day in the beginning and the three poems from the 3rd Day at the end frame the nine poems from the 2nd Day. This frame provides

the poem from the 2nd day with a blow-up effect comparable to the sequence in Book 17. This effect is another tight connection between the two sequences, although there is one distinct difference. While the changing of imagination ranges in the sequence of Book 17 puts the weight on spatial aspects, the sequence from Book 19 focusses on the passage of time. The three cries of “today” in the poems from the 3rd day are evidence for this.

Poem 4154, the next one in Book 19, was composed on the 8th Day (pretext), opening a gap of five days. It is a long poem (*chōka*) and the difference in form makes the disconnection even more evident. Here, it seems again as if Yakamochi intentionally kept the groups separate. If this assumption is correct, the sequence would have the same structure as the sequence in Book 17, namely a framed narrative structure.

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