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X-Rated and Excessively Long: *Ji-Amari* in Hayashi Amari's *Tanka*

Jon Holt

As a fixed 31-syllable form of short poetry, Japan's *tanka* is one of the world's oldest forms of still-practiced poetry, with examples perhaps dating back to the fifth century. In the modern periods of Meiji (1868-1912) and Taishō (1912-1926), poets radically reformed the genre, expanding diction beyond millennium-old classical limits, thereby allowing poets to write not only about cherry blossoms and tragic love but also about things like steam trains and baseball games; although today many *tanka* poets in practicing circles still employ classical Japanese, many modern masters innovated the genre by skillfully blending in colloquial language. Like their modern forebears, poets in the contemporary period (1945-present) continue to experiment with the metrical and time limits of this short form.

Hayashi Amari (b. 1963) is one poet who frequently and consistently violated the thirty-one-syllable count when she wrote her unabashedly frank poems about female sexuality in *MARS*ANGEL* (*Maasu-enjeru*, 1986), *Scent of Nanako* (*Nanako no nioi*, 1988), and *X-Rated Couple* (*Futari etchi*, 1999). Viewed early on as a rebel who wrote

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“light-verse” (*raito vaasu*) (Hara 1990, 97), she made an impact on the world of *tanka* for her rule-breaking *tanka*, her songwriting for contemporary ballads, and her experiments with hybrid collections of *tanka* and illustrations, including manga. These “collaborative” works include famed manga artists and illustrators Hayashi Sei’ichi (no relation), Tōno Kazumi, and Katsu Aki. In some instances, her savvy publishers have helped market Hayashi Amari’s poems to larger audiences with deluxe pictorial editions; in other cases, the artists provide images to accompany Hayashi’s works; in others, as in her adaptation of Katsu Aki’s manga, Hayashi fashions new poems based on Katsu’s scenes and characters. “The character wrote the poems for me,” she remembers (Hayashi 1998, 227). Her variegated publishing output alone demands further examination, but first and foremost one must consider how Hayashi’s skill and unusual style as a poet established her as a prominent voice in *tanka* in the 1980s and 1990s.

Although her place in the world of *tanka* may have been eclipsed by the rise of Tawara Machi (b. 1962), whose *Salad Anniversary* (*Sarada kinenbi*, 1987) created a larger boom of interest in the genre, Hayashi’s work—although now overlooked—still serves as a compelling reminder that the conservative world of *tanka* was changing in other dramatic ways before the end of the millennium. Scholars and critics (Lovitz et al. 1994; Okai et al. 1998; Okai and Michiura 1999; Homura 2015) have often commented on the content of her highly sexualized and feminist poetry, but one of Hayashi’s achievements was to gain admittance to the *tanka* world, even though she frequently breaks the 31-syllable count that has defined the medium for over a thousand years.

In this article, I examine how Hayashi’s poetic art, far from being defective, capitalizes on hypermetric verses, or *ji-amari*, both in order to explore female sexuality and to challenge conservative poetic norms. Her excessively long verses bring into focus what kind of freedoms women in particular began to enjoy in the *tanka* world of the late 1980s and 1990s. Hayashi’s case indicates the limits of such agency, as she was challenged by fellow poets, critics, and the general public. Ultimately, her *ji-amari*-laden *tanka* reveal the potential for personal expression—both in terms of content and form—that a female *tanka* poet could expect as her star rose in the 1990s.

“Fake and Artificial”: Resisting Traditional *Tanka* Rhythm

Writing in 1998, a decade after her debut, Hayashi describes her entry into the world of *tanka* as highly unlikely given that, as a high school student, she was no fan of *tanka*, haiku, or free verse (*shi*):

Poetry was something that I associated with rhythm, and rhythm could never make me feel it was something other than fake (*uso-kusai*) and artificial (*kazarimono*).... The

only thing I trusted were words... and free verse seemed heretical although it consisted of words. Particularly, *tanka* and *haiku* were two genres that I really hated because their rhythm made them so stiff (*rizumu no katamari*) (Hayashi 1998, 109).

Soon after high school, she was encouraged by her teacher to apply to Seikei University, where she was taught literature by *tanka* poet Maeda Tōru (son of *tanka* innovator Maeda Yūgure). Hayashi fell in love with *tanka* and received close guidance there from Maeda. She embraced the *tanka* form and began writing the poetry that would later constitute her debut collection. The poems of *MARS*ANGEL* typically defy the limitations of thirty-one syllables.

For clarity, hereafter I use the term mora(e) instead of syllable(s) or characters (*ji*) to measure the beats of the *tanka*, following the distinction made by Kawamoto Kōji, a professor of comparative literature at Tokyo University and scholar of Japanese poetry, in his study of Japanese prosody. In classical prosody the mora represented a unit of metrical duration, and Japanese linguistics

has come to use it to represent the actual sound which is pronounced in this ‘mora’s worth’ of time. Thus, following the definition of a syllable mentioned above, a Japanese mora may be defined as a simple nucleus (i.e., a single short vowel), which optionally may be preceded by an onset of one consonant, and which does not take a coda (Kawamoto 2000, 293-294).

In Hayashi’s *MARS*ANGEL*, I find that 122 of its 177 poems (70 percent) exceed the traditional count of 31 beats (*miso-hito-moji*), frequently having 32, 33, or 34 beats. The average morae count for the collection is 32.16. (See Table 1 for the frequency and peaks of poems loaded with *ji-amari* in the collection.) In her debut *tanka* collection, Hayashi clearly disregards the genre’s limits with these hyper-metric verses.

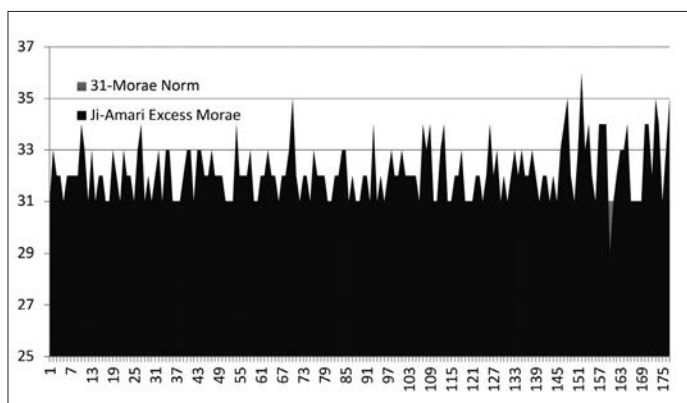


Table 1: Graph of morae count and *ji-amari* excesses over the 31-mora norm of *tanka* in Hayashi’s *MARS*ANGEL* (177 poems total).

Ji-amari are common both in classical Japanese *waka* and contemporary verse. Even though Japanese verse from the ancient period already tended to fall into 5-7 or 7-5 meter, one may find instances in which poets broke these early rules of formation. Roy Andrew Miller (1975, 67), writing about early poem inscriptions of old Japanese, notes that “regular alternation in sequence of unvaried lines of five and seven feet would surely have been too wooden and too stolid,” so this prosodic system with its “potential monotony” was “compensated for, in some degree, by a system of permitted metrical irregularities (*ji amari*, literally ‘syllable excess’).” Kawamoto (2000, 259) describes in more detail how Miller’s instances of collapsed-vowel *ji-amari*, or synaloepha, could work in a system of triplet-based groups, but he finds these techniques of vowel elision were in decline near the end of the classical age in the twelfth century when “the innovative priest-poet Saigyō was already creating *ji-amari* verses which can in no way be reduced through aphaeresis or elision.” In the Meiji period, modern, innovating poets questioned the strict adherence to traditional meter for *tanka*. Masaoka Shiki (1975, 15) once challenged conservative poets for their “prejudiced views” (*hekikan*) and small mindedness about metrical limits. Ishikawa Takuboku (1980, 288) encouraged his young comrades to experiment with the form, telling them that if they felt the meter’s restrictions to be inconvenient (*fuben*), then they “should go over the syllable count (*ji-amari ni suru sa*)!” Curiously, when these two canonical poets are promoted in textbooks or articles, their featured poems are usually their best true-to-form haiku of 17 morae or *tanka* of 31 morae.

By Hayashi’s debut in the 1980s, the postwar wave of the avant-garde had already opened up paths for metrical experimentation with verse straddling (*ji-matagari*). Usually scholars and critics point to the work of Hayashi’s contemporary, Tawara Machi—discussed above—for naturalizing experimental rhythms in which meaning will “straddle, not coincide exactly with, 5-7-5-7-7” morae groupings (Carpenter 2014, 138). Okai Takashi, a member of the postwar *tanka* avant-garde, describes Tawara’s achievement in taking their gains and plying “verse-straddling” (*ku-matagari*) for maximum effect:

In terms of her technique, when [*Salad Anniversary*] first appeared, people looked at [famous poems like “Aijin de / ii no to utau /...” (“I’m okay with being/ your lover”)] and many asked, “Is this *tanka*?” It’s the way Tawara pulls off verse-straddling so easily and naturally. Until that time, colloquial-verse *tanka* poets strived to make their colloquial phrases fit the 5-7-5-7-7 meter. If you wonder where she got that, I think it started with Tsukamoto Kunio. Fundamentally that was what the avant-garde movement was doing (Okai et al. 1998, 99).

Unafraid to Be Bad: Breaking *Tanka* Rules and Finding Success

In contrast to Tawara, who has repeatedly defended her seemingly perfect 31-mora rhythms, Hayashi has never made any claims that her *tanka* were perfect. She has urged poets, “Don’t worry (*ki ni shinakute mo ii*) whether or not the *tanka* has its 5-7-5-7-7” (Hayashi 1991b, 33). Hayashi (1991b, 23) argued against Tawara’s “conservative” (*hoshuteki*) “Salad-style” (Sarada-*fū*, referring to *Salad Anniversary*), and she advised young poets instead to think of the poem’s emotional “necessity” (*hitsuzensei*), Tawara, herself no fan of Hayashi, writes in a stinging 1988 essay, “Hayashi Amari and Me” (Hayashi Amari to watashi), that the poetic merit of Hayashi’s *tanka* are questionable, particularly in her heavy use of “code” (*kigō*) elements, like her use of English words and punctuation, which Tawara feels far more reflect Hayashi’s love of “jangly [literary] accessories” (*akusesarii no yō ni jara jara*) than their poetic merit (Tawara, 1988, 46). She concludes her essay by writing that to read Hayashi’s *tanka* is “unbearable” (*mite ite setsunai*) (Tawara 1988, 46).¹ The world of *tanka* was undergoing growing pains in the 1980s and 1990s with, for example, the widely divergent verse styles of Hayashi and Tawara. Whereas Tawara quietly experimented with *ji-amari* (Holt 2018), it was Hayashi who both boldly and honestly defended her poems for their highly sexual content as well as their adventurously new and expanded rhythms.

The following poem, from the second section of “Yozakura O-Shichi” (Nighttime Cherry Miss Seven) is a good example of her expanded rhythms, showing how Hayashi heavily loads the first two (6/9/5/7/7) of the five measures, which is one of the common patterns of her *tanka* that feature *ji-amari*:

さくらさくらいつまでも待っても来ぬひとと
死んだひととはおなじさくら! (Hayashi 1993, 73)²

*Sakura sakura / itsumade mo matte mo / konu hito to
shinda hito to wa / onaji sa sakura!*

Cherry Blossoms, Cherry Blossoms
no matter how long you wait for them
men who do not come and
dead men
are all the same, Cherry Blossoms!

In this *tanka*, the seventh in a ten-poem sequence (*rensaku*), Hayashi overdoes things by creating *ji-amari* both in her first measure (“*sakura sakura*”: 6, not 5 morae) and also in

the second measure by 2 beats (“*itsu made mo matte mo*”: 9, not 7 morae). By necessity, the first measure has to be 6 morae, given that *sakura*, a 3-mora word, is repeated twice in a formulaic way that suggests it is a song snippet, perhaps overheard by the poetic speaker at a cherry-blossom festival in Edo (the city that became Tokyo in 1868).³ The second measure is quite modern, however, and one gets the sense that Hayashi prefers not to break it over the second and third measures. She caps each of the two phrases with *mo* in order to create a pleasant musical rhythm that perhaps the poet wishes to preserve even if it means breaking the rules of meter. Hayashi later used the full poem as the refrain for the *enka* (ballad) song “Yozakura O-Shichi,” which she wrote for singer Sakamoto Fuyumi in 1994. The song’s refrain is repeated three times in the song. This repetition reveals the poet’s strong attachment to these verses, even if they break the prescribed rules for its original 31-mora form.

When Hayashi extends the verses of her poems with additional beats, she might be doing so to create a mimetic effect, as in the poem discussed below. In the poem discussed above, Hayashi intensifies the emotional power of the poem’s feeling of waiting by means of its extended verses; however, in this next *tanka*—which was also integrated into Sakamoto’s song—she plays with the repetitive image of tears that fall one after the other in the extended measure. The final image of one more tear rolling down the cheek of the poem’s female protagonist is enhanced by the *tanka*’s expanded 32-mora meter (5/7/5/7/8).

口紅をつけてティッシュをくわえたら
涙がぽろり、もうひとつぽろり (Hayashi 1992, 33)

Kuchibeni o / tsukete tisshu o / kuwaetara
namida ga porori / moo hitotsu porori

When I put on rouge,
holding a tissue
‘tween my lips
A tear breaks loose,
and then, another one

The poem even plays with numbers: Hayashi counts off the tears, adding “another one” (*mō hitotsu*); she also repeats the onomatopoeic phrase “drip/plop” (*porori*) to mimetically display the emergence of multiple tears. Hayashi enhances these effects with the poem’s metrical violations, which in turn emphasize the poem’s strong feeling of sadness and

perhaps even justify the protagonist's transgressive or spectacular figure, who boldly displays her colors, her sexiness, and her tragic figure. Hayashi would later add this poem to her earlier "Yozakura O-Shichi" tanka to create a robust tragic figure for Sakamoto Fuyumi's *enka* song.

Another poem from her second collection, *Scents of Nanako*, more vividly demonstrates Hayashi's twin propensities for highly sexualized and rule-breaking verse. The following poem easily has a mora count over the 31-mora norm, particularly because Hayashi uses the Japanese pronunciation of the English word "SEX" (*sekkusu*, romanized in the original):

夕焼けが濃くなってゆく生理前
ゆるされるなにもつけないSEX (Hayashi 1993, 139)⁴

Yuuyake ga / koku natte yuku / seiri-mae
yurusareru nani mo / tsukenai sekkusu

Right before my period,
the sunset grows ruddy
but it's okay:
SEX
without a condom this time⁵

The first three lines follow the orthodox 5-7-5 rhythm, but the final two lines each contain 8, not 7, beats that result in the poem having 33 morae. It is possible to read Hayashi's final word here, "SEX," with the original English pronunciation (and Hayashi's use of capital letters) and thus the word may only have one beat, but doing so would result in a hypometric (*ji-tarazu*) line of 5 beats, which I doubt Hayashi intends. The poem is better off having the excessive beats as the persona's feeling of sexual desire and her encouragement are made stronger by the poem's elongated and heavier meter. Novelist Matsumoto Yūko (2000, 232) describes the "viscous" (*nettori*) quality of the poem with its combined images of the heat and weight of the woman's premenstrual body and her sense of daring to be free from the cares of contraception. Critic Oketani Hideaki (1993, 186) describes how in *Scents of Nanako*, Hayashi "is probably trying to express her own thoughts and feelings in pushing to the limit what is possible in their tone (*kyūkyoku ni jibun no kanō no seichō no katachi*)." Both Matsumoto and Oketani stress how Hayashi skillfully blends images of the female body and the voice of a woman in these poems to create new possibilities for personal expression in the *tanka* genre.

Critics who discuss Hayashi's *tanka* usually focus on the hyper-sexualized content of her poems, not their hypermetric rule-breaking. For example, Hayashi (2000, 225) recalls how she upset her early *dōjinshi* (amateur magazines) readers who were offended that "a young unmarried woman" could experience and write about such things; when another reader demanded she "should go before the grave of [her mentor] Maeda Tōru, hands clasped and apologize," even Hayashi (2000, 225) contextualizes this scorn and shock to the content, not the technique, of her poems. This harsh criticism came while she was publishing in *dōjinshi* from 1985 to 1986, right before her full debut with *MARS*ANGEL*, but similar evaluations of her work have stayed with her since. For example, at a group discussion of six women poets in 1992, Hayashi could glibly acknowledge her reputation already as "the radical porno *tanka* poet," but she felt that it was better to be branded as that instead of as a generic "woman poet" (*joryū kajin*) (Tawara et al. 1992, 264).⁶ Hayashi (1998, 264) then proudly considered herself to be a feminist poet, following the paths blazed in free verse (*shi*) by Itō Hiromi and *tanka* by Akitsu Ei. Even so, she was careful to dodge fellow poet Ōta Miwa's term "radical feminism" (*radikaru feminizumu*) for her third, lesbian-focused *tanka* collection *The Penultimate Kiss* (*Saigo kara nibanme no kissu*, 1991). Hayashi (1992, 264) insisted that she does lean towards feminism but that because "there are many kinds," she felt that instead of "taking a principled stand . . . [I] want to express myself in poetry—the thing that I can do—and so that is my connection to feminism." In the long run, risking condemnation from both *tanka* readers and fellow poets, Hayashi continued to write *tanka* in her own way, experimenting with both content and form.

At a critical roundtable discussion held later in 1998, poets Okai Takashi and Michiura Motoko (1999, 193) positively evaluate Hayashi's *tanka* as coming from a person who is "not ideological" but "makes assertive [poetry]"; they call her a poet who "unlike other poets is not overly conscious of her expressions" and who "rather skillfully makes her poems have their own rhythm." Sociologist and literary critic Mita Munesuke, also present in the discussion, is less sympathetic of Hayashi's style, comparing her to her contemporary Tawara: "If Ms. Tawara is the serious star student (*majime na yūtōsei*) of the *tanka* world, then Ms. Hayashi is the serious rebel star student (*majime na han-yūtōsei*). And in terms of seriousness, Ms. Hayashi is very serious," he says, damning her with praise (194). The word "*majime*" has connotations of being hard-working but also can be used pejoratively to express one's disapproval of a person's nerdy, overachieving nature. Although Mita is unspecific about this quality in her work, those who then respond to his comment defend her use of rhythm (*onritsu*). Without specifically describing her use of *ji-amari* poems as defective, Hayashi's contemporaries noticed her unusual rhythms.

“Okay If It Isn’t Exactly 5-7-5-7-7”

After the success and criticism she received from these early collections, Hayashi wrote a series of essays for aspiring poets, which were later collected in *End-of-the-Century Mademoiselle* (*Seiki-matsu wa madomoazeru*, 1991), in which she advises them to write what they want and not worry about meter constraints: “Try to get as close as you can to your feeling, and if you get a poem that seems like 5-7-5-7-7 (5-7-5-7-7 *rashiki mono*), then ask yourself if you have expressed yourself the best you can” (Hayashi 1991b, 34). Hayashi (1991b, 34) adds, “When you whisper the poem to yourself, and you think, ‘I get to the last 7-7 part, but it seems like I have to say it fast,’ don’t get hung up on that. Just remember that it is okay if the rhythm isn’t exactly 5-7-5-7-7 (*kanarazushimo kicchiri 5-7-5-7-7 ni natte inakutemo ii no desu*). Get a rhythm that feels like your own and you can make a *tanka*.” Thus, even in her advice on *tanka* composition, she encourages *ji-amari* as long as the extra beats help convey the poet’s individuality.

As a self-professed “unstable” (*yureru*) poet, in a 1998 essay Hayashi admits that “my *tanka* always lack a fixed quality. Even now I’m still not used to using a strict 5-7-5-7-7 count, probably because I had that hatred of rhythm from high school. I’m aware I’m working in a metered form of poetry, but it doesn’t weigh me down” (112). In my readings of Hayashi’s poetry, her most numerous and dense *ji-amari* violations are found in her fifth *tanka* collection, *X-Rated Couple*, published in 1999, an adaptation of Katsu Aki’s erotic manga of almost the same name, *Step-Up Love Story X-Rated Couple* (*Step-Up Love Story futari etchi*, hereafter known as *X-Rated Couple*, 1997-2018). Upon his debut in the manga world, Katsu Aki—the penname for Nakamura Katsuaki (b. 1961)—immediately won numerous awards before running his first full feature series in 1985 in *Shōnen Sunday*. An author of over eighteen extended manga series, he is best known for *X-Rated Couple*, which the author himself describes as inaugurating the “third” and “most challenging” phase of his manga career (Katsu 2005, 112). And it is Hayashi’s *tanka* adaptation of this manga—more than her *MARS*ANGEL* or *Scent of Nanako*—that best demonstrates Hayashi’s rule-breaking tendencies as well as her highly sexualized writing style.

X-Rated Couple is a long-running manga serial, which began in 1997 and still continues to appear monthly in *Young Animal* and *Young Animal Arashi*, published by Hakusensha. In July 2018, the publisher released the seventy-sixth collected volume of the ongoing story. By 2018, an estimated twenty-seven million copies of the manga paperbacks had been sold in Japan (Katsu 2018, 253).⁷ A translated English edition of the first 150 installments, published in four volumes by TokyoPop, briefly appeared in the United States as *Manga Sutra* from 2008 to 2009 before it was cancelled. *X-Rated Couple* follows the story of two virginal newlyweds, Yura and Makoto, as they learn about

sex, “transition[ing] from complete sexual inexperience to an arranged marriage,” as they “step up” (thus the English subtitle) “to its sexual and erotic challenges” (Perper and Cornog 2007, 201). While I was reaching the material for this article, it appeared to me that Katsu planned to close the story with the birth of the first child of Makoto and Yura, but there is no indication that either the manga artist or the publisher now intend to end the series. Perper and Cornog (2007, 201) describe Katsu’s original *seinen* (young men’s) manga as “a platform to provide not only an ongoing narrative but also systematic and well-designed serious lessons in sexuality itself.” However, instead of conveying the sexual qualities of the original manga, Hayashi’s adaptation seems far more grounded in Katsu’s “emotionally charged drama of arousal, hope, pain, and disappointment” (Perper and Cornog 2007, 206).

Prior to this volume, Hayashi had previously worked with two notable graphic artists on what she called “collaborations” (*koraborēshon*) (Hayashi 2000, 227) in which her poems were published with large illustrations in gorgeous, deluxe format books. The first such hybrid work was *Scent of Nanako*, where the poet published ninety-two *tanka* in an “accordion-style” format—the book unfolds like a screen, with text and art on both front and back sides—and illustrator Fukui Shin’ichi had fashioned various tableaux on both sides to reflect the sexy, evocative world of Hayashi’s poems. Her next “collaboration” was with famous *Garō* manga artist Hayashi Sei’ichi for *Shortcut* (*Shōtokatto*, 1992). Hayashi Amari has used the term “picture-book” (*ehon*) to describe *Shortcut*—a series of exquisitely rendered illustrations of half-naked women, typical for the manga artist—but she has never explicitly commented on the nature of their working relationship (Hayashi 2000, 226). Hayashi Sei’ichi’s illustrations were paired with poems from *MARS*ANGEL* for this book. Their publisher Sanrio asked them to collaborate on a follow-up book, *Hey, Kiss Me* (*Nee, kissu shite*, 1996), which again linked Hayashi Sei’ichi’s images, reprinted from his *Japanese Woman* (*Japanīzu ūman*, 1990), with previously published poems, this time from the poet’s third *tanka* collection, *The Penultimate Kiss*. Rather than being “collaborative” works, these books were edited or arranged for the authors; yet they are still important in understanding how Hayashi positioned her work outside of normal *tanka* circles.

In 1999, Hayashi published two more hybrid works that were clearly more collaborative. In contrast to the same year’s *X-Rated Couple*, in which Hayashi responded to Katsu’s previously published manga, Hayashi’s collaboration with *shōjo* (girls’) manga artist Tōno Kazumi in *Girlish* (*Gārisshu*, 1999) was clearly one in which Hayashi sent the artist new poems and Tōno responded with illustrations, which Tōno’s afterword confirms: “Hayashi, thank you for these great poems. It’s because they’re so good that I must say sorry if, through my own lack of skill, I could not [visually] depict them” (Hayashi and

Tōno 1999, 143). Unlike her other four visual collaborations, for *X-Rated Couple*, Hayashi would respond to Katsu’s images and story, which might be the first such *tanka*-manga collaboration in the history of these genres. One senses that Hayashi (1991b, 22) was proud of these innovative publishing efforts, whereas in an earlier essay, “*Tanka Poets Who Like to Act Cute*” (Burikko kajin). She had derided other young poets for producing similar *tanka*-art books involving other visual media, stating that they were relying too much on “their book’s bright design,” and so “[they lack] substance (*nakami*), which is a problem.” In this defensive comment, Hayashi might have been referring to Tawara’s early, post-*Salad* experimental *tanka*-photo book collaboration with photographer Asai Shinpei, *Freshly Picked Tanka* (*Toretate no tanka desu*, 1987). For *Freshly Picked Tanka*, Tawara and Asai truly collaborated on their work, taking turns providing poems to be photographed and vice versa. However, Tawara never returned to this hybrid method of composing and publishing *tanka*, unlike Hayashi, for whom the collaborative style has become a hallmark of her oeuvre.

Adapting *X-Rated Couple* Using *Ji-Amari*

In her skillful adaptation of *X-Rated Couple*, Hayashi uses her favored type of *tanka* with *ji-amari* in order to fully express the awakening sexuality of the story’s female protagonist, Yura. Of the eighty-three poems in the collection, fifty-nine (71 percent) *tanka* have *ji-amari*. The poems on average have 32.2 morae. The additional length of these poems with *ji-amari* allows Hayashi to more fully depict Yura’s dramatic growth and self-discovery. Interestingly, unlike *MARS*ANGEL*, Hayashi’s *X-Rated Couple* has far less instances of regular 31-mora poems: there are only two short sections where two or three such regular *tanka* appear together in a sequence.⁸ Hayashi’s adaption of *X-Rated Couple* is an exercise in excess both in terms of sexual exploration as well as in meter-defying poetry, where the latter serves the former.

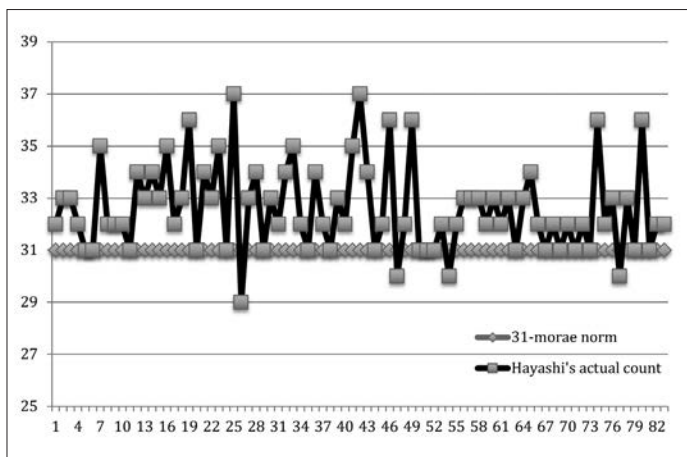


Table 2: Graph of morae count and *ji-amari* excesses over the 31-mora norm of *tanka* in Hayashi’s *X-Rated Couple* (83 poems total).

All of the six showcase poems that preview the collection's contents—printed alongside Aki's color illustration plates—have a syllable count of over 31 beats. It is easy to conclude that the publisher Hakusensha's main selling point for Hayashi's *X-Rated Couple* is her *tanka* that can be excessively sexy: both in keeping up with Katsu's original erotic “step-up” manga and with Hayashi's poetic rule-breaking style. At the very least, one might expect Hayashi to indulge in *ji-amari*, overloading the beats of her *tanka*'s measures, in order to express the titillating excitement Yura feels at each new sexual discovery she and her newlywed husband make. This is seen in the following showcase poem:

「女の子はボタンの左右が逆なんだね」
はしやぐあなたにあふれる乳房 (Hayashi 1999, 11)

“*Onna no ko wa / botan no sayū ga / gyaku nan da ne*”
hashagu anata ni / afureru chibusa

“Girls have
their right and left buttons
reversed, huh?”
you mess around and
my breasts swell

It is possible to read this poem as simply having 31 morae if one views each of Hayashi's couplings of the final consonants “*n*” together with their preceding morae as one unit. In that case “*o-n-na*” (women) would have two, not three beats; similarly, “*bo-ta-n*” (button) would also have two, not three beats. Were that so, then one would expect Hayashi to be consistent about squeezing these nasal final consonants “*n*” into the preceding mora to always save one beat, but one can find exceptions where Hayashi clearly uses “*n*” for an individual beat in other poems. For example, the poem below is one of the few orthodox 31-mora poems in the collection; it also uses the word “*botan*” (button):



Figure 1: Illustration plate and poem (‘Girls have their...’) from the opening of Hayashi's *tanka* adaptation of Katsu Aki's *Step-Up Love Story X-Rated Couple*. Reprinted with permission from Hakusensha.

シャツを着たままのあなたに抱かれる
ボタンがひやり乳房を冷やす (Hayashi 1999, 22)

Shatsu o kita / mama no anata ni / idakareru
botan ga hiyari / chibusa o hiyasu

Taken hold by you,
still in your shirt,
your cold buttons
chilling
my breasts

By comparing the two poems, one can come to a confident count of the number of morae as well as a clear sense of how Hayashi intends a reader to parse her meter. This poem has a more somber, calmer feeling that, perhaps appropriately, does not transgress metrical limits. One would expect the moraic nasal “*n*” to count as a regular beat in order to produce a standard *tanka*, rather than one without the full 31 beats, deficient because of a hypometric (*ji-tarazu*) measure. Moreover, Hayashi gives the reader a rare *rubi* (pronunciation guide using phonetic kana written above Kanji characters) to the third-measure word *idakareru* (passive for “to hold”), one supposes, in order to ensure that the reader recognizes that it is a full five-beat word (instead of an alternative reading of *dakareru*) and thus clearly establishing that the poem has a regular *tanka* rhythm.

By my reckoning, the earlier “reversed buttons” poem has to have 34 morae: 6/8/6/7/7. Its strong, sexy images seem to demand a longer, stronger poem. Hayashi intersperses each of the first three measures with the moraic nasal “*n*,” two of which are followed by a full mora of *na* or *no*, which creates a pleasing rhythm of warm nasal sounds, like the warm “buttons” her sexy manga girl has. If the moraic nasal “*n*” bonds or blends with the following *n*-mora word, only then would the morae count as 5/7/5 across the first three lines instead of 6/8/6; however, given the chaotic inversion of the poem’s content, it would be unwise to try to find regular order in the first three lines. True to her “radical porno” style, Hayashi is being excessively playful with her rhythm, as well as with her poem’s content. By the poem’s end, order is doubly restored with a strict 7-mora count and its technique of closing on a noun—the main image of fulsome breasts in the poem. *Tanka* poets use this noun-ending technique, *taigen-dome*, and omit the predicate in order to postpone closure on the poem, encouraging the reader to fill in the blanks and imagine a larger scene.⁹ As she often does, Hayashi here uses *taigen-dome* and *ji-amari* techniques because the lyric feeling of the poem cannot be contained by the standard 5-7-5-7-7 verses.

The second showcase poem also features two *ji-amari* violations (5/7/7/8/7), perhaps justly called for, given the importance of the image of her panicked confusion (*midare*):

指先を撫でられ肘に届く頃には
呼吸の乱れをかくしきれない (Hayashi 1999, 24)

Yubisaki o / naderare hiji ni / todoku koro ni wa
kokyū no midare o / kaku-shikirenai

My fingertips fondled
by you and right around
when you reach my elbows—
I no longer can hide
my panicked breaths

Here, Hayashi boldly breaks out of the 5-mora limit in her third line, using instead 7 beats (“*todoku koro ni wa*”); she follows that line with another *ji-amari* measure (“*kokyū no midare o*”), which I reckon has 8 morae. This is the work of an excessive *tanka* poet. Hayashi then squeezes in object-marker “o” after *midare*—which is certainly one of the most common *ji-amari* practices in *tanka*, as poets typically combine the vowel “o” with another vowel of the preceding noun (which typically ends in a vowel-ending sound). One wonders if the poet did not intend *kokyū* to be read as *iki*, for “breath,” which would allow for a standard 7-syllable count (“*i-ki no mi-da-re o*”), but Hayashi typically applies *rubi* glosses when she wants to help readers with non-standardized readings of kanji compounds to help the reader fit the word into the standard measure length. Given the poems’ powerful feeling of sexual excitement and increased physiological response, it makes sense for Hayashi to overload these two measures with a count beyond 5-7. Again, as with the “buttons” poem, the reader might be tempted to rationalize a standard 31-mora count in Hayashi’s poem, but it is usually vain to do so. Hayashi’s *tanka* invite unorthodox readings. The final line, which has a perfect 7-mora count, reinforces that sense of disrupted order, concluding her *tanka* with a moment of sharp dramatic tension. “*Kakushi-kirenai*,” by which Yura cannot control or hide her breathing, actually is quite controlled and provides neat closure to this intense *nureba* (love) scene.

Of the eighty-three poems in *X-Rated Couple*, only twenty have the traditional 31-mora count. Four have fewer than the orthodox number. Instead of being deficient, their hypometric (*ji-tarazu*) measures mimetically and skillfully convey the poems’ themes



Figure 2: Example of a manga sequence interspersed in Hayashi's *tanka* adaptation (page 17) of Katsu's *X-Rated Couple*. Taken from the second installment of Katsu's manga, this scene depicts the virginal Yura beginning to desire Makoto's touch. Reprinted with permission from Hakusensha.

of inadequacy. Although some of these hypometric poems still feature *ji-amari* measures, Hayashi leaves other measures deficient in 5- or 7-mora length, resulting in poems that range anywhere from 28 to 30 morae. These *ji-tarazu* poems often do not express excess emotion or excitement but instead convey a sense of anxiety or embarrassment, as apparent in the poem below that only has 29 morae (4/4/5/8/8); here, Hayashi bookends a set of two awkward *ji-tarazu* measures against a set of more confident *ji-amari* ones. In this poem, Yura hears Makoto confess that he has masturbated, but she does not reprove her sexual partner. True to the original manga character, Hayashi's Yura exhibits a maternal tendency to accept Makoto regardless of his indulgent faults (*amae*):

きのうは自分でしちゃった、
と恥ずかしそうに
少年の顔で (Hayashi 1999, 38)

Kinō wa / jibun de / shichatta,
to / hazukashisō ni
shōnen no kao de

“Yesterday,
I ended up masturbating,”
You said looking
embarrassed with
the face of a boy

Poems like this, which either have traditional measures or insufficient (*ji-tarazu*) ones, generally play two roles in the collection: 1) they reflect the shyness Yura and Makoto have about their sexuality in the manga, and 2) they contrast with the otherwise ecstatic

tone of Hayashi's adaptation, creating a "ground" (*ji*) pattern next to the striking and sexier "design" (*mon*) poems, and thus one could argue that Hayashi uses a classical poetic practice of arranging poems within a collection or employing a *rensaku* (*tanka* section) to vary stronger, more intense poems with more standard ones.¹⁰ At the very least, the use of these poems with *ji-tarazu* suggests that Hayashi adjusts the pattern of meter from poem to poem both to serve the individual poem's theme or feeling, and to create variations in the larger mood of the *rensaku*'s macro-rhythm.

Climactic Excess

Some sections, particularly the final three, exhibit more control of or respect for orthodox meter, as Hayashi strings together 31-mora *tanka*, maintaining a regular rhythm and demonstrating that she can write an orthodox *tanka*. However, she concludes the collection with a climactic spectacle of poems with *ji-amari* excess. Poems 73, 81 and 82 demonstrate Hayashi's skillful and appropriate use of additional syllables to boldly expand the lyrical range of the *tanka* to include physical as well as emotional highs. Poem 73 is one of the longest in the collection with 36 morae (5/8/5/7/11) as Yura excessively expresses her "full" satisfaction with herself, having learned how to satisfy Makoto, as seen in the final 11-mora line:

目を開けるうれしき
 あなたを気持ち良くさせてわたしはこんなに満ち足りている (Hayashi 1999, 99)

Me o akeru / ureshiki
anata o / kimochi yoku / sasete watashi wa / konna ni michitarite iru

Making you feel
 so good that you
 open your eyes
 for me is what brings me
 to full satisfaction like this

Yura brings Makoto to a physical high, building him up in the first half of the poem, which already exhibits an additional beat in the second measure ("*ureshiki anata*"); Hayashi then splits or shares the feeling of satisfaction across the two-line poem with a longer second half, thus allowing Yura more space and time to express her own satisfaction, seemingly based on her awareness of her own greater agency in their sexual union. It is Yura, our poetic persona, who feels complete fulfillment, perhaps both physically and emotionally,

by the final line, which swells far beyond its expected 7-beat length to 11 morae. Nothing is held back. As Hayashi (1999, 117) writes in the afterword of the collection, it is the overlapping nature of Yura and Makoto's experiences that leads to "their two-person-three-legged race to 'step up' their sex." Thus Hayashi's *tanka* lyrics mimetically expand as they reflect the shared growth of the couple's experiences.

The last two poems of the collection each have 32 morae, and they suggest the powerful, "full" feeling of love shared by Yura and Makoto by subtly transgressing the metrical limits of the *tanka*. Like in the previous "satisfaction" poem, Hayashi uses words or phrases that describe a fulsome state ("*tappuri to*" [generous]) or a largish number or a jumble of items (the twin set of legs in "*shiroi ashi / chairo no ashi o*"), which I find are commonly used in *ji-amari* measures by other contemporary poets:¹¹

たっぷりとかまわれた夜は
あなたから花束が届く夢などもみる (Hayashi 1999, 110)

Tappuri to [5] / *kamawareta yo wa* [7]
anata kara [5] / *hanasoku ga todoku* [8] / *yume nado mo miru* [7]

On this night
when I receive your
generous attention
I even have a dream of getting
flowers from you

熱帯魚の水槽の下
白い脚、茶色の脚を泳がせてふたり (Hayashi 1999, 111)

Nettaigyo no [6] / *suisō no shita* [7]
shiroi ashi, [5] / *chairo no ashi o* [7] / *oyogasete futari* [8]

Tropical fish
at the bottom of the tank—
making you to kick your brown legs
me to kick my white
that's the two of us

The final poem, ending on the word *futari* (“twosome” or “couple”), ends on a number, a fitting way to end this *ji-amari*-filled collection titled *X-Rated Couple (Futari etchi)*. Although the number two is not excessive, Hayashi seems justified closing with it here. In order to adapt an excessive sexy manga into *tanka* form, she needs more syllables than normally allotted to *tanka* poets. *X-Rated Couple*, as a *tanka* collection, is not about the lyrical feeling of one woman, Hayashi’s poetic protagonist Yura. Rather, as Hayashi (1999,111) writes in the afterword, her *tanka* adaptation instead embodies the larger sense of two people growing—a couple “who have become one (*hitotsu ni natta*),” a phrase and idea that she borrowed from the manga.

Conclusion

Although Hayashi has receded from the *tanka* world since 2004 in order to dedicate her energies to Christianity and to the theater, her poetic experiments like *X-Rated Couple* still remind us what an extremely fecund period the 1990s were for *tanka*. Certainly, her work has been overshadowed by that of Tawara Machi, whose *Salad Anniversary* celebrated its thirtieth anniversary with a special 2017 “mook” (*mukku*, a publication more substantial than a magazine but in a larger format and with more images than usual for books), *Kawade Dream Mook: Tawara Machi and the Greatest 31-Character Poems in History (Kawade yume mukku: Tawara Machi, shijō saikō no miso-hito moji*, compiled by Takagi Reiko). Nevertheless, because of the extreme risks taken by Hayashi, her contemporaries, like Homura Hiroshi, continue to remember her important work. Homura includes more poems by Hayashi than by Tawara in his 2015 “notebook” survey of *tanka*, *My Tanka Notebook (Boku no tanka nōto)*. For example, he praises Hayashi’s famous “Yozakura O-Shichi” poem for its special “variations” that exemplify the “high tension” qualities in contemporary *tanka* (Homura 2015, 223). In other words, he reminds us of what made Hayashi a star in her own right: her excessive and sexy style that destabilized the genre. As for her most recent turn to *tanka* about Christianity (Hayashi 2004), Hayashi may have shifted her focus from sex to spirit, but I argue that her excessive desire for love has not changed.

On the other hand, in her commentary on Hayashi’s later career collections *X-Rated Couple* and *Bedside (Beddosaido, 2000)*, Matsumoto Yūko (2000, 234) contends that in the erotic poetry Hayashi wrote ten years after her debut, “one sees her having doubts about sex.” Nonetheless, the very nature of Hayashi’s *X-Rated Couple*, with each section depicting—like the manga—the stages of a couple’s discovery of the different techniques and positions of sex, indicates that, even as late as 1999, Hayashi was exploring the new possibilities for a woman’s voice through her discoveries of sexual pleasure. Certainly, *X-Rated Couple* is not a dark, despairing collection like *Bedside* arguably is, and

Matsumoto (2000, 236) is correct in detecting “a change, where one feels gentleness and warmth” in the collection. However, I challenge Matsumoto’s claim that Hayashi’s later poems lack the “eagerness” (*kioi*) of her earlier work.

As I have demonstrated in my examination of *X-Rated Couple*, Hayashi’s poems with *ji-amari*—which usually are excessively long and sexually provocative—here are quite optimistic about sex. They in no way exhibit what Matsumoto (2000, 235) describes as a “nihilistic outlook toward sex (*sei e no nihirizumu*),” although the *X-Rated Couple tanka* are not as engrossed in biological or scatological details like her earlier *MARS*ANGEL* and *Scent of Nanako* poems. “There are no more stagey lines,” Matsumoto (2000, 235) writes, “no more excessive showiness (*kari na sōshoku*), no more speaking in loud voices. Now the poems speak in soft whispers.”

Rather being a complete reversal or retreat from her earlier works in terms of content and style, this 1999 collection seems to have more in common with her earlier works. In 2000, Hayashi (227) wrote about the ease and fun she felt while writing the *X-Rated Couple tanka*: “I felt that Yura-san, the heroine of Katsu Aki’s manga, wrote herself for me.” Yet if Hayashi were retreating from her image of being a “porno” poet by the late 1990s, *X-Rated Couple* proves that she had not fully abandoned her theme of the formation of female identity through sexual experience; more importantly, her voice had not been tamed, regulated, or limited by the demands of the 31-mora form.

Writing in 1998 about her Christian faith (Hayashi was baptized in 1978), she considered her art and her faith in her own terms: “I discovered *tanka* at the same time I discovered faith in God. God, whom I could not understand except through reason (*rikutsu*), has come over time for me to live in reality” (Hayashi 1998, 112). Earlier, Hayashi (1991, 19-20) had defended her dual beliefs in Christianity and practice of sexual poetic expression:

People often have the image that Christians neither drink nor smoke, that they are kind to others, but if those people were to read my *tanka*, they would be surprised . . . There are those kind of fine Christians out there, but it is a fact that there are also Christians like me who do not do everything right, who are not simple. Being morally correct is not the most important principle for Christians. I can proudly say that even a person like me is a Christian.

Whereas she had previously searched for personal identity through the sexual experiences of her poetic protagonists, she now does so through knowing Jesus Christ. The following poem from her eleven-poem sequence “Good Morning” (Ohayō), in which Hayashi imagines meeting her savior after his resurrection, demonstrates that though Hayashi has

clearly moved away from her earlier X-rated sexual style, she has not changed when it comes to excessive feeling and meter:

わたくしに、まずわたくしに会いに来てくださったのですか、
このわたくしに一。(Hayashi 2004, 12)

Watakushi ni, / mazu watakushi ni / ai ni kite / kudasatta no desu ka,
kono watakushi ni

To come
see me, did you
first come
all this way
for someone like me ——? (Hayashi 2015)

In 33 morae (5/7/5/9/7), not 31, Hayashi makes her *tanka* simultaneously embody both her own humility and the prodigious generosity of Christ precisely in the fourth robust *ji-amari* measure (*kudasatta no desu ka*), which makes the whole poem swell with love—both given and received.

In sum, despite being scorned as a “porno poet” and not gaining as much critical attention as her contemporary Tawara Machi, Hayashi doggedly defied *tanka* decorum with her rule-breaking *ji-amari*. Even her robust poems about love, redemption, and Christianity reveal how *tanka*, as a short lyric form, can sustain complex, even contradictory, emotions. Through her experiments with both metrical form and hybrid poetic-illustrative publishing, she interjected her own values into *tanka*. During the course of her poetic career, Hayashi has created a diverse body of experimental *tanka*, blazed new territory for sexual and spiritual expression in the genre, and generated new possibilities for the *tanka* in terms of metrical limits, while being a “radical” in her violation of the rule of 31 beats.

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Notes

1. Hayashi and Tawara first met in June 1986, around the time Hayashi debuted with her *MARS*ANGEL* poems and a year before Tawara published *Salad Anniversary*. Tawara, who usually writes with equanimity, is quite visibly vitriolic about being cast in the same light as Hayashi (see “Hayashi Amari and Me” [Hayashi Amari to watashi] in Tawara 1988). She recalls the sense of confidence Hayashi had in her personal appearance, in her relationships with other *tanka* poets, and in her verse, all of which Tawara (1988, 43), somewhat enviously, lacked at this stage in her own career.
2. Although *tanka* have traditionally been written in a single line, contemporary poets have experimented with the layout of the verses. Hayashi uses a distinctive two-line form. Leza Lovitz, Miyuki Aoyama, and Akemi Tomioka, in their collection of contemporary Japanese women’s verse, *A Long Rainy Season*, use a four-line form to render their translations of Hayashi’s verse. In this article, I use a five-line form for my English translations so readers can sense how Hayashi parses the five measures (*ku*) of the *tanka*.
3. Edward Seidensticker (1983, 132) reminds us that viewing cherry blossoms at night was popular in the Edo Period (1600-1868) and one place to often do this was in Edo’s red-light district, the Yoshiwara, where O-Shichi probably belongs: “It is not surprising, though it is sad, that so many famous places of early Meiji for the things of the seasons are missing from late-Meiji lists. Gone, for instance, are the night cherries of the Yoshiwara, popular in the dim light of early Meiji.” It is not hard to imagine Hayashi associating both the Yoshiwara and its (former) night-time cherry blossoms viewings with her heroine O-Shichi: the *tanka* *rensaku* straddles multiple worlds of old Edo, of Meiji Tokyo, of their shared liminal locale of the city’s demimonde quarter, and of Japan in the present day.
4. Because *Scent of Nanako* was originally published by Magazine House in an “accordion-style” format without page numbers, I use the reprint edition found in Kawade shobō’s *MARS*ANGEL* for citation.
5. For translations from Hayashi’s *Scent of Nanako* collection and her short Christian poem sequence “Good Morning” (Ohayō), see Hayashi 2015.
6. See Sarah Strong’s prescient article (1991) on this pigeonholing term for female *tanka* poets.
7. This claim appears as a blurb on the initial page for Episode 509 of *X-Rated Couple* in the July 27, 2018 (30, no. 15) issue of *Young Animal* (*Yangu animaru*) (page 253).
8. Poems 5 (“Hiekitta” [Gone Completely Cold]) and 6 (“Sō subete” [Yes, All the Way]) show

an initial indication that there might be a normal, controlled rhythm to these songs of sexual awakening, but Hayashi soon dispenses with such restraints. The only other section where regular 31-mora poems appear in a sequence is in the “Getting Wet” (Uruotte) section with poems 49 (“Yawarakaku” [Softly]), 50, and 51. By contrast, *MARS*ANGEL*, which is a longer collection, has nearly ten sections where Hayashi regularly sequences together at least two or three regular 31-mora poems.

9. Robert Brower and Earl Miner (1961, 275) note that a major shift in *waka* poetry occurred around the twelfth century when *New Collection of Waka Poems from Ages Past and Present* (*Shinkokinshū*) poets began to rely less on verbs than on nouns, which, if placed at the end of the poem, make the poem inconclusive: “In this age nouns achieve a new importance because of their imagistic role in description and their connotative richness in a traditional poetic language. Not only do verbs grow fewer in number, but they also tend to become less conspicuous. The copula is used more widely, and often a poem is reduced almost wholly to nouns with even the copula omitted. Only fifty-two poems in the *Kokinshū* [*Collection of Waka Poems from Ages Past and Present*, 905] terminate in nouns, whereas in the *Shinkokinshū* the number is 456.”
10. See Konishi Jin’ichi’s (1984, 254) discussion of this classical practice in anthologizing *waka* using alternating “ground” and “design” poems, especially beginning with the *Shinkokinshū* collection. Tawara Machi (1993, 151) has written that in making a *rensaku* sequence, it is important to have “blank spaces” between similar *tanka* (*isshu to isshu no aida ni kūhakububun*) in order to stimulate reader imagination and discovery.
11. For another discussion of how *tanka* poets use *ji-amari* to express larger moods, see Holt 2018.