



Are You an Echo? *The Lost Poetry of Misuzu Kaneko*

Misuzu's empathetic children's poetry was lost for decades. Now, this color-illustrated, bilingual volume presents her biography and most beloved poems.

Though the work of beloved Japanese children's poet Misuzu Kaneko (1903-1930) has been translated into 10 other languages, this edition marks the introduction of her poetry and life story to English-language speakers in North America. The first half of this children's picture book interweaves Kaneko's biography with poems; the latter half features twenty-five new translations of her poetry alongside the Japanese originals. Every page is filled with beautiful color illustrations by Japanese artist Toshikado Hajiri.

Misuzu wonders: How does a snowdrift feel? Where does day end and night begin? From her seaside home, Misuzu writes poetry, but as her fame grows, hardship ensues. Sadly, her life ends prematurely, and her work is forgotten. Decades later her lost poems are rediscovered—just in time to touch a new generation devastated by the tsunami of 2011.

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Are You an Echo?

*If I say, "Let's play?"
you say, "Let's play!"*

*If I say, "Stupid!"
you say, "Stupid!"*

*If I say, "I don't want to play anymore,"
you say, "I don't want to play anymore."*

*And then, after awhile,
becoming lonely*

*I say, "Sorry."
You say, "Sorry."*

*Are you just an echo?
No, you are everyone.*

Misuzu's story

Born in 1903, Misuzu Kaneko was an instant success when she began submitting poems for publication in her twenties. She was one of only two women admitted to a prestigious national society of children's poets.

Despite her fame as a writer, Misuzu suffered hardship in her private life. She married a philandering husband who infected her with gonorrhea and forbade her from writing. They divorced after four years, but he refused to give up custody of their one child, which was his right by Japanese law at the time. Shortly before her 27th birthday in 1930, she committed suicide.

Nearly forgotten for the next 50 years, Kaneko's work was rediscovered in 1982. With the release of a six-volume anthology, she soon became one of Japan's most well known children's poets, her work appearing in songs, elementary school textbooks, and multiple television dramas. But it was the appearance of her poem "Are You an Echo?" in a public service advertisement after the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami that solidified her reputation among Japan's most beloved children's writers.

Advance Praise for *Are You an Echo?*

“*Are You an Echo?* transcends the genre of picture book biography. Beyond tracing the outline of the poet’s life, it tells a larger story about the search for Misuzu Kaneko’s personal history and the collaborative nature of biography, translation, and bookmaking. David Jacobson artfully blends Kaneko’s poems into his narrative, which is at once **gentle and unflinching**. The sweetness of Hajiri’s illustrations soften the harsher details of Kaneko’s short life, and just when you think the story is coming to a close, a generous selection of poetry follows.”

Matthew Burgess, Poet and author of *Enormous Smallness: The Story of E.E. Cummings*

“**A mystery, a quest, a mother and a child**, an earthquake and a discovery: *Are You an Echo?* folds poetry and history into recent events, resurrecting the work of Misuzu Kaneko and bringing the gentle grace of her poems to a new generation.”

Lauren Redniss, Author of *Radioactive: Marie & Pierre Currie: A Tale of Love and Fallout*, Finalist for the National Book Award

“David Jacobson **weaves poetry and tragic history** into the poignant biography of an iconic Japanese children’s author. Leavened by gentle, **expressive illustrations** and a generous selection of translated poems ranging from observational to inspirational, *Are You an Echo?* confronts unlikely subjects for a picture book and will leave parents and children with much to discuss.”

Bruno Navasky, Poet and former Editor of *American Poet*, *The Journal of the Academy of American Poets*

“Beautifully translated, written, and drawn, this graphic book - for children and adults alike - links two stories: that of a people faced with natural disaster, and that of the life of Misuzu Kaneko, revered Japanese poet of the early 20th century, whose works for children evince a cosmology of kindness we can all embrace. It’s almost **a companion to St. Exupery’s Little Prince!** Here stars, snow, echoes, silkworms, tomatoes, dewdrops and fish, among others, cohabit our world and give us hope together. Children will love Misuzu’s inquiring mind and her questions of the world, and will learn very gently as well about tragedy and difficulty, about the lives of women before feminism gave them a legal voice, and about the life-force of poetry.”

Erin Moure, Poet and Translator

“A true miracle can be found in this book of wonders: amid exquisite artwork and lovely and compelling poems, Kaneko’s magnificent spirit - the spirit of poetry - lives on despite her heartbreaking real-life story. **An utterly original book** of immense beauty and importance.”

Brenda Shaughnessy, Poet

“**Brimming with compassion, empathy, and love** for all things on this planet...and beyond. The translations are truly superb - the illustrations, truly lovely. This is a book presented with all the beauty of an exquisite Japanese meal!”

Roger Pulvers, Winner of The NOMA Award for The Translation of Japanese Literature

Contributors

Written by [David Jacobson](#)

David Jacobson is a longtime journalist and writer with a specialty in Japan. He has a BA in East Asian Studies from Yale University and was awarded a Mombusho scholarship to study at Tokyo's Hitotsubashi University. While a journalist in print and broadcast media, his news articles and TV scripts appeared in the *Associated Press*, *The Washington Post*, *The Seattle Times*, *The Japan Times*, and on NHK and CNN. Since joining Chin Music Press in 2008, David has edited or copyedited titles including *Yokohama Yankee*, *The Sun Gods* and *Why Ghosts Appear*. He lives in Seattle, Washington.

Illustrated by [Toshikado Hajiri](#)

Toshikado Hajiri is a graphic artist and illustrator in Tokushima, Japan. After graduating from Ritsumeikan University in international relations and working at a trading company, in 2009 he decided to pursue his love for painting full-time by becoming an illustrator. His work has appeared in school textbooks, advertisements, calendars, and in several children's picture books. He was awarded 2nd prize in the 2006 International Illustration Competition sponsored by the Japan Illustrators' Association. In 2016, his work was selected for inclusion in the illustrator's gallery of the Asia Festival of Children's Content. His illustrations for *Are You an Echo?* will be his first for international publication.

Translated by [Sally Ito](#)

Sally Ito holds a BFA in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia and an MA in English from the University of Alberta. She received a Mombusho scholarship to study at Waseda University, where she worked on literary translations of modern and contemporary Japanese poetry. She has taught writing at several universities and reviewed children's books for the *Paper Tigers* blog. She is the author of several volumes of poetry, including *Alert to Glory*, and her 1998 story collection *Floating Shore* won the Writers Guild of Alberta Book Award. She lives in Calgary, Canada.

Translated by [Michiko Tsuboi](#)

Michiko Tsuboi is a graduate of Doshisha Women's College where she majored in English literature. She also attended the University of Alberta in Edmonton where she studied and read Canadian literature in English. She works professionally as a translator and English teacher in Shiga, Japan.

Additional Resources

- Professional leveling determined a Guided Reading Level of *W*, suitable for 6th graders with interest level spanning 4th through 8th grade
- Teacher's guide available at Follett & Ingram
- Website at MisuzuKaneke.com