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Osaka University

THE RELEVANCE OF ONO TŌZABURO'S POETRY TODAY

アンドリュー・村上スミス

1. Introduction

Ono Tōzaburō was a poet who lived most of his life in Osaka, so he can be considered as a poet of Osaka. He can also be seen as an Anarchist poet, as he began his career by writing Anarchist poems in the 1920s. However, his career spans eight decades, into the 1990s. This very long career cannot simply be explained by labels like "poet of Osaka" or "Anarchist poet." What kind of poet was Ono? I would like to investigate how Ono's poetry may be considered to be relevant today, both outside his native Osaka and even outside Japan.

Biography

Ono Tōzaburō (小野十三郎 1903-1996) was born and raised in Osaka. In 1921, he went to Tokyo to enter Tōyō University, but withdrew after only eight months to devote himself to the Anarchist Poetry movement, first publishing in the poetry journal *Red and Black (Aka to kuro)* founded by Hagiwara Kyōjirō, Tsuboi Shigeji, and Okamoto Jun. His first anthology *A Half-Opened Window (Hambun hiraita mado)* was self-published in 1926. In 1930 he helped found the journal *Trajectory (Dandō)* with Hagiwara, Akiyama Kiyoshi, and Kusano Shimpei. Working with Kusano and Hagiwara, he translated the poems of Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson, and others, publishing them in 1931 as *An Anthology of American Proletarian Poetry (Amerika puroretaria shishū).* Amid increasing police suppression of Anarchism, labor organization, and proletarian activism, he returned to Osaka in 1933. With publication of the anthology *Osaka* in 1939, he began to depict his native city – not the merchant and entertainment districts of the traditional image of Osaka, but the newly-industrializing reclaimed lands along Osaka Bay, which he called the "Land of Reeds" *(ashi no chihō).* He continued publishing poetry anthologies until the 1990s, and also wrote essays on poetry, collectively referred to as his "Poetics" *(shiron)*, in which he fiercely attacked what he called the "*tanka* lyricism" of traditional Japanese poetry (the *tanka* being a traditional 31-syllable poem with a rhythm of 5/7/5/7/7 syllables). Ono also served as a mentor to younger poets (such as Tomioka Taeko), founding the Osaka School of Literature in 1954 (whose graduates include novelists Tanabe Seiko and Asai Makate), and serving as president of the Japan Poets Association from 1977 to 1979. His career is commemorated by the Ono Tōzaburō Prize for outstanding poetry or poetry criticism, awarded annually since 1999.

2. An American Connection

First, I would like to compare a poem by Ono (Poem 1 in the Appendix) with one by the well-known American poet Carl Sandburg (Poem 2). (English and Japanese versions of both poems are provided.)

Some similarities in style, tone, and subject matter can be found between these two poems. Both poems are in blank verse (without rhyme), both describe natural (perhaps imaginary) scenes, and both seem to have a political message. Poem 1 is Ono's "The Waterfront (A Fable)" and its English translation by Murakami-Smith. Poem 2 is "Masses" by the American poet Carl Sandburg, along with its Japanese translation by Ono.

Carl Sandburg (1878-1967) wrote of the common people: factory workers, ditch-diggers, immigrants, people riding on a streetcar. He is perhaps best known for his poem "Chicago" from the anthology *Chicago Poems* (1916). Ono borrowed a copy of *Chicago Poems* from the poet Kusano Shimpei in 1926 (Yamada & Hosomi (2008), p.13), the same year in which Ono published his first anthology. The issue of direct influence from Sandburg on Ono's poetry is an interesting question requiring further research. Of course, Ono had begun writing poetry before he read Sandburg's poems, but one could argue that the poems Ono wrote after his exposure to Sandburg focused more on the common people, and became increasingly political. A detailed comparison of Ono's and Sandburg's works would no doubt yield a variety of interesting similarities and differences.

Ono and Kusano, working with Hagiwara Kyōjirō, translated Sandburg's poems, along with those of such North American and Mexican poets as Sherwood Anderson and Salvador Díaz Mirón, and published them in 1931 as *An Anthology of American Proletarian Poetry (Amerika puroretaria shishū)*. It is

interesting that in the US, neither Sandburg nor Anderson is considered a specifically "proletarian" poet. Ono's classification of Sandburg as a proletarian poet reflects his involvement with such Anarchist poetry journals as *Red and Black (Aka to kuro)* and *Trajectory (Dandō)* in Tokyo in the 1920s and early 1930s.

3. An Anarchist Poet

In his early career, Ono can be read as an Anarchist poet. Anarchism[1] is a political philosophy that believes that societies should govern themselves through voluntary institutions, without governments. Anarchism "holds the state to be undesirable, unnecessary, and harmful."[2] In Japan before the Pacific War, Anarchism can be considered as part of the Proletarian movement, which also included various kinds of socialists, communists, and labor organizers. In the arts, the Proletarian Literature movement[3] held that literary works could advance the cause of the proletariat. For example, on the cover of the first issue of the Anarchist poetry journal *Red and Black (Aka to kuro)* in which Ono participated was the slogan, "A poem is a bomb! Poets are black criminals who throw bombs at the unyielding walls and doors of the prison!"[4]

Ono's early career (especially the anthology *The Death of Sacco & Vanzetti*) includes some poems consisting of almost nothing but political slogans, such as Poem 3 in the Appendix, an excerpt from "The Death of Sacco & Vanzetti." To the modern reader, such poems may not be very interesting. Even at the time, there was much debate about the literary value of works with overtly political content. (Shiga Naoya, for example, strongly doubted that a work with strong ideological content could be great literature).[5] More interesting might be a poem like Poem 4, "The Factory Song and the *Kouta,*" which has a political message but also expresses a particular view of music (and, by extension, poetry?) as a kind of "opiate of the people," weakening the workers against the exploitation of the capitalists.

In the mid- to late 1930s, the Proletarian Literature movement (along with all kinds of communist activism and labor organization) was crushed by the police, with many writers being arrested and forced to sign a declaration of "Reorientation,"[6] to the effect that henceforth they would write no more Proletarian works. Kobayashi Takiji, author of *The Crab Cannery Ship*,[7] was tortured and beaten to death in prison. Ono himself, although he was never charged with any crime, was detained by the police for about a fortnight in November, 1935.[8] The Proletarian Literature movement, along with Anarchist poetry, seemed to be dead. And in fact, overt political content seems to be absent from Ono's later work.

Why should we be interested in Anarchism today? Two reasons come to mind:

(1) Anarchists' method of using acts of violence (bombings, assassinations, etc.) to attract publicity to their cause, which they called the "propaganda of the deed," is the same method used by terrorist groups today.

(2) Anarchist groups are still part of popular protests against, for example, the World Trade Organization, and were involved in the protests against the inauguration of Donald Trump as president of the United States on January 21, 2017. (On the other hand, the popular support that allowed Trump to be elected in the first place could also be seen as the expression of an Anarchic or Libertarian dissatisfaction with the US government and political system.)

4. A Poet of Osaka

As mentioned above, Ono did not continue to write Anarchist poetry in Tokyo. Instead, he returned to Osaka and became what many people consider a "poet of Osaka." Poem 5 in the Appendix, "Tennōji Park," appears to express Ono's feelings on returning to Osaka. Please note the determination to record what he sees. (It is interesting to note here that throughout his career, from his first anthology (1926) to his last

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[1] アナーキズム（無政府主義）

[2] Wikipedia, "Anarchism."

[3] See Bowen-Struyk & Field for an overview of the movement and a selection of Proletarian works.

[4] 「詩とは爆弾である！詩人とは牢獄の固き壁と扉とに爆弾を投ずる黒き犯人である！」Wikipedia, *"Aka to kuro (Shishi)."*

[5] He wrote in a letter to the Proletarian writer Kobayashi Takiji: "…I believe that as art it is awkward and unattractive when a man expounds a particular philosophy in his writings." (Keene, p. 619)

[6] 転向

[7] 『蟹工船』(1929), translated by Zeljko Cipris in Kobayashi, *The Crab Cannery Ship and Other Novels of Struggle*.

[8] Yamada & Hosomi, p. 29.

(1992), when writing the word "eye," Ono always used the *kanji* 眼, the physical, anatomical eye, instead of 目, which covers both physical and metaphorical meanings of "eye.")

Many of the poems of this period take the form of landscape poems, but they nearly always include a human element, like the homeless of Poem 5, "Tennōji Park" or the fisherman, children, and Korean families of Poem 6, "I Sing the Clouds of Summer." They depict the border between nature and industry on the reclaimed land along Osaka Bay (Poem 7, "Land of Reeds"), as well as the hard, disorderly lives of the poor (Poem 8, "Old Spring"). As such, these poems rebel against the lyrical depictions of nature in traditional Japanese poetry. Further, by depicting scenes of Osaka far removed from the stereotypical sites of Dōtombori, Osaka Castle, Kuromon Market or the pleasure quarters, these poems create a new image of Osaka. (As one fellow Osaka writer remarked, Ono's Osaka is an "Osaka seen from the sea."[9])

Ono lived the rest of his life in Osaka. He founded the Osaka School of Literature[10] in 1954, and served as its head until 1991. Graduates of the School of Literature include well-known writers such as Tanabe Seiko and Asai Makate.[11] Ono also served as a mentor to younger poets such as Tomioka Taeko.[12] Thus, Ono played an influential role in the Osaka cultural scene for many years. Ono's achievements point out the important role to be played by writers who continue to live in the Kansai (like Tanabe Seiko and Miyamoto Teru) rather than relocating to Tokyo (Murakami Haruki, Kawakami Mieko, Shibasaki Tomoka, …). And the Osaka School of Literature that Ono founded continues to produce new writers today.

5. An Environmentalist Poet?

An interesting question often raised by undergraduates who read Ono's poems in English translation, is whether Ono could be considered an environmentalist poet. If one recalls the dying plants, industrial pollution, and general ugliness of the scenes depicted in, for example, Poem 7 in the Appendix, "Land of Reeds," or in the first part of Poem 9, "A New Land," one might assume the speaker in the poems is lamenting the destruction of nature. However, consider the second half of Poem 9, "A New Land." Regarding the changes that industry has wrought on the landscape, the speaker comments, "I think it is good." Then, after remarking, "Poetry has become completely outmoded/And does not move me," he concludes, "The world, on the other hand, will change a tiny bit." This reminds us that, for an Anarchist or social activist, change is a hopeful thing that can bring society closer to its ideal form. Further, as Ono pledged in Poem 5, "Tennōji Park," his goal is to record everything he sees in front of his eyes, whether beautiful or ugly. This attitude is also expressed in Poem 10, "A Distant View of Oil Fields."

Although it would be an over-simplification to call Ono's attitude toward nature "environmentalist," the attitudes of speakers of various Ono poems might be an interesting topic for investigation. We could probably find examples of two strains of thinking about the environment that are still current today: one attitude that nostalgically longs for a return to the pristine, unspoiled nature before industrialization and environmental destruction, and another that confidently believes in further technological progress as the key to restoring the environment and avoiding further environmental damage.

6. Ono's *Poetics (Shiron)*

Ono's commitment to depict in his poetry everything he sees, whether human or natural, beautiful or ugly, reflects his rejection of the lyrical depiction of nature in traditional Japanese poetry. This "denial of *tanka* lyricism"[13] was articulated in his *Poetics* (*Shiron,* 1947-1962), in a paradoxical phrase, "Song against song" or "Turning away from song, toward song."[14] Recall Poem 4 in the Appendix, "The Factory Song and the *Kouta*," which points out the stultifying dangers of music, which weakens the workers against

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[9] Tomioka Taeko, *"Umi kara mita tochi – Ono Tōzaburō,"* in *Ono Tōzaburō chosakushū* v. 2, pp. 575-586.

[10] 大阪文学学校

[11] 田辺聖子 and 朝井まかて, author of *Renka*『恋歌』about the life of Nakajima Utako (中島歌子), poetry teacher to the famous Meiji-period writer Higuchi Ichiyo (樋口一葉), and *Oranda Saikaku*『阿蘭陀西鶴』 about the life of Ihara Saikaku (井原西鶴), told from the point of view of his daughter.

[12] 富岡妙子, poet and writer of screenplays, fiction, and literary criticism. Incidentally, she was born in Dempō (伝法) along the Yodo River, in Ono's "Land of Reeds."

[13] 「短歌的抒情の否定」explained in the *Poetics* and in, for example, *"Tanka-teki jojō ni kō shite" ("In defiance of tanka lyricism")* (*Ono Tōzaburō chosakushū* v. 2, pp. 501-506).

[14] Expressed as 「歌と逆に。歌に。」in *Poetics,* No. 98 (*Ono Tōzaburō chosakushū* v. 2, p. 332), and as 「歌と逆に歌に。」in *Poetics,* No. 236 (*Ono Tōzaburō chosakushū* v. 2, p. 389).

the exploitation of the capitalists. Even though the poems of Ono's middle to late career lack the overt political slogans of his early poetry, Ono remained wary of the connections among the comfortable 5/7/5-syllable rhythm of traditional forms of Japanese poetry, the lyricism of modern poets like Hagiwara Sakutarō, the natural beauties of the Japanese landscape, and the "Japanese spirit" extolled during the Pacific War. Ono's answer was to become a poet of "things," or a poet of "matter" (in opposition to "spirit").[15]

To the extent that Ono's poems depict "things" using language, they are still subject to the seductive attractions of sound and rhythm, and his poems do, in fact, have a rhythm of their own (whether in the original Japanese or in English translation). This seeming contradiction is recognized by his paradoxical aphorism, "Song against song," and by Ono's naming of one of his poetry anthologies *A Collection of Lyric Poetry* (*Jojōshi-shū*, 1947). An ambivalent attitude toward poetry, and in particular, doubts about its effectiveness as a tool to advance social change, are expressed in poems such as Poem 11, "Quick-Acting Poison," and Poem 12, "In the Wrong Country."

The question of what kind of literature to write under an oppressive government, and whether literature can be effective in opposing such governments, is, of course, still current today. Now, more than ever, perhaps, we have doubts about the significance of literature and music, whether as agents of social change or of personal enrichment. In today's commercial society, works of literature and music, no matter how revolutionary or anti-social, are commodified as products to be sold on the market.

7. A Poet of the Imagination

Given Ono's desire to record "everything in front of my eyes," and his unemotional depictions of "things," we might expect that his poems are faithful observations of scenes the poet himself witnessed. He might be considered a knd of Realist poet. However, as in all literary works, Ono's poems "fictionalize" the poet's own experiences. For example, Poem 7 in the Appendix, "Land of Reeds" is set in "late autumn," but, according to Ono's own recollections, the first time he "discovered" the reclaimed lands of reeds and factories along Osaka Bay was early spring, and "Land of Reeds" was actually written on New Year's Day, 1939.[16] Another example is the author photo used in the anthology *Osaka* of 1939. In the photo, Ono stands on a riverbank among reeds, with a railroad bridge in the background. The scene seems to be Ono's "Land of Reeds," but as Ono himself writes in his autobiographical *Kimyō na hondana,* the photograph was actually taken by the Arakawa flood-control canal outside of Tokyo. Ono even writes that, "if possible, I would have liked to go to a reed plain outside some great industrial area abroad, perhaps Detroit or Baltimore on the east coast of the United States" to take the photograph.[17]

This "fictionalizing" impulse can be seen even more strongly in Ono's later career (after about 1966), in which many poems, such as Poem 13, "The Village of Guzen," paint an imaginative or even fanciful scene. In other poems, there is a blending together of imagination and memory, as can be seen in Poem 14, "Hidden Fort." Note that this poem (from 1980) shows a consciousness of being an Anarchist or revolutionary, even years after political slogans had disappeared from Ono's poetry. Questions of the representation of reality (including the author's personal experience) in literature, as well as the borderline between fiction and fact, are, of course, central questions in literary criticism even today.

8. Searching for Words

In the final phase of Ono's career, poems based on imagination and memory became more and more numerous. This may reflect the reduced sphere of activity of an old man. At the same time, there appeared many poems whose theme might be called "searching for words," especially in the last three anthologies, after 1988. In poems like Poem 15 in the Appendix, "Where the Words Are," and Poem 16, "When the Evening Cicada Falls Silent," the speaker recognizes that the scenes in one's mind, whether memories or imagined scenes, are constructed of words. In Poem 16, "When the Evening Cicada Falls Silent," and Poem 17, "At the Speed of a Canoe," the poet's job is dramatized as "searching for words." The poet's experience has increasingly become limited to the world inside his own mind, but there is still the possibility of discovering just the right word, or of forging, as in Poem 18, "There Is No One," a "still-

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[15] 「物」and「物質」as opposed to「精神」. Yamada & Hosomi, p. 10, p. 42.

[16] *"Ashi no chihō" ("Land of reeds"),* in *Ono Tōzaburō chosakushū* v. 3, pp. 69-78.

[17] *Ono Tōzaburō chosakushū* v. 3, p. 78.

unknown connection" between words. At the same time, there is a dissatisfaction with "words worn out by use," a doubt whether trite words can be used to communicate something new to another person.

Interestingly, there is a Carl Sandburg poem that expresses similar anxieties about words: Poem 19 in the Appendix, "Languages." In this poem, there is no way to "personalize" the words one uses: a language belongs to whole peoples, changes from era to era, and in the end, the words one speaks vanish: "Sing—and singing—remember/Your song dies and changes/And is not here to-morrow."

Surely, however, we can disagree with this pessimistic view. If, as Ono recognized, we can only think and communicate by means of words, then surely it is precisely words that make us most human, that allow us to live our lives in this world and among other people. It is precisely because words are "worn out by use," soiled by everyone's hands, that we can use them to communicate something from one person to another. (There is something communist about language, never privately owned but held in common by all, and something anarchic as well, in that it can never be completely controlled by any single group or government.)

As long as words are written down or digitized, they do not simply vanish like "the wind/Blowing ten thousand years ago." Ono died in 1996, but his words – whether written in 1926 or 1939, in 1947 or 1967, in 1980 or 1992, still remain. And while they do remain, there is always the possibility that they will reach across those years – and across languages, from Japanese to English – and speak to us. And I hope the above discussion has shown that there are several reasons why we should listen.

List of Ono Tōzaburō's Poetry Anthologies

- *A Half-Opened Window* (『半分開いた窓』1926)
- *The Death of Sacco & Vanzetti* (『サッコ、ヴァンゼッチの死』1928)
- *Built on the Old World* (『古き世界の上に』1934)
- *Osaka* (『大阪』1939)
- *Landscape Poetry Selections* (『風景詩抄』1943)
- *The Ocean's Edge* (『大海辺』1947)
- *A Collection of Lyric Poetry* (『抒情詩集』1947)
- *Fire-Swallowing Zelkova* (『火呑む欅』1952)
- *Heavy-Oil Fuji* (『重油富士』1956)
- *An Outrageous Hope* (『とほうもないねがい』1962)
- *A Foreign Land* (『異郷』1966)
- *Songs of the Sun* (『太陽のうた』1967)
- *Vertical Journey* (『垂直旅行』1970)
- *Tree of Refusal* (『拒絶の木』1974)
- *Steam Locomotive* (『蒸気機関車』1979)
- *Songs of a Moated Fortress* (『環濠城塞歌』1980)
- *Trees* (『樹木たち』1982)
- *The Last Tree* (『最期の木』1984)
- *At the Speed of a Canoe* (『カヌーの速度で』1988)
- *Where I Am Now* (『いまいるところ』1989)
- *On Pluto* (『冥王星で』1992)

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Appendix: Poems

(1) "The Waterfront (A Fable)" (1934)

With the wind, I have visited all the wharves of the world
I have had many enjoyable experiences there, and
Twice as many painful experiences
I have flowed away like a river crossing a plain
Beneath a bright silver sky　And through a magnificent sunset like striped agate
And again through a long, melancholy day of leaden clouds hanging low
I recall
An old copperplate etching
A forest of yardarms in evening mist　And lights swaying in the depths of darkness
I am possessed and cannot forget
That boisterous uproar at every tavern
The bloody fights between man and man
The women of the gay quarters　And my committed companions
Oh! But in comparison with another memory of mine
How insubstantial you all seem
It is not of strife among people
Nor is it of the ilk of a faint longing for home
I have seen it
Day after day the seagulls cried to each other in the offing
And people thronged the dock
There an eerie kind of silence floated
And in the eyes sunken by hunger and fatigue
Quietly, quietly blazed a deep-rooted hatred of something that was greater than human beings

(1) 波止場（寓話）

わたしは風とともに世界のあらゆる波止場をおとづれた
わたしはそこでいろいろ楽しいおもひをしたし
それに倍する苦しい目にもあつた
平野をよぎる川のやうにわたしは流れていつた
銀白のまぶしい空の下を　縞瑪瑙のやうにみごとな夕映の中を
また灰色の雲が低くどんより垂れこめた物憂い長い一日を
わたしは想ひだす
古い一枚の銅版画を
夕靄の中に林立する帆柱や　闇の底にゆらぐ灯などを
わたしは神かけて忘れない
酒場々々のあの乱痴気騒ぎを
男と男の血を見る喧嘩を
陽気な街の女や　義理堅いわたしの相棒たちを
あゝ　しかしわたしにあるもう一つの想ひ出の前では
おんみたちは何とまあ影のうすいことだらう
人と人との争闘（いさかい）ではない
ほのかな郷愁のたぐひではない
わたしは視た
毎日々々鷗は沖に呼びかわし
人々は船渠（ドック）に群れてゐた
そこには一種底気味悪い沈黙が流れ

飢と疲労に凹んだ瞳の奥に
何かしら人間以上のものに向つての根深い憎悪がしづかにしづかに燃えたぎつてゐた

(2) “Masses” (1916)

Among the mountains I wandered and saw blue haze and red crag and was amazed;
On the beach where the long push under the endless tide maneuvers, I stood silent;
Under the stars on the prairie watching the Dipper slant over the horizon's grass, I was full of thoughts.
Great men, pageants of war and labor, soldiers and workers, mothers lifting their children--these all I touched, and felt the solemn thrill of them.
And then one day I got a true look at the Poor, millions of the Poor, patient and toiling; more patient than crags, tides, and stars; innumerable, patient as the darkness of night--and all broken, humble ruins of nations.

(2) 被圧迫階級

山岳地方を放浪したとき藍色のモヤと真赤な地肌を見て驚い
絶間なく潮が満ちたり干いたりしてゐる海岸にたつたとき、俺はぐの音も出なかつた
地平のかなたにすぢかひにかかつた北斗をみつめてゐる平原の星雲の下で　俺は胸一ぱいになつた
偉大なる人間　戦ひと労働の壮観　兵卒たち　労働者たち　子供等の行末を考へてゐる世のお母さんたち——俺はこれらの人々に接し思はず襟を正した
そして或日俺は虐げられたる者、数百万の貧しき者の真の姿を見た、倦（う）まず撓（たわ）まざる、岩よりも、潮よりも、星よりも、もつと辛抱強い、数限りなく夜の闇のやうにおし黙つてゐる——ぶたれながらぐつと耐え忍んでゐる、あらゆる国家の最下位を

(3) “The Death of Sacco & Vanzetti” (1928) (excerpt)

[…]
Who shouted
Save Sacco & Vanzetti?
Who in the world forsook them?
Workers, Anarchists, if you can declare that you fought to your last drop of sttrength
Come before us!
Come forth and shout savagely!
[…]
Even more fiercely　continuously　thoroughly
Resist the oppression of International Capitalism!

Do not let our Sacco & Vanzetti have died in vain!

(3) サツコ、ヴアンゼツチの死　（抜粋）

［　略　］
サツコ、ヴアンゼツチを救へ！
叫んだ奴は誰だ
二人を見殺しにしたのはどこのどいつだ！
死力を尽して戦つたと断言出来る労働者、無政府主義者は
俺たちの前に出てこい！

出てきて獰猛に怒鳴れ！
［　略　］
さらに猛烈に　継続的に　徹底的に
国際的資本主義の弾圧に抗争せよ！

俺たちのサツコとヴァンゼツチを犬死さすな！

(4) "The Factory Song and the *Kouta*[18]" (1928)

Here at morn and eventide　Peacefully
The dusty town　Left behind
The business prospering　Everlastingly
By the light of hope　Illumined

(One verse of "Factory Song of the Tokyo Muslin Co. Kamedo Factory")

You want to sing, don't you?
You'd like to raise your voices together and sing, wouldn't you?
Sing, then
But to you, who have no good
Song that truly touches your hearts
What kind of songs are left?
The Factory Song composed by the in-house Bachelor of Arts
The tearful *kouta* with its effect like anesthesia
And what other kind of song
Could express your factory's
No! – *their* factory's
Their class's – Capital's – the Nation's
Every avaricious ideal
Than these?

Ruining your digestion, or catching tuberculosis
Palely and pathologically putting on weight, or wasting away
Your feelings have become so jaded that no matter how much cheap makeup you smear on
The dark bags at the corners of your eyes no longer go away
Until you fall into a deep, deep sleep from which your volition will never awaken
There are innumerable *kouta* that will caress you tenderly and tearfully to the very end

I have heard
In the morning
When the whistle at the start of work blows
One of your number
Singing a verse of the Factory Song in a loud voice
With the carefree cheerfulness of a ten-year-old girl
And in the night town after the lights are out
Beyond a brick wall three times my height
I have listened to the low notes of the *kouta*
That you sing

I have seen it
There!
The blindfold, the manacles they have put on you

[18] *Kouta* (小唄) are traditional Japanese songs sung with *shamisen* accompaniment, originating in the entertainments of the licensed quarters in the Edo period.

The destiny they have given you
Their power, law, duty, right
Their religion, education, culture, ideals
Which chain you together with twofold chains
And I have seen
How cleverly those things have allowed them to carry out their exploitation
And how auspiciously everything has been conducted
Do you want to sing one more time?
Do you want to raise your voices together and sing one more time?
The Factory Song composed by the in-house Bachelor of Arts
The tearful *kouta* with its effect like anesthesia

(4) 工場歌と小唄

此処よ朝夕　　おだやかに
塵の巷を　　よそにして
事業の栄　　永久に
希望の光　　照るところ
（東京モスリン亀戸工場工場歌ノ一節）

歌ひたいでしやう
みんなで声を合わせて歌つてみたいでしやう
お歌ひなさい
しかしほんとうに自分の胸をうつやうないゝ
歌をもたないあなたに
どんな歌が残つてゐませう
お傭ひ文学士の作曲した工場歌
魔睡剤のやうな効能（きゝめ）のある涙つぽい小唄
そしてそのほかにどんな歌が
あなたの工場の
あいつらの階級の　資本の　国家の
あらゆる貪慾な理想を表象する歌が
そこにあるのです

胃腸をこわし　結核を病み
蒼白く病的に肥えふとり　ゲツソリ痩せ衰へいくら安白粉をベタベタ塗りつけても
眼のフチの黒い隈が消えなくなるまで
感情が日増しにすさみ
意慾が再び眼醒めることのない深い深い眠りにつくまで
泥のやうな永久の物憂さと焦燥の中で
あなたを最終まで優しく涙つぽく愛撫してくれる数々の小唄がそこにあるのです

私は聞きました
朝
始業の汽笛が鳴り響くとき
あなたたちの一人が
まるで十歳の少女のやうなくつたくのない明るさで
工場歌の一節を声高に歌つてゐたのを
また灯の消えた夜の町や
身の丈の三倍もある煉瓦塀の向ふ側で
あなたたちが口吟む

あの小唄の低い音色にも耳を傾けました

私は見た
そこに！
あいつらがあなたにほどこした眼隠しを足枷を
あいつらがあなたに与へた宿命を
あなたたちを二重の鎖で数珠つなぎにする
あいつらの権力、法律、義務、正義を
あいつらの宗教、教育、文化、理想を
そして私が見た
それらによつてあいつらの搾取がいかに巧みに行われ
いかにすべてはお目出度くいつてゐたかを
も一度歌ひますか
も一度声を合わせてあなたたち歌ひますか
お傭ひ文学士の作曲した工場歌
魔睡剤のやうに効能のある涙つぽい小唄を

(5) “Tennōji Park” (1934)

I can’t believe it
That ten years of time have passed
The scraps of newspaper at the side of the road, blown by the wind
The phlegm, cigarette butts, *bentō* boxes, spat out, scattered indiscriminately
The athletic field with a wisteria trellis
The walls of the meeting hall, into which the rain has seeped
The trees and lawns, covered with dust
The antiquated tower of iron girders – “Tsūtenkaku”
The disarray of the summer clouds floating beyond it
And the weary faces, the dull gazes of the people walking here
Everything is the same as it was then
The hat missing its hatband is the same, the dirty white coat the same
“Yesterday,” too, the homeless and the day laborers out of work slept on the benches and under the bushes, bodies bent like shrimp
Ten years ago, too, wasn’t a shabby Korean woman letting a child pee at that railing?
But oh, how their numbers have grown!
So, then, not everything is the same as it was in the old days
I have come back to this neighborhood
And am walking the old familiar park
Through the dusty trees and the messy crowds
Now, about “My Hometown,” I feel neither loneliness nor self-ridicule
I simply feel that I want to see clearly every single thing in front of my eyes

(5) 天王寺公園

嘘のやうだ
十年の歳月が流れたとは
路端の風にあふられる新聞屑
ところきらわず吐きちらされた痰唾、吸殻、弁当殻
藤棚のある運動場
雨水の滲みこんだ公会堂の壁
砂を浴びた樹立や芝生

古ぼけた鉄骨の高塔――「通天閣」
そのかなたに浮んでゐる夏雲のみだれ
そしてまたこゝを歩いてゐる人々の疲れた顔、鈍い眼眸（まなざし）
みんな昔のまゝだ
リボンのとれた帽子も　よごれた白衣も
「昨日」もあゝしてベンチの上や植込の蔭でアブレや浮浪者はエビのやうに身体を折り曲げて眠つてゐた
十年前にもあゝして鉄柵のところでみすぼらしい鮮人の女は子供のおしつこをさしてゐたつけ
あゝ、しかしなんとかれらの数の増えたことか
してみると何もかも昔のまゝとい云ふわけではないのだ
俺は再びこの街に帰つてきた
そして昔なじみの公園を歩いてゐる
埃つぽい樹木やゴミゴミした雑踏の間を
俺は「俺の故郷」についてなんの淋しさも自嘲も今は感じない
ただこの眼に映るものを残らずハツキリと視たい気持だ

(6) “I Sing the Clouds of Summer” (1934)

Reflection from the glittering waves of the river
Trailing a line from a fishing pole
Is merely a pose
He is probably staring fixedly out of boredom at shadows of water weeds swaying on the yellow sand of the shallow bottom
The large, white scattered clouds that had been floating beyond the Kema Bridge are slowly moving this way
Now it seems he has raised his face and looks vacantly at the movement of the clouds
Pricking up one’s ears in the buzzing stillness
The shouts of the kids bathing at the distant sandbar can be faintly heard, like the buzzing of a cloud of mosquitoes
It is like listening to something akin to sad music
A row of poplars plastered together
The riverbanks thickly overgrown with weeds
A long board fence inscribed with the wide-spaced words Japan – Steel – Works
A group of women and children picking over a mountain of coal cinders with hand-rakes and bamboo sieves
Puffing out smoke is the huge smokestack of Kanebō
Clustering along both banks like swept-up trash, dilapidated barges, tugboats, and roofed passenger boats
The sun of 2:00 PM dries the flags of cloth diapers waving everywhere
Pours down onto the sooty tin roofs
Sets the clouds overhead ablaze
This settlement of “floating mansions,” rocking with over 300 Koreans in 19 families
In this lazy afternoon, raises not a voice.

(6) 夏の雲を歌ふ

ギラギラ光る河波の照りかへし
釣竿を垂れてゐるのはかたちだけだ
浅瀬の底の黄ろい砂の上にゆらぐ藻の影などを所在なく凝視めてゐるのだらう
毛馬橋のかなたに浮んでゐた白い大きなちぎれ雲がだんだんこちらに近づいてくる
今度は顔をあげて雲の動きをポカンと見てゐる様子だ
じ―んとした静けさの中に耳をすますと

遠くの中洲で水浴びしてゐるガキ共のわめきが群蚊のやうにかすかにながれてくるのだ
それは何か悲しい音楽でも聞いてゐるやうだ
べつとりとしたポプラ並木
雑草の生ひ茂つた河原
日、本、製、鋼、と一字づつ間隔をおいて書かれた長い板塀
手鉤とザルを持つて石炭骸の山を漁つてゐる女や子供の群
むんむん煙を吐いてゐるのは鐘紡の大煙突だ
掃きよせられたゴミのやうに両岸に集まつたボロボロの団平、曳船、十石船
午後二時の太陽は張りめぐらされた襠褓（おしめ）の旗をカラカラに乾かし
煤けたトタン屋根にふりそゝぎ
頭上の雲を輝かせ
このあたり鮮人部落十九家族三百余人の世帯に揺れる
「船屋敷」も今は声一つたてない

(7) “Land of Reeds” (1939)

Far off
The sound of waves.
Above the wide plain of reeds withering from their tips,
The arc of high-tension wires sags low.
On the horizon
Fuel oil tanks.
In the cold, clear, late-autumn sunlight
Damselflies like *euphausia*[19] flow with the wind
And on the plain of ammonium sulfate and soda
And electricity and steel
A clump of *chrysanthemum japonense*[20] shrivels
And expires.

(7) 葦の地方

遠方に
波の音がする。
末枯れはじめた大葦原の上に
高圧線の弧が大きくたるんでゐる。
地平には
重油タンク。
寒い透きとほる晩秋の陽の中を
ユーフアウシャのやうなとうすみ蜻蛉が風に流され
硫安や　曹達や
電気や　鋼鉄の原で
ノヂギクの一むらがちぢれあがり
絶滅する。

(8) “Old Spring” (1939)

The willows have broken into leaf

[19] Krill.
[20] *Nojigiku* in Japanese.

Rape flowers are blooming
And a chicken is picking over a trash pile.
Beyond the elevated railroad tracks can be seen mountains in a thin haze.
On the laundry-drying platform of a sooty row house beside the tracks
Has been modestly placed a white plum in a pot.
Sunlight slants through the open second-floor windows, shining on the *tatami* mats
And among mountains of cardboard boxes stacked up next to a wall
A baby sleeps alone, body half off a shabby futon.
A row of small, tin chimneys.
Shaking the beams, the sound of a motor, hurriedly rotating all day long.
Toothbrushes, handkerchiefs, scrub-brushes, work gloves, cheap toys
Clasps for *tabi* socks and ribs for Western umbrellas.
Looking up, I see
Caught by the wind, tiny particles of coal dust sparkling in the depths of the blue sky:
Here, too, old spring had come again.

(8) 古い春

柳が芽をふき
菜種の花が咲き
鶏がゴミ溜めを漁つてゐる。
高架線の向ふに淡靄のかかつた山々が見える。
線路に沿ふた煤ぼけた長屋の物干台に
鉢植の白梅がつゝましくおかれてゐる。
明け放たれた二階から陽はなゝめに畳に射しこみ
壁際に堆高く積まれた紙函の山の間に
赤ん坊がひとりボロ蒲団からはみ出して眠つてゐる。
立ちならぶ鍼力の小煙突。
梁をゆさぶつて終日せつかちに廻転する動力の音。
歯刷子、ハンケチ、タワシ、軍手、一銭玩具
足袋のコハゼや蝙蝠傘の骨たち。
仰ぎみれば
舞ひ上つ炭塵の微粒子は青空の深みにキラキラ光り
古い春はこゝにも還つてゐた。

(9) “A New Land” (1942)

They say you can tell from
The soil,
The rocks,
The veins of ore,
The ecology of plants.
Someone even sounded the darkness underground
By biting an autumn fern.
Water, transparent blue with its content of copper sulfate.
A ravine with a stream that stains its gravel bed crimson.
The folds in strata permeated by magnetism and electricity.
The low rumble of an explosion echoes in the autumn sky
And part of a mountain is blown away.
Three thousand years have swiftly passed.
Now the very bones of the mountains of Japan change their form.
Tamba Province’s Mt. Ōe of yore has become a nickel mine,

And on humid nights Mt. Fuji discharges oil sludge.
Iron. Bronze. Zinc. Tin.
Chrome. Magnesium. Tungsten.
Hokkaido, too, is greatly altered.
Korea, too, is in a state.
I think it is good.
—One brilliantly clear morning, I raise the blinds and the moors of far-off Mt. Fuji are forested with rotary oil derricks. Like California.
Poetry has become completely outmoded
And does not move me.
The world, on the other hand, will change a tiny bit.

(9) 新風土

土や
岩石や
露頭や
植物の生態で
それがわかると云ふ。
ベニ羊歯の葉を噛んで
地下の暗黒を打診したやつもゐる。
硫酸銅を含有して青く透きとほつてゐる水。
川底の砂礫を朱赤色に染めてゐる谿。
磁気や電気が浸透する地層の褶曲。
秋空に低く発破が砑して
山の一角が吹つとんでしまふ。
滔々三千年。
いま日本の山骨が形状を変へる。
昔々の丹波の大江山はニツケル坑になり
蒸し暑い夜に富士山が泥状石油を吐く。
鉄。銅。亜鉛。錫。
クローム。マンガン。タングステン。
北海道在大変。
朝鮮もたいへん。
わたしはいいと思ふ。
——或る天気晴朗なる朝、ブラインドをあげると、はるか富士の灌木帯にロータリー式石油櫓が林立してゐる。カリフオルニヤのやうに。
詩はねつから古くなり
わたしを感動させない。
少うし世界の方が変つてくれる。

(10) “A Distant View of Oil Fields” (1943)

Over there
Do not depict the spiky, eroded mountain ridge
Nor the lonely shapes of the stunted trees.
Dark, heavy heaving of the waves:
Avoid that shore.
Do not look at nature
With eyes like those drawn into a haze.
Rather, with a light brilliant enough

To take the measure of the bottomless darkness
Of our lives,
Illuminate a forest of oil derricks in the tropical night.
Without indiscriminate decoration with words of love.
Make a friend of the desolation of heaven and earth.

(10) 油田遠望

あの地に
山骨の刺々しさを
矮か樹木の寂しい影をうつすな。
暗い重い波のうねりは
あの岸を避けよ。
靄の中に吸ひこまれるやうな眼で
自然を視るな。
むしろわれらが生命の
底知れね暗黒を測る
強烈な光もて
林立する熱帯の夜の石油櫓を照らせ。
みだりに愛の言葉を飾らず。
天地の荒廃を友とせよ。

(11) "Quick-Acting Poison" (1982)

If, by chance
If I am still alive
I will be somewhere I have never been before
Whether in the mountains or at the sea.
I will be seeing things I have never seen before
And doing things I have never done before.
Things not at all like my present self.
Hmm… What else? Ah, yes.
One more thing I would like to come across
Is that thing
I have never managed to write:
A poem whose poison takes effect so quickly.

(11) 毒の廻り

もしもだ
それまで
もしも生きていたら
山でも　海でも
かつて一度もおらざりしところにいる。
かつて見ざりしものを見
かつてなしえざりしことをしている。
まったくいまのおれらしくないことをな。
ええと、そうだな
その他にめぐりあいたいのは
ついに書きえなかった

あれだ。
毒の廻りの
めっぽう早い歌。

(12) “In the Wrong Country” (1980)

You are
In the wrong place
In this country.
This place where, when mist rises, the mist speaks
Where, when rain falls ceaselessly, the rain speaks
Where, when wind rises, the wind speaks
Isn’t right for you.
Poetry, it would have been better
If you’d been in a rougher country.
Somewhere with no evergreen forests.
A country where the land is parched and cracked.
It would have been better if you’d been in a place
Where the mountains are no more than masses of saltpeter
Shining whitely in the direct sunlight of never-ending summer
Where the only plants on the land
Are tree-shaped cacti, or agave
Or something similar, anyway
And nothing else.
The most suitable for you would have been
A country where the scenes with people in them
Are of a blown-up railway in the desert
With a locomotive always fallen over on its side.
Poetry, you are
Also in the wrong time.
It would have been better
If you’d been born about a century and a half ago, in a rougher country.
If you’d died there
And people were saying, These are your bones.
You have lived too long.
Summer’s coming again.
How will you greet this summer?
Might you be in the mountains at dusk, cool air descending
Listening to the cry of the evening cicadas?
In the wrong country
In the wrong time.

(12) まちがった国で

おまえは
いるところをまちがえて
この国にいる。
靄がかかると靄が
雨がぶりつづくと雨が
風が立つとその風もものを云うところは
おまえには向かんのだ。
詩よ、おまえは
もっと荒っぽい国にいたらよかったんだ。

照葉樹林なんかないところに。
地は乾きに乾いて亀裂がはしってる国にな。
山なら硝石の塊にすぎないような山が
永劫の夏の直射日光に白く映えているところ
地上にある植物は
樹状シャボテンか、竜舌蘭か
まあそんなものぐらいで
他になにもない
そんなところにいたらよかった。
爆破された砂漠の鉄道に
機関車がつねに横倒しになっているところ
それが人間がいる風景である国が
おまえには一ばん向いていたんだよ。
詩よ、おまえは
いる時間もまちがえた。
一世紀半ほど前に生まれて
もっと荒っぽい国にいたらよかったんだ。
そこで死んで
これがおまえの骨だと云われていたら。
長生きしすぎたよ。
また、夏がくるわ
おまえ、この夏をどう迎えるんだ。
暗くなって、冷気がおりてくる山で
カナカナの声でもきいているんか。
まちがった国の
まちがった時間の中で。

(13) "The Village of Guzen" (1970) (excerpt)

To my ears
It sounded like "village of Guzen."
A place where an entire mountain
Is a huge foodstuffs warehouse
And weapons and ammunition dump.
I visited it deep in the mountains of Kiso[21].
Catching a ride on a forestry railroad
For transporting logs cut in the forest
Winding through
Valley after valley
[…]
Looking up at the mountain in front of me
And pretending to read a survey map
I told the doubting people
I'm going to the other side.
Then I waved
Took my leave of them
And headed into the depths of the mountains
Without even a decent path.
[…]
I saw with my own eyes

[21] In southern Nagano Prefecture.

The place where I am meant to take up residence.
It was one mountain in the middle of the mountains.
It was a mountain like any other, covered with the luxuriant foliage of trees.
From within the mountain
I heard, not the calls of birds
But human language that I could understand.
Suddenly before me
As if operated by the touch of a button
A part of the slope of the mountain
Rose upward
Shaking the branches of the trees.
The mouth of a cave opened
As if to say, Come in.

(13) グゼンの里　（抜粋）

おれの耳に
それは「グゼンの里」ときこえた。
山全体が
巨大な食物貯蔵庫であり
武器弾薬庫であるところ。
そこを木曽路の山の山の奥に訪ねたのだ。
丸太にして切り出された
大きな杉や檜を搬ぶ森林鉄道に便乗して
渓また渓を
いく曲りかして行くと
［　略　］
おれは行手の山を仰ぎ
測量地図を見てるようなふりをして
いぶかしがる人たちに
あの向うまで行くんだと云った。
そして手を振って
かれらと訣れ
道らしい道もない山ふところへ分け入った。
［　略　］
おれはおれの住みつくべきところを
眼のあたりに見た。
それは山の中の一つの山であった。
樹木が照り映えてるなんのへんてつもない山であった。
その山の中から
鳥の声ではない
おれがききわけることができる人語がきこえた。
とつぜん、おれの前に
ボタン一つで操作されてるように
その山の山腹の一カ所が
樹木の枝をゆすぶって
ざあっと持ち上げられた。
はいれ、とばかり
ぽっかり口をあけた。

(14) “Hidden Fort” (1980)

How many hundreds of meters deep
Is the Baiyin Cave in China?
In the mountains of northern Japan
There are even deeper
Still-unknown limestone caves and grottoes.
Most are prehistoric
Entombing dinosaur bones and ammonite fossils.
All my comrades who died young.
Are now there.
Those who are still alive
But who have gone missing
Found those caves before me and have gone there.
Those who are stubborn and solitary
And do not get along well with others.
Those who, from birth, have made an enemy of the power of the State
Have no other place to go
In the end.
The weak light of a lantern crawls across the wall of a cave.
The ceiling of the maze continues on into the depths.
The depth of these caves is more than a few hundred, a few thousand meters.
A spotlight stops on the innermost rock wall.
Leave a space
For me, too
Comrades.

(14) 隠し砦（1980 年）

白隠洞は
地下何百米に達しているか。
北国の山中には
もっと深い
未だに知られざる鍾乳洞や地下岩窟がある。
多くは有史前のもので
恐竜の骨や巨大な巻貝の化石を埋没さしている。
若くして死んだおれの仲間たち。
かれらは、いまみんなそこにいる。
行方不明のまま
まだこの世に生きているやつも
おれより先にそこを見つけて行っている。
かたくなで、孤独で
人づきあいが悪かったやつ。
生れるや国家権力を敵としてきた人間が
最後に行きつくところは
そんなところしかないのだ。
カンテラの淡い灯が洞窟の壁を匍っている。
迷路の天井は奥までつづいている。
その深さは何百米、何千米なんてものではない。
どんづまりの岩盤にスポットがとまっている。

おれのためにも
場所を一つあけておいてくれ。
友よ。

(15) “Where the Words Are” (1988)

Around me
There are no trees
But when I try to say something
In my mind
I always see images of trees.
Their shadings are somehow different
From the ones I have seen in the world as it really is
But they are gentle, just like
Branches spreading wanly in the sky at dawn.
At some point
Nature has receded
And now all I can see
Are the images of trees I have made in my mind.
Even if I can live for a few more years
That is the only space
Where I can search
For words that will fit circumstances.
In my dream last night appeared
A grove of large horse chestnut trees
On the bank of a river somewhere.
Along with the sound of the rain falling into it
I went
Into the grove.

(15) 言葉のありか

あたりには
なんの樹木もないのに
ものを言おうとすると
頭の中に
いつも木の影がうかんでくる。
ありのままの世界に見てきたのと
陰影はどこかちがっているが
それは夜あけの空に
淡くひろがってる枝と同じようにやさしい。
いつのころからか
自然は遠のいて
頭の中に自分が作りだした木の影しか
おれには見えなくなった。
あと何年か生きられるとしても
状況に見合った言葉を
さがしだせる空間は
そこにしかない。
きのう夢に現われたのは
どこかの川べりの

大きな栃の木の林だった。
降りこんでいる雨の音とともに
おれはその中に
入っていった。

(16) “When the Evening Cicada Falls Silent” (1989 or 1990)

At the end of summer
Just before the evening sun vanishes
It burns more brightly for an instant
And then sets.
The evening cicada rasps for the last time
And the mountain darkens.
Lifting my eyes
I see a sky of faint stars.
I seem to see this now
But it is an evening scene in the far-off mountains that suddenly
Arises before my mind’s eye as I sit at my desk late at night.
But this did not so much
Arise naturally before my mind’s eye
When I had laid down my pen
To search for a word.
Rather, it is the silhouette of certain things assembled together in my head.
These “certain things” are words.
When the evening cicada fell silent
I grasped the word
I had been searching for.

(16) ひぐらしがなきやむとき

夏の終り
消えぎわの夕日が
一とき、ぱっと明るく燃えて
そして沈む。
ひぐらしが最後にジイとなくと
山は暗くなる。
眼を上げると
淡いけれど星空である。
いま、見ているようだが
夜中に机に向っていてわたしの頭に
ふと、浮んだ遠山の夜景だ。
けれど、これは
言葉さがしをしているわたしが
ペンを置いてた時に
自然にというより
一瞬、頭に浮んで
構築されたあるものの陰影である。
あるものとは言葉だ。
ひぐらしがなきやんだ時間に
探していた言葉をつかんだ、
わたしは。

(17) “At the Speed of a Canoe” (1988)

Slowly
At the speed of a canoe cutting through the water
I am searching for words.
My time
Sometimes pauses
But among my friends are a few
Who at such times
Pursue words
All the more avidly.
One of them had been wanting to go to Fiji
And now he is no doubt on one of those islands.
In my dreams
No less than in his
The shadings of things are sharp.
Hanging down over the face of the water
Are the branches of a tree
Like a mangrove.
Words hide beneath them.
I stop time
And send the canoe quietly
In among them.

(17) カヌーの速度で

ゆっくり
水を切るカヌーの速度で
言葉さがしをしている。
おれの時間は
ときどき停止するが
そんなときに
かえって情熱的に
言葉を追っている者が
おれの仲間に何人かいる。
彼は前からフィジーに行きたがっていたから
いまはそのあたりの島にいるだろう。
おれの夢の中も
そいつにまけず
物の陰影ははっきりしているのだ。
水面一ぱいにたれ下っているのは
マングローブみたいな
木の枝だ。
その下に言葉はかくれているんだ。
時間をとめて
カヌーよしずかに
その中にはいっていけ。

(18) “There Is No One” (1988)

Between words and other words
There is a still-unknown connection.
Now, upon it
Glares the light
Of this sun at the end of summer.
The silhouettes of the material phenomena in my world
Will, tomorrow, become more distinct.
Someone is always nearby
So all that is left here
Are words worn out by use.
There is still time.
Oh, this light at the end of summer!
Search for a place
Where there is no one.

(18) だれもいない

言葉と言葉には
まだ未知の関係がある。
そこに、いま
この夏の終りの陽が
カッと射している。
おれの世界にある物象の陰影は
明日はもっとあざやかになるだろう。
だれかがいつもそばにいるから
使い古してきた言葉だけしか
ここには残っていないんだ。
時間はまだある。
この夏の終りの光よ
だれもいないところを
探せ。

(19) Carl Sandburg, “Languages” (c. 1900-1910)

There are no handles upon a language
Whereby men take hold of it
And mark it with signs for its remembrance.
It is a river, this language,
Once in a thousand years
Breaking a new course
Changing its way to the ocean.
It is mountain effluvia
Moving to valleys
And from nation to nation
Crossing borders and mixing.
Languages die like rivers.
Words wrapped round your tongue today
And broken to shape of thought

Between your teeth and lips speaking
Now and today
Shall be faded hieroglyphics
Ten thousand years from now.
Sing—and singing—remember
Your song dies and changes
And is not here to-morrow
Any more than the wind
Blowing ten thousand years ago.