

The Scholar Poet as a Young Man:  
Reading Morita Takeshi's *New Haven* and *Aoi Nagisa*  
[*The Blue Shore*]

Yuko Matsukawa

As an instructor of literatures written in English, I often remind my students that the narrator of a literary work, whether a poem, a novel, or a play, is not the writer. This was drilled into me as a student; as a reader, I too try to follow this dictum faithfully, though as the years go by, I realize that the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction as well as fiction and autobiography are more porous than I was led to believe. Reading my colleague Morita Takeshi<sup>1</sup>'s first two poetry collections, *New Haven* (1978) and *Aoi Nagisa* [*The Blue Shore*](1980) , which together comprise selected Japanese tanka poems written during his twenties and thirties, further blurred those boundaries and threw into question my reading practices of the last few decades. Perusing his poetry also made me realize that what little I know about the conventions of composing and reading tanka derive from long ago high school lessons so it was high time I learned a little bit more.

Because I studied and taught at various universities in the United States where it was more or less a given that creative writers were faculty members, I was delighted to find out that Professor Morita, an eminent American literature scholar (and the chair who hired me here to teach at

Seijo University) was also a serious poet. Not that I had much occasion to talk to him about his poetry—the busyness of academic life limited our conversations to administrative matters that needed to be settled quickly, or short musings on teaching or the weather or entrance exams, usually while we were copying material for teaching. But questions about his life as a poet sat in the back of my mind: why poetry and why tanka? Why choose to be both a scholar and a poet? How do they interact? How does this inform his writing about and teaching American literature?

Professor Morita's impending retirement seemed to be as good a reason to interview him about these matters as any. When we sat down for our conversation on October 13, 2009, he graciously and patiently answered queries about his poetry. In the first half of this essay, I relay what he shared with me about the impetus for writing that he felt early in life, his association with the poet Kondō Yoshimi and the poetry journal *Mirai*, his thoughts about writing, and his poetry plans after retirement. The second half of this essay introduces the scholar poet through his tanka on scholarship, writing, translating, and teaching in the two volumes, *New Haven* and *Aoi Nagisa*. The translations of my colleague's tanka are all mine and the original tanka are listed in the appendix. As the Italians say, "*traduttore, traditore*"; as a traitorous translator then, all I ask for is a little clemency from both the composer of these tanka and his audience as they read.

### **The Scholar Poet as a Young Man**

Though I rather narrowmindedly thought that someone who would end up studying nineteenth- and twentieth-century American literature would naturally gravitate towards free verse, this was not the case for Morita. He

told me that it was his mother's influence that led him to writing tanka. His mother, a tanka poet herself, inspired her young son to try his hand at writing this classical form of Japanese poetry so her example and that literary environment in which he was raised nurtured an appreciation for this particular form. In high school, Morita published a series of tanka in his school literary magazine and read poetry avidly but it was not until he encountered the poetry of Kondō Yoshimi<sup>2</sup> that he found a style of tanka that he thought was worth reading and writing. He was so taken by Kondō's poetry that he screwed up the courage to write to Kondō and asked to be part of his poetry circle. Kondō, who was a member of the famous Araragi school of poetry that admired the poetry of Masaoka Shiki, served as a mentor to Morita, who developed his poetic style and skills under Kondō's tutelage. Morita also became a member of the group that contributed poetry to the monthly poetry journal *Mirai* [*The Future*] which was founded by Kondō and others. Morita helped edit the journal in his twenties; he has continued to submit tanka for publication there for fifty years.

My confusion over whether I ought to read the narrator of the poems as being identical to the poet was gently explained away by Morita's reminding me that the form of the tanka traditionally has urged the poet to write about his/her own experiences; so tanka are by definition about the poet, or, even if one resists the idea of the narrator = poet, one has to accept that the poems are deeply informed by the poet's experiences. "Not that everything the poems say is exactly what I think," cautions Morita during our conversation, "but since these tanka come out of my own experiences, you may assume that the narrator is a version of me."

Morita's first collection of poetry, *New Haven* (1978) is comprised of the

tanka he wrote during his sabbatical year at Yale (1973–1974). It sold well, so well, he tells me, that there are no longer copies available. He takes his only copy down from one of his bookcases to show me. “See, I included some of my woodblock prints and drawings and photographs of my family,” he points out, showing me the photographs in color at the beginning of the book. The cherubic faces of his two older children peek out from under rustling mounds of leaves; other pictures reveal younger versions of Morita and his wife enjoying American life.

It was through Kondō that Morita started submitting poems to the monthly poetry journal *Mirai*. He showed me recent issues which include his poetry. It took me a while to understand that he has been publishing tanka in *Mirai* every month for the last few decades. “Every month?” I ask incredulously. “Every month,” confirms Morita. “Now that I’m a veteran poet here, I’m limited to seven tanka a month but when I was younger, I’d send in ten tanka and Kondō Yoshimi would choose seven or eight of them to publish. Sometimes he’d choose all ten but in any case, I’d have on the average one hundred tanka published yearly in *Mirai*. Kondō would usually eliminate one or two, and tell me not to write this kind of poem or how that one could be better. So this is the way I had a long ongoing dialogue with him about composing tanka.”

“You’ve been submitting poetry monthly for the last fifty years?” again I ask with not a little wonder. “Yes,” he answers patiently, “but there was a period, three or four years, I think, when I was busy with my academic writing and so dropped out of the scene for a while. My poetry friends told me that everyone had that kind of period but then I came back to poetry. And I never stopped being a member.” A member of *Mirai*, he means,

which only publishes poetry by its member subscribers, though he also tells me that anyone can become a member. Morita says that sometimes he would publish poems in other journals when asked, but most of his tanka appeared in *Mirai* first. Morita explained that the tanka of his seven poetry collections were culled from those poems in *Mirai*.

As for the process of writing, Morita says he writes tanka every day, and when it is time to send in his submissions, he chooses the best ones and then throws the rest out. When he was younger, he could write tanka after tanka in one sitting, but nowadays, he muses, since much of his inspiration comes from his reading, he takes notes when he reads and then composes bits and pieces of tanka on pieces of paper; those poetry fragments—the *kaminoku* or first half of the tanka (seventeen syllables) or the *shimonoku* or second half (fourteen syllables)—are then combined and revised into individual tanka. And since inspiration can hit any time, Morita discloses one of the tricks of his trade: “I also keep paper and pen on my nightstand so that if I wake up in the middle of the night with a poem in my head, I can write it down immediately. Sometimes when I wake up I think, ‘I’ll write it down later,’ but I always forget and think, ‘Ah, but it was such a good poem—what a loss.’ So to prevent that, I decided to take notes and write things down whenever I think of something.” Those poems then go through a revision process though some remain in their original form.

If he reads a tanka, Morita will recognize whether it is his or not but he does not have his *oeuvre* memorized; he tells me that it is Kondō Yoshimi’s verse that he has committed to memory. “When I was young, I probably could recite about 2000 of Kondō Yoshimi’s tanka,” says Morita. “People used to memorize tanka more in the past, *Kokinshū* [*The Collection*

*of Ancient and Modern Poems* (c. 905)], for instance, because that was part of our culture and besides, we had fewer distractions.”

When asked who his favorite poets to read are, besides his mentor Kondō Yoshimi, Morita lists Tsuchiya Bummei and Saitō Mokichi, both Araragi poets, as well as Takaha Shugyō, a haiku poet he likes. Morita confesses that he is very much into haiku lately, not to compose but to read, but also recognizes that this might be an instance of the grass being greener on the other side.

When I mention noticing that he dedicates his books to his children, he laughs and says, “I decided to dedicate those to my children because then it would be the same as dedicating them to my wife. I’m not like those American and British writers who can dedicate books to their wives [without being embarrassed].” He also revealed to me that he intends to continue writing and publishing tanka after he retires from Seijo University: “I’ve published seven volumes already and have new tanka ready so after retirement when I publish my collected works, I will dedicate that to my wife.”

Morita is matter-of-fact about the merits of his life as a poet: he sees his composing tanka as contributing to his appreciation of language and to the further honing of his sensibilities in Japanese as well as English. This in turn informs his reading, teaching, and writing (both scholarly and creative). He adds, “Many literary scholars are gripped by the urge to be creative writers and so they work hard to infuse their academic writing with creativity. Because I was already a creative writer, I didn’t have to do that . . . This made my analyses of literature very objective and my academic writing quite stoic.” He also recognizes his special perspective: “Because of

my poet's eye, I am more aware of my surroundings, am curious about the world, and notice things that move me." In the next section, then, we will see what Morita the poet observes about Morita the scholar.

### **Reading Morita Takeshi's *New Haven and Aoi Nagisa* [*The Blue Shore*]**

Though *New Haven* was Morita's first published volume of poetry, chronologically, it sits between the two sections of his second published collection, *Aoi Nagisa*. The first section of *Aoi Nagisa* which is also called "Aoi Nagisa" encompasses the years before he and his family spent his sabbatical year (1973–1974) at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. Then comes *New Haven* which, as Susugu Yoshida notes in his afterword/commentary to that volume, "has for its author, significance as a record of his year studying abroad" (translation mine, 270). This is then followed by the second longer section of *Aoi Nagisa* which is entitled "Kakehashi" [ "The Bridge" ] which is comprised of the poems written during the remainder of his thirties. Though most of the tanka are about observations in daily life, we are allowed glimpses of him as a reader and scholar, a translator, and university professor.

Because we can trace his poetic lineage back to Masaoka Shiki and the Araragi school via his mentor, Kondō Yoshimi, Morita in his tanka adheres to what we now consider characteristics of Shiki and the Araragi poets: an affinity for realistic representation of the ordinary, or sketching from life, and through that, an exploration of the depths of human psychology. For instance, the tanka from which the title of the collection is derived illustrates this approach:

Because you stand  
With a warm glow on the blue shore  
My own sea  
Gradually gains clarity (*Aoi Nagisa* 43)

In the afterword/commentary to *Aoi Nagisa*, Yoshida Susugu argues that the style and sensibility of Morita's poetry changes after his year at Yale:

Readers will notice that in the second section, "Kakehashi" which contains poems written after *New Haven*, his writing style has changed. The sensitivity he displayed, gently and so refreshingly, toward his surroundings—nature, history, the everyday lives of people, and children—loses its transparency once he returns to this "fussy," "compactly hardened and organized" "country of netsuke [miniature carved ornaments]" (as Takamura Kōtarō would say). Frustration and bitterness. We can see how he questions something that storms within him as well as without. (translation mine, 279)

I do not think that Yoshida considers this change necessarily a disappointment, even though there is a tinge of longing for the kind of wonder that seems to be lost. A sabbatical and the fact that he was a temporary visitor to the United States who was unfettered by the social ties and obligations he had left behind in Japan allowed Morita to see things with fresh eyes and a kind of innocence. But then again, even within the *tanka* in *New Haven*, he is not without anxieties about himself, his work, his family, and the world around him. Reading these two volumes together, then allows us to see the gradual growing up of a scholar and a poet and a tempering of a sensibility

and sensitivity through the workaday world.

### **Reading and Libraries**

Reading is an integral part of Morita's life; in every period of his life depicted in these poems, libraries figure as a location for work and contemplation. One of the first tanka we encounter shows us the everyday life of a young scholar:

After the rain  
On days my reading proceeds well  
At the library  
I return home  
Swinging my umbrella jauntily (*Aoi Nagisa* 3)

This carefree elation is not habitual. Once at Yale, even libraries which should be familiar cause anxiety and a sense of alienation:

At the library my reading  
Does not progress  
Small things I'm not used to  
Have grave meanings (*New Haven* 15)

Getting used to a place, a system, a way of life that is new comes with its own hardships and can foster homesickness. One feels the delight, awe, and relief that the poet experiences when he encounters a familiar name on a library book:

Like burnished silver

Shining in the stacks  
My mentor's second poetry collection  
I encounter  
Here across the ocean (*New Haven* 87)

Yet given enough time, going to the library also becomes a part of his everyday routine, despite the inclement weather of New England:

The muddy path to the library,  
Freezing and thawing  
Over and over again,  
I tread upon  
The dull-colored heavy ridges (*New Haven* 109)

And Morita transforms this library at Yale into a familiar place where he can work for long hours and then exult in the sensations of nature on his way home:

Leaving the library  
When it closes at midnight  
The scent of ivy clinging to the walls (*New Haven* 91)

### **Writing and Authors**

Early on in the collection we are introduced to one of the writers young Morita studies: William Faulkner. These early tanka speak to the intensity of Morita's engagement with Faulknerian things:

When fatigued by

The vivid breathing visage  
floating in thin air  
Of Faulkner  
I close my eyes (*Aoi Nagisa* 17)

With the sudden cry of cicadas  
Late at night  
I'm called back to my room  
From Faulkner's South (*Aoi Nagisa* 26)

What was once imaginary travel to Yoknapatawpha county in Faulkner's fictional South becomes a reality during the sabbatical year when Morita and his family make a pilgrimage to Faulkner's home and grave:

Aah, cicadas chirp in the same way  
They do in Japan  
When we visit the garden of Faulkner's home  
In the Deep South (*New Haven* 224)

The old black cemetery keeper  
Shows us the way  
To the grave we want to visit  
As he stands on a tree stump (*New Haven* 225)

Faulkner occupies Morita's thoughts after he returns to Japan but unlike his earlier poems, sudden sounds in his immediate surroundings do not call him back from his deep investigation of Faulkner's writings but rather

remind him to go back to work:

After hearing  
The waterfowl that cries for a while  
At the same time every night,  
I return to Faulkner (*Aoi Nagisa* 84)

Now a husband and a father, Morita is aware of how his wife frees him so that he may pursue his reading, writing, and research by caring for their children; the tanka coupled with the one above indicate this succinctly:

Exhausted by children  
Who need lots of attention  
My wife sleeps and  
Yet again tonight  
Does not hear the waterfowl (*Aoi Nagisa* 84)

The other writers who enthrall Morita are Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe. The tanka below are about the joys of reading works by and writing about these two writers:

The sea is an guide to my soul  
During the days I commute  
To read Hawthorne's unpublished letters (*New Haven* 48)

With a just-finished essay  
On Hawthorne in my hands  
I go out on a morning in which

The fog meanders on the sea (*New Haven* 111)

I wander among the lines of poetry  
Night after night  
As if to release the raven  
That Poe has entrapped there (*New Haven* 174)

But this does not mean writer's block is alien to Morita, both in New Haven and back in Japan. While at Yale, despite not being able to write, perhaps there is still a sense of wonder that is available to Morita since he can afford to stargaze and chart time like the nineteenth-century writers he studied undoubtedly did:

There are constellations  
That shift in the skies languidly  
Even though my report  
Still is not progressing (*New Haven* 80)

However, once back in Japan, the same blockage is no longer romanticized and is a source of great anxiety:

The deadline long past  
For an essay on Poe—  
Writer's block for several days  
And insomnia continues (*Aoi Nagisa* 84)

### **Writing and Translating**

While in New Haven, Morita pens this poem:

Searching for words beyond words  
Beauty, beyond beauty  
In this land where nuances and shadings  
Of language and color are different (*New Haven* 81)

This mental grasping for contexts and contents that are familiar connects to Morita's travails as a translator; as an exercise, it is fascinating, but as a job, he understands the frustrations that attend it:

I've gotten used to the idea  
That this doesn't serve the world  
Still I continue to translate  
Little by little  
A few English poems (*Aoi Nagisa* 69)

When I finally encounter  
And decide upon  
A translation for a word  
A spider throws a line of thread  
From the rainy eaves (*Aoi Nagisa* 86)

## **Family**

Morita's children, charmingly enough, recognize him as a knower of words, a translator of what they have to say, and an accomplice:

Coming to me to inquire  
What the equivalent term for "one's old man"

Might apply for one's mother,  
My child says "Don't tell Mama" (*Aoi Nagisa* 136)

The children come from a family of readers, though here in an early poem,  
the children's grandmother is sleeping:

My mother drowns, face down  
As she sits in the kotatsu  
Even as she was having me read  
Small print to her (*Aoi Nagisa* 35)

In contrast to his poet mother, Morita's father, because he passed away when  
Morita was a child, is an absence and a mystery:

My wife thinks  
I'm simply  
An indulgent father—  
I, who have no memories of  
My own father (*New Haven* 100)

Morita's wife is his partner who he acknowledges in many direct and  
indirect ways as enabling him to be the scholar poet that he is. In the  
following poem, they negotiate the way home after attending a party in New  
Haven with their children; in the tanka after that, she symbolizes comfort  
and security:

A moonlit slope  
With a child each on our backs  
My wife and I leave the party mid-way (*New Haven* 52)

I wake beside my wife  
And think of Sōseki  
Who suffered from neuroses  
While he studied (*New Haven* 176)

One may argue that the modern Japanese writer Natsume Sōseki (1867–1916) suffered from neuroses throughout his life. Best known for his novels such as *Wagahai wa Neko de aru* [*I am a Cat*] and *Botchan*, Sōseki taught English literature at Tokyo Imperial University after he returned from studying in London from 1900 to 1902 where he was miserable and lonely and suffered from mental illness. Seventy-odd years after Sōseki's stay in London, Morita, also a professor of English, finds himself in New Haven. Though, as Susugu Yoshida notes in his afterword/commentary to *New Haven*, Morita does not write about difficulties and sufferings in this collection (270), how can he not contrast his congenial sabbatical year at Yale with his family, punctuated with literary and cultural sightseeing trips, to Sōseki's profound and solitary alienation? That his wife is there beside him diffuses Monta's anxiety and one can imagine the relief he felt.

### **Encounters with Americans**

Unlike Sōseki, who had a hard time leaving his rooms and engaging with Londoners, Morita, during his sojourn in New Haven, delighted in his encounters with Americans. His tanka record his observations of them in succinct verse. For example, instead of writing about experiences inside the classroom, Morita gives us a very humorous glimpse of one of his

professors, Norman Holmes Pearson, as he introduces Morita and his family to the convenience of American household gadgets:

You're like a magician  
We say to his delight as  
He then repeated shows us  
How to use the remote-controlled  
Garage door opener (*New Haven* 12)

In the following tanka, Morita's seems to state a fact, yet slyly expresses his wonder at not only the diversity of the American people, but also how pleased he is to be able to connect with someone who is different from himself in terms of race, religion, and discipline:

My first friend in this foreign land is  
A medical student whose grandfather  
Was a Jewish immigrant from Poland (*New Haven* 19)

But it is his many tanka about his encounters and friendships with African Americans that chart a growing awareness of the complexities of race. At first, his curiosity about those of a different race is mirrored:

The black boy  
Comes near me  
As if to find out what time it is  
And asks instead  
Where are you from? (*New Haven* 119)

Living in the United States, Morita can't help but hear discriminatory language in everyday discourse and comments on how those who say such things apologetically seem to understand they are being condescending but can't help themselves:

There are good ones and  
There are bad ones among them,  
You say rapidly  
As if to make excuses (*New Haven* 120)

Morita responds to the ridiculous illogic of racism with quiet humor, by pointing out what he observes in everyday life:

You say blacks are dirty but  
The number of whites who  
Don't wash their hands  
After they return home  
Is pretty conspicuous too (*New Haven* 254)

And he deliberately counters stereotypes of black women by stating:

I've met many  
Quiet, discreet, smiling  
Black women (*New Haven* 256)

Though his poems do not address directly the racial discrimination that he may have experienced, a couple of tanka illustrate the ease and solidarity he feels with his black neighbors by the end of his sabbatical:

At the post office  
When I tell a black acquaintance  
That I'm going back home  
He laughs and asks  
Have you earned enough? (*New Haven* 256)

Because you ask if I've earned enough  
I'm reminded of  
All those who come from other lands  
As dekasegi migrant workers (*New Haven* 257)

This simple query and the thoughts it triggered subtly expand Morita's transpacific experience into something that connects him to the larger context of global migration.

### **Teaching**

Once he returns to Japan, Morita also returns to teaching. He contrasts the long hours of marking students papers hunched over a desk with stretching his legs and enjoying the view from his office window:

After reading a stack of essays  
I stand at the window  
The blinking lights of the city  
Are luminous in the distance (*Aoi Nagisa* 80)

However, in a series of heartbreaking tanka (of which I have only translated a few) dedicated to a friend from graduate school, fellow scholar,

and colleague who was in a coma for six months after a devastating car accident, we are reminded of how deep Morita's professional and personal roots run here in Japan. Compared to the perceptive and often lighthearted observations as a visitor to the United States, these poems are visceral and grounded not only because of the subject matter but also because they reveal the depths of his relationships over time:

The hand that holds  
The telephone shakes and  
My voice sticks in my throat  
When I hear that you are  
In critical condition (*Aoi Nagisa* 202)

Waiting for a bus at the bus stop  
And then being run over by a car  
Driven by a dozing driver  
How bitterly vexed you must be (*Aoi Nagisa* 202)

As I rush to your side  
In the train I find myself  
Saying aloud "Don't die"  
And then all eyes are upon me (*Aoi Nagisa* 202)

Hoping to hear that  
There is even a glimmer of hope for you  
I wait in the corridor

By the brain surgeon's office (*Aoi Nagisa* 203)

All we can do

Is pray

For your life

Silently we face

Our late lunch (*Aoi Nagisa* 203)

These tanka expose Morita's desperation and compassion in situations that are not aberrations, but rather important parts of life. As Morita intimates, the evoking of everyday things and spaces—telephone calls, bus stops, cars, trains, hospital corridors, lunchrooms—reminds us of the dangers that lurk around the corner, but also of how composing poetry makes the intolerable tolerable.

Reading *New Haven* and *Aoi Nagisa* gave me some insights into how Morita Takeshi became the person he is today. I see his passion for literature and tremendous discipline in the poems and detect the whimsical playfulness he sometimes reveals to us at work in his poetry as well. The attentiveness to social issues and keen observation that he displays are also contained in the verses. The two collections taught me much about art and its relationship to economy in language, not only in Japanese but also in English, as I made my translations. And for this learning experience I am very grateful.

## Appendix

What follows are the tanka by Morita Takeshi I chose to translate here listed by section and in the original Japanese.

### Reading Morita Takeshi's *New Haven* and *Aoi Nagisa* [*The Blue Shore*]

ほのぼのと青き渚にたたずめる汝により吾の海は澄みゆく

### Reading and Libraries

雨霽<sup>は</sup>れて図書館に読書進みし日大きく傘を振りふり帰りぬ  
図書館に進まぬ読書些細なることの不慣れの重き意味かな  
燻し銀の光を書庫に放つ師の第二歌集に出合いぬ海を越え来て  
解けてまた凍<sup>ぬかるみ</sup>る泥濘図書館まで鈍色<sup>にび</sup>重き起伏踏みゆく  
午前零時になりて閉りし図書館を出ずれば匂う壁の常春藤<sup>きずた</sup>の

### Writing and Authors

ありありと虚空に息づく面差しのフォークナーに疲れて眼閉ずれば  
不意に鳴く夜更けの蟬に吾が部屋にフォークナーの南部より呼び戻されつ  
ああ蟬は日本と同じように啼く訪い来し深南部フォークナー邸の庭  
目ざす墓指し示めくれつ黒人の老いし墓守り切り株に立ちて  
夜ごと同じ刻をひととき啼く水鶏聞き了えてまた戻るフォークナーに  
手のかかる子らに疲れて眠りたれば妻は今宵も水鶏を聞かず  
海は吾が心の指標ホーソーンの未刊の書翰読み通う日日

書き終えしホーソン論一つ抱え出づ海面に霧の立ち迷う朝  
詩の行間を踏み迷う夜夜ポオの塗り籠めし大鴉解き放つべく  
おもむろに位置を変えゆく星座あり吾がレポートは抄らぬまま  
締め切りの過ぎて久しきポオ論の幾日も書けず続く不眠の

## Writing and Translating

求めゆく言外の言美外の美語感色感異なれる地に  
世の役に立たぬ思いにもいつか慣れ細ほそ訳しつぐ英詩幾編  
決めかねる訳語一語に出でくれば雨の軒端に糸を吐く蜘蛛

## Family

母を呼ぶに「おやじ」と対の語を訊きにくる子は「ママに内緒」と言いつつ  
うつぶしていつか炬燵に眠る母小さき活字を吾に読ませつつ  
ただ甘き父とのみ妻は思うらし父の記憶を持たぬ父吾<sup>われ</sup>  
月光の坂道妻と一人ずつ子を背に戻りぬパーティー半ば  
妻の傍えに覚めては思うノイローゼに苦しみ学びし漱石のこと

## Encounters with Americans

魔術師の如しといえは喜びてドアの遠隔操作を繰り返し見す  
初めての異国の友はユダヤ系ポーランド移民を祖父に持つ医学徒  
時刻を訊くごとく寄りて来て黒人の少年は問う何国人かと  
彼らには良いのと悪いのとあると言う君の言い訳の如き早口  
黒人はきたないと言うが帰宅しても手を洗わぬ白人はずい分目立つよ

寡黙にて常に慎しく微笑める黒人女性にあまた会いたり  
帰国すると告ぐれば稼ぎ得しかと笑む郵便局にて見知りし黒人  
稼ぎしかと君に問われて改めて出稼ぎ異邦人に思い及べり

## Teaching

レポートの束読み了えて立つ窓やまたたく街の灯遠く潤みて  
受話器の掌<sup>て</sup>ふるえ張りつく喉の声君が重態と告げられて来て  
バス停にバスを待ち居て居眠りの車に撥ねられし君ぞくやしき  
幾らかでも希望につながる徴候を聞かなと粘りぬ脳外科の廊に  
ただ吾ら君の生命<sup>いのち</sup>を祈るのみ黙しつつ向かう遅き昼餉に

## Notes

1. In this essay, for those who publish in Japanese, I follow the Japanese practice of writing surnames first; for those who publish in English, given names come first.
2. Kondō Yoshimi (1913–2006) was born in Korea where his father was posted as a bank employee and then returned to Japan when he was twelve in order to continue his schooling. Makoto Ueda notes, “Because several teachers at the school were tanka poets, he began writing tanka under their guidance” (181). Trained as an architect at the Tokyo College of Engineering, Kondō worked for the Shimizu Construction Company while continuing to write his poetry. It was not until after World War II ended that he started to publish his poetry to great acclaim. A member of the Araragi school of poetry, Kondō and others founded their own poetry group and magazine, both called *Mirai*, in 1951. He was on the poetry selection committee of Asahi Shimbun’s tanka submissions column for half a century and was recognized as a Person of Cultural Merits by the government in

1996. Twenty of his poems are translated and included in Ueda's anthology, *Modern Japanese Tanka*.

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