
2016

My Bones, Journey, and Winds of Betrayal: On Artaud's Van Gogh
by Yoko Mihashi

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Recommended Citation

(2016) "*My Bones, Journey, and Winds of Betrayal: On Artaud's Van Gogh* by Yoko Mihashi," *Transference*: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 22.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/transference/vol3/iss1/22>

Steve Light
My Bones

Yoko Mihashi
私の骨

Crush my bones into sand
And scatter them upon the canal
A gondola passes, the voice
Of a tenor echoes in the dirty alleys
As if offering an excuse,
Yet with each successive passing
The beauty of Venice sways gently

Because Venice is sinking over time
I want to flow with the scattered dust,
Leisurely, past the Rialto Bridge
Upon which prostitutes tread in their heels,
Back to the original Venice
When it was nothing but a delta

Crush my bones into sand
And because only the pillars remain
Of a temple ransacked by the Greeks
Standing on a hill above a Turkish amphitheater
Scatter them there so that the winds
May carry them away while
The cheerful noise of selfish gods
Will not cease even for a moment

Steve Light
Journey

Yoko Mihashi
旅

I am going to Turkey
But no sooner do I have my ticket in hand
The journey ceases

Without recourse
There is no dream
Which doesn't end

But there is nothing we dream
That we do not already
Know in its entirety

Why do I travel?
To return,
I who did not wish to be born,
Desiring only to go
Far beyond my mother's womb

Steve Light

Winds of Betrayal:

On Artaud's Van Gogh

Yoko Mihashi

風の背信-

アルトーのゴッホ論によせて

Over there and here
An awakened, a mad perception,
A ripened time
That cannot be entered.
Observe Van Gogh
Live Van Gogh
In rushing winds of betrayal,
In time which crashes down with noise,
There is nothing.
Madness, ceaselessly turning towards zero,
Seeks equal value, balance.

Memory, lacking foundation,
Breaks apart,
Over there and here
Beyond the time
Which begins to float.
He who holds on to this perception
That should not be named
Is neither singular nor plural.
Traverse the body,
Live the body,
Freedom of eyes
Which seek equality,
Become penetrable skin
Leaving only a light weariness.

Every day is a bright yet cloudy day.
Guessing at light, measuring shadows
Needing no map
I am here.

Do not sing until you are spoken,
Walk freely in front of objects,

Do not become weary,
After weariness
Expression is spoiled.

Artaud walks
Seeking self-acknowledgment
Artaud expresses
Without being swayed by his epoch.

Yoko Mihashi, one of contemporary Japan's stellar poets, brought out a two-volume collection of poetry in 2001, *Madobe-no Garibā* (*Gulliver at the Window*) (vol. 1: *Kasa Tatamaseru* [*To Have the Umbrella Closed*]; vol. 2: *Kaze-no Haishin* [*Winds of Betrayal*]) which in its affective and ideational registers gives rise to that kind of resonance within us whereby we immediately recognize that poetry's most sought-after promise has not only been offered but has been kept in sounded depths and expansive charms.

Yoko Mihashi is a poet who has that marvelous ability to combine and unify force and tenderness in her poems, and it is one of the most difficult of combinations, but one that seizes readers perhaps more than any other and brings readers the most splendid kind of poetic adventure and happiness. In this she bears kinship to one of the greatest poets of the pre-war period, Marina Tsvetaeva, although in other respects there are significant differences between these two poets.

Mihashi began her poetic life primarily writing in traditional Japanese forms, particularly the *waka*. Hers was and remains always a verse of concision and compression, the flavor and rhythm of which endure in a special poetic vibrato where affection and ideation find that sustained breath always propelled by true poetic gratitude. Here our poetic experience opens up in the wider horizons of our fraught and friable, but also fancied and tremulous existence. In her verse ideation always shimmers with—and within—the sentiment of the idea. A poet of sentience, of immersion, and of existential and quotidian surprise, she is also and certainly a philosophical poet in the best sense of encompassment and intensity.

As for the three poems translated here, they come from the second volume of *Gulliver at the Window*, the volume of free verse, and were chosen by Yoko Mihashi herself because she has special affection for them.

In translating these three poems the Artaud poem gave rise to the greatest number of challenges. Already in the first stanza of “Winds of Betrayal: On Artaud’s Van Gogh,” the characterization of time as full, matured, advanced, ripe, pregnant could all be carried within the signifying thrust of the Japanese character but in English either one had to have recourse to a free combination or judge that a singular choice would work. “Ripe time”? It seemed too static and so the choice for “ripened” was made which in my interpretation comes closest to the connotation intended by Ms. Mihashi. But there was also the problem of the further characterization of time. Ms. Mihashi's phrase here, *fumicomennai kanjuku-no jikan*, can be literally rendered as “time into which one cannot step.” Time as forbidding, a restricted time in the spatial sense, time that cannot be entered, is also available within the resonance of the original Japanese. In English it seemed best to use the latter possibility, i.e. “time that cannot be entered.”

There was also a difficulty of determining a proper English sentence structure in the immediately subsequent characterization of time: *ototatete hokaisuru jikan-no nakani-wa nanimonai*: “In time which crashes down with noise / There is nothing.” Was the referent for *nanimonai* (“there is nothing”) time alone? It seemed to me that it was. Rhythmically it seemed best, therefore, to put the rhythmic emphasis on *nanimonai*, “there is nothing,” and so I used an inverted sentence structure.

In the second stanza the references to time also gave rise to difficulty. I initially had trouble with the spatial references *vis-a-vis* the initial subject of the stanza, “memory.” *Fuyushihajimeru jikan-no*: “[Beyond] the time / Which begins to float.” The poem speaks of memory breaking apart and existing at once here and there. But after initial uncertainty it seemed clear that the referent for existing “beyond the time” had to be memory and not the holder of this perception which immediately follows upon this line: “He who holds on to this perception...”

The volatilities in Artaud’s life—and in Van Gogh’s—are rendered in the volatilities of Ms. Mihashi’s poem—and poems—and in the concatenations of striking and unexpected images. Consequently, beyond the immediate linguistic difficulties of connotation, denotation, word choice, and sentence structure, there was the crucial problem of transitions of either an asyndetic or syndetic manner. When should one employ standard conjunction and when should one employ parataxis so as to most successfully render or capture in English the syndetic or asyndetic rhythms of a language, Japanese, that is more paratactic than is English?