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Book Review of, Beneath the Sleepless Tossing of the Planets: Selected Poems of Makoto Ōoka

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also provides an avenue by which to critique the discursive underpinnings of postcolonial *ressentiment*; a line of inquiry which, while increasingly apparent in broader theoretical discussions of post-coloniality, has only just begun to make headway in the study of *zainichi* fiction. This is a potentially rich field of discussion and one that I hope Yi will continue to pursue in her future projects.

Beneath the Sleepless Tossing of the Planets: Selected Poems of Makoto Ōoka

By Makoto Ōoka. Translated by **Janine Beichman**, Kumamoto, Japan: Kurodahan Press, 2018, 173 pp. \$16.00.

**Reviewed by
Jon Holt**

Originally published by Katydid Press in 1995, *Beneath the Sleepless Tossing of the Planets: Selected Poems* is back in print. Its translator Janine Beichman and Kurodahan Press have re-released this slim but nicely sized anthology and thereby reaffirmed Ōoka's standing in Japanese literature. Ōoka's passing in 2017 was painfully felt by many, but Kurodahan has made sure that he will not be forgotten. With its bilingual format, allowing readers to enjoy Beichman's translation, *Beneath* will appeal to a wider range of readers than its previous incarnation did.

The book consists of sixty poems originally chosen by the translator across nine of the poet's collections from the 1970s and 1980s, although the majority of the poems are from Ōoka's work from the latter decade. Kurodahan kindly printed all of Ōoka's original Japanese works in the back of the book, which truly enhances its value as readers can enjoy both the poet's and Beichman's voices here, comparing as one is wont to do. It is easy to go from the Japanese originals to English translations with a running header indicating page locations. Modestly priced, this selection of Ōoka's poems will appeal to both English- and Japanese-language readers—a great place to discover his works. Essentially one is getting two books for one price. Photographs of Ōoka and reproductions

of his calligraphy—although present in the original 1995 edition—are further supplemented by a few images of Ōoka's manuscript pages in this updated version. All of these things help make Ōoka as poet, writer, and artist immediately accessible to the reader. Obviously, this is a work of love to a great figure in Japanese literature.

Changes made by the translator to her English original renderings of the poems are nearly impossible to find. Beichman did slim down and smooth out a new English translation of Tanikawa Shuntarō's preface, which fares much better this time around. The younger poet's critical appraisal of Ōoka here is less mired in those actual events and moments of Tanikawa's life, and Beichman allows the English reader to appreciate the larger gems of Tanikawa's insight: Ōoka is a non-dualistic poet; he is at once both very Japanese and also quite global; he is a poet of paneroticism, which apparently is a good thing, meaning here that he celebrates humanity.

In addition, Beichman reworked her concluding Translator's Note into a translator's introduction, which is more helpful than either version of the Tanikawa preface in contextualizing the impact Ōoka made on Japanese poetry. Beichman relates her own experiences visiting the Ōoka Word Museum and she recalls for readers how the installations of his poetry worked in an interactive space. All these experiences give the reader perhaps the best preparation for how to go about reading Ōoka. It is about voice. Further anecdotes and details from her interactions with the poet as well as her own fresh ruminations on her translations provide the English reader with better angles to enter these poems, so as to avoid random and inaccurate takes on the poem. For example, Beichman's clarifies how the USS Thresher's 1963 disappearance fits into Japanese cultural history, so a reader today—either Japanese or non-Japanese—might appreciate the impression its disappearance beneath the waves of the Atlantic made on Ōoka and his Japanese contemporaries. And as I read Beichman's translations of the poems, I realized that the more context provided, the more I could fully appreciate the artistic choices the poet made (as well as the linguistic ones of his translator).

One of the challenges in translating Japanese poetry is providing context to often very short works. Japanese is a high-context language so any utterance—no matter how simple or how short—often can convey much information however minimally. For example, when we encounter the word *you* in Ōoka's English-translated poems, we must pause. The *you* might be exalted, treated with honorific language—in other words,

more like a *thou* (albeit this is hyperbole in English). Conversely, Japanese has words like *kimi* and *omae* for second-person pronouns that can show closeness or even a bit of disrespect. At any rate, they give the native speaker a compass. The reference at least shows the position of the speaker in relation to his interlocutor, however imaginary. For this reason, apostrophe poems by Ōoka that Beichman translates are problematic for me. “Speak Please I Beg You” (“*Itte kudasai dō ka*”) takes the reader through a cornucopia of polite, humble, and honorific language, in speaking either about a Creator or speaking to that Creator; the poem then travels to a more colloquial place, including a short conversation—therefore more first- and second-person conversational utterances: who are these different *yous*? One cannot guess from the English but with the Japanese one has a better sense of them (or at least who they think they are in relation to their interlocutors). Finally, the poem returns to the original supplicant’s voice before, I assume, the Creator gets the last word, using the second person, this time against the poet/dreamer/main speaker. Beichman could do better by the shifts in tone if she did not simply rely on *you* to cover them all. How does one do it then? *Thou* instead of *You*? A capitalized *You* instead of *you*? I admit I have no solution for this poem, but I can say this is a poem that is so Japanese that translation of it can only approximate about half of its content. As Beichman notes in her Introduction, “Speak Please I Beg You” probably should be understood as a dirge for the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but she feels that Ōoka too would have been reluctant to designate it as grief only for the victims of the atomic bombings. Beichman captures Ōoka’s grief for them in her poignant translation near its ending: “In this town even the human silhouettes burned into / stone steps take their constitutionals / The whole town’s burned into / one of those black holes the universe has.” Nonetheless, the poem is as much as about speech styles—of human beings—no, Japanese people speaking Japanese—as it is about the content. For this reader, it was difficult to enjoy translations of poems like these without a more accurate transfer of linguistic markers.

As free-verse poet, Ōoka writes poems about poems to a surprising degree. Poets that I myself have translated, including Masaoka Shiki, Ishikawa Takuboku, Hayashi Amari, and Tawara Machi, certainly do this, but Ōoka (at least here) often takes art as his subject in his art instead of focusing more on lived life (*seikatsu*), which one increasingly finds in contemporary Japanese poetry. By my reckoning, nearly half of

Beichman's choice of sixty poems (chosen from a larger number originally suggested by the poet) reflect Ōoka's interest in the poetic form: how does one write poetry, how is poetry read, what is poetry? In fact, many of these poems are from Ōoka's collection, *What Is Poetry?* (*Shi to wa nani ka*, 1985) and because these are small, bite-sized works, one is left wondering with Ōoka about the question he posed. Instead of giving a textbook answer, Poem #10 provides a good taste:

The kitten
sits on a
plate

How deep is
the fur of those who live
naked

Beichman re-renders her four-line translation of the original two-line poem here in six lines. By doing so, the English reader might be inclined to seek a pattern, here a juxtaposition between the final two standalone words of the two sections: "plate" versus "naked." Other contradictory juxtapositions exist of course: a soft kitten that sits on a hard plate; the deep fur of a naked creature. Not only is there a gap between the two stanzas, but Ōoka creates gaps within each stanza. What is poetry? Logic jumps. Association leaps. Despite the poet's distance of more than a decade from his original surrealistic origins in the 1970s, he still takes his reader across vertiginously impossible chasms, showing poetic possibilities through the alienation of everyday things like a kitten, a plate, a feeling of fur, or our own skins.

By focusing my reading on images in the translated version, not the rhythm of the Ōoka's Japanese, I disobeyed Tanikawa's prefatory advice: acknowledging Ōoka's surrealistic influences, I sought to understand how his vastly contrastive images could convey remarkable sensations and discoveries. I disagree with Tanikawa: judging from the poems sampled in this collection, Ōoka's roots are easily unearthed and their intellectual strands, long and deep, are made plain to see in the English translation. Although I did not sense this from Beichman's translations, when I went back to Ōoka's original Japanese verses, they reminded me of the *shi* of Hagiwara Sakutarō, that early twentieth-century pioneer who mixed colloquial and modified classical Japanese language. Although Ōoka could certainly skillfully capture vibrantly

colloquial Japanese, his *bungo* lines with their archaic orthography often seemed very stiff to me—high poetry coming across in arch language that can alienate rather than draw people together. Beichman’s translations on the other hand, regardless of how much the original expressed a more archaic-like Japanese, truly seemed more colloquial and modern in her English, which is probably for the best. She bypasses Ōoka’s interplay between classical and modern language to grab the heart of these poems: the sensual images, which her English readers will immediately grasp. Certainly, Ōoka’s poetry is much more positive than his forebear Hagiwara’s; moreover, Beichman is right to assert that these are poems of “love” in every sense of the word, but Ōoka’s love makes you think. When she translated the poems, and, by *mutatis mutandis*, communicated the poems’ rich, dreamy images in a more sensual or intimate tone, Beichman succeeded in conveying Ōoka’s essence to her English-language audience.

Another aspect of Ōoka’s poetry that really comes across in this collection is his eye for color. So many poems show the love of vivid hues that would even put a painter to shame. It is no wonder that “Dreaming Sam Francis”—an early poem about the American painter and friend to the poet—can capture color in even a couple of lines:

California darkness gives off an orange glow
Sam’s darkness gives off the light of human honey

Beichman wisely omits the additional nominal *tsuya* (luster), a third, further parallel component of Ōoka’s two lines, to have the English reader zero in on the actual warm colors as they emerge from their blacks. Other poems explore the different sensitivities a Japanese person can have in seeing color, most notably the prose poem “Green Women” (“Midori no onna”), in which he playfully describes the origins of the color in Japan in an exceptionally concise way. Albeit the comparison is unfair, this poem alone—certainly helpful for those who teach premodern Japanese culture—does in about one page what Michel Pastoureau takes a whole book to do for the history of the color in the West in his *Green: a History of Color*. Seeing is an important element in Ōoka’s poetry as poems like “To Art Museums” and “Valley Stream Reflect the Mountain Light” immediately attest.

Sound, hearing, and how we hear also greatly interest the poet. A great poem can often make something we do in everyday life fresh and new to us. Ōoka can do this with his short poetry. I might be generalizing

from these selected poems, but whereas the poet in the 1970s explored dreams in long exploratory verse, in the next decade we see him economizing and honing his art with sensory impressions often in more compact forms. So very concise pieces like “Life Story” powerfully convey silence; “Children’s Song” manages to recall the memory of something aurally scary; the delightful “Crab Talk” captures the conversational tone of humans sadly—and respectfully—discussing the good old days, as it were, of ecological predation. All in all, Beichman’s translations of Ōoka’s poetry skillfully demonstrate how multi-faceted the poet was in his ability to weave together in his verses so many threads of humanity—our dreams, our subconscious, the visual beauty of our world, effervescent aural, or our verbal play.

Kakawaru kotoba: Sankashi taiwa-suru kyōiku · kenkyū e no izanai (Engaging Language: An Invitation to Dialogic Education and Research)

Edited by **Shinji Satō** and **Yutaka Saeki**. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2017. viii, 217 pp. ¥2,500.

Reviewed by
Yoshiki Chikuma

Kakawaru Kotoba (KK) explores the ways people interact with one another through language from a wide range of perspectives. It consists of a preface and an introduction, written by one of the editors, and seven chapters. The contributors’ backgrounds range from early child education to educational anthropology to Japanese language pedagogy. Though there is a brief description of each contributor’s academic background at the end of the book, what stands out is the way Sato chronicles how he became acquainted with each contributor in the introduction, since such personal tidbits are rarely included in academic publications. The reader will encounter similar up-close-and-personal approaches throughout *KK*, which coincide with its central theme that language educators and researchers should view language as a vehicle through which the learner’s identity is negotiated in interaction. This contrasts with the type of language often observed in the traditional