

Hiroaki Sato

SHŪŌSHI'S
 “‘NATURE’S TRUTH’ AND ‘TRUTH IN LITERARY ARTS’”

The article translated below, “‘Nature’s Truth’ and ‘Truth in Literary Arts’” (「自然の真」と「文芸上の真」), is significant in modern Japanese haiku history as Mizuhara Shūōshi’s (水原秋桜子) declaration of independence from Takahama Kyoshi (高浜虚子, 1874–1959) and his magazine, *Hototogisu* (ホトトギス). Born in 1892 the first son of an obstetrician-cum-gynecologist who ran a private clinic, Shūōshi studied serologic chemistry, then obstetrics and gynecology, at the Medical School of the Imperial University of Tokyo and went on to take over his father’s clinic. He died in 1981.

Shūōshi was initially and for some time inclined more toward tanka and other varieties of literature, but he had an epiphany in 1916, it is said, when he read *Hototogisu* while visiting Seoul. He was a third-year medical student at the time. Still, it was not until 1921 that his haiku were accepted by *Hototogisu* and he met “the pope,” so nicknamed because he was not above “excommunicating” his “disciples.” The following year he joined a group, led by Nakata Mizuho (中田みづほ, 1893–1975), to resuscitate the Tōdai Haiku Society (東大俳句会), *Tōdai* being an acronym of the Imperial University of Tokyo. The other members of the group were Tomiyasu Fūsei (富安風生, 1885–1979), Yamaguchi Seishi (山口誓子, 1901–1994), and Yamaguchi Seison (山口青邨, 1892–1988). Kyoshi was to be their “guide.”

In the mid-1920s Shūōshi, along with Seishi, Awano Seiho (阿波野青畝, 1889–1992), and Takano Sujū (高野素十, 1893–1976), called the 4 S’s

in reference to the initials of their given names,¹ created the golden era of *Hototogisu*. Gradually, though, Shūōshi became disenchanted with *kyakkan shasei* (客観写生), the approach Masaoka Shiki (正岡子規, 1867–1902) advocated, and Kyoshi at the time was turning into a dogma, of objectively reproducing observations of natural things.² He began bringing into his haiku the subjective elements he learned from tanka, as well as things overtly romantic, suggestive, and, under the influences of French painters, “impressionistic.”

Kyoshi took note. In 1928 he printed in his magazine a transcript of his talk “Shūōshi and Sujū” (秋桜子と素十) in which he contrasted the two, judging that Sujū’s haiku represented “*shasei* in the strict sense of the word.” Sujū, like Shūōshi a graduate of the Medical School of the Imperial University of Tokyo, where he studied forensic medicine, would go on to become an authority in the field.

Three years later *Hototogisu* printed another article contrasting Shūōshi and Sujū, which again praised Sujū at the expense of Shūōshi. A transcript of a dialogue between Nakata Mizuho and Hamaguchi Kon’ya (浜口今夜, 1893–1943), it had seen print in a haiku magazine in Niigata called *Mahagi* (まはぎ).³ Mizuho, who was judge of the *zatsuei* (雑詠), “non-specified topics,” section of the local magazine, observed in it that Sujū’s were “haiku that express the absolute of truth” and that they made him “feel the revelation that the most haikuesque of haiku proceed like this.” Mizuho was another graduate of the Medical School of the Imperial University of Tokyo, and he went on to become a “world-renowned” brain surgeon, or so says a biographical note on him.⁴

Shūōshi no doubt took Kyoshi’s act of reprinting the article, which reiterated a point he had already made, to be adding insult to injury. The result was the article we are going to see here, with its impatient, condescending tone, let alone its pseudo-academic chapter setup which is silly even for what he called a “short thesis.” He published it in his own haiku magazine, *Ashibi* (馬酔木).⁵ In translating it, I have tried to remain as faithful to the original as I can. Where Shūōshi refers to Mizuho sometimes in the third person, sometimes in the second person, as was at times done in those days, I have retained that feature as well.

Shūōshi's article is followed by a brief response from Sujū, a man who was praised, then damned. All Japanese names here are given the Japanese way, family name first.

Mizuhara Shūōshi

“NATURE’S TRUTH” AND “TRUTH IN LITERARY ARTS”

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In literary arts, “truth” is a word that has been advocated repeatedly, many times over, and in literary arts it always has a grave significance. Nevertheless, the meaning contained in the word “truth” has had to change over time. For example, in Naturalism, which was influential from the end of the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, the word “truth” was used in the sense of “Nature’s truth.” “Just as natural sciences are the fields of study that pursue ‘Nature’s truth,’” people of this school advocated “art has the aim of illuminating Nature’s truth.”

In the present literary world no one recognizes Naturalism as worthy. The word “truth” is used mainly with the meaning of “literary truth.” When someone says, “That literary piece has no truth in it,” he means it has no “literary truth,” never that it has no “Nature’s truth.” And “literary truth” denotes “Nature’s truth” with the most important *extract*⁶ added to it, as I shall explain in detail later.

In haiku also, the word “truth” has always been advocated. In the future, too, there will be no harm in repeating it many times as a warning to those who may forget it. Nonetheless, I do think that this “truth” must be “literary truth.” To go backward in history and advocate “Nature’s truth” now is to expose clearly a lack of culture, and it is an embarrassment for the haiku world, I think.

This spring, Mr. Nakata Mizuho published a critical essay entitled “Shūōshi and Sujū” in the *Mahagi* magazine. It was also reprinted in *Hototogisu*. Because it is an argument by one who is my senior and whom I

always follow as my elder brother⁷ and because it also has to do with me, I, needless to say, read it at once. To my surprise, though, in this critical essay he often discusses what is called “truth.” That isn’t the only thing. He is proud as though advocating “truth” in haiku were his original idea.

Judging from the intense spirit that was revealed in your prose, I imagined that the “truth” you advocate might contain some new research result and so carefully savored your argument. To my disappointment, however, your theory had no original idea whatsoever, and the “truth” you regarded as most important turned out to be not “literary truth.” Or else you may mistake it for “literary truth.” But it is no different from the conventional arguments of Naturalism. This you will understand at once, I’d think, if you read some books on aesthetics at hand.

If this essay were a transcript of a talk that was done when you were badly unprepared, I might accept that that kind of error is possible. But I would think it more to the point to regard this essay as a product of someone saying things with a considerable amount of thought. For this reason, I can’t help sorrowing for my friend, Mizuho.

Things like this can happen to Mizuho, yes, but I realized that not a few people fail to understand the meaning of “truth,” and I decided to take up my pen to write this small thesis. Its main point is to explain what relations “Nature’s truth” and “literary truth” have with each other. As long as I’ve been called upon,⁸ however, I thought it would be discourteous of me to remain silent about his essay. So, I decided to take this opportunity to sweep away your misunderstandings, as well as that of those who share your view.

CHAPTER II: “NATURE’S TRUTH” AND “LITERARY TRUTH”

Section 1: Nature’s Truth

When Mizuho says, “This is true and so is good,” in writing about a haiku that deals with Nature, we may safely assume that his criterion is based on the dictum, “Truth is beauty.” The same thinking in literary arts was once fashionable, as I said in the introduction. Schools of thought such as Realism and Naturalism advocated that “copying Nature as is, is the aim of literary arts.” That is, they tried to imitate Nature as it is.

In the first place, what is called Nature's truth—for example, the bud of which grass is like what⁹—belongs to science and isn't something that enters the domain of art. Art is something noble that doesn't depend on any conceptual judgment whatsoever. Also, what is called Nature's beauty, as far as aesthetic principles are concerned, cannot exist independently; it can be recognized as such only when it can be seen simultaneously as art. In other words, Nature's beauty can also be said to be a reflection of art. Accordingly, the notion that Nature's truth is beauty and that it is the mission of art to imitate it as it is is patently wrong.

Not a few of the haiku that treat the so-called "one-tree, one-grass" as their topics take this kind of Nature's truth as their content. This is because the writers of such pieces did not comprehend the matter of fundamental importance, "What is art?" before taking up a notebook and a pencil. It is because they did not bother to read a single book. Isn't it said that it appears as though a minority of our comrades were supporting the isolated fort of Naturalism when the path of the literary arts is advancing pervasively? What is called "Nature's truth," strictly speaking, belongs to science. In addition, pursuing Nature's truth as a literary topic never requires genius. What it requires is a modicum of patience. Accordingly, people with no genius have little difficulty describing a single tree or a single blade of grass as it is.

I submit that what is called "Nature's truth" is, in the literary arts, a piece of mineral ore that's dug out and left as is. If you say such an ore is of absolute value, you may say it is valuable to imitate Nature. Art is no such thing. Art must be something equipped with stern superiority.

Section 2: Literary Truth

"Literary truth" is, needless to say, something absolutely necessary in literature. It is never Nature itself. It is something that is prepared and forged further with skill by the brain of an artist who can set his mind right. And the words "prepared by the brain" fully recognize, of course, the workings of imagination and creativity. Accordingly, in "literary truth" the writer's individuality must shine and glitter.

Scholars say: That art is an expression of individuality means none other than that an artist is required to show us a certain something that is unique

to himself and something only he has; that is why we make the exception of allowing the artist the name of creator.

These are words we can understand without a modicum of doubt. For us to do the best work, we must first nurture our creativity and enrich our imagination, and we need to hone the skill that is required in transferring our subjectivity to writing.

Those mistaking “Nature’s truth” for “literary truth” have advocated omitting things from their material. And they have tended to forget to add something to it. A true creator’s attitude is totally different. In dealing with his material he, too, may omit things, but even when he does that, he never forgets to add creativity and express individuality. He not only does not forget. He regards that as most important and works till he may emaciate himself in both body and mind.

Suppose there is a flower. The writers who mistake “Nature’s truth” for “literary truth” describe things like how many petals it has and what its pistils are like. With that, they think their work is done. They have nothing to add to it. In contrast, for the true creators the question is: “What did the flower look like to me?” Of course, they, too, keep their power of observation sharp. But they add the aforementioned question to it. Only then is a beautiful flower unique to themselves created in their head. Accordingly, looking at the same flower, different writers produce works that are very different in flavor depending on the differences in their individualities. This situation is not limited to literature; it is exactly the same in painting. In fact, all this may be more understandable if painting is used as an example.

With what I have said so far, I think I’ve been able to explain why creativity is important to art. But I’d like to expend some unnecessary words on individuality, which has a close relationship to creativity.

Individuality is more valuable the more unique it is to the writer.¹⁰ Nonetheless, it at the same time needs to have universality to some extent. Otherwise, it will end up being not understood by anyone. When the two are well balanced, a masterpiece may be born that contemporaries respect and that can survive into the future.

To sum up, “literary truth” points to “Nature’s truth” which, being a mineral ore, is melted in the blast furnace that is the artist’s brain, which is then forged, processed, and finished.

Section 3: The Relationship between the Two Truths in Haiku

The relationship between “Nature’s truth” and “literary truth” that I have explained in the preceding section can be transferred to haiku, I think, without any difficulty. The only thing is that because haiku, compared with other literary arts, has more opportunities to come in contact with Nature, some people may think that “Nature’s truth” has a greater value to it than to other literary arts. They are wrong, however; an ore has only an ore’s value, no matter what you do with it. It can’t suddenly start emitting a glittering light because it’s placed in a certain spot.

My haiku training began when I started to collect such ores. This was not *shasei*. It was simply training to see things. It was a process of learning “Nature’s truth.” I might call it work in which the higher workings of the brain did not take part. While training my eyes thus on the one hand, on the other hand I tried to nurture my creativity and imagination by reading as many books as I could, hunting as many scholarly articles as I could, and looking at as many paintings and sculptures as I could. Then gradually I began to forge the ores in my head, the blast furnace, to express them in seventeen-letter poems.¹¹ I believe that only this process of capturing “literary truth” can be called *shasei*.

No matter how hard we try to copy Nature as is, the Nature we can depict in seventeen letters can’t be said to be more detailed than the real Nature. Nevertheless, when we recite a superior haiku, we have the feeling that it is truer than Nature itself because something exists in the haiku that captures our heart. That something is none other than “literary truth.”

I repeat: “Nature’s truth” is an ore for good haiku. In contrast, for the writer to remain in a passive position—to describe what he saw as he saw it—is, strictly speaking, an attitude that can be named Natural Imitationism. A true artist takes a more positive attitude. He tries to add forging to the ore, to add creativity to it, and to produce something delicate and profound.

Some among the Natural Imitationists laugh at this attitude as a “vainly noble ideal.” This can be attributed to their inability to understand “literary truth” because they lack learning. Even they should be able to find out their view is wrong by reading a couple of books, once they decide to pursue the truth and study.

CHAPTER II: EXAMINATION OF MIZUHO'S THEORY

Section 1: Mizuho's So-called Truth

As I said in my introduction, in his critical essay titled “Shūōshi and Sujū,” Mr. Nakata Mizuho points out the extremely different tendencies between my haiku and Sujū's and argues that what characterizes Sujū's haiku is the truth they possess. To excerpt his main point:

As I contemplate it, [what characterizes Sujū's haiku] is, I think, the terrifying power of truth. It is the heart of the heart of something. It is the kernel with nothing extraneous clinging to it. It is a reward for his calm passion that does not retreat a single step until he extracts this kernel out of Nature. *It contains nothing of the process of creating something in the head.* It is an effort to filter only the penetrating energy coming from outside that is pure and perceive in a preceptor as sharp as God the filtering equipment and the stimulus of power;¹² *no process of processing it in the head is added* (italics in the original).

In other words, the truth Mizuho advocates is “Nature's truth,” not “literary truth.” I can't help saying that it is an argument that is too backward for today's world. (In his critical essays published later, Mizuho supplements his theory to some extent with words such as “*falsehood-like falsehood*” and “*falsehood-like truth*.” They are, however, crude arguments.)

Furthermore, what's most unacceptable about Mizuho's theory is that he describes this theory of truth as though it were his original view. I would never say that “literary truth” is my original view. It is a theory I learned, understood, and experienced through “études.” That you dared touch a grave argument even while lacking the two things, humility and study, simply amazes me.

Thus, you say Sujū's haiku are good because they grasp “Nature's truth.” Also, you call making haiku with such an intent a centripetal¹³ movement and talk as though Sujū alone is engaged in that movement. According to my thinking, the first stage of your theory is of course wrong, and the second stage is equally wrong. To prove this, I will proceed to my argument in the next section by citing Sujū's haiku that you have cited as examples.

Section 1: The Path Suju Has Taken

Mizuho categorizes Sujū's works since his middle period (the pre-middle period is not in question) into three kinds to state his views. According to him, among Sujū's haiku there are pieces like

方丈の大庇より春の蝶¹⁴

Hōjō no ōbishashi yori haru no chō

Out of the massive eaves of the main hall a spring butterfly

菊の香の夜の扉に合掌す

Kiku no ka no yoru no tobira ni gasshō su

In chrysanthemum scent before night's doors I join my hands

山中湖凧の上れる小春かな

Sanchū-ko tako no agareru koharu¹⁵ kana

Mountain-lake a kite has risen in "small spring"

But as his haiku state of mind¹⁶ advanced, he made pieces like:

初蝶にかたまりあるく人数かな

Hatsuchō ni katamari aruku ninzu kana

At first butterflies people walk about forming groups

まつすぐの道に出でけり秋の暮

Massugu no michi ni idekeri aki no kure

I've come out on a straight path this autumn evening

水すまし流るゝ黄楊の花を追ふ

Mizusumashi nagaruru tsuge no hana o ou

A water-strider chases a flowing boxwood flower

These were “intermediary,” Mizuho says, before Sujū finally achieved haiku that press upon the reader with the power of truth, such as:

揚羽蝶おいらん草にぶら下がる

Agehachō oiran-sō ni burasagaru

A swallowtail hangs down from a phlox

甘草の芽のとびとびの一ならび

*Kanzō no me no tobi tobi hito narabi*¹⁷

Licorice buds make up a line spaces in between

朝顔の双葉のどこか濡れ居たる

Asagao no futaba no dokoka nureitaru

Paired morning-glory leaves wet someplace

風吹いて蝶々迅く飛びにけり

Kaze fuite chōchō hayaku tobinikeri

A wind blew and butterflies flew swiftly

一弁の疵つき開く辛夷かな

*Ichiben no kizu tsuki hiraku kobushi*¹⁸ kana

One petal damaged a magnolia flower opens

おほばこの芽や大小の葉三つ

Ōbako no me ya daishō no ha mittsu

Plantain buds three leaves that are large and small

もちの葉の落ちたる土にうらがへる

*Mochi*¹⁹ *no ha no ochitaru tsuchi ni uragaeru*

An ilex leaf drops on the earth then turns upside down

For the convenience of my argument, I shall call [the stages of] these works first, second, and third categories.

In the first category, I like the following very much:

In chrysanthemum scent before night's doors I join my hands

Aside from “Nature’s truth,” this haiku clearly shows the writer’s creativity. I can’t persuade myself to like the next one as much as the one just cited, but it nonetheless adequately contains “literary truth.”

Out of the massive eaves of the main hall a spring butterfly

In the second category, it is difficult to explain what kind of scene this (or the following) haiku is describing:

At first butterflies people walk about forming groups

in terms of what kind of scene it is describing. The professional haiku writers²⁰ are free to determine that this is about a *ginkō*, “haiku walk,” but it makes no sense for the general appreciators of literature.

I’ve come out on a straight path this autumn evening

This haiku is old both in its makeup and flavor, but it does of course have “literary truth.” Similarly, the next piece evinces in its tone, other than “Nature’s truth,” a considerable amount of the brain’s working that its writer added:

A water-strider chases a flowing boxwood flower

In contrast, in the haiku of the third category I feel “literary truth” is sharply reduced. In particular, in examples such as the following, I’d like to ask if there is anything added, other than “Nature’s truth”:

Licorice buds make up a line spaces in between

One petal damaged a magnolia flower opens

An ilex leaf drops on the earth then turns upside down

In my view, Sujū’s haiku have gradually moved from those with “literary truth” to those only with “Nature’s truth.” Needless to say, the path he has taken has descended from works with much artistic value to works with little of it. In the circumstances we come to the question: Why did he commit such a miscalculation? I can imagine a number of causes, such as “a reaction to the tendency to use too fluid a tone,” “mistaking tasteless and dryness for *shibumi*,” and “lack of scholarly research”²¹—but this is nothing more than I would have expected. I can only wait for the day when he publishes his opinions.

Still and all, when it comes to the cause of Mizuho’s error in calling the haiku of the third category an area no one has explored before and in conferring a great artistic value on them, I can clearly explain it. For the rest, I’ll point my pen in that direction.

Section 3:

The Cause of Mizuho’s Misunderstanding and his Perspective

When you look at Mizuho’s work systematically, you feel that the earlier the works, the greater the feeling that they were “made on the desk.” You can fully discern the brilliance of the so-called fingertip-manipulation skills, but they had nothing as weighty as the writer’s creativity; above all, they lacked “Nature’s truth.” You can tell this in light of the circumstances of the haiku world in those days, when people did not go on a *ginkō*, “haiku walk,” as frequently as they do today. As to the popularity that *ginkō* has

gained of late, the Tōdai Haiku Society can take at least some part of the credit, I think, but by the time *ginkō* became common practice throughout Japan, Mizuho had already left for Niigata. Accordingly, I seldom had the opportunity to watch him contemplate nature.

Let us look at his haiku in those days.

秋暑き西日に箱根山その他

Aki atsuki nishibi ni Hakone-yama sono ta

Autumn hot in the westerly Mt. Hakone and so forth

泰山木壺の色といひ形といひ

Taisanboku²² tsubo no iro to ii katachi to ii

Magnolia tree the pot's color yes its form yes

魂のもどりし気配昼寝人

Tamashii no modorishi kehai hirune-bito

The sense his spirit's returned the daytime nap-taker

編物に倦まず撓まずチューリップ

Amimono ni umazu tawamazu chūrippu

Neither getting wearied of knitting nor bending: a tulip²³

好謔や夏瘦にいや瘦せ細そり

Kōgyaku²⁴ ya natsuyase²⁵ ni iya yasehosori

Liking jokes summer-weight-loss weight so lost

Take any one of these, and it lacks “Nature’s truth,” let alone “literary truth,” which it is hard to detect even a glimpse of. All I can find in these pieces is only fingertip-manipulation skills.

It was a process not in the least difficult to understand that the writer who so lacked “Nature’s truth” was overjoyed to see Sujū’s haiku, while at the same time feeling his heart whipped. It was, I think, truly an error that deserves our sympathy.

Compared with Mizuho’s training like that, my training process was fundamentally different. As I wrote in my preface to *Katsushika* (葛飾),²⁶ I first trained to observe Nature closely. And I worked hard to transfer my heart to haiku while nurturing it. In other words, I built “literary truth” on the foundation of “Nature’s truth.” In today’s haiku world, there are countless people who have proceeded as I have. Isn’t it right and proper that someone who has followed this legitimate path can’t be impressed by Sujū’s haiku which simply try to go backward toward “Nature’s truth”?

Also, Mizuho’s theory that Sujū’s haiku in the third category are of the kind no one has explored before is wrong. This is because, by hunting a little among the achievements of our seniors, we can at once find pieces like the following:

こち向き浮く鳥やゝこち向き浮寝鳥

*Kochi muki uku tori yaya kochi muki ukinedori*²⁷

Facing this way floating birds facing this way a little floating-
sleeping birds

*Hara Sekitei*²⁸

朝顔の大輪や葉に狭められ

Asagao no tairin ya ha ni sebamerare

Morning-glory’s large round flower squeezed by the leaves

*Nishiyama Hakuun*²⁹

牡丹葉に深く花さまたげず鬱々と

Botan-ha ni fukaku hana samatagezu utsuutsu to

Deep in peony leaves the flower unblocked depressed

*Hara Sekitei*³⁰

蓮の葉や波定まりて二三枚

Hasu no ha ya nami sadamarite ni san mai

Lotus leaves the waves having settled two or three

*Murakami Kijō*³¹

I can cite countless other haiku that take the same approach as these. Among these, note about Sekitei's haiku on "floating-sleeping-birds" how sharp is its power of observation that has gouged out "Nature's truth." In comparison, Sujū's haiku on "licorice buds" doesn't deserve to be discussed alongside it, and that in point of observation alone.

You guessed it. Even in the study of haiku, Mizuho lacked the passion for "hunting among literary material."

Mizuho and I look at haiku from totally different perspectives, and Mizuho's perspective is wrong and narrow. The moat between us has grown wider and deeper year by year, until today our views of art are so far apart that there is no room left for compromise, or so I guess.

Section 4: Modern Haiku

While my pen keeps moving, I would correct one other mistake Mizuho commits. In the same critical essay he says:

To attach the word "modern" to Sujū's haiku may appear extremely contradictory (I can guess from snatches of comments young writers made); but I think the point [I have noted] is what makes them modern. At first blush, they may appear very old, but [in that oldness] they have something that makes them remain new through thousands of years.³²

That Sujū's haiku are not new even in modern times I have already proved. So allow me to expend a word on whether they are modern or not.

First, I must clarify the meaning of "modern haiku" (近代的の句). Simply put, "modern haiku" means "haiku describing the thoughts and life influenced by modern civilization," as you will readily find out by looking in a literary dictionary. (I don't have to mention the difference in the meanings of "modern haiku" and "haiku of modern times.") Therefore, "modern haiku" is never the same as "haiku that remain new through thousands of years." For example, the tanka in the *Man'yōshū* (万葉集)³³ will remain new for thousands of years, but they are not tanka of modern times.

Having explained the matter thus far, whether Sujū's haiku are modern or not—I don't think I need to comment any more. To take care of the matter in unmistakable terms, it isn't wrong to say that his haiku are extremely un-modern.

CHAPTER IV. CONCLUSION

I think I have almost exhausted what I have to say about "Nature's truth" and "literary truth," but I'd like to add the following as a conclusion.

If a haiku poet thinks he's done everything he has to do when he has understood "Nature's truth," he has neither to study in his library nor to regard it as important to nurture his mind. All he has to do is to take a notebook and follow the shadow of a cloud. Then, in a few years, he will be recognized as a writer worth his value. If, however, he is someone with a genius truly to understand literary arts, he is bound to reach a dead end in his work, and he is bound to start to doubt: "Is this all right?"

In contrast, those who value "literary truth" have a future that is at once wide and deep. The moment they climb up to the top of one hill, they'll inevitably find another hill which is higher and with a superior overlook. When he has conquered the next hill—that's when his mental state has become more transparent, when his creativity has doubled. It may be a journey whose end they'll never reach after spending all their life, but they will always be happy in their hearts, and they will take each of their steps with renewed hope.

There's a saying: Art is religious. This saying must not be given to a Naturalist who simply imitates Nature from start to end. Without question, it must be something to be given to an Idealist who attempts to reflect the essence of his own mind on Nature. Blessed be those who value "literary truth"! Glory should always be upon them.

TAKANO SUJŪ'S RESPONSE

To Shūōshi

I don't know what you call "Nature's truth." Neither do I know what you call "literary truth," which is said to be something that has added an important extract to "Nature's truth"—and I'm not in the least ashamed of this.

I simply saw various phases of Nature. My haiku were merely an attempt to copy them. I think I will continue to do the same from now on, too.

I imagine that a mineral ore has its own beauty, a refined mineral ore its refined beauty. I've seen that a mountain, a river, grass, and tree each has its own beauty.

While you were exhausting your search for "Nature's truth" and adding an extract to what you found, I was working to copy phases of Nature, work which you say doesn't require what you call the higher workings of the brain. There are few haiku that I can say have managed to do that.

My feeling is simply that as long as haiku of some other people are recognized as such, mine may be, too, but I won't force this issue, either. I know my own prospects more or less. For example, even if I were given three thousand years, I'd never know what's called Nature's truth.

As someone who affirms and is satisfied with the proposition, "Haiku is a literature to sing of flowers and birds,"³⁴ I'm inclined to think: Haiku can't separate itself from either literature or Nature.

Even if you explore a great deal until you finally grasp the meaning of "Nature's truth," add to it what you call an extract with the brain that you further nurture in your study, and then turn it into what you call

“literary truth,” as long as what you are working out are haiku in the end, I wonder if the results shouldn’t be called “phases of Nature.” That is to say, even when the results work out fine, I wonder if they all don’t go back to “Nature’s truth.”

Pure gold is something human beings can make, but there’s a lot of pure gold that’s lying about in Nature.

I, for one, can’t really understand why you, saying you’ve grasped the meaning of “Nature’s truth,” need to deepen your mind further. By deepening your mind further, what do you expect to observe, in what do you expect to be interested?

I don’t have the kind of brilliant brain that can read several books on art and aesthetics and instantly comprehend the question, “What is art?” Also, I don’t have the kind of mind which, while at home entering a study to hunt among literary material and while out going to a Takenodai exhibition to appreciate paintings and sculptures, thereby deepening itself.

I often hear that the question is, “How did he look at this flower?” I have never seen “this flower” in that way, however. I did once make some effort to get rid of, truly rid myself of, the thought of “how I looked at something.” To me, only “this flower” is important.

I am a renegade who takes delight in following the shadow of a cloud. I am a worthless fellow who feels joy watching a phase of Nature passing before my eyes that you so despise.

I don’t think the focus of my haiku (if there is any such) can be moved this way or that by your artistic theory. It may perhaps be affected by the interest of my mind. Isn’t religion something like that?

I have just voiced my own unworthy view.

NOTES

¹ Which were of course all pen names; the actual name of Shūōshi, for example, was the mundane Yutaka (豊). The three Chinese characters applied to Shūōshi mean “autumn-cherry-person.” I do not know what lay behind the making of the name, allusive or otherwise.

² *Shasei*, originally a Chinese word meaning “copying live,” was chosen for “sketch,” the painterly technique said to have been brought to Japan by the Italian painter

Antonio Fontanesi (1818–1882), who taught there, from 1876 to 1878. As the Japanese painter-poet Tanomura Chikuden (田能村竹田, 1777–1835), quoting the Song painter-poet Su Dongpo (蘇東坡, 1037–1101), said of the word: “Transfer the form, and you convey its spirit.” As Shiki defined it, *shasei* was to “simply depict only objective things that have struck me as beautiful,” he having “realized that it was superfluous to express the results of my own feelings.” *Sha* of *shasei* has the verb form of *utsusu*, which means “copy,” “transfer,” “reflect,” and so forth.

³ Or *hagi* (*Lespedeza bicolor*): bush-clover. *Ma* is a suffix meaning “true,” “genuine.”

⁴ Among his haiku that reflect his profession is *Kokukoku to shujutsu wa susumu mi-yuki kana* (刻々と手術はすゝむ深雪かな), “Minute by minute the surgery proceeds in deep snow.”

⁵ *Ashibi* (*Pieris Japonica*) is a shrub with clusters of pot-shaped flowers, pink or white. The Chinese name with three characters meaning “horse-intoxicating-tree” comes from the fact that the horse becomes “drunk” by eating its leaves, which contain a certain toxin. Shūōshi started the magazine, originally named *Hamakyū* (破魔弓), in 1922 as an associate magazine of *Hototogisu*, renamed it *Ashibi* in July 1928 and made it completely independent in October 1936.

⁶ Here Shūōshi uses one of the Dutch words adopted into Japanese early on. The Japanized form retains only the first part of the original word. It means “essence.”

⁷ Mizuho was one year younger than Shūōshi but completed his medical studies in a shorter time than Shūōshi did. Thus he was Shūōshi’s “senior.” The expression as a whole is a standard form of deference.

⁸ The original phrase may be an example of obfuscation. More bluntly, Shūōshi might have said, “Since Kyoshi is out to get me.”

⁹ 何草の芽はどうなっているか, *nani kusa no me ha dō natteiru ka*. During the second half of the 1920s Kyoshi encouraged the kind of haiku that stressed describing small details of nature just as they were observed. Sujū was regarded as the foremost practitioner of that approach. Because of the way Shūōshi put it, such haiku would be termed *kusa no me* haiku, “grass-bud haiku,” and those inclined to dislike such pieces condemned them as heinous examples of trivialism (the English word was used).

¹⁰ William Shawn, the famed editor of *The New Yorker*, would have said, “‘Unique’ can’t be ‘more unique.’”

¹¹ *Jūshichi-ji shi* (十七字詩).

¹² If this “critical essay” is in fact a transcript of a dialogue, as some sources say it is, this sentence may be pardonable. Still, it doesn’t make sense.

¹³ *Kyūshinteki* (求心的). If Mizuho had a medical term in mind, it might mean “excitor-like.”

¹⁴ Sujū made this haiku at the Ryōan temple (龍安寺), in Kyoto, framed for its rock garden. *Hōjō* (方丈), here translated as “main hall,” is the resident monk’s room. There must be a large number of poems about this garden. One of the two left by Lindley Williams Hubbell (1901–1994), the American poet who lived in Kyoto from 1953 until his death, is a quatrain and it reads: “This is the ultimate subtlety of art, / The marrow in the bones: / A rectangle of raked gravel / And a few stones.”

¹⁵ *Koharu*, here given literally as “small spring,” refers to the tenth month by the lunar calendar when balmy days return for a while after the autumn typhoons. Comparable to Indian summer.

¹⁶ *Kukyō* (句境).

¹⁷ Typical “grass-bud haiku” (see note 9). With Shūōshi’s condemnation (later in this article), this piece gained such notoriety that some recent *saijiki*, “seasonal accounts,” do not cite this piece in the *kanzō*, “licorice,” section.

¹⁸ A species of magnolia: *Magnolia kobus*. It grows to be thirty feet tall and puts on showy white flowers.

¹⁹ *Ilex integra*. Its leaves are coriaceous—that is, leathery.

²⁰ *Haijin* (俳人).

²¹ Whether these quoted words, especially the first two, are actually quotes is hard to determine.

²² *Magnolia grandiflora*. A species of magnolia originally from the United States.

²³ Whether Sujū is playing with the expression *umazu tayumazu* (倦まず弛まず) is not clear.

²⁴ A word not found in my dictionaries, it nonetheless appears to have been common in Shūōshi’s day. The translation is tentative.

²⁵ Because of the torrid humidity in summer months people are thought to lose weight in Japan, hence the term *natsuyase*. In fact, it is an old *kigo*. Ōshima Ryōta (大島蓼太, 1718–1787): 夏瘦のわが骨探る寝覚かな, *Natsuyase no waga hone saguru nezame kana*, “Summer-weight-loss I grope for my bones waking.” At any rate, what Sujū meant to convey through this piece is not clear. Maybe an in-joke.

²⁶ Shūōshi's first book, published in 1930. It contains 539 haiku.

²⁷ *Ukinedori*, "floating-sleeping-birds," are ducks that appear to sleep while floating on the water; commonly pochards (redheads, canvasbacks) and tufted ducks. This haiku is hypersyllabic and hard to scan: perhaps 8–6–5.

²⁸ (原石鼎, 1886–1951). For a while he worked as Kyoshi's scribe and a judge of *Hototogisu*.

²⁹ (西山泊雲, 1877–1944). A sake brewer's son. Disliking his father's business when a boy, he once attempted suicide. The brewery went bankrupt, but Hakuun came up with the idea of selling sake with a brand name Kyoshi chose for it through *Hototogisu*, and the venture proved a great success.

³⁰ What is not blocking what? What or who is it that is depressed? Word-for-word translation: peony-leaf-in (at?)-deep-flower-block-not-being-depressed. My wife Nancy, who vetted this translation, imagines "a flower bud still deep in leaves." This haiku is hypersyllabic: 5–10–5 or 5–3–7–5.

³¹ (村上鬼城, 1865–1938). In his late teens he became deaf. He inherited his father's job as a court scribe and while staying in that low-paying position married three women and produced ten children among them. One of the first members of *Hototogisu*, he dedicated his life to haiku.

³² The original wording is cryptic.

³³ The first extant anthology of Japanese poems. Compiled in the latter part of the eighth century, it contains 4,550 poems.

³⁴ Kyoshi famously argued that *kachōfūgetsu* (花鳥風月), "flower-bird-wind-moon," is the true subject of haiku. The similar-sounding phrase *kachōfūei* (花鳥諷詠), which Sujū here uses, means "to sing of flowers and birds."

Hiroaki Sato

SHŪŌSHI'S HAIKU

Mizuhara Shūōshi (水原秋桜子, 1892-1981) famously broke with Takahama Kyoshi (高浜虚子, 1874-1959), the publisher-editor of the dominant haiku magazine of the day, *Hototogisu* (ホトトギス), on what haiku ought to describe. To make his case against Kyoshi's *kyakkan shasei* (客観写生), "objective transference," he penned, in 1931, an article titled "Nature's Truth and 'Truth in Literary Arts'" (「自然の真」と「文芸上の真」)—see above. In doing so, he cited haiku by other writers for criticism or approval, but he did not dare cite his own to explicate what he meant. So let us look at some of his—a couple from his first collection of haiku *Katsushika* (葛飾), published in 1930, which the indefatigable haiku analyst Yamamoto Kenkichi (山本健吉, 1907-1988) exalted for its "freshness, fertility of sentiment, and brilliance."¹

Katsushika as a place name² today refers to a relatively small area where Tokyo, Ibaraki, Chiba, and Saitama come close to one another, but it once designated a large area east of the Sumida River, a great stretch of lowland prone to flooding as part of the Toné River (利根川) system. Shūōshi, who was born and grew up in Kanda, Tokyo, wrote that he used to visit the area in his "grammar school, middle school, and high school days," but by the time he started going back there—and that was after he had taken up haiku as his mode of literary expression—the region had been "almost transformed and had lost its beauty." The vast modern drainage work was taking hold and urbanization was proceeding apace. So his Katsushika haiku were, in truth, pieces he made by "superimposing the beauty in my memory on the present landscape."³ Or, as he put it elsewhere in discussing the landscapes that might be turned into haiku, "Today's scenery of Katsushika is so devoid of poetic feelings that it is no easy task to seek and find subject matter" for haiku there.

The second quotation above comes from Yamamoto commenting on one of Shūōshi's haiku from *Katsushika*. He also, conveniently for us, quotes for contrast a haiku by Takano Sujū (高野素十, 1893-1976), the man Kyoshi

upheld to condemn Shūōshi. Before the Kyoshi-induced controversy came to the fore, Shūōshi and Sujū often went to Katsushika together to seek material to compose haiku. Sujū's Katsushika haiku—or his haiku mentioning the place name Katsushika, anyway—that Yamamoto quotes reads:

夕ぐれの葛飾道の落穂かな

Yūgure no Katsushika-michi no ochibo kana

This evening on a Katsushika path an ear of rice

Ochibo, here given as “an ear of rice,” refers to any of the rice ears the reapers overlooked in the dry paddies or, as suggested here, dropped while carrying home bundles of rice they had harvested. During the period Sujū described, rice paddies were common in Katsushika, so was, we imagine, what he noticed and described in this haiku. In his commentary Yamamoto calls Sujū “a follower of *kyakkan shasei*,” and observes that the kind of “just-the-way-it-is, focused-on-the-present haiku state of mind (淡々とした現在のな句境)” that you discern here is typical of “Sujū’s world.” In another book, Yamamoto cites another of Sujū’s haiku as the prime example of *trivialism* to which Kyoshi’s objectivism “would inevitably lead,”⁴ but here, he is neither dismissive nor condemnatory. It uses “an ordinary, just-as-it-is expression (何でもない淡々たる表現),” he notes, but it has something you can’t ignore about it. “Here it has something akin to the sadness of a rural evening scene. It has a suggestion of the writer’s lamentation that appears to seep out.”⁵

Yamamoto is even more affirmative with Shūōshi’s Katsushika haiku he cites for extended commentary.

葛飾や桃の籬も水田べり

Katsushika ya momo no magaki mo mizuta beri

In Katsushika even a hedge of peach trees stands by water paddies

“An artist’s intrinsic yearnings for something perfect, something genuine, something beautiful are evident in [Shūōshi] to a fastidious extent,” Yamamoto says:

He coaxes out of the landscape that exists as an object a *more* genuine and perfect landscape painting that exists only in his *Idee*. The landscape must imitate his *Idee*—is the way he loves the landscape. It is only in his memory that the Katsushika landscape exists in perfect form; this is why in depth and richness of sentiment his Katsushika haiku are far superior to those he gained from the places he visited for the first time. In these you can even find a Tokyo-ite’s special sense of pain for the changing landscape in the suburbs nearby.⁶

Yamamoto goes on to remind us of the legendary Tego(na) of Mama, in Katsushika, in the oldest extant anthology of Japanese poetry, the *Man’yōshū* (万葉集). None other than the great Yamabe no Akahito (山部赤人) has left us an elegy on the legendary beauty, even though by the time Akahito wrote his poem, the fisherman’s daughter had become part of ancient lore. He was unable to find her famous grave because of “the luxuriating leaves of black pines,” Akahito lamented.⁷ Though Yamamoto does not quote from Shūōshi, the haiku poet apparently wrote about the Tegona Shrine and the stream flowing right next to it in reference to this haiku, saying that the stream still had abundant water and an abundance of fish swimming in it when he visited there as a grammar school pupil, but no more.

You may nonetheless wonder about the linkage between the haiku under discussion and the legend cited in the *Man’yōshū*. The haiku does not even mention the shrine. My guess is that the reference to “a hedge of peach trees” is expected to suggest the ancient idyllic world of the *Man’yōshū*, which to a considerable degree was permeated with Chinese ideals. One such was that of Tōgenkyō (*taoyuanxiang* in Chinese: 桃源郷), an earthly paradise full of peach trees.

梨咲くと葛飾の野はとのぐもり

Nashi saku to Katsushika no no wa tonogumori

Pears blooming the Katsushika field is faintly overcast

In his self-explication Shūōshi explains that *nashi saku to*, here given as “pears blooming,” is a compressed way of saying “time for the pears to bloom having come,” and in his commentary Yamamoto points out that the expression *tonogumori*, “faintly overcast,” directly comes from the *Man'yōshū*. Whether or not such lexical points help, Yamamoto judges: “This one makes a beautiful, lyrical landscape haiku.” This haiku was selected to be engraved on a large rock in the Guhōji (弘法寺), in Mama.

Shūōshi wrote an enormous number of haiku during the long span of his life. When his “complete works” were published in 1977, four years before his death, they required twenty-one volumes.⁸ I have cited these two haiku to give just a glimpse of what Shūōshi was up to and what might have touched off the famous breakup in the haiku world eighty years ago.

NOTES

¹ Yamamoto Kenkichi. *Gendai haiku* (現代俳句). Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1964, 151.

² The two Chinese characters normally applied mean “kudzu-adorned,” but the Japanese pronunciation hardly suggests anything of the sort. One Web site gives the etymology of the name as meaning “hilly lowland” but does not explain where the interpretation comes from.

³ His self-explication quoted in *Mizuhara Shūōshi*, et al. (volume 31 of *Nihon shijin shū*), Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1969, 12–13. Mori Sumio (森澄雄, born 1919) was assigned to discuss Shūōshi in this anthology of thirteen haiku writers. Haiku writers’ explication of their own pieces is standard practice in Japan’s haiku world.

⁴ Yamamoto Kenkichi. *Haiku no sekai* (俳句の世界). Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1969, 15. The English word “trivialism” was used, not just by Yamamoto, but (most likely) by those involved in the controversy at the time.

⁵ Yamamoto 192.

⁶ Yamamoto 151.

⁷ *Man'yōshū*, poem no. 431, which comes with two envoys. There, the two Chinese characters applied to Katsushika are 勝鹿, “winning deer.” As far as the pronunciation goes, this combination of Chinese characters makes far better sense.

⁸ Selections of his haiku and self-explications are available in a number of paperback editions.

