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Translating “by Ear”: Eric Selland and Yoshioka’s *Kusudama*

Gregory Dunne

Brush painting from the notebooks of Eric Selland

This interview was conducted in Shimokitazawa, Tokyo in February 2022.

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Dunne: Isobar press recently reprinted your translation of the Japanese modernist poet Minoru Yoshioka’s book of poems *Kusudama*, which you originally published with Shoshi Yamada (Tokyo) in 1983. That is 40 years!

Clearly, you have been at work with translation for a major portion of your life. When did you first begin to study Japanese and what was your motivation for study?

Selland: I began studying Japanese at age 14 when I attended a beginner’s class on Saturday mornings at the Fresno Buddhist temple, originally built in 1910 by Japanese immigrants. At first, I was compelled to study Chinese because of my fascination with Chinese characters. I developed this fascination looking at my mother’s Chinese language text book. She was doing

an MA in Chinese history at the time and there was a language requirement. Perhaps I should mention here that the family had a lot of exposure to Asian cultures due to my mother's involvements, first as a volunteer in the sister city organization, and later during her graduate studies. We had Burmese refugees at our home in the 1960s as well as dinners where we had guests from all of the east Asian cultures. And my father designed and made a Japanese garden. We had statues of the Buddha and my mother's favorite, Quan Yin (the Boddhisatva Kannon) in the house, as well as a Burmese harp and various other Asian art and artifacts, plus some really beautiful books on Japanese gardens.

So, I began because of an interest in kanji and Japanese culture and arts in general. I also began reading on Zen philosophy and haiku from around age 15. My mother gave me a copy of Alan Watts' book, *The Way of Zen*, so that's how I started with that interest. This was all made possible, of course, by the Japan boom and the boom in Asian philosophies in the 1960s and 70s.

Dunne: In addition to being a translator of Japanese poetry, you are also a poet in your own right. Did these two vocations arrive at the same time, or did one precede the other?

Selland: I'd say they both arrived around the same time. I had already been exposed to poetry while in high school. I went to readings by Philip Levine and other Fresno poets, and then was exposed to a broader range of postwar poetry including Robert Creeley, Gary Snyder, etc. through an anthology called *Naked Poetry* edited by Levine, which included all of the major voices of the time with a focus on free verse. But my own writing really took off in college when I took a poetry workshop led by Michael Palmer, who introduced me to contemporary experimental writing, as well as Jazz and abstract expressionist painting. In my Japanese classes, I was exposed to modern poets such as Hagiwara Sakutaro and Nakahara Chuya, and my first reaction on reading poetry in Japanese that I liked was to translate it. It was something I was compelled to do in the same way that one might be compelled to actually sing, or perform on an instrument, the music that one loves. So, poetry came along with jazz, abstract expressionist painting, and translation.

I also discovered the poetry of Yoshioka Minoru during my last semester at San Francisco State. I would take regular trips to Kinokuniya in the San Francisco Japan Center complex, and I ran across Hiroaki Sato's translation. It seemed like exactly the kind of thing I was getting interested in via Michael Palmer's poetry workshop (by the way, Palmer really encouraged me in doing translations of Japanese poetry). I wanted to try translating myself, so I bought a Yoshioka selected [poems] in the Japanese original at Kinokuniya around the same time.

Dunne: How has translating Japanese poetry affected your own development as a poet, your sense of poetry and poetics?

Selland The presence of a second language in my daily life as spoken with my wife and the people around me, as well as in the daily practice of translation both as a working professional

and as a poet translating poetry, has been so ubiquitous since I first lived in Japan during the 1980s and even during the years I was living in the States, that it can be difficult to put my finger on what it is exactly that one could call influence on my poetry and poetics. My poetics as it has developed, as it became by the time I matured as a poet, is of course a poetics of translation, profoundly so, I would say. But in the beginning, like many young poets, there were certain poets I read and was influenced by, all in the English language, and I carried around the sound and rhythm of these poetic voices inside me. So there, at the beginning (we used the old Donald Alan anthology, *The New American Poetry*, in the Palmer workshop), and I have memories of chatting with George Oppen at readings in San Francisco, and then hearing him read from his last collection, *Primitive*, when it was published. This was before I returned to Japan to find work and in hopes of meeting and translating Yoshioka Minoru. Oppen's voice, the breath, the pauses and hesitations, have been a very strong rhythm working on my subconscious. But I had Michael Palmer's rhythm also, more of a nonstop flow, a quiet murmur or rumbling in the background. My old friend Steven Forth, who was the first to publish my translation of Yoshioka's *Kusudama* in 1990, says that my prose poetry has a Japanese rhythm. Again, that flow, something like the sound of flowing water, the sound of a brook in the distance. And something that I came to feel very strongly early on, after taking a workshop from a British actor on how to read poetry out loud in which he insisted that we should forget the text, change things or ad-lib during the reading etc. etc., was that for me, poetry is on the page. Not that I ignore sound (I don't at all), but the poetry is an inscription on the page. It has a certain look, a shape, a form on the page and the printed page is the thing. This was brought home to me all the more strongly when translating Yoshioka and reading certain thinkers on language and writing. For Yoshioka, the poem has to be on the page and it has to appear in a certain way. He never did readings. Poetry was in writing – the written character. And I think this affected me also. Perhaps the relationship to language and the word one develops through learning and writing kanji, dealing with Japanese calligraphy and so on, has also been a big influence on me. There has been a concern with the materiality of language in my writing, which of course is very much a part of the tradition of Modernism in English as well, but exposure to Japanese perhaps made that all the more essential to me. Right now, all my writing is in hand, using fountain pens and Japanese brush, in the notebook – a kind of notebook art, journaling, or poet's notebook. So, it is now even more profoundly on the page, almost a kind of visual art. But even before that I used a kind of translation process in producing poetry, since much of it came from reading and quoting, then rearranging language on the page. Like translation, one reads, attempts to come to an understanding, an interpretation, and then rewrites or reforms the material in one's own language.

Something very key in my poetic methodology that comes from my experience as a translator, and which was an important part of the use of appropriated language and piecing fragments of found language together like a puzzle in order to create a poem, is the knowledge that meaning comes from context. Without context you don't know what it means. You can't translate. Change the context and you change the meaning.

Dunne: You began to lean into Yoshioka while you were still a student studying with Michael Palmer in the United States. I'm curious to know what it was that had you becoming interested

in this particular poet, who is said to be one of the more difficult post war period poets to read and one of the most highly praised? What attracted you?

Selland I first became interested in Yoshioka's work via the translations of Hiroaki Sato because I found something in common with Michael Palmer's poetry. He had just published *Without Music*, and I was attracted to his approach to an experimental form which retained the lyric beauty of the language as well as the connection to Modernism. I was attracted to Yoshioka's intricacy, the strange beauty of his first collection, *Still Life*, which I think could be described as being like a surrealist painting by de Chirico. I sensed this profound silence at the base of the poems and reading them gave me a feeling of calm, almost a kind of meditative state. I get into the same state of mind listening to the solo piano pieces of Arnold Schoenberg. Dissonant, yet somehow calming. There's a strangeness to Yoshioka's work which at the same time takes the reader to a different world. I don't think I experienced Yoshioka as being any more difficult than reading other poets in Japanese, or perhaps reading anything in that language. In either case, reading and translating required a lot of time and concentration. I suppose it's the question of how rewarded you feel after having invested the time. I always felt rewarded having translated something by Yoshioka.

Dunne: Did you ever meet Yoshioka? Could you comment on that? How did you meet him? Was he helpful to you in any way with the translation work?

I managed to meet Yoshioka about a year after my return to Japan at age 24 to 'seek my fortune' as they say. We met regularly at the Top Café in Shibuya, and I met many other poets and haikuists through him, including a group of younger poets such as Kido Shuri, who Forrest Gander has translated. I had some difficulty finding him at first, because attempts to contact him via a Japanese academic who had translated some of his work just brought me up against a brick wall. Finally, I asked Shiraishi Kazuko after one of her readings with American Jazz musicians complete with the tight sequined mini-skirt she was famous for wearing well beyond middle-age. She was extremely helpful and gladly gave me his number. She was very encouraging about translating him. Yoshioka was a big supporter of hers when she started out and she was also a major admirer of his poetry. Yoshioka was very energetic despite his age, and interested in new things. A lot of young people gathered around him. He didn't sit on his laurels and he did not demand to be worshipped as the great sensei – I realized soon that he hung out with younger poets because they were interesting to him. He was always soaking up new information. He was fascinated by the poetry of Charles Olson who he knew only through the single poem that had been translated into Japanese as of that point in time – "The Kingfishers". In fact, he was so interested in gleaning information from me along with the other young people that I think I spent less time in questioning him about his work than the other way around. He did answer some questions about *Kusudama,* but all in all, he wasn't one to explain his work or to think that much about poetics. It was all in the doing of it. But through Yoshioka I came into contact with all of the important poets at the time, as well as Butoh people and small press publishers who were important to contemporary and experimental poetry.

Dunne: You mentioned in your Introduction to this volume that Yoshioka didn't like to "read" his poetry before an audience. Could you talk about that a little? Did you ever see him read? What was that like? I gather that the meetings in the Top Cafe were informal events, did the meetings ever involve his reading his poetry out loud to you?

Selland: Right. Yoshioka refused to do readings. For one thing, poetry readings were not very common during the postwar era when Yoshioka was active. Public readings and performance were associated more with the projects of barely a handful of poets, most notably Shiraishi Kazuko and Yoshimasu Gozo. It wasn't until the 1990s that readings took on some popularity. But that said, Yoshioka did have specific reasons to avoid doing so. His poems were meant for the page, to be seen. How they looked on the page, the choice of kanji and so on were all important to him. He first became interested in writing poetry after seeing poems by Kitasono Katue, which he found had a kind of physical or geometric beauty. In other words, it was the materiality of Kitasono's poetic language that attracted him. Then, when he began writing again after the war, he was inspired by Rilke's book length essay on the sculptor, Rodin. Yoshioka wanted to become a sculptor himself when he was younger. So you can see now the importance of materiality, shape and so on to him. Many critics pointed out the similarity of Yoshioka's work to sculpture. He was also very fascinated by painting, including the paintings of Francis Bacon.

Dunne: What about Takamura Kōtarō (1883-1956), the sculptor – he studied painting and sculpture in Paris and later became a poet as well as a sculptor – was there any connection between these two poets?

Selland: Not really. First of all, in terms of poetry, Yoshioka was directly influenced by Modernist and experimental work – first the Modernist (non-seasonal) haiku of Tomisawa Kakio, and then the surrealist inspired work then being done by Kitasono Katue and Sagawa Chika. It was actually Kitasono where he sensed something sculpturesque – something he referred to as a kind of "geometric beauty". He seemed to intuit something very tangible or three-dimensional from the work.

Dunne: You've mentioned that his first book *Still Life,* published in 1955, was the first of his books that you encountered. In considering *Kusudama,* could you comment on how his work changed or evolved over time?

Selland: During the few years, previous to *Kusudama,* Yoshioka began developing ways of incorporating fragments of quoted text into his poems. Until then, his work tended to be stream of consciousness – his process was to lay down on the tatami mats and write down whatever spontaneously came into his head. Yoshioka was not one to reflect a lot on his poetics or to write about it, so we don't have a lot to go on to explain what was behind the shift to the type of writing found in *Kusudama*. I think we can only assume that his work got to a certain point where he found the need to do something new and different. Perhaps he felt he had come to the end of the possibilities of what he could get out of his previous approach to writing. I do remember a statement in writing somewhere about wanting to borrow the

voices of others – in other words, bringing multiple voices into the poem. And the form of *Kusudama*, how the lines move across the page rather than keeping a fixed left margin, and the extremely long lines, may have come from his fascination with the poetry of Charles Olson. *Kusudama* is also much more "constructed" than his earlier poetry.

Dunne: You mention in the Introduction, that *Kusudama* is considered his magnum opus. Why so? What makes the book stand out as a singular achievement?

Selland: It's the apex of his career in the sense of hitting peak performance in producing a poetry that is subtle and beautiful both in sound and image, as well as having a depth and dimension of meaning, and texture if that makes sense. It is also probably the most difficult work out of all of his output, which was already difficult as it is. At the same time Yoshioka breaks through to his own homespun Japanese post-modernism after having spent years putting the finishing touches on Japanese Modernism, which was interrupted by the events of the 1930s and 40s. Kiwao Nomura and Kido Shuri wrote on Japan's postwar poetry in the late 1990s and describe Yoshioka's work as being an important transformative stage providing a bridge between periods in Japanese poetry. For Nomura and Kido, Yoshioka is one of the three most important poets of the postwar period. After Yoshioka and the official end of the postwar period with the death of Emperor Hirohito, the lid just blows off of Japanese poetry. Yoshioka's work made a whole new range of things possible for younger poets maturing in the early 90s.

Dunne: You have mentioned how his early poetry gave you "a feeling of calm, almost a kind of meditative state," what about this later work, *Kusudama?* Here is a poetry that is sonically and visually rich, a poetry that has a fractured and surreal sweep to it. What challenges does it pose for readers? What pleasures offer?

Selland: Initially I was simply mesmerized by the physical beauty of the book and his use of kanji. It was so difficult for me to read at that point in my career (I was just starting out as a translator) that it was only after carefully "decoding" the first few lines that I could then hear the sound of the language in my inner ear and was deeply moved by the sound and the rhythm. What it reminded me of was my experience in college of reading the classics in the original. There's a certain grandeur, if you will, coming from the rhythm and use of vowel echoing or assonance. Of course, when translating, the first thing you lose is the sound (as well as the visual effect of the kanji of course), but I did my best to come up with something close to it. I think I've said this before in presentations, but I really believe in translating "by ear" – you have to both hear the music of the original language and at the same time hear the music in the target language, in this case of course English. For this I'm really thankful for my early training in reading and attempting to imitate the projective verse of the Black Mountain school (Olson, Duncan, Creeley, etc.) In studying Japanese, we spend so much time trying to understand the complexities of that language (while having to prove ourselves over and over again to show the Japanese that a gaijin actually can learn and understand the language) that it's easy to forget that when translating, we also have to pay attention to the subtleties of our own language.

Dunne: *Kusudama* seems to have a mythic quality about it, as if Yoshioka were invested in creating his own mythical world, a sacred world. We see frequent mention of spirits in the book. We also encounter references to family members: the speaker's father, mother, younger sister, and brother. Can you shed any light on what Yoshioka might be up to here in evoking the both spiritual realm and the lives of his own family members, many of them deceased?

Selland: What I find interesting about that process of myth-making is that Yoshioka makes the very worldly Shitamachi of his youth into something exalted. He never spoke or wrote all that much detail about his family, but in a sense, included in that would be the student boarders they took in. They lived in what's called a *nagaya*, a kind of tenement, where there wouldn't have been much privacy. And Yoshioka notes that there were no books in the house. He was introduced to poetry by one of the student boarders, starting with tanka and then haiku. Interestingly enough this was the Modernist haiku of Tomisawa Kakio, who introduced non-seasonal haiku, and it was this reading that first inspired Yoshioka to become a poet. As I mentioned, I don't know any of the specifics about Yoshioka's siblings, but he was the youngest, so you can imagine what it may have been like looking up to all these older siblings. In a way, perhaps they were like gods and goddesses to him. Both of his parents died (of natural causes) while he was away serving in the military in Manchuria. I don't know whether his older siblings survived the fire-bombing of the Shitamachi area of March 10, 1945, but that whole world of his youth went up in smoke in one night and he had nothing to return to after the war. When Tokyo was rebuilt and some of the neighborhoods re-zoned, his former neighborhood disappeared. The place name no longer exists. So, the disappearance of his past was total. This too could be part of the process you're asking about. Interestingly enough, Yoshioka did not produce the same kind of large family that he grew up in. He and his wife, Yoko, had no children. And instead of settling down in the area he grew up in, he lived for much of his adult life in the Nakameguro area. He would walk from there to Shibuya where he would meet and talk with the young poets at the Top Café.

Dunne: Yoshioka was a close friend of the founder of Butoh dance, Tatsumi Hijikata, and he published a memoir about their friendship, do you see any similarities in their artistic sensibilities or concerns?

Selland: I've heard a recording of Hijikata and Yoshioka in conversation, and the first thing one notices is that Hijikata does most of the talking. He was a charismatic personality. Yoshioka was fascinated with Hijikata's Butoh because of the physicality as well as, of course, the intensity of the technical skill required. I think we can easily place Yoshioka in that generation of postwar artists who had a concern with the body, sensual reality, and eroticism, something that was a response to the extreme deprivation of the war years[1]. There

[1] Yoshioka was also a big fan of the "traditional" Japanese strip show. There was a strip club around the corner from the Top Café where he would drop by on the way home. This is of course part of the *Kasutori Jidai* experience – the early postwar years where everything that had been suppressed blew up. But it may also be a part of his experience of growing up near Asakusa with its burlesque shows during the prewar years and the

was a fascination with the physical, with sexuality and sensuality, and with a certain rawness. You can find it in Yoshioka's early work as well, but it usually passes current-day western readers by[2]. For instance, the egg which appears often in Yoshioka's poetry of that time is considered to be a symbol of the feminine and to contain a certain erotic meaning. There was something that fascinated Yoshioka about this twisting of the human form into odd shapes in such a way that questions the traditional concept of beauty. For much the same reason he was fascinated with the paintings of Francis Bacon. Elsewhere I have described it like this: "Poetic meaning in Yoshioka functions in much the same way as the paintings of Francis Bacon – it is only through the distortion of normative reality that we are capable of reaching its underlying truth."

Dunne: I understand that you are now compiling an anthology of Japanese poetry. Could you speak to your approach at editing and translating such a volume? Will the anthology include modern and contemporary poets? How might this volume differ from earlier anthologies?

Selland: The aim of the anthology is to represent Japan's 20th century tradition of Modernist and experimental poetry. It's first of all an attempt to put right the assumption amongst most American poets that Japanese poetry means primarily or only haiku and Zen (and as you know, not even haiku is associated with Zen in particular in Japan). In other words, it's an attempt to impart the history of 20th century Japanese poetry as one that was driven very much by new ideas and experimentation – and not simply imitation. Though our intent is to undermine the conventional canon, we do not necessarily propose a new one. It's more like a "de-canonization," a questioning of the idea of an official canon, and of the major vs. minor mindset which is still pretty prevalent in Japan. Another major effort was to include as many women as possible – not only the poets but the translators. Japanese literary translation has had a reputation for being very white and very male, so we do our best to make changes here. One of our problems when we were first working on the book was that it was difficult finding women poets doing experimental poetry during the Modernist (prewar) period. My first assumption was that it was simply more common for women to write tanka, but when we researched more deeply with the help of the footnotes and other marginal material in studies such as John Solt's biography of Kitasono Katue, we found names of women associated with Sagawa Chika (translated by Sawako Nakayasu), so I visited the Museum of Contemporary Japanese Poetry (Nihon Shiika Bungakukan) in Iwate Prefecture and dug up work by these women. I should note here that these women are completely unknown even in Japan except by a handful of scholars of women's poetry and some "fans". So, this is something very special and unusual about the anthology in addition to giving Futurists such as Kambara Tai (also a major painter) and Hirato Renkichi their rightful place in Japan's literary history. We continue in this vein into postwar, including not only poets that are well known, such as Yoshimasu Gozo and Shiraishi Kazuko, but also the lesser-known poets such as those

popular aesthetic of *eroguro nansensu* (see *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: The Mass Culture of Japanese Modern Times*, by Miriam Silverberg, University of California Press, 2006).

[2] The experience of reading the original Japanese can be quite different. Yoshioka's imagery, coupled with the physicality of the written character itself, can elicit an extremely visceral reaction to the poetry on the part of a native speaker. In this sense, his poetry is intensely physical as in Butoh.

associated with Kitasono's VOU group. The VOU group was ignored mostly for political reasons. This is also a group of poets you won't generally see in publications in the U.S. There have been major improvements in the market for poetry in translation in the U.S. during the years we were working on this book, so you actually can find some of these poets on the shelves now, but in the past, it was nearly impossible to get a single volume published devoted to a single Japanese poet. Happily, that's gradually changing.

Dunne: This sounds like a new and exciting – needed – contribution to Japanese poetry in translation. How many poets will it feature? How many different translators? Who will publish the book and when would you expect it to be published?

Selland: There are a total of 51 poets with works spanning from around 1916 to the 1990s, and 30 translators including the editors, myself and Sawako Nakayasu. The book will be published by New Directions sometime in the near future.

Dunne: You are a poet, as well as a translator. Before we finish, could you tell us about your own poetry? When did your books begin to be published? Can you describe the poetry at all, how has it evolved over the years? What are you working on presently?

Selland: I have a lot of unpublished work. Probably can't compete with Cid Corman, but in any case, my first book was with TELS (Tokyo English Literature Society) in 1985, entitled *Preface,* then I spent ten years working on a long poem, *Transparencies*, which was never in print, though it was on a website for a long time.

When I started working on this long poem in 1985, I was married to my first wife, and when I finished in 1995, we were divorced! It was done entirely in seven-syllable lines(!) My first publisher didn't want to do that one because he felt there was too much juvenilia remaining in parts, so my next book, *The Condition of Music,* came in 2000. I wrote another book in the same form (what is sometimes called a hybrid form) that was completed soon after, but it took 15 years to publish.

I wrote three books in that form, though in a sense you could also count *Object States* as part of that, a sort of sequel to the others. I have also occasionally done some haiku and tanka on the side in more recent years. The hybrid form I mentioned is what I began doing in the late 90s: the term hybrid (which really hasn't caught on, though you see it from time to time) refers to works which are a mix of genres, though I don't think this really completely describes what's going on in those works. *The Condition of Music*, *Arc Tangent*, and *Beethoven's Dream* all use prose poem stanzas mixed with shorter 'poetic' lines. Occasionally you can see a relationship to the *kubun* form (prose followed by a haiku). I also made use of appropriation (a kind of quotation and collage similar to Yoshioka's approach in *Kusudama)*. But the point is that it's a mix of things, not sticking to one clear form or any limited number of themes. It sometimes sounds like narrative, but there's not a clear narrative line. Many of the prose stanzas are dream narratives. Narratives of my own dreams and memories. So even to say that appropriation or quotation is central to the process in a sense

misses the point. It's a kind of writing that includes 'everything'. I've also heard it called a 'notebook work' by George Albon (a highly respected local poet in San Francisco who often produces works along these lines). This is because, like a notebook or journal, it contains whatever one is thinking about in whatever form strikes the poet as interesting at the time all in the same work.

All said, I have five books and two chapbooks. After *The Condition of Music* came *Arc Tangent,* then *Beethoven's Dream,* and *Object States*. In between, I did chapbooks - *Inventions* and *Still Lifes.* I guess the irony of it all (or maybe not so?) is that in order to get all my work published I had to come back to Japan to live in 2012 – around the time that Paul Rossiter established his small press, Isobar Press. Poets survive by being a member of a particular poetic community, and though I made connections in the U.S. that I still have, obviously Japan was home. I had just been away for a long time.

Brush painting from the notebooks of Eric Selland

from Paul Klee's Table, 1959-1980

Paul Klee's Table

Things familiar to the lonely heart
At one time all unravel the solid shape of light
And enter a dark house where no one lives
Creating vibrant images
In the arrogant shadows of metal
And quietly gather there
At the far end of the modest interior
Forks grow like withered grass
And glasses forever parted from lips
Hang suspended in air
Bitter wine flows
Sausage skins and a fish now nothing but bones sink
In a town of water lacking a commanding view
A sheer cliff made of leftover cloth
A cat looks furtively up
And with a weight which carries the dark rays of light
An empty bottle stands
Having taken up residence alone on the table
Anyone would feel lonely standing there
It naturally develops a slender neck
But no-one is invited, so
The umbrellas are left closed and dripping
In the corner of the doorway from morning till night
And the chairs are drawn near to the table
Plates and various receptacles are gathered there
Amongst them some that have been devoured in vain
But even more sad are the plates which never become dirty
All piled up on the shelf
They lay there at night with no echoes beneath the butter
The soothing feast is nearing its end
And from inside a jar of salt
Its belly swollen like a mother
A voice emerges
There is no response so it returns from whence it came
A table where no-one ever appears to wipe up
Just now the white walls surrounding it
On four sides
Fall silent
As if they had swallowed the sea

Lilac Garden

The color purple is the gift of night
So that all music can easily sink
Little by little as they bubble up

The stars are extinguished from the garden
This is the time when the lilacs bloom all around
The stone statue whispers
Both jealousy and love
Model an abstract boredom
With a torn ear hanging down
The beautiful wife is lured
From the shadows
A wet bird runs through her heart
Wearing the waistband of adultery
She hangs on the arm of an orange man
Pure love abounds
An angle that can be taken only once
The woman is supported by the weight of an olive branch
The tear in the undergarment of joyous sin
When the troublesome silk foot gets involved
The bearded man who owns this mansion
Suddenly rushes out bellowing
The running dogs　the cats protecting the lamp
The bearded man expands the great circle of lust
At the center of the collapse of flowers
Lies my beloved　the woman in the green kimono
While listening to the awakening voices of
The flowers other than the lilacs which have nearly bloomed
A male servant does the toy monkey dance
And a maid does the toy snake dance
Don’t hold a match
Amongst the overgrown lilacs
Don’t make the nightingale sing
The ocean breeze which enchants the light of the mansion’s candles
Is altogether invited in
The fullness of the breasts of a woman who feigns love
Wearing the wife’s gown with its many beautiful folds
Are carved in stone
And the echoes of the autumn sea become fainter
In the sky over the garden now absent of people
The nightingale sings too much
Other kinds of flowers reveal their scent
The yellow moon rising madly
Is an offering to the approaching morning

from Poems for a Mysterious Time (1976)

Solid Objects

Even in the afternoon of midsummer
They remain gentlemen
They do not pace inside the room
Dressed in frock coats
They stand erect
When the next door is opened
There will be an avalanche of dead rats
Make no mistake that's how it is today
They leave by a separate door
A fat gentleman
With a butterfly mustache
Turns the handle of the gramophone
In order to make the hot summer hotter
It makes a squeaking noise
Now you must remember!
Broken nails / the sound of childbirth
Because they are gentlemen
They remove their formal slacks
And repeatedly cast nets from the bay window
From the dark depths of the nets
That slowly spread
The future of an error
Sticking out both its breasts
The crimson cracks in the cross
Stopped in their tracks
They hold gramophones in their arms
Flowers made of brass
Consultation meditation
Without speaking without moving
Will their intentions call in the next wave?
Toward a world without communication
On the table
A fossilized bird flies around a fossilized apple
A fossilized mirror reflects a soft loaf of freshly baked bread
Does a fossilized arrow pierce the soft neck of a child?
A time like this passes
Their filthy eyes
The muddy lion they keep as a pet
Their filthy books
What is this plasticity?
The carpet path burns in the furnace of summer
Dripping with sweat
Their hearts remain cold
As they paint one large canvas
They draw a curved line the way the bride wants it
An arrow runs along the surface

And the burning color of orange
From the flowing center
Vertically and horizontally
They reveal the secret voice of joy
Make the flesh of inner vision shine!
Autumn of the spirit of the inner ear
Floating in the lake beyond
The rainy morning of the Korean morning glory comes
Because they are gentlemen
Dressed in their frock coats
In order to exist
In a collective fantasy
They hold up sweet goldfish bowls

From Spindle Form (1959-62)

Diarrhea

I have diarrhea it's not what I wished for nor do I have any means of resistance under cover of night in which historical transition and the work of the individual are superimposed I have diarrhea a crimson flower and water in an underground vault that vomits phlegm coloring the twilight sky is this a phenomenon only I experience today again I do the same and yesterday as well now that I think about it in a memory from long ago as I peered inside the inner chamber of a winter melon with blue skin diarrhea is our daily habit the newly washed toilets of the world are all gathered together my diarrhea begins to swallow up my spirit and reaches the hearts of many people causing food for starving people to rot from that moment a group of young and old men and women lie down their quiet voices the movement of their pathetic hands and feet the love of excretion that proves they are alive everyone is in the position of driftwood I am located somewhere higher up immediately covered in ash in order to eat a masochistic meal most likely horses and dogs would never experience I have humorously metaphysical diarrhea though powerless it shows that I am alive where pain leads to I see a tower rising in the space at the end of a battle of lightening when the flow of martyrdom's blood echoing in my mortal body rises I have diarrhea on sloping land that is cultivated below the stones and pebbles of the endless spring from where water is drawn the bowels of opportunity of my inner turmoil are eternally severed I am forgotten I forget people and things because it is a friendship that began with a chance meeting in a temporary structure coming out of a hypnotic state bending over the ugliness of modernity with cold diarrhea the extraordinary darkness of recovery changes dimension at its center contact with natural light is repeated in the garden of the 20th century I become a healthy man as a member of a collective I begin by eating a pear here a new relationship / a new dialogue begins