



otata 20

August 2017

Otata 20 (August 2017)

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from otata's bookshelf

John Perlman, *Florida Keys, II*

# tokonoma

## *Letter*

With my stomach full after eating lunch  
I'm writing this letter to the once hungry me.

It used to happen sometimes.  
You won't be upset, will you?

There were times of luxury too, you know.  
I hope you won't forget that.

I was sure of tomorrow  
for twenty years!

Now that I'm full  
I'm worried I might forget all that

so I'm  
writing this letter.

— Ch'on Sang Pyong  
Translated by Brother Anthony of Taizé  
and Kim Young-Moo

with thanks to Jeremy Seligson

*vincent tripi*

cremation ...  
ashes enough  
for the wren box

the chrysalis  
splits-open  
The Middle Way

a young hoody  
stops me on the street  
I think of Merton's cowl

# *Elisa Bernardinis*

*tra i rami oscillano  
desideri di uomini  
la Via Lattea*

human desires  
swinging among branches  
Milky Way

*bora di luglio —  
tre piccoli fagiani  
corrono in fila*

July bora  
three small pheasants  
run in a row

(bora: a kind of wind of northwest Italy very  
strong and cold in the winter period)

cumulonembi –  
il ronzio di una mosca  
sale a spirale

cumulonimbus  
the buzz's fly rises  
in spirals

*semi di lino —  
si arrotola alla tenda  
il vento estivo*

summer wind  
rolling around the curtains  
flaxseed

*solstizio estivo  
in giardino una bambina  
canta Hallelujah*

summer solstice  
in the garden a child  
sings Hallelujah

*brucio l'incenso  
nella stanza in penombra —  
solstizio estivo*

burning incense  
in the shaded room  
summer solstice

*cumolonembi  
Il gatto al mio fianco fa un cerchio perfetto*

storm clouds  
the cat at my side make a perfect circle

*lo sguardo fisso  
delle orate al mercato —  
canicola*

at the market stall  
a sea bream's stare  
heat wave

*Sean Burn*

*moniack monochords*

*dedicated to gibby keys and beatrice robertson were written as part of our jessie kesson literary fellowship  
2016, moniack mhor - scotlands writing centre*

4/3/16 three knives-blocked, three on the chopping

5/3/16 this s/lightest ov flake snows rant-and-reel over strawberry bed

6/3/16 snow strafing the blackest where mole jes hilled

7/3/16 hoodie grubbing branches ov pine, cone falling

8/3/16 winds dartings making the pine for clàrsach

9/3/16 for the sixth day canny-crow shrugging her shoulders at us

10/3/16 spider in the shower - how long have yu been waiting? yr flies are in the living room!

11/3/16 mountain no-one can name peek-a-booing amid the dreich

12/3/16 paint-peel the bathroom near-enough butterfly before flit

13/3/16 blading air, wing-beat-none in this glide-ride ov current

- 14/3/16      moon cleft in hyacinth-skies, later she will turn electric
- 15/3/16      buttercup jcb marracking a neighbouring field
- 16/3/16      shrugging a spider outside into the shroud-silk-mist
- 17/3/16      steel toe-caps and two (double) espresso'd morning
- 18/3/16      dvoraks cypresses - their string-quartetting years, tears and
- 19/3/16      snow-melt watering more than eyes
- 20/3/16      two red kites joust hours, heartbeats ov cloud thudding beyond
- 21/3/16      tornado jet chunters, meanwhile the desperate-for-suncatcher-crocussings
- 22/3/16      wagtail s/pied runnelling gutters, meanwhile my washing-up awaits
- 23/3/16      long-time friend txts she's carving out writing space in wishaw
- 24/3/16      egg-shells ov palest blue, olive, cream - their omelette bursting sun
- 25/3/16      overnight, the forgotten chopped onions reach first floor
- 26/3/16      misread postcard in printer-room: aching a poem?
- 27/3/16      ... rainstrikeglasstrikerain, patterning in gain&loss & loss again, meanwhile i ...  
(i.m frances horovitz, see her last poem orcop haiku)

28/3/16 trees caressing shadow over pebble-dash ov writers cottage

29/3/16 paper, plastic, glass to recycling then stuck behind their lorry en-route to train south

[Ed. note. A lovely short film, Sean reading in background, can be found [here](#). His most recent book, *is that a bruise or a tattoo* is available from Shearsman.]

# *Angiola Inglese*

*così limpida  
la luna fra le case —  
così vicina*

so clear the moon  
among the houses-  
so close

*notte di luna —  
si destano i papaveri  
da un sonno breve*

moonlit night —  
poppies awaken  
from a short sleep

*notte d'estate -  
così intensa la luce  
dei fiori bianchi*

summer night -  
so intense the light  
of white flowers

# *Goran Gatalica*

flowing river —  
the way mother  
touches wolfberries

early snowfall  
clinging to starlight —  
winter deepens

melting snow —  
a waterfall spills  
from our rooftop

Easter night -  
a rabbit's eyes blinking  
through the mist

# *Elisa Allo*

midnight swim —  
eyes closed  
the sound of waves

life drawing...  
jasmine scent  
impregnates the canvas

from the window  
a cricket reminds me  
to clear the table

# *Tigz De Palma*

singing the sun drunk cicadas

waiting for the last boat those unripe figs

his scarab wingbeats starlight

# *Sonam Chhoki*

## *Short history of love*

How can I forget when we first met? Even the ratio of cloud swirls to the poplars against a cerulean sky was perfect.

*abandoned dovecots  
the way the sun lights up  
each nest-hole*

## *Nearly everything*

This summer the house martins arrive well before the rain, animatedly chirruping as they criss-cross the cloudless May sky. The monsoon too is punctual, almost to the day of the long-range forecast. It seems everything is on course. You would have whistled in delight to see your avocado tree brim with the promise of a good harvest.

*anniversary  
prayer flags shedding mist  
at sunrise*

*Should we have known?*

The house martins suddenly leave for the warmth of Benares. Our winter visitors, the black-necked cranes are late arriving in the valley. One day, the paddy stubbles glow in the low sun, the next, they are enamelled in hoar frost well into dusk.

*how still*

*Orion's belt and sword*

*night of the quake*

has spring come early  
to the winter-bleached valley  
cress shoots in the snow

Deep winter  
untrammelled by the urge  
to sow, weed and reap  
I let things be  
revisit ancestral dreams

Even if  
the Bar-do Tho-dol  
is recited every day  
How will I find the Clear Light  
without you by my side

if nothing else  
when it is time to go  
I shall be enrobed  
in the deepest purple  
of a mountain night

# Margherita Petriccione

*autunno —  
il volto nello specchio  
come una vecchia foto*

autumn—  
the face in the mirror  
like an old photo

*mattino d'inverno —  
sulla piazzale della chiesa  
le persone più anziane*

winter morning  
on the church square  
the oldest people

zazen on the grass —  
appears and disappears  
a poppy

zazen sull'erba -  
appare e scompare  
unpapavero

5  
fog wall -  
from nothing to nothing  
a magpie

muro di nebbia-  
dal nulla al nulla  
una gazza

# *Elmedin Kadric*

how long  
it takes  
the vapour trail

sunlight  
all of us  
in first class

in the end  
the weight of white  
blossoms

from day  
one  
the sun

at the end of the walk a man waiting for his dog

opening the balcony door  
to my neighbor  
the rain

# Angela Giordano

*Afa d'agosto  
Già appassiti i fiori  
colti al mattino*

August  
the flowers picked this morning  
already dried

*Onde di grano  
Piccole barche rosse  
i papaveri*

Wheat waves  
Small red boats  
And poppies

*Dentro il cortile  
Lo starnazzare d'ocche  
tra le peonie*

Inside the courtyard  
The cackling of geese  
among the peonies

# *Jack Galmitz*

*The apple*  
has a partner  
in the orchard  
hand-picked  
a hard worker.  
The apple  
gives a thump  
in the grass  
when the moon  
is hidden  
and no one is listening.  
There are others.  
The apple  
turns about  
with the earth's orbit  
lightning and thunder  
and the deep fountain.  
The apple  
pressed  
and fermented  
I drink and  
this moment  
see  
a meteor shower.

# *Mark Young*

## *Conversation Piece*

"The art of  
conversation is dead."

Do you agree or  
disagree? SMS

your answer  
to 1234 567 890.

## *Editorial*

Fresh poems are  
fresh meat for the  
locusts. They eat all  
the words, leave only  
punctuation. So. You  
write another. Then an-  
other. Eventually one  
will come along that  
is indigestible to  
insects, fit for a  
human palate.

*a piece of meat*

Alexander Alekhine died  
seventy years ago.

Elevated levels of ammonia  
have since been discovered.

Also, artificial sweeteners that  
lead to weight gain.

We are stuck in the real world.

An opened icon is already  
a postscript.

*of Proto-Germanic origin*

This may be counter-  
intuitive, but when  
a black dog started  
chasing him, the heart-  
less robot became  
emotionally available  
& forgot all his baggage.

## *The young Han Solo*

describes the past decade  
as a really tumultuous

time for the beef industry

but he is excited about  
what the future holds.

## *"Aliens' sex life," however, returned 106 hits*

An analysis of the  
incidence of local

searches for the jailing  
of blacks reveals that,

even when combined  
with contains a peel-

off sticky card, it still  
attracts no interest.

## *A 1920s flapper*

Be comfortable & intimate.  
An entire home/apt for \$29.  
New types of fibers offer  
new possibilities. Do you  
have healthy boundaries? If

your answer is yes & you live  
in Brooklyn then check out  
TripAdvisor members' 1507  
candid photos of genetically  
modified sexual fetishes.

# *Lucia Cardillo*

*più lente le ore  
nella canicola estiva —  
formiche in fila*

more slow hours  
in the summer heatwave –  
ants in a row

*muri di pietra —  
nella frescura a sera  
menta e lavanda*

stone walls -  
in the night coolness  
mint and lavender

*mare d'estate —  
il turchese del cielo  
ai miei piedi*

sea in summer —  
the sky's turquoise  
bathes my feet

*pioggia d'estate —  
appaiono dal nulla  
le lumachine*

summer rain -  
snails appear out  
of nowhere

*formiche —  
vanno ... vengono ... vanno  
su fichi caduti*

ants -  
they go ... they come... they go  
on fallen figs

# *Eufemia Griffio*

blueberry stains  
counting the mistakes  
on a white tablecloth

old love letters  
an agave flower  
among his words

\**Agave* flowers only once before dying: a symbol of great  
love that comes to destruction.

mandala ...  
a little sunbeam  
from petal to petal

drops of ink  
all the words  
I didn't tell you

# *Christina Sng*

the things  
that tear at me  
thorny bramble

flowering thistles  
caring for one generation  
after another

# *David Read*

it's mine  
now. this mask from  
the 17th century

nearly five hundred years old  
cherry blossoms  
waiting to rot

talk of frogs!  
my son's pebble  
scares them off

up and down the coast  
the long line of  
mountain dwellers

# *Patrick Sweeney*

marsh grass with all windows rolled down

teeming:  
under the rainmaker's truck  
a sparrow hops in place

alone so long...  
the upper Amazon  
of her simple predicate

after Nietzsche letting my rope burns air

high school biology to see the lamb's eye moon

# *Robert Epstein*

Indian summer  
the treehouse  
makeover

Sunday morning  
more silent  
than an open coffin

birthday dinner  
she carefully makes  
sixty cuts

mom's cancer  
I can't stop shaking  
the snow globe

nothing in the pond a frog croaks

one-breath morning like no other before it

# *Scott Watson*

## *Santoka's Love*

In 1919, Santōka left Sakino, his wife, and Ken, his 8-year-old son, in Kumamoto and went to Tokyo. His used book shop, on Shimo Avenue in Kumamoto, had not prospered and he had to take to selling photos of famous actors and actresses on the streets. At times he would use whatever money he had gathered from sales to get drunk.

Some of his haiku compatriots were leaving for Tokyo to pursue studies or an occupation, and there was a better chance at finding steady work in the great metropolis. Things at home with Sakino were souring. Santōka left for the capital and left the book store for Sakino to continue operating.

His first employment was physical labor working for the Tokyo water works. He worked a sieve to sift sand to make cement.

One young man whom Santōka had befriended in Kumamoto was Kudo Yoshimi. Kudo was from Saiki in Oita Prefecture, also on Kyushu, and had come to Kumamoto to study at Kumamoto high school (now Kumamoto University) in preparation for medical studies. But Kudo also wrote and was interested in haiku poetry and literature in general. One day he found his way to Santōka's book store. A friendship began. It may be that the older (by 16 years) poet's influence was what turned him away from a career in medicine, which his father was pushing him into. Kudo entered Waseda University in Tokyo where he chose to study British literature.

Kudo Yoshimi had a younger sister named Chiyo. She went to Tokyo too, in part to cook and clean for her brother, but she also worked as a librarian. According to Kei Furukawa, whose book *山頭火の恋* [Santōka's Love] I rely on for many of the details in this chapter (and the account in Furukawa's book is found only there—not in Ōyama and not in Murakami), it was Chiyo who got Santōka a job as a librarian.

Those years working as a temporary employee for the Tokyo municipal government at the Hitotsubashi Public Library were likely the happiest years of his adult life. He had a steady income, he was not too exhausted—as he had been from working at the water works—to continue his literary work (not just poems: for example he wrote an essay comparing Chekov to Bashō).

During that time there were no tragedies in his life. No one died. No one committed suicide. The only regrettable event—depending on how one looks at it—was receiving divorce papers from Sakino's elder brother, along with the brother's fuming letter accusing Santōka of all sorts of inappropriate behavior and irresponsibilities. Looking only at the surface of things, none of those accusations can be denied. (Sakino herself seems not to have expressed complaints about her husband. According to various accounts, she was 良妻賢母, a good wife and wise mother. Supposedly she “understood” him and was tolerant of his unconventional ways.)

Another reason for his comparatively happy days during that time is his deepening friendship with the Kudos, Yoshimi and Chiyo. Like Santōka, Yoshimi liked haiku and liked drinking saké (though maybe not as much as Santōka). Chiyo was able engage Santōka, get him to open up. He felt comfortable with her.

We know that where Santōka lived in the Yushima area of Tokyo was not far from where the Kudos lived. We know he visited them. Was the relationship between Santōka and Chiyo (19 years apart) an elder brotherly sisterly thing, or was there a romance going on? She was in her early twenties. He was in his late thirties.

Late in 1922 Santōka suffered another nervous breakdown and had to quit his job at the library. This was the second major occurrence of what was medically termed neurasthenia. The first was as a university student at Waseda when his father stopped sending money for tuition and Santōka was forced to quit school.

In Murakami's biography, the reason for the 1922 breakdown is left as unknown with only a guess that it might have been brought on by a change of Santōka's boss at the library, with whom he apparently did not get along well.

The 1904 breakdown happened because his student life and chance for a stable future had been shut down because of his father's flagrant misuse of money. But, 18 years and various family losses, employment and marital troubles later, his second breakdown occurs because of a new boss? Hmmm.

We know that just before the breakdown Chiyo was hospitalized with pneumonia, which eventually became tuberculosis (tuberculosis pleurisy). From the time of the Meiji Restoration, TB in Japan had been increasing due to modernization, which produced crowded conditions in cities and unhealthy industrial working conditions. For many, because antibiotics did not yet exist, TB was a death sentence, depending on the course of the disease. Mori Ogai, though, the novelist and medical doctor, lived with TB from the time he was a young man until his death at age 60.

Yoshimi Kudo took his sister by train back to the family home in Oita Prefecture. Chiyo died there at age 24.

In 1923, about a month after the Great Kanto Disaster (7.9 earthquake followed by a fire that destroyed 60 per cent of Tokyo, Santōka returned to Kumamoto.

In 1924 there is the famous event in the Santōka narrative in which, drunk, he stands on tracks in front of an approaching streetcar. It was not a steaming locomotive, but a slow moving streetcar that was able to stop. Mysteriously, no police were summoned, and a concerned citizen took him not to a police station (as would normally be the course recommended by authorities in the case of unruly behavior) but to a Zen temple.

In 1925, by which time Santōka was just starting life as a Zen monk, when he heard of Chiyo's death. He "borrowed" money and went by train to Saiki, where he paid respects to her family and read sutra at Chiyo's memorial tablet in the family altar.

Four years later, in 1929, on one of his pilgrimages to sacred sites on Kyushu, he goes out of his way to revisit Saiki.

It impossible to find any reference to Chiyo in Santōka's diaries. That is because he burnt his diaries of those years. Why? By that time he knew that friends and members of Strata were saving his letters and postcards. He knew he was going to be around as a literary figure after he died. He wanted to protect her, keep her memory private. He wrote in a later diary that he had never loved a woman and had never been loved by a woman. He also tells us that his mother's suicide made any natural relationship with a woman impossible.

In fact there are precious few Santōka haiku concerned with anything that might be thought of as romantic love. Here is one:

*Tread on fallen leaves as if I'd seen my lover*

## *A Santōka Story*

Towards the end of 1935, Santōka journeyed north. On June 14th he arrived from Niigata by train at Tsuruoka, which is along the Japan Sea coast in Yamagata Prefecture. A younger member of the Sōun [Strata] haiku group, WADA Akitoshi, was Santōka's host. He put the elder poet up at a hot spring inn called みさご [Misago, Osprey]. That inn is still in business though ownership has changed, as has the name. It's name is now called 仙荘 [Sensō, Hermit Cottage, or, more romantically, Villa of the Immortals].

While there, Santōka was entertained at Wada's expense with geisha, lots of saké, and haute cuisine at the best dining places the resort town had to offer. Santōka was likely unaware that Wada, though from a high ranking samurai lineage, was struggling to get by. In order to host Santōka, who was by then a well-respected (though regarded as eccentric) poet in the literary world, Wada sold off collections of books and took on an extra shift, the night shift, at his job to save up enough money to offer おもてなし (omotenashi) hospitality to the revered guest. (I'm told that the English word "hospitality" does not have the complete sense of "omotenashi." It might be best to think of it as hospitality on steroids. Imagine an imperial visit and then tone it down a few notches.)

Santōka thoroughly indulged himself for nine days. On the last day, June 23rd, Santōka, borrowing a yukata (a light kimono worn in summer or used as a bathrobe) and a towel, left from Wada's home saying he was going off to try out a local sentō (public bathhouse). Instead he went to Tsuruoka Station and boarded a train to Sendai.

In Sendai he paid visits to members of the Strata group. One day he visited a friend who was an art teacher at Tohoku Gakuin junior high school. Santōka appeared at the school wearing that bathrobe. One evening locals organized a haiku event at which Santōka was the special guest. Other members were in semiformal attire. Either the traditional Japanese formal kimono or Western style suit and tie. Santōka wore the bathrobe. The locals were flabbergasted. "Scandalous!" The impression Santōka made was not a good one.

After Sendai he traveled on visiting some of the Bashō places until he got the northernmost spot Bashō visited, Hiraizumi. All the while with only a bathrobe to wear. That yukata is all he had to wear until he reached Eihei Temple, which was founded by Zen priest Dōgen (1200~1253), in Fukui Prefecture late in July. He'd left his priest robe, his kasa hat, his staff, and his "pouch" (rakusu 絡子) at Wada's house. From Fukui he sent Wada a postcard telling him to keep the kasa and staff but to please send the priest robe.

On a Zen plane, the only one thing to wear is in accord with having only one bowl, etc. It's just that the one thing didn't conform to conventional dress for those occasions.

Once again in his priest robe, Santōka went on to Osaka, where he came into some money, some of which he sent to Wada to help reimburse him for money Wada had spent playing the gracious host.

This story is one of many that illustrate that, though there is a popular image of Santōka as a freeloader, a fuller picture shows that he tried to repay those who had helped him.

# *David Oates*

two days  
away from the boat  
still feel it shift













