

“IMAGES OF IMAGES”

a paper by John Solt

presented for the panel “The Engagé Writer of the Nineties: Calls for
Post-Revolutionary Change?”

at the Fourth International Conference of the
International Society for the Study of European Ideas (ISSEI)

Graz, Austria

August 25, 1994

IMAGES OF IMAGES: JAPANESE POETRY DURING THE GULF WAR

John Solt¹

On January 25, 1991, when Saddam Hussein carried out his threat to ignite Kuwait's oil wells and pollute the Persian Gulf, the worldwide media displayed footage of oil-drenched cormorants. It was the "image of the week" and symbolized the ecological crisis, the stupidity of war, the destructive potential of mankind, and an emerging dark side to the realignment taking shape in the post-Cold War world. The one and only mass-media poetry magazine in Japan, Hato yo! ("Oh Dove!"), sent a photograph of one of the cormorants covered with sticky oil to forty-six poets representing twenty-nine countries and solicited poems from them.² The manuscripts were collected and published as a special issue while the war was still in progress.³ This

¹ All books cited were published in Tokyo. Japanese names are given in the customary order of surname first. All translations are by me. I would like to acknowledge my appreciation to Amherst College for a Faculty Research Award, 1994-1995, during which time this article was written.

² The editorial column does not mention specifically what kind of poem was requested, but we can infer by the contributions that it was about the bird, the crisis, or the war in general.

³ Hato yo! (Magajin hausu, May 1991). Hereafter all references to Hato yo! are to this issue.

The Gulf War was fought from January 17-April 6, 1991.

ambitious project could not have been accomplished without the fax machine, and it points to one exciting new direction for poetry and technology to dock in the 1990s. Combining the compression of the short or medium-length poem with the speed of the fax and contributions from around the globe would have been impossible for Hato yo! on this scale without the broad contacts of Shiraishi Kazuko and others. Shiraishi is a distinguished poet and exciting performer of her work and, not coincidentally, has been invited to read at every major international poetry festival over the last twenty years.

Shiraishi and others made telephone calls and sent faxes requesting manuscripts on behalf of the editorship.⁴ Within a matter of days works

⁴ “I was asked to help collect manuscripts from poets around the world. Tamura Satoko requested poets from South America. I asked poets from more than ten countries, including Gunter Kunert of Germany, Alexander Petrov of Yugoslavia, Rendra of Indonesia, Anthony Howell of England, and Mazisi Kunene of South Africa.” Shiraishi Kazuko, “Hato yo! no wangan shi tokushū ni sankā shita shijintachi no gawa kara kakkoku no shijin no daibensha to shite” (“As Proxy Explaining the Point of View of International Poets Contributing to the Hato yo! Special Issue Anthology of Gulf War Poems”), Gendaishi techō (“Notebook of Modern Poetry”; Shichōsha, July 1991), 119.

In a newspaper article on the anthology it states that “Tanikawa [Shuntarō] and others, using personal contacts, sent the request to international poets”; “Wangan sensō, bungeikai nimo ōkina hamon” (“The Gulf War Also Causes Big Ripples in the Arts’ World”), Asahi shimbun; yūkan (“Asahi newspaper; evening edition”), March 30, 1991, 18.

Hato yo! does not acknowledge the editorial contributions of Shiraishi, Tamura, and Tanikawa (Shiraishi, for example, is credited only as a poet and one of ten translators). The magazine seems to accord little prestige to guest editing. As if making up for the “oversight,” Rendra presciently credits Shiraishi within the lines of his poem: “I wrote this poem/ because my good friend Shirashi Kazuko asked me to/ and I saw/ under a mango tree/ a mother breastfeeding her daughter.” Hato yo!, 21.

arrived from poets representing a phenomenal range of countries (in order of appearance in the special issue): Iraq, Palestine, U.S.A., Israel, Germany, Soviet Union, Indonesia, Yugoslavia, South Africa, Mexico, England (two participants), France, Nepal, Malaysia, Scotland, Venezuela, Cuba, Bangladesh, Nicaragua, Spain, Argentina, Philippines, Bolivia, Taiwan, Columbia, Ecuador, Korea, India, and Japan (seventeen participants).⁵ The list shows how flexible a term “country” or “nation-state” is because two of them no longer exist (Soviet Union and Yugoslavia) and one had not yet been put on the map at the time (Palestine). The brief notes on contributors inform us that the participants are literati who have achieved a considerable amount of fame or notoriety or both in their homelands.

The special issue of Hato yo! also contains abundant graphic material—original drawings, full-page color and black and white photographs (depicting mostly Middle Eastern life), and some of the poems are printed in color with large typeface. These slick and expensive effects are rarely found in poetry magazines in Japan or anywhere else. Moreover, the ninety-page issue is devoted in its entirety to poetry, the above-mentioned graphics, and one short

⁵ Three of the twenty-eight foreign poets and four of the seventeen Japanese poets are women.

The seventeen Japanese poets appear in the following order: Tanikawa Shuntarō, Hashimoto Osamu, Shiraishi Kazuko, Nakae Toshio, Fujitomi Yasuo, Sasaki Mikio, Fukuma Kenji, Yamamoto Kazuko, Yoshida Fuminori, Arakawa Yōji, Nakamura Shin'ichirō, Tamura Ryūichi, Setouchi Jakuchō (comment), Nagase Kiyoko, Ei Rokusuke, Sasakura Akira, and Kisaka Ryō.

editorial statement; there are no essays, book reviews, or articles of any sort, and advertisements are tastefully restricted to the inside covers and back cover.

Reviewing the Hato yo! special issue, critic-poet Kitagawa Tōru sardonically notes:

In Hato yo! for the first time since World War Two a mass-media Japanese magazine devoted all its pages to poetry compositions, but for that to happen it was necessary for Japan to be involved as a nation in a war situation.⁶

The special issue of Hato yo!, went on sale a full month before the date on the cover, as is conventional for mass-media publications.⁷ It had a wide circulation and in poetry circles stirred a debate which was picked up by the daily newspapers about the powerlessness of poetry in the face of war.⁸

Limiting myself to poems by the Japanese contributors, I will attempt to gauge the range of responses to what amounted to a request to produce a

⁶ Kitagawa Tōru, "Sensōshi wo 'oishiku' kaku hōhō," ("How To Write 'Delicious' War Poetry") Gendaishi techō (July 1991) 133.

We can recall that no Japanese soldiers fought in the war, but the country paid a hefty sum towards the total enterprise. According to Foreign Ministry figures, Japan made a donation to the Gulf Peace Fund (a division of the Gulf Council Corporation) of ¥1,492,280,000,000 (roughly equivalent at the time to US\$11.4 billion). With a population of 122 million, this amounted to a Gulf War tax of \$93.44 per person. Japanese Foreign Ministry Information Service; telephone conversation of May 30, 1994.

⁷ The May issue appeared on the newsstands on April 3.

⁸ See the Bibliography.

political or philosophical statement using the vehicle of poetry.⁹ I will discuss some problematics of the project, analyze devices the poets employ to express their ideological perspectives, and introduce the controversy that ensued. As might be expected, everyone was pro-peace and anti-war, pro-ecology and against polluting cormorants. The poets received information about the waterbirds and the war from the same media as the readers, so there is no special knowledge involved, as poets have been known to claim from time to time.

The ideological responses fall within the following camps: 1) overtly siding with Iraq as the underdog (Arakawa, Setouchi); 2) favoring the U.S.A. indirectly by making fun of Saddam's holy war (Fujitomi); 3) blaming both sides (Sasakura); 4) refusing to take sides (Tanikawa); and 5) blaming the human species in general (Shiraishi, Tamura). Several poems express a combination of these positions. I do not think the poets' opinions differ much from those of the Japanese population at large. Therefore, rather than focusing exclusively on their political viewpoints, I will evaluate how they use poetry to frame their particular messages.

We can assume each of the Japanese contributors was well aware that poets during the Pacific War (1941-1945) were coerced by the government to write patriotic verse, and almost all of them complied. After the war, critics

⁹ One of the submissions is listed as a "comment."

held up the jingoist anthologies as evidence of the capitulation and shallow Westernization of the wartime poets, most of whom never recovered their reputations. During the Gulf War, the patriotic poetry from the previous war of a half-century before, while mostly ignored, still hovered in the background. The line between poetry and propaganda is blurry in any anthology of war poems, whether pro or con, and Hato yo! is no exception. Kitagawa discusses the anthology and, in passing, boldly lashes out at Gendaishi techō, the establishment poetry journal he is writing in:

The thought of a special issue on the Gulf War wouldn't occur to the established journals of the contemporary poetry world who have cut themselves off from the masses and cornered themselves into the limitlessly narrow market of poet = reader, because they still carry the trauma of the nightmare of Aikoku shishū ("Anthology of Patriotic Poems") and Tsuji shishū ("Anthology of Streetcorner Poems") and can't extricate themselves from that historical situation. Of course one can't say that the established journals' inability to act is a plus or minus, but in that darkness, to criticize Hato yo! is not to condone the others for not acting.¹⁰

After the poets received the request with the photograph, the initial dilemma facing them was whether or not to respond. We are not told how many poets refused to take part, but here was a chance to make a difference, a challenge to prove oneself relevant amidst the generally perceived devaluation

¹⁰ Kitagawa, 133.

Tsuji shishū (Kume Masao, ed., *Nihon Bungaku Hōkoku Kai*, 1943) in which 208 poets are represented, is the best known of the war anthologies.

of poetry in contemporary society.¹¹ Poets may have agreed to contribute because the payment was ample— about ten times the price for a manuscript in poetry trade journals— or because they did not want to be left out, or for other reasons.¹² The consideration of motivation arises not because there is anything intrinsically wrong with poets writing on a given topic— in Japan and China it has been fashionable for over a millenium— but because in the modern world there is a widely held perception that poets ordinarily do not compose “to order” but write what moves them and then somehow the works find their way into print. The editorial column in Hato yo! states, “In the midst of the Gulf War we sent an urgent request to poets in Japan, to poets in Baghdad undergoing bombardment, and to poets in Jerusalem, New York, and

¹¹ The editorial column does mention, “A famous American poet has refused to give any message. It seems that with the approval rating of the war exceeding 80% in the U.S.A., threats are being sent to anyone in opposition.” Miura Minoru, Hato yo!, 21.

The Japanese language does not specify singular or plural, so there could have been more than one poet. We are not told who refused to participate. Conceivably, there were reasons for hesitation other than fear of reprisal.

¹² According to Yoshida Fuminori, “I wrote a poem for Hato yo!. I received ten times the price I get for a poem in the trade journals, and I spent most of it right away on living expenses. Why did I write it? I wanted the money (this is a criminal confession!?), and that was my sole motive.” Yoshida also mentions that he was sure he was replacing someone who had refused to contribute, because he received the request only two days before the deadline. Yoshida Fuminori, “Wangan sensōshi wo meguru koto nado” (“Concerning the Gulf War Poetry, Etc.”), Gendaishi techō (July 1991), 169.

Moscow...”¹³ The phrase “an urgent request to poets” is a contradiction in terms, and indeed signifies a flaw embedded in the concept of the project. Put another way, can “good poetry” be inspired at will for a high price?

Other questions along these lines include: Should the poet endeavor to shed the perception of contemporary poetry as insular and impenetrable except to other poets, and purposely offer an “easy read” because Hato yo! is for mass circulation? If one were to make a special effort to be readily comprehensible, how would that be accomplished without sacrificing the “poetic”? This last question begs a larger one: what makes poetry “poetry” in the first place? For the sake of argument, I accept the circular definition that for the Hato yo! special issue poetry is produced by poets, and that each poet has the right to be considered a producer of poetry because he or she has credentials such as prior poetry publications.¹⁴

The poets had to take an emotional issue— environmental pollution or the war in general— received as an image over the television screen— and convey appropriate meaningfulness while demonstrating deftness of language and form. As to how many poets stayed with the sentimental topic of the

¹³ Hato yo!, 21.

¹⁴ Notes on contributors are provided for foreign poets and Japanese translators, but not for Japanese poets.

polluted cormorant, and how many took poetic license to veer into other territory, Kitagawa provides the following statistics:

Of the forty-six contributions, exactly half of them responded either directly or by allusion to the 'oil-drenched waterbird' or some image related to it (for example, 'dolphin,' 'mermaid,' or 'bird'), as did twelve of the seventeen Japanese poets (seventy-one percent). The Japanese poets responded more faithfully to the photographic image.¹⁵

We find clues from other sources as to why the Japanese responded more literally to the request— about two-to-one compared to non-Japanese participants. Yoshida Fuminori remarks,

Hato yo! required us to direct our attention to the "Persian Gulf cormorants drenched in oil." To be honest, I detested the demand. It was not to write about "the war" or just to express yourself freely about anything...¹⁶

On the other hand, Shiraishi Kazuko interpreted the request of Hato yo! more openendedly to be: "take the photograph of the oil-soaked cormorant as a symbol and write a poem..." so the responses by the international poets she contacted thus reflect her line of thinking.¹⁷

As might be expected, the Japanese poets reacted with a variety of writing styles to express their ideological positions. One obvious way to meet the challenge would be to use the poet's supposed gift of persuasion to evoke

¹⁵ Kitagawa, 134-135.

¹⁶ Yoshida Fuminori, Gendaishi techō (July 1991), 169.

¹⁷ (Emphasis added.) Shiraishi Kazuko, Gendaishi techō (July 1991), 119.

sympathy for the cormorants or empathy for the soldiers at war. Arakawa Yōji takes this approach in “Hata wa mitakunai” (“I Don’t Want to See Flags”), which opens:

A white flag is pulled out, but it’s not over. “Please don’t shoot,” says an Iraqi soldier begging for his life. Iraqi soldiers leap forward to be the first to reach food hurled at them. Those were really pathetic scenes. America is calling it “victory.”¹⁸

Arakawa uses realism to replay scenes that were often shown on television. One can detect a siding with the underdog in his choice of images: he contrasts the suffering of Iraqi individuals with the U.S.A. State Department announcement of “victory,” making the latter take on a callous, sinister tone. He also interpolates his own opinion, “Those were really pathetic scenes,” seemingly as a means to corral any dumb-witted reader who missed the point in the juxtaposition of the images themselves. This condescension to the reader blurs the line between poetry and the opinionated letters-to-the-editor section in a newspaper.¹⁹ Is there a middle ground between spelling out the alphabet and alienating all but a miniscule audience?

¹⁸ Arakawa Yōji, “Hata wa mitakunai,” Hato yo!, 40.

¹⁹ Fujii Sadakazu, in a published dialogue with Arakawa Shūsaku, praises the poet for the range of subjects covered in one of his books, stating, “your service to the reader is so thorough.” Arakawa Shūsaku and Fujii Sadakazu, “Shi no akuchuarichi towa nanika” (“What is the Actuality of Poetry?”), Gendaishi techō (July 1991), 71.

In the same dialogue, Arakawa out of the blue defends his Hato yo! piece: “I sent Hato yo! an 800-word essay, but others seemed to have sent poems, and so my essay got listed as a poem with the others.” *Ibid.*, 69.

Shiraishi Kazuko is one of the poets in the anthology who does not recycle the television image of the waterbird back to the readers in a realistic fashion but passes it through the funnel of her imagination.²⁰ For Hato yo! she contributed “Horobi e mukau marasonman” (“Marathon Man Faces Extinction”):

the only monument
adorning the shoreline
that faces the 21st century
is the black oil drenched
dead bird sculpture²¹

Shiraishi not only uses the medium of poetry to evoke the medium of sculpture— playfully making art within art— but performs this illusionism with the material of hard reality, a news image. By doing so, she reverses the process of conceptual art or abstract word imagery which usually conveys a sense of reality patching together fragments from the imagination.

The poem ends with an image that reinforces the nihilism of the “dead bird sculpture,” while extending it into a whimsical foreboding of the demise of the planet:

facing extinction what sunset
can the marathon man see?
holding the earth in his armpit

²⁰ To give an example of Shiraishi’s wit, after staying overnight in a New York church that had gone bankrupt and been converted to condominiums, she titled a poem “God Sells Own Body.”

²¹ Shiraishi Kazuko, “Horobi e mukau marasonman,” Hato yo!, 22.

where will he discard it?²²

Shiraishi's ominous message is packaged in ~~erisp~~^{ously} humor. Marathon man, the human species at its evolutionary endpoint, has conquered nature so completely that the nurturing environment has been turned into a bundle of garbage. In the line "holding the earth in his armpit" there is a rapidfire spin of perceptions: inversion is employed to shrink the earth and inflate marathon man, and then the focus shifts microcosmically to a precise body part, his armpit. The subtext undulates between several associational sets: the marathon man and mythical Atlas, the world carried in the armpit and the world hoisted on the shoulders, a sweaty armpit and the earth as garbage. The tone of her ideological position is underscored by her nonchalant wit.

Shiraishi's surrealism transcends journalistic discourse in that it would be unacceptable copy for a newspaper article, unlike the straightforward, realistic imagery used by many of the Hato yo! poets. Sasaki Mikio also displays a similar bent toward surrealism in a line from his poem: "a chirping tongue slides on a plate of spilled oil."²³

Fujitomi Yasuo, known for the dry humor in his verse, is an avid birdwatcher on the side. Other Hato yo! poets, including Tamura Ryūichi,²⁴

²² Ibid.

²³ Sasaki Mikio, "Saezuru" ("To Chirp"), Hato yo!, 32.

²⁴ A translation of Tamura's Hato yo! poem appears in the Appendix.

personify the cormorant to elicit empathy, but Fujitomi's identification with the waterbird is the most convincing. He places the thoughts of the dying animal in the first person to give them confessional intimacy, and then has the bird function as a distancing device to comment on the world of humans. The poem begins with an imagistic approach derived from the modernist tradition:

we swam inside the stripes of the wide waves
a fleet went far into the offing
on the deck
we saw boys with their shirts off
in the evening ebb tide
we collected shells hiding in the tideland²⁵

The subject matter is essentially tragic, but Fujitomi treats it with an undercurrent of irony. This becomes more evident towards the end of the poem when he overlaps the Japanese Buddhist belief that humans become gods at the moment of death with the Islamic fundamentalist belief that the faithful who die in a holy war go directly to heaven:

if we died we'd become gods
a human instigator said
but this body is already swollen
by the black resin of the oncoming waves
I'm just awaiting death
the humans who couldn't become gods
I can dimly see
waving white flags
and though I don't want to become a god
my breath cuts off²⁶

²⁵ Fujitomi Yasuo, "Sesshōkai" ("Killing Ocean"), Hato yo!, 30-31.

²⁶ Ibid.

Fujitomi's criticism of the war is effective because of its understatement, and because he is also poking fun at his own religious tradition. There is an implicit pro-U.S.A. stance in his tongue-in-cheek ruminations from inside the head of the dying cormorant, "the humans [Iraqis] who couldn't become gods/ I can dimly see/ waving white flags." The lines also serve as a chilling allusion to World War Two in which millions of Japanese died believing they were fighting a sacred war for a divine emperor.

Setouchi Jakuchō, novelist, television personality, and Buddhist nun, ends her piece by alluding to the bad karma generated by the war. Without pretension, she appropriately titles her direct statements a "Comment" rather than poetry.

I am against the point of view of America which thinks it can triumph with might in a war for justice. Those who have suffered from the violence on both sides will certainly not forget their grudges, and the roots of their evil actions will remain in the world even after they have long departed.²⁷

Ei Rokusuke also treats the theme of religion and war, but instead of eliciting resonances as Fujitomi had managed to, utters unembellished statements that are so commonsensical they ring flat:

the problem is war
and the powerlessness of religion to stop it
"oh god!"
while both sides pray to god
I wonder what god did

²⁷ Setouchi Jakuchō, "Komento," Hato yo!, 74.

if god is powerless
then humans are even more so²⁸

Ei spoofs the mass-media magazine's sugary name "Oh Dove!" by liberally sprinkling throughout his poem the outdated trope "oh" + noun + !": "oh bird!" "oh cameraman!" "oh dove!" "oh god!" "oh humans!"²⁹ The piece does have effective moments, as when he makes a clever pun on "oil":

"oh bird!"
oh bird lacquered in Persian Gulf oil
would being served in cooking oil have been preferable?³⁰

Ei then bites the hand that feeds him by conceptually interchanging the dying bird and the magazine's name, "Oh Dove!," implying that the latter is also responsible for the ecological crisis and the war:³¹

"Oh Dove!"
"Oh Dove" is also lacquered in oil
the print and illustrations are also oil
"Oh Dove!" throws off its oil and becomes revived paper
the bird lacquered in oil doesn't revive
that's all it's about³²

28 Ei Rokusuke, "Tori yo!" ("Oh Bird!"), Hato yo!, 82.

29 "The name "Oh Dove!" is based on Picasso's famous painting which symbolizes peace." Miura Minoru, Hato yo!, 21.

30 Ibid.

31 Kitagawa also makes this point. Kitagawa, 136

32 Ibid.

Ei's hint at one of the causes for the war— a fight for oil— shows his refusal to accept at face value the poetry assignment and the world siphoned through the television screen. He wants to penetrate the membrane of the illusionism and discover first-hand truths but is thwarted in his attempt. His grasp of the problematics of writing a poem based on television imagery for a mass-media magazine are worked to uneven effect by the seemingly parodical tone of his stale rhetoric:

I don't believe my eyes
I don't want to believe imagery
whenever I'm fooled
I come to disbelieve my eyes
I want sound with the information
"oh bird!"
couldn't you cry out sadly?
"oh camera!"
perhaps the image of the bird lacquered in oil
easily passed the censors
are you sure it wasn't exploited in the information war?³³

Tanikawa Shuntarō also deals with the ambiguity of his situation as poet commenting on the war, but his rhetoric is more eloquently couched in a confessional style that he has polished over the years. His persona gives the appearance of being humble and sincere. Tanikawa's poems are readily understandable and, consequently, have found their way even into elementary school textbooks. In spite of his easily digestible style, his works often pack an unexpected punch. The son of a former philosophy professor, Tanikawa's own

³³ Ibid.

philosophizing is carried nimbly within his confessional framework. His title, “Gaman” (“Patience”), is the cliché Japanese response to any complicated problem and prepares the reader for his neutral position.

with the t.v. as a side dish, I'm eating again today
no matter what'll happen between now and death
as usual eating and having it turn to shit³⁴

Already in the first line Tanikawa invokes the problematics of television imagery using the metaphor of food. With a few strokes, he places us in the intimacy of a home voyeuristically spying on his persona watching t.v. and eating. We also wonder about the span left to him on earth, and muse on the repetitive cycle of food turning to feces. His use of the word “kuso” (“shit”) ensures that this poem will not be used in elementary school textbooks. With the next line, “anyway, that’s all the desert soldiers are up to,” Tanikawa makes us switch perception gears retroactively. We realize that the philosophizing about the universal human predicament and the cyclicity of eating and defecating is superimposed on the war and applies to the soldiers confronting the possibility of a palpably immediate death. The gap between musing on eventual death from the safety of one’s home and the soldiers facing the possibility of a dog’s death in the battlefield is artfully evoked. Tanikawa adopts the kakekotoba (“pivot word”) technique of having the same word (or phrase) take on a different meaning according to what precedes and follows it.

³⁴ Tanikawa Shuntarō, “Jiman” (“Boast”) Hato yo!, 11.

The compression and shock value of kakekotoba has been a staple of Japanese poets for over one thousand years and is also a common feature of renga (“linked verse”), a form of group composition popular since the twelfth century, whose contemporary, multilingual version Tanikawa has occasionally participated in with foreign poets.

In the second stanza the protagonist displays neutrality towards both sides in the conflict, “they... shoot missiles/ enemies and allies base their launches in belief systems.” He then returns to his own situation, “because I don’t carry such beliefs/ and not knowing what to do, all I can be is patient.” The sincerity is appealing, although the choice of language is commonplace. In the next two stanzas we follow the protagonist as he continues the “reality check” on himself:

this is no answer, only an attitude
I don’t trust answers
especially clearcut ones are suspicious
the more complicated the problem
the more people search for easy answers

simple emotions and easy answers are packaged as a set
I’m not such an easy target as to buy them
and to talk like a bigshot at the barbershop is embarrassing³⁵

One can empathize with Tanikawa as he responds directly and clearly to the assignment, but is it “poetry”? If not, then at least the way he closes the piece— by repeating the first line, “with the t.v. as a side dish, I’m eating

³⁵ Ibid.

again today” — is clearly evocative. By bringing the focus back to the dinner table and the string of associations of waiting for death, eating and defecating, and reflecting on the battlefield soldiers, his words attain a symmetry of form while setting resonances in motion. The protagonist’s defining of his position in the longish middle section, no matter how correct or incorrect it may sound as ideology, is saved from banality of expression only by the reverberations of the metaphor of the television being consumed as a side dish.

Sasakura Akira’s contribution to the special issue is uninteresting as poetry, because he just makes direct statements of opinion, as we have seen in the pieces of Arakawa and Ei. Sasakura’s prose in lines is noteworthy for the history lesson it provides. Although it ends with “the cormorants drenched in oil standing on the shore/ condemn both sides,” there is an uneasy ideological ambivalence running through the work which seems to sum up what many Japanese felt during the Gulf War. Sasakura’s poem is titled “Hikaku” (“Comparison”), and in it he compares Japan of World War Two and Iraq of the Gulf War, “Tōjō who kept on fighting a losing cause/ and Saddam Hussein.”³⁶ He decries the fact that “Japan once heavily encroached on Asia/ after withdrawing from the League of Nations” and “at one time the Japanese army which had no chance/ to win the war thought it could/ and the greatest sign of that madness/ was the policy of devouring and pulverizing Asia.” And

³⁶ Sasakura Akira, “Hikaku” (“Comparison”), Hato yo!, 84

yet again, "Asia eventually was liberated/ but the harsh colonial policy/ left deep scars." Japan as the aggressor again is implied in his zoom in on the Gulf War: "Hussein won't budge a step/ against the powerful groups/ cutting to shreds the Arab world for its spoils." Sasakura also condemns present-day Japan when he writes, "...our country dyed in the logic and values of the West/ has lost its identity." He comes out strongly against imperialism, whether practiced by Japan or the U.S.A. A sense of nostalgia for old Japan, victimized during and right after the war, seems to lurk behind his words of empathy and respect for the underdog:

Hussein's madness is easy to censure
but it takes courage to look into the eyes
that bring about that madness³⁷

Sasakura's musings help explain the complexity of Japan's tangled situation as a nation 1) uninvolved in the bloodshed; 2) siding with the U.S.A. (because Japan also has access to Kuwaiti oil); and 3) sympathetic to the pathos of Iraq's hopeless stance, because Japan had been similarly one-pointed in its defiance during the Pacific War until U.S. military might crushed it. If a straightforward, albeit opinionated, history lecture in lines and stanzas can be poetry, then Sasakura's work qualifies. With stricter standards, however, one would say that the form of his utterances resembles poetry, but the way the content is arranged falls outside the genre— perhaps it is mere propaganda—

³⁷ Ibid.

unless one regards his ability to synthesize a large segment of public opinion as enough to warrant its consideration as poetry.

Fukuma Kenji's contribution, "Watashi wa kanashimanai" ("I Don't Get Sad") is perhaps the most evocative poem in the anthology. His refusal to become sad is in part an indictment of the purport behind the Hato yo! assignment to get sad or angry about the polluted cormorants and the war. Fukuma wears his rejection of sadness as a tough attitude much like Tanikawa's had done in proclaiming his "patience."

In the first of four stanzas, Fukuma sets up a contrast between ancient and modern times that is reinforced as the poem develops:

"during those ancient times
the whole world was an enigma
humans couldn't explain a thing
and couldn't understand anything"
from there to the next scene
like the first gestures
now with my own eyes and hands
I think I know you by your portrait³⁸

Using realism, including dialogue, the protagonist alludes to mythical time in which, he asserts, the mystery of human existence and the secrets of nature were inexplicable. With the line "from there to the next scene" the reader is transported from the ancient to the present when, by implication, everything is explicable. Later, the protagonist reinforces this view by stating,

³⁸ Fukuma Kenji, "Watashi wa kanashimanai," ("I Don't Get Sad"), Hato yo! 34-35.

“...around this town/ nothing is sacred or enigmatic.” Fukuma jiggles the reader’s imagination to construct (or reconstruct) an image of prehistoric time. One pattern repeats from stanza to stanza: first something is partially explained leading towards the expectation of more revelation. Then, suddenly, the line of thought breaks off enigmatically, a subtle reinforcement that the protagonist is also living in a mythical timeframe.

The second stanza starts with what appears to be an allusion to the television screen and ends with a further reference to the protagonist in ancient time:

“its hard
but if you smash it, it’ll break
but no matter how hard you smash it, it won’t cry”
what I can ascertain with my own eyes and hands
that’s what it’s about but
mirrors and numbers and clothes taken off
in this room that rejects sadness
I enter the tranquil time
of wood and stone³⁹

In the third stanza suspense is again created as if a mysterious truth were about to be imparted, this time in relation to the war, “friends strangely come to life with the war news/ and return to their fairytale worlds.” But then he changes the subject and weaves confusion:

“husbands and wives argue
sitting on cold floors”

³⁹ Ibid.

able to do nothing but play with dirty salt⁴⁰

Fukuma's distanced criticism of modern society may strike the reader as simply escapist, because he never clarifies his position. However, by filling the substance of his poem with evocative and even confusing imagery instead of straightforward opinionating, he creates resonances of possibilities of meaning. The jarring of logical perception is part and parcel of the poetic effect that pushes the reader back to "...the tranquil time/ of wood and stone."

Fukuma's poem ends with a literal rupture, "outside the dream all sounds of things cease," echoing the previous stanza-ending shifts away from logic. The sense of closure, however, is too neat and dilutes the enigmatic effect he has established.⁴¹ Overall, Fukuma's contrastive technique induces a synaptic disturbance that is refreshing. He manages the paradoxical feat of using words to explain about "explanation and enigma" while simultaneously remaining enigmatic. In a statement that calls into question the criterion upon which the special issue was based, Kitagawa, who has a high regard for Fukuma's poem, insists the poet hoodwinked Hato yo! and sent an unpublished poem from a series he had been writing about his friend, the poet Satō

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Fukuma is not unique in this regard; many of the Hato yo! poets seem to tack on easy endings.

Yasushi, who committed suicide.⁴² Fukuma does mention war directly in the poem, but Kitagawa's assertion is thought provoking in implying that poetry grounded in deep emotions and personal experience has a better chance to move the reader than verse based on television imagery from far away, no matter how horrific the latter may be.

Another unique approach to the problem of how to be engaged in the world and yet write poetry that is not propagandistic comes from outside the Hato yo! anthology and not during the Gulf War. Andō Kazuo in 1986 wrote a poem which in part reflects on the brutal regime of Idi Amin in Uganda. He employs a contrastive technique similar to what we have seen in Fukuma's poem, but the contours of his polarizations are more starkly drawn. Andō conjures up the horror of starving Africans by juxtaposing ordinary language with parenthetical statements alluding to sexual intimacy. The first section ends with "(ahhh honey I'm coming ooh I can't stop myself...)"

(3)

Idi Amin's
hometown
the village of Yei

now
chewing on pebbles
no other food around

in the city

⁴² Kitagawa, 136.

rotten human flesh
lined up

(I can't listen to your lies anymore you're disgusting
get your paws off my skin)

(4)

[...]
hugging a dangling
fully-wrinkled breast

women of Uganda's Kakwa tribe
collapse

(we furiously entwined our breathing that night ahh
a a ah you shook the inner depths of my flesh)⁴³

The intimacy of the private world of the bedroom versus the public horror of mass starvation is poignantly evoked by Andō's flip-flop between television images and taboo colloquialisms. The two worlds depicted are at polar opposites, urging the reader to think, but not suggesting what to think. In this sense, Andō's poem treats a topical issue but transcends simplistic propaganda.

The poem written about the Gulf War that caused the greatest reaction from critics was Fujii Sadakazu's "Amerika seifu wa kakuheiki wo shiyō suru" ("The American Government Will Use Nuclear Weapons") and was not

⁴³ Andō Kazuo, "Sude ni sore wa" ("Already, That Was"), GUI Vol. 8 No. 19 (1986); trans. slightly altered from GUI Vol. 9 No. 23 (1987).

published in Hato yo! but the little magazine Kazari chimaki ("Decorated Rice Sticks").⁴⁴ To follow his train of thought I quote the poem in full:

since the Gulf War has become reality
I haven't done any of my own work
I can't concentrate on my work
if I were a tanka poet, I'd compose a worrying poem about the war
a tanka magazine would put out a special issue
and it would all vividly come to life
but we useless and incompetent modern poets
think, "ah it's war," but are unable to find appropriately vivid expressions
now if it becomes like the Vietnam War
what will you do, poets?
I can predict that it won't get like the Vietnam War
I was a right-wing youth
but during the anti-security-treaty 60s I switched to the left
and demonstrated in front of the American Embassy
but when the Soviets held their first nuclear test
and the communists insisted it was a clean atom bomb
I demonstrated with only a few dozen people
in front of the Soviet Embassy
I also marched against the Vietnam War
and went to Hiroshima and Nagasaki
as a teacher I became absorbed in peace education
looking back, I guess I was a pacifist writer
with a child's heart I remember the Pacific War victimization
and now the Gulf War is treading the same direct path
as in the Pacific War
Kuwait is Okinawa
when the ground war begins and chemical weapons are used
the miserable corpses of American soldiers will roll over
that's what Hussein used against the Kurds
the Iraqi children are being killed one after another

⁴⁴ Fujii Sadakazu, "Amerika seifu wa kakuheiki wo shiyō suru," Kazari chimaki, Vol. 2 No. 24, April 1991, 46-49.

according to Southeast Asian textbooks
the atomic bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki ended the war
and revived peace in Asia
and of course most Americans are in agreement
it's said that Japan, the only country victimized by the bomb, has been
declaring its misery to the world
for 45 years making sure that nuclear weapons aren't reused in warfare
a few thousand nuclear tests have been conducted in the Pacific Ocean
small scale nuclear bombs, called "clean bombs," have been developed
to display their "harvest" to the world
to gain the Israeli government's consent
to weaken the will of victimized Japanese
or in regret for not having used them in Vietnam
for the many mothers and fathers of former American soldiers
and with the serious intent of restraining worldwide aggression by nuclear force
Bush has been thinking since he dispatched troops to Saudi in August 1990
that now is the time
to use nuclear weapons in Iraq (around Khafji)⁴⁵
I send my applause to Inoki and Doi⁴⁶
who jumped into that dangerous delta
while a useless and incompetent poet
spends 10,000 yen to weep in a poetry magazine⁴⁷
this prophecy will probably not turn out to be true
I've heard that when excellent forecasters make their predictions
the forecasted reality escapes
and nothing happens
because the prediction doesn't materialize

⁴⁵ According to the Iraqi Embassy in Tokyo, "Khafji is the oil-rich area in eastern Saudi Arabia that was held by Iraq during the Gulf War." (May 30, 1994.)

⁴⁶ Antonio Inoki and Doi Takako were two parliamentarians who went to Iraq and met with Saddam Hussein in a fruitless attempt to avert the Gulf War.

⁴⁷ About \$85 at the time. Contributors share publication expenses in poetry little magazines in Japan.

they are scorned by the world and abandoned
for me only right now is good enough
so I can't bear the thought of not being an excellent prophet
February 12, 1991 (midnight)

Fujii's narrative, using unadorned language, highlights the distraught state of mind of his protagonist who can't work and feels compelled to write this doomsday prophecy. The first-person account discloses his right-wing past and then conversion to the left, his anguish over Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Vietnam, and his current angst about what he sees as the upcoming use of nuclear weapons in Iraq. The poem's last word is "midnight," conveying another personal touch, that of the alienated man in the pitch-dark night. Contrasted with the intimate tone of the narrative is his highly political forecast. Fujii's protagonist takes the heroic pose of a prophet who wishes he could only cast off his burden as Seer. He squarely places his bet that doom is on the way in the form of a nuclear attack on Iraq, but then hedges it by hoping that he will be proved wrong. Either he is correct and his forecast will be recorded in the annals of modern Japanese poetry, or he is wrong and will be considered a good humanist for wishing to avert disaster.

The protagonist states, "Japan, the only country victimized by the bomb" and, adopting an autobiographical stance, "with a child's heart I remember the Pacific War victimization." He adds that America has developed small

nuclear warheads called “clean bombs” and plans to use them to show its might to the world and “to weaken the will of victimized Japanese.”

Identifying himself as a victim, he extends his sympathy to the Iraqis whom he imagines will undergo nuclear bombardment. Ironically, the “real politik” of the world that the protagonist claims insight into is much more complex than what he is envisioning as the mechanism that will lead to the deployment of nuclear weapons.

In retrospect, the prediction in Fujii’s poem proved to be utterly naive. His fixation on nuclear weapons is out of date, because the American military accomplished its purpose with “cluster bombs,” probably just as ghastly to die from as nuclear warheads but certainly more ecological. There were hardly any protests against the use of cluster bombs, whereas a worldwide outrage would have ensued had one small nuclear bomb been used. Fujii’s protagonist restricts his concern to nuclear weapons, a position that must have been taken into consideration by the U.S. military which artfully dodged the issue— and largescale criticism— with its brand-new technology. In this sense, those who swallowed the disinformation campaign about the upcoming use of nuclear weapons and built their agitation solely around that issue turned out to have been duped, while the U.S. military proved itself the superior “prophet,” able to confidently forecast the success of its own strategy.

A small storm of controversy brewed over the Hato yo! anthology, and especially Fujii's poem, largely centering on whether poetry is or is not powerless in times of war. Curiously, no one acknowledged the achievement of merging poetry and the fax machine, which was Hato yo!'s greatest innovation.

Several poets criticized the Japanese contributors individually for their works, but not one of the foreigners' poems was scrutinized. Moreover, the foreign works were never praised when brought up as a group; they were either ignored or criticized. For example, Shimizu Akira wrote:

All the poems by foreign and Japanese poets for Hato yo! are uninteresting. One of the reasons is that the poets don't take the problem as one of immediate concern to them. In short, it isn't a question of life and death to them. Poems like that are nothing but decadent.⁴⁸

Along similar lines, Seo Ikuo, in an article titled "Something I Wanted To Say," condemns the Japanese participants in Hato yo! along with Fujii Sadakazu's poem and then, without mentioning the foreign contributors, also directs strong criticism their way:

⁴⁸ Shimizu Akira, "Shijintachi no wangan sensō" ("The Poets' Gulf War"), Gendaishi techō, Sept. 1991, 127.

Mixed in with the [foreign] poets who are singing their soft-headed, anti-war messages along a strong and simplistic line are Japan's frontline poets, and I have no idea what they mean to say with their ambiguous expressions.⁴⁹

Seo's damned-if-you-do and damned-if-you-don't approach seems to suggest that he would have been satisfied only with pro-war poems or none at all.

Shiraishi responded with a defense of the foreign poets in which she calls Seo "ignorant" and "insolent" and points out that conditions outside Japan are often unsafe for writers.⁵⁰ She adds that many of the contributors had done time in jail for previous poems, and that she approached them cautiously, not wanting to jeopardize their situations. Shiraishi also explained what prompted her to partake in the project:

Since the war, there have been works by foreign poets translated into Japanese and published in journals for poetry specialists such as Eureka and Gendaishi techō, but almost all of them were previously published. This was probably the first time that a direct request for poems was sent to top-notch foreign poets. It's not the Olympics, but at the present time when poets around the world are thinking about the same issues and writing about them, even if the economic strength of Hato yo! is necessary to gather and publish those works, I think the endeavor is worthwhile.⁵¹

49 Seo Ikuo, "Hitokoto iitakunatta koto," Gendaishi techō, May 1991, 213.

50 Shiraishi Kazuko, Gendaishi techō, July 1991, 119-121.

51 Ibid, 119-120.

Seo ignored Shiraishi's comments but continued on a debate with Fujii Sadakazu about the "powerlessness" of poetry. Seo accused Fujii of self-loathing and no longer believing in the efficacy of the poetic Word.⁵² Seo also states,

I am against Fujii's understanding [of my position]. I have been consistent in defining poetry as simply "words with power," and in a book of criticism I wrote, The Possessors of the Script, I even titled a chapter "Towards the Power of Words."⁵³

Here Seo appears to have staked out a position against Fujii on the side of poetry's efficacy, but then he hastily muddies the waters by adding:

Of course I also can't go without mentioning the powerlessness of poetry or, more clearly stated, "the death of poetry"... [P]oetry can't bear the heaviness of its own incremental accumulation, and therefore heads toward death.⁵⁴

Fujii is just as ambiguous in his statements. In his second of three essays defending his poem, he explicitly articulates with a double negative that "I wouldn't say that poetry isn't powerless," but then backtracks in the same

⁵² Seo Ikuo, Gendaishi techō, May 1991, 213; "Chōyaku ni tsuite" ("About Leaping"), Gendaishi techō, July 1991, 28-38

⁵³ Ibid, July 1991, 30.

Seo's book is Moji shoyūsha tachi and the chapter "Kotoba no chikara he."

⁵⁴ Ibid, 30-31.

paragraph and declares, “In ‘America Will Use Nuclear Weapons’ I chose words carefully, and I deliberately did not use the word ‘powerless.’”⁵⁵

Most critics refused to take the debate seriously. Kawabata Takayuki opens his article titled “I Am from the Powerless Nerd Tribe [haha]” with his tongue firmly in cheek: “Fujii Sadakazu and Seo Ikuo are apparently carrying on a debate about something that seems like ‘anti-war poetry’”⁵⁶ Shimizu Tetsuo also followed suit:

In the current debate (?) between Seo Ikuo and Fujii Sadakazu, the phrase “powerlessness of poetry” has been repeatedly bantered about, but I have absolutely no clue what they mean by “powerless.” For example, is poetry powerless because it isn’t read by a great number of people? Or is poetry powerless because it cannot replace bread for starving people? Or, rather, is poetry powerless because the structure of the poetic consciousness itself in some innate way obstructs the human will to survive? Many other questions of this sort float to mind.⁵⁷

Shimizu was equally severe on Hato yo!:

I haven’t read the May special issue of Hato yo!, which is an anthology of poems on the Gulf War. It was sent to me and sat here in front of me, but I never got the urge to read it.

⁵⁵ Fujii Sadakazu, “Shi wa muryoku de aru ka” (“Is Poetry Powerless?”), Gendaishi techō, June 1991, 162.

⁵⁶ Kawabata Takayuki, “I am a muryoku na otakuzoku (warai),” Gendaishi techō, July 1991, 126.

⁵⁷ Shimizu Tetsuo, “Sensō mo mata muryoku de aru” (“War is Also Powerless”), Gendaishi techō, July 1991, 122.

My reason is simple. I can't stand it when for some journalistic event and at somebody's command poets huddle together and cast their words in a decided direction.⁵⁸

Arts critic Katō Norihiro made a blanket condemnation of Gulf War literary works.

The subject of war and war itself are altogether different... Unfortunately, the words of literati became one and the same as those of politicians. When this happens and we cannot find competent criticism in literary works themselves, then criticism has no choice but to take on the qualities of fiction.⁵⁹

Following Katō's logic, his own statement becomes fictitious.

Kitagawa Tōru provided the most graphic metaphors in his assessment of Japanese poetry written during the Gulf War:

If we can say that for Hato yo! our country's modern poets wrote delicious war poetry with a rich flavoring of apocalysm, then we can add that Fujii's poem has the wild natural taste of abundant country cooking which gives you the feeling a sudden burst of diarrhea is on its way.⁶⁰

As we can see by these brief examples, Hato yo! and Fujii's poem caused quite a stir in literary circles, mostly resentment against the journalistic appeal upon which the compositions were based. In the long run, perhaps the main

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Asahi shimbun; yūkan, March 30, 1991, 18

⁶⁰ Kitagawa Tōru, Gendaishi techō, July 1991, 137.

significance of Hato yo! having put together a special issue on reactions to the oil-soaked cormorants and the war in the Persian Gulf was that poets and readers alike were made to reflect on what they expect from the genre of poetry. The outrage of the critics demonstrates the resistance of many in the poetry community against those who would wish to tamper with poetry for journalistic purposes, and suggests that they prefer the genre to die a quiet and honorable death, if that be its course, than to debase its currency in search of mass appeal and profits. Never mind that the stakes may seem to be paltry; the Gulf War proved that in Japan of the 1990s poetry is still worth arguing about, even if it is hopelessly ineffective in stopping bloodshed.

SHIRAIISHI KAZUKO

MARATHON MAN FACES EXTINCTION

birds have stopped singing
mermaids have vanished
the only monument
adorning the shoreline
that faces the 21st century
is the black oil drenched
dead bird sculpture

earth time's sickness is grave
for the human race
beliefs and desires
justice and bargaining
all add up to the same
shameless conviction in power
already subjugates the world

the map of the mind of someone running for extinction
is utterly enormous
wrapping up earth, wrapping up the future
so that it's always available for instant extinction

facing extinction what sunset
can the marathon man see?
holding the earth in his armpit
where will he discard it?

TAMURA RYŪICHI

THE BURNED DESERT, AND THEN... THE CORMORANT SANG

I became blinded my tears
became heavy

I can't fly anymore my wings
turned to lead

fish and sky in the dead ocean
are only floating

because people are dumb
when they become blind
they don't realize it when their hearts turn to lead
they fake not noticing and can only raise screams of empty words

FUJITOMI YASUO

KILLING OCEAN

we swam inside the stripes of the wide waves
a fleet went far into the offing
on the deck
we saw boys with their shirts off
in the evening ebb tide
we collected shells hiding in the tideland

then one day
boats in the shape of "hateful gods" increased
on the shore
we heard the firing of mourning shots
instead of a steam whistle
we heard huge guns which shook the waves

after some time
one told a friend
"my body feels sticky"
then it happened to me, too
it was one morning all of a sudden
all of us
were dressed in sticky mourning clothes
I shook my head my eyes alone shone strangely
I tried to scream
but my soul was disembodied
I tried to fly but my wings were stuck
if we died we'd become gods
a human instigator said
but this body is already swollen
by the black resin of the oncoming waves
I'm just awaiting death
the humans who couldn't become gods
I can dimly see
waving white flags
and though I don't want to become a god
my breath cuts off

EI ROKUSUKE

OH BIRD!

“oh bird!”

oh bird lacquered in Persian Gulf oil
would being served in cooking oil have been preferable?

“Oh Dove!”

“Oh Dove!” is also lacquered in oil
the print and illustrations are also oil

“Oh Dove!” throws off its oil and becomes revived paper
the bird lacquered in oil doesn’t revive

that’s all it’s about

the problem is war

and the powerlessness of religion to stop it

“oh god!”

while both sides pray to god

I wonder what god did

if god is powerless

then humans are even more so

birds are only better than humans in that they can fly

“oh bird!”

why didn’t you fly?

“oh war!”

human intelligence and stupidity!

“oh camera!”

before you photographed the bird
wasn’t there something else to take?

consider us who are forced to read the end of the earth

by a photographer’s hobby

I don’t believe my eyes

I don’t want to believe imagery

whenever I’m fooled

I come to disbelieve my eyes

I want sound with the information

“oh bird!”

couldn’t you cry out sadly?

“oh camera!”

perhaps the image of the bird lacquered in oil

easily passed the censors

are you sure it wasn’t exploited in the information war?

“humans!”

god’s voice is praying to humans...

TANIKAWA SHUNTARŌ

PATIENCE

with the t.v. as a side dish, I'm eating again today
no matter what'll happen between now and death
as usual eating and having it turn to shit
anyway, that's all the desert soldiers are up to

in the meantime they also shoot missiles
enemies and allies base their launches in belief systems
because I don't carry such beliefs
and not knowing what to do, all I can be is patient

this is no answer, only an attitude
I don't trust answers
especially clearcut ones are suspicious
the more complicated the problem
the more people search for easy answers

simple emotions and easy answers are packaged as a set
I'm not such an easy target as to buy them
and to talk like a bigshot at the barbershop is embarrassing
so with the t.v. as a side dish, I'm eating again today

SASAKURA AKIRA

COMPARISON

an incomparable comparison races around in me
already Japan once heavily encroached on Asia
after withdrawing from the League of Nations
and now Iraq
faces mighty America
and over one hundred enemy countries
Tōjō who kept on fighting a losing cause
and Saddam Hussein

I'm sure the loser will be blamed for the mistakes
and the winner will be one hundred percent correct
and our country dyed in the logic and values of the West
has lost its identity
Asia eventually was liberated
but the harsh colonial policy
left deep scars

Hussein won't budge a step
against the powerful groups
cutting to shreds the Arab world for its spoils
at one time the Japanese army which had no chance
to win the war thought it could
and the greatest sign of that madness
was the policy of devouring and pulverizing Asia
Hussein's madness is easy to censure
but it takes courage to look into the eyes
that bring about that madness

I imagine that in this war
the Japanese have their way of praying
but has it been forgotten?
the cormorants drenched in oil standing on the shore
condemn both sides

FUKUMA KENJI

I DON'T GET SAD

“during those ancient times
the whole world was an enigma
humans couldn't explain a thing
and couldn't understand anything”
from there to the next scene
like the first gestures
now with my own eyes and hands
I think I know you by your portrait

“it's hard
but if you smash it, it'll break
but no matter how hard you smash it, it won't cry”
what I can ascertain with my own eyes and hands
that's what it's about but
mirrors and numbers and clothes taken off
in this room that rejects sadness
I enter the tranquil time
of wood and stone

your portrait was shown
around this town
nothing is sacred or enigmatic
friends strangely come to life with the war news
and return to their fairytale worlds
“husbands and wives argue
sitting on cold floors”
able to do nothing but play with dirty salt

well, “will the brightness
surrounding humans
widen no further?
your portrait
and next to that death
with the spirits of a new world
I'll also probably dance”
and then
outside the dream all sounds of things cease

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