

LITERARY & ARTISTIC SURREALISM MERGE: TORII SHŌZŌ'S *ALPHABET TRAP*

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I. *Introduction*

The poet, bookmaker, editor and bibliophile Torii Shōzō (1932-1994) wrote seven volumes of poetry and two books of prose. Five volumes of poetry were collected from the journal of influential avant-garde club VOU, headed by Kitasono Katué. They are: 火の装置 (*Hi no Sochi* — “The Fire’s Apparatus” [1959]), 黒い形而上学 (*Kuroi Keijijogaku* — “Black Metaphysics” [1961]), アルファベットの罠 (*Alphabetto no Wana* — “A Trap of Alphabet,” [1984]), 化石の海 (*Kaseki no Umi* — “The Fossilized Sea” [1985]), 背中の砂漠 (*Senaka no Sabaku* — “The Back’s Desert;” published in the year he died). The poems contained in “Wind Semiotics” 風の記号 (1992), were collected from Torii’s privately published journal, *Trap*.

By 1937 VOU had been publishing in Japanese such essays as Ezra Pound’s “How To Write” (#18, 1937), “Solution du Probleme” by Salvador Dali (#17, 1937), and an essay on poets and Pablo Picasso (#18) establishing the journal’s dedication to promoting the newest in the arts. In the latter half of the 1950s an influx of younger poets energized the club such as beat translator Suwa Yu, Shiraishi Kazuko, and Torii Shōzō. Torii’s first contribution was the essay 「新しい書物」 (“A New Volume”) and the poem 「青い nude」 (“Blue nude”) in *VOU* 56. Kitasono founded VOU Club with journal VOU in 1935 and eventually published one-hundred and sixty issues until 1978. The poems in *Alphabet Trap* were originally published in *VOU* from 1967 to 1973.

To begin, the characteristics of Torii’s poems contained in *Alphabet Trap* are viewed objectively. The people and animals, objects, and physical ailments in these poems are introduced to establish the field for more interpretive readings. Then from the viewpoint of the Russian formalist term *ostranenie* (to “make strange”), his particular techniques in creating surrealist poems are highlighted. In the next section, three poems, accompanied with commentary after each, are presented in English translation. Finally, in the appendix, another facet of this poet’s creative output — his work as a bookmaker and editor — is briefly introduced in text and photos. Considered cumulatively: the unpredictable, fresh imagery of Torii’s poetry, the books he produced in a modernist style and the journal which he edited, he is a significant contributor to “Yaponesian” avant-garde. Torii utilized techniques to compose poems bordering on artistic surrealist works. The books he produced are artworks in their own right. By forming his own poetic idiom largely adopting artistic surrealism, Torii dismantled divisions of genre within the arts.

II. *Establishing the Poems' Foundations*

The heading to each poem in *Alphabet Trap* contains a letter of the alphabet, written in roman letters with a title — for example “(e) Holy Crime” 「聖犯罪」. The bulk of poems consist of 14 to 15 lines, while the shortest length of poems is 10 lines. Each poem is composed of between three and six stanzas ranging between one and seven lines.

In each work, the letter stands as abbreviations for people. (One critic who knew Torii Shōzō and is familiar with VOU Club remarked in conversation that at least a few of the characters in the poems resemble actual people.) Usually both wife and husband (only once mentioned together) are the *donné* — as in Mr. and Mrs. A. Exceptions are General D, Countess O (オ伯爵夫人), former General P (パイ元將軍), Lady Q (女医キウ夫人), Mr. Salesman S, Mademoiselle V (these last two written in *katakana*), Your Excellency Madame X (エクス閣下夫人) and “aged thespian” Z (老優ゼット氏). The “guest” characters who populate these works include an “imprisoned thin man” (囚われの細い男) in letter “d,” artists such as the Belgian Paul Delvaux (printed in roman letters) appear in letter “e,” a Chubby Cardinal, a Catholic priest, a devoted deacon, an eternal woman, private detectives (including the Japanese comic book hero Mike Hama), police officers, “thin long naked children” and blue lovers. Beings of a mystical nature include apparitions and ghosts, Dracula, dead bodies, and spirits. An example of personification indicative of Torii’s wit is found in letter “a” — “the night” which “shows its rising backside” (夜は背中をみせて立ちあがる).

Other beings — the animals and fish — often appear in humorous guises. While the objects in these poems are usually commonplace, the non-human beings here are often exotic, made even stranger by the adjectives used to describe them. So in “(b) Ampitheatre Site” 「円型劇場跡」 the “goateed *oshiropinno*” (顎ひげのあるオオシロピンノは) makes its unique appearance. (*Oshiropinno* is the Japanese expression for “*Prinnotheres sinensis* Shen,” a crab which dwells in clams.) A “white summer sphinx” (白い夏のスフィンクス) is introduced and promptly killed in the last line of “d.” Too add to this list, in the final line of “(g) Ero Redux” 「回春」, Mr. G is noted to be “a melancholic snake of primary colors” (憂鬱な原色の蛇である). Fish are sometimes taken out of their common context for hilarious effect. The poem “(k) Final Flight,” contains a scene where “the seashell street bubbles with tropical fish” (貝殻の街は熱帯魚であわだち) while “inside soaked gloves, blue fish are jumping” in “(n) Sun Stroke.” “(q) The Vampires” (吸血鬼) portrays a dream scene replete with sunflowers followed by the description of place as being “in Hieronmus Bosch’s deep air” where “swimming giant fighting fish flock” (泳ぐ巨大な闘魚鶴の群れ). As mysterious as the beings above may seem, the contents are counter-balanced by the commonplace.

To offer a few of the objects present in these poems, there are eight references to facial hair, four mentions of shadows, while deserts are sometimes the locale. Often guns appear, sometimes reporting, but characteristic of Torii’s irony, they may be duds. The larger man-made buildings and adornments include gates, churches and temples, bells, crosses, chairs, clocks, windows, toilets, ladders and dinner tables. Such machines include patrol cars, jets, and ambulances are mentioned, while human accessories include handbags, swimsuits, spectacles, and hats.

Physical ailments and fetish abound in *Alphabet Trap*. Diarrhea discomforts in (c), and to contrast, constipation in (w). Phlegm is problematic in (b) while insomnia and tootaches

create pain in (k). Mrs M's skin is "burnable," and Mrs. N drowns. Not only does Count O have Heine Meidin disease but "refined sadism" as well. Mr. Q, or Dracula, has Leukemia. Your Excellency Madame X's cranium itches. Odd behaviors include the belly button fetish of Mrs. A, Mr. K is involved in a panty auction, former General P is "in a dangerous spaced-out state" (危険な放心状態になっている) and a "vivacious rapist" in "(r) Monarchy Kingdom" makes an illusionary appearance. Mention of rape also occurs in letters e and f. Teeth are discarded, madness is mentioned by name, and treachery is committed in letter d.

III. *Ostranenie and Surrealist Techniques in Alphabet Trap*

Ostranenie — literally 'making strange' — accommodates the reader by offering a perspective to interpret Torii's poetry. Victor Shklovsky (1893-1984) was a leader of a group of scholars taking part in the Moscow Linguistic Circle, the Opayaz group. His critical essay "Art as Technique" was a crucial document in the field of linguistic theory of Russian Formalism. Several ideas Shklovsky delineates are relevant towards reading Torii's poetry.

Shklovsky argues that "perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic. Thus...all our habits retreat into the area of the unconsciously automatic." Further, he posits that if people live their lives unconsciously, "then such lives are as if they had never been." The "technique of art," stresses the process of creation. Art endeavors, Shklovsky continues, to defamiliarize objects, "to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged." Shklovsky, relevant to the poetics of Torii Shōzō, offers this observation (the italicized section attributed to the author): "An image...is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object — *it creates a vision of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it.*" Torii's poems are filled with visions which defy attempts to be rationalized but nonetheless are interpretable. While maintaining cognizance of Shklovsky's theories, analysis of the poet's particular techniques in composing visually-compelling works is suggested. It should be stated that Torii most likely did not write with a particular reference to *ostranenie* in mind.

The methods Torii used to disorient the reader are numerous — even considering the poems contained only in *Alphabet Trap*. Layering of negative elements, utilizing ambiguity and contradiction are effective, general tools to dislodge logic. The method of substitution in a variety of manners is a versatile specific method: things are given new substances, uncharacteristic actions (sometimes personified), or events occur in alien surroundings.

A common surrealist technique, and a poetic manner in general, is the synthesis of positive and negative forces. Torii surpasses this strategy by joining two or more negative forces together. More than one poetic method may fused into the same image or in the same stanzas for the purpose of stupefaction. Negativity and personification work in tandem in "New World" (f). In the second to last stanza, a tercet, the morning sun is "nimble" and "rejects" the (angelic) "shadow" of Mr. F who threw away his front teeth. Mr. F has twofold worries, some of his teeth are gone and the sun in some manner has rejected him.

To continue with another illustration of plural negativity, "ascetic Mr. H" leans on a "hard sofa." The scene here illustrates a comic character, pretentiously posturing, who disavows pleasures in life. The tension of the brittle body next to the hard sofa makes it seem as if the sofa could damage him. Earlier in the same poem, Mr. H's cat has an "allergic reaction

to nettles / which a swarm of ants is eating” (気ままな仔猫が蕁麻疹になって / 蟻ばかり食べています). The meeting between the nettles and the ants is viscerally repulsive. Lautréamont’s meeting of an umbrella and a sewing machine on an operating table seems tame compared to the above exchange between a cat, nettles and ants. This particular poetic method of multiplying negative actions, elements and scenes, intensifies the psychological dramas occurring in these works. Heightening of tension allows the reader to further immerse herself into the poem. Though these non-positive elements amount to nihilist visions, they succeed in impressing the reader with the freshness of language — their unpredictability. Ambiguity leaves interpretation open; widening the field.

Mrs. J, who is introduced at the ending couplet either has footwear which spout blood or has an active imagination: “Mrs. J’s white / boots — a fountain of blood brilliantly sparkling” (ジェイ夫人の白い / ブーツは血の噴水で華やかに光っている). Since the lines are joined in a couplet, one may assume that the two items, the boots and blood are related, but the language does not make that direct association. By leaving the relation between these images indefinite, the reader has more freedom in deciding whether the images are conjoined. A blatant example of ambiguity for which the author should have been arrested for is in “(r) Monarchy Kingdom.” The first stanza illustrates a plastic town where wind blows signs announcing “today we’re closed.” The scene of the first line of the next stanza, a tercet, takes place at a gun shop’s waiting room on the side of an alley next to a bank. Then, “a vivacious rapist’s / crime which isn’t a crime...” (犯罪でない犯罪) begins. Once again the lack of closure begs for the participation of the reader to re-speculate the poem’s contents. The most significant use of contradiction is in the use of titles and how the titles relate to the following poem. One obvious example is “(t) Disease Paradise.” In spite of the title, “Valentine’s Day” (u), Mrs. U faints in an ambulance and dies as indicated by Mr. U who erotically and ironically writes condolences on a “pear’s behind.”

The reader first encounters supplanted matter in unlikely subjects or candidates in poem “b”: “the paper stairway” leads to a veranda where “surplus pigment of red pepper” lie (ベランダに続く紙の階段は / 色素過剰の唐辛子で). The reader’s rational footing already is in danger of becoming dislodged. Another example, the “cardboard steamship” (c), is further compounded by being out of place on a “desolated red desert.” (Torii also applies purposeful redundancy to enforce descriptions: a desert, already commonly perceived as isolated, is made redundant by the adjective “desolate.”) Mrs. H is nervous about her “cellophane swimsuit,” Mr. K’s beard of “photographic paper gets wet” (ケイ氏のやわらかい印画紙 / の口髭をぬらした), Mr. L leaves home into the “concretish night,” while Mrs. M is hugged by an “elastic plant’s hands.” A section of the setting to “Monarchy Kingdom (r)” is a “plastic town.” Fashioning objects out of impractical material results in an atmosphere of artificiality and absurdity. This technique more positively adds a sense of novelty, of newness of things.

The application of uncharacteristic actions to objects is another way the poet jolts the reader out of everyday consciousness, sometimes by injecting slapstick in the scenes. Mrs. B dips her “dry skin” in a “hot rug.” In letter “c,” sand begins “migration.” The artist Paul Delvaux has his hair raped in “Holy Crime” (e). The final image in the last stanza of this poem, describes a marble emperor which “smashes a hard penis.” This is an example of “enhanced” personification, since the emperor, made of rock, represents a human and is further attributed human action. René Magritte makes a cameo appearance in which his “mustache with a torso attached plunder a wet hat” (ルネ・マグリットの髭のあるトルソオ

が / 濡れた帽子を掠奪する), while Mr. H “leans.” This last image inserts a moving collage within the poem.

The impression of “soft wind” melting inside the head of Mr. J exhibits tactile synesthesia by attributing wind with combustibility. Melting wind forms an indelible impression pleasantly in the reader’s mind. “R” closes with “pretenders” who “sand sift the sun.” Personification occurs when brick submarines are assigned limbs in “f,” a pumpkin head spouts sweat in “p” (カボチャの頭が汗を噴いて身構える) and in “u, Valentine’s Day,” not only does the night have a “handle,” but the night’s handle is “hot obscene hair” (夜は把手は熱いみだらな毛). This transcending of metaphor to concreteness is a poetic device which gives objects multi-dimensionality to further disassociate them from their inherited roles.

Attributing objects with startling descriptions in addition to injecting objects in awkward environments are used to enhance the reader’s defamiliarization process. In poem “a” the reader finds a “bearded cone” (髭のある円錐) which is dedicated to a “pleasure blade” (快楽の刃). An insect is given a characteristic of a winged vertebrate when a “bearded, silver bookworm” pecks at Mr. T’s “dried eyeballs” (その乾いた眼球を / 髭のある銀いろの魚が啄んでいる). The alien atmosphere of “t” is unsettling: “from winter’s smooth pavement / thin long naked children stream” (冬のなめらかな舗道を / 細ながい裸の子供たちが流されていく). Locations are made exotic by objects: somehow a “lonely” crane has lost its way to find itself at a desert hill in “f” and in a conch shell there is a spiral staircase as described in “(i) Holy Land.” In the first three examples given above, facial hair graces things and living beings affording them with style. The poet indirectly parodies the lives of humans by associating these subjects with irrational human behavior.

Note on the translations: I am indebted to Miura Reiichi sensei for reading these versions and offering illuminating comments. Any mistakes in translation are mine.

IV. *THREE POEMS from ALPHABET TRAP and COMMENTARY*

(g) *ero redux*

the striped vest well suits Mr. G
while suntanning
his over-stretched mustache bakes

at the window, a headless statue faces
blue clouds, a conversation of silence exchanges, Spring
is a madness-filled season

the village's outskirts suspension bridge is frozen
before long, night's wedge is driven

in an old-fashioned locket's fire letter
a sloped breeze transports the past
noticing not, Mrs. G's
breasts of roses drive her mad

the Mr. G who reads Plato
is a melancholic snake of primary colors

(g) *ero redux*

The first stanza of "Ero Redux" 「回春」 introduces a dandy incongruously wearing a striped vest while sun-bathing and mustache-baking. Though not explicitly evocative of any particular painting, the atmosphere is of René Magritte hallucinating with Salvador Dali. One of Magritte's methods in constructing paintings was to attribute fire to unlikely material candidates: for example, a burning trombone in a room next to two burnable materials (a newspaper and chair) in "The Ladder of Fire" (1934). This trombone reincarnates in different surroundings in "Le Domaine Enchanté VI" (1951-1953). Now that the reader has been suitably dislodged out of her every day consciousness into a new world, she is sufficiently prepared to view a headless statue which faces *blue* clouds (窓ぎわの首のない石像が／青い雲に向って). The pun of a "headless" statue which "faces" may lead one to imagine that the ghost of the face of the decapitated statue still looks ahead even though its visage is transparent. This second stanza is evocative of Giorgio de Chirico's desolated, dream-like landscapes of architecture, and statues, for example his "Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon" (1915). Comparable to Magritte too is Torii's incorporating reversal of lighting. Consider

Magritte's famous painting "The Dominion of Light" (1961) where the sky is alight even though the scene of the trees and house below is hauntingly dark. Torii's more subtle "blue clouds" is provocative and can easily be misread as typical white clouds since readers interpret images unconsciously, ingrained through habit. The next couplet relates an unnamed, frozen bridge even though it is Spring time, and the previous line of a "madness-filled season" (春／は狂気にみちた季節) exudes intensity of heat. Most notably the couplet contains the compelling action of the night with its "wedge driven" (夜の楔が打ち込まれる). This example of animism, in which nature is given enlivened, powerful spirit is combined with personification — man-made wedges. At the same time, this anthropomorphism is made negative since the verb "to drive" connotes a violent, hammer-like thrust — of a masculine nature — into the madness of the feminine Spring. In spite of the negative nuance of this description of night, the imaginative scene affords a positive effect due to the freshness of the kinetic imagery.

The next stanza shows Torii's technique of inversion: how can there be a "fire letter" (火の手紙) contained in a locket, which ordinarily is too small of an object to hold documents? The past flies out of the locket (過去へ運んで), perhaps due to the cue of night's wedge being driven, triggering the succeeding events. Since the letter is hot, possibly it is a love letter from a past "flame" — a lover. Thus, symbolically, the complicated description of the return of the past may be another method of expressing a flash back of an erotic reminiscence. Yet Mrs. G is not conscious of the force of the past blowing into the present and suffers from its effects. Without recourse to simile or metaphor, literally, her "breasts of roses drive her mad" (薔薇の乳房を狂わせる). Compare this image to Magritte's "The Great War" (1964) in which the face of an elegant, white-clad woman posing with a parasol is blotted out by a bouquet of purple flowers. The unexpected surprise of the flowers superimposed on the woman's face is horrifying since the face underneath is likely to be more beautiful than the misplaced flowers. The face of Mrs. G, who is suffering from amorous delirium, must be painful-looking as her breast of roses make her insane. Imagining the roses bursting from her breast is horrifying, the reader now picturing this scene as if viewing a work of art. Nonchalantly, the intellectual Mr. G is described as a fundamentally-colored snake. The image is obviously phallic, but the philosophies of Plato do not commonly inspire passion or lust. The implication is that since he is only a snake of primary colors (ジイ氏は／... 原色の蛇である), rather than a rainbow-colored snake implies his sexual abilities is limited, perhaps solely masturbatory. Thus Mrs. G is made aroused through neglect because her husband is complacent by being more interested in sun-tanning and reading Plato than in engaging in the sex act with her. The husband's blasé attitude may actually be attributed to impotency since the statue, interpretable as a phallic emblem too, is headless, the clouds unlike the color of spermatozoa.

If this were a morality play, the message would be uncharacteristic of the genre: abstention from physical love may result in mental imbalance. Admittedly this is a limited interpretation. To briefly describe each stanza may afford a further appreciation of "(g) Ero Redux": Stanza one — the comic and absurd Mr. G, Stanza two — enigmatic (headless statue facing; silent conversation; blue clouds), Stanza three — anthropomorphic (night's wedge), Stanza four — mysterious (fire letter), supernatural (transport of the past), madness; Stanza five — complacent, blandly psychedelic (snake of primary colors). Forces are working between the lines creating psychological dramas. The slapstick nature of the burning mustache is Torii's first invitation to join in the poet's world; the first degree of separation from

commonplace reality. The headless, blind statue has a nonverbal conversation. The second removal from the common is this negative scenery and the third degree of separation is shown in the reversal of blue clouds. Conundrum then further complicates reader's eternalization process in the guise of the fire letter.

(n) sun stroke

aiming at the lead stars above the striped shirt
Mr. N's doing nothing

the beautiful bottom of Mrs. N
the bosomed trembling diamonds are
color-faded scandal drops
inside soaked gloves blue fish are jumping

at a hole-covered night
at the rhythmical dream's far side of Mr. N — wearing makeup
why is a pistol chirping?

bathing in shrill light, Mrs. N drowns

(n) sun stroke

The opening couplet of this poem 「日射病」, followed by the quatrain, with the exception of the final line, exude a languid, bourgeois aura. Mr. N is “killing time” (the idiom especially appropriate here) and Mrs. N is a finely figured, moneyed woman. The diamonds she is wearing — described as “scandal drops” (スキャンダルの滴) — suggest that either her husband is a politician who had misappropriated funds or that the wife had an adulterous affair. The “lead stars” (鉛の星) are most likely a part of the wife's jewelry attire. The enjambment of the second and third lines of this quatrain stress the reality of “trembling diamonds” (ゆれるダイヤモンド) which acquire a separate existence as “scandal drops.” Notice that the bosom is not necessarily shaking but rather the diamonds are, implying that the diamonds are nervous or would rather not be adorning Mrs. N's breast. By turning the concrete diamonds into morally offensive behavior (scandalous), which is attributed with substance (drops), the object becomes transformed into a new identity separate from its original nature.

The reader is lulled into a brooding, opulent mood only to be surprised by the blue fish jumping in the exceptional locale — wet gloves (ぬれた手袋の中で青い魚がはねている). Again the method of situating common objects in especial environs is common surrealist strategy, used to great degree by the author of these poems. This image of the fish jumping

mid-way through the poem performs as comic relief contrasting to the inactivity of the persons in the previous lines. One may interpret this fake catharsis in at least two ways: as a glimpse into a world in which there is no boredom but only excitement — a contrast to the waste of human potential and the struggle to attain material wealth — or as a foreshadowing of the psychological tension which ensues. The effeminate Mr. N, wearing makeup, dreams. The general location of the action happening in the tercet is at the “far side” of the dream (夢の かなたで) implying that there are many more visions occurring in the same reverie. Affording the pistol with a bird-like quality — chirping — (ピストルが鳴る) leads one to suspect that the woodpecker-gun pecked holes into the night (穴だらけの夜). Yet it is just a gun (with bird-like qualities) recalling the aiming action in the first couplet.

To hypothesize, on a subconscious level in the vision, Mr. N has killed his wife by shooting holes into her night, or actual nature, resulting in a flood of light which kills her — the title of this poem. Mr. N has pierced through Mrs. N's subterfuge or infiltrated her dream world by “shedding light” — thereby revealing her true materialistic, shallow nature. “Shrill light” is one of the few direct examples of synesthesia found in *Alphabet Trap* enhancing the image of the gun chirping in a hole-filled night with macabre background noise. The scenes made vivid in “Sun Stroke” are evocative of the mood of Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali's movie *Un Chien Andalou* (1929). Also comparable is Magritte's “The Great Family” which illustrates a huge bird, likely a seagull, wings outspread and superimposed on the backdrop of green-grayish evening clouds; below ocean waves roll. The bird's whole body however is constituted not by feathers but by clouds and sky instead. In this stanza of Torii's poem too are a bird and a night scene where the lighting in nature is transposed. The techniques are similar but the choices of materials and resultant images distinct. Imagining the visual and aural signs in the reader's consciousness, who is witnessing cinematic, kinetic poetry.

(v) vision day

through the glass grated window, the moon
 on Mademoiselle V's fervent back
 stamps transparent traces

surrounded within an unseen box
 a fully sound-proofed room

*just a little more
 harder*

the blond hair of wild animals
 its sealed heart is mumbling
 heavy breasts mountain-ridged shake

from Mademoiselle V's black
 glove, a diamond whip which splashes out
 is a flash of death

at that time
 a phantom sea boils, its mask off

(v) vision day

Conundrum abounds in “Vision Day” 「幻日」. Firstly, the “glass grated window” (ガラス格子の窓) is made of a clear, breakable material, making the grating impractical. The reader is likely to accept the plausibility of the moon being stamped on Mademoiselle V's fervent back (とおして月が / マドゥモアゼル・ヴィの燃える背中) on a poetic leap of faith — the image is supposed to be outlandish. To evoke the mysterious, Magritte too substitutes natural scenes within bodies in his artwork. Both “The King's Museum” (1966) and “The Happy Donor” (1966) consist of stark backdrops upon which a bowler hat-topped outline of a man is superimposed. Within the outlines of the men are natural scenes; in one, yellowish stars and a moon shine. Substituting natural scenes within persons in unpredictable ways is a similarity both Torii and Magritte share in dis-associating common perceptions of objects by injecting new refreshed perceptions.

In the last line of the opening tercet, the reader is challenged to visualize the impossible: “transparent traces” (透明な痕跡). By randomly substituting “jellyfish” for “traces” for example, at least the reader has an actual object to visually grasp. By making the object abstract, the reader is left to grope for a thread of matter. The traces may not necessarily be traces of a physical matter, but spiritual, magical, or other intangible material. This line in particular is exemplary of Torii's ability to transcend language in order to effect in the reader

worlds of possibilities. Enigmatic too is the “unseen box” (見えない容器) which contains the sound-proof room, an example of inversion (a larger item inside a commonly considered smaller one) where copulation occurs as indicated by the speech, presumably, of Mademoiselle V. Since the room is protected against noise, the reader imagines that the sounds emanating from Ms. V are loud and since wild animals are made part of the ensemble of beings in this poem — bestial. Ms. V may not be copulating with a human partner since no other people are mentioned here. The reader may imagine that an aspect of the “transparent traces” has taken a physical form and enacted as a partner, perhaps a spirit, in coitus. My personal interpretation of “sealed heart” is that it is a tattoo embedded in bodily hair, hence the speaker writes of the “blond hair of animals” (金髪の野獣). The next line defies any sense of narrative line by introducing a non sequitur. The subject matter of “heavy breasts” which are “mountain-ridged” has no reference within “Vision Day” unless the reader generalizes by retracing earlier in the poem to an element in nature — the moon — or the mysterious “traces” in the first tercet. A reversal of substitution occurs in this line. First, the moon, a part of nature, was sealed onto a woman’s body; now part of a woman’s body — breasts — are seen mountain-ridge aligned, thus reversing the process of natural human element. There are several instances of this type of replacement in Magritte’s artwork where eagles become mountain ridges, birds sprout out the earth as plants, or trees are reassigned noses (“Alice in Wonderland,” 1952). The horrifying “diamond whip which splashes out” is a sudden flash of death (ダイヤモンドの鞭は／一閃の死). Fashioning death, an abstract noun, into concrete action intensifies the awe-inspiring nature of the image.

To review, “(g) Ero Redux,” may be interpreted as the negative ramifications of sexual abstinence and “(n) Sun Stroke,” the danger of inactivity and non-communication. It is tempting to view this collection as a morality play where solely vices (not virtues) are personified among the cast of characters. However, im-morality surreal poems would be the more accurate description. “Vision Day” however, does not particularly seem to lampoon any human characteristic, rather sexual abandonment (committed solo or with imaginary or real beings) and even sado-masochism seems to be praised for the visions they inspire. Easy to overlook is how the whip acts of its own accord — it “splashes out a flash of death” without the assistance of Mademoiselle V. Depending on how the reader may venture into this imaginary world, a variety of graphic, erotic readings may be read as the cracking of the whip sets off a boiling, illusionary sea. The sea may represent the womb and the fact that it is boiling illustrates excitability or heat. The more one imagines what the poems reflect, the more the reader strays into uncharted terrains of possibility, which must be one of the intentions of the poet.

V. *Conclusions*

Torii Shōzō mastered a variety of techniques to defamiliarize the reader from dulled down, daily reality. This process of making strange challenges the reader’s ability to visualize matter in different ways. Since the images are so uncommon, the reader’s ability to decipher meaning is slowed down so that the aesthetic appeal increases. Types of substitution often acts to create awe and facilitates the imagining of new possible worlds. These images are further enhanced with kinetics and new textures. Torii’s visions are vivid, bringing forth unexpected

worlds, refreshing the reader's imagination. By forcing conundrum, the reader must grapple by making new associations superseding previous manners of logic. The degree of aesthetic attainment evident in these works are advanced, and yet *Alphabet Trap* could be interpreted as an allegory of humans' worst tendencies. *Alphabet Trap* indicates that a poet could create layers of visions worthy of the surrealist masters.

Professor Taguchi Tetsuya wrote of Torii in relation to "poetry-art." 「鳥居昌三は・・・その実験的手法から造本に至るまでの芸術的センスは、超一流で、日本の詩芸術をトップレベルまでに押し上げた功績は特筆すべきものである。」 *Torii Shōzō...From his experimental techniques to his bookbinding, attained first-class artistic sense, he pushed Japan's poetry-art to a top level. His meritorious service deserves special mention.* To acquire the idea of "poet-artist," Torii advanced his poetry to a surrealistically and visually appealing level, virtually turning the page into complex, kinetic canvasses, merging literary and artistic surrealism.

VI. Addendum

Torii Shōzō produced deluxe and limited editions of poetry privately through his 海人舎 — Kaijinsha Press. Of the books produced by Kaijinsha below, at least two of these at least attain the level of artworks themselves — *objêt*. These two volumes of poetry by Kitasono Katué and John Solt were designed by Ohie Toshio — a specialist in 19th century French bookmaking.

One-hundred and sixty five copies of *Alphabet Trap* (fig. 1) were printed on Suruga Sodenō Mitsumata paper. The blue covering and the contents of the volume fit in a similar-colored box which snaps when closed, the curved binding slenderly protruding from the box. The simple cover cut is by Kitasono Katué.

The volume pictured in the next photo exhibits a modernist aesthetic. It is 「重い仮説」 — "Heavy Hypothesis" — by Kitasono (fig. 2). The editor to the complete writings of Kitasono were not aware of the existence of this final book of poems. Permission to use the illustration by Kitasono was received which designer Ohie acquired to shape the book into art. On a light blue background green geometric shapes are set; in the center circle-figure with appendages in silver lining engraved. This thirty copy limited edition was produced on either Moroccan grass paper or washi paper and is completed by an all leather cover. *Heavy Hypothesis* was published posthumously, eight years after Kitasono died.

John Solt's volume of poems *Underwater Balcony* (fig. 3) is the only book published in English by Kaijinsha, though Torii did publish the works of such poets as Lawrence Ferlinghetti in English in *Trap* journal. A total of four-hundred copies were printed of this volume, twenty copies in a special edition. For this edition, for the all-leather blue cover, designer Ohie was required to fashion a stamp of the illustration by surrealist photographer Yamamoto Kansuke; the finger protruding from the glove printed in red ink. Published in 1988, it included a fine box matching the cover. The illustrations inside the book are by Kitasono and Nakata Yoshie.

Torii published fifteen issues of *Trap* (fig. 4) from 1983 until 1992. Each issue contained an essay on the arts or on poetry, poems, two delicately pasted high-quality photos, and an afterward by the editor. Within a thick A4 page of washi folded containing loose leafed pages

of light washi — mitsumata paper — with text. The cover illustration by Kitasono is from his designs of the Kinokuniya journal *Tsukué*. In number nine he published the poems of former VOU members such as Kuroda Iri, Takahashi Shohachiro, Shimizu Masato, and Torii himself (which would be collected for *Kaze no kigo*), and photos by VOU comrade Okazaki Katsuhiko. Also contained is an essay on the art of Yamamoto Kansuke. The homemade issues numbered between one-hundred sixty-five to one-hundred ninety-five. Each were numbered and personally stamped with his seal (fig. 5). The lettering of the title “Trap” in each issue was differently colored — number 9 printed in pink ink. The titles of each work too would use the same color for a simple, elegant result.

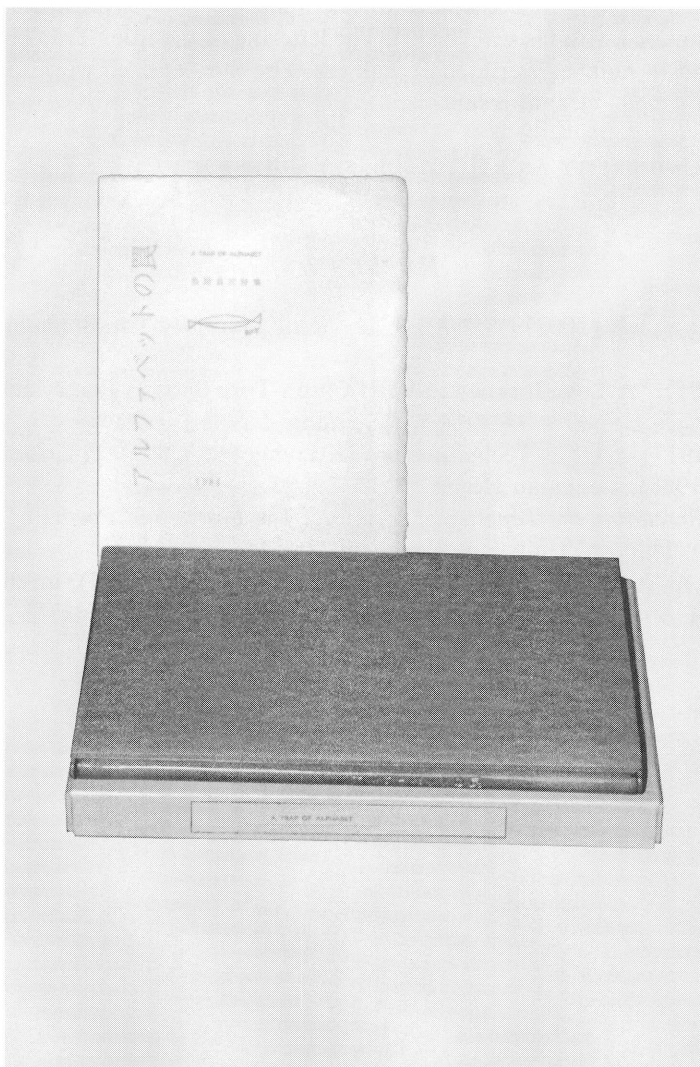
DAITO BUNKA UNIVERSITY AND HITOTSUBASHI UNIVERSITY

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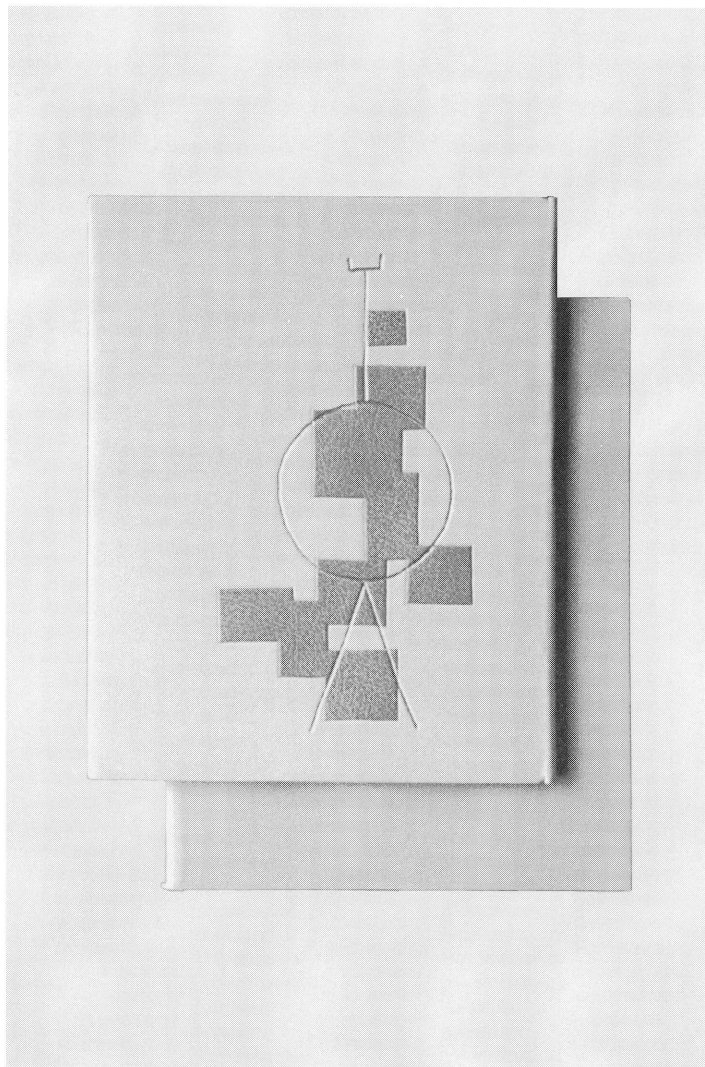
FIGURES

FIG. 1 TORII SHŌZŌ, アルファベットの罟 — *Alphabet Trap*



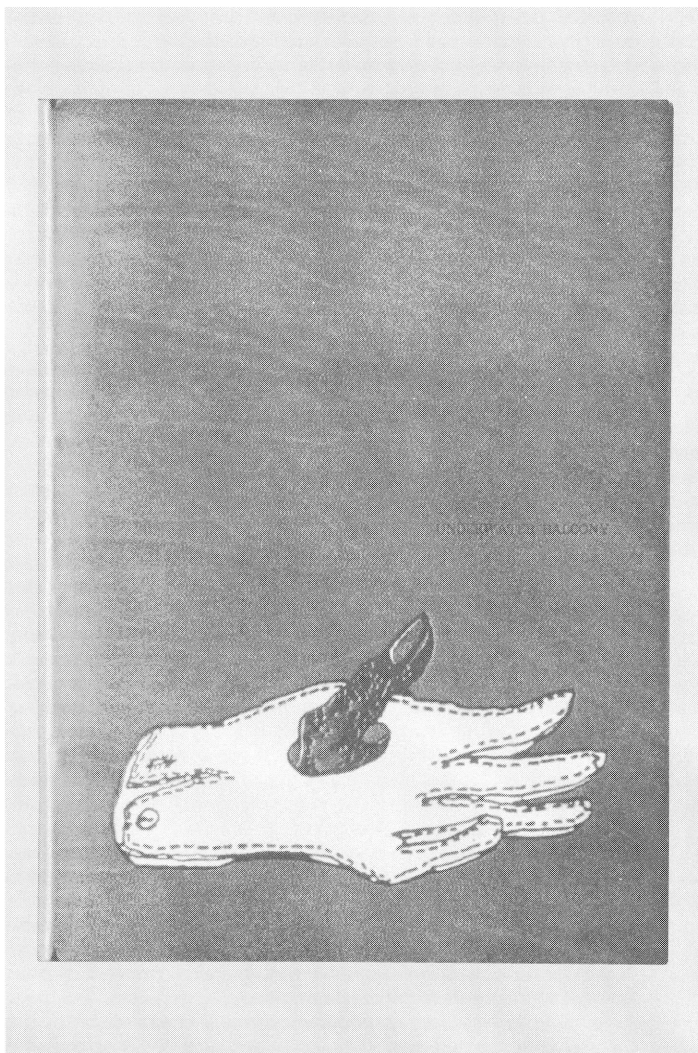
Note: These pictures (except figure 4), were taken by photographer, poet and critic Suzuki Masafumi in September of 2002 at the house where Torii wrote poetry, collected books, researched, and edited — Itoh, Shizuoka. Am much obliged to Torii Fusako-san for allowing us to print these photos and for information which contributed to the facts in this introduction of the poetic art works by Torii Shōzō.

FIG. 2 KITASONO KATUÉ おもい仮説 — *Heavy Hypothesis*

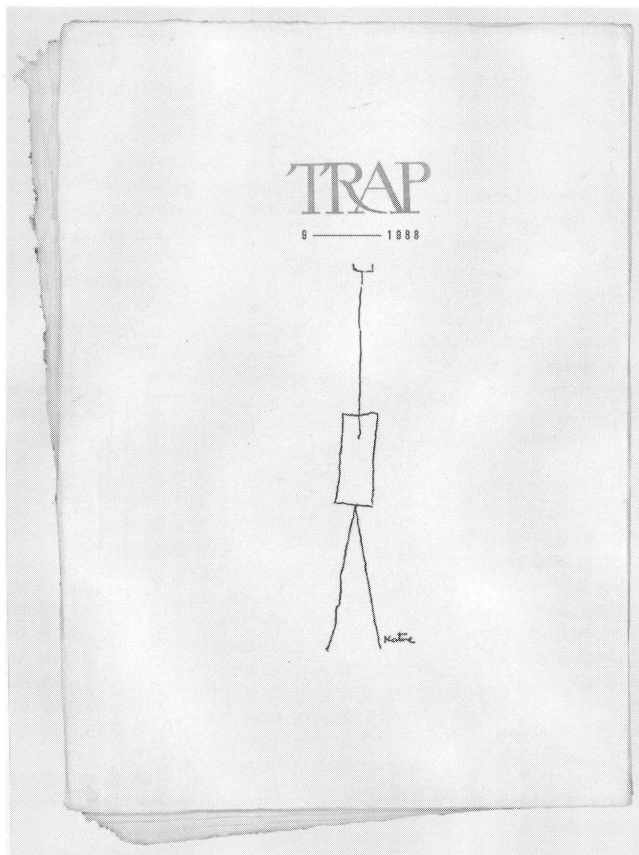


Note: Kaijinsha, 1986.

FIG. 3 JOHN SOLT, *Underwater Balcony*



Note: Kaijinsha, 1988.

FIG. 4 TORII SHŌZŌ (ed), *TRAP* number 9

Note: Kaijinsha, 1988. Courtesy Shima Yufuko

FIG. 5 TORII SHŌZŌ'S SEAL

