

**POET
SANTŌKA:
A LITTLE
BIG BOOK**

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Scott Watson

For
Mr. Cairns
Terebeis,

Best wishes.
Scott Watson
June 2021

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This book is dedicated to
my first and longtime friend
in Japan, His Reverence
Hōyū Igarashi, of Dairen-ji
[大蓮寺] in Sendai, Japan

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Zen Priest Professor Taiken Tanaka of Aichi Prefecture in 2006 invited me to join his group and give a talk about Santōka at an international conference in Lisbon, Portugal in 2007. That

chance inspired me to write about Santōka in addition to translating his haiku poems. I want to express my gratitude and appreciation to him.

Others who deserve mention appear the introduction's narrative.

My partner, Morie Watson, accompanied me on research trips to Yamaguchi Prefecture and to Kumamoto. She also answered many questions that came up while reading Japanese language writing about Santōka. Thank you Morie.

All responsibility for content and interpretations are my own.

Introduction

Taneda Santōka (1882~1940)

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Welcome, dear reader.

To start off: about the title. In Japanese Santōka is called a *haijin* (俳人, person who makes haiku, haiku practitioner, etc.) even though traditionalists maintain his works are not haiku. How, then, can he be called *haijin*? The word “poet,” in an English-Japanese dictionary, is given as 詩人 (*shijin*), a word which doesn't include haikuists, wakaists, tankaists, or anyone other than what is indicated by the word 詩 (*shi*), i.e. modern poetry. English “poet,” though, is more inclusive. It can include all forms: epic, sonnet, long, free verse, short, haiku, tanka, etc. Because of that translation discrepancy I chose “Poet Santōka” for this book's title.

There are several books of English translations of

Santōka's poems available. In most of those books, in their introductions, there is a basic account of the poet's life. Those introductions rely on Japanese language writings, and the Japanese writings, the ones that are mentioned, are often those of Ōyama Sumita (1899~1994).

John Stevens, in *Mountain Tasting* (1980), says "There are two well-known stories about Santōka... told by Sumita Ōyama, Santōka's close friend, editor, and biographer." Here is Cid Corman [*Walking Into the Wind*, 1990]: "Briefly (and I draw from John Stevens' useful volume... which draws from the standard biography by the poet's friend Sumita Oyama... ."

Ōyama was 17 years Santōka's junior. He was a fellow member of the freestyle haiku group called Sōun (Strata). He lived in Hiroshima, where he was an employee at a communications bureau (telephone and telegraph). Ōyama and Santōka became close friends, and Ōyama helped Santōka in various ways. Ōyama's writings about Santōka,

though, tend to verge on lionization of the elder poet. Santōka himself even chided Ōyama for seeing only the good in him. At any rate, Ōyama's writings about Santōka, valuable as they may be, are memoirs—not thoroughly researched scholarship. His writing is not "the standard biography;" it is all there was. Santōka trusted Ōyama and the younger man became an editor of Santōka's later as well as posthumously published works.

It is because what is known in English about Santōka came, for many years, overwhelmingly from Ōyama's writings that a book such as this for English language readers might be appreciated. Though there were a couple other Japanese language accounts of Santōka's life that appeared in the 1970s, Murakami Mamoru's full critical biography on Santōka, the standard biography, did not exist until 1988. The book you are now reading is not a translation of Murakami, but his book is in the background.

The purpose of this book, then, is to offer a fuller view of Santōka than what is available in the introductions to English language translations. The hope is that a fuller view will open a way to a deeper appreciation of his poetry. For example, in 2009 at a writer's conference in Canada, a participant informed me that "Everything is Zen here." To Western readers, Santōka has been introduced as an "enlightened Zen priest," who some like to believe lived freely and did whatever he wanted. An eccentric drunk monk! This book introduces readers—briefly—to what Zen was in Japan back in Santōka's day. Or, as another example, Santōka is everywhere introduced as a big drinker of saké. This book probes into what saké might mean to the poem making process. It also brings out the downside of all the booze, so we see a different man than the "drink loving, eccentric haiku poet" to whom Western readers are often introduced.

Next to nothing, in English language accounts, is mentioned about the influence of literary natural-

ism on Santōka's development. Nor is anything said about Santōka as a modernist. Though what appears in this book is far from an in-depth analysis, naturalism and modernism are not ignored as elements of his writing.

A poet's life is lived through a certain language, a certain society, a certain culture. These are the soil from which a poetry arises. These are transformed, distilled, by a poet into an expression that reveals his or her essence. Expressence [sic]. These matter to Santōka's poetry, but, as this is only a little big book, I write about only what to me seems vital.

This book is a result of many years connecting with Santōka through his poetry (mainly), in which is to be found his expressential [sic] being. Attraction to Santōka's poetry has taken me to various places: to Hōfu in Yamaguchi Prefecture where he was born and raised, to Kumamoto, on Kyūshū, where he lived with his spouse and son after marriage and where he entered the priest-

hood, and to Matsuyama, in Ehime Prefecture on Shikoku, where he spent roughly the last year of his life.

In Hōfu and in Matsuyama there are organizations centering on Santōka that offer various annual programs commemorating Santōka's life and poetry. Members of those organizations—Mr. Kubota, His Reverence Priest Hashimoto of Gokoku Temple (where Santōka's grave is located), and others in Hōfu; Mr. Ōta and Ms. Tamura of the Santōka Club in Matsuyama; His Reverence Priest Kashiwagi of Mitori Kannon-dō and His Reverence Priest Michizaki of Hōon Temple in Kumamoto—all kindly spent time with me when I visited. I am indebted to them.

Each chapter within is a personal essay about one or more aspects of Santōka's life, or poetry. My writing assumes the reader already has some degree of knowledge about Santōka.

Shōichi was his given name. He was born into a

rather prestigious local family and into turbulent times. By the First Sino-Japan War (1894~1895), Japan had transformed itself from the—as seen from the world stage—obscure land it had been prior to its opening to international relations to the most powerful country in Asia. With the Russo-Japanese War (1904~1905), Japan became known the world over as a powerful country, one that mattered.

Transition from a war-lord feudalistic society (though changing, modernizing at its own pace and in its own way even before opening diplomatic relations with certain Western countries) almost completely closed off to the rest of the world to a modern military industrial imperialist power was neither smooth nor peaceful.

During the first years of the Second Sino-Japan War (1937~1945) Santōka was early old age (for those days). His response to that war in both poetry and prose (diary entries) was minimal; it might seem to some that he was more concerned

with his own troubles than with the world around him. His attitude might be seen as narcissistic.

His way of life as mendicant Buddhist priest (though read later about whether he was actually a priest) for whom food and enough money for a place to stay were daily concerns might, relatively speaking, have something to do with lack of zeal either for or against that war or for anything (other than poetry).

Life on the road, the life he chose when he was a middle-aged man, or the life he was maybe required to live so as to arrive at at a condition called emotional stability—which was a fleeting, fragile, state for him—is not the romantic dream of travel some might envision. To have, permanently, no home to which he could return, to have, permanently, no particular destination to which he could be heading, and to be often without adequate funds (in a society based on money which was at times hard pressed due to economic depression), is far from easy living. The cheap

lodging houses he could afford were often insect infested, and when Santōka could take a bath, lice could be found floating in it after he'd gotten out. (Bashō, writing of his most famous journey, in a haiku tells us of fleas and lice bothering his sleep. Isabella Byrd, writing of her travels in Meiji Japan, complains about swarms of fleas. Post-war Japanese children were fumigated by Allied Forces with DDT for lice. The situation got better somewhere along the way but I can't say exactly when or how.) Nights he spent sleeping outdoors he'd be visited by snakes, frogs, or toads.

On the other hand, on his journeys he often received hospitality of haiku friends who were also members of Strata. Later on, once he'd become a veteran Strata poet with significant influence in the freestyle haiku movement, a major figure in that world, he was a celebrated honored guest wherever he stopped, and he was well hosted. Such a life, we might think, is not too hard to take.

The reason he set out on those journeys, it should be remembered, was his own emotional instability. For example, shortly before he set out for the Tohoku region he was plagued by emotional darkness and could be called suicidal.

It seems that Santōka was unable to stay anywhere long. Even after he succeeded in finding a permanent residence in a two-room cottage, when signs of spring appeared Santōka became emotionally unsettled, agitated. One expression for early spring in Japanese is 木の芽時 (*kono-medoki*). The expression has special associations for those who are prone to depression. It's a time of year some become particularly susceptible. It is also the time of year Santōka's mother committed suicide. That was in March.

Santōka did not set out on foot because he saw, as Bashō did, journey as a way of life ("... taking each day as journey, dwelling in journey"). Santōka set out as therapy. Walking, traveling, soothed him. Mountains more than seas; oceans,

with constant movement, could be agitating for him. Walking, traveling, focused him, and provided distance from the torments of his own mind.

He was a man given to self-condemnation, enough so to make us wonder what part that scorn played in his making poems. That matter is touched on in the chapter on his mother's suicide. Indulging in self-mockery, he at times could find humor in a condition he himself deplored. He was, through his begging bowl and through funds requested most often from and wired by his oldest and dearest friend Kimura Ryokuhei (physician/Strata member, 1888~1968), for the last fifteen years of his life—those years as a Zen monk—totally dependent on others. There was a support group made up of haiku friends that at times wired him small sums of money, enough for basic survival, and for a time he was dependent on his only child, his son Ken, who, having a steady job with a mining company, sent his father a regular allowance, but that ended when Ken was trans-

ferred to Manchuria, then an area under Japanese control. Being so utterly dependent on others was a source of profound shame as well as a source of profound gratitude. Having next to nothing made him grateful for anything.

His sole purpose in life, his soul purpose, was making poems. More than any sort of priestly vocation, more than any Zen quest for enlightenment—though he WAS a religious or spiritual person as well as a sensitive literary alcoholic—prescribed by institutional Zen, he realized that making poems was the best he could do and that making poems was his enlightenment. And it was ALL that he could do.

There is no predetermined way of life a poet must lead. He found his own way, a way that was him. The way of life and the way of poetry must be one's own realization, he said. The living and the words must be one.

Before moving to Matsuyama, where he had set-

tled on as his spirit-place to die, Santōka was for a short time in a cottage in the city of Yamaguchi where at times he associated with and was mentoring younger poets (one was a brother of Nakahara Chūya, who until his early death had been a rising star poet). Moving to Matsuyama, while at a cottage he named One Blade [of (wild) grass] Hut, he continued writing on his life of making poems. There he came to use the expression "the way of haiku" (俳句道). He could state with conviction that poetry is a way of life only because he himself had lived it. Only through a lifetime's devotion to poetry could that sound true.

In one essay there is a section on the role his dead mother played in his poem making. He carried her mortuary tablet with him everywhere he went, and, when he settled into cottage living, that tablet was in an Buddhist altar at the room's center. He offered her prayers every day upon waking.

Eventually he took to sticking strips of haiku

poems to his cottage's inner walls. This was at Ogōri at the Genchūan. (Ogōri now is included in the expanded city of Yamaguchi.) The mortuary tablet in the room's center on an altar, the walls covered with haiku poems; such was his dwelling.

Santōka seems to not have had room in his life for any woman other than his dead mother. His married life was short—only a few years of living together—and not necessarily sweet, though he at times after an official divorce would return to Kumamoto and stay with his ex-wife Sakino, and he once implies in a diary that they had sexual intercourse during one of those visits. He did have sex, from time to time, with prostitutes, and had morning erections, or eventually with years a decrease of them, which became a source of concern (erections being thought of as an indicator of health and vigor in a male) and a realization of his growing older. When no longer visited by morning erections he, humorously enough, seemed proud of his shedding carnal desire. He

was on his way to enlightenment, he thought.

There is an essay in this book about a possible romantic relationship Santōka may have had as an early middle-aged man in Tokyo.

Santōka was an alcoholic. Because he was unable to control himself, he was arrested at various times in his life. Drunk and disorderly, or, drunk and not necessarily disorderly, or disorderly in the sense of running up tabs at restaurants or drinking establishments that he couldn't pay. He was told by a physician in Hiroshima, while visiting his friend Ōyama, that his heart had been weakened by drink. During the last year of his life he was plagued by hallucinations, which, once he'd returned to his senses, he attributed to alcohol. There is an essay in this book concerning saké and it's possible role in his Zen life and poetry.

From the time he took up cottage living, he began preparing for death, putting things in order,

almost as if obsessed. Cerebral apoplexy (stroke) is the cause of death written on the death certificate. He had written that he would prefer to die by just slumping over. His actual death was not far removed from his wish. There was to be a haiku gathering at his cottage one day. Santōka had been up and around, seen by the temple priest's wife (his cottage, the One Blade Hut, was located on the grounds of Miyuki Temple) when she came by on her regular rounds, but passing by again later she discovered him on the floor. Checking, she saw he was breathing and was relieved to hear haiku guests approaching. She left. The haiku guests went on with their gathering thinking Santōka was sleeping. They thought it a bit rude of him not get up and play host.

When the haiku event ended, Santōka was reportedly still breathing. The guests left, but one, Takahashi, was worried. He returned to the cottage later and realized that Santōka was no longer breathing. He ran off to find a doctor in the wee

hours of the morning. A doctor arrived and pronounced the poet dead.

Gusto mounting walk off to clouds

That is considered his death poem. He had produced seven collections of poems of various sizes. Most of these would be called chapbooks. They, similar to sutra books, opened accordion style. Haiku appeared reading right to left, top to bottom.

My first contact with Santōka was through a student named Michiko Futatsugawa. It was a third year seminar class and the theme was poetry. Instead of assigning readings to those four young ladies, I asked them to each bring in whatever poems attracted them. Three were not so energetic; they brought in Japanese poems from their Japanese high school textbooks, complete with the explanations that accompany poems presented in those schoolbooks. Ms. Futatsugawa, though, brought in poems from around the world (with

English or Japanese translations). She brought in poems by German poets, Indonesian poets, Chinese poets, French poets, British poets... . And she brought in Santōka.

For some reason there was an immediate attraction. There are poets we call nature poets who write about forests, rivers, and life outdoors etc., but Santōka's poems, more than being "about" nature, strike me as being nature itself. There is no other poet I know of who can bring the feel of nature itself (nonhuman as well as human) into a few words. Reading Santōka takes me directly to source, to the source of the flow of all living and dying. We don't need to know anything about Japanese culture. His poems don't require us to appreciate allusions to poems of poets past. There they are, Santōka's poems, living things themselves, flowing from and returning to "the All," the great beyond as the here and now.

Since I was reading the originals, I thought I may as well do something with them in English. I

did not set out intending to translate him. It's just something that occurred to me. At the time I was walking a lot. Back and forth to school, to city center and back, and his poems were with me, becoming part of me. I imagined Santōka himself was reciting his poems to me in English. I simply wrote them down.

After publishing two sets of translations in the Tohoku Gakuin University Review, Mr. Tadano, an agent with the company that publishes that review, suggested, since his company still had the typeset plates, putting the two appearances into one book. That became *The Santōka*. The title suggests a fine brandy or single malt scotch whiskey such as The Glenlivet. It was not intended to mean, as one reviewer interpreted it, that my book was the ultimate translation. THE Santōka.

After that a misunderstanding with a small press publisher in America resulted in a second book of translations. Bob Arnold, at Longhouse, had asked me for a "barrel full;" I assumed he ima-

gined a larger book. What came out was a tiny but artfully done fold out accordion booklet with maybe a dozen haiku. Not a barrel full as I'd imagined, but a nice job. I took the barrel full and with the help of book designer Jonathan Greene published them as *Walking By My Self Again*. That received a translation award of some kind from the Haiku Society of America. It was published just after The Great East Japan Disaster with the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown.

Most recently Mark Kuniya's Country Valley Press did 20 of my English versions of Santōka haiku in a lovely hand-sewn edition on Japanese paper.

The idea to write this book came from a comment by long time friend in poetry John Martone who publishes an online haiku blog called *Otata*. I'd sent around by email to friends an essay on Santōka, which John wanted to use in *Otata*. He asked me if it's part of "a big book." That's

when I realized it would be good to give English language Santōka admirers something more than they can get reading introductions to Santōka translations.

All English renderings are my own unless otherwise noted.

Here we go.

Santōka and Public Taste

As is inevitably the case with all of us, Santōka is seen in different ways by different people, but, until the past several decades, many Japanese, young or old, never heard of him, which is to say had never seen him in print. If you say the name it is recognized because some years back someone in Hokkaido decided to name a chain of ramen noodle shops Santōka, written with the same ideograms as the poet's haiku name.

Otherwise a young person might recall a haiku poem that is included in their schoolbook. 分け入っても分け入っても青い山 (Going on/in ongoing/ mountain green.) That was the end of Santōka's public presence in the life of this land. Who can say what presence he might have in the personal life of this one and that one? There are a plethora of testimonies to be found online on blogs and what not.

There was a time when a Santōka poem was not in a schoolbook. The older than younger generation knew nothing of him through compulsory education; if they encountered him at all it was by chance (unless they were involved in literature). Even though many enjoy the ramen noodles named after him, they often don't inquire what the name means. Or if customers do inquire there is a high probability the shop's noodle makers can't answer. It's not a literary age we live in now.

Though some who do know who he is have told me they have no idea what Santōka's haiku mean, none of the non-haiku-specialist persons I've met are aggressively anti-Santōka. Haiku experts, on the other hand, are another world. I've been told by some that Santōka's works are not haiku. It is best to take into consideration, upon hearing that his poems are not haiku, that, for centuries, the different poetic forms were carved in the stone of tradition (by those who control what tradition is), and were forever fixed. Change

was unthinkable.

Whether Santōka's poems are technically haiku is a matter beyond my expertise. It does not bother me if they are not. What concerns me is whether they are poems. To me, they are clearly poems.

Along with the denial due to the fact that Santōka's free-style haiku step outside the parameters of what was or is accepted as being formally or officially or technically haiku there is, for certain readers, a social distaste for the content of some of his work. It may be that there is a bit of overlap, in Japan, in what is considered formally incorrect and what is considered socially inappropriate; that is a matter to be looked into later. For any particular Japanese, the judgmental word 乱れている [midareteiru] can mean that a poem is seen as disordered, disheveled in form. For another Japanese, 乱れている can mean a poem is considered inappropriate because it refers to sex organs, urination, prostitutes or nudity. The number of such poems are few. Here's one:

ちんぽこもおそろも湧いてあふれる湯

Peckers
and
pussies
a hot
bath
over-
flowing

Not only the form and content of his poetry but Santōka's way of life displeases some Japanese who do know who he is. The fact that he was married and had a wife and child he was unable to care for requires some to place him in a morally disreputable class of human beings. Another matter that gives rise to disapproval is that for a large part of his adult time on this earth he did not live the way most others feel obligated to live. He did not lead a settled life working a steady job. During the last fifteen years of his life he lived as a wanderer or dwelled alone in a cottage, a person removed from the world most

people feel obliged to labor in.

Santōka was not alone in what was considered an unstable way of life. Consider this quote from Kaneko Mitsuharu's autobiography *Shijin (Poet)*:

“Meanwhile, in keeping with the poverty of my life I had to abandon all show and had to plunge my hands into the mud to catch even little fish. Nihilism helped me in this. As long as I passed for a man of refinement, I was unable to eke out an existence. For I was so inexperienced in practical life and was also likely to make a mess of whatever I did, I felt that I was simply on the way to becoming a beggar.”

There are quite a few other poets and artists who came from families with money or class but who, for some time at least, lived a vagabond's life, a “messy” life. This does not necessarily mean they did not want to work.

Santōka was not the only writer to sponge off oth-

ers. In fact, from the Meiji Era, in which education became compulsory and nationalized, there were not enough jobs commensurate with the educational level of an increasing number of young intellectuals. Some took to writing to pay the bills. Of them, some were successful. Others had to live in poverty. For them, mooching was survival.

Though Santōka himself in diaries refers to his own life as “messy,” for some it was a messy time all around. Messy was not uncommon as a way of life in those times. We need to keep in mind that there were slums in Japan's big cities. All over the world systems of capitalist industrialization create slums. Matsubara Iwagoro's *In Darkest Tokyo (Saiankoku no Tokyo)*, came out in 1893 and depicts the scene in Tokyo's slums. Kagawa Toyohiko's collection of poems *Songs From The Slums* (1935) describes the scene in Kobe.

What is called modernization produced that inner

city slum scene for those coming from rural communities, driving them into big cities or driving them into coal mines. Leaving Japan was another possibility. Young men went off to Hawaii seeking higher wages working on plantations, to California, to South America....

Another outlet, temporary or permanent, for the young male population was military service in one of Japan's colonies. Some sought employment there as a civilian. Colonies were needed, as with European nations, to serve modernization, industrialization.

The life of small farmers was miserable. That situation is described in Nagatsuka Takashi's novel *± [Soil]* (1910), which is based on the lives of real individuals though he changed their names. A poor farm woman, wife and mother, dies from infection after using a twig to self-abort a pregnancy. This was because there was no means to support yet another child, and no money to pay for professional medical care.

The years between 1906 and 1913, within which *Soil* appeared, were years of unstable economy. Certain sectors did well while others fared poorly, creating as a side effect doubt or disbelief in the system, which then opened the way for growth of various ideologies such as socialism and anarchism that challenged the capitalist undertaking.

Compulsory education, it seemed, had achieved its goal of educating a populace for work in a capitalist industrial economy, but when an economy slumps and jobs are scarce it is natural enough that hopelessness would be on the rise with graduates who cannot find employment.

Modernization in Japan was not a development arising organically from Japan itself. (Does it arise organically anywhere?) In Santōka's time the Japanese government, or society as a whole, was as yet unsuccessful in providing for its entire population. Labor strikes and riots were widespread: factories, shipyards, mines.

Modernization impacted Santōka's immediate family as well, even before he was born. 1868 is the year the Shogun abdicated. In 1871, at age 16, Santōka's father Takejirō took over supervision of the Taneda family. That was the year feudal domains were abolished. There was upheaval in financial markets, in land regulations, product distribution, geographical designations, etc. 16-year-old Takejirō was expected to steer the substantial Taneda household/economy through that turbulent transition period.

Some who introduce Santōka place him in a tradition of wandering Buddhist poetmonks such as Priest Saigyō. In fact it seems that before marriage Santōka spoke of a desire to become a Buddhist priest, using that as an excuse in an attempt to dissuade his father from forcing him into marriage.

If we are looking only diachronically, only interested in linking to traditions, then it would indeed seem logical to conclude that Santōka might be

last in a line of wandering poet-monks. That is not a full-bodied way of seeing him though. Such a way of looking, because it ignores synchronicity, gives us a less complete idea of Santōka's scene than we'd get if we look at what is going on in the contemporary society. It was a time of crisis. Santōka's life reflected that. Various forces—connected with the modernization mentioned above—shook Japan economically, socially, politically and psychologically.

Imagine an imaginary wall on one side of which were those profiting from the multitude of political, economic and social changes that had begun with the Meiji Reformation and continued through the Taisho Era. They were basking in prosperity. On the other side of that wall were those who had no leisure to bask; they were too busy suffering. The numbers basking were far fewer than the numbers not basking. Prosperity was not an evenly spread phenomenon. Many were left out, cut out, thrown out (of the new system). If a word of complaint or criticism was

uttered through a narrative such as socialism, communism or anarchism, one opened oneself to charges of sedition, to ostracism, censorship, beatings, imprisonment, or even the death penalty, depending on the year and what was criticized. In the year Santōka was born, 1882, one could be arrested for the crime of “political speech.”

Santōka was from a known family (the “Great Taneda”). His ancestors originated in what is now Kochi Prefecture on Shikoku, where they were 郷士 (Gōshi: country samurai, samurai farmers, something like country squires maybe). He was good at schoolwork and was accepted later at a new university which accepted only those with good scholastic ability. One might imagine him as on the way to life on the more comfortable side of the imaginary wall that separates the haves from the have nots.

“Things happen.” After arriving in Tokyo he attended a kind of prep school, after which he

entered Waseda University. Though he was among the top students of his class back in Yamaguchi, as a first year student at Waseda his class rank was 36 out of 85. Just so so. It has been said that this is when he began drinking heavily. It wouldn’t be the first time a young man drinks heavily after entering college.

It is on record that he left school due to illness. That illness was called neurasthenia. In common language, it was a nervous breakdown. What brought that on, according to Murakami Mamoru’s book on Santōka, was likely financial distress: money from home would come, if at all, sporadically.

Before Tokyo he was in what would now be called high school in Yamaguchi. The school was not in his hometown but in the neighboring city and prefectural capital. It was for him a boarding school environment which supposedly he didn’t take to well, where he had few or no friends. Weekends he would return home to

Hōfu.

There is something happening here. He does well in schools back home. But he is uncomfortable being away from home—even though it's not far—in a boarding school environment. Farther away in Tokyo, the experience at Waseda does not result in success, in graduation. It makes me wonder if he might have been homesick.

A lonely young man, a motherless young man, a sensitive young man with a literary inclination. A homesick young man. Later in life he finds home in homeless wandering.

まっすぐな道でさみしい

Straight ahead outreaching loneliness road

It may be, too, that his condition can also be called a general sense of social rootlessness of which his own personal loneliness is a symptom, an exclamation mark. Things are happening to

us on different levels, some we're often not conscious of. This is a rootlessness that comes from, again, Japan's modernization. It is a sense of isolation caused by the break up of traditional culture, a break up of community. It is a loss of belonging. It is a loss of the world described by Lafcadio Hearn in so many of his writings about Japan. It is a loss in which even those on the prospering side of that imaginary wall were victims. It is a loss creating an emptiness that eventually is filled by pride in the inhumanity of military conquest and is after the Pacific War filled by efforts to create economic prosperity (which seems always a plus/minus kind of thing).

Conservatism. In one sense, it can be characterized in Japan as attachment to a past that no living Japanese ever experienced, a nostalgia for the way, according to some narratives, things are said to have been, for all that's been lost. It sees the past as utopian and seems to not make a distinction between what in the past actually helped life go on and what might have been destructive. In

an ideological sphere it means an appeal to the past as “real, or pure, Japan.”

The search for genuine Japan has been carried out from ancient times. The chronicles of old distort history so as to establish legitimacy for the rulers of the time, to make it seem they were always here, to give them gods from which to originate, to dissociate the land from Korean peninsula progenitors. Which means that from its beginning Japan is what certain people say it is.

Then there was the long ago importation of Chinese culture. Again comes the need to identify what is pure Japan. Scholars were given the assignment. National scholars (scholars of ancient Japanese language and literature).

The conservative desire is to play roles that attain value because of their connection to a fabricated image of genuine Japan. “All the world’s a stage.” By doing so they hope to reap rewards. In other words, an idea of sacred Japan is

invented so that those whose business it is to manipulate images can slap on themselves symbols of authority, of power, that derive from that invented idea.

Traditionalists play the game. Santōka doesn’t. That is maybe another reason why they shunned him. But now Santōka is gradually, reluctantly, being accepted into the canon.

It is not my purpose here to defend Santōka. His way of life does not upset me. Whatever his shortcomings, the poetry he gave us goes long and deep.

In Japan there is at times, in places, an uneasy connection between tradition and change. For some, there was the golden age of the Edo era and then the split when modernization was made compulsory starting in Meiji. The result is a troubled identity both captive to and appreciative of modern convenience but feeling at a loss as to what it really means to be Japanese. What

replaces that organic rootedness is social conditioning encountered at home and in school, social conditioning which substitutes for whatever the genuine Japan was that was lost. Much of the population had been involved in agriculture; most lives were more connected with nature as it reveals itself in changing seasons, etc. Now people are told (in various ways) this or that is what Japanese culture is. Ikebana and Tea Ceremony, festivals that are held as “custom,” for show as tourist attractions, but which might lack much of the original divine inflatus.

Both home and school are authority, excessive adherence to which creates a deficiency of personal development within. Where adherence to external authority is strong, a personality develops that is attached to the particular mindset represented by that authority, whether it takes the form of a religion or the form of politically right, left, or moderate.

Santōka, though, through walking, cottage-dwell-

ing-simple-life, saké, water, Zen, and poetry, attained for himself an unalloyed existence. That doesn’t mean he was removed from suffering; it means he didn’t hide from it.

What, then, is taste when it comes to poetry? There is a personal, individual, subjective element and there is a consensual, shared, social element which is overwhelmingly (to the extent many people never get to hear of a poet) controlled by traditionalist forces. The conservative forces want an image that will make Japanese feel good about being Japanese. Hence the deification of Bashō, who, beyond anything he actually wrote, is, in the realm of underlying emotional appeal, “what it means to be Japanese.” There is not much to the shabby mess sot Santōka—voluntarily in poverty—which they could make into an image that would satisfy their underlying emotional needs. But read on, read on! Times change!

Poetry is not what defines the present age in

Japan. Mass media controls the world of song. Conservative forces control mass media. Conservative forces control education. Even when poetry is presented to young people in a schoolbook, there is inevitably commentary telling the young readers what the poem is about. The commentaries I have seen, though not lies, present the safest interpretations possible. It may be they do that to keep young minds from being “disturbed” by a poem’s multidimensionality, by the fact that there are so many elements running through a poem, so many forces involved, that it becomes impossible to say definitely what a poem means. It means life, ultimately. Multidimensionality, though a natural condition, is somehow threatening to a school. It presents alternatives, and those alternatives challenge authority, though not necessarily intending to. It’s just that authority tends to see any alternative as opposition. (This too might be a tradition. A tradition of paranoia that goes back to the Tokugawa bakufu.)

The purpose of schools seems to be to limit vision to a dimension that is acceptable to the conservative powers that be. To limit vision is to limit taste, to reduce it. Japan at present is not a tasteless society but it is a society in which conservative taste forces everything unlike it away towards the unknown.

Limiting the kinds of poetry people are exposed to, limiting the interpretations people are exposed to, is reduction, and it creates a deficiency.

Yes, a poet, artist, etc. can leave the mainstream and seek life elsewhere. Call it avant-garde this or that, call it the world of experimental whatever. The fact that it must be adjektivized [sic] means metaphorical banishment. This is where Santōka was. Free-style haiku. At present he is becoming more acceptable. But why?

Santōka’s reputation has taken an upward swing here in Japan.

There was recently an NHK (Japan's public broadcaster) documentary which in part featured a respected actor (Takenaka Naoto) playing Santōka in Buddhist priest robe and kasa hat walking by an ocean in zōri sandals to a soundtrack of haiku poems and diary passages. There was talk of a movie being made about Santōka, but that project seems to have died.

The main collection of Santōka's poems 草木塔 (Sōmokutō, Grass Tree Cairn, hereafter GTC) appears in a well received movie called 貴方へ (To You) starring the late Ken Takakura. In the movie, the character played by Kitano Takeshi gifts the grieving (over the loss of his wife) Takakura Ken character with a copy of GTC.

Around 2012 a major Japanese newspaper (The Mainichi) published results of a survey in which Santōka ranked among the top 5 most respected Japanese poets of the modern era.

From almost unknown to the top 5. Again: it

makes me wonder what taste is. It seems it can be a relatively quickly shifting phenomenon in Japan. Twenty years, shall we say? As mentioned above, public taste is conditioned by conservative forces. When those conservative forces, in this case NHK, allow a full-length program about Santōka to be aired, what does it mean?

Japanese society is now making efforts to include physically and emotionally challenged individuals in general society (workplace, school, ...) instead of keeping those individuals separate. As that scene develops, it means that it is safe now for mass media to present Santōka for general consumption. Because he is said to have been emotionally troubled, because he is said to have been suffering. (And he himself says as much in diaries and letters.)

The NHK documentary includes testimonials by readers who, plagued by their own spiritual or emotional difficulties, find solace in Santōka poems. Which is all well and good. Poetry

can help, is healing. No doubt.

Does the media phenomenon mean that we must now read Santōka according to the Zeitgeist with its preoccupation with disorders, counseling, and therapy? Has it always been a disturbed world that is just now awakening to its own pathology? In therapists' waiting rooms will there be copies of GTC?

Over the years we are exposed to images of Santōka ranging from "an eccentric, drink-loving haiku poet" "enlightened Zen Master" (John Stevens, 1980) to long suffering Buddha-self-help psychotherapist. Always with the imagineering is there an underlying agenda?

Alas: "Poet" will never be enough for the world. The poet must always, it seems, be dressed up, made presentable for consumption.

We see that conservative media masters are willing to sponsor a certain image of Santōka. Big

Brother Japan is there for us. What is being offered is something reduced to a particular dimension that will assist the state apparatus, a dimension of poem-therapy to be provided as the powers that be grind us, work us to death, drive us to suicide, reduce our earnings, strip us of rights, put children into poverty, expose us to radiation, etc.

Should we celebrate Santōka's greater exposure? Or should we be wary anytime we see a documentary about a poet on TV?

I personally don't mind seeing more people exposed to Santōka. My concern with the new Santōka is that psych-talk readings are not the poem. It is an aspect of his poetry that is being expropriated by forces that might want to use his poetry for their own purposes. While the real Santōka remains out in the cold.

Still in it
falling snow

Santōka

Pure Santōka poetry is unalloyed. It isn't anything but poetry. Same as his life. He was all about being outside everything.

Making the New Santōka

Most of us are aware that labels such as Romanticism, Modernism, Postmodernism, etc. are scholarly or intellectual constructions, organizational and interpretive tools, and that individual poets (at least the ones I know) do not go around with "I'm a Modernist" in their head while making a poem. At the same time some of them don't want to write in the way writers in a previous century wrote and they want to allow their work to reflect a present take on things rather than using antiquated forms. They sense a duty to push their art forward. Some of them. Those are the ones who are/were labeled "Modernist."

Was Santōka a modernist? A naturalist? Both? Neither?

Meiji was an age in which much was different from before the opening of Japan to Western thought, technology, and gadgetry. Novelty was

fashionable. Novelist Natsume Soseki could have his own ice cream making machine.

Modernization in Japan, though, was not just a desire for novelty. New national pride was involved as well. Many Japanese, since their nation was newly on stage in an international environment, wanted an identity as a modern and powerful nation. They did not want to think of themselves as citizens of a country still rooted in feudalism. Keep up with the Joneses. Keep up with the times. The Meiji emperor was photographed in a Western uniform.

Certainly with minimalist brevity we can place Pound's dictum "Make it new" upon much that was attempted in writing. Though even Pound's "Make it new" itself was ages old. Scholars tell us it comes from a long ago Chinese injunction, which might move us to wonder just what new is under the sun. It's relative. Literary modernism, though, was a phenomena happening in many places all over the world, so it should not

surprise us that expressions of newness pop up all over.

Santōka was living the new times just as the new times were forming him. In Tokyo he was first a prep student then a student enrolled at Waseda University, which itself was only as old as Santōka (both began in 1882). There in the literature department it would have been difficult to avoid contact with new literary forms being imported from the West.

Naturalism was big.

Santōka could not remain at Waseda. Money from home came sporadically, which meant that he was unable to pay tuition. Then he had a nervous breakdown, after which he returned to Hōfu.

Searching for the new. Back in his hometown Hōfu, he was promoting the new (in a local mag called *Seinen*.) In Tokyo new developments in literature were a sign of the times. Hōfu, though,

was not Tokyo. Santōka was finding the local scene on the whole reluctant to go along as newly as he may have wished.

“Make it new”: how is that said about the overwhelmingly promoted image of Santōka as “Zen,” about a person who, some years later, at age 45, decides to live out his days as a Zen Buddhist poet-monk, wandering the land or practicing simple, solitary living in a small cottage?

That Zen image, though, captures only the last 15 years of his life. Besides the limited view that image offers, it is also difficult to catch hold of what Buddhism, or Zen Buddhism, is at a particular moment in the flow of Japan, and then what was it for Santōka?

After leaving Tokyo (Waseda), back in Hōfu, he received newly published books and literary magazines from the capital. Contemporary Western literature was all the rage among certain Japanese, especially younger writers. Some of the lit mags

of those days were connected with universities: 白樺 [Shirakaba, White Birch, began in 1910], 三田文学 [Mita Bungaku, Mita Literature, began in 1910], and 新思潮 [Shinshichō, which I render as New Thought Tide, though the kanji can also carry a sense of opportunity, began in 1907].

We know that in the same year (1913, Taishō 2) Ezra Pound began his now famous poem at a metro in Paris (though recent scholarship has now set the year as 1912) Taneda Shōichi (Santōka) had started publishing his own lit mag called 郷土 (Kyodō: Virgin Soil). In the first issue he describes the efforts within as 新しき (atarashiki: new, newly, anew). Pound's various proclamations concerning “make it new!”, as far as we can tell from available sources, came years later, beginning in 1928.

In his opening remarks in Virgin Soil, Santōka tells readers that “making it new” means discovery, originality, and fecundity.

While in Tokyo, Santōka had been drawn by the writings of Maupassant and Turgenev. He did some translations of both though supposedly he had little French, less Russian. Both authors are known as being connected with naturalism in literature and both were available in Japanese translation. (By Futabatei Shimei, for the Russian.)

“[A] feature distinguishing the last part of the first decade [of the twentieth century] was the rise of what was called naturalism.... Theorizing or arguing did not suit their temper; to expose life in its naked reality seemed to them the only method of arriving at a satisfactory solution of human problems... By “naked reality” were meant the actualities of life stripped of all conventionalities, and the literature produced for this cause aimed at a relentless exposure of all compromise and hypocrisy.” [Masaharu Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, p. 387]

Readers of the various introductions to English language translations of Santōka are told that he had done some translations of the two authors mentioned above, but they are not told how big literary naturalism was in Japan while Santōka was developing. Santōka was just as much influenced by naturalism as by Zen, which, in literary scholarship, would place him as an example of literary naturalism in a haiku realm.

It is not too difficult to see a connection between certain aspects of “human nature revealing” naturalism and certain aspects of Zen, (though Santōka was years away from a personal relationship with Zen) but, after Japan’s modernization begins, Buddhism in general is seen as old fashioned and as inconsistent with logic and science. It’s seen as superstition (by some of Japan’s intellectual, international, progressive elite). Besides that, with the efforts to establish state Shintō, Buddhism comes under attack as a “foreign religion” (though it has been in Japan since the sixth century). Some temples are destroyed, some

lands are confiscated. As things proceed there is a jostling for position in society, and Buddhism, including Zen, engages in self-renovation. One way the Zen world tries to reestablish itself is by jumping on the bushidō [way of the samurai warrior] bandwagon that appears as Meiji theorists seek some unifying image and principle that can assuage their inferiority complex in what was for Japan a new international scene.

For Zen Japan, as for Japanese Buddhism in general, it was a choice between finding some way to appear useful in the nationalist, imperialist scheme, or ceasing to exist. That is why Zen—seen by some as foreign or old fashioned—promoted itself as linked with a revisionist history of an age old way of the samurai (bushidō) that was being promoted as a source of “unique” national identity for all Japanese even if they were not descendants of samurai houses. This began just a couple decades after the samurai class was officially abolished. [See Oleg Benesch. *Inventing the Way of the Samurai: Nationalism,*

Internationalism, and Bushidō in Modern Japan.]

That scene, with Zen hooked up with nationalism and imperialism, makes it easy for some to imagine Santōka was involved in it because he took priestly vows and wore a monk's robe, etc. But Santōka is all about not being in that world. He was too emotionally unstable to be in it even if he'd wanted to, and, as mentioned in the introduction to this book, he was too busy trying to survive to get caught up in ideologies, right or left.

At the same time Japanese Buddhism was trying to establish itself as being sufficiently Japanese and patriotic, it was trying to make itself sufficiently modern. It was trying to show itself as inextricably entwined in Japanese identity AND as an inherently modern thought system.

Making it new: *In History of Japanese Religion*, Anesaki Masaharu tells us that “young Buddhists [of the late nineteenth century] found that the

Buddhist conception of the world as a perpetually flowing process and the continuity of Karma had anticipated the Darwinian theory of evolution; that the dialectical method of Buddhist philosophy in analyzing all conceptions and dispelling the idea of permanent entity was quite congenial to Spencerian agnosticism; that the Hegelian logic of reaching a higher synthesis over the concepts of being and non-being was exactly the kernel of the Tendai doctrine of the Middle Path.” [p. 361]

Eventually war comes. What’s new? According to Brian Victoria in *Zen at War*, the Zen sects—as well as other Buddhist sects—of Santōka’s day were supportive of imperial wars and explained away aggression’s injustices with old time karma so that it is the victims, due to their own bad karma, who are responsible for having their country taken over by Japan, for whatever suffering they incurred. (Nor is it anything new in Japan for Zen or other Buddhist sects to be involved in war. Even though Buddhism is sup-

posedly pacifist.)

The haiku form Santōka’s early Meiji predecessors inherited was centuries old, dating back, as a form independent from *renku* linked verse, to Bashō in the 17th century. Traditional Buddhism, as mentioned, was seen in modernizing Meiji as old fashioned. So with the haiku form. And much else, I suspect. Masaoka Shiki, though, instead of abandoning the haiku form, pulled it, dusty and old, out of its “tradition” condition. He brushed it off, made it good as new looking at real life scenes. Shiki is said to have opened the way for something different with this form, something new.

Different haikuists took away different things from Shiki, but through one of his disciples, Kawahigashi Hekigotō (1873~1937) begins a movement calling for the abandonment of the traditional 5, 7, 5 syllabic pattern as well as conven-

tional use of season words. From Hekigotō we get to the prolific (he authored over 300 books) Ogiwara Seisensui.

Ogiwara Seisensui continued the push to reform the practice of haiku by dropping—and urging other poets to drop—all the (what seemed to him as) tedious and unnecessary rules and mannerism governing, or constricting, haiku making. Let Haiku Be Fresh and Alive. The result is called free-style haiku. That is the style Santōka adopted after his encounter with Ogiwara. (Some ask if the result of dropping all the traditional can in fact be called a haiku. Again, I personally don't care. It's poetry. That should be enough.)

Years before undertaking any training in Zen, Santōka says *A Poem Is Born*. Not “born of...” —BORN. This is a visceral response to poem making, but the fact that a visceral response is recognized as a valid take on poem making is maybe due to exposure to Western influence (Nat-

uralism?) and is telling of a modernization that could compass a wider reality with high literature than the ethereality of previous times. The fact that he expresses the matter as originating in his being's own bowels sets it apart from what we might hear before the Meiji opening when a reference to the raw act of giving birth might have been frowned on as not being in good taste.

The point is that various poets of the new age were responding to developments each in his or her unique way (individualism?), and they each had different takes on what they were doing, whether it was Yosano's *jikkan* (“feel of the moment” is my inept rendering), Hagiwara's *shiseishin* (poetic spirit), or Ogiwara's “Listen to nature”... . Their responses were uniquely tuning the spirit of the times. At times (more often than not?) they did not agree with or appreciate what another poet was doing, so it is impossible for a modernist movement in literature to be called a unified field.

Neither was what they were doing necessarily new in all aspects. Yosano Akiko continued writing her tanka poems in classical, Heian era, Japanese. Ogiwara, after scraping off centuries of whatever it is that accumulates when one is a poetry god, returns to vitality he finds in Bashō. "Follow nature and return to nature."

These were not close-minded people and they knew there was still much from the ancients that was usable just as they found inspiration through imports they could adapt to express something vital through their Japanese language and culture.

It was the POSSIBILITY for their different responses to have a venue, a presence (in a literary world), that came with the changing times.

Japan's traditional forms are said to have bothered some of its modernist poets. Hagiwara Sakutarō (1886~1942), whose years pretty much coincide with Santōka's (1882~1940), wrote that "It is no wonder that in an age of anxiety like ours

such a poetry of elegant beauty and leisurely pleasure has begun to bore readers" [Eng. by Ueda Makoto]. Hagiwara is referring to especially haiku. Though even before Hagiwara was born, in the year of Santōka's birth, a group of university professors brought out a poetry anthology entitled *Shintaishishō* (Selected Poems in the New Form), which, in its manifesto, brought down an ax upon all previous poetic forms because they were, according to the editors, unable to express a new Japan's condition, with all its changes and expansion of thought.

Santōka abandoned traditional haiku after he met Ogiwara. In his free-style haiku there is an absence of elegant beauty and leisurely pleasure. But neither is his poetry filled with modern life anxiety, despair, or sense of meaninglessness, despite whatever manifested as his actual life, and despite his brooding passages in letters, essays, and diaries—though one might expect from someone with Buddhist background the notion that the world—not necessarily the modern

world—is illusory and defiled. In his poetry, though, what we mostly find is naturally flowing birth, breath, and death. All else has been shed. In his poetry there is what can't be labelled. To label something we must bring it to a standstill to be boxed and stamped; that is not possible with Santōka's flux.

The haiku, in his hands at least, is able to embrace Westernization and modernity in all its permeations and permutations.

Santōka, in priest robes, is in town standing chanting sutra holding his iron alms bowl begging. Jazz music pumps out from inside a building. Santōka writes of it:

お経届かないジャズの騒音

Which, in one dimension, in prose, could mean something like "This jazz is too loud for a sutra to be heard." In terms of a scholarly classification, it might be seen as the use of the haiku form

to explore issues of modernity. That does not mean, though, that Santoka intended such an exploration.

Are Jazz and sutra set in opposition? Is something from the modern age set against tradition, drowning it out? That is the standard interpretation of modernity versus tradition. As modernity advances, many customs disappear, are not preserved. Not eating meat, for example.

Is Santōka lamenting the influence of Western cultural imports? Or are both sutra and jazz manifestations of non-divisive mystery? If Santōka's words are merely the explanatory prose mentioned above, where is the poetry? What's the poem?

Sōon (騒音) is usually used in a negative way as in "Jazz isn't music, it's just noise." We might wonder, though, why Santōka seems to find jazz objectionable. Didn't he have some kind of affinity for jazz because, like his own freestyle

work that abandons rules for traditional haiku, jazz is at times improvisational and can be performed comparatively freely, based on a performer's sense of the number at the moment. (It might be of interest to readers that once war against the Allies began with Pearl Harbor, jazz was outlawed in Japan. The enemy's music.)

It's hard to tell with Santōka, since he, in a journal entry, tells us that a jazz dance performance got on his nerves. (He uses the term neurasthenia, which was the official diagnosis of his condition by a Tokyo physician.) Not only that but the performance apparently bothered the country folk where the encounter took place.

On Santōka's *kasa* hat or begging bib there was no insignia indicating monasterial affiliation, which would be the practice with *takuhatsu* (monk's begging, spiritual begging) in Japan. Which means that he had no monastery to return to for shelter or food. The practice of *takuhatsu*, which has continued since the days of the Bud-

dha, is said to be a practice to develop acceptance, humility, and poverty. According to one story a begging monk named Makakasho ate a leper's finger that had fallen off into his begging bowl. The monk Ryōkan supposedly ate offerings which insects were also eating. Santōka accepts jazz—why doesn't he move and beg somewhere else?—even though it might interfere with his chanting and begging, even though to him it is noisy and gets on his nerves, even though to him it might represent modernity's materialism, arrogance, whatever. It's likely the sutra he's chanting at the time is about emptiness. Form is emptiness, emptiness is form. The Heart Sutra.

The act of giving alms, for the giver, supposedly brings with it a sense of being connected with the spiritual. A monk's reception of whatever is given is thought to connect a monk with a community as protector of dharma. This doesn't necessarily mean Santōka saw himself at that moment as dharma protector. On the other hand his condition was likely not raw desperation.

In another poem he connects jazz with a beautiful facial profile:

横顔の美しいジャズ

Likely his response to jazz, or to modernity, depends not only on the matter at hand—whether it's literature or music or whatever—but also on his emotional condition at the moment. Santōka doesn't seem to have formulated an ideology for or against social modernization in its entirety. Though from his university days he had been actively promoting foreign-inspired newness in literature, Santōka has been by one author, in a fictional work, accused of supporting nationalism.

According to Murakami, somewhere along the way of his walking, Santōka came to a realization of his being Japanese in a Japanese culture. Interest in foreign literary imports waned, as did his interest in Marxist theory. He did not negate what Marxism has to say. He merely said "Leave Marxism to the Marxists." He was sens-

ing his own aging, shedding some of the concerns of his younger self.

Nationalism, at that time in Japan, is complicated. The nationalism of his day doesn't necessarily mean support for imperialism and colonialism. For some it was a more agrarian nationalism that could mean opposition to war, opposition to imperialism, and opposition to capitalism. It could mean wanting to protect that country's way of life against the onslaught of Western culture. It could mean wanting Japan to still be Japan. In that sense, Lafcadio Hearn was a Japanese nationalist. Miyazawa Kenji was a nationalist.

For Santōka the fecund is anything anywhere. Anything can be poetry—even nothing. It depends. Santōka's sutra chanting witnesses jazz, lets jazz be. The loud jazz lets the sutra chanter realize his own power to go on, even though it might seem he is powerless, ineffectual. Through his haiku both flow as one (not Pure Land but) poemland place. East and West

can never meet because of the fragmentary nature of our minds. But Santōka takes us beyond East and West.

Buddhist tradition is brought into contact with the materialistic, secular modern age (jazz) and is renewed through his poetry. Everywhere is dharma, even in that goddamn noisy jazz! Modern age secularism is brought into contact with Buddhism and made spiritual—though not made traditional—through his poetry. Buddhism is set free from predetermined boundaries for what spiritual is. Jazz is set free from predetermined boundaries for what materialistic music is.

And he does this with haiku, which Hagiwara tells us are unusable by modern Japanese. Eye of the beholder, it seems. Depends on how the eye is conditioned. Or unconditioned. Or ear.

Jazz too
in the begging bowl
Santōka

When Santōka journeyed north to the Tōhoku region, visiting some of the spots Bashō visited and visiting members of Stratus, he went as far as Hiraizumi in Iwate Prefecture, which was the northernmost spot Bashō visited. Hiraizumi is a place of historical significance.

ここまでを来し水飲んで去る

Come all the way here drink water leave

Not to dwell, but it absorbs both ancient and modern.

Was Santōka a “modernist” in the sense of an experimental or avant-garde style? Certainly a case can be made for that label. There is his dispensing with haiku conventions, the push to create something new through new forms of writing, the nonlinearity of his haiku poems—or what I’ve called elsewhere his “Zen grammar,” and there is what might be called the interiority of his work. In a discussion of which label is appropriate—

whether his writing reflects a modernist movement or a lay-it-bare naturalist movement or some overlap of the two—what would be a good classification? Again, as mentioned above, it is my humble opinion that Santōka can't be labeled.

Of Adultery, Suicide, Zen Enlightenment, and Poetry

There is a Japanese expression 浮気は男の甲斐性 [*uwaki wa otoko no kaishō*] which I render in English as “keeping a mistress shows a man's success.” It's not a literal translation. The word *uwaki* would more technically be extramarital sex. But as a behavior in the days of Santōka's father and for a man of his social class it meant keeping a mistress, or more than one.

It seems that yesteryear Japanese wives were more tolerant of their husbands' sex outside marriage. IF their position as wife was secure. They'd pretend not to know. They'd look the other way.

The law itself was tolerant too, provided the woman involved was not married. Here is the scene: during the Edo period, if a man had an adulterous relationship with a married woman he

could be paraded through the streets, imprisoned, or put to death. It was not illegal, though, for a married man to have sex with a woman who was not married. There was no punishment for that. If a married woman had sex outside of marriage with either a married or single man, death was the punishment.

During the Meiji, Taisho, and prewar Showa periods, adultery was a criminal offense for a married woman as well as for a man who had sex with another married woman. But it was no longer punishable by death. Married men who had sex with single women were not punished by law. It was not illegal for men to keep mistresses. The Meiji emperor had five concubines.

Although it doesn't concern the case of Santōka's father, the crime of adultery was abolished after WW2 by the Civil Code of 1947. The new marriage laws supposedly protect individual dignity and the essential equality of the sexes.

Marriage in premodern Japan was regulated within the family system. That system, once patriarchy had become the norm, was controlled by a family's head male. From the beginning of the Edo period marriage gradually was moved into a public domain and various codes regulating marriage became required.

When Santōka was a child, adult married men who were able to support a family and were still with enough energy and money to have a mistress were thought to be overflowing with success. Though such matters were not broadcast publicly, were kept out of the public eye, stayed under the social radar, a mistress could be viewed as a feather in a man's cap, a sign of how virile he was, and women of those times, wives, some at least, are said to have been proud of their husband's "power." It might be seen as a feather in a wife's bonnet, then, too (below the social radar of course). It was not something to be ashamed of, not something to seek a divorce about. PROVIDED her own position was secure, provided

the husband was not going to toss her out and bring home another woman to replace her. Though some wives might have been jealous, or have felt their dignity offended. Who knows the statistics? There aren't any.

The importance of all this to the study of Santōka is that the father's keeping of mistresses is often given as explanation for Santōka's mother's suicide by letting herself fall down a well outside the family home in Hōfu. That sad event is said to have been a central trauma in Santōka's life and to have denied him for life any loving relationship with a woman.

That narrative begins with Ōyama Sumita, who was a member of Sōun (Stratus, the free-style haiku group to which Santōka belonged) as well as a good friend with whom Santōka exchanged visits. Through his memoirs and other writings, Ōyama introduced a deceased Santōka to a wider audience.

In an encyclopedia article Ōyama is described as 宗教家, a religionist. According to Murakami's book, Ōyama worked as an editor at the communications (telegraph, telephone) bureau in Hiroshima. One translator tells us Ōyama was a Zen priest. It is possible to be priest and hold a full time secular job. Many work as teachers. Maybe that is why so much of the writing that was originally available about Santōka focused on his Zen ways. Ōyama died in 1994.

Given the times, though, we might question whether the father's philandering, in itself, is a solid reason for his mother's suicide. The Taneda were wealthy landowners. As mentioned above, for male householders of such families, keeping a mistress was not an uncommon practice. That reason alone sounds insufficient to drive his mother to such distress, to suicide.

There is speculation about the possibility that there was a disorder in the mother and that this, genetically or environmentally (or both), was

passed on to Santōka and to his younger brother as well. I have no details about other siblings though I met a grandson of a younger sister when in Hōfu (Santōka's home town). Depression, or manic depression (bipolar disorder). The only factual medical records we have about Santōka are from his days as a university student and later—in his early 40s—working as a librarian in Tokyo. He was diagnosed as 神経衰弱 [shinkei suijaku, neurasthenia], which is a diagnosis that is not used much now but would commonly be referred to as nervous breakdown. (“Nervous disorder” or “neurosis” are terms that seem to be used now for what used to be diagnosed as neurasthenia.)

Neurasthenia was early on thought to be connected with modern life and its increasing urbanization. In fact Santoka's symptoms first appear after his move to the Tokyo metropolis.

It is said that Santōka himself wrote in a diary that it was his father's keeping mistresses that

drove his mother to suicide.

Japan was not, is not, a couples based society. It was/is an “家” (IE: household) based patriarchal society. A wife, until 1947, was a husband's possession, a daughter was a father's possession. The situation was/is similar in male-dominated societies the world over. Japanese men, from Edo period on, made adultery laws that were more severe for women so as to secure their property and bind their women to their households. This means that husband and wife were for the most not bound by love. As mentioned above, it was not illegal at the time of Santōka's father's philandering for married men to have sex with single women, prostitutes or mistresses. Or even with young boys.

It might seem that these social and legal subtleties are irrelevant for a wife who, whether it's labeled betrayal of love in a Western sense or, in a Japanese sense, disloyalty to household or neglect of duty (the duty of fidelity) was punished just the

same (when an adulterous husband was not). The importance, in the case of Santōka's mother, is psychological. It doesn't seem that a reason for her suicide would be a broken heart resulting from love betrayed. Nor did most wives whose husbands had mistresses kill themselves.

I have not been able to find the diary entry mentioned above. What I have found is this:

"Sadness dominates my mind and body. Our family's unhappiness begins with mother's suicide. And that, I guess, is the beginning of my writing autobiography.

Mother is not to blame. No one is to blame. If we want to say it's someone's fault then it's everyone's fault. Humans are hopeless.

I put my own affairs in order. Contradiction being what it is." [my English]

While staying at the Gochūan Cottage (Cottage in the Midst) in Yamaguchi, on March third, an

anniversary of his dear mother's death, Santōka wrote the above.

Make no mistake about it: I'm NOT defending Takejirō's (Santōka's father's name) behavior. In addition to keeping a mistress or spending time with and money on geisha, the father's behavior may have been seen as reprehensible in other ways, or immoral, because it may have been considered overly self-indulgent. But if he, as is reported, in fact squandered the family fortune, which means recklessly selling off pieces of the family's land holdings—to pay for geisha or to support mistresses—to the extent that the "IE"—the continuation of the family name, its wealth, position, reputation—would be threatened, would he have been able to hold office as deputy mayor or serve as village headman? If so, it might, for some Westerners at least, be a bit of a negative reflection on Japanese society.

The question opens a complicated scene. On one hand, some might assume that individuals

holding public office are supposed to be at least outwardly socially responsible, respectable people. On the other hand we hear daily news reports of misdoings of people holding public office, of bribery, of misuse of public funds, of association with criminal elements, and so on. Anyway politics everywhere can be thought of as a web of deceit.

My own experience in Japan leads me to think that an individual's personal merit is not a major consideration when it comes to holding public office. At least locally. What seems important is, once again, "IE" (household). Is it a "great" name, which is comprised of lineage, renown, land, wealth, and standing. Consensus would see a scion of a "great" family as right for public office.

Through town gossip everyone in a Japanese community pretty much knows what everyone else is doing, especially when there is any "gossip value" to behavior. People would have known

Takejirō was a womanizer. But the "great household" thinking overrides that. Keeping mistresses does not interfere with holding public office. The Meiji emperor kept five.

Murakami tells us that the local political scene required various expenditures. We already know about the failure of the saké business, which is supposedly what finally bankrupted Takejirō and brought an end to the *ie* (household).

It seems safe to say that the (main) branch of the Taneda house had seen better days before coming under Takejiro's control.

Returning to the quotation above from Santōka's diary, the sentence "Mother is not to blame" raises another question: Why would the mother be blamed? She would in fact be blamed in the Japan of that day because for a mother to commit suicide and leave behind five children would by most be considered selfish and irresponsible (not fulfilling her duty). Which is why Santōka feels

a need to write “Mother is not to blame.” Otherwise why would he be moved to set that out in his diary?

The narratives concerning Santōka’s early life, the ones available for English language readers, all seem to connect the mother’s suicide with the father’s philandering and reckless use of money. Earlier English language translators get their biographical narratives from what they find written in Japanese. For example James Abrams and John Stevens borrow from Sumita Ōyama.

Is Ōyama writing about Santōka as a scholarly biographer or is he writing a personal memoir? The latter. Then other English language translators borrow from Abrams or Stevens. What we get is a limited view, a view that has as its source only one narrative.

The Ōyama writings about Santōka were the first available. Ōyama was the main agent through which Santōka’s works gained a wider audience.

In 1988, though, Murakami Mamoru, who became the leading Santōka scholar in Japan (and so in the world), brought out a detailed scholarly account, a critical biography, of Santōka called 放浪の俳人山頭火, which I render into English as The Wandering Poet Santōka.

In that book is an account of what happened in Santōka’s family that may have prompted his mother’s leaping down a well. Murakami’s account includes the bit about Takejirō’s philandering, but his explanation takes into account other, maybe more significant factors.

In another chapter I have mentioned some of the effects Meiji period modernization had on the overall scene in Japan and in particular on Santōka’s family. Due to his grandfather’s early death, in 1871, at age 16, Santōka’s father Takejirō was placed in control of a landholder household of significant size and influence (in the area). (For reference it might be helpful to know that in Japan the age of majority was set at age 20 in

1896.) There was no guardianship. Nor was there any apprenticeship for him as overseer of a large estate. Times were turbulent. Regulations were changing. Was he overwhelmed by it all?

According to Murakami, the father's involvement in local politics required much time and money. Takejirō neglected his family. His activity had a negative effect on the family finances, throwing things into disorder. Fusa, Santōka's mother, grumbled. Her complaining had a negative effect on her relations with her mother-in-law, who lived with them. The scene at home was cold; Takejirō was at home even less. Vicious cycle. Fusa became more and more isolated within the family. Her troubles grew in intensity until she became neurotic and developed a persecution complex.

This is fuller background that explains how she became delusional and killed herself. It wasn't only because her husband kept mistresses.

If a person survives a traumatic event, he or she cannot completely understand his or her experience. Is it even possible to communicate what is not understood? The act of trying to understand the meaning of an event changes the survivor.

For an eleven-year-old child, seeing a mother's dead drowned body brought up out from a well she'd let herself fall down was a traumatic experience that Santōka spent many years trying to find the meaning of. It might be said that it was an event which transformed his entire life, setting him off on a quest, the goal of which was acceptance.

It has been suggested that Santōka was so disturbed by his mother's suicide that, beginning as a young adult, he sought relief with saké, or that he eventually took to walking in order to accommodate an undesirable past. Taking it outdoors

provided ample room to air maybe.

We might wonder why it took so many years for that event to become the issue it eventually did. After all, subsequent to his mother's suicide, Santōka seems to have led a life relatively undisturbed by traumatic memories. He continued schooling and got good grades (continually in the top 25% of his class). He did not become a juvenile delinquent. He was not violent towards others. Nor did he torture animals and insects. He did not set things on fire. He did not inflict himself with wounds. He did not run away from home. He exhibited none of the behaviors typically associated with a "problem child."

But in the five years of schooling (at a time when four years were compulsory) prior to entering a junior high school course there were 1500 school days. Santōka attended 977. That is only a 65 percent attendance record. There is no known official explanation for all the absenteeism.

It is possible that he experienced a sense of inadequacy. His mother had died, had taken her own life. It's an unhappy event, a black mark on one's karmic social record. Everyone in town and at school would have known. Word gets around. It may have left him with a sense of stigma. Suicide as an act of taking responsibility was/is considered honorable in Japan. If a woman with five children kills herself it was/is considered irresponsible and brings with it some degree of dishonor. Her suicide was an offense against social mores. Within the group psychology those social mores gave rise to, the boy's sense of identity in that community, his sense of belonging, became insecure.

Truancy is a word that might characterize certain aspects of his later life as husband and father. Not there a lot of the time. And then it becomes a permanent state in which he is often never anywhere settled.

It is possible that Santōka was not even conscious

of the fact that being absent was his way of dealing with trauma. (In certain works by Freud and Ferenczi, life itself is seen as trauma. We're all terrorized and because we are we're absent, not in the here and now).

Santōka described himself, and his life, as a mess. Traumatic experiences tend to leave personal histories that are messy and unresolved. The only means available to Santōka was poetry. Making poems, he tells us, is one the few things he is good at. Another was drinking saké.

It is not my intention to pick out particular poems and tell readers they represent his striving to understand his mother's suicide or deal with the abandonment the boy Shōichi (Santōka) may have felt. But is the fact that he turned to poetry and that poetry became a mainstay of his life connected in any way to that sad loss of his mother? Poetry became a surrogate mother. That is the red thread umbilical connection that had been broken (drowned); poetry was its reconstruc-

tion. It is her renewed body as his body of poetry.

Why couldn't he disappear in a crowd? Why did he have to pursue a life of singularity? Because she left him. Mother, in Japan, and elsewhere too maybe, is the prime buffer between child and world. She helps the child blend in. She is love's body/bodhi. All is lost when she's gone when he's eleven.

He becomes increasingly unconnected with the world and the adult roles it asks him to play: husband, father, provider. For a person of his sensitive nature, is poetry where he feels most secure?

He was able to "get over" his father, but his mother held him back. He was moved towards the Buddhist priesthood early on, and it might be convenient to imagine that for Santōka, who, unlike most, had no longer any attachments to family or home, whose "family line house" [家, *ie*] was gone thanks to his father's mismanage-

ment and his own inability as eldest son to rectify the situation, whose wife had divorced him and raised their child on her own, there were no obstacles to living the Zen life of *muga* and *mushin* [無我, no self; 無心, no mind]. It would seem reasonable to conclude that his inability to transcend his mother prevented an encounter of the highest perfect wisdom kind. He couldn't become an "enlightened Zen master" as did Ikkyū, Hakuin, and Ryōkan. Unable to extract himself from her death, he was ever attached to the emotional and psychological agitation (which may be why he preferred mountains to seaside, the sea with its endless action being too much like his own mind), or "messiness," it produced in his life; he continually fell back into the world's disturbances. Ups and downs, he tumbled as in laundromat dryer, seeking a way out through a poem. His poems are all about her.

She is Mother Poem. She is the medium through which the tribulations and ups and downs are distilled. She/poetry is his 道 [michi, way,

path]. He could never accept himself, but it didn't matter because She/poetry accepted him, exempting him from that responsibility and making way for his continuous lack of adult responsibility that was characteristic of a child.

Here I've been probing into how his mother's suicide might have effected Santōka's development, but there is professional psychiatric opinion that Santōka's instability was a result of bipolar disorder. Santōka might have become unstable even if his mother did not kill herself.

Do we need to be reminded that there are children who undergo traumatic experiences who grow up to live conventional adult lives, who hold jobs, support families, etc.? There is a story came to me about a woman who as a child saw her father perish engulfed in flames on the kitchen floor. She grew up to marry, remain married, and to raise children of her own. So much depends on the person.

Is it possible that what was happening with Santōka was not, as suggested earlier, an act of trying to understand the meaning of his mother's suicide, an act which changed him, but that, in trying to understand his own condition, which he realizes at some point is not stable, he grasps onto his mother's death as explanation for it all?

Santōka's Love

In 1919, Santōka left Sakino, his wife, and Ken, his 8-year-old son, in Kumamoto and went to Tokyo. His used book shop, on Shimo Avenue in Kumamoto, had not prospered and, besides a change in the store's merchandise, Santōka had to take to the streets, peddling decorative picture frames. At times a (bad influence) acquaintance would turn up and Santōka would drink up proceeds from the day's sales.

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

His first employment was physical labor working for the Tokyo water works. He worked a sieve

to sift sand that would be used to make cement.

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

Kudo Yoshimi had a younger sister named Chiyo. She went to Tokyo too, in part to cook and clean for her brother, but she also worked as a librarian. According to Kei Furukawa, whose book 山頭火の恋 [Santōka's Love] I rely on for many of the details in this chapter (and the account of

romance in Furukawa's book is found only there — not in Ōyama and not in Murakami), it was Chiyo who got Santōka a job as a librarian.

Those years working as a temporary employee (the work continued; "temporary" means not an official full-time employee) for the Tokyo municipal government at the Hitotsubashi Public Library were likely the happiest years of his adult life. He had a steady income, he was not too exhausted—as he had been working at the water works—to continue his literary work (not just poems: for example he wrote an essay comparing Chekov to Bashō, which no longer exists).

During that time there were no tragedies in his life. No one died. No one committed suicide. The only regrettable event—depending on how one looks at it—was receiving divorce papers sent by Sakino's high-handed elder brother, along with the brother's fuming letter accusing Santōka of all sorts of inappropriate behavior and irresponsibilities. Looking only at the surface of

things, none of those accusations can be denied. (Sakino herself seems not to have expressed complaints about her husband. According to various accounts, she was 良妻賢母, a good wife and wise mother. Supposedly she “understood” him and was tolerant of his unconventional ways.)

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

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

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

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

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

We know that just before the breakdown Chiyo

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

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

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

In 1924 there is the famous event in the Santōka

narrative in which, drunk, he stands on tracks in front of an approaching streetcar. Mysteriously, especially in Japan, no police were summoned; a concerned citizen who, according to one account, recognized Santōka because he'd seen him at series of lectures about Zen, took him not to a police station (as would normally be the course recommended by authorities in the case of unruly behavior) but to a Zen temple.

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

Four years later, in 1929, on one of his pilgrimages to sacred sites on Kyushu, he changed the usual course in order to revisit Saiki.

It is impossible to find any reference to Chiyo in

Santōka's diaries. That is because he burnt his diaries of those years. He burnt all his diaries that he had been keeping from his high school days. Why? In his Beggar's Diary, he writes (9/14/1930):

単に句を整理するばかりじゃない、私は今、
私の過去一切を清算しなければならなくなっ
ているのである、……

"All [I'm doing] is putting my haiku in order, and I need to completely bury my past... ."

We can wonder if a reason for destroying his diaries might be that by then he was aware that haiku friends and members of Strata were saving his letters and postcards. He knew he was going to be around as a literary figure after he died. It may be that he wanted to protect Chiyo, wanted to keep her memory private. That may have been partly why he burnt them. But no one knows for sure.

焼き捨てて日記の灰のこれだけか

Burned my diaries their ashes just this

We might wonder too if there is a connection with the notion of *gedatsu* [解脱] mentioned in the chapter "Santōka Zen." The notion of *suteru* [捨てる, to throw away, discard, strip off] in this case can be thought of as ridding oneself of one's past, or of one's self, leaving only what is necessary. One psychological aspect of his walking may have been to rid himself of all but his essential self, which is death, the big eraser.

He wrote in a later diary that he had never loved a woman and had never been loved by a woman. He also tells us that his mother's suicide made any natural relationship with a woman impossible.

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

落葉をふんできて恋人に逢ったなどという

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

There are three haiku in this set from 1933 and they are prefaced with “*Gesaku*: For a certain young man and woman.” And, as an addition to that brief note, Santōka adds: “For a certain young woman.” *Gesaku* is light literature written for amusement. In the Edo period it referred to a form of popular novel.

The two other haiku are:

あれから十年たった顔だほぐろだ

On this ten years after face a mole

泣かれて泣かされる私だった朝寒を別れた

Her tears my tears that cold morning we parted

It might be important to note that Santōka last

saw Chiyo alive in 1923. The poems from 1933 are ten years after.

Santōkazen

Saké Water Mountains Clouds

Santōka's time as a Zen priest was the last 15 years of his 58-year life. (Average life expectancy for Japanese men in 1940—when Santōka died—was 47.) He settled into a life of single wandering or single dwelling in a rented room or cottage. It was a simple life; elements often mentioned in connection with him then—poems (meaning haiku), saké, water, mountains, clouds—are not necessarily reductions of a complex man to simpler things to make him understandable. Necessity is how he lived, a way of life he “chose” (see the introduction). He rid himself of all that he deemed unnecessary, even the task of making a living. This might be called, if we want to give it a Zen interpretation, a practice of *gedatsu* [解脱: being liberated from earthly desire and the woes of humans. The *ge* kanji of *gedatsu* carries the meanings of

“unravel,” “untie,” “undo.” The *datsu* kanji carries the meanings of “undress,” “remove,” “escape from,” “be rid of”.]

From an official Sōtō Sect Zen standpoint, Santōka was only an entry level priest. Because he had taken vows, had taken a Buddhist name (Koho, replacing his given name Shōichi), and had done some elementary studies, according the Sōtō system he could be called a priest, but Santōka never completed the course of preparation that would have qualified him fully as a member of their priesthood. In that scheme of things, Santōka was a dropout.

It is necessary to note these matters here because there is much in print in English about Santōka as a Zen priest that is incorrect. One of the most common mistakes is that Santōka was an ordained priest. In English—as well as in Sōtō officialdom—ordination refers to the ceremony of bestowing a person with a position of religious authority. Most translators tell readers that

Santōka was ordained. Here is Hiroaki Satō in the introduction to his book of translations (*Grass and Tree Cairn*): “The following year he was ordained a Zen monk.” Here’s another from Burton Watson’s introduction to his book *For All My Walking*: “... he was ordained a priest of the Sōtō Zen sect.” Here is yet another example from John Stevens (*Mountain Tasting*, 2009): “In 1925, at the age of forty-two, Santōka was ordained a Zen priest....” And yet another—as if by enough repetition it will become fact—by James Abrams in “Hail in the Begging Bowl:” “... in February 1925, at the age of forty-two, he was ordained as a priest.” That ordination ceremony, called *shinsan-shiki* (晋山式), in which a novice is granted full authority as a Sōtō Zen priest and is entitled to perform ceremonies such as funerals, is one Santōka never underwent. He never attained a position of religious authority.

The ceremony he did have is called *tokudo-shiki* or *shukke tokudo-shiki* (得度式, 出家得度式). In this ceremony, which is one for entering the

Sōtō priesthood and not an ordination ceremony, one receives a priest’s robe, an eating bowl, etc., and takes the precepts. (I cut the description short because the ceremony isn’t). With the Tokudo ceremony one becomes a monk in training. That is the only level in the Sōtō hierarchy to which Santōka advanced.

It might be helpful to compare Santōka with Ikkyū. Ikkyū, after some twenty years of study at monasteries, had—according to most reports—received the *inka* (certificate of enlightenment, to put it briefly) from Kasō, the head monk of the monastery at which he completed his training. His long program of studies and training was then over and it was officially recognized that he could leave the monastery and wander as a pilgrim over the land visiting sacred spots, the purpose of which would be to deepen his practice. (Apparently the Chan school in China actually prescribed a period of wandering—after proof of enlightenment had been established—as a way towards fuller growth.) Santōka undertook only

the latter activity, without all the years of study and meditation that were considered preparation.

Though Santōka entered the Sōtō sect—not Ikkyū's Rinzai—a life spent wandering the land begging for alms is not something the Sōtō Sect sanctions for a priest of Santōka's level, and, more generally, it can be said that the entire Zen establishment in Japan for centuries had been trying to disassociate itself from the old Chan/Zen spirit represented in Japan by monks such as Ikkyū (wandering the land in tattered robes, whoring and drinking whenever he felt like it). It is a matter of fact that Santōka, after one year and two months serving as keeper of the little Mitori temple in the countryside near Kumamoto city, considered completing the course of preparation at one of the sect's two monasteries, at Eihei-ji, in Fukui Prefecture. He decided against it, probably because his body at that age would not be able to take the rigorous program.

(It is while he was keeper at the Mitori temple,

where there was little or nothing pressing to do—

Wind through pines
day and night
ring a bell

—that he begins venturing farther and farther away on his begging jaunts. Then he departs permanently and for the first time—after notifying Priest Mochizuki—takes up wandering without a place to which he could return.)

Most of the monks training at Eihei-ji are young men fresh out of high school or college. What they are subjected to is nothing like the some of the images floating around in popular culture. There are no beatings with bamboo rods, no required chanting of sutra with a waterfall pounding down on one's head.

There is sleep deprivation. Young monks are awakened at 3 a.m. There are severe dietary restrictions. They are given Zen vegetarian

meals which have no animal protein, and the amount of food they receive is restricted. A young priest might lose five kilograms during the first two weeks of training. Out of 100 newly arrived young monks, 20 might disappear. They either run away or are hospitalized for beriberi and never return. (It brings to mind how some dietary Vegans suffered from vitamin B-12 deficiency before there were vegetarian B-12 supplements available.)

Those aspects, along with the fact that every waking moment is meant to be a form of training, are why the program is considered gruelling. It would have been hard for Santōka. Saké is not served at Eihei-ji. During the just a bit less than a year that he was under the guidance of Priest Mochizuki at Hōon-ji in Kumamoto, Santōka would from time to time leave the temple to go drink saké with a friend. That would not be possible at Eihei-ji.

(Not much else is known about Santoka's time at

the Kumamoto temple. Priest Mochizuki was apparently silent regarding Santōka, with nothing bad nor good to say about him.)

It seems to me that there are ways to practice Zen that are outside the boundaries of what is officially recognized by the Sōtō Sect. It is in those outside dimensions, if anywhere at all, that we must find Santōka's Zen practice.

There are many methods. Consuming in a day one large bottle (1800 ml, almost half a gallon)—or two—of saké when he received some or received money with which to buy some and there was inclination to drink does not have to be thought of as outside the sphere of Zen practice. One can practice Zen any way that finds one. That you, once “lost/found” (English does not have a word for this; neither does Japanese), does not get in your own way. One is unlocked. A path opens. The way you get to is arrived at by losing the you the world (illusion) imprisons you as. This is referred to as *muga* [無我, “no self”].

Zen Buddhist abstinence is not because of alcohol, as alcohol, but because of possible attachment to it. This is reflected in one of Santōka's comments about his drinking. He said he was attempting to attain a certain border area between wanting to drink and not wanting to drink, not an abstinence but a condition in which wanting to drink and not wanting to drink (because one can as easily become attached to not wanting to drink as one can to wanting to drink) are one, a condition which transcends both, then and only then can one truly savor saké. Such is the Zen of saké.

Towards the end of his life, he wrote in a diary that saké is his kōan. It's hard to tell, given what comes after that remark, which is him having a conversation with a cockroach that has made its way into his mosquito net, whether he's in a serious mood. It does show, though, that he had been thinking of saké in relation to Zen.

What I have to say about the matter is only

loosely based on what Santōka has to say about it, though from over twenty years of listening to him his words no doubt reverberate in the background.

My thinking is that drinking saké is transformed just as his life is transformed once he begins to wander without a point of return. Though Santōka liked Bashō and read several times Ogiwara Seisensui's book on Bashō as a traveller, it seems that, unlike Bashō, who apparently from a certain stage of his life had a fixed notion of journey as daily existence, Santōka seems to have walked only to leave behind, to shed, his life as it manifested in a social world.

Drinking saké, it seems to me, served a similar purpose. The way in which saké served that purpose changes once he begins his travels. It's no longer a just a chance to get drunk with any Joe Schmo who turns up and forget all his troubles, which is what it seems to have been at times in his street salesman days in Kumamoto.

For trainees at Eihei-ji, as mentioned earlier, every waking moment is Zen practice. Or is supposed to be. Santōka no doubt knew this since the priest he trained with at Hōon-ji (Mochizuki) had trained at that monastery. It seems likely that Santōka would have explored how to make drinking saké a way to practice Zen.

For Santōka, the consumption of so much saké—though he didn't drink so much every single day—is not necessarily in opposition to practicing Zen. Does taking peyote or ayahuasca interfere with shamanic practice? What is important, it seems to me, is getting the mind away from all interpretations, conventional and otherwise. *Mushin* [無心]. *Muga* [無我]. Saké helps release inhibitions. Letting go of the mind, body, spirit, setting life free, losing or at least loosening the persona life makes a social appearance as, things begin to flow. Saké is poems, poems are saké. Saké is Zen, Zen is saké. Poems are Zen. Zen is poems, mountains are poems, poems are mountains. Water is saké,

water is Zen, poems are water, clouds are Zen, poems are clouds, everything is everything, everything is empty. Everything flows together, merges.

Saké itself is empty. Empty is an interpretation. Interpretation is empty.

In fact there is an Edo period collection called 本朝酔菩提全伝 [Honchō Suibodai Zenden, Complete Accounts of Drunken Enlightenment in Our Country].

Where Santōka walks is always going. Earth is taking him for a ride. This is what it is for him to walk, to wander. (Even though he says he goes where the wind blows he's often headed in a direction where there's someone he knows. But that isn't the point.) This is how everything is flowing, even mountains. Flowing together. Feelings become flowings [sic] that are running through his body instead of existing only in mind. He gets out of his own head, out of his

mind, he gets into life as it is. Santōka follows, flows.

It may be hard to appreciate how life is walking unless one walks. Alone. Without someone along to chat with, to point out this and that, to exchange observations with.

Santōka is Santōka, the nature he is born with, which is not an interpretation, though our natures are empty, according to Zen, and that meditated emptiness is what the word Zen means. What Santōka eventually came to drink wasn't just saké. It was Zen saké. Zen saké is empty saké. One has to drink the way for it to become a way. Saké became, as did walking, a way of meditation. Drinking saké might not be his kōan to solve, as he seems to have thought. It might have been one of his approaches to solving the kōan of life itself.

When every aspect of living, even simple breathing, becomes meditation, is that what it means to

be a Zen master?

The matter of being unable to die naturally as grasses do he experiences keenly as his own and so our own human disability. We are unable, it seems, to just shed our lives as so much fertilizer. Only he "owns" that condition. Because we know we die, we can't. Or we think we can't, because we think, or think we know.

Grasses don't know they die. There are no inhibitions there. At a certain living-thing depth we don't know either. We know and we don't know. Saké loosens inhibitions. It helps us approach a state in which knowing and not knowing are one. A finger pointing at the moon. An empty saké bottle. That's the Zen of saké.

This was after he took up the Zen way. (Again, it must be pointed out that the Sōtō Sect does not recognize Santōka's behavior as "the Zen way," nor does it have an official recognition of him as the "Zen master" one translator describes him

as.) After he took up walking and cottage life. Those years were his last fifteen.

Was Santōka the enlightened Zen master Professor John Stevens describes? I'm not sure exactly what an enlightened Zen master is or is supposed to be. According to one account, Zen master is "a somewhat vague English term that arose in the first half of the 20th century, sometimes used to refer to an individual who teaches Zen Buddhist meditation and practices, usually implying longtime study and subsequent authorization to teach and transmit the tradition themselves." (Wikipedia)

That definition would not seem to describe Santōka. He certainly did not receive an *inka* certification from anyone within the Sōtō sect. Santōka, once he put on the robes, certainly in his own manner tried to live in a vaguely Mahayana way. Mahayana itself, it might be pointed out, is not, nor ever was, a unified occurrence. It developed over centuries out of a wide variety of

practices linked loosely to vinaya (monastic codes, discipline) of non-Mahayana practice.

That he was a master of poetry there is no doubt.

We might imagine Santōka in his tattered priestly robes and his few possessions as living very close to nature. Though he doesn't go back to the wild. There is that very civilized practice called Zen—essential Zen, as opposed to the formalizations of it taught in monasteries—that is more or less guiding him. Zen is so civilized because it rids itself of what is thought of as civilized. Very close to "nature." Very close to life as it is, however it is, without its cultural dress ups.

Zen is different things for different people. If you pour Zen into an orange glass, it looks orange. If poured into a green glass, it looks green: For Santōka, Zen was a way to focus his living by keeping things simple. Focused, his life opens up to all that is beyond itself. That is the catalyst for the intermingling of poetry saké

water mountains clouds.

Santōka's Zen Poetry

For years the term Zen poetry made me wonder. Not that I know a great deal about Zen, but from what little I do know I had to ask: What does the “Zen” of Zen poetry mean? What, as an adjective, does it indicate? Given what I do know, it seems safe to say it means a meditated awakening to “emptiness” or “nothingness” as an approach to an ever altering state of mind and being. Emptiness and nothingness are not extremely informative as adjectives describing poetry.

I realize that my question may arise from looking at the term overly literally, but that's the way I am. No doubt to other readers it means poetry that is connected in some way—formally or casually—to Zen Buddhism.

If we accept Zen teachings—Buddha nature is everywhere and nowhere, etc. etc.—then it would

be impossible for poetry—or anything at all—not to be connected with Zen. Zen would be unavoidable. The air we breathe.

Some of us prefer a scientific interpretation, that air is oxygen, etc. To each his own. Her own. Oxyzen [sic]?

There is Zen and there is Zen manifested as a phenomena called the practice of Zen, which includes seated meditation or moving meditation as well as other forms of behavior manifesting formlessness. The Zen of anything and everything.

A long ago Zen priest in Japan tells us that to write poetry is to practice Zen. It seems to me that anything we do, if done in Zen, is enacting, or practicing Zen. Taking a shit is to practice Zen? “Dao is in piss and shit” (too).

“[Zen poetry’s] general features may be cited: conciseness, rigor, volitionality, virility, and

serenity.” (Takashi Ikemoto, *Zen: Poems, Prayers, Sermons, Anecdotes, Interviews*. Intro, xviii.)

The notion of spontaneity might be added. Though it can occur outside of what is called a Zen experience, spontaneity seems to make a regular appearance in that realm. Each occurrence of satori, when a mind vanishes in an encounter with emptiness, nothingness, or when a self realizes it doesn’t exist, finds expression, if it finds expression, spontaneously, without premeditation, as one with whatever arises.

“As an expression of the inexpressible Absolute, Zen poetry is of course often illogical; it is usually colored and enlivened by what we may call “absolute symbolism.” These features mark Zen poems, especially those composed in classical Chinese forms; and most of the pieces of Japanese masters are in that style, the others being waka and haiku.” [Ikemoto]

Santōka’s poetry has been described as Zen

poetry. Okay. I have no problem with that. Though he was writing haiku poems before he put on a priest's robes, which was for what turned out to be the fourth quarter of his life, the haiku form itself is said to have been connected, to one degree or another, with Zen. In Japan no one is ever far away from Zen or other forms of Buddhism. Without even knowing it, people of various ages pass Zen temples mesmerized by a smartphone screen.

In the book mentioned above, a good number of the Japanese Zen poems seem to be about the experience of satori. They are sort of overtly about Zen so that, without some background in it, a reader can be lost as to what's being attempted. Their being anthologized in a book of Zen poems provides a frame of reference we wouldn't have if we encountered some of these poems in isolation. In 14th century Japan's Five Mountains system*, one element of Zen training was the art of poetry. Naturally, some were better at it than others.

Trying to imagine Santōka poems in an anthology of Zen poems makes me ask is it kosher for his poems to be there with Ikkyū, Issa, Ryōkan and the rest. Sure, the world of Zen poetry can claim Santōka, but does Santōka need to be claimed by Zen? No.

Quite a few of the poems found in the anthologies don't seem to stand well alone as poetry, but that's a matter of taste; subjective. Many specialize in the "absolute symbolism" Ikemoto mentions. To me, they can be appreciated as special interest writing that takes an available poetic form.

I moved across the Dharma-nature,
The earth was buoyant, marvelous.
That very night, whipping its iron horse,
The void galloped into Cloud Street.

[Getsudo. Eng. by Ikemoto and Lucien Stryk]

Lucien Stryk pointed out how such a poem from

14th century Japan might pass as a surrealist poem of the 20th century. That is an interesting observation. But we can appreciate Santōka's poems without any special interest in Zen, or in an avant garde movement for that matter.

*Five Mountain System. Briefly: a system of state-sponsored Zen temples. In Japan there are five in Kyoto, five in Kamakura, etc. The word "mountain" denotes temple or monastery.

Two Santōka Stories

1.

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

While there, Santōka was entertained at Wada's expense with geisha, lots of saké, and haute cuisine at the best dining places the resort had to offer. Santōka was likely unaware that Wada, though from a high ranking samurai lineage, was

struggling to get by. In order to host Santōka, who was by then a well-respected (though regarded as eccentric) poet, Wada sold off collections of books and took on an extra shift, the night shift, at his job to save up enough money to offer おもてなし (omotenashi) hospitality to the revered guest. (I'm told that the English word "hospitality" does not have the complete sense of "omotenashi." It might be best to think of it as hospitality on steroids. Imagine an imperial visit and then tone it down some.)

Santōka thoroughly indulged himself for nine days. He might not have known about Wada's financial situation, and, even if he had known, what was he to do: refuse all the hospitality? On the last day, June 23rd, Santōka, borrowing a yukata (a light kimono worn in summer or used as a bathrobe) and a towel, left from Wada's home saying he was going off to try out a local sentō (public bathhouse). Instead he went to Tsuruoka Station and boarded a train to Sendai.

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

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

and staff but to please send the priest robe.

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

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

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

2.

SANTŌKA HUMOR

Santōka is making his way through Miyazaki Prefecture. In one city he spots a café. He enters.

Remember he's in priest garb, carrying his begging bowl. In many such places he's turned out, told to move along. In this particular cafe it seems he actually wanted a cup of coffee and is standing waiting to be seated. There are three young waitresses who ignore him. It's obvious to him that they don't see him as customer, only as a beggar priest.

Santōka decides to turn the situation into a test of endurance. He begins chanting the Kannon Sutra*. About halfway through, one of the waitresses comes and puts a copper coin of lowest value into his bowl. Santōka feels he's won the endurance test. But instead of being thankful and receiving the coin, he returns it to her, telling her it's a tip.

He thinks of the incident as nonsensical, humorous.

Brief example:

Kannon,
paying homage to Buddha,
forged a causal connection with Buddha,
a karmic affinity with Buddha,
a karmic affinity with Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha,
thus attaining permanence, ease, selfhood, and purity.
In the morning think of Kannon,
in the evening think of Kannon.
Thought after thought arises from mind;
thought after thought is not separate from mind.

Writing or Living Santōka

“Sincerity, of course, does not necessarily make for great poetry, and Santoka certainly did not possess the poetic genius of itinerant nature poets such as Saigyō or Bashō or the intellectual skills and polish of semi-recluses such as Kamo no Chomei or Buson. Yet the intricate relationship between his artistic and experiential lives, coupled with his training in Zen and Buddhist thought, gives his work an acuteness of expression and at times a striking freshness.”

(James Abrams, “Hail in the Begging Bowl”)

“... Santōka certainly did not possess the poetic genius... or the intellectual skills and polish... .”

Was it easy for Abrams to write that?

“A poorly born haiku is preferable to a finely made haiku”. (Santōka, 1915, my English.)
Abrams also has a version of this but in my hum-

ble opinion he misses its point. Santōka's thinking was that a poem coming from one's core being, in its natural element, as that natural element, will speak to readers more directly, more genuinely, than a poem draped in the literary finery of polished skills. It may be easy for scholar/critics to question or dismiss such work because it deviates from the Aristotelian model they are trained to worship. Or it might be some think it easy to just ignore all the rules governing haiku making and just slop something down on paper. Maybe they don't realize how hard it is to make words themselves resonate beyond measure.

By the way, the above statement by Santōka came ten years before any Zen Buddhist training (though see the essay on Santōka's Zen poetry). A difficult question is whether the statement shows the influence of literary naturalism or of Zen. It's likely the case that any serious haiku practitioner would know the works of Bashō, Issa, and others in whose works there are said to

be connections with Zen. At that time in Santōka's life, though, he was more consciously aware of naturalism than he was of Zen. Naturalism was something new that had been happening on Japan's literary scene. Are the poverty and sad life seen in Santōka's diaries connected at all with the poverty and sad life seen in the fiction of Japanese naturalists? Granted Santōka was poor and his life had maybe more than its fair share of sadness, but it was also a time, with the advent of naturalism, in which focus on poverty and misery was acceptable content for literature.

It was a time when the artless as-it-is-ness of one's stripped naked essence was considered art. We might wonder whether he could have written as he did had naturalism not been on the scene (or if there had been no freestyle haiku movement). Was Santōka a pioneer? A go-it-aloner? We know that it was a new age for literature, an age shaped in part by a naturalism that no doubt connected directly to Santōka's personal condition.

Santōka was writing in an age in which what was is now called modern poetry was becoming prose, meaning that, from Meiji period on, prose used in literary modes called realism and naturalism, written in increasingly colloquial Japanese, gradually takes over the position of high literature, replacing poetry, and the language of poetry itself becomes less “poetic,” less flowery, less elegant, less dependent upon antiquated techniques, less “beautiful.” It was becoming more like prose. Poetry can be distinguished from prose by how words are arranged on a page, but also by the depths a poem’s words reflect. The whole push is that all the predetermined elegant expression is not needed—not to mention that it is anachronistic—in a world in which a major concern is whether to put linoleum in a living room. Revelation of human nature at depth—beyond beautiful and ugly—becomes something to savor.

To take diary entries to try to reconstruct a total-

ity of a person’s life does not, to me, seem awfully reasonable but this is what so often happens in the church of reason. Granted, at times that is all there is to work from. Diaries, notebooks... . These are sometimes all a scholar has.

It has been pointed out that there can be a discrepancy between an author in his or her words and that author’s behavior in his or her life. We hear that in real life such and such an author was a real bastard, etc. Or we are told a writer we admire was gay, and, depending on our acceptance or nonacceptance of love in many forms, that information might make a difference in how we read that author. Or we hear about embarrassing political connections or all sorts of things that might tarnish a shining image of a writer we might have in our minds. Is a writer to blame for the image we create?

People all over the world, hundreds or thousands of years after, don’t read a poet because of what society deems personal defects. We read them

for what their poetry offers. This does not mean we need to excuse what may be seen as disgusting personal behavior. That's up to each of us as readers.

A writer can, while being hopelessly flawed as a person, present something vital for people anywhere, any time. THAT writer, that essential being, can be found only in the words he or she offers. Out of his personal life's ruins Santōka arises clear and resonant in poetry.

But scholars seem often to feel a need to dwell on the personal life. That is because doing so involves them in the production of knowledge, which is what their business is. Production and distribution. But poetry offers nothing from which to produce knowledge, which is why they focus on the person, and when they do, we can see a similarity between a scholar and a journalist.

A journalist is taught to predetermine what the

(marketable) "story" is in some event. Then a journalist proceeds by arranging things in such a way as to roll that story out. To begin with, they're looking for "an angle."

In this way a scholar/fiction-writer comes along reading Santōka's diaries and, picking this and that from here and there, shows the poet having affiliation with members of ultra-right wing societies and portrays the poet as a supporter of war. Another scholar reads Santōka's diaries and draws from them to build an image of Santōka as existentialist sufferer. Another finds in the diaries or in the memoirs of Santōka's friend Ōyama Sumita material to present Santōka as an enlightened Zen master.

As we see, Santōka's diary entries are open to all sorts of interpretations. Like a journalist, a scholar comes to his or her task with a predetermined angle.

This is not to deny the material used to construct

an image of Santōka. It's just to say that the resulting image turns out to be partial and doesn't show the poet fully.

Let's return to the above Abrams quote about Santōka's lack of poetic genius. It seems to me that Mr. Abram's may have fallen just a bit short of being able to make a distinction between writing as literature—with its niceties of polish, skills, and genius— and writing as fecundity. The latter goes beyond being literature and comes from a mystery zone that is the source of all living and dying.

Literature gives aficionados something to delve into with endless orations, explaining this and that to kingdom come.

Fecundity offers an infusion of life. Nothing can be said.

We find life flowing in Santōka's poems.

His life is ours. Our lives are his. Here we are, brought together through poetry to where life is one without possessives such as "his" or "ours."

We find life. If we are able to sense life as we live it. If you meet the Buddha on a road kill him (says long ago Zen). Life manifesting as Santōka. Life manifesting as you, and as everything else. Even nothing. We live. Confronting our annihilation.

Scott Watson

万流庵

All-Flowing Cottage

Sendai, Japan