



*Landforms and Climates* is the product of a one-year collaboration of four contemporary Japanese poets: Misei Akegata, Keijiro Suga, Sayaka Ozaki, and Mizuho Ishida. They invited me from the start to be their translator. Kotaro Totsuji of Sayusha Publishing posted the new sonnets and translations on their website at an average of one per week over 52 weeks. As is stated in the opening of *Landforms and Climates*,

these sonnet-*renshi* hybrid poems follow rules inspired by the renga master Sogi, in particular *Minasesangin*, and devised by Sayaka Ozaki, the poet-director of the project. The rules are: poems should be in sonnet form, include an environmental description, link from the last line to the first line across stanzas, and should be written with an awareness of the 5 and 7 morae rhythm of Japanese tradition.

*Landforms and Climates* thematically engages the growing contemporary concern in literature and in the world at large with our planet's environmental changes, or as some in eco-criticism call it: the "Anthropocene," this epoch when human activity has greatly impacted climate and threatens our co-inhabitants of the Earth as well as humanity itself. However, as Sayaka Ozaki says in the afterward, these poets face the impending disaster of our own destruction with "wordplay—[*Landforms and Climates* is] a carefree work of cheerful ecstasy." Or as it is expressed in the final line of one verse herein, "the halo at the end of life."

At the same time, these poets are inveterate travelers and references to various locales around the world abound, cultural references, descriptions of diverse landscapes and a smattering of other languages help form an additional geological-literary layer to this poetry collection, that of the eco-travelogue. The Afterward mentions actual trips taken by the poets during the composition: Tibet, the U.S., Paris, Laos and Lithuania. But the verses engage more far flung locations: Lhasa, Lisbon, Guatemala, Vietnam, Argentina, the Matterhorn and the Shandong Valley to mention a few. It also makes mention of perhaps the most legendary of travelers: Magellan.

Among the verses there are those that manifest spatial and temporal flows, the rivers and oceans of time in their ebb and flow, if you will. They offer diverse voices and perspectives of “unpeopled” swaths of land, “contours of transparent blue” space, a “ghost ship” sailing on dream-time waters. Animals and their perceptions include a kingfisher stalking fish, the quetzal coloring this world with its presence, the perceptions of plants and the voice of humidity.

As translator I faithfully kept my nose to the ground of the special language being conjured by all four of these poets. I doggedly ignored whose composition I was working on at any given moment but followed each individual scent in the hope that I would form no preconceptions but sniff out and track each new linguistic texture in an entirely new encounter. I am not sure I was up to the task, but I thoroughly enjoyed the process and am proud to offer up this result. When we reached the end I think I can say we all felt spent—that it took all we had and left us ecstatic with a tinge of sadness. It is an impressive work of poetry.