

# On Poetic Images in Yone Noguchi's *An American Diary of a Japanese Girl*

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ヨネ・ノグチの『日本少女の米国日記』における詩的イメージ

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## 要旨

この論文では、American Minority Literature の分類に入る愛知県出身の野口米次郎の初期の作品である『*The American Diary of a Japanese Girl* (日本少女の米国日記)』を考察することである。野口は詩人・小説家で、活動期は明治30年(1896年)～昭和22年(1947年)だった。デビュー作の詩集を含め、野口は初期のほとんどの作品を英語で書いたもので、大変話題を呼んだ作家であった。本稿では、野口の詩人としての質を『日本少女のアメリカ日記』の中での現れ方を見ることとし、その英語の表現の美しさと野口が自ら訳した本の日本語表現を比較することとする。

## I. Introduction

Yone Noguchi was the English penname of 野口米次郎, born in Aichi Prefecture in 1875. Recalling his early experiences with the English language in *The Story of Yone Noguchi*, he tells us that from an early age, he thrived on reading books in English: from a spelling book which he kept by his pillow to Readers which were his textbooks in school. At the age of 14, he moved to Tokyo. There, at Keio Gijuku, he became intrigued with more literary works.

At the age of eighteen, he sailed for San Francisco, arriving there in late 1893. His first job was as a servant for a Jewish family. Never

satisfied with his circumstances, Noguchi moved from job to job while continuing to devour as much English literature as he could. Poetry intrigued him, and he tried his hand at writing poetry as well. His first English publication was an anthology called *Seen & Unseen, or, Monologues of a Homeless Snail* (1897).

His first novel, the subject of this paper, was *The American Diary of a Japanese Girl*, first published in 1901 in two installments in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, followed by its publication as a book in early 1902. This novel was the first novel by a Japanese writer to be written in English and published in the United States. As no extra information was given about

the author of the diary, other than her name, it was considered to be an authentic report written by a “Miss Morning Glory,” an 18-year-old maiden who had recently arrived from Japan. The novel opens on September 23rd, before Morning Glory begins her journey to San Francisco and continues until she arrives in New York, seven months later.

Noguchi’s love of poetry and Haiku shows through in the sometimes breathtaking images he poses. America is seen through the delicate eyes of a young Japanese maiden of high-ranking birth, and it is with these tinted glasses that the English reader finds a fresh view of America whilst learning about life in the Orient.

Finally, I would like to look briefly at how Noguchi has translated his first novel into Japanese. To translate one’s own novel is not an easy feat that most writers ask others to do, even if they are proficient in the language(s). And what of the end product? Does it show an equal sensitivity to the topic and is it able to capture the reader in the same way? I hope to find some answers.

## II. Comparing America and Japan

The late 1800’s saw an increase of books and articles on Japan written for an American or Continental audience. Pierre Loti had published *Madame Chrysantheme* in 1887 and in 1898, John Luther Long published a short story called *Madame Butterfly* which later became a play, and was made famous as an opera produced by Giacomo Puccini. Other writers, such as Lafcadio Hearn<sup>1)</sup>, wrote about their experiences in Japan. After a long period of seclusion, Japan was being discovered.

When comparing different cultures, one can look at population differences, climate, or scenery. Morning Glory prefers to compare facial characteristics and mannerisms. Even before leaving Japan, she comments: “Let me learn the beauty of American freedom, starting with hair.”<sup>2)</sup> Indeed, she seems to already miss her hair being done up in Japanese style. As frivolous as any women might be, her wants and wishes soon change. Soon after arriving in America she says how she wishes she could “exchange a ten-dollar gold-piece for a tassel of curly hair.”<sup>3)</sup> She continues with: “In Japan I regarded it as bad luck to own waving hair. But my tastes cannot remain unaltered in Amerikey.” Although she had thought of red hair as being scary; “the hair of the red demon in Jigoku”, here she was commenting on its “vivacity, fit for Summer’s shiny air.” It is very interesting that Noguchi should have Morning Glory speak about hair, as a trip to the hair salon is often an ordeal for woman in foreign countries. While Showa fashion praised permanent waves, Japanese salons now have some of the best technology for straightening hair.

Not only did curly or wavy hair fascinate Morning Glory, but so did “long eyelashes lacing around the large eyes of brown hue!”<sup>4)</sup> Morning Glory calls a girl clever for “learning the art of raising and dropping her curtain of eyelashes.”<sup>5)</sup> Later on the same day in her diary, Morning Glory compares two beauties; that is, herself and Miss Ada, and acknowledges that both have their own different attractions: “She may be Spring white sunshine, while I am yellow Autumn moonbeams. One is animation, and the other sweetness.”<sup>6)</sup> Noguchi’s subtle mention of race is ingenious.

As the Japanese maiden's stay in America continues, she finds more and more topics to compare. In the entry of November 13th, she tells how a bishop came to visit. In spite of an ominous comment made by a Buddhist monk before her departure from Tokyo<sup>7)</sup>, Morning Glory enjoys the bishop's company. Later in the afternoon, when the bishop talks to her of Christianity, she makes the declaration that "Christianity was the sun, while Buddhism was the moon. The sun is day and life, and the moon night and rest. How can we live without the sun? The moon is poetry."<sup>8)</sup> These kinds of comments make one think that Morning Glory would make an excellent diplomat; not giving in on her side, and also not exerting one's own beliefs on others, but, at the same time, not allowing others to push her into unfamiliar arenas.

Although the diary is full of her excitement at experiencing new things, and praise for the land she is visiting, Morning Glory becomes very negative when speaking about Chicago. While still in Japan, Morning Glory describes the sound of wooden clogs as "melodious, like a rhythmic prayer unto the sky"<sup>9)</sup>. While in Chicago she puts her hands over her ears as "the thunderous noise menaced [her] so."<sup>10)</sup> She even speculates if roses could bloom in such "turbulent air", and, imitating the poet Percy Shelley, she compares the noisy, bustling city so full of smog to a city in hell.<sup>11)</sup> According to her distressed diary entries, she spends less than a week in Chicago. She bids farewell to the "flowerless, birdless city"<sup>12)</sup> and travels to New York which is where she declares that she will look for work. Morning Glory ends this diary by stating that she will become a parlor maid, and that her next diary will be about her days as a parlor maid in New York.

### III. Noguchi's Poetic Images

Let us return now to the earlier entries of the *Diary*, for it is here where Noguchi's readership is caught up in the poet's intriguing use of metaphors. During a languid afternoon in late September, Noguchi sets the atmosphere: "The song of gay children scattered over the street had subsided. The harvest moon shone like a yellow halo of 'Nono Sama'."<sup>13)</sup> We can picture a scattering of autumn leaves being caught up by the wind and gathering up the laughter of young children in its folds. Later that evening, when Morning Glory pulls water from the well, she sees the moonbeams "beautifully stealing into the waters." This image of moonbeams creeping into a well is typical of how Noguchi not only animates inanimate objects, but also couples them with sensuous verbs.

Along with the sun and moon, the elements of wind and rain also allow Noguchi to showcase his poetic flare. In early October, the autumn "winds brought a gush of melancholy evening prayer from the temple."<sup>14)</sup> In late February of the next year, the winds "scolded bitterly" the clouds that had floated abruptly in front of the sun.<sup>15)</sup> Morning Glory compares "soft, woolen Autumn rain" to gossamer. She calls it "sweet sad poetry."<sup>16)</sup> A shower of rain in San Francisco is described as a "city dipped in a bath. The pedestrians threw their vaguely delicate shadows on the pavements."<sup>17)</sup> As Christmas approaches, we read that a certain Mr. Ellis is painting Morning Glory's portrait. As she sits for him, she observes her surroundings: "A garden tree sent its shadow through the window. The time passed as gracefully as a fairy on tiptoe. The air was purple."<sup>18)</sup> Personification of inanimate objects is

a technique often used by writers, but Noguchi's ability entices the reader to visualize the scene through a poetic eye.

In particular, Morning Glory enjoyed her time at Mr. Poet's house, that is, the time spent with Joaquin Miller. There on a hillside above the city, looking over the San Francisco Bay, she tends the rose garden, writes the diary of a squirrel and enjoys the poet and his family. Miller was an enthusiast of Japan and Japanese things. In his book, *The Story of Yone Noguchi*, Noguchi devotes a full chapter to the poet, explaining that he had hoped to learn much from him. Although the stay at the "Heights" was not fulfilling in terms of "learning" English, Noguchi indicates, through Morning Glory, how much he enjoyed experiencing poetry there: "Dream and reality are not marked here by different badges. They waltz round. Dear poet home!"<sup>19)</sup>

#### IV. Author Authenticity

Authorship of *The American Diary of a Japanese Girl* was given to "Miss Morning Glory" and as Laura E. Franey states in her introduction of the 2007 annotated edition, readers considered a woman's visit to her uncle, a Yale graduate and an elite in the Nippon Mining Company, to be a very plausible situation.<sup>20)</sup> Indeed, many of the passages contain phrases that seem to reiterate the image of a woman in a man's world. American and Japanese manners often appear in the diary. As any young maiden of that era would, Morning Glory found herself blushing when she saw a man kissing his lady friend in public.<sup>21)</sup> When she is given a passbook for "the first time in [her] life," she says that she "held it close to [her] bosom as a tiny girl with a new

doll."<sup>22)</sup> She speaks at how "fascinating" a man's suit is, even venturing into her uncle's room in the hope that she may be able to try it on.<sup>23)</sup> When at a circus with her friend Ada, she comments on how handsome the ringmaster is, and how she wished she were a boy earning money selling peanuts and lemonade.<sup>24)</sup> All of these images, along with comments on unruly hair, perfumes, and esthetic revelations of nature promoted the impression of a woman writer. Franey recounts how a reviewer in the *Chicago Journal* wrote that the *Diary* could only be written by a female. In the afterward of the annotated edition, Edward Marx explains that, although some reviewers wondered if the author was indeed Japanese, very few questioned the gender of the author.<sup>25)</sup>

Interestingly, in her persona as a Japanese girl, Morning Glory is greater able to criticize the popular novel, *Madame Butterfly*, which soon became a popular opera.<sup>26)</sup> "Your Oriental novel, let me be courageous enough to say, is a farce at its best," she says and promptly throws the book out from the train platform to the mountain lions of Nevada. She adds that she, Morning Glory, will soon offer them a genuine story written by a Japanese maiden. Noguchi also uses Morning Glory's voice to comment on how the Chinese immigrant workers were all called by the nickname of "Charley"<sup>27)</sup> Noguchi is also critical of how foreign domestics took care of babies, a topic that was included in Ariyoshi Sawako's 1964 novel 『非色 (Not Because of Color)』, and a habit that is even now considered to be a sign of prestige: "It seems to me a recent style that New York ladies discard their babies to leave them in the hands of European immigrants."<sup>28)</sup>

## V. Noguchi's Translation

The Japanese language is a complex, multi-layered language. Besides the difference in written style and spoken style, the spoken style can be divided into polite and colloquial language, similar to High Dutch and Low Dutch where vocabulary as well as grammar changed occasionally. There are also expressions that only women would use, or that only men would use. This is not unknown in English, but is not an integral part of the language, such as it is with Japanese. Consequently, to translate a sentence from Japanese into English can be much easier because one need not go into as much background detail on who spoke, where, when, and to whom. Morning Glory, being a young maiden from an upper-class family, needs to have diary entries that are coherent with her status.

Women's language can be recognized chiefly by the first-person pronouns and sentence-final particles. In the Japanese translation of the *Diary*, Morning Glory calls herself 「私」 (watashi) which is consistent with the norm. She also ends most of her sentences with 「よ」 which, along with 「わ」, are normal sentence endings for women. However, as this is a personal diary, and not a transcript of a conversation, the constant repetition of 「ですよ」 seems to change the way the reader interprets the content. In the English version, the reader seems to see the world through the eyes of the author while in the case of the Japanese translation, the author seems to be carrying out a *tete-a-tete* with the reader. The reader faces the author; they do not become the author. Take the following example from the diary entry of September 26th 1899 :

E: My shoes are superior shape. They have

a small high heel./ I'm glad they make me taller.<sup>29)</sup>

J: 私の靴は上品な格好で、小さい高い踵を持っていますのよ。/ 靴が背を高くするのが嬉しいのですよ。<sup>30)</sup>

The English is very straight forward, while the Japanese is conversational.

In the entry for November 21st, the gardener arrives to "fix" the lawn (庭の掃除). Morning Glory decides to become an amateur gardener, though all she has is a big summer hat. The English description is quite gay.

E: A large summer hat! That was the customary attire./ But my light-hearted straw one with its laughing bouquet was not adapted to November, however gorgeously the sun might shine.<sup>31)</sup>

J: 大きい夏帽子、其が仕來の服装なのです。/ 何んぼ太陽が剛氣に輝いて居ても笑つて居る花束の付いて居る氣輕な麥稈帽子は十一月には不向ですからね。<sup>32)</sup>

The word 「氣輕」 is often translated as "casual", while the word "light-hearted" can be translated as 「陽氣な」. Although the Japanese translation also uses the word 「笑う」 in the description of the summer hat, the use of "light-hearted straw hat" and "laughing bouquet" bring more animation to the scene. The Japanese phrasing, however, seems to highlight the ridiculousness of a summer hat worn when it is almost winter.

When measuring the appropriateness of a translation, one must not forget that the cultures specific to the language are in the background. In the case of *The American Diary of a Japanese Girl* and 『日本少女の米国日記』, the author of the Japanese version translated the words written with full knowledge of the sentiment of the author at the time of writing. The English version,

however, received some editing from Leonie Gilmour, though this researcher cannot speculate on how much Noguchi's original script was modified. That said, as can be inferred from the above examples, the English version can be said to be more entertaining with more vibrant poetic images than its Japanese partner.

## VI. In Conclusion

Being the first novel by a Japanese writer to be written in English and published in the United States, *The American Diary of a Japanese Girl* rightly deserves the attention it got after being published, and the attention it is starting to get again now. It gives insight into how many Japanese experienced life in America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and encourages us to look at how America was viewed from the outside. It should also be recognized as a work full of delightful, poetic images. Even when working with an editor to correct his English, Noguchi wanted the book to keep the style of a Japanese visitor who was not completely fluent in English, while also remaining "artistic."<sup>33</sup> As I have tried to show in this paper, Noguchi is certainly an artist; one who has painted many delightful, poetic images within the entries of a Japanese girl's diary.

## Notes

- 1) Lafcadio Hearn (1850 - 1904) Hearn came to Japan in 1890, and whilst teaching at universities in Matsue, Kumamoto, and later Tokyo, he wrote numerous books and articles about his life in Japan. Other well-known Japanologists at the time were Basil Hall Chamberlain, Ernest Satow, and W. G. Aston.
- 2) *The American Diary of a Japanese Girl: An Annotated Edition* ed. Edward Marx and Laura E. Franey, p. 8, Diary entry: Oct 1<sup>st</sup>. All page numbers accompanying extracts in this paper come from the annotated edition.
- 3) *ibid.* p. 26, Diary entry: October 27<sup>th</sup>.
- 4) *ibid.* p. 26, Diary entry: October 28<sup>th</sup>.
- 5) *ibid.* p. 28, Diary entry: October 28<sup>th</sup>.
- 6) *ibid.* p. 28, Diary entry: October 28<sup>th</sup>.
- 7) *ibid.* p. 10, Diary entry: October 4<sup>th</sup>: "Christians are barbarians. They eat beef at funerals."
- 8) *ibid.* p. 55, Diary entry: November 13<sup>th</sup>.
- 9) *ibid.* p. 4, Diary entry: September 24<sup>th</sup>.
- 10) *ibid.* p. 122, Diary entry: March 7<sup>th</sup>.
- 11) In his book of essays, *The Story of Yone Noguchi*, Noguchi elaborates on why he considers Chicago to be a dirty, busy city that no woman would like to live in. However, unlike the diary which is largely full of negative comments, the article in *The Story of Yone Noguchi*, also greatly praises the effort of the men of Chicago who never rest, and always work diligently. 'Chicago' pp. 84 - 118.
- 12) *op cit.* p. 126, Diary entry: March 11<sup>th</sup>.
- 13) *ibid.* p. 3, Diary entry: September 24<sup>th</sup>.
- 14) *ibid.* p. 10, Diary entry: October 4<sup>th</sup>.
- 15) *ibid.* p. 116, Diary entry: February 25<sup>th</sup>.
- 16) *ibid.* p. 12, Diary entry: October 6<sup>th</sup>.
- 17) *ibid.* p. 34, Diary entry: November 6<sup>th</sup>.
- 18) *ibid.* p. 63, Diary entry: December 24<sup>th</sup>.
- 19) *ibid.* p. 92, Diary entry: February 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- 20) *ibid.* p.vii.
- 21) *ibid.* p. 25, Diary entry: October 25<sup>th</sup>.
- 22) *ibid.* p. 40, Diary entry: November 17<sup>th</sup>.
- 23) *ibid.* p. 43, Diary entry: November 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- 24) *ibid.* p. 73, Diary entry: January 8<sup>th</sup>.
- 25) *ibid.* p. 136 - 7.
- 26) *ibid.* p. 119 - 20, Diary entry: Overland Train, March 4<sup>th</sup>.
- 27) *ibid.* p. 64, Diary entry: December 25<sup>th</sup>. In the chapter "How I Learned English" in *The Story of*

*Yone Noguchi*, by Yone Noguchi, he recalls how he was called “John” by the master at one of the houses where he worked in his early days in San Francisco. (p. 10)

- 28) *ibid.* p. 129, Diary entry: March 16<sup>th</sup>.
- 29) *ibid.* p. 4, Diary entry: September 26<sup>th</sup>.
- 30) 『日本少女の米国日記』p. 4, Diary entry: September 26<sup>th</sup>.
- 31) *op. cit.*, p. 42, Diary entry: November 21<sup>st</sup>.
- 32) 『日本少女の米国日記』p. 75, Diary entry: November 21<sup>st</sup>.
- 33) Quoted in L. E. Franey's Introduction to the annotated edition, p.x.

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