

Poetry Group Report, February 2023, by Annie Clouston

This month's theme was **Poetry in Translation**. This opened up – quite literally – the world, and exposed us to the expression of other cultures, as well as to a whole heap of questions: How does the translator decide what to prioritise in his work? Is it rhythm, rhyme? meaning? How does a translator work out meaning in the absence of dialogue with the poet (because she is deceased)? Is it possible to really get inside a culture that isn't your heritage to be true to the subtleties of poetry? We put all this in the too hard box, for the most part and just enjoyed the poems we had chosen. However, this poem by **Kotaro Takamura** (1883 – 1956) seems to sum up the cultural specificity of, and therefore the challenges of getting to grips with, poetry in translation:

My Poetry

My poetry is not part of western poetry;
The two touch, circumference against circumference,
But never quite coincide...
I have a passion for the world of western poetry,
But I do not deny that my poetry is formed differently.
The air of Athens and the subterranean fountain of Christianity
Have fostered the pattern of thought and diction of western poetry.
It strikes through my heart with its infinite beauty and strength –
But its physiology, of wheat-meal and cheese and entrecotes,
Runs counter to the necessities of my language.
My poetry derives from my bowels –
Born at the furthest limits of the far east,
Bred on rice and malt and soya-beans and the flesh of fish,
My soul – though permeated by the lingering fragrance of Gandhara
And later enlightened by the 'Yellow Earth' civilisation of a vast continent
And immersed in the murmuring stream of Japanese classics –
Now marvels excitedly at the power of the split atom...
My poetry is no other than what I am,
And what I am is no other than a sculptor of the far east.
For me the universe is the prototype of composition,
And poetry is the composed counter-points.
Western poetry is my dear neighbour,
But the traffic of my poetry moves on a different path...

(Gandhara literally means Land of Fragrance)

March's theme is **The American Beat Poets**. If you would like to join us at future meetings, or would like a copy of the poetry file for each theme, please contact me via annie@cloustons.uk.