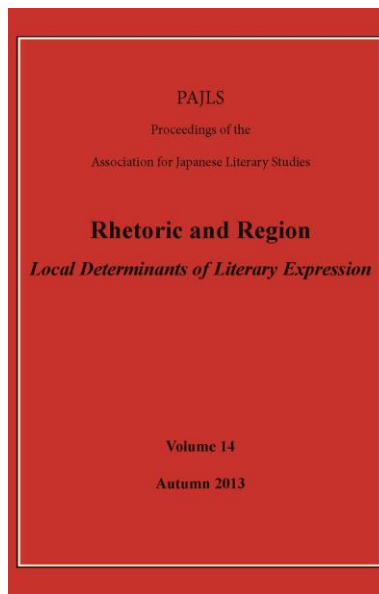


“Yamato as Cultural Memory: Maekawa Samio’s
Poetry on Nara”

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Yamato as Cultural Memory: Maekawa Samio's Poetry on Nara

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Simon Schama in his acclaimed 1995 book *Landscape & Memory* writes that, 'Even the landscapes that we suppose to be most free of our culture may turn out, on closer inspection, to be its product...this is a cause not for guilt or sorrow but celebration.'¹ Maekawa Samio (1903-1990) was one of the most important tanka poets in twentieth century Japan, and was second to none in celebrating in verse the landscape of Nara, his homeland, writing some 1,000 poems on the subject. Maekawa also achieved fame as a pioneer modernist poet in the 1930s. So, for Maekawa, travelling meant 'journeying' to the sources of Western art and modernism, but more importantly, the notion signified the many trips he undertook around his birthplace of Nara, and more generally, the Yamato region where he was raised and lived for most of his life. The word Yamato was the ancient term for the area now called Nara, but also functions as a poetic metonym in that it summons up many of the associations, literary and historical, that cling to this city, the capital of Japan from 710 to 784 CE. The landscape of Maekawa's first poetry collection *Shokubutsusai* (Botanic revels, 1930) reveals the impact of his upbringing in the Arcadian paradise of rural Nara. Therefore I will examine the significance that the topography and the traditions of Nara held for Maekawa in this volume, and also one or two other volumes written at about the same time, seeing how both aspects of the notion of 'travel' are incorporated into these groundbreaking collections of verse, the first fruits of Samio's youth.

I will also trace the significance of Nara on his poetry by a detailed analysis of the two major works he wrote on Nara. The first work is a collection of poetry on Yamato entitled *Yamato roppyakuka* (Six Hundred Verses on Yamato), published in 1971. In the postscript to this volume, Samio wrote that he selected these poems from about 1,000 verses, that is, the best 600 poems from among all the verse he had written on Yamato hitherto. Maekawa's final expression of what Nara meant to him is his 1982 book on Nara entitled *Yamato mahoroba no ki* (Yamato: Beauty Unsurpassed), a combination of travel diary, personal poetic record and almanac chronicling the geographic, historic, cultural and literary achievements and monuments of the region. A reading of the poems he wrote on Nara included in this last volume will serve to illustrate the changes in Maekawa's understanding of the notion of landscape itself, as well as the continuing attraction that this rural Arcadia held for him. I will begin with some preliminary remarks on the nature and significance of landscape for Japanese poetry generally by summarizing the tradition of such verse as articulated in the notion of the figure or device of *utamakura* or poetic toponym, which virtually constitutes a poetic genre in its own right.

¹ Simon Schama, *Landscape & Memory* (London: Fontana Press, 1995), p. 9.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Poet

In 1922 at the age of 20 the poet left his native province of Nara, where his grandfather owned large tracts of agricultural land, to enter university in Tokyo. The poetry written until that point in time was all composed amid the idyllic environs of rural Nara, and as such is directly concerned with the region and the poet's experience of growing up within the embrace of his family. Samio (hereon I shall refer to the poet by his given name) was born in a small village now called Oshimi at the foot of Mt. Katsuragi bordering Nara and Osaka prefectures. Despite its remote location this village and the surrounding region is rich in historical and cultural associations dating back to the eighth century when Nara was the capital of Japan. Samio's grandfather Sajūro was the village head and a prominent member of the local gentry.² From a young age, Samio turned to artistic and intellectual interests, as revealed in the following tanka:

Wakaki hi no	When I was small
Inochi kanashi to	My life was sad
Efude mochi	With paintbrush in hand
Maruki kagami ni	Into the round mirror
Nozoki irikeri	I stared forever ³

This tanka was composed in 1920 by Samio, then seventeen-years old, but made public over half a century later in a privately published collection of poetry collected from the poet's youth.⁴ The poem reveals the characteristic narcissism of the young poet, who had mixed feelings about his rural abode. Samio's 1943 tanka collection *Haru no hi* (Spring Days) assembled all the poetry that the poet wished to preserve from 1921, when the poet was in his eighteenth year to 1927, and so actually represents his first collection of verse. Let us look at a few poems from *Spring Days* that reflect on the poet's upbringing and his feelings about his homeland Nara.

Furusato ni	Coming back
Kaeri kitarite	To my home village
Otōto to	With my little brother
Yoyo wa kaeru wo	Every night listening to the frogs
Kikite ne ni keru	We fall asleep ⁵

² Saigusa Takayuki, *Maekawa Samio* (Tokyo: Goryū shoin, 1993), pp. 18-9. For studies of Maekawa in English, see Leith Morton, 'Modernism in Prewar Poetry', pp. 231-246 in Roy Starrs (ed.), *Rethinking Japanese Modernism* (Leiden, Boston: Global Oriental, 2012) and Leith Morton, 'The Poetry of Maekawa Samio and Modern Art', pp. 107-119 in *Word and Act* (Gengo bunka ronsō) Vol. 17 (2012). See also the Maekawa translations of Ueda Makoto, *Modern Japanese Tanka: An Anthology*, pp.145-157 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

³ *Maekawa Samio zenshū* (Tokyo: Sunagoya Shobō, 2002-2008), 3 vols, vol.2, p.41.

⁴ *Maekawa Samio zenshū*, vol.2, p.592.

⁵ *Maekawa Samio zenshū*, vol.1, p.33.

Tamakagiru	On this
Yūbe to nare ba	Gem-glistening evening
Kui ōshi	I have many regrets
Kono yamasuso ni	Making my life here
Ware ikimu to su	At the foot of a mountain ⁶

These verses do not evoke the past: neither the glorious history nor the rich culture of Samio's homeland. Rather, the personal aspect of the youthful poet's verse betrays mixed feelings; almost a sense of alienation towards the rural backwaters of his home. In Samio's first published poetry collection *Botanical Revels* (1930), containing poems written between 1926 and 1928, after he had left his homeland to journey to the big city, the alienation emerges more clearly:

Nan to kono	Coming home
Furui miyako ni	To this
Kaeri kite	Ancient capital
Nagai rekishi o	Days come when I
Norou hi mo ari	Curse its long history ⁷

Tairyoku no	On afternoons
Otoroe kitteru	When I am
Hiru goro wa	Utterly exhausted
Nihon no shokubutsu ga	I hate all
Mina iya ni naru	Japanese plants ⁸

This is not to argue that all the poems written on the theme of Nara in these first two collections are personal in tone: there are a number of poems in both collections that evoke the cultural legacy of the city and its surrounds, although they comprise only a minor thread among the many other elements that make up the two collections. In *Spring Days* Samio began with tanka on Nara that focused on the secular dimension of his everyday life, on his youthful meditations on growing up surrounded by the forests and mountains of his home, but in later collections his attention shifts to matters sacred, as the poet chronicles the omnipresent religious traditions of

⁶ *Maekawa Samio zenshū*, vol.1, p.40.

⁷ *Maekawa Samio zenshū*, vol.1, p.125.

⁸ *Maekawa Samio zenshū*, vol.1, p.159.

Nara. The following tanka is one of a group of seven poems on the theme of the famous Hasedera Temple in Nara, the main temple of the Buzan sect of Shingon Buddhism, and represents a thread that was later to grow and dominate his verse on this topic. Here Samio refers to the famous statue of the Bodhisattva Kwannon (the Goddess of Mercy) located within the temple.⁹

Kannon no	The purple
Mimune atari ni	Wistaria
Tatematsureru	On the holy breast
Fuji no murasaki	Of the Goddess of Mercy
Nabike to inoru	How I pray it would dance! ¹⁰

The fascinating conceit of the wisteria for which the temple is equally famed is used here to good effect to perhaps point to the notion of Kannon coming to life or to allow the breezes outside the mountaintop temple to blow within its sacred precincts or simply as a metaphor to liven up conventional expressions of Buddhist piety.

Samio's 4th collection of poetry entitled *Yamato* was published in 1940, consisting of poems composed between 1936 and 1939, but oddly enough, contains very few poems on the theme of Yamato. One of these verses, which I translate below, does convey the nostalgia the poet felt towards Nara, the land in which his family had lived for generations, from the perspective of far-off Tokyo, where he now resided.

Mioyara o	Musing on my ancestors
Tōku shinubu wa	From so far away
Yomoyama mo	Mountains all around
Kasumite mienu	I think of Yamato
Yamato to omoi	Invisible in the mists ¹¹

Relocating Landscape as Art: *Six Hundred Verses on Yamato*

⁹ The temple is located in Sakurai, Nara, and was first built in 686 and dedicated to the Emperor Temmu. In 727, a statue of the eleven-faced Kannon was placed near the original temple, which has been celebrated in classical prose and verse.

¹⁰ *Maekawa Samio zenshū*, vol.1, p.89.

¹¹ *Maekawa Samio zenshū*, vol.1, p.297.

As mentioned above, Maekawa Samio's only collection of poetry devoted solely to the region of Yamato is *Six Hundred Verses on Yamato*, published in 1971.¹² In the postscript to this volume, Samio wrote:

I was born in Yamato, lived in Nara for decades; I am, simply speaking, an ordinary Nara boy. I had intended to bury my bones in Nara but at the end of last year, I moved to Chigasaki [near Tokyo.] I was asked often as to the reason but it was for the sake of my health. The sea breezes are good for my body so I found this place to be an appropriate one to which to retire. Some people feel sorry for me. I am grateful for their concern but I will probably never return to live in Nara. As a farewell to Nara, and to commemorate the event, I have compiled this collection.

As the title *Six Hundred Verses on Yamato* states, the book is solely concerned with poems about Nara and Yamato.... I have divided the volume into eleven sections on Nara, Saho, Saki and the west capital. This is for the sake of convenience but the volume has ended up as a collection of poetry on noted places and also a travel diary in verse.

I thought I'd composed poetry about all the places in Nara and Yamato but some yet remain. I was too close to the subject so I couldn't write the poems or I simply chose not to, and also there are still places [in the region] unknown to me. I'd like to compose verse about these sites someday. I hope I have time to do so.¹³

The poems collected in this volume are mainly taken from Samio's postwar collections. After the Second World War, Samio was viciously criticized for his wartime patriotic verse by his erstwhile comrades in the 1920s proletarian tanka movement, who dominated postwar tanka circles. Samio was the outstanding poet in this group, and as the leading Modernist poet of his time, was the standard-bearer for prewar avant-garde tanka. By the late 1930s, he had turned away from experimentation in favour of what he called 'Neo-classicism', a return to a more orthodox mode of tanka, but one which did not repudiate modernist influences.

The poems collected in *Six Hundred Verses on Yamato* initially disclose two conceptual dimensions or contexts: the original context when the poetry was first composed, and the layered meanings adhering to the verse when the poet relocates and restructures the context in later rearrangements of the verses. Hence the context determines the meaning, and the landscape of Nara has sacerdotal, secular, historical, cultural and personal associations and nuances that fold and fold again around the poetry. The resulting collection or rearrangement is an inevitable result of replacement, or to put it another way, a variation on the poetics of displacement. Poetic toponyms here add complexity to the poem that is unpacked by the poet *as he pleases* in his later prose volume *Yamato: Beauty Unsurpassed*, which constitutes the poet's exegesis on his own

¹² Samio's third volume of poetry entitled *Yamato* (1940) has only 15 poems on the topic of Yamato out of a total of 550 poems in the collection. See Shimazu Tadao, *Shimazu Tadao chosakushū* (Osaka: Izumi shoin, 2006) vol. 9, pp. 225-6 for details.

¹³ Maekawa Samio, *Yamato roppyakuka [600 Poems of Yamato]* (Tokyo: Tanka shinbunsha, 1971), pp. 303-4.

verse on Nara, as we will shortly discover. I will analyze three verses from *Six Hundred Verses on Yamato*, which will serve as a useful starting point to reading the Nara poetry as layered artifact.

Inishie no	Around the old ruins
Miyaato dokoro	Left from bygone days
Haya natsu no	The yellow dragonflies
Kiemba tobaba	Of early summer dart about
Aoemba tobi	Blue dragonflies scooting ¹⁴

This first poem appears with the headnote: ‘south Misasagi on Mt. Saho’, indicating a region in Nara where numerous Imperial tombs are located, and specifically referring to the mausoleum of Emperor Shōmu. The poem was placed in a section of the book entitled ‘*tenpyō chigo*’ (Tenpyō temple attendants) under the heading of: ‘2 May Emperor Shōmu’s commemoration’. Thus the tanka can be read as expressing familiarity and even affection for an area of Nara clearly close to the poet’s heart as well as making a link to the Japanese past. Emperor Shōmu reigned from 724 to 749 (during the Tenpyō era) and is regarded as the ruler who did most to turn Japan into a Buddhist nation, with his commissioning of the Great Buddha in Tōdaiji Temple in Nara in 743 and also by becoming a Buddhist priest after his retirement, the first emperor to do so.¹⁵ The next poem I will discuss is the following tanka:

Harugasumi	The spring mist
Iyo yo koku naru	Thickens still more
Mahiruma no	Right on noon
Nanimo mieneba	Nothing is visible
Yamato to omoe ¹⁶	This, believe this above all, is Yamato

This is one of the most famous poems that Samio ever wrote. The central conceit turns upon the paradox (a quintessentially Modernist paradox) that by not being able to see Yamato, then a fully imagined Yamato of legend, the Yamato that is the historic heartland of Japan, that Yamato is completely visible, fully realized in the narrator and the reader’s imagination.¹⁷ Saigusa Takayuki also comments that the verse refers obliquely to the dark times of the late 1930s in that it conceptualizes a notion of beauty, an ideal that can no longer be glimpsed.¹⁸ The poem can also

¹⁴ *600 Poems of Yamato*, p. 53. *Maekawa Samio Zenshū*, vol.1, p.527.

¹⁵ *Biographical Dictionary of Japanese History* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1978), pp.60-1.

¹⁶ *Maekawa Samio zenshū*, vol.1, p.296. *600 Poems of Yamato*, p.159.

¹⁷ Itō Kazuhiko, *Maekawa Samio* (Tokyo: Hon’ami shoten, 1993), p. 84-5.

¹⁸ Saigusa Takayuki, *Maekawa Samio*, pp., 85-6.

be read as expressing the paradoxical emotions of love and hatred that the poet bears towards his homeland, gesturing as it does towards both the physical landscape of Nara and the overdetermined conceptual landscape as well. This, in turn, leads us back to the central paradox of the poem: only by being aware of both landscapes can anything be visible but when one does this the result is conceptual confusion, that is, ‘Nothing is visible’.

The verse has been carved into a stone in the Miwa Hibara Jinja, mentioned in the *Man'yōshū* as a site of many poems. Mt. Miwa is also known as Mimoro or Mimuro Omiwa Jinja, and as Klaus Antoni notes, ‘Even in Japan, a land of sacred mountains, Mt. Miwa is nearly unparalleled as a stage of religious activity and as an object of religious adoration. The divine mountain Miwayama is itself theshintai of the god Omononushi, and is regarded as holy and invulnerable. Thus religious adoration is directed straight to the mountain.’¹⁹ Perhaps conceptual confusion and paradox are here complicit with religious adoration

The next poem is included in a section of *Six Hundred Verses on Yamato* concerned with the sights in the vicinity of the famous Kōfukuji Temple, and refers to the boy servant Seitaka (sanskrit: Cetaka) of the Boddhisattva Acala (Fudō Myōō). According to legend, he assumes the form of a youth with skin the colour of a red lotus, which in the poem is suggested by the colour of the sunset reflecting onto the clouds. From the first appearance of the poem in Samio’s fifth collection *Tempyōun* (Tempyō Clouds, 1942) we know that it was composed in 1941.

Kisaragi no	On a evening
Ama ga beni mitsu	In February
Yūbe nite	The sunset clouds glowing crimson
Seitaka dōji ga	The youth Cetaka, servant of Boddhisattva Acala
Ware o maneku yo	Beckons me hither ²⁰

I will discuss this difficult poem a little later but first it is important to examine the context surrounding the original publication of the verse in the 1941 volume *Tempyō Clouds*. Saigusa Takayuki notes that this collection refers to the dark times of the late 1930s but also contains poetry that is written with the onset of the war in the Pacific—the newest phase of the war—in mind. Thus the collection presents Samio’s public face through patriotic verse as well as his private face through verse attempting to cling to the ideals of beauty and art.²¹ In *Tempyō Clouds* the poem

¹⁹ Klaus Antoni, ‘The “Separation of Gods and Buddhas” at Omiwa Shrine in Meiji Japan’, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 22:1 (1995), p. 140. The poem is also chiseled into a poem stele at the Maekawa family tomb in Nara, and has been reprinted in many of Samio’s collections, both before and after the war, see Shimazu Tadao, *Shimazu Tadao chosakushū*, vol. 9, p. 230.

²⁰ Maekawa Samio, *600 Poems of Yamato*, p.29. *Maekawa Samio zenshū*, vol.1, p.378.

²¹ Saigusa, *Maekawa Samio*, pp. 219-222.

above is the last in a six verse sequence entitled ‘Hyakka’ (One Hundred Flowers), and included in this sequence are the following two poems:

Kōrōgi no	Guided by
Yoru naku koe ni	The voice of the crickets
Michibikare	Singing in the night
Monomina to tomo ni	Every one together
Utagawazu neru	Falls asleep with no doubts whatever ²²

Taishō no	Granted the holy
Miyo no oshie o	Wisdom of
Ukete kite	The Emperor Taishō
Kaerimiru ima wa	Looking back
Sabishiki kana ya	Today how sad things are! ²³

It might not be stretching a long bow to argue that both these poems express disquiet, at the very least, at the dark path down which Japan was being led. The first poem clearly hints at doubts the poet may have concerning the road to war in the Pacific.²⁴ The contrast in the second poem between the pacific era of the Emperor Taishō (1912-26), always identified with liberalism in the political sphere and the avant-garde in the artistic domain, and the present martial era of the Emperor Shōwa is quite striking. Thus with this original context in mind, the poem about Cetaka may refer to the fact that, in a rite dedicated to him in the Fukūkenjaku Daranikyō (a sutra expounding the mercy of one of the six kinds of Kannon), he is described as having a joyful appearance and smiling visage, in contrast to the wrathful nature attributed to him as an attendant of Fudō.²⁵ In other words, we find another contrast between peace and war, with the youth as the symbol of peace beckoning to the narrator. The verse may be just an expression of Buddhist piety and perhaps this is what is intended in *Six Hundred Verses on Yamato*, but the shift in placement or displacement may suggest another reading entirely.

Landscape and Tourism: *Yamato: Beauty Unsurpassed*

²² *Maekawa Samio zenshū*, vol.1, p.377.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ For a detailed study of wartime tanka, see Leith Morton, ‘Wartime Tanka Poetry: Writing in Extremis’, pp. 256-285 in (eds.) Jacob Edmund, Henry Johnson and Jacqueline Leckie, *Recentring Asia: Histories, Encounters, Identities*. Leiden, Boston: Global Oriental, 2011.

²⁵ Hisao Inagaki (ed.), *A Dictionary of Japanese Buddhist Terms* (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshodo, 1985), p. 54.

In *Yamato: Beauty Unsurpassed* Samio is continually forging links between the Japanese poetic tradition, cultural monuments, especially those relating to Buddhism, and his verse. If we examine one chapter—chapter five—out of the 13 chapters in the book (although the chapters are not numbered), then we can see how Samio imitates the practice of waka poets in the past. Chapter five is concerned with several mountains, temples and tombs in Nara, centering on Byakugōji temple and Mt. Kōnoyama, but also including the region where the tomb of the emperor Kōnin (709-82) is located. Samio commences his journey in this mountainous region of Nara with a poem, and on foot, although he soon avails himself of buses, trains and taxis. After visiting several temples and climbing various slopes, he arrives deep in the mountains in Takamadoyama where he has a lengthy quotation from the *Manyōshū*, Japan's earliest imperial poetry collection, which describes in verse the connections between the Imperial household and this region. Samio then analyses two *Manyōshū* waka in order to give readers a sense of the place and its history, and follows this with a poem of his own.²⁶ After this, he records his climb up the mountain and we find the following mixture of poetry and prose. First the poem:

Takamado no	Climbing over
Yama koete yuku	Mt. Takamado
Kagetomo no	Accompanied only by my shadow
Boro boro no michi no	On the rock-strewn trail
Fuji no murasaki	How purple the wisteria! ²⁷

This poem is straightforward and concentrates on the solitary traveller and his arduous climb. There is an almost identical poem published in his 1971 collection *Shiroki kuroki* (White Wood and Black Wood) where we see that the reference to the solitary traveller has been replaced by an 'old rock-strewn trail'.²⁸ But the later version in the travel diary has a different emphasis, as is demonstrated clearly in the prose that follows: 'I sat down to take a breather. Right below me is a deep valley. I hear the sound of water. It is the Iwai River. I can see water dropping down here and there like waterfalls.'²⁹ Here it is the real mountain landscape, and, above all, the solitary mountain climber who appears as a figure in the landscape rather than the earlier references to the literary precedents that engages the poet. This is a modern notion of landscape, different from landscape that is almost entirely imagined.

Louisa Mackenzie in *The Poetry of Place*, her 2011 book on sixteenth century French poetry and landscape, discusses how modern poets differ from premodern poets on landscape and

²⁶ Maekawa Samio, *Yamato mahoroba no ki—utsukushii sanga o utau* (Tokyo: Kadokawa sensho [136]), 1982, pp. 70-73.

²⁷ Maekawa Samio, *Yamato mahoroba no ki*, p. 73.

²⁸ Maekawa Samio, *Maekawa Samio zenshū*, vol. 2, p. 398

²⁹ Maekawa Samio, *Yamato mahoroba no ki*, p. 73.

her remarks are relevant for readers of Samio: ‘We do not have the same criteria for beauty. We privilege mountains, for example; solitude is salutary rather than suspect. But people did not always climb mountains for pleasure... Jacques Peletier... in his book-length poem describing the landscape ...[echoes] the dominant sentiment of his time when he wonders why anyone would want to climb a mountain.’³⁰ Nevertheless, a few pages later Samio is musing on various old poems related to emperor Kōnin that he loves, and writes the following verse:

Takamado no	After climbing
Yama koete kinu	Mt. Takamado
Tahara naru	How deserted is Emperor Kōnin’s Tomb in
Misasagi sabishi	Tahara
Ososakura chiru	A scattering of late cherry-blossoms ³¹

The opening words are almost identical to the previous tanka but here the emphasis is not on the individual traveller but on how the mighty have fallen, a reference to Imperial history and the fate that befalls all. Samio blends history with personal experience, his book is a cross between an almanac and a diary. The personal tone never disappears; at the end of this chapter we find the following poem:

Kōnoyama no	Invited to
Tsutsujimatsuri ni	The azalea festival
Yobarekite	On Mt. Kōnoyama
Nodo ni hanakage ni	Under the shade of the flowers
Yoite nemureru	At peace, drunk, I fall asleep ³²

This verse is followed by the words: ‘Spring comes late deep in the mountains’, and only a few lines later the poet is invited to descend the mountain in a Self-Defence force helicopter but declines this generous offer to make his descent on foot. Again, the focus swiftly shifts to the personal.

Finally I will discuss some poems relating to temples, this combination of narrative and verse making up much of the book as a whole. First, a poem about the Sarusawa-no-ike Pond (located at the famous Kōfuku-ji Temple) that appears in the first chapter written on the topic of the pond.

Yume naru ya	Is this dream?
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³⁰ Mackenzie, Louisa, *The Poetry of Place: Lyric, Landscape and Ideology in Renaissance France* (Toronto, London: The University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 22-3.

³¹ Maekawa Samio, *Yamato mahoroba no ki*, p. 77.

³² Maekawa Samio, *Maekawa Samio zenshū*, vol. 1, p. 514. Maekawa Samio, *Yamato mahoroba no ki*, p. 80.

Mangetsu terasu	A full moon shining down
Sarusawa no	On Sarusawa Pond
Ikeni ukaberu	And floating on the waters
Hanaōgibune	A flower-fan boat ³³

The five-storied pagoda reflected on the pond's surface is a spectacularly beautiful sight but Samio instead centers his poem around the reflection of the boat which is used as a float in the Uneme festival held in the grounds of the temple. This festival, which celebrates the glory of old Japan, was started by a friend of Samio, as he tells us a few lines later. In this instance Samio's poem is as much a construct for tourists as a reminder of Nara's past.

The next few poems are included in the next chapter in the book on the great Tōdaiji Temple in Nara, and specifically relate to the Nigatsudō or 'February Pavilion' found within the temple grounds. The Omizutori, or the annual, sacred Water-Drawing festival, is the final rite in observance of the two week-long Shuni-e ceremony. This ceremony is to cleanse the people of their sins as well as to usher in the spring of the New Year. There is an evening ceremony, called Otaimatsu, where young monks brandish large torches that are burning fiercely. While waving the torches in the air, they draw large circles with the fire they emit. It is believed that if a person viewing the ceremony is showered with the sparks from the fire, that the person will then be protected from evil. The rite of drawing of the water is held with an accompaniment of ancient Japanese music. The monks draw water, which only springs up from the well in front of the temple building, and offer it first to the Buddhist deities, the Bodhisattva Kannon, and then offer it to the public. It is believed that the water, being blessed, can cure ailments. Samio composed the following poems about these events.

Koromo moro ni	Tucking up
Takushiagete	Their robes
Hashiru sō	Monks running
Mireba kano Ashuraō	Gazing upon this, I think of
Tobihaneru goto	The Ashura king: a demi-god leaping ³⁴

Dattan no	The esoteric Tartar
Gyōhō ima shi	Ritual is now performed
Sakari ni te	At its peak
Makafushigi no	What a phantasmagoric world!
Yo zo to me tsumuru	I close my eyes ³⁵

³³ Maekawa Samio, *Yamato mahoroba no ki*, p.16.

³⁴ Maekawa Samio, *Yamato mahoroba no ki*, p.31.

³⁵ Maekawa Samio, *Yamato mahoroba no ki*, p.35.

The ritual consists of the monks running out of the temple and hurling their bodies onto the earth. Samio comments on this ritual to the effect that the word ‘dattan’ (Tartar) has a phantasmagoric, curious, exotic air about it. It is the origin of Japanese theatre, he opines; in the beginning, the ritual was an entertainment for the monks, according to a monk he asked. When asked if this was done as a performance, his friend answered that if it were not for the audience, this would not be performed.³⁶ Here the ancient ritual is exoticised in Samio’s verse, and the landscape of Nara becomes a constructed collage of Buddhist images taken from a ceremony conducted nowadays for the edification of tourists undergoing pilgrimages to religious sites or, perhaps, just for tourists. Landscape in these verses fulfills the role of a tourist guidebook, conforming to Louisa Mackenzie’s definition of landscape as ‘socially constructed by forces of capital, power, gender, and cultural memory’.³⁷

Conclusion

In her discussion of English landscape poetry, Jacqueline Labbe writes, ‘The poem *becomes* topography; the poet, in exercising his physical mobility, facilitates an imaginative peripatetics that institutes travelling and writing as a joined activity, and resting and reading as perhaps its necessary corollary.’ Labbe is making the point that the topography referred to above is not merely an inner space of the imagination but is something real; as she puts it, ‘The poet *is* the locale; the poet is *in* the locale’.³⁸ The identification of poet with locale is a strong current in the work of Maekawa Samio, as we have seen displayed in his poems on Nara. In the case of the Japanese poet’s verse, the landscape has a very powerful presence as place, the place of tradition and history, but also as utamakura, the site of a particular set of cultural memories embodied in the waka tradition.³⁹ Samio both honours this tradition as seen in *Yamato: Beauty Unsurpassed* and other works, and also defies it by personalizing the place in the manner of the modern traveller; that is to say, as a tourist. There is no necessary contradiction between reading place as cultural artifact and as tourist site, both can and do easily coincide. Nor does the intrusion of the poet as a traveller evoke any sense of contradiction, as the narrator is an essential element in constructing utamakura and tanka poetry. It goes without saying that, with his deep local knowledge, Samio is a special kind of tourist, more like a guardian of the sites that tourism celebrates.

Samio’s early verse on Nara, or more broadly Yamato, published in his first few collections does suggest a certain unease with his homeland. The desire to escape from this rural backwater to the bright lights of Tokyo is clearly visible in these collections, as is the desire to see the topography of Nara as a surrealistic landscape, far removed from the modern metropolis. These

³⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 35-6.

³⁷ Louisa Mackenzie, *The Poetry of Place*, p. 24.

³⁸ Jacqueline Labbe, ‘At the Intersection of Artifice and Reality’, pp. 25-6 in (eds.) Christoph Bode and Jacqueline Labbe, *Romantic Localities: Europe Writes Place* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010).

³⁹ On utamakura, see Edward Kamens, *Utamakura, Allusion, and Intertextuality in Traditional Japanese Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997); and Kōji Kawamoto, *The Poetics of Japanese Verse: Imagery, Structure, Meter* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 2000).

impulses are contradictory, to be sure, but perhaps are an accurate reflection of the young poet's thinking at this time: Japanese poetry was to be reformed, remade along the lines of the avant-garde modernist verse of Europe but it was still to be Japanese, that is to look back to the waka tradition (including poetic figures like *utamakura*) while reforming it. This reforming tendency Samio called 'Neo-Classicism', a title that reflects the contradictions in the poet's theorizing and his poetic practice.

Samio's postwar poetry on Nara is less reformist and more classical, at least in respect of his focus on the temples and shrines of Nara. The poetry written during wartime is even more complex in its valorization of Japanese tradition as well as its subversion of its more fanatical expressions of xenophobia. To trace in detail the precise movement of these competing impulses in Samio's poetry on Nara would be a long and arduous process, but a job worth doing. Labbe's notion that the poet *is* topography can, I believe, be applied to Maekawa Samio, but to properly define the sense of topography in his work will require far more analysis than I have been able to accomplish today. In this respect Maekawa is not untypical of many tanka poets, if not prodigiously more talented than most, but without the concept and poetic figure of landscape, his poetry would almost cease to be. I hope at least that this much has been made clear from my preliminary analysis of his verse on Nara.