**Yone (Yonejiro) Noguchi**

Joseph Lavery, June 2012.

In a review of Yone Noguchi’s *From the Eastern Sea* (1902), **Arthur Symons** noted that the “strange little pamphlet” partook of both Asian and European cultural influences, claiming Mallarmé and impressionism as two direct influences, but noting that “both have come straight from Japan.” The poet’s American contemporaries were less struck by the French influences than by the guileless good humor of his verse. Reviewers in *The Dial*, for instance, were convinced that Noguchi’s first book of poetry, *Seen and Unseen* (1897), was a collection of comic verse published pseudonymously by the “consummate wag” Gellett Burgess, the author of “The Purple Cow.” To critics of American modernism, however, these late-Victorian contexts have proven less vital than the tradition that Noguchi helped to inaugurate: haiku poetics in general, and Japanese-American poetry in particular. Noguchi was probably the first poet to publish original haikus in English (in *Seen and Unseen*), and his theory of the punctuality and epitomizing force of Japanese poetry laid a foundation for the similar, though more widely read, interventions of **Ezra Pound**. His first novel, *The American Diary of a Japanese Girl*, is a comedy of manners set on the West coast of the United States, focalized through a young, Japanese narrator; it has been called the first Asian-American novel, and received substantial attention from scholars of queer studies for its playful and anti-essentialist performances of gender – attention amplified by histories of Noguchi’s own bisexuality. Critics such as Amy Sueyoshi and Laura Franey have praised *The American Diary* for its anti-Orientalist tone, but Noguchi’s position within Asian-American literary history was, historically, deeply controversial. One of the discipline’s founders, Frank Chin, excluded Noguchi and **Sadakichi Hartmann** from the canon of Asian-American literature because they “said nothing about Asian America, because, in fact, these writers weren't Asian-Americans but Americanized Asians.”

Noguchi’s problematic relationship to the United States reflects, too, a complex relationship to his native Japan. After the Japanese invasion of Korea and the launch of the Russo-Japanese war in 1904, Noguchi’s writing became militarist and imperialist in its theme. Together with his mentor and former employer Joaquin Miller, Noguchi published *Japan of Sword and Love* (1905), dedicated to “the Meiji spirit which declared war against Russia.” The prosody of his later poetry moves away from Mallarmé and towards the Whitmanian long line: a poem entitled “LET US MARCH TOWARD MANCHURIA!” comprises an arrangement of irregularly stressed exclamations: “Let us march toward Manchuria! / Let us sweep in like a northern tempest!” His ongoing public support for the Japanese imperial project led to a public disagreement with his former ally (and fellow pan-Asianist) **Rabindranath Tagore**in 1938. Noguchi’s critical writing, on the other hand, always emphasizes the cosmopolitan and anti-nationalist potential of poetry and culture, and the mutual indebtedness of East and West. Of particular importance to Noguchi was a connection between Irish and Japanese cultures, as typified for his particular admiration for **W. B. Yeats**, about whom he writes “I know that all the Japanese poets ancient and modern went into a Celtic invocation, when they were alone with the sad melody of Nature.” Noguchi’s relationship with the editor Leonie Gilmour was the subject of a film in 2009; their son Isamu became a celebrated sculptor, interior designer, and architect after his father’s death.

Noguchi, Yone, 1875 – 1947.

Photograph sent as email attachment.

Joaquin Miller and Yone Noguchi, *Japan of Sword and Love*, (Tokyo: Kanao Nunyendo, 1905)

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*–––––The American Diary of a Japanese Girl*, ed. Edward Marx with Laura E. Franey, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007)

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Hisako Matsui, *Leonie*, (Hyde Park Entertainment, 2010)

Amy Sueyoshi, *Queer Compulsions: Race, Nation, and Sexuality in the Affairs of Yone Noguchi*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012)