Echo

Mutsuo Takahashi (trans. by Frank Sewell & Mitsuko Ohno)

for Takao Ono

Morning Angelus, evening Angelus,
on the tongues of thousands of bells
echoing between heaven and earth,
in paintings of the life of Christ
on old church and cathedral walls
where Lorenzo, Giovanni, and Alessandro,
amid crowds who heard His sermons
or saw His robe stripped from Him,
aim hard stares back at the viewer.
The faces and eyes of these liars
and real-life hypocrites soon fade
in time like their memory
but are restored over the years
by brush-strokes, drawing them out
from walls and murals, bringing the colour
out of their *quattrocento* clothes
into the bright *novecento*
where today's colourful crowds
see out the second millennium
as Gianfranco, Guido, Pierpaolo …
Don't blame them for the lack of faith
in their modern faces and eyes.
Before these towns and cities were born,
God was always with them, the crowds:
Morning Angelus, evening Angelus,
on the tongues of thousands of bells
echoing between heaven and earth.
God said always, says now and forever:

> *Blessed art thou,*
> *the unfaithful.*
> *I am*
> *because thou art*
> *unfaithful to Me.*

Biography

Mutsuo Takahashi is one of the most prolific authors in contemporary Japan, best known as a formally inventive poet and a master of the traditional poetic forms of tanka and haiku, although he has also written plays, novels and essays.

Takahashi was born on 13th December 1937 in the city now known as Kitakyūshū. In 1962, he graduated from Fukuoka University of Education and moved to Tokyo where he started working at the Design Centre. In 1964 he published his first book, *Rose Tree: Fake Lovers* (*Bara nō ki, nise nō koibito-tachi*, Tokyo, Gendaishi Kōbō, 1964). Takahashi has, to date, published about thirty books of poetry, including *Between Two Shores* (Dedalus Press, Dublin 2006), numerous tanka and haiku, and three collected volumes; and has also made a number of recordings of his works, most notably in the volume entitled *Voice Garden* (Star Valley Library, Zushi 1996).