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Design and Cover by I. K. Anderson

THE POETRY OF
KAORU MARUYAMA

translated from
the Japanese by
ROBERT EPP

A large, bold calligraphic character '詩' (Shi) written in black ink, positioned at the bottom left of the page.

A vertical calligraphic signature '丸山薫' (Maruyama Kaoru) written in black ink, positioned on the right side of the page.

Calligraphy by Ensho Ashikaga

INTRODUCTION

Japanese verse has revelled in romantic sensitivity for a thousand years. The modernity of many a contemporary poet in Japan consists in overlaying his sentimental heritage with a timeless and universal idiom—even as he aspires to convey emotional states through the traditional method of overtones and associations instead of ideas. Kaoru Maruyama is such a poet. Strung between the past and the present and dealing with internal more than external landscapes, much of his poetry abounds in tension. Not even tautness detracts from the haunting beauty and mellifluous flow, nor do many contest the judgment that Maruyama's early works "occupy a unique position in the corpus of Japanese poetry written since 1926."

His poems published since 1940 are different enough to constitute a separate stage in his development. The level of sentimentality and the length of the average verse increase, tension and density decrease. Though the poet relaxes he does not lose his terror of people and his preoccupation with loneliness, nor does he abandon his attempt to personify inanimate objects and describe concrete phenomena. Later pieces may be less dense, but they continue on occasion to seem uninteresting until they generate a kind of "critical mass" that suddenly makes them fuse into a meaningful whole. And he has continued writing poetry which, though clearly ordered by the intellect, is grounded in the intuition and moves not in linear categories of logic or time but in cubic categories of sculpture or space.

What makes him a Japanese poet is the way he understands and articulates the whole tradition he inherits. The threshold of sentimentality allowed by that tradition often makes him sound in translation like a nineteenth-century romantic. True, he is not completely at home in our world, nor has he resolved the tension between the feminine nature-orientation of his tradition and the masculine ego-orientation of the contemporary milieu. But he is modern enough—despite his tears—to inherit that property of the alienated modern: stomach ulcers.

His sense of alienation developed at an early age. Born in 1899, the fourth son of a government official who led his large family through a bewildering succession of new posts, Kaoru knew what it meant to be a migrant. After his father's death the family settled in his mother's home town. He was only twelve, yet he had entered a new school practically every year. Looking back he wrote, "I never had roots anywhere; I grew up feeling like an alien." In a culture which stresses belonging, the alternative is retreat into the world of Mother's arms. Or into

dreams. Kaoru fed his dreams on tales of the sea by reading in translation *Lord Jim*, *Treasure Island*, *Robinson Crusoe* and the like. His hopes for a career at sea were dashed, however, when sickness forced him out of the Merchant Marine Academy as a plebe.

While regaining his health he dreamed of a career in Japanese literature. At twenty-six he was a freshman at Tokyo Imperial University; at twenty-nine he married and became a dropout. His first collection, *Sail-Lamp-Seagull* (1932), established him instantaneously as "the poet of the sea." Thus at thirty-three Maruyama found himself among the leaders of the modern lyrical tradition in Japan. He published eleven other books of verse between 1935 and 1962. Two resulted from voyages. The 1943 collection was based on an excursion with the training barque *Neptune* in 1941. Another in 1962 grew out of a journey to Australian ports on a freighter in 1955. Collections in 1946 and 1948 reflect his experiences at an isolated mountain school between 1945 to 1948. Since 1948 he has been at Aichi University where he is now Professor of Literature.

Incapable of being a Fitzgerald to Omar Khayyam, I have aimed merely at being a translator to Kaoru Maruyama, one as loyal as possible to the Japanese without necessarily rendering every word. I have also tried to duplicate some of the lilting movement a bit of the music and a taste of the melancholy mood which permeates his verse. Fortunately, Maruyama's poetic vision is universal and original enough to survive any injustice which translation does him. My hope is that these versions might give the reader some small hint of the poet's range and power. The translations follow the sequence in which Maruyama arranged the poems and are ordered chronologically by date of publication. Each collection except that published in 1952 is represented; two additional verses from 1968 have been appended. I have chosen over forty pieces from Maruyama's first four books because these works established and maintain his reputation as a major poet. The remaining translations illustrate how his poetic gifts developed after 1936.

Many have helped improve the felicity of expression and increase the accuracy of translation. Particularly must I thank Stanley K. Freiberg of the University of Calgary, Akira Nakamura of the University of Southern California, and my colleagues at U.C.L.A., Ben Befu and Elva Kremenliev. I am also extremely grateful to the editors of this journal, who proposed the project and offered many suggestions.

These translations are dedicated to Edwin O. Reischauer.

Robert Epp

河

口

Estuary

The ship drops anchor,
Sailors drop anchor in their hearts.

Seagulls salute groaning halyards from the river;
Fish draw near the bilgewater.

Changing clothes salted by seawind,
 the captain goes ashore;
Night after night he remains in town.
How many more barnacles weight the hull by now?

Each day as dusk deepens, his sailor son
Lights the green lamp in the bow alone.

福

The Anchor

The captain sips his rum, singing a song
Which sounds as hoarse and plaintive
As a pulley wheeling slowly in its block.

The muffled wings of seagulls
Whisper through murk at the stern;
The moon will soon rise in the estuary.

The captain's breast
Becomes the full tide of his red rum;
Tonight beneath its swell
His tattoo anchor quivers blue.

帆
か
た
う
た

Song Of The Sail

Gullwings beat the dark sky of the sea;
if I dip my shoulders
I think I might touch them.
Gullcries shriek the dark sky of the sea;
if I reach out my hands
I think I might catch them.
I could capture them
but for the flickering lamp
that dangles from my neck.
I'll blow it out and wait for the gull
to come and light upon
the snuffed-out blackness of the flame.

ラ
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ブ
か
た
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た

Song Of The Lamp

The anchor chain fades
into the sea's dark face
beyond where my eye can reach.
The rigging escapes
into the mast's dark heights
beyond where my eye can reach.
My feeble rays light only my sightless face.
Far in the distance past vision
A seagull fixes his eyes on me and shrieks.

鷗
か
歌
つ
た

Song Of The Seagull

I cannot see myself
How much less can I be seen by the lamp
Or the sail that catches its light?
Yet from where I soar
Lamp and sail are clearly visible.
Frozen and distant
I merely arch through the gloom.

鷗
愁

The Pain Of Parting

A seagull whispers into an anchor's ear.
Suddenly the anchor slips down without reply;
In an instant it sinks and pales into the sea.
Startled, the gull flies off;
The feelings that linger in its breast
Become a plaintive shriek lost to the sky.

鶴

The Crane (I)

What other than his broken wing
Has a crane with a broken wing?
Dipping your cracked wing as deeply as a sail
Crane, what would you keep from the wind?

ランプ
信天翁

The Lamp And The Albatross

An albatross over the blue sea
Turns into a lamp on the mast at sunset.
The navigation lamp on the dark mast
Turns back into the albatross at sunrise.

Neither albatross nor lamp knows
Whether the albatross is a lamp
Or the lamp an albatross.

What if the lamp on the dark mast
Never returned at sunrise to the sea
Or if the albatross above the blue
Never returned at sunset to the mast?

It would mean a single albatross
Had disappeared from the vast expanses of the sea
But how would the barque's mast
Navigate the billows of darkness
Without its lamp?

噴
水

The Fountain

Just as the crane would take wing
Beads of water welled
And spurted through his throat.
Ever since
He has stood there looking up and wondering
Why has this happened to me?



The Wind

A cow lows in the thicket;
Branches rumble in chorus to veil the sound, then
stillness returns to every twig.

A cow lows in the thicket;
Branches rumble in chorus to veil the sound, then
each twig bursts into giggles.

A cow lows in the thicket;
One by one branches begin to hum, then
melt together into laughter.

A cow lows in the thicket;
Each branch begins to stir, then their humming
disappears into the leaves.
The hidden hums chuckle over every twig.

Laced with that laughter is the sound
of a lowing cow.



Fortress

Bits of debris yearned for form
Breached walls yearned to smile
Gun barrels yearned to pick themselves up and sit
on their mounts again
All dreamed of wholeness fled
As every puff of wind
Buried them deeper under sand
the sea beyond their sight
the glint of a migratory bird

破

片

Debris

Ravens nest in a mortar barrel
Bats lurk in the ruined mount
Earth and sand accumulate . . .
Taking night for day and day for night
Each glides through time
Coiled by thoughts in rust.

曉

Daybreak

A wild duck winged up from a clump of reeds
Where a lantern had been swaying through the night
His beak smoldering blackly
His face wearing that moment of burnt oil

夜

Night

Saké creaked misery's stairway
To light a lantern in the attic of despair
Sighs stood up and bowed violas of laughter
Tears listened quietly to the tune



Voices

Light from the lantern
Melted a gull's eyes onto his cheeks
His wings became gleaming blindmen
Staggering through flame



All Day Long

A blind fountain
Touching strings
A deaf flower
Bending . . .



Waves And Foam

Plunge to the depth of the cup
You sorrows,
As an anchor hurls itself into the waves.

Hide yourselves in *saké* bubbles
You sighs,
As a seagull drowns in foam.



Shadows

Sounds spill from the harmonium
When sun sets;
Lilies saunter in from the distance
And stare into the lantern's face.



Wings

A gull careened through the porthole
Knocked over a lantern
And lay unconscious in the gloom.

Once Hope perhaps,
These wings tarnished by the tide
Now glow with fragrances of regret.



Sundown

When I lit the lantern
It promptly wailed
—I cannot see the gloom out there
I cannot see it . . .

When I took it to the gloom
It lamented the more vehemently
—It's dark now where I was
It's dark . . .

A bat chuckled.

酒
の
歌

Barsong

Throw a wine bottle into the sea
It never sinks but floats
Cheek to cheek with the waves

Some day it will sprout wings of poetry
Sing to the clouds and return to me

春

Spring

Wind's howl
 erases my memory
 completely
Sand hammers the windowpane
I cover my eyes
 the clock abruptly and plaintively
 tolls the time

夏

Summer

Bedraggled by sun and singing memories of the peak
A lily walked me down the steep slope

At sunset she wearied and slipped from my fingers
As I stood on the cliff above a stream
She disappeared in an instant, swallowed by mist

峠

Mountain Pass

Nipped by squeaks gasping from its gears,
The locomotive whistles
As it scales the zigzag to the heights.
A yellow lily behind a grade marker
Set to see off trains
Shrinks as conspicuously as a strained blink
Beyond the tunnel's arch.
Mountain peaks press near
Trading bold salutes with sunset silhouettes.
Even my face in the window
Becomes one of many shadows cast by the dim lamp
And tramps forlornly
Over the slope of that distant gorge.

哀
傷

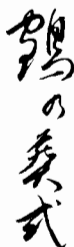
Sorrow

His face scorning the world,
A demon perches high on the peak
Of the temple's tiled roof.
On hot summer afternoons
When clouds burn brilliantly,
A raven sometimes swoops down
From the heart of the blazing heat
To light on the demon's ear
And peck at his eye.



Home

A clock that looks like Mother hung on the wall
The children became adults looking up to it
As rooms emptied, the maids left one by one
By then Father was as speechless as the setting sun
Soon the crane in our yard also passed away



Funeral Of The Crane

At sunset a single cloud
 eyes swollen with tears in the sun
 finally sank behind
 the artificial hill in our garden

The cloud seemed to wait for the wind
 soon
 it lifted its stiffened wings
 and bolted through the back gate

Momentarily from where pine branches
 sweep down the slope
 I saw it etched coldly
 against the western sky

For several days
 there has been no sign of rain

水
の
精
神

The Spirit Of Water

The water is limpid, but it boils
in distress and trembles disconsolately.
The water wants to curb its feelings, but cries out
frequently—only to be lashed by conscience.
Its untamed feelings glow and heave;
they are rent and crushed.
The water is drained of hope; at times it awakens
From the nightmare that it had suddenly
Tilted, upturned, screamed and scattered.
Awake, it pales forlornly, praying desperately
to find itself; prayer brings nothing.
Bursting with protest, the water chokes,
its words babble meaninglessly.
What has fermented such shapeless sounds?
Anger mounts, swells, overflows; unable to contain
itself, the water gives in to despair.
Sadness soon returns; the water wants to absorb
itself and thinks momentarily that it can . . .
It has not yet awakened from its dream.
Sun gently strokes the water's eyelids.

鴉

The Raven

In the hills a fellow costumed in black
Forever caws for a chilly wind.
In the hills a fellow with cheeks that never look back
Forever weeps into the sunset.

秃
头
山

Bald Mountain

On Bald Mountain
Are neither boulders nor pines.
All that quivers are bamboo leaves—
Uncertain which way their cool faces will veer,
A faded crimson wind weaves past;
Whenever it retreats toward the swarming sunlight
Another skylark takes wing from behind the violets.
Have the larks returned?
One has wandered off into the field.
Water will murmur like a tinkling bell
Through the lost lark's breast
When night's ring of stars begins to glisten.

父

Father

Our lordlike father leaves the house
Driving our hearts into gloom . . .
Our mad father returns to the heart of our home
Robbing us of Mother . . .

子
以
为
父

The Lion

Mother: I have only one request
I ask that when my boy grows up
He might become as strong as this lion
Son: I only ask one thing
I want this lion to gobble up my mother
She's fat as a sponge cake

火车
乘

By Train

I'll go by train
Into a countryside that looks like Ireland
Where dancers whirl their festive parasols
And rain falls as the sun shines.
Skimming lakes and threading tunnels
I take as my companion
That face reflected in the window
Into a countryside that looks like Ireland
Where cattle and girls with exotic faces wander.

鸽

Pigeons

I stand on the pavement and stare
Into pigeons dismounting the sky.
The rainbow hues they cast my way
Make me think the time for grief has come.
One brakes his tail feathers in descent
And beats hard against my forehead
Chilling the wounds in my heart.

练习
船

Training Barque

Any young man who loves the sea
Hopes one day to sail a training barque.
With sheets unfurled to the wind
He'll fly to the South Seas where bananas grow
And spend an entire life at the waves' mercy
Heedless of woman's love.
When he's as weathered as Robinson Crusoe
He'll take to wife a doll-like girl.

新
春

New Year Season

Carpenters wedge together dovetailed timbers
Heave assembled sections on their shoulders
And haul them to foundation stones
Purified by sacred leaves and laid on firmly tamped
black soil

Hammer blows echo stridently
Cased in morning sun
The studs burn like candles

一
日
長
夢

Daylong Dreams

Morning floods my studio
I pick up a carpenter's plane
And dash for that sun-struck pillar
To shave away shreds of reverie
Threatening to gleam through the day

午
後

Afternoon

Two ravens scurry by
Late on a cloudy afternoon—
 over the city's hurried rooftops
 over the river's shrieking whistles.
Their footsteps blend instantly with space,
Their stretching shrinking shapes rise momentarily
Into the telescope of my nostalgia.
One addresses the other with a wispy voice,
His partner's answer hangs unheard.

夕
日
映

1 **Sunset**

That single chimney
 ought not stir up the skies;
That ominous strand of smoke
 ought not threaten the skies
Blackening the horizon's rose-tiled shore.

Could I be dreaming?
Sunset's terrors reflect the bottomless abyss
 of my heart . . .
Could I be staring into pensive scraps of reverie?

春
鳥
の
歌
る

Bird In Spring

Not even oats will sprout
On this barren soil
Nor does the light of a dandelion shine.
What does that lump of gravel plan?
A bird claws at it to see.
Every time he pecks the stubborn core
A flash of flame turns twilight to grief
Flickering faintly in his eyes.

桜

Cherry Blossoms

Could those be cherry trees in bloom?
Dancing up and down beneath them are a thousand
Are ten thousand demons
Are faint flaming blossoms bursting with light
Now and again aligning their foreheads
Staring at me, jeering

Today a train lumbers over the weary dust
Over the dark path of the sun
Through the depths of the world

生
計

Making A Living

Once again today
Humble hands
Rake up dead leaves
Pick up woodscraps
Burn up rags
Send smoke
. . . toward the stars.

Standing In The Field

Mustard blossoms shimmer
Milk vetch flash pink in the paddies
An evening star trembles on the river
Scattering shreds of smoke, its whistle windless
A train chugs along the riverbank
Like a lengthy shadow gliding into Sheol

The Crane (II)

The crane looks up
Stretching his wings;
Sun paints him
 till he seems near flame.
In a moment he is gone . . .
Turned to smoke
He drifts gracefully through the sky.

学
校
远
望

College From Afar

A dozen years have passed since college days.
Looking over my shoulder I see the school
Glittering dimly in memory's depths
Like the carving on a medal:
 classroom tiles merge together
 poplars turn and tremble in the wind
 a teacher's voice fills the room
 youthful faces listen as one.
A boy by the window turns (as I did then)
To stare vacantly in my direction;
I wonder, does he see me at this distance?
I see him so very clearly.

犬
跌
足
今

Our Dog

One day when we were all on the veranda
Tears suddenly streamed down my cheeks.
Mother wondered whether it was dust,
My wife eyed me dubiously.
I wanted to laugh it off
But knew no way to hide my tears
Don't badger me about sentimentality!
I couldn't bear to see our dog,
His hair bristling like tufts of cotton,
That smart little fellow more honest than we,
Looking up at us from the cold ground.
Actually it was but a trifle that touched me.

古
詩
集

An Old Poetry Collection

Using a tattered goosequill pen
I wrote some boyish poems shaped from youth.
Compiled into a nice collection
They were strewn to the winds of the world
Lost to me completely.

Years passed.
Hunting for a book of poetry
Yesterday I chanced upon this warm friend
On a dusty shelf
In a dismal second-hand bookshop.
He sold for fifteen sen.

I would have paid a yen for him.
Holding him and turning his pages
I saw the sunrise on the corner
Where I lived long ago;
A faded dog yelped from gaps between the print
And leaped up on my shoulder.

沖
見
天

Watching The Horizon

A dilapidated Western house
Stands on a slope of the dune.
Apparently no one lives there
For every shutter on the balcony
Is tightly closed.
Breezes flutter the blossoms
Of a shepherd's purse
Growing on the handrail.

A dog stretches out
Motionless in the afternoon glitter.
At intervals he raises his head
Sharpens his ears and gazes steadily
At a seascape unshadowed by sails.
He lays his head back on his forepaws
As though weary of the scene.

Beyond wavetops swelling infinitely
I saw a single crest come into view
Glistening breaking falling.

海
風

Sea Wind

A wave surges from the offing
Swells and breaks over the beach

Look! Someone stands on the shore
Now he walks over the sand

Someone without form
With no more than eyes of foam

He climbs straight up the hill
Glowing with pampas grass

犀
と
獅子

The Rhinoceros And The Lion

The rhinoceros is running,
The lion clings to his back
Biting him.

Blood spurts as the pained rhino
Twists his neck and glares into sky.
In the hushed blue
There drifts a daytime moon.

This is a picture,
A momentary incident in a distant jungle.
Therefore the scene is still,
The forms of the two animals are frozen.
But in the grave silence
Second by second the lion kills,
Timelessly the rhinoceros dies.

秋
の
印
象

Autumn Impression

At evening when the boy came home
 he said breathlessly
"What a big red sun
 just dropped
 behind the grove!"
I stared intently into his face and I was sure of it
Clearly a round redness still burned
 in his youthful cheeks

未
明
の
馬

Horse Before Dawn

Sounds of hooves
Gallop from the depths of my dream
And stop before the house.
My horse has come for me.

I think of plans to take a trip today
And quickly leap from bed.
I must hurry.

As I dress
He kicks impatiently on the gate.
I hear volleys of his piercing
Irritated whinny.

I see him in the frosted gray of dawn
Wearing golden wings
Like the sun.

ペンギン島
漂流

The Drifting Penguin

Chunks break from the continent of ice
And a penguin riding one floe
Swirls into the sun-bright ocean.
The floe shrinks under sky
Till one morning it fits the penguin's feet
Then surrenders completely to the sea.

He floats on the brine a while.
About to be overcome by waves
He is rescued by a merchant ship
Whose kindly bearded captain takes him aboard
And carries him to Japan
To a temperate climate he had never known.

Now inside the steel mesh of the zoo
He stands on a small island
In a pond scattered with autumn leaves
Posing with one wing raised
Like Napoleon greeting his troops.

未
来
~

To The Future

The Father said:
Look at the picture
At the flying sleigh
At the wolfpack chasing it
At the driver frantically whipping the reindeer
At the rider taking steady aim with his rifle
 from behind the baggage
There, a scarlet flash from the muzzle!

The son said:
One wolf is down
Another springs toward the sleigh
Spurting blood and about to fall
It's night
The endless steppe is buried in snow
Will the wolfpack catch the rider?
How far has the sleigh to go?

The Father said:
It dashes into dawn
Killing yesterday's regrets one by one
It rushes like time into a new day
Soon tomorrow will radiate
Like a city beyond the path of the rising sun
Look, sky on the hill
Is already tinged with white.

海
瞳

The Sea's Eyes

When the ship rolls
my quarters suddenly submerge
Their portholes turn deep blue
and sea's cold eyes peer in

They observe me as though
I were a fish in a tiny room
the way I once looked through thick glass
at fish in an aquarium
Sea stares at this hapless fish
who escaped from land's unrest
into the unrest of the sea.

舵
輪

The Helm

The huge helm at the stern
heavy as something sprouted from waves
takes the might
of two sturdy young sailors
to turn it round and round

I glance up at the mizzenmast
The ship is turning
No it isn't the ship but the clouds
That begin to turn in silence
pivoting on the royal sail
Little by little the sky and the sea
indeed the world
begin to turn

舟
夫
の
足

Sailors' Feet

Sailors walk barefoot
over slick decks

polished each morning
with sand and coconuts
washed down with sea water
swept by brooms
dried in the equatorial sun

There is no dirt in the sea wind
Sailors' feet are cleaner
than if they walked on waves

Once crewmen on the footropes
worked a high yard
Every eye looked up at their white soles
which seemed to mirror
the seven seas

陸
の
風
海
の
風

Land Breeze, Sea Breeze

We've been at anchor ten days.
Every morning a land breeze
Slips through my open porthole

Greeting me with a bright
Good day!

Land breeze tells me it's time to rise
And fills my lungs
With the scent of fruits and vegetables
As though she were a Chinese girl returning from
market

With a shopping basket on her arm.
She's been like a cheery wife
Staying all day with me on board
Walking all day long around port
Returning with me at night to the ship.

Today I shall leave her behind.
Listen!

The anchor windlass is silent now
The prow is already turning
The stern has begun to pull its milky wake.
The coast fades into the distance
And the land breeze quickly pales.
Farewell Amoy! Quemoy Island! Lighthouse!
Goodby land breeze.

We enter the gateway to the East China Sea
And the ship pitches gently.
Now waves will start to look
Into cabins below deck.
I descend the companionway
To secure my portholes.
Deserted by the land breeze
I stand alone in my quarters
With a breeze from the sea.

冬
北
夢

Winter Dreams

Snow falls.
By morning the streets have disappeared.
Today's roads begin
Over yesterday's.

New paths rise narrowly
Day by day.
In February when snow packs hard
Roads rise
Where there were no roads.

Children and sleds
Dash freely over the crusted snow.

Soon spring comes.
The snow begins to melt.
Akebia vines and tips of branches
Appear
From under our straw boots.

People in the snow country
Realize only belatedly
Like those awakened from a dream
That they had been walking
Through the skies
Of twigtips and valleys.

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White Pictures

I told my class to paint anything
that had to do with spring
The children mixed their own colors
but had no idea what to use them on

Our scenery consists solely of white mountains
undulating white fields
and branchtips scattered in sparse groves
thrusting through the snow like faint shadows

I tried to color one child's sky a light cobalt
Since the paint on his picture was still wet
I ended up with a yellow splotch
spread between the branches of a tree

I regretted having tried it
but the children rather enjoyed my mistake
"Look, a witch hazel!" they exclaimed
utterly delighted

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Mountain Village

I live in a village high on a mountain.
Each morning the sun
Rises from snow-decked hills
Beyond the plain spread below
And shines up from under my bed
While I'm indulging dreams.
One by one birds rise on updrafts from the deep valley
Struggling breathlessly to the eaves of my cottage.
I always look down at their backs
Never up at their breasts.

Since coming to live on this mountain top
I have been staring down
At the day-by-day unraveling of my destiny.

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Writing Themes

Snow steals sun from the children
Snow steals places to play from the children
Snow steals colors and shapes
 of mountains and rocks and grass
 from the children
Snow steals bird songs from the children
No sunlight no colors no sounds
What indeed do children do
During six months of ashen monotone?

I had my class write themes
Though the children licked hard on their stubby
pencils
They recorded only
Getting up in the morning
Going to bed at night
Eating meals

Powdery snow from mountains wrapped in wind
Swirls up from the pathetic dullness of each paper
To flog my forehead



Deepening Snow

Snow deepens
The classbell rings again this morning
At the little mountain school

The harmonium echoes
And children's voices reading books aloud
or struggling to be called upon
Shrill across the snow
But in a moment everything
Is still

Indeed soundless
Completely quiet

All the trees hold their tongues
Listening to stillness
Somewhere in the distance beyond the valley
Rabbits and squirrels under leaves and stumps
buried in the mountain snow
Prick up their ears and hearken
to the hush

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Beyond The Distant Past

On a snowy evening
as I walk along the road
something brushes my forehead

I look up
and see a cherry branch

Is it possible
the snow is already so deep?
Is it possible that so much has fallen
that the road is now
this far above ground?

I recall looking up
at this very limb last spring
I recall looking up
through blossoms on its twigs
into the pale blue sky
I recall this dazzling dream as though
it reached beyond the distant past

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Early Spring

Soft spring snows
Accumulate on winter's crusts
But do not cling to them.
One bright morning
The loose snow abruptly begins
Sliding soundlessly down the slope.
Glittering, moving at demonic speed,
It cascades from the precipice
Like smoke in a painting
And scatters into the valley below.

A baby squirrel gazing at the sky
From an oak hollow on the valley floor
Is smothered in white—alone.

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The Joys Of Snow

When snow piles high
Boys go tumbling through drifts
Certain that motherly arms
Will reach out to hold them
Where they fall

Look at all the hollows
Left again this morning
Where boys and the snow tenderly
Embraced each other under blue skies
On their way to school

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Spring In The North

Wonderful!

Sounds in the gorge
That masses snow from the mountains;
The rising roar of water
That thunders into our valley . . .

Branches spring up one by one
From under snow beginning to relent.
Each twig raises hard knots
That beat the cheeks of passers-by
Like fearless whips.
Woods in the foothills
Will soon be tinted faint green.
Perhaps the first blooms will be the white
Of mountain magnolias.

Early this morning when class began
One little girl raised her hand and said
"Teacher the swallows have come."

风
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A Climate

The roofs incline sharply
on houses pitched parallel to the valley's slope
The soles of their feet have been inclined
ever since their father's time
since their grandfather's time—even since
their great grandfather's time



The Heart Of The Flower

All the girls were smiling
They did not say
I like you or I hate you
They just smiled silently
And vanished one by one

A double-petaled smile
Spreads forever on my palm
Now I pluck it
One petal at a time
All the way to the core

The smile gone
Fragrance alone remains



Age

Before he passed away
My fellow poet Nobuo Tsumura told me
That though we live as men through youth and old age
We do not as poets live adolescence or prime

What he said was near the truth
Actually I find myself knocking too soon
 at the door of old age

Young man! you have left me with a silver crown
 on my head
Strains of your flute dissolve into the distance

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Like A Lamp

She who loved me all her life
she who continues loving me
my mother my wife

Mother's love brightened me for half a century
Three years ago it flickered out
leaving shadows in a corner of my heart
where I stood in tears

My wife has loved me for twenty years
with an unfaltering flame

Most likely she will outlive me
and shine alone in a husbandless room
like a lamp

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Unspoken Love

When I walk over deep snow
 heaped near the high peak
Or under bowed trees bathing in sun
I find myself reminiscing about

Mother who is gone
My wife at home

Or about modest acts of kindness
Done by women chanced upon along the way
Women who have left no other trace on me

Mellowing in nature
Memories of unspoken love
Often howl like wind through my mind



Accordions And Trains

My accordion serenaded
Cheerfully yet
Tinged with strains of sadness.

My train dashed
Through unknown fields
In splendor though it was
Black outside the window.

Could this have been adolescence?
Could it have been mine?

Countless other accordions
Pile their serenading on the tunes
Of my silenced instrument.

Trains arrive one after the other
Pursuing my misplaced hours.

珊瑚海

The Coral Sea

The prow endlessly furrows up
Huge waves
Whose every emerald heave
Casts lights not there yesterday
And shadows not cast the day before.

What comes waltzing from the lights
From the shadows?
What dances nimbly on the wind
Fluttering and skimming now and again
Past the portholes and over the stack?
Are they seagulls or flying fish?
No, no they are leaves
Sprinkled through the autumn
Of the ocean

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A Young Sailor

The stern begins to froth.
The capstan
Winds in the heavy hawser
Whose writhing end dances about
While a lad barely sixteen or seventeen
Tries to tame it and is instead tamed.

What ran through my mind at his age?
Surely his dreams are tender still
Ah but that chin strap hugging his frantic cheeks
The tang of the sea, of the tar, of the smoke
The flutter of flags running up the mast
All make him seem wise in the ways of the world.

The ship leaves the quay
And without adieus heads for the offing
Where winds blow.

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Sailing Through Autumn

Morning.

As I shave in the cool breeze
A shell-shaped island
Flows through the back of my mirror
Trailing two or three puffs
Of smoke.

I go to the salon.
Everyone has on a suit coat
Except one sailor in a sportshirt.
"All of a sudden it's fall."
The sailor sneezes.
"Day after tomorrow I suppose it'll be winter."

Sky and clouds seem to sing far in the distance.
Keeping time with their song
The Coral Sea fiercely pitches and rolls
Through the day.

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News From The Cape

Over the past two or three days
the sea has been intensely clear
the sky pure blue

Each day I show my heels to the clouds
and dive deep into the sea
Wonders! Wonders!
Suddenly I am in the sky
I peer through my goggles
and see the sun between a cleft in the rocks

Pointing my harpoon
I move toward the light
The leisurely strains of a harp
flow from nowhere into my ears
and a string of fish above my head
moves in circles
as in an ancient Egyptian mural

Gently extending my arm
I pluck sea mussels and ear-shells
from behind the sun

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Autumn Dreams

Evening insects hum

When I hear their voices
My body lies outside the window
Asleep on the grass

Evening rain falls

When I savor its fragrance
My mind lies outside the door
Asleep on the ground

Soaking my spine, penetrating my neck
Insect voices and rain's fragrance
Bring me sleep
I dream desolation through the night

I see my house turn old
Rot and collapse before my eyes
my wife?
the children?

At dawn

My screams awaken me
The rain has stopped
The wind is blowing

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Near Chichi-jima

Like cards
melting into a magician's hands
swallows flew into my palm and disappeared.
My dream broke off
just as I wondered how many I had caught.
I vividly recall the scene.
Returning from the South Pacific
we were somewhere near Chichi-jima
though the island itself was nowhere in sight
when the dawn breeze swept in a lone swallow.
It glided solitarily
and so tottered
that it appeared again and again
to flutter to my fingertips
falling at last into the waves.