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THE POETRY OF
KAORU MARUYAMA

translated from
the Japanese by
ROBERT EPP

詩

丸山薫の

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

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

鷗

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
と
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.