

POEMS 88-89

Mutsūra [PUBL. OLD VERSION, REDONE]

[A Postcard to Her (Meditating on Lady Kunaikyō) (T 53) -- NOT USED HERE]

[On: Looking; Into! My? [Address-Book] -- NOT USED HERE]

[Deadly Memory -- NOT USED HERE]

Lessons of Buddhism [PUBL.]

In Love with Heel Tendons

[A une passante (Young Tokyo Woman) -- NOT USED HERE]

O Karl (T 54-55)

Three Days in July (H 206-08)

“if it’s torn off” (T 56)

The Bed

Hymn to an Indifferent Godhead

Visions off Yamada

["I cannot bear..." (T 59) -- NOT USED HERE]

Haiku of Missed Chance (H 211)

Cythera (T 58)

Dying Fall (H 209)

February

Disputing Bashō II (H 215)

"your pencil box" (H 216 – USED IN “SATURNIAN FUGUE”)

aki no uta (H 217– USED IN “SATURNIAN FUGUE”)

Salut, Already (T 60)

Raison d'être (T 61) 12/88

Kokoro aru (H 213, 221-23, 225-28, 210, 229)

Disputing Narihira (T 62)

Yes, Akiko (T 63)

Akatsuki (T 64)

Yume awase (Portent of Dreams)

Ballad of the Scholar's Wife

"Yes i lost..." (T 65)

Choosy About Propertius

MUTSŪRA

Enough is enough, Zeami, yes, but when
Should the red pale into grass green? What the point
Where the fateful Peter Principle arrows into the last
Incompetence notch, catastrophe of the amuck-
-Running competition game? When to deploy
The tree-spirit's golden & sky-blue fan, hold it horizontal
In sign of deep intent, stamp the foot
Upon the resonant floor? The evergreen pine

May look calmly on, but we go thru the spiralling down days,
Late & soon, each to the market pushing his price
Higher, Alice running harder & harder, she who veils her face
With the sleeve of forgetfulness (within which it may be seen
The red & green maple leaves have always been there)
Is lost in the bidding:

thus we too,

The anti-marketeers, rue & marjoram, are in the market
Pushing our anti-market ideas, verbalizing superlatives, & cannot

Rest satisfied with, enter Nirvana.

No consummation

Devoutly to be wished for, the shogun
Has entered upon a new dispensation, O Zeami,
You & we looking homeward, angel, from Sado Island,
Saying goodbye from the *hashigakari*, slow &
Stately goodbye, our waxen wings buckle & melt,
O the pressure, rainy season, this spasm,
Défaillance of the heart/mind...

Applause by an old-fashioned audience, open umbrellas, trudge
Stubbornly on thru carmine neons of mass cyberpunk
Subway plazas & quarters: Shibuya with the hideously faithful
Doggy statue, that ideal corporation dying; Harajuku with the surging
Teens, Shinjuku the hectic heaven of earthquake-proof
Skyscrapers. A curious look at the poison
Green & purple shadows pulsating "Consume me, me,"
On the young women's febrile night-petal faces.

NOTE: *Mutsūra* is Zeami's Nô play about the spirit of the maple tree that one day decided to stop producing red leaves since it had produced highly admired ones & thus fulfilled its destiny. The elements from the spirit's impressive dance at the end are as seen at the Kanze performance in 1988; the *hashigakari* is the entrance/exit bridge for the Nô protagonist. When the enlightened shogun who loved him was supplanted by a new one, Zeami himself was exiled to far-off Sado Island.

The "Peter Principle" for modern bureaucracy says, "Everybody will be promoted to the level of his/her incompetence" (e.g. a good researcher to mediocre lab director).

The Japanese *kokoro* can be indifferently translated as heart or mind -- the feeling essence of personality -- but a medical pun is also involved here.

LESSONS OF BUDDHISM

1.

The Fugacity of Things opens its tiger jaws
& the eve of my unquiet end flutters near.
That roar is the tempest of universal evanescence,
I need to elect a wavelength tuned into the Law:
Unsatisfied, to understand more numinous lessons
& the Buddhas will laugh & be content.

In the kalpa-long eclipse of the Moon, mirror
In the sky, common reference informing the multifarious
Disparate realities of atomic me & thee,
In the night of the dead & the reborn & the dying,
Hidden by the clouds of Obfuscation,
In truth, the misery of this world!

All the myriad still & busy agents are impermanent,
Their law is fugitive life shading into death,
Having been brought forth they stop desist & cease;
Nonetheless, joyous & without fear,
Straightforward among the bodhisattvas, rejecting
The salvific artifices, let us announce the Overriding Law.

For when i'm perishing of cold, the enlightenment is my cloak,
A clear & fresh pond for the thirsty,
A guide for the desert caravan, a bark for those
Who needs must cross this turbulent river,
A healer for the sick, a light that shows the way

In this darkness.

2.

The first lesson is to see the ground oneself stands on.
The Auditors who merely listen & the Buddhas-for-themselves
Only reach a partial truth. Their circle of light
Is not the triumphant entry into the Kingdom of
Correct-Full-Feedback-Awakening: their haloes shine inward,
They are the Two Sterile Vehicles.

The second lesson is of the ladder that stands on the ground.
It has three rungs & goes on, we know not where.
The first rung of Insight says the surface covers emptiness:
This is a truth but not the overriding truth,
It divides the thinkers from the animals
Happy in their lynx-like sight of the prey.

The second rung is much higher, it sees the sensual world,
But its treader panics when he follows
This world's unceasing waterfall flow;
She squints past the lynx's illusions & starts up
An absolute Reality that can be immutably grasped
For comfort by the absolutist mind.
Only the third rung is *en*, whole firm & satisfying,
It shows the surface phenomena & the Reality as one & the same.
There are no Lords or Saviors hiding behind the senses,
The sensorium, the brain & the Reality bite each other's tails,
You & I live in this patient donkey body or not at all,
However far we may ride on it, propelled by Dumbo's ears

Or on Aladdin's magic carpet, rubbing the lamp
(Fortunate those who attain the enlightenment of *yonis!*).
Attaining enlightenment is to put dreams into tactile space,
To have one's body transfigured by realized feeling,
Safe as a sleepwalker on the razorbacks of this world's paths;
This is the Correct Awakening, seeing the Thusness,

Changing & forever there,
Before me, after me, in me,

Before you, after you, in you,
Between you & me: in us--
In the world's dreaming body.

8-1088

IN LOVE WITH HEEL TENDONS

Is it possible to be in love with heel tendons?
Or, more precisely, with the sweet hollow between the heel tendons
Of the woman marching before me, delineated at each step, left & right?
I've read of trembling at sight of the hollow behind the kneecap
But this riveting now adds the firmness of youthful flesh,
The tender loom-curves of the calf muscles petering out,
The skin tone in this Summer dusk,
The feel in the palm of my hand when i run it down
Searching for her instep, to heighten the catch in two throats
As we change positions, assembling the riddled love.

2788

BLOWING

Butter wouldn't melt in her mouth
Oil wouldn't scald in her hands
Her cunt was hot & moist at first touch
Breast-tips always cold, bright eyes
Always open, I still see her direct gaze
At the airport, the warm embrace,
The cool friendly smile, self-possessed,
As if etched in acid.

23788

O KARL AGAIN

1. Le bon usage

O Karl, best ladder
i climb to reach my beloved:

once in her lap, on
the high plateau of delight,
i won't need you, old ladder.

2. & Yet

O Karl, best raft-builder
for love of the other shore
your half-built raft needs
more planks from us, but we can't
get by without you, good raft.

4-788

THREE DAYS IN JULY (A HAIKU SEQUENCE)

18/7

We can be friends, said
she at the train station. Why
did the day turn grey?

23/7

Let's watch this play,
i'll explain, said she. The play
did not take place.

25/7

Let us meet again,
said she, smiling sweetly.
Only one of us came.

25788

If it's torn off, on=
ly clods are left. As it blows,
in its thusness, to
all the Enlightened, this flower --
stem, root, petals -- i offer.

26788

Empty street geometries hush & darken
This is no more the season of my youth.
But yesterday i didn't realize that today
Will be the last day. When you die,
Will i be the most loved one,
The one who ferries you across the River of the Dead?

26788

HYMN TO AN INDIFFERENT GODHEAD

With acknowledgement to Tirunaavukkarasar's Tamil
devotional poems, transl. R. Radhakrishnan & N.
Rajagopalan; for H.G. Coward

Pain, anxiety, death, conspicuous waste of this only life,
O golden Indifferent One,
Thou hast not taken away nor much soothed
I am one of thy servants & we don't understand thee any more
Our stomachs knot & twist, our innards fill up with poison
We follow but we do not fathom, we believe
Because everything else is fouled & absurd.

We wish to believe in you, our shoulders shake
We pluck for thee fresh flowers from the river banks
Some of us have gathered shells on the sea-shore
But we never see thee any more. Love alone soothes,
Love of the multifarious things in which thou dwellest
& of the beauteous bodies which we would not see

But for thy breath in them & in us, connecting us
Even as thou parest thy nails somewhere on high.
'Tis easy for thee, thou hast unimaginable kalpas' time,
But we cannot bear thy serene leisure, we can neither
Go on with thee nor await without thee, so
Do something, step out of thine indolence,

O exalted cur!

101088

In Yamada on the coast a mirage can be seen every year. It is said that it is usually the scenery of a foreign country: an unknown capital with many carriages in the streets & people coming & going. It's quite amazing. From year to year, the shapes of the houses & other things don't change in the least.

Yanagita Kunio, *Tôno monogatari* 106

1. In Praise of a Wonderful Sight

Come see this bridge.
How can we build it?
Cross it this way & that?
Get there, across the bridge?

Come see this main gate.
It is made of solid red wood
It is an auspicious wide gate

Push open the doors, look:
What a wonderful age,
There, behind the straight gate!

I wish i could come
See & push open the gate,
Enter the wonderful age.

Come see the spacious houses
Of the people, for the people
Built by skilled carpenters

For themselves, by their own hands,
Own designs. They do not have to kill,
Choke off food, air, water, eat

Up brain synapses so as
To live: they vie to interpret

Their enterprise--yours & mine!

The curving roofs look like wood bark
Karamatsu pines grow above
Springs flow non-acid to the left & the right
Scoop it up & drink, the water never fails.
Come see the great Hall of the Commune Morning & evening sunshine on that temple
A hundred rosy-cheeked children run into it,
Run out of it, like water down the mountain,

Bubbling, falling, going on.

Come see my own home
In that wonderful age.

Now, I rent a too crowded apartment.
Then, it's the house of a kind-hearted person.

Here, all my children are arranged words.
There, they are also bodies, blended with yours.

2. Choosing the Stag's Wife

As soon as it's born, the fawn runs about the hills
We too go around, run about the park.
Try to gaze around attentive, find a doe
But heavy smog hides all mountain tops.
O happy we! The cruel wind has blown off the smog
We are off in search of the doe.

Let us celebrate the Siberian wind, sweet rain,
Let's gather & drink warm rice-wine
Let us worship the twohundredandtenth day,
October, the stormiest month of the year.

Which direction shall we salute? Salute the North!
The North Wind wins over the polluted mist.

Now we have made a barn for the doe
We cut *kikyô* flowers & morning grass
The barn is bright with the beauty of flowers
Of course, it took so long to furnish it!
Wherever the doe hides, i'll search all the ways
I'll walk on roads & thru waving grasses:

Like bamboo stems, tall & appetizing, wherever
She hides, the pretty doe will be found.
Look at the doe & stag, their bodies lusty,
Their hearts full of tender affection
They need to hurry together, browse together,
Sleep together, have offspring, in a brief world.

Deep in the mountain passes a stag dances
Still burning with passion for the doe.
Look at the pines up the slope, the silly ivy
Clings to the pine; without good luck
The ivy leaves will fall off the pine. In the park
We are planting another pillar
The stag may rub his antlers, grow young. Out at sea,
The plover sways with the waves,
Cries, in the end flies smoothly off. Let us dream
A Spring not far behind.

3. Where the Waves Meet

When i hear a good singer in this gathering
I'm ashamed to dance & sing.
I learned yesterday what i give you today
Please be kind forgive the mistakes.

The flowered mats with their fine designs
Let's bring them to this gathering
The silver-lacquered rice-wine set
Let's drink from it to this gathering.

The Queen of May pours *sake* herself
The gathering brightens with joy
Drink a cup of this wine from the celadon set
Believe that we can all live well.

The King of October roasts the *yakitori* himself
With the wine goes also sea-bream,
Mountain trout, swordfish cut into steaks,
Tuna from the wave off Kanagawa.

To begin the banqueting, somebody sing!
To say my song is good
Is impossible. Who will come to hear
This well-wishing song? Everyone is welcome!

What carpenter made this stand?
It is solid, a treasure is inside.
What wine do you think this is?
It's *kiku no sake* from the famous fields.

Where does this rice-paper come from?
From Harima? From Kashima?
Never mind, it folds well,
It's good paper, you can read from it.

Which is the spot that holds the fan together?
It's *uchi no miya*, the pivot point
It folds well, snaps closed ready for use.
Friends, let us bow deep & be going.

4.

That's all there is to the story.

(If only life were not a crystal.)

NOTE: This poem has been catalyzed by Yanagita's famous collection of Japanese folklore cited in the epigraph; many lines are pieced together from Yanagita's stories & poems, with small alterations but against a different horizon. "Yakitori" = chicken brochette; "kiku no sake" = special rice wine with

chrysanthemum leaves; "That's all there is to the story" (Kore de dondo hare) = the obligatory ending to any Japanese folktale (but in the poem it is not the ending).

271088

HAIKU OF MISSED CHANCE

sulky face framed by
fled felicities
 holding back,
flesh does not flower
 131188

CYTHERA

Softly, sweetly, little
pheasant: easy to catch here,
pheasant hen, press her
down & clasp her tight, hearts
beat quicker at such sweetness.
 141188

DYING FALL

Plum petals descend
silent, easy, in season--
markets scream loud
 10-1288

FEBRUARY (REGARDING A RITUAL ILLUSION)

Februlare, to ritually kick out from a home the ghosts
of the dead.

Foucault, *Naissance de la Clinique*

In memory of Michel F, a dinner in Montréal;
& to Sheila & Katya, diagnosticians

Death invades the champignons of tissues in campaign tide,

Freezes them with white eyeball, socket stare,
Waiting for no man, no nor woman either, biting off
Bit by bit. First the hair grows whiter & whiter.
Then the white teeth turn into cavities, or
Porcelain-&-gold. Muscles & ligaments begin
To crack or grow lax, with blue & rainbow veins.
Fiftythousand neurons die each revolving day.

With what cheek, what face then, may i present myself
Before you, at the height of my feverish life,
By now clarified, defined as what is before death, refined
Into what cohabits with dying? Am i allowed to kick out
My dead from my skull-&-bones home? I am not.
No clarity without shadow, no line without blank,
No picture without limit. No purifying living-water
Prevails, double-faced January is my true season

Following May.

41288

DISPUTING BASHŌ II

sniffing faded flowers;
serene in far off temples
wormhole Bodhisattvas

161288

SALUT, ALREADY

Life brief, craft vast.
At the lake of dreams, steadfast
passion flowers blow
whilst in the leaves a sound of
already autumn sweeps by.

161288

RAISON D'ÊTRE

the world goes on
& on
for whom shall i cross
the dark ocean?

(On Reading the Lotus Sutra)

Bosatsu Ever-Hurt
we see
when the Bodhisattva
of Superb Act?

(Remembering Attorney-general Mitchell)

The world wobbles
unsteady. The steadfast ones
stand out.

101088

twelve sun hours' off
the Moon's long ladder
silver
thru your misty dawn.

1189

DISPUTING NARIHIRA

tsuki ya aranu/ haru ya mukashi no/ haru naranu/ waga mi hitotsu wa/ moto no mi ni shite

Is not the Moon
the selfsame Moon? isn't the Spring
the Spring as it was?
Only this body of mine
is not the same as of old.

2189

YES, AKIKO

Tsumi ôki/ otoko korase to/ hada kiyoku/ kurokami nagaku/ tsukurareshi ware

To reward the strong
long-lasting desires
the kami gave you
these long elegant legs
the warm intelligent eyes

29189

YUME AWASE (PORTENT OF DREAMS)

It is the Peace Fair in Nerima with you
In my dream, a hot June, among lemonades
You sell me a purse, but also Kanagawa
With Hokusai's waves beckoning, & now plovers

Calling from a smooth expanse of sea: chiri chiri
Ya chiri chiri, & kids rowing the sandolines
Of my Adriatic youth: karari-korori,
Karari-korori, oars groan against oarlocks:

You sit still with a parasol on the gondola prow,
All dressed up in auspicious black, half-impatient
Against the dazzling sun, going to Tsukuda-jima. All the time
We talk, one moment you grow cross, but now we chuckle
Together, press close, after the bed we even walk.

Then i woke up; then i reached for the phone.

3289

AKATSUKI

Strange near or
far, this carnal love
breaks all the rules:
wherever you are, it's my joy

to think of you, near & far.

3289

THE SCHOLAR'S WIFE

1. Ballad

With thanks to the River Merchant of Kiangxia

I remember when i was young & beautiful
I could have channelled otherwhere the love in my heart.
I don't think i wished for a husband, tho who
Would have thot it i married a wandering scholar,
A gypsy minstrel thinking foremost of penmanship
& verse & essays & now have too much grief
 In my life.

At first when we married we were happy but how
Often is he at home with me? Every year
He disappears in Spring together with the snow.
Only once he has taken me along on his travels.
Every year i strain my eyes to follow his ship
As it dwindles, friends to the east & west of us
 Take their wives along,

Who scoff at me & put black thots
Into my head since how may i know
With whom is he? I go & cultivate my garden then
& from time to time i get a beautiful letter
Or book or poem from him, i wonder why i must be
Left behind so sadly. Taking a mirror
 I scan my face,

I sigh & think long thots, isn't it better
To marry a dull young clerk, at least each day
He would be at my side? Now i begin to doubt that
Being wed to a scholar was a good idea, a wandering
Scribbler seeking preferment by means of his brain
In strange countries. He will regret our separation now
 While we're still young,

When we should be happy together, too late.
With him gone from me who then sees properly
What i am?

2. 10 Years Later

The East wind blows hard, heavy rain strands splash
I've striven to be of the same mind as you, don't yell at me
Tho no longer young & beautiful, i have my value
I've worked for you & lived with you, i should die with you.

Where the river is deep, one passes by raft or boat
Where the river is shallow, one wades or swims
Whatever you felt was useful, i did it for you
Whenever our friends were in need, i wore myself out to help.

When young i was a poor & abandoned orphan
When i first married you we went thru difficult years
Now i need a hoard to keep me against the winter
Please think of the days when you came & found rest in me.

583-892

yes i lost my wish
finally it died i'm that
the loser
hasn't she
who hadn't wished to keep wishing
lost herself & the other?

87-89

CHOOSY ABOUT PROPERTIUS

Me juvet in gremio doctae legisse puellae...

I dream of reading my things in the bosom of a young woman:
Who is learned & shares my horizons & upbraids my slack times
So that the blind class spot on the Socratic retina --

A lens to focus on how things fare in this common world --
& the delight of buds of feeling, touching directly
On the irreducibly deep surfaces of things, come finally together
Just as the distance is lessened between the touching twain.

Long-standing dream, pressed down by the leaden cap of the Powers-
-That-Be, yet easier now where i (alas) also grow older;
For the ancient quarrel of all-creating Venus, the Foam
Born, & learned Minerva, helmeted spear-armed divider, subsides
In the elated efforts to refashion the Triple One: many a fair grows fairer
As consciousness raises its look onto the whys of this world's wrongs:

Hunger, loneliness, double work schedule, desires that rot,
Why our star-cluster is the way it is while it might not,
When is the brain dead & why deadened, by whom how,
& uppermost: in whose interest; & how energy circulates rapid
(As Lucretius already told us) in society's ruthless channels
Enforced by the clinamen of profit's polluted returns.

The secretive pleasures guessed at where dress now veils the shapes
Are then joined by arts the woman masters, mother & sister
& lover, producing us with my input: & if one of such fair,
Shapely leg in stocking of uplifting blue, likes me,
I care not what common sense, the prejudiced geezer, mutters:
I dream of reading my things in the bosom of a learned woman.