

Visions Off Yamada (1988)

Note 2020: This poem was catalysed 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).

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 in order
 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.)

271088