

GREEN AND GRAY

(福 田 勲)

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Preface

Here is a selection of my English poems. They are the expression of my occasional thoughts and sentiments, and are manifold in subjects and moods. Various experiences I have had in the past are expressed in verse form here. Some are written humourously, some composed fancifully, others reflectively, yearningly, or meditatively. Since I am a Japanese, I might say with some confidence that they represent what Japanese in general think, feel, or wish to express. In this sense, they may be of some interest to Western people who wish to get an intimate knowledge of the Japanese people, who are, they say, industrious, wise, and sometimes, mysterious. I began to write English poems more than ten years ago, when I was a teacher of English at Hirosaki University. The reading of many masterpieces in English and American literature, the translation of some representative works in Japanese literature into English, and my daily teaching of English, have naturally led me to the writing of English poems. When I sent them to Mr. Kirkup, an English poet, who has been in Japan for many years and love this country and its people with good understanding and regard, he was kind enough to read and give a favourable opinion of them.

Moreover, he kindly sent them to English publishers for publication. One of my poems is to be included in his anthology to be published in England. Another English publisher is to include some of my poems in its anthology. I am also working with Dr. Gibson, an English essayist, who is generous enough to include my poems in his essays published in the *Journal of Current English* monthly.

Mr. Kirkup calls mine down-to-earth poems. They are the expression of my actual experiences in verse form in realistic style. They are written in simple and plain style so that everyone who reads them may catch their meaning at once. Different people may like different poems in this selection, but they will communicate something to their hearts or minds, if they are good enough.

I think there are two objects in the study of a foreign language. One is the mastery of the language ; the other is the actual use of it for various purposes in our daily life. One of these purposes may be the introduction of the culture and civilization of this country into other countries, using this medium. In this country since the introduction of the English language into it, emphasis seems to have be laid on the translation into gapanese rather than on the actual use of it in connection with the purpose mentioned above. So with this purpose in view I have written most of my

studies in English literature in English.

My English poems are also written with this point in view. The communication of various thoughts and sentiments of an Oriental to Western people is my object, as I stated above. If my English poems can awake vibrations in the hearts of Western people with their rhythmic flow, I firmly believe that they will be of some use in the furtherance the mutual friendship and understanding between this country and others through the medium of the English language.

A STRANGER IN PARIS, A REMEMBRANCE

With the Eiffel Tower rising before me,
I sat down on a bench,
Found on the bank of the River Seine,
And enjoyed the surrounding views
For some time,
And then I came down to the river brink
To find in the river the reflected image
Of myself, a shabbily-dressed Oriental.
Suddenly I called to mind
My home and family.

A SILVER LYRE

A silver lyre sounds golden
Twanged by
Mellow age,
Golden,
Like the waves
Shone upon
By the moonlight.
A silver lyre
Sounds forlorn
Twanged by
Gray age,
Forlorn,
Like the waves
Dashing against
The dark shore.

MY DREAMS

Floating my dreams in the sky,
Colouring them in its dye,
I numbered the years gone by,
Treading the leaves fallen dry.

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CICADA-HUNTING

Summer has come
With its green,
With its showers,
With its cicadas.

I remember how I enjoyed
Cicada-hunting,
When a child,
Often getting
Urinary ablution
Instead of the prize.

A BRAINY CREATURE

Do you laugh at a man
Who slips on a banana peel?

Are you not laughable then
Who slip on the empty words
Of political foxes?

Do you call a lion a wild beast,
Which kills another when it is hungry?

What do you call a brainy creature,
Who kills others when he is not hungry?

A SMALL POND

Into the calm of the pond
A small stone was thrown.
It went down to the bottom
To see the light of the sun no more,
Leaving rings of water widening
To disappear soon, reaching the shore.
A small stone was thrown suddenly
Into the calm of the pond,
Lying concealed in the depth of my heart,
To see the light of the sun never more.

THE SUBWAY IN NEW YORK

Here forests of skyscrapers
Compete with one another in height
Among the splendour and grandeur
Which this mammoth city prides in.

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I found, however, its subway quite miserable.
The window-frames of the car I got into
Were encrusted with much rust.
Its matted seats were worn
And torn and disembowelled.
Dirty were the window-panes,
Spoiled with many rain-marks,
Through which I could see only dimly
The shifting scenes of the outside world,
When the car came out of the long, noisy tube.
Quite disappointed, I stole a glance
At the magazine a girl was reading
And found she was poring on
The recent fashions in Paris.

A TRITON

Teaching lessons to boys and girls,
An old teacher lives a busy life.
On his head thin and gray hair
Grieves for its gone comrades.
In his mouth scattered teeth
Mourns for their lost partners.
Near-sighted and close to the texts,
He cons hard for his small pittance.
Believing borrowed thoughts to be his own,
And losing himself often in the maze of a hard passages,
He lives happily and unhappily as a Triton
Among the minnows naughty and quite inattentive.

THE COLOUR OF DEATH

They say green is the colour of life,
But I once saw it on the face of my dead wife.
I saw it also on the face of a young student
Killed during the war hit by an incendiary bomb.
How ghastly the sight was !
But at the same time
How beautiful the colour was !
Lurid but exquisitely fine,
Was the colour of confined death,
Found on a summer's day
Many hours after life was gone.

THE DUST-GATHERING CAR

Sounding sweet music,
A dust-gathering car has come round,
And lots of rubbish from every house
Is brought out to be piled on the car.
The dustmen have now begun to throw it up
To the top of the garbage mountains high :
Waste paper, fruit peels, and many other odds and ends ;
Manifold in kind are they and various in colours,
But are not the dustmen and all of us waste and dust, too,
To be sent, when breath is lost, to the eternal home,
To the tunes of the temple bell,
Different from those sounding now ?

LIFE

If we mean anything by life,
We may say it is a knife.
It may make a tuneful reed ;
It may cut and make us bleed.

THE MOSQUITO I KILLED

At a single stroke of my hand
I killed the mosquito
That had been sucking blood,
From my arm.
Looking at the insect,
Grushed, besmeared with my blood,
I pitied it at first,
And then I blessed it.

I remembered the girl
Who died young, unmarried,
Because of her lost love.

ENGLISH

How glad I am
To find English
Written or spoken
Everywhere in this country,
Since I am
A teacher of English !

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How sorry I am
To find English
Spoken or written
Everywhere in this country,
Since I am
A Japanese !

A GARDEN

Living in a box-like house
Without a garden,
Daily I plant many flowers
In my garden of imagination,
Though I know very well
That when a garden
Becomes a reality,
I shall not plant in it
Even a single flower.

THE ROMANTIC MOON

I love the romantic moon
To please our nightly sight,
With her melancholy pallor,
And its modest quietude ;

Not the scientific moon
Ravaged by spacemen,
With its crateral pocksmarks,
And dusty, rocky waste.

I love the romantic moon
With her lovely traditional hare
Pounding rice-cake in the mortar
With his wooden pestle,

Not the scientific moon
With its veil ripped open by spacemen,
To our loss and lamentation
Of another romantic dream.

MY LINES

So many dull lines,
So many trite lines,
And a handful of tolerable lines.

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They are my daytime comfort,
They are my nightly solace ;
They are my life and death, too.
I am fed with others' thoughts
Too much.

WHEN I AM ALONE

When I am alone
And lone,
Even a fly
Flying about
Is my best friend.

When I am alone
And lone,
Even television,
A frequent object of my scorn,
Is the best provider of amusement.

THE SLEEP OF THE DULL

Cicadas are singing in the green
In their triumphant intensity.
I am sprawling in my physical
And mental lassitude.
I will sleep the sleep of the dull ;
My summer is already gone.

EVENING GLORIES

Evening glories are smiling,
Shedding their white quietude
In the deepening gloom,
Comforting my eyes
Worn with solar dazzling
In the daytime.

"BARBER SHOP"

Tired with reading
An English book,
I lay on my back
On the *tatami*
To have a short rest,

GREEN AND GRAY

When the tick-tacking
Of a new portable alarm clock
On the bookshelf reached my ears.
By and by it reminded me
Of the sound of hair-cutting
At a barber's.
Then it led me to the recollection
Of the words painted on the signboard
Of the barber's shop near by :
 "Bar Ber Shop"
This misspelling amused me at first,
But soon it gave way to a reflection
Quite different.
I took up the book again,
And read it on with redoubled fervour.

THE CAST-OFF SHELL

Cicadas are singing
Their summer intensity
In the green shade near by
Under the burning sun.

I am half dozing,
Dull fancy fuddling my brain.
My hand hardly leading my pen,
Or rather my pen leading my hand.

Suddenly my wrinkled fingers
Have reminded me of a cicada's shell
I picked up yesterday, while strolling,
The cast-off shell of what I was once.

MOSQUITOES

When summer evening falls,
The cool breeze revives me,
And its faithful winged followers
Come with their stealthy flight,
And, taking pity on my thin frame,
Swell it here and there
With their slender tubes ;
To repay their kindness
I try to send them to heaven,

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And mostly I fail in it
To their misfortune.

JIZO, THE GUARDIAN GOD OF CHILDREN

The sight of lighted red paper-lanterns,
Brightening a small shrine built in a hidden corner,
And dedicated to jizo, the guardian god of children,
With many boys and girls playing before it in Japanese clothes
— this is the evening given to Jizo —
Has brought me back to my childhood,
When we had neither radio nor television,
When motor-cars were a rare sight,
When we had our playground everywhere
And purer air.

GRAY HAIR

The first sight of a few strands
Of gray hair on my head
In the looking-glass
Was a sorrowful surprise to me.

Now increasing gray hairs
Add a greater zest
To my enjoyment of life
With its difficulties and tribulations
As well as its joys.

I remember having almost lost my life
More than once.

SHORTER AND LONGER

The days are growing shorter ;
My day-dreams are growing longer.

My days are growing shorter ;
My regrets are growing longer.

My temper is growing shorter ;
My complaints are growing longer.

My time of reading is growing shorter ;
My time of dozing is growing longer.

God be merciful enough to make
My days longer and my final throes shorter !

SILENCE

In my box-like study
You find the most precious treasures
To make me a great scholar,
A world-famous scholar
By happy chance,
Books, books, books.
What is lacking here,
A fly in the ointment,
Is silence.
When this long-wished-for object
Of mine is attained,
I shall be completely silent,
And, what is better, be still.

A CELESTIAL BRIDGE

A celestial bridge
Has been built
Between the brotherly globes,
Elder and younger,
By American aeronauts
With the co-operation
And the goodwill of the world.
It is the greatest and most memorable
Undertaking ever achieved by man,
And shows the immensity
Of human heroism and wisdom.
I earnestly wish
The American fervour and exertion
Shown for the lunar exploration,
Raising a rainbow of cosmic hope,
To be also directed
With the same fiery intention
Towards the realization
Of permanent world peace and amity
With the widened view realized,
Taking a leading part
In giving up the most terrible weapons of war,
Which might bring about.
By unhappy chance
The desolation

GREEN AND GRAY

On the earth
As the lunar waste land
Of the moon presents
To us.

THE DUST-GATHERING CAR

Sounding sweet music,
A dust-gathering car has come round,
And lots of rubbish from every house
Is brought out to be piled on the car.
The dustmen have now begun to throw it up
To the top of the garbage mountainous high :
Waste paper, fruit peels, and many other odds and ends ;
Manifold in kind are they and various in colours,
But are not the dustmen and all of us waste and dust, too,
To be sent, when breath is lost, to the eternal home,
To the tunes of the temple bell,
Different from those sounding now ?

SMALL MILESTONES

I am going on, putting up
Small milestones one after another
On my way somewhere.
They may be lost some day,
Broken or buried in dust,
But I will go on, putting up
Small milestones one after another
Till I end my life,
Rather wishing them to be lost ;
They are only small milestones.

A COLOURFUL SHOW

Spring rain falling on the street
Presents a colourful umbrella show
In spite of its silent modesty.

THE WALL

I love the earthen wall
Standing white in its solidity,
Encircling the old dwelling,
A little way from my home,

GREEN AND GRAY

With its arboreal verdure,
The wall, mantled with ivies,
Keeps the enclosure
In its green, red, or white seasonal silence.
In spring cherry-blossoms
Are peeping out modestly
To please passers-by ;
In autumn persimmons
Glory in their shining maturity.
Though I don't know
What light or shadow
Brightens or darkens
The domestic comfort,
I love the old wall
Encircling the big mansion
With its ivied silence
And extension.

THE VALLEY OF DEATH IN ARIZONA

Under the broiling heat of the sun
Our bus is rushing straight along like Fate
Through the arid desolation of the Valley of Death,
Not a single cloud variegating the fiery vault,
Not a single grass growth softening the grim reality.
Our bus is running miles on miles of its mechanical rapidity
Through the primitive wildness of the desert undulations,
Along the white line of its mechanical counterpart,
Painting on the reddish-brown canvas of Arizona
An inharmonious harmony of modern mentality.

PERSIMMONS

Turning to the right
Into a quiet alley
From a noisy street,
I found persimmons
Of golden maturity
Peeping out from the fence
Of an old house.
They reminded me of my childhood,
Passed in an out-of-the-way place,
When I enjoyed these fruit of autumn,

GREEN AND GRAY

Climbing up the trees that bore them.

Suddenly I felt very young,

As young as I was then,

But the next moment,

I felt very old,

Older than I am.

I hurried on my way

Without looking up

At the fruit again

Autumn was very proud of.