Translations of Seven Poems by Kenji Miyazawa

Michiko Ono

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TO MY STUDENTS

How pleasant
These four years have been to me!
I have spent each day
Singing bird-like in the classroom.
I swear that through this work
Never have I felt tired.

Boys, when the deep blue horizon swells and rises
Do you want to sink into it?
Indeed, you should be mountains
Of every shape on the horizon.
Do you not feel the transparent, clean wind
Blowing from your Future Circle?
It is a ray of light sent out,
South wind determined.
Do you want to suffer like a slave
Forced and led by the times?
Rather, boys, make a fresh new age of righteousness.
The world perpetually changes because of us.
Instead of using up all the natural power
Such as the tide and wind
You must endeavor to form nature anew.

Copernicuses of a new age,
Release this galactic system
From the too oppresive law of gravitation!
Marxes of a new age,
Change this world which moves on blind impulse
Into a gloriously beautiful construction!

Darwins of a new age,
Further, on board the Challenger, with quiet oriental watch,
Get outside of the galactic space!
Show still more clearly and deeply the correct history of the earth
And enlarged, revised biology to us!

Exalt to the sphere of dance
By cold and transparent analysis
Along with its deep blue shadow
All the agricultural work
Which is done as if on impulse.

New poets,
Receive the new and transparent energy
From the clouds, light, and storm
And suggest to people and the earth
The forms they should take.

A RICE CROP EPISODE (WORK NO. 1082)

You see the rice field over there—
It contains too much nitrogen.
Drain the water thoroughly,
Weed not a third time.
—Running intently through the footpath between the rice paddies,
    Amid the green rice, the boy wipes away the sweat from his face—
Is there any phosphoric acid left?
Or have you used it up?
Then if this weather
Continues five more days,
Those drooping leaves,
Leaves drooping like this,
Pluck them up and get rid of them.
—Restlessly nodding, the boy wipes the sweat from his face.
    When he attended my course last winter,
    Though he had been working in the fields for one year,
    He still had a bright smile and cheeks like red apples.
Now so tanned is he from sun and tears,
He looks worn away from many sleepless nights—
Mind you,
At the end of this month
When that rice has grown taller than your chest,
Use the top button of your shirt as a ruler
And cut the tips of the leaves.
—Not only the sweat
Is he wiping, but tears as well—
I have seen the rice paddy,
The one you tried out with your own idea.
The one with Rikuu NO. 132,
You did that very well.
There is no unevenness of fertilizer at all,
And the rice is growing strong.
You spread the ammonium sulfate yourself, didn’t you?
People may say various things,
But there is nothing to worry about with that paddy.
If you are to get eight straw bags of rice,
You can count on that.
Work steadily.
True future study is
Not to learn with a sense of duty
From a professional teacher, while playing tennis,
But, like you,
Finding a little time for study
During snowstorms and between working hours,
Crying,
To learn through the physical work.
That kind of study will soon sprout strong and steady,
And never will we know how tall it will grow.
That is the beginning of a new study.
Now farewell.
—From the clouds and wind
May this transparent power
Be transported
To the boy—
PINE NEEDLES

This is the clean branch of a pine tree
I gathered some sleet from a while ago.
Oh, as if jumping at the green needles,
You place your flushed cheeks against them.
How great is my surprise
That you let the green plant needles
Sting your cheeks so passionately
As if devouring them!
You wanted to go to the woods that much.
While you were burning with fever,
Writhing in sweat and pain,
I was working pleasantly in the sun
Or strolling in the woods, thinking of other people.
   —Ah, how pleasant! I feel refreshed.
   I feel as if I were in the woods—
You loved the woods
Like a bird, like a squirrel.
How I envied you!
Alas, my sister, who is leaving for a distant land within a day,
Are you really going alone?
Ask me to accompany you.
Cry and tell me so.
   Your cheeks, nevertheless,
   How beautiful they look today!
On your green mosquito tent
I will place this fresh pine branch.
Drops of water will soon fall on you.
And see?
You can smell the fresh
Scent of turpentine.
FROM "WINTER SKETCHES"

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The Waga River, with pale-yellow waves,  
Flowing at the reddish brown bottom  
Of a steep-sided valley  
In the white snow in the mid-day spring.

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The Buddhist saints amid the sleet—  
Their response like a hollow sound—  
Just like an ephemeral love—  
Retrieving the Way of Truth.

—Alas! I am dying  
  here today—

Alas! I am dying here today—  
Having a fervent wish—  
Involved only in outer matters—  
Ten years have elapsed in vain.

Ah, my parents have grown old.  
People come to visit me,  
Not finding the Way of Truth,  
Why was I ever born?

Burning with the sweat of repentance—  
Coughing up blood of agony—  
Wishing if only there were an altar  
To dedicate this weakened body of mine.

If I were to be born again—  
Remembering this wish of mine—  
Praying that I may be strong enough  
To repay people's kindness I have received.
NOT BEATEN BY RAIN

Not beaten by rain,
Not beaten by wind,
Not beaten by snow or the heat of summer,
With a strong body,
Without greed,
Never getting angry,
Always smiling quietly—
Eating each day four go of unpolished rice
And miso and a few vegetables,
Without reckoning myself,
Looking and listening well
To all kinds of things,
And Never forgetting them—
Living in a small thatched hut
In the rear of a pine woods—
A child suffering from illness in the east,
Going there to nurse him—
A tired mother in the west,
Going there to carry the bundles of rice plants for her—
A dying person in the south,
Going there to tell him not to be afraid—
A quarrel or a lawsuit in the north,
Going there to tell the people to stop such worthlessness—
Shedding tears over dry weather,
Walking upset on a cold summer,
Called Blockhead by everybody,
Not praised,
Nor taken to be bothersome—
Such a person
I wish to be.
SPRING AND ASURA (MENTAL SKETCH MODIFIED)

In the gray steel color of my mental sketch modified
The vine of akebi is entangled in a cloud—
The wild rose bush and the marsh of humus—
All around—all around—the world of flattery—
(Fragments of amber fall
More often than the wind-instrumental music at noon)
The bitterness and blueness of anger
At the bottom of the bright atmosphere of April—
Spitting and grinding, I pace back and forth—
I am a man like Asura.
(The scenery is blurred with tears)
Through a rift of broken clouds
Over the clear and beautiful celestial sea
The holy crystal wind blows, coming and going.

ZYPPRESSEN in a line in spring
Imbibe ether into blackness.
Through the rows of their dark legs
Even the edge of snow on the celestial mountain shines.
(The heat-waving air and polarized white light)
Words of truth have been lost.
Clouds are scattered and fly in the sky.
Alas, at the bottom of brilliant April—
Grinding and burning with anger, I pace back and forth—
I am a man like Asura.
(Chalcedony clouds are drifting—
Where is the spring bird singing? I wonder)
When the sun is shadowed in blue
Asura reverberates in the wood.
From a sinking and darkened bowl of heaven
Extends a group of calamite clouds—
The branches sad over their thick growth—
In the scenery—all double
From a treetop of the wood of a mourning god
A crow flies away fluttering.
(The atmosphere clearer than ever—
White cedars standing quietly against the sky)
Something comes through a golden meadow.
Soon it is a figure of a man
Wearing kera—the farmer who looks at me—
Can he really see me?
At the bottom seas of dazzling atmosphere
(Sadness is deep blue)
ZYPPRESSEND quietly sway.
A bird cuts across the blue sky again.
(Words of the truth are not here—
Tears of Asura fall on soil)

When I breathe in the air afresh from the sky
I feel as if my lungs had shrunk dim white.
(This body be broken into pieces and scattering skyward)
The treetop of a ginkgo tree glistens—
ZYPPRESSEND blacker than ever—
Sparks of clouds pouring on—

PREFACE (from “SPRING AND ASURA”)

The phenomenon, I,
Am a blue light of an electric lamp
Under supposed organic alternating current—
(A composed body of all transparent ghosts)
A blue light of an electric lamp
Under alternating current of causation
Along with the landscape and other people
Restlessly, restlessly blinking—
Yet continues to really exist.
(The light is kept—the electric lamp is lost)

From the direction perceived as the past
Of twenty-two months
With paper and mineral ink
(All that is blinking with me—
What we all sense at the same time)
This is a chain of light and shade
That has been retained so far—
The exact mental sketch modified.
About these things, people, galaxy, Asura, and sea urchins,
Eating dust of the universe, breathing in air or salty water,
Each may think out a new ontology
But, after all, all this is among the scenes of the mind.
Nevertheless, these scenes that are truly recorded
Are the recorded scenes as they are—
If they are nihil, nihil itself is real—
And this applies to all to a certain extent.
   (As all is all in me—
   All is all in each)

However, these words that must have been copied correctly
Within this enormously bright integration of time
Of the Cenozoic alluvial period
Have already changed their construction and quality swiftly
In the light and shade equal to one point—
   (Or one billion years of Asura)
And it can happen as a tendency
That both the printer and I
Feel as if they have not changed at all.
Indeed, as we sense our own senses, the landscape, and persons,
And as we simply sense them mutually,
We merely sense
   (Under the restriction of time and space of causation)
Records, history, or geological history
Together with their various data.
Perhaps, two thousand years from now
An appropriate, different geology may be applied,
Proportionate evidences from the past turning up one after another—
People may suppose that two thousand years back in history
Transparent peacocks filled the blue sky—
Rising scholars may excavate nice fossils
From around the sparkling, frozen nitrogen
In the uppermost part of the atmosphere—
Or, they may discover the huge footprints of a transparent mankind
On the strafification plane of the sandstone from the Cretaceous period—

All these propositions
Will be established within the fourth extension
As the nature of mental sketches and time itself.