

〔創 作〕

Amherst Poems (II)

by

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This is the second series of the poems I wrote in Amherst during my stay 2009-2010.

Trees on the Amherst College Campus

The winds combing the pine trees
Make the needle leaves
Shine like silver waves
With the cascades of light,
Swooning me
With the scent
Of rosin wafting down
Like the invisible stream
Of green mist.

The thick trunks are dotted with knots,
Asserting as if nothing grows
Without gnarls;
Plagued sometimes
For the sake of human convenience;
Branches have been cut,
Pins driven,
Placarded like prisoners.

But they have borne
All these hardships
Just by following
Their natural instincts.

How many generations of men's voices
Have they heard

That strolled underneath
And disappeared?
Youthful hope and despair,
Fulfilled and unrequited love,
Joy and fear of life,
All is gone now.
Everything seems to be
The same repetition.

Some trees are dedicated for memory;
A weeping cherry tree blooms in spring
With willowy strings of blossoms
For a young deceased student;
A huge oak spreads its wide branches
As if it never knows the end of life,
Always fresh with the memory of a friend.

The foliage and blossom penetrate
The dull cycle of life,
As the fragrance of blossoms spreads,
Like the unexpected swift of memory,
Pricking the indifference of forgetfulness,
Reminding there are still
Certain rays of light,
Shedding from afar
Trespassing the individuality of selfishness and ignorance,
Connecting from age to age
Some invisible ellipses;
As birds cross from tree to tree,
Keeping their dominions;
They follow invisible but eternal
Familiar lines.

Zero Symmetry

A pine tree has
An incredible balance,
Bending south
And north
Weighing all the weight
Of leaves and branches
It keeps as its center
Zero symmetry:

A pivotal line
Rising vertical upwards
Needling deep
Into the sky.

The tree
Spreading its twigs wide around,
Providing eternal shades,
Shooting down cones;
It exists,
As it is.

Two Tanka

A zero gravity
Rising Vertical Upwards
Of a tall pine tree
Flourishing with inner bloom
Needling into the sky

Penetrating into
A tall pine tree
The setting sun
Turns all the way down
The bole into shining scales

A Suitcase

All you need
On a long journey
Is a suitcase,
In which you put
The Essentials:
Compactly folded towels and clothes,
A toothbrush and paste and soap.
An ID, and jewelries if any.
Some family photos,
Books to idle away time
And a notebook to keep memos.

When all these things are in, you are ready to leave.
But how scant these are.

Like a retiring person,
Clearing the desk of old stuff,
Putting things in boxes.
And done.

Life, however, is not made up
Of things;
You know this,
When you make a long journey.

On Seeing *The Holy Family* by Gerrad David
at Museum of Fine Arts in Boston on June 21, 2009

Innocence and ignorance are different,
But do they really differ?
Joseph, a homely man, with a faint bearded smile
Gazes on the two from behind,
Revealing a rustic simplicity.
And the Virgin Mary in a white satin
Has a strange blank expression on her face,
Which assumes the look of the naked baby's holiness.
Mary's and the baby's faces appear so blunt and
Ignorant; no smiles,
no earthiness.
Stupefied and lost,
They are beyond time and space.
With no traces of thought: they look
Almost stupid.

Stupidity is part of our nature,
Though ignorance can be dumb
And holy.
Oh, holy ignorance.
Fragile and naïve, it is rare in this mundane world;
Before the baby's ankles touch the dust of earth,
And the Virgin's heart bleeds from the horrible sight,
It dominates at this moment
A world so relative,
While serene and communicable for a while,

Speaking in radical innocence
So bright and so mute.

Two Tanka

Souls may haunt
 just like the seeds
of poplars
 wind-borne
in the town of Amherst

In the rain
 of dark morning
two fern leaves
 turned their backs
like white letters

Walking in the Rain

In the rain waxing the green turf
I walk to Amherst College's library.
The rain has made the far mountain range
The grey girdle of soft mist,
And the willow leaves nearby are drooping
Like the strings of green glassy shards.
The smell of rain and grass,
And the sounds of rain on my umbrella and on the path
Numb me into a sightless vision:

*I have been at this place before
In the rain, untied from daily bonds
Alone but not sad,
An old sensation rising up all at once
Familiar and mute,
Myself extended far beyond
With the flashes of memories;
Inertia, joy and sadness, guilt and pain,
And the mind opens and cringes like morning glories.
Like the pure water flowing out*

*After the stirred water settles,
Something central comes out,
A central self,
So honest and nostalgic, sempiternal,
Shining always like a green pasture
Or like the rays coming out from the crevices of clouds
Hidden but always close
The world's end,
Parts of the oblivion and myself,
Popping up and dissolved soon in the rain.*

Now on my umbrella the rain is falling
With the everlasting echoes of silvery drops.

Eleven Tanka

On a summer day
a red petal
of magnolia
is fallen on
an asphalt path

The same
goes even for
an American ant
busy carrying
a large thing

The same
goes even for
an American fly,
rubbing its hands
to pray

Shaking hands
and hugging one by one
some professors

pass among
the graduates

With thick boughs
stands this
ancient oak
in a peaceful
equilibrium

A shadow
following a flying
bird
has disappeared
now beyond a hill

In the bosoms
of young graduates
is now enclosed
the motto of the college
Terra Irradiant

Irish morning
tea has
a faint
aroma of grass
in the far countryside

When playing Go,
Bill's face,
sixty-five,
looks like
a child of innocence

A spruce
beside the grave
of Emily
stands thrusting
into the blue sky

A path
is covered all
with the red
shells fallen from
maple sprouts

Love Calls for Pain

Intense love, scintillating,
Is beautiful but fatal.
So take care
And be moderate.

With a tint of reason,
Love becomes firm,
Though shining with different heat,
So be content.

In routine life
Love is rare and un-daily
Beyond, like a rainbow,
So be watchful.

Love sometimes calls for pain,
Tested in distance.
So do not be betrayed,
And be ready to endure.

The Birth

A poet said
The English expression
“I was born”

Is passive,
And all of us were made
To be born on this earth,
To be doomed
And lonely.

In Japanese words
The equivalent is active,
“Watashiwa umareta,”
Literally, “I came into being.”

Surely, we have no choice
In our birth.
We asked no one to bear us.
But we are here
To grasp the light of the sun,
And to breathe in deep
The fresh air of morning.
The words echo, “Umareta,” “Umareta.”
A joy of the news resounds,
And engulfing are the sounds of the family’s and neighbor’s
Laughters and celebrations
As the birth is not private
But an event in community.

Like the sun worshipped
And received in the palms of hands
Or like the moon
To celebrate harvests
Or like the south wind thawing the frost
Or like the stars staging mythic heroes at night
You come out into this world.

It is as natural as a river flows,
And as the sea of time washes the shores,
You come out.
Your cry is not of chagrin
To be born on this earth
Nor of feeling loneliness
But of ecstasy.

“Watashiwa umareta.”
“I came into being.”
You are here to embrace your life,
To hold a flower of yourself,

And to make it bloom.
What else is there
But to do on this earth?

Two Tanka

Under the leaves
of elm trees; filtered sunshine
on a sheet
We are leaving it crumpled
just as it is.

In the cool
shadow
of elm trees
You touched me
with your green fingers