

# Miyazawa Kenji's "Preface" and Other Poems

Translated by

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## Preface

The phenomenon called I  
Is one postulated, organic alternating-current-lamp  
Blue illumination  
(A complex of all transparent ghosts)  
Together with scenes and with everyone  
Busily, busily flickering  
Very surely to keep on lighting,  
One karmic alternating-current-lamp  
Blue illumination  
(Light persisting, its electric lamp lost)

These, from twenty-two months'  
Direction sensed to be past  
Papers and mineral ink assembling  
(Everything that flickers with me  
Everyone senses at the same time)  
Continuing on to this,  
Are links and links of light and shade,  
Sketches of mental images as they are

About all this, people, galaxies, asuras and sea urchins  
Eating cosmic dust, inhaling air or saltwater

Might think up fresh ontologies  
But they are ultimately a mental climate  
Yet surely these recorded scenes are  
Each the very scene recorded as it is  
And if it is nothing, nothing itself is as it is  
And so to an extent is shared by everyone  
(All is within me everyone  
So everyone within each one is all)

Yet within the Cenozoic alluvial epoch's  
Enormous shining accumulation of time,  
The words supposed to have been rendered correctly  
In a light's eclipse, time's mere speck  
(Or a billion years of Asura)  
Might have already changed composition or quality  
And yet both I and the typographer  
Might sense them to be not changed at all,  
That, as a tendency, is possible,  
Really as we sense our receptive organs  
And scenes and characters  
Just sensing them in common,  
So what is called records and histories, geological histories  
Along with various data  
(Under the temporal spatial constraints of karma)  
Are no more than what we sense  
Perhaps two thousand years from now  
A pertinently different geology will be adopted  
Relevant evidence will emerge one by one from the past  
So everyone will think that two thousand years before  
There were colorless peacocks filling the blue sky  
And then aspiring scholars at the upper stratum of the atmosphere  
From the place of glittering frozen nitrogen  
Will excavate splendid fossils  
Or might well find  
In a stratified plane of Cretaceous sandstone  
Gigantic footprints of transparent humankind

All these propositions are asserted  
As properties of images or time itself  
In the fourth dimensional continuum

January 20, 1924      Miyazawa Kenji

Spring and Asura  
(mental sketch modified)

From the gray steel of mental images  
 Akebi vines coil around clouds  
 Wild rose thickets, humus marshes  
 Everywhere patterns and patterns of duplicity  
 (When thicker than the noon's wind-instrument music  
 Amber splinters fall down)  
 Anger's bitterness, blueness  
 At the bottom of the light in April's atmosphere  
 Spitting, gnashing, coming and going  
 I am an asura  
 (The scene swaying in tears)  
 Unto the limits of visible smashing clouds  
 In the limpid sea of the heavens  
   The winds of Sacred Glass go far and wide  
   Zypressen one single row of spring  
   Breathes in ether, black  
     From the column of their darkened feet  
     Snowy ridges of Mount Heaven can be glimpsed, however  
     (Shimmering waves, white polarized light)  
   True words are not here  
   Clouds scatter and fly in the sky  
   Ah, at the bottom of shining April  
   Gnashing, burning coming and going  
 I am an asura  
 (Chalcedonic clouds flowing  
 Where does it sing, a bird of spring?)  
 The Sun Wheel darkening to blue  
 Asura resonates with the woods  
   From heaven's bowl collapsing in a dazzle  
   Throngs of black trees extend  
   Their branches grown thick and sorrowful  
   All the duplicated scenes when  
   In the dispirited woods from a treetop  
   Flashes, darts off, a crow  
   (The atmosphere clearer and clearer  
   The hushed cypresses stand in the heavens)  
 Someone is passing the grass field's gold  
 One ordinary human form  
 In a straw coat looking at me, a farmer  
 Can you really see me?  
 At the bottom of the blinding ocean atmosphere

(The sorrow deeper and bluer)  
Zypressen swaying quietly  
A bird again cuts the blue sky  
(True words are not here  
Asura's tears fall to the dirt)

Breathing in the sky anew  
The lungs shrink, pale white  
(May this body be dispersed into particles in the sky)  
The treetops of ginkgos flash once again  
Zypressen blacker and blacker  
Sparks of clouds flow down

(April 8, 1922)

### Annelida Tänzerin

(Well this is water sol  
Hazy agar liquid)  
The sunlight golden roses  
A small, red wriggling worm  
Wearing water and light around its body  
Is alone doing a dance  
(Eh, 8 γ e 6 α  
Truly arabesque letters decorate)  
Fly corpses  
Dead yew leaves  
Pearl bubbles  
Moss stems ripped up and so  
(Princess Nachiranatora  
Now at the bottom of the water on a granite stone  
Together with Mister Yellow Shadow  
Deigns to dance for pleasure  
Oh but, no, before long  
Her Highness will float up, soon)  
The red Annelida Tänzerin  
Has two pointed ears  
With segments of phosphorescent coral  
Adorned primly with pearl buttons  
She turns and twirls around  
(Eh 8 γ e 6 α  
Truly arabesque letters decorate)

With her back brightly glittering  
She twirls her body with all her strength but  
The pearls are in truth false ones  
Not even of glass but of air  
    (And yet, still  
    Eight gamma e six alpha  
    Truly arabesque letters decorate)  
Peeped through the opera glasses  
Of crystalline lens and membranes  
Even though you are said to be dancing  
When pearl bubbles disturb you  
You are not at all at ease  
    And the sun is now hidden by a cloud  
    And my feet have gotten numb sitting on the stone too long  
    And the wood chip at the bottom looks like a worm or a sea slug  
    And most importantly your form can't be seen now  
    So, have you really melted away?  
Or from the start has everything been  
Just a faint blue dream?  
    (No, Her Highness is there, surely there  
    The Princess is there  
    8  $\gamma$  e 6  $\alpha$   
    Truly arabesque letters decorate  
Hmmm the water hazy  
Lights meandering  
The worm Eight gamma e six alpha  
    Truly arabesque letters decorate, aren't they?  
    Ha ha ha  
(Yes, that's it exactly  
    Eight gamma e six alpha  
    Truly arabesque letters decorate)

(May 20, 1922)

## Wind Woods

(In an oak tree no bird builds a nest  
Because it rattles too much)  
Here the grass is too rough  
And doesn't suit breathing air from a faraway sky and  
Falling over as hard as I like  
There lying down watery-colored

A row of students rests  
 (Their shadows a synthesis of night and zinc)  
 With them behind  
 I throw myself on the grass  
 The moon is now gradually losing silver atoms  
 The oak trees bend their backs blackly  
 Yanagisawa's cedars are dearer to me than colloid  
 And beyond bald Numamori  
 A cavalry regiment's lights stagnate  
 ((Ah I wouldn't mind dying))  
 ((I too could die))  
 (Was that Miyazawa standing so forlornly?  
 Or Odajima or Kunitomo  
 The darkness behind the oak trees there  
 Just now trembled, emitting lights  
 That must be from the Egmont Overture  
 Who said such a thing  
 I need not wonder really  
 ((Hey Den, how many shirts do you wear? Three?))  
 Tall and good-natured, Sato Denshiro  
 In the dim twilight of reflected moonbeams  
 Buttoning up his shirts  
 Smiles and twists his mouth firmly  
 With night particles and wind fragments cascading down  
 And next to them like lead needles, flow moonbeams dimming  
 ((Oh I...))  
 Saying that why did Hotta stop?  
 The last part of his voice echoes sadly  
 He should've finished saying that  
 (If not say it write it down in a notebook)  
 Toshiko, Toshiko  
 Coming to a field  
 Or standing in the wind  
 Without fail I remember you  
 Are you on that gigantic Jupiter  
 Beyond the steel-blue, splendid sky?  
 (Ah but in that space that no one ever knows  
 Really are there light ribbons and orchestras?  
 .....Here a day is long, long  
 Can't even say what time of day.....  
 Only a bit of communication from you  
 One time on a train reached me)  
 Toshiko, shall I cry out loud?  
 ((My hands are numb))  
 ((Numb hands?

Toshio, you get that numbness often  
The other day you made me button up for you))  
Which Toshio of the two? Kawamura?  
That pale genius of comedy, an actor in "The Plant Doctor"  
I should jump up to my feet  
((Oh you said Toshio, which one?))  
((Kawamura))  
As I thought,  
Moonbeams stir the throng of oaks  
The oaks rustle all over

(June 3, 1923)

### White Birds

((They are all thoroughbreds  
That kind of horse, that anyone can go catch?))  
(But only by the people who really know))  
Under the antique looking Mount Kurakake  
The tufts of pasqueflower sway  
Under the light blue birch trees  
A gathering of chestnut horses  
Shine truly splendidly  
(The Japanese scroll of a sky's ultramarine  
And the horizon's turquoise is not rare  
But such a large ring of light,  
A phase of mind in the scene, is unusual)  
Two big white birds  
Sharply, sorrowfully crying to each other  
Fly away in the wet morning sunlight  
That must be my sister  
Must be my dead sister  
Crying so sorrowfully as her brother has come  
(That is wrong up to a point  
But not thoroughly wrong)  
Crying so sorrowfully  
Flying in the morning light  
(Not in the morning sunlight  
But like a ripe, tired afternoon)  
That however is also a vague silver illusion  
Caused by walking all night long  
(Surely this morning I saw the twisted molten gold liquid

Rise from the blue dream of the Kitakami Mountains)  
 Why do these birds, two of them  
 Sound sorrowful like this?  
 When I lost in me a power to rescue  
 I also lost my sister  
 That is the reason for the sorrow  
     (Last night in the moonlight of an oak woods  
     This morning among the throng of lily bells  
     How many times I called that name  
     And a voice, whose it is no one knows,  
     From the end of the field where no one was  
     Responded to ridicule me)  
 That is the reason for the sorrow  
 Though really that voice too is sorrowful  
 Now the birds, two of them, flash and flutter white  
 And in the distant marsh, fall among the blue reeds  
 Or seem to fall but rise again  
     (In front of the new burial mound of Yamato Takeru  
     The consorts prostrated and grieved  
     And when by chance a plover flew  
     Thinking it was the spirit of Takeru  
     Hurting their feet on the blue reeds  
     Along the seashore, they followed him)  
 Kiyohara stands, laughing  
     (Sun-tanned, shining, a real child of the village  
     The bodhisattva-like shape of the head came from Gandhara)  
 The water shines, clear silver water  
 ((Now, there's water over there  
 Let's rinse our mouths and go refreshed  
 This field is now clear))

(June 4, 1923)

## A Letter

Rain is falling, pitter-patter  
 Transparent rain falling intermittently, among flickering mental images  
 Wetting, horsetails and sorrels  
 Cypress' hair grown too long

My chest is dark and hot  
 It seems to begin fermenting

This side of the green bank wet with the rain  
A mantle coated with rubber as if blue with mud  
Is moving slowly, slowly  
That surely is a tough thing

Where are you right now?  
Already in the yellowish shady space on the right side of me  
Are you standing straight?  
The rain has turned more transparent, and stronger

Is some child chewing?  
Over there that man sputters noises from his throat

Now I think I'd like to go into the hallway  
Please come and go with me ten more times  
With your big, bare feet shining white  
On the cold boards  
Please walk with me

(May 12, 1922)

[The hanging ornaments are hard, and drop down straight]

[the beginning lost]  
The hanging ornaments are hard, and drop down straight.  
Really, shimmering and shining, the living things fall down.

Truly those heavenly beings'  
Sorrowful cries more transparent  
Than hydrogen sometime somewhere,  
Have you not heard?  
The spears of ice sticking straight into the heavens,  
Their cries, you must have heard.

But when you hear about those who  
Fall down, or those who drowning try to  
Gulp down bitter salt water wholeheartedly,  
You only hear it now as  
A pitiable story of certain silly things  
Or a slightly unusual tale.

Yet only to think so

And actually to bite into water  
Are utterly, utterly different.  
It is cold enough to be hot,  
Bitter enough to be tasteless,  
Sad enough for blue darkness to become transparent.

Those who have fallen there all cry out,  
Is it I who have fallen into this lake?  
Has the fall really happened?  
Completely. Who could believe that at once?  
But in the end they believe it,  
And are sadder because of it.

I have told you such a thing  
Not so that you may not fall  
But for you to fall, and to swim all the way.  
Everyone will see it, and  
The strongest ones fall down wishing it,  
And then fly upward, together with the other ones.

(May 12, 1922)

[When I go through this woods]

(July 5, 1924)

When I go through this woods  
The path will return to the waterwheel I saw  
The birds are crying, glimmering  
They surely are thrushes, migrating  
All night long as the southern tip of the Milky Way  
Exploded in shining white  
Fireflies flew too often  
And moreover the winds incessantly shook the trees,  
So the birds could not sleep peacefully  
And now are so noisy  
Yet  
Only because I barely stepped into this woods  
Loud like this  
Louder like this  
They are crying like a shower of rain  
What strange fellows!  
This is a big cypress woods, and

Upon each of the pitch-black branches  
 Here and there shreds of sky are  
 Trembling and respiring,  
 To send out a kind of catalog  
 Of the lights of all ages  
     .....As the birds are so noisy  
     I am standing, blank.....  
 The path flows far away, barely white  
 And from a dent in a clump of trees  
 A red, turbid Mars rises  
 Only two of the birds at some time came here stealthily  
 And went away leaving clear, screeching sounds  
 Ah, as the winds blow sending the sensations  
 Of warmth and silver molecules  
 And all the tetrahedrons,  
 And fireflies fly fitfully,  
 The birds cry louder than the rain  
 I hear my dead sister's voice  
 From the farthest end of the woods  
     .....So even if it's no longer so,  
     As with anyone it's the same  
     No need to think about it again.....  
 The grass vapors and cedar smell  
 The birds are noisy again  
 Why do they cry so loud?  
 Even when the men drawing water for rice paddies  
 Walk furtively at the edge of the woods  
 And the stars shoot again and again in the southern sky,  
 There's nothing very dangerous  
 One may sleep quietly

Of these translations, "Preface" (序), "Spring and Asura" (春と修羅), "Annelida Tänzerin" (蠕虫舞手), "Wind Woods" (風林) and "White Birds" (白い鳥) belong to the only collection of poems published in his lifetime, in 1924, *Spring and Asura* (『春と修羅』). "A Letter" (手簡) and "[The hanging ornaments are hard, and drop down straight]" [堅い環珞はまっすぐ下に垂れます]) are from the unpublished, additional poems relating to *Spring and Asura* grouped by his editors as "Supplementary Poems to *Spring and Asura*" (『春と修羅』補遺). "[When I go through this woods]" [この森を通りぬければ]) comes from the "Spring and Asura, Second Series" (『春と修羅 第二集』), a collection of poems prepared by Miyazawa but never published.

Of those from *Spring and Asura* "Preface" and "Spring and Asura" can be characterized as representative poems of Miyazawa, and have been rendered into English by several translators, including Snyder, Strong, Sato and Pulvers. The versions here obviously rely on theirs, and we

did not pursue difference for its own sake. Still, the ones here are different in several aspects. For instance in “Preface” we present the metaphysical/religious announcements in parentheses to sound like coming from someplace else. In “Spring and Asura” we handle the lines as being hurtled forcefully but with clear syntactical connections.

“Annelida Tänzlerin” observes a worm in water, transforming it into a princess. It attests to Miyazawa’s fertile imagination. Its refrain of numerals and Roman and Greek letters, an auditory and visual mimicry of the worm’s movements, is quite striking. It is one of the early, joyous poems and in the collection comes after “Vacuum Solvent,” a rambling, fantastic and pataphysical poem dealing with the merger with, and dissolution into, Nature’s forces. We have already published its translation in *Poetry Kanto*, No. 24.

The next two, “Wind Woods” and “White Birds” form one phase of Miyazawa’s tortuous spiritual vicissitudes after the death of his beloved sister Toshiko on November 27, 1922. They are followed by several groups of astonishing poems, including “Aomori Elegy,” “Bird Transitions,” and “Blue of a Dewdrop on a Leaf of Leak,” published in the No. 24 of this *Gengo Bunka* journal.

“A Letter” and “[The hanging ornaments are hard, and drop down straight]” are poems not included in the *Spring and Asura* collection. They have a certain raw, unfinished feel, but are subtly cadenced in their own way. The former deals with a sense of loneliness and fragility, after contracting a lung disease which would eventually kill him, and an inkling of a visionary presence. The second one, though the first lines seem to have been lost, is a strong religious poem presenting the fall of heavenly beings and the possible reversal of falling and rising.

As noted, “[When I go through this woods]” belongs to “Spring and Asura, Second Series,” and is one of the poems tracing the aftereffects of the death of Toshiko.

These poems span several aspects of Miyazawa’s complex oeuvre.

### English Translations Cited

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