

WHITE ENSO

Inspired by Japan

Issue 5

Summer 2022



“Great things are done by a series of small things brought together.”

Vincent van Gogh

fiction

non-fiction

haiga

poetry

visual art

design

Cover art: Pinched Goldfish
Quilt by Kumiko Komiya

亡母の残してくれたたくさんの手ぬぐいを使って、今回の今にも釣られてしまいそうな金魚の様子を作品にしてみました。

For this quilt, I used towels left by my deceased mother. I tried to capture the goldfish as it is about to get caught.

Letter From The Editor

Welcome to the fifth issue of White Enso.

I like to think that, as editor, I'm in charge of White Enso. The truth is, something else is in charge; for each issue, unrelated people from around the world send me related submissions. For example, in this issue, several works about trains were submitted. Each was interesting and well done, but two stood out to me because they so beautifully connected to this month's theme of Reflection. Mark Meyer's haibun "Off the Rails...Stops Along the Way" uses the Arakawa Toden streetcar as a metaphor for life, while Michael Pronko contributed an essay called "Tokyo Train Time" to reflect on the diversity of people, life, experiences, thoughts, styles, and attitudes that is Tokyo. History is reflected in both Elahe Nassr's "Ashes of a Wandering Dream," which is the account of the life of a fictional character in Hiroshima, and in "May the Sun Rise," where Dibyasree Nandy imagines a letter written by Takasugi Shinsaku, a supporter of the Meiji Restoration to Tokugawa supporter General Hijikata Toshizō.

The visual art in this issue--from Heather Midori Yamada, Monica Deife, Ron C. Moss, and Debbie Strange-- is simply stunning. And oddly, thanks to fate(?), Karma(?), the ether(?) Amber Logan submitted Tanabata Night, a twisted, backward, alternative account of the Japanese holiday. Why thanks to fate? Because, by coincidence, I was playing around with some of my photographs and created a twisted, backward, alternative perspective in Alternate Reality.

The contributions highlighted above are only a few of the many outstanding works in this issue, but the others are by no means less in any way. Please make your way to the Table of Contents and visit each page.

Many years ago, a friend of mine visited me in Zurich and I bought him a few of my favorite chocolate truffles. He popped one in his mouth and gulped it down. I gasped. Truffles are meant to sit gently on the tongue and be allowed to melt so that the cacophony of flavors can be understood, reflected upon, savored. (It's true. Truffles are like good wine.) I bring up this story because, like truffles, White Enso should be savored. I suggest reading a story, a poem, an essay, then let the ideas in it simmer within you before moving on to the next page. I hope the work in White Enso will stick with you, change you. They will certainly impress you. Enjoy!

Linda Gould
Managing Editor

All photos in White Enso by Linda Gould unless otherwise noted.

Contributor Bios & Table of Contents



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Arlene Geller

Moon Dance (poetry)

Poet/lyricist Arlene Geller has always been fascinated with words and is passionate about writing. Her poetry has been published in newspapers, magazines, and journals including *Better Than Starbucks*, *Tiferet Journal*, *The Penwood Review*, *The Jewish Writing Project*, and *White Enso*. Collaborations with composers include commissioned pieces, such as: “Elusive Peace,” which premiered as part of Service of Lessons and Carols at Vassar College in New York; and “River Song,” which premiered as one of five movements of “I Rise: Women in Song” at Lehigh University, Pennsylvania. See and hear samples of lyrics and songs at arlenegeller.com.



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Constance Wrzesniewski

Reflections (haibun)

Constance Wrzesniewski lives in Doylestown, PA. She writes for the *Bucks County Herald*. Published in several magazines, her poetry appears in numerous journals. She participated in “Making Magic: Beauty In Word And Image” exhibition in the Michener Museum, won third prize in Delaware Valley University Writers' Conference, and was second runner-up in Doylestown Bookshop Main Street Voices Poetry Contest. *Watching Over My Shoulder*, a chapbook, was published June 2015, followed by *As I Was Saying*, July 2018. Her latest, *One More Time*, came out in June 2022. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee.

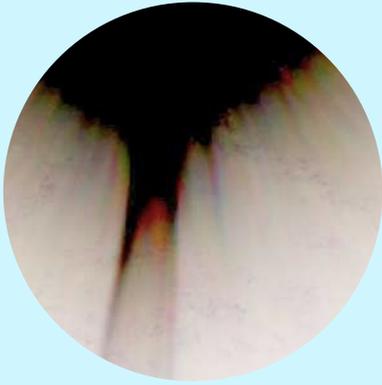


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Linda A. Gould

Alternate Reality (Visual Art)

Linda A. Gould is the Managing Editor of *White Enso* and an on-again, off-again writer. Her work has appeared in magazines, newspapers, and online. She is the host of *The Kaidankai* podcast, which features tales of the supernatural from around the world, and “Japanese Ghost Stories” on Facebook. Her dual-language book in English and Japanese, *The Diamond Tree*, is available on Amazon.



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Amber Logan

Tanabata Night (fiction)

Amber A. Logan is a university professor, freelance editor, and author of speculative fiction living in Kansas with her husband and two children—Fox and Willow. In addition to her degrees in Psychology, Liberal Arts, and International Relations, Amber holds a PhD in Creative Writing from Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge. When she's not writing, Amber enjoys trips to Japan, exploring unusual vegetarian foods, and reading Haruki Murakami. Amber's debut novel is *The Secret Garden of Yang Inn* - out October 2022 from CamCat Books. Find out more at www.AmberALogan.com

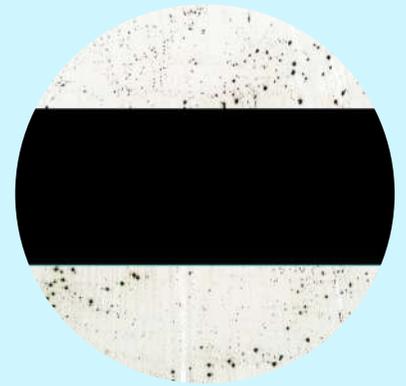


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Ramachandran Sundararajan

Beside Basho's Pond (poetry)

Ram is a Corporate Lawyer by profession. He has been writing English poetry since his college days. Writing Japanese short form poetry since 2020, his English language haiku have been widely published internationally in print and digital Journals.
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haiku_ram_chandran



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Elahe Nassr

Wandering Ashes of a Dream

Elahe Nassr is an independent writer and filmmaker based in Japan. She is the recipient of the 2018 Henry Fong Award, and a participant in the 2019 Kyoto Filmmakers Lab—Masters Session. Her first short film "*Life as It Is*" was selected at the Longless Film Festival for the *International Selection* category in 2020. Her photography works were selected for contests by Kyoto International Student Film & Video Festival, and Tokyo 2020 Olympics Torch Relay. She is currently the programming manager of Japan Web Fest and a graduate student in the field of tourism. Forthcoming: Elahe's second short film, *Nozomi*
Instagram: @elahelennassr
Facebook: elahe.nassr.5



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Heather Midori Yamada

(Visual Art)

Visual artist, teacher and Buddha dharma practitioner, Heather Midori Yamada leads contemplative art workshops inviting participants to rest in their natural state of awareness while accessing innate creativity. Explorations using Japanese *washi* papers, brush, *sumi* ink and colour Heather guides participants using accessible exercises.



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Sara Backer

Three Works of Poetry

Sara Backer lived in Japan for three years and published a novel, *American Fuji*. Her first book of poetry, *Such Luck*, follows two chapbooks: *Scavenger Hunt*, and *Bicycle Lotus*, which won the Turtle Island Poetry Award. Her honors include a prize in the 2019 Plough Poetry Competition, nine Pushcart nominations, and fellowships from the Norton Island and Djerassi resident artist programs. She holds an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts and reads for *The Maine Review*. Recent publications include *Lake Effect*, *Slant*, *CutBank*, *Kenyon Review*, and *Poetry Northwest*. She lives in New Hampshire with a partner and two cats: Zbigniew and Wislawa.



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Eugene Ryan

Mori Tower & Fireworks (poetry)

Eugene Ryan is a Londoner of Irish roots who first came to Japan in 1994. Since then, he has lived in Okinawa, Tokyo, Nagasaki and Toyohashi, where he now lives. He currently teaches at a university in Aichi prefecture. His research interest is currently focused on using role-playing games to help autistic children improve their communicative confidence. His poetry was previously published in *Rat's Ass Review*, *The Font*, and *Tokyo Poetry Journal*. He loves gardening, sea swimming and time with friends. You can find more of his poetry at www.eugespoems.wordpress.com



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Caroline Sato

Katherine Draws (Visual Art)

Caroline Sato is an Australian artist, designer and bricoleur currently based in Japan. She engages in her work as a natural reaction to her surroundings, working in mediums including textiles, gold leaf and *sumi* in flat and functional forms. Her work encapsulates themes of people and values, and pattern and adornment, See more of her work at www.carolinesato.com or follow her on Instagram [@car0sat0](https://www.instagram.com/car0sat0)



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Ron C. Moss

Almost Full Moon & Indigo Moon (Haiga)

Ron C. Moss lives in Tasmania and has been writing haiku and related genres since 1999. He has published over a thousand haiku worldwide in many collections and prestigious anthologies. He's the author of several award-winning collections, and his latest 'Cloud Hands' is available at moss.cloudhands@gmail.com. Ron is a visual artist and award-winning photographer. He combines poetry and art, and has exhibited in Australia, New Zealand and the USA. Ron is a member of the British and Australian Haiku Societies and is an editor and regular judge of art and haiku. He has a lifelong love of Japanese aesthetics and culture and is a Zen practitioner. Ron is also a 25-year veteran volunteer firefighter and Brigade Chief in his local brigade. www.ronmoss.com



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Debbie Strange

Seasons of Sorrow (Haiga)

Debbie Strange (Canada) is a chronically ill short-form poet, haiga artist, and photographer whose creative passions connect her more closely to the world and to herself. Debbie's work has been translated, anthologized, and widely published internationally. Her most recent book, *The Language of Loss: Haiku & Tanka Conversations*, won the Sable Books 2019 International Women's Haiku Contest and Haiku Canada's 2022 Marianne Bluger Chapbook Award. It also received an Honourable Mention in the Haiku Society of America's 2021 Merit Book Awards. Please visit her publication archive at: www.debbiemstrange.blogspot.com and follow her on Twitter [@Debbie_Strange](https://twitter.com/Debbie_Strange) and Instagram [@debbiemstrange](https://www.instagram.com/debbiemstrange).



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Reed Venrick

The Knock on the Wall
(Poetic Fiction)

Reed Venrick resides in Florida on his orange grove farm; formerly an instructor of composition and pronunciation at Sophia University, Ichigaya, and Sophia Junior College, Hadano.



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Taylor Mignon

Homage to JJ
(Poetic Essay)

Taylor Mignon is a poet, editor and translator living in Saitama. His most recent book is *VOU: Visual Poetry, Tokio, 1958–1978* (Isobar Press, 2022). He is cofounding editor of *Tokyo Poetry Journal* (ToPoJo), responsible for a special book-length issue on Japan and the Beats, and led the translation and editing of *Bearded Cones & Pleasure Blades: The Collected Poems of Torii Shōzō* (highmoonoon, 2013). His translations are to appear in an upcoming anthology of Japanese experimental poetry of the twentieth century (New Directions, 2022). He is planning another book of visual poetry for ToPoJo v.14, with editor Zoria Petkoska.



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Lloyd Morgan

March of Progress & Transplanting
(Poetry)

Lloyd Morgan looks to position human experience as something divine, embedded in the framework of the natural world. Forthcoming work can be found through *Heliosparrow*; he can likely be found in the backwoods of the Tanzawa peaks



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A. A. Marcoff

Four Tanka

Tony (A.A.) Marcoff is an Anglo-Russian poet who has lived in Africa, Iran, France, and Japan. He writes mainly tanka and tanka prose now, but has also had many mainstream poems published in *Poetry Review* and other journals. Tony has been a university librarian, teacher, and occupational therapy helper in a large psychiatric hospital, where he was in charge of poetry and creative writing. He now lives in England near the beautiful River Mole, which is his meditation and inspiration.



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Mark Meyer

Off the Rails—Stops Along the Way
(Haibun Essay)

Mark Meyer is a septuagenarian artist, writer, & former research biologist who resides in the middle of a lake in Washington State. He enjoys a great fondness for dogs, guitars, & scotch. His artwork & poetry have somehow managed to get around here and there. Mark Meyer's "Under a Pale Moon," read and published on White Enso's Kaidankai (a podcast of ghost and supernatural stories), was a finalist for the Rhysling Award.



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Michael Pronko

Tokyo Train Time (Non-fiction)

Michael Pronko is a professor of American Literature and Culture at Meiji Gakuin University. His seminars focus on contemporary novels and film adaptations. He is the author of the Detective Hiroshi mystery series set in Tokyo: *The Last Train* (2017), *The Moving Blade* (2018), *Tokyo Traffic* (2020), and *Tokyo Zangyo* (2021). He's written three award-winning collections on Tokyo life: *Motions and Moments* (2015), *Tokyo's Mystery Deepens* (2014), and *Beauty and Chaos* (2014). He also runs Jazz in Japan (www.jazzinjapan.com). For more information, visit: www.michaelpronko.com.



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Monica Deife

Visual Art

Monica Deife is originally from Washington State in the USA, but now lives in Nara Prefecture. She resumed her interest in photography when she realized her iPhone had a camera. She learned the basics of photography from an online course and eventually switched to a mirrorless camera. Since then, she has fed her passion with many online courses. Recently, she enjoys photographic expressionism, works made using Intentional Camera Movement (ICM) and layering. See more of her work at Instagram: [@monicainnara](https://www.instagram.com/monicainnara)



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Dibyasree Nandy

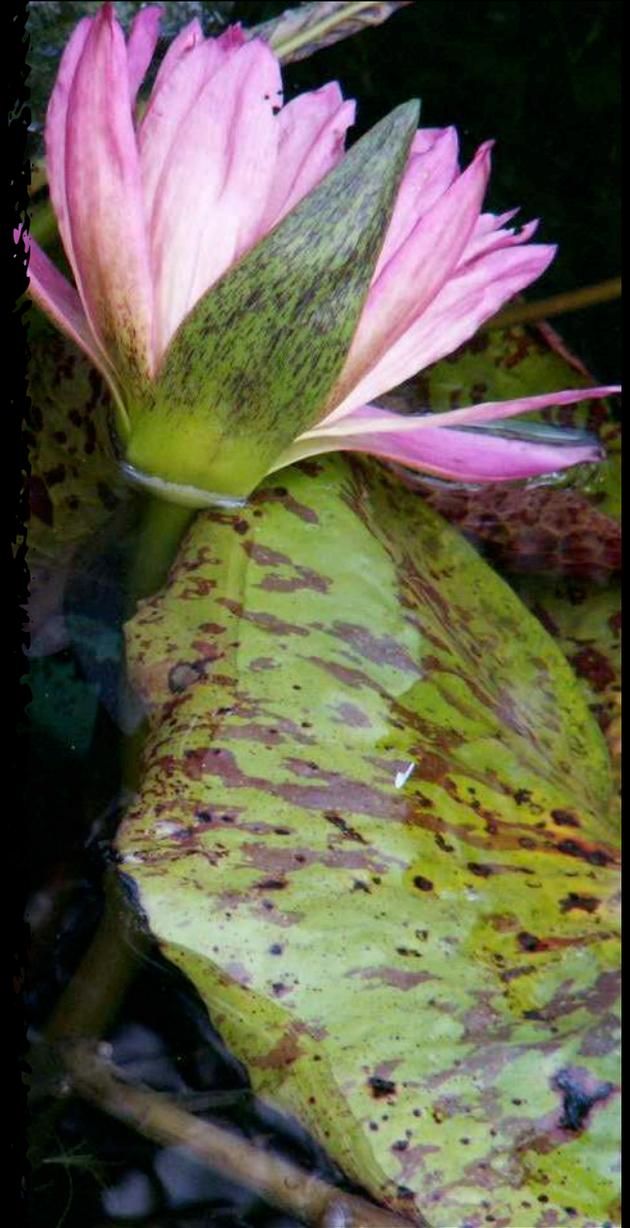
May the Sun Rise
(Epistolary fiction)

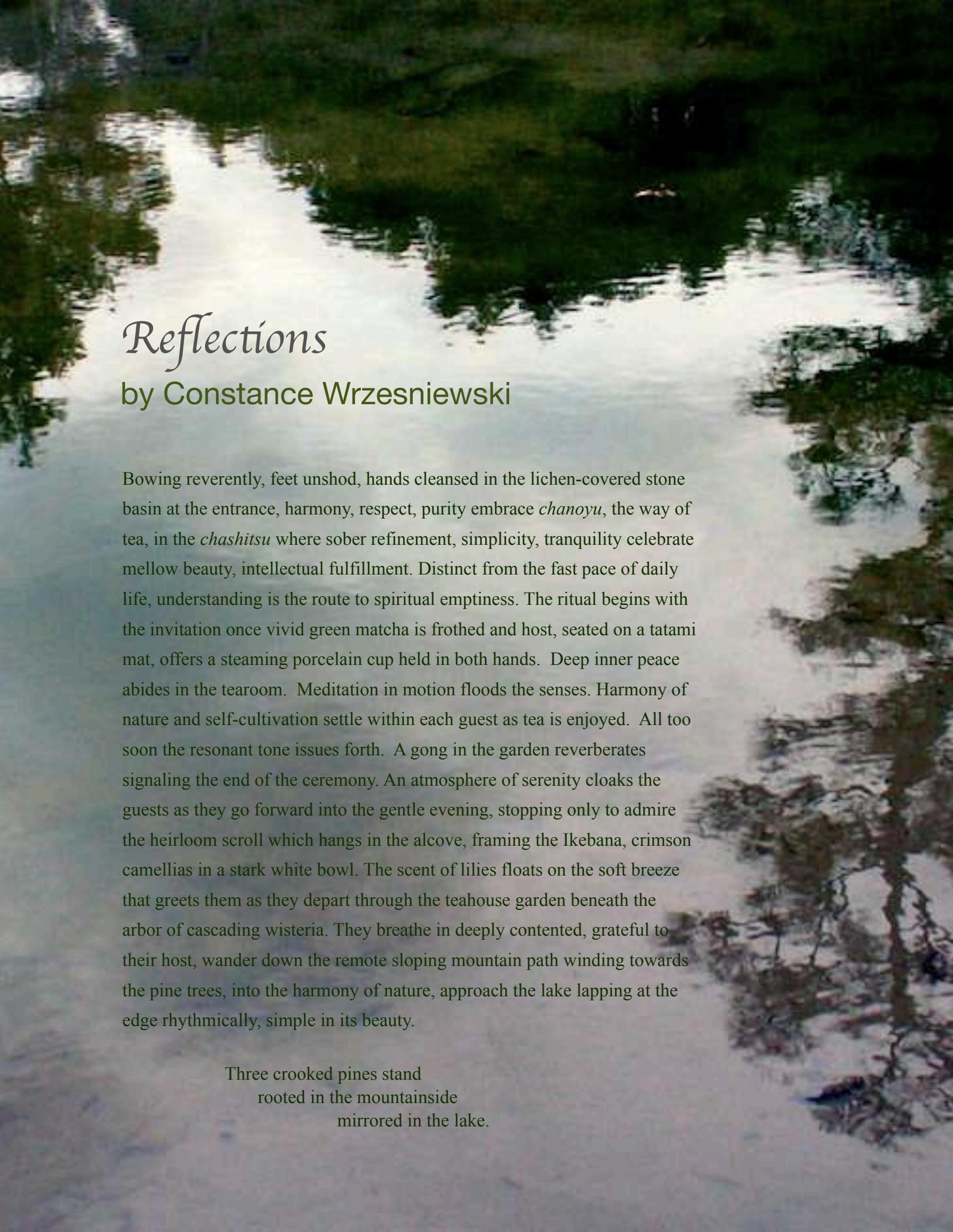
Dibyasree Nandy, 29 years old, is a resident of India. After completing M.Sc and M.Tech, she began writing during the lock-down period of the Covid-19 pandemic. She has written four books: *The Labyrinth of Silent Voices- Epistles of the Mahabharata*, *Stardust- Haiku and Other Poems*, *Studded with Rubies*; *A Hundred Short Stories*, and *Marchen of Newer Days*.

Moon Dance
By Arlene Geller

*I glide effortlessly
on the glasslike surface,
a lotus flower in a lily pond
no ripples no strife*

*I turn toward the heavens
to keep me safe & calm
a respite in a world
where prayers often float
unanswered*





Reflections

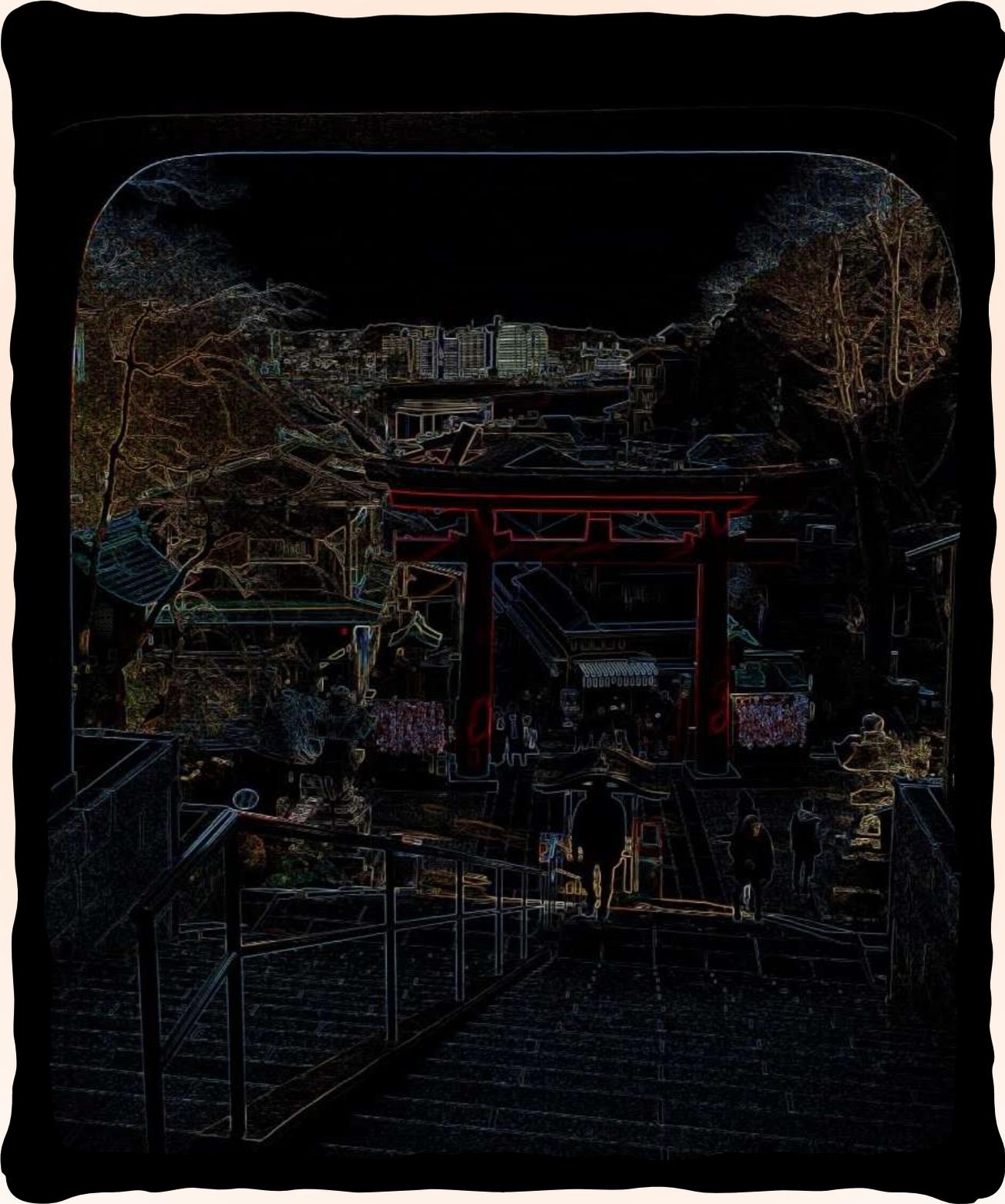
by Constance Wrzesniewski

Bowing reverently, feet unshod, hands cleansed in the lichen-covered stone basin at the entrance, harmony, respect, purity embrace *chanoyu*, the way of tea, in the *chashitsu* where sober refinement, simplicity, tranquility celebrate mellow beauty, intellectual fulfillment. Distinct from the fast pace of daily life, understanding is the route to spiritual emptiness. The ritual begins with the invitation once vivid green matcha is frothed and host, seated on a tatami mat, offers a steaming porcelain cup held in both hands. Deep inner peace abides in the tearoom. Meditation in motion floods the senses. Harmony of nature and self-cultivation settle within each guest as tea is enjoyed. All too soon the resonant tone issues forth. A gong in the garden reverberates signaling the end of the ceremony. An atmosphere of serenity cloaks the guests as they go forward into the gentle evening, stopping only to admire the heirloom scroll which hangs in the alcove, framing the Ikebana, crimson camellias in a stark white bowl. The scent of lilies floats on the soft breeze that greets them as they depart through the teahouse garden beneath the arbor of cascading wisteria. They breathe in deeply contented, grateful to their host, wander down the remote sloping mountain path winding towards the pine trees, into the harmony of nature, approach the lake lapping at the edge rhythmically, simple in its beauty.

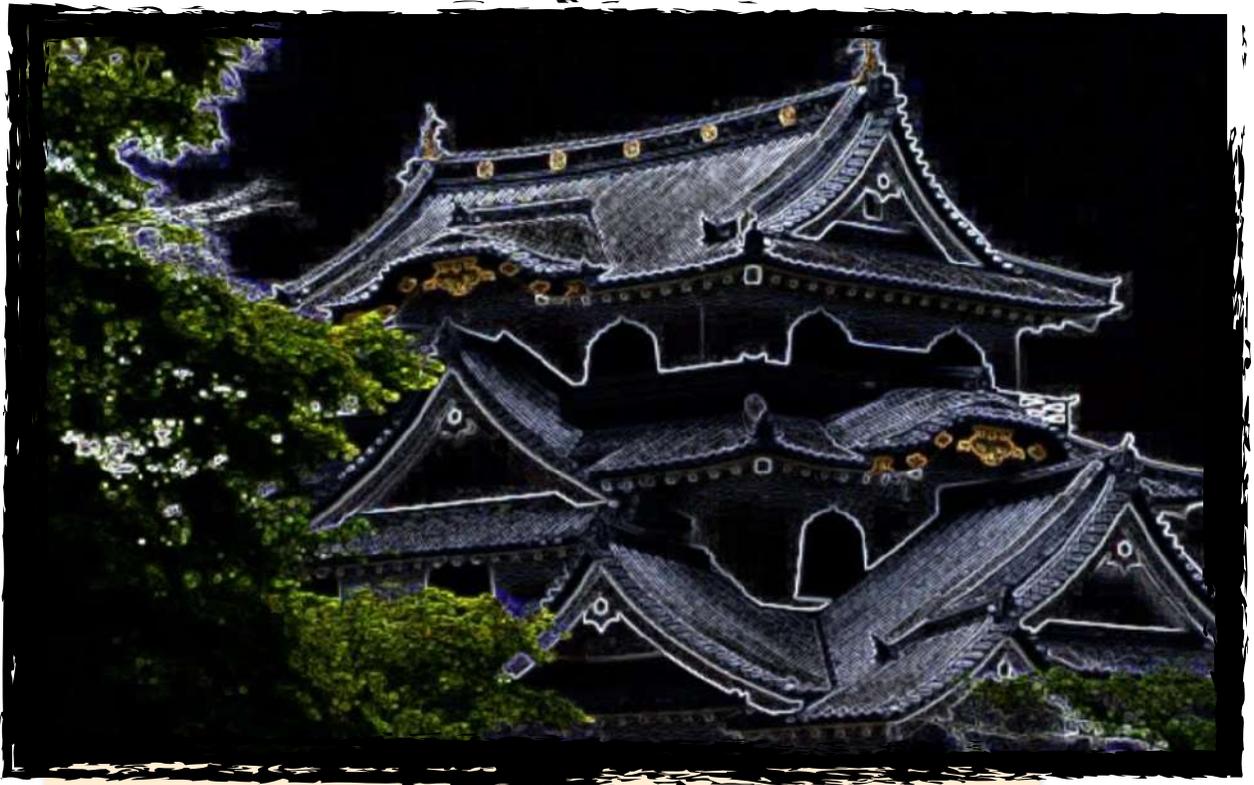
Three crooked pines stand
rooted in the mountainside
mirrored in the lake.

Alternate Reality

By Linda A. Gould





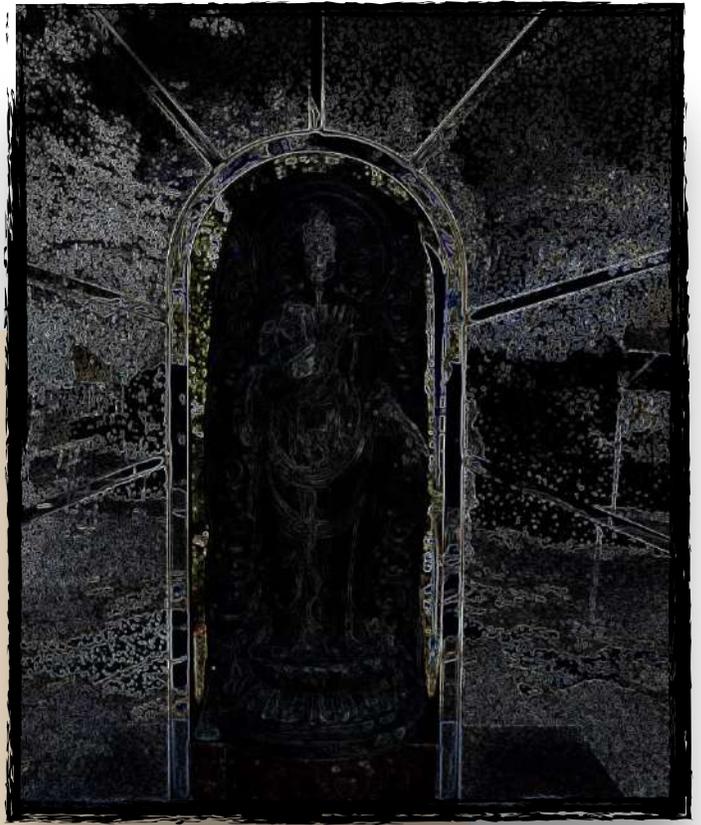




阿夫利神



本殿本納記念



川口ザザ

口出益



神聖

神聖

富翁

富翁



正宗 純米

正宗 純米

花春米

花春米



清酒の 大見

清酒の 大見



Tanabata Night

By Amber Logan

When the sky turns deep purple, like the clouds themselves are bruised, I know the rains are going to last. After seven days of rainfall, our house smells of moldy straw.

I've heard that in other parts, places not blessed with as much rain as Izumo Village, the people pray for a clear *Tanabata* night. Their children sing songs to keep the rain clouds away for the festival, allowing the celestial lovers to finally meet on the seventh day of the seventh month. I ask *Okaasan* if it's because people like to pray for things they might actually get instead of asking for ideals that will never be. But my mother insists there's more to it than that.

★★★

"*Okaasan*, what are they making?" I whisper in my mother's ear as we pass the red *torii* gate. I'm only a few inches shorter than her now, nearly full grown. "Are those the kind of sticks they hit themselves with?"

"Shh!" my mother hisses through closed teeth, averting her eyes from the priests. "Flagellation is sacred. We mustn't speak of it so crassly."

The priests gather in front of the shrine, wearing only their loincloths in the rain. They slice open stalks of bamboo as if making the hand fans they sell during summer festivals, but these are too long for hand fans.

★★★

At the market, the drizzle has reduced to a fine mist. I take off my straw hat and tilt my head toward the heavens. The sun peeks through the soft veil of clouds until a beam of sunlight breaks through and hits my face.

The warmth on my eyelids is sensual, soothing, and I imagine myself a lizard drying off on a warm sunny stone.

Okaasan shoves the hat back on my head, the rough edges pulling on my hair. "Don't look at the heavens, Hoshiko!"

But around us in the market, more and more vendors are setting down their wares and stepping out from under their umbrellas to blink at the clearing sky.

It is *Tanabata* day, and the clouds are abandoning us.

★★★

Okaasan bargains for fresh mackerel from the old fishmonger and buys a thick daikon from a girl who looks no older than me, though she wears her hair in a bun and a sad wisdom in her eyes. As we leave, vendors are adjusting their market umbrellas and gazing warily up at the sun. The fresh air is filled with the aroma of grilled fish and whispers:

“I’m sure the storms will return by evening,” said the eggplant seller as she rearranged her wilting wares in the shade.

“Look at the dark clouds on the horizon—the sun can’t last.” The fishmonger dumped more ice on his dead-eyed freshwater eels, now starting to smell.

“Will you look up?” a young boy asked his mother.

“Of course not,” she snapped, tugging him along toward home.

I take the straw hat off again, letting it hang off my neck by its leather cord, and this time *Okaasan* doesn’t scold me when I tilt my head to the heavens to absorb the warming rays.

★ ★ ★

We hear the priests before we see them. FLACK... FLACK... FLACK. No grunting, no groans. Just the flapping of bamboo shards striking soft human flesh.

My mother casts down her eyes as we pass the torii gate, dwarfed by the surrounding pines, but I sneak a glance. The eldest priest is bald, his wrinkled back crisscrossed with white scars. He kneels on the shrine’s steps,

chanting ritual prayers. Every few moments he holds one of the syllables on his tongue and slaps the long, shredded bamboo across his bare back. Fresh, red vertical stripes ooze with each strike. FLACK...FLACK...FLACK.

I glance up at the increasingly blue sky and a wet pit forms in my stomach.

★ ★ ★

The silence at our table is maddening. I set down the rice scoop and cross my arms across my chest.

“So what happens if the clouds don’t return?”

My father, still dressed in his herder’s clothes, runs a hand through his hair and glances at my mother across the table. She stares at her hands, folded in her lap.

“We’ll still have the festival, right?” I look from parent to parent.

My father’s chopsticks grab a daikon slice from the bowl in the middle of the table. He takes a bite, chews thoughtfully.

“I don’t know, Hoshiko. We’ll just have to wait and see.”

We finish our meal in silence. How quiet the house is without the sound of rain splattering on the straw roof.

★ ★ ★

The sun sinks beneath the mountains, bleeding the sky into pinks and purples. The first real sunset in months.

I’m pounding rice in the mortar with *Okaasan* when a solid knock on the front door breaks the rhythm of our strokes. We so rarely receive visitors, it makes both of us jump.

My father opens the door, though only a crack. I crane my head and glimpse the elderly priest we’d passed earlier, this time wearing a coarse brown robe. I flinch, imagining how the rough fabric must feel against his raw wounds.

By the look on my father’s face when he turns around, I know what he’s going to say. “The priests have decided to call off the festival. Just to be safe.”

Blood rushes to my face. “Safe from what? What’s so wrong with having nice weather for a festival?” I throw down the *mochi* mallet and storm out of the room.

★ ★ ★

I lay on my bed, listening to the silence of a clear, beautiful night interrupted only by the clipped whispers of my parents in the next room. They will go to bed early, too, tired of tiptoeing so as not to disturb me further.

When the house has been quiet for more than an hour, I rise from my bed. Without lighting the lantern, I pull on my yukata (light blue with silver stars) and tie the obi.

My parents are asleep on their futons in the main room, my mother curled up in a tight ball on her side, and my father snoring on his back. I tiptoe past them to the front door but turn to catch one last glimpse of my mother before I leave. She looks like a child

having a bad dream. Her brow is furrowed, lips pursed. I slip outside before she has a chance to wake and discover her only child is missing.

★ ★ ★

The full moon peeks through the branches overhead, shedding brilliance across the road and a shadow where I've been. The silence rings in my ears; even the cicadas are speechless. I try whistling a tune, but it comes out muffled and flat like when I shout into my pillow, so I stop. My wooden clogs crunch along the rocks.

The property around the shrine is deserted; not even the priests are here to witness this night. The entire village is superstitious about the stars.

The flails are all stored away or burned, but in the grass, I find a discarded strip of the bamboo. It slices open my finger like a paper cut. A single red drop wells up. I stare at it before popping my forefinger into my mouth.

Where the forest fades and the foothills begin, I find the clearing where the festival would've been held had we been hidden from the heavens by rain. A few abandoned food stands were set up early by optimistic vendors, their colorful signboards painted with octopus and cups of *kakigori*. The grass on the north side is tamped down in a wide muddy circle. The dancing circle.

It's sad to look at this empty place now, when it should've been filled with happy villagers dancing

in the rain and enjoying *takoyaki* with bamboo skewers.

All because of some stars. Who cares if the lovers come together or not?

Despite my bravado, my heart pounds when I enter the clearing, eyes trained on the flattened, yellowing grass of midsummer. If I look up, I could see the entire sky from this high ground, away from the pine forests.

Why can't I force my eyes upwards?

★ ★ ★

My mother's stories were always colored with superstitions and folklore.

"When a pretty girl has done nothing but weave for a full year, kept away from her lover by the river of the Milky Way, she and her handsome ox-herder will surely be amorous when they finally meet." My mother stared at the flames of the cooking fire. "And from that forbidden union will be born many evil deities, who will send drought and unspeakable calamities down upon the earth."

I raised an eyebrow at my mother and paused in my sewing. "You sound like you're reciting a sutra."

"Well, it's what my mother told me, and what her mother told her. Of course, it sounds a little stale."

I wanted to say the myth sounded an awful lot like the story of my mother and father in their youth, separated as they were by the Hii River, except when my mother could persuade her no-good cousin to ferry her across

on his fishing boat. But I kept my mouth shut.

My mother took one look at my face and clucked her tongue like a disappointed hen. "Hoshiko, don't make light of the union of Orihime and Hikoboshi. Or drought." She stirred up the fire. "Where do you think this family would be without the rains?"

★ ★ ★

When I finally look up, the night sky is an inky black ocean, sprayed with tiny shining pebbles. Never have I seen so many stars. I blink back the tears to clear my vision.

I spin in a full circle before I find the summer triangle my mother taught me about. I raise a finger to trace the lines. Those two stars must be the lovers.

But something isn't right. A brilliant streak of white is spreading out from the space between Orihime and Hikoboshi, curving out like a bold stroke from a calligraphy brush. Is this what it looks like when the star gods finally meet?

As I watch, the streak grows, spreading until it's a thick line of paint bleeding against the black paper of the sky. My skin tingles. My tongue is dry. I cannot stop staring.

CAW, CAW, CAW

The silence is broken by crows taking wing from the trees nearby. They fly west, and I wonder whether they will pass over my house, waking my parents.

I wish my mother were here with me.



The streak spreads further and further, its blotted head growing until it obscures the star-lovers. I close my eyes, but the light is still seared into my eyelids.

It grows. It expands, like it is feeding on stars. Then it sheds babies, like sparks thrown off a festival sparkler. One, two, three, they spit and fizzle out until I see them no longer, but the mother keeps growing, even as she discards her progeny.

I still hold the sliver of bamboo in my hand, and it bites into my palm inside my tight fist. Blood trickles down and splatters on the muddy grass at my feet.

The light fills half my vision, but still it grows. A roar sounds in my ears like the waves on the beach during a storm, but I can't tell if it comes from the light or the blood surging through my veins. The light sheds more babies, but now they are like the giant bonfires lighting the way up the mountain during *Obon*, and they disappear over the mountain, smoke trailing in their wake.

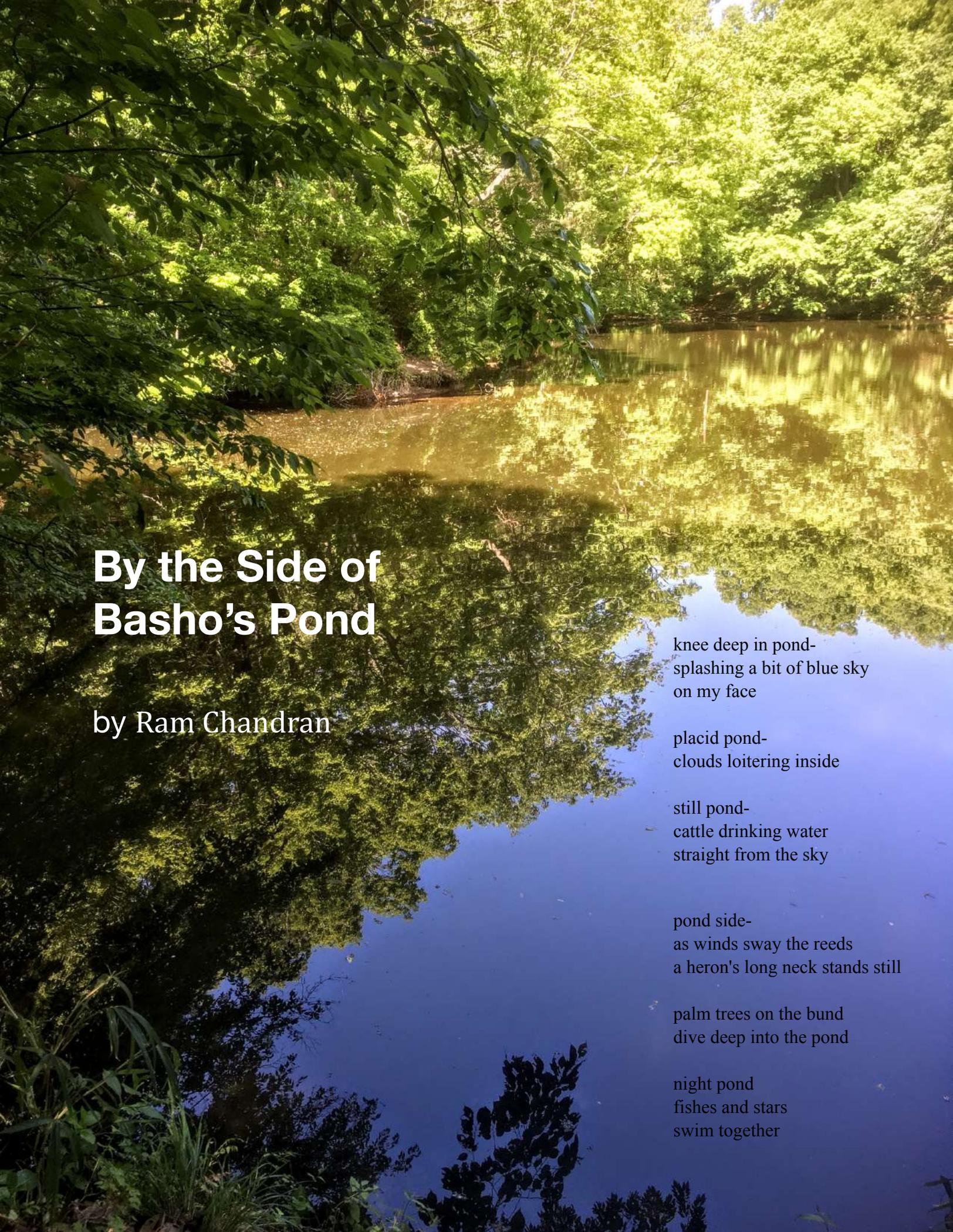
There will be fires tonight, a quiet voice murmurs in the back of my brain.

I should run. My mother always taught me to run toward the beach if I saw fire, for the ocean can't burn. The ocean is safe, as long as I don't wade out too deep.

But this light is the size of the ocean.

In the remaining seconds, I think of the crows and wonder how fast they can fly. I hope they manage to get away.





By the Side of Basho's Pond

by Ram Chandran

knee deep in pond-
splashing a bit of blue sky
on my face

placid pond-
clouds loitering inside

still pond-
cattle drinking water
straight from the sky

pond side-
as winds sway the reeds
a heron's long neck stands still

palm trees on the bund
dive deep into the pond

night pond
fishes and stars
swim together

WANDERING ASHES OF A DREAM

By Elahe Nassr

Once upon a time, in the land of the rising sun, I existed no more.

Born on a tiny island, every morning I was woken by the whisper of the sapphire blue Seto Naikai. But that was not where I died. Life was not all that fancy. A half-empty school, a tiny library, and a shokudo that was almost always closed. We had the most amazing lemon orchards. As we ran through the lemon trees, beautiful memories were made one after another. There, happiness was like an old tradition that we all practiced. I remember I had my first kiss behind those trees. That was the only kiss I ever had. In this, our little world. We had enough joy, though, enough love.

What can I say? I was a young boy blinded by his many ambitions. Our little island wasn't big enough for my dreams. Or, at least, that's what I thought. All I dreamed of was to become a musician. To sit among those very trees and see them alluringly dancing with the wind. Dancing to my songs. Had I known there would be no return, I'd have never dreamed.

I had to take the earliest train. The sky was as dark as my destiny when I left. I was about to board the train when my mom gave me one last hug. "Oh, Tetsuya! Promise your mother you'll come back soon," she said, wiping away her tears. I held her frail hands. They had their usual citrus scent.

"Mama, I will make you proud." I lied to her, without even knowing it myself. The train departed. We kept waving until she receded into the horizon. I sat on one of the few empty seats. My big, stubborn smile refused to leave and so did my excitement. My fellow travelers, clearly annoyed by the never-ending noises of the rail, kept staring at me. However much they were curious about my jolly mood, I was indifferent about them. I kept dreaming about all the new experiences that the future was bearing for me. All the songs I was going to play. And the love of my life. Oh, the love of my life. I pictured her in my mind, and the train became empty. It was only the two of us. Holding her hands, I sensed a familiar citrus scent. I began to play our secret song, and she began to dance. As she twirled in my imagination, the train stopped. I got off, letting go of all the thoughts about the new chapter of my life, a chapter that was never opened.

All I brought was my violin and a small suitcase that carried my dreams. I was finally in Hiroshima. I watched people walking around. Some laughing, some frowning. Cafes were being opened, one after another. The school wasn't far from the station, so I decided to walk, enjoying the views of this new city. People were already sitting in cafes, enjoying their breakfast. A beautiful day had just begun.

I walked across the Aioi bridge and arrived, at last, at the school entrance. Students were walking about, so with my heart pounding with joy. I entered, looking at the azure sky with so much hope. I saw **Little Boy** coming, shamelessly, to take away my youthful dreams.

I didn't get enough of a life to become a musician. To fall in love. Or to smell, once again, the citrus scent of my mother's hands. I am now wandering ashes in a burning school, beaten by the lashes of the wind and rain.

Heather Midori Yamada





“The challenge of living through chaotic times is tempered by cultivating curiosity about one’s own state of mind. By staying open to messages from the phenomenal world, paying attention to stasis and silence bolsters trust. ‘Right actions’, leads to unhesitating movement, gesture and mark-making during the creative process. Whether via paint, poetry or polemics, artistic expression becomes a natural expression of an authentic human. The whole world becomes one’s teacher.

“Many symbols arise during the process of looking, seeing and executing a ‘true mark’. Triangles, single strokes like Japanese *ichi* , denoting one, or *enso*, the continuous circular Japanese *kanji* arise seemingly unbidden. The bridge from the as yet unrevealed unconscious to the relevant conscious mind is the breath. Usually ignored or taken for granted, the breath pattern and the space or gaps between the inbreath and outbreath hold the place of mystery. “

Heather Midori Yamada

Sara Backer

Breath

Inhale a gun, a fear, a color-by-number painting kit with no numbers, a picked lock, a door that flaps but can not fly, unlucky to lose the key in a garden of thistles. A voice stretches plastic wrap.

Exhale a ring, a warning, a zero, an *enso* as water evaporates on the paper beginning and beginning again, ideas fading before letters can birth words.

I Live Without Heat

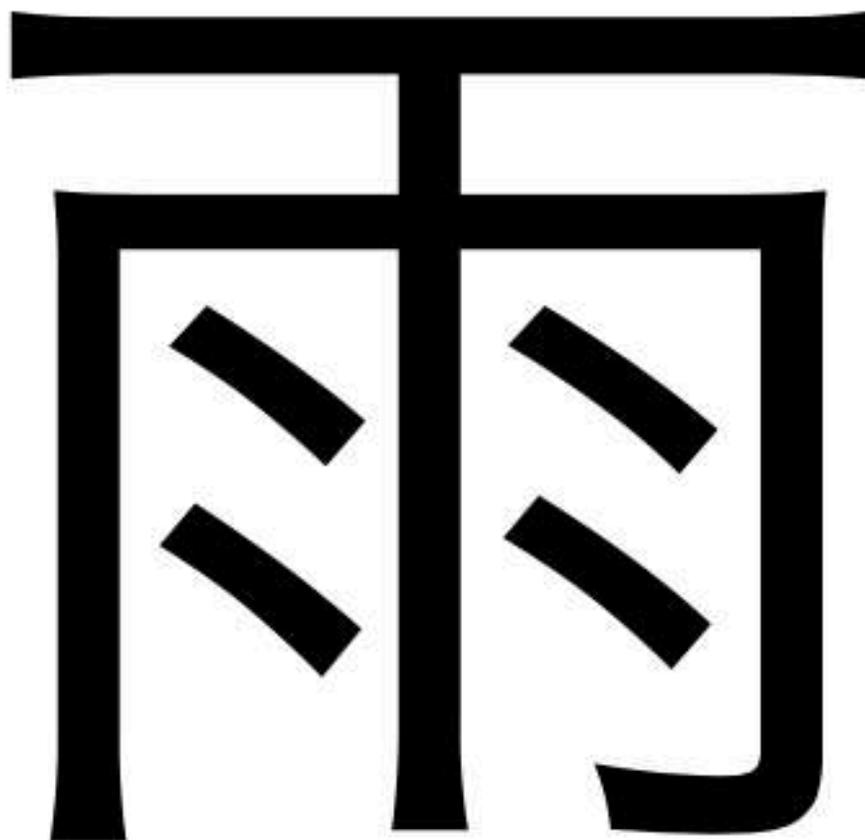
Fireworks over the river. Japan is obsessed with *hanabi*. Year round, my students light them on the tetrapod piled on the shore. I lean over balcony bars to see tails of fading fire. Only a few minutes—cold air forces me back inside, where it's also cold without insulation. As my boyfriend and I argue about how to buy an electric heater, historic arguments costume up and reenact. Too many tangerines, no marijuana, I'm no longer fun, he's sick of nameless streets and noisy trucks and *gaijin, gaijin*. I mention he has the gift of time to do whatever he wants. (That is what I want.) My boyfriend says it's not costing me to support him—I'm not sacrificing for him. The word *sacrifice* explodes into red flags. At that moment—just after *rif*, on the cusp of *ice*—I know we're about to break up.

Next day, a small protest march on Gofukucho Street. A nervous man with a Mt. Fuji goatee glances at me. He carries a photo of John Lennon and I begin to cry.

Tsuyu

The retired teacher
practices Chinese,
drawing the same word
over and over:

rain, rain, rain, rain, rain



Eugene Ryan

Mori Tower

Our fury had spent itself,
collapsing into sadness,
percolating softly
like a coffee maker in
another room.
Lying on *tatami*,
We watched a story from Palestine,
a courtyard, and
sunshine on water,
the strange sounds of music
and the music of words
clear and empty of meaning
in the otherwise silent flat.

As evening gathered,
We left to catch a show downtown.
If the art spoke to us,
I no longer recall,
dwarfed as it was
by the supernova of
Tokyo itself.
From the 52nd floor,
the tangled code of our thoughts
spiralled out
like dust through an airlock,
to find its place amongst
the fretful brilliance
of the dreaming city by night.

Fireworks

Fireworks at night
Like a desert rain
Brought forth a bloom of faces
On rooftops, in windows
Above this lonely city

We are together! I thought
And waved excitedly,
As to a passing ship



Katherine Draws

by Caroline Sato



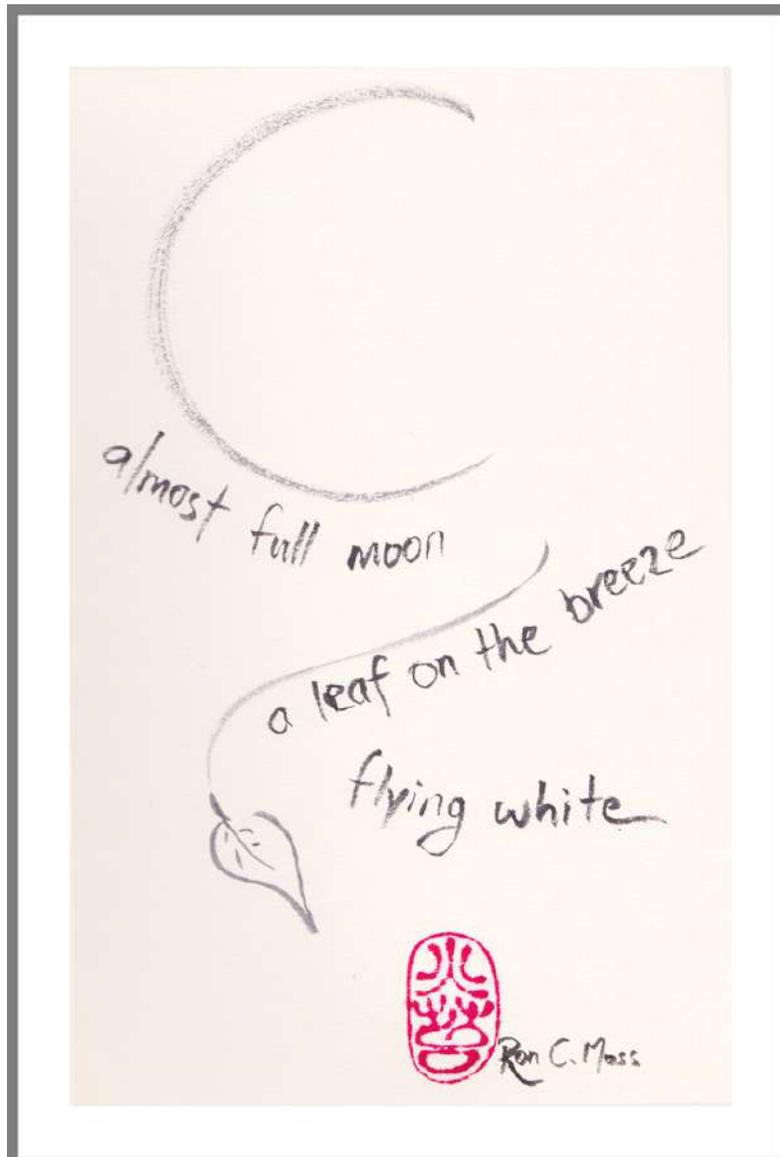
I was gifted *sumi* by a Korean artist in late 2021. With *shuji* and *sumi-e* so masterfully taught and practiced in Japan, I was a bit overwhelmed. In addition, I typically avoid black

However, there is something mysterious in *sumigarashi*, *orizome*, and feathering, just as there is in the process of creation. "Katherine Draws" reflects that magic that glimmers in our reality. That thoughtful gift had a wondrous effect: thanks Sun Chun Lee!

H A I G A

By Ron C. Moss

Almost Full Moon



Indigo Moon



forest gate
the ancient scent
of pine

snowflakes
trees glowing
with light

garden temple
painted dragons
from the sky

cool breeze
bamboo leaves
flickering silence

graveyard stone
the light touch
of falling petals

seed pods
a monk bends
to the earth

walking in clouds
a place to rest
on Mt Yoshida

indigo moon
trickling over
the waterfall

SEASONS OF SORROW

Haiga by Debbie Strange



The image is a vertical rectangular painting. The background is a light, textured wash of pale blue and white. In the center, there is a darker, more vibrant area of blue and green, representing a sea of clouds. The colors are layered and textured, with visible brushstrokes. A dark, indistinct shape, likely representing a ship, is visible in the lower part of the central area, appearing to sink below a horizontal line that represents the horizon. The overall mood is somber and ethereal.

sea of clouds
your ship sinks
below the horizon

words/image(C)DStrange



if there were
a way to know
bird of passage

words/image(C)DStrange

A painting of a path through a field of frost-nipped grass. The path is a narrow, winding line of golden-brown grass, leading from the foreground into the distance. The surrounding grass is dark and textured, suggesting frost or shadow. The sky is a deep, dark blue, with golden light rays streaming down from the top, illuminating the path and the grass. The overall mood is quiet and contemplative.

this is where
we used to walk
frost-nipped grass

words/image(C)DStrange

Reed Venrick

The

Knock

on the

Wall

ONE

Imagine renting a flat in Tokyo, just
An ordinary building on the third floor,
Long and narrow in design, a kind
Known as a railroad car, where
Walking in from the landing, you unlock
The door, step into the petite entrance,
Leave your shoes, of course. With two
Steps more, you enter the kitchen, just
A meter and half wide. There you look
Over the dining area, containing only
A “kotatsu” table standing low against
The left wall, where crushed cushions
Rest on the floor for you and guests.

To the right, a tiny bathroom, just
Wide enough for a sink and toilet,
And a square tub only big enough
For one to bathe or shower. You step
Further into the railroad car: a sliding
“Shoji” paper door allows you to enter
Your “tatami” sleeping room, a raised
Floor made of smooth, woven reeds.

Three steps across the tatami
And you slide open the glass door
To a balcony not larger than
The space of a caboose, and
Standing there, you look across
The blue-tied roofs of suburban
Shinjuku—you gaze up and over
The skyscrapers of downtown.
On clear days and sometimes
Waxing moon nights, you can see
Across the 105 kilometers to
The snow crown of Mt. Fuji. You
Look around: a cozy, petite flat,
Just a 5 minute walk to the local
Train, then a 5 minute ride onto
Your much-traveled Yamanote
Loop train that circles downtown
And makes all Tokyo accessible.

TWO

But imagine: the second night in
Your new flat. You have just fallen
asleep—jarred awake by the noise
Of water gushing from your bathroom.
You leap from the sheets, fearing
The water pipe in the tub has broken,
You run into the bathroom, you flick
On the ceiling light, then realize
The running water is coming
From the other side of the wall—
Someone is drawing a bath. You
Tap lightly on the wall to check the
Wall—must be made of material
Hardly thicker than paper board.

Your first Sunday morning there,
You lean on your balcony railing,
Sipping your Kona coffee, you see
That this petite balcony is barely
Big enough to stretch out your
Legs; still you are glad to rent
This “pied a Terre,” but as you
Look back around, you realize
This small flat was originally
Double this size, but at some point,
Partitioned into equal halves.

Now you understand why the width
Is so narrow, excepting the tatami
Room, you can stand most places—
Stretch your arms and touch both
Walls with your fingers. But you
Think: ah, no problem, You are
Single again. Half a railroad
Car is all the space a bachelor
Needs, because the grand city
Of Tokyo contains plenty of room
To roam ‘round ,as you daily wheel
Your “mamasan” bicycle about
The streets of Takadanobaba, and
Grocery stores in Ikebukuro, and
Catch trains nearby, when you
Go to your university classes.



You hear the phone ringing from
Your kotatsu table, and you hurry
To get it, but when you hear a female
Voice answer “moshi moshi,” you
Laugh to realize that again you
Were fooled—standing by
The thin wall, you hear a melodic
Voice of a woman speaking in
“Nihongo,” and you think: this is
Uncanny. Her voice is so close,
So clear, she could be speaking

Inside your own flat. Later, that
Afternoon, you again hear water
Being drawn from the tub, but this
Time you hear the slapping and
Flapping of wet clothes, and
A while later later, as you are
Reading Tanizaki’s “In Praise of
Shadows,” you sit up in your tatami
Room. Suddenly you hear footsteps
On the balcony, and as you step
Over, you see female clothes
Hung out on a spiderweb clothesline.

And in the early evening, the delicious
Scent of someone cooking ginger
Chicken wafts through your flat, and
When someone clinks the dishes,
When someone vacuums the floor,
When someone watches Japanese
Tv, and when someone takes another
Bath, its not too much to imagine
That the two of you are flatmates.

THREE

People in Tokyo work long hours,
Often not returning home until
10 p.m., depending on trains.
You, as well, in addition to your
Day job, work some evenings,
Tutoring English to executives
In corporate offices. Imagine
One Tuesday night, you arrive
At your building to see the back

Of a slim woman with long hair;
She wears a formal blue suit with skirt,
With long hair, walking up the stairs
In front of you, and as you come
Onto your third floor landing, you
See her unlocking the door, just
Two meters away from your own,
But her back is turned, and you
Cannot see her face.

When you say “konban wa,”: she
Repeats the greeting, but she
Turns only partially, as she politely
Nods, but her dark hair hangs so
Long, her face is hidden, and as
She opens her door, all you see
Are elegant fingers, polished nails.

—Watashi no namae—you begin.

—No Eng-lish, no Eng-lish—she says,

Waving a nervous, minimal hand,
Then swift as a dancer, she enters
Her flat, closes the door, but opens
It again so that you see one lovely,
Long-lashed eye behind the door slit.

—Gomen Nasai, she says, then
Not waiting for an answer, she
Shuts the door, clicks the lock.

Then, imagine a few evenings later,
A Friday night, you come home
About 9:30, feeling tired after
A long work day and a corporate
Tutoring job you have in Shibuya,
And as you are undressing in the tatami
Room you hear a gentle knocking
On the wall. You hesitate. Was she
Knocking for you? Or just slapping
A mosquito? What the hell, you think

And knock back. With an increasing
Heart beat, you wait until you hear her
Footsteps crossing her room and again
A knock-on-the-wall. You smile and
Shake your head, and knock once again.
How strange yet how charming. Two
People living separately but existing
So closely that if there were no wall,
You could reach and touch her arm.

FOUR

So a habit begins that autumn night.
When you came home you knew
Within minutes if she were at home.
But usually she arrived later, around
10 p.m., so you would wait until she
Entered her tatami bedroom, and then
You would knock twice, and she would
Respond in kind. Similarly, when she
Arrived home before, she would knock
First on the wall.

Once your knocking becomes a ritual,
You think it will be inevitable that
You would meet. You compose a note
In your feeble Japanese, which says
To the effect: "Do you catch the local
Train at "Shimo-Ochiai" Station? You
know the Mikan Kissaten" there? Care
To meet on the weekend for coffee?
Say 3 or 4 pm?" You rewrite the note to
Get the syntax better, according to
The Japanese course you took at
Sophia University over in Ichigaya.

But as you are slipping the note
Into an envelope, you hear voices
From her side. One voice was hers,
And one, a man's, who clearly did not
Know how thin the wall was—he
Spoke so loudly in Japanese that he
Might have been talking in your kitchen.

You stare at the written note and shake
Your head. You go to the kitchen and
Prepare your evening meal—soba pasta,
A tub of tofu and a can of tuna, then
You spend the evening, sitting back
On your tatami wall, doing exercises

In the book "Japanese for Busy People."
But you find it difficult to study, for all
You hear for two hours is the exchange

Of a Loud male and a quiet female voice
Next door. You feel angst of knowing
They are intimate—further chagrined
To be woken when he exits the door at 12: 17.
You grab up the note from the kotatsu, the
One you'd written in your labored "Nihongo,"
And throw it in the trash, and in the days
And weeks that follow, you no longer
Knock on the wall, and neither does she.

FIVE

The partition that divides the balcony
The two of you share is no more than
A few plastic boards wired together.
If you had a bucket to stand on, you
Could jump over with just a hop. Since
Neither of you have washing machines,
She hangs out her clothes to dry.
The dividing boards are high enough
That from where you sit in your tatami
Room, you can see her bare feet and
Toned calves. You notice her "yukata"

Changes from a summer green to a
Crimson autumn color. But Imagine
That one Wednesday morning, a storm
Blows through Tokyo. You arrive home
And find her clothes and intimates
And the clothes-line strewn on your
Balcony side. You debate what to do.
You put them into a plastic bag and
Hang them on her side. But you write
Another note in your roman-lettered
Japanese—tape it to the bag.

You expect a note in return, but all
You get back that night was an
Extended-four-knocks. That evening
Was cold, almost freezing, You lay
Under your futon with the winter
Moonlight lighting up your room and
You ponder: how is it that a woman
Of her good looks is living alone
And not married at 30 years? More
Or less, your own age.

You remind yourself of the pattern.
Apparently the same man visits her
Every two weeks, usually on Fridays.
Always he arrives late, and soon you
Hear him engaging in loud talk and
Even louder sex, then he leaves
Around midnight, but he never spends
The night, so you ask: is she “a second
Woman?” The next time he leaves,
You check your front door’s eyehole,
And see a man with diamond earrings,
Dark, curled hair, and as you watch,
He rolls down his sleeves over full
Tattoos on both arms—so you know.

SIX

Imagine how, you, a divorced man,
Living alone, can become obsessed
With a woman you are virtually
Co-habiting with. You soon know
Her daily habits, almost as well as
You know your own, yet you still
Don’t know her name, so one day,
You check her letters in her open
Mailbox and copy down the writing
You see on her electric bill, a mix
Of “hiragana” and “kanji.” You then
Show the writing to a colleague
At work. “Her name is Ogawa,”
He says. “No,” I say, “just her first
Name,” He grins, “Komako, but
Why do you ask? Who is she?”

Months pass with few changes.
But imagine that one Friday Evening
During “hanami,” those blossoming
Weeks in April, you realize that
You have not heard a man inside her
Flat for several weeks. Had they
Broken up? At that time, you are
Studying calligraphy in Roppongi
At the International House, so you
Write a note, using brush and ink
On fine parchment paper:

“Genki desu Ka! Do you drink tea or
Coffee? Sometimes I go to the “Kissaten”
Near the 7-Eleven in Takadanobaba.
Care to stop by on Saturday or

Sunday afternoon?” You take a deep
Breath and slip it under her door.
But the only response you get that
Evening, when she returns, is a feeble
Tap on your tatami wall. So you pass
Another night hearing her every
Movement: when she goes to bed,

When she goes to the bathroom,
When she rises in the morning, when
She slides open her balcony door,
When she locks her front door and
Goes to work, when she returns,
When she speaks on the phone.
And you imagine: how simple to just
Remove the boards that separate
The balcony—the two of you then
Could sit together on the shared space
And watch the moon fly over Mt Fuji.

SEVEN

Warm days of summer arrive, but
you are reading Kawabata’s “Snow
Country.” Easy to imagine that
You and Komako are living together
In Niigata, Akita, or in Aomori, where
On snowy weekends you ski
Trails with the “Friends of the Earth”
And soak in hot springs afterwards.
And yes, you imagine you are hiding out
From the infamous “Yakuza,” who throw

A net over Japan to seize you, but you
Imagine that you are the newest James
Bond, so you smack the bad guys down
The nearest stairs, then you and
Komako hike up through the foothills
Of Mt. Fuji and sojourn long winter nights
Above the timber line in a peasant’s hut,
Where the rice cooking is tastily done
In a cast-iron pot hanging from a rusty
Chain over a hearth, but alas, the bliss
Does not last. One overcast day the yakuza
Find you and the razor-sharp swords
Slash down the shoji doors. You, and
The love of your life, Komako, leap
Through the paper window and ski down
The snow-covered Mt. Fuji, later flagging
Down a bullet train “Shinkansen” to zip

Over to the Izu Peninsula, where with
Help of Komako's uncle, a "wasabi"
Farmer—neighbor to a sea captain
Of a trans-Pacific freighter—and he
Allows you to stowaway to Los Angeles.

You continue your academic career,
Teaching in a community college, but
You miss your life in Japan, and there
In Long Beach, you never find a place
That has the charm and uniqueness
Of that little railroad flat in Shinjuku.
So a dream begins that often repeats:



EIGHT

One Friday evening, you walk up
The stairs to the third-floor landing.
Again you enter your tiny kitchen,
Of the old railroad flat, you peer
Down the long length of the rooms
To see Hokusai's woodcut of "Boy
Viewing Mt Fuji" facing you there
on the balcony much like Rene
Magritte's "The Human Condition."

Now your dream grows more
Surreal, even incomprehensible,
As dreams will. Your Japanese wife,
Komako, has arrived home earlier
Than you, and, as you remove
Your shoes, next to hers, you
Hear her drawing you a bath, just
As she usually does. But when
You call out the familiar "tadaiima,"
She does not answer. You are
Alarmed—you hurry into the bath.
But, as you enter, you hear the knock
on the wall, and you know all is well.

SUMMER IN JAPAN



Homage to JJ

By Taylor Mignon

Note: italicized poetry written by Jeffrey Johnson

The Mojo behind ToPoJo is the mapatriarch of Barbaradical and Jeffreedom
JJ, Your poésie compares to yourself, slow to speak, bro to speak
You believe in the power of words, conjuring lexical stuff out the deep
JJ, resembling The Dude, your laid back cool oozes from your being & rubs off
(Thanks shaker & mover Shakyamuni Joan Anderson for this plagiaristic rip off!)

His Dudeness, Duder, El Duderino
Add one to the trope Gentleman, scholar, poet
The uncapitalized i, no ego seen
Like Mallarmé modest, engaged, serene

Like Wilhelm Albert Vladimir Apollinaris Kostrowitzky
A flair for the concrete or vis u al po e try
After Dali, the Dude doesn't do dope, he *is* dope

Respect for immigrants who lay down lives on Turtle Island
Expressed in Poem for Dead Father
Whose face is *jutting towards the new world*

Contained in Onze Haikai, taking a cue from Paul Eluard
The Dude's poésie contains visionary universes:

Reflection!

in the autumnal pond:

the smoke of Muromachi in flames

Cool vs heat, water vs smoke, autumnal decay vs brightness
Barrier between dreaming and waking states, thin, crossable

The poem Aurora most violates spacetime
as we land in a rock garden
In your poetry again we find *yūgen*
Finding the extra in the ordinary
Your *toriawase* juxtaposition of concrete particulars
Is a gift, presenting the world as is, at times peculiar
Someone said he didn't understand your poetry
If we did perfectly what would it call it?
Rather it is profound subtlety, depth and mystery
You make *yūgen* contemporary
So, Basho's black birds and EA Poe's ravens
Give cameos in Crows rule, Tokyo, 2am
Tough love in *heavymetal sludge* of decay in Karmic Junkyard

Talkin' tech, this guy's gotta knack for rhyme and consonance

The Unplayed Flute
we were left to the fate of fates
That the unplayed flute will forever resonate

In Post 3.11 Post Revisited
politicians and powercompanies obfuscate
Polite conversations circumnavigate

& in i remember
searching for my father's youth
fat sisters with freckled faces placing me like furniture

The road trip of the Blue Bug
Where the car cruises *on Coconino country roads*
covered in clouds of kicked up dust

Already endowed with a musical ear
These words, presenting the world as a gift
Realistic Psychedelic Visionary Prophetic

When fused ala ToPoJo Toasters' Samm Bennett
We benefit from musico-poetico subtleness
We witness wicked depth: heightened senses
JJ, yr calm resonate voice stretches
While Samm's strumming accentuates
Creating sometimes trance-like states
stripped down Negative beauty equals the plus side

“This was written in 2017 in response to an unpublished manuscript of poems written by Jeffrey Johnson, so it is both an homage and review of sorts. It also is a token of my gratitude for being a member of the ToPoJo staff for which I’m still grateful to this day. Recently, Jeffrey published the volume *Conjurers Dream of Voyage*. A few of the ones contained there were included in the unpublished draft. Fond memories writing this with a drink at Cliff’s Bar and Lounge in Lincoln, Nebraska.”
Taylor Mignon

Lloyd Morgan

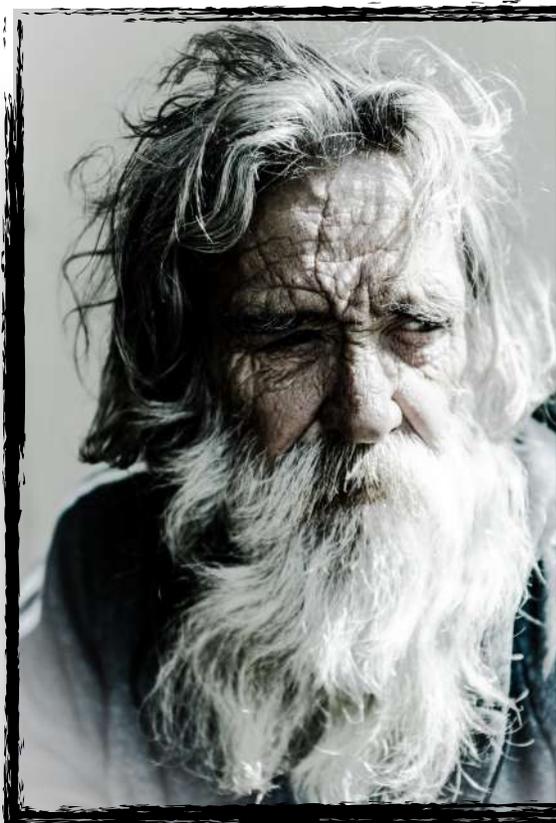


Photo by Donald Teel on Unsplash

March of Progress

Leering from its time-worn cavity
in Fujidana's housing complex,
bath-house *Nakanoyu* lies. A wreck
of empire; a cracked tile continent
mired in mould, the depravity
and depredation of age – a sentiment
carved on those pock-marked monuments,

its clientele. All now disregard
those men of coal who forged these towns.
Weighed down by decades, their frowns
and pallid bellies betray nothing of before:
sinew raging through the night, charred
bellows weaving imperial lore.
Now, knock-kneed, age-ravened and sore,

here they shelter from unresting time.
Long since the anvils fell to silence
they wither, unheld in any remembrance.
See one ghost out now: the sun's cheerful rays
stream past the stout chimney, riddled with grime.
He falters, unspeaking, in loss and dismay
– then passes along his decembring way.

Transplanting

I, forger of a foreign home,
lost day within the cedars
that enfold our quiet stead.
A lament formed beneath my breath
for native clay, for thick Welsh loam.

You, tender of bright leaves,
cast *fuji* through the treeline
and raise *tsutsuji* heads;
your *ajisai* blaze gloried blue
through silver-tipped *susuki* sheaves.

She, cultivar in your womb,
will claim Okura woodland
and my Scottish corrie-treads.
The dark earth shall sustain her there,
wherever she sees fit to bloom.



A. A. Marcoff

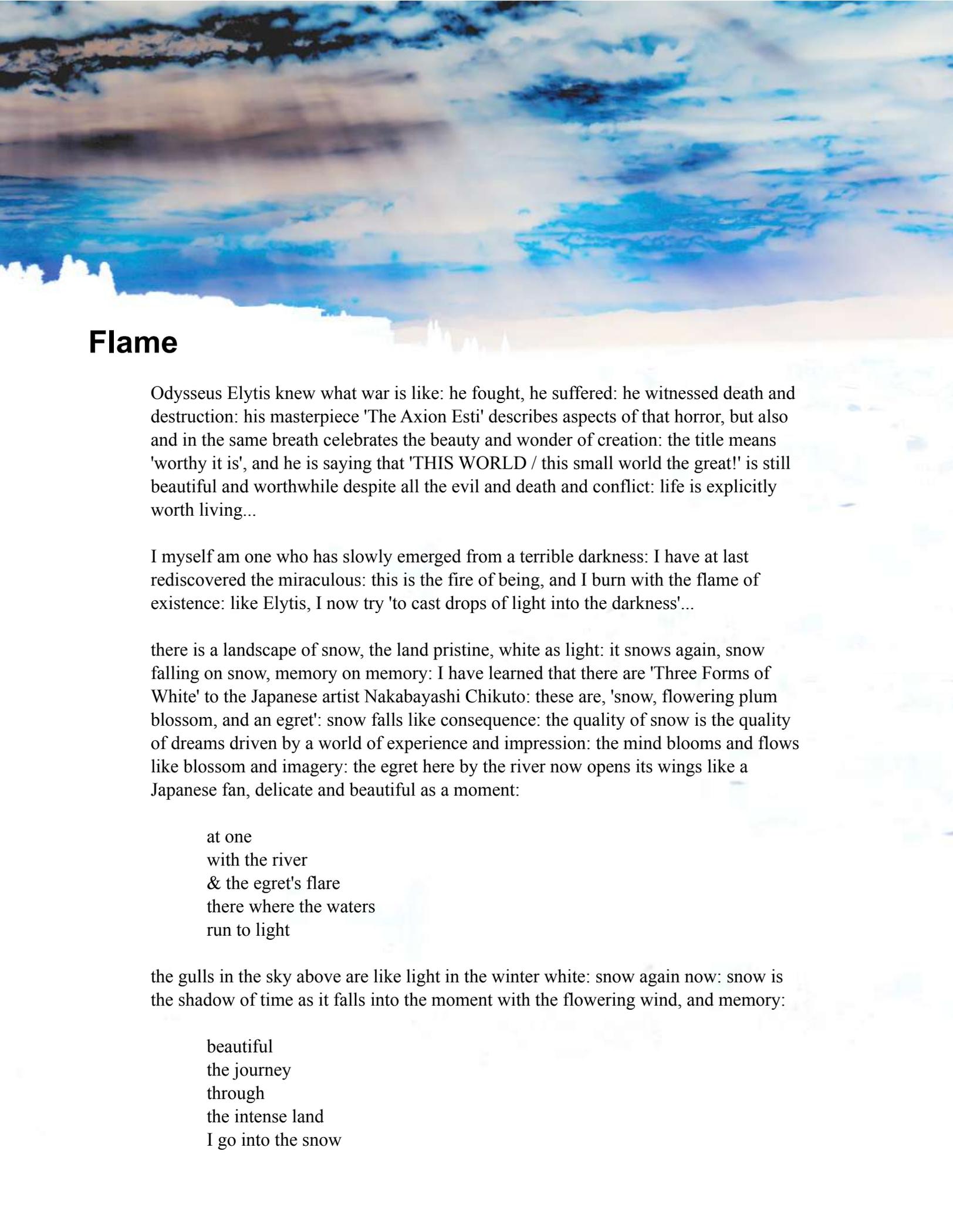
The End of the Day

the whole sky is invocation and fugue: its pink light seems attenuated, rarefied as angels, stretched into moments that evoke a world to be, now, and always, a world into which the gulls go, in wave after wave, as if swirled onto a canvas with all the energy of Van Gogh: where the gulls go is the wild: the Mole Valley extends into its hills, and fades with dusk like a vision, or flower, or rumour: I will always remember these moments, and they echo those years of my youth when I looked into an African sunset and saw the cosmos red and crimson as a nebula, soaring with galaxies, the ground beneath my feet also red, a red clay, or earth:

flowers
burst out of my vase
like stars
such is this universe
of infinities

I am listening to Richard Strauss in the catena of time and space, his 'Four Last Songs': the orchestra sounds as though those violins are played with rainbows, and the songs inhere within me, and so does the setting sun: the music unfolds like weather and wing and celebration and legend: I first heard this sublime work when I was suffering with depression, and it sang to me then, of spring, September, and my death, a going to sleep I would have welcomed as a friend: it is the farewell and the flow, the process of dreaming and the shadow of a dream: now the whole planet seems to drift off into sleep, and I hold a stone in my hand, from the garden, and remember how Newton, at the end of his life, looked back with modesty and thoughtfulness, looking out towards the red horizon, thinking the infinity of dreams, the rouge of an apple, the sky, a red world:

red –
the great sea
of sunset:
worlds are born,
stars



Flame

Odysseus Elytis knew what war is like: he fought, he suffered: he witnessed death and destruction: his masterpiece 'The Axion Esti' describes aspects of that horror, but also and in the same breath celebrates the beauty and wonder of creation: the title means 'worthy it is', and he is saying that 'THIS WORLD / this small world the great!' is still beautiful and worthwhile despite all the evil and death and conflict: life is explicitly worth living...

I myself am one who has slowly emerged from a terrible darkness: I have at last rediscovered the miraculous: this is the fire of being, and I burn with the flame of existence: like Elytis, I now try 'to cast drops of light into the darkness'...

there is a landscape of snow, the land pristine, white as light: it snows again, snow falling on snow, memory on memory: I have learned that there are 'Three Forms of White' to the Japanese artist Nakabayashi Chikuto: these are, 'snow, flowering plum blossom, and an egret': snow falls like consequence: the quality of snow is the quality of dreams driven by a world of experience and impression: the mind blooms and flows like blossom and imagery: the egret here by the river now opens its wings like a Japanese fan, delicate and beautiful as a moment:

at one
with the river
& the egret's flare
there where the waters
run to light

the gulls in the sky above are like light in the winter white: snow again now: snow is the shadow of time as it falls into the moment with the flowering wind, and memory:

beautiful
the journey
through
the intense land
I go into the snow

Valley Of Light

El Greco it was who influenced the young Picasso, with that blue luminosity and otherworldliness, poor people, the destitute, appearing like ghosts in blue composition and atmosphere: the blue silence of paint: Matisse it was who gave us a world-within-a-world, his 'The Joy of Life', all that primitive pink and yellow exuberance, those nude reclining figures slightly distorted, strange landscape: and it was Turner who captured an ocean of light, that radiance swaying endlessly and changeably upon the waters: I think of his 'After the Deluge' (Moses reading from 'Genesis'), as the artist explored Goethe's 'theory of colour': and I remember too Locke's writings on the primary and secondary qualities of matter, as he also explored colour:

theory of colour
theory of matter
the sun strikes the waters
like fire
& turns light into a swan

this holds the theatre of the world, illuminations, essence: it is the miracular and verges on a steeper, deeper light: this is the genius of time, and I hear the voice of the wild...

and the blue light of El Greco and Picasso inheres within the blue light of the kingfisher in my years by the River Mole, and I have long felt a sustained sense of joy in the Mole Valley, something comparable to Matisse, and I see gulls every day wing their formations in the great sky, over the hills where the sun rises on a morning of worlds:

gulls appear
like a constellation
soaring
on the wings of springtime
on the wings of the sky

the swan it is that looms like the light of dawn, the sun in its cosmic wings: the swan swells my consciousness with its white space, like a Bach partita on the violin, bends the light like a bow, becomes the sky:

that ordinary magic
of light and shadow
watching
a philosophy
of swans

the valley opens up, both groundwork and dream, parable of wing and water, impetus of dreams: light is the fountain of this world, and I watch it flowering as a white-wing hawk in the confirmation of the wild: and I have found those fugitive qualities of light here by the river, and I write a sunlit script on the pages of that light, exalted in my innermost irrevocable being, and sing and sing and sing...



Water Lillies

there are some landscapes that have haunted me, followed me like a breeze through the course of my life: and where else to begin than with Giverny? I have learned that Monet endured much poverty in his early career, and suffered the tragic loss of his first wife: there were times when he never knew if they would have a roof over their heads, and times when he was ejected from an inn where he was staying...

but in 1870, after the disastrous war with Prussia, he left Paris and went to London: and it was here that he discovered the work of Turner: that essence of landscape, sketch, mirage, something indeterminate yet wild as nature itself: some say it was Turner who really inspired the Impressionists: Turner achieved the painting and the poetry of light and moment, that radiant ruby of colour: Monet himself produced fields of crimson and the memory of poppies, improvisations, The Thames in a weird light, Waterloo Bridge, impressions – a sunrise: when he settled at Giverny, he designed his sublime garden and pond where, following Turner, he reinvented landscape painting, and was constantly inspired by the presence of water-lilies there:

water-lilies –
the flowering
of
a moment
of light

after nearly going blind, he did regain his eyesight (almost miraculously), and spent his final phase painting those lilies of Giverny a little obsessively: his last paintings go round and round the oval galleries at the Orangerie – a world within a world of worlds:

casting a flower
into the cosmos
floating
through years
of water-lily dreams

suddenly everything blazes white and blind, as light crashes through it all like an avalanche: and I find myself by the mill-pond here in Fetcham uncertain of anything but water and light: here have I seen six egrets round the edges of the pond – flares of white within the wings of reality – that white space: and in the aftermath of this blaze of fire and light I stand by the stillness of water, awake, alive, aware: these waters exist like consciousness and contemplation and the flowers float with that reality of dreaming:

long since settled to silence
as if
the world itself
were about to dream –
water-lilies



OFF THE RAILS

STOPS ALONG THE WAY

By Mark Meyer

I've a long-lasting love for Tokyo; I've been there many times. It's old, it's new, always regenerating itself. It's exhilarating, it's frightening, it's fascinating, gargantuan yet microcosmic. Alone among millions - - lost but, paradoxically, never alone. it's just..... well, Tokyo.

Here's the thing. Ever since I took my first ride on the Arakawa Toden streetcar back in 1993, an ultra-green gaijin, I've remained fascinated by the **strange streetcar's strange allure**. Dumped off the bus at Ueno, I managed to navigate my way through the Tokyo labyrinth to the Toden. How? I'll never know.... perhaps it was the udon and Kirin fortification.

crowded streetcar...
the mysterious smells
of old neighborhoods

One of Tokyo's last two remaining streetcars, the Toden travels a 12.2 km route back and forth through 30 stops, from Waseda to Minowabashi. The route traverses older parts of the city, areas overlooked by most tourists who search elsewhere for excitement. But, for me, each stop along the way presents a unique microcosm of Tokyo life the way it was, is, and is constantly evolving to be.

it starts where it ends
somehow each day
it ends where it starts

at Zōshigaya
on the poets grave
cigarette butts

Guess I've made and haiku-chronicled about half the stops. I'd like to return again, ride those rails once more, back and forth, do the rest of them.....ahh, maybe in the afterlife.

as worn as the rails
he hums a sad melody...
end of the line



Tokyo Train Time

By
Michael
Pronko

The doors shut with a familiar whoosh, everyone balances themselves, settles in, then the motion, too subtle to notice at first, begins. There is a floating sensation, my feet lifting, my mind lifting, the city falling away on both sides.

Some people find Tokyo's trains an annoyance. The Chuo Line—"my" train—is crowded and often late. Other people may use their train time to snooze, text, shop, game, or watch some sports/drama/film unfold on a hand-size screen. For me, train time is meditative.

I reflect on the day ahead or the day done, on the people in gentle motion, the passing stations, the city beyond. I like the train's lulling sound as I'm moved around the city, wrapped in sensations, close to people, taken away from all the stuff I have to do, and put close to people I don't have to know.

I'm not sure if, like Walt Whitman, I contain multitudes, but Tokyo trains definitely do. I think of other passengers as a mantra of lives not lived. It's unsettling to consider all the paths not taken, all the stations unvisited, the areas left untrod. But it's a good unsettling. I like the human hive of a Tokyo train, watching the social dance around me, sensing the meanings in small actions, being drawn in by the magnetism of human complexities.

At times I feel discomfited by the density of the human possibilities spread out before me. The panoply of people is a recitation of life's vast choices. There are hundreds of people on a single train who live other lives, do other things, think other thoughts. My train ride includes an exhibit of lives I'll never see more than a few minutes of. It's not speed dating; it's speed observation.

And just as Joni Mitchell sings in "Hejira," "I see something of myself in everyone." Watching people in various states of sleepiness, I position myself on the continuum of fatigue. Seeing their clothes, I can tell what they're doing that day. From the wrinkles in their brows, I sense their day's pressures and compare them to mine. Of course, they're observing everyone else, too, only they do it more discreetly. Train time is the last mirror before job, school, or meeting significant others.

Salarymen, students, retirees, and workers tend to follow their assigned forms, but their inner lives go unseen. That's where diversity resides. Everyone is so different inside, so unique, so quick to get off at the next station. Is that what a city means? Is that what Tokyo trains mean? It's a writer's *koan* to ponder, process, and store for future narrative use. The train is a bookstore filled with stories being lived.

Some days it seems all people do is peck peck peck on their little screens, lost in the bounce of colorful moving objects, but in fact, people often read. Their hands form little desks. Pecking means not reading, scrolling means skimming, but often the eyes of the readers move calmly and regularly over the

writing below. You can tell they're reading by how their eyes move, their neck angles, their body unwinds. I like to see people engrossed by some inner drama or info intake as their body reclines. It's as amazing as watching someone dream.

I love being so close to the human form, the bodily manifestations of balance and proportion and beauty. I must turn away from it sometimes—it's too much anatomy. Pick a part of the human body you like best, and your ideal of it will appear within the week. The train becomes a life-drawing class, everyone posing, me sketching with mental pencils. How do you get people to look right? Well, they already do.

I marvel at Japanese consumer culture's power to keep everyone clothed so well. Tokyo's consumer kaleidoscope, with shapes and colors spinning into new patterns, is usually demure. It seems like it's all sensible, easy black, but then an outfit pops up that is color-filled and stunning. On the train at least, bad taste is the frame around good taste.

Entering a Tokyo train is entering the consumer world of beer smiles, fake doctors, bright-colored hopes, and exclamatory faces. Our desires return to us in the overhead line of advertising. Video screens over the doors dish out snippets of news, weather, products, quizzes, anointing us all in the religion of buying that flows through every train car.

The more profound side of the daily train journey is not just into the consumer world, and not just a to-and-from of work, play, or home. The train burrows into the heart of Japan, a hard-to-reach destination, with its distancing psyche and odd habits. On the train, I am inside another level of Japanese society and culture. I'm surrounded by it. I'm as welcomed and as rejected as anyone else who pays their several hundred yen, but I have to figure it out for myself.



I find that in-it-but-not-of-it oddly comforting. I like that I'm not like everyone around me. It forces my foreignness back onto me. And yet we're on the same train, eyeing and pushing each other. Train time is for comparing and contrasting, sorting through what matters, what doesn't. I close my eyes and feel the car burrow into the underground labyrinths of Japan, better than a Parisian café for people watching, better than channel surfing or internet scrolling for image overload.

I always try to see past the protective masks to get to the bullying boss, the pressure to pass exams, the irritations of the day's impositions. For the duration of the ride, the worst worries of life are stilled and dormant, channeled into minute gestures. People primp their hair, fiddle with cellphones, check themselves in the reflection of the window, their concerns held like extra shopping bags. Watching people on Tokyo trains, I am reminded it's not all Disney and light.

Some people on trains are blithely indifferent to train time and more resistant to observation and analysis. I study them too, their masks so complete, so effective. Not everyone's worried. Many accept their uniforms, their commute, the crowd, their lives without a care or thought, happy to do what needs to be done, to dress how one is to look as they travel across the city in the safe armor of conformity.

Or so it seems. Trains are all about seeming. I find it humbling to seem to be just one more body, one more part of the crowd. And not much more. I like that self-effacing feeling of being repositioned in the urban universe of Tokyo. The train accepts all, none denied.

I feel jealous of the kids commuting to school giggling over finger games, sharing video screens, plowing through thick adult legs, cramming test info, or snoozing in refusal. They move so easily on the train. I'm envious it's such a natural environment for them. It's not quite that for me. They know they belong on the train and always will.

Adults, too, ease into the space. Friends, lovers, family, the entire spectrum of social dyads, drop into natural train mode. In the daytime, they're restrained. But at night, loud and loose with drink after a long izakaya chat, they talk, joke, touch each other's forearms, and release their thoughts in the last few minutes before their stop. I like that, too. They're going to get home. I try to overhear their whispered conversations. The tone of their voices harmonizes with the sounds of the train to make Tokyo train music, the calm echoes of the rigors of the Tokyo day.

Even when relaxing, though, the train is intense. Tokyo trains are the place where, as Thirdspace theorist Edward Soja said, "everything comes together... subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, everyday life and unending history." The downtime of the train brings all polarities closer to be seen with greater refinement and understanding.

For me, the time on the train is a bit like the Jewish Sabbath, not a day but an hour or two of non-action. It's time to rethink, reflect, reimagine. I don't really do anything. There's no cleaning, cooking, working, or turning on light switches. The train is a time to STOP doing things and start being something.

Maybe the urban planners had that in mind. I don't mean the government bureaucrats or cityscape architects, but the social forces that give rise to the urban transit system. There's a demand from some deep well inside us for a space in motion, a place to be together where opposites meet, for the hope to get somewhere in life and return home again.

Without trains, Tokyo would not be itself, Tokyoites would not be themselves, and I wouldn't be myself in Tokyo. Bodies need moving, and minds need moving, too. Among the millions of Tokyo spaces, the train is the one space I can't be without. I like taking the time to check in on humanity. I walk off the train restored, content that everyone's all right.



Art by

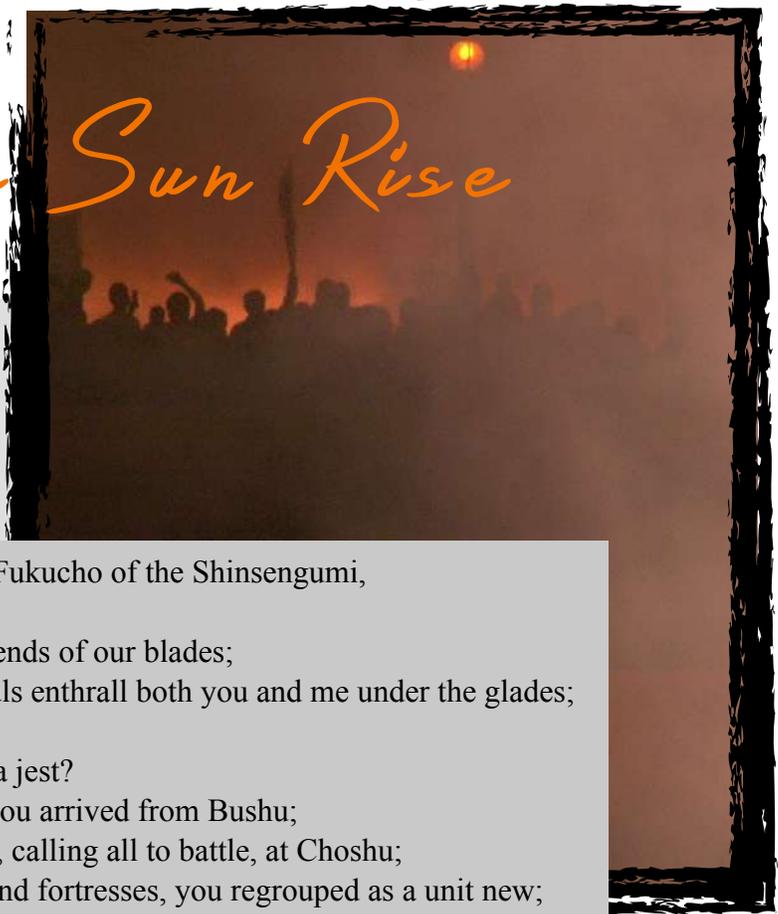
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May The Sun Rise

By Dibyasree Nandy



To Hijikata Toshizō-san, Oni-no-Fukucho of the Shinsengumi,

The sun glints on the opposite ends of our blades;
And yet the same swirls of petals enthrall both you and me under the glades;
Do you not detest unrest?
Equality, hope for better days, a jest?
With ambitions in your heart, you arrived from Bushu;
Lost a teacher, I raised my flag, calling all to battle, at Choshu;
Supporting crumbling castles and fortresses, you regrouped as a unit new;
Called an ogre with ideals not few.
We opposed, hence dubbed terrorists, barbarians, crude;
Driving away usurpers, is that wrong? Those words hurt; they sound rude;
Locked within grey cages many a time;
Wondered, what was my crime?
Had there been no storms, no tempests;
No tensed soldiers huddled in the tents;
We could've shared drinks, the moon glistening on the surface, rippling;
The lanterns casting a red glow on factions all, uniting.
O Wolf Mighty;
Flames along the skyline, most unsightly;
Let the hail rain down;
Both shall be calmed, no king, no crown.
Enemies, true;
As the era flew;
Connected, linked, the steel in our souls;
Compatriots we are, my friend, shan't live to see our goals.

From someone who wishes for a brighter future just as much as you do;
Takasugi Shinsaku,
Commander of the Kiheitai.

Editor's note: Hijikata Toshizō fought to maintain Shogunate rule and Japanese isolationism. He died in 1869 during the final battle of the Boshin (civil) war. Takasugi Shinsaku fought against Tokugawa's shogunate armies and was a key proponent of the Meiji Restoration having studied with Shoin Yoshida. Hijikata and Takasugi, though on opposing sides, never fought each other.

Thank you for reading White Enso. It was our pleasure to review the submissions and offer you the best.

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Thank you for your support.

Linda and Ellen