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Translated by Jordan A. Y. Smith

The Yamanba's Dream

In a closed away garden
A bird sang out
A butterfly circled the space between flowers
And I, as a poet once did,
Sang to myself,
“All's right with the world!”

Higher than a rampart
Ash trees stretch their leafy branches
Banksia roses
Spend their last covering gaps in the hedges
This is a small paradise
Let's take a nice nap
No one
Will come pushing their way through the wall of thorns

Swept pure sunlight streams down
A safe place
In the corner a deep well stands covered
I have finally managed to arrive
Walking along the banks of a waterless river
Stealthily Though, as a landmark
Trailing shreds of memories as I went

Neither killers nor princes will enter
 A miniature of Mother Nature itself
 I am ruler of this small space
 Don't strain to listen to the water's sound
 Now I will keep watch
 Over this eternal early afternoon

Burn scars on arms flashed boldly,
 A woman naps
 This life on the riverside the children glared at as an enemy
 I searched for the whereabouts of the *hagoromo*
 Camped out in the tent on the shore
 Staving off starvation by eating the native snakes
 The sounds deep in my ears
 I harmonized with the winds high above
 Circling the mountain range jutting from my dream tableau
 Now This large woman with body relaxed
 Like the evening horizon Directly over the line between time zones
 Limitless
 Reposes on her side

The crows have eaten up the scraps of memory
 The well long since gone dry
 When I wake from the nap
 I'll sweep the garden once more
 Today
 Since I cannot hope to see the sunset
 Let's close the gate early

(July 7, 2004)
 from *The Road Home* (Kiro, 2008)

Waiting

I ate an apple
The apple of legend
And because I ate it
Ended up meeting you
It took more than I had
To chew it up
In this hole
Coffin-like
Though I've been long awaiting
The one who will come to greet me
That small boat gliding through the forest
The one who gave me the apple
The one with such malice
Like radiation
Circulating through the area,
No one draws near
No one peers into the hole
The apple
As yet round as ever
Inside my body
Is waiting
To dissolve—
For acidity to overtake it—

from *Sea of Blue Algae* (Aoi mo no umi, 2013)

Gravity

Rapidly growing heavier
 That's how much
 Time has passed
 The insides of my stomach
 Stuffed with rocks
 At first it was red apples
 No gastric fluids flowing
 In this parched cave
 Gray piled on gray
 All an indistinguishable
 Mass of rock
 No longer able to move my body
 To get out of here
 I will have to split my stomach
 And then the box
 Outside that
 A deep bramble forest
 If I can escape from that
 A white plain A white sun
 A distant long-ago
 Utopia
 Or a detour
 Or simply some prank
 Ah, I've been here so long
 The woodcutter never came
 No magic spell of salvation
 What slipped from my lips
 Was that odorless, dreadful wind.
 Was she still there,
 Bearing colorless fossilized apples
 Free of poison
 Long journey
 Infinite pages of sand
 How many ashen lumps
 Can I go on carrying,
 Not just my share
 But theirs too?

Is there nothing to smash it with?
This long
Anti-monogatari,
Its gravity

from *Sea of Blue Algae* (Aoi mo no umi, 2013)

To the Boat

In the wall of algae, I opened a hole
 And peeked outside
 A blue kelp forest spread before me
 Though I've been so protected
 I've become so lost
 Never reached the bottom
 Heavy and light Sinking and floating
 Not night
 Not day
 Won't you just choose one?
 Suddenly, bringing me here
 For this surprise attack
 Melancholic
 Blue algae labyrinth
 Isn't there some path?
 Limits of a wandering lost child
 Confined to a single place
 I wonder how much time has passed
 Defenseless
 Brooding
 Beds of kelp
 Coiling slippery smooth depression
 Drowsily
 Sleeping through
 A cozy eternity
 Without time, without the other
 In a vacuum of
 Weightlessness
 A colorless solitude
 Floating
 Spreading outward
 Somewhere
 In that bluegreen forest
 A boat awaits
 Run aground
 Tinted bright blue

That shipwreck
Just as it arrived
The little boat
You abandoned
Is waiting
To get there
Submerged in blue
Cutting across the blue
Let the seaplants carry us
Our swaying
Trustworthy guard
Wound into a narrow opening
If I don't go that far,
My hollow stomach
My limbs
Torn apart
And carried off
Surely will come back, dancing
Please give me the blue
If I can make it there,
I'll return home alone,
No welcoming
No sending off
On a boat with oarsman vanished

from *Sea of Blue Algae* (Aoi mo no umi, 2013)

Stained Glass

Crafting stained glass,
 I place myself inside
 Become the glittering smooth of the surface
 Intercepting the dark interior space and
 Outside world flowing boundless light
 So as to shine
 Surface of a fixed single dimension
 Inserted so both my hands dangle
 The saints surround me
 A Gothic window safeguards my position
 My flesh
 Honor of the wound
 Multidimensional yearning of the one who atones
 Four faces Eight hues
 Comprised of fragments
 Radiant woman of beatitudes
 Limitless fatigue of darkness and light
 Invisible night and
 A salvation of white reticence
 Its eternal drama
 Protected by Gothic techniques,
 Taken in,
 This translucent me

from *At the End of Spring* (Haru no owari ni, 1976)
 English published in *The High Window*, 2017

If You Happen into a Deep Sleep

If you happen into a deep sleep,
An awakening will certainly follow,
Just as when the seasons change
And the field grasses put forth new buds

If you're riding on a train,
It's fine to send parting glances back
Toward all those things left behind
A man standing transfixed on a river embankment,
Young siblings holding hands at a railway crossing,
All a momentary farewell,
The speed of things disappearing behind,
Which I cannot run back to regain
On these legs

Drifting off to sleep,
In a deep cylinder
Spinning away
Slipping away
Not enough, no matter how far it goes
Dropping
Bottomless temptation
Resigned to fall even to the underworld,
Yet never arriving
At the wound
Awakening's reliable
Aspiration
What is drifting to sleep amidst echoes
Reverberating nothing through the deep phantom valley
Out of the mist
Making its way home
Soundless sound
Never departing, echo of time

from *Sea of Blue Algae* (Aoi mo no umi, 2013)

The Forgetful Aster

Forgotten
So completely
Did I feign longing, now
Forgotten
So very distantly
Did I gaze at an invisible sky, now
Forgotten
So very many
Songs of lament did I sing, now
Forgotten
So very rich
The pride of its lavender, now
Already completely
Completely forgotten:
This summer's end

Written in 2015, “Miyako wasure”
English Published in *The High Window*, 2017

The Lushun Museum

The oasis gushed water
Surroundings completely greened
Those things
Driven to another world deep underground
Tenaciously
Hiding
Eventually the water dried up
From times when the green was buried in sand
Those things
Gradually
Aimed for the earth's surface
Eventually
Became rulers of the world above ground
A circle of nine
Exactly like
That which came to be called life
Long enduring
Leaving faint traces of their color
Like that which came to be called eros
Fascinating
Beckoning
Riveting the eyes
Snatching away the heart
All of you—
What's your message?
In this way
Such stately display
Blurring long ago with now
Mingling life with death

Perhaps yearning to declare
 That this is its essence
 A civilization may perish
 Doesn't matter—
 A dynasty may perish
 A revolution may destroy something
 With unchanging expression,
 Like all of you,
 Survival is impossible
Memento mori, we might rather say
 So, you seek a way
 To live on and on?
 This is how
 You seek to delight
 All that meets your eye?
 You want its beauty praised?
 —Those thin arms and legs,
 That universal facial expression
 The acacia trees too, in full bloom,
 Aged buildings of this museum
 Not even a century has passed
 Newcomers
 Vanish more quickly
 Than you
 Giving up easily
 Fugitives
 Declare, that's enough
 Along with the green
 You old timers of the world
 This civilization too
 Will live on
 A bit longer
 Just as it is
 Just as it is

from *Sea of Blue Algae* (Aoi mo no umi, 2013)

The Fossil Museum

I rose up through the long darkness,
Slowly, taking my time
I reflect,
Was there such thing as time?
Long, or brief?
This
Isn't something I came to understand
By myself
A tree?
A rock?
Upward, upward
Gradually
Obstinately
Through my surroundings
Substance that grows soft
Downward, downward
Steadily
Engraving time
Sense
Breaking down form
Taking in things that come falling down

Ah, how to describe this hardness
Long-living
This chill
That cannot be absorbed

Remaining here
Just as it is
One hundred billion years
Two hundred billion years
It did not move
Or disappear

Unmelting body
 Goodbye
 Warm moisture
 Goodbye
 Unwakening sleep
 Far and near
 Small and large
 Just as it is
 Unbreakable volition

It shook in the wind
 Seeking sunshine and rain
 Extended its limbs
 As far as it could
 Remnants of consciousness
 In a dream
 Did flowers bloom all around?
 Like a rock
 Staying silent
 Like a giant tree
 Revering the heavens
 Leading the charge into solitude
 That time
 That small body
 Did your heart close
 Dreaming of forever?

Suddenly realizing,
 I'm being watched
 Hero in hard glass
 Laid bare
 In first bloom
 Obstinate trying to survive,
 I became rock
 With such beauty
 Such youth,
 Under Medusa's glare
 From perishable beauty
 To undecaying solidity

And
To refined glory
Illuminated glass case
Incandescent spotlight
First offense of an immortal war criminal
First achievements discovered
Eternity in glass
Though at most, a one-hundred-billion-year
Moment's worth of events
A one-act play performed
In a large building
First flowers to blossom
Epic of obscurity
Incomprehensible to scholars
Where are the screenwriters?
They've arrived so late
The directors
Colorless
Formless
Without gestures or lines
This skit with
Such a fine mood
Such a bright stage
Anything, everything
Contained in
This deep emotion

from *Sea of Blue Algae* (Aoi mo no umi, 2013)

Wings

So easy to see through,
Tiny,
Ever so transparent,
Through their clarity:
The ends of this universe

A spring day in this wide world,
Thin,
Ever so intricate,
Converging in a single line:
The sounds of water underground

Resting on the branch of a giant tree,
So enormous, so bright,
Until from here it flies off to vanish,
Hiding nothing, illuminating nothing,
Alone it perches.

(January 21, 2017)

The White Rabbit's Love

You, always silent,
You, always by my side,
Is your distant gaze trained
somewhere I know not,
or are you gazing at me?
Something approaches:
a red sphere deep in my heart,
imbibing me,
imbibing me,
I yearn to travel this globe
in your unblinking
eyes

from *Rabbit in the Garden* (Usagi no iru niwa, 2020)

Excerpt from *Tokyo Sabbath*

Aujourd'hui, Mamie est morte
 Ou peut-être est-ce demain.
 À Tokyo, c'est un jour plus tôt.

Today, grandmother died.
 Or maybe it was tomorrow.
 After all, Tokyo is a day ahead.

A morning like any other
 Sunlight streams in from the outer reaches
 Some tidings surely will arrive
 Moment of awakening
 A single moment
 Foretold these past two-thousand years
 The shadows elongate, fade,
 Was someone there?
 Something trying to manifest?
 Things that are and things that are not there
 And words that never became words
 Tales told only within the heart,
 Light and shadow,
 Intermingling perhaps?
 Or rather,
 With cool indifference,
 Receding from each other?
 Yesterday and today
 Just another long-ago
 Endless long-ago
 Inadequate conclusion
 A long, boring tale,
 Raw, unprocessable heaps
 Of information on those who've lived

However always
The notice
Too many notices
To pay proper notice
For now, pack up the crucial things
And head out for home,
In that imperceptible
Untouchable time
Somehow making it in time
Toward the time of sabbatical
Toward that someday
Perhaps
It will be revived
Beginning and ending
Both uncertain
At that moment
Within that tale

Backpack shouldered,
I cross the Pacific breakwaters
Heading for the other side
Nine-thousand kilometer journey
Five grandchildren
Raised by their grandmother
Sleeping steadily
For the past two-thousand years
Telling me her tales
For the past two-thousand years
Tales
Uninterrupted
Badgering, persisting, “And then what, and then what...”
Then, “Enough That’s enough,” I plug my ears

The stories of strangers
Will be my dreams tonight,
Though I could never meet them,

I always met them
 Inside the tales,
 Grandmother's grandchildren,
 Trying to be born,
 They've become grandfathers
 Grandmother's grandchildren
 Always a different name
 Always coming home
 Two-thousand year distance
 In two thousand years
 Her body invisible
 Not fretting over time
 Lying down,
 Back to being grandmother
 Just like
 The albatross
 Revived from the brink of extinction
 Piloted on
 A journey to annihilation
 Ignorant to time
 One day came home
 Stood at the roadside
 And to the people passing by
 Told tedious tales
 Of unknown people
 Survivor narratives
 Always come home

Whether swept off in the spring tides
 Or from the bottom of a giant whirlpool,
 Tales that should have concluded
 Prolonged narratives
 Though they're tedious
 They're scary
 Scary is
 Beautiful
 Beautiful is
 A precipice

Continued without pause
Night after night, the dream
A cobbled, patchwork mess
Suddenly It leaps down
Into pitch-black sleep
Navigation into extinction
Who could that be running out front?
A hint of the familiar
As though if I pursued, I could call out
He's not alone
It magnifies:
No face or limbs
The soul of air

* * *

My, two-thousand years already passed
Since that distant day
when I went East to meet her,
to offer up scented oils
I do not yet need them
When two-thousand years have passed,
Please come back to me
At that time,
You can listen to all the stories
For the sake of that time,
For the sake of washing an elderly woman's body,
Let us bring scented oils,
An array of them,
For the sake of bearing witness to that moment

Sure enough, you've been right out in the lead
Must have walked forever
Haven't stopped since back then
Always in the present
Knowing nothing about life
Even less about how to live

What you do know
 Is only yourself
 Even when the rain soaks you to the bone
 Even when exposed to the beating sunlight
 You return to the start
 Winds blowing past,
 You push on
 Through pain too
 After that moment
 It's all tales of the old days
 At times, floating amid the algae of mourning
 Never were you lost,
 Never did you change,
 A sponge, absorbing all,
 Impurities wrung out,
 It has returned
 To its original state,
 Your pure heart—
 That's why my daughter abandoned you
 My daughter is not here
 She never comes home
 Already, two thousand years
 Have passed since she left
 Where she is,
 When...
 No sight of her since that time at our hilltop home,
 House of flames,
 Of its charred remnants,
 Nothing remains but my daughters' holiday dolls,
 Taken along to the evacuation center
 From the hilltop to the burning river,
 Bellowing sea of flame
 All that survived
 Was that handsome
 Little doll,
 The fever tree too caught fire,
 A two-thousand year absence

I sent a letter from the Dead Sea
Has it arrived?
Please give me your daughter's hand in marriage
We stand surrounded by the desert
We are about to climb Masada,
We

Will survive even a genocide,
Please let me call you mother
Even if six million people die,
We will survive
Please give me your daughter's hand
Even if we have to hide in a spy's house,
We will wait it out, you'll see.

He was a saint,
Free from all desire,
And resentment,
And gossip,
And anger,
And making unpleasant faces,
Even when he couldn't understand the language,
As calm and even as ever,
That's why she threw him away:
Child of wrath,
She up and left,
From the house of her birth,
From the flames,
From the hunger,
From the peace,
From the full belly,
She thought houses were made for leaving
Though she earned a foreign degree,
She left them scattered like scrap paper,
And never came home to show her parents.
Perhaps she threw it all into the Dead Sea—
Those endless hours passed in libraries

What is it you've amassed in the heart?
 Do you store it up to spew it out?
 Did you erase it all?
 Or did you leave it somewhere?
 After all this time, you can't possibly be searching for it, can you?
 So few men
 Can truly become fathers (did you know?)
 Did you not understand?
 After giving birth to all these children,
 They end up running off,
 Is the riverside house empty?
 You're a saint,
 Without a church of your own,
 You walk the earth
 With the brilliance of glass on your crown,
 And so you have come, to wash my body,
 The first to arrive,
 Bearing scented oils from two thousand years ago,
 Carried from afar with sacred devotion,
 My eternal sons-in-law,
 Married for two thousand years,
 Experts in survival,
 Which is why she cast you away,
 Something no one would wish to have to live through.

Living and dying are one and the same,
 Beyond them
 Lies the cosmos, such groundless fears—
 What is there:
 A jumble of life and death,
 With the silent dead.

What glows in the aging embers:
 Things exploded and
 Easy self-destruction
 Momentary tumult and
 The unnoticed exit from the stage

It's just the darkness,
It's just an interlude,
An interlude of eons,
A finale in the cosmic playhouse,
A poet's hypothesis,
The tall tale of a lifetime,
The tale of *Aniara*, of nothingness,
Even though I couldn't see her,
Even though she didn't come home,
I know she has been there,
But do send her these tidings,
You've all been walking so long,
Two thousand years of food
Stuck in your throats,
Voiceless,
Trekking on,
Staying on the kibbutz in Israel,
A town overrun with cats.

Israel, nation of apparitions,
Powerful apparitions,
Aesthetics of memory,
Silence abandoned,
Verdant country,
At work on the kibbutzim,
Raising chickens and cows.

Yet the desert
Eternally surrounds it,
A sea of ominous grains
Lapping gently,
Premonitions of atrocity,
Rustling faintly,
Omens of annihilation.

(Tokyo Sabasu, 2015)

Hydrangeas—*Garden 6*

Rather odd for the season of early summer rains
Hydrangeas, blooming under blue sky
Under the all-illuminating sunshine
No time for their color to deepen,
Too rushed for a full transformation
Without quite livening up the festival,
They burst into full blossom

Don't hurry
Don't hurry
But hydrangeas are after all a flower
Whether they hurry or not
This year will end

(August 2007)
from *The Road Home* (Kiro, 2008)

Excerpt from *Intermission*: “Prologue”

Ascending the tall monolith in the elevator,
You most certainly arrive
At a room of the twenty-first century.
Shining in its center is a hope like cherries.
In that fruit's soft flesh,
Future laboratory, chocked full of prophesy,
And you,
You falter momentarily
At the frigidity of flesh so cold as to evoke stone.
A water-bloated drunk in amber,
Invited by a hint toward ripeness dancing in the flames,
Attempts to entrust its flesh to the ring of theory.
Hoping to be impregnated,
The zealous conspirator awaits the seed.
Affection, enduring for countless centuries,
Desire, ever returning to its point of origin
Shooting at the future,
The boomerang deftly returns to the atom itself.
This is how you were
Absorbed into the seeds,
Scattered and sewn on the great fields of the atom.
Sliding deep down into the cylindrical tower,
Switching easily between sizes like Alice,
You are a twenty-first century native.
You
Pry open the eyelids of song,
Stick your head into its irises,
Seeking the placenta to be transplanted.
Words refuse to be born
From the mouths of the faintly waving grasses,
Set aflame by the odorless wind,
In the abyss of the split continent
Only the phantom of the hushed earth's floor floats up.
Blood sac awaiting some future with primeval depths to spill down,

You
Spurred on by an envious hunch about destiny,
Whatever shall you birth,
Splitting the grasses,
Clawing through mud,
Crawling insect-like you go,
Thus you transcend a continent,
With time having vanished,
You suppose you've reached your warm bed of silence,
Some yonder of memory,
Death's very pit, beyond civilization and history,
Closed behind two soft doors,
Those of caresses and mindlessness,
This is how you
Bore out a cherry pit in the ground,
Sit yourself down in the dark circle
And become a bloodstain.

from *Intermission* (Makuai, 1980)

Poem in Blue

Where memory goes fading on
Blue sky
Tumbling to the field, I follow
Where the blue ends, could long-ago be there?
Where blue goes blank
A white nothing
Better yet, a not-darkness
Sky envelops everything around
A meadow's worth of oblivion
Nowhere so much as a trace
I
Inhale that faded memory
Flavorless
Blue

(January 7, 2005)
from *The Road Home* (Kiro , 2008)