

Imitated from the Japanese

W.B. Yeats

A most astonishing thing
Seventy years have I lived;
(Hurrah for the flowers of Spring
For Spring is here again.)
Seventy years have I lived
No ragged beggar man,
Seventy years have I lived,
Seventy years man and boy,
And never have I danced for joy.

Everything is Going to be All Right

Derek Mahon

How should I not be glad to contemplate
the clouds clearing beyond the dormer window
and a high tide reflected on the ceiling?
There will be dying, there will be dying,
but there is no need to go into that.
The poems flow from the hand unbidden
and the hidden source is the watchful heart.
The sun rises in spite of everything
and the far cities are beautiful and bright.
I lie here in a riot of sunlight
watching the day break and the clouds flying.
Everything is going to be all right.

THE SNOW PARTY

by Derek Mahon

for Louis Asekoff

Basho, coming
To the city of Nagoya,
Is asked to a snow party.
There is a tinkling of china
And tea into china;
There are introductions.
Then everyone
Crowds to the window
To watch the falling snow.
Snow is falling on Nagoya
And farther south
On the tiles of Kyoto.
Eastward, beyond Irago,
It is falling
Like leaves on the cold sea.
Elsewhere they are burning
Witches and heretics
In the boiling squares,
Thousands have died since dawn
In the service

Of barbarous kings;

But there is silence
In the houses of Nagoya
And the hills of Ise.

A Grain of Rice (1995)

Michael Longley

Wrap my poem around your chopsticks to keep them clean.
I hardly know you. I do not want you to die. Our names
Fit on to a grain of rice like Hokusai's two sparrows,
Or else, like the praying mantis and the yellow butterfly,
We are a crowd in the garden where nothing grows but stones.
I do not understand the characters: sunlight through leaves,
An ivy pattern like fingers caressing a bowl, your face
In splinters where a carp kisses the moon, the waterfall
Up which its fins will spiral out of sight and into the sky.
Wrap my poem around your chopsticks to keep them clean.
Does it mean I shall not have taken one kiss for ever?
Your unimaginable breasts become the silk-worm's shrine.

The Weather in Japan (2000)

Makes bead curtains of the rain,
Of the mist a paper screen.

A Natural History of Armed Conflict (2007)

The wood of the yew
made the bow. And the arrow.
And the grave-side shade.

Way of Peace (2007)

i.m. Eamon Keating

In Adidas runners
and white karate suit
with the simple crest—
a dove round a fist,
Wado Ryu,
the way of peace—
down the Downs,
past the gate house gate,
a chubby druid,
a breathing oak,

a shifting mountain,
following patterns
modelled on monkeys,
eagles and cranes,
stray dogs and dragons,
bird man of Portlaoise,
puff-jowled adder,
dancing bear,
a man in his 60s
somehow still
sane enough to play;
and me, 16,
hidden among trees,
glimpsing the way.

Fuji Film (1998)

Ciaran Carson

I feared the yen was starting to decline again,
Devaluing my take-home honorarium.
I joined the crowd that swarmed beneath the acid rain
Like schools of fishes in a vast aquarium.

Some wore sharkskin suits that shimmered like a rainbow;
Some wore surgeons, with a white mask where their mouth should be;
Some bore barracuda grins, and some wore minnow;
One fat businessman swam like a manatee.

I saw two lobster samurai produce their swords
Of infinitely hammered folded Zeno steel,
That glittered like the icy blue of Northern fjords.

I snapped them slashing floating dollar bills in half
Beneath the signs for Coke, the giant neon roulette wheel,
The money index pulsing like a cardiograph.

Light

Celia de Fréine

Each time he dropped a coin in the slot
and turned the telescope to scan the meadow,
trees and ruins, light glimmered in the distance
but disappeared from view before the money ran out.

He kept dropping in more coins, focusing
on where the light had been and each time
discovered it had moved even as fog

descended and mantled it from view.

The wind grew louder at his back, the grass
damper beneath his feet and still he kept
searching in his pocket, spending what little
he had to capture that spark, if just for a moment.

When he was spent, the moon covered in cloud,
the grass in dew, he stumbled towards home,
coming on a river that cargoed towards the ocean
a shoal of lotuses, each with a lit candle at its core.

As the land sloped, the shoal gained momentum
before cascading over the cliff, a cacophony
of light, seen only by the lone vagabond
on the beach strumming his shamisen.

Joseph Woods

Where the word for beautiful is clean (2001)

What brought me out that morning
was the sound of someone on the roof
a monkey glanced down, then stared
away at the something interesting,
eating the core of a stolen apple,
hungry and halfway down its mountain.
I turned to see, snows had arrived
and Kyoto was below in its dip
surrounded by mountains gone white
overnight. For miles between,
millions of roof tiles covered and clean.

And we can finish with this video inspired in J.Woods' poem "Sailing to Hokaido" (in Portuguese, my translation):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WDVNFEWAvmg>