

英 詩 の 世 界

A Little Poetry for You

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What is English poetry? What is a poet? When we hear the word *eishi* (English poetry) the image we have is that English poetry is very difficult and far from practical and therefore of little use in our everyday life. But is it really so? Today I'll explore poetry through my poems and the poet James Kirkup and try to figure out the essence of poetry.

First of all, let's ask ourselves, "What makes poetry?" Is it some divine power that gives us supernatural strengths? Is it something special? Or do we find it in our everyday life? James Kirkup says:

"Poetry is part of man, part of language, it's a natural thing.
It's as natural as breathing, walking, running, the beating of
the heart, the movement of the blood in our bodies."

We all understand that everybody is breathing, running and our hearts are beating and our blood is moving but we are not all poets. What is really necessary to be a poet? What kind of attitude should we have to write poetry? Someone who writes poetry is always aware of things around him. He cannot be deceived by the surface of things, however tempting they may be. He looks into the heart of things and so express his honest and frank opinions which may sometimes offend people and the society. But he cannot help being a critic. He cannot help saying something that, he hopes, will help mend the society.

Also a poet has fresh eyes like the eyes of the baby. Everything he sees comes freshly in his mind and he never tires of common things around him. "Common things" are never common in his eyes. And

if they are expressed through his words, they become something that no one has ever seen or imagined before.

Here are some of the poems that I wrote on various occasions. Words of poetry come when one is very happy or angry or sad or when some catastrophic things happen.

LIFE, MY FRIEND

Life, come by my side.
Talk and smile with me.
You're my friend.

You're sometimes indifferent,
Sometimes harsh,
Sometimes cruel.

I love you, Life, though,
'Cause I'm sometimes indifferent,
Sometimes harsh, and sometimes cruel.

When I am happy, you look so happy.
When I am sad, you look so sad.
When I am alive, you look so alive.
When I am dead, do you also die?

Probably you do.
'Cause you are my shadow.
You are me and I am you.
We both die when time is mellow.

BEAUTY IN YOUR EYES

Child: Mom, people say I am ugly.
Am I ugly? Am I?

Mom: No. You're beautiful.
Child: Mom, you're lying.
Mom: No, I'm not. I'm not.
 You're beautiful and dear to me.
Child: Then, is everybody lying?
Mom: No, probably not.
Child: How can it be? Which am I?
 Ugly or beautiful? Tell me.
Mom: You're beautiful to me.
Child: Then what is beauty?
Mom: It's something you love.
 When you love something
 It becomes beautiful.
 Beauty is in your eyes.

NUCLEAR BABY

Let me see you smile, Baby.
Let me hear you laugh.
Let me touch your lips, Baby.
Let me kiss your hips.

Your eyes are so innocent,
Your hair so soft,
Your arm so fragile,
Your ears so pricking.

Why are you here
On this filthy, little earth?
Who has sent you here
In this crazy, little world?

This is not the world for you.
Go back to where you were.

This is not the place for you.
Go back to where you belonged.

Come back again, my dear
The day after we get zapped
When some devil pushes the button
To crash the whole, whole world.

I'll help you, my dear
To go back to your place.
My hands to your neck,
And now you're back to dust.

JAP

You hesitate to call me Jap.
You call me Japanese instead
But mean the same thing.

You hesitate to call my buddy nigger
You call him different way
But mean the same thing.

You sound pleasant.
You look kind.
You taste sweet, honey.
But you're only condescending.

Don't you ever do that
If you think I'm your love.
Don't you ever trifle
If I'm worthy of your love.

LOVE UNITED

The way you smile
The way you look
The way you walk
The way you speak
My eyes are fixed.

I feel
Even in your absence
Your breathing,
Your heart beat,
Your voiceless voice,
And your pounding pulse.

My life without you
Is not worth living.
My time without you
Is not worth spending.

Give me your hand
Give me your love
Give me everything
And I'll give you my everything back.

LOVE BROKEN

Why do you leave me, my dear?
I thought you were the only one
That I loved and cared.

You gave me words
That made me believe
That you really loved and cared.

Now that you're gone
Those words were
Just hollow, bubbling words
That nobody pays attention to.

You were my only one.
I was your one of many.
You told me lies
That I thought were truths.

What a fool am I
To cry for lost love!
Shouldn't I know
That men are like that?
Shouldn't I know
That life is like that?

TWO OF US

AMERICAN: Hey, man, I'm an American.
White, white, not black.

JAPANESE: So what, so what?

AMERICAN: Am I not something?

JAPANESE: Are you, are you?

AMERICAN: Am I not better
Than Africans—those homeless niggers?

JAPANESE: Oh?

AMERICAN: Am I not better
Than Jews—those moneymongers?

JAPANESE: Go on.

AMERICAN: Am I not better
Than Arabs—those niggers wrapped in sheets?

JAPANESE: I don't know.

AMERICAN: Am I not better

Than Japanese—those silent sneaky gooks?
 JAPANESE: What makes you,
 Makes you believe that?
 AMERICAN: Because……because I am an American.
 JAPANESE: ……

 JAPANESE: Hey, man, I'm a Japanese.
 Not Koreans, not Chinese.
 AMERICAN: So what, so what?
 JAPANESE: Am I not something?
 AMERICAN: Are you, are you?
 JAPANESE: Am I not better
 Than Koreans—those filthy little rats?
 AMERICAN: Oh?
 JAPANESE: Am I not better
 Than Chinese—those out-dated pigs?
 AMERICAN: Go on.
 JAPANESE: Am I not better
 Than British—those arrogant conservatives?
 AMERICAN: I don't know.
 JAPANESE: Am I not better
 Than Americans—those incurable optimists?
 AMERICAN: What makes you,
 Makes you believe that?
 JAPANESE: Because……because I am that unique Japanese.
 AMERICAN: ……

RUSSIAN ARROGANCE

Russians ruthlessly shot the Korean airplane,
 Hurling the lives of hundreds of people
 Into the cold, indifferent sea,
 Declaring their acts right
 For their own political cause.

Next day
The daughter of a Russian Ambassador
Was shot walking
In the yard of a madman.

Hearing this report,
The father ran
To the place
Where the daughter was lying dead,
A madman standing with a grin.

“How can you,” said the father,
“Shoot this girl so innocent?”
“Are you a devil or what?” he went on.

“She was trespassing my yard,”
Was the cold reply.

“That’s no reason to kill her,”
Said the father angrily.

“Yes. Now you know it.”

“.....”

AMERICA'S CHOICE

President Reagan was angry when
He found the Korean airplane
Shot by the Soviet missile.

Russians were saying
That they didn't know
Anything about the incident.

Reagan must show to the world
With undoubted evidence
That it was Russians' fault

America had the tape of the voice
Of the Russian pilot
Who shot the plane,
Which was enough evidence.

Reagan decided to make a video
Out of this tape and make it
More appealing……but came a
Stop from the CIA.

If America shows
Their own tape,
Their intelligence network
Becomes at stake.

Japan had the similar tape
Which was enough evidence
To show that Russians
Were to blame.

With two choices
Reagan was faced:
Japan or America
To bell the cat.

The decision was Japan;
To use as a front shield
Thinking that America's tape
Was too important
To show to the world,

Insensitively disregarding
That Japan's tape is also important.

Japan was naive enough
To accept America's offer
To act as an "international cooperator"
When in fact it was to act
As a "sacrificing pawn"
In the Russo-American wargame.

SACHIKO—THE WIFE OF A JAPANESE SOLDIER

On the day when we were married
We were separated
Tetsuya going on board
The Senkan Yamato.

He promised to return to me,
Although he knew
That it was going to be
A losing battle.

The Senkan Yamato was on her way
To Okinawa with a heavy gait.
No one believed that she could win
But she had to fight
To save the face of Japan.

Before reaching Okinawa
The Yamato sank
Into the cold sea
With Tetsuya and all the crew.

It was virtually the end of Japan

To the delight of Koreans and Americans.
But who should I turn to:
Japan, Korea or America?

Indeed America killed my dear,
But Japan sent him to fight.
Korea is not responsible for his death.
I cannot blame America,
Nor Japan nor Korea.
All I can do is
To blame myself
Because I could not stop him
From going to this merciless, meaningless war.

Tetsuya, come back and hold me.
You have never touched me, my dear.
If you do not come back
I'll come to you
To sleep with you
In the heaven above.

I have never slept in peace on earth.
Let me sleep in peace in heaven
With this dagger
In my chest!

SONG OF KISS

Kiss me.
Kiss who?
Kiss me.
Kiss me.

Kiss you.

Kiss who?

Kiss you.

Kiss you.

Kiss all.

Kiss who?

Kiss all.

Kiss all.

Kiss me, kiss you, kiss all.

It's fun to kiss you.

Save the animals and the children,

Kiss me, kiss you, kiss all.

It's fun to kiss you.

Sealing them with your KISS.

Kiss me

Kiss who?

Kiss me.

Kiss me.

Kiss you.

Kiss who?

Kiss you.

Kiss you.

Kiss all.

Kiss who?

Kiss all.

Kiss all.

K for Kindness

I for Individual

S for Smiles

S for Salvation

Kiss me.

Kiss who?

Kiss me.

Kiss me.

Kiss you.

Kiss who?

Kiss you.

Kiss you.

Kiss all.

Kiss who?

Kiss all.

Kiss all.

Now it's your time to kiss.

It's your time to hug.

It's your time to love.

Now it's your time to kiss.

It's your time to live.

It's your time to reach out.

Kiss me.

Kiss who?

Kiss me.

Kiss me.

Kiss you.

Kiss who?

Kiss you.

Kiss you.

Kiss all.

Kiss who?

Kiss all.

Kiss all.

LONELINESS

I wake up in the darkness
And see my friend, loneliness.
I see no other people
Except my dear friend, loneliness.

Loneliness, do you know
How much you mean to me?
Loneliness, do you know
How much I owe to you?

You are always with me, loneliness
When I'm with the crowd or
When I'm alone, bringing me
A deep calm and delight.

How can I repay you?
Can I mean anything to you
When you mean everything to me?
Tell me, please, I want to thank you.

You give me a wonderful delight.
You give me sweet idleness.
You give me the joy of living.
You give me everything I need in life.

But I wonder...
Am I giving you back?

Let me quote here from James Kirkup's talk on poetry some of the things that give clues to "What is poetry?" and "What is a poet?"

1. Poetry is the expression of new things and new ideas; things which are seen freshly, seen "for the first time" through the poet's eyes. A poet looking at the world sees it every day freshly, as if "for the first time". He looks at objects and people, scenery and places, machines and all the horrors of modern civilization—as well as its beauties—as if he had never seen them before.
2. Size does not count in poetry. Quantity is not quality in poetry. So the poet can make a great poem about something very small, like a fly or a flea.
3. A poet also tries to look under the surface, to see something inside things which most people cannot see.
4. Poetry is practical as well as visionary. Poets are working with materials—words and ideas—just as the sculptor is working with wood and with the shapes of the grain in the wood.
5. A poet, if he really wants to see the truth of this world, cannot help being a critic in his poetry also, and this is something we find in all our great English poets—in Shelley, in Milton, in Yeats.
6. Poets can be revolutionary: they can be rebellious, irreverent and disturbing to people. They don't fit in to normal society. They don't want to. So they can shock or frighten you. But at the same time they can create enormous pleasure and waken a new interest through the beauty or strangeness of their style.
7. The poet interprets the hidden language of life for us using a universal language, that is, art: art, the universal language that all can understand if they wish to, just as you can understand English or any foreign language if you are

willing.

8. Poets of all countries have a common language which is without words: their interpretation of reality for their fellow men is their language. A good poet is what we call a simultaneous interpreter.
9. Life speaks to the poet directly and life is immediately transmitted through his words and his being. He is a simultaneous interpreter of all experience for us.
10. Poetry is an international language of the feelings, the emotions, just like music or painting or dance or the film, when these reach the state of great art. They all belong to the language of art.
11. If we refuse to listen to poetry, we are refusing life itself, and our lives are less rich than they would be if only we opened our hearts to the poet and his voice.
12. Poetry does not begin with words. Some of the greatest poetic moments are beyond words and can only be expressed in silence or in a simple exclamation like "Ah!" or with an understanding intonation, "So!".
13. Politics has no place in any of the arts. It is the death of poetry.
14. Like the art of letter writing, poetry has been destroyed by modern technical devices like television and telephones, both of which I dislike.
15. People look upon poetry and poets with suspicion and puzzlement or indifference or condescension. But they rarely think of poetry or look at poetry with interest or love or understanding. Sopoets today are the outcasts of Western society.
16. A poem doesn't have to be big and difficult. It can be very small. A three-line poem can contain the world and can be very great.

Let me end this article with James Kirkup's poem that seems to reveal the universal essence of poetry. It's like Japanese Zen. It has Japanese feelings but it doesn't especially have Japanese characteristic. This shows that poetry does not belong to one society or nation. It belongs to everybody. It is a universal language. It is called *Broad Daylight*.

Out of all the world
take this forest.

Out of all the forest
take this tree.

Out of all the tree
take this branch.

Out of all the branch
take this leaf.

And on this leaf
that is like no other

observe this drop of rain
that is like no other.

And in this single drop
observe the reflection

of leaves and branches,
of the entire tree,

of the forest,
of all the world,

the light of stars
in the light of day.