

WAKING TO SNOW

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

BOOKS

Poems to Define the Corona of Silence (Fiddlehead, 1970)

Mantle (Fiddlehead, 1971)

Snowglobe (Fiddlehead, 1973)

Selected Poems (Outland Press, 1977)

In a Canvas Tent (Sono Nis, 1984)

CHAPBOOKS

Heartwood (Finn Hill Arts, 1986)

among what is lost (Cowan & Tetley, 1988)

WAKING TO SNOW

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for Wakana

young green sprouts

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iwama tojishi kōri mo kesa wa toke-somete
koke no shitamizu michi motomu nari

Ice that sealed the rock gaps
this morning starts to melt –
under the moss
water trickles
seeking its Way

Saigyō (1118-1190)

Rebuttal to the First Noble Truth

Cat sleeps in my lute case.

Palestrina motets

and Kona coffee.

Home-baked whole wheat scones with marmalade.

Runes

Sharing a beer with a colleague,
his bald head gleams as he gesticulates
about a lecture he gave at a conference in Taipei:
'Pragmatics in the Japanese Classroom'.

At the bus stop we part:
he to a mortgaged house, a wife and two foxy daughters.
I to this three-mat room,
silence ringing in my ears like a cracked bell.

Dried noodles and beans.
Wash the dishes. Sit for a while,
listening
to the runes of the rain.

That time I went to a fortune teller
my third year at university in Portland, Oregon:
she pored over my palm
then gave my money back.

There's nothing there, she said. Go out and live.

My hands still remember
the weight of walking away
without a history or future:
on my way to learning

how to be an unborn ghost.

My First Guide to Kyoto

Next-door neighbour's
pug-nosed Sakura
tied up all day
whimpering beneath
the stairwell: no
way to treat the
earliest cherry blossoms

in Kyoto.
So I take him for a walk –
rather he takes me,
charging like a stunted
rogue elephant
to the Kamo river's
ecstasy of in-

visible smells where
he poops three times, each
with more strain,
panting and slobbering as
he drags me along
at the end of his
taut leash. Oh

we're sailing now
past some thin old folk
playing a kind of croquet
near the bridge in the ancient
newborn sun,
past some kids crouched
bouncing a ball and chanting,

past endless blocks of
jumbled houses,
blue-tiled roofs glinting
like dragon scales. By now,
Sakura's zonked, able
to scrawl his faint
signature only at irresistible

spots, so we wend
our way home:
small dun dopey boggle-eyed
dog with fur
radiating in tufts,
deep gaze *thank you*
to each other.

Sweeping Leaves in the Cemetery
at Ryōkō-in, 4 a.m.

Bamboo broom
stone lanterns
dead leaves

I've travelled
halfway around the world
to be here

Father

I keep seeing my father
in old men passing
with stooped shoulders
and thrift shop tweed jackets
which never fit.
The same baggy trousers
and jammed necktie,
the same white moustache
carefully trimmed
and thick framed glasses which
don't quite hide
hazel eyes holding
such grief,
I want to embrace him calling
father father
but find myself frozen,
my own bones hunching into
the same question mark.
Anyway, it
turns out to be
somebody else's
father.
The world filled with the same
ancient men:
unladen from wives and children,
walking alone.

Mother Tongue

In the corner house
the old man with cancer in his lungs
listens between spasms
of coughing

to someone calling
his childhood name
beneath the trees

*dear friend
it is quiet here
you will have time
to learn the language of*

wind rain birds