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by Richard H. Minear
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原民喜著

心願の國

Hara Tamiki's
Land of My Heart's Desire

A Translation and Commentary
by Richard H. Minear¹

Hara Tamiki's "Land of My Heart's Desire" is one of the most hauntingly beautiful works of modern Japanese literature. It is also one of the most difficult. The problems lie less in the words themselves than in context and meaning. This essay offers a brief biographical sketch of Hara Tamiki, a new translation, and commentary.²

I. Hara Tamiki, 1905-1951.

Hara Tamiki was born in Hiroshima in 1905, fifth son and eighth child of a prosperous purveyor of clothing to the Japanese military. 1905 was a year of success for Japanese arms, and in an excess of patriotic delight, Hara's father named his new son Tamiki: the people (*tami*) rejoice (*ki*).³

From 1912 through 1923 Hara attended schools in Hiroshima. From 1924 to 1932 Hara was affiliated with Keiō University in Tokyo. After a brief college fling with radical politics, a month-long cohabitation with a Yokohama prostitute whose contract he bought out, and an attempted suicide, Hara married Nagai Sadae in 1933. It was for him an idyllic match. She sheltered him from a world he found hostile and encouraged him to write; inside the cocoon she wrapped around him, he wrote. But in 1939 she was diagnosed as having pulmonary tuberculosis; after five years as an invalid, she died in September 1944.

Incapable of living alone, Hara returned to Hiroshima and moved in

with his older brother at the family home. There he was on August 6, when the atomic bomb fell. After two nights in the open, Hara and his surviving relatives fled to villages west of Hiroshima. Soon Hara returned to Tokyo, where he spent the remaining years of his life. He died a suicide on March 13, 1951.

A writer since his teens, Hara produced poems and fables before Sadae's death and before Hiroshima. After 1945 he wrote Summer Flowers, by common consent the single most distinguished piece of literature written by a survivor of the atomic bomb; other short pieces and poems about the experience of the bomb; stories about his youth and his life with Sadae; a retelling of Gulliver's Travels; a long essay, "Requiem," perhaps Hara's most beautiful work; and the work translated here.⁴

"Land of My Heart's Desire" is Hara's last important work. Indeed, he enclosed it with a farewell letter to Ōkubo Fusao, editor of the journal Gunzō; it appeared there in May 1951, a scant two months after Hara's death. The letter to Ōkubo reads in its entirety:

Dear Ōkubo,
I give you a necktie.
Please be happy.
If Gunzō can't use "Land of My Heart's Desire," please
send it on to Kindai bungaku.⁵

"Land of My Heart's Desire" is made up of eight sections, linked loosely if at all. The longest runs twenty-two lines; the shortest, six lines. This form has its forerunners in traditional Japanese letters: pillow books and miscellanies come immediately to mind. In Hara's case, a significant part of the stimulus is foreign: Rainer Maria Rilke's Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge. Hara used this form to good effect in Summer Flowers, and it is the form he chose for "Land of My Heart's Desire."

Translation is risky at best. An analogy to the world of medicine may illuminate the problem. In attempting to identify the precise bacterium causing an infection, doctors isolate the bacterium and attempt to grow it in a culture, a medium supposedly neutral if not

positively supportive. But some bacteria are so delicate that the culture, weak as it is, overwhelms them.

Hara's writings are like these delicate bacteria. The best translation may function like the supposedly friendly culture, destroying what it is intended to serve. The critic Yamamoto Kenkichi said of Hara: "Amid the frenzied noise of the postwar era, he speaks to us in a faint, soft voice, as if whispering directly from soul to soul; and even though it originates in the single earth-shaking experience, his voice is so pure that only those who listen intently can hear it."⁶ If this is true for those reading Hara's work in the original, it is even truer when we approach those writings through the medium of translation.

II. The Translation.

Land of My Heart's Desire

--Musashina City, 1951

Near dawn, I am lying in bed, listening to the songbirds sing. They are singing to me now from the roof above this room. Now gentle, now sharp, their muffled tones tremble with beautiful anticipation. Can it be that these little friends have grasped the meaning of this hour, of all hours the most subtle, and now are signalling it guilelessly to each other? Lying in bed, I chuckle. Any moment now, I'll understand what they are saying. Right; a bit more time, a bit more time, and I just may reach that point. . . . Were I to be born a songbird next time around and go to visit the land of the songbirds, what kind of reception would they give me? Would I chew on my fingers in a corner then, too, like a bashful child taken for the first time to kindergarten? Or would I try to survey my surroundings intently, with the melancholy gaze of a world-weary poet? But no: how can I do either? I have already been reborn a bird. On a path through a wood beside a lake, I meet a host of people I once loved, now become birds.

"Well, well! You too?"

"Didn't know you were here."

In bed, I lose myself, as if somehow bewitched, in contemplation of such otherworldly matters. In dying, those dear to me cannot leave me behind. Right up to the moment death carries me off, I want to be as guileless as the songbirds. . . .

Am I even now being crushed to bits, swept away into infinity? A year has already gone by since I moved to these lodgings, and for me human isolation has reached, I think, its very limit. This world no longer offers even a single straw for me to grasp. Hence the stars in the night sky that hands over my head, an oblivious canopy, and the trees on the ground that stand at a distance from me seem gradually to draw near me, seem finally about to trade places with me. I may be reduced to a cipher and go ice-cold inside, but those friendly stars and trees are brimming with something infinite, are more resolute than I, or so I think. . . . I actually discovered my own star. One night, on the dark road from Kichijōji Station to my rooms, I had no sooner looked up at the starry sky over my head than a single star among the countless stars caught my eye and nodded to me. What could that mean? But before I could think about what it meant, a great wave of emotion brought tears to my eyes.

It is as if isolation has become a part of the very air. You, my wife, a tear on your eyelash because you had something in your eye. . . . Mother ever so gently using the point of a needle to remove a hangnail from my finger. . . . Insignificant, wholly insignificant events pop into my mind when I am alone. . . . One morning I had a toothache and dreamed about it. You, dead, appeared in the dream. "Which one hurts?" you asked and ran your finger lightly over the tooth. At the touch of your finger I woke up, and the toothache was gone.

Drowsy, almost asleep, I am hit by a sudden electric shock, and my head explodes. Afterwards, after a spasm wracks my body and leaves

me weak, there is silence, as if nothing had happened. Wide awake now, I check to see whether my senses are functioning. Nothing wrong, it seems, with any of them. Then what can it have been just now, a moment ago, that set my will at naught and made me explode? Where does it come from? I wonder where it comes from. I don't understand. . . . Do the countless things I failed at in this life build up inside me and explode? Or do the memories of the instant of the atomic bomb that morning choose this moment to pounce on me? I don't understand. The tragedy of Hiroshima, I think, did not affect my soul. But the trauma of that moment--is it somewhere or other keeping an eye on me and on victims like me, forever, intending some day to drive us mad?

In bed but unable to sleep, I picture to myself the globe. The night chill invades my bed, and I shiver. My body, my being, my core--why have I become now as cold as ice? I try calling out to the globe, which affords me life. As I do so, the globe floats hazily in my mind. Poor globe, oh earth now cold as ice! But it must be a globe I do not know, a globe several million years in the future. Before my eyes comes floating another dark mass, a second globe. At its core, inside the sphere, a dark red mass of fire is simmering, swirling. Does anything exist, I wonder, inside that blast furnace? Perhaps elements still undiscovered, mysteries still unconceived mingle there? And whatever will become of this world when they all are spewed up onto its surface? Everyone probably dreams of treasure-houses underground--destruction? salvation? a wholly unknowable future. . . .

It seems so long ago that I began to dream of the day the murmur of a quiet spring will sound deep in each and every person's heart and nothing is able to destroy individual human lives, that some day such harmony will visit this earth.

This is a railroad crossing I use often; often the barrier comes down and makes me wait. Trains appear from the direction of Nishi-Ogikubo or from Kichijōji. As the trains approach, the tracks here vibrate perceptibly up and down. Then the trains roar past at

full throttle. The speed somehow washes me clean of all cares. It may be that I envy those people who can charge through life at full throttle. But the ones who appear in my mind's eye are those who fix their gaze despondently on these tracks. People broken by life, who despite all their struggling have already been shoved down into a pit from which there is no escape--they haunt these tracks, or so I feel every time I come here. Sunk in contemplation of these things, I stand at this crossing . . . Is it possible that, all unbeknownst, I too am already haunting these tracks?

One day before sundown I was strolling along the highway. Suddenly and mysteriously the blue sky became absolutely clear, and there was one spot where silver rays of light shone like mother-of-pearl. Had my eye knowingly chosen that spot and fixed on it? My eye knew that that silver light was drenching the tops of the trees standing neatly in a row. The trees were slender, and something, it now appeared, was happening quietly to them. As my eye settled on the top of one neatly pruned tree, a large leaf, brown and withered, broke off from a branch. Breaking off from the branch, the dead leaf slid straight down along the trunk. It landed atop the dead leaves on the ground by the trunk. The pace at which it fell was incomparably delicate. Between branch and ground, that single dead leaf was surely taking a farewell look at this whole world. . . . How long has it been that I have thought of taking a farewell look at this world? One day I start off toward Kanda, where I lived a year ago. The familiar hustle and bustle of the bookstore district spreads out before me. Threading my way through the crowds, I am looking--am I not?--for my own shadow. Just then I notice a dead tree and its shadow merging palely on a concrete wall. Can it be that surprises as pale and quiet as this are all it takes to alarm my eyes?

If I'd simply sat quietly in my room, I would have frozen; so I have come out. Yesterday's snow is still here, lying as it fell; the neighborhood looks entirely different. As I walk on the snow, my spirits lift gradually, and my body warms up. The chill air pene-

trates my lungs pleurably. (Of course: the day snow first fell on the ruins of Hiroshima, then too I took deep breaths of air like this, and my heart leapt.) It occurs to me that I have yet to write a poem in praise of snow. How nice it would be to walk on and on, mind vacant, amid the snow of the Swiss highlands! Beautiful fantasies of death by freezing bind me fast. I enter a tea shop and sit smoking a cigarette, my mind a blank. From a corner comes the music of Bach, and a frosted cake sparkles inside a glass-fronted cabinet. Even after I am no longer in this world, a young man with a temperament like mine will probably sit like this, at this time of day, mind blank, in some corner of this world. I leave the tea shop and walk again along a snowy street. It is a street not many people use. A young cripple comes hobbling from the opposite direction. I seem to understand intuitively why he has chosen to be out walking on a snowy day such as this. As we pass, my heart calls out to him: keep your spirits up!

"Despite having been shown all the misery that injures our spirits and stifles our breath, we have an irrepressible instinct to improve ourselves." (Pascal)

It happened on a summer's afternoon when I was about six. I was playing by myself at the stone steps of our earthen storehouse. To the left of the steps, a luxuriant cherry tree caught the sparkling rays of the sun. The rays of the sun fell also on the leaves of a yellow bush-clover right beside the steps. But a refreshing breeze was blowing across the steps on which I was squatting. There was some sand on top of the granite steps; mind blank, I was running it through my fingers. An ant came bustling along near my hand. Without thinking, I squashed it with my finger. The ant moved no more. Soon another ant can along. That one too I crushed with my finger. One after the other, ants came to the spot where I sat, and one after the other I smashed them. Gradually I became totally absorbed, and time passed as in a dream. At the time I had no idea what I was doing. The sun set, dusk gathered, and suddenly I was plunged into a

weird fantasy. I was indoors. But I no longer knew where I was. A river of bright red flames swirled about and flowed off. In the dim light, strange beings I had never seen before looked in my direction and showed their resentment quietly, in whispers. (Could that hazy picture of hell have been a premonition of the hell of Hiroshima I was later made to see so clearly, this time for real?)

I wanted to try and write about a uniquely delicate, uniquely sensitive child. A puff of wind can snap his thin nerves in two; but hidden inside, paradoxically, there appears to be a magnificent universe.

Only one thing, I think, can bring a true smile to my heart. A short ode to that young girl may be all that brings me solace. U. . . . when I first came to know her, in mid-summer two years ago, I experienced a thrill not of this world. It was a premonition that my earthly farewell was already approaching, that with little notice the end of my days would descend upon me. I was always able to think of that beautiful girl with fondness, my feelings completely pure. Each time I parted from her, I felt as if, in the midst of rain, I had seen a beautiful rainbow. Then in my heart I would clasp my hands and offer up a private prayer for her happiness.

Once again, I feel the rapid alternation of warmth and chill, and the signs of approaching "Spring" leave me in a daze. Defenseless against the bouncy, light, gentle, artful seductions of the angels, I am about to surrender. Even single shafts of sunlight are full of this foretaste of the radiant festival day when the flowers all bloom and the birds burst into song. Some restlessness, something that will not stay quiet, begins to tremble inside me. The Flower Festival of the city of my birth, now in ruins, appears before my eyes. In my mind's eye I see my late mother and older sister, dressed in their holiday best. They look lovely, almost girlish. The "Spring" that is glorified in verse and painting and music whispers to me, makes me dizzy. Nevertheless, I am chilly and a bit sad.

Back then, dear, in bed, you must have trembled at the foretaste of "Spring" that came calling. For you, as death drew near, wasn't everything clear as crystal, the pure air of Heaven at your side? What dreams did you dream, back then, as you lay ill?

Now I am forever dreaming, of the skylark that flies up from the wheat field at midday, dancing up into the scorching blue firmament. . . . The skylark (is it you, dead, or is it I?) flies straight up at top speed, higher, higher, infinitely higher, higher. And now it neither rises nor falls. It simply ignites and sends out a flash of light; already having escaped the bounds of life, the skylark becomes a shooting star. (It is not I. But it surely is my heart's desire. If only a life ignited gloriously and all its brief moments came beautifully to completion. . . .)

III. Commentary

Hara's World of Fantasy

Little of Hara's prewar writing was autobiographical. He had led a checkered life, dabbling in radical politics, living the life of a dandy, buying out the contract of a prostitute, attempting suicide. But little of all that got into his writing. His early writings were mostly poems and fairy tales. In these fairy tales trees and bumblebees speak, and people turn into birds.

Fantasy, the fantastic, was very real to Hara. "Land of My Heart's Desire" is full of such very real fantasy. It opens with Hara's fantasy that in the next life he becomes a bird; it closes with Hara becoming a skylark and vanishing into nothingness. In between, a star nods approvingly to him, an incident he commemorated as well in a poem:

In the water, a fire burns
 In the dampness of the evening mist, a fire burns
 In the leafless tree, a fire burns
 A single star--out walking⁷

In addition, he has a vision of a new earth--"a second globe. At its core, inside the sphere, a dark red mass of fire is simmering"--and of a mysterious light, and he recalls a childhood nightmare of "strange beings I had never seen before." To read these passages with sympathy is to enter the world in which Hara spent most of his life.

Solitude and Oppression

Much of Hara's later writing is autobiographical, and "Land of My Heart's Desire" is no exception. As a child Hara was a loner, particularly after staying behind a year at age thirteen; one of his friends remembered that Hara literally did not open his mouth in school thereafter. And in his later years Hara was indeed world-weary, the hopes for a new human being he entertained after 1945 having faded quickly. So the speculation in the opening section is taken from his life: "Were I to be born a songbird next time around and go to visit the land of the songbirds, what kind of reception would they give me? Would I chew on my fingers in a corner then, too, like a bashful child taken for the first time to kindergarten? Or would I try to survey my surroundings intently, with the melancholy gaze of a world-weary poet?" Hara seems to have spent much of his life aimlessly walking the streets or staring out of windows.

This isolation became particularly marked in the years after 1945. In an essay published posthumously, Hara refers to himself in the third person: "After he moved to lodgings in Kichijōji, people rarely came to visit. In a week, even ten days, he had virtually no opportunities to converse with human beings. When, going out, he bought cigarettes, he said, 'Cigarettes, please.' Entering a coffee shop, he gave his order, 'Coffee.' He uttered words twice or three times a day. But by way of compensation the countless words that went unvoiced constantly swirled about him."⁸

This mood is also the subject of one of his late poems, "Restaurant Ode":

Day after day after day--am I really a traveller?
 Leaning against the restaurant table,
 looking out spellbound
 at the pavement, bright after the sudden shower
 has lifted.

No house anywhere will take me in;
 still I rest, elbows on the table.
 Long ago I never dreamed of such a life.
 Tomorrow I may die on some street or other.
 Today, the brightness of the roadside trees
 seen through the window.⁹

One critic has commented that the final two lines are worlds apart, the absolute isolation of the poet juxtaposed against his continuing appreciation of beauty.

Characteristic also of Hara the man was a sense of oppression. From an early age Hara was at least hyper-sensitive (he described himself as schizoid). He feared loud noises, bright lights, shocks of any kind. In *Summer Flowers* he speaks of the mountains around Hiroshima as if they were alive, almost lying in wait for him; the passive voice occurs frequently in his writing. The sixth section of "Land of My Heart's Desire" concludes with this passage: "I wanted to try and write about a uniquely delicate, uniquely sensitive child. A puff of wind can snap his thin nerves in two; but hidden inside, paradoxically, there appears to be a magnificent universe."

Hara's clearest *cri de coeur* (and his finest writing) occurs in "Requiem" (1949). There he writes: "I have absolutely no idea how everyone lives. Humanity is all like glass shattered into smithereens. . . . The world is broken. Humankind! Humankind! Humankind! I can't understand. I can't connect. I am trembling. Humankind. Humankind. Humankind. I want to understand. I want to connect. I want to live. Am I the only one trembling? Always inside me there is the sound of something exploding. Always something is chasing after me. I am made to tremble, am flogged, am made to flare up, am shut down."¹⁰

A second essay of 1949 reinforces this impression. "Death, Love, Solitude" takes its title from its conclusion: "No matter how my writing changes in the future, the words I would give as title to my self-portrait are probably these three--death, love, solitude."¹¹ But before he reaches that conclusion Hara speaks of his sense of oppression: ". . . the tempestuous seas of the postwar era beat thunderously against me and even now threaten to break me in pieces. . . . For me it seems precisely as if, living on this earth, each moment is filled to the brim with unfathomable horror. And the tragedies that take place daily in people's minds, the unbearable agonies to which each individual is subjected--things like these fester horribly inside me. It is likely that I can stand up to them, depict them!"¹²

Similarly, the second section of "Land of My Heart's Desire" is an essay on solitude and a sense of oppression: "Am I even now being crushed to bits, swept away into infinity? A year has already gone by since I moved to these lodgings; and for me human isolation has reached, I think, its very limit. This world no longer offers even a single straw for me to grasp." With little in this life to console him, the narrator takes refuge in memories. Typically, these memories concern his mother and his wife.

Hara's Mother, Elder Sister, and Wife

The central figures in Hara's life were women. His mother was thirty-one when Hara was born, and she died in 1936. The eighth of twelve children, Hara had to share his mother's affection. In an essay entitled "Mother" he writes: "Raised in a house with many brothers and sisters, older and younger, I had no monopoly on Mother's love." And he describes her only "love letter" to him: carrying him on her back to his school one day, she said, "If you were an only child, I could do this for you every day." But, writes Hara, "As an infant, I stopped trying to monopolize Mother's love."¹³ She appears in "Land of My Heart's Desire" digging out a hangnail of his and, later, dressed for the Festival of the Flowers in Hiroshima.

His sister Tsuru, younger of his two older sisters, stepped in and

became Hara's surrogate mother; indeed, in "Mother," Hara speaks more warmly of her (he calls her a "miraculous being"). However, she died in 1918 at age twenty-one, when Hara was thirteen. She figures here only briefly, dressed up with her mother and sister for the Festival of Flowers.

Hara's wife Nagai Sadae was his salvation. He married her in 1933, not long after attempting suicide, and she quickly became virtually his exclusive contact with the outside world. She accompanied him to the doctor's office just around the corner; he conversed with friends by whispering to her what he wished to say. Her long illness (tuberculosis, diagnosed in 1939) and death (1944) left Hara utterly bereft. Sadae figures in "Land of My Heart's Desire" at least twice. At one point he remembers a wholly insignificant event: "You, my wife, a tear on your eyelash because you had something in your eye. . . ." Like this passage, much of his later writing is addressed to Sadae. At another point Hara speculates about her thoughts as she lay ill: "Back then, dead, in bed, you must have trembled at the foretaste of 'Spring' that came calling. For you, as death drew near, wasn't everything clear as crystal, the pure air of Heaven at your side? What dreams did you dream, back then, as you lay ill?" By 1951 all three women were dead. It is surely they he has in mind in his fantasy of people reborn as birds: "In dying, those dear to me cannot leave me behind."

U.

Only one of the women in his life, Soda Yūko, was still alive in 1951. Hara had come to know her in 1949; he was then forty-four and she, in her early twenties. A mutual acquaintance, Ōkubo Fusao, has described the first meeting between the two. Since Hara simply would not go to meet Soda alone, a third friend asked Ōkubo to go along. The beginning was not an auspicious one: a coffee shop empty and untidy, reminding Ōkubo of the waiting room of a crematorium; Hara's whispered attempts at conversation; Ōkubo's impression that Soda was not a particularly cultivated person. But the friendship flourished despite it all. In 1950 Hara moved and thereafter did not see Soda

so frequently.

Hara himself wrote of U. in "Eternally Green," a short piece published soon after his death. There he speaks of himself in the third person: "A twenty-two-year-old woman named U., whom he had come to know by chance, became for him a marvellous being. At first, her face dazzled him and caused him to tremble; being with her somehow made it hard to breathe. But as he grew accustomed to her, his internal distress went away; no matter how many times he met her, the intense feeling of fineness and neatness did not change. . . . At twenty-two she was the age of his wife when he had married her."¹⁴

One of the letters found after Hara's death was addressed to Soda. It reads:

At last I become a skylark and fade away. I fade away
but you please live on in good spirits.
It was like a miracle in the evening of this bleak life of
mine that I should come to know someone as beautiful and
gentle as you.
The hours I spent in your company were truly dear,
crystalline, glorious hours.
All sorts of happiness will surely still come your way.
Please stay beautiful and well and able.
My heart full of blessings for you, I take my leave.
Please give my greetings to your mother, too.¹⁵

It is Soda of whom Hara writes in "Land of My Heart's Desire": "I was always able to think of that beautiful girl with fondness, my feelings completely pure. Each time I parted from her, I felt as if, in the midst of rain, I had seen a beautiful rainbow."

Hiroshima: August 6, 1945

Next to the death of Sadae, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima was the decisive event of Hara's life. Incapable of living alone after Sadae's death in September 1944, Hara had to return to the family home in early 1945. The family home was the residence of his oldest

brother. There Hara was on August 6, 1945. Much of his writing thereafter--Summer Flowers, essays, poems--concerned that experience.

In "Land of My Heart's Desire" Hiroshima appears as the putative cause of a sudden shock the narrator experiences long afterwards: "Do the countless things I failed at in this life build up inside me and explode? Or do the memories of the instant of the atomic bomb that morning choose this moment to pounce on me? I don't understand. The tragedy of Hiroshima, I think, did not affect my soul. But the trauma of that moment--is it somewhere or other keeping an eye on me and on victims like me, forever, intending some day to drive us mad?"

Hara proceeds to envision the globe after the next atomic war: "Poor globe, oh earth now as cold as ice." In early 1951 Hara had good reason for his apocalyptic thoughts, for in November 1950 Harry S. Truman, the man who had ordered the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, told a press conference that the use of atomic weapons in Korea was "under consideration." Hara responded to that pronouncement with this poem:

Lord, pity the orphan's Christmas
 The child now an orphan
 will be an orphan tomorrow, too
 And the children who now have families --
 they too will orphans tomorrow
 Wretched, stupid, we lead ourselves
 on to destruction, bodies and souls
 Not knowing enough to stop
 one step this side of destruction
 Tomorrow, once again, fire will pour down
 from the skies
 Tomorrow, once again, people will be seared and die
 The misery will continue, repeat itself
 Till countries everywhere, cities everywhere,
 all meet destruction
 Pity, pity these thoughts of a Christmas night
 Filled, filled with signs
 that the day of destruction is near.¹⁶

Pastoral Vision

Hara's solitude yields ultimately to his sense of human kinship; his speechlessness, to the richness of his writing. So also Hara's horror at the prospect of atomic war yields ultimately to the pastoral vision Hara held so dear. Consider the epigraph he wrote for Summer Flowers, the grisly chronicle of the suffering brought on by the atomic bomb: "O loved ones, may you romp and play / like the doe, the fawn / deep in fragrant mountains." Consider also the epitaph he composed for himself: "Carved in stone on a distant day / its shadow falling on the sand: / midst the collapsing universe / a vision of a single flower."¹⁷ The "collapsing universe" is a reference to Hiroshima and to future atomic destruction. The "vision of a single flower" is more ambiguous. It surely refers to a vision of beauty (his wife, deathly sick as a child, had had a vision of a flower); it may also be a note of hope and peace.

Hara wrote all his poems about the atomic bomb in katakana, not the syllabary normally used for poetry--except one. That one is "Green Eternally," in which he pours out his hopes for the future:

In the delta of Hiroshima
let new leaves flourish.

With death and flames fresh in memory
a good prayer, this. Let it be

green eternally,
green eternally.

In the delta of Hiroshima
let green leaves glisten.¹⁸

Similarly, Hara concludes the section on Hiroshima in "Land of My Heart's Desire" with what amounts to a prayer: "It seems so long ago that I began to dream of the day the murmur of a quiet spring will sound deep in each and every person's heart and nothing is able to

destroy individual human lives, that some day such harmony will visit this earth."

Hara's Death

"Land of My Heart's Desire" is an announcement of Hara's own death. He writes of a section of railway between Nishi-Ogikubo and Kichijōji that he finds haunted by the shades of "people broken by life. . . Is it possible that, all unbeknownst, I too am already already haunting these tracks?" Indeed. His friend the poet Satō Haruo commemorated Hara's death with this poem:

At a bar in the evening
I laughed with the girls;
but in the shadow of the embankment,
dark rail for a pillow
at 11:31,
back of the skull crushed,
one leg severed,
was a man.

Clad in stiff-collared shirt,
having left his good clothes on the fence,
set there for his friends
like a skin sloughed off;
firm in his breast--a vision of a single flower
midst this crumbling universe,
praying to be a lark in the world to come,
a man died.
To the friends he parted from
as if nothing special were afoot,
many farewell notes.¹⁹

Satō's poem incorporates Hara's own epitaph; it also refers to the poem Hara enclosed in his farewell letter to Soda Yūko:

Green meets green in the willows
 along the moat, so soon
 enveloped in mist beneath the smiling sky

The still water's clarity
 seeks from me an elegy

All partings exchanged
 as if nothing special were afoot,
 all bitterness effaced
 as if nothing special were afoot;
 blessings, still only dimly seen, across the divide

I walk away. I wish now to fade away
 crystalline, into eternity.²⁰

Hara was bent on suicide, and die he did. In dying, he became a bird, joining his loved ones on the other side of the great divide. The final impression of "Land of My Heart's Desire" is of utter tranquility, of death as release. At the cost of great suffering Hara came to terms with hypersensitivity, love, the death of loved ones, Hiroshima, and his own death.

Yamamoto Kenkichi, friend and critic (and brother of Hara's wife Sadae), has written eloquently of the relation between Hara's death and his writing: "Hara's death is illumination that Hara himself cast on his writings. At least, it removes the veil from the poetic works in which--ever since Hiroshima--he had clamored, pleaded, prayed, grieved, wailed with all his might, and it makes clear their meaning. The death he freely chose becomes one of the finishing touches to his works. Works in which death appears inevitable, works in which death seems to be fulfillment--these are Hara's literary works."²¹

Notes

1. The author wishes to thank Hara Tokihiko for permission to publish this translation; Ch'ing-mao Cheng for the calligraphy on the

2. There are no textual problems with "Land of My Heart's Desire" (Shingan no Kuni). It was published first in Gunzō (May 1951). It can be found in Hara Tamiki zenshū (Collected Works of Hara Tamiki; 3 vols.; Tokyo: Seidosha, 1978) 2:328-335 and in Nihon no gembaku bungaku (Japan's atomic-bomb literature; 15 vols.; Tokyo: Horupu, 1983) 1:224-229. The existing translation is John Bester's: "The Land of Heart's Desire" in Atomic Aftermath: Short Stories About Hiroshima and Nagasaki (ed. Kenzaburo Oe; Tokyo: Shueisha, 1984), pp. 55-61.
3. For a more extended biographical essay on Hara, see Richard H. Minear, ed. and tr., Hiroshima: Three Witnesses (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).
4. For a translation of Summer Flowers (Natsu no hana), see Minear, Hiroshima: Three Witnesses; for Hara's haiku on Hiroshima, see Minear, "Haiku and Hiroshima: Hara Tamiki," Modern Haiku 19.1 (Winter-Spring 1988), pp. 11-17.
5. Hara Tamiki zenshū 3:334.
6. "Hara Tamiki," in Yamamoto Kenkichi zenshū (Collected Works of Yamamoto Kenkichi; Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1984) 10:160.
7. "Landscape" (Fūkei), Hara Tamiki zenshū 3:38.
8. "Eternally Green" (Eien no midori), Hara Tamiki zenshū 2:160.
9. "Gaishoku shokudo no uta," Hara Tamiki zenshū 3:31.
10. Chinkonka, Hara Tamiki zenshū 2:122-123.
11. "Shi to ai to kōdoku," Hara Tamiki zenshū 2:551.
12. Hara Tamiki zenshū 2:550.
13. "Hahaoya ni tsuite" (1949), Hara Tamiki zenshū 2:545.
14. "Eien no midori," Hara Tamiki zenshū 2:164.
15. Hara Tamiki zenshū 3:335.
16. "Ie naki ko no Kurisumasu," Hara Tamiki zenshū 3:318.
17. "Epitaph" (Himei), Hara Tamiki zenshū 3:37.
18. "Eien no midori," Hara Tamiki zenshū 3:28.
19. "The events of the night of March 13" (Sangatsu jūsannichi yo no koto), in Kokai Eiji, Hara tamiki--shijin no shi (Hara Tamiki--death of a poet; Tokyo: Kokubunsha, 1978), pp. 7-8.
20. Hara Tamiki zenshū 3:39, for an alternate translation, see John Bester, tr. "Elegy," in Atomic Aftermath, p. 62.
21. Yamamoto Kenkichi zenshū 10:160.

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