

Cherry Blossom Contemplations

Kansai, Japan

1

By sap or by blood
plants and animals begin
in springtime to bud:
blossoms like cocoons on cherries
and antlers on stags like berries.

2

The prim Japanese
come out to watch the cherries
put on their blouses ...
and then they watch as the trees
perform a prolonged striptease.

3

Cherries, so it goes,
dare Kyoto women to meet
them in kimonos—
yet each spring the trees compete
they win nothing but defeat.

4

Lake Biwa Canal
no longer buoys cargo boats:
But its architects
would surely be cheered to see
these crafts from the cherry tree.

5

Those pastel petals
floating down the old canal
hearten us to think
that cherry trees, though unseen,
are blooming somewhere upstream.

P.T.O

6

But for the waka
of long-gone poets, who would
guess or ever grieve
the blossoms of bygone years
that moved the ancients to tears?

7

They barely open
before they feel a far call,
the cherry blossoms,
and death entices them all
to channel the leaves of fall.

8

In life, transience
or perhaps, cherry blossoms,
in death, permanence ...
then again would you have us
explore, in God, transcendence?

9

They should be sinking,
petals sailing pond and sky,
they should be sinking
with the load placed on them by
poets, priests and samurai.

10

It's simply stunning,
woundingly lovely and fresh,
springtime in Kyoto—
who cares if it never varies,
ever starting with the cherries?