

It wouldn't be wrong to say that traditional Japanese poetry, such as these waka, is properly untranslatable. The characters are ideograms, and the poet can choose from among many of near meaning, allowing the graphics to sing the poem in another dimension, a challenge to Western poetic form. The speech is rarified, oblique, elliptical. A flat translation would read like a string of obscure declarations, making the poems seem rough and experimental, unlike the assiduously polished works of art they are. We'll try instead to convey the keenly universal emotions with which they still succeed in stirring the heart.

もろともにあはれと思へ山桜
花よりばかり知る人もなし

前大僧正行尊

花さそふ嵐の庭の雪ならで
降りゆくものはわが身なりけり

入道前大臣大臣

人はいさ心も知らず古里は
花ぞ昔の香にほひける

紀貫之

あなたのお心は、むかしのままかどうか、よくわかりません。しかし、これまで何度もたずねて来てよく知っている、この初瀬の里の梅の花は、むかしどおりのかおりで美しく咲いて、わたしをむかえてくれています。

Whether you feel about me as you once did I really no longer know, but the blossoms in this rustic place, lovely as ever and splendidly fragrant, welcome me. Won't you please change your mind and let me stay with you? - Kino Tsurayuki

桜の花が散るのをさそうように嵐の吹く庭は、「降りゆく」ように花吹雪が舞っている。だが、「古りゆく（老いる）」のは桜の花ではなく、本当はこの年老いた私なのだなあ。

A spring squall blows away the last petals of the cherry tree. Blossoms fall with the rain. But the cherry blossoms forever, and I am really the ancient one who is falling. - Nyuudou Sakino Dajoudaijin

私がおまえを懐かしく思うように、おまえも私を懐かしいと思っておくれ、山桜よ。こんな山奥では、私の心を知る人はおまえの他には、誰もいないのだから。

Won't you hold in your heart the same fond, familiar feelings I have for you, wild cherry blossom? It is you alone, in these mountain recesses, who knows what is in my mind. - Sakino Daisoujou Gyouson [Note: This would seem to be the entreaty of one seeking comfort in a place of exile.]

久方の光のとけき、春の日に
しづ心なく、花の散るらむ

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紀友則

高砂の尾上の桜咲きどけり
外山の霞立たずもあらなむ

——
権中納言匡房

花の色は移りにけりないたづらに
我が身世にふるながめせし間に

——
小野小町

降りつづく春の雨に、桜の花はさかりをすぎ、すっかり色あせてしまいました。かなえられぬ恋の思いにうちしずみながら、降りつづく雨をぼんやりながめ暮らしているうちに、わたしの美しさも、花の色のおとろえてしまいました。

The long spring rain kept the cherry blossoms from reaching full flower, now they are dormant. Filled with thoughts of love unanswered, I gaze distractedly at the rainy view, and feel my beauty fade like those pale blossoms. - Onono' Komachi
[Note: The wordplay makes this the idle thought of a young woman.]

高い山の峰の上にも、桜が咲いたなあ。手前にある人里近い山の霞よ、どうか立たないでくれ。あの美しい山桜がかくれないようにしてくれ。

At last, the wild cherry blossoms atop von towering peak... You, mist on this side, where people live, could you somehow not rise up and block those gorgeous wild cherry trees? - Gonchuunagon Masafusa

うらかな日の光がふりそそいでいる。こんなのかな春の日に、桜の花は、どうしておちついた心もなく、あわただしく散るのであるうか。

This spring day is bathed in a heavenly light. With calm such as this, why do cherry blossoms ceaselessly hasten to fall? - Kino Tomonori