

Classic Poetry Series

Shimazaki Toson

- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Shimazaki Toson(1872-1943)

Toson Shimazaki (Shimazaki Toson, 25 March 1872 – 22 August 1943) is the pen-name of a Japanese author, active in the Meiji, Taisho and early Showa period Japan. He began his career as a poet, but went on to establish himself as the major proponent of naturalism in Japanese literature. His real name was Shimazaki Haruki.

Toson was lauded by literary critics for the establishment of a new Japanese verse form in Wakanashu and as one of the creators of the Meiji Romanticism (Meiji Romantan Shugi) literary movement, he soon turned his talents to prose fiction.

His first novel, The Broken Commandment was published in 1906. It was considered a landmark in Japanese realism and is thus regarded as the first Japanese naturalist novel. It is a story of a burakumin schoolteacher, who keeps his out-caste status secret until near the end of the story. While he was writing, each of his three children died of illness.

His second novel, Haru (Spring, 1908) was much weaker and is a lyrical and sentimental autobiographical account of his youthful days with the Bungakukai.

His third novel, Ie (Family, 1910-1911) is considered by many to be his masterpiece. It depicts the slow moving decline of two provincial families to whom the protagonist is related.

Toson created a major scandal with his next novel, Shinsei (New Life, 1918-1919). A more emotional work than Ie, it is an autobiographical account of his own extramarital relations with his niece, Komako, and the knowledge that her father (his elder brother) knew of the incestuous affair, but concealed it. When Komako became pregnant, Toson fled to France to avoid the confrontation with his relatives, abandoning the girl. Toson attempts to justify his behavior by revealing that his father had committed a similar sin and that he could not avoid the curse of his lineage. The general public did not see it that way and Toson was censured on many fronts for his behavior and for what was perceived as a gross vulgarity by attempting to capitalize on the disgraceful incident by turning it into a novel.

On his return to Japan, Toson accepted a teaching post at Waseda University. He then wrote Yoakemae starting in 1929, a semi-historical novel about the Meiji Restoration from the point of view of a provincial loyalist, who is

a thinly veiled representation of his father. Written unevenly, the protagonist dies in bitterness and disappointment. It was serialized in the literary magazine *Chûron* over a six-year period and was later released as a two-part novel.

In 1935, Tōson became the founding chairman of the Japanese chapter of the International PEN organization. Tōson died of a stroke at the age of 71, in 1943. His grave is at the temple of Jifuku-ji, in Oiso, Kanagawa Prefecture.

First Love

you had swept back your bangs for the first time
when I saw you under the apple tree
the flower-comb in your hair
I thought you yourself were a flower too.

you stretched out your pale white hand gently
giving me an apple:
like the ripening red of the autumn fruit
my first feeling of love

my sigh, without any awareness
touched your hair
the joys of love's offerings
drinking your love...

under a tree in the apple orchard
nature's narrow road
who left this token here?
your question gave me a piercing pleasure.

Shimazaki Toson