TWO POEMS FROM THE JAPANESE

Translated by Graeme Wilson

Two at Night

The night-trains plopping coldly into snow
Forewarn that we shall starve. Chicko's tough,
A woman tougher than most other women,
But cherishes a weakness, mild enough,
For notions drawn from centuries ago:
She'd rather die by fire than die by famine.

Our talking peters out. We lie and listen
To the wet ploppings of the falling rain.
The wind seems slightly stronger. Rain-drops glisten.
Rose-branches niggle at the window-pane.

Takamura Kotaro (1883-1956)

Serendip

The natives of the island
Were all indoors.

Alone
I walked in the searing sunlight.
A lizard like a stone
Lay stretched out on a sewer-pipe.
A blaze of aubergine
Blazed, and the glare of violets
Consumed all sense of green.

Hot sand from the violet-leaves
Spilled on my hand, and shone:
The island of Sri Lanka
When it was still Ceylon.

Nishiwaki Junzaburo (1894-1982)