

## 宮沢賢治の『ガドルフの百合』の英訳と一考察

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### Gadolf's Lily

A Translation of and Reflections on Kenji Miyazawa's 『ガドルフの百合』

George Wallace

Gadolf had been walking flat out since morning, off on a wretched journey along an avenue of frolicking willows stretching out in front of him like a hackney horse's tail, beneath a sky of china white.

It was only forty miles to the next town but there was still no sign of it and little likelihood of its coming into view for a long while yet.

'The willows are dazzlingly green as if their leaves were made of tin plate. I wonder what further tricks they will play on my eyes, these toy-like leaves that look as if they are covered in some cheap arsenic paint,' Gadolf thought to himself as he walked on, his body prickling with anger.

Suddenly the clouds became swollen and heavy.

'What puffs of cheap nickel dust you are! What cheap light you cast!'

From somewhere in the clouds came the sound of thunder ripping through the sky.

'The roadside looks strangely white. Oh look! Someone's coming from over there. No, perhaps not. That looks like a dog walking across the road up ahead. No, maybe not. Shit!' Gadolf marched on vigorously.

Soon it began to grow dark and with the dusk came the rain. And the rain was soon a torrent. Lightning streaked across the sky bleaching the lonesome traveller of all colour. The green leaves of the trees were wrenched back and forth, and with the raindrops they crashed down onto the hard road below as branches were ripped asunder.

'This is crazy! What a chaotic mess, as if the sky will never be clear again. Will I ever be able to see the stars once more? Am I dreaming, or is that fog? It looks like some sort of spray.'

Gadolf walked on as fast as he could, looking way beyond the avenue of trees over towards a vague watery light.

'That's the spot where I thought I saw a dog a moment ago. If I could just make it over there, maybe I'll be okay.'

It was not long before night fell. Here and there a loud roar of rolling thunder could be heard in the sky above. Lightning flickered frequently, as if it were the consciousness of the big black night sky.

The road felt like a stream of concrete beneath Gadolf's feet. He could not keep walking for much more than twenty minutes at most.

In a flash of thin lightning Gadolf caught sight of a large black house standing on the left side of the road.

'It looks like the head of a black electromagnet with its five-cornered roof sticking up. That black stuff is agar, and it is into that black gelatin heart that I will go.'

With a leap and a jump, Gadolf ran in through the front door.

'Good evening! Is anyone at home? Hello?'

Inside the house it was pitch black. There was no reply to break the eerie silence that reigned. Carpets and clothing had been left scattered about the floor higgledy-piggledy.

'They must have all run away. Maybe they thought a volcano was about to erupt. No, that's hardly likely. Maybe it was the plague that did it. No, I doubt that, too. There I go, I'm talking to myself again. What about that dog I thought I saw back there? Anyway, let's get out of these wet clothes for a start.'

Gadolf mumbled to himself in his head, thinking with his lips. His head was ringing like church bells calling out their chorus for morning mass. Grasping his boots as if to embrace them, Gadolf tugged them off, and limping slightly, walked into the pitch-blackness of the messy house. In front of him there was a large room that looked like it must be the stairwell, lit up by lightning bursting in through a window.

Standing there in the darkness of the room Gadolf closed his eyes. As he took off his heavy coat pulling his wet sleeves, he could clearly see the willow trees he had passed earlier in the day, only now they were as if made of shell. He opened his eyes again.

'What are you playing at? One minute you are made of tin, the next of shell? But then again, seen against that backdrop of midnight blue, those willows do look good, though.'

Even after he had opened his eyes, the image of the trees remained fixed in his mind. He wiped dry his wet head and face, and at last felt able to relax.

Lightning poured in through the window illuminating his knapsack which lay on the floor in the shape of a crab. Squatting down on his haunches, Gadolf reached out into the darkness, feeling for his bag.

Opening it, he reached inside to touch a small instrument nestling there. This seemed to reassure him. Careful not to make any noise, he slipped into the next room.

Flashes of lightning burst in, in a kaleidoscope of colours lighting up a plaster statue on the floor, a bed and an overturned table.

'It looks like some sort of boarding house or perhaps even a sanatorium. Whatever it is, I've got a feeling there might be someone upstairs. I'd better go and take a look otherwise I won't be able to relax.'

Gadolf went back into the stairwell, got his knapsack and had just started climbing the stairs one by one when suddenly a purple streak of lightning lit up the room with a dazzling brightness that took his breath away.

He stopped dead in his tracks, gazing in dumb amazement first at his own black shadow, then over towards the window.

As the lightning flashed, flickered and then was gone, Gadolf could have sworn he had seen a half dozen white objects gazing silently in through the window.

'They didn't seem that tall. Could be kids, I suppose, seeking shelter from the sudden downpour just like me. Or perhaps it could be the owners of this place returning home. I haven't really got a clue, to be honest. Anyway, let's open the window and say hello.'

Gadolf went over and opened the rickety broken window. Suddenly cold wind and rain slapped against his face. He called out into the darkness, his words half blown away in the gusting wind.

'Who's there? Good evening! Hello! Is anyone there?'

The vaguely discernible white objects moved ever so slightly but made no reply. Instead as if on cue, a brilliant flash of lightning lit up the sky as brightly as if it were day.

'Ha! Ha! Ha! They're lilies! Well, I'll be! No wonder they didn't answer me.'

Gadolf's cheerful laughter was blown rumbling tumbling upstairs by the wind. Outside the window ten white lilies stood there stock-still in the storm, shining in the flashes of sheet lightning.

Suddenly all was dark again and the dazzlingly bright lilies were no longer to be seen. Wearing his very last dry shirt, Gadolf leaned out the window, letting himself be washed by the rain. He gazed intently at the gently swaying shadowy flowers, patiently awaiting the next flash of lightning.

Before long another flash of lightning cracked down, brightly splitting the air. The garden floated up before Gadolf's eyes like a colour slide of vibrant green. Raindrops caught in the light froze in mid-air, beautiful in their ovalness, whilst Gadolf's dearly beloved flowers stood there quivering white with rage.

'All my love is in those white lilies there. Mind you don't break now.'

This all happened in but a twinkling of an eye. Now once again, the darkness returned pushing back the green light, leaving the image of the flowers barely visible, a large vague whiteness swaying this way and that, battered by the wind, leaning over as if to touch the ground.

Somewhere deep inside his head burning with pain, Gadolf could see a second cluster of lilies made of shell, shining stock-still and bright on a blue-black slope. Standing there holding his breath, he gazed upon the two sets of flowers.

This too was all but in the twinkling of his eye, a moment's vision shattered as suddenly the next flash of lightning burning more brightly than a flame of magnesium, struck the earth with all the seductive power of ultra-violet light.

The beautiful lilies' rage reached its zenith, their red-hot petals more dignified than snow. To Gadolf it seemed as if he could even hear the sound of the flowers' fury.

After what seemed a mere moment of darkness, another streak of lightning came crawling across the sky from the distant jagged clouds, like a white rain pouring down from a mountain in a painting by Hokusai, an intangible red hand of light grazing the lilies as it went by.

The rain grew heavier and heavier whilst thunder claps boomed as if trying to blow up the sky. Gadolf marvelled at how the sky could just stand there and endure such ruffians raging around it.

The next streak of lightning was so weak and indistinct as almost to go unnoticed. But in its faint glimmer borne on the wind, Gadolf could see the fragile broken stem of one of the lilies, its flower bent sharply down to the ground.

A fresh flash of lightning flooded down, lighting it up; it had been the tallest lily, but now it lay on its side, silent and broken, a victim of its own white excitement, the power of which had destroyed it.

Gadolf turned away from the garden back into the darkness of the room and after carefully closing the rattling window, he returned to the spot where he had left his knapsack. From his bag he took a small sheet, which he wrapped around him, and shivering with cold, he sat down on the stairs, huddling up with his arms around his knees to keep himself warm. He shut his eyes.

Unable to bear the cold any longer, he got up and groping along the floor with his hands he found a rug which he added to the sheet, wrapping it around him.

He tried to get off to sleep, but streaks of lightning kept sweeping over him, their brightness playing upon the surface of his eyelids. Hunger and tiredness were boiling up inside him. His head burned with a dancing pain as he sat there trembling.

'I'm whacked out. I haven't even got the strength to think clearly anymore. All I know is that my lily is bent and broken, and so is my love,' Gadolf thought to himself.

As he sat there, he thought of the people of the River Ikuyama, their image floating up in his

mind's eye like a lantern. The rumbling of thunder sounded to him like the voices of old friends, the willows seen earlier in the day stretched out to touch the white sky and before he knew it, Gadolf was asleep.

Suddenly he heard a loud thumping noise. There was a banging of heavy footsteps. There was a loud roar and violent jeering.

Gadolf could not make out what was happening, but from the sounds of it, something akin to a fight was raging.

Then above his head two large men appeared grappling, kicking and punching one another, all the while uttering terrifying screams. It looked like they were on a green slope that glistened most beautifully. In the darkness one of the men could clearly be seen wearing a loose-fitting coat of leopard skin, whilst the other was clothed in the black velvety garb of an eagle. Gadolf could also see himself, sitting there small and timid, looking up the green-shining slope at the battle raging above.

All of a sudden the birdman was caught by his throat and thrown to the floor, but immediately he was up again flailing out a foot that struck the leopardman smartly on the chin. Again they were at each other's throats, locked together, twisting this way and that, with first one, and then the other getting on top. As they fought and yelled, it was impossible to tell which was which, but then with an almighty bang-bang-bang, the two of them entwined came tumbling head over heels down the slope.

As quickly as he could, Gadolf tried to dodge out of their way but with a mighty thump, he was knocked flat over.

It was then that Gadolf opened his eyes. He stood up, shivering with cold.

A bolt of lightning had just fallen, and now a muffled noise rang out far off in the distance. The rain had stopped, leaving the occasional flash of lightning to streak its way across the sky, illuminating the contours of the clouds, mapping out the heavens. All of the lilies but one had weathered the storm and there they stood shining white.

Gadolf clenched then unclenched his fists, busily stamping his feet on the ground. Outside the window a raindrop could be seen dangling from a tree, and from it shone forth a pale rose-colored light.

'That's not the rose colour of dawn, it's the red light of Scorpio in the south. It's still the middle of the night. If this rain would just ease off, I could be on my way again. I should be able to make out the road by starlight and besides, the next town can't be far off from here. I can't say I'm keen on the idea of setting off in my wet clothes, though. It can't be helped, I suppose. My lilies won through, after all.'

Gadolf stood there in silence, lost in thought.

## Notes on the story

A boy is out walking late one night. He has been walking all day. He is far from home. Indeed he is far from anywhere; the next town is forty miles away. It is pouring with rain. A thunderstorm is raging. The boy takes shelter in a deserted house. He sees some lilies outside. They are being buffeted by the strong wind and rain. Overcome with tiredness, the boy falls asleep. He dreams of a fight between two men. When he wakes up, the storm is over, and all but one of the lilies is still standing. He decides to push on with his journey.

Summarising the story makes it sound rather dull. There is a cast of only one. The hero does not accomplish any great feats that amaze and astound us. He gets tired, he falls asleep, and he has a dream. In a way, it is a bit like *Alice in Wonderland* but without the talking animals.

The odd thing about this story is this: read it once and it will stay with you. You will start asking yourself all sorts of questions, the vast majority of which have no obvious answer: Who is this boy? We are told that he is called Gadolf, but that is all we learn about him. We are left in the dark about his age, his nationality, and his reasons for walking alone late at night far from any town or village. There is no mention of any family for him, so perhaps we are supposed to assume he is an orphan. The nature and purpose of his journey are unclear; all we know is that he has an overcoat and a knapsack, that he is tired and hungry, and he does not have much spare clothing to change into if he gets wet (just the one shirt).

Like Alice, Gadolf talks to himself a lot. But whereas Alice is a very proper little girl who tries hard to remember what she has been taught and how to behave correctly, Gadolf strikes us as being a much more passionate and unruly sort of boy. He often seems to be angry for no apparent reason, and acts in an impulsive and irrational way; he declares his love for some lilies and worries whether they will survive the storm. Finding herself in the same situation, Alice would no doubt look in the kitchen to see if there was any food, as any sensible child would do. It never crosses Gadolf's mind to go and see if there is anything to eat or drink. Even though he is wet and cold, he does not think of trying to make a fire to get himself warm and dry. When he does change into his spare shirt, the only dry item of clothing he has to hand, he immediately stands at the open window, and leans out into the lashing rain, getting soaked to the skin.

The question of who this strange boy is and where he is from is worth returning to. Gadolf is not a Japanese name, and if anything, sounds as if it might be German, being just one letter away from Adolf. Yet there is nothing else in the story to reinforce this idea. In spite of his foreign (non-Japanese) name, written in *katakana*, the phonetic script used for *gairaigo* (loan words borrowed from other languages), Gadolf is walking through a landscape that is clearly meant to be somewhere

in Japan. There are references to a painting by the Japanese artist Hokusai (北齋の山下白雨, *Hokusai no yamashita shiro-ame*), willow trees are described in Buddhist terminology (楊の舍利, *yanagi no shari*) and there is an allusion to a famous *tanka* in talking of 幾山河の人たち, *Ikuyamagawa no hitotachi*.

Kenji Miyazawa loved the landscape around his home in Iwate prefecture in the north of Japan, and he used it as the setting for his stories. It might also be the setting for this story, but there is no clear indication one way or the other. We have to interpret the clues and make our own guesses. When Gadolf finds the house deserted, he thinks that the owners may have run off afraid of a volcano erupting. Or there again, perhaps they fled to escape the plague, Gadolf thinks to himself, and this idea of there being an always present danger of contagious disease is taken up when Gadolf wonders if the house may once have been a sanatorium, a place where patients could be isolated to stop the spread of infection. Kenji himself was put in such a place at the age of six, so we might again see this as pointing towards the setting of the story as being Iwate.

In another of Kenji's stories, *The Biography of Gusko Budori*, we read of two children having to wander about on their own, fending for themselves as best they can after their parents have died from famine. Iwate prefecture was not a wealthy place in Kenji's day, and life for its farming communities was harsh. Famine and disease were by no means uncommon. Perhaps Gadolf, like Gusko, has lost his parents and is wandering from place to place looking for food and shelter.

The incongruity of having a hero speak in Japanese, walk in a Japanese landscape and yet have a distinctly un-Japanese name is something we find time and again in Kenji's tales. Here it is Gadolf, elsewhere it is Gusko. The hero of Kenji's most well-known story *Ginga Tetsudo no Yoru* is called Giovanni. Then there is Gorsch the cellist. Obviously Kenji had a thing about foreign names beginning with the letter 'g'. It is only a pity he never saw fit to write a story with a George as its hero.

The sense of foreignness we get from Gadolf's name is heightened by its being the first word we read when we start the story; it is the first word of the title. If we were to read only the title, it would be impossible for us to make sense of it. Only by reading the opening lines of the story itself do we come to realize that Gadolf is the name of a boy.

The title an author gives to a story is vitally important; if it does not arouse our curiosity, we will not bother reading any further. *Watching Paint Dry in Coventry* is unlikely to get the blood pumping in many veins. *Gadolf's Lily* is a mixture of something as yet unknowable (who or what is Gadolf or perhaps even 'gadolf?') and something known (and entrancing). There is enough there to draw us in, and make us want to find out who or what this Gadolf might be, and what relationship he (or she or even it) might have with a lily (Does he run a flower shop? Does he

paint still life?).

Having stimulated our curiosity with the attention-grabbing *Gadolf* of the title, Kenji then begins the tale proper and immediately hits us with another *gairaigo* ('Hackney'). In translating this, we have to be careful. Kenji sought to give his opening a dramatic flourish by throwing in this (to Japanese ears of the Taisho era) exotic-sounding word. To British ears of the Tony Blair era, the word Hackney is not quite so exotic, being a rather grotty area of east London that is almost totally ignored by the Underground train network. Kenji strives to make his opening sentence in Japanese as mesmerizing as he can, so when we come to put this sentence into English, we must try to convey this sense of wonder. However, unhappily for the English translator, starting the tale with "Like a Hackney horse's tail . . ." would sound (dare I say it) rather hackneyed. But I digress.

The problem we face when reading (and translating) this story is trying to understand what Kenji was driving at when he used phrases such as "like a Hackney horse's tail". Why does he specify the breed of horse? Does he do so assuming his readership will be au fait with the finer points of equine breeding? Or does he do so to strike a pose? Is he showing off his knowledge? What effect is Kenji aiming for?

As the story proceeds, we come across more and more phrases that stand out and demand our attention: willow trees are frolicking, the sky is china-white, leaves are covered in arsenic, dust is made of nickel, roofs look like electro-magnets, houses look as if they are made of gelatin. It is clear from even this short list that Kenji is fascinated by science.

Kenji's story crackles and spits with nervous energy and with an intensity that mirrors the electrical storm that lights up the sky and *Gadolf's* lilies. We read of lightning burning more brightly than a magnesium flame. As with the case of the Hackney horse, here too, there is a suspicion that Kenji is parading his knowledge, showboating to a certain degree. Surely very few people in Taisho Japan were well acquainted with magnesium flames. But perhaps we should give Kenji the benefit of the doubt. He is clearly a writer in thrall to the marvels of the natural world, and no doubt he wanted to share this fascination with his readership.

Kenji clearly takes great joy in the materials that make up the universe we inhabit: everything from shell to fur, from concrete and plaster of Paris to tin and glass. It is not only textures but also colours that are described in loving, almost obsessive detail: white, Kenji's symbol for purity and love, appears eleven times; black eight times, blue seven times, and then there are violets, reds, roses and yellows. All these colours appear in a story that takes place at night in a raging storm, in a house with no lights. The only light is that provided by nature, in the form of lightning and (once the storm has abated) the stars in the night sky.

In many ways it is a black and white world, with the darkness of the night alternating with the



dazzling brightness of the lightning flashes. At one point Kenji says that the lightning has bleached Gadolf of all colour. This contrast between darkness and light is taken up in the juxtaposition of the dire situation Gadolf finds himself in (cold, wet, hungry, far from home, with no food or friends, exhausted), with his love for the white lilies. In spite of the gloom and harsh reality confronting the lonely traveler, Gadolf does not give in, and sees the lilies as a symbol for love, purity and endurance. In spite of the cold and wet, and in spite of the disturbing nightmare he has as he huddles up in the ramshackle house, Gadolf finishes the story in a much more relaxed and positive frame of mind than he started it. The reason he is able to do this is precisely because the lilies in which he invested his emotional wellbeing have managed to survive the storm. Only one of the ten lilies has been damaged. The beautiful and delicate-looking flowers have withstood all the wind and rain could throw at them, and have not buckled under the strain. This is clearly a case of 雨にも負けず, 風にも負けず (*Ame ni mo makezu, kaze ni mo makezu*). This theme of enduring hardship is perhaps the one for which Kenji is best remembered.

The positive attitude Gadolf adopts once he sees the lilies have survived the storm is in stark contrast to his grumpiness at the outset. As we join him as the story begins, we find Gadolf walking along the road, cursing the leaves on the trees, and even casting aspersions on the nature of the light (淫らな光, *midara-na hikari*). He is so tired that he cannot even trust his own eyes; he thinks he sees a dog, but cannot be sure (later referring to it as that 曖昧な犬, *aimai-na inu*).

Kenji tells us that Gadolf's ears are ringing like the bells of a Catholic church calling out morning mass. For a country with a tiny Christian population, it is odd to find such a reference; soon afterwards there is a further religious allusion but this time it is a Buddhist image that Kenji uses: 楊の舍利 (*yanagi no shari*), the *shari* being the bones of Buddha.

After the many references to science, now we read of religion. And before we know it, Kenji moves on, with great verve and energy, to describe the power of the natural world in the shape of wind and rain, of thunder and lightning. In the midst of all this noise and confusion, Gadolf's head is fit to explode.

Driven on by hunger, never slowing his pace even after a day spent walking, Gadolf is clearly running on empty. He is angry at the world, and seems starved not only of food but also of love. It is out of this lonely desperation that he gives the lilies so great a meaning. For him they are so much more than merely flowers; they represent to him a symbol of hope, purity and love. He ardently desires that they stand tall and strong, and when his hope is borne out, it rejuvenates him, giving him the impetus to continue his journey (the journey we call life).

One of the most remarkable scenes in this story is the dream sequence where Gadolf sees two men fighting on a slope. One of the men is dressed in a baggy panther skin, while the other is

described as looking like the king of the birds (i.e. an eagle). These two weirdly-clad shadowy characters wrestle and grapple, uttering blood-curdling screams that petrify Gadolf who is convinced they will crush him on the slope as they come tumbling down. Just as Alice awakes from her dream when the cards fall on her, here Gadolf is woken from his nightmare as he is knocked flat by the men falling on him. Just as Alice is relieved to find herself back on terra firma, so is Gadolf; he picks himself up and cheered by the thought that his lilies have won through, he waits for the rain to ease up before continuing on his way.