

宮澤賢治の『かしわばやしの夜』の英訳と一考察

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A Night in the Oak Grove : A Translation of and Reflections on Kenji Miyazawa's 『かしわばやしの夜』

George Wallace

"The sun's set! The sun's set!" Seisaku said as he busily pressed down the earth on the barnyard grass seedlings he had just planted.

The amber sun had already disappeared behind the ultramarine mountains to the south, and the fields were now strangely sad and lonely. From the white birch trees a fine powder seemed to pour forth into the air.

Suddenly the sound of a strange voice could be heard coming from the oak grove. Someone was singing out of tune at the top of his voice.

"A saffron chapeau, dum-diddly-dee!"

The colour drained from Seisaku's face as he stood there stock still in amazement. Throwing his hoe to the ground, he ran as quietly as he could over towards the oak grove.

He had barely reached the wood when suddenly someone grabbed him around the neck from behind. Caught by surprise Seisaku twisted round and saw before him an extremely tall, sharp-eyed artist who was seething with anger. On his head he wore a red fez and on his feet he had leather shoes. His strange grey smock flapped about him in the wind, many sizes too big for him.

"What do you think you're doing, walking round here that like, creeping about on all fours as if you were a mouse? Well, what have you got to say for yourself?"

Seisaku didn't know quite what to say.

'If he's looking for a fight, I'll teach him a lesson he won't forget,' he thought to himself. Looking up at the sky, he suddenly yelled out at the top of his voice, "A red chapeau, dum-diddly-dee!"

All at once, the artist let go of Seisaku, and burst into laughter like a dog howling at the moon, the noise echoing throughout the wood.

"That's wonderful! That really is excellent! What would you say to us going for a walk in the woods? How about it? Oh, of course! We haven't even said hello properly yet, have we? Well, if it's all right with you, I'll go

first. Good evening! The finely chopped shadows are scattered in the fields. Well? What do you think of that? Not a bad way of saying hello, wouldn't you agree? Now it's your turn," the artist said, clearing his throat as if in anticipation. His face suddenly took on a look of contempt as he peered down his nose at Seisaku.

Seisaku felt confused. It was late in the evening, and he was hungry. As he gazed up into the sky, the clouds looked to him as if they were made of rice cakes. In a panic he blurted out, "Umm . . . Good evening! What a lovely evening it is, too! Umm . . . The sky is covered with bean flour. I'm sorry, but that's all I can come up with."

The artist however was evidently delighted with this, clapping his hands as he jumped up and down with joy.

"Come on. Let's go into the woods! Tonight I'm the guest of the Great King of the Oak Grove. Come with me and I'll show you something you'll never forget!"

All of a sudden the artist became very serious. Hoisting his red and white paint box, splashed and smeared with paint, onto his shoulders, he quickly strode off into the heart of the wood. Seisaku followed on behind, swinging his arms as he went.

The wood smelled of cinnamon and everything in it looked pale yellow. The third tree they came to seemed about to break into a dance, with its leg poised in the air. When it caught sight of them approaching however, the tree stopped dead in surprise. Looking very embarrassed, it licked the knee of its raised leg and carefully watched Seisaku and the artist out of the corner of its eye as they walked by. As Seisaku strolled by, the tree sneered at him.

'Oh well, nothing much for it, I suppose,' Seisaku thought to himself as he followed on behind the artist in silence.

But as they walked on, it seemed to Seisaku that while all the trees greeted the artist with a smile, to him they did nothing but frown.

In the gloomy twilight, suddenly a gnarled and knotty oak stuck out its leg to trip Seisaku as he walked by. Spotting the danger in time, Seisaku leaped over the outstretched leg with a cry of "Oh no, you don't!"

"What's the matter?" the artist asked over his shoulder. Without waiting for an answer, he quickly walked on again.

The wind was blowing through the trees, as they tried to frighten Seisaku with creepy ghoulish voices, whispering as he went, "Seisaku, you're going to be so, so sorry!"

But Seisaku gave as good as he got. Opening his mouth as wide as he could, he shouted, "Seisaku's going to huff and puff and blow your house down!"

Frightened witless, the trees fell silent, their silence only broken by the staccato laughter of the artist as he struggled for breath.

At last after a long walk through the woods, the two finally arrived before the Great King of the Oak Grove, a massive tree that loomed up in the darkness with nineteen arms and one fat sturdy leg. Around him stood his mighty entourage, all of them loyal down to the last tree.

The artist dropped his paint box down onto the ground with a thud. His back bent with age, the king addressed

the artist in a low voice.

“So, you’re back with us already, eh? We’ve been expecting you. And who’s this then, this new visitor to our woods? If I were you, I’d have nothing to do with him. He’s a criminal with a record longer than your arm. Ninety-eight convictions he’s had!”

“You’re lying!” Seisaku thundered. “I’m no criminal! I’m an honest man!”

“What are you talking about?” The king replied angrily, throwing out his rugged chest in defiance. “We’ve got the evidence to prove it. It’s all written down in our files. There are still ninety-eight traces of you and your axe around this wood even today.”

“Ha! Ha! Ha! Oh, this really is too funny! You’re talking about the ninety-eight tree trunks that I chopped down, aren’t you? Well, what of it? Those trees I paid for, fair and square. I bought them from Tosuke for two large bottles of *sake*, and he owns all the land round here.”

“Why don’t you buy me some *sake*?” The king asked.

“Why should I? I’ve no reason to buy you any.”

“I could give you many reasons why you should! Now come on, buy me some!”

“I’ve got no reason to buy you anything!”

The artist frowned as he stood there dejectedly listening to the quarrel. Then pointing through the trees over towards the east, he suddenly shouted, “Come on, you two, stop your bickering or you’ll be made fun of by the moon!”

Over in the east, the large smiling peach-blossom moon rose up over the dark-blue mountain tops. Around it there glowed a pale green halo. All the young trees stretched out their arms towards it as if about to jump up and fly into the air.

*“Dear moon, dear sweet moon,
Forgive us for not recognizing you
You look so different tonight
Forgive us for not seeing it was you.”*

The Great King of the Oaks twisted his white beard, murmuring to himself. Gazing intently at the moon, he then quietly began to sing.

*“Tonight you wear
Your best pink kimono.
Tonight in the oak grove
It is the third night of the summer dance.*

*Soon you will change into
Your pale blue kimono.
Joy and happiness reign in our wood
As long as you are in the sky.”*

The artist enthusiastically clapped his hands.

“That’s wonderful! Bravo! That’s right! It is the third night of the summer dance. Come on, everyone, I want you all to step forward and sing a song. The words and melody of your song should be your own. I’ll paint some big medals to give to the best nine singers and tomorrow I’ll hang them on your branches for you.”

Seisaku was having a really good time and in his excitement he blurted out, “Yes, that’s right. And for the worst nine of you, I’ve got a special prize! Tomorrow I’ll chop you down and drag you off to a place where they’ll scare the living daylights out of you.”

“Wash your mouth out, you impudent little toad!” The Great Oak King said angrily.

“Who are you calling a toad? I’m only going to cut down nine trees, and besides, I’ve already paid for them, ages ago, when I bought Tosuke all that *sake*.”

“Well, why won’t you buy me any then?”

“Why on earth should I? No reason to buy you any.”

“There are plenty of reasons you should! So, come on, cough up!”

“No way!”

With a frown on his face, the artist impatiently waved his hands in the air ordering them to stop.

“Oh really! You’re not at it again, are you? The stars are already out in the sky and I want things to go smoothly tonight so let’s get on with the singing, shall we? All right? I’ll go first. This is called *The Song of the Prizes*:

“The first prize is a platinum medal.

The second prize is of gold.

The third prize is of quicksilver

While the fourth prize is made of nickel.

The fifth prize is a zinc medal and

The sixth prize is a fake.

The seventh prize is a medal made of lead.

While the eighth prize is one of tin.

The ninth prize is made of matches.

And from the tenth prize to the hundredth prize will be medals made of I don’t know quite what!”

The Great Oak King was in a better mood already and he laughed with all his might. The other oaks stood in a semi-circle in front of their king.

The moon was slowly changing into its pale blue kimono. The wood looked like the bottom of a pond, and the shadows of the trees fell onto the ground like a thin net.

The artist's red hat seemed to flicker with flame as he stood holding his notebook in his hand. He licked his pencil.

"Come on, then. Let's get on with it! Hurry up, you lot! The sooner you sing, the better your score will be."

A small oak jumped out from the semi-circle and bowed before the king. The moonlight suddenly turned blue.

"What's the title of your song?" the artist asked with a serious look on his face.

"The Horse and The Rabbit."

"Okay. Let's hear it, then," the artist said, writing down the title in his notebook.

"The ears of the rabbit are long—"

"Just a moment," the artist said interrupting. "My pencil's broken. Wait a moment, please, if you would, while I sharpen it."

The artist took off a shoe, which he used to collect the shavings as he sharpened his pencil. All the oak trees watched in amazement, whispering among themselves as they looked on. Finally their king spoke.

"Really, you are too kind. I am touched by your consideration, and I am truly grateful for your efforts to keep our wood clean."

"What are you talking about?" the artist asked offhandedly. "I'm going to use these shavings to make vinegar later."

The king felt sick and looked away. The trees all felt as if a cold wet blanket had been thrown over them, and even the moonlight seemed to pale and blanch.

His pencil-sharpening over, the artist got up again and said affably, "Okay, let's get this show on the road!"

The oaks began to stir, the moonlight regained its bluish transparency and even the king seemed to be in better spirits, murmuring to himself contentedly.

The young oak tree thrust out its chest and began to sing once more:

"The ears of a rabbit are long

But not as long

As the ears of a horse."

"That's wonderful! Superb! Hahaha! Hohoho!" Everyone fell about in laughter and applause.

"I award you first prize – the platinum medal!" the artist cried out in a loud voice, making a note in his book.

"My song is called *The Foxes' Song*," said the second oak to step forward. The moonlight turned slightly green.

“Righty-ho, let’s hear it!”

*“Foxy fox, you little fox,
Your tail caught fire
On a moonlit night.”*

“That is brilliant! That is great! Hahaha! Hohoho!”

“I award you second prize – the gold medal is yours!”

“I’m next! My song is called *The Cats’ Song*.”

“Fire away, then! Let’s hear it!”

*“Country cats
Meow and purr,
But town cats
Mousey and purr.”*

“That is superb! Wonderful! Hahaha! Hohoho!”

“I award you third prize – for you, the quicksilver medal! Come on, you lot! I want some of you bigger trees taking part too, you know! What are you waiting for? Let’s get a move on!” the artist said looking at them rather severely.

“My song is called *The Walnut Trees’ Song*,” said one of the slightly larger trees as he shyly stepped forward.

“Jolly good! Right, everyone, quieten down, please!”

The oak tree began to sing:

*“The walnut trees rustle in the wind
Their leaves all golden and green.
The walnut trees flutter in the wind
Their leaves all golden and green.”*

“What a beautiful tenor voice you have! Bravo!”

“I award you fourth prize – the nickel medal!”

“My song is called *The Monkey’s Seat*.”

“Okay, let’s hear it!”

The tree put its hands on its hips and began to sing:

*"Little monkey, little monkey,
Your seat is all wet,
All wet and mushy with mist it is,
Your seat is all rotten through."*

"What a beautiful tenor voice! Bravo!"

"I award you fifth prize – the zinc medal!"

"My song is called *The Chapeau Song*," said the oak who had earlier tried to trip Seisaku as he entered the wood.

"Right you are, let's hear it!"

*"A saffron chapeau, dum-diddly-dee!
A red chapeau, dum-diddly-dee!"*

"That's remarkable! Superb! Bravo!"

"I award you sixth prize – the fake medal!"

Until then, Seisaku had listened to the songs without saying a word, but now he suddenly cried out, "What are you talking about? That song's not original! You heard us singing it earlier and thought you'd use it yourself!"

"Shut up, you impudent whelk! This has got nothing to do with you!" the Oak King thundered, quivering with rage.

"Oh yeah? It's a second-hand song, you hear, nothing but a cheap imitation. You go round calling me names like that and I'll show you what's what. Tomorrow I'll bring my axe and chop you all down, one by one!"

"What damned cheek! And how do you suppose you'd ever get away with it?"

"Just you wait. Tomorrow I'll go and buy Tosuke two large bottles of *sake* and then you'll be in trouble!"

"If you're buying him *sake*, why won't you buy me some?"

"Why should I? I've got no reason to buy you any."

"Buy me some, damn you!"

"No way!"

"Calm down, you two, and stop bickering. The song's not original so I'm giving it the fake medal. Now let's not have any more arguing about it. Right, who's next up to sing? Come on, let's be having you!"

The moonlight was transparent blue and the wood was like the bottom of a lake.

"My song is called *Seisaku's Song*," said a young strong oak stepping forward to sing.

"What the blazes!" With his fists flying, Seisaku charged forward only to be held back by the artist.

"Wooah! Hold your horses, there! Just because you heard your name mentioned doesn't mean they've insulted

you. Let's just listen to the song first, shall we, before jumping to conclusions. When you're ready!"

Bobbing up and down, the young oak began to sing.

"In his lance-corporal's uniform

Seisaku went out into the fields

And picked many grapes."

"That's as far as I go. I'll leave it to someone else to continue."

"Hahaha, hohoho!" All the trees erupted in a storm of laughter, obviously enjoying Seisaku's discomfort.

"I award you seventh prize – the lead medal!"

"I'll continue the song," said another oak stepping forward.

"Righty-ho, let's hear it!"

The tree glanced over at Seisaku, laughing slightly scornfully as if to make fun of him. Then with sudden seriousness he launched into his song:

"Seisaku squeezed the juice

Out of all the grapes,

Added sugar,

And bottled it."

"Come on, someone. You add the next bit."

"Hahaha, hohoho!" The trees howled with laughter which blew through the wood like a weird wind. They were certainly having fun at Seisaku's expense. For his part, Seisaku was itching to leap forward and strike them all down, one after another, but the artist stepped into his path blocking the way just in time.

"I award you eighth prize – the medal made of tin!"

"Me next," said another oak stepping forward.

"Righty-ho, let's hear you!"

"All the wine bottles

Seisaku stored in the barn

Went Pop! Pop! Pop!

And now there is not a drop left!"

“Hahaha, hohoho! Hahaha, hohoho!” The trees could hardly contain their laughter.

“Shut up, damn you! Why on earth do you lot always have to drag up gossip from the past? That’s an old story that only you want to remember.”

Seisaku was raring to let fly at them, but the artist firmly held him in check.

“I award you ninth prize – the medal made of matches! Come on, who’s next? Let’s be having you!”

None of the trees moved. Suddenly they all went silent.

“Now this won’t do at all! Come on, sing, damn you! You are all going to have to sing, whether you like it or not!”

The artist’s words had no effect. No one moved.

“The next prize I award will be the best one yet, so come on, you lot, let’s hear you sing!”

There was a rustling of leaves and the trees at last began to stir.

Just then from somewhere deep in the woods there came the sound of murmuring, and all of a sudden a large flock of owls flew by. Flapping their wings in the bluish moonlight they settled on the heads and shoulders, the arms and chests of the oaks.

“Too-wit-too-woo

The moon on high

Too-wit-too-woo to you.”

The Owl General dressed in splendid gold braid, swiftly and silently flew through the air coming to a halt before the Great Oak King. The bright red bags under his eyes looked most peculiar; he must certainly have been a very old owl indeed.

“Good evening to you, Great King and also to your honorable guests. We have just finished hunting for the night and we were wondering if by any chance you might be interested in holding a joint dance with us? Just a while ago we heard such sweet and melodious singing coming from over here that we felt we just simply had to come over and see what was going on.”

“What do you mean, such sweet and melodious singing?” Seisaku yelled out at him.

Pretending he hadn’t heard this outburst, the Great Oak King nodded his approval to the owl leader.

“That is a very fine suggestion to which I hereby grant my warmest blessings. Come on, let’s get started straight away, shall we?”

“That’s wonderful!”

Turning to face everyone, the Owl General began to sing in a voice sweeter than sugar.

“As Kanzaemon the crow

*Shakes his sleepy black head
And Tozaemon the kite
Dozes on two litres of oil,
We fearless owls with our hearts full of courage
Are busy catching worms
And attacking birds in their sleep
All under the cover of night."*

The owls all went wild, whooping it up with their too-wit-too-woo.

"I must say your song does seem a little vulgar to me, not quite the sort of thing for someone of noble character to listen to . . ."

The Owl General looked the Great Oak King in the eye. Suddenly his adjutant festooned with red and white ribbons burst into laughter.

"Come now, let us not argue with one another tonight. Don't worry – we'll make sure the next song is much more dignified. Let us all join in a dance! Are you trees ready? Are you owls ready? If so, let the dance begin!"

*"Dear moon on high, dear moon, dear moon!
You are so round, so round, so round!
Dear stars in the sky, dear stars, dear stars!
You shine so bright, so bright, so bright!
The oaks go kan-kara-kan!
The owls go too-wit-too-woo!"*

Raising their hands into the air, the oak trees threw back their heads and danced like dervishes. With great aplomb the owls flapped their silvery wings in time to the dancing. The moon glimmered like a pearl as the Great Oak King joyfully sang his reply:

*"The rain splashes down,
The wind howls and moans,
The hail hammers down,
The rain splashes down."*

"Oh no! Fog is moving in!" the adjutant cried out. Indeed the moon was already half hidden. It was now nothing

more than a faint circle of light dimly visible as the fog fell upon the oak grove like an arrow piercing the air.

The trees seemed to lose all self-control. In a twinkling of an eye they were as if turned to stone, caught in mid-dance with one leg in the air and their hands stretched out before them.

The cold misty air blew against Seisaku's cheeks. The artist was nowhere to be seen and only his red hat remained, left behind on the ground as if forgotten.

An owl, obviously not yet used to flying in fog, could be heard flapping its wings in a panic as it tried to escape. Out of the corner of their eyes, the oaks sadly watched Seisaku go.

As he walked out the wood, Seisaku looked up at the sky. Where the moon had earlier been was now gradually getting light and a black cloud in the shape of a dog was running across the sky. From over in the direction of the marshy wood that lay far off behind the oak grove, the artist's voice could be faintly heard. He was singing at the top of his voice:

"A red chapeau, dum-diddly-dee!"

A Comparison of *The Garden of Live Flowers* (Chapter Two of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*) and Kenji Miyazawa's *Kashiwabayashi no Yoru*

In both stories the main character is a child, and one who has an extraordinary dreamlike experience talking with anthropomorphic trees and flowers. The interaction between child and the plant life is hardly pastoral, far from idyllic and full of conflict. The antagonism between human and plant is comical but at the same time rather unsettling.

Both stories begin in similar fashion: Alice and Seisaku are both alone, although Alice does have her cats for company. In both stories the sun has set and it is cold and dark outside. Alice is sitting in an armchair upstairs in front of a fire, while outside in the snow boys collect firewood for the November 5th Guy Fawkes celebrations. Once she has climbed through the mirror, Alice goes out into the garden where she meets the live flowers. Yet while Alice begins her adventures indoors, later moving outside into the garden, Seisaku spends the entirety of his story in the open air. As his adventure begins, he is working in a field when he hears some strange singing and runs over to the oak grove. Once he has entered the grove (and Alice the garden), the story proper begins.

The third tree Seisaku walks by looks as if it is about to break into a dance but stops and licks its knee, sneering at Seisaku as the boy walks by. Seisaku senses that all the trees are against him, and one tries in vain to trip the boy.

The wind was blowing through the trees, as they tried to frighten Seisaku with creepy ghoulish voices, whispering as he passed, “Seisaku, you’re going to be so, so sorry!”

The noise made by the wind blowing through the trees in the darkness sounds to Seisaku like a threat, and he feels scared. But he is no coward and decides to act tough, shouting out into the void, much to the artist’s amusement. The trees’ branches are buffeted this way and that by the strong wind; it appears as if the trees are dancing. Their dance is perceived by Seisaku as a creepy, ghoulish threat while in *Looking-Glass House* (Chapter One of *Through the Looking-Glass*) Alice talks of the trees waking up in summer when “they dress themselves all in green, and dance about—whenever the wind blows—oh, that’s very pretty!” But the garden she walks into with its talking flowers is not dissimilar from the wood where Seisaku finds himself constantly being sniped at by the trees. The trees Seisaku meets and the flowers Alice meets all treat the human children with barely concealed contempt. The artist is advised to stay away from Seisaku because of his criminal record. Alice is not accused of crimes and misdemeanors, but she is left in no doubt how low an opinion the flowers have of her. The flowers’ stinging criticisms of Alice are aimed primarily at her appearance and her intelligence. Alice is said to be beginning to ‘fade’ and become ‘untidy’. Her shape is ‘awkward’. Her face is described as not being ‘a clever one’. Her hair is deemed not curly enough. The Rose says, “It’s my opinion that you never think *at all*”, while the Violet adds that she has never seen “anybody that looked stupider.”

This barrage of verbal nastiness meted out to Alice is very catty and unpleasant, but at least Alice is never in any danger of physical assault. In the oak grove, the trees not only make fun of Seisaku in their songs, we also get the feeling that they pose a physical threat (and not merely when they try to trip him up).

However on closer inspection we realize that the ones most likely to suffer an attack are the trees. Seisaku threatens to come back with his axe and chop them all down, just as he did to the ninety-eight he has already felled. The child is not defenceless by any means. Likewise Alice is clearly more than able to stand up for herself, warning the flowers that if they don’t hold their tongues, she’ll pick them.

It is interesting to compare this with Kenji Miyazawa’s story *Gadolf and the Lilies* in which the eponymous young hero finds shelter from a storm in a deserted house in the middle of nowhere. As the storm rages through the night and Gadolf, hungry and cold, shivers in the darkness, he spots some lilies being buffeted by the wind and rain. The boy invests these lilies with great significance, seeing them as symbols of life and love (and by extension, his own survival in an uncaring world). The next morning he awakes to find that the lilies have indeed survived the storm, and this gives him the necessary impetus to set off on his journey once more.

Gadolf’s unspeaking lilies are encouraging him, filling him with hope for the future, while Seisaku’s all-singing, all-dancing trees do their best to cut him down to size, giving him a verbal drubbing to repay him for his cutting down of their fellow trees. They are vindictive and snide, and take great pleasure in making fun of

Seisaku. For their part, Carroll's live flowers do their utmost to cut Alice down to size. This young interloper who has stumbled into their midst is made to feel very dumpy and unattractive, even old before her time, by the sharp-tongued flowers. But whereas Seisaku gets increasingly agitated by the songs the oaks sing teasing him and making fun of his unsuccessful attempts to make wine, Alice is seemingly unaffected by the rude remarks directed her way by the flowers.

When the Red Queen appears, Alice does not seek her company as an escape from the flowers (whom she found 'interesting enough'), but because Alice is a snob ('she felt it would be far grander to have a talk with a real Queen'). The flowers are immediately deemed to be droppable once someone of higher rank (and therefore intrinsically more interesting to the status-conscious Alice) turns up. Curiously the Rose for all her barbed remarks about Alice's lack of intelligence, does try to help Alice meet the Red Queen; she advises her to walk 'the other way' (i.e. away from the Queen) in order to meet her. Alice being the headstrong girl she is, ignores this sound advice and soon finds herself far from where she wants to be, 'walking in at the front-door again'.

There is clearly a strong sense of rivalry and competition between the humans and the antagonistic plant life. The flowers' comments about Alice are obviously inspired by jealousy, while Seisaku's problems with the oak trees are caused in part by the fact he refuses to show the Great Oak King the respect (and the *sake*) that the tree thinks is his due.

There is also a clear sense of hierarchy in both stories: Alice is quick to turn her back on the flowers and turn her attention to the Red Queen when the latter appears. The Red Queen demands and gets the respect of Alice, who is after all a well brought-up child used to showing deference to her social superiors. In Seisaku's case, it is clear he is not a product of the well-off middle-class; he works the land with his hoe and gets his hands dirty. He defers to no one, though he is perhaps slightly in thrall to the artist who is a wildly colourful and eccentric character who dresses in a most outlandish style. In Kenji's tale it is the trees and the owls who display a keen sense of hierarchy. The trees have a king and the owls a general.

The role of the artist mirrors that of the Red Queen in some respects. Both are adult companions who provide the child heroes with some support but of a rather ambivalent nature. They lead Seisaku and Alice on, showing them the way, and act as instigators to the stories. Without them there is a feeling that the children's adventures in their dreamlike worlds would not have taken place. Seisaku would have stayed hoeing the field, while Alice would not have found her way to the chessboard-like plain which she first catches sight of when the Red Queen takes her to the hilltop.

In spite of the important function they both carry out, neither can be said to be particularly friendly. In fact their attitude to their young protégés is ambivalent at best. They guide them along but their intentions are far from clear. The artist is a capricious and willfully eccentric type, who appears out of the blue one evening, only to disappear without warning, leaving Seisaku to wonder who on earth he might have been and where he came

from. His curious utterances are as ridiculous as the clothes he wears, and though he does nothing to endanger Seisaku's life, it is unclear whether his influence over the boy is benign or not. Seisaku follows him into the oak grove as unthinkingly as a dog trotting after its master, and doesn't stop to consider whether he is someone to be trusted or not. Once they are in the oak grove, the artist is happy to reward the trees for singing their song ridiculing Seisaku. In effect the artist is colluding and conniving in the boy's humiliation. It is almost as if he has led Seisaku into the woods solely to enable the oaks to have some fun at the boy's expense.

The Red Queen is by no means a likeable character either, bossing Alice about, telling her what she is to do. However, it is clear from the outset that her function is to facilitate Alice's entry into the chess game. She explains to Alice how she will move (for example, by train), whom she will meet, and what she can look forward to (for example, becoming a queen). Although her manner may not be to our liking, it is at least undeniable that her role is to help Alice and to reassure her of what she is to face. She prepares Alice for the adventures that lie before her, and by mentioning the fact that Alice will one day be a queen herself, she makes the journey one of keen anticipation (both for the reader and for Alice herself).