

FIVE CHILDREN'S POEMS FROM THE JAPANESE
(TRADITIONAL)

Translated by Graeme Wilson

How Old's the Moon

How old's the moon?
The moon's thirteen,
Thirteen years and seven more.
The moon's still young.
It bore that child;
This other child the young moon bore.

Who'll carry the child?
Let Oman carry it.
Where, o where, is Oman gone?
Oman went
To buy some tea,
To buy some oil is Oman gone.

In front of the oil-shop
Oman slipped,
Fell and spilt a quart of oil.
Then what happened?
Jiro's dog
And Taro's dog, they licked it all.

So then what happened
To those two lap-dogs?
Those two dogs have now become
One the skin
Of a tambourine,
One the skin for a big round drum.

Facing this way,
Ratta tat tat:
Facing that way: ratta tat tat!
Two dead dog-skins,
Two dead dog-skins,
Dog-skins squashed and beaten flat.

Festival of the Dead

“Good Master Snail, come join us,”
The bad black Raven said;
“It’s time to go to the temple
And offer prayers for the dead.”

“Well, not just now,” the Snail replied.
“Come, come! What’s eating you?”
“I think indeed that a certain bird
Will eat me if I do.”

“In that case,” said the Raven,
“If that’s his style of mind,
Perhaps we’ll all be better off
If that slacker stays behind.”

The Priest of the Mountain Temple

The priest of the mountain temple
Was fond of bouncing ball
But no-one in that temple
Had any toys at all,
So he stuffed a cat in a paper bag
And, when he kicks it now,
Bam goes his foot on the paper bag
And the football goes *miaow*.

Bam, bam, bam he kicks that ball:
Miaow, miaow, miaow.

Snail of the Paddy

Snail of the paddy, snail of the paddy,
Off to the hills now: go, go, go.

That's where I went in the spring last year
And a big black bird they call a crow
Pecked me this side, pecked me that side,
Rolled me over on my back,
Pecked me this side, pecked me that side,
Pecked this paddy-snail blue and black.

Never for a second time, no, no, no:
Back to the hills I will not go.

Mister Moon

Mister Moon, Mister Moon,
Why don't the stars come out?
Because the full moon hates them:
That's why they won't come out.

What's that there? A baby owl,
A baby owl that skims the pond.
And what is that beyond the owl?
Nobody knows what lies beyond.