

# The Poet Farmer: Recapturing Kenji Miyazawa's Rural and Agricultural Roots

Neil Shafer Oatsvall

Arkansas School for Mathematics, Sciences, and the Arts



# Kenji Miyazawa

---

• 1896-1933

「おれたちはみな農民  
である」

“We are all farmers.” –  
*Outline of Agrarian Art*  
(1926)



# Hanamaki City, Iwate Prefecture



- Site of the 3/11 Earthquake/Tsunami
- “Tibet of Japan”
- Largely agricultural/rural
- Shohei Ohtani

# Beloved Poet and Children's Storyteller

- “Restaurant of Many Orders”
- “Night on the Galactic Railroad”
- “Strong in the Rain”
- “Koiwai Farm”



# Other Scholars

- Typically focus on Kenji as Buddhist
- Also family life, especially the death of his younger sister and his parents owning a pawn shop



Sobacchi, the Hanamaki mascot

Thesis:

In focusing on his Buddhist philosophy, sometimes scholars have lost sight of the primacy that agriculture and rural spaces played in Kenji's life and writing.

More than that, his consistent use of rural and agricultural themes and images in his writing suggests that his working life was more than just a career—Kenji Miyazawa believed that rural life denoted a peacefulness and purpose that extended far beyond a way to eke out a meager living on this planet.

# “Night on the Galactic Railroad” (1934)

- “Of course, we practice agriculture in these parts, but there is a promise that by and large good things will just grow on their own accord. Agriculture itself doesn’t take such a lot of effort. Usually if you just sow the seeds you want, the crops grow quickly by themselves. Even the rice is huskless, like rice in the Pacific area, and the grains are ten times bigger than normal and have a good smell. But where you folks are headed there isn’t any more agriculture. Even cakes and apples don’t have any residue when you eat them but are wafted off as delicate fragrances through the pores of the skin. The fragrance is different for each person.”





# “Night on the Galactic Railroad,” cont.



# Poems

- “Strong in the Rain”
  - “in the shade of the woods of the pines of the fields being in a little thatched hut”
- “Mr. Pamirs the Scholar Takes a Walk”
  - “It would seem that excessive firmness; Is not priced in the evaluation of a nation’s soil; For the ground to form shallow indentations; In response to the tread of a foot upon it.”
- “Cow”
  - An Ayrshire cow “playing, rubbing her horns in the grass, in the misty soil, at her back the pulp factory fires; scorch the night clouds; over low dunes; the sea booms; a brass moon; like you could scoop up and swallow; so the cow feels pretty good; playing now; tapping the fence with her horns.”

## “A Rice-Growing Episode”

Yours is the kind of learning  
etched into yourself  
in the blizzards, in the sparse free time between work,  
crying—  
which will soon sprout vigorously  
and no one knows how big it will grow.  
That’s the beginning of knowledge.

\*\*Riku-u No. 132

# “The Unruly Horse”

For the last two days  
he's been in the dark stable,  
tying up hot, sickening manure  
into hundreds of bundles,  
and he's mad at the world.



# *Outline of Agrarian Art (1926)*



- “We are all farmers.”
  - 「おれたちはみな農民である」
- Science is “cold and dark” and religion “has regrettably fallen away from us”
- “My friends, together let’s combine the right power of all of the countryside with all of our lives to create one giant piece of four-dimensional art.”

# The Poet Farmer: Recapturing Kenji Miyazawa's Rural and Agricultural Roots

Neil Shafer Oatsvall

Arkansas School for Mathematics, Sciences, and the Arts