

Wilderness House Literary Review 18/2

Erik Priedkalns
Ancestor Worship

At first,

it's simple child's play. You laugh and let the eight-legged pest survive.

At first, it's a joke when she thanks her dead grandma for the
strength, food and luck.

At first you laugh at the way she tells her long gone mother about her day.

Leaving the house in the morning she says a litany of goodbyes.

So, at first you joke and say so long to that fun, gone uncle you drank
with that night.

Kanpai!

At first,

the travel magazine scenes are simply just scenes:
surface romance, good for the photography.

At first animals are just animals, trees just trees.

Flower strewn stone Buddhas, roadside shrines planted every other street.

At first, it just superstitious childish fantasy.

But when the swampy Kobe air shoves itself into your pours; and
the rising sun sky shows its dazzling face every dawn,

How can you not realize this place is alive?

The mountain rivers gurgle out the names from the past.

This ancient land is bent from its countless broken backs.

How can you simply say death is the end

when the country graveyards rest there so alive?

When the silence sinks down on the thick bamboo forests and figures
move in the corner of your eye.

When the cicadas sing from the sacred places.

While the temple incense burns as the people keep moving forward,

How can you claim death lives in the land?

At the end of the day on the way to the train, the station's rafters are
filled with the departed spirits' eyes.

As you walk home from the station you feel them watching, peering,
guarding from the bushes, rocks and streams.

You hear the adoring prayers of the dead carried through the leaves,
their prayers on the wind for those still alive.

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You feel the blood of the nation
in every stone, tree and leaf,

This land is timeless.

“Don’t kill the spider,” she says, “it might be my mom.”

But this time there’s no smirk, no joke or rolling eyes.

This time you let it reach cover moving quickly
across the floor,

“Bye mom,” she says.

Finally, you understand.