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*Mona Lisa, A Deer, That Man, and The Night of an Artificial
Satellite* by Murano Shirō

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Goro Takano

Mona Lisa

Murano Shirō

モナリザ

Stop looking at us with such a monotonous look, please
Such spiritual convulsions are not meaningful anymore
Stop standing in our way, please
Because of your presence
We cannot look at any landscape
You always block
Both your background and our foreground
What a bandage over our eyes you are
Behind you
Our eyeballs are bloodshot
Behind the vague
And secret fertility you unfold
Lies no shadow of eternity
What we really want to know is the truth of
Pathetic changes or
The bleak bluff and fresh bones you hide
Behind your back
Because of your own immense look
You cannot look at ours yet
Because of your own existence
We cannot look at our own landscapes yet

Goro Takano
A Deer

Murano Shirō
鹿

Standing still at the edge of a forest
In evening sunlight was a deer
He knew
His small forehead was sighted on
But
What could he do then
He was standing calmly and
Staring at a village
His lifetime was shining like gold
Against the background of the night of
The huge forest he inhabited

Goro Takano
That Man

Murano Shirō
あの人

When, for instance, I'm awfully exhausted
I sometimes see something like a castle
Soaring precariously
On the spot where everything else slips down
No visitor has been seen there for a long time
Every path bends as if to stay away from the castle
Milling around on its grounds is only a growth of trailing plants
Its every door, while shutting out the direct sunlight, resists
Crumbling away
Every name of the dead in its charnel house is still legible
And the dressing room adjoining
The storage place for armor is
Fraught with the sobs of some ladies
As long as no one dares to listen to them
Even their death remains semipermanently distorted
And their tragedies stay intact without any decay
The view of the solitary castle tilting in the air is
Yearned for best when
It is rather distant from my eyes
Often, nevertheless, I come across
A silhouette passing one of its windows
He has neither escaped from death
Nor risen from the dead
Newly born, perhaps, out of tragedies, now
He stares with raptures at the inorganic
Sparkle setting slowly in the distance

Goro Takano
The Night of an Artificial Satellite

Murano Shirō
人工衛星の夜に

Tonight, once again, we can watch a satellite flying
Through the autumnal oleaceous atmosphere
Veiling the dark Earth
Within such moist emotions, our ethics sprout
From the soil like mushrooms
And rot into the same soil
On this tiny mother ground, no more space is left
For the burial of new corpses or carcasses, apparently

Now, nobody knows which heavenly body
Will be eventually chosen for our own burial
The entire human history is turning topsy-turvily
How weird, this *ewige Wiederkehr*
The more seriously we think about this, the more sharply
We feel our blood curdling and our love thinning, but
Still, nobody knows what kind of new life
Will be waiting for us
All we know is the very chilliness of
The new beginning of this universe
Behold, the ghosts who once disappeared from the past
Are, in metallic armor, ascending the future
To welcome us
They seem to be going to usher us to brand-new tombs
Under this damp oleaceous night air
Veiling the dark, dark Earth

Commentary

The four poems I chose for my translation are originally included in *On Lost Sheep* (the Japanese original title is *Bōyō-ki* or 『亡羊記』 by Murano Shirō [村野四郎], 1901–1975).

Murano is one of the most influential poets in the history of the modern poetry in Shōwa era Japan (1926–1989). *On Lost Sheep* was Murano's ninth poetry collection in his roughly fifty-year career, and was awarded the prestigious Yomiuri Prize for Literature in 1960. The Japanese word “Bōyō” (“lost sheep”) is strongly associated with a well-known passage contained in the 4th-century C.E. Taoist text *Liezi*, whose moral is that it is simply difficult to reach the truth among countless ways in academia, just as it is almost impossible to get back the lost sheep from among too many pathways. Murano's choice of this particular word for his prize-winning book may imply his longtime faith in keeping Japanese naturalism at arm's length.

Murano's poetry began to draw national attention, especially when his second poetry collection titled *Poetry on Gymnastics* (『体操詩集』) was published in 1939. Strongly influenced by the 1920–30s German objectivism called “Neue Sachlichkeit,” he sought to carve out, through the poems in this second anthology, the pure beauty of a gymnast's every form. In those early years of his career, Murano was also deeply affected by surrealism and imagism. Those Western influences in his pre-WWII years, as much as his own agonizing experiences in wartime, led Murano to be obsessed, after the end of the Pacific War, with the Heideggerian concept called (in Murano's own terms) “nostalgia for existence.” This key idea is, in fact, functioning even as the bottom line of *On Lost Sheep*.

While working as director for a Japanese electronics company and writing poetry, Murano even wrote numerous essays on his own poetics, in which his private inclinations toward such artists as Rainer Maria Rilke, Ezra Pound, Jean Cocteau, Matsuo Bashō and Nishiwaki Junzaburō are frequently shown. Reading some of them was, honestly, quite helpful in my confronting his poetry as a translator. He emphasizes in one of them, for instance, that his free verses “need no music,” partly because they belong to, in Pound's lexicon, “logopoeia” which should be based solely on logic's geometric images and nothing else (Murano Shirō, “On Images,” in *The Poetry of Murano Shirō*, Tokyo: Shichō-sha, 1987, pp. 112–19). He also declares in one of the other essays: “I will never end up a degraded nihilist. My poetry may seem to have lost its subject matter, but it doesn't, actually. It just shows my anarchic attitude, my one and only attitude, that's all. By showing so, my poetry confirms my life and my own position. Also, it prepares me to dive into reality without hesitation” (Shirō Murano, “The Afterword” [for *On Lost Sheep*], in *The Poetry of Murano Shirō*, p. 94). I endeavored to reflect his personal poetics as faithfully as possible in my own translation.

Last but not least, I'll briefly mention here why I decided to use the German phrase “ewige Wiederkehr” in the poem “The Night of an Artificial Satellite,” instead of such corresponding English words as, say, “eternal recurrence.” As

I explained above, Murano's poetry is, overall, tinged with the pre-WWII German culture. Thus, I expected the choice of the German original phrase to be much more suited to the translation of the word 永劫回帰 in the original poem, which is the Japanese counterpart of the foregoing Nietzschean concept.