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A Community in the Open, An Autumnal Fossil, On Skeletons, and Orpheus at the Butcher Shop by Shiro Murano

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Goro Takano
A Community in the Open

Shiro Murano
空地の群落

Clusters of wild chrysanthemums are
Too crowded on a desolate empty lot and even overflow into a road
Among them, the end of a corroded steel framework is partly visible

Although I always pass on the road with anxiety
Strangely enough, nobody has been hurt there before
Beautiful ladies flutter
Their thin-cloth skirts and
Pass by the chrysanthemums indifferently
Ah, only unconcern and oblivion
May be barely able to sustain humans

While burying rusty memories into themselves
The wild chrysanthemums continue to prevail
And, obviously, around this wilderness
Finding the skyline is already impossible

Goro Takano
An Autumnal Fossil

Shiro Murano
秋の化石

This autumn, after the latest typhoon veered off course—
I wonder how many had passed before it—I opened a morning paper
And found an intriguing article, unexpectedly:
“A Giant Horn of the Prehistoric Creature Megaloceros Is Unearthed”
The article said that this Pleistocene deer had perished
Because the very horns on their heads
Had developed too heavily for them to endure

Now, perhaps
No bush hides

Such a ridiculously dreamy animal
What still lingers in my mind is
Such logic had remained safely fossilized
In the underworld for thousands of years
With no decay at all
That may be the way it goes
Now I cannot help seeking after an illusion
Of the eyes of the unfortunate deer
In the cotton-rose-like thin sunshine of this autumn—
The season of an eclipse

Goro Takano
On Skeletons

Shiro Murano
骸骨について

Dead-ended, no more shelters to rely on
Totally at a loss, finally transformed
And—what a woeful defenseless result
No more thirst to quench
No more worries over getting drenched
Nothing but the stiff present which will simply *plock* if you rap it
Neither a shell, nor a stone
Behold this jawbone and those eye sockets
This is a vestige of my distant days
Burning every meaning and blood into this
And fossilizing laughter, sobs
Love, hate
Light, and shadows into this
The old unlimited pressure was gone, eventually

Left here now is only one lime object
So hollow, so infinitely nostalgia-provoking

Mind you—he may be now absent from his grave
Sometimes, he turns to me and
Walks through my own metaphysics

Goro Takano
Orpheus at the Butcher Shop

Shiro Murano
肉屋のオルフェ

Whenever I pass by the veil-like rank
Of fat masses of meat facing this street
My soul thaws, oddly

Each of these faceless torsos
Lines up with uncanny politeness
While showing one another intimately
Their own selves injured all over, as if
They are the very worst wounds imaginable
They are interwoven like a parallel-striped pattern
And seen now like the vast expanse of numbness

Call this neither the illusion of death
Nor the dizziness lasting forever
Rather, this is something more condensed
Or something you may call the sunset of existence
Looming out of this reddish-brown trail
Is a chain of small bloodless hooves
Kicking the air obstinately yet, which
Now remains weathered on this street
With now-or-never wretchedness

The four poems I chose for my translation are originally included in *On Lost Sheep* (*Boyo-ki* or 亡羊記) by Shiro Murano (村野四郎, 1901–1975).

Murano is one of the influential poets you can never disregard in surveying the history of the modern poetry in Showa-era Japan (1926–1989). *On Lost Sheep* was Murano's ninth poetry collection in his roughly fifty-year poetry-writing career and was awarded the prestigious Yomiuri Prize for Literature in 1960. While his early poetics were deeply affected by surrealism, imagism, and German objectivism, Murano's later years were strongly influenced by existentialism.

One of the difficulties I had to face in translating the first poem “A Community in the Open,” was which English word to choose for the word 群落 (“community”) in the original title. There were several other options for this Japanese word such as “colony” or “stock,” but I ended up picking the word “community” because the chrysanthemums in the original poem seemed almost like an independent, self-governing “community” of people.

The eighth line of the second stanza in the original of the second poem, “An Autumnal Fossil,” was a difficult puzzle for me to solve. さもあらばあれ was the original sentence, and, although Japanese is my native language, it was difficult for me to grasp its nuance accurately. This line could even be translated as, say, “It is alright even if that's the case” or “Let it be so then,” but, eventually, I chose the expression “That may be the way it goes.” I'm still wondering, though, whether or not it was the very best choice for the original.

Some people may argue that putting the phrase “Mind you” at the top of the last stanza in the third poem, “On Skeletons,” might be too audacious an act. There is certainly no precise counterpart in the original's same stanza, but I felt the entire stanza in the Japanese was somehow warning the reader implicitly of the skeleton's vagrancy. I still believe that the use of the phrase “mind you” for this translation is a nice idea.

The most difficult part in the whole translation process of the fourth poem, “Orpheus at the Butcher Shop,” was how to treat its second stanza. Its syntactic structure in the original seems peculiarly complex, and I had to paraphrase the whole stanza in my translation to better its readability. I hope here that my own interpretation of this stanza, which soaked inevitably into this act of paraphrasing, suits Murano's original intention.