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Untitled Nonsense, She, and Contradictions by Yoshihara Sachiko

Carol Hayes

The Australian National University, carol.hayes@anu.edu.au

Rina Kikuchi

Shiga University / Australian National University, kikuchi@biwako.shiga-u.ac.jp

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Carol Hayes and Rina Kikuchi
Untitled Nonsense

Yoshihara Sachiko
無題

wind blowing
tree standing
ah on a night like this you're standing there aren't you tree

wind blowing tree standing a sound

late in the night alone in my bathroom
soap foam like a crab blowing bubbles bitter play
lukewarm bathwater

slug creeping
over the wet towel in the bathroom
ah on a night like this you're creeping aren't you slug
I'll cover you in salt
then you disappear but you're still here

is fear
existing
non-existing - I wonder

again spring arrives again the wind blows

I am the salted slug I don't exist
I exist nowhere

I seem buried in soap foam washed away

ah a night like this

Carol Hayes and Rina Kikuchi
She

Yoshihara Sachiko
あのひと

she was living
she was there
just yesterday until just yesterday
she was there she was laughing

she was living
mackerel in miso soy simmered pumpkin
yummy yummy, she said
she was there she was eating

just yesterday eighty years ago
she was a girl
the pencil she sharpened
the swing she swung

just yesterday three years ago
she was a girl
in an angelic delicate voice
she sang “chasing rabbits”

every time she saw my dimples
cutie cutie, she said
reaching out her warm palm
squeezing tight she held my hand

the flowers
the shoji screens
the juggling balls
the fallen leaves

she grew
she mended
she made
she burnt

the comb
the futon
the letters
the paths

she used
she slept in
she wrote
she walked

the sunsets
the sounds of the sea
the loves
she
she

she saw
she heard
she remembered
was living
was living

Carol Hayes and Rina Kikuchi
Contradictions

Yoshihara Sachiko
むじゆん

Snow-covered mountains dyed red in the distant sunset
Wild birds motionless on each rock of the luminous river bank
Two little children sing in pure soprano
I will soon go to my death
I suffer the world as beautiful as this

*

Weekend fireworks blossom in the distant night sky
A fragment of stone pierces the soft throat of a child
Black snow falls on black sea
I will soon go to my death
I suffer if the future is not beautiful!

Commentary

Yoshihara Sachiko 吉原幸子 (1932-2002) was born in Tokyo and studied French literature at Tokyo University, graduating in 1956. Very active in theatre while at university, she became a member of the famed *Gekidanshiki* (The Shiki Theatre Company) after graduation. She came to poetry later in life, publishing her first collection *Yōnen rentō* (幼年連禱: *Childhood Litany*) in 1964, which won the fourth Murō Saisei Poetry Award in 1974. Her third collection, *Ondine* (オンディーヌ), published in 1972, and the fourth, *Hirugao* (昼顔: *Calystegia Japonica*), published in 1974, are often considered as a pair, winning the fourth Takami Jun Award. Her eighth poetry collection, *Hana no moto ni te, haru* (花のもとにて 春: *Under the Blossoms, Spring*), published in 1983, includes poems dedicated to her beloved mother, who passed away at the age of ninety in 1982.

She was a pioneer Japanese feminist poet, who founded *La Mer* magazine together with Shinkawa Kazue (新川和江, b. 1929) which ran for ten years from 1983 to 1993 and helped to launch the careers of many younger female poets. *La Mer* was discontinued due to Yoshihara's ill health. She was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 1994. Her last poetry collection, *Hakkō* (発光: *Bioluminescence*), published with the help of Shinkawa Kazue in 1995, won the third Hagiwara Sakutarō Poetry Award.

Of the poems included here, "Untitled Nonsense" was taken from *Childhood Litany*, "She" from *Under the Blossoms, Spring*, and finally, "Contradictions" from *Bioluminescence*.

In her Japanese writing style, Yoshihara chose very intentionally to use old-style hiragana kyū-kana dzukai (旧仮名遣い) rather than modern hiragana usage, shin-kana dzukai (新仮名遣い). When compared to modern hiragana usage, old-style hiragana usage sounds the same and the meaning does not change. Its main effect is visual, and thus, it is not reflected in our translations. Similarly, the visual impact of "Contradictions," written completely in hiragana, is again lost in the English translation.

Yoshihara drew on the linguistic possibilities available to her in Japanese to create layers of meaning in her work, by using both kanji and furigana superscript. One example is the

title of “Untitled Nonsense.” The original Japanese uses the kanji term *mu-dai* (無題) which translates directly as “no-title,” with the superscript furigana *nansensu* (ナンセンス) written above the kanji. Because *nansensu* is a foreign loan word coming from the English word “nonsense,” katakana script is used. We aimed to capture these two layers in our translated title.

Another interesting title translation issue is in the poem, “She.” In the original Japanese, the title of this poem is *ano hito* (あのひと) which translates directly as “that person.” However, this is a poem dedicated to her ailing mother, and the “that person” is the poet’s mother. In Japanese, the expression *ano hito* does not carry the same sense of distance as “that person” in English. Thus, we have chosen to use “she” as it conveys a more immediate and personal feeling which we feel the original evokes.

Yoshihara intentionally uses single or double spaces between her words and phrases in the original poems, although Japanese sentences do not usually include any such spaces. We have used ten English spaces for each single Japanese space to reflect this structure.

Finally, when we translate we often find ourselves discussing the smaller grammatical elements in the original Japanese and deciding whether or not to include them in the English, as they sometimes add too much emphasis to a particular word, over and beyond the original. For example, in “Contradictions,” Yoshihara uses *no ni* (のこ) which is a conjunction that carries a number of meanings, such as “although,” “in spite of,” or “regardless.” In this poem, we argue that the meaning is “regardless” and not “although,” and that if we included it, the translation of Line 4 in both stanzas would become, “Regardless of the fact that I will soon go to my death.” This we feel is too explanatory and places too much emphasis on the interconnection between Lines 4 and 5. As a result we have chosen to leave it to the reader to make that connection.

Translators’ Notes: *She*

Chasing rabbits: This is the beginning of the well-known Japanese song, “Furusato” (ふるさ), which means “home country.”

Source texts:

Yoshihara, Sachiko. 無題 ("Untitled Nonsense"). *Yoshihara Sachiko Zenshi*, vol. 1, Shichosha, 1981, pp. 22–23.

—. あのひと ("She"). *Yoshihara Sachiko Zenshi*, vol. 3, Shichosha, 2012, pp. 94–96.

—. むじゅん ("Contradictions"). *Yoshihara Sachiko Zenshi*, vol. 3, Shichosha, 2012, pp. 350–51.