

2017

*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*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/transference>



Part of the Japanese Studies Commons, Language Interpretation and Translation Commons, Modern Literature Commons, and the Poetry Commons

---

**Recommended Citation**

Hayes, Carol and Kikuchi, Rina (2017) "*Untitled Nonsense, She, and Contradictions* by Yoshihara Sachiko," *Transference*: Vol. 5: Iss. 1, Article 12.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/transference/vol5/iss1/12>

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  
むじゅん

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 forth 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* (のに) 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.