

## Annotated Translations: Three Poems by Yoshihara Sachiko<sup>1</sup>

Rina Kikuchi<sup>2</sup> and Carol Hayes<sup>3</sup>



吉原 Sachiko

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<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Economics, Shiga University. [http://researchers.shiga-u.ac.jp/html/100002503\\_en.html](http://researchers.shiga-u.ac.jp/html/100002503_en.html)  
Contact:kikuchi@biwako.shiga-u.ac.jp

<sup>3</sup> School of Culture, History and Language, College of Asia and Pacific, The Australian National University.  
<https://researchers.anu.edu.au/researchers/hayes-c> Contact: carol.hayes@anu.edu.au

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# INTRODUCTION

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.

Yoshihara was deeply engaged in theatrical activities, as a playwright, director and actor. She directed her own play *Salome*, which toured in the U.S.A. in 1986. The tour included the performance, "DANCE • POETRY • MUSIC", in which she read her poems to the accompaniment of music and dance. She was also active in performance poetry. She read her work on the radio, toured both abroad and within Japan, held many poetry readings with other Japanese poets and organised 'joint-concerts' of music and poetry, which was very 'new' at the time. She also published translations, including the poetry of Sylvia Plath, and children's stories.

Her work has been admired by her contemporaries throughout her career, despite the fact her artistic activities became increasingly restricted due to her Parkinson's disease from her 60s. At her death, Tanigawa Shuntarō (谷川俊太郎, b. 1931), one of the most celebrated poets in Japan, noted

that “she lived like a woman who lived 120 years” on her death (“A woman who lived 120 years”, *Gendaishi techō (Contemporary Poetry Notebook)*, January issue, 2003).

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

In this paper, we have presented the Japanese original in old-style hiragana ‘kyū-kana’ (旧仮名遣い) throughout, as this is the style Yoshikawa intentionally used throughout her poetic life and therefore we argue that her work should not be re-written to align with modern hiragana usage, ‘new-kana’ (新仮名遣い). When compared to modern hiragana usage, old-style hiragana usage sounds the same and does not change the meaning. Its main effect is visual, and thus, it is not reflected in our translations. Also, Yoshikawa 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.

ナンセンス  
無題

風 吹いてゐる  
木 立ってゐる  
ああ こんなよる 立ってゐるのね 木

風 吹いてゐる 木 立ってゐる 音がする

よふけの ひとりの 浴室の  
せっけんの泡 かにみたいに吐きだす にかいあそび  
ゆるいお湯

なめくぢ 匍ってゐる  
浴室の ぬれたタオルを  
ああ こんなよる 匍ってゐるのね なめくぢ  
おまへに塩をかけてやる  
するとおまへは ゐなくなるくせに そこにゐる

おそろしさとは  
ゐることかしら  
ゐないことかしら

また 春がきて また 風が 吹いてゐるのに

わたしはなめくぢの塩づけ わたしはゐない  
どこにも ゐない

わたしはきっと せっけんの泡に埋もれて 流れてしまったの

ああ こんなよる

# Untitled Nonsense

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      in my own      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

fear is

existence

non-existence

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      on a night like this

# あのひと

あのひとは 生きてゐました  
あのひとは そこにゐました  
ついきのふ ついきのふまで  
そこにゐて 笑つてゐました

あのひとは 生きてゐました  
さばのみそ煮 かぼちやの煮つけ  
おいしいね おいしいねと言って  
そこにゐて 食べてゐました

ついきのふ 八十年まへ  
あのひとは 少女でした  
あのひとの けづった鉛筆  
あのひとの こいだぶらんこ

ついきのふ 三年まへにも  
あのひとは 少女でした  
あどけない かぼそい声で  
ウサギオーイシ うたつて

あたしのゑくぼを 見るたび  
かはいいいね かはいいいねと言って  
あつたかいてのひら さしだし  
ぎゅつとにぎつて ゐました

# She

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 again  
In an angelic delicate voice  
She sang “chasing rabbits”

Every time she saw my dimples  
Cutie cutie, she said  
Reaching out her warm palm  
Grasping tight she held my hand



あのひとの 育てた花  
あのひとの 貼った障子  
あのひとの つくったお手玉  
あのひとの 焚いた落ち葉

あのひとの とかした櫛  
あのひとの 眠ったふとん  
あのひとの 書いた手紙  
あのひとの 歩いた道

あのひとの 見た夕焼け  
あのひとの きいた海鳴り  
あのひとの 恋の思ひ出  
あのひとは 生きてゐました  
あのひとは 生きてゐました

The flowers	she grew
The shoji screens	she mended
The juggling balls	she made
The fallen leaves	she burnt
The comb	she used
The futon	she slept in
The letters	she wrote
The paths	she walked
The sunsets	she saw
The sounds of the sea	she heard
The loves	she remembered
She	was living
She	was living

## むじゅん

とほいゆきやまがゆふひにあかくそまる  
きよいかはぎしのどのいしにものとりがちっととまって  
をさなごがふたりすんだそぷらのでうたってゐる  
わたしはまもなくしんでゆくのに  
せかいがこんなにうつくしくては こまる

\*

とほいよぞらにしゅうまつのはなびがさく  
やはらかいこどものどにいしのはへんがつきささる  
くろいうみにくろいゆきがふる  
わたしはまもなくしんでゆくのに  
みらいがうつくしくなくては こまる！

# Contradictions

Snow-covered mountains dyed red in the distant sunset

Wild birds still on each rock of the luminous river bank

Two little children sing in pure soprano

I will soon go to my death

I suffer        that the world is as beautiful as this

\*

Weekend fireworks blossom in the distant night sky

A fragment of stone sticks in the soft throat of a child

Black snow falls on black sea

I will soon go to my death

I will suffer        if the future is not beautiful!

# Translators' Notes

## “Untitled Nonsense”

**Untitled Nonsense:** The original Japanese title creates two layers by using both kanji and furigana. The kanji term uses ‘mu-dai (無題)’ translates directly as ‘no-title’, and the furigana ‘nansensu (ナンセンス)’ written in katakana because it is a foreign loan word, which comes from the English word, ‘nonsense’. We aimed to capture these two layers in our translated titled “Untitled Nonsense”.

## “She”

**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 ‘that person’ is the poet’s mother. In Japanese this expression ‘ano hito’ does not create the same sense of distance as ‘that person’ in English. Thus, we have chosen to use ‘she’ as it conveys more immediate and personal feeling which evokes in the original poem.

**“chasing rabbits”:** This is the beginning of the well-known Japanese song, “furusato” (ふるさと), which means ‘home country’.

## “Contradictions”

It is important to note that in the original Japanese, this poem is written completely in hiragana. Unfortunately, it is impossible to reflect this in the English translation.

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