

Two poems by Masayo Koike
translated by Hiroaki Sato

The Most Sensual Room

One wall of the bathroom of Jay's apartment has a cat's footprints. Absence is something like that. To leave evidence. I see it. By rolling the world back. The way the cat ran up the wall and escaped out of the window. The wind that came in just as the cat left knocked down everything it touched by reversing time, from the small past in which the cat had disappeared, toward the present. The wind, having substantially disturbed the proper position of a light letter on the desk, has now passed by. And it is no longer here. Jay and I are contained in the room. And yet, the room feels vacant, somehow. Am I here? Clearly exist here? I am passing through it. I will become absent.

From the open window I hear the sounds of the neighbor's house. Why aren't you finishing your homework? The noise of plates. Would you come here and help me a bit? The noise of plates. What did you do with that? The noise of a washing machine. The soft ringing of a telephone. Hello, hello? Hello, hello? The beep signaling that the washing machine finished its work. We don't know the faces of our neighbors. Nonetheless, they come in. Like a flood. Our neighbors' daily routines, into this vacant room.

Jay and I turn on music. A brief conversation. Sexual intercourse. Laughter. The sound of slapping flesh. Two people cursing each other. These noises, too, slowly go out. Toward our neighbor's house. Unobtrusively, directly. We languidly blend with one another, with voices alone. On the ground separating us ivy leaves overgrow.

The Sunday morning when I leave Jay's room. There is Jay's room where I no longer am. I don't leave a single footprint, but my invisible fingerprints are imprinted everywhere. Nights, I think of the room. I peer out of the window. I see the absences of myself and the cat. Jay is a man who is part of that room. His long body tightly coiled into hardness, he, the penis of the room, is quietly asleep. I stretch my hand and touch the room. The wall is soft. I push the room harder, and the room goes out of the room. The room that contains nothing, except Jay, at first with some bounce, like a soap bubble, goes out of the hard room, slowly.

In the midst of reverberations

(Eb)

on a road after rain there is a dark pool
in the shallow water an elm tree is wavering
a dead leaf flutters down into it
falling from a tree trying to reach the tree
the dead leaf is mercilessly rejected by the water's surface
ripples spread like anxiety
(I saw: bamboo & sin & honey, ivy & hole & people & trave)¹
even a single dead leaf falling
creates reverberations behind the water's surface
PPP
in a round, round wet place
as if shot through,
of this world,
a tree is wavering like a heart

(E)

*I once gave birth to twins one a man one a woman
I thought I had brought them up without differentiation
until one day I noticed the girl was dead
her face buried in the pool
was still small had just turned three
I grabbed her left arm, it slipped, off
Look what you did,
everyone around me said just like that
there are two of them, stop thinking about it
she having died just like that I remember
how I'd taken good care of only the boy
all the girl did was look into the pool besides she always wanted to be alone
each time you possess one thing whatever it may be
the shadow is reflected of the other, lost existence
beings begin all twin-shaped
torn apart they can't meet forever*

(A)

on the earth now is the season of mixed chorus
once a bird's small vocal chord begins to tremble

¹ Words associated with the composer's family name Takemitsu, including anagrammatic ones.

the sky trembles the page trembles the pool trembles I tremble
when the page of the score like a great eagle is turned
a wind rises
a hundred years in the batting of an eye
a family nameplate drops on the ground with a clutter
and in an abandoned house a one-piece dress covered with mud
(I saw: bamboo & sin & honey, ivy & hole & people & trave)
PPP
who is it
by the old well-water
who's washing his hard ankle
that resembles the shape of the soul?

Masayo Koike was born in Tokyo in 1959. After graduating from the International Relations Department at Tsuda College, she worked at a legal publishing house while publishing her own poems, and published her first collection of poems, *Mizu no Machi kara Arukidashite* (Beginning to Walk from a Water Town), in 1988. In 1997, her third book, *Eien ni Konai Basu* (The Bus That Just Won't Come) won the Hanatsubaki prize, and her fourth, *Mottomo Kannôtekina Heya* (The Most Sensuous Room), won the Takami Jun prize in the year 2000. In addition to poetry, Koike has published books of translations, essays, and collections of short stories.

A leading translator of Japanese poetry into English, **Hiroaki Sato** has won the 1982 PEN American Center Translation Prize for *From the Country of Eight Islands: Anthology of Japanese Poetry* (Anchor Books, 1981, with Burton Watson), as well as the 1999 Japan-United States Friendship Commission Japanese Literary Translation Prize for *Breeze Through Bamboo: Kanshi of Ema Saikō* (Columbia, 1997).