Hoshinaga Fumio: Selected Haiku from *Kumaso-Ha*

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Please also see the accompanying interview,
**The Miraculous Power of Language:
A Conversation with the Poet Hoshinaga Fumio**
***Modern Haiku, 35:3*, Autumn 2004, pp. 27-45.**

Introduction

"The greatest power that haiku have is the gift of freedom," Hoshinaga remarked as he was looking over the translated poems below. Having a living author to confer with in terms of translation is a godsend, and more so, a writer so conversationally ebullient. The commentaries accompanying these haiku progressed in stages, from first translation, to conversations with colleagues, and finally, discussions with the poet. It is necessary to draw distinctions between the poet's own relationship with the poem, the sense that might be made of it by a sensitive Japanese reader, and what might be evoked in an English-language environment, particularly in that Japanese haiku generally require some knowledge of a poet's life and times for improved comprehension. A given work may have implicit linkage to biographic and social contexts — this may make the poem more "dependent," from a Western sensibility. Although the works below certainly do stand on their own as haiku in English, presenting universal themes and concerns, readers glancingly familiar with Hoshinaga's life will know that poems of childhood and young adulthood reflect personal experience — the implied "I" is the author, in a particular locale and circumstance (which can be garnered by reading through his oeuvre); childhood haiku occur against the background of World War II, while poems of young adulthood ("rebel" haiku particularly) are often set in the postwar circumstances of the 1950s; images such as "postwar fathers" and "dazzle of the era" below, ostensibly relate to this time period. Importantly, Hoshinaga is a resident of central Kyushu, the southern countryside of Japan, and his haiku arise from this

unique environment.

In working to provide a balance between cultural and language contexts I've been helped by the Kumamoto University English Haiku Society, particularly Professor Masahiro Hori, Shinjuku Rollingstone, Ito Yuki, and Shinobu Yamaguchi. Most of the haiku below use *kigo* (season words). Where the season isn't obvious in a poem, the *kigo* is mentioned in the commentary. Hoshinaga's use of *kigo*, while drawing upon the historic kigo environment, uproots the tradition through the use of symbolic, psychological, or iconic allusion. The literal season or image given by the *kigo* is only one of its dimensions; there are no cases where a particular kigo is meant to be taken only realistically or pictorially. In fact, Hoshinaga's poems educate the reader into a new haiku sensibility, as it is through multiple allusive dimensions that they unfold. With a publication date of September 2003, *Kumaso-Ha* arrives in the midst of the Iraq war. The biting relevance and poetic import of these haiku speaks precisely to our era.

Adapted from the bilingual foreword to the book:

逃げ水へ戦後の父を追いつめる
nigemizu e sengo no chichi wo oitsumeru

toward the mirage of water
the postwar fathers
chasing after . . .

The zeitgeist of an era seems indicated by the spring *kigo* "mirage of water" as subject. The main image hovers on the surface, to disappear as we move closer. The phrases of the poem syntactically evoke the mirage, almost, but not quite cohering. The deceptively transparent style fuses social comment, personal truth and imagistic landscape to comment on a lost generation.

From the chapter "Myself:"

けんけんの六歩目　蛇踏んじゃった
kenken no roppome　hebi funjyatta

hopping on one foot stepping on the sixth
on a snake

A freestyle haiku with great rhythm and an unexpected image. *kenken* (hopping on one foot), a concise onomatopoeic expression, evokes the environment of childhood: a children's game more popular in an era prior to television culture, and in poor postwar circumstances, the author comments. The *kigo* "snake" evokes a rural, summer setting, but may be taken metaphorically due to the idiosyncratic use of the number six. Another poem ("counting down," shown below) also uses this number. The numbers one, two, and three have the familiar sense as, for instance, "ready, set go." In Japan the number four (*shi*) is the number of death (*shinu*), while five (*go*) is a very lucky number. After five, it's hard to say if six provides a good omen or not — there is some uncertainty and ambivalence in the number. As a result, the haiku above may indicate a tragedy or shock spelling the end of childhood innocence.

ガム噛んで　敵意をかんで　少年初夏
gamu kande　tekii wo kande　shōnen shoka

chewing gum
chewing on enmity—
the summer rebel

An image of James Dean in East of Eden comes to mind. The rhythmic substitution of *kande* ("chewing") in the first two phrases (the same word used in different rhythmic patterns) binds the metaphor. The author is likely referring to chewing gum given to him by American soldiers following the war. What will these soldiers bring, liberation or more deception? *Shônen shoka* at the end glides on the tongue and rides like a youthful wind. The manner in which rhythm plays against meaning creates a charismatic music, fusing polarized emotions into an ambivalent image.

縄とびの輪に蜩が入ってくる
nawatobi no wa ni higurashi ga haittekuru

in the jump rope's spinning ring a cicada jumps in

A childhood remembrance: the unique image strongly evokes its reality. The assonance and circularity of the English version attempts to echo the repetition (of *wa*) and "circular" sound sequence of *bi-ni-hi-shi*. The *higurashi* is a particular species of cicada (and *kigo*), appearing in the early fall, suggesting the end of a school summer vacation. This cicada lives for only one week — the sense of impermanence is sharp. The jump rope's spinning ring resonates with life and time, the spinning ring of becoming. Does the poet jump in? There is perhaps a delicate reference to Bashô's *furu ike ya*.

From the chapter "Fellow Travelers:"

駅前でまぶしい時代と一杯飲ったが
eki mae de mabushii jidai to ippai yatta ga

near the station
drinking with the dazzle
of the era

It's common to find any number of street stalls (*yattai*) to eat and drink in around train stations — this loose sense of national "neighborhood" exists throughout cosmopolitan Japan. "Era" here is personified as a drinking partner. The poet drinks in solitude *and* with the zeitgeist. The poem balances or parses realistic and psychological image; space, person and time. This poem has no *kigo*, though "era" has strong environmental and historical connotations.

革命が雪の売店で買えるか、な
kakumei ga yuki no kiyosuku de kaeru ka, na

revolution
in the snowy kiosk
for sale .?

The Turkish loan-word "kiosk" in a winter setting of snow. Kiosks filled with novel items began to appear in train stations throughout postwar Japan as the rail lines developed, and represented a new world, a new era of consumption and economic development. The resulting revolution spoken of here is domestic and cultural. A unique formal feature of this haiku is its last, fragmentary character *na*, which follows a question marker (*ka*), comma, and space, a uniquely creative contribution. Hovering between a statement of certainty and strong doubt (disbelief?), an indefinite solution is created by the orthography, causing this haiku to reflect back upon its topic, deepening the question.

From the chapter "Social Foibles:"

筍山から謀反の徒が出る　風に出る
takenokoyama kara muhon no to ga deru　kaze ni deru

from young bamboo mountain rebels take off —　against the wind

A freestyle haiku of 21 *on* (8-8-5). A mountain of young bamboo shoots, a *kigo* of summer, is valuable and delicious, though in recent times fewer farmers are entering the groves to harvest the shoots. Consequently, disused groves have become overpopulated and diseased. The young bamboo shoots allude to youthful rebels, who set off to challenge such winds as prevail. Here, poetic metaphor is used as a means of social critique. There seems also a deeply personal dimension to this haiku, a call for a free and defiantly individualistic spirit in relation to society; the poet rides with the rebels.

善人の順にかぞえて　六おぼろ
zennin no jun ni kazoete roku oboro

counting down the goodness of man:
from the sixth
obscure

The focal point of this haiku seems to be on a subject that is either indistinct or missing: the subject is not allowed or able to solidify or cohere. A difficult technique to manage, as an indistinct subject will in general create a haiku lacking in poetic direction — it will be unclear what images to base sensation upon. Ending with "obscure" (also "dreamlike, foggy," a spring *kigo*), the haiku seems to echo with multiple dimensions of obscurity — of

goodness and its measurement, of finding goodness, and the sense that, in the human realm, such findings may be moot. The obscurity of the subject is instigated from the unusual syntax of the leading phrase "counting down the goodness," an idiosyncratic collocational phrase combining counting with an uncountable noun, an ironic pun. "Sixth" is significant: as a whole number it is definite, though ambivalent in its symbolic meaning (as previously discussed); to what type of subject does it refer, exactly? We see a successful use of allusion in Hoshinaga's style. The mystery of the subject as well as the content and sense of deep questioning in the haiku keeps the reader involved (adapted from "Disjunction in English-language Haiku," *Modern Haiku 35:2*).

From the chapter "Lament:"

遊園地にナチスがいっぱいです　秋
yūenichi ni nachisu ga ippai desu　　aki

the amusement park
full of nazis –
this autumn

Many of Hoshinaga's haiku comment on the darker side of human nature, referring to destructive political events or social conundrums. In *Kumaso-Ha*, Nazis are mentioned several times (rebels and revolution are also encountered). The dark ironic humor which pairs "amusement" with Nazis implies the Holocaust, and more literally, a gang of neighborhood toughs. Will history once again repeat itself, the author seems to ask. The *kigo* "autumn" adds bluntness to the sense of chilling contemplation.

水虫がかゆくてヒトラーにはなれぬ
mizumushi ga kayukute Hitorā ni wa narenu

Athelete's foot itches –
still can't become
Hitler

The playfully dark, ironic metaphor of "becoming Hitler" is disjunctive, allowing a sense of depth to enter the haiku, a depth partly created through allusion. Due to itchy feet (a summer *kigo*), the author cannot smartly click his heels or march in goose-step. The poem presents a disturbing psychosocial complex indicating the will to power or assumption of dictatorial

authority which often remains hidden in persons or society.

From the chapter "Revivification:"

立冬や　棒になりきるまで歩く
rittō ya　bō ni narikiru made aruku

first day of winter –
on a walk turning completely
into a stick

Surprise and impossibility fuse human and natural realms in this haiku. The idea of "completely into" is creative: rhythmically one finds that strong first-beat feet (**NA**ri|**KI**ru|**MA**de) bring reality-sense and presence to the transformative notion. This haiku seems a good example of what Hoshinaga refers to as the creation of "human mental images." Metaphor and idiom are employed both to irrupt realism and create a natural scene, that is, "no separation between man and nature — harmony." The play between the allusion of becoming "frozen up" and actually (impossibly) transforming into a natural object is delightful and refreshing.

全山の杉武装して雪つくる
zenzan no sugi busō shite yuki tsukuru

a whole mountain
Japanese cedar fully armored
create snow

Here, a mountain of cedar is likened to an army. As with the haiku just above, the phrase "fully armored" creates realistic impossibility. Yet the perceptual impression seems deeper and more powerfully resonant than that found in many pictorial haiku styles, due to the added psychological dimension. The poem seems equally concerned with nature and culture, implying an era of warfare and strife. The Japanese cedar (particularly, in the Oguni area of Kumamoto prefecture, the poet remarks) stand at attention in their legions. The addition of "armored" shifts the image toward cultural commentary, that is, frighteningly inhuman aggressiveness, as reflected perhaps in a modern mechanized army, the contemporary result of an ancient pedigree. On the other hand, is it merely the poet's internal conflict which images a mountain of trees as fully armored? In this indeterminate image, completeness and

incompleteness play against each other — what is innovative here are the psychological and imaginative realms in which this play occurs.

From the chapter "Conflict:"

春の樹に登る　戦争が見えるまで
haru no ki ni noboru　sensō ga mieru made

the spring tree –
I climb until I can
see the war

Here, pictorial shasei style and allied straightforward juxtaposition are subverted by the revelatory shock of war seen over the wall, reversing the expectation of a natural (beautiful, pleasant) pictorial scene. Concision and rhythm create biting social commentary within the frame of boyhood observation. Is the image realistic or an internal portrayal? By remaining indeterminate as an image, war is made vast, a fusion of internal and external phenomena.

銀行街にて軍艦発光す
ginkōgai nite gunkan hakkō su

from the banking district:
suddenly the battleship's
disintegrating light

This haiku has a relationship to summer, which accords with the destruction of Tokyo by fire, atomic bombing, and the end of the war. *Ginkogai* is a Tokyo district, whose American synonym might be Wall Street. Though wartime history is implied, the word "from" places the battleship within the banking district, creating a surreal or symbolic image. As well, the death ray of "disintegrating light" is not what might be expected from a battleship. Here multiple levels of allusion may indicate a causal relationship between economic force, leading to military force, resulting in destruction and annihilation.

From the chapter "Alone:"

朴咲くよ　一 。二 。三 。で死が来れば
hō saku yo　ichi　ni　san　de shinu ga kureba

from magnolia blossoms
1 . 2 . 3 : if
death comes

An experimental use of form emphasizes the fusion of number with blooming (late spring/ early summer) magnolia flowers. The flowers bloom: 1, 2, 3, and with that, does death occur? Death is the number four, which lies implicitly before "if." It is difficult to translate the conditional sense of this poem, which is fragmentary and bare. The kigo of magnolia is paired with the end of life: life with death, as a mathematically inclined child might count up mortality, including it as a whole number in a simple series. Do a child and a man of seventy count up the blooms (acts of life) in a similar manner — or from entirely different perspectives? The polarity between these two voices or personae, as between number and time, generates a philosophical speculation on mortality.

六月は水より　孤独は壁より　来
rokugatsu wa mizu yori　kodoku wa kabe yori　ku

june　is from water　solitude from the wall　: comes

A rhythmically outstanding haiku, which breaks up time into fragments of immanence. In reading this haiku aloud, it was suggested that the last *ku*, which is the verb, be preceded by a long pause; a dramatic semantic and rhythmic break. The final verb seems more a force of space than time, a wave of sorrow or grief in intimate quiet.

From the chapter "Unsettled Affairs:"

天狼が屋根に　昭和がその裏に
siriusu ga yane ni　shōwa ga sono ura ni

Sirius over the roofline
Showa: beyond

In this poem space becomes time through the use of impossible metaphor, as the author gazes into the stars over the roof and sees the life of a previous era. We now know that space is a living history show of time, the light from even nearby stars being many centuries old. The metaphor is ambivalent: one cannot recapture the past, though one perceives it at a distance, present in space (so space is here both physical and psychic). Traveling through the far horizon, the past exists as a presence. At the same time, the obverse is likewise true, the past is present in the near-horizon of personal memory. Space, memory and time inhabit a holistic landscape without separation.

From the chapter "Timber Trees:"

癇の虫鳴くから　寒椿ぽたぽた
kan no mushi naku kara　kantsubaki pota-pota

so irritated the
winter camellia flutter down

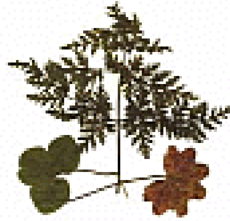
Like a butterfly collector's specimen, a single instant or fragment of a psychological moment is positioned to view. Just at the moment of petals falling the author's mood of irritation disappears in a gap of self-forgetting (represented by the orthography). In Japanese, the rhythm of the second half seems the obverse of the first, creating a mirror-like effect between the two emotional states. This haiku has a free rhythm of 9-9 on, which can be further broken down to 5-4 *on* / 5-4 *on*.

霧に五体のナマハゲが居て胎やわし
kiri ni gotai no namahage ga ite hara yawashi

within the mist
five *namahage* exist;
embryo within the womb's softness

A sense of mystery and depth pervades this haiku. The *namahage* are dangerous and deadly masculine-toned demon-deities with human aspects, having the power to confer health and longevity. They are also known to be on the lookout for disobedient children and lazy family members. The animate and monstrous nature of a roiling fog or mist (a prebirth environment) is the atmosphere in which mysterious and profound borders between nature and living force are articulated: the paradoxical juxtaposition between the demonic

namahage and "womb's softness" evokes an eerie and almost frighteningly wild image of neonatal development. Because *namahage* can also bring health and long life, this poem confers blessings upon a child yet to be born, suggesting that all life is likewise blessed and protected, in order to survive into birth. There is a paradox expressed here, in that the *namahage*, masculine and violent, are paired or opposed by feminine sanctuary and power ("womb" is also read as *hara*, a mystical as well as literal power-center of the body). The poet poses these opposing and sacred forces as gateways into human existence in a poem of blessing for a child, and for humanity.



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