

A Translation and Study of Short Stories by Hirano Keiichirō

by

Brandon Geist

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Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Anthony Chambers, Chair  
Anne-Catherine Dutoit  
John Creamer

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## ABSTRACT

Hirano Keiichirō is an award-winning, contemporary Japanese author. He experiments with many styles, and his novels explore a broad range of themes and social issues. Unfortunately, little of his work is available in English translation, and he remains largely unknown to English-reading audiences. This thesis includes a brief overview of Hirano's career as well as translations and analyses of two of his short stories, “Tojikomerareta shōnen” (“Trapped,” 2003) and “Hinshi no gogo to namiutsu iso no osanai kyōdai” (“A Fatal Afternoon and Young Brothers on a Wave-swept Shore,” 2003). These two stories are representative of the second period of Hirano's career, in which he focused on short fiction. They integrate experimental literary styles with contemporary, real-life themes to create effective, resonant literature.

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## INTRODUCTION

Hirano Keiichirō 平野啓一郎 (1975- ) is the celebrated author of eight novels, three short-story collections, and numerous essays and critical reviews. He also published a Japanese translation of Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, from the original French, in 2012.<sup>1</sup> He published his first novel, *Nisshoku* (*Eclipse*, 1998), when he was a 23-year-old undergraduate at Kyoto University. *Eclipse* earned him the coveted Akutagawa Prize for Literature, making him, at the time, the youngest recipient of Japan's most prestigious literary award.<sup>2</sup> He has since earned additional honors for subsequent novels<sup>3</sup>, and his work has been translated into Korean, Chinese, French, Arabic<sup>4</sup>, and English.

Few English translations of contemporary Japanese literature are widely published, and Hirano's work is mostly unavailable to English reading audiences. At the time of this writing, only one of his short stories, "Shimizu" ("Clear Water," 1999), has been published in English. Hirano is an important contemporary, Japanese author; and I want to introduce him to American readers and make his works accessible to them.

This thesis begins with a brief overview of Hirano's career and includes translations and analyses of two short stories, "Tojikomerareta shōnen" ("Trapped," 2003) and "Hinshi no gogo to namiutsu iso no osanai kyōdai" ("A

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<sup>1</sup> A bibliography of Hirano's novels and essays, including published translations of his works, can be found in Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> The youngest recipient ever is Wataya Risa (綿矢りさ). She received the award in 2003 at the age of 19.

<sup>3</sup> For a full list of awards given to Hirano, see Appendix B.

<sup>4</sup> The Arabic translation of *Eclipse* is complete but awaits publication.

Fatal Afternoon and Young Brothers on a Wave-swept Shore,” 2003). There are no published English translations of either story.

The first period of Hirano’s career (1998-2002) includes three novels: *Eclipse*, *Ichigetsu monogatari (Tale of a Single Moon*, 1999), and *Sōsō (Farewell to the Departed*, 2002). They are written in elegant, literary language and are meticulously researched. *Eclipse* is set in medieval France and depicts life during the Inquisition. *Tale of a Single Moon* is reminiscent of Izumi Kyōka’s *Kōya hijiri (The Holy Man of Mount Kōya*, 1900) and Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s *Yoshino kuzu (Arrowroot*, 1930). It is a highly romantic story of a young poet’s 1897 journey into the Yoshino Mountains and is inspired by the life of the poet Kitamura Tōkoku (1868-1894). *Farewell to the Departed* depicts the lives of romanticists Eugene Delacroix, George Sand, and Fredric Chopin. It is set in Paris against the backdrop of the 1848 February Revolution.

Following the release of *Farewell to the Departed*, Hirano focused on short fiction during the second period of his career (2002-2007). He published 24 short stories, rereleased in three collections, and a novella. The medium of the short story collection allowed Hirano to explore a wide range of modern-day issues and reflect the diversity of contemporary society.<sup>5</sup> His short fiction explores a variety of themes and subjects, including sex, war, family, death, modernization, technology, and virtual identity. Hirano’s short fiction also represents a shift from the elevated style of his first three novels to contemporary, colloquial prose, and the stories are set mostly in modern-day Japan. Hirano

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<sup>5</sup> “*Shitatariochiru tokei tachi no hamon zengo*,” pp. 333-334

explores many styles, and, as exemplified by “Trapped” and “A Fatal Afternoon and Young Brothers on a Wave-swept Shore,” many of his stories from this period feature ingenious, experimental methods of storytelling.

The third period of Hirano’s work (2007-2010) saw his return to long fiction. The three novels of this period explore and reject the idea of the true self in favor of the “dividual” (*bunjin*, 分人). Hirano postulates that there is no singular “true self” and that an individual is the amalgamation of countless dividuals, which emerge during different situations and from interactions with various people.<sup>6</sup> *Kekkai (Dam Break, 2008)* details a string of gruesome murders and explores the isolation of modern life and the meaning of happiness and evil. *Dōn (Dawn, 2009)* is set in the near future and chronicles the return of a Japanese astronaut from the first manned mission to Mars, against the background of an American presidential election. In *Katachi dake no ai (Artificial Love, 2010)*, an industrial designer crafts a prosthetic limb for an actress who has lost a leg in a crash. It treats themes of love, situational identity, and the body.

The fourth period of Hirano’s career begins with his most recent novel, *Kūhaku wo mitashinasai (Fill in the Blanks)*. Serialization began in 2011 in the *manga* magazine *Mōningu (Morning)*; the novel will be published in book form in late 2012. It deals with themes of life and death, and was inspired by Hirano turning thirty seven, the age at which his father died.

Throughout his career, Hirano has regularly appeared on Japanese television and published essays and dialogues, many of which have been

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<sup>6</sup> “‘The Individual’ and ‘Love’”

republished as books and collections. He has written about a wide range of topics from literature, art, and jazz to law and technology. Most recently, he published *Watashi to wa nani ka—“kojin” kara “bunjin” e (Defining the Self—from Individual to Dividual, 2012)*, which discusses the nature of the self and expounds his theory of the dividual. An overview of Hirano’s career suggests a talented and fearless writer, who has mastered numerous genres and styles.

“Trapped” and “A Fatal Afternoon and Young Brothers on a Wave-swept Shore” first appeared with “Chinji” (“A Curious Incident”), “les petites Passions,” and “Kushami” (“Sneeze”) in the November, 2003 edition of the literary magazine *Gunzō*. They were republished in *Shitatariochiru tokeitachi no hamon (Ripples of Dripping Clocks, 2004)*, Hirano’s second short-story collection. There is no significance to these five stories appearing together in *Gunzō*, but Hirano wrote them, and four others, intending to compile them in one collection.<sup>7</sup>

*Ripples of Dripping Clocks* showcases Hirano’s creativity. Its nine stories are set in the present-day and focus on modern issues, but the similarities end there; they feature diverse themes and styles. Many of Hirano’s short stories tackle contemporary, real-life issues to explore the human condition. Every event is the result of numerous causes, and the background of societal issues provides the context to understand them more fully. Placing characters in these situations allows the reader to explore human nature and how people react to adverse

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<sup>7</sup> “*Shitatariochiru tokeitachi no hamon ni tsuite,*” pp. 326-328



situations.<sup>8</sup> Without losing sight of writing engaging stories, he employs a number of experimental styles that provide much of the fun of *Ripples of Dripping Clocks*.

“Trapped” and “A Fatal Afternoon and Young Brothers on a Wave-swept Shore” are exemplary of the collection—they explore important social themes of bullying, unemployment, and latchkey children and combine them with ingenious, literary experiments. Hirano believes that experimentation for the sake of experimentation does not result in engaging literature and that his successful experiments are ones that are coupled with fitting themes.<sup>9</sup> The success of the experiments in the two stories included here relies on their integration with style and content. Effective literature is engaging and elicits an emotional response from the reader. An analysis of “Trapped” and “A Fatal Afternoon and Young Brothers on a Wave-swept Shore” will illustrate how Hirano produces such work.

“Trapped” is the story of a bullied boy who stabs his tormentor. A more literal translation of the title would be “The Trapped Boy,” and as it suggests, the elements of the story combine to trap the boy literally and figuratively. He is trapped by the bullies, his situation, his memories, and the story’s structure. Taken separately, the elements of the story are intriguing, but the effectiveness of “Trapped” relies on their integration.

“Trapped” is written as a palindrome—it reads the same backwards and forwards. The climactic sentence, in which the protagonist stabs his tormentor, is framed by the rest of the story and acts as a pivoting point for the sentences to repeat themselves. The structure of the story was suggested to Hirano by the

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<sup>8</sup> Interview

<sup>9</sup> Interview

violin duet “*der Spiegel*,” often attributed to Mozart, in which two musicians play from the same sheet of music in opposite directions, meeting briefly in the middle.<sup>10</sup> The structure that Hirano chose for his story created a necessity for short sentences that work in two different contexts. The result is a kind of lyrical symmetry which suggests the boy’s agitation with abrupt and sometimes choppy prose.

In addition to its value as a creative experiment, the structure serves two essential roles in the story. First, it traps the climax between the repeating sentences, framing the moment the boy stabs his bully and making it an obvious focal point of the story—the two boys in the sentence, the protagonist and his tormentor, are literally trapped by the story’s structure, suggesting them as the titular boy or boys. More importantly, it is a terrible moment of clarity in a swirling *mélange* of memory.

Memory does not always work linearly. Experiences are often distorted when they become memories, and the significance or trauma of certain experiences may assign them more prominent places in our minds—often, a bad memory will replay itself over and over. The structure of “Trapped” is meant to suggest the nonlinear nature of memory.<sup>11</sup> The murder of the boy’s tormentor is trapped by the structure of the story, and the boy is trapped by the memories of being bullied and of his irreversible act of violence. The story offers no exit from the cycle that brings the boy to the moment of the murder, and he must run

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<sup>10</sup> “*Shitatariochiru tokei tachi no hamon zengo*,” p. 343

<sup>11</sup> Interview

through the oppressive rain, forever reliving the event. The structure of the story is a metaphor for the boy's situation and a visceral representation of his agitation.

The boy is understandably agitated. He suffers physical and mental anguish at the hands of the bullies and has to live with his new identity as a murderer. The driving rain adds to his isolation and is a physical barrier between him and the town he runs through. Readers can easily understand the boy's predicament, because bullying and its consequences are recognized social issues in both America and Japan; reports of bullied children driven to murder or suicide often appear in the news. A combination of present-day issues and a sympathetic protagonist makes "Trapped" resonate with its readers, but the combination of all of the story's elements makes it effective literature.

Hirano's experiment is ideally paired with a story about isolation and inescapable memories—the integration of the style with an appropriate theme tells the boy's story with immediacy and depth. The reader is told about the boy's predicament, but the disorienting structure of the narrative and the terse style make one feel the protagonist's anxiety and hopelessness. The experiment is successful because it is not merely a curiosity but is integral to the narrative.

"A Fatal Afternoon and Young Brothers on a Wave-swept Shore" also features a creative experiment that, integrated with the themes of the story, becomes an integral part of the story's effectiveness. Though "A Fatal Afternoon" and "Young Brothers on a Wave-swept Shore" take place in the city and the countryside, respectively, and deal with different issues, a shared metaphor and imagery connect them, making them appropriate counterparts for each other. The

two parts are seemingly unrelated, but they both end with their characters in mortal peril—it is a story of unexpected death. As in “Trapped,” present-day issues inform the events and motivations of the characters to add depth and immediacy to the story.

Metaphors intrigue Hirano, and he sees them as doorways from the world of one story to another.<sup>12</sup> Before writing “A Fatal Afternoon and Young Brothers on a Wave-swept Shore,” he considered writing a story in which the world of every metaphor was described, but abandoned the idea, fearing it would quickly become tiresome for readers.<sup>13</sup> Instead, he experimented by writing two seemingly unrelated stories with a shared metaphor, creating a doorway between them. The blood from the thief’s ear and the red crab crawling from the rocks are similar images, but more importantly each suggests the other story. The last sentence of “Young Brothers on a Wave-swept Shore,” for example, likens the crab to “blood pouring from the ear of a man dead on the street in broad daylight.” An imaginative reader may be intrigued by the implied story of the dead man—how did he die and why? Hirano obliges readers by providing a story for each part of the metaphor, connecting the worlds of the two parts of the story.

In both parts, the final images represent mortal danger for the characters, thus tying the parts together. The shared imagery of the ocean further strengthens and illustrates the universality of the theme of unexpected death. The boys of “Young Brothers on a Wave-swept Shore” are potentially killed by the ocean, and the thief’s body in “A Fatal Afternoon” is disturbed by the rumble of a dump

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<sup>12</sup> “*Shitatariochiru tokeitachi no hamon ni tsuite*,” p. 328

<sup>13</sup> Interview

truck that is likened to ocean waves. To Hirano, the unpredictability of seas and rivers embodies unexpected death and appears in some of his other works as well.<sup>14</sup> In *Artificial Love*, for example, the protagonist ponders the potential for children playing in a dry riverbed to be killed by a sudden swell of a river.<sup>15</sup> Ultimately, the shared imagery, along with the metaphor likening the crab and the blood to each other, tie the two parts of the story together, but the stories relate very different events.

As in real life, the events of the two parts of “A Fatal Afternoon and Young Brothers on a Wave-swept Shore” are the culmination of a number of factors. The use of real-life issues allows readers to understand the characters’ motives and see how the tragic events come to pass. Readers are given the context necessary for exploring human reactions to adverse situations, and the story highlights the dangers of modern society.

“A Fatal Afternoon” thrusts two strangers together, but first describes the unfortunate details of their lives. They are both victims of a poor economy and are social outcasts unable to support themselves in a way that will gain societal approval. The reader will probably be more sympathetic to the woman who desperately tries to save her business, but the thief is not entirely unsympathetic. He is like countless other lost, young people of his generation who are unable to find a job that suits them and float around without an identity. In a culture that defines people and their worth by their occupations, both characters are driven to extreme measures and make poor choices. Their situations make the result of their

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<sup>14</sup> Interview

<sup>15</sup> *Katachi dake no ai*, p. 231

encounter almost inevitable; when two desperate people are thrust into conflict, it is likely to end badly for at least one of them. Because readers can understand the reasons for the conflict, they can see the accident as more than just a random event. Hirano makes the reader think about the way people respond to adversity and how they arrive at such situations.

“Young Brothers on a Wave-swept Shore” deals with the issue of latchkey children, and much of the charm of the story is in the interaction between the brothers. They are neglected, and the older brother assumes the role of parent. Though he is well intentioned, his plan to make his brother happy has disastrous results. It would be easy to blame the older brother for their apparent death because he stubbornly goes after the crab, but the tragedy arises from his attempt to look after his brother and create a good memory for them. Their circumstances and previous failures combine to result in their predicament. Here, too, understanding their motivations gives readers a better understanding of the situation and allows them to reflect on how the boys come to the end that they do.

“A Fatal Afternoon and Young Brothers on a Wave-swept Shore” explores a theme of unexpected death in two seemingly unrelated parts, but the parts are not so dissimilar upon closer inspection. They both present a pessimistic view of modern society and depict victims of social issues in tragic accidents. The varied settings and characters give the stories’ treatment of unexpected death a broad scope, and the shared metaphor of the blood and the crab strengthens the theme by explicitly linking the two stories. Again, the integration of experiment and theme is integral to the effectiveness of the story.

## Translation Process and Challenges

My experience translating literature has taught me that translation is an impossibly difficult task. That is not to say that it is a waste of time or is not a worthwhile pursuit. On the contrary, translation enriches the target language. Ortega y Gasset gives a strong argument in favor of accepting impossible tasks, saying, “there always exists the possibility of bettering, refining, perfecting: ‘progress,’ in short.”<sup>16</sup> It is through tackling difficult tasks that we better ourselves; because translation is hard, it is worth doing. The most important thing for a translator to do is to honestly confront his limitations and the limitations of language, and then to push the boundaries of those limitations. He should strive to be a “good utopian,” who acknowledges the impossibility of his task but always tries to improve.<sup>17</sup>

The greatest challenge that a translator faces is the relationship between language and thought. I agree with Schleiermacher that we cannot think outside the limits of language, and one’s native language dictates the way concepts are formed. Every language is comprised of a system of concepts that overlap, inform, and complement each other, and neither the parts nor the whole correspond exactly to the systems of other languages.<sup>18</sup> We can infer, therefore, that no translation can perfectly represent the nuances created by the associations of words and concepts in the original language. A perfect translation is an unrealistic goal, but a good translation is not; it will, necessarily, be different from the source

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<sup>16</sup> Ortega y Gasset, p. 99

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99

<sup>18</sup> Schleiermacher, 38

text but should serve as an accurate reproduction of a verbal object.<sup>19</sup> Accuracy is paramount, but a translator will be confronted with choices. He wants to remain faithful to the source text but can never remain faithful to every aspect of it. What, then, should he be faithful to?

Schleiermacher famously asserted, “either the translator leaves the author alone as much as possible and moves the reader toward the author, or he leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the author toward the reader.”<sup>20</sup> I disagree, however, with his assertion that there is no acceptable middle ground. The reader should be brought to the author as much as possible, but if the translation is incomprehensible to readers of the target language, it has failed as a translation. It is, therefore, necessary to make some concessions to the reader. Nabokov would argue that “skyscrapers” of footnotes are the way to remain faithful to the original and to bring readers to the author,<sup>21</sup> but extensive footnotes are not the answer. They alienate readers and, if anything, move them farther from appreciating the text. Footnotes can be a useful tool, but I have chosen not to use them. When absolutely necessary, I have opted for brief interpolations.

The translator must first choose an audience and then make consistent choices to best communicate the text to them. I want to appeal to a diverse audience, but my ideal readers are my peers at the School of International Letters and Cultures—people interested in challenging literature and foreign cultures. There is little in the two stories that requires explanation, but my audience’s

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<sup>19</sup> Paz, 155

<sup>20</sup> Schleiermacher, 42

<sup>21</sup> Nabokov, 143



interest in foreign cultures helped me to avoid footnotes and interpolations. For example, in “Young Brothers on a Wave-swept Shore,” there is a reference to Obon, but I assume that my audience is familiar with this Japanese holiday (or will look it up), and so did not explain it. My audience also allowed me to translate *gēmu sentā* as “game center” instead of “video arcade.” I made this choice because, for a thoughtful reader, the potentially unfamiliar term “game center” suggests a different image than “video arcade” does. Keeping words like Obon and game center may not seem particularly important, but they place the stories in Japan and are one way in which the reader can be brought to the author.

Once the translator selects an audience, he must decide which aspects of the original to adhere most faithfully to. He cannot remain faithful to every aspect of the source text, and some aspects, like the nuances of rhythm and word choice, can be approximated at best. Because every text is different, the translator, after he has read the original, should reflect on it carefully and decide which aspects of it formed the strongest impressions or stood out as defining features. When difficult decisions have to be made, those aspects should be made a priority for preservation.

With “Trapped,” I focused on its innovative structure; not remaining faithful to that would do violence to the original. I also paid careful attention to preserving the terse style, because the disorienting repetition of sentences and the choppy prose are imperative for reinforcing the theme and atmosphere of the story. The structure of the story requires it to be written with few long sentences, but every sentence must work in two contexts. This proved to be challenging, and I

was forced to take occasional liberties with the source text. The form and content of the story cannot be separated, and I was willing to sacrifice strict adherence to the words of the original to remain faithful to its structure.

Japanese sentences can be vague, allowing multiple interpretations, and Hirano uses the flexibility of the Japanese language to his advantage. The English translator, on the other hand, must supply omitted subjects, use articles, and clarify whether nouns are singular or plural. These considerations made it difficult to create grammatical English that is vague enough to work in different contexts. The following examples illustrate this problem:

- “Chi no nagare ga midarete, zenshin no itaru tokoro de maigo ni natte iru yō datta.”<sup>22</sup>

“Chi no nagare” initially refers to the circulation of the narrator’s blood, but later describes the blood coursing from the bully’s stab wound. As a result, I could not retain it as the subject of the sentence; “blood flow” does not work in both situations. “Zenshin ni itaru tokoro de” was also problematic because it refers first to “my body” and then to “his body.” I considered “the body” as a rough translation but quickly discarded it because it did not work in either situation. It was more important to me that the sentence be identical both times it appears than to adhere closely to the words of the original sentence. I translated the sentence: “Blood coursed, wild and aimless.”

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<sup>22</sup>Tojikomerareta shōnen,” pp. 101 & 104

「血の流れが乱れて、全身の至るところで迷子になっているようだった。」

- “Boku no migi te wa, nakusanai yō ni to itsumo hahaoya kara chūi sarete iru jitaku no kagi no yō ni, shikkari to oritatamishiki no naifu wo nigirishimete iru.”<sup>23</sup>

A simple translation could read, “I clutched a knife in my right hand.” The sentence is not complicated, but English grammar dictates that I add an article, in this case “a.” A problem arises, however, the second time the sentence appears—we have already been introduced to the knife, making “a” inappropriate. I could not substitute “the” for “a” the second time and remain faithful to the story’s structure, so I chose the possessive adjective, “my,” instead.

- “Sore wa marude, ijimerarete ita toki no boku no yō na, hisshi no, shikashi muryoku na koe datta.”<sup>24</sup>

The “*sore*” that begins this sentence is plural the first time this sentence appears and singular the second; it refers to the bully’s friends’ screams and to the bully’s scream respectively. I had to choose between “it” and “they.” I solved the problem by making the friends’ screams a “din” so that I could use the singular pronoun “it” both times.

“A Fatal Afternoon and Young Brothers on a Wave-swept Shore” is written in colloquial, contemporary Japanese and, unlike “Trapped,” does not have an unusual structure. Each sentence appears only once, freeing me to focus on approximating the nuances of word choice and sentence structure in a single

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<sup>23</sup> Tojikomerareta shōnen,” pp. 102 & 103

「僕の右手は、なくさないようにと何時も母親から注意されている自宅の鍵のように、しっかりと折り畳み式のナイフを握り締めている。」

<sup>24</sup>Tojikomerareta shōnen,” pp. 102 & 103

「それはまるで、いじめられていた時の僕のような、必死の、しかし無力な声だった。」

context. One way that I tried to accomplish this was to pay close attention to sentence length. It has become uncommon to link several clauses into long sentences in English, but such sentences appear regularly in Japanese prose. Focusing on the flow between long and short sentences allowed me to preserve some of the rhythm of the source text. I also considered my word choice carefully and regularly consulted a thesaurus to find the best approximations possible. I was faced with choices, however, and had to decide which aspects of the source text were most important for preservation.

The shared metaphors that end each part of the story are innovative and are the most interesting stylistic features of the text. I translated them carefully, but they were not particularly problematic. The narrator of “A Fatal Afternoon” is detached, and there is little dialogue. The details of the two characters’ lives and the incidents of the story are told dispassionately and impartially. I tried to maintain that feeling with a matter-of-fact style. The action of “Young Brothers on a Wave-swept Shore,” on the other hand, is regularly punctuated with dialogue, and the relationship and interaction of the boys left a strong impression on me. I focused on the dialogue and the boys’ interaction. Translating “A Fatal Afternoon and Young Brothers on a Wave-swept Shore” presented some interesting problems, which I outline below.

The woman in “A Fatal Afternoon” employs two non-Japanese—the text describes them as “Asian.” An American reader may find this odd, because Japanese people are Asian. Conferring with the author, I learned that his word choice was not intended to be provocative; referring to Asian foreigners simply as

Asian is commonplace in Japan. The question that faced me was whether or not to change “Asian” to something less provocative, like “non-Japanese Asian.” Which would be more faithful to the original: altering the word to avoid surprise, or raising eyebrows with a direct approximation? I considered this an opportunity to bring the reader to the Japanese language and left it as “Asian employees.” I do not believe that it is too distracting, and it suggests an interesting dichotomy in Japanese society. Not surprising for an island nation, many Japanese consider themselves both part of Asia and separate from it. My target audience would find such a distinction interesting, so I left it in.

The biggest problem that confronted me when translating “Young Brothers on a Wave-swept Shore” was finding an appropriate way of translating “*ani*” and “*otōto*,” the two unnamed boys are referred to merely as the older brother and younger brother. Additionally, the younger boy often calls the older boy “*ni-chan*” (big brother). In Japanese, it is common to call out to your older brother by saying “*ni-chan*,” but “big brother,” in English, brings to mind a dystopian Orwellian future or a silly reality-television program. I was unable to think of an appropriate way to have the brothers refer to each other that isn’t too strange in English. The solution was, unfortunately, to remove words like “*ni-chan*” from the translation. I was reluctant to do it because I want to retain some of the idiosyncrasies of Japanese in my translations. Having the younger boy call his brother “big brother” or “big bro” would be more faithful to the words of the original, but not to its essence; such a translation would be distracting to an English reading audience.

The boys' dialect presented another problem that is familiar to most translators. They speak the dialect of Kitakyushu, which, at the very least, suggests that the action of the story takes place there. Additionally, a Japanese speaker is likely to associate the characters with images and stereotypes of the area. The dialect communicates more information than just the words that the boys use. The question for the translator, then, is what to do with the dialect. There are two realistic options: disregard the dialect or substitute it for a dialect of the English language. If we consider the second option, we will quickly realize that it is inappropriate.

Some translators may argue that a foreign dialect can be successfully superimposed on another language, but I disagree. It is true that it would demonstrate to an English reading audience that the boys are not speaking in the "standard" dialect, and the substitute dialect would communicate additional cultural information. The problem, however, is with the cultural information it conveys. Giving the boys a Midwestern accent, for example, would suggest associations with the American Midwest which is not analogous to Kitakyushu. The dialect would also suggest that the story takes place in the United States rather than in Japan. I elected to remove the dialect and have the boys speak "standard" American English. It is better to lose the nuances of the dialect than to mislead readers with an inaccurate substitute. I focused, instead, on writing dialogue that is appropriately childish. There may not be an analogous dialect in English, but children's speech can and should be approximated. I accomplished this by avoiding big words and complicated grammar.

"TRAPPED"<sup>25</sup>

The dark, late-afternoon town was blanketed in heavy clouds; frantically, I kept running.

I was alone. I was gasping for breath. There was no way I could go home like this, with my school uniform so filthy. Drenched from head to toe, my body was cold, but beneath my collar, the dull heat of steaming sweat clung to me unpleasantly.

It was the end of the rainy-season, but the downpour, like a heavy midsummer shower, tormented me mercilessly. I repeatedly wiped my face and swept back my hair. I was distraught, like a beast with a thorn deep in its paw. My heart bared its fangs and tore at my chest. Unbearable frustration and anxiety. Engulfed in a hopeless frenzy, I felt as though I might unravel at any moment.

Their miserable faces are an indelible bloodstain on my mind....

There's no escape. I'm cornered. If only the rain would wash my memory clean.

I passed the riverbank where I'd been kicked until I spat up blood, where my school books and notebooks had been thrown into the water. I passed the used-bookstore where I'd sold stolen *manga* to give them money. I passed the darkness beneath the viaduct where the shadows of those sneering pricks had lain in wait for me after school.

The rain showed no sign of letting up.

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<sup>25</sup> The source text for this translation is *Shitatariochiru tokeitachi no hamon*.

I ran, dragging my sneakers, heavy with water, as if they were steel manacles. People's reflections blurred around me. The town lost its shape, its outlines bleeding together as in a sodden water color.

The bully who had always hit me the most cruelly was surrounded by his friends in front of the game center, flapping his mouth with a stupid look on his face.

I stopped and gazed at the scene from a distance. I was sick to my stomach. I felt out of touch with reality. Blood coursed, wild and aimless.

A motorcycle raced past, spraying water with its tires.

One of the bully's friends turned around suddenly, glared at me, and showered me with curses in a shrill voice.

I forced myself not to betray my trembling. It must have been impossible to read my feelings in my face.

Inhaling deeply to settle my ragged breath, I thrust my right hand into my pocket. I was in a daze, my body trembling. I bit my lip and somehow managed to swallow the lump of saliva that threatened to lodge itself in my throat.

Their umbrellas clustered like hydrangea blossoms magnified by a loupe but black as though ravaged by sickness.

I raised my face. My right hand firmly grasped my pocketknife like it was the house key my mother always admonished me not to lose.

My heart raced. The next instant, my foot struck a puddle, spewing a muddy spray over the asphalt.



Lightning flashed across the distant sky, followed by a low rumble of thunder. My tormentor's eyes widened with surprise, and he looked at me, confusion written on his face.

His discarded umbrella danced on the street like a leaf; a din of mournful voices cried out. It sounded like my voice when I was being tormented, desperate but powerless.

“No! Stop!”

I stabbed his rigid, fear-stricken body wildly, staining his dress-shirt crimson in an instant with my rancorous assault.

“No! Stop!”

It sounded like my voice when I was being tormented, desperate but powerless. His discarded umbrella danced on the street like a leaf; a din of mournful voices cried out.

My tormentor's eyes widened with surprise, and he looked at me, confusion written on his face. Lightning flashed across the distant sky, followed by a low rumble of thunder.

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The bully who had always hit me the most cruelly was surrounded by his friends in front of the game center, flapping his mouth with a stupid look on his face.

The town lost its shape, its outlines bleeding together as in a sodden water color. People's reflections blurred around me. I ran, dragging my sneakers, heavy with water, as if they were steel manacles.

The rain showed no sign of letting up.

I passed the darkness beneath the viaduct where the shadows of those sneering pricks had lain in wait for me after school. I passed the used-bookstore where I'd sold stolen *manga* to give them money. I passed the riverbank where

I'd been kicked until I spat up blood, where my school books and notebooks had been thrown into the water.

If only the rain would wash my memory clean.

I'm cornered. There's no escape. Their miserable faces are an indelible bloodstain on my mind....

Engulfed in a hopeless frenzy, I felt as though I might unravel at any moment. Unbearable frustration and anxiety. My heart bared its fangs and tore at my chest. I was distraught, like a beast with a thorn deep in its paw. I repeatedly wiped my face and swept back my hair. It was the end of the rainy-season, but the downpour, like a heavy midsummer shower, tormented me mercilessly. Drenched from head to toe, my body was cold, but beneath my collar, the dull heat of steaming sweat clung to me unpleasantly.

There was no way I could go home like this, with my school uniform so filthy.

I was gasping for breath.

I was alone. The dark, late-afternoon town was blanketed in heavy clouds; frantically, I kept running.

"A FATAL AFTERNOON AND YOUNG BROTHERS ON A WAVE-SWEPT SHORE"<sup>26</sup>

"A Fatal Afternoon"

The man was a seasoned purse-snatcher who'd been working this neighborhood for awhile.

He was a 26-year-old Japanese (witness testimony placed him in his mid-twenties), stood 170 cm tall, was thin and fair-skinned, and had tousled, black hair. Behind his back, the locals widely speculated that he might be Chinese.

He was unemployed. It wasn't that he was uninterested in working; when he was lucky enough to find a day's employment, he'd show up. Occasionally, as if on impulse, he interviewed for part-time positions at convenience stores or restaurants, but had never been chosen for the job. Employers gave him various reasons. Sometimes, he was told that they prefer to hire students; other times, he was rejected because they preferred someone with experience. Whenever they told him that they'd be in touch, they'd later refuse him on the pretense of having hired someone else. There were some among them who came right out and told him the truth: he made a terrible impression.

He began stealing because he had no alternative. The pattern of his criminal activity was almost always the same. When he ran out of money, he'd first set out in the dead of night to steal a moped. Then, he'd bring the bike home, dirty the mirrors so they wouldn't reflect his face, and, if he planned to use it for a

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<sup>26</sup> The source text for this translation is *Shitatariochiru tokeitachi no hamon*.

while, doctor the license plate (his methods included bending it and changing a “ • ” or “6” into an “8”). The next morning, he’d be hard at “work.”

He’d ride around town on the stolen bike searching for an easy mark: early mornings, he targeted nightclub hostesses walking unsteadily and holding their handbags (tributes from their admirers) in one hand; midday, female office workers returning from lunch with full stomachs and clasping their wallets; afternoons, housewives with shopping bags stuffed in the front baskets of their bicycles; as the sun began to set, elderly people out on walks; and evenings, high school girls out on the town. Once he’d carefully chosen his target, he’d follow her furtively, descend upon her when no one was around, snatch his prize, and put her screams behind him. He was swift as a raptor. Even if his target panicked and tried to clutch her bag, she usually grabbed at air. Some victims just stood dumbfounded. There was little opportunity to say anything, but on the rare occasions when insults or curses were hurled at him, they never reached his rapidly shrinking figure.

To minimize the danger, his crimes had to be quick, but when his efforts yielded little return, he’d knock out two or three “jobs” in one outing. Then, even before the police could be notified, he would abandon the bike and, keeping only the contents, throw the bags into a river or gutter. Finally, he’d remove his gloves and sunglasses, change into clothes he’d stashed in a train station bathroom, and cautiously return home by train or bus.

He poured most of the money he came away with into pachinko and, for a while, would enjoy a carefree life of leisure. He began habitually purse-snatching

because, as with pachinko, he'd been blessed with "beginner's luck." The first bag he stole contained 3,000,000 yen. He hadn't landed a bigger catch since, and it'd become customary for him to cluck his tongue in disappointment after opening stolen wallets.

He'd lived like this for nearly a year.

One day, he was holed up in a pachinko parlor, as usual, with the money he'd stolen. He'd heard they were getting new machines, so he'd lined up before the parlor opened to assure a spot for himself. For some reason, though, not even a single ball came out, and by the afternoon, he'd blown all of his money. He got up and—after cursing the young employee who admonished him for kicking the machine—left through the parlor's back door. The fruits of the previous day's labor had been nullified. Thinking about it made his blood boil. He was chilled to the bone from being so long in the air-conditioning. His arms, sticking out of a threadbare, white T-shirt, broke out in goose bumps when they came in contact with the outside air; it had an awful, artificial warmth—the heat of stale, dead air spewed into the gaps between buildings.

"Should I do a quick job somewhere before I go home?"

The thought occurred to him as he searched for his bike along the quiet backstreets of the shopping arcade. His head was still pounding from the blaring music and metallic sound of pachinko balls inside the parlor. At length, he found the bike, but someone had knocked it over. He kicked the rim of the tire: "Shit!"

He was angry. He righted the bike, picked up the helmet he'd stolen with it, and lowered himself onto the seat before pulling a cigarette from his pocket

and lighting it. He'd bought the pack on the way there, but it was his last one. He'd planned to restock by winning a carton, but that hadn't panned out. He twisted the empty box and threw it into the street before exhaling smoke in a long sigh.

The way things stood, it seemed unlikely that today would end well. He suddenly had an irresistible desire to sleep with a woman, but had neither prospects nor money. He thought that he ought to rape someone. It was no wild flight of fancy; he'd never gone through with it, but the idea had crossed his mind several times. Anyone would do. Perhaps he'd follow that young woman walking nearby. Just then, a middle-aged woman rushed out of the multi-tenant building diagonally across from him. She had no escort and clutched a bag under her arm like it was precious to her. Even better, she began walking down the left side of a one-way street with her back to him—an ideal target.

The building was a regular source of gossip in those parts because it housed a nasty loan-shark.

He sensed right away that this would be a good score. He hadn't made any preparations, but he could hardly pass up this opportunity.

She looked like a person who'd mortgaged her future to preserve her present hopes; temporary relief was scrawled on her face. Her cheeks, pallid and without a trace of makeup, were framed by stray locks of white hair. She looked at her watch anxiously; it was 1:05. One more...well, maybe two more places. Would she make it in time?

The room was nearly empty; only two men were inside. One of them, in his mid-forties, was sprawled on a couch in the screened-off rear of the office. The way he gazed lazily at the ceiling, she couldn't tell whether or not he was awake. His hair was dyed brown, and a gold necklace hung across the wide opening of his shirt. She caught sight of him as she was shown through the room and immediately lowered her gaze. The other man, probably still in his twenties, noticed her reticence and encouraged her: "Come in." He might have been even younger than her son. He wore a double-breasted suit, had black hair, and his unhealthily sunken cheeks were lightly covered with stubble.

She was more obsequious than she'd ever been. She found the two men in the room with her beastly; naturally, she was afraid, but contempt for these men far outstripped her fear. Whatever it took, however, she couldn't leave without borrowing money—she intended to beg and even throw herself at their feet if she was refused. She had to devise some way of making 150,000 yen by 3PM. If not, the company would be unable to pay its bills. She'd managed to collect 50,000 yen, but was still short 100,000 yen. One way or another, she ought to have been able to raise that amount, but she'd tried everything humanly possible and had only scraped together 50,000 yen. 100,000 to go. A mere ten 10,000 yen bills. Would she and her husband lose the factory they'd nurtured for more than twenty-five years for that small a sum? Would they lose it because she couldn't overcome the challenges of this one day? Right! For now, she just needed to get through today. Since her husband had had a stroke and was carried off in an ambulance two days ago, she'd been caring for him as well as rushing around collecting



money. What would happen if, when he'd recovered and was released from the hospital, he were to learn that the company had gone bankrupt? It was unthinkable. Even if she overextended herself today, her husband was sure to figure something out if he'd only recover. Until then, she would preserve the company, whatever the cost. If they went bankrupt, it was all over. Lamenting it after the fact would accomplish nothing.

The man on the sofa occasionally fiddled with the air conditioner remote, changing the direction and volume of the air. The adjustments were incredibly minute; the beep of the machine sounded through the room over and over again. It seemed to bother the younger man, and every time the air conditioner beeped, he'd grimace and glare at the partition, his legs shaking so violently the desk rattled.

The woman's company was a low-level subcontractor for a major electrical appliance manufacturer, and they mostly produced parts for commercial air conditioners. Even while weathering the recession, business had been steady until five years ago, and they'd always employed about ten people. Around that time, they suffered a sharp decline in work orders that reflected the worsening performance of their parent company, and to make matters worse, it became clear that financial institutions were reluctant to lend money. Now, she and her husband, along with a skilled worker who'd been with them since the beginning, and two Asian employees, were able to barely manage the work load—one third of what it had been in their heyday. During that time, their debt swelled immensely. They mortgaged both their home and the company. Their company was performing

poorly, and they had nothing left to offer as collateral; neither banks nor credit unions would give them additional loans. To make ends meet, they took out small personal loans from credit sales companies, and when that wasn't enough, they borrowed from consumer finance companies. They began relying on these loans more and more frequently. As the amount increased, they began to feel the strain of interest and, before long, were drowning in debt. They cashed out their life insurance policies, pawned their belongings a few at a time, and even borrowed money from their son and his wife. For the last month, they'd also tightened their food budget as much as they could. That was the cause of her husband's collapse and hospitalization.

She thought his poor health was due to overexertion which she blamed on the state of the world. Their son and his wife came to visit her husband in the hospital for a day but immediately took the bullet train home. They didn't ask for their money back, but they also didn't ask about the state of the business. When the woman and her husband had borrowed the money, they'd all decided it would be a one-time loan.

While her husband was hospitalized, she'd been mulling over a last resort, namely the dubious junk mail that had been piling up the last few days. Slogans leapt from each of the postcards she'd attached to the refrigerator with magnets: "Same Day Transfer," "No Interview Required," "Borrow up to 300,000 Yen without Collateral or Sponsor." The payment deadlines for her bills creeping ever closer, she trepidatiously called the company that seemed the most respectable. The younger man had handled her case and had been surprisingly meticulous. He

asked, in detail, her name, age, address, telephone number, and amount of debt; and after a thirty-minute “screening,” she called again and was informed that, seeing as she was a first-time customer, it was unlikely they could loan her the money without her visiting the office. She agreed without hesitation. If they were calling her in, they’d surely give her a loan. She was uneasy about going by herself, but she was in no position to object. She asked for the address; it was about thirty minutes by subway. In any case, she had to do everything she could.

Holding the application form with the necessary information, the young man went into the back for a moment but immediately returned and reproached her for lying about her debt over the phone. He was right. Had she disclosed the full amount of her debt, she probably would’ve been turned away at the door. She was sure of this, and so impulsively had given a lower number. The man explained gravely that in this day and age, you can find any information with a computer. Apologizing profusely that it had been a misunderstanding, she begged him repeatedly to lend her money, all the while confessing her actual debt; she even told him about her husband’s hospitalization. From behind the screen, the sound of the air conditioner remote continued unabated. After listening to her for a while, the young man stood up and conferred with the man on the sofa before solemnly returning with cash and several documents.

When the woman saw the money in his hand, she thanked him worshipfully. She’d be given a loan. The conditions, however, were totally different from what had been written on the postcard. She received a 100,000 yen loan, but a 5,000 yen processing fee and ten-day, fifty percent interest had been

deducted, leaving her with only 45,000 yen. She persisted that she must have 100,000 yen today, but was coldly refused; she had no “record” of repayment and was welcome to go elsewhere if she was dissatisfied. Of course, she had nowhere else to go. At the moment, she was also incapable of considering anything carefully. She was fearful and impatient. There was no time; the company was about to go bankrupt; she needed money; she had nowhere else to borrow money from; her husband wasn’t there; it was up to her to find a solution...her mind was brimming with problems heaped one on top of another. One thing was sure: she had to borrow money. Gradually, an absurd optimism cleared her mind like a vacuum. To begin with, she would borrow the 45,000 yen. Naturally, she was uneasy about a fifty percent interest rate over ten days, but her dread of being told they wouldn’t lend her anything won out. She’d have to try somewhere else for the rest. If she were to have time for that, she couldn’t waste any more of it here.

Once she’d signed the loan agreement and affixed her seal, she was asked, as a formality, for her signature and seal on a “Lawyer Noninvolvement Agreement” and a “Telephone Subscription Release Form.” Moreover, she had to sign several blank letters of proxy. Then, she was finally given the money. Once she’d confirmed the amount several times with trembling hands and carefully put it in her bag, she thanked him again, bowing her head deeply. When she lifted her head, a trace of a smile lingered on his face. She clearly saw his weaselly duplicity but instantly lowered her head and pretended not to notice.

When she went down the stairs and onto the street, she was a little short of breath. Distrustful of other people and fearing that the money would be stolen, she

carefully surveyed her surroundings, wedged her bag tightly beneath her right arm, and started down the filthy asphalt road—it was covered in old, black gum stains and white cigarette butts. When she'd arrived, she'd been looking for the building and had only looked up, but now that she gave the street another look, she saw that it was a complete mess. Rain-damp tissue packets advertising telephone sex lines were scattered about. As were dubious life counseling leaflets and handwritten real-estate listings. On the telephone pole, a faded, year-old poster for a professional wrestling event. On the walls, spray-painted graffiti and masses of flyers for amateur bands.

She looked over the advertisement the young man had handed her when she stood up. He said that he'd refer her to an acquaintance if she really must have another 50,000 yen. It would be all right, he explained in a strangely friendly tone; he didn't usually do this, but since he felt sorry for her, he would call ahead. The business-card-sized flyer was the kind often seen in telephone booths and used language similar to the junk mail she'd been receiving, but one unusual phrase, "B-listers Welcome," stood out to her, and she wondered for a moment what it meant. When she realized that it referred to people on money-lenders' "black lists," she was taken aback to realize that she'd, at some point, become such a person. As though she were coming out of anesthesia, she suddenly became frightened again. She could reach the address in fifteen minutes by subway. There was still time. She feared, however, that she would be saddled with another ten-day, fifty percent interest rate. Then there were the letters of proxy. What would they use them for?

Leaving the office, she'd heard the sound of the air-conditioner remote again. It was strangely unsettling to recall it. It was as though it were saying good-bye to her. Perhaps that was their intent. What was the relationship between those two men? Were they yakuza?...or not yakuza, but some other kind of thugs? If she were unable to return the loan, how would they collect it? There was no way she'd get off lightly. She'd also given them her son's contact information. If they were to do something to her grandchildren...it was terrifying.

Discarding his cigarette butt, the man lowered the bike from its kick-stand, put on his helmet without fastening the chin strap, and started the engine. The bike was, of course, stolen; he'd used it for his crimes yesterday, but it was a real beauty—the speed limiter had been removed and it was frighteningly fast—so he'd kept it and just changed the license plate.

She would come out onto a main street soon. She turned her eyes dreamily toward the cars zooming past the bright exit of the alley. If she turned left and walked a short ways, she would reach the subway station. If she rode the subway, visited one more firm, and went to the bank, the factory would be saved. After that, her husband would think of something—or was it all over? The worries she'd put aside moments ago gripped her breast. She may have made a mistake they couldn't recover from. What should she do? She couldn't make the decision herself. If only her husband were well! Was it too late to turn around and return the money she'd just borrowed? Her pleas would almost certainly fall on deaf ears.

Fatigue and heat took their toll, slightly weakening her right arm, which pressed against her bag. A winding row of bicycles was parked illegally along the left side of the road, and just as her grip loosened, they clamorously toppled over like dominos. Surprised, the woman instinctively turned around. Two short beeps of a car's horn blared as though the driver blamed her for knocking them over. She spun around toward the opposite side of the street, startled as if she'd been ordered to halt. At that moment, something stretched out toward her. It was a hand. She immediately felt she was in danger and screamed, but what it grabbed hold of, as though it would tear her flesh along with it, was the shoulder strap of her bag. She was stunned. She clung to the bag for dear life. The man expected this to be a simple "job," and so he was puzzled at this unexpected resistance. With his left hand he repeatedly yanked on his prize as hard as he could, and though he'd lost his balance, he twisted the accelerator heedlessly with his right.

"Help! Thief! Somebody! Thief!" she screamed, concentrating all of her strength into her arms as if her life depended on it. He, too, worked his arms furiously. The next instant, the pitch of the bike's engine rose another level, and the woman, pulled suddenly forward, finally got her legs entangled and crashed to the ground. She still didn't release the bag. Regardless, he drove on, dragging her for several meters. Several passersby at the exit to the main street stopped and stared at the scene, curious about what was happening. The bike was weaving, and though he was fighting a losing battle, the man gave one last heroic tug on the bag's strap. One of the fasteners holding the strap to either side of the bag tore loose; the loop of the strap straightened into a cord, doubling its length, and it tore

from his hands. Its load lightened, the bike shot off violently. The man clucked his tongue, and the moment he looked forward, he shot out onto the main street and crashed into the side of a van. His helmet flew off, and he was thrown into the air before slamming head first onto the ground.

One after another, two cars collided with the van as it quickly applied its brakes. The sharp, piercing squeal of tires and the sound of glass and metal crashing together. Screaming car horns and the commotion of passersby.

The woman's navy dress was badly torn, exposing her beige underpants, and her face, arms, shoulders, and knees oozed blood painfully where they'd been scraped along the ground. She still clutched her bag firmly to her chest.

Not only passersby, but also people from nearby shops and buildings gathered around them, quickly forming a crowd.

Some used their cell phones to call the police and fire departments, while others used them to take photographs of the scene. The windows were crowded with people, jostling each other to stare below. A few people walked over to the prone woman. "Are you all right?" they asked her, but she screwed up her face in pain and readjusted her grip on her bag as if she expected another thief. Then she gave a small nod, breathed laboriously, lifted her face and looked at her left arm. The glass on her watch was cracked and brightly reflected the sunlight. Below, the second-hand ticked along, mercilessly carving away time.

The man didn't even twitch.

Onlookers formed a wide circle around him and stared at the scene; their consciences troubled them, and they spoke to those nearby: "It looks like he hit



his head. It's best we don't move him, right?" "Nah, he's already dead." They all wondered what in the world had happened.

The bike's engine was still running and continued to spew exhaust. The driver of the rear-ended van got out of his vehicle holding his neck, and, as he walked toward the man, a few others approached as though he were pulling them along. The driver was in shock; all he said was, "It was an accident, an accident...." A few people, strangers to each other, conferred, saying it was probably best not to move him until the ambulance arrived. They all watched as a middle-aged man in a suit squatted next to the man and tried speaking to him. The rumble of a dump truck driving by in the other lane passed through the asphalt like the roar of the sea. The man didn't respond. The vibration disturbed his body, and when his head moved, dark-red blood spilled from his dirty ear, like a small crab crawling from the stones of a rocky beach, and dripped slowly onto the ground.

“Young Brothers on a Wave-swept Shore”

The boy broke the silence as he and his older brother finished crossing a bridge.

“That was scary, huh?”

He sat astride a bicycle from which the training wheels had just been removed and followed his brother, wobbling from time to time. The older boy had been without a bicycle since handing down his old one, but this summer, his parents had finally bought him the mountain bike with twenty-inch tires that he’d had his heart set on. He proudly stomped the pedals and expertly rattled the gears of the six-speed bicycle.

“That’s not scary at all! You were scared?”

Challenged by his older brother, the boy shook his head: “I wasn’t scared! I was just asking.”

They’d just crossed the river separating school districts. On the day of their school’s closing ceremony, they’d been sternly reminded in their classrooms that crossing district lines during summer vacation without a guardian was forbidden; they were sure to get at least a slap on both cheeks if they were found out.

To avoid discovery, they’d left the house today hiding their intentions from their parents and friends. They planned to slip out to the beach in secret.

“Liar! You were scared, huh?”

“No, I wasn’t!”

Stung by his brother's teasing, the younger boy looked as though he might start crying at any moment.

"Okay, okay. Don't cry 'cause of that," the older brother said, exasperated.

"I'm not crying!" The boy puffed his cheeks, about to cry. "It's 'cause you're being mean."

They pedaled in silence for a while. Sweat poured onto their darkly tanned faces from the identical crew cuts they'd received from the local barber. It stung their eyes, causing them to blink constantly. The older boy's T-shirt and the younger boy's tank top were soaking wet and clung to their backs. The cries of cicadas rang across the clear blue sky.

"It's hot, huh?" the younger brother asked tentatively, still sensitive about their last exchange.

This time his brother readily agreed: "Yeah, it is."

"It's hot.... I'm tired.... Are we there yet?"

"A little farther."

The older boy had come down this highway to the sea with school friends once before. They'd found a vending machine along the way, and it had the most delicious soft drink he'd ever tasted; he was secretly looking forward to buying it again today. Since before they left home, he'd been planning to have a short rest there. He also wanted to have his brother try it; he would be so surprised! The older boy had been searching for the vending machine for awhile, but for some reason he couldn't find it. He recognized their surroundings, so he didn't think he'd taken the wrong road. Perhaps they'd already passed it?

“Ooh! There’s a convenience store over there!”

The younger boy, his eyes lighting up, pointed, causing him to lose his balance, and was in danger of veering into traffic.

“Look out!”

As the older boy hollered, a car sounded its horn behind them, but his brother re-gripped his handle bars and restored his balance at the last moment.

He laughed. “Whoa, that was close.”

“Careful! What if you get hit by a car?”

“Sorry.”

The boy was abashed at his brother’s sharp tone. After a short pause, the older boy said resignedly, “Should we stop?”

The smile returned to the younger boy’s face immediately: “Yeah, let’s go! I want ice cream!”

They parked their bikes in a corner of the parking lot and went inside, mopping sweat from their brows. The shop was well air-conditioned; it felt wonderful. The younger boy dashed straight for the ice cream freezer-box and stuck his face against the sliding-glass lid. His brother chose a carbonated soft drink and joined him.

“I want that one!” the younger boy said, pointing.

“Do you want juice or ice cream? You can only have one. Are you sure you want ice cream?” his brother asked, confirming the younger boy’s choice as though he were his parent.

“Yeah, I want something cold. C’mon, let’s get it!”

He impatiently opened the lid and, rustling through the ice cream with his hand, snatched the coldest cream-soda flavored ice cream from the bottom. The white wisps of cold air and the sound of scraping frost were refreshing.

The older boy took some coins from his nylon, Velcro wallet, and after he paid for both of them, they went outside and sat down in the shade of the building. Wiping away sweat, the boys drank their soft drink and ate their ice cream.

“Does that river go to the ocean too?”

“Huh? Yeah, probably.”

“Really? I can’t wait to see it!”

“Yeah....”

The older brother was still dwelling on the vending machine he couldn’t find, and so answered indifferently.

Pretty soon, the older boy’s prediction came true. His brother had eaten his ice cream fast enough to make his head hurt, and after sucking the left-over liquid from the wooden stick, he pleaded for some juice: “Can I have just a sip?”

The older boy wordlessly handed him the can.

The younger boy drank greedily, and, eyeing the can expectantly, returned it, saying, “Yum! That’s so good, huh?”

Then, a little later: “Can I have just one more sip?”

His older brother glared at him. “That’s why I asked you which one you wanted!”

“But...I’m thirsty....”

“Then drink the tea in the water bottle.”

The younger boy got up to throw away his ice cream wrapper and then reluctantly took the water bottle from the bike's basket and put his mouth to the straw. The bottle was filled with barley tea their mother had made; the older boy had taken it from the fridge before setting off that morning.

The younger boy drank a little and looked up. "It's already warm."

His brother ignored him and watched a bright-red sports car drive past.

The boy called out again, "Hey," but there was no reply. "Hey. Can't I have the money for my next drink now? I won't have anything on the way back."

The older boy turned around, at last, and shouted, "You're just going to ask for some of mine again, you know! It'll be hotter on the way back! You really think you'll be okay?"

The younger boy started crying because of the scolding. "But..."

The older boy feigned indifference and looked back at the street. Several unremarkable mini-vans—not at all cool—drove by. His brother seemed unlikely to stop crying.

Eventually, the older boy savored one last mouthful and resignedly handed the quarter-full can to his brother: "You can have it, so stop crying."

The younger boy wiped his tears, and, though his shoulders jerked up and down from incessant hiccups, he took the can from his brother. His voice trailing off, he said, "Thanks."

"It's okay, but give me a drink of yours on the way back."

The younger boy gave a small nod in response.

They put the convenience store behind them and set out again down the road toward the ocean.

They hadn't gone far before the older boy found the vending machine he'd been looking for at the side of the road. As they were about to pass it, he saw the rare, orange can he remembered on the far side of the display. He thought his plans had been ruined. They would stop there. Whatever else they did, that was imperative. He wanted the drink, and he wanted to have his brother try it. To surprise him, however, he had kept his plan from the younger boy.

The two of them hadn't been taken anywhere during the summer holiday. Both of their parents worked, and so they were used to being neglected and didn't complain, but they'd cautiously hoped to be taken somewhere. They hadn't even gone to their grandparents' home for the Obon holiday; their parents had just lounged about the house. Whenever the boys thought about broaching the subject, their parents would complain, practically panting from exhaustion, that they were tired. There was nothing else for the boys to do but spend every day, from morning until night, at the park, kicking a soccer ball.

The last day of school after Obon, the older boy was subjected to his classmates' boasting about their summer vacations and returned home in a dark mood. Some of his more conscientious classmates had even bought souvenirs for him. Among them was a signed photo of a popular baseball player, from a stack that a student who'd gone to a game had proudly spread around; he didn't want it, so he crumpled it up and threw it into a field on the way home. When he got home, his younger brother beamed and showed him the Australian picture postcards he'd

received from a friend. They all showed beautiful landscapes that he'd never seen before, but it was the curious, unfamiliar smell of the paper itself that directly sparked the older boy's imagination about the foreign country he'd never visited. Summer vacation would be over soon. Before then, he wanted to take his brother somewhere. They should go by bike. They would go, just the two of them, and they wouldn't tell their parents or the school! What he came up with was the ocean. They would thrust wooden chopsticks into the heads of sea anemones, decorate washed-up jellyfish with seaweed, make sea hares expel their gross, purple liquid, and pull octopuses from their hiding places between rocks. They would capture a mountain of crabs and hermit crabs, keep them in the tank at home, and boast about them to a few select friends. They would take care of them in secret, raising them by themselves on the sly, without being found out by the adults. Perhaps when the crabs were grown, the boys would grill them and share them with everyone.

When they approached a long, uphill stretch of road, they pedaled standing up, twisting and swaying their bikes. The older boy occasionally called out, "Are you okay?"

"Uh-huh," the younger boy would reply. When they finally reached the top, they could see the ocean radiating pure-blue light, like a mirror reflecting the sky.

"Wow! The ocean!"

"Yeah! Just a little farther. Hang in there!"

"Yeah! Awesome! It's so awesome!"



With their legs raised, they sped down the long, straight hill. The wind blew away the heat. One after another, the scenery flew past their field of vision. They passed a fishing-supply store, a box-lunch shop, a road-side watermelon stand, a bar, a lunch counter, a sign reading HOTEL, which looked somehow indecent... When they finally reached an advertisement for a seaside bathhouse, they forgot their fatigue and pedaled as hard as they could. It gladdened the older boy to see his younger brother so elated. They reached a dead end and got turned around for a while, but they eventually found their way onto a road that ran parallel to the ocean.

“Wow!” the younger brother cheered. This wasn’t his first time coming here, but he’d been very young the last time, and it probably hadn’t left much of an impression on him.

“It’s huge, huh!?”

“Yeah, watch out for cars.”

“kay!”

On the other side of a shoddy embankment tattooed with graffiti, tetrapods plastered with dried shells and seaweed were piled imposingly.

“Whoa, there’re tons of cockroaches!”

“Where? Ah, those aren’t cockroaches, they’re wharf roaches.”

“Wharf roaches?”

“Yeah...well, they’re like ocean cockroaches.”

“They’re gross, huh? Wow, they’re over there too!”

“*Those things are everywhere.* Hey! Watch out for cars!”

“kay.”

They cycled along a road without a pedestrian path for awhile and, after parking their bikes to one side of the seaside bath’s parking lot, took the water bottle and plastic bags from their bicycle baskets and headed for the beach. Along the way, the younger boy asked, “Can I take a pee?”

“Yeah, I will too.” They made two stains, like large jellyfish, side-by-side at the wall of the embankment.

The beach was sparsely occupied. A few families with children were eating or napping under umbrellas. Beside them were holes and sand hills with tunnels that the children had made. The boys saw an occasional couple as well. No one was completely in the water.

“Is the water cold?”

“No, but there’re jellyfish, so you can’t swim anymore.”

“Does it hurt if you get stung?”

“It sure does. It swells up a ton.”

“No way! Have you ever been stung?”

“No, but my...” the older boy began before something caught his eye.

“Oh!” he said, running off and pulling his brother by the hand: “Come on!” At their destination lay the carcass of a huge, 30-centimeter-wide jellyfish that had been washed ashore. Sticking out of its whitish, translucent head was a sparkler with a gold ornament attached to its red handle.

“Whoa, it’s so thick!”

The younger brother stared at it, blinking.

“Look! His head’s all burnt.” He giggled.

“Yeah, that was mean.”

“You think a bike gang did it?”

“Probably.”

“It was mean, huh?”

“Didn’t you just laugh at it?”

“Yeah, but...it’s all burnt.”

The younger brother laughed pleasantly and poked the handle of the sparkler sticking straight out of the jellyfish. Two or three flies were disturbed by the vibration, but they quickly retook their places. “Whoa, it’s jiggly! Gross!”

Two years before, when the older boy had come here with his classmates, he’d poked a similar, dead, washed-up jellyfish with his finger, but that no longer appealed to him.

“Let’s go.”

He prodded his brother and started walking toward a rocky outcrop. Looking back regretfully, the younger boy followed so he wouldn’t be left behind.

Massive cumulonimbus clouds jostled above the sea like a herd of stirring giants. They were strangely calm, however, like a photograph that captured a fixed moment. Distant waves were silent; waves surging nearby roared; waves spreading thinly to their limit along the beach scattered a multitude of bubbles, too fine to be seen, and withdrew. The beach was littered with the husks of fireworks, the remnants of barbeques, plastic bottles, and cigarette butts.

In their uncomfortably sandy shoes, the boys eventually made it to the outcrop, stopping from time to time to collect an unusual shell or to skip small stones across the ocean's surface. Turning around, they saw footprints—appearing, for the most part, as one long, thin line—trailing behind them; they'd put a great distance between themselves and the people on the beach. The last fisherman they passed had asked, "Where are you kids going all alone?"

The older boy, thinking quickly on his feet, avoided trouble by answering, "Our dad's just over there."

The outcrop extended into the distance; sea water had collected in hollows of varying size. A few other people could also be seen here and there.

"Don't slip on the barnacles. If you scrape one with your hand, you'll get cut."

"kay."

The younger boy heeded his brother's warning and cautiously watched the ground at his feet.

"Wow! Fish!" he said, squatting beside the largest nearby tide pool.

"Where?"

The older boy turned around and stared into the pool. Short, thin lines darted agilely about a thicket of seaweed and anemones.

"Okay. Give me a plastic bag."

"Can you catch 'em?"

"Of course!"

The older boy handed his brother the water bottle he'd slung diagonally over his shoulder, leaned in, brought his hand near the water, and thrust it in. The fish nimbly escaped.

"Oh!" the younger boy exclaimed on his brother's behalf. The older boy continued to take aim at another fish near his feet and raised another spray of water. This fish, too, evaded him.

"They're screwing with me."

He stood up, clucking his tongue.

His brother said, "We should have brought a net, huh?"

"I don't need a net!" the older boy snapped, displeased with his brother's suggestion.

They continued farther along the outcrop. The younger brother collected hermit crabs and shellfish along the way, so that the plastic bag, swollen with sea water and his catch, spun around as it struck his thigh.

After a while, the older boy crept up to another tide pool as if he'd spotted something, carefully squatted down, and reached into the water. His prey slipped out of his hand. He didn't give up—he tried a second and a third time. The water turned pitch black, and he groped around recklessly; the next instant, he cried out in pain. Blood trickled down the back of his blackened hand when he withdrew it from the water.

Startled, his younger brother said: "Oh, you're bleeding!"

The boy licked his wound and grimaced at the taste of the blood—salty, warm, and like iron.

“Ow....”

The younger boy regarded his brother with concern.

“I’m okay,” the older boy said, his mouth blackened with ink. It seemed he’d cut his hand on an anemone. “There was an octopus.”

“An octopus!?”

“Yeah. But it was small.”

“No way! Where? Where?”

The younger boy peered excitedly into the water, but the whole area was cloudy with the ink the octopus had released while escaping.

“No way...an octopus...aw, I wanted to see it too.”

Truly disappointed, he turned toward his brother somewhat reproachfully.

“Next time, can I try?”

The older boy stared at the blood as it flowed through the lines of his skin, forming countless diamonds across his hand.

“Yeah...go ahead.”

“Yes! I’ll make him pay!” the younger boy said courageously. He walked in front of his brother focusing on the rocks, concentration written on his face.

“Careful not to trip,” his brother warned as he followed, but the younger boy’s head was in the clouds.

Glory, as it turned out, was not easily attained. Stopping here and there, they both thrust their hands repeatedly into the water, but they were unable to catch anything impressive. Each time they failed, they moved a little closer to the ocean. The older boy looked back once or twice, but they hadn’t gone so far that

they couldn't get back. "Oh!" the younger boy exclaimed, squatting at the center of a rock that protruded slightly above the others. He reached out his hand but suddenly stopped and waved his brother over.

When the older boy approached, his brother pointed to a small hole in the rock and said, "There's a red crab. It went in here."

"A crab?"

"Yeah!"

"You couldn't catch it?"

"Uh uh."

From his response, the older boy understood why his brother had let the crab escape.

"Were you afraid of the pinchers?"

"No! I wasn't scared!" the younger brother retorted immediately. He desperately wanted the crab in the hole and so finally asked, "Can you catch it?"

"Of course!"

The older boy took his younger brother's place and squatted in front of the hole. The younger boy watched his brother's efforts confidently from the side, his chest swelling with expectation.

The hole was above water level but surprisingly deep; when he peered into it, the older boy could see the small, red crab in the back, its pinchers held firmly against its abdomen. He thought that perhaps they would return home with it as the fruit of their labor. It certainly wasn't a large or unusual crab, but since his brother said he wanted it, it was a special crab.

First, the boy tried reaching in directly with his fingers to pull it out, but he could just barely graze it with his nails, putting the crab on its guard; it was likely to withdraw farther into the hole; and so next, he tried scraping it out with a wooden chopstick that he'd taken from a discarded box-lunch along the way. Careful not to harm the crab, he tried to slide the tip of the chopstick into the gap between its shell and the rock. Occasionally, he purposefully poked the crab and waited, thinking it might grab the chopstick. Then, he would repeat the process.

Sweat poured from his head into his eyes, and when he wiped them with his sea-water soaked fingers, they hurt even worse. The wound on the back of his hand also smarted. He tried splashing water into the hole and proffering strips of seaweed to the crab, like bait, on the end of the chopstick, but to no avail.

The younger boy was beginning to get bored. He was the one who'd asked for the crab, so he was afraid his brother would be angry with him again if he said he didn't want it anymore; but since all he could do was ask, "Can you catch it?" he amused himself by releasing his hermit crabs into a nearby pool and sticking his finger into anemones.

The older boy was losing his patience. The crab continued to shrink back into the hole and showed no sign of coming out. If he were alone, he'd have already given up, but he couldn't do that in front of his brother. The desire to please the boy and the fear of being ridiculed by him combined to prevent him from leaving.

The sun began to sink slowly behind the mountains.



The older boy gave only distracted replies and wouldn't even turn around, so his brother moved away and engrossed himself in stuffing hermit crabs into anemones. How much time had passed? The younger boy stood up to stretch his legs, which hurt from squatting for so long. He happened to cast his eyes toward the shore. The scenery was somehow different. They'd walked over an expansive, rocky outcrop, but, at some point, it had been hidden by sea water and was like a puzzle full of gaps. There was no one else around.

The younger boy became worried and called out to his brother. There was no reply. He tried calling out to him again. The third time, the older boy lost his temper and, without turning around, said, "Shut up! If you want to go home, go by yourself."

The younger boy looked at the shore again. They didn't seem to be in immediate danger. He chose a landmark and decided he'd call out to his brother again when the surf covered it; he went back to playing in the water. The tide, however, didn't rise in the way the younger boy had expected. The rock he'd chosen was still above water, but because the sea encroached from elsewhere, the rocky beach between the boy and his landmark was steadily being swallowed up. He couldn't predict how quickly the tide would come in.

The next time he raised his head, the rocky outcrop had been split in two. Even if they went back that way, they would have to cross through water and get their shoes wet. It was shallow, so he didn't think they were in danger, but he became increasingly uneasy and called out to his brother again.

The older boy, still in front of the hole, was so frustrated he could have cried and ignored his brother's voice. A little while later, he heard his brother calling him again. He didn't reply. There was no way he'd go home until he caught that crab. When he went back to picking at the hole, he felt the presence of his younger brother weeping behind him. He eventually heard his brother say, between racking sobs, "I'm scared...."

Finally realizing that something was wrong, the older boy turned around. He stood up and stared, dumbfounded, at the rocky shore, which had been swallowed by the tide and now resembled the open sea. The path had become impassable and the rocky outcrop could only be seen as occasional floating islands. The sound of the waves was close, and ocean spray scattered around them.

The younger boy cried out loud, rubbing his eyes.

"Don't cry! We can still make it!"

The older boy threw the chopstick into the sea and, propelled by dizzying fear, looked behind him. The waves swelled slowly, greedily absorbing the afternoon sunlight. As the fierce, white fangs pounced at the boys, the small crab crept out of the hole in the rock, like blood pouring from the ear of a man dead on the street in broad daylight, and exposed its dark-red shell.

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APPENDIX A  
WORKS BY HIRANO KEIICHIRO

## Novels

*Nisshoku* 日蝕 (*Eclipse*). Shinchōsha, 1998.

Translations:

(Korean) Yang Yun-ok, trans. *Ilsik*. Seoul: Munhakdongne, 1999.

(French) Jean Campignon, trans. *L'Eclipse*. Arles: Editions Philippe Picquier, 2001.

(Chinese—traditional characters) Lu Yu trans. *Rishi*. Unitas, 2003.

*Ichigetsu monogatari* 一月物語 (Tale of a Single Moon). Shinchōsha, 1999.

Translations:

(Korean) Yang Yun-ok, trans. *Tal*. Seoul: Munhakdongne, 1999.

(French) Corinne Atlan, trans. *Conte de la première lune*. Arles: Editions Philippe Picquier, 2002.

*Sōsō* 葬送 (Farewell to the Departed). Shinchōsha, 2002.

Translation:

(Korean) Yang Yun-ok, trans. *Changsong: Hirano Keichi'ro changp'yŏn sosŏl*. Paju: Munhakdongne, 2005.

*Kao no nai rataitachi* 顔のない裸体たち (Nudes Without Faces). Shinchōsha 新潮社, 2006.

Translations:

(Chinese—traditional characters) Ye Weili, trans. *Ma saike xia de luolou*. Eurasian Press, 2007.

(Korean) Yi Yŏng-mi, trans. *Ōlgul ōmnŭn nach'edŭl*. Paju: Munhakdongne, 2012.

*Kekkai* 決壊 (Dam Break). Shinchōsha, 2008.

*Dōn* ドーン (Dawn). Kodansha, 2009.

*Katachi dake no ai* かたちだけの愛 (Artificial Love). Chūōkōronshinsha, 2010.

## Short Story Collections

*Takasegawa* 高瀬川 (Takase River). Kodansha, 2003.

Translations:

(Korean) Yang Yun-ok, trans. *Sent'iment'al*. Paju: Munhakdongne, 2006.

(English) Anthony Chambers, trans. "Clear Water." In *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature: 1945 to the Present*, ed. J. Thomas Rimer and Van C. Gessel, pp. 542-549. Columbia University Press, 2007.

*Shitatariochiru tokeitachi no hamon* 滴り落ちる時計たちの波紋 (Ripples of Dripping Clocks). Bungeishunjū, 2004.

Translations:

(French) Corinne Atlan, trans. "La Dernière Métamorphose." Arles: Editions Philippe Picquier, 2007.

(Korean) Sin Ŭn-ju and Hong Sun-ae, trans. *Pangul jyō ttōlō chinŭn sigyedŭl ūi p'amun*. Paju: Munhakdongne, 2008.

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(French) Corinne Atlan, trans. "Une evenement." In vol. 599 of *La Nouvelle Revue Française: Du Japon*. Paris: Gallimard, 2012.

*Anata ga, inakatta, anata* あなたが、いなかった、あなた (You Weren't There). Shinchōsha 新潮社, 2007.

Translation:

(Korean) Sin Ŭn-ju and Hong Sun-ae, trans. *Tangsin i, ōpsōtta, tangsin*. Paju: Munhakdongne, 2008.

## Essays

*Bunmei no yū'utsu* 文明の憂鬱 (The Melancholy of Civilization). PHP Kenkyūsho, 2002.

Translation:

(Korean) Yōm Ŭn-ju, trans. *Munmyōng ūi uul*. Paju: Munhakdongne, 2005.

*Hon no yomikata surō riidingu no jissen* 本の読み方 スロー・リーディングの実践 (How to Read Books: Putting Slow Reading into Practice). PHP Shinsho, 2006.

Translation:

(Korean) Kim Hyo-sun, trans. *Ch'aek ūl ingnŭn pangbōp*. Paju: Munhakdongne, 2008.

*Mairuzu Deibisu to wa dare ka*—“*jyazu no teiō*“ *o meguru 21nin* マイルズ・デイヴィスとは誰か—「ジャズの帝王」を巡る21人 (Who is Miles Davis?—21 People Around ‘the King of Jazz’). Heibonshashinsho, 2007.

*Monorōgu (essei shū)* モノローグ (エッセイ集) (Monologue [Essay Collection]). Kōdansha, 2007.

*Shōsetsu no yomikata—kansō ga katareru chakuganten* 小説の読み方～感想が語れる着眼点 (How to Read Novels: A Point from Which You Can Express Your Impressions). PHP Shinsho, 2009.

Translation:

(Korean) Yang Yun-ok, trans. *Sosōl ingnūn pangbōp*. Paju: Munhakdongne, 2011.

*Watashi to wa nani ka*—“*kojin*” *kara* “*bunjin*” *e* 私とは何か—「個人」から「分人」へ (Defining the Self—from Individual to Dividual). Kōdansha, 2012.

### Dialogues

*TALKIN’ jyazu×bungaku* TALKIN’ ジャズ×文学 (TALKIN’ Jazz×Literature). Heibonsha, 2005.

*Webu ningenron* ウェブ人間論 (The Web and Humanity). Shinchō shinsho, 2006.

Translation:

(Korean) Yi Chōng-hwan, trans. *Web in’gannon*. Seoul: Nexus, 2007.

*Diarōgu (taidanshū)* デイアローグ (対談集) (Dialogue [Interview Collection]). Kodansha, 2007.

### Translations

*Salomé* サロメ, by Oscar Wilde. Kōbunsha, 2012.



APPENDIX B

AWARDS

- 120th (1998) Akutagawa Prize (芥川賞), for *Nisshoku*
- 18th (2000) Kyoto Culture Prize (京都府文化賞 奨励賞)
- 59th (2008) Education, Science and Technology Minister's Art Encouragement Prize for New Writers (芸術選奨文部科学大臣新人賞), for *Kekkai*
- 19th (2009) Prix Deux Magots Bunkamura (ドゥマゴ文学賞), for *Dōn*
- 19th (2012) Fukuoka Culture Prize (福岡県文化賞 創造部門)