

Vagabond Press Asia Pacific Poetry Series

# Poems of Hiromi Itō, Toshiko Hirata & Takako Arai

Translated from Japanese by Jeffrey Angles

Poems of Hiromi Itō, Toshiko Hirata & Takako Arai Asia Pacific Poetry Series 9

First published 2016 by Vagabond Press PO Box 958 Newtown NSW 2042 Australia www.vagabondpress.net

Hiromi Itō, Toshiko Hirata & Takako Arai © 2016 English translations, Jeffrey Angles © 2016.

Cover image © Miyako Ishiuchi (2016), sa-bo-ten #18. Designed and typeset by Michael Brennan.

Except for on the cover of this book and the copyright information, where the names appear in the Western order with surname last for the sake of cataloging, all Japanese names in the interior of the book appear in the traditional Japanese order, with the surname before the given name.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher. The information and views set out in this book are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the publisher.

ISBN 978-1-922181-74-9

## CONTENTS

				-
INTR	ODI	CT	ON	7
$\mathbf{n}_{III}$	$\omega$		UIN	/

#### ITŌ Hiromi

## FROM ON TERRITORY 1 (1986)

Coyote .... 22

Vinegar, Oil .... 26

## FROM THE SHAMANESS AND HER INTERPRETER (1991)

Father's Uterus, Or The Map .... 30

Marjoram, Dill, Rosemary .... 33

## FROM THE HEART SUTRA EXPLAINED (2010)

The Heart Sutra .... 36

#### NEW AND UNCOLLECTED POEMS

Yakisoba .... 40

Eels and Catfish .... 42

Anpanman and Johnnies .... 48

Mother Dies .... 50

Cooking, Writing Poetry .... 54

#### HIRATA Toshiko

## FROM TERMINAL (1997)

Greetings are Important .... 62

My Fun Family .... 63

Complaints from the Inhabitant .... 64

Weird .... 64

P-E-O-P-L-E .... 66

The Cat Stays Even After It's Gone, and I Cast

My Suspicions on It .... 68

Can't Get Through .... 69

The Next Day .... 70 Lots of Visitors .... 71 The Vacant Seat .... 72 Upstanding Creatures .... 73 Making Up My Mind .... 75 Man Without Arms .... 78

## FROM TREASURES (2007)

We Make It a Point to Wash Our Hands .... 80 Camera .... 82 Van Gogh's Bedroom as I See It .... 84 Lemons .... 86 Water .... 88 Treasure .... 90

Distant Sky .... 92 Morning Illusions .... 93

## FROM THE FREEDOM OF THE JOKE (2015)

Beautiful Staples .... 95 At Some Point Things Get Rough .... 96 Do Not Tremble .... 97 Cold Spring .... 98

### AR AI Takako

## FROM SOUL DANCE (2007)

Give Us Morning .... 100 When the Moon Rises .... 103 Clusters of Falling Stars .... 105 Backvard .... 107 Colored Glass .... 110

## FROM BEDS AND LOOMS (2013)

Beds and Looms .... 112 Galapagos :... 116 Half a Pair of Shoes .... 118

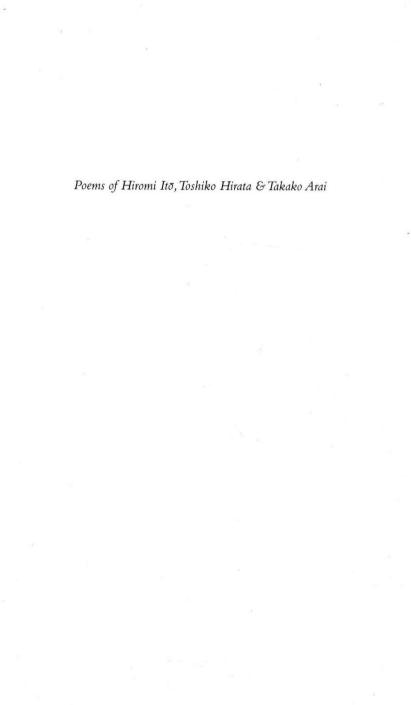
此为试读,需要完整PDF请访问: www.ertong

Lots and Lots .... 120 Specter! .... 125

## UNCOLLECTED POEMS

Shadows .... 127

Translator's Notes .... 128 Acknowledgements .... 137



Poems of Hiromi Itō, Toshiko Hirata & Takako Arai Asia Pacific Poetry Series 9

First published 2016 by Vagabond Press PO Box 958 Newtown NSW 2042 Australia www.vagabondpress.net

Hiromi Itō, Toshiko Hirata & Takako Arai © 2016 English translations, Jeffrey Angles © 2016.

Cover image © Miyako Ishiuchi (2016), sa-bo-ten #18. Designed and typeset by Michael Brennan.

Except for on the cover of this book and the copyright information, where the names appear in the Western order with surname last for the sake of cataloging, all Japanese names in the interior of the book appear in the traditional Japanese order, with the surname before the given name.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher. The information and views set out in this book are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the publisher.

ISBN 978-1-922181-74-9

# Poems of Hiromi Itō, Toshiko Hirata & Takako Arai

Translated from Japanese by Jeffrey Angles

## CONTENTS

				-
INTR	ODI	CT	ON	7
$\mathbf{n}_{III}$	$\omega$		UIN	/

#### ITŌ Hiromi

## FROM ON TERRITORY 1 (1986)

Coyote .... 22

Vinegar, Oil .... 26

## FROM THE SHAMANESS AND HER INTERPRETER (1991)

Father's Uterus, Or The Map .... 30

Marjoram, Dill, Rosemary .... 33

## FROM THE HEART SUTRA EXPLAINED (2010)

The Heart Sutra .... 36

#### NEW AND UNCOLLECTED POEMS

Yakisoba .... 40

Eels and Catfish .... 42

Anpanman and Johnnies .... 48

Mother Dies .... 50

Cooking, Writing Poetry .... 54

#### HIRATA Toshiko

## FROM TERMINAL (1997)

Greetings are Important .... 62

My Fun Family .... 63

Complaints from the Inhabitant .... 64

Weird .... 64

P-E-O-P-L-E .... 66

The Cat Stays Even After It's Gone, and I Cast

My Suspicions on It .... 68

Can't Get Through .... 69

The Next Day .... 70 Lots of Visitors .... 71 The Vacant Seat .... 72 Upstanding Creatures .... 73 Making Up My Mind .... 75 Man Without Arms .... 78

## FROM TREASURES (2007)

We Make It a Point to Wash Our Hands .... 80 Camera .... 82 Van Gogh's Bedroom as I See It .... 84 Lemons .... 86 Water .... 88 Treasure .... 90

Distant Sky .... 92 Morning Illusions .... 93

## FROM THE FREEDOM OF THE JOKE (2015)

Beautiful Staples .... 95 At Some Point Things Get Rough .... 96 Do Not Tremble .... 97 Cold Spring .... 98

### AR AI Takako

## FROM SOUL DANCE (2007)

Give Us Morning .... 100 When the Moon Rises .... 103 Clusters of Falling Stars .... 105 Backvard .... 107 Colored Glass .... 110

## FROM BEDS AND LOOMS (2013)

Beds and Looms .... 112 Galapagos :... 116 Half a Pair of Shoes .... 118

此为试读,需要完整PDF请访问: www.ertong

Lots and Lots .... 120 Specter! .... 125

## UNCOLLECTED POEMS

Shadows .... 127

Translator's Notes .... 128 Acknowledgements .... 137

#### INTRODUCTION

This collection brings together three of the most startlingly original voices of contemporary Japanese poetry. All three are women who started their careers on the edges of the Japanese poetic world—a world that even now tends to prioritize male writers over female writers in the literary canon. Thanks to their bold experiments with style and subject matter, however, all three of the writers in this book have taken a place among the most creative and influential voices in the contemporary poetic world. Although Itō Hiromi, Hirata Toshiko, and Arai Takako take quite different approaches to their art, all are socially engaged writers who have used their poetry to explore the desires, expectations, limitations, and destinies of contemporary Japanese women within society, the family, and the workplace. This is not to say that they only write about the experiences of women-far from it. In recent years, Ito, for instance, has written extensively about the end-of-life experiences of various family members and about the experiences of the Japanese diaspora abroad. Hirata has written about a great deal about the functions (and disfunctions) of modern families. One of the major themes of Arai's work has been the remembrance of people whose well-being has been sacrificed to the greater socioeconomic order.

Another commonality between these three poets is that they have frequently rejected the stayed, polished, and artsy language that dominates a good deal of poetic discourse. Instead, they have turned to the rhythms, patterns, and quirks of colloquial language to give their work a sense of immediacy and drama. All three have made use of various forms of non-standard, non-literary, colloquial Japanese as a source of inspiration.

A few examples might help illustrate. Since early in her career, Ito has drawn from the idiosyncratic linguistic patterns of people outside the literary world, and in recent years, the language of the Japanese diaspora has been a subject of ongoing fascination for her. The poem "Yakisoba" included in this anthology draws inspiration from the macaronic combination of Japanese and English—"Japanglish"—that she hears in the Japanese-American community of southern California where she lives. In her early work, Hirata often included bits of dialect from western Japan, the region in which she spent her early life. In recent years, however, she has moved away from dialect although she continues to pay close attention to the particularities of the ways that words sound, building entire poems out of sound-related similarities. Many of Arai's poems about the lives of women in the weaving factories of her home in Gunma Prefecture contain representations of the workers' dialect, thus giving direct expression to their woes and laments. For instance, the poem "Colored Glass" presents a modified version of a children's song, and "Beds and Looms" contains lines several passages rendered entirely in phonetic representations of the dialect of the town where Arai spent her childhood.

Considering that all three writers are so attuned to sound, it is perhaps no coincidence that all three are known for their dramatic and powerful readings. Ito's poetry, in particular, tends to gives a sense of coming from somewhere from deep within the natural rhythms of the body. When she reads in public, she punctuates her reading with bodily movements, fluctuations of the voice, and pauses that not only add drama, but also remind the listener that literature is as much about the sound of the voice as the printed word on the page. In her readings, Hirata emphasizes the sonic qualities of language, bringing alive the sound associations, alliteration, and use of homophones that give her work a visceral sense of direction and movement. Arai, who has written extensively about the theater director Kara Jurō (1970-), reads her own work with all the drama and presence of a professional actress, as if inviting the narrators of her poems to come inhabit her body while on stage.

Let me say a few words about each of the three poets individually.

Born in Tokyo in 1955, Itō Hiromi began to make headlines in the 1980s with a series of dramatic collections of poetry that described sexuality, pregnancy, and feminine erotic desire in powerful direct language. Her willingness to deal with touchy subjects such as post-partum depression, infanticide, and sexual desire shocked Japan-a nation that was until that time more comfortable with images of women as proud wives, mothers, and quiet care-givers than of deeply feeling subjects in their own right. Because Ito was so willing to write about these subjects, she quickly became one of the foremost voices of what came to-be known as the "women's boom" of poetry in the 1980s. Although Ito frequently rebelled against the tendency of the male critical establishment to label her a "woman poet" instead of simply a "poet," she continued to focus a good deal of her attention on the kinds of experiences that, although common to many women, rarely became the stuff of poetry. A number of these early poems appear in Killing Kanoko: Selected Poems of Hiromi Ito (Action Books, 2009), translated by Jeffrey Angles. In fact, the title of the volume comes from one particularly infamous and frequently discussed poem in which Itō imagined killing her own daughter Kanoko in a fit of postpartum depression.

The poet Kido Shuri (1959-) describes Ito's position in contemporary Japanese letters writing, "The appearance of Ito Hiromi, a figure that one might best call a 'shamaness of poetry' (shi no miko), was an enormous event in post-postwar poetry. Her physiological sensitivity and writing style, which cannot be captured within any existing framework, became the igniting force behind the subsequent flourishing of women's poetry, just as Hagiwara Sakutarō had revolutionized modern poetry with his morbid sensitivity and colloquial style." The comparison between Itō and Hagiwara Sakutarō (1886-1942), a figure sometimes called the father of modern Japanese poetry, suggests the colossal importance of Itō's contribution to contemporary

letters. In fact, many younger poets including Arai Takako (also included in this volume), Minashita Kiriu (available in another volume from Vagabond Press), and Ōsaki Sayaka (a recent winner of the Nakahara Chūya Prize for emerging poets), have all commented that even before they ever met her in person, Itō's poetry showed them new ways to write and helped to inspire them to write poetry themselves.

In the late 1980s, Ito's relationship with her husband Nishi Masahiko (1955- ), a scholar of European and postcolonial literature, was failing, and she decided to go to America to start anew. One reason Itō chose America in particular was her growing passion for Native American poetry, which she had first encountered a few years earlier in Japanese translations by the scholar Kanaseki Hisao (1918-1996). The narrativity of these poems, along with their eagerness to use language in magical, even mystical ways, suggested to her a radically new approach, and in Native American writing, she found the tools she needed to rebel against the inward-looking, intensely personal writing of so many other Japanese poets. Her interest in Native poetry is evident in the frequently anthologized poem "Coyote," which begins this volume. In it, she describes the mystical connections across multiple generations of women in her family, and the ways that the transmission of language shaped their lives and sense of belonging in the world. As Ito mentions in this poem, her grandmother was a shamaness who communicated with spirits, and so perhaps it is no surprise that Ito came to believe in the mystical power of language. Ito's interest in Native poetry led her to the work of Jerome Rothenberg (1931-), the avant-garde poet who had published several key collections of Native poetry and helped make "ethnopoetics" a major force in contemporary American poetic circles. In 1990, Ito met Rothenberg when he visited Japan, and in 1991 she traveled with her two daughters to the University of California at San Diego where he was teaching.

Her stay in California was a turning point in her life. She settled into life in America, making friends and building a home, although her then rudimentary English meant that she maintained a strong sense of being a resident alien in a foreign environment. Since gaining permanent residency in 1997, Itō has divided her time in Encinitas, a quiet seaside city near San Diego, and Kumamoto, a city in the southern Japanese island of Kyūshū. Her already prodigious output of essays increased, and she began writing novellas. When asked about this shift, she typically mentioned it was because she was tired of the strictures of poetry and because she felt prose was better suited to exploring her new experiences as an immigrant. When she returned to writing poetry, the result was her masterpiece Wild Grass on the Riverbank (Kawara arekusa, 2005), which was translated into English by Jeffrey Angles in 2014. In this book-length and surreal narrative poem, she depicts the experiences of a young migrant who moves between two nations without ever feeling at home in either of them.

Several of the shorter poems translated for this collection build upon Ito's interest in the experience of Japanese expatriates and the destinies of their children. In addition to the poem "Yakisoba" mentioned above, this book includes "Anpanman and Johnnies," a poem about the students at a Japanese-language school in California; "Eels and Catfish," a poem in which Itō describes going on a search for the ancestral grave of Brandon Shimoda, a Japanese-American poet who came to visit her in Kumamoto; and "Mother Dies," a poem in which she talks about some of the hassles and identity crises that confronted her after the death of her mother in Japan.

A strong interest in Buddhism is another theme that runs through Ito's work. Since the 1990s, she has frequently drawn inspiration from *sekkyo-bushi*, a kind of half-poetry, half-prose moralistic storytelling form created by itinerant Buddhist performers. In 2010, Itō published a different kind of book, *The*