

**NATSUMI HAGINO**

**FROM DISTANT FUNERAL**

**TRANSLATED BY ERIC SELLAND**

## IN THE MORNING

Do you remember?  
The whiteness of the instrument shelter  
Surrounded by a stretch of green  
Feet about to walk away  
That cool summer

We knew a secret passage  
Through the gloom  
The red of our feet cut on the rocks  
Indistinguishable  
From the markings of a sandal  
Then disappearing

I can't move.  
Ocean at my fingertips  
Softly bound by the dawn  
(Music)  
I wish I would drown

In the interval  
Between breaths too well-regulated  
Slipping through the trachea  
The evening cicadas sing  
Deep inside my body

The wind blowing through  
The instrument shelter  
Moistens me behind the eyes  
Hits the return and leaves me on a new line – empty, white  
And submerges the morning

## IN BROAD DAYLIGHT

Waiting expectantly

Here and there, familiar fingers are scattered  
With nothing to point out  
That they have survived is everything  
So they say  
In broad daylight  
Because your posing  
Achieves nothing  
Below the cherry trees whose blossoms have fallen  
Revealing the new green leaves  
I could devote myself to forgiving  
The numberless sleeps  
Slipped out of place

In order to arrive

You mustn't make a sound  
Leave your lips  
And your eyelids  
Just as they are  
Before long you will arrive at spring  
For just a moment  
You may slow your steps  
At the sound of the waves arising  
From the stems you gather secretly on your way, but

Those who become separated

For you  
There is another page forthcoming  
The season always  
Reflects the surface of

The bookmark inserted in the lungs  
Then goes on its way  
The distorted levee goes on and on  
Many times over I've puked in your blue arms  
And then laughed  
Cheerfully

In broad daylight  
Below the cherry trees whose blossoms have fallen

For us  
An offering of a new voice

## MIDNIGHT

The night and I touch  
Those cheeks

Insects burned on the streetlights  
Rusty thorns  
Stray musical notes

Someone's bones transported on the breeze

\*

In order that our exchange  
Be forgotten  
We have a coughing fit  
And place an ocean at regular intervals  
In the innermost part of the auricle  
Which is disgusting

Then thinking you'll snatch it away  
You are peacefully betrayed  
Again the rain  
Covers the lighthouse in smoke

\*

Nobody comes to visit  
Burnt slumber

You grope around  
And gather up  
Some tired tailfins  
No sign remains  
Of their having been torn off  
Not here anymore

Anymore  
Here

\*

The hustle and bustle is far away now  
You  
Never turn your back  
On any night

In the weather-beaten margins  
You awaken as if opening a window

## SEPTEMBER

Because things grow unwieldy [you said]  
First one, then two  
It's true, I was left behind  
It was September

Were you ever really here?  
What were we doing?  
The consequences of questioning  
Ponderings

Of the evening sunset glow  
Of the voice, the voice  
Contained in the tips of the rice plants  
The palm of that hand, bound

With no one to turn to it is  
A simple sketch  
A simple sketch  
Prior to its decay

## DISTANT FUNERAL

It just keeps falling away

Pointless snow

You make fall in the forest of artificial arms

Letting out a pale laugh (*I'm home*)

Pointless Roses

I scatter in the ocean of artificial eyes

And absurdly burn (*welcome home*)

At the path's extremity with its uniform erosion

The chief mourner is unable to move. According to established procedure,

A shadow appears on the slice of a lung – yours.

As soon as I catch my breath

A minced Polaris

As compensation for choosing to keep silent

(*It's grown cold, hasn't it*)

Warm entrails set out on the dinner table

Drawing closer

Live

Or collapse

Surrounded by inactivity

Showing only the sea's horizon and backbone

Sticky notes which blur my cries of sorrow

Without noticing

From my eyelids thinly affixed on the sidereal table

I walk along the water

(*Be careful not to spill*)



Without exception the semblance is yours,  
Bending down before the throat which has stopped trembling  
I become a planar surface  
With fingernails and  
Then with nothing but countless retinas  
I am all wet and shiny  
Then later  
That which keeps falling away

The biotope that gets mixed in when I wipe my mouth,  
I try to write a poem. I begin to write “to the ends of the earth,” but then give up  
You will never take off those black clothes.

*(It's time to say good night)*

In the gap which has been tamed  
Only the voice calling the chief mourner is filled

## ON THE POETRY OF HAGINO NATSUMI

Natsumi's work is quiet and sensitive, with a very strong feminine tone. She has a preference for the hiragana syllabary as opposed to kanji characters. There seems to be an "I" and a "you" present, but ultimately, subject and subject-object relationship remain vague and undefinable. The words "I" and "you" actually appear rarely in the poetry, though I often use them because it seems to be insinuated, and often that's the only way to make the English work. There's also more difficulty than appears on the surface. She uses invented words such as her title, 遠葬 (Far Funeral – a single noun in Japanese utilizing the kanji characters with those meanings, but is a non-existent word whose meaning is ultimately unknowable). She uses the same pattern (the kanji for funeral placed with another kanji) in many of the other titles in the book, including: 雪葬, 春葬, 葬列, 夏葬. My translations, especially of the title poem, "Distant Funeral", tend to make things more concrete than they really are, since this is what happens when you translate in a way so that the English works well. But the question remains whether this is really the way the poems should be represented.

The name "Natsumi" is a pseudonym taken from what was to have been the name of the poet's unborn sister. Hagino nursed deep feelings of guilt about her mother's miscarriage in which the new awaited baby was lost. Hagino had never spoken about these feelings until recently, not even to her parents. One senses the presence of the unborn child in these poems. The overriding funereal sense in the poems (especially titles) may also be related to this experience. Even so, Natsumi is not a confessional poet. Another theme which these poems often hint at is that of language and the writing process itself. Perhaps ultimately, Natsumi's major theme is language, especially the indeterminacy of meaning.

Translating Hagino becomes a choice between representing the ambiguities, including lack of personal pronouns, requiring an English which is in third person and hence more neutral and distant, or keeping the warmth and intimacy of Natsumi's voice, which I believe is central to these poems.