

The Reception of ‘A Fairy’ in Modern Japanese Literature:

‘Changelings’ from Irish fairy folklore in Hiroko Katayama’s Works

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(abstract)

This paper focuses on the word ‘ma’ (魔), meaning ‘an evil spirit’, in works by the Japanese *tanka* poet and translator Hiroko Katayama (1878–1957). Hiroko translated the word ‘fairy’ from Irish plays into ‘魔’ and ‘魔物’ in Japanese. She used the word ‘魔’ in her *tanka* poems that can be interpreted as representing Hiroko’s wish to be tempted by an evil spirit. Moreover, she writes certain *tanka* poems that can be interpreted as representations of ‘changelings’.

Japanese *tanka* poet and translator Hiroko Katayama

Hiroko Katayama was born in 1878 in Tokyo and died in 1957. Although Hiroko never travelled outside Japan during her lifetime, she was familiar with Western culture and began learning English when she was five years old because her father was a diplomat who was stationed in China, England and the United States. Beginning at the age of ten, she was educated for seven years at Toyo Eiwa Jogakuin, a private mission school. The school was opened by a missionary sent on behalf of the Woman's Missionary Society of the Methodist Church of Canada.

After graduating, she became the pupil of the famous poet and scholar Sasaki Nobutsuna, from whom she learned Japanese classical literature and how to write *tanka* poetry. Then she submitted *tanka* poems, essays and translations to be published in the literary journal *Kokoro no Hana*, edited by Nobutsuna. At that time, she was recognised as one of the representative poets of this coterie of writers.

In 1899, she married a banker and had two children. Later, both her husband and son died when they were middle-aged. Since the beginning of the Taisho Era, Hiroko had published translations under the pseudonym Mineko Matsumura. She mainly translated Celtic revival literature, including works by W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and J. M.

Synge, into Japanese.

As for tanka writing, Hiroko published only two collections of tanka poems in her life time. The first was *Kawasemi* (翡翠), meaning ‘kingfisher’, which was published in 1916. Her second collection of tanka poetry was *No ni sumite* (野に住みて), meaning ‘living in the field’, which was published in 1954.

Therefore, it has been difficult for tanka poets and researchers to evaluate Hiroko’s works fully. However, complete volumes of her works have recently published, and in response more critical evaluations on her writings has been published.

The word ‘ma’ (魔) in Hiroko’s tanka poems

Hiroko is considered a poet who transcended boundaries, seamlessly moving between worlds. She composed poems on mortality and death from the perspective of the dead and on encounters with supernatural beings like goblins and ghosts.

In the first decade of the 1900s, Hiroko often used the word ‘ma’ (魔) in her tanka poems. According to a 1911 Japanese-English dictionary, the word ‘ma’ means ‘a demon’, ‘evil’ and ‘an evil spirit’. For example, the following tanka poem appears in *Kokoro no Hana* in 1910. Translations of Hiroko’s tanka poems in this paper are literal ones. They convey only the meanings of the original texts.

In the evening the wind blows with the fragrance of roses,
I await even an evil spirit who tempts me to go out
standing alone by the window. (1910)

風かをるうばらの窓に一人ゐて魔のさそひさへまたるゝ夕べ

This tanka poem can be interpreted as representing Hiroko’s wish to be taken away to another world by a supernatural being, as she is tired of living in the real world.

It is worthy of note that Hiroko translated the word ‘fairy’ into Japanese as ‘ma’ (魔) or ‘mamono’ (魔物) in plays by Lady Gregory and W.B. Yeats. This differentiates Hiroko’s translations from other Japanese translations of these plays. In addition, fairies that appear in both of these plays are related to the ‘changelings’ of Irish fairy folklore.

‘Changelings’ in Irish fairy folklore

W.B. Yeats stated the following concerning ‘changelings’ in his work *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888):

Sometime the fairies fancy mortals and carry them away into their own country, leaving instead some sickly fairy child, or a log of wood so bewitched that it seems to be a mortal pining away, dying and being buried.

Hiroko translated the Irish fairy tale ‘Jamie Freel and the Young Lady’, which is categorised as ‘changelings’ in the Yeats’s collection, into Japanese. She published it in *Kodomo no Sekai*, a periodical for children, in 1949. In the tale, fairies steal a young woman and leave a stick in her place which takes her exact form.

‘Ma’ (魔) in Hiroko’s translations of Irish Plays

Hiroko published ‘Mangetsu’ in *Kokoro no Hana* in 1914 as a Japanese translation of Lady Gregory’s play *The Full Moon* (1910). It was her first translation work of Celtic revival literature. *The Full Moon* is a one-act comedy that centres on peasants who believe that everything should be at its worst when the moon is full. In the end of the play, Mr. Halvey, who is a distinguished man living in a country town, leaves the town to secure his freedom. People in the town think that he has gone mad when Halvey pours his heart out like a different person. One of them, Mrs. Broderik says, ‘If there are fairies in it, it is in the fairies he is’. The line can be interpreted as saying that Mr. Halvey suffers ‘changelings’ by fairies. Hiroko translates her statement into Japanese as 「もし^{フェアリー}魔物といふものがあるなら、あの人もお仲間入したんですね」. That is, she seems to understand the sense of these words as relating to ‘changelings’.

The Land of Heart’s Desire (1894) by Yeats is also a one-act play based on ‘changelings’. The play tells of the legend that on May Eve the fairies may steal away a newly married bride. Hiroko published Japanese translations of the play in 1922 and 1927.

A newly married bride named Maire calls on the fairies to take her

from the dull house where she is deprived of her freedom. Then the fairy child comes to her and calls upon Maire to ride upon the winds with her. At the end of the play, she yields to the fairy's temptation and goes to their world with her, which leads to Maire's death. Her husband's mother, Bridget, says the following to her son:

Come from that image; body and soul are gone
You have thrown your arms about a drift of leaves,
Or bole of an ash-tree changed into her image.

(7th ed. Revised, 1912)

Hiroko translates 'fairy child' in this play into 「^{フェアリー}魔の子」 ('manoko') in Japanese. The use of 「魔」 in Hiroko's translations of *The Full Moon* and *The Land of Heart's Desire* seem to correspond to 「魔」 in her tanka, which reveals her wish to be tempted by a supernatural being.

‘Changelings’ in tanka poems by Hiroko

In recent times, her tanka poems in the first collection 『翡翠』 have been re-evaluated by scholars. Yukitsuna Sasaki, who is the great-grandson of Hiroko's teacher Nobutsuna Sasaki and a president of tanka association Kokoro no Hana, focused on her frequent use in the collection of the word 「われ」 ('ware'), which means 'I' in English. He points that Hiroko is not satisfied with the real world and 「われ」, her soul, wanders among real and imaginary worlds or her former and future lives.

Furthermore, in Hiroko's tanka poems, there are certain works which are able to be interpreted as representations of 'changelings'.

Somebody has stolen my soul.
I will never tell anyone that
I am weary of searching for it. (1918)

ぬすまれし我のこゝろを追ひ求め疲れたりとは人にもつげじ

I have treated myself as if

I am a piece of stone or wood.

But when I am ill, I take care of myself. (1919)

石くれか木のはしくれとあつかひしこの身なれども病めば尊し

The concept of a stolen soul and considering herself to be ‘a piece of stone or wood’ in these tanka poems can be interpreted in relation to representations of ‘changelings’.

In her real life, she had to spend many years at home doing housework, performing child care and taking care of her family like most contemporary women. Therefore, in her tanka poems she transcends boundaries and describes her soul wandering among this world and that which lies beyond. Moreover, through translating Irish literature, she learns about ‘changelings’ and becomes attracted to the idea.

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