

## DONNA BOURNE

*Water Like Glass*, 2011  
oil on canvas, 12 x 12 in.



courtesy: the artist

## GORO TAKANO

# The Remains of Remains

**A**t your favorite café you are about to order another cup of coffee, while reading a huge philosophy book.

The café is located in the center of a city with a mundane name that starts with the word “New.”

Inside, a number of fluorescent lights are glaring.

The page you’ve been reading so far explains a wacky religious principle that every human being needs to be a prey to unexpected violence to receive ultimate redemption.

You’ve been reading this mosaic hardcover to write a book in the near future—a book about yourself.

When, putting the book on your table, you try to ask for a waiter, an aged, barefoot hobo-looking man opens the door.

Huddling in some layers of rugged overcoats and wearing a couple of soiled scarves, he walks quietly into the café, which is far cooler due to the air-conditioning than the outside.

The café is now quite crowded, and all the customers (except you and a mother and her baby sitting at the farthest corner from you) are a bunch of beautifully dressed, sexually attractive, aristocratically handsome men and women.

In your eyes, though, they all look like fancy-looking mannequins neglected in a summer house.

You say to yourself, “The snobs never stop longing for other people’s property and feeding on the anger of others, while I’m not like them.”

You can neither see the young mother breastfeeding her baby nor hear her singing a tranquil lullaby.

On your table, beside the philosophy book, there is a pile of medications and a diary riddled with your everyday punctual entries on your own temperature, blood pressure, body fat percentage, pulse rate, et cetera. “Hospitals are my enemy,” you say silently.

With a thick book tucked under his arm, the hobo, with a deeply wrinkled face, begins to walk very slowly among the crowd.

He seems to be looking for an empty space, and the only untaken chair in the café is right in front of you.

He must be a mongrel seasonal worker or something. “He is nothing but the exotic,” you even emphasize in your mind.

Nobody else casts a glance at the hobo, and he keeps dragging his feet among them silently, like—your imagination begins to twist up—just like an ancient haiku poet traveling alone from one place to another.

You start supposing that this haiku poet must have been born in so many places that he hasn’t obtained any roots.

You say to yourself he probably used to be, say, in Patagonia, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Alaska. He used to live, sometimes, in adobe pueblos, surrounded by micaceous windows, or stay in a tiny village on a mesa. He even used to walk barefoot through so many deserts, so many ice fields, vast tundra, immense plains of alabaster, the horizon nothing but minerals, an endless-looking wasteland.

*where did my land go?  
The hobo whispers, but  
you cannot hear it.*

You visualize a world map and continue mumbling one place-name after another, ignoring every other customer's threatening gaze.

"I don't want to go native here," you swear once again in your mind.

After departing from, say, Tibet, the haiku poet must have whispered some haiku and forgotten them quickly:

Beyond a wave  
Of motorcycle beeps  
A monk's whisper

Candlelight fades  
No wind enters the pagoda  
The echo of a gong

A god in the dark  
Stares at me, I look down  
I'm not enough yet

Now you wonder why the hobo's asymmetric dark eyes keep avoiding the only empty chair positioned before your eyes.

As if he slides languidly on water without any map in hand, the hobo keeps going around in the cafe, now with the thick book right on the top of his head, while moving all his fingers lightly in the air, as if he caresses something like a keyboard.

WHERE DID MY LAND GO? The hobo whispers, but you cannot hear it.

He must be a roaming pianist or something, you

say to yourself. Playing, say, the *Goldberg Variations*, perhaps. This lunatic may be now looking for the best-suited chair for his invisible Steinway. And such a chair must be unlike the one right here.

WHY CANNOT YOU LEAVE ME ALONE? The hobo whispers again, but you cannot hear it, either.

Again, you start supposing that the languages used by the chosen few like this pianist are now in danger of extinction. "To save them, he probably needs some alien help like me," you conclude secretly.

SO MANY VOICES AT A TIME ALWAYS DRIVE ME CRAZY, the hobo whispers again, but it eludes you just the same.

You wonder what kind of landscape will be left in his mind's eye at the end of his life.

And you have yet to wonder what kind of soundscape will echo in your ears at the end of yours.

His eyes finally meet yours, as if a predator and its prey exchange a momentary dialogue of death.

You keep in your bosom a solemn question to ask him, but cannot help feeling it's already known to this reticent old man before voicing it.

WE HAVE TO CUT DOWN ON OUR NUMBER AND SIMPLIFY OURSELVES, OTHERWISE, the hobo shouts suddenly.

The shout is quickly muffled, though, by the buzz of the crowd in the cafe, for instance:

"Did you know that the notorious cesium 137 never perishes from the earth?"

"Yes. We can move it from one place to another, but cannot extinguish it."

You begin to suppose that the hobo might once have been exposed to a massive dose of radiation.

Under a number of fluorescent lamps, you visualize him thinking: "I'm dirtied, but I'm too old to regret it. But what if my body dirties the lands of others and the purity of children?"

The buzz of the crowd continues yet:

"Why are you still hesitating to evacuate?"

"That's exactly what I was about to ask you!"

"How long can we enjoy this electricity?"

THIS IS THE REMAINS OF REMAINS, the hobo shouts like a ghost.

And—his fingers start groping an invisible woman's bosom in the air.

Or—they start rubbing an invisible man's penis in the void.

Until the intangible milk starts to drop or the intangible semen begins to splash, you continue to watch his whole movement as if you were a tourist.

His hostile eyes meet yours again, when you are about to open your mouth at last and ask him:

"Don't you think our nostalgia is sometimes dangerous? The more strongly we expect our homeland to be the same as before, the more violently we may deprive others on it of their independent stories about their ongoing changes. Don't you think so?"

In the midst of your question, the hobo's sinewy hand throws the thick mosaic hardcover (titled *Human Development*) like a cannonball and it strikes home on your forehead.

What if that's the same philosophy book you've been reading so far?

YOU MIXED-BLOOD GHOST, I'LL TRAVEL YOU NEXT, the hobo mumbles, and a frontier in your soul moves.

\* \* \*

Deep sky-blue pink, heavy mass of wind, barren richness, overwhelming light, blood-red soil, and the whole universe on fire at sunset.

\* \* \*

The young mother's lullaby finally reaches your ears:

*On looking up, on looking down,  
She saw a dead man on the ground  
The worms crawled out, the worms crawled in  
Then she unto the parson said  
Shall I be so when I die  
O yes O yes the parson said  
You will be so when you are dead*

The hobo opens the door and leaves, probably for another place you've never seen.

When your sight begins to collapse, the owner of the café declares that the closing time has come.

No more cups of coffee for you, obviously.

—inspired by Flannery O'Connor and Keiji Suga

**Goro Takano** was born in the city of Hiroshima, and is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Medicine at Saga University, Japan, where he teaches English and Japanese literature. His first novel, *With One More Step Ahead*, was published by BlazeVOX in 2009. His first poetry collection, *Responsibilities of the Obsessed*, is forthcoming this December from BlazeVOX.