

## 〈書評〉

蒲池美鶴著

*The Regression Clock*

(The Heron Press、2017年)

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The exercise of clairvoyance is often a solitary praxis, fraught with endless internal vacillations, ever contained within the eerie realm of an unsubstantial and ultimately personal sense of premonition. And yet, the pairing of haunting and haunted—seer and seen—exist together in the liminal void between otherworldly projections and the pervasive presence of self-doubt. This constant oscillation of recognition and perception is central to the spectral ponderings of Mitsuru Kamachi's most recent volume of poetry, *The Regression Clock* (The Heron Press, 2017).

Intimate inspections of the instancial distances of death, the separations of the corporeal and the memorial, and the many spiritual evasions of time and space that we make and imagine in periods of crisis are some of the themes that pervade this collection of poems. Largely composed (as she states in her foreword) in rapid earnest upon the poet's return to Japan from England in 1992, Kamachi's apparent perturbation with familiarities, and her frustration with transparencies (both cultural and personal), enwrap these poems of return with an ominously desolate shroud, marking her moment of return as less a retreat to the known than a repeat of the past viewed through the thread-bare tapestries of a future that has already been archived in the mental museums of remembrance.

In “Parting,” spirit and body are split, revealing an ephemeral and ultimately disjointed break with a previous moment of unity. The poem’s narrator views this fracturing of unity with a witch’s eye for delineation. Spirit and body exist in unequal measure at the tail end of the affair—spirit flying off among the phosphorescent insects of the night, body remaining in little more than a formal forfeit to an essence departed. The wraithlike recital of this division is chilling in its acquiescence to a separation that holds no quarter with the world of the living, even as the narrator intimates her return as being with the severed physicality of a love that once was whole.

In “The Hospital,” the reader is met with a moment of distress that begs sympathy in its dire import. A woman is at the end of her tether. Seeking deliverance, the woman makes her way to the ledge of a window and threatens to plunge to her death, but at the last moment the controlling tentacles of society reach out and pull her back into the very darkness that she was hoping to escape. And with: “Her scream trailing / Like the cry / Of a lone crane / Before nightfall,” she is hauled back into void that she almost evaded. But the question remains, has she really been saved, or has the termination of her tortuous existence simply been postponed?

And in “Death by Water,” the passage of a vainglorious phantom through the pellucid currents of time toward the depths of an “ice-cold sea,” is depicted in two short stanzas with a subtle grace that belies the portentous import of the event. The reader is asked to contemplate the very nature of recognition when confronting visions that disappear into the distance of a suddenly-haunted memory. As a conjuring act, this poem recalls the inscrutable logic of Harry Houdini’s famous aphorism, “What the eyes see and the ears hear, the mind believes,” while making it clear that what is seen and heard is confined within the mind of the believer, and thus, equal parts recollection and projection.

Of course, this isn’t to say that there are not moments of verbal mirth and playful innocence in many of the poems collected in this volume. A fairytale giddiness runs through the lines of several of the poems, indeed, throughout the volume Kamachi displays an obvious delight in mingling delicacy and darkness. Nevertheless, even during these sunny respites from shadow, the reader is made constantly aware of the tenuous boundaries that separate now from then, and hap-

piness from horror.

Ultimately, it is the horror that maintains precedence in *The Regression Clock*, summoned like a spell of indirection more circular and baffling in its rotation than the hands of a clock in retrograde. These poems turn back upon themselves to ponder: is it memory that populates the mind with ghosts?